

Syria - Country Focus



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

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



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Disclaimer

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

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

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

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

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

The drafting of this report was finalised on 31 August 2023. 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
CTC	Counterterrorism Court
GoS	Government of Syria
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State (IS), or Daesh
MEB	Minimum Expenditure Basket
MSNA	Multi-Sector Needs Assessment
<i>mukhtar</i>	Mayor or chief of a village/neighbourhood
NDF	National Defence Forces
NPA	North Press Agency
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SNA	Syrian National Army





Term	Definition
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
SOHR	Syrian Observatory of Human Rights
STJ	Syrians for Truth & Justice
UNCOI	Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs





Introduction

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

The report covers the period of August 2022 – August 2023, and provides a limited update of selected sections previously addressed in the EUAA COI reports: [Syria - Targeting of individuals \(September 2022\)](#) and [Syria - Targeting of individuals \(March 2020\)](#) as well as an update of the EUAA COI report: [Syria - Socio-economic situation in Damascus city \(September 2022\)](#).

This report should be read in conjunction with the EUAA COI report: [Syria – Security situation \(September 2023\)](#).

Methodology

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

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

Defining the terms of reference

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

Collecting information

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 8 August 2023. Some limited additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 31 August 2023.

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

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



Quality control

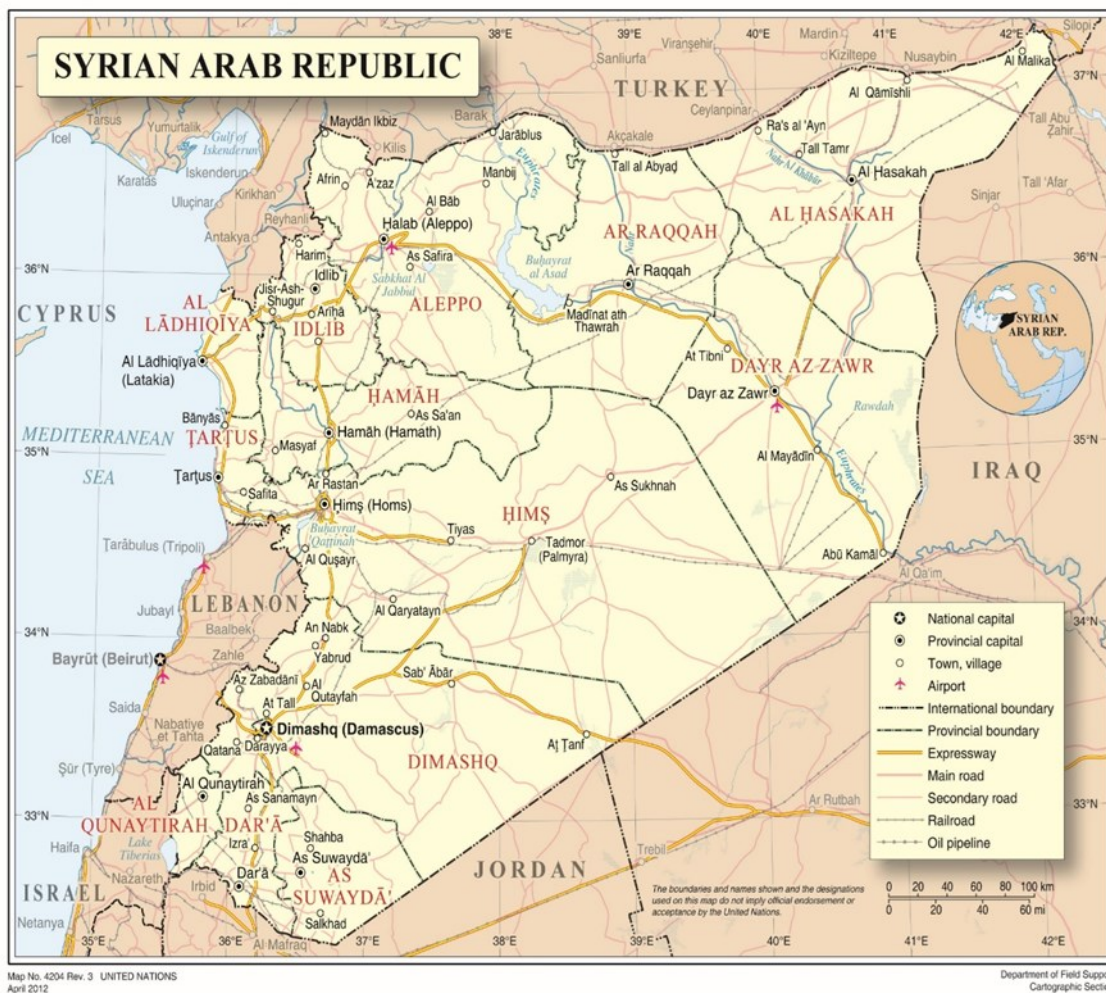
To ensure that the authors respected the EUAA COI Report Methodology and that the Terms of Reference were comprehensively addressed, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report, which was finalised on 31 August 2023. EUAA also performed the final quality review and editing of the text.

Sources

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

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

Maps



Map 1: Syrian Arab Republic, © United Nations³

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

1. Profiles

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

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

Security incidents, including attacks on GoS forces, increased in GoS-controlled areas since mid-2022 as the government conducted security and retaliatory policies, forced conscriptions,⁴ and arbitrary arrests.⁵ Disappearances and deaths in detention also continued to be reported, as were cases of extortion, harassment and other violations.⁶ During the reference period, civilians were reported to have been targeted by a variety of state or state-backed actors, including the Military Intelligence Directorate,⁷ the Air Force Intelligence Directorate, the Political Security Directorate,⁸ the Syrian Arab Army (SAA)'s Fourth Division⁹ and pro-GoS militias.¹⁰

Civilians who were arrested or otherwise targeted included protesters,¹¹ media workers,¹² political activists, human rights defenders,¹³ university students, lawyers and government employees¹⁴ and others expressing views critical of local conditions and the authorities' conduct

⁴ Jusoor for Studies, Manifestations of Security Disorder in Syrian Regime Areas: Causes and Implications, 19 June 2023, [url](#)

⁵ Jusoor for Studies, Manifestations of Security Disorder in Syrian Regime Areas: Causes and Implications, 19 June 2023, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 23, 52

⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 23

⁷ SNHR, At Least 178 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in January 2023, Including 14 Children and Seven Women, 2 February 2023, [url](#), pp. 12-13; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 56

⁸ SNHR, At Least 178 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in January 2023, Including 14 Children and Seven Women, 2 February 2023, [url](#), p. 13

⁹ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 18; SOHR, Ongoing arbitrary arrests | Members of 4th Division arrest displaced young man in Aleppo city, 29 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰ SNHR, At Least 208 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in October 2022, Including Seven Children and Five Women, Mostly at the Hands of Syrian Regime Forces, 2 November 2022, [url](#), p. 11; SOHR, For unknown reasons | Iranian-backed militia arrests civilian in Rif Dimashq, 10 June 2023, [url](#)

¹¹ SNHR, At Least 158 Arbitrary Arrests/Detention Documented in April, Including Five Children and Eight Women, 2 May 2023, [url](#), pp. 4, 9; SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 5

¹² SNHR, At Least 158 Arbitrary Arrests/Detention Documented in April, Including Five Children and Eight Women, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 9; SOHR, Having criticised regime government | Security services arrest journalist in Masyaf for "undermining prestige of the state", 28 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Accused of undermining Syria's prestige | Regime security services arrest correspondent of regime-run channel in Aleppo, 12 December 2022, [url](#)

¹³ AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/23 – Syria, 27 March 2023, [url](#), p. 352

¹⁴ SNHR, At Least 2,221 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in 2022, Including 148 children and 457 Women (Adult Female), with 213 Cases Documented in December, 3 January 2023, [url](#), p. 9



in GoS-held areas¹⁵ (including some cases of arrests and attempted arrests for social media activity),¹⁶ members of political parties other than the ruling Baath party,¹⁷ residents of areas reconquered by the GoS who have entered so-called ‘reconciliation’ agreements,¹⁸ individuals who travelled between areas outside GoS control and GoS-held areas¹⁹ or contacted relatives in opposition-held areas,²⁰ individuals with family members who were dissidents, activists²¹ or armed opposition members,²² as well as returnees from abroad²³ and internally displaced persons (IDPs) seeking to return to their original places of residence in GoS-held areas.²⁴

Moreover, GoS-controlled areas saw large numbers of ‘random’ arrests of civilians of unspecified profile.²⁵ In southern Syria, there was a reported ‘pattern’ of targeted assassinations of former members of opposition groups by unidentified persons.²⁶

Cases involving political or national security offences were ‘assigned in an apparently arbitrary manner to the Counterterrorism Court (CTC), courts martial, or criminal courts’.²⁷ The US Department of State (USDOS) cited media and NGO reports stating that sentences against persons accused of anti-GoS activity were generally harsh, with non-violent offenders receiving

¹⁵ SNHR, At Least 226 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in May, Including Six Children and 11 Women, 2 June 2023, [url](#), p. 4; SNHR, At Least 137 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in February 2023, Including Six Children and Three Women (Adult Females), 2 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 8, 13

¹⁶ SNHR, At Least 164 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in March 2023, Including Nine Children and Three Women (Adult Females), 2 April 2023, [url](#), p. 9; BBC News, Syria: Protests over growing economic hardship spread in south, 24 August 2023, [url](#); Mohammed Alaa Ghanem, Alawites in Syria breaking silence?: Criticizing the dictatorship from within, MEI, 11 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 70-71

¹⁸ HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#); SNHR, At Least 226 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in May, Including Six Children and 11 Women, 2 June 2023, [url](#), p. 4. The 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 nonstarter 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 \(January 2020\)](#)

¹⁹ SNHR, At Least 178 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in January 2023, Including 14 Children and Seven Women, 2 February 2023, [url](#), p. 13

²⁰ SNHR, At Least 137 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in February 2023, Including Six Children and Three Women (Adult Females), 2 March 2023, [url](#), p. 13

²¹ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 10; SNHR, At Least 2,221 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in 2022, Including 148 children and 457 Women (Adult Female), with 213 Cases Documented in December, 3 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

²² USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 10

²³ SNHR, At Least 226 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in May, Including Six Children and 11 Women, 2 June 2023, [url](#), pp. 4, 9; SNHR, At Least 158 Arbitrary Arrests/Detention Documented in April, Including Five Children and Eight Women, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 4; SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 15

²⁴ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 21

²⁵ SNHR, At Least 226 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in May, Including Six Children and 11 Women, 2 June 2023, [url](#), p. 4; SNHR, At Least 158 Arbitrary Arrests/Detention Documented in April, Including Five Children and Eight Women, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 4

²⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 46

²⁷ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 15



punishments similar to those accused of violent activity.²⁸ Prison conditions for political and national security prisoners, especially alleged opposition members, were reportedly ‘much worse than those for ordinary criminals’.²⁹

The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (UNCOI), in a report covering the period from January 2020 to April 2023, noted that torture was practised at detention facilities of the Military Intelligence Directorate (also known as Military Security),³⁰ the Air Force Intelligence Directorate,³¹ and the Political Security Directorate,³² all of which had branches across the country, as well as in facilities of the General Intelligence Directorate (based in the Damascus area),³³ the Criminal Security Department of the police,³⁴ and in military prisons overseen by the Military Police (including Sednaya military prison).³⁵

1.1.2. Specific profiles interpreted by the government as opposition

(a) Members of political opposition parties

The GoS has been reported to ban ‘genuine’ political opposition.³⁶ While the USDOS reported that the GoS had ‘little tolerance’ for non-Baathist parties,³⁷ a Syrian academic interviewed for this report observed that the GoS was relatively tolerant towards independent politicians and members of parties labelled as ‘domestic’ opposition as long as these groups did not call for the overthrow of the Syrian President. Nevertheless, such members of domestic opposition were not completely immune to harassment and arrest.³⁸ On the other hand, the GoS used its intelligence and security apparatus to ‘monitor and punish opposition movements that could meaningfully challenge Assad’s rule’³⁹ and reportedly harassed parties with a Socialist/Communist or Islamist agenda.⁴⁰

In Sweida governorate, it was reported that the Military Intelligence Directorate carried out abductions at checkpoints targeting suspected members of the Syrian al-Liwa Party,⁴¹ a local

²⁸ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 21

²⁹ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 23

³⁰ UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), para. 17-18

³¹ UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), para. 22-23

³² UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), para. 27

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

³⁴ UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), para. 32

³⁵ UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), para. 33

³⁶ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Syria, 2023, [url](#)

³⁷ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 70-71

³⁸ Syrian academic, email correspondence, 15 August 2023

³⁹ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Syria, 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 71

⁴¹ SNHR, At Least 2,221 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in 2022, Including 148 children and 457 Women (Adult Female), with 213 Cases Documented in December, 3 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10



anti-GoS Druze political party⁴² which had a military wing⁴³ (the ‘Counter-Terrorism Force’)⁴⁴ that reportedly collaborated with the US-supported Maghawir al-Thawra militia in Al-Tanf.⁴⁵ In late January 2023, it was reported that eight members of the Counter-Terrorism Force who had been arrested in a GoS military campaign on the party’s headquarters in June 2022 had died in detention, with the bodies reported to be showing signs of maltreatment in custody.⁴⁶

(b) Political activists and protesters

Political activists (including journalists and media activists)

While the 2012 Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic guarantees freedom of expression (Article 42.2) and freedom of the press (Article 43),⁴⁷ it was noted that the GoS suppressed free speech, and persons seeking to expose or criticise government corruption faced reprisals ranging from job dismissal to imprisonment.⁴⁸ In GoS-held areas, the authorities were reportedly controlling all forms of media- and internet-based expression, and independent media outlets did not exist.⁴⁹ According to civil society organisations, Syrian journalists faced arrest, abduction, torture⁵⁰ and death in custody, as well as censorship.⁵¹

Syria’s new Cybercrime Law (Law No. 20 of 2022), which was adopted in April 2022 and came into effect the following month,⁵² provides an overhaul of legal rules on cybercrime that were previously specified in the now-repealed⁵³ Law (Legislative Decree) No. 17 of 2012.⁵⁴ It contains a broadened definition of cybercrimes⁵⁵ and imposes harsher punishments for publishing dissident content on the internet⁵⁶ (up to 15 years in prison).⁵⁷ Freedom of expression and the press have also been restricted by provisions of the 2011 Media Law⁵⁸ the Law for Protecting the Revolution (1965),⁵⁹ the Terrorism Law (2012), and the Penal Code.⁶⁰

⁴² The Syrian al-Liwa Party, founded in mid-2021, proclaims that it seeks to protect Sweida from GoS-backed insecurity and ‘terrorism’ to represent the Druze community politically. Al-Monitor, New Druze political party, military faction take shape in Suwayda, 18 July 2021, [url](#)

⁴³ Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Tamimi, A. J., Interview with Hizb al-Liwa’ al-Souri in al-Suwayda’ Province [blog], 31 December 2022, [url](#); Syria Direct, In Suwayda, ‘organized gangs’ serve as an arm of Damascus and violence threatens to ignite interfamilial conflicts, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, January - March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 13

⁴⁶ NPA, Government hands body of arrestee to Men of Dignity In Syria’s Suwayda, 31 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷ Syria, Constitution, Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, 26 February 2012, [url](#), Articles 42.2, 43

⁴⁸ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Syria, 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹ Al, Türkiye/Syria: A human rights response to the 6 February earthquakes, February 2023, [url](#), p. 5

⁵⁰ RSF, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

⁵¹ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Syria, 2023, [url](#)

⁵² TIMEP, Understanding Assad’s New Cyber-Crackdown in Syria, 5 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵³ STJ, Syria: Cybercrime Law is an Additional Tool for Suppressing Freedom of Expression, 14 June 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴ SNHR, The Annual Report on the Most Notable Violations Against Media Workers in Syria, 3 May 2023, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁵ STJ, Syria: Cybercrime Law is an Additional Tool for Suppressing Freedom of Expression, 14 June 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶ SNHR, The Annual Report on the Most Notable Violations Against Media Workers in Syria, 3 May 2023, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁷ TIMEP, Understanding Assad’s New Cyber-Crackdown in Syria, 5 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁸ RSF, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁹ RSF, Syria, n.d., [url](#); Al, Syria: End human rights violations in Syria – Amnesty International submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review 12th session of the UPR Working Group, October 2011, July 2011, [url](#), p. 3

⁶⁰ RSF, Syria, n.d., [url](#)



According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), the GoS arrested a variety of individuals based on the Cybercrime Law, including pro-government media workers⁶¹ and citizen journalists. These included persons who on social media called for the implementation of the Anti-Torture Act in GoS-controlled areas⁶² or voiced criticism of living conditions and corruption in GoS-held areas.⁶³ The authorities also arrested one or several individuals for allegedly communicating news to external media.⁶⁴ In the wake of the 6 February 2023 earthquake, sources reported that authorities arrested individuals who had criticised the GoS's aid distribution practices.⁶⁵

The GoS authorities reportedly also arrested and tortured persons with real or perceived family links to political dissidents and activists.⁶⁶ They also targeted young men suspected of knowing the identities of individuals who were wanted for writing public messages calling for the overthrow of the Assad government,⁶⁷ as well as individuals accused of criticizing the Iranian presence in the country.⁶⁸

Protesters

The 2012 Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic guarantees peaceful assembly (Article 44).⁶⁹ In late 2022/early 2023, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented an increase in the number of sit-ins and demonstrations to protest the worsening living conditions, including in Dar'a and Sweida governorates. Most of these events were peaceful and unfolded without the use of force or interference by the security forces.⁷⁰

However, in early December 2022, security forces opened fire at protesters in Sweida who had stormed a governorate building, set fire to it, and torn down pictures of President Bashar al-Assad.⁷¹ In at least two instances following this event, GoS security services in Damascus arrested persons from Sweida over their alleged participation in anti-GoS protests in their home

⁶¹ SNHR, At Least 2,221 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in 2022, Including 148 children and 457 Women (Adult Female), with 213 Cases Documented in December, 3 January 2023, [url](#), p. 9; SOHR, Accused of undermining Syria's prestige | Regime security services arrest correspondent of regime-run channel in Aleppo, 12 December 2022, [url](#)

⁶² SNHR, The Annual Report on the Most Notable Violations Against Media Workers in Syria, 3 May 2023, [url](#), pp. 6-7

⁶³ SNHR, At Least 226 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in May, Including Six Children and 11 Women, 2 June 2023, [url](#), p. 4; SNHR, At Least 158 Arbitrary Arrests/Detention Documented in April, Including Five Children and Eight Women, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 9

⁶⁴ SNHR, At Least 186 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in August 2022, Including 17 Children and 11 Women, 2 September 2022, [url](#), p. 10

⁶⁵ AI, Türkiye/Syria: A human rights response to the 6 February earthquakes, February 2023, [url](#), p. 5

⁶⁶ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 10; SNHR, At Least 2,221 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in 2022, Including 148 children and 457 Women (Adult Female), with 213 Cases Documented in December, 3 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁶⁷ SOHR, Regime storms houses | Unidentified people write sentences against regime on walls in Rif Dimashq, 2 January 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁸ SOHR, Publications against Iranian and Hezbollah presence | Regime security service arrested six people in Al-Hasakah, 23 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁹ Syria, Constitution, Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, 26 February 2012, [url](#), Article 44

⁷⁰ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 32

⁷¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 49



governorate.⁷² Further arrests were reported after protests in Qudsaya city (Rural Damascus governorate) calling for the release of detainees and the overthrow of the GoS.⁷³

In August 2023, protests criticising the economic situation and the Assad regime grew significantly in GoS-controlled areas, particularly in Sweida and Dar'a, but also in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and the coastal regions of Latakia and Tartous.⁷⁴ In the first 25 days of August 2023, SNHR documented the arrest of 57 protesters by the GoS forces, as well as raids on the homes of protesters for the purpose of intimidation.⁷⁵

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

There were numerous reports of arrests of civilians in GoS-controlled areas, including those reconquered by the GoS.⁷⁶ According to International Crisis Group, 'the mere fact of having lived outside regime-controlled areas exposes returnees to suspicion of sympathising with, aiding or actively participating in rebel activities'. Such suspicions could be a pretext for detention or financial exploitation.⁷⁷

Among those detained were IDPs, including some who had signed settlement agreements with the GoS upon their return to GoS-held territory.⁷⁸ Other civilians were arrested on terrorism charges⁷⁹ (a charge commonly brought against political opponents and other detainees)⁸⁰ or after being accused of offences such as having a damaged ID document⁸¹ or possessing/selling mobile phones for which no customs duties had been paid.⁸² The arrests sometimes also targeted persons who had previously been released from GoS detention.⁸³ Several civilians who

⁷² SNHR, At Least 158 Arbitrary Arrests/Detention Documented in April, Including Five Children and Eight Women, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 9; SOHR, Accused of expressing his political opinion | Regime security services arbitrarily arrest civilian at Damascus international airport, 27 January 2023, [url](#)

⁷³ SOHR, Arrests campaign | Regime patrols arrest 14 civilians in Rif Dimashq following attack on Republican Guard checkpoint and anti-regime graphics, 10 January 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁴ SNHR, The Syrian Regime is Responding to the August 2023 Protests with the Same Savage Mindset with Which It Reacted to the Protests of March 2011, 26 August 2023, [url](#), pp. 1-3; New York Times (The), Rare protests in Syria summon echoes of Arab Spring, 31 August 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁵ SNHR, The Syrian Regime is Responding to the August 2023 Protests with the Same Savage Mindset with Which It Reacted to the Protests of March 2011, 26 August 2023, [url](#), p. 2

⁷⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 52; SNHR, At Least 164 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in March 2023, Including Nine Children and Three Women (Adult Females), 2 April 2023, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, At Least 178 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in January 2023, Including 14 Children and Seven Women, 2 February 2023, [url](#), p. 8; HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷ International Crisis Group, Syria: Ruling over Aleppo's Ruins, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. 19

⁷⁸ SOHR, After returning to Syria | Regime security services arrest a civilian on his way to Damascus, 13 May 2023, [url](#); SOHR, "Out of frying pan, into fire" | "State Security" arrests civilian with settled status in Homs after leaving Al-Rukban camp, 19 December 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁹ SOHR, Since beginning of March | Regime security services arrest over 80 civilians including child and woman, 19 March 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁰ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 26-27

⁸¹ SOHR, For "possession of damaged ID" | Young man arrested by "Military Security" in Rif Dimashq, 3 November 2022, [url](#)

⁸² SOHR, Accused of "selling uncustomed mobile phones" | Regime security service arrest civilian in Deir Ezzor city, 30 May 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Ongoing oppression | Security services launch security campaign in Aleppo, arresting hundreds of civilians and imposing large fines, 28 April 2023, [url](#)

⁸³ SNHR, At Least 178 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in January 2023, Including 14 Children and Seven Women, 2 February 2023, [url](#), p. 8



had undergone ‘reconciliation’ were reported to have died in GoS custody.⁸⁴ It was noted that many individuals in southern Syria who were explicitly wanted by the authorities rarely left their homes so as to avoid encounters with GoS-linked security actors.⁸⁵

In recent years, GoS security forces have also been harassing, detaining and extorting individuals who had relatives in armed opposition-controlled areas.⁸⁶ There were several reported cases of civilians in GoS-controlled areas who were arrested for communicating on the phone with relatives living in areas outside GoS control.⁸⁷ Similarly, civilians were arrested for travelling between GoS-held areas and areas controlled by other parties,⁸⁸ e.g. from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-held areas in Aleppo’s northern countryside to Aleppo City’s GoS-controlled territory.⁸⁹ Others were current humanitarian workers in areas of Deir Ez-Zor currently controlled by the SDF⁹⁰ or former health/humanitarian workers in now-reconquered areas.⁹¹ In many cases, meanwhile, the authorities did not provide reasons for arrests.⁹² Such cases often concerned young men⁹³ (including university students),⁹⁴ some of whom had reportedly not sided with any party to the conflict.⁹⁵ For information on the treatment of young men accused of draft evasion or failing to perform military service, see section 1.2 of this report.

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

During the reference period, there were a number of reported arrests of individuals with various types of alleged links to anti-GoS armed groups, some of whom had undergone

⁸⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 59; SOHR, During October | Five civilians died under torture in regime prisons, 1 November 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁵ Etana Syria, Arrests in South Syria – February 2023, 20 February 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, Syria: Ruling over Aleppo’s Ruins, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁸⁷ SNHR, At Least 137 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in February 2023, Including Six Children and Three Women (Adult Females), 2 March 2023, [url](#), p. 13; SNHR, At Least 2,221 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in 2022, Including 148 children and 457 Women (Adult Female), with 213 Cases Documented in December, 3 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁸⁸ SNHR, At Least 2,221 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in 2022, Including 148 children and 457 Women (Adult Female), with 213 Cases Documented in December, 3 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁸⁹ SNHR, At Least 178 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in January 2023, Including 14 Children and Seven Women, 2 February 2023, [url](#), p. 13; SOHR, Arbitrary arrests | Political security arrests displaced people from Afrin en route to Aleppo for “dealing with “Autonomous Administration”, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁰ SOHR, Ongoing oppression | Regime forces arbitrarily arrest five people in the military hospital in Deir Ezzor, 11 April 2023, [url](#)

⁹¹ SNHR, At Least 2,221 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in 2022, Including 148 children and 457 Women (Adult Female), with 213 Cases Documented in December, 3 January 2023, [url](#), p. 9

⁹² UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 32; SOHR, For unknown reasons | Regime checkpoints arrest four young men in Al-Bokamal city in Deir Ezzor, 27 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Arbitrary arrests | Regime security services arrest young man at one of their checkpoints in western countryside of Daraa, 22 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Since beginning of March | Regime security services arrest over 80 civilians including child and woman, 19 March 2023, [url](#)

⁹³ SOHR, For unknown reasons | Regime checkpoints arrest four young men in Al-Bokamal city in Deir Ezzor, 27 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Arbitrary arrests | Regime security services arrest young man at one of their checkpoints in western countryside of Daraa, 22 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Demanding ransoms | Group of “Military Intelligence” arrests young man in Daraa, 14 April 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁴ MEMO, Syria regime arrests university students near Damascus, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁵ SOHR, Demanding ransoms | Group of “Military Intelligence” arrests young man in Daraa, 14 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, For taking pictures | Regime security patrol arrests young man in Al-Mayadin in Deir Ezzor, 3 December 2022, [url](#)



‘reconciliation’/settlement with the GoS.⁹⁶ Those detained included persons suspected of former membership of the Free Syrian Army,⁹⁷ the pro- Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) Khalid ibn al-Walid Army⁹⁸ or unspecified opposition factions⁹⁹ (including at least one former commander¹⁰⁰ and several members of unspecified rank¹⁰¹). Moreover, in Dar’a governorate, there was a continuing ‘pattern’ of targeted assassinations of former members of opposition groups by unidentified gunmen.¹⁰²

Several civilians were arrested by the Military Intelligence Directorate on (reportedly unfounded) allegations of ‘communicating with opposition groups in north Syria’ and planning a car-bomb attack,¹⁰³ or because they lived near places where attacks on GoS targets had occurred.¹⁰⁴ In several instances, arrests were made of individuals (including women)¹⁰⁵ with relatives who had been affiliated with armed opposition groups such as ISIL¹⁰⁶ and the Yassir Al-Aboud faction, a local armed group in Dar’a governorate.¹⁰⁷

The USDOS reported that the outcomes of court trials of defendants accused of membership in the armed opposition ‘appeared predetermined’, although some defendants were able to bribe prosecutors and court officials.¹⁰⁸ The same source cited media and NGO reports stating that sentences of persons accused of anti-GoS activity (including violence against the GoS) were generally harsh.¹⁰⁹

⁹⁶ SOHR, Deir Ezzor | Regime security services arrest brother of ex-ISIS wali of Deir Ezzor, 21 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Security campaign | Commanders and officers of IRGC, Hezbollah and Air Intelligence investigate 34 Syrians in Deir Ezzor for “dealing with coalition”, 21 September 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Ongoing arresting campaign | Security forces arrest former commander of Daraa opposition factions, 10 September 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁷ SOHR, Arrests campaign | Military Intelligence arrests five young men in Atman town north of Daraa, 1 February 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁸ SOHR, Daraa countryside | Regime forces arrest man for “joining faction pledging allegiance to ISIS”, 8 August 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁹ SOHR, Deir Ezzor | Regime security services arrest three National Defence commanders in less than week, 11 September 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Ongoing arresting campaign | Security forces arrest former commander of Daraa opposition factions, 10 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ SOHR, Ongoing arresting campaign | Security forces arrest former commander of Daraa opposition factions, 10 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ SOHR, Arrests campaign | Military Intelligence arrests five young men in Atman town north of Daraa, 1 February 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Deir Ezzor | Regime security services arrest three National Defence commanders in less than week, 11 September 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Daraa countryside | Regime forces arrest man for “joining faction pledging allegiance to ISIS”, 8 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 46

¹⁰³ SOHR, Accused of planning to detonate car-bomb near Hama University | Three young men arrested by military intelligence service in Talbiseh, 17 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ SOHR, Over targeting regime military convoy | Military intelligence of regime launches arrest campaign against young men in Daraa, 14 May 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Arrests campaign | Regime patrols arrest 14 civilians in Rif Dimashq following attack on Republican Guard checkpoint and anti-regime graphics, 10 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ SOHR, Ongoing oppression | Regime security services arrest woman arbitrarily in Al-Mayadeen city, 23 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, After the arrest of a woman | protests erupt to demand the release of detainees and overthrow the regime, 25 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ SOHR, Ongoing oppression | Regime security services arrest woman arbitrarily in Al-Mayadeen city, 23 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Deir Ezzor | Regime security services arrest brother of ex-ISIS wali of Deir Ezzor, 21 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ SOHR, After the arrest of a woman | protests erupt to demand the release of detainees and overthrow the regime, 25 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁰⁹ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 21



(e) Returnees from abroad perceived as opposition

Current return procedures

Individuals returning to Syria need to go through one or both of two return procedures: security clearance and status settlement.¹¹⁰ Both procedures are run by Syrian intelligence.¹¹¹ However, the distinction between making an application for security clearance and settling one's status was not always clear-cut.¹¹² According to International Crisis Group, the process of 'settlement of security status (*taswiyat al-wadaa al-amni*)' involved obtaining formal security clearance from all four main security agencies as well as verification of whether the applicant has satisfied the requirements regarding the mandatory military service.¹¹³

The UNCOI found that on-the-ground procedures regarding return varied considerably and often depended on where persons were returning from, where they intended to go,¹¹⁴ their individual profile,¹¹⁵ and the intelligence services' local capacities. While all returnees were required to visit security agencies,¹¹⁶ in some areas they had to 'navigate multiple and overlapping clearance processes involving a range of authorities'.¹¹⁷ Some returnees were required to settle their status in 'status settlement' centres in GoS-held areas before embarking on their return, thus having to rely on family members or friends in Syria acting on their behalf. Others lodged a request for status settlement at a border crossing or accessed such centres in person after re-entering Syria through clandestine routes.¹¹⁸

Persons who found out that they were listed as wanted by the authorities paid large amounts of money to members of security forces and brokers to avoid arrest upon their return to GoS-held territory.¹¹⁹ In some cases, the Syrian intelligence agencies denied return permissions on 'criminal' or security-related grounds. In other cases, persons wishing to return were denied entry at the border.¹²⁰ For detailed information on return procedures to Syria, see sections 1.1.3 Wanted lists and 1.2.5 Returnees from abroad perceived as opposition of the [EUAA COI report Syria: Targeting of individuals \(September 2022\)](#).

¹¹⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria: Issues regarding return, October 2021, [url](#), p. 8

¹¹¹ Syria Direct, 'Syria is safe, refugees should return': The dangers of the growing narrative, 29 June 2021, [url](#); Al Jumhuriya, *مناهاة الموافقة الأمنية* [Maze of security approval], 14 March 2022, [url](#)

¹¹² 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

¹¹³ International Crisis Group, Syria: Ruling over Aleppo's Ruins, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. 20

¹¹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 63-64

¹¹⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 63-64; TIMEP, The Selective Return of Syrian Refugees, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ TIMEP, The Selective Return of Syrian Refugees, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 64

¹¹⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 64

¹¹⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 67

¹²⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 65



Treatment of returnees by GoS and affiliated armed groups

Returning to Syria from abroad was described as a ‘gamble’¹²¹ due to documented human rights abuses against returnees, including arbitrary detention, torture and forced disappearances.¹²² As of 30 June 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported 370 323 self-organised refugee returns to Syria since 2016.¹²³ The actual numbers could however be greater, as there is also return movement via informal routes.¹²⁴

GoS forces and affiliated militias continued to ‘detain, disappear, and mistreat’ former refugees who had returned to reconquered areas,¹²⁵ including persons who had coordinated their return with a GoS ‘reconciliation committee’.¹²⁶ Numerous arrests of returnees were reported at the Syrian-Lebanese border (notably the al-Masnaa border crossing),¹²⁷ including of individuals returning from Lebanon under a voluntary repatriation scheme after agreeing to security settlements with the GoS. Further concentrations of arrests were reported at the Syrian-Turkish border, especially at the Kasab border crossing.¹²⁸ Those detained included returnees who were wanted for opposition to the GoS,¹²⁹ draft evasion¹³⁰ or defection from the Syrian military during the conflict.¹³¹ There were also cases of returnees being arrested for the purpose of exacting bribes in exchange for their release.¹³²

According to a report by the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP), returnees were not targeted based on whether they were actually opposed to the GoS, but ‘rather simply because they are refugees or belong to an environment that opposes the regime’. The same report added that ‘due to the lack of proper coordination between agencies’ there was no guarantee that a returnee would be spared from being targeted by intelligence services. Moreover, given

¹²¹ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Migration and Displacement in the Arab World Demands a More Equitable Response, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

¹²² HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

¹²³ UNHCR, Operational Data Portal – Syria Regional Refugee Response, last updated 30 June 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁴ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Migration and Displacement in the Arab World Demands a More Equitable Response, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁵ HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁶ SOHR, Despite giving “guarantees for return” | Regime security services arrest three people after entering Syrian territory, 22 August 2022, [url](#); UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), para. 77; HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁷ SNHR, At Least 226 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in May, Including Six Children and 11 Women, 2 June 2023, [url](#), pp. 4, 9; SNHR, At Least 158 Arbitrary Arrests/Detention Documented in April, Including Five Children and Eight Women, 2 May 2023, [url](#), pp. 4, 9

¹²⁸ SNHR, At Least 2,221 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in 2022, Including 148 children and 457 Women (Adult Female), with 213 Cases Documented in December, 3 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

¹²⁹ New York Times (The), As Assad’s Isolation Lifts, Syrian Refugees Fear Pressure to Return Home, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁰ New York Times (The), As Assad’s Isolation Lifts, Syrian Refugees Fear Pressure to Return Home, 5 June 2023, [url](#); SNHR, At Least 158 Arbitrary Arrests/Detention Documented in April, Including Five Children and Eight Women, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 9

¹³¹ New York Times (The), As Assad’s Isolation Lifts, Syrian Refugees Fear Pressure to Return Home, 5 June 2023, [url](#); Syria Direct, 1,100 Syrian refugees arrested, 600 deported from Lebanon in unprecedented crackdown, 4 May 2023, [url](#)

¹³² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 68; SOHR, Having been deported from Lebanon | Regime security services arrest nearly 40 civilians to collect ransoms, 22 April 2023, [url](#)



the involvement of the General Intelligence Directorate in the coordination of returns, a returnee may incidentally be wanted by this agency and thus fall into its hands upon return.¹³³

The UNCOI in a July 2023 report covering the period from January 2020 to April 2023, noted that the GoS authorities arrested returnees at checkpoints for carrying outdated or inadequate papers and inflicted torture to coerce confessions from returnees, including about their previous involvement in protests.¹³⁴ Some individuals who attempted to reach Europe by sea were captured, arrested and forcibly returned to Syria.¹³⁵

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

For detailed background information and developments prior to August 2022, please see the [EUAA COI Report on Syria: Military service \(April 2021\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Targeting of individuals \(September 2022\)](#). The following sections focus mainly on recent developments.

1.2.1 Changes to the military service law

No significant changes to the military service law were reported during the reference period. 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.¹³⁶ Sources have reported in previous years on cases where men past the age of 42 were conscripted or called up for reserve service.¹³⁷ Ali Aljasem¹³⁸ stated in a July 2023 interview that he did not have knowledge of conscripts serving in the SAA past the age of 42 but knew numerous cases of persons over 42 serving in SAA-affiliated militias.¹³⁹

1.2.2 Recruitment of conscripts and reservists

Recruitment of conscripts and reservists in the SAA continues to take place according to the existing laws regarding compulsory and reserve service.¹⁴⁰ The need for reservists is at its minimum because SAA's need for manpower is low and the GoS also relies on affiliated militias

¹³³ TIMEP, The Selective Return of Syrian Refugees, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁴ UNCOI, "No End in Sight": Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), para. 74

¹³⁵ UNCOI, "No End in Sight": Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), para. 76

¹³⁶ EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), p. 13

¹³⁷ EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), p. 19; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria], May 2022, [url](#), p. 53

¹³⁸ Ali Aljasem is a PhD student at the Center for Conflict Studies - History of International Relations at Utrecht University and focuses on paramilitarism in Syria. For more information see [Bibliography](#).

¹³⁹ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023

¹⁴⁰ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence 11 July 2023; online interview 17 July 2023.



for operations, who are more efficient and cheaper.¹⁴¹ The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) also stated in an interview with the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) that conscripts are called up for military service in much higher numbers than reservists.¹⁴²

After turning 18, men must report for military service and get their military booklet at a local recruitment division office.¹⁴³ All Syrian men receive a military service booklet after turning 18.¹⁴⁴ Syrians living abroad have to report to a Syrian embassy or consulate to fill in a specific form which would serve as a substitute for the military booklet until their return to Syria.¹⁴⁵ Military exemptions and deferrals are recorded in the military booklet.¹⁴⁶

Between the months of January and May, the GoS announces the lists of men who need to report for military service during that year.¹⁴⁷ These lists are also announced on official government TV channels and posted at the office of the local *mukhtar* (mayor).¹⁴⁸ The recruitment division office also sends written notifications to the address of the person eligible to start military service informing him about the drafting date.¹⁴⁹

Failure to report to the military recruitment division within the period specified results in a fine¹⁵⁰ and a potential extension of the military service period with additional months.¹⁵¹ In an interview with DIS, SOHR stated that, if a person does not report for military service, the *mukhtar* will notify his family and subsequently the military police will visit his house and deliver a notification to report to the military recruitment division.¹⁵² SNHR also stated that the military police may visit the person's house to notify him to report for military service, although this rarely occurs in practice.¹⁵³ Those who do not report within one year of becoming eligible for military service or do not start their military service, are registered in a national database as draft evaders.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴¹ Aljaseem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023.

¹⁴² DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: SOHR], July 2023, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁴³ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 24

¹⁴⁴ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [sources: SOHR, SNHR, Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), pp. 19, 20, 23

¹⁴⁵ Syrian Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, المكلّفون الموجودون خارج أراضي الجمهورية العربية السورية [Taxpayers located outside the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic], [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [sources: SOHR, SNHR, Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), pp. 19, 21, 25

¹⁴⁷ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁴⁸ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [sources: Suhail al-Ghazi, SOHR], July 2023, [url](#), pp. 18, 23

¹⁴⁹ Syrian Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, المكلّفون الموجودون خارج أراضي الجمهورية العربية السورية [Taxpayers located outside the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic], [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence 11 July 2023; online interview 17 July 2023.

¹⁵¹ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 24; Syrian Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, الخدمة الإلزامية [Compulsory Military Service], [url](#)

¹⁵² DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: SOHR], July 2023, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁵³ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: SNHR], July 2023, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁵⁴ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 24



According to Ali Aljasem, new conscripts will get a maximum of 45 days training and are then considered ready for deployment.¹⁵⁵ However, Syrian researcher Suhail al-Ghazi¹⁵⁶ stated that training of conscripts lasts six months.¹⁵⁷

a) Recruitment through reconciliation agreements/settlement of status

The SAA is also recruiting conscripts through ‘reconciliation’ agreements which are announced periodically. These conscripts are either incorporated directly in the SAA or in affiliated militias.¹⁵⁸

For instance, in June 2023, the GoS initiated a settlement in Dar’a governorate for draft evaders, those wanted for reserve service and for military defectors.¹⁵⁹ Persons wanted for military service and reserve service who underwent the status settlement were granted a six-month deferment period before having to join the military, while military defectors were granted a similar one-month deferment.¹⁶⁰ All those who underwent the settlement had the possibility to obtain official travel documentation and travel outside the country. Sources noted that in this way the GoS is incentivising young men from Dar’a to leave the country¹⁶¹ while also gathering information on opposition members¹⁶² and extorting money from those who undergo the process.¹⁶³ While the GoS announced that around 15 000 men underwent the settlement by mid-June,¹⁶⁴ other sources reported that over 50 % of those wanted in Dar’a boycotted the settlement. Military defectors particularly expressed distrust of the settlement.¹⁶⁵

In Sweida governorate, the local Druze population has largely resisted compulsory and reserve conscription in the SAA throughout the conflict.¹⁶⁶ The number of draft evaders in the governorate is estimated at around 30 000.¹⁶⁷ In October 2022, the GoS initiated a ‘security settlement’ in the governorate for persons wanted for compulsory and reserve service. The settlement granted those who underwent it an administrative postponement for a period of six months after which they would be required to join SAA units deployed in southern Syria. It also granted those who conclude it a ‘settlement card’ which allows them freedom of movement and to approach state institutions for issuing travel documents without the fear of arrest and

¹⁵⁵ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023

¹⁵⁶ Suhail al-Ghazi is a Syrian researcher who focuses on security and military developments in Syria in addition to governance and economical aspects of the Syrian conflict. His work has been published in various media outlets and think-tanks such as the Atlantic Council, ORSAM, Alsharq Forum and TIMEP.

¹⁵⁷ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts’ duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁵⁸ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023; Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023.

¹⁵⁹ Syria Direct, Wave of new Daraa settlements amid Arab normalization efforts, 9 June 2023, [url](#); Enab Baladi, New security settlement to enhance regime grip on Daraa: activists, displaced, 14 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰ Syria Direct, Wave of new Daraa settlements amid Arab normalization efforts, 9 June 2023, [url](#); Enab Baladi, New security settlement to enhance regime grip on Daraa: activists, displaced, 14 June 2023, [url](#); NPA, Daraa youth doubt Syrian government promises, boycott settlement, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ Syria Direct, Wave of new Daraa settlements amid Arab normalization efforts, 9 June 2023, [url](#); Enab Baladi, New security settlement to enhance regime grip on Daraa: activists, displaced, 14 June 2023, [url](#); NPA, Daraa youth doubt Syrian government promises, boycott settlement, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶² Enab Baladi, New security settlement to enhance regime grip on Daraa: activists, displaced, 14 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶³ Enab Baladi, New security settlement to enhance regime grip on Daraa: activists, displaced, 14 June 2023, [url](#); NPA, Daraa youth doubt Syrian government promises, boycott settlement, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ SANA, Hundreds of citizens in Daraa join the settlement process, 14 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ NPA, Daraa youth doubt Syrian government promises, boycott settlement, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶ EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁶⁷ Ezzi, M., What’s New About the Sweida Protests in Southern Syria?, EUI, 12 December 2022, [url](#); NPA, Popular rejection to government-imposed settlements in Syria’s Suwayda, 30 October 2022, [url](#)



detention.¹⁶⁸ Sources reported that only between 1 000¹⁶⁹ and 2 500 out of 30 000 men wanted for compulsory and reserve service have undergone the security settlement.¹⁷⁰

b) Recruitment of conscripts in SAA-affiliated forces

In practice, an alternative to the military service in the SAA is joining a pro-GoS militia.¹⁷¹ According to Ali Aljasem, joining a militia is not a legal alternative to the military service, but rather one that ensures mobilisation of manpower for the GoS. Those who join militias do so for better salaries and incentives,¹⁷² as well as for being promised that they would be serving in their area of origin and be exempted from military service under further notice.¹⁷³ However, when the SAA is involved in active fighting and has need for manpower, such as it was the case in February 2020 in Idlib and northern Hama, militias would also be deployed to the frontlines to take part in the confrontations as auxiliary forces to the SAA.¹⁷⁴ Once their service in the militias is completed, individuals still risk being conscripted by the SAA under the pretext of avoiding mandatory military service.¹⁷⁵ Such cases have been reported occurring in Deir Ez-Zor governorate.¹⁷⁶

c) Recruitment of reservists

Reservists continue to be called up for service¹⁷⁷, albeit in smaller numbers compared to previous years due to the reduction of armed confrontations.¹⁷⁸ The law details four categories of reservists (first line, second line, third line and general reserve) and the contexts in which they can be called up for particular duties. The duration of reserve service as prescribed by the law is of five years for the categories of first line, second line and third line, and unspecified for general reserve service.¹⁷⁹ In practice there have been cases where the duration of the reserve service has reached nine years.¹⁸⁰

Reservists are called up for service in the same way as conscripts.¹⁸¹ When a reservist is called up, the military recruitment division announces the birth year of the reservist and the specific number of the military training course that they passed when they were conscripts.¹⁸² According to SNHR, the reservist is called up 'by military recruitment division via the *mukhtar* who may

¹⁶⁸ Ezzi, M., What's New About the Sweida Protests in Southern Syria?, EUI, 12 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ NPA, Popular rejection to government-imposed settlements in Syria's Suwayda, 30 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰ Ezzi, M., What's New About the Sweida Protests in Southern Syria?, EUI, 12 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023; DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 23; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Military service, April 2021, [url](#), pp. 16-17

¹⁷² Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Military service, April 2021, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁷³ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023

¹⁷⁴ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023

¹⁷⁵ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023; Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023.

¹⁷⁶ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023.

¹⁷⁷ Netherlands (The), MFA, Country of origin information report Syria, May 2022, [url](#), p. 53; AlMustafa, M., email correspondence 11 July 2023; online interview 17 July 2023.

¹⁷⁸ Netherlands (The), MFA, Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria] [source: confidential sources interviewed in March and April 2023], August 2023, [url](#), p. 54

¹⁷⁹ Syrian Arab Republic, Legislative Decree 30 of 2007 Military service law, 12 May 2007, [url](#), Articles 15-20

¹⁸⁰ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence 11 July 2023; online interview 17 July 2023.

¹⁸¹ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: SOHR], July 2023, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁸² DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: SOHR], July 2023, [url](#), p. 19



approach the person at his residence'.¹⁸³ According to Suhail Al-Ghazi, individuals with specific skills such as tank crewmen are more likely to be called up for reserve service. The same source further stated that reservists from former opposition-held areas are increasingly called up for service, as the GoS wants to assert more control over these areas.¹⁸⁴ If those who are called up for reserve service do not report within the given deadline, their name will be added to wanted lists and they would risk being arrested by the authorities.¹⁸⁵ During the reference period, sources reported that GoS security forces arrested men wanted for reserve service, including in Rural Damascus¹⁸⁶ and Idlib governorates.¹⁸⁷ Reservists cannot choose their place of deployment.¹⁸⁸

1.2.3 Deployment of conscripts and reservists

According to Omran Center for Strategic Studies researcher Muhsen AlMustafa,¹⁸⁹ military operations and the GoS' need of manpower are the main factors influencing the deployment of conscripts and reservists.¹⁹⁰ Conscripts and reservists cannot choose their place of deployment.¹⁹¹ Conscripts may be able to pay a bribe to the commander of the division to be assigned to a specific division or avoid specific duties.¹⁹² Bribing an officer to serve in a non-field position or not to serve at all is also a common practice.¹⁹³

The GoS tends to deploy its forces in areas that pose the greatest threat to its control, for instance in northwestern Syria (Idlib and northern Aleppo).¹⁹⁴ Conscripts may be assigned to do their military service in units that have been involved in human rights violations including war crimes throughout the conflict, such as the Special Forces, the Republican Guard, the Fourth Armoured Division, the Air Force Intelligence or Military Intelligence.¹⁹⁵ The conscripts do not have the possibility to choose the unit in which they are to serve.¹⁹⁶

¹⁸³ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [sources: SNHR, Suhail Al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), pp. 22, 26

¹⁸⁴ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 26; Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023.

¹⁸⁵ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: SNHR], July 2023, [url](#), p. 22

¹⁸⁶ MEMO, Syria regime forces launch campaign of arrests in Damascus, 17 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ NPA, Government arrests dozens in Syria's Idlib for military reserve service, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023; AlMustafa, M., email correspondence 11 July 2023; online interview 17 July 2023; DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [sources: SOHR, SNHR, Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), pp. 19-20, 23, 27

¹⁸⁹ Muhsen AlMustafa is a researcher at the Omran Center for Strategic Studies focusing on security, military, and governance in Syria. His work has been published in various outlets and think-tanks such as TIMEP, Italian Institute for International Studies and Tawazun. For more information see [Bibliography](#).

¹⁹⁰ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence 11 July 2023; online interview 17 July 2023.

¹⁹¹ EUAA interview with Ali Aljasem, online interview, 10 July 2023; AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023; DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [sources: SOHR, SNHR, Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), pp. 19-20, 23, 27

¹⁹² DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [sources: SOHR, SNHR, Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), pp. 20, 23, 27; EUAA interview with Ali Aljasem, online interview, 10 July 2023.

¹⁹³ Al Mustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023; Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023; Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023.

¹⁹⁴ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023.

¹⁹⁵ DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023, [url](#), pp. 8-9, 12-14

¹⁹⁶ DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023 [sources: SNHR, A Human Rights Organisation], [url](#), p. 26



Traditionally, the Republican Guard and Fourth Armoured Division have recruited mostly Alawites into their ranks,¹⁹⁷ with the vast majority of officers in the Fourth Armoured Division being Alawite.¹⁹⁸ However, sources reported in 2023 that the Fourth Armoured Division's recent recruitment practices have also targeted Sunni conscripts and former opposition fighters into its ranks, particularly in Dar'a governorate,¹⁹⁹ as well as draft evaders and deserters in Homs governorate.²⁰⁰ According to Muhsen AlMustafa, conscripts from former opposition areas would not be selected to serve in sensitive positions such as in intelligence agencies where conscripts who are viewed as loyal to the GoS would be preferred.²⁰¹

According to Suhail al-Ghazi, conscripts may be sent to the frontlines irrespective of their fighting experience or military skills.²⁰² Sources interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs assessed that conscripts originating from former opposition held areas would be disproportionately sent to the frontlines despite receiving minimal training, as punishment for their perceived lack of loyalty to the GoS.²⁰³ Ali Aljasem noted that most of the casualties suffered by the SAA on active frontlines (such as Idlib in early 2020) were conscripts who originated from former opposition held areas (such as Dar'a, Darraya, Douma) and had little fighting experience. The expert noted that at this stage of the conflict the GoS expects even conscripts who are not viewed as loyalists to fight and contribute to its victory.²⁰⁴

According to Muhsen AlMustafa, a conscript's level of education influences the rank he receives during the compulsory military service. Persons with university degrees of four (graduation rate of 75 % or more), five or six years and those with master's degrees or above are given the officer rank of lieutenant and those with university degrees of four years the rank of warrant officer, while those with lower education certificates get lower ranks such as corporal, sergeant and first sergeant. Recruits which have minimum or partial disability will be attributed a rank one level lower than the one they would be awarded if they didn't have any disability.²⁰⁵ According to a source interviewed by ACCORD in December 2021, persons with a university degree will be more likely to have to work in an office, while someone without a degree is more likely to be deployed to the front.²⁰⁶

¹⁹⁷ DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023 [sources: SNHR, A Human Rights Organisation], [url](#), pp. 12, 23

¹⁹⁸ DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023 [sources: SNHR, A Human Rights Organisation], [url](#), p. 12, 23; Alghadawi, A., The Fourth Division: Syria's Parallel Army, MEI, September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ Shahhoud A., Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), pp. 9-10

²⁰⁰ Enab Baladi, Fourth Division strengthens "smuggling economy" with military deserters, 17 January 2023, [url](#)

²⁰¹ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023.

²⁰² DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 27

²⁰³ Netherlands (The), MFA, Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria] [source: confidential sources interviewed in March and April 2023], August 2023, [url](#), p. 59

²⁰⁴ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023. The use of conscripts from former opposition-held areas in active fighting that took place in early 2020 was also documented in the EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Military service, April 2021, [url](#), p. 23

²⁰⁵ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023.

²⁰⁶ Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Kheder Khaddour], 27 January 2022, [url](#), p. 19



1.2.4 Demobilisation of conscripts and reservists

Throughout the current conflict, conscripts and reservists have served beyond the compulsory period of military service.²⁰⁷ During the reference period of this report, three administrative orders were issued to discharge certain groups of conscripts and reservists who had already served a certain number of years.²⁰⁸

In August 2022, an administrative order ended the retention and recall of certain categories: reserve officers (doctors, dentists, and pharmacists), officers (doctors, dentists, and pharmacists) who are serving under compulsory service shall be discharged upon the completion of their compulsory service. Upon completing their mandatory or reserve service, specialist doctors in anaesthesia, intensive care, and emergency medicine would also be discharged.²⁰⁹

In late August 2022, an administrative order ended the retention and recall of the following categories, effective from 1 October 2022: retained conscripted officers, retained conscripted officer cadets from all specialties, reserve officers and officer cadets ('enlisted attendees') who have completed at least one year of actual reserve service until 31 August 2022. Additionally, officers and conscripted officer cadets would be discharged upon completion of mandatory military service. Reserve ranks and personnel who have completed six and a half or more years of reserve service years, and reserve ranks and personnel who were born in 1983 and completed two or more years of reserve service until 31 August 2022, would also be discharged from 1 October 2022.²¹⁰

In July 2023, the president of Syria issued an administrative order ending the retention and recall of non-commissioned officers and reservist soldiers who have completed six and a half years of actual service until 31 July 2023. The order was effective from 1 September 2023.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ EUAA, Targeting of individuals, September 2022, [url](#), pp. 40-41; EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), p. 26; Kinaan, N., An Exile Returns to Find Syria Changed Forever, New Lines Magazine, 29 November 2022, [url](#)

²⁰⁸ Syria Ministry of Defence, Administrative Order No. /16492-1/ dated 10/8/2022 AD issued by the General Command of the Army and Armed Forces, 10 August 2022, [url](#); SANA, الرئيس الأسد يصدر أمراً إدارياً بإنهاء الاحتفاظ والاستدعاء والتسريح للضباط المجندين الاحتياطيين وصف الضباط والأفراد الاحتياطيين [President al-Assad issues an administrative order to end the retention, call-up and demobilization of the reserve enlisted officers and the description of the reserve officers and personnel], 27 August 2022, [url](#); SANA, President al-Assad issues administrative order to end military personnel retention of some soldiers, 17 July 2023, [url](#)

²⁰⁹ Syria Ministry of Defence, Administrative Order No. /16492-1/ dated 10/8/2022 AD issued by the General Command of the Army and Armed Forces, 10 August 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Ending reserve service in regime forces; Move to reduce financial, political pressure, 27 July 2023, [url](#)

²¹⁰ SANA, الرئيس الأسد يصدر أمراً إدارياً بإنهاء الاحتفاظ والاستدعاء والتسريح للضباط المجندين الاحتياطيين وصف الضباط والأفراد الاحتياطيين [President al-Assad issues an administrative order to end the retention, call-up and demobilization of the reserve enlisted officers and the description of the reserve officers and personnel], 27 August 2022, [url](#)

²¹¹ SANA, President al-Assad issues administrative order to end military personnel retention of some soldiers, 17 July 2023, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Ending reserve service in regime forces; Move to reduce financial, political pressure, 27 July 2023, [url](#)



1.2.5 Implementation in practice of legal exemptions and deferrals

It is not possible to conscientiously object to conscription,²¹² although Legislative Decree 30/2007 allows deferrals for compulsory service and exemptions for certain persons, which are discussed below.²¹³ According to the USDOS, in 2022, 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.²¹⁴

According to the Conscription law, a person is exempted from military service if he has completed at least 10 years of service in the internal security services, including in the police.²¹⁵ This period was reduced to five years by Legislative Decree No. 1 of 2012. Those who do not serve the full five years are still required to complete their military service. However, anyone who is accepted into the police signs a 10-year contract.²¹⁶

The law also 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.²¹⁷ The law also allows for the payment of an exemption fee; however, this only applies for people residing abroad.²¹⁸

Generally, the exemptions from military service are being enforced in practice by the GoS.²¹⁹ However, sources noted that, at times, the GoS resorts to blackmail²²⁰ and extortion²²¹ of individuals seeking to obtain or renew exemptions. According to Muhsen AlMustafa, it is advisable for persons to carry the necessary documents pertaining to their exemptions or deferrals from military service at all times. Issues may arise if a person doesn’t have relevant documents on him when questioned by authorities. Such a situation may lead to the person being mistakenly enlisted, which can be time consuming to rectify.²²² According to Suhail al-Ghazi, showing the military booklet when questioned by the authorities is usually sufficient to prove the exemption/deferral. However, if the military booklet presents any suspicion to the authorities checking it, other documents proving the exemption/deferral need to be presented.²²³

Military service exemptions are granted for medical reasons related to a person’s inability to handle military duties (such as heart conditions and visual impairments). Examples of such illnesses may exempt the person from military service or assign him to ‘non-combatant roles’, such as administrative positions that do not require physical exertion that would conflict with their health condition.²²⁴ A person wishing to make use of this exemption has to undergo a

²¹² 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](#)

²¹³ TIMEP, TIMEP Brief: Conscription Law, 22 August 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁴ USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

²¹⁵ Netherlands (The), MFA, Country of origin information report Syria, May 2022, [url](#), p. 56

²¹⁶ Netherlands (The), MFA, Country of origin information report Syria, May 2022, [url](#), p. 56; ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Syrien: Wehrdienstverweigerung und Desertion, 8 September 2022 [Al-Mustafa, Muhsen: E-Mail-Auskunft, 8 August 2022], [url](#), p. 22

²¹⁷ EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), pp. 28-32

²¹⁸ EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), pp. 28-32

²¹⁹ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts’ duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: SNHR], July 2023, [url](#), p. 21; Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023; AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023.

²²⁰ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023.

²²¹ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023.

²²² AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023.

²²³ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts’ duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 25

²²⁴ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023.



medical examination which would need to determine that he has a medical issue that would make him only eligible for administrative tasks.²²⁵

Obtaining an exemption from military service for medical reasons²²⁶ or being assigned to non-combatant roles is increasingly difficult and issues of bribery and extortion are common.²²⁷ In some cases, if authorities discover that the medical exemption was wrongfully granted (e.g. via paying a bribe) they would require the person to undergo another medical examination.²²⁸ Residents 'determined to serve in a non-field service' in the military because of their specific health conditions can pay a fee of USD 3 000 to be exempted from military service.²²⁹

Syrians who reside abroad for one, two, three or four years may pay USD 10 000, 9 000, 8 000 or 7 000 respectively to be exempted from military service.²³⁰ Exemption from reserve service is also acquirable by Syrians who have been residing abroad for at least one year and pay a fee of USD 5 000.²³¹ The exemption fee can be paid either from abroad at a Syrian embassy or consulate, or by a proxy (for instance a family member) in Syria. In both cases, the exemption will have to be registered in the military booklet of the person. If the exemption fee is paid by a proxy, the person will have to send his military booklet to the proxy in Syria. After paying the fee and receiving a receipt, the proxy will approach the military recruitment division that will register the exemption in the military booklet. If the person pays the exemption fee himself from abroad, he will receive a receipt which he will have to show upon his return to Syria as proof of being exempted from military service. Once back in Syria, the person will have to approach the military recruitment division to have the exemption registered in his military booklet.²³²

Several sources stated that the GoS does not forcibly conscript persons who paid the exemption fee.²³³

According to a Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) 2022 survey based on face-to-face interviews with refugee returnees currently residing in Homs, Rural Damascus and Damascus, 40 % of respondents stated that they were concerned that either them, friends or relatives were at risk of forced conscription in the SAA despite the fact that in some cases they had served in the SAA prior to the current conflict or paid the exemption fee. Around 18 % of respondents stated

²²⁵ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 25

²²⁶ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [sources: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), pp. 24-25; Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence, 11 July 2023.

²²⁷ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023.

²²⁸ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023.

²²⁹ Syria, Legislative Decree 31, President Bashar Al-Assad issues the LD # 31/2020, amending some articles of the LD# 30 date 03/05/2007, as amended, which contains the Military Service Law, [url](#), art. 1; AlMustafa, M., Fight or Flight: The Syrian Conscription Nightmare, ISPI, 5 June 2023, [url](#); DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 25

²³⁰ 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; AlMustafa, M., Fight or Flight: The Syrian Conscription Nightmare, ISPI, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

²³¹ AlMustafa, M., Fight or Flight: The Syrian Conscription Nightmare, ISPI, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

²³² DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: SNHR], July 2023, [url](#), pp. 21-22

²³³ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023; Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023; DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: SNHR], July 2023, [url](#), p. 21; Sweden, Migrationsverket, Syrisk militärtjänst (version 2.0) [Syria Military service] [source: former officer in the Syrian army; Syrian lawyer active in Damascus], 22 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; Netherlands (The), MFA, Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria] [source: confidential sources interviewed in November 2022 and March 2023], August 2023, [url](#), pp. 55-56

that they were interrogated by security forces upon returning, including as follow up on exemptions to military service.²³⁴

Men who have evaded compulsory military service and have not paid the exemption fee before reaching the age of 43, must pay a fee of USD 8 000²³⁵ or they risk having their property seized without notification or the opportunity to challenge the decision.²³⁶ If they do not have any properties or real estate, the reserve seizure will be executed on the properties of their family members.²³⁷ While older reports noted that the Ministry of Finance froze the assets of draft evaders and their family members,²³⁸ Jusoor for Studies²³⁹ claimed that in practice the seizure of assets has not been implemented.²⁴⁰ Muhsen AlMustafa stated that he had no knowledge of cases of asset seizure of individuals under the aforementioned law. The expert further assessed that the law has not been implemented because most men either have not reached the age of 43 yet, have paid the exemption fee or have already completed their military service. However, since the asset seizure is prescribed by the law, the expert expects that it will be implemented in the future.²⁴¹

Palestinian refugees claimed that Palestinian draft evaders were denied access to their properties in Yarmouk camp. No further information on the reason behind the denial of access was provided.²⁴²

Students can postpone their conscription on a yearly basis while they are studying.²⁴³ The GoS issued a decision prohibiting students from repeating their final year of college more than three times, as it was discovered that some students deliberately failed in the last year of college in order to delay their enlistment in the military.²⁴⁴ A student in such a situation would not be granted exemption from military service and would risk conscription.²⁴⁵

In August 2022, the GoS issued a decree whereby students and graduates of medical and health schools who committed themselves to serve in public institutions for a 10-year period were exempted from military service.²⁴⁶ Muhsen AlMustafa attributed the decision to the significant shortage of medical personnel in Syria resulting from emigration.²⁴⁷ According to Ali Aljasem, because of the GoS's shortage of medical personnel, doctors would not be able to bribe authorities to get exempted from military service or influence their deployment.²⁴⁸

²³⁴ RPW, Endless Refuge and Unsafe Homecoming, 7 December 2022, [url](#), p. 29

²³⁵ AlMustafa, M., The Selective Return of Syrian Refugees, TIMEP, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

²³⁶ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 27; HRW, Syrian 'Military Evaders' Face Unlawful Seizure of Property, Assets, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

²³⁷ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023.

²³⁸ 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

²³⁹ Jusoor for Studies is an independent institution specializing in information management and conducting studies and research related to the Syrian political and social affairs in particular and the Middle East region in general.

²⁴⁰ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023.

²⁴¹ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023.

²⁴² AGPS, Syrian Regime Deprives Military Service Evaders of Their Property in Yarmouk Camp, 3 January 2023, [url](#)

²⁴³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military Service, May 2020, [url](#), p. 58; Syrian academic, email correspondence, 25 April 2022

²⁴⁴ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023.

²⁴⁵ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023.

²⁴⁶ AlMustafa, M., Fight or Flight: The Syrian Conscription Nightmare, ISPI, 5 June 2023, [url](#); SANA, الرئيس الأسد يصدر مرسوماً يقبل عدد من طلاب كليات الطب ومن حملة الإجازة في الطب كملتزمين بالخدمة لدى الجهات العامة [President al-Assad issues a decree accepting a number of students of medical schools and holders of medical degrees as committed to serving with public authorities], 29 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁷ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023.

²⁴⁸ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023.

University students who transit between areas held by GoS and SDF stated that they risk conscription by both parties since the identity documentation and military deferments issued by one administration are not recognised by the other.²⁴⁹ SOHR reported in April 2023 that four students were arrested in Damascus for evading military service despite having valid deferral documents.²⁵⁰

1.2.6 Implementation practice for amnesties

The GoS regularly announces amnesties which cover offences of army desertion or evasion from military service.²⁵¹ According to Jusoor for Studies, amnesties do not cover those who evaded reserve service.²⁵² Most amnesties 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’.²⁵³ According to Ali Aljasem, individuals who want to make use of the amnesties must also generally undergo a ‘reconciliation’/settlement process.²⁵⁴ Those who benefit from the amnesties are still required to perform compulsory military service.²⁵⁵

In early 2022, Decree 3/2022²⁵⁶ was announced by the GoS. It stipulated that 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 (“internal desertion”) and 101 (“external desertion”) of the Military Penal Code.²⁵⁷ Regarding the implementation of Decree 3/2022, SNHR documented the release of at least nine individuals from detention centres under the control of the GoS and their conscription into mandatory military service. Additionally, 36 individuals residing in GoS-held areas presented themselves to recruitment centres and were enlisted into mandatory military service.²⁵⁸

In December 2022, Assad issued Legislative Decree 24 which provided amnesty for the penalty stipulated in Articles 100 (“internal desertion”) and 101 (“external desertion”) of the Military Penal Code²⁵⁹ if deserters reported for military service within three to four months. Those inside Syria had to report within three months while those abroad had to report within four months.²⁶⁰ Regarding the implementation of Legislative Decree No. 24/2022, SNHR documented the release of at least 14 individuals from detention centres under the control of the GoS and their

²⁴⁹ Enab Baladi, Northeastern Syria students are target of double recruitment campaigns, 15 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁵⁰ SOHR, To undergo compulsory service | Extensive security mobilization of regime searching for wanted people, 5 April 2023, [url](#)

²⁵¹ EUAA, Targeting of individuals, September 2022, [url](#), pp. 42-43; Both, Pieter, Manipulating National Trauma: The Assad Regime’s Wartime Instrumentalisation of Presidential Amnesties, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁵² Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023.

²⁵³ SADC, Normalisation of Horror - Security and Living Conditions in Assad-held Syria, 9 August 2021, [url](#), p. 27

²⁵⁴ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023.

²⁵⁵ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023; AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023; EUAA, Targeting of individuals, September 2022, [url](#), pp. 42-43

²⁵⁶ See SANA, [President al-Assad grants a general amnesty for crimes of internal and external flight committed before 25-1-2022], 25 January 2022, [url](#)

²⁵⁷ 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](#)

²⁵⁸ Reuters, Syria’s Assad issues conditional amnesty for draft dodgers, 21 December 2022, [url](#); Asharq Al Awsat, Syria’s Assad Issues Conditional Amnesty for Draft Dodgers, 21 December 2022, [url](#)

²⁵⁹ Syrian Arab Republic, Parliament, 2022-12-21 الرئيس الأسد يصدر مرسوماً بمنح عفو عام عن الجرائم المرتكبة قبل تاريخ 21-12-2022, [President al-Assad issues a decree granting a general amnesty for crimes committed before 12-21-2022], 21 December 2022, [url](#)

²⁶⁰ Reuters, Syria’s Assad issues conditional amnesty for draft dodgers, 21 December 2022, [url](#); Asharq Al Awsat, Syria’s Assad Issues Conditional Amnesty for Draft Dodgers, 21 December 2022, [url](#)



conscription into mandatory military service. Additionally, 24 individuals presented themselves to recruitment centres and were enlisted into mandatory military service.²⁶¹

According to Muhsen AlMustafa, amnesties such as Decree 24 of 2022 generally provide pardons for crimes outlined in Article 100 and 101 of the Military Penal Code but do not cover offences listed in subsequent articles such as Articles 102 ('fleeing to the enemy', 'fleeing upon facing the enemy'), 103 ('flight by conspiracy and flight in times of war'), and 104 ('joining a foreign country to escape military duties').²⁶² As a result, defectors who try to make use of these amnesties may be charged with additional offences which fall outside their scope.²⁶³ According to Jusoor for Studies, amnesties issued by GoS do not exonerate defectors but rather criminalise them because of 'their dealings with external entities'. Defectors are still subject to prosecution, investigation, and compulsory residence for those who are older and whose have bad health conditions.²⁶⁴

1.2.7 Treatment of draft evaders, deserters and defectors

Draft evaders are mainly apprehended at checkpoints²⁶⁵ where their ID's and military booklet is verified²⁶⁶ or when applying for a service at state institutions.²⁶⁷ According to Ali Aljasem, currently the authorities do not carry out house raids to search for draft evaders.²⁶⁸ Those who are caught are sent to the military police and from there to military bases for training and deployment.²⁶⁹

During the reference period, sources reported that GoS security forces arrested men wanted for conscription at checkpoints in Rural Damascus²⁷⁰, Dar'a²⁷¹ and Deir Ez-Zor governorates.²⁷² Young men who gathered to watch the Qatar 2022 World Cup in Damascus were arrested by security forces for evading conscription.²⁷³ For instance, on 22 November 2022, local media reported that 35 young males were arrested in the Damascus suburb of Babila.²⁷⁴ Arrest campaigns targeting persons wanted for military service were also reported in reconquered areas in Idlib governorate.²⁷⁵

²⁶¹ SNHR, email correspondence, 24 July 2023.

²⁶² Syrian Arab Republic, Law No. 61 of 1950, as amended (Military Penal Code) [UNHCR unofficial translation], 16 February 2017, [url](#), pp. 3-4

²⁶³ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023.

²⁶⁴ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023.

²⁶⁵ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 24

²⁶⁶ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023

²⁶⁷ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: SOHR], July 2023, [url](#), p. 19; Netherlands, MFA, Country of origin information report Syria, May 2022, [url](#), p. 36; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Military service, April 2021, [url](#), pp. 20-21

²⁶⁸ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023

²⁶⁹ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023

²⁷⁰ New Arab (The), Syrian regime arrests dozens of football fans at World Cup screening venues in forced conscription operation, 30 November 2022, [url](#)

²⁷¹ NPA, Government forces arbitrarily arrest 10 people in Syria's Daraa, 10 September 2022, [url](#)

²⁷² SOHR, To undergo compulsory service | Extensive security mobilization of regime searching for wanted people, 5 April 2023, [url](#)

²⁷³ New Arab (The), Syrian regime arrests dozens of football fans at World Cup screening venues in forced conscription operation, 30 November 2022, [url](#); USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 57

²⁷⁴ New Arab (The), Syrian regime arrests dozens of football fans at World Cup screening venues in forced conscription operation, 30 November 2022, [url](#)

²⁷⁵ NPA, Government forces arrest 50 individuals in Syria's Idlib, 21 August 2023, [url](#)



Draft evaders who are apprehended by the authorities will ultimately be sent to military service.²⁷⁶ Draft evaders can also make use of the ‘reconciliation’/settlement deals that the GoS initiates regularly, whereby if they report for military service within a period of time prescribed by the settlement and do not have additional security issues they will not incur any punishment.²⁷⁷ The treatment of draft evaders who have other security issues pending with the GoS apart from evading military service would depend on the nature and gravity of the issues.²⁷⁸ Those who do not solve their security issues, especially prominent figures, would risk arrest and forced disappearance.²⁷⁹ According to a confidential source interviewed in March 2023 by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, draft evaders originating from former opposition-held areas would be viewed with suspicion and be more likely to be imprisoned or sent to the front.²⁸⁰

The treatment of defectors by GoS authorities depends on their individual situation such as rank and previous activities (e.g. how they defected, joining an opposition group, participation in military activities against GoS etc.)²⁸¹ According to Muhsen AlMustafa, deserters and defectors will be dealt by the GoS based on the nature of their escape (internal or external) and the penalties imposed by the Penal Code (Articles 100 to 104).²⁸²

According to Muhsen AlMustafa, a defector who turns himself in would be tried by a military court and imprisoned. After finishing his prison sentence/or if an amnesty is granted he will be taken to serve in the military unit where he defected from.²⁸³ According to Ali Aljasem, deserters and defectors usually enter ‘reconciliation’ deals with the authorities whereby they join or form a militia or a military formation that is affiliated with the SAA or intelligence services.²⁸⁴ Examples of SAA-affiliated units where defectors have been integrated include the 25th Division (previously Tiger Forces)²⁸⁵ and the Eight Brigade.²⁸⁶ Paying bribes to GoS authorities for facilitating the return and integration of defectors into SAA affiliated units is also reported.²⁸⁷

Entering into a ‘reconciliation’/settlement with the GoS does not guarantee that the deserter/defector will be safe in the future.²⁸⁸ According to Ali Aljasem, there are cases where neighbours denounce the person who underwent ‘reconciliation’/settlement to the intelligence services for previous activities. This situation would create additional security issues for the person which would have to be dealt by interacting with the intelligence services.²⁸⁹

²⁷⁶ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023; Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023; AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023.

²⁷⁷ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023.

²⁷⁸ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023.

²⁷⁹ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023.

²⁸⁰ Netherlands (The), MFA, Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria] [source: confidential source interviewed in March 2023], August 2023, [url](#), p. 58

²⁸¹ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023; AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023.

²⁸² AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023.

²⁸³ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence, 11 July 2023; online interview, 17 July 2023.

²⁸⁴ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023.

²⁸⁵ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023.

²⁸⁶ Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 6; Al-Jabassini, A., The Eighth Brigade: Striving for Supremacy in Southern Syria, EUI, December 2020, [url](#), pp. 7-8

²⁸⁷ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023; Waters, G. The Lion and The Eagle: The Syrian Arab Army’s Destruction and Rebirth, MEI, 18 July 2019, [url](#); Waters, G., From Tiger Forces to the 16th Brigade: Russia’s evolving Syrian proxies, MEI, 16 September 2022, [url](#)

²⁸⁸ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023; EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), pp. 36-37

²⁸⁹ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023.



Arrests, detention²⁹⁰ and torture²⁹¹ of defector returnees were reported by sources during the reference period of this report. In a report documenting torture and ill treatment in Syria between 1 January 2020 and 30 April 2023, the UNCOI reported on cases where testimonies claimed that, in 2020, military defectors detained by the Air Force Intelligence at its facility at Kuweires airport (Aleppo governorate) showed signs of physical abuse and stated that they were beaten with electric cables and sticks as punishment for defecting.²⁹² In another documented case, a military defector who was arrested in 2020 and held 'entirely outside the legal system' was subsequently released following payment of a bribe of thousands of dollars by his family and tribe. In a third case, in 2020, the brother of an army defector from Raqqa governorate who was arrested for defection in 2019, received the death certificate of the defector without any further details.²⁹³ SNHR stated in a June 2023 statement that the GoS takes revenge on defectors through arbitrary arrest, torture and enforced disappearance.²⁹⁴

Sources interviewed by EUAA for this report stated that issues related to military service (e.g. draft evasion, desertion, defection) do not currently lead to direct repercussions for family members.²⁹⁵ However, according to Ali Aljasem, in cases where the persons wanted by the GoS are higher profile, their family members would also be at risk.²⁹⁶

1.3. Trafficking in human beings

In accordance with Decree No. 3/2010,²⁹⁷ some forms of sex and labour trafficking are prohibited and punished at minimum with seven years of imprisonment and a fine,²⁹⁸ although the law does not include a clear definition of trafficking.²⁹⁹ The Decree established a Department to Combat Human Trafficking at the Ministry of the Interior and a national plan to combat trafficking and provide care for victims.³⁰⁰ An UN study published in 2018 reported that, despite several measures undertaken by the government to implement the anti-trafficking law, several gaps in its application persist such as: inconsistent application of the law by the Courts; anti-trafficking law not included in the Faculties of Law's learning programs; lack of specialised centres for victims of trafficking and the centralisation of the Department to Combat Trafficking in Persons.³⁰¹

²⁹⁰ Syria Direct, 1,100 Syrian refugees arrested, 600 deported from Lebanon in unprecedented crackdown, 4 May 2023, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 19

²⁹¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 19

²⁹² UN Human Rights Council, "No End in Sight": Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#), para. 26

²⁹³ UN Human Rights Council, "No End in Sight": Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#), paras 26, 31

²⁹⁴ SNHR, We Urge Lebanese Authorities Not to Forcibly Repatriate Syrian Regime Army Defector Saleh Nemer al-Samar to Syria, Which Would Put His Life at Risk, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁹⁵ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023; Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence 11 July & 24 July 2023. See also EUAA, Targeting of individuals, September 2022, [url](#), p. 46

²⁹⁶ Aljasem, A., online interview, 10 July 2023

²⁹⁷ Syrian Arab Republic, Decree 3/2010, [url](#), no English translation available

²⁹⁸ USDOS, Trafficking in persons report 2023, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁹⁹ Antislavery in domestic legislation, Syrian Arab Republic, [url](#); USDOS, Trafficking in persons report 2023, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁰⁰ UN Human Rights Council, National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 15 (a) of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1*, **, 2 September 2011, [url](#), pp. 7, 15, paras 24, 73

³⁰¹ UNDP, Syria Gender Justice, Assessment of laws affecting gender equality and protection against gender-based violence, 2018, pp. 19-20, [url](#)



In its Trafficking in persons Report published in June 2023 and covering the period between April 2022 and March 2023, USDOS observed that the GoS did not undertake any clear action to ensure law enforcement. Likewise, notwithstanding the anti-trafficking law, no measure has been taken by the government either to protect victims of trafficking or to prosecute traffickers. On the contrary, the source highlighted the complicity of the state in human trafficking.³⁰² In its Organized Crime Report, the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime highlighted that the inactivity of the state and the facilitation of human trafficking resulted in an increased vulnerability of persons to exploitation. The same source observed that most criminal markets in Syria are run by actors affiliated with the GoS, including the National Defense Forces (NDF) and Tiger Forces.³⁰³

The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime defined the human trafficking market in Syria as ‘flourishing’ with forced labour and sexual exploitation as being ‘pervasive’ across the country. Trafficking in persons occurred all across the country though Deir Ez-Zor and Al Qaim, an Iraqi town on border with Syria, have been identified as the major trafficking hubs.³⁰⁴

Girls, boys and women were subjected to exploitation by armed groups, community members and criminal gangs.³⁰⁵ The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) noted an escalation in terms of exploitation of women and girls and a growing incidence of child labour among adolescent girls due to the deteriorating levels of poverty and food insecurity across the country.³⁰⁶ Moreover, the devastating earthquakes of February 2023 exacerbated the vulnerability to sex trafficking, forced labour and recruitment or use of children by armed groups.³⁰⁷ Children, divorced and widowed women, and displaced persons were more exposed to exploitation. Unaccompanied minors were also more likely to be involved in forced child labour to access basic needs when compared to other children with caregivers.³⁰⁸ Children recruited by armed groups were used by combatants in child labour as informants, exposing them to retaliation by other combatants.³⁰⁹ Child labour also exposed children to exploitation, sexual and psychological violence.³¹⁰

Children who had been victims of trafficking continued to be detained by the GoS, NDF, SDF and Syrian National Army (SNA) on the basis of their alleged association with armed or terrorist groups.³¹¹ In a statement released in March 2023, the UN expressed concerns about the risk of trafficking and enslavement of children held captive in north-eastern Syria.³¹² According to

³⁰² USDOS, Trafficking in persons report 2023, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁰³ Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, Global organized crime index, Syria, 2021, [url](#), pp. 3-4

³⁰⁴ Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, Global organized crime index, Syria, 2021, [url](#), p. 3

³⁰⁵ USDOS, Trafficking in persons report, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁰⁶ UNFPA, GPC, Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility: Voices from Syria 2023 - Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, [url](#), p. 67, 28 March 2023

³⁰⁷ USDOS, Trafficking in persons report, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁰⁸ UNFPA, GPC, Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility: Voices from Syria 2023 - Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 28 March 2023, [url](#), p. 68

³⁰⁹ USDOS, Trafficking in persons report, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³¹⁰ UNFPA, GPC, Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility: Voices from Syria 2023 - Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 28 March 2023, [url](#), p. 68

³¹¹ USDOS, Trafficking in persons report, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³¹² UN Human Rights Council, Children in Northeast Syria must be urgently repatriated: UN experts, 31 March 2023 [url](#)



USDOS, victims of trafficking are reportedly detained, arrested and abused by GoS for trafficking-related crimes, including child soldiers.³¹³

In areas where the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has a presence and exerts a degree of control, girls and women are forced into marriage with fighters, subjected to domestic servitude, sexual slavery and early marriage, especially for those belonging to minority communities. In such areas, women and girls exposed to early child marriage are also at higher risk of sexual slavery and forced labour.³¹⁴

Due to the lack of livelihoods, women, girls and female-households are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).³¹⁵ IDPs and persons with disabilities are more at risk of trafficking and sex exploitation in exchange for food or money by armed groups, community members and criminal gangs.³¹⁶ The overpopulation in IDP camps, informal settlements and collective centres further exposes girls and women to exploitation, especially persons with disabilities.³¹⁷

Freedom House noted that IDPs and refugees are also more subjected to sexual and labour exploitation in relatively stable GoS-controlled areas due to the limited access to employment and investment opportunities.³¹⁸ Syrian refugees are also highly vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labour in neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Türkiye. An estimated number of 6 000 women and children, mainly Yazidis, who had been previously abducted and transferred to Syria by ISIL, have been sold into sex trafficking.³¹⁹

1.4. Children

In its Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023 covering the period between January 2022 and January 2023, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) observed that children ‘continue to be greatly affected by the crisis in Syria’ and exposed to violations in the hostilities.³²⁰ As indicated in the June 2023 report by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, 2 438 grave violations against 2 407 children (2 059 boys, 312 girls, 36 sex unknown) occurred throughout 2022. The same source recorded for 2022 the killing (307) and maiming (404) of 711 children, mostly perpetrated by unidentified actors, GoS and affiliated forces. The main reasons behind the casualties are explosive ordnance (375), ground shelling (217), air strikes (63) and live ammunition.³²¹ In the first half of 2023, SNHR recorded the killing of at least 71 children.³²² Most of the casualties were the result of landmines, explosions and killings by unidentified actors.³²³ According to UNOCHA, in the period between 1 January and

³¹³ USDOS, Trafficking in persons report, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³¹⁴ USDOS, Trafficking in persons report, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³¹⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023, December 2022, [url](#), p. 97

³¹⁶ USDOS, Trafficking in persons report, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³¹⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023, Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 84

³¹⁸ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Syria, 2023, [url](#)

³¹⁹ USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

³²⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 18

³²¹ UN Secretary General, Report by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, Children and armed conflict, 5 June 2023, [url](#), p. 24, paras 191, 194

³²² SNHR, Most notable human rights violations in Syria in June and the first half of 2023, [url](#), p. 15

³²³ SNHR, 501 Civilians, including 71 Children, 42 women and 20 individuals who died due to torture documented killed in Syria in the first half of 2023, 2 July 2023, [url](#), p. 8



30 September 2022, the leading source of death and maiming of children is related to the extensive contaminations of ERWs in large areas of Syria.³²⁴ The UN Secretary-General report covering 2022 also identified explosive ordnance as the main reason behind the casualties (375).³²⁵ In the period between March 2011 and 4 April 2023, SNHR documented the killing of 889 children due to explosions of landmines.³²⁶ For the period between April and May 2023, the UN Security Council reported the continuing killing of children due to explosion of landmines and ERW in areas under control of different actors.³²⁷ In the period between 1 July and 31 December 2022, UNCOI reported cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated by SNA.³²⁸

In north-eastern Syria, SDF continue to detain persons with perceived affiliation to ISIL, including children. UNOCHA reported that more than 1 000 children with perceived affiliation to armed groups are detained without due legal process in north-eastern Syria,³²⁹ while the UN stated that more than 600 children were under detention in north-eastern Syria at the end of 2022.³³⁰ Some 56 000 persons, most of them children under 12 years old³³¹ and wives or widows of allegedly former ISIL combatants, are interned in camps in northeast Syria in 'horrid conditions'.³³² The situation in such camps continues to deteriorate with extremely limited access to adequate health care and education, especially affecting children with disabilities³³³ and with a high rate of violence targeting women and children.³³⁴ Human Rights Watch stated that the conditions of children in Al Roj and Hoj Camps 'may amount to torture' as the situation is 'life-threatening, deeply degrading, and in many cases, inhuman'.³³⁵ Moreover, adolescent girls with disabilities experience an heightened risk of gender-based violence.³³⁶

Children in IDP camps

As of December 2022, UNICEF recorded 3 000 000 IDP children to be present in Syria.³³⁷ The population of IDP children continues to grow due to the hostilities, facing increased

³²⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 18

³²⁵ UN Secretary General, Report by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, Children and armed conflict, 5 June 2023, [url](#), p. 25, para. 194

³²⁶ SNHR, On the international day for mine awareness and assistance in mine action: landmines continue to plague large areas of Syria and threaten the lives of millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 18

³²⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), p. 5, para. 23

³²⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), p. 15, para. 96

³²⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 80

³³⁰ UN Secretary General, Report by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, Children and armed conflict, 5 June 2023, [url](#), p. 25, para. 193

³³¹ HRW, Revictimizing the Victims: Children Unlawfully Detained in Northeast Syria, 27 January 2023, [url](#)

³³² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Gendered impact of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on women and girls, 12 June 2023, [url](#), pp. 3, 11

³³³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), p. 18, para. 116

³³⁴ UN Secretary General, Report by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, Children and armed conflict, 5 June 2023, [url](#), p. 25, para. 205

³³⁵ HRW, Revictimizing the Victims: Children Unlawfully Detained in Northeast Syria, 27 January 2023, [url](#)

³³⁶ UNFPA, GPC, Whole of Syria, Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility: Voices from Syria 2023 - Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 28 March 2023, [url](#), p. 43

³³⁷ UNICEF, Humanitarian Action for Children 2023 – Syrian Arab Republic, 5 December 2022, [url](#)



vulnerability to abuses³³⁸ whereby the overcrowded and harsh living conditions worsen SGBV risks.³³⁹

Negative coping-mechanisms

The growing inability to meet basic needs and the widespread poverty induce households across the country to rely on negative coping mechanisms. In this context, female-headed households and children are affected disproportionately.³⁴⁰ The UNCOI highlighted the increasing number of female-headed households as a result of the protracted conflict and massive displacement.³⁴¹

Child labour, child recruitment and child marriage have a devastating impact on children, including on their level of attendance to school.³⁴² Displaced children are particularly exposed to forced labour, especially by organised begging rings.³⁴³ Child labour is particularly common among IDPs living out of camps. UNOCHA reported that female-headed households are twice as likely to report a complete inability to meet basic needs in comparison with male-headed households. The same source observed a higher reliance on child labour of children aged 15-17 years old (7 %) in female-headed households compared to male-headed households (2 %).³⁴⁴ More frequently, in female-headed households, women are unable to transmit the nationality to their children exposing them to risk of statelessness, mostly in areas outside GoS control and among IDPs in GoS-controlled areas. The lack of civil documentation and nationality has multifaceted consequences on the life of the children affected, hindering their access to education and health services and exposing them to ‘exploitation, abuse and trafficking’.³⁴⁵

An increasing number of children born out of wedlock are abandoned by their mothers for fear of stigmatisation by the society. Child marriage is reportedly increasing due to the conflict, and it is widespread across the country.³⁴⁶ Child marriage is deployed as a coping mechanism to face financial hardship and as a tool of ‘traditional protection’, especially in IDP camps.³⁴⁷ Around 84 % of children live in locations where child marriage is an issue for girls aged 15 to 17 years.³⁴⁸ This practice is used to face economic hardship and as a tool to mitigate reputational risks for family honour.³⁴⁹

³³⁸ USDOS, Human Rights Report 2022 Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 85

³³⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 49; UNFPA, GPC, Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility: Voices from Syria 2023 - Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 28 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 71, 78

³⁴⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 70

³⁴¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Gendered impact of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on women and girls, [url](#), p. 2

³⁴² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 9

³⁴³ USDOS, Trafficking in persons report 2023, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁴⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 61

³⁴⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Gendered impact of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on women and girls, 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 12

³⁴⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Gendered impact of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on women and girls, 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 8

³⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 79

³⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 40

³⁴⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Gendered impact of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on women and girls, 12 June 2023, [url](#), pp. 2



Unregistered customary marriage is also reportedly increasing, in some cases involving girls younger than 15 years old.³⁵⁰ Children and girls are also reportedly vulnerable to forced early marriage, including with ISIL fighters. In ISIL-controlled areas, girls are subjected to domestic servitude, sexual slavery, rape and other forms of sexual violence.³⁵¹

Child recruitment by government armed forces and other armed groups

Recruitment of children is prohibited according to Act No. 11 of 2013 which amended the Penal Code.³⁵² The law prescribes the criminalisation of all forms of recruitment under the age of 18 by armed forces and armed groups.³⁵³ However, the government did not take any evident action to prevent child recruitment by armed opposition groups and designated terrorist organisations. On the contrary, according to USDOS, the GoS reportedly showed official complicity in child recruitment, not undertaking any action to prosecute government officials and being itself an actor of recruitment.³⁵⁴ The June 2023 report published by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly states that a total of 1 696 children (of whom 1 593 boys and 103 girls) were recruited in 2022. Figures show that children in Syria are increasingly recruited,³⁵⁵ notwithstanding the de-escalating fighting in most parts of the country.³⁵⁶ Cases of children as young as 14 being recruited are also reported,³⁵⁷ UNICEF indicated that over 2 400 grave violations against children were verified, including recruitment by armed groups throughout 2022.³⁵⁸ USDOS observed that each of GoS forces, pro-GoS militias and armed non-state actors recruit children.³⁵⁹

Those responsible for recruitment were identified both in state actors and in non-state armed groups. The majority of children were recruited and used by SDF and affiliated armed groups (637), SNA (611), HTS (383), GoS and affiliated armed groups (25).³⁶⁰

In an interview with AP News, the Director of Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), an independent NGO documenting human rights violations in Syria, observed that forced

³⁵⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Gendered impact of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on women and girls, 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 2

³⁵¹ USDOS, Trafficking in persons report 2023, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁵² ILO, NATLEX, Database of national labour, social security and related human rights legislation, Syrian Arab Republic, General provisions, [url](#)

³⁵³ Syrian Arab Republic, Act No. 11 of 2013 amending the Penal Code No. 148 of 1949, [url](#), no English translation available; ILO, NATLEX, Database of national labour, social security and related human rights legislation, Syrian Arab Republic, General provisions, [url](#); UNDP, Syria Gender Justice, Assessment of laws affecting gender equality and protection against gender-based violence, December 2019, p. 12, [url](#)

³⁵⁴ USDOS, Trafficking in persons Report 2023, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁵⁵ UN Secretary General, Report by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, Children and armed conflict, 5 June 2023, [url](#), pp. 24, 26; paras 192, 201

³⁵⁶ AP News, Recruitment of children by armed groups in Syria is on the rise, even as fighting subsides, 28 June 2023, [url](#); there were 813 documented child recruitment cases in 2020; 1 296 in 2021, 1 696 in 2022, based on data published in: UN Report by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, Children and armed conflict, 6 May 2021, [url](#), p.24, para. 179; UN Secretary General, Report by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, Children and armed conflict, 23 June 2022, [url](#), p. 25, para. 189; UN Secretary General, Report by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, Children and armed conflict, 5 June 2023, [url](#), p. 24, para. 192

³⁵⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, [url](#), 13 March 2023, p. 17, para. 107

³⁵⁸ UNICEF, Whole of Syria Humanitarian Situation Report, January-December 2022, [url](#), p. 5

³⁵⁹ USDOS, Trafficking in persons report 2023, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁶⁰ UN Secretary General, Report by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, Children and armed conflict, 5 June 2023, [url](#), pp. 24-25; para. 192



recruitment is still in place in some cases, while in other cases children enrol to armed groups to respond to the economic needs for their households.³⁶¹ According to Suhail Al-Ghazi, interviewed by DIS in October 2022, the recruitment of children by SNA is ‘very common’ in SNA-controlled areas where the main target is poor children.³⁶² Pro-GoS militias such as Hezbollah and NDF forcibly recruit children as young as six years old. Children recruited by armed groups can also be used to fight in Libya. ISIL recruits children in Al-Hoj and Roj camps. HTS and ISIL have used children as ‘human shields, suicide bombers, snipers, and executioners’. In north-western Syria, the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG and YPJ) recruit and use boys and girls as young as 12 years old from IDP camps in north-eastern Syria.³⁶³

In an interview with DIS held in October 2022, Suhail Al-Ghazi stated that HTS recruits minors to a lesser extent than in the past. Reportedly, its recruitment methods are rely on an ideological basis through local mosques and sheikhs in IDP camps. Children recruited by HTS are as young as 12-14 years old.³⁶⁴

Notwithstanding the action plan signed in June 2019 with the UN that aimed to end the recruitment and use of children in conflict,³⁶⁵ SDF continue to recruit children, whose number increased in 2022.³⁶⁶ With a total of 637 verified cases in 2022, the UN reported an increase of child recruitment by the SDF, with most of the children being recruited into the YPG or the women’s units YPJ.³⁶⁷

Access to education

According to UNICEF, there are 6 400 000 children (50 % of them girls) in need of education assistance in Syria. This includes 2 400 000 out-of-school children,³⁶⁸ nearly 40 % of whom are girls.³⁶⁹ The rate of self-reported school attendance was 88 % for children from 6 to 17 years old.³⁷⁰ Out of school children are more likely exposed to child labour, early and forced marriage, trafficking, and recruitment into the fighting.³⁷¹ As stated by UNICEF, there are 1 600 000 children at risk of dropping out.³⁷² The UN Security Council also states that the figures are likely to increase following the February 2023 earthquakes.³⁷³

³⁶¹ AP News, Recruitment of children by armed groups in Syria is on the rise, even as fighting subsides, 28 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁶² DIS, Recruitment to opposition groups, December 2022, [url](#), p. 18

³⁶³ USDOS, Trafficking in persons 2023, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁶⁴ DIS, Recruitment to opposition groups, December 2022, [url](#), pp. 9, 15

³⁶⁵ UN News, New UN-Syrian Action Plan signals an ‘important day’ for child protection, says UN envoy, 1 July 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁶ UN Secretary General, Report by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, Children and armed conflict, 5 June 2023, [url](#), p. 26, para. 201

³⁶⁷ UN Secretary General, Report by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, Children and armed conflict, 5 June 2023, [url](#), para. 192, 201

³⁶⁸ UNICEF, Humanitarian Action for Children 2023 - Syrian Arab Republic, 5 December 2022, [url](#); UNICEF, Whole of Syria, Humanitarian Situation Report January – June 2023, [url](#)

³⁶⁹ UNICEF, Whole of Syria, Education response, January to May 2023, [url](#)

³⁷⁰ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 25

³⁷¹ UNICEF, Every Day Counts, Children of Syria cannot wait any longer, [url](#)

³⁷² UNICEF, Humanitarian Action for Children 2023 – Syrian Arab Republic, 5 December 2022, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷³ UN Security Council, Humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic, Report of the Secretary-General, 9 June 2023, [url](#), para. 35, p. 8



In IDP camps in north-western Syria, 57 % of children do not have access to primary school, while 80 % do not have access to secondary school.³⁷⁴ In north-eastern Syria, 47 % of the households interviewed by UNOCHA³⁷⁵ stated that their children did not attend school for the year 2021-2022. In SDF-controlled areas, teachers and education personnel have been reportedly intimidated and harassed.³⁷⁶ In Al-Hol camp access to education is severely limited.³⁷⁷

UNICEF identified several barriers for children to return to school such as: limited access to education premises for vulnerable children (including children with disabilities) and poor capacity to include children with disabilities in learning programmes; low quality of education programmes; limited modalities to reach and document the status of out of school children; poor economic capacities for families to support enrolment in learning programme; early marriages for girls and child labour for boys.³⁷⁸ Additionally, UNOCHA observed constraints related to the overcrowding of learning spaces, lack of teachers, shortage of school after primary level. Among the governorates, Hasaka (24 %), Raqqqa (22 %), Deir Ez-Zor (19 %), Aleppo (16 %) and Idlib (15 %) registered the highest level of children non-attendance rates to school.³⁷⁹

For the year 2022, the UN verified 13 attacks on schools resulting from ground shelling, air strikes and live ammunition, which were mainly attributed to GoS and affiliated forces and unidentified perpetrators. Schools were also being used for military purposes, particularly by YPG/YPJ.³⁸⁰ UNICEF indicated that one in three schools in Syria is no longer used for educational purposes as they have been ‘destroyed, damaged, continue to shelter displaced families or are being used for military purposes’.³⁸¹ For the period between January and May 2023, UN Security Council did not report any confirmed attack on education facilities.³⁸²

The devastating impact of the prolonged conflict, the economic constraints and widespread poverty across the country are factors hindering access to education as the children are compelled to work to support the households.³⁸³ Around 48 % of families surveyed by

³⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 84, 92

³⁷⁵ The data collected in HNO 2023 are based on the Multi Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA), a household assessment aimed at showing needs across Syria, and are the result of 34 065 interviews conducted with households in July-August 2022. More information on the methodology used can be found in UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023, [url](#), p. 118

³⁷⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 20, 21, 84

³⁷⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/51/45], 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 98, p. 16; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 20, 21, 84

³⁷⁸ UNICEF, Whole of Syria, Education response, January to May 2023, n.d., [url](#)

³⁷⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 92

³⁸⁰ UN Secretary General, Report by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, Children and armed conflict, 5 June 2023, [url](#), p. 26; paras 196, 197, 203

³⁸¹ UNICEF, Every Day Counts, Children of Syria cannot wait any longer, n.d., [url](#)

³⁸² UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 34; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 33; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), p. 6, para. 28

³⁸³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 88-89; UNICEF, Whole of Syria, Education response, January to May 2023, [url](#)



UNOCHA stated that the main reason their child was not attending school was to support the household.³⁸⁴

In north-western Syria, the devastating earthquakes of February 2023 also resulted in massive damage to school infrastructure. Save the Children estimated that in north-western Syria 54 % of schools and 37 % of teaching and learning spaces were affected by the earthquake.³⁸⁵

Children with disabilities experience additional barriers to education due to restriction of movements, lack of tailored learning programmes and proper education facilities.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 40

³⁸⁵ Save the Children, The impact of the earthquake on implementing education programmes in Northwest Syria, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁸⁶ UNFPA, GPC, Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility: Voices from Syria 2023 - Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 28 March 2023, [url](#), p. 43



2. Socio-economic situation in Damascus city

2.1. Mobility and admittance

2.1.1. International flight connections

The Damascus Airport website shows international flight connections with Iran (Tehran), Iraq (Al Najaf, Erbil, Baghdad, Basra), Jordan (Amman), Lebanon (Beirut), the UAE (Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, Dubai), Oman (Muscat), Qatar (Doha), Kuwait (Kuwait city), Libya (Misurata), Sudan (Khartoum), Côte d'Ivoire (Abidjan), Pakistan (Karachi, Lahore) and Russia (Moscow).³⁸⁷ The flight tracker FlightConnections, which provides information about current flight connections, indicated that, as of 29 August 2023, international flights were being operated to 10 cities in 5 countries, including the UAE (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah), Iraq (Baghdad, Erbil, Al Najaf, Basra), Pakistan (Karachi), Iran (Tehran) and Venezuela (Caracas).³⁸⁸ Flightradar24 also showed flights arriving or scheduled to arrive from Moscow, Muscat, Kuwait city and Athens.³⁸⁹ Greek City Times and Agenzia Nova had reported in March and June 2023, respectively, that the Greek Air Mediterranean airline would start operating flights between Athens and Syria.³⁹⁰ In June 2023, the Lebanese website Al-Modon reported that Saudi Arabia had agreed to resume direct flights to Syria.³⁹¹

According to the USDOS, the Syrian government 'routinely' ordered the closure of the Damascus airport allegedly because of violence or the threat of violence.³⁹²

At least two attacks on the capital's airport occurred during the reporting period, including an Israeli airstrike on Damascus International Airport on 17 September 2022. There was no immediate confirmation whether airport operations had been affected by the airstrike.³⁹³ The Guardian noted with reference to the SOHR that the airstrike was targeted at Iranian-backed groups based near the airport.³⁹⁴ Another Israeli airstrike on the airport reportedly occurred on 2 January 2023. News articles stated that the airport was out of service for several hours but resumed operations later the same day.³⁹⁵

³⁸⁷ Damascus international airport, Destinations, n.d., [url](#), accessed on 31 August 2023

³⁸⁸ FlightConnections, Direct flights to Damascus (DAM), last updated 20 July 2023, [url](#)

³⁸⁹ Flightradar24, Damascus International Airport Syria (DAM/OSDI): Arrivals: 19 to 21 July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

³⁹⁰ Agenzia Nova, The Syrian civil aviation announces a weekly flight connection with Greece, 7 June 2023, [url](#); Greek City Times, Greece's Air Mediterranean to inaugurate first flight from Europe to Syria in over a decade!, 8 March 2023, [url](#)

³⁹¹ Al-Modon, Saudi Arabia Agrees to Resume Flights from Damascus, The Syrian Observer, 9 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁹² USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 62

³⁹³ Al Jazeera, Syria says five killed in Israeli air attack on Damascus airport, 17 September 2022, [url](#); Reuters, Israel attacks Damascus airport, five soldiers killed, Syria says, 17 September 2022, [url](#)

³⁹⁴ Guardian (The), Israeli airstrike on Damascus airport kills five Syrian troops – reports, 17 September 2022, [url](#)

³⁹⁵ Al-Monitor, Israeli strikes on Syria put Damascus airport briefly out of service, kill two, 2 January 2023, [url](#); DW, Syria says Israeli strike briefly paralyzed Damascus airport, 2 January 2023, [url](#)



2.1.2. Beirut – Damascus land route

The main road connecting the capital cities of Beirut and Damascus runs through the Al-Masnaa (Lebanon) / Jdeidet Yabous (Syria) border crossing, located 60 km from Damascus and 110 km from Beirut,³⁹⁶ and constituting the largest border crossing between the two countries.³⁹⁷ Asharq Al-Awsat³⁹⁸ indicated in January 2023 that the route, which formed part of a larger route connecting Beirut with Iran's capital Tehran, was being controlled by pro-Iranian militias, but that the GoS was working on regaining control over parts of the road.³⁹⁹

In an article of January 2023, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, the Arabic version of the London-based news site The New Arab, quoted the political activist Suleiman Al-Ali describing a journey from Lebanon to Damascus and Tartous in Syria. According to him, the journey began with the required exchange of 100 US dollars per person for Syrian pounds at the (much lower) official rate established by the Syrian Central Bank, followed by hours of waiting for criminal and security checks. Passengers who received their papers and were able to continue their journey along the road from the Lebanese border to Damascus, passed several checkpoints controlled by different units, including from the Military and Air Force Intelligence Directorates, the Political Security Directorate, State Security and the Fourth Division.⁴⁰⁰

In March 2023, Sawt Al-Asimah⁴⁰¹ reported that a group linked to the Qalaa Security Company and owned by a Syrian businessman known as Abu Ali Khader had established a checkpoint on the Syrian side of the Beirut-Damascus road close to the Masnaa / Jdeidet Yabous border crossing. According to a driver quoted by Sawt Al-Asimah, an officer of the Fourth Division was also permanently present. Checkpoint staff reportedly searched the luggage of arriving passengers for electronics and electric household appliances, charged fees for letting them pass and confiscated devices of those who failed to pay. According to the same driver, arriving passenger cars had to pass six or seven checkpoints, including the Qalaa checkpoint, state security, military security and customs checkpoints and a checkpoint recently established by the SAA's Fourth Division on the Jdeidet Yabous road. According to other sources quoted by Sawt Al-Asimah, officers at the Qalaa checkpoint also checked arriving cars and asked drivers about their destination and place of residence. This procedure reportedly also applied to Lebanese cars and drivers.⁴⁰² The Qalaa Security Company (Al-Qalaa Security and Protection, CPS) was reportedly closely affiliated with the Fourth Division

³⁹⁶ WFP, Logistics Cluster, n.d., 2.3.1. Land Border Crossing Al Masnaa, [url](#)

³⁹⁷ CMI, National and international migration policy in Lebanon, 1 December 2022, [url](#), p. 13

³⁹⁸ Asharq Al-Awsat is a pan-Arab London-based newspaper and part of the Saudi-Arabian SRMG media group. Asharq Al-Awsat, About us, n.d., [url](#)

³⁹⁹ Asharq Al-Awsat, Will Damascus Undermine Tehran's Mediterranean Dream?, 28 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰ Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, الحواجز الأمنية في سورية: مراكز ابتزاز تزيد معاناة المدنيين [Security checkpoints in Syria: extortion centers increase civilian suffering], 22 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰¹ Sawt Al-Asimah describes itself as an independent media organisation established in 2016 by a group of "activists and amateur journalists" from Damascus and with a focus on news about Damascus and its countryside, as well as about Syrian refugees across the world. Sawt Al-Asimah, من نحن [Who are we], n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁰² Sawt Al-Asimah, شركة القلعة الأمنية تتشأ حاجزاً على طريق بيروت – دمشق [Qalaa Security Company establishes a barrier on the Beirut-Damascus road], 14 March 2023, [url](#)



commander Maher Assad,⁴⁰³ the brother of President Assad, and the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and was managed by former SAA and police officers.⁴⁰⁴

2.1.3. Freedom of movement

(a) Location of checkpoints

In its 2023 report, Freedom House described a ‘proliferation’ of checkpoints by government and militia forces, severely restricting the population’s freedom of movement.⁴⁰⁵ According to a report of March 2023 by researchers Annsar Shahhoud and Muhanad Abulhusn, the SAA’s Fourth Division had checkpoints at the entrances of urban centres, including Damascus, where they also had the mandate to function as parallel customs police. Moreover, the Fourth Division controlled checkpoints at international border crossings [Lebanon (Qalamoun/Bekaa Valley), Jordan (Naseeb), and Iraq (Abu Kamal)], at all border crossings into opposition-controlled areas as well as at the entrances of the ports of Latakia and Tartous.⁴⁰⁶ The Kurdish North Press Agency (NPA) reported five checkpoints along the 110km road between Damascus and Sweida, including Qaser Al-Motamarat, Al-Adliyah, Al-Masmiyah, Hazem and, eventually, Tel Shihan, close to the city of Shahba in Sweida governorate.⁴⁰⁷ Al-Araby Al-Jadeed stated in an article of January 2023 that there were eight security checkpoints between Damascus International Airport and the city of Sweida, with the first one before leaving the airport premises and the last one near the city of Shahba, which belonged to the National Defence Forces (NDF) and was staffed with members of the government’s security branches. Moreover, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed noted that the Fourth Division controlled entrances to Damascus as well as to other main urban areas via checkpoints established in the area west of Damascus and in the greater region, where they sometimes collaborated with other affiliated forces.⁴⁰⁸

In an article of April 2023, Vedeng News⁴⁰⁹ described the removal of several security checkpoints in Damascus city, including in the vicinity of Umayyad Square - the starting point for several roads leading to the neighbourhoods of Abu Rummaneh, Maliki and Al-Muhajireen and connecting to main roads such as the Mezzeh highway, Beirut Road and People’s Palace Road.⁴¹⁰ Orient Net⁴¹¹ reported with reference to a local correspondent that the removed security checkpoints had been under the control of state and military security branches.

⁴⁰³ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, May 23, 2023, 23 May 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁴ Diyaruna, IRGC hides behind Syria private security companies, 10 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁵ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Syria, 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁶ Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria’s 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 13

⁴⁰⁷ NPA, Locals say government exploits insecurity in Suwayda for increased control, 31 May 2023, [url](#); see also Shaam Network, New cases of kidnapping of civilians from Sweida on the Damascus road were recorded, 20 May 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁸ Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, [الحواجز الأمنية في سورية: مراكز ابتزاز تزيد معاناة المدنيين](#) [Security checkpoints in Syria: extortion centers increase civilian suffering], 22 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁹ Vedeng News was founded in 2015 by media professionals in Syria and describes itself as an independent media agency focusing on Syrian affairs and ‘as the first platform for individuals in Syria to express, write and blog freely outside the boundaries of editorial agendas’. Vedeng News, [من نحن](#) [Who we are], 2 September 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹⁰ Vedeng News, [إزالة حواجز أمنية من مناطق حيوية في دمشق... ما السبب؟](#) [Security checkpoints removed from vital areas in Damascus... What is the reason?], 18 April 2023, [url](#)

⁴¹¹ Orient Net describes itself as an independent Syrian media organization, owned and funded by the Dubai-based Ghassan Abboud Trading Group. Orient Net, Home, n.d., [url](#)

Checkpoints at the entry roads to Damascus city, in the vicinity of the capital and in towns across Rural Damascus governorate remained in place.⁴¹² Similarly, a Syrian academic interviewed for this report noted that the number of checkpoints had significantly decreased and remained limited to a few major city entrances.⁴¹³

(b) Specific groups/impact on civilians

According to the USDOS, the Syrian government extensively banned international travel of opposition members. Moreover, journalists and human rights or civil society activists were often banned from travelling abroad,⁴¹⁴ or were interrogated upon return. USDOS noted that the GoS restricted in-country movements and established checkpoints to monitor travels inside the areas under its control. Legal and cultural restrictions limited women's freedom of movement in many areas.⁴¹⁵ According to USDOS, the law allowed certain male relatives to prohibit women from travelling,⁴¹⁶ and UNFPA stated that women and girls faced movement restrictions imposed by male family members in the households, often justified with the fear of violence against females in public space and the social stigma placed on women, especially widows and divorcees.⁴¹⁷

In its October 2022 report on arrests and detentions, SNHR indicated that it had recorded the detention of IDPs and returnees from abroad who were trying to return to their original places of residence in territory under control of the GoS. Most of the arrests reportedly took place at Damascus airport, Damascus city and at the border crossings with Lebanon.⁴¹⁸ For further information on the detention of civilians and alleged draft evaders, see sections [1.1.2](#) and [1.2.7](#) above.

(c) Procedures at checkpoints

According to a Syrian academic, checkpoints generally tended to focus on asking more questions (for example, on current address or occupation) to individuals coming from areas that were loosely controlled by the GoS, such as Dar'a governorate, or from rebel-held areas such as Idlib and northern Aleppo.⁴¹⁹

Having identity documents, birth certificates and other personal documents was essential for being able to move freely.⁴²⁰

The media outlet Middle East Monitor (MEMO) noted in June 2023 that the government's military checkpoints had taken up the practice of extorting residents, public transport vehicles

⁴¹² Orient Net, [إزالة حواجز أمنية إضافية في دمشق.. وطرده ميليشيا أسد من بلدة حدودية مع لبنان](#) [Removing additional security checkpoints in Damascus. Assad's militia expelled from a border town with Lebanon], 1 May 2023, [url](#)

⁴¹³ Syrian academic, email correspondence, 22 June 2023

⁴¹⁴ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 62

⁴¹⁵ UNFPA and Global Protection Cluster, Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility: Voices from Syria 2023 - Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 28 March 2023, [url](#), p. 34

⁴¹⁶ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 59-60

⁴¹⁷ UNFPA and Global Protection Cluster, Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility: Voices from Syria 2023 - Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 28 March 2023, [url](#), p. 34

⁴¹⁸ SNHR, At Least 208 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in October 2022, Including Seven Children and Five Women, Mostly at the Hands of Syrian Regime Forces, 2 November 2022, [url](#), p. 10

⁴¹⁹ Syrian academic, email correspondence, 22 June 2023

⁴²⁰ UNHCR, UNHCR Legal Assistance in Syria. January – December 2022, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 3

and others for money and fees.⁴²¹ According to researchers Annsar Shahhoud and Muhanad Abulhusn, it was the SAA's Fourth Division as well as affiliated militia groups and businesses who had come to solely profit from this practice. Payments were reportedly demanded from many civilians as well as from entities and business owners for all cargo crossing the checkpoint, regardless of ownership. Fees were calculated according to the cargo's weight and content, and non-payment resulted in the cargo's confiscation.⁴²² In May 2023, SOHR reported on a checkpoint run by the Military Intelligence Directorate on the road between the cities of Jadida Artouz and Qatna in Rural Damascus governorate. Checkpoint staff reportedly imposed fees (payments that had to be made in order to be allowed to pass) amounting to 30 000 to 50 000 Syrian pounds (USD 2.3⁴²³ to 3.8)⁴²⁴ on passers-by, threatening to confiscate cars and motorbikes in case of refusal to pay.⁴²⁵ Similarly, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed stated in an article of January 2023 that staff at all checkpoints along the road from Damascus International Airport to the city of Sweida reportedly demanded fees from those arriving from the airport and for every vehicle transporting goods and vegetables from Damascus to Sweida. According to a driver quoted by Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, each checkpoint had its own tariffs depending on the type of goods and rate of the US dollar, and while some accepted also in-kind payment, others insisted on cash payments. Drivers who refused to pay were forced to unload their entire cargo for inspection.⁴²⁶

Ransom payments for the release of civilians previously detained at checkpoints under the control of the Fourth Division and the Republican Guard constituted another source of income, according to the SNHR in an interview with the DIS in August 2022. Other violations against civilians as described by the SNHR included intimidations such as threats, insults, physical and psychological violence, the robbery of personal property and executions of civilians for allegedly not stopping at a checkpoint or because they refused to hand over their property or make any payments.⁴²⁷

2.1.4. Accessibility from Damascus airport to the city

According to a Syrian academic questioned for this report, the airport was generally accessible from and to the city. There had been instances in the past where Israeli airstrikes

⁴²¹ MEMO, Syria regime arrests university students near Damascus, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴²² Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 12

⁴²³ All currency calculations in this report (except where otherwise stated) are based on the informal exchange rate of SYP 13 000 per US dollar as of 26 July 2023, according to the Black Market Tracker, a tracking tool developed by researcher Karam Shaar, that regularly collects and analyses data from three exchange rate online platforms widely used by Syrians. Shaar, K., Hourly black market exchange rates and gold prices in Syria by city, n.d., [url](#), accessed 26 July 2023. For further details on the methodology, see Shaar, K., Hourly black market exchange rates and gold prices in Syria by city: Motivation and Methodology, n.d., [url](#)

⁴²⁴ It was decided to base currency calculations throughout this report on the – at the point of writing – latest available informal exchange rate instead of the official rate to better reflect the actual costs for the persons concerned. For more information on the development of official and informal exchange rates, see section [2.2.1](#) below.

⁴²⁵ SOHR, Rif Dimashq - Regime checkpoint imposes royalties on passengers and threatens to confiscate vehicles, 23 May 2023, [url](#)

⁴²⁶ Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, [الحوافز الأمنية في سورية: مراكز ابتزاز تزيد معاناة المدنيين](#) [Security checkpoints in Syria: extortion centers increase civilian suffering], 22 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴²⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria - The Special Forces and the elite units. Annex I: Meeting Minutes. Skype meeting with the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), 23 August 2022, April 2023, [url](#), pp. 24-25



temporarily disrupted the operations of the airport. For example, in January 2023, there were reported airstrikes that affected the airport's functioning (for more information, see section 2.1.1 above on International flight connections). The roads between Damascus and the airport, however, remained accessible.⁴²⁸ According to reports from official sources, efforts were underway to improve and repair the roads leading to the airport.⁴²⁹ For information on the presence of checkpoints near Damascus International Airport, see section 2.1.3 above.

Further information on accessibility from Damascus airport to the city could not be found.

2.1.5. Restrictions on access and return to certain areas

The UNCOI pointed in February 2023 to reports of returnees who had to pay bribes to members of the local administration in order to access their properties. In case of refusal to pay, they were reportedly denied access to their homes. Other returnees reported that neighbours had taken over their property and threatened them when they tried to get it back. In one case, neighbours reportedly severely damaged the house before returning it. The UNCOI noted that remedies were 'lacking or ineffective' as in some cases local authorities did not react to complaints from returnees, while in other cases, returnees refrained from submitting complaints for fear of reprisals.⁴³⁰ Similarly, in April 2023, The Guardian reported on alleged schemes to deprive persons who fled abroad of their property by forging sales documents for vacant houses and have them confirmed by courts involved in the scheme without the knowledge of the houses' owners. Networks involved in these schemes reportedly included up to 50 persons, among them lawyers, judges, and military officials – in particular, according to some of The Guardian's interviewees, members of the Fourth Division.⁴³¹

Diyaruna reported in March 2023 that members of Iranian-aligned Hezbollah and IRGC were buying up or confiscating property in areas of strategic interest to them, such as Damascus and its surrounding areas. Acquisitions reportedly took place with the help of Syrian traders and brokers, who in some cases were exploiting the real estate owners' difficult financial or economic circumstances to buy property for the families of Iranian militia members.⁴³²

(a) Yarmouk

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF)⁴³³ stated in a report of November 2022 that the GoS had for several years prevented the return of residents of the Yarmouk camp to their homes.

⁴²⁸ Syrian academic, email correspondence, 22 June 2023

⁴²⁹ Syria, Ministry of Transport, المواصلات الطرقية تباشر صيانة بعض الأجزاء من طريق مطار دمشق الدولي [Road Transport Begins Maintenance of Some Parts of Damascus International Airport Road], 12 June 2023, [url](#); SANA, بدء صيانة الأجزاء المتضررة من طريق مطار دمشق الدولي [Maintenance of damaged parts of Damascus International Airport Road begins], 12 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴³⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 69

⁴³¹ Guardian (The), Scandal of Syria's stolen homes: fraudsters use courts to legitimise thefts from refugees, 24 April 2023, [url](#)

⁴³² Diyaruna, Hizbullah scoops up Syria real estate, taking advantage of war-shocked population, 28 March 2023, [url](#)

⁴³³ The Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF) is a German political foundation based on the principles of liberalism and named after the German liberal politician Friedrich Naumann. FNF, The Foundation for Freedom in Germany and the World, n.d., [url](#)



Residents wishing to return were required to obtain a security approval and had to prove the ownership and structural safety of their houses, even though most of the buildings had been affected by the large-scale destruction of the camp.⁴³⁴ According to UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) estimates, close to 4 000 individuals (1 200 families) had returned as of June 2022, including about 800 Palestinian families.⁴³⁵

According to the Syria Indicator,⁴³⁶ former residents of Yarmouk claimed that potential returnees had to provide proof of ownership as well as the payment of all services payment of all services since 2012, including electricity, water, telephone, and other services before having to undergo a security check.⁴³⁷ The Syria Report, a website focused on business and economic news from Syria, noted that residents applying for return to Al-Hajar Al-Aswad were rejected security approval if they failed to provide ownership documents, despite following a procedure recommended by the city municipality, namely, to obtain a record from the police station, proof of payment of water or electricity bills, and a document from their neighbourhood *mukhtar* with the testimonies of two witnesses from the area that the applicant was a local property owner.⁴³⁸

Sawt Al-Asimah indicated in March 2023 that residents of Yarmouk and Al-Hajar Al-Aswad camps were no longer required to appear in person at the Palestinian branch of the Military Intelligence Directorate and the National Security Office to apply for approval to return to their homes. Instead, residents now had to submit a written request to a newly established Military Intelligence detachment on Thalateen Street in Yarmouk camp. According to Sawt Al-Asimah, the Military Intelligence detachment published a bulletin with the names of 100 people whose applications for return to Yarmouk camp had been approved. Moreover, 50 people received permission to return to Al-Hajar Al-Aswad. Persons with pending security cases or who had previously been arrested were denied the right to return. Similarly, persons with children wanted by the government, living in Northern Syria or having links to the armed groups controlling the area, or who were wanted for forced conscription were banned from returning to their homes.⁴³⁹ Syria Direct quoted a resident as saying that during the application process she had been asked about the origins of her family and whether any member of her family was missing. According to her, anyone with a person missing in their family would be banned from entering the camp.⁴⁴⁰ In April 2023, 15 people were reportedly detained by a Military Intelligence patrol in Yarmouk for allegedly entering the area without having security approvals to return to or visit the area for more than 24 hours.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁴ FNF, Demographic Engineering in the Course of Syria's War, November 2022, [url](#), p. 48

⁴³⁵ UNRWA, Yarmouk (unofficial camp), n.d., [url](#)

⁴³⁶ Syria Indicator describes itself as an independent journalism project with journalists from inside and outside Syria that produces investigative reports on economic, social, and environmental cases. Syria Indicator, About Sindicat, n.d., [url](#)

⁴³⁷ Syria Indicator, The Fall of Yarmouk: War Economy Laws Leave Capital of Palestinian Diaspora in Ruins, 28 April 2023, [url](#)

⁴³⁸ Syria Report (The), Some Displaced Residents Allowed to Return to New Neighbourhoods in Al-Hajar Al-Aswad, 6 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴³⁹ Sawt Al-Asimah, فرع فلسطين يلغي شرط مراجعته للعودة إلى مخيم اليرموك والحجر الأسود [Palestine Branch Cancels Requirement to Review Return to Yarmouk and Hajar Al-Aswad Camp], 16 March 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁰ Syria Direct, The battle for Yarmouk continues: Damascus' laws, decisions threaten property rights, 22 March 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴¹ Sawt Al-Asimah, اعتقالات في مخيم اليرموك بسبب دخوله دون موافقة أمنية مسبقة [Arrests in Yarmouk Camp for Entering Without Prior Security Approval], 27 April 2023, [url](#)



The Syria Report noted in January 2023 that the government made an ambiguously worded announcement that Yarmouk residents and property owners were required to visit the Yarmouk Services Department to remove their damaged or destroyed buildings within one month. Otherwise, the property would be removed at the owners' cost.⁴⁴² Given that the majority of the camp's residents were displaced and would have problems to prove their ownership, this provision might lead to residents being dispossessed from their properties,⁴⁴³ or in the unlawful appropriation of debris by the government.⁴⁴⁴ The announcement was reportedly withdrawn a few days later.⁴⁴⁵ Residents claimed that looting of homes in Yarmouk presumably happened with support or knowledge of authorities.⁴⁴⁶

(b) Jobar and Qaboun

In an article of April 2023, Syria Direct described the situation of former residents of the Damascus Jobar neighbourhood, most of whom had been displaced by the time the government retook control of the area from opposition forces in 2018. According to one former resident, authorities did not allow residents' access to the area. Local media noted that the government has not officially announced such a ban but that the Damascus Provincial Council made an 'unannounced' decision to permanently ban returns under the directive of security services.⁴⁴⁷ Similarly, a displaced resident of Qaboun neighbourhood noted that access to the area was banned and the neighbourhood was surrounded by checkpoints.⁴⁴⁸

In June 2022, Jobar and surrounding areas, including Qaboun, were reportedly included in urban development plan No. 106.⁴⁴⁹ By law, residents of the areas affected were granted a 30-day period following the announcement of the new urban development plan to submit objections to the plan or to prove ownership of their property. In practice, however, this was difficult, according to STJ, as many of them were displaced or abroad and/or feared being targeted if they appeared in person. On the other hand, obtaining a security clearance to issue a power of attorney for someone to represent them was time-consuming and prone to fail in case the property owner had security problems or had been sentenced in absentia.⁴⁵⁰ A lawyer quoted by Syria Direct noted that, due to Jobar's, and other areas' inclusion in the development plan, some of the former residents were to lose all or part of their property to make way for the construction of new buildings and infrastructure. Moreover, according to the

⁴⁴² Syria Report (The), Governorate Orders Property Owners in Yarmouk Camp to Remove Damaged Damascus Buildings, 31 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴³ New Arab (The), Syrian regime removes Palestinian symbols from 'obliterated' Yarmouk camp, 13 April 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁴ STJ, Damascus: The Governorate's Announcement on Removing Yarmouk Rubble Violates Ownership Right, 27 April 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁵ Syria Direct, The battle for Yarmouk continues: Damascus' laws, decisions threaten property rights, 22 March 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁶ Syria Direct, 'Locusts': Organized looting, destruction of displaced Syrians' homes by 'demolition forces' and regime-affiliated groups, 26 May 2023, [url](#); Syria Direct, The battle for Yarmouk continues: Damascus' laws, decisions threaten property rights, 22 March 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁷ Syria Direct, Awaiting reconstruction: For displaced residents of Damascus' Jobar neighborhood, no return until redevelopment, 27 April 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁸ SADC, From the heart of the capital Damascus: "We lost hope of returning to our homes, and we are trying to leave in search of a decent life.", 26 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁹ Other areas included in development plan No. 106 were Aqsaab Mosque neighbourhood, Irbin, Zamalka and Ein Tarma.

⁴⁵⁰ STJ, Syria: Urban Scheme for Jobar – a New Attempt to Seize Residents' Properties Based on Legislative Decree No.5, 1 September 2022, [url](#)



Damascus Director of Development and Urban Planning, residents would not receive alternative housing as compensation but shares in the new development project.⁴⁵¹ This was also reflected in a statement made by a displaced resident from Qaboun neighbourhood in Damascus – an area that was included in an urban redevelopment zone under Law No. 10. The buildings of those who failed to provide proof of ownership were to be confiscated by the authorities.⁴⁵² Moreover, many of the former residential buildings that were reportedly still standing when the GoS retook control over Qaboun in May 2017, were later demolished. The demolitions were explained by the GoS with the need to detonate mines left by militants, while former residents considered the demolitions a ‘revenge’ by the GoS since Qaboun had been an opposition stronghold during the war.⁴⁵³

2.1.6. Administrative requirements for settling in Damascus

According to a Syrian academic interviewed for the report, applying for security clearance was a prerequisite for establishing residence in any part of Damascus city. The security screening process for IDPs relocating to Damascus was stricter than that applied to existing Damascus residents undergoing intra-city moves. The approval of an individual's security clearance was influenced by various factors, including their background, place of origin, and activities over the past years. More often than not, the *mukhtar* played a role in the process. Prospective residents had to first submit their leasing agreements and related documentation to the *mukhtar*, who subsequently forwarded these materials to the relevant security authorities for review. In some cases, prospected returnees submitted their applications directly to security services. Generally, returnees had to prove ownership of property to settle in the area in which they lived prior to displacement.⁴⁵⁴

In an article of November 2022, The Syria Report noted that it remained difficult for forcibly displaced people to return to their homes. Apart from the need to fulfil a set of requirements, return also depended on whether the area had been rehabilitated and basic services installed. As part of the requirements, applicants had to submit documents proving ownership of their home, a familial civil registration extract and copies of each family member's ID cards. Based on these documents, security services approved or rejected the application. In case of approval, applicants were required to obtain an engineering report for their house from the public safety committee, which was linked to the local administrative unit. The committee decided whether a house was in a stable condition and inhabitable. In case the house was declared safe, the potential returnee had to apply to the municipality for permission to do any necessary repair work. According to The Syria Report, the role of public safety committees was not clearly defined, and critics claimed that security services were intervening in their

⁴⁵¹ Syria Direct, Awaiting reconstruction: For displaced residents of Damascus' Jobar neighborhood, no return until redevelopment, 27 April 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁵² SACD, From the heart of the capital Damascus: “We lost hope of returning to our homes, and we are trying to leave in search of a decent life.”, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵³ SACD, From the heart of the capital Damascus: “We lost hope of returning to our homes, and we are trying to leave in search of a decent life.”, 26 April 2022, [url](#); The Guardian, ‘It’s a kind of revenge’: Damascus suburb demolished as Assad builds a ‘new Syria’, 23 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁴ Syrian academic, email correspondence, 23 August 2023



work. In practice, however, it was these committees that made the final decision over the preservation or demolition of a building.⁴⁵⁵

In another report of October 2022, The Syria Report noted that, given the conditions for security approval, only property owners who lived in areas under GoS-control and were not wanted by the security services would eventually be allowed to return. Other returnees had to agree to a 'security settlement' that may involve extensive investigations, arrest in case of pending search warrants and military conscription for men who had so far failed to do military service.⁴⁵⁶

For further information regarding procedures for settling in Damascus, see section 2.5. of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Socio-economic situation in Damascus city \(August 2022\)](#).

2.2. Socio-economic overview

2.2.1. Economy

Very few information could be found during the reporting period on the economic situation in Damascus city specifically. This section therefore mainly deals with the general economic situation in areas under GoS control.

In a speech to the UN Security Council in January 2023, the UN Special Envoy for Syria noted that, after 12 years of war, the financial collapse in Lebanon, the Covid-19 pandemic, sanctions and other events, the country was facing an economic crisis 'of epic proportions'.⁴⁵⁷ UNOCHA noted in its 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview for Syria that the 'crippled economy', marked by high inflation, currency devaluation and rising prices, remained 'one of the biggest drivers of need'.⁴⁵⁸

In January 2023, the Central Bank of Syria (CBS) increased the official exchange rate from SYP 3 015 per US dollar to SYP 4 522 per US dollar⁴⁵⁹ in an apparent attempt, as AP noted, to make more people use the official exchange rate than trade in the black market.⁴⁶⁰ The average informal market exchange rate was at SYP 6 520 per US dollar as of January 2023.⁴⁶¹ At the beginning of February 2023, the CBS split the official exchange rate in two: the Banks Exchange rate, which continued using the original exchange rate for foreign exchange transactions, and the Money Transfer and Cash Foreign Exchange (MTC) rate. The MTC rate was a new floating exchange rate specifically for remittances and earthquake aid-related funds that reflected the informal (parallel) market exchange rate.⁴⁶² According to the World

⁴⁵⁵ Syria Report (The), Some of the main HLP-related factors impacting the return of displaced people during the first half of 2022, 1 November 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁶ Syria Report (The), Damascus Governorate to Begin Granting Restoration Permits in Qaboun, 25 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁷ UN Special envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen, Briefing to the Security Council, 25 January 2023, [url](#), para. 3

⁴⁵⁸ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁵⁹ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin January 2023, 9 March 2023, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁶⁰ AP News, EXPLAINER: Why has Syria's economic crisis hit a new low?, 5 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁶¹ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin January 2023, 9 March 2023, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁶² Syria Report (The), Central Bank brings Forex rate closer to Black Market, UN Agencies and NGOs to benefit, 14 February 2023, [url](#)



Food Programme (WFP), the MTC rate and the parallel rate ‘have moved in tandem’ since the former’s introduction.⁴⁶³ In July 2023, the Syrian pound was devalued for a third time since the beginning of 2023 and was officially traded at SYP 8 542 per US dollar. On the parallel market, it was traded at SYP 13 180 per US-dollar, indicating a loss of 51 % of its value since the beginning of 2023, of 69 % within one year and of 95 % since October 2019, the onset of the economic crisis in Lebanon.⁴⁶⁴ As of 26 July 2023, the MTC rate was at SYP 9 900 per US dollar according to the CBS,⁴⁶⁵ while it was SYP 13 000 per US dollar on the parallel market in Damascus.⁴⁶⁶ According to Etana Syria, a Syrian civil society organisation striving for democratic change, the Syrian pound lost more than 35 % of its value since Syria was readmitted into the Arab League in May 2023 alone.⁴⁶⁷ While the devaluation of the Syrian pound continued, the CBS raised the threshold for daily withdrawals from SYP 15 million to SYP 25 million (USD 1 153.8 to USD 1 923) in August 2023.⁴⁶⁸

In a March 2023 report, the World Bank indicated that currency devaluation and in particular the increase in food prices have contributed to rising inflation since early 2022. According to the World Bank, since the war on Ukraine, food prices in Syria have been increasing faster than global food prices, partly due to a reduction of state subsidies, a ‘record-low’ domestic agricultural production, and shortages caused by supply-chain interruptions, which also contributed to higher prices for some food and energy goods.⁴⁶⁹ Food prices, however, had been increasing already before: according to the WFP, they had increased by 532 % in the period from 2020 to 2022,⁴⁷⁰ or by almost 12 times in the period from 2020 to 2023.⁴⁷¹

Several sources reported of severe fuel shortages due to delayed fuel imports⁴⁷² in the winter of 2022/23: WFP described that some of its staff in Syria had difficulties commuting to their offices or heating their homes, and some monitoring visits had to be cancelled due to a lack of fuel.⁴⁷³ The Washington Post noted that a black market for fuel had developed along the border to Lebanon.⁴⁷⁴ In Damascus, the streets were almost devoid of traffic.⁴⁷⁵ Moreover, households in Damascus continued to face recurring electricity cuts,⁴⁷⁶ and difficulties in

⁴⁶³ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin May 2023, 2 July 2023, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁶⁴ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin June 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁴⁶⁵ CBS, Money Transfers and Cash Foreign Exchange Quotations, 26 July 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁶ Karam Shaar, Hourly black market exchange rates and gold prices in Syria by city, n.d. [url](#), accessed 26 July 2023

⁴⁶⁷ Etana Syria, Brief: Syria’s Currency Collapse & Political Discontent, 1 August 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁸ Makki, D., Syria’s economic freefall continues despite Arab League return, MEI (Middle East Institute), 16 August 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁹ World Bank, Syria Economic Monitor: Syria’s Economy in Ruins after a Decade-long War, Winter 2022/23, 17 March 2023, [url](#), p. 16

⁴⁷⁰ European Commission - ECHO, Syria: life in the time of food insecurity, 14 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁷¹ WFP, Hunger soars to 12-year high in Syria, WFP chief calls for urgent action, 27 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷² Syria used to be an oil-exporting country until 2011 but lost control over oil fields during the war, most of which are located in the country’s east, in Kurdish-controlled areas under US protection. Meanwhile, the GoS has to import fuel, with Iran being the main provider. AP News, EXPLAINER: Why has Syria’s economic crisis hit a new low?, 5 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷³ WFP Syria, Situation Report 12 – December 2022, 20 February 2023, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁷⁴ Washington Post (The), ‘No life’ in Syrian cities as fuel crisis plunges country into darkness, 20 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁵ AP News, EXPLAINER: Why has Syria’s economic crisis hit a new low?, 5 January 2023, [url](#); Washington Post (The), ‘No life’ in Syrian cities as fuel crisis plunges country into darkness, 20 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁶ AP News, EXPLAINER: Why has Syria’s economic crisis hit a new low?, 5 January 2023, [url](#); Washington Post (The), ‘No life’ in Syrian cities as fuel crisis plunges country into darkness, 20 January 2023, [url](#); National (The), Syrians suffer patchy electricity supply as summer heat pushes up demand, 22 June 2023, [url](#)



heating their homes, with some reportedly resorting to burning pistachio shells⁴⁷⁷ or old clothes, shoes and plastic bags (despite the health risks) to stay warm.⁴⁷⁸

According to Etana Syria, more than 50 % of factories and commercial stores in GoS-controlled areas closed in 2022 due to electricity shortages.⁴⁷⁹ In Damascus city, half of the city's privately-run bakeries stopped working due to the shortage of fuel, according to the head of the bakers' association quoted by Agence France-Presse (AFP).⁴⁸⁰ Electricity remained in short supply in 2023, with people in the GoS-controlled areas reportedly getting just about one hour of electricity per day.⁴⁸¹

Middle East Eye (MEE) noted that also money transfer systems were affected by the February 2023 earthquake, as transfer offices were overwhelmed with requests to transfer money to the affected areas. The Western Union office in Aleppo was reportedly closed due to the war and people had to travel to Damascus (or Latakia) to pick up the money.⁴⁸²

2.2.2. Humanitarian situation and assistance

According to a statement to the UN Security Council by Ms. Ghada Eltahir Mudawi, UNOCHA's Deputy Director of the Operations and Advocacy Division of 30 May 2023, almost 70 % of Syria's population, or 15.3 million people, needed humanitarian assistance. More than 330 000 people remained displaced after the February 2023 earthquakes.⁴⁸³ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) pointed to the fact that the presence of humanitarian aid organisations in Damascus and other areas under GoS-control was very limited. Moreover, MSF had not received authorisation to work in the country's northwest, despite seeking registration for years.⁴⁸⁴

UNOCHA noted that displacement to Damascus governorate and three other governorates began a few days after the earthquakes of 6 February 2023 and lasted for two to three weeks. By the end of February, about 455 families from Aleppo and Latakia had found shelter with their relatives or in homes provided by local communities in Damascus and the other three governorates, before some of these families returned to their home governorates in March. In addition, UNOCHA pointed to concerns over the structural safety of residential buildings and services facilities in the conflict-affected areas of Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates, as several buildings collapsed a few days after the earthquake and others sustained damages. Moreover, there were pre-existing tunnels in some areas in these two governorates, which might affect structural safety.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁷⁷ AFP, Syria fuel crisis slows down life in Damascus, 18 December 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁸ Reuters, Syrians brace for long, cold winter as fuel crisis bites, 8 December 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁹ Etana Syria, Syria's Economic Crisis in 2022 – A Year in Review, 9 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁰ AFP, Syria fuel crisis slows down life in Damascus, 18 December 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁸¹ Al-Monitor, Syrians in Damascus spend Ramadan in darkness, 28 March 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸² Makki D., Syria earthquake relief efforts bring vital foreign remittance system to its knees, MEE, 17 February 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸³ UNOCHA, Ms. Ghada Eltahir Mudawi, Deputy Director Of The Operations And Advocacy Division For The Office For The Coordination Of Humanitarian Affairs, On Behalf Of Under-Secretary-General For Humanitarian Affairs And Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Martin Griffith, Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria, 30 May 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁴⁸⁴ MSF, The necessary renewal of the UN cross-border resolution for Syria, December 2022, [url](#), p. 14

⁴⁸⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update, Issue 10, March 2023, 4 May 2023, [url](#), p. 6



The pro-GoS newspaper Athr Press⁴⁸⁶ noted that according to the head of the Damascus branch of the Pharmacists Syndicate, the city's pharmacies' stock of infant formula has temporarily decreased by 50 % since much of the available stock has been distributed to families in the areas affected by the earthquake.⁴⁸⁷

Further information specifically on the humanitarian situation in Damascus city could not be found.

2.2.3. Employment

Access to employment was reportedly often dependent on personal, communal, or political affiliations, making it particularly hard for IDPs to find work. IDPs were therefore at greater risk of labour exploitation.⁴⁸⁸

The World Bank observed that, due to the increasingly difficult economic situation of households, more vulnerable persons had entered the labour market in 2022 to support their families. People were increasingly forced to accept any kind of work, irrespective of its quality. With reference to data from UNHCR's Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme, the World Bank noted that 12.6 % of households had reported to rely on high risk and/or exploitative work in 2022, in comparison to 5.4 % in 2021.⁴⁸⁹

In its 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview, UNOCHA noted that 94 % of households interviewed for the report in the framework of a Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA)⁴⁹⁰ indicated that at least one household member was employed.⁴⁹¹ At the same time, in 51 % of households, only one member was employed. Those most affected by unemployment were IDP households living outside camps: 25 % of such households interviewed for the report did not have a single member earning an income.⁴⁹²

According to a survey on the socio-economic situation in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and Homs, conducted for the Country of Origin Information (COI) Unit of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, the unemployment rate among respondents⁴⁹³ was lowest

⁴⁸⁶ Athr Press is a pro-government Syrian newspaper. The Syrian Observer, After Destruction of Manufacturing Facility: Source Reveals to Athr Press Specifications of HTS Drones, 30 May 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁷ Athr Press, "تخفيض حصة دمشق من حليب الأطفال مقابل زيادتها في المناطق المنكوبة.. نقابة الصيادلة لـ [Reducing Damascus' Share Of Infant Formula In Exchange For Increasing It In The Affected Areas. Pharmacists Syndicate For "Athar": Breakthrough At The Beginning Of March], 20 February 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁸ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Syria, 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁹ World Bank, Syria Economic Monitor: Syria's Economy in Ruins after a Decade-long War, Winter 2022/23, 17 March 2023, [url](#), p. 22

⁴⁹⁰ The MSNA was conducted in the period from July to August 2022 and comprised interviews with 34,065 households across all sub-districts in Syria. The four main population groups covered by the MSNA were IDPs in and out of camps, returnees and vulnerable residents. UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 7, 10

⁴⁹¹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 36

⁴⁹² UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 89

⁴⁹³ The survey included 300 respondents, 100 each per city, equally representing men and women between 16 and 35 years old. Statistics Lebanon Ltd. and Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2022, 2022, [url](#), p. 2



in Damascus city (3 %). Damascus was also the city with the highest number of respondents working in full-time jobs (58.5 %).⁴⁹⁴

No further information could be found on the situation regarding employment/unemployment in Damascus city specifically.

2.2.4. Poverty

Specific information on poverty levels in Damascus city could not be found during the reporting period.

According to UN data, 90 % of the Syrian population were living below the poverty line as of June 2023.⁴⁹⁵ UNOCHA pointed to the existence of and potential increase in ‘working poor’ households who were unable to cover living costs despite having an income: in areas under GoS control, incomes would need to increase by 67 % to cover the rising costs of basic needs.⁴⁹⁶

In Damascus governorate, 74 % of households reported being either completely unable or insufficiently able to meet basic needs. UNOCHA also pointed to the ‘increasingly desperate’ coping mechanisms to cover basic needs, including buying on credit, borrowing, and relying on protracted debt, remittances and humanitarian assistance. In Damascus governorate, 66 % of households reported relying on remittances, while particularly IDPs were relying on humanitarian aid.⁴⁹⁷ Similarly, AP quoted Joseph Daher, a researcher and professor at the European University Institute (EUI), as observing that most people lived on remittances, humanitarian aid or worked in two or three jobs since they could not live on their wages alone.⁴⁹⁸ Remittances sent to Syria from Syrians abroad were estimated at USD 5 to 7 (and sometimes up to 10) million per day, according to Ali Kanaan, a professor of finance and banking at the University of Damascus quoted by the pro-government newspaper Al-Watan.⁴⁹⁹ By comparison, in the year 2010 – newer data are not available – personal remittances received in Syria amounted to USD 1.6 billion, according to World Bank estimates.⁵⁰⁰

The Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) – a monetary threshold for what a family of five needs in a month to cover its essential needs, including goods, services, utilities, and resources – was SYP 1346 638 (USD 103,6) as of June 2023, according to the WFP. Compared to June 2022, this represented an increase of 74 %. At the same time, due to the high inflation, the monthly minimum wage corresponded to only 7 % of the costs of the MEB.⁵⁰¹ The average public sector monthly salary was USD 22, according to Etana Syria,⁵⁰² while Asharq Al-Awsat, a London-based Pan-Arab newspaper, stated that it was SYP 150 000 (roughly USD 11.5) ‘at

⁴⁹⁴ Statistics Lebanon Ltd. and Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2022, 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁹⁵ UN, Briefers Stress to Security Council Syria’s Worsening Situation Needs Fully Funded Humanitarian Response Plan, 12-Month Extension of Cross-Border Aid Mechanism, 29 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁶ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 88

⁴⁹⁷ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 37, 39-40

⁴⁹⁸ AP News, EXPLAINER: Why has Syria’s economic crisis hit a new low?, 5 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁹ Al-Watan, Expatriates Remittances Help Syrian Economy, The Syrian Observer, 20 April 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁰ World Bank, Personal remittances, received (current US\$) - Syrian Arab Republic, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁰¹ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin June 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁵⁰² Etana Syria, Syria’s Economic Crisis in 2022 – A Year in Review, 9 January 2023, [url](#)



best'.⁵⁰³ Etana Syria observed that since the price of a litre of fuel at the black market was USD 3, it was impossible for public sector employees to pay for a full tank of an average vehicle. Therefore, an increasing number of employees stayed at home rather than paying for transport to a job that earned them less than their expenses,⁵⁰⁴ or were searching for other positions within Syria or abroad.⁵⁰⁵ As of mid-August 2023, state salaries were increased to SYP 200 000 (USD 15.4), which pushed prices further up: while the subsidised price of 20 litres of gasoline increased from SYP 75 000 (USD 5.8) to SYP 160 000 (USD 12.3), the same amount of fuel was sold on the black market for more than SYP 300 000 (USD 23).⁵⁰⁶

In March 2023, Al-Monitor noted that several shopkeepers in Damascus who used to close their shops for some days at the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan left them open in 2023. One shop owner was quoted as saying that closure was impossible due to the inflation and that if he closed the shop now, he would not open again.⁵⁰⁷ The city's director of social affairs confirmed an increase in the number of beggars, including children, in Damascus. Many children were collecting plastic and other materials from garbage containers to sell them for recycling and thus contribute to their families' income.⁵⁰⁸ In a survey on the socio-economic situation in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and Homs, 10 % of respondents from Damascus stated that their children worked / contributed to the household income.⁵⁰⁹

In an article from September 2022, Syria Direct quoted a public official in Damascus as saying that he was unable to register the youngest of his five children in kindergarten since he was unable to afford the fees and expenses. Paying for his oldest son's books and supplies for high school alone reportedly took nearly half of his monthly salary of SYP 175 000 (USD 39.50, according to the then current black market exchange rate).⁵¹⁰

2.2.5. Food security

As of April 2023, 12.1 million people were food insecure, according to the WFP.⁵¹¹ These included the 2 million people living in camps. Moreover, an additional 2.9 million people were estimated to be at risk of food insecurity. Food was the third-most reported unmet need in Damascus governorate, according to UNOCHA's 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview, while it was the most reported one in the majority of the other governorates.⁵¹²

⁵⁰³ Asharq Al-Awsat, جنوب سوريا يقتات على تحويلات مغتربيه [Southern Syria feeds on expatriate remittances], 25 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁴ Etana Syria, Syria's Economic Crisis in 2022 – A Year in Review, 9 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁵ Arab Weekly (The), As living costs surge, Syria's civil servants head for the exits, 23 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁶ Makki, D., Syria's economic freefall continues despite Arab League return, MEI (Middle East Institute), 16 August 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁷ Al-Monitor, Syrians in Damascus spend Ramadan in darkness, 28 March 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁸ Baladi News, Female Official from Damascus: Rising Percentage of Children Beggars in Capital, The Syrian Observer, 22 May 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁹ Statistics Lebanon Ltd. and Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2022, 2022, [url](#), p. 18

⁵¹⁰ Syria Direct, In Damascus, students go back to school and families go without, 6 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹¹ WFP Syria, Situation Report 4 – April 2023, 7 June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁵¹² UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 39, 95



The price of the standard average food basket⁵¹³ in April 2023 was SYP 511 686 (USD 39.4) and therefore – for the first time in nine months – almost the same as in the previous month, but 61 % higher than in April 2022, according to WFP. In Damascus governorate, the price of an average food basket was slightly higher, at SYP 554 067 (USD 42.6).⁵¹⁴ On the other hand, Kassiou, the website of the Syrian People's Will Party,⁵¹⁵ put the minimum monthly costs of basic food for a family of five at SYP 2 127 650 (USD 163.7) at the end of March 2023, based on the average prices of these basic food items⁵¹⁶ at local markets in Damascus. According to Kassiou, prices for these items increased between 3.7 % (rice⁵¹⁷) and 67.5 % (meat⁵¹⁸) from January 2023 to the end of March 2023.⁵¹⁹ The WFP, comparing prices per kilogram on a year-on-year basis, pointed to 'soaring' prices for rice (up by 129 %), sugar (up by 86 %) and lentils (up by 62 %) as of April 2023 and noted that the minimum wage covered only one-fifth of the food basket.⁵²⁰ The price of chicken was SYP 50 000 (USD 3.8), according to El País, which quoted a resident of Damascus as saying that an average family needed about SYP 1 million (USD 76.9) to survive and twice as much if they wanted to buy meat or fresh fruit as well.⁵²¹ According to the latest numbers provided by WFP, as of June 2023, the price of the standard average food basket was SYP 530 028 (USD 40.8) and was slightly higher in Damascus governorate, with SYP 556 334 (USD 42.8).⁵²²

According to a survey conducted by the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) in six Syrian cities⁵²³ in 2022, food accounted for the largest share of the total consumption of families in all six cities. In Damascus, the rate of spending on food was 42 % of families' total consumption. 81 % of respondents in Damascus stated that their entire income (including money transfers and aid) was not sufficient to cover their basic needs.⁵²⁴ According to a survey on the socio-economic situation in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and Homs, conducted for the Country of Origin Information (COI) Unit of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 43 % of respondents in Damascus said they 'just about' managed to buy sufficient food for their families, 21 % said they 'hardly' managed and 3 % said they were unable to do so. Only one

⁵¹³ The standard food basket includes food items necessary to provide 2,060 kcal per day for a family of 5 for one month. It includes 37kg bread, 19 kg rice, 19 kg lentils, 5 kg of sugar, and 7 litres of vegetable oil.

⁵¹⁴ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin April 2023, 2 June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁵¹⁵ The party describes itself as the party of the Syrian working class and the 'inheritor and the extension of the Syrian Communist Movement'. PWP, About PWP, 28 November 2013, [url](#)

⁵¹⁶ Food items included in Kassiou's basic food basket are meat, sweets, cheese, eggs, vegetables, fruits, rice and bread. Kassiou calculated the content of the basic food basket on the daily need of about 2,400kcal per person.

⁵¹⁷ From SYP 945 (USD 0.12) to SYP 980 (USD 0.13) for 70g.

⁵¹⁸ From SYP 2,888 (USD 0.37) to SYP 4,838 (USD 0.63) for 75g of red meat and chicken.

⁵¹⁹ Kassiou, 5.6 Million is the Average Cost of Living for the Syrian Family at the Beginning of Ramadan, 26 March 2023, [url](#)

⁵²⁰ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin April 2023, 2 June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁵²¹ El País, In Syria, people fear hunger more than bombs, 30 March 2023, [url](#)

⁵²² WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin June 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁵²³ Damascus, Aleppo (both under GoS control), Qamishli, Raqqah (both under control of the Autonomous Administration of North Eastern Syrian, AANES), Azaz (controlled by the Syrian Interim Government, SIG), and Idlib (controlled by Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham, HTS). FES, Mechanisms of Exploitation: Economic and Social Changes in Syria During the Conflict, September 2022, [url](#), p. 18

⁵²⁴ FES, Mechanisms of Exploitation: Economic and Social Changes in Syria During the Conflict, September 2022, [url](#), pp. 84-85



third (33 %) of respondents in Damascus said they were able to buy sufficient food for their families.⁵²⁵

UNOCHA pointed to harmful changes in food consumption due to the economic crisis, including buying less expensive or less preferable food, and/or reducing the size of their meals at least once a week. These practices were particularly common among female-headed households, where 19 % also reported that at least one household member would go to bed hungry due to a lack of food.⁵²⁶ Similarly, Syria TV reported of residents of Damascus city suffering hunger,⁵²⁷ and skipping meals as food had become too expensive.⁵²⁸ Half of the privately-run bakeries in Damascus stopped working in December 2022 and about a third (30 %) were only working partially due to fuel shortages. One-fifth (20 %) were working despite high prices.⁵²⁹

In June 2023, the WFP announced that it would have to cut its assistance in Syria by about half – from 5.5 million to 3 million people – due to lack of funding and after exhausting other options, including the gradual downsizing of monthly rations to half the standard size.⁵³⁰ Already in March 2023, Al-Araby, the Arab-language website of The New Arab, had reported of the exclusion of 5 000 families in Damascus from the food assistance programme.⁵³¹

2.2.6. Housing, water, and sanitation

(a) Housing

According to UN-Habitat estimates, about 328 000 houses have been destroyed or damaged beyond repair as a result of the war, while a further 600 000 up to 1 million buildings have been ‘moderately or lightly’ damaged. In Damascus governorate, the estimated total damage of housing units was 12 %, or 56 792 housing units.⁵³² The UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) pointed in its Annual Report for 2022 to the presence of explosives in 140 buildings in Damascus and Rural Damascus.⁵³³

UNOCHA explained that in Damascus governorate, shelter assistance was the fifth most reported unmet need.⁵³⁴ According to the survey conducted by the FES in six Syrian cities in

⁵²⁵ Statistics Lebanon Ltd. and Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2022, 2022, [url](#), p. 13

⁵²⁶ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 40

⁵²⁷ Syria TV, “Darkness, Cold, Hunger, and no Transportation”: What’s Happening in Damascus?, The Syrian Observer, 8 December 2022, [url](#)

⁵²⁸ Syria TV, "سكان في دمشق يحذفون وجبات غذائية من موائدهم" ["For fear of hunger". Damascus residents remove meals from their tables], 29 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵²⁹ UNOCHA, Syria Humanitarian Update December 2022, 2 February 2023, [url](#), p. 4

⁵³⁰ WFP, WFP forced to scale down operations in Syria, as donors gather in Brussels ahead of a major conference, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

⁵³¹ Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, البرنامج الأغذية العالمي يستبعد آلاف الأسر السورية [WFP excludes thousands of Syrian families], 20 March 2023, [url](#)

⁵³² UN-Habitat, Considerations for a housing sector recovery framework in Syria, Urban Recover Framework, July 2022, [url](#), pp. 8, 18

⁵³³ UNMAS, Annual Report 2022, 5 April 2023, [url](#), p. 107

⁵³⁴ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 37-39



2022, the quality of housing and its assets, including the availability of electricity and furniture, was considered best in Damascus city.⁵³⁵

In January 2023, the opposition website Al-Souria Net, quoting from a government newspaper, reported about an increase in house rents by up to 200 %, especially in Damascus city. Thus, in some neighbourhoods, the rent for an apartment was SYP 500 000 (USD 38.5), while in a prestigious neighbourhood it amounted to up to SYP 2 million (USD 153.8). In comparison, the rent for a small (50sqm) apartment in Rural Damascus was SYP 200 000 (USD 15.4), and SYP 500 000 (USD 38.5) for an 80sqm apartment, according to a local real estate office quoted in the article.⁵³⁶

(b) Water and sanitation

The UN Secretary-General noted in a May 2023 report that the availability of drinking water in the country had decreased by 40 % since the beginning of the conflict. Moreover, access to water was hampered by a lack of electricity and fuel to run water pumping stations, as well as drought. An outbreak of cholera with thousands of suspected cases⁵³⁷ was related to poor water quality.⁵³⁸ In this context, the pro-GoS Athr Press reported in September 2022 that some farmers in Damascus and its countryside used to irrigate their fields with sewage water. Due to this practice, after the cholera outbreak, authorities in Rural Damascus governorate ordered the destruction of several thousand square metres of vegetable crops to prevent them from being sold on Damascus' markets.⁵³⁹

According to the survey conducted by the FES in six Syrian cities in 2022, the availability of drinking water was rated lowest in Damascus city, while the sanitation system was considered good in all six cities, especially in Damascus.⁵⁴⁰ Most families in all six cities resorted to buying water from private tanks to cope with the water shortage, further straining families' household budgets.⁵⁴¹ According to a survey on the socio-economic situation in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and Homs, conducted for the Country of Origin Information Unit (COI) of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 77 % of respondents in Damascus said that they had access to clean drinking water. The survey, however, did not further specify the modes of access.⁵⁴²

UNOCHA stated in a report of August 2022 that 35 % of households had to spend more than 5 % of their monthly income to pay for water; some sub-districts in Damascus governorate

⁵³⁵ FES, Mechanisms of Exploitation: Economic and Social Changes in Syria During the Conflict, September 2022, [url](#), pp. 76-77

⁵³⁶ Al-Souria Net, Newspaper: Increase of 200% in House Rents in Damascus, The Syrian Observer, 4 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵³⁷ For further details, see below, sub-section 2.2.7 on health care.

⁵³⁸ UN Security Council, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, S/2023/345, 12 May 2023, [url](#), para. 84

⁵³⁹ Athr Press, Price of Leafy Greens Drops 80 Percent due to Cholera Outbreak, The Syrian Observer, 28 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁰ FES, Mechanisms of Exploitation: Economic and Social Changes in Syria During the Conflict, September 2022, [url](#), pp. 77-78

⁵⁴¹ FES, Mechanisms of Exploitation: Economic and Social Changes in Syria During the Conflict, September 2022, [url](#), p. 80

⁵⁴² Statistics Lebanon Ltd. and Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2022, 2022, [url](#), p. 19



were among the most affected.⁵⁴³ In May 2023, the state news agency SANA and the Syrian media platform 7al reported that the General Company for Water Bottling – a company reportedly indirectly affiliated with the Ministry of Industry⁵⁴⁴ – published a new price list for bottled drinking water: consumers were to pay from SYP 925 (USD 0.07) - for a bottle of half a litre – to SYP 5 800 (USD 0.4) for a 10 litre bottle of drinking water.⁵⁴⁵ In February 2023, the German company Gauff Engineering reported on its website that it had been commissioned by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to conduct a ‘diagnosis and feasibility study for the rehabilitation of the Fijeh and Barada water supply’, two of the main water springs in Syria and source of drinking water for the population of Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates. These two water systems had been severely damaged between 2015 and 2017.⁵⁴⁶

2.2.7. Health care

According to a report of May 2023 by the UN Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, only 53 % of health centres were operational in Syria.⁵⁴⁷ In December 2022, a representative of the World Health Organisation (WHO) noted that almost 30 % of the country’s public health facilities remained non-functional. He also pointed to the ‘chronic shortage of health care staff’.⁵⁴⁸ According to WHO estimates, up to 50 % of the health workforce had left the country and the remaining health workers were unequally distributed across the country, with Damascus being among the governorates with a comparably higher ratio of health personnel per population than other governorates such as Hasaka, Raqqqa or Dar’a.⁵⁴⁹

The Syrian newspaper Al-Watan and the international news site Al-Araby Al-Jadeed reported on a lack of medical supplies in hospitals, including in Damascus city, requiring patients to purchase them in pharmacies.⁵⁵⁰ Al-Araby Al-Jadeed noted that this put additional financial strain especially on patients with chronic or complex medical conditions, who in some cases stopped treatment as they could no longer afford it. Moreover, prices of medicines had reportedly been increased several times during the last months, including an increase by 50 % in March 2023.⁵⁵¹ A second 50 %-increase was decided in August 2023, probably motivated

⁵⁴³ UNOCHA, Response to the Water Crisis in Syria - Critical Response and Funding Requirements, 15 September 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁵⁴⁴ 7al, “ترتفع كل صيف،” [“Rises every summer”. New prices for mineral water in Syria], 25 May 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁵ SANA, لائحة أسعار جديدة للمياه المعبأة [New bottled water price list], 24 May 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁶ Gauff Engineering, Rehabilitation of the Fijeh and Barada drinking water supply systems in Syria, 17 February 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁷ UN Security Council, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, S/2023/345, 12 May 2023, [url](#), para. 23

⁵⁴⁸ WHO, Cholera further exacerbates vulnerabilities in Syria, 8 December 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁹ WHO, Syrian Arab Republic: Public Health Situation Analysis (PHSA) Long Form, 18 August 2022, [url](#), pp. 2, 39

⁵⁵⁰ Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, هياكل مستشفيات “سوداء أيام”... [Hospitals Structures... “Black days” for patients in Damascus and its countryside], 20 April 2023, [url](#); Al-Watan, الكفوف وحتى الموضعي والمخدر «القسطرة» منها النفيس ابن في عامين منذ مفقودة ضرورية مواد زيتون... للمشافى طبية ومستلزمات الأدوية بشنري المريض [The patient buys medicines and medical supplies for hospitals ... Zeitoun: Necessary materials have been missing for two years in Ibn al-Nafis, including catheters, local anaesthetics and even the gloves!], 23 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁵¹ Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, هياكل مستشفيات “سوداء أيام”... [Hospitals Structures... “Black days” for patients in Damascus and its countryside], 20 April 2023, [url](#)

by a lack of hard currency and raw materials necessary for the production of medicines.⁵⁵² According to UNOCHA's Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA), 94 % of households in Damascus (among other governorates) stated that high costs for consultations, laboratory and diagnostic procedures were a key barrier to health access.⁵⁵³

In the context of a survey on the socio-economic situation in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and Homs, respondents in Damascus indicated that access to a doctor, medical specialist and hospital was generally available. However, a significant proportion of respondents could not afford the services: 33 % could not afford the services of a doctor, 43 % could not afford the services of a medical specialist and 41 % could not afford treatment/surgery in a hospital.⁵⁵⁴

The Damascus-based state-owned newspaper Tishreen reported in May 2023 on a decreasing birth rate and an increase in requests for abortions, which were explained with high costs of living and a low income. Moreover, some doctors reportedly preferred to perform a caesarean section without indication as the prices for the operation were higher than for assistance at a natural birth. Prices reportedly ranged from SYP 800 000 (USD 61.5) to 6 million (USD 461.5) for a C-section compared with SYP 400 000 (USD 30.8) to 2 million (USD 153.9) for a natural birth.⁵⁵⁵ The Syrian news site Baladi News quoted a specialist in gynaecology explaining that part of the price depended on what hospitals charged for accommodation and other services provided to the patients. Moreover, Baladi News noted that public hospitals suffered from a shortage of anaesthesiologists, who either left the country or preferred to work in private hospitals due to the higher salaries.⁵⁵⁶

According to the UN Secretary-General, as at the start of April 2023, more than 111 000 cases of watery diarrhoea had been recorded across all 14 governorates since the start of a cholera outbreak in August 2022.⁵⁵⁷ The Ministry of Health (MoH) confirmed the first cases of cholera in Aleppo governorate on 10⁵⁵⁸ September 2022.⁵⁵⁹ In Damascus governorate, 43 suspected cases were recorded as of 19 March 2023.⁵⁶⁰

2.2.8. Education

According to the USDOS, the GoS granted free education to children with Syrian citizenship from primary school to (and including) university. While noncitizen children could attend public schools as well, they needed prior permission from the Ministry of Education and stateless

⁵⁵² Makki, D., Syria's economic freefall continues despite Arab League return, MEI (Middle East Institute), 16 August 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵³ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 102

⁵⁵⁴ Statistics Lebanon Ltd. and Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2022, 2022, [url](#), pp. 23-25

⁵⁵⁵ Tishreen, 6 "ملايين ليرة تكلفة" القيصرية "في بعض المشافي.. وأطباء يكشفون عن ازدياد لافت في محاولات الإجهاض هرباً من القادم" [6 Million Liras is the cost of "caesarean section" in some hospitals. And doctors reveal a remarkable increase in abortion attempts to escape the next], 29 May 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁶ Baladi News, سوريا، ارتفاع أسعار عمليات الولادة القيصرية في سوريا [Prices of short deliveries rise in Syria], 4 June 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 13

⁵⁵⁸ 6 September, according to another source. Syria Indicator, Investigation Uncovers Link between Damascus Vegetables and Cholera and Cancer, 7 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁹ The Syrian Ministry of Health confirmed the first cholera cases in Aleppo governorate on 10 September 2022. WHO, Syrian Arab Republic: WHO Syria Situation Report #16, Cholera Outbreak: W48 (27 November-3 December 2022), 8 December 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁶⁰ UNOCHA et al., Whole of Syria: Cholera outbreak situation report No. 15, 3 April 2023, [url](#), p. 2



Kurds were excluded from receiving a degree that documented their academic achievements.⁵⁶¹

Save the Children explained in a report of 2022 that the number of pupils per classroom in Damascus was 101 children, compared to the national average of 54 children per classroom.⁵⁶² On the other hand, NPA quoted teachers from different schools in Damascus saying that they had 39 and 40 pupils in class, respectively. While some parents reportedly turned to private kindergartens and schools to avoid overcrowded classrooms, these were costly. A resident of Damascus reportedly paid SYP 10 million or up to USD 2 000⁵⁶³ per year for four children in kindergarten and school up to grade three, while another resident paid nearly SYP 6 million (USD 461.5) per year for three children at a private school.⁵⁶⁴ In an article of September 2022, Syria Direct pointed to high costs for school supplies and textbooks, noting that, for example, the price for textbooks for 11th grade and baccalaureate students had increased by 36 % and 30 %, respectively, compared with 2021.⁵⁶⁵

WFP reported in its Annual Country Report for the year 2022 on its three-component school feeding programme, with one of the programme's components operational in three governorates, including Damascus.⁵⁶⁶ UNHCR pointed to remedial classes and homework cafés for children that were offered in the organisation's community centres.⁵⁶⁷ As of December 2022, UNHCR ran 93 community centres in all 14 governorates, including four centres in Damascus.⁵⁶⁸

For further information on access to education at country-level, see section [1.4](#).

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⁵⁶² Save the Children, Education Interrupted: Prioritising early recovery in the education sector in Syria, 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁶³ USD 769.2, according to the informal market exchange rate of 26 July 2023. Karam Shaar, Hourly black market exchange rates and gold prices in Syria by city, n.d. [url](#), accessed 26 July 2023

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⁵⁶⁵ Syria Direct, In Damascus, students go back to school and families go without, 6 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁶ WFP, Syrian Arab Republic Annual Country Report 2022 - Country Strategic Plan 2022 – 2023, 8 April 2023, [url](#), p. 19

⁵⁶⁷ UNHCR, Education in Syria, January – December 2022, 1 May 2023, [url](#), p. 2

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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The research should focus on the period between August 2022 – August 2023. Background information and older trends should be kept very brief and crosslinked as much as possible with previous reports published: [Targeting of Individuals \(September 2022\)](#), [Targeting of individuals \(March 2020\)](#), and [Socio-economic situation in Damascus city \(August 2022\)](#).

Research should cover the following:

1. Profiles

- ☐ **Persons perceived to be opposing the Government of Syria (GoS)**
 - Which profiles are perceived as opposing the government?
 - Treatment of persons perceived as opposing the government
 - Treatment of family members
- ☐ **Persons fearing recruitment by the government armed forces, military draft evaders, deserters and defectors**
 - Changes to the Syrian military service law, including legal status of conscientious objectors
 - Recruitment and deployment strategies of conscripts and reservists
 - Demobilisation of conscripts and reservists
 - Implementation in practice of legal exemptions and amnesties
 - treatment of draft evaders, deserters and defectors including of family members
- ☐ **Trafficking in human beings**
 - Profiles subjected to trafficking in human beings
 - Actors involved in trafficking in human beings
 - Availability of state protection
- ☐ **Children**
 - Targeting of children by different actors
 - Situation of children in IDP camps
 - Child recruitment by armed groups
 - Access to education

2. Socio-economic situation in Damascus city

Chapter should focus on Damascus city. The chapter should address internal mobility issues relating to accessibility (travel and admittance) and key socioeconomic indicators: housing, food security, water and sanitation, health care, education, livelihood opportunities such as employment.

- ☐ **Mobility and admittance**





❑ **Socio-economic overview**

- Economy
- Humanitarian situation and assistance
- Employment
- Poverty
- Food security
- Housing, water, and sanitation
- Health care
- Education



