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Home Office

# Country Policy and Information Note

## Syria: Kurds and Kurdish areas

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# Executive summary

On 8 December 2024, the regime of Bashar Al-Assad fell, bringing an end to over 50 years of Al-Assad family rule. An Islamist rebel group called Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) led by Ahmad Al-Sharaa, commenced the 11-day offensive which culminated in the toppling of Al-Assad. Ahmad Al-Sharaa is now the de facto leader of Syria, and figures affiliated with HTS occupy the major positions in the new government.

Kurds in Syria are unlikely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from the state. They are also unlikely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Whilst there is reporting on detentions and mistreatment carried out against those in opposition to the SDF or critical of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North East Syria (DAANES), the detail is vague and non-specific and does not point to this being a generalised risk. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.

Kurds in areas under de facto Syrian National Army (SNA) control are likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from the SNA based on their ethnicity and/or based on their actual or perceived political opinion.

In general, people who evade, or desert from, military service do not fall within one of the 5 Refugee Convention grounds, including particular social group (PSG).

The conditions for adult male conscripts performing mandatory military service with the Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP) generally do not amount to serious harm. In general, women are not at risk of forced recruitment and are not required to perform military service. In general, children are likely to have a well-founded fear of serious harm given consistent reporting of forced recruitment of children into the SDF/YPG.

Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to obtain protection and are unlikely to be able to internally relocate to escape that risk. Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a non-state or rogue state actor, they are unlikely to be able to obtain protection from the state but are likely to be able to internally relocate to escape that risk.

Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

All cases must be considered on their individual facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate they face persecution or serious harm.

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# Assessment

Section updated: 6 June 2025

## About the assessment

This section considers the evidence relevant to this note – that is the [country information](#), refugee/human rights laws and policies, and applicable caselaw – and provides an assessment of whether, **in general**:

- a Kurdish person faces a real risk of persecution/serious harm by state actors or non-state actors because of their Kurdish ethnicity
- a Kurdish person faces a real risk of persecution/serious harm by state actors or non-state actors because of their actual or imputed political opinion
- the state (or quasi state bodies) can provide effective protection
- internal relocation is possible to avoid persecution/serious harm
- a claim, if refused, is likely or not to be certified as 'clearly unfounded' under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Sources cited in the [country information](#) may refer interchangeably to Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), or the interim or de facto government or authorities. Within this assessment, we use the (new) Syrian government and, since 8 December 2024 they are considered the controlling party of the state or a substantial part of the territory of the State (for the purposes of Article 1(A)(2) of the Refugee Convention).

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### 1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals

#### 1.1 Credibility

1.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

1.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).

1.1.3 Decision makers must also consider making an international biometric data-sharing check, when such a check has not already been undertaken (see [Biometric data-sharing process \(Migration 5 biometric data-sharing process\)](#)).

1.1.4 In cases where there are doubts surrounding a person's claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider language analysis testing, where available (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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### **1.2 Exclusion**

- 1.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons to apply one (or more) of the exclusion clauses. Each case must be considered on its individual facts.
- 1.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 1.2.3 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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### **2. Convention reason(s)**

- 2.1.1 Actual or imputed political opinion and/or race.
- 2.1.2 In general, people who evade, or desert from, military service do not fall within one of the 5 Refugee Convention grounds, including particular social group (PSG). This is because they:
  - do not share an innate characteristic, or a common background that cannot be changed, or share a characteristic or belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that a person should not be forced to renounce it – and
  - do not have a distinct identity which is perceived as being different by the surrounding society.
- 2.1.3 Some people may claim that refusing to do military service, including as a conscientious objector, will be perceived by the state as an act of political opposition. The [Asylum Instruction on Military Service and Conscientious Objection](#) and paragraph 22 of the House of Lords judgement in the case of

[Sepet & Another v. SSHD \[2003\] UKHL 15](#) explain that it is necessary to carefully examine the reason for the persecution in the mind of the persecutor rather than the reason which the victim believes is why they are being persecuted.

- 2.1.4 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.
- 2.1.5 In the absence of a link to one of the 5 Refugee Convention reasons necessary for the grant of asylum, the question is whether the person will face a real risk of serious harm to qualify for Humanitarian Protection (HP).
- 2.1.6 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds, see the Asylum Instruction, [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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### 3. Risk

#### 3.1 Risk from the state

- 3.1.1 Kurds in Syria are unlikely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from the state, on the evidence that is currently available. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 3.1.2 Kurds make up approximately 10% of Syria's currently estimated 24 million population (see [Number of Kurds in Syria](#)). Kurdish communities are primarily concentrated in the north and north east of the country, with large Kurdish communities in Afrin, Kobani and the Jazira region which includes the cities of Qamishli and Al Hasakah. Large Kurdish communities also exist in parts of Aleppo, for example in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafieh. Areas with Kurdish communities are not geographically contiguous and are ethnically mixed (see [Location of Kurds in Syria](#)). Kurds in Syria speak the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish, but most also speak Arabic. The majority are Sunni Muslims, but are largely secular, and women have been more active in public life than in Arab cultures. However, many Kurds have assimilated into Arab society (see [Background](#)).
- 3.1.3 Under the Assad regime, the Kurdish language was banned from use, Kurdish land was redistributed to Arabs and Kurdish activists and individuals were reportedly detained and tortured (see [Treatment by the former Assad regime](#)).
- 3.1.4 A 1962 census required people in al-Hasakeh governorate, which had a large Kurdish population, to provide evidence of residence in Syria dating back to 1945. Unable to do this, approximately 120,000 Kurds were made stateless – a number which grew to an estimated 300,000 as their descendants inherited this status. Those without citizenship could not access public services and could not travel in areas controlled by the former government of Syria. However, the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) did not distinguish between citizens and non-citizens, with stateless persons having equal access to services, institutions and education. The new government of Syria has stated that full constitutional rights and citizenship will be granted to Kurdish people, but CPIT was unable to find information about any new processes for Kurds to acquire citizenship (see [Stateless Kurds in Syria](#)).

3.1.5 The new government of Syria has also assured minorities, including Kurds, that they will be protected and that violations against them will cease. They have stated that armed factions will be removed from Afrin and that they will assist Kurdish internally displaced persons to return to their homes. They have stated that they will open a complaints office in Afrin (see [Hayat Tahrir al-Sham \(HTS\) rhetoric regarding Kurds in Syria](#)).

3.1.6 In the days after the fall of the Assad regime, there were reports of HTS forces besieging Kurdish neighbourhoods in Aleppo and Damascus, but also reports that they attempted to avoid clashes with Kurdish forces and arrested Syrian National Army (SNA) fighters for harming Kurdish civilians.

3.1.7 In the sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)), there is no evidence to suggest that HTS have committed violations against Kurdish people on the basis of their ethnicity or (perceived) political opinion since the fall of the al-Assad regime (see [Treatment by HTS](#)).

3.1.8 As of April 2025, the new government is gradually taking control of areas formerly held by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and SNA. These groups and the DAANES institutions have yet to be fully integrated with the new Syrian state apparatus, and despite positive rhetoric regarding the dissolution of armed factions, reports continue of their presence and operations in Kurdish areas. It therefore remains unclear how Kurdish areas will be governed in practice (see [Risk from non-state actors: Syrian Democratic Forces](#) and [Risk from non-state actors: Syrian National Army](#)).

3.1.9 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 3.2 Risk from non-state actors: Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

3.2.1 Kurds in Syria are unlikely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from the SDF. Whilst there is reporting on detentions and mistreatment carried out against those in opposition to the SDF or critical of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North East Syria (DAANES), the detail is vague and non-specific. Numbers, frequency and timescales are very hard to quantify and the specific examples that are provided do not point to this being a systematic risk, or a risk in general, to anyone who has shown opposition to the SDF/DAANES. It will be for the person to credibly demonstrate how and why their particular circumstances, based on their profile, background and history, would place them at real risk of persecution.

3.2.2 The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), founded in 2015, is the military wing of the DAANES. At time of writing, it controls almost a third of Syrian territory, encompassing Hasakah, eastern Deir Ez-Zor and parts of Raqqa and Aleppo governorates. The SDF is multi-ethnic, but its leadership is Kurdish. It has approximately 100,000 fighters and is comprised of predominantly the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and its female contingent the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) (see [Maps](#), [Syrian Democratic Forces \(SDF\) and connected actors](#)).

3.2.3 The SDF reportedly does not tolerate dissent in areas under its control, and has detained those expressing critical views towards the DAANES, including Kurdish political opponents, human rights activists and children as young as 12. Detainees have reported being tortured, however it is unclear from the

sources consulted how many or over what time period. After the fall of Assad, SDF members reportedly shot at civilians and demonstrators who were protesting against its continued control ([Treatment by the SDF and connected actors](#)).

3.2.4 The SDF and affiliated actors reportedly use and recruit child soldiers. A report by the UN Secretary General indicated that 231 children were recruited by the SDF in 2023, which includes 203 by the YPG/YPJ. Sources reported that the Revolutionary Youth Movement, a radical political youth organisation, has been increasingly recruiting children and transferring them to armed groups affiliated with the SDF. Recruitment methods range from ideological encouragement to abduction. Recruitment was more common from Kurdish areas and among children from a lower socio-economic background. In 2019, the SDF signed an action plan with the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to end and prevent this, and established child protection offices. However, the practice has reportedly continued (see [Use of child soldiers by the SDF and connected actors](#)).

3.2.5 On 10 March 2025, an agreement was reached between the new Syrian government and the SDF that all civil and military institutions in northeastern Syria would be merged into the administration of the Syrian state. This deal included a ceasefire across Syria. Executive committees were appointed to oversee the implementation of the deal before the end of 2025. The SDF agreed on 1 April 2025 to withdraw its forces from Aleppo. As of 13 April 2025 the withdrawal was progressing, but SDF-related security forces remained stationed in the city's main Kurdish neighbourhoods (see [Integration of the SDF into Syrian state apparatus](#)).

3.2.6 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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3.3 [Risk from non-state actors: conscription by the SDF and connected actors](#)

3.3.1 A requirement to do compulsory military service – or punishment for failing to complete this duty – does not, in itself, give rise to a well-founded fear of persecution. It will only do so where, on account of a Convention reason:

- (a) military service would involve acts, with which the person may be associated, which are contrary to the basic rules of human conduct; or
- (b) the conditions of military service would be so harsh as to amount to persecution; or
- (c) the punishment for draft evasion or desertion is disproportionately harsh or severe.

3.3.2 These principles are drawn from the [Sepet](#) case, which established that it is considered legitimate for states to have national service regimes. It should be noted that the reference to Sepet in this subsection is intended simply as a method of assessing whether the treatment of SDF conscripts amounts to persecution or serious harm. It is **not** intended to imply that the DAANES has the same legal status or rights as a state and it must **not** be considered to be one.

3.3.3 With reference to the three principles outlined in paragraph 3.3.1, in general,

(a) does not apply in respect of adult males living in SDF-controlled areas. This is because conscripts are not generally used in combat situations.

(b) does not apply in respect of adult males living in SDF-controlled areas. This is because the (albeit limited) evidence available does not suggest that any conditions encountered would be so harsh as to amount to persecution.

(c) does not apply in respect of adult males living in SDF-controlled areas. This is because draft evaders are punished with one month of extra service which is not disproportionately harsh or severe. The law does not specify a penalty for deserters, and sources did not indicate that deserters were subject to ill-treatment.

3.3.4 Decision makers should also consider whether the method of recruitment involves treatment amounting to persecution or serious harm, and whether an applicant is likely to be eligible for a deferment of, or exemption from, military service.

3.3.5 In general, women are not at risk of forced recruitment. This is because mandatory military service does not apply to women, who serve on a voluntary basis.

3.3.6 In general, children are likely to have a well-founded fear of serious harm given consistent reporting of forced recruitment of children into the SDF/YPG. It should be noted that children fearing forced recruitment by the SDF/YPG generally do not fall within one of the five Refugee Convention grounds. Therefore, where a child fears forced recruitment and internal relocation is not reasonable, a grant of humanitarian protection is likely to be appropriate.

3.3.7 The Danish Immigration Service conducted a Fact Finding Mission (FFM) in 2024 on military recruitment in north and east Syria. According to this FFM and other sources, conscription is mandatory for all male residents of the DAANES territory aged between 18 and 40. Women are not required to serve but can join voluntarily. Deferrals can be granted for students, recent returnees, those with medical conditions and those with certain family situations. One year is the standard duration of service for conscripts, although it may be extended during emergency situations. Conscripts are recruited into the Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP), not the SDF/YPG. The HXP is an auxiliary force with the main task of protecting public buildings and supporting the SDF. They are thus generally not used in combat situations (see [Conscription by the SDF and connected actors](#)).

3.3.8 There have been reports of arrest and forced recruitment of draft evaders, and of those who fit the conditions for deferral. Sources describe two main methods of forced recruitment: names are distributed to checkpoints where draft evaders are detained when passing through, or they are arrested in raids on homes, workplaces and public spaces. They are then sent to complete mandatory military service. Draft evaders are reportedly punished by one month of additional service. The SDF defines a deserter as a fighter who has been absent for 15 consecutive days after joining. Consequences for desertion are unclear, as the law does not specify a penalty for deserters. Sources reported that they undergo investigations about their motives for their desertion but that they were not aware of any instances of ill-treatment towards them. Sources differ on whether forced recruitment of persons other

than draft evaders/deserters takes place (see [Conscription by the SDF and connected actors](#)).

- 3.3.9 As of January 2025, the SDF cited the security situation as the reason it has postponed demobilisation of those who have completed their compulsory military service (see [Conscription by the SDF and connected actors](#)).
- 3.3.10 The new authorities in Damascus have stated that mandatory conscription into Syria's armed forces will be abolished, except in extreme cases such as war. The effect of this on SDF conscription remains to be seen (see [Conscription by the SDF and connected actors](#)).
- 3.3.11 For further information on military service in Syria in general, see [Country Policy and Information Note Syria: Military service](#).

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#### 3.4 Risk from non-state actors: Syrian National Army (SNA)

- 3.4.1 Kurds in areas under de facto Syrian National Army (SNA) control are likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from the SNA based on their ethnicity and/or based on their actual or perceived political opinion.
- 3.4.2 The SNA, often referred to as 'Turkish-affiliated armed groups', is a collection of more than 35 armed factions comprising approximately 30,000 to 90,000 fighters (see [Syrian National Army \(SNA\)](#)).
- 3.4.3 It exercises de facto control over parts of north and north west Syria, including the area between A'zaz, Al-Bab and Jarablus. Until February 2025, Afrin was also under its control (see [Maps, Syrian National Army \(SNA\)](#)).
- 3.4.4 The SDF and SNA were in conflict over territory in northern Syria until as recently as April 2025 (see [Conflict between the SDF and SNA](#)).
- 3.4.5 In SNA-controlled areas, Kurdish people were reportedly detained and questioned regarding alleged ties to the SDF, DAANES and YPG. Sources suggest that the SNA views Kurds as indistinguishable from the YPG, which is seen as a terrorist group by Turkey. Torture was reported at SNA detention facilities, which were reportedly in poor condition. Sexual violence was also perpetrated by SNA members against detainees. Victims said that their Kurdish ethnicity was mentioned by perpetrators during torture. Some detainees were released after they or their family paid money to SNA members. Family members of detainees were reportedly threatened, and sources stated that Kurdish women were detained, beaten, kidnapped and subjected to sexual violence by SNA fighters. Sources did not consistently report a number of victims. However, it was estimated in 2024 that 431 people were arrested throughout 2023 by SNA-affiliates in Afrin, Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad in northern Syria. Of that total, 93 persons were released and of these, 85 reported being tortured. It was also estimated that 128 people were detained by the SNA between November 2024 and mid-December 2024, more than half being accused of involvement with the SDF (see [Treatment by the SNA](#)).
- 3.4.6 It was widely reported that the SNA seized the properties of Kurdish people and used them to house their families or fighters, particularly in Afrin. Victims believed this was due to their Kurdish ethnicity. Those returning to SNA-held areas faced detention and were often forced to pay fees to regain their property. Despite orders to the contrary from their leaders, certain SNA

factions demanded tax from olive harvests in the areas under their control (see [Treatment by the SNA](#) and [Internally Displaced Persons \(IDPs\)](#)).

- 3.4.7 The above violations continued after the fall of the Assad regime, particularly in Afrin and Shahba. On 29 January 2025, the new Syrian leader Ahmed Al Shara announced the dissolution of all armed factions and their merging into state institutions. However, as of April 2025, the extent of this integration remained unclear as reports continued of SNA presence and operations in northern Syria, including in Afrin (see [Treatment by the SNA](#), [Integration of the SNA into Syrian state forces](#)).
- 3.4.8 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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#### **4. Protection**

- 4.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to obtain protection.
- 4.1.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from non-state or rogue state actors, they are unlikely to be able to obtain protection from the state.
- 4.1.3 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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#### **5. Internal relocation**

- 5.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 5.1.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a non-state or rogue state actor, they are likely to be able to internally relocate to escape that risk. See the CPIN [Syria: Internal relocation](#) for more information.
- 5.1.3 For further guidance on internal relocation and factors to consider, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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#### **6. Certification**

- 6.1.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 6.1.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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# Country information

## About the country information

This section contains publicly available or disclosable country of origin information (COI) which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the [research methodology](#). It provides the evidence base for the assessment which, as stated in the [About the assessment](#), is the guide to the current objective conditions.

The structure and content follow a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to the scope of this note.

This document is intended to be comprehensive but not exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned this does not mean that the event did or did not take place or that the person or organisation does or does not exist.

The COI included was published or made publicly available on or before **27 April 2025**. Any event taking place or report published after this date will not be included.

Decision makers must use relevant COI as the evidential basis for decisions.

**NOTE: The maps in this CPIN are not intended to reflect the UK Government's views of any boundaries.**

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## 7. Fall of the Al-Assad regime

7.1.1 In the early morning of Sunday 8 December 2024, opposition forces (also referred to as rebels) entered Damascus and declared the end of the regime of President Bashar Al-Assad, who fled to Russia. The fall of Damascus was the culmination of an 11-day offensive which started in north-west Syria. Faced with little resistance from the regime, rebels took control of the cities of Aleppo, Hama, and Homs. Meanwhile, other opposition groups gained control of the city of Deir Ezzor in the east of the country, while the regime also relinquished control of the southern cities of Daraa and Suwayda<sup>1 2</sup>.

7.1.2 Opposition forces comprised an array of different groups, with the most prominent being Sunni Islamist militant group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), led by Abu Mohammed Al-Jolani<sup>3 4</sup>.

7.1.3 For more information, see the Country Policy and Information Note, [Syria: Returnees After Fall of Al-Assad Regime](#).

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## 8. Kurds in Syria

### 8.1 Background

8.1.1 In March 2025, the BBC stated that 'Between 25 and 35 million Kurds inhabit a mountainous region straddling the borders of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran and Armenia. They make up the fourth-largest ethnic group in the Middle East, but they have never obtained a permanent nation state.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Al Jazeera, [What happened in Syria? How did al-Assad fall?](#), 8 December 2024

<sup>2</sup> Sky News, [How the rebel assault unfolded in Syria...](#), 8 December 2024

<sup>3</sup> Sky News, [Who is Syrian rebel leader Abu Mohammed al-Jolani and what are...](#), 9 December 2024

<sup>4</sup> CNN, [After decades of brutal rule, Bashar al-Assad's regime has...](#), 9 December 2024

<sup>5</sup> BBC, [Kurdish-led SDF agrees to integrate with Syrian government forces](#), 11 March 2025

8.1.2 The below map was published by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior in 2016. It shows the main areas of Kurdish settlement in the Middle East, noting that 'The Middle Eastern population is very heterogeneous in terms of ethnic and linguistic affiliation, especially in urban centers.'<sup>6</sup>



8.1.3 A December 2023 article written by a Kurdish journalist and published in New Lines Magazine, a US global affairs online magazine<sup>7</sup>, stated:

'The Kurdish people, estimated at 45 million by the Kurdish Institute of Paris, have never recognized what they consider the artificial boundaries that divide them across four nation-states — Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey — and have struggled to form an independent state of their own since the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916.

'Under this agreement, western Kurdistan was definitively separated from northern Kurdistan and became part of the newly formed state of Syria. These changes made Kurds in Syria the largest non-Arab ethnicity.'

8.1.4 Encyclopaedia Britannica's entry on Kurds, updated in March 2025, stated that: 'The Treaty of Sèvres, drawn up in 1920, provided for an autonomous Kurdistan but was never ratified; the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which replaced the Treaty of Sèvres, made no mention of Kurdistan or the Kurds. Thus ... Kurdistan after the war [World War 1] was more fragmented than before, and various separatist movements arose among Kurdish groups.'<sup>8</sup>

8.1.5 The same source stated that:

'The traditional Kurdish way of life was nomadic, revolving around sheep and goat herding ... The enforcement of national boundaries beginning after World War I (1914–18) impeded the seasonal migrations of the flocks, forcing most of the Kurds to abandon their traditional ways for village life and

<sup>6</sup> Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, [Atlas Syria and Iraq](#) (pages 21, 22), 2016

<sup>7</sup> New Lines Magazine, [About](#), no date

<sup>8</sup> New Lines Magazine, [Revisiting the Erasure of Kurdish Identity in Syria](#), 20 December 2023

<sup>9</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, [Kurd](#), updated 17 March 2025

settled farming; others entered nontraditional employment ...

‘Most Kurds are Sunni Muslims, and among them are many who practice Sufism and other mystical sects ...

‘The principal unit in traditional Kurdish society was the tribe, typically led by a sheikh or an aga, whose rule was firm. Tribal identification and the sheikh’s authority are still felt, though to a lesser degree, in the large urban areas ... Kurdish women ... traditionally have been more active in public life than Turkish, Arab, and Iranian women ...’<sup>10</sup>

8.1.6 The December 2023 article in New Lines Magazine stated:

‘Kurds have a distinct culture, language (Kurdish) with many dialects, and history. We have a rich cultural heritage, with unique traditions in music, dance, clothing and cuisine. While the majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslims, there are also Kurdish communities that practice Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Yarsanism, Yazidism, Alevism and Judaism.

‘Kurdish society places a high value on hospitality, honor and tribal ties, and extended families often live in close-knit communities.’<sup>11</sup>

8.1.7 Minority Rights Group (MRG)’s profile on Kurds in Syria, last updated in 2018, stated that Syria’s Kurds ‘... speak Kurdish (the Kirmanji dialect), but most speak Arabic, too, and many Kurds have at least partially assimilated into Arab society. Most are Sunni Muslims.’<sup>12</sup>

8.1.8 On 4 December 2024, The New Arab, a London-based news website<sup>13</sup>, reported that ‘... even though the majority of Syrian Kurds are Muslims, they are staunchly secular in their way of life and expect this to be respected.’<sup>14</sup>

8.1.9 On 13 December 2024, Deutsche Welle stated:

‘The Kurdish people are often described as one of the biggest ethnic groups in the world without a country of their own. If they did have a country, it would lie in the Kurdish-majority areas where Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey meet.

‘There is a Kurdish independence movement in each of those countries, whose members have lobbied and even fought for an independent state or Kurdish autonomy, with varying degrees of success. Kurdish independence movements in each of the countries have also been repressed by their respective governments — also with varying degrees of success. In Turkey, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party or PKK, turned to violence to try to achieve their aims.

‘In Syria, near the start of the civil war, around 2012, the forces of now-deposed dictator Assad, withdrew from Kurdish-majority areas in northeastern and eastern Syria without much of a fight ...

‘Syrian Arab revolutionaries said they didn’t want the Kurds to be independent from Syria and that the country should remain united. There was also scurrilous talk about whether ... in a bid to pursue their own goal of Kurdish independence, the Kurds would maintain neutrality in the civil war.

<sup>10</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, [Kurd](#), updated 17 March 2025

<sup>11</sup> New Lines Magazine, [Revisiting the Erasure of Kurdish Identity in Syria](#), 20 December 2023

<sup>12</sup> MRG, [Kurds in Syria](#), updated March 2018

<sup>13</sup> The New Arab, [About Us](#), no date

<sup>14</sup> The New Arab, [After Aleppo, what will happen to the Kurds of northwest Syria?](#), 4 December 2024

The Kurds never really fought against Assad's forces, and this alleged "betrayal" caused antipathy between Syrian Arabs and Syrian Kurds ...

'During the 13-year civil war, the US got involved with Syria's Kurds, allying with them to combat the extremist group known as the "Islamic State" (IS)...

'... while fighting against the IS group, Syrian Kurds also expanded the terrain under their control, including Arab-majority areas like Raqqa and Deir al-Zour.

'Locals have protested against the Kurdish leadership there...'<sup>15</sup>

#### 8.1.10 For further information on the history of the Kurdish people, see:

- BBC, [Who are the Kurds?](#), 15 October 2019
- Council on Foreign Relations, [The Kurds' Long Struggle With Statelessness](#) (1920-2022), no date
- Minority Rights Group, [Kurds in Syria](#), updated March 2018
- Rojava Information Centre, [Rojava: a timeline](#) (1960's to 2019), no date

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### 8.2 Number of Kurds in Syria

#### 8.2.1 In an 18 December 2024 article entitled 'Syria's ethnic and religious groups explained', Deutsche Welle stated that:

'It is impossible to get accurate and current data on Syria's varied population. This is due to a war that lasted over a decade ...

'Those numbers there are differ wildly according to the source. Syria's Central Bureau of Statistics said 29.2 million people lived in the country as of December 10, 2019. The World Factbook produced by the CIA, the US' foreign intelligence service, then estimates that by July 2021 around 20.4 million people were living in Syria. For its part, the World Bank put the population at around 23 million in 2023. Other estimates pin the number closer to 25 million.'<sup>16</sup>

#### 8.2.2 According to the CIA World Factbook, updated on 13 March 2025, the estimated total population of Syria as of 2024 was 23.865 million<sup>17</sup>.

#### 8.2.3 In March 2025, both the BBC and the CIA World Factbook stated that Kurds make up approximately 10% of Syria's population<sup>18 19</sup>.

#### 8.2.4 In March 2023, the Groupe d'études géopolitiques (GEG), an independent research organisation and think tank based in Paris<sup>20</sup>, stated that 'In 2011, the total Kurdish population in Syria was estimated at 2 million out of 21 million inhabitants.'<sup>21</sup>

#### 8.2.5 MRG's profile of Kurds in Syria, updated in 2018, estimated that 'There are

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<sup>15</sup> Deutsche Welle, [Fighting in Syrian Kurdish-held areas: What you need to know](#), 13 December 2024

<sup>16</sup> Deutsche Welle, [Syria's ethnic and religious groups explained](#), 18 December 2024

<sup>17</sup> CIA World Factbook, [Syria](#) (People and society), updated 16 January 2025

<sup>18</sup> BBC, [Kurdish-led SDF agrees to integrate with Syrian government forces](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>19</sup> CIA World Factbook, [Syria](#) (Ethnic groups), updated 13 March 2025

<sup>20</sup> GEG, [About](#), no date

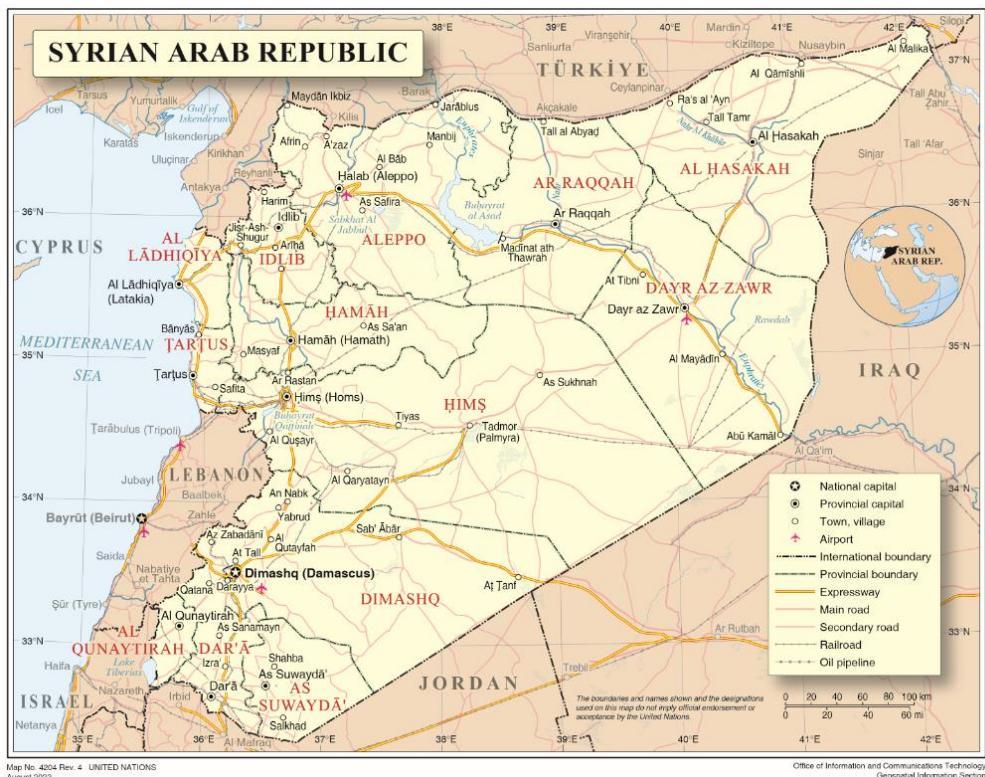
<sup>21</sup> GEG, [Iraq and Syria: Kurdish Autonomous Regions Under Threat](#), 4 March 2023

around 2.5 million Kurds in Syria.<sup>22</sup>

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### 8.3 Location of Kurds in Syria

8.3.1 The UN shared the below map of Syria, dated August 2022, showing the main cities and governorates<sup>23</sup>:



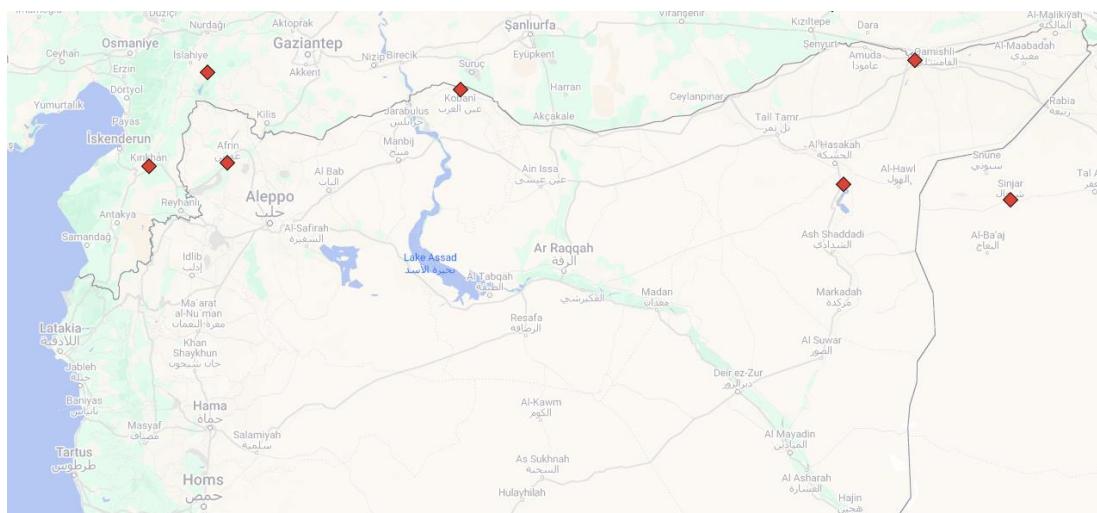
8.3.2 The Kurdish project is a 'nonprofit digital agency' and 'cultural-education initiative to raise awareness in Western culture of Kurdish people'<sup>24</sup>. It produced an [interactive map](#), published in March 2018, which highlights cities that have historically been inhabited by large Kurdish populations. This map highlighted the main Kurdish areas in Syria as being Afrin, Kobani, Qamishli, and Al Hasakah, all located in the north and north-east of the country<sup>25</sup>:

<sup>22</sup> MRG, [Kurds in Syria](#), updated March 2018

<sup>23</sup> United Nations, [Syrian Arab Republic](#), 1 August 2022

<sup>24</sup> The Kurdish Project, [Our mission](#), no date

<sup>25</sup> The Kurdish Project, [Kurdish Populated Cities](#), March 2018



8.3.3 The Kurdish project stated on an undated webpage that 'The Kurdish region of northeastern Syria is ... also known as Rojava...  
 '...Rojava is broken into three cantons. Afrin Canton in the West, Kobane Canton in the center, and Cizre Canton in the East.'<sup>26</sup>

8.3.4 MRG's profile on Kurds in Syria stated that 'About a third of them live in the foothills of the Taurus Mountains north of Aleppo, and an equal number along the Turkish border in the Jazirah. A further 10 per cent can be found in the vicinity of Jarabulus north-east of Aleppo, and from 10-15 per cent in the Hayy al-Akrad (Quarter of the Kurds) on the outskirts of Damascus.'<sup>27</sup>

8.3.5 In an October 2019 article, the BBC stated that 'Before the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began in 2011 most [of Syria's Kurds] lived in the cities of Damascus and Aleppo, and in three, non-contiguous areas around Kobane, Afrin, and the north-eastern city of Qamishli.'<sup>28</sup>

8.3.6 In a November 2021 paper, the Clingendael Institute, 'an independent international affairs think tank and academy'<sup>29</sup>, stated that:  
 '... the area of Syria that was majority-Kurdish or Kurdish-only populated in 2011 is actually quite small. In fact, only Afrin, Kobani, Amouda, Debersiya, Derik/Al-Malikiya, several Kurdish-majority towns in Hasaka, the Al-Ruz district of Damascus as well as the Sheikh Maqsoud district of Aleppo qualify. Cities like Hasaka, Qahtaniya, and even Ra's al-Ain are patchworks of identities (Kurdish, Arab, Syriac, and Armenian etc). Tel Abyad and Raqqa only have small minority Kurdish populations, while Deir Ezzor is fully Arab.'<sup>30</sup>

8.3.7 In March 2023, the GEG stated, regarding Kurdish-populated areas in Syria:  
 'The Afrin Region is the more rugged ... Most of the Kurdish territory covers the small hills around Kobanî and, above all, the vast plains in Jazira. Between these three zones with a homogenous Kurdish population, the majority of the population is Arab ... this is therefore not a vast, homogenous Kurdish territory. In the Euphrates Valley, the Kurdish population is limited to

<sup>26</sup> The Kurdish Project, [Syria \(Rojava or Western Kurdistan\)](#), no date

<sup>27</sup> MRG, [Kurds in Syria](#), updated March 2018

<sup>28</sup> BBC, [Who are the Kurds?](#), 15 October 2019

<sup>29</sup> Clingendael, [About Us](#), no date

<sup>30</sup> Clingendael, [Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist](#) (page 35), April 2021

a few districts in Raqqa ... Qamishli and Al Hasakah, the two largest cities of the Jazira region, are divided into Kurdish and Arab districts. The former are a majority in Qamishli but a minority in Al Hasakah. In 2011 ... Half [of Syria's Kurdish population] were located in their home territories and the other half were in Aleppo and Damascus. The Kurdish neighborhood of Sheikh Maqsoud in Aleppo alone was home to more than half a million Kurds, a result of the rural exodus from Afrin and Kobanî. In the territory that now makes up the AANES [Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria], the Kurdish population is estimated at more than a million inhabitants while Sunni Arabs number 1.5 to 2 million ...<sup>31</sup>

8.3.8 Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024 assesses movements toward democracy and market economy around the world<sup>32</sup>. This report, covering the period from 1 February 2021 to 31 January 2023, stated 'Most Kurds live in AANES territory in the northeast of Syria.'<sup>33</sup> See paragraph 10.3.6 for a map of the regions that make up the AANES.

8.3.9 In its 20 December 2023 article, New Lines Magazine described 'the resource-rich northeast of Syria' as 'the area of the country most densely populated by Kurds.'<sup>34</sup>

8.3.10 In a May 2024 report, The Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies, 'an independent nonprofit research institution, focusing on the production of political, social and intellectual studies and research related particularly to the Syrian issue',<sup>35</sup> stated:

'Northern Syria is a mosaic of towns that are mainly Arab, towns that are mainly Kurdish, and everything in between. However, the majority are Arab ... Syrian Kurds live mainly in three areas: Afrin, Kobani and Jezira near the Turkish border, and in quarters in Aleppo and Damascus ... Syrian Kurds do not have one single geographically connected area that is mainly populated by Kurds. Various Syrian border areas in the north, formerly inhabited to a great extent by Kurds, have since the 1960s become more heavily populated by Arabs who have settled there as part of the Ba'thist policy to Arabize the northern Syrian border areas, the so-called "Arab belt" ...'<sup>36</sup>

8.3.11 Middle East Eye, an independent digital news organisation<sup>37</sup>, reported on 3 December 2024 that: 'More than 100,000 Kurds live in the Aleppo neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafieh, with the towns of Tel Rifaat, Tel Aran and Tel Hassel also housing significant Kurdish communities.'<sup>38</sup>

8.3.12 On 4 December 2024, an article in The New Arab stated: 'Aleppo city has two Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods, Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah. Altogether, there are approximately 500,000 Kurds in this large northwestern area west of the Euphrates River.'<sup>39</sup>

<sup>31</sup> GEG, [Iraq and Syria: Kurdish Autonomous Regions Under Threat](#), 4 March 2023

<sup>32</sup> BTI, [Who we are](#), no date

<sup>33</sup> BTI, [Syria Country Report](#) (Welfare Regime), 2024

<sup>34</sup> New Lines Magazine, [Revisiting the Erasure of Kurdish Identity in Syria](#), 20 December 2023

<sup>35</sup> Harmoon Center, [About Us](#), no date

<sup>36</sup> Harmoon Center, [Child Abductions in PYD Areas](#) (pages 15, 16), 30 May 2024

<sup>37</sup> Middle East Eye, [About](#), no date

<sup>38</sup> Middle East Eye, [Syria: Aleppo's Kurds fear displacement as thousands flee...](#), 3 December 2024

<sup>39</sup> The New Arab, [After Aleppo, what will happen to the Kurds of northwest Syria?](#), 4 December 2024

8.3.13 On 5 December 2024, international news channel France24 reported 'As many as half a million Kurds are believed to live in Aleppo and surrounding towns and villages west of the Euphrates.'<sup>40</sup>

8.3.14 Deutsche Welle's article of 18 December 2024 stated that 'The Kurdish-ruled Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, also known as Rojava, is home to Syria's largest minority, about 2.5 million Kurdish people. Some Kurds also live in and around Syria's capital Damascus.'<sup>41</sup>

8.3.15 On 4 April 2025, Rudaw, an independent media agency based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq<sup>42</sup>, reported: 'Rukn al-Din, one of Damascus' oldest neighborhoods, is home to a significant Kurdish population, often called the neighborhood of the Kurds.'<sup>43</sup>

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## 9. Control over Kurdish areas in Syria

### 9.1 Overview of main actors

9.1.1 The below table was reproduced by CPIT, from a 13 December 2024 Deutsche Welle article<sup>44</sup>:

PKK:	Kurdistan Workers Party, fighting Turkish state since 1984, classified as a terrorist group by many countries.
PYD:	Democratic Union Party, shares power in the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, allegedly affiliated with PKK.
(D)AANES:	Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.
SDC:	Syrian Democratic Council, political wing of the DAANES <sup>45</sup> .
YPG:	People's Protection Units (female division is YPJ), Kurdish armed forces, affiliated with PKK.
SDF:	Syrian Democratic Forces, comprised mostly of YPG fighters, led by the PYD, allegedly affiliated with PKK, supported by US.
SNA:	Syrian National Army. Includes former rebel fighters of the anti-Assad Free Syrian Army, or FSA, now backed by and loyal to Turkey.
HTS:	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, anti-Assad rebel militia that controlled parts of northern Syria, led offensive that ended Assad regime

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<sup>40</sup> France24, [Kurds' dream of self-rule under threat...](#), 5 December 2024

<sup>41</sup> Deutsche Welle, [Syria's ethnic and religious groups explained](#), 18 December 2024

<sup>42</sup> Rudaw, [About Us](#), no date

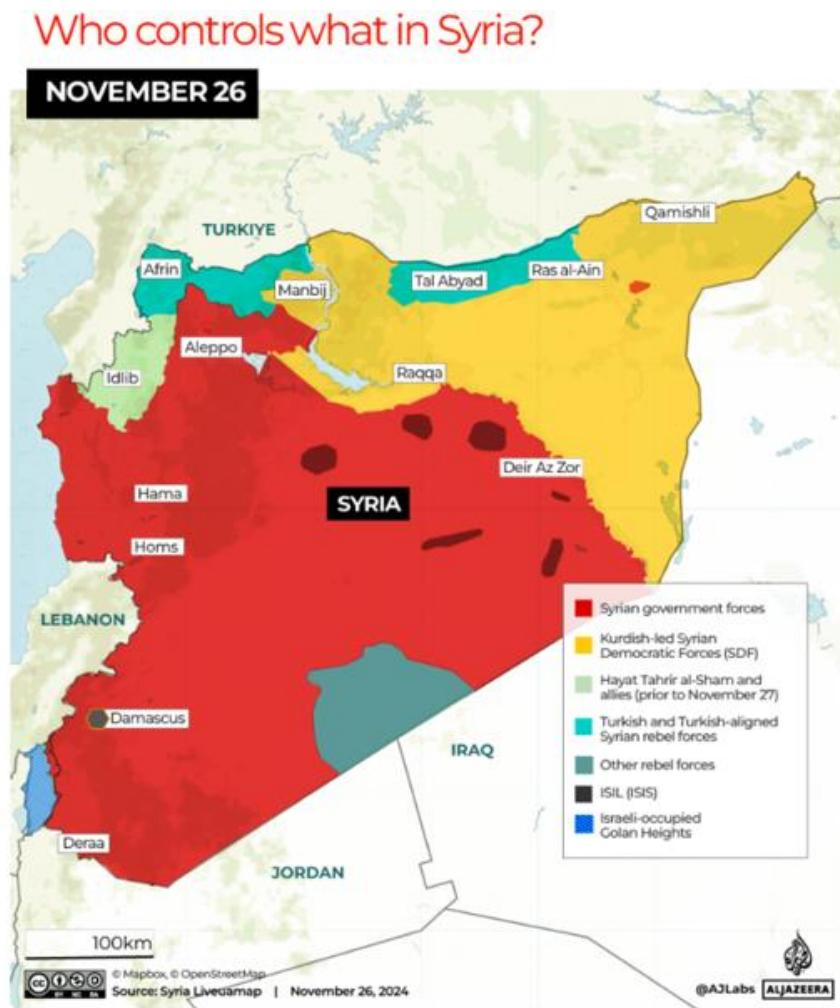
<sup>43</sup> Rudaw, [Kurds in Damascus cautiously hopeful about Aleppo deal](#), 4 April 2025

<sup>44</sup> Deutsche Welle, [Fighting in Syrian Kurdish-held areas: What you need to know](#), 13 December 2024

<sup>45</sup> SDC, [Syrian Democratic Council](#), 27 January 2025

## 9.2 Maps

9.2.1 In December 2024, Al Jazeera shared the below map showing territorial control in Syria on 26 November 2024, prior to the fall of Assad. The map shows that on that date, the main Kurdish-populated areas of Syria were controlled by either the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), shown in yellow, or Turkish-aligned Syrian rebel forces (this refers to the Syrian National Army, SNA<sup>46</sup>), shown in turquoise<sup>47</sup>:



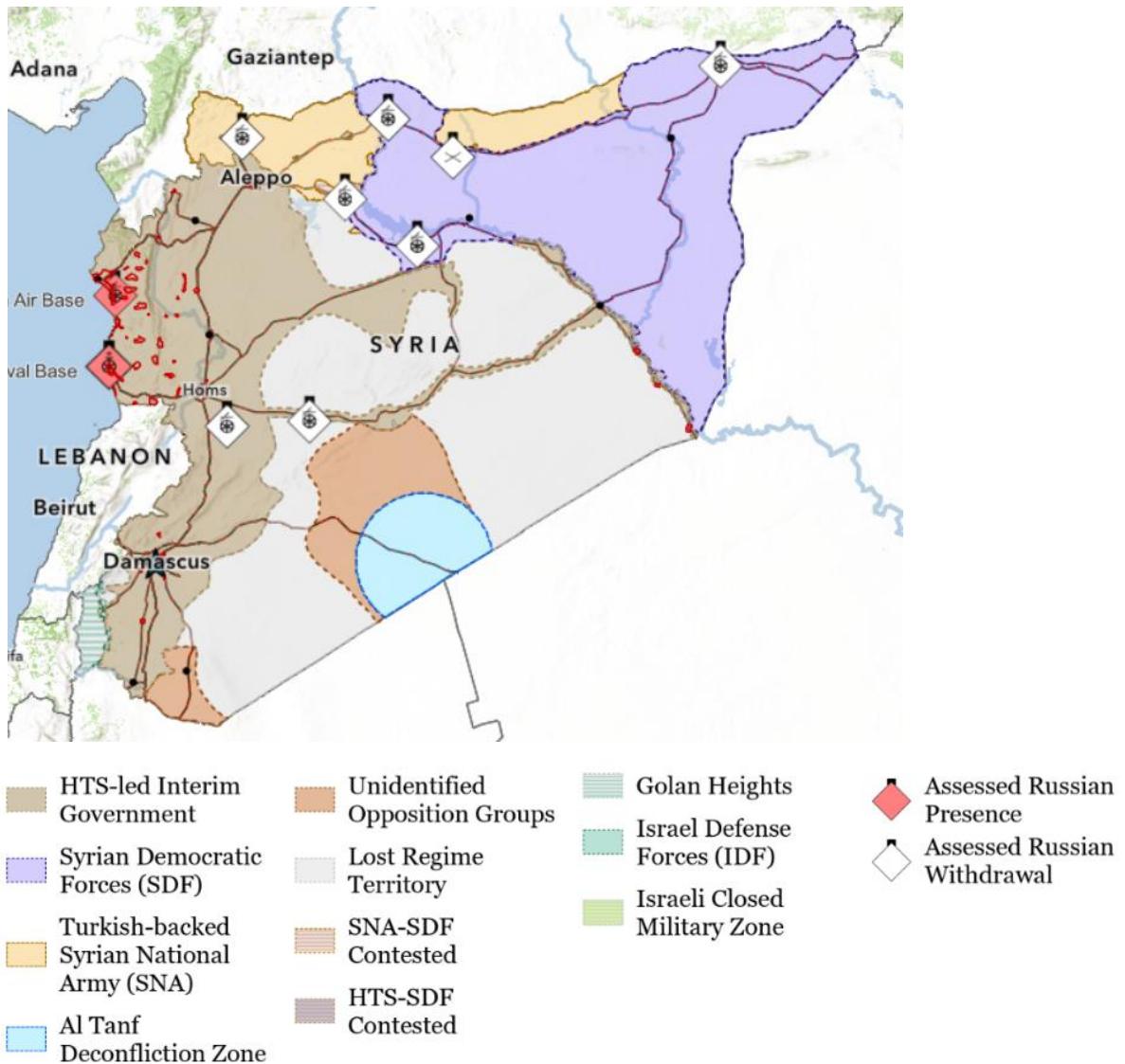
9.2.2 The Institute for the Study of War (ISW), a ‘non-partisan, non-profit, public policy research organization’ based in Washington DC<sup>48</sup>, produced a regularly updated [map](#) of territorial control in Syria. Its 2 April 2025 iteration also showed that the main Kurdish areas of Syria were on that date also controlled by the SDF (areas in purple) or the SNA (areas in yellow)<sup>49</sup>:

<sup>46</sup> Al Jazeera, [Taking Syria: The opposition's battles shown in 11 maps for 11 days](#), 8 December 2024

<sup>47</sup> Al Jazeera, [Taking Syria: The opposition's battles shown in 11 maps for 11 days](#), 8 December 2024

<sup>48</sup> ISW, [Who We Are](#), no date

<sup>49</sup> ISW, [Interactive Map: Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria](#), 2 April 2025



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## 10. Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and connected actors

### 10.1 Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

10.1.1 In October 2024, citing various sources, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) stated in a report titled 'Syria – Security Situation' (EUAA 2024 report) that:

'The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are a "Kurdish-led coalition of non-state armed groups" which control Hasaka, eastern Deir Ez-Zor as well as parts of Raqqa and Aleppo governorates, the region governed by the civilian Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES). They are comprised of the Kurdish People's Defense Units (YPG) as well as other groups of Kurdish, Arab, Assyrian/Syriac and Armenian origin.

According to estimated figures provided by the IISS [International Institute for Strategic Studies<sup>50</sup>] Military Balance of 2024, the SDF consists approximately 50 000 fighters.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> IISS, [About Us](#), no date

<sup>51</sup> EUAA, [Syria – Security Situation](#) (page 30), October 2024

10.1.2 In October 2023, the Washington DC-based Arab Center, 'a nonprofit, independent, and nonpartisan research organization dedicated to furthering the political, economic, and social understanding of the Arab world in the United States'<sup>52</sup>, stated that 'Although the SDF, over time, came to encompass more Arabs than Kurds in its ranks, the leadership of the organization has remained Kurdish.'<sup>53</sup>

10.1.3 The Guardian reported on 9 December 2024 that the SDF '... was founded in 2015 and did much of the hardest fighting against IS. Led by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), the SDF is viewed by Ankara as part of the broader Kurdish separatist movement that has fought a bloody nationalist campaign against Turkey for decades.'<sup>54</sup>

10.1.4 On 9 December 2024, Sky News quoted military analyst Professor Michael Clarke as stating that the SDF is "well organised" and strongest militarily in terms of "numbers and ability", but ... it "doesn't want to take over the whole of Syria" - and is purely focused on the Kurdish struggle.<sup>55</sup>

10.1.5 On 16 December 2024, Voice of America stated:

'The SDF is the military force of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, which controls the region east of the Euphrates River...

'While the group's secular democratic ideology and equal treatment of women has garnered international support, they have been accused by other rebel groups of collaborating with the Assad regime and are considered by Turkey to be a branch of the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), who are designated as a terrorist group by multiple governments.'<sup>56</sup>

10.1.6 The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP) 'is a non-profit ... that works to center advocates and experts from and in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in the policy discourse'<sup>57</sup>. A 19 December 2024 article by TIMEP stated that the SDF '... continue to govern regions in northeastern Syria, including Hassakeh, Raqqa, and the countrysides of Deir Ezzor and Aleppo. However, the SDF has experienced a reduction in its territory, having lost Manbij and other areas in the Deir Ezzor governorate following the regime's collapse, due to clashes with Turkish-backed opposition groups.'<sup>58</sup>

10.1.7 Al Jazeera reported on 6 January 2025 that: 'The SDF currently controls a large swath of northeast Syria, accounting for nearly a third of the country's overall territory...'<sup>59</sup>

10.1.8 A 23 January 2025 article in Enab Baladi, a Syrian non-profit media organisation<sup>60</sup>, stated:

'Despite the lack of accurate statistics on the number of SDF fighters or its affiliated factions, the number of formations within it was estimated in 2017

<sup>52</sup> The Arab Center, [About](#), no date

<sup>53</sup> The Arab Center, [Syrian Kurds in an Increasingly Precarious Position](#), 18 October 2023

<sup>54</sup> The Guardian, [Who are the main actors in the fall of the regime in Syria?](#), 9 December 2024

<sup>55</sup> Sky News, [Who are the different rebel groups in Syria...](#), 9 December 2024

<sup>56</sup> Voice of America, [Who controls Syria after Assad?](#), 16 December 2024

<sup>57</sup> TIMEP, [About us](#), no date

<sup>58</sup> TIMEP, [A Post-Assad Syria: Navigating the Transition Ahead](#), 19 December 2024

<sup>59</sup> Al Jazeera, [What is behind US strategy of keeping troops in post-Assad Syria?](#), 6 January 2025

<sup>60</sup> Enab Baladi, [About](#), no date

to range between 60,000 and 75,000.

‘According to a study by the Omran Center for Strategic Studies published in 2017, the Syrian Democratic Forces are governed by a strict organizational structure led by a military council ...

‘The council includes representatives from all factions and military formations and is responsible for making strategic decisions ... and determining the forces’ objectives...

‘The general commander of the SDF is elected directly by the military council...

‘The SDF leadership consists of 9 to 13 members chosen through elections among military council members, emphasizing representation of women ...

‘The leadership is responsible for executing the military council’s decisions, planning military campaigns, managing troop movements, and enforcing compliance from all factions. No faction is allowed to launch any battle or campaign without consulting the leadership.

‘The military discipline committee, which consists of 5 to 7 members appointed by the military council, is responsible for addressing disputes among factions ...

‘...[A] researcher specialized in northeastern Syria, Samer al-Ahmad, points to prominent divisions within the SDF.

‘These include: Asayish (internal security/ police forces), HAT (counter-terrorism forces), YAT (rapid intervention forces), as well as the intelligence service and the People’s Protection Units ...

‘He says that these forces have been striving for years to establish ... a federal region akin to the Kurdish experience in northern Iraq.’<sup>61</sup>

10.1.9 On 9 February 2025, The Guardian noted that female-only units of Kurdish soldiers, the YPJ (translated as ‘Women’s Protection Units’<sup>62</sup>) ‘... are now part of the Syrian Democratic Forces, the autonomous administration’s army ...’<sup>63</sup>

10.1.10 On 14 February 2025, Asharq Al-Awsat, a pan-Arab newspaper<sup>64</sup>, reported that ‘... Arab fighters number around 2,000 or slightly more, but they have little influence over the SDF’s internal and external policies ... Currently, the SDF operates like a state within a state, with its own military and security forces and territory beyond Damascus’ control ...’<sup>65</sup>

10.1.11 On 18 February 2025, The New Arab reported that ‘The SDF held around 25 percent of Syrian territory, including many of the richest areas in terms of oil, natural gas and minerals, with many of these areas being Arab-majority areas prior to the war and their conquest by the Kurdish force.’<sup>66</sup>

10.1.12 In March 2025, Al Jazeera described the leadership of the SDF as

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<sup>61</sup> Enab Baladi, [What is SDF’s military structure...](#), 23 January 2025

<sup>62</sup> The Kurdish Project, [YPJ: Women’s Protection Units](#), no date

<sup>63</sup> The Guardian, [‘Woman, life, freedom’: the Syrian feminists...](#), 9 February 2025

<sup>64</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, [About Us](#), no date

<sup>65</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, [SDF Factions: Uncertain Scenarios in Complex Relations...](#), 14 February 2025

<sup>66</sup> The New Arab, [Kurdish-led SDF agree to integrate forces into Syrian army](#), 18 February 2025

‘secular’<sup>67</sup>.

10.1.13 On 11 March 2025, the BBC reported that the SDF ‘... which has tens of thousands of well-armed and well-trained fighters, was not aligned with either Assad’s regime or the opposition during the civil war. It currently controls more than 46,000 sq km (18,000 sq miles) of territory in the north-east ...’<sup>68</sup>

10.1.14 On 11 March 2025, BBC Monitoring stated that the SDF is: ‘... an alliance of Kurdish, Turkmen, Syriac Christian and Arab militias ... the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) account for most of their fighters. The SDF’s commander in July 2024 said that the group’s fighters exceed 100,000 ... Although the SDF has been increasingly recruiting Arabs ... they have come under criticism for the allegedly exclusive presence of Kurds in the upper echelons ...’<sup>69</sup>

10.1.15 In addition to the YPG and YPJ, the same source listed some other member groups of the SDF as the Kurdish-majority Burkan al-Furat, the Christian Syriac Military Council, the multi-ethnic Jaysh al-Thuwwar, the Arab al-Sanadid Forces, and the Turkmen Seljuk Brigade<sup>70</sup>.

10.1.16 In a 25 March 2025 report, the EUAA stated that, within the SDF, ‘Alongside the YPG there are regional military councils such as the Deir Ez-Zor Military Council, Manbij Council, and Raqqa Council, whose primary task is to protect their own areas ...’<sup>71</sup>

10.1.17 The same source stated:

‘As of February and March 2025, the territories controlled, occupied, or seized by the SDF encompassed most of Hasaka, approximately half of Raqqa (including Raqqa city), and the portions of Deir Ez-Zor and Aleppo that are located east of the Euphrates River, as well as a narrow salient on Aleppo’s western Euphrates bank, situated south of Lake Assad and near the Tishreen Dam ... At least in the immediate aftermath of the takeover of Aleppo city by the armed opposition, the SDF remained in control of the city’s two Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods Ashrafieh and Sheikh Maqsoud.’<sup>72</sup>

10.1.18 The website of the Syrian Democratic Council explained ‘The SDF provides the North and East regions with public security, and it is accountable to both the AANES and local councils, which represent the citizens of the region ...’<sup>73</sup>

10.1.19 On 13 April 2025, The New Arab noted that the north-east of Syria is ‘an Arab-majority region but under the control of a Kurdish-dominated political and security apparatus.’<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Al Jazeera, [Syria merges Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces into state...](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>68</sup> BBC, [Kurdish-led SDF agrees to integrate with Syrian government forces](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>69</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syrian Democratic Forces \(SDF\)](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>70</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syrian Democratic Forces \(SDF\)](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>71</sup> EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 50), 25 March 2025

<sup>72</sup> EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (pages 73, 74), 25 March 2025

<sup>73</sup> SDC, [Syrian Democratic Council](#), 27 January 2025

<sup>74</sup> The New Arab, [Kurdish-led SDF impose media blackout on Aleppo neighbourhoods](#), 13 April 2025

## 10.2 Syrian Democratic Council (SDC)

### 10.2.1 The website of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) explained:

‘The Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) is a confederation of multi-ethnic political parties, associations, civil society organizations, and local activists in Syria calling for democracy, religious freedom, individual rights, and the empowerment of women in the country. The Syrian Democratic Council was established in 2015 ... The SDC is the political leadership of the ... DAANES ... and the ... SDF...

‘The SDC has worked to protect ethnic and religious freedoms and plurality in North and East Syria since its establishment ...

‘Full gender equality is a principle at the heart of the SDC platform, and women make up about half of all SDC and AANES government positions.’<sup>75</sup>

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## 10.3 Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES)

### 10.3.1 In October 2023, the Arab Center stated:

‘In 2014, the PYD created an autonomous political entity called Rojava which means “west” in the Syrian Kurdish dialect ... but changed its name to the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) in 2018 to make it more palatable to the non-Kurdish elements in the area ... and to signal that its autonomy is regionally-based, not ethnically-focused ...

‘... the AANES, while taking on a multi-ethnic character, was largely run by Kurds from the PYD.’<sup>76</sup>

### 10.3.2 An 18 February 2025 article in The New Arab noted that the AANES ‘is the civil authority that rules SDF-held areas of Syria’<sup>77</sup>

### 10.3.3 A 26 February 2025 BBC article reported that ‘Bashar al-Assad’s regime never recognised’ the AANES<sup>78</sup>.

### 10.3.4 On its website, the SDC stated that the AANES ‘was established ... on July 16, 2018’ and is ‘an administrative structure that coordinates ... services between the seven regional administrations of Jazeera, Afrin, Euphrates (al-Furat), Manbij, Tabqa, Raqqa, and Der Al-Zor’<sup>79</sup>. The AANES is based on a ‘social contract’ which ‘states that the peoples of the AANES include the Arabs, Kurds, Christians (Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, and Arameans), Yezidis, Turkmen, and Armenians’<sup>80</sup>

### 10.3.5 The website of the SDC explained ‘The AANES constitution ... mandates that each political position in the regional government, local councils, and villages be held by individuals from two distinct cultural and/or religious backgrounds. The constitution guarantees full rights to minority groups and protects them from persecution ...’<sup>81</sup>

<sup>75</sup> SDC, [Syrian Democratic Council](#), 27 January 2025

<sup>76</sup> The Arab Center, [Syrian Kurds in an Increasingly Precarious Position](#), 18 October 2023

<sup>77</sup> The New Arab, [Kurdish-led SDF agree to integrate forces into Syrian army](#), 18 February 2025

<sup>78</sup> BBC, [‘We are still at war’: Syria’s Kurds battle Turkey months after Assad’s fall](#), 26 February 2025

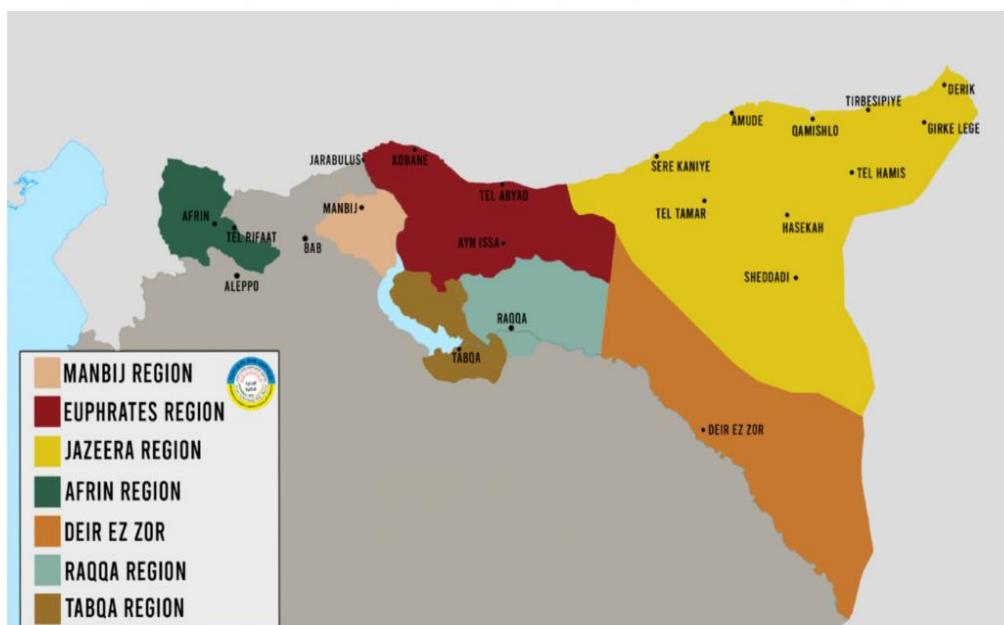
<sup>79</sup> SDC, [Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria](#), no date

<sup>80</sup> SDC, [Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria](#), no date

<sup>81</sup> SDC, [Fact Sheet](#), no date

10.3.6 The SDC shared the below map showing the areas of the AANES<sup>82</sup>:

## AUTONOMOUS ADMINISTRATION OF NORTH AND EAST SYRIA



10.3.7 On 12 December 2023, Kurdish news agency Kurdistan24<sup>83</sup> reported that '... the AANES was renamed as Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) ...'<sup>84</sup>

10.3.8 In February 2025, referring to the DAANES area, The Guardian reported '... the administration's governing structures are based on strictly equal power-sharing between men and women. It has set up complex networks of committees and councils that work from the level of the neighbourhood to the region, and each of these has a male and female co-chair ...' '... nobody I meet says that they want the autonomous administration to be separate from the new Syrian government ...'<sup>85</sup>

10.3.9 On 14 March 2025, BBC Monitoring described the DAANES: 'The autonomous administration has been ruling over territories in north and east Syria since 2012 [although it has been previously known by different official names]. "Its highest political assembly is the Syrian Democratic Council... and its unified military force is the... SDF..."' '... Kurds are not currently likely to make up the majority of the population in AANES regions, especially since the SDF's military victories against the Islamic State [IS] have annexed Arab-majority regions such as Manbij, Deir el-Zour and Raqqa. AANES is also home to Syriac Christians, Assyrian Christians, Armenian Christians, Yazidis, Turkmen and Chechens, whose rights and political representation are enshrined in law, according to the Rojava Information Center ...' '... Critics often describe the AANES as a PYD-dominated political body ...'<sup>86</sup>

<sup>82</sup> SDC, [Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria](#), no date

<sup>83</sup> Kurdistan24, [About Us](#), no date

<sup>84</sup> Kurdistan24, [New administration name adopted...](#), 13 December 2023

<sup>85</sup> The Guardian, ['Woman, life, freedom': the Syrian feminists...](#), 9 February 2025

<sup>86</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria \(AANES\)](#), 14 March 2025

#### 10.4 Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)

10.4.1 A 23 January 2025 article in Enab Baladi stated that '[A researcher specialized in northeastern Syria, Samer al-Ahmad] noted that the actual control of military and security decisions within the SDF belongs to leaders from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) ...'<sup>87</sup>

10.4.2 In March 2025, Al Jazeera noted that '...Turkiye, along with the European Union and the US, considers the group [PKK] a "terrorist" organisation.'<sup>88</sup>

10.4.3 On 2 April 2025, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a research institute aiming to 'advance a balanced and realistic understanding of American interests in the Middle East and to promote the policies that secure them'<sup>89</sup>, stated that 'the SDF denies' that it is 'a proxy of the PKK'<sup>90</sup>

10.4.4 On 27 February 2025, the BBC reported that: 'Abdullah Ocalan, the jailed leader of the outlawed Kurdish group PKK, has called on his movement to lay down its arms and dissolve itself ...' 'Appealing to members of the PKK - the Kurdistan Workers' Party - Ocalan said "all groups must lay their arms and the PKK must dissolve itself".'<sup>91</sup>

10.4.5 On 27 February 2025, Reuters reported that:

'The commander of the Kurdish-led forces that control northeastern Syria said that a call by the leader of the ... PKK ... in Turkey for the PKK to dissolve did not apply to the group he leads.

'... [SDF] commander Mazloum Abdi said he welcomed the historic call ... which he said would have positive consequences in the region.

'But Abdi said ... Ocalan's announcement on Thursday [27 February 2025] applied only to the PKK and was "not related to us in Syria".

'Abdi's comment signalled Ocalan's announcement would have no immediate impact on the SDF despite the affiliation of Syria's main Kurdish groups at the core of the SDF ... to the PKK ...

"If there is peace in Turkey, that means there is no excuse to keep attacking us here in Syria," Abdi said.'<sup>92</sup>

10.4.6 For information on the PKK, see [Country Policy and Information note, Turkey: Kurdistan Workers' Party \(PKK\)](#).

#### 10.5 Democratic Union Party (PYD)

10.5.1 On an undated webpage, The Kurdish Project stated that the PYD is 'similar in almost every respect to the PKK'.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Enab Baladi, [What is SDF's military structure...](#), 23 January 2025

<sup>88</sup> Al Jazeera, [Syria merges Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces into state...](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>89</sup> Washington Institute, [About](#), no date

<sup>90</sup> Washington Institute, [Facilitating the New SDF Agreement Is Key to Stabilizing Syria](#), 2 April 2025

<sup>91</sup> BBC, [Jailed Kurdish leader issues call to lay down arms](#), 27 February 2025

<sup>92</sup> Reuters, [SDF chief says PKK disarmament call 'not related to us in Syria'](#), 27 February 2025

<sup>93</sup> The Kurdish Project, [Rojava: A Syrian Kurdish Democracy](#), no date

- 10.5.2 In October 2020, the Al Sharq Forum, an independent, non-profit research organisation<sup>94</sup>, stated that the SDF, SDC and AANES are ‘products’ of the PYD’s ‘quest for obtaining societal and political legitimacy’.<sup>95</sup>
- 10.5.3 In a 2021 paper, the Clingendael Institute described the AANES as ‘PYD-run’ and the SDC as ‘PYD-dominated’<sup>96</sup>.
- 10.5.4 A 2021 article by TIMEP stated that the PYD ‘was established in 2003 in Northern Syria ... The Syrian PYD enjoys close ties with the Turkish PKK ... However, individual PYD officials deny this connection and insist that the PYD is an independent party ...’<sup>97</sup>.
- 10.5.5 The same source stated that the PYD ‘leads’ the SDF<sup>98</sup>.
- 10.5.6 In October 2022, BBC Monitoring described the PYD as a: ‘Banned Kurdish party, as of April 2004 ... and still considered illegal as of June 2022 by the Syrian government ...’<sup>99</sup>
- 10.5.7 An 18 February 2025 article in The New Arab noted that ‘The Syrian Democratic Union (PYD) ... is essentially the Syrian wing of the PKK.’<sup>100</sup>

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## 10.6 People’s Protection Units (YPG)

- 10.6.1 In December 2024, BBC Monitoring stated that the YPG:
 

‘... became the main military component of the ... SDF ... after it joined it in October 2015. It was officially established in 2011, though its roots trace back to small units in 2004. The YPG is widely considered as the armed wing of the ... PYD ... though the group denies any formal ties to political parties. The Turkish government looks at the YPG as an offshoot of the ... PKK ... The YPG often clashes with Turkey-backed groups, sometimes along with ... the ... YPJ, in northern Syria.’<sup>101</sup>
- 10.6.2 On 4 March 2025, BBC Monitoring stated that ‘The YPG and YPJ are the two key Kurdish-majority components of the Syrian Democratic Forces ...’<sup>102</sup>
- 10.6.3 A May 2024 report by The Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies stated, regarding the YPG, that ‘In Arab areas, many of its fighters are Arabs, in Deir Ezzor its fighters are almost all Arabs.’<sup>103</sup>

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## 10.7 Women’s Protection Units (YPJ)

- 10.7.1 The Kurdish Project stated that ‘The YPJ ... is the all-female brigade of the YPG ...’<sup>104</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Al Sharq Forum, [Homepage](#), no date

<sup>95</sup> Al Sharq Forum, [The Transformation Struggle of the PYD...](#), 28 October 2020

<sup>96</sup> Clingendael, [Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist](#) (page 2), April 2021

<sup>97</sup> TIMEP, [Kurdish-Kurdish Negotiations in Syria](#), 14 May 2021

<sup>98</sup> TIMEP, [Kurdish-Kurdish Negotiations in Syria](#), 14 May 2021

<sup>99</sup> BBC Monitoring, [\(Kurdish\) Democratic Union Party \(PYD\)](#), 5 October 2022

<sup>100</sup> The New Arab, [Kurdish-led SDF agree to integrate forces into Syrian army](#), 18 February 2025

<sup>101</sup> BBC Monitoring, [People’s Protection Units \(YPG\)](#), 10 December 2024

<sup>102</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syria: Kurdish weekly media highlights 24 Feb - 2 Mar 25](#), 4 March 2025

<sup>103</sup> Harmoon Center, [Child Abductions in PYD Areas](#) (page 5), 30 May 2024

<sup>104</sup> The Kurdish Project, [YPJ: Kurdish Women’s Protection Units](#), no date

- 10.7.2 In November 2023, BBC Monitoring stated: 'YPJ Commander Meryem Derik tells Firat News Agency in April 2013 that ... the group's goal "is to have participation from all ethnic groups and to turn the YPJ into a force that represents women from all peoples ..."'<sup>105</sup>
- 10.7.3 In 2021, The Guardian reported that a YPJ commander estimated the YPJ's size to be 'about 5,000' and that the YPJ 'no longer accepts married women'.<sup>106</sup>
- 10.7.4 In February 2025, The Guardian reported that 'The YPJ are now part of the Syrian Democratic Forces, the autonomous administration's army ...'.<sup>107</sup>

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## 11. Syrian National Army (SNA)

- 11.1.1 In February 2024, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stated:  

'Turkish-affiliated armed groups ... are ... now operating largely under the umbrella of the so-called ... SNA ... exercising de facto control and authority over parts of the territory in north-western, northern and north-eastern Syria ... namely in northern Aleppo, northern ar-Raqqa and northern al-Hassakeh governorates ... These groups receive financial, logistical, operational support, and in some instances instructions, from Türkiye ... while engaged in military operations mainly against ... the SDF.'<sup>108</sup>
- 11.1.2 In February 2024, Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated:  

'The SNA ... consists of Turkmen armed groups, former Free Syrian Army groups, and other Islamist groups ... The SNA is comprised of numerous armed factions from ... across Syria, but lacks a unified command structure ... the factions haphazardly exercise control over Turkish-occupied territories, with individual villages, towns, and even neighborhoods divided up between them. The various factions often merge into legions, blocs, and divisions only to split or defect and merge into different structures. Estimates have put the total number of SNA fighters at somewhere between 70,000 and 90,000. Yet, each of the more than 35 factions that make up the SNA has its own commander, its own emblem and flag, and despite attempts at integrating them into a cohesive coalition, many still operate as distinct units, vying amongst each other for control over villages, neighborhoods, agricultural lands, checkpoints, and trade routes. As a result, violent infighting is a common occurrence ...'.<sup>109</sup>
- 11.1.3 The EUAA 2024 report stated:  

'The SNA controls two areas adjoining the Turkish border: the first covers the northern countryside of Aleppo from Afrin to Jarablus, and the second one spans from Tall Abyad to Ras Al-Ayn, in the north of Raqqa and Hasaka governorates ... According to Enab Baladi, the Sultan Murad Division was considered one of the most prominent SNA factions. The military police, a force reportedly answering directly to Turkish intelligence and military

<sup>105</sup> BBC Monitoring, [\(Kurdish\) Women's Protection Units \(YPJ\)](#), 28 November 2023

<sup>106</sup> The Guardian, ['Now I've a purpose': why more Kurdish women are choosing to fight](#), 19 July 2021

<sup>107</sup> The Guardian, ['Woman, life, freedom': the Syrian feminists...](#), 9 February 2025

<sup>108</sup> UN OHCHR, ["We did not fear death but the life there"](#) (page 34), February 2024

<sup>109</sup> Human Rights Watch, ["Everything is by the Power of the Weapon"](#), 29 February 2024

officials, had subbranches in SNA-controlled cities and operated prisons and detention facilities across the Turkish-occupied zone, including in Afrin and Al-Bab.<sup>110</sup>

11.1.4 On 7 December 2024, Middle East Eye stated:

‘The SNA was formed north of Aleppo in 2017, to bring together a number of armed groups ...

‘The merger between the NLF [National Liberation Front, a Turkey-backed alliance of armed opposition actors that merged with the SNA in October 2019<sup>111</sup>] and SNA brought more than 40 armed groups together, creating a combined force that’s estimated to be between 30,000 and 80,000 in strength ...

“...The main decision-makers inside the SNA are the leaders of each faction,” he [Omer Ozkizilcik, a nonresident fellow for the Syria Project at the Atlantic Council<sup>112</sup>] told MEE...

‘Many of the SNA’s factions have taken part in Turkish military operations along the border with northern Syria, targeting ... the ... YPG ...’<sup>113</sup>

11.1.5 On 9 December 2024, Sky News reported that the SNA:

‘... incorporated many elements of what was previously known as the Free Syrian Army (FSA)...

“Like the SDF, they’ve got an anti-Islamist agenda ...” Professor Clarke [military analyst Professor Michael Clarke<sup>114</sup>] says.

‘While they were willing to join HTS forces to oust Assad - their agenda is ultimately “antagonistic” towards them, he adds.

‘The SNA currently holds territory along the Turkish border, which is split by larger SDF-held areas in the northeast and northwest.’<sup>115</sup>

11.1.6 On 16 December 2024, Voice of America stated: ‘...the SNA represents both Islamic and secular factions ... While they have at times been both an ally and a rival to HTS, the SNA has consistently fought against the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces ...’<sup>116</sup>

11.1.7 On 18 December 2024, Voice of America stated: ‘The SNA ... helped HTS recapture Syria’s second-largest city, Aleppo, from regime forces in early December ...’<sup>117</sup>

11.1.8 A 19 December 2024 article by TIMEP stated that the SNA: ‘... retains control over territories it held prior to the offensive in northern Syria—including Azaz, al-Bab, Jarablus, and Afrin—along with newly captured areas, particularly in the eastern countryside of Aleppo.’<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> EUAA, [Syria – Security Situation](#) (pages 28-29), October 2024

<sup>111</sup> Middle East Eye, [The Syrian National Army: Rebels, thugs or Turkish proxies?](#), 7 December 2024

<sup>112</sup> Middle East Eye, [The Syrian National Army: Rebels, thugs or Turkish proxies?](#), 7 December 2024

<sup>113</sup> Middle East Eye, [The Syrian National Army: Rebels, thugs or Turkish proxies?](#), 7 December 2024

<sup>114</sup> Sky News, [Who are the different rebel groups in Syria...](#), 9 December 2024

<sup>115</sup> Sky News, [Who are the different rebel groups in Syria...](#), 9 December 2024

<sup>116</sup> Voice of America, [Who controls Syria after Assad?](#), 16 December 2024

<sup>117</sup> Voice of America, [Future uncertain for Syria’s Kurds...](#), 18 December 2024

<sup>118</sup> TIMEP, [A Post-Assad Syria: Navigating the Transition Ahead](#), 19 December 2024

11.1.9 On 13 January 2025, BBC Monitoring detailed that the SNA consists of Aleppo-based and Idlib-based factions. The Aleppo-based factions, among others, are listed as:

- Levant Front
- Sultan Murad Division
- Jaysh al-Islam
- Joint Force (Al-Hamza Division and Sultan Suleiman Shah Division)
- Liberation and Construction Movement
- Mutasim Division<sup>119</sup>

11.1.10 The Idlib-based factions are listed by BBC Monitoring as:

- National Liberation Front
- Ahrar al-Sham
- Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement<sup>120</sup>

11.1.11 The March 2025 EUAA report on Syria, citing a range of sources, stated:

'As of February and early March 2025, the ... SNA ... controlled northern and eastern rural Aleppo, including the area between A'zaz, Al-Bab and Jarablus (operation Euphrates Shield area). The SNA also controlled a stretch of territory further east that is known as the operation Peace Spring area, roughly delimited by the Tall Abyad area (Raqqa) in the west and Ras Al-Ain (Hasaka) in the east, with some SNA presence mapped as far east as Tall al-Amir (Hasaka). Meanwhile, control of northwestern Aleppo's Afrin area, previously occupied by SNA factions since 2018, was transferred to the transitional administration as its security forces entered Afrin city in early February 2025.'<sup>121</sup>

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## 12. Integration of the SDF into Syrian state apparatus

12.1.1 On 30 January 2025, Enab Baladi reported: 'In an interview conducted by the Turkish channel "A Haber" with Ahmed al-Sharaa on January 23 [2025], he stated that he had spoken to the Kurdish People's Protection Units (referring to the SDF) after entering Damascus, but the party did not agree to dissolve itself and hand over its weapons.

'He added ... that no one can carry weapons outside the framework of the state...'<sup>122</sup>

12.1.2 On 4 March 2025, in a round-up of Kurdish weekly media highlights from 24 February 2025 to 2 March 2025, BBC Monitoring reported 'Senior PYD official Salih Muslim was cited by the outlets as saying that "... in north-east Syria we carried arms to defend ourselves, and if attacks against us stop, we will lay down arms..."'<sup>123</sup>

<sup>119</sup> BBC Monitoring, [...Key factions of the Turkey-backed Syria National Army...](#), 13 January 2025

<sup>120</sup> BBC Monitoring, [...Key factions of the Turkey-backed Syria National Army...](#), 13 January 2025

<sup>121</sup> EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 69), 25 March 2025

<sup>122</sup> Enab Baladi, [Damascus - SDF negotiations await the "deal"](#), 30 January 2025

<sup>123</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syria: Kurdish weekly media highlights 24 Feb - 2 Mar 25](#), 4 March 2025

12.1.3 On 10 March 2025, Al Jazeera reported that:

‘Syria says that it has reached an agreement with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces to integrate the latter with state institutions.

‘The Syrian presidency made the announcement on Monday [10 March 2025] ...

‘The agreement emphasised the unity of Syria, and stipulated that “all civil and military institutions in northeastern Syria” be merged “into the administration of the Syrian state ...” ...

‘The agreement, if implemented, would bring that territory under the full control of the Syrian central government ...

‘The agreement includes a ceasefire in all of Syria ...’<sup>124</sup>

12.1.4 On 11 March 2025, the BBC reported, referring to the integration agreement: ‘SDF commander Mazloum Abdi called the deal a “real opportunity to build a new Syria”’<sup>125</sup>

12.1.5 BBC Monitoring shared the following timeline of events:

‘2024, 24 December

‘The General Command (@G\_CSyriaa) account on Telegram, which is closely associated with the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), announces the dissolution of all armed groups, and for them to be merged under the umbrella of the ministry of defence ...

‘2024, 27 December

‘SDF leader Mazloum Abdi tells pan-Arab Aharq al-Awsat that the SDF forces are ready to merge with the new Syrian army after an “appropriate formula” is found via negotiations ...

‘2024, 29 December

‘... Ahmed al-Sharaa says that the current Syrian administration is in talks with the SDF to resolve the crisis in the north-east of Syria [in reference to fighting between the SDF and Turkey-backed groups] with the aim of “merging” them into the government’s armed forces at a later stage. He adds that Kurds are an “integral part of Syria’s components” ...

‘2025, 19 January

‘Leader Mazloum Abdi also tells Al-Arabiya ... that the SDF has not been invited to the meeting held by the HTS-led interim government on integrating Syrian factions into the armed forces ...

‘2025, 10 March

‘The Syrian presidency says in a statement on Telegram (@G\_CSyriaa) that interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa and SDF leader Mazloum Abdi have signed a deal which would establish a “ceasefire across Syria” and integrate all institutions in the north-east into the Syrian state ... The deal also “guarantees the rights of all Syrians to representation and participation in the

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<sup>124</sup> Al Jazeera, [Syria merges Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces into state...](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>125</sup> BBC, [Kurdish-led SDF agrees to integrate with Syrian government forces](#), 11 March 2025

political process and all state institutions" regardless of ethnic ... background'<sup>126</sup>

12.1.6 On 11 March 2025, Middle East Eye reported, regarding the integration deal: 'Mohammed A Salih, a non-resident senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, described the deal to Middle East Eye as a significant and positive development for Syria, especially for its Kurdish population ...' 'According to the agreement, all SDF-controlled entities ... will be integrated into the state institutions ...' 'Lastly, it establishes executive committees to oversee the implementation of the agreement before the end of the year ...'<sup>127</sup>

12.1.7 On 17 March 2025, in a round-up of Kurdish weekly media highlights from 10 March 2025 to 16 March 2025, BBC Monitoring stated: 'The Kurdish Hawar News Agency (ANHA) published the eight-point deal which stated that: '- The rights of all Syrians in representation and participation within the political process and in all state institutions ... irrespective of their ... ethnic backgrounds, is guaranteed ...' '- A ceasefire [must come into effect] across all Syrian territory' '- All civilian and security institutions in north-east Syria must be integrated into the Syrian state ...' '- The [joint] implementation committees will seek to apply all the terms of this agreement by the end of the year [2025] ...' 'The AANES also issued a statement hailing the deal as a "victory for all Syrians ... which would block all attempts to ... create chaos and tension ... particularly between Arab and Kurdish people".' 'The ... PYD ... also welcomed the deal...'<sup>128</sup>

12.1.8 On 1 April 2025, the ISW reported that the SDF: '... agreed to withdraw its forces and allow Syrian Interim Interior Ministry forces to deploy to Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah neighborhoods in Aleppo City on April 1 [2025] ... The Syrian Interim Interior Ministry will take over security responsibilities in the two neighborhoods and set up two checkpoints in each neighborhood. Kurdish media reported that members of the SDF's Internal Security Forces ... from Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah will integrate into local police forces under the Interior Ministry ...' 'The April 1 [2025] agreement allows Kurdish residents from Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah to move freely throughout Aleppo City and stipulates that Kurdish institutions cannot be discriminated against in municipal organizations.'<sup>129</sup>

12.1.9 On 4 April 2025, Rudaw reported on the integration of the Kurdish neighbourhoods of Aleppo: 'The mukhtar (chieftan) of the Kurdish neighborhood, Bassam Ahmed, said that the agreement contributed to the

<sup>126</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syrian Democratic Forces \(SDF\)](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>127</sup> Middle East Eye, [Landmark SDF deal hailed as positive step for Syria and Kurds](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>128</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syria: Kurdish weekly media highlights 10-16 Mar 25](#), 17 March 2025

<sup>129</sup> ISW, [Iran Update](#), 1 April 2025

return of normal life in the area. "They could not go to their homes because the roads were closed ... but now everything is open, and God willing, the situation is good."<sup>130</sup>

12.1.10 A 10 April 2025 article in The National, an Abu Dhabi-based news agency<sup>131</sup>, stated:

'A Kurdish militia [YPG] withdrew another batch of fighters from northern parts of ... Aleppo on Wednesday and Thursday [9 and 10 April 2025] ...

'However, it remains unclear whether the central government will have full control of the area ...

'HTS is seeking to disarm the country's numerous factions and militias ... by offering them a place in a new army and other security organisations ...

'A Kurdish administration official in Sheikh Maqsoud said he expected the YPG to complete the withdrawal of its 2,000 fighters from Aleppo in one week. He said three batches of fighters have left the city since last week ...

'But the Kurdish official told The National that YPG intelligence personnel, as well as a Kurdish police force called Al Ashayesh, would remain in Aleppo, especially in Sheikh Maqsoud and Al Asharafiyeh. "The deal will be implemented, but slowly," he said ...

'... How the deal will be implemented has yet to be negotiated and there is no guarantee the process will succeed.'<sup>132</sup>

12.1.11 On 13 April 2025, The New Arab reported, regarding Aleppo's Sheikh Maqsoud and Achrafiah neighbourhoods, that:

'... members of the ... SDF ... left the neighbourhoods this week after an agreement with the Syrian government ...

'... it was agreed that all areas would eventually be brought under government control and SDF units integrated into the national army.

'Following the withdrawal of Kurdish fighters last week, armed guards from the SDF-linked Asayish security forces remained stationed at the entrance of Sheikh Maqsoud on Friday [11 April 2024], inspecting bags and screening people entering the district ...'<sup>133</sup>

12.1.12 On 26 April 2024, Rudaw reported that:

'Kurdish political groups in Syria have agreed on a joint vision for a decentralized, democratic state that guarantees Kurdish rights and calls for a national dialogue to reshape the country's future, according to the final statement issued by a conference held on Saturday [26 April 2025] in northeast Syria ...

"... a joint Kurdish political vision has been formulated that expresses a collective will and its project for a just solution to the Kurdish issue in Syria as a decentralized democratic state," read the statement ...

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<sup>130</sup> Rudaw, [Kurds in Damascus cautiously hopeful about Aleppo deal](#), 4 April 2025

<sup>131</sup> The National, [Who we are](#), no date

<sup>132</sup> The National, [Kurdish militia withdraws slowly from Aleppo amid fear...](#), 10 April 2025

<sup>133</sup> The New Arab, [Kurdish-led SDF impose media blackout on Aleppo neighbourhoods](#), 13 April 2025

‘The Kurdish Unity and Consensus in Western Kurdistan Conference, gathering over 400 Kurds from Syria, Kurdistan Region and Turkey, took place as Kurds are navigating their future in the new Syria ...

‘Kurds in Rojava ... are concerned about the centralization of power and reliance on Islamic jurisprudence in the transitional constitution that has been adopted by the interim government in Damascus ...

‘An advisor to the Kurdish-led administration in Rojava issued a warning if Kurdish rights are ignored.

“Failure to resolve the Kurdish issue in Syria will lead to instability, and rights, democracy, and justice will be rendered meaningless in Syria's future. Rather, oppression and tyranny will be the defining characteristic of that future,” Bedran Chiya wrote on X on Saturday.<sup>134</sup>

12.1.13 On 27 April 2025, Reuters reported that:

‘Syria's Islamist leaders said on Sunday [27 April 2025] that Kurdish demands for the country to adopt a decentralised system of government in a post-Assad political order posed a threat to national unity.

“We clearly reject any attempt to impose a partition or create separatist cantons under the terms of federalism or self-autonomy without a national consensus,” Syrian leader Ahmed al-Sharaa's office said in a statement ...

‘The Syrian presidency's statement also said recent statements by SDF leaders advocating a federal solution went clearly against that deal [the agreement to integrate the SDF with state apparatus<sup>135</sup>].<sup>136</sup>

12.1.14 On 27 April 2025, Rudaw reported that:

‘The Damascus leadership on Sunday [27 April 2025] censured the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces’ (SDF) “calls for federalism,” saying they contradict the landmark agreement inked by Syria's interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa and SDF chief Mazloum Abdi in March [2025].

‘The Abdi-Sharaa agreement “marked a positive step towards de-escalation” and “a comprehensive national solution,” read a statement from the Syrian Presidency, adding, “However the latest maneuvers and statements by the SDF leadership, which call for federalism and entrench a separate reality on the ground, openly contradict the substance of the agreement and threaten the unity of the country and the integrity of its territory.” ...

‘The Syrian leadership finally stressed that the SDF “cannot control the decision in northeast Syria [Rojava]” where “Arabs, Kurds, Christians and others coexist,” and urged the Kurdish-led force to “truly uphold” the Sharaa-Abdi agreement and “prioritize the higher national interest.”<sup>137</sup>

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### 13. Integration of the SNA into Syrian state forces

13.1.1 In a 6 February 2025 update, the ISW stated:

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<sup>134</sup> Rudaw, [Kurds unite behind vision for decentralized Syria](#), 26 April 2025

<sup>135</sup> Reuters, [Syria's Sharaa rejects Kurdish demands for decentralisation](#), 27 April 2025

<sup>136</sup> Reuters, [Syria's Sharaa rejects Kurdish demands for decentralisation](#), 27 April 2025

<sup>137</sup> Rudaw, [Damascus censures SDF 'calls for federalism' ...](#), 27 April 2025

‘Syrian interim government forces have deployed to areas previously controlled by the ... SNA ... as armed factions have started to integrate into the new Syrian army and security apparatus. Interim government security forces deployed to Afrin and Jandairis, north of Aleppo, on February 6 [2025] ... Kurdish media claimed that the interim government would take control of SNA territory and dismantle barracks and other military infrastructure in the area. Interim government-affiliated Public Security forces deployed to checkpoints near the entrances to Manbij, Aleppo Province, on February 5 [2025], demonstrating that the deployment of interim government forces extends across SNA-controlled territory.

‘... It is unclear how extensive the integration of armed groups across Syria will be or the pace at which this integration will occur. It is also unclear to what extent groups that integrate into the Defense Ministry will subordinate themselves to largely HTS-dominated command structures ... The Syrian interim government said that it dissolved all former rebel and armed groups, including factions of the SNA, on January 29 [2025], but the fact that SNA groups continue to fight against the SDF along the Euphrates River suggests that the SNA groups have been dissolved in name only.’<sup>138</sup>

### 13.1.2 On 21 February 2025, The National reported that:

‘Most former opposition factions attended a “victory conference” held in Damascus on January 29 [2025], at which Syrian leader Ahmed Al Shara announced the dissolution of all armed factions, political and civilian revolutionary bodies, and their merging into state institutions ...

‘... SNA ... are still operating in several areas, according to two officials, although they are gradually handing over some tasks to formations controlled by Damascus ...

“The borders and checkpoints have now been handed over to Damascus, while the rest of the institutions are still under the control of the Syrian Interim Government (SIG), including military institutions such as military courts and the military police,” one of the sources said, referring to an opposition political force that controlled areas of north-western Syria when Mr Al Assad was still in power ...

‘A third source said that the SNA factions were “still deployed in their barracks outside the cities and at deployment points,” but had “become affiliated with the Ministry of Defense in Damascus”...

“Currently, the new state is entering the regions of northern Syria and work is being done to receive all official departments ...” another source said...<sup>139</sup>

### 13.1.3 On 25 February 2025, an article in New Lines Magazine stated:

‘... Al-Sharaa ... has so far succeeded in dissolving the Turkish-backed factions in the northern parts of Syria ...

‘... some expressed to me their concern over the deep-seated distrust and fear among the rank and file of the newly formed armed forces. One central SNA commander captured this sentiment. “My rifle is my only guarantee of safety ... I’ll join the Ministry of Defense, but I will never give up my weapon...”...

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<sup>138</sup> ISW, [Iran Update](#), 6 February 2025

<sup>139</sup> The National, [Steep uphill battle...](#), 21 February 2025

‘... Azzam Gharib, the central commander of the Levant Front, serves as the governor of Aleppo, with his former security commander as deputy ...

‘... the motivations of individual fighters remain a critical challenge. Many continue to carry grievances, ideological commitments or fears of marginalization.’<sup>140</sup>

- 13.1.4 On 27 February 2025, the ISW stated: ‘The SNA has begun integrating its forces into the Defense Ministry in recent weeks. The rate of SNA attacks and activity against the SDF in northeastern Syria has not decreased, however...’<sup>141</sup>
- 13.1.5 The March 2025 EUAA report on Syria stated that ‘Some SNA faction leaders reportedly showed reluctance to integrate into the Ministry of Defence, fearing they might be held accountable for past human rights abuses or losing their political clout.’<sup>142</sup>
- 13.1.6 On 2 April 2025, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy stated that the SNA ‘has continued attacking the SDF in the Tishrin Dam area despite agreeing to integrate with the Syrian Defense Ministry’<sup>143</sup>

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## 14. Conflict between the SDF and SNA

- 14.1.1 The Arab Center stated in an 18 December 2024 article:

‘The rapid collapse of the Assad regime ... has put Syrian Kurds ... in northeastern Syria in an increasingly precarious position as ... Syrian National Army (SNA) fighters have taken advantage of the situation to advance on Kurdish-controlled towns ...

‘... The town of Tel Rifaat fell quickly to the SNA, which soon moved on Manbij, just west of the Euphrates River ... The SNA has also mounted an offensive on Kobane, which lies just across the border from Turkey ...

‘It appears that ... the United States and Turkey worked out an arrangement in which the SDF would withdraw from Manbij, and Turkey and its SNA allies would not advance east of the Euphrates River... However, the SDF has said this truce arrangement broke down soon after...’<sup>144</sup>
- 14.1.2 On 15 January 2025, BBC Monitoring reported:

‘Syrian media have reported deadly clashes between the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces and the Turkey-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) in the northern Aleppo province, which have been ongoing since the fall of President Bashar al-Assad in December [2024].

‘The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported on 15 January [2025] fighting between Turkey-backed fighters and the SDF near the strategic Tishreen dam in north-eastern Aleppo ...

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<sup>140</sup> New Lines Magazine, [Syria's New Rulers Are Working To Unify Military Power](#), 25 February 2025

<sup>141</sup> ISW, [Iran Update](#), 27 February 2025

<sup>142</sup> EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 46), 25 March 2025

<sup>143</sup> Washington Institute, [Facilitating the New SDF Agreement Is Key to Stabilizing Syria](#), 2 April 2025

<sup>144</sup> The Arab Center, [Syria's Kurds Facing Dangerous Headwinds](#), 18 December 2024

‘The SOHR noted that clashes had been ongoing for over a month “without any change in the map of control”... It said it had documented 396 deaths since the fighting began in December.

‘The dam, located on the Euphrates river south-east of the city of Manbij, is a key supply of water and electricity in northern Syria ...

‘The pro-Kurdish Hawar News agency (ANHA) published images of the destruction caused by recent shelling around the Tishreen dam, which it said had cause “significant material damage” to local infrastructure ...’<sup>145</sup>

14.1.3 On 21 January 2025, The New Arab reported: ‘... in late November [2024], the SNA launched a concurrent offensive targeting Kurds in that province [Aleppo] that displaced tens of thousands of civilians...

‘The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor estimates that at least 423 people have been killed in this SNA-SDF conflict since 12 December [2024]; 41 of them civilians ...’<sup>146</sup>

14.1.4 On 21 February 2025, The Guardian reported: ‘In the countryside surrounding the city [Kobani], Turkey carries out airstrikes regularly ... Attacks on the Tishrin Dam and other civilian infrastructure has left the city without water and electricity for days at a time.’<sup>147</sup>

14.1.5 On 22 February 2025, BBC Monitoring reported that ‘There is a battle of narratives between pro-SNA and pro-SDF media in the reporting of fighting in northern Syria, particularly the Tishreen Dam area. In January 2025, pro-Kurdish media reported that civilians were heading for the dam in convoys to protest against attempts to seize it by the SNA ... The SNA-affiliated Joint Force, which killed civilians in strikes on the convoy, said the SDF ... was using civilians as “human shields ...”’<sup>148</sup>

14.1.6 The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC)’s Independent International Commission of Inquiry (IICI) on the Syrian Arab Republic is mandated ‘to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law since March 2011 in the Syrian Arab Republic and to present public reports on its findings’<sup>149</sup>. In a 14 March 2025 report, the Commission stated:

‘... on 30 November 2024, the Syrian National Army launched an offensive entitled Operation Dawn of Freedom against ... the Syrian Democratic Forces in northern Aleppo Governorate ... The Syrian National Army captured Manbij from the Syrian Democratic Forces on 11 December 2024. At the time of writing, intense clashes, aerial attacks and shelling, including in residential areas impacting civilian objects and causing civilian casualties and power outages, continued to be reported in frontline areas. Looting of public and private facilities, including homes, schools, and medical facilities were widely reported. Civilians were reportedly subjected to threats and robberies by fighters and forced to pay bribes and hand over valuables to pass checkpoints...’<sup>150</sup>

14.1.7 The March 2025 EUAA report on Syria stated:

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<sup>145</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Briefing: Deadly clashes continue between SDF, SNA...](#), 15 January 2025

<sup>146</sup> The New Arab, [Why fighting is raging in north Syria...](#), 21 January 2025

<sup>147</sup> The Guardian, [‘We are part of Syria’: Kurdish-led SDF fights for place...](#), 21 February 2025

<sup>148</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Media Guide Syria](#), 22 February 2025

<sup>149</sup> UNHRC, [Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic](#), no date

<sup>150</sup> UNHRC, [Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry](#) (page 7), 14 March 2025

'Heavy clashes between the SNA and the SDF were reported in January and February 2025 at the frontlines around the strategic Tishreen Dam and Qara Qozak Bridge on the Euphrates River, in villages in rural Manbij and around the city of Kobane ... dozens of civilians were killed or injured ...

'According to ACLED data, the areas under the control of SNA/disputed in Aleppo governorate which were the most affected by security incidents (battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) during the reporting period were Ain Al Arab/Kobane (401 incidents) and Manbij districts (212 incidents), amounting to around 49 % of the total number of security incidents recorded in Aleppo governorate ...

'According to ACLED data, the areas under the control of SNA/disputed in Raqqa and Hasaka governorates which were the most affected by security incidents (battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) during the reporting period were Raqqa's Tall Abyad (193 incidents), and Hasaka's Ras Al Ain (111) districts, amounting to around 51 % and 27 % of all security incidents recorded in Raqqa and Hasaka governorates...'<sup>151</sup>

- 14.1.8 On 2 April 2025, in a round-up of Kurdish weekly media highlights from 24 March 2025 to 30 March 2025, BBC Monitoring reported: 'Fierce fighting between the SDF and ... SNA ... in the area around the strategic Tishreen Dam and the Qaraqozaq bridge ... appeared to have halted by 26 March.'<sup>152</sup>
- 14.1.9 On 12 April 2025, Enab Baladi reported:
  - 'Syrian army forces have begun entering Tishrin Dam ... under an agreement signed between the Syrian Ministry of Defense and ... SDF ...
  - '[Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA)] added that the army's entrance to the area aims to impose security and stability there ...
  - 'The SDF has not officially announced its withdrawal from the area or its handover to the Syrian Ministry of Defense ...
  - 'The fighting continued for months, even after the agreement between the SDF commander, Mazloum Abdi, and the Syrian transitional president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, but it recently ceased ...
  - 'This change in control over the dam comes under the al-Sharaa-Abdi agreement signed last March [2025] ...'<sup>153</sup>

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## 15. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) rhetoric regarding Kurds in Syria

- 15.1.1 On 4 December 2024, an article in The Syria Report, an 'English-language publication covering Syrian economic and political economy affairs'<sup>154</sup>, stated: 'After HTS took over Aleppo city, Abu Mohammad Al-Joulani reassured ... minorities that they would be safe under his rule. A similar message was later addressed to the Kurds'<sup>155</sup>
- 15.1.2 On 17 December 2024, BBC Monitoring reported:

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<sup>151</sup> EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (pages 70, 72, 73), 25 March 2025

<sup>152</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syria: Kurdish weekly media highlights 24–30 Mar 25](#), 2 April 2025

<sup>153</sup> Enab Baladi, [Syrian army enters Tishrin Dam in Aleppo countryside](#), 12 April 2025

<sup>154</sup> The Syria Report, [About Us](#), no date

<sup>155</sup> The Syria Report, [A Radiography of HTS Military and Governance Capabilities](#), 4 December 2024

‘... Ahmed al-Sharaa has sought to reassure the Kurds that they will face a different future in Syria after the fall of Bashar al-Assad’s government, although his opaque promises and statements by the interim authority have offered a mixed picture.

‘Kurdish media on 14 December [2024] widely reported a video in which ... Sharaa ... said the Kurds would not be oppressed ...

‘The HTS leader said ... they would help the displaced people of Afrin return to their homes.

‘The HTS leader, however, has refrained from commenting on the ongoing attacks by the ... SNA ... against the ... SDF ... in areas around Manbij and Kobane (Ain al-Arab) ...

‘On 14 December [2024], Syria’s new interim government warned that it will stamp out Kurdish “separatism” and “liberate” Syria’s east.

‘On 16 December [2024], the HTS leader said he hoped the north-eastern provinces of Raqqa, Hasaka and Deir al-Zour could “gain freedom”, an apparent reference to potential moves to expel Kurdish-led forces.<sup>156</sup>

15.1.3 The Arab Center stated in an 18 December 2024 article: ‘... it is unclear what the relationship between the AANES and the HTS leadership will be ... there were no tears shed by the Syrian Kurds when the Assad government collapsed ... HTS’s Islamist ideology (and its al-Qaeda roots) makes officials of the AANES nervous, as the entity ... is secular...

‘So far, the HTS leadership has not commented on the status of the AANES, nor has it made any major military moves against SDF positions...<sup>157</sup>

15.1.4 On 24 January 2025, the Middle East Institute, a non-partisan think tank dedicated to the study of the Middle East<sup>158</sup>, reported:

‘Damascus expressed willingness to accommodate Kurdish self-administration institutions by restructuring them to align with other government bodies. The state also committed to ensuring the return of all displaced persons, especially Kurdish residents of Afrin, and to addressing the historical injustices faced by the Kurdish community by granting them full citizenship rights equal to all other Syrians. However, Damascus asserted that the SDF does not exclusively represent the Kurdish community but includes other groups as well. Damascus also offered to mediate between the SDF and Turkey ...<sup>159</sup>

15.1.5 On 4 February 2025, The Harmoon Center for Contemporary studies stated:

‘In his second speech on January 30, 2025, President al-Shara briefly outlined several key elements of the transition process ...

“We will work to form an inclusive transitional government that reflects the diversity of Syria – its men, women, and youth ...” Here, al-Shara acknowledged Syrian diversity in terms of gender representation ... but avoided explicitly addressing the diversity of political orientations and the

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<sup>156</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Briefing: Syria’s HTS offers Kurds mixed messages](#), 17 December 2024

<sup>157</sup> The Arab Center, [Syria’s Kurds Facing Dangerous Headwinds](#), 18 December 2024

<sup>158</sup> Middle East Institute, [About](#), no date

<sup>159</sup> Middle East Institute, [Will Damascus-SDF negotiations lead to agreement...](#), 24 January 2025

various ethnic ... components of the Syrian people. While he likely intended to encompass groups such as ... Kurds... he did not state this directly<sup>160</sup>

15.1.6 On 15 February 2025, The Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies stated, in a report covering the period 15 January 2025 to 30 January 2025: '... al-Sharaa ... emphasized ... commitment to Syria's territorial unity. This stance signals that ... the new leadership is determined to reclaim areas under SDF control ...'<sup>161</sup>

15.1.7 On 27 February 2025, the ISW stated that 'The interim government has not provided guarantees to the SDF that it would prevent Turkey or the SNA from ... committing crimes against Kurds in northeastern Syria while the SDF integrates into the Defense Ministry...'<sup>162</sup>

15.1.8 On 13 March 2025, Rudaw reported: 'Syria's interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa visited Afrin in mid-February and met with locals, the majority of whom were Kurds. He pledged to remove armed groups and put an end to the violations...'<sup>163</sup>

15.1.9 The March 2025 EUAA report on Syria stated:

'With regards to the Kurdish community, upon taking control, Al-Sharaa held an initial meeting with a senior SDF delegation ... His remarks implied that the transitional administration did not align with the ... SNA's anti-SDF approach. Nevertheless, Mohammed A. Salih, a scholar specialising in Kurdish and regional issues, described his remarks as unclear and unsupportive of Kurdish goals ... In Aleppo, the Kurds primarily interacted with HTS, which has exhibited moderation and openness to dialogue...'<sup>164</sup>

15.1.10 Originally published in Arabic and translated using an online translation tool (translation available upon request), on 13 March 2025, Syria TV, 'a public media service ... currently broadcasting from Turkey'<sup>165</sup>, reported on the Constitutional Declaration which was issued that day:

'The declaration commits to preserving Syria's territorial integrity and criminalizes calls for partition, secession ... It is also committed to achieving coexistence, societal stability, maintaining civil peace, and guarantees cultural diversity and linguistic rights for all Syrians ...

'The Declaration guarantees a wide range of fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens, including ... freedom of movement, the right to political participation ... equal opportunities ... the right to litigation and defence, the inviolability of the body and the prevention of torture and enforced disappearance ... all rights and freedoms enshrined in international human rights treaties and covenants ratified by Syria are an integral part of this Declaration ...

'The legislature shall be vested in the People's Assembly, which shall be formed by appointing one-third of its members by the President of the Republic and electing the other two-thirds by electoral colleges. Executive power shall be exercised by the President of the Republic and the

<sup>160</sup> Harmoon Center, [Ahmed al-Sharaa Addresses the Nation...](#), 4 February 2025

<sup>161</sup> Harmoon Center, [Harmoon Center Monitoring Report, 15-30 January 2025](#), 15 February 2025

<sup>162</sup> ISW, [Iran Update](#), 27 February 2025

<sup>163</sup> Rudaw, [More Kurds return to Afrin after Damascus-SDF deal](#), 13 March 2025

<sup>164</sup> EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 31), 25 March 2025

<sup>165</sup> Syria TV, [About Syria TV](#), no date

Ministers. The judiciary would be independent, and a new Supreme Constitutional Court would be established ...

‘... a member of the drafting committee of the constitutional declaration, Rayan Kahilan, said that “the freedoms in the constitutional declaration were set for all components of the people in Syria”’<sup>166</sup>

15.1.11 On 11 April 2025, Syrians for Truth and Justice, an NGO documenting ‘human rights violations committed anywhere against Syrians’<sup>167</sup>, noted:

‘... on 15 February 2025 ... Ahmed al-Sharaa, visited Afrin in the northern countryside of Aleppo. This marked his first official visit to the Kurdish regions since assuming the presidency ...

‘... al-Sharaa held a meeting with Afrin residents, including members of local councils, religious leaders, and community figures. During the meeting, council representatives addressed the situation of Kurdish community and “the ongoing violations stemming from the factions’ presence, the imposition of taxes, levies, arrests, the brutal and reckless deforestation, failure to return homes to returning owners, kidnappings, humiliation... and others.”

‘... al-Sharaa promised that “the government will soon extend its authority over the entire region, and put an end to the factions’ situation. Additionally, rights will be restored to their owners. He also promised to open a complaints office in Afrin, allowing residents to submit their complaints.”’<sup>168</sup>

15.1.12 See also [Integration of the SDF into Syrian state apparatus](#) for statements from Syria’s new authorities regarding territorial unity and rejecting decentralisation.

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## 16. Treatment of Kurds in Syria

### 16.1 Treatment by the former Assad regime

16.1.1 A January 2021 article by the Arab Center stated ‘When the civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, the Kurds did not side with the Assad regime or the opposition, which they regarded as opposed to Kurdish autonomy ... They were generally excluded from opposition meetings ...’<sup>169</sup>

16.1.2 The Washington Kurdish Institute, a ‘non-profit organization committed to public awareness and discussion of issues concerning the Kurdish people’<sup>170</sup>, noted on an undated webpage that: ‘The PYD faced repression and censorship at the hands of the Assad government...’<sup>171</sup>

16.1.3 In a November 2021 report, the Clingendael Institute stated:

‘... the autocratic nature of the various Ba’ath regimes, especially under the Assads, created a generic level of repression across Syrian society in which Kurdish-specific repression was nested ... Syrian Kurds could be part of the state apparatus and army as long as they fully embraced the regime and relegated their Kurdishness to the background. Nevertheless, the regime did

<sup>166</sup> Syria TV, [...Syrian Republic issues the Constitutional Declaration...](#), 13 March 2025

<sup>167</sup> Syrians for Truth and Justice, [About STJ](#), no date

<sup>168</sup> Syrians for Truth and Justice, [Syria/Afrin: Promises by Transitional Authorities...](#), 11 April 2025

<sup>169</sup> The Arab Center, [Kurdish Dilemmas in Syria](#), 13 January 2021

<sup>170</sup> Washington Kurdish Institute, [Home](#), no date

<sup>171</sup> Washington Kurdish Institute, [Democratic Union Party \(PYD\)](#), no date

single Syrian Kurdish communities out for particularly intense and targeted repressive treatment ... the relevance of these policies is that they created a climate of fear and distrust among Syrian Kurdish communities’<sup>172</sup>

16.1.4 The same source quoted a Syrian activist: ‘Back in 1977, when Hafez al-Assad was in power ... if you spoke Kurdish, or if they saw a Kurdish book with you, that was enough to arrest you: then you were a threat to state security ... Moreover, the regime removed Kurds to bring about demographic changes. They brought Arabs from Aleppo and Raqqa to our territory, took land from Kurds and gave it to the Arabs.’<sup>173</sup>

16.1.5 On 27 November 2023, Rudaw reported:

‘Successive Syrian regimes categorically denied Kurdish cultural and political rights and suppressed any movements that strived to promote them...

‘Syrian Kurds have been subjected to state discrimination since the establishment of the country nearly 80 years ago ... The Kurdish language was banned from public use. Former Syrian president Hafez al-Assad intensified the process of Arabization when he came to power and his successor and son Bashar al-Assad inherited the oppressive policy...’<sup>174</sup>

16.1.6 The United States State Department (USSD) ‘Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria’, published in 2024 and covering events throughout 2023 (USSD 2023 report), without elaborating on the scale of the discrimination or violence, noted that:

‘The regime actively restricted members of national and ethnic minority groups from conducting traditional, religious, and cultural activities. The regime continued to limit the use of the Kurdish language, restricting publication in Kurdish of books and other materials and Kurdish cultural expression. The Kurdish population faced official and societal discrimination and repression, as well as regime-sponsored violence. Regime and proregime forces ... reportedly arrested, detained, tortured, killed, or otherwise abused numerous Kurdish activists and individuals, as well as members of the SDF during the year.’<sup>175</sup>

16.1.7 On 22 February 2024, The Arab Weekly, ‘an independent English language publication’ focusing on ‘unfolding developments in the Middle East and North Africa’<sup>176</sup>, stated: ‘The only official language in Syria is Arabic. Writing in any other language is prohibited.

‘Writer Shevan Ibrahim notes that Kurdish has never gained official recognition in Syria as it remains banned in government institutions, schools, universities and mainstream media ...’<sup>177</sup>

16.1.8 A September 2024 article in the Oxford Political Review, ‘[a]n Oxford-based publication covering current affairs, political theory and international relations’<sup>178</sup>, stated:

<sup>172</sup> Clingendael, [Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist](#) (pages 11, 12), April 2021

<sup>173</sup> Clingendael, [Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist](#) (page 12), April 2021

<sup>174</sup> Rudaw, [Kurdish language finally flourishing in Rojava](#), 27 November 2023

<sup>175</sup> USSD, [Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria](#) (section 6), 2024

<sup>176</sup> The Arab Weekly, [About Us](#), no date

<sup>177</sup> The Arab Weekly, [Kurdish language still struggles for acceptability in Syria](#), 22 February 2024

<sup>178</sup> Oxford Political Review, [Censor the Language, Curtail the People...](#), 5 September 2024

‘Linguistic erasure manifested in the forms of a refusal to register citizens with Kurdish names, the renaming of towns or cities with Kurdish origins, and ... the prohibition of Kurdish schools, books and publications. It was not until the establishment of Rojava in 2011 that Kurdish language classes were finally offered in Syria, legitimising the practice of speaking Kurdish.

However, Kurdish linguistic and cultural oppression still persist in Syria, with reports of physical and verbal violence being expressed by Syrian teachers towards Kurdish students within classrooms and the continued exclusion of Kurdish language instruction at all education levels.’<sup>179</sup>

#### 16.1.9 On 3 December 2024, Middle East Eye reported:

‘Prior to 2011, the [Kurdish] minority faced widespread discrimination under a government that promoted an Arab nationalist political agenda ...

“They were oppressed like all Syrians, plus their language and culture was not respected - all over Syria, Kurdish was not used in any official context, or in education for example. However, they were also an integrated part of the society.” [Thomas Schmidinger, a political scientist at the University of Kurdistan Hewler in Erbil<sup>180</sup>] ...

‘... rebel groups accused the YPG of helping the Assad government besiege opposition-held areas.

‘In the past few years, however, monitors say Sheikh Maqsoud has been besieged by government forces.

‘Food and other basic supplies have been blocked from entering the neighbourhood by state security services, and living conditions have deteriorated.’<sup>181</sup>

#### 16.1.10 On 15 January 2025, an article in The Nation, an independent news agency<sup>182</sup>, stated: ‘There was no love lost between Assad and the Kurds. Father and son both repressed the Kurdish identity and jailed, tortured, and killed many Kurdish activists over the years.’<sup>183</sup>

#### 16.1.11 On 10 March 2025, Al Jazeera reported that: ‘The SDF had a more ambiguous position towards al-Assad than other opposition forces, and was accused of being allied with the regime.’<sup>184</sup>

#### 16.1.12 On 11 March 2025, the BBC reported that: ‘Syria's Kurds... were suppressed and denied basic rights during the Assad family's rule.’<sup>185</sup>

#### 16.1.13 On 4 April 2025, Rudaw reported that:

‘Kurds in Syria have long faced systemic repression and discrimination from successive authorities, including attacks on peaceful gatherings, arrests of political activists, and bans on cultural celebrations. Thousands have been denied full citizenship rights, with many rendered stateless due to exclusionary policies that date back decades. These measures disproportionately targeted Kurds, stripping them of their nationality and

<sup>179</sup> Oxford Political Review, [Censor the Language, Curtail the People...](#), 5 September 2024

<sup>180</sup> Middle East Eye, [Sheikh Maqsoud: The Kurdish enclave in Syria's Aleppo](#), 3 December 2024

<sup>181</sup> Middle East Eye, [Sheikh Maqsoud: The Kurdish enclave in Syria's Aleppo](#), 3 December 2024

<sup>182</sup> The Nation, [About The Nation](#), no date

<sup>183</sup> The Nation, [What Does the Future Hold for Syrian Kurds Post-Assad?](#), 15 January 2025

<sup>184</sup> Al Jazeera, [Syria merges Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces into state...](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>185</sup> BBC, [Kurdish-led SDF agrees to integrate with Syrian government forces](#), 11 March 2025

relegating them to second-class status, denying them education, employment opportunities, and political representation. While reforms were introduced in 2011, the process was limited and disrupted by conflict.<sup>186</sup>

16.1.14 The same source noted that 'Kurdish is not an official language in Syria, but the Kurdish-led administration in northeast Syria (Rojava) has made it official within the regions it controls.'<sup>187</sup>

16.1.15 See also [Stateless Kurds in Syria](#).

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## 16.2 Treatment by the SDF and connected actors

16.2.1 In a November 2021 report, the Clingendael Institute stated that 'the YPG/PYD runs northeast Syria in a fairly autocratic fashion despite promises and some efforts at more inclusive governance. It does not tolerate dissent, regularly commits human rights violations ... At the same time, it also provides basic security and services ...'<sup>188</sup>

16.2.2 In a February 2023 report, covering the period between 1 July 2022 and 31 December 2022 and based on 467 interviews, the UNHRC IICI stated that 'SDF continued to arbitrarily detain civilians, including individuals allegedly associated with Da'esh and their families'<sup>189</sup> The section it then refers to (VII-B) focusses almost exclusively on the latter, and adds 'One person who had expressed critical views of the self-administration and SDF was detained for several months, without due process guarantees, in the context of intra-Kurdish tensions ...'<sup>190</sup>

16.2.3 The report also said that 'In ... detention facilities across the north-east, previously documented detention-related violations reportedly continued, including in Asayish custody in Shaykh Maqsud, Aleppo.'<sup>191</sup> To conclude that 'The Commission has reasonable grounds to believe that SDF members arbitrarily deprived individuals of their liberty, including some in a manner tantamount to enforced disappearance...'<sup>192</sup> However, the former is based on one of its earlier reports which provides no sense of scale<sup>193</sup> other than what it describes as 'one emblematic case'<sup>194</sup> and one example of four members of the KDP<sup>195</sup>.

16.2.4 The USSD 2023 report noted '[T]he SDF continued to unjustly detain civilians, including women and children, and held them in detention without charge... The SNHR [Syrian Network for Human Rights] and the NGO Syrians for Truth and Justice reported instances of SDF fighters detaining civilians, including journalists, human rights activists, and opposition party members ... In some instances, the detainees' locations remained unknown.'<sup>196</sup>

<sup>186</sup> Rudaw, [Kurds in Damascus cautiously hopeful about Aleppo deal](#), 4 April 2025

<sup>187</sup> Rudaw, [Kurds in Damascus cautiously hopeful about Aleppo deal](#), 4 April 2025

<sup>188</sup> Clingendael, [Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist](#) (page 2), April 2021

<sup>189</sup> UNHRC, [Report of the Independent International Commission...](#) (para 106), 7 February 2023

<sup>190</sup> UNHRC, [Report of the Independent International Commission...](#) (para 119), 7 February 2023

<sup>191</sup> UNHRC, [Report of the Independent International Commission...](#) (para 119), 7 February 2023

<sup>192</sup> UNHRC, [Report of the Independent International Commission...](#) (para 120), 7 February 2023

<sup>193</sup> UNHRC, [Report of the Independent International Commission...](#) (para 102), 8 February 2022

<sup>194</sup> UNHRC, [Report of the Independent International Commission...](#) (para 103), 8 February 2022

<sup>195</sup> UNHRC, [Report of the Independent International Commission...](#) (para 104), 8 February 2022

<sup>196</sup> USSD, [Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria](#) (section 1), 2024

16.2.5 In a May 2024 report, The Harmoon Center for Contemporary studies stated:

‘Many locals lament [the SDF’s] authoritarian practices, such as its treatment and marginalization of opponents, and the killing, detention, torture, or expulsion of fellow Kurds who oppose it ...

‘From 2011 on, the YPG has assassinated a number of Kurdish anti-Assad opponents, and crushed anti-Assad demonstrations, it has jailed and continues to detain KNC [Kurdish National Council] politicians and activists in the northern Kurdish areas ...

‘... the YPG/PYD is intolerant of political pluralism, secretive about its agenda, and represses political competition.’<sup>197</sup>

16.2.6 In a July 2024 report detailing human rights violations that took place in Syria throughout June 2024, The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC), a Syrian human rights organisation that documents and analyses human rights violations<sup>198</sup>, stated:

‘SJAC’s documentation team ... interviewed an individual whom the SDF previously detained in Al-Hasakeh governorate, as a result of his criticism of an Autonomous Administration policy ... He reported being tortured ...

‘... the SDF frequently arrests people who make any criticism of the Autonomous Administration or the SDF. Even children are subject to such arrests, as evidenced by an Autonomous Administration court ruling in June [2024] that sentenced a 12-year old boy to three years in prison for “insulting SDF leadership” in a video ...’<sup>199</sup>

16.2.7 In an August 2024 report covering the period between 1 January 2024 and 30 June 2024 and based on 385 interviews, UNHRC IICI stated:

‘... On 15 May [2024], a boy was shot in the head and killed as he was swimming near an SDF checkpoint in Dernaj village, eastern Dayr al-Zawr. In the same village, on 22 May, following a dispute between a group of civilians and SDF members, a dozen SDF and Asayish fighters opened fire on [a] crowd, killing two boys and injuring four civilians. The following month, SDF raided a house in Dhiban, detained a man, beat him on the head with guns, and took him to a detention facility in the Al-Omar oil fields. Later the same day, his dead body was delivered to a relative, with wounds suggesting he had been tortured.

‘... SDF and the Asayish continued to detain civilians, including political activists perceived as opposed to the Democratic Union Party or the self-administration. In early April, a Kurdish political activist opposed to the Democratic Union Party was detained and beaten in Malikya by the Asayish ...

‘... several premises of political parties deemed opposed to the de facto authorities had been attacked and set on fire between March and May [2024], including an office of a Kurdish political party in central Qamishli ... The Asayish have yet to investigate the incident ...’<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Harmoon Center, [Child Abductions in PYD Areas](#) (pages 9, 14, 15), 30 May 2024

<sup>198</sup> SJAC, [About](#), no date

<sup>199</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria - June 2024](#), 24 July 2024

<sup>200</sup> UNHRC, [Report of the Independent International Commission...](#) (pages 16, 18), 12 August 2024

16.2.8 In a September 2024 report detailing human rights violations that took place in Syria throughout July 2024, SJAC noted that the SDF holds 'political prisoners (Which include members of the Kurdish opposition - the Kurdish National Council) in detention.'<sup>201</sup>

16.2.9 The EUAA 2024 report stated 'In the first half of 2024, SNHR documented 35 civilian deaths (about 8 percent of the overall number of civilian deaths documented in that period) attributed to the SDF, among which 7 deaths due to torture. The organisation documented individual cases of civilians being shot by SDF patrolmen as well as further cases of arbitrary arrest.'<sup>202</sup>

16.2.10 On 13 December 2024, Syria Direct, 'an independent, nonprofit media and training organization'<sup>203</sup>, reported:

'On December 9 [2024], local media reported SDF forces fired on a demonstration in Deir e-Zor city, with 10 people ultimately killed as a result. The SDF ... withdrew on December 11 [2024]. The HTS-led Military Operations Department (MOD) later officially announced it had taken control of the city.

'A commander within the Deir e-Zor Military Council denied the SDF was responsible for shooting demonstrators ...'<sup>204</sup>

16.2.11 In a 22 January 2025 report covering December 2024 to January 2025, SJAC stated:

'The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) governs parts of Al-Hasakeh, Deir Ezzor, Al-Raqqa and Aleppo governorates

'... the Syrian Democratic Forces and other affiliated military/security entities in [AANES] territory engage in significant violations against the population, including arbitrary detention, torture and mistreatment of detainees, and political repression.

'In the days after the Assad government's fall, SJAC documented multiple incidents of the SDF firing live bullets at protesters celebrating the fall of the government and denouncing the SDF...

'... In SDF-controlled neighborhoods of Aleppo city (Sheikh Maqsoud and Al-Ashrafieh), documenters reported multiple instances of snipers firing at "anything that moves." In an area of Al-Hasakeh city that the former government used as its "security zone," documenters report frequently hearing sounds of SDF members' gunfire at night, which SDF members have explained is an attempt to intimidate the population. In response to growing defections from the SDF, documenters also reported that SDF members raided homes to search for defectors in early January.'<sup>205</sup>

16.2.12 On 24 January 2025, the Middle East Institute reported:

'... SDF-controlled areas witnessed escalating security tensions, including ... protests against SDF security dominance, forced conscription of youth, and arrests of anti-SDF activists in Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and Hasakah. According to media reports and activists in the area, the PKK-affiliated

<sup>201</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria - July 2024](#), 3 September 2024

<sup>202</sup> EUAA, [Syria – Security Situation](#) (page 31), October 2024

<sup>203</sup> Syria Direct, [About Us](#), no date

<sup>204</sup> Syria Direct, [Protests and SDF defections: Discontent simmers...](#), 13 December 2024

<sup>205</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria: December 2024 - January 2025](#), 22 January 2025

“Revolutionary Youth” imposed large taxes on shop owners and forced employees of the self-administered areas to participate in mandatory demonstrations supporting the SDF...’<sup>206</sup>

16.2.13 A 1 February 2025 report by the Syrian Network of Human Rights (SNHR), an independent organisation monitoring human rights violations in Syria<sup>207</sup>, stated that ‘the SDF killed 21 civilians in January [2025], including seven children and six women’, noting that one woman died due to torture<sup>208</sup>.

16.2.14 On 6 February 2025, the SNHR reported that:

‘SDF military personnel, particularly those stationed primarily in al-Sheikh Maqsoud and al-Ashrafiya neighborhoods in Aleppo city, have been carrying out widespread and repeated sniper attacks deliberately targeting civilians. Between November 30, 2024, and January 30, 2025, SNHR documented the killing of at least 65 civilians ... by SDF snipers in Aleppo city ... During the same period, SNHR has also documented dozens of reports of people going missing when they either approached or entered SDF-controlled areas ...’<sup>209</sup>

16.2.15 On 22 February 2025, SNHR reported that between the beginning of 2025 and mid-February 2025:

‘SDF carried out sporadic detention operations in areas under their control in Hasaka and Raqqa governorates, targeting at least six civilians ... These arrests were carried out in response to the detainees removing banners and other items bearing SDF slogans from certain public locations and replacing them with the current Syrian national flag ... during public celebrations following the fall of the Assad regime ...

‘... the detention operations involved SDF personnel using violence, and verbally insulting, and beating the detainees who were then taken to undisclosed locations. As of this writing, their fate remains unknown.’<sup>210</sup>

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### 16.3 Conscription by the SDF and connected actors

16.3.1 The Country of Origin Information on conscription below dates from prior to the fall of the Assad regime (see [Fall of the Al-Assad regime](#)) and prior to the agreement between the new Syrian authorities and the SDF to integrate the SDF into Syrian state apparatus (see [Integration of the SDF into Syrian state apparatus](#)). In the sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)), CPIT was unable to find any further information relating to conscription in Kurdish areas.

16.3.2 EUAA Country Guidance on Syria, updated in February 2023, stated:

‘Compulsory recruitment continued in 2021 based on the conscription law passed by the Kurdish Administration in June 2019 about the “Duty of Self Defence”. Geographically, the law applies to the areas of northern and eastern Syria under the control of the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration.

“Conscription” is mandatory for all male residents, including Syrian nationals and stateless Kurds, living in the territories under the Autonomous

<sup>206</sup> Middle East Institute, [Will Damascus-SDF negotiations lead to agreement...](#), 24 January 2025

<sup>207</sup> SNHR, [About us](#), no date

<sup>208</sup> SNHR, [...in January 2025, 21 Civilians Were Killed by SDF](#), 1 February 2025

<sup>209</sup> SNHR, [65 Civilians... Killed by SDF Snipers...](#), 6 February 2025

<sup>210</sup> SNHR, [SNHR Condemns SDF’s Continued Detentions of Civilians...](#), 22 February 2025

Administration. A May 2021 amendment expanded eligibility for conscription to those aged between 18 and 31 years ... Men serve in the YPG, while women can join the YPJ on a voluntary basis ...

‘Deferrals can be granted by the Self-Defence Duty Department for: students, recent returnees to Syria, and persons with siblings younger than 18 years and a passed away or handicapped father. Exceptions to the “Duty of Self-Defence” include medical reasons, disabilities, family members of martyrs holding a proving certificate thereof, or only sons. There is conflicting information as to whether the payment of a fee can exempt an individual from the “Duty of Self-Defence” ...

‘SDF and YPG have used forced recruitment in addition to the “conscription” ... There were documented cases of arbitrary arrest for recruitment despite applicable postponements for education or medical reasons ... Following the May 2021 amendment, large-scale campaigns by the SDF in various Arab-majority communities to arrest and forcibly recruit men and women aged between 18 and 31 years were reported. SDF units reportedly pursued young men in their homes and arrested anyone who refused to comply with these decisions ...

‘There were also reports that the SDF was asking returning families to volunteer one man per family to join YPG ... Some families chose to move from the areas under SDF in order to avoid reprisals, including arrest, for not accepting recruitment.’<sup>211</sup>

16.3.3 On 29 January 2024, Amnesty International reported that an 18-year old female student was suspected to have been forcibly conscripted to the YPJ in April 2023, in violation of local law. The article stated that ‘the YPJ has denied the family’s wish to see and communicate with Fidaa. In July 2023, the YPJ denied that Fidaa had joined their ranks and denied allegations of her disappearance ...

‘According to the law in force in north-east Syria under the control of the AANES, women can voluntarily join the YPJ, while men aged 18 to 40 must complete a one-year compulsory military service.’<sup>212</sup>

16.3.4 On 22 February 2024, Enab Baladi stated, regarding amendments to the law on mandatory conscription:

‘AANES ... stated that some amendments were made to the law during the General Council meeting held in September 2023. The amendments specified a certain age to allow for educational deferment for each educational stage separately. For example, a master’s student can postpone military service until he reaches 32 years of age ...

‘A new article ... was added to the law, stating that doctors and pharmacists who graduated and are committed to rural service have their military service postponed for a full year, provided that the applicant’s age does not exceed 30 years, and he is entitled to a two-year postponement only.

‘Mandatory conscription was implemented by the ... YPG ... in 2014 ...

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<sup>211</sup> EUAA, [Country Guidance: Syria](#) (section 4.6), February 2023

<sup>212</sup> Amnesty International, [Syrian Kurdish student disappeared in Syria...](#), 29 January 2024

‘The conscription law took its final form on June 23, 2019, when AANES adopted a new law consisting of 35 articles, making it similar to the Syrian regime’s mandatory military service law and named “Duty of Self-Defense.”

‘The SDF defines a deserter in the Self-Defense Duty Law as a fighter who has been absent for 15 consecutive days after joining, while the full period of service lasts 12 months.

‘... mandatory military service is imposed on males who have reached 18 years of age, and females have the right to join voluntarily ...’<sup>213</sup>

16.3.5 In a May 2024 report based on ‘approximately 400 interviews’<sup>214</sup> in ‘various areas in northern Syria’<sup>215</sup>, The Harmoon Center for Contemporary studies stated ‘... In SDF ... held areas, conscription happens forcibly, in general...’<sup>216</sup>

16.3.6 In a June 2024 report detailing human rights violations that took place in Syria throughout May 2024, SJAC noted:

‘Young adults are also subject to forced conscription in SDF-controlled areas. In May [2024], the SDF reportedly arrested nearly 50 young men at checkpoints in Al-Hasakeh governorate and took them to perform mandatory military service ... While the Autonomous Administration previously released a statement saying that it would no longer conduct raids to conscript people from their workplaces, markets/shops, or their homes, the SDF continues to stop young men at checkpoints and forcibly take them for military service. While some options exist for postponing military service, including for education, these exemptions are not always granted.’<sup>217</sup>

16.3.7 In a report of a Fact Finding Mission to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq on military recruitment in North and East Syria, carried out from 27 April 2024 to 4 May 2024 and published in June 2024, the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) stated, regarding mandatory military service in the DAANES area:

‘The Mandatory Self-Defence Duty ... is a compulsory military service for young men in the areas controlled by the DAANES. Conscripts fulfilling this duty serve in the Self-Defence Duty Forces (in Kurdish Hêzên XweParastinê: HXP) ...

‘According to Article 1-A in the Self-Defence Duty Law, men over the age of 18 ... are required to perform the duty ... As of June 2024, men born in 1998 or later are being called up for Self-Defence Duty, which means that the age range of men conscripted is 18-26 years ... the DAANES is still cautious in implementing the Self-Defence Duty law in areas with a predominantly Arab population. Likewise, Christians are, in practice, not subjected to the same enforcement of the Self-Defence Duty law as Kurds ...

‘Syrian nationals originating from outside NES [North and East Syria region], who have been residing in NES for a minimum of three consecutive years are obliged to perform the Self-Defence Duty ...

‘The Self-Defence Duty is exclusively mandatory for men...

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<sup>213</sup> Enab Baladi, [AANES adopts amendments to conscription laws](#), 22 February 2024

<sup>214</sup> Harmoon Center, [Child Abductions in PYD Areas](#) (page 9), 30 May 2024

<sup>215</sup> Harmoon Center, [Child Abductions in PYD Areas](#) (page 7), 30 May 2024

<sup>216</sup> Harmoon Center, [Child Abductions in PYD Areas](#) (page 20), 30 May 2024

<sup>217</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria - May 2024](#), 20 June 2024

‘The legislation allows for individuals required to serve the Self-Defence Duty to defer their service or be exempt from it, depending on their individual circumstances ...

‘... one year ... remains the current standard duration of the Self-Defence Duty ...

‘The consulted DAANES authorities as well as a Syrian Kurdish expert confirmed the possibility of extending the duration of the service during emergency situations ...

‘Conscription for the Self-Defence Duty takes place once or twice a year, during which the authorities announce the specific age groups for conscription on TV and their media platforms ...

‘Once their conscription has been announced, persons belonging to the age group called up are expected to report for duty at the recruitment centre in their area to obtain a military booklet, which is then filled in ...

‘The Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP) is under the administration of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC). It operates independently of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and has its own military leadership. However, the SDF delegates assignments to the HXP and determines its deployment locations ...

‘... the HXP is an auxiliary force with the main task of guarding or protecting public buildings and supporting the SDF and they are thus generally not used in combat situations ... The majority of conscripts in the HXP carry out their tasks, such as guarding certain buildings or areas, within their own region.

‘... draft evaders ... will be punished by one additional month of service. The consulted sources informed DIS that additional month of service is the consequence of evading in practice. The names of draft evaders are publicised and circulated to checkpoints ... which limits their mobility ... Authorities do not search for evaders at their homes ... evaders will be temporarily detained and then sent to perform their duty when they are identified at a checkpoint. The family of the individual will be informed about the situation ... According to one source, the law is strictly enforced regarding conscription of evaders.

‘The former HXP conscript consulted by DIS stated that evasion from the Self-Defence Duty is often based on a fear of being assigned to combat duties. It is the source’s perception that this is a misunderstanding ...

‘The sources were not aware of any cases of violence or mistreatment of evaders or deserters caught at checkpoints.

‘... The law does not stipulate any specific repercussions regarding deserters. According to two consulted sources ... deserters undergo investigations about their motives for their desertion. Deserters often opt to leave the region out of concern for potential repercussions, although the specifics of these consequences remain unclear. Periodic amnesties are announced for both evaders and deserters, provided that they report for and conduct their Self-Defence Duty. The most recent amnesty was issued in early May 2024 ...

‘... Sources were unaware of any cases where family members of evaders

and deserters faced harassment or other violations due to their relatives' evasion or desertion ...'<sup>218</sup>

16.3.8 Regarding recruitment to other agencies of the DAANES, the same source stated:

'Although frequently conflated with the Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP), the SDF and the HXP are separate military forces within the DAANES administration and have different command structures ...

'... recruitment of personnel to the SDF remains voluntary and is based on a contract between the SDF and the individual concerned. The standard duration of the contract is two years' service ...

'In the previous DIS report from 2022, sources interviewed by the DIS generally concurred that the PKK and its military wing did not employ force to recruit in NES [North East Syria]. A Syrian university professor has stated that this remains the case, and that the PKK and its military wing, the People's Defence Forces (HPG), do not use force to recruit members in NES. Rather, the PKK uses indirect methods to recruit young people through the RYM (Revolutionary Youth Movement) ...'<sup>219</sup>

16.3.9 On 13 December 2024, Syria Direct reported:

'Several commanders defected from the ... SDF ... in the eastern countryside of Deir e-Zor in recent days, amid demonstrations and calls for Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)-led forces to take control of the area.

'Turki al-Dhari, the official spokesperson of the SDF-affiliated Deir e-Zor Military Council ... announced his defection ... He cited "SDF violations against civilians in Deir e-Zor and Raqqa" as the reason for his decision ...

'... the Deir e-Zor Military Council commander who remains at his post denied reports of any large-scale defections ... "Only two defected, and they have ambitions west of the Euphrates," he said. "Our forces are pursuing those saboteurs."<sup>220</sup>

16.3.10 On 16 January 2025, originally published in Arabic and translated using an online translation tool (translation available upon request), Syria TV reported:

'The ... SDF ... have halted the process of demobilizing recruits who have completed their official military service, due to a significant rise in desertions and defections among its forces.

'The SDF imposes compulsory military service on every young man who entered the age of eighteen and was born between 1998 and 2006, and the duration of military service is one year.

'... a forced SDF recruit, told Syria TV that he had finished his military service two months ago and the SDF refused to discharge him along with hundreds of other recruits, without explaining the reasons ...

'[A source close to the SDF] added that "the rate of desertion of conscripts from military service reached in some locations south of Hasaka and in the

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<sup>218</sup> Danish Immigration Service, [Military recruitment...](#) (pages 13, 14, 18-23), June 2024

<sup>219</sup> Danish Immigration Service, [Military recruitment...](#) (pages 24, 29), June 2024

<sup>220</sup> Syria Direct, [Protests and SDF defections: Discontent simmers...](#), 13 December 2024

countryside of Deir Ezzor to more than 90% ... after the fall of the regime..."<sup>221</sup>

16.3.11 On 16 December 2024, The New Arab reported that: 'Ahmed al-Sharaa ... said in an interview ... that the new Syrian transitional government will abolish mandatory conscription into Syria's armed forces ... Expanding further, al-Sharaa explained that conscription would only be reintroduced in extreme cases, such as national emergencies relating to war.'<sup>222</sup>

16.3.12 For further information on military service in Syria, in general, and the abolition of mandatory conscription, see [Country Policy and Information Note: Military service, Syria](#).

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#### 16.4 Use of child soldiers by the SDF and connected actors

16.4.1 In 2021, The Guardian reported: 'The YPJ ... claim it no longer accepts women under 18 after intense pressure from the UN and human rights groups to stop the use of child soldiers; although many of the women I met had joined below that age, though years ago.'<sup>223</sup>

16.4.2 In a February 2023 report, covering the period between 1 July 2022 and 31 December 2022 and based on 467 interviews, the UNHRC IICI stated: '... reports of child recruitment ... persist despite the June 2019 action plan signed by SDF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children under the age of 18; the 2020 establishment, by the Executive Council of the self-administration, of child protection offices and ongoing efforts by SDF to put an end to this practice. Some families approached child protection offices to report cases of children as young as 14 being recruited, but were told that no action could be taken as the children had been taken by the Kurdish revolutionary youth movement. Despite requests by families, the whereabouts of some recruited children remained unknown ...'<sup>224</sup>

16.4.3 In a February 2024 report covering the period between 1 July 2023 and 31 December 2023 and based on 528 interviews, UNHRC IICI stated 'underage boys and girls continued to be recruited ... Families looking for their children did not receive support from various self-administration or SDF offices, which ... in most cases, refused to register the cases.'<sup>225</sup>

16.4.4 In a May 2024 report, The Harmoon Center for Contemporary studies stated: '... in SDF areas, children, both girls and boys, are forcibly taken against their will to places outside their homes — unbeknownst to their parents who are often unable to obtain any information about what happened ...' 'The abduction of Kurdish ... children in SDF areas occurs often via the PYD-linked "Revolutionary Youth" (Ciwanê Shoresher) [RY] ... Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) said that...the AANES offices refused to register any of the complaints filed by families of recruited children, especially those against the RY ...'

<sup>221</sup> Syria TV, [SDF halts demobilization of recruits...](#), 16 January 2025

<sup>222</sup> The New Arab, [Why Al-Sharaa's scrapping of conscription for Syrians matters](#), 16 December 2024

<sup>223</sup> The Guardian, ['Now I've a purpose': why more Kurdish women are choosing to fight](#), 19 July 2021

<sup>224</sup> UNHRC, [Report of the Independent International Commission...](#) (page 17), 7 February 2023

<sup>225</sup> UNHRC, [Report of the Independent International Commission...](#) (page 19), 9 February 2024

‘Co-founder of the Kurdish National Council (KNC) ... described the Revolutionary Youth as from the poorest of Kurdish society ...

‘Syria TV describes the RY as ... [“] a group consisting of young men and women - most of whom are minors - who do not actually belong to any of the “Self-Administration” institutions, and are led by cadres (military commanders) belonging to the Kurdistan workers’ party. [”]’<sup>226</sup>

16.4.5 In a May 2024 report detailing human rights violations that took place in Syria throughout April 2024, SJAC stated: ‘The SDF ... condones child recruitment, which is conducted by an affiliated group called the Revolutionary Youth. Media reports from April [2024] discuss the Revolutionary Youth’s kidnapping of at least three children this month ... the authorities ... denied any knowledge of the girl’s whereabouts. SJAC has conducted several interviews with families of those kidnapped in similar circumstances...’<sup>227</sup>

16.4.6 The USSD’s ‘2024 Trafficking in Persons Report’, covering the period from April 2023 to March 2024, noted:

‘The SDF continued to implement the UNSCR-mandated action plan to end the recruitment and use of children and demobilize children in SDF ranks; however, an international organization reported SDF-affiliated armed groups recruited and used children in 2022 and 2023. The Revolutionary Youth Movement continued to recruit children ... through fraudulent announcements for educational courses in northeast Syria; NGOs and international organizations report Revolutionary Youth Movement continued to fraudulently and forcibly recruit and use children. Observers report these children have undergone military training in the Qandil Mountains of Iraq.’<sup>228</sup>

16.4.7 In a June 2024 report covering events of 2023, the UN Secretary General stated that 231 children had been verified as recruited and used by the SDF, comprising 203 by the YPG/YPJ and 27 by the ‘Internal Security Forces under the umbrella of the self-administration in northern and eastern Syria’<sup>229</sup>. It stated that ‘most children... were used in combat roles.’<sup>230</sup>

16.4.8 The same report stated that the UN Secretary General ‘... note[s] the constructive dialogue between SDF, the self-administration in northern and eastern Syria, and the United Nations in adopting a road map to prioritize the implementation of the action plan, including ... a military order reiterating the prohibition of the recruitment and use of children’<sup>231</sup>

16.4.9 In a June 2024 report of a Fact Finding Mission, the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) stated, regarding mandatory Self-Defence Duty in the Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP): ‘Individuals under 18 are not conscripted into the HXP, and the regulations of the Self-Defence Duty Law regarding the recruitment age are generally respected and consistently enforced by DAANES authorities.’<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Harmoon Center, [Child Abductions in PYD Areas](#) (pages 9, 14, 18, 20-22), 30 May 2024

<sup>227</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria - April 2024](#), 20 May 2024

<sup>228</sup> USSD, [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Syria](#), 24 June 2024

<sup>229</sup> UN Secretary General, [Children and armed conflict](#) (page 27), 3 June 2024

<sup>230</sup> UN Secretary General, [Children and armed conflict](#) (page 27), 3 June 2024

<sup>231</sup> UN Secretary General, [Children and armed conflict](#) (page 28), 3 June 2024

<sup>232</sup> Danish Immigration Service, Military recruitment in North and East Syria (page 14), June 2024

#### 16.4.10 Regarding recruitment of minors to the SDF, the same source stated:

‘There have been reports of recruitment of individuals under the age of 18 into the SDF ... However, the exact numbers and the extent to which this recruitment was conducted by use of physical force (e.g. kidnappings) remain unclear, as the recruitment of minors is a politically sensitive issue ...

‘... the number of cases regarding the recruitment of minors to the SDF has decreased in recent years, although recruitment of minors still occurs.

‘...The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) recorded at least 672 cases of minors being recruited to the YPG/SDF in the period from July 2012 until June 2024... the scale of recruitment [of minors] has increased as the SDF has consolidated its security and military control over the NES region.’<sup>233</sup>

#### 16.4.11 Regarding recruitment by the Revolutionary Youth Movement, the same source stated:

‘The Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) ... was established in 2011. It is a radical political youth organisation affiliated with the ... PYD ... and according to some sources, the PKK ...

‘The RYM has offices in Amuda and Qamishli ... The RYM has also been linked to attacks on journalists, protestors and the Kurdish National Council (KNC), a political party in opposition to the PYD ...

‘According to a consulted Syrian university professor, since 2022, there has been a notable increase in the recruitment of minors by the RYM ... no substantial action has been taken against it due to internal divisions within the DAANES and the alleged influence of the PKK in the administration.

‘...There have been reports of attacks on families protesting against this group's activities ... there is speculation that minors recruited by RYM become fighters for the PKK or the SDF. There have been reports of minors being indoctrinated by the group and ending up in training camps in the Qandil or Sinjar mountains. However, the number of confirmed reports about such cases has been limited, according the Kurdish media ...

‘Reports on the RYM's recruitment methods are inconsistent. Whilst several consulted sources indicate that recruitment of minors by the RYM takes place through encouragement, other sources report about prevalence of cases where minors are recruited by use of physical force, including instances of kidnapping from schools or homes.

‘It has been reported that minors have been recruited across NES [North East Syria], including in Qamishli, Sheikh Maqsoud, Manbij, Raqqa and Ayn al-Arab/Kobane. One source stated that there was less recruitment to the RYM in areas with an Arab majority, such as Raqqa or Deir Ezzour, in comparison to regions with a high concentration of Kurds, such as Hasakah and Qamishli.

‘Reports of forced recruitment commonly originate from the Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhood of Aleppo, as well as areas with a GoS [government of Syria] presence, such as Hasakah ...

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<sup>233</sup> Danish Immigration Service, Military recruitment in North and East Syria (page 26-27), June 2024

‘STJ reported that the majority of recruited minors come from families facing socio-economic and domestic problems ...’<sup>234</sup>

16.4.12 In an August 2024 report covering the period between 1 January 2024 and 30 June 2024 and based on 385 interviews, UNHRC IICI stated:

‘Children were reportedly increasingly recruited in areas controlled by SDF, despite an action plan signed with the United Nations. They included two girls and three boys aged from 12 to 17 recruited by the Revolutionary Youth between December 2023 and April 2024 in Qamishli, Ayn al-Arab (Kobane) and Manbij.

‘...In most documented cases, parents who sought help from the self-administration or SDF were unable to obtain information on the whereabouts of their abducted children, with some parents expressing fear of retaliation.

‘...SDF continued to breach its commitment to prevent recruitment of all children under 18 in the area under its control.’<sup>235</sup>

16.4.13 In a September 2024 report detailing human rights violations that took place in Syria throughout July 2024, SJAC noted ‘Media reports and statements to SJAC documenters in July [2024] discuss the Revolutionary Youth’s kidnapping of several children (aged 13-15) this month, and taking them to youth conscription camps ... Documenters note that in July [2024], instances of child recruitment by the Revolutionary Youth occurred ... almost weekly...’<sup>236</sup>

16.4.14 On 2 October 2024, HRW stated:

‘The Revolutionary Youth Movement ... has recruited girls and boys as young as 12 ...

‘While not an armed group itself, the youth group appears to be deeply intertwined in the political and military structures of the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration for North and East Syria ... the youth group has transferred children, primarily girls, to armed groups affiliated with the SDF, despite commitments by the SDF to end child recruitment ...

‘Between June and August 2024, Human Rights Watch interviewed seven families in territory governed by the Autonomous Administration who said that their [8] children ... were taken by the Revolutionary Youth Movement between March 2023 and July 2024 ...

‘None of the families have managed to establish contact with their children ... In two cases, families saw pictures of their children in military uniforms ...

‘... the Revolutionary Youth Movement has been transferring children to the ... YPG ... and ... YPJ, both of them ... have been themselves directly implicated in recruiting child soldiers ...

‘In all but one case, families interviewed reported that their children had simply left home one day and never returned ...

‘... A July 2023 report by Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) found that out of 52 cases of child recruitment that they documented in SDF areas in 2023

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<sup>234</sup> Danish Immigration Service, [Military recruitment in North and East Syria](#) (page 29-32), June 2024

<sup>235</sup> UNHRC, Report of the Independent International Commission... (page 20), 12 August 2024

<sup>236</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria - July 2024](#), 3 September 2024

alone, the Revolutionary Youth was responsible for 43.

‘In June 2023, an official from the Revolutionary Youth admitted to the Associated Press (AP) that the group recruits children but denied any forced conscription ...’<sup>237</sup>

#### 16.4.15 The same source stated that:

‘In 2019, the Syrian Democratic Forces signed an action plan with the UN, committing to concrete and time-bound measures to end and prevent the recruitment and military use of children.

‘As part of its action plan, the SDF ... issued military orders prohibiting the recruitment and use of children, trained commanders, established child protection offices ... and demobilized dozens of child recruits.

‘However, the UN’s successive reports show fluctuating progress ...

‘In 2022 SDF child recruitment spiked to 637 verified cases. That ... year ... SDF demobilizations also fell sharply to just 33 children, according to the UN ... In November 2022 the SDF also reportedly shut down one of its eight main child protection offices ...

‘In six of the cases Human Rights Watch documented, families reported that they reached out to relevant Autonomous Administration and SDF officials, including the child protection offices, but the authorities failed to intervene effectively, providing no discernable assistance in locating or recovering their children ...

‘While ... the SDF has taken disciplinary measures against SDF personnel who violate commitments made ... there is no indication that the SDF or the Autonomous Administration have taken any steps to investigate and hold the Revolutionary Youth group accountable ...

‘A spokesperson for an SDF-affiliated child protection office also acknowledged to the AP that child recruitment in SDF-controlled areas was ongoing but emphasized that the complaint mechanism was effective, noting that the SDF returned four children to their families in early 2023’<sup>238</sup>

#### 16.4.16 In a November 2024 report detailing human rights violations that took place in Syria throughout October 2024, SJAC noted ‘the Revolutionary Youth kidnapped a young boy from SDF-controlled areas near Afrin ... [and] a minor girl from the Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood of Aleppo city ... this minor girl is Arab, rather than Kurdish, which is ... somewhat rare ...’<sup>239</sup>

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### 16.5 Treatment by the SNA

#### 16.5.1 In a February 2023 report covering the period between 1 July 2022 and 31 December 2022 and based on 467 interviews, the UNHRC IICI stated:

‘Arrests and detention by SNA brigades and the SNA military police continued. Kurdish detainees were routinely questioned on their alleged ties to the Kurdish People’s Protection Units or SDF. Detainees were transferred between different SNA brigades, deprived of legal counsel and brought

<sup>237</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Northeast Syria: Military Recruitment of Children Persists](#), 2 October 2024

<sup>238</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Northeast Syria: Military Recruitment of Children Persists](#), 2 October 2024

<sup>239</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria - October 2024](#), 19 November 2024

before military courts. Some of them were ... released only after a payment had been made to members of the SNA military police.

‘... Torture and ill-treatment were documented in several SNA facilities ... In some cases, such practices led to the death of detainees ...

‘SNA again informed the Commission that detainees were allowed access to a lawyer and contact with their families as well as visits by human rights organizations, and that measures to prevent torture had been put in place.

‘Victims consistently described poor detention conditions ...

‘SNA members also arrested people who expressed opposing ... views ...

‘The Commission continued documenting cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence, perpetrated by SNA members, including of children ...

‘... interviewees reported being prevented from regaining access to their properties, some of which had been confiscated in 2018; threatened with arrests for claiming properties back; or forced to pay “fees” imposed by SNA members on people seeking to return ...

‘Women who live alone and own property are particularly affected by such practices...’<sup>240</sup>

16.5.2 Synergy Hevdesti is ‘a community-based initiative that aims to provide justice to all victims in Syria’<sup>241</sup>. In a November 2023 report, based on statements collected between March 2023 and May 2023 regarding human rights violations against Kurds in the Afrin region, Aleppo’s northern countryside and al-Hasakah province, the source stated that Kurds were accused of working with the AANES or being members of the PKK ‘as a pretext to arrest and torture’ them, to seize their properties and to ‘deny them access to their homes and lands’, noting that these practices were also perpetrated against Kurds who were not accused of connection to the AANES/PKK, including several AANES political opponents. The report also referred to SNA groups using torture methods to coerce confessions, carrying out abductions, raping detainees and threatening the family members of victims<sup>242</sup>.

16.5.3 Regarding property seizures, the same report stated that ‘In some cases, the armed groups used these properties to house the families of their fighters or rent them out to internally displaced persons (IDPs) from elsewhere in Syria’, noting that ‘civilian property confiscations occurred in almost all of Afrin’s districts ... Several victims ... believe that their Kurdish ethnicity is the primary reason ...’. The report also documented ‘large-scale confiscations of property owned by the Yazidi community.’<sup>243</sup>

16.5.4 The same report recounted various examples of torture by SNA forces, noting that ‘torture was not exclusive to men’ and that victims gave examples of their Kurdish ethnicity being mentioned by the perpetrators. It also stated that ‘... practices documented by fighters themselves and videos that recorded the mutilation of the dead bodies of female Kurdish fighters and

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<sup>240</sup> UNHRC, [Report of the Independent International Commission...](#) (pages 14-23), 7 February 2023

<sup>241</sup> Synergy Hevdesti, [About Us](#), no date

<sup>242</sup> Synergy Hevdesti, [“Five Years of Injustice are Enough!”](#), 13 November 2023

<sup>243</sup> Synergy Hevdesti, [“Five Years of Injustice are Enough!”](#), 13 November 2023

summary executions make it even more likely that these violations were systematic and targeted at Kurds on ethnic grounds ...’<sup>244</sup>

16.5.5 The same source reported that the following SNA factions were more frequently referred to as perpetrators of the above violations than others: ‘the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division, the Sultan Murad Division, the Sham Legion/Faylaq al-Sham, the Levant Front/al-Jabha al-Shamiya, the Eastern Army/Jaysh al-Sharqiya, the Ahrar al-Sharqiya/Free Men of the East, the Elite Army/Jaysh al-Nukhba-Northern Sector, Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement, and the Military Police, in addition to the Turkish Intelligence.’<sup>245</sup>

16.5.6 The USSD 2023 report stated that:

‘NGOs reported factions of the SNA often carried out detentions in conjunction with property appropriation, forcing many to leave the area and preventing their return ... women faced additional challenges due to pre-existing gender inequalities and were reluctant to seek redress for property-related violations from such all-men committees.

‘NGOs continued to assess these and other abuses ... were part of a systematic effort to enforce demographic change targeting Kurdish Syrians ...

‘In August [2023], the COI [UN Commission of Inquiry for Syria] reported it continued to receive credible accounts of sexual violence by members of the SNA from both male and female survivors ...

‘NGO reporting suggested SNA members continued detaining, beating, and kidnapping Kurdish women in Afrin and Ra’s al-Ayn. Kurdish women activists were particularly affected, with some ceasing all engagement in public life as they feared detention by the SNA.’<sup>246</sup>

16.5.7 HRW’s World Report 2024, covering events of 2023, stated ‘In 2023, the US returned Türkiye to its list of countries implicated in the use of child soldiers in response to its support to factions of the Syrian National Army accused of child recruitment.

‘SNA factions continued to violate civilians’ housing, land, and property rights, including by forcefully seizing homes, lands, and businesses.’<sup>247</sup>

16.5.8 In a February 2024 report covering the period between 1 July 2023 and 31 December 2023 and based on 528 interviews, the UNHRC IICI stated:

‘... the Commission was informed that SNA was investigating alleged violations and abuses and holding those responsible accountable. Nonetheless, the Commission documented several instances of detention by SNA military police and armed SNA factions. Several detentions, of both Arab and Kurdish men and women, were ostensibly based on “terrorism”, affiliation with PKK and alleged cooperation with foreign entities.

‘Detention was also used by certain factions to extort money from families, with detainees being held for prolonged periods without being brought before a judge, only to be released without charge after families paid thousands of dollars for their release. Returnees to SNA-controlled areas were often

<sup>244</sup> Synergy Hevdesti, [“Five Years of Injustice are Enough!”](#), 13 November 2023

<sup>245</sup> Synergy Hevdesti, [“Five Years of Injustice are Enough!”](#), 13 November 2023

<sup>246</sup> USSD, [Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria](#) (section 6), 2024

<sup>247</sup> Human Rights Watch, [World Report 2024: Syria](#), 2024

detained for investigation with SNA factions, notably the Suleiman Shah Brigade and Brigade 211, imposing stiff fines on returnees...

‘Torture and ill-treatment of detainees continued to be documented in several SNA detention facilities ... Former detainees consistently highlighted poor conditions in several detention facilities ...

‘... isolated cases of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by SNA members continue, including threats of sexual violence made against women detainees ...

‘On 9 October [2023], SNA issued ... instruction ... to cease preventing olive harvests or collecting any portion or tax from the harvest. Despite this, the practice continued by ... notably the Suleiman Shah Brigade, the Hamzah Division and the Sultan Murad Division, who ... appear to act with impunity ...

‘... many homeowners in the Afrin region feared retaliation by SNA factions if they approached the authorities to complain about their houses being seized or occupied by armed actors or internally displaced persons, and there was little faith in the justice system ...

‘On 12 November [2023], Suleiman Shah Brigade members threatened to forcibly evict internally displaced families ... They opened fire on the internally displaced persons, shooting three men in the legs ... Members of the Brigade vandalized the homes ... and stole residents’ possessions ... the Brigade reportedly committed to holding those responsible accountable ...’<sup>248</sup>

#### 16.5.9 On 25 February 2024, Synergy Hevdesti reported on arrests by the SNA:

‘During 2023, Synergy Association for Victims documented the arrest of at least 431 people, including 22 women and 27 children, in areas of Afrin, Ras al-Ayn/ Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad in northern Syria. These arrests were carried out by the Turkish forces and Turkish-backed factions affiliated with the SNA. While only 93 persons out of the total toll of detainees have been released, 338 remain detained ...

‘... Inhuman detention conditions were imposed on all the victims ... Victims of the Kurdish origin were often described as pigs and infidels ...

‘A human rights activist working on documenting human rights violations in northern Syria told Synergy that “Since the occupation of Afrin five years ago, its remaining Kurdish residents have been repeatedly arrested on alleged charges of previous connections with the Autonomous Administration or working with one of its civil or military institutions. However, the main purpose behind that is to intimidate the Kurdish residents and push them to leave the area then seizing their properties, let alone extorting families of the detainees to get ransoms.” ...

‘While in custody...Women’s health needs were not considered; ...they were deliberately deprived of normal use of toilets and baths and forced to be escorted by male guards when using toilets, resulting in reproductive health issues for these female victims.

‘... several factions of the Syrian National Army and their leaders are listed on sanctions lists of the US Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) ... for connections to committing serious human

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<sup>248</sup> UNHRC, [Report of the Independent International Commission...](#) (pages 13-15), 9 February 2024

rights violations against the Kurds residents in Afrin ... including abduction, detention, extortion, rape, torture, and property seizure ...

‘In 2023, the biggest rate of documented arrest cases was recorded in Afrin region ... 336 persons ... were arrested. Only 68 out of them were released, among them 62 reported that they have been subjected to torture ...

‘... in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad regions, 95 persons ... were arbitrarily arrested. Out of them, only 25 arrestees were released ... with 23 of those released reporting that they were subjected to torture ...

‘The detainees were ... released only after paying sums of money to members of the SNA’s factions ...

‘The released interviewees narrated to Synergy that they were continuously subjected to ill-treatment and torture ...

‘The Association believes that the actual number of arrest cases is significantly higher than the figure given in this report ...

‘... violations ... are often characterized with a racist background, particularly against the Kurds. Other violations such as arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance and property seizure among others are perpetuated on the motives of making money ...’<sup>249</sup>

16.5.10 In a May 2024 report detailing human rights violations that took place in Syria throughout April 2024, SJAC stated:

‘In April 2024, SNA factions reportedly arrested a number of civilians (mainly Kurdish) in Afrin and Azaz. These arrests are not a new phenomenon ... Many of those arrested are charged with previous “cooperation with the Autonomous Administration,” usually referring to actions taken when the area was controlled by the AANES prior to 2018. Accusations of “cooperation” with the AANES could refer to actions such as performing mandatory military service required by the AANES “Self Defense” law, or working civilian jobs (teachers, nurses, municipality employees) for the Autonomous Administration.

‘... SJAC received several reports of civilians being detained without charges ... In many cases ... the factions offer that the detainee can be released after paying a sum of money (typically thousands of dollars) ... the arrests serve to intimidate the Kurdish population in northern Aleppo...’<sup>250</sup>

16.5.11 In a June 2024 report detailing human rights violations that took place in Syria throughout May 2024, SJAC noted:

‘In the past few months, SJAC’s documenters have ... received multiple reports of original owners attempting to reclaim their land and property, but being severely beaten and/or detained for doing so ...

‘In late May, Nowruz Hasso, a Kurdish judge in the criminal court in Afrin, issued an unprecedented ruling stating that those living in homes belonging to forcibly displaced Kurdish residents must leave the homes, returning them to their original owners ... displaced Syrians living in Afrin launched a smear campaign against her, holding protests and threatening her with rape and murder, and also threatening to harm her family ... protests

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<sup>249</sup> Synergy Hevdesti, [Northern Syria: Arbitrary Detention and Torture...](#), 25 February 2024

<sup>250</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria - April 2024](#), 20 May 2024

of this size could not occur without approval and support from the National Army factions operating in the area.<sup>251</sup>

16.5.12 In a June 2024 report covering the period January to December 2023, the UN Secretary General stated that the SNA had recruited 282 and used children<sup>252</sup>.

16.5.13 The same report noted that the Secretary General ‘welcome[s] the engagement of the opposition SNA ... leading to the signature on 3 June 2024 of an action plan between the opposition Syrian National Army ... and its aligned legions and factions and the United Nations to end and prevent grave violations against children.’<sup>253</sup>

16.5.14 In an August 2024 report covering the period between 1 January 2024 and 30 June 2024 and based on 385 interviews, the UNHRC IICI stated:

‘Arrest, violence and financial extortion by Syrian National Army (SNA) military police and certain factions, notably the Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade (SSSB) and the Sultan Murad Division ... continued. Kurdish ... women and men arriving in SNA areas ... were routinely summoned by the military police and kept in custody until they were cleared, or tried in SNA military courts for alleged terrorism offences or for links with SDF.

‘... methods of torture ... were documented in ... detention facilities ...

‘Reports also continued of sexual and gender-based violence committed in SNA detention facilities ...

‘Overall, interviewees continued to report deplorable detention conditions ...

‘Many were held incommunicado, including a 15-year-old Kurdish boy held incommunicado for two and a half years. Several families came to know about the fate of their relatives only when they were asked for money to secure their release – with some families paying thousands of dollars ...

‘... Lawyers reported that confessions obtained under duress were sometimes held admissible by judges ... with detainees bearing visible signs of torture still seeing their concerns dismissed by judges ...

‘...A Kurdish woman ... was gang-raped in a location controlled by a local armed SNA faction, by a SNA member and other men ... Another Kurdish woman was sexually assaulted in her home in Afrin by a Sultan Murad Division member in 2023 who threatened to kill her family.

‘... convictions were secured for the killing of four Kurdish men in Jinderes during Nowruz ... SNA also gave information about other ongoing investigations and prosecutions, including in cases of ... alleged deaths in detention, and property-related crimes ...

‘... SSSB confiscated ... property and imposed exorbitant “taxes” on the civilian population ... In several documented cases, those who resisted the demands of SSSB were detained and subjected to violence. A Kurdish landowner had to pay more than \$8,000 [approx. £6,034<sup>254</sup>] to SSSB in three

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<sup>251</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria - May 2024](#), 20 June 2024

<sup>252</sup> UN Secretary General, [Children and armed conflict](#) (page 27), 3 June 2024

<sup>253</sup> UN Secretary General, [Children and armed conflict](#) (page 28), 3 June 2024

<sup>254</sup> Xe.com, [8,000 USD to GBP](#), 17 April 2024

“tax” demands in a matter of months ... Attempts to seek accountability through the police and courts were unsuccessful.<sup>255</sup>

16.5.15 In a November 2024 report detailing human rights violations that took place in Syria throughout October 2024, SJAC noted:

‘... the military police and members of various SNA factions continued to arrest civilians in Afrin and the surrounding area, a pattern that has occurred since Türkiye and the SNA factions gained control of the area in 2018. SJAC has witnessed an increase in these cases in the past several months ... In recent months, SJAC documenters have observed an upward trend in the amounts of money that the factions are requesting to release the people they arrest. It is now becoming more common to see amounts in the thousands...

‘The military police have arrested people who were previously employed by the AANES in any capacity, including strictly civilian jobs as teachers, nurses, or municipality employees.

‘... the military police, composed of members of various SNA factions, operates ... with minimal oversight, committing violations against civilian members of the population, often with complete impunity ...

‘SNA factions also engage in various housing, land, and property-related violations in the areas they control ... Civilians have little recourse if they submit complaints about property violations committed by the factions – doing so may even put them at risk of arrest.<sup>256</sup>

16.5.16 Middle East Eye stated on 3 December 2024 that ‘According to [Nicholas Heras, an analyst at the US-based New Lines Institute think tank<sup>257</sup>], many Turkey-backed rebels see Kurds and the YPG as indistinguishable...’<sup>258</sup>

16.5.17 On 4 December 2024, The New Arab reported:

“Kurds cannot trust the ... SNA,” [Mohammed A. Salih, Non-Resident Senior Fellow in the Foreign Policy Research Institute<sup>259</sup>] said. “They have good reason for this based on ... their past records ... in dealing with them...”...

“... there is an actual demographic change campaign against Kurds underway in areas west of the Euphrates, particularly those areas under the control of the SNA. The SNA represents the most anti-Kurdish faction among the anti-Assad opposition groups,” Salih said.

“Kurds in the Tel Rifaat and the entire Shahba region are in danger of retribution by SNA groups whose entire mission at this point ... appears to be fighting Kurds,” he added ...

‘[Kyle Orton, an independent Middle East analyst] also believes the SNA is a “much more worrying” threat to Kurds.

“There is little discipline in SNA ranks, and its fighters carry a much more bitterly ethno-sectarian outlook,” he said. “The chances of indiscriminate attacks on Kurdish populations by the SNA are much higher, and even

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<sup>255</sup> UNHRC, [Report of the Independent International Commission...](#) (pages 13-15), 12 August 2024

<sup>256</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria - October 2024](#), 19 November 2024

<sup>257</sup> Middle East Eye, [Syria: Aleppo's Kurds fear displacement as thousands flee...](#), 3 December 2024

<sup>258</sup> Middle East Eye, [Syria: Aleppo's Kurds fear displacement as thousands flee...](#), 3 December 2024

<sup>259</sup> The New Arab, [After Aleppo, what will happen to the Kurds of northwest Syria?](#), 4 December 2024

without a targeted assault, the SNA's governance methods are much more predatory and chaotic," he added.<sup>260</sup>

#### 16.5.18 On 4 December 2024, BBC Monitoring reported:

'A UK-based Syria war monitor has reported allegations of ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity ... committed by Turkey-backed faction against Kurds ...

'... these alleged crimes had occurred in the Shahba canton and the countryside of northern Aleppo province ...

'In another report on 2 December [2024], the SOHR [NGO Syrian Observatory for Human Rights<sup>261</sup>] said that Turkey-backed armed factions had attacked a convoy transporting people displaced from Shahba to the territory of the Kurdish-led the Autonomous Administration of North East Syria, assaulting and injuring a number of people.'<sup>262</sup>

#### 16.5.19 On 5 December 2024, France24 reported:

'Kurdish civilians now living under the ... SNA have reported having their homes seized by Turkish-backed troops ...

'... "As the conflict in the past days unravels, Kurds once again face displacement, massacres and persecution at the hands of these jihadi-Islamist groups in many places like Aleppo, Tal Rifaat and Shahba." [Dara Salam, a teaching fellow at SOAS University of London's department of politics and international studies<sup>263</sup>] ...

'Dastan Jasim, a research fellow at the GIGA Institute for Middle East Studies, said Syria's Kurds had good reason to be fearful given what she described as years of abuses against Kurdish communities in parts of the country's northwest held by the SNA ...

'... "...Kurdish life in Afrin is a living hell – it's basically impossible. Sexual violence is rampant, there have been kidnappings of people – just ordinary Kurdish people that are accused out of the blue of being PKK sympathisers are being abducted and killed."<sup>264</sup>

#### 16.5.20 In a 7 December 2024 article, The Middle East Eye reported that:

'SNA factions also engage in various housing, land, and property-related violations in the areas they control. They've been accused of arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detentions, abductions and torture ...

'Footage has also circulated this week showing SNA troops abusing captured Kurdish fighters ...

'Ozkizilcik [Omer Ozkizilcik, a nonresident fellow for the Syria Project at the Atlantic Council<sup>265</sup>] said that the SNA had established mechanisms to deal with human rights abuses, arresting and imprisoning many of its members who were found guilty.

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<sup>260</sup> The New Arab, [After Aleppo, what will happen to the Kurds of northwest Syria?](#), 4 December 2024

<sup>261</sup> SOHR, [About Us](#), no date

<sup>262</sup> BBC Monitoring, [...War monitor reports 'ethnic cleansing' against Kurds...](#), 4 December 2024

<sup>263</sup> France24, [Kurds' dream of self-rule under threat...](#), 5 December 2024

<sup>264</sup> France24, [Kurds' dream of self-rule under threat...](#), 5 December 2024

<sup>265</sup> Middle East Eye, [The Syrian National Army: Rebels, thugs or Turkish proxies?](#), 7 December 2024

‘He added that the SNA, like HTS, had also affirmed the importance of Kurds as an essential part of Syria.

“Ergo, you will find many Kurdish commanders and soldiers among the SNA ... especially in northern Aleppo, in Afrin, and in the region south of Azaz”<sup>266</sup>

#### 16.5.21 On 19 December 2024, Synergy Hevesti stated:

‘Areas in Afrin and al-Shahba in Northern Aleppo have been experiencing a new wave of gross violations committed against the Kurdish civilians since ... November, 2024, by factions of the [SNA] ...

‘Synergy Association has documented the arrest of 128 persons, including 20 women ... most of whom are either returnees to ... Afrin or individuals trapped in the al-Shahba areas in Northern Aleppo, in addition to cases of torture and sexual assaults. While 52 of the detained have been released after enduring physical and psychological torture, the fate of the remaining 76 remains unaccounted for ...

‘More than 50% of the arrests occurred in the villages of al-Shahba Region, Northern Aleppo ... under the pretext of dealing with the SDF. Some were released ... upon paying a ransom ...

‘Synergy has also verified the killing of four women in the villages of the al-Shahba Region in Northern Aleppo, who were raped before being murdered ... an elderly Kurdish man died after being arrested by these factions ... His family was informed of his death during interrogation.

‘Under the general amnesty decision [issued by the Syrian Interim Government], dozens of detainees were released from the SNA-run prisons ... many Kurdish detainees were excluded from the amnesty, and arbitrary detention continue[s] to be practices against them...’<sup>267</sup>

#### 16.5.22 On 21 January 2025, The New Arab reported that ‘When Syrian opposition forces led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group captured ... Aleppo, in late November [2024], the SNA launched a concurrent offensive targeting Kurds in that province that displaced tens of thousands of civilians.’<sup>268</sup>

#### 16.5.23 The same source quoted Aron Lund, a Middle East analyst at the Swedish Defense Research Agency: “HTS’s capacity to govern and control events is still uncertain, and the SNA groups are famously chaotic and unmanageable”<sup>269</sup>

#### 16.5.24 In a 22 January 2025 report covering December 2024 to January 2025, SJAC stated:

‘...various SNA factions and the military police continued to arrest civilians in Afrin and the surrounding area in December 2024 and early January 2025 ...

‘In January [2025] ... members of SNA factions arrested at least 10 Kurdish individuals in Afrin and the surrounding area. After arresting a group of Kurdish women in January, members of the Hamzat and Suleiman Shah factions released three of them after their families paid the factions ransom ... the amounts requested for the release have been increasing significantly

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<sup>266</sup> Middle East Eye, [The Syrian National Army: Rebels, thugs or Turkish proxies?](#), 7 December 2024

<sup>267</sup> Synergy Hevesti, [Northern Syria: Escalation of Violations...](#), 19 December 2024

<sup>268</sup> The New Arab, [Why fighting is raging in north Syria...](#), 21 January 2025

<sup>269</sup> The New Arab, [Why fighting is raging in north Syria...](#), 21 January 2025

since early 2024, and now often total more than \$1,000 USD [approx. £754<sup>270</sup>] per person.<sup>271</sup>

16.5.25 On 8 February 2025, Rudaw reported that 87 people had been kidnapped in Afrin thusfar during 2025, citing the NGO Violations Documentation Center<sup>272</sup>.

16.5.26 On 12 February 2025, Syria Direct reported: 'This month, when the Syrian transitional government's General Security Department entered Afrin, Kurdish residents welcomed what seemed to be a change ... However, it appears "the General Security spectacle that took place in Afrin was just to convince people that it has come under the new administration," one local notable told Syria Direct. "The reality is the opposite—the factions continue to abuse civilians." ...'<sup>273</sup>

16.5.27 On 24 February 2025, in a round-up of Kurdish weekly media highlights from 17 February 2025 to 23 February 2025, BBC Monitoring reported that 'Kurdish media ... reported attacks and abuses against the Kurds in Afrin, and in the cities of Aleppo and Damascus, which they said had taken place despite promises that Sharaa had made to end abuses against Kurds ...'<sup>274</sup> It provided examples from media sources, including 'kidnapping of civilians for ransom, the beating of civilians, the takeover of residences and farms and the cutting down of trees' by SNA factions<sup>275</sup>. It also noted that members of the Suleyman Shah Brigade reportedly raided a Kurdish-majority suburb of Damascus (Zorava), 'and had randomly fired at residents, wounding several of them ... the gunmen had done so while making death threats and chanting anti-Kurdish slogans'.<sup>276</sup>

16.5.28 On 17 March 2025, in a round-up of Kurdish weekly media highlights from 10 March 2025 to 16 March 2025, BBC Monitoring reported that 'Xeber24 [a Kurdish news agency<sup>277</sup>] and al-Yaum [an independent news agency focusing on Syria and the Middle East<sup>278</sup>] said that Turkey-backed factions ... continued to perpetrate abuses against Kurdish civilians in Afrin this week.'<sup>279</sup>

16.5.29 On 11 April 2025, Syrians for Truth and Justice noted:

'The radical shift in the political landscape in Syria following the "fall of the Assad regime" on 8 December 2024 ... has yet to bring a noticeable change in the human rights situation in Afrin, particularly with regard to arbitrary detention and prisons.

'... prisons and detention centers in Afrin have not been opened. Several reports indicate that these centers hold a large number of Kurds arrested by various SNA factions on pretextual charges, such as ... affiliation with the [PKK, SDF, AANES] ...

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<sup>270</sup> Xe.com, [1,000 USD to GBP](#), 17 April 2025

<sup>271</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria: December 2024 - January 2025](#), 22 January 2025

<sup>272</sup> Rudaw, [87 people 'kidnapped' in Afrin since start of 2025](#), 8 February 2025

<sup>273</sup> Syria Direct, [Waning hopes: Will Damascus help Afrin's Kurds...](#), 12 February 2025

<sup>274</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syria: Kurdish weekly media highlights 17-23 Feb 25](#), 24 February 2025

<sup>275</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syria: Kurdish weekly media highlights 17-23 Feb 25](#), 24 February 2025

<sup>276</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syria: Kurdish weekly media highlights 17-23 Feb 25](#), 24 February 2025

<sup>277</sup> Xeber24, [Home](#), no date

<sup>278</sup> Al Yaum, [Homepage](#), no date

<sup>279</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syria: Kurdish weekly media highlights 10-16 Mar 25](#), 17 March 2025

‘... the factions have widely used arbitrary detention and torture as tools to extract ransoms or to pressure residents to leave Afrin ...

‘Despite announcing the dissolution and integration of SNA’s factions into the new Syrian Ministry of Defense ... the SNA and Military Police factions continue to operate in their designated locations in Afrin ...

‘The Suleiman Shah Brigade/al-Amshat led by Mohammad al-Jasim (Abu Amsha), remains active in the Shaykh al-Hadid district, while also expanding its activities to Manbij in northeastern Aleppo and the northern Hama countryside. On 3 February 2025, the Ministry of Defense in the Syrian Transitional Government had appointed Mohammad al-Jasim as commander of Hama Division ...

‘STJ field researcher documented 10 cases of arrest in various areas of Afrin following the entry of the General Security convoy into the region [on 6 February 2025] ... Four of the detainees were accused of “raising pro-SDF slogans while welcoming the General Security delegation.”

‘STJ field researcher also documented 31 arrests in various parts of Afrin during January 2025.’<sup>280</sup>

16.5.30 For further information on violations committed by the SNA since the fall of the Assad regime, see Rojava Information Center, [After Assad - Turkey and SNA Crimes Against Civilians in NES](#), 29 March 2025.

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## 16.6 Treatment by HTS

16.6.1 For an overview of HTS, see [Country Policy and Information Note: Alawites and Actual or Perceived Assadists, Syria](#). An 8 December 2024 article by Al Jazeera stated that ‘Before November 27 [2024], Syrian opposition forces were mostly confined to their stronghold in the northwestern governorate of Idlib ...’<sup>281</sup> The sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#), [Location of Kurds in Syria](#)) did not highlight Idlib as an area with a large Kurdish population. For Country of Origin information on HTS’ treatment of people under its control in general prior to the fall of the Assad regime, see [Country Policy and Information Note: Alawites and Actual or Perceived Assadists, Syria](#).

16.6.2 In 2020 duvaR, a Turkey-based journalism agency<sup>282</sup>, reported that HTS:

‘... militants reportedly killed 23-year-old [Kurd] Betal Hesen eight months after he was deported [from Turkey to Syria] ... According to Hesen’s uncle ... they have beheaded him before there was even a trial ...

‘This is not the first time the militant group has executed a Kurd. The news website Afrin Post also reported that another Kurd from Afrin, Mohammed Hussein Bakr, was arrested in mid-December 2019 after being detained for over a year. Bakr was also arrested by the HTS after being deported from Turkey ...

<sup>280</sup> Syrians for Truth and Justice, [Syria/Afrin: Promises by Transitional Authorities...](#), 11 April 2025

<sup>281</sup> Al Jazeera, [Taking Syria: The opposition’s battles shown in 11 maps...](#), 8 December 2024

<sup>282</sup> duvaR, [About Us](#), no date

“We have documented cases of people deported by Turkey and some of them were arrested [by the HTS] because they were Kurds,” he [Bassam al-Ahmad, the executive director of Syrians for Truth and Justice<sup>283</sup>] added.<sup>284</sup>

16.6.3 On 21 March 2023, an article in The Independent reported on the killing of 4 men celebrating Kurdish new year in Jinderis, an area held by Turkey-backed opposition fighters:

‘The attack on the Kurdish men rekindled tensions between Turkish-backed armed groups controlling the area and Kurdish residents ... At the request of Kurdish residents, fighters from the armed opposition group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham deployed en masse around Jinderis ...

‘The Syrian National Army ... issued a statement condemning the killing of the Kurdish men in “the strongest possible terms” and promising to bring the perpetrators to justice ...

‘... Kurds ... who remained [in Jinderis after 2018] ... complain that they are often mistreated and subjected to discrimination ...

‘... many Kurdish residents of the area said they see [HTS] as preferable to the Turkish-backed groups.

‘HTS leader Abu Mohammed al-Golani met with a group of the victims’ families late Monday evening and promised revenge.

“The ones who harmed you will be killed, God willing,” Golani told the group<sup>285</sup>

16.6.4 Middle East Eye reported on 3 December 2024:

‘Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham ... has called on Kurdish fighters to leave the city [Aleppo] but asked Kurdish civilians to stay.

‘It condemned the “barbaric practices” the Islamic State group carried out on Kurds, promising to “guarantee their security in their original areas in the city of Aleppo, which will be stronger with its diversity”.

‘Yet, according to local news reports, HTS has surrounded and besieged Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafieh, with residents facing dwindling food supplies and a lack of services.

““There is no water, electricity or internet,” [Sinam Mohamad, the representative of the SDF’s political wing in the United States<sup>286</sup>] said, confirming that HTS had offered a deal to the Kurdish forces. “They said you can leave if you can, but all the people who have homes there, their businesses, their work, I don’t know if they can move,” she said ...’<sup>287</sup>

16.6.5 On 4 December 2024, The New Arab reported:

“Kurds have had a bad experience with HTS folks from the Jabhat al-Nusra days,” Mohammed A. Salih, Non-Resident Senior Fellow in the Foreign Policy Research Institute and an expert on Kurdish and regional affairs, told The New Arab.

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<sup>283</sup> duvaR, [Hayat Tahrir al-Sham 'executes Syrian Kurdish...'](#), 4 May 2020

<sup>284</sup> duvaR, [Hayat Tahrir al-Sham 'executes Syrian Kurdish...'](#), 4 May 2020

<sup>285</sup> The Independent, [Killing of Kurds in northern Syria sparks protests, tensions](#), 21 March 2023

<sup>286</sup> Middle East Eye, [Syria: Aleppo's Kurds fear displacement as thousands flee...](#), 3 December 2024

<sup>287</sup> Middle East Eye, [Syria: Aleppo's Kurds fear displacement as thousands flee...](#), 3 December 2024

“... many Assad opposition groups ... are chauvinistic toward Kurds ...” ...

“Kurds cannot trust the HTS ... Salih said. “They have good reason for this based on ... their past records both in dealing with them and the non-Sunni, non-Arab and non-Turkmen populations of Syria,” he added. “It’s a very fluid and unpredictable situation.”...

‘It’s unclear if HTS can provide security guarantees for any Kurds who decide to remain in their homes in the city ...

‘Kyle Orton, an independent Middle East analyst, described the present situation for Kurds in northern Syria as “precarious” but believes they have a better chance of surviving under HTS rule than other Syrian minorities.

“In theory, HTS’s Islamist worldview is actually less of a menace to Kurds per se, those that do not have ties to the YPG, since Kurds are Muslims,” Orton told TNA [The New Arab].<sup>288</sup>

- 16.6.6 On 5 December 2024, France24 reported that ‘HTS appears to be trying to avoid direct clashes with Kurdish forces.’<sup>289</sup>
- 16.6.7 In a 7 December 2024 article, The Middle East Eye reported that “During the most recent offensive, HTS arrested several fighters from SNA groups north of Aleppo in the Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhood, accusing them of looting and harming Kurdish civilians,” said [Broderick McDonald, an expert on political violence in Syria]<sup>290</sup>[<sup>291</sup>
- 16.6.8 On 15 January 2025, Hawar News Agency, a news agency founded by Kurdish journalists<sup>292</sup>, reported:

‘According to information received from sources in Damascus, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham members surrounded the predominantly Kurdish Zorafa neighborhood today and raided many homes there.

‘The sources reported that the raids were preceded by gunfire, and the members raided the homes and insulted their residents. The members withdrew from the neighborhood after completing the raids, but the situation remains tense.’<sup>293</sup>
- 16.6.9 On 18 February 2025, BBC Monitoring reported:

‘Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa announced the formation of a preparatory committee for a long-awaited national dialogue conference on the country's future on 11 February ...

‘The absence of an ethnic Kurdish representative ... sparked an angry response from the Kurdish-led authorities, who continue to control large parts of the north-east.

‘A senior Kurdish official warned they would not recognise the conference's decisions unless the Kurds were fairly represented.

‘The committee said the ... Kurdish-led authority and its military wing had not been invited because they had not surrendered their weapons to the interim

<sup>288</sup> The New Arab, [After Aleppo, what will happen to the Kurds of northwest Syria?](#), 4 December 2024

<sup>289</sup> France24, [Kurds' dream of self-rule under threat...](#), 5 December 2024

<sup>290</sup> Middle East Eye, [The Syrian National Army: Rebels, thugs or Turkish proxies?](#), 7 December 2024

<sup>291</sup> Middle East Eye, [The Syrian National Army: Rebels, thugs or Turkish proxies?](#), 7 December 2024

<sup>292</sup> Hawar News Agency, [Homepage](#), no date

<sup>293</sup> Hawar News Agency, [HTS members raid Kurdish homes in Damascus](#), 15 January 2025

central authorities.<sup>294</sup>

16.6.10 On 25 February 2025, Associated Press reported:

‘Syria’s new rulers held a long-awaited national dialogue conference ...

‘The gathering was meant to come up with nonbinding recommendations on the country’s interim rules before drafting a new constitution and forming a new government ...

‘SDF figures weren’t invited to the conference, although the organizers said the Kurdish community would be represented.

‘A group of mostly Kurdish political parties said in a statement ... that the conference did “not reflect the reality of the Syrian components”<sup>295</sup>

16.6.11 On 9 March 2025, Rudaw reported:

‘Syria’s interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa visited Afrin in mid-February, and met with locals, the majority of whom were Kurds. He pledged to remove armed groups and put an end to the violations [against Afrin’s Kurdish population since 2018], a representative from ENKS [the Kurdish National Council] who attended the meeting told Rudaw.

‘[Ahmed Hassan, head of the local council for the Kurdish National Council<sup>296</sup>] confirmed that the general security forces under the Syrian government in Damascus are present in the center of Afrin, while armed factions still control several other districts.

“The general security forces have informed residents of these districts that within 15-20 days, they will extend their control there as well, and no armed factions will remain. Residents should be able to return safely,” he said.

‘He added that the situation in Afrin “has significantly improved compared to previous years” and that the return of property to its original owners “is being resolved within a matter of days.”

“Armed factions are no longer interfering, and their presence is now limited to only a few areas,” he said.

‘Kurds returning to Afrin are no longer subjected to imprisonment or forced to pay levies.<sup>297</sup>

16.6.12 BBC Monitoring reported that ‘Groups across the political and social spectrum in north-east Syria rejected the interim constitutional declaration ratified by Sharraa on 13 March [2025].

‘The document provides the basis for a five-year transition period ...

‘... Syria would still be called the Syrian Arab Republic, something that Kurds have widely criticised as “exclusionist and a denial of Kurdish identity”<sup>298</sup>

16.6.13 On 30 March 2025, BBC Monitoring reported: ‘Syria’s interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa announced on 29 March the formation of a new

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<sup>294</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Explainer: Who is on Syria’s national dialogue committee?](#), 18 February 2025

<sup>295</sup> Associated Press, [Syria’s national dialogue conference held...](#), 25 February 2025

<sup>296</sup> Rudaw, [Hundreds of Kurdish families return to Afrin as settlers leave](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>297</sup> Rudaw, [Hundreds of Kurdish families return to Afrin as settlers leave](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>298</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syria: Kurdish weekly media highlights 10-16 Mar 25](#), 17 March 2025

transitional government ... the new cabinet reportedly includes ... one member of the country's Kurdish community'<sup>299</sup>

16.6.14 On 2 April 2025, in a round-up of Kurdish weekly media highlights from 24 March 2025 to 30 March 2025, BBC Monitoring reported that the AANES and SDC 'have rejected what they describe as the "exclusion" and "lack of participation and diversity" in the new transitional government named in Damascus on 29 March...'<sup>300</sup>

16.6.15 For information on actions taken by HTS to respond to the situation of armed factions in Kurdish areas of Syria, see [Integration of the SDF into Syrian state apparatus](#), [Integration of the SNA into Syrian state forces](#)

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## 17. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

17.1.1 Middle East Eye reported on 3 December 2024:

'The dramatic rebel takeover of Aleppo and its countryside has sent tens of thousands of Syrian Kurds fleeing east ...

'Many of the Kurds taken to the east on Monday [28 November 2024] night were originally displaced in 2018 from Afrin, 30km to the west, when that town was seized by the SNA, and had been living in informal camps in Tel Rifaat ever since ...

'[Sinam Mohamad, the representative of the SDF's political wing in the United States<sup>301</sup>] told Middle East Eye that the situation was very dangerous for the people displaced from Afrin living in Tel Rifaat, who she said had been attacked by the SNA ...

'On Monday [28 November 2024], 120,000 Kurds ... were moved in convoy to Tabqa and placed in temporary shelters.

"Massive displacement has not occurred in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafieh, at least for now," Sophie Stone, a researcher from Syria-based Rojava Information Centre (RIC), told MEE.<sup>302</sup>

17.1.2 On 11 December 2024, referring to the period immediately after the fall of Assad, HRW stated:

'Seeking safety from SNA factions seizing territory throughout Aleppo governorate, more than 100,000 people fled to areas governed by the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). The situation is exacerbating an acute and longstanding crisis, with overcrowded camps and severely damaged infrastructure and a lack of water, power, healthcare, food, and weather-appropriate shelter.

"... intense fighting and fear of retaliation and violence by armed groups is displacing thousands of civilians to areas unprepared for such an influx," said Adam Coogle, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch ...

'... Hostilities are ongoing in Deir Ezzor, Manbij (Aleppo governorate), and Kobane, driving displacement of mostly Kurds ...

<sup>299</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Briefing: Syrian media highlight appointment...](#), 30 March 2025

<sup>300</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syria: Kurdish weekly media highlights 24–30 Mar 25](#), 2 April 2025

<sup>301</sup> Middle East Eye, [Syria: Aleppo's Kurds fear displacement as thousands flee...](#), 3 December 2024

<sup>302</sup> Middle East Eye, [Syria: Aleppo's Kurds fear displacement as thousands flee...](#), 3 December 2024

‘... overwhelming numbers of people were arriving in northeastern Syria, including in Tabqa, prompting the opening of a new reception site on December 4 [2024] and the use of an additional 35 buildings to host internally displaced people. In Raqqa, the situation remained critical even though the authorities opened more than 70 buildings as temporary collective shelters. In Tabqa and Raqqa the reception sites have reached full capacity. The authorities also established reception sites in Kobane, al-Hasakah, and Qamishli.

‘Local authorities are using 186 schools in Raqqa, Tabqa, al-Hasakah, and Qamishli as shelters, disrupting the education of nearly 185,000 students, according to the United Nations. Health care services and water and sanitation services are also severely affected ...

‘Tens of thousands of internally displaced people living in overstretched camps and shelters in northeast Syria have lacked sustained or adequate aid over the years, while an acute water crisis affecting al-Hasakah region put further strain on local authorities and nongovernmental groups supporting the displaced communities.

‘Earlier hostilities in the region, between October 23 and 26 [2024], severely damaged critical infrastructure, [which] affected access to water, electricity, heating, health care, and food.’<sup>303</sup>

17.1.3 The same source stated that of 5 interviewees, 3 ‘said they were insulted at checkpoints. They said they knew of people who had been assaulted’. One Yazidi interviewee stated that she ‘witnessed two pregnant women give birth without any medical care’ in Tabqa and that the IDPs ‘experienced verbal abuse and harassment by SNA fighters at checkpoints “simply because we were Kurdish.”’<sup>304</sup>

17.1.4 On 19 December 2024, Synergy Hevesti stated that:

‘The hostilities resulting from the SNA attacks on Northern and Northeastern Syria since November 30 [2024] have forcibly displaced more than 120,000 people, the majority of whom are Kurdish people from Afrin.

‘Synergy Association ... received reports of multiple violations faced by displaced people at the hands of the SNA’s factions en route from Tall Rifaat and al-Shahba Region in Northern Aleppo towards Syria’s Northeast ... violations include targeting and humiliating convoys of the IDPs, arbitrary arrests and financial extortion.

‘According to local authorities, more than 90,000 people displaced to Northeast Syria where they were accommodated temporarily in schools and stadiums in ... Tabqa and Raqqa. Later, thousands of them were distributed between Kobani and al-Jazira regions. However, the humanitarian conditions in the accommodation centers are... disastrous ...’<sup>305</sup>

17.1.5 The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported on 2 January 2025 that ‘As of 27 December [2024], 664,000 people remain newly displaced inside Syria since the beginning of December [2024], 75% of whom are women and children. Around 486,000 internally displaced people

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<sup>303</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Northeast Syria: Displacement Worsens Aid Crisis](#), 11 December 2024

<sup>304</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Northeast Syria: Displacement Worsens Aid Crisis](#), 11 December 2024

<sup>305</sup> Synergy Hevesti, [Northern Syria: Escalation of Violations...](#), 19 December 2024

have now returned to their areas of origin.<sup>306</sup>

17.1.6 On 3 January 2025, Syria Direct reported on the experiences of IDP returnees to Afrin:

‘70,000 people... chose to return to the Afrin area, according to figures Syria Direct obtained from the local council in Afrin city ...

‘Local councils “sent staff to facilitate returns, in coordination with civil society organizations that provided emergency services, such as first aid and food, to returnees,” [Azad Othman, a member of the Afrin city local council<sup>307</sup>] added. Activists from Afrin, meanwhile, “sent cars to bring displaced people who did not have ... transportation to their villages.” ...’<sup>308</sup>

17.1.7 However, the same source shared an example of an IDP who claimed that she ‘did not face any harassment by SNA forces while returning to Afrin’, but that her husband ‘was “arrested while crossing an [SNA] checkpoint” on December 17 [2024] ... [her] husband was still detained at the time of publication, though “many employees of ... AANES ... institutions and the Asayish returned and were not arrested”’<sup>309</sup>.

17.1.8 The same article stated that:

‘Othman ... confirmed that SNA-affiliated ... security agencies “arrested dozens of young people returning to Afrin who performed self-defense duty for the AANES, as well as others accused of ... being affiliated with the terrorist PKK forces ...” Some of those arrested “were released, while others are being detained until they are transferred to the judiciary and their situation is settled.” ...

‘Abdullah Halawa, a military commander with an SNA special forces division, denied that anyone was detained while returning, with the exception of “those involved with the party [PKK].” For others, “civilians and workers in civilian institutions, we give assurances that we will not touch them,” ...

‘Contrary to Halawa’s account, Ezzedin Saleh, Synergy’s executive director, told Syria Direct all detentions his organization documented involved “civilians, some of whom previously worked in AANES civil institutions before the [Turkish] occupation of Afrin.”

‘... Othman ... did not rule out the possibility that “some returnees were financially extorted by faction middlemen and lawyers.”

‘...There is a proposal to prepare camps to accommodate Kurdish returnees until the Arab displaced can return to their homes, Othman added.

‘... Halawa vowed that no returnees would be harmed, with the exception of “those whose hands are stained with Syrians’ blood,” ... “who will be brought to trial.”’<sup>310</sup>

17.1.9 In a 22 January 2025 report covering December 2024 to January 2025, SJAC stated that it:

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<sup>306</sup> UNHCR, Regional Flash Update #8 - Syria Situation Crisis, 2 January 2025

<sup>307</sup> Syria Direct, [Tens of thousands return to Afrin...](#), 3 January 2025

<sup>308</sup> Syria Direct, [Tens of thousands return to Afrin...](#), 3 January 2025

<sup>309</sup> Syria Direct, [Tens of thousands return to Afrin...](#), 3 January 2025

<sup>310</sup> Syria Direct, [Tens of thousands return to Afrin...](#), 3 January 2025

‘… received reports that a gunman killed a Kurdish man soon after he returned to his home in Afrin, following a period of displacement.

‘Housing, land, and property violations continue to persist in and around Afrin, as the original Kurdish residents --many of whom have lived in displacement for years -- seek to return and take back their homes. Even though many of the displaced people who had been squatting in these homes have now left after the fall of the Assad government, multiple reports claimed that members of National Army factions are forcing original residents of Afrin to pay steep fees (up to \$10,000 USD [approx. £7,538<sup>311</sup>]) to regain access to their homes.’<sup>312</sup>

#### 17.1.10 On 29 January 2025, The New Arab reported:

‘Returnees [to Afrin] aren't expected to face any obstacles, except for individuals who have connections to the [AANES] …

‘Some returnees have been arrested, however, according to local council man Azad Osman, who said that young people returning have been detained by armed groups on charges of links to the Kurdish-led administration in the area.

‘Osman told Rudaw that some “armed groups have occupied Kurdish houses,” and have demanded “money as ransom for returning the properties”.

“They continue to take money from the Kurds who are returning,” he said. “Some groups either take no money or very little, but the al-Amshat group requires a lot of money and they now charge \$1,000 [approx. £754<sup>313</sup>] to \$1,500 [approx. £1,130<sup>314</sup>] for any family that wants to return to the area they control.”<sup>315</sup>

#### 17.1.11 On 12 February 2025, Syria Direct reported:

‘… displaced Afrin residents received official assurances from the new Syrian administration … encouraging them to return. Tens of thousands did, but found it difficult to reclaim their homes—some seized by SNA commanders or fighters and others occupied by Syrians displaced from other parts of the country …

‘Despite promises made to displaced Afrin residents to encourage their return, 15 out of the 250 families who recently returned to Rajo had not managed to recover their homes as of late January [2025], Khalil Bakr, the head of the subdistrict’s local council, told Syria Direct. Those occupying these homes are asking for payments of “between \$200 [approx. £150<sup>316</sup>] and \$1,000 [approx. £754<sup>317</sup>] to vacate,” he said …

‘Local councils in different parts of Afrin are trying to help returnees recover their properties, including by communicating with SNA commanders. Faction

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<sup>311</sup> Xe.com, [10,000 USD to GBP](#), 17 April 2025

<sup>312</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria: December 2024 - January 2025](#), 22 January 2025

<sup>313</sup> Xe.com, [1,000 USD to GBP](#), 17 April 2025

<sup>314</sup> Xe.com, [1,500 USD to GBP](#), 17 April 2025

<sup>315</sup> The New Arab, [Syria: 70,000 Kurds return to Afrin since fall of Assad](#), 29 January 2025

<sup>316</sup> Xe.com, [200 USD to GBP](#), 17 April 2025

<sup>317</sup> Xe.com, [1,000 USD to GBP](#), 17 April 2025

members have “promised to empty the houses, but it is still just promises—we don’t know the extent to which they can be implemented,” Bakr said.

‘In Afrin’s Sheran (Shera) subdistrict, around 1,000 families have returned, but more than 60 percent have not been able to reclaim their homes ... some are held by SNA factions ... “They ask for sums between \$500 [approx. £377<sup>318</sup>] and \$2,500 [approx. £1,886<sup>319</sup>] to hand them over to their owners,” Muhammad Othman Jalousi, the head of the relief office at the Sheran Local Council, told Syria Direct ...

‘... “every injured party can turn to the judiciary to remove the unlawful occupant from the property...” Ghazwan Koronfol, a Turkey-based Syrian lawyer and head of the Free Syrian Lawyers Association.

‘However, there is no independent judiciary in Afrin that “dares to do that,” ...

“Many cases have reached the courts, and the judge summons the residents and warns them to vacate within an agreed-upon period,” [Othman] said. . However, “judicial procedures are long, and the rulings are not mandatory if the displaced person [occupying a returnee’s home] appeals to the military faction” responsible for the area.

‘... Homeowners ... lack “confidence that the judiciary will be just when one of the parties in the case is a Kurd.” [Othman added]...’<sup>320</sup>

#### 17.1.12 On 9 March 2025, Rudaw reported:

‘[Ahmed Hassan, head of the local council for the Kurdish National Council<sup>321</sup>] confirmed that the general security forces under the Syrian government in Damascus are present in the center of Afrin, while armed factions still control several other districts.

“The general security forces have informed residents of these districts that within 15-20 days, they will extend their control there as well, and no armed factions will remain. Residents should be able to return safely,” he said ...

‘Kurds returning to Afrin are no longer subjected to imprisonment or forced to pay levies.’<sup>322</sup>

#### 17.1.13 On 11 March 2025, Middle East Eye reported that the deal between the SDF and interim government “appears to address ... major issues for the Kurds ... ensuring the return of those displaced by pro-Turkey groups from areas like Afrin,” he [Mohammed A Salih, a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute<sup>323</sup>] said ...

‘The deal ... stipulates the return and protection of displaced Syrians ...’<sup>324</sup>

#### 17.1.14 On 13 March 2025, Rudaw reported:

‘A Kurdish politician on Thursday [13 March 2025] said that the number of Kurds returning to Afrin in northwest Syria has significantly increased after the agreement between the new Syrian administration and the ... SDF...’

<sup>318</sup> Xe.com, [500 USD to GBP](#), 17 April 2025

<sup>319</sup> Xe.com, [2,500 USD to GBP](#), 17 April 2025

<sup>320</sup> Syria Direct, [Waning hopes: Will Damascus help Afrin’s Kurds...](#), 12 February 2025

<sup>321</sup> Rudaw, [Hundreds of Kurdish families return to Afrin as settlers leave](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>322</sup> Rudaw, [Hundreds of Kurdish families return to Afrin as settlers leave](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>323</sup> Middle East Eye, [Landmark SDF deal hailed as positive step for Syria and Kurds](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>324</sup> Middle East Eye, [Landmark SDF deal hailed as positive step for Syria and Kurds](#), 11 March 2025

“Exact statistics are not available, but after the March 10 [2025] agreement, Kurdish returns have significantly increased, to the point where people are returning to their areas minute by minute,” [Ahmed Hassan head of the local council for the Kurdish National Council (ENKS/KNC), coalition of Kurdish political parties considered the main opposition in northeast Syria<sup>325</sup>] ...<sup>326</sup>

17.1.15 On 17 March 2025, in a round-up of Kurdish weekly media highlights from 10 March 2025 to 16 March 2025, BBC Monitoring reported on the integration deal between the interim authorities and the SDF:

‘The Kurdish Hawar News Agency (ANHA) published the eight-point deal which stated that:

‘... The return of all internally displaced Syrians (IDPs) must be guaranteed and they must be protected by the state ...

‘... the interim government had also promised to take measures to guarantee the safe return of civilians who had been displaced from the previously AANES-run Kurdish-majority canton of Afrin ... and the town of Serekaniye (Ras al-Ayn) in Hasaka province...’<sup>327</sup>

17.1.16 The March 2025 EUAA COI report on Syria stated that: ‘In early 2025, UNOCHA [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs] noted additional waves of conflict-related displacements from the Manbij area, with up to 15 000 displacements in mid-January 2025, followed by more than 25 000 later the same month.’<sup>328</sup>

17.1.17 On 25 March 2025, Rudaw reported:

‘No official Syrian government decision has been made to support the return of Afrin’s residents. Some families come back on their own, while others return through aid from the Kurdish National Council (ENKS/KNC) ... Nearly 300,000 Kurds have been displaced from Afrin since 2018, and while the number of returnees has not yet been officially documented, the ENKS says that 15,000 have come back ... Residents of Afrin this year were also able to freely celebrate Newroz, the Kurdish New Year, for the first time since the enclave was invaded by militia groups seven years ago.’<sup>329</sup>

17.1.18 A March 2025 report by Rojava Information Center (RIC), an independent, volunteer-staffed organisation based in North East Syria<sup>330</sup>, stated that:

‘the SDF negotiated an agreement in which the civilian population could leave the area [of Shehba/Shahba] safely if they wished ... When the convoy was finally able to proceed, on December 2<sup>nd</sup> [2024], around 80,000 people left Shehba and headed towards the closest SDF-held territory – Tabqa ... A further 7,500 attempted to return to their native Afrin instead.

‘...Those who left in the main convoy from Shehba to Tabqa on December 2nd were subject to a slew of rights violations from the SNA ... experiencing arbitrary arrests, murder, looting, verbal and physical abuse, threats and hate speech, and assaults on the convoy.

<sup>325</sup> Rudaw, [More Kurds return to Afrin after Damascus-SDF deal](#), 13 March 2025

<sup>326</sup> Rudaw, [More Kurds return to Afrin after Damascus-SDF deal](#), 13 March 2025

<sup>327</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syria: Kurdish weekly media highlights 10-16 Mar 25](#), 17 March 2025

<sup>328</sup> EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 89), 25 March 2025

<sup>329</sup> Rudaw, [Afrin returnees decry ruined livelihoods after years of displacement](#), 25 March 2025

<sup>330</sup> Rojava Information Center, Who we are, no date

‘...Every IDP RIC interviewed reported experiencing relentless verbal abuse from SNA militiamen as they left in the convoy, such as being called “pigs”, “the dirt of mankind”, or “unbelievers” as well as insults directed towards the Kurdish nationality. Furthermore, many IDPs said they were threatened ...

‘...At the time of writing, the IDPs from Shehba are spread as follows: 5,300 families in the Jazira canton, 2,300 in Tabqa canton, 1,200 in Raqqa canton, 3,500 in Aleppo city (both inside and outside the DAANES neighbourhoods), 600 in Kobane and 1,500 in Turkish-occupied Afrin.’<sup>331</sup>

17.1.19 See also [Treatment by the SNA](#)

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## 18. Stateless Kurds in Syria

18.1.1 In August 2022, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) published a paper on stateless Syrian refugees. This paper stated that:

‘On October 5, 1962, the Government of Syria conducted a one-day census in al-Hasakeh governorate, a region predominantly inhabited by ethnic Kurds, in response to purported immigration from Turkey and Iraq. Families were required to present evidence of residency in Syria back to 1945. Those who presented documents but could not meet the residency requirement were registered as ajanib (‘foreigners’ in Arabic). Those who could not present any documents or did not participate in the census were not registered and became known as maktoumeen (‘concealed’ in Arabic), whose residence in Syria became illegal. An estimated 120,000 Syrian Kurds, or 20% of the Kurdish population, were stripped of citizenship during this exercise, a number that grew to an estimated 300,000 by 2010, as descendants of ajanib and maktoumeen inherited this status.

‘Syrian Kurds registered as ajanib were eligible to receive government identification stating that they were foreigners in Syria ... However, maktoumeen Kurds were not eligible to receive state-issued documents, though they could obtain an informal document with prior permission from the local Syrian police known as a shahadat at-taarif from a mukhtar, or community leader that could be used to register a child for school, create an informal marriage certificate, and obtain other basic services.

‘In April 2011, the Government of Syria passed Decree 49 (2011), granting ajanib Syrian citizenship ... by 2015, 105,000 ajanib had successfully obtained citizenship through this order. The 2011 decree did not mention to maktoumeen Syrian Kurds.

‘Between early 2011 and late 2013, various sources estimate that the number of ajanib and maktoumeen Syrian Kurds inside Syria dropped from 300,000 to 160,000, likely as a combined result the decision to grant ajanib citizenship and forced displacement outside of Syria due to the conflict ... Research from 2016 suggests that very few ajanib and maktoumeen remain inside Syria, with the majority of ajanib having nationalized under the 2011 provisions, and the majority of maktoumeen having fled ...

‘Prior to the Syrian conflict and the advent of the Syrian Self-Administration in northeast Syria (who do not distinguish between citizens and non-

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<sup>331</sup> Rojava Information Center, [...Crimes Against Civilians in NES](#) (pages 8-12, 14), 29 March 2025

citizens), maktoumeen could not access public services and needed security permission to travel between cities in Syria.

‘While some maktoumeen report paying an intermediary to obtain ajanib registration with the intention to convert this into citizenship, there are no formal legal provisions to convert maktoum status to citizen.’<sup>332</sup>

18.1.2 A 20 December 2023 article in New Lines Magazine stated that:

‘The arbitrary nature of the census meant that, in some cases, one man would remain a Syrian citizen, but his brother would be classed as a “foreigner,” or “ajnabi” in Arabic. Someone who is classified as a “foreigner” does not have the right to vote, own property or land, or start or own a business. They cannot obtain a Syrian passport, legally marry or work for the government. They have limited or irregular access to education, healthcare and employment. They do not have the right to travel inside or outside the country ...’

‘Another category of stateless Syrian-born Kurds is “unregistered,” or “maktoum” in Arabic. People are classified as “unregistered” if they are the offspring of a “foreigner” father and citizen mother. (In the reverse situation, if the father is a citizen and the mother a foreigner, the children are automatically citizens, but Syrian law does not yet grant women the right to pass on their citizenship.) “Unregistered” people are in an even more tenuous position than those categorized as “foreigners.” The existence of these people is not recorded at all in the official civil status records. According to the records, they do not exist.’<sup>333</sup>

18.1.3 EUAA Country Guidance on Syria, last updated in February 2023, stated:

‘... nearly 20 000 ajnabis remained stateless in 2021 ... The only apparent way for maktoumeen to obtain citizenship is to register as ajnabi and then apply for naturalisation under Decree 49/2011. Due to their lack of citizenship and official identity documents, stateless persons faced numerous problems. In GoS [Government of Syria]-controlled areas, stateless Kurds were for example denied the right to work, form and join trade unions, and the right to social security, health care and education. The Kurdish-led AANES reportedly did not differentiate between stateless Kurds and those holding citizenship, and stateless individuals had equal access to services, institutions, and education.’<sup>334</sup>

18.1.4 The USSD 2023 report stated:

‘Kurds who lost their citizenship, and their descendants, lacked identity cards and could not access government services, including health care and education. They also faced social and economic discrimination. Stateless Kurds did not have the right to inherit or bequeath assets, and their lack of citizenship or identity documents restricted their travel to and from the country ...’

‘... Because women could not confer nationality on their children, an unknown number of children whose fathers were missing or deceased due to the continuing conflict were at risk of statelessness. Mothers also could not pass citizenship to children born outside the country, including in neighboring

<sup>332</sup> NRC, [...statelessness among Syrian refugees...](#) (pages 5-6), 28 August 2022

<sup>333</sup> New Lines Magazine, [Revisiting the Erasure of Kurdish Identity in Syria](#), 20 December 2023

<sup>334</sup> EUAA, [Country Guidance: Syria](#) (Kurds), April 2024

countries hosting refugee camps. Children who left the country during the conflict also experienced difficulties obtaining identification necessary to prove citizenship and obtain services...

‘... The regime did not register the births of Kurdish noncitizen residents, including stateless Kurds. Failure to register resulted in deprivation of services, such as diplomas for high school-level studies, access to universities, access to formal employment, and civil documentation and protection ...

‘... noncitizens, including stateless Kurds, could generally send their children to school and universities, stateless Kurds were ineligible to receive a degree...’<sup>335</sup>

- 18.1.5 The BTI 2024 stated ‘... an estimated 200,000 to 500,000 Syrian Kurds – the country’s largest minority – remain stateless as a result of a controversial 1962 census and therefore lack citizen rights.’<sup>336</sup>
- 18.1.6 Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated in March 2025, stated that, in reference to the 1962 census:

‘Individuals stripped of Syrian citizenship ... were deemed “foreigners” by the government and have since carried special, red identity cards and were afforded limited rights in the country. Under the Assad regime, they were not eligible to vote or to be issued passports or other travel documents. They also faced restrictions on property ownership, career eligibility, and use of public services. Marriages between Syrian citizens and noncitizens were not recognized by the government. A third group of Syrian Kurds, officially called unregistered (maktūmūn), were those who were never given identity cards or listed on official registers. The group also included children with a noncitizen father and a citizen mother, those with one noncitizen parent and one unregistered parent, and those with two unregistered parents. In March 2025 the post-Assad government signed an agreement with the ... SDF ... that sought to integrate the Kurdish-led militia into the new government and promised to ... recognize Syrian Kurds as part of the state with the rights of citizenship.’<sup>337</sup>

- 18.1.7 On 10 March 2025, Al Jazeera reported that: ‘Syria says that it has reached an agreement with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces to integrate the latter with state institutions ... It... includes an affirmation that the Kurdish people are integral to Syria and have a right to citizenship and guaranteed constitutional rights ...’<sup>338</sup>
- 18.1.8 On 11 March 2025, Middle East Eye reported that the deal between the SDF and interim government: ‘... led to spontaneous celebrations ... Many see the deal as a pathway to more equality for Syria’s long-marginalised Kurds as it includes recognising the Kurdish component as an integral part of the state with full citizenship and constitutional rights.’<sup>339</sup>
- 18.1.9 On 17 March 2025, in a round-up of Kurdish weekly media highlights from 10 March 2025 to 16 March 2025, BBC Monitoring reported on the integration

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<sup>335</sup> USSD, [Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria](#) (sections 2, 6), 2024

<sup>336</sup> BTI, [Syria Country Report](#) (Welfare Regime), 2024

<sup>337</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, [Kurd](#), updated 17 March 2025

<sup>338</sup> Al Jazeera, [Syria merges Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces into state...](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>339</sup> Middle East Eye, [Landmark SDF deal hailed as positive step for Syria and Kurds](#), 11 March 2025

deal between the interim authorities and the SDF, which includes a provision stating that: 'The Kurdish people are an indigenous community in the Syrian state, and the state guarantees their citizenship and all constitutional rights ...<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> BBC Monitoring, [Syria: Kurdish weekly media highlights 10-16 Mar 25](#), 17 March 2025

# Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2024. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources

Commentary may be provided on source(s) and information to help readers understand the meaning and limits of the COI.

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

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# Terms of Reference

The 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) provides a broad outline of the issues relevant to the scope of this note and forms the basis for the [country information](#).

The following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Kurds in Syria
  - Main Kurdish areas in Syria
  - Number of Kurds in Syria
- Control over Kurdish areas in Syria
  - How this is changing since the fall of the Assad regime
- Treatment of Kurds in Syria
  - Prior to the fall of the Assad regime
  - By the main non-state armed actors controlling Kurdish areas, before and after the fall of the Assad regime
  - By the interim authorities
- Attitude of the interim authorities towards Kurds in Syria

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# Version control and feedback

## Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version 2.0
- valid from **19 December 2025**

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### Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

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### Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

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## Changes from last version of this note

- Parts of the Assessment section have been edited for clarity
- No changes have been made to the Country of Origin Information (COI) section

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## Feedback to the Home Office

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

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## Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support them in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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