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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the seventy-second submitted pursuant to paragraph 17 of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), paragraph 10 of resolution 2165 (2014), paragraph 5 of resolution 2191 (2014), paragraph 5 of resolution 2258 (2015), paragraph 5 of resolution 2332 (2016), paragraph 6 of resolution 2393 (2017), paragraph 12 of resolution 2401 (2018), paragraph 6 of resolution 2449 (2018), paragraph 8 of resolution 2504 (2020), and paragraph 3 of resolution 2533 (2020), in the last of which the Council requested the Secretary-General to provide a report at least every 60 days, on the implementation of the resolutions by all parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

2. The information contained herein is based on data available to entities of the United Nations system and obtained from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and other relevant sources. Data from entities of the United Nations system regarding their humanitarian deliveries have been reported for the months of February and March 2021.

II. Major developments

Key points

1. Hostilities in the north-west escalated in late March. On 21 March, artillery shells struck the Atarib Surgical Hospital, which had received United Nations support, killing seven civilians and forcing the hospital's full evacuation and closure. On the same day, aerial attacks near Bab al-Hawa, the last remaining Security Council-authorized crossing point for cross-border assistance, damaged and destroyed humanitarian supplies and infrastructure close to densely populated areas with camps for displaced persons. Following these incidents, mortar and rocket strikes were reported in neighbourhoods of Aleppo city and on military bases of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic.



2. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified at least 177 incidents, in which at least 171 civilians, including 23 women and 32 children, were killed and at least 257 civilians, including 26 women and 78 children, were injured as a result of hostilities across the Syrian Arab Republic.

3. The value of the Syrian pound on the informal market fell to its lowest point on record against the United States dollar in March. It subsequently recovered slightly. Food prices reached a new record high, with a 241 per cent increase recorded year-on-year. Key food security indicators remained at critical levels. Long lines at fuel stations continued to be reported in all governorates.

4. At Hawl camp in the north-east, the security situation continued to deteriorate. A staff member of a humanitarian organization was killed in their tent and 42 murders were recorded since the start of 2021. A security operation in the camp, launched on 28 March, forced the suspension of some humanitarian services.

5. Available information continued to indicate a high degree of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) transmission in the Syrian Arab Republic, far exceeding officially recorded infection rates. The Ministry of Health announced that public hospitals in Damascus, including intensive care units, were at full capacity. The United Nations supported planning and preparation for the roll-out of vaccines received under the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, of which a first delivery is anticipated in April.

6. At the fifth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, humanitarian organizations appealed for \$4.2 billion for the response inside the Syrian Arab Republic and \$5.8 billion for support to neighbouring countries. Pledges of \$4.4 billion were made for 2021 and multi-year pledges of close to \$2 billion were made for 2022 and beyond. Another \$7 billion was announced in loans on concessional terms.

Humanitarian update

3. In the north-west, the Idlib de-escalation area saw an escalation of hostilities, with at least 30 communities affected by artillery shelling and air strikes on 21 and 22 March. On 21 March, the Atarib Surgical Hospital in western Aleppo, which had received United Nations support, was hit by artillery fire, forcing its full evacuation and closure. Seven patients and visitors were killed in the attack, including two children. A total of 5 medical staff were among at least 12 civilians injured, some of them critically. The hospital's orthopaedic and emergency clinics, as well as electricity generators, sustained major damage and the hospital remained closed at the end of the reporting period. On the same day, multiple air-to-surface missiles impacted the road leading to the Bab al-Hawa border crossing in northern Idlib, an area hosting a high density of displaced persons camps and settlements, as well as offices and warehouses of humanitarian organizations. One of the missiles struck a lot where trucks used for transporting humanitarian supplies were parked, leaving 4 trucks destroyed and 60 more damaged. The air strikes started a fire in a nearby warehouse of a non-governmental organization (NGO) where food and other humanitarian supplies were stored, destroying a quarter of its stocks, amounting to aid for some 25,000 people. Several other NGO facilities in the area sustained damage and at least five NGOs suspended some or all of their operations on 22 and 23 March.

4. Following these incidents, mortar and rocket strikes were reported in neighbourhoods of Aleppo city, killing at least 2 civilians and injuring 17, and on military bases of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. During the periods prior to and following this escalation, the overall level of violence remained relatively low, albeit with regular artillery shelling and occasional cross-line raids and skirmishes between parties, mostly south of the M4 highway. Aerial bombardment took place on areas both south and north of the M4 highway. Air strikes in Idlib Governorate were reported.

5. In northern Aleppo, mutual shelling and small arms fire and raids intensified across lines of contact in Bab. In Bab and Jarabulus, aerial and missile attacks against oil refineries and storage facilities intensified, while high levels of improvised explosive device and vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attacks continued to be reported in these areas. Mutual shelling and limited ground-based clashes continued along contact lines in Afrin, I'zaz, Tall Rif'at and Manbij in Aleppo Governorate, around Ayn Isa in Raqqah Governorate, and around Abu Rasin and Tall Tamr in Hasakah Governorate. There was some de-escalation of tensions between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and de facto authorities in the north-east. Following an agreement, a limited number of detainees were released and mutual restrictions on access and humanitarian assistance were lifted in Qamishli and Aleppo city. However, the security posture of both parties remained heightened, with sporadic confrontations and mutual detentions during the period after the agreement was reached. Shortages of potable and agricultural water continued to be reported in Bab city and surrounding areas, affecting some 185,000 people. Based on available information, the pipeline from the Ayn al-Bayda pumping station to the Bab city network is technically capable of delivering water supply from the Khafsah station on the Euphrates. The United Nations continued to advocate for a resumption of water supply to Bab from the Ayn al-Bayda station.

6. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) continued to launch ambush attacks and assassination attempts on government forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces in areas across Dayr al-Zawr, Hasakah and eastern rural Homs Governorates. Counter-ISIL operations by various parties continued. On 5 March, clashes erupted on the main road running through Shahil town close to an NGO-supported hospital. After the clashes, members of the Syrian Democratic Forces assaulted people inside the hospital, including NGO staff members, patients and visitors, several of whom were injured. Hospital equipment and vehicles were damaged and 12 people were temporarily detained. The NGO temporarily suspended some activities as a result. In a subsequent statement, the Syrian Democratic Forces condemned the attack and committed to compensate for the damage caused.

7. Some 61,800 people remained at Hawl camp, of whom 40,000 were children. The situation at the camp continued to deteriorate. On 24 February, a staff member of a humanitarian organization was killed while off duty in their tent. At least 42 residents have been murdered since the beginning of the year. On 28 March, a security operation involving large numbers of military personnel was launched in Hawl, with the stated intention of restoring security in the camp. The exercise forced the suspension of some humanitarian services. Damage to common areas and humanitarian facilities, such as learning centres, schools and distribution sites, was also reported. The security operation concluded on 1 April and reportedly led to the detention of 125 camp residents. The United Nations continued to advocate for the provision of security at the camp in a manner that does not endanger residents or violate their rights and that does not restrict humanitarian access.

8. The United Nations remained without humanitarian access to the 12,000 people living at Rukban. It continued to advocate for immediate humanitarian access and

assistance to reach those remaining at the camp, alongside efforts to support voluntary departures.

9. The situation in the south-west part of the country remained unstable throughout the reporting period. There were further attacks against and assassinations of both government forces and fighters reconciled from former armed opposition groups. Government security forces conducted security operations in a number of towns in the southern part of the country, established new checkpoints and expanded conscription efforts. Further arrests of fighters reconciled from former armed opposition forces were reported.

10. The economic situation continued to deteriorate, affecting civilians in all parts of the country. The Central Bank of Syria issued a new preferential rate for humanitarian partners on 25 March, while on the informal market, the value of the Syrian pound fell to its lowest point on record against the United States dollar in March, recovering slightly to 3,675 Syrian pounds against the United States dollar at the end of March. Price monitoring by the World Food Programme (WFP) indicated an average increase in food prices of 13 per cent between January and February, with the price of a standard reference food basket reaching a new record high of 136,398 Syrian pounds, a 241 per cent increase year-on-year. Key food security indicators remained at critical levels. According to WFP data, 47 per cent of households surveyed in February reported inadequate (poor and borderline) food consumption, a 48 per cent year-on-year increase and an increase of 3 percentage points from December 2020. Households headed by women reported significantly higher rates of inadequate food consumption, at 59 per cent. Long lines at fuel stations continued to be reported in all governorates. Weekly fuel rations were reduced by 50 per cent in some governorates and many fuel stations suspended operations owing to low supply. The unavailability of fuel increased pressure on public transport in some cities, with reports of overcrowded buses, heightening risks of COVID-19 transmission. Some humanitarian organizations reported having to cancel planned missions and limit operations of mobile health clinics and other services owing to a lack of fuel.

11. Available information continued to indicate a high degree of COVID-19 transmission in the Syrian Arab Republic, far exceeding officially recorded infection rates. On 19 March, the Ministry of Health announced that public hospitals in Damascus, including intensive care units, were at full capacity. Elective and non-life-threatening surgeries were cancelled and some patients were transferred to hospitals in Rif Dimashq. At the end of March, 18,775 cases had been announced by the Ministry of Health, including 1,254 deaths. Another 21,293 cases, including 637 deaths, had been reported in areas outside of government control in the north-west since the onset of the pandemic, and another 10,509 cases, including 450 deaths, had been reported in areas outside of government control in the north-east. The United Nations continued to support planning and preparation for the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines to be received through the COVAX Facility, which are expected to cover 20 per cent of the total Syrian population. A first delivery of doses is anticipated in May.

12. The fifth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region was held on 30 March in virtual format, hosted by the European Union and co-chaired by the European Union and the United Nations. The Secretary-General highlighted the suffering endured by Syrians for a decade, paid tribute to humanitarian workers and stressed the collective responsibility of the international community to end the war. Humanitarian organizations coordinated by the United Nations appealed for \$4.2 billion for the response inside Syria, to reach 12.3 million people in need. Another \$5.8 billion was sought for support to countries hosting Syrian refugees in the region. Pledges of \$4.4 billion were made for 2021, and multi-year pledges of close to \$2 billion were made for 2022 and beyond. Another \$7 billion was announced in loans on concessional terms.

Update on overall developments

13. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria continued to engage the parties and members of the Constitutional Committee, including its Co-Chairs nominated by the Government and the opposition Syrian Negotiation Commission and members of the middle third, in order to prepare for a sixth session of the small drafting body of the Constitutional Committee. The Special Envoy continued to stress that assurances should be in place that future sessions would be guided by the Committee's terms of reference and core rules of procedure, in order to make progress on the Committee's mandate and to build trust and confidence. The Special Envoy also liaised with members of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, which continued to reinforce the importance of women's voices in all elements of the political process, a message that was reinforced by the Special Envoy on International Women's Day on 8 March 2021.

14. The Special Envoy attended the Astana-format meeting, held on 16 and 17 February in Sochi, Russian Federation, at which the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and Turkey, as Astana guarantors, reaffirmed their commitment to the United Nations-facilitated political process, in line with Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#).

15. At the fifth Brussels Conference, the Special Envoy called again for strengthened international cooperation towards a broader political process. Regional and international interlocutors continued to support a sustainable and credible Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, including his facilitation of that process, in line with Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#).

Protection

16. Civilians across the Syrian Arab Republic continued to suffer the direct and indirect consequences of armed conflict and violence. OHCHR verified at least 177 incidents in which at least 171 civilians, including 23 women and 32 children, were killed and at least 257 civilians, including 26 women and 78 children, were injured as a result of hostilities across the country. These included incidents of ground-based strikes, improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war, armed clashes and targeted killings at the hands of various parties to the conflict or by unidentified perpetrators. Explosions of explosive remnants of war, including landmines and unexploded ordnance, were the primary cause of verified civilian deaths (39 per cent). In the light of the patterns observed and the high numbers of incidents and civilians killed and injured in markets and residential areas, it appears that parties to the conflict have failed to respect the key principles under international humanitarian law of distinguishing civilians from fighters and civilian objects from military objectives; of refraining from indiscriminate attacks; of respecting proportionality in attack; and of taking constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects in the conduct of military operations.

17. In the Idlib de-escalation area in the north-west part of the country, OHCHR documented 29 incidents in which 19 civilians, including 5 boys, were killed as a result of air- and ground-based strikes. In addition, various armed groups in north-west, northern and eastern parts of the country continued fighting among themselves, resulting in civilian casualties.

18. In areas controlled by the Government, OHCHR verified incidents in which at least 86 civilians, including 17 women and 13 children, were killed and at least 77 civilians, including 4 women and 35 children, were injured as a result of hostilities. The majority of civilian casualties in these areas were attributed to landmines and explosive remnants of war, including unexploded ordnance. During the reporting

period, OHCHR documented 44 incidents of explosions of explosive remnants of war, in which 52 civilians, including 12 children, were killed and 58 civilians, including 34 children, were injured.

19. Civilians in Hawl camp continued to suffer protection issues, including family separation and restricted access to humanitarian assistance, and restrictions on their freedom of movement continued to be reported. Levels of violence increased significantly (see para. 7). OHCHR verified at least 16 incidents in which at least 18 civilians, including 3 women and 1 boy, were killed by unidentified perpetrators.

20. In Dar'a, OHCHR documented 39 incidents in which 28 civilians, including 2 boys, appeared to be subjected to targeted killings. The majority of such attacks were carried out by unidentified perpetrators. Targeted killings have also been carried out by unidentified perpetrators in areas under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces. Some such incidents have recently been claimed by ISIL. OHCHR recorded 31 such incidents in which 30 civilians were killed, including 1 boy.

21. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) recorded an increase in reported cases of different types of gender-based violence, including incidents of rape. Reports of such incidents have continued to rise as the economic crisis and the humanitarian situation, with the compounding impact of COVID-19, have exacerbated protection risks for women and girls and further limited their access to basic services.

22. Parties to the conflict continued to arbitrarily detain individuals in areas under their control. In the majority of cases recorded by OHCHR, detainees were denied information about the reasons for their detention and other due process rights, while their families were denied information concerning their whereabouts or their fate, raising concerns that, in some cases, such detentions may constitute enforced disappearance. In areas under the control of the Government, OHCHR continued to document cases of detainees who died in custody, allegedly owing to natural causes. Families either coincidentally learn about these deaths as they are processing unrelated papers at the personal status registry office or as government authorities contact them directly. During the reporting period, OHCHR documented at least 13 such incidents. In many such cases, individuals appear to have been subjected to enforced disappearance and their detention by the Government did not become known until their deaths were acknowledged. The bodies are rarely returned to their families, who are also denied the opportunity to question the causes of death stated in the notification or to know the whereabouts of the bodies of the deceased.

23. Parties to the conflict continued to systematically intimidate and harass civilians, including media professionals and health service providers who were perceived as being affiliates to an opposing party or critical of the party in control of the territory. Such tactics included targeted killings, abductions, deprivation of liberty, ill-treatment, torture, enforced disappearances, looting and confiscation of property. The whereabouts and fate of many of those deprived of their liberty remain unknown. Parties to the conflict continued to impede or target humanitarian, education and health-care services. In February, de facto authorities in the north-east arrested at least 23 teachers on the grounds that they were teaching government curricula in areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces. In March, civilians staged demonstrations in the cities of Shahil, Abu Hammam, and Basirah in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr to protest against the conscription of teachers by the Syrian Democratic Forces.

24. During the reporting period, at least three humanitarian workers were killed and six were injured as result of attacks using improvised explosive devices and ground-based strikes, as well as the indiscriminate exchange of small arms fire between armed groups. In addition, the Syrian Democratic Forces arrested five medical staff in Shahil city in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr.

25. The United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting recorded one incident of hostilities causing damage to educational facilities during the reporting period. On 24 March, Jil Al-Ghad school in Ariha city, Idlib Governorate, was affected by shelling, resulting in material damage to the facility. In addition, on 9 February, an unexploded mortar round was found inside the Muzayrib school compound in Muzayrib town, Dar'a Governorate, prompting an evacuation of students and teachers from nearby classrooms; the unexploded ordnance was removed the same day. Additional incidents are yet to be verified as part of the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism.

26. The Surveillance System for attacks on health care of the World Health Organization (WHO) reported six incidents affecting health care. Additional incidents are yet to be verified as part of the WHO Surveillance System.

Humanitarian response

27. Humanitarian assistance by United Nations entities continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic (see table 1). Assistance included WFP food assistance for 5 million people in February and 4.8 million people in March, across all 14 governorates. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees continued to support 128 operational community/satellite centres and mobile units across the country, providing a set of integrated services to persons of concern. Mine Action Service-trained explosive ordnance risk education teams delivered awareness sessions to more than 25,000 civilians, promoting safe behaviours in communities most affected by explosive ordnance contamination. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) supported risk education on explosive weapons and survivor assistance for 169,700 children in February. UNFPA continued to deliver life-saving reproductive health and gender-based violence services and information through static clinics, mobile teams and safe spaces across 14 governorates, reaching an average of 269,900 people per month. The United Nations continued to support the COVID-19 response across the country, including by enhancing surveillance and diagnostic capacity and procuring vital medical supplies and equipment; supporting clinical readiness; protecting the delivery of essential health-care services; supporting protective measures in schools; and supporting preparations for the roll-out of vaccinations.

Table 1

Average number of people reached each month by the United Nations and other organizations through all modalities throughout the Syrian Arab Republic: February and March 2021

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Average number of people reached monthly</i>
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	225 200
International Organization for Migration	157 800
Mine Action Service	25 200
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	184 900
United Nations Children's Fund	675 900
United Nations Development Programme	450 100
United Nations Population Fund	269 900
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	140 000
World Food Programme	4 900 000
World Health Organization	657 700

28. From inside the Syrian Arab Republic, assistance provided by United Nations entities included the delivery of food assistance by WFP for 3.7 million people in February and 3.5 million people in March. A joint project of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and WFP in Dayr al-Zawr restored water access across 3,600 hectares of farmland, enabling over 6,000 families to resume farming activities and increasing wheat yield in the area by up to 12,000 metric tons in 2021. A joint UNFPA-WFP cash and voucher assistance programme reached almost 72,000 pregnant and lactating women in February and 78,600 pregnant and lactating women in March across 14 governorates. UNICEF supported access to safe water for 442,000 people and improved sanitation services for 332,800 people in February. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) began the first round of cash assistance of 2021 in March, reaching over 140,000 Palestine refugees. In February, the Mine Action Service established a presence in Aleppo, where a second explosive ordnance assessment team will be deployed. Since its deployment to Rif Dimashq in August 2020, the first Mine Action Service explosive ordnance assessment team has surveyed approximately 5,400,000 m² and located and marked 630 items of explosive ordnance. WHO delivered 470,400 medical treatments cross-line to the north-east of the country, and some 2,552,750 children were reached through polio vaccination campaigns in the north-east in March (see also para. 36).

29. Humanitarian assistance delivered cross-border into the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic included WFP delivery of food assistance for 1.3 million people in February and 1.3 million people in March. UNICEF delivered Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All assistance to 158,800 people in the north-west each month. UNFPA supported the training and equipment of partners in the north-west to provide essential reproductive health and gender-based violence services to those in most need, reaching over 84,700 people. Some 71,300 households benefited from livestock vaccination campaigns of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. In February, WFP and its cooperating partners completed the emergency response to the floods that had affected north-western Syria in early 2021 and, by the end of February, they had provided ready-to-eat rations to some 75,200 people (see figure I and table 2).

Figure I

Number of beneficiaries assisted by the United Nations and its partners through cross-border humanitarian deliveries, by cluster: February and March 2021 (monthly average)

(Thousands)

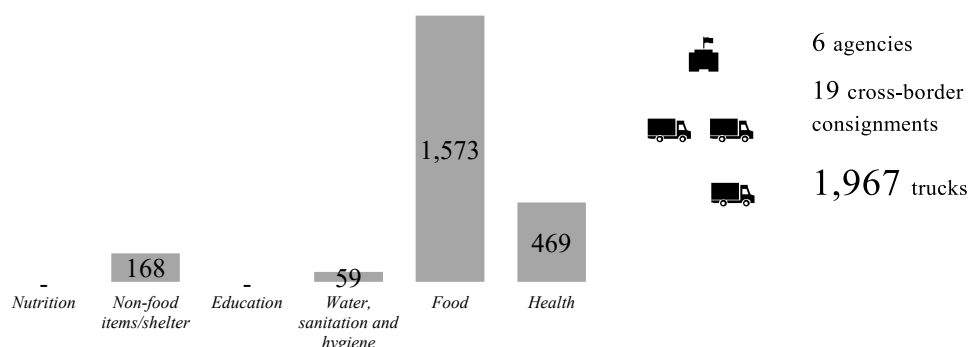


Table 2
**Number of beneficiaries targeted through cross-border deliveries, by sector and by district:
 February and March 2021 (monthly average)**

<i>Governorate</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Early recovery/ livelihood</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Food</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>Non-food items/ shelter</i>	<i>Nutrition</i>	<i>Water, sanitation and hygiene</i>
Aleppo	Afrin	41 592	–	145 776	–	3 372	–	–
Aleppo	Bab	1 145	–	2 400	–	5 000	–	5 000
Aleppo	I'zaz	6 289	–	144 075	–	7 538	–	26 790
Aleppo	Jarabulus	549	–	–	–	451	–	–
Aleppo	Jabal Sim'an	31 796	–	55 250	–	–	–	3 750
Idlib	Harim	305 296	–	1 046 230	469 000	75 044	–	5 475
Idlib	Idlib	17 801	–	179 133	–	77 350	–	18 250

30. The Russian Federation sent informational bulletins to the United Nations from the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides and Refugee Migration Monitoring, which outlined the provision of bilateral relief assistance. Other Member States also continued to provide bilateral and other forms of humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian access

31. The provision of humanitarian assistance requires timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded access by the United Nations and all humanitarian partners to people in need across the Syrian Arab Republic. Principled humanitarian action depends on the ability to independently assess needs and deliver assistance, and to monitor and evaluate impact independently, including by engaging regularly and directly with affected people. The access landscape in the country is complex, with different geographical areas and different types of services requiring different operating modalities. More than 1,800 United Nations staff members are based in-country, with more than 600 deployed in humanitarian hubs outside Damascus, in Aleppo, Dayr al-Zawr, Hama, Homs, Ladhqiyyah, Qamishli, Suwayda' and Tartus. A further 3,610 UNRWA staff are deployed across the country. A decentralized presence contributes to greater access and proximity to affected populations. Across the Syrian Arab Republic, aid is distributed and implemented primarily by national actors, including NGOs and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

Access limitations related to the pandemic

32. Most land borders into the Syrian Arab Republic remained sporadically closed, with some limited exemptions, including commercial and relief shipments and the movement of humanitarian and international organization personnel. Access through some crossing points inside the Syrian Arab Republic remained restricted. Domestic flights continued to operate, including the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service. Overall, COVID-19 preventative measures were no longer considered a significant impediment to humanitarian response activities, with humanitarian actors adapting programming and activities to new operational realities and facilitating measures by relevant authorities.

Access in government-controlled areas

33. In government-controlled areas, communities and enclaves that remained difficult to access, owing to administrative and security approvals, included Shaffuniyah, Mayda'a and Kafr Batna in eastern Ghouta, and Bayt Jinn and Mazra'at

Bayt Jinn in western Rif Dimashq. In the southern part of the country, insecurity and administrative restrictions continued to prevent sustained access to areas formerly controlled by non-State armed groups, in particular in the Dar'a al-Balad neighbourhood in Dar'a city and in parts of western Dar'a and Qunaytirah.

34. United Nations personnel and third-party contractors continued to travel to field locations alongside national NGOs and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to conduct assessment and monitoring, as well as logistics and administrative support missions. In February and March, 2,424 regular programmatic movements took place with programme or blanket approvals. This is an increase of over 30 per cent from the December to January period, when 1,852 such missions took place (see table 3 and figure II).¹

Table 3

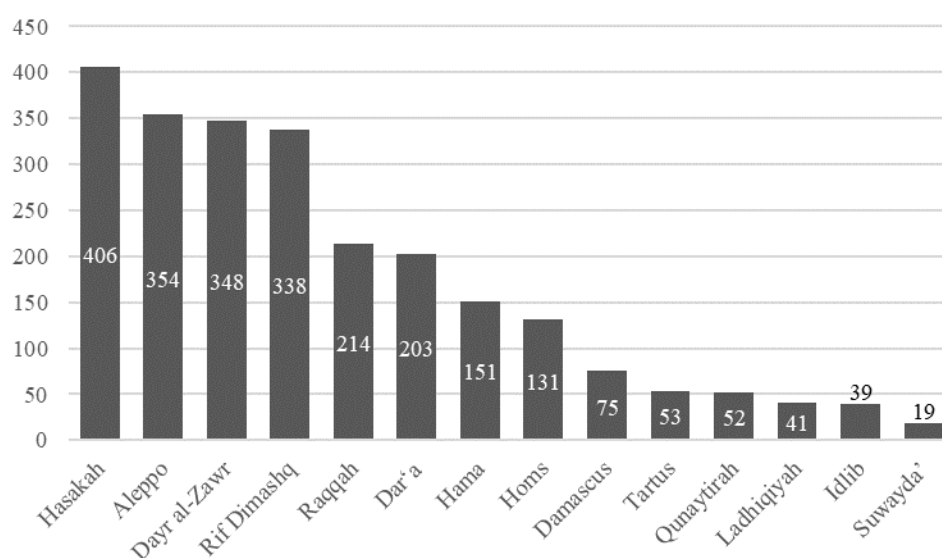
Total number of missions conducted with programme or blanket approvals^a from within the Syrian Arab Republic by United Nations agencies and third parties/facilitators, by type: February and March 2021

Type of mission	Blanket approval	Programme approval	Total number
Assessment missions	32	1	33
Missions accompanying aid deliveries	1 340	31	1 371
Monitoring missions	945	34	979
Security, logistics and administrative support missions	34	7	41
Total	2 351	73	2 424

^a Missions conducted under programme or blanket approvals do not require specific approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Figure II

Total number of missions conducted with programme or blanket approvals from within the Syrian Arab Republic by United Nations agencies and third parties/facilitators, by governorate: February and March 2021



¹ United Nations staff and third-party contractors operating at humanitarian hubs outside of Damascus obtain "blanket approvals" to carry out movements as part of their regular programming. These enable regular access and reduce bureaucratic requirements.

35. For missions requiring specific approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United Nations submitted 237 new requests, of which 167 (70 per cent) were approved (see table 4). This represents a minimal decrease, by 1 percentage point, compared with the previous reporting period, but remains significantly higher than the average approval rate over the previous 12 months (a 58 per cent average approval rate since February 2020). United Nations entities ultimately conducted 143 missions over the reporting period, with several reporting that approved and planned missions could not proceed owing to fuel shortages.

Table 4

Missions from within the Syrian Arab Republic requiring specific approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: February and March 2021

<i>Type of request</i>	<i>Number requested</i>	<i>Number approved</i>	<i>Percentage approved</i>
Assessment missions	32	22	69
Missions accompanying aid deliveries	40	35	88
Monitoring missions	76	38	50
Security, logistics and administrative support missions	52	35	67
Explosive ordnance assessment missions	37	37	100
Total	237	167	70

Note: Missions by United Nations personnel departing from Damascus or travelling cross-line generally require specific approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Access in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic

36. In the north-east, the United Nations maintained regular and sustained humanitarian access in most parts of Hasakah Governorate and some parts of Raqqah Governorate, while other areas, including Manbij and Ayn al-Arab, remained difficult for the United Nations and its partners to access from Damascus, owing to the lack of agreement between parties in control. The last United Nations cross-line convoy to Manbij deployed in March 2019. Needs in the area are high. Only 60 per cent of 6- to 11-year-olds in displacement camps have access to education services. Some 77 per cent of households report an insufficient ability to meet basic needs and 83 per cent of households report food and nutrition as their top priority need.

37. Efforts continued towards the delivery of sufficient and sustained medical assistance to areas in the north-east outside of government control. In February and March, WHO delivered two cross-line shipments carrying 21,400 kg of aid to the north-east of the country, amounting to 470,375 treatments. These shipments included supplementary emergency health kits, medical supplies and lab supplies. WHO reported no major operational or logistical challenges in these deliveries. Humanitarian organizations in the north-east continued to report limited functionality and capacity of health-care facilities, a lack of adequately trained medical staff and imminent stock-outs of medical supplies, including critical medicines, such as insulin, and cardiovascular and antibacterial medicines. Humanitarian operations in the north-east were left vulnerable to such supply shortages with the loss of United Nations supply chain support when the Security Council authorization for the use by the United Nations of the Ya‘rubiyah border crossing expired.

38. Recent assessments in displacement camps in Dayr al-Zawr and Hasakah show that only half of the pregnant women and new mothers in these camps are able to access obstetric or antenatal care. One partner operating at Hawl camp reports that 30 per cent of camp residents with chronic conditions cannot be covered with the

medications currently available. An estimated 1.8 million people require assistance in areas of the north-east outside of government control; over 70 per cent of them are considered to be in extreme need, which is higher than the national average.

Access in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic

39. United Nations entities and humanitarian partners continued to address the logistical and operational challenges resulting from the reduction to one authorized border crossing following the adoption of Security Council resolution [2533 \(2020\)](#). All United Nations humanitarian assistance into the north-west continues to be routed through the Bab al-Hawa crossing, with 6,336 trucks of humanitarian aid sent in by way of this crossing point since Council resolution [2533 \(2020\)](#) came into effect.

40. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic continued its operations as mandated under Security Council resolutions [2165 \(2014\)](#), [2191 \(2014\)](#), [2258 \(2015\)](#), [2332 \(2016\)](#), [2393 \(2017\)](#), [2449 \(2018\)](#), [2504 \(2020\)](#) and [2533 \(2020\)](#). The Monitoring Mechanism monitored and confirmed the humanitarian nature of 19 consignments consisting of 1,967 trucks that crossed into the Syrian Arab Republic from Turkey, all through the Bab al-Hawa crossing. This brings the total number of trucks monitored since the beginning of operations to 46,349 (36,377 through Bab al-Hawa, 5,268 through Bab al-Salam, 4,595 through Ramtha, and 109 through Ya‘rubiyah). There were no concerns or questions regarding the humanitarian nature of these consignments. For every shipment that crossed the border, the United Nations provided 48-hour advance notice to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, including information on the humanitarian goods to be delivered, the number of trucks, the United Nations owner and the destination (district). The Mechanism continued to benefit from the excellent cooperation of the Government of Turkey.

41. The 21 March air strike on the road leading to the Bab al-Hawa border crossing (see para. 3) resulted in damage to, and the destruction of, humanitarian supplies and infrastructure. Among the damaged NGO facilities were two warehouses belonging to two WFP cooperating partners. Some 64 trucks were damaged or destroyed, several of which belonged to United Nations-contracted transporters. At least five NGOs suspended their operations on 22 and 23 March. No United Nations cross-border deliveries had been scheduled at the time of the attack.

42. Humanitarian workers continued to actively pursue an all-modalities approach to respond to the humanitarian needs in the north-west. The United Nations continued engagement with the concerned parties regarding the dispatch of a cross-line mission into the north-west from inside the Syrian Arab Republic. A revised concept of operations was presented to the relevant parties in March. There was no agreement by all relevant parties on the operational details of the proposed mission by the end of the reporting period. Consultations continued in order to address parties’ reservations, including on the issue of how aid would be distributed following the arrival of the convoy. While the United Nations continued its efforts to develop an approach that will allow the mission to proceed in a safe and timely manner, the 21 March attack on Atarib, which is the planned destination for a first cross-line mission, demonstrated the high risk involved in dispatching assistance across what remains an active front line.

43. On 25 March, the opening of three crossing points in rural Aleppo and eastern rural Idlib, announced by the Russian Federation, did not lead to civilian movement as of the end of March while parties to the conflict did not reach agreement on it. There was a similar attempt to open a crossing in Saraqab on 22 February, but this led to no civilian or commercial movement.

Access in the south of the Syrian Arab Republic

44. The last United Nations humanitarian convoy to reach Rukban from within the Syrian Arab Republic was undertaken in September 2019. Access by commercial trucks, using informal routes, has been sporadic. Since the decision by the Government of Jordan in March 2020 to close the border as a COVID-19 preventative measure, medical cases from Rukban have been unable to access the United Nations clinic on the Jordanian side of the border. Critical health cases continued to be referred to Damascus, in coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, but those who left have not been allowed to return. UNICEF supported the medical evacuation of two women and five children in partnership with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in February and March. UNFPA estimates 2,500 women in Rukban to be of reproductive age and in need of critical life-saving protection and reproductive health services. Around 300 women are estimated to be pregnant at any time. Elevated risks of early marriage and pregnancy, with related complications, make access to medical services critically urgent.

Visas and registrations

45. The United Nations continued to work with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to allow for the timely provision of visas to staff (see table 5).

Table 5

Requests for United Nations visas: February and March 2021

<i>Type of request</i>	<i>Number requested</i>	<i>Number approved</i>	<i>Number rejected</i>	<i>Number pending^a</i>
Visas requested during reporting period	46	20	–	22
Renewals requested during reporting period	190	136	–	54
Visas pending from before reporting period	61	21	2	33
Renewals pending from before reporting period	56	49	–	7

Note: The United Nations withdrew four visa requests submitted during the reporting period and five visa requests pending from before the reporting period. The number of pending visa requests and visa renewal requests shown in rows 3 and 4 cover the period from February 2020 to January 2021.

^a The number of pending visa requests and visa renewal requests covers the period between February and November 2020.

46. A total of 41 international NGOs are registered with the Government to operate in the country.

Safety and security of humanitarian personnel and premises

47. The United Nations and NGOs continued to implement programmes in areas affected by frequent armed clashes, air strikes and regular exchanges of indirect artillery fire and other types of attacks by or among parties to the conflict. Humanitarian relief personnel also operate in areas highly contaminated with unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war and landmines.

48. Since the beginning of the conflict, hundreds of humanitarian workers have reportedly been killed, including 22 staff members of the United Nations and of the entities of the United Nations system, 20 of whom were staff members of UNRWA; 66 staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent; and 8 staff members and volunteers of the Palestine Red Crescent Society. Many staff members of international and national NGOs have also been killed.

49. During the reporting period, at least three humanitarian workers were killed and at least three others were injured as a result of hostilities. On 16 February, a humanitarian worker was killed and two others were injured when a reported improvised explosive device attached to a vehicle detonated in Bab city in eastern Aleppo. On 24 February, a humanitarian worker was killed while off duty in their tent at Hawl camp in Hasakah Governorate. On 15 March, a humanitarian worker was injured after a reported improvised explosive device attached to his vehicle detonated in the village of Baksariyah in western Idlib. On 18 March, a humanitarian worker was killed in crossfire in Idlib Governorate.

50. A total of 15 staff members of agencies and programmes of the United Nations system were detained or missing as at the end of the reporting period.

III. Observations

51. Marking 10 years of conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, I noted on 10 March that the situation for millions of people in the Syrian Arab Republic remains a living nightmare. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, millions have been displaced and countless others remain illegally detained and are often tortured, missing, disappeared or living in uncertainty and deprivation. This is the tragic reality of the Syrian Arab Republic today.

52. I reiterate my strong condemnation of the wave of attacks in the north-west, which killed and injured dozens of civilians, and I call on all parties to immediately renew their commitment to a cessation of hostilities. A hospital in western Aleppo Governorate hit by artillery fire on 21 March had received United Nations support. The location of the hospital was well known to the warring parties. A residential neighbourhood in Aleppo city was reportedly shelled that same day. Aerial attacks near Bab al-Hawa on the border between the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey struck close to the single remaining authorized border crossing for United Nations cross-border aid, in an area with a high concentration of extremely vulnerable displaced persons, as well as numerous humanitarian facilities. Directing attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including medical units, such as hospitals, is strictly prohibited under international humanitarian law. Attacks that are directed against civilians or that are indiscriminate, including improvised explosive device attacks in populated areas and markets, must cease immediately. Attacks directed against civilian objects, such as hospitals, must be investigated. Impunity must end and there must be accountability for crimes perpetrated in the Syrian Arab Republic.

53. When it comes to delivering life-saving aid to people in need across the Syrian Arab Republic, all channels should be made, and kept, available. Intensified cross-line and cross-border deliveries are essential to reach everyone in need, everywhere, and I have repeatedly urged the Security Council to achieve consensus on this crucial matter. People are worse off today than they were nine months ago, when the issue was last reviewed by the Security Council. A failure to extend the United Nations cross-border authorization would not only disrupt life-saving aid to millions of people in desperate need, it would also disrupt the United Nations COVID-19 vaccine distribution plans for the north-west part of the country. A large-scale United Nations-supported cross-border response for an additional 12 months remains essential to save lives. There is no alternative. While the United Nations continues its efforts to establish access into the north-west from inside the Syrian Arab Republic, such cross-line convoys, even if deployed regularly, could not replicate the size and scope of the cross-border operation. The escalation of hostilities in the north-west in March is a stern reminder of the high degree of risk inherent in operating in what remains, despite the ceasefire agreement, an active conflict zone.

54. In the north-east, humanitarian needs remain high, and the situation has worsened following the removal of Ya'rubiyah as a Security Council-authorized United Nations crossing in 2020. While the United Nations has continued to scale up deliveries to the north-east across lines of control, this represents a modest proportion of total needs, and many facilities remain short of staff, supplies and equipment. Overall, there is not enough aid of all sorts reaching the north-east part of the country. At Hawl and other camps and places of detention in the north-east, where tens of thousands of children are growing up in desperate and frankly scandalous conditions, we are seeing a collective failure to protect women and children. I urge all countries with nationals at Hawl camp to rapidly and safely allow for their voluntary repatriation, with particular urgency for children and their families, in line with international law and standards.

55. I welcome the financial commitments made at the fifth Brussels Conference in support of response operations in the Syrian Arab Republic and the region and urge donors to quickly turn these pledges into contributions. I also stress that now is not the time to reduce humanitarian aid to the Syrian Arab Republic. More support is needed to prevent a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

56. The Special Envoy continues his efforts for the unilateral release of persons arbitrarily deprived of their liberty, the majority of whom are held by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. I call upon the Government and other parties to account for the fate and whereabouts of those they are detaining and to allow humanitarian and human rights agencies access to all places of detention. I remind parties that torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and arbitrary arrest and detention, are prohibited. All persons in detention should be promptly informed of any charges against them. Persons facing prosecution should be afforded all minimum fair trial guarantees. They should be brought promptly before a judge and immediately released if their deprivation of liberty is arbitrary. Detaining authorities should carry out prompt, effective, thorough and transparent investigations of deaths in custody and, if it is found that such deaths resulted from criminal acts, the perpetrators should be brought to justice. Families of persons who have died in custody should be informed and receive full and adequate reparations within a reasonable period in the case of wrongful death. Respect for these principles would also build confidence, both within society and between the parties and international stakeholders. A failure to address arbitrary deprivation of liberty would leave credible justice, true reconciliation and sustainable peace elusive.

57. Perpetrators of serious violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law must be held accountable. I remind all States, in particular those with direct influence over parties to the conflict, that they are bound to take proactive steps to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, including as it relates to the protection of civilians. I call upon all parties to the conflict, in particular the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as all States, civil society and the United Nations system, to cooperate fully with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, in particular by providing relevant information and documentation. Accountability for serious violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law is both a legal requirement and central to achieving sustainable peace in the Syrian Arab Republic. I reiterate my call for the situation in the country to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

58. In view of the ongoing serious concerns repeatedly raised with regard to the protection of civilians and other human rights concerns in the Syrian Arab Republic, I continue to strongly urge the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, in line with Human Rights Council resolutions [S-18/1](#) and [19/22](#), to cooperate with the special

procedures of the Human Rights Council and with OHCHR, including through the establishment of a field presence with the mandate to protect and promote human rights.

59. I am encouraged by the political support shown to my Special Envoy by the international community, including at the fifth Brussels Conference. That said, expressions of support alone will not bring the Syrian conflict to an end. The United Nations-facilitated political process, in line with Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#), must be enabled to succeed through concrete action. The Constitutional Committee is one component of a broader political process for which trust and confidence are key. Thus far, however, the results of the Committee's work have fallen short of everyone's expectations. That is why I fully support my Special Envoy's call that a sixth session needs to be different from what has gone before – with clear goals, credible working methods, enhanced Co-Chair cooperation and a future workplan. I urge all parties to redouble their efforts and expeditiously and meaningfully engage with my Special Envoy on this matter. I remain convinced that mutual and reciprocal steps by the Syrian parties and key international stakeholders on the comprehensive set of issues outlined in resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#) are necessary to anchor the political process and move Syrians beyond a state of conflict towards a common vision of peace.

Annex

Reported incidents affecting civilians recorded by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: February and March 2021*

Idlib Governorate

- On 5 February, a boy was killed when a reported landmine exploded in Ayn al-Hamra' village in western rural Idlib.
- On 13 February, a civilian was injured after a reported unexploded ordnance detonated near his home in Qurqina village in northern rural Idlib.
- On 23 February, a civilian was killed after a reported ground-based strike landed in the outskirts of Bzabur village in southern rural Idlib.
- On 27 February, a girl was injured when a reported ground-based strike landed near her home in Balyun village in southern rural Idlib.
- On 15 March, a humanitarian worker was seriously injured after a reported magnetic improvised explosive device attached to his vehicle detonated in the village of Baksariyah in western rural Idlib. A civilian nearby was also killed in the explosion.
- On 18 March, a humanitarian worker was killed in reported crossfire in Idlib Governorate.
- On 21 March, Jil al-Ghad School for Girls and al-Sayadi School for Boys were damaged in a reported ground-based strike in the Ariha city in southern rural Idlib. No civilian casualties were recorded.

Aleppo Governorate

- On 16 February, a humanitarian worker was killed and two others, a driver and a co-worker, were injured when a reported magnetic improvised explosive device attached to a vehicle detonated in Bab city in eastern rural Aleppo.
- On 17 February, 13 civilians, including 3 women, 2 boys and 4 girls, were injured when several reported ground-based strikes landed in a residential area in Afrin district in north-west Aleppo. Al-Shifa' Hospital sustained material damage in the explosions.
- On 5 March, 2 civilians were killed and another 42 civilians were injured when several reported ground-based strikes landed in a diesel market in the Humran region in eastern Aleppo.
- On 5 March, members of an armed group attacked Shahil Hospital and its staff, arresting at least five hospital personnel, in Shahil city in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 8 March, armed groups arrested two civilians at their home in Ma'batli town in Afrin district in north-west rural Aleppo. The detainees' families were denied information about their fate and whereabouts.

* The list of incidents exemplifies human rights issues of concern raised in the report. Owing to the changing patterns of conflict and the loss of networks of credible and/or reliable sources in many conflict-affected areas, however, verifying incidents is increasingly difficult. The list, which contains only those incidents that were reported to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and that have been verified according to its methodology, should not be considered comprehensive.

- On 15 March, three civilians were killed and a civilian was injured when a reported landmine detonated in an agricultural field near Maskanah city in eastern rural Aleppo.
- On 20 March, a boy was killed when a reported landmine detonated in an agricultural field near Afrin city in north-west rural Aleppo.
- On 21 March, at least 7 civilians, including 2 boys, were killed and 14 civilians, including 5 hospital staff, were injured when three ground-based strikes impacted at the Atarib Surgical Hospital, in the city of Atarib in western rural Aleppo. Several hospital rooms and generators were damaged.

Hasakah Governorate

- On 7 February, a civilian was shot and killed in Hawl camp in rural Hasakah.
- On 7 and 8 February, nine teachers were arrested and released by armed actors in Amuda city in northern rural Hasakah, reportedly for teaching curricula approved by the Government.
- On 8 and 9 February, eight schoolteachers were arrested and released in Mu'abbadah district in northern rural Hasakah, reportedly for teaching curricula approved by the Government.
- On 25 February, five civilians, including a woman and two boys, were killed and a civilian was injured after a reported magnetic improvised explosive device attached to a vehicle detonated in Faruj market in Ra's al-Ayn city in Hasakah.
- On 23 March, a civilian was shot and killed in Hawl camp in rural Hasakah.
- On 24 February, a humanitarian worker was killed while off duty in their tent at Hawl camp in Hasakah Governorate.
- On 25 March, a civilian was killed inside his tent in Hawl Camp in rural Hasakah.

Hama Governorate

- On 7 March, 14 civilians, including 10 women, were killed and 4 civilians, 2 of them women, were injured when a reported landmine detonated in Azib Valley in Salamiyah area in eastern rural Hama.
- On the same day, in a separate incident, at least three civilians, including a woman, were killed when a reported landmine detonated in Azib Valley in Salamiyah area in eastern rural Hama.

Dar'a Governorate

- On 10 February, six civilians were arrested at a checkpoint on the road between al-Baqah village and Izra' city in eastern rural Dar'a. One person was released, and the fate and whereabouts of the others are unknown.
- On 10 March, a civilian and his son were reportedly killed in a drive-by shooting in Umm Walad town in eastern rural Dar'a.

Dayr al-Zawr Governorate

- On 9 March, a prominent tribal figure was killed in a drive-by shooting in Hawayij Diyab village in north-west rural Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 18 March, two men were arrested by an armed group in Shahil city in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr. Details about their fate and whereabouts remain unknown.

Raqqah Governorate

- On 19 March, a boy was killed and four civilians were injured after several reported ground-based strikes landed south of Ayn Isa city in northern rural Raqqah.
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