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**ON WORLD CHILDREN'S DAY**

**SNHR's 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Report**

**on Violations Against  
Children in Syria**

No fewer than

**30,127** Children

**have been killed in Syria**

since March 2011, including 198  
who died due to torture, while  
5,229 children are still detained  
and/or forcibly disappeared

**Monday 20 November 2023**

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.



## Contents:

|                                                                                                                                                        |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| I. Ramifications to the Violations Against Children is a Threat to Their Future for Decades to Come amid Inability to Address Those Ramifications..... | 1  |
| II. Report Methodology .....                                                                                                                           | 3  |
| III. SNHR Closely Collaborates With the UNICEF's MRM and the UN and International Mechanisms in Support of Children's Rights in Syria .....            | 6  |
| IV. Violations Against Children as Shown on SNHR's Database.....                                                                                       | 9  |
| V. Outline of the Reality and Context of Gross Violations Against Children at the Hands of the Various Parties to the Conflict.....                    | 23 |
| VI. Catastrophic Ramifications to the Violations Against Children's Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.....                                         | 58 |
| VII. Conclusions and Recommendations .....                                                                                                             | 62 |
| Acknowledgment.....                                                                                                                                    | 65 |

## **I. Ramifications to the Violations Against Children is a Threat to Their Future for Decades to Come amid Inability to Address Those Ramifications**

Since the Syrian people first called for freedom and dignity in March 2011, the Syrian people have suffered numerous violations, the aim of which was to crush their demands for a political democratic transition. Children have been tragically and massively affected by multi-faceted aspects of the various violations inflicted in Syria. Throughout the past 13 years, almost every violation we have recorded involved children. Those violations have had a devastating impact on the lives of Syria's children, effectively depriving them of their most fundamental rights, while creating an unsuitable, outright life-threatening, and hostile environment in which to grow up. Needless to say, such circumstances are absolutely irreconcilable with instilling any sense of human dignity or meeting children's needs. Not only has this terrible situation resulted in a massive and disproportionate number of child victims who've been subjected to grave human rights violations, the most crucial of which was extrajudicial killing, unlawful arrest/detention, torture, sexual violence, recruitment, and targeting of facilities that provide basic services such as education and healthcare, but it's also meant that the living situation for Syrian children has grown exponentially worse in light of the repeated forced displacement caused by the relentless bombardment by the Syrian regime and its allies, as well as the clashes between the various parties to the conflict, all of which have also led to widespread destruction of infrastructure and a lack of basic services. The lack of any foreseeable future resolution to these multiple crises, together with the still-worsening living conditions and economic catastrophe perpetuated by violence and violations against children, have had unimaginably destructive ramifications on children's wellbeing, which will be hard to redress in the near future for as long as the abysmal status quo in terms of security, human rights, economic and societal collapse, continues.

Children are the most vulnerable group in society, which means that the impact of the violations, whether against them or against their families and friends, are dramatically more profound. While our focus has been on the violations themselves, some of the children's families have been telling us in recent years about the symptoms their children are grappling with as a result of a certain trauma, be it the death or disappearance of their father, the destruction of their home, or the bombardment of their school. Many families told us that children have been suffering from problems such as nightmares, persistent anxiety, paranoia, and bed-wetting, among others. We ourselves have noticed the ramifications of these issues while speaking to some children which displayed a level of despair, which, we believe, is related to some of them making the decision to use drugs or join armed groups, including extremist ones. These complex issues come in light of the fragile state across the country, and especially in northwestern Syria, where children have suffered the most in terms of violations. In this context, there is a severe shortage of psychological healthcare and psychological healthcare providers who are equipped to treat the trauma those children have experienced.



On June 5, 2023, [the UN Secretary-General submitted his annual report on children and armed conflict for the year 2022](#). The report sheds light on the prevalent trends with regard to the impact of the armed conflict on children. The report also addresses the violations committed by the parties to the conflict; including government forces and other armed groups, both pro-government and anti-government; against children in many countries including Syria in 2022. Upon reviewing the report, we released [a statement](#) in which we have determined that Syria is the fourth-worst country globally, in terms of grave human rights violations against children, with **2,438** violations documented, including incidents of killing, maiming, recruitment, detention, abduction, sexual violence, and attacks on schools and hospitals, using these facilities for military purposes, and denial of humanitarian assistance. These violations have affected no fewer than **2,407** children in the past year, making Syria the world's second-worst country in terms of the number of children affected by grave human rights violations. It should be noted that SNHR is considered a principle source on violations against children in Syria, in cooperation and partnership with the UNICEF's Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Violations (MRM).

Fadel Abdul Ghany, SNHR Executive Director says:

Having worked on compiling SNHR's database for the past 13 years, it has become clear to us that the Syrian regime's violations against children are, in large part, deliberate and calculated. They aim to inflict as much pain as possible on the families, neighborhoods, and areas that opposed the Assads' rule and called for long overdue political change. Not only has the regime bombed and arrested men and women, but it also targeted the dearest things to their hearts, namely their children, in order to subjugate and terrorize them, and to send a threatening message to the other neighborhoods and areas of the dreadful cost of joining the calls for political change, which explains the regime's repeated bombardment of schools and kindergartens .



## II. Report Methodology

This report, one of SNHR's major annual reports, is released on November 20 every year to mark World Children's Day. As in previous years, SNHR's 12th annual report on violations against children in Syria tries to summarize the losses suffered by Syria's children as a result of the violations against them, and how these affected the children and their rights. In keeping with our continuous cumulative work, the figures included in this report cover the period between March 2011 and November 2023, with a particular focus on the incidents that took place between November 20, 2022, and November 20, 2023, or in other words since [our most recent report on children in Syria released last year](#), in an attempt to emphasize the fact that violations are still being committed in Syria. Finally, it should be noted that when we summarize an incident that took place before the period November 20, 2022-November 20, 2023, it means that we only verified the incident later in 2023.

In addition to utilizing rigorous methodology in documenting and recording violations, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) includes special criteria for documenting violations involving children. In all procedures related to children, SNHR ensures compliance with a number of general principles, such as prioritizing the best interests of the child as put forth in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). For SNHR, this legal instrument is the cornerstone for monitoring, documenting, and following the regulations and procedures for each child, including ensuring that a child can ensure their opinions and feelings are taken into account in every step with respect to documenting violations, and that they can freely express their feelings while taking into account their age, level of maturity, and articulation. There are also other principles we always take into consideration such as non-harm. To that end, when conducting interviews about violations involving children, we make sure that we obtain the informed consent of both the child and their family beforehand, explaining the goals of our documentation process in a way that caters to the child in question's age and cognitive abilities.

Thanks to our continuous work since March 2011, SNHR has acquired valuable experience in relation to the implementation of procedures, which we always strive to develop further. Broadly speaking, SNHR never records accounts by children directly. Rather, we collect data on children gathered by their primary caretakers -a father, mother, relative, or guardian - or from eyewitnesses who witnessed the violations and have information about the incident in question. This is consistent with the principles we outlined above, taking into consideration the fact that children are affected differently and far more severely than adults by the violations they suffer, on both the physical and psychological levels. In a very limited number of cases, we may resort to taking a child's first-hand account, doing so no more than once and under very specific and exceptional circumstances. This usually occurs based on our assessment that information might be lost if we opted not to take a child's account, which potentially harms the interests of the child in question, and we only do this with their guardians present.

Culpability for the violations included in this report is assigned to one of the parties to the conflict. In cases where no sufficient evidence was found to reliably assign culpability, we identify the perpetrators as parties we have not yet been able to identify, which we indicate while summarizing the incidents, cases, and data. This report dedicates a section to each one of the parties to the conflict. Relatedly, the report focuses on the gross human rights violations committed against children, which, as we noted,

have been practiced in a systematic way. Those seven primary violations are: Extrajudicial killing; unlawful detention, arbitrary arrest, abduction, and enforced disappearance; torture; sexual violence; child recruitment; attacks on vital facilities, such as schools, and medical facilities, such as hospitals, and the blockage or denial of humanitarian assistance. Besides these seven gross violations, which are mentioned in the relevant Security Council resolutions, we observed a vast number of other violations related to the need for protection of children that should be mentioned, including the use of judicial proceedings in trying children; child labor; denial of social and cultural rights such as a proper education; denial of an adequate residence which can refer to children living in camps, and to the use of children in drug trafficking. While some of these violations existed before the conflict, they have dramatically escalated in number and severity as a result of the conflict. Therefore, we have taken the decision to provide some idea of the ramifications of these violations with respect to children, and how they extend to affect other rights, since most of these violations are compounded and all have been among the primary factors in the decline of the state of children's rights in Syria.

The report draws upon SNHR's database, which is the result of our daily monitoring and documentation activities conducted since March 2011, and which encompasses violations of extrajudicial killing, arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance and torture, conscription, sexual violence, attacks that saw the use of various weapons, and attacks on vital civilian facilities. All the figures included in this report have been documented according to our [methodology](#), and are based on the information and details we have been able to access and verify. We always work to make sure that our database is regularly updated with the latest details so as to ensure the highest level of reliability and accuracy.

We have categorized violations against children according to gender (male/female), by the parties to the conflict committing the violation, or the year in which the violations took place, in addition to providing an analysis based on each categorization. We also conducted a comparison between the overall toll of violations taking place since March 2011 up until November 2023, and between March 2011 and November 2022, since the release of our last report on violations against children, while focusing on whether or not the rate of violations has increased, decreased, or remained at the same level in every chart.

SNHR's team strives at all times to verify the violations we include in our reports by consulting with various sources, including media outlets social media and other open sources, in addition to working with activists, eyewitnesses, survivors, and our team members who are scattered across all parts of Syria. Our team also goes to great lengths to gather and cross-check evidence and data and to visit crime scenes whenever possible. We try to locate and rely first and foremost on the firsthand accounts of survivors who suffered the violation in question or their family members as primary sources. Secondly, we try to locate people who witnessed or recorded the violation. This report also draws upon accounts and interviews conducted with eyewitnesses from various Syrian governorates. We conduct those interviews in-person or using various communication channels. This report contains 10 first-hand accounts which we have collected directly from eyewitnesses, rather than any second-hand sources. In some cases, we have used aliases in order to maintain the eyewitnesses' confidentiality, and more importantly to protect them from harassment or persecution. None of the interviewees received any financial compensation for any of the interviews, nor were they promised any such compensation. We informed all the individuals interviewed of the purpose of the report beforehand, and they gave us permission to use the information they revealed in the service of the goals of the report and of our documentation efforts. Such procedures are part of our rigorous internal protocols, which we have maintained for years. We always strive constantly to improve our protocols, so as to keep track with the best levels of quality psychological care of victims.



Furthermore, this report additionally draws upon analyzing the material available from open sources such as the internet and media, and through talking with medical personnel who worked on the treatment and examination of victims' bodies and determined the cause of death in attacks and extrajudicial killings. We keep copies of all the videos and pictures included in this report in a confidential online database, as well as multiple backup copies in hard drives. Still, we do not claim to have documented all cases in light of the proscriptions on and persecution of SNHR's activists by Syrian regime forces and other armed groups. Some of the pictures and video footage in our archives show harrowing images such as dead and wounded children, some of whom suffocated to death under the rubble of buildings destroyed in bombing, while others died of starvation and illness. We have retained copies of this footage, some of which is included in this report.

All of the attacks included in this report, which were carried out by the various parties to the conflict in Syria, targeted civilian areas where we documented no presence of any military personnel or weapons cache before or during the attack. Additionally, no warning was issued to civilians by the attacking forces prior to these attacks as required by international humanitarian law.

In 1993, Syria ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>1</sup>, and its two optional protocols: the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and subsequently the 2002 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.<sup>2</sup> While it's true that all parties to the conflict in Syria have been guilty of violating children's rights to some degree, the Syrian regime bears by far the greatest responsibility in terms of the number of crimes perpetrated in a manner which exhibits a clear pattern and demonstrates a deliberate and systematic aspect in the regime's violations of children's rights, particularly of those rights established in Articles 6, 37, and 38 - namely the inherent right to life and the survival and development of the child (Article 6), children's right not to be subjected to torture nor suffer the deprivation of their liberty (Article 37), and that state parties are to respect and ensure the respect for the rules of international humanitarian law which are relevant to the child during armed conflicts (Article 38).<sup>3</sup> As such, the regime's crimes in this regard amount to crimes against humanity. Moreover, the Syrian regime and other parties to the conflict have contravened the 1999 Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) established by the International Labour Organization (ILO),<sup>4</sup> which addresses child recruitment and the use of children in armed conflicts, which can constitute war crimes.<sup>5</sup> The Committee on the Rights of the Child, a body established to monitor the implementation of the UNCRC, bears legal and moral responsibility for monitoring the state of rights of the child in Syria, and for putting an end to the violations being committed by the Syrian regime.<sup>6</sup>

1. For a list of countries that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, see: [https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtldsg\\_no=IV-11&chapter=4&clang=en](https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtldsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&clang=en)

2. United Nations, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/opaccrc.aspx>

United Nations, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/optional-protocol-convention-rights-child-sale-children-child>

3. For the full text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including Articles 6, 37, and 38, see: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

4. In the 1999's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182), the ILO called for putting an end to children's involvement in armed conflicts, including putting an end to conscription of children, which was further emphasized in the optional protocol that came into effect in 2002, and which eventually became the foundation for the Special Court for Sierra Leone which dictated that 18 years is the minimum age for either government conscription, any form of recruitment in any non-government forces, or engaging in warfare. Elsewhere, the use of child soldiers have been repeatedly condemned in UNSC resolutions.

5. See, International Labour Organization (ILO), Article 3 of the 1999's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182): [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C182](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C182)

6. Abdul Ghany, F. (2021). "The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Its Committee Are Helpless in Effectively Defending Children Rights in Syria and Around the World". Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR).

This report adopts a legal focus in its approach to summarizing the violations undermining the rights that children should enjoy in armed conflicts, particularly those related to the protection of civilians and combatants in international humanitarian law. These laws acknowledge the vulnerable nature and the special needs of children in armed conflicts, whether in light of the two additional protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 1977, which address a range of violations, including military recruitment of children and involving children younger than the age of 15 in hostilities, or in regard to violations to the rights of the child established in the 1989's UNCRC, as well as the customary rules found in international law which aim to limit the effects of conflict on children.

The report proves that the laws promulgated by the Syrian regime with relation to children are marred with many deficits, not the most critical of which the fact that it exist only on paper with no real or true effect on the promotion of the protection of children. Even though there are some laws that, on the surface, addresses the rights of the child, such as Law No. 21 of 2021, and the Law on juveniles, our monitoring on their implementation shows that children have been subjected to a wide range of violations, especially with relation to the laws on measures aimed at children, and in detention, which we will shed light on in this report.

The details contained in report only represent the bare minimum of the actual severity and magnitude of the violations that have occurred in Syria since 2011. Also, the report does not include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications of these events.

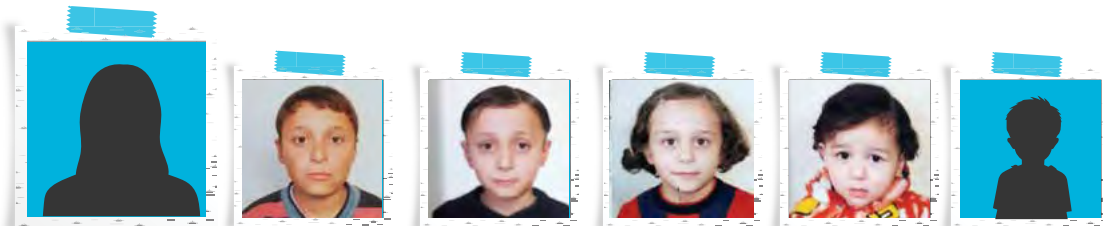
### **III. SNHR Closely Collaborates With the UNICEF's MRM and the UN and International Mechanisms in Support of Children's Rights in Syria**

SNHR has fostered a number of close partnerships with various international and UN institution that work to protect children's rights in Syria and to combat violations against children. Those include the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI), the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR), and the UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). This has been achieved thanks to SNHR's consistent work on collecting and analyzing data and information on violations and presenting accurate reports and information to the international community. Through these collaborations, we aim to promote international efforts to ensure that these violations are properly investigated and those responsible are held legally accountable, which can be done through reporting on and raising awareness of the staggering magnitude of the catastrophe in Syria, and underscoring the importance of combating violations, exposing their perpetrators, and protecting children's rights in Syria.

In this context, SNHR diligently works with the UNICEF's MRM by periodically sharing the data that our team members have been able to document on various types of violations against children, including killing and maiming children; recruitment; arrest/detention; attacks on schools, hospitals, and medical or educational personnel who have protected status; sexual violence, and denial of humanitarian assistance for children. The MRM's mandate, as established in [Security Resolution 1612 \(2005\)](#) and its subsequent resolution, was invoked in Syria in 2014 after the parties to the conflict responsible for committing grave violations against children were named in the UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict.

Moreover, SNHR [regularly submits messages](#) to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, placing special and great emphasis on cases involving children in this regard. We have received many official responses in regard to the cases about which the Working Group has made inquiries with the Syrian regime, which were some of the cases we shared. The Working Group also includes those cases in the special annex to the UN report on enforced disappearance in Syria.

Additionally, we submit briefings on all of these cases to the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the UN Special Rapporteur on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights while Countering Terrorism, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.



👁 Children of Mayyada Burhan Wakil



👁 Children of Nawal Khaled Khalil



👁 Mahmoud Abdullah  
Hejazi



👁 Osama Mohammad  
Waqqaf

We have also created [a form](#) on our website that families can fill in, which is then automatically sent to our team focusing on cases involving detainees and forcibly disappeared persons, who, in turn, review the case and contact the family to complete the documentation and registration processes. We regularly receive documents from the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on cases submitted by SNHR about which the UN has contacted the Syrian regime to make inquiries and to demand that these individuals' fate be disclosed.

In this context, SNHR urges the families to cooperate more, so as to enable us to report as many cases of forcibly disappeared children as possible to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. Our team works tirelessly to build relationships with the families of forcibly disappeared persons and to access and store whatever data is available on children and forcibly disappeared persons. We have created secure communication channels and dedicated a special phone line to facilitate access for victims' families.

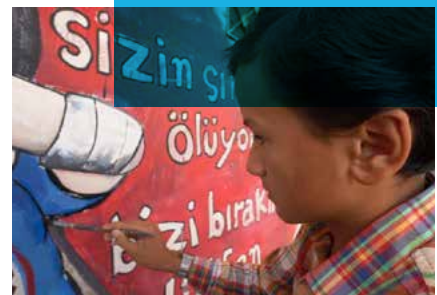
As part of the activities SNHR undertakes to support children, and building on the year-long collaboration relationship between the [world-renowned KidsRights Foundation](#) and SNHR, we, whenever the opportunity presents itself, nominate a girl or a boy from one of the various Syrian areas for the annual [International Children's Peace Prize](#) in acknowledgment of their exceptional efforts in supporting their peers and highlighting their suffering resulting from the violations they've experienced due to the armed conflict in Syria. We always try to highlight the efforts of children who are active in their local communities every year, which is consistent with our goals to support the children of Syria and their personal engagement in defending children's rights.



👁 Sirin Mathloun Na'san



👁 Anar al-Hamrawi



👁 Muhammad Nour al-Asmar

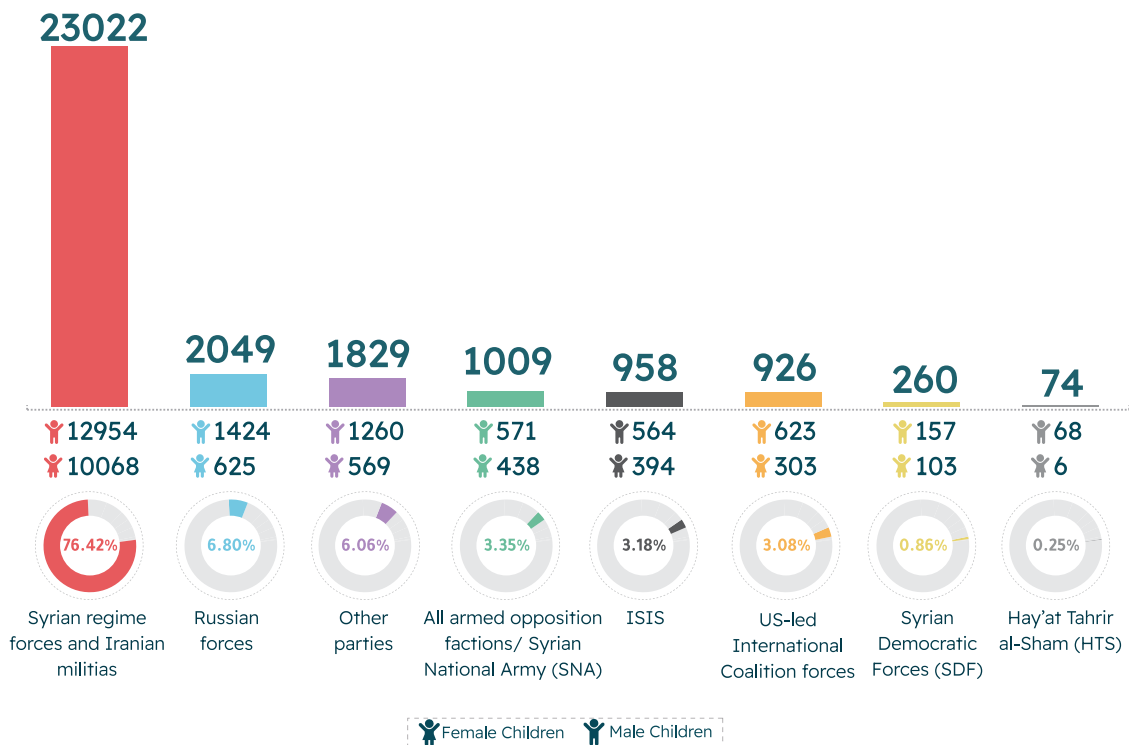


## IV. Violations Against Children as Shown on SNHR's Database

Children in Syria experience various and repeated patterns of violations that vary in their severity and frequency, and in their current and future ramifications for Syrian children. At SNHR, we focus on the gross and life-threatening violations as determined by the UN Security Council, which are documented in accordance with our methodology. Naturally, killing children is classified as the primary and most dangerous violation taking place in Syria, more especially considering the significantly high numbers of child victims. The second most dangerous violation is arrest/abduction which goes on to become enforced disappearance in the overwhelming majority of cases, and then torture. We also focus on child recruitment and attacks on educational and medical facilities, which result in children falling out of the educational system. The Syrian regime is responsible for the vast majority of these violations in comparison to the other parties to the conflict, as attested by the data at hand.

### A. Extrajudicial killing

SNHR has documented the killing of **30,127** children at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 20, 2023, distributed as follows:



- **Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias):**<sup>7</sup> 23,022 children - 12,954 male children and 10,068 female children.
- **Russian forces:** 2,049 children - 1,424 male children and 625 female children.
- **ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):** 958 children - 564 male children and 394 female children.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham/HTS<sup>8</sup> (an alliance composed of Fateh al-Sham Front and a number of armed opposition factions):** 74 children - 68 male children and six female children.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF):** 260 children - 157 male children and 103 female children.
- **All armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA):**<sup>9</sup> 1,009 children - 571 male children and 438 female children.
- **US-led International Coalition forces:** 926 children - 623 male children and 303 female children.
- **Other parties:** 1,829 children - 1,260 male children and 569 female children.

As the chart shows, the Syrian regime is responsible for roughly 77% of all cases of extrajudicial killing involving children. This suggests that the Syrian regime has been targeting children in a deliberate and calculated manner.

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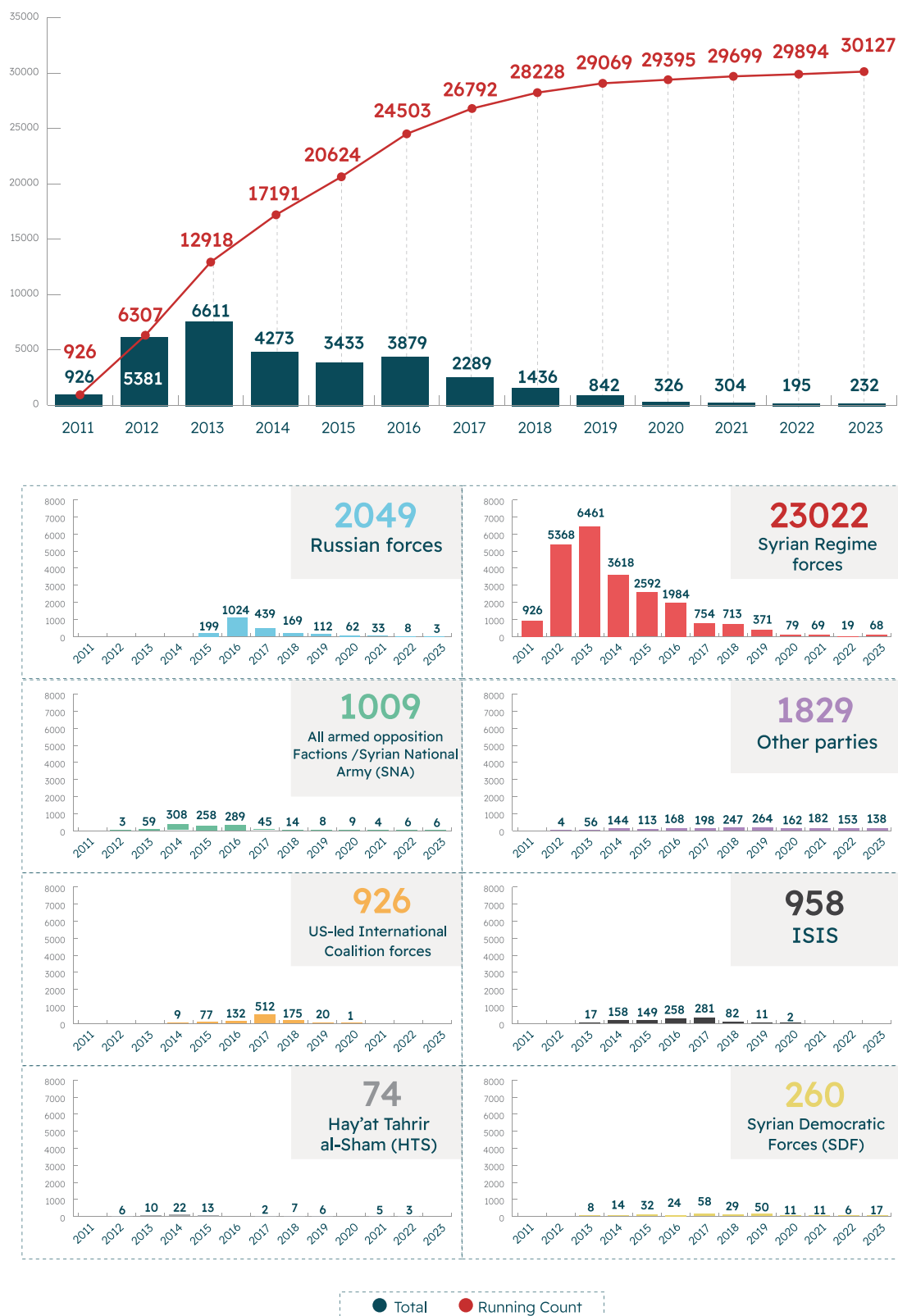
7. We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is that of a totalitarian dictatorship where power is concentrated in the hands of a small circle of individuals, namely the President of the Republic and the heads of the regime's security apparatus. As a result, the ministers, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior, play a restricted, largely ceremonial role, which is limited to implementing precisely what the ruling regime orders, with no real decision-making power or active role of their own. Syria is under autocratic/family rule, with no independent decision-making structure. Rather, the government is an empty façade merely for show. The Minister of Interior receives orders from the security branches over which he supposedly presides. The Minister of Justice cannot even summon a low-ranking security office, let alone a security branch head. Syria is ruled by the president assisted by the heads of the security branches.

While we are aware that the United Nations and its agencies use the term 'the Syrian government', we believe that this is a completely inaccurate and misleading term in the Syrian context.

8. Designated as a terror group by the UN.

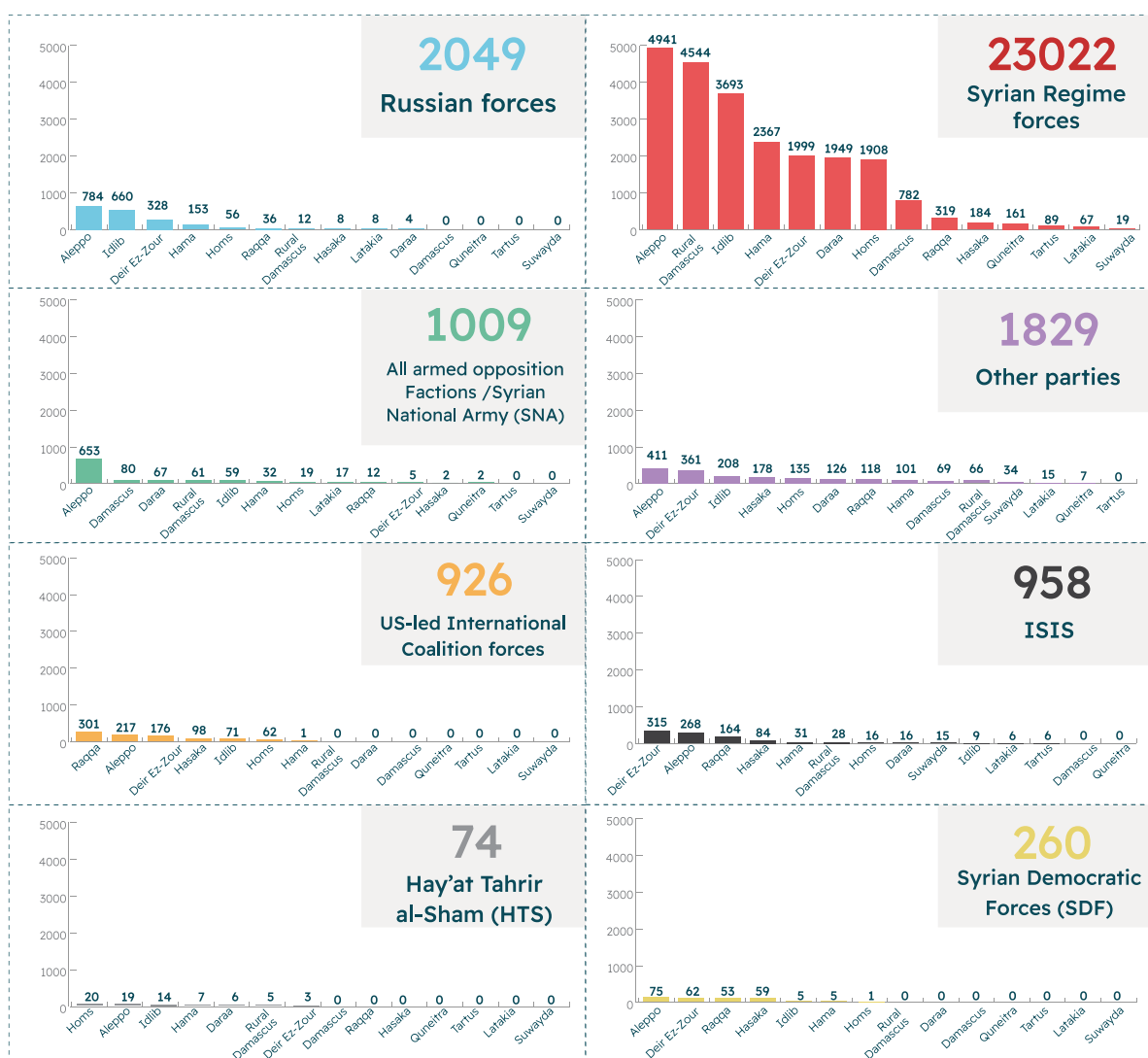
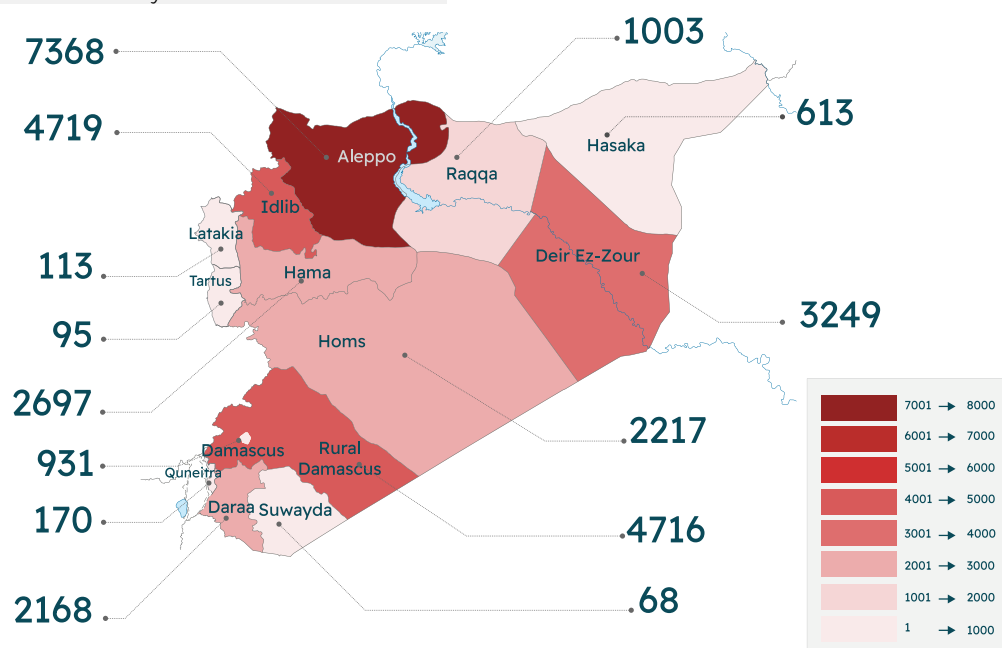
9. All armed opposition factions: All armed opposition factions founded since 2011 across Syria. Many of those formations are no longer active, and many was not structured around a central command. Towards the end of 2017, the Syrian National Army (SNA) was founded as an umbrella formulation that incorporated all active armed opposition factions at the time.

Child deaths at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria is distributed by year as follows:



Analyzing the data above shows that the year 2013 was the worst year in terms of children's deaths, most of which were at the hands of Syrian regime forces, followed by 2012, then 2014, and then 2016. The Syrian regime was responsible for over half of all the children's deaths we recorded in every one of these years.

Child deaths at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces are distributed by governorate in which they were killed as follows:

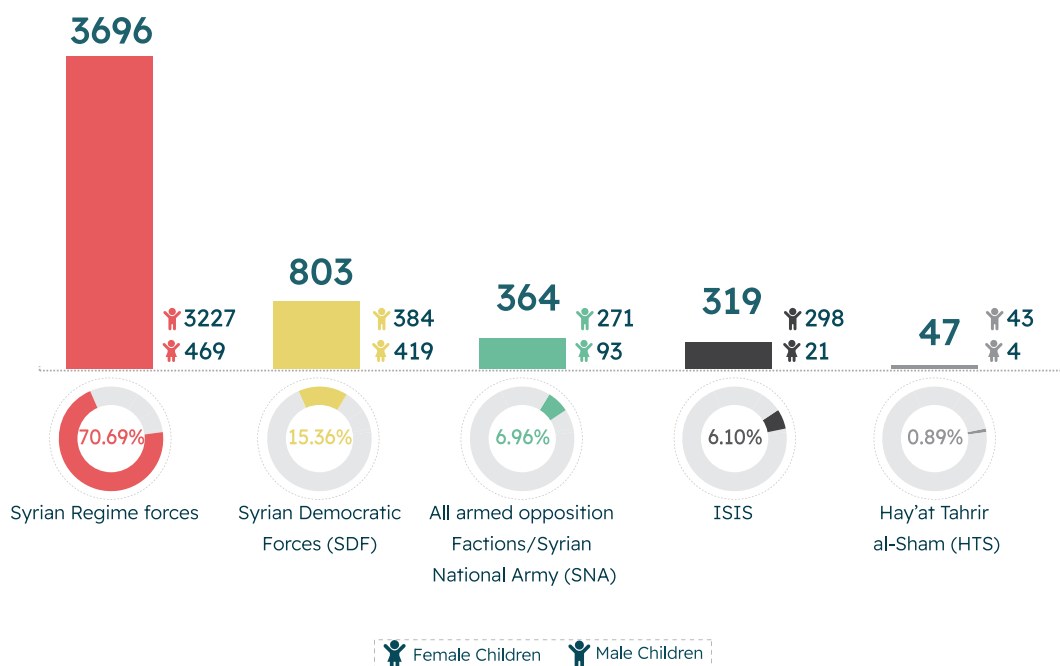


The map above shows that Aleppo governorate has seen the highest number of child deaths, followed by Idlib, then Rural Damascus (Rif Dimshaq), and then Deir Ez-Zour.



## B. Arbitrary arrest/detention and enforced disappearance

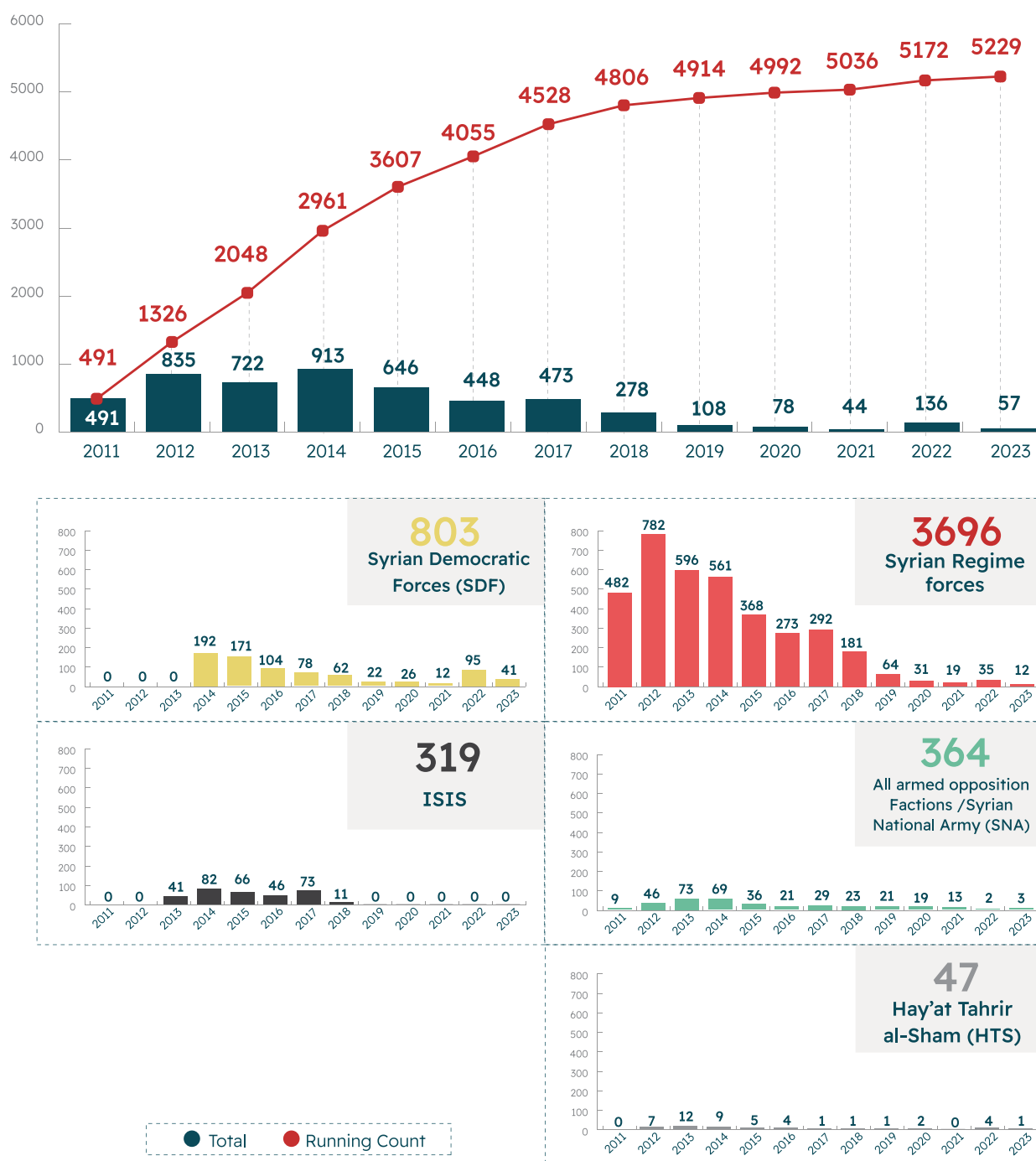
According to SNHR's database, no fewer than **5,229** of the children arrested, detained, and/or forcibly disappeared by the parties to the conflict and controlling force in Syria since March 2011 are still under arrest, in detention or forcibly disappeared as of November 20, 2023, distributed as follows:



- **Syrian regime forces:** 3,696 children - 3,227 male children and 469 female children.
- **ISIS:** 319 children - 298 male children and 21 female children.
- **HTS:** 47 children - 43 male children and four female children.
- **SDF:** 803 children - 384 male children and 419 female children.
- **All armed opposition factions/(SNA):** 364 children - 271 male children and 93 female children.

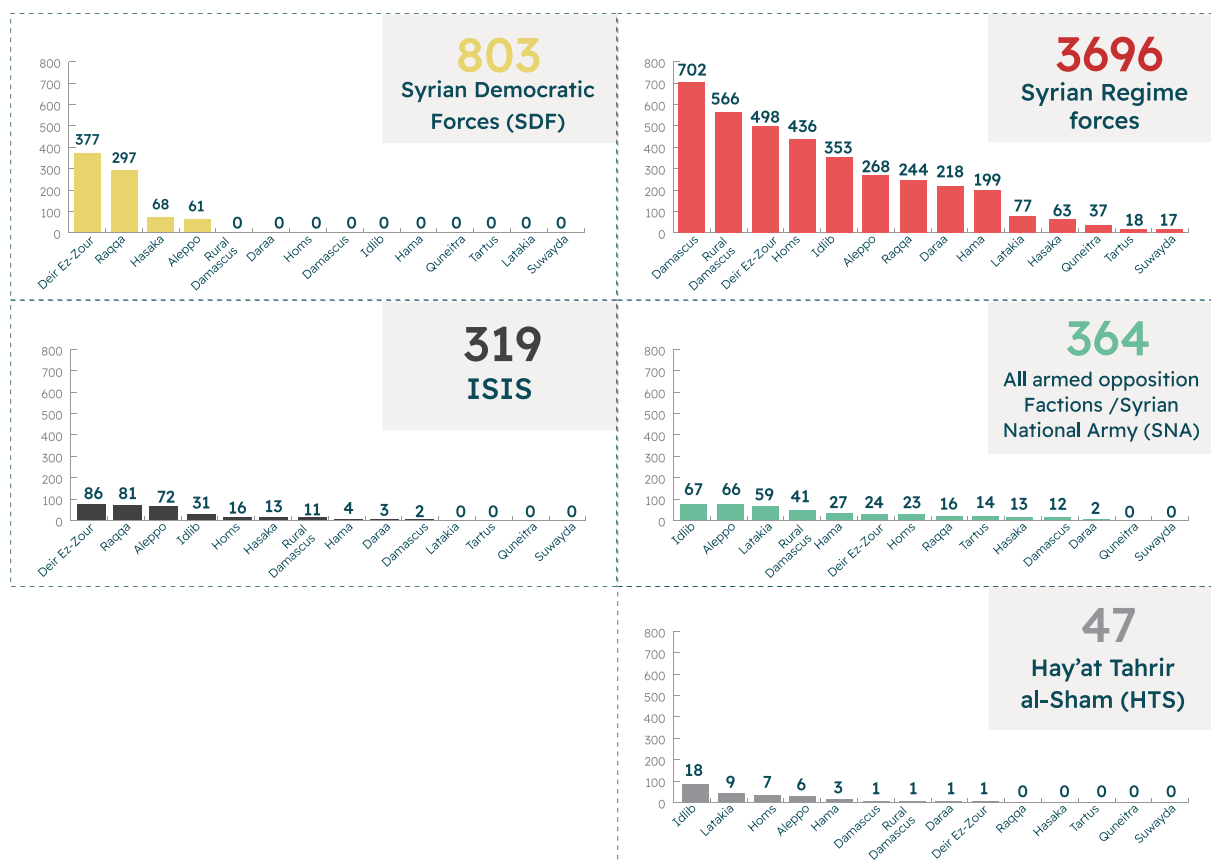
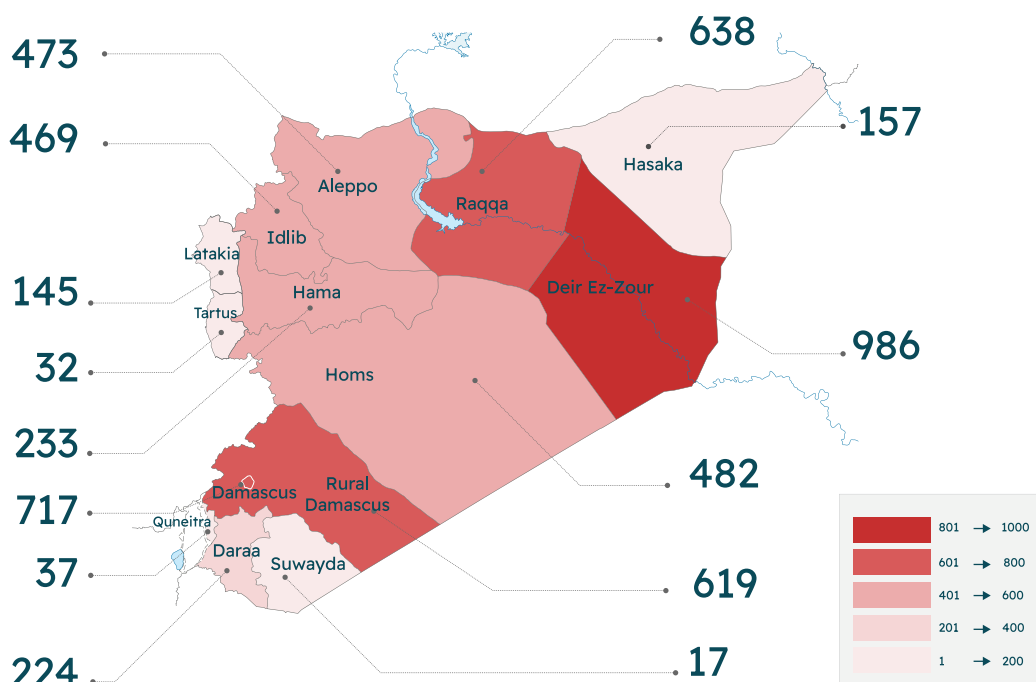
As the chart shows, the Syrian regime is responsible for approximately 71 percent of all arrests and enforced disappearances involving children. This implies that the Syrian regime has been pursuing, arresting, and disappearing children for various motives in a deliberate and calculated manner.

Cases of arrest/detention and/or enforced disappearance involving children at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria are distributed by year as follows:



According to the chart, 2014 was the worst year in terms of arrests targeting children, with roughly 71 percent of all arrests of children that year being carried out by Syrian regime forces, followed by 2012, then 2013, and 2015. The Syrian regime was responsible for over half of all the arrests of children which we documented in all of these years.

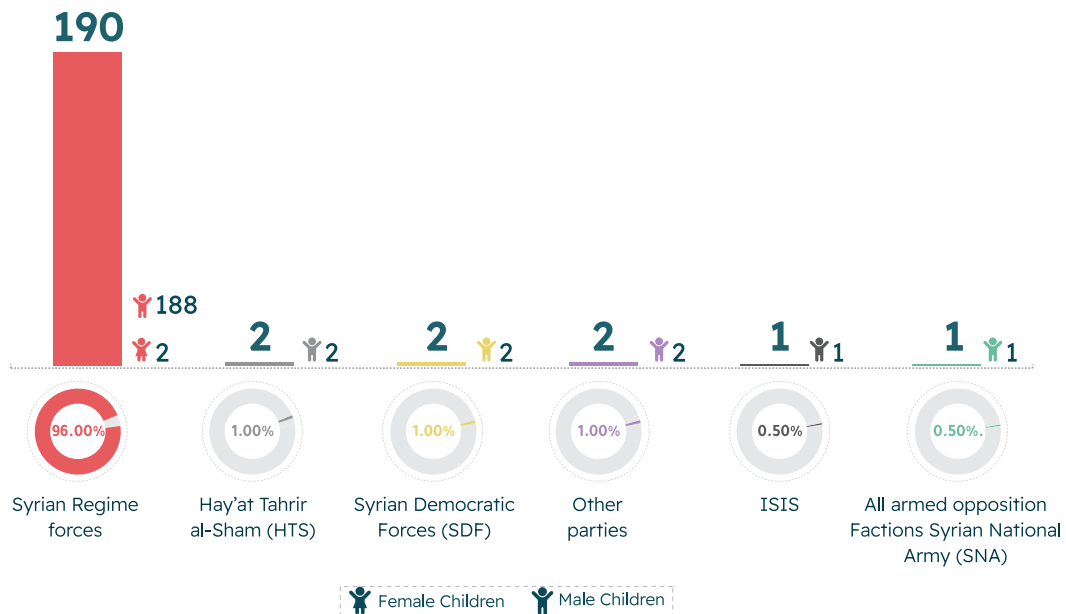
Cases of arrest/detention and/or enforced disappearance involving children at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria are distributed by governorate as follows:



As the map shows, the highest number of child arrests was documented in Deir Ez-Zour governorate, followed by Damascus, then Rural Damascus.

### C. Child deaths due to torture

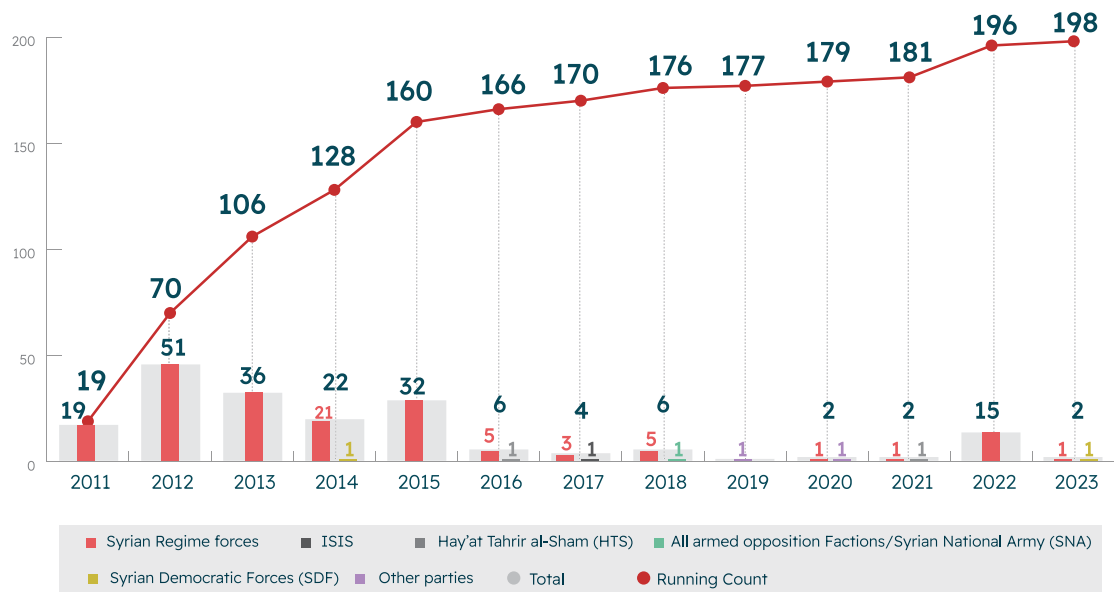
Between March 2011 and November 2023, we documented that no fewer than **198 children** died due to torture in the detention centers operated by the various parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria:



- **Syrian regime forces:** 190 child deaths due to torture - 188 male children and two female children.
- **ISIS:** One child death due to torture.
- **HTS:** Two child deaths due to torture.
- **SDF:** Two child deaths due to torture.
- **Armed opposition/SNA:** One child death due to torture.
- **Other parties:** Two child deaths due to torture.

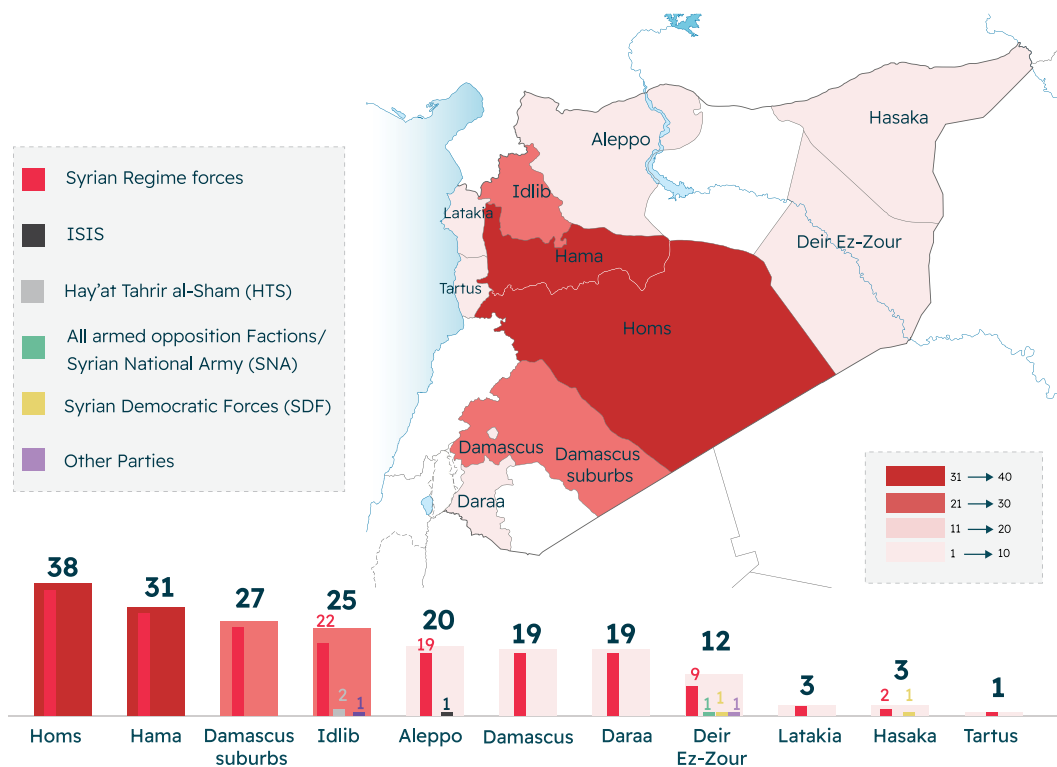
As the chart above shows, Syrian regime forces are responsible for approximately 96 percent of all child deaths due to torture in detention centers, which suggests that Syrian regime forces have failed to distinguish between children and adults with relation to their arrest and detention practices.

Child deaths due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria are distributed by year as follows:



The data above shows that 2012 was the worst in terms of child deaths due to torture, with Syrian regime forces being responsible for all deaths documented that year. 2012 is followed by 2013, then 2015, and then 2014. In all of these years, save for one, the Syrian regime was the party responsible for all cases of child death due to torture.

Distribution of child deaths due to torture at the hands of parties to the conflict and controlling forces by governorate is as follows:



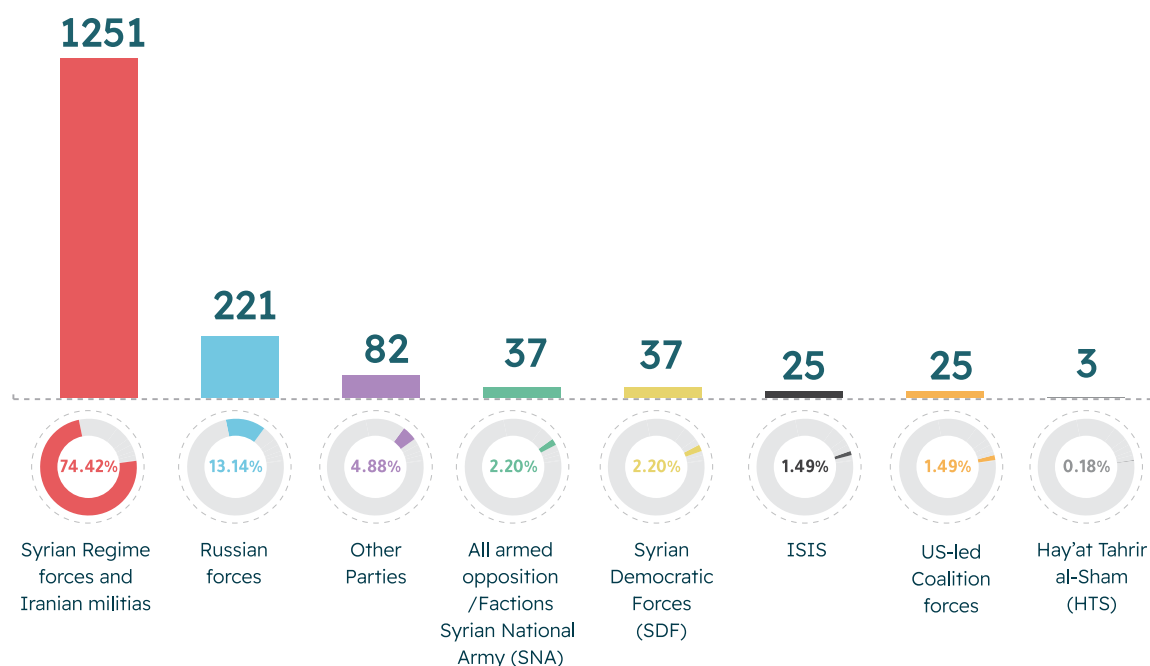
As the chart above shows, Homs saw the highest number of cases of child deaths due to torture, followed by Hama, then Rural Damascus, and then Idlib.



## D. Attacks on schools, kindergartens, and medical facilities

### Schools and kindergartens

SNHR has documented that no fewer than **1,681** schools and kindergartens have been subjected to targeted attacks by the various parties to the conflict and controlling forces since March 2011 up until November 20, 2023. These attacks are distributed as follows:

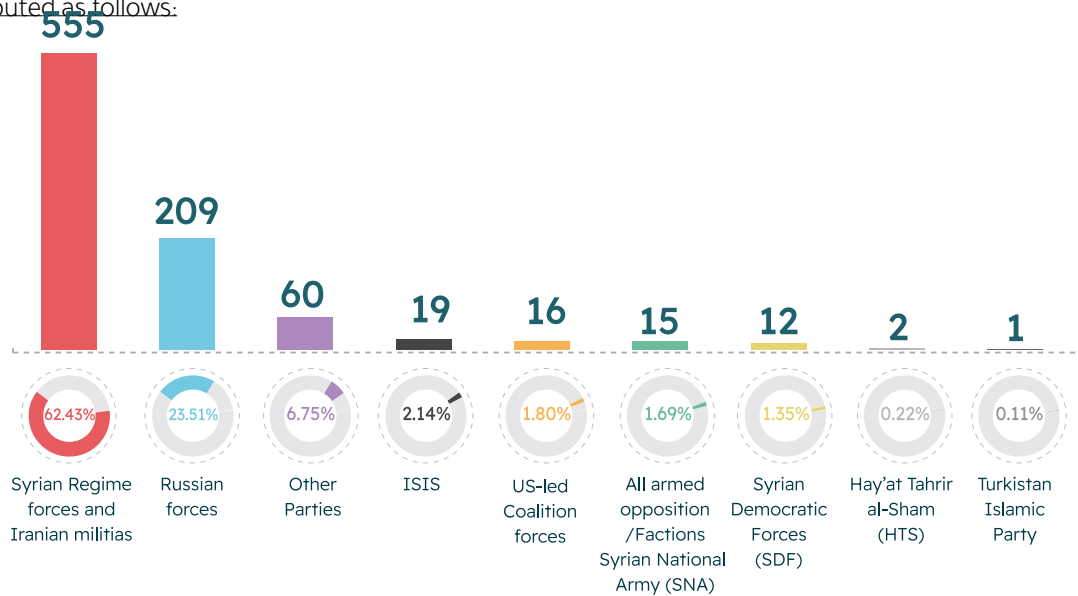


- **Syrian regime forces:** 1,251 facilities.
- **Russian forces:** 221 facilities.
- **ISIS:** 25 facilities.
- **HTS:** Three facilities.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA:** 37 facilities.
- **SDF:** 37 facilities.
- **US-led international coalition forces:** 25 facilities.
- **Other parties:** 82 facilities.

As the chart above shows, Syrian regime forces are responsible for approximately 75 percent of all attacks that targeted schools and kindergartens in Syria.

## Medical facilities

SNHR has documented no fewer than **889 attacks on medical facilities** at the hands of the various parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria since March 2011 up until November 20, 2023. Those attacks are distributed as follows:

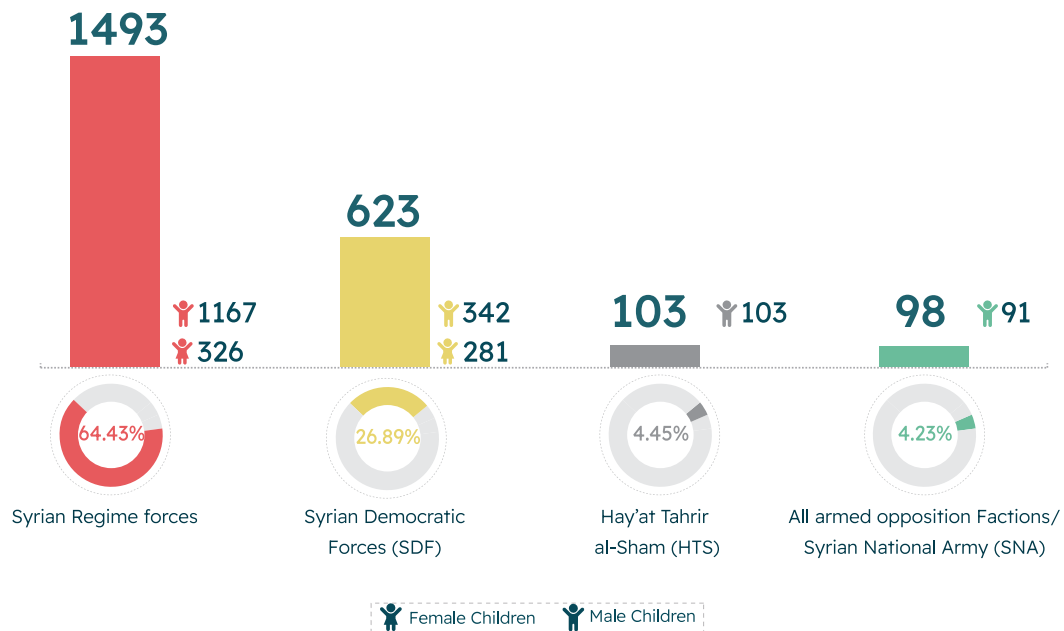


- **Syrian regime forces:** 555 attacks.
- **Russian forces:** 209 attacks.
- **ISIS:** 19 attacks.
- **HTS:** Two attacks.
- **Turkistan Islamic Party:** One attack.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA:** 15 attacks.
- **SDF:** 12 attacks.
- **US-led international coalition forces:** 16 attacks.
- **Other parties:** 60 attacks.

As shown in the chart above, Syrian regime forces were responsible for 63 percent of all attacks on medical facilities in Syria.

## Child recruitment

Between March 2011 and November 2023, SNHR documented no fewer than **2,317 cases** of child recruitment at the hands of the various parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria. Those cases are distributed as follows:

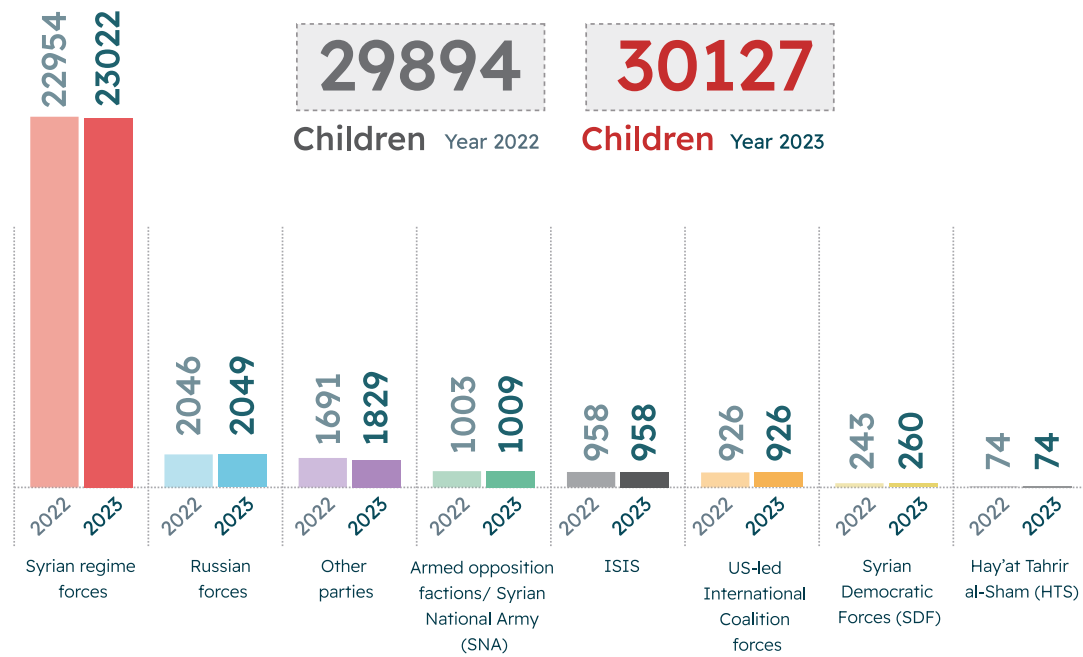


- **Syrian regime forces:** 1,493 cases, with 1,317 children still actively serving.
- **SDF:** 623 cases, with 296 children still actively serving.
- **HTS:** 103 cases, with 56 children still actively serving.
- **All armed opposition factions/SNA:** 98 cases, with 79 children still actively serving.

As shown in the chart above, Syrian regime forces, through their affiliated local and foreign militias, are responsible for approximately 65 percent of all child recruitment cases, followed by the SDF, with children making up a significant proportion of their forces.

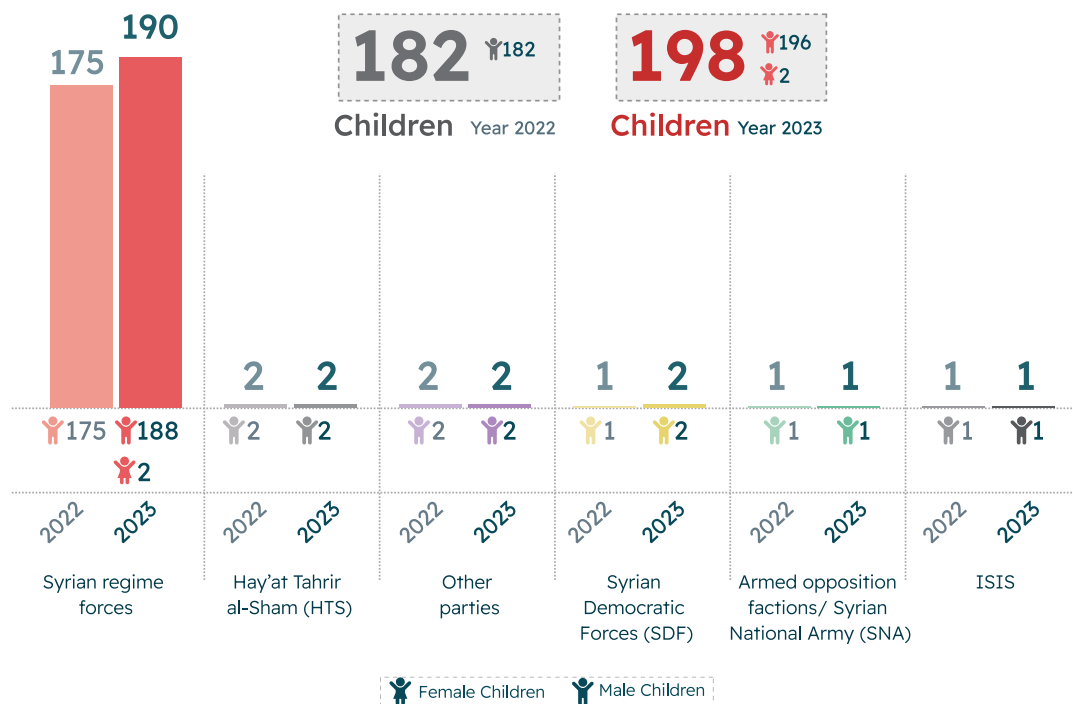
## Comparison between the most notable patterns of violations against children between March 2011 and World's Children Day 2022, and between March 2011 and World's Children Day and 2023

Comparison between child deaths at the hands of the various parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 20, 2022, and between March 2011 and November 20, 2023



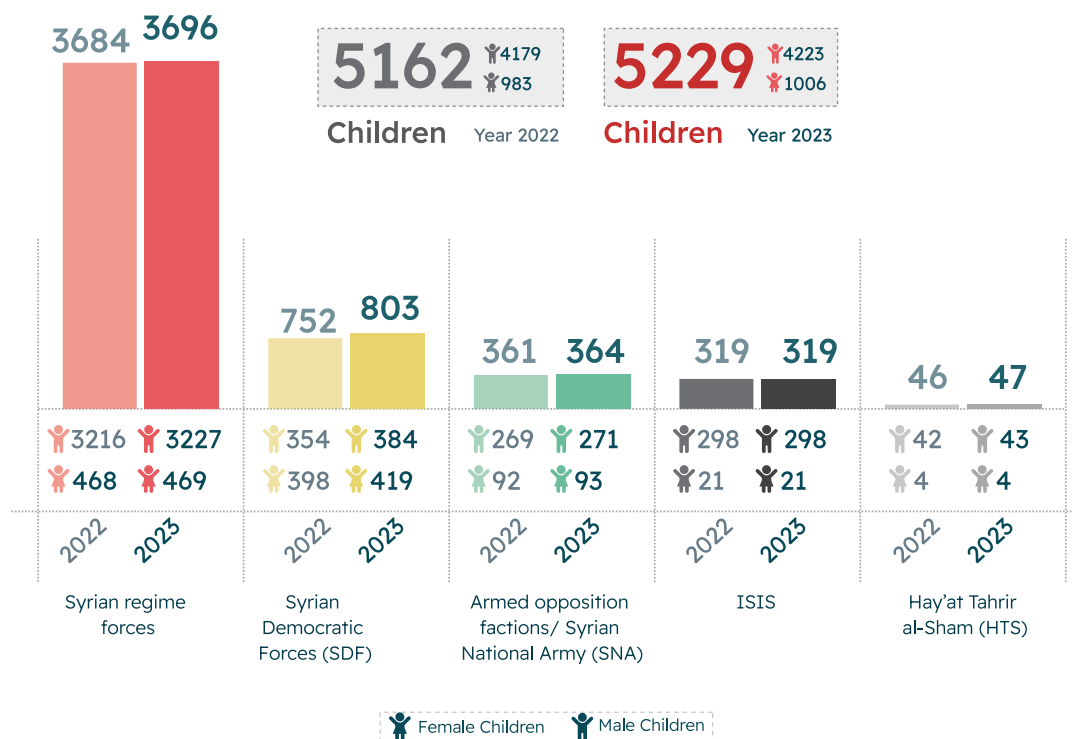
As shown above, the comparison shows an increase in the number of child deaths compared to previous years, mainly at the hands of Syrian regime forces and Russian forces, which have been the result of bombardment, often of a vengeful character, targeting heavily populated areas. These attacks resulted in many deaths and massacres, in which civilians, including children, lost their lives.

Comparison between child deaths due to torture at the hands of the various parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 20, 2022, and between March 2011 and November 20, 2023



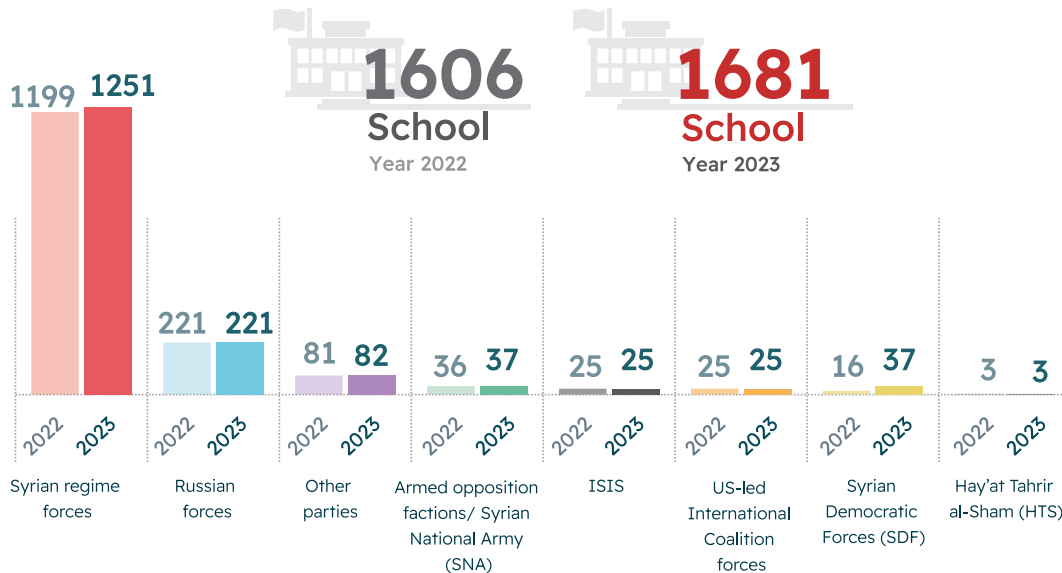
As the chart shows, more children died due to torture in regime detention centers over the last year, confirming that torture practices have not stopped since new deaths due to torture are still taking place. In fact, SNHR has obtained hundreds of death certificates for persons forcibly disappeared at the hands of the Syrian regime, including children, which explains the increase in the number of cases documented.

Comparison between the number of children who are still detained and/or forcibly disappeared out of all the children arrested by the various parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 20, 2022, and between March 2011 and November 20, 2023.



As shown in the chart above, the number of children who are still detained and/or forcibly disappeared increased over the last year. Those children are mostly being held in regime detention centers, further confirming that arrests and detentions targeting children continue to this day.

Comparison between the number of attacks on schools and kindergartens by the various parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 20, 2022, and between March 2011 and November 20, 2023.



As the chart above shows, the targeting schools and kindergartens has continued, mainly by Syrian regime forces, confirming that regime forces are still deliberately targeting schools in their attacks, which has led to education being suspended permanently or temporarily for many children.

## V. Outline of the Reality and Context of Gross Violations Against Children at the Hands of the Various Parties to the Conflict

### A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias)

#### 1. Extrajudicial killing

No fewer than 16 percent of all of those killed at the hands of the Syrian regime in the last 12 years were children, which is an alarmingly high percentage. At least one in every 10 civilians killed by Syrian regime forces is a child. In carrying out these killings, Syrian regime forces have used various methods and approaches that have at times exhibited a systematic manner, while other instances have been more indiscriminate. Regardless of the method used in individual incidents, however, those killings were all part of a calculated deliberate policy driven by various motives such as retaliation or the desire to inflict more suffering on Syrian society, especially in those areas that broke free of regime control. Below is an outline of the methods that characterized the Syrian regime's strategy in killing children:



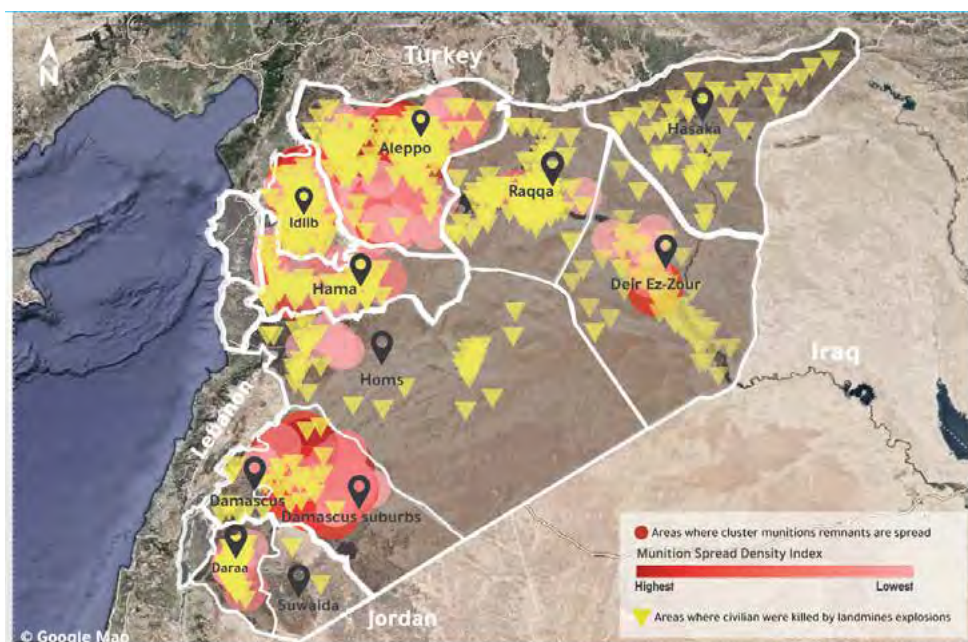
- Aerial and ground attacks:** The bombardment of heavily populated civilian cities and areas, whether in ground or aerial attacks, has been one of the most pervasive methods of killings that resulted in child deaths. This includes barrel bomb attacks, and the use of a wide range of missiles, rockets, and artillery shells. Each one of these weapons has been heavily used by the Syrian regime, either in indiscriminate or targeted attacks. In these attacks, homes, residential neighborhoods, and public markets were targeted, resulting in the deaths and injuries of children. Moreover, the regime deliberately targeted vital facilities, such as schools, medical facilities, and camps, all of which, due to their very nature, have sizeable numbers of children present. This is further evidenced by the fact that many of those attacks resulted in horrific massacres, and consequently a horrifically massive rise in the number of child deaths, with hundreds of children being physically dismembered due to the force of the bomb blasts, while others suffocated and died under the rubble of destroyed buildings. For instance, SNHR documented the killing of no fewer than **1,821** children in barrel bomb attacks at the hands of Syrian regime forces between July 2012 and November 20, 2023.
- Chemical attacks, incendiary ammunitions, and cluster munitions:** It is no wonder that the attacks involving the use of internationally prohibited weapons by the Syrian regime, such as cluster munitions, incendiary munitions, and chemical weapons, have been among the deadliest and bloodiest, as every one of these attacks resulted in numerous civilian deaths simultaneously, with the victims in every case including children. This is particularly the case in the regime's chemical weapons attacks, in which we documented that many children died in their homes along with other family members. As SNHR's database attests, we have recorded **222 chemical attacks** in Syria since the first documented use of chemical weapons on December 23, 2012, up until August 20, 2023; 98 percent of those attacks were carried out by Syrian regime forces and resulted in the death of 214 children. Meanwhile, the heavy and repeated use of cluster munitions by the Syrian regime in attacks directed at civilian targets, including agricultural land and populated areas have led to many civilian casualties, including children, since the first documented use of cluster munitions in Syria in July 2012. As is widely known, cluster munitions have an additional dimension of fatal danger extending beyond the time of the attack itself; as well as killing victims by the explosion of cluster munitions during the attack itself, approximately 10 to 40 percent of cluster munitions do not explode immediately, instead remaining live and ready to detonate at any contact, and posing a lethal threat to anyone in the vicinity for years afterwards. We have recorded no fewer than **496** cluster munition attacks since July 2012 up until January 2023, including 251 attacks by Syrian regime forces, which killed 337 children.<sup>10</sup> We [reiterated, in a previous report](#), that hundreds of cluster submunitions in Syria have effectively turned into landmines than can kill, maim, or cause serious injuries to civilians.
- Starvation, denial of food, and blockage of humanitarian assistance:** The Syrian regime has imposed sieges on many areas across Syria, including in the governorates of Homs, Rural Damascus or 'Rif Dimshaq', Aleppo, and Idlib. The regime has also continuously impeded or wholly blocked the delivery of humanitarian assistance, which created insurmountably cruel and horrific living conditions that affected entire populations, including children. On August 3, 2023, SNHR issued [a distress call](#) to end the suffering of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in al-Rukban Camp in Homs governorate who have been living under a grueling and suffocating regime-imposed siege since 2014, with the almost complete absence of safe drinking water and essential food supplies, and with regime forces forbidding anyone from entering or leaving the camp. Given these conditions, al-Rukban's population are effectively regime detainees. Although SNHR has issued numerous statements and appeals calling attention to the brutal siege imposed on the camp and the inhumane conditions existing there, the population of al-Rukban Camp continues to live under these monstrous conditions created by the siege as of this writing.

10. This figure does not include children who were killed by the explosion of cluster submunitions left by older bombardments.

On August 23, 2023, we issued [a statement condemning](#) the suspension of the delivery of UN cross-border humanitarian assistance via the Bab al-Hawa Crossing, which had already stopped at that time for some weeks, with the last convoy entering in July 2023, which threatens the lives of tens of thousands of civilians. To put things in perspective, [northwestern Syria has a population of over 4.5 million people according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#), with 1.9 million of these people living in camps, in which 90 percent of the population relies on UN cross-border humanitarian assistance to meet their basic survival needs. UN cross-border humanitarian assistance is delivered to northwestern Syria in line with [UN resolutions adopted since 2014](#); however, the amount of humanitarian assistance has been shrinking every year, with Russia lobbying against and extorting these mandates, to the point that aid is now being delivered only via one crossing, with the introduction of the concept of cross-line humanitarian assistance delivery in line with [Security Council resolution 2585 adopted in 2021](#).

- Unexploded remnants of war and landmines:** The countless bombardment operations carried out by regime forces have left thousands of unexploded remnants of war, particularly cluster submunitions, notoriously indiscriminate weapons that scatter across wide areas following attacks coming to rest between buildings, among rubble, in agricultural land, and in the refugee camps that have been targeted. Consequently, it is an extremely difficult and dangerous task to pinpoint the location of and safely remove these bomblets due to the still-unstable situation and the repeated bombings. In addition to cluster submunitions, anti-personnel landmines (APLs) are also scattered across Syria. SNHR previously released [a detailed report](#) including maps in an attempt to approximately pinpoint areas that are likely to be contaminated with APLs. It should be noted that those bombs, mines and submunitions will pose a lethal threat to Syrians' lives and movements for decades to come, more especially to children who are both incapable of distinguishing these remnants and unaware of their lethal danger, with these deadly munitions already resulting in numerous casualties and injuries, including permanent disabilities and disfigurements.

[Photo caption] Map outlining areas contaminated with APLs in Syria as a result of the military operations carried out by the various parties to the conflict between March 2011 and April 2023



Since March 2011 up until April 4, 2023, we have recorded the killing of **889** children in hundreds of explosions of APLs in Syria. Those are distributed as follows:

- 756 children killed in hundreds of explosions of landmines across Syria.
- 124 children killed at the hands of Syrian-Russian alliance forces as a result of the explosion of cluster submunition remnants left by older attacks carried out by those forces since the first documented use of cluster munitions in Syria, in July 2012.
- **Shooting and attacking civilians:** We have documented hundreds of incidents in which regime forces shot civilians directly using live bullets. This happens either during demonstrations, by these forces opening fire at houses, or through the use of ground anti-aircraft systems to counter Israeli warplanes, all of which have led to civilian casualties, including children. We have also recorded dozens of cases in which regime personnel opened fire during celebrations, regardless of the reason or occasion, which have also resulted in civilian casualties, including children.

Between March 2011, and November 20, 2023, SNHR documented the killing of no fewer than **23,022** children at the hands of Syrian regime forces, divided between **12,954** male children and **10,068** female children. Those child deaths are all documented on SNHR's database, with photos and documents related to the attacks in which they were killed, as well as photos of those children before and after their deaths. It is worth noting that hundreds of those children were killed in massacres, including massacres of an ethnic/sectarian character, some of which saw the use of white weapons (those whose use doesn't involve fire or explosions).

### Most notable incidents in which child victims were killed:

A boy named Mohammad Zakariya Ismail died on Wednesday, August 2, 2023, of wounds sustained one day earlier, on August 1, when Syrian regime artillery forces fired multiple shells at his home village of Ma'ar Ballit in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib governorate. One of the shells fired struck Mohammad's family's house, fatally injuring Mohammad.



👁 Mohammad Zakariya Ismail (child)

Hassan Osama al-Ghathith, a 15-year-old boy, died on Friday, August 25, 2023, of injuries sustained when he was shot by a member of the Syrian regime's Military Security force four days earlier on August 21, 2023, following a verbal altercation between the soldier and the child at a checkpoint in Hassan's home town of Buqrus in eastern Deir Ez-Zour governorate.



👁 Hassan Osama al-Ghathith, a child

Yaman Munther Baydoun, a six-month-old baby boy, was killed on Saturday, September 2, 2023, in an attack by Syrian regime artillery forces on the city of Sarmin in eastern rural Idlib governorate. One of the shells hit Yaman's family's home, killing him and injuring three other civilians.



👁 Yaman Munther Baydoun, a baby child

Furat Uqba Shbat, a 10-year-old girl, was run over and killed on September 17, 2023, by a military vehicle belonging to the Syrian regime's 15th Division, while she was returning home from school in her hometown of al-Sheikh Miskeen in northern rural Daraa governorate.

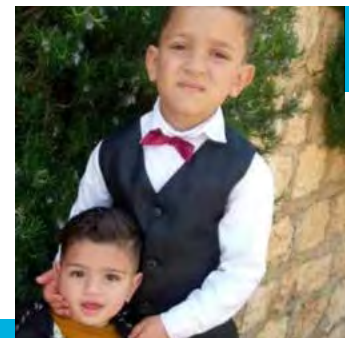


👁 Furat Uqbda Shbat, a child

Zidan Mohammad, a two-year-old boy from Deir Ez-Zour city who was living with his family in Hasaka city, was killed on Thursday, September 21, 2023, in bombardment by Syrian regime forces who fired multiple mortar shells at al-Nasra neighborhood in the center of Hasaka city. One of the shells hit Zidan's family's house, killing him.

Layla Ahmad al-Masri, a girl, was killed on Wednesday, October 4, 2023, in a rocket attack by Syrian regime forces on her home city of Sarmin in eastern rural Idlib governorate. One of the rockets landed in al-Shamali neighborhood in the city, killing Layla and injuring six other civilians (three girls, including a baby, two women, and one man).

Tayyem Ahmad al-Stouf and Samir Ahmad al-Stouf, two boys, were killed on Saturday, October 7, 2023, by Syrian regime forces who used rocket launchers to fire multiple rockets at their home village of Kaf-lata village in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib governorate. The bombardment targeted multiple homes in the village, killing the two children and injuring a third child, as well as completely destroying a number of houses. The area was under the control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.



👁 Tayyem Ahmad al-Stouf and Samir Ahmad al-Stouf, children

It should be noted that these intensified attacks were of a retaliatory nature, with the regime ordering intensified bombardment of these areas in response to a bombing that targeted the regime's Military College in Homs city on October 5, 2023.

Mohammad Emad Qarniya, a boy, died on October 11, 2023, of wounds sustained four days earlier, on October 7, when Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to fire multiple rockets at his home city of Ariha in southern rural Idlib governorate. The area was under the control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.



👁️ Mohammad Emad Qarniya, a child

## 2. Arrest/detention, enforced disappearance, and torture

### A. No fewer than 3,696 children are still detained and/or forcibly disappeared persons in regime detention centers, the overwhelming majority of whom have been suffering in horrific detention conditions for years

The Syrian regime's arbitrary and widespread arrests did not spare children and minors. Furthermore, child detainees go through the same harrowing arrest process that adults go through. Following their detention, which is usually carried out without any judicial warrant, children are classified as forcibly disappeared persons. During the process of their arrest and detention, children are also the victims of a series of compounded violations from the very moment of their arrest, and then through a process of interrogation and torture, as well as being subjected to 'trials' before military and exceptional court, where they receive absurdly harsh sentences, even capital punishment in some cases. This is to say that the entire process of detaining children is one of continuous, ceaseless violence and torture. As for the reasons behind the regime's imprisonment machine targeting children, the motives and contexts vary; in many cases, the children are punished for their fathers' and/or mothers' political activism, since the regime considers these children to be family members of dissidents and thus subjects them to the same punishment. Similarly, children may be arrested to pressure family members, while in other cases, children are arrested simply due to being with their parents at the time of their parents' arrests, or during raids and mass arrests targeting whole neighborhoods and areas which the regime has identified as centers of dissent or anti-regime dissident activism, as part of its practices of intimidation and collective punishment. Additionally, we've documented children being arrested over their involvement in the popular uprising for freedom, as well as over altercations between children and regime soldiers at checkpoints or during raids of houses and neighborhoods.

Theoretically, according to Syrian legislation, the issue of juvenile offenders<sup>11</sup> in Syria is regulated by Law No. 18 of 1974<sup>12</sup> which supposedly governs the arrest and detention of juveniles, places of detention, and the process of trying juvenile offenders in a way that ensures the child's interests. According to these legal texts, juvenile offenders should be jailed in a corrective institution for juveniles, with such punishment not dictated by the crime and its severity, but rather by the individual case and the requirement to reform the child in question. To that end, any judge handling such a case should not refer to the Syrian Penal Code except in the event of the absence of any texts that address the case at hand in the law regarding juvenile offenders. Moreover, Article 209 of the Syrian Penal Code states, 'No individual shall incur a punishment unless they committed the respective offense knowingly and willingly'. As such, a juvenile, whether male or a female, has not reached the age of assuming legal responsibility. In relation to this

11. Juvenile offenders: a term that refers to juveniles who committed crimes before reaching the age of majority. Only those who have committed crimes after reaching 'age of discernment' can be criminally prosecuted.

12. Was amended by Law No. 51 of 1979, and Law No. 52 of 2003.



issue, Legislative Decree No. 52/2003, adopted on September 1, 2003, raised the age of legal responsibility to 10 years of age. In this sense, a juvenile is a child no younger than 10 and no older than 18. Therefore, offenders in this age group should only receive corrective measures as stated in the juvenile law, which defines a juvenile as, 'Every male or female younger than 18 years of age'. Taking all of these points together, only children aged older than 10 and under 18 who are suspected of having committed a crime are eligible under Syrian law to be tried according to the law on juvenile offenders and may be subjected to public prosecution and corrective measures.

On a related note, Article 29 of the law on juveniles is specifically concerned with juveniles of 15 years of age or older suspected of committing criminal offenses. The article reduces the original sentence handed down for the same crimes when committed by adults. Moreover, the law gives the court the power to combine sentences with other measures. For instance, the law replaces the death sentence with an imprisonment sentence of 6-12 years with hard labor, or temporary detention of 1-5 years with hard labor. The law on juvenile offenders also requires that juvenile offenders are tried in a closed court in the presence of the offender with his guardian, representative, or primary caregiver, together with the personal prosecutor, their representatives, an agent from the social service bureau or the 'notice center',<sup>13</sup> and a behavioral observer,<sup>14</sup> in addition to a representative of the public prosecution service and the court clerk. These procedures were put in place to protect the future of the juvenile in question. Article 30 of the law on juveniles requires that they should be held in 'Juvenile Correction Institutes',<sup>15</sup> to prevent their mixing with adult offenders, with a special wing assigned to them. Moreover, Article 58 stipulates that repetition rulings<sup>16</sup> do not apply to juvenile offenders, and that any verdicts against them should not be included in the judicial records.

**In reality,** however, children arrested are subjected to the same detention conditions as adults, **which includes:**

- The various regime security agencies supervise the arrest, interrogation and detention of children rather than delegating this to the public prosecution for juvenile cases. According to the law, the examining magistrate should consult the public prosecution before issuing an arrest warrant since failure to do so means that they failed to follow the proper procedures so the case could be appealed before the referral judge. In reality, however, no arrest warrant is presented during the arrest of the overwhelming majority of children detained, as with their adult peers, with children also interrogated and tortured in security branches. Child detainees are also prevented from contacting their families or lawyer. In many cases, family members are allowed to see child detainees only as a way to put pressure on the children's loved ones or to obtain information. In such cases, the child is tortured and threatened with death in front of their family members to force the family members to accede to the regime authorities' demands.
- During interrogations, security agencies have no care for the sensitive cognitive and physical conditions of a child. Children are routinely accused of committing acts that far exceed their competence or physical abilities, such as taking part in bombings or attacking military and security facilities, with no evidence of any kind presented against them. Most of the children we have met told us they had no idea of the nature of the charges they faced, and they were simply in a state of trauma and exhaustion from being constantly subjected to torture and, as such, had confessed to the charges they faced in the matter they were instructed to by the interrogating officers.

13. Article 1 of the law on juveniles defines the 'notice center' as the center where the judge decides to hold juvenile offenders ahead of their verdict.

14. A behavior observer is selected from the social workers employed by the Minister of Social Affairs and Labor, who is required to have experience in social services. One of their responsibilities is attending the trial of the juvenile offender in question.

15. Correction Institute are educational institutions for juveniles who received a verdict. They are affiliated with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. One of their management board members is a juvenile judge.

16. Repetition rulings concerns the event where a convict commits one or multiple crimes after a verdict was issued that convict them of a previous crime. In such cases, the punishment is increased in light of the most recent crime.

- The Syrian regime has referred children to exceptional courts such as the [Military Field Court](#) and the [Counterterrorism Court](#) without assigning a special juvenile judge, as required, except in a handful of cases. Many of these children received exceptionally harsh sentences, including both long prison sentences and even death sentences. We have documented many cases where children were arrested before they were even 10 years old and were not released until they were adults. Many children also told us they were taken to trial sessions in handcuffs and wearing ragged clothing that didn't hide the signs of torture and malnutrition. They were also left alone with no family or a family member. The judges trying their cases did not listen to their statements or take their age into consideration. This is despite the fact that the juvenile judiciary is, under Syrian law, the sole apparatus authorized to try juvenile offenders in terms of its individual, quantitative and spatial jurisdiction. The juvenile judiciary is an independent apparatus, with no other court qualified to try juvenile offenders even in the case of an exceptional court with a special mandate established by a special law; this was the ruling of the Court of Cassation<sup>17</sup> when it dictated that juvenile courts alone can specialize in handling juvenile offenders, a mandate held by no other authority, whether military or civilian. An amendment to Article 32 of the juvenile law saw it further delineate the jurisdiction of the juvenile judiciary in cases of felonies and misdemeanors with a prison sentence of more than one year.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, all cases involving a juvenile offender aged older than 10 years and younger than 18 should appear before a juvenile court whether they're charged with a felony or a misdemeanor punishable by a prison sentence of more than one year.
- Most children spent the whole period of their detention in detention centers operated by the security agencies, as well as in military and civilian prisons with adult prisoners, including violent criminals, without being provided with any special accommodation or consideration, whether concerning their sleep, food, labor, or recess, rather than being held in correction institutes. Most of them were also denied educational, social, and health care, and many told us that they were forced to perform arduous labor such as transferring food and cleaning hallways, bathrooms, and cells.
- Children have been subjected to harsh detention conditions. As with adult detainees, children are usually subjected to torture from the very first moment of their arrest. Regime forces do not distinguish between children and adults in their types and methods of torture. We previously documented the most notable methods of torture used against detainees in [a special, detailed report](#). Torture, which may or may not lead to both juvenile and adult detainees' deaths, begin from the very first moment of arrest, throughout the entire period of detention, and its damaging physical and psychological ramifications last even after a child is released.
- Children younger than 10 years, or those who were born in detention centers suffer uniquely terribly. Usually, children arrested with their mothers are separated from their mothers, and taken to a separate cell, or to an orphanage, or undisclosed location, with their mothers being deliberately denied any information about where their children have been taken as a way to create a constant, crippling state of anxiety and fearfulness over the fate of their children. When children are taken into an orphanage, their families are denied any opportunity to visit them, with those children remaining in what are effectively, detention centers. When children are born in prison, both the mother and the newborn child are denied the necessary postnatal healthcare and receive no special accommodations. We have recorded no fewer than 93 cases of birth in detention centers, with all those involved being denied the necessary postnatal care, which led to the death of seven of those 93 children.

17. Reversal No. 1178, dated December 23, 1967 in Gazette of Law of 1968, 93. Also, Misdemeanor No. 334, dated February 2, 1954 in Gazette of Law, 5(2), 241.

18. Previously, Article 40 of the repealed law on juvenile offenders of the year 1953 stipulated that crimes committed by juveniles should be handled by the juvenile court, except for crimes committed by adolescents (defined in the law as those between 15-18 years of age), in which case they should appear before a regular criminal court. This law was further strengthened by Article 2 of Legislative Decree No. 47 on June 18, 1966, which states, "Criminal juvenile offenses retain their criminal description", with criminal courts being responsible for looking into felonies committed by adolescents. The first law was justified as follows: "It was noted that trying adolescents, those of 15-18 years of age, according to modern laws on juvenile judiciary. Legally, this principle was adopted. However, considering there is no special criminal courts for juveniles, and considering that juvenile courts issue reduced sentences according to Article 5, it was decided that regular criminal courts shall have the power to look into felonies committed by adolescents, while juvenile courts shall look into misdemeanor and infractions committed by adolescents."



- We documented many cases in which regime-controlled or pro-regime state TV channels broadcast footage of imprisoned children, male and female, 'confessing' to crimes as part of TV programs. In these grotesque 'confession' videos, the children are forced to confess falsely to being saboteurs or terrorists, in a way calculated to demean and humiliate them and rob them of their dignity. In this context, it should be mentioned that juvenile law prohibits the publishing of any photos of juvenile criminals, or the publication of the proceedings of their trials, reports on their trials or any other details in books, newspapers, video reports, or any other means unless this has been especially approved by the court. As such, these 'confession' videos blatantly violate these laws and are grounds for prosecuting those responsible under Article 410 of the Syrian Penal Code.

SNHR has documented that no fewer than **3,696** of the children arrested between March 2011 and November 20, 2023, divided between 3,227 male children and 469 female children, are still arrested and/or forcibly disappeared. We also documented the deaths of no fewer than **190** children due to torture in regime detention centers in the same period.

**B. The Syrian regime has acknowledged the death of no fewer than 24 forcibly disappeared children in the civil registry's records. We believe all those children died due to torture. Four children were also identified in the photos leaked from the regime military hospitals, known as the Caesar Photos.**

Since the beginning of 2018, SNHR has been working on documenting cases in which persons forcibly disappeared in regime detention centers have been registered as dead. We have been diligently monitoring and following up on these harrowing practices, starting with documenting the mechanisms by which victims' families learn that their loved ones have died, then the procedures adopted by the regime to tamper with victims' civil records, the institutions involved, and analysis of the victims' death certificates. We have released [many reports](#) on this issue and its psychological and legal repercussions on the victims' families. While we had received hundreds of death certificates from families since the beginning of 2018, at the beginning of 2022 we obtained new death certificates from regime insiders about cases that had not been revealed before, which we focused on and provided details of in our extensive report released on [December 20, 2022](#), in which we revealed that we had obtained hundreds of death certificates for persons forcibly disappeared in regime detention centers. The Syrian regime did not notify the victims' families of their loved ones' deaths, which were also not made public in the civil registry records. Moreover, some of these death certificates concerned prominent activists in the Syrian uprising, as well as women and children. We are still receiving such death certificates to this day through our extensive network of contacts and sources across Syria which we have fostered over the years. At this point, our team has gained a great deal of experience in verifying and authenticating these death certificates.

From the beginning of 2018 up until November 20, 2023, SNHR has documented that no fewer than 24 of the children forcibly disappeared in regime detention centers were registered dead in the civil registry's records. The cause of death has not been revealed in any of these cases, while the victims' bodies have not been returned to the families, and their deaths were not publicly registered at the time they took place.

In addition, since the first days of obtaining the [photos leaked from the regime military hospitals, known as the 'Caesar photographs'](#), SNHR has been working on identifying the victims who appear in those photographs, and we have released multiple reports on this issue, which we continue to work on. In our [12<sup>th</sup> annual report on torture in Syria](#), we endeavored to summarize our mechanisms used in identifying the victims, and we are working on releasing a detailed report on this issue. Since the beginning of 2015, we have identified four children out of the approximately 6,786 victims appearing in Caesar photographs. Currently, we are verifying and identifying hundreds of other cases.

### **Most notable cases of child detention, torture, and enforced disappearance**

Brothers Ramadan and Fayez Ahmad Kajak, born in 1995 and 1996 respectively, from Andan city in north-western rural Aleppo governorate, were arrested on Sunday, June 17, 2012, (meaning they were children at the time of their arrest) by personnel from the Syrian regime's Air Force Intelligence Directorate near the Baath Party headquarters in Saadallah Al-Jabri Square in Aleppo city. The two brothers were arrested after being pursued by Air Force Intelligence Directorate officers, who stopped the vehicle they were in. They were then taken to the al-Jamiliya Police Station in Aleppo city, from where they were transferred to a regime detention center in Damascus city. They have been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with their fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to their family.

SNHR spoke with a relative of Ramadan's and Fayez's, known as Maher Hamdan, who told us:

**"Ramadan and Fayez were in a car with their cousins on their way to meet their aunt's wife at the domestic transportation service company in Aleppo city to replace a gas tank in their home. When they arrived at Saadallah al-Jabri Square near the Baath Party headquarters, a vehicle belonging to the Air Force Intelligence Directorate appeared and pursued and stopped them. They were arrested and taken to the al-Jamiliya Police Station, where they were accused of making plans to detonate the gas tank they had with them. We had not received any information about them since then until a former prisoner told us that he had been imprisoned with them for 50 days in the al-Jamiliya Police Station, but then they were transferred via a helicopter to Damascus city and then to the Palestine Branch. We could not hire a lawyer since they were facing terror charges. We paid a lot of money, up to \$12,000, to learn anything about them, to no avail. We were just exploited, and to this day we do not know anything about them."**

Ali Ahmad al-Arbiniya, a child from Irbeen city in Eastern Ghouta in Rural Damascus governorate, born in 2005, was arrested on Monday, January 28, 2013 (meaning he was a child when he was arrested) at a sponge factory in Adra city, Rural Damascus governorate, where Ali and his family were taking shelter after fleeing their home city to Adra due to clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions taking place at the time. Ali was then taken to an undisclosed location. His fate remains unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.

SNHR spoke to Mr. Redwan,<sup>19</sup> an uncle of Ali's. He told us:

**"After Ali the child fled with his family from Irbeen city in Eastern Ghouta to Adra city in Rural Damascus governorate on account of the clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed opposition factions at the time, they settled in al-Sbi'i Sponge Factory in Adra city. That was when Syrian regime forces raided the factory and arrested him with his mother and two siblings (Lana & Obada) as well as 18 of his mother's family members and her grandmother. All of them have been disappeared since then, and we know nothing about them."**

Nedal Jamal al-Makhzoum, born in 1997, from Hama city, was arrested on Monday, March 10, 2014, at a checkpoint in Hama city. He was taken to an undisclosed location. His fate remains unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.



👁 Nedal Jamal al-Makhzoum

SNHR spoke to Mr. Fadel,<sup>20</sup> Nedal's uncle. He told us:

**"Nedal lives in Kazou neighborhood in Hama city. At the neighborhood's entrance, there is a checkpoint for the [Syrian regime's] Military Security directorate. Any civilian who leaves or enters the neighborhood has to pass through this checkpoint. When Nedal was leaving Kazou neighborhood for the city center, he was arrested by the checkpoint personnel following a check on his name, even though Nedal passes through this checkpoint daily. We have not received any information about the cause of his arrest or his whereabouts since he went missing."**

Hussein Ali Mahmoud, a boy born in 2004 from Souran city in northern rural Hama governorate, was arrested on Wednesday, July 6, 2016, by Syrian regime forces in Hama city. His fate remains unknown to SNHR as well as his family.

SNHR spoke to Mr. Hasan,<sup>21</sup> a relative of Hussein's, who told us:

**"Hussein was heading from Souran city for Hama city to buy some supplies with some of his friends. When they reached Hama city's garage, regime personnel did a check on his name, and they found out he is wanted so they arrested him. We have received no information about him since then, not even the cause of his arrest despite his young age. We are also certain that he has never had any involvement in politics."**

Mohammad Raed al-Halqi, a 14-year-old boy with special needs, from Jasim city in northern rural Daraa governorate, was arrested on Thursday, March 9, 2023, by armed Syrian regime personnel in Qedsayya city in Rural Damascus governorate. He was taken to the regime's Juvenile Prison in Qedsayya city.



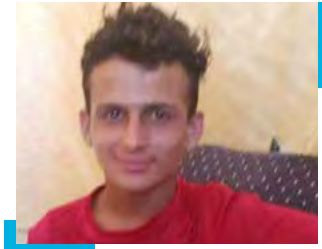
👁 Mohammad Raed al-Halqi,  
a child

19. Via phone on July 10, 2022.

20. Via phone on December 16, 2022.

21. Via phone on January 21, 2023

Sattam Wahid al-Rajab, a 13-year-old boy from Heymar Labda town, which is administratively affiliated with Manbij city eastern rural Aleppo governorate, was arrested on Friday, July 21, 2023, by Syrian regime forces at the Abaja Checkpoint near Abu Hanaya village in al-Salamiya area in eastern rural Hama governorate, while he was returning from Lebanon. He was taken to an undisclosed location.



👁️ *Sattam Wahid al-Rajab, a child*

Nagham Abdullah Othman, a 17-year-old girl from al-Ghariya al-Gharbiya town in eastern rural Daraa governorate, was arrested on July 25, 2023, by Syrian regime forces at a checkpoint while she was traveling from her home town to Jordan via the Nasib Border Crossing in southern Daraa governorate. She was taken to the Syrian regime's Military Security Intelligence branch in Daraa city. On July 28, 2023, she was transferred to a regime detention center in Damascus city. She was released on August 8, 2023.

Walid Khaled al-Hussein, from Hatla town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was 17 years old when he was arrested in April 2022, by personnel from the Syrian regime's Military Security in a raid on his family's home in the town. He was taken to a regime detention center in Deir Ez-Zour city, and was then transferred to al-Balouna Prison in Homs governorate. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with Syrian regime authorities denying any knowledge of his whereabouts and refusing to let anyone visit him, even a lawyer. On Wednesday, February 1, 2023, Syrian regime forces informed his family that he had died in al-Balouna Prison, returning his body to them two days later on February 3. SNHR can confirm that he was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong probability that he died due to torture and medical negligence.

### 3. Sexual violence

Sexual violence has been practiced in a widespread manner against children, both boys and girls, especially in regime detention centers. In fact, sexual violence is one of the worst forms of torture children have been subjected to. In many cases, we have documented children being subjected to one or more types of sexual violence throughout the duration of their detention. Based on the accounts of survivors who were formerly detained, we can identify the following types of sexual violence as being commonly practiced in a systematic manner:

- **Forced undressing:** children were forced to strip naked when transferred to detention centers, especially those operated by security agencies. This took place in hallways in front of other detainees, and security personnel or police officers. Furthermore, these traumatized children were left naked for hours until the 'inspection' was over, or whenever the officer in charge ordered them to get dressed. It is safe to say that the overwhelming majority of children who experienced detention experienced forced undressing.

- **Beating the genitals:** During interrogation, children are subjected to various types of beating, including beating the genitals to inflict greater pain. Many children and their family members told us that these beatings were not random, with the officers carrying out the abuse deliberately beating the children's genitals.
- **Molestation and rape:** Molesting usually takes place during inspection or transfers between detention centers, through inappropriately touching the children's sexual organs. Meanwhile, rape usually takes place during torture, especially against boys.
- **Sexual, verbal, and psychological violence:** This includes accusations and insults with sexual connotations and psychological abuse of children. This is one of the most common types of abuse that children are subjected to, in an intense and continuous manner. We have documented many cases in which regime-controlled Syrian state media show footage of detained girls 'confessing' to having had sex with armed opposition fighters; after appearing in these 'confession' videos, the girls are again forcibly disappeared.

Documenting cases of sexual violence against children is a particularly complex and difficult endeavor, due to the challenges we encounter in the process of collecting and verifying information. In most cases, children who suffer sexual violence are afraid and reluctant to share the details of the violations, even when they are with their families, especially given the lack of, or insufficient proper psychological and social support required for their treatment and recovery. Since our most recent report on November 20, 2022, we have documented no new cases over the **539 cases** of sexual violence against children recorded since March 2011. However, this does not mean that the Syrian regime has stopped practicing sexual violence against children. Rather, it means we have not been able to verify new cases in accordance with our rigorous documentation methodology. Furthermore, we have no reason to believe that the Syrian regime has stopped its torture practices, including sexual violence. On the contrary, all the evidence suggests that the Syrian regime continues to practice torture and has not changed any of its brutal abuses of detainees, including women and children.

#### 4. Attacks on schools, kindergartens, and medical facilities

The attacks that targeted educational and medical facilities have had dangerous ramifications on children. These ramifications are made more serious and compounded by the fact that most of these facilities have been deliberately targeted in attacks that resulted in massive casualties among children, health workers, and teachers. On the other hand, destroying schools and medical facilities have suspended education and healthcare for children, which means that Syrian children are losing access to education and basic medical services. Even military hostilities in themselves have led to the suspension of education, which gave rise to major issues as will be outlined later in this report. Lastly, bombarding schools and medical facilities has created a state of panic, distress, instability, and a sense lack of safety for children. Under those difficult psychological conditions, many children were driven to refuse to go to school or to receive treatment in fear of being killed.

Since March 2011, the ongoing bombardment has destroyed, partially or completely, no fewer than **1,251 schools** and kindergartens, most of which have been rendered out of commission, while no fewer than **555 attacks** were carried out on medical facilities by regime forces.

#### Most notable attacks on schools and kindergartens

On Sunday, November 6, 2022, at around 06:54 Damascus time, Syrian regime forces and Iranian militias, who we later confirmed were stationed in al-Nayrab Military Airbase, used a rocket launcher to fire multiple rockets loaded with cluster submunitions. A total of eight rockets were fired in all, judging by the remnants from the attack. The rockets exploded in rapid succession over a hilly area heavily populated with IDP camps to the northwest and west of Idlib city and Ahrash al-Bassil area. [One of the rockets' remnants struck the fence of Murin Elementary School](#) in Murin village in western rural Idlib governorate, [heavily damaging it](#). The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) at the time of the incident.



👁 Damage to Murin Elementary School in Murin village in Idlib caused by a ground attack by Syrian regime forces - November 6, 2022. © SNHR



On Tuesday, August 1, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a shell at Ma'ar Ballit School for Elementary Education in Ma'ar Ballit village in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib governorate. The shell hit the school's perimeter fence, [partially destroying it](#). The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

On Tuesday, August 10, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a shell at [al-Jena School for Girls](#) in al-Jena village in western rural Aleppo governorate, [which damaged the schoolyard, creating a number of holes where the shell struck](#). The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.



👁 Damage to al-Jena School for Girls in al-Jena village in western rural Aleppo governorate caused by a ground attack by Syrian regime forces - August 10, 2023

On Saturday, August 26, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired multiple shells at al-Mozara village in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib governorate. One of the shells struck the [Mohammad al-Fateh School](#), located next to the Abdul Karim Hallaq School. [The Mohammad al-Fateh school's building was partially destroyed](#), although no damage was documented at the other school. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

On Thursday, October 5, 2023, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to bomb the [Hussein Haj Abboud School for Elementary Education](#) in Sarmin city in eastern rural Aleppo governorate, [partially destroying several classrooms, the school's perimeter fence, and its schoolyard, and heavily damaging its interior furnishing](#). The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.



👁 Damage in Hussein Haj Abboud School for Elementary Education in Sarmin city in Idlib following a ground attack by Syrian regime forces – October 5, 2023. © SNHR

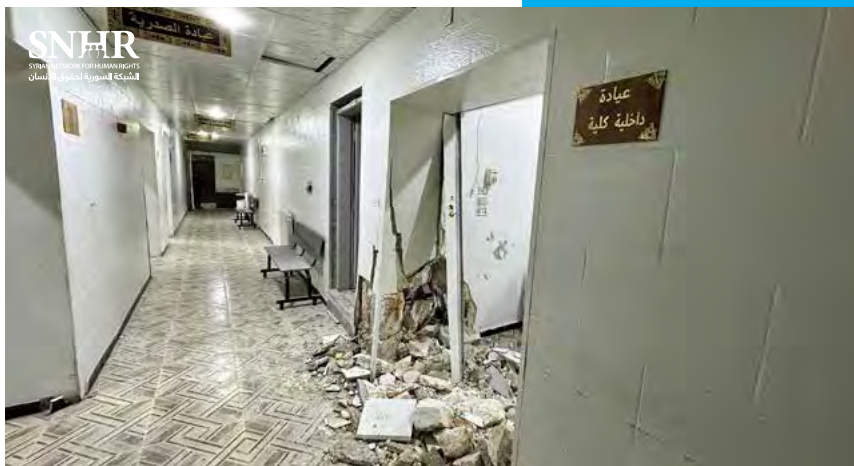
On Friday, October 6, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired a shell at Bdama School in [Bdama](#) town in western rural Idlib governorate, [heavily damaging the school's perimeter fence](#). The town was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

On Sunday, October 8, 2023, Syrian regime forces used rocket launchers to bomb the boys' middle school in al- Abzemou town in western rural Aleppo governorate, [partially destroying one of the classrooms and moderately damaging the school's interior furnishing](#). The town was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

### **Most notable attacks on medical facilities**

On Sunday, April 9, 2023, Syrian regime artillery forces fired three shells at Sarmin city in eastern rural Idlib governorate. One of the shells landed about 10 meters from the medical clinic in Sarmin, located in the center of the city, killing one child, and slightly damaging the medical point. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and the HTS at the time of the incident.

At around 13:00 local time on Sunday, October 8, 2023, Syrian regime forces used a rocket launcher to target a hospital building, known as the University Hospital building, that consists of six stories aboveground, and two underground (basement) levels, and which is located on a public road connecting al-Siyasiya roundabout and al-Zera'a roundabout. The building houses the University Hospital (affiliated with the Salvation Government), the Ibn Sina Children Hospital and the Maternity Hospital (both of which are supported by the Syrian-American Medical Society/SAMS), as well as a center for heart surgery (operated by a medical organization in Idlib). [The rocket struck the building's perimeter fence at the ambulance entrance](#), killing a civilian who was inside a car at the entrance, [as well as partially destroying the fence and heavily damaging the building itself](#). [Another rocket directly struck the building of the National Hospital](#) (affiliated with the Salvation Government), located near the University Hospital building, which consists of two aboveground stories and a lobby. [The building, whose top floor also houses the central aid network, was partially destroyed, with its equipment damaged to varying degrees](#). The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.



👁 Destruction in the National Hospital in Idlib city following a ground attack by Syrian regime forces - October 8, 2023. © SNHR

Visual analysis of a rocket attack carried out by Syrian regime forces that targeted the University's Hospital building in the center of Idlib city on October 8, 2023



SNHR spoke with Abdullah Hallaq,<sup>22</sup> a medical staff member at the National Hospital in Idlib city. Abdullah told us that he heard an explosion while he was in the break room, with the blast caused by a rocket that landed in front of the University's Hospital entrance. He continued:

**"A second rocket struck the clinics corridor in the National Hospital some meters away from where we were. The rocket penetrated the wall of the hospital and landed on the first floor. Patients started screaming, and we rushed to evacuate the hospital. We carried seven patients who were in the clinics wing outside, and then the medical staff came out. After we made sure the attack had ended, about half an hour later, we evacuated the wounded and went down to the basement in fear of another attack."**

Abdullah said that they did not hear the sound of the rocket, and were surprised by the explosion, which he described as "very strong". Abdullah also noted that he noticed that the remnants that fell in the hospital came from a rocket. He added: **"A young man who was in his car in front of the University's Hospital died while waiting for a relative who was a patient. The destruction amounted to a hole in the wall and [another] in the floor. The worst damage was in the clinics wing, since the rocket landed in a bathroom and washroom near the nephrology clinic."**

## 5. Recruitment

The Syrian regime has used various means to recruit and conscript minors and used them in its military operations, due to viewing them as being less costly than adult combatants. While we did not document any formal recruitment of children by the regime's official forces, such as the military, security forces, and police, a great deal of unofficial child recruitment has been carried out under their support, supervision, and planning. Moreover, a number of official institutions affiliated with the regime have been involved in supporting and directly perpetrating child recruitment practices. These include the Baath Party,<sup>23</sup> 'Talā'i al-Baath' ['The Seeds of the Baath'],<sup>24</sup> and 'Shabybah althawrah' ['The Youth of the Revolution'],<sup>25</sup> as well as state media and many pro-regime figures with official positions in the regime and its government institutions or the People's Assembly of Syria. Below is an outline of the calculated mechanism used by the regime to recruit children:

**Recruitment of children by the informal local forces:** The Syrian regime's informal forces, i.e. the regime-affiliated militias and other bodies, were the bodies primarily responsible for recruiting children, such as the National Defense Forces, and the local groups and battalions who work in coordination with, and under the supervision of the regime formal forces and security agencies. Those forces recruit children through their recruitment centers and headquarters. To do so, they entice children and their families by offering attractive salaries and financial rewards, as well as other inducements. Many children who were recruited told us that they were promised that they would be relieved of their mandatory military service if they chose to join these informal militias, or at the very least that the period of their mandatory service would be reduced in acknowledgement of the time that they'd served with the militias. Overall, children prefer being recruited by informal local militias over the regime's official military forces for various reasons. For one, they serve locally, rather than being deployed to distant areas. Second, they receive higher wages than regime troops, and thirdly the environment within those militias is less restrictive and severe compared to that of the regime's formal armed services. Fourth, child recruits receive military ID cards that they can use to seamlessly pass through checkpoints and also to receive privileged government services. The regime's child recruitment took on a more systemized and organized fashion

22. Via WhatsApp on October 9, 2023.

23. The ruling party in Syria since 1963. Towards the end of 2012, its members formed the Baath Brigades as a militias that fight side-by-side with army forces. These militias have also been involved in child recruitment practices.

24. Also known as the National Organization for Syrian Childhood, the Seeds of the Bath is a regime-affiliated organization whose focus is schools, especially on the elementary level. It works on propagating the doctrine and views of the Baath Party.

25. An organization that is affiliated with the Baath Party. It works on mobilizing and indoctrinating adolescents in the middle and high school levels with the Baath ideology, as a way to prepare them to join the party as members when they reach the threshold of adulthood.



with the formation of the National Defense Army<sup>26</sup> which sought to recruit children to make up for lost manpower. Children were both used as fighters in hostilities, or assigned with supporting tasks such as transferring ammunition, reinforcing the frontlines, cleaning weapons, and guard duty. Moreover, children have been implicated in the pillaging and looting that targeted the areas where the regime regained control. It is important to note that we monitored an increase in the rates of child recruitments since early 2019 in the areas that agreed to reconciliation and local settlements, mainly in the governorates of Rural Damascus, Daraa, and Aleppo. In most cases, those children were assigned combat roles without receiving the proper training.

**Recruitment by foreign militias:** The foreign militias, who are mainly Iranian, Iraqi, Lebanese, Palestinian, and Afghani, have worked to recruit Syrian children, as well as children of their own nationalities to fight in Syria, allocating special military training facilities particularly for children. As well as using children in combat roles, we've also documented these militias subjecting children to ideological indoctrination in what appear to be ideological education groups centered on religious sectarianism and inculcating extremist beliefs and sectarian hatred, as a way to ensure these children's zealous commitment to these groups. In fact, the Syrian regime has facilitated the process of recruiting children in foreign militias by never investigating or enquiring about their activities or holding anyone accountable for any child recruitment practices. On the contrary, the regime has turned a blind eye to the recruitment leaflets, pamphlets and other publications published by those groups specifically to encourage people to volunteer and fight with them.

In most cases, child recruits, whether recruited by local or foreign militias, are manipulated into joining those groups through taking advantage of their families' poverty and dire living conditions due to the rampant poverty and unemployment. In some cases, parents allowed their children to be recruited to avoid pressure or persecution by security forces, with this phenomenon being more common in the areas that agreed to settlements and reconciliations. The relentless propaganda and promotional campaigns for recruitment also played a role.

SNHR has documented no fewer than **1,493 cases** of child recruitment by regime forces, divided between 1,167 boys and 326 girls. Of these, no fewer than 67 child recruits are known to have been killed in battle. Moreover, no fewer than 109 children have been discharged, while the remaining **1,317** are still actively serving with regime forces (1,083 boys and 234 girls). These 1,493 cases include all the cases documented in the past years in which children (i.e. juveniles aged under 18) have been recruited. Given the high number of children recruited and the low number of child discharges, the number of children who are militarily active has not changed greatly during this period. In other words, for every child discharged, several others are recruited. We have also noticed that when a child reaches the age at which they are required to begin their military service, they are redeployed from the militias with which they were serving to the formal regime army. Meanwhile, we've documented the conscription of no fewer than **86 children** by Iranian or pro-Iranian regime militias, mainly the Liwa Fatemiyoun and the Liwa al-Quds; 24 of these children were killed in battle, especially in the Syrian badiya, or desert, primarily during clashes with ISIS.

In June 2023, a number of photos circulated on Facebook showing armed members of the Baath Brigades, the armed wing of the ruling Baath Party in Syria, [training a group of children on how to use](#), disassemble, and reassemble a weapon as part of the opening ceremony for the Youth Educational Camp in Ara town in western rural Suwayda governorate.

26. Formed in 2013, the National Defense Army are informal militias that fought side-by-side with regime forces. They spawned a number of other regime-affiliated groups and battalions across Syria, such as the People's Committees and others, and accept volunteers of all ages, both children and adults.

## B. Russian forces

### 1. Extrajudicial killing

Russian forces have not hesitated to use the most extreme levels of violence since the beginning of their military intervention in Syria. SNHR's data shows that the first year of the Russian intervention was the bloodiest, approximately 52 percent of all victims killed to date by Russian forces. Every year since then, on September 30, the anniversary of the date in 2015 on which the Russian military intervention was officially launched, SNHR releases its [annual report](#) on the most notable violations by Russian forces, in which we summarize the violence inflicted by Russian forces and its impact in terms of destruction and forced displacement, which are largely similar to the devastating effects of the Syrian regime's violations, with Russian aerial attacks also following a strategy of killing and inflicting as many casualties and as much destruction to the infrastructure as possible. This has been achieved through the use of advanced and experimental weapons, as well as through double-strikes and the targeting of heavily populated areas, markets, vital facilities, and all kinds of communities. Naturally, this has included many horrific massacres, in in which children were killed. Children account for approximately 30 percent of the total number of victims killed by Russian forces, a high percentage which suggests that Russian forces have deliberately targeted children in their operations.

As SNHR's database attests, Russian attacks have killed **2,049 children**, divided between 1,424 male children and 625 female children, since the launch of the Russian intervention on September 30, 2015, up until November 20, 2023.

Russian forces have heavily relied on cluster munitions in their attacks that targeted areas outside regime control. In this context, one must point out that Russian forces and Syrian regime forces are the only parties to have used cluster munitions in the Syrian conflicts. Those munitions were either launched using rocket launchers or other platforms, or dropped from aircraft. The areas targeted in cluster munition attacks were heavily populated, in some cases housing IDPs camps. We have recorded an increase in the rate of the use of cluster munitions since the launch of the Russian intervention by both Russian forces and Syrian regime forces. This suggests that Russia has been supplying the regime with more modern cluster munitions. SNHR has recorded no fewer than 237 cluster munition attacks carried out by Russian forces since the launch of their military intervention on September 30, 2015, up until November 20, 2023, with these attacks resulting in the deaths of 67 children.

### Most notable Russian attacks that resulted in the killing of children

On Friday, October 6, 2023, one child was killed, while another two were injured, in an attack by fixed-wing warplanes believed to be Russian that fired multiple missiles at houses in Jafatlek Haj Hammoud village, which is administratively affiliated with Jisr al-Shoghour city in western rural Idlib. The bombardment also resulted in massive destruction to civilian homes. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.



## 2. Attacks on medical and educational facilities

The fact that Russian forces have targeted educational and medical facilities show that those facilities were an essential target for Russian forces which used both guided and non-guided weapons to destroy these facilities either partially or completely. Those attacks have also resulted in the deaths of children. Since the launch of the Russian intervention on September 30, 2015, we have documented Russian forces targeting no fewer than **221 schools**, while no fewer than **209 attacks** were carried out on medical facilities in Syria by Russian forces.

### Most notable attacks on medical facilities

On Friday, October 6, 2023, fixed-wing warplanes believed to be Russian fired a missile that landed about 100 meters from [the dispensary](#) in Bdama town, administratively affiliated with Jisr al-Shogohur city in western rural Idlib governorate. The missile partially destroyed the dispensary's outer perimeter fence and slightly damaged its equipment. The town was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.

## C. HTS (an alliance composed of Fateh al-Sham Front, formerly al-Nusra, and armed opposition factions)

### 1. Extrajudicial killing

The military operations carried out by HTS in the course of their clashes with other parties have had horrific results, with the group resorting to indiscriminate bombardment, resulting in civilian deaths, including of children. HTS has also been engaged in incidents of infighting with foes among armed opposition factions that broke out in populated areas. Moreover, HTS members have opened fire indiscriminately during raids, inspections, and pursuits of wanted individuals in areas under their control. According to SNHR's database, no fewer than 74 children, divided between 68 male children and six female children, have been killed by HTS since the emergence of al-Nusra Front (rebranded subsequently as HTS) in January 2012, up until November 20, 2023.

A woman, identified as Teryaq Rustum, from Jourin town in western rural Hama governorate, and a child, identified as Arwa' Maher Abbas from Qal'et Merza town in western rural Hama governorate, [died](#) on August 29, 2023, of wounds sustained on August 25, 2023, when HTS forces used a rocket launcher to fire multiple shells at the towns of Jourin and Qal'et Merza in western rural Hama governorate.

### 2. Arrest/detention, enforced disappearance, and torture

HTS has deliberately targeted children and minors which it has arbitrarily detained and abducted on various pretexts. In reality, however, whatever the supposed reasons HTS gives for these arrests, HTS' aim through such practices is brutally imposing its control in line with its extremist ideology. For instance, SNHR's database shows about one-quarter of the juveniles detained by HTS were children who were charged with infractions of the draconian regulations and laws imposed by HTS in areas under its control, such as gender segregation in some areas, or even charging children with blasphemy. HTS has also abducted children and held them as hostages during attacks on areas outside its control. Additionally, HTS took children from ISIS fighters' families as hostages during the group's pursuit of ISIS affiliates. We also documented detentions of children by HTS personnel on charges of working with hostile forces such as armed opposition factions, as well as children being detained for taking part in anti-HTS demonstrations or being arrested at checkpoints if they were coming from areas under the control of other parties, such as the regime.

The detention conditions children are subjected to in HTS-operated detention centers are similar to those in regime detention centers, with no special sections assigned for children who are placed in the same cells as adults. This also applies to HTS' failure to take into consideration the age and vulnerability of children who are subjected to torture and denied any opportunity to see their families. HTS also imposed cruel and degrading punishments on children, such as solitary confinement, beating, denial of food, verbal abuse in public areas, and forcing them to attend religious courses. We previously released [a detailed report](#) on the detention centers operated by the HTS. Child detainees' suffering is compounded when they are arrested together with their mothers, with HTS's usual policy being to separate male children aged over seven from their mothers, in which case these vulnerable, already traumatized young boys are taken from their mothers and put in the same cells with adult men. In many cases, children are held for many months or even years without trial, as is the case with children related to ISIS fighters.

SNHR has documented that **47 of the children** arrested between January 2012 and November 20, 2023 - 43 male s and four females - are still detained and/or forcibly disappeared in HTS detention centers. We have also documented the deaths of two children due to torture in HTS detention centers in the same period.

### **Most notable cases of detention and enforced disappearance involving children**

A 14-year-old boy, identified as Ahmad Omar al-Dal', was arrested/detained on May 9, 2023, by HTS personnel in a raid on Deir Hassan village over accusations that he had taken part in an anti-HTS demonstration held by the Tahrir Party. His fate remains unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.



👁 Ahmad Omar al-Dal', a child

### **3. Recruitment**

HTS has actively worked to recruit children who've made up a significant proportion of its forces since the inception of al-Nusra Front in Syria in January 2012. In fact, HTS has steadily increased the level of its child recruitment over the years, which began initially with the recruitment of children from HTS members' families, before extending to recruiting children from all parts of society in areas under its control, with the group encouraging children to join, and establishing military training centers for children, as well as conducting periodic mobilization campaigns through its religious and propagandist arms, especially in camps. Those campaigns are usually intensified when regime forces intensify their offensives on HTS-held areas. The group usually enrolls child recruits in simultaneous religious and military training courses to mold their beliefs and values and indoctrinate them into taking up arms and joining its ranks. In fact, HTS uses many of the methods previously employed by ISIS in relation to recruiting and indoctrinating children at an early age to ensure their enduring loyalty.

Following training, these children are deployed to the fronts, where they are assigned a wide range of tasks, including guard duty, transferring ammunition, and establishing checkpoints. HTS also takes advantage of the economic hardships suffered by most residents in areas under the group's control by offering meagre but still welcome financial inducements to attract and recruit children.

SNHR has documented no fewer than **103 cases** of child recruitment by HTS, all of male children. No fewer than four of these child recruits were killed in battle, while about **43** others have been discharged, with **56** children still actively serving with HTS.

It should be noted that HTS selectively recruits children.<sup>27</sup> Despite this, the group has condemned the very same practices by other parties. For instance, HTS criticized ISIS's use of children in the conflict.<sup>28</sup> In a broader context, recruiting children has become an issue that is employed by each of the parties to the conflict to condemn one another before the international community as a way to increase pressure, although none make any attempt to abide by international law by banning child recruitment, which is a war crime and an explicit contravention of international norms and laws.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. Attacks on schools and medical facilities

HTS has taken over many schools in areas under its control, which it subsequently turned into other civilian amenities, such as religious schools, or military facilities. In either case, education is suspended in these schools and the curriculum is changed to conform to HTS' extremist ideology. This commandeering of schools and using them for goals other than education has had a strongly deleterious on children's education in those areas and on their right to a high-quality and neutral education. These practices have also weakened the educational environment in HTS-held areas, and pushed more children and adolescents towards being recruited by the HTS instead of enjoying genuine and independent educational opportunities. As of November 20, 2023, HTS has carried out attacks on **three schools**, while two attacks were carried out on medical facilities by the HTS.

27. Benotman, N., & Malik, N. (2016). The Children of Islamic State. Quilliam. <https://f.hypotheses.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/2725/files/2016/04/the-children-of-islamic-state.pdf>

28. Plowright, W. (2021). Armed Groups and International Legitimacy: Child Soldiers in Intra-State Conflict. Routledge.

29. Ibid.

## D. SDF

### 1. Extrajudicial killing

The SDF has engaged in many practices that resulted in civilian deaths, including of children. Most notably has been the group's indiscriminate bombardment of areas under the control of other parties, as well as conducting military operations, and engaging in clashes, and raids in populated areas. SDF personnel have also opened fire indiscriminately during raids and inspections of houses and during pursuits of wanted individuals. Furthermore, SDF snipers have targeted civilians, particularly in areas adjacent to territories under SDF control which are controlled by its foes. Overall, as SNHR's database attests, SDF personnel have killed 260 children, divided into 157 male children and 103 female children, since the group was initially founded as the People's Protection Units (YPG) in July 2012, up until November 20, 2023.

In addition, the people, including children, detained in al-Hawl Camp in eastern rural Hasaka governorate, which is controlled by the SDF, suffer extremely dire humanitarian conditions in terms of healthcare, education, and security. SNHR has released [an extensive report](#) on the camp, documenting many acts of violence and murders whose victims include children. As the party controlling the camp, the SDF is responsible for ensuring the safety of the detainees there, which includes protecting them against assaults and crimes and fostering a safe and healthy environment for children. The SDF must take the necessary measures to achieve this.

### Most notable incidents resulting in child deaths

A 10-year-old boy, identified as Abdul Hai Jihad Mohammad al-Rawi from Darnaj village in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was shot dead on Monday, January 30, 2023, by an SDF member in al-Hawija area on the bank of the Euphrates River between Darnaj village and al-Ashara city, while he was delivering food to his family members who were working on agricultural land at the time. It should be noted that al-Hawija area is a sparsely populated agricultural area located on the dividing lines between the SDF-held areas and regime areas.

A 16-year-old boy, identified as Mohammad Majed al-Saleh al-Hazim from Eqerbat town in rural Hama, was shot dead on Wednesday, March 22, 2023, by SDF patrol personnel who opened fire at him directly following a pursuit, while he was riding a motorbike through the SDF-held al-Tabaqa city in western rural Raqa governorate. It should be noted that the SDF had issued a ban on motorbikes in al-Tabaqa city a few days before the incident.



👁️ Mohammad Majid al-Saleh al-Hazim, a child

A seven-year-old boy, identified as Mohammad al-Yousef, was shot dead on Thursday, April 20, 2023, by personnel from the SDF's Asayesh forces while he was playing with other children. Mohammad was shot when he was trying to pick a flower near the fence of the eighth section in the SDF-held al-Hawl Camp in eastern Hasaka.



👁️ Mohammad al-Yousef, a child

A 15-year-old boy, identified as Turki Abdul Rahman from al-Mrouh village to the south of Manbij city in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo, died on Sunday, May 5, 2023, when he fell into a well in Abu Kahf village to the southwest of Manbij city in eastern Aleppo governorate, while he was trying to flee SDF personnel who caught him carrying a container of fuel which he was trying to smuggle from the regime-held al-Tayha area to areas controlled by the SDF.

A woman, identified as Fedda al-Setta, and her granddaughter, Ranya Amjad al-Hassan, from Theyban town in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate, were killed on Monday, September 25, 2023, by an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), commonly known as a drone, operated by SDF personnel. Fedda and her granddaughter were killed while they were fleeing from their SDF-controlled hometown heading to the regime-controlled town of Mahkan via a river crossing in Deir Ez-Zour governorate. Five other civilians - four children and a woman - were also injured to varying degrees in the attack. The area was under the control of the SDF at the time of the incident.



👁️ Ranya Amjad al-Hassan, a child

A boy, identified as Faris Nabil al-Khadr, was shot dead on Thursday, October 12, 2023, by SDF personnel in Abu Hamam town in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The SDF personnel indiscriminately opened fire following the explosion of a landmine that struck an SDF military patrol and killed one SDF member. The SDF's gunfire also injured Faris's father. The area was under the control of the SDF at the time of the incident.



👁️ Faris Nabil al-Khadr, a child

## 2. Detention, enforced disappearance, and torture

The SDF has held detained children in an extensive manner, mainly during its war with ISIS. Following the decline of ISIS, the SDF has persecuted civilians, including children, on the pretext of having ties with ISIS, with those civilians facing terror-related accusations. Subsequently, many of these detained civilians go on to become forcibly disappeared persons. Meanwhile, the SDF has detained many children after separating them from their mothers in the camps where ISIS fighters' families were placed. These children were removed from their mothers by the SDF and placed in detention centers with adult prisoners on the pretext of supposedly protecting them from the incidents of violence that occur frequently in those camps. We have also noted that US-led international coalition forces have been involved in supporting the SDF in many of these incidents.

Furthermore, the SDF has abducted numerous children and minors for the purpose of conscription, again in a widespread manner. Those children are usually taken to training centers after being abducted from the street, in school, or while they are playing in front of their families' homes. We also documented many arrests of children by the SDF during raids on homes, with the children effectively being used as hostages to pressure family members to surrender themselves, or as bargaining chips during talks with Arab tribes. Additionally, many children were arrested at checkpoints while traveling from areas under the control of other parties to the conflict to SDF-controlled areas. Those children were released in exchange for sums of money. In addition to these practices, the SDF has also indiscriminately arrested many children without charge during raids by its personnel on cities and towns. We have also recorded the arrest of many children working in SDF-controlled oil fields over accusations of trying to smuggle oil to areas outside the SDF control.

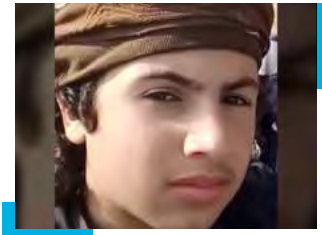
In the SDF's detention centers, children suffer harsh detention conditions. Many children's parents have told us that their children suffer from malnutrition and extreme weight-loss during their imprisonment. These same children were also denied any opportunity to be transferred to medical facilities to receive treatment, with their psychological and mental state also deteriorating terribly as a result of enduring such trauma. In most cases, families of child detainees are forced to bear the costs of their children's food and medication in detention centers where children are usually held with adults. Like the adult prisoners, these child detainees are also subjected to harsh punishments, such as denial of visits or phone calls from their families, solitary confinements for prolonged periods of time, beatings, and mistreatment. Children held in detention centers designated for ISIS fighters suffer particularly severe and horrific conditions. In these facilities, they are held with adults, and have no proper place to sleep due to the cells being extremely cramped, in addition to being forced to perform arduous labor. Many of the children held in SDF detention centers have been injured and wounded during detention and subsequently denied treatment, sustaining these injuries either during torture by prison guards, or during fights with adult detainees.

No fewer than **803 of the children detained** by SDF personnel since the group's initial emergence in July 2012, when it was known as the YPG, up until November 20, 2023, divided between 384 male children and 419 female children, are still under arrest and/or forcibly disappeared in SDF detention centers. This significant number can be explained by the rising number of SDF abductions and detentions of children, which we believe are primarily carried out for conscription purposes, although we have not been able to conclusively determine their fate after their abduction to ascertain whether they were taken to detention centers or recruitment centers. We also documented the deaths of no fewer than two children in SDF detention centers during that time.



## Most notable incidents of detention, torture, and enforced disappearance involving children

Nawwaf Khaled al-Ibeid al-Hbeira, born in 2004, from Theyban town in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was arrested on Monday, June 22, 2020 (he was a child at the time of his arrest) by SDF personnel, and taken to an undisclosed location. He has been classified as forcibly disappeared ever since, with his fate remaining unknown to SNHR as well as to his family.



Faris Nabil al-Khadr, a child

SNHR spoke with Nawwaf's father<sup>30</sup> who told us:

**"Nawwaf had to leave school in the sixth grade, and started working as a day laborer to help us provide for the household. On the day of his arrest, he left the house at 9:00 pm, and there was an SDF patrol that arrested him, even though they knew he is a local and he is not involved in any anti-SDF activism. We checked with all of the prisons and detention centers affiliated with the SDF but they denied having him. A prisoner who was released told us he is in al-Kamp al-Sini Prison. We tried to get some tribal intermediaries involved, and paid money in order to find out Nawwaf's fate, yet we never found out his fate, we never saw him, or discovered what he is charged with."**

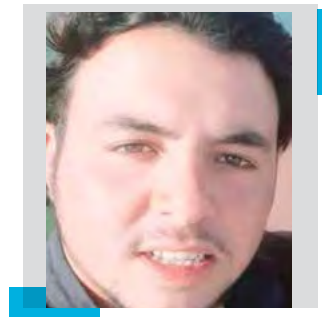
A 14-year-old boy, identified as Mahmoud Ahmad al-Abdullah from Abu al-Neitel village in northern Deir Ez-Zour governorate who was working guarding one of the oil wells in the al-Seijan Oilfield in northeastern Deir Ez-Zour, was arrested at the oilfield on Friday, September 22, 2023, by SDF personnel, and taken to a detention center in al-Omar Oil Field, also in rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate. Mahmoud was beaten by the personnel during his arrest.

A boy, identified as Abdul Samad Mahmoud al-Sayel, born in 2005 from Theyban town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was arrested in the town by SDF personnel on Monday, July 27, 2020. His family was able to visit him in October 2022 at the Central Prison in Hasaka city.

On Monday, February 27, 2023, his family received notification from an SDF official that Abdul Samad needed to undergo surgery, for which his family members had to pay the SDF a sum of money, after he contracted tuberculosis in detention.

On Sunday, March 5, 2023, Abdul Samad's family received another message from an SDF official summoning them to the National Hospital in al-Aziziya neighborhood in Hasaka city to visit the boy. When they arrived at the hospital, they were informed that Abdul Samad had died of tuberculosis. His body was returned to his family.

SNHR can confirm that Abdul Samad was in good health at the time of his arrest, indicating a strong possibility that he died due to torture and medical negligence in Ghwayran Prison.



Faris Nabil al-Khadr, a child

30. Via phone on June 26, 2023.

SNHR spoke with a neighbor of Abdul Samad's family's named Ahmad al-Saed,<sup>31</sup> who told us:

"Abdul Samad was arrested by an SDF patrol while farming in his family's land in the badiya [desert] of Theyban town. Two years after his arrest, we learned he was in the Allaya Prison in al-Qameshli. They allowed his family to visit him, and he seemed in good health at the time. In October 2022, however, he was transferred to the Central Prison in Hasaka city, and his family was able to visit him for a second time. After that, he was denied visits. We sought through tribal intermediaries to have him released, but to no avail. We also tried to hire a lawyer, but they did not allow us since his case was related to terrorism. This is because, when he was 12 years old, he was taken to an ISIS camp and he stayed there for one year, but we were able to get him back because he was a child. On February 28, 2023, they [the SDF] called the family by phone and told us we can visit him. When his father and mother went to visit him, they could not see him, and they were told he was in court and not in prison. When they went home, they [the SDF] called them [Abdul Samad's parents] again and told them that Abdul Samad required surgery that would cost three million SYP. His father was able to secure 3.3 million SYP and gave them the money, but he was not allowed to see him. When Abdul Samad's father returned home, they called him and told him to come to the National Hospital at 5:00 pm. Abdul Samad's parents went to the hospital the next day. At the time designated for the visit, someone came and took information from them, and had Abdul Samad's father sign some papers even though he does not know how to write or read. They told them that Abdul Samad died the night before from a heart attack, and they [the family] would be receiving his body now. The body was extremely skinny compared to the last time they'd visited him, at which time he was in good health. There were no signs on Abdul Samad's body indicating that he had undergone surgery. In fact, [the SDF] returned part of the sum of money to the family."

### 3. Recruitment

Juvenile boys and girls are a key element of the SDF. Recruitments are part of a systematic, established policy carried out under the supervision of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).<sup>32</sup> Many of the SDF's different divisions have been involved in recruiting children since the first month of the SDF's emergence (as the YPG in July 2012). In recent years, recruitment has been expanded to include all areas under the SDF's control. The group al-Shabiba al-Thawriya, (Revolutionary Youth) faction, also known as the 'Joanne Schurchkar',<sup>33</sup> together with the Women's Protection Units and the YPG Units, are the most prominent entities responsible for recruiting children and taking them to training camps and the military units of the SDF. We have also monitored that many schools affiliated with the Self-Administration have been involved in supporting child recruitment.

31. Via phone on March 9, 2023.

32. Designated as a terror group by many states, including the US.

33. Joanne Schurchkar/Revolutionary Youth: an armed organizations that operates in the SDF's territories and under its supersession. The organization receives directives from the PKK.

Children are either recruited compulsory, as they are abducted from schools, streets, and public roads, or voluntarily through attempts to change their beliefs and encourage them to enlist by offering financial incentives to them and their families. The SDF has established recruitment centers that are usually distant from children's places of residence. In some cases as well, children are taken abroad to the territories under the control of the PKK in Iraq. Usually, the SDF denies child recruits any opportunity to contact their families for months or even years, in fear of the families trying to convince their children to return. Many of the families of child recruits who tried to search for and return their children have faced threats and pressure. Moreover, families are not allowed to visit their children, and when they attempt to do so they are usually faced with verbal insults and expulsions at SDF headquarters.

In training camps, children are trained in how to use weapons and fight. They were also taught the beliefs and ideology of the PKK, before they are thrust into various military operations. We have noticed that rates of recruiting children and enlisting them in the ranks of the SDF dramatically increase in tandem with any attacks against SDF-held areas, as an attempt to make up for the lost manpower.

The Kurdish Self-Administration signed [a joint action plan with the UN](#) in June 2019 to put an end to child recruitment, and release children who have been already recruited. Additionally, the YPG and Women's Protection Units signed a deed of commitment with the Geneva Call organization in June 2014 banning the use of children in wars. Despite these actions, however, the group's recruitment of children has not stopped, but, on the contrary, has seen an unprecedented increase compared to previous years. Although the SDF founded the Office for the Protection of Children from Armed Conflicts on August 30, 2020, to receive complaints about children recruitment in areas under its control, many of the child recruits' and conscripts' families have received no response to their enquiries or any information about the fate of their children. The UN Secretary-General's report on children and the armed conflict in Syria for the year 2022, which was released in June 2023, stressed that the SDF was the worst party in the country with respect to recruiting children, followed by armed opposition factions/SNA, and then the HTS.

SNHR has documented no fewer than **623 cases of child** recruitment by the SDF, divided into 342 male children and 281 female children. No fewer than **30** of these child recruits were killed in battle, while about 297 others have been discharged, with 296 children still actively serving with the SDF, divided into 187 male children and 109 female children.

### **Most notable cases of child recruitment or discharge by the SDF**

A 16-year-old boy, identified as Jad'an Adnan al-Mohammad, was abducted for military conscription on Tuesday, July 4, 2023, by the SDF's al-Shabiba al-Thawriya, (Revolutionary Youth) faction, also known as the 'Joanne Schurchkar', in his home village of Ousajli Kabir, administratively affiliated with Manbij city in eastern rural Aleppo governorate. He was taken to an SDF recruitment center.



 *Jad'an Adnan al-Mohammad, a child*

SNHR spoke to Jamil Khalaf,<sup>34</sup> a relative of Jad'an's. He told us:

**"Jad'an left home to buy some groceries from a store in Ousajli Kabir village, but he disappeared and we could not find out anything about him for about a week. Then, a Joanne Sschurchkar member told us in secret that he was abducted by the group following multiple attempts to convince him to join. The child's family then headed for [the SDF's] center in Manbij city to ask about him, but they denied having him."**

A 16-year-old boy, identified as Hussein Saddam al-Hassan, was abducted for military conscription on Thursday, September 28, 2023, by the SDF's al-Shabiba al-Thawriya, (Revolutionary Youth) faction, also known as the 'Joanne Schurchkar', in Manbij city. He was subsequently taken to an SDF recruitment center.

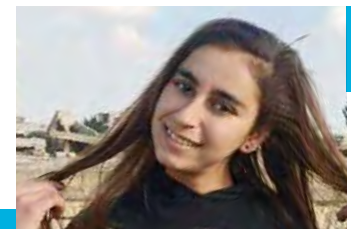


👁 Hussein Saddam al-Hassan, a child

SNHR spoke to Saeed al-Mustafa,<sup>35</sup> an activist in Manbij city. He told us:

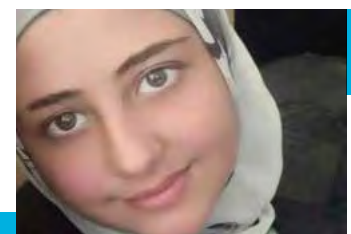
**"Hussein and his father got into a dispute, which led to Hussein storming out of the house and heading for Manbij city. As the family was searching for him, a car driver told Hussein's father that he had headed for the Joanne Schurchkar center in Manbij city to see a friend. Hussein's father headed for the Joanne Schurchkar center in Manbij city to ask about him, but they denied having him."**

A girl, identified as Alif Mohammad Othman born on March 15, 2007, from Halil village, administratively a part of the Rajou subdistrict in northern rural Aleppo governorate, who lives in Tal Ref'at city also in northern rural Aleppo governorate, was abducted for military conscription on Saturday, January 7, 2023, by the SDF's al-Shabiba al-Thawriya, (Revolutionary Youth) faction, also known as the 'Joanne Schurchkar', while on her way to school in Tal Ref'at city. She was subsequently taken to an SDF recruitment center. On January 31, 2023, the Joanne Schurchkar returned her to her family under pressure and demands from them.



👁 Alif Mohammad Othman, a child

A 15-year-old girl, identified as Asil Mohammad Hajji Hassan from Meryamin village, administratively affiliated with Afrin city in rural Aleppo governorate, who lives with her family in Raqqa city, was recruited on Sunday, March 26, 2023, by the SDF's al-Shabiba al-Thawriya, (Revolutionary Youth) faction, also known as the 'Joanne Schurchkar', after they enticed her into joining them at the al-Helal Thahabi Center for Gifted Children in February 23 Street in Raqqa city. She was subsequently taken to an SDF recruitment center.



👁 Asil Mohammad Hajji Hassan, a child

34. Via phone on July 15, 2023.

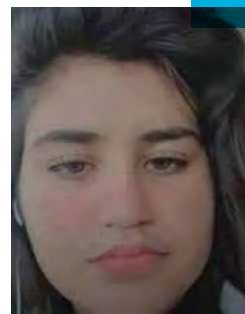
35. Via phone on September 30, 2023.

It should be noted that Asil, who has suffered from multiple psychological conditions for years, had been receiving music therapy in Raqqa city, where she had enrolled in music courses in the cultural center. Following her recruitment, Asil's family held a protest in front of Joanne Shurchkar's headquarters in Raqqa city, calling on the group to reveal Asil's fate and return her to her family. During the protest, her mother was assaulted, insulted, and threatened with arrest by Joanne Shurchkar members.

A girl, identified as Bayal Mohammad Saleh Aqil, born in 2010, from al-Qameshli city in rural Hasaka governorate, was abducted for military conscription on Wednesday, May 24, 2023, by the SDF's 'al-Shabiba al-Thawriya; (Revolutionary Youth) faction, also known as the 'Joanne Schurchkar'. She was taken to an SDF recruitment center. The following day, Bayal appeared in a video saying in Kurdish that she had voluntarily joined the SDF.



👁 Video of Bayal Mohammad Saleh Aqil, a girl born in 2010, after she was recruited by the SDF, saying in Kurdish that she had voluntarily joined the group



👁 Bayal Mohammad Saleh Aqil, a child

A boy, identified as Mustafa Mohammad Ali, born in 2008, who works at a pastry shop in his home city of Ein al-Arab city in eastern rural Aleppo governorate, was abducted for conscription on Monday, June 26, 2023, by the SDF's al-Shabiba al-Thawriya, (Revolutionary Youth) faction, also known as the 'Joanne Schurchkar', on his way home from work. He was taken to an SDF recruitment center.



👁 Mustafa Mohammad Ali, a child

A girl, identified as Farah Hassan Khalli, born in 2009, was abducted for conscription on Monday, August 7, 2023, by the SDF's al-Shabiba al-Thawriya, (Revolutionary Youth) faction, also known as the 'Joanne Schurchkar', from in front of her family's home in her home village of in al-Qanaya village, administratively affiliated with Ein al-Arab city in eastern rural Aleppo governorate. She was then taken to an SDF recruitment center in Hasaka governorate.



👁 Farah Hassan Khalli, a child

#### 4. Targeting schools, kindergartens, and medical facilities

A number of educational facilities were severely damaged as a result of indiscriminate bombardment carried out by the SDF. The group has also taken over many schools in its territories and turned them into military enclaves. In all, we have documented attacks on no fewer than **37 schools**, while **12 attacks** were carried out on medical facilities by the SDF as of November 20, 2023.

##### Most notable attacks on schools and kindergartens

Between Tuesday and Thursday, September 5-7, 2023, SDF personnel took over the al-Hamdani, al-Swyaheen, and al-Hasya schools in Theyban town in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The three schools were turned into military facilities in which SDF forces were stationed. The town was under the control of the SDF at the time of the incident.

These violations took place amid clashes between the SDF and Arab tribes backed by Deir Ez-Zour Military Council, which broke out on August 27, 2023, and spread across Deir Ez-Zour governorate for a few days.

### E. All armed opposition factions/SNA<sup>36</sup>

#### 1. Extrajudicial killing

All armed opposition factions have resorted to indiscriminate bombardment operations, in which they've used non-guided and locally made weaponry in its attacks on areas outside their control, or in retaliation for attacks against their territories. These attacks resulted in civilian deaths, including children. Armed opposition factions have also engaged in clashes, whether with other parties or in infighting among each other, in populated areas with no regard for the protection of civilians' lives. In addition, we have recorded many incidents where armed opposition fighters opened fire in public areas and towards civilians to break up fights.

As of November 20, 2023, SNHR has recorded the killing of no fewer than **1,009 children**, divided between 571 male children and 438 female children, at the hands of all armed opposition factions.

##### Most notable incidents resulting in child deaths

A 16-year-old boy, identified as Assad Mahamid al-Omar, was killed on Sunday, December 25, 2022, in an artillery attack by the SNA whose forces fired multiple shells which landed near his family's home in Tanb village, administratively affiliated with Afrin city in northern rural Aleppo governorate. The village is located on the dividing lines between the areas under the control of the SNA and those under the control of the SDF.

Two boys, identified as 11-year-old Abdul Rahman Hamid al-Ahmad and 14-year-old Hassan Ali al-Ibeid, and a civilian police officer identified as Ismail al-Jad'an al-Aboud, were shot dead on Wednesday, July 5, 2023, during clashes that broke out at an SNA civilian police force checkpoint in Ras al-Ein city in rural Hasaka governorate, between the SNA's Ferqat al-Sultan and the civilian police officers manning the checkpoint.

36. All armed opposition factions founded since 2011 across Syria. Many of those formations are no longer active, and many were not structured around a central command. Towards the end of 2017, the Syrian National Army (SNA) was founded as an umbrella formulation that incorporated all active armed opposition factions to date.



## 2. Arrest, enforced disappearance, and torture

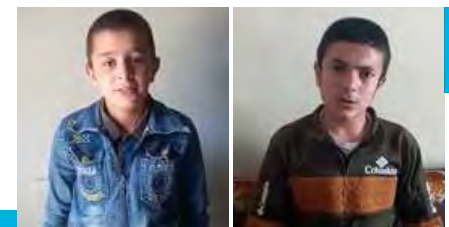
Armed opposition factions/SNA have targeted children for detention and arrest in a number of cases during their attacks on areas outside their control. Those groups have used children as hostages, with many of these children subsequently being classified as forcibly disappeared persons. We have noticed that these cases of abduction and detention were widely observed during the fiercest fighting between the armed opposition and regime forces in 2013-2014, before declining. Moreover, some children have been detained and abducted by armed opposition factions who subsequently released them in exchange for large sums of money, or been detained and abducted as a mean to pressure their families into handing over their properties. Another noteworthy point is that some abductions by these forces, particularly in the Afrin area in northern rural Aleppo governorate, have exhibited an ethnic character. Additionally, armed opposition factions have detained children entering areas under their control, along with their mothers, on the pretext of interrogating them. Those children endured extremely poor detention conditions. Lastly, we have recorded many indiscriminate detentions of children at armed opposition forces' checkpoints in areas under their control.

With the absence of any genuine, credible authority to administer detention centers in the armed opposition/SNA's territories, children detained by these groups have experienced harsh detention conditions. Usually, children are detained in the military headquarters of the faction responsible for their arrest. Those headquarters lack the most basic necessities in terms of healthcare, food, and privacy. Meanwhile, children coming from outside these forces' territories are placed in cramped facilities with adults. Detained children are subjected to various types of torture at the hands of the SNA's police, including severe beating, 'falqa' [foot whipping], and suspension by their wrists in the air. Children have also been forced to perform arduous labor, such as cleaning and transferring food in armed opposition/SNA detention centers, mainly the police stations affiliated with the civilian and military police.

As of November 20, 2023, SNHR has recorded that no fewer than **364 of the children** - 271 males and 93 females - arrested by all armed opposition factions/SNA children since March 2011 are still detained or forcibly disappeared at the hands of these forces. Most of the arrests of children that we have documented by these forces end up being classified as enforced disappearance. We also documented that one child had died due to torture in armed opposition detention centers during the same period.

### Most notable cases of detention and enforced disappearance involving children

Two boys, identified as 10-year-old Yousef Ghurab and 12-year-old Mustafa Tahhan, were arrested/detained on Friday, April 14, 2023, by police personnel from the Shmarin Village Police Station, which is affiliated with the SNA's Security and Police Directorate, in Izaz area in rural Aleppo governorate. The two children were arrested over accusations of stealing soap bars from the same police station. We recorded that the two boys were released on Tuesday, May 23, 2023, from the SNA's Court in al-Ra'ie town in northern rural Aleppo governorate. Both had been subjected to beating and torture during their detention inside Shmarin Village Police Station.



👁 Yousef Ghurab,  
a child

👁 Mustafa Tahhan,  
a child

SNHR spoke to Naser al-Ibeied,<sup>37</sup> a relative of the two children's. He told us:

**"The two children were arrested by police officers from Sharmin Village Police Station which is affiliated with the SNA after they were accused of stealing soap bars from the police station. After their release, the two children told us that they were beaten with sticks on their feet (as part of a torture method called al-Dulab) for four consecutive days, after which they were forced to sink their feet in cold water. This took place in the evenings. Afterwards, they were transferred to Al-Ra'ie town's prison, where they experienced no torture or beatings. After the effects of torture wore off their bodies, they were referred to the Court of al-Ra'ie Town, and then released."**

Two young sisters, identified as Hevein and Mariam Yousef Jouma, aged 16 and 24 respectively, from Alka village, which is administratively a part of Afrin city in northwestern Aleppo, were arrested on Tuesday, August 1, 2023, by SNA personnel in Afrin city, and taken to an undisclosed location.

### 3. Recruitment

Armed opposition factions/SNA have recruited children and juveniles in a widespread manner and for various reasons, as we have noted, one of which is the fact that children are viewed as being less costly and easier to manipulate and control than adults. In this, armed opposition factions have exploited the poor economic situation of these children's families. In many cases, we have noticed that armed opposition factions, especially smaller groups looking to establish themselves, resorted to recruiting children to increase their manpower. Moreover, we have documented cases of child recruitment in a tribal context, when a faction or a group predominantly consists of members of a particular tribe. Similarly, some children were recruited over being related to a member of an armed opposition faction. The lack of any regulatory framework governing and enforcing rules for armed opposition factions'/SNA enlistment procedures means we've found no strict and effective regulations or mechanisms in place prohibiting child recruitment by these forces.

Child recruits are usually assigned menial tasks such as guard duty, transferring ammunition, cleaning, and operating checkpoints. Children have been also thrust into armed conflict. SNHR has documented no fewer than 98 cases of child recruitment, all of male children, by armed opposition factions/SNA. No fewer than 12 of these child recruits were killed in battle, while about seven others have been discharged, with no fewer than 79 children still actively serving with armed opposition factions/SNA. When armed opposition factions had been involved in military operations in Libya and Azerbaijan at the request of the Turkish government, these deployed groups included children in a blatant violation of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### 4. Targeting schools and medical facilities

We have documented attacks on no fewer than 37 schools, while 15 attacks were carried out on medical facilities by armed opposition factions/SNA between March 2011 and November 20, 2023, involving either indiscriminate bombardment operations or clashes.

37. Via phone on May 29, 2023.

## F. Other parties

### 1. Extrajudicial killing

SNHR's documentation contains various categories including victims killed in bombings by unidentified parties, by gunshots by unidentified parties, by landmines of unidentified source, or by drowning, as well as those killed by Jordanian, Turkish, or Lebanese forces.

Within this category, SNHR has documented the killing of no fewer than **1,829** children, divided between 1,260 male children and 569 female children, as of November 20, 2023.

#### Most notable incidents resulting in child deaths

On Sunday, January 14, 2023, five civilians from the same family (father, mother, and three children) were killed by the explosion of an unidentified object (which we believe was a landmine) under their car while they were at work moving stones in Dubai village, located in the vicinity of Jabal Kawkab in eastern Hasaka governorate. The family lived in al-Salihiya neighborhood in Hasaka city. The area was under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of the incident.

On Sunday, July 9, 2023, five civilians, including one child, were killed while another three were injured by the explosion of a car bomb of unidentified source. The car exploded in front of a car repair workshop in Shawa village in al-Ra'ie area in eastern rural Aleppo governorate when it stopped. The area was under the control of the SNA at the time of the incident.

### 2. Targeting schools, kindergartens, and medical facilities

Between March 2011 and November 2023, we documented that no fewer than **82** schools were attacked, while **60** attacks were carried out on medical facilities by other parties.

On Tuesday, November 22, 2022, an artillery battalion, believed to be led by Turkish forces stationed in Türkiye, fired multiple shells at the Kouran Elementary School, affiliated with the Education Directorate in the Euphrates Revoin, in [Kouran](#) village to the east of Ein al-Arab Koubani city in eastern rural Aleppo governorate. [The bombardment completely destroyed the school building, putting the school out of commission.](#) The village was under the control of the SDF at the time of the incident. It should be noted that the SDF uses a building adjacent to the school as a military enclave, which was also targeted by Turkish forces who failed to uphold the principle of distinction, thereby damaging a vital civilian facility.

#### Most notable attacks on medical facilities

On Friday, June 16, 2023, an artillery battalion, believed to be led by Turkish forces, and stationed in one of the military sites in SNA-held areas in northern Aleppo governorate fired multiple shells at Tal Ref'at city in northern rural Aleppo governorate. A number of shells landed near Tal Ref'at Hospital on the city's southern outskirts, injuring four individuals. In addition, [the hospital building and its cladding were moderately damaged, while the glass window of an ambulance was shattered.](#) The city was under the control of the SDF at the time of the incident.

## VI. Catastrophic Ramifications to the Violations Against Children's Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

Every right in the Convention on the Rights of the Child is interconnected and inalienable. That is to say that denying a child one of these rights will inevitably lead to the erosion of other rights. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child<sup>38</sup> has adopted this holistic approach as a guideline in its monitoring and observation efforts. In this, the committee includes economic, social, and cultural rights, addressing these in its reports. For instance, its rulings on healthcare and social care are grounded in the right to be alive, and the rulings on education are founded on the right to development. Below is an outline of the ramifications caused by the gross violations against children with respect to their economic, social, and cultural rights. The following section will particularly address education, child labor, use of children in drug trafficking, and living conditions in camps.

### A. Children and Labor & Forced Labor

One of the most serious risks children face among those born out of the widespread violations against children is the rapid spread of child labor in its worst forms. Child labor is a true manifestation of the compounded and repeated violations that ultimately cost children their providers by one of the many patterns of death detailed in this report. Today, there are thousands of orphaned children in Syria who have lost all of their family members, who should be their first line of protection. In other cases, children have lost their father, elder brother, or sister. Many children have also been displaced multiple times. Under these and other traumatic and grueling conditions, many children have found themselves forced to assume the role of the breadwinner for themselves and their families. To do so, these children have had to sacrifice their education, with the numbers of children who have completed their primary education plummeting, which will affect their future level of income and level of development. In this context, it should be noted that the ILO's Minimum Age Convention (C138) of 1973 dictates the minimum age for legal employment as 15,<sup>39</sup> while taking into consideration local legislations.<sup>40</sup>

According to the ILO, the worst forms of child labor is any labor that puts children's mental and physical health at risk, as well as labor that harms them socially and ethically, and which conflicts with their education by depriving them of going to school, or forcing them to drop out. This includes trying to combine education and long hours of hard work. As such, defining what constitutes child labor depends on the age of the child, type of work, work hours, and working conditions. In the case of Syria, child labor is an established practice, with all parties to the conflict tolerating, directly or indirectly, child labor especially in light of the difficult economic conditions and the systematic destruction of schools and educational facilities.

Moreover, many children are working in dangerous jobs that pose a serious threat to their lives. For instance, many children in Syria are working at rudimentary oil refinery facilities and garbage dumps, where they are exposed to dangerous substances and toxic gases. Children are also used to smuggle goods between the territories of the various parties to the conflict, putting them at a direct risk of being arrested/detained or shot.

38. Watkins, K. (1999). Education Now: Break the Cycle of Poverty. Oxfam International.

39. See, International Labour Organization (ILO), C138 - Minimum Age Convention, 1973, Article 2 [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::N::P12100\\_ilo\\_code:C138](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::N::P12100_ilo_code:C138)

40. It is worth noting that the Convention allows for national legislations to regulate what it calls 'light work' (at 12-13 years of age). Light work, according to the Convention, is the type of work that "not likely to be harmful to [children's] health or development".

By exposing children to labor, we are witnessing one of the most immediate and compounded dangerous outcomes of the conflict. Depriving a country's children of a healthy, safe and proper childhood, means destroying the future of an entire nation. The worst forms of child labor are not limited to merely committing crimes against children, as serious and unconscionable as those are, but also to depriving Syria of their future potential, which is primarily wasted today in the form of recruitment, forced labor, and drug trafficking.

There is a pressing and persistent need to redouble the efforts of the ILO and its work with national and international partners in Syria to put an end to the worst forms of child labor in vulnerable communities by preventing children from being forced to endure these conditions and by, removing children from such workplaces, ensuring they don't need to do such work, and rehabilitating working children and others susceptible to the risk of child labor.

## **B. Children Suffer Cruel Living Conditions in Camps**

International law recognizes the right to adequate housing as a fundamental human right, which is an integral part of having an adequate standard of living. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has emphasized that the right to adequate housing must be viewed as the right to live in a place with safety, peace, and dignity. A primary aspect of this is the right to have adequate space, as well as protection against extreme weather conditions such as cold, damp, heat, rain, wind, and other threats to health, as well as structural hazards. Furthermore, the right to adequate housing entails availability of materials, facilities and infrastructure, with housing not deemed adequate if its occupants are without safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, energy for cooking, heating, lighting, food storage or refuse disposal. Meanwhile, housing is not considered adequate if it is cut off from healthcare services, schools, childcare centers, and other social facilities, or if it is located in polluted or dangerous areas.

However, the violations by the Syrian regime have led to the widespread displacement of millions of Syrians. Even though the regime has regained control of large areas over which it previously lost control, a very limited number of the refugees and internally displaced people who fled those areas since 2011 have chosen to return to their homes. Today, northwestern Syria houses the largest camp population, with children accounting for 46 percent of the entire IDP population. Many of those children have been born and raised in camps, where they lack any access to the most basic life necessities, including hygiene, privacy, bathrooms, and safe housing. Every year, the seasonal waves of extreme heat, cold, heavy rainfall, snow and gale-force winds flood, uproot, damage, or destroy camps, resulting in children deaths due to the lack of safety and security measures and the lack of insulation which is an essential component in the process of building camps.

Meanwhile, camps have a shortage of healthcare and educational facilities, which also means that children's access to healthcare and education have been dramatically affected. Some children have to travel long distances just to obtain basic healthcare, while others have had no access to education, with both these factors leading to increasingly widespread illness, disease and illiteracy among children.

In addition to the harsh living conditions, camps have also been subjected to bombing on numerous occasions, primarily by regime forces who showed no regard for the terrible dangers of such attacks given the high population density in these camps and the lack of any means of protection in camps' infrastructure.

### Most notable incidents resulting in child deaths in camps

Two children, brothers, identified as Abdullah & Salam Ibrahim al-Adama from Deir Ez-Zour governorate, died on Monday, December 26, 2022, in a fire caused by the explosion of a gas heater in their family's tent in al-Arisha IDPs Camp in al-Arisha town in southern rural Idlib governorate.

On February 27, 2023, A fire, caused by the misuse of a heating device, broke out in a tent in al-Amal IDPs Camp near Izmarin village in western rural Idlib governorate. The displaced family living in the tent had survived the earthquake that hit southern Turkey and northwestern Syria on February 6, 2023, and had been relocated to al-Amal Camp following that earthquake. Eight members of the family - six children and two women - suffered burns of varying degrees in the blaze, which completely destroyed their tent and moderately damaged a number of nearby ones. The next day, February 28, 2023, two of the injured children, one-year-old Mohammad Khaled al-Hussein and his five-year-old sister, Rasha, died of their burn wounds after they had been transferred to a hospital in Turkey.

On Friday, March 3, 2023, a third child severely burnt in the blaze, eight-year-old Zaid Ahmad Ghannam, who had also been transferred to a Turkish hospital for treatment, died of his injuries.



👁 Location of the camp where the fire broke out (photo is exclusive to ©SNHR)



👁 Zaid Ghanna, the child who died on March 3, 2023



👁 Mohammad and Rasha al-Hussein, the two siblings who died on February 28, 2023



## C. Using children in the drug trade

Drugs, primarily the amphetamine Captagon, have spread throughout Syria, especially in regime-held areas. The Syrian regime maintains a monopoly over Captagon production, trafficking and export networks,<sup>41</sup> with many massive consignments of the addictive narcotic detected in the good shipments transferred from Syria to other regional and global states.<sup>42</sup> The year 2019 saw a pivotal shift in Captagon trafficking, with what had been a Syria-limited trade turning into a global issue through transnational networks exporting drugs from regime areas to the entire world.

This internationally condemned trade takes place under the direct supervision and management of the Syrian regime and its security and military arms, yielding massive political and financial gains for the regime. To that end, the Syrian regime has established a complex system, in which it enlisted the help of its ally Hezbollah, which has a great deal of experience in the international drug trade, as well as a limited circle of regime insiders, security and military bodies, and civilian merchants, all of whom are absolutely and blindly loyal to the regime. The drug trade's disastrous effects are not limited to young Syrian adults, but also affects children, since dealing in and consumption of the narcotic has led to rising rates of violence and crime in Syria,<sup>43</sup> not to mention the direct risk of children potentially getting addicted to drugs in their crucial formative years.<sup>44</sup>

The ramifications of the drug trade are not limited to these issues; some children under the age of 18 have been pulled into the world of this internationally prohibited trade through Captagon networks in Syria, which operate through a meticulously well-organized network, involving large numbers of people each assigned to different tasks, in every area of Syria. This is unsurprising given the Captagon trade's status as one of the most profitable sectors for the regime, which is keen on optimizing its efficiency and productivity. Within the Captagon trade, children are used in:

1. **Storage:** Youth and juvenile children are used to store Captagon, which is an important part of the workflow of trafficking. Children are involved in transporting and storing the raw materials used in the drug's manufacture and the finished products in a number of warehouses. Batches of the final product are transferred from manufacturing laboratories, mostly in Rural Damascus governorate, and then stored in warehouses ahead of their export to Jordan when the opportunity arises. The figures in charge of this process are generally members of the local militias, working in collaboration with the Syrian regime's Fourth Division and Hezbollah, and in coordination with and under the cover of the branches of the Syrian regime's Military Security Intelligence Directorate.
2. **Domestic promotion:** Young people and minor children are also used to promote Captagon mainly in the domestic market, where children are selected from the targeted areas, which has led to the seamless spread of Captagon use among the youth and children.
3. **Smuggling:** Drug network leaders used young people and children in smuggling operations by tempting them with money. Those smuggling attempts have now become even more highly risky following the recent security crackdown by Jordanian authorities.

Given these dangers, especially to children, serious work must be done by the international community to curb the drug trade by cutting off its sources. The international community must act to put an end to the Captagon trade operated by the Syrian regime and its partners, considering its catastrophic social and economic effects on Syria, and on children especially.

41. Ghazi, S. (2022). Drug Smuggling in Syria: Involvement By Assad Regime And Complication On Regional Countries. Center for Middle Eastern Studies. from <https://bit.ly/3SMpKIG>

42. Ibid.

43. See: Global Organized Crime Index: Syria. Global Organized Crime Index. <https://bit.ly/3MLs3Bw>

44. Wu, N., Feng, Z., He, X., Kwon, W. T., Wang, J., & Xie, X. (2019). Insight of Captagon abuse by chemogenomics knowledgebase-guided systems Pharmacology target mapping analyses. Scientific Reports, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-018-35449-6>

## IV. Conclusions & Recommendations

### Conclusions:

- International humanitarian law states that “Children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault. The parties to the conflict shall provide them with the care and aid they require.” In addition, the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>45</sup> defines the nature of children’s rights, whose aim is to protect children at all times. International humanitarian law also provides general protection to children as civilians who do not engage in hostilities,<sup>46</sup> as well as special protection as members of vulnerable, and non-armed groups.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Rule 135 of customary international humanitarian law states that “Children affected by armed conflict are entitled to special respect and protection.”<sup>48</sup>
- Article 3 of the Geneva Convention I<sup>49</sup> states that children as “Persons taking no active part in the hostilities... shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction.” In a more general sense, international legal instruments place emphasis on protecting children from hostilities and ensuring they receive the necessary care, aid, and protection, particularly in areas where armed conflicts are taking place.
- Customary international law prohibits the conscription of children younger than 15 years of age. This prohibition, which was initially limited to international armed conflict, was later expanded to also include non-international armed conflicts. Meanwhile, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court establishes that “Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into the national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities” and “Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into armed forces or groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities” are war crimes.<sup>50</sup>
- On May 25, 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted an optional protocol that addresses the involvement of children in armed conflicts. In it, the minimum age for a child to join armed forces was raised from 15 years to 18 years. The same protocol bans conscription for children younger than 18 years of age.<sup>51</sup> However, criminal prosecution is still limited to conscription of children below the age of 15.
- Armed groups outside the scope of a state are still bound by the rules of international human rights law, including Articles 1-4 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Article 4 states, “**Armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years.**”<sup>52</sup>

45. United Nations (UN), Convention on the Rights of the Child <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

46. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Geneva Convention (IV) on Civilians, 1949, Article 3 <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=A4E145A2A7A68875C12563CD0051B9AE>

47. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Geneva Convention (IV) on Civilians, 1949, Article 14 <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=89E3AD97A4E5117AC12563CD0051BAB2>

48. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), customary international humanitarian law <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/customary-international-humanitarian-law-i-icrc-eng.pdf>

49. International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva Convention (I) on civilians, 1949, Article 3 <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=BAA341028EBFF1E8C12563CD00519E66>

50. International Criminal Court (CC), Rome Statute, Article 8-2-b(26) and Article 8-2-e(7) <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>

51. United Nations (UN), Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/opaccrc.aspx>

52. United Nations (UN), Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, Article 4 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/opaccrc.aspx>

Despite the abundance of international instruments as demonstrated above, violations against children in Syria have not stopped for 12 years. All parties to the conflict have failed to respect these rules. The Syrian regime has not been deterred by these conventions, despite having ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, from committing violations against children, some of which qualify as crimes against humanity through acts of extrajudicial killing, enforced disappearance, torture, while others qualify as war crimes through the acts of compulsory recruitment. Furthermore, many of the violations committed by the other parties to the conflict against children could amount to war crimes if they were committed in the context of the conflict, and also as widespread violations of international human rights law if they were committed against children affiliated with those forces. Arbitrary detention and torture are at the head of these violations, followed by conscription.

## Recommendations:

### All parties to the conflict

- The Syrian regime should uphold its commitment to compliance with the Conventions on the Rights of the Child, the two International Covenants, and the Geneva Conventions, all of which the regime has ratified.
- The Syrian-Russian alliance, Iranian militias, and their subsidiaries should cease deliberately attacking schools, kindergartens, and areas populated by children and their families, as well as ceasing the killing and maiming of children.
- All parties to the conflict should release child detainees immediately, especially those detained in the context of the armed conflict. The parties to the conflict should also uphold international laws on detaining children, especially girls, including providing adequate and sufficient food, and access to education by allowing them to attend school, whether they are free or detained.
- Cease torturing detained children, and separate children from adults, as established in Rules 8-D and 85 of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, and Article 10-2-B of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- Adopt the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice when trying children. Those rules detail the guidelines regulating criminal responsibility for minors and punishments against children. Furthermore, those rules were complemented by the UN Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty.
- Completely cease the recruitment of children and release any children below the age of 15 from any and all military entities or missions.

53. Fadel Abdul Ghany. (2021). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Its Committee Are Helpless in Effectively Defending Children Rights in Syria and Around the World. Syrian Network for Human Rights. <https://snhr.org/blog/2021/07/25/56576/>

54. United Nations (UN), Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners [https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson\\_Mandela\\_Rules-E-book.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-book.pdf)

55. United Nations (UN), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

56. United Nations, United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile justice ("The Beijing Rules") <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/beijingrules.pdf>

57. United Nations, Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/united-nations-rules-protection-juveniles-deprived-their-liberty>

### International community and UN Security council

- Ensure the protection of and aid for forcibly displaced children, both IDPs and refugees, especially girls and ensure their needs are met, particularly in regard to protection.
- All the world's states should ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and uphold their commitments to it, in order to expose the Syrian regime and its crimes against the children of Syria, and should spare no effort to alleviate and put an end to the regime's crimes.
- Expose the states supporting the Syrian regime which are effectively trying to normalize and sponsor perpetrators of crimes against humanity and war crimes against the children of Syria.
- Exert more effort at the UN level to put an end to child recruitment. All parties to the conflict must discharge all children active in their forces.
- Work towards developing international legislation aiming to protect children in times of war, and to put an end to child conscription.
- Take every available legal, political, and financial measure against the Syrian regime and its allies, as well as against other perpetrators of violations in the Syrian conflict, in order to put pressure on them to compel them to respect children's rights.
- Meet the financial pledges made to:
- Help neighboring countries and provide every bit of support to improve the level of education and healthcare in those countries that are housing the largest portion of child refugees.
- Devise mechanisms to stop the bombing of schools and kindergartens, protect those facilities, and work on creating a safe educational environment, which goes towards establishing the bare minimum of levels of protection for civilians.
- The issue of Syrian children is a global issue. All states should make the effort to ease the ramification of this issue by supporting schools and the educational and medical process in Syria and for child refugees.

### United Nations

#### Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

- Coordinate humanitarian relief operations by focusing on the worst affected areas, and avoid the pressure and exploitation by the Syrian regime that attempts to solicit aid in its own favor.
- Secure the necessary resources to rehabilitate children, while placing especial consideration on the special needs of girls who have been directly affected by violations and suffered sexual exploitation based on the worst affected areas.

### **International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI)**

- Investigate the incidents included in this report and shed more light on the suffering of the children of Syria.

### **Supporting states and the European Union**

- Syria has been one of the world's worst affected countries in terms of many patterns of violations against children. As such, Syria needs more assistance than the majority of other states and areas, especially since grave violations are still ongoing up to the present day.
- Accord more resources to UNICEF and the MRM, and rely on its database in launching a process to rehabilitate children survivors.

### **Neighboring countries**

- Ensure Syrian refugees' ability to seek asylum is protected and respect their rights, including non-refoulement, accelerate the family reunion process. EU countries and other states should try and ease the burden of Syria's neighboring countries by taking in more Syrian refugees. Meanwhile, donor states should increase their support for the UNHCR and local community organization in asylum countries.

### **United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

- Create a stable and safe environment for Syrian child refugees and put more effort into integrating them into their communities through long-term psychological support.
- Support investment in education and healthcare.

## **Acknowledgment**

The Syrian Network for Human Rights would like to express our most heartfelt gratitude to all those who shared any news or information, particularly survivors, eyewitnesses, and local activists for their invaluable contributions to this report.



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