

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	2214
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	ACCORD
Titel:	Information collection on developments regarding the SDF and Kurdish areas
Udgivet:	30. januar 2026
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	15. juni 2026

Document #2136014

ACCORD – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (Author)

Information collection on developments regarding the SDF and Kurdish areas

Background information

Collection of information on developments concerning the SDF and Kurdish-controlled areas

In January 2026, the conflict between the Syrian transitional government and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) escalated. This was triggered by the expiry of a deadline set by the transitional government for the integration of the SDF into state structures and the government's declared goal of regaining complete territorial control over north-eastern Syria ([DW, 20 January 2026](#)).

Fighting in Aleppo and displacement of the civilian population

In early January, intense fighting broke out in the predominantly Kurdish neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh in Aleppo between government troops, pro-government militias and SDF-affiliated forces ([MEI, 13 January 2026](#)). On 10 January, Kurdish police forces were withdrawn from the last remaining Kurdish neighbourhood and troops of the Syrian transitional government took control of the entire city of Aleppo. Several thousand Kurds fled the city to Afrin and to Kurdish-controlled areas east of the Euphrates ([Schmidinger, 23 January 2026](#)). By the end of January, the situation in the previously contested districts had stabilised. Ninety per cent of those who had been displaced had returned, and the destroyed infrastructure was being repaired. A continuing

challenge in the city and the surrounding area of Aleppo is the improvised explosive devices (IEDs) left behind by SDF fighters ([MEI, 29. Jänner 2026](#)).

Expansion of the offensive in north-eastern Syria and support for the transitional government by Arab tribes

On 16 January, the Transitional Ministry of Defence announced an operation to capture Deir Hafer and Maskana, parts of the last SDF-held areas in the east of Aleppo province. Within less than 24 hours, pro-government forces took control of both locations and expanded their offensive to areas of Raqqa province and other SDF-controlled regions in northeastern Syria. On 17 January, pro-government forces, including units from the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior as well as allied tribal militias, launched an offensive from the directions of Raqqa and Deir Ezzor. By the end of the same day, the Al-Schamiyeh region in the west of Raqqa province had fallen, and shortly afterwards, pro-government forces began advancing on the city of Raqqa. In the province of Deir Ezzor, tribal fighters attacked SDF positions even before the transitional government forces arrived. The rapid advance was aided by the considerable weakening of the SDF as a result of desertions and by the support of influential Arab tribes for the transitional authorities. With the exception of Al-Shaddadeh, much of the southern outskirts of Hasakah province also came under the control of the transitional government ([Etana Syria, 20 January 2026](#); see also: [Schmidinger, 23 January 2026](#)).

According to Syria expert Charles Lister, isolated crimes were committed by government troops and Kurdish militiamen during the offensive. There are confirmed cases of desecration of corpses, the destruction of an SDF cemetery and the use of unguided munitions in civilian areas by the Syrian army. At the same time, Kurdish fighters are accused of killing nearly 20 civilians with sniper fire and carrying out several extrajudicial executions ([MEI, 29. Jänner 2026](#)).

Ceasefire

On 18 January, representatives of the transitional government and the SDF agreed on a ceasefire, which was followed by fighting ([Al Jazeera, 20 January 2026](#)). On 24 January, the ceasefire was extended for another 15 days, with a call for the SDF to lay down its arms and present a plan for integration into the Syrian army ([Reuters, 24 January 2026](#)). Even during this agreed ceasefire, there were mutual attacks ([Der Standard, 26 January 2026](#), [The National, 29. Jänner 2026](#)). On 29 January, for example, Syrian military drones carried out attacks on SDF positions in the vicinity of the Al Qahtaniyah subdistrict in Hasakah Province ([Long War Journal, 29. Jänner 2026](#)).

Control over prisons and IS prisoners

As a result of the fighting described above, suspected members of Islamic State (IS) escaped from a prison in Shaddadi. While the Syrian government reported that around 120 prisoners had escaped, the SDF put the number at 1,500. The Syrian army imposed a curfew on Shaddadi and launched search and arrest operations, in which, according to official figures, 81 people were recaptured. Further fighting and prison breaks were also reported in the city of Raqqa ([The Guardian, 20 January 2026](#)).

As part of the ceasefire, the Syrian army took control of the al-Hol camp, which houses thousands of people, mainly family members of IS members ([AP News, 25 January 2026](#)). The UN subsequently took over responsibility for camp management, but was still unable to enter the camp as of 22 January for security reasons ([Reuters, 22 January 2026](#)).

Reuters reported that the US had begun transferring IS prisoners from Syria to Iraq. The first transfers involved 150 people, with further transfers – of up to 7,000 prisoners – planned ([Reuters, 21 January 2026](#)).

Situation in Hasakah

The SDF continues to control predominantly Kurdish areas. Government troops did not enter these regions, in particular the cities of Qamishli and Hasakah in north-eastern Syria and Kobane in the province of Aleppo near the Turkish border. The background to this are ongoing negotiations on the future administration of these areas and the return of state institutions. According to the Syrian news website Enab Baladi, both sides are preparing for further possible combat operations. Both the SDF and pro-government forces moved military reinforcements to the contact lines south of Hasakah, while the SDF expanded its positions, continued patrols and raids in the city districts, and converted a civilian hospital into a military hospital ([Enab Baladi, 24 January 2026](#)).

Situation in Kobane (also known as Ain al-Arab)

The city of Kobane, which is predominantly inhabited by Kurds, is surrounded by the Turkish border to the north and by pro-government forces on all other sides . It is home to numerous internally displaced persons as a result of the recent fighting and has become a humanitarian hotspot. Kurdish forces accused the Syrian army of besieging the city, and activists warned of a humanitarian crisis due to shortages of food, water and electricity. Following the extension of the ceasefire on 24 January, two humanitarian corridors were established and a United Nations humanitarian convoy reached the city ([DW, 25 January 2026](#); see also: [France 24, 25 January 2026](#)). The New Arab reported on 29 January that hundreds of armed Iraqi Kurds had travelled to Hasakah province as volunteers over the previous two days ([The New Arab, 29. Jänner 2026](#)).

Humanitarian situation and internal displacement

UNICEF reports that the humanitarian situation in north-eastern Syria is continuing to deteriorate, particularly in Kobane and the surrounding areas. In Kobane and around 50 neighbouring villages, an estimated 400,000 people have been without access to water since 19 January due to a complete power failure, damaged infrastructure and a lack of fuel. According to UNICEF, this poses significant health and safety risks. Internal displacement continues to increase: as of 21 January, around 165,000 displaced persons had been recorded in the provinces of Aleppo and Hasakah, with women and children accounting for around 70 per cent of those affected. Health services are severely limited, with many facilities closed or undersupplied. The education system is also significantly affected, as schools are damaged or are being used as emergency shelters. At the same time, water, sanitation and hygiene services are severely limited ([UNICEF, 25 January 2026, pp. 1-2](#)).

Associated documents

Document ID 2136014 Is updated by

6 February 2026 | [ACCORD – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation](#) (Author)

Syrian Arab Republic

Information collection on developments regarding the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Kurdish areas

[Information collection on developments regarding the SDF and Kurdish areas](#) (Periodical Report, English)

en

ID 2136390

Document ID 2136014 Translation / language version

30 January 2026 | [ACCORD – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation](#) (Author)

Syrian Arab Republic

Information collection on developments regarding the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Kurdish areas

[Informationssammlung zu Entwicklungen rund um die SDF und die kurdisch-kontrollierten Gebiete](#) (Periodical Report, German)

de

ID 2136015

ecoi.net description:

Information collection on developments regarding the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Kurdish areas

Country:

Syrian Arab Republic

Source:

[ACCORD – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation](#) (Author)

Published:

30 January 2026

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Available on ecoi.net since:

3 February 2026

Document ID:

2136014

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

