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Syria

*Military service:
recruitment procedure,
conscripts' duties and
military service for naturalised Ajanibs*



This brief report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The brief report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service.

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Executive summary

Recruitment of conscripts and reservists in the areas controlled by the Government of Syria (GoS) is continuing. The recruitment procedure through which conscripts and reservists are called up is the same in all GoS-controlled areas.

Young men eligible for military service and their families are notified through different channels when they are called up for service. Failure to report for service in due time entails penalties such as a fine and an extension of service, depending on how late the person reports. Eventually, the person's name will be put on a wanted list. He will then risk being arrested and sent to military service if he comes across the authorities, for instance at checkpoints.

Conscripts may be assigned to duties such as active fighting that may entail violations of international law. A variety of factors affect whether a conscript is assigned to such duties, e.g. his level of education, military skills and the military unit in which he conducts his military service. A conscript cannot choose his duties.

A conscript may be able to influence his duties or where he will serve his military service by paying a bribe. Depending on the amount of the bribe, a person can be assigned to office duties, be deployed to army divisions in areas where he will not be involved in combat, or he can be completely exempted.

As regards military service for naturalised Ajanib Kurds, those born before 1993 are exempted from military service. However, none of the sources specified the number and title of the reported government decree from 2011 exempting naturalised Ajanib born before 1993 from military service, and there are no officially published and openly consultable sources for the rules regarding this exemption. One source, who had not heard of the mentioned decree or the exemption of Ajanib born before 1993, assumed that if such exemption exists, it may be temporary and specific to Hasakah Governorate.

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Introduction

This brief report focuses on the following issues regarding military service in Syria:

- Procedure for recruitment of conscripts and reservists;
- Conscripts' duties during the service; and
- Military service for naturalised Ajanib Kurds.

The report is an update of some of the issues addressed in the DIS report: [Syria, Military service, May 2020](#), as regards the procedure for recruitment and conscripts' duties during the service.

The report is written in accordance with the European Agency for Asylum (EUAA) COI Report Methodology.¹

The report is a synthesis of information collected from written sources and online interviews with three oral sources: the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) and the Syrian researcher Suhail al-Ghazi.

The consulted oral sources have been selected by virtue of their expertise on the topics of this report. Meeting minutes have been forwarded to the sources for approval, providing them an opportunity to amend, comment or correct their statements to ensure that the minutes reflect the shared information most accurately. All three sources have approved their statements, which can be found in Annex 1.

For the sake of transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the meeting minutes have been given consecutive numbers, which are used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes. The consulted sources were informed about the purpose of the meetings and the fact that their statements would be included in a public report.

During the meetings, the sources also touched upon topics that are not addressed in the Terms of Reference (ToR). While not included in the report, the information is available in the minutes as some topics may be relevant for asylum cases. ToR is included in Annex II.

Due to the changeable and unstable situation in Syria, this report may quickly become outdated. Therefore, the issues addressed in this report should be monitored periodically and brought up to date accordingly.

The research and editing of this report was finalised on 7 July 2023.

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

Abbreviations

COI	Country of Origin Information
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
GoS	Government of Syria
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
ToR	Terms of Reference
SOHR	Syrian Observatory for Human Rights

1. Procedure for recruitment of conscripts and reservists

Recruitment of conscripts and reservists in the GoS-controlled areas of Syria is continuing. The number of conscripts called up for military service are much higher than the number of reservists called up. The recruitment procedure through which conscripts and reservists are called up is the same in all GoS-controlled areas.²

1.1. Recruitment of conscripts

On the official website of the General Recruitment Directorate of the Syrian Ministry of Defence, it is stated that a man who reaches the age of 18 is to report for military service to obtain a military booklet at a recruitment division office from the day he has turned 18 and until the end of that same year.³

The authorities announce the birth year and month of the men who are to report for military service at the age of 18.⁴ The Syrian researcher Suhail al-Ghazi informed DIS that in January and May, the Ministry of Defence announces on its homepage that men born in x year are eligible for military service and must report to make their military booklet within a specific period. This announcement will also be posted at the office of the local mukhtar (local mayor).⁵ SOHR informed DIS that every 45 days, the military recruitment division releases a list of dates and requests all men who have turned 18 by these dates to approach the military recruitment division office within 15-20 days. These lists of dates will usually be announced in the news of the official government TV channels.⁶

Young Syrian men usually know when they will be called up for military service and they know the recruitment procedure well.⁷ At times, people also know from their network that they are to report for service.⁸

The person called up has to approach the military recruitment division of the city in which he lives.⁹

If a person is assessed fit for military service, after he has undergone a medical examination and received a military booklet (more about this process in [1.1.2.1. Procedure for obtaining a military booklet](#)), he will be told to report to a military training centre for a military training

² SOHR: 1, 13

³ With the exception of those who reaches the age of 18 in the last week of December who will be able to report for military service until the first official working day of the following year. Syrian Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, *الخدمة الإلزامية* [Compulsory Military Service], n.d., [url](#)

⁴ Al-Ghazi: 1-2; SNHR: 1; SOHR: 2

⁵ Al-Ghazi: 1-2

⁶ SOHR: 2

⁷ SOHR: 4; SNHR: 2

⁸ Al-Ghazi: 2

⁹ SOHR: 2; Al-Ghazi: 1

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course on a certain date.¹⁰ The General Recruitment Directorate states on its website that the recruitment division office will also send a written notification to the person's address to remind him about the drafting date.¹¹

The drafting dates, i.e. the dates where conscripts must report for military training, are, according to SNHR, announced and posted at the military recruitment division offices. On the posters, it is announced that persons born in specific months of a certain year have to join the upcoming military training course (which will have a specific number) within a deadline. In addition, persons of conscription age usually inform each other in the neighbourhood about the announced dates, and even the parents will ask the authorities and others about the dates.¹²

SOHR stated that military training courses start every 45 days and every course has a unique number.¹³ Unlike SOHR, Suhail al-Ghazi stated that military training starts in April and October each year. Whether a person starts in April or October depends on firstly, when he has completed the military booklet and medical examination and secondly, whether he has reasons to postpone the training from April to October; for example, if he is completing high school.¹⁴

1.1.1. Failure to report to the military recruitment division

If a person does not report to the military recruitment division within the announced period, his name will be posted on a list of names at the mukhtar's office (local mayor) of the neighbourhood.¹⁵

The General Recruitment Directorate states on its website that a person who fails to report to the military recruitment division within the announced period will be fined and his compulsory military service period (of 24 months) may also be extended with additional months. The size of the fine and the number of months his military service might be extended with depend on when he reports to the recruitment division, i.e. how long after the announced period.¹⁶

Similarly, Suhail al-Ghazi informed DIS that if the person does not report to the military recruitment division within one year after he was announced eligible for military service, he will have to pay a fine. His name will then be removed from the list and then he will have to serve his military service. However, if he does not report within one year, or if he reports and obtains his military booklet but does not start his military service, his name will be registered in the national database as someone who is wanted for military service; he will be considered a draft evader.¹⁷

¹⁰ Al-Ghazi: 16; SOHR: 3

¹¹ Syrian Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, *الخدمة الإلزامية* [Compulsory Military Service], [url](#)

¹² SNHR: 5

¹³ SOHR: 3

¹⁴ Al-Ghazi: 16

¹⁵ SOHR: 4; Al-Ghazi: 2

¹⁶ Syrian Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, *الخدمة الإلزامية* [Compulsory Military Service], [url](#)

¹⁷ Al-Ghazi: 3

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SOHR provided different information on the process following when a person has not reported for military service. According to SOHR, the mukhtar will notify the families of the persons who are on the list of names.¹⁸ Afterwards, if a person named on such a list does not approach the nearest military recruitment division office within one to two weeks, the military police will go to this person's house and hand over a notification stating that the person should approach a military recruitment office as soon as possible.¹⁹ In case the person does not approach a military recruitment division office after being notified by the military police, the person's name will appear on a list of names of people wanted for military service.²⁰

Similarly, SNHR considered that in the event a person does not report for military service within the deadline stated on the announcement, the military police may approach the person's residence, although this happens rarely, to inform him that he is called up for military service. If the person does not report for military service after being notified by the military police, his name will be added to a wanted list and he will be considered a draft evader.²¹

The wanted list of draft evaders is usually distributed to checkpoints and public administration offices. If a draft evader goes through checkpoints or apply for a service at a government office, he will be arrested and sent directly to military training.²² According to Suhail al-Ghazi, draft evaders are mainly caught at checkpoints, although searching for draft evaders at their place of residence is still taking place. Al-Ghazi thus assessed that a draft evader has no choice but to either hide, report for military service in the SAA or leave the country.²³

1.1.2. *The military booklet*

The military booklet is roughly the size of a hand and on every page it is printed: 'the army and the armed forces'.²⁴ On the first page, the personal information of the person is registered, including name, age, place of origin, the number of the military recruitment division office, the number of his file at the military recruitment division and a photo of the person. On the last page, the person's height, weight, special physical marks and health condition is registered. The other pages are empty in order to be filled in by the military recruitment division to register e.g. drafting date, place of conscription and reserve service, dates of leave during the service, exemptions and deferrals as well as the reasons for the exemption or deferral.²⁵

¹⁸ SOHR: 5

¹⁹ SOHR: 6

²⁰ SOHR: 7

²¹ SNHR: 6-7

²² Netherlands, MFA, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2022, [url](#), p. 36; EUAA, *Syria: Targeting of Individuals*, September 2022, [url](#), p. 41; SOHR: 7; SNHR: 6-7; Al-Ghazi: 3

²³ Al-Ghazi: 3

²⁴ SNHR: 8

²⁵ Al-Ghazi: 13-14; SOHR 9; SNHR: 8

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The name and title of the officer who filled in the booklet and a stamp of the military recruitment division will follow anything filled in on the pages.²⁶ The military booklet is filled out by hand, which leaves room for corruption, according to Suhail al-Ghazi.²⁷

1.1.2.1. Procedure for obtaining a military booklet

The procedure for obtaining a military booklet is the same throughout all GoS-controlled areas of Syria.²⁸ All Syrian men who turn 18 must obtain a military booklet.²⁹ Even those who are exempted from military service gets a military booklet.³⁰

When the person reports to receive his military booklet, he needs to bring documents that state his personal information, and, in case he wants to be exempted or postpone his military service, he also has to bring all necessary papers that document his situation.³¹ At the recruitment office, the person called up will fill out papers for his military booklet and go through a medical examination.³² The result of the initial medical check is registered in the military booklet.³³

The medical examination is usually a very quick, basic examination at which they check the height, weight and eyesight etc. of the person. Only if a person claims that he is suffering from a serious disease (e.g. diabetes, heart diseases, terminal diseases etc.), he will go through a more thorough examination. If a person has a disease that is assessed by the military recruitment division to be a hindrance for him to do his military service, he will be exempted; a person who is assessed to be unfit for field service will be assigned to do administrative tasks.³⁴

At present, it is very difficult for a person to obtain exemption from military service for medical reasons.³⁵ However, according to the law, if the medical examination shows that a person has a medical issue which makes him only eligible for administrative tasks, the person has the option of paying 3 000 USD and be exempted instead of serving in an office.³⁶ In a report by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs published in May 2022, a consulted source stated that persons who have obtained an exemption due to medical issues are still being recruited, as the authorities do not respect this kind of exemption.³⁷

Suhail al-Ghazi stated that some persons use the medical examination as an opportunity to bribe the doctors examining them in order to be exempted from military service for medical

²⁶ SNHR: 8

²⁷ Al-Ghazi: 11

²⁸ Al-Ghazi: 6

²⁹ Al-Ghazi: 12; SOHR: 9; SNHR: 2

³⁰ Al-Ghazi: 12

³¹ SNHR: 4; Al-Ghazi: 5

³² Al-Ghazi: 6; SOHR: 3; SNHR: 2

³³ SNHR: 3; Al-Ghazi: 11

³⁴ SNHR: 3; Al-Ghazi: 7

³⁵ Al-Ghazi: 7

³⁶ Al-Ghazi: 10

³⁷ Netherlands, MFA, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2022, [url](#), p. 54

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reasons. Some conscripts pay a bribe (usually 3 000 – 4 000 USD) to do their military service in an office, whereas others pay a higher bribe (i.e. higher than 4 000 USD) in order to be considered unfit for military service and be exempted.³⁸

As regards Syrians living abroad, the General Recruitment Directorate of the Syrian Ministry of Defence announces on its website that a person who reaches the age of 18 while residing outside Syria should report to a Syrian diplomatic representation in the country in which he lives to fill in a form specifically for the compulsory military service. The Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates should afterwards certify this form. This form is a substitute for a military booklet until the person returns to Syria where he will obtain a military booklet. If this person has not applied for deferral or exemption from abroad within the year in which he turned 18, he will be considered a draft evader.³⁹

1.1.2.2. Exemption by paying a fee and its registration in the military booklet

A person living abroad can be exempted by paying an exemption fee either by himself while he is abroad or by a proxy in Syria. Exemption by paying an exemption fee is also registered in the military booklet.⁴⁰

If the person pays the exemption fee from abroad through a Syrian representation (embassy or consulate), he will receive a receipt from the military recruitment division in Syria via the Syrian representation stating that he has paid the exemption fee and therefore is exempted.⁴¹ It is not possible for the representation to register the exemption in the military booklet, as it should include a stamp from the military recruitment division in Syria. Therefore, the person will only be able to get the exemption registered in his military booklet when he returns to Syria.⁴²

After arriving in Syria, he will have to show the receipt to prove that he is exempted from military service at the airport, at checkpoints and at any encounter with the authorities.⁴³ When returning to Syria, the authorities at the airport accept the receipt and let him enter the country, according to SNHR. The person will then have to go to the military recruitment division to have the exemption registered in his military booklet in order to avoid delay at mobile military police checkpoints where the checkpoint officers may spend time verifying the receipt, as they may not have access to the central database.⁴⁴

A person who wants to use a proxy (for instance his parents) to pay the exemption fee for him in Syria will have to send his military booklet to the proxy in order to have the exemption registered in the booklet. The proxy will receive a receipt when he/she pays the exemption fee

³⁸ Al-Ghazi: 8-9

³⁹ Syrian Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, *الخدمة الإلزامية* [Compulsory Military Service], [url](#)

⁴⁰ SNHR: 10

⁴¹ SOHR: 10; SNHR: 12

⁴² SOHR: 10-11

⁴³ SNHR: 12; SOHR: 11

⁴⁴ SNHR: 12

at the Ministry of Finance and thereafter, the military recruitment division will register the exemption in the military booklet.⁴⁵

When passing by checkpoints, it is usually sufficient to show the military booklet; it will not be necessary to show other documents proving that the person is exempted or that he has a specific military service status. However, if the officer at a checkpoint suspects that the military booklet has been manipulated, he may ask the person to show other documents. In such situations, the person can show the document that proves his military status.⁴⁶

1.2. Recruitment of reservists

Reservists are still being called up for service.⁴⁷ After 2011, the GoS has been recruiting reservists for a variety of reasons, including the need for more manpower or for people with certain military skills. Persons with special skills who have had a special function during their military service, such as tank crewman, are more likely to be called up for reserve duty compared to persons without special skills. In order to assert more control over former opposition-controlled areas, the GoS has been recruiting more reservists from these areas than areas that were under GoS-control during the conflict.⁴⁸

Reservists are called up by the authorities announcing both the birth year of the reservists and the specific number of the military training course that they passed when they were conscripts.⁴⁹ According to Suhail al-Ghazi, the SAA recruits reservists by announcing that persons with certain skills (for instance mechanics), who have participated in military training course X (the number of the course), must report for reserve duty before a certain date. Similar to the recruitment of people for the first time, the names of persons who have not reported for service within the announced period will be published on a list posted at the local mukhtar's office.⁵⁰

According to SNHR, a person will be called up for reserve duty by the military recruitment division via the mukhtar who may approach the person at his residence. Sometimes, a military recruitment officer goes with the mukhtar to the person's residence. The mukhtar may also choose to call the person by phone to inform him to report for reserve duty within a specific deadline. If a person does not report for reserve duty within the given deadline, his name will be added to a wanted list.⁵¹

⁴⁵ SNHR: 11; SOHR: 12

⁴⁶ Al-Ghazi: 15

⁴⁷ Netherlands, MFA, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2022, [url](#), p. 53

⁴⁸ Al-Ghazi: 18

⁴⁹ SOHR: 8

⁵⁰ Al-Ghazi: 17

⁵¹ SNHR: 13-14

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As for conscripts who do not report for military service after having been called up, persons called up for reserve service also risk being arrested in any encounter with the authorities.⁵²

The Syrian authorities also call up men who return from abroad to the reserve service. The returnees will be told upon their arrival in Syria that they must report to a recruitment division office within 15 days. Those who do not report for service within the deadline will have their names put on a wanted list.⁵³

⁵² Al-Ghazi: 17; SNHR: 14

⁵³ Netherlands, MFA, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2022, [url](#), p. 53

2. Conscripts' duties during the service

Conscripts who complete their six months training are assigned to duties in different places. For example, some may be assigned to man checkpoints, others to do normal guard duty, whereas others are assigned to administrative tasks in an office.⁵⁴ Conscripts may be deployed to any place including frontlines.⁵⁵

Some conscripts are sent to the frontlines in Idlib, which is controlled by opposition groups, or to frontlines in areas controlled by the Turkish army in north Syria where they may participate in fighting.⁵⁶ Other conscripts are deployed to other places where there is no active fighting but where they may nonetheless be exposed to attacks such as in the Badia desert area (which comprises much of Homs, northeastern Hama, southern Raqqqa, and western Deir ez-Zour governorates)⁵⁷ where there are confrontations with the Islamic State.⁵⁸

A conscript cannot choose his duties or influence where he will serve his military service. A conscript who refuses to accept his assignment will be punished, e.g. sentenced to imprisonment or death, depending on the individual case.⁵⁹

2.1. Factors impacting assignment to duties potentially involving violations

2.1.1. Education and military skills

Persons who have completed university are more likely to be assigned to work in an office, than someone without a university degree, who are more likely to be deployed to the front.⁶⁰

Deployment to the frontline takes place regardless of the person's fighting experience or military skills.⁶¹

2.1.2. Unit of deployment

The place of deployment and the duties of conscripts also depend on which army division and regiment they will serve in.⁶² Some conscripts are assigned to do their military service with the Air Force Intelligence or Military Intelligence. In these cases, they will most likely either participate in or witness violations such as war crimes. Checkpoints are usually manned by either the Air Force Intelligence, the Military Intelligence, the 4th Division or pro-government militias.⁶³

⁵⁴ Al-Ghazi: 19

⁵⁵ SOHR 14; Al-Ghazi: 24

⁵⁶ Al-Ghazi: 19

⁵⁷ Lister, C., *The growing threat of ISIS in Syria's Badia*, 17 April 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸ SNHR: 16; SOHR: 14; Al-Ghazi: 19

⁵⁹ SOHR: 16

⁶⁰ EUAA, *Syria: Targeting of Individuals*, September 2022, [url](#), p. 41

⁶¹ Al-Ghazi: 24; SOHR: 14

⁶² SNHR: 16

⁶³ Al-Ghazi: 20

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Other conscripts may be assigned to do their military service in the Special Forces, the Republican Guard or the 4th Division, all of which were involved in a number of violations in 2021 and 2022. As with assignment to any other unit or duties, conscripts assigned to these units have no choice but to serve there.⁶⁴

2.1.3. *Paying a bribe*

The only way in which a conscript might influence his duties or where he will serve is by paying a bribe.⁶⁵ The bigger the bribe is, the more the person's preferences regarding duties and deployment place will be met.⁶⁶ Some conscripts are able to bribe their commanding officer and be assigned to a different army unit away from the front or to avoid specific duties.⁶⁷

It was common even before the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011 that conscripts bribed their commanding officer in order to serve under more lenient conditions, including closer to their hometown.⁶⁸

A bribe can range from 100 USD to 1 000 USD depending on what it is paid for. For example, those who are deployed to the front must pay a large amount of money to be moved to a different army unit because the commanding officer also needs money to pay someone higher up in the system.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ DIS, *Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units*, April 2023, [url](#), pp. 1, 8, 12

⁶⁵ SOHR: 15; SNHR: 17; Al-Ghazi: 21

⁶⁶ SOHR: 15

⁶⁷ Al-Ghazi: 22; SNHR: 17

⁶⁸ Al-Ghazi: 22

⁶⁹ Al-Ghazi: 23. In order to give a broader idea of the salaries in the SAA and the magnitude of corruption and bribes in the army compared to the salaries, Al-Ghazi referred to a study conducted by Omran Center for Strategic Studies: Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Salary Increases, A Syrian Regime Policy Driving the Militarization of Society*, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

3. Military service for naturalised Ajanib Kurds

Stateless Kurds (Ajanib and Maktumeen) are not conscripted by the SAA.⁷⁰ Ajanib Kurds who have acquired Syrian citizenship, however, are required to do military service on equal terms with other Syrian citizens.⁷¹ The Norwegian Refugee Council reported conversely that it is unclear whether naturalised Ajanib are required to complete military service under Syrian law.⁷²

3.1. Exemption of naturalised Ajanib born before 1993 from military service

According to several sources, naturalised Ajanib Kurds born before 1993 are exempt from military service.⁷³

According to an article published by Tilburg University in 2013, the GoS issued a decree in December 2011, following decree no. 49 of April 2011 on the naturalisation of stateless Ajanib, exempting naturalised Kurds born before 1993 from military service. The contents of the supplementary decree were reported as follows:

- naturalised Ajanib born before 1993 are exempted from military service;
- those born in 1993 are conscripted but would not immediately be called up for military service; and
- those born in 1994 or later would be immediately eligible for military service once they turn 18 as other Syrian citizens.⁷⁴

Many of the sources consulted by Tilburg University in 2013 stated, however, that there were no officially published and openly consultable source for these purported rules, and none of the sources could specify the number and title of the decree.⁷⁵

Of the three sources interviewed by DIS in May and June 2023, SNHR and SOHR similarly stated that naturalised Ajanib born before 1993 (i.e. born in 1992 or earlier) are exempted from military service in practice. Naturalised Ajanib Kurds born in 1993 and later have been called up for military service.⁷⁶ The exemption is registered in the military booklet of the naturalised Kurds who were born before 1993.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ EASO, *Syria - Military service*, April 2021, [url](#), p. 19

⁷¹ Al-Ghazi: 25; EASO, *Syria - Military service*, April 2021, [url](#), p. 19; Netherlands, MFA, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2022, [url](#), p. 49

⁷² NRC, *Understanding Statelessness among Syrian Refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, 28 August 2022, [url](#)

⁷³ SNHR: 18, 19; SOHR: 17; Tilburg University, Statelessness Programme, *The Stateless Syrians*, May 2013, [url](#), p. 20

⁷⁴ Tilburg University, Statelessness Programme, *The Stateless Syrians*, May 2013, [url](#), p. 20

⁷⁵ Tilburg University, Statelessness Programme, *The Stateless Syrians*, May 2013, [url](#), p. 20

⁷⁶ SOHR: 17; SNHR: 19

⁷⁷ SNHR: 19

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SNHR affirmed the existence of a decree from 2011 exempting Ajanib Kurds born before 2013 from military service.⁷⁸ However, neither SNHR nor SOHR specified the number or title of this decree.

The third source, Suhail al-Ghazi, had not heard of such a decree and had spent hours searching for it prior to the interview. Al-Ghazi had only found one article on a Syrian website⁷⁹ mentioning such a decree but without referring to a specific title or number. He assumed that this exemption, in the event it exists, may be temporary and specific to Hasakah, as the GoS several times during the conflict has issued decrees that were temporary and applied to a specific area or certain groups.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ SNHR: 18

⁷⁹ حكايات سوريا [Syria Stories], إعفاء المجنسين الأكراد من الخدمة الإلزامية [Exemption of naturalised Kurds from military service], 8 February 2012, [url](#)

⁸⁰ Al-Ghazi: 26

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Suhail Al-Ghazi

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Annex 1: Meeting minutes

WhatsApp meeting with the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), 24 May 2023

About the source: [The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights \(SOHR\)](#) is a human rights organisation based in the UK. Through a large network of activists, SOHR monitors, documents and publishes the daily developments in Syria.

Recruitment of conscripts and reservists - procedure and practices

1. In all GoS-controlled governorates, the same procedure is used to call up conscripts and reservists for military service.
2. The military recruitment division is responsible for calling up Syrian men for conscription when they turn 18. Every 45 days, the division releases a list of dates and asks all men who have turned 18 by these dates to approach the military recruitment division office of the city in which the person lives. These lists of dates will usually be announced in the news in the official government TV channels.
3. The person called up will have between 15 and 20 days to approach the nearest military recruitment division office where he will undergo a medical examination and then, if assessed fit for military service, he will be asked to join a military training course (Arabic: *dawra*) at a certain date. Every military training course has a unique number and every 45 days a new military training course is initiated.
4. Young Syrian men and their parents will normally know the recruitment procedure well and will be able to figure out in what period the young men might be called up for conscription. However, if a person among the group called up does not report to the military recruitment division within 15-20 days, the military recruitment division will put his name on a list of people who are to report immediately for military service.
5. This list of names will be sent to the mukhtar (local mayor) of the neighbourhood who in turn will notify the families of the persons who are on the list.
6. If a person named on such a list does not approach the nearest military recruitment division office within one to two weeks, the military police will go to this person's house and hand over a notification saying that the person should approach a military recruitment office as soon as possible.
7. In case the person does not approach a military recruitment division office after being notified by the military police, the person's name will appear on a list of names of people wanted for military service. These lists are usually distributed to checkpoints and

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public administration offices. If a person wanted for military service goes through checkpoints or apply for a service at a government office, he will be arrested and sent directly to military training.

8. Reservists are called up the same way as conscripts with the exception that the military recruitment division will announce both the birth year of the reservists and the specific number of the military training course (Arabic: *dawra*) that they passed when they were conscripts.
9. The military booklet will be given to a Syrian man when he turns 18. The booklet contains personal details about the person and his military service status, including possible exemptions, deferrals, discharge etc. There are specific pages in the military booklet where the exemptions should be noted.
10. A person who lives outside Syria and pays the exemption fee through a Syrian representation abroad (embassy or consulate) will receive a document from the military recruitment division in Syria via the Syrian representation certifying that he has paid the exemption fee and is therefore exempted. It is not possible for the representation to register the exemption in the military booklet as it should include a stamp from the military recruitment division in Syria.
11. The exemption document is usually enough to prove one's exemption at checkpoints and at any encounter with the authorities. The person will be able to get the exemption registered in his military booklet when he returns to Syria.
12. The person will also be able to get the exemption registered in his military booklet if the proxy paying the exemption fee (usually one of his parents) is in possession of the person's military booklet. The person can send his military booklet to his proxy who will pay an exemption fee to the Syrian authorities and get an exemption registered in the military booklet in addition to a separate document that certifies the exemption.
13. The Syrian army is in need of soldiers even though active fighting has decreased significantly since 2018. The number of conscripts called up for military service are much higher than the number of reservists called up.

Conscripts' duties during the service

14. Conscripts can be deployed to any place including at frontlines. They are also deployed to places where there is no active fighting but where the area is exposed to daily attacks. For example, there is no fighting in Deraa or in the Syrian desert area in the east (*Badia*); however, the Islamic State has conducted attacks at checkpoints and at military barracks of the GoS in these places killing among others conscripts.

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15. It is not possible to choose one's duties during service (including participation in active fighting) or to influence where one will serve unless one pays a bribe. The bigger the bribe is, the more one's preferences regarding duties and deployment place will be met. Some people are able to provide the needed amount of bribe, which is about 3 000 dollars, in order to avoid military service.
16. A person who refuses to accept his assignment will be punished, e.g. sentenced to imprisonment or death, depending on the individual case.

Military service for naturalised Ajanib Kurds

17. All naturalised Ajanib Kurds born in 1993 or later are wanted for military service by the GoS, and those born in 1992 or before are exempted.
18. Whilst many Ajanib Kurds became Syrian nationals due to the 2011 decree, the situation of unregistered Kurds (*Maktumeen*) is unchanged and they cannot obtain Syrian nationality as they have no ID documents.

Teams meeting with the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), 8 June 2023

About the source: [The Syrian Network for Human Rights \(SNHR\)](#) is a human rights organisation that monitors and documents human rights violations in Syria. The organization has monitored and documented human rights violations in Syria since 2011.

Recruitment of conscripts - procedure and practices

1. The military recruitment division is responsible for calling up conscripts and reservists for military service.
2. Syrian men usually know that they have to go to the military recruitment division when they turn 18 to do initial medical checks and receive a military booklet.
3. The result of the initial medical check is registered in the military booklet. If the person has a disease that is assessed by the military recruitment division to be a hindrance for the person to do his military service, the person will be exempted. If the person is assessed to be unfit for field service, he will be assigned to administrative tasks during his service.
4. When the person reports to receive his military booklet, he needs to bring documents stating his personal information. In case he wants to be exempted or postpone his military service because he is the only son of his family, a student or

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travelling abroad etc., he has to bring the necessary papers to document his situation.

5. Persons of conscription age usually know the drafting dates (Arabic: *tawarikh al-souq* *تواريخ السوق*), as these dates have been fixed for many years. The drafting dates are also announced on posters put up at the military recruitment division offices. On the posters, it is announced that persons born in specific months of a certain year have to join the upcoming military training course (which will have a specific number) within a deadline. In addition, persons of conscription age usually inform each other in the neighbourhood about the announced dates, and even the parents will ask the authorities and others about the dates.
6. In the event a person does not report for military service within the deadline stated on the announcement, the military police may approach the person's residence to inform him that he is called up for military service. However, since the Syrian conflict started, the military police have rarely gone to people's home to notify them about military service.
7. If the person does not report for military service after being notified by the military police, his name will be added to a wanted list and he will be considered a draft evader. He will then risk being arrested by the authorities if he for instance approaches a checkpoint.
8. The military booklet is roughly the size of a hand and on all the pages it is printed: 'the army and the armed forces' (الجيش والقوات المسلحة). On the first page, the personal information of the person is registered, including name, age, place of origin, the number of the military recruitment division office, the number of his file in the military recruitment division and a photo of the person. On the last page, the person's height, weight, special physical marks (that make the person differ from other persons) and health condition is registered. The other pages are empty in order to be filled in by the military recruitment division to register e.g. drafting date, place of conscription and reserve service, dates of leave during the service, exemptions and deferrals. The name and title of the officer who filled it in and a stamp of the recruitment military division will follow anything filled in on the pages.
9. All rules about exemption from military service, including exemption due to being the only son of the family, having paid the exemption fee, exemption for medical reasons etc., are being enforced by the GoS.
10. A person living abroad can be exempted by paying an exemption fee either by himself or by a proxy in Syria.

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11. A person who wants to use a proxy will send his military booklet to a proxy (who can be his parents or another person) in Syria who will be requested by the military recruitment division to pay the exemption fee at the Finance Ministry. The proxy will receive a receipt for having paid the fee and he or she will then show this receipt to the military recruitment division who will register the exemption in the military booklet.
12. A person can also pay the exemption fee by himself through a Syrian representation in any country where he will receive a receipt stating he has paid the exemption fee. When the person returns to Syria, he will have to show the receipt to prove that he is exempted from military service. In practice, the authorities at the airport in Syria accept the receipt and let him go. However, the person will have to go to the military recruitment division to have the exemption registered in his military booklet in order to avoid delay at mobile military police checkpoints where the checkpoint officers may spend time verifying the receipt, as they may not have access to the central database.

Recruitment of reservists - procedure and practices

13. A person will be called up for reserve duty by the military recruitment division via the mukhtar who may approach the person at his residence. Sometimes, a military recruitment officer goes with the mukhtar to the person's residence. The mukhtar may also choose to call the person by phone to inform him to report for reserve duty within a specific deadline.
14. If a person does not report for reserve duty within the given deadline, his name will be added to a wanted list. Like persons called up for military service for the first time, he will then risk being arrested by the authorities when he for instance approaches a checkpoint.

Conscripts' duties during the service

15. Active fighting has decreased in Syria since 2018; however, the state of alert is high. Therefore, the demand for conscripts and reservists is the same as it was before 2018. There are still conscripts in the army who have been serving for several years.
16. The place of deployment and the duties of conscripts and reservists depend on which army division and regiment they will serve in. Some divisions are deployed to the frontlines, and some are placed at military bases in dangerous areas like the Syrian desert area (*Badia*) where there are confrontations with the Islamic State.

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17. A conscript or reservist cannot choose where to be deployed. Persons may be able to pay a bribe to the commander of the division to be assigned to a specific division or to avoid specific duties.

Military service for naturalised Ajanib Kurds

18. Decree No. 49 on the naturalisation of Ajanib from 2011 was followed by a supplementary decree stipulating that naturalised Kurds who have reached the age of twenty are exempted from military service. Naturalised Kurds born in 1993 and thereafter are therefore not exempted from military service.
19. The decree about naturalisation and the supplementary decree about the exemption have been implemented. The exemption is registered in the military booklet of the naturalised Kurds who were born before 1993. Naturalised Kurds who were not exempted have been called up for military service.

Skype meeting with Suhail al-Ghazi, Syrian researcher based in Europe, 24 May and 12 June 2023

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

Recruitment of conscripts - procedure and practices

1. A person in the military service age will be informed about his duty to report for military service in the SAA between January and May of the year in which he is to report for obtaining the military booklet at the nearest recruitment office in his area of origin; if he for instance is from Latakia and lives in Aleppo, he must report for duty in Latakia. However, since 2011 and due to the limited possibilities for movement between different areas because of the conflict, the Ministry of Defence have allowed men to do their papers and obtain their military booklets in the governorates in which they live instead of in their area of origin.
2. In January, the Ministry of Defence announces on its homepage that men born in x year are eligible for military service and must report to make their military booklet within a specific period. This announcement will also be posted at the office of the local mukhtar (local mayor). The names of men who did not report within the announced period will be posted at the mukhtar's office. There is a mukhtar in every neighbourhood, and everyone knows where to go to see the announcement from

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the Ministry of Defence or the list of persons who have not reported yet. At times, people will also know from their network that they are on the list.

3. If a person whose name is on the list in the mukhtar's office, does report within one year after he was announced eligible for military service, he will only have to pay a fine to have his name removed from the list and then do his military service. However, if he does not report within one year, or if he reports and makes his military booklet, but does not start his service, his name will be registered in the national database as wanted for military service, and he will be considered an evader. In such case, the military or civil police may come to his house to notify his family about this and they will arrest him if they find him there. He will also risk being arrested at checkpoints when they check his ID. He will thus have no choice but to either hide, report for military service in the SAA or leave the country. Since 2011, the individual can join various pro-government militias, including Iranian or Russian backed militias, Instead of joining the SAA. During the Syrian conflict, however, the police has not been searching for draft evaders at their place of residence to the same degree as before 2011, and catching draft evaders mainly takes place at checkpoints.
4. Almost every year, Bashar Al-Assad issues an amnesty for evaders which means that they will not face penalties for having evaded military service if they report for duty within 4 months after the amnesty was announced. However, it is unclear whether these amnesties are implemented in practice.
5. Upon being notified about his duty to report, the person must go to the local general recruitment office where he submits his ID, sometimes his family booklet and his latest education certificate (whether it be middle school or high school etc.). The rank and duties of the conscript as well as the duration of his military service will depend on his educational background.
6. At the recruitment office, the person will fill out papers for his military booklet and go through a medical examination. This procedure applies throughout all government-controlled areas in Syria.
7. The medical examination is usually a very quick basic examination at which they check the height, weight and eyesight etc. of the person. This quick examination is a mere formality; the purpose is rather to sign the papers than to assess the person's health condition with regard to his ability to do military service. Only if a person claims that he is suffering from a serious disease (e.g. diabetes, heart diseases, terminal diseases etc.) and requests a more thorough examination will he go through such an examination. Nowadays, it is very difficult to obtain exemption

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from military service and men suffering from medical conditions, which usually would trigger an exemption, will instead be assigned to office jobs during their military service.

8. The medical examination also constitutes an opportunity for the person to bribe the doctors examining him in order to be exempted from military service for medical reasons.
9. Some conscripts also pay a bribe (usually 3 000 - 4 000 USD) to do their military service in an office. There are also men who pay a higher bribe (i.e. higher than 4 000 USD) to officers as well as to the doctors at the military hospital who conduct the medical examination in order to be considered unfit for military service and be exempted.
10. According to the law, if the medical examination shows that a person has a medical issue, which makes him only eligible for administrative tasks, the person has the option of paying 3 000 USD and be exempted, instead of serving in an office.
11. After going through the medical examination and filling out the papers at the recruitment office, the person will get a military booklet. The military booklet is filled out by hand which leaves room for corruption.
12. All Syrian men who turn 18 must obtain a military booklet. Even those who are exempted from military service gets a military booklet in which the exemption and the reason for it is stated.
13. In the military booklet, all information about the person and his military service status is written, including information about the completion of, exemption from or deferral on the service. If the individual has been exempted because of him being the only son of the family, it will be noted in the booklet that his mother has gone through a medical examination that concludes that she is infertile and no longer able to give birth.
14. In addition to the exemption or deferral being registered and stamped in the military booklet, the person exempted is also provided with a document stating the reason for the exemption or the deferral.
15. When passing by checkpoints, it is usually sufficient to show the military booklet; it will not be necessary to show other documents proving that the person is exempted or that his military service has been postponed (e.g. due to studies). However, if the officer at a checkpoint suspects of the military booklet being manipulated, he may ask the person to show other documents. In such situations, the person can show the documents mentioned above.

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16. Upon completing the recruitment procedures, including the medical examination, the person will be told to report to the training centre or base on a certain date in April or October where the training starts. Whether a person starts in April or October depends on firstly, when he has completed the military booklet and medical examination and secondly, whether he has reasons to postpone the training from April to October; for example if he is completing high school.

Recruitment of reservists - procedure and practices

17. Reservists are not recruited regularly or on the basis of fixed rules and uniform procedures as persons recruited to the military service for the first time. The SAA recruits reservists by announcing that persons with certain skills (for instance mechanics) who have participated in military training course x (each training course has a number, for instance 105) must report for reserve duty before a certain date. Like with the recruitment of people for the first time, the names of persons who have not reported within the announced period will be published on a list posted at the local Mukhtar's office. Similar to the situation of men wanted for military service, the military police may also come to the reservist's place of residence if he does not show up at the recruitment offices. Likewise, he could also be arrested and taken to the reserve service if his name appears on the wanted list at a checkpoint.
18. After 2011, the Syrian government has been recruiting reservists for a variety of reasons, including the need for more manpower or for people with certain military skills. Persons with special skills who have had a special function during their military service, such as tank crewman, are more likely to be called up for reserve duty compared to persons without special skills. In order to assert more control over former opposition-controlled areas, the GoS has been recruiting more reservists from these areas than areas that were under the GoS' control during the conflict.

Conscripts' duties during the service

19. After six months' training, conscripts are assigned to duties in different places. They may be assigned to man checkpoints, they may end up doing normal guard duty or, if they are lucky or have paid enough in bribe, they are assigned to administrative tasks in an office. Other conscripts are sent to the frontlines in Idlib, which is controlled by opposition groups, or to frontlines in areas controlled by the Turkish army in north Syria where they may participate in fighting. They may also be sent to Deir ez-Zour to fight the Islamic State.
20. Some conscripts are sent to do their military service in the Air Force Intelligence or Military Intelligence. Here they will most likely either participate in or witness

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violations, e.g. war crimes. Checkpoints are manned either by the militias, Air Force Intelligence, 4th division or Military Intelligence.

21. A conscript has no choice but to do the duties he is assigned to and in the areas he is deployed to unless he deserts or, if possible, bribes his way out.
22. After the six months' training period, it is common that the conscript bribes his commanding officer to get days off to visit his family, or to be deployed in a different place away from the front or to be moved from one army unit to another. The source knows many people who have paid bribes to serve closer to their home town. Paying a bribe to serve under more lenient conditions, including doing one's service close to one's area, has existed for decades, i.e. even before the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011.
23. The bribe can range from 100 USD to 1 000 USD depending on what it is paid for. For example, those who are deployed to the front must pay a large amount of money to be moved to a different army unit because the commanding officer also needs to pay someone higher up in the system. In order to give a broader idea of the salaries in SAA and the magnitude of corruption and bribes in the army compared to the salaries, the source referred to a study conducted by Omran Center for Strategic Studies.⁸¹
24. Any conscript may be sent to the frontlines regardless of his fighting experience or military skills.

Military service for naturalised Ajanib Kurds

25. All Ajanib Kurds who have acquired Syrian citizenship are required to do military service on equal terms with other Syrian citizens.
26. The source has not heard of a reported decree exempting naturalised Ajanib Kurds born before 1993 from military service. Prior to the interview, the source had spent hours searching for such a decree but he only found one article from a Syrian website (syriastories.net⁸²) mentioning it without referring to a specific title or number of the decree. However, the source assumes that this exemption, in the event it exists, may be temporary and specific to Hasakah, as the GoS several times during the conflict has issued decrees that were temporary and applied to a specific area or certain groups. An example of this is when the GoS in April 2021 granted men in Deraa governorate who had failed to report for military service or reserve

⁸¹ Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Salary Increases, A Syrian Regime Policy Driving the Militarization of Society*, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

⁸² حكايات سوريا [Syria Stories], *إعفاء المجنسين الأكراد من الخدمة الإلزامية*, [Exemption of naturalised Kurds from military service], 8 February 2012, [url](#)

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duty a one year postponement of the deadline within which they had to report for service.⁸³

⁸³ Enab Baladi, درعا, تأجيل لعام كامل للمتخلفين عن الخدمة الإلزامية في درعا [A one-year postponement for those who failed to complete compulsory service in Deraa], 5 April 2021, [url](#)

Annex 2: Terms of Reference (ToR)

Issues regarding military service

1. Recruitment procedures and practices
 - 1.1. Recruitment of conscripts – formal procedure and practice
 - 1.2. Recruitment of reservists – formal procedure and practice
2. Military service for naturalised Ajanib Kurds
 - 2.1. Implementation of decree exempting naturalised Ajanib Kurds born before 1993 from military service
3. Conscripts' duties during the service
 - 3.1. Assignment to duties potentially involving violations
 - 3.2. Possibility to refuse assignment to duties potentially involving violations