

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1423
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	UN Security Council
Titel:	Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018) 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020)
Udgivet:	11. december 2020
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	26. april 2021



Security Council

Distr.: General
11 December 2020

Original: English

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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

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

2. The information contained herein is based on data available to agencies of the United Nations system and obtained from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and other relevant sources. Data from agencies of the United Nations system regarding their humanitarian deliveries have been reported for the months of October and November 2020.

II. Major developments

Key points

1. The number of confirmed coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases continued to rise sharply, amid continued reports of widespread shortages in personal protective equipment. While testing capacity increased in some areas, overall testing capacity remained inadequate, making the extent of the outbreak in the country difficult to discern.

2. The economic crisis continued to deepen humanitarian needs across the country, with new surges in bread and fuel prices of particular concern. Subsidized bread and fuel prices doubled over the reporting period and the price of a standard reference food basket in October was higher than at any point since price monitoring by the World Food Programme (WFP) began in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2013.



3. The onset of winter weather brought rainfall and flooding that damaged hundreds of tents in displacement sites in Idlib Governorate and western Aleppo Governorate. As weather conditions deteriorate, concern is high for more than 2.2 million internally displaced persons across the country who lack adequate shelter, as well as for other vulnerable communities, including those living in elevated areas, and those who lack basics such as fuel for heating, blankets, warm clothes and shoes.

4. In the north-west, the ceasefire in the Idlib de-escalation area largely continued to hold, albeit with a gradual increase in the number of violations. Communities continued to endure increasing hostilities, including air- and ground-based strikes, as well as attacks using improvised explosive devices. Intensifying hostilities along the lines of control in southern Idlib Governorate and western Aleppo Governorate impacted the delivery of assistance, with aid distribution for 12,000 people in Idlib and Ariha subdistricts delayed due to insecurity. At least three humanitarian workers were killed and at least five were injured in the north-west.

5. In the north-east, mutual cross-line attacks reportedly increased, notably along the south-eastern contact lines of the Operation Peace Spring area. Multiple parties continued to suffer attacks by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) cells, while counter-ISIL operations continued.

6. The south-west saw continued popular unrest and tensions. Violence remained at an elevated level, including assassinations, attacks using improvised explosive devices and small arms fire, in addition to kidnapping attempts and local clashes. A large number of arrests of fighters reconciled from former armed opposition groups were reported, as well as the releases of several detainees.

7. In the western part of the country, wildfires in Ladhikiyah, Tartus and Homs Governorates in October affected an estimated 200,000 people and destroyed thousands of hectares of agricultural lands.

8. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified 80 incidents, in which at least 73 civilians, including 15 children, were killed, and at least 214 civilians, including 68 children, were injured as a result of the conduct of hostilities throughout the Syrian Arab Republic.

9. Humanitarian assistance by United Nations agencies continued throughout the country. The humanitarian response continued to reach 7.4 million people every month on average across the Syrian Arab Republic.

Humanitarian update

3. Reported cases of COVID-19 in the Syrian Arab Republic more than quadrupled over the reporting period, reaching almost 31,000 cases as at 30 November. Of these, some 7,900 were reported by the Syrian Ministry of Health, some 16,000 were reported in the north-west and some 7,000 were reported in the north-east. Testing capacity increased in some areas, with 550 samples per day being tested by laboratories in government areas, with the capacity to test 1,400 samples per day in the north-west, and 400 per day in the north-east. Overall testing capacity nonetheless remained inadequate, making the extent of the outbreak in the country difficult to discern. However, it is likely that the actual number of cases far exceeds the official figures. Increasing transmission rates continued to be reported among health-care workers, amid continued reports of widespread shortages in personal protective equipment.

4. The economic crisis continued to deepen humanitarian needs across the country, with new surges in bread and fuel prices of particular concern. The value of the Syrian

pound on the informal market declined steadily until late November, reaching over LS 2,900 against the United States dollar in late November and closing at around LS 2,600 at the end of the reporting period. The prices of many essential goods rose more sharply than in previous months. The price of subsidized bread doubled from September to October, while the weight per subsidized bundle was reduced by 15 per cent. The market price of bread increased by 26 per cent over the same period. The price of a standard reference food basket increased by 5 per cent from September to October, reaching LS 88,138. This represents a year-on-year increase of 247 per cent, and a higher level than at any point since price monitoring by WFP began in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2013. Monitoring data for October indicated an increase in inadequate food consumption, with 49 per cent of households reporting poor and borderline food consumption.

5. Rising fuel prices were of particular concern with the onset of winter weather. The price of subsidized diesel fuel rose by 120 per cent during the reporting period. Displaced families are particularly vulnerable to deteriorating weather conditions, as are communities in elevated areas, such as in parts of Rif Dimashq. A third of the 6.7 million internally displaced people in the Syrian Arab Republic lack adequate shelter. Geographically, poor shelter conditions are most prevalent in Idlib, Aleppo and Rif Dimashq Governorates, in Raqqah city and generally in camps in the north-east and north-west. In November, rainfall and flooding damaged almost 400 tents in 10 displacement sites in Idlib Governorate and western Aleppo Governorate.

6. In the north-west, the ceasefire in the Idlib de-escalation area largely continued to hold, albeit with a gradual increase in the number of violations. Mutual artillery shelling across contact lines took place on a nearly daily basis, while sporadic airstrikes continued. Ground-based clashes remained local, limited and intermittent. On 4 November, multiple incidents of airstrikes and shelling in different parts of Idlib killed at least 7 civilians, including 4 children, and injured at least 14 civilians, including 3 children, in a single day. Among those killed were two aid workers on their way to a UNICEF-supported child-friendly space. Two schools were also reportedly damaged as a result of shelling that day.

7. Insecurity also continued in the Afrin and I‘zaz to Jarabulus areas. On 6 October, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device in Bab city is reported to have killed at least 18 civilians, including 5 children, and injured at least 62, including 11 children. Among the injured were three non-governmental organization (NGO) staff working in the local COVID-19 referral system. On 15 October, two Syrian aid workers and their driver, travelling from a project site in Salqin city, were reported to have been injured by shrapnel from a drone attack on another car travelling in the area. One of the aid workers has since died of her injuries. On 24 November, separate bombings in Bab and Afrin reportedly killed at least six civilians and injured more than 40.

8. In northern Aleppo, shortages of potable and agricultural water supply continued to be reported in Bab city and surrounding areas, affecting some 185,000 people. The channelling of electricity from Turkish electrical providers in late November enabled an increase in water pumping from local wells; however, overall supply remains vastly inadequate to meet demand in the area. Since water supply through the Ayn al-Bayda pumping station ceased in February 2017, the population has been reliant on alternative sources, which have been assessed as insufficient and unsafe. Bab has been among the top four subdistricts reporting waterborne diseases throughout the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2017. The United Nations continued to advocate for a resumption of water supply from the Ayn al-Bayda pumping station.

9. In the western part of the country, wildfires in Ladhikiyah, Tartus and Homs Governorates in October affected an estimated 200,000 people by destroying or

damaging homes and assets and agricultural lands, cutting power and water supply, and by limiting access to services. An estimated 9,000 hectares of agricultural and forested land were destroyed in the fires between 9 and 11 October. Across the country, more than 35,000 hectares of agricultural land are estimated to have burned in 2020, with a long-term impact on food production anticipated.

10. In the north-east, an increase in reports of mutual cross-line attacks was recorded, notably along the south-eastern contact lines of the Operation Peace Spring area between Tall Abyad and Ra's al-Ayn. Multiple parties continued to suffer attacks by ISIL cells, which resulted in dozens of casualties. In more than one instance, oil truck convoys were taken away by ISIL and the drivers executed. Multiple parties continued counter-ISIL operations.

11. Relocations of displaced persons to Tala'i' camp near Hasakah City continued. As at 25 November, over 6,800 people had been relocated from schools used as collective shelters in Hasakah Governorate to Tala'i' camp. Humanitarian organizations continued to raise concerns regarding these relocations, including as to their voluntary nature. Technical teams were provided access to Uluk water station, and water supply continued without major interruption.

12. Over 100 schools in Hasakah that were closed by local authorities in August remained shuttered, even as other schools in the Governorate reopened, following a six-month closure owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. The continued closures impacted some 10,000 students. The United Nations continued to advocate the restoration of students' access to accredited education at schools of their choosing, while supporting interim measures, including the provision of printed self-learning materials and enabling attendance at schools in other areas. Country-wide, only 50 per cent of schools are functional, and 2.1 million children are out of school.

13. Some 63,800 people remained at Hawl camp, 94 per cent of whom are women and children and 53 per cent of whom are children under the age of 12. Over 1,300 people departed Hawl camp in October and November, mostly to areas of origin within the Syrian Arab Republic. Reports were received of some families not being permitted to leave on account of missing identity documents. Security incidents continued to be recorded, including search and arrest campaigns and threats against humanitarian staff and outreach volunteers. Humanitarian organizations continued to advocate with camp authorities for improved safety for residents and humanitarian workers. Movement of residents from Hawl to Roj camp continued and humanitarian organizations continued to raise concerns regarding the potential separation of children from their parents during such movements. Hawl remained at risk of a wider COVID-19 outbreak, with 13 cases confirmed among camp residents, including 3 fatalities. Sustainable solutions continued to be sought for those living in camp and camp-like settings in the north-east.

14. The south-west saw continued popular unrest and tensions. Violence remained at an elevated level, and included assassinations, attacks using improvised explosive devices and small arms fire, in addition to kidnapping attempts and local clashes. A large number of arrests of fighters reconciled from former armed opposition groups were reported, as well as releases of several detainees.

15. The United Nations remained without access to the 12,000 people living at Rukban. Alongside efforts to support voluntary departures, the United Nations continued to advocate for immediate humanitarian assistance to reach those remaining at the camp. A United Nations inter-agency assessment mission visited the Wahah transit centre on 4 November as part of ongoing efforts to facilitate departures for those wishing to leave Rukban.

Update on overall developments

16. The Special Envoy for Syria convened the fourth session of the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned Constitutional Committee in Geneva on 30 November for one week. He did so after facilitating agreement by the Co-Chairs nominated by the Syrian Government and the opposition Syrian Negotiation Commission that the fourth and fifth sessions would entail discussions on national foundations and principles and constitutional principles, respectively. The Co-Chairs further agreed that the fifth meeting would be convened in January 2021, COVID-19 precautions permitting.

17. During his visit to Damascus in late October, the Special Envoy had substantial discussions on the upcoming Constitutional Committee sessions and ways to develop a wider political process in accordance with Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#). In the lead-up to the fourth and fifth sessions, and in his capacity as facilitator of the process, the Special Envoy conducted extensive consultations with international and regional interlocutors, including in the lead-up to the sessions of the Constitutional Committee to urge constructive international diplomacy with regard to the Syrian Arab Republic. He also briefed members of the middle third component of the small body of the Constitutional Committee and the Syrian Women's Advisory Board.

Protection

18. Civilians across the Syrian Arab Republic continued to suffer the direct and indirect consequences of armed conflict and violence. Civilians were killed and injured as a result of shelling and intermittent airstrikes, fighting between and within various armed groups, shootings, attacks carried out with various types of improvised explosive devices, including vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, and as a result of explosive remnants of war, including unexploded ordnance. Some improvised explosive device attacks were carried out inside residential areas and local markets, appearing either to target civilians or to be heedless of their impact on civilians.

19. OHCHR verified 80 incidents in which at least 73 civilians, including 6 women and 15 children, were killed, and at least 214 civilians, including 19 women and 68 children, were injured as a result of the conduct of hostilities across the Syrian Arab Republic, including shelling, airstrikes, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war, armed clashes and targeted killings at the hands of various parties to the conflict or by unidentified perpetrators. The majority of civilian deaths (60 per cent) were attributed to shelling and improvised explosive device attacks. In the light of the patterns observed and the large number of incidents and civilians killed and injured in markets and residential areas, it appears that parties to the conflict have failed to respect the key principles under international humanitarian law of distinguishing civilians from fighters and civilian objects from military objectives; of refraining from indiscriminate attacks; of respecting proportionality in attack; and of taking constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects in the conduct of military operations.

20. Tens of thousands of civilians reportedly remain missing or arbitrarily detained, with the vast majority held in government facilities. Both pro-government forces and armed groups continued to arbitrarily detain individuals in areas under their effective control. In the majority of cases documented by OHCHR, detainees were denied information about the reasons for their detention and other due process rights, while their families were denied information concerning their whereabouts or their fate, raising concerns that, in some cases, such detentions may constitute enforced disappearance. In areas under the control of the Government, OHCHR continued to document cases of detainees dying while in custody, allegedly owing to natural causes. In many such cases, individuals appear to have been subjected to enforced

disappearance, and the fact that they were detained by the Government did not become known until their deaths were acknowledged. The bodies of the deceased are rarely returned to their families, who are also denied the opportunity to question the official causes of death or to know the whereabouts of the bodies. OHCHR has also documented cases of detainees and abductees dying while in the custody of non-State armed groups, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and the Syrian Democratic Forces.

21. In Dar'a, OHCHR continued to document targeted killings of civilians and reconciled former members of armed opposition groups. The majority of such attacks have been carried out by unidentified perpetrators. Targeted killings have also been carried out in areas in Dayr al-Zawr Governorate, by unidentified perpetrators, except for some claimed by ISIL.

22. Non-State armed groups in the north-western, northern and eastern parts of the country continued to systematically target civilians, including those perceived as being affiliated with opposing parties or alleged to be critical of those in control of the territory, including through killings, the arbitrary deprivation of liberty, torture, ill-treatment and kidnappings. Parties to the conflict continued to impose rules and codes of conduct on civilians living in areas under their control that are fundamentally contrary to human rights, including the rights to life, liberty and security of person, to freedom of movement and to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

23. Parties to the conflict continued to target some humanitarian and health-care services and personnel in addition to media professionals, including through attacks with improvised explosive devices and abductions. Some health-care facilities and their personnel have been directly attacked. Under international humanitarian law, parties to the conflict must protect civilians and civilian objects, including humanitarian relief personnel and objects used for humanitarian relief operations. Medical personnel, units and transports exclusively assigned to medical duties must be respected and protected under international humanitarian law.

24. UNICEF recorded two incidents of hostilities causing damage to educational facilities during the reporting period:

(a) On 4 November, Zakariya Saadu school was impacted by ground-based shelling on Ariha city centre, Idlib Governorate, causing damage to walls and classroom furniture, as well as to the playground and fence of the school;

(b) On 4 November, Al Hikmah school in Al Hikmah Education complex, Kafraya, Ma'arratmisrin, Idlib Governorate, was hit by ground-based shelling, resulting in damage to walls and furniture of the school.

25. The Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care of the World Health Organization (WHO) reported one incident affecting health care. Additional incidents are yet to be verified as part of the WHO surveillance system. A total of 25 attacks affecting health care were recorded since the beginning of the year, resulting in at least 13 deaths and 41 injuries to health-care workers and patients. Such incidents continue to strain an already weakened health system, the vulnerabilities of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

26. Although the scale and scope of explosive contamination across the Syrian Arab Republic has yet to be fully determined, approximately one explosive incident every 10 minutes was recorded between January 2019 and March 2020.

Humanitarian response

27. Humanitarian assistance by United Nations agencies continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic. The humanitarian operation of the United Nations and its partners reached 7.4 million people on average per month. Assistance included WFP food assistance for 4.5 million people in October and 4.3 million people in November, in all 14 Governorates. UNHCR continued its support to 128 community and satellite centres, as well as 120 mobile units, with 2,714 community outreach volunteers providing a range of protection, livelihood support services and other services.

28. The United Nations continued to support the COVID-19 response across the country, prioritizing containment of the virus by: enhancing surveillance and diagnostics capacity and procuring vital medical supplies and equipment; supporting clinical readiness; and protecting the delivery of essential health-care services. Testing capacity was increased in the north-west, with two new laboratories set up in Jarabulus and Afrin, in addition to the existing laboratory in Idlib city. Staff training and procurement of additional testing kits is ongoing. As a result of these efforts, daily testing capacity increased from 200 to 1,400 tests per day.

Table 1

Average number of people reached each month by the United Nations and other organizations through all modalities throughout the Syrian Arab Republic: October and November 2020

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Average number of people reached monthly</i>
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	33 200
International Organization for Migration	70 800
Mine Action Service	10 700
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	363 600
United Nations Children's Fund	1 582 200
United Nations Development Programme	389 900
United Nations Population Fund	451 800
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	142 500
World Food Programme	4 455 000

29. From inside the Syrian Arab Republic, humanitarian operations reached at least 4 million people on average per month. Assistance provided by United Nations agencies included WFP delivery of food assistance for 3.2 million people in October and 3 million people in November. It also included cash distributions to 285,000 Palestinian refugees through United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in November. In eastern and western Ghutah, a Mine Action Service explosive ordnance assessment, under way since August, surveyed 68 hectares of land, 63 per cent of which was identified as contaminated, with 272 items of explosive ordnance located and marked. Risk education teams trained by the Mine Action Service delivered awareness sessions to more than 10,000 civilians, promoting safe behaviours in communities most affected by explosive ordnance contamination. In Hawl camp, UNICEF resumed educational activities in phases 4 and 5 of the camp and commenced rehabilitation of its centre in phase 3. Rehabilitation of the camp reception area by UNHCR was nearing completion. Winterization distributions were completed in all formal camps apart from the "Annex" section of Hawl camp, where distributions will be completed by mid-December.

30. In the north-west, humanitarian assistance delivered cross-border through the Bab al-Hawa crossing included WFP delivery of food assistance for 1.4 million people in October and 1.4 million people in November. It also included UNFPA health assistance to over 34,000 people and IOM shelter and non-food item assistance to almost 20,000 people. In Aleppo and Idlib Governorates, FAO supported over 7,000 small-scale dairy farmer households through a Lumpy Skin Disease vaccination campaign and 3,000 small-scale livestock keepers with an enterotoxaemia vaccination campaign.

Figure I

Number of beneficiaries assisted by the United Nations and its partners through cross-border humanitarian deliveries, by cluster: October and November 2020 (monthly average)

(Thousands)

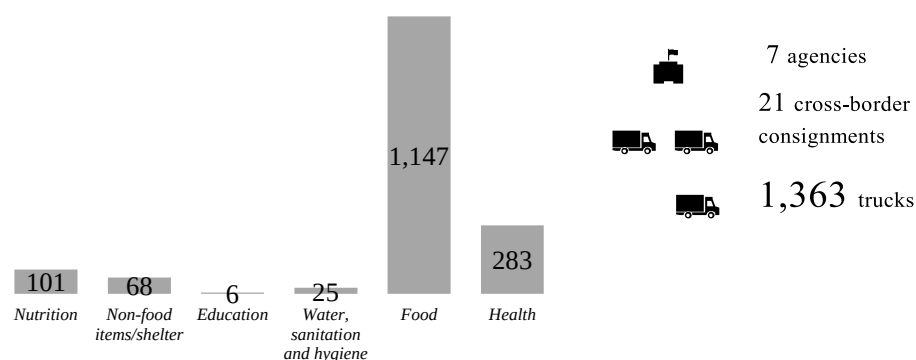


Table 2

Number of beneficiaries targeted through cross-border deliveries, by sector and by district: October and November 2020 (monthly average)

Governorate	District	Education	Food	Health	Non-food items/shelter	Nutrition	Water, sanitation and hygiene
Aleppo	Afrin	—	36 250	—	—	—	—
Aleppo	Bab	—	—	—	5 000	—	5 000
Aleppo	I'zaz	—	113 365	—	5 000	—	5 000
Aleppo	Jarabulus	—	—	—	1 200	—	—
Aleppo	Jabal Sim'an	—	42 250	—	—	—	—
Idlib	Harim	—	882 000	276 153	15 238	—	—
Idlib	Idlib	5 700	73 500	7 000	41 200	10 500	15 000

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

Humanitarian access

32. The provision of humanitarian assistance requires timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded access by the United Nations and all humanitarian partners to people in need throughout the Syrian Arab Republic. Principled humanitarian action depends

on the ability to independently assess needs and deliver assistance, and to monitor and evaluate impact independently, including by engaging regularly and directly with affected people. The access landscape in the country is complex, with different geographical areas and different types of services requiring different operating modalities. More than 1,800 United Nations staff members are in-country, with more than 600 deployed in humanitarian hubs outside Damascus, in Aleppo, Dayr al-Zawr, Hama, Homs, Ladhikiyah, Qamishli, Suwayda' and Tartus. A further 3,860 UNRWA staff are deployed across the country. Decentralized presence contributes to greater access and proximity to affected populations. Throughout the Syrian Arab Republic, aid is distributed and implemented primarily by national actors, including NGOs and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

Access limitations related to the pandemic

33. Border crossings remained impacted as the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries continued implementation of COVID-19-related precautionary measures. Most land borders into the Syrian Arab Republic remained closed, with some limited exemptions from Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, including commercial and relief shipments and the movement of humanitarian and international organization personnel. International commercial passenger flights resumed at Damascus International Airport as of 1 October. Access through crossing points inside the Syrian Arab Republic also remained restricted, with exceptions for humanitarian and commercial cargo, humanitarian personnel, students and medical cases. Domestic cargo and passenger flights continued to operate, including the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service.

Access in government-controlled areas

34. In government-controlled areas, communities and enclaves that remained difficult to access, owing to administrative and security approvals, included Shaffuniyah, Mayda'a and Kafr Batna in Eastern Ghutah, and Bayt Jinn and Mazra'at Bayt Jinn in western Rif Dimashq. In the southern part of the country, insecurity and administrative restrictions continued to prevent sustained access to areas formerly controlled by non-State armed groups, particularly in Dar'a al-Balad neighbourhood in Dar'a city, in Karak al-Sharqi in Dar'a Governorate and in parts of western Dar'a and Qunaytirah.

35. United Nations personnel and third-party contractors continued to mobilize to field locations alongside national NGOs and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to conduct assessment and monitoring, as well as logistics and administrative support missions. In October and November, 1,940 regular programmatic movements took place with programme or blanket approvals, a 7 per cent decrease on the August to September reporting period, when 2,092 such movements took place (see table 3).¹ Monitoring missions, mostly conducted by third-party monitors, constituted the bulk of all conducted missions, at approximately 60 per cent of the total. Of these regular programme movements, 32 per cent were conducted in the north-eastern governorates of Hasakah, Raqqah, and Dayr al-Zawr. Another 13 per cent were conducted in the southern governorates of Suwayda', Dar'a and Qunaytirah (see figure II).

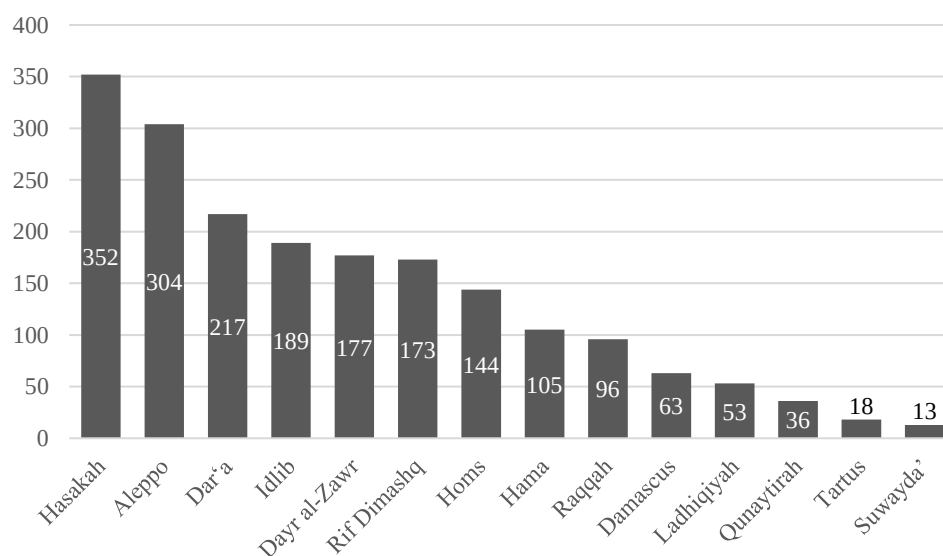
¹ United Nations staff and third-party contractors operating at humanitarian hubs outside of Damascus obtain "blanket approvals" to carry out movements as part of their regular programming. These enable regular access and reduce bureaucratic requirements.

Table 3
Total number of missions conducted under programme or blanket approvals* from within the Syrian Arab Republic by United Nations agencies and third parties/facilitators, by type: October and November 2020

<i>Type of mission</i>	<i>Blanket approval</i>	<i>Programme approval</i>	<i>Total number</i>
Assessment missions	12	4	16
Missions accompanying aid deliveries	686	–	686
Monitoring missions	1 163	–	1 163
Security, logistics and administrative support missions	75	–	75
Total	1 936	4	1 940

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

Figure II
Total number of missions conducted under programme or blanket approvals from within the Syrian Arab Republic by United Nations agencies and third parties/facilitators, by governorate: October and November 2020



36. For missions requiring specific approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United Nations submitted 387 new requests, of which 66 per cent were approved. This represents an improvement of two percentage points on the previous reporting period, when 64 per cent of 278 requested missions were approved, and is 11 percentage points higher than the average approval rate since December 2019 (53 per cent average approval rate).

37. Humanitarian access continued to gradually improve to areas that came under government control in 2019 and 2020, with a decentralized approval process requiring only Governors' approvals, as opposed to approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For instance, in November, United Nations agencies and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent carried out two multisectoral needs assessments in areas which changed control in south and western rural Aleppo (Zarbah, Khan Tuman, Is, Tall Hadiyeh,

Kafr Da'il, Mansurah and Shantarah). Both assessments found considerable levels of damage and destruction to civilian infrastructure, including water systems, homes and health facilities. Development of response plans commenced to meet these needs.

38. On 13 October, WFP conducted a mission to the town of Darayya in Rif Dimashq Governorate. This was the first United Nations mission to this area in 2020. Despite the reconciliation agreement that was signed in Rif Dimashq in 2016, access to Darayya remained heavily restricted. As access to the town improved, the number of resident families increased, with most requiring multisectoral humanitarian assistance owing to a lack of basic services, dire living conditions and few livelihood opportunities. WFP, through a partner organization, commenced general food assistance in Darayya in January and currently supports some 12,500 people in the town each month.

39. On 4 November, an inter-agency mission to Wahah transit centre and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent health centre in Dumayr in Rif Dimashq was conducted to identify key elements to be addressed for Wahah to function as a temporary quarantine centre for civilians voluntarily departing Rukban.

Table 4

Missions from within the Syrian Arab Republic requiring specific approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: October and November 2020

<i>Type of request</i>	<i>Number requested</i>	<i>Number approved</i>	<i>Percentage approved</i>
Assessment missions	97	46	47
Missions accompanying aid deliveries	96	81	84
Monitoring missions	121	69	57
Security, logistics and administrative support missions	42	27	64
Explosive ordnance assessment missions	31	31	100
Total	387	254	66

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

Access in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic

40. In the north-east, the United Nations maintained regular and sustained humanitarian access in most parts of Hasakah Governorate and some parts of Raqqah Governorate, while other areas, including Manbij and Ayn al-Arab, remained difficult to access from Damascus, owing to the lack of agreement between parties in control and to insecurity. In early October, a WFP partner received instructions from Government of the Syrian Arab Republic authorities to stop their distributions of WFP general food assistance to some 220,000 people in non-government controlled areas of Raqqah Governorate, while they were permitted to continue operating in government-controlled areas. Following high-level engagement, WFP on 2 December received confirmation from the Government that it would be able to restart distributions in Raqqah.

41. Efforts continued to bridge gaps in the delivery of medical assistance to areas outside of government control. As at the end of the reporting period, all 17 hospitals and 106 primary health-care facilities in the north-east had been reached with medical supplies on at least one occasion, through one or more delivery modalities, including the hospitals and primary health-care centres that previously depended on United Nations-supported cross-border operations. Access was inconsistent however, and

gaps in medical assistance continued to be reported. The most recent cross-line shipment of medical supplies, as at the end of the reporting period, was in July 2020.

42. The United Nations continued to advocate for regular and sustained access to the “Annex” section of Hawl camp and the extension in Roj camp. Services in the Annex section of Hawl remained limited almost five months on from the establishment of the service centre in the Annex, owing to lack of agreement with camp administration on security procedures. A lack of permits to operate in the Annex prevented humanitarian partners from delivering at scale.

Access in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic

43. Intensifying hostilities along the lines of control in southern Idlib Governorate and western Aleppo Governorate led to temporary disruptions to humanitarian assistance. Distributions of WFP assistance to 12,000 people in Idlib and Ariha subdistricts were delayed owing to insecurity.

44. United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners continued to address the logistical and operational challenges resulting from the reduction to one authorized border crossing following the adoption of Security Council resolution [2533 \(2020\)](#). Following the expansion of the transshipment hub at Bab al-Hawa, roadworks continued on the main route connecting Bab al-Hawa to northern Aleppo, funded through the Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund, with the aim of completing the most urgent repairs before winter weather makes such work impossible. All United Nations humanitarian assistance into the north-west is being routed through the Bab al-Hawa crossing, with over 2,400 trucks of humanitarian aid sent in via this crossing point since Council resolution [2533 \(2020\)](#) came into effect. On 27 October, a United Nations inter-agency mission crossed into Idlib Governorate from Turkey and gathered first-hand information about the humanitarian situation in the area. The mission visited a new displacement camp being constructed in central Idlib, supported through funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund. It saw the extremely difficult conditions in which displaced people are living, with many still living in tents on the sides of roads. The mission also met with humanitarian personnel and visited warehouses storing supplies for winterization and COVID-19 response.

45. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic continued its operations as mandated under Security Council resolutions [2165 \(2014\)](#), [2191 \(2014\)](#), [2258 \(2015\)](#), [2332 \(2016\)](#), [2393 \(2017\)](#), [2449 \(2018\)](#), [2504 \(2020\)](#) and [2533 \(2020\)](#). The Monitoring Mechanism monitored and confirmed the humanitarian nature of 21 consignments consisting of 1,363 trucks that crossed into the Syrian Arab Republic from Turkey, all through the Bab al-Hawa crossing. This brings the total number of trucks monitored since the beginning of operations to 42,418 (32,446 through Bab al-Hawa, 5,268 through Bab al-Salam, 4,595 through Ramtha and 109 through Ya‘rubiyah). There were no concerns or questions regarding the humanitarian nature of these consignments. For every shipment that crossed the border, the United Nations provided 48-hour advance notice to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, including information on the humanitarian goods to be delivered, the number of trucks, the United Nations owner and the destination (district). The Mechanism continued to benefit from the excellent cooperation of the Government of Turkey.

46. Humanitarian workers continued to actively pursue an all-modalities approach to respond to the humanitarian needs of the affected population, including continued efforts to complement cross-border operations with cross-line assistance. Dialogue continued with all the concerned parties regarding the operational modalities for a first such cross-line mission into the north-west.

Access in the south-east of the Syrian Arab Republic

47. The most recent United Nations humanitarian convoy to reach Rukban from within the Syrian Arab Republic was undertaken in September 2019. Since then, only a handful of commercial trucks have reached Rukban through informal routes. The United Nations continued to advocate for immediate humanitarian access to civilians remaining at Rukban. Since the decision by the Government of Jordan in March to close the border as a COVID-19 preventive measure, medical cases from Rukban have been unable to access the United Nations clinic on the Jordanian side of the border. There have been 63 medical evacuations from Rukban to facilities in the Syrian Arab Republic since the closure of the clinic. Engagement continued with relevant parties to facilitate delivery of and access to humanitarian assistance for the remaining Rukban population.

Visas and registrations

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

Table 5

Requests for United Nations visas: October and November 2020

<i>Type of request</i>	<i>Number requested</i>	<i>Number approved</i>	<i>Number rejected</i>	<i>Number pending^a</i>
Visas requested during reporting period	47	20	–	27
Renewals requested during reporting period	139	81	–	58
Visas pending from before reporting period	51	14	1	36
Renewals pending from before reporting period	30	24	–	4

Note: The United Nations withdrew two visa requests pending from before the reporting period.

The number of pending visa requests and visa renewal requests shown in rows 3 and 4 covers the period from February to September 2020.

^a The number of pending visa requests and visa renewal requests covers the period from February to July 2020.

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

Safety and security of humanitarian personnel and premises

50. The United Nations and non-governmental organizations continued to implement programmes in areas affected by frequent clashes among parties to the conflict, by air strikes and by the regular exchange of indirect artillery fire and other attacks. Humanitarian relief personnel also operate in areas highly contaminated with unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war and landmines.

51. Since the beginning of the conflict, hundreds of humanitarian workers have reportedly been killed, including: 24 staff members of the United Nations and of the entities of the United Nations system, 19 of whom were staff members of UNRWA; 66 staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent; and 8 staff members and volunteers of the Palestine Red Crescent Society. Many staff members of international and national NGOs have also been killed.

52. A total of 20 staff members of agencies and programmes of the United Nations system (all from UNRWA) were detained or missing at the end of the reporting period.

III. Observations

53. I remain gravely concerned by the complete absence of respite for civilians in the country in what has now been almost a decade of war, displacement, impoverishment and loss. None of the metrics point to improvement; on the contrary, humanitarian needs are deepening, now driven increasingly by economic decay and the compounding impact of COVID-19. Food prices are higher than at any point in the conflict. Wasting among children is expected to increase significantly in 2021, as is the overall number of people in need of aid. According to latest assessments, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic is expected to rise by 1.9 million, reaching a staggering 13 million people in 2021. Even as hostilities have decreased in some areas, civilians continue to suffer the devastating consequences of years of explosive weapons use. I am particularly worried about the millions of civilians who lack proper shelter, heating fuel or simply warm clothes and shoes, as we enter this winter season. The United Nations and our humanitarian partners are racing to get the necessary assistance to those who need it most. They require urgent support.

54. Humanitarian assistance and unimpeded humanitarian access remain crucial. I remind all parties to the conflict of their obligation under international humanitarian law to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need that is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction. United Nations agencies continue to work with their humanitarian partners to overcome the operational challenges that derive from the reduction to one border crossing to access the north-west. Efforts continue to establish cross-line access into the north-west. The responsibility for these cross-line missions to proceed is a collective one, and I call upon the parties to continue their engagement with the United Nations to reach agreement on the operational modalities.

55. I remain alarmed by the fact that civilians continue to bear the brunt of hostilities, including as a result of indiscriminate attacks in populated areas. Attacks that are directed against civilians or that are indiscriminate, including improvised explosive device attacks in populated areas and markets, must cease immediately. I am deeply concerned at the recent rise in violent incidents impacting humanitarian workers, most of whom are Syrians, themselves affected by the crisis and delivering aid under immensely difficult circumstances. Such violence is unacceptable, and I call upon all parties to meet their obligations to protect humanitarian workers.

56. I further remind the parties of their obligation under international humanitarian law not to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects that are indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, which include drinking-water installations and supplies. The COVID-19 pandemic adds to the urgency of protecting access to water and sanitation. I also call upon all parties to remove practical obstacles to education in territories under their control, in line with the human right to education.

57. I reiterate my appeal for an immediate global ceasefire and fully support the appeal of my Special Envoy for a complete nationwide ceasefire throughout the Syrian Arab Republic, as called for in Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#).

58. My Special Envoy continues efforts for the unilateral release of persons arbitrarily deprived of their liberty, the majority of whom remain detained by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. I call upon the Government and all other parties to account for their fate and whereabouts, and to allow humanitarian and human rights agencies access to all places of detention. All persons in detention should be promptly informed of any charges against them. Persons facing prosecution should be afforded all minimum fair trial guarantees. They should be brought promptly before a judge and immediately released if their deprivation of liberty is

arbitrary. Detaining authorities should carry out prompt, effective, thorough and transparent investigations of deaths in custody and, if it is found that such deaths resulted from criminal acts, the perpetrators should be brought to justice. Families of persons who have died in custody should be informed and receive full and adequate reparations within a reasonable period in the case of wrongful death. Respect for these principles would also build confidence, both within society and between the parties and international stakeholders. A failure to address arbitrary deprivation of liberty would leave credible justice, true reconciliation and sustainable peace elusive.

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

60. In view of the ongoing serious concerns repeatedly raised with regard to the protection of civilians and other human rights concerns in the Syrian Arab Republic, I continue to strongly urge the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, in line with Human Rights Council resolutions [S-18/1](#) and [19/22](#), to cooperate with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council and with OHCHR, including through the establishment of a field presence with the mandate to protect and promote human rights.

61. I continue to offer my full support to my Special Envoy and the parties represented in the Constitutional Committee as they seek the emergence of commonalities. While it is my belief that the constitutional process is an important aspect of the larger political process, and could help unlock the other elements contained in Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#), substantive progress toward a broad political solution to the Syrian conflict remains elusive. I reaffirm that any sustainable peace arrangement depends on including women at the negotiating table as full partners. I continue to call upon Syrian parties, and their international and regional supporters, to demonstrate a renewed sense of urgency in finding a United Nations-facilitated political solution as set out in resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#), the only framework that enjoys legitimacy and the support of the entire international community, with a view to ensuring that the interests of Syrians, ending their suffering and ensuring that sustainable peace remain the overriding priority.

Annex

Reported incidents affecting civilians recorded by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: October and November 2020*

Idlib Governorate

- On 9 October, a girl was killed by a reported ground-based strike in Shinan village in southern rural Idlib.
- On 10 October, a woman was killed by a reported ground-based strike near her home in Barah town in southern rural Idlib.
- On 14 October, a civilian was reportedly shot and killed by members of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham near Balmis village in western rural Idlib, allegedly for refusing to stop at a checkpoint.
- On 21 October, a woman, a boy and a girl were injured by reported airstrikes in a residential area of Rami in southern rural Idlib. On the same day, two other civilians, including a woman, were injured after reported ground-based strikes in Barah town.
- On 28 October, four civilians, including a boy, were killed and eight civilians, including a woman and two boys, were injured by a reported ground-based strike in the city of Ariha in southern rural Idlib. On the same day, four civilians were killed and three others injured when a reported landmine detonated on agricultural land near the city of Khan Shaykhun in southern rural Idlib.
- On 31 October, three civilians, including a woman, were injured by a reported drone strike on agricultural land in Nahlah village in southern rural Idlib. On the same day, a civilian was killed and five other civilians, including a boy, were injured by a reported drone strike on agricultural land near Ma'arratmisrin town in northern rural Idlib.
- On 1 November, a woman civilian was injured in a reported ground-based strike in Kafraya town in northern rural Idlib.
- On 4 November, four civilians, including two aid workers and a girl, were killed, and five civilians, including four women, were injured by reported airstrikes in the city of Ariha in southern rural Idlib. On the same day, a civilian in the city was injured by reported shelling, which also damaged two schools. Also on the same day, two boys were killed by a reported ground-based strike in Kafraya town in northern rural Idlib. Also on 4 November, a boy was killed and eight other civilians, including a woman, two boys and a girl, were injured in reported ground-based strikes in Sina'a neighbourhood in the city of Idlib.
- On 6 November, a girl was killed by reported ground-based strikes in the city of Ariha in southern rural Idlib.
- On 9 November, a civilian was injured after a reported ground-based strike on Ibdita village near Jabal al-Zawiyah in southern rural Idlib.

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

Aleppo Governorate

- On 1 October, two civilians were injured when a reported vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated in the city of Afrin in north-western rural Aleppo.
- On 3 October, a woman was injured when a reported landmine detonated on agricultural land near the city of Tall Rif'atin in northern rural Aleppo.
- On 6 October, 18 civilians, including 1 woman, 3 boys and 2 girls, were killed and at least 62 civilians, including 5 women, 9 boys and 2 girls, were injured when a reported vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated in the city of Bab. Three humanitarian workers were injured in the blast, and an NGO ambulance was damaged.
- On 10 October, a boy was killed and a woman and a boy were injured in a reported indiscriminate exchange of small arms fire between rival armed groups in Tel' Ada town in western rural Aleppo.
- On 26 October, a civilian and his two children were injured when a reported magnetic improvised explosive device attached to their car detonated in the city of Bab. On the same day, two male civilians were killed and eight civilians, including five children, were injured when a reported improvised explosive device attached to a motorcycle detonated in the city of Afrin in north-western rural Aleppo.
- On 27 October, two civilians, one of whom was a woman, were killed and a woman was injured when a reported ground-based strike hit their home in Tadil village in western rural Aleppo.
- On 29 October, 11 civilians, including a woman, eight boys and a girl, were injured after reported ground-based strikes in Isca village in Afrin district in north-western rural Aleppo. A nearby school was also reported to have sustained damage.
- On 3 November, a boy was killed when a reported landmine detonated on agricultural land near the town of Dayr Hafir in eastern rural Aleppo.

Hasakah Governorate

- On 2 November, four civilians, including a boy, were injured when a reported improvised explosive device detonated in the city of Ra's al-Ayn in western rural Hasakah.
- On 11 November, the body of a civilian was reportedly found by his family in the village of Daman in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) later claimed responsibility for his murder.
- On 14 November, a civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in the city of Shahil city in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 15 November, a boy was injured when a reported landmine detonated near him in Rumaylan Basha village in north-east rural Hasakah.

Hama Governorate

- On 5 October, five civilians, including a woman, were injured by a reported ground-based strike near their car on the road between Qarquur and Shaykh Sindiyan villages in western rural Hama.

- On 10 October, five civilians, including two boys, were injured when a reported landmine detonated on agricultural land near Safsafah village in north-western rural Hama.
- On 21 October, a woman was injured after a reported ground-based strike hit Qarqur village in western rural Hama.
- On 2 November, two boys were injured when a reported landmine detonated on agricultural land near the town of Harbinafsih in southern rural Hama.
- On 8 November, three civilians, two of whom were women, were killed when reported unexploded ordnance detonated on agricultural land in Qasr al-Mukharrem village in eastern rural Hama.

Homs Governorate

- On 2 October, four boys were injured when reported unexploded ordnance detonated in Baba Amru neighbourhood in the city of Homs.
- On 3 October, two boys were injured when reported unexploded ordnance detonated in Wadi al-Dhahab neighbourhood in the city of Homs.

Dayr al-Zawr Governorate

- On 17 October, two boys were killed and three other boys were injured when reported unexploded ordnance detonated in Baghuz town in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 20 October, a tribal leader in northern rural Dayr al-Zawr was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in Sabhah town in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr.

Raqqah Governorate

- On 13 October, a civilian was killed near his tent during reported indiscriminate exchange of small arms fire outside Hushariyah village in eastern rural Aleppo.
- On 16 October, a boy was killed and eight civilians were injured when reported ground-based strikes hit Ayn Isa town in northern rural Raqqah.
- On 18 October, a civilian was killed by reported sniper fire in the outskirts of Tirwaziyah village in Ayn Isa area in northern rural Raqqah.
- On 3 November, two civilians, one of whom was a boy, were injured after a reported improvised explosive device attached to a motorcycle detonated in Ali Bajliyah village in rural Tall Abyad area in northern rural Raqqah.

Dar'a Governorate

- On 5 October, two civilians were killed by a reported roadside improvised explosive device that detonated in the city of Inkhil in northern rural Dar'a.
- On 11 October, a civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in Da'il town in northern rural Dar'a.
- On 15 October, a civilian was killed when a reported landmine detonated on agricultural land near Dayr al-Adas village in northern rural Dar'a.
- On 27 October, a civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting by unidentified perpetrators in the Tafas town in western rural Dar'a.

Rif Dimashq Governorate

- On 1 October, six boys and three girls were injured in a reported explosion on the road between Bayt Jinn town and Mazra‘at Bayt Jinn village in the area of Qatana in Rif Dimashq Governorate.
 - On 22 October, the Mufti of Damascus and Rif Dimashq Governorates, Mohammad Adnan al-Afyouni, was killed by a reported improvised explosive device planted inside his car and detonated as he was leaving the mosque in the city of Qadsayya in Rif Dimashq Governorate. No group claimed responsibility.
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