

**THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC- MEDIA MONITORING REPORT  
THE SECURITY SITUATION - LATEST DEVELOPMENTS**

2023

Proiect derulat de:



**Terre des hommes**  
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SERVICIUL IEZUITILOR PENTRU REFUGIATI  
ROMANIA

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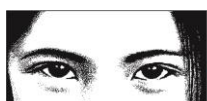
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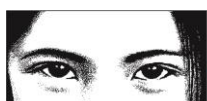
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**Jesuit Refugee Service Romania.** In its capacity as a humanitarian, non-governmental, independent, non-profit, apolitical, democratic association, JRS Romania aims to defend, support, and promote fundamental human rights, especially those of refugees. At the same time, considering the defense, support, and promotion of fundamental human rights, as well as the continuous need to adapt to the dynamic changes within society, JRS Romania contributes to the prevention and relief of suffering in all forms.

**Terre des hommes Foundation** has been active in Romania continuously since 1992, contributing to the improvement of the child protection system and to the reform of social assistance. Tdh's mission is to improve the child protection system and one of its priorities is to support the migrant children who are affected by migration, the prevention of unsafe migration of children and young foreigners and ensure access to fundamental rights for minors affected by migration.

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## Note

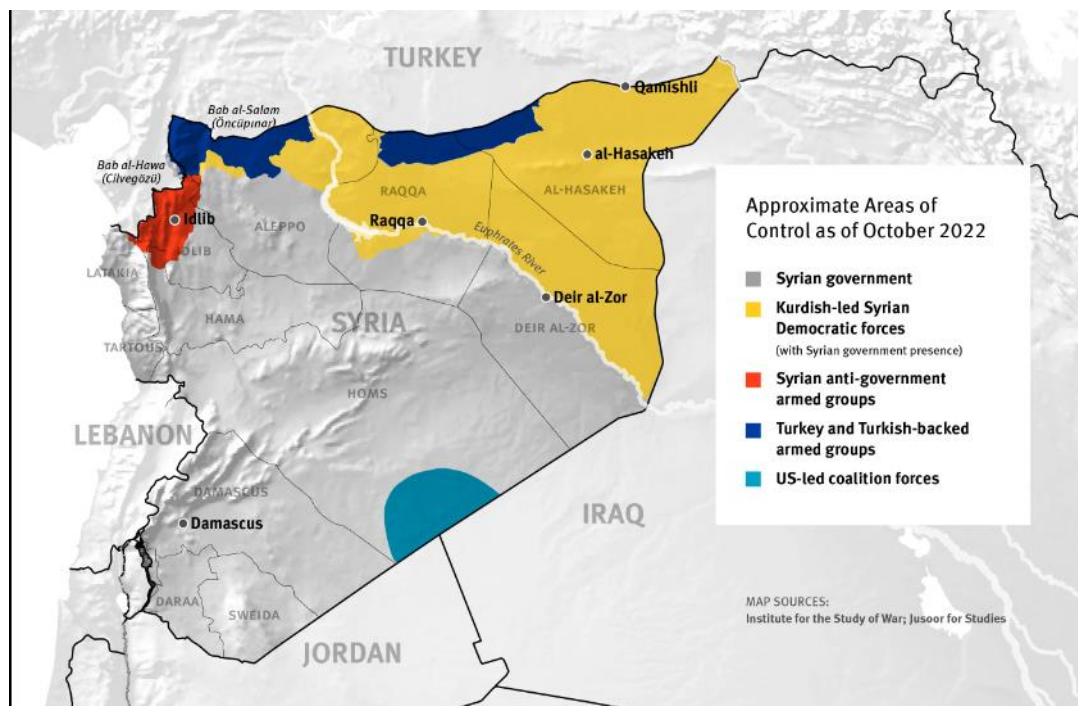
The current Country of Origin Information Report has been compiled in accordance with EASO Country of Origin Information Report Methodology. All sources used are reference sources collected from international reports, press articles and specific war crimes investigations reports.

The purpose of this report is to provide general information with regards to the security situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, covering 2022. The information compiled in this report can be used by all practitioners within the asylum procedure in Romania. However, this report does not analyze the merits of granting a form of protection in Romania.

All information presented within the current report has been carefully analyzed and verified. This report does not claim to be an exhaustive one; therefore, if a significant event or situation has not been presented in the current work, this does not mean that the event or situation did not happen.

The way of presenting information within this report is citation, used in accordance with EASO COI Writing and Referencing Guide. The main outcome of the report is to organize large amounts of information in a focused, clear, well-sourced and fact-based report in order to support the rendering of asylum decisions.

The information presented in the current report do not necessarily reflect the official position of Jesuit Refugee Service Romania or of its project implementing partner, Terre des Hommes Romania



© 2022 Human Rights Watch<sup>1</sup>

Geir O. Pedersen<sup>2</sup> “noted in particular a slow increase in fighting between the Syrian Democratic Forces on the one side, and Türkiye and armed opposition groups on the other, across northern Syria, with violence spilling over into Turkish territory. Recalling the Secretary-General’s plea for all parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid escalation, he said that more violence will spell more harm for Syrian civilians and endanger regional stability — with listed terrorist groups taking advantage of fresh instability.”<sup>3</sup>

“As of the beginning of 2022, the GoS<sup>4</sup> had control over 63.38 % of the state’s territory, including central and southern Syria, the governorates along the Mediterranean coast, and parts of eastern Syria and Aleppo. The GoS also controlled Syria’s most important cities such as Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, or Hama”<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Watch, Turkey: Hundreds of Refugees deported to Syria, 24 October 2022, [link](#), accessed on 15 December 2022.

<sup>2</sup> UN Special Rapporteur for Syria

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, Uptick in Violence Threatens Three Years of Relative Calm in Syria, Special Envoy Tells Security Council, Calling for De-Escalation, 29 November 2022, [link](#), accessed on 15 December 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Government of Syria

<sup>5</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum. *Syria: Security situation Country of Origin Information Report* September 2022, [link](#), p.42, accessed on 15 December 2022.

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“(…) targeted killings, IED<sup>6</sup> attacks, exchanges of fire, clashes and abductions were reported from Dar’a, Quneitra and Sweida governorates in the first half of 2022, involving GoS forces, pro-GoS militia groups, former members of armed opposition groups, ISIL<sup>7</sup> fighters and other unidentified actors. Violent incidents including killings and assassination attempts in Dar’a governorate were also reported in the context of drug trade and other criminal activities, as well as previous, political and personal conflicts. Violent incidents in April and May 2022, including killings of GoS-affiliated individuals, were also reported from Rural Damascus governorate. Reportedly, the perpetrators of these attacks remained unknown except for two incidents for which ISIL claimed responsibility.”<sup>8</sup>

In SDF<sup>9</sup>-controlled areas, ISIL organizes “roadside bombings, drive-by shootings and assassinations, mainly of Arabs close to the SDF, as well as through extortion, it has instilled widespread fear. ISIS has concentrated its attacks in certain parts of Deir al-Zor, but it has also harried areas farther to the north and west, such as southern and eastern Hasakeh district, the Raqqa countryside and the town of Manbij. These constant, low-level attacks reached a higher pitch in early 2022, when ISIS fighters assailed the al-Sinaa prison in Hasakeh and subsequently entered a two-week street battle with SDF units in the adjoining neighborhood of Ghowayran”<sup>10</sup>.

According to a field investigation conducted between 2021-2022 by Crisis Group investigators, “ISIS relies on three primary funding sources: racketeering, taxation and smuggling. With this money ISIS buys weapons and supplies, offers stipends to its members’ families, bribes SDF guards to secure detainees’ release, recruits new fighters and pays the occasional hit man. In many ways, ISIS operates like a mafia, preying on governing institutions and businesses through extortion and blackmail. In some cases, it has recruited local council employees to collect protection money from their colleagues. It also shakes down traders, artisanal oil refinery owners, bakers and

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<sup>6</sup> Improvised explosive device

<sup>7</sup> Islamic State

<sup>8</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum, *op.cit.*, pp. 21-22

<sup>9</sup> The **Syrian Democratic Forces** is an armed militia of the rebels in North and East of Syria formed by Kurds, Arabs and Assyrians

<sup>10</sup> International Crisis Group, *Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria*, 18 July 2022, [link](#), p.2, accessed on 15 December 2022.



smugglers. (...) SDF officials claim that oil investors and refinery owners pay thousands of dollars per month to avoid ISIS attacks on their businesses”<sup>11</sup>.

“During the second week of October, unprecedented full-fledged military confrontations broke out in northern Syria between factions of the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA<sup>12</sup>), with Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) subsequently intervening in support of some factions over others. The escalation began when members of the al-Hamzah Division (HD) assassinated the political activist Muhammad Abu Ghanoum and his pregnant wife in al-Bab in eastern Aleppo on Oct. 7. In response, the Third Legion, which is dominated by the Levant Front (LF) and Jaysh al-Islam (JI), launched multiple attacks against HD and its ally, the Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade (SSSB), driving them out of their military bases in Turkish-influenced rural eastern Aleppo and Afrin (...)”<sup>13</sup>

The author of the article concludes that “Turkey has an interest in stabilizing the north to stave off a potential influx of Syrian refugees into its territory and send back those already in Turkey. Yet this desire has often been hampered by the constantly deteriorating security situation resulting mainly, but not exclusively, from infighting between SNA factions. Ankara’s efforts to permanently resolve disputes and demarcate clear lines between these factions have rarely succeeded, allowing for new formations to emerge within the SNA and leaving space for bloody power struggles and competition over economic benefits between its leaders.”<sup>14</sup>

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents in its monthly report for July 2022 “the deaths of 568 civilians at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria in the first half of 2022, including 115 children and 53 women (adult female). This figure is broken down according to the perpetrators in each case, with 124 of the civilians, including 12 children and four women, killed at the hands of Syrian

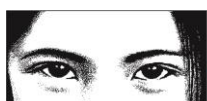
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<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.22-23

<sup>12</sup> The Syrian National Army is a antigovernmental groups coalition backed military and financially by Turkey

<sup>13</sup> Orwa Ajjoub, HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria’s north, Middle East Institute, 26 October 2022, [link](#), accessed on 15 December 2022.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*



regime forces, while three civilians, including two children and one woman, were killed at the hands of Russian forces, eight civilians were killed at the hands of ISIS, and nine civilians, including two children and one woman, were killed by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham. The report also documents the deaths of 12 civilians, including two children and two women, at the hands of all Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army, while Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces killed 39 civilians, including four children and two women. The report also documents 373 civilians, including 93 children and 43 women, killed at the hands of other parties.

(...) Daraa governorate saw the largest death toll compared to other Syrian governorates in the first half of 2022, accounting for 23% of the total death toll, followed by Aleppo, accounting for 16%, then Idlib and Damascus Suburbs with approximately 14% and 13% respectively”<sup>15</sup>.

### **Foreign military operations/presence on Syrian territory**

“Turkey has launched a wave of air raids in northern Syria and Iraq, after a deadly bombing on Istanbul’s Istiklal Avenue. The country blames the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), and groups it claims are PKK-affiliates in Syria and Iraq, for the bombing”<sup>16</sup>.

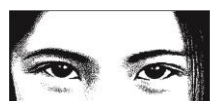
“The US says it conducted two rounds of air strikes in eastern Syria in one day against groups affiliated with Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC).

(...) About 900 US troops are operating out of bases in southern and eastern Syria, without the permission of the Syrian government, as part of the US-led global coalition against the jihadist group Islamic State (IS). They are tasked with preventing a resurgence of IS, whose militants once controlled large swathes of Syria before being defeated in 2019 following separate campaigns waged by US-backed Kurdish and Arab militia fighters and Iran- and Russia-backed pro-government forces. The IRGC

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<sup>15</sup> Syrian Network for Human Rights, <https://snhr.org/blog/2022/07/02/568-civilians-including-115-children-53-women-and-101-victims-who-died-due-to-torture-were-documented-killed-in-syria-in-the-first-half-of-2022/> 2 iulie 2022, accessed on 15 December 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Al Jazeera, Why is Turkey carrying out air strikes in Syria and Iraq?, 1 December 2022, [link](#), accessed on 15 December 2022.





has built a substantial presence in Syria since the civil war began in 2011, sending hundreds of troops to advise President Bashar al-Assad's forces and to train and arm thousands of militiamen”<sup>17</sup>.

“To minimize the threat that Syria will serve as a conduit for Iran to upgrade the military capacities of Hizbollah, Israel has carried out more than 100 strikes on convoys and warehouses serving Hizbollah’s Syrian supply lines. Preventing the delivery of precision-guided missiles to the Shiite movement appears to have high priority. Hizbollah has generally played down the effectiveness of these attacks, and largely refrained from direct retaliation. Since late 2017, Israel has also launched at an increasing pace, strikes against suspected Iranian assets in Syria that appear to aim at disrupting the build-up of Iranian military infrastructure”<sup>18</sup>.

“The few remaining Russian jets in Syria took to the skies later on Sunday and early on Monday morning, bombing rural areas of Idlib near the Turkish border and civilian sites near two refugee camps. (...) Russian jets have repeatedly attacked communities and militant groups in areas outside the control of Damascus, claiming they support hardliners. Attacks, however, have mostly hit civilian targets. <<We know the Russian and Syrian planes from the sounds they make>> said Mustafa Shabanda, an internally displaced Syrian in Idlib province. <<They’re old and you can hear them from a long way off. The Turkish ones are different. They appear from nowhere and are gone just as fast. But they don’t bother us. They’re after the Kurds>>”<sup>19</sup>.

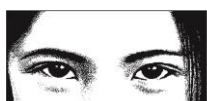
“Since civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, President Bashar al-Assad of Syria has relied on military support from Iran and its proxies to keep rebels at bay, as well as from President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia. Russia has kept a military presence in Syria since the 1970s, but Mr. Putin significantly bolstered it in 2015 with several

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<sup>17</sup> BBC, US strikes Iran-backed groups in Syria twice in 24 hours after attacks, 25 August 2022, [link](#), accessed on 15 December 2022.

<sup>18</sup> International Crisis Group, Flashpoint: Golan Heights and South/West Syria, 10 December 2022, [link](#), accessed on 16 December 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Chulov, How airstrikes by Israel, Turkey and Russia denote a new era in Syrian war, The Guardian, 22 November 2022, [link](#), accessed on 16 December 2022.



thousand Russian troops and aircraft, turning the tide of the Syrian war in Mr. Assad's favor."<sup>20</sup>

“Although many Chechens and Belarusians are already fighting alongside Russia, Russia has begun to broaden its pool by redeploying Wagner forces and recruiting Syrians, (...) Russia is particularly interested in these Syrian recruits because of their low cost. Syrian media and human rights sources have reported the opening of more than ten recruitment centers in the country. These centers encourage Syrians to join the fight to give back to Russia, saying that it saved the Syrian regime from falling. However, the actual reasons motivating Syrians to join—particularly those living under regime control—are more practical and reflect the state of deteriorating living conditions at home. Many of these recruits are aware that living conditions inside Syria will likely only continue to worsen given the economic repercussions and food shortages of the war in Ukraine. Fighting for Russia offers a rare opportunity for real salaries. Although the material cost paid to Syrian mercenaries is uncertain, local sources estimate that it ranges between \$300 and \$600 per month, and includes compensation for anyone killed in battle”<sup>21</sup>.

Israel's support of Ukraine is also influenced by the foreign military developments in Syria. “In a statement, Benny Gantz, the Israeli defense minister said: <<Israel supports and stands with Ukraine, NATO and the West — this is something we have said in the past and repeat today. This being said>> he added, <<I would like to emphasize that Israel will not deliver weapon systems to Ukraine, due to a variety of operational considerations.>> Those considerations include Russia's lingering military presence in Syria, including a separate air defense system, the S-400, and large air and naval bases in Western Syria.”<sup>22</sup>.

“As of the beginning of 2022, Iranian forces had 333 military, security, and operational points in Syria, including 186 sites of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC),

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<sup>20</sup> Patrick Kingsley and Ronen Bergman, Russia Shrinks Forces in Syria, a Factor in Israeli Strategy There, New York Times, 19 October 2022, [link](#), accessed on 16 December 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Omar Abu Layla, How the War in Ukraine Impacts Proxies in Syria, Washington Institute, 7 April 2022, [link](#), accessed on 16 December 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Patrick Kingsley and Ronen Bergman, *op.cit.*

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80 sites of Hezbollah, an Iran-backed, Lebanese armed group 48, and 67 sites that were shared by both forces (...) Similarly, Iran has reportedly increased its influence in Deir Ez-Zor governorate by providing services to the local population, helping to improve their living conditions (...)”<sup>23</sup>.

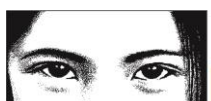
“Iran has been playing the long game in Deir al-Zour, successfully recruiting local Syrians to allied militias, providing services the deeply distrusted government cannot deliver and putting down roots in a strategic province that could further Tehran’s regional interests even after the Syrian civil war eventually ends and Iran’s support for President Bashar al-Assad is no longer as vital.”<sup>24</sup> Abu Khadija, a young Syrian recruited by an Iran-backed militia said “residents in his area have largely accepted Iranian hegemony, mostly because the Iranian-backed militias clearly have more power on the ground than the Syrian army. Residents even file complaints with Iranian officials when government soldiers cause problems. <<They have more influence than the army,>> he said”<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum, *op.cit*, pp.20-21

<sup>24</sup> Sarah Dadouch, Iran is putting down roots in eastern Syria, outcompeting Assad’s regime in signing up fighters, Washington Post, 28 ianuarie 2022, [link](#), accessed on 16 December 2022.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*



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