

On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

SNHR's 12th Annual Report on Violations Against Females in Syria

No fewer than

28926

Females have been killed in Syria

since March 2011, including
117 who died due to torture,
while 11,203 females are
still detained/arrested, and
11,541 incidents of sexual
violence against females

Saturday November 25 2023

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



Contents:

I. The 12 th Annual Report on Violations Against Women in Syria: A Systemic Pattern of Discrimination Seen in Most Violations Against Women in Syria	1
II. Report Methodology	3
III. Close Collaboration With the UN Mechanisms and Bodies Supporting Women's Rights in Syria	6
IV. Outline of the Violations Against Women as Documented on SNHR's Database.....	7
V. Outline of the Reality and Context of Gross Violations Against Women at the Hands of the Various Parties to the Conflict.....	20
VI. Gender Dimensions and the Implication of Local Legislation Promulgated and Implemented by the Syrian Regime on Women's Rights and Growing Hardships.....	49
VII. Threats & Slanders Against Female Activists in Various Areas under Different Parties' Control Have Had A Dramatic Impact on Women's Activism and Services for Women.....	52
VIII. Conclusions and Recommendations	55
Acknowledgment.....	59

I. The 12th Annual Report on Violations Against Women in Syria: A Systemic Pattern of Discrimination Seen in Most Violations Against Women in Syria

Over the past 13 years, women in Syria have been consistently and repeatedly subjected to a wide range of gross violations. This has not been the only trauma women have suffered, with thousands also facing insurmountable challenges over their involvement in activism, or, on a more basic level, in obtaining their most essential rights and needs amid the numerous horrific violations committed by the parties to the conflict.

As part of its focus on women's rights and violations against women, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) releases two extended reports every year on women - the first on [International Women's Day](#), March 8, and the second on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, on November 25. As in previous years, SNHR's 12th annual report on violations against women in Syria tries to summarize the losses suffered by Syria's females as a result of the violations against them, and to explain how women are also indirectly affected by the devastation caused by those violations, which ultimately further erode their rights. In doing so, SNHR is working to fulfill its goals of defending the rights of victims and their families. In keeping with the continuous cumulative nature of our work, the figures on the main violations included in this report cover the period between March 2011 and November 25, 2023, focusing particularly on the incidents that took place between November 25, 2022, and November 25, 2023, or in other words since [our most recent previous report on women in Syria released last year](#), in an attempt to emphasize the fact that violations are still being committed in Syria. Finally, it should be noted that when we summarize an incident that took place before the period November 25, 2022-November 25, 2023, it means that we only verified the incident later in 2023.

Since SNHR was founded 12 years ago, we have documented egregious violations against females almost every day. Many of these violations, all of which were committed without the slightest regard or respect for the victims, also exhibited a strongly misogynistic character.

SNHR believes that women play an integral, equal and central role in the Syrian people's struggle to attain all their long-denied human rights, of which women's rights are one, which is why we feel it is an imperative duty to focus on violations against women.. Also, the ramifications of violations against women extend in a unique way across society, affecting their families and wider society in an appalling and compounded way. To ensure that these violations are clearly reported, we make sure that attention is drawn to female victims' suffering in all the reports, statements, and news stories we publish, and in the special reports and news articles we release particularly on women. SNHR also maintains a specialist database documenting violations against females committed by the parties to the conflict since 2011. Needless to say, the information we have been able to document only reflects the bare minimum of such violations.

The data included in this report reflects the discriminatory pattern of the violations perpetrated against females in many aspects of the continuous and repeated nature of these violations n, including extrajudicial killing, unlawful detention, arbitrary arrest, torture, sexual violence, and attacks on medical and humanitarian facilities which provides services specifically to women. Because of this discrimination, women have been forced to bear an additional burden of violence, as well as disproportionately dealing with the other horrendous ramifications of the conflict caused by the worsening conditions regarding women's human rights, and the economic, social, and political crises they're enduring. Since 2011, women's lives in Syria have been dramatically disrupted, as they face insurmountable difficulties in maintaining their safety and stability.

The barbaric violence unleashed against women and wider society has, unsurprisingly, left profound psychological scars, high levels of stress, trauma, panic, and many other psychological and physical ailments.

Fadel Abdul Ghany, SNHR Executive Director, says:

“In documenting the violations and difficulties faced by Syrian women, our aim is not to simply chronicle the massive suffering they've borne, or to recount their often unimaginably extraordinary endurance. The reports we release are also a message to the international community, the UN Security Council, and women's rights organization around the world urging them to exert far more serious effort to alleviate the plight of Syria's women and empower them to handle the exceptional challenges they face in Syria.”



II. Report Methodology

In addition to using our customary rigorous methodology in documenting and recording violations, SNHR also includes additional special criteria in documenting violations involving females. For one, we always pay attention to the gender-based context in all the types and patterns of violations committed against women, even if those violations have been experienced by all civilian groups. That is to say that victims do not suffer the same degree of punishment for the same violations, with depends on many interrelated factors that may increase or decrease individuals' exposure to various patterns of violations, including, inter alia, involvement, activism, geographic location, economic and social status, age, and even ethnic and sectarian identity. One of these factors is female identity, or in other words, how females have been subjected to certain violations solely due to their sex. Therefore, in the process of monitoring and documenting violations against females in the context of the Syrian conflict, we always adopt a systematic gender-based approach to ascertaining the true aims and definitions of violations experienced by women, especially since the effects of many violations are not limited solely to the victims' but extend to their families and communities as mentioned earlier.

In all procedures related to females, SNHR complies with a number of general principles, such as non-harm, safety, security, and informed, simultaneous, voluntary, and explicit consent. We also prioritize the best interests of female children and juveniles. Thanks to our continuous work since March 2011, SNHR has acquired valuable experience in relation to the implementation of procedures, which we always strive to develop further. Broadly speaking, SNHR makes a point of distinguishing between adult and minor females/girls. To this end, we never take accounts directly from juveniles, female or male. Instead, we collect data on violations against children provided by their primary caretakers - a parent, relative, or guardian - or from eyewitnesses who witnessed the violations and have information about the incident in question. This is consistent with the principles we outlined above, taking into consideration the fact that children are affected differently and far more severely than adults by the violations they suffer, on both the physical and psychological levels. In a very limited number of cases, we may resort to taking a child's first-hand account, doing so no more than once and under very specific and exceptional circumstances. This usually occurs based on our assessment that information might be lost if we opted not to take a child's account, which potentially harms the interests of the child in question, and we only do this with their guardians present.

Culpability for the violations included in this report is assigned to one of the parties to the conflict. In cases where no sufficient evidence was found to reliably assign culpability, we identify the perpetrators as parties we have not yet been able to identify, which we indicate while summarizing the incidents, cases, and data. This report dedicates a section to each one of the parties to the conflict. Relatedly, the report focuses on the gross human rights violations committed against females, which, as we noted, have been practiced in a systematic way. These seven primary violations are: Extrajudicial killing; unlawful detention, arbitrary arrest, abduction, and enforced disappearance; torture; sexual violence; child recruitment; attacks on vital facilities, such as schools, and medical facilities, such as hospitals, and the blockage or denial of humanitarian assistance.

In addition to these seven gross violations, we observed other violations, which are important to point out. Those violations include, for instance, violations related to judicial and security procedures put in place to prove ownership, certifying deaths, and the gender dimension of many laws and regulations involving discriminatory practices that have affected women. Moreover, women activists have faced slander and intimidation, which grew dramatically worse in light of the conflict. Therefore, we have included a summary of the ramification of these violations in relation to females and how they affect other rights, particularly given the multi-faceted nature of these violations, which has ultimately harmed the overall human rights state of women in Syria.

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

In terms of the geographical distribution of the violations covered by this report, SNHR's database features a filter function that enables us to sort female victims, whether of extrajudicial killing, enforced disappearance, or other violations, according to the governorate in which the violation took place, by the victim's governorate of origin, or by their usual place of residence - three geographical criteria that we can use separately or combine together. In this report, we sort the data on female victims, whether they were killed or detained and/or forcibly disappeared, according to the place where the arrest or killing took place rather than the victim's governorate of origin, due to the nature of the violations with which this report is concerned. The only exception to this approach is females who died due to torture, who are categorized according to their governorate of origin, since, in the majority of these female victims' cases, the location of death or the governorate where it took place is one of the main detention centers in Damascus governorate. It is also worth noting that in some cases we categorize victims according to their governorate of origin, in order to give a sense of the magnitude of the loss and violence suffered by a particular governorate in comparison to others. We ensure to bring this to the reader's attention whenever this is the case.

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

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

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

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

This report adopts a legal focus in its approach to summarizing the violations undermining the rights that females should enjoy in armed conflicts, particularly those related to the protection of civilians and combatants in international humanitarian law. These laws acknowledge the vulnerable nature and the special needs of females in armed conflicts, whether according to the two additional protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 1977, or the customary rules found in international law which aim to limit the effects of conflict on females. In many aspects of this report, we have also used a descriptive and/or analytical approach.

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

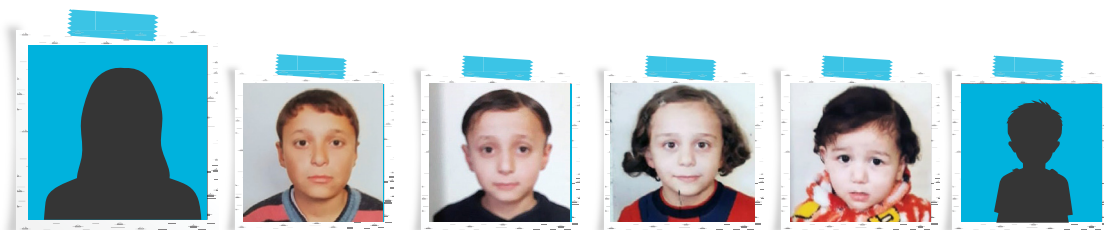
III. Close Collaboration With the UN Mechanisms and Bodies Supporting Women's Rights in Syria

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

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

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

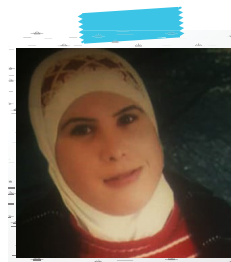
Furthermore, SNHR focuses on involving and engaging with female survivors of various types of violations through many international advocacy events held annually. These events give women a platform to directly deliver their message to the international community. SNHR has always considered it a priority to reach and empower female survivors and speakers as part of our goals to promote and support the involvement of female survivors from different communities.



👁 Mayyada Burhan Wakil has been forcibly disappeared along with her five children since 2013



👁 Ibtisam Jumaa has been forcibly disappeared since 2013



👁 Muna Abdull Latif has been forcibly disappeared since 2013

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

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

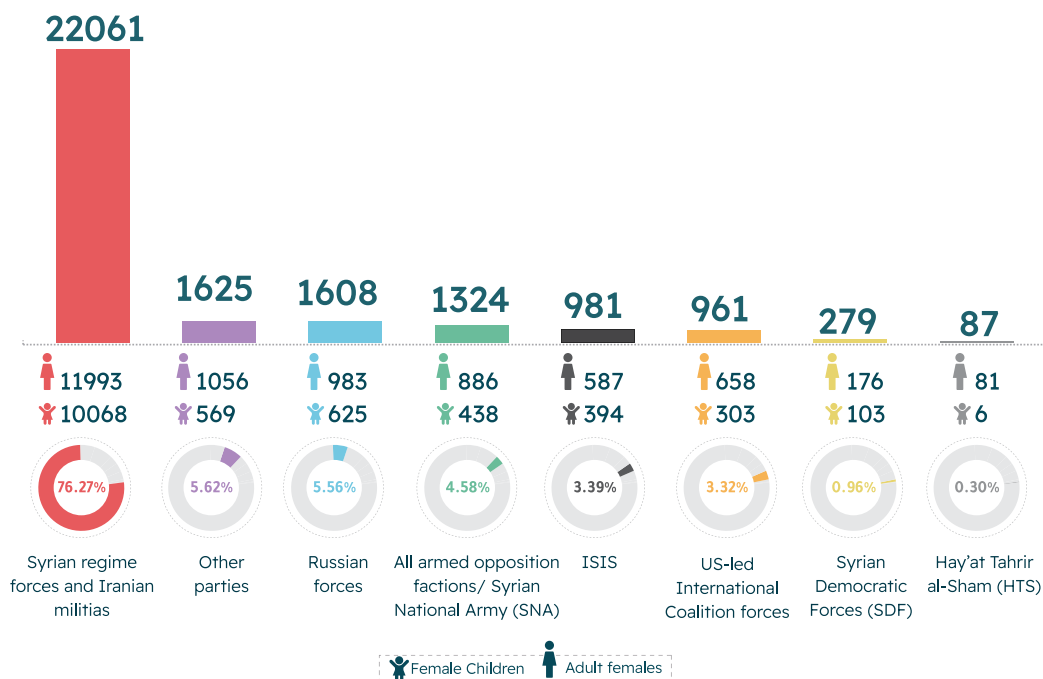
SNHR strives to promote its collaboration with the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls and on the causes and consequences of this, as part of our objective to formulate an enduring and comprehensive approach to reporting violence against females in the context of armed conflicts, including violence related to the domestic, cultural, economic, political, and social spheres.

IV. Outline of the Violations Against Women as Documented on SNHR's Database

Women in Syria experience various and repeated types of violations that vary in their severity and frequency, and in their current and future ramifications for girls and women in Syria and for wider society. Naturally, the killing of girls and women is classified as the primary and most dangerous violation in this category, more especially given the notably large numbers of female victims. The second most dangerous violation is arrest/detention, which goes on to be classified as enforced disappearance in the overwhelming majority of cases, followed by torture and sexual violence. We also focus on the military conscription and recruitment of girls and women and on attacks on medical facilities, which further reduces the already inadequate level of healthcare available to women, especially since many of these attacks targeted maternity and women's health facilities.

A. Extrajudicial killing

SNHR has documented the killing of **28,926 females** at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 25, 2023, distributed as follows:



- **Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias):**¹ 22,061 females - 11,993 adult females and 10,068 female children.
- **Russian forces:** 1,608 females - 983 adult females and 625 female children.
- **ISIS (the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State'):** 981 females - 587 adult females and 394 female children.
- **Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS):**² 87 females - 81 adult females and six female children.
- **All armed opposition factions/Syrian National Army (SNA):**³ 1,324 females - 886 adult females and 438 female children.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF):** 279 females - 176 adult females and 103 female children.
- **US-led International Coalition forces:** 961 females - 658 adult females and 303 female children.
- **Other parties:** 1,625 females - 1,056 adult females and 569 female children.

As the chart shows, the Syrian regime is responsible for roughly 77% of all cases of extrajudicial killing involving females, with more than 23 percent of these involving female children. This suggests that the Syrian regime has been targeting females in a deliberate and calculated manner.

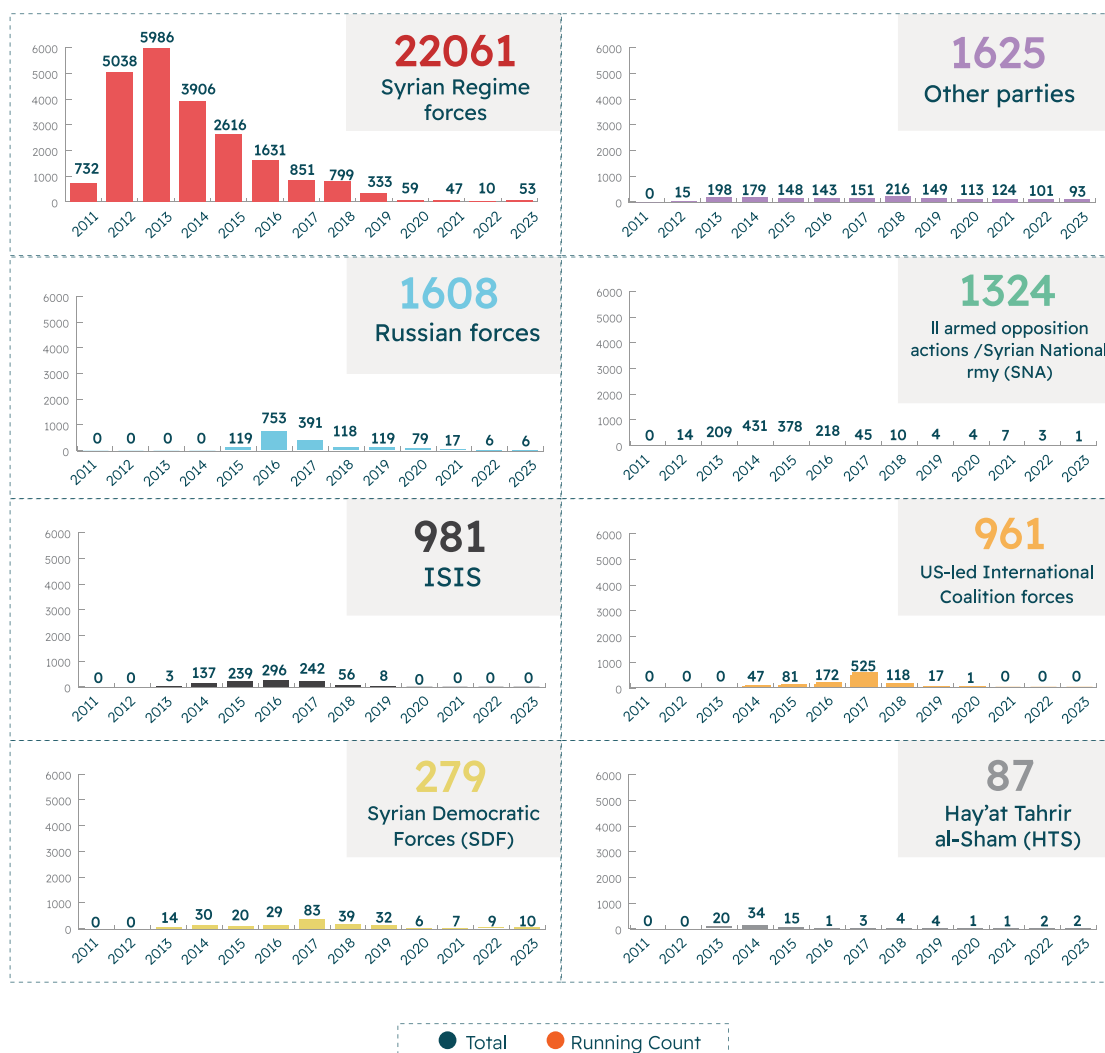
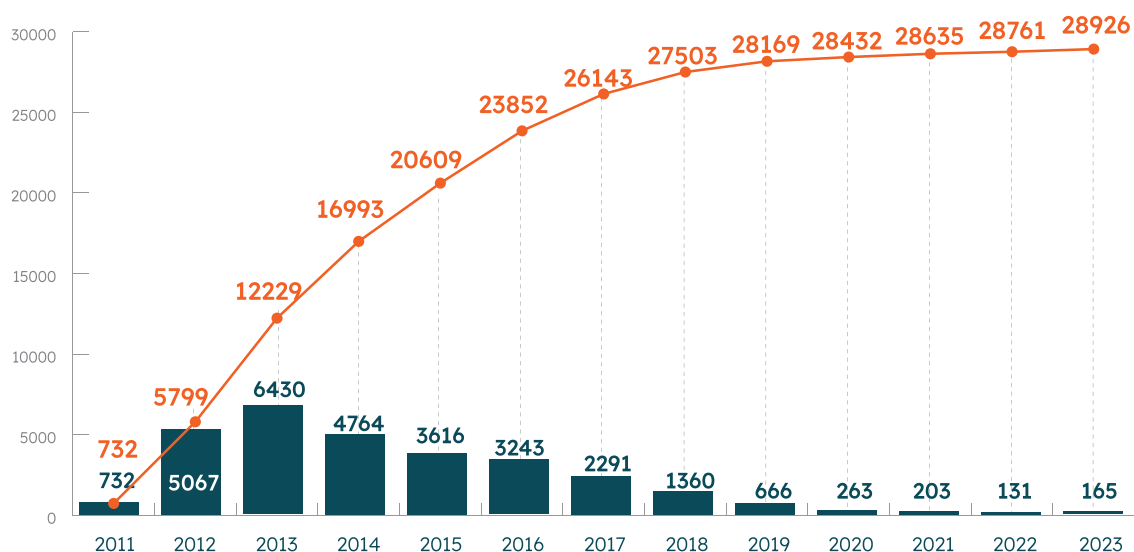
1. We generally use the term 'the Syrian regime' rather than 'the Syrian government', because the nature of the ruling power in Syria is that of a totalitarian dictatorship where power is concentrated in the hands of a small circle of individuals, namely the President of the Republic and the heads of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

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

2. Designated as a terror group by the UN.

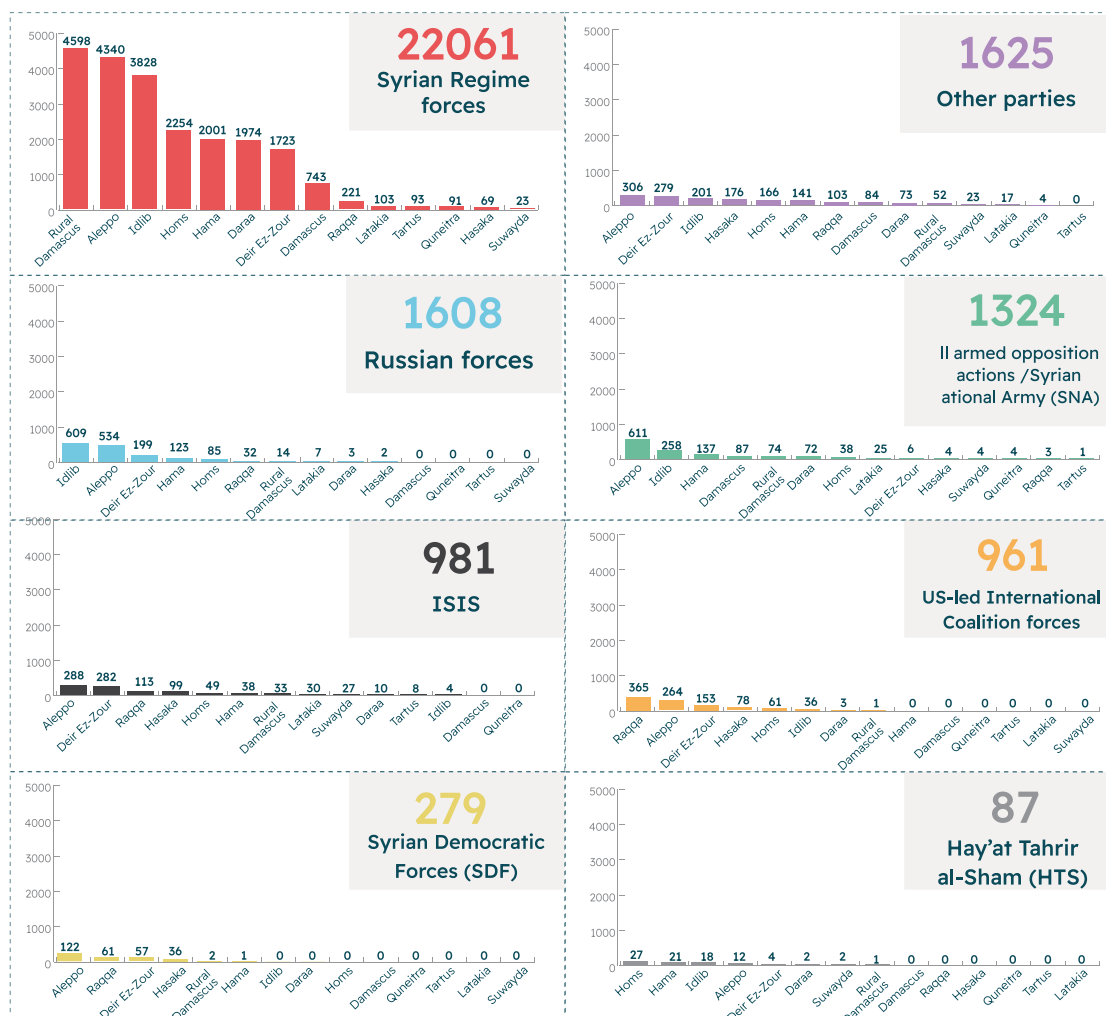
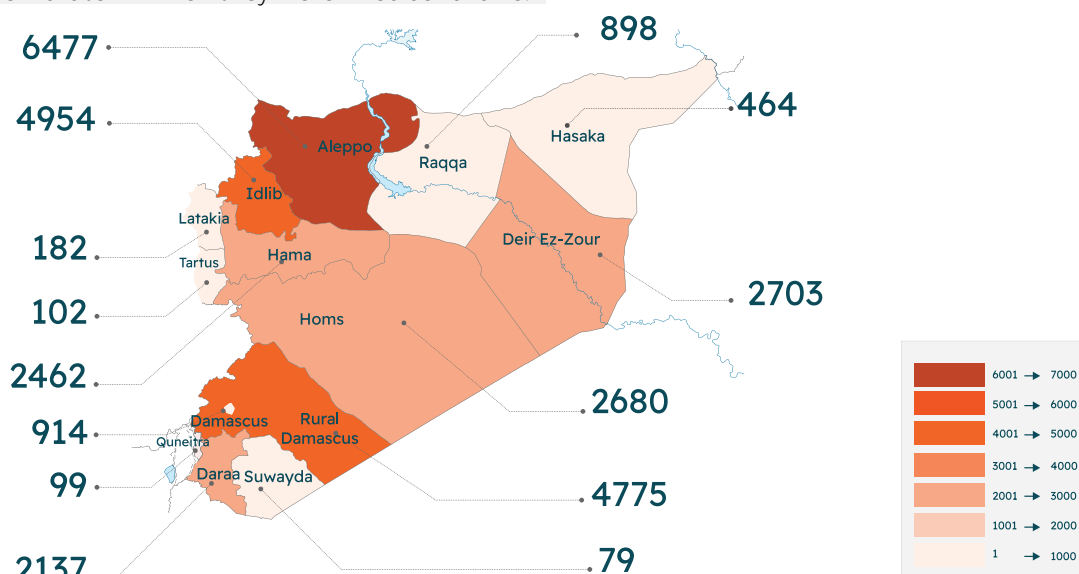
3. All armed opposition factions: All armed opposition factions founded since 2011 across Syria. Many of those formations are no longer active, and many were or are not structured around a central command. Towards the end of 2017, the Syrian National Army (SNA) was founded as an umbrella formulation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

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



Analyzing the data above shows that the year 2013 was the worst in terms of female deaths, with 93 percent of these inflicted by Syrian regime forces; this was followed by 2012, then 2014, and then 2015. The Syrian regime was responsible for over half of all the female deaths we recorded in every one of these years.

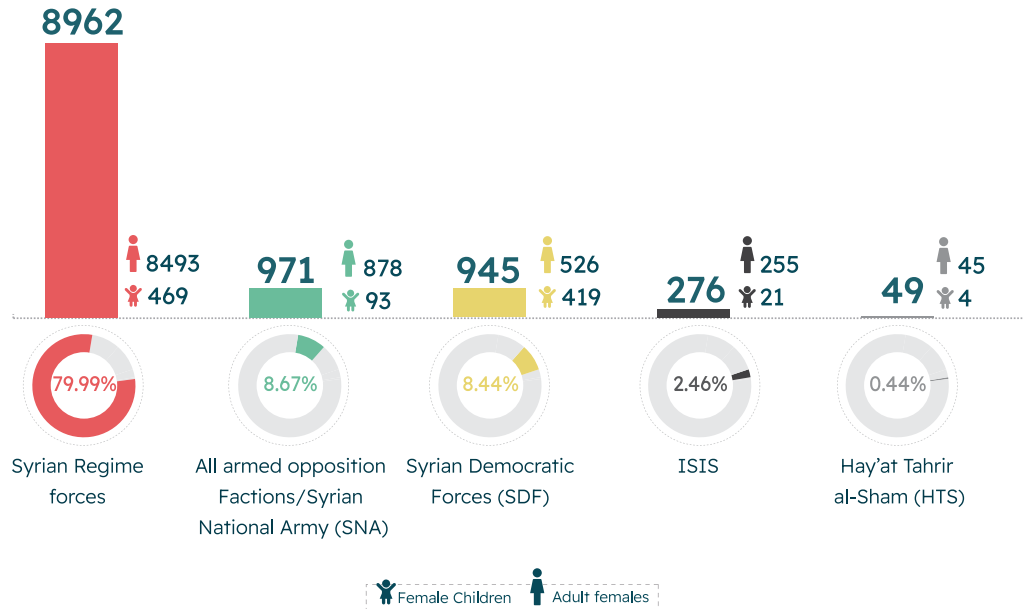
Female deaths at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces are distributed by the governorate in which they were killed as follows:



The map above shows that Aleppo governorate has seen the highest number of female deaths, followed by Idlib, then Rural Damascus (Rif Dimshaq), with these being the governorates that saw the most brutal offensives by regime force.

B. Arbitrary arrest/detention and enforced disappearance

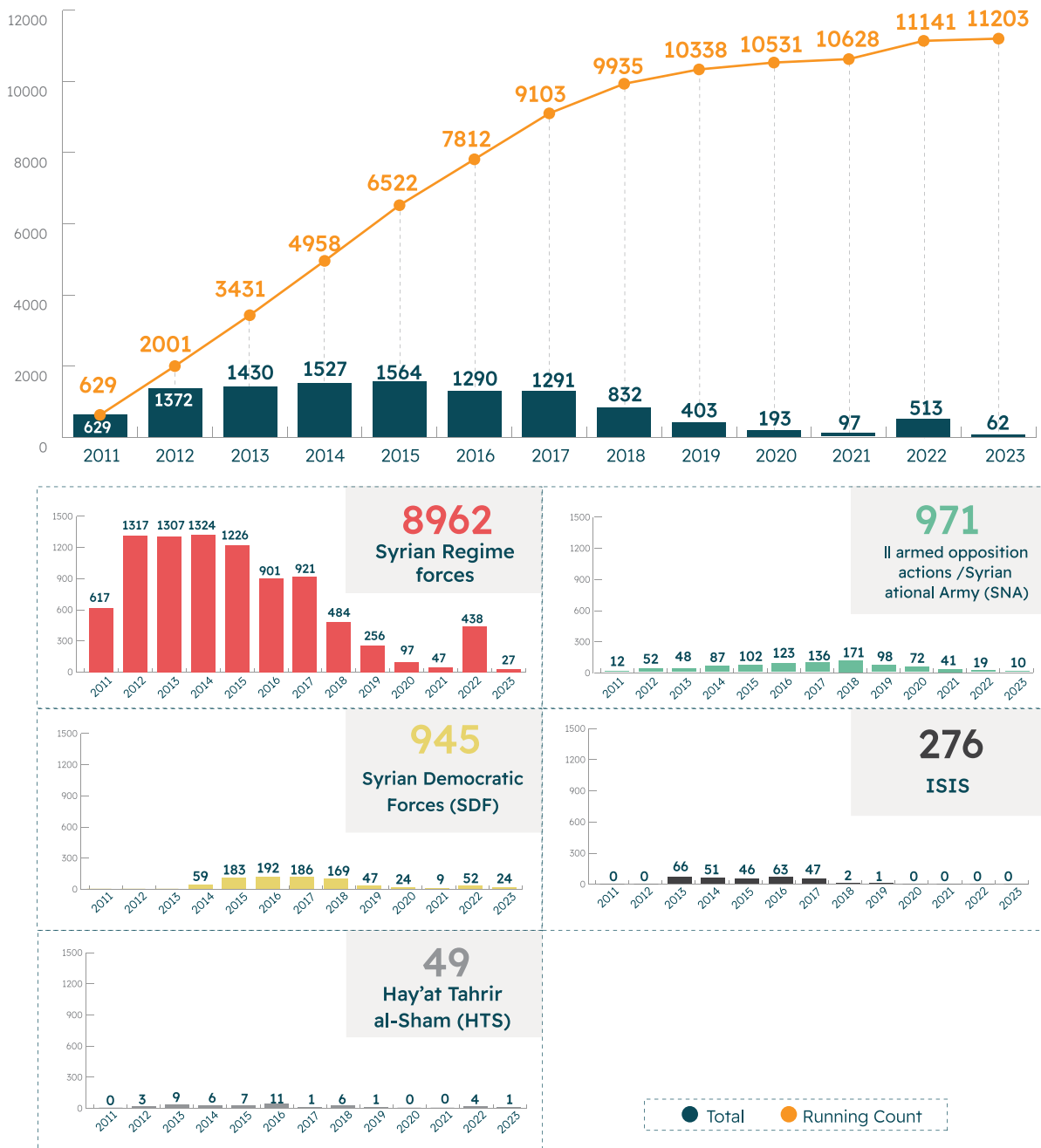
According to SNHR's database, no fewer than **11,203** of the females arrested, detained, and/or forcibly disappeared by the parties to the conflict and controlling force in Syria since March 2011 are still under arrest, in detention or forcibly disappeared as of November 25, 2023, with these being distributed as follows:



- **Syrian regime forces:** 8,962 females - 8,493 adult females and 469 female children.
- **ISIS:** 276 females - 255 adult females and 21 female children.
- **HTS:** 49 females - 45 adult females and four female children.
- **All armed opposition factions (SNA):** 971 females - 878 adult females and 93 female children.
- **SDF:** 945 females - 526 adult females and 419 female children.

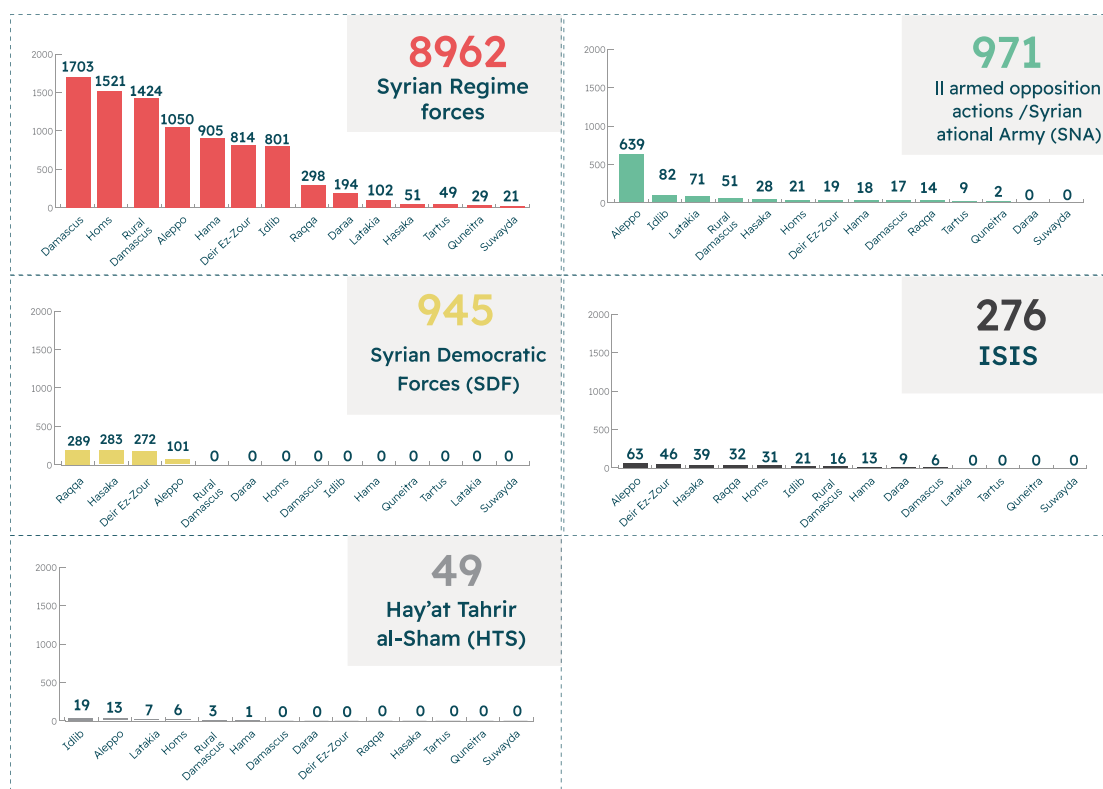
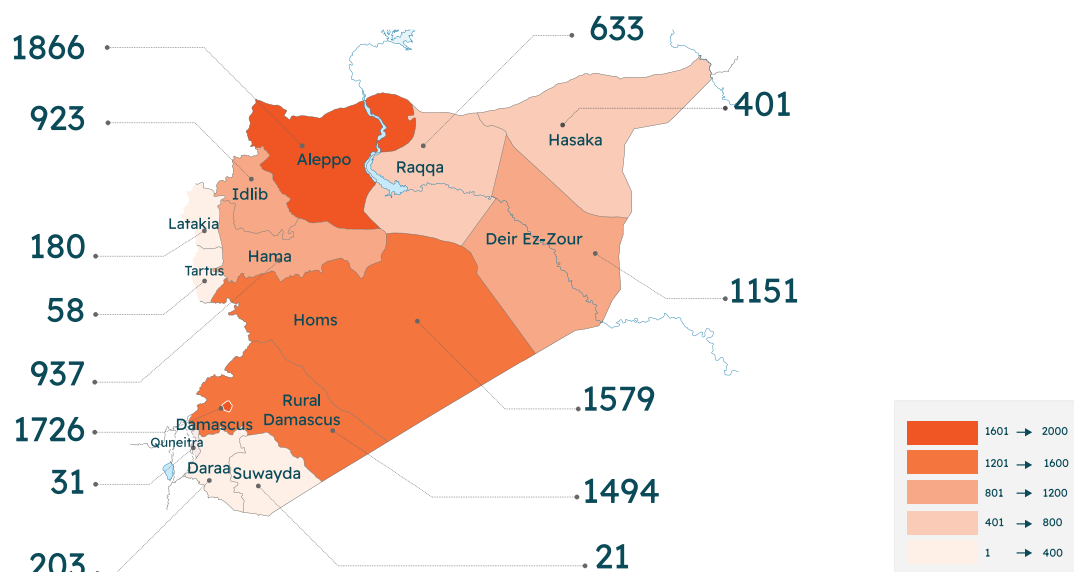
As the chart shows, the Syrian regime is responsible for no fewer than 80 percent of all arrests and enforced disappearances involving females. This indicates that the Syrian regime has been pursuing, arresting, and disappearing females for various motives in a deliberate and calculated manner, which we will outline in this report.

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



According to the chart, 2015 was the worst year in terms of arrests targeting females, with roughly 78 percent of all arrests of females that year being carried out by Syrian regime forces, followed by 2014, then 2013, and 2012. The Syrian regime was responsible for over half of all the arrests of females which we documented in all of these years.

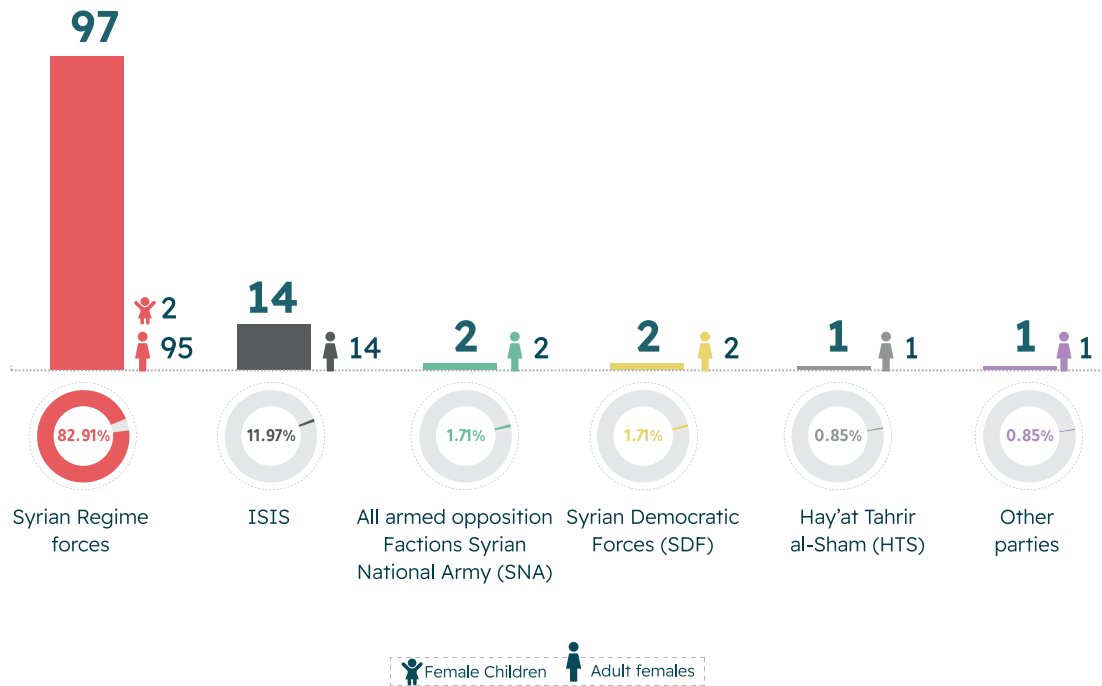
Cases of arrest/detention and/or enforced disappearance involving females at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria are distributed by governorate as follows:



As the map shows, the highest number of female arrests was documented in Aleppo governorate, followed by Damascus, then Homs, then Rural Damascus.

C. Female deaths due to torture

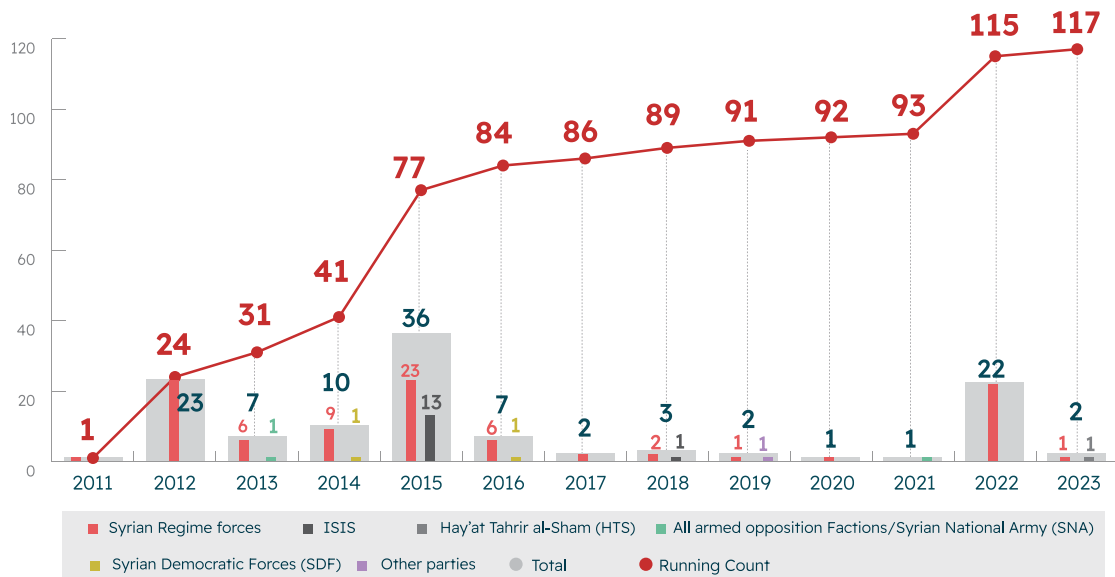
Between March 2011 and November 25, 2023, we documented the deaths of no fewer than **117 females** due to torture in the detention centers operated by the various parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria:



- **Syrian regime forces:** 97 female deaths due to torture - 95 adult females and two female children.
- **ISIS:** 14 female deaths due to torture.
- **SDF:** Two female deaths due to torture.
- **Armed opposition/SNA:** Two female deaths due to torture.
- **HTS:** One female death due to torture.
- **Other parties:** One female death due to torture.

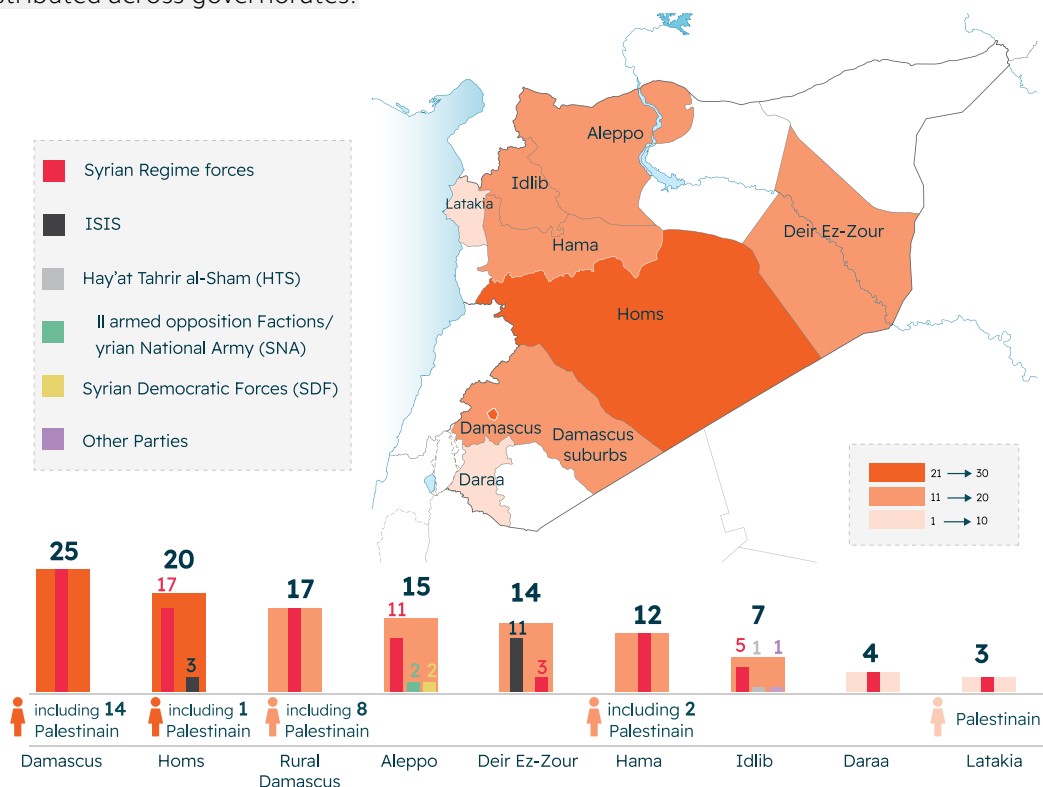
As the chart above shows, Syrian regime forces are responsible for approximately 83 percent of all female deaths due to torture in detention centers.

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



As the chart above shows, 2015 was the worst in terms of female deaths due to torture accounting for 23 percent of the total, with the Syrian regime and ISIS being responsible for all cases recorded that year, followed by 2012, and then 2022. The Syrian regime was also responsible for all female deaths due to torture recorded in both of those years.

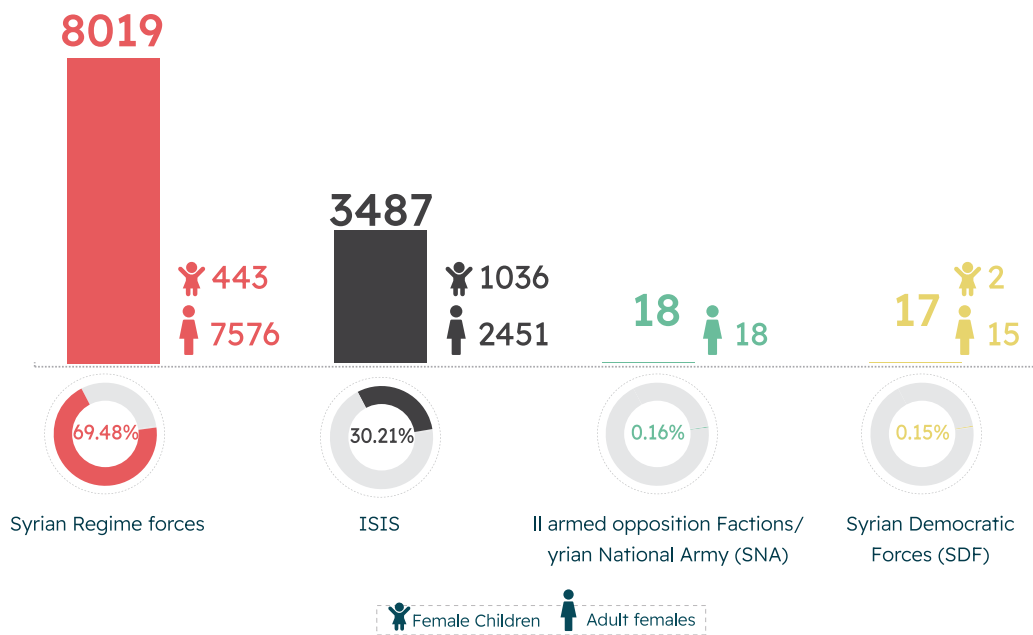
Female deaths due to torture at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria are distributed across governorates:



As the map above shows, Damascus recorded the highest number of female deaths due to torture, followed by Homs, then Rural Damascus, then Aleppo, and then Deir Ez-Zour.

D. Sexual violence against females

SNHR has documented no fewer than **11,541 incidents** of sexual violence against females, including female minors below the age of 18, at the hands of parties to the conflict and the controlling forces between March 2011 and November 25, 2023, distributed as follows:

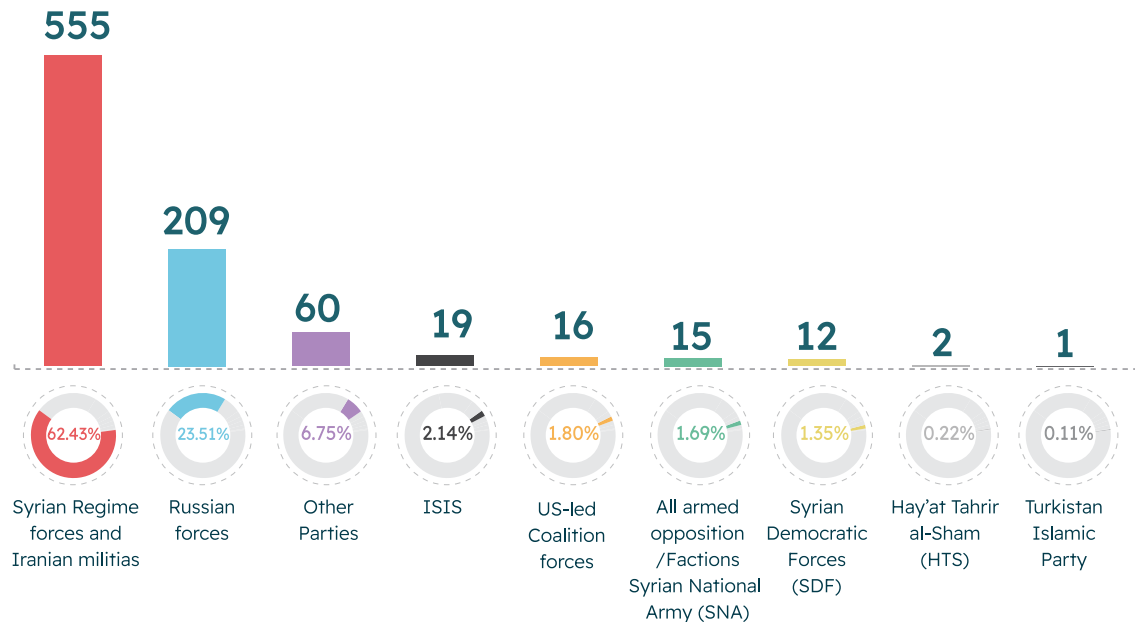


- **Syrian regime forces:** 8,019 incidents, divided into 7,576 involving adult females and 443 involving female children.
- **ISIS:** 3,487 incidents, divided into 2,451 involving adult females and 1,036 involving female children.
- **Armed opposition factions:** 18 incidents.
- **SDF:** 17 incidents.

As the graph shows, the Syrian regime has been responsible for roughly 70 percent of all sexual violence cases we have recorded, followed by ISIS. Both of these parties used sexual violence as a strategic weapon of war and instrument of torture and retaliation against the Syrian society. ISIS is followed by the SDF and armed opposition factions/SNA, which both used sexual violence as a discriminatory instrument to extort victims and their families.

E. Attacks on medical facilities

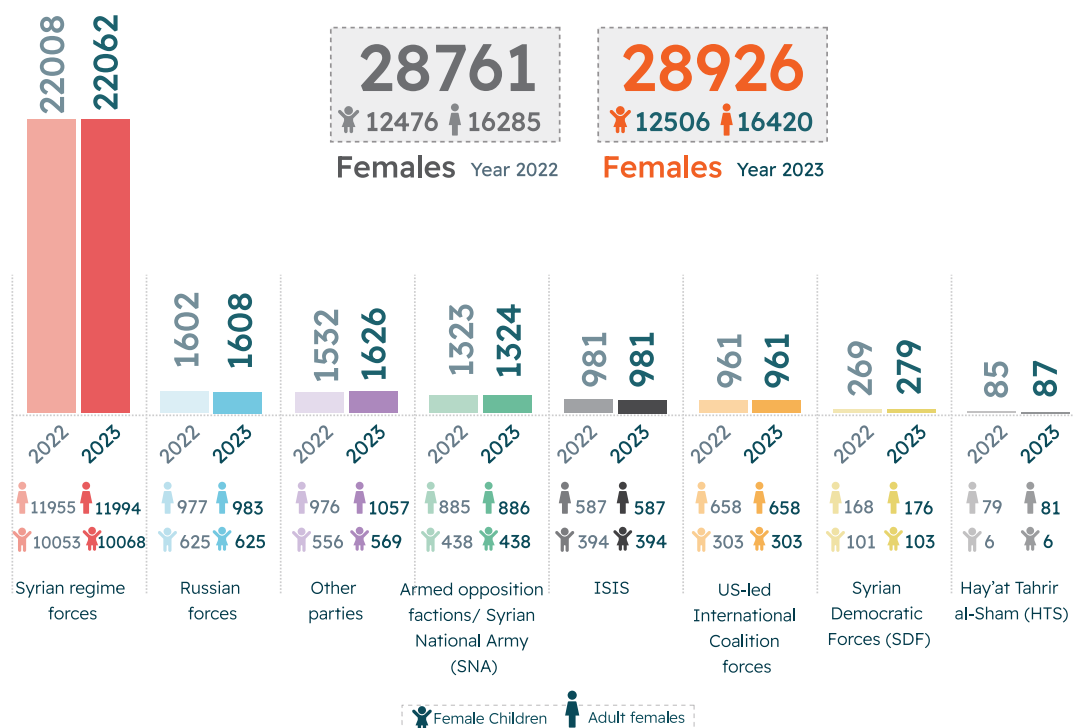
SNHR has documented no fewer than **889 attacks** on medical facilities at the hands of the various parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria from March 2011 up until November 25, 2023. Those attacks are distributed as follows:



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

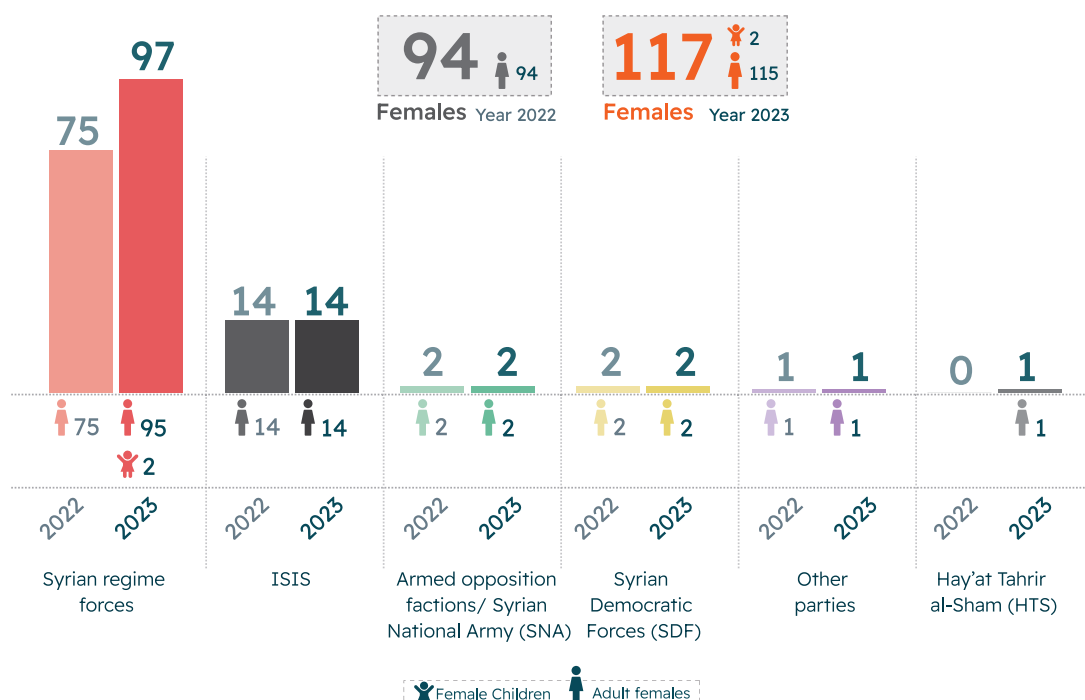
As shown in the chart above, Syrian regime forces were responsible for 63 percent of all attacks on medical facilities in Syria. This high number of attacks on the already scarce and limited medical facilities have further reduced the level of healthcare and basic services available to females

Comparison between female victims killed by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 25, 2022, and those killed between March 2011 and November 25, 2023



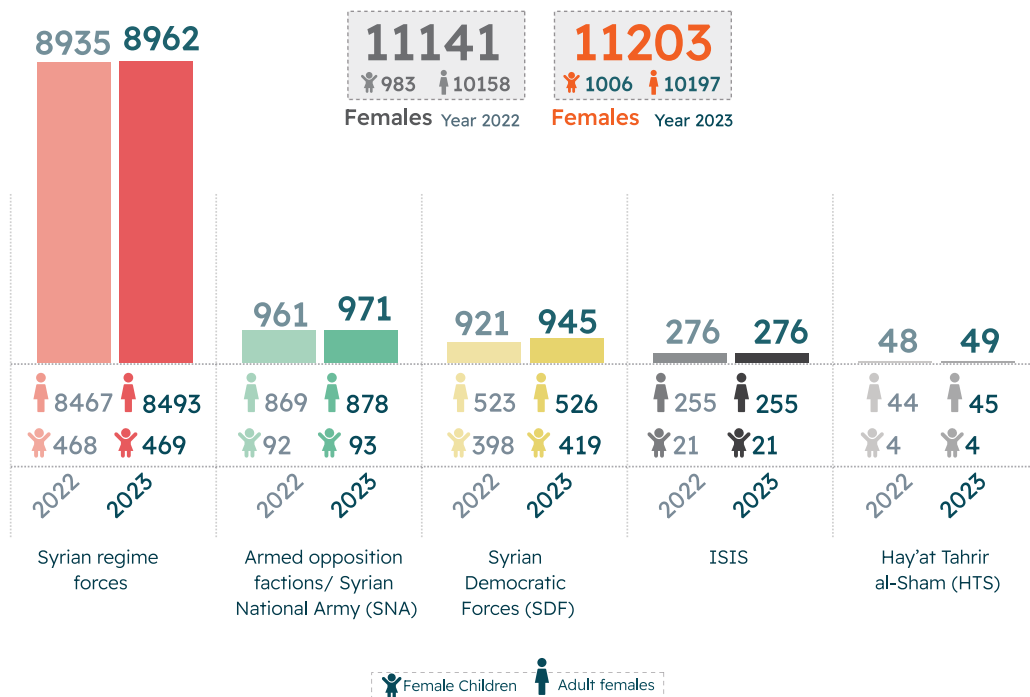
As can be seen above, the comparison shows an increase in the number of female deaths compared to previous years, mainly at the hands of Syrian regime forces and other parties, the result of bombardment, often of a vengeful character, targeting heavily populated areas. These attacks resulted in many deaths and massacres, in which civilians, including women, lost their lives. Female deaths also increased due to the explosions of live landmines and war remnants in agricultural lands.

Comparison between female deaths due to torture at the hands of the various parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 25, 2022, and between March 2011 and November 25, 2023



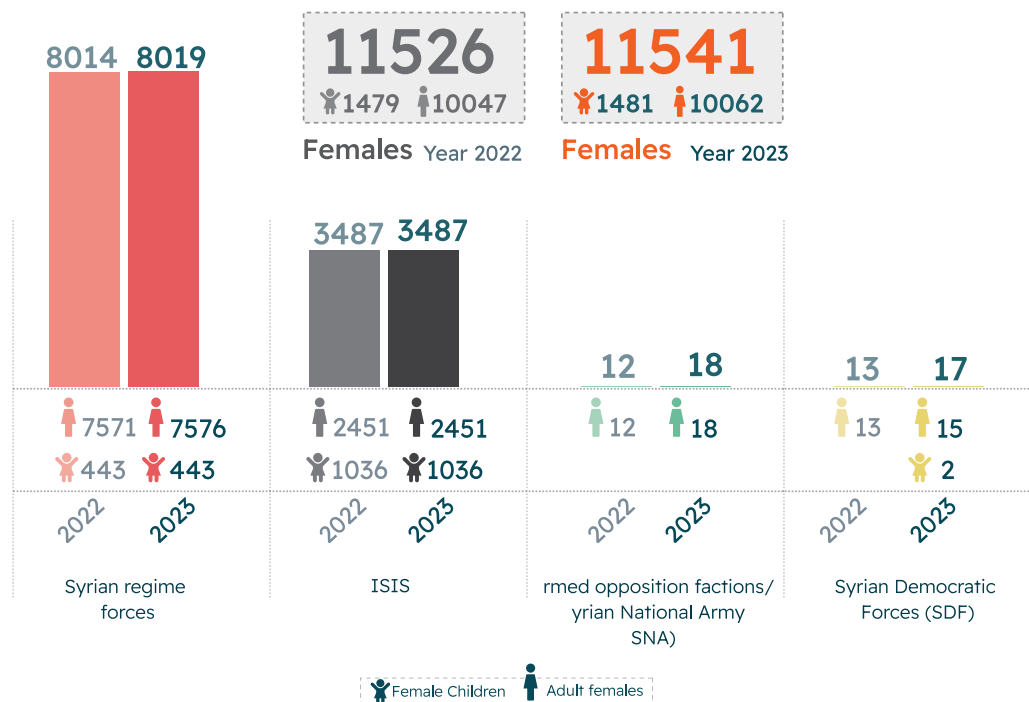
As the chart shows, more females died due to torture in regime detention centers during the last year, confirming that torture practices have not stopped since new deaths due to torture are still taking place. In fact, in 2022, SNHR obtained hundreds of death certificates for persons forcibly disappeared at the hands of the Syrian regime, including female, which explains the increase in the number of cases documented.

Comparison between the number of females who are still detained and/or forcibly disappeared out of all the females arrested by the various parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 25, 2022, and between March 2011 and November 25, 2023



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

Comparison between the number of incidents of sexual violence against females by the various parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria between March 2011 and November 25, 2022, and between March 2011 and November 25, 2023.



As shown on the graph, the number of incidents of sexual violence against females increased, as all parties continued their practices, especially during raids and detention.

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

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

1. Extrajudicial killing

Syrian regime bears by far the largest responsibility for extrajudicial killings of females. As SNHR's database attests, about 78 percent of female deaths were at the hands of Syrian regime forces, while females account for about 11 percent of all civilian deaths at the hands of regime forces, who have used various strategies and in an increasingly widespread approach over the past 12 years. Female deaths have been most frequent and concentrated in non-regime areas, reaching their highest level to date in the year 2013, followed by 2012, 2014, and 2015. Most notably, regime forces killed civilians, including females, in indiscriminate and guided aerial and ground bombardments using a wide variety of weapons, such as rockets, various shells, indiscriminate weapons such as barrel bombs and cluster munitions, chemical weapons, and landmines. All these weapons have been used against populated areas, including camps, markets, residential neighborhoods, and vital facilities. In most cases, we documented regime forces using a 'double-tap' strategy in its aerial attacks, as

well as repeatedly and simultaneously targeting the same site using multiple weapons, such as perpetrating aerial and artillery attacks at the same time. Both these strategies aim to kill as many civilians as possible. SNHR has published dozens of independent investigations on such attacks, proving that most of them have targeted civilian objects with no military presence, which means that regime forces deliberately targeted civilians in a vindictive manner and with the aim of causing severe human losses. It was these attacks in particular which resulted in the highest proportion of female deaths, including hundreds of women who were killed along with their children, while they were pregnant, or who were buried alive under the rubble of their homes.

Furthermore, Syrian regime forces deliberately targeted females in a gender-based and discriminatory manner, or in other words because they were females. This was the case especially in massacres, which were carried out in barbaric ways exhibiting characteristics of sectarian cleansing and retaliation, during attacks or raids by regime forces and local and foreign pro-regime militias against areas that saw widespread anti-regime activism. These attacks involved burning people alive, slaughter using various weapons, and using victims' mutilated bodies to spread fear and push people to flee or submit. This pattern of massacres was mostly seen in Homs governorate, Banyas city in Tartus governorate, Jdaifat al Fadel and al-Qalamoun in Rural Damascus governorate, northern rural Hama, rural Aleppo governorate, and rural Daraa governorate. In the aftermath of many of these massacres, regime forces burned the victims' bodies in basements and homes, or took them in their vehicles to unknown locations for disposal.

We also documented many killings targeting women and girls after they were imprisoned in their homes, as a means of retaliating against, and degrading their husbands or fathers. SNHR possesses many video clips of such operations. We also possess dozens of photos of women who died due to torture that were leaked from the regime's military hospitals, from the "Caesar Photographs".

Chemical weapons attacks are another type of attack that has resulted in large numbers of simultaneous civilian deaths with every use, including of females who died, in most of these attacks, inside their homes alongside their families. According to SNHR's database, we have recorded **222 chemical attacks** in Syria since the first documented use of chemical weapons on December 23, 2012, up until August 20, 2023; 98 percent of those attacks were carried out by Syrian regime forces and resulted in the death of no fewer than **262 adult females**. Meanwhile, the heavy and repeated use of cluster munitions by the Syrian regime in attacks directed at civilian targets, including agricultural land and populated areas have led to many civilian casualties, including females, since the first documented use of cluster munitions in Syria in July 2012. As is widely known, cluster munitions have an additional dimension of fatal danger extending beyond the time of the attack itself; as well as killing victims by the explosion of cluster munitions during the attack itself, approximately 10 to 40 percent of cluster munitions do not explode immediately, instead remaining live and ready to detonate at any contact, and posing a lethal threat to anyone in the vicinity for years afterwards. We have recorded no fewer than **496 cluster munition attacks** since July 2012 up until January 2023, including **251 attacks** by Syrian regime forces, which killed **191 adult female**.⁴ [We reiterated, in a previous report,](#) that hundreds of cluster submunitions in Syria have effectively turned into landmines that can kill, maim, or cause serious injuries to civilians.

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

Deliberate starvation and the obstruction of the delivery of humanitarian assistance have also led to female deaths due to the lack of healthcare, or due to the increasing suffering caused by malnutrition. This was the case in the sieges imposed by the regime on many areas in Homs, Rural Damascus, Deir Ez-Zour, Aleppo, and Idlib. The repeated obstruction of the delivery of humanitarian assistance has had horrific humanitarian consequences, particularly for women and children. On August 3, 2023, SNHR issued [a distress call](#) to end the suffering of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in al-Rukban Camp in Homs governorate which has been living under a grueling and suffocating regime-imposed siege since 2014, with the almost complete absence of safe drinking water and essential food supplies, and with regime forces forbidding anyone from entering or leaving the camp. Given these conditions, al-Rukban's population are effectively regime detainees. SNHR has spoken on many occasions about the siege imposed on the camp and the inhumane conditions there. On August 28, 2023, [we issued a statement condemning the suspension of the delivery of UN cross-border humanitarian assistance via the Bab al-Hawa Crossing, which had already stopped at that time for some weeks, with the last convoy entering in July 2023](#), which threatens the lives of tens of thousands of civilians in northwestern Syria. To put matters in perspective, northwestern Syria has a population of over 4.5 million people according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), with 1.9 million of these people living in camps, in which 90 percent of the population relies on UN cross-border humanitarian assistance to meet their basic survival needs. UN cross-border humanitarian assistance is delivered to northwestern Syria in line with [UN resolutions adopted since 2014](#); however, the amount of humanitarian assistance has diminished every year, with Russia lobbying against and extorting these mandates, to the point that aid is now being delivered only via one crossing, with the introduction of the concept of cross-line humanitarian assistance delivery in line [with Security Council resolution 2585 adopted in 2021](#).

Syrian regime forces' strategy of violence and widespread killing targeting women has also had numerous other dangerous ramifications, manifested in the form of tearing families apart and undermining the foundations of society. Orphaned children have been left with no support or care, with all these phenomena having a profoundly traumatizing emotional, psychological, and social effect. Furthermore, wider Syrian society has tragically been deprived of the massive potential which those female victims had.

Between March 2011, and November 25, 2023, SNHR documented the killing of **22,061 females** at the hands of Syrian regime forces, divided between 11,993 adult females and 10,068 female children. These female deaths are all documented on SNHR's database.

Most notable incidents in which female victims were killed:

A 20-year-old woman, identified as Noura Abdul Hamid al-Ahmar, was killed on Tuesday, April 25, 2023, by Syrian regime artillery forces who fired multiple shells at her home village of Ma'ar Ballit in southern rural Idlib. One of the shells struck a home in the middle of the village, killing Noura and four other members of her family, including two girls; one of them an infant. The area was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident, and is located close to regime-controlled areas.

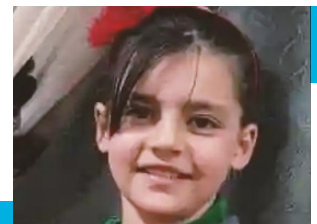
A woman, identified as Radayya al-Othman, died on Wednesday, July 5, 2023, of wounds sustained on the day before, July 4, 2023, when Syrian regime artillery forces fired multiple shells at al-Janoubi neighborhood in her home town of al-Bara in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib governorate. The area was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.



👁 Radayya al-Othman

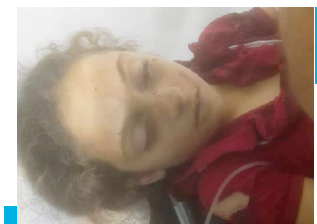
A 55-year-old woman, identified as Fatima al-Haj Mohammad al-Khleif, was killed on Saturday, September 2, 2023, in an attack by Syrian regime artillery forces who fired multiple shells at her home village of Arab Hassan near southern rural Jarablos in eastern rural Aleppo governorate. The area targeted is located on the dividing lines between the areas under the control of the SNA and the SDF. This incident took place amid ongoing clashes between the SDF and Deir Ez-Zour Military Council backed by Arab tribes, which broke out on August 29, 2023.

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



👁 Furat Uqbda Shbat, a child

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



👁 Layla Ahmad al-Masri, a child

A woman, identified as Sulaf Subhi Ebeidou from Ariha city in southern rural Idlib governorate, was killed on Thursday, October 5, 2023, by Syrian regime forces who used a rocket launcher to fire multiple rockets at Mentef village in southern rural Idlib governorate. The area was under the control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) at the time of the incident. It should be noted that these intensified attacks were of a retaliatory nature, with the regime ordering intensified bombardment of these areas in response to a bombing that targeted the regime's Military College in Homs city on October 5, 2023.

A woman and a girl, identified respectively as Hayfa Redwan al-Kinj and Jihan Abdou al-Zain, were killed on Saturday, October 7, 2023, in an artillery attack by Syrian regime forces who fired multiple shells at their hometown of Ihsim in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern rural Idlib governorate. Three other children were wounded in the attack, which also destroyed a number of civilian homes. The area was under the joint control of the armed opposition and the HTS at the time of the incident.

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

A woman, identified as Amal Mahmoud Gheiba from Kafr Ta'al village in western rural Aleppo governorate, was killed on November 2, 2023, in an attack by Syrian regime artillery forces who fired a shell at an agricultural field between the villages of Tadil and Kafr Ta'al in western rural Aleppo governorate. The shell struck the field while Amal was harvesting olives, killing her and injuring a woman and an elderly man. The area was under the control of armed opposition factions and the HTS at the time of the incident.

2. Arrest/detention, enforced disappearance, and torture

Targeting females for arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention has been part of the Syrian regime's strategy since the first months of the popular uprising for democracy in March 2011. In pursuit of this policy, the regime has used arrests, which subsequently turned into enforced disappearance in most cases, in a deliberate and calculated manner against females as an effective weapon to crush the protests. By analyzing hundreds of cases and accounts of incidents of female arrest, we pinpointed three main patterns and dimensions of these arrests; one of these was their discriminatory nature, while the other two are concerned with identifying these arrests as part of the Syrian regime's strategy of enforced disappearance which it uses indiscriminately against the entire Syrian population.

- **First: Gender and discriminatory dimension:** Arresting women on the basis of sex/gender has been one of the most widespread strategies employed by the regime, with females being targeted simply for being female. Arresting and detaining females is generally employed as a means of imposing control over an area and ensuring the local population's submission. We have documented many instances of women being arrested on a mass scale to apply pressure on the rest of the population in areas that saw protests or military action against the regime as a means of re-establishing control. Furthermore, arrests of females have been used in the context of retaliation and intimidation of individuals, as an attempt to crush their spirit, quash dissent, and ultimately restrict their activism. In many cases, regime forces arrested women in an attempt to distort local identity, culture, and history, with these women being forced into appearing in videos broadcast on state media in which they make coerced, fabricated 'confessions' that tarnish the image of the popular uprising, and impugn their own integrity and dignity as well as that of their families. This was also done through insulting the local and popular committees that were formed to spearhead negotiations to secure these women's release.

- **Second: Activism:** In addition to being targeted for their gender, we documented that females were also targeted for their involvement and activism, such as participating in the peaceful demonstrations calling for political change, as well as in various forms of civilian, media, and human rights activism. Women have also been involved in vital humanitarian efforts, including providing care and assistance for IDPs, wounded people, children, and affected families. These roles have made them a target for the regime's security agencies, as part of a wider regime to target activists and other civilians through arrests and enforced disappearances.
- **Third: On a sectarian, regional, and ethnic basis:** In many cases, females were arrested due to their own sect or ethnicity or affiliation with a certain area, sect, or ethnicity while passing through checkpoints, or when visiting government institutions. These arrests exhibited a retaliatory character, forming part of a policy of collective punishment, or being intended to extort, pressure, and persecute the victims' families.

Usually, females are arrested at checkpoints and border crossing while travelling between areas; in ambushes into which they are lured using different methods; in raids on their homes, places of residence, places of work, or universities. Women have also been arrested in crackdowns on dissident activities, such as demonstrations and protests, as well as during their humanitarian tasks, such as helping IDPs and the wounded. Moreover, women have been abducted from the street, or after being summoned to security branches for questioning, being arrested when they attend. Similarly, women have been arrested while visiting civilian detention centers to visit detained relatives. Lastly, a number of women have been arrested at regime checkpoints while trying to leave areas besieged by regime forces.

a. No fewer than 8,962 female detainee/forcibly disappeared persons in regime detention centers, most of them have been suffering brutal and discriminatory detention conditions for years.

While females were arrested for various reasons, accentuating different dimensions, most of them have invariably been subjected to harsh detention conditions. In the Syrian regime's case, the process of arrest and detention constitutes ceaseless torture from the very first moment of their arrest, which lasts throughout the period of their detention. Females, however, suffer doubly compared to their male counterparts. Female detainees suffer particularly in light of the lack of any infrastructure in regime detention centers that takes into consideration females' special requirements, including the lack of female prison officers to supervise female detainees. This is, of course, in addition to females being subjected to the same types of torture and mistreatment as their male counterpart, with this horrific abuse being inflicted on all detainees without exception, including women, children, elderly people, invalids, and individuals with special needs. SNHR issued a report previously cataloguing [72 of the most common methods of physical, psychological, and sexual torture used by the regime](#), which are inflicted in a calculated and widespread manner in its detention centers. Worse still, this torture is made even more brutal by deliberate medical negligence, starvation, and the unhealthy detention conditions including a lack of any proper ventilation or sanitation in regime prisons, where large numbers of detainees, male and female, are crammed into small, squalid and filthy cells that are by no means equipped to house these ever-increasing numbers. Detainees are also denied clothing and blankets to protect themselves from the chilling cold or provided with any relief from the scorching heat.

These practices can be summarized in six points:

- Most arrests involving females were carried out by male officers with no female officers or security personnel present. This is simply because there are few female personnel, especially in the Syrian regime's security apparatus. Usually, therefore, male officers carry out the processes involved in arresting and transferring female detainees among detention centers. Also, male officers oversee the inspection and interrogation of female detainees. All of this, as mentioned above, further compounds the suffering of female detainees, exposing them to greater violence and ill-treatment, given the different physical characteristics of male security officers and female detainees.
- There are no locations or prison wings specifically designated for women in security facilities. In most cases, women are put together in a cell located in the same detention centers housing male prisoners' cells. Female detainees share the same bathrooms with male detainees. Furthermore, throughout their detention period, they are overseen by male jailers. This includes, for instance, male officers escorting female detainees to bathrooms, taking them for interrogation, or even accompanying them when they have to be taken to military hospitals for medical treatment or to give birth.
- No special care is provided to meet the particular physiological needs of female prisoners. In regime detention centers, females do not receive the necessary feminine hygiene products, either as a deliberate form of punishment or due to the lack of these items. Understandably, female detainees are fearful of requesting such items, wishing to avoid potential mockery or derision from male officers, with these shortages having further damaging consequences for their health and wellbeing, and further exacerbated their suffering.
- Even when females are transferred from detention centers in security branches to civilian prisons with women's wings and female officers, the detention conditions are not much different, since those wings are small and overcrowded. Also, females who were arrested in connection with the popular uprising, female prisoners of conscience, and mothers arrested with their children are not separated from other prisoners, which further intensifies the psychological suffering of these detainees who are exposed to violence stemming from political or other disputes between prisoners. Furthermore, female political prisoners receive unfavorable treatment compared to their criminal peers in relation to access to food, bathing facilities, sleeping places, and family visits, including even contact with their families. Even in prisons with female officers, the women's wings are under the command of male officers. We have also documented many instances of female officers beating and degrading detainees, and refusing to secure their basic needs and requirements in civilian prisons.
- Syrian regime forces do not provide any of the essential medical care required for women arrested with their children or while pregnant. In such cases, these women face additional suffering, the worst of which is when their children are used to pressure them during interrogation; for instance, officers will beat and torture children to pressure their mothers, or may take them away from their mothers and place them in other cells with adult detainees, thereby torturing the mother by depriving her of seeing her children. Meanwhile, pregnant women are denied the most basic and essential medical and nutritional care. They are not allowed to receive regular check-ups or the necessary medical examinations from doctors. At the time of birth, they are taken to military hospitals in handcuffs without any consideration for their condition or that of their newborn babies, including clothing, medical care, and nutrition. After birth, the mother is usually directly taken back to the prison cell with her newborn within a few hours. Between

March 2011 and November 25, 2023, we documented no fewer than 91 childbirths in regime detention centers, with all of these mothers and children suffering from the lack of any of the necessary postnatal care, as well as food, medication, health supplies, and psychological care, which negligence resulted in the death of seven newborn babies.

- The Syrian regime has sent female prisoners, including children, to exceptional courts such as the [Military Field Court and the Counterterrorism Court](#). Many of these female detainees have received exceptionally harsh sentences, including both long prison sentences and even the death penalty. We have recorded many instances of women who were tried by Military Field Courts being abruptly taken from civilian prisons to undisclosed locations, since when they've been classified as forcibly disappeared persons. In addition, female detainees usually wait for long periods of time before appearing before a judge, given the backlog of thousands of cases being tried by exceptional courts. In many cases, the time female detainees spent in prison awaiting trial is longer than their assigned sentence. Through our monitoring of the releases from regime detention centers, especially those in connection with the 22 amnesty decrees promulgated by the regime, we documented that only four percent of all female detainees were released in connection with those decrees.

SNHR has documented that no fewer than 8,962 of the females arrested between March 2011 and November 25, 2023, divided between 8,493 adult females and 469 female children, are still detained and/or forcibly disappeared. We also documented the deaths of no fewer than 97 females, divided between 95 adult females and two female children, due to torture in regime detention centers in the same period.

b. The Syrian regime has acknowledged the death of no fewer than 23 forcibly disappeared females in the civil registry's records. We believe that all those females died due to torture and medical negligence. Also, 11 women have been identified in the 'Caesar' photos leaked from the regime's military hospitals.

The Syrian regime routinely and continuously registers forcibly disappeared persons as dead in the civil registry's records. We first began documenting this practice in early 2018; however, through subsequent closer inspection and the analysis of death certificates, we've ascertained that the regime has been doing this since 2013. We have released [many reports](#) on this issue and its psychological and legal repercussions on the victims' families. While we had received hundreds of death certificates from families since the beginning of 2018, at the beginning of 2022 we obtained a number of new death certificates from regime insiders about cases that had not been revealed before, which we focused on and provided details of in our extensive report released [on December 20, 2022](#), in which we revealed that we had obtained hundreds of death certificates for persons forcibly disappeared in regime detention centers. The Syrian regime had not notified these victims' families of their loved ones' deaths, which were also not made public in the civil registry records. Moreover, some of these death certificates were issued for prominent activists in the Syrian uprising, as well as for women and children. We are still receiving such death certificates to this day through our extensive network of contacts and sources across Syria which we have fostered over the years. At this point, our team has gained a great deal of experience in verifying and authenticating these death certificates.

From the beginning of 2018 up until November 25, 2023, SNHR has documented that no fewer than **23 of the women** forcibly disappeared in regime detention centers have been registered as dead in the civil registry's records. The cause of death has not been revealed in any of these cases, while the victims' bodies have not been returned to the families, and their deaths were not publicly registered at the time they took place.

In addition, since the first days of obtaining the [photos leaked from the regime military hospitals, known as the 'Caesar photographs'](#), SNHR has been working on identifying the victims who appear in those photographs, and we have released multiple reports on this issue, which we continue to work on. In our [12th annual report on torture in Syria](#), we endeavored to summarize our mechanisms used in identifying the victims, and we are working on releasing a detailed report on this issue. Since the beginning of 2015, we have identified 11 females out of the approximately 6,786 victims appearing in Caesar photographs, or the photos obtained by SNHR through Caesar, which have not been published. Currently, we are working on verifying and identifying many other cases.

Most notable cases of female detention, torture, and enforced disappearance

At the beginning of 2013, a woman, identified as Isra Bashir al-Sharif, born in 1987, from Ibreen city in Eastern Ghouta in eastern Rural Damascus governorate, was living with her own family and other families in a sponge factory in Adra city in Rural Damascus governorate after they fled Irbeen city to Adria city amid the ongoing clashes between regime forces and armed opposition factions. On Monday, January 28, 2013, she was arrested along with her children (Ali, Lana, and Obada Ahmad al-Arbiniya) by regime forces who raided their place of residence in the Sponge Factory. They were taken to an undisclosed location. Their fate remains unknown to SNHR as well as their families.

SNHR spoke with Israa's brother, Mr. Redwan,⁵ who told us:

"While living with her family and other families in al-Sbi'i Sponge Factory in Adra city in Rural Damascus governorate after fleeing Irbeen city to Adra city among the ongoing clashes between regime forces and opposition factions, [Isra] was arrested along with her children and 18 others who were in the factory. They were taken to an unknown place. A few days later, my uncle Ihsan went through an intermediary mediator to negotiate with an officer in the Air Force Intelligence branch, which was in charge of the arrest. My uncle agreed to secure their release in exchange for a sum of money and his car. When the time came, they took the money and arrested Ihsan, and we've found out nothing about them ever since."
Redwan added that his family received unconfirmed information in 2018 that their loved ones had been killed and buried behind the factory, but they could not verify those claims.

A woman, identified as Fatima Mohammad Nour Dabbas, born in 1984, from Harbnoush village in northern rural Idlib governorate, who had been living in the Jobar neighborhood of Damascus city, was arrested in February 2013 by regime forces at a sponge factory in Adra city in Rural Damascus governorate after fleeing the Jobar neighborhood amid the clashes between regime forces and armed opposition factions at the time. She was taken to an undisclosed location. Her fate remains unknown to SNHR as well as her family.

5. Via phone on March 14, 2023.

SNHR spoke with Mohammad Hmeidan,⁶ a relative of Fatima's, who told us:

"My uncle's wife Fatima fled with other relatives of mine to al-Sbi'i Sponge Factory in Adra city, where my uncle was working as an executive director. Fatima, her husband and my uncle, and their six children lived there. At the time, clashes had broken out between regime forces and Jaish al-Islam in the area, so on January 28, 2013, regime forces raided the factory and detained all the civilian families there, and fortified themselves in the factory, using the civilians as human shields to stop Jaish al-Islam from advancing and getting into the factory. Subsequently, regime forces withdrew and took the civilians they held inside the factory with them. We know nothing about them ever since."

A woman, identified as Muna Abdul Latif Nasab, born in 1992, from al-Kiswa city in Western Ghouta in western Rural Damascus governorate, was arrested in June 2013 by Syrian regime forces near the regime army First Division's sites while she was on her way from Damascus city to al-Kiswa city. She was then taken to an undisclosed location. Her fate remains unknown to SNHR as well as her family.



👁 Muna Abdul Latif Nasab

SNHR spoke to Maher al-Ahmad,⁷ a relative of Muna's, who told us:

"Muna was with her fiancée in Damascus buying some supplies. They were heading back from Damascus to al-Kiswa when they were stopped at a checkpoint manned by the Syrian regime's First Division. They checked on their names, and found out that her fiancée is wanted, so they arrested him. Muna tried to interfere, but they told her: 'We will arrest you if you do not go away.' She answered, 'Fine, arrest me!', so they did arrest her with her fiancée. We know nothing about them ever since."

A 60-year-old woman, identified as Fatima Ahmad al-Hassan from al-Hasaka city, was arrested on Friday, May 26, 2023, in the al-Garage area in Homs city, while she was trying to irregularly cross into Lebanon, as she was seeking asylum and medical treatment. She was taken to a regime detention center in Homs city. She was released on June 18, 2023.

SNHR spoke to Fadi Hamad,⁸ a friend of Fatima's family's. He told us:

"Mrs. Fatima suffers from multiple illnesses and her health condition is unstable. That is why she decided to travel to her son who lives in Lebanon to receive treatment with the help of smugglers. So they agreed to meet with a smuggler in a garage in Homs city, and he was supposed to escort her to Lebanon. When she arrived in the garage area, we lost contact with her. After a few days of search, we learned through someone that she had been arrested by regime forces, and she'd been taken to the Political Security branch for interrogation, and then transferred to Homs Central Prison. She was subsequently released. She told us after her release that she was insulted and beaten on the head by a regime officer when she was arrested in the garage. She also told us that she signed a pledge at the Political Security branch to never try to travel irregularly."

6. Via Messenger on October 21, 2022.

7. Via Messenger on January 9, 2023.

8. Via phone on July 10, 2023.

A woman, identified as Hayfa Adnan al-Hasoun from al-Tah village in southern rural Idlib governorate, was arrested on Thursday, February 23, 2023, along with her children (eight-year-old Jana, six-year-old Tayyem, and two-and-a-half-year-old Fatima) by personnel from the Syrian regime's Military Security Intelligence Directorate at a checkpoint in Ikarda in southern rural Aleppo governorate while they were returning from Lebanon to Idlib governorate. They were released on February 25, 2023.

A 30-year-old woman, identified as Ruzalin Abou Ali, from Kherbat Shran (administratively a part of Afrin city) in northern Aleppo governorate, was arrested on Tuesday, April 18, 2023, by members of the Syrian regime's State Security force at a checkpoint situated at the northern entrance of Aleppo city, while she was travelling from Aleppo city to the SDF-held al-Shahba area. She was taken to an undisclosed location.

A 30-year-old woman, identified as Samah Ghneim, from Sa'sa' town in Western Rural Damascus governorate, was arrested along with her four-year-old son Rawad Ashour on Friday, April 21, 2023, at al-Mawasat Hospital in Damascus city over accusations of exporting IEDs to Damascus city. We recorded that she was released on April 28, 2023.

A 27-year-old woman, identified as Tahani Ahmad al-Hamidi al-Dablan from al-Qosour neighborhood in Deir Ez-Zour city, was arrested on Saturday, July 23, 2023, by regime personnel who raided her husband's family's home in Damascus city over accusations of working with the SNA. She was transferred to Adra Central Prison in Rural Damascus governorate. Her family was last able to visit her in the Adra Central Prison in August 2023. At the time, she was in extremely poor health, having sustained fractures to her hand and nose, and was unable to stand on her feet due to the brutal torture she had been subjected to, along with the medical negligence and denial of food she'd suffered during detention. There were also signs of torture on her body.

On Friday, November 3, 2023, Tahani's family learned, while trying to organize another visit to the Adra Central Prison to meet with her, that she'd died there a week earlier, on October 27. Her body has not been returned to her family.

3. Sexual violence

Sexual violence, one of the most dangerous forms of violence practiced against females by regime forces, has been inflicted in a widespread manner. The complex and extensive nature of the effects of sexual violence mean it has long-term consequences that don't only traumatize and haunt the female victims themselves, but extend to their families and the wider community, especially since the Syrian regime uses sexual violence as a weapon of war and an instrument of punishment in order to spread mass fear and to force residents to flee ahead of raids. Sexual violence has also been routinely used by regime forces as a method of torture, retaliation, and intimidation. Therefore, as sexual violence is being practiced on such a wide scale, it is very clear that this is happening with the implicit approval of the officers in charge of the security apparatus and army forces who authorize such practices. This is even more clear when analyzing data on sexual violence and the accounts of survivors which show a close correlation between those areas with high rates of sexual violence and those where anti-regime activities were most widespread, with the highest rates of sexual violence inflicted by regime forces during raids against those areas that saw anti-regime activism or during military operations to take back control of areas that broke free of the regime's control, as well as inside the regime's official and non-official detention centers.

We have also documented instances of sexual violence incidents during raids and inspections of homes, as well as at checkpoints. The first four years of the popular uprising saw the highest rates of sexual violence, though these have continued ever since, albeit at varying rates in many areas. It's also clear that the sexual violence inflicted on detainees in regime detention centers is systematic in nature.

We face considerable challenges in the course of documenting sexual violence incidents due to the nature of these violations and the complex conditions under which instances of sexual violence take place. Through the data we have collected over the year from sexual violence victims, **we were able to break down the most common patterns of sexual violence by the Syrian regime forces against females in to the following categories:**

- **Compulsory nudity:** forcing female detainees to take their clothes off or watching them as they use the bathrooms or the toilet.
- **Molestation:** Inappropriately touching of female detainees' bodies, usually during inspection or interrogation.
- **Beating and directing torture at the genitals:** Beating or electroshocking females' reproductive organs during torture. Such practices usually result in serious physical harm to women.
- **Rape and rape threats:** Usually during interrogation and as a form of torture and retaliation. Many female detainees have faced rape threats, especially when officers are trying to force them to confess to the charges they've imposed.
- **Verbal/psychological sexual violence:** This takes various forms. Usually, a female detainee is forced to talk about her sex life or about her partner. Insults of a sexual nature are also common, as is pressurizing female detainees to force them to respond to the interrogators'/officers' demands for information about sex, among other verbal sexual threats.
- **Blackmail and sexual extortion:** We have recorded many cases of sexual extortion of women in return for certain goods and services. For instance, female detainees are routinely sexually extorted in exchange for basic requirements such as food and water.
- **Prostitution accusations against female detainees/prisoners:** The Syrian regime has forced no fewer than 11 female detainees, including girls below the age of 18, to appear on its official TV channels and confess to having had intercourse with fighters from the armed opposition. All of these female detainees have been forcibly disappeared after their TV appearances. Moreover, many female detainees have told us that among the charges they faced in their trials were prostitution, which is a way for the regime to shame female detainees, destroy their image within their local communities, and put their lives at serious risk due to potential 'honor crimes'.

SNHR has documented no fewer than **8,019 incidents** of sexual violence at the hands of Syrian regime forces, including about **881 incidents** that took place in detention centers, and no fewer than **443 cases** of sexual violence against girls under the age of 18.

4. Attacks on medical facilities

Attacks targeting medical facilities have had dangerous ramifications for females. These consequences are made more serious and compounded by the fact that most of these facilities have been deliberately targeted in attacks that resulted in massive casualties among female patients, staff and health workers. Destroying medical facilities has also suspended or stopped healthcare provision to females in the affected areas, which meant that many have lost access to basic healthcare which they need to survive. Moreover, military operations have temporarily put medical facilities out of commission, which also had serious ramifications. Attacks on medical facilities have created a climate of fear, disruption, instability, and insecurity among women and their families, which has left deep psychological wounds, with many of them refusing medical treatment at these facilities in fear of being targeted.

Since March 2011, no fewer than **555 attacks** have been carried out to date on medical facilities, putting most of them out of commission.

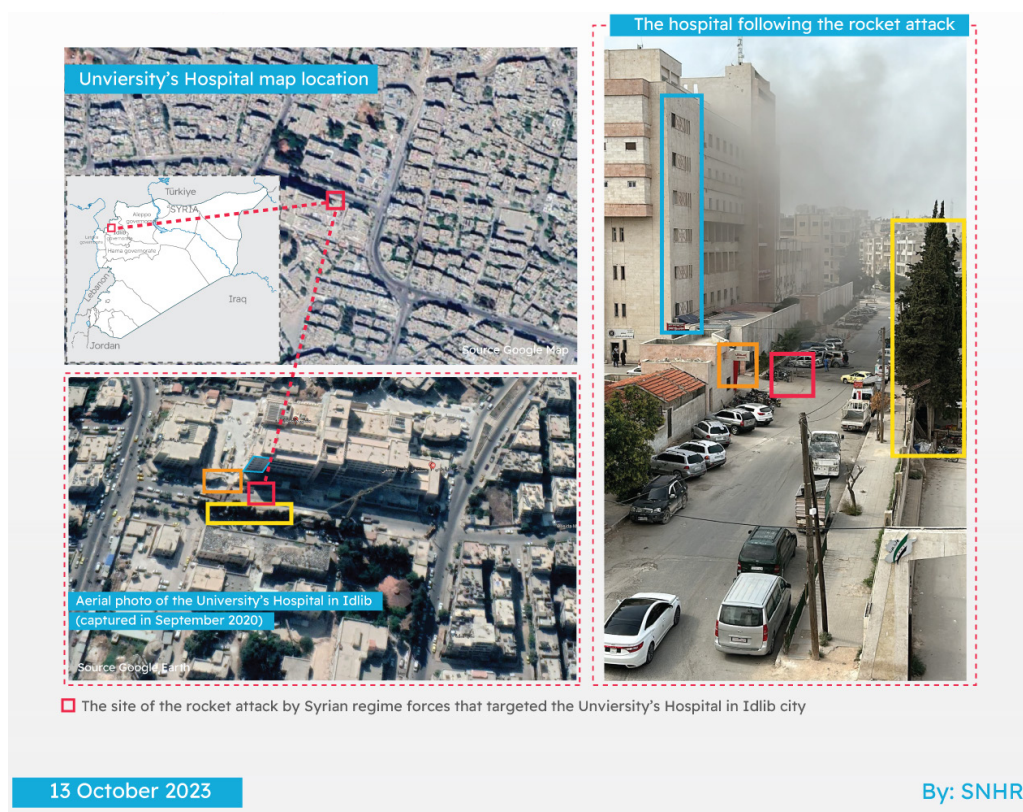
Most notable attacks on medical facilities

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

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



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



SNHR spoke with Abdullah Hallaq,⁹ a medical staff member at the National Hospital in Idlib city. Abdullah told us that he heard an explosion while he was in the break room, with the blast caused by a rocket that landed in front of the University's Hospital entrance. He continued:

"A second rocket struck the clinics corridor in the National Hospital some meters away from where we were. The rocket penetrated the wall of the hospital and landed on the first floor. Patients started screaming, and we rushed to evacuate the hospital. We carried seven patients who were in the clinics wing outside, and then the medical staff came out. After we made sure the attack had ended, about half an hour later, we evacuated the wounded and went down to the basement in fear of another attack." Abdullah said that they did not hear the sound of the rocket, and were surprised by the explosion, which he described as "very strong". Abdullah also noted that he noticed that the weapon remnants that fell in the hospital came from a rocket. He added: "A young man who was in his car in front of the University's Hospital died while waiting for a relative who was a patient. The destruction amounted to a hole in the wall and [another] in the floor. The worst damage was in the clinics wing, since the rocket landed in a bathroom and washroom near the nephrology clinic."

B. Russian forces

1. Extrajudicial killing

Russian forces have not hesitated to use the most extreme levels of violence since the beginning of their military intervention in Syria. SNHR's data shows that the first year of the Russian intervention was the bloodiest, accounting for approximately 52 percent of all victims killed to date by Russian forces. Females account for 30 percent of all civilian deaths at the hands of Russian forces, a notably high percentage which suggests that Russian forces have been deliberately targeting females. Every year on September 30, the anniversary of the date in 2015 on which the Russian military intervention was officially launched, SNHR releases its [annual report](#) on the most notable violations by Russian forces. The military strategy adopted by Russian forces, whereby Russian forces use their air force and ground forces' military operations heavily and excessively to carry out attacks on non-regime areas in order to devastate those areas and force their residents to flee, the same strategy used by the regime, as part of its objective to support the regime and assert Russia's presence in Syria. However, Russian forces possess more advanced and deadly weapons than the regime, and have also used experimental weapons against populated areas in an indiscriminate manner, devastating civilian populations, resulted in massive human losses, and destroying the infrastructure. In most attacks by Russian forces, we recorded their use of double-strikes and the targeting of heavily populated areas, markets, vital facilities, and all kinds of civilian communities. Naturally, this has included many horrific massacres, in which numerous females were killed.

9. Via WhatsApp on October 9, 2023.

As SNHR's database attests, Russian attacks have been documented as killing **1,608 females**, divided between 983 adult females and 625 female children, since the launch of the Russian intervention on September 30, 2015, up until November 25, 2023.

Russian forces have heavily relied on cluster munitions in their attacks that targeted areas outside regime control. In this context, one must point out that Russian and Syrian regime forces are the only parties to have used cluster munitions in the Syrian conflict. These munitions have either been launched using rocket launchers or other platforms, or dropped from aircraft. The areas targeted in cluster munition attacks have all been heavily populated, in some cases housing IDPs camps. We have recorded an increase in the rate of the use of cluster munitions since the launch of the Russian intervention by both Russian forces and Syrian regime forces. This suggests that Russia has been supplying the regime with more modern cluster munitions. SNHR has recorded no fewer than **237 cluster munition attacks** carried out by Russian forces since the launch of their military intervention on September 30, 2015, up until January 2023, with these attacks resulting in the deaths of **28 adult females**.

Most notable Russian attacks that resulted in the killing of females

On Saturday, August 5, 2023, three civilians, identified as Absi Mohammad Sami Balsha, his wife Ibtisam Suleiman, and their son Ahmad Balsha, were killed in bombardment by fixed-wing warplanes believed to be Russian, which carried out four consecutive airstrikes, firing eight missiles in total. The airstrikes targeted the farm where the family had been living on Ein Sheib Road on the western outskirts of Idlib city. The attack also injured several civilians and caused heavy material damage. The area was under the control of HTS at the time of the incident.

On Friday, October 13, 2023, a woman, identified as Hanaa al-Rihawi from Ariha city in southern rural Idlib governorate, was killed in an airstrike carried out by fixed-wing warplanes believed to be Russian that fired multiple missiles at Bazza village in al-Arba'ien area in southern rural Idlib governorate. One of the missiles struck Hanaa's house, killing her and completely destroying her home. The area was under the control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the incident.

On Tuesday, October 24, 2023, six civilians – two children, three women, and an unborn child – were killed, while five others, including three children, were injured, in airstrikes by fixed-wing warplanes believed to be Russian at around 12:17. The airstrike targeted al-Masbah IDPs Camp, also known as Ahl Saraqeb IDPs Camp, located in agricultural lands on the southwestern outskirts of al-Hamama village in rural areas of Jisr al-Shoghur in western rural Idlib governorate.

2. Attacks on medical facilities

The fact that Russian forces have targeted medical facilities show that these facilities are considered an essential target for Russian forces which have used both guided and non-guided weapons to destroy these facilities either partially or completely. These attacks have also resulted in the deaths of females. Since the launch of the Russian intervention on September 30, 2015, we have documented no fewer than **209 attacks** on medical facilities in Syria.

Most notable attacks on medical facilities

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

C. SDF

1. Extrajudicial killing

The SDF, in most of their military operations, have carried out indiscriminate attacks and targeted infrastructure and residential communities through indiscriminate bombardment targeting areas outside their control. This was also the case in the clashes and raids that took place in populated areas, where SDF personnel indiscriminately opened fire during raids on and inspections of homes, as well as whilst pursuing fugitives. Furthermore, we have recorded many incidents in which SDF personnel have deliberately and explicitly fired directly at civilians, with forces manning their checkpoints opening fire at civilians' vehicles. In all, **279 females**, divided between 176 adult females and 103 female children, have been documented on SNHR's database as having been killed by the SDF since the group's initial establishment as the People's Protection Units (YPG) in July 2012 up until November 25, 2023.

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

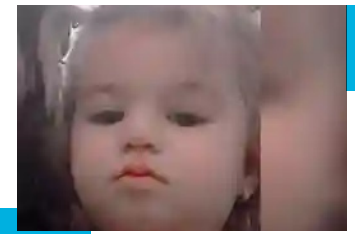
Most notable incidents resulting in female deaths

A woman, identified as Zahra Ali al-Hassan, born in 1987, was shot dead on Monday, January 16, 2023, by an SDF sniper in her home village of Hazwan village to the northwest of al-Bab city in eastern rural Aleppo governorate.

Two women, identified as Fatima Mohammad al-Saleh and Salma Ismail al-Louha, were killed on Saturday, September 2, 2023, in an artillery attack by the SDF who fired multiple shells at HPlease ajin city in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The shelling also injured 21 civilians to varying degrees.

A 37-year-old woman, identified as Marwa Ahmad al-Mu'ti from al- Qaryatein city in eastern rural Homs governorate, died on Tuesday, September 12, 2023 of wounds sustained in earlier SDF mortar bombardment -Bseira city in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The area was under the SDF's control at the time of the incident.

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



 Ranya Amjad al-Hassan

A woman, identified as Shahnaz Ayed al-Hussein from al-Shahil city, who was living in the village of al-Hawayej in eastern Deir Ez-Zour governorate, was killed on Monday, September 25, 2023, near her house in the village in a drone attack by the SDF. The area was under the SDF's control at the time.

A woman, identified as Yusra Hussein al-Bakr, was killed on September 25, 2023, in Theyban town, in eastern Deir Ez-Zour governorate, in a drone attack by the SDF. The attack also injured her husband Khalil Saleh al-Hajem, and another man identified as Ammar al-S'oud. The area was under the control of the SDF at the time of the incident.

2. Detention, enforced disappearance, and torture

The SDF has focused on women in many of the detentions and arbitrary arrests crackdowns the group has carried out against civilians in territories under its control. Those crackdowns did not exclude girls. Those practices were fueled by a number of specific motives, all culminating in the group's strategy to assert control in their held areas. Through our documentation of such incidents and cases, we have pinpointed the most common features seen in the SDF's detentions and arrests of females:

- **Accusations of terror:** The SDF has resorted to the use of terror- and security-related charges in a widespread manner, with such charges being the main pretext used by the SDF to justify its targeting of females. This applies, for instance, to female detainees with any links with ISIS or other parties to the conflict, whether as family members or otherwise. Since 2019, we have documented an even more expansive use of those charges. Detainees arrested in this context usually end up being classified as forcibly disappeared persons. Many of the victims and their families have told us that they were arrested over malicious security reports with no basis in reality, a practice similar to the Syrian regime's methods.
- **Abduction and detention for conscription purposes:** Most of the cases involving girls, both abductions and detentions, were for the purpose of recruiting them in the SDF's ranks.
- **Targeting females on a discriminatory, gender-related, and ethnic basis:** We have recorded many cases in which women were arrested with no charges, save for simply being female. Women and girls detained in this manner are usually used for extortion or as hostages to pressure relatives into surrendering themselves. We have also documented many cases in which females have been targeted due to their ethnicity.
- **Activism:** Female activists, or those who voice criticism of or object to the SDF's practices, have been detained and abducted in raids on their homes, in the street, from the workplace, or at checkpoints.
- **Travel and violating SDF-imposed policies:** We have recorded many incidents where SDF detained women heading for areas under the control of armed opposition factions at checkpoints, or while they were coming from areas under other forces' control to SDF-held areas. In the former case, those arrests were made on the pretext of not having a sponsor or 'kafil'.

Females at SDF detention centers suffer incredibly poor conditions from overcrowded cells and bad ventilation to lack of hygienic facilities and poor treatment. Females also are subjected to various methods of torture that include severe beating, nail removal, hair-shaving, falqa, prolonged solitary confinement, and denying them the right to see their families. It is not uncommon for females to be mistreated on the basis of their ethnicity in SDF detention centers, where they are deprived of healthcare and food. Moreover, those detained are not charged with any specific charges or subject to a trial until they have already suffered long periods of detention that may last for months or even years. Moreover, the females detained in al-Hawl Camp, which is effectively a detention center, lack security, protection, and basic services including education and healthcare. Females' suffering is compounded by the fact that their imprisonment is simply open-ended; they do not know when their suffering and detention will end. We have also documented dozens of cases where male children were separated from their mother and taken to detention centers designated for adults. Those mothers were denied the chance to visit or contact their children.

As SNHR's database attests, no fewer than **945 of the females detained** by SDF personnel since the group's initial emergence in July 2012, when it was known as the YPG, up until November 25, 2023, divided between 526 adult females and 419 female children, are still detained and/or forcibly disappeared in SDF detention centers. We also documented the deaths of no fewer than two women (adult females) in SDF detention centers during that time.

Additionally, we have recorded that many females were beaten and assaulted during raids and inspection by the SDF in their pursuit of fugitives, when those personnel enter houses by force with no judicial warrant.

On Wednesday, July 5, 2023, personnel from the SDF's Military Police severely assaulted a woman in a raid on her home in al-Assadiya neighborhood in southern Manbij city in eastern rural Aleppo governorate, while she was trying to stop them from arresting her son, Eisa al-Qaddour.

Most notable incidents of detention, torture, and enforced disappearance involving females

A woman, identified as Shadiya al-Ali, was arrested on Saturday, January 28, 2023, by SDF personnel during a raid on her house in her home village of al-Ibeidat village in Sarin area in eastern rural Aleppo governorate. She was accused of being linked to ISIS, and was taken to an undisclosed location.

A 15-year-old girl, identified as Dua al-Hassan, was arrested on Saturday, January 28, 2023, by SDF personnel who raided her family's house in her home village of al-Ibeidat village in Sarin area in eastern rural Aleppo governorate. She was accused of being linked to ISIS, and was taken to an undisclosed location.

A woman, identified as Ula Mohammad al-Abdullah from al-Mray'iya village in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate, who is an IDP living in al-Hawl IDPs Camp in eastern Hasaka governorate, was arrested on Thursday, March 30, 2023, by SDF personnel in a raid on her tent in the camp. She was then taken to an undisclosed location.

A 35-year-old woman, identified as Fatima Ibrahim al-Hamad from Manbij city in rural Aleppo governorate, was re-arrested along with her 10-year-old son on Monday, May 29, 2023, at a checkpoint on the entrance of Sad Tishreen area in eastern rural Aleppo, after she had been released from al-Hawl Camp in rural Hasaka governorate. She was then taken to an SDF detention center in Ein al-Arab city in eastern rural Aleppo governorate.

3. Recruitment

Through military recruitment and conscription, the SDF has used females, including female children, to reinforce its forces and assert control over the areas under its control. Juvenile girls are a key element of the SDF. This military recruitment and conscription is a key part of a systematic, established policy carried out under the supervision of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).¹⁰ Many of the SDF's different divisions have been involved in recruiting children since the first months of the SDF's emergence (as the YPG in July 2012). In recent years, recruitment and conscription have been expanded to include all areas under the SDF's control. The group al-Shabiba al-Thawriya, (Revolutionary Youth) faction, also known as the 'Joanne Schurchkar',¹¹ together with the Women's Protection Units and the YPG Units, are the most prominent entities responsible for recruiting and conscripting children and taking them to training camps and the military units of the SDF. We have also monitored that many schools affiliated with the Self-Administration have been involved in supporting child recruitment. These recruitment and conscription practices have exposed many females to sexual violence, as well as to injuries and death.

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

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

Girls are either forcibly conscripted, being abducted from schools, streets, and public roads, or voluntarily recruited through attempts to indoctrinate them, change their beliefs and encourage them to enlist by offering financial incentives to them and their families. The SDF has established recruitment centers that are usually distant from the girls' places of residence. In some cases, girls are taken abroad to PKK-controlled areas in Iraq. Usually, the SDF denies these juvenile female recruits any opportunity to contact their families for months or even years, fearing that the families may convince their children to return home. Many of these conscripted girls' parents, who've tried to search for their daughters and bring them home have faced threats and pressure. Moreover, parents are not allowed to visit their children, and when they attempt to do so they are usually confronted with verbal insults and expulsions at SDF headquarters.

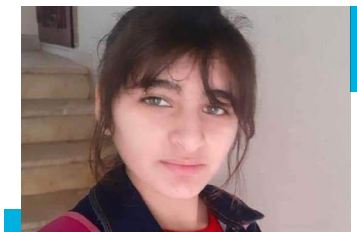
In training camps, girls are trained in how to use weapons and fight. They were also taught the beliefs and ideology of the PKK, before being forced into various military operations. We have noticed that rates of conscripting female children and enlisting them into the SDF's ranks dramatically increase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

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

SNHR has documented no fewer than **281 cases** of underage girls being recruited or conscripted by the SDF. No fewer than **eight** of these juvenile female conscripts were killed in battle, while about **164** others have been discharged, with **109** girls still actively serving with the SDF

Most notable cases of child recruitment or discharge by the SDF

Lam'en Mahmoud Othman, a girl born in 2008 from Karzeleih village, administratively affiliated with Afrin city in northern Aleppo governorate, whose family lives in al-Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood in Aleppo city, was abducted in the east of the neighborhood on Saturday, December 10, 2022, by the SDF's al-Shabiba al-Thawriya, 'Joanne Schurchkar' group for the purpose of military conscription. She was taken to an SDF recruitment center.



👁️ Lam'en Mahmoud Othman

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



👁️ Alif Mohammad Othman, a child

A 14-year-old girl, identified as Rankin Shukri Jum'a from Hasaka city, who live with her family in Tal Tawil Marshou village in northern Hasaka governorate, was abducted for military conscription on Monday February 20, 2023, by the SDF's al-Shabiba al-Thawriya, (Revolutionary Youth) faction, also known as the 'Joanne Schurchkar', after leaving her family's house in the village. She was taken to an SDF recruitment center.



👁️ Rankin Shukri Jum'a, a child

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



👁️ Asil Mohammad Hajji Hassan, a child

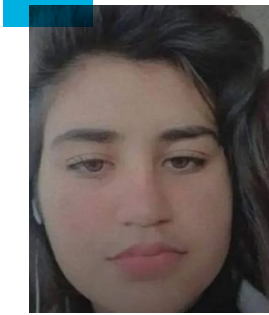
It should be noted that Asil, who has suffered from multiple psychological conditions for years, had been receiving music therapy in Raqqa city, where she had enrolled in music courses in the cultural center. Following her recruitment, Asil's family held a protest in front of Joanne Shurchkar's headquarters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

A 16-year-old girl, identified as Nourhan Mustafa al-Batran, a middle school student from al-Mahsna village (administratively a part of Manbij city) in eastern rural Aleppo governorate, was abducted for military conscription on Saturday, April 1, 2023, for conscription purposes by the Syrian Democratic Forces' (SDF) al-Shabiba al-Thawriya, (Revolutionary Youth) faction, also known as the 'Joanne Schurchkar', from a tuition center for middle and high school students in Manbej city after being lured there by a female member of al-Shabiba al-Thawriya at the center. The girl was taken to an SDF recruitment center in Aleppo governorate.



👁️ Nourhan Mustafa al-Batran

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



👁 Bayal Mohammad Saleh Aqil, a child



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

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



👁 Farah Hassan Khalli, a child

4. Sexual violence

Many acts of sexual violence have been carried out against girls and women by SDF personnel in the group's detention centers, female recruitment centers checkpoints, reception centers and camps under the group's protection and supervision. The SDF has exhibited various patterns of sexual violence during inspections and interrogations in detention centers. The most notable of these are: molestation during inspection or at female recruitment centers, verbal sexual violence, which includes phrases of sexual nature or rape threats, and sexual exploitation of females on various pretexts such as facilitating relief aid or services. As of November 25, 2023, we have documented no fewer than **17 incidents of sexual violence** at the hands of SDF.

5. Targeting medical facilities

Indiscriminate attacks by the SDF have severely damaged medical facilities, with the SDF carrying out no fewer than **12 attacks** on medical facilities up to November 25, 2023.

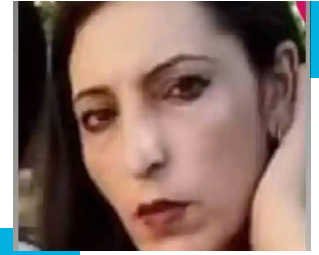
D. HTS (an alliance composed of Fateh al-Sham Front, formerly al-Nusra, and armed opposition factions)

1. Extrajudicial killing

The military operations carried out by HTS in the course of their clashes with other parties have resulted in civilian deaths, including of females, with the group resorting to indiscriminate bombardment using locally made and non-guided weapons. HTS has also been engaged in incidents of infighting with foes among armed opposition factions that broke out in populated areas. Moreover, HTS members have, in increasing number of cases, opened fire indiscriminately during raids, inspections, and pursuits of wanted individuals in areas under their control. According to SNHR's database, no fewer than 87 females, divided between 81 adult females and six female children, have been killed by HTS since the emergence of al-Nusra Front (rebranded subsequently as HTS) in January 2012, up until November 25, 2023.

Most notable incidents resulting in female deaths

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



👁 Teryaq Rustum, a woman

2. Arrest/detention, enforced disappearance, and torture

HTS has adopted various forms of targeting females through detentions, abductions, and arbitrary arrests since the group's emergence (As the al-Nusra Front in July 2012). However, HTS's strategies in this regard have varied over the past 12 years, along with the manner in which the group carries out these arrests. In January 2022, we have released [a detailed report](#) on the security and judicial apparatus and detention centers operated by the HTS. Based on our analysis, we can pinpoint the contexts in which females are targeted through abductions and detention as follows:

- **Mass abduction of females:** The HTS has deliberately detained/abducted females during their attacks on areas outside their control, on a sectarian and ethnic basis. Those females have then been used as hostages in prisoner exchange deals with regime or other forces, or in other cases released in exchange for large sums of money. These cases were frequently seen in the years 2012-2016, but then dramatically declined in line with the declining rate of HTS military operations.
- **Detaining female members of extremist groups' families:** This refers to families with members affiliated with extremist groups, especially ISIS as well as Jund al-Aqsa and Huras al-Din. Broadly, HTS targeted such families in areas under its control during offensives or in the course of pursuing affiliates of these groups. These detainees have been placed in secret detention centers, and then denied any contact with the outside world. SNHR has received no information confirming or denying that humanitarian groups or humanitarian assistance have been able to obtain access to those detainees, or any information about their fate.

- **Detaining female activists and female workers with humanitarian groups:** The HTS has targeted female activists in territories under its control, as well as women working with humanitarian organizations or in media. These women have faced charges related to their activism, including allegations of treason, as a way to pressure them to cease their activism or to work within the restrictive limits prescribed by the group. HTS also persecuted women who participate in anti-HTS protests or voice objections to the group's practices.
- **Detaining females on a discriminatory basis:** We have recorded cases where women were targeted with no clear charges, simply because they are related to members of rival groups, such as the armed opposition or the SDF, as a way to pressurize and extort enemies.

According to SNHR's database, **49 of the females arrested** between January 2012 and November 25, 2023 - **45 adult females and four female children** - are still detained and/or forcibly disappeared in HTS detention centers. We have also documented the death of one woman (adult family) due to torture and medical negligence in an HTS detention center in the same period.

Female detainees are subjected to harsh detention conditions, ranging from being denied any opportunity to contact their families to intimidation, threats, and serious accusations during interrogation. HTS uses various methods of torture in its detention centers, which are somewhat similar to those employed by the Syrian regime. It should also be noted that there are many similarities between the torture techniques employed by both parties to extract confessions from detainees, with HTS also not distinguishing between male and female detainees in its use of all forms of torture. HTS has no detention centers designated specifically for women, and gives no special attention to their needs. Usually, female detainees are placed in small areas or cells in the same facilities holding men. We have also recorded many cases where the HTS has imprisoned female detainees in houses or military facilities affiliated with the group.

Most notable cases of detention and enforced disappearance involving children

Muna al-Ahmad, a media activist from Rural Damascus governorate who lives in Izaz city in northern rural Aleppo governorate, was detained along with a number of her family members on Wednesday, April 19, 2023, by HST personnel at al-Ghazzawiya checkpoint that divides HTS-held areas from those under the control of the SNA in the rural areas of Idlib and Aleppo. Muna, who faced accusations of 'immorality,' was released on the same day. It should be noted that the HTS deliberately tries to intimidate female activists by detaining them and accusing them of such allegations to tarnish their image, in an attempt to limit their activism.

3. Attacks on medical facilities

We have documented **two attacks** on medical facilities by HTS since its emergence up until November 25, 2023. These attacks were carried out in the course of the group's indiscriminate bombardment and during clashes in which the group has been involved.

E. All armed opposition factions/SNA¹²

1. Extrajudicial killing

All armed opposition factions have resorted to indiscriminate bombardment operations, in which they've used non-guided and locally made weaponry in their attacks on areas outside their control, or in retaliation for attacks against their territories. These attacks have resulted in civilians', including females', deaths. Armed opposition factions have also engaged in clashes, whether with other parties or in infighting with one another, in populated areas with no regard for the protection of civilians' lives. In addition, we have recorded many incidents in which armed opposition fighters opened fire in public areas and towards civilians to break up fights. Additionally, SNA personnel operating checkpoints have opened fire at civilians' vehicles, especially at checkpoints adjacent to other parties' territories.

As of November 25, 2023, SNHR has recorded the killing of no fewer than **1,324 females**, divided between 886 adult females and 438 female children, at the hands of all armed opposition factions.

Most notable incidents resulting in female deaths

A 55-year-old woman, identified as Ayoush Mohammad al-Azoum, from al-Dana village in the eastern suburbs of Aleppo, was shot dead on Sunday, April 16, 2023, by members of the SNA's Ferqat al-Hamza (the Hamza Squad) who opened fire at the car she was in, in al-Sukarryat village, also in eastern rural Aleppo, while she was traveling to territories controlled by the SDF.

2. Arrest, enforced disappearance, and torture

Females have been detained and abducted by armed opposition factions/SNA in a widespread manner in recent years. The contexts and motives of these incidents vary depending on the reality on the ground and developments concerning those factions, such as changes in territorial control, or even the dissolution of many of these groups involved in those practices. However, the same practices of targeting females have persisted. These practices were also difficult to make sense of since there is no real framework governing the practices of armed opposition, and there is also no independent judiciary that oversees such operations in a transparent and clear way. Since the armed opposition's territories have been confined in certain areas in northwestern Syria, there have been certain patterns shaping the most notable incidents and cases of female detention and abductions:

- **Detaining females on an ethnic and gender basis for the purpose of extortion:**

Armed opposition factions/SNA have resorted to abducting and detaining women, and releasing them for large sums of money, or as a means of pressurizing their families into handing over their properties. Most abductions exhibited an ethnic character particularly in Afrin area in northern rural Aleppo.

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

- **Detaining females to limit their travel and movement:** Armed opposition factions detain women with children entering their territories or trying to cross into Türkiye to seek asylum. Usually, those detained in such cases face no charges, and are detained on the pretext of checking their background, but are held in extremely poor detention conditions. In many cases, these women were extorted, with these forces demanding money in exchange for releasing them or allowing them to pass.
- **Detaining females on security charges:** We have recorded many incidents where women were targeted on the basis of their ethnicity particularly in Afrin city in northern rural Aleppo governorate, or on the pretext of working, currently or in the past, with the SDF or its institutions. Many of the women detained this way or faced those charges have been subsequently classified as forcibly disappeared persons.
- **Detaining females over their activism:** Females have also been detained/abducted because of their activism in the media or in the humanitarian field, or for voicing criticism of armed opposition factions' practices in their areas of control.

With the absence of any genuine, credible authority to administer detention centers in the armed opposition/SNA's territories, female detained by these groups have experienced harsh detention conditions. Usually, females are detained in the military headquarters of the faction responsible for their arrest. Those headquarters lack the most basic necessities in terms of healthcare, food, and privacy. Women who are detained in detention centers operated by the armed opposition/SNA are subjected to various torture methods, including severe beating, electricity, death threats, and solitary confinements. Women are also denied healthcare, food, and their basic needs, in addition to taking their children away in case they were detained with their children.

As of November 25, 2023, SNHR has recorded that no fewer than **971 of the females** - 878 adult females and 93 female children - arrested by all armed opposition factions/SNA children since March 2011 are still detained or forcibly disappeared at the hands of these forces. Most of the arrests of females that we have documented by these forces end up being classified as enforced disappearance. We also documented that **two women** had died due to torture in armed opposition detention centers during the same period.

Most notable cases of detention and enforced disappearance involving children

Two girl siblings, Inja and Faidana Fawzi Mohammad Muslim, aged 15 and 12 respectively, were arrested on Wednesday, January 4, 2023, by personnel from the SNA's Military Police who raided their house in their home village of Midan Akbs, administratively affiliated with Afrin city in northern rural Aleppo governorate. They were taken to an SNA detention center in Afrin city. We recorded that they were released on January 31, 2023.

A 40-year-old woman, identified as Khadija Hanan from Kafr Zit village, administratively affiliated with Afrin city in northwestern Aleppo, was detained along with her husband Ibrahim Hanan on Friday, May 12, 2023, by personnel from the SNA's Military Police at al-Qaws Checkpoint in the center of Afrin city, over accusations of previously working with the SDF. We recorded that they were released on the same day.

A 26-year-old woman, identified as Nawal Khalil Haj Hanan, was arrested/detained on Wednesday, May 24, 2023, by personnel from the SNA's Military Police in their home village of Kafrdali Tehtani, administratively affiliated with Afrin city in rural Aleppo governorate, over accusations of working with the SDF. She was then taken to an undisclosed location.

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

A 35-year-old woman, identified as Ahad Yousef Sedou who works at a school in Afrin city in rural Aleppo governorate, was arrested/detained on Sunday, September 24, 2023, by the personnel from the SNA's civilian police over accusations of working previously with the SDF. She was taken to an undisclosed location.

4. Targeting schools and medical facilities

We have recorded no fewer than **15 attacks** on medical facilities at the hands of the armed opposition factions since March 2011 up until November 25, 2023. Those attacks were carried out in the course of the indiscriminate bombardment and clashes in which these groups have been involved.

F. Other parties

1. Extrajudicial killing

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

Within this category, SNHR has documented the killing of no fewer than **1,625 females**, divided between 1,056 adult females and 569 female children, as of November 25, 2023.

Most notable incidents resulting in female deaths

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

On Tuesday, July 11, 2023, a woman, identified as Hanan al-Dreib, was killed by the explosion of a landmine whose source we have not yet been able to identify while collecting firewood in Tishreen village, administratively a part of al-Ashara city, in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The explosion also injured a second woman, identified as Suhaila al-Mohammad. The area was under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of the incident.

On Saturday, September 9, 2023, a 50-year-old woman, identified as Nadya al-Jgheiman, and her 14-year-old son, Hamad Shaher al-Jgheiman, members of a Bedouin tribe in al-Laja area in eastern Daraa governorate, were killed by the explosion of a war remnant whose source we have not been able to identify while working in a tomato field to the north of Jasim city in northern rural Daraa governorate. The area was under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of the incident.

A woman, identified as Hanan Mohammad Aqla Abu Nouh, was shot dead on Tuesday, October 31, 2023, by gunmen we have not yet been able to identify in a street in her hometown of Atman in northern rural Daraa governorate. The area was under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of the incident.

A woman, identified as Dousha al-Ahmad al-Mohammad, was killed on Saturday, November 4, 2023, by the explosion of a landmine whose source we have not yet been able to identify near her home village of al-Mahsanli in eastern rural Aleppo governorate, which is on the dividing lines with the areas under the control of the SNA.

2. Abduction and enforced disappearance

Between March 2011 and November 25, 2023, we documented that, of the females abducted and forcibly disappeared at the hands of unidentified parties, no fewer than **3,119** are still imprisoned and/or forcibly disappeared.

Most notable incidents of detention, torture, and enforced disappearance involving females

A woman, identified as Weam al-Sheikh, born in 2006, was abducted on Thursday, March 2, 2023, by gunmen we have not yet been able to identify while she was leaving her home city of Manbij in eastern rural Aleppo governorate to visit his husband who is detained in an SDF detention center in al-Arima town to the west of the city. The area was under the control of the SDF at the time of the incident.

A 10-year-old girl, identified as Salma Mhab al-Dheis, was abducted on October 2, 2023, by gunmen we have not yet been able to identify from in front of her school in her home city of Nawa in western rural Daraa governorate. She was taken to an undisclosed location. The area was under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of the incident.



👁 Salma Mhab al-Dheis, a child

3. Attacks on medical facilities

Between March 2011 and November 25, 2023, we recorded no fewer than **60 attacks** on medical facilities at the hands of other parties.

Most notable attacks on medical facilities

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

VI. Gender Dimensions and the Implication of Local Legislation Promulgated and Implemented by the Syrian Regime on Women's Rights and Growing Hardships

Over the past 12 years, the Syrian regime has relied heavily on the promulgation of self-serving legislative articles and laws as one of the strategies serving its aims in crushing political dissidents. To that end, the Syrian regime has directed the state institutions to serve its political and security interests and enhance its resources. In the process, those legislations have had major ramifications on civilians' lives, especially those of women, whether those who suffered violations themselves or who lost their husbands or a family member. More particularly, the laws and decisions issued on property and registering deaths have affected women, and stripped of their rights, or at best, left them unable to attain these rights despite negotiating numerous obstacles. In May 2023, SNHR released a report that details the laws employed by the Syrian regime to control real estate ownership and lands in Syria, which primarily targeted the people forcibly displaced, forcibly disappeared persons in regime detention centers, and the victims who were killed but not registered in the civil registry. In this report, we will be focusing on how these laws and procedures reflected on women. We will not be focusing on the clear gender-based discriminatory aspects of laws, as we will tackle those in a separate report, since they command more detailing in light of the long history and long-standing practices of discrimination both before and after the conflict in Syria, in terms of legislations.

In Syria today, widowed women who have lost main caretaker are bearing the vital important role of providing for their families. This includes, in most cases, having to take care of paperwork in courts and Syrian government institutions, in order to secure the women's own rights as well as those of their families after their husbands had either been killed or disappeared. In many cases, women also found themselves having to bear such responsibilities due to their husbands being fugitives, or simply due to the erroneous belief that women might face less restrictions and persecution by security forces compared to males.

Meanwhile, women cannot secure their rightful inheritance after the death of their husbands or sons, or do anything with properties belonging to them, whether in the case of these being joint property, or when women have been assigned power of attorney, or when they're trying to prove that their husbands have gone missing so the power to dispose of the property can be transferred to them. In order to be able to do so, they must go through a complex and arduous two-part judicial and security process, [which has four main characteristics:](#)

- **High costs:** These transactions and government fees can be costly. In many cases, applicants need to pay bribes to facilitate the process.
- **Long, unspecified waiting periods:** These transactions take a long time to complete, with this process causing applicants mental and financial stress, as well as a sense of instability.
- **The risk of being arrested or property being expropriated:** Women also face the risk of violence or extortion in this process, especially when they need to obtain a security clearance.
- **Before being able to do anything, IDP and refugee women need to access regime-held areas to conduct these transactions,** or at least need to have the ability to give someone trustworthy the power of attorney to represent them.

As mentioned above, this process consists of two stages:

Stage one: A petition to prove death and register the deceased in the civil registry's records

In order for women to attain their inheritance and property rights, they first need to establish the deaths of their husbands, sons, or fathers in the civil registry. We talked in [a previous report](#) about how the Syrian regime controls the procedure and mechanisms of registering an incident of death that took place in connection to the conflict that started in March 2011. To do so, women must file a petition and go through a series of legal transactions that are usually impeded by the need to obtain security clearance. On August 10, 2022, the Syrian regime government's Minister of Justice issued [Circular No. 22](#) specifying the procedures for the conduct of proceedings related to registering deaths within Sharia courts. The circular included new conditions stipulating that five items of evidence must be submitted to and approved by the relevant judges in proceedings related to registering the death. It also requires that all relevant courts involved in death registration cases comply with the circular's content. In an additional move to further restrict the families of the missing, the regime imposed a security clearance requirement requiring applicants to obtain a judicial power of attorney for absent or missing individuals,¹³ with Decision No. 30 issued by the Ministry of Justice on September 16, 2021, which requires that anyone needing to obtain legal power of attorney for an absent or missing individual should first obtain 'security clearance'. The procedures required to obtain this clearance are accompanied by bargaining and material extortion; women were among the first victims of the circular's ruling, since wives and mothers are invariably the family members involved in the legal procedures to prove the absence or loss of their husbands, sons or other family members, and thus need to obtain the judicial power of attorney. In cases where wives or mothers are present in government-controlled areas and want to obtain the power of attorney, the 'new security clearance' increases their risk of being subjected to violence, extortion, or material, verbal and psychological abuse. If the judicial power of attorney for the absent person is not obtained due to difficulties in obtaining security clearance, their interests will be severely restricted and they will not be able to carry out the transfer of inheritance, obtain identification documents or bank cards, or receive salaries and pensions on behalf of the missing or absent individuals, especially since some of these absentees are wanted by the regime's security services. In this context, it should be noted that there are currently about **96,000 forcibly** disappeared persons in regime detention centers. This circular means

13. According to articles 202 and 203 of the Syrian Personal Status Law, an 'absent' person [Ghālib] is someone who is known to be alive, but has no known place of residence or location, or someone who has a known place of residence or location abroad, but cannot conduct their personal matters themselves, while a 'missing' person [Maḥqūd] is someone about whom no news can be found; their location and whether they are alive or dead are unknown.

that it is impossible to give absentees' family members and relatives the right to obtain the power of attorney to manage the funds of their absent loved ones. This circular is also considered a major legal violation due to its violation of the Syrian Personal Status Law, which does not require any clearance of any kind. Dozens of women who have had to go through these procedures told us security clearances and most of the judicial procedures were an instrument used by the regime to restrict their rights and expose them to extortion.

Stage two: Claims for inheritance, and the right for disposal or restoration of property

Even when women have managed to establish and register an incident of death, they then have to go through another stage of judicial and security clearances related to their right to obtain their inheritance or dispose of their property. In such claims, another security clearance is required in order to be able to obtain or dispose of property, including selling or buying. In many cases, the property in question can be seized by influential figures in the regime's security authorities or by people with links to the regime - that is if the property in question has not been seized already. In such cases, women need to file a 'property usurpation' claim which is subdivided into two separate claims; the first of these goes to the Criminal Conciliation Court, according to which the usurper is defined in accordance with Article 723 of the Syrian Penal Code, with the second part consisting of a civil lawsuit brought at the First Instance Court to expel the usurper in order to impose punishment on them. It is clear from all these points that the Syrian regime has put in place a series of long, costly, and obscure procedures without taking into account the state of the conflict and the conditions which these women are facing. The Syrian regime is also the only authority empowered to administer these procedures, which has a particularly deleterious effect on women, further increasing their suffering and worsening their plight. Those complications have led many women to simply decide not to go through this agonizingly complex process, which naturally costs them their rights, and consequently exacerbates their situation on multiple economic, social, and psychological levels.

VII. Threats & Slanders Against Female Activists in Various Areas under Different Parties' Control Have Had A Dramatic Impact on Women's Activism and Services for Women

All over Syria, female activists play an integral role in the struggle for rights and justice. As such, they have faced serious dangers. Not only have women been subjected to the gross violations outlined in this report and suffered multiple severe losses resulting from these violations, but they have also faced additional challenges in the form of threats, slanders, and restrictions, which naturally adversely affected their role in society, as well as the services they receive or provide for other women, or for society in general. Threats and slander are effective tools in eroding the standing of female activists. We have documented a noticeable decline in the work of many female activists who tragically have been affected by such campaigns, as with the civil society organizations they work with or lead. In such attacks, women are attacked and targeted with the aim of crushing their spirit and destroying their social and professional reputation.

There have been various types of campaigns and attacks against woman activists, including threats of physical violence, and verbal violence that have been directly targeted at them or through text messages. There have also been cases in which women have been the victims of slander or have seen sensitive personal information on them published on social media or other public settings. In many other cases, women were summoned to the security headquarters of the various controlling forces, and faced accusations impugning their morality or attacking their dignity, or even been publicly molested. These incidents and challenges have been recorded widely in all areas. Even though the figures or entities behind them are not directly connected with any of the various parties to the conflict, the calculated strategy of targeting woman activists leads us to suspect that parties to the conflict are involved in, or backing such campaigns, especially since none of the parties to the conflict have launched any investigation or accountability process, or taken any measures to protect women and allow them to freely participate in activism. On the contrary, discriminatory policies and decisions have been imposed against women.

- Since August 2023, Suwayda governorate has witnessed widespread ant-regime demonstrations, with women being an integral part of these protests. We have documented that many of the women involved in these protests have been the victims of slander campaigns, as well as threats and been subjected to societal and security services' pressure, all with the objective of driving them to cease their activism.

SNHR spoke with 41-year-old Seham al-Atta,¹⁴ a female activist who helped organize protests and worked with many media outlets to cover the civilian protests and demands in Suwayda. Seham has been the victim of multiple slander campaigns and multiple threats that even extended to her family. She told us, **"About two weeks into my involvement with the daily demonstrations and working with media outlets, and spreading news about the movement in Suwayda, I started receiving death threats and accusations of treason on my personal Facebook account. I dismissed those threats and continued doing what I was doing. Afterwards, I was attacked by many fake accounts on social media that have been publishing posts tarnishing my reputation and my family's. Things developed and I started receiving calls from people who threatened to call me, as did my father who received calls from people who I think work at the security branches who told him to force me to stop my activism, and threatened to kill him if he does not comply."**

14. An alias, via phone on October 6, 2023



👁 Group of women heading for al-Karama Square (formerly al-Seir) in the center of Suwayda city to partake in an anti-regime demonstration
Friday, November 10, 2023

- Through its institutions, HTS has also issued a number of discriminatory decisions against females in areas under its control, including the imposition of policies such as gender segregation in universities and banning women from studying certain majors in the universities under its control. The group has also imposed a dress code on women and limited their personal freedom.

On August 6, 2023, HTS's Salvation Government sent out a circulation to all private educational institutions in areas under its control insisting that they enforce compliance with its regulations regarding the “religiously accepted dress code” for females and the complete segregation of male and female students at primary and high school levels.



👁 Circulation sent out by the HTS's Salvation Government

We have noticed a phenomenon whereby religious institutions use various means, especially sermons delivered in mosques, to promote extremist views or attack the reputation of female activists and women's organizations. In this context, religion is misused to cast doubt on the true intentions of those groups by promoting a narrative claiming that their activities violate religious norms or that they are working against society, with the objective of polluting their image and rejecting their activism. In fact, these practices have had serious consequences, leading to an increase in the number of threats and assaults against women. Furthermore, a number of female activists and organizations involved in such causes have been forced to completely end or temporarily suspend their activities.

In early-July 2023, a calculated slander campaign targeted the Equity and Empowerment organization, which advocates for human rights and particularly women's rights, in northern Syria. The campaign began with fake accounts on social media, particularly Facebook and Telegram, which published slanderous claims about the organization and women working with it in HTS-held areas. Subsequently, the campaign grew and was adopted by certain individuals and groups, focusing mainly on the work of Heba Izzdin, the founder of the group, by publishing misleading information and posts attacking her reputation and personal freedom. This came as the organization's Facebook page announced the launch of a training program for women. Some of the comments beneath the announcement post seen by SNHR attacked the program and Ms. Heba. The matter escalated further with text messages being sent to the organization's private phone numbers threatening to report its activities to the HTS' General Security authority. By the end of July 2023, the slander campaign took a more serious turn when a mosque Imam in rural Idlib governorate condemned Hiba and the Equity and Empowerment organization in front of dozens of civilians. The sermon was recorded and widely shared on social media, reaching hundreds of people. Other extremist religious figures also joined in with these calls, exposing Ms. Hiba and the other women working in the organization to serious threats of persecution and death. SNHR has stored audio and video copies of these sermons and of the slanderous posts.

Consequently, those campaigns had profoundly negative effects, not only on Hiba and other women working at the Equity and Empowerment organization, but on all women working in the public sphere. They also created an atmosphere of anxiety, fear, and insecurity. Although the organization was forced to suspend its activities and the services it provides for women, it resumed its operation in early-November.

IV. Conclusions & Recommendations

Legal Conclusions:

- International The parties to the conflict in Syria have failed to engage in the proper treatment of women, as defined by Rule 134¹⁵ of customary international humanitarian law: "The specific protection, health and assistance needs of women affected by armed conflict must be respected."
- The parties to the conflict in Syria, particularly the Syrian regime which is responsible for the majority of violations in the conflict, have violated many legal articles regarding women, as included in Protocol II additional to the Geneva Convention, adopted in 1977. These violations include: "Violence to the life, health and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular murder as well as cruel treatment such as torture, mutilation, or any form of corporal punishment"¹⁶ as well as "outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault."¹⁷
- As this report clearly shows, patterns of discrimination against women have been exhibited in a range of practices, which constitute violations of the CEDAW treaty,¹⁸ which established all the articles that states must implement to protect women from the negative effects resulting from discrimination. In addition, such practices constitute a violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.¹⁹
- Among the violations included in this report that have been perpetrated by the Syrian regime in the form of widespread and systematic attacks in a way that qualifies them as crimes against humanity are: murder, torture, rape, and forced displacement.
- Among the violations included in this report that have been perpetrated by the Syrian regime, as well as the other parties to the conflict, in a way that qualifies them as war crimes are: sexual violence, violence to life, particularly murder in its different forms, mutilation, cruel treatment, and outrages upon personal dignity.
- International humanitarian law establishes that women should be properly respected, that women should be detained or arrested in places separate from men, that women shall not be inspected except by another woman, and that pregnant women and mothers of young children shall receive additional nutritional care that meets their physiological needs. All of the parties to the conflict have failed to meet these requirements.
- All of the parties to the conflict, particularly the SDF, have violated the rights of girls through conscription. The prohibition on recruiting children was introduced as a customary law in accordance with Rule 136 of the International Committee of the Red Cross's study of customary international humanitarian law, which states that "children must not be recruited into armed forces or armed groups" in both international and non-international armed conflicts. Furthermore, Rule 137 states, "Children must not be allowed to take part in hostilities." Meanwhile, Article 4-1 of the Optional

15. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), customary international humanitarian law. [Rule 134](#)

16. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), Protocol II Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1494, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-international Armed Conflicts, Article 4 (2-a) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-additional-geneva-conventions-12-august-1949-and-0>

17. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), Protocol II Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1494, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-international Armed Conflicts, Article 4 (2-e) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-additional-geneva-conventions-12-august-1949-and-0>

18. United Nations, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women New York, 18 December 1979 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

19. United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1325 (October 31, 2000)

Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict states, "Armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years." The Rome Statute of the ICC establishes in the case of international armed conflicts and non-international armed conflicts that "Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into the national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities" are classified as war crimes.

Recommendations

All parties to the conflict

- The Syrian regime must uphold its pledges entailed in its ratification of the CEDAW treaty,²⁰ implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, including General Recommendation No. 30,²¹ respect both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,²² as well as the Geneva Conventions, and accordingly put an end to its crimes against humanity and war crimes.
- All parties to the conflict should immediately release all arbitrarily detained women, and comply with the international laws on detaining girls, which includes separating them from men, having them inspected and guarded by women, and implement protocols when entering detention to internally report cases of sexual violence.
- Implement the UN Security Council's Resolutions on the Syrian conflict and on the role of the parties to the conflict in protecting women from sexual violence, particularly Resolutions 1325²³ and 2122.²⁴
- Completely cease the recruitment of children, including female children, and discharge all children below 15 years of age from all military formations and missions.
- Conduct investigations to identify the perpetrators of violations, hold them accountable, and start compensating the victims and providing reparations and damages.
- Provide protection and security for women's work and movements, provide support for women, and end all forms of restrictions and repression of freedoms.
- Support the efforts made by women towards combating violence against women, and work on alleviating the economic and social ramifications of the conflict on women.
- Spare women the horrors of war, and take all necessary measures to put an end to all forms of violations against women.
- Broaden the active involvement of women in all political and media entities, as well as in civil society and humanitarian relief groups.

20. For a list of states ratifying the CEDAW treaty, see: <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>

21. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General recommendation No. 30. See: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5268d2064.html>

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

United Nations (UN), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. See: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

23. United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1325 (October 31, 2000). See: <https://daccess-ods.un.org/tmp/9973298.31123352.html>

24. United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2122 (November 18, 2013). See: [https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=S%2FRES%2F2122\(2013\)&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=S%2FRES%2F2122(2013)&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False)

International community and UN Security Council

- Put pressure on all parties to the conflict and controlling forces to release all arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared females.
- Provide protection and assistance for forcibly displaced females, both IDPs and refugees, particularly girls, and respect their specific needs, most importantly protection.
- All the world's states must ratify the CEDAW treaty and uphold its commitments in order to hold the Syrian regime accountable and expose its criminal practices against women in Syria, and should spare no effort to put an end to them.
- Expose the states supporting the Syrian regime which are effectively trying to normalize and sponsor perpetrators of crimes against humanity and war crimes against the women of Syria.
- Take all available legal, political, and financial measures against the Syrian regime and its allies, as well as all perpetrators of violations in the Syrian conflict, in order to pressure and compel them to respect women's rights.
- Meet the financial pledges made to help neighboring countries and provide every possible bit of support to improve the level of education and healthcare in those countries that are housing the largest proportion of female refugees.
- At the very minimum, put pressure on the Syrian regime in order to compel it to allow international observers, including representatives of the COI, to visit women's detention centers with no preconditions or restrictions.
- Refer the situation in Syria to the ICC, or swiftly establish a special court whose purpose is to handle crimes against humanity and war crimes, in order to put an end to the impunity that has been going on for nearly a decade in Syria.

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

- In light of the magnitude of the widespread violations against women by the Syrian regime, some of which qualify as crimes against humanity, the committee needs to highlight its efforts in Syria, which seems almost non-existent to us. The committee also needs to redouble its efforts to address the individual and collective cases in Syria. We also recommend that female survivors should individually contact the committee and submit complaints, while the committee must take steps to expand the scope of its work.

Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

The Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences should redouble their efforts in Syria, considering the severity of the violence suffered by Syrian women, particularly at the hands of the Syrian government itself, compared to women in other countries. Special attention must be paid to women in the detention centers of the Syrian regime and its security arms.

European States and the European Union

- Increase the severity of economic sanctions on individuals and companies supporting the Syrian regime, Iran, and Russia.
- Provide every possible bit of support for the civil society organizations active in Syria working to rehabilitate and reintegrate female victims into society.
- Support the efforts aimed at providing psychological support and reintegration for female survivors in areas of displacement and countries of refuge.
- Syria is one of the world's worst countries in terms of many types of violations against women. As such, Syria needs far greater levels of humanitarian assistance, especially since violations continue to this day.
- Support the path of judicial accountability, and the course of prosecution under the universal jurisdiction principle, in order to assist with investigating and legally prosecuting the individuals responsible for the most serious crimes, according to the classifications of international law, that have taken place in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, and in accordance with resolution 248/71²⁵, and also support litigations on the basis of universal jurisdiction.

UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR)

- Issue a special report on the violations inflicted on Syria's women in particular.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI)

- Launch an investigation into the incidents included in this report, and consider for its next report.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

- Coordinate humanitarian relief operations by focusing on the worst affected areas, and resist the Syrian regime's pressure and exploitation which attempts to solicit aid in the regime's own favor.
- Dedicate sufficient resources to rehabilitate female survivors, especially those who have experienced sexual violence, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage, and on the basis of the areas worst affected.
- Expand the services offered to female victims of violence, particularly victims of sexual violence. This includes services such as shelter, treatment, rehabilitation, consultation, and ensuring the provision of women's and girls' special needs, with priority given to pregnant women, new mothers, and breastfeeding women.
- Establish institutions to protect and care for female victims who have suffered exclusion from their families and communities.

25. United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), resolution 71/248 (January 11, 2017). See: <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FRES%2F71%2F248&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>

Feminist groups around the world

- Provide more support and advocacy for the causes of Syria's women, highlight the horrible violations Syrian women have suffered, expand on events and projects to rehabilitate female survivors who have experienced arrest, torture, and forced displacement, and shed more light on the suffering of Syria's women in IDP camps, refuge countries, and detention centers.

Neighboring countries

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

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

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

Acknowledgment

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



SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



info@snhr.org
www.snhr.org

No justice without accountability

© Syrian Network For Human Rights (SNHR).
November 2023

