

# Syria Update

## IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

# HRW Report Highlights Human Rights Risks. Is Nexus the Solution?

## WHOLE OF SYRIA REVIEW

### US Kills Leader of Islamic State in Operation in Idleb Governorate

His killing is unlikely to hamper the decentralised group's operational capacity. [Pg 5](#)

### Arrest Campaign Follows IS Attack on al-Sina'a Prison

The SDF arrests 50 in Deir-ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa, as civilians face retribution after al-Sina'a Prison attack. [Pg 5](#)

### 27 Drug Smugglers Killed by Jordan Army in Syria-Jordan Border Battle

Jordanian Armed forces killed 27 smugglers transporting narcotics from Syria. [Pg 6](#)

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No hard steps have been taken, but familiar preparations are underway. [Pg 6](#)

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The decision targets the better-off, but few in Syria are comfortable. [Pg 6](#)

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Two girls died from the cold after heavy snow and freezing temperatures affected IDP camps in northwest Syria. [Pg 7](#)

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It is a 60% increase from 2020, but more freedom is needed. [Pg 8](#)

Amid a greater push toward a rights-based approach, new funding mechanisms are needed to meet donor needs and support Syrian communities. File photo: destruction in Syria. Image courtesy of Yeni Safak.



WEEKLY SYRIA UPDATE DIGEST



Syria in 2022

Although conflict in Syria has slowed considerably, humanitarian needs continue to rise. Aid actors have struggled to adapt. To do so, they must recognise that the crisis in Syria is arguably undergoing a paradigm shift. This report, a forecast for the year 2022, offers guidance to aid actors seeking to move beyond outmoded emergency response approaches to achieve more substantive, lasting change.

[READ MORE](#)



The Future of LGBTQ+ Syria and the Aid Response

LGBTQ+ Syrians face specific challenges, including healthcare disparities, legal discrimination, social prejudice, and the aid sector's unpreparedness to meet resulting needs. This report explores regional case studies to identify programming opportunities and entry points to meet these needs and empower and support LGBTQ+ Syrians.

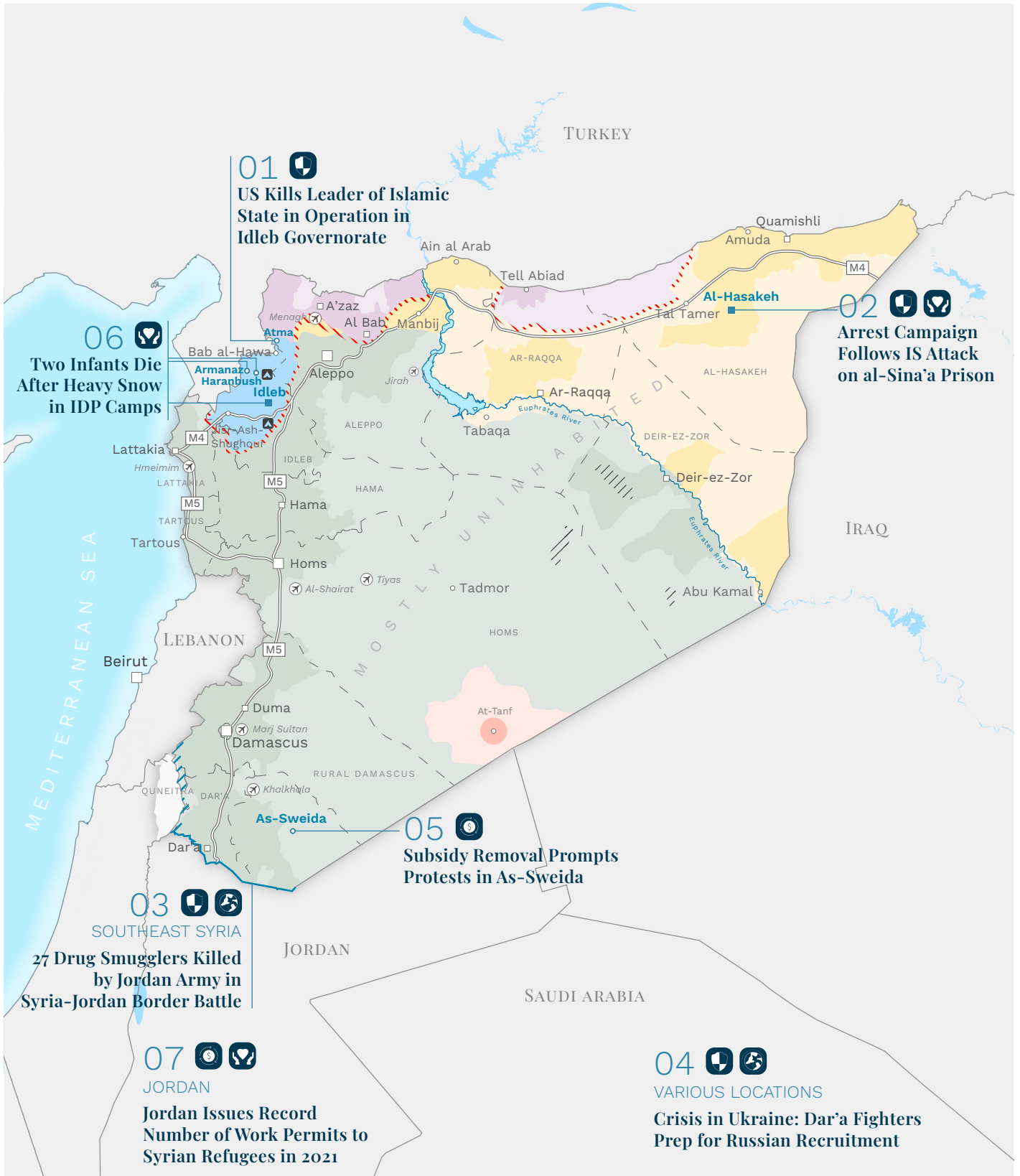
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The following is a brief synopsis of the *In-Depth Analysis* section:

On 27 January, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the Syrian Legal Development Programme (SLDP) published a highly critical report on the procurement practices of UN agencies working in Syria. The report shows how due diligence efforts have in some cases become a box-ticking exercise, posing reputational and programmatic risks. Donor agencies can reduce procurement risks through small steps, but meaningfully introducing a rights-centred approach will require more sustained adaptations. One such solution is a humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus, which offers the advantage of resolving other issues that continue to vex the response.

The following is a brief synopsis of the *Whole-of-Syria Review*:

- 01 On 2 February, Islamic State (IS) leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi was killed in a US raid in Atma, Idlib Governorate. Though it is a morale-boosting victory in the fight against IS, the group's decentralised structure means the killing is unlikely to have a significant impact on the group's operational capacity.
- 02 The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have carried out an arrest campaign in Deir-ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa following the IS prison attack. Such actions risk social cohesion and may alienate civilian populations, with long-term consequences.
- 03 At least 27 have been killed in a violent clash between Jordanian border security forces and drug smugglers. The incident is a dramatic escalation in violence, and it suggests that the region is heating up despite plans to blunt drug exports from southern Syria.
- 04 Russia has reportedly begun recruiting Syrian fighters for deployment to Ukraine. Though unconfirmed, these reports are indicative of the ways violence continues to be exported from Syria.
- 05 On 3 February, As-Sweida witnessed large protests against a Syrian Government decision to exclude 15 percent of families from the subsidy rolls. The decision, an attempt to balance Government spending amid economic freefall, is a blunt instrument that will exacerbate economic insecurity.
- 06 Two infants have died from winter conditions in Idlib camps. Such deaths are avoidable with better coordination and expedited winterisation, but funding alone will not eliminate such risks.
- 07 Jordan issued 62,000 work permits to Syrian refugees in 2021, the highest number ever. Refugees will be better able to support themselves, but unemployment remains high, and more stability is needed to reduce migration pressure.



**01**   
**US Kills Leader of Islamic State in Operation in Idleb Governorate**

**02**   
**Arrest Campaign Follows IS Attack on al-Sina'a Prison**

**06**   
**Two Infants Die After Heavy Snow in IDP Camps**

**03**   
**27 Drug Smugglers Killed by Jordan Army in Syria-Jordan Border Battle**

**05**   
**Subsidy Removal Prompts Protests in As-Sweida**

**04**   
**Crisis in Ukraine: Dar'a Fighters Prep for Russian Recruitment**

**07**   
**Jordan Issues Record Number of Work Permits to Syrian Refugees in 2021**

<p><b>Population Density</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Major city (750,000+)</li> <li> City (100,000+)</li> <li> Town (25,000+)</li> <li> IDP Camp</li> <li> Governorate</li> <li> Military airbase</li> </ul> <p>100 km</p>	<p><b>Territorial Control</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Government of Syria</li> <li> Syrian Democratic Forces</li> <li> Syrian National Army</li> <li> US-Backed Opposition Groups</li> <li> Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham</li> <li> Islamic State presence</li> <li> Contested area</li> <li> UN Disengagement Observer Force</li> </ul> <p>LOW POPULATION DENSITY</p>	<p><b>Type Of Incident</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Humanitarian Issues</li> <li> Social</li> <li> Regional Intervention</li> <li> Security</li> <li> Economy</li> <li> Governance</li> </ul>
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## IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

**O**n 27 January, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the Syrian Legal Development Programme (SLDP) published a highly critical [report](#) on the procurement practices of UN agencies working in Syria. Their review found that inapt contracting procedures pose a “serious risk of financing abusive entities”, a distinct challenge to aid operations in Syria. For donor agencies and implementers, the report is highly resonant. It comes amid broader attempts to grapple with the hard realities of contracting and partner selection, a necessity as greater emphasis is laid on scaling up assistance and increasing the impact of international support in the face of rising needs. A rights-centred approach is possible, but only if donors play a more active role shaping the aid architecture of Syria.

### What does the report say?

Citing procurement agreements with entities affiliated with militias and Syrian state security agencies, the study found that existing due diligence protocols generally fail to account for human rights principles and related risks. In several cases, contracted entities were alleged to be directly responsible for human rights abuses. Other contractors were on international sanctions lists. Importantly, the report also found that UN agencies rely heavily on self-reporting by prospective vendors, rather than independent due diligence procedures. Context-specific human rights risk assessments were rarely noted. The report provides a [toolkit](#) for procurement officers to better consider human rights-centred analysis in their work, and urges donors and UN bodies to use the Regional Dialogue Mechanism to mediate concerns over due diligence.

### Beyond box ticking

Issues such as these are familiar to donors, who are struggling to practice more effective due diligence and conflict-sensitivity procedures, particularly amid the push toward early recovery. In general, mitigation strategies continue to focus on risks that stem from the most superficial manifestations of the war economy, including diversion,

compliance issues, and linkages to the Syrian Government. Some small adaptations can make a large difference in these areas. Breaking large contracts into small tranches will open up bids to a deeper pool of potential vendors, reducing reliance on big-dollar contractors who are more likely to have problematic linkages. In terms of project design, aid actors can also reduce risk by approaching strategic sectors with caution. Procurement of high-value or highly desired goods, construction materials, electronics, and solar equipment should be managed carefully. So too projects in critical areas such as wheat or fuel, which are inherently attractive to territorial actors. To have a deeper impact, however, a more comprehensive view of contracting and implementation risk is needed (see: [Beyond Checkpoints: Local Economic Gaps and the Political Economy of Syria's Business Community](#)).

### Operationalising a rights-based approach

Despite the growing emphasis on accountability and human rights in Syria, aid actors have yet to fully centre rights in their implementation approaches. Adopting human rights criteria as another lense to assess vendor suitability may be an important first step, but more fundamental change is needed if rights criteria are to be universalised and applied in a whole of Syria framework. One possible solution, adopted successfully in other contexts, has gone little-discussed in Syria: nexus-style programming. On the highest policy levels, a nexus approach has been widely endorsed as a solution to the increasing complexity of protracted crises which works by tearing down institutional silos and unifying programming funding (see: [Nexus Programme Profiles](#)). The complexities of such an approach in Syria warrant further study, yet their initial promise is evident. Adopting a nexus mindset and funding it through a pooled fund would allow donor agencies to unify funding streams, do more with less, and strengthen their upfront emphasis on rights as a routine dimension of vendor selection criteria. Such innovations are in urgent need of exploration as the aid community seeks ways of navigating the evolving crisis in Syria.



## WHOLE OF SYRIA REVIEW



## 01 ATMA, IDLEB GOVERNORATE

## US Kills Leader of Islamic State in Operation in Idleb Governorate

On 2 February, Islamic State (IS) leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi was killed during a US raid in Atma, Idleb Governorate. During the operation, al-Qurayshi detonated a bomb that killed him and his family. The Syrian Civil Defence (aka the White Helmets) stated that at least 13 people were killed during the raid, including four women and six children. The death of al-Qurayshi occurred under similar circumstances to those of the former leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was killed in a US raid in Idleb Governorate in 2019. Nevertheless, his presence in Idleb is unlikely to signal any meaningful IS capacity in northwest Syria, where Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the de facto power in the governorate, remains hostile to the group.

### The head is cut off – again, but will the body die?

While undoubtedly a morale-boosting victory in the fight against the militant group, the death of the second “caliph” of IS is unlikely to have a significant impact on its operational capacity. The killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi had no impact on the number of operations IS carried out in the following period. Indeed, since the group’s territorial defeat in 2019, it has followed a strategy of decentralisation, returning to insurgency and pursuing guerrilla warfare. While al-Qurayshi’s death may spark a leadership crisis, individual cells across eastern Syria are likely to continue to operate according to the broad strategy, rooted in jihadist ideology of causing harm to their enemies wherever possible. Indeed, the group retains a significant ability to destabilise the areas in which it operates, shown notably by the raid on al-Sina’a Prison in Al-Hasakeh in January (see: [Syria Update 31 January 2022](#)). Aid implementers in areas of IS presence, such as northeast Syria, should be aware of the continued risk of attacks by the group and maintain dynamic security and contingency plans. Donors focused on counter-IS actions should carefully consider how livelihood and economic concerns feed into a cycle of recruitment.



## 02 AL-HASAKEH CITY, AL-HASAKEH GOVERNORATE

## Arrest Campaign Follows IS Attack on al-Sina’a Prison

On 27 January, local media sources reported that the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) arrested 50 civilians in Deir-ez-Zor city and rural Ar-Raqqa over purported IS affiliations. The arrests were part of a wide-reaching security sweep following the siege at al-Sina’a Prison in Al-Hasakeh (see: [Syria Update 31 January 2022](#)). The arrested were transferred to Ayed Prison in Tabaqa city, west of Ar-Raqqa. The prison has been shored up with additional forces, out of fear of IS-related incidents. The campaign follows the arrest of dozens of civilians and the reported forced removal of civilians from the Ghweran neighbourhood, site of the al-Sina’a prison attack, in the search for escaped IS inmates. Local sources indicate that the SDF has begun construction of a cement wall to separate the Ghweran neighbourhood from the Syrian Government-controlled zones of the city.

### SDF Blowback

The arrests point to the SDF’s difficult balancing act between security imperatives and cultivating community acceptance. This balance has often tipped in favour of security. The recent events have disrupted essential services in Al-Hasakeh Governorate and restricted the activities of relief groups, creating gaps in food assistance, access to clean water, and access to medical care. Local sources dispute the figures cited by media reports concerning the scale of arrests, housing demolitions, and other civilian fallout from the al-Sina’a attack. Nonetheless, the pursuit of IS affiliates has weighed heavily on the local population, and arrests in Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor show that the aftershocks will cascade further afield in SDF areas. The SDF’s actions towards civilians are likely to undermine its popular legitimacy, which will prompt social cohesion challenges and elevate the risk of localised resistance, if it is seen as exacting retribution. Such actions may create a self-fulfilling prophecy by allowing locally oriented extremist groups like IS to promote their mission as the clearest path to resisting the SDF.



## 03 SOUTHEAST SYRIA

## 27 Drug Smugglers Killed by Jordan Army in Syria-Jordan Border Battle

On 27 January, the Jordanian Armed Forces [announced](#) that they had foiled several drug trafficking operations on Jordan's northeastern border with Syria, killing 27 smugglers and injuring others. Local media [reported](#) that more than 30 smugglers were killed, including bedouin tribesmen from As-Sweida and Dar'a governorates. This comes on the heels of Jordan's new strategy on cross-border smuggling after two Jordanian army officers were killed deterring one such attempt (see: [Syria Update 24 January 2022](#)). The Jordanian Army has reportedly used heavy and medium weapons when confronting a series of simultaneous cross-border smuggling operations taking place under the cover of inclement weather.

### Narco-smuggling remains a lifeline, no matter how dangerous

The incident reflects a qualitative shift in the Jordanian Armed Forces' use of violence to challenge drug smuggling on the kingdom's border with Syria. According to Jordanian [officials](#), Amman has signaled to Damascus that if the Syrian Government does not stop narcotics trafficking at the source (see: [The Syrian Economy at War: Captagon, Hashish, and the Syrian Narco-State](#)), Jordan will be forced to protect its borders, come what may. The increased use of force may discourage smuggling attempts in the short term, but it is highly unlikely to halt the trade altogether.

Bedouin-led smuggling networks may respond with increasing violence, to the detriment of both states and commercial networks in border areas. Financial pressures all but guarantee that narco-smuggling will continue, however, even if actors are forced to develop new methods and routes. Clashes are likely to continue in the absence of a comprehensive solution to stop the narcotics manufacturing chain (see: [Syria in 2022: New Aid Approaches For an Evolving Crisis](#)), which has become a challenge for regional countries and aid actors.

### Jordan-Syria Border: More Violence, More Drugs

Year	Captagon Pills Seized
2020	1,400,000
2021	15,000,000
2022 to date	5,500,000

Source: Jordanian Armed Forces



## 04 VARIOUS LOCATIONS

## Crisis in Ukraine: Dar'a Fighters Prep for Russian Recruitment

On 28 January, unconfirmed media [reports](#) indicated that Russian forces have begun recruiting fighters in Syria for deployment to Ukraine. Reportedly, Russia is seeking to recruit 2,500 local fighters from the Fifth Corps, Fourth Corps, and the Tiger Forces. Local sources have indicated that fighters with the Eighth Brigade in Dar'a also anticipate being registered to travel to Ukraine, but no details concerning mobilisation or registration plans are available.

### Unconfirmed, but a familiar pattern

The reports of Syrians mobilising in support of Russia in or around Ukraine are conflicting and should not be taken at face value. They are nonetheless a worrying echo of the past regional conflicts in which Russia heavily recruited Syrian combatants. Most notably, since late 2020, Russia has recruited thousands of fighters to protect its interests and military bases in Libya (see: [The Syria-Libya Conflict Nexus: From Brothers in Revolution to Partners in Crime](#)), as it has done for other contexts, including the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (see: [Syria Update 12 October 2020](#)). The lack of civil employment opportunities and the continuing economic collapse provide an environment conducive to military mobilisation (see: [The Syrian economy at war: Armed group mobilization as livelihoods and protection strategy](#)).

How and whether Syrians will also be deployed to Ukraine remains to be seen. However, Syrians' deployment to Ukraine would provide another instance in which violence has been exported from Syria. European actors should also note that Syrians sent to the European neighbourhood may attempt to establish new migration routes.



## 05 AS-SWEIDA

## Subsidy Removal Prompts Protests in As-Sweida

On 3 February, As-Sweida witnessed large [protests](#) against a Syrian Government decision to exclude from subsidies 596,628 families, around 15 percent of the number previously subsidised through the electronic [smart card](#) system. Protesters [blocked](#) the As-Sweida-Damascus

Highway and closed Government institutions in several towns in As-Sweida's northern countryside. In a bid to ease tensions, Governor Namir Makhoul met with protestors and pledged to continue selling bread at subsidised prices to all citizens, though the protestors called for the decision to be scrapped entirely. In an interview on 30 January, the Assistant Minister of Communications and Technology for Digital Transformation, Fadia Suleiman, [said](#) the decision to remove subsidies is based on criteria such as private car ownership, the value of real estate holdings, and incomes. On 24 January, the Syrian Ministry of Communications and Technology [announced](#) that it is working on a website to allow excluded groups to challenge the decision and have their cases reconsidered.

Amid high prices of goods across Government-held areas of Syria, the categorisation of 15 percent of families as “better off” and the removal of their subsidies is a blunt instrument that will exacerbate economic insecurity. The move will likely lead to further frustration, and public demonstrations in as-Sweida likely express the frustration that is felt nationwide, including in areas where open demonstrations are difficult.

### Squeezing a non-existent middle

Amid high prices of goods across Government-held areas of Syria, the categorisation of 15 percent of families as “better off” and the removal of their subsidies is a blunt instrument that will exacerbate economic insecurity. The move will likely lead to further frustration, and public demonstrations in as-Sweida likely express the frustration that is felt nationwide, including in areas where open demonstrations are difficult. Nevertheless, the decision is likely a necessary step (a long-held policy preference) for the cash-strapped Government of Syria in its drive to balance spending amid economic freefall (see: [Syria in 2022: New Aid Approaches for an Evolving Crisis](#)). The excluded families will still be able to access their allocations of commodities through the smart card system, but will pay the unsubsidised price. The Government has said that the subsidies will be reserved for the most vulnerable and the money saved will be used to increase salaries, which remain below equivalent salaries in 2016 (see: [Syria Update 20 December 2021](#)). More broadly, however, the removal of subsidies does nothing to alleviate the cost-of-living crisis in Syria, as insufficient allocations and shortages of essential goods continue to drive up black market prices. Given widespread economic precarity throughout Syria, many families categorised as “better off” may struggle to absorb the additional costs of daily necessities, further increasing humanitarian needs.



06 AL-SHEIKH BAHR CAMP, ARMANAZ, IDLEB GOVERNORATE AND AL-LAITH CAMP, HARANBUSH, IDLEB GOVERNORATE

## Two Infants Die After Heavy Snow in IDP Camps

On 1 February, [media sources](#) reported that two infants, aged seven days and two months, died in Haranbush and Armanaz camps in northern Idleb Governorate after heavy snow and freezing temperatures struck northwest Syria. The two children were taken to the hospital, where doctors said the cause of their death was severe cold and bleeding from the lungs. The Syrian Response Coordination Group [demanded](#) that donors and relief agencies take urgent action to provide winterisation aid to IDP camps in northern Syria and enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian operations in the region during the next three months. The group also noted that access to heating materials is highly restricted in 70 percent of the camps in Idleb.

### The fatal consequences of inaction

Such deaths will be more easily avoided with better coordination and expedited winterisation, but they will persist as long as Syrians are forced to make do with substandard temporary shelters and limited access to heating fuel and other support. Winter conditions have already proved fatal in Syria this season (see: [Syria Update 24 January 2022](#)). Over 1.7 million people are living in flimsy tents in northwest Syria, including in areas that are prone to flooding and exposed to seasonal hazards. On 31 January, Mark Cutts, the UN Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, [tweeted](#) that “more funding is urgently needed to scale up the response.” Yet funding is not the only problem. Coordination between UN agencies, international and local NGOs, and planning for winterisation need to take place earlier and be executed more effectively if such conditions are to be made less fatal to the Syrians forced to endure.

Such deaths will be more easily avoided with better coordination and expedited winterisation, but they will persist as long as Syrians are forced to make do with substandard temporary shelters and limited access to heating fuel and other support.



07 JORDAN

## Jordan Issues Record Number of Work Permits to Syrian Refugees in 2021

On 25 January, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) [reported](#) that Jordan issued 62,000 work permits to Syrian refugees in 2021, compared to 38,756 in 2020. This was the highest number of permits issued in a calendar year since Syrian refugees were permitted to apply in 2016. Half of the permits were flexible, meaning that Syrians can move between employers and governorates for jobs in the same sector. Jordan officially hosts around 670,000 Syrian refugees, registered with UNHCR, though the true number is [estimated](#) at over 1.3 million – the second-highest number per capita after Lebanon.

### A small step for procedural stability, no giant leap for job opportunities

The issuance of work permits is important in building durable solutions for the Syrian refugee population in Jordan, but opportunities remain limited. The increase has largely been attributed to a Jordanian government decision in July 2021 that allowed Syrian refugees to work in all sectors and fields open to non-Jordanians, such as services, crafts, and assembly, whereas previously they could only work as day-labourers in fields such as agriculture and construction. The permits are limited to manual labour, and with Jordan's unemployment rate standing at around 23 percent, competition for jobs is high. Despite this, [analyses](#) show that work permits lead to higher wages and more secure employment, as those without permits face greater irregularity in employment and poorer conditions. While bureaucratic procedures are in place for greater numbers of Syrian refugees to work in Jordan, there is a need for further livelihood opportunities to enable refugees to support themselves, a key step to reducing migratory pressures.



## OPEN SOURCE ANNEX

## Open Source Annex

The Open Source Annex highlights key media reports, research, and primary documents that are not examined in the Syria Update. For a continuously updated collection of such records, searchable by geography, theme, and conflict actor — and curated to meet the needs of decision-makers — please see COAR’s comprehensive online search platform [Alexandrina](#).

**Note:** These records are solely the responsibility of their creators. COAR does not necessarily endorse — or confirm — the viewpoints expressed by these sources.

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### Israel Fires Rocket Barrage at Damascus Area, Syria Says

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**What does it say?** In the early morning hours of 31 January, a barrage of Israeli missiles reportedly struck Hezbollah arms caches in the vicinity of Damascus, causing material damage but no reported casualties. The incident is the first such Israeli attack of 2022, after 29 attacks throughout 2021 targeting Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed armed groups.

**Reading between the lines:** The permanent presence of Iranian-backed armed groups in Syria is both a *fait accompli* and a red line for Israel. Unable to decisively eliminate the threat, Israel will likely continue a policy of “mowing the lawn” with periodic strikes in the foreseeable future.

**Source:** Haaretz  
**Language:** English  
**Date:** 31 January 2022

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### "Sanctioned" Syrian ministers touring Europe

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**What does it say?** In November and December 2021, a number of Syrian Government officials travelled to EU countries to participate in meetings of international organisations and fora, despite the fact they were officially sanctioned by the EU.

**Reading between the lines:** As the article points out, sanctioned officials may be able to legally enter Europe, despite being sanctioned, if on official business with international organisations — especially the UN. This loophole illustrates the limited utility of sanctions — a “small stick,” as the article puts it — to shape the behaviour of the Government of Syria when not backed up by credible sanctions of a more serious nature.

**Source:** Enab Baladi  
**Language:** Arabic  
**Date:** 30 Jan 2022

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### Islamic State Plotted Comeback Long Before Syria Prison Attack

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**What does it say?** While the Islamic State is unlikely to ever regain its territorial ‘caliphate’, officials and experts believe it to be a growing threat in the lands it once dominated, and that the AL-Hasakeh prison attack of January will not be the last of its kind.

**Reading between the lines:** While a return to outright dominance is unlikely, the Islamic State could indeed persist as a mid-level threat, a millenarian mafia both thriving on and compounding the pervasive political chaos and civil strife in Syria and Iraq — especially as the US, increasingly preoccupied with pressing great-power threats to global security, seeks to extricate itself from the region.

**Source:** Wall Street Journal  
**Language:** English  
**Date:** 28 January 2022

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## Syria: Assad regime announces prosecuting US officials

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**What does it say?** The Government of Syria released a statement on 27 January calling on the US to withdraw its forces from Syria, threatening to prosecute US officials and members of the armed forces, and accusing it of supporting separatist ambitions in northeast Syria and controlling the actions of the Islamic State.

**Reading between the lines:** While it is tempting to view the Syrian Government's statement as both misinformation and a toothless riposte to recent trials of its former officials in Germany, it can also be seen as a veiled threat to engage in hostage diplomacy if it captures US forces stationed in Syria (the threat of both penal consequences and the levy of "compensation" is made explicit).

Source: [Middle East Monitor](#)  
Language: English  
Date: 29 January 2022

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## Iran is putting down roots in eastern Syria, outcompeting Assad's regime in signing up fighters

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**What does it say?** While Iranian support was a crucial factor in securing al-Assad's rule, Iran is also a de facto competitor to the Syrian Government in areas such as Deir-ez-Zor, where Iranian-backed militias lure young men with better pay and benefits than the Syrian Arab Army can offer, while waging quiet hearts-and-minds campaigns to win over the local population with services and proselytisation.

**Reading between the lines:** As momentum builds for early recovery programming in Government of Syria-held areas, donors and implementers will have to confront the fact that the true power in many such areas is not the Government of Syria,

but rather Iran and its proxies. This adds to the complexity of negotiating access, vetting, and avoiding red lines.

Source: [Washington Post](#)  
Language: English  
Date: 28 January 2022

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## Crisis in Syria: Economic crisis compounds a decade of war

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**What does it say?** The IRC reports that, while violence has abated, Syria continues to face desperate need. The risk of major offensives remains, the country is facing the worst economic crisis since the war began, access to basic goods and services is likely to deteriorate further, and the expiration of the cross-border mandate in mid-2022 could throw the whole humanitarian response into question.

**Reading between the lines:** The challenges identified by this article reflect those identified in [COAR's Syria in 2022 paper](#), which concludes that the crisis is evolving to a phase where factors other than violence will be driving humanitarian need primarily, and that donors and implementers should "consider how to move beyond outmoded emergency response approaches to achieve more substantive, lasting change."

Source: [International Rescue Committee](#)  
Language: English  
Date: 31 January 2022

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## Turkey accused of sending scores of refugees back to Syria

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**What does it say?** On 1 February, reports emerged that Turkish authorities had deported approximately 150 Syrian refugees to Syria three days earlier, after rounding them up in police sweeps in Istanbul. Some of the refugees reportedly had legal residencies, and were forced to sign "voluntary deportation" papers.

**Reading between the lines:** Despite Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's rhetoric to the contrary, forced deportation, oppressive treatment and abuse, and cynical weaponisation of Syrian refugees is nothing new. However, with anti-refugee sentiment widespread among the Turkish public in the run up to the 2023 elections and some opposition leaders openly mooting mass deportation, the politicisation of the refugee issue is likely to escalate further, and such deportations are likely to become more frequent – a reality that the aid community on both sides of the border will need to grapple with.

Source: [Middle East Eye](#)  
Language: English  
Date: 2 February 2022

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## European Union member states increase their pledge of Covid-19 vaccines to Syria

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**What does it say?** In a press release on 30 January 2022, the EEAS EU-DEL announced that Spain has donated 381,600 units of Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine to Syria through the COVAX programme, and that the EU, in cooperation with the WHO, aims to achieve 70 percent vaccination of Syria by mid-2022.

**Reading between the lines:** With Syria's vaccination rate at only 13 percent, well below the December 2021 target of 20 percent, achieving the 70 percent midyear target will be an uphill climb. Logistical challenges aside, vaccine hesitancy remains an issue. Nonetheless, this donation, coming on the heels of Chinese and Cuban vaccine deliveries, will be an important but insufficient step in both addressing public health needs and demonstrating ongoing EU investment in Syria.

Source: [EEAS – Delegation of the European Union to Syria](#)  
Language: English  
Date: 30 January 2022

The Wartime and Post-Conflict Syria project (WPCS) is funded by the European Union and implemented through a partnership between the European University Institute (Middle East Directions Programme) and the Center for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR). WPCS will provide operational and strategic analysis to policymakers and programmers concerning prospects, challenges, trends, and policy options with respect to a mid-conflict and post-conflict Syria. WPCS also aims to stimulate new approaches and policy responses to the Syrian conflict through a regular dialogue between researchers, policymakers and donors, and implementers, as well as to build a new network of Syrian researchers who will contribute to research informing international policy and practice related to their country.

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