

Syria Monthly Report



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Overview

6 October

A settlement center is established in As-Sweida, where individuals wanted by the Syrian government for military service, or outstanding criminal files, are able to settle their status and gain a six month amnesty before future service (military or security).

10 October

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham intervenes in clashes in northern Aleppo between different factions of the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army. By gaining territory from one of the armed groups – the Al-Hamzah Division – through an alliance with the Third Corps, HTS now controls a key fuel trading route into Idleb.

12 October

Bus drivers go on strike in Al-Hasakeh – with fuel prices rising, the Administration-set charges were no longer sufficient to provide a living. The strike was ultimately successful, and the charge for specific trav-

el routes has been raised. The Autonomous Administration also later raised the salaries of its employees, also in response to strikes.

17 October

Teachers' unions in the northwest agree to end a six-week long strike – although some demands were met, the result was largely unsuccessful. Clashes, threat of dismissal and lack of official negotiating power meant the demands of the teachers were not wholly met.

27 October

President Assad opens a Russian-funded gas production plant in Homs, in further efforts by the government to increase supply of industrial and domestic fuel to areas under its control.

Ongoing

In the northeast, agricultural production has been impacted by the delay in subsidized agricultural diesel deliveries, putting farmers' livelihoods

at risk. Diesel delivery delays have forced farmers to purchase black-market diesel at significantly higher prices to irrigate their lands. With the onset of winter, fuel shortages and high prices are having a profound impact on agricultural livelihoods, access to basic commodities, and socioeconomic stability in local communities across Autonomous Administration areas.

Through October, market prices, particularly those of essential food items, continue to rise in government-held areas. Traders are accused of increasing their prices for unjustified reasons by taking advantage of currency speculation and the recent devaluation of the pound. Ineffective economic policies, financial instability, low foreign direct investment, and monetary mismanagement are likely to sustain increases in production and transportation costs, which will continue to be reflected in consumer prices.



Teachers' strikes have been held since the beginning of September in Aleppo, with the teachers union demanding better living and working conditions, and an increase in salaries to match inflation. Education officials lack authority in the region, which is governed by Turkish authorities across the border. (Source: Twitter).

Summary

President Bashar al-Assad presided over the launch of the South Middle Area Gas Production Plant, a facility that was reportedly built by the Russian engineering company Stroytransgaz in Homs. The president has attempted to increase domestic and industrial gas supplies by increasing domestic production (by opening new plants), securing gas import tenders (as seen recently in meetings with Algerian officials), and following through on its energy partnerships (for example, with existing contracts with Russia). However, currently these measures have only led to a less than 1% increase in gas supply, from 11.1m to 11.2m cubic meters per day.

Settlements have been taking place in As-Sweida, in an apparent attempt by Damascus to bridge a gap between the government and local communities, to minimal effect.

Ongoing fuel shortages, import restrictions and unhelpful economic policies have further impacted prices throughout south and central Syria.

In the northeast, civil unrest has been seen throughout Administration-held areas. Strikes and protest have meant the Administration has had to increase the cost of travel routes to appease bus drivers, and increase employees' salaries to prevent further strikes. Delays in diesel deliveries to agricultural workers have meant disruption to farmers, while high fuel costs are also making it difficult for them to afford proper irrigation.

There has been a significant change in the control of fuel in opposition-controlled areas in October. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) intervened in clashes between two factions of the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), and formed an alliance with Al-Hamzah Division. The intervention looks to be a calculated plan to take control of a key fuel route into Idleb, the Al-Hamran crossing on the outskirts of Jarabulus. The crossing was controlled by the Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah (a main component of the SNA's Third Corps), also affiliated with the SNA, however was seized by Al-Hamzah Division alongside HTS. Economically, control of the crossing is likely to yield extensive profits for HTS. However, the Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah continues to have authority over the refining and transportation of the fuel; continued delivery into Idleb is now dependent on the unlikely outcome of good relations between the two groups.

Teachers have stopped striking in Aleppo, after six weeks. Their demands were met only partially, as strikes broke up following the clashes, after increased threats of dismissal, and with the lack of ability of officials in Aleppo to instigate change – the education sector in Aleppo is under Turkish authority, governed from across the border in neighboring provinces.

Cover photo: Farmers in northeast Syria are braced for the winter with temperatures falling to just above zero, and fuel prices continuing to rise, making irrigation expensive. Humanitarian organizations are providing solar panels to produce cost-efficient energy. (Source: Mercy Corps Syria, 2022).

Economic indicators

	August 2022	September 2022	October 2022
SYP/USD official exchange rate	2,800	3,000	3,000
SYP/USD parallel market rate	4,391.2 (7.8%)	4,581.1 (4.6%)	5,089.7 (11.1%)
TRY/USD official rate	18.0 (3.2%)	18.3 (1.5%)	18.6 (1.6%)

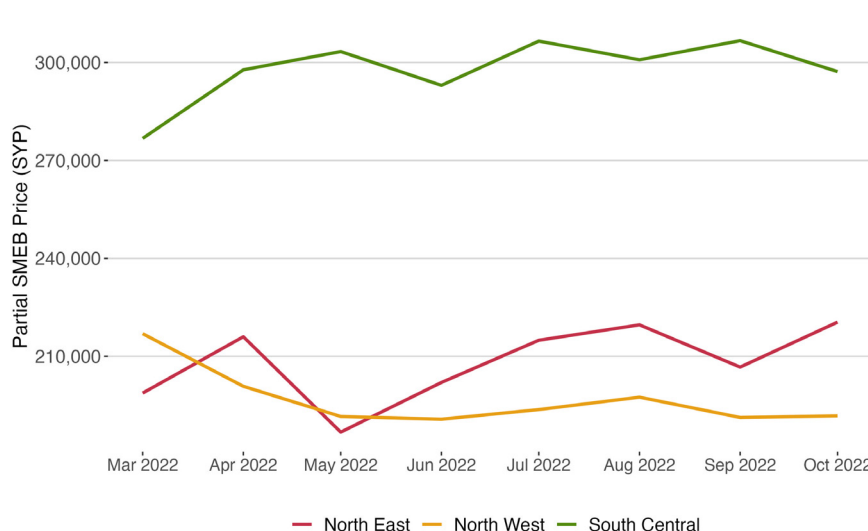
Economic indicator 1.

Official and parallel market exchange rates, SYP/USD and TRY/USD, August–October 2022



Economic indicator 2.

SYP/USD and TRY/USD, January 2021–November 2022

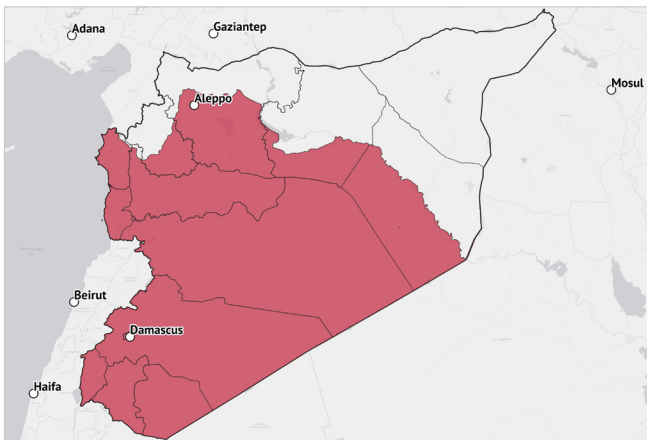


Economic indicator 3.

Change in partial SMEB price by zone of control, March–October 2022

HAT's partial SMEB price monitoring tool is in part built on Sphere recommendations of a 2100kcal daily diet per person. Items covered in the assessment include basic food items such as bread, rice, bulghur, lentils, oil, sugar, meats, vegetables, and fruits.

South & central



Syrian government seeks new avenues for gas production

The prolonged fuel crisis continues to affect Syrian government areas, negatively impacting the Syrian economy and worsening conditions for Syrian communities as winter approaches. Supply shortages, coupled with increased rationing, have forced households to purchase fuel from the black market at marked-up premiums; however, sources have stated that gas for household use has been increasingly difficult to procure, even despite a willingness to pay exorbitant black-market prices of up to 150,000 SYP per canister. Additionally, the amount of gas provided for industrial use to power stations has been insufficient for a steady supply of electricity. The Syrian government has attempted to rectify the situation by increasing domestic production, securing gas import tenders, and following through on its energy partnerships.

New gas production plant opened in Homs

President Bashar al-Assad [presided](#) over the launch of the South Middle Area Gas Production Plant, a facility that was reportedly built by the Russian engineering company Stroytransgaz in Homs with a price tag of approximately EUR 80m, and SYP 2bn. The plant, which opened on 27 October, had undergone several successful [trials](#) conducted at the beginning of the month – it is reported to [consist](#) of four compressors with the capacity to pump 2m

cubic meters of gas per day. However, the state-run SANA News Agency stated that the plant will only be adding 500,000 cubic meters per day to the country's domestic gas production at the current stage.

Syrian Prime Minister, Hussein Arnous, [stated](#) on 26 October that the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources technical teams were able to bring three gas fields into service, increasing total gas production in government-held areas to 11.2 million cubic meters. However, despite the reopening of gas fields and infrastructure improvement, the Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, Bassam Tohmeh, [highlighted](#) challenges the government has been facing accessing gas fields located in Syria's exclusive economic zone (allocated to territory along the coast for countries to invest in their natural sea resources). Tohmeh stated; "the Mediterranean sea is rich with oil and gas reserves, especially gas." However, he later added that US sanctions on the Syrian oil sector have been hampering its drilling efforts in the Mediterranean, denying it the ability to purchase or import the necessary technology, or to hire a geographical survey company to assess the location and size of potential oil and gas wells.



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad presiding over the South Middle Area Gas Production Plant's launch (Source: [SANA](#))

Government in talks with Algeria for gas imports

The Syrian government has also been attempting to expand its foreign gas supply sources. Tohmeh, reportedly [met](#) with his Algerian counterpart, Mohamad Arkab, on 13 October during the Russia

Energy Forum to discuss the possibility of cooperation between the two countries in the energy sector. During the meeting, both delegations discussed potential cooperation in the energy and mining sectors. Moreover, Tohmeh requested that Algeria supply Syria with household gas. The request was welcomed by Arkab who asked that a Syrian delegation visit Algeria to conclude the discussions and agree on the matter.

Government revisits energy cooperation with Russia

The Syrian government also [held discussions](#) with the Russian delegation regarding the latter's energy-related projects in Syria and the ongoing cooperation between both sides in the energy sector. Tohmeh also met with Russian energy minister, Nikolay Shulginov, during the Russian Energy Forum to discuss various Russian energy projects currently being built in Syria including the newly-operational South Middle Area Gas Production Plant, Tishreen Thermal Power Plant (run by Technopromexport, a Russian energy firm), phosphate mining projects run by STG Logistics, and exploring shale oil projects inside the country. Moreover, both delegations agreed on updating their energy roadmap – without mentioning the details – and discussed the training of Syrian energy sector engineers in Russia.

Efforts fall short of significantly increasing gas production

The government's recent efforts to increase gas supply have failed to yield significant results. Arnous's announced increase in gas production to 11.2 million cubic meters per day amounts to just a 1% increase; prior to the opening of the new gas fields and plants, [production stood at 11.1 million](#). It is unlikely that the slight increase will be able to alleviate gas shortages in government-held areas; additionally, the [majority of the supply](#) goes to electricity generation and powering the Homs phosphate plant, and is not provided for domestic use.

While the Syrian government is trying its best to improve its energy infrastructure, it faces numer-

ous challenges. Amid the declining economy and poor foreign investment due to sanctions, the Syrian government lacks the necessary resources to proceed with several infrastructure projects simultaneously without significant foreign investment or financial support. Work on the Tishreen Thermal Power Plant project was inaugurated approximately 16 years ago; however, improvements and rehabilitations to the plant reportedly still [have not been implemented](#). The South Middle Area Gas Production Plant took approximately 13 years before completion and, as mentioned previously, only adds 500,000 cubic meters per day to overall gas production.

Additionally, although Damascus continues to seek new avenues for oil and gas imports, as seen in its recent meetings with Algerian officials, it continues to face issues with market competition, low foreign currency reserves and infrastructural limitations. Using the example of Algeria, it has recently [increased](#) its gas supply to European countries (following Russia cutting off its supply into Europe) with many European leaders [viewing](#) it as an increasingly critical energy partner; these western countries also offer Algeria foreign currency for exported gas, unlike the Syrian government, which is likely to struggle in paying the bills due to its low foreign currency reserves. Further, [no Liquefied Natural Gas \(LNG\) Terminals](#) currently exist in government-held areas; construction of this infrastructure would come with a hefty price tag, an endeavor unlikely to be affordable for the government. The absence of these terminals prevents the Syrian government from de-liquefying hypothetical LNG shipments from Algeria, which is the only means of transporting gas in the absence of a gas pipeline connecting the two countries.

As-Sweida settlements attempt to improve government relations with locals

On 6 October, the director of General Intelligence (of the State Security apparatus), Hussam Louka, [inaugurated](#) a settlement center at the April 7th

Hall, located in As-Sweida city. The opening of the center offers the opportunity for individuals wanted by the Syrian government for compulsory and reservist military service, as well as those with pending security files, to settle their statuses with respective military and security services. The head of the settlement committee, Brigadier Yasser al Khuzam, indicated on 11 October that around 800 individuals have settled their status. He made further calls to those eligible to [take advantage](#) of the recent amnesty decree and report to the center where the process will continue until the end of the year.

The launch of the new settlements [coincided](#) with the 49th anniversary of the 1973 October War and occurred a week after a high-profile meeting between local figures and a government delegation, headed by Louka and Mohamad Rahmoun, minister of the interior, in As-Sweida city. More importantly, this is the [second](#) settlement process to take place after the major developments which altered the governorate's security landscape during July and August, when Harakat Rijal al Karama (HRK, or Men of Dignity Movement) waged a decisive [campaign](#) against local factions affiliated with the Military Intelligence Directorate (MID). The two-month-long confrontations most notably resulted in the dismantling of the Quwwat al Fajr group, headed by Raji Falhout, and effectively reducing MID's influence in As-Sweida governorate.

'New' settlements, same issues

Although the conclusion of the recent turbulence in As-Sweida might have presented a rare opportunity for the Syrian government to make amends with the local community, the prospects for such a scenario have already waned. In no observable way are the current settlements substantially different from previous attempts; media sources reported on 29 October that the [number](#) of individuals seeking has not exceeded 1,000, out of the approximately 25,000 individuals wanted for security or criminal charges and military service.

A handful of factors explain the low turnout. For military service evaders and deserters, local sources indicated the procedures did not specify a definite timeline for compulsory military service, which is highly discouraging, especially under the current socioeconomic circumstances. Local sources pointed out that most young men, particularly breadwinners, are unlikely to sacrifice their jobs for indefinite military service.¹ Furthermore, community and religious leaders in As-Sweida have long stated that a potentially acceptable must guarantee military service with the government's Syrian Arab Army (SAA) within the governorate or in non-frontline areas. The current, according to media and local sources, [stipulates](#) that individuals who settle their status would serve within the ranks of the First Brigade, whose deployments span Dar'a, Rural Damascus, As-Sweida, and Quneitra governorates. However, there are no assurances for this condition, as SAA conscripts from As-Sweida deserted the army on prior occasions when news emerged about [redeployment](#) outside the governorate; this is not to mention the well-documented poor [living conditions](#) of SAA conscripts within As-Sweida itself.



*Settlements ongoing s at the April 7th Hall, As-Sweida city.
(Source: [Snack Syrian](#))*

Interestingly, local sources reported that a sizable number of settled individuals wanted for military service aim to benefit from the 6-month grace period offered by the settlement process, during which they can apply for passports and travel abroad without limitations imposed by the Syrian government.

¹ The salary of a new SAA conscript amounts to a mere 74,000 SYP (\$14.8 on the black-market, or \$24.6 at the official exchange rate), which includes food accommodation, according to local sources.

However, one media source [counter-argued](#) that the 6-month period is insufficient for obtaining a passport (and an emergency passport costs 500,000 SYP). Another source added that the has [attracted](#) members of local armed groups – in particular, members of the now-dismantled MID-affiliated groups, who are now looking for a new cover, following HRK's crackdown. If this is indeed the case, the process offers protection to the same destabilizing forces whose presence has been a major source of local grievance. This trend is in parallel with reports from January 2022, when media sources indicated the MID was [offering](#) settlements for wanted criminal figures in exchange for payments.

Glaring trust gap persists between the local community and the Syrian government

Aside from the discouraging conditions outlined above, the Syrian government's marginalization of key local actors during settlement discussions has signaled its unwillingness to engage in a comprehensive dialogue with the local community, prematurely spelling the settlement's failure. This was most pronounced in the fact that representatives from HRK, and a prominent community leader known for being vocal against the government, Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri, [did not attend](#) the 29 September meeting between the government and community leaders in As-Sweida city; it remains uncertain whether or not HRK was invited. Instead, local attendance was [limited](#) to the pro-government leaders, including Sheikhs Youssef al Jarbou' and Hammoud al Hannawi, and As-Sweida's governor and secretary of the Baath Party branch. Sidelining HRK, a dominant actor which enjoys considerable local backing and recently spearheaded the campaign against MID-affiliated groups, contradicted the meeting's purpose and undermined its legitimacy. Local sources explained that HRK-affiliated figures are critical of the government's securitization of the As-Sweida, an approach which continues to prove futile in neighboring Dar'a where fragile security has persisted despite settlements.

The same local sources added that bridging the extant gap between state and society in As-Sweida could be initiated when the state improves service

provision, combats corruption, and contributes towards overall socio-economic recovery; the Syrian government's capacity and/or willingness to do so remains hamstrung. Locals have emphasized these priorities in the [protests](#) of February 2022 following the exclusion of many from the government's subsidization scheme. Sheikh Muwaffaq Tarif, the spiritual head of the Druze in Palestine and a major supporter of HRK, also voiced these demands during his [trip](#) to Moscow, where he met the deputy minister of foreign affairs, Mikhail Bogdanov.

A potentially successful would be a culmination of consecutive government efforts to regain local trust by addressing their demands, rather than a prerequisite for such efforts. Yet, the pressure on local livelihoods in As-Sweida, emblematic of the overall economic situation in government-held areas, continues to rise amid soaring prices of essential commodities and poor governance. Meanwhile, there are no indicators that the government can or is willing to achieve progress in this regard. The recent [harassment](#) of a Druze sheikh visiting As-Sweida at the Lebanese-Syrian borders by security members, and the [arbitrary arrest](#) of a local in Damascus by Air Force Intelligence are antagonistic policies that alienate the governorate's religious leadership and population alike and reinforce the securitized nature of the government's approach.

Prices continue increasing in government-held areas

Through October, market prices, particularly those of essential food items, continue to rise in government-held areas. High prices reportedly continue to be the most prevalent issue for many households as the government struggles to control prices. The Ministry of Domestic Trade has reportedly not been able to crack down enough on traders setting illegal prices for their products; pro-government media [stated](#) that these shortcomings have enabled traders to set their prices, leading to different prices being set for the same item in different stores. Moreover, many traders have reportedly been issuing fraudulent receipts to cover up price gouging; For example, traders selling sugar issue a receipt to

the Ministry at the official price of 4,600 SYP per kg while charging customers 5,500 SYP per kg.

Government officials consider price increases unjustified

Head of the Currency and Financial Markets Authority, Abed Fadliya, [stated](#) that traders are increasing their prices for unjustified reasons by taking advantage of currency speculation and the recent devaluation.² According to Fadliya, the devaluation only reduced the currency's value by 7%, and should have resulted in a 1–2% price increase in market prices – instead, prices rose by 10–20%. Fadliya added that traders were purchasing US dollars at the official rate and selling at the black-market rate. Member of the Damascus Chamber of Commerce, Mohamad Hallak, also [stated](#) that the devaluation should not have resulted in a price increase exceeding 3%, but added that the primary problem leading to high prices is low supply and the absence of competition.

Price increase attributed to low imports

According to Hallak, the reduction in imports has led to low supply, pushing prices up. Hallak reportedly [identified](#) three reasons discouraging traders from conducting import operations. First, the government's drive to connect all transactions, including imports, to its electronic payment system have made traders hesitant to move forward with their orders out of fear that the system would expose their actual finances and the Syrian government would impose taxes accordingly. Second, traders have faced difficulties in securing foreign currency from the Central Bank, necessary to procure imported goods, and have faced prolonged delays. Third, the increase in smuggling has become a problem for importers; consumers are opting to purchase smuggled items, which are not taxed, for their lower price.

Traders complain of unfair enforcement

Hallak also [highlighted](#) additional reasons why prices have recently increased, including the dai-

ly change in electricity and transportation costs (which entails both direct impact on prices and passed-through indirectly to consumers) and the 12% increase in customs fees following the pound's recent devaluation. Vice President of the Damascus Consumer Protection Association, Maher al-Aiz [stated](#) that fines and fees also increased by 10% following the devaluation. Pro-government media sources have stated that these realities have led traders to [complain](#) about the unfair price control enforcement conducted by the Ministry of Domestic Trade patrols. Traders have reportedly blamed producers and wholesale traders for the price increases, claiming that market prices would be lower if wholesale prices were lower. They have reportedly asked ministry patrols to crack down on the wholesalers instead of going after small-time traders.

Company closures due to unfavorable economic climate

Given the deteriorating economic situation, companies have reportedly been closing *en-masse* in government-held areas. The Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Protection's Companies manager, Zein al-Safi, [stated](#) that a total of 79 companies have closed down in Syria this year for a variety of economic and financial reasons; Safi identified the reasons as follows:

- The increased cost of industrial and agricultural production, of both imported and locally produced items, due to exchange rate volatility.
- The government's economic policies that aim to support the tourism sector instead of the productive sectors.
- The increased cost – and low supply – of electricity, which results in significant losses for companies, particularly in plastic and glass manufacturing.
- The high price and unavailability of both diesel and oil, even on the black market where the prices are higher.
- The constant loss of skilled labor and technical expertise due to the inability to offer competitive salaries.

² On 20 September the Syrian Central Bank devalued the Syrian pound by 7% against the dollar, from 2,814 to 3,015 SYP

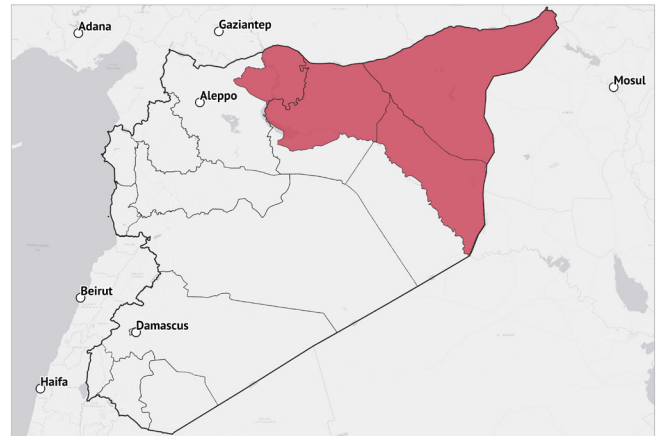
- Low household purchasing power that, in turn, lowers demand in the domestic market
- The export difficulties due to fees imposed on trucks traveling to foreign markets such as Jordan, Iraq, or the Gulf.
- Exporters are forced to sell part of their foreign currency profit to the government at the official exchange rate.
- Complex bureaucratic processes for obtaining import licenses and funding.
- Withdrawal ceilings and the illegality of trading with foreign currency in domestic markets.
- The immigration of business owners, particularly those in the industrial and agricultural sectors, from Syria due to the government's rushed and unplanned policies.
- Economic and financial sanctions imposed on the country in addition to global circumstances such as the Russia-Ukraine war and its impact on the global economy.

Price increases are set to continue as the government fails to stabilize the economy, provide a favorable investment climate, or properly enforce price control measures. The government has been unable to provide means of production, including raw materials and energy, at stable prices, leading to price fluctuations. The enforcement of restrictive economic policies, such as ceiling withdrawals from bank accounts, and forcing exporters to sell part of their foreign currency profits, is not appealing to potential investors who are likely to see their ability to spend additional funds in their operations disrupted and their profits slashed. Additionally, with the global economy at increased [risk of stagflation](#), countries and business owners are likely to invest in locations where political and economic stability are achieved, where there is a vibrant domestic market, and where they can guarantee a return on their investment.

Ineffective and counterproductive economic policies, financial instability, low foreign direct investment, and monetary mismanagement are likely to sustain increases in production and transportation

costs, which will continue to be reflected in consumer prices and make the livelihood situation for Syrian households difficult.

Northeast



Fuel (un)availability

Throughout October, and with the onset of winter, fuel shortages and high prices are having a profound impact on agricultural livelihoods, access to basic commodities, and socioeconomic stability in local communities across Autonomous Administration areas.

Administration's fuel price increases

The cost of petrol and gas canisters, used widely in agriculture and within households, are reported to have increased; from 3,500 to 4,870 per liter for diesel, and from 2,500-3,000 to 7,000 SYP for gas canisters. Local officials from the Administration in Quamishli city [attributed](#) the price hikes to high supply costs, amid a reduction in annual household gas canister allocations from 12 to 9. The price increases were followed by reports that the Administration had [formed](#) a specialized research committee, to conduct economic assessments to make decisions for budget improvement. The committee concluded a “partial and gradual increase” in the prices of basic commodities,³ including fuel, was necessary to generate revenue for the Administra-

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The necessary commodities reportedly include petrol, diesel, kerosene, gas, bread, and sugar

tion and increase employees' salaries.

The Autonomous Administration's Fuel Committee previously [adopted](#) a mechanism to facilitate vehicle owners' access to their petrol allocations through their fuel cards. However, the majority of vehicle owners reportedly [experienced](#) a delay in the fuel card distribution after submitting their applications, forcing them to buy petrol at higher rates. Media sources [highlighted](#) the Fuel Committee's inefficient oversight and lack of accountability in the fuel distribution process, resulting in long queues at gas stations, and a lack of supply for vehicle owners. Moreover, during the [past few months](#), several electricity generators in multiple residential neighborhoods stopped working because they had run out of diesel, an issue that has also led to the closure of several factories and bakeries across northeast Syria.

Diesel delays impact farmer livelihoods

Agricultural production has been impacted by the delay in subsidized agricultural diesel deliveries, putting farmers' livelihoods at risk. Diesel delivery delays have [forced](#) farmers to purchase black-market diesel at significantly higher prices⁴ to irrigate their lands, consequently increasing their cost of production. Moreover, local sources stated that the absence of efficient complaint mechanisms within local governing institutions to address challenges facing the agricultural sector has prevented farmers from demanding support and voicing their concerns. Media sources have also [shed light](#) on the lack of accountability of the Autonomous Administration's Agriculture and Fuel Committees in the diesel distribution system, further hindering effective fuel distribution. Since last year, diesel was [distributed](#) to farmers based on well depth; briefly stated, farmers who possess deeper wells require additional diesel allocations to pump water for irrigation purposes. However, the Agriculture Committee recently issued a [circular](#) banning the drilling of both surface-level and deep wells in its areas of control, justified by the need to preserve groundwater reserves. This circular has sparked popular

[discontent](#), especially among farmers, since well drilling represents a major source of water supply for agricultural, drinking, and domestic purposes. Meanwhile, local sources indicated that farmers continue to face challenges due to unaffordability and inaccessibility to sufficient quantities of diesel in light of the ongoing drought in northeast Syria since 2020; the drought has negatively impacted wheat and cotton production, subsequently reducing economic and commercial activities.

Increasing humanitarian needs

Fuel unavailability has also threatened to leave many camp residents in Administration-held areas without sufficient heating. IDPs from Syrian government-held areas are disproportionately affected, with media sources [suggesting](#) that their requests for diesel for heating were temporarily rejected by several local councils in northeast Syria until distribution to the region's residents was complete. The insufficient distribution of diesel for heating, not to mention the delays, can potentially exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in the camps. The [camp residents need](#) new tents, winter supplies and clothes, and tent insulators to be adequately prepared for the winter. Media sources [indicated](#) that camp residents are often forced to choose between securing basic needs and food items and buying heating supplies, noting that humanitarian aid is often insufficient or inefficiently distributed. The Autonomous Administration [provides](#) vouchers which grant IDPs access to fuel, including diesel, kerosene, and gas, and has allocated 300 liters of subsidized fuel for each family; however, media sources suggested that several families have complained about their poor quality. Moreover, local sources stated that the lack of alternatives to diesel and firewood and the ineffective response of local authorities to heating needs in camps, has pushed camp residents to burn waste and kerosene, which pose safety, health, and environmental risks.

Smuggling operations worsen fuel shortages

Local sources indicated that the ongoing fuel smuggling operations and inadequate fuel trade man-

⁴ Autonomous Administration sells diesel at subsidized price of 450-1200 SYP which can be purchased by fuel cards

agement and distribution caused instability and an increase in fuel prices in northeast Syria. Earlier this month, after news [circulated](#) about the establishment of a commercial river crossing linking the Syrian government and Autonomous Administration-controlled areas on the banks of the Euphrates River in Deir-ez-Zor governorate, tensions erupted between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and an armed group; media sources indicated that the armed group is allegedly engaged in cross-river smuggling operations and fear losing their revenues. However, cooperation between SDF members and river crossing smugglers has previously been [reported](#); SDF members based in the area facilitate the smugglers' movement in exchange for royalties. Media sources [added](#) that wheat and fuel shipments are smuggled to Iraq through illegal crossings in Al-Hasakeh governorate, further worsening the fuel crisis and food insecurity in the northeast. Local sources stated that the smuggled fuel shipments often constitute part of the local population and farmers' allocations, increasing the challenges faced by the agricultural sector and further delaying heating fuel distribution.

Strikes and protests continue in northeast Syria

In October, numerous protests were held throughout northeast Syria, largely driven by the deteriorating socioeconomic situation in light of the Autonomous Administration's inability to implement a policy that effectively remedies the myriad socio-economic issues that plague the region.

Teachers' protests in northeast Syria, demanding salary increases, improvement of service provision to schools, and enhancement of school security, continued throughout October, primarily in [Deir-ez-Zor](#) governorate and [Menbij](#) city. These [coincided](#) with the popular protests in these regions, during which civilians and employees in different sectors demanded salary increases, better economic and living conditions, provision of fuel and bread, and [improvements](#) to public services and infrastructure. In response, the SDF [imposed](#) curfews in several towns and villages in northeast Syria

and carried out raids and arrest campaigns against critics of the Administration's policies, with media sources indicating that tensions reportedly [erupted](#) between SDF and local communities.

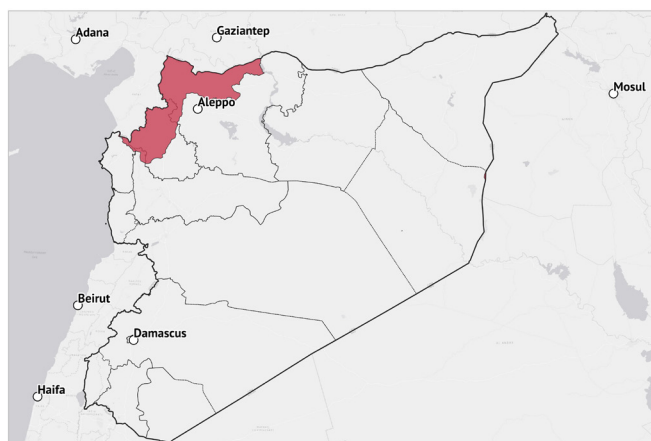
On 12 October bus drivers operating in Al-Hasakeh city suspended their activities and went on [strike](#), demanding an increase in passenger fees in light of the continuous depreciation of the Syrian pound, which reportedly surpassed 5,200 SYP per USD. The drivers called upon the Autonomous Administration to [raise](#) the passenger fees from 200 SYP to 500 SYP, which they consider to be a fair realignment with the increasing costs of vehicle maintenance (usually priced in dollars) as well as a regulatory measure that would alleviate socio-economic burdens on their livelihoods. Media sources indicated that a significant portion of drivers were already charging 300 SYP per ride within Al-Hasakeh city, despite the absence of official price adjustments by the Autonomous Administration, thereby [risking](#) fines and suspension of their driver cards.

In response to the demands, an official in the Internal Transport Department [announced](#) that passenger fees would be increased from 200 to 500 SYP; the decision also included raising passenger fees from Al-Hasakeh to Tweineh, Safya, and Washokani Camp (to 700 SYP) and Serekaniye (to 600 SYP). This development was preceded by an unofficial decision on 14 October, whereby the Department [increased](#) external transportation fees between Al-Hasakeh and Al-Malikeyeh from 5,000 SYP to 7,000 SYP, which raised concerns among locals with limited income who occasionally travel between the two cities for work or school. While it remains unclear why this decision remained unofficial, it does show the dilemma the Autonomous Administration faces when it comes to transportation-related policy-making; on one hand lies the need to ensure the stability of the transport sector by responding to drivers' demand – on the other hand, there is a limit to the extent passenger fees can be increased without causing a public backlash.

On 30 October, the Autonomous Administration [issued](#) a decision to raise the salaries of its affiliat-

ed institutions' employees who work under legal employment contracts by 100,000 SYP, after facing criticism and strikes by the employees, whose salaries [range](#) from 260,000-900,000 SYP (around \$50-200). However, this decision led to discontent among the employees – social media posts asserted that this decision was incompatible with the current unstable economic situation, price hike of basic commodities, and depreciation of the Syrian Pound.⁵ While the Autonomous Administration is attempting to maintain the continuity of its institutions' operations and somewhat responding to these institutions' employees' demands, it remains unclear how social stability and the local population's contentment will be ensured amid the increase in prices of basic commodities, which as discussed previously aims to contribute to the implementation of Autonomous Administration's [decision](#).

Northwest



Armed clashes in northern Aleppo – and their effects on the ground

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) has intervened in clashes in northern Aleppo between different factions of the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA). Violence spread throughout Al Bab when the Third Corps (largely made up of the Al-Jabha

Al-Shamiyah) launched a campaign against the Al-Hamzah Division, with both sides gathering support from other local groups. HTS forces managed to reach the borders of Azaz city, the Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah stronghold, after violent clashes against the Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah. Following [several rounds of negotiations](#) between HTS and the Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah, under Turkish supervision, a ceasefire agreement was reached, and HTS again withdrew from SNA areas – however sources reported that members of the HTS General Security Service are still present in the countryside of Aleppo, undisclosed under other names.

This is the second time that HTS forces have entered the SNA areas in Afrin, as they [intervened last June](#) to support Ahrar al-Sham against attacks by Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah. At that time, HTS forces reached areas close to Afrin city before withdrawing following a ceasefire between the groups. HTS' intervention was the result of a newly established alliance with Ahrar al-Sham, a longtime rival, in Idleb. In the most recent intervention, HTS has further expanded its alliances to include the Al-Hamzah and Sultan Suleiman Shah divisions (both of which have been [accused of corruption](#)). HTS justified its intervention by accusing Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah of having “suspicious relations with external parties, hostile to the revolutionary forces.” and therefore needing to prevent the group from gaining further control.

Control over fuel sector revenues

One of the primary benefits to HTS (alongside the Al-Hamza Division and Ahrar al-Sham) of defeating the Third Corps is further control of profitable trade crossings in the northwest, between the northeast, and with Turkey. Al-Hamran crossing, located in the countryside of the city of Jarabulus, is the [most important of these crossings](#), as it is the main passage for importing crude oil from SDF-controlled areas to opposition-controlled areas; previously controlled by the Third Corps, it is now under the control of the Al-Hamza Division and Ahrar

⁵ Women's Councils in Deir ez-Zor went on [strike](#) against the discrimination of female employees of the councils who according to media and local sources were excluded from the recently issued decision.

al-Sham. The Third Corps used to import oil from SDF-controlled areas, and, through the Emdad company, refine it in Haraqat in the countryside of Aleppo, for sale in the markets north of Aleppo, to be exported to Idleb through the Watad Company. During the export process, a fee is paid for each liter to the local council in Azaz, the local council in Afrin, and the Third Corps, in addition to the cost of refining, and additional expenses added by Watad – one liter of fuel reaches Idleb at a much higher price than when entering from the crossing. After understanding the process that the crude oil goes through to reach Idleb to be sold as fuel, it is clear that HTS, through the recent military intervention, was seeking to take control of the trade in crude oil – the Third Corps (through Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah) however remains in control of the refinery and the transport routes to Idleb. What reinforces this goal of HTS is that the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) in Idleb issued a decision to [cancel the licenses](#) to import fuels for companies a week after HTS allies took control of the Al-Hamran crossing. As a result of this decision, the Watad Company announced the suspension of its operations in Idleb, and later the Tiba Fuel Company announced the acquisition of the Watad Company.

These developments, along with supply-line delays to shipments coming into Turkey and transported through the Bab al-Hawa crossing, have led to fuel shortages in Idleb – HTS accused Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah in Azaz of stopping fuel tanks traveling into Idleb (accusations which were denied). It is clear that the fuel sector in Idleb is in a state of instability presently, with its stability in the coming period will be contingent upon a necessary understanding between HTS and Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah. Both groups need to cooperate to ensure continuous fuel supply into Idleb – whether this will continue, or one tries to gain control (through force or negotiation) remains to be seen.

Humanitarian impact of the clashes

The military confrontations in northern Aleppo caused displacement among civilians in northern Aleppo and Idleb, particularly in IDP camps between Turkish-held and HTS-controlled areas, as

in the town of Atma in the northern Idleb countryside and the camps of Deir Ballut and Muhammadiyah in the northern countryside of Aleppo. The [Response Coordination Group](#) documented attacks on 11 camps, causing partial and complete damage to more than 58 tents, and the displacement of 1,600 families from the camps, and more than 1,200 families inside cities and towns. During the clashes, civilians were held at a border crossing to be used as ‘human shields’ – overall five civilians were killed and thirty-eight were injured, including many women and children. A fire broke out in the [Kortek camp](#) on the Afrin–Azaz road, where about 200 IDP families live, which destroyed six tents, with damage to more than 25 more. No residents were injured. Several roads and crossings were also closed to civilian movements, such as the Tadef and Bza’a roads, Azaz–Afrin road, and the Al-Ghazawiya crossing, to be reopened after the ceasefire and the deployment of the Turkish army near the Al-Ghazawiya crossing. The Turkish army has strengthened its presence in the villages south of Afrin city and pushed concrete barriers to the Al-Ghazawiya crossing.

In addition to the military, humanitarian and economic effects caused by the clashes, opposition-held Syria is now more fractured as a result. Demonstrations were held in northern Aleppo, in Azaz and Al Bab, against the entry of HTS into Turkish-controlled areas; the slogans stated that HTS was a terrorist organization, which angered activists in Idleb. (Idleb activists were angered that the accusation could be used by the Syrian government and Russia to launch more attacks against its civilians.) Demonstrators in Idleb raised slogans demanding the unity of the two regions under one civil and military administration. These demonstrations are an expression of the division between the residents of two neighboring regions, under the rule of opposition factions, which if they continue would create unprecedented tension, with the disputes unresolved.

Teachers’ strike in northern Aleppo

At the beginning of September, teachers held a strike to demand an increase in salaries, and im-

proved conditions in northern Aleppo cities of Aza, Al Bab, Ra'i, and Akhtar: they had held a strike, with the same demands, in late 2021, which was largely successful. The teachers justified their demands with the decrease in the exchange rate of the Turkish lira reducing real wages, and refused the partial solutions offered in the form of food baskets or clothing vouchers. The strike of 2021 ended when salaries increased from 700 TRY to 1,000 TRY for a single teacher, and 750 TRY to 1,100 TRY for married teachers. Teachers in Azaz and Al Bab held a sit-in in a tent in front of the offices of the Education Directorates; the next day, the Al Bab [police forcibly dispersed](#) the sit-in, removed the tent, confiscated the teachers' mobile phones, deleted the video recordings and assaulted one of the media professionals who was covering the event.

Local councils, community leaders and the military have tried to end the strikes, however the teachers held firm for six weeks, refusing any offers which have not met their demands. Despite threats that the teachers would not be paid at the beginning of the year, the union has resisted ending the strike, saying decisions for dismissal is in the power of Turkish officials, rather than officials in the directorates of education or local councils in Aleppo.

Strike largely unsuccessful

On 11 October, teachers' representatives and the local councils in the city of Azaz and Al-Bab agreed on [several points](#) to end the strike, from 17 October. The agreement included recognition of the teachers' union, and the creation of a 'popular fund' to support teachers under the joint supervision of the local council, the teachers' union and a committee elected at the National Conference on Undergraduate Education. The head of the teachers' union in Azaz explained that the teachers' have 14 demands, and that the agreement meets part of them according to the ability of the local council, while the rest of the demands require higher-level negotiations with the Turkish authorities that run the region.

The implementation of the agreement was ensured by the independent committee, in which several actors participated, including representatives of the

Syrian Interim Government (SIG), the scientific and professional syndicates, the Turkish Religious Endowment, and the Syrian Islamic Council.

The teachers' strike ended without proper resolution of their demands – the threat of dismissal from local authorities, coupled with the length of the strike, and a lack of solidarity to continue the strike meant it did not hold. Eight teachers were [dismissed in Qabasin](#), further undermining the power of the unions, and were coupled with an additional determination to dismiss any teachers who did not comply with official work hours (if they were striking).

Turkish influence over education in Aleppo

Problems facing the education sector in northwest Syria are complicated because of the differences in governance depending on geographical area. Turkey officially began supervising the governance of the Euphrates Shield area following the defeat of ISIS in early 2017. This started with the restructuring of local councils, which in turn supervise the work of service sectors including healthcare and education – these would now come under the authority of governors in southern Turkish governorates. With regard to the education sector, the Turkish Ministry of Education activated and established local educational offices affiliated with the local councils to manage the provision of education in each city in coordination with the Turkish Ministry of Education. The Syrian Interim Government (SIG), has absolved itself of [responsibility for education](#) in northern Aleppo, maintaining it does not have influence in the sector from Afrin in Aleppo, to Ras al-Ain in Al-Hasakeh; all the schools in these areas belong to the local councils and are therefore under Turkish jurisdiction.

Education issue reaches SSG in Idleb

The teachers' strike extended to the areas of the Syrian Salvation Government in Idleb, where nearly 80 teachers went on strike in several schools demanding monthly salaries from the government, or humanitarian organizations working in the region. According to the protesters, the SSG had not fulfilled its promises to provide them with month-

ly salaries. The strike included [Al-Mutanabi and Al-Thawra schools](#), which are the only secondary schools with more than 50 classes. According to one of the teachers, more than 2,000 high school students were affected. For its part, the SSG announced after a meeting of the General Shura Council in Idleb, with the participation of the HTS commander, Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, [financial support](#) to the teaching and administrative units in the Ministry of Education; those from secondary schools would be supported at the beginning of November, and those from intermediate schools would be supported at the beginning of December. The [SSG Minister of Education](#) reported the numbers of students and schools, supported and unsupported, as follows:

- Primary schools: 465 (341 supported, 124 unsupported). Primary school students: 266,494 (grades 1–4)
- Intermediate (middle) schools: 540 (358 supported, 182 unsupported). Intermediate school students: 136,000 (grades 5–9)
- Secondary schools: 130 (93 supported, 37 unsupported). Secondary school students: 26,015 (grades 9–12)
- **Total number of school students: 520,000.**

The education sector in Idleb governorate is depleted, with the cessation of support by international donors meaning almost 5,000 teachers have to work voluntarily (and often leave for other professions). The [Response Coordination Group](#) reports on education with camps, stating support only reached 32% of what was needed, and dropout numbers were extremely high.

November publications



Left out in the cold: Knock-on effects of fuel shortages in government-held Syria

As the winter season quickly approaches, a sharp shortage of oil derivatives continues to raise concerns related to household heating.

In this thematic report, the HAT explores the cross-cutting themes between economic issues, climate and environment, and social tensions. Based on analysis utilizing mixed-methods analytical tools, the HAT uses secondary data sets, complimented by anecdotal primary qualitative data, to link these thematic issues.

For a copy of this report, please contact eeconomy@mercy Corps.org

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The Humanitarian Access Team (HAT) was established in Beirut in March 2015 in response to the collective challenges facing the remote humanitarian response in Syria. HAT's most important function is to collect and analyze disparate data and information. Since 2015, HAT analysis has provided a forward-looking template for international interventions in Syria, and facilitated an increasingly adaptive, integrated, and ultimately impactful international response to the conflict.

