

Syria Monthly Report



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Overview

4 September

The Autonomous Administration closes schools teaching curriculum set by Damascus throughout the northeast. Instead, the Administration insists on its own curriculum, which many citizens say are not compatible with the customs and traditions of the Arab majority in the region.

5 September

The Syrian Salvation Government bans graduates from government-held universities from working in its public institutions. Employees must have graduated from a university run by the opposition administration, or have received a higher education equivalency qualification to convert any previous degrees.

12 September

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham violently disperse a caravan of people trying to leave Syria via the Bab al Hawa crossing, with the

stated intention of traveling on to Europe. The 'Caravan of Light' was organized internally within Syria as a peaceful movement for those wanting to leave, and caused some countries (Greece, Bulgaria), to introduce precautionary measures against Syrians entering through Turkey.

17 September

The Syrian Salvation Government issues ID cards for people living in northwest Syria. Although not recognized internationally, or even within Syria by different administrations across the zones of control, the ID cards could prove essential for IDPs and others receiving humanitarian support as proof of identification needed by organizations to distribute aid.

18 September

Local administration elections are held across government-held Syria. Discussion surrounding the elections focus on whether Damascus has held these to

decentralize power, or establish Baath party members in former opposition areas, amid accusations of lack of transparency and accountability.

Ongoing

ISIS attacks and SDF counter-attacks increased in September, with ISIS widening its geographic reach into eastern Al-Ha-sakeh. An SDF operation in Al-Hol camp against alleged ISIS affiliates also sparked violence in the region, contributing to a worsening security situation.

A cholera outbreak has spread throughout Syria, across all zones of control. Unclean water in water trucks (sourced from the Euphrates), waste-water irrigation and contaminated vegetables have all been blamed. The government and various *de facto* administrations have responded, while multiple organizations have called for increased international support.



Syrians, part of the 'Caravan of Light' – organised within Syria for people wanting to migrate to Turkey or further into Europe – are attacked by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, the prominent armed group in the northwest. (Source: Getty images).

Summary

Cholera has spread throughout Syria, with cases reported across all zones of control. UNOCHA has reported 10,093 suspected cases in Syria on 30 September spanning 13 out of 14 governorates with the country's northeast being the hardest hit. Unclean water in water trucks (sourced from the Euphrates), waste-water (sewage) irrigation for crops, and contaminated vegetables have all been put forward as causes of the spread. The various de facto administrations have responded, while the UN and other humanitarian organizations have called for increased international support.

In south and central Syria, economic woes continue as the Central Bank devalues the official exchange rate to 3,015 SYP to the dollar. This has led to a 9% depreciation of the unofficial rate. Fuel prices continue to rise and subsidies fall, despite apparently sufficient supply and production – reasons for this are unclear, however could be linked to attempts to reduce government spending.

Local council elections were also held in south and central Syria, apparently to extend decentralization throughout government-controlled areas. Rumors of widespread nepotism, voter fraud and a lack of transparency and accountability in the process appeared par for the course for citizens, with many viewing the elections with apathy.

In northeast Syria, ISIS attacks continue, with the Syrian Democratic Forces launching counterattacks in attempts to stabilize security. A new SDF operation in Al-Hol camp tried to deal with increasingly violent events between residents.

The Autonomous Administration has closed a number of government-run schools, claiming illegal activity. The majority Arab population in the northeast have protested the closures, claiming the Administration's curriculum is incompatible with their beliefs and values.

The Syrian Salvation Government has introduced two new measures: the first was to ban graduates from government universities from being employed in public positions, giving priority to graduates within its jurisdiction. The second was to announce the introduction of ID cards for civilians – it remains to be seen whether these will be distributed, where and by whom they will be recognized, and if they will prove useful. IDPs in particular are interested if they will provide official ID for registration to receive aid.

Finally, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham has dispersed a caravan of people, organized within Idleb, traveling towards the Turkish border with a plan to continue to Europe. This new commitment to upholding border control is seen to be an extension of the group's attempts to appear a legitimate governing force in the northwest.

Cover photo: Cholera has been recorded throughout Syria, with potentially devastating effects to children and other vulnerable groups, particularly IDPs in camps (pictured in Idleb)

Economic indicators

	July 2022	August 2022	September 2022
SYP/USD official exchange rate	2,800	2,800	3,015
SYP/USD parallel market rate	4,050.1 (1.4%)	4,391.2 (7.8%)	4,581.1 (4.6%)
TRY/USD official rate	17.4 (2.9%)	18.0 (3.2%)	18.3 (1.5%)

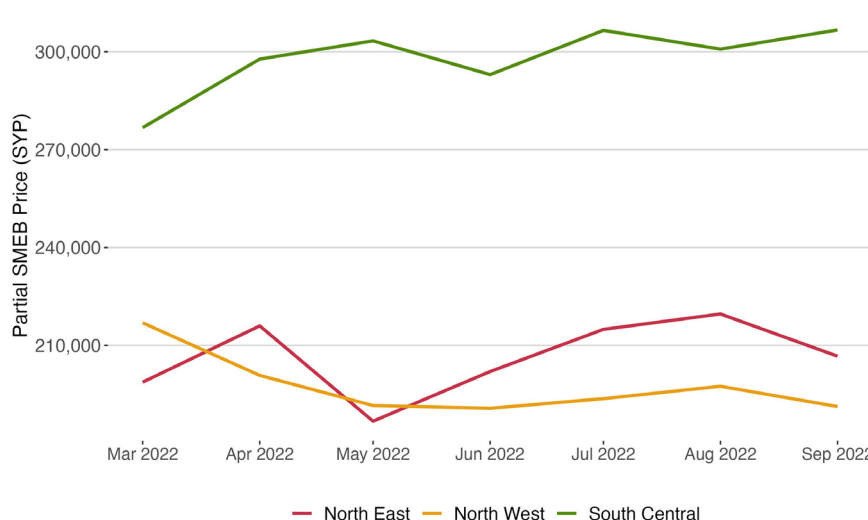
Economic indicator 1.

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



Economic indicator 2.

SYP/USD and TRY/USD, January 2020–November 2022 (predicted)



Economic indicator 3.

Change in partial SMEB price by zone of control, March–September 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.

Whole of Syria

Cholera spreads in Syria

Cholera is quickly spreading throughout all zones of control in Syria, placing pressure on vulnerable and disparate public health systems with already strained resources. UNOCHA [reported](#) 10,093 suspected cases in Syria on 30 September spanning 13 out of 14 governorates with the country's northeast being the hardest hit. On 25 September, the Syrian Ministry of Health [confirmed](#) 338 cases and 29 deaths. The UN preliminarily identified the Euphrates river in addition to the use of contaminated (sewage) water for crop irrigation as sources of the infection. Additionally, REACH reported a [correlation](#) between cases of cholera and water-trucking, while sources have stated that the private water trucking business sometimes sells water pumped from the Euphrates river. The Euphrates river's water quality has reportedly [worsened](#) over the years as a result of higher concentrations of pollution from upstream sources¹ and the decrease in water levels, both of which have [led to higher concentrations](#) of bacteria and risk of infection.

Warnings issued in early September

The Syrian government and the *de facto* authorities across Syria issued warnings and declared cholera cases in early September after thousands of suspected cases were reported nationwide. The Syrian Interim Government first warned of a potential cholera outbreak in northwest Syria on 7 September, after two confirmed cases were [reported](#) in the northeast. The Syrian Ministry of Health later [declared](#) on 10 September that its epidemiological investigation teams found more than 15 confirmed cases in Aleppo governorate. The government's declaration was soon followed by the Syrian Salvation Government's [statement](#) asking hospitals to report cholera cases and the Autonomous Administration [declaring](#) its own cases in Ar-Raqqa and Deir- ez-Zor on 11 September.



WHO ships medical aid to Syria which helps detect and treat cholera patients (Source: WHO Syria).

International community concerned over outbreak

The international community has expressed concern over the cholera outbreak in Syria. On 12 September UN resident and humanitarian coordinator in Syria, Imran Riza, [stated](#) that the outbreak “presents a serious threat to people in Syria and the region,” adding that “swift and urgent action is needed to prevent further illness and death.” Riza also called on “donor countries for urgent additional funding to contain the outbreak and prevent it from spreading and on all concerned parties to “ensure unimpeded and sustained access to affected communities.” Moreover, the WHO [sent](#) aid to the Syrian government on 19 September reportedly consisting of cholera kits, oral rehydration solutions, and rapid diagnostic tests. According to the WHO, the supplies are “enough to treat 2,000 severe cholera cases and almost 190,000 mild diarrhea cases.” Also, the US ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told the UN Security Council on 14 September that the US had pledged \$756 million to help fight cholera and would “provide clean water, food, hygiene and relief supplies, shelter, protection services, and critical health and nutrition assistance.”

Authorities enact measures to combat cholera

The different authorities across Syria's zones of control have enacted measures, within their capacity, to help combat the spread of cholera. Precautionary

¹ Untreated sewage from Raqqa and industrial waste in the Balikh.

measures in all zones of control, albeit to differing extents, mostly included awareness campaigns and increasing attentiveness to the treatment of water sources. Measures were also taken on the local level in both government and Administration-held areas by prohibiting the sale of potentially contaminated food items (leafy vegetables), cracking down on farmers irrigating their crops using sewage, and assisting in increasing the health sector's capacity to treat more patients.

Syrian government

The Syrian government has been closely monitoring cholera's spread since the first confirmed cases were recorded, and has enacted several precautionary measures against infection. The Syrian Ministry of Health has been conducting an awareness campaign throughout September, posting information on [preventative](#) measures and how to [treat](#) cholera if contracted. Moreover, the general manager of the Public Institution for Drinking Water and Sewage, Mohamad Taba', [stated](#) that water sources are being tested several times per day and are immediately shut off either if their potability is questionable or if their treatment is insufficient. Taba' also stated that the sewage infrastructure is being closely monitored, and is completely isolated from water sources.

Furthermore, measures were reportedly taken at the governorate level. In Homs, the Health Directorate's technicians have been [monitoring](#) irrigation processes to identify agricultural lands irrigated using sewage water; 48 dunams (11.8 acres) of land grown with soybeans and vegetables were destroyed as a result. In Damascus, the governorate officials reportedly prohibited restaurants in Damascus city from selling food containing leafy vegetables, to prevent contamination.

In Dar'a, the Directorate of Health formed medical teams stationed in city centers to monitor infection levels and issue advisories to residents on the precautionary measures they could take to avoid getting ill. Moreover, the Dar'a health director, Dr. Bassam Sweidan, [stated](#) that Dar'a city's laboratory was provided with cholera testing kits. In As-Swei-

da, the governorate's health council [decided](#) to test the water in water trucks daily, increase the monitoring and maintenance of sewage systems, prohibit the sale of leafy vegetables in restaurants, and disinfect many water sources using chlorine.

Autonomous Administration

The Autonomous Administration's Health Committee [published](#) guidelines, [launched](#) cholera awareness campaigns, and distributed leaflets detailing the causes and symptoms of cholera, precautionary measures to prevent infection, and how to seek medical assistance in case of infection. Media sources indicated that the Kurdish Red Crescent (KRC) [organized](#) meetings with Health Committees and directors of health centers to implement the necessary measures to prevent a cholera outbreak. The KRC also continues to coordinate with humanitarian organizations to provide the necessary assistance to prevent the spread of infection. Additionally, Action for Humanity participated in the cholera emergency response by [distributing](#) hygiene kits, providing medical assistance, and organizing awareness sessions.

In Ar-Raqqa, a specialized health center was set up for suspected cholera cases, which can accommodate up to 40 patients. Health centers in the governorate were advised to [transfer](#) cases to the newly established center. The Vice-President of the Joint Health Committee of Ar-Raqqa Civil Council urged people to follow precautionary measures, noting that water [samples](#) are being collected and tested periodically.

In Deir-ez-Zor, liquid chlorine was [distributed](#) by the Water Corporation to sterilize the drinking water. Also, an emergency cell was [established](#) in Kisreh hospital, under the supervision of the Deir-ez-Zor Civil Council's Health Committee, to provide the necessary assistance to patients infected with cholera in a separate department located outside of the hospital. This department has been [equipped](#) with 14 beds, 18 serum holders and 20 medical curtains. According to media sources, several clinics were provided with the necessary medicine to [offer](#) healthcare services to patients in Deir-ez-Zor in or-

der to alleviate pressure on Kisreh Hospital.

In Al-Hasakeh, the spokesperson for the governorate's Health Committee [announced](#) the formation of a "crisis cell", composed of the Health Committee, Water Corporation, municipalities, and civil society organizations, to implement precautionary measures, such as organizing awareness campaigns, and monitoring and sterilizing the water sources in Al-Hasakeh city. Furthermore, local authorities in cooperation with KRC [launched](#) disinfection and sterilization activities of water tanks used in health centers in northeast Syria.

Syrian Interim Government

The health authorities within the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) regions were quick to warn of the possibility of cholera spreading in their areas and took several measures to prevent infection. The SIG Ministry of Health requested in a [statement](#) that civilians follow preventative measures and sent ministerial teams to inform citizens of these measures through loudspeakers. The statement also asked health sector workers and organizations to intensify health education efforts and community awareness campaigns for proper hygiene practices and waste disposal, inform EWARN, the early warning network of health partners, of suspected cases in facilities and the community, and prepare for response in health facilities by providing fluids ([ORS solutions](#) and [intravenous fluids](#)) to treat dehydration and training staff on the processes of classifying and isolating patients. The Ministry also called to monitor drinking water sources, treat potential contamination, improve sewage systems, and increase the import of clean water by humanitarian organizations conducting WASH programming.

Syrian Salvation Government

The Syrian Salvation Government's (SSG) Ministry of Health operating in Idleb and western Aleppo [published](#) information about cholera and precautionary measures. Additionally several meetings headed by the prime minister and the minister of health were conducted to develop a plan of ac-

tion and proactive measures to prevent the spread of cholera. The SSG's Ministry of Agriculture also [warned](#) farmers against irrigating crops with untreated sewage water, as irrigation of vegetables with sewage and sewage water is widespread across the region. Moreover, local NGO volunteer teams launched awareness campaigns in IDP camps alongside medical students.

Challenges faced by health authorities

Despite a pledged increase in funds and humanitarian assistance already sent to Syria, and the measures taken by different authorities, there remain many challenges which the different administrations face.

Limited medical resources severely restrict the work of the different health sectors. In the Autonomous Administration, the shortage in medicine prompted [a circular](#) forbidding warehouses from transferring medical supplies to other zones of control without written approval from the Administration. In SSG-controlled areas, health sector officials in Idleb [stated](#) that they lack the necessary financial resources to set up specialized hospital wards to treat cholera, despite having capable medical staff. In government-held areas, the public health sector has not fully recuperated from [its response to COVID-19](#) and continues to suffer from shortages in medicine and a [lack of capacity](#) to maintain pre-existing medical equipment.

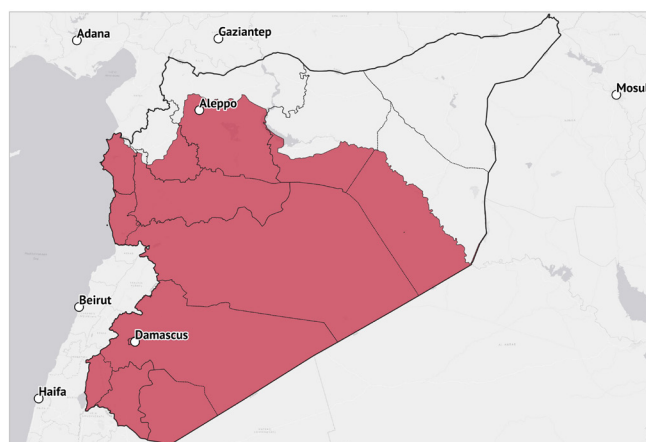
The circumstances themselves prove to be an obstacle to fighting cholera's spread. In Autonomous Administration areas, due the absence of alternative sources of water, farmers continue to rely on the contaminated Euphrates river water or wells for irrigation, which can potentially lead to crop contamination and persistence of the infection. Meanwhile, in communities in northeast Syria, residents already face challenges securing clean water due to drought and limited financial resources, further causing a dependence on unsafe water sources for domestic use. In the opposition-held northwest, the high population density and absence of sufficient infrastructure are also a hindrance. More than 1.5 million IDPs live in 1,396 camps throughout

northern Syria, which suffer from a severe shortage of services and infrastructure, most notably water and sanitation, where open sewage canals and sewers are widespread. [590 camps](#) do not have access to clean drinking water and their residents depend on purchasing drinking water from unsafe sources, while 1,223 camps have no medical points. The [humanitarian response](#) in the camps in August reached only 22% in the water and sanitation sector, and 30% in the health and nutrition sector.

These challenges make it difficult for the Syrian government and *de facto* authorities to contain the spread of cholera. Drought and financial limitations will continue to force families to rely on unsafe water sources for domestic use and irrigation, potentially furthering cholera's spread. Additionally, high population density in Syria, especially in IDP camps located in northwest Syria, are likely to be a contributing factor to infection; camp residents also often use the same water and food sources. Moreover, the limited resources which authorities possess will not be enough to change facts on the ground to prevent the disease from spreading further.

Instead, authorities are using what limited resources they have to increase awareness and try to reduce potential avenues of infection; ruining contaminated crops, forbidding the sale of water-based vegetables, and increasing water treatment. Additionally, local authorities are working towards increasing the capacity of their health sectors to be able to take in more patients. However, these measures may not be enough. The absence of a solid water infrastructure may hinder the delivery of treated water to all communities in the country. Additionally, the absence of effective monitoring may mean that many agricultural lands continue to be irrigated with sewage water. Without the sufficient resources and international aid, it is likely that authorities in all zones of control will struggle to contain cholera.

South & central



Central Bank devalues the pound

Subsidy exemptions and price increases have accelerated in Syrian government-controlled areas. As reported by HAT in a [September economic situation report](#), there have been signs of continued economic decline in government-held areas over the past few months which is yet to abate. Moreover, traders have been forced to adjust their prices relative to the crumbling Syrian pound, leading price hikes to continue. On 20 September the Syrian Central Bank devalued the Syrian pound by 7% against the dollar, from 2,814 to 3,015 SYP, while the black market rate depreciated 9%, from 4,470 to 4,850 SYP per USD. Secretary of the Homs Chamber of Commerce, Issam Tarzini, emphasized the impact that the currency has on prices, [saying](#) that “the exchange rate has an impact and role in commercial, industrial, and overall economic activity across Syria considering that imported raw materials are only imported in through hard currency (US dollars).” Tarzini added that this makes prices vulnerable to fluctuations of the exchange rate, preventing traders from setting fixed prices. Sources stated that the devaluation of the pound prompted traders to increase their prices in anticipation of a subsequent increase in customs fees. Additionally, traders who import items funded by the Central Bank² now must purchase their foreign currency at the new official rate, resulting in the increase of im-

2 Items whose imports are funded by the Central Bank include wheat, medicine, medical items, and baby formula

port costs that are ultimately passed on to the consumer in the form of price increases.

Fuel shortage remains despite sufficient supply

The fuel shortage in government-held areas continues to be characterized by prolonged delays in subsidized fuel allocations and high black-market prices. Sources stated that many families have yet to receive their subsidized gas canisters, reportedly delayed for over 130 days despite the supposed 21 day delivery cycle. Subsidized petrol delays have also exceeded two weeks; they are supposed to be delivered weekly. The delays have forced consumers to purchase fuel from unofficial (black) markets at high prices; black market diesel and petrol in southern Damascus reportedly costs 7,000 SYP per liter and 6,500 SYP per liter, respectively. High fuel prices have increased transportation costs; the head of the As-Sweida worker's syndicate, Hani Ayoub, [stated](#) on 28 September that the cost of transportation now equals half the salary of public sector workers; according to the syndicate's numbers, this has led to 400 job resignations. The supply constraints of subsidized industrial gas canisters has forced restaurant owners in As-Sweida governorate to purchase them from the black market; the black market price of one canister costs 250,000 SYP, while two are needed daily bringing up the total cost to 500,000 SYP per day. Media sources [reported](#) that this forced five restaurants in As-Sweida to temporarily close down because they could not afford the consequent high expenses.

While the general public struggles with low supply, inconsistent rationing schemes, and price increases, the Syrian government's storage capacity has been described as 'full' while refineries operate as normal. The Banyas refinery's general manager, Mahmoud Qassem, [stated](#) that the company no longer has any storage capacity for crude oil since its storage tanks are full and that the arrival of new oil shipments will not have any impact on the production process. Qassem added that three oil tankers arrived at Banyas in September alone carrying 3 million barrels of crude oil and that the remain-

ing amount was still being off-loaded. Qassem also stated that the refinery has been operational and has been producing fuel derivatives non-stop.

Foreign investment announcements increase despite uncertain landscape

Despite the economic situation, the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Protection reportedly approved the establishment of several foreign-owned companies in Syria. Approximately six companies, owned by Iraqi, Jordanian, Kuwaiti, and Egyptian investors, were established in September; two Saudi-owned companies were also opened in August. The majority of investments, largely based in Rural Damascus and Damascus city, are reportedly for companies in an array of sectors, including cereal trading, mining, and construction material manufacturing.

Economic decline, sanctions, significant infrastructural damage, and the government's inability to provide basic services do not indicate a promising investment climate. However, there are several possible reasons why these new companies have opened: these companies may have followed the Syrian government's [recipe](#) for sanctions evasion, enabling them to start operating in Syria; the establishment of these companies may be government propaganda to project the image that government-held areas are safe, that normalization is taking place, and to encourage more investment; and it is possible that these companies are the seeds for further expansion when normalization does take place, and the reconstruction process in Syria begins.

Moreover, their announced capital is not sufficient to purchase the property and equipment necessary for them to operate according to their scope of work. For example, Nawras Packaging and Transportation Company, has opened with a [capital](#) of SYP 25 million (\$5,208³), an amount insufficient to buy a fleet of transportation vehicles. The discrepancy between the starting capital and scope of work may be intentionally low to avoid high taxes.

3 Calculated at the black market rate of 4800 SYP per USD

List of companies with foreign investors approved for work in Syria between June and September 2022.

Name	Function	Foreign investor(s)
Sepya	Trading in automobile spare parts and construction material	Iranian
Nawras Packaging and Transportation Company	Packaging and ground transportation	Saudi
Nadintech Trading Company	Trading in surveillance equipment	Iranian
Barshin Tjarat Janco Company	Importing and exporting food items	Iranian
Bayt al-Omara Lil-Iksa	Importing and Exporting cladding and decoration material	Lebanese
Mersah Mining, Quarrying and Marine Handling Company	Mining	Jordanian
Rawaj Company for Cereal Trading	Cereal trading	Egyptian
Hakaya Jawad Company	Trading in construction materials	Iraqi
As-Samit Commercial company	Trading in construction materials	Kuwaiti
Al-Akila real estate company	Setting up commercial and tourism facilities	Kuwaiti
Emirati Investment Center	Renewable energy	Emirati

Economic decline likely to continue

The economic decline in government-held areas shows no signs of abating in the long-term. The Central Bank's devaluation of the official exchange rate is an indication that the government accepts this decline. Indeed, the Syrian economy has continued to deteriorate following every devaluation with no signs of significant improvement; the pound depreciated a further 9% on the black market after announcement of the devaluation. Additionally, the government's provision of low fuel supply to the market at a time when its fuel derivative production is proceeding, and its tanks are full, may be part of its subsidy removal policy. Sources stated that oil tankers have been arriving to Banyas regularly since the new Iranian credit line was established: withholding fuel may be a strategy to fabricate the fuel crisis and justify further price increases, or subsidy removals, potentially to lessen state expenses to be able to pay back the Iranian government (whose credit line terms are obscure).

Moreover, the recent establishment of foreign-owned companies in Syria, if true, may be a good sign, however, it is unlikely to produce a significantly positive impact in the short-term. The currency depreciation, combined with high fuel prices are likely to continue pushing market prices up, furthering the reduction in purchasing power and constraining economic activity. It is likely that the economic decline will continue with the Central Bank's inability to deploy effective economic tools to stabilize the currency in the long run.

Local administration elections

On 3 August, Bashar al-Assad, Syrian president, issued [Legislative Decree No 216-2022](#), setting 18 September as the date for local administration elections, with candidacy applications open between 5 and 11 August. This year's elections are in stark contrast to those held in 2018, when Syrian government forces, backed by Russia, had just made significant territorial gains at the expense of opposition forces in south and central Syria. The elec-

tions then took place in an atmosphere of [optimism](#) in Damascus that it would soon be able to extend its control north, reducing the need for enhancing mechanisms of local representation and governance. However, the post-2018 era ushered in a period of political and territorial deadlock across Syria, coupled with rapid economic deterioration. The timing of the elections is crucial, given the increasing socio-economic hardships citizens in government-held areas face on a daily basis, which in turn necessitates, [according](#) to Prime Minister Hussein Arnous, a fundamental shift in Damascus's style of governance away from the current centralized model.

Historically, Law No 107–2011 granted local administrative units (governorate councils, local councils, and municipal councils) the [legal capacity](#) to act as agents of decentralization; this capacity was further bolstered through [Law No 37–2021](#),⁴ which increased their ability to generate financial revenues and thereby their ability to play a meaningful role in supporting local economies and provide basic services. While the extant legal environment allows the emergence of a more efficient model of local administration and governance, there are strong indicators through both media and local sources that the September elections did not reflect the statutes in place. Instead, it appeared closer to a pro forma procedure, primarily due to the government's clear intervention in the elections through the Baath Party, the subsequent prevalent claims of electoral violations, and the general apathy and opposition by residents towards the electoral process.

Baath Party's candidate lists dominate the electoral scene

According to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, a [total](#) of 59,498 approved⁵ candidates competed over 19,086 seats for local administra-

tive units in 7,348 polling stations across all governorates, including Idleb, where communities in the southern countryside participated for the first time since 2011. The number of applicants for candidacy reportedly increased by around 25,000 [compared with](#) 2018, while the number of polling stations [increased by](#) 1,200. Government officials cited these figures as positive indicators of both the [local commitment](#) to the democratic process and increased efforts by the government to ensure easy [access](#) for voters in all localities – however they could also be attributed to the government's expansion of territory (in southern Syria and southern Idleb), and therefore more polling stations.

The increase in candidates for local elections may also be intentionally inflated; local branches of the Baath party issued directives instructing its members to apply for candidacy. This was the case in As-Sweida, as media sources indicated that the number of applicants jumped from a mere 70 on 8 August to 1,483 on 11 August, following [strict orders](#) for party members to increase the pool of candidates and make the elections at least appear more competitive. Local sources added that 607 of the total candidates in As-Sweida governorate withdrew during the election day. A similar scenario reportedly occurred in Aleppo, with locals [claiming](#) the Baath Party instructed low-ranking public employees⁶ in Aleppo to run as candidates to secure a larger pool of candidates, only to withdraw later on the election day.

Additional reports indicate the increase in candidates was due to a stick-and-carrot approach to encourage candidate applications. Local sources reported that the party enlisted school principals and public employees as candidates in municipality-level elections in Dar'a governorate, sometimes against their will, threatening to abolish the municipal councils in the case of absence of candidates.

4 The law stipulated an [increase](#) in the unit's taxation percentages for several sectors. These include 5% of the value of the water consumption bill, as well as 11% of the electricity bill and 20% on the value of sales of the General Organization for Tobacco and Tobacco, in addition to increases pertaining to real estate official transactions and paperwork.

5 The Supreme Judicial Committee for Elections, the body which assesses the legality of candidacy applications and their fulfillment of the conditions stipulated in the General Elections Law, [rejected](#) 10,824 applications on legal grounds.

6 Fourth-category public servants are employees with secondary level education (holders of high school diplomas). They work in operational and logistics positions across various government departments.

The same sources explained the rise in candidacy applications by citing certain privileges entitled to council members (particularly personal allocations of diesel and fuel as well as membership on fuel committees) and referring to Law 37, which increased the councils' financial capacities, rendering council membership even more profitable. Backing up this argument is the large amounts of money (estimated by media sources at hundreds of millions of Syrian pounds) spent on [electoral campaigns](#) by prominent businessmen, merchants, and warlords competing in the city of Aleppo.

The Baath party's intervention went beyond increasing the pool of candidates towards shaping the outcome of the elections. Throughout August, and via what is known as the 'partisan opinion poll', the party branches across all governorates organized an [internal voting process](#), whereby members choose their favorite candidates for the upcoming election; in other words, the winners in this poll would potentially be the future candidates on the party's electoral list (regardless of the voting).⁷ This process is flawed by nepotism, according to local sources, with the lists of candidates further manipulated by the party through recommendations from high-ranking figures, and the need to secure candidacy for families that maintain close ties with the Syrian government. The party's violation of its own internal procedures has meant discontent within its cadres, with candidates who were dropped from its electoral list (despite winning the internal voting) withdrawing from the elections, as was the case in the town of Nimreh, As-Sweida governorate.

Consequently, uncontested seats and victories by acclamation (overwhelming majority) were seen on numerous occasions when results were announced between 20–22 September. In Dar'a governorate, for instance, only 1,298 candidates [competed](#) for 1,121 seats, following the withdrawal of 1,753 candidates who failed to secure the support of the Baath party and its allies. Additionally, the Baath-led National Unity electoral lists won by acclamation in 13 municipal councils, including major localities in Dar'a, in Nawa, Tasil, Jasim, and Sheikh Saad.



Governor of Rural Damascus, Safwan Abu Sa'da, votes in Arbin - Eastern Ghouta region Source: Media Office of the Rural Damascus Governorate

A similar scenario occurred in other governorates, with Baath-supported electoral lists securing victory by acclamation in [all](#) municipal and town-level elections in Idleb governorate, the [majority](#) of councils in Aleppo governorate, 185 councils in [Homs](#) governorate, and 18 councils in [As-Sweida](#) governorate. Additionally, media sources indicated that the National Unity [maintained](#) full control of local administrative units in northeastern Syria through an alliance with the traditional local forces in Deir-ez-Zor, Ar-Raqqa, and Hasakeh governorates. Election sub-committees in Damascus, Homs, Deir-ez-Zor, Quneitra, Ar-Raqqa and Lattakia governorates [announced](#) the results of the elections for their local administrative councils on 20 September, while re-election took place in each of the governorates of Hama, Tartous, Aleppo, As-Sweida and Rural Damascus; the re-election took place following a reported difference in the number of ballots by more than 2% from the number of voters listed in the electoral register.

Violations of transparency, accountability, and division of power undermine electoral process

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), a local human rights organization, questioned the accuracy of the

⁷ The same process was implemented in the [parliamentary elections](#) for the People's Assembly in June 2020.

government's [population statistics](#): these were presented as approximately 30 million, however made no reference to the inclusion of internally and externally displaced people. With the last [official census](#) by the Central Bureau of Statistics dating back to 2004 (just under 18 million), and the [World Bank's](#) population estimates for 2020 also set around 18 million, STJ concluded that the government's figures, and subsequently its electoral register, were dubious.

In addition to the previously mentioned structural impediments towards a fair and transparent electoral process, widespread electoral violations took place in various polling stations on the election day. In Rural Damascus, local sources reported the falsification of ballot papers in several polling stations; also, candidate delegates offered payments for voters at polling stations, while other individuals collected their family members' ID cards to vote in favor of certain candidates in return for payments. The same sources added that the principle of voter anonymity was often violated, either due to the absence of voting amenities, or to the collusion of supervisor staff in these stations.

Locals respond with a mixture of indifference and intimidation

Broadly speaking, the local response to the elections was marked by a sense of indifference. Local sources in Damascus, Rural Damascus, and As-Sweida, and Dar'a indicated that participation in voting was moderate in polling stations during early hours, and mainly limited to public sector employees, reportedly instructed by the Baath party to vote. During the later hours, voter turnout significantly dropped, with the Supreme Judicial Committee [extending](#) the voting period by an extra two hours until 21:00. In Dar'a governorate, pre-emptive security measures negatively impacted voter turnout; in anticipation of destabilizing acts (protests or attacks) targeting the electoral process, the government [transferred](#) several polling stations in the governorate's eastern and western countryside (Mzeireb, Tel Shehab, Zayzoun, Jalin, Yadudeh, Kahil, el Karak) to Dar'a city, which further centralized the voting process and reduced voter turnout due to high transporta-

tion costs. In Dar'a. Threats to individuals affiliated with local government institutions are unlikely to encourage voting or candidacy applications; on 27 September, in the days following the announcement of elections results, unidentified individuals [assassinated](#) the head of Mseifra's municipal council, who was recently [re-elected](#), in the Dar'a eastern countryside.

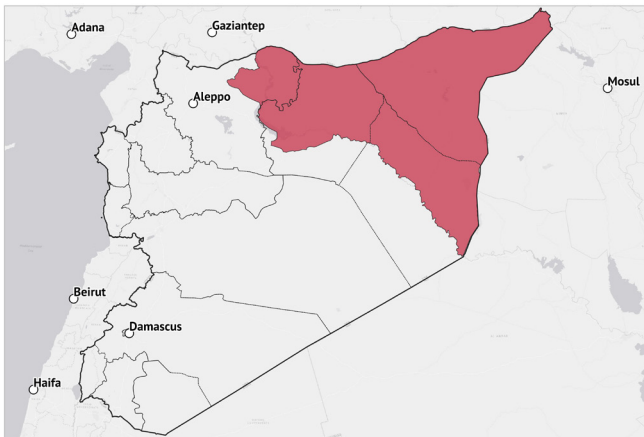
In As-Sweida governorate, local sources reported that despite the general atmosphere of apathy towards the elections, the prevalence of electoral violations resulted in a popular backlash in the town of Jnayneh; on 19 September, dozens of locals [closed](#) two polling stations and the headquarters of the Baath party branch, destroyed the ballot boxes, and prevented the electoral committee from continuing its work as a protest against the manipulation of the electoral process. According to local sources, the town's dignitaries proceeded to issue a statement addressing As-Sweida's Baath Party branch secretary, in which they accused the town's party secretary of threatening the former head of the municipal council and the SARC branch head, monopolizing well-based water provision, and violating the proper distribution of diesel for farmers. The statement's reference to the improper provision of basic services highlights local priorities in these challenging circumstances as well as their distrust in the government representatives when it comes to day-to-day administration and governance.

Elections represent a continuity of Damascus's dominance in politics and governance

The conclusion of the local administration elections without any major security incidents can be seen, or at least portrayed as, an indicator of the government's capacity to organize elections in a timely manner and in a secure environment. Although the current laws provide the opportunity for utilizing local administrative units as vehicles for decentralization and more efficient local governance, the dominance of the Baath party over the elections and its ability to evade accountability despite perpetrating serious violations of the electoral process indicates that the de facto authority in these councils will likely be centralized and shaped by the

party's leadership. From the international community's perspective, this reality contradicts with the path towards a political transition whereby new political actors ought to have a say in the post-conflict era. Meanwhile, the low levels of voter turnout and the general atmosphere of local indifference towards the elections showcases the large gap between state and society in government-held areas and illustrates the deep level of distrust in government institutions and their ability to respond to the current socio-economic challenges.

Northeast



Disruptions to the education sector

At the beginning of the new academic year in September, the Autonomous Administration [closed](#) several private schools and institutes teaching the Syrian government's curriculum in Quamishli city. Families, who had registered their children in these schools and institutes were informed that the work of these educational establishments would be suspended. Despite the deteriorating economic situation in the region, and high tuition fees, families chose to send their children to these schools and institutes to get a recognized qualification. Media sources [indicated](#) that the Autonomous Administration has allegedly imposed SYP 25 million fines on these establishments if they violate the decision.

The closure of these schools and institutes prompted popular anger and discontent. The co-chair of Education Committee of the Autonomous Admin-

istration [stated](#) that the decision stipulating the closure of private institutions targeted those operating without a license, adding that they were using "education as means of trade" in a region where the Education Committee is responsible for providing education free of charge. On the other hand, the Kurdish National Council [condemned](#) the Autonomous Administration's decision, indicating that this measure deprived students from getting an education through a recognized curriculum, and imposed restrictions on teachers' rights. The closure of the schools, accused of operating illegally, does not necessarily mean that students will attend schools run by the Administration, but instead is likely to increase pressure on educational facilities in the security squares operated by government forces.

Protests against the new educational curriculum

Protests were organized in Deir-ez-Zor, Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh, in rejection of the new educational curriculum [developed](#) by the Autonomous Administration, considered incompatible with the customs and traditions of the Arab-majority communities in northeast Syria. Additionally, teachers demanded an increase in salaries, an improvement in service provision to schools, better school security amid ongoing incidents of looting and theft, and a restructuring of the Education Committee. In Deir-ez-Zor, protestors [called](#) on UNICEF to oppose any changes in the curriculum, which was developed by the organization and has been used by educational institutions for several years. Subjects have since been added by teachers in the region, including Islamic education and history, to prepare the students for ninth and baccalaureate exams under the supervision of the Syrian government's Ministry of Education to obtain internationally recognized certificates. As a response to the widespread protests, particularly in Deir-ez-Zor governorate, the Education Committee [claimed](#) that the new curriculum includes only mathematics and science subjects. This was followed by the [issuance](#) of a statement by the Committee, suspending the distribution of mathematics and science books in the governorate and encouraging the engagement of teachers specialized in different fields in the development of a new curriculum.

Additional challenges in the education sector

Deteriorating economic conditions in northeast Syria are negatively impacting children's education and development. With their limited financial resources, and amid inflation, households are often forced to choose between securing basic needs and covering education expenses. In addition, media sources report child protection issues, [noting](#) that some households were forced to send their children to work, or to marry them to members of the community to cope with financial hardships.

According to local sources, transportation costs add a great pressure on households, particularly due to the distance between their areas of residence and Syrian government-affiliated schools, noting that the alternative option, sending their children to private schools, is also associated with high costs. The same sources indicated that parents refrain from sending their children to Autonomous Administration-affiliated schools primarily due to issues related to the curriculum, the insufficient number of qualified teachers, ineffective oversight of the Education Committee on schools and students, and exposure of schools to theft and vandalism. Furthermore, several schools in the countryside remain damaged,⁸ while others face infrastructure challenges and lack basic service provision, such as water, electricity, heating and appropriate sanitation. With the start of the new academic year, local sources indicated that lack of textbooks and learning materials, insufficient number of teachers and soaring transportation costs [continue](#) to impede the educational processes in several Autonomous Administration-affiliated schools.

SDF launches counterattacks against ISIS expansion

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) conducted extensive counter-ISIS operations in northeast Syria throughout September. The SDF launched a security campaign in Al-Hol camp, in addition to counter-terrorism operations in Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa,

and Deir-ez-Zor, where alleged ISIS affiliates and explosives manufacturers were arrested. The security campaign was followed by a notable uptick in ISIS attacks, some of which reportedly took place in new regions and targeted SDF members and Autonomous Administration employees.

SDF launches 'Humanity and Security' campaign

On 25 August, the General Command of the SDF's Internal Security Forces (ISF) [announced](#) the launch of the second phase of its "Humanity and Security" campaign in Al-Hol camp to track down ISIS cells and restore security and stability in the camp after the increase in terrorist operations. In 2022, 44 residents of the camp were tortured and killed in 43 operations. According to the statement, after the attack on Sina'a prison in Al-Hasakeh, ISIS cells planned to take control of the camp through attempted attacks launched inside and outside the camp. Additionally, amid the recent military escalation in northeast Syria, the ISF stated that Turkey has been using intelligence, security, and funding to destabilize the region through ISIS cells.

During the visits of International Coalition delegations to Al-Hol camp, a member of the ISF [highlighted](#) the concerns related to the threats posed by the ISIS-affiliates in the camp, lack of adequate international support to address these issues, and the failure of countries to repatriate their nationals, stressing the significance of the "Humanity and Security" campaign. Media sources [indicated](#) that the



Humanity and Security campaign, Al-Hol (Source: Enab Baladi)

⁸ Under the supervision of Education Committee of the Autonomous Administration, school rehabilitation projects are [ongoing](#) in northeast Syria, where according to media source hundreds of schools have been damaged due to the conflict.

administration of Al-Hol camp and the ISF have been discussing the isolation and separation of the nine sectors of the camp, similar to the sector that houses ISIS-affiliates and their families, where strict control measures are implemented. However, this has been impeded by the camp's large geographical area, population density and ongoing assassinations and criminal activities in the camp, which prompted the launch of the campaign.

During the campaign, clashes took place between members of the ISF and members of an ISIS cell that [resulted](#) in casualties on both sides. This was followed by the ISIS cell's attempt to escape the camp, which was thwarted by ISF, who arrested the members of the cell and confiscated their weapons. On 17 September, SDF [announced](#) the end of the campaign, during which, 226 alleged participants in criminal and terrorist activities were arrested, 25 trenches and tunnels used by ISIS cells were found, and many weapons and communication devices were confiscated. It is worth noting that the first [phase](#) of this campaign was launched in March 2021, by Internal Security Forces, with the support of the SDF, the Women's Protection Units, and the People's Protection Units during which 125 ISIS members were arrested.

ISIS operations

There was an increase in ISIS attacks in September, particularly in Deir-ez-Zor and Al-Hasakeh. These operations coincided with the 'Humanity and Security' campaign's launch in Al-Hol camp, with many sources stating that the attacks against SDF members came as a response to the campaign.

On 9 September, ISIS [claimed](#) 14 operations in Syria, launched since the beginning of the month; according to media sources, this is the highest rate of operations in one week since the beginning of the year. A few days later, ISIS [targeted](#) several members of SDF on Kharafi road, between Al-Hasakeh and Deir-ez-Zor, while they were returning from the Coalition base in Omar oil field. In addition, ISIS [launched](#) an attack on SDF's military convoy in eastern Al-Hasakeh governorate, killing and wounding at least 13 SDF members. Moreover,

several operations were conducted in Deir ez-Zor governorate, including the targeting of a [fuel tanker](#) that killed an SDF member in Zir and the attempted attack on an SDF [checkpoint](#) in Kobar, which led to armed clashes between the two sides and subsequently resulted in casualties. Local sources suggested that ISIS cells have been recently active in "new regions", primarily in eastern Al-Hasakeh governorate, with their movements allegedly facilitated by local tribes.

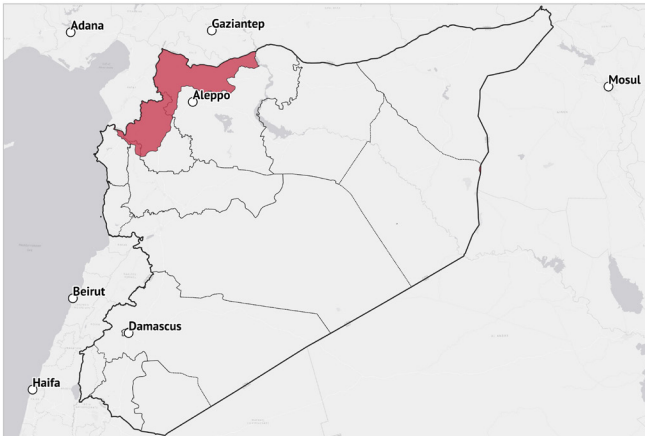
Ongoing counter operations

In early September, SDF and Coalition forces carried out counter-ISIS [operations](#) in Ghweran neighborhood in Al-Hasakeh city, arrested three alleged ISIS-affiliates and confiscated their weapons, following the arrest of an ISIS leader in eastern Deir-ez-Zor governorate. In addition, the pro Administration Rojava Media Center [stated](#) that SDF's counter-terrorism units arrested an ISIS affiliate involved in transferring funds to and from ISIS leaders and ISIS cells in northeast Syria. Counter-ISIS operations were also conducted in the northern and eastern countryside of Ar-Raqqa city, where several ISIS affiliates, allegedly [manufacturing](#) and distributing bombs for ISIS cells in the region, were arrested and their [weapons](#) confiscated. Moreover, counter-terrorism units arrested members of an ISIS cell, who were trained in Turkish-controlled areas in Al-Hasakeh governorate, [infiltrated](#) the Autonomous Administration-controlled areas and claimed responsibility for several attacks in the region. During one of the latest counter-terrorism operations, the armed forces in northeast Syria [arrested](#) thirteen ISIS cells in Deir-ez-Zor governorate, who were accused of attracting different parties with financial compensation to destabilize the region, transfer information, and coordinate ISIS attacks. In late September, the SDF and ISF [seized](#) a large amount of ammunition and weapons in the Tal Hmis countryside in Al-Hasakeh governorate; according to official statements, ISIS allegedly planned to use the ammunition and weapons to launch an attack on Al-Hol camp.

Despite SDF's ongoing efforts to combat ISIS operations and maintain stability in the region, Autono-

mous Administration-controlled areas are witnessing continuous attacks, assassinations and threats, targeting members of the SDF and Autonomous Administration [employees](#).

Northwest



HTS security forces disperse civil gathering close to Bab al-Hawa

On 12 September, a caravan of hundreds of civilians heading towards Bab al-Hawa crossing into Turkey was dispersed by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham. Calls within Idleb to create a 'Caravan of Peace' to join the ['Caravan of Light'](#)⁹ (made up of refugees with the intent to migrate to Europe) in Turkey were sent out via Telegram, and gathered over 200 people. The [UNHCR](#), human rights defenders and official bodies in the Syrian opposition, warned against participating in the migration due to the lack of Turkish approval, and the difficulty involved first in crossing into Turkey, and then through to Europe. This was exemplified by the [precautionary measures](#) taken by Greece and Bulgaria once the caravan was announced. Among those who were assaulted were well-known media activists in northwest Syria, who stated that the security forces prevented them from filming and attempted to confiscate equipment.

⁹ Syrian activists launched the "Caravan of Light" on Telegram for mass Syrian immigration to Europe from all Turkish states, at the beginning of September. On 20 September, they canceled the caravan, via a telegram message, accusing those who supported it as gangs with goals to deport Syrians out of Turkey. The calls followed growing racist rhetoric against the Syrians, with the approach of the Turkish elections, and due to a deterioration in the economic situation, high prices and high rents.

Official public reactions

The incident caused chaos and riots near the crossing, while individuals in Idleb city protested the treatment of those attempting to cross the border, in rejection of HTS' response to the caravan. To ease the tension, the district director, the police chief in Sarmada, and the director of the checkpoints all issued an apology to media activists and promised to hold the wrongdoers accountable. In a statement, the Syrian Media Association condemned the use of violence and stressed that freedom of speech is a fundamental right. The statement also rejected what it called "suspicious" mobilization by unknown parties, to organize caravans with the intent to immigrate, without coordination with any internal or external party. The HTS Public Relations Office [stated](#) that the friction between civilians and the security forces occurred as a result of exchanged abuse of security and police personnel. The statement confirmed that the incidents were not related to issues of freedom of expression or speech, and that an investigation had been opened by the SSG Ministry of Interior.

Implications of HTS' position

The incident gave HTS the opportunity to send reassurances to Turkey and Europe that it was making efforts to combat illegal immigration. Despite [allegedly](#) being involved in people smuggling in the past, it has now begun to patrol the borders for smugglers. This shift in position could be part of its 'rebranding' strategy, to present itself as a benign local administration rather than the previously designated terrorist group (Turkey, US and UN classification). Moreover, even if the responsible authorities allow the caravan to cross the border, Turkish border guards would not allow them passage, and people are likely to be met with force, detention, or other means utilized by Turkish security forces.

SSG bans employing Syrian government university graduates

The SSG issued a decision, on 5 September, [prohibiting](#) graduates from Syrian government-run universities and institutes post-2016 from working in public institutions. The SSG stipulated that, for individuals in northwest Syria to bypass the ban, they would have to earn an equivalent qualification awarded by its own education ministry and show they had been living in opposition-held areas for more than five years. Priority for jobs would however go to graduates of Syrian universities in the northwest. At the time of reporting, there are no official statistics for the number of individuals affected by the SSG's decision. After the opposition forces took control over Idleb in March 2015, many students from the northwest who were [enrolled](#) in universities in south and central Syria first completed their degrees, then moved back, fearing incomplete qualifications.

Previous SSG recruitment policy

It is likely that the decision to raise barriers for acceptance of academic credentials is, in part, a result of popular pressure, most likely related to political ideology in northwest Syria. The SSG announced a [recruitment test](#) to hire teachers last July and allowed graduates from all Syrian universities to apply; at the time, the announcement sparked widespread public anger in opposition-held areas, as the SSG was accused of providing employment opportunities to recent graduates from government universities at the expense of graduates of SSG universities. Despite denying the accusations, the SSG has now simply banned the graduates from applying.

The SSG justified its decision by claiming to secure job opportunities for graduates to reduce the [high unemployment](#) rate in opposition-controlled areas, in light of the deteriorating living conditions. The spread of nepotism and patronage in many SSG institutions hinders competent graduates from obtaining employment. Many youth in opposition-held areas insist on completing university despite the prohibitive costs and time sacrifice, in

the hope of obtaining an education and better job opportunities post-graduation. However, the continuation of the current economic situation and the absence of economic development that creates job opportunities will continue to obstruct their livelihood prospects.

SSG issues ID cards in northwest

For the first time since its establishment in 2017, the SSG has begun issuing ID cards throughout its areas of control. The decision has been met with apathy from residents, however could be an important development for IDPs, should organizations accept the IDs as official means of registering for and receiving aid. The SSG announced that applications could be made to the [Ministry of Interior](#) from 17 September, for those aged 14 years and over, at a cost of \$2.50 (or 40 TRY). The SSG has established ten [gender-segregated centers](#) in five cities to receive applications, located in Idleb, Harim, Sarmada, Dana and Kafr Takharim. To obtain the ID card, the applicant needs to visit the center three times: once to register and book an appointment, the second to provide biometric data (fingerprints and iris scan) and finally, to collect the ID. In the first stage, the issuance of ID cards will be limited to non-combatants, while coordination will be made with armed actors' leaderships. At this stage, the IDs are not required, however they are expected to become mandatory at some point in the future, when ID cards issued by the [Syrian government](#) will no longer be recognized.

Re-introducing ID cards

The SSG-issued ID was announced by the SSG Prime Minister more than once, the last of which was last January. The [pilot](#) phase launched last June, when a number of employees and police personnel applied. So far, no ID cards have been issued to any of the applicants, either from the pilot stage or to those who have applied in September. It is unclear when IDs will be issued. According to the Minister of Interior, the card was designed according to international standards and specifications, to make [forgery](#) 'impossible', as fake IDs are widely spread in opposition-held areas. Residents in SSG-controlled

areas usually carry personal identification issued by the SSG, mainly a family book or a civil extract.

Future relevance for IDPs

It is seen that this form of SSG civil registry is not a priority for many civilians, who believe that the SSG focus is on projects far from the basic needs of residents in its areas of control. The personal identification issued by the SSG does not have international recognition (as the SSG is not internationally recognized), so the current IDs will be for internal use only. The lack of recognition by competing governance bodies could also create further fracturing within Idleb and northern Aleppo; the SSG does not recognize the IDs issued by the SIG, which in turn does not recognize the SSG. So far, it is unclear whether the SIG will recognize the newly issued ID. Regardless, this project could be of importance to

a large number of IDPs who may not have official documentation, particularly the generations born during displacement throughout the conflict, who have not obtained civil registry documentation. It will be important to know if humanitarian organizations operating in the northwest will adopt the new ID as the only accepted form of identification for beneficiaries. If such a decision will be taken by the organizations, it is expected that demand will increase for fear of being deprived of aid, considered one of the most important current incentives for applicants.



SSG announcements for the introduction of ID cards in northwest Syria. (Source: <https://syriansg.org/31040/>)

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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.

