



Syria

*Military recruitment in North
and East Syria*



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and Counter Extremism

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Executive summary

The Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) implements the law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty in most of the areas under its control. The law is by and large respected by the Kurdish authorities, including regulations regarding the age of conscripts, the length of service, exemption from and deferral of the duty etc.

Conscripts are generally not used in active combat except in force majeure situations or if they guard a place under attack.

Evaders are conscripted if they are caught at checkpoints, and their one-year service may be extended with a couple of months. Neither evasion nor desertion has consequences for the person's family.

Recruitment of both men and women to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) takes place on a contractual voluntary basis. There are a number of incentives making it unnecessary to use force for recruitment, particularly the relatively high salaries paid compared to other military groups.

Minors continue to be recruited to the SDF and other groups. However, the exact numbers and the extent to which such recruitments have taken place by use of physical force (e.g. kidnappings) remain unclear.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its military wing, the People's Defence Forces (HPG), do not use force to recruit members in North and East Syria. However, there are speculations that an allegedly PKK-affiliated radical youth group called the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) encourages minors to join the PKK/HPG and the SDF, and that some of the minors recruited by the RYM become fighters for these forces.

The government of Syria (GoS) continues to conscript young people in North and East Syria region (NES) for compulsory military service in the Syrian Arab Army (SAA). However, due to the limited presence of GoS forces in NES, forced conscription only takes place in the event an individual eligible for military service approaches GoS offices in the so-called security squares in the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli.

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Introduction

This report focuses on recruitment to military forces in North and East Syria (NES). This includes the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty, recruitment to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), recruitment to the military wings of Kurdistan Worker's Party PKK as well as military service in the Syrian Arab Army (SAA). The report is an update of the report: [Syria Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate, June 2022](#), drafted by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS).

The report is written in accordance with the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) COI Report Methodology and has undergone an external peer review by the Swedish Migration Agency's Country of Origin Information (COI) unit.¹

The report is based on information from written sources as well as information collected via meetings in person with sources in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and online meetings with a number of sources inside Syria and Europe. The physical meetings and most of the online meetings took place during a fact-finding mission to KRI in the period 27 April to 4 May 2024. During the mission, the delegation gathered information on the topics addressed in this report, as well as information about documents issued in NES and access to the region, which will be published in a another report by the DIS at a later stage.

The purpose of the report is to provide updated information on the issues relevant for the processing of asylum cases. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the report were drawn up by the DIS in consultation with the Secretariat of the Danish Refugee Appeals Board. The ToR is included in the end of the report (Annex IV).

The report is a synthesis of the information obtained from oral and written sources and does not include all details and nuances provided by the sources. In the report, care has been taken to present the views of the sources as accurately and transparently as possible. The individual sources should not be held accountable for the content of the report.

Before, during and after the fact-finding mission to KRI, meetings (online as well as in person) were held with 16 sources, comprising journalists, human rights organisations, lawyers, Syrian Kurdish authorities, academics and child protection offices. All consulted sources have been selected by virtue of their expertise on the topics of this report. The sources were informed about the purpose of the meetings and the fact that their statements would be included in a public report. Some sources requested varying degrees of anonymity.

Meeting minutes have been drafted from each meeting. These were forwarded to each source (except one) for approval, providing the source an opportunity to amend, comment or correct statements so that the minutes reflect the information shared most accurately. One source inside Syria did not find it necessary to approve the minutes from the meeting with him. All

¹ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), *Country of Origin (COI) Report Methodology*, February 2022, [url](#)

other sources approved their statements. The meeting minutes are attached as an annex to this report (Annex I).

For the sake of transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the meeting minutes have been given consecutive numbers, which are used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes. During the meetings, sources also touched upon topics that are not addressed in the ToR. However, whenever such topics could be relevant for asylum cases, the information has been included in the minutes but not addressed in the report.

Attention should be called to the changeable and unstable situation in Syria, including in North and East Syria, and the fact that the information provided in this report may become outdated. Therefore, the issues addressed in this report should be monitored periodically and brought up to date accordingly.

DIS has observed conflicting information in the written sources, specifically regarding the accurate affiliation of different actors in NES. Attention should thus be called to the fact that many written sources may confuse different actors present in NES (e.g. Self-Defence Forces and the SDF, or Revolutionary Youth Movement and the SDF) due to the close relationship between these actors. When reading these sources, care has been taken to establish to which actor the specific information concerns.

The research and editing of this report was finalised on 20 June 2024. The report can be accessed from the website of DIS, www.us.dk, and is available to all stakeholders working within the field of refugee status determination as well as to the general public.

Abbreviations

COI	Country of Origin Information
DAANES	Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EUAA	European Asylum Agency
GoS	Government of Syria
HPG	People's Defence Forces
HXP	Self-Defence Duty Forces
IS	Islamic State
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
NES	North and East Syria
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PYD	Democratic Union Party
RYM	Revolutionary Youth Movement
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SDC	Syrian Democratic Council
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SNA	Syrian National Army
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
STJ	Syrians for Truth and Justice
YPG	People's Protection Units
YPJ	Women's Protection Units

Glossary

Asayish	Police force of the DAANES areas.
Child Protection Office	Known by its full name as the Office for Protection of Children in Armed Conflict; a DAANES institution, which was established to prevent recruitment of minors to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).
Conscript	A person enlisted to military service compulsorily.
DAANES	An officially unrecognised government entity under the effective control of the Democratic Union Party (PYD). Although the DAANES is officially separate from the PKK, they are closely linked ideologically.
Deserter	Soldier who has left her/his post without permission and is thus no longer in active military service.
Draft evader	Person required to perform military service, who has not enlisted in due time
Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD)	The dominant political actor of the DAANES. A Kurdish political party established in 2003 by the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The military wings of the PYD are the People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Women's Protection Units (YPJ), which are key components of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).
North and East Syria	Areas that are mainly under the control of the DAANES.
Self-Defence Forces (HXP)	The SDF is supported by an auxiliary force known as the Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP), which consists of conscripts conducting their Self-Defence Duty.
Syriac Security Office (Sutoro)	Sutoro, a local Christian security force, is a component of the SDF. Established in 2012 during the onset of Syria's civil war, the Sutoro later formed an alliance with Kurdish forces to protect Christians and other communities in northeastern Syria from various armed groups.
Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)	The main military force of the DAANES comprised of several armed groups. The military wings of the PYD, YPG and YPJ, are key components of the Syrian Democratic Forces.
Komeen	Smallest administrative unit in DAANES-controlled areas.

1. Background

In July 2012, Kurdish forces took control of most of the areas in northern Syria with a Kurdish majority.² The same year, a civil administration was established, which has been renamed several times. In December 2023, with the adoption of a new Social Contract, the administration was renamed as the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES).³

As of 14 June 2024, the DAANES governs an ethnically diverse region that accounts for almost 25% to 30% of Syria's territory, including most of Hasakah, Raqqa and Deir Ezzour governorates, as well as parts of the Aleppo governorate.⁴ The security in these territories is mainly managed by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the internal security forces, the Asayish.⁵ The term North and East Syria (NES) is used in this report to describe the territory under DAANES control.

The Government of Syria (GoS) controls smaller areas in the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli, including, Qamishli Airport. GoS and its Russian allies also have a presence close to the Syrian-Turkish border.⁶ A strip of land between Tel Abyad in Raqqa Governorate and Ras Al-Ayn in Hasakah Governorate is controlled by Syrian National Army (SNA), a Turkish-backed opposition group.⁷ In addition, American forces have also a presence in different locations in NES.⁸

² Allsopp, H., *The Kurds of Syria*, 2015, p. 1; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 159

³ Kurdistan24, *New administration name adopted for local administration in northeast Syria*, 13 December 2023, [url](#)

⁴ EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 22, 157-160; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, June 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-12, 15, 22; EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2023, [url](#), p. 28

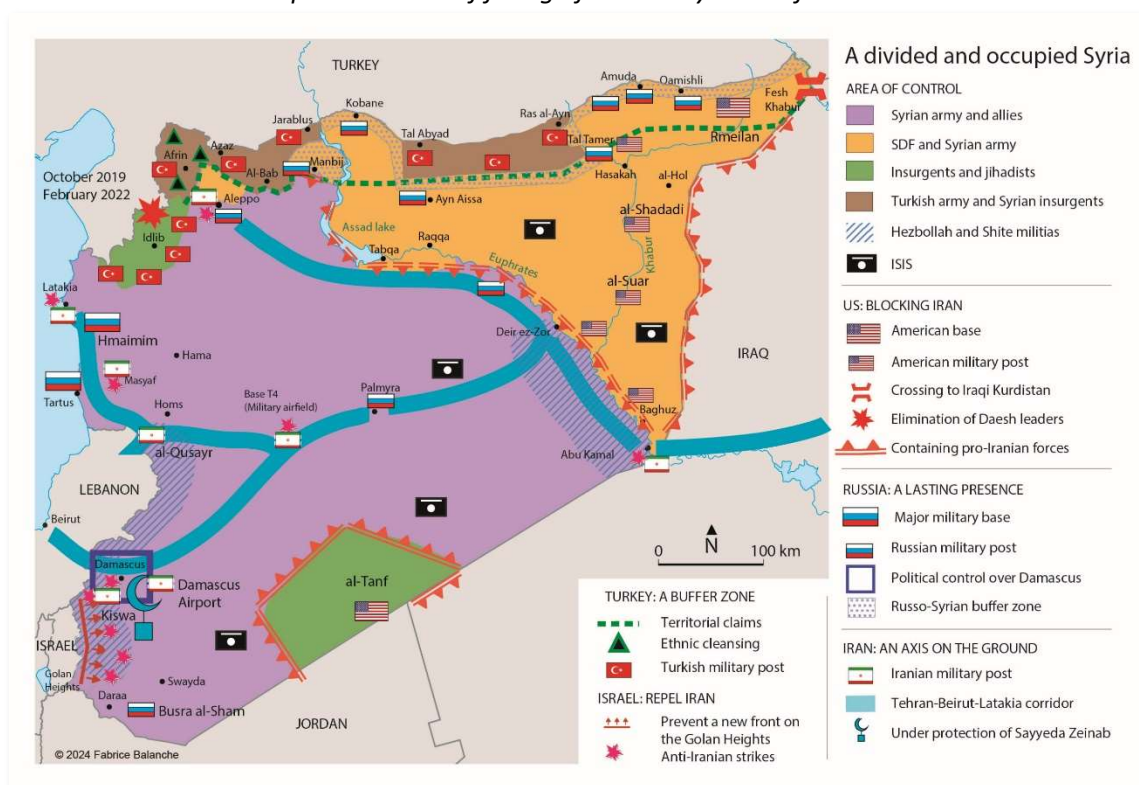
⁵ DIIS, *Mosaics of Power: Fragmentation of the Syrian state since 2011, 2018*, [url](#), p. 19; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 22-23; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 12

⁶ EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 157-160; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 25

⁷ ICG, *Steadying the New Status Quo in Syria's North East*, 27 November 2019, [url](#); Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, June 2021, [url](#), pp. 12, 25; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 159

⁸ Fabrice Balanche, *After 13 years of conflict, Syria is a failed state*, 14 March 2024, [url](#)

Map 1: Presence of foreign forces in Syria as of 2024.⁹



1.1 Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria

The Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) is the executive body of the DAANES. The SDC is governed by a coalition dominated by the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD; Partiya Yetkîye Demokrat).¹⁰

The DAANES is divided into seven administrative areas (also known as cantons): Jazire, Euphrates, Manbij, Deir Ezzour, Tabqa, Raqqqa and Afrin.¹¹ Although Afrin is considered an administrative area of the DAANES, it was as of May 2023 de facto under the control of factions friendly to Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (HTS) within the SNA.¹² The administrative area of Jazire roughly corresponds to Hasakah Governorate.¹³

⁹ Fabrice Balanche, *After 13 years of conflict, Syria is a failed state*, 14 March 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰ Allsopp, H. and van Wilgenburg, W., *The Kurds of Northern Syria*, 2019, pp. 2, 95-97; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 24; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, August 2023, [url](#), p. 14

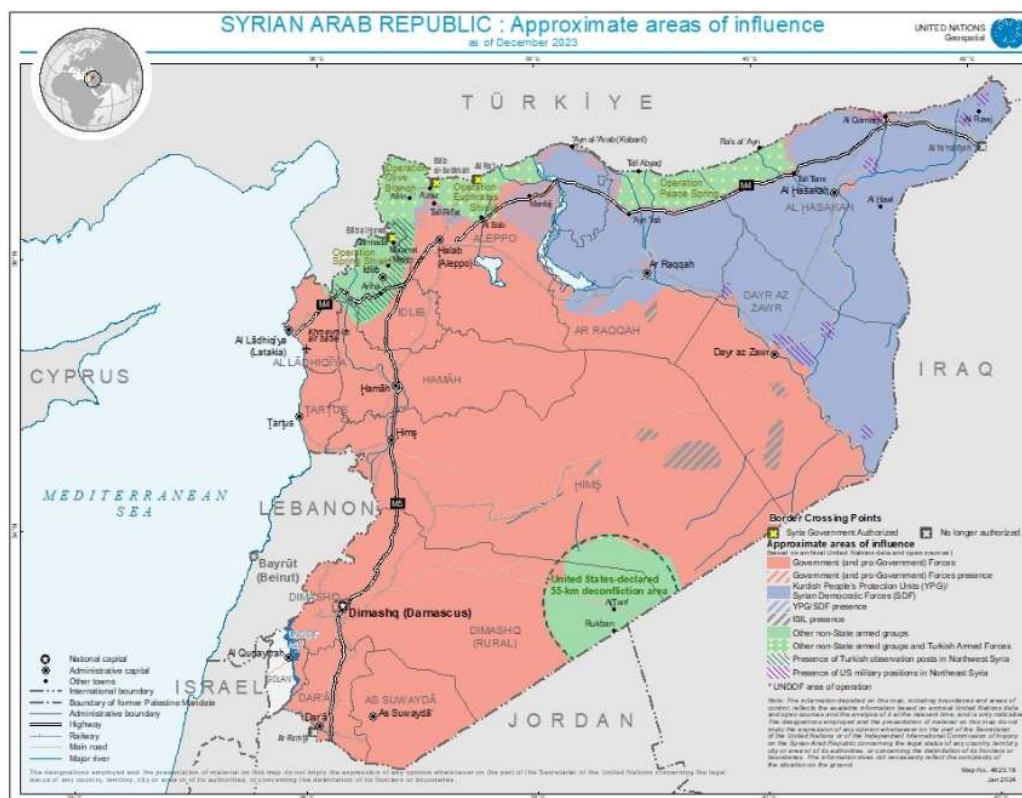
¹¹ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 8-9; DAANES Representation in KRI: 7

¹² EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation, October 2023*, [url](#), p.63

¹³ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 9

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Map 2: Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2023.¹⁴



1.1 GoS presence in NES

The GoS' continued presence in the Hasakah governorate is part of the security coordination with the Kurdish forces, initiated in 2012. At that time, the GoS withdrew from the majority of the governorate, allowing Kurdish forces to gain greater autonomy in the region. However, the GoS maintained limited positions in specific enclaves in the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli, the so-called 'security squares' (in Arabic *Al-Morab'at Al-Amniya*).¹⁵

The GoS has also maintained a presence along the Syrian-Turkish border in the Hasakah governorate, where it reinforced its presence in mid-2022 in response to Turkish warnings of a potential new military campaign in the Kurdish border areas.¹⁶

Just as the GoS exerts control over specific zones in areas held by the SDF, the SDF exerts control over the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah in the northern outskirts of

¹⁴ United Nations, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2023*, 1 January 2024, [url](#)

¹⁵ EASO, *Syria Actors*, December 2019, [url](#); p.40; Enab Baladi, *Northern Syria: "Security Squares" manage SDF and regime interests*, 9 October 2023, [url](#); EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2023, [url](#), p. 105; Enab Baladi, *Northern Syria: "Security Squares" manage SDF and regime interests*, 9 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶ EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2023, [url](#), p. 105

Aleppo city, which is held by the GoS.¹⁷ Furthermore, the SDF is present in the Tell Rifaat enclave, situated to the north of Aleppo city, as well as Manbij and Kobane in the eastern Aleppo governorate.¹⁸

The GoS and the SDF regularly exchange control and impose restrictions in these specific areas. The GoS occasionally tightens control over the Kurdish neighborhoods in Aleppo city, while the SDF reciprocates in relation to security squares in Hasakah.¹⁹ A recent example of this dynamic occurred in mid-April 2022 when GoS-owned buildings in Hasakah and Qamishli were briefly occupied by SDF forces as a retaliatory measure against the GoS siege of the Kurdish-populated neighborhoods of Aleppo.²⁰

Additionally, the SDF expands its control in Aleppo by trading with the GoS, allowing the GoS to bring flour and fuel to Sheikh Maqsoud in exchange for similar concessions in Hasakah.²¹ The SDF has also allowed GoS-forces to traverse SDF-territory.²²

1.1.1. Security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli

The GoS maintains a limited presence in the security squares in Hasakah (the capital of the Hasakah Governorate) and Qamishli, where they maintain several public offices, including those for civil status, recruitment to the SAA and schools.²³

These areas, also known as security enclaves, are small areas enclosed by streets where the GoS has a limited capacity to operate.²⁴

According to the DAANES representation in KRI, the SDF will not intervene in cases where criminals are apprehended by the GoS. However, they will intervene on behalf of the person in question if they have a relation to the DAANES.²⁵

In the context of criminal matters, the GoS is not in a position to arrest or prosecute wanted persons, according to human rights lawyer Zaki Mohammad Hajji. Criminal matters are handled by the DAANES, as the Syrian authorities present in the security squares lack the authority and capacity to do so.²⁶

¹⁷ Enab Baladi, *Northern Syria: "Security Squares" manage SDF and regime interests*, 9 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁸ EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2023, [url](#), p. 64

¹⁹ Enab Baladi, *Northern Syria: "Security Squares" manage SDF and regime interests*, 9 October 2023, [url](#)

²⁰ EUAA, *Syria: Security Situation*, September 2022, [url](#), p. 150; Enab Baladi, *SDF seizes six state buildings in Qamishli*, 14 April 2022, [url](#)

²¹ Enab Baladi, *Northern Syria: "Security Squares" manage SDF and regime interests*, 9 October 2023, [url](#)

²² EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2023, [url](#), p. 105

²³ Hossein Naasoo (lawyer): 1; Mahmoud Omer (lawyer): 1; Ciwan Issa (lawyer): 4; Zaki Mohammad Hajji (lawyer): 1,4; DAANES FRD: 16-18; DIS, *Syria – Military Recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url, p. 29](#); Enab Baladi, *Northern Syria: "Security Squares" manage SDF and regime interests*, 9 October 2023, [url](#)

²⁴ DAANES representation KRI: 26; DAANES DER: 16

²⁵ DAANES KRI: 28

²⁶ Zaki Mohammad Hajji (lawyer): 2

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According to the DAANES representation in KRI, the security square in Qamishli is slightly smaller than the security square in Hasakah. It is surrounded by SDF checkpoints, and the GoS conducts an identity check at checkpoints when people enter the security squares.²⁷

²⁷ DAANES DFR: 17,20

2. Mandatory Self-Defence Duty

The Mandatory Self-Defence Duty (hereafter: "the Self-Defence Duty") is a compulsory military service for young men in the areas controlled by the DAANES.²⁸ Conscripts fulfilling this duty serve in the Self-Defence Duty Forces (in Kurdish Hêzên XweParastinê: HXP).²⁹

The Law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty in the Democratic Autonomous Areas (hereafter: the Self-Defence Duty Law) was enacted in July 2014 in response to the growing need for a larger military force in the fight against the Islamic State.³⁰ It regulates the Self-Defence Duty.³¹ The latest amendment to the Self-Defence Duty Law was adopted during DAANES' general assembly in September 2023. However, the new changes were announced by the DAANES in February 2024.³²

2.1 Profile of conscripts

According to Article 1-A in the Self-Defence Duty Law, men over the age of 18 deriving from NES are required to perform the duty. Article 14 of the Self-Defence Duty Law stipulates that it is the Defence Office of DAANES in each administrative area that determines the age range of those required to serve.³³

As of June 2024, men born in 1998 or later are being called up for Self-Defence Duty, which means that the age range of men conscripted is 18-26 years.³⁴

The Self-Defence Duty was initially mandatory only for Kurds, as the DAANES anticipated potential opposition from Arab communities regarding the implementation of the Self-Defence Duty law in these areas. However, due to expressed dissatisfaction among Kurds with this practice, the Self-Defence Duty has been extended from the original three cantons to all seven cantons, now including areas with an Arab majority such as Raqqa, Deir Ezzour, and Manbij.³⁵ However, the DAANES is still cautious in implementing the Self-Defence Duty law in areas with a predominantly Arab population.³⁶ Likewise, Christians are, in practice, not subjected to the same enforcement of the Self-Defence Duty law as Kurds, according to one source. Due to a significant decline in the Christian population in the region caused by the conflict, the DAANES

²⁸ Allsopp, H. and van Wilgenburg, W., *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflict*, 2019, p. 99

²⁹ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, August 2023, [url](#), p. 58

³⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria: *Update on Military Service, Mandatory Self-Defence Duty and Recruitment to the YPG*, September 2015, [url](#), p. 21; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Military and Security Structures of the Autonomous Administration in Syria*, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 25; Denmark, DIS, Syria: *Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 9

³¹ DAANES FRD: 1

³² Enab Baladi, *DAANES adopts amendments to conscription laws*, 22 February 2024, [url](#)

³³ Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

³⁴ DAANES DD: 2; Syrian Human Rights Organization: 1

³⁵ Ciwan Issa (lawyer): 3; DAANES Representation in KRI: 1, 7; Syrian Kurdish expert: 1

³⁶ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 12, 14; Syrian University Professor: 2

is cautious not to cause more Christians to leave the region by pushing for conscription of Christians to the HXP. Consequently, Christian youth typically do not participate in the Self-Defence Duty but instead join the Christian police force, Sutoro, for three years. This service exempts them from the Self-Defence Duty. The Sutoro police are part of the Internal Security Forces and primarily operate within Christian communities to maintain security.³⁷

The latest amendments to the Self-Defence Duty law, outlined in Article 1-D, state that Syrian nationals originating from outside NES, who have been residing in NES for a minimum of three consecutive years are obliged to perform the Self-Defence Duty. Previously, this obligation applied after a period of five consecutive years of residence in NES.³⁸

Two sources expressed, however, doubt about the consistent conscription of individuals from outside NES across all regions.³⁹

2.1.1. Conscription of women

The Self-Defence Duty is exclusively mandatory for men.⁴⁰ However, according to Article 3 of the Self-Defence Duty Law, women have the right to voluntarily join the Self-Defence Duty.⁴¹

Wladimir van Wilgenburg, a journalist and author, along with a Syrian Kurdish expert have not heard of any instances of women being forcibly conscripted for the Self-Defence Duty.⁴²

Another journalist noted that many women voluntarily join the service, a practice that has been confirmed by the DAANES Department for Foreign Relations, which stated that women who enlist primarily take on administrative or guarding roles.⁴³

2.1.2. Conscription of minors

Individuals under 18 are not conscripted into the HXP,⁴⁴ and the regulations of the Self-Defence Duty Law regarding the recruitment age are generally respected and consistently enforced by DAANES authorities.⁴⁵ A Syrian Kurdish expert and a Syrian human rights organization had not heard of examples of minors being conscripted to the HXP, either voluntarily or forcibly.⁴⁶

2.2. Deferral and exemptions from the Self-Defence Duty

The legislation allows for individuals required to serve the Self-Defence Duty to defer their service or be exempt from it, depending on their individual circumstances.⁴⁷ These rules, which

³⁷ Syrian Kurdish expert: 2

³⁸ Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3; Ciwan Issa (lawyer): 1

³⁹ Syrian Kurdish expert: 3; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 3

⁴⁰ DAANES FRD: 4, Syrian Kurdish expert: 6; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 13; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 10

⁴¹ Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3; DAANES Representation in KRI: 3

⁴² Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 10; Syrian Kurdish expert: 6

⁴³ DAANES FRD: 4, 5; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 13

⁴⁴ Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 4; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 17; Syrian Kurdish expert: 12; Syrian Human Rights Organization: 6

⁴⁵ Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 4; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 17

⁴⁶ Syrian Kurdish expert: 12; Syrian Human Rights Organization: 6

⁴⁷ Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

among other things include exemptions due to medical reasons and deferments for students or individuals living abroad, remain upheld and enforced by the DAANES.⁴⁸ An individual who has been granted exemption or discharge from the Self-Defence Duty will have this recorded in his Self-Defence Duty booklet.⁴⁹

The below subsections concern different circumstances under which postponement or exemption from serving the Self-Defence Duty are granted.

2.2.1. Education

The Self-Defence Duty law allows students at pre-university and university level to defer their conscription in one-year increments until they complete their education. According to Article 16 of the Law, the deferral is granted for one academic year at a time, taking effect on May 31 and lasting until the same date the following year.⁵⁰

The DAANES has specified new age limits for the duration of educational deferrals at each educational level in its latest amendment to the Self-Defence Duty law.⁵¹ In accordance with Article 16 of the most recent version of the law, the following age limits apply:

1. Deferral requests for high school students are accepted until they reach the age of 21 years.
2. Deferral requests for college students are accepted until they reach the age of 24 years.
3. Deferral requests for university students are accepted until they reach the age of 26 years.
4. An additional three years, equivalent to the duration of the prescribed years, are added for postgraduate university students in all faculties except the faculty of medicine.⁵²

Furthermore, the source from the DAANES' Defence Department clarified that students do not have to be enrolled in educational institutions located within NES to be eligible for a deferral of their Self-Defence Duty. They can also be enrolled in institutions in GoS-controlled areas or in Syria's neighbouring countries, including Türkiye, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan.⁵³

According to the consulted Syrian Kurdish Journalist, ongoing education constitutes the primary reason for deferring the Self-Defence Duty.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Syrian Kurdish Journalist: 12; Syrian Kurdish expert: 11; Syrian human rights organization: 16; DAANES FRD: 12; Syrian university professor: 1; DAANES Representation in KRI: 13; Syrian Kurdish Journalist: 7; DAANES DD: 3, 4, 7; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, August 2023, [url](#), p. 59

⁴⁹ DAANES representation in KRI: 17

⁵⁰ Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

⁵¹ Enab Baladi, *DAANES adopts amendments to conscription laws*, 22 February 2024, [url](#)

⁵² Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3; For more details about deferral rules, see the Self-Defence Duty Law text in Annex 3

⁵³ DAANES DD: 5, 8

⁵⁴ Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 7

2.2.2. Medical reasons

A person can either have their duty deferred or be exempted from serving due to medical reasons, depending on the nature of the medical condition.⁵⁵ Medical exemptions are granted for physical and mental health conditions that prevent the individual from serving the Self-Defence Duty.⁵⁶ In such cases, a medical examination is conducted to determine the individual's capability to serve.⁵⁷

According to Article 29 of the Self-Defence Duty Law, persons with special needs and patients with diseases that prevent them from performing the Self-Defence Duty may be exempted from the duty if they have an approved medical report from the Military Medical Centre and the approval of the Defence Offices in administrative and civil departments.⁵⁸

A Syrian university professor informed DIS that the rules regarding medical exemptions continue to be implemented and observed by the DAANES authorities.⁵⁹

2.2.3. Staying abroad

Individuals subject to the Self-Defence Duty who hold residence permits outside Syria can defer their service.⁶⁰

According to Article 27 of the Self-Defence Duty law, residents and holders of residence permits from all countries except for countries that share land borders with Syria shall pay an annual deferral fee of 400 USD for each year since the date of enactment of the law. Obtaining deferral by paying this fee can be done twice in total.⁶¹ Individuals can freely move around within NES without being drafted to the Self-Defence Duty after paying the fee.⁶²

Individuals from NES who reside in Syria's neighbouring countries can obtain deferral for educational reasons, for example, if they are enrolled in an educational institution in Türkiye. Individuals are, according to Article 36 of the Self-Defence Duty Law not required to perform the Self-Defence Duty if they obtain a non-Syrian citizenship.⁶³

Men in the relevant age group who have left Syria but return after exceeding the maximum age of service are generally granted amnesty. However, they may be subject to a fine of up to 300 USD.⁶⁴

⁵⁵ Syrian university professor: 1; DAANES Representation in KRI: 13, 14; DAANES FRD: 12; DAANES DD: 6; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 11; Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

⁵⁶ DAANES Representation in KRI: 14; Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

⁵⁷ DAANES FRD: 12; Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

⁵⁸ Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

⁵⁹ Syrian university professor: 1

⁶⁰ Syrian Kurdish expert: 10; DAANES DD:7

⁶¹ DAANES DD: 7; Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

⁶² DAANES DD: 7

⁶³ DAANES DD: 8; Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

⁶⁴ DAANES Representation in KRI: 15

Until 2019, the law allowed individuals to be exempt from the Self-Defence Duty by paying a fee of 6,000 USD. This practice was abolished due to concerns that it exacerbated inequality, as only the affluent could afford to avoid the duty through payment.⁶⁵

2.2.4. *Familial reasons*

There are several family-related reasons that can lead to an exemption from the Self-Defence Duty, for instance if the person:

- Is the only son in his family.
- Is the only surviving member of his family, with no other living family members left.
- Has a family member martyred while serving in one of the Kurdish military forces.⁶⁶
- Is providing financial support to his family.⁶⁷

In accordance with Article 25 of the Self-Defence Duty Law, a deferral is granted to brothers of conscripts from the same mother within the HXP who have completed the training course. This deferral is granted on a maximum of two occasions, each for a period of six months.⁶⁸

Cases of deferral are first granted after approval by the Self-Defence Duty Office.⁶⁹

2.2.5. *Other reasons*

Individuals who have served in an institution or force under the DAANES for a minimum of three years may be exempt from the Self-Defence Duty. This applies to paid contract-based service in any DAANES-approved institution, such as the traffic police.⁷⁰

Former members of the Internal Security Forces (Asayish) or the SDF are exempt from service in the HXP if they have already served with either the Asayish or SDF for a period of at least two years between 2012 and 2015. Those currently serving in the Asayish or the SDF for three to five years may also apply for an exemption.⁷¹

Young men, who do not wish to enlist, may consider alternative avenues to comply with the regulations of the Self-Defence Duty law. One option is to serve in the traffic police for three years, which would qualify them for exemption from their Self-Defence Duty.⁷²

⁶⁵ DAANES DD: 9

⁶⁶ Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 9; DAANES DD: 6; Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

⁶⁷ DAANES DD: 6

⁶⁸ Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

⁶⁹ Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

⁷⁰ Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 10, 16

⁷¹ Syrian Kurdish expert: 8; DAANES FRD: 11

⁷² Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 16

2.3. Length of the Self-Defence Duty

The introduction of Article 2 in the Self-Defence Duty Law in June 2022 extended the duration of the Self-Defence Duty from nine months to one year.⁷³ This remains the current standard duration of the Self-Defence Duty.⁷⁴

In Article 1 of the Self-Defence Duty law, two concepts are introduced, which indicate that the length of duty can be extended beyond one year:

1. Retention (in Arabic *Ehtefaz*): The extension of the Self-Defence Duty service based on crucial needs.
2. Reserve (in Arabic *Ehtiat*): Any person who has completed the Self-Defence Duty service and is called up based on compelling needs to join the reserve service.⁷⁵

The consulted DAANES authorities as well as a Syrian Kurdish expert confirmed the possibility of extending the duration of the service during emergency situations.⁷⁶ A Syrian university professor was unaware of any instances of extending the Self-Defence Duty, with the exception of cases of extraordinary security situations in an area.⁷⁷

The DAANES Representation Office in KRI further stated that, for example, during the battles of Kobane (2014 - 2015) and Afrin (2018), the length of service was extended and a number of reserves were called up.⁷⁸ Another source mentioned that the service was extended by two to three months in October 2019 due to the fighting in Tell Abyad following the Turkish incursion.⁷⁹ However, according to DAANES Representation in KRI there have been no recent examples of service extensions or calling up for reserve duty.⁸⁰

According to the Foreign Relations Department of the DAANES, the decisions related to extending the service period of the Self-Defence Duty are made by local commanders in each region, depending on circumstances and needs.⁸¹

The DAANES Defence Department mentioned two situations in which an individual may be retained in service (*Ehtefaz*). The first situation occurs when someone enlists for the Self-Defence Duty late, resulting in an extension of one-two months. The second situation arises during extraordinary crisis or force majeure, where individuals may be retained in service. However, the maximum extension of service in these situations is up to three months.⁸²

⁷³ Denmark, DIS, Syria: *Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 14

⁷⁴ Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3; Ciwan Issa (lawyer): 2; DAANES Representation in KRI: 1, 8; Former HXP-recruit: 15; Syrian Human Rights Organization: 14; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 5; DAANES FRD: 6; Syrian Kurdish expert: 5

⁷⁵ Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

⁷⁶ DAANES Representation in KRI: 1, 8; Syrian Kurdish expert: 17; DAANES FRD: 6

⁷⁷ Syrian university professor: 8

⁷⁸ DAANES Representation in KRI: 8

⁷⁹ Syrian Kurdish expert: 17

⁸⁰ DAANES Representation in KRI: 8

⁸¹ DAANES FRD: 7, 10

⁸² DAANES DD: 12

A former HXP recruit confirmed that the duration of the Self-Defence Duty is one year. However, his service was extended by two months because the military recruitment office needed more time to recruit new conscripts. He stated that this extension applied not only to him but also to his entire group. This type of service extension (*Ehtefaz*) occurs occasionally depending on the situation.⁸³

Furthermore, men who have completed their military service can voluntarily re-enlist for a period of two years as professional soldiers in optional corps called *the Filaq*, where they receive a higher rank and better salary compared to during their Self-Defence service.⁸⁴

The sources consulted by DIS were unaware of any recent cases regarding individuals called up for reserve duty in the HXP following their discharge.⁸⁵

According to Wladimir van Wilgenburg, the legal provisions regarding the length of the Self-Defence are generally upheld by the DAANES authorities.⁸⁶

2.4. Conscription process

Conscription for the Self-Defence Duty takes place once or twice a year, during which the authorities announce the specific age groups for conscription on TV and their media platforms.⁸⁷ The call-up of the specific group for conscription is based not only on the year of birth, but also on specific dates of birth. Currently, individuals born in 1998 and later are being conscripted, making the age group for conscription 18 to 26 years old.⁸⁸

Among the sources consulted, the information differed on whether summons letters are sent to the address of the conscripts in case of failure to report for duty.⁸⁹

Once their conscription has been announced, persons belonging to the age group called up are expected to report for duty at the recruitment centre in their area to obtain a military booklet, which is then filled in.⁹⁰ The format of military booklet has not been subject to any change recently. A copy of the Self-Defence Duty booklet has been provided by the DAANES Representation Office in KRI and is found in Annex 2 of this report.

2.5. Service in the Self-Defence Duty Forces

The Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP) is under the administration of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC). It operates independently of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and has its own

⁸³ Former HXP-recruit: 15

⁸⁴ DAANES Representation in KRI: 9

⁸⁵ Syrian Kurdish expert: 19; DAANES DD: 11

⁸⁶ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 17

⁸⁷ Former HXP-recruit: 2; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 4; Syrian Kurdish expert: 14

⁸⁸ DAANES DD: 1,2

⁸⁹ Syrian Kurdish expert: 15; DAANES Representation in KRI: 5

⁹⁰ Syrian Kurdish expert: 13

military leadership. However, the SDF delegates assignments to the HXP and determines its deployment locations.⁹¹ The HXP are considered auxiliary forces to the SDF.⁹²

Several sources, including a former HXP recruit who completed his conscription two years ago, reported that service in the HXP begins with a basic theoretical and practical military training programme.⁹³

During the theoretical part, conscripts receive instruction in general NES history as well as culture and ethics. They also receive a theoretical introduction to military subjects, including military terms and weapons. In the practical part of the training programme, conscripts undergo physical training and weapons training.⁹⁴

Conscripts are not allowed any days off during their initial basic training period. After completing their training, they are allowed 8-10 days off before starting at their respective units and tasks they have been assigned to. Subsequently, for the remainder of their service, conscripts are entitled to one day off after every ten days of service.⁹⁵

After the training period, which takes up to about two months, conscripts are assigned to various duties at different centres or units, where they serve for the remainder of their service.⁹⁶ The conscripts' education or qualifications are often taken into consideration when they are assigned to their duties. For example, those with stronger educational backgrounds and skills are assigned to duties in offices or institutions, which could benefit from their skills. Conscripts with low level or no educational backgrounds are often assigned to tasks related to guarding or protecting public buildings.⁹⁷

2.5.1. Use of conscripts in combat

According to consulted sources, the HXP is an auxiliary force with the main task of guarding or protecting public buildings and supporting the SDF and they are thus generally not used in combat situations.⁹⁸ The former HXP-recruit stated that at no point during his conscription two years ago (2022) were he or any of the 200 other conscripts he was with deployed to active combat operations.⁹⁹

However, there have been instances, where the HXP were involved in combat situations, for instance during the battle for Afrin in 2018,¹⁰⁰ heavy fighting in Deir Ezzour in summer 2023,

⁹¹ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, August 2023, [url](#), p. 58; Al-Monitor, *In Syria's Deir ez-Zor, SDF conscription 'severs livelihoods'*, 22 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹² DAANES FRD: 8; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 16

⁹³ Former HXP-recruit: 5; Syrian Kurdish expert: 18; DAANES FRD: 9; Syrian university professor: 7

⁹⁴ Former HXP-recruit: 5, 6, 7

⁹⁵ Former HXP-recruit: 10

⁹⁶ Former HXP-recruit: 11

⁹⁷ Former HXP-recruit: 13; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 18, 19

⁹⁸ Syrian university professor: 7; the representation of the DAANES in KRI: 12; Syrian Kurdish expert: 25; former HXP-recruit: 24; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 16; DAANES FRD: 10; a Syrian human rights organization: 2

⁹⁹ Former HXP-recruit: 14

¹⁰⁰ DAANES Representation in KRI: 12

the fighting at Tell Abyad and ISIS attacks on Hasakah prison (2022), which was primarily guarded by the HXP. In some of these combats, the HXP suffered casualties.¹⁰¹ However, according to the DAANES representation office in KRI, these cases are rare and even in such instances conscripts are generally not used on the front lines.¹⁰²

The majority of conscripts in the HXP carry out their tasks, such as guarding certain buildings or areas, within their own region.¹⁰³ According to the DAANES Representation Office in KRI, only a minority of conscripts are transferred to areas outside of their home region.¹⁰⁴

2.5.2. Violations against civilians

A Human Rights organisation informed the DIS that the HXP does not commit human rights violations against civilians, mainly because HXP conscripts serve in their local areas. The source further stated that as the areas under DAANES control are tribal, the conscripts are careful about how they behave in their local areas since there will be consequences for any misbehaviour.¹⁰⁵

2.5.2. Treatment of other ethnic groups during service

The sources consulted by DIS generally agreed that Arabs or other ethnic groups in NES do not face discrimination in the HXP.¹⁰⁶

A Syrian Kurdish expert stated that there was no indication of systematic discrimination against HXP conscripts based on their ethnicity during their service, though individual cases could happen rarely. The expert further explained that discrimination does not occur in the HXP because the DAANES does not want to create tension between ethnic groups. In some cases, Kurds perceive DAANES authorities as being more flexible with Arab communities than with Kurdish communities to win their support.¹⁰⁷

The same source emphasised that NES is a multi-ethnic and religiously diverse region characterised by complexities, ongoing conflict, and uncertainty. Consequently, governing this region requires careful consideration of the treatment of other ethnic groups. The source also mentioned Hasakah and Qamishli as places with a large Arab population, which is why many Arabs are conscripted for the Self-Defence Duty there.¹⁰⁸

The former HXP recruit consulted by DIS stated that despite HXP instructors sometimes having a strict attitude towards the conscripts, he did not experience any discriminatory or inhuman

¹⁰¹ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 16

¹⁰² DAANES Representation in KRI: 12

¹⁰³ DAANES Representation in KRI: 11; Syrian Human Rights Organization: 2, 3

¹⁰⁴ DAANES Representation in KRI: 11

¹⁰⁵ Syrian Human Rights Organization: 3

¹⁰⁶ Syrian Kurdish expert: 20, 21; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 14; Former HXP-recruit: 9; DAANES FRD: 2; Syrian university professor: 5

¹⁰⁷ Syrian Kurdish expert: 20, 21

¹⁰⁸ Syrian Kurdish expert: 21, 22

treatment by the instructors during his training against conscripts because of their ethnic background or because of being draft evaders before they were conscripted.¹⁰⁹

2.6. Consequences of evasion and desertion from the Self-Defence Duty

According to Article 15 of the Self-Defence Duty Law, draft evaders conscripted to the Self-Defence Duty will be punished by one additional month of service.¹¹⁰ The consulted sources informed DIS that additional month of service is the consequence of evading in practice.¹¹¹

The names of draft evaders are publicised and circulated to checkpoints.¹¹² Evaders are sought after at checkpoints in NES, which limits their mobility in the region.¹¹³ Authorities do not search for evaders at their homes.¹¹⁴ Instead, evaders will be temporarily detained and then sent to perform their duty when they are identified at a checkpoint.¹¹⁵ The family of the individual will be informed about the situation of their apprehended family member and his conscription.¹¹⁶ According to one source, the law is strictly enforced regarding conscription of evaders.¹¹⁷

The former HXP conscript consulted by DIS stated that evasion from the Self-Defence Duty is often based on a fear of being assigned to combat duties. It is the source's perception that this is a misunderstanding, as the HXP is an auxiliary force and is not used in combat.¹¹⁸

The sources were not aware of any cases of violence or mistreatment of evaders or deserters caught at checkpoints.¹¹⁹

Life is challenging for those evading Self-Defence Duty in NES, with many young men avoiding checkpoints and waiting for opportunities to flee. Sources reported of evaders remaining hidden for years.¹²⁰ In Arab-dominated areas, evasion may persist longer due to authorities' cautious measures not to provoke tensions by seeking and arresting those, who have failed their duty.¹²¹

The law does not stipulate any specific repercussions regarding deserters.¹²² According to two consulted sources, whilst evaders do not face additional punishment, deserters undergo

¹⁰⁹ Former HXP-recruit: 9

¹¹⁰ Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

¹¹¹ DAANES DD: 10; Ciwan Issa (lawyer): 9

¹¹² DAANES Representation in KRI: 16

¹¹³ Former HXP-recruit: 18; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 15; Ciwan Issa (lawyer): 6

¹¹⁴ DAANES Representation in KRI: 16

¹¹⁵ DAANES FRD: 14; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 15; Former HXP-recruit: 18

¹¹⁶ Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 15; Former HXP-recruit: 18; DAANES FRD: 14

¹¹⁷ Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 15

¹¹⁸ Former HXP-recruit: 24

¹¹⁹ Former HXP-recruit: 19; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 17; Ciwan Issa (lawyer): 7; DAANES Representation in KRI: 16

¹²⁰ Former HXP-recruit: 22, 23; Syrian Kurdish expert: 23

¹²¹ Syrian Kurdish expert: 26

¹²² Self-Defence Duty Law, annex 3

investigations about their motives for their desertion.¹²³ Deserters often opt to leave the region out of concern for potential repercussions, although the specifics of these consequences remain unclear. Periodic amnesties are announced for both evaders and deserters, provided that they report for and conduct their Self-Defence Duty. The most recent amnesty was issued in early May 2024.¹²⁴

Young individuals typically fulfil their Self-Defence Duty obligations promptly during periods of stable security in NES, whilst they may actively seek to avoid service amid ongoing external security threats.¹²⁵

2.6.2 Consequences for family members to draft evaders and deserters

Family members of draft evaders and deserters are not penalised. Sources were unaware of any cases where family members of evaders and deserters faced harassment or other violations due to their relatives' evasion or desertion, even in cases where the evader is detained at a checkpoint.¹²⁶

¹²³ Ciwan Issa (lawyer): 7, 8; Syrian Kurdish expert: 23

¹²⁴ Syrian Kurdish expert: 24

¹²⁵ Syrian Kurdish expert: 25

¹²⁶ Former HXP-recruit: 19, 20; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 17; Ciwan Issa (lawyer): 5; Syrian university professor: 6; DAANES Representation in KRI: 16

3. Recruitment to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

The SDF was established in October 2015, following Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict. It is a Kurdish-led, multi-ethnic coalition comprising several armed groups, including the People's Protection Units (YPG; Yekîneyên Parastina Gel) and the Women's Protection Units (YPJ; Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê).¹²⁷ The SDF continues to serve as the primary military force for the DAANES and maintains close coordination with its Defence Department, following its previous important role in the international coalition's campaign against the Islamic State (IS).¹²⁸

There is a discrepancy in the figures provided by different sources regarding the current number of fighters with the SDF, which range from 50,000 to 100,000.¹²⁹

Although frequently conflated with the Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP), the SDF and the HXP are separate military forces within the DAANES administration and have different command structures.¹³⁰ In contrast to the HXP, the SDF is a professional military force that is deployed to the frontlines and conducts combat operations.¹³¹ From June 2022 to July 2023, the SDF conducted operations against the Islamic State (IS) cells operating in DAANES territory, and a renewed surge in IS attacks in April 2024 has led to the SDF's highest monthly casualty rate since 2019.¹³²

Although several written sources have reported on conscription to the SDF, the recruitment of personnel to the SDF remains voluntary and is based on a contract between the SDF and the individual concerned.¹³³ The standard duration of the contract is two years' service with the SDF, although this can be extended at the volunteers' discretion.¹³⁴

There are a number of factors that continue to motivate individuals to voluntarily join the SDF. These include economic incentives, such as the relatively high salaries paid by the SDF

¹²⁷ Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Military Recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 21; ICG, *Steadying the New Status Quo in the Syria's North East*, 27 November 2019, [url](#); Knights M., & van Wilgenburg W., *Accidental Allies: The U.S. – Syrian Democratic Forces Partnership Against the Islamic State*, 2021, [url](#), p. 83-85; European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), *Syrian Democratic Forces (Syria)*, 10 November 2020, [url](#); Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of Origin Information Report Syria*, August 2023, [url](#), p. 14; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Military and Security Structures of the Autonomous Administration in Syria*, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 45

¹²⁸ European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), *Syrian Democratic Forces (Syria)*, 10 November 2020, [url](#); ICG, *Steadying the New Status Quo in the Syria's North East*, 27 November 2019, [url](#); Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 20; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 1; Syrian Kurdish expert: 25

¹²⁹ EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2023, [url](#), p. 28

¹³⁰ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 5; Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Military Recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#)

¹³¹ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 1; Syrian Kurdish expert: 25; DAANES FRD: 10; Syrian university professor: 7

¹³² Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of Origin Information Report Syria*, August 2023, [url](#), p. 14; EUAA, *Syria: Targeting of Individuals*, September 2022, [url](#), p. 49; Etana Syria, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – April 2024*, 8 May 2024, [url](#)

¹³³ DAANES FRD: 15; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 3; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 20-21; Syrian human rights organisation: 10; Syrian Kurdish expert: 29; DAANES representation KRI: 19-20; Syrian university professor: 9; Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Military Recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 22; Etana Syria, *Syria Military Brief: North East Syria – July 2023*, August 2023, [url](#); Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of Origin Information Report Syria*, August 2023, [url](#), p. 58

¹³⁴ DAANES FRD: 15; DAANES representation KRI: 20

compared to other armed groups, which are effective in areas with limited options for alternative employment, such as Raqqa and Deir Ezzour.¹³⁵

Additionally, the SDF's capacity to provide protection from other actors and threats is a significant factor in its ability to recruit personnel in areas with an Arab majority, and ethnic Kurds join the SDF to defend their region.¹³⁶ Seyredin Yusuf, a Syrian journalist based in Erbil, asserted that the SDF refrains from recruiting by force in order to maintain its reputation as a professional military force.¹³⁷

3.1 Recruitment process

The recruitment of SDF personnel is conducted by the local military councils, which are situated within the three military regions of DAANES.¹³⁸ Individuals who wish to volunteer for the SDF are aware of the recruitment process and the appropriate channels for doing so. Therefore, advertising recruitment via public channels such as social media is not necessary.¹³⁹

A Syrian Kurdish expert based in Europe has indicated that the recruitment process to the SDF has undergone changes over time, with variations observed between regions. These changes appear to be influenced by the proportion of the population that is Arabic or Kurdish.¹⁴⁰ A Syrian university professor has stated that at present, 60% of the SDF is comprised of Arabs.¹⁴¹

The SDF conducts an identity verification in connection with recruitment, as well as a background check through the smallest administrative unit the territory controlled by the DAANES, the *Komeen*. Individuals applying to join the SDF are required to present their national ID card, family documents and a local identity document known as a *Shahadet al-Tariff/Nasnameh* issued by the local *Komeen*.¹⁴²

3.2 Recruitment of women

In line with the information provided in the [DIS 2022 report](#), there have been no reports of women being forced to join the SDF during the current reporting period.¹⁴³ In DAANES territory, women who have been ostracised from their family or tribe may join the YPJ, the women's armed force of the SDF, in order to escape from their situation. However, there are no available figures on the extent of ostracism faced by women, making it difficult to gauge how frequently this occurs.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁵ Syrian university professor: 9; Syrian Kurdish expert: 29; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 20; Wladimir van Wilgenburg; 2,13;

¹³⁶ Syrian Kurdish expert: 30

¹³⁷ Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 21

¹³⁸ Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Military Recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 22; Knights M., & van Wilgenburg W., *Accidental Allies: The U.S. – Syrian Democratic Forces Partnership Against the Islamic State*, 2021, [url](#), pp. 185-186

¹³⁹ DAANES representation KRI: 20

¹⁴⁰ Syrian Kurdish expert: 29

¹⁴¹ Syrian university professor: 10

¹⁴² DAANES representation KRI: 23

¹⁴³ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 4

¹⁴⁴ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of Origin Information Report Syria*, August 2023, [url](#), p. 50

3.3 Recruitment of minors

There have been reports of recruitment of individuals under the age of 18 into the SDF during the current reporting period. However, the exact numbers and the extent to which this recruitment was conducted by use of physical force (e.g. kidnappings) remain unclear, as the recruitment of minors is a politically sensitive issue.¹⁴⁵

Proponents of the SDF and the DAANES tend to understate this issue by suggesting that these recruitment practices do not occur or that the situation has improved. Conversely, those who are critical of the SDF and the DAANES and tend to overstate the number of these cases.¹⁴⁶

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) has reported that the SDF and other groups, including the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM), continue to recruit minors. However, the number of recruited minors has, according to STJ, decreased in recent years to dozens of cases each year; a number which includes recruitment of minors to all groups active in NES.¹⁴⁷ A representative from the Child Protection Office informed the DIS that the number of minors recruited to the SDF has fluctuated in recent years, with approximately 100 cases per year previously and approximately 50 cases in 2023.¹⁴⁸ A similar figure was reported by the STJ in an article published on 31 January 2024.¹⁴⁹

Several other consulted sources similarly indicated that the number of cases regarding the recruitment of minors to the SDF has decreased in recent years, although recruitment of minors still occurs.¹⁵⁰ A Syrian human rights organisation stated that it had not received any information regarding the recent recruitment of minors by the SDF. However, parents of minors who join the RYM ([see chapter 4](#)) typically claim that their children have joined the SDF.¹⁵¹ In such cases, the parents of recruited minors are the primary source of information about their recruitment.¹⁵²

On the other hand, the latest report on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, published by the United Nations Security Council, indicates an 80% increase in verified cases of child recruitment attributed to the SDF and the Asayish since the last report.¹⁵³ The same report indicates that 829 minors were recruited by the SDF between July 2020 and September 2022.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁵ STJ: 1; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 20

¹⁴⁶ STJ: 1,4

¹⁴⁷ STJ: 2

¹⁴⁸ Child Protection Office: 3;

¹⁴⁹ STJ, *Syria: Over 50 Children Recruited in AANES areas in 2023*, 31 January 2024, [url](#); Kurdistan24, *52 cases of child recruitment in northeast Syria in 2023: Syrians for Truth and Justice*, 2 February 2024, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ Child Protection Office: 1; Syrian Kurdish expert: 32; STJ: 11, 13; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 6

¹⁵¹ Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 11

¹⁵² Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 22; STJ: 4; SNHR 2; Child Protection Office: 3

¹⁵³ UNSC, *Children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic – Report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/805)*, 27 October 2023, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁵⁴ UNSC, *Children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic – Report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/805)*, 27 October 2023, [url](#), p. 5

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) recorded at least 672 cases of minors being recruited to the YPG/SDF in the period from July 2012 until June 2024. Additionally, the SNHR has recorded the discharge of 301 minors after being recruited, while 341 minors remain active with the SDF. The SNHR has also reported that at least 30 minors recruited by the YPG/SDF have been killed in combat.¹⁵⁵ The SNHR stated that the recruitment of minors in NES is common practice. Furthermore, the scale of recruitment has increased as the SDF has consolidated its security and military control over the NES region.¹⁵⁶

The SNHR has also observed that the number of cases regarding the recruitment of minors tends to increase when there are clashes between the SDF and Turkish forces in the region.¹⁵⁷ In their report published in November 2023, the SNHR reported of abduction of minors for the purpose of military recruitment.¹⁵⁸ It should be noted that the SNHR report includes recruitment by the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) as recruitment to the SDF, although they are separate groups.¹⁵⁹

Several consulted sources noted that various incentives motivate minors to join different groups, including emotional, ideological or economic reasons, as well as domestic problems such as household violence.¹⁶⁰ According to the Syrians for Truth and Justice, there is limited evidence that the recruitment of minors into the SDF involves the use of physical force (e.g. kidnappings).¹⁶¹

However, according to STJ, the Syrian law stipulates that a minor is legally under the custody of their parents, and recruitment of persons under the age of 18 by any party to the conflict may amount to “exploitation of minors”.¹⁶² Therefore, recruitment of minors by armed groups without the parents’ consent is considered by the general population and some of the consulted sources a violation of the parents’ custody and thereby a forced recruitment, regardless of whether the minor joins a particular group of their own volition.¹⁶³ This perception is also shared by a number of international organisations, including UN organisations, who consider any recruitment of children forced due to the impossibility for a child to give free and informed consent.¹⁶⁴

3.3.1. The Office for the Protection of Children in Armed Conflict

Following the signing of an action plan with the United Nations in 2019, the Office for the Protection of Children in Armed Conflict (henceforth the Child Protection Office) was

¹⁵⁵ SNHR: 12

¹⁵⁶ SNHR: 7

¹⁵⁷ SNHR: 1, 3, 7

¹⁵⁸ SNHR: *On World Children’s Day: SNHR’s 12th Annual Report on Violations against Children in Syria*, 20 November 2024, [url](#), p. 50-51

¹⁵⁹ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 18

¹⁶⁰ Child Protection Office: 10; DAANES representation KRI: 21-22; Syrian Kurdish expert: 31; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 7

¹⁶¹ STJ: 11

¹⁶² STJ: 5

¹⁶³ SNHR: 8; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 21

¹⁶⁴ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, International law, [url](#); Global Protection Cluster, *Protection Risk: Forced Recruitment and Association of Children in Armed Forces and Groups*, [url](#)

established as part of the DAANES administration, and is still operational.¹⁶⁵ Although the number of offices has decreased, there are currently six functioning Child Protection Offices, which are located in Al-Tabqa, Kobane, Jazira, Raqqa, Deir Ezzour and Manbij.¹⁶⁶

The Child Protection Office is responsible for cases pertaining to the recruitment of minors by the SDF. Recruitment of minors by other groups, including the RYM, is not within the scope of the office's mandate.¹⁶⁷

Parents of recruited minors can approach their area's Child Protection Office to file a case complaining about their child's recruitment. The complaints and the required documents submitted by parents are then forwarded by the office in question to the relevant SDF office in a physical and electronic format. The processing time for this type of complaint is 15-30 days.¹⁶⁸ This is primarily due to the amount of internal movement by people in the region, which complicates regular communication. In addition, a lack of documentation for the minor's age or the submission of fraudulent documents can further complicate cases.¹⁶⁹

The consulted sources provided differing assessments of the efficacy of the Child Protection Offices. The SNHR observed that the Child Protection Offices lack the necessary authority and capacity to locate and release recruited minors. Since early 2023, the SNHR has not recorded any releases of recruited minors by the SDF through these offices.¹⁷⁰ The STJ noted that the Child Protection Offices' recent decline in activity is due to shifting priorities within the SDF, despite the fact that these offices were effective and provided reliable information regarding the recruitment of minors.¹⁷¹

The Jazira Child Protection Office stated that the SDF has procedures in place to determine whether a person attempting to enlist with them is under 18 years of age. Out of the 50 cases reported to the Jazira Child Protection Office last year, approximately 40 were resolved with the discharge of the minors in question from the SDF.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁵ Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Military Recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 23; UNSC, *Children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic – Report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/805)*, 27 October 2023, [url](#), p. 5; Child Protection Office: 1; SNHR: 4

¹⁶⁶ STJ: 14; Child Protection Office: 1

¹⁶⁷ Child Protection Office: 2

¹⁶⁸ Child Protection Office: 5

¹⁶⁹ Child Protection Office: 6

¹⁷⁰ SNHR: 4,5

¹⁷¹ STJ: 14

¹⁷² Child Protection Office: 7

4. Recruitment to the PKK

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan: PKK) is currently still subject to EU sanctions under the specific measures to combat terrorism, and is considered a terrorist organisation by several state actors.¹⁷³ The group was established in the 1970s and is ideologically based on Kurdish nationalism and Marxist-Leninism.¹⁷⁴

Although formally independent, the SDF and the DAANES are ideologically and organisationally linked to the PKK.¹⁷⁵ Several former and current members of the PKK occupy key positions within the military and civilian administration of the DAANES, including the current leader of the SDF, Mazloum Abdi.¹⁷⁶ There are also numerous images of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan displayed in official buildings in NES.¹⁷⁷

4.1. Recruitment to the PKK/HPG

In the previous DIS report from 2022, sources interviewed by the DIS generally concurred that the PKK and its military wing did not employ force to recruit in NES.¹⁷⁸ A Syrian university professor has stated that this remains the case, and that the PKK and its military wing, the People's Defence Forces (HPG), do not use force to recruit members in NES. Rather, the PKK uses indirect methods to recruit young people through the RYM ([See chapter 4.2](#)).¹⁷⁹

The professor went on to elaborate that the tendency of younger generations to join military groups such as the PKK or SDF or groups like the RYM should be viewed in the context of their upbringing during the Syrian conflict. This has exposed them to conflict, extremism and constant risk of violations throughout their lives, making them now familiar with the language of violence.¹⁸⁰

4.2 Recruitment to the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM)

The Revolutionary Youth Movement, Tevgera Ciwanên Şoreşger in Kurdish, was established in 2011. It is a radical political youth organisation affiliated with the Democratic Union Party (PYD), and according to some sources, the PKK.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, the precise nature of this affiliation

¹⁷³ European council, *Council Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/329 implementing Article 2(3) of Regulation (EC) No 2580/2002 on specific restrictive measures directed against certain persons and entities with a view to combating terrorism, and repealing implementing regulation (EU) 2023/1505*, 16 January 2024, [url](#); USDoS, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, n.d., [url](#); ANS, *Listed terrorist organisations*, 24 May 2024, [url](#); UK Home Office, *Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations*, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Military Recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 26; CSIS, *Examining Extremism: Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK)*, 13 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Military Recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁷⁶ Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Military Recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 26; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 24; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience*, 7 March 2022, [url](#), p. 149-150

¹⁷⁷ Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Military Recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁷⁸ Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Military Recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁷⁹ Syrian university professor: 19

¹⁸⁰ Syrian university professor: 18

¹⁸¹ Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Military Recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#); STJ, *Northeastern Syria: The RY Use of Child Soldiers Continues unabated*, 7 July 2023, [url](#); STJ, *Northeastern Syria, The Revolutionary Youth*

and the organisational structure of the group remain uncertain.¹⁸² According to a Syrian human rights organisation, the RYM operates as an independent entity, yet the movement is ideologically aligned with the PKK and regards Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, as a role model.¹⁸³

The RYM engages in a range of activities designed to promote its ideology and indoctrinate the youth in NES.¹⁸⁴ These activities include organising language and music classes, as well as political meetings and demonstrations¹⁸⁵ and serve as an introduction to the SDF and other armed groups in the region.¹⁸⁶

The RYM has offices in Amuda and Qamishli, and the group conducts demonstrations, advocating for its views and encouraging political engagement among young people in NES.¹⁸⁷ The RYM has also been linked to attacks on journalists, protestors and the Kurdish National Council (KNC), a political party in opposition to the PYD.¹⁸⁸

Members of the RYM adopt a distinctive militant appearance and behaviour, using specific language, clothing, and mannerisms to convey their revolutionary ideals.¹⁸⁹ Additionally, they listen to nationalist Kurdish songs and partake in cultural events that reinforce their ideological messages.¹⁹⁰

According to a consulted Syrian university professor, since 2022, there has been a notable increase in the recruitment of minors by the RYM.¹⁹¹ The public in NES generally disapprove of the RYM's activities. Many locals, as well as some DAANES authorities, have expressed dissatisfaction with the group, although no substantial action has been taken against it due to

Attacks Journalists and Protestors, 21 October 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, *PKK-affiliated group attacks houses of KNC-members: KNC*, 21 October 2021, [url](#); Syrian Kurdish expert: 33; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 22; Syrian human rights organisation: 9

¹⁸² STJ: 6; Syrian Kurdish expert: 36; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 26

¹⁸³ Syrian human rights organisation: 8

¹⁸⁴ Syrian university professor: 15; STJ: 3; Syrian Kurdish expert: 34

¹⁸⁵ Syrian university professor: 12; STJ 3; Syrian Kurdish expert: 13

¹⁸⁶ Syrian university professor: 12; STJ 3; Syrian Kurdish expert: 33; SNHR: 6; Syrian human rights organization: 7

¹⁸⁷ Syrian university professor: 11; Syrian Kurdish expert: 33; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 26

¹⁸⁸ The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, *"She is Still a Child" – Investigating Recruitment Practices by the Revolutionary Youth in NE Syria*, April 2024, [url](#); Kurdistan24, *Syrian Revolutionary Youth Continues to recruit minors in Northeast Syria: Syrian Watchdog*, 9 July 2023, [url](#); STJ, *Syria: 49 Cases of Child Soldier Recruitment Verified in AAANES areas in 2022*, 25 January 2023, [url](#); STJ, *Syria: Over 50 Children Recruited in AANES Areas in 2023*, 30 January 2024, [url](#); STJ, *Northeastern Syria: The RY Use of Child Soldiers Continues unabated*, 7 July 2023, [url](#); Enab Baladi, *Al-Hasaka: Revolutionary Youth Movement kidnaps minor girls and recruits them*, 14 March 2024, [url](#); STJ, *Northeastern Syria: The Revolutionary Youth Attacks Journalists and Protestors*, 21 October 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, *PKK-affiliated group attacks houses of KNC-members: KNC*, 21 October 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, *Attacks on KNC offices in Syria continue despite US call to stop*, 24 April 2024, [url](#); STJ, *Northeastern Syria: Repeated Attacks on Media Offices and Political Party Headquarters*, 28 October 2021, [url](#); Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 18, 19; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 22, 23; STJ: 3;

¹⁸⁹ Syrian university professor: 17

¹⁹⁰ Syrian university professor: 17

¹⁹¹ Syrian university professor: 11

internal divisions within the DAANES and the alleged influence of the PKK in the administration.¹⁹²

Historically, the RYM was more popular in the first years of the Syrian conflict, but the group has become increasingly radicalised.¹⁹³ There have been reports of attacks on families protesting against this group's activities.¹⁹⁴ Although the RYM is not a military organisation and does not provide military training itself,¹⁹⁵ there is speculation that minors recruited by RYM become fighters for the PKK or the SDF.¹⁹⁶ There have been reports of minors being indoctrinated by the group and ending up in training camps in the Qandil or Sinjar mountains.¹⁹⁷ However, the number of confirmed reports about such cases has been limited, according to the Kurdish media.¹⁹⁸ In addition, the parent's claims about their children being taken to Qandil have sometimes turned out not to be correct as subsequent investigations have revealed that their child was elsewhere in Syria. For example, in one case, parents claimed that their child had been taken to Qandil, but it was later discovered that the child was in Manbij.¹⁹⁹

4.2.1. Recruitment practices

Reports on the RYM's recruitment methods are inconsistent. Whilst several consulted sources indicate that recruitment of minors by the RYM takes place through encouragement,²⁰⁰ other sources report about prevalence of cases where minors are recruited by use of physical force, including instances of kidnapping from schools or homes.²⁰¹

It has been reported that minors have been recruited across NES, including in Qamishli, Sheikh Maqsoud, Manbij, Raqqa and Ayn al-Arab/Kobane.²⁰² One source stated that there was less recruitment to the RYM in areas with an Arab majority, such as Raqqa or Deir Ezzour, in comparison to regions with a high concentration of Kurds, such as Hasakah and Qamishli.²⁰³

Reports of forced recruitment commonly originate from the Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhood of Aleppo,²⁰⁴ as well as areas with a GoS presence, such as Hasakah.²⁰⁵ One source raised question

¹⁹² Syrian university professor: 14; SNHR: 9; Enab Baladi, *Al-Hasakah: Revolutionary Youth Movement kidnaps minor girls and recruits them*, 14 March 2024, [url](#); STJ, *Syria: 49 Cases of Child Soldier Recruitment Verified in AANES areas in 2022*, 25 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁹³ Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 23

¹⁹⁴ SNHR: 10

¹⁹⁵ Syrian university professor: 15; Syrian human rights organisation: 7;

¹⁹⁶ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 25

¹⁹⁷ Syrian university professor: 15;

¹⁹⁸ STJ: 10

¹⁹⁹ STJ: 10

²⁰⁰ Syrian university professor: 12; Syrian Kurdish expert: 34; SNHR: 6; Syrian human rights organisation: 6; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 24; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: STJ: 3

²⁰¹ SNHR, *On World Children's Day: SNHR's 12th Annual Report on Violations against Children in Syria*, 20 November 2024, [url](#), p. 50-53; Enab Baladi, *Al-: Revolutionary Youth Movement kidnaps minor girls and recruits them*, 14 March 2024, [url](#); *Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria*, July 2023, [url](#); SNHR: 6; STJ: 4; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 24

²⁰² STJ, *Syria: Over 50 Children Recruited in AANES areas in 2023*, 31 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁰³ STJ: 8

²⁰⁴ SNHR: 6; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 23

²⁰⁵ SNHR: 6

about the political motives behind these reports, as they tend to be published by media outlets that are critical of the DAANES.²⁰⁶

The majority of sources interviewed by DIS generally agreed that the RYM's recruitment method is primarily focused on political indoctrination with the objective of luring or attracting young people through cultural and ideological activities rather than using force.²⁰⁷ One source described the RYM's objective as winning the hearts and minds of the younger generation and encouraging them to follow the group and its ideology.²⁰⁸

A number of sources indicated that the RYM capitalises on the security, economic, social and domestic issues faced by young people in NES, and presents its ideology as an alternative and solution to these issues.²⁰⁹ A Syrian human rights organisation also mentioned the attraction of being part of an organisation as one of the reasons why minors tend to join the RYM.²¹⁰

Similarly, the STJ reported that the majority of recruited minors come from families facing socio-economic and domestic problems, such as poverty, absent or divorced parents, or domestic violence. The circumstances render minors particularly vulnerable to the ideological propaganda of the RYM.²¹¹ A Syrian university professor stated that the RYM's recruitment efforts are mainly conducted by young adults aged 18 and older, who primarily focus on recruiting adolescents.²¹²

However, the local population and international organisations consider any recruitment without parental consent as forced, blurring the distinction between voluntary and coerced recruitment.²¹³ Parents are often the primary source of information regarding the recruitment of minors to the RYM, which additionally blurs the distinction.²¹⁴

²⁰⁶ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 23

²⁰⁷ Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 24; SNHR: 6; STJ: 3; Syrian university professor: 12

²⁰⁸ Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 22

²⁰⁹ Syrian university professor: 18; SNHR: 6; Syrian human rights organisation: 6; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 22; STJ: 7;

²¹⁰ Syrian human rights organisation: 6

²¹¹ STJ: 7

²¹² Syrian university professor: 16

²¹³ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 21; SNHR: 8

²¹⁴ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 22; Syrian Human rights organisation; 6, 11; STJ: 4

5. Recruitment to the Syrian Arab Army (SAA)

The Government of Syria (GoS) maintains a limited presence in the Kurdish controlled areas of NES.²¹⁵ The relationship between the GoS and the SDF in these areas has been characterised by limited coordination regarding security and governance, along with sporadic episodes of tension.²¹⁶

Despite the frozen frontlines and reduced demand for soldiers since 2020, the SAA continues to conscript young men for military service as well as reserve duty in all areas under its control in Syria.²¹⁷ However, recruitment to the SAA in NES is carried out differently from the areas of Syria under the control of the GoS.²¹⁸

5.2 Conscription to the SAA

In 2022, DIS reported that the GoS was unable to recruit residents from areas under DAANES control.²¹⁹ In line with this information, Wladimir van Wilgenburg informed DIS that there is a de facto agreement between the DAANES and the GoS, which generally inhibits the GoS from recruiting for military service in NES. However, the security squares of Hasakah and Qamishli are outside of the SDF zone of influence.²²⁰

A Syrian human rights organisation indicated that the GoS is recruiting for military service in the areas of NES under its control. However, they are reluctant to enforce conscription laws due to their limited power and control.²²¹

According to the sources consulted by the DIS, draft evaders or individuals with outstanding security issues will not be detained on the streets of the security squares in Hasakah or Qamishli. However, these individuals are at risk of being apprehended by the GoS if they approach GoS offices in these areas.²²² At these offices, GoS authorities are able to identify and detain wanted persons by conducting a search in databases with information about such persons.²²³

One source elaborated that wanted draft evaders risk detention if they attempt to travel from Qamishli to Damascus by air, as the airport in Qamishli is located in Qamishli's security square and controlled by the GoS.²²⁴ For this reason, individuals with outstanding security issues or

²¹⁵ Denmark, DIS, *Syria recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 29; EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2023, [url](#), p. 105; Ciwan Issa (lawyer): 4; Hossein Naasoo (lawyer): 1-3; Zaki Mohammad Hajji (lawyer): 1; DAANES FRD: 16

²¹⁶ EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2023, [url](#); EUAA, *Syria: Security Situation*, September 2022, [url](#), p. 150; EASO, *Syria Actors*, December 2019, [url](#); p.40 ;Enab Baladi, *SDF seizes six state buildings in Qamishli*, 14 April 2022, [url](#)

²¹⁷ Denmark, DIS, *Syria Military Service*, January 2024, [url](#), p. 5

²¹⁸ Denmark, DIS, *Syria recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 29

²¹⁹ Denmark, DIS, *Syria recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 29

²²⁰ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 31

²²¹ Syrian human rights organisation: 11; Zaki Mohammad Hajji (lawyer): 3,6; DAANES DER: 20; DAANES KRI

²²² DAANES KRI: 27

²²³ DAANES KRI: 27; Zaki Mohammad Hajji (lawyer): 2,6; Mahmoud Omar (lawyer): 2; DAANES DER: 20

²²⁴ Zaki Mohammad Hajji (lawyer): 5

wanted for military service are reluctant to approach the security square in Qamishli, as well as the government offices in the Hasakah security square.²²⁵

According to the DAANES' Foreign Relations Department, there have been isolated instances of individuals being conscripted by force in the security squares. However, the DAANES was able to intervene and secure their release.²²⁶

5.3 Voluntary recruitment to the SAA

Residents of the DAANES-controlled areas can choose to join the SAA voluntarily.²²⁷ To prevent desertion, men conscripted by the SAA in NES are offered the option to serve in their areas of origin. Consequently, when men from GoS-controlled areas in NES, such as certain villages south of Qamishli, reach military age, they tend to enlist for military service because they are aware that they will be serving in their own areas. If they do not enlist, GoS authorities will not actively seek to recruit them, as the GoS has limited control in these areas.²²⁸

²²⁵ Wladimir van Wligenburg: 30, 31

²²⁶ DAANES FRD: 21

²²⁷ Denmark, DIS, *Syria Military Service*, January 2024, [url](#); Syrian human rights organisation: 12

²²⁸ Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 13

6. Local knowledge about different groups

The residents of NES are able to identify and distinguish the different armed groups in the area based on their uniforms and logos.²²⁹ A Syrian university professor stated that the SDF, including the YPG and YPJ, typically wear uniforms with a camouflage print, while the Asayish and HXP uniforms are dark green and khaki-coloured, respectively.²³⁰ Members of the RYM often wear traditional Kurdish clothing similar to that of the PKK, which helps locals identify them, even though they are not a military force.²³¹ However, according to one source, as members of RYM do not carry weapons or wear specific uniforms, it is not always easy to identify them. Their presence is nevertheless noticeable during large activities such as protests and demonstrations.²³²

Initially, when these groups were established in the beginning of the Syrian conflict, it might have been confusing for local people of NES, particularly in areas with a predominantly Arab population to distinguish these groups from each other. However, over the years, people have learned to recognise them, facilitated by the fact that their logos are in both Arabic and Kurdish.²³³

²²⁹ Syrian university professor: 20; DAANES representation KRI:25; Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 25; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 27

²³⁰ Syrian university professor: 20

²³¹ Syrian university professor: 20

²³² Seyredin Yusuf (journalist): 26

²³³ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 27,28

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MILITARY RECRUITMENT IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA (NES)

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Annex 1: Meeting minutes

WhatsApp meeting with Ciwan Isso, lawyer based in Syria, 2 May 2024

The Social Contract of the DAANES

1. The Law of Defence is one of the main provisions of this framework, and stipulates that men above the age of 18, who are from NES, are obliged to serve the Self-Defence Duty in the Self-Defence Forces (HXP). The law is also applicable to young men from other parts of Syria, who have resided in NES for a period of three years. Previously, persons originating from outside NES, who had resided in NES for five years, were obligated to do the Self-Defence Duty, but this period has been reduced from five to three years, according to the new amendment of the Self-Defence Duty law.
2. Young men in the HXP serve for one year.
3. The Social Contract was accepted on regional and cantonal level including Self-Defence Law by an administrative body called the People's Council, and was therefore accepted by all regions in NES. The Law of Self-Defence was therefore technically accepted by all regions. According to the law, the mandatory Self-Defence Duty should be implemented in all the regions.

Issuance of Syrian documents in NES

4. GoS maintains service offices in the security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli.

Evasion and desertion from the Self-Defence Duty

5. From a legal point of view, evasion or desertion from the Self-Defence Duty does not have consequences for the evader's or deserter's family, as the evaders and deserters are above 18 years old and not under age. The administration is therefore only able to deal with the individual directly.
6. Draft evaders cannot travel from one city to another, as they would risk being detained at checkpoints. In some areas employment in both the public and the private sector is contingent upon completion of Self-Defence Duty.
7. When caught, draft evaders are sent to do their service, and are not punished for evasion.

8. In desertion cases, the authorities will conduct an investigation regarding the individual in question, and his motives for desertion. The source is unaware of the outcome and possible consequences/punishment related to this type of investigation.
9. For draft evaders, the duration of their service starts from the day that they are detained, and in these cases it is likely that the service will be extended for a month or two.

Telephone meeting with Child Protection Office, Jazira region of NES, 16 May 2024

Child protection office

1. There are currently six functioning child protection offices in the regions under the control of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES). These offices are located in Al-Tabaqa, Kobane, Al-Jazira, Raqqa, Deir Ezzour and Manbij. Previously there were more offices, but due to a decrease in the complaints regarding the recruitment of minors, some of these offices have been closed.
2. The child protection office handles only cases related to recruitment of minors into the SDF. Recruitment of minors into other groups, such as the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM), falls outside the office's mandate.

Complaints regarding recruitment of minors

3. There have previously been around 100 cases per year regarding the recruitment of minors to the SDF. Last year, there were around 50 cases. Complaints regarding recruitment are usually submitted by the parents of the minors in question, but the SDF does also initiate investigations regarding age determination of potential minors attempting to enlist with the SDF.
4. The number of filed complaints is highest in the Jazira region.
5. All complaints submitted by parents regarding the recruitment of minors to the SDF are forwarded electronically and on paper to the SDF by the child protection offices. In the case of the office in the Jazira region, the complaints are forwarded to the SDF office in the Jazira region.
6. The processing time of cases regarding recruitment of minors is between 15 – 30 days, which is primarily due to the amount of internal movement by people in the region making communication with them difficult, as well as lacking documentation regarding the minor's age or the submission of fraudulent documents, which are used by the minor for age manipulation in order to be able to enlist in the SDF.

7. The SDF has procedures in place to determine whether a person attempting to enlist with them is 18 or under. Out of the 50 cases reported to the Jazira child protection office last year, around 40 were resolved with the discharge of the minors in question from the SDF.
8. There is a gender difference with regard to the age of minors attempting to enlist in the SDF. Females generally seek to enlist between 11 and 12, whereas males typically attempt to enlist between the ages of 16 and 17.
9. Females in this age bracket are immediately refused enlistment as it is often possible to discern their minor status from their physical appearance.
10. In most cases involving the recruitment of minors, the individuals in question attempt to enlist with the SDF due to financial incentives or familial domestic problems. No cases of forced recruitment of minors to the SDF has been reported to the office thus far.

Meeting with a Syrian university professor, Erbil, 28 April 2024

The source is a Syrian Kurdish university professor and lecturer in politics and philosophy at a university in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The source is the author of several books and articles about Kurds in Syria. He is used as an expert by a number of international media on the political and military situation in the North and East Syria.

Implementation of Mandatory Self-Defence Duty law

1. The mandatory Self-Defence Duty law and regulations, including the exemption rules (e.g. for medical reasons, being the only son etc.) are being implemented and observed by the DAANES authorities.
2. However, in the areas such as Deir-Ezzor and Raqqa with a majority Arab population, it is still difficult for the DAANES authorities to enforce the Self-Defence Duty as the local population resists the enforcement of the law. Due to the complexity of the conflict in those areas with involvement of different actors, e.g. Iran, the GoS, the SDF etc., the DAANES is very careful not to push too hard for implementation of the law.
3. There are still young people who flee NES in order to avoid the Self-Defence Duty. However, the number has decreased due to increasingly restricted access to neighbouring countries, such as the recent entry restrictions imposed by the KRG.
4. The source emphasized that avoiding the Self-Defence Duty or recruitment to other groups is not the main reason why people leave the area. It is rather the unstable and volatile security situation in NES that makes people feel insecure in their daily lives. Another factor behind people's departure from the area is the intensive Turkish

airstrikes, which according to some estimates have destroyed around 70% of the area's infrastructure (energy, water etc.), significantly impacting the economic life in NES. Given this situation, there is little hope for economic prosperity in the near future, prompting many people to leave or want their children to leave the area to seek better conditions and opportunities (work, education etc.) in other countries.

5. The source has not heard of cases of discrimination by the authorities against Self-Defence Duty conscripts from other ethnic groups, e.g. Arabs, during the service. The source does not rule out the possibility that an individual officer can behave in a discriminatory manner, but the source has not heard of such cases.
6. The source has not heard of cases of family members of evaders or deserters from the Self-Defence Duty being subjected to harassment or any other violations due to the evasion or desertion of their family member.
7. The HXP is an auxiliary force that supports the SDF, which is a professional military force. The HXP's main duty is to guard and protect public buildings, infrastructure and other facilities, and they are thus not involved in active combat. However if they are in a location which is exposed to attack, they risk becoming involved in the fighting and even losing their lives. For instance, when the ISIS attacked the Hasakah prison in 2022, a number of HXP conscripts who were guarding the prison were killed. Due to the increasingly unstable security situation in NES, HXP soldiers now risk facing such situations to a larger extent than before.
8. The source has not heard of the Self-Defence Duty period being extended, except in cases of extraordinary security situations in an area.

Recruitment to the SDF

9. Recruitment to the SDF takes place on a voluntary basis. High salaries compared to the average local income as well as the relatively high popularity of these forces among the local population are some of the main incentives for people to join them voluntarily.
10. Even the Arab population of NES voluntarily joins the SDF. In addition to economic incentives, this is due to the fact that the area's Arab population tend to join and support the dominating group in their area, who can provide them protection. Since the SDF is currently the dominant force in the area, they prefer to join the SDF rather than other groups. Presently, sixty percent of the SDF is comprised of Arabs.

Recruitment of minors by the RYM

11. Regarding recruitment of minors to different groups, the situation has been worsening particularly when it comes to recruitment to Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM). Within the last two years, the RYM has intensified its activities with regard to

encouraging young people to join them. This happens through political arrangements as well as cultural activities such as holding language and music classes.

12. Minors are not recruited by force, i.e. by being grabbed on the street and taken by force to a training center or a military base. Instead, the RYM takes advantage of the economic, social and cultural problems faced by young people from poor and underprivileged social groups, encouraging them to join the RYM and follow its ideology as an alternative to these problems.
13. The intensified propaganda activities of the RYM as well as the worsening socio-economic and security situation in NES have resulted in more young people joining the RYM in the area.
14. The RYM is widely unpopular among the population of NES, and people are unhappy with their activities. Even the DAANES authorities have expressed discontent with the group and its activities. However, due to factions within the DAANES authorities who are under the influence of the PKK, there have so far not been any firm action taken by the authorities against the RYM's activities, and the group remains beyond DAANES's control. The source believes that the RYM is directed and controlled by the PKK. Through the RYM's activities, the PKK tries to encourage as many young people as possible to join them.
15. The RYM is not a military organization and does not provide military training. They mainly try to influence the youth ideologically through cultural activities and political indoctrination. However, due to the ideological influence, some minors end up in military training camps in the Qandil or Sinjar mountains. The source mentioned the case of a member of his extended family whose son was influenced and recruited by the RYM, and his family later received a message from the DAANES authorities that their son was arrested in Turkey by the Turkish authorities, allegedly for conducting activities on behalf of the PKK.
16. Those who lead the RYM activities and encourage minors to join the group are usually 18 and above, and those who comprise the target group for the organisation's activities are from around 13 and above.
17. The RYM members have a certain militant appearance and way of behaving, and even the language used by the group is characterized by a certain militant terminology and jargon, which is specific to the group. They listen to nationalist Kurdish songs, have a certain clothing style and have a special way of walking and behaving in public.
18. The young generation's proneness to join groups like the RYM or military forces such as the PKK and the SDF should be understood in the context of their upbringing during the Syrian conflict. For these individuals, violence has become a familiar language and way of thinking due to their experiences growing up amidst conflict. A person, who was a five years old child when the conflict started in 2011, is now 18, having known little

else besides conflict, extremism, and the constant risk of violations. This situation is not limited to NES, but extends to all of Syria. There are now a great number of children in Syria without proper education, making them an easy target for militant groups who prefer these children to join them rather than getting an education.

Recruitment to the PKK

19. The PKK does not recruit members in NES by using force. They use indirect methods such as luring and encouraging young people through the political and cultural activities of the RYM.

The local knowledge about different groups

20. From the appearance, the local people of NES can recognize and see the difference between different groups in the area, e.g. the SDF, the YPG, the YPJ, the HXP, the Assayish etc. For instance the SDF (including YPG and YPJ) have a camouflage uniform (originally marine corps print), the special anti-terror forces within the SDF have a darker uniform, the Assayish have a dark green uniform and the HXP's uniform has a khaki colour. Members of the RYM do not wear a uniform as they are not a military force, however they tend to wear a PKK-style traditional Kurdish clothing by which people can see that they belong to the RYM.

Meeting with the representation of the DAANES in Suleimaniyah, 29. April 2024

Implementation of Mandatory Self-Defence Duty

1. The Self-Defence Duty is applicable by law in all regions under DAANES control. The duration of the Self-Defence Duty is one year. However, the duration of service can be extended in emergency situations.
2. The main reason for this service is to train the young men of the region, so that they can defend the region.
3. The Self-Defence Duty is compulsory for men between the ages of 18 – 24. Women are able to serve on a voluntary basis.
4. The Self-Defence Duty is compulsory for men of the conscription age, who are born in NES, and persons from other areas of Syria, who have resided in NES for more than five years.
5. Calling up for the Self-Defence Duty is announced on television and through the DAANES' social media platforms. If the summoned person does not respond, a letter will be sent to his home address.

Legal Framework

6. There have been no changes to the Self-Defence Duty law since the amendment in 2021.
7. The DAANES Social Contract was signed in Deir Ezzour around in December 2023. Article 30 of the Social Contract states that Self-Defence is a duty for individuals and groups living in DAANES-controlled areas, which enables the DAANES to expand recruitment to territories with an Arab majority. The draft takes place in seven cantons now, where previously it was only in three. However, the ethnic background is still taken into consideration in practice in connection with the implementation for the Self-Defence Duty.

Length of Service

8. The duration of service is usually one year. However, in emergency situations the service can be extended, and the reserves can also be called up to serve. During the battles of Kobane and Afrin, the length of service was extended and a number of reserves were called up. There have been no recent cases where the duration of service has been extended.
9. Men who complete their Self-Defence Duty are able to voluntarily by re-enlist for a period of two years as professional soldiers in *the Filaq* (optional corps). They receive promotions in rank and a higher salary compared to the Self-Defence Forces.
10. The decision to enact a general extension of the Self-Defence Duty in emergency situations is taken by the regional leadership of the Self-administration.

Duties of the Self-Defence Forces (HXP)

11. The main duty of conscripts serving in the HXP is guarding certain buildings and areas of their region or home city. Only a minority of conscripts are transferred to areas outside of their home area.
12. Although guarding is the main duty of the HXP, there have been cases where units within the HXP have been embedded with other military units under the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and have taken part in active combat. However, such instances are rare and even then, the HXP conscripts are generally not used on the front lines. Last time, the HXP was used in such cases was in the battle for Afrin against the Turkish and Turkish-allied groups (January–March 2018). In this battle, they were supervised by the SDF.

Exemptions and amnesties

13. Men who have served with the Asayish for five years or more are exempt from the Self-Defence Duty, as are men who have completed their contract of service with SDF. The family members of martyrs are also granted an exemption and it is also possible to obtain a medical exemption.
14. Medical exemptions are granted for physical conditions that inhibit the person in question from serving the Self-Defence Duty and for mental conditions.
15. Men in the relevant age group who have left Syria, but return after the exceeding the maximum age of service are generally granted an amnesty, however they may be fined an amount ranging from 300 to 400 USD.

Draft evasion

16. The DAANES does not actively seek out draft evaders by contacting family or conducting house search. The names of draft evaders are publicized and circulated to checkpoints. If they are apprehended at a checkpoint, they will be detained in order to complete their Self-Defence Duty. There are no further consequences for draft evasion.

Documentation

17. Completion, discharge and exemption are registered in the Self-Defence Duty booklet, which documents the person's status regarding the Self-Defence Duty. The booklet is issued by the DAANES Ministry of Defence and stamped by the DAANES Ministry of Interior.
18. The military booklet have not been subject to any change recently.

Recruitment to SDF

19. Recruitment to SDF continues to take place on a voluntary basis, and people know where to go if they want to enlist with the SDF. It is therefore not necessary to advertise recruitment to the SDF through social media.
20. Recruitment to the SDF is based on a contract between the person in question and the SDF. The standard contract has a duration of two years. After two years of service, the person is discharged from service and free to go. However, persons who do not perform at least two years of service in the SDF before leaving, will be required to perform the Self-Defence Duty.
21. SDF regulations prohibit persons under the age of 18 from enlisting. However, there have been a few cases, where minors have attempted to join. In some cases minors have unsuccessfully attempted to join SDF more than three times.

22. Minors attempting to enlist with the SDF are primarily motivated by emotional or nationalist motives. For example in cases, where they have lost a family member.
23. The SDF conducts an identity verification in connection with recruitment as well as a background check through Komeen. People who apply to join SDF have to present their national ID-card, family documents and a Shahadet al-Tariff/Nasnameh issued by the local Komeen.
24. If a person attempting to join the SDF turns out to be a minor, the SDF will not let the person to join. Likewise, when a minor is found in the SDF ranks, the SDF will not let the person continue serving in the SDF. In such cases, if the person insists on serving in the force, the SDF will sometimes refer him or her to a civilian activity in other parts of the DAANES such as a cultural center.

Local Knowledge about different groups

25. Locals are easily able to distinguish between different groups. For instance, they can recognise the HXP from groups under the SDF. Different military groups have different uniforms, armbands and different logos, and the community has extensive knowledge about these different groups.

Security squares

26. The security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli are called security squares because of the enclaves, which are shaped as squares by the streets surrounding them.

Recruitment to the SAA

27. Persons wanted for military service or individual with outstanding security issues are not actively searched for and apprehended on the streets in the security squares. However, these people can be apprehended if they go to one of the GoS-offices and a security check is conducted. Persons arrested by the GoS can be transferred to GoS-territory by military airplanes from Qamishli airport.
28. The DAANES does not intervene in cases where criminals are apprehended by the GoS. However, the DAANES will intervene on behalf of the person in question if they have a relation to the Self-administration.

WhatsApp meeting with a Syrian Kurdish expert based in Europe,
30. April 2024

The source works with Syria's humanitarian and stabilization programming for years and visits NES frequently.

Implementation of Mandatory Self-Defence Duty

1. Theoretically, the law regulating the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty is applicable in all regions of NES. However, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) is careful regarding implementation of the Self-Defence Duty in the areas with a majority of Arab population, namely in Raqqa, Manbij and Deir Ezzour regions. The reason for that is that the DAANES does not want to create discontent in these areas given the historical tension between Kurds and Arabs in NES, the current fragile security situation, and some Arab communities' resistance to the Self-Defence Duty in these areas.
2. Ideally, the law is to be enforced uniformly upon all residents, regardless of their backgrounds. However, in practice, it is not enforced upon Christians in the same manner as others. Due to the significant decline in the Christian population in the region caused by the conflict, the DAANES is cautious not to add more reasons for the remaining Christians to leave. Christian youth typically do not participate in the Self-Defence Duty but instead join their Christian police force, Sutoro, for three years, which exempts them from the Self-Defence Duty due to their membership. The Sutoro police, which is part of the Internal Security Forces, primarily operate within Christian communities to maintain security, addressing conflict-sensitivity concerns.
3. Until 2020 – 2021 regulating the Self-Defence Duty was not applicable to persons, who were not born in NES. After 2021, a provision was added to the law that technically enabling the DAANES to draft people from outside NES for Self-Defence Duty. According to this provision, people originating from other areas in Syria, who had lived in NES for more than five years, were obligated to do the Self-Defence Duty. However, this provision is not strictly implemented.
4. The age range currently regulated by the law is men born in 1998 and above. The current age range has been implemented for around two years, and the age range has been decreased due to pressure from NGOs and civil society actors. There are new demands to further decrease the eligible age to those born in 1999 or 2000, and it is likely to be adjusted in the medium term
5. The Self-Defence Duty is compulsory and currently has a duration of 12 months. The duration of service has previously been six months when this law first started in NES in 2015 and 2016, and then it was extended to nine months after one or two years.

Recruitment of Women to the Self-Defence Forces

6. The Self-Defence Duty is only mandatory for men. Women can serve on a voluntary basis, and the source has not heard of any cases of women being forcefully recruited for the Self-Defence Duty.

Self-Defence Duty exemptions and deferrals

7. It is possible to delay the Self-Defence Duty on the basis of studies, or if there is a member of the family already serving in the Self-Defence Forces (HXP).
8. Family members of martyrs and single sons are exempt from the Self-Defence Duty. Former members of the Asayish or the SDF are also exempt from service if they have served with either the Asayish or SDF for a period of at least two years in the period from 2012 - 2015. Those, who currently serve in the Asayish (ISF) or the SDF for three-five years, will also be exempted.
9. For being exempt from the Self-Defence Duty, the individual must provide documentation for the individual circumstances regarding exemption.
10. Young men with residence permits abroad can delay their Self-Defence Duty. They pay 200 USD upon their visit to NES for delaying their duty. This does not apply to Syrians from NES residing in Lebanon or Iraq.
11. The provisions regarding exemption and delay related to the Self-Defence Duty are being respected by the DAANES.

Recruitment of minors to the Self-Defence Forces

12. The source has not heard of any cases of recruitment of minors to the HXP. However, instances of voluntary recruitment of minors to the SDF have been reported.

Process of recruitment to the HXP

13. When a young man turns 18, he is expected to go to a recruitment center to be issued a military booklet, which is then filled in. He must then perform his Self-Defence Duty unless he can document reasons for delay or exemption from the duty.
14. The Defence Department of the DAANES publicly announces the age range for Self-Defence Duty through online platforms. The recruitment centres announce the relevant age groups through assemblies in different city district and publish statements to this effect on their online platforms and TV. While there were previously regional differences in the recruitment process, these procedures have now been standardized.
15. The DAANES does not send letters to the individual conscript to call him up for Self-Defence Duty.

16. There are consistent demands to further decrease the eligible age as more individuals turn 18 each year. For instance, there are calls to exempt those born in 1998 or 1999. NGOs advocate for these changes, and these demands are also reflected in comments and widespread hashtags on official DAANES social media posts, for example on Facebook.

Extension of service

17. The law permits extensions of the Self-Defence Duty in emergency situations. This happened in October 2019 because of the fighting in Tell Abyad upon Turkish incursion, where the Self-Defence Duty was extended for two-three months for some conscripts serving in the HXP.
18. In April and May 2022, a general emergency was declared by the DAANES due to military threats from Turkey, followed by an extension of the Self-Defence Duty for a month or more. This general emergency is enforced to this date. Additionally, errors can occur, resulting in an extra month of service for individuals fulfilling their Self-Defence Duty. The source has not heard of or seen extensions for more than three months.
19. As far as the source is aware, there have not been any cases of people being called up for reserve duty in the HXP after they have been discharged.

Prevalence of discrimination in the HXP

20. There are no indication suggesting that systemic discrimination of conscripts based on their ethnicity takes place during the service in the HXP, however individual cases could happen rarely.
21. Discrimination does not take place in the Self-Defence Forces, as DAANES does not want to create tension between the ethnic groups. Sixty percent of the NES population are Arabs. In some cases, Kurds perceive the DAANES authorities being more flexible with Arab communities in order to win their support. The source emphasizes that NES is a multi-ethnic and religiously diverse region characterized by complexities, ongoing conflict and uncertainty. Consequently, governing this region requires careful consideration of the treatment of minorities.
22. Hasakah and Qamishli have large Arab populations, and you therefore see lots of Arabs in the mandatory military service as well.

Consequences of draft evasion and desertion

23. There are young people who attempt to avoid the Self-Defence Duty by delaying it as long as possible. When this is no longer possible, they will then try to avoid the service

by not travelling in the region, as they would be identified and taken to the service at checkpoints.

24. Evaders are given the opportunity to serve the due length of duty, i.e. one year, when caught without punishment. Deserters generally leave the region, as their desertion might have consequences, but these consequences are not clear. From time to time, an amnesty is being issued for those evaders and deserters, if they return to their duty. The last amnesty was issued in early May 2024.
25. When the security situation in NES is stable, young people want to serve the Self-Defence Duty in order to get it over and done with, but when there is continued external security threats in NES, as it is the case currently, people attempt to avoid the service. Unlike the SDF, the HXP is generally not an active combat force. Instead, they are mostly used to secure borders, or stationed in and assigned to protect communities and areas newly captured by the SDF.
26. A person eligible for the Self-Defence Duty may be able to avoid the service for three to four years by avoiding checkpoints and contact with the DAANES authorities, but at some point, the person will have to travel. It is possible to avoid the Self-Defence Duty for a longer period of time in the Arab-dominated areas since the DAANES authorities, as mentioned earlier, are careful not to raise tension in these areas.

Prevalence of forged documents

27. Obtaining forged or counterfeit documents in NES is not easy, but not impossible. It is easier to obtain forged or counterfeit documents in areas under GoS control. Bribery and corruption is more prevalent in GoS-controlled areas.
28. Both forged documents and genuine documents issued using incorrect information are available. Young men use forged university education documents to delay their Self-Defence Duty.

Recruitment to the SDF

29. Recruitment to the SDF is fully voluntary, but the recruitment process has changed over time and differs from region to region depending on whether the majority of population are Arab or Kurds. With the lack of job opportunities, the relatively high salaries paid by the SDF is one of the main reasons why people join them.
30. In addition to the economic incentive, Kurds join the SDF to defend their region. The same applies to people from the predominantly Arab areas, such as Deir Ezzour, who join the SDF to protect their areas, which were liberated from the ISIS, and still needs protection against possible attacks by the ISIS as well as GoS-Iran linked militias.

Recruitment of minors to the SDF

31. In the past few years, minors in the age range 15 – 17 have continued joining the SDF. One of the main motives underlying recruitment of minors to the SDF is the issues, which these minors are facing in their families, e.g. poor socio-economic conditions, violence in their households etc. As a solution to these problems, but also due to the relatively high salaries paid by the SDF with which they can support their families, these are the main motives for minors to join the SDF.
32. The recruitment of minors was previously a challenge to the DAANES and the SDF, but there are now mechanisms in place to prevent or minimize such recruitments. The SDF has established the so-called “Child Protection Office” dedicated to returning minors to their families, which have successfully returned a number of minors to their families.

The Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM)

33. The RYM was a youth movement within the PYD in NES to start with, which now has an increased presence in the region, and calls itself the Revolutionary Youth of Syria. This group serves as an introduction for young people to the SDF and other military entities in the region.
34. The RYM does promotional and motivational activities, which target young people who are influenced by the group’s ideology. The group does not recruit by force, but rather encourages young people to join them through their motivational activities.
35. The source mentioned the case of his 15-year-old cousin, who was motivated and encouraged by the RYM to join the YPJ. The family wanted her back, but she refused. However, after a period of time, she returned to the family, but expressed a continued interest in pursuing the group's ideology. Ultimately, the family persuaded her to postpone her involvement with the group until she turned 18. This scenario illustrates the typical operation of the RYM.
36. For the last two or three decades, affiliation with the PKK has had an impact on the political and social life in NES. However, the organizational affiliations of the different groups remain unclear, including the RYM’s relationship to the PKK.

WhatsApp meeting with a previous Mandatory Self-Defence Duty conscript residing in Malikiyah (Derek), Syria, 1 May 2024

The source is a 22 years old previous Self-Defence Duty conscript, who was discharged from the service in October 2023. He is from the city of Malikiya (Derek) and still lives there. He conducted his duty in the city of Hasskah.

MILITARY RECRUITMENT IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA (NES)

1. The source stayed in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq until he turned 18. When he was 18, he returned to NES. On his way back to NES, the authorities at the border informed him that he should report for the Self-Defence Duty. Upon return, he started working at the Center for Culture and Art in the city of Hasakah in order to delay his Self-Defence Duty. After two years, he could not delay his service further and he reported for the service. The source did not want to evade the service as he wanted to stay in NES and freely move around without being stopped at checkpoints, due to not having served his duty.
2. Calling up for Self-Defence Duty takes place collectively where the authorities once or twice a year announce through media and social media that people born in a certain year and month and there above should report for the service. However, young men in NES usually know in advance and expect that they will be called up for duty after they turn 18, and it will not come as a surprise when they are called up.
3. Upon reporting for the service, the source was referred to a military training center in Hasakah, as there was no training center in Derek.
4. The group of conscripts, who started the basic training together with the source, consisted of about 200 persons. The age range of the group was between 18 and 28. There were no women in the group.

Training

5. The training period consisted of basic theoretical and practical military training. In the theoretical part of the training, conscripts were taught about the general history and culture of NES and ethics, and they learned about military topics in theory, including military terms and basic knowledge about weapons etc.
6. The practical part of the training comprised much physical training as well as training in how to handle weapon such as AK and PKM.
7. A typical training day at the training center started at 5:00 AM with physical training followed by a group breakfast. Then there was military training. In the afternoon, there were classes about theoretical topics, and in the evening, there was the second part of the military training. During the training period, conscripts were not assigned guard duty, as they were new and had to be trained first before being assigned to such duties.
8. The group, which the source went through the training together with, consisted of about 200 conscripts from all over NES with different educational and ethnic background, for instance Kurds, Arabs etc.
9. Despite the fact that the instructors sometimes had a strict attitude towards the conscripts, the source did not experience during his training that conscripts were

subjected to discriminatory or inhuman treatment by the instructors due to for instance their ethnic background or because of previously having evaded the service.

10. No leave was allowed during the training period. Upon completing the training, conscripts were given 8-10 days leave. After this leave, conscripts went back to the training center where they were assigned to different tasks. When conscripts started doing the tasks they were assigned to, there were one free day after every 10 days of service.

Duties during the service

11. After about two months training in a military training center in Hasakah, conscripts were assigned to different duties based on their educational and professional background and skills. Those with stronger educational backgrounds and skills were assigned to duties in offices or institutions, which could benefit from their skills. The source, who had music skills and had worked in Center for Culture and Art in Hasakah, was assigned to work as music instructor at the at that cultural center in Hasakah, where he taught young people to play string music instruments. The source continued as music instructor for the remainder of his service period. There were also other conscripts, who were assigned to do their service at the cultural center in Hasakah, for instance some did office work whilst others recorded the activities of the center.
12. The source did not wear the HXP uniform or carry arms during his service at the cultural center, and his instructional work was conducted within the working hours of the cultural center. The head of the cultural center reported to the HXP commander responsible for the source's duty about the source's activities in the cultural center.
13. Conscripts with low educational background or no skills were assigned to guard and protection duties, for instance guarding public buildings.
14. None of the 200 conscripts, who went through the training together with the source, were assigned to combat duties.

Length of the duty

15. The length of Self-Defence Duty is one year. However, the source had to serve two more months, as the military recruitment office needed more time to recruit new conscripts to the service. It was not only the source, but the whole group of conscripts who had started their service together with him, whose service was extended with two months. Such extension of service, which is called *Ehtefaz* (meaning "keeping" in Arabic) happens occasionally in the HXP depending on the situation.
16. There is no reserve duty (*Ehtiat*) in the Self-Defence Duty in NES, and those who are discharged, will not be called up again.

Documentation of the service

17. On the first day after completing his service, the source was issued a small ID card called *Bara'at al-zamma*, which contains the name of the source, his picture, dates of his service and the signature and stamp of the military authority. This card documents that the holder has completed his Self-Defence Duty, and he can use the card when passing checkpoints. Six months after completing his service, the source has not obtained his military booklet yet. This is, according to the source, due to the large number of conscripts, who are to be issued their Self-Defence Duty booklets.

Evasion and desertion

18. When an evader is identified and caught at a checkpoint, he will be held at gathering places pertaining to the HXP. While being at these gathering points, the family of the person will be informed about him being caught and sent to the service. Conscripts will shortly after be sent to the service from these gathering places.
19. The source has not heard of any cases of persons being subjected to violence or other kinds of mistreatment when they are caught at checkpoints.
20. The source has not heard of any cases of family members of evaders and deserters being subjected to harassment or other kind of violations due to their family members' evasion or desertion.
21. There were very few among the 200 conscripts that the source was trained together with, who had evaded the service before joining the HXP for service. The source did not know of any cases among these evaders, where the service was extended due to the evasion.
22. In general, life is difficult if a person has not conducted his Self-duty duty. Most of the young men, who evade the Self-Defence Duty, do not want to stay in the region. They try to avoid checkpoints and stay in the area waiting for an opportunity to flee the area and go to other countries.
23. The source has seen evaders who have lived in the area for some years by avoiding the checkpoints and contact with the authorities. The source knows an evader, who have now stayed in NES for three years.
24. It is the source's perception that evasion from the Self-Defence Duty is often based on a fear for being assigned to combat duties. However, according to the source, this is a misunderstanding, as the HXP is an auxiliary force, which his not used in combat.

Local people's knowledge about different groups

25. In general, people are accustomed to and can recognise different groups in the area based on their appearance and uniforms, i.e. who is from SDF, HXP, Assayish, etc.

WhatsApp meeting with the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), 2 May 2024

SNHR is a human rights organization established in 2011. It documents human rights violations in all parts of Syria. Regarding NES, SNHR documents, among other issues, the recruitment of minors.

Recruitment of minors

1. According to the reports received by SNHR, recruitment of minors in NES is common. Recruitment into the military groups within the SDF (e.g., YPG, YPJ) is facilitated by the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM), with some of the minors recruited by the RYM ending up in the ranks of the SDF. There have also been cases of minors being sent to the PKK training camps in the KRI.
2. The families of recruited minors are the main source of information about their recruitment, and it is often the parents who contact SNHR, for instance by email, to report the recruitment of their child. The reports received are verified by SNHR's monitoring and documentation section, as well as by SNHR's field activists. SNHR strives to reach out to the immediate family members of the recruited minor to obtain information about the recruitment in question. If this is not possible, the extended family (i.e., second or third-degree relatives) of the minor will be.
3. In conflict situations, when there are clashes between the SDF and the Turkish forces in some areas, the recruitment of minors tends to increase.
4. The child protection offices, which were established by the DAANES in 2020, remain operational. However, these offices lack the necessary authority and capacity to locate and release recruited minors. For example, they do not appear to possess the authority to counteract the recruitment activities of the RYM or to secure the release of minors recruited by this group.
5. Since the beginning of 2023, SNHR has not recorded any instances of the SDF releasing recruited minors through its child protection offices.
6. The RYM recruits minors by luring them with promises of a better life and protection, as well as through political indoctrination via cultural and political activities such as music and language classes or political demonstrations. However, there are also reports of minors being forcibly recruited by the RYM, including instances of kidnapping minors when they leave their schools or homes. Recruitment by force often takes place in areas where the SDF shares control with other forces, such as in Hasakah

and Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhood in Aleppo, where the GoS is present and controls part of the area. In areas entirely under the control of the SDF, the RYM usually strives to recruit minors voluntarily through promoting and encouraging activities.

7. Since the very first months of its emergence, the SDF has recruited minors, with the scale of such recruitments increasing as the SDF has consolidated its security and military control over its territories in NES. Minors have been recruited both voluntarily and forcefully. Additionally, the SNHR has documented numerous cases in which schools affiliated with the DAANES have been involved in supporting recruitment of minors.
8. The SNHR considers all kinds of recruitment of minors as forced recruitment, even if a minor joins a particular group of their own will. Since a minor is legally under the custody of their parents, recruitment by a group without the parents' consent is considered a violation of the parents' custody.
9. The general public in NES are discontent with the activities of the RYM, and there have been several demonstrations by parents protesting against their activities. On the other hand, the RYM does not care about the public opinion about its activities as they believe that following their ideology is the only way to save the region from its problems, and they therefore have the right to carry out the activities they do.
10. A number of families who participated in demonstrations against recruitment of minors have received threats and been assaulted by pro-SDF groups. Additionally, they have been warned against participating in future demonstrations.
11. At the same time, the DAANES authorities, including the SDF, refrain from interfering in the RYM's activities, and they apparently do not have authority or control over the group. The source believes that the RYM is affiliated with and instructed and controlled by the PKK.
12. Since its establishment as the People's Defense Units (YPG) in July 2012 up until June 2024, SNHR has recorded at least 672 cases of minors being recruited by the SDF, comprising 364 males and 308 females. At least 30 of those minors have been killed in combat. Additionally, SNHR has recorded release/discharge of 301 minors after being recruited, while 341 minors, including 212 males and 129 females, remain active with the SDF.

WhatsApp meeting with a Syrian Human Rights Organisation, 22 April 2024

The source has been monitoring and documenting violations (e.g. killings, abductions, torture etc.) against civilians conducted by different parties of the Syrian conflict since 2011. It has a well-established network of sources throughout Syria.

Recruitment to HXP

1. The mandatory Self-Defence Duty in the Self-Defence Forces (HXP) is enforced in all areas under the control of the Self-administration (DAANES) in North and East Syria (NES). Kurdish and Arab men between the ages of 18 and 26 are conscripted into the HXP.
2. The HXP are auxiliary forces and thus the conscripts in HXP are not used in active fighting. They are mainly used for guarding checkpoints or public buildings and headquarters etc. However, there have been incidents where conscripts guarding checkpoints have been subjected to attacks from and clashed with the Syrian Arab Army (SAA).
3. HXP does not commit human rights violations against civilians, mainly because HXP conscripts serve in their local areas. As the areas under DAANES control are tribal, the conscripts are careful about how they behave in their local areas as there will be consequences for any misbehaviour.
4. The military groups in NES, e.g. SDF, YPG, YPJ and HXP, have different and unique uniforms and batches. Citizens of NES can distinguish between these groups by the uniforms and batches they wear.
5. Citizens of NES tend to refer to all these groups as “SDF” [locally named *qasad* قَسَد which is the abbreviation of the Arabic name of the group, *Quwat Suriya al-Dimoqratiya* *قوات سوريا الديمقراطية*]. This is partly due to the fact that the SDF is an umbrella military organisation covering different groups such as YPG and YPJ, but also because it is the most powerful force in the area. Citizens even refer to NES as “SDF areas”. However, this is merely a lingual reference, and they otherwise distinguish between different groups.

Recruitment of minors

6. Minors are not recruited into HXP, either forcibly or voluntarily. The source has only seen cases of minors joining the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) on a voluntary basis although there are cases where the parents of these minors may have mistakenly believed that their children had been forcibly recruited.
7. Minors join the RYM for various reasons: to run away from home due to family problems; they are attracted by the idea of being part of an organisation or they need to earn money to provide economic support for their families.
8. The RYM does not offer minors any military training. Their training activities are limited to political, cultural (e.g. music and language courses) and practical issues (e.g. sport), through which they try to influence them mentally and ideologically.

9. The RYM is affiliated with the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and despite allegations, there have so far not been any evidence that it cooperates or have any organisational relationship with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). However, they are ideologically linked to PKK as they consider Abdullah Ocalan as an icon.

Recruitment into SDF

10. Recruitment to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) is voluntary and men who have completed their mandatory service in HXP can voluntarily join SDF. The source has not heard or received information about forced recruitment by the SDF.
11. The source has not heard or received information about recent recruitment of minors by the SDF. However, parents of minors who join the RYM usually say that their children joined the SDF even though the RYM is not part of SDF.

Recruitment by the SAA in NES

12. The Syrian authorities recruit for military service in the areas they control in NES. However, they are cautious about enforcing the military service laws in these areas due to their limited power and control in these areas.
13. To avoid desertion, men conscripted by the SAA in NES are given the possibility to serve in their areas of origin. For example, men who are conscripted from villages in Qamishli that are under the Syrian authorities control serve in the villages they are from in Qamishli. For this reason, when men reach military age, they tend to enlist for military service because they know they will be serving in their own areas. If they do not enlist, the Syrian authorities will not actively seek to recruit them as the Syrian authorities have limited control in these areas.
14. Both Arabs and Kurds living in NES prefer to serve in HXP rather than serving in the SAA because mandatory military service in HXP is only for one year, whereas in the SAA whereas in the SAA the individual risks serving for many more years than the period stipulated by the law.
15. Many people are fleeing from GoS-controlled areas, particularly Deir Ezzour, to areas under DAANES control in order to avoid serving in the SAA. They prefer to serve in HXP.
16. The Syrian military law and regulations on exemptions and deferrals are implemented in the areas controlled by the Syrian authorities in NES.

Leaving and entering NES

17. There are smuggling routes between all areas controlled by different groups in Syria. People living in the DAANES-controlled areas or other areas in Syria who want to enter areas controlled by other groups can be smuggled through these routes and avoid checkpoints. They can even pass the checkpoints without being caught by bribing the personnel.
18. Bribery at checkpoints is widespread in all areas of Syria. A person, who lives in the DAANES-controlled areas and wants to go to Damascus, can pass all checkpoints even if he is wanted by the Syrian authorities, simply by bribing the personnel at all checkpoints. Usually, the drivers accompanying the wanted persons know the personnel at these checkpoints and bribe them in advance. The source is aware of cases of persons who have managed to travel from NES to Damascus several times despite being wanted by the Syrian authorities.

Written interview with Syrian lawyer, Hossein Naasoo, based in Germany, 17. April 2024

The source has provided the information in consultation with a number of lawyers inside Syria, including lawyers within NES to ensure the accuracy of the information.

Government of Syria (GoS) presence in NES

1. The areas in NES, which are under the military and administrative control of the Democratic Autonomous Administration (DAANES) comprise:
 - Tal Rifaat and the Al-Shahba areas in the Aleppo countryside
 - the neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah in Aleppo
 - Manbij, Kobani, Raqqa, parts of Deir ez-Zor
 - Al-Hasakah and Qamishli, with the exception of the security squares controlled by the GoS.
2. There is difference between different regions of NES, which are under the DAANES control, with regard to the presence of GoS civil administration. For example, there is no civil, administrative or security presence of the GoS institutions in Manbij, Raqqa, Kobani, and parts of Deir ez-Zor, neither GoS civil registry offices, real estate registration departments nor educational institutions.
3. As for the Aleppo countryside and Aleppo neighborhoods, GoS administration, is present, for instance GoS-run schools in cities with an Arab majority as well as civil registry departments.

Whatsapp-meeting with Zaki Mohammad Hajji, Human rights lawyer based in Qamishli, Northeast Syria (NES), 9 April 2024

Government of Syria (GoS) presence in NES

1. The GoS' presence in NES is limited to the so-called security squares (*Al-Morabat Al-Amniya*) in the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli, where they operate government offices, including among others civil status offices, recruitment offices and some schools etc, to serve the residents of NES. The Syrian authorities' exercise of power and authority in the security squares is limited to running these offices. The DAANES authorities control the rest of the territory in NES.
2. When it comes to criminal matters, the Syrian authorities are not in a position to exercise their authority (i.e. arresting and prosecuting wanted persons) in NES. Criminal matters are handled by the DAANES, as the Syrian authorities present in the security squares neither have the capacity nor are allowed by the DAANES authorities to do it.
3. Unless the person concerned approaches the GoS authorities in the security squares, the Syrian authorities are unable to arrest persons wanted for military service. The GoS is able to check a person's security file at the passport and immigration office in Hasakah, which enables them to arrest people with outstanding issues who approach them to make enquiries. The GoS is unable to arrest persons outside this specific setting in the security squares.

GoS documents issued in NES

4. The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) recruitment offices, which are also present in the security squares, also issue military booklets related to military service in the SAA as well as study postponement paper which is issued to students.

Access to NES from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and freedom of movement

5. Wanted draft evaders from military service with the SAA will be arrested if they attempt to fly to Damascus from Qamishli. This can happen when the person in question reaches Damascus, but also at Qamishli airport, which is controlled by the GoS authorities.
6. People from NES, who have outstanding issues with the Syrian government, will be arrested if they attempt to enter areas of Syria that are controlled by the GoS, for instance the Immigration and Pass Department in the security square in Hassakah.

WhatsApp-meeting with Mahmoud Omar, lawyer based in Qamishli, Northeast Syria (NES), 16. April 2024

GoS documents issued in NES

1. The military recruitment units in the security squares in Qamishli and Hasakah, issues military booklets in connection with military service in the SAA.

Access to NES from Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and freedom of movement

2. In the security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli, arrest of wanted persons only happens if the individual actively approaches GoS offices present in the area with access to databases of those with outstanding issues.

Meeting with Seyredin Yusuf, Syrian Kurdish journalist based in Erbil, Erbil, 30 April 2024

Implementation of the Self-Defence Duty Law

1. The Self-Defence Duty Law applies to all areas that falls under the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES), and it is implemented in all areas.
2. Previously, the Self-Defence Duty was primarily implemented in the northern regions of NES, which are predominantly Kurdish populated. However, after more areas were liberated from the ISIS and came under the control of the SDF, the law began to be enforced in these areas too, for instance in Deir Ezzour and Raqqa.
3. According to the law, anyone who is born in NES or has been a resident of NES for 5 years or more is obligated to fulfil the Self-Defence Duty. However, the source is uncertain whether this requirement is being consistently implemented across all regions.
4. The specified age range in the law is consistently enforced. Individuals reaching the age of 18 are regularly called up for service. Twice a year, public announcements are made on the website and online platforms of the DAANES regarding which age groups are being called up.
5. The duration of the Self-Defence Duty is one year.
6. The source has not heard of cases, where the length of duty has exceeded one year, even in emergencies or force majeure situations.

Postponement

7. Pre-university students have the option to defer their Self-Defence Duty until the age of 21. Bachelor of Arts students can defer service until the age of 26. For Master of Arts students, deferment is possible until the age of 28. Ph.D. students can defer service until the age of 30. The primary reason for deferring military service is education.
8. Another option for deferring conscription is if a family member is already serving their Self-Defence Duty. In such cases, individuals can postpone their own service until their family member completes theirs.

Exemption

9. The first circumstance that can lead to full exemption is when a man is the only son in his family. Another scenario is if he is the sole surviving member of his family with no other relatives left. A third avenue for exemption is if a family member of the young man in question has been martyred while serving with one of the Kurdish military forces.
10. Additionally, one can be exempted from the Self-Defence Duty if the person has already served in one of the institutions or forces under the DAANES for at least three years. This applies to paid contract-based service in any DAANES-approved institution, such as for example the traffic police.
11. A person can also be exempted if he, due to mental or physical health condition, is unable to perform his duty.
12. These rules for postponement and exemption from military service are adhered to and implemented in practice.

Recruitment of women

13. It is clearly stated in the Self-Defence Duty law that the service is solely mandatory for young men. However, it is possible for women to join the Self-Defence Forces (HXP) voluntarily. This is observed in practice, and women are not compelled to serve in the HXP.

Treatment of minorities

14. There have been no reported cases of mistreatment or discrimination against ethnic minorities, for instance Arabs, during their Self-Defence Duty. The DAANES is particularly sensitive to this issue and will take immediate action, should any cases of discrimination occur.

Evasion from the Self-Defence Duty

15. Evading the Self-Defence Duty will ultimately result in detention and enlistment. The law is strictly enforced in this regard. Evaders face the risk of being identified and apprehended at checkpoints, which restricts their ability to leave their hometown. Upon detection, they will immediately be enlisted to fulfil their duty. Similarly, evaders who are intercepted at the border while attempting to leave the country will immediately be drafted. When draft evaders are caught and apprehended at checkpoints or at the border, their families will subsequently be notified.
16. Young men who do not wish to enlist may seek alternative ways to adhere to the regulations stipulated by the Self-Defence Duty law. For instance, some opt for serving in the traffic police for three years to qualify for exemption from their Self-Defence Duty.
17. The source has not heard of any cases of evasion having negative consequences for draft evader's family members, even if the evader in question is detained at a checkpoint.

Military training during the Self-Defence Duty

18. The Self-Defence Duty commences with a standardized basic training mandatory for all individuals. Following this phase, conscripts are allocated to various departments depending on their backgrounds, education and skills. For instance, those with academic qualifications will most likely be assigned to civilian and administrative tasks rather than military duties.
19. Conscripts are typically assigned to guarding and protecting duties both in urban and rural areas. Additionally, some may undergo specialized training in weapon handling.

Recruitment to the SDF

20. The SDF, serving as the primary military defense force in NES, maintains close coordination with the DAANES' Defense Department. Recruitment to the SDF takes place on a voluntary basis and the SDF offers its recruits contracts providing relatively high financial compensation compared to the local average income. In contrast to conscripts in the HXP, the SDF members can be characterized as more professional soldiers.
21. There is no forced recruitment into the SDF for various reasons. One of these is the SDF's commitment to upholding its image as a professional force. For instance, the SDF has already engaged in numerous international agreements, which they seek to uphold in the future. As a result, they have no interest in forceful recruitment practices.

The Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM)

22. The RYM is a radical youth group originating from the PYD. The group organize activities targeting young people of NES. The RYM focuses on winning the hearts and minds of the youth encouraging them to follow the group and its ideology. Their activities center around organizing demonstrations and protests, appealing to young people by portraying themselves as revolutionaries. Due to the militant, provoking and disrupting nature of the group's activities and their attempt to lure young people to join them, the RYM is generally not enjoying popularity among the local population.
23. The RYM was notably more popular in the past, especially in the period after 2011. However, the more the DAANES institutions have taken root in the NES society, the more the group has come under pressure to stop its activities as it is not perceived to be relevant any more. This pressure has however led to the group being even more radicalized in its goals and activities. For instance, in recent years, they have targeted opposition parties not aligned with the PYD, resorting to burning down their offices or assaulting individuals associated with these opposition groups.
24. There have been accusations that the RYM has used physical abduction to forcibly recruit minors. However, these allegations have neither been confirmed nor refuted. The group generally tends to use conviction or persuasion tactics more than coercion or forceful recruitment efforts.

Local knowledge about different groups

25. The locals living in NES have a clear understanding of who is who in the region. They can decipher various groups or actors based on their attire, logos, armbands, uniforms etc. People are generally capable of distinguishing between different groups.
26. In relation to the RYM, it can be somewhat harder to recognize them in the same way. This is because they do not carry weapons or wear a specific uniform. While their presence is unmistakable during large activities such as protests or demonstrations, they are generally harder to identify compared to other groups.

Skype meeting with Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), 16 May 2024

[Syrians for Truth and Justice \(STJ\)](#) is a non-profit, human rights NGO based in France, which was established in 2016. It document human rights violations committed by the different parties to the Syrian conflict in Syria and register them in a private database. The researcher from STJ, who met with the delegation, is from Qamishli and has an extensive knowledge about the situation in the NES.

Recruitment of minors by the RYM

1. Similar to numerous other issues in Syria, the recruitment of minors in the North and East Syria (NES) is highly politicized. The reported figures of recruited minors in NES are frequently subject to significant exaggeration or understatement. International organizations, NGOs and critics of the SDF or the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) tend to overstate the numbers. In contrast, proponents of the SDF and the DAANES often depict the situation in a more favorable light, claiming either that such recruitment practices do not occur.
2. Recruitment of minors to different groups, inter alia the RYM and different military groups in the area, still takes place in the NES, and there are dozens of cases each year.
3. The Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) seeks to attract and persuade minors to join their ranks through political indoctrination. This indoctrination is facilitated by various cultural and political activities, including political meetings, Kurdish nationalistic narratives and songs as well as music, and language courses. TJ has not documented any instances of minors being kidnapped and forcibly sent to training camps.
4. Allegations of abductions are frequently reported by media outlets critical of the DAANES. In some cases, parents, desperate to retrieve their children who have left home and joined groups against their will, may exaggerate the circumstances of recruitment. They claim that their children were kidnapped from the streets to draw media and authorities' attention to their pleas for assistance. The source emphasizes thought that this does not necessarily mean that the recruitment claimed by the parents have not taken place.
5. According to Syrian law, recruiting persons under 18 (in Arabic *Naqesi al-ahliya* ناقصي الأهلية) by any party of the conflict may amount to "exploitation of minors". Against this background, the source concludes that no party can use the 'consent' of minors as an excuse to recruit them, because the law consider them as "ineligible".²³⁴
6. According to Kurdish media, there are different wings operating in the DAANES area, and the RYM is unofficially linked to one of these factions, and this is why DAANES can't stop them.
7. Recruited minors typically come from families facing socio-economic and domestic challenges, such as divorced parents, domestic violence, absence of a parent, or poverty. These circumstances render minors particularly vulnerable to the ideological propaganda of the RYM, which promises them a better future if they join the RYM.

²³⁴ The source refers to: Waqad Law Firm Encyclopedia, *Eligibility according to Syrian law* الأهلية وفقاً للقانون السوري, [url](#)

Furthermore, joining such groups or organizations provides these minors with a sense of belonging to a powerful entity capable of offering protection in a region marked by instability and insecurity.

8. The recruitment of minors occurs in a seemingly random manner, both in terms of timing and location. However, there is less recruitment in Arab-populated areas such as Raqqa and Deir Ezzor compared to regions with a high concentration of Kurds, such as Hasakah, and Qamishli.
9. Although such recruitments of minors continues, they do not necessarily and always occur with all levels of leadership of this recruiting organization being aware of this.
10. The number of confirmed cases of recruited minors being transferred to PKK training camps in the Qandil Mountains in Iraq has thus far been limited, according to the Kurdish media. Although some parents have claimed that their children were taken to Qandil, subsequent investigations revealed that these children were located elsewhere within Syria. For instance, in one case, parents asserted their child was taken to Qandil, but it was later discovered that he was in Manbij.
11. Instances of minors being recruited into the SDF still occur according to the families of minors. However, there is limited evidence that such recruitment involves the use of force.
12. Despite the SDF's declared intent to cease the recruitment of minors, it continues for several reasons. It can be challenging to ascertain that an individual is under 18 based on physical appearance alone, and some minors falsify their age and documents to be recruited. Additionally, there are instances where individual SDF officers knowingly recruit minors, disregarding their age.
13. The number of minors recruited by the SDF has somewhat decreased in recent years; however, recruitment still occurs.
14. Few child protection offices remain active, though not to the same extent as when they were first established. The decline in activity is attributed to a lack of resources and shifting priorities within the SDF. This decline is considered unfortunate, as these offices were effective and provided reliable information on child recruitment.

Meeting with Wladimir van Wilgenburg, journalist, Erbil, 30. April 2024

Recruitment to the SDF

1. The SDF is the primary military force in areas under DAANES control, and is used in active combat.
2. The SDF pays high salaries to its soldiers compared to other armed groups in Syria.
3. People who want to join the SDF go to the SDF military recruitment centres to enlist for service.
4. There are no reports of women being forced to join the SDF.
5. A large number of people perceive the Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP) as synonymous with the SDF, often conflating the two. However, the SDF and the HXP are separate forces with different commanders. Sometimes, the confusion between the two forces make the organisations that report about military recruitment in NES to mistakenly report the mandatory Self-Defence Duty as forced recruitment to the SDF.

Recruitment of minors

6. There have been a couple of cases regarding the recruitment of minors to the SDF and the Asayish. A recent report highlighted the participation of minors in Asayish training with coalition forces. However, the number of reported cases of minor recruitment has been decreasing with most instances now primarily associated with the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RY), or Tevgera Ciwanên Şoreşger in Kurdish.
7. Most minors attempt to join the SDF for economic reasons, especially in cases from the areas of NES with an Arab majority population. Some Kurdish minors joining the SDF do so for ideological reasons.
8. As far as the source is aware, there have not been any cases of minors being recruited into the HXP.

The Self-Defence Duty

9. People conscripted to the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty receive a small financial compensation for their service.
10. According to the Self-Defence Duty law, the service is mandatory for men. Women are able to serve in the HXP on a voluntary basis, and there have been no cases of women being forcefully recruited to HXP.
11. The Self-Defence Duty has occasionally been suspended in the areas with an Arab majority population due to criticism from the population in these areas. People in the

Kurdish areas, such as Kobane and Qamishli, are also critical of the Self-Defence Duty, but in these areas it was implemented nonetheless.

12. In the areas with an Arab majority such as Deir Ezzour and Raqqa, the DAANES is careful not to push for the implementation of the Self-Defence Duty due to the local dynamics and the risk of provoking a conflict with Arabs. The source is not sure whether the DAANES has started implementing the Self-Defence Duty in areas with an Arab majority.
13. At the same time, there is not a lot of employment opportunities in Raqqa or Deir Ezzour, which is why the population in these areas resist doing service in the HXP, where the conscripts merely receive a minimal financial compensation. In these areas, it is easier to recruit people by offering them a salary, for instance by recruitment to the SDF.
14. The DAANES is generally more careful regarding the implementation of law on sensitive issues such as education, gender rights or military service in the areas where the majority of the population are Arabs. An example of this is polygamy. While there are not many cases of polygamy among Syrian Kurds, and the few cases there are mainly concentrated within the older generation, polygamy is quite prevalent within the Arab tribes of this area.
15. The Self-Defence law is mostly implemented in areas with a Kurdish majority, such as Hasakah-province or the area around Kobane. However, the DAANES is slowly attempting to implement it in Deir Ezzour, Raqqa and Tabqa.
16. The HXP is an auxiliary force mainly used to guard buildings and checkpoints, and not used for active combat. However, sometimes when there is heavy fighting in an area where the HXP is present, they get involved in active combat. Last summer there was heavy fighting in Deir Ezzour, where the HXP conscripts present in the area were involved and suffered casualties. They were also involved in the fighting at Tell Abyad, where there were rumours that a lot of people from the Self-Defence Force ran away, when the heavy fighting erupted. Two years ago, conscripts serving in the HXP were also involved in active combat, when ISIS attacked Hasakah prison, which was primarily guarded by the HXP.
17. In general, the laws provisions related to the length of the Self-Defence and the recruitment age are respected by DAANES authorities.

The Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM)

18. The RYM is a radical youth group affiliated with the PYD. The group is thus not the same as and has no organizational relationship to the SDF or the HXP. The group does

political marches and protests, and it has been accused of attacking the rivals of the PYD, the Kurdish National Council, and burning down their offices.

19. The RYM is accused of recruiting minors, the DAANES continues to be criticised by the UN for not taking sufficient measure to stop recruitment of minors.
20. It is difficult to determine, whether such recruitments take place voluntarily or by force. This is partly due to the significant gap between the findings of the several reports drafted about recruitment of minor by different organisations; while some of these reports describe the recruitments as being voluntary, others present a completely different picture and characterize these recruitments as forcible.
21. At the same time, the research conducted on this topic is limited. What makes the picture additionally blurred is the general perception among the local population as well as international organisations that any recruitment without the consent of the minor's parents is to be considered forced recruitment even if the minor joins the group voluntarily.
22. Finally, it could be that the information about forced recruitment (e.g. abduction etc.) of minors to the RYM originate in the majority of cases from the parents, who are unhappy about their children being recruited without the parents' consent.
23. Many of the accusations regarding forced recruitment of minors to this group originate from Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhood in Aleppo. Often these accusations are published by media critical to the DAANES.
24. There are also media reports of young girls being forced to join the RYM against their will.
25. There is speculation that minors recruited to the RYM will end up as fighters, for instance in the SDF or the PKK, whilst others will be used in the group's activities, e.g. demonstrations and protest marches.
26. The RYM has offices in Armuda and Qamishli, where they are involved in actions, such as protests and marches, when tension is high between the Kurdish political parties,. It is unclear whether the RYM is supported or condoned by the DAANES, and it is unclear who actually controls the group.

Local knowledge about the different groups

27. The local population of NES is able to tell the difference between the HXP, the SDF and the Asayish and. The different military groups wear different uniforms and have different logos. Some militias within the SDF even have their own logos.
28. This may have been unclear in the in the beginning, when these groups were established especially in areas of NES with an Arab majority, but after all these years people know the difference, and their logos are written in Arabic and Kurdish.

The security squares and recruitment SAA

29. People with outstanding security issues or wanted for military service are reluctant to go to the security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli.
30. People with outstanding security issues or wanted for military service are reluctant to go to the security square in Qamishli to fly to Damascus, as there is a high risk of their identity being checked and then being arrested when they approach the airport.
31. There is a de facto agreement between the DAANES and the GoS, which generally inhibits the GoS from recruiting by force in NES. However, the security squares of Hasakah and Qamishli are outside of the SDF zone of influence.
32. People with outstanding security issues or wanted for military service are reluctant to enter government offices in the Hasakah security square. Instead, they renew passports and documents outside of Syria.

Leaving NES

33. The destruction of infrastructure in NES by Turkey has had direct impact on the economy of NES, and the employment rate is very low. Kobane is economically isolated because of Turkey taking control of Tal Abyad/Serekaniye. It is difficult to reach there, the road is long from the border and people need to go from Hasakah to Raqqa and then to Kobane.
34. An increasing number of people are leaving NES due to deteriorating economic situation, which is also related to the inflation of the Syrian Pound and the lack of employment opportunities. The future of NES remains highly uncertain, and there is considerable dissatisfaction among residents with the region's poorly maintained educational system.
35. People leaving NES irregularly are usually smuggled through Turkish-controlled areas into Turkey, and subsequently to Europe. People using this route run the risk of being detained by the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army militias (SNA). Previously the main route was via KRI to Turkey.

WhatsApp meeting with Fanar Al-Kait and Khaled Ibrahim, Department of Foreign Relations of the DAANES, Qamishli, April 28, 2024

Mandatory Self-Defence Duty

1. Mandatory Self-Defence Duty (hereafter referred to as Self-Defence Duty) is a compulsory military service for young men in areas under the control of the DAANES. It is regulated by the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty Law of 2014, with the latest amended version from 2024.
2. The law regulating Self-Defence Duty does not discriminate based on race or language and applies to individuals born in areas of North **and** East Syria under the control of the DAANES. These areas include Hasakah and Raqqa governorates and parts of Deir ez-Zor governorate. It does not apply to residents of NES who come from other parts of Syria unless they have resided in NES for at least three years.
3. According to the law, Self-Defence Duty is mandatory only for men who have reached the age of 18 and those born up to 1998, depending on the individual's circumstances (educational, occupational, health, etc.).
4. Women can serve in the HXP voluntarily, but their service is not mandatory.
5. Generally, women who volunteer for service primarily perform administrative tasks and guard duties.
6. The duration of Self-Defence Duty is one year according to the law. However, the law includes provisions that can extend the service period, such as attempts to evade service or committing illegal acts during service, but also in emergencies if it is in the public interest.
7. Decisions related to extending the service period in Self-Defence Duty are made by local commanders, depending on circumstances and needs.

Tasks during the Self-Defence Duty

8. The HXP are an auxiliary force to the SDF (the main military force in NES).
9. Upon completion of training, recruits typically perform administrative and technical tasks, in addition to guarding buildings and checkpoints. These tasks are carried out on the second and third lines in conflict areas, where Self-Defence recruits play a supportive role.

10. As a general rule, the HXP do not participate in actual combat, which falls under the tasks of the SDF. However, there have been incidents where buildings or checkpoints guarded by the Self-Defence Forces were targeted by the Islamic State or other hostile groups, resulting in casualties among the serving recruits.

Exemptions

11. Individuals who have served in the Syrian Democratic Forces or Asayish are exempt from Self-Defence Duty. The only son in a family and members of martyrs' families are also not required to perform Self-Defence Duty.
12. The Self-Defence Duty Law includes provisions for medical exemptions, and in such cases, a medical examination is conducted to determine the individual's capability to serve.

Documentation of Self-Defence Duty

13. Completion of Self-Defence Duty is recorded in the individual's military booklet. In addition, the person who completes the service is provided with a discharge document.

Evasion

14. If someone tries to evade service, the authorities will not search their home to find them. However, if the person approaches checkpoints, their identity will be identified, and they will be temporarily detained and then sent to perform Self-Defence Duty. The person's family will be notified of this.

Recruitment in the Syrian Democratic Forces

15. Recruitment in the SDF is contractual and based on voluntary service. The contract is between the individual and the SDF. The duration of contracts ranges from two to five years or more, depending on the volunteer's preference.

Organization of Security Squares

16. Security squares are isolated pockets in Hasakah and Qamishli. In Qamishli, the security square covers about one square kilometer. The GoS cannot operate outside the security squares, and checkpoints of the SDF will stop GoS forces if they attempt to pass with forcibly recruited individuals.
17. The security square in Hasakah is slightly larger than the one in Qamishli, as Hasakah is the provincial capital and houses many GoS offices.

18. The security square is literally the meaning of these places, as they are the limited areas where GoS forces are present.
19. Generally, people do not visit the security square in Qamishli, which is surrounded by SDF checkpoints.

Security procedures in Security Squares

20. The GoS verifies identities at checkpoints when people enter the security square. Wanted individuals will not be arrested in the streets of the security square or at the checkpoints. Detention within the security squares can only occur if the person goes to the GoS offices, where a database search can be conducted to determine if the individual has any outstanding security issues, including military service evasion.

Recruitment to the Syrian Army

21. The official stance of the DAANES is that the GoS has no influence in NES. There have been rare cases of individuals being secretly conscripted by force in the security squares, but the Autonomous Administration has been able to mediate on their behalf and secure their release.

Documents issued in NES

22. The DAANES issues driving licenses, educational certificates and family books in areas under its control.
23. Property documents, residency permits, national passports and central identity documents, including identity cards, are issued by GoS departments in Hasakah.
24. The identification certificate (*Shadat al-Taarif* in Arabic or *Nasnameh* in Kurdish) is an identity document issued by the Komeen of the councils (districts, towns, and cities) in NES under the control of the DAANESation. This certificate confirms the person's identity and residence (address). It is used, for example, when people apply for jobs and fuel requests. The identification certificate is not issued according to a standardized layout. This document is also issued to Ajanibs and Maktoumeen, who cannot obtain central identity documents issued by the Syrian government.
25. The Komeen system operates parallel to the mukhtar system in areas under GoS control.
26. Forgery exists in both NES and areas controlled by the GoS. However, the DAANES keeps records of issued documents, and procedures for verifying and authenticating documents are in place.

WhatsApp meeting with Zydan Asî, Joint Chairman of the Defense Authority for North and East Syria, the Defence Department of the DAANES, 2 May 2024

The mandatory Self-Defence Duty

1. When individuals are called up for the Self-Defence Duty, it is determined not solely based on their year of birth, but by a specific date. For example, this could include all individuals born on or before a certain day in May 2006. The specific call-up group is announced on online platforms and TV.
2. Currently, individuals born in 1998 and onwards are being called up to serve, and the age range is therefore 18-26 years old. This age determination was established in the latest legislative amendment to the Law on Self-Defence Duty introduced in 2021.

Deferment or exemption from the Self-Defence Duty

3. Students have the possibility for deferral of their Self-Defence Duty.
4. Pre-university students can defer their Self-Defence Duty for two-three years. For university students, it can be postponed until they reach the age of 36.
5. Studies and education do not need to take place at an educational institution located in NES in order for a student to be able to defer his duty; they can also be pursued at educational institutions in GoS-controlled areas or even in neighboring countries.
6. The Self-Defence Duty law provides provisions for exemption from the Self-Defence Duty for a number of reasons. Individuals who are the only sons in their families, persons from families with martyrs, or men who are required to support their families can be exempted from the Self-Defence Duty. The same applies for the case of being the sole surviving member of one's family or because of health reasons, i.e. physical or mental disabilities.

Individuals residing outside of NES

7. Individuals residing outside of NES and its neighboring countries, who return to the area, have the option to defer their Self-Defence Duty for one year by paying a fee of 400 USD, which they can do twice in total. After payment, they can freely move around NES without being drafted to the Self-Defence Duty.
8. Türkiye, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan are considered neighboring countries, and individuals from NES who reside in these countries are expected to return to fulfil their military service. However, these citizens can still obtain a deferral of their Self-Defence Duty if, for example, they are enrolled in an educational institution in Turkey. Likewise,

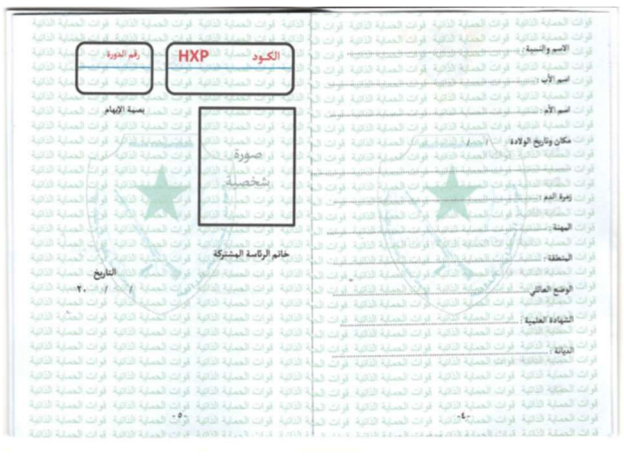
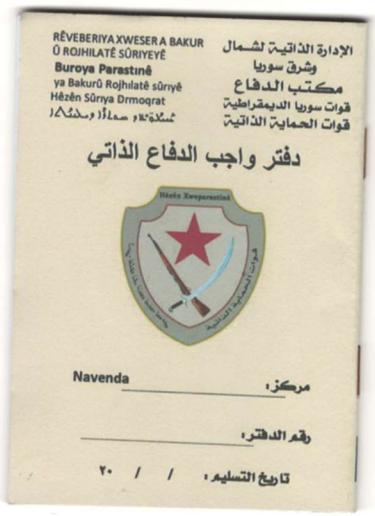
they can be exempted from the Self-Defence Duty if they acquire citizenship in one of these neighboring countries.

9. Until 2019, the law permitted individuals to buy exemption from the Self-Defence Duty by paying a fee of 6000 USD. This practice was abolished due to concerns that it exacerbated inequality, as only the affluent could afford to avoid the duty through payment.
10. Conscripts who report late for their Self-Defence Duty without valid reason are sanctioned with an additional one or two month(s) of service, extending their Self-Defence Duty with one month.
11. The HXP does not have a reserve force. Individuals who have completed their military service are not called up again.
12. A person may be retained in service (*Ehtefaz* in Arabic احتفاظ) in two situations. The first is if someone enlists for military service late. In such case, the service is extended with additional one or two months. The second is during extraordinary crisis or force majeure, where individuals may be retained in service. However, the maximum extension of service in these situations is up to three months.

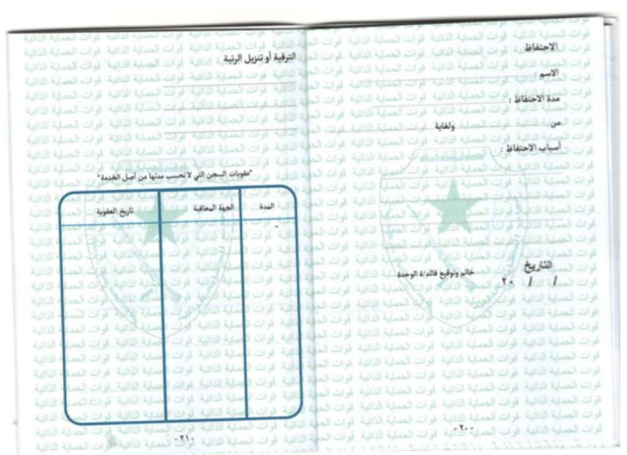
Bera ez zimma

13. Upon completing the Self-Defence Duty and while individuals are waiting for their Self-Defence Duty booklets to be sent to them, they are issued a document called "*Bera ez zimma*". It is a temporary discharge document signifying that the holder of the document has returned their weapons, uniform and other belongings. It can be presented at various checkpoints for inspection and used for travel. However, this document is temporary and must subsequently be replaced with a military booklet.

Annex 2: Copy of military booklet



MILITARY RECRUITMENT IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA (NES)



Annex 3: Self-Defence Duty Law (Amended 2024)

Source: The General Assembly of the Democratic Administration of North and East Syria, [Law nr. 1: Self-Defence Duty, 2024-amended version](#)

Translated by: The Danish Immigration Service

Based on the provisions of the Basic Charter of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria,

The General Assembly of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria passed Law No. (1) of 2019 concerning the Self-Defence Duty in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, dated 22/6/2019.

Introduction:

Self-Defence Duty is a national, humanitarian, and moral obligation that falls on every individual. It is a duty to defend the nation's borders, its people, and its institutions in accordance with the legitimate principles of Self-Defence, to protect the community, preserve coexistence and equality, and maintain the unity of diversity to create a free democratic society.

Article 1: Definitions

This law is called the Self-Defence Duty Law and adopts the following definitions:

A. **Self-Defence Duty:** A mandatory service for males from the regions of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria who have reached the age of eighteen.

B. **Self-Defence Duty Office:** An office under the Defense Department that supplies fighters to the camps through its centres.

C. **Self-Defence Duty Center:** Responsible for managing the affairs of those obligated to perform Self-Defence Duty in accordance with the law and the decisions of the Defense Department.

D. **Obligated Individual:** Any person who has reached the legal age to perform Self-Defence Duty, including residents originating from the region, Syrian nationals from outside North and East Syria who have resided continuously in the region for more than three years, and those categorized as Ajanib and Maktoumeen.

D. **Fighter:** Any person who has joined the Self-Defence Duty and undergone training in training camps.

E. **Defaulter:** Any obligated individual who has not obtained a Self-Defence Duty booklet or has obtained it but has not reported to the Self-Defence Duty centers without a legal excuse within 60 days from the date of obligation.

F. **Persons with deferred duty:** Any obligated individual whose service has been deferred according to this law.

G. **Exempt:** Any obligated individual who is relieved from Self-Defence Duty according to this law.

H. **Deserter:** Any fighter who is absent from service for more than 15 consecutive days after joining the Self-Defence Duty.

I. **Missing:** Any person whose whereabouts are completely unknown, whether alive or dead.

K. **Foundling:** A child of unknown parentage with no guardian.

L. **Expatriate:** Any obligated individual residing outside Syrian territories.

M. **Training Camps:** Places for training, preparing, and qualifying fighters, then distributing them to military units through relevant authorities.

N. **Autonomous and Civil Administrations:** These include the autonomous and civil administrations in: Jazira, Afrin, Euphrates, Manbij, Tabqa, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor.

O. **Retention:** The extension of the Self-Defence Duty service based on crucial needs.

P. **Reserve:** Any person who has completed the Self-Defence Duty service and is called up based on compelling needs to join the reserve service.

General and basic principles

Article 2:

The duration of the Self-Defence Duty in North and East Syria is 12 full calendar months from the date of enlistment.

Article 3:

Females have the right to voluntarily join the Self-Defence Duty.

Article 4:

Expatriates returning to the Self-administration regions are issued a document allowing movement within the area and must complete the procedures to obtain a Self-Defence Duty booklet within 30 days from the date of issuing the document. The document is valid from the date of the person's entry into the areas under the Self-administration in North and East Syria through official crossings and it is granted once.

Article 5:

The Self-Defence Duty booklets are issued based on the individual's place of registration, and for individuals [from outside the region] residing in the region based on their place of residence.

Deferment

Article 6:

Fines are imposed for [the loss or damage of Self-Defence Duty booklets in following situations:

- First-time loss: 15,000 Syrian pounds.
- Second-time loss: 60,000 Syrian pounds.
- Third-time and above loss: 120,000 Syrian pounds, and referral to military court.
- First-time damage: 15,000 Syrian pounds.
- Second-time damage: 30,000 Syrian pounds.
- For booklets with exhausted pages, the obligated person pays an official fee of 10,000 Syrian pounds.
- Third-time and above damage: 60,000 Syrian pounds.

Article 7:

Any forgery or alteration of official documents related to Self-Defence Duty will result in the obligated person being referred to the military court for trial. After serving his sentence, the individual will be sent to training camps to complete the duty.

Article 8:

Travel permits, where the traveller is not required to provide a financial guarantee, are granted to:

- Families of martyrs
- Permanent single sons
- Those medically exempt from the Self-Defence Duty
- Individuals who have completed their Self-Defence Duty
- Individuals with foreign residency permits, after regularizing their status as per Article 25 of this law
- Students studying abroad who are granted admission to universities outside Syria

Article 9:

Travel permits, where the person is required to provide a personal guarantee, are granted to:

- Temporary single son for father or mother
- Medical cases that cannot be treated [locally]
- Students, whose Self-Defence Duty is deferred due to studies within Syria
- Individuals, whose Self-Defence Duty is administratively deferred
- The guarantor is required to pay one million Syrian pounds to the public treasury if the obligated individual does not return within 30 days from the end of the specified period in the guarantee, and the guarantee is not renewed properly.

Article 10:

Payment of the guarantee does not exempt the individual from Self-Defence Duty.

Article 11:

All individuals subject to Self-Defence Duty must undergo an initial medical examination by a specialized medical committee.

Article 12:

Students performing Self-Defence Duty are granted examination leave outside the training period upon presenting the required documents, and this leave is not counted as a part of the actual duration of service.

Article 13:

The conscription age begins by the male turning 18 years of age and ends upon completing the period of Self-Defence Duty or being exempted from it. A defaulter must start performing his Self-Defence Duty before he reaches the age of 40.

Article 14:

The birth dates of those required to perform the Self-Defence Duty are determined by a decision made by the Defense Office in each of the autonomous and civil administrations according to the specificity of each administration, after being approved by the Defense Office in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

Article 15:

Defaulter conscripted to the Self-Defence Duty will be punished by adding one month to the end of their service. Defaulters, who failed their service before this decision was issued, will be conscripted to Self-Defence Duty.

Deferment

Article 16:

Students obligated to perform Self-Defence Duty can have their service deferred for a full academic year starting from the date 5/31 of each year and ending on the same date of the following year, provided they present the required identification documents. This applies within the following age limits:

MILITARY RECRUITMENT IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA (NES)

5. Deferral requests for high school students are only accepted until they reach the age of 21 years only.
6. Deferral requests for college students are only accepted until they reach the age of 24 years.
7. Deferral requests for university students are only accepted until they reach the age of 26 years.
8. The maximum age for deferment for postgraduate students in all faculties except medical faculties.
An additional three years, equivalent to the duration of the prescribed years, are added for postgraduate university students in all faculties except the faculty of medicine.

Maximum Age	Type of Study	Maximum Age for Postponement for Birth Dates	Remaining Birth Dates for Postponement
30 years	For a postgraduate student graduating from one of the university faculties where the study period is four years and the period of postgraduate study three years and the period of prescription years one year	Until the end of 1990	Until 31-12-2021
31 years	For a postgraduate student graduating from one of the university faculties where the study period is four years and the period of postgraduate study three years and the period of prescription years two years	Until the end of 1989	Until 31-12-2021
31 years	For a postgraduate student graduating from one of the university faculties where the study period is five years and the period of postgraduate study three years and the period of prescription years one year	Until the end of 1989	Until 31-12-2021

MILITARY RECRUITMENT IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA (NES)

32 years	For a postgraduate student graduating from one of the university faculties where the study period is five years and the period of postgraduate study three years and the period of prescription years two years	Until the end of 1988	Until 31-12-2021
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(...)

Maximum Age	Type of Study	Maximum Age for Postponement for Birth Dates	Remaining Birth Dates for Postponement
32 years	For a postgraduate student whose study period is three years	Until the end of 1988	Until 31-12-2021
33 years	For a student in general specialized or partial studies where the study period is four years	Until the end of 1987	Until 31-12-2021
34 years	For a student in general specialized or partial studies where the study period is five years	Until the end of 1986	Until 31-12-2021
35 years	For a student in general specialized or partial studies where the study period is six years	Until the end of 1985	Until 31-12-2021
36 years	For a student in general specialized or partial studies where the study period is seven years	Until the end of 1985	Until 31-12-2021

(...)

Article 19:

When a student suspends his study for one year, the suspension year is not considered as one of the official study years, and this applies once during the study period at the university or educational institutions based on the submitted documents, which explain the reasons for suspending the studies.

Article 20:

The Self-Defence Duty is deferred for obligated persons who continue their university studies, specialized studies and higher education abroad, provided that the legal age for academic deferral is not exceeded. Two years are additionally granted if the study is in a foreign language.

Article 21:

Students of higher education are granted deferral for a six months period during the registration period, based on the certificate proving that they have passed the language proficiency test. For those admitted to higher educations, they are granted deferral for a full academic year based on the required registration and documents proving university life.

Article 22:

A one-year deferral is granted as a maximum period for the national exam, especially for students who have passed the required courses and exams in which passing the national exam is required for graduation.

Article 23:

All students, who are in their graduation year at universities and colleges, but who cannot obtain their final exam certificate due to exceeding the legal age for deferment, are given an administrative deferral for a full year based on documented university life and other required documents.

Article 24:

Lawyers, whose age has not exceeded 29, are granted a full year of deferment based on the submitted documents, however the deferral is granted only for two consecutive years.

Article 25:

Deferral is granted to brothers of fighters from the same mother within the Self-Defence Forces after completing the training course. The deferral is given only twice for six months each time.

Article 26:

An administrative deferral is granted in the following cases:

A.

1. Individual newly returned from abroad for a maximum period of six months.

2. The only son for a period of two years.
3. The only brother of a missing person for a period of two years.
4. Those whose brother is under 18 years old or whose father is deceased or disabled for a period of one year.

B. In all the mentioned cases, the deferral is granted after the case being processed by the Self-Defence Duty Office and with the approval of the Self-Defence Duty Office.

Article 27:

Residents and holders of residence permits from all countries (except for countries that share land borders with Syria) shall pay an annual deferral fee of 400 USD for each year since the date of passing the law.

Article 28:

Those obligated to perform Self-Defence Duty who are arrested while illegally crossing the border will be taken directly to training centers.

Article 29:

Following are exempt from the Self-Defence Duty:

1. Sons and brothers of martyrs who are officially registered in the records of the Martyrs' Families Authority and hold a martyrdom certificate.
2. People with special needs and patients with diseases that prevent them from performing the duty, which is confirmed by a medical report from the Military Medical Center and the approval of the Defense Offices in administrative and civil departments.
3. Sole supporter of parents or one of them, whether they are alive or deceased.
4. Only male child among siblings who are of special needs, based on reports from the Military Medical Center.
5. Foundling who does not have a known lineage.

Article 30:

Doctors, pharmacists, and those committed to rural service are granted a full year's deferment for two consecutive year based on the presented documents, provided they do not exceed the age of thirty.

Article 31:

The fighter is discharged if the period of service in Self-Defence Duty is completed, provided they are not retained.

Article 32:

Only one brother of each fighter enlisted in the military forces is granted deferral from the Self-

Defence Duty. The deferral is granted on the basis of an official letter from the General Command of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Article 33:

Regarding discharge of fighters and members:

- Those who have served in the military forces for more than four years are discharged from the Self-Defence Duty based on an official letter from the General Command of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).
- Those who have been members of military regiments for two consecutive years are discharged from the Self-Defence Duty after the end of their contract period, based on an official letter from the General Command of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), accompanied by a copy of the contract.
- Members of the Internal Security Forces who have served for more than five years within the service period mentioned in their contracts are discharged from the Self-Defence Duty based on an official letter from the General Command of the Internal Security, accompanied by a copy of the contract.

Article 34:

The fighter is discharged upon proving permanent or partial disability based on a report from the specialized medical committee and the approval of the Defense Office in administrative and civil departments.

Article 35:

Every obligated individual who fails to obtain the Self-Defence Duty booklet for more than two months from the date of being obligated to serve is penalized as follows:

1. A fine of 6000 Syrian pounds for not obtaining the booklet
2. A fine of 5000 Syrian pounds for failing to defer one's service more than two months

Article 36:

Anyone holding Syrian nationality as well as Ajanib and Maktoumeen are obligated to perform the Self-Defence Duty whilst those holding non-Syrian nationality are not required to conduct the duty.

Article 37:

The Self-Defence Office in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria must issue executive instructions within a period of one month from the date of passing this law.

Article 38:

a. All previous laws regarding Self-Defence Duty in administrative and civil departments are repealed.

b. This law takes effect from the date of its passing and approval by the General Assembly on Saturday, 22/6/2019.

Note: Article (36) was amended on 03/15/2020 after being voted on by the General Assembly unanimously.

Note: Article (1) was amended on 01/04/2021 after being voted on by the majority to replace paragraphs (5-4-6) with Schedule No. (4).

Note: Article (26) was amended on 01/09/2021 after being voted on by the majority in regular session No. (41).

***Article (30) remains unchanged, and the method of explaining deferment by the executive instructions issued by the Self-Defence Office in the administration of North and East Syria is amended. This was voted on by the majority in regular session No. (41) on 01/09/2021.*

Note: Article (1) was amended on 04/11/2022 after being voted on by the majority in regular session No. (49).

Note:

- 1. The law was amended in session No. (57) on 28/07/2022 after being voted on by the majority for the amendments.*
- 2. A clause was added to Article (6).*
- 3. Clause (C) of Article (6) was amended.*
- 4. The number of articles in this law became (36) articles.*

Note: Some amendments were made to the Self-Defence Duty Law in regular session No. 87 of the General Assembly dated 26/09/2023, and they are as follows:

- 1. Clauses (A, B, C, D, H, W, Z) of Article (6) were amended.*
- 2. A special article was added regarding the deferment of students undergoing the national exam, and it became Article (22).*

Note: An article was added and took the number (30), concerning the deferment of doctors working in the countryside. The numbers of the old articles were changed accordingly, shifting the previous articles, and the number of articles in the law became (38) articles.

Joint Presidency of the General Assembly in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria

Siham Qeriyo - Farid Atti

Annex 4: Terms of Reference

1. Implementation of the Law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty
 - 1.1. Geographical prevalence of recruitment to HXP
 - 1.2. Prevalence of recruitment of men under 18 and over 24
 - 1.3. Discharge of conscripts upon completing Self-Defence Duty
 - 1.4. Calling up for reserve duty
 - 1.5. Enforcement of exemption rules
 - 1.6. Prevalence of forced recruitment of women
 - 1.7. Ethnic profile of those conscripted to HXP
 - 1.8. Treatment of other ethnic groups (e.g. Arabs) while serving the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty
 - 1.9. Consequences of draft evasion and desertion from the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty, including consequences for the person's family
 - 1.10. Documentation of having performed Mandatory Self-Defence Duty
 - 1.11. Involvement of HXP in active fighting
 - 1.12. Involvement of HXP in violations against civilians or other types of human rights violations
2. Recruitment to SDF
 - 2.1. Prevalence of forced recruitment
 - 2.2. Prevalence of forced recruitment of minors
 - 2.3. Conscripted to the Syrian Arab Army (SAA)
 - 2.4. Prevalence of conscription to military service in SAA
3. Prevalence of recruitment to HPG/PKK
 - 3.1. Recruitment to Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM)
 - 3.2. Recruitment to HPG/PKK via RYM
 - 3.3. Direct recruitment to HPG/PKK
4. Extent of local people's knowledge about different armed groups