

Northern Syria:

Activists and civilians between reality and need

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Idlib 2018 - Tim Alsiofi "Yours Truly, From Idlib"

"Whenever war breaks out, no matter where, it casts its shadow over many aspects of human existence. Only naturally, this manifests itself in the changes experienced in the lives of civilians, particularly in the case of a bloody conflict in which the most basic humanitarian principles are disregarded and where there is no serious international will to contain and limit severe loss of life."

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One A Theoretical Framework

The premise of the study: its importance and objectives

The war in Syria has been raging for over seven years, plotting an ever-climbing trajectory on the graph of violence and tragedy and leaving suffering of every shape and size in its wake: thousands of civilians killed, vast numbers detained or disappeared, millions of refugees, hundreds of thousands forcibly expelled and internally displaced. On the principle that the human being should be the ultimate concern of nation-states and human-rights agencies, the point from which all considerations must begin and at which transgressions stop, our primary focus in this study is the reality of those people who have been forcibly displaced into Northern Syria, both the civilian population and civil activists.

Our objective is to arrive at a logical and accurate portrayal of the reality experienced by these civilians and activists in Northern Syria, allowing the relevant agencies to gain a clearer understanding of their circumstances, thereby generating a breakthrough that could contribute to the study of their material and moral needs. Activists are deserving of special attention as they are the foundation on which a future Syria of justice and freedom will be built, and they are also the group whose circumstances are treated with the most interest on the international stage.

Geographical and temporal parameters

The area taken as the site of this study comprises the governorate of Idlib and surrounding countryside, as well as the rural districts of Hama and Lattakia, all of which fall under the control of the Syrian opposition and other non-regime groups. These areas have been selected as they have been the destination and eventual refuge for caravans of forcibly displaced Syrians from the outbreak of the Syrian revolution up until April 2019. [Figure 1]

Methodology

Ours is a descriptive and survey-based methodology, which seeks to foreground and clarify the issues raised in the study. To this end, we carried out field surveys and interviews listened to personal narratives and opinions, supporting our conclusions with reports and studies put out by local and international organisations and institutions.

For our interviews and surveys we took random samples of the target group, ensuring a representative distribution along gender and geographical lines, with questions following a clear logical progression. All surveys, interviews and questionnaires were carried out between August 15, 2018 and April 15, 2019.

Cohorts

The main subjects of this study are forcibly displaced civilians and activists. Those interviewed come from a range of different regions and currently live in different districts within the area being studied.

Approximately 250 interviews were carried out with civilians residing in refugee camps, villages and urban areas, and with activists working in a variety of fields.

[Figures 1,2,3 and 4 show the distribution of interview and survey subjects according to residential status (local or displaced) and gender, and whether they are activists or civilians]

Figure 1:

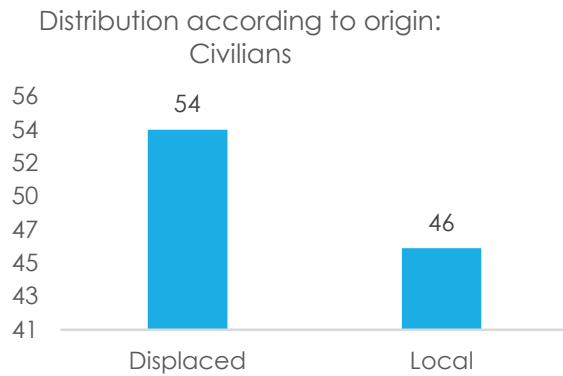


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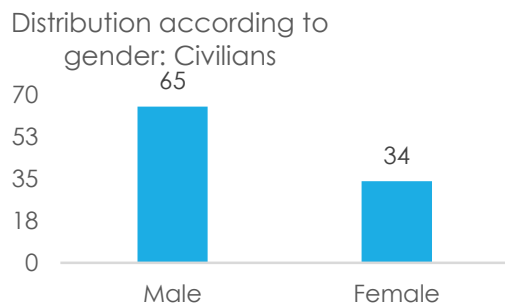


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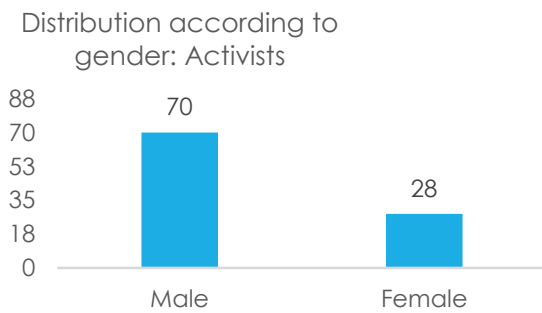
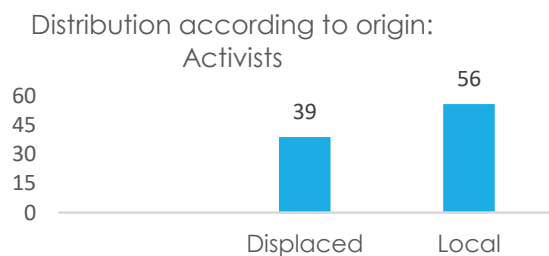


Figure 4:



Two Introduction

The governorate of Idlib is situated in the north-west of Syria, and runs along a section of the Syrian-Turkish border [1]. It was part of the revolution from its inception, and in March 2015 the regime ceded control to a group of military brigades grouped under the umbrella of Jaysh Al Fath. This militia first took over the city of Idlib and the area around Jisr Al Shughur on March 28, 2015, and by April they had extended their hold over regime-controlled villages and checkpoints before claiming the city of Jisr Al Shughur the following month. The most prominent groups within the Jaysh Al Fath coalition were Ahrar Al Sham, Failaq Al Sham and Jabhat Al Nusra. [2]

The governorate is important because it acts as a primary refuge for those displaced by the campaign of systematic expulsions carried out by the regime in the majority of pro-revolutionary areas. The campaign began with the clearing of Old Homs in May 2014, and was followed by East Aleppo in December 2016, before progressing through 2018 with the forcible expulsion of residents from rebel districts in rural areas around Damascus and north of Homs and the governorate of Deraa [3]. In addition to being subjected to continuous air raids and occasional attacks by suicide bombers, Idlib now faces the same threat of being taken over, thanks to a Russian-supported regime campaign against the governorate.

The expulsion operations that have been carried out since the very start of the revolution have affected civilians, activists and combatants. They have created a new and highly complex demographic reality in Idlib, and placed a huge burden on aid and civil-society humanitarian organisations, as many civilians requiring shelter and support following their displacement from regions that have witnessed major military assaults and serious loss of life. Then there are the sieges which have been maintained against areas like as East Ghouta, Muadamiya and Darayya over the past seven years with the aim of further displacing displaced residents who had refused to remain in their places of origin under regime control.

There is another group that has faced its share of displacement and victimisation: civil society activists who worked in a variety of different fields in the area before being forced to join the convoys. In addition to the wretched humanitarian situation they experienced in their places of origin, they were also subjected to persecution by the Assad regime, in the form of its intelligence and security services. These services made it their priority to pursue, detain, torture and murder those activists who were central to the bringing the regime's human rights abuses to the attention of the world. Other activists, those who work in the fields of aid, development and education, were based in those areas which the Assad regime subjected to a policy of constant and systematic bombardment and siege, and starving them of their most basic needs, in order to drive the population to mental and physical collapse before surrendering. [4,5,6]

It is worth noting that these expulsions took place under the direct supervision of the Russian Reconciliation Centre and were led by Russian officers in tandem with regime commanders. Residents, combatants and activists in the areas were usually given the choice between what is termed "reconciliation" or being displaced into Northern Syria [7]. Many civilians saw the latter option as taking a step into the unknown, and were unable to make up their minds immediately. Those who chose to stay saw the option as, if not the best, then the least damaging. However, Russian assurances to civilians that they would not face persecution by the security services turned out to be little more than propaganda, since detentions continue to this day, targeting civilians and activists who once worked in aid, medicine and education as well as former employees of the government and local administrations. Regime intelligence services continue to curtail the freedom of residents with their security measures and restrictions on travel between cities and districts.

We got in contact with individuals who stayed behind in East Ghouta, making sure to prioritise their own security and safety. The majority of those we contacted expressed considerable anger at the circumstances in which they lived following the regime takeover of their districts.

Rami, a young man who had remained in East Ghouta, says, "Hardly a day goes by without an arrest, and the regime security services patrol the neighbourhoods constantly. The checkpoints continue to come up with new ways to harass civilians. One officer told us, 'You're the terrorists' friends, you took them in, and if it wasn't for my orders and the forgiving nature of my superiors, I'd have you all exterminated.'"

Thair, a media activist from Al Rasin in rural Homs who chose not to leave for Northern Syria, says, “For me there wasn’t a choice whether to stay or leave. My circumstances didn’t allow me to even think about going, so I was forced to remain. [...] When the regime soldiers and security services first entered they started swaggering around the streets and alleys like they owned them. I’ve been detained twice so far. They never questioned me about anything. The only thing I remember is what I overheard an officer saying once: ‘You lot think you’re going to go back to living side-by-side with us, like it was before 2011. We’re going to break you, I give you my word. You’ll long for death but you won’t get it.’”

Labna, from the Hijr Al Iswid region of rural Damascus says, “We lived through five tough, bitter years of siege, air raids, war and poverty. We wanted an end to war at any price. To be honest, my family and I stayed on after the regime came in because we had hope that it would all be over at last, and that we could go back to living a normal life. And some of the services and utilities did return to our area, but to this day we don’t feel at ease. So many people have been detained and the inspections at the security checkpoints are almost too much to take. There’s barely any freedom of movement at night. Maybe we were wrong to have expected life to return to the way it was before the war.”

In August 2018, information out of regime-controlled East Ghouta and Deraa mentioned widespread detentions of civilian residents, particularly those who worked for local councils or for local humanitarian organisations, and women who worked as nurses or medics. That same month, news agencies carried reports that regime forces had executed Dr. Moataz Hittani, a year to the day since he had been detained at a refuge where he had taken shelter during the course of the most recent regime assault on East Ghouta. Regime forces also held employees of civil-society organisations at temporary detention centres, while others were placed under house arrest.

In addition to these serious rights violations the Assad regime has also issued warrants for the preemptive seizure of the money and assets of many civilians and activists on the pretext of their suspected involvement in terrorist activities. All evidence shows the opposite: that the principle reason for these seizures goes back to the fact that most of the names mentioned in the warrants have been involved in the political opposition, and have protested regime abuses since the outbreak of the revolution in March 2011. Warrants that have been leaked to media outlets contain names from all regional, ethnic, religious and communal backgrounds, the common denominator being that they had all opposed the regime and been involved in non-violent, civil society-based activism. They included paramedics, media activists, journalists, humanitarian workers and others. Nor were the warrants confined to the individual’s assets, but encompassed that of his wider family, or in some cases, wives and children.

Emad Al Sayyid, an aid worker active in the Deraa region, says, “Three years ago, warrants for seizure were issued against myself, my family and my children. There was no way to unfreeze my assets, because they had not been seized by court order, but on the direct instructions of the intelligence services, then ratified by the Ministry of Finance. I’m currently living in the city of Idlib, where I came in a refugee convoy from Southern Syria. I have been told by relatives and others back home that all my assets have been seized by the regime, and that because there is no court order to be appealed, they can never be recovered.”

[8,9,10,11]

Three The Situation on the Ground

Over the last seven years, the regime and its allies have displaced thousands of civilians from rebel governorates, towns and villages. Idlib has been the final destination for these refugees. The city also taken in those displaced from closer at hand, in particular those regions in which the regime fought to reestablish control, such as Sharq Al Sikka in rural Idlib, which includes districts such as Aboul Zuhour, Sinjar and surrounding villages.

According to statistics collated by organisations active in the region, which run up to the end of the period studied here, the population of this region (Idlib, the northern Homs countryside and the western Aleppo countryside) is approximately 3,867,000 local residents and displaced persons, with the latter making up some 42% of the total (i.e. 1,600,000 persons). [12,13]

After the regime had successfully reestablished its control in many of Syria's regional governorates through a combination of barbaric military assaults and the widespread use of sieges and blockades, it turned its eyes towards Idlib. In August 2018, it began to assemble its forces and allied militias along the border of the governorate, then initiated a series of air raids and land assaults into districts in the southern and eastern Idlib countryside, as well as rural areas around Hama and Lattakia.

Simultaneously, the Turks and Russians announced that they had reached an agreement over Idlib, the so-called Sochi Agreement, which according to the Turkish side was designed to spare the region a full-scale military assault by the regime and its allies. The Turks had already warned that a major humanitarian disaster would be created by the displacement of Idlib's population. [14]

But the Syrian regime forces and its allies continued with its operations, targeting the civilian populations of many villages and districts in the rural areas of Idlib, Hama and Lattakia with bombing raids and artillery. Russian media continued to broadcast rumours that militias active in Idlib were working with the Syrian Civil Defence (i.e. the White Helmets) to conduct what it called "provocations". It also started to allude to the potential use of poison gas, saying that "jihadists" and the White Helmets were smuggling in poison gas to use in false flag operations against civilians, claims that resulted in many fleeing the areas they mentioned, such as Kafr Zeita, Al Taameh and Khan Sheikhoun [15,16]. In April 2019, regime forces supported by the Russian army launched a bombing and artillery campaign against a number of villages and towns in rural Hama and the southern Idlib countryside, followed by a land assault which led to regime control of the towns of Qalaat Al Madiq and Kafr Nabudah in the northern Hama countryside, in addition to the deaths of dozens of civilians, the closure of field hospitals and clinics and the suspension of public utilities and services, all of which were directly targeted by air raids. By April 2019, some 2,476 families had evacuated their homes and moved to areas further away from the escalating conflict [17], raising the number of those displaced by regime and Russian operations since the signing of the Sochi Agreement (on September 7, 2018) to 537,392.

Civil administration and militias

Administration of the region is in the hands of what is known as the Rescue Government, the political and administrative wing of the Tahrir Al Shams brigade, which imposed its control over the city of Idlib and surrounding countryside, as well as rural areas around Hama, Lattakia and west of Aleppo. Some of these areas (Maarat Al Nouman, Ariha, and districts in the western Aleppo countryside) were previously under the control of the Patriotic Liberation Front brigades (Ahrar Al Sham and Suqour Al Sham) and fell under the administrative control of the temporary government run by the Syrian Alliance of Revolutionary Forces and the official opposition. But in January 2019, Tahrir Al Sham launched an assault on Darat Izza in the Western Aleppo countryside, taking the town itself and granting control of surrounding areas to other groups by a process of negotiation. [19,20]

Services and living conditions

Up to the end of the period covered by this study, approximately 60% of local residents were living beneath the poverty line, while for displaced persons and refugees the figure was closer to 80%, with the average family income at around \$50 per month.

These high levels of poverty are due to a number of causes:

- i) Many civilians have lost their primary source of income because roads have become impassable and they are unable to move freely from one area to another (a high proportion of those formerly employed in government institutions have had their salaries stopped, either because they are unable to travel to work to receive their wages, or because the regime has discharged them and they would be detained if they went to collect them).
- ii) Air raids and artillery bombardment have destroyed many businesses, and their owners are unable to undertake repairs. The destruction of residential buildings has placed a burden of constant repair and renovation on their inhabitants. In the worst cases, citizens are forced to rent elsewhere. The loss of much arable and pastoral land has deprived others of their main source of income, forcing them to find other work to survive.

Basic services currently available to citizens in Northern Syria include:

- i) Electricity: There is an almost total reliance on fuel-driven generators for limited periods during the day, and at high cost, with the price of a single ampere reaching \$6 in some areas.
- ii) Telecommunications and Internet: Ever since opposition groups took over Northern Syria, national mobile networks have remained inaccessible. In some areas on or near the Turkish border, residents have been able to access Turkish networks. As Turkey expands the number of watchtowers along its border and builds new broadcast towers, these networks have extended their reach into parts of southern Idlib, rural Hama, Jisr Al Shughur, districts neighbouring the Tell Touqan checkpoint and rural areas west of Aleppo. As for the landline networks, some areas have been able to restore exchanges to independent operation. Bills or levies are settled with regular payments.
- iii) Water: Provision largely depends on local networks supplied by pumping stations. However this network is generally weak, with the majority of pumping stations old and the generators which run them in need of replacement. They also suffer from many other problems, such as frequent breakdowns and shortage of fuel. The inability to provide water under high pressure and the fact that the network is only infrequently operational, mean that citizens prefer to rely on water tanks and wells, with wells being the preferred option in most cases.
- iv) Bakeries and bread: The provision of adequate supplies of bread and bread-making ingredients is the cornerstone of food security in Northern Syria. It suffers from a number of challenges, among them:
 - a/ A large rise in the cost of a packet of bread to \$0.5 (between early 2018 and May 2019). Some families can consume between three and four packets per day.
 - b/ There is a lack of subsidised flour for bakeries, meaning that it is purchased at high prices.
 - c/ Many bakeries have closed, for the following reasons:
 - A rise in operating costs
 - Many bakeries are in need of repair and upgrading due to the age of the ovens and greater demand
 - Bombing and artillery bombardments in Northern Syria have put some bakeries out of operation

[Figures 5 and 6 show residents' evaluations of the quality of life and service provision in areas of Northern Syria]

Figure 5:

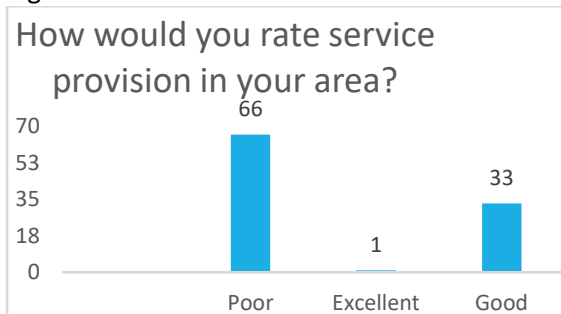
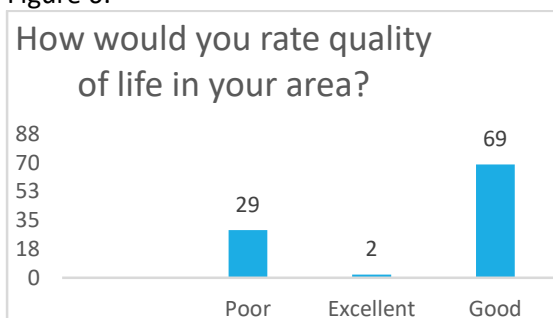
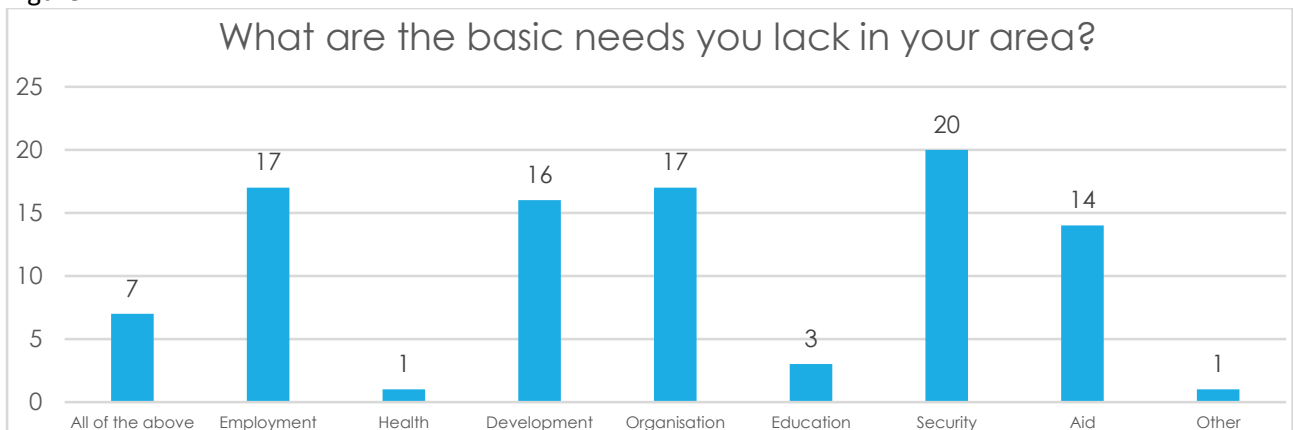


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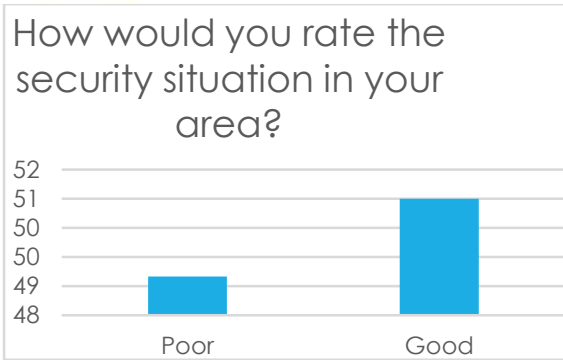


[Figure 7 shows residents' evaluation of which basic needs they lack]

Figure 7:



[Figure 8 shows residents' evaluation of their safety and security]



Displaced persons

Operations to forcibly expel residents reached their peak in 2018, encompassing large swathes of rural Damascus, the northern Homs countryside and Southern Syria. According to the local administrative and humanitarian agencies which are putting in place emergency protocols to respond to the influx of displaced persons, a total of 100,000 such individuals were recorded between January and May 2018, before they were joined by convoys of refugees from other regions. By June of that year, the total numbers were 24,473 from northern rural Homs and 83,214 from rural Damascus.

These expulsions came a year after military operations had established effective regime control of formerly opposition areas, with civilians forced to choose between displacement or staying put, a choice that could render them vulnerable to persecution by the security forces or detention. [25,26]

Northern Syria was not adequately prepared to absorb such vast numbers of refugees. The lack of accommodation in already densely populated areas, the shortage of jobs, and the poor standard of educational services in the region due to a dearth of funding and properly trained teachers, led to successive and severe humanitarian crises. The dire situation was made worse by poor security, which affected the ability of the newcomers to find a degree of social stability and to assimilate into communities with their own cultural and ethnic tensions and the presence of extremist military brigades. Mdein Mohammed, a displaced person from southern Damascus, says, "I never expected that I would one day have to leave my home, like an exile or refugee. Together with my family of five I headed out into the unknown. When we came to Northern Syria, we decided we would make a fresh start and try and build a future for our children, but things were worse than we had anticipated. Just trying to secure safe shelter for ourselves, we suffered from the high rents being demanded in areas away from the frontlines and the poor living conditions inside the camps. Furthermore, there was hardly any work to be had, and I didn't have the capital to start my own project and provide for myself that way. To this day, I'm still moving around the region, looking for shelter, employment and security."

Because of these obstacles to their acclimatisation, some of the displaced have considered returning to the areas they came from, and reaching an understanding with the regime there, despite the dangers of such a move and the risk of detention or death that it carries. The second option that many are considering, is heading into Turkey and either settling there or crossing into Europe. This, despite intensive measures along the Turkish border to prevent illegal crossings, and the concomitant lack of any legitimate means to enter Turkey from Syria. The costs of making this journey, involving brokers and smugglers, are very high, not to mention the high probability of civilians facing violence and occasionally death at the hands of the Gendarmerie (the Turkish border force). On July 23, 2018, three Syrians were shot dead as they attempted to cross the border into Turkey, among them a girl of ten.

Four The camps

Following the outbreak of the revolution in 2011, many of those living in rebel areas have found themselves having to leave their homes to avoid escalating military operations in their areas, the systematic targeting of civilians by regime forces and the deliberate assault on their quality of life and security. Such circumstances have compelled millions of Syrians of all ages, denominations and ethnicities to abandon their towns and villages and seek safer and more stable places to live. However the constant back-and-forth of the scales of military power in many governorates has, as well as forcing local residents from their homes, left displaced persons in a state of uncertainty and instability, and as the war has continued, the number of those displaced and seeking refuge has continued to rise, reaching a total of some 6,748,000 by the end of 2017.

Most waves of internal displacement have been temporary in nature. Many of those who take to the road choose to settle in areas nearby, hoping that they will be able to return when military operations come to an end. But as these operations, and the war as a whole, drags on, they are forced to repeat their displacement time and time again, further exacerbating their suffering and weakening their social standing. Anyone who follows the situation in Syria is well acquainted with the humanitarian crisis that its displaced people are living through. Against a backdrop of difficult economic circumstances and a dearth of secure and permanent accommodation, a large proportion of them have been forced to live in camps lacking the most basic requirements for a dignified life. Whether they developed spontaneously, or are planned and overseen by civil society organisations, all these camps are now extensive settlements, their populations increasing on an almost daily basis, yet lacking basic services such as education, healthcare and sewage, not to mention the challenge their residents face in finding employment in the absence of available jobs and financial support.

Most of Syria's refugee camps are located in Northern Syria, and are unplanned. Some 85.9% of them lack any form of centralised planning and organisation and many the requirements for a safe and dignified life are absent. Since there is no centralised administration to oversee the camps and offer periodic statistical reports on conditions, and because local and international organisations have proved unable to meet the needs of residents who suffer from poverty, lack of education and long-term unemployment, services and utilities are rarely in evidence. According to published statistics, the number of those living in camps for displaced persons in April 2018 stood at 857,324, dispersed over 795 camps in Northern Syria.

Health

A previous study on public health in camps for displaced persons in Northern Syria, found that lack of centralised planning, poor service provision and the widespread absence of sewage and water networks, were the proximate causes of the spread of contagious disease through the camps. The study also mentioned the high incidence of lung infections as a result of the environment in which camp residents lived, characterised by overcrowding and the failure of tents to protect their inhabitants from the weather. As for the presence of clinics and health centres, the study reported that 17 of the 31 camp areas surveyed (i.e. 54.8%) contained no healthcare facilities at all.

This severe shortfall in the provision of health services, coupled with the lack of pharmacies and medicines and the distance of the camps from town centres where treatment might be found, has led directly to the spread of disease.

As for the inoculation of children, the same study states that, according to the Syrian Immunisation Group (SIG), only 69.62% of the camps ran immunisation programmes in 2018, a worrying figure when the rate should be 100%.

On the subject of mental health, the study reports that one of the principle causes of mental illness in the camps was the heavy bombardment residents had endured in their home regions, as well as witnessing killing, destruction and the deaths of family members and friends. Conditions listed include post-traumatic shock, anxiety, depression, irritability and nervousness, as well as various mental disturbances produced by

these circumstances (hallucinations, fantasies, paranoia). The study described there being large gaps in the provision of mental healthcare services in the camps and surrounding areas, and none at all in camps such as Arabat, Aramna, Kafrwaseyeen, Deir Hassan and Kafr Takhareem.

Education

According to a media report dated July 18, 2018, educational standards in the camps of Idlib governorate and along the Turkish border have continued to decline. The area contains 169 camps divided between seven camp zones (Atme, Bab Al Salama, Sarmada, Al Karama, Al Rahma, Kharbat Al Jouz, Salqin).

While all camps share the hardships and problems that come with displacement, they differ from one another in the level of care and support provided by international and local organisations. A study by the temporary government's Support Coordination Unit and dated August 7, 2018, showed that while some camps have the rudiments of an educational structure in place, in others there is nothing.

The study surveyed the state of education in the camp zones mentioned above, providing statistics for the number of schools, the number of teacher-training instructors, the non-attendance rate among students, the availability of text books and stationary and other indicators.

The first statistic to catch the eye is that in the 169 camps studied, 55,000 children are catered to by just 44 schools, whose structural integrity and size vary from camp to camp. Of these, 13 are built of cement, 9 have corrugated zinc roofs, while 14 of them hold their lessons inside tents, 4 in mobile homes, and a single school is housed in a rented building. The schools are distributed over the seven major camp zones of Northern Syria, with the greatest number in Atme, which houses 14 schools, while there are none at all in Sarmada, which also has the highest non-attendance rate among students: 86% compared to an average of 60% among all the camp zones. Salqin has the lowest non-attendance rate of 37%, due to the relatively high number of schools there and their accessibility.

Ridwan Ismail, supervisor of schools at the Al Karama camp zone, attributes the high non-attendance rate at camp schools to a lack of facilities in some camps, or difficulty accessing them in others, not to mention the financial circumstances of families which might prevent them from meeting the basic requirements of uniforms, text books and stationary. Child labour and child marriage also play a significant role in raising drop-out and non-attendance rates.

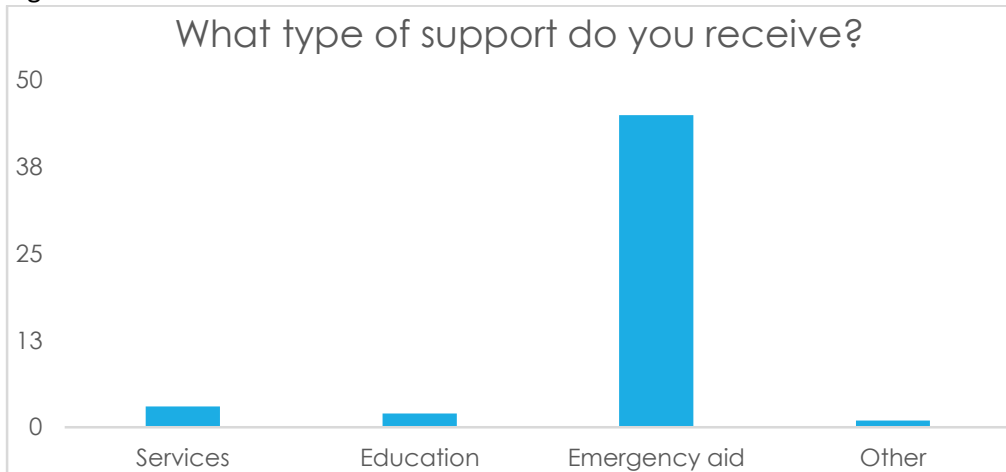
Regarding the standard of education and the qualified teachers at these schools, the study quotes Mohammed Alawi, an Arabic-language teacher: "The schools in our camp suffer from a lack of teachers, and it's the same in the other camps. It comes down to a lack of material support and the fact that most of the trained teachers left the camps. More than half the teachers are volunteers and only have high-school, or even middle-school, diplomas. We have to thank them for their voluntary service, and the role they play in eradicating child illiteracy, but we need proper qualifications if we're to raise the standard of education in the camps, especially in the high schools."

Statistics show that the 44 camp schools employ some 796 teachers, 222 of whom are not professionally trained. Alawi says that there are a number of reasons for the dearth of education specialists, such as them leaving the camps or travelling to neighbouring countries, but the most important of all is the absence of a monthly salary system and incentives. While teachers receive salaries in some camps, in the majority they are compensated on an irregular basis that forces them to find other work in order to provide for themselves and their children.

Education in the camps is divided into a two-level primary stage and a secondary stage. The secondary education is catered for in the Atme, Al Rahma, Al Karama and Qah zones, but is entirely absent from the others, which only offer primary stage education. [28,29]

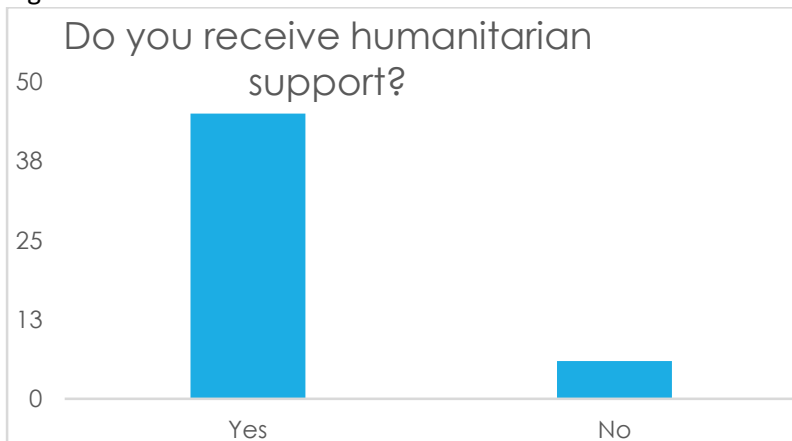
[Figure 9 shows the types of support offered to displaced persons in the camps]

Figure 9:



[Figure 10 shows the proportion of those who receive humanitarian support in the camps]

Figure 10:



Five Activists

On January 18, 2011, Syrians living abroad set up a Facebook page called “The Syrian Revolution”, the first recorded use of the phrase. The page called for a “Day of Rage” to be held on March 8. On February 22, dozens of Syrians held a sit-in outside the Libyan embassy in Damascus to protest Gaddafi’s crimes against his people, who were then in open rebellion against him [30]. Then in mid-March, a group of young Syrians marched out of marketplace in the Damascus neighbourhood of Al Hariqa, chanting for freedom and dignity. Their small, non-violent demonstration was quickly joined by local residents. [31]

These first stirrings were an opportunity for young people to get to know one another and form the collectives and groupings that would later be referred to as “activists”, a piece of revolutionary terminology which had greater meaning in a country where activism, meetings and public assembly were the monopoly of government institutions operating under the slogans and values of Party and Leader.

Most of these men and women were in their twenties and thirties, enthusiastic university students inspired by the revolutionary fervour and vitality of the Arab Spring to work for liberty and change, to forge a country which protected its citizens’ freedoms and granted them justice, dignity and equality, and to slip free of the iron grip of the security services and grasp at an alternative way of life. No sooner was repression and dictatorship at an end, they believed, than the full potential of their country could be exploited and it would flourish.

These young activists began with demonstrations and non-violent sloganeering, but were soon met with the iron and fire of the regime’s intelligence services and security agencies. No attempt was made to listen to their demands, let alone fulfill them: the immediate (and inevitable) response of a regime which had ruled for decades with a mindset that brooked no change and never made concessions. The regime launched a vicious assault against the activists, a war whose savagery increased the more determined they became: the activists were detained, tortured, murdered and disappeared; pursued and persecuted wherever they went. [32]

These young activists were central to setting the revolution in motion and developing its slogans and chants. They were the ones who organised demonstrations and demonstrators, who wrote its placards and printed its literature, who documented what happened, and all on their personal initiative. It was through them that images and accounts of the revolution were spread inside Syria and abroad. They recorded everything that happened from the cries for freedom to the regime’s violations against non-violent demonstrators, and so of course they were the prime target of a regime entirely given over to its worst and most tyrannical tendencies.

Reality and challenges

Targeted operations:

There are tens of thousands of examples of activists who have been murdered, detained or disappeared by the Syrian regime, but the regime does not have a monopoly on these violations. They have also been adopted as a strategy against activists by radical armed groups with a wide spectrum of ideologies and interests, which have sprung up inside Syria during the course of the war. [33]

On September 6, 2011, the Syrian regime detained Ghayath Matar (26), an activist involved in organising non-violent demonstrations. A few days later, the regime informed Ghayath’s family that he was dead, and asked them to come and retrieve his body. The corpse bore clear signs of torture. On December 13, 2017, Ghayath’s brother Hazem was murdered in the regime’s holding cells, five years after being detained. [34] In August 2017, the family of software developer Basel Khartabeel were informed that he had been executed in 2015, after being “tried” and sentenced to death at a field court-martial in Al Jaboun. Kharbatli had been detained by Syrian military intelligence on March 15, 2012, and held in isolation for eight months before being transferred to Adra Prison in Damascus in December 2012. He remained at Adra until October 2015, when he was transported to an unknown location and executed [35]. On November 28, 2018, reports were received that two activists, Faten Rajab and Leila Al Shawkani, had died under torture in detention.

On social media sites, rights activists confirmed that the families of the two women had been informed of their deaths by the civil registry office in Damascus. Leila Al Shawkani had been detained in Damascus in 2016, while Faten Rajab, who held a doctorate in physics, had been detained in November 2011. [36] On July 23, 2018, the family of Yehyia Shorbaji, a political activist from Darayya, stated that they had received news of his death under torture in a regime prison, alongside his brother Maan Shorbaji. The brothers had been detained by Airforce Intelligence alongside Ghayath Matar on September 6, 2011. The family clarified that Yehyia had been killed on January 15, 2013, while Maan's murder had taken place in December 13 of the same year. [37]

On December 9, 2013, the activists Razan Zeitouna, her husband Wael Hamada, Samira Al Khalil and Nazem Hamadi, were abducted from their place of work in Douma, where they documented human rights violations by all sides of the conflict against civilians in the region. International organisations and agencies held the Jaysh Al Islam militia, which was in control of Douma city at the time, responsible for the abduction of the four activists. They demanded that the militia explain what had happened to them and ordered an investigation. [38]

In conclusion, the Syrian Network for Human Rights has documented a total of 144,899 incidents of forcible detention between March 2011 and mid-2019, with 88.63% of them carried out by the Syrian regime, 7.44% by Daesh, 2.1% by the Syrian Democratic Forces, and 1.96% by armed opposition groups. [39]

Ambitions and needs

The systematic policy of forced expulsions pursued by the Syrian regime and its allies is designed to clear opposition activists and revolutionaries from their home regions and extinguish the revolution in their towns and villages. Civil activists have made images and reports of events widely available, and their documentary work, their campaigns and conferences and their reports on the scale of the crimes committed against civilians by the regime (work that causes those responsible many sleepless nights) has forced international humanitarian agencies to pay attention. As an inevitable consequence of this activity, activists form part of the convoys of people forcibly expelled from their homes by the regime. The convoys are joined by hundreds of civil-society activists working in a range of fields, and Northern Syria is now home to one of the country's largest concentrations of activists, all of whom have consciously chosen to leave their homes despite all the difficulties and hardships that come with displacement, because the alternative means harassment and persecution by the regime's security services and armed forces.

Displacement is highly traumatic for these activists, who have already suffered through the air raids and artillery bombardment, killing and sieges, which form part of the regime's systematic preparation for military operations to take control of rebel-held areas, and which contravene international law and regulations for the protection of human rights. The activists emerged from Old Homs, Darayya, rural Damascus, East Aleppo, East Ghouta and eventually from Southern Syria, their property and possessions either destroyed or seized by the regime and lost to them forever, taking nothing with them but memories of their past lives. Despite these material and psychological losses, they have attempted to acclimatise to their new reality and look for ways to lead stable, peaceful lives.

On this point, media activist Muaz Al Omr, a photographer who fled East Ghouta and came to settle in Idlib, says, "I don't regret my decision to join the convoy for an instant. Despite all the pain that displacement brings, it's nothing compared to what I'd be going through if I had remained in East Ghouta after the regime took control there. In Ghouta I worked as a photographer, documenting the regime's crimes against civilians: their bombings and bombardments and massacres, and the siege which they maintained for six years. The Assad regime would never have let me go free if I'd stayed. All the same, I still can't get used to my new situation. It's been six months since I got here and I'm still looking for ways to secure financial and psychological stability. I am far away from my family, and I miss my older brother, who was martyred during the most recent assault on our old neighbourhood. I wasn't able to bring my equipment out with me, and I've lost it all. It's a difficult situation we find ourselves in, but we have to get used to it."

Neither the security situation nor the standard of living in Northern Syria have been conducive to creating a secure environment for these activists. Violations and rights abuses have affected their activism regardless of whether or not they remained, and impact their freedom of movement and employment. In a statistical report, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights stated that the number of those targeted as part of a

campaign of assassinations in the Idlib, Aleppo and Hama countryside had risen to 251, indicating that the dead included civilians and children, members of various opposition brigades and activists. The assassinations were carried out with explosive bomb-belts, gunfire, or by abducting the target, murdering them, then disposing of the corpse.

As the conflict between different ideologically and transnationally affiliated groups in Northern Syria has intensified, the rate at which activists are assassinated, detained and disappeared has climbed, though the perpetrators cannot always be identified. The most recent such incident occurred on November 21, 2018, when Idlib woke to the news that Raed Fares, who designed the famous Kafranbel signs and ran the independent Radio Fresh, had been assassinated alongside his friend Hamoud Al Jnaid.

Addressing the high incidence of abductions and assassinations targeting activists, activist Mohammed Hossam, explains that media activism in Idlib, “is not confined to documenting the non-violent movement and the crimes of the Syrian regime against its own people, but also seeks to influence public opinion, educate society and shed light on issues that are not widely understood or discussed.” In his view, targeting activists is designed to silence the revolution. He points out that activists have been fighting from the very beginning: first against the regime, and now against the armed brigades and groups that dominate Northern Syria.

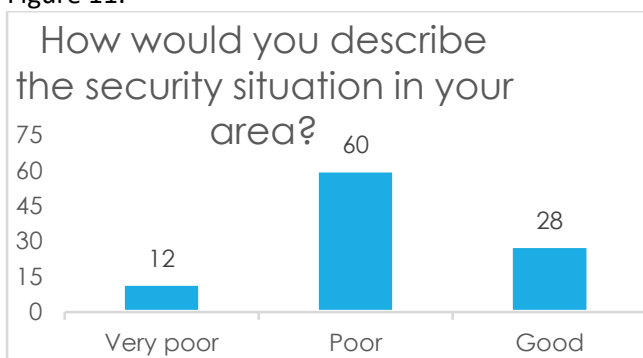
Rawad Zaki, a humanitarian aid worker, thinks that activists are targeted because, “they have helped thwart the project of extremist brigades, which includes the regime itself.” He confirms that activists play a crucial role in Syria as a whole, and that they have a profound influence of public opinion in the region. The recent spate of murders and abductions has not just affected activists in Idlib, but all sectors of society throughout the north, including merchants and members of the military brigades. Opinions differ as to who is behind them. Fighters and spokesmen for the military brigades say that they are carried out by Islamic State cells. Some believe that in cases where the perpetrators cannot be identified, it is most likely to be the work of thieves and bandits.

Many activists have taken measures to protect themselves: keeping the time and place of their meetings secret and irregular, keeping away from public places and spending as little time possible in company. This is according to journalist Raed Al Khatib, who says, “As media activists, we stop working in different places according to our personal evaluation of how safe it is. It’s a relative thing, and subjective, of course.”

The Emergency Responders team in Northern Syria has made a statement that humanitarian organisations are halting their work in the Idlib governorate because of abductions targeting aid workers.

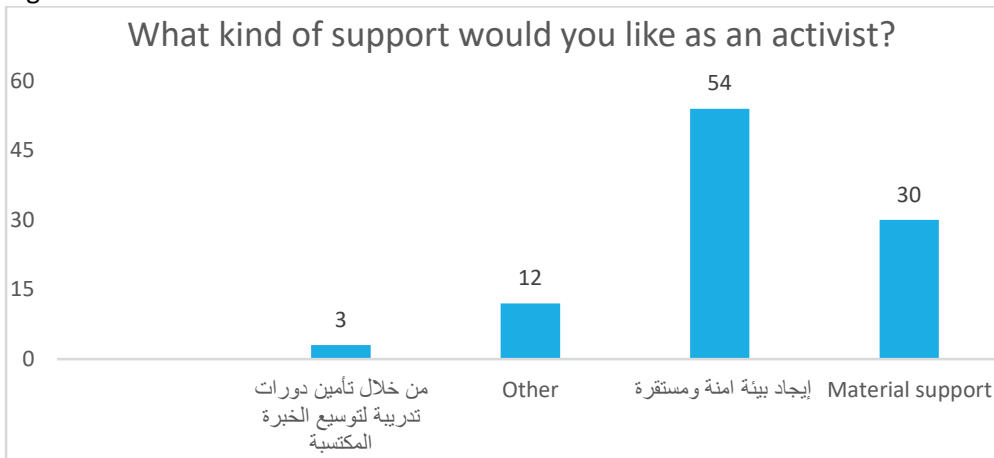
[Figure 11 shows activists’ evaluation of the security situation in their area]

Figure 11:



[Figure 12 shows the type of support required by activists]

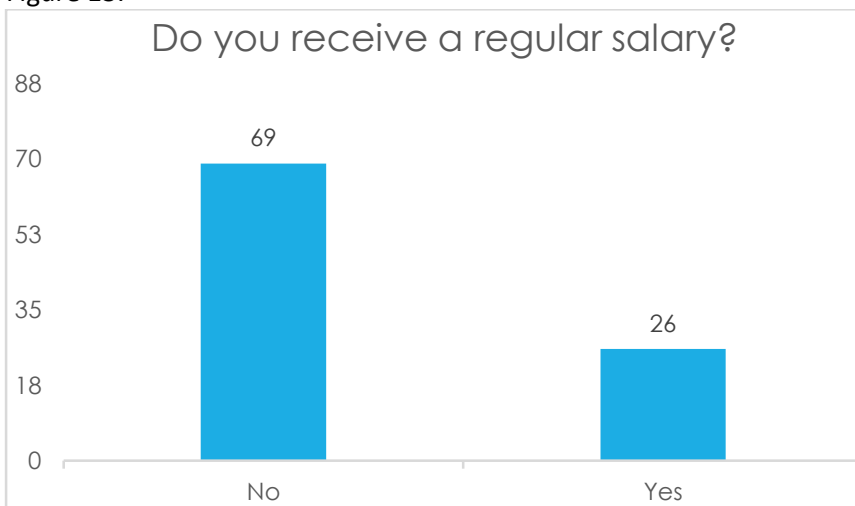
Figure 12:



In addition to these dangers, displaced activists are forced to find new employment to meet the needs of either themselves or their families, after losing the homes and jobs they had in their places of origin. Mohammed Hameidan, an activist from rural Damascus, believes that, “the most fundamental requirement for any activist is security and stability,” and that, “the principle challenge facing activists in Northern Syria is this environment of continual and widespread threat, and the mindset of many brigades and armed groups which practise a policy of silencing opposition and practising violence against alternative viewpoints. It restricts the activist’s freedom of movement and his opportunities for employment.” Hamdein goes on: “As for the future, I’m currently looking for stability: somewhere to live, as well as financial and physical security so I can meet the needs of myself and my family.”

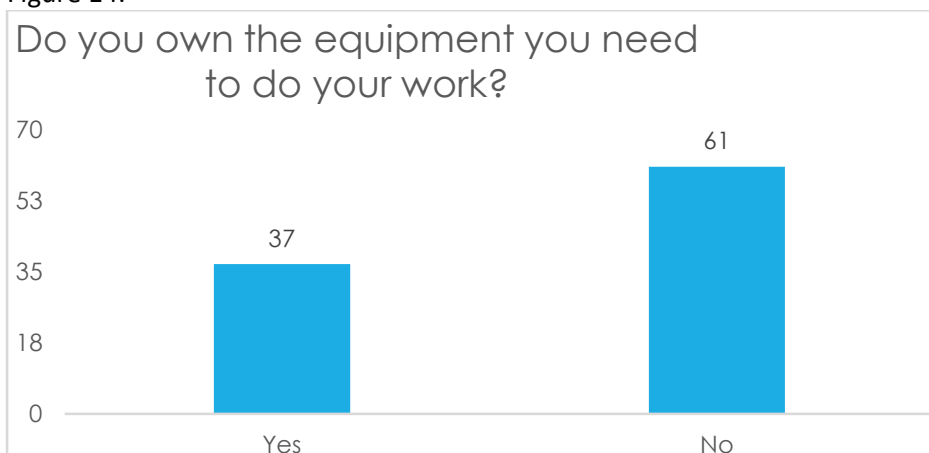
[Figure 13 shows the proportion of activists who receive a regular salary for contracted employment]

Figure 13:



[Figure 14 shows the proportion of activists who own the equipment necessary for their work]

Figure 14:



The state of education in Northern Syria does not give those activists who have had to stop their studies the opportunity to resume them, which has forced some to pursue online courses, even though these do not meet their expectations, in terms of the subjects available or the qualifications they offer. Civil activist Fady Amin describes the difficulties he faced trying to complete his higher education, a description which, we felt, could apply to almost all those we met:

“I broke off my studies in 2012. I had been studying economics at the University of Damascus, specialising in securitisation and banks. It was the last term of my final year, but I was wanted by the security services for my campus activism. Then I was trapped in East Ghouta when the siege began in 2013.

“As the years passed I gave up hope of pursuing my studies in Ghouta, and of course there was no way I could leave, so I went online and got a diploma in political science. We later found out that my diploma wasn’t accredited.

“After I was displaced and enjoyed relative freedom, I started thinking about completing my studies, either in Turkey (where a law was passed allowing Syrian students the right to complete unfinished courses at Turkish universities) or even by applying to universities further afield. There was no thought of applying inside Syria, because the standard of teaching has dropped and the universities have lost regional and international accreditation.

“But as I ran up against more and more obstacles, many of which apply to others who were previously under siege, my enthusiasm began to wane:

“It was difficult to obtain the documents I needed from my original university and the Syrian government in order to submit applications elsewhere, principally because I could not attend in person and then the problems involved in appointing someone to do it on my behalf who could also be subject to persecution by the security services. There are brokers who will collect the papers for you, but it can sometimes cost as much as \$1,000 just to obtain your grade sheet.

“Crossing legally into Turkey was a problem, not to mention the high costs and the risk to life and limb of crossing illegally. There is no agency which represents the interests of students who want to complete their studies or which at the very least could secure their safe passage out of Syria, even though this should be the priority of any halfway decent government agency.

“Everyday financial problems prevent students pursuing their academic interests. For example, even though higher education is free for Syrian students in Turkey, the cost of living is a burden on those whose finances and that of their family has already been drained by living under siege. Then there is the huge issue of academic grants, which almost always require applicants to be young. They tend not to want mature students who have had to stop their studies and sit out education through years of siege.

“Then there is the difficulty of resuming studies after all those years, not to mention the issue of being taught in another language which might require time and additional expenses in order to reach fluency. These problems are exacerbated by the lack of programs designed to refamiliarise students with the academic environment.

“Measures to familiarise applicants with available courses, the application procedure and different universities around the world, are few and far between and poorly designed. Knowing these things gives a huge boost to applicants’ chances of success. But generally speaking, finances are the single biggest obstacle to pursuing higher education.”

Women activists in Northern Syria play a pivotal role in society, particularly in the area of empowerment and support work for women. This was the work they did prior to displacement, and they choose to continue with it despite the huge challenges and risks posed by the poor security situation and the new social environment in which they find themselves. Hoda Khaiti, the director of The Centre for the Support and Empowerment of Women in Idlib, describes her experiences following her expulsion from the city of Douma:

“There were a number of challenges to our work as activists in Northern Syria, and Idlib city in particular. The most important was the reluctance of civil society organisations to support civic projects inside the city for reasons to do, as they put it, with the dominant faction there, their own ignorance of the situation on the ground, and their quite unrealistic assumptions about what was going on. I was fully aware of the poor security situation in the city, but I took this as a challenge in itself, and something that these organisations should offer support in order to change. I faced a number of personal challenges as an activist to do with the fact that I was in a totally new environment, in a community with a different culture and a different way of interacting with the dominant governmental and military forces, and these prevented me assimilating as quickly as I would have liked. As far as work goes, I currently run the only centre for the support and empowerment of women in Idlib. Women have signed up to the centre’s training workshops in huge numbers. Personally, my problems are those of any displaced activist or civilian. My family are in Turkey and I am unable to visit them due to the lack of a legal and safe route out of Syrian territory.”

As the revolution loses ground and the regime, with the help of its Russian allies, begins to prevail militarily over opposition forces, as Arab and Western state support for normalisation with the Syrian regime picks up pace and embassies are being reopened in Damascus, activists believe that by summoning the will to carry on with their work, and by using all the tools at their disposal to condemn the regime and its allies, they can reverse this trend. They continue to exert themselves to see Syrians granted the right to determine their own destiny and work for a genuine and transparent transitional process which would guarantee them the right to safe return and to live in safety and security.

Jawad, who asked that his last name not be mentioned, is an activist:

“First of all, after all the mistakes it’s made, the Syrian revolution has to reset: to restore the difference between itself and the regime. Not to mention the attempts by other countries to establish a counter-revolution and distort the true nature of the non-violent, civic revolution by creating radical, extreme organisations and establishing puppet brigades which are entirely dependent on foreign funding and have only intervened to further their own interests, whether they claim to be friends of the revolution or its enemies. This is why I don’t believe that the regime and its allies have won the true battle, the one that is most dangerous to them, because they can never erase the idea of the revolution. They can never make us compromise, or give up our desire to see freedom and justice in a civil, democratic Syria. As activists and those in solidarity, we must shoulder the responsibility and work with greater awareness and integrity and dedication, away from the cross-currents of political and international interests. We must never let up in our efforts to prevent the regime receiving decades of international funding in order to rebuild the areas it controls and revive them economically, politically and militarily, because this would be like a shot in the arm to a monster that has murdered and detained and made homeless millions of people.”

Six

Conclusions and Recommendations

- i) Idlib is the primary destination for convoys of people who have been forcibly expelled from their home districts which have fallen under regime control. As of May, 2019, displaced persons and refugees accounted for 42% of a total population of 3,900,000 in the governorate and adjoining areas. This is the basis of Idlib's humanitarian importance, and quality of life, social and security considerations should compel international donor agencies and relevant organisations to offer all forms of support to these civilians, to create an environment fit for a dignified life.
- ii) Through its military operations and siege campaigns, and with direct support from Russia and other allies such as Iran, the regime has managed to restore its control over the majority of territories in revolt against its rule. Most of these gains came in the course of 2018, during which time thousands of civilians went through the tragedy of forcible displacement. The areas most affected were rural Damascus, East Ghouta, Southern Syria, and the countryside north of Homs. The principle reasons for civilians leaving these regions were active persecution by the security services and the thought of the purges which were known to have taken place in other areas captured by the regime. Those who remained behind, whether activists or civilians, were subject to pursuit, executions and detentions. They included doctors, journalists and humanitarian workers. To this we can add the warrants for preemptive seizure of property and assets which the regime issued against many of them. This calls for serious efforts to be made on the part of international rights organisations to stand against such violations, to create effective means of counteracting the regime's unfettered pursuit of vengeance and to lay out a preventative strategy that will bring it to international justice and dissuade it from continuing its policy of rights violations.
- iii) No less than 80% of those resident in Idlib and surrounding areas (as of May 2019: this figure includes local residents and displaced persons) are regarded as living below the poverty line. With many having lost their primary means of subsistence because of the war, average monthly income is no more than \$50. The service sector in the region is in a terrible state (electricity, water, education, healthcare and nutrition in particular) mainly due to high prices, a lack of resources and the collapse of developmental and service funding projects. This requires an income stream to be set up deriving from international donors, which can give these sectors the support they need to run developmental initiatives and provide a broad range of job opportunities.
- iv) A majority of this population believe that the region should be administered by civil agencies elected by the people which possess the requisite experience and skill for the job. They emphasise how important it is to prevent military brigades and other groups from interfering in the governance of the region, while ensuring that the civil, military and political institutions of the regime have no presence at all. The regime, unanimously regarded as public enemy number one, utilises all its institutions across the full spectrum of sectors to further its dictatorial policies and the goals of its intelligence agencies. One of the most important things the population lacks is security, whether the general atmosphere of lawlessness and the absence of a functioning police service, or otherwise the constant air raids and artillery bombardments by the regime (and the Russians) that target public and civic facilities. Serious consideration should be given to the needs of the population, and they should be given all the support they require in order to obtain whatever it is they believe will carry them forward into the future. Donor agencies, foreign states and other institutions must not buy into the politicised argument being propagated by certain media outlets, which states that supporting these regions is to "strengthen terrorism". Instead, they should take into account the will of the civilian population and offer them support that would strengthen its influence. They must not abandon these civilians to the only other option which remains: ceding control to the militias and other groups.

- v) The situation in the camps constitutes a humanitarian crisis as it stands, but one that is continuing to worsen. Camp residents lack the most basic requirements for a stable and secure life. The majority of the camps in and around Idlib are unplanned and are not administered or even overseen by any governmental or humanitarian agencies. As a result they lack services in almost all sectors, from healthcare to education, nutrition, adequate shelter, water, sewage and electricity. A centralised administrative body needs to be created to oversee conditions in the camps and provide an objective evaluation of their residents' need and circumstances, and this with the support of donors and organisations capable of offering comprehensive solutions to bring a halt to the crises which are turning these camps into places of suffering and torment, where even children lack access to education.
- vi) Syrian activists are still the prime target of the Syrian regime and other combatant groups who want to reduce the impact and effectiveness of their non-violent activism, which rejects policies of oppression and enforced silence. The need to provide a secure environment which allows freedom of movement and the space to engage in activism and gainful employment is one of the most pressing needs faced by activists in the Idlib region and surrounding areas in particular, and in Northern Syria as a whole. Furthermore, the majority of activists are adamant that supporting and empowering them through initiatives which grant them experience-appropriate employment is vital. Activists in Northern Syria regard the region as the last remaining refuge from the regime. Despite the decline in living standards, security and service provision they feel they must continue for the sake of their cause, which is their guiding principle in all that they do, not to mention the fact that the population of Northern Syria need people to support them in their struggle and bring their message and their story, which the regime is trying to efface, to the outside world. For these reasons, one of the top priorities for humanitarian and international agencies must be to support the activists who, having been forcibly expelled from their homes, no longer have the option of relocating elsewhere. Others fill the detention centres of the regime while yet more have fled abroad. Drawing up a clear and transparent strategy to empower and exploit the capabilities of these activists and to ensure their safety will lend much needed strength to the efforts of the civilian population to stand firm against the various stratagems and projects of the regime and its military might.

In conclusion, we can say that as things stand at end of the period covered by this study, the governorate of Idlib is suffering from a profound and dangerous humanitarian crisis, one which continues to deteriorate on a daily basis in the absence of strategies to ensure that a population of nearly four million in a deeply unstable region is kept safe and given what they need to endure while services and resources dwindle. This study is of course unable to provide a comprehensive list of the basic requirements and demands of this population. What is needed is a systematic and properly researched international initiative to track and record quality of life, population figures and security for those living in the governorate, generating research into their needs on a regular and ongoing basis, and creating the political pressure that will halt military assaults and systematic bombardments and place civilians outside the scope of the conflict.

Footnotes:

1/ Idlib governorate's location and its participation in the revolution:

<https://www.dailysabah.com/arabic/arab-world/2018/09/14/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A5%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A8-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%81-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%9F>

2/ Idlib under the control of Jaysh Al Fath:

<https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/movementsandparties/2015/4/30/%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%AD>

3/ Displaced from home districts into Idlib:

<https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/1165586-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9>

4/ Displaced into Idlib:

https://orient-news.net/ar/news_show/149299/0/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A5%D8%AD%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A8-%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A9

5/ Siege of Ghouta:

https://ar.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%AD%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D9%88%D8%B7%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9

6/ Siege of Darayya:

https://ar.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%AD%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1_%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7_%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B6%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9

7/ Russian supervised operations to expel residents:

[https://www.arab48.com/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/2018/04/01/-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%81-](https://www.arab48.com/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/2018/04/01/-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%81-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%81-)

[%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A7-%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%A3%D9%87%D8%A8-%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87%D8%A7](#)

8/ Russia's false promises and the murder of Moataz Hittani:

<https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/245083>

9/ Detentions in Deraa:

<https://alkhaleejonline.net/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%B8%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%AC%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86>

10/ Detentions in Northern Homs:

<https://7al.net/2018/07/01/%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B0%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%AD%D9%85/>

11/ Preemptive seizure:

<https://stj-sy.org/ar/1211/>

12/ Population distribution:

<http://www.shaam.org/news/syria-news/%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%82%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A9-3%D8%8C6-%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A8-%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A9.html>

13/ Clashes and displacement in Sharq Al Sikka:

<https://www.aljumburiya.net/ar/content/%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%AD>

14/ The Sochi Agreement:

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2018/9/18/%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A5%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AD%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A3%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%AD-%D8%A8%D9%86%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%87>

15/ Collapse of the Sochi Agreement:

<https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9/%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%86-6-%D8%A2%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81-%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%81->

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/15/russian-chemical-attack-rumours>

16/ Russian chemical attack rumours:

<https://www.skynewsarabia.com/amp/middle-east/1176410-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%94-%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%85-%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%95%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A8-%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9>

17/ Recent regime battles:

<https://www.alhurra.com/amp/492631.html>

18/ Post-Sochi displacement:

https://www.sy-24.com/news/%D8%A5%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A8-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D9%86%D8%AD%D9%88-500-%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%86%D8%B5%D9%81-%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%84/?fbclid=IwAR0gXgIkFXMR_WON1ypflfqV68RaOBnd0SaXcm9dIQf-KGGKPRkRLF8ZN80

19/ Tahrir Al Sham take control of Darat Izza:

<https://www.almodon.com/arabworld/2019/1/2/%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%B2%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A3%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85>

20/ The Rescue Government runs Idlib:

<https://www.france24.com/ar/20190110-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%A6%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A5%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%81%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84-%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9>

21/ Living standards in Syria:

<https://jusoor.co/details/%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%89%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%B4%D8%A9%20%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%E2%80%A8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/421/ar>

22/ Making a living in the camps:

<https://www.omrandirasat.org/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AB/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%AE%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%AD-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A.html>

23/ An analysis of circumstances in Northern Syria (emergency responders):

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/19ZaCOEojldt8ARBbhUSqKG2mse4f1YAc/view?usp=drivesdk>

24/ Service provision (emergency responders):

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Po97JZA32ulCqkF1OVMKC4uqQdJdm371/view?usp=drivesdk>

25/ Forced expulsions from Ghouta and Qalamoun (emergency responders):

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FwSzd4ekEB-Zfw7tJBeuvBwzuvipkSM/view?usp=drivesdk>

26/ Statistics for forced expulsions (emergency responders):

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bTs9sqjrwBKTfPk7Cz7p2HNRYsycMWS-/view?usp=drivesdk>

27/ Violations and abuses by the Turkish border force:

<http://www.syriahr.com/?p=31757>

28/ Education in the camps:

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwjSqODfgZziAhUN16QKHeAUCf0QzPwB egQIARAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.alaraby.co.uk%2Fsociety%2Fcef9d72-c99d-4cf1-aa2a-fc26ed0f3805&psig=AOvVaw1nmPs2Hs9CuzTs8hs8HVX&ust=1557957352334202>

29/ Public health in the camps:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hNZ8EBzsvGIsI0eVQ-LSNK3tJB6HmEoA/view?usp=drivesdk>

30/

Protest outside the Libyan embassy:

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2011/2/24/%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%82-%D8%AA%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86>

Al Hariqa demonstrations:

<https://www.france24.com/ar/20110218-syria-demonstrations-bashar-lassad-police>

31/ Detained activists:

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2013/5/27/%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84%D9%88%D9%86>

32/ How the revolution began:

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2012/3/5/%D9%87%D9%83%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7>

33/ The death of Ghayath Matar:

https://ar.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AB_%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%B1

34/ The death of Basel Khartabeel:

https://ar.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84_%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%B7%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%84

35/ The death of Faten Rajab:

<https://geiroon.net/archives/143075>

36/ The death of Leila Shawkani:

<https://www.alarabiya.net/ar/arab-and-world/syria/2018/11/28/%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B0%D9%8A%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%8B-%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AF>

37/ The death of Yehyia Shorbaji:

<https://jisrtv.com/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B3%D8%B1/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A8%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%B7-%D9%8A%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%89-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%AC%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B0%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85/>

38/ The abduction of Razan Zeitouna:

<https://www.google.com/search?kgmid=/m/0hgqy7&hl=ar-TR&kgs=e2d5983dcbcb3429&q=%D8%B1%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86+%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A9&shndl=0&source=sh/x/kp&entrypoint=sh/x/kp>

39/ Documentation of detentions (Syrian Network for Human Rights):

<http://sn4hr.org/arabic/2018/12/31/%d9%85%d8%a7-%d9%84%d8%a7-%d9%8a%d9%82%d9%84-%d8%b9%d9%86-118829-%d8%b4%d8%ae%d8%b5%d8%a7%d9%8b-%d9%84%d8%a7-%d9%8a%d8%b2%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%88%d9%86-%d9%82%d9%8a%d8%af-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%b9%d8%aa/>