



## Statement

### **SNHR Is the Third Most Cited Information Source in the European Asylum Support Office's Report on Military Service in Syria**

**We Stress That Conscription into the Ranks of Syrian Regime Forces, Who Are Involved in Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes, Is a Major Obstacle to Refugees' Return**

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) has released a report on military service in Syria, whose purpose is to provide relevant information regarding military service in the Syrian regime's army for determining individuals' international protection status, including refugee status and subsidiary protection.

The report relies on several human rights and research sources, most notably, in order of the number of quotes included:

The Center for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR): 42

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): 29

Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR): 15

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR): 10

The report also cites other sources such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International, Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC), the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP), and others.

The report, issued in April 2021, stated that since March 2011, one of the Syrian regime government's main concerns was providing manpower to confront the popular uprising, referring to the regime army's loss of many soldiers, with causes including death or injury, draft evasion, desertion and defection. The report adds that some men have fled the country because they do not want to perform military service for fear that they will be killed in combat, while others have defected from the army or avoided military service out of political conviction and in opposition to the Syrian regime. Throughout the conflict, the Syrian regime viewed the activities of wide categories of individuals as political dissent, the report notes, adding that evasion of conscription has been reported as one of the main reasons for young men aged over 18 fleeing Syria. Furthermore, the report cites a [Forced Migration Review report](#) issued by the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, as saying 'it is also one of the primary reasons why they cannot return'. The report further adds that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) found that 75 % of Syrian refugees are reluctant to return to Syria for fear of military conscription.

The report touches on the Syrian law, which obliges male citizens between the ages of 18 and 42 to perform military service for a period of between 18 and 21 months, while women may perform military service voluntarily; Palestinians with permanent residency in Syria are also subject to conscription and usually serve in the ranks of the Syrian regime's army-affiliated Palestine Liberation Army (PLA). The report notes that internally displaced persons (IDPs) are also subjected to military service and recruited like other Syrians.

The report points out that those who have completed the aforementioned compulsory military service - between 18 and 21 months - and who have not exceeded the maximum draft age of 42 remain reservists and can be called up for reserve duty, while career soldiers can be recalled to service up to the age bracket of 48 to 62, depending on their rank.

The report adds that in many cases, draft evaders were often punished in the same way as those who actively joined the opposition ranks, noting that pro-government forces have systematically arrested defectors and military personnel suspected of sympathizing with the opposition in targeted campaigns. The report found that that conscripts who deserted the regime military's ranks were among the groups most likely to be detained arbitrarily by the Syrian regime's government forces. The report quoted the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) as stating that deserters are usually detained by branches of the Syrian intelligence services, which may expose them to the risk of torture and enforced disappearances.

As the report notes, family members of deserters/ defectors from military service routinely face house searches, pressure and harassment from military police or intelligence services to reveal the whereabouts of male relatives wanted for military service. The report indicates that in some cases, family members have been arrested or required to report to an intelligence service branch for questioning.

The report also notes that the extent to which family members may face consequences is influenced by factors such as the rank of the deserter/defector, the family's place of residence and religious background and the secret service and officer in charge of the area. For example, family members of high-ranking deserters/defectors or those from opposition-held areas would be more likely to face consequences than those with a low rank in the army or who originate from the Syrian regime-held areas.

The report states that the regime government has arrested and detained Syrians despite amnesty decisions, referring to the scarcity of information about the scope of the general amnesty decisions issued by the Syrian regime regarding draft evaders and military deserters and their implementation in practice. The report also referred to an SNHR's report which revealed that the amnesty was only partially implemented in relation to other offenses it covered. The report also notes that Syrian regime forces have detained or disappeared military deserters and defectors from former opposition-held areas who were granted amnesty as part of reconciliation agreements, while there have also been cases where deserters covered by an amnesty were imprisoned for a few months and then sent to perform their military service or draft evaders who were sent directly to do their military service.

We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) believe that the information included in the European Asylum Support Office report and the [Court of Justice of the European Union decision](#) in which the court called on member states to grant entitlement to recognition as a refugees to Syrians who refuse to perform compulsory military service, noting that there is a "strong presumption" that the refusal to perform military service may subject the person concerned to persecution or participation in war crimes, as well as [the European Union's recent statement on Syria](#), all prove once again that the areas under the control of the Syrian regime cannot be considered to constitute any sort of safe haven for residents there; all this underlines that regime-controlled areas of Syria are very definitely not a safe haven for the return of refugees or IDPs, and conscription into Syrian regime forces, which are involved in systematically committing crimes against humanity and war crimes, constitutes a major obstacle to the return of refugees and IDPs. We have previously recommended that no Syrian citizen should join the ranks of Syrian regime forces, since there is a high probability that he will be involved in committing atrocious violations and war crimes, and that there will be no stability in Syria as long as the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Armed Forces, Bashar al Assad, who is involved in crimes against humanity, wields supreme authority in Syria.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights stresses its willingness to contribute to all international reports on the human rights situation in Syria, and places its database and the extensive information it contains, compiled over the past ten years, at the service of showing the true extent of human rights violations perpetrated against the Syrian citizens and state, in the hope that this will provide a service in documenting the true history and chronicling the record of events in Syria objectively, helping to thwart the vigorous attempts by the perpetrators of violations, foremost among which are the Syrian regime, Russia and Iran, from establishing affiliated organizations which aim to change the narrative of events, and to deny or justify

heinous violations. We also stress that we will make the greatest possible effort to document violations and incidents objectively and credibly to achieve the goal of protecting civilians in Syria, holding all perpetrators accountable, and helping to start the country along the path of positive change towards democracy, in keeping with our motto: **"No Justice without Accountability"**.

To read the full report by the European Asylum Support Office, please visit this [link](#)