



# NORTHEAST SYRIA

## Protection Analysis Update

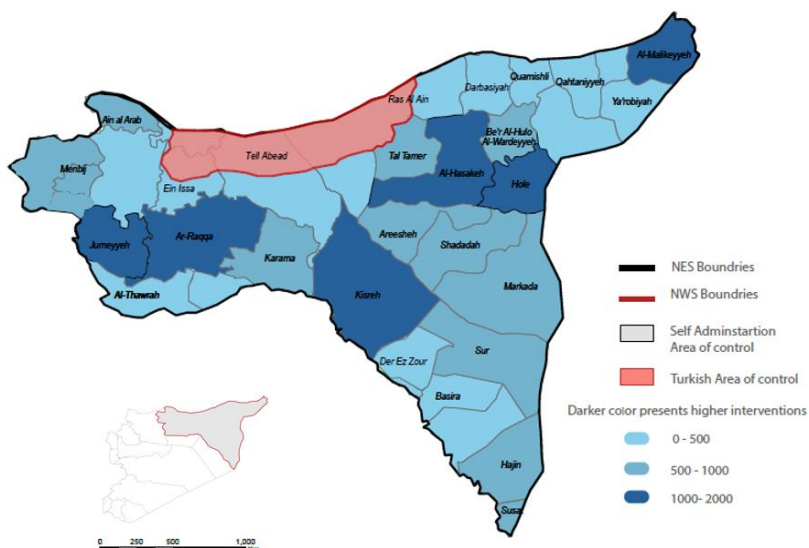
JULY 2023

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the period (September 2022 - April 2023); Northeast Syria was facing multiple crises due to the **conflict, terrorism, human rights violations, economic collapse, and environmental disasters**. Turkey has bombed civilian areas and infrastructure, causing casualties and displacement. ISIS has attacked the SDF and civilians at a low-profile modality. The region has also suffered from **water shortages, food insecurity, inflation, and cholera outbreak**. The camps and informal settlements have **poor security and services, and face exploitation, extortion, abuse, and eviction**.

The protection risks requiring immediate attention in the period covered by this analysis are:

1. Denial of access to resources, opportunities and assistance driven by the compound effects of conflict, displacement, human rights violations and environmental disasters.
2. Denial to access to Legal Identity resulting in barriers to Freedom of Movement and violation of Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Rights
3. Forced Recruitment and Association of Children in Armed Forces and Groups
4. Gender Based Violence
5. Presence of Mines and Other Explosive Ordnance



### URGENT ACTIONS NEEDED

People in northeast Syria need urgent support to protect their lives and rights, including:

- **Increase funding and access for humanitarian and development aid**, and deal with disasters, such as public health outbreaks, and climate change related natural disasters. Aid actors should support to protect vulnerable groups and their rights and legal identity, and provide opportunities for recovery, education, health, and livelihoods.
- **Enable women and girls to participate in, lead and support the social cohesion and restoring social fabrics processes in Northeast Syria**. This will empower them and ensure their voices are heard.

### UPDATE ON PROTECTION RISKS SEVERITY | 2022 – 2023

STRESS	SEVERE	EXTREME	CATASTROPHIC
Be'r Al-Hulo Al Wardeyyeh	Tell Abiad, Sabka Al-Khafsa, Menbij	Tal Tamer, Al-Hasakah, Shadadah, Markada Areesheh, Tal Hmis, ...	Al Hole, Mansoura, Ar Raqqa, Jurneyyeh
SEVERITY VARIATIONS COMPARED TO PREVIOUS ANALYSIS			
<b>INCREASE</b>	<b>11</b>	Manbij, Abu Qalqal, Ain al Arab, Lower Shuyookh, Shadadah, Be'r Al-Hulo Al-Wardeyyeh, Al-Malikeyyeh, Ras Al Ain, Sabka, Tell Abiad, Ein Issa	
<b>STABLE</b>	<b>20</b>	A'rima, Al-Khafsa, Sarin, Jarablus, Tal Tamer, Quamishli, Amuda	
<b>REDUCTION</b>	<b>10</b>	Al-Hasakah, Markada, Areesheh, Hole, Tal Hmis, Jawadiyah, Darbasiyah, Khasham, ArRaqqa, Mansura	

## CONTEXT

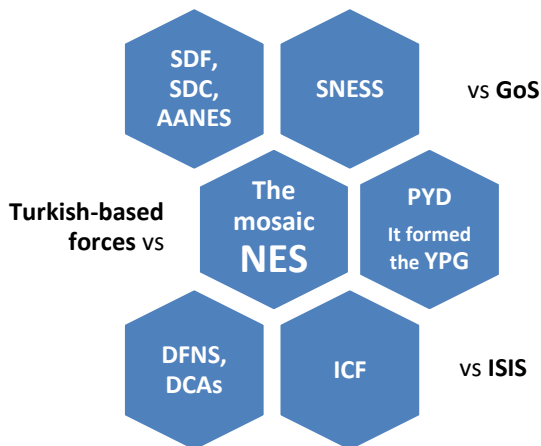


Northeast Syria (NES) is a region located in the northern part of Syria, bordering Turkey to the north and Iraq to the east. Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, the region has been in a state of flux and became a site of conflict between the Syrian government, various armed opposition groups, and the Kurdish-led **Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)**. Northern parts of the region are primarily populated by Kurds, who have long sought greater autonomy and recognition of their cultural and political rights. Other parts of northeastern Syria are majority Arab. There are also Syriac, Assyrian, Turkmen, and other minority groups in areas across the region.

The **Self Administration of Northeast Syria (SNES)** has been able to keep its autonomy because of the major help and support from the international community and its military allies. Another important factor that helps the Self Administration of Northeast Syria SNES is its control over the main economic resources of wheat and oil. These resources are not only a source of income for the SNES, but also essential for the whole of Syria. This gives the SNES and its related political and security actors an advantage over the Government of Syria (GoS).

### YEARS OF PROTRACTED CONFLICT AND INSTABILITY

The **Democratic Union Party (PYD)**, a Kurdish party, became the dominant actor in north and east Syria after the Syrian government withdrew in 2012. It formed the **People’s Protection Units (YPG)** as its military wing and Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM) as its political umbrella. It also created an array of local councils. The YPG fought ISIS with the US-led **International Coalition Forces (ICF)** support and expanded its territory. In 2015, the YPG expanded into the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) a multi-ethnic umbrella group comprising the YPG and numerous other groups. The SDF has been the main partner of the US-led ICF against ISIS in Syria.



The SDF, with the ICF support, captured more areas from ISIS in 2016 and 2017, including Manbij, Tabqa, Raqqa, and parts of Deir ez-Zor. The SDF's political wing, the SDC, set up a federation of the Kurdish regions called the **Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS)** in 2016, and separate administrations for the Arab areas called the **Democratic Civil Administrations (DCAs)** in 2017. The SDC created a new governance model called the **Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES)** in 2018, which included the DFNS and the DCAs. The AANES formed an Executive Council that oversaw seven autonomous regions: the Jazeera, Furat, Afrin, Manbij, Raqqa, Tabqa, and Deir ez-Zor regions.

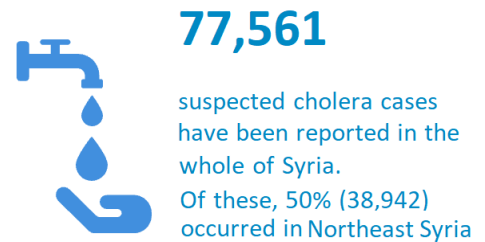
Northeast Syria has seen varied levels of conflict over the past several years. While the SDF is certainly an actor that is contesting the Government of Syria’s (GoS) authority, direct conflict between the SDF and GoS forces is infrequent. More consequential for the region have been both the SDF and GoS military campaigns to capture territory from ISIS, both resulting in significant movement of IDPs to SDF-controlled territory. While ISIS no longer retains control over territory, there are still violent incidents, attacks, and criminal activities in areas previously controlled by ISIS. The region has also seen major escalations and flare ups with Turkey and Turkish-based forces, the most significant of which was the late **2019 Operation**

**Peace Spring military operation** in which Turkey took control of Ras al-Ain and Tal Abyad along the northern border of NES. This too resulted in major displacement. According to Human Rights Watch, **Turkish airstrikes have targeted civilian areas and infrastructure**, causing casualties, displacement, and damage to water, electricity, and oil facilities.<sup>i</sup> For instance, on November 20, 2022, Turkey launched an offensive called **Operation Claw-Sword** that hit several cities and towns in northeast Syria, including Kobani, where an under-construction hospital was destroyed. The airstrikes have also aggravated the already disrupted supply of water from Alouk Water Station, which serves about 610,000 people in al-Hasakah governorate. As a result of the water crisis and poor sanitation conditions, **a cholera outbreak has infected over 20,000 people as of November 2022.**

Today, **NES has more than 600,000 IDPs**, roughly half of which are residing in last resort sites (formal and informal camps, informal settlements, and collective centers). Most of these populations are from GoS or Turkish-controlled territory and face protracted displacement in NES.

### STEADY DEPLETION OF LIVELIHOOD AND COPING CAPACITIES DUE TO CONFLICT AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Northeast Syria has experienced a steady erosion and **depletion of livelihood and coping capacities** due to ongoing conflict, displacement, economic free fall and decline, climate change and environmental degradation. The conflict has caused a huge displacement crisis in the region, as many people have had to leave their homes and seek safety in NES, not only from within the area but also from other parts of the country under the control of the government and Turkey. This has put a strain on the region's already limited resources and services, including healthcare, education, and water and sanitation. The **water, sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) has broken-down** due to protracted conflict in Northeast Syria. Poor sanitation problems coupled with shortage of water pose a major risk factor of the public health crisis in Northeast Syria. Since late August 2022, cases of severe acute watery diarrhea have been increasingly reported across Syria, concentrated particularly along the Euphrates River. These were later confirmed to be cholera cases. The Euphrates is the most important source of surface water in NES, and raw sewage is discharged into it, as there is no proper waste management system. <sup>ii</sup>As of January 2023, a total of 77,561 suspected cholera cases have been reported in the whole of Syria. Of these, 50% (38,942) occurred in Northeast Syria. <sup>iii</sup>



Additionally, the region has suffered from a **decline in economic activity, particularly in the agricultural sector**, which has historically been a major source of income for many families. Livelihood was the most reported priority need for both residents and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Insufficient income and a lack of employment opportunities that match people's skills were the most reported barriers to meeting basic needs. High prices and low purchasing power forced households to adopt negative coping strategies, including sending children to work, instead of schools and reducing food and water consumption, which resulted in increased nutrition challenges. This has been **exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic**, and the **imposition of economic sanctions**, which have further weakened the region's already fragile economy. Despite these challenges, communities in Northeast Syria have demonstrated **remarkable resilience and have developed innovative coping mechanisms**, such as community-based initiatives and informal economic activities. However, the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in the region continue to pose significant challenges to the livelihoods and well-being of its residents. <sup>iv</sup>

### WORRYING IMPACTS OF CONTINUOUS DISPLACEMENT OF CIVILIAN POPULATION

The protracted displacement of civilian population in northeast Syria has had significant humanitarian and socio-economic impacts. Displaced individuals face challenges accessing necessities such as food, water, shelter, and healthcare. The displacement has also put a strain on host communities, leading to competition for resources and potential conflict. The lack of stability and security has hindered economic development and investment in the region, **exacerbating poverty and unemployment**. Additionally, the displacement has caused disruptions in **education**, with many children unable to attend schools, having insufficient non-formal education services available to meet all the needs. The ongoing conflict and displacement have also had a significant **psychological toll on individuals and communities**, leading to **trauma, stress, and mental health issues**.

Years of conflict and underfunding have eroded the healthcare system in northeast Syria. **Health facilities**, including major

hospitals, such as the Hasaka and Raqqa National Hospitals, remain heavily damaged by the conflict, while others lack sufficient medical supplies or qualified staff. As a result, many people cannot access the medical care they need, particularly for non-communicable diseases and complex medical conditions. Additionally, **civil infrastructure** has been repeatedly compromised, severely affecting people’s access to water. As per the AANES, the Alouk water station, serving an estimated around 610,000 people in Al-Hasakah province, has suffered 24 suspensions of water supply since November 2019, the longest for 42 days. This, combined with the severe reduction in water flowing down the Euphrates River, has contributed to an increase in waterborne diseases, as well as increased food insecurity and higher risk of malnutrition.<sup>v</sup>

## PROTECTION RISKS

### RISK 1

### Denial of Access to Resources, Opportunities and Assistance Driven by the Compound Effects of Conflict, Displacement, Human Rights Violations and Environmental Disasters.

In Informal Settlements, a **multi-faceted crisis comprising conflict, displacement, human rights violations, and environmental disasters** such as floods during winter, and drought during summer periods is unfolding. These communities are grappling with challenges that not only mirror those faced in camps but are intensified and compounded due to their unique circumstances. Despite sharing similar issues with camps, and residents’ informal settlements encounter even more significant difficulties in accessing essential services and lack proper protection monitoring mechanisms (as protection monitoring helps to establish and maintain referral pathways and service mapping). Families and individuals residing in these areas are confronted with limited access to all services and long-term solutions.

Turkey aims firstly to push the SDF away from its border, creating a 20-mile (32 km) buffer zone. Turkey seeks to relocate **more than 1 million Syrian refugees in this “safe zone”**, both removing them from Turkey where their presence is becoming increasingly less accepted. and complicating the demographic mix in what they fear could become an autonomous Kurdish state on their border.<sup>vi</sup>

According to Human Rights Watch, the repeated military operations in the region have caused civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. At least 10 civilians have been killed, and 17 incidents of infrastructure damage were reported. The shelling has also hindered returns, destroyed agricultural land, and limited humanitarian access by increasing the risk of unexploded ordnance.<sup>vii</sup>

**ISIL is additionally operating at a low profile** and has been conducting frequent and deadly attacks against the SDF and civilians in the region. On March 31, 2023, two suspected ISIL members were killed during an attack on internal security forces in Hasakah governorate while they were armed with grenades, AKM rifles, and body-borne improvised explosive devices (BBIEDs) A similar incident was reported in Raqqa city as well. These attacks demonstrate the resilience and low-cost operation capacity of ISIL in northeast Syria, as well as its potential spillover to the larger areas held by the SDF. They also create security havoc and inflict distress to the general population, who are already suffering from multiple crises.<sup>viii</sup>

A severe economic and humanitarian crisis amid multiple shocks is unfolding. The World Bank reported that shocks include **prolonged armed conflict, economic sanctions, the COVID-19 pandemic, a severe drought**, deepening economic crises in neighboring Lebanon and Turkey, and the economic consequences of the war in Ukraine and associated sanctions. These factors have led to a rapid depreciation of the local currency, causing inflation and food insecurity to soar.<sup>ix</sup> According to the **UN (HNO 2023), 15.3 million people need humanitarian assistance** in Syria, a 1.9 million increase over 2021. <sup>x</sup>In Northeast Syria, where most of the territory is controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the situation is particularly dire. The region has experienced rising civil unrest due to the lack of economic opportunities, state support, and law enforcement. The region has also suffered from water shortages and drought-like conditions that have jeopardized health, water, and other systems<sup>xi</sup>



**15.3 M**  
people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria. An increase of 1.9 million over 2021.

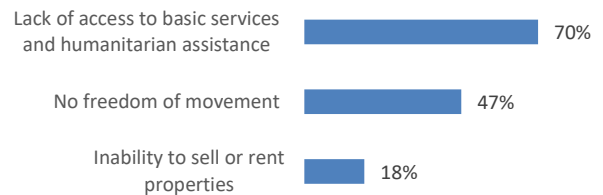
The **security situation** in Al-Hol is deteriorating due to the destruction of **personal properties, confiscation of goods, night**

**raids, arrests, murders, kidnappings, and forced disappearances** by security forces and ISIS-affiliated groups including of children (referring to the arrest and separation of teenage boys and transferring them to detention centers). The camp residents also experience economic difficulties, unfair treatment, demands for money, sexual violence, and poor communications, without due process and alternative solution from local and de facto authorities. The camp administration limits their movement, employment, and access to services and activities. Other camps in Northeast Syria also face various challenges and risks. Common problems in Al Areeshah, Serekaniye, and Washokani camps are thefts, unfair treatment, demands for money, depression because of crowded living conditions, and lack of job opportunities. The camp administration also evicts some families who they say are a security risk, without due process and proper notice. Abu Khashab camp sees random arrests and curfews by the security forces. Deir ez Zor and Raqqa camps residents are at risk of disappearances, detentions, by armed gangs (armed gangs often enter the camps and kidnap and harass people from the camps, as most camps are not protected).

**RISK 2 Denial to Access to Legal Identity Resulting in Barriers to Freedom of Movement and Violation of Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Rights**

According to the 2022/23 Multi Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA), **only 13 percent of households in NES reported possessing all civil documentation** they needed. This lack of documentation was reported as a significant barrier to enjoying freedom of movement (47 percent of households) and the ability to sell or rent properties (18 percent) while 70 percent of households live in communities where lack of documentation hinders access to basic services and humanitarian assistance. <sup>xii</sup>Barriers to obtaining legal identity and civil documentation are due to, inter alia, access and security concerns; missing, lost or damaged documentation; destruction of civil documentation records; costs and administrative burden; risks of arrest, detention, kidnapping and sexual abuse at checkpoints; and risks of forced conscription.

Lack of documentation:  
main barriers reported



There are **additionally significant risks of statelessness for children without documentation of their births, which may put them at greater risks of sexual exploitation, human trafficking, early marriage, and family separation**. This further results in negative coping mechanisms, including obtaining forged or falsified documentation, paying bribes, or resorting to brokers or middlemen who charge exorbitant costs for issuing their documents.

Across NES, **births frequently go undocumented**, leaving children at risk of statelessness; in NES, for instance in an assessment by one PWG partner conducted in 2021; 89 percent of focus group respondents reported being able to register their children’s birth prior to 2011 while only 42 percent were able to do so after 2011. <sup>xiii</sup>In camps in NES such as Al Hol and Roj, particularly formal camps where movement restrictions are most severe, Syrian IDPs and Iraqi refugees are unable to register vital life events and authorities routinely confiscate documentation and separate families. In late-2022, camp administration in Areesha carried out an exercise in which previously confiscated documents were returned to all camp residents. This decision is to be lauded and camp administration in Al Hol and Roj camps should plan for a similar exercise regarding confiscated personal documents in those respective sites. For NES, there are further issues related to the sizable stateless Kurdish population who have faced decades of discrimination even prior to the conflict and face ongoing barriers to identity documentation. Third-country nationals face many challenges in registering their civil status documents, such as complex legal procedures and lack of recognition. Their children are also at risk of becoming stateless if they cannot prove their nationality or recognize paternity.

A lack of documentation has severe freedom of movement consequences as it places individuals at greater **risk for arrest or detention at checkpoints**. For IDPs, incomplete documentation can deny them authorization to leave camps (including for urgent medical care), prevent them from returning or reintegration to their place of origin (including to check on their HLP assets), or prevent them from relocating to another area<sup>xiv</sup>. As one IDP living in Al Hol Camp in NES expressed:

“I am a dead person standing on two legs, as I do not have any documents to prove my identity.....there are obstacles that prevent me from reaching Government areas to extract my civil documents, and among them is my inability to move easily and leave the camp because I do not have any personal documents, in addition to my security fears, as I was previously living

in ISIS-controlled areas”.

The imposition of **movement restrictions on the population** of Al Hol and Al Roj camps, citing security concerns, is a matter of significant concern. While acknowledging the security challenges faced and concerns expressed by local authorities, it is crucial to emphasize that security considerations should not serve as a broad justification for curtailing freedom of movement. An overly sweeping security approach has resulted in adverse consequences and limitations affecting thousands of individuals. Addressing this situation from a perspective focused on sustainable solutions necessitates a more balanced approach from authorities, one that avoids excessive restrictions that may exacerbate future issues. Such consequences include fostering a climate of collective punishment, exacerbating tensions among camp residents, contributing to mental health issues, obstructing access to healthcare services, and complicating the reintegration of individuals into society, particularly regarding Al Hol and Roj camps. Without a significant relaxation of restrictions, individualized risk and security assessments, and structured support for community reintegration, the situation in Northeast Syria is likely to remain stagnant and lead to more enduring repercussions. Investment in civil documentation initiatives, the cultivation of community resilience, and the prevention of overly broad security measures are essential steps toward promoting durable solutions in Syria.

**The overall barriers to access legal identity documentation compound ongoing violations of on housing, land, and property (HLP) rights**, with the primary concerns related to damage or destruction of property; lack of or weak security of tenure; land grabbing or confiscation; HLP disputes; loss or lack of HLP documentation; forced eviction; secondary occupation; and inheritance, particularly in relation to women’s inheritance rights. For 2023, an estimated **5.5 million individuals living in Syria will require shelter support**, with 34 percent of the total population living in substandard accommodation and 38 percent renting or holding weak forms of occupancy agreements, which creates heightened risks of eviction. Recently, concerns have been expressed about the policies and legislation of the AANES that may affect the properties of people who are not present. This may have an impact on the population and representation in some areas, especially where the properties of different ethnic or religious groups or those who may have been linked to different armed groups may be more affected. For women, this may pose challenges for their HLP rights, as they may be affected by the alleged links of their male family members.



**5.5 M**

individuals living in Syria require shelter support, with **34%** of the total population living in substandard accommodation.

**The establishment of IDP camps has been one of the most contentious uses of land by AANES.** Some camps are located on wholly public-owned, others on privately-owned land and others on a mix of public and privately-owned land. Owners of private land where these camps were established were not always consulted prior to their construction, typically because they were displaced at the time, or because they were afraid to engage with AANES authorities. This has resulted in long-standing and unresolved HLP issues in relation to some IDP camps and displacement sites, such as with Abu Khasab in Deir-ez-Zor. Additionally, the specific boundaries and locations of public land that the AANES controls may be unknown, as GoS institutions maintain such records and are thus inaccessible to AANES authorities. There is little clarity as to how or where private rights holders can assert their HLP rights or claim compensation for the use of their property. Over the past year, local authorities have continued to evict or remove IDPs living in collective centers and informal sites, often without adequate or formal notice and without provision of suitable alternative accommodation.

**RISK 3** Forced Recruitment and Association of Children in Armed Forces and Groups

**Forced recruitment and association of children in armed forces and groups is a harrowing risk in NES.** The absence of proper protection measures and the breakdown of formal governance structures leave children exposed to coercion and manipulation by armed groups.

The already marginalized conditions in these settlements make children easy targets for recruitment, robbing them of their innocence and childhood. While child recruitment is highlighted as the most life-threatening protection concern this does litigate other child protection concerns are not present. The harsh reality in NES and erosion of basic services leaves families with no option but to turn to negative coping mechanisms. Data captured through the Child Protection information system (PRIMERO) and Protection monitoring reports indicate **neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, child marriage and child labor**



**1200**

children have been recruited in the 2023, mainly as combatants

including begging to be among the rising risks. The under-reporting of gender-based violence in children does not indicate the absence of GBV risks children are faced with. Constant displacement, eruption of outbreak diseases (Cholera) further triggers the protection risks children are exposed to.

The General Assembly Security Council June report published on June 5th, 2023, indicates **over 1200 children have been recruited with the majority mainly as combatants**. CAAC task force in North-east Syria between the year 2021 and early 2022 has received a caseload of approximately 730 released and excluded children while it is still believed many children are with armed groups and forces despite signing the Action plan with UN. Economic constraints, limited education opportunities, tribal clashes and continuous safety risks across the region are contributing factors to child recruitment and family separation. While acknowledging child recruitment is happening in NES, sensitivities around the topic in the community has made it challenging to collect data and report on the issue. Humanitarian actors have shown efforts and readiness to respond and prevent child recruitment in coordination with security forces and Authorities however, the constant barriers in implementation of CAAC activities has further indicated a probability in recruitment in the community with access to detention/prisons centers denied. The ineffective complaint mechanisms hinder the reporting and response to child recruitment.

Of 42,000 foreigners suspected of affiliation with ISIS<sup>xv</sup>, **more than 60% of the camp detainees are children**, who are held in dire conditions which put these children more at risk of recruitment by armed groups. The removal of children from the camps without proper transparency and consent of caregivers increases the cases of family separation and possible recruitment. In many reported cases caregivers do not know the whereabouts of their children and are not able to contact them. In the period between Jan 2023 to May 2023 approximately 20 adolescents' boys reported to have been forcefully separated from the caregiver.

## RISK 4 Gender Based Violence

GBV remains prevalent and under-reported in Northeast Syria due to deep rooted cultural systems and beliefs that normalize GBV. Despite efforts made by humanitarian organizations together with the local partners and actors to increase accessibility to GBV response services and empowerment programs, women, and girls (who are mostly affected) still experience gender discrimination, fear and stigma attached to reporting and this negatively impacts on their health and wellbeing. Estimates from the whole of Syria Gender Based Violence Area of Responsibility indicate that **1,181,860 Individuals need Gender Based Violence (GBV) response services in Northeast Syria in 2023**. The figures estimated are not representative of the actual situation as GBV is very under-reported but shed light on the nature of issues disclosed. The GBV risks are quite prevalent in camp settings where women and girls lack access to proper, segregated WASH facilities, privacy and safe shelters.

The effects of displacement compounded by years of conflict and instability have contributed to limited livelihood opportunities for both men and women and increased family tensions that have **increased GBV risks and Intimate partner Violence (IPV)**<sup>xvi(xvii)</sup> Still, women and girls are most affected as they have limited decision making power and access to essential services; female-headed households, widowed women, adolescent girls, and women living with disability have been reported to experience increased GBV risks compounded by their vulnerability status .

In many locations in Northeast Syria, **services for GBV survivors are limited or not available** particularly in Der ez Zor governorate where health services are very limited, yet these are critical for a holistic support to survivors. Legal services for survivors are not available in the Northeast Syria context which is severely reducing survivors' options to seek justice. Many women face accessibility related challenges that are compounded by their vulnerability status, women and girls face gendered limitations to accessing services and opportunities. They often need a male escort, permission to move or denied services if from female headed households, are divorced women or not married. When they are attempting to register their marriages or advocate for their rights During displacement, many women lose legal documents and need support with accessing information on how to replace or renew them. Limited funding for GBV response activities affects timely delivery of GBV risk mitigation activities and supplies such as dignity items and cash support.



**GBV response and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) safeguarding are key priorities for GBV actors to empower communities and actors to uphold Human Rights**



**GBV response and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) safeguarding are key priorities** for GBV actors to empower communities and actors to uphold human rights. GBV should be integrated into different sectors planning and response to ensure fast and effective support for survivors and women and girls at risk. Developing healthy coping strategies/mechanisms for women and girls is also essential, as they lack specialized services to recover from the effects of the crises they face.

## RISK 5 Presence of Mines and Other Explosive Ordnance

The presence of mines and other EO contamination poses a **serious threat to the security, protection, dignity, well-being, resilience, and recovery of the people in NES** and requires urgent and coordinated action from all stakeholders. The presence of EO continues to kill and injure civilians and impede development perspectives in NES. Access to livelihood and key services, including humanitarian assistance, remains compromised. According to the 2022 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA), one in three communities in Syria is thought to be contaminated by EO. In NES all districts controlled by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) have been affected by EO contamination. However, some known contaminated districts such as Ain Al Arab (Kobani), Ras Al Ain, Tell Abyad, Al Mayadin and Abu Kamal are currently not covered by HMA operators due to security and access constraints. As such, the current level of reported contamination in these districts is lower than in Al Hasakah, Ar Raqqa, and other districts where HMA operators are present. **The first quarter of 2023 has been marked by a tragic and extraordinary level of victims, especially in Deir Ez-Zor district.** As an illustration, during the month of February 2023, eight workers were reportedly killed, and 35 others injured in the explosion of an anti-tank landmine in the Deir Ez-Zor district. The workers were on their way to pick up truffles in the region. For the reporting period from September 2022 to April 2023 (inclusive), HMA partners officially documented, through the conduct of community liaison and survey activities, **115 EO-related incidents affecting 139 victims in NES.** As accidents and victims are under-documented and under-reported due to a lack of follow up capacity, iMMAP collects open-source information through its Explosive Hazards Incident (EHI) database. As such, it is estimated that a combined 355 persons were injured or killed over the reporting period by EO in NES. A lack of resources and capacity means HMA partners are unable to follow up all open-source reports. The number of reported victims through the EHI system in the first quarter of 2023 has already surpassed the total recorded in the whole of 2022. If this tragic trend continues in 2023, the number of victims may reach the same levels as previously seen in 2018. For the consolidated period from January 2017 to April 2023 (inclusive), HMA partners officially documented, via the conduct of community liaison and survey activities, 2345 EO victims in NES. At the same time in parallel (through its EHI open-source system), iMMAP reported a total of 3369 victims caused by EO since 2017 in NES.



### 3369

victims caused by EO since 2017 to April 2023 in NES, reported by iMMAP

For the period from September 2022 to April 2023 (inclusive of April) **435 new hazardous areas have been reported** and are still awaiting follow up activity, corresponding to 4,484,056m<sup>2</sup>. This includes 424 new blockages reported by HMA partners. These blockages include critical infrastructure (such as water facilities, hospitals, and schools), agricultural land, roads, and non-agricultural land for development. These blockages impede further humanitarian assistance. Overall records show that 661 areas remain openly contaminated as Suspect Hazardous Areas (SHA) or Confirmed Hazardous Areas (CHA) requiring follow-up activity, corresponding to 29,165,262m<sup>2</sup>. In addition to the above, 432 single EO items are still awaiting to be safely removed or destroyed.

Considering the high level of EO-related accidents and victims in NES and in particular Deir Ez-Zor district over the last three months, the number of Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) beneficiaries recorded is comparatively low. This is concerning and illustrates the **need to increase awareness sessions** in the area and adapt them to risk-taker profiles (e.g., truffle workers, collecting truffles as a means of income, and participating in risk-taking activity).

## RESPONSE

### PROGRESS MADE ON PROTECTION

The PWG has 31 partners (20 INGO, 11 NNGO); Child protection has 13 (9 INGO, 4 NNGO) active partners; GBV has 14 partners (11 INGO, 3 NNGO) and HMA has 5 partners (4 INGO, 1 NNGO). Hence, all AoRs are trying to address the protection issues, despite limited partner presence and funding challenges.

The **protection sector has started new area-based coordination that aims to decentralize the coordination in NES according to the needs and relevance**. This coordination will help to decentralize the coordination and decision-making process including but not limited to **avoiding duplication of efforts and creating synergy for maximum impact, strengthening area-based service mapping and referral pathways**.

For the period from September 2022 to April 2023 (inclusive of April) HMA partners removed or destroyed 3607 items and cleared (or canceled through NTS) an area of 1,103,381m<sup>2</sup>. In addition, over this period, 171 new EO single items were recorded. For the consolidated period from January 2017 (date from which there is consolidated data) to April 2023 (inclusive of April), HMA partners (humanitarian and commercial) removed/destroyed 118,950 items and cleared (or canceled through NTS) a total of 34,212,889m<sup>2</sup>.

### CRITICAL GAPS IN FUNDING AND POPULATION REACHED

The humanitarian response in Syria is facing limited resources. The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan requires \$5.4 billion to assist 15.3 million people across the country. However, only less than 10 percent of the funds have been received so far. This puts 2.5 million people at risk of losing food or cash assistance, which is vital for their survival. **Northeast Syria has 2.1M people in need of humanitarian aid, and 1.9M are targeted for assistance**. Many of them are male (51%), elderly and children (55%), and PwD (18%). From September 2022 to April 2023, about 46% of the target population received humanitarian aid. The protection sectors require \$415.7M for the whole of Syria, but approximately around 35 million have been funded to the NES partners (including protection, child protection and GBV), but excluding Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA). The lack of funding is like to increase protection risks and also drive-up negative coping mechanisms, particularly affecting the most vulnerable, including women and girls, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

The protection sector in NES is mainly active in formal camps and some informal settlements in Al Hassake and Raqqa governorates. In Deir Ez-Zor and Aleppo district, protection activities were very limited in 2022/2023 due to security, access, and funding challenges. This affected the reporting of new hazardous areas. In addition, no protection, GBV and HMA teams were fully working in Tell Abiad and Ain Al Arab (Kobane) districts because of security and resource constraints. Furthermore, there is almost limited protection presence outside of camps and informal settlements which prevents access to information, protection issues and community tensions, and promotion of return and reintegration.

GBV response and reproductive health systems need to be strengthened, as there are critical gaps and unmet needs. Some women are seeking unsafe abortion services, which is a joint concern for GBV and health. Reproductive health conversations should be initiated as we address the root causes of unwanted pregnancies, such as rape, false promised marriages and sexual exploitation that are aggravating it.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### RISK 1

Denial of Access to Resources, Opportunities and Assistance Driven by the Compound Effects of Conflict, Displacement, Human Rights Violations and Environmental Disasters.

#### GOVERNMENT and PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT

- All parties to the conflict should respect international humanitarian law and human rights. Parties to the conflict and other responsible actors need to ensure that the people are treated with respect and dignity, and that their rights and identity are protected.

#### HUMANITARIAN COUNTRY TEAM AND HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY

- Escalate advocacy and efforts to ensure respect of human rights and dignity of people in NES, including monitoring any cases of exploitation, extortion, sexual abuse, harassment and any other human rights violation by any party.
- Supporting humanitarian actors and host communities to help the third country nationals in NES access essential services, livelihoods, and resettlement options, while respecting their right to voluntary return when conditions are safe and dignified. We need to ensure that they are not discriminated against or neglected, and that they have a choice in their future.
- Ensure humanitarian access, including the delivery of life-saving assistance, protection, and mental health and psychosocial support to the most critical and hard to reach areas in NES.

### RISK 2

Denial to Access to Legal Identity Resulting in Barriers to Freedom of Movement and Violation of Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Rights

#### HUMANITARIAN COUNTRY TEAM AND HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY

- Enhance coordination with AANES and camp administration to allow camp residents, particularly those in formal camps, to move more freely and especially as this relates to livelihoods, access to healthcare and obtaining civil documentation.
- Helping camp residents obtain civil documentation and providing legal awareness, counseling, and legal assistance, including paying for their transportation and administrative fees. This also means ensuring that civil documentation is not a prerequisite or barrier to accessing humanitarian services and assistance.
- Undertaking due diligence and risk mitigation to protect housing, land, and property (HLP) rights in humanitarian activities, including camp establishment. This also means building relations with landlords and host communities to prevent HLP conflicts and eviction risks, and advocating for free legal assistance and awareness for Syrians who fear or face unlawful property confiscation.
- Ensuring adequate funding and commitments in all shelter, WASH, Early Recovery or Site and Settlement Working Group (SSWG) interventions for proper due diligence assessments to avoid creating, contributing to, or exacerbating HLP rights violations, including during the establishment or expansion of new camps or collective centers.
- Scale up support to long-term and early recovery programming: Increase support to programs that help residents inside and outside of camp, including legal assistance and removing freedom of movement barriers. This also means enabling camp residents to pursue durable solutions such as formal schooling, employment, return or relocation.

#### AANES AND CAMP ADMINISTRATION

- Remove unlawful limitations on the movement of displaced civilians both within and outside of camps. As enshrined under Article 12 of the ICCPR and Principle 14 of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, international law requires that any attempts to restrict movement have a clear legal basis and a specific end date.
- Guarantee camp residents can access their rights to civil documentation and legal identity, including by ensuring that all residents are able to register new life events (births, marriages, deaths, divorces). To do so, consider coordinating mobile civil registry services within camp service areas to expedite and simplify registration processes. Immediately cease any practices of confiscation of personal documents and, where documents have previously been confiscated, implement activities to ensure the safe return of those documents in coordination with humanitarian partners.
- Increase the opportunities for camp residents to exit camps temporarily or permanently for various reasons, including

accessing health care, livelihoods, education, and other basic rights as well seeking durable solutions such as safe return or relocation.

- Protect HLP rights of all Syrians, including those displaced from NES, in line with international humanitarian and human rights law. Simplify and facilitate HLP registration and documentation processes. Recognize ownership rights and provide appropriate compensation for private land which may currently be managed or utilized by AANES for other purposes, including for displaced persons' camps.

### **RISK 3** Forced Recruitment and Association of Children in Armed Forces and Groups

#### **SYRIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES AND AANES**

- Uphold their commitment in the Action Plan signed between them and UN, in protection of children i.e., stopping child recruitment, released children and support reintegration of released and excluded children.
- The security forces and de facto government facilitate safety and access of humanitarian actors to provide humanitarian assistance to affected children.

#### **PROTECTION ACTORS**

- Coordinate with security forces and authorities to reintegrate children from armed groups and monitor protection.
- Advocate for transparency and consent of caregivers in removing children from ISIS-affiliated camps, ensure caregivers and children maintain communication and information is provided on the exact location of their children.
- Monitor the effectiveness of complaint mechanisms and community education on preventing child recruitment and family separation in NES.

#### **DONORS**

- Long-term financial support for sustainable, timely, gender- and age-sensitive, survivor-centered and inclusive programs, including reintegration for victims of grave violations and to address the needs of children with disabilities.

### **RISK 4** Gender-based violence

#### **HUMANITARIAN COUNTRY TEAM AND HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY**

- Prioritize and mainstream GBV response, prevention, and risk mitigation across sectors in NES.
- Support and advocacy for increased funding and strengthening of women and girls focused programs such as WGSSs, PSS sessions, GBV risk mitigations, women movement building, and solidarity. Equip women and girls with skills to recover and rebuild beyond aid.

#### **PROTECTION ACTORS**

- Increase and diversify services available for GBV survivors including cash, shelter, comprehensive health services and livelihood opportunities.

### **RISK 5** Presence of Mine and Other Explosives Ordinance

#### **HUMANITARIAN COUNTRY TEAM AND HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY**

- Support the NES Mine Action Office in developing a prioritization system for HMA activities in NES and expanding HMA resources in Deir ez Zor governorate as a priority due to high accident rates.
- Increase funding for multi-year HMA programming to build capacity and sustainability and strengthen integration between HMA and other sectors to maximize impact.

#### **PROTECTION ACTORS**

- Finalize contamination survey to obtain regional baseline of EO contamination to accurately identify and map future funding required for future clearance and further development.
- Build and strengthen strategic partnerships with local actors to develop local capacities and ensure continuity of response.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>xi</sup> Global Conflict tracker; Available at <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-syria>
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### Methodology

The Protection working group, in coordination with the Gender Based Violence (GBV) AoR, the Child Protection (CP) AoR and Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA) AoR, held a Protection Analysis Workshop in April 2023. The workshop followed the Protection Analysis Framework where 14 partners (national and international NGOs) participated. The analysis was based on both quantitative and qualitative data from existing secondary data sources, protection assessments and reports covering events from September 2022 to April 2023. This data came from key Northeast Syria protection monitoring tools, protection rapid assessments and multi sectoral needs assessment data. After getting feedback from partners, the sector and AoRs coordinators contributed to the finalization of the document. Feedback and comments of NES NGO FORUM has also incorporated.

### Limitations

This report focuses on the cross-border coordination of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in northeast Syria (NES) and does not address the activities of the Access and Humanitarian Coordination Team (AHCT) in NES. Data available in Northeast Syria is predominantly limited to areas that are currently accessible by humanitarian actors. Areas in Aleppo (Menbij and Ain Al Arab (Kobani)) limited presence, almost no protection partner and similarly Ras Al Ain in Al Hasakeh governorate and Afrin in Aleppo, both under control of Turkish backed armed actors, are currently inaccessible to the humanitarian community.



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