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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the sixty-ninth submitted pursuant to paragraph 17 of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), paragraph 10 of resolution 2165 (2014), paragraph 5 of resolution 2191 (2014), paragraph 5 of resolution 2258 (2015), paragraph 5 of resolution 2332 (2016), paragraph 6 of resolution 2393 (2017), paragraph 12 of resolution 2401 (2018), paragraph 6 of resolution 2449 (2018), paragraph 8 of resolution 2504 (2020), and paragraph 3 of resolution 2533 (2020), in the last of which the Council requested the Secretary-General to provide a report at least every 60 days on the implementation of the resolutions by all parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

2. The information contained herein is based on data available to agencies of the United Nations system and obtained from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and other relevant sources. Data from agencies of the United Nations system regarding their humanitarian deliveries have been reported for the months of August and September 2020.

II. Major developments

Key points

1. The number of confirmed cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continued to rise, but remained low compared with some neighbouring countries. Limited testing and a high degree of community transmission, with 92 per cent of confirmed cases not traceable to a known source, indicate that the actual number of cases may far exceed the official count.

2. The impact of the economic crisis continued to be felt across the country. While food prices decreased by 3 per cent in August, they remained at nearly 22 times the pre-crisis average. Bread and fuel shortages prompted long queues and concerns over civilians' capacity to cope during the winter months.



3. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights verified at least 117 incidents in which 108 civilians, including 7 women and 24 children, were killed and at least 172 civilians, including 12 women and 21 children, were injured as a result of the conduct of hostilities across the Syrian Arab Republic.

4. In the north-west, almost daily ceasefire violations were reported in the Idlib de-escalation area, although the ceasefire largely continued to hold. Water shortages continued in Bab city and its surroundings, affecting some 185,000 people.

5. In the north-east, an assessment mission deployed to Hawl in August following the deaths of eight children at the camp between 6 and 10 August. Pumping at the Uluk water station resumed as at 27 August, following a two-week disruption that affected at least 460,000 people in Hasakah city, Tall Tamr and surrounding areas.

6. In the southern part of the country, water shortages around Dar'a city affected over 65,000 people. In Rukban, some 12,000 people continued to live under harsh conditions with very restricted access for humanitarian organizations. Incidents of targeted attacks affecting civilians continued to be recorded.

7. Humanitarian assistance by United Nations agencies continued throughout the country. The humanitarian response reached an average of 7.4 million people every month across the country during the first six months of 2020.

8. An attack against a Turkish Red Crescent Society vehicle in northern Aleppo on 14 September resulted in the death of one humanitarian worker and the injury of another. On the same day, a car bomb in Afrin killed two humanitarian workers.

Humanitarian update

3. Available data continued to indicate widespread community transmission of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the Syrian Arab Republic, with over 92 per cent of officially confirmed cases not traceable to a known case. As at 30 September, the Syrian Ministry of Health reported 4,200 cases, including 200 deaths. Another 1,072 cases were reported in the north-west, including 6 deaths, and 1,557 cases were reported in the north-east, including 62 deaths. Humanitarian entities continued to receive reports concerning additional possible cases as well as of health-care facilities in some areas unable to absorb all suspected cases, with some suspending surgeries or adapting wards to accommodate the increase in COVID-19 patients.

4. The economic crisis continued to affect civilians across the Syrian Arab Republic. While the value of the Syrian pound on the informal market was relatively stable compared with earlier in 2020, the final week of September saw daily fluctuations of over LS 100. Food prices decreased by 3 per cent from July to August. However, the price of a standard reference food basket remained nearly 22 times the pre-crisis average. The World Food Programme (WFP) recorded bread shortages in September, especially in the southern governorates, largely owing to the scarcity of wheat flour across the country and electricity cuts, as well as the ongoing fuel crisis. The production of wheat, barley and olives and other tree crops was also affected by wildfires; more than 16,000 hectares of wheat were thought to have been burned during the 2019–2020 cropping season. While impact on food production is difficult to assess with precision, losses on this scale would equate to around 32,000 tons of wheat, enough to meet the annual needs of some 160,000 people. The Syrian Arab Republic consumes an estimated 3.7 million tons of wheat flour annually, which exceeds current production by around 1 million tons.

5. Fuel shortages prompted queues at public gas stations, with reports of people waiting for two days in Homs and Hama. Black market prices for fuel surged by

50 per cent. Over 86 per cent of surveyed humanitarian entities reported challenges in sourcing fuel, and multiple scheduled aid convoys in Homs and Hama were delayed in September as a result. Fuel shortages are of particular concern as temperatures drop. Humanitarian planning for winterization continued, with 3.1 million people estimated to require such support.

6. In the north-west, the ceasefire in the Idlib de-escalation area largely continued to hold, albeit with an increasing number of violations. Mutual artillery shelling across lines of contact, notably in the southern part of the de-escalation area, took place on an almost daily basis. Shelling on Jurin village in north-west Hama Governorate reportedly killed 20 civilians in a single day on 24 September. Ground-based clashes occurred less frequently and were limited in scope. Pro-Government aerial bombardments were reported to the north and south of the M4 highway. Since the beginning of 2020, an estimated 225,000 people had returned to areas in the north-west not under Government control from which they had been displaced, with most having moved back to areas south of or close to the M4 highway, such as Ariha and Ihsim, and to areas west of and close to the M5 highway, such as Darat Izzah and Atarib.

7. In northern Aleppo, water shortages continued to be reported in Bab city and surrounding areas, affecting some 185,000 people. Some 30 per cent of COVID-19 cases in the north-west have been reported in Bab, making it the district with the highest number of reported cases in the north-west. Since water supply through the Ayn al-Bayda pumping station ceased in February 2017, the population has been reliant on alternative sources, which have been assessed as insufficient and unsafe. Bab has been among the top four subdistricts reporting waterborne diseases across the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2017. Rehabilitation works on the main water tank and the conflict-damaged water network in Bab city were completed in September. While additional infrastructural repairs are needed, the repairs will not resolve the water shortages, as the water feeding the network from local wells covers only 15 per cent of basic requirements.

8. In the north-east, several cross-line attacks were recorded along the south-eastern contact lines of the Operation Peace Spring area, notably near Tall Tamr. Attacks, which included the use of improvised explosive devices, vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices and small arms fire, continued to be reported, including against civilians. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) cells reportedly increased attacks during the period. Multiple parties continued counter-ISIL operations. Detention facilities reported more attempted break outs.

9. On 8 September, local authorities in the north-east commenced the relocation of internally displaced persons, who had been displaced during military operations in October 2019, to the newly established Tal'ah camp near Hasakah city. As at 30 September, 3,063 persons had been relocated to the new camp from collective shelters in Hasakah city. Humanitarian entities continued to raise concerns regarding the relocations, including with regard to their voluntary nature.

10. Water supply from the Uluk water station to Hasakah city resumed as at 27 August, following a two-week disruption that affected at least 460,000 people in Hasakah city, Tall Tamr and surrounding areas. Power supply from the Tishrin Dam and the Mabrukah and Darbasiyah electricity stations to the region where the Alouk water station is located had resumed on 22 August. Water supply reached Tall Tamr town the same day; however, owing to weak pumping pressure as a result of repeated power cuts, water took longer to reach Hasakah city. Technical teams were able to carry out essential repairs at the station on 25 August. During the two-week disruption, over a thousand cases of diarrhoea were reported in health centres in the area as the local population resorted to using water from alternative and in some cases unsafe sources.

11. Some 64,600 people remained at Hawl camp, of whom 94 per cent were women and children and, of those, 53 per cent were children under the age of 12. Following the deaths of eight children in Hawl between 6 and 10 August, the World Health Organization (WHO) led an inter-agency assessment mission to the camp on 24 and 25 August. Mission findings confirmed that COVID-19 and strict security measures were among the factors limiting referral capacities to medical facilities outside of the camp. Several facilities at the camp also reported shortages of some essential medicines, including for newborns and for chronic diseases. Humanitarian organizations continued to express concern over the security situation in the camp. A rise in violent incidents was recorded in September, including the murders of 10 people. Hawl remained at risk of a wider COVID-19 outbreak, with four cases confirmed among camp residents, including one fatality.

12. The south-west of the Syrian Arab Republic saw continued clashes affecting civilians and the assassinations of fighters reconciled from former armed opposition groups and of Government-affiliated figures, as well as continued localized protests against Government raids, arbitrary detention, conscription drives and the lack of public services. Intermittent clashes continued to take place, notably in the vicinity of Dar'a.

13. Humanitarian needs in the south remained extensive. In Dar'a Governorate, with a population of some 1 million people, 41 per cent are food insecure and over a third of the population are returnees. Over 65,000 people around Dar'a city were affected by water shortages, as the local dam has dried up owing to overuse. Although this is an annual event, low rainfall in 2020 and an overflow into dams in Suwayda' have left residents and farmers without sufficient alternative sources of water.

14. In Rukban, which the United Nations has been unable to access since September 2019, some 12,000 people continued to live in harsh conditions. Medical cases remained unable to access the United Nations clinic on the Jordanian side of the border since its full closure as part of COVID-19 preventative measures in March 2020. On 19 September, 286 people, including 118 children, arrived from Rukban at the Mahmoud Othman shelter in Homs. So far, 19,769 people have left Rukban transiting through the Homs shelters (see also paras. 38 and 45 below).

Update on overall developments

15. The Special Envoy for Syria convened a third session of the small body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee in Geneva during the week of 24 August. Discussions were mostly substantive and focused on the agreed agenda. There were real differences on substance, however, and the Committee's Co-Chairs were not able to agree on an agenda for the next session. The Special Envoy, in accordance with his mandate and with the agreed Terms of Reference and Core Rules of Procedure of the Constitutional Committee, continued to facilitate efforts to support agreement among the Co-Chairs on an agenda and date for the next session. The Special Envoy continued consultations with international interlocutors on the margins of, and outside, the Constitutional Committee session to urge constructive international diplomacy with regard to the Syrian Arab Republic.

16. The Special Envoy continued to consult with the members of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board. On the margins of the Constitutional Committee session in Geneva, members expressed belief in the possibility of finding commonalities and shared ideas on safeguarding the rights of Syrian women. They stressed that progress in the political process should happen in parallel with tangible improvements in the lives of Syrians, who have continued security and health concerns as well as urgent humanitarian and economic needs. These messages were echoed by a broad range of civil society actors with whom the Special Envoy and his team engaged.

Protection

17. Civilians across the Syrian Arab Republic continued to suffer the direct and indirect consequences of armed conflict and violence. Civilians were killed and injured as a result of shelling and intermittent airstrikes in the de-escalation area in the north-west, and as a result of fighting between and within various armed groups in the north-west, northern and eastern parts of the country. Civilians also continued to be killed and injured by attacks carried out with various types of improvised explosive devices, including vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, and as a result of explosive remnants of war, including unexploded ordnance. Some improvised explosive device attacks were carried out inside residential areas and local markets, either targeting civilians or heedless of their impact on civilians.

18. From 1 August to 30 September 2020, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified at least 117 incidents in which 108 civilians, including 7 women and 24 children, were killed and at least 172 civilians, including 12 women and 21 children, were injured as a result of the conduct of hostilities across the Syrian Arab Republic, including shelling, airstrikes, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war, armed clashes and targeted killings at the hands of various parties to the conflict or by unidentified perpetrators. The majority of civilian deaths (64 per cent) were attributed to explosive remnants of war in agricultural lands and to targeted killings. In the light of the patterns observed and the large number of incidents and civilians killed and injured in markets and residential areas, it appears that parties to the conflict have failed to respect the key principles, set out under international humanitarian law, of distinguishing civilians from fighters and civilian objects from military objectives; of refraining from indiscriminate attacks; of respecting proportionality in attack; and of taking constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects in the conduct of military operations.

19. Both pro-Government forces and armed groups continued to arbitrarily detain individuals in areas under their effective control. In the majority of cases documented by OHCHR, detainees were denied information about the reasons for their detention and other due process rights, or their families were denied information concerning their whereabouts or their fate, raising concerns that in some cases such detentions may constitute enforced disappearances. In areas under the control of the Government, OHCHR continued to document cases of detainees dying while in custody, allegedly due to natural causes. In many such cases, individuals appear to have been subjected to enforced disappearance, and the fact that they were detained by the Government did not become known until their deaths were acknowledged. The bodies of the deceased were rarely returned to their families, who were also denied the opportunity to question the official causes of death or to know the whereabouts of the bodies. OHCHR has also documented cases of detainees and abductees dying while in the custody of non-State armed groups, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and the Syrian Democratic Forces.

20. In Dar'a, OHCHR continued to record incidents of targeted killings of civilians and fighters reconciled from former armed opposition groups. The majority of such attacks have been carried out by unidentified perpetrators. Targeted killings have also been carried out by unidentified perpetrators in areas under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces in Dayr al-Zawr Governorate, except for a few killings that have recently been claimed by ISIL.

21. Non-State armed groups in the north-western, northern and eastern parts of the country continued to systematically target civilians, including those perceived as being affiliated with opposing parties or alleged to be critical of those in control of the territory, including through killings, the arbitrary deprivation of liberty, torture, ill-treatment and kidnappings. Parties to the conflict continued to impose rules and

codes of conduct on civilians living in areas under their control that were fundamentally contrary to human rights, including the rights to life, liberty and security of person, to freedom of movement and to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

22. Various armed groups continued to target some humanitarian and health-care services and personnel, in addition to media professionals. Some of the health-care facilities and their personnel have been directly attacked or targeted. Under international humanitarian law, parties to the conflict must respect and protect humanitarian relief personnel and medical personnel exclusively assigned to medical duties.

23. During the reporting period, access to education was impeded. In the northern and north-eastern parts of the country, including in Hasakah, the local authorities took decisions that denied people's access to education, freedom of movement and other basic rights. There was no agreement regarding the more than 100 schools that have reportedly been closed by the local authorities since August 2020. United Nations engagement on this issue continued, including on how to ensure that the best interests of the child were upheld, and how to ensure that students had access to good quality, accredited education and related education pathways that offer opportunities for the future at schools of their choosing. Other schools in Hasakah reopened at the end of September, following a six-month closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

24. The security situation in the north-east and north-west, as well as mitigation measures related to COVID-19, had a negative impact on the ability of women and adolescent girls to access life-saving sexual and reproductive health services as well as gender-based violence services. Information received by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) indicated heightened risks of gender-based violence, including early marriage, linked to the economic crisis and the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19.

25. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) did not record incidents of hostilities causing damage to educational facilities during the reporting period.

26. The WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care reported four incidents affecting health care during the reporting period. Additional incidents have occurred, but have yet to be verified as part of the WHO Surveillance System. A total of 24 attacks affecting health care have been recorded since the beginning of the year, including 41 injuries and 13 deaths. Such incidents continue to strain an already weakened health system. Vulnerabilities of the health system across the country have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Humanitarian response

27. Humanitarian assistance by United Nations agencies continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic. The humanitarian response reached an average of 7.4 million people every month during the first six months of 2020. The average reach increased by an estimated 21 per cent between the first and second quarters. Assistance during the reporting period included food assistance from WFP for 4.8 million people in August and 4.9 million people in September, across all 14 governorates. Livestock vaccinations supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations benefited over 63,100 vulnerable livestock-owning households. Protection services provided through 244 community centres and mobile units provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reached 13 governorates, and UNHCR-supported lawyers and legal outreach volunteers provided legal services to 39,700 internally displaced persons, returnees and host community members in 14 governorates. Legal services and referrals for some 700 Palestine refugees were supported by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency

for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Risk education teams trained by the Mine Action Service delivered awareness sessions to 9,000 civilians and UNICEF-supported partners reached 468,700 children and 184,300 caregivers with risk education, promoting safer behaviours in communities most affected by contamination from explosive ordnance. Billboards on explosive ordnance awareness were installed in communities that had witnessed hostilities in Aleppo, Dar'a, Hama, Qunaytirah, Rif Dimashq, Homs, Ladhqiyyah, Suwayda'and Tartus governorates. UNFPA reached some 582,700 people with reproductive health and gender-based violence services, 33,400 of whom were reached in remote areas.

28. The United Nations continued to support COVID-19 preparedness and response across the country, prioritizing containment of the virus by enhancing surveillance and diagnostics capacity and procuring vital medical supplies and equipment, supporting clinical readiness and protecting the delivery of essential health care. COVID-19 awareness was also promoted at food distribution points, while food rations included hygiene and informational products. As of the end of September, WFP had provided food assistance to some 11,100 people in COVID-19 quarantine centres in Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Dayr al-Zawr, Ladhqiyyah, Rif Dimashq and Tartus governorates under the institutional feeding programme. Response modalities by humanitarian entities were adapted for the safety of beneficiaries and humanitarian workers and to enable the continuity of the broader response.

Table 1

Average number of people reached each month by the United Nations and other organizations through all modalities throughout the Syrian Arab Republic: August and September 2020

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Average number of people reached monthly</i>
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	202 300
International Organization for Migration	68 100
Mine Action Service	4 600
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	443 700
United Nations Children's Fund	2 640 500
United Nations Development Programme	1 388 931
United Nations Population Fund	318 800
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	25 200
World Food Programme	4 850 000
World Health Organization	472 000

29. Within the Syrian Arab Republic, humanitarian assistance provided by United Nations agencies included delivery of food assistance by WFP for 3.5 million people in August and 3.4 million people in September. WFP also distributed ready-to-eat rations for some 14,000 people in Ra's al-Ma'arra in Rif Dimashq Governorate, which was previously on full lock down due to COVID-19. This was conducted under an emergency response plan aimed at preventing vulnerable people in locations that were locked down as a result of the pandemic from slipping further into food insecurity. Using the allocation of \$23 million provided in May from the Syria Humanitarian Fund, which focused on COVID-19 response, 3 million people received hygiene kits, six health facilities servicing 93,000 people were being repaired and 300,000 people were provided with access to potable water. On 13 September, 103 UNRWA schools opened their doors to more than 50,400 students for the new term.

30. In the north-west, cross-border humanitarian assistance delivered through the Bab al-Hawa crossing included WFP food assistance for 1.3 million people in August and 1.5 million people in September. Water, sanitation and health services supported by UNICEF reached 1.8 million people. Some 88,000 children benefited from UNICEF-supported nutrition programmes in the north-west (see also para. 42 below).

Figure I
Number of beneficiaries assisted by the United Nations and its partners through cross-border humanitarian deliveries, by cluster: August and September 2020 (monthly average)

(Thousands)

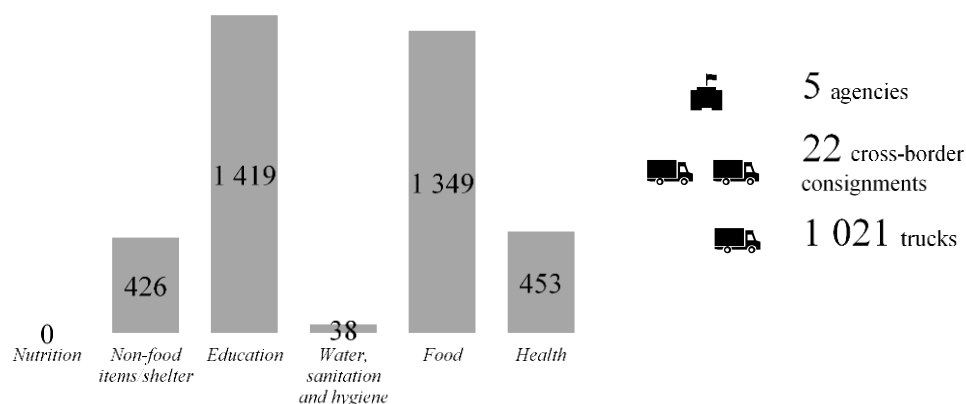


Table 2
Number of beneficiaries targeted through cross-border deliveries, by sector and by district: August and September 2020 (monthly average)

Governorate	District	Education	Food	Health	Non-food items/shelter	Nutrition	Water, sanitation and hygiene
Aleppo	Afrin	187 375	210 010	–	22 635	–	–
Aleppo	I'zaz	68 750	73 468	12 500	17 218	–	–
Idlib	Harim	1 161 471	1 065 423	435 425	379 767	–	37 710
Idlib	Idlib	1 200	–	5 000	6 770	–	570

31. During the reporting period, the Russian Federation sent informational bulletins to the United Nations from the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides and Refugee Migration Monitoring, which outlined the provision of bilateral relief assistance. Other Member States also continued to provide bilateral and other forms of humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian access

32. The provision of humanitarian assistance requires timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded access by the United Nations and all humanitarian partners to people in need across the Syrian Arab Republic. Principled humanitarian action depends on the ability to independently assess needs and deliver assistance, and to monitor and evaluate impacts independently, including by engaging regularly and directly with affected people. The access landscape in the country is complex, with different geographical areas and different types of services requiring different operating modalities. More than 1,800 United Nations staff members are in-country, with more

than 600 deployed in nine humanitarian hubs outside Damascus, in Aleppo, Dar‘a, Dayr al-Zawr, Hama, Homs, Ladhqiyyah, Qamishli, Suwayda’ and Tartus. A further 3,860 UNRWA staff are deployed across the country. The decentralized presence contributes to greater access and proximity to affected populations. Across the Syrian Arab Republic, aid is distributed and implemented primarily by national actors, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

Access limitations related to the pandemic

33. Most land borders remained closed to individual civilian movements, with measures in place to enable the importing of supplies and humanitarian assistance, as well as the return of some nationals and in some cases persons referred for medical reasons. Access through crossing points inside the Syrian Arab Republic also remained largely restricted, with some exceptions for humanitarian and commercial cargo, humanitarian personnel, students and medical cases. International commercial passenger flights remained suspended. Domestic cargo and passenger flights continued to operate, including the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service.

Access in government-controlled areas

34. In Government-controlled areas, communities and enclaves that remained difficult to access, owing to administrative and security approvals, included Shaffuniyah, Mayda‘a and Kafr Batna in eastern Ghouta, and Bayt Jinn and Mazra‘at Bayt Jinn in western Rif Dimashq. In the southern part of the country, insecurity and administrative restrictions continued to prevent sustained access to areas formerly controlled by non-State armed groups, in particular in Dar‘a al-Balad neighborhood in Dar‘a city and in parts of western Dar‘a and Qunaytirah.

35. United Nations personnel and third-party contractors continued to mobilize to field locations alongside national NGOs and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to conduct assessment, monitoring and logistics and administrative support missions. In August and September 2020, 2,092 regular programme movements took place with programme or blanket approvals, a 36 per cent increase as compared with the June–July reporting period, when 1,541 such movements took place (see table 3).¹ That increase is mainly attributable to an easing of the curfew related to COVID-19 and to adjustments to COVID-19 precautionary measures by implementing partners. The increase consists mostly of monitoring missions and missions accompanying aid deliveries, in particular in Dayr al-Zawr and Dar‘a and largely by third-party monitors.

36. Of those regular programme movements, 37 per cent were conducted in the north-eastern governorates of Hasakah, Raqqah and Dayr al-Zawr, which represented an increase of 87 per cent as compared with the previous reporting period. Another 21 per cent were conducted in the southern governorates of Suwayda’, Dar‘a and Qunaytirah, representing an increase of 50 per cent as compared with the previous reporting period (see figure II). There was a reduction in the frequency of some missions in mid-September, as a result of fuel shortages. In some instances, that drop in frequency led to reduced monitoring, implementation delays and budget amendments by implementing partners.

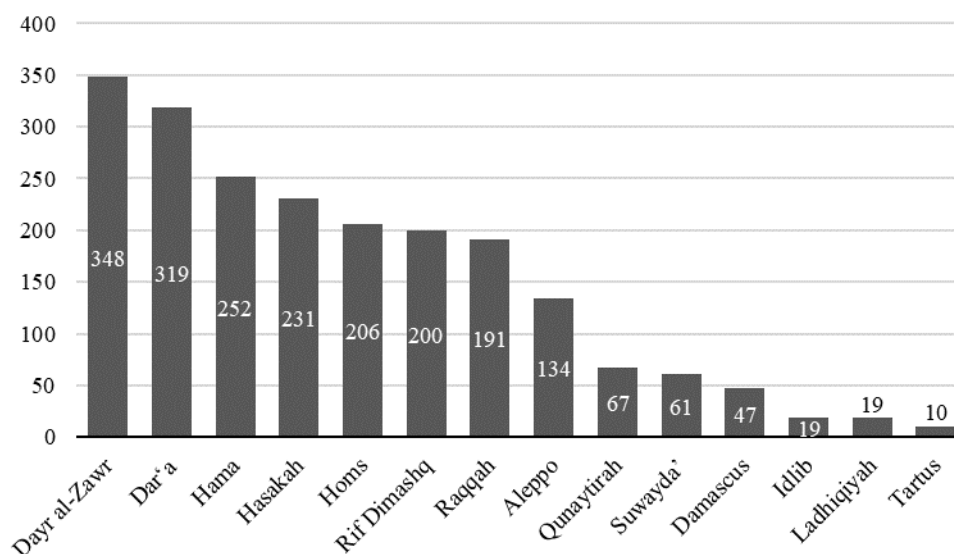
¹ United Nations staff and third-party contractors operating at humanitarian hubs outside Damascus obtain programme or “blanket” approvals to carry out movements as part of their regular programming. These enable regular access and reduce bureaucratic requirements.

Table 3
Total number of missions conducted under programme or blanket approvals from within the Syrian Arab Republic by United Nations agencies and third parties/facilitators, by type: August and September 2020

Type of mission	Blanket approval	Programme approval	Total
Assessment missions	54	1	55
Missions accompanying aid deliveries	56	–	56
Monitoring missions	1 965	3	1 968
Security, logistics and administrative support missions	13	–	13
Total	2 088	4	2 092

Note: Missions conducted under programme or blanket approvals do not require specific approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Figure II
Missions conducted under programme or blanket approvals from within the Syrian Arab Republic by United Nations agencies and third parties/facilitators, by governorate: August and September 2020



Note: Missions conducted under programme or blanket approvals do not require specific approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

37. For missions requiring specific approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United Nations submitted 278 new requests, of which 64 per cent were approved (see table 4). This represents an improvement of 9 percentage points as compared with the previous reporting period, when 55 per cent of 251 requested missions were approved, and an improvement of 16 percentage points as compared with the average approval rate since December 2019 (48 per cent). United Nations agencies ultimately conducted only 152 out of the 177 missions approved during the August–September reporting period.

38. On 17 September 2020, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs coordinated a mission, led by the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian

Coordinator, to Wahah and Dumayr in Rif Dimashq. The mission formed part of the joint efforts by the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to support civilians wishing to leave Rukban, while advocacy for durable solutions for all civilians at Rukban continued. Preparations commenced for a United Nations technical team to conduct a needs assessment in Wahah in October.

39. On 29 September 2020, the United Nations conducted a joint assessment mission with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to areas that shifted control in northern rural Hama, visiting Muhradah district, Murak in Sawran district and Kafr Zayta, Lataminah and Latmin villages. The mission was approved by the Governor of Hama. The Mine Action Service conducted 21 missions in September in eastern and western Ghouta and Rif Dimashq to assess the explosive ordnance contamination in the local communities.

Table 4

Missions from within the Syrian Arab Republic requiring specific approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by type: August and September 2020

<i>Type of request</i>	<i>Number requested</i>	<i>Number approved</i>	<i>Percentage approved</i>
Assessment missions	91	64	70
Missions accompanying aid deliveries	31	19	61
Monitoring missions	99	46	46
Security, logistics and administrative support missions	28	19	68
Explosive ordnance assessment missions	29	29	100
Total	278	177	64

Note: Missions by United Nations personnel departing from Damascus or travelling cross-line generally require specific approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Access in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic

40. In the north-east, the United Nations maintained regular and sustained humanitarian access in most parts of Hasakah Governorate, and some parts of Raqqah Governorate, while other areas, including Manbij and Ayn al-Arab, remained difficult to access from Damascus, owing to the lack of agreement between parties in control and to insecurity. In the first half of September, multiple cross-line humanitarian deliveries dispatched from Damascus, Homs and Ladhqiyyah to Qamishli were delayed at the Tabaqah crossing point as a result of new bureaucratic procedures imposed by the local authorities. More than 100 aid trucks were affected, all of which were able to proceed as from 16 September. However, United Nations agencies experienced significant delays in obtaining government approvals, which are required to allow shipments to move onwards from Qamishli to their delivery locations in areas outside of government control in the north-east.

41. Gaps continued to be reported with regard to deliveries of medical items to facilities previously supported through United Nations cross-border operations from Iraq. Overall, approximately 36 per cent of facilities that previously depended on cross-border operations from Iraq were reached with medical supplies from cross-line deliveries in 2020. All hospitals that previously depended on cross-border operations have now received medical items from cross-line deliveries on at least one occasion. There remains a gap in the number of primary health centres and mobile medical units reached. The distribution of 85 tons of medical supplies from the most recent WHO overland shipment to reach the north-east, in July, was completed by the end of the reporting period. Facilities receiving supplies from that consignment to date included

17 hospitals, of which 12 had previously been supported through cross-border operations. Once final distribution data from this shipment becomes available, they may show a further increase in facilities reached with cross-line deliveries. Local supply chains for pharmaceuticals and medical supplies were also disrupted by the economic situation, causing shortages in some key medicines, such as insulin. One NGO partner that supports 38 health facilities reported a complete stock-out of insulin, as well as shortages of critical medicines for non-communicable diseases.

Access in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic

42. United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners continued to address the logistical and operational challenges resulting from the reduction to one authorized border crossing following the adoption of Security Council resolution 2533 (2020). The WFP-led logistics cluster expanded the trans-shipment hub at the remaining authorized crossing at Bab al-Hawa. The expansion doubles the physical size of the hub from 5,000 m² to 10,000 m² to meet increased staffing needs and ensure continued compliance with COVID-19 physical distancing measures. While the initial humanitarian convoys from Bab-al-Hawa to areas previously covered from Bab-al-Salam faced some logistical challenges, agreements were reached with parties in control for simplified bureaucratic procedures, enabling improved access for humanitarian shipments to all destinations in north-west Syria. Concerns remained regarding the conditions and capacity of roads connecting Bab al-Hawa with northern Aleppo. Following an assessment, a United Nations-funded road rehabilitation project was initiated with the aim of completing the most urgent repairs ahead of the winter season.

43. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic continued its operations as mandated under Security Council resolutions 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020). From 1 August to 30 September, the Mechanism monitored and confirmed the humanitarian nature of 22 consignments consisting of 1,021 trucks that crossed into Syria from Turkey, all through the Bab al-Hawa crossing. This brings the total number of trucks monitored since the beginning of operations to 41,055 (31,083 through Bab al-Hawa, 5,268 through Bab al-Salam, 4,595 through Ramtha and 109 through Ya‘rubiyah). There were no concerns or questions regarding the humanitarian nature of those consignments. For every shipment that crossed the border, the United Nations provided 48-hour advance notice to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, including information on the humanitarian goods to be delivered, the number of trucks, the United Nations owner and the destination (district). The Mechanism continued to benefit from the excellent cooperation of the Government of Turkey.

44. Humanitarian workers continued to actively pursue an all-modalities approach to respond to the humanitarian needs of the affected population, including not only through cross-border assistance but also through continued efforts to complement that assistance with cross-line assistance to the north-west. Dialogue continued with all parties concerned regarding the operational modalities for a first such mission. Agreement on those modalities was not reached during the reporting period.

Access in the south-east of the Syrian Arab Republic

45. The last United Nations humanitarian convoy to reach Rukban from within the Syrian Arab Republic was undertaken in September 2019. Since then, only a handful of commercial trucks have reached Rukban, through informal routes. Since the decision taken by the Government of Jordan in March to close the border as a COVID-19 preventive measure, medical cases from Rukban have been unable to access the United Nations clinic on the Jordanian side of the border. Engagement

continued with relevant parties to facilitate delivery of and access to humanitarian assistance for the remaining Rukban population.

Visas and registrations

46. The United Nations continued to work with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to allow for the timely provision of visas to staff (see table 5).

Table 5

Requests for United Nations visas: August and September 2020

<i>Type of request</i>	<i>Number requested</i>	<i>Number approved</i>	<i>Number rejected</i>	<i>Number pending^a</i>
Visas requested during reporting period	48	27	1	20
Renewals requested during reporting period	155	120	–	35
Visas pending from before reporting period	49	16	2	31
Renewals pending from before reporting period	38	33	–	5

Note: The United Nations withdrew one visa request that had been submitted during the reporting period and eight visa requests that had been pending from before the reporting period.

^a The number of pending visa requests and visa renewal requests covers the period between February and July 2020.

47. A total of 41 international NGOs are registered with the Government to operate in the country.

Safety and security of humanitarian personnel and premises

48. The United Nations and NGOs continued to implement programmes in areas affected by frequent clashes among parties to the conflict, by air strikes and by the regular exchange of indirect artillery fire and other attacks. Humanitarian relief personnel also operated in areas highly contaminated with unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war and landmines.

49. Since the beginning of the conflict, hundreds of humanitarian workers have reportedly been killed, including: 24 staff members of the United Nations and of the entities of the United Nations system, 19 of whom were staff members of UNRWA; 66 staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent; and 8 staff members and volunteers of the Palestine Red Crescent Society. Many staff members of international and national NGOs have also been killed. On 14 September 2020, an attack against a vehicle of the Turkish Red Crescent Society in northern Aleppo resulted in the death of one humanitarian worker of the Turkish Red Crescent Society while another was injured. On the same day, a car bomb in Afrin, which killed at least 9 civilians and injured at least 19 more, resulted in the deaths of 2 humanitarian workers.

50. A total of 24 staff members of agencies and programmes of the United Nations system, all from UNRWA, were detained or missing at the end of the reporting period.

III. Observations

51. I remain alarmed by the daily impact of armed conflict and violence on civilians across the Syrian Arab Republic, including on humanitarian workers. The military conflict continues in some areas, although to a lesser degree than previously witnessed. Attacks that deliberately or indiscriminately harm civilians, including improvised explosive device attacks in populated areas and markets, must cease

immediately. The obligation to protect civilians and civilian objects under international humanitarian law binds all parties to conflict. I underscore the need to contain these violent and destabilizing incidents, build on the relative calm and establish a nationwide ceasefire pursuant to resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#).

52. The economic downturn continues to affect all civilians in the Syrian Arab Republic, but is hardest on the most vulnerable. Food prices remain at 22 times their pre-crisis level; consequently, many families are unable to afford staple goods. The health and socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are exacerbating needs across the country. Humanitarian assistance and unimpeded humanitarian access remain crucial in this context, and I remind all parties to the conflict of their obligation under international humanitarian law to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian relief for civilians in need, conducted without any adverse distinction. United Nations agencies continue to work with their humanitarian partners to overcome the operational challenges stemming from the reduction to access to the north-west to a single border crossing. This includes the expansion of the trans-shipment hub at Bab al-Hawa, which has already been completed, doubling the physical size of the hub. Efforts have been and will continue to be made to deliver cross-line assistance to the north-west.

53. I also remind the parties of their obligation under international humanitarian law not to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects, including drinking-water installations and supplies, that are indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. The COVID-19 pandemic adds to the urgency of action with regard to access to water and sanitation. I further call upon all parties to remove practical obstacles to education in territories under their control, in line with the human right to education.

54. The Special Envoy continues efforts for the unilateral release of persons arbitrarily deprived of their liberty, the majority remain detained by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. I call upon the Government and all other parties to account for the fate and whereabouts of those they are detaining and to allow humanitarian and human rights agencies access to all places of detention. Persons facing prosecution should be afforded all minimum fair trial guarantees. Detaining authorities should carry out prompt, effective, thorough and transparent investigations to establish the cause and circumstances of deaths in custody, and if it is found that such deaths resulted from criminal acts, the perpetrators must be brought to justice. Families must be given information on the fate of persons who have died in custody and receive full and adequate reparations within a reasonable period in the case of wrongful death. Meeting those obligations would also build confidence, both within society and between the parties and international stakeholders. A failure to address the issue surrounding arbitrarily detained persons would leave credible justice, true reconciliation and sustainable peace elusive.

55. Continued impunity for serious violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law remains of grave concern. Perpetrators of serious violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law must be held accountable. I remind all States, in particular those with direct influence over parties to the conflict, that they are bound to take proactive steps to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, including as it relates to the protection of civilians. I call upon all parties to the conflict, in particular the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as all States, civil society and the United Nations system, to cooperate fully with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, in particular by providing relevant information and documentation. Accountability for serious violations and abuses of human rights and international

humanitarian law is both a legal requirement and central to achieving sustainable peace in the Syrian Arab Republic. I reiterate my call for the situation in the country to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

56. In view of the ongoing serious concerns repeatedly raised with regard to the protection of civilians and other human rights concerns in the country, I continue to strongly urge the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, in line with Human Rights Council resolutions [S-18/1](#) and [19/22](#), to cooperate with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council and with OHCHR, including through the establishment of a field presence with the mandate to protect and promote human rights.

57. I reiterate that any sustainable peace arrangement depends on including women at the negotiating table as full partners. I continue to fully support the efforts of my Special Envoy to advance the political process, including as he seeks to convene the fourth session of the Constitutional Committee. I urge all parties to demonstrate their commitment to that end, including by achieving a compromise on the agenda and date for the next session. My Special Envoy continues to remind all interlocutors that the Constitutional Committee can open the door to a wider political process in line with Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#). This must meet the aspirations of all Syrians. I continue to call upon parties to this political process to enter into discussions in a spirit of constructiveness, with a view to ensuring that the interests of Syrians, ending their suffering and ensuring sustainable peace, remain the overriding priority.

Annex

Reported incidents affecting civilians recorded by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: August and September 2020*

Idlib Governorate

- On 3 August, three civilians were killed and one was injured by reported airstrikes that impacted in a makeshift internally displaced persons camp near the town of Binnish in eastern rural Idlib.
- On 11 August, a woman was injured in a reported ground-based strike that impacted in Nayrab town in eastern rural Idlib.
- On 14 August, two civilians were killed and one was injured after a reported landmine detonated in agricultural land near Nayrab in eastern rural Idlib.
- On 15 August, nine civilians were injured when a reported landmine detonated in agricultural land near Khan Shaykhun in southern rural Idlib.
- On 24 August, a civilian died from injuries reportedly suffered in a reported ground-based strike that landed in Barah in southern rural Idlib.
- On 1 September, two civilians were injured in a reported ground-based strike that landed in Balyun in southern rural Idlib. On the same day, a civilian was injured after a reported landmine detonated in agricultural land near Barah in southern rural Idlib.
- On 3 September, 11 civilians, including 2 boys, were injured after a suspected improvised explosive device attached to a motorbike reportedly detonated in Ma'arratmisrin in northern rural Idlib.
- On 7 September, one civilian was killed and another was injured after a reported landmine detonated in agricultural land near Barah in southern rural Idlib.
- On 7 September, two civilians were killed and five, including a woman and a boy, were injured after several ground-based strikes reportedly landed in the city of Ariha in southern rural Idlib. On the same day, a civilian was injured when reported ground-based strikes impacted in the town of Kansafrah in southern rural Idlib.

Aleppo Governorate

- On 6 August, a boy was killed after several ground-based strikes reportedly landed in the village of Hamran in eastern rural Aleppo.
- On 15 August, one civilian was killed and seven were injured when a suspected improvised explosive device attached to a motorbike reportedly detonated inside a market in the city of Jarabulus in eastern rural Aleppo.
- On 28 August, two civilians were injured when a suspected magnetic improvised explosive device attached to a vehicle reportedly detonated in Bab in eastern rural Aleppo.

* The list of incidents exemplifies human rights issues of concern raised in the report. Owing to the changing patterns of conflict and the loss of networks of credible and/or reliable sources in many conflict-affected areas, however, verifying incidents is increasingly difficult. The list, which contains only those incidents that were reported to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and that have been verified according to its methodology, should not be considered comprehensive.

- On 31 August, a civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in the town of Ra'i in northern rural Aleppo.
- On 2 September, two boys were injured when a reported landmine detonated in agricultural land near the village of Tall Sha'ir in northern rural Aleppo.
- On 12 September, two civilians were injured in a reported ground-based strike in the village of Burj al-Qas in northern rural Aleppo.
- On 14 September, 11 civilians, including 1 boy, were killed and 17 civilians, including 2 women, 6 boys and 1 girl, were injured when a suspected vehicle-borne improvised explosive device reportedly detonated in Afrin in northwest Aleppo.
- On 14 September, a member of the Turkish Red Crescent Society was killed and another humanitarian worker was injured when unidentified gunmen opened fire on their vehicle near the village of Tall Battal in eastern rural Aleppo. The vehicle had the logo of the Turkish Red Crescent Society clearly marked.
- On 15 September, two civilians were injured after a reported roadside improvised explosive device detonated in Baraziyah in eastern rural Aleppo.
- On 26 September, two civilians, including a woman, were injured after a reported landmine detonated in agricultural land in the village of Qasim in north-west rural Aleppo.

Hasakah Governorate

- On 11 August, a civilian man was reportedly killed at a checkpoint near Qahtaniyah in northern rural Hasakah.
- On 27 August, 11 civilians, including 1 boy, were injured when a reported roadside improvised explosive device detonated in Ra's al-Ayn in western rural Hasakah.
- On 12 September, five civilians, including four women, were killed and six civilians, including one woman, were injured when a reported roadside improvised explosive device detonated in Ra's al-Ayn in western rural Hasakah.
- On 24 September, at least one civilian was injured when a suspected improvised explosive device attached to a motorbike reportedly detonated in Tall Halaf in western rural Hasakah. Approximately one hour later, two civilians, including a boy, were killed and six civilians, including two boys, were injured when a suspected vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated in the town.
- On 26 September, at least two civilians were killed and at least nine other civilians were injured after a reported vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated near the city of Ra's al-Ayn in western rural Hasakah.

Hama Governorate

- On 6 August, two civilians, including one woman, were injured after reported ground-based strikes landed in the village of Tall Wasit in western rural Hama.
- On 9 August, three boys were injured by a reported landmine that detonated near the village of Breadg in northern rural Hama.
- On 13 August, seven civilians were injured after a reported landmine detonated in agricultural land near the village of Khuwayn in northern rural Hama.
- On 24 September, two civilians, including one woman, were injured after a reported ground-based strike in the village of Jurin in northern rural Hama.

Homs Governorate

- On 11 August, a boy and a girl were killed when a reported landmine detonated near the city of Palmyra in eastern rural Homs.

Dayr al-Zawr Governorate

- On 15 August, a boy was injured when a reported landmine detonated in Baghuz in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 29 August, a girl was killed by reported sniper fire in the outskirts of Suwaydan Jazirah in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 31 August, a civilian was injured in a reported drive-by shooting in the city of Shahil in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 6 September, a civilian was injured in a reported drive-by shooting in the village of Sabha in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 7 September, a woman was injured after a reported landmine detonated in the town of Kashmah in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 11 September, a civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in the town of Kubar in western rural Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 15 September, a civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in the town of Dahlah in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 23 September, a civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in the city of Basirah in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr. On the same day, another civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in the town of Dhiban in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant later claimed responsibility for both attacks.

Raqqah Governorate

- On 4 August, a civilian man was injured in a reported ground-based strike in the village of Afdko in northern rural Raqqah.
- On 6 August, 20 civilians, including 7 boys, were injured when a suspected hand grenade reportedly exploded in the city of Tall Abyad in northern rural Raqqah.
- On 10 August, two civilians were reportedly injured by an armed group in the village of Ali Bajliyah in northern rural Raqqah.
- On 26 August, a civilian was killed after a reported ground-based strike landed near the village of Shaykh Hasan in northern rural Raqqah.

Dar'a Governorate

- On 4 August, a civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting on the road between Tafas and the town of Muzayrib in western rural Dar'a.
- On 7 August, a civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in the city of Dar'a.
- On 13 August, a civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting on the road between Ma'raba and Ghasm in eastern rural Dar'a. On the same day, three civilians, including a boy and a girl, were killed in a reported drive-by shooting in the village of Mudawwarah.
- On 16 August, a civilian with a disability was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in Tafas in western rural Dar'a.

- On 24 August, two boys were killed and three other civilians, including one boy, were injured after a reported roadside improvised explosive device explosion and drive-by shooting in the town of Da'il in northern rural Dar'a.
- On 25 August, a female child was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in Jasim in northern rural Dar'a.
- On 27 August, a civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in the town of Jallayn in western Dar'a.
- On 28 August, a civilian was reportedly killed by unidentified perpetrators in his home in the town of Yadudah in western rural Dar'a.
- On 10 September, a civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in the town of Jasim in northern rural Dar'a.
- On 10 September, a civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in the city of Dar'a.
- On 12 September, a civilian was killed in a reported drive-by shooting in the town of Muzayrib in western rural Dar'a.
- On 12 September, two civilians were injured in a reported drive-by shooting in the city of Shaykh Miskin in northern rural Dar'a.
- On 26 September, three civilians were injured in a reported drive-by shooting on the road between Yadudah and Muzayrib in western rural Dar'a.

Damascus Governorate

- On 21 September, three women and a three-year-old girl were reportedly arrested at a checkpoint near the town of Tayyibah in Rif Dimashq Governorate. Their fate remains unknown to their families.
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