



Oral Update on the Extent of Conflict-Related Deaths in the Syrian Arab Republic

Background Note on the Statistical Analysis

24 September 2021

1 Introduction

In its update to the Human Rights Council at its 48th session (A/HRC/RES/46/22), OHCHR informed the Council that it has compiled a list of 350,209 identified individuals killed in the Syrian conflict between March 2011 to March 2021. This note describes the statistical analysis behind that number and provides more information on the yearly disaggregations by sex, age, and governorate of death. OHCHR has also begun processing information on the actors alleged to have caused the deaths, the civilian status of casualties, and the cause of death by weapon type.

The statistical work undertaken builds on previous efforts. In 2013 and 2014, OHCHR commissioned three statistical analyses of documented killings in Syria.¹ However, the situation in Syria in 2014 grew more complex and dangerous, which affected its capacity to maintain the required standards of quality and verification and led to the suspension of this work. In 2019, OHCHR reinforced its capacity to monitor and investigate incidents involving civilian casualties and resumed the statistical analysis to include Syria in its global reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals indicator on conflict-related deaths (SDG indicator 16.1.2).²

2 Methodology

Pursuant to the HRC mandate, in July 2021 OHCHR issued a call for submissions of available data on casualties during the 10 years of conflict in Syria.³ OHCHR also transmitted a Note Verbale to the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations Office at Geneva and Specialized Institutions in Switzerland, requesting any information on conflict-related deaths from March 2011 until March 2021. For this analysis, involving hundreds of thousands of records to be reviewed and compared to avoid duplication, OHCHR

¹ <https://hrdag.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Benotech-final-SY-report.pdf> ;
<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/HRDAG-Updated-SY-report.pdf> ;
<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/HRDAGUpdatedReportAug2014.pdf>

² For more information on this indicator, see <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Indicators/Pages/SDGindicators.aspx>

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/MENARegion/Pages/SyriaCallSubmission10yearsofconflict.aspx>

contracted the Human Rights Data Analysis Group (HRDAG), the same organization commissioned by OHCHR in 2013 and 2014 on the statistical analyses of conflict-related deaths in Syria.⁴

For this statistical analysis, the sources used and the corresponding periods of time for which these sources had available data are as follows:

1. Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies (DCHRS)⁵ – March 2011 – December 2018
2. Center for Statistics and Research – Syria (CSR-SY)⁶ – March 2011 – March 2021
3. Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)⁷ - March 2011 – March 2021
4. Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR)⁸ - March 2011 – March 2021
5. Violations Documentation Center (VDC)⁹ – March 2011 – February 2020 (records scraped from their website with permission)
6. Records shared with OHCHR by the Syrian Government - March 2011- November 2012
7. Records HRDAG downloaded from the Syria Shuhada website with permission (SS) - March 2011 - May 2014
8. The civilian casualty records from the Syria Office of OHCHR – January 2019 – March 2021

OHCHR has engaged bilaterally with DCHRS, CSR-SY, SNHR, SOHR, and VDC, to understand their methodology, including the categories used to disaggregate the data. OHCHR has been working with these sources over time, and although their capacities vary, they maintain consistency in the quality and content of their respective records. Documenting conflict-related deaths amid a conflict is extremely difficult and dangerous, and these groups' continuous work and efforts must be acknowledged and supported.

The analysis undertaken used an established statistical technique called 'record linkage' and entailed the following steps. Firstly, removing records that did not include the deceased's full name and the date and location of the incident. Records that appeared to be the same or similar across several sources were then combined and an exhaustive analysis carried out to avoid counting the same individual several times. Lastly and crucially, the identification of the source(s) reporting on each death was tracked, and this information makes subsequent statistical estimation possible. The final figure comprises all the unique documented deaths from these combined sources.

3 Documented Deaths and Disaggregations 2011-2021

Based on the information collected by the eight groups listed in the previous section, OHCHR finds a total of **350,209** unique, documented, identifiable casualties for the period 1 March 2011 through 31 March 2021. A casualty is considered identifiable if their full name, date of death, and the governorate in which they died have

⁴ HRDAG is a non-profit, non-partisan organization which applies scientific methods to the analysis of human rights violations around the world. They have provided their expertise to truth and reconciliation commissions, UN missions, human rights bodies, and international and domestic criminal tribunals. For more information, see <https://hrdag.org/>.

⁵ <http://dchrs.org/>

⁶ <https://csr-sy.org/>

⁷ <http://sn4hr.org/>

⁸ <https://www.syriahr.com/>

⁹ <https://vdc-sy.net/>

been recorded. Records missing any of this information are excluded from this analysis. The number of documented deaths by sex, age group, and governorate for each year is presented in Tables A1–A4. As mentioned above, OHCHR has also begun processing information on the actors alleged to have caused the deaths, the civilian status of casualties, and the cause of death by weapon type.

Though these tables accurately reflect what has been recorded by these organizations, perceived patterns in the documentation may not necessarily reflect underlying patterns of violence. Further statistical estimation is needed to account for undocumented violence to draw conclusions about patterns.

Table A1: Documented Deaths by year

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total	10,105	60,873	58,532	46,593	49,959	45,117	34,331	23,372	12,324	7,729	1,274

Table A2: Documented Deaths by governorate and year

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Al-Hasaka	92	689	699	701	1,251	760	395	614	1,129	329	162
Aleppo	235	7,234	8,348	7,949	7,406	10,600	2,944	4,308	1,295	1,197	215
ar-Raqqah	44	587	922	624	468	1,015	2,514	859	713	284	69
As-Suwayda	106	878	1,034	1,109	1,611	1,268	689	279	42	64	21
Damascus	317	3,357	3,730	2,108	1,779	1,027	1,213	882	221	278	3
Daraa	1,190	3,908	4,367	3,764	3,204	1,812	1,665	1,279	305	404	156
Deir ez-Zor	405	3,785	2,415	2,778	2,157	2,468	3,286	2,900	1,543	735	290
Hama	1,424	5,809	4,455	3,946	4,064	3,398	4,099	1,729	2,082	845	142
Homs	3,062	9,374	7,474	4,946	5,544	4,801	3,734	1,243	272	501	35
Idlib	1,173	6,332	4,092	3,204	3,704	3,647	2,974	2,288	3,892	1,831	134
Latakia	775	4,440	4,023	3,477	5,347	4,672	3,368	808	625	876	9
Quneitra	48	420	686	722	547	375	290	56	18	25	17
Rural Damascus	714	10,058	11,407	6,833	7,000	4,361	2,804	4,070	141	74	21
Tartus	520	4,002	4,880	4,432	5,877	4,913	4,356	2,057	46	286	0

Table A3: Documented Deaths by sex and year

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Female	325	4,135	5,193	3,517	3,547	3,770	2,613	2,033	1,052	423	119
Male	9,778	56,082	51,557	41,354	45,651	41,300	31,698	11,139	4,877	2,787	1,154
Unknown	2	656	1,782	1,722	761	47	20	10,200	6,395	4,519	1

Table A4: Documented Deaths by age group and year

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Adult	8,713	53,202	48,809	39,351	43,627	38,225	29,004	6,759	3,212	1,586	1,065
Child	591	4,692	5,109	3,502	3,379	3,741	2,337	2,058	1,144	418	155
Unknown	801	2,979	4,614	3,740	2,953	3,151	2,990	14,555	7,968	5,725	54

4 Next Steps – Estimation

As described in the previous section, only identifiable records are included in this enumeration, representing only a subset of all conflict-related deaths. The next step is to use statistical estimation techniques to account for missing data - undocumented and unidentified casualties. The analysis will estimate the number of deaths not documented by any of the sources used or who were excluded from the above analysis due to missing information and measure the uncertainty surrounding the findings. Such estimates are appropriate for drawing comparisons about documentation patterns and patterns of violence during the period under review.