

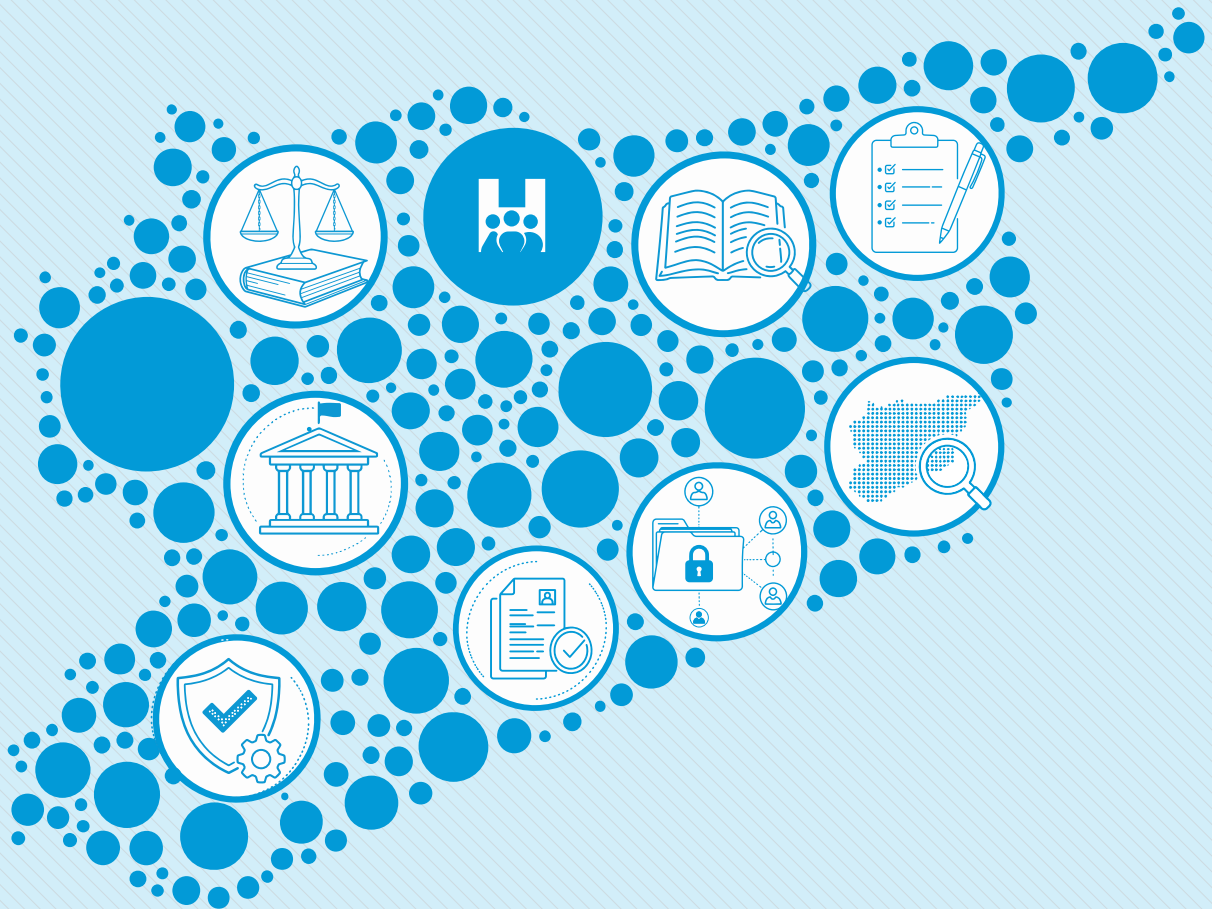


الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

METHODOLOGY MANUAL

of the Syrian Network for Human Rights

Edition 2026





The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

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Part

01

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK



Section One: Mission and Purpose

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) is an independent, non-governmental organization established in June 2011. Its mission is to strengthen the human rights situation and to document violations of international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and international criminal law committed on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, and to safeguard the rights of all victims of these violations regardless of their identity, affiliations, or circumstances.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights has devoted its efforts to the systematic documentation of the human rights violations that have occurred in Syria since March 2011, with the aim of collecting and preserving evidence, testimonies, and data and using them across the various litigation and justice mechanisms. The methodology of the Syrian Network for Human Rights has developed markedly and cumulatively over the long years since its founding in June 2011, and it has undergone numerous amendments and improvements in line with the ongoing challenges facing human rights in Syria and with the evolution of the available tools, techniques, acquired expertise, and competence. This continuous development and growth has been reflected in all of the publications issued by the Syrian Network for Human Rights, whether reports, research, statistical data, or their analysis.

The documents of the Syrian Network for Human Rights serve the following purposes:

- **First**, safeguarding the individual and collective rights of victims through the creation of an accurate factual record of the violations committed against them, including, wherever possible, the identity of the victims, the circumstances of the violation, the responsible party, and the supporting evidence for each case.
- **Second**, supporting accountability through the collection, verification, and preservation of evidence and information, so that it may be drawn upon before international and national judicial and quasi-judicial mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism on Syria (IIIM), courts exercising universal jurisdiction, and any competent national courts, in proceedings aimed at establishing individual criminal responsibility for grave violations.
- **Third**, supporting transitional justice processes through the provision of a documented evidentiary base that contributes to truth-seeking, reparations, institutional reform, vetting, and guarantees of non-recurrence, and that contributes to identifying and analyzing the patterns of violations, the chains of command, and the structural conditions that enabled them to occur.
- **Fourth**, contributing to the building of the historical record through the creation of a comprehensive, searchable archive comprising the documented violations, victims, perpetrators, incidents, and associated evidence, to serve as a national repository of documented information about the human cost of the conflict and its consequences.

- Fifth, supporting advocacy and public policy through the provision of documented, evidence-based information to international bodies, governments, civil society organizations, and the public, thereby enriching decision-making related to protection, humanitarian response, political processes, and legal reform.

The documentation mission of the Syrian Network for Human Rights encompasses three principal temporal and situational frameworks, each with its own operational requirements and particular legal considerations:

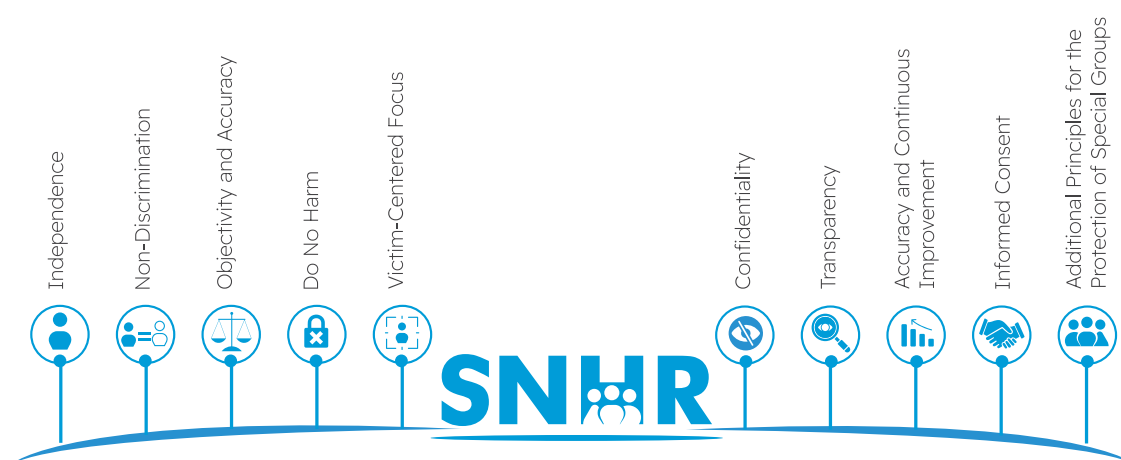
- **(a) Legacy cases:** these include the violations committed during the period extending from March 2011 to December 2024, including the Assad regime's suppression of the popular revolution, the multi-party armed conflict, and all of the violations committed by the various parties during that period. These cases also include dealing with evidence that has newly become available, including detention records, mass graves, and institutional archives that became accessible after the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024.
- **(b) The transitional period:** this includes the violations committed in the transitional phase, from December 2024 onward, during the exercise of governmental functions or in the context of security operations.
- **(c) Ongoing armed conflicts and military occupation:** these include the violations resulting from Israeli military operations and the occupation of parts of Syrian territory, in addition to the violations associated with the armed conflict in the areas effectively outside the control of government forces, such as "Suwayda Governorate as of the issuance of this manual," as well as any other instances of armed conflict or military operations on Syrian territory, including the residual activities of ISIS or other non-governmental armed groups.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights carries out its work with complete independence from the transitional government, all parties to the armed conflicts on Syrian territory, and likewise from all foreign governments and political, military, and ideological factions. The Network maintains neutrality toward all parties, and its role is confined to strengthening human rights conditions through the accurate documentation of violations and the safeguarding of victims' rights.

This methodology is built on the principles of independent rights-based documentation and the internationally recognized standards, adapted to suit the complex field reality in Syria. It aims to ensure the highest possible degree of accuracy, neutrality, and consistency in the collection, analysis, and documentation of data, without claiming perfection or the absolute completeness of the information. Building on this institutional framework, the Syrian Network for Human Rights sets out a set of governing principles and values that guide all stages of the documentation and analytical work.

Section Two: Principles and Values

The following principles govern all aspects of the documentation work of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, and their practical effects are reflected in the operational protocols set out in the later sections of this methodology. The Network also seeks to apply these principles at all stages of the monitoring, documentation, and interviewing processes, with the aim of achieving best practices and the highest standards of integrity and effectiveness in the course of its work. These principles are as follows:



2.1. Independence

The Syrian Network for Human Rights operates with complete independence from the Syrian transitional government, all parties to the armed conflicts on Syrian territory, all foreign governments, international organizations, and political entities. The Network is not subject to any instructions, directives, or conditions from any external party regarding the content, scope, or findings of its documents. Funding mechanisms likewise do not influence its methodological or documentation decisions, and the Network refrains from accepting any funding conditioned on documentation outcomes. This independence also extends to internal decision-making regarding which violations should be documented, how parties and incidents are classified, the legal frameworks applicable, and when and with whom data is shared.

2.2. Non-Discrimination

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents all violations without any discrimination. The same standards are applied to all parties, including governments, occupation forces, armed groups, and non-governmental organizations. The volume of documentation reflects the nature of the violations established by evidence, without any selective considerations.

2.3. Objectivity and Accuracy

The Network relies solely on documented evidence, without engaging in political analysis or the interpretation of intentions. The work is confined to recording the facts, determining responsibility based on the evidence, and applying the appropriate legal classification. Where the evidence is insufficient, the case is recorded together with a statement of the confidence level and the limits of certainty.

2.4. Do No Harm

The documentation activities carried out by the Syrian Network for Human Rights must not expose victims, survivors, witnesses, sources, staff, or local communities to any additional risk. This principle applies at all stages of the documentation process, beginning with the initial contact with sources, the collection of testimonies, the preservation of evidence, the analysis, and the preparation of reports, through to data sharing. Before embarking on any documentation activity, the Network assesses the potential risks to the persons concerned and adjusts its methods accordingly. If the risk of harm resulting from a documentation activity exceeds the benefit hoped for from the information, the Network refrains from that activity or modifies its approach so as to reduce the risks to an acceptable level.

2.5. Victim-Centered Focus

The rights, dignity, and safety of victims constitute the fundamental considerations in all documentation decisions. Documentation is carried out for the benefit of victims and in a manner that respects their autonomy. This means informing victims and survivors of the purpose of the documentation, how their information will be used, and their right to refuse to participate or to withdraw their consent at any stage. A victim-centered focus also requires the Syrian Network for Human Rights to adapt its documentation methods to the needs and circumstances of the various categories of victims, including children, women, persons with disabilities, survivors of sexual violence, and members of communities exposed to systematic persecution.

2.6. Confidentiality

The Syrian Network for Human Rights treats the information provided by sources, witnesses, survivors, and victims' families as confidential by default. No identifying information is disclosed in public reports or to any third party without the explicit and informed consent of the person concerned, unless the disclosure is required under a data sharing agreement approved by the person in accordance with the procedures set out in Section 18 of this methodology. Confidentiality covers the identity of sources, the content of their testimonies, their locations, their contact details, and any other information that could be used to identify them. If the Syrian Network for Human Rights considers that a source's safety would be exposed to danger in the event that the information is disclosed, even where consent exists, it reserves the right to withhold that information regardless of the source's wish to disclose their identity.

2.7. Transparency

The Syrian Network for Human Rights makes its methodology available to the public, and it clarifies in its published reports the methods through which it arrived at its findings, the types and quantity of evidence it relied upon, and the limits of its data. Transparency does not mean disclosing confidential source information or the details of internal verification processes if their disclosure would compromise the protection of sources or enable others to manipulate the Network's systems. Transparency means that any reader of a report issued by the Syrian Network for Human Rights is able to understand the basis on which the conclusion was built and to assess the strength of the evidence supporting it.

2.8. Accuracy and Continuous Improvement

The Network is committed to updating its data on a continuous basis whenever new information becomes available. Any erroneous or incomplete data is corrected, and updates are issued as needed. The methodology is also reviewed periodically in order to align it with legal, technical, and operational developments.

2.9. Informed Consent:

The Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts the principle of informed consent as a fundamental condition prior to conducting any documentation activity involving victims, witnesses, survivors, or any persons cooperating with the monitoring and documentation processes.

This principle means obtaining voluntary, explicit, and pre-specified consent, after providing the person concerned with clear and comprehensive information regarding:

- The aims and purposes of the documentation process.
- The nature of the use of the information provided.
- The level of confidentiality applied to the data.
- The parties with whom the information may be shared (such as international mechanisms, partners, or human rights reports).
- The potential risks associated with sharing.

The identity of the party carrying out the documentation, the nature of its work, and the framework within which it operates are also clarified, so as to ensure that the decision to participate is made on the basis of a full and free understanding of the information.

The person concerned has the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw their consent at any stage of the documentation, without any consequences.

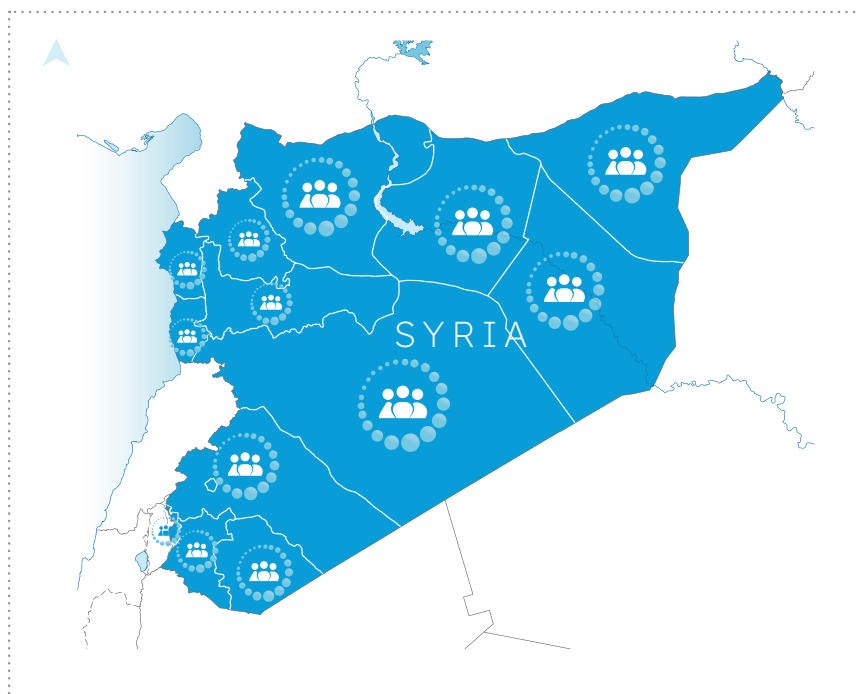
2.10. Additional Principles for the Protection of Special Groups

In addition to the general principles mentioned above, the Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts special protection standards when documenting the violations committed against children and females, so as to ensure that the privacy and the psychological and social considerations associated with each group are taken into account.

In our procedures relating to children, we rely on the principle of the best interests of the child, and in accordance with what is provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which constitutes the fundamental pillar in the monitoring and documentation process, and we follow the controls and procedures that suit the particular situation of each child, including ensuring the child's ability to express their opinion in all of the procedures followed that are relevant to the documentation of the violations, and recognizing their feelings, taking into account in this the child's age, maturity, and capacity to express themselves. This is in addition to the general principles set out above. Therefore, the consent that we obtain during the interviews in which we record a violation connected to a child is twofold, from the child's family and from the child themselves, taking into account in this the provision of an explanation of our documentation aims in a manner that suits the child's age and level of understanding. As a result of its continuous work from March 2011 until now, the Syrian Network for Human Rights has acquired important experience in carrying out these procedures in its work, and it seeks to develop them continuously. In general, the Syrian Network for Human Rights does not record children's accounts directly from them; rather, it collects data and information from the persons surrounding the child ("fathers and mothers, relatives, the child's guardians, or witnesses who saw the violation and have information about it"), in order to obtain a general statement about the violation that the child suffered or witnessed, using open and focused questions, out of regard for these same principles and because children are affected psychologically and physically to a significant degree by the violation they have suffered, and in a manner different from adults. In a few cases, we may resort to taking the child's statement directly and on a single occasion, in specific circumstances, particularly when we assess that this information may be at risk of being lost if the statement is not taken, and in a manner that may negatively affect the child's interests, and in the presence of the child's family/guardians.

As for the violations committed against females, we take care not to overlook the context based on gender or sex in the patterns of most of the violations that females have suffered, even while considering that all civilians have been exposed to these violations. In many violations, females and males are not exposed to the same level of violations, yet whether the levels are higher or lower, this is due to the existence of many associated factors that may increase or reduce a person's exposure to the different patterns of violations, among them participation, activism, location, economic and social status, age, and even ethnic and sectarian affiliation, and other interlinked factors. However, with respect to females, they have often been subjected to violations because they are females. Therefore, during our work in monitoring and documenting the violations committed against females in the context of the Syrian conflict, we always attach importance to undertaking the methodological approach based on gender and sex to the mechanism and details of the occurrence of the violation, so as to ascertain the true aims and dimensions of this violation for females, especially since the effects of most of the violations that targeted them did not stop at the victim alone, but extended to include her family and her community.

Section Three: Temporal Scope and Geographic Scope



3.1. Temporal Scope

Each report has its own temporal scope clearly defined within the methodology section, so as to ensure that the time period covered by the report is determined precisely. This determination is used as a basis for compiling the data, analyzing it, and linking it temporally within the relevant databases.

3.2. Geographic Scope

The geographic scope of the Syrian Network for Human Rights covers the entire territory of the Syrian Arab Republic within its internationally recognized borders, including the land, the territorial waters, and the airspace.

This scope includes all the areas located within Syrian territory, regardless of the nature of the effective control over them, among them:

The areas subject to Israeli occupation or military control, including any buffer zones, exclusion zones, or areas subject to Israeli military administration, regardless of whether Israel officially describes its presence as an occupation.

3.3. Extraterritorial Documentation

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the violations committed against Syrian citizens outside Syrian territory, whenever these violations are directly connected to the Syrian conflict or its repercussions. This includes, by way of example and not limitation:

- The forced return or involuntary deportation of Syrian refugees.
- The violations committed against Syrian refugees or asylum seekers by the authorities of the host state on account of their status as Syrian citizens.
- The violations committed by Syrian actors, whether governmental or non-governmental, against Syrians outside Syria.

The violations occurring outside the territorial borders are documented in accordance with the same methodology adopted in documenting the violations within them, taking into account the practical constraints relating to access to information and the possibilities of verification in each case individually.

3.4. Determining the Applicable Legal Status

For each documented incident, the Syrian Network for Human Rights determines the applicable legal framework according to the following categories, which constitute the basis for determining the rules of law to be applied under Section 4:

- **(a) International armed conflict:** this applies when hostilities take place between the armed forces of two or more states, or when a state occupies the territory of another state. This description currently applies to the Israeli military operations and to the occupation of Syrian territory.
- **(b) Non-international armed conflict:** this applies in the event of protracted armed violence between governmental armed forces and organized armed groups, or between organized armed groups among themselves, within a level of organization and intensity of violence that meets the conditions of international humanitarian law.
- **(c) Law enforcement situations:** this applies when a governmental authority exercises police or security functions in the absence of an armed conflict. The standards of international human rights law apply in such situations primarily. This description currently applies to the transitional government's exercise of law enforcement functions in the areas under its control that are not witnessing an armed conflict.
- **(d) Occupation:** this applies when a foreign force exercises effective control over a territory without the consent of the sovereign state. This description currently applies to the areas under Israeli control in Syrian territory. This entails the application of the rules of the law of occupation in accordance with international humanitarian law.

3.5. The Overlap Between Legal Frameworks

These classifications are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and more than one legal system may apply to the same territory or incident at different times or simultaneously.

In cases of overlap, the Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts the legal framework that provides the highest level of protection for the affected persons, taking into account the rules of interaction between international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in accordance with the relevant international jurisprudence, including:

- The opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons (1996)
- The Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (2004)

Part

02

LEGAL FRAMEWORK



Section 4: Applicable Legal Frameworks

This section sets out the international legal frameworks that the Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts in classifying the violations and in determining the legal obligations of the parties whose conduct it documents.

The Network does not exercise any judicial or quasi-judicial role, and it does not issue binding rulings. Its legal classifications constitute an analytical assessment based on the application of the adopted international legal standards to the facts as they are documented. These classifications may be reviewed or updated whenever new evidence or relevant legal developments emerge.

4.1. International Human Rights Law

International human rights law applies at all times and in all circumstances without exception. It binds all authorities that exercise governmental functions or effective control over territory and population, including the transitional government and de facto authorities, and it also restrains the conduct of the occupying power. International human rights law applies in parallel with international humanitarian law in situations of armed conflict and occupation.

The obligations of the state under this law are divided into three principal categories:

- The obligation to respect: that the state or its institutions, including the security forces and the army, must not violate human rights.
- The obligation to protect: that the state must prevent human rights violations by others, including individuals and acting groups.
- The obligation to fulfill: that the state must take positive measures and steps to ensure the full enjoyment by all individuals of all human rights.

4.2. International Humanitarian Law

International humanitarian law applies in situations of armed conflict, whether international or non-international, in that it regulates the conduct of hostilities and provides protection for persons who are not participating, or who have ceased to participate, in them. The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies this law in all cases on Syrian territory that meet the conditions of an armed conflict, as well as in situations of military occupation.

4.2.1. International Armed Conflict

An armed conflict is deemed international whenever there is a resort to armed force between two or more states. The Israeli military operations on Syrian territory, as well as Israel's occupation of parts of Syrian territory, constitute an international armed conflict.

4.2.2. Non-International Armed Conflict

An armed conflict is deemed non-international when the armed violence between governmental forces and organized armed groups, or between such groups among themselves, reaches a level of intensity and organization that goes beyond internal disturbances and tensions. The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the threshold criteria set out in Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions, and where appropriate, in Additional Protocol II of 1977, to which Syria is a party.

4.2.3. Remaining Armed Conflicts

If parties from the period prior to the fall of the Assad regime become involved in acts of armed violence during the transitional period, such as the remnants of ISIS, then the Syrian Network for Human Rights assesses whether this violence independently meets the criteria of a non-international armed conflict in light of the present facts. The legal classification of the conflict does not transfer automatically from the previous period to the transitional period; rather, it is reassessed on the basis of the actual circumstances prevailing at the time the incidents occur.

4.3. The Law of Occupation

The law of occupation applies when a foreign force exercises effective control over a territory without the consent of the legitimate sovereign authority. The Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts the factual standard of effective control set out in Article 42 of the Hague Regulations of 1907, the substance of which is that territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army, and that the occupation extends only to the territory where such authority has been established and can be exercised.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights's classification of the presence of Israeli forces in areas of Syrian territory as an occupation is based on this factual test, and it does not rely on any official declaration by Israel or on any recognition by another party.

4.4. International Criminal Law

The documents of the Syrian Network for Human Rights are designed to support the identification of the individuals criminally responsible for grave violations of international law and their accountability. The Network adopts the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court as a fundamental reference framework for the classification of individual crimes, while acknowledging that the rules of customary international criminal law may be applied independently of the Rome Statute.

4.4.1. War Crimes

The Syrian Network for Human Rights classifies the documented violations as war crimes when the evidence indicates that the act was committed in the context of an armed conflict, international or non-international, and was connected to it, and that it falls within the acts criminalized in Article 8 of the Rome Statute.

4.4.2. Crimes Against Humanity

The Syrian Network for Human Rights classifies the documented violations as crimes against humanity when the evidence indicates that the act was committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against the civilian population, with knowledge of that attack.

4.4.3. Modes of Criminal Responsibility

The Syrian Network for Human Rights collects its data relating to the perpetrators and structures it in a manner that supports analysis across all the modes of responsibility recognized in the Rome Statute, including direct commission; ordering, soliciting, or inducing; aiding, abetting, or any other form of assistance; contribution to a crime committed by a group; and command and superior responsibility. The data collected concerning the chain of command, the identification of units, and individual roles is intended to facilitate the application of command responsibility in particular, including establishing the superior-subordinate relationship, actual or constructive knowledge, and the failure to prevent, repress, or refer the matter to the competent authorities.

4.5. Concurrent Application of Legal Frameworks

In many cases, more than one legal system applies to the same event. The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the following principles to determine the interaction between these frameworks:

- a.** International human rights law applies at all times, and it is not displaced by the application of international humanitarian law. In situations of armed conflict or occupation, international humanitarian law applies as the special law (*lex specialis*) that regulates the conduct of hostilities and the protection of persons in those contexts. Wherever international humanitarian law does not address a particular question, international human rights law remains applicable to it.
- b.** The law of occupation applies concurrently with both international humanitarian law, which regulates the conduct of hostilities within or in relation to the occupied territory, and international human rights law, which regulates the treatment by the occupying power of the population under its control.
- c.** International criminal law applies independently of the other frameworks. A single act may be classified as a war crime, a crime against humanity, or genocide, regardless of whether it also constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law or of international human rights law. This classification relates to individual criminal responsibility, and it does not replace the classification of state responsibility or the responsibility of other entities under international humanitarian law or international human rights law.
- d.** When an incident involves multiple parties subject to different legal frameworks, such as an airstrike carried out by an occupying power in the context of a non-international armed conflict between other parties, the Syrian Network for Human Rights assesses the conduct of each party according to the legal framework applicable to it.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights records the legal framework or frameworks applicable to each documented incident in its database, in accordance with the legal classification protocol set out in Section 4.

Part

03

DEFINITIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS



Section 5: Definitions

This section defines the core terms used throughout the documentation work of the Syrian Network for Human Rights. Each term is defined for a specific purpose within the Network's methodology, and it is applied consistently across all of the databases, reports, and publications.

The definitions set out in this section are interpreted in a unified methodological manner, and the definition stated in this manual is the one relied upon for the purposes of documentation and analysis within the Syrian Network for Human Rights and in its outputs, even where it differs from the linguistic, political, or media usages of the term.

Where the operational definition used differs from its definition under international law, this is indicated clearly, with a statement of the aspects of the difference and its reasons. In cases of conflict, the more specific definition, and the one closest to the purposes of documentation, is adopted, with the nature of the difference clarified where appropriate.

These definitions are used for purely operational and documentary purposes, and they are not intended to express any political or legal position outside the scope of this methodology.

These definitions may also be reviewed and updated as necessary in accordance with the development of the field context or of the international legal standards, provided that any amendment, its date, and its reasons are documented. The definitions are organized within thematic clusters to ensure consistency and ease of use.

5.1. Parties and Actors

- **The Transitional Government:** It is the governmental authority that was formed in Damascus following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. Within the framework of this methodology, this term refers to the de facto governmental authority that exercises effective control over Syrian territory, and to its executive and administrative organs. The Transitional Government is bound by the international legal obligations incumbent upon Syria from the moment it assumes effective governmental authority.
- **The Forces of the Transitional Government:** They are all of the armed and security forces that operate under the authority, direction, or effective control of the Transitional Government. This includes the military forces, the police, the intelligence and security services, the gendarmerie, the border guard forces, and any irregular or semi-integrated armed groups that operate under a mandate from the Transitional Government or with its consent. If an armed faction that was previously independent is effectively integrated into the security forces of the Transitional Government, its members are classified within the Forces of the Transitional Government as of the date of this effective integration.

- **The Occupying Power:** It is a state whose armed forces exercise effective control over territory belonging to another state without the consent of its sovereign authority. In this methodology, this definition is applied to Israel with respect to areas of Syrian territory subject to Israeli military control, based on the criteria set out in Section 4.3.
- **The Non-State Armed Group:** It is an organized armed group that takes part in an armed conflict without being part of the armed forces of a state. Within the framework of this methodology, the classification of an entity as a non-state armed group requires the existence of a minimum degree of organization, including the presence of a command structure, the capacity to sustain military operations, and the capacity to implement the relevant obligations under international humanitarian law. Unorganized criminal gangs, spontaneous crowds, or individuals acting in isolation do not fall within this definition.
- **The Organized Armed Group:** This term is used in this methodology interchangeably with the term “non-state armed group,” and in accordance with the same defining criteria.
- **Party to the Conflict:** It is any state or organized armed group that takes part in an armed conflict, whether the conflict is an international armed conflict or a non-international one. The status of party to the conflict entails legal obligations under international humanitarian law. The Syrian Network for Human Rights classifies the parties to a conflict on the basis of the factual evidence relating to their participation in hostilities, not on the basis of their self-classification or of the recognition of them by the other parties.
- **The Controlling Authority:** It is any party, whether a state, a transitional government, a non-state armed group, or an occupying power, that exercises effective administrative and security control over a defined area and over its population. This term is used in this methodology as a general term encompassing all de facto authorities, regardless of their legal status.

5.2. Persons

- **The Civilian:** It is any person who is not a member of the armed forces of one of the parties to the conflict, and who does not participate directly in hostilities. In the event of doubt as to the civilian status of a person, that person is presumed to be a civilian. The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies this presumption in its documentation, such that the victim is classified as a civilian whenever the evidence does not establish that the person was a combatant or was participating directly in hostilities at the time the incident occurred.
- **The Combatant:** It is a member of the armed forces of a party to an international armed conflict, with the exception of medical and religious personnel, and the person has the right to participate directly in hostilities. In the context of non-international armed conflicts, the Syrian Network for Human Rights uses the term “combatant” for its operational purposes to refer to any individual who belongs to an organized armed group and performs within it a continuous combat function, consistent with the Interpretive Guidance of the International Committee of the Red Cross on the notion of direct participation in hostilities.

- **The Person Hors de Combat:** It is every combatant or person participating in hostilities who has become incapable of continuing in them as a result of injury, illness, drowning, detention, surrender, or any other cause that led to the person falling into the hands of the adversary or being placed out of combat.
- **The Person Participating Directly in Hostilities:** It is a civilian who carries out acts that constitute direct participation in hostilities in accordance with the interpretation set out in the Interpretive Guidance of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Such a person loses protection from direct attack for the duration of each act of direct participation, without acquiring the status of a combatant. The Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts the three cumulative criteria set out in that Guidance, which are:
 - The effect of the act on the military capabilities of one of the parties, or the causing of harm to protected persons or objects.
 - The existence of a direct causal link between the act and the harm.
 - That the act is specifically designed to support one party to the conflict to the detriment of another.

When the Syrian Network for Human Rights documents a victim whose status has not been determined with certainty, it records the person provisionally as a civilian on the basis of the presumption of civilian status. If the evidence later establishes that the victim was a combatant or was directly participating in hostilities at the time the incident occurred, the person is reclassified accordingly.

- **The Protected Person:** It is, under the Fourth Geneva Convention, every person who finds himself, at any time and in any manner whatsoever, in a situation of conflict or occupation, in the hands of a party to the conflict or an occupying power of which he is not a national, subject to the exceptions provided for in Article 4 of the Convention. The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies this definition when documenting the violations of the Israeli occupation forces committed against the Syrian civilian population in the occupied territories.
- **The Detainee:** It is any person who is deprived of liberty by a governmental authority, a party to a conflict, or an occupying power, regardless of the official characterization of this deprivation of liberty, whether it is called arrest, detention, pretrial detention, imprisonment, or otherwise. The Syrian Network for Human Rights uses the term “detainee” as a general term encompassing all forms of deprivation of liberty, with more specific sub-definitions where appropriate.
- **The Arbitrarily Detained Person:** It is every detainee who is deprived of liberty without a legal basis, or without observance of due process of law, or in a manner that violates inter-

national human rights law or international humanitarian law. The Syrian Network for Human Rights classifies a detention as arbitrary if one of the following criteria is met:

- The absence of a legal basis in national or international law.
 - Or the carrying out of the deprivation of liberty without a judicial warrant or without reasonable suspicion of the commission of a crime.
 - Or the detention of the person on account of the exercise of basic rights, such as freedom of expression, assembly, association, or the holding of a political opinion.
 - Or the denial to the person of contact with a lawyer, of judicial review, or of communication with the family.
 - Or where the duration or the conditions of the detention are disproportionate or incompatible with international human rights law or international humanitarian law.
- **The Administrative Detainee:** It is the person detained by an occupying power on the basis of the administrative detention provisions set out in the Fourth Geneva Convention. This type of deprivation of liberty is a security measure and not a criminal penalty, and it is subject to specific procedural safeguards, including the right to challenge and to periodic review. The Syrian Network for Human Rights distinguishes between this type of detention and criminal detention, and documents it as an independent sub-category within the violations associated with occupation.
 - **The Forcibly Disappeared Person:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts in this regard a two-level definition:
 - a. The legal definition: Enforced disappearance is the arrest, detention, abduction, or any other form of deprivation of liberty at the hands of agents of the state, or of persons or groups acting with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of the state, followed by a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of liberty or by a concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which places that person outside the protection of the law.
 - b. The operational threshold: For the purposes of documentation and data classification, the Syrian Network for Human Rights classifies a person as forcibly disappeared when the detaining party denies the fact of the detention or refuses to disclose the person's fate or whereabouts, and after the lapse of a period of no less than twenty days from the deprivation of liberty. This period represents an operational classification tool only, and it does not constitute an element of the legal definition of enforced disappearance, which does not require a minimum duration of deprivation of liberty.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights records enforced disappearance as a continuing violation for as long as the fate or whereabouts of the person remains unknown, whether the person is alive or deceased. The notification by the detaining party of the occurrence of death, without the handing over of the body, the enabling of independent verification, or the provision of a full account of the circumstances of death, does not bring an end to the description of enforced disappearance.

As for the cases in which non-state armed groups or entities that do not act under a mandate from the state commit similar acts, the Syrian Network for Human Rights classifies the deprivation of liberty as abduction or hostage-taking, and documents it in accordance with the applicable legal framework, whether international humanitarian law or international human rights law. When a non-state armed group exercises de facto governmental functions over a particular territory, the distinction between enforced disappearance and other forms of unacknowledged detention is assessed on a case-by-case basis.

- **The Missing:** The term “the missing” encompasses all individuals who have gone missing for unknown reasons, and whose relatives have been unable to determine their fate or to know any party responsible for their loss. This definition includes cases of loss resulting from the crossing of borders, or as a result of shelling, or during fighting, or in the course of displacement, and other circumstances. The Syrian Network for Human Rights has allocated a separate database for the missing, so as to distinguish them from those forcibly disappeared at the hands of the parties to the conflict.
- **The Victim:** It is any person who has suffered harm as a result of a violation of international human rights law, international humanitarian law, or international criminal law. The harm includes physical harm, psychological harm, death, deprivation of liberty, the destruction or confiscation of property, forced displacement, and any other form of injury or loss resulting from a documented violation. Immediate family members may also be considered victims if they have suffered harm as a result of the violation, as in the cases of the families of forcibly disappeared persons.
- **The Survivor:** It is the victim who has survived the violation. The Syrian Network for Human Rights uses this term in particular in the context of survivors of detention and torture, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and survivors of assaults. This term is used alongside the term “victim” without an absolute preference for either of them, taking into account the context and giving preference to the person concerned whenever that person can be identified.
- **The Witness:** It is any person who has direct or indirect knowledge relevant to a documented incident and who provides information to the Syrian Network for Human Rights. This includes eyewitnesses, hearsay witnesses, family members, members of the local community, medical personnel, rescue workers, and other persons who possess relevant information. This term, in this methodology, does not refer to a formal legal status.
- **The Media Worker:** It is any person who performs a professional or regular function in the gathering, production, or dissemination of news, including journalists, whether employed or freelance, editors, videographers, photographers, sound technicians, and other technicians. This category also includes citizen journalists, that is, persons who do not practice media work as a regular profession, but who perform a regular and clear function in conveying and disseminating news from areas affected by the conflict, including through social media. This category also includes students enrolled in media or journalism programs whenever they are actually performing this function.

The media worker retains this status unless the person takes on a continuous combat role within an organized armed group. If the person participates directly in hostilities on an intermittent basis, then he loses protection from direct attack for the duration of each instance of direct participation, without losing his classification as a media worker for the purposes of documentation. If he takes on a continuous combat role, he is reclassified as a combatant, and he may be reclassified as a media worker upon the end of that role.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights does not adopt the term “offensive combat operations” that was used in some of its earlier methodologies, because international humanitarian law does not distinguish, for the purposes of determining the status of a combatant or direct participation in hostilities, between offensive operations and defensive operations.

- **The Medical Worker:** It is any person who performs a medical or health function, on a permanent or temporary basis, including doctors, nurses, paramedics, laboratory technicians, ambulance drivers, and all other workers who provide medical care, medical evacuation services, or health support directly connected to treatment. This category includes persons who carry out medical tasks in emergency situations, whether their assignment is formal or de facto. The protection afforded to medical personnel under international humanitarian law applies to all who perform medical functions within this meaning. The medical worker does not lose his protection unless he commits, outside the scope of his humanitarian function, acts harmful to the adversary. The carrying of light individual weapons for self-defense or for the defense of patients is not a cause for the loss of this protection.
- **The Humanitarian Worker:** It is any person who works or volunteers with a humanitarian organization, including international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in the provision of humanitarian assistance or protection. This classification includes members of the Civil Defense.

5.3. The Demographic Characteristics of the Victims

- **The Man:** a male who has reached 18 years of age or more.
- **The Woman:** a female who has reached 18 years of age or more.
- **The Child:** every person under 18 years of age, in accordance with Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Where appropriate, children are also classified by sex into males and females.
- **The Infant:** a child from birth up to the age of two years.
- **The Elderly Person:** one who has reached 60 years of age or more.
- **The Person with a Disability:** every person who has long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder his full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others, in accordance with Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Syrian Network for Human Rights records the disability status whenever it is known, and documents the violations that affect persons with disabilities disproportionately or that target them in particular.

These demographic categories are not mutually exclusive. A victim may fall within more than one category at the same time, such as a girl with a disability, or an elderly person with a disability. The Syrian Network for Human Rights records all of the categories applicable to each victim.

5.4. Incidents and Violations

- **The Incident:** It is any event that results in, or involves, a potential violation of international human rights law, international humanitarian law, or international criminal law. An incident may consist of a single act, such as a single airstrike, or of an interconnected series of acts occurring in a specific time and place, such as a military operation that results in several violations. A unique identifier is assigned to each incident in the database of the Syrian Network for Human Rights.
- **Extrajudicial Killing:** It is the deprivation of life at the hands of an agent of the state or a person acting under its authorization, support, or acquiescence, when this killing is not based on a prior judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court affording all of the indispensable judicial guarantees, or when it occurs in violation of the legal standards applicable to the use of lethal force. In the context of law enforcement, this includes the contravention of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms. In the context of armed conflict, it includes the contravention of the rules on the conduct of hostilities, including the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions in attack. In the context of a non-international armed conflict, the killing of a person who is hors de combat or of a person who does not participate directly in hostilities is an extrajudicial killing. In the context of occupation, the killing of a protected person in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention is an extrajudicial killing.
- **The Massacre:** It is a procedural classification adopted by the Syrian Network for Human Rights to denote any single incident that results in the killing of five or more civilians. This classification is not a technical legal term, but rather an operational criterion used to set documentation priorities, to allocate investigation resources, and to organize public reports. The adoption of this threshold does not mean that incidents in which the number of civilians killed is fewer than five are less serious or less deserving of documentation, since the Network documents all cases of extrajudicial killing regardless of the number of victims.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights keeps this threshold at five victims so as to maintain consistency with its earlier practices, while ensuring that all of the documented killings, regardless of their number, are assessed in terms of patterns, legal classification, and reporting.

5.5. The Classified Violations (the Principal Acts and Violations)

This includes the definitions of the following principal acts and violations:

- **Arbitrary Detention:** As defined in Section 5.2 under the heading “the arbitrarily detained person.”
- **Enforced Disappearance:** As defined in Section 5.2 under the heading “the forcibly disappeared person.”
- **Torture:** It is any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person, for such purposes as obtaining from him or from another person information or a confession, punishing him for an act that he has committed or is suspected of having committed, intimidating or coercing him, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by a public official or other person acting in an official capacity, or occurs at his instigation or with his consent or acquiescence. The Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts this definition as a fundamental criterion for the classification of acts of torture.
- **Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment:** It is the acts that do not satisfy all of the elements of torture, but which cause grave physical or psychological suffering, and which constitute a violation of international human rights law or international humanitarian law. The distinction between them and torture is assessed in light of the severity of the suffering, the purpose of the act, and the degree of intent, in accordance with the interpretive approach adopted in international jurisprudence and practice.
- **Sexual and Gender-Based Violence:** It is any act of violence directed against a person on account of that person’s sex or gender, or any act of a sexual nature committed against the person without consent. This includes rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, sexual torture, sexual humiliation, forced nudity, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents this type of violation as an independent category, and also records it under the relevant general classification, such as torture or crimes against humanity, wherever that is applicable.
- **Conflict-Related Sexual Violence:** It is sexual violence that occurs in the context of an armed conflict or that is linked to it. This includes sexual violence committed by combatants, or connected to militarization, or that occurs in detention centers, or that is used as a tactic of war or as part of a widespread or systematic attack against the civilian population. The Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts in this area the definition used within the framework of the United Nations on conflict-related sexual violence.
- **Forced Displacement:** It is the forced movement of persons from their habitual places of residence as a result of armed conflicts, or to avoid their effects, or as a result of generalized violence, human rights violations, or natural or human-made disasters. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents both internal displacement and cross-border displacement. Forced displacement includes direct displacement resulting from orders, threats, or physical coercion, and it also includes indirect or structural displacement resulting from the destruction of infrastructure, the imposition of siege, the denial of basic services, or the creation of conditions that render the area uninhabitable.

- **Forcible Return:** It is the forcible return of a displaced person or refugee to a territory or area in which the person faces a real risk of being subjected to persecution, torture, cruel treatment, or other grave harm. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents forcible return as a violation of the principle of non-refoulement under international refugee law, the Convention against Torture, and customary international law.
- **Destruction of Civilian Objects:** It is the destruction or damaging of objects that do not constitute military objectives, in a manner that constitutes a violation of the principle of distinction. Civilian objects include all objects that do not, by their nature, location, purpose, or use, make an effective contribution to military action, and whose destruction, capture, or neutralization, in whole or in part, does not offer a definite military advantage in the circumstances ruling at the time of the attack.
- **Attack on Protected Objects:** It is an attack that targets objects enjoying special protection under international humanitarian law, including medical units and means of medical transport, cultural property, objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, installations containing dangerous forces, such as dams, bridges, and nuclear stations, and religious buildings. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents attacks on protected objects within the categories specified in Section 11.
- **The Siege:** It is the encirclement of a populated area by one of the parties to the conflict, coupled with the restriction of the movement of persons and goods to and from the area, in a manner that leads to the deprivation of the civilian population of food, medical supplies, and other necessities essential for survival. If the siege is carried out with the intent of starving the civilian population or coercing it into surrender by depriving it of essential supplies, then it constitutes a violation of the prohibition of starvation as a method of warfare, and it may amount, depending on the circumstances, to a war crime or a crime against humanity.
- **Collective Punishment:** It is any penalty or sanction imposed on individuals or groups of the population on account of acts that they did not personally commit. Collective punishment is prohibited in all cases under international humanitarian law, and it also constitutes a violation of the principle of individual criminal responsibility and of the guarantees of a fair trial.
- **Settlement Activity:** It is the transfer by the occupying power of its civilian population into the occupied territory, or the establishment of residential, agricultural, industrial, or service infrastructure in support of this transfer. Settlement activity is prohibited under international humanitarian law, and it may constitute a war crime in accordance with the Rome Statute.
- **Annexation:** It is a state's unilateral declaration of its sovereignty over territory belonging to another state, whether this takes place through a formal declaration, legislation, administrative measures, or by the imposition of facts on the ground, such as the extension of the application of its laws, the establishment of permanent infrastructure, or the transfer of population, leading to a de facto annexation. The annexation of occupied territory is prohibited under international humanitarian law and customary international law, and it produces no legal effect on the status of the land or on the rights of its population.

- **Administrative Detention under Occupation:** It is the detention of protected persons or the imposition of assigned residence upon them by the occupying authority for security reasons, on the basis of the relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, without bringing a criminal charge against them or subjecting them to trial. This detention is lawful only if it is required by an actual security necessity, and it remains subject to the established procedural safeguards, including the right to challenge and to periodic review by a competent body.
- **Housing, Land, and Property Violations:** They are any acts or omissions that deprive a person of his right to housing, land, or property, including seizure, confiscation, expropriation, destruction, denial of access, forced eviction, legislative or administrative dispossession, and the obstruction of the restitution of rights. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents these violations in light of the Pinheiro Principles and international human rights law, including the right to property, the right to adequate housing, and the right to the inviolability of the home, and in the context of occupation, in light of the restrictions and prohibitions set out in the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Hague Regulations.
- **Practices Restricting Freedoms:** These practices include all of the activities carried out by the parties to the conflict with the aim of restricting the freedom of civilians, including freedom of expression, freedom of movement, freedom of demonstration, and freedom of belief, as well as censorship of the media and the internet.

5.6. Operational Terms

- **Verification:** It is the process by which the Syrian Network for Human Rights determines whether a reported incident or available piece of information satisfies the minimum evidence required for its inclusion in its database. Verification does not mean the conclusive assertion of all of the facts of the incident, but rather it means subjecting the information to the procedures of examination, scrutiny, and cross-comparison set out in Section 8, and reaching a result that satisfies the adopted standard. The detailed requirements for verification are set out in Section 8.
- **Corroboration:** It is the confirmation of the validity of a reported piece of information through an independent source, or through documentary, digital, or material evidence. The corroborating source or evidence is required to be independent of the original source, which means that the corroborated information has been obtained through a separate channel and does not trace back to the same source.
- **Open-Source Materials:** They are the publicly available information that can be accessed without the need for a special license, a security clearance, or covert means. These materials include social media content, news reports, satellite imagery, official statements, court documents, legislative texts, public databases, and any other materials available to the public. The use by the Syrian Network for Human Rights of open-source materials is subject to the protocols set out in Section 16.
- **Digital Evidence:** It is any information stored or transmitted in digital form that can be used to support or establish the facts of a documented incident. It includes photographs, video clips, audio recordings, social media posts, metadata, geolocation data, satellite imagery, and communications records. The processing of digital evidence is subject to the standards set out in Section 16, and in a manner consistent with the Berkeley Protocol.

And the Metadata: it is the technical data accompanying digital files, such as the date of capture, the geographic location, the type of device used, the camera settings, and any technical information that assists in verifying the authenticity and the context of the digital material.

- **Material Evidence:** It is the tangible objects that can be used to establish the facts of a documented incident, including weapons remnants, munitions fragments, soil samples, biological samples, clothing, documents, and any other relevant material objects. The handling of material evidence is subject to chain-of-custody requirements.
- **Testimonial Evidence:** It is the oral or written statements provided by witnesses, survivors, family members of victims, or others who have relevant knowledge of a documented incident. Testimonial evidence is collected through interviews conducted in accordance with the protocols set out in Sections 6 and 7.
- **Chain of Custody:** It is the documented sequence of the preservation, control, transfer, analysis, and disposition of evidence, from the moment of its collection or acquisition until its use in reports or its submission to a judicial or quasi-judicial body. The complete record of the chain of custody enables any subsequent user of the evidence to verify that it has not been subjected to alteration, tampering, or contamination. The chain of custody also includes the recording of any access, modification, or analysis that occurs to the evidence during its preservation cycle, and the Syrian Network for Human Rights maintains chain-of-custody records for all of the evidence that it collects or acquires, in accordance with the standards specified in Section 16.

The strength of evidence varies according to its nature, the multiplicity of its sources, and its degree of independence, and it is assessed within the verification and corroboration system adopted in the Network.

Part

04

DOCUMENTATION METHODOLOGY



Section 6: Source Management

6.1. Identifying and Recruiting Sources

The Syrian Network for Human Rights manages a wide network of sources across the various governorates and areas of Syrian territory. These sources include eyewitnesses, survivors, family members of victims, community leaders, local activists, medical personnel, rescue workers, civil society actors, media workers, and any other persons who have direct or indirect knowledge of the documented incidents. The Network also receives information from institutional sources, including local councils, humanitarian organizations, and medical facilities, in addition to official bodies.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights works actively to identify and recruit new sources in the areas that require the strengthening of coverage. Sources are identified through referrals received from existing trusted contacts, through the public intake channels of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, including the website forms and the verified accounts on social media, through field presence in the areas that can be accessed, and through coordination with the approved partners.

6.2. Verifying Sources and Assessing Their Reliability

All of the sources in the Syrian Network for Human Rights are subject to a methodical assessment of reliability in accordance with the following criteria:

(a) The degree of proximity to the event:

The knowledge of the source is assessed on the basis of whether it is a direct witness, an affected party, a participant in the event, or one who conveys the information indirectly. Direct sources are given greater weight in the assessment.

(b) The prior record of the source:

This includes the assessment of the accuracy of the prior information, the extent to which it was corroborated by independent evidence, and any instances of correction or of prior inconsistency in the statements.

(c) Internal and external consistency:

The extent of the internal coherence of the source's statement, and its consistency with the other information available to the Network concerning the incident or the general context.

(d) The possibility of bias or interest:

This includes any political, social, military, or economic affiliation that may affect the impartiality of the information. The existence of a potential bias does not lead to the exclusion of the source, but rather it is recorded and taken into account in the assessment.

(e) Factors of pressure or coercion:

The possibility that the source is subjected to surveillance, threat, or pressure from any party that may affect the accuracy of the information or the freedom to provide it is assessed. Each source is assigned a cumulative reliability score that is updated periodically. Unconfirmed information is not adopted in the database unless it has been corroborated by an independent source or supporting evidence, unless the verification protocols (Section 8) provide otherwise.

6.3. Source Protection

The protection of sources is a continuing obligation that takes precedence, where necessary, over the requirements of information gathering, and the Syrian Network for Human Rights takes the reasonable measures to protect the safety and security of its sources. The protection of sources represents an operational obligation that applies at all stages of communication, from the moment of the initial contact until the preservation or use of the data.

The following protocols are applied in this context:

- a. Communications security:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights communicates with its sources through secure channels. The choice of the means of communication is determined on the basis of a risk assessment that takes into account the working environment, the technical capacity of the source, and the surveillance capabilities available to the authorities controlling the area in which the source is located. The Network issues internal guidance concerning the approved communication tools and platforms, and it is updated continuously in accordance with the development of the security conditions.
- b. Identity protection:** The identities of sources are stored separately from the substantive information that they provide. Access to the identity data of sources is limited to the authorized staff in the Syrian Network for Human Rights, in accordance with the need-to-know principle. The identities of sources are not disclosed in public reports except on the basis of the express and informed consent of the source, and they are not disclosed to third parties, including data-sharing partners, except with the specific consent of the source to this disclosure, and in accordance with the procedures set out in Section 18.
- c. Limited retention:** The identity data of sources is reviewed periodically to determine the extent of the continuing operational need to retain it, and it is deleted or securely destroyed whenever the legitimate necessity for it ceases, in a manner consistent with the preservation and documentation requirements.
- d. Risk assessment:** Before embarking on contact with any source in a high-risk area, such as the occupied territories, areas of active conflict, or the areas under the control of the party whose violations are being documented, the Syrian Network for Human Rights conducts a risk assessment to determine whether the contact can be made without exposing the source to an unacceptable risk. If this assessment concludes that the contact involves an unacceptable risk, the Network postpones the contact until the conditions improve, or it resorts to indirect means to obtain the information.
- e. Communication protocols:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights does not contact its sources in places or through channels that are subject to the surveillance or control of the party whose violations are being documented. It also does not ask sources to travel to places that may expose them to danger. The Network takes into account, as far as possible, the preferences of the source with regard to the time, place, and manner of the contact.

- f. Contingency planning:** With the safety of the source as the overriding priority, if it becomes apparent to the Syrian Network for Human Rights that one of the sources faces an imminent threat as a result of providing it with information, then it activates its emergency protocols, which may include referral to bodies or protection organizations, the cutting off of contact, the destruction of identifying records, or the taking of any other measures that the circumstances require. The detailed emergency protocols are kept in the internal security plan of the Syrian Network for Human Rights.
- g. Data minimization:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights does not collect the identifying information about the source except what is reasonably necessary for the purposes of documentation, verification, and protection.
- h. Psychological safety:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights takes into account the potential psychological impact of communicating with sources, particularly survivors of grave violations, and it adapts the interview methods so as to reduce the likelihood of re-traumatization.

6.4. Source Diversity and Geographic and Demographic Coverage

The Syrian Network for Human Rights regularly monitors the geographic and demographic distribution of its source network, with the aim of identifying coverage gaps and ensuring that its documentation work reflects, to the greatest extent possible, the full range of the violations occurring across the various parts of Syrian territory, and their impact on the various categories of the population. The Syrian Network for Human Rights discloses, where appropriate, the methodological limitations relating to source coverage in its public reports.

Source diversity is subject to the following principles:

- a. Geographic coverage:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights seeks to maintain source networks that cover the various Syrian governorates, including the areas that are subject to distinct patterns of military or administrative control. Gaps in geographic coverage are identified, documented, and addressed through the recruitment of active sources in the areas concerned.
- b. Demographic representation:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights seeks to maintain source networks that include men and women, persons of different age groups, and individuals from various ethnic, religious, and sectarian components, and from diverse social and economic backgrounds. The Network acknowledges that its source network may not fully reflect the demographic composition of the affected population, and it takes this limitation into account when analyzing its data. When demographic gaps are observed, the Network takes specific steps to recruit sources from the underrepresented categories.
- c. Institutional diversity:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights seeks to obtain information from a diverse spectrum of institutional sources, including medical facilities, humanitarian organizations, local councils, and civil society organizations, alongside individual witnesses and community contacts, with the aim of strengthening the verification of information and reducing reliance on a single type of source.

- d. Functional diversity:** The Network seeks to engage sources with diverse functions and expertise, such as medical workers, media workers, rights advocates, relief workers, and members of local communities.
- e. Conflict-of-interest management:** When a source is affiliated with one of the parties to the conflict, with a political faction, or with an institution whose conduct is being documented, this affiliation is recorded, and the information provided by the source is subjected to heightened scrutiny requirements. Any potential motive for misleading, exaggeration, or concealment is also recorded.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights does not automatically exclude affiliated sources, but it does not rely on the information they provide as the sole basis for recording an incident, unless it is corroborated by additional independent evidence.

- f. Coverage monitoring:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights periodically reviews the extent of the coverage of its sources, and conducts an internal assessment of the geographic and demographic distribution of these sources, of the extent of their responsiveness and reliability in each area, and of the types of violations for which source coverage remains weaker. The results of these assessments are used in determining the Network's priorities in source recruitment. The absence of sources or the weakness of coverage in a particular area does not mean the absence of violations there, but rather it may reflect a limited capacity for monitoring.

Section 7: Informed Consent, Confidentiality, and Data Protection

7.1. Informed Consent

The Syrian Network for Human Rights obtains informed consent from all of the persons who provide information or testimonies, prior to the collection, use, or external sharing of the data, so as to ensure that the participation is voluntary and based on a clear understanding of the nature of the process, its risks, and its effects.

Informed consent requires that the person has received, in clear and comprehensible language, sufficient information concerning the following:

- a.** The identity and nature of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, as an independent non-governmental organization that works in the field of documenting human rights violations.
- b.** The specific purpose of the collection of the information, including documentation, the preservation of evidence, and the possibility of its use in the pathways of accountability, transitional justice, rights analysis, and public reporting.

- c. How the information will be used, including its inclusion in the internal database of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, the possibility of its use in its public reports, anonymously or attributed, in accordance with the choice of the person, and the possibility of its being shared with third parties in accordance with the conditions set out below.
- d. The categories of external bodies with which the information may be shared, including the international mechanisms, such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, the international Commission of Inquiry, the International Criminal Court, the courts exercising universal jurisdiction, the national judicial authorities, and the civil society partners. The person is informed that the sharing of the information with each one of these categories requires independent and specific consent.
- e. The right of the person to refuse to participate, to refuse to answer any particular question, to withdraw consent at any stage, and to request the deletion of the information already provided, or the restriction of its use, within the possible operational and legal limits.
- f. The measures that the Syrian Network for Human Rights takes to protect the identity and safety of the person, and the limits of this protection.
- g. The constraints that prevent the guaranteeing of absolute confidentiality, including the possibility that the digital records are subjected to unauthorized access despite the security measures taken, and the possibility that the information shared with third parties, under data-exchange arrangements, is subject to disclosure obligations specific to those bodies.
- h. That the Syrian Network for Human Rights is not a judicial body, a legal representative, or a service provider, and that the provision of information to it does not create a legal relationship, and does not entail a right to obtain legal, financial, or other assistance.
- i. The possibility of recontacting the person in the future if the nature of the use changes or a necessity arises to obtain additional consent.

The staff of the Syrian Network for Human Rights record the consent at the time of data collection. Consent may be oral or written. If it is oral, the staff member establishes the fact of the consent and its date in the case file. If it is written, it is taken, wherever possible, using a form drawn up in Arabic, or in any other language that the person understands, provided that it clarifies the points mentioned above in clear and comprehensible language.

Special consent procedures are applied in the following cases:

- **Children:** If the person providing the information is under eighteen years of age, the consent of one of the parents or the legal guardian is obtained. If neither of them is present, the Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the child protection protocol set out in Section 14.1, and the interview does not begin except in the presence of a trusted adult, and after confirming that conducting the interview serves the best interests of the child.
- **Persons who are detained or subjected to coercion:** If the person providing the information is detained at the time, recently released, or subjected to any form of coercion or pressure, the Syrian Network for Human Rights assesses whether he is able to grant consent freely. If it concludes that his circumstances do not permit that, then the interview is not conducted, or it is postponed until the conditions of free and informed consent are available.
- **High-risk categories:** Enhanced consent and protection measures are applied to high-risk witnesses, survivors of sexual violence, defectors, and sources within hostile environments.

7.2. Withdrawal of Consent and Deletion of Data

Any person who has provided information to the Syrian Network for Human Rights has the right to:

- a. Withdraw consent entirely.
- b. Request the deletion of his personal data.
- c. Request the restriction of the use of his data to specific purposes.
- d. Request the cessation of the sharing of his data with third parties in the future.

Upon receiving this request, the Syrian Network for Human Rights takes the following steps:

- a. The identifying information of the person is deleted from the active database. As for the testimonial evidence that he provided, it is deleted or retained after the anonymization of his identity, according to the wish of the person.
- b. If the information has already been shared with a third party under a data-exchange agreement, the Syrian Network for Human Rights notifies that party of the withdrawal of consent, and requests the deletion of the data or the restriction of its use, in accordance with the provisions of the applicable data-exchange agreement.
- c. If the information was previously published in a report issued by the Syrian Network for Human Rights with a reference to the source, the Network removes the reference to the source from any digital copy of the report and establishes this modification in the corrections log. As for the printed materials that were previously distributed, they cannot be retrieved.

- d. The withdrawal of consent does not affect the lawfulness of the prior uses that were carried out on the basis of consent that was valid at the time.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights records the fact of the withdrawal of consent and the steps taken concerning it in the case file.

7.3. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is the default rule for all of the information provided to the Syrian Network for Human Rights. No identifying information concerning the source, the witness, the survivor, or a family member of the victim may be disclosed without the express consent of the person concerned, except in the exceptional circumstances specified below.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the following levels of confidentiality:

- a. **Full confidentiality:** The identifying data is separated from the substantive data, and the identity of the person and all of the identifying data concerning him, including the name, the location, the contact details, the physical description, the family relationships, and any other details that may lead to the identification of his identity, are withheld from all external parties and from all published materials. The information provided by the person may be used in databases and internal or public reports in aggregated or anonymized form, provided that it does not include any details that could lead to its being traced back to the person concerned.
- b. **Attributed use on the basis of express consent:** When the person grants express and informed consent, the Syrian Network for Human Rights may attribute the information to him by his name, by a pseudonym, or by any other identifier, in the published reports or in the data shared with third parties. The person is informed in advance of the specific publication or sharing arrangements before the information is attributed to him.
- c. **Limited disclosure on the basis of consent:** When the person consents to the sharing of his information with a specific category of third parties, such as an international mechanism or a prosecuting body exercising universal jurisdiction, his identifying information may be disclosed to that body alone in accordance with the terms of the data-exchange agreement, without its being published or disclosed to any other body.
- **Anonymization procedures:** When the information is published or shared in anonymized form, the Syrian Network for Human Rights applies sufficient anonymization procedures that prevent any party from identifying the person concerned, including the parties that possess local knowledge of the context of the incident. This includes the deletion of names,

precise locations, dates that may facilitate the identification of the person, family details, and other unique characteristics. The adequacy of the anonymization is assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the size and characteristics of the community concerned.

- **Exception:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights may disclose identifying information without consent if it determines, in good faith, that non-disclosure will lead to an imminent threat to life. This exception is applied within the narrowest limits, and it may not be resorted to except with the consent of the senior management in the Network.

7.4. Data Protection

The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies data protection measures with the aim of safeguarding all of the information in its possession from unauthorized access, modification, destruction, or disclosure and leakage. These measures include the digital data, the physical records, and the means of communication.

■ Digital security:

- a. All of the databases and digital files that contain personal information, testimonial evidence, or data relating to perpetrators are encrypted, during storage and during transfer, using encryption standards that reflect the prevailing best practices.
- b. Access to the databases and files is limited to the authorized staff of the Syrian Network for Human Rights only, in accordance with the need-to-know principle. Access permissions are determined according to the functional role, and they are reviewed periodically.
- c. The Syrian Network for Human Rights maintains access logs that show who accessed which data and when, and these logs are reviewed periodically to monitor any unusual patterns or anomalies.
- d. Backup copies of all of the databases are kept in geographically separate locations, and the backups are subject to the same encryption standards and access controls applied to the original copies.
- e. The Syrian Network for Human Rights conducts a periodic assessment of its digital security infrastructure, including vulnerability testing, the review of encryption standards, and the updating of systems in response to the identified risks and the evolving threats.

In the event of a security breach or unauthorized access to sensitive data, the Syrian Network for Human Rights activates the incident response protocol, which includes the assessment of the damage, the containment of the breach, its documentation, and the notification of the persons at risk when that is necessary for their protection.

■ Physical security:

- f. The physical records, including the paper files, the printed photographs, and the material evidence, are kept in secure facilities with controlled access, and entry to these records is logged.
- g. The physical records are digitized wherever that is possible, and the digital copies are subject to the standards established for digital security.

■ Communications security:

- h. The Syrian Network for Human Rights uses secure communication channels in all of its communications with sources, witnesses, and partners. The choice of channel is determined on the basis of the risk assessment referred to in Section 6.3.

■ Data retention:

- i. The Syrian Network for Human Rights retains the data for as long as it is necessary for the purposes of documentation, accountability, and transitional justice. Given the nature of the Syrian context, in which accountability processes may extend for decades, the Network does not adopt a fixed data-retention period. The data that is no longer relevant to any existing or anticipated purpose of documentation, accountability, or transitional justice may be deleted, or its identity anonymized, after a review conducted by the senior management of the Network.

■ Risks associated with jurisdiction:

- j. The Syrian Network for Human Rights assesses the legal risks associated with the storage and processing of data, including the data protection laws in force in any jurisdiction in which the data is stored, the possibility of its being subject to binding legal procedures, such as subpoenas, search warrants, or disclosure orders, and the risk of access to it by governmental authorities. The Network selects the data storage locations and the service providers on the basis of this assessment.

7.5. Consent to Data Sharing

When the Syrian Network for Human Rights proposes to share data that includes personal information with a third party, it obtains specific consent from the persons to whom that information relates, in addition to the general informed consent that was obtained at the time of the data collection in accordance with Section 7.1.

Personal data is not shared except:

- a. With separate and specific consent.
- b. Under a written data-exchange agreement.
- c. After the assessment of the legal and security risks.
- d. In accordance with the principle of the minimum necessary.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights distinguishes between the following categories of data recipients, each of which has different consent requirements and different levels of risk:

- a. **International mechanisms:** These include, for example, the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, the international Commission of Inquiry, and the International Criminal Court. The sharing of information with these bodies serves the purpose of international accountability, and it is, in the main, relatively low-risk for the sources, given the standards of confidentiality and source protection that these bodies adopt.
- b. **Public prosecution bodies that exercise universal jurisdiction:** The sharing of information with prosecution bodies in third states, such as Germany, France, Sweden, and the Netherlands, contributes to supporting the procedures of criminal accountability. The Syrian Network for Human Rights informs the sources that their information may be submitted to a foreign criminal justice system, that the competent authorities may contact them, and that the information will be subject to the legal framework of the receiving state, including the potential disclosure obligations under its code of criminal procedure. Consent is taken on this basis.

The policies of consent, confidentiality, data protection, and data sharing are subject to periodic review, to ensure:

- Legal compliance.
- Operational safety.
- Keeping pace with the changing risks.
- Continuous improvement.

All of the modifications are documented in an internal methodical log.

Section 8: Verification and Corroboration Standards

8.1. Definition of Verification

- An incident or victim record is deemed “documented” in the database of the Syrian Network for Human Rights when it has undergone the procedures of verification and cross-checking set out in this Section, and has satisfied the minimum evidence required. What is meant by documented here is the internal documentation within the database, and not necessarily public publication.
- Documentation means that the Syrian Network for Human Rights has reasonable grounds to believe, on the basis of the available evidence, that the incident occurred as recorded, and that the attribution of responsibility rests on supporting evidence. Documentation does not mean reaching the degree of absolute certainty, but rather it means that the evidence has undergone an organized and methodical assessment process and has satisfied the adopted minimum standards.

8.2. The Minimum Evidentiary Requirements

The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the following minimum verification requirements for the inclusion of the record of any incident or victim in its database:

- a. The primary standard:** At least two independent sources must corroborate the essential facts of the incident, including its occurrence, its time and place approximately, the type of violation, and the identity of the responsible party. The two sources are required to be independent of each other, in the sense that each of them has obtained its information through a separate channel. Two persons who convey the same account from a single original witness are not considered two independent sources under this standard.
- b. The alternative standard:** In the event that only a single source is available, the incident may be included in the database if the account of this source is supported by documentary, digital, or material evidence. This includes photographs, video clips, medical records, satellite imagery, open-source materials, or any material evidence consistent with the account of the source, with consideration given to the possibility of verifying the temporal and spatial context as far as possible.
- c. Reports received from a single source or incomplete reports:** If an incident is reported through a single source only, and no corroborating evidence is available, the incident is recorded within the “under verification” or “pending” category. These reports are not included in the published statistics or the public reports of the Syrian Network for Human Rights until the process of verifying them is completed. The Network continues to follow up on these reports, reclassifying them when the conditions of verification are satisfied.
- d. Mass-casualty incidents and massacres:** For the incidents that involve the killing of five civilians or more, the Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the primary standard as the minimum that must be available. If there is disagreement or uncertainty concerning the number of victims, the lowest number supported by the evidence is recorded, with an indication of the estimated range of victims whenever that is appropriate.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights recognizes that the requirement of two independent sources reduces the risk of including inaccurate reports in the database, but it may also lead to a delay in documenting real violations in the areas where access to sources is limited, such as the occupied territories or remote conflict areas. The Network addresses this limitation through the active recruitment of sources in the under-covered areas, and through the use of open-source materials and satellite imagery as supporting evidence under the alternative standard. The under-verification reports category also ensures that the reported incidents are not lost, even when the corroborating evidence is not immediately available.

8.3. Confidence Levels

The Syrian Network for Human Rights determines a confidence level for each verified incident record, in a manner that reflects the strength of the evidence and its degree of consistency:

- a. Confirmed:** When the essential facts of the incident have been established through two or more independent sources, and were consistent with the available documentary, digital, or material evidence. The identification of the responsible party in this case rests on direct evidence, such as the recognition of witnesses, visual evidence, or intercepted communications, or on strong circumstantial evidence, such as the pattern of attacks, the type of weapon used, or the control over the area.
- b. Probable:** When the essential facts have been established through at least a single source, and were consistent with the corroborating evidence available under the alternative standard, without the full satisfaction of the requirements of the primary standard. The identification of the responsible party in this case rests on considerable circumstantial evidence, but with a lower degree of confidence than the confirmed category.
- c. Reported:** When the incident has been reported through one or more sources, but the process of verifying it has not yet been completed. This category corresponds to the “under verification” or “pending” classification referred to in paragraph 8.2(c). These incidents are included in the internal database for the purposes of follow-up and monitoring, but they do not enter into the published statistics unless they are clearly distinguished and in a manner that does not impair the accuracy of the public presentation.

The confidence level is recorded in the database, and it is reassessed whenever new evidence appears. The level of an incident may be raised from “reported” to “probable” or “confirmed,” and it may also be lowered if contradictory evidence appears or evidence revealing the weakness of the evidentiary basis.

8.4. Cross-Referencing

The Syrian Network for Human Rights conducts cross-references between its various databases, including the databases of victims, detainees, incidents, perpetrators, vital facilities, and weapons, with the aim of enhancing accuracy and detecting inconsistencies, duplications, and patterns. The cross-referencing procedures include the following:

- a.** Detection of duplicate data: Before entering a new record for an incident or victim, the system of the Syrian Network for Human Rights checks the existing records for potential duplication using the name, the date, the location, the demographic data, and other relevant indicators. If a potential duplication is found, the records concerned are reviewed and merged or distinguished as the case requires.
- b.** Consistency verification: The information relating to a single incident is reviewed when it is entered in more than one database, such as the recording of an airstrike in the victims database and in the vital facilities database, to verify the consistency of the date, the location, the type of weapon, the responsible party, and the rest of the shared fields.
- c.** Pattern analysis: The Syrian Network for Human Rights periodically reviews its databases in order to identify the patterns of violations, such as geographic concentration, temporal clustering, weapons-use patterns, and chain-of-command patterns, which are patterns that may corroborate individual incident records or reveal violations that had not been previously monitored.
- d.** External cross-verification: When the Syrian Network for Human Rights has data-exchange agreements with partner organizations, it conducts a cross-reference between its records and the records of those organizations for the purpose of detecting inconsistencies, closing gaps, and verifying the validity of the shared data. This external cross-verification is carried out in accordance with the data protection and consent protocols set out in Sections 7 and 18. In the event of a conflict between the sources, priority is given to the sources that are more direct, independent, or supported by material evidence.

8.5. Error Correction

When the Syrian Network for Human Rights determines that there is an error in one of the database entries, whether through internal review, the appearance of new evidence, cross-referencing, or external observations, it applies the following procedure:

- a.** The nature of the error is assessed, whether it is a factual error, such as an error in the date, the location, the name, or the attribution of responsibility; or an error in classification, such as an error in the legal characterization or in the category of the victim; or the result of a duplicate entry.

- b. The original entry is retained in the database archive, with a statement of the correction, its date, and its reason. The Syrian Network for Human Rights does not delete the original entries permanently, but rather replaces them with corrected entries while retaining an audit log that shows the path of the modification.
- c. If the error is one that affects a published report, the Syrian Network for Human Rights issues a correction in the digital copy of the report. If the error is material, such as an error in the attribution of the violation to the responsible party, the Network publishes a separate correction notice.
- d. If the error involved an incorrect attribution of the violation to a particular party, the Syrian Network for Human Rights reclassifies the incident, and it may notify the party to which the violation was wrongly attributed, as appropriate, whether publicly or through the appropriate data-exchange channels.
- e. The errors that are discovered through the quality-control and review processes, in accordance with Section 19, are recorded in a central error log, and these logs are reviewed periodically in order to identify structural or recurring problems in the documentation process.

Section 9: Documentation of Extrajudicial Killing and Unlawful Death

9.1. The Incident Documentation Workflow

In documenting cases of extrajudicial killing and unlawful deaths, the Syrian Network for Human Rights follows a methodical workflow that begins with the initial reporting and ends with the inclusion of the data in the database. This workflow rests in principle on the Minnesota Protocol of 2016 on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death, adapted in a manner that suits the operational capacities of the Syrian Network for Human Rights and the constraints imposed by the Syrian context.

The stages of this workflow are as follows:

- a. **Initial reporting:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights receives information about a killing incident through its network of sources, the public reporting channels, the open monitoring systems, or media reports. The initial report is recorded with the date and time of receipt, the identity or category of the source, and a summary of the reported facts.
- b. **Preliminary assessment:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights assesses whether the reported killing incident falls within the scope of its documentation mandate, that is, whether it constitutes an extrajudicial killing or an unlawful death in accordance with the adopted definitions, and whether it occurred within the temporal and geographic scope defined in Section 3. Excluded from this are the cases that are not connected to the conflict or to

documented violations, such as natural deaths, deaths resulting from diseases unrelated to the conflict or to the conditions of detention, and deaths resulting exclusively from personal disputes unconnected to a documented violation, unless there is a direct connection to other violations, such as a death resulting from the denial of medical care in the context of a siege or detention.

- c. Evidence collection:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights makes contact with the witnesses, the survivors, the family members of the victims, and others who have information about the incident. It also collects open-source materials, such as photographs, video clips, social media posts, satellite imagery, and any available documentary evidence, including medical reports and death certificates. The collection of evidence is carried out in accordance with the protocols set out in Sections 7, 8, and 16.
- d. Verification and corroboration:** The incident undergoes the verification and corroboration procedures set out in Section 8.
- e. Entry of the data into the database:** Once the verification requirements are completed, the incident and victim records are included in the database of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, with the completion of the relevant fields to the extent that the available evidence permits.
- f. Legal classification:** The legal characterization of the incident is determined in accordance with the rules and procedures set out in Section 4.
- g. Continuous review:** The record remains subject to continuous review, and it is updated whenever new evidence or additional information appears.

9.2. Identification of the Victim

For each documented victim of extrajudicial killing or unlawful death, the Syrian Network for Human Rights collects, as far as possible, the following data:

- The full name and any known pseudonyms or alternative names.
- Sex.
- Age at the time of the incident, whether precisely or within an estimated range.
- The demographic category, such as man, woman, child, infant, elderly person, or person with a disability.
- Nationality and place of origin, including the governorate, the region, and the district or town wherever possible.
- The civilian or combatant status, with a statement of the basis on which this determination rested.
- The occupation or functional capacity, including whether the victim was a media worker, a medical worker, or a humanitarian worker, whenever that is applicable.

- The place of the killing, including the governorate, the region, the district or town, and the specific location wherever possible.
- The date and time of the killing.
- The circumstances of the killing, including the means used, the type of weapon, and the general context of the incident.
- The party responsible for the killing, with a statement of the basis on which the attribution rests.
- The supporting evidence, including photographs, video clips, witness testimonies, open-source materials, and other relevant evidence.
- The unique identifier assigned to the victim in the database of the Syrian Network for Human Rights.
- Any additional information relevant to the legal classification of the incident.

When the identity of the victim cannot be determined by name, the Syrian Network for Human Rights records all of the available identifying particulars, such as the sex, the approximate age, the physical description, the location, and the circumstances of the death, and it assigns a unique identifier to the victim. The unidentified victims are included in the database and in the published statistics, with an indication that the process of identification has not yet been completed.

9.3. Determination of the Cause of Death

The Syrian Network for Human Rights determines the cause of death on the basis of the available evidence, which may include the following:

- Witness statements:** The accounts of the persons who witnessed the killing incident or examined the body of the victim.
- Medical reports:** The documents issued by the workers in the medical field who examined the victim or the body, including the medical estimates relating to the cause of death.
- Visual evidence:** The photographs and video clips that show the body, the injuries, or the circumstances of the death.
- Weapons analysis:** The identification of the type of weapon used on the basis of the remnants, the impact patterns, or the assessments of experts.
- Forensic evidence:** The results of the forensic examination, wherever it is available and accessible.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights acknowledges that forensic examination is often not available in the Syrian context, and that the determination of the cause of death rests in many cases on non-forensic evidence that is nonetheless coherent and multi-source.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights records the method of killing in its database according to a standardized classification that includes, among other things, airstrikes, ground munitions, such as artillery, mortar shells, and rockets, gunfire, explosions, including improvised explosive devices, car bombs, and mines, stabbing or penetrating injuries, blunt-force injuries, chemical weapons, incendiary weapons, death in detention, whether as a result of torture, neglect, execution, or for undetermined reasons, drowning, and other means. If the method cannot be determined, it is recorded as unknown.

9.4. The Presumption of Civilian Status

The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the presumption of civilian status to all of the victims. If the evidence does not establish that the victim was a combatant or directly participating in the hostilities at the time of the incident, he is classified as a civilian. This presumption rests on the rules recognized in international humanitarian law, and the Syrian Network for Human Rights applies it in all types of conflicts, as well as in law enforcement situations.

This presumption is rebutted when the evidence establishes one or more of the following matters:

- a. That the victim was a member of the armed forces of one of the parties to the conflict.
- b. That the victim was a member of an organized armed group and performed a continuous combat function within it.
- c. That the victim was directly participating in the hostilities at the time of the incident, within the meaning adopted in the Interpretive Guidance of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

When the presumption of civilian status is rebutted, the victim is reclassified as a combatant or a direct participant in the hostilities, as the case may be, and the evidence justifying the reclassification is recorded in the database.

9.5. Massacre Classification

The Syrian Network for Human Rights classifies any single incident that leads to the killing of five civilians or more, in accordance with the definition adopted in Section 5.4, as a massacre. This classification entails the application of enhanced documentation procedures, among them giving the incident priority in the investigation, allocating additional human resources to it, and seeking to document each victim independently. The massacre classification is applied in addition to the individual victim records and the legal characterization of the incident, not as an alternative to them.

9.6. Mass Graves and the Discoveries Following the Fall of the Assad Regime

After the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, it became possible that the Syrian Network for Human Rights would be able to access mass graves, the records of detention centers, and institutional archives that may contain evidence of killings that had not been documented before. The Network applies the following protocol in dealing with these discoveries:

- a. Recording the discovery:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the location of the discovery, its date, the party that discovered it, and the preliminary observations relating to the site or the discovered records.
- b. Coordination with identification mechanisms:** If there is a national or international mechanism competent in the identification of remains, such as the national body competent for the missing, the Syrian Network for Human Rights coordinates with it in a manner that does not infringe on its independence. The Network does not undertake exhumation or forensic examination of remains; rather, its role is confined to documenting the existence of the mass graves and their circumstances, and recording the identification results issued by the competent bodies.
- c. Matching with the existing records:** The remains or the victims who have been newly identified are matched with the databases of the Syrian Network for Human Rights concerning cases of enforced disappearance and detainees. If a potential or confirmed match appears, the enforced-disappearance or detention record is updated with the new information in accordance with the relevant protocols.
- d. Attribution and legal classification:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the legal framework in force at the time the killing occurred, and it attributes the violation to the responsible party on the basis of the available evidence. If the mass grave is found in a facility belonging to the Assad regime or in its proximity, such as a military base, a detention center, or the headquarters of an intelligence apparatus, that constitutes circumstantial evidence of the regime's responsibility, but the Network seeks, whenever possible, to reinforce this conclusion with additional evidence.
- e. Preservation of evidence:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights calls for the preservation of the mass grave sites and the records of the detention facilities as potential evidence in future accountability proceedings, and it documents any unauthorized tampering, destruction, modification, or disturbance affecting these sites or records.

9.7. The Structure of the Database

The victims database in the Syrian Network for Human Rights records each victim in an independent entry that bears a unique identifier. This entry includes all of the data fields set out in Section 9.2, the confidence level determined in accordance with Section 8.3, the legal classification determined in accordance with Section 4, and the chain of custody of any evidence that has been collected.

The database supports the capabilities of classification and sorting by governorate, sex, age, responsible party, type of weapon, date, and other relevant fields, and it also allows cross-referencing with the incidents database, the perpetrators database, and the detainees database.

Section 10: Documentation of Arbitrary Detention, Enforced Disappearance, and Torture

10.1. Definitions

This Section applies the definitions of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, set out in Sections 5.2 and 5.5.

In addition to that, this Section adopts the following operational term:

The released person / the survivor of detention: This is the person who was previously deprived of his liberty and was then released or managed to escape. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the testimonies of the released persons as a fundamental source of the information relating to the conditions of detention, torture, and the fate of the persons who are still detained or forcibly disappeared.

10.2. The Documentation Workflow

The process of documenting arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture follows a methodical, sequential workflow that includes:

- a. Initial reporting:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights receives information about the arrest or detention through its network of sources, the families of the victims, the public reporting channels, the released detainees, or through open-source monitoring. The initial report is recorded with the date of receipt, the identity or category of the source, and a summary of the reported facts.
- b. Admissibility assessment:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights assesses whether the

reported incident of deprivation of liberty falls within the scope of its documentation mandate. It documents all of the cases of deprivation of liberty that constitute, or may constitute, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, or unlawful detention under international human rights law, international humanitarian law, or the law of occupation. The Network does not document the cases of arrest that are carried out pursuant to a valid judicial warrant, in accordance with due process, and for a reason relating to a legally recognized crime, unless there are indications that the detention is arbitrary or that the detainee was subjected to torture or other violations. As for the cases of abduction or detention committed by non-state actors, they are documented within independent categories according to their nature and the legal framework applicable to them.

- c. Evidence collection:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights makes contact with the family of the detainee, the witnesses of the arrest, the former detainees who were with him, and any other persons who have information about the case. It also collects documentary evidence, wherever it is available, including arrest records, court documents, correspondence issued by the detaining authority, photographs, and medical records.
- d. Verification:** The case undergoes the verification and corroboration procedures set out in Section 8.
- e. Entry of the data into the database:** The case is included in the detainees database with the completion of all of the applicable data fields.
- f. Status monitoring:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights keeps the case open and active, and it continuously follows up on the status of the detainee, whether he is still detained, has been released, has been transferred, his death has been confirmed, or he has remained missing. All of the status updates are recorded in the database.
- g. Legal classification:** The legal characterization of the case is determined in accordance with Section 4.

10.3: Distinguishing between detention, abduction, and hostage-taking:

The Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts the following distinction for the purposes of documentation:

- The term detention is used when the deprivation of liberty is attributed to a party that exercises de facto authority, governmental authority, or organized force within the context of a conflict or law enforcement.
- The term abduction is used when the deprivation of liberty is carried out by non-state actors without legal authorization or recognized de facto authority.

- The term hostage-taking is used when the deprivation of liberty is coupled with the use of the detained person as a means of pressure, negotiation, or political or military extortion. The final classification is determined on the basis of the nature of the actor, the context, and the purpose of the deprivation of liberty, and not on the basis of the designation given by the party carrying it out.

10.4. Protocols by the Detaining Party

The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies documentation protocols designed according to the party carrying out the detention, in a manner that reflects the difference in the legal frameworks, the conditions of access, and the information environments associated with each party.

10.4.1. Detention by the Forces of the Transitional Government

The security forces of the transitional government, including the army, the police, the intelligence apparatuses, and any semi-integrated armed groups, carry out arrests and detentions in the areas under their control. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents these cases in light of the framework of international human rights law, in particular the provisions relating to personal liberty and security, the treatment of detainees, the guarantees of a fair trial, and the prohibition of torture.

The documentation protocol in this context includes the following:

- The recording of the identity of the party carrying out the arrest, whether it is a security apparatus, a military unit, or an affiliated armed group, the declared or apparent reason for the arrest, whether an arrest warrant was presented, whether the detainee was given access to a lawyer or contact with his family, the place of detention, and any available information about the conditions of detention.
- When the security forces of the transitional government include individuals from armed factions that were previously independent, the Syrian Network for Human Rights records the identity of the specific unit and its former affiliation, to the extent that this information is available, for the purposes of analyzing the chain of command and responsibility.
- The monitoring of whether the detention practices subject to the transitional government are subject to effective judicial oversight, and the documentation of the systematic patterns, such as the use of pre-trial detention without bringing a charge, the detention of political opponents or critics, or the detention of individuals on the basis of their ethnic, religious, or sectarian affiliation.

10.4.2. Detention by the Israeli Occupation Forces

Israel detains persons in the occupied Syrian territories on the basis of the administrative-detention provisions set out in the Fourth Geneva Convention, and pursuant to the military orders in force in the occupied area. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents these cases in light of the law of occupation and international human rights law.

The documentation protocol in this context includes the following:

- The recording of the declared legal basis for the detention, whether it is an administrative-detention order, a charge before a military court, or otherwise, the identity of the military body that issued the order, the place of detention, whether inside the occupied territories or outside them, the duration of the detention, and whether the detainee was given access to legal counsel and to periodic review.
- The documentation of any transfer of detainees from the occupied Syrian territories into the Israeli territory as a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.
- The documentation of the conditions of detention, and any torture or ill-treatment that is reported, and their assessment in accordance with the Convention against Torture and the Mandela Rules.

10.4.3. Detention by the Syrian Democratic Forces

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the cases of detention attributed to the Syrian Democratic Forces in accordance with the legal framework applicable to their status in the relevant period, as set out in Section 4.5. When the Syrian Democratic Forces exercise governmental functions in areas under their control, their detention practices are assessed in light of the standards of international human rights law. If they are a party to an armed conflict, international humanitarian law is applied concurrently with that.

The documentation protocol includes the recording of the identity of the arresting authority within the structure of the Syrian Democratic Forces, whether it is the Asayish, the military police, or otherwise, the declared reason for the arrest, and the extent of the availability of judicial review or any other review mechanism.

10.4.4. Detention in the Context of the Suwayda Conflict

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the cases of detention committed by all of the parties to the conflict in Suwayda, in accordance with the applicable legal framework set out in Section 4.5. The standards of Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions are applied as a minimum to all of the parties. When a non-state armed group carries out a detention, the Network documents the conditions of detention and any treatment that constitutes a violation of common Article 3 or of the relevant customary rules of international humanitarian law.

10.4.5. Legacy Cases Relating to the Assad Regime and Other Historical Parties

The Syrian Network for Human Rights maintains its comprehensive database of those detained by the forces of the Assad regime and other historical parties, and it continues to update it on an ongoing basis. Section 10.5 addresses how these legacy cases are dealt with in the post-December 2024 context.

10.5. Processing the Legacy Case Files

The fall of the Assad regime made it possible to access new information relating to the cases of enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention that had been previously documented. The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the following protocol in this context:

- a. Monitoring the newly opened facilities:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights monitors the opening of detention facilities, the headquarters of the security apparatuses, and other sites in which the Assad regime detained prisoners. If these facilities are opened and living detainees are found in them, the Network seeks to determine their identities and compare them with its current database of the forcibly disappeared. If remains are found, the Network applies the protocol set out in Section 9.6.
- b. Access to the detention records:** When the transitional government or any other authority is able to access detention records belonging to the Assad regime, the Syrian Network for Human Rights seeks to access those records or obtain copies of them, in a manner that does not infringe on its independence, for the purpose of determining the identities of the detainees, ascertaining their fate, and verifying or completing the existing records.
- c. Updating the database:** When new information reveals the fate of a person whose enforced disappearance was previously documented, whether by confirming that he survived and was released, by confirming his death, or by his transfer to another facility, the Syrian Network for Human Rights updates the database record accordingly. The record retains the full history of the documentation, including the original disappearance record, all of the status updates, and the new information.
- d. The continuation of the characterization of enforced disappearance:** As set out in Section 5.2, the Syrian Network for Human Rights maintains the characterization of enforced disappearance in all of the cases in which the fate or the whereabouts of the person remains unknown, regardless of the political changes. The fall of the regime does not, in itself, bring an end to the legal characterization of enforced disappearance unless the fate of the person is determined conclusively.
- e. The testimonies of the released persons:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights gives priority to conducting interviews with the persons released from the former detention centers of the Assad regime, with the aim of collecting testimonies concerning the conditions of detention, torture, deaths in detention, the identities of other detainees, and the information relating to the chain of command. These testimonies are compared with the existing records, and they are used to confirm, complete, or correct the prior documentation.

10.6. Documentation of Torture

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents all of the acts of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment that are reported, and it applies the definitions set out in Section 5.5, while it also aligns its documentation practices with the Istanbul Protocol, that is, the Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, in its revised version.

The documentation protocol includes the following:

- a.** A detailed recording of the reported acts, including the methods of torture, the affected parts of the body, the duration of the exposure, its repetition, and its apparent purpose, whether interrogation, punishment, coercion, or intimidation, in addition to the identity of the perpetrators as far as it is known.
- b.** The recording of the physical and psychological effects that the survivor reports, including the injuries, the disabilities, and the effects relating to mental and psychological health.
- c.** If the survivor has undergone a medical examination or received treatment, the Syrian Network for Human Rights seeks to obtain the relevant medical reports or records, subject to the consent of the survivor.
- d.** The recording of the conditions of detention that may, in themselves, amount to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, including overcrowding, the deprivation of food, water, medical care, or sanitation services, and exposure to extreme temperatures.
- e.** The documentation of all of the cases of torture in accordance with the protocols of informed consent, confidentiality, and psychosocial protection, set out in Sections 7 and 20.

10.7. Protocols for the Interviews with the Survivors of Detention and Torture

The interviews with the survivors of detention and torture are conducted by staff of the Syrian Network for Human Rights who have received training on conducting trauma-informed interviews. The following protocols are applied in this context:

- a.** The interview is entirely voluntary, and the survivor may end it at any time without stating the reasons.
- b.** The interviewer verifies that the survivor is in a safe place, that he is not subject to pressure or surveillance, and that he has sufficient time to conduct the interview.

- c. The interviewer avoids posing leading questions, does not pressure the survivor to obtain details that he is reluctant to disclose, and does not ask him to re-enact the acts of torture or to demonstrate them physically.
- d. The interviewer pays attention to the signs of distress or exhaustion, and offers to pause, modify, or end the interview, in accordance with what the condition of the survivor requires.
- e. The interviewer provides the survivor with referral information to the psychosocial support services, wherever these services are available.
- f. When the survivor reports sexual violence, the interview is conducted in accordance with the protocols specific to sexual and gender-based violence set out in Section 14.2.

10.8. The Structure of the Database

The detainees database records each case in an independent entry with a unique identifier. This entry includes the name of the detainee and any pseudonyms known for him, his sex, his age, his nationality, his place of birth, the date and place of his arrest, the party carrying out the arrest and its unit, the place or places of detention, his current status, whether he is still detained, has been released, has been transferred, has died, or is still missing, any available information about the conditions of detention and treatment, the declared legal basis for the detention if the detaining party stated it, the legal classification determined by the Syrian Network for Human Rights, and the chain of custody of any evidence that has been collected. The database supports cross-referencing with the victims database in cases of death in detention, with the perpetrators database, and with the incidents database.

Section 11: Documentation of Attacks on Civilian Objects and Protected Sites

11.1. The Categories of Civilian Objects and Protected Sites

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the attacks on the following civilian objects and protected sites. All of these objects are treated, in accordance with international humanitarian law, as civilian objects covered by the original protection, unless their use for military purposes is established and in a manner that directly and immediately affects their legal status.

It is also taken into account that some objects may have a dual use, where the temporary or partial military use does not automatically or permanently lead to the loss of the civilian protection; rather, its effect is confined to the period of the actual military use.

- **Places of worship:** These include mosques, churches, monasteries, and other buildings dedicated to religious rites.
- **Educational facilities:** These include schools, universities, institutes, nurseries, university campuses, orphanages, and vocational training centers.
- **Medical facilities:** These include hospitals, dispensaries, medical clinics, field hospitals, primary health-care centers, blood-bank centers, pharmacies, mental and psychological health facilities, ambulances, and other means of medical transport.
- **Cultural property:** These include archaeological sites, such as citadels, fortresses, ancient burial grounds, temples, and amphitheaters, as well as museums, libraries, archives, and historical landmarks. The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies in this field the protection established in the Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its protocols, in addition to the rules of customary international humanitarian law.
- **Public facilities:** These include markets, commercial centers, gardens, parks, hotels, homes for the care of the elderly, playgrounds, and sports facilities.
- **International humanitarian emblems:** These include the facilities and vehicles belonging to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, and other bodies authorized to use the protected emblems.
- **Infrastructure:** This includes the following:
 - Energy: Power grids, electricity generation and transmission stations, fuel stations, oil and gas wells and their installations, and pipelines.
 - Civil defense: Civil defense centers, fire stations, and their vehicles.
 - Water and sanitation: Water networks and pipes, wells, pumping and treatment stations, irrigation canals, dams, water reservoirs, wastewater treatment plants, and sanitation systems.
 - Means of transport: Bridges, highways, railways, bus and train stations, civilian airports, border crossings, and parking lots.
 - Food supply installations: Bakeries, grain silos, and livestock farms.
 - The industrial sector: Factories and industrial zones.
 - Government buildings: The institutional headquarters, the ministries, and other official structures, whenever they are of a civilian character and were not being used for military purposes at the time of the attack.
 - Banking and financial services: Banks and financial institutions.
 - Diplomatic missions: Embassies, consulates, and representative offices.
 - Media: The offices of the media organizations, their studios, and their equipment.
 - The headquarters of international organizations: The offices, assets, and agencies of the United Nations and other international organizations.
 - Civil society organizations: The offices and facilities of civil society organizations.
- **Displacement sites:** These include the camps of the internally displaced, the formal and the informal, the shelter centers, and the gatherings of the displaced.

- **Agricultural land and resources:** These include agricultural land, crops, orchards, plastic or glass greenhouses, agricultural equipment, and livestock. This category was added to address the violations associated with the Israeli occupation, including confiscation, destruction, and the establishment of buffer zones that affect the agricultural areas, and it is a category that applies to all of the parties.
- **Water resources subject to control or diversion:** These include water sources, groundwater aquifers, and distribution systems that are subject to control, diversion, or restriction by an occupying power or any party to the conflict.
- **Residential buildings subject to demolition orders:** These include the individual dwellings or the residential areas that are subjected to demolition by any party, whether as a punitive measure, a form of collective punishment, in the context of settlement activity, the establishment of buffer zones, or for any other reason that is not justified by imperative military necessity. This category was added to address the practices associated with military occupation, and it applies to all of the parties.

11.2. The Documentation Workflow

For each documented attack on a civilian object or a protected site, the Syrian Network for Human Rights collects the following information:

- a. The identification of the facility or the object: The name, the type in accordance with the categories set out above, the location, and the operational status before the attack, whether it was fully operational, partially operational, closed, or already damaged as a result of previous attacks.
- b. The date and time of the attack.
- c. The attacking party: The party responsible for the attack, with a statement of the basis of attribution, including witness testimonies, the monitoring of air traffic, the type of weapon, the direction of fire, territorial control, open-source materials, and other relevant evidence.
- d. The weapon used: The type of weapon, its caliber, the type of munition, and any additional details relating to prohibited, restricted, or specially characterized weapons.
- e. Damage assessment: The extent of the damage inflicted on the object or the facility, whether total destruction, severe damage, partial damage, or slight damage, on the basis of witness testimonies, photographs, video clips, and satellite imagery whenever it is available. The Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts a standardized scale for estimating the damage, and it records the basis on which this assessment was built.
- f. Human losses: The number of those killed and wounded associated with the attack on the facility, with a cross-reference to the victims database.
- g. The status of the facility after the attack: Whether it continued to operate, was forced to close, or its functions were transferred to another place.

- h. The previous attacks:** Whether the facility was subjected to previous attacks, and if so, the number of those attacks, their dates, and the parties responsible for them. This cumulative record allows the analysis of the patterns and the assessment of the cumulative effect of the attacks on the function of the facility.
- i. The supporting evidence:** This includes photographs, video clips, satellite imagery, open-source materials, witness testimonies, and any physical evidence that has been collected.
- j. The preliminary legal assessment of the attack:** This includes the identification of preliminary indicators such as:
 - Indiscriminate targeting
 - The deliberate targeting of civilian objects
 - Disproportionality
 - The use of prohibited weapons

This assessment is recorded without replacing the final legal classification.

11.3. Attribution in the Multi-Party Cases

If a civilian object or a protected site is subjected to repeated attacks from more than one party over time, or if there is a possibility that a single attack was carried out in a coordinated manner by multiple parties, the Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the following protocol:

- a.** Each attack is documented as an independent incident with its own entry in the database, and it is attributed to the party responsible for that specific attack on the basis of the available evidence.
- b.** A cumulative record is kept of the attacks to which a particular facility has been subjected as an interconnected series of entries, in a manner that allows the analysis of the overall effect of the attacks on that facility.
- c.** If a particular attack cannot be attributed to a specific party because the evidence is insufficient to distinguish between the potential actors, the incident is recorded with a statement that the responsible party is “undetermined” or that the attribution is “disputed,” with a description of the available evidence and the existing possibilities.
- d.** The Syrian Network for Human Rights does not attribute joint or collective responsibility to more than one party for a single attack unless the evidence establishes that they acted jointly or in a coordinated manner.
- e.** The Network analyzes the systematic patterns of the attacks to determine whether they are part of a systematic targeting policy against a particular type of object.

11.4. Cumulative Impact Analysis

The Syrian Network for Human Rights conducts a cumulative assessment of the impact resulting from the repeated attacks on the same facility or the same type of object, including:

- The disruption of the essential function of the facility.
- The impact on the civilian population.
- The consequences of displacement or the deprivation of services.
- The collapse of the service infrastructure over the long term.

11.5. The Structure of the Database

The database of civilian objects and protected sites records each attack in an independent entry linked to the record of the relevant facility or object. The record of the facility includes its identifying data, its location, its type, and its operational status. As for the record of the attack, it includes all of the data fields set out in Section 11.2. The database supports cross-referencing with the incidents database, the victims database, and the weapons database.

After the verification of each incident of attack on a civilian object or a protected site is completed in accordance with all of the conditions and rules clarified above in the parts of Section 11, and it is entered as a completed documentation incident, the incident is included in the statistics table set out below, which is built mainly on the methodology of classifying civilian objects and protected sites clarified in Section 11.1.

The Actor	The Parties Responsible for the Attack							
The Site Attacked								
Religious Vital Centers								
Mosques								
Churches and Monasteries								
Religious Shrines and Sanctuaries								
Educational Facilities								
Schools								
Universities								
Educational Institutes								
Nurseries								
University Campuses								
Orphanages								
Vocational Training Centers								
Medical Facilities								
Medical installations (these include hospitals, dispensaries, medical clinics, field hospitals, primary health-care centers, and blood-bank centers)								
Pharmacies								
Mental and Psychological Health Facilities								
Ambulances								
Cultural Property								
Archaeological Sites								
Museums and Historical Landmarks								
Public Facilities								
Gardens and Parks								
Markets								
Commercial Centers								
Hotels								
Homes for the Disabled and the Care of the Elderly								
Sports Facilities								
International Humanitarian Emblems								
The International Committee of the Red Cross								
The Red Crescent								
Infrastructure								
Energy (these include power grids, electricity generation and transmission stations, fuel stations, oil and gas wells and their installations, and pipelines)								
Civil Defense								

Water and sanitation (these include water networks and pipes, wells, pumping and treatment stations, irrigation canals, dams, water reservoirs, wastewater treatment plants, and sanitation systems)								
Means of transport (these include bridges, highways, railways, bus and train stations, civilian airports, border crossings, and parking lots)								
Food supply installations (these include bakeries, grain silos, and live-stock farms)								
The industrial sector (this includes factories and industrial zones)								
Government buildings (these include the institutional headquarters, the ministries, and other official structures, whenever they are of a civilian character and were not being used for military purposes at the time of the attack)								
Banking and financial services (these include banks and financial institutions)								
Diplomatic missions (these include embassies, consulates, and representative offices)								
Media (these include the offices of the media organizations, their studios, and their equipment)								
The headquarters of international organizations (these include the offices and assets of the United Nations agencies and other international organizations)								
Civil society organizations (these include the offices and facilities of civil society organizations)								
Displacement Sites								
The Formal Camps of the Displaced								
The Informal Camps of the Displaced								
Shelter Centers								
The Gatherings of the Displaced								
Agricultural Land and Resources								
Agricultural land and resources (these include agricultural land, crops, orchards, plastic or glass greenhouses, agricultural equipment, and livestock. This category was added to address the violations associated with the Israeli occupation, including confiscation, destruction, and the establishment of buffer zones that affect the agricultural areas, and it is a category that applies to all of the parties)								
Water Resources Subject to Control or Diversion								
Water resources subject to control or diversion (these include water sources, groundwater aquifers, and distribution systems that are subject to control, diversion, or restriction by an occupying power or any party to the conflict)								
Residential Buildings Subject to Demolition Orders								
Residential buildings subject to demolition orders (these include the individual dwellings or the residential areas that are subjected to demolition by any party, whether as a punitive measure, a form of collective punishment, in the context of settlement activity, the establishment of buffer zones, or for any other reason that is not justified by imperative military necessity. This category was added to address the practices associated with military occupation, and it applies to all of the parties)								
Total:								

Section 12: Documentation of Weapons Use

12.1. The Classification of Weapons

The Syrian Network for Human Rights classifies the weapons used in the documented incidents in accordance with the following classification:

First: Conventional weapons by the means of delivery

- Air-delivered munitions, including bombs, guided missiles, and air-to-surface missiles.
- Ground munitions, including artillery shells, mortar shells, tank shells, rockets, and guided missiles.
- Small arms and light weapons, including rifles, machine guns, pistols, and RPG rounds.
- Explosive devices, including improvised explosive devices, vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, remotely detonated explosives, and landmines.
- Sea-launched munitions, wherever that is applicable.

Second: Prohibited or restricted weapons

- Chemical weapons, which are prohibited under the Chemical Weapons Convention.
- Cluster munitions, which are prohibited under the Convention on Cluster Munitions, taking into account that Syria and Israel are not parties to it.
- Barrel bombs, which are improvised munitions dropped from the air, and are not subject to a specific treaty prohibition, but are indiscriminate by their nature in many of the patterns of their use.
- Incendiary weapons, which are restricted under the Third Protocol annexed to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.
- Anti-personnel mines, which are prohibited under the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines, with the observation that Syria and Israel are not parties to it.

Third: Other categories of weapons or means

- Unmanned aerial vehicles, including armed drones and reconnaissance drones.
- Precision-guided munitions.
- Explosive remnants of war and unexploded ordnance.
- White phosphorus, which is documented as an incendiary weapon when it is used against the civilian population or in its proximity, with a reference to the possibility of its use for obscuration purposes as well.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights adds new categories to this classification when new patterns of weaponization emerge. The use of any weapon is assessed in light of the principles of international humanitarian law relating to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in attack, regardless of whether the weapon is prohibited under a specific treaty.

12.2. The Protocol for Documenting Weapons-Related Incidents

For each documented incident that involves the use of a weapon, the Syrian Network for Human Rights collects the following data:

- a. The time and date of the attack.
- b. The location, including the governorate, the area, the neighborhood, and the specific site, with the geographic coordinates wherever they can be obtained.
- c. The weather conditions at the time of the attack, whenever they are relevant to the assessment of visibility, the accuracy of targeting, or the dispersal of chemical or incendiary agents.
- d. The nature of the targeted site, whether it was a civilian area, a military site, a contested area, or otherwise.
- e. The human losses, including those killed and wounded, with a cross-reference to the victims database.
- f. The type of weapon, in accordance with the classification set out in Section 12.1, with the greatest degree of specification that the evidence allows, such that a general description of the sort “an airstrike” is not deemed sufficient, for example, if it is possible to identify the type of munition or its nature more precisely.
- g. The physical evidence, including photographs or video clips of munition remnants, impact craters, fragmentation patterns, or other indicators that help to identify the type of weapon. When the staff of the Syrian Network for Human Rights or its partners are able to reach the site, the relevant physical measurements are recorded, such as the dimensions of the impact crater or the radius of the fragmentation.
- h. The visual and open-source analysis, including the analysis of photographs, video clips, and satellite imagery, to identify the type of weapon, the direction and angle of the attack, the pattern of destruction, and the number of munitions used.
- i. The medical evidence, particularly in cases of chemical or incendiary weapons, where the Network collects testimonies and medical records from the treating physicians that describe the symptoms and injuries consistent with the nature of the exposure, in accordance with the methodology specific to that.

- j. The attribution of responsibility, that is, the identification of the party responsible for the attack, with a statement of the basis on which this identification rested, such as the monitoring of air traffic, the type of weapon, the direction of fire, territorial control, intercepted communications, or the patterns of the attacks.

12.3. The Levels of Certainty in the Identification of the Weapon

The Network adopts three levels for the identification of the type of weapon:

- **Confirmed:** The identification of the weapon on the basis of physical remnants or multiple independent and matching pieces of evidence.
- **Probable:** The identification of the weapon on the basis of visual evidence or testimonies supported by circumstantial evidence.
- **Possible:** An approximate identification in the absence of sufficient physical evidence, with the presence of consistent indicators.

The level of certainty is updated when any new evidence emerges, with the recording of the date of each modification.

12.4. Methodological Considerations and the Limits of Identification

The Network acknowledges that the identification of the type of weapon may be affected by several factors, among them:

- The similarity of the effects of explosions between different types of munitions.
- The limited field access to the sites of the attacks.
- The possibility of manipulation of the photographed materials or the loss of their original data.
- The overlap between the effects of different weapons in the compound incidents.

Therefore, the identification of the type of weapon is not interpreted as an absolute certainty except where the “confirmed” standard is met.

Likewise, the nature of the target or the legality of the targeting is not inferred from the type of weapon alone, in that a separation is maintained between the type of weapon, the nature of the target, and the extent of the lawfulness of the use.

12.5. The Documentation of Chemical Weapons

In view of the intensity of the use of chemical weapons during the Syrian conflict, and the cumulative experience that the Syrian Network for Human Rights has gained in this field, the Network applies a special protocol for documenting attacks suspected of being chemical, and it includes the following:

- a. The collection of testimonies from the survivors that include a description of the symptoms, such as shortness of breath, skin irritation, loss of consciousness, the constriction of the pupils, convulsions, and other indicators consistent with exposure to nerve agents, choking agents, or blistering agents.
- b. The collection of testimonies from the medical workers who treated the injured, including a description of the symptoms, the treatments provided, and the response to the treatment.
- c. The collection of the photographic and visual evidence that shows the injured, including indicators such as the constriction of the pupil, skin lesions, breathing difficulties, the discharge of foam, and other visible signs.
- d. The collection of the evidence relating to the environmental contamination, including the discoloration of plants, the death of animals, or the unusual odors reported by the witnesses.
- e. Wherever possible, the collection of physical samples, or the facilitation of their collection, such as samples of soil, water, biological samples, and munition remnants, for their analysis in specialized laboratories. The Syrian Network for Human Rights acknowledges that it does not possess the technical capacity to conduct the chemical analysis itself, and it relies in that on the specialized bodies and mechanisms, such as the fact-finding missions of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.
- f. The keeping of a chain-of-custody record for any physical samples that have been collected or whose collection has been facilitated, with the documentation of the identity of the collector of the sample, the time and place of the collection, the conditions of storage and transport, and the body to which it was referred for the competent analytical authority.

12.6. The Explosive Remnants of War and the Unexploded Ordnance

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the presence and effect of the explosive remnants of war and the unexploded ordnance as a continuing effect of the armed conflicts and a permanent source of threat and protection concern. This documentation includes the following:

- a. The location and type of the explosive remnants of war or the unexploded ordnance, including the remnants of cluster munitions, unexploded bombs, mines, and the components of improvised explosive devices.
- b. The human losses resulting from the explosion of these remnants or munitions, including the injuries inflicted on the returnees and the civilians in the formerly contested areas after the cessation of combat operations.
- c. The areas known or suspected to be contaminated, and the effect of this contamination on the access of civilians, their return, and their agricultural or subsistence use of the land.

12.7. The Structure of the Database

The weapons database of the Syrian Network for Human Rights records each incident relating to the use of weapons, using the data fields set out in Section 12.2. This database is linked to the incidents database and the victims database. The Network also maintains sub-databases for specific categories of weapons, such as chemical weapons, cluster munitions, barrel bombs, and incendiary weapons, in support of thematic analysis and the preparation of specialized reports.

Section 13: Documentation of Forced Displacement and the Conditions of Return

13.1. The Documentation of Forced Displacement

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the cases of forced displacement through a multi-stage analytical framework that aims to identify the facts, the context, the legal nature of the displacement, and its continuing effects on the affected population. For each documented case of displacement, the Network does the following:

- a. Chronological analysis:** The reconstruction of the sequence of the events that led to the displacement, including the military operations, the escalation of hostilities, the attacks on civilians or civilian objects, the siege, the issuance of evacuation orders or ultimatums, the displacement agreements, and the timing of the movement of the population.
- b. Analysis of military and administrative control:** The assessment of the bodies that were controlling the area before, during, and after the displacement, and a statement of the effect of the change of control on the patterns of displacement, the decisions of the population to be displaced, or their being prevented from remaining.
- c. Analysis of ceasefires, agreements, and coercive measures:** The study of any ceasefire agreements, local arrangements, or so-called “reconciliation agreements” that preceded or accompanied the displacement, including whether they were concluded under coercion, and whether the displacement was a condition of them or a result of them.
- d. The collection of individual and collective testimonies:** The conducting of interviews with the displaced, family members, and community bodies to document their experiences, the reasons for the displacement, and its circumstances, including the routes and means of departure, the treatment and the violations during the displacement, the humanitarian conditions and the possibility of access to assistance, and their current situation.
- e. Analysis of the effect of the attacks on the infrastructure and the vital objects:** A reference to the database of vital objects and weapons to assess whether the destruction of homes, medical facilities and schools, water and electricity networks, or food sources, had rendered the area uninhabitable and contributed to forcing the population to be displaced.
- f. Analysis of siege and deprivation:** The documentation of the role of the siege, starvation, the deprivation of essential services, or repeated shelling, in driving the population to displacement.
- g. Analysis of satellite imagery and open sources:** The use of satellite imagery and visual evidence to assess the scope of the physical destruction in the area of displacement, the changes in the built environment and the population density, and the indicators of the movement of the population.
- h. The documentation of housing, land, and property violations:** The documentation of any confiscation, seizure, destruction, or denial of access, affecting the homes, lands, or properties of the displaced, including the legislative or administrative measures that deprive them of their rights to ownership, possession, or restitution.

13.2. Determining the Legal Nature of the Displacement

The Syrian Network for Human Rights determines the legal nature of each case of displacement in accordance with the evidence and the legal context, which includes:

- a.** Forced internal displacement.
- b.** Forcible transfer or the forcible transfer of the population.
- c.** Unlawful evacuation.
- d.** Deportation or unlawful transfer in the context of occupation.
- e.** Displacement resulting from siege or starvation.
- f.** Displacement associated with demographic change or population engineering.
- g.** Displacement arising from a well-founded fear of persecution or grave violations.

The Network records the factual and legal basis for each classification.

13.3. The Documentation of the Conditions of Return

The Network documents the conditions of return for refugees and the internally displaced with the aim of assessing the extent of the availability of return that is voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable. In the aftermath of the fall of the Assad regime, the question of the return of refugees and the internally displaced became a practical issue of particular importance. The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the conditions of return through the following:

- a.** The assessment of the physical conditions in the areas of return: The study of the state of the infrastructure, housing, and essential services, the contamination of areas with the explosive remnants of war and the unexploded ordnance, and the environmental damage, with the referral of these data to the database of vital objects and the satellite imagery.
- b.** The assessment of the security conditions: The documentation of the presence and conduct of armed elements, the extent of the availability of the rule of law, the existence of functioning policing and judicial institutions, and any threats or acts of intimidation reported by the returnees.
- c.** The assessment of the housing, land, and property conditions: The verification of whether the returnees are able to access their homes, lands, and properties, whether these properties have been confiscated, seized, destroyed, or occupied by other parties, and whether there are effective legal mechanisms for compensation or the restitution of rights.

- d.** The documentation of the violations to which the returnees are subjected: including harassment, arbitrary detention, the confiscation of property, extortion, forced recruitment, discrimination, and the rest of the violations that occur during the return or after it.
- e.** The documentation of the obstacles to return: including the legal, administrative, security, economic, and social obstacles that prevent the return or deter it, such as the requirement of security approvals, the risk of prosecution on account of political activity, the loss of civil documents, or the destruction of civil registry records.

The documents of the Syrian Network for Human Rights relating to the conditions of return aim to provide an evidentiary base that helps the refugees and the displaced to take informed decisions, and they also support the assessment by the international bodies and the host states of the extent of the availability of the conditions of voluntary, safe, and dignified return, and they contribute to the pathways of transitional justice that address displacement as a violation.

Forced or involuntary return

The Network also documents:

- Forcible return from the host states.
- Deportation.
- The economic or security pressures that drive return.
- Return conditioned on security approvals or coerced settlements.

13.4. Housing, Land, and Property Violations

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the violations of housing, land, and property in light of the Pinheiro Principles and international human rights law, including the right to property, the right to adequate housing, and the inviolability of the home, as well as in light of the relevant rules of the law of occupation, particularly the provisions relating to the protection of private and public property and the prohibition of unlawful destruction or confiscation.

This documentation includes the following:

- a.** The seizure of property, its confiscation, or its expropriation: by any party, with the recording of the legal or administrative instrument used, the declared justification, and the effect resulting on the owner or the rights holder.
- b.** The destruction of property: whether the destruction was deliberate or incidental, with the identification of the responsible party, an assessment of whether there was a military necessity that could be invoked, and the extent of the destruction inflicted on the property.

- c.** Expropriation through legislation or administration: including the laws, decrees, or administrative decisions that deprive individuals of their rights to property, among them the measures that were enacted during the era of Assad and are still in force or in effect during the transitional period.
- d.** The denial of access: through checkpoints, permit systems, buffer zones, or other physical or administrative barriers that prevent the owners or the rights holders from accessing their properties.
- e.** Secondary occupation: that is, the occupation of the abandoned or confiscated properties by persons other than the lawful owner, including armed groups, persons displaced from other areas, or persons politically or militarily associated with the controlling authority.
- f.** The processes of restitution, the return of rights, and compensation: any mechanisms established by the transitional government or other authorities for the purpose of the restitution of property or the return of rights, with an assessment of their effectiveness, their integrity, and their consistency with the international standards.

13.5. Demographic Change and Population Engineering

The Network documents the patterns that may point to forced demographic changes, including:

- a.** The emptying of specific population areas.
- b.** The prevention of the return of particular groups.
- c.** The resettlement of other groups.
- d.** Policies of the confiscation of lands and their reallocation.
- e.** Settlement expansion or the establishment of buffer zones.
- f.** Discrimination on the basis of political, ethnic, religious, or sectarian affiliation.

13.6. The Levels of Confidence and Verification

The Network adopts the following levels of confidence:

- a.** Confirmed: multiple independent and consistent pieces of evidence.
- b.** Probable: a principal source supported by circumstantial or documentary evidence.
- c.** Reported / under verification: preliminary information that has not yet met the conditions of full documentation.

The level of confidence is reassessed as new evidence emerges.

13.7. Methodological Considerations and Limitations

The Network acknowledges the following challenges:

- The multiplicity of the waves of displacement.
- Repeated displacement.
- The difficulty of verifying the exact numbers.
- The overlap of voluntary and forced displacement.
- The security restrictions on access.
- The possibility of a shortage of official documents.

These limitations are recorded within the assessment of each file.

13.8. The Structure of the Database

The displacement database records each case or displaced group in an independent entry that includes:

- A unique identifier.
- The original location.
- The location of displacement.
- The date of displacement.
- The number of individuals.
- The demographic composition.
- The responsible party.
- The cause of displacement.
- The legal classification.
- The housing, land, and property conditions.
- The status of return.
- The supporting evidence.
- The level of confidence.
- The cross-reference to the databases of incidents, victims, civilian objects, and weapons.

13.9. The Reference Standards

The documents of the Syrian Network for Human Rights relating to displacement and the conditions of return rest on the following international standards:

- The United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.
- The Pinheiro Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons.
- The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.
- The right to adequate housing as set out in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- General Comment No. 4 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the right to adequate housing, and General Comment No. 7 on forced eviction.
 - The law of occupation.
 - International humanitarian law.
 - International human rights law.
 - The standards of transitional justice relating to the return of rights and compensation.

Section 14: Documentation of the Violations against Persons in Situations of Vulnerability

14.1. Children

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the violations committed against children, that is, the persons who have not reached the age of eighteen as defined in Section 5.3, across all the categories of violations covered by this methodology, with particular attention to the violations that concern children directly, or that affect them disproportionately, or cumulatively over the long term.

The documentation also includes the violations associated with the child as a bearer of a legal and civil identity, including the loss or destruction of civil documents, the registration of births outside the official frameworks, or the deprivation of identity registration as a result of the conflict, displacement, or the collapse of the state institutions, with the effects resulting from that on the right to nationality, identity, legal protection, and access to services.

The categories of violations against children include the following:

- a. Recruitment and use:** this includes the recruitment of children, their use, or their involvement in hostilities by any party, whether that took place forcibly, in apparent voluntariness, or through manipulation, exploitation, or economic, security, or social pressure, including through local intermediaries, informal networks, or families subjected to pressure.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts the stricter standard set out in the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which sets the age of compulsory recruitment and direct participation at eighteen. The Network documents the cases of the recruitment of children or their use under the age of eighteen, and it classifies them within the applicable legal framework. It also adopts the Paris Principles and the related guidelines as a practical standard in identifying and documenting the cases of the association of children with armed forces or groups.

- b. The attacks on schools and educational facilities:** these attacks are documented in accordance with Section 11, with particular attention to their effect on the right of children to education and on the physical and psychological protection of children. The documentation also includes the use of schools as shelters for the displaced or as multi-use civilian facilities, and the cases of the use of schools for military purposes, which may affect their protected status, without justifying indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks. The Syrian Network for Human Rights is guided by the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.
- c. The detention of children:** it is documented in accordance with Section 10, with a focus on the separation of children from adults, the formal and informal conditions of detention, including the temporary or undeclared places of detention, and the extent of their consistency with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Mandela Rules), and with the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty.

The principle that detention should be a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period is also observed, and any detention outside this framework is assessed as an indicator of a potential violation.

- d. Sexual violence against children:** it is documented in accordance with Section 14.2, with the application of heightened requirements relating to protection, confidentiality, informed consent, and the avoidance of re-traumatization. This includes sexual violence associated with detention, extortion, threats, or exploitation at checkpoints or in centers of power.
- e. Separation from the family:** this includes the documentation of the cases of children separated from their families as a result of the conflict, displacement, detention, death, the loss of documents, or forced dispersal, including the unaccompanied and separated children, with the monitoring of family-reunification efforts and the legal, administrative, and security obstacles that prevent it.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights also takes into account the cumulative effect of the conflict on children, including the recurrence of displacement, chronic educational interruption, the repeated exposure to violence, recruitment, or detention, and the psychological effects resulting from repeated traumas, such as post-traumatic stress disorders and the loss of family and social stability.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies documentation protocols that take into account the specificity of children, as follows:

- Interviews with children are not conducted except when necessary, and when it is not possible to obtain the same information from an adult witness.
- The interview is conducted by a staff member trained in interview techniques that take into account the age of the child and his or her psychological condition.
- One of the parents, the guardian, or a trusted adult is present during the interview, unless the best interests of the child require otherwise, as in the cases where the parent or the guardian is the potential perpetrator.
- The interview is adapted according to the age of the child and his or her developmental capacities, and the child is not asked to recount the traumatic events in unnecessary detail.
- The interview is voluntary, and the child has the right to end it at any time.
- The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies its protection policy in all of the interactions with children, including the mandatory reporting of any imminent danger threatening the child, in accordance with what the adopted standards require.

14.2. Women, Sexual Violence, and Gender-Based Violence

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the violations committed against women across all of the categories covered by this methodology, with particular attention to sexual violence and gender-based violence, and to the other violations that affect women disproportionately, including the administrative and legal restrictions that continue in the post-conflict context.

The documentation of sexual violence and gender-based violence is subject to the following protocols, in addition to the general rules relating to informed consent and confidentiality:

- a. A survivor-centered approach: the safety of the survivor, her dignity, and her autonomy are the fundamental considerations. The survivor decides for herself whether she will provide the information and how she will provide it. The Syrian Network for Human Rights does not exercise any pressure on her to disclose details that she does not wish to share.

- b.** The choice of the interviewer: interviews with survivors are conducted by staff members trained in the documentation of sexual violence and gender-based violence, and it is observed, wherever possible, that the interviewer is of the gender that the survivor prefers.
- c.** Confidentiality and the protection of identity: the cases of sexual violence and gender-based violence are subject to a heightened degree of confidentiality. The Syrian Network for Human Rights does not disclose the identity of the survivors in any public report, even in the case of the existence of consent, unless it is established, after consultation with the survivor, that the disclosure achieves her interest and does not involve a risk to her. In the published materials, all of the details that could lead to the identification of the survivor within her social surroundings are removed.
- d.** Referral to support: the Syrian Network for Human Rights provides the survivors with referral information to medical, psychological, social, and legal support services, wherever they are available. The acceptance of the referral is not required as a condition for the documentation of the case.
- e.** Consistency with the Murad Code: the practices of the Syrian Network for Human Rights in the documentation of conflict-related sexual violence are consistent with the principles set out in the Murad Code, including informed consent, the avoidance of harm, non-discrimination, confidentiality, and the prioritization of the survivor's well-being over the informational value of the testimony.
- f.** Forced marriage: the Syrian Network for Human Rights documents forced marriage as a form of sexual violence and gender-based violence, including the marriage imposed by armed groups, the marriage based on coercion in displacement environments, and child marriage. The documentation includes the identity of the coercing party, the conditions of the coercion, and the age of the victim.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights also documents the restrictions imposed on freedom of movement, work, education, and public or political participation, including the administrative and legal restrictions after the conflict, such as the requirements of security approvals, the obstacles of civil registration, the restrictions of property, or legal guardianship, whenever these restrictions constitute a violation of international human rights law or are imposed by a party to the conflict or a de facto authority.

Section 15: Documentation of the Violations Specific to Military Occupation

This section addresses the categories of violations that arise in a particular manner in the context of the Israeli military occupation of the Syrian territories, and which require dedicated documentation protocols. These categories are documented in addition to the general categories of violations applicable in all situations. The legal framework governing these violations is set out in Sections 4.3 and 5.2.

In this section, the Syrian Network for Human Rights relies, in addition to the international legal framework, on the analysis of the structure of effective control over the territory, including the military, administrative, and security bodies that exercise de facto authority, whether formal or informal, for the purposes of determining responsibility and documenting the violations in the context of occupation.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights acknowledges that the environment of occupation often imposes severe restrictions on direct field access, which limits the ability to verify the facts directly. Therefore, the Network adopts a multi-source approach that includes satellite imagery, open sources, indirect testimonies, and visual analysis, with the application of rigorous verification standards to ensure the reliability of the findings.

15.1. Settlement Activity and Settler Violence

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents any transfer of the civilian population belonging to the occupying power into the occupied Syrian territories, and any establishment of residential, agricultural, industrial, or service infrastructure to facilitate this transfer, and it also documents the acts of violence, the destruction of property, or the other assaults that the settlers commit against the Syrian civilian population in the occupied territories.

15.2. Annexation Measures

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents any legal, administrative, or field measures that the occupying authority takes and that amount to, or point to, the de facto or de jure annexation of the occupied Syrian territories. These measures may include the following:

- a. The extension of the scope of the national law of the occupying state to include the occupied territories.
- b. The subjection of the occupied territories to the administrative, municipal, or civil jurisdiction of the occupying authority.
- c. The establishment of permanent infrastructure, such as roads, facilities, and communications networks, that link the occupied territories to the territory of the occupying power or serve its population.

- d. Demographic engineering, that is, the measures aimed at changing the population composition of the occupied territories, including the transfer of the population and the incentivization of settlement.
- e. The official declarations, laws, or legislative decisions that affirm sovereignty over the occupied territories.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights records these measures and classifies them as violations of Article 47 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and of customary international law.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights also takes into account, when assessing the annexation measures, the cumulative effect of these procedures over the long term, including the gradual transformation of the legal, administrative, and social structure in the occupied territories, even in the case of the absence of an official declaration of annexation.

15.3. Movement Restrictions

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the restrictions imposed on the movement of the Syrian civilian population in the occupied territories, including the following:

- a. Checkpoints: their location, their frequency, the identity of the body operating them, and the treatment of the persons passing through them, including delay, search, interrogation, the prevention of passage, and any physical violence.
- b. Closures: the total or partial closure of areas, roads, or access points, and the effect of that on the access of civilians to medical care, education, the markets, the agricultural lands, and family ties.

The cumulative effect of these restrictions on the daily life of the civilian population and the continuity of services is also documented.

15.4. The Destruction and Confiscation of Property

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the operations of the destruction of the immovable and movable property belonging to the Syrian population in the occupied territories, or its confiscation, and it assesses each act in light of the prohibition set out in Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 46 of the Hague Regulations, and the other relevant rules. The documentation includes the identification of the executing body, the type of procedure, the declared basis, and the effect on the original owners.

15.5. Administrative Detention under Occupation

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the administrative detention of the protected persons by the occupying authority, on the basis of the legal framework set out in Section 4.3, and in conjunction with the documentation protocol set out in Section 10.4.2.

15.6. The Use of Force against Civilians in the Occupied Territories

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the use of force by the forces of the occupying state against the civilian population in the occupied territories, including the cases of killing, injury, or the excessive use of force. Each incident is assessed in light of the principles of distinction, proportionality, and necessity, with the documentation of the visual evidence, the testimonies, and the open-source materials where they are available.

15.7. The Exploitation of Natural Resources

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents any exploitation of the natural resources in the occupied Syrian territories by the occupying authority, including water, agricultural land, minerals, and energy resources, in light of Article 55 of the Hague Regulations and the relevant customary rules. The documentation includes the nature of the exploitation, its scope, and its effect on the local population and the environment.

15.8. The Transfer of the Population of the Occupying State

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents any operation of transfer, whether organized, incentivized, or facilitated by the occupying power, of its own civilian population into the occupied Syrian territories. This act constitutes a violation of Article 49(6) of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and it may amount to a war crime under Article 8(2)(b)(viii) of the Rome Statute. The documentation includes the routes of the transfer, the organizing bodies, the forms of support or incentives provided, and the effect of that on the population structure of the occupied territories.

Documentation of the Individuals Involved in the Commission of the Violations:

In accordance with all of the foregoing patterns of multiple violations, the Syrian Network for Human Rights exerts intensive efforts to identify their perpetrators, with the aim of holding them legally and morally responsible, exposing their crimes, and then bringing them to account. After the identity of the perpetrators is determined, we seek to go deeper in the research to obtain additional details, such as:

- The individuals contributing to the implementation of the violation.
- The rank that they hold.
- The length of time during which they occupied their positions.
- Knowledge of their chain of command.
- Any other relevant details.

The Network has built a database that contains the names and details of tens of thousands of individuals who are believed to be involved, directly or indirectly, in the commission of violations. This database includes individuals from all of the main parties involved in the conflict, however the overwhelming majority of these persons belong to the Assad regime and its allies.

- Sources of Information -

This data was collected from a diverse range of sources:

- Defectors from the Assad regime.
- Individuals who are still in service within the Syrian government.
- Civilians who are familiar with the functions and roles of these individuals.
- Information published on websites loyal to the Assad regime.
- Activists.
- Open sources.

We also rely on the wide network of relationships that we have built over the years with Syrian society and the local activists, where we cross-reference and analyze this data to verify its accuracy and credibility.

- The Challenges -

The Network faces significant challenges during the building of the database relating to those responsible for the violations, among them:

- **The secrecy of the parties to the conflict:** including the Assad regime, where the official websites, such as the Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of Interior, don't contain any information relating to the leaderships of the army or the security branches.
- **The change of the commanders or their killing:** in the case of the dismissal or killing of one of the commanders or the executing elements, it becomes difficult to determine the date of his killing or the responsibility that he bore at the time of the occurrence of the incident, in addition to the difficulty of knowing who assumed the responsibility after him.
- **The fear of civilians:** many civilians feel afraid of cooperating on this sensitive subject, which obstructs the process of collecting the information.

Part

05

OPEN-SOURCE INVESTIGATION AND DIGITAL EVIDENCE



Section 16: The Methodology of Open-Source Investigation

16.1. The Sources Subject to Monitoring

The Syrian Network for Human Rights continuously monitors the following categories of open sources:

- a.** Social media platforms: including, by way of example and not limitation, the platforms most used in the Syrian context, taking into account the change of usage patterns over time. The monitoring includes posts, video clips, images, live broadcasts, and the channels or groups available to the public.
- b.** News media: this includes the local, regional, and international media outlets, including the written, visual, and audio reports.
- c.** Official communications: this includes the statements, the press releases, the orders, and the publications issued by the parties to the conflict, the transitional government, the military authorities, the Israeli army, the Syrian Democratic Forces, and the other relevant actors.
- d.** Satellite imagery: this includes the commercial and publicly available imagery, and it is used to assess damage, to geolocate, to analyze infrastructure, and to monitor settlement activity, buffer zones, and the movement of displacement.
- e.** Human rights and humanitarian reports: this includes the publications of the other credible rights organizations, the humanitarian agencies, and the United Nations bodies.
- f.** Legal and judicial documents: this includes case files, indictments, search warrants, and the rulings issued by national and international courts.
- g.** Governmental records and archives: this is within the limits of what is available, including the civil registry records, the property records, the legislative texts, and the institutional archives.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights maintains internal guidance that identifies the priority sources according to the geographic area and the type of violation, and this guidance is updated periodically.

16.2. The Protocols of Collection

- a. Systematic monitoring:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights assigns staff to monitor the identified sources on a daily basis, using keyword searches, geographic filters, and alert systems, to monitor the content relevant to the violations that it documents.
- b. Targeted collection of information:** when the Syrian Network for Human Rights receives a report about a particular incident, the staff conduct directed searches across all of the sources subject to monitoring to find additional relevant evidence.
- c. Archival research:** with respect to historical events or the processing of legacy case files, the Syrian Network for Human Rights conducts retroactive searches in the archived content, the saved pages, and the historical satellite imagery.
- d. Immediate preservation:** whenever relevant content is identified, it is preserved immediately before the platform or the original party is able to modify, delete, or remove it. The methods of preservation are set out in Section 16.4.

The Network also gives particular attention to monitoring disinformation campaigns or the re-publication of misleading content, and it analyzes the political and media context of the sources when there is a suspicion of direction, amplification, or systematic manipulation of the information.

16.3. The Verification of Authenticity

The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies procedures to verify the authenticity of the open-source materials, in a manner consistent with the Berkeley Protocol on Digital Open Source Investigations, and they include the following:

- a. Metadata analysis:** the extraction and examination of the metadata embedded in the digital files, such as the images and the video clips, including the timestamps, the device information, and the geolocation data. The Network acknowledges the possibility of the manipulation of this data, and therefore it does not rely on it alone to establish the authenticity of the content.
- b. Geolocation:** the verification of the location appearing in the image or the video through the comparison of the visual features, such as the buildings, the terrain, the road networks, and the distinctive marks, with the satellite imagery and other reference sources. The Syrian Network for Human Rights uses, where appropriate, more than one means of geolocation in order to strengthen the confidence in the result.

- c. Chronolocation:** the estimation of the date and the time at which the image or the video was taken using the analysis of the shadows, the position of the celestial bodies, the weather conditions, and the reference to events known in time. The tools of chronolocation include, where appropriate, the analysis of the sequence of the digital upload (upload patterns), the data associated with the traffic of the social networks, and the comparison of the circulating versions of the content over time.
- d. Reverse image and video search:** the examination of whether the image or the footage has been used previously, recycled, or misattributed to another incident.
- e. Consistency assessment:** the estimation of the extent of the consistency of the content in itself, and its consistency with the other available evidence relating to the incident, the location, and the relevant conditions.
- f. Source assessment:** the evaluation of the reliability of the account, the channel, or the platform that published or redistributed the material, taking into account its previous record and the nature of its content.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights does not include the open-source materials in its database except after subjecting them to these verification procedures and their satisfaction of the necessary checks. As for the materials whose authenticity cannot be verified, they are stored separately and classified as undocumented. The open-source materials are used as a supporting verification layer and not as a sole source of proof, and they are systematically linked with the databases of the incidents, the victims, and the weapons in order to strengthen the cross-verification.

16.4. Preservation

The Syrian Network for Human Rights preserves the open-source materials in accordance with the following standards, and in a manner consistent with the Berkeley Protocol:

- a. The preservation of the original format:** the material is preserved in its original digital format without modification, editing, or compression.
- b. Hashing:** a cryptographic hash value is created for each preserved file at the time of its preservation, so that it serves the function of the digital fingerprint that can be referred back to in order to verify that the file has not been changed after its preservation.
- c. Timestamping:** the date and the time of the preservation are recorded.
- d. The recording of the link and the source:** the link through which the material was obtained, the name of the platform, the name of the account or the publishing body, and any other identifying data connected to the source and the context of publication, are recorded.

- e. **The contextual capture:** a screenshot or a screen recording showing the material as it appeared in its original context, including the surrounding comments, the timestamps, and the platform data, is preserved, in addition to the raw file itself.
- f. **Storage:** the preserved materials are stored in the secure digital archive of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, in accordance with the data protection standards set out in Section 7.4.
- g. **The recording of the context of the initial discovery of the material,** including the accounts that re-published it, and its initial temporal spread, in order to trace the path of the digital spread of the material.

16.5. The Chain of Custody for the Digital Evidence

The Syrian Network for Human Rights maintains a chain-of-custody record for each element of the digital evidence, from the moment of its collection or acquisition until any subsequent use of it in the preparation of reports or its submission to a judicial or quasi-judicial body. The chain-of-custody record includes the following:

- a. The identity of the person who collected or acquired the material.
- b. The date, the time, and the method of the collection.
- c. The source from which the material was obtained.
- d. The hash value recorded at the time of preservation.
- e. Any processing or analysis carried out on the material, the identity of the person who carried it out, and its date.
- f. Any transfer of the material to a third party, including the date of the transfer, the receiving body, and the legal or procedural basis for the transfer.

16.6. The Ethical Use of the Open-Source Materials

The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the following ethical standards to the use of the open-source materials:

- a. **Materials showing identifiable victims:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights does not publish in its public reports materials that depict identifiable victims in a manner that may cause harm, distress, or re-traumatization to them or to their families, unless there is informed consent from the victim or the family, and the publication serves a legitimate documentary purpose.

- b. Materials showing children:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights does not publish open-source materials that show identifiable children in any context that may expose them to harm, exploitation, or re-traumatization. When using images or video clips of children in the reports, the identifying features are concealed wherever that is necessary.
- c. Materials depicting sexual violence or identifiable survivors:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights does not, under any circumstance, publish open-source materials that depict sexual violence or identifiable survivors of sexual violence or gender-based violence.
- d. The do-no-harm assessment:** before using or publishing any open-source material, the Syrian Network for Human Rights conducts an assessment of whether the use may expose the persons appearing in the material, or the person who created or published it, or any other persons who may be identified through it, to danger.
- e. Respect for dignity:** all the open-source materials used by the Syrian Network for Human Rights are presented in a manner that preserves the dignity of the persons whom they show.

16.7. The Technological Tools

The Syrian Network for Human Rights uses technological tools and platforms to support its work in open-source investigation, including satellite-image analysis software, verification tools, geolocation platforms, and where appropriate, artificial-intelligence-assisted analysis tools for the processing of large quantities of materials.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the following principles to tool-assisted analysis:

- a.** No output issued by a technical tool is accepted without human review. All automated or artificial-intelligence-assisted results are subjected to verification by trained staff.
- b.** The staff who use the technological tools are trained on their capabilities and their limitations, including the risks of false positive results, false negative results, and the biases inherent in automated systems.
- c.** The Syrian Network for Human Rights documents the tools used in each analysis, including the version, the settings, and any relevant parameters, in a manner that ensures that the work can be reviewed and reproduced when needed.

Part

06

DATA MANAGEMENT AND SHARING



Section 17: Database Architecture and Interoperability

17.1. Database Architecture

The Syrian Network for Human Rights maintains the following interlinked databases:

- a. **The victims database:** it includes individual records of the persons who were killed in extra-judicial killings or in unlawful deaths, in accordance with what is set out in Section 9.
- b. **The detainees database:** it includes individual records of the persons who were subjected to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, or torture, in accordance with what is set out in Section 10.
- c. **The incidents database:** it includes the records of the documented incidents, and each record in it is linked to the relevant victim, detainee, perpetrator, facility, or weapon.
- d. **The perpetrators database:** it includes individual records of the persons involved in the violations.
- e. **The vital objects database:** it includes the records of the attacks on the civilian objects and the protected sites, in accordance with what is set out in Section 11.
- f. **The weapons database:** it includes the records of the use of weapons in the documented incidents, in accordance with what is set out in Section 12.
- g. **The displacement database:** it includes the records of the forced displacement events and the conditions of return, in accordance with what is set out in Section 13.
- h. **The open-source evidence archive:** it includes the digital evidence that has been preserved, documented, and indexed, in accordance with what is set out in Section 16.

Each entry in the databases is assigned a unique identifier. The entries are linked across the various databases through the shared incident identifiers, the victim and perpetrator identifiers, and the geographic and temporal codes.

In addition to the databases dedicated to each pattern of violation, the Network relies in its documentation processes on the following:

- **The form:** a file containing multiple sections of sequential questions connected to the nature of the violation. It is filled out exclusively with the consent of the victim or the family, is preserved within the database, and is sent to the UN committees concerned with the violation.
- **The statement / the testimony:** a file containing what the victim or witness recounted of the circumstances of the violation to which they were subjected, with a detailed narration of the event. It is collected with the consent of the victim or the witness, in accordance with a specific structure and sequence, and it includes all the details relating to the context of the violation, in addition to the images and documents connected to it.

- **The audio or video interview:** it is conducted in accordance with the standards for the conduct of interviews and it resembles the statement to a large extent. In it, the consent of the victim or the witness is obtained for the recording of the meeting in audio or video form. In some cases, the victims of the violations may be in a state of vulnerability or trauma, and therefore a vulnerability assessment is carried out to determine the extent of the person's fitness to undertake such an interview.
- **The reports:** they are prepared by the researchers on the basis of the information deduced from the documentation, in accordance with a defined methodology for the review and analysis of the data connected to the violation, and in accordance with a plan specific to each report.

17.2. Data Standards

The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the following data standards, in a manner that ensures consistency and ease of use:

- Geographic coding:** all the locations are recorded by the names of the governorates, the regions, the sub-districts, and the towns or the neighborhoods, with the geographic coordinates wherever it is possible to obtain them. The Network adopts a unified list of geographic codes covering the entire Syrian territory, including the occupied areas.
- Temporal coding:** all the dates and the times are recorded in a unified standard format, using the twenty-four-hour system and the local time of the location of the incident. When the date or the time is not known precisely, the narrowest time range that can be established is recorded.
- Naming conventions:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights applies unified rules in the writing of personal names, place names, and the names of organizations, with reference to the aliases, the alternative spellings, and the common variations in transliteration or writing.
- Unique identifiers:** each entry in the database, whether it relates to a victim, a detainee, a perpetrator, an incident, or a facility, is assigned a unique and permanent alphanumeric identifier, which does not change even if the content of the entry is updated.
- Data quality management:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts internal mechanisms for the periodic review of data quality, including the double-checking of the entries, the review of the consistency between the interlinked databases, and the detection of duplication, contradiction, or deficiency in the information, in a manner that ensures the highest degrees of accuracy and reliability in the records.

- f. The log of modifications:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights maintains a complete log of all the modifications that occur to any entry in the databases, including the nature of the modification, its reason, the identity of the staff member who carried it out, and its date and time, without deleting or replacing the previous versions, in a manner that ensures full traceability of the path of the data over time.
- g. Sensitivity classification:** The data within the Network's databases is classified according to different levels of sensitivity (public, restricted, confidential, highly confidential), in accordance with the degree of the potential danger to individuals or the nature of the analytical or judicial use, with the application of strict access controls for each category.

17.3. Interoperability

The Syrian Network for Human Rights designs its data structures in a manner that supports interoperability with the data systems of the international mechanisms and the partner organizations. This includes the following:

- a. Data formats:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights maintains the capacity to export the data in structured and unified formats, compatible with the data systems of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, the International Criminal Court, and the other relevant mechanisms, in accordance with the data-exchange protocols set out in Section 18.
- b. Transfer protocols:** the data is transferred to the receiving bodies through secure channels, with its encryption during the transfer and during the storage, and with the documentation of the chain of custody for each transfer process.
- c. Metadata standards:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights records metadata for each entry in the database, including the date of creation, the date of the last modification, the level of confidence, the legal classification, and the type of source, whether it is a testimony, a document, an open-source material, or a physical piece of evidence.
- d. Judicial linkability:** The databases are designed so as to allow the linking of the incidents, the victims, the perpetrators, and the evidence in a manner that supports the building of integrated judicial files, in a way that enables the tracing of the chain of individual and institutional responsibility in accordance with the standards of international accountability, and in a way that facilitates their use before the international judicial or quasi-judicial mechanisms.
- e. The judicial standards for export:** When exporting the data, the Syrian Network for Human Rights takes into account the requirements of admissibility in the judicial contexts, including the possibility of converting the data into digital evidence usable before the international courts or the independent investigation mechanisms, with the full preservation of the chain of custody, the integrity of the data, and the possibility of verifying it.

Section 18: Data Sharing

18.1. The Standards of Sharing and the Assessment of Risks

Before sharing any data with any receiving body, the Syrian Network for Human Rights conducts an assessment of the risks that includes the following:

- a.** The capacity of the receiving body, and its commitment, to protect the confidentiality and the security of the data.
- b.** The legal framework that governs the receiving body's handling of the data, including any legal obligations that may be imposed upon it to disclose the data to third parties, such as the disclosure obligations under the laws of criminal procedure.
- c.** The risks that may result for the sources, the witnesses, or the victims as a consequence of the sharing, including the risk of reprisal, harassment, or re-traumatization.
- d.** Whether the data subjects have given the specific consent required for sharing with the category of receiving bodies concerned, in accordance with Section 2.9 and Section 7.1.
- e.** The purpose of the use of the data, and whether this purpose is consistent with the original purpose for which the data was collected.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights does not share the data when the assessment of the risks concludes that the sharing will create an unacceptable risk to the safety of the sources, the witnesses, or the victims, or when the required consent has not been duly obtained.

f. The levels of data sharing:

The Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts a classification system for the levels of data sharing that determines the scope of the disclosure in accordance with the degree of the sensitivity of the information. These levels include: public sharing, conditional sharing, restricted sharing, confidential sharing, and highly restricted sharing, in a manner that ensures the achievement of a balance between the analytical use and the protection of the safety of the sources.

18.2. The Agreements of Data Sharing

All the processes of the exchange of data, with the exception of what is published within the public reports of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, are subject to a written agreement for the exchange of data between the Network and the receiving body. This agreement specifies the following:

- a. The purpose of the sharing.
- b. The categories of the data that will be shared.
- c. The obligations relating to confidentiality and security.
- d. The restrictions imposed on the re-sharing or the re-disclosure.
- e. The obligations of the retention of the data and its deletion.
- f. The procedures for dealing with any security breach or intrusion incident.
- g. The right of the Syrian Network for Human Rights to suspend or terminate the exchange of data.
- h. The re-use of the data: any process of the re-use or the subsequent processing of the data by the receiving body is subject to the restrictions set out in the data-sharing agreement, and the data may not be used for purposes that differ from the original purpose except with the express consent of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, and after a re-assessment of the risks.

18.3. The Standards of Public Reporting

The reports published by the Syrian Network for Human Rights represent a form of the forms of sharing the data with the public. In this context, the Network applies the following standards:

- a. Anonymization: all the identifying information relating to the sources, the witnesses, and the victims is removed in the public reports, unless the person has given informed consent to the attributed publication, and the publication does not involve a risk, in accordance with Section 7.3.
- b. The identification of the perpetrators: the names of the perpetrators may be included in the public reports when the evidence is strong, and the publication serves a legitimate purpose, and the internal review set out in Section 19.1 has been completed.
- c. Aggregated data: the statistics published in the public reports reflect only the entries that have been verified, and they are disaggregated according to the categories specified in the structure of the relevant database, such as the governorate, the responsible party, the sex, the age, the type of weapon, and so on.

- d.** Methodological disclosure: each public report describes the methodology used, the types of evidence on which the findings were based and their quantity, and the limitations that govern the data and the analysis.
- e.** The disclosure of the level of certainty: the Syrian Network for Human Rights clarifies in its public reports, wherever that is applicable, the level of certainty associated with the data or the findings, including the distinction between the confirmed, the probable, the possible, and the incomplete data, so as to ensure methodological transparency in the presentation and the analysis.

18.4. The Log of Data Sharing

The Syrian Network for Human Rights maintains an internal log of all the processes of sharing the data, which includes the following:

- a.** The date and time of the sharing.
- b.** The receiving body.
- c.** The categories of the data that were shared.
- d.** The legal or contractual basis of the sharing.
- e.** The results of the risk assessment associated with the sharing.
- f.** The restrictions imposed on the use or the re-publication.
- g.** Any subsequent updates or modifications to the conditions of the sharing.

This log aims to ensure the full traceability of all the processes of the disclosure of the data and to strengthen internal accountability.

Part

07

QUALITY CONTROL AND INSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS



Section 19: Quality Control and Review

19.1. Internal Review

The Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the following internal-review procedures:

- a. The review of the entries:** every new entry in the database, whether it relates to a victim, a detainee, an incident, or a perpetrator, is subject to a review by a staff member other than the person who created the entry, before it is finally approved. The reviewer verifies the compliance with the verification standards set out in Section 8, the accuracy of the data fields, the appropriateness of the legal classification, and the completeness of the record of the evidence.
- b. The supervisory review:** the heads of the sections conduct periodic reviews of the entries falling within the scope of their responsibilities, and they select samples of them for an in-depth review.
- c. The thematic review:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights periodically conducts thematic reviews that include all the entries relating to a particular type of violation, or to a particular geographic area, or to a particular party, with the aim of detecting the contradictions, the gaps, and the recurrent patterns.
- d. The pre-publication review:** the public reports are subject to an internal review in order to ascertain their factual accuracy, their adherence to the methodology, the correctness of their legal classification, their compliance with the requirements of confidentiality, and the clarity of their presentation. This review is conducted by at least one of the legal and human rights experts working in the team of the Syrian Network for Human Rights.
- e. The audit of consistency between the databases:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights conducts periodic audits in order to ascertain the internal consistency between the inter-linked databases set out in Section 17.1, including the matching of the records of the victims with the incidents, the linking of the detainees with the related events, and the verification of the absence of any duplication, contradiction, or unjustified gaps in the data.

19.2. The Correction of Errors

The procedure for the correction of errors set out in Section 8.5 forms part of the system of quality control. The errors that are detected through any of the review processes are corrected in accordance with that procedure. It should be noted that the correction of errors is not limited to the modification of the entries within the databases, but it includes the documentation of the effect of the error on the records associated with it within the structure set out in Section 17, including the incidents, the victims, the perpetrators, the weapons, and the vital objects, and the updating of any analytical findings or published reports that were affected by it where necessary, while retaining the original version for the purposes of audit.

19.3. External Review

The Syrian Network for Human Rights welcomes the conduct of a periodic external review or audit of its methodology and the quality of its data by qualified independent experts or peer organizations. The Network may initiate this review, or it may be conducted upon the request of one of the partners or the relevant bodies. The external reviewers are subject to strict obligations of confidentiality, and they may not have access to any identifying information relating to the sources or the witnesses except by express authorization. The senior management of the Syrian Network for Human Rights considers the results of the external reviews and their recommendations, and when it accepts them, they are integrated into the amended internal procedures or into the updates of the methodology.

- a. The standards of the independence of the external review:** priority is given in the selection of the external reviewers to ensuring their complete independence from the parties to the conflict, and the absence of any direct or indirect conflict of interest, with the disclosure of any previous professional relationship that may affect impartiality.
- b. The restricted scope of access:** the scope of the access of the external reviewers is determined in accordance with the principle of the minimum necessary, such that access is permitted only to the data necessary for the performance of the review process, with the exclusion of any sensitive identifying data unless a specific and particular authorization is given.

19.4. The Methodological Linkage with the Structure of the Databases (Section 17)

The processes of quality control and review set out in this section constitute a direct extension of the structure of the databases set out in Section 17, and they operate within an integrative framework that ensures the following:

- a. The integration of the life cycle of the data:** the data passes through a complete cycle that begins with the entry into the databases, through the processes of verification and classification, and ends with the internal and external review, in a manner that ensures the continuity of the audit across all the stages of the processing of the data without interruption.
- b. The cross-verification between the databases:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts mechanisms of cross-verification between the different databases (the victims, the incidents, the detainees, the perpetrators, the weapons, the vital objects, the displacement, and the open-source evidence), with the aim of detecting the contradictions and strengthening the structural consistency of the information.

- c. The linking of the modifications with the analytical structure:** any modification resulting from the processes of review or the correction of errors is reflected sequentially across all the related databases, with the preservation of a complete log of the changes that allows the tracing of the analytical and legal effect of any modification.
- d. Ensuring the capacity for judicial audit:** all the procedures of review are designed so as to ensure the possibility of tracing every data entry from the moment of its creation to the moment of its final use in the reports or the judicial referrals, in a manner that is consistent with the requirements of digital evidence and the chain of custody.

Section 20: The Duty of Psychological and Social Care

The Syrian Network for Human Rights acknowledges that the staff working in the documentation of human rights violations, and in particular the violations that involve killing, torture, sexual violence, and the violations committed against children, are exposed to the risks of primary or secondary trauma, vicarious trauma, and professional burnout. It also acknowledges that the duty of care extends to include the protection of the safety and the well-being of each of the staff, the sources, the witnesses, the survivors, and any parties who interact with the processes of documentation, in accordance with the principle of do no harm and the relevant international standards.

Accordingly, the Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts the following measures:

20.1. The Support of the Staff

- a. The management of the workload:** the Network monitors the workload falling upon the staff who deal with the most traumatic materials, such as the testimonies of torture, the sexual violence, the violations against children, and the mass graves, and it resorts to the rotation of the tasks whenever that is possible in order to limit the prolonged exposure.
- b. Institutional psychological support:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights provides mechanisms of internal or external psychological support when needed, including individual or group support sessions under the supervision of specialists, and the provision of referral to specialized psychotherapy services when necessary.
- c. Training:** the staff receive training on the recognition of the indicators of secondary trauma, and on the strategies of self-care and mutual support.
- d. Institutional culture:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights encourages a work environment that allows the staff to acknowledge the emotional effect of their work without stigma, and in which the requests for support are dealt with as a natural professional part of the work.
- e. The reduction of cumulative exposure:** the Network adopts a policy that aims to reduce the repeated exposure to the highly traumatic materials through the distribution of the tasks among the teams, and the setting of flexible time limits when needed, in a manner that limits the risks of cumulative traumatic burnout.

20.2. The Support of the Sources, the Witnesses, and the Survivors

The Syrian Network for Human Rights understands that the process of documentation itself may cause or aggravate the suffering of the sources, the witnesses, or the survivors. Therefore, it adopts the following measures:

- a. The trauma-informed interviews:** all the interviews are conducted in accordance with the protocols set out in Sections 10.7, 14.1, and 14.2, and by staff trained in the methods that are mindful of psychological trauma.
- b. The referral to the support services:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights maintains an updated directory of the psychological and social support services available in the areas where it works, and it provides the referral information to all the persons participating in the process of documentation. The referral remains available without being a precondition for the participation in the documentation.
- c. The do-no-harm assessment:** before contacting any source, witness, or survivor, the Syrian Network for Human Rights assesses whether the process of documentation may cause that person severe distress or additional harm, and it adjusts its approach accordingly. If the result of the assessment indicates that the interview will be harmful, the Network postpones it or adopts alternative means of obtaining the information.
- d. The commitment to the Murad Code:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights aligns its practices with the principles of the Murad Code relating to the well-being of the survivors, including the principle that requires the well-being of the survivor to be placed ahead of the informational value of the testimony.
- e. The right of immediate cessation:** any source, witness, or survivor has the right to stop the interview at any time without giving reasons, and the Network is committed to stopping the interview immediately without any pressure or any unwanted attempt to complete it.
- f. The prevention of re-victimization:** the Network takes systematic measures in order to avoid the reproduction of the traumatic experience, including the reduction of the unnecessary repetitive questions, the avoidance of insisting on painful details, and the limiting of the re-telling of the traumatic events more than once.

Section 21: The Ethical Framework

The documentation work carried out by the Syrian Network for Human Rights represents a form of the forms of applied research in the field of human rights, and it is subject to ethical principles derived from the frameworks of research that involve human beings, with their adaptation in a manner that is consistent with the particular nature of the documentation of the violations in the context of the conflict and the post-conflict.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights also adopts the principle of “**the continuous ethical responsibility**,” which means that the ethical decisions are not taken only once at the moment of the collection of the data, but rather they accompany the entire life cycle of the data, from the collection to the publication and beyond.

The fundamental principles include the following:

21.1. The Ethics of Research

- a. Respect for persons:** that is, the recognition of the autonomy and the dignity of every person who provides information to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, which is reflected in the practices of informed consent, confidentiality, and the right of withdrawal.
- b. Beneficence:** that is, the commitment to maximizing the expected benefit of the documentation, including the service of accountability, the truth, and justice, while minimizing the harm that may befall the individuals and the communities.
- c. Justice:** that is, the fair distribution of the benefits and the burdens of the documentation among the different categories of the affected population, including the commitment to the documentation of the violations befalling all the categories without discrimination.
- d. Do no harm:** that is, the commitment that the process of the documentation should not cause harm, which is translated through the principle of do no harm and the preventive protocols set out in this methodology.
- e. Independence and research integrity:** the Syrian Network for Human Rights is committed to preserving the independence of its documentary and analytical decisions from any political, financial, or institutional pressures, and it prevents any external influence on the results of the documentation or the classification of the violations.

21.2. The Ethical Oversight

The management of the Syrian Network for Human Rights undertakes the function of the ethical oversight of the documentary decisions that involve essential ethical considerations. When needed, a multi-level internal review may be formed in the highly sensitive cases. The decisions that are referred to this oversight include the following:

- a. Whether a particular type of violation or incident ought to be documented when the documentation itself would create a significant risk to the sources or the affected communities.
- b. Whether information that may lead to the identification of the identity of the victims or the survivors ought to be published, despite the taking of measures of anonymization.
- c. Whether the data ought to be shared with a receiving body whose adherence to the conditions set out in Section 18 is not settled.
- d. Whether a documentation protocol ought to be modified in response to a particular contextual development that raises ethical problems.
- e. Whether the documentation in a particular area or file ought to be suspended or postponed because of the rise of the level of the risks to the sources.

All the ethical decisions are documented, with a statement of their justifications and the considerations on which they were based, in a manner that ensures the possibility of the subsequent internal review.

21.3. The Recurrent Ethical Tensions

The Syrian Network for Human Rights acknowledges the existence of recurrent ethical tensions in its work, and it addresses them through the protocols specified in this methodology, the most prominent of which are:

- a. **The objectives of the documentation versus the protection of the sources:** the desire to document the largest possible number of violations may conflict with the commitment to protect the sources from harm. When this conflict arises, priority is given to the protection of the sources, in accordance with what is set out in Sections 6.3 and 7.1.
- b. **Comprehensiveness versus accuracy:** the desire to document every violation may conflict with the evidentiary standards necessary for accurate documentation. When this conflict arises, priority is given to accuracy, and the reports that do not satisfy the standards of verification are kept within the category of the cases under verification, rather than being included in the published statistics.

- c. Public reporting versus confidentiality:** the desire to inform the public and to support advocacy may conflict with the commitment to protect the identity of the sources and the victims. When this conflict arises, priority is given to confidentiality, in accordance with Section 7.3.
- d. National accountability versus institutional independence:** the desire to support the procedures of national accountability undertaken by the transitional government may conflict with the commitment to preserve the independence from the party whose conduct is being documented. This tension is dealt with in accordance with the conditions set out in Section 18.3.
- e. Speed versus the integrity of the verification:** some incidents may require speed in publication, however the Syrian Network for Human Rights does not issue any findings before the completion of the minimum required verification, even in the urgent cases.

In all cases, the Syrian Network for Human Rights works to address these tensions by reference to the principles and the protocols set out in this methodology, while considering the safety and the well-being of the victims, the survivors, the witnesses, and the sources to be the most important consideration in all the ethical decisions.

Section 22: The Challenges and the Limitations

22.1. The Continuing Challenges

The documentation work carried out by the Syrian Network for Human Rights still faces a set of continuing structural and field challenges, the most prominent of which are:

- a. The security risks:** the staff of the Syrian Network for Human Rights and its sources face the dangers of exposure to physical harm, detention, intimidation, and surveillance. These risks affect directly the capacity for access to the sources, the continuity of the communication with them, and the level of the disclosure of the information, which leads at times to documentary gaps that cannot be filled completely.
- b. The restrictions on access:** the access to the occupied areas is subject to the control of the occupying authority, and the capacity of the Syrian Network for Human Rights to conduct direct investigations inside them remains limited. The access to Suwayda is also restricted by reason of the ongoing conflict.

- c. The restrictions of resources:** the scope of the documentation mandate of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, which includes the legacy cases, the transitional period, the ongoing armed conflicts, and the military occupation, exceeds the current human and logistical resources of the organization. Therefore, the decisions of the setting of priorities remain necessary, and they are taken on the basis of the gravity of the violation, the availability of the evidence, and the extent of the narrowness of the temporal window of the documentation.
- d. The reluctance of the sources:** the pattern that prevailed during the previous stage, represented in the abstention of the families from reporting the cases of detention or the other violations out of the fear of reprisal, re-targeting, or social stigma, and the belief in the futility of reporting, which leads to a permanent documentary gap in some of the categories.
- e. The digital threats:** the development of the tools of digital surveillance among the governmental and the non-governmental bodies alike generates continuing dangers to the communications of the Syrian Network for Human Rights and to its storage of the data. The digital threats also include the attempts of phishing, the impersonation of the identity, the breaching of the accounts, and the targeting of the social networks of the sources, which imposes the adoption of strict and continuously changing digital-security protocols.

22.2. The Documentary Gap and the Documented Minimum

The Syrian Network for Human Rights acknowledges that its databases reflect only the documented minimum of the violations. It is certain that the actual number of the violations committed on the Syrian territory since March 2011 is far higher than the number that the Network has been able to document. This difference is owed to the challenges referred to above, and to the structural limitations inherent in the work of the non-governmental organizations in the contexts of conflict and post-conflict.

The nature of the work in the environments of conflict and post-conflict contributes to the production of a permanent gap between the actual reality and the documented violations. It is a structural gap that cannot be eliminated completely, but it can be reduced gradually.

The fall of the Assad regime has made available opportunities for the partial closing of this gap, in that the access to areas that were previously closed, and to the facilities of detention, and to the institutional archives, may reveal evidence relating to violations that were not documented before.

For this reason, the statistics and the findings that the Syrian Network for Human Rights publishes are presented as a documented minimum, not as a comprehensive count. This minimum is understood as a methodological result of the objective limitations in the environments of conflict and its aftermath, and not as a reflection of the actual or comprehensive size of the violations. This limitation is indicated expressly in every published report.

Part

08

REVIEW AND VERSION CONTROL



Section 23: The Review of the Methodology

23.1. The Drivers of the Review

The Syrian Network for Human Rights reviews this methodology and amends it where appropriate in the following cases:

- a.** The occurrence of an essential change in the working environment that affects the applicability of the provisions of the methodology, such as the outbreak of a new armed conflict, the conclusion of a peace agreement, the change of the status of one of the parties, the expansion or the recession of the foreign military presence, or the establishment of new governmental or judicial institutions.
- b.** The occurrence of an important development in the international legal standards that affects the legal framework that the Syrian Network for Human Rights applies, such as the adoption of a new treaty, the issuance of a judicial decision of binding force or of considerable interpretive value, or the publication of new guidance by a body of the United Nations or by the International Committee of the Red Cross.
- c.** The detection of a methodological gap, an inconsistency, or a point of weakness through the processes of quality control and review of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, as in Section 19, or through the external review.
- d.** The mandatory periodic review, which is conducted at least once every three years, even in the absence of essential changes, in order to ensure the continuity of the methodological appropriateness and the updating of the standards.

23.2. The Governance of the Review, and the Approval of the Amendments and the Reporting of them

The process of the amendment of the methodology is subject to internal-governance procedures that ensure the accuracy and the consistency, and they include the following:

- a.** The preparation of the draft of the amendments by the specialized team or the methodology unit.
- b.** A multi-level internal review that includes the legal, the methodological, and the operational aspects.
- c.** The approval of the final amendments by the senior management of the Syrian Network for Human Rights.

- d. The documentation of all the amendments, their reasons, and their effect on the methodology, formally, in the version log.
- e. The reporting of the amendments: the essential updates are circulated to the relevant internal teams, and they are also shared with the relevant partners where appropriate, in order to ensure the consistency of the application of the methodology.

23.3. Version Control

Each edition of this methodology is assigned a clear version number and effective date. All the previous editions are kept in an institutional archive that ensures the possibility of referring back to them for the purposes of audit, comparison, or evaluation.

The Network also maintains a central version log that includes:

- The summary of the amendments in each edition.
- The reasons for the amendment.
- The scope of the changes (essential / partial / editorial).
- The date of the approval and the entry into force.

This log is attached permanently to the current approved edition.

23.4. Ensuring the Consistency between the Editions

When any amendment is introduced into the methodology, the relevant sections are reviewed in order to ascertain the absence of any internal conflict or contradiction, and the cross-references between the sections are updated when needed.

A comprehensive review is also conducted in order to ensure the consistency of the terminology, the definitions, and the legal and methodological references between all the parts of the document.

23.5. The Date of Entry into Force and the Transitional Provisions

The amended methodology enters into force on the date determined by the Executive Director. Its provisions apply to all the documentation work that is conducted after that date. The amended methodology does not, as a matter of principle, lead to a change in the legal classification of the violations that were documented under a previous version, unless the amendment expressly provides for its retroactive application. The retroactive effect is applied only in the cases in which the correction is necessary in order to ensure the accuracy of the historical record or to remove an essential error in the classification, with the documentation of all the previous amendments transparently without deleting them from the original log.

When the amendment results in a change in the system of classification, such as the re-classification of one of the parties, the Syrian Network for Human Rights applies the new classification with a future effect, and it records in the database the date of the re-classification, its reason, and its effect on the previous databases.

Section 24: Training and Capacity-Building

24.1. The Institutional Framework of the Training

The Syrian Network for Human Rights considers that the quality of the documentation work depends directly on the competence of the staff working for it, and on their capacity to apply the methodology accurately and consistently across all the stages of the collection, the analysis, and the preservation of the data. Accordingly, the Network adopts an organized institutional program for training and capacity-building, which aims to ensure the unification of the methodological understanding and the strengthening of the technical, the legal, and the research skills of the staff.

The training is not looked upon as a separate or a phased activity, but rather as a continuous and integrated process that accompanies all the levels of the work, from the new staff and up to the senior researchers.

24.2. The Basic Training of the New Staff

All the new staff, before their commencement of any documentary tasks, are subject to a foundational training program that includes the following axes:

- a. The introduction to the institutional framework of the Syrian Network for Human Rights and its governing principles.
- b. The comprehension of the relevant international legal frameworks, including international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and international criminal law.

- c. The understanding of the methodology adopted in the documentation, including the definitions, the workflows, the levels of verification, and the structure of the databases.
- d. The training on the principles of confidentiality, data protection, informed consent, and do no harm.
- e. The training on the protocols of the interviews, in particular with the special categories such as the children and the survivors of torture and sexual violence.

The staff member is not permitted to participate in the collection of the data or in the conduct of the field interviews before the completion of this program and its approval.

24.3. The Specialized Training according to the Tasks

The Syrian Network for Human Rights provides specialized training programs connected to the nature of the functional role, and they include, by way of example and not of limitation:

- a. Advanced training in the documentation of extrajudicial killing and unlawful deaths.
- b. Training in the analysis of the patterns of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance.
- c. Training in the investigation of the attacks on the civilian objects and the analysis of the cumulative impact.
- d. Training in the documentation of forced displacement and the violations of housing, land, and property.
- e. Training in open-source investigation and the verification of the digital materials.
- f. Training in the management of the databases, their analysis, and their interlinkage.

These programs are updated periodically in a manner that keeps pace with the development of the field context and the development of the international standards.

24.4. Continuous Capacity-Building and Evaluation

The Syrian Network for Human Rights adopts a continuous system for the evaluation of the performance and the building of the capacities, which includes:

- a. Periodic reviews of the performance of the staff in the application of the methodology.
- b. The identification of the skills gaps and the development of individual and collective training plans in order to address them.

- c. Internal review sessions of the complex cases in order to strengthen the institutional learning.
- d. The exchange of expertise between the field teams, the analysis teams, and the database teams.

This system is looked upon as a fundamental part of ensuring the quality of the documentation, and not as a separate administrative activity.

24.5. The Institutional Culture of Learning

The Syrian Network for Human Rights encourages an institutional culture based on continuous learning, constructive self-criticism, and the exchange of knowledge. The methodological discussion concerning the difficult cases or the potential errors is considered a natural part of the work, and not an indicator of weakness in the performance, so long as it takes place within a professional framework that respects the ethical standards and the confidentiality.

Section 25: The Management of the Physical Evidence and the Documents

25.1. The General Framework of the Physical Evidence

Alongside the digital evidence and the open sources, the Syrian Network for Human Rights relies in its documentation work on the physical evidence and the traditional documents, as fundamental elements in the establishment of the violations and the strengthening of the force of the documentary file.

The physical evidence and the documents include, by way of example and not of limitation: the official documents, the identity papers, the medical records, the death certificates, the records of detention, the judicial documents, the maps, the printed photographs, the paper correspondence, and any other physical materials related to the incident, the victim, or the perpetrator.

25.2. The Collection of the Physical Evidence and the Documentation of its Source

The process of the collection of the physical evidence is subject to a set of strict controls, which include:

- a.** The accurate recording of the source of each document or physical material, including the body or the person who provided it, and the circumstances of obtaining it.
- b.** The documentation of the context of the obtaining of the evidence, and the determination of its relationship to the incident or the violation under investigation.
- c.** A preliminary assessment of the reliability of the document on the basis of its source and its consistency with the other evidence.
- d.** The prevention of any modification or change in the original material during the process of the collection or the transfer.

No document is accepted within the database except after subjecting it to the approved procedures of verification.

25.3. The Verification of the Documents and the Physical Evidence

The documents and the physical evidence are subject to multi-level processes of verification, which include:

- a.** The examination of the external form of the document, including the seals, the signatures, and the official patterns.
- b.** The comparison of the content with other independent sources or with data existing in the databases.
- c.** The verification of the temporal and the spatial consistency of the document with the event being documented.
- d.** The analysis of the possibility of forgery or manipulation, where appropriate, with the assistance of specialized expertise.

In the event that it is not possible to verify the document fully, it is classified within the category of “supporting evidence of incomplete verification,” and it is not used on its own to establish a fact.

25.4. The Preservation of the Physical Evidence and the Chain of Custody

The Syrian Network for Human Rights is committed to strict standards for the preservation of the physical evidence, which include:

- a.** The recording of every transfer of the evidence within a clear and complete chain of custody.
- b.** The storage of the original documents in safe places, protected from damage or loss.
- c.** The creation of high-resolution digital copies of the paper evidence when needed, with their linking to the original copies.
- d.** The restriction of the access to the physical evidence to the authorized staff only.

25.5. The Integration of the Physical Evidence into the Databases

The physical evidence is integrated within the structure of the databases approved in the Syrian Network for Human Rights, such that it is linked to each of:

- a.** The related incidents.
- b.** The victims, the detainees, or the perpetrators.
- c.** The geographic locations.
- d.** The digital and open-source evidence related to the same incident.

This integration aims to build a multi-layered documentary file that strengthens the force of the legal and the analytical conclusions.

The Conclusion of the Methodology

This methodology represents the reference framework upon which the Syrian Network for Human Rights relies in the collection of the data, its verification, its analysis, and the documentation of the violations committed in the context of the armed conflict and its aftermath in Syria, including the situations of military occupation and the transitional period.

This methodology has been designed so as to be a strict practical framework, applicable in the field, and capable of development at the same time, in a manner that reflects the nature of the changing Syrian context, and the complexities of the collection of the evidence in the environments of the continuing conflict and the restriction of the access.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights affirms that this methodology does not aim to present a complete or a final picture of all the violations, but rather to document what can be verified in accordance with the highest possible standards in light of the realistic constraints imposed on the field work and the sources of the information.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights is also committed to keeping this methodology a living document, subject to continuous review and updating whenever the legal, the field, or the technical developments require that, and in a manner that ensures the preservation of its accuracy, its appropriateness, and its effectiveness.

Finally, all the work resulting from the application of this methodology rests upon fundamental and indivisible principles, foremost among them: the respect for human dignity, the doing of no harm, professional impartiality, independence, accuracy in the documentation, and transparency in the presentation of the findings.

It should be noted⁹ that this methodology is an updated and developed version of the previous framework of the Network, in line with the development of the tools of documentation, and in response to the newly arising field changes, and out of a concern for transparency and the provision of the opportunity for the researchers and the interested parties. The previous version of the methodology remains available for consultation through the following link:



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