

4.12.2. Child recruitment

Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, this document has been reviewed and updated. Please consult '[Interim Country Guidance: Syria \(2025\)](#)'

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: April 2024

COI summary

Children, most frequently boys, have been used in hostilities by parties to the conflict for combat roles, to act as spies or informants, or to serve at checkpoints. Both State forces, including NDF and pro-government militias, and non-State armed groups are reported to recruit minors to their forces. [[Targeting 2020](#), 12.1, pp. 92]

Recent figures shows that children in Syria are increasingly recruited, notwithstanding the deescalating fighting in most parts of the country. The June 2023 report published by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly stated that a total of 1 696 children (of whom 1 593 boys and 103 girls) were recruited in 2022. Cases of children as young as 14 being recruited were also reported. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, pp. 40-41]

The majority of children were recruited and used by the SDF and affiliated armed groups, and anti-government groups such as the SNA and HTS. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 40]

The recruitment of children by SNA is reportedly 'very common' in SNA-controlled areas, where the main target are poor children [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 41. See also the subsection 'Child recruitment' under [4.6. Persons fearing forced or child recruitment by Kurdish forces](#)].

Recruitment of children by HTS in IDP camps and by ISIL in the Al-Hoj and Roj camps has also been reported. Both HTS and ISIL have used children as 'human shields, suicide bombers, snipers, and executioners'. Children recruited by armed groups can also be used to fight in Libya. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 41].

Fewer cases of recruitment by GoS and affiliated armed groups were reported. Recruitment of children is prohibited according to Act No. 11 of 2013 which amended the Syrian Penal Code. The law prescribes the criminalisation of all forms of recruitment under the age of 18 by armed forces and armed groups. However, the GoS did not take any evident action to prevent child recruitment by armed opposition groups and designated terrorist organisations. Moreover, the GoS reportedly showed official complicity in child recruitment, not undertaking any action to prosecute government officials and being itself an actor of recruitment. Pro-GoS militias also forcibly recruited children as young as six years old. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 40]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Child recruitment is of such severe nature that it would amount to persecution.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: socio-economic situation (for example, residing in IDP camps), family status, area of origin or residence, ethnicity, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

The individual circumstances of the applicant need to be taken into account to determine whether a nexus to a reason for persecution can be substantiated. For example, in the case of children who refuse to join armed groups, persecution may be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.

See other topics concerning children:

- [4.12.1. Violence against children: overview](#)
- [4.12.2. Child recruitment](#)
- [4.12.3. Child labour and child trafficking](#)
- [4.12.4. Child marriage](#)
- [4.12.5. Access to education](#)
- [4.12.6. Lack of documentation](#)