2.5. Individuals fearing forced or child recruitment by Kurdish-led forces

2.5.1. Developments regarding military service in DAANES

The conscription under the Law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty has ceased in practice since late January 2026.413 According to Wladimir van Wilgenburg, a journalist and analyst specialised in Kurdish affairs, conscription under the Law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty had, in practice, ceased following the clashes of January 2026, although no official announcement abolishing conscription has been made.414 In the Arab-majority areas that came under transitional government control after the SDF's territorial losses in January 2026, conscription reportedly ceased altogether. In other areas where the SDF remained present but no longer exercised full control, such as Hasaka and Kobane, there were likewise no reports of ongoing conscription under the Law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty.415 SNHR noted that the integration agreement signed on 30 January 2026 did not alter the legal status of the Mandatory Self-Defense Duty. However, in practice, the 'self-defence duty' became unenforceable in Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor governorates following their transfer to transitional government control.416

After January 2026 no recruitment campaigns for the 'self-defence duty' have been reported. UNHCR assessed that following loss of territory and operating under state control, 'the SDF should no longer be in a position to continue the forced recruitment practices previously reported in those areas.'417

Likewise, after January 2026, conscripts serving under the Law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty were demobilised418 or required to undergo reconciliation with the transitional government.419 The process required individuals who served in the civil and military structures of DAANES, including the SDF and Asayish members,420 and those serving the Mandatory Self-Defense Duty (HXP) 421 to hand over identification documents and equipment issued by the former authorities including weapons and to receive a document allowing them to move freely without being stopped at checkpoints.422 According to SNHR, former member of SDF and those serving the Mandatory Self-Defense Duty (HXP) were reaching individual arrangements with the government forces or local commanders. These arrangements are regarded by SNHR as informal and inconsistent, and they do not constitute a systematic framework of general amnesty nor a formal demobilisation mechanism. Those who surrendered to the transitional government or defected before or during January 2026 were, in some cases, permitted to return to civilian life, while others faced detention for purposes of security vetting.423

According to Wladimir van Wilgenburg, many individuals who had previously served in DAANES civil and military institutions were now unemployed.424 According to Haid Haid, some former conscripts serving the Mandatory Self-Defense Duty (HXP) were now attempting to join armed groups on a voluntary basis.425

Prior to January 2026, DAANES was requiring men to serve the mandatory ‘self-defence duty’ for 12 months upon reaching the age of 18.426 Compulsory recruitment campaigns in northeastern Syria, particularly in Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor and Hasaka governorates, were reported mainly in September and October 2025427 and led to the detention of more than 500 individuals only in Raqqa.428 These operations reportedly targeted young men born between 1999 and 2007429 and were conducted through raids and checkpoints.430 According to SNHR, evaders from the ‘self-defence duty’ were generally transferred directly to service once apprehended while defectors faced detention, military judicial proceedings, and forcible return to service.431

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