

IV. What has become of Syria and the Syrian people?



The victims of the conflict : who's killing who?

First of all, how are the statistics concerning the number of victims collected? Are they reliable?

They constitute an army on the ground : armed not with weapons but with pens, notebooks, smartphones or cameras. They collect, register, photograph. In constant danger, in the middle of bombarded civilian zones, they often lose their lives, to be replaced by other volunteers. They work for different organizations: the Violations Documentation Center*, created at Douma in Syria in April 2011 by Razan Zaitouneh**, a lawyer and human rights activist

(VDC: <http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/>), the Syrian Network for Human rights, created in June of the same year

(SN4HR: <http://sn4hr.org>), the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights based in London (OSDH: <http://www.syriahr.com/en/>) and others.

The OSDH, who communicates little information on its methodology, affirms disposing of a rather vast network of correspondants all over Syria, while the VDC and the SNHR work only in zones controlled by the rebellion. The methodology of these two organisms consists in sending volunteers on site immediately after an attack to register the number of victims and the circumstances of their death. They inquire at hospitals and question Imams who pronounce funeral rites. These numerous citizen-journalists across the country are able to cross-check data from different sources.

Example of data collected by VDC:

[table id=4 /]

All sorts of information is collected: circumstances, identification of arms, origin of the attacks, etc. Civilians must be distinguished from combatants. See the very precise [questionnaire](#) used by the members of this organisation***.

The impossibility of an exact count...

We must note that victims in the zones controlled by the regime as well as those controlled by Daech are not included in the statistics as these territories are difficult to penetrate and neither IS nor the regime communicate this information. Only the OSDH provides a global figure for the number of victims of all parties – a figure whose reliability cannot be evaluated.

In spite of these limitations, the UN has affirmed the reliability of these organizations and has often relied on them itself to estimate the number of casualties. However, in April 2014 the UN decided to stop the counting, as it had become impossible to produce a real figure due to the complexity of the situation on the ground and the difficulties in the collection of data. The UN maintains the figure of 260,000 deaths, unchanged for over a year... The figures which circulate are most often those of OSDH. According to the newspaper Le Monde of August 8, 2016, the NGO announced the figure of 292,817 deaths as of July 31, 2016 : 84,472 civilians, 50,548 insurgents including Kurdish combatants, 49,547 djihadists, 104,656 members of the loyalist forces of which 57,909 were soldiers. The organism announced 9,000 additional deaths on September 13, bringing the total number to 300,000 victims, but it estimates that the number is larger in reality. The impossibility of an exact count obliges us to remain cautious.

We must just retain an order of magnitude. Unofficially, among UN organizations, the figure of 300,000 victims is considered realistic.

Exact statistics will certainly be known after the war. It must include all indirect casualties due to the lack of food and medical care, as well as those disappeared, for the most part persons arrested by the forces or secret services of the regime. The local councils who manage the towns have also kept statistics that will one day be a great help in establishing the truth.

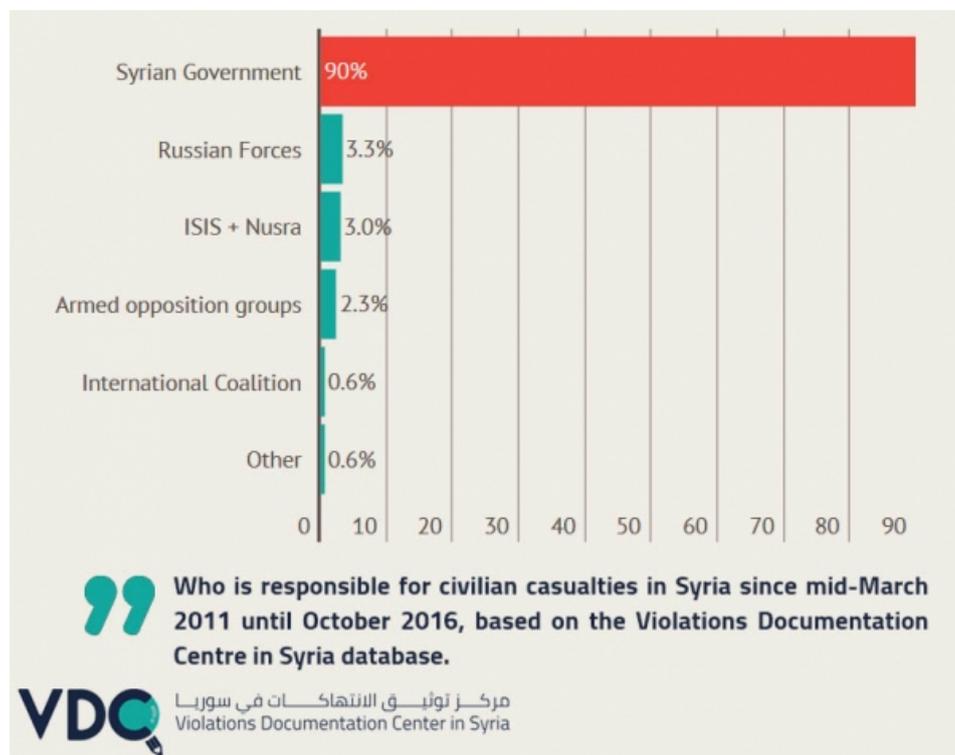
* The abbreviations are in English

** Razan Zaitouneh was abducted in Douma in December 2013, most likely by the extremist islamist organization Jaysh al Islam. There is no news of her since that date.

***The informaton collected by these groups could be used during future trials of the authors of these atrocities and for the establishment of a memorial for the victims of the repression and the war in Syria.

Who is responsible for the death of civilians and who is killing who?

The proportions vary from source to source, but they all agree that the overwhelming majority of civilian deaths can be attributed to the Syrian regime. See the data collected by the SNHR who established the chart of civilian victims living in zones controlled by the rebellion below. It covers the period from March 2011 to October 2016, five years of conflict. It is most certainly incomplete due to the difficulties enumerated above, and note that it does not include civilian victims on the side of the loyalist forces. Here again we are obliged to be cautious. In any case, the predominance of the responsibility of governmental forces and their allies in the death toll of the war is evident.



The SNHR also produces a monthly count. In August 2016, it tallied 1,521 civilians killed (far from the 9,000 accounted for by OSDH, because it only takes into account those victims noted by the organization). 1,082 were killed by the forces of the regime (or of Russia:189). The remaining victims were killed by IS (148), and other rebel groups (179). In addition are those killed by Kurdish groups and other brigades. The SNHR declares that for that month there were considerable difficulties in the collection of data in the specific territory covered. This means that the figures are higher and that the distribution among the authors of the killings may vary. However, whatever the figures or the organizations collecting the data, the Syrian regime is invariably identified as the one principally responsible for death and destruction.

This fact is not surprising. With its allies, the Syrian regime has considerable supremacy in military assets. No other group involved in ground combat is doted with aviation. According to VDC, more than a third of the civilian victims of August 2016 were killed by air attacks.** The incessant bombing of residential zones since the beginning of the bombarding in Summer 2012 has not only resulted in a great number of civilian victims, but has deprived the population of shelter, economic resources and medical care (hospitals are deliberately targeted as well as economic infrastructures and cultivated fields at harvest time) all leading to a number of indirect casualties which cannot be evaluated. A UN communiqué of September 6, 2016 concerning the bombing of Aleppo by Syrian and Russian aviation notes : ” *While many lose their lives under the bombs, others die from the lack of medical structures – the result of the destruction by pro-governmental forces of 20 hospitals and clinics in the region of Aleppo alone since the beginning of the year.*“*

We know from the Caesar Report that at least 11,000 people have died under torture (the photos exist to corroborate this fact: see Opération Caesar by Garance Le Caisne, Stock, 2015). This report was instructed by international experts (medical examiners, public prosecutors...). Among them, David Crane, former chief prosecutor for the special court of Sierra Leone, affirmed that the images of the bodies of the starved and tortured were only comparable to those of Auschwitz. He added “as prosecutors we rarely have acces to proof of crimes against humanity so direct and precise” and that these documents only represented “*the visible part of the iceberg because they concern only three detention centers and there are fifty*” in all of Syria.

More recent reports have pointed out possible crimes in the prison of Sednaya, 30 kilometers from Damascus. Between 5,000 and 13,000 prisoners were hung between September 2011 and December 2015. For Amnesty International the prison can be likened to a “human slaughterhouse”. Read the report here.

* <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.aps?NewsID=54856#.V9AZcTun-ON>

** <http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/reports/1473673722#.V9grzDun-0N>

Over 5 million refugees*

Why do they leave? ... "They flee Daech"...

We have all heard this phrase in conversations or in the media (see a reportage on France 2 concerning the exploitation of Syrian children in Turkey, June 21, 2016).

Because of the omnipresence of the terrorist organization and its exactions in the media and in the collective mentality, for many people it seems evident that the Syrians flee only to escape from Daech. Many non-rigorous journalists nourish this simplistic explanation. In fact, this idea serves the interests of the leaders of the regime and lets them get off easily.

A few figures and dates allow to rectify the situation. The djihadi group IS became established in Syria in April 2013, but it did not exercise destructive power on the population until Summer 2014, after the siege of Mossoul in Iraq, which allowed the group to consolidate its power in the zone under its control between Iraq and Syria. However, at the end of 2013, the UNHCR had already registered 2,5 million refugees – refugees who had fled for reasons which had little to do with Daech.

The reasons these Syrians had fled were exposed in a UN report: *"The deliberate targetting of civilians and the incapacity of all the actors of the conflict to protect civilians are known to be the principal causes of displacement. Populations are more and more frequently forced to flee the closing down of services, notably the health system, and the loss of all means of subsistence."*^{**}

Thousands of Syrians who took the road to exile this summer at the beginning of the battle of Aleppo fled for the same reasons : incessant bombing by Russian and Syrian aviation, the destruction of homes, hospitals and other infrastructures, a total lack of resources and the exorbitant prices of food.

The geographical origins of the refugees gives a clear indication of the cause of departure. Daech occupies essentially certain pockets of northeastern Syria, like Raqaa and Deir ez-Zor. The families who come from these zones flee most certainly the persecution of Daech. But those from Aleppo, Homs, Damas or Latakia leave their native towns for the above-mentioned reasons. As for young people who leave the zones controlled by the regime, they flee conscription, which is a problem for the Syrian army which is weakened and has great difficulty recruiting.

If IS is driven out of Syrian territory, we cannot expect a massive return of refugees. However, the end of the combats or the establishment of a “no-fly zone” would enable the return of a certain number of them.

*number of Syrian refugees enregistered by the HCR in Avril 2017

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<http://www.refworld.org/publisher,UNHCR,COUNTRYPOS,SYR,5641ef894,0.html>

The destruction of the health system

Medical and paramedical personnel have been particularly targeted : 654 deaths (93% at the hands of the regime). 15,000 others have left the country.

Hospitals are systematically bombed, both by the regime and the Russians: 12 hospitals were attacked in October 2015. It is estimated that 26% of Syrian hospitals are no longer functioning and 33% function only partially.

Eleven million people are in need of medical care. Today only half of Syrian children are vaccinated, resulting in the resurgence and propagation of contagious diseases which had been previously eradicated in the country: polio, leishmaniasis, measles, typhoid, and even cholera.

Due to the lack of care and drugs, those afflicted with chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure or cancer represent other victims and augment the toll of lives (approximately several tens of thousands, not included in the preceding figures).

According to international estimations, In addition to these figures, 13 million persons are in need of humanitarian relief.

[lexpress.fr – Syrie : une ONG dénonce les “insupportables” bombardements des hôpitaux](#)

A diminishing population, displaced persons

The Syrian population has decreased 23% due to the number of victims, but also because of the decrease in the number of births: 50% less than in 2011.

More than 5 million Syrians have left the country to take refuge in neighboring countries, in Europe and less frequently in the Gulf countries or in the US.

Refugees: 5,030,391

Turkey: 2,973,980

Lebanon: 1,011,366

Jordan: 658,015

Iraq: 236,772

Egypt: 120,154

North Africa: 29,275

Population in refugee camps: 10%

Requests for political asylum by Syrians in Europe between April 2011 and May 2016 :

1,066,844.

In France, the number of requests for political asylum (many more than those actually granted the status) between April 2011 and May 2016: 12,142 (in comparison: Germany 354,038 Serbia 313,656 Sweden 110,579 Hungary 72,505 Netherlands 32,070).

There are also between 7 and 8 million Syrians displaced inside their country.

If we total the number of Syrians displaced inside and outside the country, one out of two Syrians no longer lives in his home!

The displacement of populations provokes changes in demography (see this study addressing these issues). A first observation reveals that the demographic majority, the Arab Sunnite population, is the main group leaving the country. This phenomenon creates a slightly better balance of other minority groups. Certain reports (example here) develop the

hypothesis that the regime deliberately destroys certain zones in order to reconstruct them with the installation of foreign Shiite populations. These theories must be considered with caution. Nevertheless, some evidence, such as presidential decrees preventing the return of displaced populations in the district of Mezze, could be a sign of a desire to create a zone of Iranian influence, in the same way that the Hezbollah established itself in the southern suburbs of Beirut in Lebanon.

A lost generation?

The extent of the consequences of the Syrian tragedy for future generations and the regime's deliberate strategy of targeting [youth](#) can be summarised in a few figures:

- 1 child out of 3 has known only wartime
- More than a third of the children massacred were killed while at school or while coming or going to school
- Since 2011, there have been more than 4,000 attacks against schools. Today, only one school out of four in Syria is open
- More than 2 million children are out of school and an additional 1,35 million could soon abandon school

Syrian children also suffer from psychological traumatism. A report from the international NGO Save the Children intitled "*Invisible Wounds*" shows the impact of six years of war on the mental health of these children : more than **70%** of them suffer from "*toxic stress*". See this report [here](#).

The cost of destruction

The destruction first hit Syria's national heritage. UNESCO has repeatedly deplored the "immense destruction" of archeological and cultural treasures. The tragic list is enumerated here.

It is estimated that 2,1 million habitations and more than 7,000 schools have been destroyed. Their cost is estimated at 270 billion dollars.

If the reconstruction were to be undertaken today, when the war is not yet over, it would cost 300 billion dollars, or ten times more than the

Americans invested in the reconstruction of Iraq.

The problem of reconstruction remains to be confronted : with whom, when, by which channel ? It is obvious that the reconstruction must be linked to political transition, so as not to reproduce the pattern of the Israelo-Palestinian conflict, where Europe sends funds in vain, fails to obtain any political influence and remains powerless to prevent new destruction. After Aleppo, it is tempting to think that funds for reconstruction should be sent to Damascus. In reality, this position englobes several risks:

- 1) The misappropriation of the funds, as occurred with those given by the UN for humanitarian aid which ended up being used by the regime for its own financing (see this [explanation](#));
- 2) The utilisation of the funds only in zones favorable to the regime, ignoring those of the opposition, accentuating the fractures and humanitarian distress in the country and thus the conflict.

A devastated economy

Economic production, evaluated with regard to the GDP in constant prices, is half of what it was at the beginning of the crisis.

The production of electricity, which was deficient before the crisis, has been reduced by 70%.

Agricultural production has been reduced by more than 40%.

The unemployment rate is 50%.

The average inflation rate over the four year period was 50%, with peaks at 120% in 2013.

The official exchange rate in May 2015 was 220 Syrian pounds to the dollar, and 300 on the black market.

If the economy has not completely collapsed, it is largely due to aid from Iran (provisioning of petrol and renewal of credit lines).

A ransacked cultural heritage

Due to the combats (in Aleppo, for example), voluntary destruction by Daech (the temples of Bel and Baal-Shamin in Palmyra, among others), and the systematic pillaging committed by both Daech and the regime in order to finance their actions, many vestiges of the cultural heritage of humanity present in Syria have been damaged and many others are in danger of destruction.

The civilian population: How do the Syrian people carry on during the crisis?

Wherever they are and whatever their community, political orientation or socio-economic situation, all Syrians have had their lives shattered by the conflict.

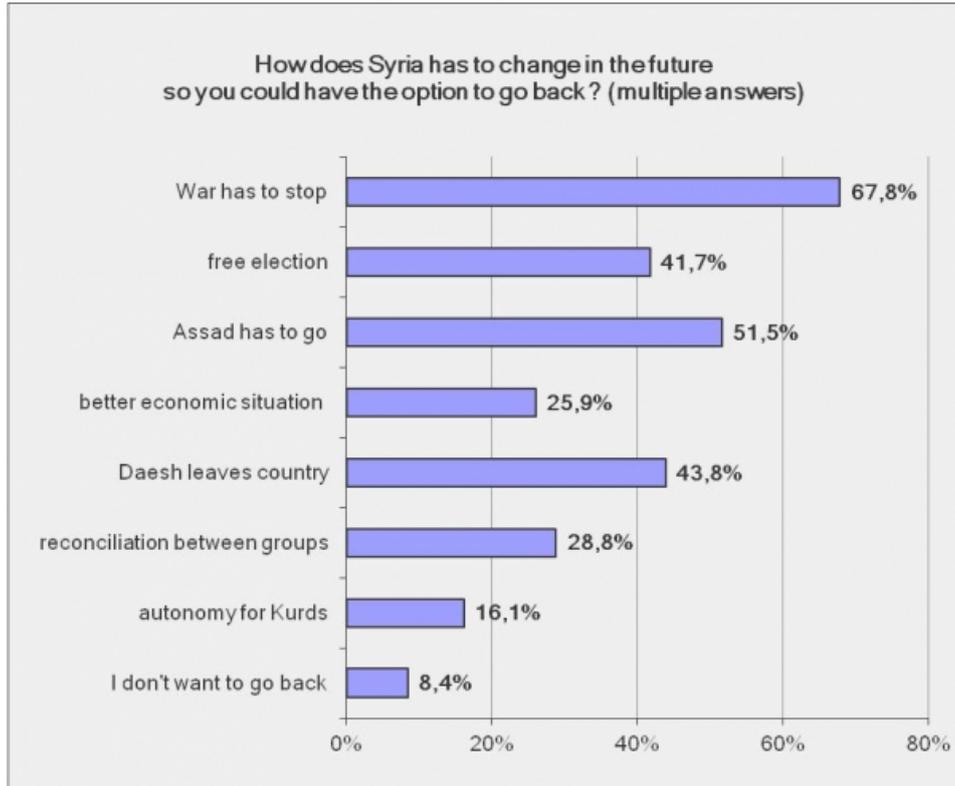
Obviously, **in areas controlled by the regime**, the inhabitants are safest because they are not bombarded. They still enjoy most public services: administration, education, health, etc. However, under pressure and close surveillance by security forces and the militia, they continue to live in fear. The economic difficulties of everyday life (see above) are their main concern, due to power and water cuts and especially the lack of fuel for heating and transportation and the soaring prices of all basic necessities.

In areas controlled by the Syrian opposition, the populations are the most hard hit by war and violence. Certain regions are entirely besieged by the army and have no access to the most basic products. Others are regularly bombed by aviation of the regime or the Russians. Towns and villages are devastated. Syrians who remain in these areas are mainly those who do not have the possibility to go elsewhere and some who refuse to leave their homes and their environment. Everyday life is organized locally by civilian councils in coordination with the combatants who control each zone. Services for health, education, justice etc. ... are guaranteed more or less correctly depending on the locality. The poorest residents receive humanitarian aid for food, while others live from some commercial activities, services or black economy.

In areas controlled by the Islamic State, Daech subjugates the inhabitants to its rigorous order, which controls all aspects of daily life by means of ruthless terror. All activity and all commerce must stop during prayer time. Women cannot go out in the street without the black niqab that covers them from head to toe. Anyone who transgresses this totalitarian governance is subjected to extreme persecution, including summary executions and torture. Schools, hospitals and courts are established and managed by the services and the police of Daech, which are mainly composed of foreign jihadis.

In the refugee camps of Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and inside the Syrian borders, families usually live in tents and occasionally in trailers or prefabricated structures. They are supported by international and local humanitarian organizations that distribute food, linen and blankets and provide medical care. Children account for the majority of the population of these camps. Some schools have been created where informal education is provided by volunteers. Some camps have become veritable towns or slums, such as Zaatari in North of Jordan, which has about 150,000 inhabitants now. Some commercial activities and workshops for women have been developed by refugees. However, with terribly degraded living conditions, some camps have become lawless no-man's lands, where the residents suffer the presence of mafias, prostitution, and trafficking of all kinds.

There are millions of Syrian expatriates and refugees around the world, belonging to many different communities and social categories. Most left the country individually, to escape the fighting and repression, or because they had lost their homes or in an attempt to find security for their families. They are concentrated in neighboring countries (1 out of 4 residents in Lebanon is a Syrian refugee), but notably since 2015, and at incredible risks, they increasingly seek asylum in Europe, mainly in Germany or in Sweden, despite the fact that these countries are gradually closing their borders. Surveys show that the overwhelming majority of these refugees do not wish to remain in Europe but hope to return to their country as soon as possible, and most of them only when Syria will be free of Assad. The refugee crisis will only find its solution in the resolution of the Syrian conflict.



Source : « Survey amongst Syrian refugees in Germany », adoptrevolution.com, octobre 2015.

adoptrevolution.org – Majority of Syrian refugees in Europe are running from the Assad regime, not Isis, says survey
lexpress.fr – Syrie: les derniers survivants d'Alep