

Syria/Libya: Complaint to the UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries





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*Syrian organizations address the grave consequences
mercenaryism has for the families of recruits, particularly the
practice's adverse impact on women and children*





Submission Introduction

In this submission, Syrians for Truth and Justice ([STJ](#)), the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre ([SJAC](#)), [Hevdestî](#) Association for Victims in North and East Syria, and other local Syrian organizations¹ present an update to their previous reporting on the recruitment of Syrians for mercenary combat abroad. In 2020 and 2021, STJ and SJAC documented the methods by which Turkey and Russia and their local partners in Syria had recruited mercenaries primarily for combat in Libya and Azerbaijan. The documentation revealed how the predatory system of recruitment in Syria was enriching criminal militias—especially in the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA)—that were committing egregious human rights violations in Syria as well as the foreign battlefields to which they were being sent.

This submission comes after conflict in Azerbaijan has ceased and UN-brokered talks have initiated the repatriation of foreign fighters from Libya. However, approximately 5,000 mercenaries remain in Libya, while the dire humanitarian conditions in Syria that incentivized mercenary recruitment in the first place have only worsened. STJ and SJAC provide here new documentation regarding the recruitment of Syrian children for mercenary combat, the negative social impact on families of recruits, the false promises of citizenship to recruits and their families, and lack of health care for wounded mercenaries.

In previous reports and submissions to the UN Working Group, STJ and SJAC issued recommendations to the states and local partners responsible for mercenary recruitment as well as the international community. Among the goals at that time were the immediate halt to recruitment and accountability for the human rights abuses that Syrian mercenaries committed. Since then, there has been progress on the mercenaries file, with recruitment by Turkish and Russian-backed groups in Syria declining and SNA leaders making at least superficial gestures toward respect for international humanitarian law. Hence, some of the recommendations from STJ and SJAC's previous reports are featured here.

However, as this submission documents, violations continue to occur and significant justice needs remain. Although Syrian mercenary groups have returned from Azerbaijan and begun to return from Libya under UN-brokered peace talks, there must be investigations into the violations that these groups committed in combat abroad as well as in Syria in the process of predatory recruitment practices. Moreover, the dire humanitarian conditions that incentivize mercenary recruitment in the first place have only worsened. These have led to the continued violations documented in this submission and informed the recommendations that STJ and SJAC make to the Working Group, which are:

To Contracting, Home, and Territorial States:

- *Turkey/Russia:* Cease the financing and recruitment, whether direct or indirect, of Syrian armed groups or individuals for the purpose of mercenary combat abroad. As an occupying power in Northwest Syria, Turkey is legally responsible for conducting impartial and independent investigations into the SNA factions that have engaged in predatory recruitment practices—including in IDP camps.
- *Turkey:* Work to prevent mercenary recruitment activity in IDP camps in areas of Northwest Syria under Turkish control. Turkey should furthermore ensure that basic humanitarian needs are met in the territories under its effective control, both to meet its obligations under international law and to disincentivize mercenary recruitment.

¹ Several participating local Syrian organizations opted for anonymity for security purposes.





- *Syria*: Release SNA mercenaries who were captured in Libya and taken to Syria, as part of a wider program of prisoner releases in the country.
- *Libya/Azerbaijan*: Investigate violations of human rights and labor abuses committed by Syrian mercenaries and PMSCs operating with their approval. As territorial states, they should prosecute such groups for crimes committed on their territory according to fair trial standards, and coordinate with contracting states to determine appropriate fields of operation.
- *Turkey/Russia*: Provide redress to victims of human rights and labor abuses committed by Syrian mercenaries and PMSCs, such as Syrian families who have been defrauded by recruiters and Libyans whose homes have been pillaged by SNA factions.

To Syrian Armed Groups:

- Cease the recruitment of Syrians for the purpose of mercenary combat, particularly when these individuals are children.
- Provide redress to families of mercenaries who were defrauded by recruitment brokers and have not received the compensation that was promised.
- Honor the obligation to respect human rights in the areas under which they exercise effective control or government-like functions, whether in Syria itself or in the foreign countries to which they have been sent (e.g., as civil police in Libya/Azerbaijan: Reject the deployment of mercenaries by Turkey/Russia, or any other countries). Make a public commitment to not accept the role of mercenaries from allies or countries providing security assistance.
- In the case of the SNA, these recommendations should be pursued as part of a broader effort to discipline members for human rights violations committed in Northwest Syria.

To the UN and International Community:

- Investigate and hold accountable states and individuals engaged in the recruitment and deployment of Syrian mercenaries. These may be done through the imposition of targeted sanctions on state officials instrumental in citizenship transfers, military commanders responsible for combat operations, and business figures with known ties to PMSCs. In the case of Syrian mercenaries in Libya, there is a preexisting international mechanism in place for such actions, given that the use of mercenaries there violates the UN embargo on military transfers to the country.
- Hold accountable Libyan/Azerbaijani officials involved in accepting the recruited mercenaries, including imposing targeted sanctions on officials involved in the process.
- Address the dire humanitarian situation in IDP camps in Northwest Syria, particularly through the increased delivery of food and medical aid that could reduce the incentive of mercenary contracts.
- Support disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs for Syrian mercenaries who have returned from combat abroad. Although the precise design of such programs goes beyond the scope of this report, they could be modeled on past interventions in contexts like Sierra Leone where former fighters received vocational training and compensation in exchange for disarmament.

To Justice Actors:

- Support efforts by Syrian CSOs and individuals to hold Turkey accountable at the European Court of Human Rights for its violations of the European Convention for Human Rights & Fundamental Freedoms, to which it is a state party.





- Support Libyan and Azerbaijani CSOs in engaging with victims of rights abuses committed by Syrian mercenary groups and PMSCs operating in these territories.

Executive Summary

Two years ago, Turkey and Russia started recruiting Syrians to fight as mercenaries, deploying them to alien battlefields outside Syria. The recruitment was large in scale and had profoundly adverse impacts on the local communities where the enlistment was most common. The consequences are now rising to the surface and can be clearly observed in the damage that befell the lives of the recruits and their families, who were already suffering from the throes of war. Mercenarism intensified their distress and worsened their conditions, contrary to the promises promoted by the recruiters and the hopes that recruits and families had pinned on the mercenary contracts.

The promises were traps and turned many of the recruits into victims: broken financially, and even more damaged physically. Several of the fighters sustained serious physical injuries during the military operations, some of which developed into long-term disabilities. On top of these life-hampering damages, recruits have been unable to claim some of “the rights they were promised”, including proper medical treatment or compensation for their injuries.

The families of recruits are also encountering similar challenges with regard to the broken promises of mercenary recruiters. The families of those killed have not received promised condolence payments, while hundreds were denied the Turkish citizenship they were promised if their sons died in battle. These abuses of family and individual rights are only the tip of the iceberg. Mercenarism had deeper and darker impacts on the lives of the recruits, with devastating social repercussions. Several of the recruited fighters developed an addiction to narcotics. Drug abuse led to family fragmentation and dysfunctional relations, higher divorce rates, and intensified domestic violence against female family members, wives, and/or sisters.

The consequences of mercenarism have been catastrophic, particularly for women. Wives, among them mothers, were forced to work despite the scarcity of job opportunities and the dire working conditions after they lost their breadwinners, either because their husbands died or developed permanent disabilities during combat or (in some cases) due to substance abuse.

Despite the social and familial consequences of mercenarism, recruits were driven to enlist through false promises of economic stability and citizenship. In a [joint report](#), STJ and SJAC documented how a significant number of the recruits fell victim to local and foreign military entities, which enlisted them and later withheld their salaries or even arrested and detained them. Fraud and salary manipulations were particularly devastating for the fighters who signed contracts in the hope of improving their dire financial conditions.

The organizations thoroughly analyzed the documented cases and observed that extreme poverty was common among the recruits, who could be divided into two major categories:

1. Civilians who were forced to leave their communities and settle in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a result of military hostilities. These individuals sought in mercenarism the potential for a better life and a way out of poverty.
2. Lower-ranking fighters in several of the local armed opposition groups who enlisted but were close neither to commanders nor to other influential figures within their groups. Therefore, these individuals were considered easy victims and could be deprived of their rights to salaries and healthcare.





While these two groups are subject to the immediate perils of mercenarism, their families continue to suffer from the less visible repercussions of this vicious military practice. Many of these family members belong to the most vulnerable groups in Syria, among them children, women, and elderly who are spread across under-serviced and poverty-stricken IDP camps.

Methodology

For the purposes of the report, the partner organizations and entities divided the documentation process into two phases: information collection and screening.

During the collection phase, field researchers with STJ carried out large-scale monitoring operations, both in Syria and abroad.

The leads that field researchers obtained demonstrated that mercenarism had adverse impacts on all those directly or indirectly involved in its activities, but that it had sharply affected some groups more than others. The researchers, based on their findings, estimate that hundreds are affected.

For screening purposes, the partners created a victim/witness statement form to facilitate the collection of in-depth testimonies. Using the form, field researchers collected 14 detailed testimonies. Based on this, experts organized the affected people into groups and identified acute vulnerability among the following four groups:

- a. Minors recruited at the demand of their parents, who were seeking the monthly salary attached to enlistment.
- b. Injured recruits who developed permanent disabilities and were deprived of healthcare and compensation. These recruits and their families remain without breadwinners.
- c. Wives of recruits who suffered from beating and other forms of domestic violence due to their husband's substance abuse. These marriages ended with divorce.
- d. Families of recruits who died in battle. These families were denied the condolence payment and Turkish citizenship that had been established in the enlistment terms between the recruit and the recruiter.

The 14 stories documented in this report are not the only cases our organizations monitored; however, they provide a sample of the impact mercenarism is having on communities inside Syria. In this report, STJ and SJAC investigate the testimonies of mercenary fighters and their families to shed light on the wider calamity brought about on local communities by international recruiters and their predatory practices.





The Use of Syrian Mercenaries in Foreign Conflicts

In December 2019, Syrian mercenaries were making news. Headlines reported the deployment of hundreds, then thousands, of Turkey-backed SNA fighters to Libya; these were dispatched to fight alongside the Government of National Accord (GNA). The reports were refuted by senior figures within both the SNA and the GNA.

However, it was only a matter of time before the SNA and the GNA's claims of misinformation were countered by images and videos of Syrian fighters in Libya. Shortly thereafter, these claims lost all validity with the arrival of the bodies of deceased fighters to Syria, in addition to other evidence.

STJ's researchers began monitoring the use of Syrian fighters as mercenaries abroad as the first rumors and images circulated. On 24 January 2020, STJ posted its first report on the subject, investigating the arrest of a Syrian fighter from the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat), an affiliate with the SNA, by the Libyan National Army (LNA) forces headed by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar.²

On 11 May 2020, STJ published the first extensive report on mercenarism in Syria, revealing the mechanism underway for recruiting Syrians as fighters in Libya.³ The report documented the transport methods that recruiters used to deploy fighters, flying them from Syria to Turkey first, and then to Libya. Turkey used civilian/commercial flights to disguise the mercenaries' traffic. The same report revealed that the recruiters enlisted children in combat. The findings were cited in the report submitted to "the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination" the UN Secretary-General submitted to the General Assembly.⁴

STJ identified that Turkey was not the only state-body responsible for recruiting mercenaries. On 28 June 2020, STJ published a report revealing that the Syrian government collaborated with a Russian security company, and together they deployed thousands of Syrian fighters to Libya to assist the LNA.⁵

In the months that followed, STJ published additional reports which monitored the continued recruitment of mercenaries, and the use and transport of child soldiers to Libya.⁶ STJ also

² "Further Details on a Video Showing a Syrian Fighter Captured in Libya" STJ, 24 January 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/further-details-on-a-video-showing-a-syrian-fighter-captured-in-libya/> (last accessed: 07 March 2022).

³ "Turkey's Recruitment of Syrian Mercenaries to Fight in Libya: Process and Legal Consequences," STJ, 11 May 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/turkeys-recruitment-of-syrian-mercenaries-to-fight-in-libya-process-and-legal-consequences/> (last accessed: 07 March 2022).

⁴ Seventy-fifth session; Item 71 of the provisional agenda. Right of peoples to self-determination: "Use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination," Note by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, 28 July 2020, <https://undocs.org/en/A/75/259> (last accessed: 07 March 2022).

⁵ "In Collusion with the 'Syrian Government', a Russian Security Company Recruits Thousands of Syrians as Mercenaries to Fight in Libya alongside 'Haftar'," STJ, 28 June 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/in-collusion-with-the-syrian-government-a-russian-security-company-recruits-thousands-of-syrians-as-mercenaries-to-fight-in-libya-alongside-haftar/> (07 March 2022)

⁶ "Child Soldiers Continue to be Deployed to Libya," STJ, 31 August 2021, <https://stj-sy.org/en/child-soldiers-continue-to-be-deployed-to-libya/> (last accessed: 07 March 2022).





documented the wide range of violations committed by Syrian fighters in Libya.⁷ Additionally, STJ obtained information proving that Turkey was undermining stability in Libya by not withdrawing foreign fighters (i.e., Syrian mercenaries) in accordance with the ceasefire signed by parties to the Libyan conflict. Furthermore, the information confirmed that Turkey has continued to transport mercenaries to Libya despite the ceasefire.⁸

This report focuses in particular on the impact mercenarism has had on the families of recruits.

⁷ "Syrian Mercenaries in Libya: Fraudster Commanders and Recruits Involved in Serious Violations," STJ 18 March 2021, <https://stj-sy.org/en/syrian-mercenaries-in-libya-commanders-and-recruits-involved-in-serious-violations/> (last accessed: 07 March 2022).

⁸ "Libya: 5,000 Syrian Mercenaries Continue to Operate in Tripoli," STJ, 1 September 2021, <https://stj-sy.org/en/libya-5000-syrian-mercenaries-continue-to-operate-in-tripoli/> (last accessed: 07 March 2022).





The Consequences of Mercenarism

Mercenarism has negatively impacted recruits, their families, and their communities.

Some mercenaries were victimized by recruiters. Many fighters fell into the trap of fraud schemes perpetrated by Turkish authorities at the onset of the recruitment process, or later by faction general-commanders or their immediate commanders. Witnesses claimed that fighters were deprived of their salaries and promised compensation. Others were denied Turkish citizenships promised to them by Turkish authorities in return for agreeing to fight outside Syria.

In addition to the recruited fighters, mercenarism has had various adverse effects on the families of mercenary recruits, permanently impacting their lives and livelihoods. Many families lost their only breadwinners when they were killed or physically disabled through serious injuries sustained in mercenary combat.

While families and recruits suffered dire financial consequences, de facto authorities, who cooperated with international recruiters, subjected children to twofold abuse. Many were recruited for mercenary use and deployed to battle fields outside Syria, regardless of their age. Among these, several were forced to join combat against their will, coerced by their parents who planned to use their salaries.

This section presents the testimonies of 14 witnesses interviewed by STJ; they all come from vulnerable backgrounds, including children and women. The witnesses include two children forced to travel to Libya, and an adult with a mental disorder whom his family sent to Libya in an attempt to relieve themselves of the burden of caring for him. Additionally, the witnesses include six fighters. One of these fighters was imprisoned, and the other five all sustained injuries that later developed into long-term disabilities, for which they were deprived of medical treatment and compensation. STJ also reached out to two women who were subjected to domestic violence at the hands of their husbands, one due to drug abuse while in Libya; the other due to psychological instability after he sustained an injury. Among those interviewed are three families who lost their sons in the Libyan conflict. All three families were denied compensation for the deaths of their sons, as well as the Turkish citizenship that had been promised to them.

With these stories, STJ aims to back previous reports which call to attention the suffering of locals under mercenarism. Previously, STJ [cited](#) the stories of two women whose lives changed irrevocably after their husbands were sent to Libya. One of these women was kicked out of her tent by her in-laws after they learned that their son went to Libya. They forced her to abandon her residence and go live with her parents in a different IDP camp. The second woman became a widow only one week after her marriage. Her husband left home for Libya one day after their wedding and died there.

Children Forcibly Recruited

1. Abdo Z. (16), forcibly enlisted by his parents

Abdo was born in the town of Taftanaz,⁹ in Idlib province. He holds an ID issued by the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG), which is affiliated with the military faction Hayat Tahrir al-Sham

⁹ STJ refrains from publishing the child's full name for security purposes.





(HTS). Abdo's family reached out to a commander within the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division to broker their son's recruitment. The commander, Mu'taz Abdullah (also known as Abu Faisal al-Binichi) hails from Idlib province and leads the Liwa al-Ghab/al-Ghab Brigade, a sub-group within the al-Hamza Division.

On 9 December 2020, Abdo was transported with a group of other recruits to an assembly point near Hawar Kilis village, on the Syrian side of the border with Turkey. On 13 December, they were all taken to Turkey, and the Turkish government then transferred them to Tripoli, Libya, on 01 January 2021.

STJ talked to the child, who said that his family recruited him, planning to use the money he was to be paid for fighting in Libya. The family agreed with the commander on a monthly salary of 9,000 Turkish Lira (TL). Abdo said that recently he has been paid only 7,000 TL, and recounted:

"I was injured in Libya and returned to Syria for treatment. They deployed me back to Libya when I got better. I am currently present at Salah Eddin Camp, near Tripoli."

He added:

"After I was injured, my family repeatedly asked the faction to discharge and return me to Syria, but their efforts were of no use. Today, I live in a constant state of fear. I am mostly afraid of violating any military orders I am given, for the punishment would be prison in the best case. I am afraid of the assassinations and the killings; the fighters are assassinating other fighters without accountability. There is no judiciary or court here."

2. Wael. Z (16) was forcibly enlisted by his parents

Wael was born in Taftanaz town,¹⁰ in Idlib province. For an ID, he has an individual status record issued by the Idlib Civil Registry. Like Abdo, Wael was sent to fight in Libya by his parents. The family reached out to the same commander within al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division, Mu'taz Abdullah, and Wael was transported to Turkey with a batch of fighters. From there, they headed to Libya on 11 February 2020.

Today, Wael serves in the Yarmouk Camp, within the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat security office. STJ reached out to one of the child's relatives, who described how:

"The family sent their son to Libya, greedy for the 9,000 TL monthly salary. Wael was lucky: he was assigned administrative duties and managed to remain in the same place. He was not sent to fight. However, he got addicted to [the drug] Crystal, or what they locally call *H-Pose*.¹¹ The parents are aware of his addiction, but they do not bother [to do anything about it]. All they care about is the salary their son sends."

¹⁰ STJ refrains from publishing the child's full name for security purposes.

¹¹ Crystal methamphetamine can be swallowed as a pill, injected intravenously, snorted or smoked, and looks like little shards of glass or a white odorless powder. Meth is manufactured in labs, unlike other recreational drugs, such as cocaine, which is extracted from large quantities of coca leaves. Users feel relaxed and euphoric, which are the effects of increased production of dopamine. However, these feelings fade away between 6-8 hours, and sometimes the effects take 24 hours to dim. Methamphetamine is manufactured illegally by clandestine labs. The key component is available in flu and cold medications, which is, thus, leaked from drug warehouses and medicine labs. The remaining components are largely accessible. Lately, this drug has been spreading widely across Syria; it is accessible and sold for competitive prices according to quality. Several meth shipments were seized on their





Wounded Mercenaries Denied Healthcare and Compensation

An informed source from the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division said that over 2000 Syrian fighters were injured during combat in Libya, and hundreds did not receive compensation for their injuries.

In a previous report, STJ [cited](#) an interview with an administrative employee within the First Legion of the SNA. The employee was responsible for recording the names of Syrian fighters recruited as mercenaries and said that recruits were promised compensation of 35,000 USD in the event of a permanent injury sustained while fighting in Libya. Wounded fighters receive smaller sums in cases of less serious and temporary impairments. Hundreds of fighters were denied compensation and were left to seek care for themselves, despite injuries that developed into long-term impairments.

1. Mustafa H., whose salary was cut down to 9,000 SYP

Mustafa was born in the city of al-Bab, in Aleppo province, in 1989. He is married and a father of four. He holds an ID issued by the al-Bab Local Council. He was recruited by Hamza al-Shaker, a commander within the Liwa Muhammad al-Fateh/Muhammad al-Fateh Brigade.

Mustafa was transported to Libya on 7 March 2020. He was injured in combat on 8 April 2020, with the injury developing into a long-term disability in his left leg and vision impairment in the right eye (retinal detachment). He was discharged and returned to Syria on 22 October 2021.

STJ reached out to one of the fighter's relatives, who recounted:

“My relative went to Libya for the salary, which witnessed several reductions, until it was only 9,000 Syrian Pounds (SYP). The faction did not give him compensation, nor cover the treatment costs for his injury. We constantly contact the Medical Department of the Recruitment Office, affiliated with the Public Relations Office in Hawar Kilis. The PR office is run by a person called Abu Huzaifa Abdulsalam. However, our efforts are useless, we are getting nothing but promises.”

He added:

“Fortunately, his wife works in a civil society organization and is managing the family finances. Her family also helps her; they send her some money. Without the wife's job, the family would have been in a very dire situation.”

2. Abduljabar M., whose wife left him to care for their son

Abduljabar was born in the city of al-Bab, in Aleppo province, in 1985. He is married and has a son. He holds an ID issued by the al-Bab Local Council. Today, he is based in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. His wife abandoned him, took their son, and went to live in al-Bab.

way out of Syria. In Syria, meth labs are centered in Syrian government (SG) areas, but recently a lab was discovered in Afrin, controlled jointly by the armed opposition and the Turkish army. This lab has likely been getting raw materials from SG areas. In this regard, STJ talked to several eyewitnesses, who said that some sub-groups within key opposition factions distributed meth in Libya and Azerbaijan, which they smuggled from Syria by hiding the amounts among personal clothes.





He was recruited by Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat), by a commander within the Abu Aubaida Military Group, called Abu Murad al-Jasim/ the cousin of Muhammad al-Jasim Abu Amsha. He was transported to Libya on 13 August 2020. He was injured three times there, and the last time his left leg had to be amputated. STJ reached out to a close relative of the fighter, who said:

“My relative went to Libya for the money. However, he was injured shortly after and returned to Syria. When in Libya, he got addicted to drugs. When he returned to Syria, his family situation became tragic. His wife abandoned him and was forced to work as a janitor in a local council to afford her son’s basic needs.”

He added:

“My relative was given only 5,000 TL following the injury. The money did not even cover the costs of treatment. We submitted an application for injury compensation at the Hawar Kilis Public Relations Office, particularly the office of the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat), run by a person called Nizar Smaddi. However, Nizar deferred the matter every time. Finally, he told us that Turkey would not pay the compensation, so the faction will not.”

He added:

“He is disabled and cannot work. He is also addicted to drugs, a habit he developed in Libya. His wife asked for divorce . . . his situation has become extremely bad.”

3. M.H, whose commander took shares of his salary

M. H was born in Rif Dimashq (Damascus Countryside), in 2001. Today, he lives in Shaykh al-Hadid town, in Afrin. He was recruited by the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat) and transported to Libya on 1 February 2021. He was contracted for a monthly salary of 1,200 USD, but he was actually paid only 800 USD. The remaining 400 USD was confiscated by his commander, Abu Siraj.

On 22 April 2021, M.H was injured in a landmine explosion. The injury harmed his liver and spleen, forcing doctors to remove parts of his liver. The fighter’s father said that his son did not receive an injury compensation because, as the recruiting faction commanders told him, compensation is limited to seriousness levels of 60% and above – and they judged M.H’s injury to be only 40% serious. Instead of the compensation, M.H was paid 2400 USD (three months’ salary) and a sum of 1400 TL, a two months’ worth of salary he was paid for being an injured fighter. After these payments, M.H received no further salaries, healthcare, or medication costs, even though now he depends on medication to survive.

The father told STJ:

“There are seven people in my family. My oldest is [M.H], whom I sent to Libya. I have disc problems and cannot work. [M.H’s] enlistment into the al-Amshat faction and travel to Libya was our only way to better our finances. Most importantly, the al-Amshat threatened to expel us from the Shaykh al-Hadid town if we refused to send one of our family members to Libya. We have no other place to go. For all these reasons, I agreed to send my son to Libya.”

The father added:





“After [M.H] was injured, we received no compensation, despite the promises we were given. Because I cannot work, my wife started selling tissues on the streets and my younger son is working at a small falafel shop. When [M.H] lost his salary, our financial situation was worse than before.”

4. Marwan R.’s recruiter robbed him of his salary

Marwan was born in Rif Dimashq (Damascus Countryside), in 1994. He is married and has two children, who have asthma and kidney issues. Today, he is based in Shaykh al-Hadid town, in Afrin region. He was recruited by the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat) and was among the first fighter batches to be deployed to Libya. The SADAT Defense security company was a key recruiter of Marwan’s group of mercenaries. Marwan was transported to Libya in December 2019 and was promised a monthly salary of 2000 USD and compensation in cases of injury or death.

Marwan narrated:

“When I was in Libya, I got injured during combat, in a mortar shelling on 25 September 2020. They amputated my left leg, with the treatment starting in Libya and finishing in Antakya in Turkey., I was then returned to Syria, where I applied for the injury compensation. However, Abu Siraj, a commander within al-Amshat faction and the person who oversaw my recruitment, refused to give me anything, not even my salary.”

He added:

“The dispute between me and Abu Siraj intensified. I spoke about his fraud and how he robbed me of my salary on WhatsApp groups. This made him angry, so he removed me from the faction entirely and threatened to kick me out of Shaykh al-Hadid town unless I kept silent and stopped attacking him. Today, I run a small cigarette stall in town and cannot afford medications for my children, who suffer from asthma and kidney failure.”

5. Abdullah A., crushed by discriminatory treatment

Abdullah was born in Rif Dimashq (Damascus Countryside), in 1994. He is married and has two children. Today, he is based in Shaykh al-Hadid town, in Afrin region. He was recruited by the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat) and was transported to Libya on 11 September 2020. He was promised a monthly salary of 1,200 USD and compensation in cases of injury or death¹².

Abdullah was shot in the back during a battle on 15 October 2020. The shot caused him paraplegia. He was returned to Syria and received no compensation. He told STJ:

“I was paid only 2,800 USD for fighting in Libya, out of the 6,000 USD I was promised according to the agreement. The deal was that I would get six months’ worth of salary, which was the duration of the contract, even if I got injured and failed to serve. They also refused to provide me with compensation even though I developed paraplegia. The compensation is all about favoritism. A friend of mine was injured in Libya. Even though he fully recuperated after three months, he received the injury compensation, because

¹² A tax of about 200 USD is taken out of the fighters’ salary, resulting in a promised salary of closer to 1000 USD.





he gave commander Abu Siraj 9,000 USD. The commander put in a word for him and convinced the Turkish intelligence of his injury and to give him compensation, while I was denied even the monthly salary I was promised.”

Women Subjected to Domestic Violence

1. Mariam Sh.’s husband, a mercenary fighter who beat her every time he returned home

Mariam is married to fighter Salim M. Salim was born in al-Bab city in 1993. He was recruited by Ahmad Zakour, commander of the Farouq Division, within the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division. Today, he remains stationed in the Misrata-based camp of the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division’s in Libya, where he oversees one of the division’s camp jails.

The wife lives in a camp, within the IDP camp area in Bab al-Hawa, in Idlib. She explained:

“I have been married to Salim for two and half years. We do not have kids. We started to have problems when he traveled to Libya, where he started using drugs. When he returned home during recruit change shifts, nearly every three months, he treated me violently. He would beat me and get angry for the most trivial reasons.”

She added:

“Once, he returned to Syria because he was injured. He stayed longer than usual. During this time, I discovered significant changes in his sexual behavior and some perverted tendencies. He was not like himself. His addiction was worse and he often hallucinated and spoke gibberish. His violence was acute, the beating increased. I asked for divorce, but he refused. I went to court for divorce and he returned to Libya. I am not divorced yet and did not get any marital rights. This all happened because he went to Libya.”

2. Umm al-Baraa, a wife of a fighter and expelled from her husband’s tent

Um al-Baraa (22) has a two year old son. She used to live with her husband and in-laws in a camp in Afrin. The family is originally from western Hama’s countryside. Her in-laws suddenly expelled her from the tent when they learned that their son went to fight in Libya within the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat) on 1 May 2020.

Umm al-Baraa told STJ:

“My husband went to Libya without telling us. He would sometimes spend 15 days away from home after joining the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat) in Afrin. But then he went missing for over a month, and we had no idea where he was. One of his friends shocked us when he told us that he traveled to Libya. His parents then asked me to go live in my parents’ tent in the Kafar Houm camp. They blamed me for his travel and accused me of not telling them about his plans, even though I had no idea about them . . . I hope that my husband will return alive from there, because he has only called me once since he traveled. I have heard no other news of him.”

Bereaved Families Denied Compensation and Citizenship





There are no accurate statistics on the number of casualties among Syrian mercenaries deployed to Libya since Turkey decided to intervene in the Libyan conflict. However, STJ's team estimates the number to be in the hundreds; this figure is based on the documentation STJ carried out over two years, in which the team followed leads and death announcements made by the families of the recruits, their friends, or the factions that recruited them. The documented numbers have been cited in separate publications, some of which were noted in the sections above.

In a previous report, STJ [cited](#) an account by an administrative employee within the First Legion of the SNA. The employee said that recruiters had promised that their families would be provided with compensation in case they died during combat in Libya; the money would be granted to the father and mother of single fighters, and to the wives and children of married fighters. As for the amount, the employee said that the fighters were promised a death compensation of 60,000 USD, in addition to Turkish citizenship. Nonetheless, dozens of bereaved families were denied both the money and the nationality.

1. Muhammad M., his family's only breadwinner

Muhammad was transported to Libya on 15 March 2020 as a combat photographer with the Mu'tasim Division. He was assigned to film battles and military operations and to store and archive the visuals. During a battle on the outskirts of Tripoli in April 2020, Muhammad was killed in mortar shelling. His body was returned to Syria nearly a month and a half later and buried in a cemetery in Rajo, in the region of Afrin. One of Muhammad's close friends recounted how:

“Muhammad was his family's only breadwinner. His father could not work and he had four young siblings. Muhammad's family received the salary for his services in Libya, but not the compensation for his death, which was to total 60,000 USD according to the agreement between Muhammad and the faction. The faction has been citing administrative proceedings as a pretext to delay the payment. The family also did not get citizenship and attempted to file an application in that regard, but the faction has been stalling them. It has been nearly two years and the family's condition could not be worse.”

2. Ghayath A., who died before seeing his baby

Ghayath (23) was recruited by the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat) on 12 September 2020. He was killed in combat in late 2020. His body was transported to Syria on 25 January 2021 and buried in the town of Shaykh al-Hadid, in the region of Afrin.

The fighter's wife, Marwa A. (born in 2000), was one month pregnant when her husband left for Libya. After he died, she went to live at her father's house, who is also a fighter within the brigade. STJ reached out to Marwa's maternal cousin, who gave us Marwa's account:

“My husband went to Libya as a communications specialist and was assigned [to work] as a signal and communication worker. When he talked to me, he used to tell me that the battles were fierce and the situation was very bad, stressing that there was such a shortage of fighters that the [faction] sent the cooks and the kitchen workers on guard shifts. My husband was killed almost two months after he was deployed. I was in the





early stage of pregnancy. When they brought his dead body to Shaykh al-Hadid, they did not allow me to see the body because it was all charred remains.”

The witness, quoting Marwa, added:

“Abu Amsha promised me in person that I would get the six months’ salary in return for my husband’s services, but I got an amount worth two months only. He also promised that I would get a condolence payment and Turkish citizenship. However, I have not gotten anything, nor have the other families that were present in the same meeting. I have only been offered 500 TL every two months, which they call a martyr’s salary.”

3. Yassin J., who died a few days after his wedding

STJ reached out to the fighter’s mother, who narrated:

“My son was only 30 years old. He and his wife told me that he was going to Libya to fight with the SNA there, just after his wedding ceremony was finished. He was lured by the financial incentives . . . My son traveled the day after his wedding. He went and never returned. He died one week after he arrived in Libya. His wife and I tried to make him change his mind, repeatedly, but we failed. They brought us his dead body, which was full of shrapnel. We did not get any compensation for his death.”

Other Cases

1. Omar Z., whose family sent him to Libya to rid themselves of his burden

Omar was born in Mount Zawiya, in Idlib province, in 1997. As an ID, he has an individual civil record issued by the Idlib Civil Registry. He suffered from a long-term mental disability and psychological conditions. Omar’s father enlisted him to “get rid of him”, and in doing so, deprived his wife and four children of his presence.

STJ reached out to one of Omar’s relatives, who explained that the father was on good terms with Abu Jasim al-Faysal, the commander of the al-Maghawir Division of the Glory Corps/Faylaq al-Majd. The father asked the commander to deploy his son to Libya. On 11 March 2020, Omar was transported to Libya and assigned administrative duties. He remains in Libya. The witness added:

“Apparently, the division’s commander agreed to recruit Omar to scale up the number of fighters, because back then they were focused on recruiting the largest number possible of fighters. Omar was assigned fixed services within the Tripoli-based military camp of the Glory Corps/Faylaq al-Majd. However, the fighters there make fun of him relentlessly, patronizing and humiliating him because of his mental condition.”

He added:

“Omar’s father wanted to get rid of him due to his condition because he caused him troubles even though he is married and has four children. The father deprived the children of their father and now takes care of their financial needs.”





2. Fadi Sh., who was imprisoned over a personal dispute with commander

Fadi was born in Rif Dimashq (Damascus Countryside). He is married, a father to three children, and the sole breadwinner for his mother and two sisters. He used to live in the town of Shaykh al-Hadid, in the region of Afrin. He was recruited by the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat) and transported to Libya on 2 April 2020. The key recruiter was the armed group's commander Abu Siraj. The fighter has been held captive in a Libyan prison run by the brigade since June 2021. STJ reached out to the fighter's cousin, who recounted how:

“Fadi was a fighter within the al-Amshat, and he was paid only 4,50 TL as a salary. The money was not enough to meet the needs of his children, mother, and sisters, so he decided to go to Libya. There, he had a dispute with Basel al-Jasim, Abu Amsha's brother, who is the general commander of the al-Amshat brigade in Libya. We are not sure what the reason for the fight was because we could not reach Fadi in prison. Basel also did not tell anyone about their dispute.”

He added:

“Fadi's mother met Abu Amsha several times and implored for her son's release and that he interfere to resolve the issue. He gave her promises every time, and nothing has changed. The family's condition deteriorated; the mother and the sisters have been forced to clean houses and do sewing work to make ends meet.”

