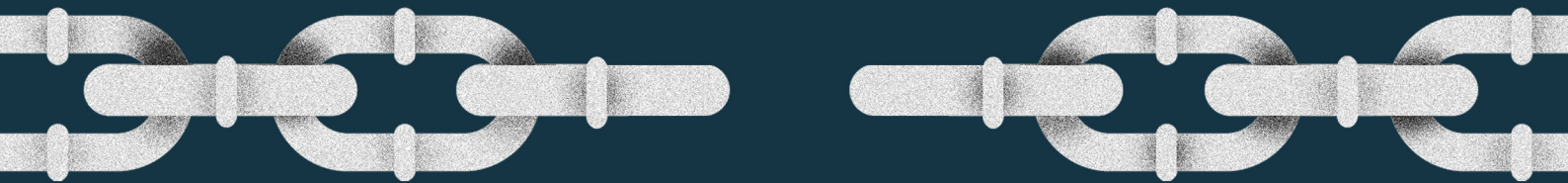


Forcibly Disappeared in Syrian Detention Centers

Research about the Details of the Process of Forced
Disappearance and the Fate of the Victims



The Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison seeks to uncover the truth and to achieve justice for those detained for their political opinion or activity. It works to expose the fate of the missing and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria in general, and the Sednaya prison in particular. It handles the affairs of detainees and disappeared persons in Sednaya prison and works on documenting their numbers, regions, date of disappearance and the party responsible for their arrest. The Association seeks to communicate with the families of the missing, to provide them with moral support, and to convey their voice and their suffering in various possible ways and means. The Association works on explaining the issue of the detainees and the missing to the local and international public, and cooperates with local and international human rights organizations to conduct investigations about the cases of detainees and missing persons in Sednaya prison.

رابطة معتقلي ومفقودي سجن صيدنايا
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December 2020

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The visit, which lasted only four minutes, felt like an era ... an era of torment and oppression. When he turned around to leave, I noticed that his pants were sliding off his body and that he was unable to lift them. I felt like his legs were two melted ropes. I was imagining how much they would beat him now, because I heard that they used to beat the detainees after visits. When we went out, my mother said: “Your brother will not last long... Find any way to release him!” I did not leave a door that I did not knock, nor a voice that could reach, nor an attempt that could be tried. Exactly a month later, on April 27, he was martyred. Relieved. I was relieved! Because he is no longer in their hands, and he did not continue to be in the agony that he was in. But his pain still burns us, and neither I nor my mother can regain our previous lives, as long as the one who killed him still kills others, and does not feel the guilt for what he did, nor how he injured and destroyed our lives. Our life changed after these four minutes. It changed after we saw how oppressed my brother was, how he suffered and was unfairly treated.

Testimony of Manal Al-Rifai

“

All released persons testimonies included in this report are taken from the book published recently by the Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison, entitled “Sednaya Prison during the Revolution: Testimonies”, 2019.

The book can be downloaded free of charge from the association’s website via the following link: <https://bit.ly/2GOWXJW>.

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If you are registered as sick, this may mean your end, because of the beating you are subjected to, on your way back and forth to the Tishreen Military Hospital, and even from the doctor. When you are escorted by the jailers, they give you a number and you are not allowed to mention your name. Once, I was registered as patient and they gave me the number 2529. We were about 30 persons referred to the hospital, and when we arrived, four of us were dead. The next day, they took me to put the bodies of those who had died in the hospital into bags. They were more than 15 killed by Shabiha and doctors. I think that more people died in this hospital than in Sednaya prison!

Testimony of Emad Eddin Shahoud

“

Executive Summary

This report aims to study the topic of forced disappearance in Syria. For this purpose, we analyzed quantitative data based on interviews with 508 families of the forcibly disappeared. The Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison began conducting these interviews in the fall of 2018, with the aim of documenting cases of forced disappearance in Syria. In addition, and in order to compare between the released (those who entered Sednaya prison and came out alive) and the forcibly disappeared (those who entered the detention centers and about whom there was no more information), we also analyzed quantitative data derived from 709 interviews with the released ones conducted by the association in the same time period. These interviews were carried out directly with the respondents through face-to-face meetings in the different locations of the team members in southern Turkey, Idlib and Afrin, and by phone, internet and social media for those who are located elsewhere.

This topic has been studied by several parties, but most of them consisted of documenting figures and reporting some personal data, or focused on studying the consequences of forced disappearance on the families. What distinguishes our pioneering study is that it uses quantitative analysis to understand what happened (and is happening) with the forcibly disappeared and how this process takes place, which forms a basic pillar in the relationship of the Syrian state with its society. It is also the first time that a study has relied on such a large number of interviews, and it is also the first study (to our knowledge) that distinguishes in a detailed way between the forcibly disappeared and the released. This distinction helps to better understand the state's strategies in dealing with its population, especially during the protests, which swept the country in 2011. Hence, this study goes far beyond documenting numbers and personal data. The most prominent results were as follows:

Families (Information Providers)

- The largest percentage of those who communicate or report cases of forced disappearance live in places outside the control of the regime.
- More than a third were over the age of 48 (age in August 2020). More than two-thirds of them have a first-degree relationship with the forcibly disappeared (father, mother, son and daughter) or second-degree (grandfather, grandmother, sibling and grandchildren). They have a strong desire and enthusiasm to move forward in the direction of not only uncovering the fate of the forcibly disappeared, but to prosecute the perpetrators and establish justice: 93.9% asserted that they were willing to donate samples in order for organizations and bodies specialized in searching for the forcibly disappeared and uncovering their fate to conduct DNA tests. 90.75% said that they agree to the use of all or part of the information provided by them in international or national criminal procedures with regard to accountability and interrogation of persons accused of committing crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes (while ensuring confidentiality in the disclosure of explicit names and addresses).

Who are the Forcibly Disappeared?

- Almost all of the forcibly disappeared are men, of Arab ethnicity and of Muslim Sunni confession. More than 80% of them are over 27 years old (age in August 2020) and about 7% of them suffer from chronic diseases. The vast majority (more than 70%) did not obtain a high school degree. Only about a quarter of them hold a high school diploma or more.

- Approximately 64% of them are married, which indicates that forced disappearance has an important social consequence.
- Among the forcibly disappeared are individuals of non-Syrian nationalities including Iraqis, Kuwaitis, Turks, Lebanese and Tunisians.
- Forced disappearances do not target former detainees, but rather people who are, in most cases, arrested for the first time. Indeed, only 5.12% were former detainees.
- The percentage of forcibly disappeared persons born in Idlib (from the total sample of forcibly disappeared) exceeds the percentage of released individuals born in Idlib (out of the total sample of released) by a large difference (more than double), 48.43% and 21.02% respectively. They make up about half of the forcibly disappeared and less than a quarter of the released as documented by the Association. As for Homs and Hama, a comparison of the region of origin shows the opposite: the released are more than the forcibly disappeared, and the proportions are similar in the rest of the governorates. However, it should be noted that these percentages may have been affected to a large extent by the distribution of the field team of the association and its presence being limited to Idlib and Afrin, which led to a decrease in the number of cases documented from other regions. In any case, since the documentation process is underway, it will be necessary to review these percentages and compare them with more cases documented in other Syrian regions.
- When comparing between the place of residence of the disappeared and their place of work, Idlib appears again as a different case: about half of the forcibly disappeared residents of Idlib were working outside it before their disappearance: 48.43% said that the place of residence of the disappeared was Idlib, but this city was not mentioned as a workplace except in the case of 25.79%.

The Incident of Forced Disappearance

- 2012 is the year of forced disappearances in Syria. If we distinguish between the detention cases that led to the forced disappearance and others (in which the detainee was released from prison), we find that the number of arrests (in the sample of released individuals) reached its peak in 2011, while the cases of detention that led to the forced disappearance slightly increased that same year in comparison to 2010, but did not reach its peak until the year 2012.
- The Syrian Arab Army is the primary party that is responsible for these types of arrests. The data shows that it is responsible for more than a third of the cases, followed by the Military Security Division who is responsible for at least 18% of the cases and lastly the Air Force Intelligence Administration and the Political Security Division with approximately 5%.
- About half of the forcibly disappeared persons were arrested at checkpoints, while the released were generally more likely to be arrested from their workplace. There are implications for this difference. It points at the role of the Syrian Arab Army which is usually in charge of the checkpoints in the storming and controlling of rebel cities.
- Most of the forced disappearances occurred in the governorates of Damascus and Idlib; about half of these operations took place in these governorates. Damascus tops the list, then Idlib, followed by Aleppo and Homs. In general, the cases decrease dramatically in the rest of the governorates.
- In Damascus, disappearance operations probably occurred to “transients” from other governorates. Idlib reached its peak in 2012, while Damascus attained it in 2013.
- Most of the forcibly disappeared born in Idlib were kidnapped at one of the checkpoints (53.36%), while the percentage drops to about 43% in the case of those born in the rest of the governorates

(the average rate is 48%). Idlib is about five points above average. If we compare the percentage of those forcibly disappeared at the hands of the Syrian Arab Army, we notice an important difference between those born in Idlib and others (50% versus 31.45%). Idlib is about 12 points higher than the general average. All of this indicates the possibility of forced disappearances based on ID.

Monetary Extortion

- More than a quarter of the respondents (or 129 participants) in the survey about the forcibly disappeared indicated that relatives had paid sums of money to obtain information about the forcibly disappeared. Additionally, more than 7% (or 38 people) of them indicated that they had paid money for a promise to visit their forcibly disappeared relative. These 129 participants paid US\$461,500 to obtain information about the forcibly disappeared person. As for the sums paid for a promise to visit the forcibly disappeared, the total amounted to US\$95,250.
- In the case of released individuals, respondents were asked (in one combined question) whether money was paid towards the promise of obtaining information about their situation or permission to visit. 44% (or 312 respondents) responded that this actually did happen. When asked if money was paid towards the promise of releasing them, nearly 28% (or 196 respondents) answered yes.
- The total amount of money that released individuals said was paid for information about their fate and promises to visit them, reaches more than US\$1,119,400. The sums paid for a promise to release them exceeded US\$1million. In fact, the 196 respondents paid a total of US\$1,038,100 for it.
- Based on the analysis of the data about released and forcibly disappeared persons, it appeared that a total of US\$2,714,250 had been paid either for promise of information, promise to visit, or promise to release. If we assume that the total number of forcibly disappeared people is 100,000 (there are no exact figures, but this is an estimate based on the cases that have been documented by the Syrian Network for Human Rights) and that a total of 250,000 people have been arrested and released (which is a very conservative estimate, since the real number is probably much larger), then the total amount paid is close to US\$900 million (868,900,573 specifically).

What is the information available to people and what are its sources?

- In the majority of cases (67.72%), there were witnesses to the forced disappearance.
- The information is often related to whether the person is alive and where he/she is. Yet, more than 40% are left without knowing anything about the forcibly disappeared person.
- The majority (60.43%) indicated that they had information suggesting that the forcibly disappeared was in one of the prisons of the Syrian regime.
- Sednaya prison is at the top of the list of detention centers responsible for forced disappearances; it was cited in more than 80% of the cases.
- Families search for any information related to the fate of the forcibly disappeared (life or death in general) or the prison in which he/she is detained. They mostly get this information from the released (former detainees who were released and reached out to them). This way of obtaining information was mentioned by 67.78% of the respondents in the case of information related to their fate, and 47.8% to know in which prison the forcibly disappeared person was held.
- Only about 4% were able to visit the forcibly disappeared. More than half of the respondents

indicated that the main reason for not visiting was the fear of being arrested if they were to ask about the forcibly disappeared, and about a third said that the arresting party does not admit to the fact that the forcibly disappeared is with them.

- Forcibly disappeared were last seen in detention centers belonging to the Ministry of Defense, which makes it the primary responsible for most cases of forced disappearance, and more than half of them were seen in detention centers affiliated to the Military Police, specifically in the Sednaya Prison.
- Only about 3% said they had obtained a death certificate and about 1% a personal or family record from civil affairs proving the death of the disappeared. This means that the vast majority still have an unknown fate, and there are thousands of families living in the hope of obtaining any information about them.

In conclusion, these results show that forced disappearance is a major strategy of the Syrian state to control and intimidate society. Arrest and monetary extortion of the population constitute a great source of funding of the state, and its repressive apparatus specifically. Therefore, maximum pressure must be exerted on the supporters of the Syrian regime, specifically on the Russian Federation, to reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared, and to allow the families to visit those of them who are still alive, to report on the fate of the corpses of the dead, to clarify the places of burial, to investigate the causes of death and to return the remains so that their families can bury them in a manner befitting them. As the Independent International Commission of Inquiry emphasized two years ago, so far to no avail: “No progress can be made in reaching a political settlement and lasting peace in Syria without an urgent response to the need for justice of Syrian victims, survivors and their families”.¹

For its part, Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison will continue its work in documenting cases, and continuously comparing data by issuing periodic reports that allow verification of the conclusions reached by this report, while revealing more details after reaching larger samples of different demographic and social groups in Syria.

¹ The Independent International Commission of Inquiry about the Syrian Arab Republic, Death Notifications in the Syrian Arab Republic, 2018. (<https://bit.ly/3eEAs62>).

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When we were in the Palestine Branch, before the revolution, of course, they often used to stop torture, if the prisoner lost consciousness, because they would consider avoiding his death in their hands, or perhaps they would be implementing the orders of the branch chief. As for here, they used to hit the defectors on the head with metal sticks, and when the victim fell silent, they continued beating. This was not a beating, but an execution by beating.

Testimony of Abul-Fath

“

Introduction

The issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria is one of the most important challenges, if not the main challenge facing the future of Syrians. The frightening numbers of victims of forced disappearance in the country puts the problem at an unprecedented level. It is much greater than any other problem against any peace process and threatens to destroy any political transition project. The Sednaya prison (and before it, Tadmur Prison), has been the preferred place for the authority for forced disappearances practiced against its political opponents, and this situation developed after 2011 making this prison a symbol that reflects the suffering of the society from the brutality of the repressive state apparatus in Syria.

Forced disappearance can be defined as “arrest, detention, abduction, or any form of deprivation of liberty that occurs at the hands of state officials, or persons or groups of individuals who act with the permission or support of the state or with its consent, followed by a refusal to acknowledge depriving the person of his freedom or concealing the fate of the disappeared person or his whereabouts, which deprives him/her of the protection of the law.” It is considered a crime that does not affect the victim only, but also extends to his/her family, spouse, children and loved ones. It is a crime against humanity in certain circumstances as determined by international law². Forced disappearance was one of the main strategies adopted by Hafez Al-Assad to intimidate and dominate Syrian society³. It is estimated that there were more than 17,000 cases during his rule, most of which dated back to the 1980s⁴. But after 2011, and under the rule of the Bashar Al-Assad and the widespread popular protests in the country, these numbers began to rise very dramatically, reaching 98,000 forcibly disappeared (between 2011-2019) according to the estimates of the Syrian Network for Human Rights today: about 85,000 are in the prisons of the Syrian regime, and the rest are distributed among militant Islamic organizations, armed opposition factions, and the Syrian Democratic Forces⁵.

Every “political” detainee in Syria can be considered as forcibly disappeared until his/her family is able to visit him/her. But even if this does happen, this does not mean that there is sufficient justification to check on the detainee’s life. In many cases, news of the detainee may be suddenly cut off and he may re-enter the cycle of forced disappearance. The first report of the Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison, based on interviews with released individuals (former detainees), showed that only in about 11% of cases, does the arresting enforcement agency identify itself to the arrested at the moment of his/her arrest. The report showed that hardly anyone escaped torture⁶. The death notifications received by thousands of detainees’ families (who were most likely detained between 2011 and 2014) in addition to Caesar’s photographs and numerous reports, indicate the systematic liquidation of their detainees and even mass executions inside detention centers⁷. Therefore, the detainees’ families live with concerns and constant questions about the conditions of their detainees, since there is no room for reassurance about their lives as long; they are absent in detention centers run by the authoritarian state apparatus in Syria. But what do they know and what do we know about the forcibly disappeared?

2 International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. <https://bit.ly/2CdkGlr>

3 Hafez al-Assad ruled Syria as of 1970, and after his death in 2000, his son Bashar al-Assad took power.

4 Soguel, Dominique. For kin of Syria’s ‘disappeared,’ a trap: You can’t not pay to find them. November 6, 2015, Christian Science Monitor. <https://bit.ly/32uBNcY>

5 Syrian Network for Human Rights. Forced disappearance, the most painful and brutal weapon of the Syrian regime, August 30, 2019. Estimates vary, so there are no accurate figures. The Syrian Violations Documentation Center (VDC) was able to document 93,453 cases of forced disappearance. This is what has been documented by these organizations. Given the difficulties of documentation processes, we can say that the number is probably much higher. <https://bit.ly/2CpBcP7>

6 Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison. Detention in Sednaya: Report on the Procedures and Consequences of Political Imprisonment. 2019. <https://bit.ly/2GOWXJW>

7 Compare: The international investigation committee concerned with the Syrian Arab Republic, Notification of Deaths in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as, Amnesty International Organization in the year 2014, <https://bit.ly/3eMYEmR>. Human Slaughterhouse: Mass Hangings and Extermination at Sednaya Prison, Syria, 2017. The deserting soldier also known as Caesar, leaked around 55,000 pictures of 11,000 detainees who were deceased in the Syrian regime detention centers and the effects of torture appear on their bodies. For more information about this matter, refer to the Syrian Association for Missing and Conscience Detainees (<https://safmcd.com/home?>).

With the exception of reports that document the names and numbers of the forcibly disappeared, there are a very few studies that have investigated the issue of the forcibly disappeared separately from the detainees. Perhaps the most prominent of these is the study published by Amnesty International entitled “Between Prison and Grave: Forced Disappearances in Syria” (2015). This is in addition to a research study published by the Dawlaty Foundation and Women Now for Development “Shadows of the Disappeared.” In general, these studies are based on qualitative methodological approaches and focus on understanding the effects of forced disappearances on the families of the forcibly disappeared. It can be said that almost all efforts have so far focused mainly on documenting, and to a lesser extent, on the consequences of detention on families. Undoubtedly, this is very important and must continue, but on the other hand, there have been no attempts to «gather» different parts of the story to understand what happened to them and how it happened (or is happening). We claim that researching the families’ narratives and their information (despite their ambiguities and differences) and analyzing them statistically will help us advance in answering these questions. This is the main aim of this research. Therefore, this effort comes to complement the attempts and endeavors to define the issue of the forcibly disappeared and to reveal its circumstances and consequences. This is extremely important, as the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations for Political Affairs and Peace Building, Rosemary de Carlo said, “Many families have no information on the fate of their loved ones. Detainees, including women and children, are held without due process or access to legal representation or their families. Places of detention are not accessible to the UN or international monitors. Records from hospitals or burial sites are not public. Some families have been forced to pay enormous sums of money in hope of obtaining information often in vain.”⁸

Nevertheless, we confirm that we are fully aware of the difficulties of this process. We are dealing with complex information and hypotheses that make it difficult to obtain accurate results. However, we have no choice but to start this work, especially since the project of documenting cases of forced disappearance implemented by the Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison is continuing, and therefore it will be possible in the future to analyze more data and compare it with the data we present in this report. This will allow us to draw a clearer picture of this issue and confirm or deny hypotheses.

This report is divided into four main sections. The first section examines the characteristics of the information providers: their social and demographic backgrounds and the extent of their willingness to cooperate with human rights organizations to uncover the fate of their loved ones and achieve justice. The second section seeks to answer the question of who are the forcibly disappeared. The third section studies the event of the disappearance: its location, time, manner of occurrence, the parties responsible for it, the financial extortion to which the families of the victims are exposed, the information available to them and their sources.

8 UN News, In the Security Council debate on the missing, DiCarlo calls for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court. August 2019 <https://bit.ly/39eznAD>

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My colleagues were standing with their faces to the wall as usual, as it was forbidden to see the jailers, and if they notice that he had seen one of them they would take out his eyes and take him back. I reached them and fell to the ground while the jailer was coming out. I fainted for about a quarter of an hour. When I woke up, I asked my colleagues to hold me on my feet to check if I was still intact or paralyzed. I was crying and everyone started crying with me. They supported me and I was able to stand, thank God.

Testimony of Khaldoun Mansour

“

Methodology and Sample

Since its inception, the Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison has been in constant communication with the families of the forcibly disappeared in Sednaya Prison in particular and Syria in general. This communication comes within a broad strategy adopted by the Association that aims to collect all the details and information that could help reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared and support their families, by helping them search for their children and loved ones and avoid fraudulent scams promising to provide information on visits or release. For this purpose, the Association worked in February 2019 on a project to document cases of forced disappearances caused by the acting parties on the Syrian territory. The data collected falls under six main areas:

1. **Data about the person providing the personal statement:** full name, father's and mother's name, gender, place and date of birth, permanent residence address, and degree of relationship to the forcibly disappeared.
2. **Data about the forcibly disappeared person:** full name, father's and mother's name, gender, nickname, occupation, work address, educational attainment, place and date of birth, national or ethnic group, religion or sect at birth, nationality, province/ city/ town/ neighborhood, last address before the disappearance, marital status, height, weight, blood group, hair color, eye color, distinctive signs, surgeries, devices or metal sheets in the body, artificial limbs, diseases, previous kidnappings or arrests and any available information about them. This is in addition to any documents proving the identity of the forcibly disappeared, along with the most recent photos etc.
3. **Information about the forced disappearance:** the date of the incident, the place and the force controlling the area, the place of arrest (if the disappearance was a result of an arrest), the place of arrest (home, work, university, school, ambush, checkpoint), security summons if applicable, witnesses to the disappearance etc.
4. **Information about the place in which the disappeared is suspected to be:** the nature of the information, its sources and how it was obtained, the names of the suspected detention centers, visits to the detainee (or reasons for visits not occurring), evidence of their occurrence (if the forcibly disappeared is detained and lost or has disappeared in prison), the authorities' responses regarding the disappearance incident after the visit, people who met the forcibly disappeared after the disappearance incident.
5. **Information on financial extortion:** the sums paid and to whom, as well as outcomes of whether they contributed or not to obtaining information about the disappeared etc.
6. **Other information:** obtaining a death certificate from the Syrian authorities and all the information available about the death, such as the place and date of its occurrence and the reasons mentioned in the certificate, a civil record proving the death, and willingness to donate DNA samples to organizations working to search for the forcibly disappeared or to exhume the bodies and identify them.

Data was collected by a research team consisting of 6 people, three women and three men, who are former detainees and by families of forcibly disappeared persons who have been trained in documenting human rights violations and documenting forced disappearances. The team is geographically located in southern Turkey and northwestern Syria. The Turkey team is located in the city of Reyhaniye and the city of Gaziantep, while the Syria team is in Idlib and Aleppo governorates, and in the Afrin region in particular. The Association tried to work in other parts of Syria but could not for many reasons including not being allowed by the power of the fait accompli to work freely or forbidding them under the pretext of the lack of a permit to carry out such activities.

The Association was also unable to reach the areas controlled by the Syrian regime, in which we believe that the presence of families of the forcibly disappeared is the highest, due to the high security grip and the severe danger surrounding work in such research projects.

To overcome the bias that arises from the limited presence in certain geographical areas and not in others, the Association uses multiple methods of data collection which are based on direct interviews with the families of the forcibly disappeared. This is done through in-person visits by the team or through contacting them in the available ways (by phone or through social media). It also happens that families of the forcibly disappeared visit the Association's office in the Turkish city of Gaziantep or get in contact (by phone or through the Association's website or Facebook page). They ask about whether the forcibly disappeared are in Sednaya prison or whether or not his/her name had been mentioned by one of the previous detainees in this prison. They ask to document the case of the disappeared and for help in obtaining information from recently released detainees from Sednaya prison about him/her.

It should be noted here that the Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on the progress of work, as the Association closed its office in the city of Gaziantep and field teams stopped visiting families in Syria. During the quarantine imposed in Turkey, the Association relied during this period on interviews through meeting programs (Zoom or Google Meet) or messaging applications (WhatsApp, Telegram, IMO) (Table 1).

Table 1: Methods of data collection

Method	Number	Percentage (%)
Face to face	122	24,01
Phone call	39	7,68
Internet applications and programs	347	68,31
Total	508	100,00

The documentation process starts by examining the details of the last day of the disappeared at the moment of the incident. The team member, in cooperation with the families of the disappeared person, develops several scenarios for the disappearance process and collects the largest number of testimonies and documents that prove its occurrence including its location, how it occurred, the controlling force on the ground, and witnesses to it if present. The team, in cooperation with the families, then draws a scheme for the places in which the disappeared is suspected to be. All the information received by the interviewees is put into the above-mentioned scheme mentioning its sources and how it happened or how the families had reached it. This information is scrutinized and the extent of its credibility and possibility of occurrence is verified in order to attain the greatest degree of reliability and confirmation of the incident and the party that is responsible for it. The interviewing team presents the most accurate scenario based on evidence and testimonies about it and accordingly provide information about the fate of the forcibly disappeared. By doing so, the Association supports the search efforts being carried out by the families and / or any other party, about the forcibly disappeared persons and their fate⁹. In addition, it assists entities and agencies that may, in the future, carry out the operations of opening mass graves, extracting bodies from them and determining their

⁹ Lately, the Association was able to uncover the fate of 14 forcibly disappeared persons, and their families were informed about the information possessed by the Association as they were put in contact with released witnesses who had met the disappeared and provided information and testimonies directly to the family.

identity through DNA tests and/or traditional methods of identifying the bodies. Further, this documentation process is necessary in order to advance the path of transitional justice and accountability by identifying the parties responsible for forced disappearances in Syria.

This report relies on an analysis of the data received from the first 508 (501 men and 7 women) cases that were documented anonymizing all information referring to names or personal data that allow the identification of the information provider or the disappeared¹⁰. The majority of respondents showed the personal identification documents of the disappeared (ID/ family record/ driving license/ registration certificate/ title deed/ marriage contract etc.) (Table 2). This indicates the credibility and rigor of the association's documentation process. Yet, some people were afraid of providing documents, while others lost documents due to the displacement, bombing operations or other reasons:

Table 2: Do you have evidence that proves the identity of the forcibly disappeared?

	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	317	62,40
No	185	36,42
No answer	6	1,18
Total	508	100,00

In our sample, there were 75 cases in which the respondents did not know the exact date of the incident. There were 12 cases in which the disappearance occurred before the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in March 2011. The first was in the Deraa governorate on 12/20/2001 and the last was in the Hama governorate on 02/23/2011. As for those that occurred after the revolution, they numbered 421, the first of which was in the Hama governorate on 04/14/2011 and the last was in the Idlib governorate on 06/23/2020.

In addition to the data collected about the forcibly disappeared, the Association had collected data about individuals who were detained and then released (Sednaya detainees who were released alive). The first report by the Association, which was published last year, was based on the first 400 cases of that sample. The number of cases that have been documented until the time of preparation of this report had reached 710¹¹. We thus compare between the data on released persons and that of the forcibly disappeared at different points of this report, whenever we found that it may help to understand what has happened and is happening to the forcibly disappeared.

Although it is a non-probability sample, it sheds light on many issues that remain unknown until now and allows us to better understand what has happened and is happening with the forcibly disappeared. To illustrate the importance of this sample size and this report, it may be useful to point out that if we assume that we are in front of an infinite research population (i.e. more than 10,000), then a probability sample of this number (508) with a confidence level of 95% and a community of 100,000 forcibly disappeared individuals, will give results with a margin of error of +/- 4.4%. However much the sample size increases, the margin of error remains close. Suppose that

¹⁰ It is estimated that the percentage of forcibly disappeared women is around 10% of the total number of disappeared persons (based on Amnesty International organization, *Between Prison and Grave*, p.7). Therefore, the ratio in our sample does not reflect these estimates. This may be due to the fact that the sample depends mainly on the network of the relations of the association, which are mostly made up of detainees and families of the forcibly disappeared in Sednaya Prison. As we mentioned in our first report (*Detention in Sednaya*), it is likely that there were no arrests of women in Sednaya.

¹¹ To access the information included in the database of released persons, see the Association's first report, *Detention in Sednaya*.

the researcher increases the sample from 508 to 1000, the margin of error will be approximately +/- 3.1%. That is, it improves by approximately one percent¹².

Furthermore, given that the documentation process is an ongoing process, the continuous analysis of results will help verify the generalizability of the findings contained in this report. The best way to overcome the problem of inaccessibility of a probability sample is to iterate research: to analyze more data in later periods, with more work in the process of documentation and a continuous comparison between them.

Sample size
Total number of forcibly disappeared (approximate figure): 100,000
Confidence level: 95%
Margin of error: +/- 4.4%
Maximum heterogeneity: q=p
Required sample size: 494
Actual sample size: 508

12 Margin of error is a statistical term expressing what is known as sampling error in a probability sample (resulting from generalizing the results derived from the sample to the research population). Suppose that the results of a poll showed that 60% of the population will elect so-and-so and who are the candidates, and the margin of error is +/- 3%, then this means that the real number in reality should be between 57% and 63%. The greater the margin of error the greater the doubts about the accuracy of the results and their proximity to the true numbers in reality. In general, the acceptable margin of error in the social sciences is +/- 5% at most. The main problem with non-probability samples is the researchers inability to determine the margin of error, and thus the results may or may not be very close to the real numbers. Nevertheless, when we talk about proximity or distance, we often talk about percentages that may slightly exceed 5%, but not far from them, and thus remain valid in order to provide us with a better understanding of the subject of study. This is true with the exception of very few cases, which often occur when the sample number is small, or if the researcher did not consider the characteristics of the research community, and this does not apply to our report because our sample is large, and because we considered the various main categories of the forcibly disappeared, including civilians, military personnel, youth, the elderly and others that.

”

They put him in the room, and here I will complete the narration, based on the accounts of my mother and sister, who were visiting. Two of the warders carried him, or dragged him, and in order to continue standing, they attached his body to the nets and one of them supported him by his hand from his back. At this moment, my sister spotted him and said to my mother: “look, look at this young man ... How will his family visit him?!!” My mother looked at him and said: “Yes, ei walla, pity him ... how will his mother bear to see him!” Until the jailers announced the name and called my mother, saying, “This is your son!”

Testimony of Muhammad

“

Information Providers: Who Are They?

The percentage of men with whom we met reached 55.91% and that of women was 44.09%. The largest percentages of the sample reside outside of Syria (33.46%) and in the Idlib Governorate, which is outside the control of the Syrian regime (43.50%). This means that more than three-quarters of the families of the forcibly disappeared who provided their testimonies reside outside the security grip of the regime. On one hand, this indicates the fear of the families (of reporting forcibly disappeared individuals), and on the other hand, it indicates the difficulties facing the process of documenting the forcibly disappeared. Families in areas controlled by the Syrian regime prefer not to provide any information. More than a third were over 48 years old. About two-thirds of them have a first-degree relationship with the forcibly disappeared (father, mother, son, and daughter) or second-degree (grandmother, grandfather, brothers and grandchildren).¹³

Table 3: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Providers of Information

	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Current place of residence		
Idlib	221	43,50
Aleppo	72	14,17
Deraa	14	2,76
Damascus	4	0,79
Latakia	4	0,79
Hama	2	0,39
Hasakah	2	0,39
Homs	2	0,39
Raqqqa	2	0,39
Deir ez-Zor	1	0,20
No answer	14	2,76
Other countries	170	33,46
Gender of reporter		
Women	224	44,09
Men	284	55,91
Relation to the forcibly disappeared person		
First degree: Father, Mother, Son, Daughter.	154	30,31
Second degree: Grandmother, Grandfather, Siblings and Grandchildren	190	37,40
Third degree: Aunt, Uncle, Niece, Nephew	13	2,56
Fourth degree: Cousin	48	9,45
Other (spouse and others)	103	20,28
Age (In August 2020)		
Less than 18 years	4	0,79
18-27 years	73	14,37

13 To classify the degrees of kinship, we relied on Syrian civil law, according to which Article 38 states that: "In calculating the degree of kinship, each branch is considered as a degree when going back in the ancestry to ascertain this ancestry. When calculating the degree of relatives, the degrees are counted starting from the common ancestor and then descending from him/her to the next degree. Every branch, except for the common ancestor, is considered a degree."

	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Age (In August 2020)		
28-37 years	145	28,54
38-47 years	101	19,88
48 years and above	167	32,87
No answer	18	3,54
Total	508	100.00

We asked the respondents if they were willing to donate samples for organizations and bodies specialized in searching for the forcibly disappeared and uncovering their fate, to conduct DNA tests. We also explained to them that the data collected by the Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison can be used in international or national criminal procedures with regard to interrogating the persons accused of committing crimes against humanity, genocide, war crimes and holding them accountable, and it is possible that all or part of the data provided by them will be used in these procedures. As such, we then asked them whether or not they approve the use of “all or part of the information provided in such procedures, of course, while ensuring confidentiality in disclosing the explicit names or addresses” in these procedures.

The results show a near consensus in terms of their willingness to donate samples as well as consent to use the data (Figures 1 and 2). This expresses a great desire and enthusiasm to move forward in the direction not only to reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared, but also to prosecute the perpetrators and achieve justice.

This means that what hinders this, is not the cooperation of the families of the forcibly disappeared, but rather the absence of the international desire in the first place and the failure of the concerned human rights authorities to communicate with them and extend a helping hand to them in their quest to know the fate of their families and to achieve justice in Syria.

Figure 1: Are you willing to donate samples, for organizations and bodies specialized in searching for the forcibly disappeared and uncovering their fate to conduct DNA tests? (%)

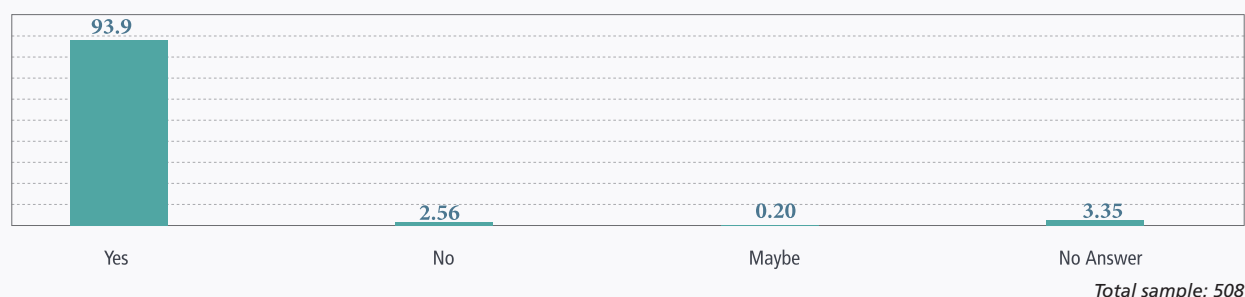


Figure 2: Do you approve our using all or part of the information provided in such procedures, of course, while ensuring confidentiality in disclosing the explicit names or addresses? (%)



”

People in prison gather mostly on a regional basis, such as Al-Shawam, Al-Adaliba and Al-Lawadeqa, (from Damascus, Idlib, and Latakia) with some exceptions of a person from another region for some reason. The accent adopted by the jailers was the Alawi dialect, but we could already distinguish the real Alawites from those who impersonate this accent, just as Shadi himself did to become a shawish. And given that we did not encounter any non-Sunni prisoner, this would provoke terrible but repressed reactions in the hearts of the prisoners.

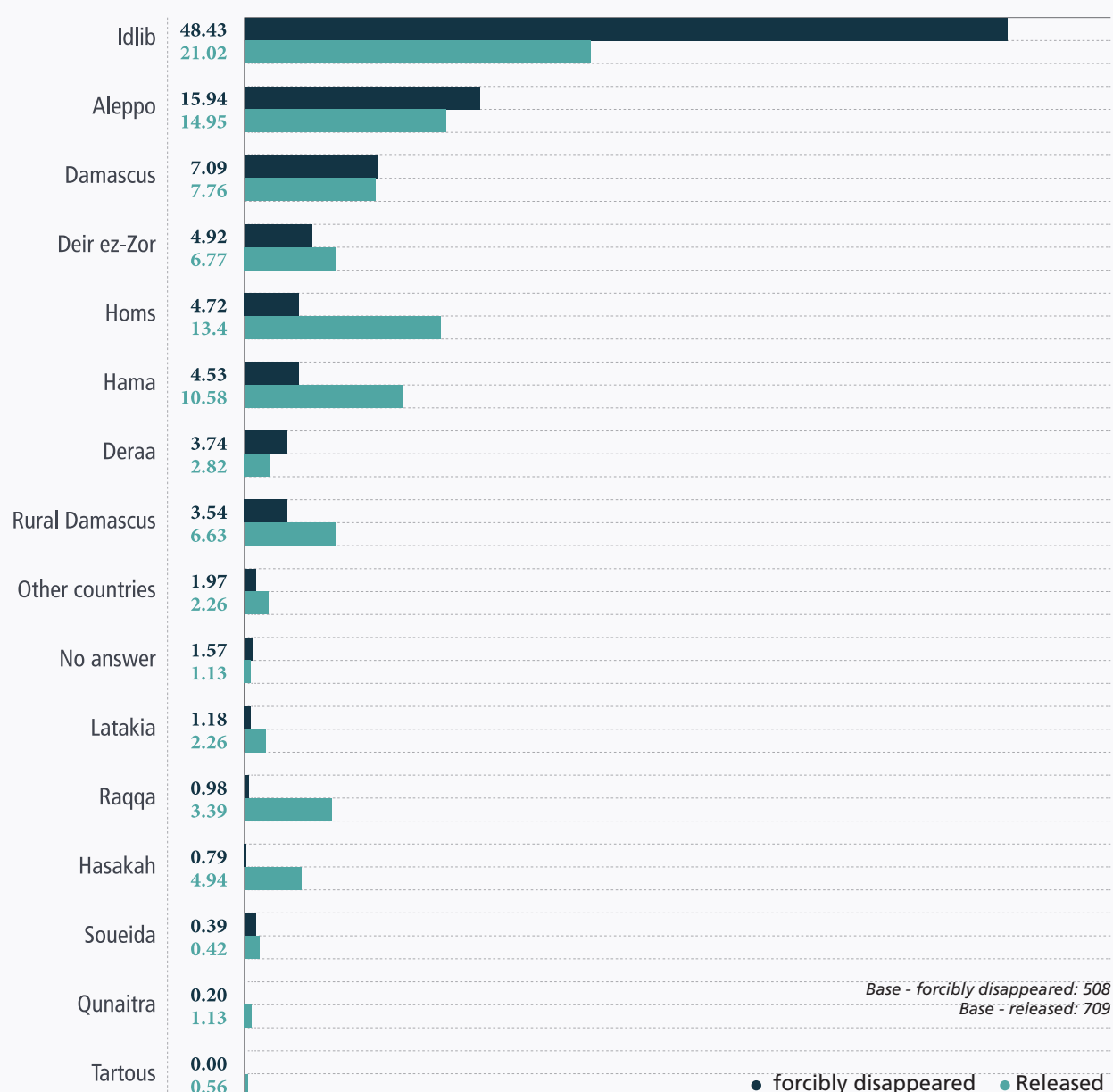
Testimony of Munir al-Faqeer

“

Socio-Demographic Background of the Forcibly Disappeared Persons

When comparing the place of birth of the released persons and the forcibly disappeared, we notice an important difference between the cases of Idlib and Homs, and to a lesser extent in Hama and Rural Damascus. It seems that the percentage of forcibly disappeared persons born in Idlib (out of the total forcibly disappeared sample) exceeds the percentage of the released persons born in Idlib (out of the total sample of the released persons) by a large difference (more than double), 21.02% to 48.43% respectively. They make up about half of the forcibly disappeared and less than a quarter of the released persons. As for Homs and Hama, a comparison of the percentages, shows the opposite: the released persons are more than the forcibly disappeared, and the proportions are similar in the rest of the governorates (Figure 3). The case of Idlib, in particular, raises many questions. What makes the percentage of forcibly disappeared persons so high when compared to the released persons? Is this due to the direct kidnapping or identity-based arrest of detainees born in Idlib in higher frequency than others? Later, in order to answer these questions, we will try to identify in detail the situation of the disappeared in Idlib in comparison to others.

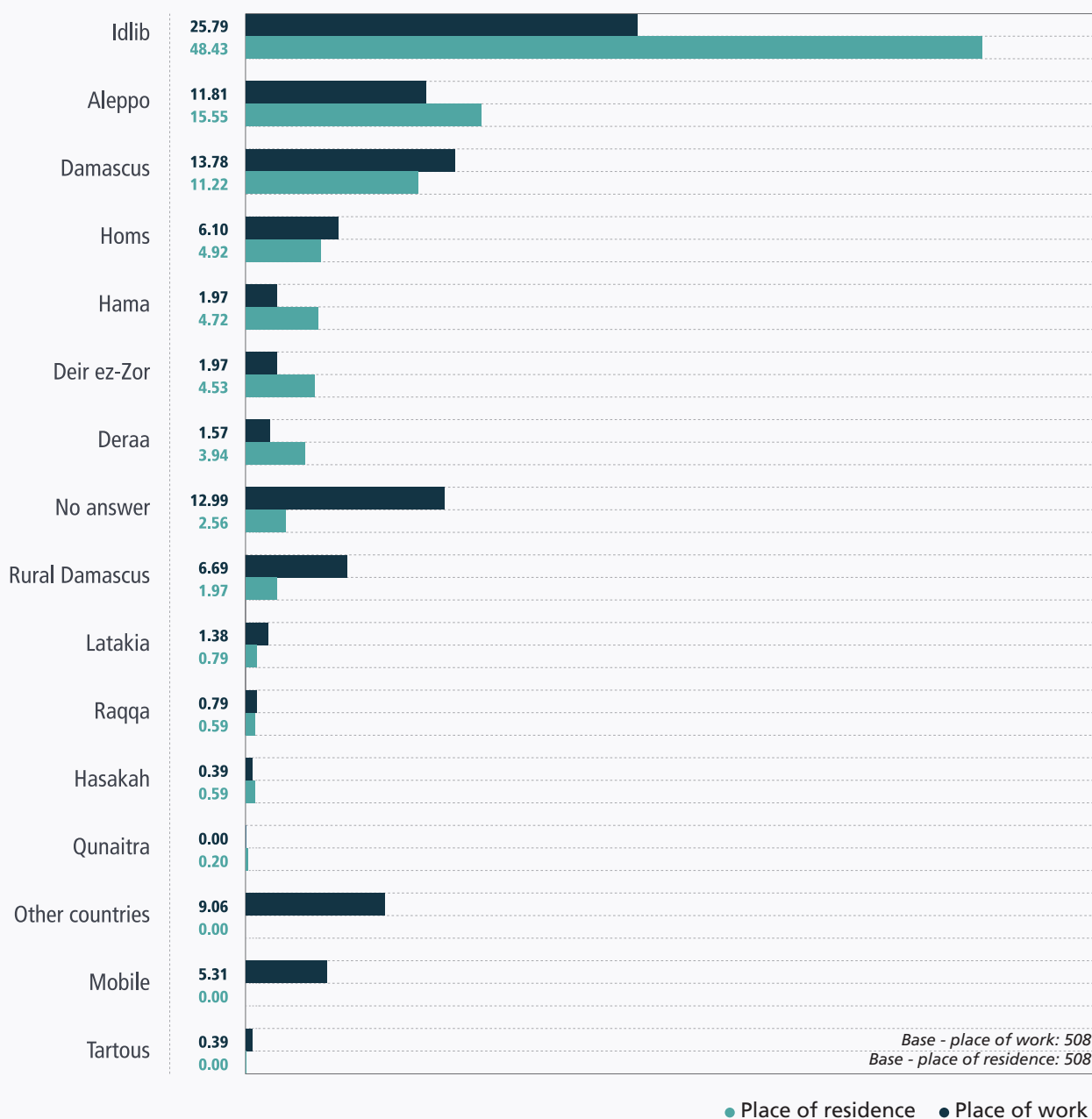
Figure 3: Place of birth among forcibly disappeared and released individuals (%)



The comparison between the place of residence of the forcibly disappeared persons and their place of work shows that Idlib appears again as a different case: About half of the forcibly disappeared from the residents of Idlib were working elsewhere at the time of their disappearance: 48.43% said that the place of residence of the disappeared person was Idlib, but this city was not mentioned as a workplace except in the case of 25.79% (Figure 4).

Even if we assume that what we had previously found in terms of a much higher percentage of forcibly disappeared persons born in Idlib when compared with the percentage of the released persons of them is due to differences related to the data collection process (due to relying on a non-probability sample), the fact that about one in two of the forcibly disappeared (among Idlib residents) was working somewhere outside Idlib, is a matter that must be further explored, especially that we do not find this situation in the rest of the regions.

Figure 4: Place of work and place of residence of the forcibly disappeared persons (%)



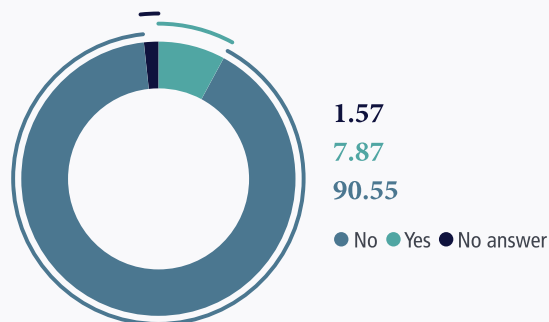
Almost all of the forcibly disappeared are men, of Arab ethnicity and of Muslim Sunni confession. More than 80% of them are over 27 years old and about 7% of them suffer from serious diseases, most of which are stomach pain/ disease/ ulcers (11 cases), diabetes (6 cases), and blood pressure/ heart disease (7 cases) among others (Table 4 and Figure 5). Only about a quarter of them have high school diplomas and higher degrees. Approximately 64% of them are married, which reflects that forced disappearance has significant social consequences (Table 4). The issue is not only related to the forcibly disappeared nor their parents and siblings only, but there are also spouses and children in most cases. Among the forcibly disappeared persons were individuals of non-Syrian nationalities including Iraqi, Kuwaiti, Turkish, Lebanese and Tunisian.

Table 4: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Forcibly Disappeared Persons

	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Women	7	1.38
Men	501	98.62
Age (In August 2020)		
Less than 18 years	1	0.20
18-27 years	77	15.16
28-37 years	210	41.34
38-47 years	120	23.62
48 years and above	89	17.52
No answer	11	2.17
Level of Education		
Illiterate/can read and write	10	1.97
Primary	204	40.16
Middle School	160	31.50
Secondary	53	10.43
Technical institute	16	3.15
University	63	12.40
No Answer	2	0.39
Nationality		
Syrian	496	97.64
Turkish	1	0.20
Iraqi	4	0.79
Palestinian-Syrian	1	0.20
Kuwaiti	1	0.20
Lebanese	1	0.20
Tunisian	1	0.20
No Answer	3	0.59

	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Religion-Sect		
Sunni	505	98.03
Ismaili	1	0.20
No Answer	2	1.77
Ethnicity		
Arab	500	98.43
Kurdish	1	0.20
Turkmen	3	0.59
No Answer	4	0.79
Civil Status		
Single	157	30.91
Married	327	64.37
No Answer	24	4.72
Total	508	100.00

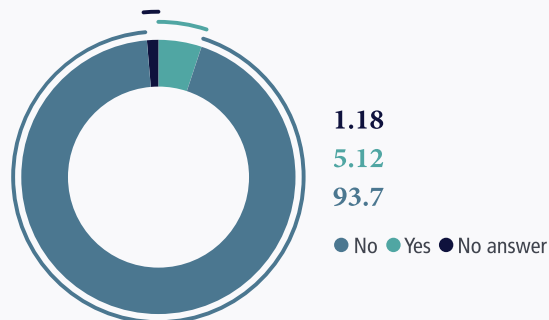
Figure 5: Does the forcibly disappeared person suffer from any chronic diseases? (%)



Base: 508

A small percentage of the forcibly disappeared persons had had a previous experience of arrest: 5.12% compared to 93.70% who had not been previously arrested (Figure 6). This percentage is low, which indicates that forced disappearance does not target former detainees, as they are often “new” people who are arrested for the first time. Those who had formerly been detained had received various charges, most of them related to participating in protests. In addition to that, others received charges of being in the Muslim Brotherhood, smuggling, dissent, similarity in names, participating in fighting, and in some cases, the arrests were random.

Figure 6: Had the forcibly disappeared person been arrested in the past? (%)



Base: 508

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The water started to cut, sometimes for seven or eight days in a row, so we started to ration it. The food quantity began to decrease and the jailer started throwing it at us. The prisoners began to get sick and die after their immunity weakened. In 2013, the beatings became daily, and it was very severe, and blood was on the walls.

Testimony of Mu'tasim Abdul Sater

“

Forced Disappearance Incident

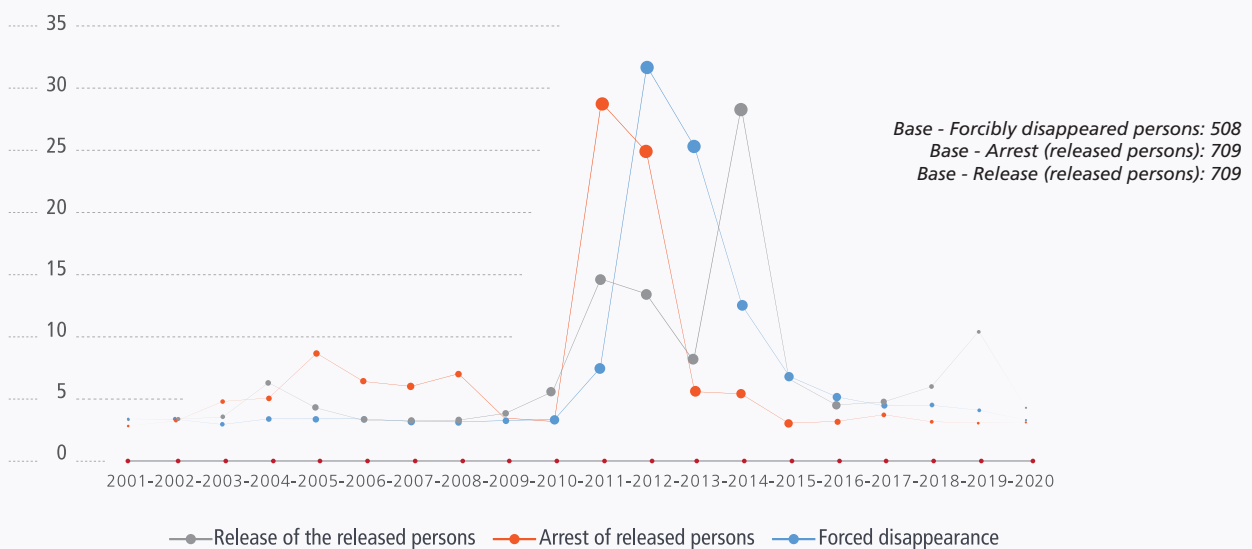
We are looking here into the incident of forced disappearance, about which we are trying to identify all of the information available to the families and to analyze the relation between different variables to understand how, when and where it occurred. We also try to identify who is the party responsible for the arrest.

Time and Place

As shown in Figure 7, the arrest campaigns reached their peak between 2011 and 2012. However, if we look at the data in more detail distinguishing between cases of detention that led to forced disappearance and others (after which the detainee was released from prison), we find that the arrest (in the sample of the released persons) reached its peak in 2011. The cases of detention that led to forced disappearance somewhat increased slightly in comparison to 2010, but did not reach its peak until 2012. That was the exclusive forced disappearance year in Syria¹⁴.

This can be explained by the fact that Syrian prisons were overcrowded in 2011, as even the cases of releases were low, since the regime apparently did not release them until 2014. Forced disappearance was a means for it to crush those who could not be accommodated in its prisons or to reduce its overcrowding and at the same time to control specific areas, especially the capital, Damascus, which was the most frequent place of forced disappearances. Of course, this is in addition to the decline in conditions of detention centers and the widespread systematic torture in them after 2011¹⁵.

Figure 7: Dates of Arrest and Release among the Released Persons and Dates of Disappearance Incident in the sample of the Forcibly Disappeared (%)



14 This result converges with the findings of the Syrian Network for Human Rights in its recent report entitled: The Ninth Annual Report on Forced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of Victims of Forced Disappearance, No Political Solution without the Disappeared, 2020. It was found that 2012 is the highest in terms of the forced disappearance, followed by 2013.

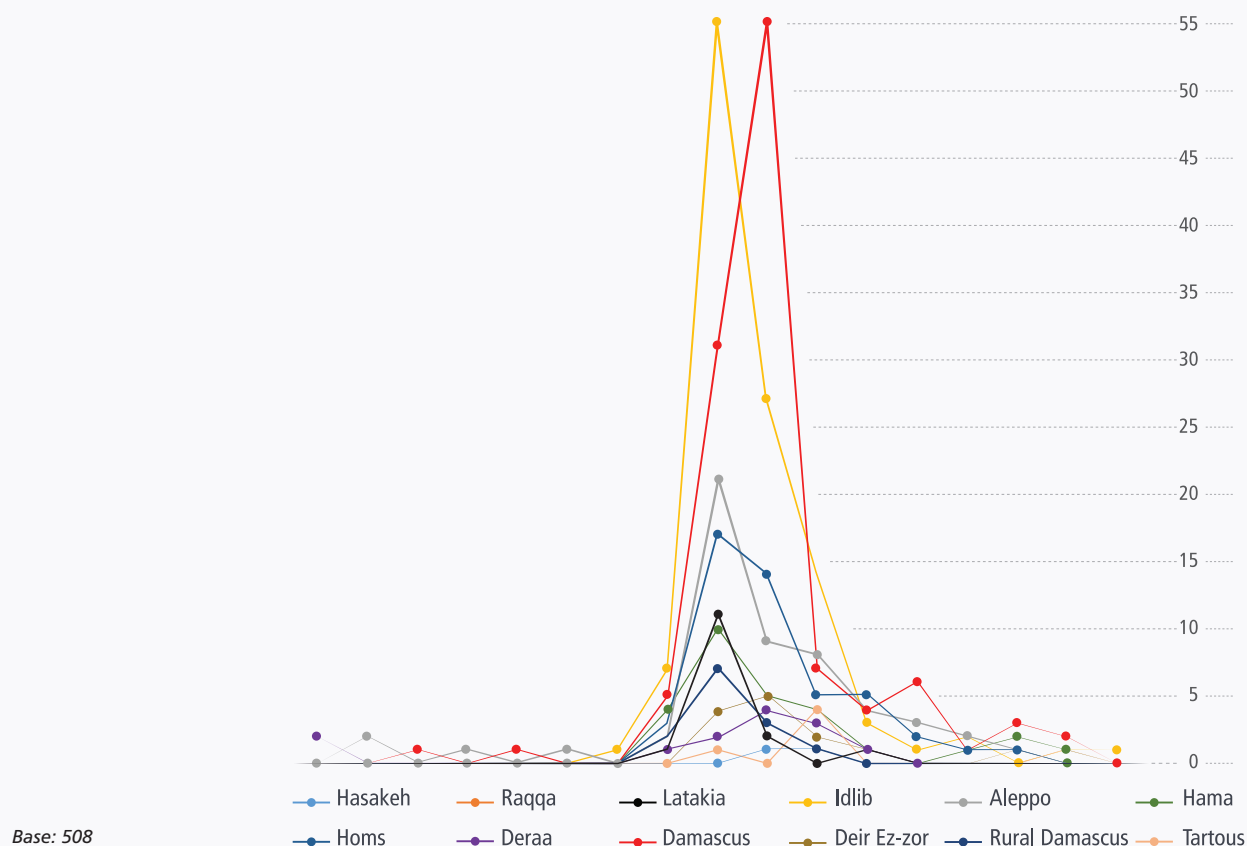
15 As it clearly appeared in our first report about released persons, "there is a very important increase in resorting to all types of physical, psychological and sexual torture after 2011. To give a general characteristic of physical torture at this stage, that distinguishes it from what preceded it, torture aims to leave noticeable physical effects accompanying the detainee for a long time after his release, with the aim of spreading terror in the rebel communities. Psychological torture is also characterized by the use of corpses of deceased detainees to torture the ones that are alive [by leaving the corpses in the prison cells]. As to sexual torture, what distinguishes it after the revolution is that it leaves "the maximum possible degree of long-term physical and psychological effects on the detainee (a significant increase in direct beatings and forcing to adopt sexual positions» (Detention in Sednaya: Report on the Procedures and Consequences of Political Imprisonment, page 53) In light of these practices, it is only natural that these are accompanied by a significant increase in deaths among detainees, but this alone does not explain the large number of forcibly disappeared persons, which reached its peak in 2012 and their concentration among certain demographic groups.

Figure 8 shows the date of the disappearance and the governorate in which the disappearance occurred. Most of the forced disappearances occurred in Damascus and Idlib¹⁶. About half of the forced disappearances occurred in these two governorates.

However, it should be noted that the percentages of forcibly disappeared persons residing in Idlib (and to a lesser extent in Rural Damascus) is higher in comparison to the disappearances that occurred in these governorates (Idlib and Rural Damascus). On the contrary, in the case of Damascus, the percentage of forcibly disappeared persons residing in Damascus is lower than the percentage of disappearances that occurred in this governorate (Figure 9). In other words, it is more likely that in Damascus, forced disappearances were affecting “transients” from other governorates¹⁷.

The difference between Idlib and Damascus is that the former reached its peak in 2012, whereas the latter in 2013. This means that the latter came relatively later. In addition, the decrease in Idlib was gradual and less severe than Damascus (which also experienced a decrease in percentages from 55 documented cases in 2013 to 7 in 2014). All of the above indicates a decision or an organized campaign to control the capital at any price and forced disappearances is one of its main relied upon tools.

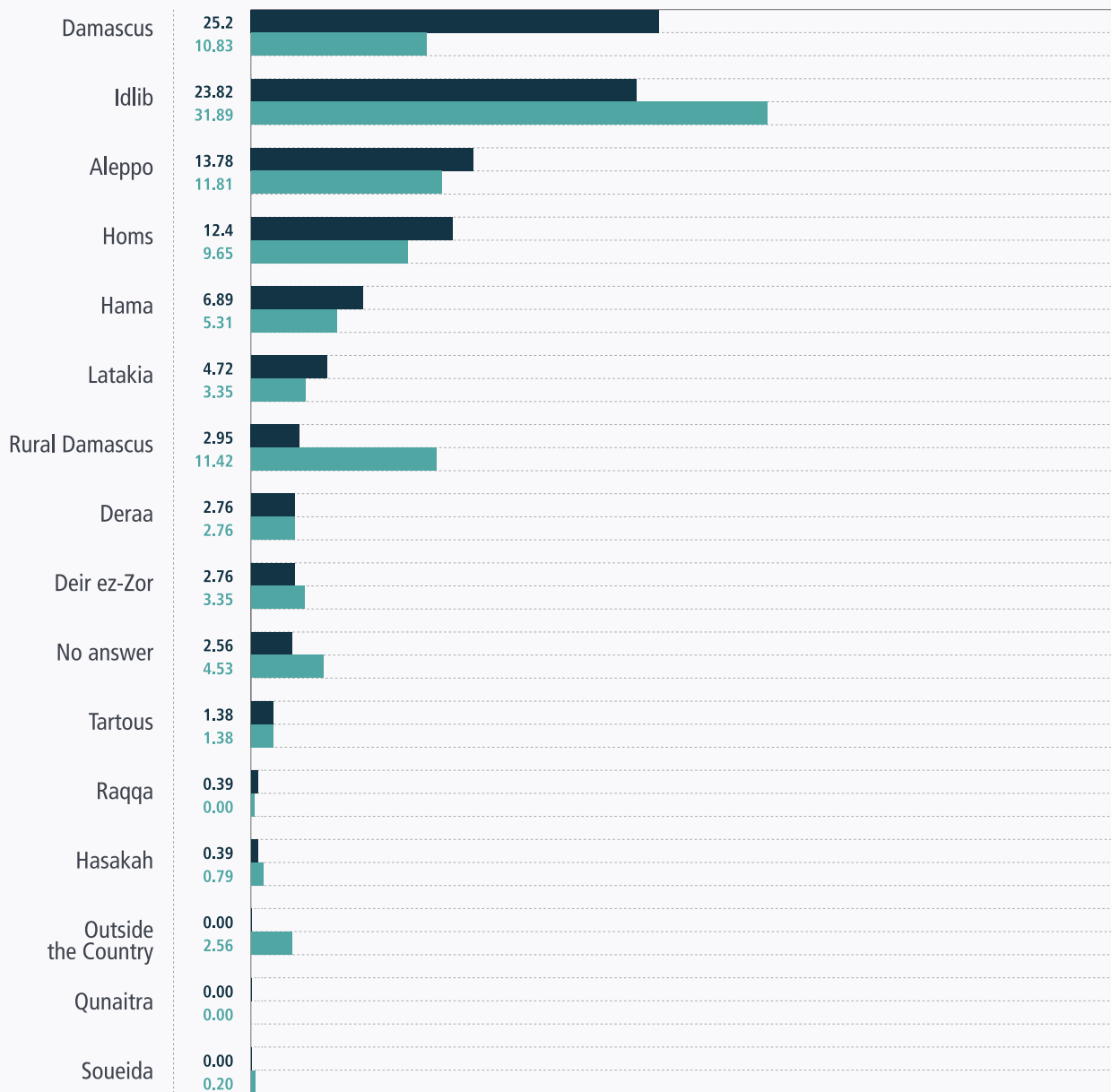
Figure 8: Date of Forced Disappearance Incident based on the Governorate (n.)



¹⁶ Our data here differs from that of the Syrian Network for Human Rights (the Ninth Annual Report on Forced Disappearances). They ordered the governorate as follows: first Rural Damascus, second Aleppo, and third Damascus. The report does not clarify whether it means the place of the occurrence of the forced disappearance or the place of permanent residence of the person. In any case, there is a difference. Even if we take the place of residence, we find that the order according to our data is as follows: Idlib, then Aleppo, then Damascus. Therefore, this issue must be verified and the documentation process should be continued.

¹⁷ Syria is a highly centralized state. All state departments and institutions are located in the major cities, to which many citizens are forced to come to obtain or certify any necessary documents from government departments. We documented one of the cases (a university student) which can be considered as an example of what might happen when a resident of a rebel region is forced to visit the capital, where they are arrested and kidnapped by the repressive state apparatus. This student, who is from Idlib Governorate, was forced to go to Damascus University to obtain a transcript, so he was arrested and his family did not know anything about him.

Figure 9: Place of Forced Disappearance Incident and Last Address before Disappearance (%)

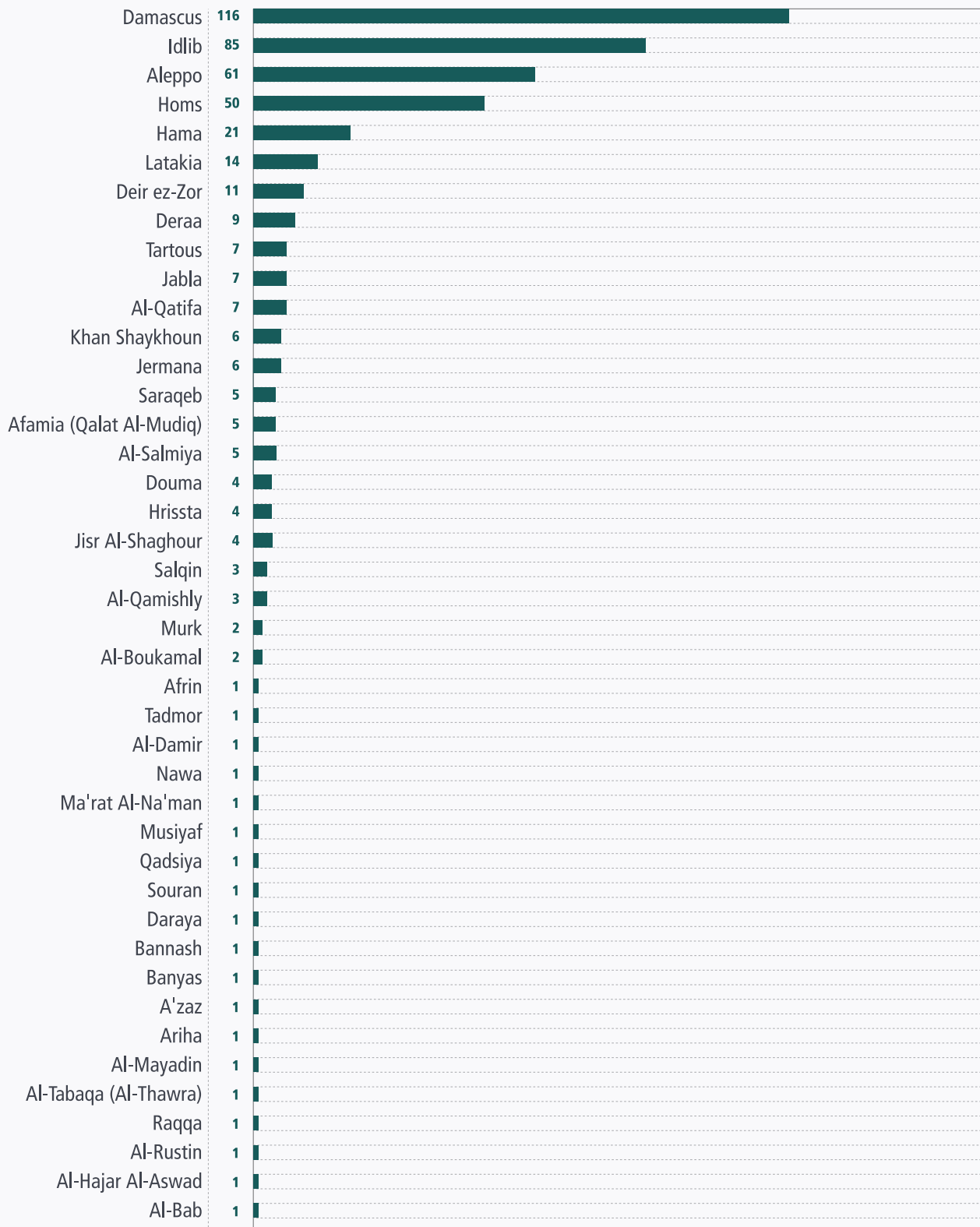


- Last address before disappearance (%)
- Place of forced disappearance incident (%)

Base - Place of forced disappearance incident: 508
Base - Last address before disappearance: 508

As for the provinces, researching cities and towns will help us to better understand the picture: Damascus appears at the top of the list and is followed by Idlib, then Aleppo and Homs. In general, the documented cases decrease dramatically in other cities and towns (Figure 10). The opposition forces did not control the city of Idlib until September 9, 2015. That is, the disappearances occurred during the control of the Syrian regime and its forces on the city. The same can be said about Damascus, which was never under the control of the opposition. As for Aleppo and Homs, some of its neighborhoods came under the control of the opposition, starting in 2012. Therefore, in the following lines, we will discuss in more detail the parties responsible for the disappearance. However, before that, we will try to search in more detail to understand the Idlib case.

Figure 10: Forced Disappearances based on Cities and Towns (n.)



Base: 508

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As for during the investigation, the prisoner is subjected to various forms of torture. Standing as a ghost, on your feet for 48 or 72 hours, as the investigator decides, and there is the well-known ghost which is suspension for an hour, and beating with the tube known as “Al-Akhdar Al-Ibrahimi”. The food was very bad and of small quantity. The standard period of investigation was 60 days, extended to 90 if there were developments during that time. But I spent more than that at the time, because they had kept all detainees that are from hot spots to use them in a planned prisoner exchange.

Testimony of Mohab Al-Qatini

“

Forced Disappearance Based on ID?

Many of the testimonies and circulating information indicate arrests based on personal identity (the distinction is made specifically on the basis of the place of birth or the household). It is difficult to establish a link between forced disappearance and place of birth, based on the data currently available to us¹⁸. However, as we have previously shown, the data on births in Idlib lead us to think in this direction. Therefore, we compared between Idlib on the one hand and the rest of the governorates on the other side, according to the place of arrest (checkpoint, the house, etc.) and the party that made the arrest. The person at the checkpoint first asks for the identity card of the person who is crossing it. Figure 11 shows a big difference between those born in Idlib and in the rest of the governorates.

Most of the forcibly disappeared born in Idlib were kidnapped at one of the checkpoints (53.36%), while in the case of those born in the rest of the governorates, the percentage drops to about 43% (the general rate in Syria - the total sample - is 48%). Idlib is about five points above average. It is also noticed that the families of the forcibly disappeared, born in Idlib, know which security apparatus had made the arrest, while the families of those born in the rest of the provinces are more likely to say 'I do not know'. If we compare the percentage of those born in Idlib among the forcibly disappeared at the hands of the Syrian Arab Army and those born elsewhere, we notice a big difference (50% versus 31.45% respectively). Idlib is about 12 points higher than the general average. However, the agencies responsible for arrest were almost the same: first comes the Syrian Arab Army and second the Military Security. There is a slight difference with regard to Air Force Intelligence and Political Security, whereby the first ranks third in the rest of the governorates, followed by Political Security, while in the case of Idlib: the proportions are similar between Political Security and Air Intelligence (around 7%)(Table 5).

¹⁸ We focused on Idlib due to the high number of cases. As the process of documentation and confirmation of further cases advances in several governorates, it will be possible to research this issue in a better way. We would then be able to ascertain and specify a general average, and order the governorates based on their degree of distinction.

Figure 11: Where was the forcibly disappeared arrested? (%)

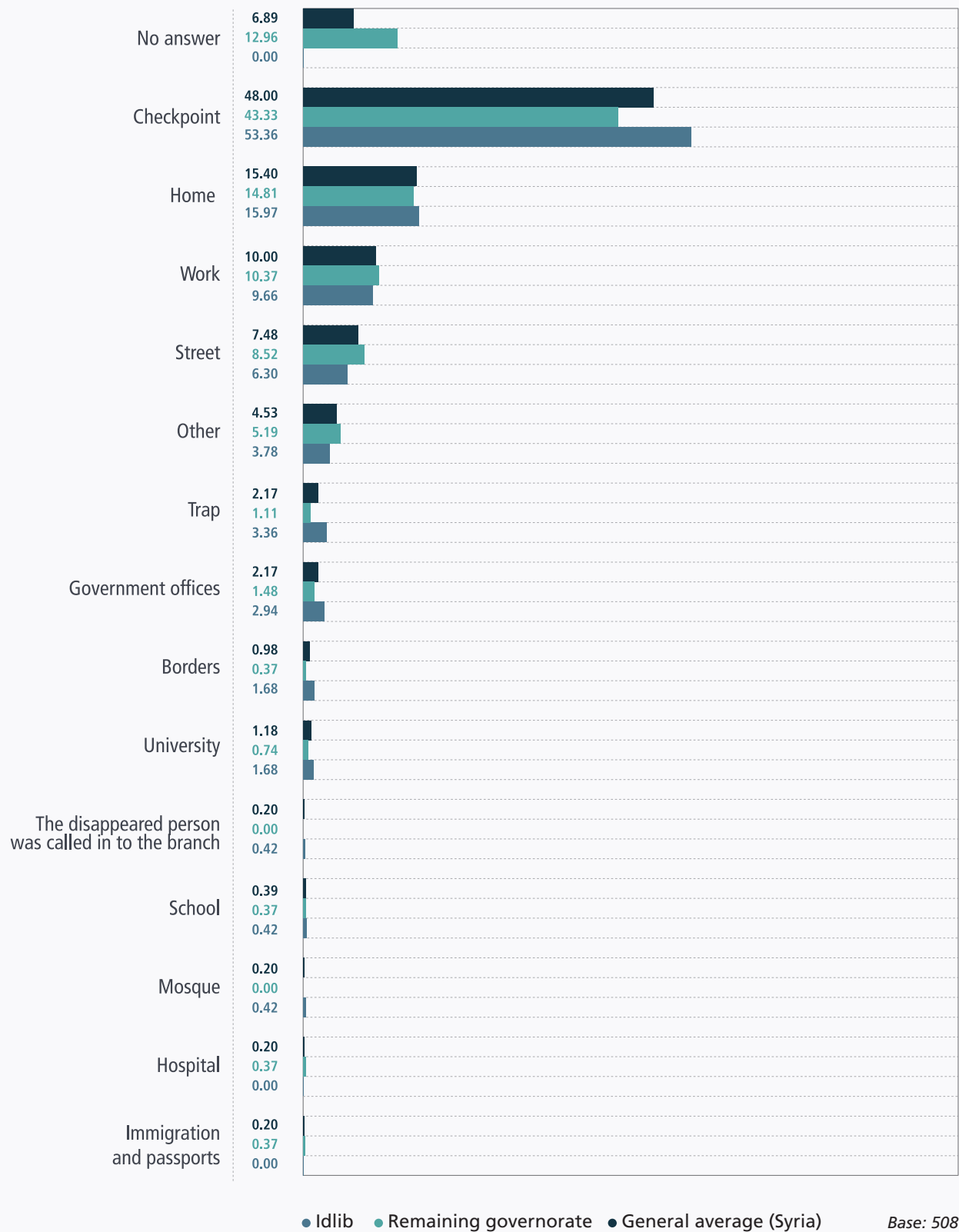


Figure 5: Parties Responsible for the Arrest – Comparison between Idlib and the Rest of the Governorates and Syria - Total Sample

		Idlib		Remaining governorates		Syria	
Responsible party	Prison or Branch	Number	Percentage (%)	Number	Percentage (%)	Number	Percentage (%)
Ministry of Defense							
Syrian Arab Army	Syrian Arab Army	95	50.00	100	31.45	195	38.39
General Intelligence Branch	State Security	14	7.37	11	3.46	25	4.92
Airforce Intelligence Directorate	Al Mazze (Airforce Intelligence)	11	5.79	23	7.23	34	6.69
Military Intelligence Branch	Military Security	52	27.37	45	14.15	97	19.09
	Palestine Branch (235)	0	0.00	3	0.94	3	0.59
	Region Branch (227)	0	0.00	2	0.63	2	0.39
	Branch 215 (Break-in and Raid Branch)	0	0.00	1	0.31	1	0.20
Ministry of Interior Affairs							
Political Security Branch		15	7.89	8	2.52	23	4.53
Adra Prison		3	1.58	0	0.00	3	0.59
Unknown		0	0.00	125	39.31	125	24.61
Total		190	100.00	318	100.00	508	100.00

”

On the days of the visits, each of us would go to a corner and pray that he would not receive a visit. In case any one of was released, we used to request from the released person to visit the families of the others to reassure them about us and to ask them not to visit their imprisoned son if they wanted to see him alive one day, as he may be killed as a result of this visit. Because the guards would beat him while taking him from the prison and while bringing him/her back.

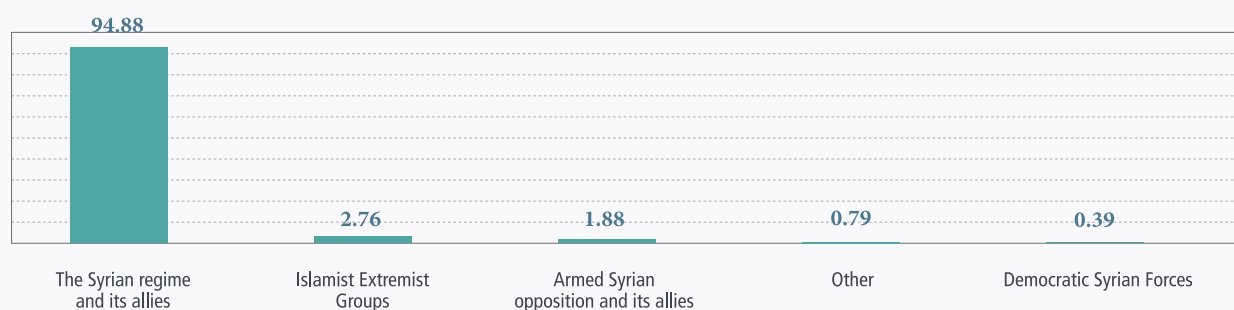
Testimony of Ashraf Al Hussein

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Arrest and the Party Responsible for it

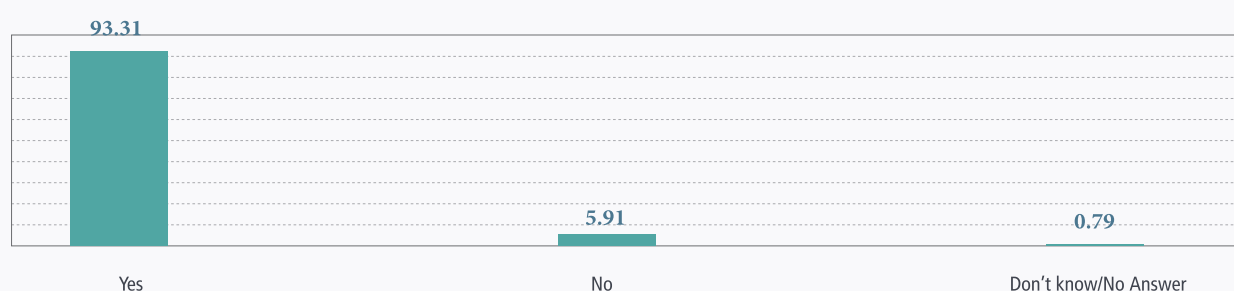
More than 94% of the forced disappearance cases took place in areas under the control of the Syrian regime and its allies, and the rest is distributed among the rest of the armed forces (Figure 12). Approximately the same percentage of these cases were carried out by the forces of the regime and its allies (Figure 13). As for the authorities responsible for the arrest, the Syrian Arab Army comes first, responsible for more than a third of the cases, and Military Security comes second, responsible for at least 19% of the cases. Following that, come the Air Force Intelligence and Political Security with around 5% (see Table 5). Most of those who mentioned the extremist Islamic group said it was the Islamic State (ISIS) in 12 cases, followed by Al-Nusra in two cases.

Figure 12: The party controlling the region in which the forced disappearance occurred (%)



Base: 508

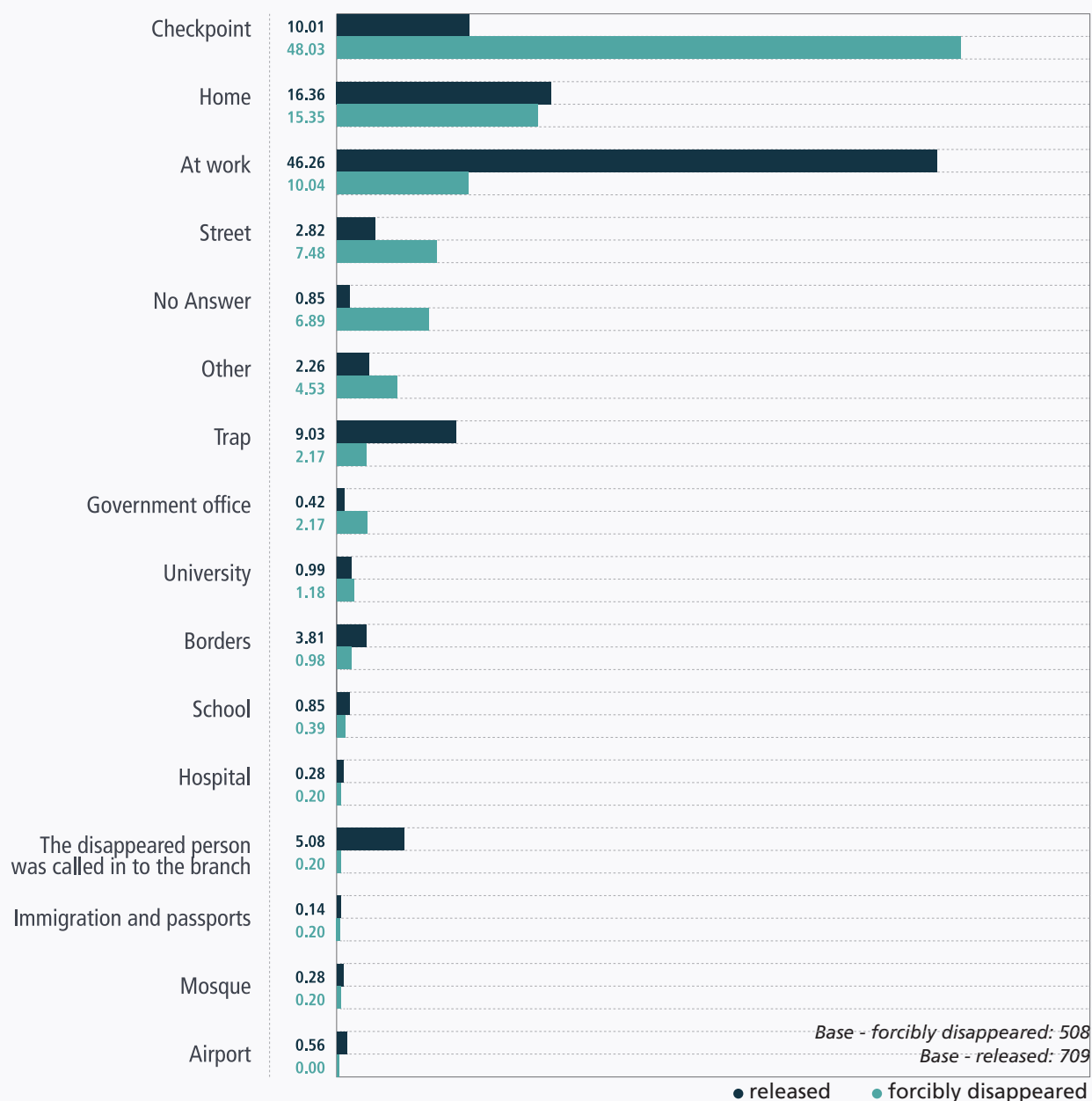
Figure 13: Was the disappeared person arrested by the Syrian regime and its allies? (%)



Base: 508

About half of the forcibly disappeared were arrested at checkpoints. As for the released persons, they were arrested most often from the workplace. This difference has its implications. The checkpoints are closely related to the Syrian Arab Army and its role in storming and controlling of the rebel cities. Perhaps this is the reason for which the Syrian Arab Army appears in the first place (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Place of arrest in the released sample and the forcibly disappeared sample (%)



It is difficult to know any information about the manner in which the arrest was carried out. The few who had such information said that it happened without a warrant from the relevant authorities. In addition, very few knew the reasons for the arrest. They only mentioned reasons related to accusations of terrorism and financing it. However, there is what shows the regime's tendency to seek out revenge on local residents, such as the case we documented of a man being arrested for insulting the regime at his son's grave.

”

I rushed to follow them, so I found out that they had taken him to Criminal Security. Things were easy the first time. I hired a lawyer for him and “we worked”. I paid between three hundred and four hundred thousand liras (Syrian liras), so we were able to release him after two months and ten days. The lawyer assured us that his matters were in order and that our troubles had ended. However, my husband was worried and suggested that I change the house, so we did. He came out in a miserable condition; he had lost about 20 kilograms, and fear did not leave him until they arrested him for the second time about two months later.

Testimony of Umm Ali

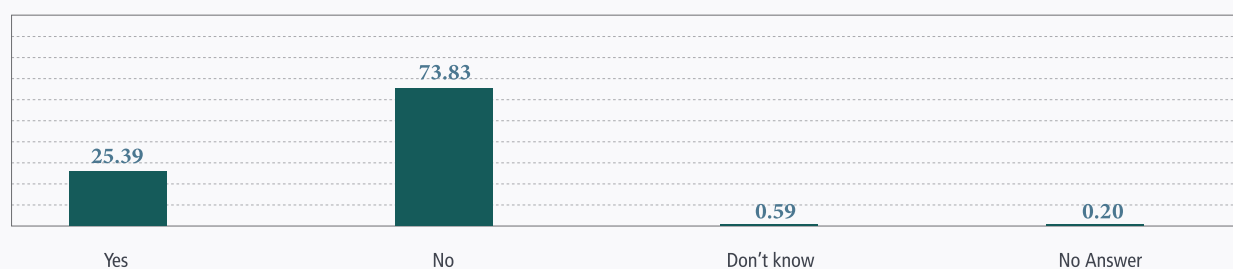
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Financial Extortion

A very large number of people had paid sums of money to officials, either to obtain information about the detainee or in return for promises to visit (in the case of families and families of the forcibly disappeared) or to release (in the case of the released persons). Hence, knowing how much money was spent and where it went is crucial. The data presented below brings together these different sources of data on the forcibly disappeared and the released persons to give an idea of the scale of this issue. In light of these results, we can ask whether or not the detention, kidnapping, and disappearance of detainees were also strategies used by the authorities to finance themselves and their institutions after the start of the Syrian revolution in 2011, especially after the regime began losing control of large areas in the country in 2012 and the years that followed.

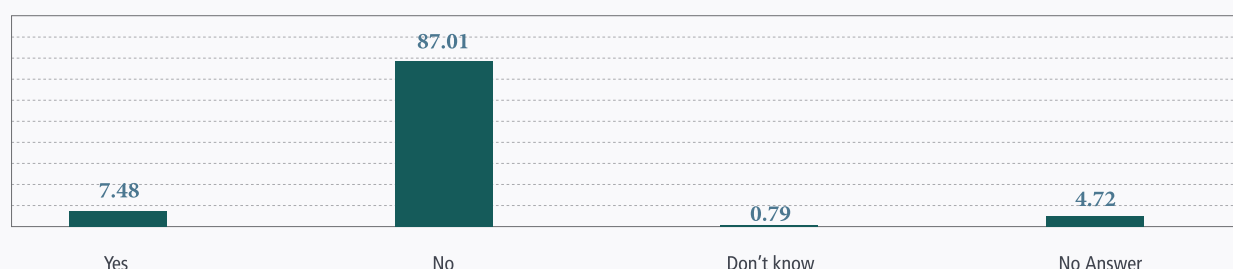
More than a quarter of the respondents (or 129 participants) in the sample of the forcibly disappeared said that they had paid sums of money to obtain information about the forcibly disappeared (Figure 15). In addition, more than 7% (or 38 people) of them indicated that they had paid money in exchange for promises to visit (Figure 16)

Figure 15: Was any amount of money paid in exchange for information about the fate of the forcibly disappeared person? (%)



Base: 508

Figure 16: Was any amount of money paid in exchange for promise of visit to the forcibly disappeared person in their place of detention? (%)



Base: 508

Moreover, in the case of the released persons, respondents were asked whether money was paid to obtain information about their status or to obtain permission to visit (together in one question). Around 44% (or 312 respondents) responded that that this actually did happen (Figure 17). When asked if money was paid for promises to release, about 28% (or 196 participants) answered yes (Figure 18).

Figure 17: Was money paid in exchange for information or to obtain a permit to visit? (released persons) (%)

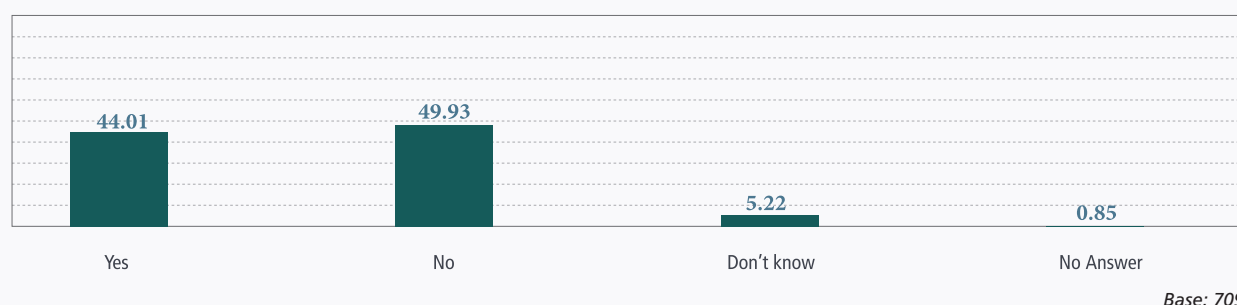
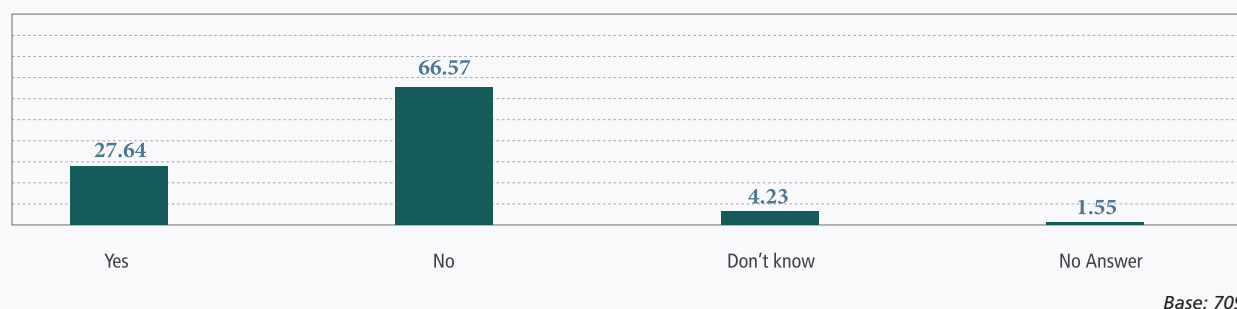


Figure 18: Was money paid in exchange for release? (released persons) (%)

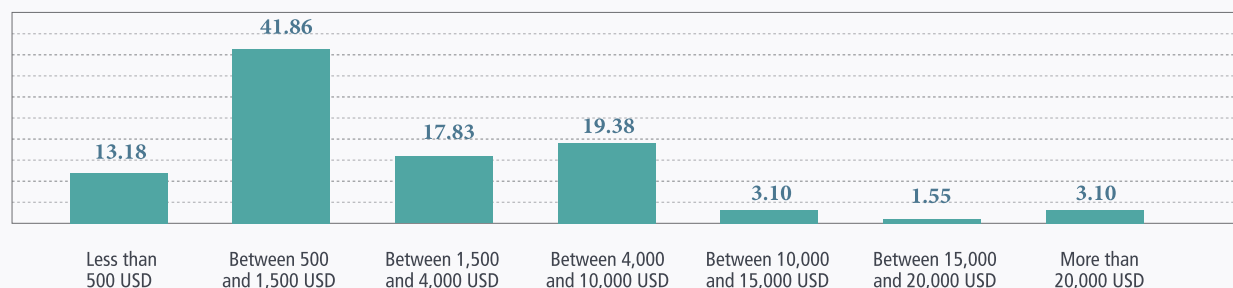


The amounts paid were very large. In order to estimate these amounts, we considered the sums that were paid by those who said they had actually already paid a sum of money. We excluded from our estimates those who said that no amount was paid and who did not know if an amount was paid or not, or preferred not to answer.

Among the 129 participants who said they paid money to obtain information about the forcibly disappeared person, more than 40% (or 54 respondents) said they paid between US\$500 and US\$1,500, and less than a quarter (25 participants) paid between US\$4,000 and US\$10,000 (Figure 19). If we consider the average of all ranges and multiply it by the number of respondents who said that they have paid in this range, it appears that the amount that the 129 participants paid in order to obtain information about the forcibly disappeared, totaled US\$461,500. As for the sums paid in exchange for a promise to visit the forcibly disappeared, the total was US\$95,250 (see Figure 20)¹⁹.

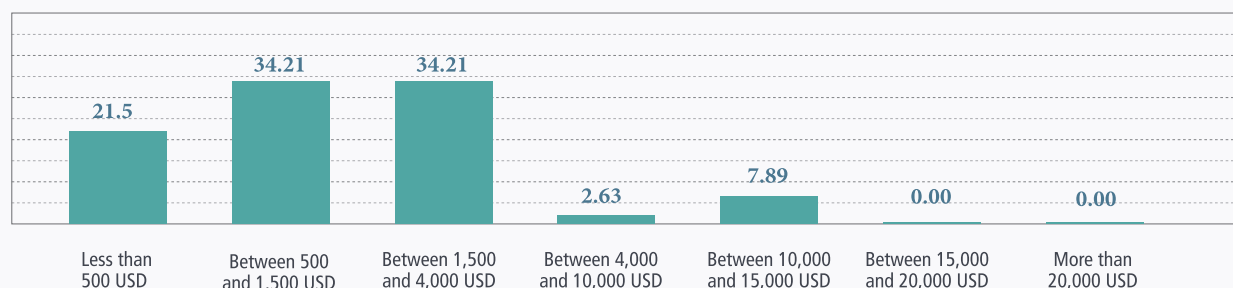
¹⁹ We calculate the mean by multiplying the number of respondents in each row, by the midpoint of the range in USD (for example, the midpoint of the range 4,000 to 10,000 USD is 7,000 USD) and then adding the total. The average per capita income in Syria is estimated at around US\$90 per month, according to numbeo website, which means that the sums paid by families range from six months to nine years' salaries.

Figure 19: What was the total amount paid to obtain information on the fate of the forcibly disappeared person? (%)



Base: 129

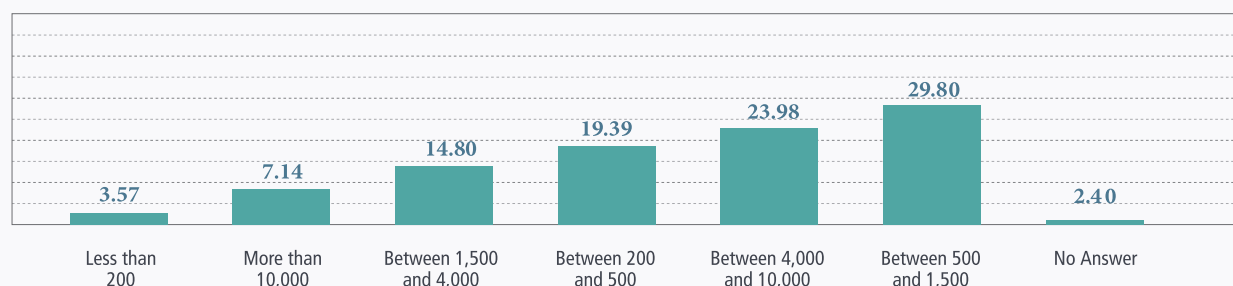
Figure 20: What was the total amount paid in exchange for a promise to visit the forcibly disappeared person in the place of detention? (%)



Base: 38

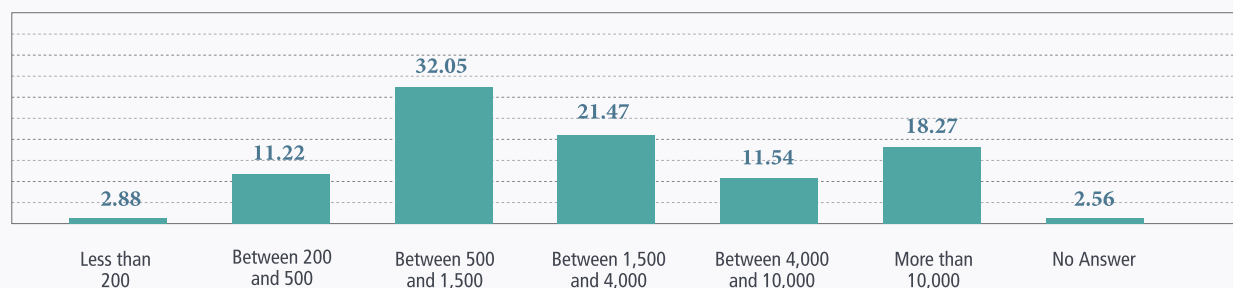
Likewise, and as mentioned above, a large percentage of respondents who were arrested and released responded positively to paying money. The sums paid for promises to release (in the sample of the released persons) exceeded US\$1 million (Figure 21). In fact, the 196 respondents paid a total of US\$1,038,100 for this purpose. The total amount of money reported by the respondents to have been paid in order to obtain information about the fate of the disappeared persons and against a promise to visit them, amounted to more than US\$1,119,400 (Figure 22).

Figure 21: Amounts of money paid in exchange for promise of release (sample of the released persons) (%)



Base: 196

Figure 22: Amounts of money paid in exchange for information or promise of a visit (sample of the released persons) (%)



Base: 196

In general, based on analysis of the data from these two samples, it appears that a total of US\$2,714,250 had been paid either for information, promises to visit, or for release²⁰. In short, if we assume that the total number of forcibly disappeared persons is 100 thousand (this is an estimate based on the cases that have been documented by the Syrian Network for Human Rights) and we multiply this figure by 25.40% (the percentage of those who said they paid for information) and the average amount paid for information which is US\$3,578 per person, then the total amount paid to obtain information on the forcibly disappeared is over US\$90 million (90,881,200) (Table 6). Likewise, if we multiply this number of forcibly disappeared persons (100,000) by 7.50% (the percentage of those who say they have received promises to visit) and the average amount paid for a promise to visit (US\$2,507 per person), the total is close to US\$19 million (18,802,500) (Table 6). If we do the same for the released persons, assuming that a total of 250,000 people have been arrested and released (which is a very conservative estimate), the total amount that should have been paid will be approximately US\$900 million (specifically 868,900,573) (Table 6).

²⁰ Our estimates of the cost of a single person (released or forcibly disappeared) differs slightly from what the researcher Sultan Chalabi found in his study of a sample of 100 cases of arbitrary arrest and detention (The detention trade in the prisons and detention centers of the Syrian regime, A Story that was not told, 16 April 2020). The cost of the detainee (whether or not he was forcibly disappeared) was estimated at about US\$10,000. However, we estimate that it is in the range of US\$6,000 for the disappeared, and US\$9,000 for the released persons. However, the main difference appears in the percentage of those who paid; in the aforementioned report, the percentage is 75% of the sample. While our data show that there are differences between the forcibly disappeared and the detainees, and in any case, they are less than half.

Table 6: Estimates of total amounts received by the Syrian regime through financial extortions from families of the forcibly disappeared and released persons

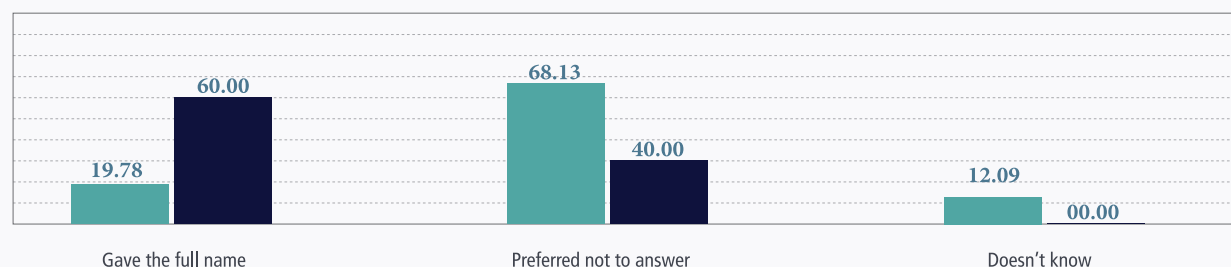
	Estimated numbers	Percentage (%) of those who said they had paid	Average amount paid per person in US\$*	Total (in US\$)
Forcibly Disappeared				
Information	100,000	25,40%	3578	90 881 200
Visit	100,000	7,50%	2507	18 802 500
Released				
Information and visit promise	250,000	43,90%	3588	393 763 301
Release	250,000	27,60%	5296	365 453 571
			Total	868 900 573

We relied on very conservative estimates of the numbers: The number of released persons from the prisons of the Syrian regime certainly exceeded 250,000 by far. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, more than one million Syrian citizens was exposed to the experience of detention.²¹

To Whom Does the Money Go?

When we tried to document the names of the people who received the money in return for obtaining information, most of the respondents refused to name them. Only about 20% mentioned the name. On the other hand, when asked about the names of those who received the money in return for promises to visit, the percentage rose to 60%. However, attention should be paid here, and the percentages should be read carefully, as the number of those who answered this question was small: only 20 respondents, compared to 91 (Figure 23).

Figure 23: To Whom Does the Money Go? (%)

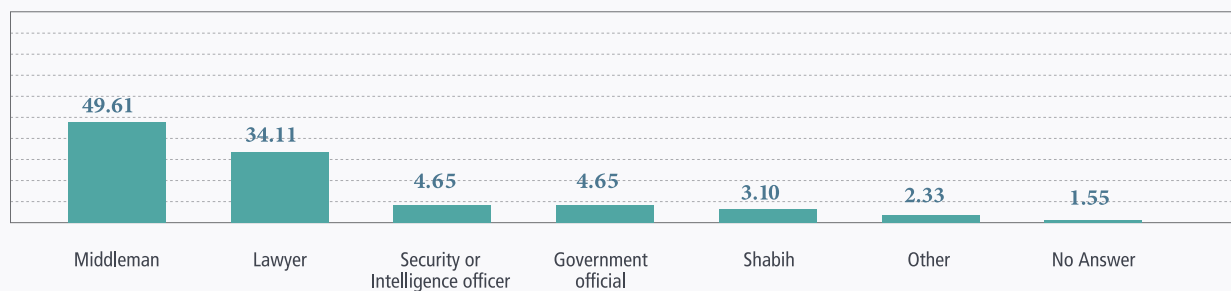


● in exchange for information ● in exchange for promise of a visit

²¹ Syrian Networks for Human Rights, The Ninth Annual Report about Torture in Syria at the International Day of Support for the Victims of Torture. June 2020. <https://bit.ly/3k2NJs4>

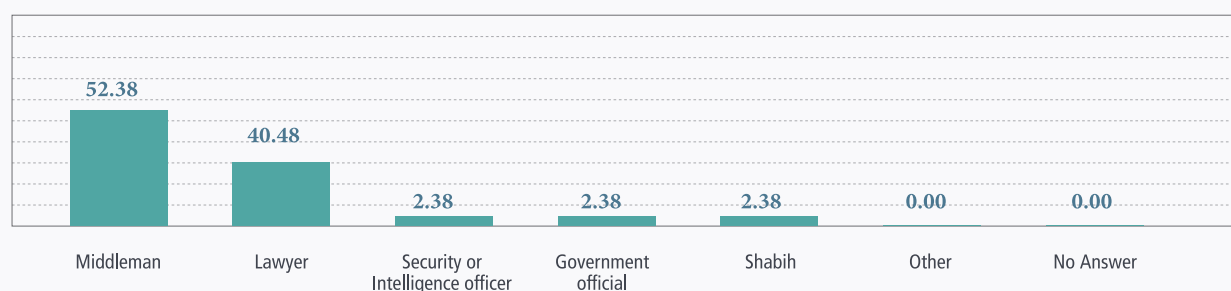
When we tried to find out the job of the person who got the money in exchange for information about the forcibly disappeared, nearly half (49.61%) of the respondents said that it was through middlemen (64 participants), and about a third (34.11%) said it was done through a lawyer (44 respondents). The rest said that they gave money to security or intelligence personnel, government employees and others (Figure 24).²² As for the jobs of those who took money in exchange for promises to visit the disappeared, more than half were middlemen (52.38%) and less than half were lawyers (40.48%). On the contrary, the remaining indicated that they offered money to army officers, intelligence officers or other government officials or *Shabiha* (Figure 25). Interestingly, among those who had paid amounts of money in exchange for promises of a visit to the forcibly disappeared, only one person was able to visit, while 41 persons said that they had paid but did not obtain a visit. This shows that the money was often paid in vain.

Figure 24: Who is the person to whom money was paid in exchange for information on the fate of the forcibly disappeared? (%)



Base: 129

Figure 25: Who is the person to whom money was paid in exchange for a promise to visit the forcibly disappeared in the place of detention? (%)



Base: 42

22 Middlemen are generally people who are partners of the *Shabiha* and the security services, and they work with security coverage from them and represent their interface to work.

”

I noticed signs of fear on those around me and was surprised about that after everything that had happened to us. When I shared this with them, one of them asked me: “For how long have you been imprisoned? And through which branches have you been?” When I answered him, he said: “You should consider the period you have been imprisoned and the branches that you went through as if you were at your family’s house!” I was surprised by his words so he repeated: “Consider that you were at your family’s house or on a tour in comparison to what we are going to!” I felt fear and began praying.

Testimony of Abu Anas Al-Hamwi

“

Information about the Fate of the Forcibly Disappeared and its Sources

According to the relatives' information, in the majority of cases (67.72%) there were witnesses to the forced disappearance (Figure 26). The families had also obtained information about the fate of the forcibly disappeared in most cases (53.15%). Nevertheless, more than 40% still do not know anything about the forcibly disappeared (Figure 27).

Figure 26: Were there witnesses to the disappearance incident? (%)

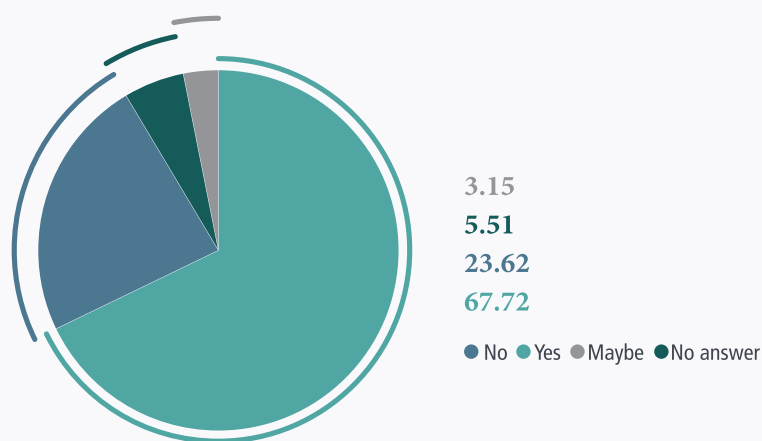
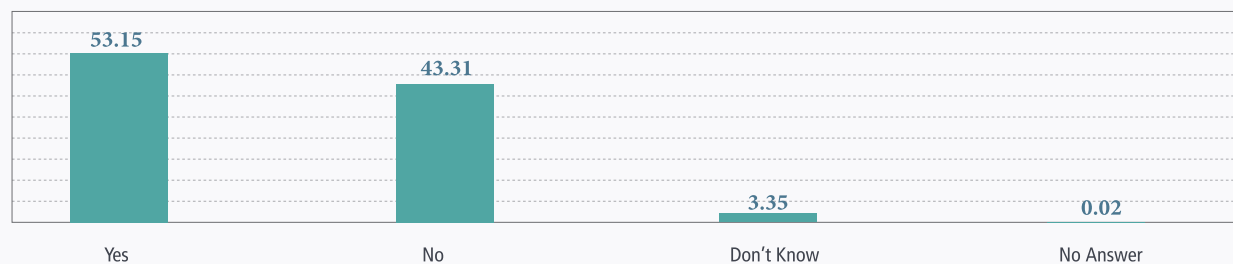


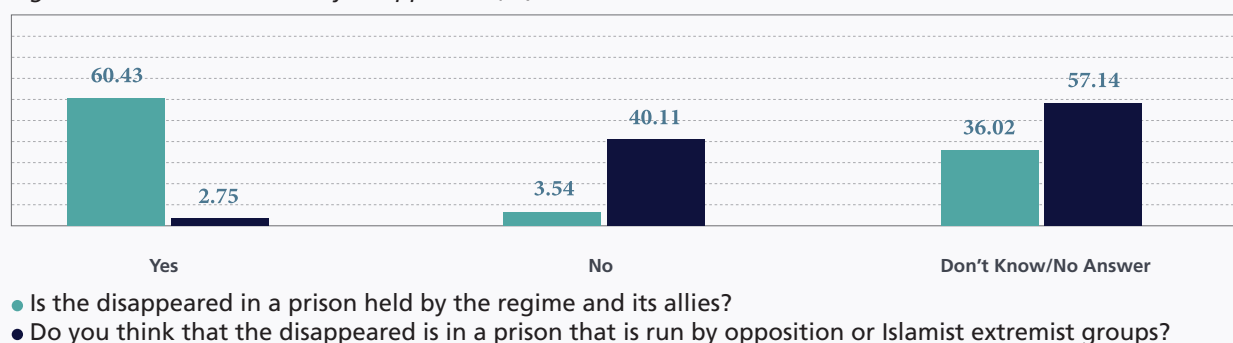
Figure 27: Did you obtain any information about the fate of the forcibly disappeared? (%)



What is the information received?

The majority (60.43%) said they had information that the forcibly disappeared was in one of the prisons of the Syrian regime, at the time of the interview. Less than 3% said that the disappeared was in prisons belonging to the opposition or extremist Islamic factions. More than a third said that they did not know and could not give an answer, as it is likely that a large proportion of them believed that (s)he was dead (Figure 28).

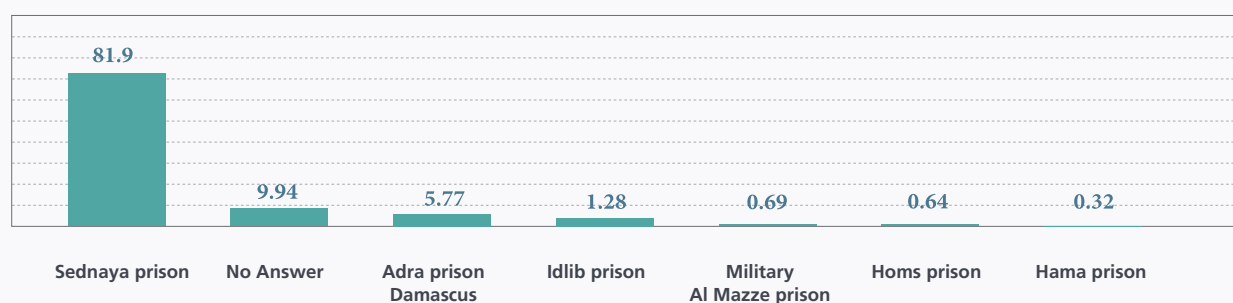
Figure 28: Location of forcibly disappeared (%)



Base - located in prisons of the regime: 508
Base - located in a prison that is run by opposition or Islamist extremist groups: 182

But which prison? Sednaya prison is on the top of the list of detention centers responsible for forced disappearances. It is responsible for more than 80% of cases (Figure 29).

Figure 29: Prison believed by relatives to be the place in which the forcibly disappeared is detained at the time of the interview (%)

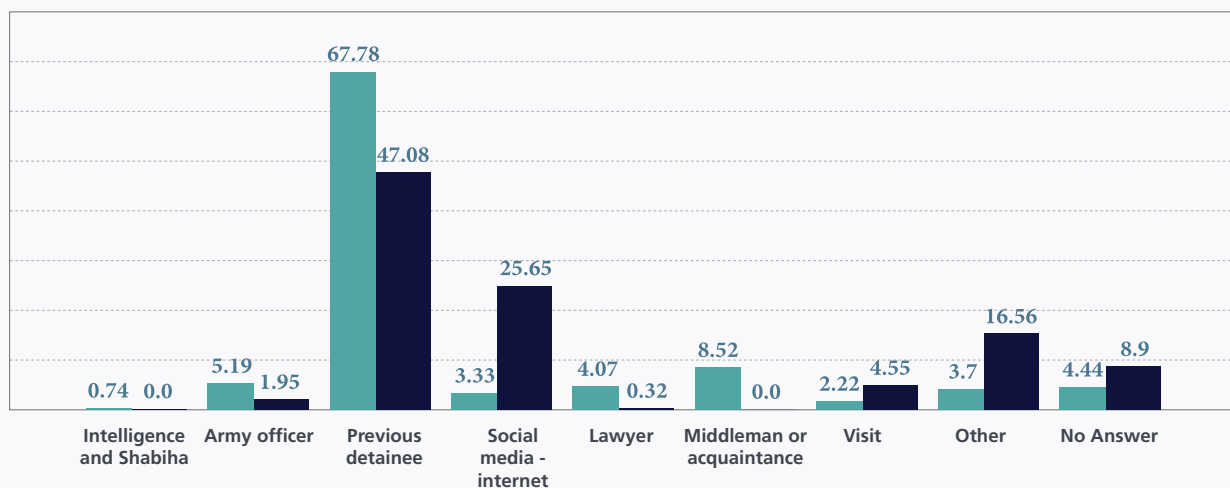


Base: 312

Previous detainees (these are detainees who were released from detention and contacted families directly) were the most important source of information for families whether in terms of general information related to the fate of the forcibly disappeared (67.78%) or whether in terms of the prison in which (s)he is present (47.8%).

However, there is an important difference in the case of social media and the internet (as sources of information) in the case of imprisonment (about a quarter) compared to general information (about 3%) (Figure 30). The news often spreads through the internet, Facebook or elsewhere that someone saw the detainee in such-and-such prison. This brings back hope to the people that the disappeared person is alive, but it often turns out to be old or duplicate information, or it is for the purpose of financially extorting people or causing psychological harm to them by leaving them in a state of constant search and anxiety.

Figure 30: Sources of information (%)

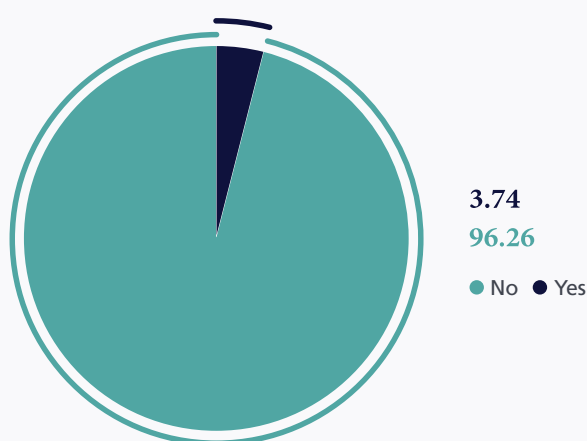


- Information about the fate of the disappeared in general
- Information about his/her detention in prison

Base - information about the fate: 270
Base - information about prison detention: 167

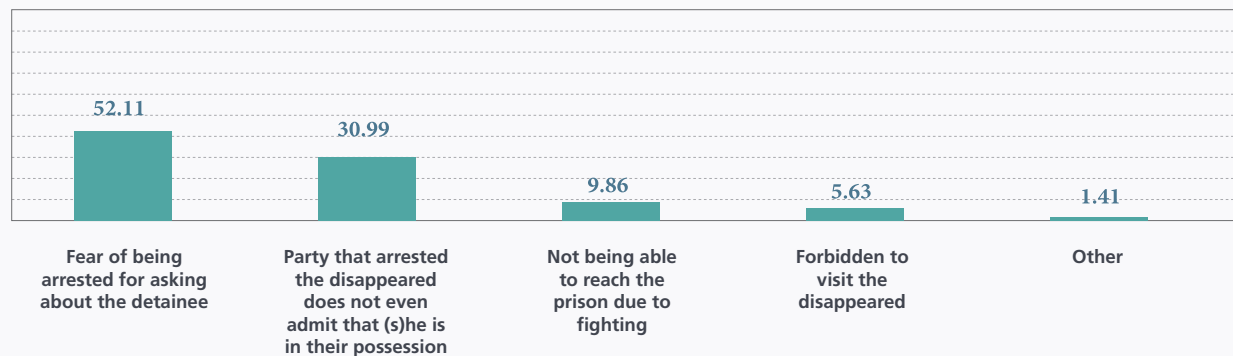
Only about 4% were able to visit the forcibly disappeared (Figure 31). More than half of the respondents said that the main reason for not visiting is the fear of arrest if they enquire about the forcibly disappeared, and about a third said that the party that arrested the disappeared does not even admit that (s)he is in their possession (Figure 32). This reflects the extent of fear that the regime is exerting on the people through forced disappearances.

Figure 31: Were you able to visit the forcibly disappeared? (%)



Base: 508

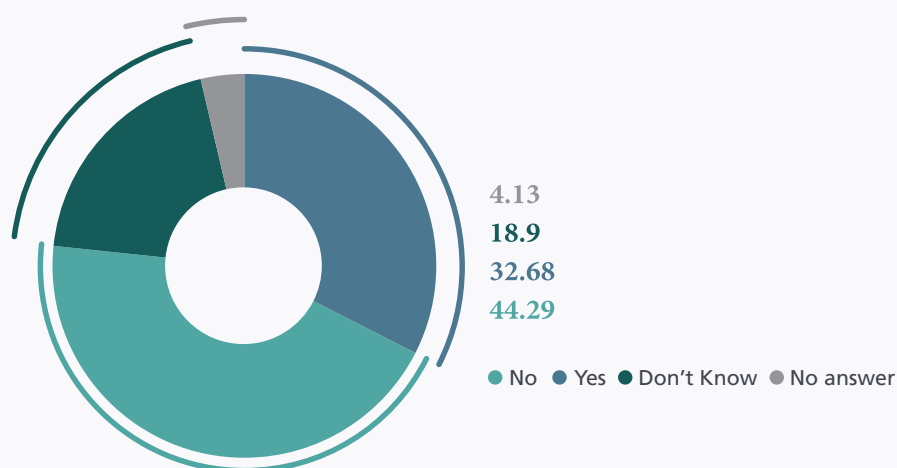
Figure 32: Reasons for lack of visit (%)



Base: 71

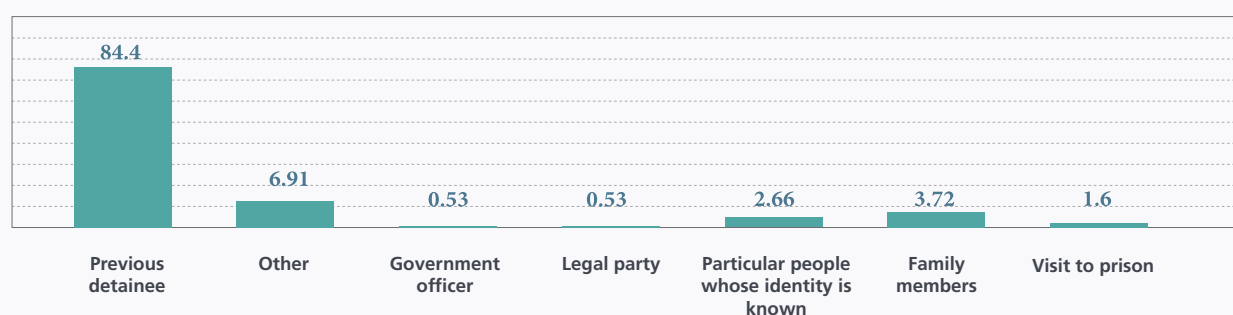
Around one third of the forcibly disappeared persons were seen by other people after their arrest (Figure 33), mostly from previous detainees in the vast majority of cases (Figure 34).

Figure 33: Are there people who saw the forcibly disappeared after the incident? (%)



Base: 508

Figure 34: Who saw the forcibly disappeared? (%)



Base: 188

Forcibly disappeared were last seen in detention centers belonging to the Ministry of Defense, which makes it the primary responsible for most cases of forced disappearance, and more than half of them were seen in detention centers affiliated to the Military Police, specifically in the Sednaya Prison (Table 7). This is in addition to a few cases in the prisons of the Islamic State (ISIS) and the Al-Nusra Front: one case in Manbij and another in Al-Bab, and a third case in the Al-Aqab prison of the Al-Nusra Front in Idlib.

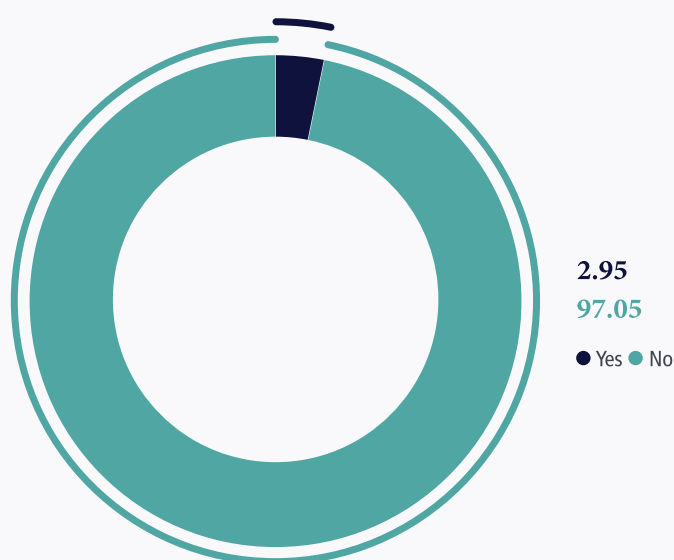
Table 7: Last place in which the forcibly disappeared was seen

Party responsible	Prison or branch	Number	Percentage (%)
Ministry of Defense			
Military Police	Sednaya prison	142	53.38%
	Military police (Al Qaboun)	1	0.38%
	Al Balouneh prison (Second military prison)	2	0.75%
General Intelligence Branch (State Security)	State Security	5	1.88%
Airforce Intelligence Directorate	Al Mazze (Airforce Intelligence)	15	5.64%
Military Intelligence Branch	Military Security	4	1.50%
	Palestine Branch (235)	5	1.88%
	Regional Branch (227)	1	0.38%
	Branch 215 (Raids Branch)	11	4.14%
	Branch 248 (Military Investigation Branch)	2	0.75%
Ministry of Interior Affairs			
Political Security Branch		4	1.50%
Idlib Prison		9	3.38%
Adra Prison		17	6.39%
Hama Prison		4	1.50%
Unknown		44	16.54%
Total		269	100.00%

Only about 3% said that they had obtained a death certificate and about 1% received a personal or family civil record for the disappeared from the civil affairs bureau, proving the death of the disappeared (Figures 35 and 36). This number is small, if we consider the widespread news of the arrival of lists to the registry offices indicating the death of the forcibly disappeared. According to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, in 2018, the names of «up to thousands or tens of thousands» of detainees were disclosed, but the state did not disclose «any information about the whereabouts of the bodies, and it did not take any measures to return personal property».²³ This means that the fate of the vast majority is still unknown, and there are thousands of families living in the hope of getting any news about them.

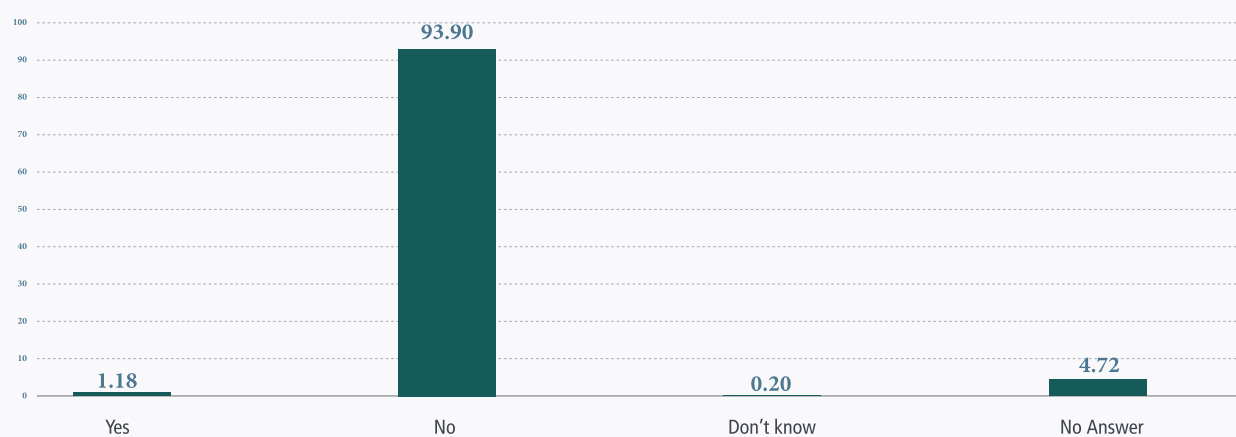
²³ See Notifications of Deaths in the Arab Republic of Syria.

Figure 35: Have you received a death certificate from an official party proving the death of the forcibly disappeared? (%)



Base: 508

Figure 36: Have you obtained a personal or family civil record for the forcibly disappeared from the civil affairs bureau that prove the death of the forcibly disappeared? (%)



Base: 508

”

The disaster started since 2013. Prisoners started dying, in our ward, not a week passed without one or two deaths, if not more. Scabies and lice spread. The torture increased after the rebels killed the prison director, Talat Mahfoud. His successor was a real criminal, and the eliminations began.

Testimony of Abu Omar

“

Summary and Recommendations

This study sought to find out what happened and what is happening with the forcibly disappeared in Syrian detention centers. This is the first time that a sample of this size (508 interviews with families of the forcibly disappeared) was analyzed. In addition, it is also the first time that the issue of forced detention in Syria has been researched with this methodology. The results showed that 2012 was the year of forced disappearance in Syria, and that the Syrian Arab Army is primarily responsible for cases of forced disappearance, and that the capital, Damascus, is the place where the largest proportion of them was concentrated. It also revealed that forced disappearance is not only a strategy to crush the opposition and the Syrian society, but also a means of financing the state and its repressive apparatus through financial extortion of the families. Figures indicate that the sums collected so far exceed US\$100 million in the case of the forcibly disappeared only. We note that this number is higher in the case of the released persons, reaching more than seven hundred million US dollars according to the most conservative estimates. Additionally, as a result of the large presence of social media and the internet as a source of information, the people remain in a continuous cycle of searches and extortion. This reinforces the systematic strategies of the regime of manipulating the information about the fate of the forcibly disappeared and transmitting conflicting news about their lives and whereabouts, and spreading panic and fear among families of consequences of inquiry about the disappeared.

The families of the forcibly disappeared have shown a great willingness to cooperate with initiatives aimed at clarifying the fate of their loved ones and achieving justice. Therefore, the concerned legal parties must communicate with them, and in this process the association can play an important role in coordinating, in case of serious initiatives in the future, between these parties and the families with whom they met and whose cases they documented.

Additionally, the United Nations and countries sponsoring any upcoming negotiations between the opposition and the regime must place the issue of the forcibly disappeared and detainees as its top priority by obliging the regime to reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared, to allow the families to visit the ones among them that are still alive and to inform them of the deceased. This constitutes the first step towards progress in resolving this issue and peace building in the aftermath of the war in Syria. It is also imperative that the families of the forcibly disappeared and victims' groups be present in any potential transitional justice projects in this country.

This study comes as a first step in understanding the process of forced disappearance in Syria by collecting and analyzing available information about it. Therefore, progress on this issue must continue through other studies, while pursuing the project of documenting cases of forced disappearance in the Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison. This will also help in better understanding hypotheses that could not be validated, despite the fact that the data indicate their validity, such as the existence of forced disappearances based on identity: in the case of Idlib, for example. Collecting more data will provide greater opportunity to compare between forcibly disappeared individuals from different governorates and their methods of arrest.



The Forcibly Disappeared in Syrian Detention Centers

December 2020

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