NORTHEASTERN SYRIA

Return and Reintegration Profile No.16
Quamishli City

December 2021
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## GLOSSARY

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Computed tomography scan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GoS</td>
<td>Government of Syria</td>
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<td>HAT</td>
<td>Counter-Terrorism Units</td>
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<tr>
<td>HLP</td>
<td>Housing, land, and property</td>
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<tr>
<td>HPC</td>
<td>Community Protection Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>HWARI</td>
<td>Rapid Response Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally displaced person</td>
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<tr>
<td>I/NGO</td>
<td>International non-governmental organization</td>
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<td>ISIS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and Syria</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISF</td>
<td>Internal Security Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>KDP-S</td>
<td>Kurdistan Democratic Party-Syria</td>
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<tr>
<td>KNC</td>
<td>Kurdish National Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Legislative Decree</td>
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<tr>
<td>L/NGO</td>
<td>Local non-governmental organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>MRI</td>
<td>Magnetic resonance imaging devices</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDF</td>
<td>National Defense Forces</td>
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<td>NES</td>
<td>Northeastern Syria</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPS</td>
<td>Operation Peace Spring</td>
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<tr>
<td>PKK</td>
<td>Kurdistan Workers’ Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPE</td>
<td>Personal protective equipment</td>
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<tr>
<td>PYD</td>
<td>Democratic Union Party</td>
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<td>RCM</td>
<td>Returns Context Monitoring program</td>
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<td>SANES</td>
<td>Self Administration of North and East Syria</td>
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<td>SDF</td>
<td>Syrian Democratic Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPF</td>
<td>Self Protection Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>SYP</td>
<td>Syrian Pound</td>
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<tr>
<td>TSO</td>
<td>Turkish-Supported Opposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USD</td>
<td>United Stated dollar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VBIED</td>
<td>Vehicle-borne improvised explosive device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>WoS</td>
<td>Whole of Syria</td>
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<tr>
<td>YPG</td>
<td>People’s Protection Units</td>
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<td>YPJ</td>
<td>Women’s Protection Units</td>
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1. KEY FINDINGS

- Home to approximately 280,000 people as of November 2021, Quamishli city has remained a diverse city since its founding in the early 20th century. With Arabs and Kurds making up the majority of the city’s resident population, the city is also home to a sizeable Christian, largely Syriac, minority.

- Following decades of anti-Kurdish, oppressive Government of Syria (GoS) policies, thousands of Kurds took part in anti-GoS protests and riots in Quamishli city in 2004. While the GoS put down the protests and became increasingly intolerant of a Kurdish activism, Quamishli remained a symbolically important city for Syrian Kurds.

- Unlike much of northeastern Syria (NES), Quamishli city avoided significant levels of conflict-related violence and destruction during the Syrian conflict.

- Even as the GoS had oppressed Kurds prior to the conflict, at the start of the Syrian revolution it pragmatically worked with the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and affiliated People’s Protection Units (YPG) to avoid a large anti-GoS uprising in Quamishli city and other Kurdish-majority areas of northeastern Syria.

- Building on this coordination, the GoS partially withdrew from Quamishli city in early 2013 to focus resources on defending against opposition advances in other parts of the country, and quietly handed over of the majority of the city to the PYD-YPG.1

- Since then, control of Quamishli city has been split, with various Self Administration bodies, established by the PYD-YPG, controlling the majority of the city, and the GoS maintaining control of an approximately one square km area in the city center (known as the security square), and the Quamishli airport and surrounding areas in the south of the city.

- Divided Self Administration2 – GoS control of the city has manifested in parallel, at times overlapping, governance, services, and security bodies in the city.

- With the majority of Quamishli city under Self Administration control, most local governance and service provision functions are carried out by the Self Administration bodies and structures. These include the Quamishli City People’s Municipality and sector specific bodies within the Jazeera Region Administration, which is responsible for overseeing governance and service provision in Self Administration areas of the Al-Hasakeh governorate.

- While these Self Administration governance structures, as well as a number of less active advisory and reporting bodies, are in theory locally driven and bottom up, in practice, all key decision-making authority within governance and services, as well as security, lies within a parallel opaque structure made up of Kurdish PYD-YPG kadros.

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1 While the YPG is the armed wing of the PYD and a distinct organization, due to overlapping leadership, policies, and aims, for clarity they are referred to jointly as the PYD-YPG at points throughout this report.

2 The report uses the term Self Administration to collectively refer to the PYD, YPG, and the set of military, political, and governance bodies established by the PYD and YPG between 2015 and 2018, including the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Internal Security Forces (ISF), Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), and Self Administration for North and East Syria (SANES).
Notably, Self Administration and GoS services bodies have continued to coordinate efforts in the power and water sectors, with the Self Administration controlling much of the infrastructure and the GoS continuing to house most technical capacity and enjoying access to UN support.

While the degree of Self Administration-GoS coordination has been sensitive to larger political or military shift in NES, it is likely to persist and remains a key sign of the Self Administration’s interest in maintaining strong economic relations with the GoS, and in leaving the door open for political talks with the GoS – which is of increasing interest to the US and Russia.

At the same, due to its relative security, position as a de facto capital of the Self Administration, strong history of trade and manufacturing, and proximity to Iraq, Quamishli city has been well placed to benefit from several wider shifts in NES’s economy.

Consequently, the city has become the primary hub of trade between the Al-Hasakeh governorate and the rest of Syria and between Syria and Iraq and a base of operations for numerous large, specialized traders, as well as manufacturers, who are responsible for distributing goods across NES, Syria, and Iraq.

The continued growth in trade and manufacturing have also helped support a strong financial services and logistics sectors, and to a certain extent have contributed to additional investment in various services businesses.

Quamishli city’s stability, services, and economy have acted as key draws for internally displaced persons (IDPs) from elsewhere in NES, and as of November 2021, the city home to an estimated 62,000 IDPs.

The majority of IDPs living in Quamishli city arrived between 2014 and 2017 from the Deir-ez-Zor, Ar-Raqqa, and Aleppo governorates and the surrounding Al-Hasakeh countryside after fleeing Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) expansion and subsequent campaigns to destroy the group. Quamishli city also hosts several thousand IDPs from Ras Al-Ain, who fled Turkey’s Operation Peace Spring (OPS) in late 2019.

Relations between residents and IDPs in Quamishli City have generally remained positive and, to date, the city has not witnessed significant resident-IDP tensions. The city’s historical diversity as well as a relative equilibrium in displacement to and from the city have played a role in this, minimizing shocks to supply of basic services, housing, and labor.

Notably, nearly all IDPs in Quamishli city live in apartments or houses and there are no IDP camps or collective shelters. While some IDPs report feeling isolated, generally economic and social integration has been good.

Although conditions in Quamishli city are better than many parts of NES, the city still suffers from many serious challenges and has witnessed few returns.
On services, Quamishli’s power and water networks are regularly subject to disruptions, and its deteriorated sewage network is responsible for several public health issues. As economic hardship has increased, the Self Administration and GoS have struggled to maintain adequate bread and fuel support in the city. The Self Administration’s implementation of an unpopular and unaccredited curriculum has exacerbated challenges in the struggling education sector and raised significant questions about the prospects of the city’s youth. Similarly, the city remains subject to predatory GoS property restrictions, which although frozen due to the presence of the Self Administration, raise serious questions about long term housing, land, and property (HLP) conditions.

On the economy, the city’s economic successes have disproportionately benefitted a small portion of the population, namely powerful families, former smugglers, and political and military figures, including kadros, within the Self Administration and GoS. Meanwhile, with still limited opportunities and the devaluation of the Syrian pound (SYP), much of the population has witnessed their wages shrink and cost of living increases. With few options, many households have become heavily reliant on remittances to meet their basic needs.

Services and economic issues are exacerbated by several security concerns. In addition to continued concerns about renewed Self Administration-GoS clashes in the city, residents and IDPs in Quamishli city continue to hold concerns a potential United States (US) withdrawal from NES, which could have broad implications for personal safety and future economic prospects.

Thousands of young people in the city also hold specific personal protection concerns. Most young men in the city are subject to separate Self Administration and GoS mandatory military service requirements. When combined with poor economic prospects and broader political and security uncertainties, the threat of mandatory military service, and the inability to avoid the requirement so land as they remain in Syria, has driven a continuous stream of local young men to flee abroad.
2. METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

2.1. BACKGROUND

The Return Context Monitoring (RCM) project was established at iMMAP in June 2020 to fill qualitative information gaps around experiences of and conditions for IDPs and refugee returnees inside Syria. RCM operates through two main deliverable streams, return and reintegration area profiles which cover specific geographic areas, and thematic reports on topics relevant to return dynamics at the regional or whole of Syria (WoS) level. RCM works with a variety of stakeholders to identify key information gaps and develop research aims, including durable solutions working groups, sector working groups, and bilateral partner and donor consultations.

This report is the 16th RCM area profile, covering Quamishli City and the surrounding suburbs. In addition to exploring conditions for returns, which are currently unfavorable, the report explores the distribution and status of IDPs in the city, the drivers of outward migration, and prospects for returns and further displacement over the coming years.

2.2. METHODOLOGY

The information and findings in this report are based on desk research and primary research. Desk research consisted of two components: 1) a review of relevant local and international news reports, social media content, and humanitarian reporting; and 2) a review of population data from operational partners and the Government of Syria (GoS).

Building on initial desk research findings, the core RCM analysis team developed a semi-structured questionnaire for qualitative primary research, including: conditions and challenges of geography, demography, security, governance, service provision, freedom of movement, and the economy. Following discussions around each questionnaire with the core RCM analysis team, two Syrian research consultants completed the questionnaires through discussions with dozens of local stakeholders, including community leaders, residents, current IDPs, returnees, and Self Administration and opposition officials. Field reports were reviewed with follow up calls, and a verification questionnaire completed by a third Syrian research consultant. Both the core RCM analysis team and research consultants also carried out ad hoc follow-up with relevant stakeholders to address outstanding information gaps and to support triangulation efforts.
2.3. LIMITATIONS

The RCM analysis team faced two limitations throughout data collection for this report, namely the complexity and sensitivity of parallel economic and governance functions between the Self Administration and GoS and security concerns. Fully understanding both the on-paper and in-practice structure and functioning of the administrative workings for key economic and service sectors requires gathering information that is not always forthcoming via in depth independent study of each topic – an undertaking which was outside the scope of this report. Accordingly, the research team opted to limit the focus to examining the services and structures that most immediately impact residents, IDPs, and returnees in their day-to-day lives. To this end, RCM made use of the significant experience and networks of local and international research consultants with specific experience researching the relevant sectors.

Poor security conditions in Quamishli city and increased scrutiny of journalists and local media in Self Administration areas of NES also presented a distinct limitation. The RCM analysis team consequently chose to limit the amount of field data collection and increased the time period between collection and verification of data to avoid focusing many interviews into a concentrated period.

Additionally assessing population and movement data proved challenging with differing figures provided by international humanitarian and field resources. While information on displacement has improved over the past four years, providing the RCM analysis team with reliable figures about general population movement, the team relied on triangulated field reporting to determine the nature of displacement and movement at the local level.
3. AREA BACKGROUND

3.1. GEOGRAPHY

According to GoS administrative boundaries, Quamishli city is located in the Quamishli subdistrict of the Quamishli district/Al-Hasakeh governorate, while the administrative boundaries determined by the Self Administration place the city sits within the Quamishli canton\(^{3}\) of Jazeera region. The city sits along the Syrian-Turkish border opposite the Turkish city of Nusaybin and just north of the M4 highway. Founded in the early 20th century, Quamishli city has been a hub for commerce, trade, and administration in NES throughout modern Syrian history. This is not only due to its proximity to the Syrian-Turkish border and M4 highway, but also the surrounding countryside's contribution to the Syrian economy, namely wheat and cotton cultivation and the oil and gas industry.

\(^{3}\) Cantons are a unique Self Administration administrative unit which falls below the Self Administration region.
The Jaghjagh river runs through the center of Qamishli city, dividing the city into the eastern and western sides that collectively contain 24 neighborhoods. While most of the city is under Self Administration control, the GoS has retained control of several key areas and infrastructure sites over the past ten years. Prior to clashes in April 2021 between GoS forces and Self Administration ISF, the GoS controlled a narrow, contiguous band of territory running from the Turkish border to the GoS 154th Artillery Regiment base along the M4 highway. In the aftermath of clashes, GoS forces were forced to withdraw from the Tayy neighborhood. Since then, GoS-held the area has been divided into two distinct areas, the security square and the Qamishli airport and southern Qamishli countryside.

The security square is an area of approximately one square km in the city center stretching from central Al-Wusta neighborhood to the Nusaybin roundabout in the Wahda neighborhood which leads north to Turkey. The security square houses GoS courts, civil registry, security headquarters, administrative buildings, schools, bakeries, and GoS employee residences. The GoS also maintains control of several checkpoints along the Syrian-Turkish border directly north of the security square.

The GoS maintains control of most of the immediate countryside south of Qamishli city. Extending from the Qamishli airport to the west and the Zunud neighborhood to the east, this area extends approximately 3 km south to the M4 highway and houses the GoS 154th Artillery Regiment base and the Hmeira and Tartab towns. Meanwhile, the Qamishli airport is located in the southwest corner of Qamishli city and has remained under GoS control since 2011. While civilian airlines continue to offer regular flights to Damascus, the airport is also used by the GoS and Russian military to transfer forces and equipment to the city as well as by the United Nations (UN) and international actors to deliver emergency aid and medicine.
3.2. POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHY

Population

The pre-conflict population of Quamishli city was estimated at 184,231\(^4\) in the 2004 GoS census – making Quamishli as the fourth largest city in NES behind the cities of Ar-Raqqa, Deir-ez-Zor, and Al-Hasakeh. By early 2011, Population growth estimates suggest that Quamishli city was home to approximately 211,127 people.\(^5\) Since 2011, Quamishli city witnessed relatively little active conflict and avoided much of the destruction seen elsewhere in NES. Consequently, the city became a common destination for IDPs and migrants from elsewhere in NES. While Quamishli city still witnessed steady population outflows as residents fled general instability and uncertainty in Syria, outflows have roughly matched IDP and migrant inflows over the course of the conflict. Currently, operational partners estimate that the population of Quamishli city is 282,876, including over 62,000 IDPs.

Demography

Quamishli has remained a diverse city since its founding in the early 20th century. Initially the city was made up of a Christian (primarily Syriac) majority, notable Sunni-Muslim Arab and Kurdish minorities, and a small Jewish community. In the latter half of the 20th century, much of the city’s growth resulted from Arab and Kurdish rural-urban migration and the arrival of Kurdish refugees from Iraq and Turkey. Consequently, today Arabs and Kurds make up Quamishli’s two largest ethnoreligious groups. Despite significant Christian migration from the city after 2011, notable Syriac, Assyrian, Chaldean, and Armenian Christian minority communities remain.

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\(^4\) Including the surrounding areas, the population of the Quamishli subdistrict was estimated to be 232,095 according to the 2004 GoS census.

\(^5\) Urban-S estimate, based on applying GoS Central Bureau of Statistics national growth rate to the 2004 census figure.
Arab communities in Quamishli city are centered in southern neighborhoods, namely the Tay, Zunud, Corniche, and Jemaiyeh neighborhoods, and extend into the city’s southern suburbs and countryside. Tribal identity and tribalism remain strong among Quamishli’s Arab communities. The Tayy confederation has the largest presence in Quamishli city and is spread across all the city’s Arab neighborhoods. Other prominent tribes in the city include the Al-Harb, Al-Jabour, Al-Sharabiyeen, and Beni Sab’ah confederations, and the Al-Ghannameh tribe.

The Kurdish community in Quamishli city is present throughout the city, with the most notable concentrations found in neighborhoods along the eastern and western fringes of the city, namely the Qanat as-Suways, Entariye, Maysalun, and Jemaiyeh neighborhoods to the east and the Hilaliyah and Berekyle neighborhoods to the west. Tribalism is less prominent within the Kurdish community in Quamishli city when compared to the Arab population, and over the years has been overshadowed by ethnic and political identities. Nevertheless, a number of large, prominent Kurdish tribes still play an important role in the city’s social, political, and economic affairs. These include the Omri, Al-Mahamiyah, Al-Allian, Mersini, and Pinar Ali tribes.

Quamishli’s Christian communities are generally concentrated in the city’s central neighborhoods, including the Al-Wusta, Al-Bashiriyah, and Erbewye neighborhoods as well as other central neighborhoods west of the river. Among Christian communities, ethnic and denominational identities and familial bonds are the primary foundation of community. Syriacs make up the largest Christian ethnoreligious group in Quamishli city, with most adherents of the Syriac Orthodox church. Assyrian members of the Assyrian Church of the East and Chaldeans of the Chaldean Catholic church also make up a notable portion of Quamishli city’s Christian population, while a small number of Armenian Orthodox families are also present in the city.

Relations between Quamishli city’s diverse ethnoreligious groups have been mixed. Prior to the Syrian conflict, the city’s Kurdish community suffered greatly from the GoS’s oppressive anti-Kurdish policies. Until 2011, the GoS maintained a 1962 law that stripped
Syrian citizenship from over 100,000 so-called foreign Kurds in NES. As a result of the law, generations of Syrian Kurds, who would come to be known as foreign Kurds, were forced to register as foreigners and were forbidden from owning property, marrying Syrians, gaining government employment, receiving subsidized services, and operating businesses. In addition to these policies, the GoS also targeted Kurdish identity in Syria more broadly. For decades the GoS discouraged the use of Kurdish language in public, outlawed Kurdish-language schools, and replaced Kurdish city and town names with Arabic names. It also used rhetoric which fostered suspicion of Kurds and perpetuated damaging anti-Kurdish stereotypes and discrimination.

While Kurds across Syria had long remained relatively quietest, resentments eventually boiled over in March 2004 in Quamishli city. After Arab fans raised photos of Saddam Hussein and chanted insults of Iraqi Kurdish leaders during a football match between teams from Quamishli and Deir-ez-Zor, fights between Kurdish and Arab fans spilled into the streets and gave way to an anti-GoS Kurdish protests and riots. During this unrest, which Kurds commonly refer to as the intifada, Kurdish protestors burned down the local Baath party headquarters and destroyed a statue of former Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad. The GoS, with help from members of the Tayy confederation, brutally put down the protest and between 2004 and 2011 adopted a sweeping, zero tolerance approach towards Kurdish activism, which led to thousands of arrests and heightened efforts to suppress Kurdish identity. As a result of the 2004 protests and subsequent demonstrations, Quamishli city became the symbolic center of anti-GoS Kurdish opposition.

Even as segments of the city’s Arab and Christian population held negative views of Kurds and embraced the discriminatory policies perpetuated by the GoS, relations between the majority of the city’s diverse population remained relatively peaceful following the 2004 protests. This dynamic has continued largely unchanged throughout the conflict, even as the GoS and PYD and YPG exploit ethnic and political differences in Quamishli city as a recruitment tool and to garner local support.

**IDP Settlement Dynamics**

Quamishli city has become an important center for IDP settlement in NES. While operational partners in NES estimate the city currently hosts 62,000 IDPs, local sources believe the figure may be over 100,000. The discrepancy between the two figures is likely the result of differing definitions of who constitutes an IDP and the common tendency of local authorities in Syria to overestimate population figures.

Although precise figures on IDP areas of origin do not exist, numerous local sources report the largest group of IDPs currently residing in Quamishli city are Arab residents of Deir-ez-Zor, Ar-Raqqa, and Aleppo, who arrived between 2014 and 2017 after fleeing ISIS advances as well as GoS and International Coalition campaigns against ISIS. Local sources estimate there are currently 40,000 IDPs fitting this profile currently residing in Quamishli city. Although direct conflict has subsided in Deir-ez-Zor, Ar-Raqqa, and Aleppo, security concerns among those who originate from or must travel through GoS-held areas and areas where ISIS cells still pose a serious threat, have discouraged returns. Economic considerations as well as the relatively better service provision in Quamishli city, have further discouraged IDPs from returning to their area of origin. Quamishli city also hosts Kurdish and Christian IDPs who fled Ras al Ain as a result of the Turkish Operation Peace Spring in October 2019 and remain unable or unwilling to return to the Turkish- and Turkish supported opposition (TSO) held area. While operational partners estimate there are approximately 1,000 IDPs fitting this profile currently residing in Quamishli city, local sources report there are approximately 12,000 such IDPs in the city. Finally, local sources estimate there are 12,500 IDPs from surrounding rural areas of the Al-Hasakeh governorate, as well as approximately 9,500 IDPs from the Homs, Rural Damascus, Idlib, and Hama governorates, most of whom arrived in the early years of the Syrian conflict. There are no camps or informal settlements in Quamishli city and almost all IDPs rent homes or live with relatives, with a small number owning homes.

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6 Common estimates suggest the law impacted 120,000 people, representing 20% of the Syrian-Kurdish population at the time.
Relations between residents and IDPs in Quamishli City are generally positive and, to date, the city has not witnessed significant resident-IDP tensions. The city’s urban nature and historically diverse and dynamic population has reportedly played a role in this. Further, the maintenance of a relatively stable total population figure due to a rough equilibrium between movements in and out of the city have minimized shocks to the supply of basic services, housing, and labor and have helped to abate potential tensions. Nevertheless, local sources indicate that some IDPs report feeling isolated, looked down upon, or considered a burden to the city.

In addition to IDPs there are also thousands of workers and their families that live and travel though Quamishli city looking for work. However, local authorities do not consider them to be IDPs due to their economic and migratory nature, and because most are original residents of nearby areas. Similarly, local authorities do not consider hundreds of former residents of nearby Tal Hmis who have lived in the Jemaiyeh neighborhood since ISIS briefly took control of that area in 2014 as IDPs.
4. CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT DYNAMICS

While the start of the Syrian Revolution in March 2011 gave way to widespread unrest in much of Syria, the situation in Quamishli city remained comparatively stable. This was in large part due to the GoS fears of an anti-GoS Kurdish uprising in NES and its efforts to cautiously placate Syria’s Kurdish population to avoid such an outcome. In early March 2011, after protests had toppled authorities in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, the GoS issued Legislative Decree (LD) 49-2011, extending citizenship to an estimated 300,000 so-called foreign Kurds7 who had been denied Syrian citizenship as a result of the 1962 census. Soon after, the GoS also pardoned several dozen high-profile Kurdish activists and released them from prison. Although this was greeted positively by Kurds, it did not prevent large, predominantly Kurdish anti-GoS protests from breaking out in Quamishli city in parallel to protests elsewhere in the country. Nevertheless, local sources report the GoS’s crackdown on protests in Quamishli city was notably more reserved than elsewhere in the country.

During this period, Kurdish political movements quickly attempted to position themselves to influence the trajectory of NES. As many Syrian Kurds in NES and Quamishli City had admired the recent success of Kurds in Iraq, the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Syria (KDP-S) quickly became a prominent political force in the city. Aligning itself with the wider Syrian opposition, the KDP-S and several smaller Kurdish parties established the opposition Kurdish National Council (KNC) in October 2011 with support from Massoud Barzani, then-president of the KRI, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Iraq. At the same time, the PYD, established in 2003 as a Syrian offshoot of the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK), also reemerged after more than a decade of underground activity in NES. Adopting a neutral stance towards the revolution, the PYD maintained a relatively low profile in the city’s protest movement throughout 2011. Nevertheless, by 2012 the PYD had successfully promoted a focused, Kurdish liberation agenda to recruit thousands of new members. At the same time, the PYD also began to organize armed local protection committees in Kurdish neighborhoods throughout the city.

Local sources report that between 2012 and 2013, the PYD began to target local Kurdish opposition activists and figures associated with the KNC in Quamishli city and elsewhere. Although the KNC and PYD had attempted to establish a joint political platform and governance arrangement in mid-2012, the PYD used its armed presence, now represented by several formal forces including the YPG, and growing base of support to completely sideline the KNC by the following year.

It remains unclear how closely the GoS coordinated its approach in Quamishli city and surrounding Kurdish-majority areas with the PYD between 2011 and mid-2012. Nevertheless, by late 2012, the GoS chose to hand over Kurdish-majority areas of NES to the PYD-YPG in order to focus resources on defending against opposition advances in other parts of the country. While the GoS fully withdrew from most Kurdish-majority areas along the Syrian-Turkish border,8 it partially withdrew from Al-Hasakeh city and Quamishli city. Similar to developments in Al-Hasakeh city, the GoS ceded control of most of Quamishli city to the PYD-YPG, while retaining control of the so-called security square in central Quamishli city, the Quamishli airport, the 154th Artillery Regiment south of the city, and several administrative and security sites in neighborhoods under PYD-YPG control.

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7 Of the estimated 300,000 so-called foreign Kurds impacted by the 1962 law, an estimated 20,000 have remained stateless as of July 2021. Additionally, the decision did not grant access to citizenship for an estimated 80,000 so-called foreign Kurds who had not registered as foreigners with the GoS. These Kurds continue to be referred to as Al-Maktomeen.

8 These areas include the Al-Malikeyyeh and Ras Al-Ain districts, as well as the Qahtaniyyeh, Amuda, and Tal Hmis subdistricts of the Al-Hasakeh governorate and the Ain Al Arab/Kobane district of the Aleppo governorate.
Over the next several years, Quamishli city became the de facto capital of emerging PYD-YPG governance, political, security, and military structures in NES, collectively known as the Self Administration. Enjoying control of most Kurdish-majority areas of NES, the PYD-YPG worked to establish a number of ostensibly bottom-up local governance bodies that would be loosely integrated into a series of larger governance structures that would emerge between 2013 and 2018. At the same time, the PYD-YPG pragmatically continued to coordinate closely with GoS administrative and services bodies in Al-Hasakeh and Quamishli city on service provision throughout areas under its control.

In contrast to services, the PYD-YPG and GoS managed local security independent of one another. In Quamishli city, the ISF and YPG oversaw security in PYD-YPG-held neighborhoods, and GoS intelligence services and several GoS-aligned paramilitary groups, including a local chapter of the National Defense Forces (NDF) drawn from the Tayy confederation, oversaw security in GoS-held neighborhoods and areas. While Quamishli city had witnessed brief, isolated clashes between the two sides between 2013 and 2016, tensions notably increased from 2016 onward.

In April 2016, September 2018, and January to April 2021, Quamishli city witnessed prolonged, intense clashes between the ISF and GoS forces. Clashes between the two sides in 2016 and 2021 resulted in the ISF expanding their presence in Quamishli city. In April 2016, the ISF and YPG expelled GoS forces from several GoS administrative and security sites in Self Administration-held neighborhoods of the city, and in April 2021, the ISF fractured the corridor of contiguous GoS control when they gained full control of the NDF stronghold Tayy neighborhood and several adjacent areas. While these clashes were all initially triggered by local disagreements between the ISF and NDF, they also emerged during periods of increased, wider Self Administration-GoS tensions.

Between 2011 and 2021, Quamishli city has continued to witness gradual population outflows. Even as the city avoided levels of conflict and violence seen elsewhere in the country, economic decline, poor services, and political and security uncertainty pushed an estimated 50,000 to leave the city for Turkey, Iraq, or Europe and remain outside. According to local sources, population outflows have been highest amongst young Arabs and Kurds and the city’s Christian communities. While there are no precise figures, local Christian figures estimate the local Christian population has dropped by more than half over the course of the conflict.

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9 The Self Administration is the military, political, and governance structures established by the PYD-YPG between 2015 and 2018. These include: 1) the military component - the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF); 2) the political component - Syrian Democratic Council (SDC); and 3) the governance and services component – the Self Administration for North and East Syria (SANES).

10 Even as the Self Administration would gradually headquarter its governance and administrative component, SANES, to Ain Issa in 2018, and the Ar-Raqqa city in 2020, key SANES bodies and figures remain based in Quamishli city, as well as Amuda.

11 The PYD-YPG established three governance and services bodies between 2013 and 2018, including the Democratic Autonomous Cantons of Afrin, Kobane, and Jazeera in 2013, the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria in 2016, and SANES in late 2018.

12 In addition to previously mentioned ISF-NDF clashes, in 2015 and 2016 Quamishli city suffered from a series of deadly ISIS VBIED attacks. The most significant attack occurred in April 2016, when a VBIED blast in a crowded market on the western side of the city killed over 40 people and injured more than 150.

13 With no precise figures available, this estimate is based on operational partner reporting and local sources. While local estimates on outflows hover around 50,000, historic and current population data from operational partners support these estimates.
In addition to general outflows, Quamishli city also witnessed several waves of temporary displacement. During the aforementioned ISF–NDF clashes in 2016, 2018, and 2021, thousands of residents and IDPs fled neighborhoods impacted by the fighting. In most cases, people were displaced for several days and allowed to return to their homes after the Self Administration and GoS reached a sustained truce.

When Turkey launched OPS in October 2019, an estimated 1,765 individuals also temporarily fled the city towards Al-Hasakeh due to Turkish shelling and widespread concerns that Turkey would expand operations along the Syrian-Turkish border. Although Russia had established a limited presence at the Quamishli airport in late 2017, its expanded presence in the city following Operation Peace Spring, and the presence of nearby US forces, have alleviated local concerns of a potential Turkish operation against the city.

**Graphic 1. Quamishli City Major Population Movement Events**

**Displacement of residents from Quamishli city**

- **August to September 2013**
  Opening of Semalka-Fishkhabour border crossing, outflux of population to KRI.

- **2013 to 2016**
  Gradual outflux of population to KRI, Turkey, and Europe.

- **April 2016**
  Temporary displacement of over 100 people to Darbasiyah, Amuda, and Malikeyyeh due to GoS/NDF - ISF clashes.

- **September to October 2019**
  Displacement from the city due to Operation Peace Spring. An estimated 1,765 people fled to Al-Hasakeh city, and communities in Tal Hmis sub-district. Most of the displacement was temporary, but some fled to KRI and remain displaced.

- **April 2021**
  Temporary displacement of up to 15,000 people from Tayy neighborhood and central parts of the city due to ISF – GoS/NDF clashes.

**Arrival of IDPs to Quamishli city**

- **2011 to 2013**
  Arrivals of Kurds with ties to the city from other parts of Syria.

- **2014 to 2017**
  Conflict and the expansion of ISIS lead IDPs to Quamishli from Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa, and Deir-ez-Zor as well as from small villages in Al-Hasakeh governorate. IDP population in Quamishli city reaches an estimated 56,910 IDPs in December 2016, 62,368 in November 2017, and 58,701 IDPs in December 2018.

- **October 2019**
  Operation Peace Spring causes large scale displacement along the Syrian-Turkish border. An estimated 1,384 IDPs arrive to Quamishli city mostly from Ras Al-Ain.

**Residents still displaced: 50,000+**
most reside in the KRI, Turkey, and Europe, with smaller numbers displaced to other areas in Syria

**Current IDPs: 62,000**
Estimated as of the end of November 2021

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14 For more information on OPS and its displacement impacts, see RCM Thematic Report 6: Operation Peace Spring and Turkish Intervention Scenarios.
5. GOVERNANCE AND SECURITY DYNAMICS

5.1. GOVERNANCE

Since 2013, the PYD-YPG has established and overseen several local governance and services bodies responsible for neighborhoods under its control. Currently, all these bodies fall within SANES, which represents the governance and services component of the wider Self Administration. SANES bodies operating in Quamishli city, or relevant to local governance and services are detailed in Table 1: SANES Bodies in Quamishli City.

Table 1. SANES Bodies Quamishli City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Governance Body</th>
<th>About</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>Jazeera Region Administration</td>
<td>The Jazeera Region Administration, based in Amuda, is the equivalent of a provincial council, and is made up of three branches: 1) Executive Council; 2) Legislative Council; and 3) Social Justice Council. The most prominent branch of the Jazeera Region is the Executive Council, which is responsible for managing service provision across the Jazeera region. The council is led by a Co-Presidency Office and composed of 18 sector-specific commissions and offices. While commissions centrally manage several key services, such as power, education, and bread and fuel provision, through teams located across the Jazeera region, they manage water and municipal service in coordination with SANES bodies at the canton and local level, specifically the Quamishli Canton Council and Quamishli City People’s Municipality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canton</td>
<td>Quamishli Canton Council</td>
<td>The Quamishli Canton Council is a subregional advisory and reporting body that plays a limited role in service provision. The council is comprised of 45 to 60 members loosely operating across a Co-Presidency Office and 11 sector-specific committees, which partially align with those found in the Jazeera Region Administration Executive Council. The council is jointly overseen by the Jazeera Region Executive and Legislative Councils. Within the council, the Environment Protection and Municipalities Committee is the only committee to play a direct role in service provision, specifically in the water sector, through an associated Quamishli Canton Water Directorate, and municipal works, through People’s Municipalities in cities and towns across the canton.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Quamishli Subdistrict Council</td>
<td>The Quamishli Subdistrict Council is a minor advisory and reporting body that plays a limited reporting and coordinating role with various SANES bodies involved in service provision in the subdistrict. The council technically oversees five local councils, including the Quamishli City Council, and is overseen by the Quamishli Canton Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quamishli City Council</td>
<td>The Quamishli City Council is a minor advisory and reporting body made up of 35 to 40 members, loosely operating across a Co-Presidency Office and 11 sector-specific committees. The council is responsible for overseeing communes, reporting local feedback to the Quamishli City People’s Municipalities and other SANES bodies involved in service provision in the city. The Quamishli City council is overseen by the Quamishli Subdistrict Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quamishli People’s Municipality</td>
<td>The Quamishli People’s Municipality is a service provision body, responsible for a variety of municipal services in Quamishli city. The municipality is made up of 9 departments that oversee trash collection, waste and rubble removal, business registration, and minor water and sewage network repairs. It is jointly overseen by the Quamishli Canton Council and the Jazeera Region Administration Executive Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communes</td>
<td>Communes are made up a co-presidency and several commune committee members. Communes are generally responsible for receiving and conveying residents’ complaints and feedback, and supporting aid, bread, and fuel provision. In Quamishli city, communes are overseen by the Quamishli City Council.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The PYD-YPG have developed SANES according to bottom-up governance theories and approaches advanced by democratic confederalism. Accordingly, SANES is meant to allow for locally driven, democratic decision making that empowers all components of local society. To achieve this aim, the PYD-YPG have established several ostensibly representative coordination and advisory bodies in and around Quamishli city, including communes, the Quamishli City Council, Quamishli Subdistrict Council, and the Quamishli Canton Council. While these bodies may report on local needs and urgent local issues, to date they have played an extremely limited, if not completely absent.

In practice, all key governance and services decisions in Self Administration-held neighborhoods of Quamishli city are determined and/or approved by PYD-YPG kadros and implemented by Quamishli City People’s Municipality and sector specific bodies within the Jazeera Region Administration Executive Council, in some cases in coordination with local GoS counterparts. PYD-YPG kadros collectively represent a parallel, opaque Self Administration governance structure. Although kadro hierarchies and structures are unclear, like other Self Administration areas of NES, junior and senior kadros are embedded across SANES bodies in Quamishli city and regional and canton-level bodies relevant to the city. In addition to controlling key financial, staffing, and planning decisions, local sources report kadros are responsible for managing coordination with GoS governance and services bodies in Quamishli city, which continue to play an important role in service provision in Self Administration-held neighborhoods.

In contrast to other Self Administration-held areas of NES, the PYD-YPG’s initial ascent in Quamishli city in 2013 was coordinated with the GoS. Since then, the GoS has been able to maintain a small, but crucial administrative presence in the city, consisting of local governance and services bodies tied to governorate-level sector specific directorates in Al-Hasakeh city overseen by GoS ministries in Damascus. Even as the PYD-YPG has established alternative SANES governance structures and gradually seeks to lessen the Self Administration’s reliance on the GoS, it has pragmatically chosen to preserve coordination with existing GoS bodies on certain key services.

In the power and water sectors across Al-Hasakeh, the Self Administration remains in control of infrastructure sites, while the GoS continues to be the primary employer of knowledgeable, experienced local management and staff and enjoys access to key forms of support from the UN and international and local non-governmental organizations (L/NGOs and I/NGOs) operating through Damascus. To date, both sides have acknowledged this reality and have pursued management of both sectors in relatively close cooperation. Similarly, the PYD-YPG have not established alternative civil documentation mechanisms in Quamishli city or elsewhere and continue to effectively cede authority on such matters to the GoS.

While this coordination has contracted, and been strained on several occasions, in lieu of larger political or military shift in NES, it is likely to persist. In addition to being a cost-effective, mutually beneficial way to maintain key services in the city, continued local coordination on governance and services remains a key sign of the PYD-YPG’s willingness to cooperate with Damascus. This not only helps maintain important economic relations between the two sides, but also leaves the door open for an eventual political resolution between them, which the US and Russia are increasingly interested in achieving.

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15 Democratic confederalism is a central PYD political philosophy, originally pioneered by Abdullah Ocalan.
5.2. SECURITY

Security Actors

Reflecting divided control, Quamishli city is home to both Self Administration and GoS security and military forces. Within Self Administration neighborhoods, the primary security force is the ISF. While the Internal Affairs Commission of the SANES Jazeera Region Administration is technically responsible for overseeing ISF units in the city, local sources report real authority over the force lies with key PYD-YPG kadros who are responsible for managing the various ISF component forces. These forces include Checkpoint Forces, Rapid Response Forces (HWARI), Traffic Police, General Security, Anti-Organized Crime forces, and Counter Terrorism Units (HAT).

The three most visible components of the ISF in Quamishli city are the Checkpoint Forces, HWARI, and Traffic Police, which are collectively responsible for maintaining day-to-day security in the city. As their name denotes, Checkpoint Forces oversee ISF checkpoints throughout the city, including checkpoints around the perimeter of the city, within Self Administration-held neighborhoods, and checkpoints at crossing points with GoS-held neighborhoods. Rapid Response Force units regularly patrol the city and are responsible for responding to various crimes, while Traffic Police are responsible for directing traffic and clearing streets, as well as administrative tasks such as licensing. The ISF oversees general intelligence gathering through General Security units, who work in coordination with the Anti-Organized Crime Force and ISF HAT units to pursue individuals involved in drug trafficking and sales, smuggling, counterfeiting, and terrorism, which in the context of the Quamishli city entails counter-ISIS and counter-TSO efforts. All ISF component forces in Quamishli city are overseen by Kurdish PYD-YPG kadros.

In addition to the ISF, Community Protection Forces (HPC), Sootoro Forces, YPG, Women's Protection Forces (YPJ), and Self Protection Forces (SPF) also play a role in local security. HPC units are community based, volunteer units tied to communes and made up of local volunteers trained to respond to urgent security incidents within the commune. In addition to establishing checkpoints following security incidents and patrolling local demonstrations and public events organized by authorities, HPC units are also relied on to temporarily manage local security during escalations elsewhere in NES that require the Self Administration to deploy ISF and YPG forces to frontlines. Likewise, Sootoro Forces are a local security force linked to the PYD-affiliated Syriac Union Party (SUP) made up of Syriac members who respond to security incidents in Self Administration-held Syriac-majority neighborhoods. YPG and YPJ units are stationed at SDF military bases outside Quamishli City. SPF units, which are comprised of locals fulfilling their mandatory conscription requirement, are also stationed in these bases. While the YPG, YPJ, and SPF are primarily focused on patrolling the Syrian-Turkish border and SDF-TSO frontlines and counter-ISIS activities in southern Al-Hasakeh and other areas of Self Administration-held NES regions, YPG, YPJ, and SPF units have been deployed to the city during ISF-GoS clashes. Like ISF components, YPG, YPJ, and SPF units are overseen by Kurdish PYD-YPG kadros.

In GoS-held neighborhoods of Quamishli city, the GoS maintains several security and military forces. Local sources report all four GoS intelligence agencies maintain a presence in the security square and the Quamishli airport, where they oversee local intelligence gathering and monitor administrative affairs such as land registration, commercial licensing, and movement to and from the city. GoS intelligence agencies are also responsible for overseeing several local GoS-affiliated paramilitary forces responsible for day-to-day security in GoS-held neighborhoods, including the local branch of the NDF and several unnamed local units. The GoS also oversees the Suturu forces, separate from the PYD-affiliated Sootoro forces mentioned above, a local Christian security force located in Christian-majority GoS-held neighborhoods, and a small contingent of the Al-Baath Forces. Finally, since late 2012 GoS Syrian Arab Army forces (SAA) have largely remained confined to the 154th Artillery Regiment and Quamishli Airport, where they are joined by Russian Military Police units in both locations.
Security Concerns

Despite the relatively stable security situation in Quamishli City, residents and IDPs throughout the city continue to hold several security concerns which include broad issues related to local and regional instability as well as specific and acute personal protection concerns.

Generally, there are broad concerns of renewed ISF-GoS hostilities in the city. Such concerns are highest in central and southern neighborhoods, as they are likely to be the most directly impacted by ISF-GoS hostilities. Nevertheless, such concerns are reportedly present throughout the city, as escalations could upend local Self Administration-GoS coordination and undermine access to services, mobility, and the local economy. Although concerns of a Turkish campaign against Quamishli city have largely subsided with the deployment of Russian forces to the city and surrounding area, there remain concerns in Self Administration neighborhoods around the impact of a potential US withdrawal. Local sources report belief in the US’s commitment to NES, including Quamishli city, has significantly decreased since the US’s withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021. As a US withdrawal from NES would allow the GoS to reassert full control over Quamishli city, residents and IDPs in Self Administration-held neighborhoods hold concerns about what that means for their personal safety and freedom, as well as their future economic prospects.

In addition to broader security concerns, local sources report many local young men are concerned about forced conscription and undo arrest. Both the Self Administration and GoS maintain policies requiring mandatory military service for young men. While the YPG began implementing mandatory conscription in Quamishli city in 2014, current Self Administration policy requires all men in Self Administration-neighborhoods of the city born between 1998 and 2003 to serve in the SPF for one year. As the policy has been unpopular in the city and local Self Administration security forces have carried out repeated campaigns to arrest individuals who have failed to report for service, the policy has been a major driver of outward migration amongst young men. Meanwhile, reports indicate that the YPG and YPJ continue to recruit male and female minor without their parents’ consent. A report published by the UN in May 2021 said that more than 400 children were recruited between July 2018 and June 2020. In late November 2021, dozens of Kurdish families demonstrated outside UN offices in Quamishli City to demand action after a number of girls were reported to have been recruited into the YPJ, some of them allegedly by force. While the Self Administration only applies this requirement to men in areas under its control, the GoS applies its conscription mandate to all Syrian men between the age of 18 and 42, regardless of where they live. Due to its limited presence, and the fact that the majority of local men have not fulfilled their mandatory GoS military service, the GoS has largely suspended enforcement of mandatory conscription in Quamishli city. Nevertheless, men who have failed to fulfill their mandatory GoS military service are largely unable to travel to other GoS-held areas of the country, and are reportedly hesitant to visit GoS institutions in the city due to fears of potential arrest.

Both the Self Administration and GoS have also exhibited intolerance of perceived dissent and unsanctioned activism and journalism in Quamishli city. Fears of being detained by GoS intelligence agencies or one of several GoS-affiliated paramilitary forces lead local activists and journalists to largely avoid travel to GoS-held neighborhoods and areas, and especially those in southern Quamishli. Local sources report, activists and journalists also fear being targeted by Self Administration security forces and PYD-YPG-affiliated groups working to suppress dissent, such as the Revolutionary Youth Organization. Since 2013, local sources report the ISF have arrested several local activists, journalists, and opposition figures on terrorism charges under the pretext of collaborating with Turkey, TSO forces, and rival Kurdish parties such as the KNC. Similarly, members of the Revolutionary Youth Organization have been responsible for assaulting, and in some cases kidnapping, local journalists and critics of the Self Administration. Although the Revolutionary Youth Organization is ostensibly a SANES youth group overseen by the SANES Youth and Sports Commission, local sources report it is in fact a PYD-YPG body overseen by hardline PYD-YPG kadros. Consequently, regular ISF units are unable to prevent and investigate abuses by the group.
Residents and IDPs living in Quamishli city face mixed freedom of movement. With some exceptions, Self Administration security policies do not present a major impediment to the general population's freedom of movement within Quamishli city. Although residents and IDPs are required to pass through ISF checkpoints within Self Administration-held neighborhoods of the city, outside of periods of heightened security or crackdowns on men failing to fulfill mandatory SPF military service, these checkpoints do not usually undertake ID checks or searches. Similarly, at checkpoints adjoining the GoS-held security square, ISF checkpoints, as well as GoS checkpoints, generally do not carry out identification checks or searches. Conversely, local sources report security measures are notably higher at ISF and GoS checkpoints between Self Administration and GoS-held areas in the southern edge of the city around the Quamishli airport and Zunud neighborhood. This is reportedly due to the strong presence of GoS paramilitary forces and GoS sensitivities around security at the Quamishli airport and areas near the 154th Artillery Regiment base.

In order to travel to and from Quamishli city and other Self Administration areas of NES, individuals must travel through a number of ISF checkpoints positioned at entrances to the city. At such checkpoints, local sources report checkpoints routinely carry out ID checks. Even as IDs are not routinely checked within the city, residents and IDPs are required to carry some form of identification recognized by the Self Administration, including GoS-issued IDs, passports, and family books, or Self Administration newcomer cards, explained further in Sub-section 6.7: Civil Documentation. If an individual does not possess ID, or arouse suspicions based on their behavior, demographic profile, or prevailing security circumstances, they may be pulled for searches and additional questioning.

Meanwhile, residents and IDPs in Quamishli city who are not wanted by GoS security services and have valid GoS-issued IDs can travel to GoS-held areas via two main routes. The most common route is via bus lines operating from Quamishli city which travel to various cities in GoS-held Syria via formal Self Administration-GoS crossings at Tabqa and Menbij. Bus tickets for trips to Damascus are generally 25,000 SYP, approximately 7.14 United States dollars (USD), and for trips to Aleppo city are generally 20,000 SYP (approximately 5.71 USD). For those who can afford to do so, the Quamishli airport also has regular flights to Damascus. Options for air travel between Quamishli city and Damascus include: 1) daily cargo flights that offer a limited number of seats to civilian passengers for as low as 30,000 SYP (approximately 8.50 USD); 2) twice weekly Syrian Air flights that offer tickets as low as 90,000 SYP (approximately 25.50 USD); and 3) twice weekly Cham Air flights that offer tickets as low as 350,000 SYP (approximately 100 USD).

Currently, the ability to travel from Quamishli city out of Syria is limited. All of the borders between Self Administration areas and Turkey are closed, and Turkish security measures along the Syrian-Turkish border around Quamishli make illegal crossings nearly impossible. While individuals can enter TSO-held areas via smugglers for approximately 200 USD, the cost to smuggle individuals out of these areas has risen to more than 3,000 USD. As Turkey has also cracked down on illegal crossings, the prospects of crossing successfully from either area have become increasingly low. Likewise, crossing into Iraq has also become increasingly challenging over the past year, as the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq has started to require Syrians crossing via the Semalka-Fishkhabour crossing to submit extensive personal information and have extended wait times for approvals. Consequently, the most common way to travel out of Syria from Quamishli city is to first travel to Damascus and then travel out of the country from the Damascus airport.

16 In the context of Quamishli city this most commonly entails men who have failed to fulfill mandatory GoS military service and individuals with close ties to the Self Administration or previous ties to the opposition.
17 All SYP-USD conversions in the report are based on the prevailing rate in Quamishli city, which was of 3.500 SYP per 1 USD in December 2021.
6. SERVICES AND LIVELIHOODS DYNAMICS

6.1. ELECTRICITY

Quamishli city receives power from two main sources: the national power grid and private generators. Unlike much of NES, the national power grid remains a main source of electricity for people in Quamishli city. The SANES Jazeera Power Department and GoS General Electricity Company–Al-Hasakeh are jointly responsible for managing the national grid in and around Quamishli city. While most buildings in Quamishli city contain power meters, the SANES Jazeera Power Department and GoS General Electricity Company–Al-Hasakeh do not monitor meters. Rather than requiring households and businesses to pay for power consumed, both bodies require households and businesses connected to the national network to pay a symbolic monthly maintenance fee, which sits at approximately 1,000 SYP (approximately 0.28 USD) per month, at offices in the city. As the GoS requires individuals to prove they have paid monthly power fees prior to issuing civil documentation, local sources report most residents and IDPs in Self Administration-neighborhoods of the city pay monthly maintenance fees to both SANES and the GoS.

In most of Quamishli city, households receive up to 8-12 hours of electricity a day and 32 amps per month, enough to operate household electronics and appliances. Nevertheless, network malfunctions and power rationing frequently lead to reduced hours and outages. In addition to general power lines to households and businesses, the national grid consists of service lines which power water pumping stations, streetlights, bakeries, hospitals, Self Administration and GoS offices, and security posts in Quamishli city close to 24 hours a day. Due to the concentration of GoS administrative bodies in the security square, neighborhoods that make up the security square also receive near all day power. The main sources of power for the national grid in Quamishli city are the Tabqa and Tishreen hydropower dams in Ar-Raqqa and the gas operated Sweidiyeh power plant located approximately 80 km east of the city, which is jointly operated by SANES Jazeera Power Department and GoS General Electricity Company–Al-Hasakeh. Similarly, both bodies are responsible for jointly managing network maintenance and repairs inside Quamishli city.

Due to frequent disruptions to power via the national grid, many households in Self Administration-held neighborhoods of the city and GoS-held neighborhoods in southern Quamishli city also purchase additional electricity from large, privately owned generators which generally serve between 100 to 250 users. To receive power from private generators, households and businesses purchase a monthly subscription for a certain number of amperes per month from local generator owners. The minimum, and reportedly most common subscription is 4 amperes per month, however, subscriptions can run as high as 10 amperes per month. As the price per ampere is 4,000 SYP (approximately 1.14 USD), subscriptions cost between 16,000 SYP (approximately 4.57 USD) and 40,000 SYP (approximately 11.29 USD). To keep prices down, SANES requires private generator owners to register with the Quamishli City People’s Municipality in exchange for subsidized diesel fuel. Despite fuel subsidies, generator owners have struggled to maintain services amid SYP depreciation. Due to price controls and popular pressure against price increases the price of electricity has decreased in recent years, from 800 SYP per ampere in 2018 (approximately 2 USD at that time) to 4,000 SYP per ampere in 2021 (approximately 1.14 USD), while the cost of maintenance, spare parts, and engine oils have increased.

Some households own also small, personal generators capable of producing 5 to 10 amperes used most often in the case of national grid failure or private generators, however, operation and maintenance costs limit accessibility for most. Some solar panels have also been installed in the city since 2020, however, accessibility has been limited by the high price of panels and the need for sufficient roof space.

18 The SANES Jazeera Power Department is part of the Jazeera Region Administration Power and Telecommunications Office.
19 In addition to cost at initial purchase, generators burn roughly one liter of gasoline per hour at a cost of 250 SYP per liter for subsidized gasoline or 800 SYP per liter of unsubsidized gas. Local sources estimate the cost of gasoline and repairing breakdowns can reach between 20,000 to 50,000 SYP (approximately 5.50 to 14.00 USD) per month.
20 Local sources report the price of initial purchase and installation for solar panels ranges between 900 to 2,500 USD.
6.2. WATER

Households and businesses in Quamishli city receive water from four main sources: the public water network, private wells, tanker trucks, and local markets. In contrast to most of NES, the public water network has remained the main source of water in the city. The network in Quamishli city, which extends to all neighborhoods of the city, is fed by three local groundwater pumping stations which are supplemented by water drawn from several dams to east at Al-Malkeyyeh and Jawadiyah. Water in the public network is typically treated and drinkable, and availability is considered good during rainy winter months but can be subject to shortages during dry summer months and during interruptions to the power grid which place pumping stations offline. Households receive water from the public network in exchange for a symbolic fee of 2000 SYP (0.57 USD) paid to the Quamishli People's Municipality every two months for water and cleaning services. In GoS-held neighborhoods, some residents may also pay a fixed payment of 1,500 SYP (0.43 USD) every three months to the GoS Quamishli Water Unit, which operates under the GoS General Establishment for Water and Sewage.

Similar to electricity, both Self Administration and GoS bodies have significant roles in managing the public water network in Quamishli city. Under SANES, water is primarily overseen by the Quamishli Water Directorate21 and the Quamishli City People's Municipality Water Department. The Quamishli Water Directorate is responsible for managing the main pumping stations serving Quamishli city within the Quamishli Canton, while the Water Department is responsible for tracking interruptions to the public network, addressing minor maintenance issues, identifying local project and repair priorities, and collecting fees from households and businesses using the network. Even as all major pumping stations and pipelines feeding the water network in Quamishli city are in Self Administration-held areas, both bodies coordinate regularly with GoS counterparts from the General Establishment of Water and Sewerage. The Water Directorate reportedly relies heavily on experienced GoS engineers to address technical problems and depends on the Establishment of Water and Sewerage to secure water treatment inputs through the UN and GoS-registered I/NGOs. Both the Water Directorate and Water Department work with GoS counterparts in Quamishli when they need to address issues impacting the city's overall public water network.

In addition to the public network, some residents also have access to private wells that they can use in case of water shortages or disruptions to the public network. In summer months especially, suspension of the public network, coupled with higher consumption, can also strain the network, forcing some people to purchase water from private tanker trucks. Finally, many residents and IDPs purchase bottled drinking water from the local market and use water from the public network or tanker trucks for other household uses.

While Quamishli city currently faces fewer water related challenges than other areas of NES, local sources have suggested that water management is inadequate, noting that groundwater levels, water quality, and network damages are not monitored. With the current focus on threats to the water supply in Al-Hasakeh, issues related to the water supply in Quamishli city rarely capture the attention of the Self Administration, GoS, or I/NGOs as the situation is perceived to be relatively more manageable.

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21 The Quamishli Water Directorate operates under the Quamishli Canton Council Environment Protection and Municipalities Committee, which coordinates the directorate’s activities with the Local Administration and Municipalities Commission of the Jazeera Region Administration.
Sewage and Wastewater

Approximately 90% of Quamishli City is connected to combined sewers that carry both sewage and wastewater to two discharge points without undergoing any treatment processes. However, most of the network suffers critical infrastructure issues due to inadequate maintenance and chronic underinvestment. Additionally, the network’s reliance on small diameter pipes has rendered the sewage system insufficient.

Challenges posed by the deteriorated sewage networks are exacerbated during the rainy winter season as the system is unable to cope with excess surface water runoff and is prone to flooding. As explained further in Sub-section 6.4 Health below, flooding-related discharge of the untreated sewage poses serious health risks and has wide negative consequences for livelihoods and the environment. While a technical team from the Quamishli City People’s Municipality, as well as a team from the GoS Establishment of Water and Sewerage, are responsible for maintaining the network, to date, no major efforts have been undertaken to address systemic issues within the city’s sewage and wastewater network.

6.3. FUEL AND FOOD SUPPORT

Food support in Quamishli city consists of subsidized bread provision from the Self Administration and GoS and limited food support by I/NGOs and charitable organizations. As illustrated in Table 2: Types and Prices of Bread in Self Administration-held Neighborhoods of Quamishli City there are three primary types of bread available in Quamishli city, regular bread, stone oven bread, and tourist bread. Regular bread is subsidized and the most common and affordable type of bread. Regular bread is found across Syria and baked in automated and semi-automated bakeries. In Quamishli city, it is produced in two large public automated bakeries, the SANES managed Tishreen Bakery and the GoS managed Al-Baath bakery, as well as several semi-automated private bakeries contracted by the Self Administration and the GoS. In exchange for producing regular bread, contracted private bakeries receive flour, fuel, and other inputs at significantly reduced prices from the Self Administration and GoS. Traditionally making up a significant proportion of the local diet, demand for regular bread has reportedly increased dramatically over the past several years as economic conditions have worsened.

Stone oven bread, which is unique to Quamishli city and several areas of NES, is made in small, private brick oven bakeries and is thicker than regular bread. Meanwhile, tourist bread is made in semi-automated private bakeries and resembles regular bread but has a slightly different taste due to a different flour mixture and the addition of milk and sugar. Both the Self Administration and GoS have placed price caps for stone oven bread and tourist bread. However, in 2021 SANES began extending limited flour and fuel support to private bakeries producing these breads in response to SYP depreciation and wheat shortages. Due to recurrent regular bread shortages and the declining quality of regular bread, discussed below, demand for unsubsidized stone oven and tourist breads, have also risen.

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22 Both discharge points terminate at the Jaghjagh River, one located near the Helku neighborhood at the southern edge of the city and the other located near the Ailaya neighborhood at the eastern edge of the city.

23 Private bakeries contracted to produce regular, subsidized bread must register with the Bakeries Office of the Jazeera Region Economy and Agriculture Commission.

24 Prior to 2021, the Self Administration relied on an agreement with the GoS to process Self Administration wheat in three large public GoS flour mills in the Al-Hasakeh governorate. The agreement ended in February 2021, when the ISF gained control of the mills following a period of extended clashes in Quamishli city and Al-Hasakeh city and established a new public SANES flour mill soon after. Since then, the Jazeera Office of Supply and Consumer Protection of the Jazeera Region Administration Economic and Agriculture Commission has overseen all four public SANES mills and distributes subsidized flour to the SANES public bakery and contracted private bakeries in Quamishli city in coordination with the Quamishli City People’s Municipality.
### Table 2. Types and Prices of Bread in Self Administration-held Neighborhoods of Quamishli City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bread Type</th>
<th>Subsidized</th>
<th>Producers</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Demand</th>
<th>Price - Self Administration</th>
<th>Price – GoS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular Bread</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public bakeries and private bakeries with automated and semi-automated ovens contracted to produce subsidized bread</td>
<td>Low to average</td>
<td>High - Most common and most affordable daily bread</td>
<td>300 SYP per 1,250 gram bundle*</td>
<td>200 SYP per 1,000 gram bundle*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist Bread</td>
<td>Generally no but some limited flour and fuel support since 2021</td>
<td>Private bakeries with semi-automated ovens</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Average - Consistent demand among those who can afford it, demand raises when regular bread is unavailable</td>
<td>1,200 SYP per 600 gram bundle</td>
<td>1,200 SYP per 600 gram bundle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone Oven Bread</td>
<td>Generally no but some limited flour and fuel support since 2021</td>
<td>Private bakeries with small brick ovens</td>
<td>Average to high</td>
<td>Average - Traditional cultural bread, higher demand on the weekends and when regular bread is unavailable</td>
<td>500 SYP per 300 gram loaf</td>
<td>500 SYP per 300 gram loaf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\*limit based on family size, approximately one bundle daily per 3 people

Public and contracted private bakeries distribute regular bread in Self Administration–held neighborhoods of Quamishli city through local distributors assigned to each commune. These distributors provide regular bread to residents and IDPs of a given commune six days a week at local distribution stalls. In order to receive regular bread, residents and IDPs living in a commune must present a paper bread card\(^{25}\) at the distribution stall, which indicates the daily amount of regular bread allotted to the card holder. In GoS-held neighborhoods, residents and IDPs receive bread directly from the Al-Baath bakery or through local distributors. In order to receive regular bread, residents and IDPs in GoS-held neighborhoods must present their GoS smart card, which was introduced in Quamishli city in early 2021, and registers receipt of the daily amount of regular bread allotted to the card holder.

The provision of regular bread by both the Self Administration and GoS have contributed to relatively high availability of bread in Quamishli city compared to other areas in NES. Nevertheless, subsidy programs in Quamishli city suffer from many of the same issues witnessed elsewhere. Namely, SYP depreciation and weak wheat harvests have made regular bread difficult and costly to sustain and incentivized wheat and flour diversion by authorities and bakery operators. Consequently, Quamishli city has witnessed several regular bread shortages, long regular bread distribution lines, declining regular bread quality, and frequent price increases. Although those who can afford to can purchase stone oven bread and tourist bread as alternatives, the rising price of wheat and flour has also led spikes in the cost of both breads and have forced several bakeries to go out of business.

\(^{25}\)The paper bread card is issued every month.
Basic food and non-food items are generally available for purchase in Quamishli markets. While some items may face short term unavailability, the city has not faced significant prolonged shortages of key items in markets in recent years. However, reports indicate that rising prices have strained households’ ability to meet their needs.

Like bread, Quamishli city is heavily reliant on subsidized fuel from the Self Administration and GoS. In Self Administration-held neighborhoods, fuel distribution is overseen by the Jazeera Fuel Administration, which manages the distribution of fuel to local gas stations and distribution points with local authorities. SANES fuel subsidies for households include specific quantities of diesel for heating, gasoline for owners of cars or generators, and propane gas cylinders for cooking and heating. Additionally, SANES also provides specific fuel subsidies for bakeries, farmers, NGOs, and certain businesses.

**Table 3. Types and Prices of Fuel in Self Administration-held Neighborhoods of Quamishli City**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Fuel</th>
<th>Diesel</th>
<th>Gasoline</th>
<th>Butane Gas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subsidized diesel:</strong> Available for household heating systems (limit 440 liters per year distributed in two batches), bakeries, mills, and generator operators.</td>
<td><strong>Subsidized gasoline:</strong> Available for machinery, trucks, factories, and fuel tankers.</td>
<td>Used for cooking.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unsubsidized diesel:</strong> Primarily used for vehicles, commercial machinery, private generators</td>
<td><strong>Unsubsidized gasoline:</strong> Primarily used for vehicles, personal generators.</td>
<td><strong>Subsidized:</strong> Households can purchase one subsidized butane gas cylinder per month.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SANES Price per liter</strong></td>
<td><strong>SANES Price per liter</strong></td>
<td><strong>SANES Price per cylinder</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subsidized</strong></td>
<td>55 SYP for SANES bakeries</td>
<td>85 to 135 SYP</td>
<td>2,500 SYP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85 SYP for households and generator operators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>135 SYP for private bakeries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unsubsidized low quality</strong></td>
<td>410 SYP</td>
<td>210 to 710 SYP</td>
<td>16,000 SYP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unsubsidized High quality</strong></td>
<td>710 SYP</td>
<td>340 SYP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to subsidized bread provision, SYP depreciation and diversion has made subsidized fuel provision increasingly costly for SANES. In May 2021, SANES announced plans to more than double the price of subsidized fuel across NES. However, after the announcement was met by large protests in Quamishli city and other areas of NES, SANES quickly reversed the decision.
6.4. HEALTH

Although Quamishli city remains a destination for health services for individuals from other parts of NES, the local health sector is lacking in adequate infrastructure, qualified staff, and critical supplies. The number and size of public health facilities in the city is insufficient to meet local and regional demand, and private medical care has become increasingly unaffordable for most of the population. Additionally, the city continues to face a shortage of qualified medical staff and specialists, which alongside the lack of specialized equipment and diagnostic services, have limited the availability of advanced, and certain basic, treatments.

Key healthcare infrastructure in Quamishli city includes the public GoS Quamishli National Hospital, one public SANES hospital, 12 private hospitals, 10 GoS and I/NGO managed polyclinics and medical points, and approximately 300 private doctors’ clinics, which operate alongside 28 medical labs and around 200 pharmacies. The largest hospital is the GoS Quamishli National Hospital with a capacity of 200 beds. While it is a general hospital, it contains an advanced lab and a dialysis unit. Meanwhile, the SANES-managed Heart and Eye Hospital was established in 2018 with a capacity of 33 beds to deal with heart and eye diseases, including surgeries and cardiac catheterization. The hospital is also home to the only computed tomography (CT) scan in the Al-Hasakeh governorate. Finally, SANES also manages the Military Hospital, providing services exclusively to military and security force members and, at times, their family members and associates. While the health sector in Quamishli City is overseen by SANES and GoS health authorities, it is heavily reliant on material and technical support from the UN and World Health Organization (WHO), I/NGOs, and L/NGOs. The Quamishli Health Directorate overseen by the SANES Jazeera Region Health Commission is responsible for managing the provision of supplies, certain medical equipment, health worker salaries, and staffing decisions in SANES public facilities in the city. In addition to working closely with several L/NGOs, the SANES Jazeera Region Health Commission and Quamishli Health Directorate reportedly carry out ad hoc coordination with the the GoS Al-Hasakeh Health Directorate and GoS authorities overseeing vaccination campaigns.

Public healthcare facilities provide most healthcare services free of charge as costs in such facilities are covered by the GoS, SANES, or I/NGOs. However, due to long wait times and a lack of specializations, patients that can afford to are often forced to seek treatment in relatively expensive local private facilities. Similarly, even as medications are regularly available in Quamishli city, the prices of medications are high and increasingly volatile. To partially overcome this issue, both SANES and the GoS have developed arrangements with several private hospitals, private clinics, and pharmacies to secure discounts for certain employees holding health cards.

While private hospitals and clinics fill some gaps in the availability and quality of services in public facilities, neither offer adequate treatment for many serious health conditions. The health sector in Quamishli lacks qualified specialists, advanced medical devices, and necessary medications to treat complex and chronic diseases. This includes a shortage of specialized cardiac surgeons and neurosurgeons, a lack of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) devices and CT scans, limited capacity to deal with serious burns, and no public chemotherapy centers to treat cancer patients. As a result, patients requiring advanced treatment or complex operations usually travel to Damascus or the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

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26 SANES also operates a public dialysis clinic in Quamishli city.
27 The SANES Quamishli Canton Health Committee also plays a limited role in coordination in the local health sector.
28 Five of the 12 private hospitals in Quamishli and approximately 187 private clinics are contracted to offer half price reductions to SANES employees holding SANES-issued health cards.
29 There are currently two operational MRI devices and one operational CT scan in Quamishli city.
COVID-related infrastructure in Quamishli includes only one center, the Gayan center, consisting of 60 beds equipped to deal with severe and moderate cases. Supported by SANES Health Commission and I/NGOs, the center suffers from the lack of oxygen, essential medicines, ventilators, and personal protective equipment (PPE). During the latest peak in COVID-19 cases in October 2021, authorities moved three ventilators from Al-Hasakeh to Quamishli City as surge support, bringing the current number of ventilators at the center to twelve. Quamishli city is also home to the only PCR lab in NES, which is managed by the central SANES Health Commission. Nevertheless, the lab suffers from a shortage of testing kits which has forced authorities to limit testing. On 10 November, SANES halted regular testing and appealed for support to increase capacity. In mid-December, an I/NGO provided the lab with a batch of 15,000 kits, which according to authorities will be sufficient to resume testing for only one month.

Only a small fraction of the population has been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 since the WHO launched their NES vaccine campaign in May 2021. As of 15 December 2021, approximately 42,500 individuals have received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine in the Al-Hasakeh governorate, including an estimated 1,000 in Quamishli city – less than 1% of the city’s population. Vaccination efforts have been limited by vaccine shortages and logistic challenges. Further, concerns about vaccine safety remain widespread among the population fueled by a lack of accurate information and the rapid dissemination of misinformation.

In addition to struggling with COVID-19, Quamishli city has witnessed a wave of skin diseases such as leishmaniasis and black fungus. According to local sources, the Kurdish Red Crescent documented 68 cases of Leishmaniasis in September and October 2021 in Quamishli City alone. Water contamination due to sewerage-related water contamination and sewage-fed agriculture are believed to be responsible for the rise in such cases. They are also believed to be responsible for a recent rise of diarrhea, intestinal infections, and food poisoning. While sewage contamination of drinking water pipes in the Qanat As-Suways neighborhood led to approximately 200 documented cases of intestinal infections in September 2021, the Quamishli National Hospital has reportedly received an average of 20 food poisoning cases a day throughout 2021 as a result of food and liquid contamination.

6.5. EDUCATION

The education sector in Quamishli city has deteriorated over the course of the conflict and faces several significant challenges. The sector suffers from a lack of schools generally and a number of infrastructure issues, including building neglect, insufficient heating, and unreliable access to water and electricity. While addressing these issues is key to improving the sector, the main challenge is the presence of two distinct education systems.

In 2015, the PYD-YPG began to introduce a new curriculum in schools in Kurdish-majority areas under its control, including Quamishli city. Between 2015 and 2020, the PYD-YPG, through SANES, continued to expand the curriculum to include grades 1 through 12 in three languages, Kurdish, Arabic, and Syriac. SANES’s mandated use of the curriculum in public schools in Self Administration-held areas of Quamishli city has created several challenges for the sector.

This figure is approximated based on the estimated number of doses provided by GoS polyclinics.
Since introduction of the new curriculum, Self Administration and GoS education authorities in Quamishli city have not coordinated. Between 2013 and 2015, the GoS was responsible for paying teachers in public schools in both Self Administration and GoS-held neighborhoods of the city. Nevertheless, immediately after the Self Administration's roll out of the new curriculum, the GoS announced it would suspend salaries to teachers in the city who taught the Self Administration curriculum. As most teachers chose to suspend teaching to retain their GoS salary, the Self Administration scrambled to quickly hire new teachers. According to local sources, this has exacerbated issues in the sector, as many of the teachers were unqualified and have never received adequate training.

Although the curriculum allows Kurdish students to learn in Kurdish, it is unaccredited and underdeveloped. Additionally, the curriculum contains components that exhibit a pro-Kurdish, anti-Arab bias, and several components that exhibit a strong PYD ideological-bias and others that are culturally insensitive. While there is frequent criticism around the content of the curriculum, public resistance to the Self Administration's imposition has largely been tied to its lack of accreditation. As diplomas granted through the curriculum are not recognized by the GoS or internationally, the imposition of the curriculum severely complicates prospects for continued education.

To ensure children have an opportunity to pursue their education past 12th grade, or even receive an accredited diploma, families and students in Quamishli city have adopted two approaches. A limited number of families register their children in GoS public schools in GoS-controlled neighborhoods of the city, or one of eight local private Christian schools. However, in both cases this has led to significant overcrowding in these schools which has impacted education quality, increased enrollment fees, and forced families to incur additional transportation costs.

As the aforementioned option is out of reach for most families, the majority of students in Self Administration-held neighborhoods of Quamishli city attend SANES public schools. Those who want to attend accredited universities or technical schools must take three GoS exams to receive a GoS diploma. Resident students must register with the GoS Ministry of Education– Al-Hasakeh Directorate and travel to GoS testing centers in Quamishli city or Al-Hasakeh city to sit for exams. While IDP or migrant students from other areas of the Al-Hasakeh governorate can also sit for exams in Al-Hasakeh city, the GoS Ministry of Education requires IDP students from other parts of Syria living in the city to register for and sit for exams in their home governorate listed on their GoS identification documents. Finally, all students seeking to sit for GoS exams who are not enrolled in GoS or Christian schools must also study independently or pay for tutoring in the GoS curriculum to prepare for exams.

Despite the challenges this presents for individual families and students, and damage it does to the education sector in Quamishli city more broadly, the Self Administration has refused to adjust its policy and has launched several crackdowns to discouraged use of the GoS curriculum in the city. Since 2016, the Self Administration has banned private institutes from offering lessons in the GoS curriculum in the city. In addition to closing several such institutes, the ISF has also continued to arrest local teachers providing private tutoring courses in the GoS curriculum. In mid-2018, the Self Administration and PYD-affiliated SUP also attempted to impose the Self Administration curriculum on private Christian schools in Quamishli city. After major public backlash and intervention by Christian religious authorities in the city, the Self Administration reversed its decision. Throughout 2020 and 2021, the ISF has arrested several dozen teachers in Quamishli city for offering private tutoring courses in the GoS curriculum.

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31 As of late November 2021, operational partners estimate that only 321 people have returned to the city in the calendar year.
32 Although the Self Administration has developed a Syriac version of the curriculum, local sources report most Syriac and Assyrian families have largely refused to send their children to Self Administration public schools.
33 Students seeking a GoS diploma must take the 9th grade exam, a placement test for the 12th grade exam, and the 12th grade exam.
Beyond primary and secondary schools, there are also two universities in Quamishli city. The Self Administration opened Rojava University in 2016, where local sources report an estimated 1,500 students are enrolled in more than a dozen departments. To date, Rojava University remains unaccredited and is not recognized by the GoS or internationally. In addition to Rojava University, the small, private GoS-licensed University of Cordoba also operates in Self Administration-held areas just south of Quamishli city. Due to the limited options to pursue a university education in Quamishli city, most students seeking to attend university enroll in the public GoS Furat University, with a campus in Al-Hasakeh city, or various public and private universities in other GoS-held areas of Syria.

6.6. HOUSING

In the years prior to 2011, local sources report Quamishli city faced a growing housing shortage due to a combination of high demand related to rural-urban migration to the city and GoS policies that prevented property development and investment. In 2008 the GoS issued LD 49-2008 which officially froze property development, sale, inheritance, transfer, or modification and restricted property rental and leasing throughout the Al-Hasakeh governorate. While the decree allowed property owners to apply for exceptions with the Ministry of Interior, local sources reported exceptions were only given to individuals close to the state. With no rationale provided for the decree, it became increasingly clear that it was meant to allow the GoS and local loyalists to seize land and property throughout the governorate and Quamishli city.

Since the GoS's partial withdrawal in 2013, building in Quamishli city has increased significantly. In contrast to the GoS, the Self Administration has adopted lax property and development rules which have facilitated expanded building. To develop property, owners and investors only need to receive approval from the Quamishli City People's Municipality and communes. Similar to GoS approvals, this may require individuals to pay bribes to local SANES officials and kadros, however, the process is reportedly simpler and quicker.

The increase in building has been supported by sustained demand in the housing market due to the influx of IDPs and migrants over the course of the conflict. New construction and vacated properties, belonging to Quamishli residents abroad, have allowed the city to maintain an adequate supply of housing to shelter resident and IDP populations without the development of informal settlements or use of collective centers. However, rent prices remain high due to continued demand for rental units amongst IDPs and SYP depreciation. Many struggle to afford monthly rental payments, which reach above 100 USD per month for apartments in central neighborhoods and between 60 to 80 USD in other parts of the city. Some IDPs live with host families, or in apartments that have been offered for free, while others rent basic stand-alone homes outside the city center that are less expensive but lack certain amenities and services. While new empty apartments are available for sale,34 local sources indicate that they remain too expensive for most residents and IDPs and are often purchased by people outside of Syria.

Notably, the Self Administration's ambiguous long-term prospects in Quamishli city and NES present several housing, land, and property challenges. Even as the GoS partially amended LD 49-2008 in 2011 to exclude properties previously recorded by the GoS in formal city records and plans, informal buildings and properties newly developed with Self Administration approvals are generally still subject to the freeze on property transactions. Additionally, the Self Administration does not operate a land registry in Quamishli city, and only requires land sales be certified by a sales agent and several witnesses. While some residents and IDPs in Self Administration-held neighborhoods continue to register property transactions with the GoS land registry in Quamishli city, local sources report many do not. Consequently, in the event that the GoS reasserts control over Quamishli city, there will be a need for widespread reconciliation of property records. Using LD 49-2008 and other means, the GoS is likely to exploit this process to target individuals with real or perceived ties to the Self Administration, seize land, and extract bribes.

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34 As of March 2019, Urban-S estimated that Quamishli city had 3,286 surplus housing units available.
6.7. CIVIL DOCUMENTATION

To date, the Self Administration has not made efforts to establish an independent civil registry and does not issue civil documentation at a large scale. Accordingly, the most widely used and recognized forms of civil documentation for residents and IDPs in Quamishli city continue to be those issued by the GoS. The GoS operates an active civil registry in the GoS-controlled security square in Quamishli city which can provide and renew GoS-issued documents and IDs. However, the registry is not accessible to all in the city. Military age males who have not completed mandatory GoS military service and individuals with close opposition ties may be obliged to hire fixers at high costs to manage their civil documentation needs for fear of arrest upon entering GoS institutions. Additionally, IDPs whose original records are not registered or issued in the Al-Hasakeh governorate are often unable to utilize the GoS civil registry or other similar offices in Quamishli city and must travel to GoS offices in their governorate of origin.

Access to GoS-issued civil documentation is not only critical to freedom of movement through the many checkpoints in and around Quamishli city, but also impacts access to accredited education, GoS health facilities, housing, land, and property rights, and the ability to travel outside of NES or country. Further, many people make efforts to maintain up-to-date family records of birth, death, marriage, divorce, and inheritance in the GoS civil registry in case the GoS reasserts its control across the city and NES.

IDPs in Self Administration-held neighborhoods of Quamishli city who are not originally from NES are subject to additional documentation requirements and must obtain Self Administration mandated newcomer cards to formally register and legitimize their residence. Newcomer cards are obtained by registering with the Quamishli City People's Municipality and require a local sponsor to guarantee that the IDP will not be a security threat to the area. Without these cards, IDPs who originate from outside NES may be unable to access SANES-administered services, suffer restrictions on their freedom of movement, and could be vulnerable to forced expulsion from their current residence. While Self Administration authorities consider the cards a necessary and appropriate security and administrative measure, local sources report IDPs have identified newcomer cards and their associated sponsorship and fee requirements as a form of discrimination.

Stateless Kurds also face a unique situation for civil documentation. While the GoS extended pathways to citizenship for an estimated 300,000 stateless Kurds in 2011, 20,000 are estimated to remain stateless, and a further 80,000 undocumented Kurds, known as Al-Maktomeen, were excluded from the decision. In Quamishli city, the Self Administration grants a special ID for these populations which allows them to travel through ISF and SDF checkpoints but are not recognized by the GoS or GoS security and military forces.

6.8. ECONOMY AND LIVELIHOODS

Prior to the Syrian conflict, Quamishli city was an important economic hub in NES. Situated amidst NES’s fertile agriculture lands, considered Syria’s breadbasket, and located along the M4 highway, the city was a key point in the Syrian wheat and cotton trade. At the same time, the city was also a center of general trade and smuggling due to its position between the Syrian-Turkish and Syrian-Iraqi borders, and proximity to Syrian oil and gas fields. At the same time, local investors established numerous businesses which served and employed the city’s growing population and the GoS maintained a significant administrative presence which it used to employ thousands of residents.

35 While recent amendments to GoS civil status law have included stipulations to allow people to access their civil registration from offices in any governorate these have not yet been widely implemented.
36 While newcomer cards are required across all Self Administration-held areas of NES, enforcement is reportedly most strict in Ar Raqqaa city, Menbij, and Ain Al Arab/Kobani.
37 SANES indicated in February 2021 that they would be loosening requirements for obtaining newcomer cards, however, official reforms have not yet been announced.
Since the start of the Syrian conflict, several regional factors have significantly altered the economy in NES and Quamishli city. Even as the Self Administration has maintained an effective monopoly on both wheat and oil and gas production following the GoS's withdrawal from much of NES, its policies towards both have been less restrictive than the GoS and it has continued to rely on local trader networks to establish and maintain economic ties with the GoS and Iraq. While this has opened opportunities for certain actors and networks, some of which are based in Quamishli city, the Self Administration’s lack of currency controls and the continued flow of external support to NES have also incentivize local investment and supported the economy. With its relative security, growing population, position as a de facto capital of the Self Administration, strong history of trade and manufacturing, and proximity to Iraq, Quamishli city has been well placed to benefit from these wider shifts in NES’s economy.

Over the past eight years, Quamishli City has been the hub of trade between the Al-Hasakeh governorate and the rest of Syria and between Syria and Iraq. Thus, the city has become a base of operations for numerous large and specialized traders who are responsible for distributing goods across NES, Syria, and Iraq. The most common trade activities based in the city include the trade of produce, foodstuffs, household goods, construction materials, cars and spare parts, pharmaceuticals, and medical equipment. At the same time, Quamishli city has also continued to attract investment for certain industrial and manufacturing projects, with the most common activities including foodstuff processing, plastics manufacturing, and furniture.

The estimated workforce in Table 4: Employment by Economic Activity in Quamishli City - GoS 2004 Census and Table 5: Employment by Sector in Quamishli City - GoS 2004 Census was determined by applying the approximate 2004 national unemployment rate (10%) to the approximate population of Quamishli city 15 years and older (116,000) according to the GoS 2004 census. Note, this figure does not account for potentially thousands of so-called foreign Kurds living in the city, or several thousand men serving in the SAA and GoS security and intelligence agencies.

Other comprises individuals employed in the cooperative sector, joint sector, and non-profit sector. The cooperative sector included GoS-sanctioned cooperatives, while the joint sector included public–private companies. According to local Self Administration authorities, there are 170 licensed industrial and manufacturing projects in the Quamishli Canton, including 65 projects in Quamishli City. Local sources report the Self Administration generally undercounts, or does not reliably register such projects and there are likely more industrial and manufacturing projects in and around the city.
SERVICES AND LIVELIHOODS DYNAMICS

The growth of Quamishli city's trade and manufacturing sectors have both benefitted from the city’s strong transport and financial services, and supported their continued growth. On financial services, increasing transactions, due to trade, investment, and remittances, combined with the Self Administration’s lack of regulation, has led to the proliferation of currency exchanges and hawala offices, including GoS-licensed offices and informal hawala networks, in Quamishli city. Continued demand for housing and services, in large part due to the arrival of thousands of IDPs, has also led to increased investment in construction, and the establishment of new businesses.

Despite its notable success, Quamishli city’s economy has not been immune to Syria’s recent accelerated economic decline, the depreciation of the SYP, and political and military dynamics elsewhere in the country. SYP depreciation has complicated trade and manufacturing, as imported products and raw materials are priced in USD but often sold in SYP, at times forcing traders, manufacturers, and businesses to sell goods at a loss. As the wider economy has declined, markets in Quamishli city and across Syria for imported and locally manufactured goods have also contracted. Recurrent disruptions to power and water, poor rainfalls, and military escalations elsewhere in the country, have also limited productivity and access, and further distorted prices.

Local sources report the rewards of Quamishli city’s economic success have largely been felt by a relatively small portion of the city’s population, including a number of historically powerful families, former smugglers, and political and military figures, including kadros, within the Self Administration and GoS. Meanwhile, the majority of the population has continued to suffer from limited employment opportunities, low wages, and high costs of living. In addition to regular employment in the services sector, civil service and military and security forces, and irregular day and seasonal work, many Quamishli city residents rely heavily on remittances from relatives based in Turkey and Europe to send money through hawala networks, often on a monthly basis.

41 A recent decision by the GoS to revoke the license of major hawala offices unless they relocate into the security square will likely increase the demand for SANES-licensed offices and the informal hawala networks in SANES-held neighborhoods.
7. RETURN AND DISPLACEMENT PROSPECTS

7.1. RETURN PROSPECTS

In Quamishli city and across the region, the deteriorating economic situation, poor and increasingly strained essential services, education challenges, and barriers to accessing GoS documentation and freedom of movement remain significant barriers to return and very few are returning to the city. With limited opportunities for meaningful improvements in these key areas, the prospects for largescale sustainable return to Quamishli city and across the region are minimal in the short to medium term.

The largest group of those who remain displaced from Quamishli city have left Syria, taking refuge in the KRI and Turkey as well as Europe and the Gulf. Refugee returns from these regions are unlikely without significant improvements in basic conditions. The continued uncertainty of the long-term political and security future of NES also acts as a deterrent to refugee returns, as there is currently no clear pathway to a political solution for NES, and the potential for Turkish and GoS offensives and shifts in control remain. While IDP returns to the city may be more feasible, there are not believed to be any notable IDP communities in Syria made up of original Quamishli residents.

Given these conditions, it is most likely that returns recorded in Quamishli in the coming year will continue to be return of those who recently experienced a short-term displacement from the city due to localized security incidents.

While largescale sustainable spontaneous voluntary returns remain unlikely, there is a potential for an increase in push factors in neighboring Turkey that could lead to higher volumes of return to the city over the next year. Turkey has gradually suspended issuing kimlik documents to Syrians, protection cards that serve as most Syrian refugees' legal basis for residence in the country, which has disincentivized movement to Turkey. In September 2021, Turkey also stopped offering free medical care to Syrians in state hospitals. While similar policies have been issued in the past, these developments may signal increasing pressure in the asylum space. Turkey is currently struggling with increased inflation and political unrest, which has led to concerns about increasing restrictions on Syrians in Turkey and potential deportations, concerns that are only likely to increase in the run up to the Turkey's general elections in mid-2023.
7.2. DISPLACEMENT PROSPECTS

Poor economic conditions, strains on basic service provision, and potential for escalation in the security situation as mentioned above as barriers to return also have the potential to become factors in displacement from Quamishli city if left unresolved. However, options for displacement from the city are limited. Pathways out of Syria are restricted and prospects for largescale crossline movements are minimal. While displacement to other areas of NES may be more accessible, it is likely that economic, service, and security deteriorations would be NES-wide, and not confined to Quamishli city, again limiting options for where people seek refuge.

However, Quamishli does face some unique conditions that have and are likely to continue to cause population movements. As a center of the Self Administration, Quamishli city is especially subject to enforcement of its conscription and education policies, which continue to drive small scale but regular displacement of youth and relocation of families from the city. Additionally, divided Self Administration-GoS control of the city has repeatedly proven to be a flash point for clashes and may again lead to short term displacements from the city over the coming year.

Finally, as noted above, in the absence of a clear solution for the future political and security status of the region, the potential for large scale conflict, and largescale displacement, remains. The potential for such an escalation is explored in depth in RCM Thematic Report 6: Operation Peace Spring and Potential Turkish Intervention Scenarios. Overall, an offensive directly targeted at Quamishli city appears unlikely. Nevertheless, in addition to causing largescale displacement, a sustained Turkish offensive against the city would likely lead to the collapse of the Self Administration. Targeting another area along the border may be more likely, and, like OPS, would lead to both short-term displacement from Quamishli city and the arrival of additional IDPs to the city.