

Curricula in Afrin: Between "Turkification" and Restrictions on the Kurdish Language





Curricula in Afrin: Between "Turkification" and Restrictions on the Kurdish Language

Invoking the spirit of Article 43 of The Hague Regulations of 1907, Article 47 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the occupying power from making fundamental changes to the institutions and laws existing in the occupied territories

Cover Picture: Syrian students carrying the Turkish flag in a classroom in one of Afrin's schools after 2018. Credit: Anadoluimages.





Contents

Background	5
Methodology	6
Introduction	7
The Afrin Region	9
Three Different Curricula in Less than Ten Years	10
GOS Curricula	10
AANES Curricula.....	10
Under Turkey's Control.....	13
Status of the Kurdish Language in Afrin	20
The Role of the Kurdish Bloc within the SOC.....	22
Education under the Turkification Policy.....	26
Kurdish Students in Afrin.....	29
Syria's Linguistic Policies toward the Kurdish Language	32
Legal Opinion and Recommendations	34





About the partner organizations:



Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.



We are a group of Afrin's daughters and sons who love its soil and are devoted to its olive groves. In honour of the history of our ancestors and their struggle for the people and land; for the trees to reclaim their splendour; and for families and loved ones to return to their mountains, plains, and homes, we founded Lêlûn as the first step on the path towards justice and the restoration of rights to their owners.

Seeking to achieve justice, several young men and women from Afrin, with different ethnic, religious, social, and political affiliations, came together to establish the Lêlûn Association for the Victims of Violations in Afrin. The association aims to help all victims equally, defend their rights, and channel their voices.





1. Background

Contemporary Syria, since its inception, has not once witnessed official recognition of the Kurdish language, with its use constantly banned in the official domain and even in the public sphere. The successive Syrian governments have forbidden Kurdish communities to open institutes or centers to teach their language. Worse yet, they persecuted and arrested those who tried to teach Kurdish or issued prints using it. The only exception came during the French Mandate (1920-1946) when the French authorities allowed Kurdish intellectuals to publish periodicals in Kurdish.

With the evacuation of the French forces, the Arab nationalist ideology established its dominance over the Syrian landscape and maintained hegemony as it proceeded with projects to melt into its pot the different nationalities existing in Syria. To this end, Arab nationalists deployed constitutions the governments adopted over a series of military coups and later by the government of the United Arab Republic (UAR) of Syria and Egypt.

The policy of "forced assimilation" peaked in the aftermath of the 1963 *coup d'état*, led and celebrated by a group of officers affiliated with the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party (hereinafter Ba'ath Party) as *Thawrat al-Thamen min Athar* (March 8th Revolution). In the following years, the Ba'ath Party, the ruling party, inscribed its ideology into several articles of the [1973 Constitution](#). The extent of the incorporation of the Ba'athist mind-set in that constitution is evident especially in Article 1, which includes several "Arab nationalist" terms, such as "the state of the Federation of the Arab Republics," "the Syrian Arab Republic," "the Syrian Arab country," "the Arab homeland," and "the Arab nation."

With the decades-long stress on the Arab identity and language, the first time that educational bodies managed to develop Kurdish curricula was after the sweeping March 2011 protests and the subsequent withdrawal of the government of Syria (GOS) from areas that are Kurdish-majority or have large Kurdish populations. The administrative entities of the GOS no longer operated in Afrin, Kobanî (Ayn al-Arab), and al-Hasakah in the summer of 2012, which then became under the control of the Democratic Union Party (PYD).

In 2014, the PYD established the Autonomous Administration, which is a federal governing regional body hinged on a self-issued social contract. Under the contract, the administration declared Kurdish, Arabic, and Syriac as the three official languages in its areas of governance and especially in the Afrin region, while guaranteeing the right of the various ethnic communities in the region to learn their original languages. Next, the administration rolled out two versions of the school curricula, one in Kurdish for Kurdish students and another in Arabic for Arab students. However, the administration faced harsh criticism for some of the ideas it included in the curricula. Detractors accused it of propagandizing some of the school materials to indoctrinate students with the ideas of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

However, the Afrin region was soon to see another set of curricula. In March 2018, the Turkish military and affiliated Syrian armed opposition groups launched Operation Olive Branch into Afrin and ultimately controlled it. Afterward, the Ministry of Education of the Syrian Interim Government (SIG)—an offshoot of the Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC), developed its curricula. The ministry also changed school hours assigned to subjects, dedicating four hours to Turkish and four to Kurdish. Nevertheless, the ministry then cut the Kurdish language hours





down to half, allowing for two hours only and, in some cases, one, while several schools dropped the subject altogether on the pretext of lacking Kurdish language teachers.

In tandem, Turkey and the ministry imposed the Turkish language on Syrian Kurds and Arabs who fled hostilities in their areas and sought refuge in the Afrin region. Additionally, they used the Turkish language course books to promote Turkish nationalist and religious figures and personalities, who are alien to the Syrian cultural and social environments.

Notably, Turkey's meddling with education in the region did not stop at the limits of the curricula and passed into the administrative sphere. The authorities of the Turkish occupation issued a decree signed by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan under Additional Article 30 of the Higher Education Institutions Regulation Law No. 2809 and Additional Article 39 of the Higher Education Law No. 2547.¹ The decree established a Turkish Ministry of Education in Afrin city and attached it to the Gaziantep University. Nevertheless, the decree did not provide for initiating a Department of Kurdish Literature, which could have supplemented schools with needed academically trained teachers.

Today, Kurdish is a secondary language. While it ranks fourth after Arabic, Turkish, and English in terms of class hours, it remains an elective and non-credited class in middle and high schools. The status of the Kurdish language is ironic. Turkish, the language of the occupation, supersedes Kurdish, the language of native communities, with the former gaining superiority through class hours, quality of teachers, scientific status attributed to it, and applicability towards higher degrees within the territories of the Syrian State.

Notably, the policies geared towards marginalizing the Kurdish language—while triggering sentiments of injustice within Kurdish communities, are reminiscent of decades of discrimination. Simultaneous with the systemic denial of their linguistic rights, Kurds continue to experience daily discrimination and harassment for speaking their language by teachers or IDPs.

2. Methodology

In this paper, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) presents two sets of information. First, STJ includes data collected through monitoring and documentation efforts of the methods and dynamics governing the Kurdish language instruction in the Afrin region. Second, STJ provides the accounts obtained through 10 extensive interviews with students, parents, administrative staffers currently in Afrin, and IDPs from the Afrin region who fled their homes to areas in Northeastern Syria but continue to contact the locals who remained in Afrin almost daily.

To carry out interviews, STJ designed targeted interview forms, each containing questions relevant to the cluster of interviewees met. STJ conducted most of the interviews online from late December 2021 to the second half of 2022.

Notably, STJ will withhold the real names and positions of the interviewees at their request for fear of persecution by the factions controlling their areas and potential arrest on charges of affiliation with or working for the Autonomous Administration.

¹ "Turkish University Offering Education in Northern Syria", Anadolu Agency, 25 November 2019. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/education/turkish-university-offering-education-in-northern-syria/1654838>





In terms of structure, STJ has divided the paper into five sections. The first section provides an overview of the three curricula imposed on Afrin's locals—previously the curricula of the GOS and the Autonomous Administration and presently the SIG's, which are mixed and include materials from Turkish curricula. The second section sheds light on the status of the Kurdish language in the Afrin region and the roles political and military forces play in sustaining it. The third section delves into the policy of Turkification Turkey is enforcing in the region. The fourth section discusses the impact of learning in mother tongue on children, particularly on students in the early stages of education. In its fifth and final section, the paper approaches linguistic policies successive Syrian governments have been applying since the inception of Syria.

3. Introduction

The ongoing conflict continues to wreak havoc on the education system in Syria. Since 2011, numerous schools and educational facilities have been documented as out of service because they were either destroyed in hostilities or repurposed and used as makeshift housing centers for IDPs or military headquarters for armed groups.² Staff shortages also continue to affect the quality of education adversely because several staffers are internally displaced or have fled the country altogether.

In addition to war-damaged resources, the educational system in areas with Kurdish populations, particularly in the Afrin region, has been critically shaken by rapid governance changes. In less than ten years, the Afrin region has had at least three administrations, each with a different ideology often mainstreamed through education with no regard for the rights of the students.

Notably, there are no official figures about the exact number of school or university students from the Afrin region who lost many years of schooling due to the turbulent administrative shifts. Kurdish students remain deprived of education under the control of Turkey and affiliated armed groups, struggling with deliberate educational neglect—especially denial of access to instruction in their mother language.

Educational neglect became rife in the region following Operation Olive Branch on 18 March 2018, which, according to Amnesty International,³ led to Turkey's occupation of Afrin, held by several Turkey-backed armed opposition groups today. In the wake of the incursion, SIG-

² "Syria at War: Eight Years On", United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2020. Document coded E/ESCWA/CL 3.SEP/2020/TOP.5, p. 29.

<https://archive.unescwa.org/publications/syria-war-eight-years>

Also see: "UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore: Briefing to the Security Council on the situation for children in Syria", UNICEF, February 2020.

<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-executive-director-henrietta-fore-briefing-security-council-situation>

Also see: Abed Rabbo, Shuruq. "Problems of Syrian Education under the Crisis: Elementary Stage as a Model" (In Arabic), graduation project from the Syrian International Academy for Training and Development, p. 11.

<https://sia-sy.net/researches-final-projects>

Also See: "Schools in Syria Map – E7", ACU, 2022.

https://acu-sy.org/imu_reports/schools-in-syria-07-interactive-2022/

³ "Syria: Turkey must stop serious violations by allied groups and its own forces in Afrin", Amnesty International, 2 August 2018.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/syria-turkey-must-stop-serious-violations-by-allied-groups-and-its-own-forces-in-afrin/>





affiliated local councils replaced the Kurdish curricula with ones that prioritize Arabic and Turkish as equally primary languages while assigning limited class hours to Kurdish language instruction for Kurdish students. The SIG opted for these curricula ignoring that the Afrin region was a Kurdish-majority area, with Kurds making up over 90% of the population before the occupation.⁴

The curricula changes have presented the Afrin students with massive challenges. Many students struggle with understanding SIG-dictated course materials since they are not well-versed in Arabic. These students do not speak or write Arabic efficiently after being taught all-Kurdish curricula in previous years.⁵



Syrian students carrying the Turkish flag in a classroom in one of Afrin's schools after 2018. Credit: Anadoluimages.

⁴ "Actual Percentage of Arabs in Afrin, Syrian Kurdistan, is Less Than 2%" (in Arabic), Rudaw, 18 November 2017. <https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/kurdistan/181120179>

Also see: Al-Kate', Muhannad, "The Human Geography of Kurds in Syria" (in Arabic), Our Syria, 13 November 2021. <https://our-syria.com/55845/>

⁵ "Killing Mother Tongues as a form of the Continued Cultural Genocide in Syria", STJ, 22 February 2021. <https://stj-sy.org/en/killing-mother-tongues-as-a-form-of-the-continued-cultural-genocide/>





4. The Afrin Region

Afrin is one of Syria's Kurdish-majority regions, located in the northwestern parts of the country and administratively affiliated with Aleppo province. In addition to Muslim Kurds, the region is home to Yazidi and Alawite Kurdish communities.⁶

The population count of the Afrin region changed dramatically over the course of the conflict. Estimations of the region's pre-conflict population indicate that Afrin was home to a maximum of 200,000 persons.⁷ Afrin's population hit over twice that figure during the war, as the region received between 200,000 and 300,000 IDPs from other Syrian territories.⁸

Like locals in other Syrian areas, Afrin's residents partook in protests against the GOS. With the growing opposition, the GOS gradually retreated from the area, which in 2013 was controlled by the People's Protection Units (YPG)—that Turkey deems an extension to the PKK. In January 2014, the Afrin region became one of the three counties the Autonomous Administration governs.

Notably, during the PYD's reign, Afrin was a safe destination for a large number of IDPs who fled extensive hostilities in areas such as Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and Raqqa. Many of these IDPS also relocated their businesses, small soap and clothing factories, to the region from Aleppo. However, the situation changed when Turkey announced Operation Olive Branch on 20 January 2018.

The battles for Afrin began in early 2018 after negotiations between Russia and the YPG failed because the latter refused to remove its forces from the region and surrender it to the GOS forces. In response, Russia withdrew its small military base near Kafr Janneh village to Tall Rifat city on 19 January 2018. The base relocation was Russia's greenlight to Turkey to proceed with the incursion.

Turkey established control over the Afrin region after two months of fierce battles. Notably, the ensuing Russia-Turkey understanding about the Afrin region caused the complete collapse of the "de-escalation" agreement,⁹ to which Turkey was a guarantor State within the context of

⁶ The Afrin region includes seven towns: Bulbul, Rajo, Sharran, Maabatli/Mabeta, Shaykh Al Hadid (Şiyê), and Jindires, in addition to the city center of Afrin. According to unofficial statistics, the population of Afrin is estimated at 800,000 people. A large segment of Afrin's Kurds lives in the Ashrafiyeh and Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhoods in Aleppo. Only 9,000 Arabs reside in the region, making up less than 2% of Afrin's population. Also see: "Actual Percentage of Arabs in Afrin, Syrian Kurdistan, is Less Than 2%" (in Arabic), Rudaw, 18 November 2017.

<https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/kurdistan/181120179>

Also see: "Demographics of Syria" (In Arabic), Heritage for Peace. <http://www.heritageforpeace.org/syria-country-information/geography/?lang=ar>

⁷ "Syrian Arab Republic - Population Statistics", the figures include population numbers and demographic indicators from the 2004 census:

<https://data.humdata.org/dataset/syrian-arab-republic-other-0-0-0-0-0-0-0>

⁸ "Demographic Change in Afrin" (in Arabic), VDC, 17 July 2019. <https://vdc-nsy.com/archives/20694>

Also see: Interactive map of Syrian areas, showing population displacement and return movements in northern Syria, August 2022.

<https://data.humdata.org/dataset/population-displacement-and-return-movements-in-northern-syria>

⁹ "De-escalation Zones in Syria: Where and How?" (In Arabic), Aljazeera, 4 May 2017.

<https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2017/5/4/%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%82-%D8%AE%D9%81%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B1->





the Astana Process. The onset of Turkey's incursion went parallel to the large-scale land grabs the GOS started in Eastern Ghouta, one of the regions included in the de-escalation agreement.¹⁰

The incursion had devastating effects on the Afrin region. The Turkish operation did not only change the population count, but it also critically transformed its demographics. A 2019 census by the Afrin City Local Council shows that 23,964 families live in the region, only 35% of whom are local Kurds and members of Arab tribes. The remaining families are IDPS, 35% of whom are from Damascus and its countryside, 13% from Aleppo, 5% from Homs, 3% from Deir ez-Zor, and 9% from various other Syrian territories.¹¹

5. Three Different Curricula in Less than Ten Years

The educational experience of the Afrin region remains a unique case within the Syrian context. Afrin's students have been exposed to three distinct and, most importantly, conflicted curricula since the start of the war.

5.1. GOS Curricula

Since it claimed power in 1963, the Ba'ath Party has constantly used education to forward its ideology. It made Arabic the language of instruction and used civics textbooks to disseminate its ideas and visions.

Beyond language and curricula, the party acted on a third level to inject its ideology into the educational system and ensure an extensive spread of its mindset within society. The party has established Ba'athist student organizations and continues to force students at various levels to join them. These student groups include the Ba'ath Vanguard's Organization, the Revolutionary Youth Union, and the National Union of Syrian Students.

5.2. AANES Curricula

In 2012, after the GOS forces withdrew from the Kurdish-majority areas of Afrin, Kobani (Ayn al-Arab), and al-Hasakah, the PYD took over and established control over the entirety of the Afrin region. In 2014, the PYD and several other Kurdish, Arab, and Syriac parties founded a federal governing body—which had different names until it settled into today's Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANE). The AANES hinges on its self-issued social contract, under which Kurdish, Arabic, and Syriac are the official languages in the areas it

<https://hdl.handle.net/1814/63745>

¹⁰ AL-HILU, Khayrallah. "Afrin under Turkish control : political, economic and social transformations," Middle East Directions (MED), Wartime and Post-Conflict in Syria, 2019/10 - <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/63745>

¹¹ "Only 35% of the Afrin Population is Indigenous" (in Arabic), AlModon, 17 April 2019.

<https://www.almodon.com/arabworld/2019/4/17/%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B5%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-35>

Also see: Interactive map of Syrian areas, showing population displacement and return movements in northern Syria, August 2022.

<https://data.humdata.org/dataset/population-displacement-and-return-movements-in-northern-syria>





controls. In addition to official recognition of these languages, the contract guarantees the right of the diverse communities in the region to learn their mother tongues.¹²

Furthermore, the AANES rolled out new curricula in the Afrin region, which reflected its politics and were used to make a political, rather than an educational or a cultural, statement. The AANES linked all the educational institutions in the region to its Executive Body and affiliated them with its Committee of Education. Notably, between the school year 2012-2013 and mid-2013-2014, the Kurdish Language Foundation and the Teachers of the Western Kurdistan Union administrated these institutions.¹³

With the new curricula came an educational observatory body. The AANES founded a new system to oversee education in its regions and called it The Education System of the Democratic Society. Under its mantle, the system had all education-related committees, the Kurdish Language Institute, and centers and academies that use Kurdish for instruction. The AANES enforced the system in its three counties and other affiliated areas, including Tal Abyad, Sarrin, and al-Shahbaa region, which includes the cities of Manbij, al-Bab, and A'zaz. Under this system, students learned three languages over three stages. Over the first three grades, learners are taught and instructed in their mother tongue. In grade four, they start learning a second local language, whereby Kurdish students start having Arabic language courses, and Arab peers take Kurdish language courses. In grade six, all students begin learning a foreign language, such as English.¹⁴

Notably, STJ collected a dataset of the numbers of education facilities, staffers, and students during the AANES's control of Afrin. The region had 311 schools, including 261 elementary and 50 middle and high schools. In terms of staff, the AANES hired 2327 teachers and 589 higher education instructors. Moreover, the dataset shows that 38,000 students attended elementary school, including 27,000 who learned in Kurdish and 11,000 in Arabic, and 8000 students attended middle and high schools. Additionally, the AANES founded the University of Afrin, which included the faculties of medicine, engineering, economics, and literature (including the Kurdish language department). The university also established the seven

¹² Brunaccioni, Dominic. "Withering Branch: The Story of Afrin and its Peoples, Pre & Post Operation Olive Branch", Washington Kurdish Institute, 9 March 2022. <https://dckurd.org/2022/03/09/withering-branch-the-story-of-afrin-and-its-peoples-pre-post-operation-olive-branch/>

¹³ "The AANES and kurdification of Education" (In Arabic), Enab Baladi, 17 April 2016. <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/74403>

¹⁴ "Education under the AANES: Mother Tongue a Priority and Disrecognition of Curricula an Obstacle" (in Arabic), Suwar, 21 December 2016.

<https://www.suwar-magazine.org/articles/1411-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%84%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85-%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AC-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%82-%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A5%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D8%B7%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%85-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3>





institutes of medicine, engineering, topography, music and theater, business management and Kurdish language.¹⁵

On 17 November 2014, the AANES decided to make Kurdish the only language of textbooks and instruction. With the linguistic uniformity of the curricula, some dimensions of the educational process in the Afrin region began to echo the PPK's ideology and intellectual fundamentals.

The Afrin Administrative Council initiated the curricula changes ordering the education committee in the region to replace the curricula for the 2014-2015 school year. The committee introduced all-Kurdish curricula to the first three grades. In 2015, all elementary school curricula, from grades 1 to 6, were all in Kurdish, with course hours assigned to Arabic starting from the 4th grade and English from the 5th grade.¹⁶ The schools taught all-Kurdish courses to Kurdish students, while they taught Arab students, in separate classrooms, the GOS curricula in addition to Kurdish language courses starting from the 4th grade.¹⁷

However, the AANES's educational plan did not progress smoothly in the Afrin region. Schools in Afrin city and its suburbs struggled with logistic and technical shortages and had no printed textbooks for nearly four years. The AANES failed to meet the needs of the area's populations, comprised of locals and IDPs—which unofficial statistics indicated amounted to 500,000 persons at the time.

Another critical factor hampered education in the Afrin region. Schools lacked trained staffers after the AANES started administrating the area because the GOS instructed its education staff against cooperating with the administration, threatening to punish offenders. Therefore, the issue of teachers remained a dilemma even though the AANES's education committee trained nearly 1000 Kurdish language teachers in a year. The residents harshly criticized the trainees for their ineligibility because many had no university degrees or higher institute diplomas.¹⁸

¹⁵ "Training Afrin's Teachers in New Curricula" (In Arabic), ANF, 9 August 2015.

<https://anfarabic.com/akhr-l-khbr/tjhyz-lmdrsyn-l-lmnh-ljdyd-lltdrys-fy-mdrs-fryn-20904%D8%9B>

Also see: Mulla Rashid, Bedir. "Education in AANES-Held Areas" (In Arabic), Omran Center for Strategic Studies. 15 November 2016.

<https://www.omrandirasat.org/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AB/%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%AB%D9%8A%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A9.html>

Also see: "Syrian Kurds Risk Opening a University in Afrin in while Hoping for Future International Recognition" (In Arabic), al-Monitor, 18 May 2016.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/ar/contents/articles/originals/2016/05/kurds-rojava-afrin-first-university-ideology-ocalan.html>

¹⁶ "Education in AANES-Held Areas", previous source.

¹⁷ "Afrin: Women a Priority in All-Kurdish Curricula" (In Arabic), Rozana, 15 December 2015.

<https://www.rozana.fm/ar/reports/2015/12/15/%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AC-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A3%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%84%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9>

¹⁸ "Education in AANES-Held Areas", previous source.





For a comment on the status of education during the AANES's control of the Afrin region, STJ carried out extensive interviews with several locals. One of the interviewees was Nazli,¹⁹ a stay-at-home mother of two and former teacher. She recounted:

"The curricula of the AANES had poor quality. The course materials were extensively ideologized, spoke about Öcalan, presented distorted values, and defamed women and marriage, especially in the *Jineolojî* (women studies) classes. The teachers were unqualified and did not have the slightest idea about education."

Other interviewees that STJ met with said that the curricula were full of mistakes and gaps, needed thorough revisions, were overtly propagandist and lacked national and international recognition. Furthermore, the interviewees pointed out other obstacles that undermined the purposes of the curricula, including the qualification of teachers, needed teaching plans, school facilities, and furniture, among others.²⁰

Notably, another factor contributed to the instability and the dysfunctionality of education-related structures in the Afrin region. The overlap between service and administrative institutions of the GOS and the AANES had immediate repercussions for education. This conflation only worsened the already disrupted education in the region. Additionally, the AANES's desire to establish its de facto authority aggravated the situation further because it had neither detailed educational plans nor qualified staffers capable of implementing its guidelines.²¹ Contrary to AANES's vision, the imposition of curricula prompted parents to stop sending their children to schools, which caused the dropout phenomenon to spread across the region and triggered families to relocate to other areas, especially Aleppo.²²

5.3. Under Turkey's Control

Following Operation Olive Branch on 18 March 2018, Turkey and affiliated Syrian factions established control across the Afrin region. Both the hostilities and accompanying violations

¹⁹ Nazli is a pseudonym. The interviewee is based in Rajo district in the Afrin region and was interviewed through Telegram on 9 February 2022.

²⁰ Khalil, Ibrahim. "AANES's All-Kurdish Curricula" (in Arabic), Medarat Kurd, 8 December 2015 (Last visited: 11 February 2023).

<https://www.medaratkurd.com/2015/12/%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B0%D8%A7/>

²¹ "AANES Shuts Down Centers Teaching Arabic Curricula in Afrin" (In Arabic), Enab Baladi, 31 May 2016.

<https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/82171>

²² "AANES Curricula: Syrians Experience New Form of Displacement" (In Arabic), New Arab, 3 November 2017.

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%8B-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1>

Also see: "AANES Threatens to Punish Parents who Send Children to Syrian Government Schools" (in Arabic), Rudaw TV., 3 October 2018.

<https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/kurdistan/031020182>

Also see: "Despite Recognition Demands: AANES's Curricula Remain Untrusted by Qamishli Parents" (in Arabic), Enab Baladi, 27 January 2021. <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/452232>





forced nearly 137,000 locals to flee Afrin. The escape of residents was not the only impact the operation had on the region because Turkey and the factions subsequently made critical administrative alterations. They dismantled the AANES's structures, abolished its regulations and laws, linked Afrin to the Turkish state of Hatay, and assigned it a Turkish governor.²³

The alterations took a toll on the stability the region achieved under the AANES's control, as they disrupted the education of dozens of thousands of students, obliterated the Kurdish culture that gained prominence at the time, and adversely influenced the coexistence among the region's diverse communities.²⁴

The Turkish authorities and the factions shut down schools and educational centers, demolished others, or looted their contents, including the facilities of the university and its affiliated higher institutes. Consequently, they deprived all the region's children of completing their school year. Thousands of students fled their homes with their parents to north Aleppo, where only a small segment started attending poorly equipped schools that IDPs themselves founded and funded.²⁵

In early October 2018, the Turkish authorities decided to open schools ignoring the region's dire humanitarian conditions and neglecting school preparations, which should have started in advance. To resume education, Turkey delegated the matter to the SIG's education ministry, which operates under the supervision of the Turkish education ministry represented by the education committee in Hatay. Additionally, Turkey established a ministry of education in the Olive Branch Strip²⁶ and canceled both the AANES and the GOS curricula,²⁷ promising locals to inscribe Kurdish language courses into the curricula it was to roll out.

For a comment on education under Turkey's control, STJ reached out to Abu Raizan,²⁸ an education official within one of the region's local councils. He narrated:

"After Turkey and the armed groups entered the region, there were no longer any prerequisites for hiring teachers because the region was almost depopulated. We had

²³ "2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic", OCHA, 1 March 2019.

<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/whole-of-syria/document/2019-humanitarian-needs-overview-syrian-arab-republic-0>

Also see: "Ankara is Said to Appoint Governor in Afrin and Link it to Antakya" (In Arabic), DW, 31 March 2018.

<https://www.dw.com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A3%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8D-%D9%88%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B7%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A9/a-43212315>

²⁴ "Afrin under Turkish Control: Political, Economic and Social Transformations", previous source.

²⁵ "Turkey Denies 38,000 Kurdish Students Education in their Mother Tongue" (In Arabic), Hafryat, 9 September 2019. <https://hafryat.com/ar/blog/%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%85-38-%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%81-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D9%83%D9%8F%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85>

²⁶ Directorate of Education in the Olive Branch Strip, Official Facebook page,

<https://www.facebook.com/ZeytinDali777/>

²⁷ "Afrin: Kurdish Language Cancelled and Arabic Dominates All School Curricula" (in Arabic), Rudaw, 14 July 2018.

<https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/kurdistan/14072018>

²⁸ A pseudonym. STJ reached out to the interviewee through Telegram on 11 February 2022.





to search for degree holders, even those with only middle and high school diplomas, to assign them to schools. The majority refused the job because they were anxious about the unknown future. Later, we opened six schools in the district, and Arab IDPs started settling in Afrin and its sub-districts. Then, the new authorities began discharging local Kurdish teachers and hiring IDPs in their places. They faked charges for the former teachers, accused them of affiliation with the AANES when it controlled the area, brought them before the court, and fined each a sum of 600 Turkish Liras (TL)."

As they changed the staff, the new authorities introduced new curricula, revised by the SIG. Schoolwork also included Kurdish language courses for Kurdish students and Turkish language courses for all students because Turkish became a primary language at the region's schools.²⁹

Abu Raizan added:

"Turkey and Syrian armed opposition groups have repeatedly attempted to cancel the Kurdish language courses, alleging that locals did not know the language. Despite objections from locals, they cut Kurdish language class hours to two a week, prioritizing sharia and religious subjects instead."

Notably, the new curricula were an amended version of the GOS's curricula. The GIS supervised the edits through its ministry of education, founded in mid-2014. On 4 June of the same year, the ministry started its activities through affiliated directorates of education in the provinces of Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Latakia, Damascus, Rif Dimashq (Damascus' countryside), Homs, Daraa, and Quneitra.³⁰ However, with the successive changes in control, the ministry today only runs the education sector in opposition-held areas in Aleppo—including Jarabulus, A'zaz, al-Bab, Afrin, Idlib, Raqqa—including Tal Abyad, and al-Hasakah— including Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê.³¹

²⁹ Abu Shams, Mustafa. "Afrin's Schools under Turkey's Auspices" (in Arabic), Al-Jumhuriya, 12 November 2019.

<https://aljumhuriya.net/ar/2019/11/12/%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A9/>

³⁰ SIG Minister of Education Emad Barq. [AlAan TV]. (2016, 11 July). *Education in Areas Outside the Regime's Control—Reality and Horizons! Open Session, EP. 112* [Video]. YouTube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=no_iwIjrnw

³¹ The SIG Ministry of Education starts elementary and high school exams for the school year 2021-2022 in the liberated areas, the website of the Syrian Interim Government, 4 June 2022:

<https://www.syriaig.net/ar/2602/content/%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A3-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A9-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85->





Under Turkey's control, the number of schools across the region plummeted from 324 to 204, hosting nearly 45,000 students, with various media reports covering the repurposing of several facilities into Turkish army stations.³² Additionally, the number of Kurdish students decreased to nearly 30% compared to 95% before the military operation, while 70% of today's school attendees are Arabs and Turkmen. Furthermore, Kurdish language was assigned only a few class hours after it was a core subject.³³

STJ interviewed Nadir for insights on the critical changes in the region.³⁴ From Afrin and a father of two students, he narrated:

"Kurdish students constitute only 30% of Afrin's total number of schoolgoers. Additionally, the number of schools decreased to half because several facilities were turned into military centers and barracks. Our children are denied their right to education. They have hired IDP teachers for all school subjects, but these hold fake degrees and are underqualified. Furthermore, the staff demonstrates no interest in the ethical dimensions of education while we continue to struggle with chaos and lack of discipline. I agree that scientific subjects are necessary and useful, but the teachers are inexperienced. Furthermore, there has been unfair treatment of languages and the distribution of school hours to relevant courses. Therefore, I am unsatisfied with our children's knowledge of Kurdish, their mother tongue."

STJ also met with Zaki,³⁵ a linguist and retired teacher. He narrated:

"The Turkish education ministry had issued a decree assigning four class hours to Kurdish and Turkish."

At the organizational level, Turkey's education ministry affiliated the Afrin region administratively with the education directorate in Hatay province. The directorate oversees the educational system through The Directorate for Lifelong Learning.³⁶

<https://www.alkhabar-sy.com/60409-2/>
<https://www.hawarnews.com/ar/haber/baltfasyi-anha-tkshf-an-mqrat-wsiwn-alahtlal-altrky-wmrtzqth-fy-afryn-almhtlh-h69357.html>

³² "Turkey Transforms Schools in Occupied Afrin into Military Centers and Prisons" (In Arabic), AlKhabar, 14 August 2019. <https://www.alkhabar-sy.com/60409-2/>

Also see: "ANHA Reveals Details about Military Centers and Prisons of Turkish Occupation and Affiliated Mercenaries in Occupied Afrin" (In Arabic), ANHA, 4 August 2022.

<https://www.hawarnews.com/ar/haber/baltfasyi-anha-tkshf-an-mqrat-wsiwn-alahtlal-altrky-wmrtzqth-fy-afryn-almhtlh-h69357.html>

³³ "Afrin: 70% of the Students are Arabs and Turkmen" (In Arabic), Rudaw TV, 9 May 2019.

<https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/kurdistan/09052019>

Also see: "Afrin: Kurdish Cancelled and Arabic Made Mandatory in All School Curricula" (in Arabic), Rudaw, 14 July 2018. <https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/kurdistan/14072018>

³⁴ A pseudonym.

³⁵ A pseudonym. STJ met with the interviewee in person in the city of Qamishli/Qamihslo.

³⁶ The General Directorate for Lifelong Learning (Hayat Boyu Öğrenme Genel Müdürlüğü) is one of the institutions of the Turkish Ministry of Education. It is concerned with open or distance education, with branches across Turkey. Of the directorate's widespread educational institutes are the popular education centers (Halk Eğitim Merkezleri)





Turkey has distributed the administration of the educational sector to the three directorates of education in Afrin and suburbs, Rajo and Jindires districts, which abide by and apply the Turkish administrative instructions and regulations on school days and official holidays. Additionally, Turkey has delegated supervisors to monitor the three areas after it reactivated the educational sector; first, by restoring the majority of school facilities destroyed during hostilities, and second, by hiring staffers, whom it later presented with qualification training.³⁷

Speaking about the Turkish-enforced education structure, Abu Raizan said:

“The majority of the staff in the education sector are directly linked to the Turkish government and work under the supervision of Turkish coordinators. Each district has a coordinator, who remains the top official and supervisor over its schools. The coordinators operate under the Turkish coordinator in Afrin city, who channels to them Turkey’s instructions.”

While Turkey’s Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) handles the logistical dimensions of the education process,³⁸ the Turkey Maarif Foundation prints textbooks and pays the salaries of teachers,³⁹ whom Turkey hires through a process of admission examinations. Additionally, the foundation has opened several educational centers and university faculties in the region.⁴⁰

Controlling teachers and school materials, Turkey managed to inscribe its vision into the curricula taught in schools across the areas it occupies in the Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, and Peace Spring strips. Turkey mandated the Turkish language as a primary school subject for all grades⁴¹ and enforced caveats to negative references to the Turkish State or the Ottoman Empire.⁴²

which offer language, music, drawing, and computer courses. These centers also provide after-school programs, helping students with regular schoolwork after school hours or on weekends. The other tasks the directorate carries out include developing and implementing emergency education policies; offering educational activities in affiliated centers; designing curricula and education materials, and cooperating with national and international education entities under conditions of migration and emergency.

<http://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/www/goc-ve-acil-durum-egitim-dair>

³⁷ Training the Teachers Program in Afrin: <https://www.ogretmenler.net/afrinde-ogretmen-egitimi-programi>

³⁸ “Afrin’s Schools Under Turkey’s Auspices”, previous source.

³⁹ The Turkey Maarif Foundation (Türkiye Maarif Vakfı) was established in 2016. It is considered Turkey’s only official representative in the domain of international education. <https://turkiyemaarif.org/page/532-hakkimiz>

⁴⁰ The Faculty of Education in Afrin comprises several departments, including education sciences, psychological guidance and counseling, elementary education, teacher training, and the Turkish language.

<https://dogm.meb.gov.tr/www/daire-baskani-yildiz-afrinde-ogretmen-egitimi-programina-katildi/icerik/1304>

⁴¹ “Turkish Language is Officially Part of North Aleppo Curricula” (In Arabic), Enab Baladi, 12 September 2017.

<https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/172475>

⁴² “Four approaches on the political and ideological map of conflicts are shaping the future of education in Syria”, Enab Baladi, 13 May 2018.

<https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2018/05/four-approaches-on-the-political-and-ideological-map-of-conflicts-are-shaping-the-future-of-education-in-syria/>

Also see: “Turkey and Policy of Turkification: What Is Going On in Northern Syria?” (In Arabic), Hafryat, 9 March 2019.

<https://hafryat.com/ar/blog/%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%AB-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%9F>





Abu Raizan confirmed to STJ that such pro-Turkey tendencies do govern education in the region, saying:

"All instructions come from Turkey directly. [The Turkish government] continues to attempt to change the region's concepts and norms during Turkish language hours."

In contrast to the stress laid upon the Turkish language, Zahir,⁴³ a teacher, pointed to the struggles facing the Kurdish language, including the schools' inability to hire qualified teachers. He narrated:

"We tried to recruit scientifically and academically qualified Kurdish language instructors. However, the military operation and the practices of the armed factions have displaced the majority of competent people. Therefore, we relied on those who could fluently speak and write the Kurdish language. However, this has presented us with a massive problem because these individuals do not have the required teaching skills. The city of Afrin lacks any specialized Kurdish language academy or a branch for Kurdish literature in the university, and it suffers from a severe shortage of teaching staff because those available are incompetent enough and underqualified."

Ahmad, a teaching specialist and school principal in Afrin,⁴⁴ also spoke to STJ about the dynamics they have in place for recruiting Kurdish language teachers and the degree of qualification maintained by teachers in SIG schools:

"Initially, schools hired teachers relying on connections and personal relationships. Then, they announced vacancies and recruitment competitions. However, the available Kurdish language teachers are underqualified because competent teachers have mostly fled their homes while there is no institute for teaching Kurdish in Afrin."

Unlike other interviewees, Ahmad believes that the hours assigned to the Kurdish language are adequate. He said:

"Considering the current circumstances in the region, the massive number of IDPs coming in, and the factions on the ground, four class hours are sufficient. However, when the situation stabilizes and locals return home, there will be a different opinion about the matter."

Notably, the directorates of education in the Afrin region function as executive entities, acting upon the instructions they often receive from the Turkish directorates. These instructions cover the school's administrative operations, hiring teachers, and official holidays. For instance, schools in Afrin have days off on the Turkish republic, child, sports, and youth days, while they ceased to celebrate Syrian official occasions, such as teacher and mother days. Additionally, Turkish directorates decide the school start and mid-term break dates.⁴⁵

⁴³ Pseudonym. The interviewee is a university graduate, working as a Kurdish language teacher. STJ interviewed him through Telegram on 6 February 2022.

⁴⁴ Pseudonym. STJ met with the interviewee through Telegram on 4 February 2022.

⁴⁵ "Afrin's Schools Under Turkey's Auspices", previous source.

Also see: "Turkey Continues Turkification Policy In Its Held Areas Northern Syria", North Press Agency, 6 January 2022. <https://npasyria.com/en/70390/>







6. Status of the Kurdish Language in Afrin

After it controlled the Afrin region, Turkey obliged schools to teach all subjects in Arabic, prioritized the Turkish language and religious education, and opened an Islamic high school in the fashion of the Turkish Imam Hatip schools.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the Turkish Religious Endowment, representing the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey and the President of Al-Zahra University, visited the region intending to initiate religious educational projects. The endowment organized courses and activities through schools and private associations,⁴⁷ including the Shabab al-Huda (Youth or Righteousness) association, which "promotes the neo-Ottomanist thought, under guises of enlightenment and guidance aimed at reforming the beliefs and ideas of the people."⁴⁸

Commenting on the critical changes Turkey made to the curricula in alignment with its agendas, Zaki said:

"The Turkish Ministry of Education had previously issued a decree allocating Turkish and Kurdish four class hours each. However, the [ministry] reduced Kurdish classes deliberately to weaken the Kurdish language and culture under the pretext of lacking teaching staff. They should provide institutes and academic centers that produce linguistic competencies, not reduce the number of Kurdish class hours to two and assign two additional hours for Islamic religious education, making them five hours a week, not to mention the continuous exclusion of Kurds from administrative positions in the education sector."

Notably, Turkey promised Afrin's residents to inscribe the Kurdish language into curricula because it is the mother tongue of a large number of locals and due to the challenges all-Arabic curricula would pose to the students schooled in Kurdish over the course of the AANES's control of the area. However, against its pledges, Turkey had tightened restrictions on the Kurdish communities in general and their use of Kurdish in particular.⁴⁹

On the demotion in the status of the Kurdish language, Abu Raizan narrated:

"Kurdish is a selective course for middle and high school students; they can attend the classes or drop them without consequences. Additionally, no finals are assigned for the Kurdish language, claiming that some areas are Arab-majority, where locals do not speak Kurdish. They use this claim knowing that these people do not speak Turkish

⁴⁶ "Turkey and Policy of Turkification: What Is Going On in Northern Syria?" previous source.

⁴⁷ Ceremony honoring those who had memorized Quran in Afrin:

<https://tdv.org/tr-TR/afrinde-hafizlar-icin-icazet-toreni/>

⁴⁸ "Syria's Afrin: A Kurdish Identity Caught in the Fires of Turkification Wars" (in Arabic), AlHurra, 12 January 2020.

<https://www.alhurra.com/latest/2020/01/21/%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%87%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%87%D8%A8-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83>

⁴⁹ Muhammad Sido, deputy head of Bulbulay City Local Council in Afrin, an interview with Rudaw TV, Afrin:

Excluding Kurdish and Imposing Arabic on Curricula, Rudaw, 14 June 2018.

<https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/kurdistan/14072018>





also. Despite this, they have allocated Turkish more hours than Kurdish. All this is an attempt at devaluing Kurdish and removing it from the curricula.”

While hostilities and concurrent and subsequent violations committed by the Syrian armed opposition groups forced most of Afrin’s university students and locals proficient in Kurdish to flee their homes, local councils continue to impose restrictions on the Kurdish language.⁵⁰ They do not only assign minimum hours to the Kurdish language, but they also marginalize it by making it a non-credited subject, ranking fourth in priority after Arabic, Turkish, and English.

Speaking to STJ about the disadvantaged status of the Kurdish language, Ahmad added:

“The fact that Kurdish is not mandatory is frustrating for students. They are discouraged, disinterested, and careless about their education. Additionally, IDP communities are not invested in Kurdish due to its current situation, causing the language to lose its symbolic, political, and identity-related value. In contrast, Turkish is mandatory and thus is credited. Therefore, it influences the students' success chances and affects their grade point average. Turkish is allocated four class hours a week.”

Moreover, Ahmad highlighted that Kurdish is not even taught in some of Afrin’s districts. He said:

“The class hours initially allocated to Kurdish were cut down from four to two a week, with these hours reassigned to Islamic religious education. Therefore, Kurdish has been marginalized. Additionally, schools in some parts of Afrin and its districts either do not teach Kurdish or allocate it only one hour a week, alleging that there are no teachers. Moreover, some locals applied for positions as Kurdish language teachers, but their applications were all rejected.”

For his part, Zaki said he is discontent with the status of the Kurdish language:

“We are unsatisfied with the status of Kurdish in the curricula as schools continue to tamper with its educational value, enforce discriminatory policies against our Kurdish children, and exclude them from decision-making positions in education departments. [Concerned authorities] must eliminate marginalization and discrimination against Kurds and invest more interest in the Kurdish language. Schools must allocate Kurdish at least four hours a week and offer teachers qualification training. Additionally, there must be Kurdish language institutes and university departments to improve its status.”

Commenting on the contents of the Kurdish language school materials, Zaki said:

“The Kurdish language textbooks include information about Kurdish customs, traditions, literature, and culture. Additionally, they offer insights into the works of contemporary and older Kurdish authors and historians, such as Ahmed Khani, Mullah Ahmad al-Jazarī, Osman Sabri, and Cegerxwîn (Jigarkhwin). The textbooks also contain Kurdish proverbs, highlight areas of normal life, health, and sports, and stress the value of education. The books also introduce students to the founder of the Kurdish

⁵⁰ The Human Rights Organization in Afrin discusses the status of the Kurdish language in the region", The Kurdish National Council, 30 September 2019. <https://www.r-enks.net/?p=21003>





alphabet, Prince Jaladat Ali Badirkhan. There are also excerpts from *Hawar* magazine, including a picture of the Kurdistan flag on its cover. Kurdish language textbooks are distributed free of charge. A statement in Arabic written on the last page of the Kurdish language book says: This book was printed for Syrian students by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Turkey.”

Within the local efforts to inscribe Kurdish into language teaching curricula in Free Aleppo University, in northern Syria, a delegation of Kurdish language experts from Afrin visited the presidency of the university, located in A'zaz city.⁵¹ The delegation proposed that the university also offer Kurdish language courses along with the other languages taught there. The university welcomed the proposal in case the delegation had qualified staff and necessary course materials. Indeed, the university advertised Kurdish language courses to be taught in its affiliated Higher Institute of languages, located in A'zaz, not Afrin. The course offers three levels over a period of two months.⁵²

7. The Role of the Kurdish Bloc within the SOC

The SOC—also known as the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces,⁵³ has several Kurdish parties within its ranks, including the Kurdish National Council (KNC),⁵⁴ the Association of Independent Syrian Kurds (AISK), and several independent Kurdish personalities.⁵⁵

The KNC joined the coalition on 27 August 2013. In the first clause of the membership agreement, the SOC pledges to “[c]onstitutionally recognize the national identity of the Kurdish people, consider the Kurdish issue an essential part of the national cause and the quest for democracy in the country, and identify the national rights of the Kurdish people within the framework of the unity of the Syrian land and people.”⁵⁶

Building on this agreement, the SIG’s education committee, based in Mardin, southeast of Turkey, issued a first-grade Kurdish language textbook. The committee officially rolled out the textbook in 2014-2015 and distributed it to schools in southeast Turkey that have large

⁵¹ A delegation of Kurdish language experts from Afrin discusses the possibility of inscribing the Kurdish language into language programs in the Free Aleppo University” (In Arabic), Association of Independent Syrian Kurds, 4 August 2022. <http://www.kks-sy.com/%D9%88%D9%81%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%B5%D8%B5-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%8A/>

Also see: Firat Haber Ajansı on Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/alfuratagency/posts/pfbid0nYocuqgb6dH22W8nF3tFJisWLqn37WrD2L6nPHYkS9or e7kbEYoM3DmT8thCFFpm/>

⁵² “Free Aleppo University in A'zaz Launches Kurdish Language Courses” (in Arabic), Syria TV, 15 August 2022. <https://www.syria.tv/179007>

⁵³ The National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces: <https://en.etilaf.org/>

⁵⁴ the Kurdish National Council (KNC): <https://en.r-enks.net/>

⁵⁵ The Association of Independent Syrian Kurds (AISK) was established in the Turkish city of Şanlıurfa on 11 June 2016. The association describes itself as an independent, voluntary, national Kurdish gathering active in the political, social, and developmental fields, including Kurdish independents from all segments of society who believe in the Syrian revolution, its goals, and its principles. It aims to communicate the independent Kurdish voice to various local, regional, and international platforms. <http://www.kks-sy.com/>

⁵⁶ “Document of the Agreement between the Kurdish National Council and the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces” (In Arabic), ARK, 20 October 2018. <https://www.arknews.net/ar/node/3780>





numbers of Kurdish students—these schools are founded by international organizations to accommodate refugee Syrian students in Turkey. The committee stipulated that schools teach the textbook exclusively in Kurdish and use the Latin alphabet. Notably, textbooks for the remaining grades were supposed to be designed when the SIG had expanded its education committee.⁵⁷

On 10 May 2020, the AISK followed the KNC's steps and joined the SOC.⁵⁸ However, unlike the KNC, the AISK had an active role in the Afrin region. On the evening of Turkey's control of Afrin city, the AISK held a conference in Gaziantep city to form a local council and an administration for the region⁵⁹ and opened a representative office in Afrin.⁶⁰

For its part, the KNC, as the SOC's representative of the Kurdish component, had no role in the administration of the Afrin region. The KNC neither partook in forming local councils that run the service sector in Afrin nor the security entities there. The KNC did not even summon its Syrian Peshmerga forces deployed in Iraq, which it repeatedly demanded to be allowed into the east of the Euphrates to participate in managing the area with the SDF.⁶¹

⁵⁷ "SIG Finishes Work on First-Grade Kurdish Language Textbook" (In Arabic), Al-Quds Al-Arabi, 22 August 2014. <https://www.alquds.co.uk/%EF%BB%BF%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%91%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%B2-%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%AA/>

Also see: "Kurdish Education Specialist: SOC to Use Amended GOS Curricula" (In Arabic), Rudaw, 29 March 2018. <https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/middleeast/syria/290320184>

Also see: "First-Grade Kurdish Language Textbook Completed" (In Arabic), Buyer Press, 17 August 2014. <https://buyerpress.com/?p=5429>

⁵⁸ "The SOC Integrates Tribal Council and Kurdish Independents" (In Arabic), New Arab, 11 May 2020. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B6%D9%85-%22%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84%22-%D9%88%22%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%AF%22>

⁵⁹ Abdulaziz Tammo praises and thanks the Turkish military for their efforts in Afrin in an interview with the TRT Kurdi channel (in Kurdish). <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=631858790916070>

Also see: "Turkey's Control of Afrin: Impact on Actors and Next Step" (In Arabic), Jusoor, 23 March 2018.

<https://jusoor.co/ar/details/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9>

⁶⁰ "The Association of Independent Syrian Kurds Opens First Office in Afrin" (In Arabic), Anadolu Agency, 23 July 2018. <https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9/%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%AA%D8%AD-%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8-%D9%84%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86/1211732>

⁶¹ "The KNC's Standing on the Afrin Issue" (In Arabic), New Arab, 13 March 2022.

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%A3%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%9F>





The SIG curricula were negatively received in the region, especially because they were not designed by Syrian experts. Channeling the people's sentiments, Abu Rizan said:

"I am unsatisfied with the Kurdish language curricula because they were developed by Turkey-affiliated institutes while copying the personal experiences of Turkey's Kurds. The curricula must be revised and a committee of supervisors and Syrian Kurdish language specialists must be formed to design curricula that align with the reality of the language and the purpose of raising a generation of Kurds."

Curricula are not the only site of tension. The SOC's High Negotiations Committee (HNC) presented the Group of Friends of the Syrian People during a London conference with an executive document that breached the provisions of the agreement signed with KNC.⁶² The document overlooks the ethnic and national plurality in Syria and considers Arabic the only official language in the country. With this, it ignores and cancels the Kurdish language in Kurdish-majority areas. The marginalization of Kurdish is not only at odds with the agreement, but it also stands against the SOC's founding principles, which stress that the Syrian State recognizes the various national components of the Syrian society and emphasizes their right to use their own languages, celebrate their traditions, and practice their rituals in an atmosphere of freedom guaranteed by law.⁶³

Notably, after Turkey and affiliated armed opposition groups controlled the Kurdish-majority areas in the Afrin region through Operation Olive Branch and Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê through Operation Peace Spring, schools in these areas taught the SOC curricula only partially. The schools limited the Kurdish language class hours, made the language uncredited, and relinquished its middle and high school exams, while they made Turkish mandatory for all grades, whereby the Turkish language exam affects the students' GPAs.

Explaining the causes underlying the extensive marginalization of the Kurdish language, Zaki pointed to the passive standing Kurdish powers have of the matter. He said:

"Making Kurdish a secondary language that does not influence the outcomes of middle and high school exams has to do with [the authority's] desire to distance students from their mother tongue. They claim they cannot use all-Kurdish curricula in the region because most of Afrin's residents today are Arabs. Unfortunately, the main reason

⁶² "Syrian Opposition Sets Out Executive Framework for Political Solution in Syria", SOC, 7 September 2016. <https://en.etilaf.org/all-news/news/syrian-opposition-sets-out-executive-framework-for-political-solution-in-syria> Also see: "Complete Manuscript of the Syrian Oppositions Executive Framework for Political Solution" (In Arabic), AlModon, 17 September 2016.

<https://www.almodon.com/arabworld/2016/9/7/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B5-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A4%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%84-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7> Also see: "The Crisis of the Syrian Political Opposition" (In Arabic), Jusoor, 11 July 2020.

<https://jusoor.co/ar/details/%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9>

⁶³ Article 2 of the SOC's Political Framework and Principles (In Arabic), <https://www.etilaf.org/about-us/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b1%d8%a4%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%af%d8%a6-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%a3%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%84>





behind this situation is the political and administrative void the Kurdish political powers have created."

In September 2021, several media outlets reported that the SIG's education ministry eliminated the Kurdish language from the curricula taught in the Afrin region.⁶⁴ However, the ministry issued a statement refuting the reports:⁶⁵

"Several media outlets and social media accounts reported that the Ministry of Education of the Syrian Interim Government has cut Kurdish language courses from the curricula taught in the Afrin region. This news is baseless."

The ministry added:

"Considering this matter, the SIG refutes the suspension of Kurdish language courses in Afrin and wishes to emphasize the right of all Syrian citizens, regardless of the social components they belong to, to the freedom of learning their languages. Therefore, our children, who belong to the Kurdish component, can study the Kurdish language in the schools across Afrin and other liberated areas. To this end, the education ministry designed and printed the Kurdish language textbook and have this year completed designing and printing the textbooks that were lacking in previous school years. The ministry is currently distributing these textbooks to students for free."

Notably, STJ visited the SIG online curricula database, which lists all materials assigned to the schools in the areas it controls. However, STJ found no information about the Kurdish language curricula.⁶⁶

Additionally, the SIG founded a faculty of education under Afrin University. Nevertheless, the faculty does not offer Kurdish language specializations. In response, the KNC stated that Free Aleppo University has established a Kurdish language institute.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ "Syrian Opposition Removes the Kurdish Language from School Curricula" (In Kurdish), Rudaw, 7 September 2021. <https://www.rudaw.net/kurmanci/kurdistan/0709202119>

⁶⁵ "A Statement about the Allegations related to the Abolition of the Kurdish Language School Courses in Afrin" (In Arabic), SIG, 12 September 2021.

<https://www.syriaig.net/public/ar/1780/content/%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86%20%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A1%D8%A7%D8%AA%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A9%20%D8%A8%D8%A5%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%A1%20%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B3%20%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D9%85%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AC%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86>

⁶⁶ All School Curricula Textbooks 2018, SIG's Ministry of Education: https://syriaig.org/book/Edu_book_Syr_Interim_Gov_Min_Edu.htm

⁶⁷ "A Statement on Free Aleppo University's First Kurdish Language Course" (In Arabic), Yekîti Media, 14 August 2022. <https://ara.yekiti-media.org/%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AD-%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A5%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AF%D9%88/>





8. Education under the Turkification Policy

In a 2021 report titled "The Erdoğan Revolution in the Turkish Curriculum Textbooks", IMPACT-se and Henry Jackson Society examine the recent radicalization of Turkish textbooks.⁶⁸ Radicalization transpires through the normalization of "Jihad war" and the glorification of "martyrdom in battle". These ideas are introduced with an emphasis on "ethno-nationalist religious objectives in the spirit of neoOttomanism and Pan-Turkism", under which "Islam is depicted as a political matter, with science and technology used to advance its goals."

The report editors highlight that Turkish textbooks do not provide "caveats to their support for the radicalism inherent within these interpretations of historical resurgence", stressing concepts, such as "Turkish World Domination" and Turkish or Ottoman "Ideal of the World Order." Therefore, in the curricula, the "Turkish Basin" is defined as "stretch[ing] from the Adriatic Sea to Central Asia." Moreover, the textbooks are inscribed with anti-America messages.

Additionally, the editors found out that while students are offered both Ottoman Turkish and Arabic language studies, the materials they are taught continue to largely neglect the "Kurdish minority's identity and cultural needs . . . Elective programs such as Kurdish have been neglected and largely replaced by religious "elective" courses, which are often mandatory in practice."

Notably, the dogmatic currents underlying Turkish curricula are extensively projected onto the areas Turkey controls in Syria, including the Afrin region. Therefore, Turkey continues to strangle the linguistic freedoms of Kurdish communities in these areas as it does to Kurdish populations in eastern Turkey, enforcing a pro-Turkey ideology utilizing its educational departments, its military, intelligence services, and interior ministry.⁶⁹

Turkey openly declared its political dominance over the Afrin region through hoisting its flag in schools, public squares, service and administrative departments. With this, Turkey became the only country that maintains a military presence in Syria to display a national symbol in non-military structures as proof of its administrative hegemony.⁷⁰ Additionally, in 2019 Turkey evacuated and repurposed several school facilities into military stations for its forces deployed in the region. Furthermore, the Turkish Ministry of National Education announced it had supervised curricula design for Afrin, as well as for al-Bab, A'zaz, and Jarabulus, where Turkey also has a military presence.⁷¹

⁶⁸ "The Erdoğan Revolution in the Turkish Curriculum Textbooks", IMPACT-se and Henry Jackson Society, 3 March 2021. <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/erdogan-revolution-curriculum/>

⁶⁹ Koontz, Kayla. "Turkey's Undead Pro-Kurdish Political Parties, Part 1: Local Representation", Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 15 November 2021. <https://newlinesinstitute.org/kurds/turkeys-undead-pro-kurdish-political-parties-part-1-local-representation/>

⁷⁰ "The Turkification of Afrin", ANF, 9 May 2018. <https://anfenglish.com/features/the-turkification-of-afrin-26557>

⁷¹ "The Turkification of northern Syria", Ahval, 4 February 2019. <https://ahvalnews.com/turkey-syria/turkification-northern-syria-kurdish-news-outlet>

Also see: "Rector Statement Regarding Universities to be Established in Syria" (In Turkish), Independent Türkçe, 4 October 2019. <https://www.indyrturk.com/node/77421/suriyede-kurulacak-olan-%C3%BCniversitelere-ili%C5%9Fkin-rekt%C3%B6rden-a%C3%A7%C4%B1klama-suriyeli-gen%C3%A7lerin>





Notably, Turkification through education complements steps Turkey took in various other directions to assimilate the territories it holds into its ideological frames. Turkey altered the identity of the areas it entered in northern Aleppo, particularly Afrin,⁷² and subjected them to demographic reengineering. Turkey substituted the Arabic and Kurdish names of villages and streets with Turkish ones, provided residents with Turkish identification cards,⁷³ flew the Turkish flag over public facilities and service department buildings, and forced residents to use the Turkish Lira.⁷⁴ Additionally, Turkey allowed several Turkish service departments and companies of all domains to have branches in these areas on the pretext of serving residents.

These steps were all conducive to the critical demographic changes the Turkish incursions induced in the area.⁷⁵ Before Operation Olive Branch, over 30,000 students attended 98 elementary, 12 middle, and several high schools. The hostilities mass displaced most of the population of Afrin, including a large number of these students and their families, who were Kurdish locals. Following the operation, IDPs, mostly Arabs, from other Syrian territories settled down in the area en masse tipping its ethnic balance. Today, 204 schools across Afrin host 45000 students who are taught Arabic and Turkish curricula. Since the Turkish Ministry of Education brought the education system in Afrin under its control,⁷⁶ in October 2019, Turkey also opened the College of Economic and Administrative Sciences in al-Bab, the School of Islamic Studies in A'zaz, and the College of Education in Afrin.⁷⁷ All three are administratively part of Gaziantep University and are run by its education committee.⁷⁸

Additionally, Turkey established a religious high school, with its teachings hinged on Turkey's national Islamic politics. Several sources reported that the school was recruiting youths from Afrin as fighters within local armed groups or as mercenaries deployed abroad.⁷⁹ Within this

⁷² Ellis, Robert. "The EU must take a stand against Turkey's aggression", Euractiv, 8 July 2020.

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/opinion/the-eu-must-take-a-stand-against-turkeys-aggression/>

Also see: "Kurdish Village Names Substituted with Turkish Ones" (In Kurdish), Rudaw, 27 November 2018.

<https://www.rudaw.net/kurmanci/kurdistan/2711201810>

⁷³ "Syria: Turkish Identification Cards Obliterate Identity of Natives and Displaced populations Alike", STJ, 21 October 2019.

<https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-turkish-identification-cards-obliterate-identity-of-natives-and-displaced-populations-alike/>

⁷⁴ "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic", OHCHR, 49th session, 21 January 2022. Document coded: A/HRC/49/77.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc4977-report-independent-international-commission-inquiry-syrian-arab>

Also see: "Explainer: The 'Turkification' of northern Syria", BBC Monitoring, 13 February 2019.

<https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c200m69u>

⁷⁵ "Education campaign in Afrin" (In Turkish), Anadolu Agency, 22 March 2018. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/afrinde-egitim-seferberligi>

⁷⁶ "Ministry of National Education is Seeking Volunteer Teachers for Afrin in Hatay" (In Turkish), Evrensel, 22 January 2018.

<https://www.evrensel.net/haber/343908/milli-egitim-hatayda-afrin-icin-gonullu-ogretmen-ariyor>

Also see: "Educational Assistance in Operation Olive Branch Area" (In Turkish), Yortan ilkokulu, 15 October 2018.

https://yortanilkokulu.meb.k12.tr/icerikler/zeytin-dali-operasyonu-bolgesindeki-okullara-egitim-yardimi_5579441.html

⁷⁷ "Restoration of the Faculty of Education Building in Afrin" (In Turkish), Emlak Kulisi, 10 September 2020.

<https://emlakkulisi.com/afrin-egitim-fakultesi-binasi-restore-edilecek/648165>

⁷⁸ Aydıntaşbaş, Asli. "A new Gaza: Turkey's border policy in northern Syria", European Council on Foreign Relations, 28 May 2020.

https://ecfr.eu/publication/a_new_gaza_turkeys_border_policy_in_northern_syria/#life-in-turkish-controlled-areas-of-syria

⁷⁹ "Education Minister Yılmaz witnessed Emotional Moments at School Inauguration" (In Turkish), 21 April 2018.

<https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/burdur/milli-egitim-bakani-yilmaz-okul-acilisinda-duygu-dolu-anlar-yasadi-12747044>





frame of religious indoctrination, Turkey also founded several religious centers specialized in training clerics in 2018 and 2019. Furthermore, it sent 5 muftis and 299 religious clerics to Afrin in 2019. At the time, the Ankara-based Directorate of Religious Affairs overtly said it deployed these men of religion to the region to spread *aqidah* (creed). In tandem, Ankara sought to tighten the hijab code so far loosely applied in schools.⁸⁰

Dress code restrictions were applied outside schools. The hardliner Islamist armed groups, operating under the institutional mantle of the SNA, mandated that women in the region cover their faces and wear black exclusively.⁸¹ Simultaneously, Shabab al-Huda Association became a key religious force in Afrin, indoctrinating youth with its religious ideas in 2019. To this end, the association opened several schools in the region under a delegation from Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs.⁸²

While previous Turkification methods were cautious, including introducing Turkish as a secondary language in curricula in addition to Arabic, Turkey took a bolder step in 2019. It opened the first all-Turkish school in Rajo district,⁸³ in Afrin's northwestern suburbs, in addition to a high school in the fashion of the Turkish imam Hatip School, along with several other Turkey-funded schools.⁸⁴

A ban on Kurdish language use came at the end of the intricate policy Turkey curated to obliterate the region's identity, segregate it, and sever it further from the rest of the Syrian territories culturally and socially. Turkey altered the region's demographic character as it Turkified Kurdish names of streets, roads, and housing settlements, forcing locals to learn Turkish,⁸⁵ using textbooks that are heavily loaded with Turkish national symbols.⁸⁶ Commenting on the contents of the course books, Ahmad said:

"The Turkish course book opens with the Turkish national anthem, while most of the pages are adorned with designs of the Turkish flag."

Also see: "Turkey trains 'Syrian' teachers at Islamic school in Afrin, Turkifies curriculum", Kurdistan 24, 3 February 2019. <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/18776-Turkey-trains-%27Syrian%27-teachers-at-Islamic-school-in-Afrin.-Turkifies-curriculum>

⁸⁰ "The Turkification of northern Syria", Ahval, previous source.

⁸¹ "Turkification, Kidnapping, Torture, and Killing in the Occupied Territories" (In Kurdish), HAWAR, 1 October 2019. <https://www.hawarnews.com/kr/haber/li-hermn-dagirkir-tirkkirin-revandin-skence-kustin-h22074.html>

⁸² "Afrin: Turkish State Embarks on an Ideological Invasion" (In Kurdish), Ronahi TV, 8 July 2019. <https://ronahi.tv/archives/15581>

⁸³ "Ankara Opens an All-Turkish School in Northern Aleppo: Curricula are Turkish too" (In Arabic), Athr Press, 21 November 2021. <https://www.athrpress.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85-%D9%88%D9%81%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%8A%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%8B-%D8%A3%D9%86%D9%82/%D8%A3%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%85/>

⁸⁴ "Does Turkey Seek to Turkify Northern Syria and Annex It?" (In Arabic), Shorouk News, 8 March 2019. <https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=08032019&id=2b3eb1c7-6063-4d78-9a81-c0b368ed382e>

⁸⁵ "İmam Hatip School in Jindires" (In Turkish), En Son Haber, 24 March 2021.

<https://www.ensonhaber.com/dunya/terorden-arindirilan-cindereste-imam-hatip-okulu-acildi>

Also see: "Kurdish language banned in occupied and Turkified Afrin", AFN, 20 September 2021.

<https://anfenglishmobile.live/human-rights/kurdish-language-banned-in-occupied-and-turkified-afrin-55010>

⁸⁶ "Afrin...Forced displacement, Turkification under cover of humanity", HAWAR, 9 April 2022.

<https://hawarnews.com/en/haber/afrinforced-displacement-turkification-under-cover-of-humanity-h29992.html#:~:text=Since%20the%20occupation%20of%20Afrin,lands%20in%20order%20to%20change>





Abu Ali,⁸⁷ a father of four students, two at college and two at high school, presented STJ with a matching account:

“The Turkish language courses include lessons on the Turkish national anthem, flag, and culture. In the university, Turkish professors often speak about Turkish authors and novelists. They do not discuss political figures but mainly literary, scientific, or Islamic personalities.”

Several humanitarian organizations and Turkey-funded centers perpetuate the process of Turkification by offering Turkish language courses, including the Önder Organization for Cooperation and Development and Yunus Emre Institute, which Turkey founded to promote the Turkish language and culture. The institute holds courses across Turkey-held areas, especially Afrin, attracting youth and teachers. The institute offers the course goers an attendance allowance of 15 USD each day they appear in class. Dedicating it to the same purposes as the institute, Turkey has also lately opened the Anatolian Cultural Center in Afrin. The center continues to hold cultural seminars and lectures about Turkish history and Ottoman Empire.

The promotion of the Turkish language is not limited to schools and organizations active in the region. The Turkey-backed Afrin City Local Council also holds annual Turkish language courses for teachers in the attempt to mandate the Turkish language in schools.⁸⁸

9. Kurdish Students in Afrin

Teaching children in their mother tongue in early school years is an essential factor that enables them to have a better learning experience of other languages and branches of knowledge, the head of the Arab World Committee within the International Federation of French Language Teachers, Bushra Baghdadi Adra, told UN News during an International Mother Language Day interview in 2022. She added that this correlation is corroborated by research into chief foreign language teaching methods and strategies and is recommended by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).⁸⁹

For her part, the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, points out that studies have shown that education in a language other than the mother tongue interferes with learning and widens gaps and disparities while bilingual or multilingual education based on students' mother tongue not only encourages learning but also contributes to understanding and dialogue among peoples.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Pseudonym. STJ met with the interviewee through Telegram on 5 February 2022.

⁸⁸ “In continuation of the policy of demographic change... the Turkish language invades northern Syria”, ASO, 15 April 2022. <https://aso-network.com/en/archives/29579>

⁸⁹ “On Its International Day, the Mother Tongue Tops all Languages Given its Role in Promoting Multilingualism and Building Bridges” (In Arabic), UN News, 21 February 2022. <https://news.un.org/ar/interview/2022/02/1094512>

⁹⁰ “The International Mother Language Day: ‘Languages Without Borders’ for Spreading Peace and Diversity” (In Arabic), UN News, 21 February 2021. <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2020/02/1049711>





Additionally, learning in the mother tongue affects the student's comprehension and receptiveness of curricula. Several educators STJ met with for this paper stressed the vital influence learning in the mother tongue has on student psychology, their learning performance, and outcomes.

Notably, the advantages mother tongue learners reap are almost inaccessible for Kurdish students in the Afrin region. The restrictions on the Kurdish language in and out of class are taking a toll on the Kurdish students' performance and relationship with their educational environment. Kurdish students not only struggle with cuts on class time dedicated to their mother tongue but also the pressure teachers and IDPs are subjecting them to, especially since their Arab peers continue to miss Kurdish language classes. The lack of interest in the Kurdish language is fostering feelings of alienation and discrimination among Kurdish students.

Speaking to STJ about the suffering Kurdish students experience due to the schools' approach to the Kurdish language, Israa,⁹¹ a Kurdish 21th-grade high school student, narrated:

"The fact that we have Arb students in the classroom is fascinating. We can coexist and learn each other's languages. However, unfortunately, the majority of the Arab students leave the classroom during Kurdish language hours."

She added:

"Two hours are insufficient. This interval does not leave [teachers] enough room to teach the Kurdish language, its grammar, history, and geography. [Education authorities] are better to increase the number of hours and get Kurdish language course books, Kurdish history books, poetry and story collections, and other materials. Additionally, [authorities] must add the Kurdish language to the national exams. Indeed, the existing Kurdish language curricula are easy at most school levels. However, schools give curricula little care because the teachers are underqualified and only two class hours are assigned to Kurdish on the one hand, while there are no private schools, language centers, English Literature department at the Afrin University, or any entity besides the school that can help us improve our linguistic skills. For my future studies, I dream of studying Kurdish literature."

Shiyar,⁹² a Kurdish 9th-grade middle school student in Afrin, also stressed the IDP student's lack of interest in the Kurdish language. He recounted:

"The worst part is that our language has no exams. Additionally, even though the Kurdish language curriculum is easy and supports an efficient style of instruction, [IDPs] do not appreciate it, and [schools] teach it only to dodge criticism."

For his part, Sami,⁹³ a Kurdish 12th-grade high school student in Afrin, told STJ:

⁹¹ Pseudonym. STJ met with the interviewee through Telegram on 7 February 2022.

⁹² Pseudonym. STJ met with the interviewee through Telegram on 8 February 2022.

⁹³ Pseudonym. STJ met with the interviewee through Telegram on 7 February 2022.





"[Education authorities] must assign the Kurdish language more class hours and include it in the final exam. Kurdish is our mother tongue, and it is our right to learn it. Regarding Arab students, it is up to them to attend the class. It is heartbreaking that teachers do not pay us sufficient attention. They only ask us to memorize a few Kurdish words and terms. A few teachers have poor linguistic skills and are underqualified as teachers. Certainly, if the Kurdish language were respected in Afrin, it would not have been treated thus. Instead, it would have been part of the curricula taught in Afrin, and we would have Kurdish language specialists."

Wishing that learning Kurdish were mandatory, Layla,⁹⁴ a middle school student in Afrin, told STJ:

"I would like to study a mixed Arabic-Kurdish curriculum, but that should not be at the expense of my mother tongue. [Education authorities] must increase the Kurdish language class hours, and Arab students must commit to attending these classes. [Authorities] must also assign Kurdish a high pass grade for middle and high school finals. [Kurdish students] struggle with feelings of injustice and discrimination because we study an Arabic curriculum while Arab students do not join our Kurdish language classes."

Addressing the quality of education, Layla said:

"We struggle with comprehending the Kurdish language materials because most of the teachers do not teach us the assigned textbooks. The Kurdish language curriculum is divided into six parts taught throughout school from 1st- to 12th-grade."

The language barrier is fostering sentiments of injustice among Kurdish students, especially as they feel pressured and disadvantaged because teachers and a segment of the IDP students frown at them as they speak Kurdish among each other. The refusal to accept the Kurdish students' right to use their language is a consequence of the policy of devaluation the authorities have subjected the Kurdish language to, denying the language its authenticity and deprioritizing it compared to other languages.

Within this context of refusal, Kurdish students feel alienated at schools, as if they do not fit into its unfamiliar environment. Harboring these sentiments, Sami narrated:

"I do not feel like I belong, and I am unsure what this homeland signifies to me as it does not respect my language. Curricula are part of the political system, and these curricula do not mention the historical presence of Kurds in Syria, urging people to disassociate themselves from the place and revoke affiliation with it. Also, I feel discriminated against. Arab teachers and students keep saying, 'speak Arabic!' Why should I speak Arabic at school even with my brother? That is a very distressing situation."

Addressing discrimination, Israa said:

⁹⁴ Pseudonym. STJ met with the interviewee through Telegram on 3 February 2022.





"Some teachers are racist. When we speak Kurdish among each other, they consider it racism. Why do they demand that we learn in Arabic, which is not our language, and they get uneasy when we speak Kurdish, our mother tongue? This is unfair."

The children's suffering is a continuation of a generations-long struggle. Parents are familiar with the pain because they had to battle the ban on the Kurdish language as a medium of learning and instruction under former Syrian governments and nationalist parties that dominated the country's politics. The present experiences of Kurdish students echo deeply with Nazli, who narrated:

"They are fighting the Kurdish language to Arabize Afrin, especially through the curricula. Students are suffering from discrimination based on language. IDP children are favored because the teaching and administrative staffers are either IDPs or Turks."

Parents remain unsatisfied with the curricula and teachers, both in terms of their respect for the Kurdish language and teaching skills. Therefore, they are uncertain and worried about their children's future, especially as they do not find in the SIG curricula a potential solution or a desire to preserve the Kurdish language. Several parents that STJ met with said that SIG curricula do not encourage multilingualism or reflect an interest in Kurds as one of Afrin's native communities. Having this opinion, Nadir told STJ:

"We want curricula that express our true Kurdish culture; this is in terms of literature. Relating to the scientific dimension, we want curricula that can accommodate the capacities of our children, the difficult circumstances they have struggled with due to the unqualified teaching staff and their lack of interest, and the impact of the current crisis that has adversely affected education."

For her part, Nazli said:

"The armed groups control the schools, which lack needed attention. The teaching staff is poorly equipped; most teachers do not come from educational backgrounds. Additionally, two hours are insufficient to teach children and students everything about Kurdish and its history. My son is gaining little knowledge at school. Therefore, I am teaching him at home. The teachers are underqualified, and the education ministry is not investing much interest in Kurdish and takes it for granted."

10. Syria's Linguistic Policies toward the Kurdish Language

The dominance of Arab nationalism or pan-Arabism started in the early stages of the Syrian State. Headed by King Faisal I in 1920, the country was called the "Syrian Arab Kingdom" and Article 3 of its constitution stipulated Arabic as "an official language," referring to none of the other languages spoken by Syrians, including Kurdish and Syriac.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ The 1920 Constitution of the Arab Kingdom of Syria (In Arabic), Wikisource.

https://ar.wikisource.org/wiki/%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1_%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7_1920

Also see: The 1920 Constitution of the Arab Kingdom of Syria (In Arabic), Syrian Modern History.

<https://syrmh.com/2020/07/04/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86->





The influence of Arab nationalism abated under the French Mandate that enforced the 1930 Constitution. The constitution adopted the name "the Republic of Syria," not describing the nascent State as Arab. Article 16 of the constitution stipulated that Syrians are equal before the law, in access to civil and political rights and duties and responsibilities, prohibiting discrimination among Syrians based on religion, sect, origin, or language. In Article 19, the constitution established the freedom of education as long as it does not disturb public order, contradict morals, or prejudice the dignity of the country or its religions. Moreover, in Article 24, the constitution stipulated that the Arabic language is the official language in all State departments, except in cases where other languages are added to it in this capacity under the law or an international agreement.⁹⁶

However, Arab nationalism regained its hegemony through official discourse with the 1950 Constitution the government enforced following independence. The constitution emphasized the Arab identity of the country twice in the preamble alone using the phraseology "we are the representatives of the Syrian Arab people." This was resumed in Articles 1 and 4. Article 1 called Syria a "democratic Arab republic" and the Syrian people "part of the Arab nation." Article 4, for its part, defined Arabic as the official language, again excluding other languages in Syria.⁹⁷

Arab nationalism retained its monopoly over the Syrian landscape by forcefully bringing under its mantle the diverse ethnic groups that reside across Syria. To this end, Arab nationalists deployed constitutions the governments adopted over a series of coups and later by the government of the United Arab Republic (UAR) of Syria and Egypt.

The concept of Arabism spread especially after 1963, as an after-effect of the March 8th Revolution. In the following years, the Ba'ath Party inscribed its ideology into several articles of the 1973 Constitution. For instance, Article 1 includes several "Arab nationalist" terms, such as "the state of the Federation of the Arab Republics," "the Syrian Arab Republic," "the Syrian Arab country," "the Arab homeland," and "the Arab nation." Additionally, Article 8 suffocated all hopes for political pluralism, overtly declaring the Ba'ath Party as "[t]he leading party in the society and the state . . . It leads a patriotic and progressive front seeking to unify the resources of the people's masses and place them at the service of the Arab nation's goals."⁹⁸

The current constitution, issued in February 2012, ascribes the same status to the Ba'ath Party. This constitution repealed Article 8 mentioned above; however, it continues to underscore the Ba'athist ideology and its power dynamics.

Additionally, Article 4 of the constitution affirms that "Arabic is the official language of the State." It thus deprives non-Arab minorities of a constitutional footing for their cultural rights, which are overshadowed by Arabism that pigeonholes all citizens as Arabs. Notably, this

[%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D9%85%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7/](https://ar.wikisource.org/wiki/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D9%85%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7/)

⁹⁶ The 1930 Constitution of Syria (In Arabic), Wikisource.

https://ar.wikisource.org/wiki/%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1_%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7_1930

⁹⁷ The 1950 Constitution of Syria (In Arabic), Wikisource.

https://ar.wikisource.org/wiki/%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1_%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7_1950

⁹⁸ The 1973 Constitution of Syria (In Arabic), Syrian People's Assembly.

<http://parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=5518&cat=413&>





constitutional rhetoric is inscribed into the policies of the Syrian authorities and the country's domestic legislation.⁹⁹

Banished from the official sphere since 1960, the Kurdish language became vulnerable to practices of oppression and de-legitimization as a medium of instruction and publishing. The Syrian authorities banned Kurdish in government schools, withheld licenses for private Kurdish language schools and centers, and prohibited its use in public by several unpublished decrees, the contents of which was leaked by lawyers and government employees. Additionally, the authorities imprisoned several Kurdish language activists and confiscated equipment and printers used for printing Kurdish language curricula and textbooks. Therefore, teaching Kurdish remained confined to tight circles and shrouded in the privacy of homes, often through courses organized by Kurdish parties, personalities, or intellectuals capable of instruction.

Kurdish continued to struggle with official marginalization and bans on use in schools, universities, and private centers until the Syrian uprising broke out. With the start of the protests, activists revitalized publication in Kurdish and, even though on a tight scale, they began teaching the language.

As activists pushed Kurdish to the forefront, the language flourished after the PYD controlled Kurdish-populated areas, including the Afrin region. The revival of Kurdish transpired through the unified and all-Kurdish curricula the AANES used in schools across the areas it governed.

However, as demonstrated above, this boom was short-lived in the Afrin region and ended with the March 2018 Operation Olive Branch. The incursion led to Turkey and affiliated Syrian opposition factions' control over Afrin, who sought to establish their rule through the education sector. Turkey imposed its laws on the region's schools, abolished the AANES' education system, and introduced SIG-designed curricula instead of those taught at the time.

11. Legal Opinion and Recommendations

Article 30 of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter, Convention) establishes the status of the child as an independent right holder and not merely an instrument for channeling parental, community, or State preferences. The article enshrines the right of the child from a minority in the State to enjoy and practice their language, culture, and religion. Therefore, the State must consider the best interest of the child as an individual while implementing this right. Additionally, the State must guarantee that this right is unthreatened by cancellation or unfair discrimination under the pretext of the best interest of the group to which the child may not belong. This group might be a linguistic "majority" compared to the linguistic "minority" to which the child belongs.

Article 30 of the Convention complements Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966. Article 27 emphasizes the collective right of members of minorities to enjoy their own culture, profess their religion, and use their language. Notably,

⁹⁹ Georges, Nael. "Minorities in the Syrian Legal System and the Principle of State Neutrality", European Center for Kurdish Studies, August 2020. PP. 10-11.
https://power-sharing-syria.ezks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Study_Nael-Georges_Minorities-and-State-Neutrality_En.pdf





the language of these two articles not only enshrines the duty of the State not to interfere or not to deprive these groups of these rights but also imposes a positive obligation on the State to take appropriate measures to respect, protect and enforce these rights. It is necessary to stress that the right of minorities to use their languages is a standalone right. Therefore, it should not be addressed purely implicitly in the context of other rights, such as the right to freedom of expression.

The right to language within the meaning of the two articles relates to a set of other applicable principles. The most important of these principles is non-discrimination on any grounds, and the need for this principle to be implemented in legislation and practice to ensure the enjoyment of all the rights safeguarded in the provisions of international human rights law, including the right to language in Articles 27 of the Covenant and 30 of the Convention. Additionally, considerations of the child's best interests are one of the pillars of the international legal framework for children's rights. In this context, when implementing their duties related to the right to language, authorities must consider the child's choices, well-being, and development by adopting a broad participatory approach involving diverse societal groups. Therefore, making educational decisions that impede or prevent members of minorities from learning and/or using their language in the educational process is considered a deficient measure and a clear violation of the duty of continuous care in the best interest of the child. Also, such decisions, even if they are justified by the lack of material or human resources, are considered to contradict the directives of the Committee on the Rights of the Child not to neglect the individual right of the child in favor of the rights of the group. Moreover, the authorities shall always resume their duty to take the necessary measures to ensure the enforcement of rights and not the other way around.

Furthermore, there is a deep correlation between the right to language and culture and the right to life established in Article 6 and underscored in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, issued by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution No. 47/135 of 1992. Notably, Article 30 is related to the ability to claim religious, cultural, and linguistic rights. It has implications for the preservation of identity, history, values, and the family and community ties that bind an individual to the group to which they belong. Consequently, depriving members of minorities of their ability to exercise these rights, directly or indirectly, is a tool that threatens the survival of groups that constitute minorities in society. In this context, international law rejects the policies governing the attempts of the Turkish State—as an occupying power—the SIG and the Turkey-backed factions in control on the ground to marginalize the Kurdish language and impose the Turkish and Arabic languages on the indigenous people of the region, as well as their attempts to assimilate these people and forcibly melt them into the crucible of Arab and Turkish nationalism.

The international legal framework applicable to occupation in the context of international humanitarian law (IHL) does not allocate independent provisions to the right to language. However, Articles 50 and 94 of the Fourth Geneva Convention expressly stipulate the duty of the occupying power to facilitate the work of educational institutions in occupied areas and to ensure that children and adolescents continue to have access to education. Notably, international human rights law (IHRL) continues to apply during armed conflicts and occupation, and its provisions complement and interpret the IHL provisions. Therefore, the duty of the occupying power to ensure the continuation of education stems from the right to education safeguarded in IHRL. Additionally, since the minorities' right to learn, use their





languages, and enjoy their cultures is essentially linked to education as contained in Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention, the occupying power must comply with these obligations, including the obligation to take measures to ensure their enforcement. Moreover, the lack of a qualified Kurdish language teaching staff cannot be invoked. Furthermore, assuming the validity of this argument, it remains the duty of dominant powers to create a suitable climate for the provision of these competencies in the region, especially with the presence of educational institutions supported by the Turkish government, such as Free Aleppo University and branches of Gaziantep University there.¹⁰⁰

To ensure that residents in occupied territories enjoy their rights and remain protected from violation or extortion due to the power and dominance of the occupation, Article 47 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the occupying power from making fundamental changes to the institutions and laws existing in the occupied territories. The article invokes the spirit of Article 43 of the [Hague Regulations](#) of 1907, which warrants alterations only in the case of absolute necessity related to details affecting the security of the occupying power, or with the aim of improvement, including restoring security or enhancing the civilian population's enjoyment of their rights. Notably, this obligation is not overridden by any agreement the occupying power concludes with any authorities in the occupied territories that would produce the same prohibitions as stipulated in Article 47.

Even though the prohibition of fundamental changes to the institutions and laws of the occupied territories does not explicitly enumerate the rights protected outside the scope of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the applicability of IHRL contributes to enabling the interpretation of this prohibition in its broadest sense. This interpretation guarantees the continued enjoyment of the inhabitants of these territories of their rights under the occupation. Based on this, the procedures restricting access to the right to learning and use of the Kurdish language fall within the same context, even if these procedures were enforced at the behest of the occupation or are ordained by the de facto authorities that it has imposed on the region and continues to control.

Similar stress on minority linguistic rights remains lacking across the Syrian legal frameworks. Almost mirroring its antecedent of 1973, the operative 2012 Constitution does not address the rights of non-Arab Syrian constituents, including Kurds, to use their languages. In Article 4, the constitution recognizes only Arabic as the official language in Syria. As it denies minorities recognition of their language, members of these groups lose not only their right to use their mother tongues but also a set of related rights, including their right to teach their languages to upcoming generations. Disrecognition, thus, induces a state of inequality among the diverse constituents of the Syrian people and creates room for favoritism, whereby the authorities prioritize a majority group over minority groups on various levels. In this context of favoritism, minority groups are robbed of access to use, preserve, and develop their mother tongues. Therefore, as it continues to bestow a disadvantaged position on minorities, Article 4 constitutes a breach of the constitution's Article 33(3), which provides that citizens are equal in rights and duties.

Additionally, Article 4 renders Article 9 of the constitution dysfunctional, which guarantees "the protection of cultural diversity of the Syrian society with all its components and the multiplicity of its tributaries." Given the linguistic policies the GOS enforces, Article 9 provides an illusion of respect for diversity in Syria because it does not impose on the GOS specific

¹⁰⁰ This detail was discussed elaborately in footnote 78.





obligations to ensure this diversity remains protected. Without obligatory frames, the GOS did not translate the article into practical measures, nor did local de facto authorities adhere to them in the areas covered by the paper.

In these areas, including Afrin, it is the duty of the Turkish government and the factions on the ground to remedy the repercussions of these illegal practices, primarily by putting an end to discriminatory linguistic policies, prone to deprive Kurdish communities of speaking their mother tongue in the future. Moreover, Turkey and the de facto authorities must take the necessary positive measures to enable all the components in the region, including Kurds, to protect their linguistic and cultural identities, create conditions that ensure the promotion of their different identities, and ensure that their children have sufficient opportunities to learn their mother tongues.

Furthermore, the current and upcoming Syrian governments must consider practices geared toward preventing indigenous peoples and minorities from enjoying their linguistic and cultural rights and practices aimed at assimilating diverse ethnicities and languages into one national or linguistic crucible crimes punishable by law across Syria.

Moreover, the Syrian Constitutional Committee (SCC) must pay heed to inscribing articles in the new constitution—should the SCC succeed in drafting it, that recognize other languages in Syria as equally official as Arabic, at least in the areas where speakers of a language are a majority. Additionally, these articles must oblige the government to take the necessary measures to achieve this.



About the partners

About LELUN:



We are a group of Afrin's daughters and sons who love its soil and are devoted to its olive groves. In honour of the history of our ancestors and their struggle for the people and land; for the trees to reclaim their splendour; and for families and loved ones to return to their mountains, plains, and homes, we founded Lêlûn as the first step on the path towards justice and the restoration of rights to their owners

Seeking to achieve justice, several young men and women from Afrin, with different ethnic, religious, social, and political affiliations, came together to establish the Lêlûn Association for the Victims of Violations in Afrin. The association aims to help all victims equally, defend their rights, and channel their voices

About STJ:



Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.