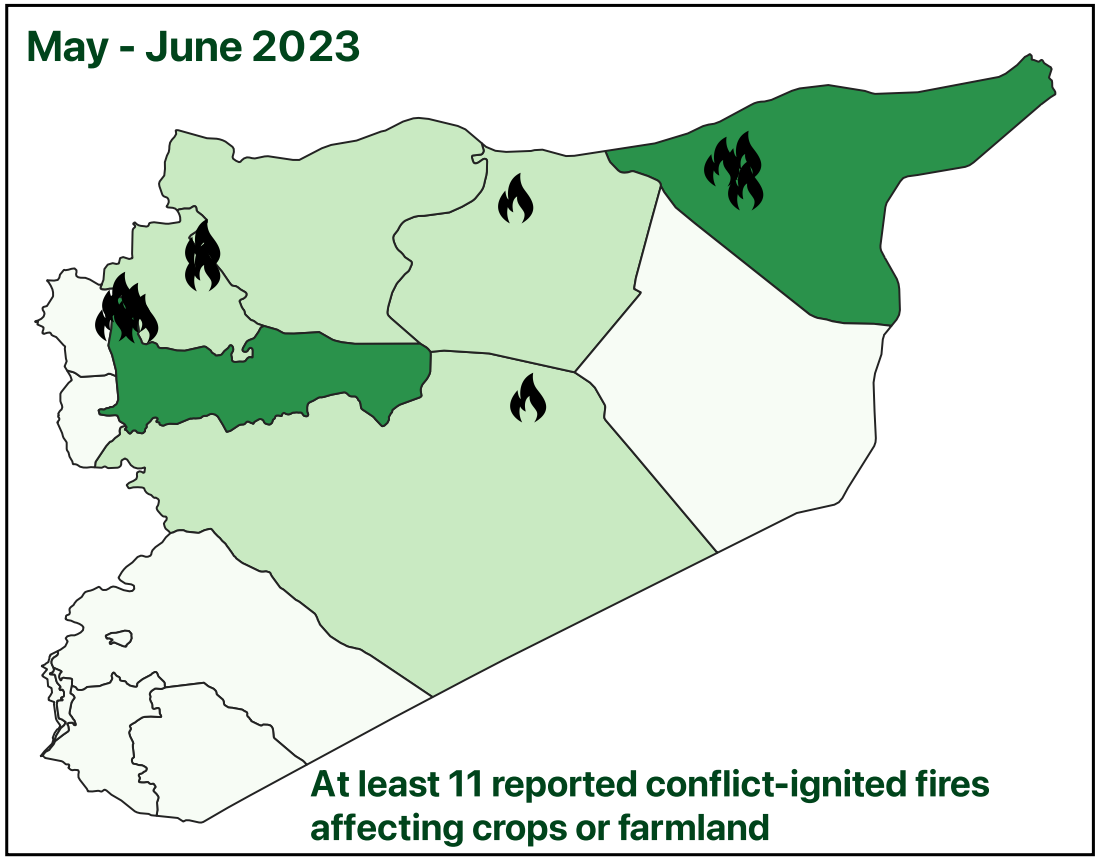
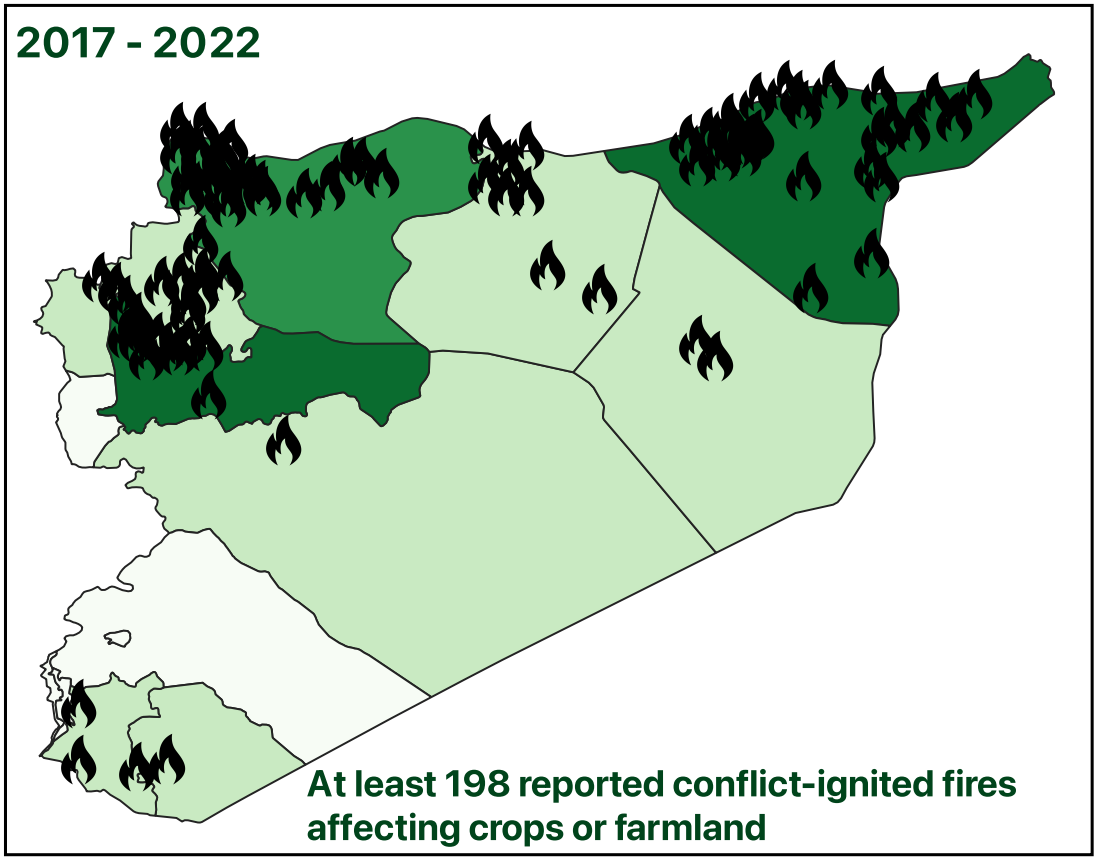
The Recurring Risks of Crop Destruction in Syria from Conflict-Ignited Fires During the Summer Months





Fires ignited by conflict actions such as shelling have been a recurrent feature of the Syrian civil war. According to Insecurity Insight's Food Insecurity and Violent Conflict (FIVC) dataset, crops and farmland were set on fire at least 198 times between 2017 and 2022. Over 90% of these crop fires occurred during May and June, when temperatures are regularly over 34 degrees Celsius. As of 16 June 2023, Insecurity Insight has already identified at least 11 reported incidents in May and June this year in which crops and farmland were set on fire in Syria. Six cases were attributed to shelling and artillery fire by Syrian government forces in Hama, Idlib and Aleppo governorates. Four incidents followed shelling by the armed forces of Türkiye in Al-Hasakah (Syria's main wheat-producing region) and Raqqah governorates. The Islamic State group is also reported to have set fire to two wheatfields owned by a Syrian government intelligence commander in Homs governorate. In one case this year a reported 100 acres of wheat were affected by fires. In 2022 the United Nations reported that wheat production in Syria had fallen by 75% compared with before the conflict started in 2011. At the start of 2023 hunger in the country reached a 12 year high, with 2.5 million people being severely food insecure.

In this context, it is crucial that conflict parties refrain from using explosive weapons and other devices that are likely to ignite fires in or close to crops. This is especially important during hot summer weather. Ignoring such precautions has the foreseeable, wide-ranging and long-term impacts of reducing food production, incomes in rural communities and Syrian food security in general.

Insecurity Insight

Funded by European Union Humanitarian Aid

This document is published by Insecurity Insight, a Humanitarian to Humanitarian (H2H) organisation committed to the humanitarian principles.The document was developed with the financial assistance of the Basque Agency for Development Cooperation and the H2H Fund which is supported by aid from the UK government.The opinions in it do not reflect in any way the position of the Basque Agency for Development Cooperation,the H2H Network or the UK government,who are not responsible for either the content expressed in this document or its use. Source of symbol for maps: The Noun Project (https://thenounproject.com). Wheat icon source: icons8.com .

Download the FIVC-Syria dataset at:
https://data.humdata.org/dataset/conflict-hunger-and-aid-security
Read Insecurity Insight's full report on conflict and food insecurity in Syria at:
https://bit.ly/SYRHungerApr2023