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Country Guidance: Syria



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Common analysis and guidance note

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Introduction

The country guidance documents provide country-specific common analysis and guidance in relation to the assessment criteria established in the recast [Qualification Directive](#) (Directive 2011/95/EU) ⁽¹⁾. They are developed by the EUAA together with a network of senior-level policy officials from EU+ countries and represent their joint assessment of the situation in main countries of origin, in accordance with current EU legislation and jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).

The aim of the country guidance documents is to assist decision-makers and policy-makers in their daily work and to foster convergence in the assessment of applications for international protection and the type of protection granted in the context of the common European asylum system.

The development, review and update of country guidance is regulated under [Article 11 of the EUAA Regulation](#) ⁽²⁾.



In accordance with [Article 11\(3\) EUAA Regulation](#), Member States have the obligation to take into account the common analysis and guidance notes when examining applications for international protection, without prejudice to their competence to decide on individual applications.

This common analysis is based on country of origin information (COI) with a clearly indicated reference period. Each section of the country guidance documents also clearly states the timing of its last update.

The analysis and guidance within this document should be considered valid as long as current events and developments in the country fall within the trends and patterns described within the COI on which the assessment at hand is based on.

The analysis and guidance provided within this document are not exhaustive.

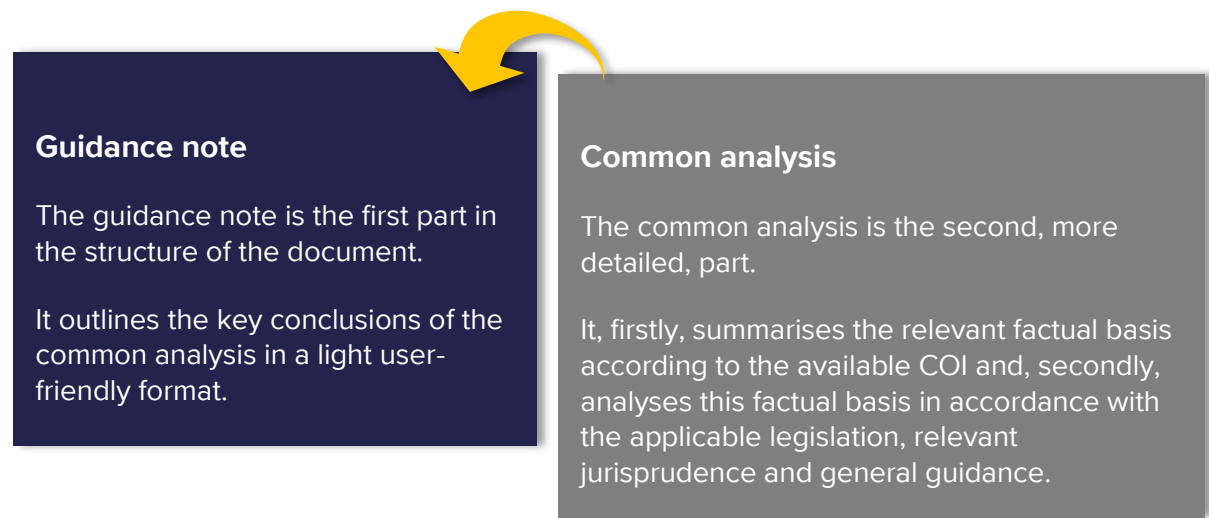
⁽¹⁾ Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted.

⁽²⁾ Regulation (EU) 2021/2303 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2021 on the European Union Agency for Asylum and repealing Regulation (EU) No 439/2010.

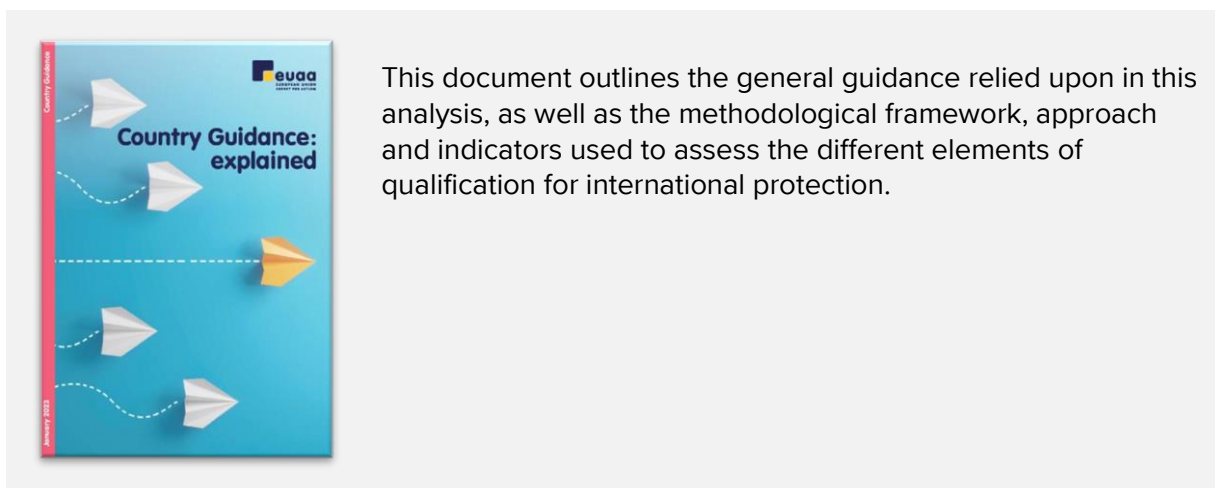


Common analysis, guidance note and methodological approach

The country guidance document consists of two important components: the guidance note and the common analysis. These two parts focus on the situation in the country of origin and provide analysis and guidance on the assessment of relevant international protection needs.



They should be read in conjunction with the separate document '[Country Guidance: explained](#)'.

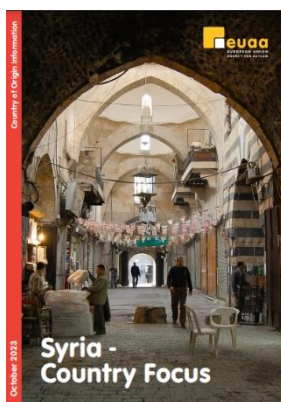


Scope of this update

The current version of the guidance updates and replaces the ‘Country Guidance: Syria’ (February 2023).

This update mainly focuses on the potential refugee status protection needs of [persons perceived to be opposing the government of Syria](#), [children](#) and [profiles related to military service](#), the section on [Article 15\(c\) QD](#) under the subsidiary protection chapter, as well as the [internal protection alternative](#) chapter.

This update is based on the following recent COI:



Country Focus 2023

EUAA COI Report:
Syria - Country focus
(October 2023)

Security 2023

EUAA COI Report:
Syria - Security situation
(October 2023)

COI Update 2023

EUAA COI Query Response:
Syria - Major human rights,
security, and socio-economic
developments
(December 2023)

[Annex II. Country of origin information references](#) provides further details on all COI reports used as a basis for the analysis within this document. References and links within this document are to the respective sections of these COI reports.



To access EUAA COI reports, visit <https://euaa.europa.eu/coi-publications>.



Guidance note

Last update: April 2024

The current version of the document supersedes the one issued in February 2023 and introduces updates across most chapters of the analysis. This update is primarily based on country information concerning the period from 1 August 2022 to 30 November 2023.

The guidance note on Syria is produced by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) together with EU+ countries⁽³⁾ in accordance with [Article 11 of the EUAA Regulation](#).⁽⁴⁾ It is based on and summarises the conclusions of a comprehensive common analysis. The aim of the guidance note and the common analysis is to assist EU+ countries in the examination of applications for international protection. The guidance note and the common analysis are a pivotal tool in the roadmap to greater convergence in the Common European Asylum System.

The guidance note is part of the 'Country Guidance: Syria' and should be read in conjunction with the [Common analysis](#).

The [implications of leaving Syria](#) may be a relevant consideration in the examination of international protection needs.

The Government of Syria remains a main **actor of persecution and serious harm** in the country. In addition, a number of State and non-State actors continue to be active, including the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Asayish, the Syrian National Army, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), etc. See [Actors of persecution or serious harm](#).

Among the commonly encountered profiles of applicants for international protection, the following would be **highly likely to qualify for refugee status**:

- [Members of anti-government armed groups](#)
- [Political activists, opposition party members and protesters](#)
- [Draft evaders](#)
- [Military deserters and defectors](#)
- [Persons with perceived links to ISIL](#)

(3) The assessment and guidance reflect the conclusions of the EUAA Country Guidance Network, which consists of EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland. The guidance note has been endorsed by the EUAA Management Board.

(4) Regulation (EU) 2021/2303 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2021 on the European Union Agency for Asylum and repealing Regulation (EU) No 439/2010.





- [Members of and persons perceived to be collaborating with the SDF and YPG](#)
- [LGBTIQ persons.](#)

Further guidance is provided on the **risk-impacting circumstances which may affect the probability of granting refugee status** to profiles such as:

- [Civilians originating from areas associated with opposition to the government](#)
- [Persons perceived to be opposing the SDF/YPG](#)
- [Persons fearing forced or child recruitment by Kurdish forces](#)
- [Government of Syria officials, members of the SAA and pro-government armed groups](#)
- [Civilians perceived to be supporting the government](#)
- [Journalists, other media professionals and human rights activists](#)
- [Doctors, other medical personnel and civil defence volunteers](#)
- [Sunni Arabs](#)
- [Kurds](#)
- [Druze](#)
- [Alawites](#)
- [Christians](#)
- [Yazidis](#)
- [Palestinians](#)
- [Women and girls](#)
- [Children.](#)

Where refugee status has not been granted, Member States should proceed to consider the granting of **subsidiary protection**.

Article 15(a) QD: death penalty or execution may be relevant when there is a reasonable degree of likelihood of death penalty or execution by the Government of Syria or execution by other actors, such as extremist groups.

Article 15(b) QD: torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment may also apply, such as in the cases of healthcare facilities having been destroyed or damaged in targeted attacks and of the restriction of the supply of food, water and electricity as well as the entry of basic necessities in cases of sieges; in the case of harsh and life-threatening prison and detention conditions and ill-treatment in detention; and in the case of criminal violence due to a state of lawlessness in several governorates.

With regard to subsidiary protection under Article 15(c) QD: indiscriminate violence in situations of armed conflict, it is assessed that the **mere presence** of a civilian in the governorates of [Aleppo](#), [Dar'a](#), [Deir Ez-Zor](#), [Hasaka](#) and





Idlib would substantiate a real risk of serious harm. **Additional personal circumstances** should be taken into account in relation to the governorates of [Hama](#), [Homs](#), [Latakia](#), [Quneitra](#), [Raqqqa](#), [Rural Damascus](#) and [Sweida](#). On the other hand, for the governorates of [Damascus](#) and [Tartous](#) **no real risk under Article 15(c) QD** would in general be substantiated.

The protection needs of Syrian applicants are further compounded by the general lack of protection in the country, with the Government of Syria not being considered an **actor of protection** in accordance with Article 7 QD and no other actors fulfilling these requirements. See [Actors of protection](#).

The possibility to substantiate [Internal protection](#) alternative in accordance with Article 8 QD in Damascus city in individual cases also remains exceptional, taking into account the present safety risks, limitations to travel and admittance, and the continuously deteriorating economic situation, healthcare, and food security.

The case officer should be reminded that Exclusion considerations may be relevant in a number of cases concerning applicants from Syria. Examples include members of the Government of Syria and associated armed groups, members of anti-government armed groups such as HTS, members of ISIL, Kurdish political actors (PYD) and security forces (SDF, YPG, Asayish), individuals involved in criminal activity and individuals having committed violence against women and children.



Common analysis

1. Introduction to the situation in Syria

Last update: April 2024

The Syrian armed conflict began in 2011 as a civil uprising against the government of President Bashar al-Assad, inspired by the Arab Spring protests. Since 2012, the conflict became increasingly violent and developed in a full-scale civil war, as armed opposition groups confronted Syrian government forces and began seizing key territories.

The rise of Islamist groups and subsequent infighting marked another phase in the conflict that culminated in 2014, with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) conquering large areas in the eastern part of the country and further into Iraq and establishing the so-called 'Islamic State caliphate'. The creation of the 'caliphate' prompted the military intervention of an international US-led coalition against ISIL. Since late 2015, military interventions of other external actors in support of Assad marked the comeback of the Syrian government, which gradually recaptured most territories and consolidated its control. By the end of 2018, the conflict was viewed as having shifted decisively in Assad's favour.

Assad was re-elected for a fourth term as President of Syria in the May 2021 elections, which were found to lack any form of credibility [[Actors](#), 1.1, p. 4; [Security 2021](#), 1.2, p. 13]. States from the region such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have re-established diplomatic relations with Syria and the country was officially readmitted to the Arab League in May 2023. Multilateral efforts for a political solution to the Syrian conflict have so far yielded no results [[Security 2023](#), 1.2, p. 17].

During the course of the war, Syria became the scene for a series of intersecting conflicts involving many internal and international actors [[Actors](#), 1.1, p. 4]. Three main campaigns have driven the conflict in Syria: the violence between the Syrian government and opposition forces; the efforts of a US-led coalition to defeat ISIL; and the military operations against Syrian Kurds by Turkish forces [[Security 2021](#), 1.4, p. 19]. Complex alliances, shifting allegiances, rivalries and conflicting interests between the actors involved continue to affect the balance of power and to foster uncertainty [[Actors](#), 1.1, p. 4]. Since 2020, the frontlines have remained static while the conflict has changed from large-scale military clashes to localised clashes between armed groups and government forces with a decrease in civilian casualties [[Security 2023](#), 1.1, pp. 16-17; 1.5.3, p. 40].

By 2022, a total of 306 887 civilians were estimated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to have been killed since the beginning of the armed conflict. Most other sources estimated the number of fatalities to be at around 500 000 or higher. The conflict has also caused the biggest displacement crisis in the world.



According to estimates, it has driven some 5.2 million Syrian refugees out of the country and, as of May 2023, 6.8 million Syrians were living in internal displacement (80 % of whom had been displaced for more than five years), making the country home to the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world. [[Security 2023](#), 1.5.3, p. 40; [Security 2022](#), 1.6.3, p. 58]

A combination of factors, including international economic sanctions, the financial collapse of Lebanon, protracted conflict, hyperinflation, currency devaluation and rising prices, as well as water and fuel shortages have contributed to a further significant worsening of the socio-economic conditions in Syria. The economic situation has also contributed to a rapid deterioration of humanitarian conditions in the country. Over 90 % of the Syrian population were living below the poverty line as of June 2023. About 15.3 million Syrians (of an overall population of 21.7 million) were assessed to be in need of humanitarian assistance and around 12.1 million persons faced acute food insecurity in the country. Moreover, the devastating earthquakes of February 2023 resulted in massive damages of infrastructure (e.g. schools) and displacement. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4., p. 43; 2.2.1, pp. 53-55, 2.2.2, p. 55, 2.2.4, p. 57, 2.2.5, pp. 58-59]



Deliberate targeting by multiple actors, as well as risks associated with indiscriminate violence have had a significant impact on the civilian population in the country.

The individual assessment of international protection needs should also take into account the presence and activity of [different actors](#) in the applicant's home area and the situation in the areas the applicant would need to travel through in order to reach their home area. Moreover, the assessment should account for the evolution of the security situation in the country.

It should also be noted that in some cases, where international protection needs would be established, exclusion considerations may be relevant.



2. The implications of leaving Syria

Last update: April 2024



It is inherent in the situation of applicants for international protection that they have left their country of origin. In the context of Syria, and in particular of targeting by the government of Syria (GoS), this in itself could have implications for the treatment of an individual upon return. ⁽⁵⁾

This section is to be read in conjunction with the other sections of this country guidance, and in particular those concerning different profiles under [4. Refugee status](#), [5.2. Article 15\(b\) QD](#), [6. Actors of protection](#) and [7. Internal protection alternative](#).

Following the Syrian forces' territorial gains over the past years, the government has been trying to foster the image of stability and has called on refugees to return. Such GoS statements constituted a change from the previous stance of the GoS, which had perceived the mass exodus as a means of gaining a more homogenous society and ensuring subservience from the civilian population [[IDPs and returnees](#), 3.1, p. 19]. The EU and UNHCR argued that the situation in Syria was not conducive to a safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of refugees, pointing out that the Syrian authorities continued to violate human rights, including by forced conscription, indiscriminate detention, enforced disappearances, torture, physical and sexual violence and discrimination in access to housing, land and property [[Returnees from abroad](#), 1.1, p. 11; [Damascus 2021](#), 2.2.1, p. 25].

There are no comprehensive statistics on how many Syrians and stateless persons from Syria have returned to Syria [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.5, pp. 29-36]. The number of returns of Syrian refugees reportedly remained limited and decreased over the years [[Security 2022](#), 1.6.4, p. 65]. As of 30 June 2023, UNHCR reported 370 323 self-organised refugee returns to Syria since 2016. The actual numbers could however be greater, as there is also return movement via informal routes [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 21]. Some EU+ countries have also observed movements of Syrian applicants and beneficiaries of international protection, travelling back to Syria and subsequently returning to Europe.

Among the main reasons given for not returning were safety and security concerns, while reasons for returning were the need to protect assets and properties as well as the worsening economic situation in the displacement location, especially for those returning from outside Syria [[Security 2022](#), 1.6.4, p. 66].

⁽⁵⁾ This section uses the terms 'return' and 'returnee' in their usual meaning in everyday language and should not be understood as a reference to Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals (Return Directive).



The Syrian Ministry of Interior issued a circular in March 2019 waiving the punishment of illegal exit by means of imprisonment and/or fines which used to be in effect previously. However, individuals returning to Syria may need to go through two procedures to return: security clearance and status settlement. These procedures are run by the Syrian intelligence. Sources have indicated that no clear-cut distinction existed between making an application for security clearance and settling one's status. As the European Institute of Peace observed, 'there is no single set of uniform procedures that a returnee must undergo before going back to Syria, nor any process that provides guarantees about security on their return, even where there is a process for specific groups or in specific circumstances.' [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.5, p. 30; [Returnees from abroad](#), 2.1, p. 18, 3.1] The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (UNCOI) found that on-the-ground procedures regarding return varied considerably. Some returnees were reportedly required to settle their status in 'status settlement' centres in GoS-held areas before embarking on their return, thus having to rely on family members or friends in Syria acting on their behalf. Others lodged a request for status settlement at a border crossing or accessed such centres in person after re-entering Syria through clandestine routes. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 20]

Obtaining security clearance can be understood as a background check on whether an individual has an 'unsettled' security issue, such as participation in protests, criticising the government, or taking up arms against the GoS. [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.5, p. 30]

As part of their return process, many returnees were required to fill out return or reconciliation forms in order to reconcile their status with the state authorities 'while attempting to demonstrate a clean record or seek "forgiveness" from the state'. Most returnees were required to undergo the process of reconciliation, which implied providing personal information to the GoS, including on their relatives' past and their social media accounts. [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.5, p. 31; [Returnees from abroad](#), 3.2, pp. 21-22]

Syrian refugees in Lebanon have pointed out that a risk they fear upon returning is the practice of writing a *taqrir* (a 'report', meaning reporting people to the security agencies). They reported on instances of detention upon return as a result of being denounced by neighbours or even family members. The practice of writing a *taqrir* is reportedly used either to avoid being targeted, for personal gain, or for vengeance. [[IDPs and returnees](#), 3.5, p. 34]

Persons who found out that they were listed as wanted by the authorities paid large amounts of money to members of security forces and brokers to avoid arrest upon their return to GoS-held territory. In some cases, the Syrian intelligence agencies denied return permissions on 'criminal' or security-related grounds. In other cases, persons wishing to return were denied entry at the border. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 20]

Concerning the treatment of returnees, it was noted that due in particular to GoS restrictions on the UN and UNHCR, no systematic monitoring of returnees has been carried out and as a result, obtaining information about the extent of mistreatment and violations committed by GoS against returnees was not possible. [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.5, p. 33]

According to one source, there were no consequences known of having applied for asylum abroad and the source had no information that such individuals were specifically punished on return. The same source also reported that returnees who had not engaged in opposition



activities and departed from Syria only due to the war tended not to face problems upon return unless in their absence somebody had reported them to the authorities alleging that they were, for example, involved in activities opposing the GoS. [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.5, p. 33]

According to multiple sources, obtaining a security clearance would by no means guarantee a safe return to Syria, and the Syrian authorities continued to arrest, (temporarily) detain, interrogate, torture and/or prosecute returnees in terrorism courts upon return. Sources noted that persons who departed from Syria were viewed with suspicion by the Syrian authorities for leaving the country and one source highlighted the government's 'hostile perceptions towards those who sought safety outside of the country'. According to another source, nearly half (48 %) of the interviewed returnees to GoS areas reported that they or a family member had experienced 'persecution' due to having left Syria illegally, for having applied for asylum abroad or because of their area of origin. [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.5, p. 33; [Returnees from abroad](#), 2.2, p. 18; [Targeting 2020](#), 1.3.6, p. 27]

According to one source, there was no guarantee that a returnee would not be targeted by intelligence services 'due to the lack of proper coordination between agencies'. Moreover, given the involvement of the General Intelligence Directorate in the coordination of returns, a returnee may incidentally be wanted by this agency and thus targeted upon return. The UNCOI in a July 2023 report covering the period from January 2020 to April 2023, noted that the GoS authorities arrested returnees at checkpoints for carrying outdated or inadequate papers and inflicted torture to coerce confessions from returnees, including about their previous involvement in protests. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, pp. 21-22]

According to returnees' testimonies collected by Amnesty International, Syrian officials perceived individuals who left the country as having been disloyal and supportive of the opposition 'either because of the fact that they fled or because of the place where they sought refuge'. Refugees were perceived 'as traitors, given that they readily incriminate the Syrian government before host countries in order to obtain protection there'. [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.5, pp. 32-33]

According to some sources, lacking civil documentation does not necessarily obstruct the process of return itself. Those who do not have a passport or whose passport expired, for instance, can apply for a *laissez-passer* at a Syrian diplomatic mission abroad. However, a lack of civil documentation represents an obstacle upon return when seeking to access government services, to initiate legal procedures and to file property claims. [[Returnees from abroad](#), 4.2, p. 25]

Several reports documented violations against returnees based on interviews with returnees and their relatives, namely unlawful or arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, including rape and sexual violence, and enforced disappearance. These also took place in Damascus, the Damascus area and the international airport [[Returnees from abroad](#), 5, p. 27]. The UN also observed that the Syrian authorities routinely denied Syrians return to their places of origin, most notably in formerly besieged areas that had been retaken by the Syrian armed forces. Some sources stated that some groups of returnees were denied access to a particular area of origin, because of their ethnicity, religion and/or political orientation [[Returnees from abroad](#), 4.1, p. 24].



More recently, the UNCOI, described cases of returnees from abroad to GoS areas who were either extorted, arrested, detained, conscripted, tortured, or forcibly disappeared [[COI Update 2023](#), 3, p. 11]. Numerous arrests of returnees were also reported at the Syrian-Lebanese border (notably at the al-Masnaa border crossing), including of individuals returning from Lebanon under a voluntary repatriation scheme after agreeing to security settlements with the GoS. Further concentrations of arrests of returnees, including persons who were wanted for opposition to the GoS, draft evasion or defection from the Syrian military, were reported at the Syrian-Turkish border, especially at the Kasab border crossing [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 21].

Returnees from abroad were arrested for a variety of reasons, most frequently on broad accusations of ‘terrorism’, often based on the claim that a relative was affiliated with the political or armed opposition, because the returnee originated from an area previously held by the opposition, for their alleged participation in protests or political opposition groups in the early days of the Syrian uprising, or for purportedly criticising Syria [[Returnees from abroad](#), 5, p. 27]. There were also cases of returnees being arrested for the purpose of exacting bribes in exchange for their release [[COI Update 2023](#), 3, p. 11; [Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 21].

For more guidance on the required documentation and treatment at checkpoints in Damascus, see the section [Travel and admittance](#) under [Internal protection](#) alternative.



The fact of having left Syria in itself would not normally lead to the level of risk required to establish well-founded fear of persecution. In most cases where a well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated, this would be related to circumstances falling under other profiles included in this guidance, and in particular 4.1. Persons perceived to be opposing the government.

However, in some cases, returnees could be exposed to acts which are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution (e.g. arrest, torture) and a nexus to a reason for persecution may be substantiated.

In cases where nexus is not substantiated, the implications of having left Syria may be a relevant consideration with regard to subsidiary protection. They should also be taken into account when assessing the willingness of the GoS to provide protection in the meaning of Article 7 QD and in the assessment of an internal protection alternative (IPA).

The individual conduct of the applicant is a relevant consideration in this regard, including when they left Syria, possible contact with the Syrian authorities (e.g. issuance of passport), and travel back to Syria, modalities of entry/exit and time spent in the country, etc. These circumstances should be taken into account in the examination of the international protection needs of an applicant, as well as in relation to the potential withdrawal of international protection in accordance with Article 14 or Article 19 QD.



3. Actors of persecution or serious harm

[Article 6 QD](#)



The contents of this chapter include:

[3.1. Areas of control and influence](#)

[3.2. The Government of Syria and associated armed groups](#)

[3.3. Syrian Democratic Forces and Asayish](#)

[3.4. Anti-government armed groups](#)

[3.5. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant \(ISIL\)](#)

[3.6. Other non-State actors](#)

3.1 Areas of control and influence

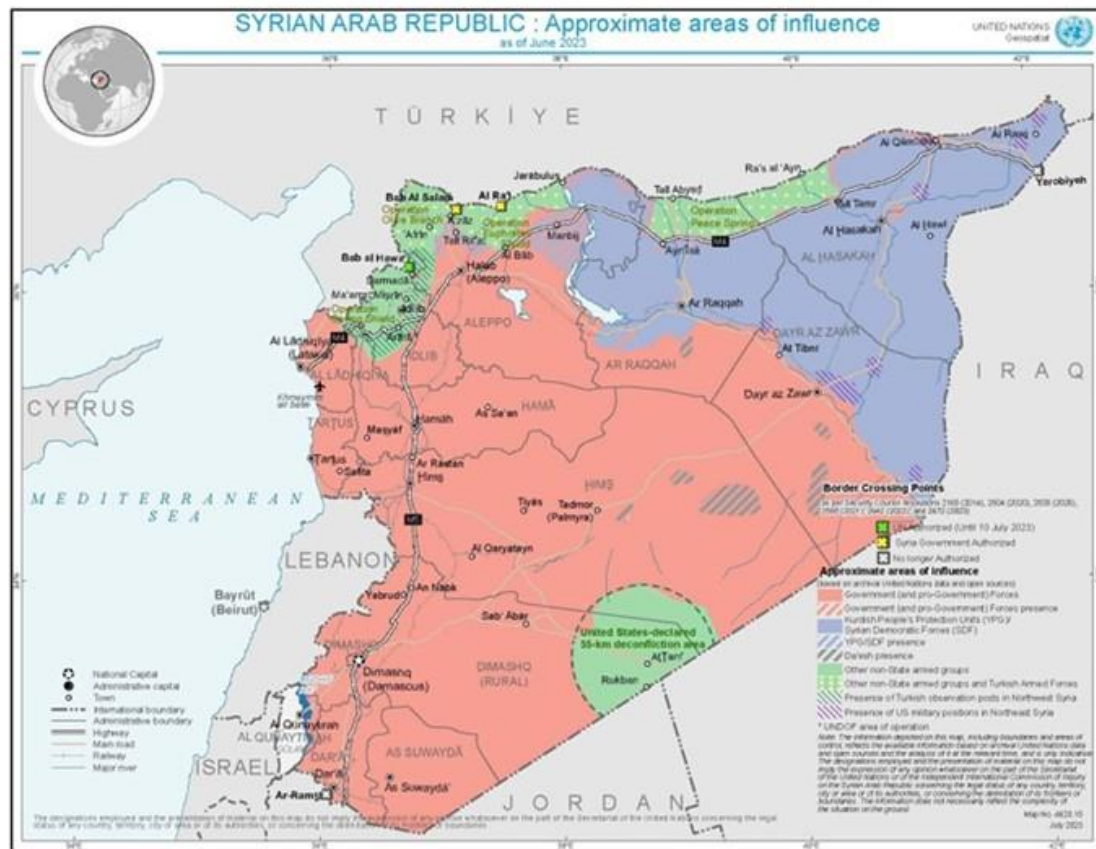
Last update: April 2024

In Syria, a wide range of different groups and individuals can be considered as actors of persecution or serious harm. This includes a multitude of internal and international actors pursuing their own interests and goals [[Security 2023](#), 1.3, pp. 18-24; [Actors](#), 1.2, pp. 4-11].

Since a March 2020 ceasefire which froze the last major frontline in Idlib governorate, the country has been de facto partitioned into four main areas controlled by different parties to the conflict: the GoS-controlled area (about two thirds of the country), the northeast controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a territory in northern Syria under control of the Syrian National Army (SNA) and the area in the northwest controlled by the rebel group Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) [[Security 2023](#), 1.1, pp. 16-17].

The map below ([Figure 1](#)) outlines the approximate areas of control and influence in the country as of June 2023. This map presents an indication and cannot be seen as an absolute representation of the situation in terms of spatial or temporal accuracy. The depictions on this map do not imply any opinion on the part of the EUAA concerning the legal status or effective control over any territory in the country.

Figure 1. © UN Geospatial, Approximate areas of influence as of June 2023.



For more information on territorial control and/or presence of the actors of persecution or serious harm listed below, please refer to [Indiscriminate violence](#) under Article 15(c) QD: indiscriminate violence in situations of armed conflict.

3.2 The Government of Syria and associated armed groups

Last update: April 2024

The Syrian State actors include members of security forces and other authorities, such as local councils or other local officials, e.g. *mukhtars*. It should also be noted that the distinction between official State forces and non-State forces is not always clear.

The **Syrian Armed Forces** consist of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), the Naval Forces, the Air Forces, Air Defence Forces and the National Defence Forces (NDF). Alawites hold the most important positions in the SAA, and elite divisions, such as the Republican Guard and the Fourth Division, were reportedly mostly Alawite. SAA leaders allegedly lack control over their divisions. Army divisions are said to be controlled by the government's intelligence services

and to be under the authority of Iranian and Russian influence. The army can no longer be considered a cohesive force, but rather a coalition of regular forces and allied militias [Security 2022, 1.4.1, p. 26]. The Fourth Division established and backed by Russia has reportedly amassed power and influence, expanding its military, economic and criminal activities. The military core of this division is deployed throughout the country but mainly present near the capital and its western and southwestern peripheries. [Security 2023, 1.4.1, p. 26].

Intelligence services are operating in Syria. The services operate outside the law with no defined boundaries between their areas of jurisdiction and with overlapping responsibilities. Several laws empower the security apparatus and allow its members to act with impunity [Actors, 2.3.2, p. 31]. The **police force** report to the Ministry of Interior, but they can receive orders from branches of the intelligence agencies. There have also been frequent instances where police acted as informers on anti-government activity and political dissidence in support of the services [Actors, 2.3.3, p. 32].

A number of **pro-government militias** are operating alongside the regular armed forces. There are local militias, such as the NDF, and non-Syrian militias made up of foreign fighters, mainly backed by Iran [Security 2023, 1.4.1, p. 24-25; Actors, 2.3.4, p. 34]. By 2012, the GoS consolidated militias under its control and incorporated them under an umbrella network set up with Iran's assistance, the **NDF**. The NDF were reported to be 'quite inclusive of all the groups that are willing to fight on the side of Syrian government', including Sunnis from Damascus and Aleppo, 'mercenaries, crime lords, and unemployed citizens'. They have become auxiliary security institutions, which operate their own prisons and investigation commissions [Actors, 2.3.4, p. 34]. Other examples of Syrian pro-government militias include the **Tiger Forces** ⁽⁶⁾, serving as the army of the Air Forces Intelligence, militias of wealthy and powerful Alawite businessmen with close links to the Assad government, such as the **al-Bustan militias** and **Suquor al Sahara** [Actors, 2.3.4, p. 35].

Apart from Syrian pro-GoS militias, **Shia foreign fighters** were mobilised by Iran and sent to fight on the side of the Assad government. The most prominent groups included the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade, the Pakistani Zeinabiyoun Brigade, as well as various Iraqi Shia militias that are members of the Iraqi Popular Mobilisation Forces, and fighters from Yemen [Actors, 2.3.4, p. 34].

Palestinian militias such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command, the SAA-affiliated Palestinian Liberation Army and the Al-Quds Brigade (Liwa Al-Quds) also supported the government military in the conflict [Actors, 2.3.4, p. 36]. The latter group has come to dominate the Palestinian camps in Aleppo, Latakia, Hama and Homs as a political and military force [Security 2023, 1.4.1, p. 25].

As of December 2022, the GoS controlled about two thirds of the country, including central and southern Syria, the governorates along the Mediterranean coast, and parts of eastern

⁽⁶⁾ The Tiger Forces were renamed to 25th Special Tasks Division in 2019. See [Security 2023, 1.4.1, footnote 96].



Syria and Aleppo. The GoS also controlled Syria's most important cities such as Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, or Hama [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.1, p. 25; [Security 2022](#), 1.5.1, p. 41].

Syrian State actors including associated armed groups have committed a wide range of human rights violations since the beginning of the conflict. Recent sources indicated that GoS forces continued to arbitrarily arrest and detain people, with detention leading to torture, ill-treatment, and in some instances to death of detainees. Besides arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances, the GoS was reported to use torture and sexual violence as a method of control, intimidation and extortion, harassment and other violations [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.1, p. 12; [Security 2023](#), 1.4.1, p. 26, [Targeting 2022](#), 1.1.2, p. 20].



For further information on human rights violations committed by the GoS and associated armed groups and their relevance as potential exclusion grounds, see [8. Exclusion](#).

3.3 Syrian Democratic Forces and Asayish

Last update: April 2024

The **Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)** are the main armed force of the Autonomous Administration of North and East of Syria (AANES). They are militarily and financially supported by the US to fight ISIL in northeast Syria. The SDF is a mixed force, with Arab, Kurds and fighters of other minorities within its ranks. They are a coalition of Arab and Kurdish militias as well as tribal groups, among which the Kurdish components form the People's Protection Units (YPG). The YPG are the strongest fighting component and constitute the military leadership of the SDF. In comparison, the **Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG)**, which leads the SDF, only features Kurdish fighters from Syria, Iraq, Türkiye and Iran, and is considered by some sources to have links with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party - *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*). [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.3., p. 28; [Security 2022](#), 1.4.3, p. 31]

The **Asayish** are the police force of the AANES and fulfil various security roles that range from police to counterterrorism. Similarly to SDF, they also receive funding from the US to train, equip and pay their members. The Asayish reportedly have command centres in each canton of the Kurdish-controlled region, some of which operate independently from each other. There are also 30 000 police officers operating in Kurdish-controlled areas in northeast Syria. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.3., p. 28; [Actors](#), 3.2.2, p. 46]

The SDF hold a demographically heterogeneous region of about 30 % of the Syrian territory, comprising most of Hasaka governorate as well as areas in Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqqa governorates and a small enclave in Aleppo countryside. Due to the threat of Turkish incursions, the SDF further had to negotiate with Russia and the GoS, accepting SAA reinforcements into its territory near the contact lines with Turkish-backed forces in Tall Rifaat and Manbij. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.3., p. 28]



Recent sources noted that, the SDF engaged in extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearance as well as torture in detention centres. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.3., p. 30] SDF continued to recruit children, whose number increased in 2022 [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 41].



For further information on human rights violations committed by the SDF and the Asayish and their relevance as potential exclusion grounds, see [8. Exclusion](#).

3.4 Anti-government armed groups

Last update: April 2024

The **Syrian National Army (SNA)** is an umbrella organisation of a loose formation of militias backed by Türkiye and several Gulf states.

In 2019, the SNA incorporated the **National Liberation Front (NLF)**, also a Turkish-backed alliance of opposition-armed groups using the brand of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) into its ranks [[Actors](#), 4.3, p. 56, 5.1, p. 58].

The SNA controls two areas adjoining the Turkish border: the first covers the northern countryside of Aleppo from Afrin to Jarablus, and the second one spans from Tall Abyad to Ras al-Ayn in the north of Raqqa and Hasaka governorates [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.2, p. 26].

The SNA forces play an essential role in day-to-day matters in the areas under their control, ‘impacting everything from the security situation to real estate sales, business dealings, the work of NGOs, and local governance institutions’. The SNA is reportedly comprised of more than 40 factions with several sources reporting the group’s internal conflicts and rivalries as a major issue [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.2, p. 26-27].

According to recent sources, abuses by the SNA against civilians continued, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, including rape, and pillage. Looting, theft, occupation and expropriation of predominately Kurdish properties by SNA were also reported [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.2, p. 28; [Targeting 2022](#), 10.2, p. 92].

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham or **Organisation for the Liberation of the Levant (HTS)** is a coalition of Islamist Sunni anti-government armed groups which continues to be listed as a terrorist organisation by the EU, the UN and many states [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.4, p. 30, [Security 2021](#), 1.4.4, p. 25]. HTS is comprised of several armed factions, including *Jabhat Fatah al-Sham* (also known as *Jabhat al-Nusra* and previously as the *Al-Nusra Front*). It maintains its power through the Syrian Salvation Government, which has been as the group’s ‘political arm’. [[Security 2022](#), 2.1.2, p. 69; [Actors](#), 4.1.1, p. 50]



HTS exercised military and security control within its territory in Idlib governorate, parts of Aleppo's western countryside and Latakia's countryside as well as the Al-Ghab Plain located northwest of Hama and is considered as the dominant actor and military superior armed group in the area. In October 2022, HTS fighters took control of the city of Afrin and surrounding areas before a Turkish-brokered truce led to their withdrawal. HTS personnel, however, reportedly remained in the Afrin area, but avoided being publicly visible [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.4, pp. 30-31, 2.1.2, p. 69, 2.2.3, p. 83].

HTS forces have been involved in extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention of civilians [[Security 2022](#), 1.4.4, p. 35, 1.4.5, p. 27, 2.1.2, p. 67]. Enforced disappearances, confiscation of property, harassment and intimidation against women were also reported [[Targeting 2022](#), 8.2, p. 82, 11, p. 96, 13.4.2, pp. 118-119]. In recent times, the group attempted to publicly distance itself from al-Qaeda and portray it as a legitimate civilian authority. Despite its legitimisation efforts, HTS continued to commit serious human rights violations [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.4, p. 31].

A number of other anti-GoS armed groups are also present in the Idlib area.



For further information on human rights violations committed by various anti-government armed groups and their relevance as potential exclusion grounds, see [8. Exclusion](#).

3.5 Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

Last update: April 2024

The **Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)**, also known as ISIS, IS and Daesh, was originally created by the wing of Al Qaeda in Iraq and by smaller Iraqi Sunni insurgent groups. It is an UN and EU designated terrorist organisation aiming to establish a global Islamic caliphate and fostering violent conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims. [[Actors](#), 6, p. 59]

ISIL's strength has been estimated at between 5 000 and 7 000 members across Syria and Iraq, about half of whom were reported to be fighters. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.6., p. 33]

ISIL's territorial control and governance in Syria ceased to exist in March 2019. However, according to recent sources, ISIL was reported to 'remain resilient' to be 'taking advantage of political and military developments' in Syria to regain presence. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.6., p. 33; [Security 2021](#), 1.4.6., p. 28]

ISIL fighters were present in the mountainous and hard-to control Badia desert and along the Syrian-Iraqi border, especially in the areas of Deir Ez- Zor, Palmyra, Al-Sukhna, and also in Al-Qaryatain. The group reportedly used these regions as operational bases to rebuild cells, train its fighters and carry out attacks throughout the region. ISIL cells and activities were



moreover reported in Syria's south, particularly in Dar'a governorate. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.6., p. 33]

The first quarter of 2023 saw an increase in ISIL activities in Syria. ISIL attacks within the Syrian desert have increased but decreased in northeastern Syria. In spring 2023, ISIL reportedly launched two separate operations in the Badia region involving more than 100 fighters, indicating the group's coordinating and tactical capacity. ISIL operations centred on Deir Ez-Zor and Homs, but also reached Hama, Hasaka, and Raqqqa governorates. The group's attack zones reportedly expanded along both banks of the Euphrates River. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.6., p. 34]

ISIL continued its 'guerrilla warfare tactics' launching hit and run attacks against GoS and SDF forces, but also against civilians. Intimidation and extortion practices, as well as attacks on businesses and assassinations of community leaders were also reported. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.6., p. 34]



For further information on human rights violations committed by various anti-government armed groups and their relevance as potential exclusion grounds, see [8. Exclusion](#).

3.6 Other non-State actors

Last update: February 2023

Human rights violations, which could amount to persecution or serious harm, are also committed by other non-State actors, such as family members or criminal gangs.

Some examples include domestic violence, 'honour' violence by family members, sexual violence, violence against LGBTIQ individuals, etc. See, for example, the profiles of [4.13. LGBTIQ persons](#) and [4.11. Women and girls](#), etc.



4. Refugee status

[Article 2\(d\) QD](#)

[Article 9 QD](#)

[Article 10 QD](#)

This chapter provides a brief outline and general considerations with regard to the assessment of applications for international protection in relation to the elements of the refugee definition ([Article 2\(d\) QD](#)) and proceeds with the analysis of information concerning 13 particular profiles of applicants for international protection in relation to qualification for refugee status.

The contents of this chapter include:



[General remarks](#)

[4.1. Persons perceived to be opposing the government](#)

[4.2. Persons who evaded or deserted military service](#)

[4.3. Persons with perceived links to ISIL](#)

[4.4. Members of and persons perceived to be collaborating with the SDF and YPG](#)

[4.5. Persons perceived to be opposing the SDF/YPG](#)

[4.6. Persons fearing forced or child recruitment by Kurdish forces](#)

[4.7. Persons associated with the Government of Syria](#)

[4.8. Journalists, other media professionals and human rights activists](#)

[4.9. Doctors, other medical personnel and civil defence volunteers](#)

[4.10. Ethno-religious groups](#)

[4.11. Women and girls](#)

[4.12. Children](#)

[4.13. LGBTIQ persons](#)



General remarks

Last update: April 2024

While the conclusions under this common analysis could provide general guidance, the protection needs of each applicant should be **examined individually**. The non-exhaustive lists of examples with regard to sub-profiles at a differentiated risk and to circumstances, which would normally increase or decrease the risk, are to be taken into account in light of all circumstances in the individual case.

The individual applicant could fall under **more than one profile** included in this common analysis. The protection needs associated with all such circumstances should be fully examined.

The considerations under each profile should, furthermore, be viewed without prejudice to the credibility assessment of the applicant's claims. This common analysis deals solely with issues of risk analysis and qualification.



For more guidance on how to read the following subsections, please refer '[Country Guidance: explained](#)': [Refugee status](#).

For each profile, the sections below provide:

COI summary: This is an outline of the factual basis of the analysis and the main elements taken into account when reaching the respective assessment of protection needs.

Conclusions and guidance: The conclusions and guidance are structured within three subsequent parts.

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

Where relevant, further guidance is provided with regard to the circumstances which should be taken into account in the individual assessment, including circumstances which would in general increase the risk for an individual.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?



For more guidance on how to read the following subsections, please refer '[Country Guidance: explained](#)': [Using country guidance](#).



4.1 Persons perceived to be opposing the government

Last update: April 2024

This profile refers to different groups viewed by the government as opposition, such as members of anti-government groups, political opposition activists and protesters, and civilians originating from areas associated with opposition to the government.

For guidance regarding other profiles, which may be relevant, see [4.2. Persons who evaded or deserted military service](#); [4.8. Journalists, other media professionals and human rights activists](#); and [4.9. Doctors, other medical personnel and civil defence volunteers](#).

4.1.1 Political dissent and opposition in Syria: overview

Government forces harshly repressed the anti-government protests that erupted in 2011 and the ensuing military uprising. Throughout the conflict, the GoS has used systematic torture, unlawful detentions and enforced disappearances, starvation and medical deprivation sieges, as well as mass casualty weapons, including chemical weapons, against civilians. Civilians perceived to be either supporting the opposition or insufficiently loyal to GoS were arbitrarily arrested and detained. In particular, individuals perceived to be opposition supporters were most likely to be detained arbitrarily by government forces and their allied militias. [[Targeting 2022](#), 1, p. 17, 1.2.3, p. 26]

GoS is reported to view as political dissent the activities of **wide categories of individuals**, including members of political parties other than the ruling Baath party, peaceful protesters, activists and critics of the government, professionals such as humanitarian workers, doctors, human rights defenders, university students, lawyers, journalists, media workers, bloggers and online activists, as well as draft evaders and defected soldiers. Individuals living in opposition-controlled areas, those in recaptured areas, returnees from abroad, IDPs seeking to return to their original places of residence in GoS-held areas, individuals with family members who were dissidents, activists or armed opposition members and those who have been in contact with family members or friends residing in opposition-controlled areas, have also been targeted. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.1, pp. 12-13; [Targeting 2022](#), 1, p. 17; [Targeting 2020](#), 1, pp. 13-14].

According to recent reports, perceived opponents of the government continued to be targeted by variety of state-backed actors, including security services and pro-GoS militias [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.1, p. 12]. The priority of GoS is reportedly to eliminate remaining structures of resistance and discourage future rebellion, leading to arrests of civilians as well as former opposition fighters in reconciled areas taken by GoS. [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.1, p. 23]

Syrians have ended up wanted by the government and arbitrarily detained for a wide variety of reasons, including for example for having a similar name with a person that in fact opposes the government, and at times without a clear reason. [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.1.3, p. 22].



The GoS has at its disposal an extensive range of tools and networks of informants for intelligence gathering, surveillance and for punishing anyone perceived to be a dissident or insufficiently loyal to it. Among those tools, the authorities reportedly kept extensive lists of persons wanted for arrest or questioning. These lists included the names of individuals suspected of involvement in perceived opposition activities and men wanted for military service. Persons on wanted lists were vulnerable to being arrested or forcibly disappeared 'at official ports of entry and exit, such as land border crossings and airports, as well as checkpoints and government offices on regime-held territory'. [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.1, p. 16]

More than 100 000 people have been detained, abducted or gone missing during Syria's civil war, largely at the hands of the GoS. GoS forces arrested civilians perceived to be supporting the opposition or deemed insufficiently loyal to the government. Thousands of detainees were being held without trial, some since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011. Intelligence services were reported to commit systematic rights abuses. [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.1.1, p. 18] Civilians perceived to be opposed to the government also claimed to have been denied access to medical treatment in Damascus [[Damascus 2022](#), 3.6.1, p. 52].

On 30 April 2022, the president issued Legislative Decree No. 7 which included a general amnesty for terrorist crimes. The amnesty did not cover persons charged under other laws, political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. Only a small number of persons have been reportedly released. [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.1.1, pp. 19-20; [Security 2022](#), 1.4.1, p. 29]

Sentences against persons accused of anti-GoS activity were generally harsh, while prison conditions for political and national security prisoners, especially alleged opposition members, were 'much worse than those for ordinary criminals'. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.1, pp. 13-14]

On 28 March 2022 GoS passed a law criminalising torture, while during the first half of 2022, 90 deaths by torture at the hands of GoS and affiliated partners were recorded [[Security 2022](#), 1.4.1, p. 28; [Targeting 2022](#), 1.1.2, p. 21]. Government forces, especially the intelligence branches, were reported to torture perceived opponents. Most of the victims were men between the ages of 18 and 60, but torture of women and children was also reported. Extrajudicial executions by the intelligence branches were also reported [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.1.2, p. 16, 1.1.4, p. 18]. Enforced disappearances and deaths in detention due to torture and medical negligence also continued to be reported in recent sources [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.1, p. 12; [Security 2023](#), 1.4.1, p. 26].

4.1.2 Members of anti-government armed groups

Last update: April 2024

There are multiple anti-government armed groups active in Syria (see [3.4. Anti-government armed groups](#)). This profile addresses the situation of current and former members of anti-government armed groups, including those that had undergone a reconciliation process, and their targeting by the GoS.



For targeting of members of these groups by other armed actors, see [4.4. Members of and persons perceived to be collaborating with the SDF and YPG](#) and [4.5. Persons perceived to be opposing the SDF/YPG](#).

COI summary

Arrests of individuals with various types of alleged links to anti-GoS armed groups, some of whom had undergone ‘reconciliation’/settlement with the GoS, continued to be reported in 2023. Those detained included persons suspected of former membership of the Free Syrian Army, ISIL and other (un)specified opposition factions, as well as individuals (including women) with relatives who had been affiliated with armed opposition groups. Several civilians were also arrested on (reportedly unfounded) allegations of ‘communicating with opposition groups in north Syria’ and planning a car-bomb attack, or because they lived near places where attacks on GoS targets had occurred [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, pp. 18-19].

Detainees were subjected to systematic torture in the intelligence services’ many detention centres. They were detained for days or months, often without being brought before a judge and without being told what they were accused of. In most cases, the detainees’ families were not informed of their whereabouts. Detainees were held in crowded cells and without sufficient food. [[Security 2019](#), 4.3, p. 33]

The outcomes of court trials of defendants accused of membership in the armed opposition reportedly ‘appeared predetermined’, although some defendants were able to bribe prosecutors and court officials. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 19]

GoS entered into so-called reconciliation agreements with different actors in most of the areas the GoS forces had recaptured from various anti-government groups. The reconciliation agreements vary to a great extent. They may range from opposition fighters remaining involved in security and governance roles in their areas to cases of virtual opposition surrender involving (forced) evacuations of fighters or even whole populations. In several places, armed rebel groups had switched sides in the conflict as part of a reconciliation agreement. [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.2.1, p. 18]

Applications from individuals who wished to surrender were also possible. The formal process known as ‘resolving status’ typically involves interrogation about previous opposition activities, many of which fall under the GoS’s expansive definition of ‘terrorism’. Additionally, it involves a pledge to abstain from such actions in the future. Thereafter, the individual receives a clearance paper, and the security agencies supposedly remove him or her from their list of wanted persons. [[Recaptured areas](#), 2.5.1, p. 17]

However, the reconciliation agreements have been broken often. In particular, former activists, opposition commanders and persons who have been affiliated to an armed rebel group have been arrested, disappeared or have been harassed despite the reconciliation agreements. [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.2.1, p. 19] Furthermore, civilians and former opposition fighters who signed reconciliation agreements with GoS and who took up positions in local administration or military forces have been killed by unknown perpetrators, particularly in southern Syria, in what appeared to be targeted killings. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.1, p. 13;



[Security 2022](#), p. 29; 2.11.3, p. 195; [Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.4, p. 28; [Recaptured areas](#), 3.2.2.1, p. 36]

Some groups and individuals are denied or do not enter into the reconciliation agreements. This applies to individuals that have ‘Syrian blood on their hands’ as well as those that are considered by GoS to be affiliated with terrorist groups like ISIL or HTS. Another condition of the reconciliation process is that it ‘shall not overturn criminal sentences that are unrelated to current events in Syria, or which are related to the rights of other Syrian civilians’. Those who refuse the reconciliation agreement with GoS, as was the case for around 10 000 persons from Dar’a and Quneitra governorates, were evacuated to areas under the armed opposition’s control in Idlib and northern Aleppo governorates [[Recaptured areas](#), 2.5.3, p. 19]. It was reported that the GoS considers the fighters who chose passage to Idlib over the ‘reconciliation deals’ to be ‘irreconcilable’, suggesting that it will entertain no such bargain in case Idlib is recaptured [[Security 2020](#), 2.1.3, p. 62].

There are reports of reconciliation agreements not being observed by the government, for both individuals and communities. There are many reports of returnees having been arrested, detained, harassed or conscripted after they had completed the reconciliation process and received protection papers [[COI update 2023](#), 2, p.11; [Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 21; [Targeting 2020](#), 1.3.6, p. 27].

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

In itself, the prosecution of criminal acts committed by members of anti-government armed groups and their potential targeting in accordance with the rules of international humanitarian law would not amount to persecution. However, acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. assassination, torture, arbitrary arrest).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

For members of anti-government armed groups, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated. In case of reconciliation agreement, well-founded fear of persecution would also be substantiated in general, as those are often broken in practice and the reconciled individuals may furthermore face a risk of targeting by other actors.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.



Exclusion considerations could be relevant to this profile (see the chapter [8. Exclusion](#)).

4.1.3 Political activists, opposition party members and protesters

Last update: April 2024

This sub-profile refers to individuals who would be seen by the government as opposing it, in particular to perceived political activists, protesters, opposition party members, and those who have expressed criticism towards the regime.

COI summary

Political activism in Syria had been kept in check by the government for decades. Although a 2011 decree allowed for the registration of independent political parties, in practice the government enforced it selectively, permitting only pro-government groups to form official parties. [\[Targeting 2020, 1.2.2, p. 20\]](#)

The GoS has been reported to ban ‘genuine’ political opposition [\[Country Focus 2023, 1.1.2, p. 14\]](#). Members of political parties, which are known to support the calls for overthrowing the Assad government, are considered enemies of the state [\[Targeting 2020, 1.2.2, p. 20\]](#). In this context, the GoS used its intelligence and security apparatus to ‘monitor and punish opposition movements that could meaningfully challenge Assad’s rule’ and reportedly harassed parties with a Socialist/Communist or Islamist agenda. The GoS was reportedly relatively tolerant towards independent politicians and members of parties labelled as ‘domestic’ opposition as long as these groups did not call for the overthrow of the Syrian President. Nevertheless, such members of domestic opposition were not completely ‘immune’ to harassment and arrest [\[Country Focus 2023, 1.1.2, p. 14\]](#).

Most of the members of the political opposition to the Assad government have either fled Syria, were killed or were in prison [\[Targeting 2020, 1.2.2, p. 20\]](#). Opposition activists refrained from forming parties out of fear that the GoS might use party lists to pursue opposition members [\[Targeting 2022, 1.2, p. 23\]](#).

Since the beginning of the conflict, the targeting of political activists and protesters who sided with the opposition has been a key element in the GoS’s counterinsurgency strategy. Opposition protests in government-held areas were often met with gunfire, mass arrests, and torture and killing of those detained. The GoS forces conducted regular raids to detain political and civil activists [\[Targeting 2020, 1.2.2, p. 20\]](#). There were also reports that persons believed to have been involved in opposition-related activities, including protesters, were on the ‘wanted lists’ [\[Targeting 2020, 1.1.3, p. 17, 1.3.6, p. 28\]](#). Persons who took part in previous activities, for instance by joining a protest during the early stages of the uprising, were targeted by GoS with arbitrary arrests ‘individually in a slow systematic manner’ in more recent years, including in 2021 [\[Targeting 2022, 1.2.2, p. 24\]](#). GoS engaged in practices of seizing lands and properties of its opponents, redistributing these assets among members of



the security services and local pro-GoS militias [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.3, p. 23]. More recently, protests criticising the economic situation and the Assad regime took place in Sweida and Dar'a governorates, but also in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and the coastal regions of Latakia and Tartous. On certain occasions protests were followed by arrests and detentions as well as raids on the homes of protesters for the purpose of intimidation. In two documented incidents security forces reportedly opened fire at protesters in Sweida who attempted to storm governorate buildings [[COI update 2023](#), 2, p. 10; [Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, pp. 16-17].

In April 2022, GoS issued a new law on cybercrime with imprisonment period up to 15 years and harsher penalties for online criticism against the constitution, the president, or the state [[Security 2022](#), 1.4.1, p. 29]. Various individuals were reportedly arrested based on the Cybercrime Law, including persons who on social media called for the implementation of the Anti-Torture Act in GoS-controlled areas or voiced criticism of living conditions and corruption in GoS-held areas. In the wake of the 6 February 2023 earthquake, sources reported that authorities arrested individuals who had criticised the GoS's aid distribution practices [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, pp. 15-16].

The UNCOI documented in the first half of 2023 cases of arbitrary arrests and detention by GoS forces of activists and of persons who made critical statements against the GoS on social media. [[COI update 2023](#), 2, p.11]

Persons with real or perceived family links to political dissidents and activists were also reportedly arrested and tortured by GoS authorities. GoS also targeted young men suspected of knowing the identities of individuals who were wanted for writing public messages calling for the overthrow of the Assad government, as well as individuals accused of criticising the Iranian presence in the country. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 16]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. detention, torture, killing).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

For individuals considered by the government as opposing it, such as political activists, opposition party members, persons who took part in protests, and persons who expressed criticism towards the regime, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.





Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.

4.1.4 Civilians originating from areas associated with opposition to the government

Last update: April 2024

This sub-profile refers to civilians from areas associated with opposition to the government, in particular (former) opposition-held areas in Dar'a, Rural Damascus, Idlib, Latakia, Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Quneitra. It addresses the situation of civilians from recaptured areas as well as, briefly, from areas which continue to be under the control of anti-government armed groups.

COI summary

The government's territorial gains over the course of the conflict have been followed by continued arbitrary arrests and detention [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.2.3, p. 21].

There were numerous reports of deliberate targeting, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances of civilians in GoS-controlled areas, including those reconquered by the GoS. Among those detained were IDPs, including some who had signed settlement agreements with the GoS upon their return to GoS-held territory. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 17. For more detailed information on reconquered areas see [Recaptured areas](#) COI report]

GoS treats individuals from former opposition-held areas with a heavy degree of suspicion. The intelligence agencies created a wide network of informants and surveillance to ensure that the government kept a close watch of all aspects of Syrians' everyday life and restricted criticism of the GoS [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.1.1, p. 15]. The scrutiny of individuals from former opposition-held areas is the highest in Damascus, given the concentration of security personnel in the city as well as the importance of the capital to the government. The GoS also restricted the access of civilians that wished to return to Damascus and Rural Damascus and unlawfully demolished houses of residents [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.2.3, p. 23]. Persons in GoS-controlled areas whose origin is from areas controlled by anti-government groups may also be perceived as disloyal [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.3, p. 25].

Furthermore, GoS security forces in recent years have also been harassing, detaining and extorting individuals who had relatives in armed opposition-controlled areas [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 18]. Civilians were arrested for communicating with their relatives or friends in rebel-held territory or abroad and they were prevented from establishing further contact [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.1.1, p. 15]. Similarly, civilians were arrested for travelling between GoS-held areas and areas controlled by other parties [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 18].

GoS also punished family members of alleged opposition supporters by applying a number of laws that violate their individual property rights. Women with familial ties to opposition fighters



were reportedly detained for intelligence-gathering purposes or retribution [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.2.3, p. 21].

There were also reports of indiscriminate attacks such as bombing and shelling from GoS forces resulting in civilian casualties along the borders of the different areas of control, including areas held by opposition groups. Pro-GoS forces targeted civilians in hospitals, residential areas, schools, and IDP settlements throughout 2022. These forces reportedly employed the ‘deliberate killing of civilians, as well as their forced displacement, starvation, and protracted siege-like conditions’. [[Security 2023](#), 1.5.1, p. 35]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. arbitrary arrests, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: regional aspects (who is in control in the area, whether it was considered an opposition stronghold, etc.), and level of perceived support or collaboration with anti-government forces, familial ties or other connection to suspected members of anti-government armed groups and/or political opposition members, perceived support for the government, ethno-religious background (e.g. being [Sunni Arab](#)), etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.

4.2 Persons who evaded or deserted military service

Last update: April 2024

This section provides an analysis with regard to the profiles of:



Draft evader: a draft evader is a Syrian male, above the age of 18, who has avoided being drafted into the Syrian Armed Forces either by hiding from the Syrian authorities or by fleeing Syria.

Deserter: a deserter is a former member of the Syrian Armed Forces (e.g. a conscript, a non-commissioned officer (corporal or sergeant) or an officer) who has left his post or unit in the Syrian Armed Forces without permission. See also [4.2.3. Military deserters and defectors](#) for the legal definition of military desertion according to Syrian law.

Defector: a defector is a former member of the Syrian Armed Forces who has left the Syrian Armed Forces and joined an armed opposition group in Syria.

Reservist: a reservist is a Syrian male who has previously completed his mandatory military service in Syria and can still be called up for reserve service in the Syrian Armed Forces.

Military service: the term is used broadly to cover both military service and reserve service in the Syrian Armed Forces.

For more information on the structure of the Syrian Armed Forces, see [3.2. The Government of Syria and associated armed groups](#).

4.2.1 Military service: overview

Last update: April 2024

Male citizens between the age of 18 and 42 are obliged by law to perform their military service for a duration of between 18 and 21 months, depending on their level of education. Career soldiers can be called to service up to the age bracket of 48 to 62, depending on the rank. Registered Palestinians residing in Syria are also subject to conscription and usually serve in the ranks of the SAA-affiliated Palestinian Liberation Army. After completing compulsory military service, former soldiers can be called up for reserve service until 42 years of age [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.1, p.22; [Targeting 2022](#), 2.1, p. 37; [Military service](#), 2, p. 13]. The age limit is less dependent on the universal draft than on the government's mobilising efforts and local developments [[Military service](#), 2.1, p. 13]. Sources have reported in previous years on cases where men past the age of 42 were conscripted or called up for reserve service. A source interviewed in July 2023 stated that they were not aware of conscripts serving in the SAA past the age of 42 but knew numerous cases of persons over 42 serving in SAA-affiliated militias [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.1, p.22].

Recruitment of conscripts and reservists

All Syrian men must report for military service and get their military booklet at a local recruitment division office after turning 18. Syrians living abroad have to report to a Syrian



embassy or consulate to fill in a specific form which would serve as a substitute for the military booklet until their return to Syria. Military exemptions and deferrals are recorded in the military booklet. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.2, p. 23]

Failure to report to the military recruitment division within the period specified results in a fine and a potential extension of additional months of the military service period. Those who do not report within one year of becoming eligible for military service or do not start their military service, are registered in a national database as draft evaders. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.2, p. 23].

The SAA is also recruiting conscripts through reconciliation agreements/settlement of status which are announced periodically. These conscripts are either incorporated directly in the SAA or in affiliated militias [For more information on these agreements see below the section [Regional specifics](#)].

According to one source, new conscripts will get a maximum of 45 days training and are then considered ready for deployment, while another source stated that training of conscripts lasts six months. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.2, p. 24]

In practice, an alternative to the military service in the SAA is joining a SAA-affiliated militia. Those who join militias reportedly do so for better salaries and incentives, such as being promised that they would be serving in their area of origin and be exempted from military service. However, according to a source, when the SAA is involved in active fighting and has a need for manpower, militias would also be deployed to the frontlines to take part in the confrontations as auxiliary forces to the SAA. Moreover, once their service in the militias is completed, individuals still risk being conscripted by the SAA under the pretext that they had avoided mandatory military service. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.2, p. 25]

Reservists continue to be called up for service, albeit in smaller numbers compared to previous years due to the reduction of armed confrontations. Individuals with specific skills such as tank crewmen are more likely to be called up for reserve service. It has also been reported that reservists from former opposition-held areas are increasingly called up for service, as the GoS wants to assert more control over these areas. If those who are called up for reserve service do not report within the given deadline, their name will be added to wanted lists and they would risk being arrested by the authorities. Between August 2022 and August 2023, sources reported that GoS security forces arrested men wanted for reserve service, including in Rural Damascus and Idlib governorates. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.2, p. 25-26]

Conscientious objection

According to Article 46 of the Syrian Constitution of 2012, 'compulsory military service shall be a sacred duty' and 'defending the territorial integrity of the homeland and maintaining the secrets of the state shall be a duty of every citizen'. The right to conscientious objection is not legally recognised and there are no provisions for substitute or alternative service. Only Christian and Muslim religious leaders continued to be exempted from the military based on



conscientious objection, although Muslim religious leaders were required to pay an exemption fee. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.5, p.29; [Targeting 2022](#), 2.2, p. 14]

Exemptions and deferrals

The law permits exemptions from military service for the categories of individuals described below. Generally, the exemptions from military service are being enforced in practice by the GoS. However, sources noted that, at times, the GoS resorts to blackmail and extortion of individuals seeking to obtain or renew exemptions. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.5, p. 29; [Military service](#), 3, p. 28]

- **Only sons:** a family's only son can be granted deferral from military service for one or more years, which he must renew until he is granted a permanent exemption, i.e. until his mother reaches an age when she is not expected to be able to give birth to another child. In October 2021, there were increasing reports of the conscription of men who were the only sons in a family [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.6, p. 44; [Military service](#), 3.1, p. 28].
- **Medical cases:** military service exemptions are granted for medical reasons related to a person's inability to handle military duties (such as heart conditions and visual impairments). Such illnesses may exempt the person from military service or assign him to 'non-combatant roles', such as administrative positions that do not require physical exertion that would conflict with their health condition. A person wishing to make use of this exemption has to undergo a medical examination which would need to determine that he has a medical issue that would make him only eligible for administrative tasks. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.5, pp. 29-30].

Obtaining an exemption from military service for medical reasons or being assigned to non-combatant roles has been increasingly difficult, and issues of bribery and extortion are common [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.5, p. 30]. In January and February 2022, sources noted that it was common for medical exemptions to be ignored and for the person to be required to serve in the military anyway [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.6, p. 44]. In some cases, if authorities discovered that the medical exemption was wrongfully granted (e.g. via paying a bribe) they would require the person to undergo another medical examination. Residents 'determined to serve in a non-field service' in the military because of their specific health conditions can pay a fee of USD 3 000 to be exempted from military service [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.5, p. 30].

- **Students:** students can defer their conscription on a yearly basis while they are studying [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.5, p. 30]. Restrictions apply on the age limits allowed to start different levels of education, as well as on the number of study years during which students are permitted to request exemption from military service. As of October 2021, exemptions for students had become increasingly difficult to claim, and students had been drafted on a case-by-case basis [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.6, p. 45; [Military service](#), 3.3, p. 29]. The GoS issued a decision prohibiting students from repeating their final year of college more than three times, as it was discovered that some students deliberately failed in the last year of college in order to delay their enlistment in the military. A student in such a situation would not be granted exemption from military service and would risk



conscription. In August 2022, the GoS issued a decree whereby students and graduates of medical and health schools who committed themselves to serve in public institutions for a 10-year period were exempted from military service. A source attributed the decision to the significant shortage of medical personnel in Syria. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.5, p. 31]

- **Paying an exemption fee:** the law also allows for the payment of an exemption fee; however, this only applies for people residing abroad. The amount of the exemption fee is between 7 000 to 10 000 USD and depends on the length of stay abroad [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.5, p. 31; [Targeting 2022](#), 2.1, p. 37]. It was reported that many conscripts residing abroad had made use of the option of paying an exemption fee, but the rules change regularly [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.6, p. 45; [Military service](#), 3.4, p. 31]. Exemption from reserve service is also acquirable by Syrians who have been residing abroad for at least one year upon payment of a fee of USD 5 000 [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.5, p. 30].

The exemption fee can be paid either from abroad at a Syrian embassy or consulate, or by a proxy (for instance a family member) in Syria. In both cases, the exemption will have to be registered in the military booklet of the person by approaching the military recruitment division either through the proxy or in person upon return to Syria, in the case of persons paying the exemption fee themselves from abroad. While several sources stated that the GoS does not forcibly conscript persons who paid the exemption fee, some returnees have reportedly expressed concerns that either them, friends or relatives were at risk of forced conscription in the SAA despite the fact that in some cases they had served in the SAA prior to the current conflict or paid the exemption fee. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.5, pp. 30-31]

- **Service in the internal security services, including police:** according to the Conscription law, a person is exempted from military service if he has completed at least 10 years of service in the internal security services, including in the police. This period was reduced to five years by Legislative Decree No. 1 of 2012. Those who do not serve the full five years are still required to complete their military service. However, anyone who is accepted into the police signs a 10-year contract [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.5, p. 29].

Amnesties

The GoS regularly announces amnesties which cover offences of army desertion or evasion from military service. According to a source, amnesties do not cover those who evaded reserve service. Most amnesties are partial and selective in nature and several 'end up excluding the release of detainees who were arrested for their role in the uprising or for their political position' [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.6, p. 32; [Targeting 2022](#), 2.5, p. 42]. The amnesties' implementation often takes place 'with a considerable level of corruption and extortion'. Other sources also mentioned that there was distrust among the population, because the GoS has repeatedly shown its unreliability by not respecting prior amnesties and reconciliation agreements, e.g. by arresting and detaining Syrians or by sending them directly to military service. [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.5, p. 43]

Individuals who want to make use of the amnesties must also generally undergo a reconciliation/settlement process. Those who benefit from the amnesties are still required to



perform compulsory military service. Following amnesty decrees issued in 2022, the release of some individuals from detention centres under the control of the GoS and their conscription into mandatory military service was documented, as well as cases of individuals who presented themselves to recruitment centres and were enlisted into mandatory military service. According to sources, amnesties issued by GoS do not exonerate defectors but rather criminalise them because of ‘their dealings with external entities’. Defectors are still subject to prosecution, investigation, and compulsory residence for those who are older and who have bad health conditions [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.6, p. 32-33].

Discharge

According to Law No. 35/2011, military service lasts between 18 and 21 months. However, since the outbreak of the conflict, reservists and military personnel have reportedly served for an indefinite period of time. A source from March 2022 pointed out that people with special military skills served longer, while those in socially demanded professions, such as doctors, were more likely to be demobilised at the end of the official duration of military service [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.3, p. 41]. Between August 2022 and August 2023, three administrative orders were issued to discharge certain groups of conscripts and reservists who had already served a certain number of years [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.6, p. 28-29].

Regional specifics

In the recaptured territories, men of military age must also perform compulsory military service and the SAA is reportedly recruiting conscripts through ‘reconciliation’ agreements which are announced periodically. These conscripts are either incorporated directly in the SAA or in affiliated militias. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.2, p. 24]

Although reconciliation agreements usually gave them a six-month grace period once they had clarified their situation with the security forces (*‘taswiyat al-wada’*), reports have documented the arrest, detention and forced conscription of individuals before this grace period expired. [[Military service](#), 2.3.1, p. 16]

In June 2023, the GoS initiated a settlement in Dar’a governorate for draft evaders, for those wanted for reserve service and for military defectors. All those who underwent the settlement had the possibility to obtain official travel documentation and travel outside the country. Sources noted that, in this way, the GoS was incentivising young men from Dar’a to leave the country while also gathering information on opposition members and extorting money from those who underwent the process. While the GoS announced that around 15 000 men underwent the settlement by mid-June, other sources reported that over 50 % of those wanted in Dar’a boycotted the settlement. Reportedly, military defectors particularly expressed distrust of the settlement. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.2, p. 24]

In Sweida governorate, the local Druze population has largely resisted compulsory and reserve conscription in the SAA throughout the conflict [[Military service](#), 2.3.2, p. 17]. The number of draft evaders in the governorate was, according to several sources, estimated at around 30 000. In October 2022, the GoS also initiated a ‘security settlement’ in the governorate for persons wanted for compulsory and reserve service. Sources reported that



only between 1 000 and 2 500 out of 30 000 men wanted for compulsory and reserve service had undergone the security settlement [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.2, p. 24-25].

The GoS has reportedly not been able to recruit conscripts in SDF-controlled areas. Some sources reported that forced recruitment to the SAA is being carried out in GoS-controlled security areas located in Hasaka and Qamishli cities, while others contrarily did not expect that persons entering these security areas would be conscripted. [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.3, p. 40]. Moreover, it was reported that from its controlled areas in Hasaka and Qamishli cities, the GoS was also trying to recruit conscripts from areas outside its control [[COI Update 2023](#), 3, p. 12].

Deployment

Military operations and the GoS' need of manpower are reportedly the main factors influencing the deployment of conscripts and reservists. According to different sources, conscripts and reservists cannot choose their place of deployment. Conscripts may, allegedly, be able to pay a bribe to the commander of the division to be assigned to a specific division or avoid specific duties. Bribing an officer to serve in a non-field position or not to serve at all is, according to sources, also a common practice. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.3, p. 26]

The GoS reportedly tends to deploy its forces in areas that pose the greatest threat to its control, for instance in northwestern Syria (Idlib and northern Aleppo). It has been reported that conscripts may be assigned to do their military service in units that have been involved in human rights violations, including war crimes, throughout the conflict, such as the Special Forces, the Republican Guard, the Fourth Armoured Division, the Air Force Intelligence or the Military Intelligence. According to the same source, the conscripts do not have the possibility to choose the unit in which they are to serve. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.3, p. 26]

While some of the main elite divisions of the SAA, such as the Fourth Armoured Division, have recruited mostly Alawites into their ranks, sources in 2023 have reported that recent recruitment practices of that group have also targeted Sunni conscripts and former opposition fighters, particularly in Dar'a governorate, as well as draft evaders and deserters in Homs governorate. According to a source, conscripts from former opposition areas would not be selected to serve in sensitive positions such as in intelligence agencies where conscripts who are viewed as loyal to the GoS would be preferred [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.3, p. 27; [Security 2023](#), 1.4.1, p. 24-25].

According to another source, conscripts may be sent to the frontlines irrespective of their fighting experience or military skills. Conscripts originating from former opposition-held areas reportedly would be disproportionately sent to the frontlines despite receiving minimal training, as punishment for their perceived lack of loyalty to the GoS. A source noted that most of the casualties suffered by the SAA on active frontlines (such as Idlib in early 2020) were conscripts who originated from former opposition-held areas (such as Dar'a, Darraya, Douma) and had little fighting experience [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.3, p. 27]. Several sources indicated that reservists are also deployed to the frontlines, although in smaller numbers [[Military service](#), 2.5.1, p. 24, 2.5.2, p. 25]



Conduct of the Syrian military

The implication of the regime and the associated armed groups in acts which fall under the exclusion provision of [Article 12\(2\)\(a\) QD](#) and [Article 17\(1\)\(a\) QD](#) has been noted repeatedly by the UN and others. Throughout the conflict, government forces and associated armed groups have used a wide range of tactics to force opposition-held areas into surrendering, including sieges, blocking of humanitarian aid, denial of access to food and other basic services, and targeted attacks on medical facilities, schools and local markets. GoS attacks on opposition-held areas have been largely disproportionate, including attacks against protected objects and residential areas. The GoS not only used cluster bombs, which have an indiscriminate effect, but also weapons that have been banned internationally, such as some chemical and incendiary weapons. The Assad regime has been reported to deliberately and repeatedly target civilians in Syria with both conventional and chemical weapons. As of early 2019, reports ranged from 32 to about 330 chemical attacks attributed to the Syrian government. [\[Security 2020, 1.6.1.4, p. 15, Annex II, pp. 244-245; Actors, 2.4, p. 38\]](#)

Violence, including rape of women, girls and occasionally men, committed by government forces and associated militias during ground operations, raids and in detention, was also reported [\[Actors, 2.4, p. 38\]](#).

According to recent reports, the GoS forces continued to employ ground-based and aerial attacks on populated areas resulting in civilian casualties. They were further responsible for extrajudicial killings and deaths in detention centres due to torture and medical negligence [\[Security 2023, 1.4.1, p. 26\]](#). (Pro-)GoS forces targeted civilians in hospitals, residential areas, schools, and IDP settlements throughout 2022. These forces reportedly employed the ‘deliberate killing of civilians, as well as their forced displacement, rape, and starvation, and protracted siege-like conditions that occasionally forced local surrenders’ as military tactics. Between August 2022 and August 2023, siege-like conditions imposed by the GoS were reported in Al-Rukban IDP camp, which shelters between 7 500 and 10 000 IDPs in eastern Homs governorate, and in the SDF-controlled neighbourhoods of Al-Ashrafiya and Al-Sheikh Maqsoud in Aleppo city, as well as in the Al-Shahba area, which includes the Tall Rifaat region in northern Aleppo [\[Security 2023, 1.5.1, p. 35-36\]](#).

There were fewer attacks on medical and emergency rescue personnel and facilities in 2020 and 2021 respectively compared to previous years. A decrease in GoS attacks on such targets in areas controlled by other conflict parties has also been observed in 2022. However, the deliberate targeting of medical facilities and medical personnel by GoS forces continued through attacks and shelling. The GoS also continued to arrest, detain, or forcibly disappear medical personnel in their own areas [\[Security 2023, 1.5.1, p. 36, 1.5.4, p. 43; Targeting 2022, 8.1, pp. 80-82\]](#)



For further guidance on the qualification of the acts of the GoS forces as excludable in relation to Article 12(2) and Article 17(1) QD, see [8. Exclusion](#).



4.2.2 Draft evaders

Last update: April 2024

This profile refers to men who have refused or evaded conscription, including those who have not yet been confronted with conscription. It also includes reservists.

For information on military service and definition of ‘draft evader’ and ‘reservist’ see [4.2.1. Military service: overview](#).

COI summary

As of August 2023, recruitment of conscripts and reservists in the SAA continued to take place according to the existing laws regarding compulsory and reserve service. The need for reservists is at its minimum because SAA’s need for manpower is low and the GoS also relies on affiliated militias for operations, who are more efficient and cheaper. As a result, conscripts are reportedly called up for military service in much higher numbers than reservists. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.2, p. 22-23]

It has been reported that the names of men called up for military service were recorded in so called ‘wanted lists’ and in central databases, which were also accessible to officers at checkpoints and at the border and most of draft evaders were recruited at checkpoints, for example when travelling between or around cities. Paying bribes was reportedly a common method of evading military service, e.g. to have one’s name removed from wanted lists or to be waved through checkpoints. [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.3, p. 39; [Military service](#), 2.4, p. 21]

According to recent reports, draft evaders were mainly apprehended at checkpoints where their identification documents and military booklet are verified or when applying for a service at state institutions. According to a source, the authorities do not carry out house raids to search for draft evaders. Those who are caught are sent to the military police and from there to military bases for training and deployment. During the period August 2022 – August 2023, sources reported arrests of men wanted for conscription at checkpoints in Rural Damascus, Dar’a and Deir Ez-Zor governorates, as well as on certain occasions in Damascus city. Arrest campaigns targeting persons wanted for military service were also reported in reconquered areas in Idlib governorate [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.7, p. 33]. In November 2023, arrests of persons wanted for military and reserve service reportedly took place in Aleppo, Homs and Hama governorates. Moreover, it was reported that from its controlled areas in Hasaka and Qamishli cities, the GoS was also trying to recruit conscripts from areas outside its control [[COI Update 2023](#), 3, p. 12].

Draft evaders who are apprehended by the authorities will ultimately be sent to military service [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.7, p. 33]. It has been reported that they would not be treated differently in the army than regularly recruited soldiers, as the individual qualification of the conscript is more important. However, there is further information that arrested draft evaders as well as returnees who did not pay their exemption fee were immediately sent to the army and most often to an active war zone. Furthermore, it is reported that conscripts who did not pay their exemption fee were first detained for a few weeks and then sent to the army. Draft



evaders returning after some years abroad were reported to be punished with imprisonment. According to various sources, it was likely that people were first detained for some time and sometimes even tortured before being recruited and sent to fight. [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.4, p. 42]

Conflicting information exists on how the GoS considers draft evasion. On the one hand, it was reported that draft evasion was seen as disloyalty or even political dissent towards the GoS and that persons who refuse military service are considered cowards and traitors by the authorities. In a war situation, military field tribunals with summary execution are possible, as draft evasion is regarded as betrayal of the nation. On the other hand, a source noted that the GoS does not necessarily consider draft evaders to be opponents of the government in general, knowing that many people have fled only to avoid death and not because of an oppositional attitude. [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.7, p. 46]

According to the Syrian Military Penal Code (Articles 98, 99), draft evaders are punished with one to six months of imprisonment in peacetime, after which they have to complete their military service in full. In wartime, draft evasion is a criminal offence, punishable by up to five years in prison and individuals have to complete their military service. Military conscription has been reported as a reason for arrest. In April 2022, there was information that draft evaders who had not been involved in any opposition activities were detained for a short period and then sent to military service. Returnees were reportedly also at risk of being detained and/or being re-enlisted. It is also assumed that all prisoners in Syria are tortured and that soldiers could be treated worse. According to one source, even a conviction under the anti-terror law for draft evaders is possible. Regarding the personal background of draft evaders, it was reported that the sanctions, such as the risk of being imprisoned and drafted into the army, are similar for all of them, even for the privileged ones, for example those from Alawite families or with contacts to the regime. [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.7, p. 48]

Recent sources indicated that draft evaders could make use of the reconciliation/settlement deals that the GoS initiates regularly, whereby if they report for military service within a period of time prescribed by the settlement and do not have additional security issues, they will not incur any punishment. The treatment of draft evaders who have other security issues pending with the GoS apart from evading military service would depend on the nature and gravity of the issues. Those who do not solve their security issues, especially prominent figures, would risk arrest and enforced disappearance. It has also been reported that draft evaders originating from former opposition-held areas would be viewed with suspicion and be more likely to be imprisoned or sent to the front. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.7, p. 34]

Men who have evaded compulsory military service and have not paid the exemption fee before reaching the age of 43, must pay a fee of USD 8 000 or they risk having their property seized without notification or the opportunity to challenge the decision. If they do not have any property or real estate, the reserve seizure will be executed on the properties of their family members. While previous reports noted the freeze of assets of draft evaders and their family members, more recent information indicated that asset seizure of individuals under the relevant law has not been implemented in practice because most men either have not reached the age of 43 yet, have paid the exemption fee or have already completed their military service. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.5, p. 31]



There were also reports that family members of those evading military service and deserters faced retaliation by GoS. Concerning family members of draft evaders, reports ranged from pressure and harassment to house searches, interrogations and arrests, with sources noting that family members of draft evaders from former opposition-held areas had been more severely harassed [[Military service](#), 4.1.2, pp. 34-35, 4.2.1, p. 38]. Recent sources indicated that issues related to military service (e.g. draft evasion, desertion, defection) do not currently lead to direct repercussions for family members. However, according to a source, in cases where the persons wanted by the GoS are higher profile, their family members would also be at risk [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.7, p. 35].

Conclusions and guidance ⁽⁷⁾

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Several aspects should be taken into account when determining whether the feared actions would qualify as persecution:

- For **conscientious objectors**, being subjected to military service in itself would constitute a form of persecution in the meaning of Article 9(1) QD.
- For others, the conscription itself, which is a legitimate right of a state, would in general not meet the requirements of Article 9 QD. However, in the context of the various excludable acts committed by the Syrian Armed Forces, **evading conscription** should be analysed in relation to **Article 9(2)(e) QD**, according to which ‘prosecution or punishment for refusal to perform military service in a conflict, where performing military service would include crimes or acts falling within the scope of the grounds for exclusion as set out in Article 12(2)’ would be considered a form of persecution. There is no requirement to further assess the nature and proportionality of the prosecution or punishment and extrajudicial punishment may also qualify as persecution in this context.
- Moreover, **other acts reported to be committed against draft evaders** are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution (e.g. arbitrary arrest along with other forms of mistreatment such as physical violence and the risks associated with the treatment in detention facilities, including torture).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

With regard to **conscientious objectors**, taking into account that there are no provisions for alternative service, and there is no right to conscientious objection except for Christian and Muslim religious leaders, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.

⁽⁷⁾ See also CJEU, *Andre Lawrence Shepherd v Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, C-472/13, judgment of 26 February 2015 (*Shepherd*), and *EZ v Federal Republic of Germany, represented by the Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge*, C-238/19, judgment of 19 November 2020 (*EZ*).

It is noted that the level of violence in the context of the ongoing conflict in Syria has decreased in recent years. Nevertheless, various excludable acts continued to be committed by the Syrian Armed Forces. Taking this into account, and in conjunction with the fact that the individual recruits generally have no control over their role within the armed forces, neither with regard to their place of deployment nor with regard to the assignment of specific tasks, well-founded fear of persecution in relation to **Article 9(2)(e) QD** would in general be substantiated for **draft evaders**.

This analysis also takes into account that amnesty decrees are limited in time and do not remove the obligation to perform military service.

In addition to being sent to active service, **other acts of ill treatment** reported to be committed against **draft evaders** take place arbitrarily and well-founded fear of persecution in this regard would also in general be substantiated.

In relation to **reservists**, it is noted that the overall need for reservist manpower in the Syrian Armed Forces has largely decreased. Therefore, the individual assessment would depend on the likelihood for the individual to be called into active service. It should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as the specific skills of the individual (e.g. tank crewmen) and their area of origin (former opposition-held areas).

At the time of writing, certain (permanent) **exemptions** from military service are reported to be generally respected in Syria, in particular the exemption of individuals residing abroad based on having paid the exemption fee. The individual assessment in cases where the applicant has been exempted should take into account the nature of the exemption.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion. In the case of conscientious objectors, persecution may also be for reasons of religion. In the individual case, it is always for the national authorities to ascertain whether a nexus under Article 10 QD is plausible, in light of relevant up-to-date information about the situation in the country of origin and the personal circumstances of the applicant.

See also EZ, para. 60 and para. 61 (and fourth point of operative part)⁸.

60. In the third place, in the context of armed conflict, particularly civil war, and where there is no legal possibility of avoiding military obligations, it is highly likely that the authorities will interpret the refusal to perform military service as an act of

⁸ See also CJEU, Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 8 February 2024 in *A. A. v Federal Republic of Germany* (C-216/22), which concerns the question whether a judgment of the CJEU can constitute a new element justifying a fresh examination of the substance of the asylum application (subsequent applications) and makes reference to the *EZ* judgment, in particular in para.53.

political opposition, irrespective of any more complex personal motives of the person concerned. According to Article 10(2) of Directive 2011/95, ‘when assessing if an applicant has a well-founded fear of being persecuted it is immaterial whether the applicant actually possesses the racial, religious, national, social or political characteristic which attracts the persecution, provided that such a characteristic is attributed to the applicant by the actor of persecution’.

61. It follows from the foregoing that Article 9(2)(e) in conjunction with Article 9(3) of Directive 2011/95 must be interpreted as meaning that the existence of a connection between the reasons mentioned in Article 2(d) and Article 10 of that directive and the prosecution and punishment for refusal to perform the military service referred to in Article 9(2)(e) of that directive cannot be regarded as established solely because that prosecution and punishment are connected to that refusal. Nevertheless, there is a strong presumption that refusal to perform military service under the conditions set out in Article 9(2)(e) of that directive relates to one of the five reasons set out in Article 10 thereof. It is for the competent national authorities to ascertain, in the light of all the circumstances at issue, whether that connection is plausible.

4.2.3 Military deserters and defectors

Last update: April 2024

This profile refers to men who have left military service (duty or post) without permission. In accordance with the terms of the Syrian Military Penal Code, a ‘fugitive military person or military-equivalent person’ is considered: any military person or equivalent person who is absent from his squad or detachment without permission for a certain period qualified by the law; and any military person who travelled alone from one place to another or from point-to-point and his vacation has ended and he has not returned within a certain time period from the date fixed for his arrival or return. The applicable durations of absence depend on whether the offence takes place in peace or war time, the duration of service, and whether the person crosses an international border. ⁽⁹⁾

For information on military service and definitions of ‘deserter’ and ‘defector’, see [4.2.1. Military service: overview](#).

COI summary

According to the Military Penal Code (Articles 100, 101), desertion is punishable by one to five years of imprisonment in peacetime and can result in a prison sentence up to twice as long in wartime [[Military service](#), 4.2, p. 35]. Those who have left the country following desertion can be punished with a penalty of up to 15 years imprisonment in wartime. Desertion to the enemy

⁽⁹⁾ Article 100, Syria: Law No. 61 of 1950, as amended (Military Penal Code) [Syrian Arab Republic], 16 February 2017, unofficial translation by UNHCR, available at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/58a5e1b34.html>.



is punishable by life imprisonment or the death penalty. Deserters are punished more severely than draft evaders [[Military service](#), 4.2, p. 36].

Most reports of deserters date back to the early years of the conflict, but the number of deserters and defectors has reportedly increased between January 2020 and January 2021. Information largely relates to deserters and defectors from former opposition-held areas, which have undergone a reconciliation process. According to reports from 2018 and 2019, deserters were among the groups most likely to be detained arbitrarily by the GoS forces. In previous years, they were often punished in the same way as those who actively joined the opposition. In targeted campaigns, the government systematically arrested defectors and military personnel suspected of sympathising with the opposition [[Military service](#), 4.2, p. 35; [Targeting 2020](#), 2.3.2, p. 37].

More recently, it has been reported that the treatment of deserters and defectors by the GoS depends on the nature of their escape (internal or external) and the penalties imposed by the Penal Code (Articles 100 to 104). The treatment of defectors by GoS authorities is also contingent on their individual situation, such as rank and previous activities (e.g. how they defected, joining an opposition group, participation in military activities against GoS etc.). [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.7, p. 34]

According to a source from April 2022, deserters from the military who were not involved in opposition activities were detained for a short time and then sent back to military service [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.7, p. 46]. Another source noted more recently that, a defector who turns himself in would be tried by a military court and imprisoned. After finishing his prison sentence, or if an amnesty is granted, he will be taken to serve in the military unit where he defected from [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.7, p. 34].

Deserters and defectors usually enter 'reconciliation' deals with the authorities whereby they join or form a militia or a military formation that is affiliated with the SAA or intelligence services. Paying bribes to GoS authorities for facilitating the return and integration of defectors into SAA-affiliated units is also reported. Nevertheless, entering into a reconciliation/settlement with the GoS does not guarantee that the deserter/defector will be safe in the future. Cases where neighbours denounced the person who underwent reconciliation/settlement to the intelligence services for previous activities have been reported [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.7, p. 34].

Despite reconciliation processes and time-limited partial amnesties, deserters and defectors were subjected to arrest, detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and even death under torture [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.7, p. 46; [Military service](#), 4.2, p. 37, 4.3, p. 39]. It was reported that deserters are usually detained by branches of the Syrian intelligence services. Sources also indicated that, in some cases, deserters would be given a short prison sentence followed by military service, including to the frontlines. One source also indicated that the GoS would not only punish deserters according to the provisions of the Military Penal Code but would also make use of the provisions of the Anti-terrorism Law of 2012. [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.7, p. 46; [Military service](#), 4.2, p. 37, 4.3, p. 39]

Arrests, detention and torture of defectors were also reported by recent sources. In a report documenting torture and ill-treatment in Syria between 1 January 2020 and 30 April 2023, the



UNCOI reported on cases of enforced disappearance as well as arbitrary arrests and torture of military defectors by intelligence services as punishment for defecting. Similarly, SNHR in June 2023 stated that the GoS takes revenge on defectors through arbitrary arrest, torture and enforced disappearance. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.7, p. 35]

There were also reports of family members of deserters facing retaliation by GoS. A January 2021 source noted that family members of defectors may also be subjected to torture, death in custody and execution, while, according to a source from April 2022, family members of military deserters do not face any repercussions from authorities [[Targeting 2022](#), 2.7, p. 46]. The extent to which family members may face consequences would be influenced by factors such as the rank of the deserter/defector, the family's place of residence and religious background and the secret service and officer in charge of the area [[Military service](#), 4.1.2, p. 34, 4.2.1, p. 38]. Recent sources indicated that issues related to military service (e.g. draft evasion, desertion, defection) do not currently lead to direct repercussions for family members. However, according to a source, in cases where the persons wanted by the GoS are higher profile, their family members would also be at risk [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.7, p. 35].

Conclusions and guidance ⁽¹⁰⁾

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts of ill-treatment reported to be committed against military deserters and defectors are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. detention, enforced disappearance, torture, death penalty).

Moreover, the desertion from the Syrian Armes Forces should be also analysed in relation to **Article 9(2)(e) QD**, according to which 'prosecution or punishment for refusal to perform military service in a conflict, where performing military service would include crimes or acts falling within the scope of the grounds for exclusion as set out in Article 12(2)' would be considered a form of persecution. There is no requirement to further assess the nature and proportionality of the prosecution or punishment and extrajudicial punishment may also qualify as persecution in this context.

Subjecting **conscientious objectors** to active military service under the conditions of conscription constitutes a severe violation of their rights meeting the requirements of Article 9(1) QD.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

For military deserters and defectors, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated in relation to reported acts of **ill-treatment**, such as torture and in some cases death penalty.

⁽¹⁰⁾ See also *Shepherd* and *EZ* judgments.



According to available country information, military deserters and defectors are also returned to active service. It is noted that the level of violence in the context of the ongoing conflict in Syria has decreased in recent years. Nevertheless, various excludable acts continued to be committed by the Syrian Armed Forces. Taking this into account, and in conjunction with the fact that individuals generally have no control over their role within the armed forces, neither with regard to their place of deployment nor with regard to the assignment of specific tasks, for military deserters and defectors, well-founded fear of persecution in relation to **Article 9(2)(e) QD** would also in general be substantiated.

With regard to **conscientious objectors**, taking into account the absence of a procedure for obtaining, or recognition of, the status of conscientious objector and the absence of alternative service in Syria, in the case of individuals who have deserted military service on grounds of conscience, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.

Taking into account that amnesty decrees concerning deserters are limited in time and do not remove the obligation to perform military service, they would generally not impact the level of risk associated with the desertion of military service. Therefore, in the case of military deserters and defectors, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion. In the case of conscientious objectors, persecution may also be for reasons of religion.



Exclusion considerations could be relevant to this profile (see the chapter [8. Exclusion](#)).

4.3 Persons with perceived links to ISIL

Last update: April 2024

This profile refers to persons with perceived links to ISIL and family members of such persons, as well as civilians who resided in territories previously controlled by ISIL.

COI summary

ISIL is an UN- and EU-designated terrorist organisation. The group began capturing territory in Syria in 2013, which attracted an international US-led coalition military response. Since September 2014, the US-led Global Coalition against ISIL has carried out military operations against ISIL and other targets in Syria [[Actors](#), 1.2.2, p. 6]. The Kurdish-controlled areas in



northeast Syria covers most of the territory that was previously under ISIL control in Syria and which sources considered ‘the main theatre for ISIS’s insurgency’ [[Targeting 2020](#), 6.2, p. 61].

ISIL’s territorial control and governance in Syria ceased to exist in March 2019. However, according to recent sources, ISIL was reported to ‘remain resilient’ and to be ‘taking advantage of political and military developments’ in Syria to regain presence. Among others, ISIL activities were reported in the Kurdish controlled areas [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.6., p. 33].

Between August 2022 and August 2023, the SDF routinely carried out security operations against ISIL cells in territories under their control, which included destroying hideouts, dismantling recruitment and support networks, and confiscating weapons. However, as part of such operations, they also reportedly targeted people opposed to the SDF, conducting home raids, imposing curfews or partial lockdowns and carrying out sweeping arrests. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.3, p. 29]

SDF arrested villagers on suspicion of being ISIL members or having links with ISIL cells during anti-ISIL raids, and reportedly provided no arrest warrants and took detainees to unknown locations. It was noted that raids often caused harm to civilians, including wrongful arrests, due to faulty intelligence [[Security 2022](#), 2.9.3, p. 176]. Cases of kidnapping and civilians being killed were also reported. Some of the detainees were later released, while others remained disappeared. In the aftermath of the ISIL attack on Al-Sinaa prison in Hasaka governorate in January 2022, dozens of local Arab residents were accused of being ISIL members and subjected to arbitrary arrest by the SDF. Women were also targeted by the SDF with detention, among other reasons for being relatives of suspected ISIL members, with the aim of pressuring family members to turn themselves in [[Targeting 2022](#), 3.1, p. 50].

Throughout the AANES territory, the SDF held about 10 000 ISIL fighters in more than 20 detention facilities, the largest of them located in Hasaka city. This vast amount of incarcerated ISIL members continued to be a source of insecurity [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.3, p.29]. Moreover, in north-eastern Syria, SDF continued to detain persons with perceived affiliation to ISIL, including children [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 38]. The conditions in prisons for ISIL suspects, both for men and women, were described as ‘dire’, with ‘severely overcrowded cells with open latrines and poor ventilation’ and lacking adequate medical care. Female inmates were reportedly subjected to abusive treatment [[Targeting 2022](#), 3.2, p. 52].

The wives and children of ISIL suspects were taken to displacement camps such as Al-Hol and Al-Roj, characterised by appalling living conditions, limited medical care and food, and with a high rate of violence targeting women and children [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p.38]. Most residents of Al-Hol camp were said to have no connection to ISIL. Still, there were some women and children with family ties to ISIL fighters [[Targeting 2022](#), 3.2, p. 52]. Female ISIL members in Al-Hol camp are also reported to impose ISIL ideology and norms on displaced women and children and to commit acts of violence, including murders, against persons considered to be ISIL opponents [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.3.3, p. 117].

In 2015, the YPG established the terrorism court – known as the ‘People’s Court’ – to prosecute ISIL fighters and affiliates. The court has judges and prosecutors lacking judicial training, who often come from different professional backgrounds, such as architects,



construction workers, bakers or auto mechanics. The Kurdish authorities were reported to have tried thousands of Syrian ISIL suspects in flawed proceedings. The Kurdish authorities' approach to prosecution of ISIL fighters was described as uneven, with some fighters being freed or given light sentences, while other waiting years for a trial. Defence lawyers for cases of ISIL fighters were reportedly not available due to fears of retaliation from ISIL cells. Kurdish authorities handed out reduced sentences to ISIL members who have surrendered to them or released them as part of reconciliation deals brokered with tribal leaders [Actors, 3.1.4, p. 43]. In mid-2020, the Kurdish authorities declared to have brought 8 650 cases to trial and having convicted 1 881 Syrian nationals for association with ISIL, with a further 1 600 detainees awaiting judicial process [Targeting 2022, 3.2, p. 51]. In June 2023, the AANES further announced that it would start trying suspected ISIL fighters who have been in its custody for years [Security 2023, 1.4.3, p.29].

SDF regularly claims to arrest ISIL affiliates, but it has been accused of arresting civil activists involved in the uprising against the Assad government. There were several incidents of arrests of local activists and humanitarian workers in Raqqah governorate under the accusation of ISIL affiliation. [Targeting 2020, 3.2, p. 41]

YPG forces were reported to be engaged in razing of villages, confiscation of property and forced displacements of people in retaliation for perceived affiliation or sympathies to ISIL or other armed groups during anti-ISIL operations in Hasaka and Raqqah governorates carried out in 2015. [Targeting 2020, 3.2, p. 41]

Those considered to be affiliated with terrorist groups such as ISIL can be denied entering in reconciliation agreements with the GoS. However, GoS has on several occasions struck deals with the group and participated in the evacuation of its members. In May 2018, ISIL soldiers and their families were evacuated from Yarmouk Camp and Hajar al-Aswad in Damascus to areas that were then under ISIL control in the desert in Badia. [Recaptured areas, 2.5.3.1, p. 19].

Recent sources also reported several instances where government forces arrested individuals (including women) with relatives who had been affiliated with armed opposition groups such as ISIL. [Country Focus 2023 1.1.2, p. 19]

The Syrian Penal Code envisages the death penalty for terrorism-related offences, including terrorist acts and the financing of terrorist acts, regardless of whether such acts result in death or not. However, little information is available about death sentences passed and there is no information on executions. [Actors, 2.2.3, p. 20]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

In itself, the prosecution of the criminal acts of the insurgents and their targeting in accordance with the rules of international humanitarian law do not amount to persecution. However, acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. enforced disappearance, death penalty, killing).





What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

For persons with perceived links to ISIL and the family members of such persons, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.

In the case of civilians who resided in territories previously controlled by ISIL, the individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, in particular the perceived level of support for ISIL.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.



Exclusion considerations could be relevant to this profile (see the chapter [8. Exclusion](#)).

4.4 Members of and persons perceived to be collaborating with the SDF and YPG

Last update: February 2023

This profile refers to members of the SDF and the YPG, as well as to other individuals perceived to be collaborating with them.

See also the profile [4.10.2. Kurds](#).

COI summary

The COI summary focuses on targeting of such individuals by the SNA and by ISIL.

a. Targeting by the SNA

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 4, pp. 53-57]



In areas under their control, the SNA reportedly perpetrated torture, sexual violence, looting and arbitrary detention. During the year 2021, SNA members were reportedly responsible for arbitrary arrests resulting in alleged cases of extrajudicial killings, incommunicado detention as well as looting and seizure of properties. An Afrin-based human rights organisation reported 14 arrests of civilians at the beginning of April 2022 on charges of having previously dealt with the AANES.

Cases were reported of persons accused of activities for the YPG and having fulfilled military service for AANES and being arrested or sentenced to imprisonment. There were numerous reports in 2021 and 2022 of men being tortured by SNA and having consequently died because of alleged activities for the YPG or the PKK. There were also reports about the arrests of nine persons on the basis of SDF-affiliation. Confiscation of property and looting affecting the local population living in SNA-held territories, among which 800 houses which belonged to residents affiliated to AANES, were also reported.

As a result of Turkish military activities along the Turkish-Syrian border in 2021 and 2022 civilian casualties were allegedly made. Some of them were targeted attacks on AANES-linked individuals and SDF commanders.

b. Targeting by ISIL

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 4.2, pp. 56-58]

Over the course of the reference period, ISIL carried out kidnappings and assassinations targeting SDF members and collaborators, persons working for the AANES, tribal leaders as well as civilians, predominantly in the countryside of Deir Ez-Zor governorate. USDOS also reported that during the first three months of 2022, ISIL targeted persons affiliated with SDF and the AANES. ISIL also targeted other civilians, such as teachers and civil servants accused of links with the SDF.

In an ISIL coordinated attack on the Ghweiran/Al-Sina prison controlled by SDF and US-led coalition in Hasaka city in 2022 and ensuing clashes, at least 181 people were reportedly killed, among them 50 police, SDF members and prison guards.

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. arbitrary arrest, abduction, killing).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

For members of and persons perceived to be collaborating with SDF/YPG in areas where the SNA operates, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.



In Kurdish-controlled areas that were previously under the ISIL control, the threat posed by ISIL to individuals under this profile has decreased compared to previous years. Nevertheless, ISIL continues to be capable of attacks in those areas and members of and persons perceived to be collaborating with the SDF/YPG are viewed by ISIL as a priority target. The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: regional specifics (areas where ISIL continues to operate), visibility of the applicant, position within the community, nature of activities undertaken by the individual, public expression of support for SDF/YPG or condemnation of ISIL's actions, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion. In the case of persecution by SNA, it may also be for reasons of race/nationality.



Exclusion considerations could be relevant to this profile (see the chapter [8. Exclusion](#)).

4.5 Persons perceived to be opposing the SDF/YPG

Last update: February 2023

This profile refers to different groups perceived by the SDF/YPG as opposing them. It includes, in particular, political opponents, persons with perceived links to ISIL (see also [4.3.](#)), and persons associated with Türkiye and/or the SNA. In addition, it addresses the situation of Arabs and Christians in Kurdish-controlled areas.

COI summary

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 5, pp. 58-66]

Different profiles of individuals with real or perceived links to a variety of groups or activities can be considered by the SDF/YPG as opposition:

Political opponents and supporters of opposition parties

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 5.1, pp. 58-60, 5.2.1, pp. 60-62]



SDF/YPG operates through the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), an officially unrecognised government entity under the effective control of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the dominant political actor in the Kurdish controlled areas. During the reference period, intra-Kurdish negotiations for power sharing which aimed at unifying the PYD and the Kurdish National Council (KNC) into a single Kurdish political party reportedly made progress towards an agreement, with restrictions on the KNC's political activities relaxed as talks progressed.

Nonetheless, the SDF continued to arbitrarily arrest and detain persons who have links to political parties opposing the PYD or the AANES or criticise their policies. These detainees included political activists, humanitarian workers, civil society activists and media professionals [for information on the treatment of journalists by SDF/YPG, see [4.8. Journalists, other media professionals and human rights activists](#)]. The majority of these individuals were either affiliated to parties within the KNC, including the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), or worked for organisations closely aligned to the KNC. The majority were reportedly released, although in exceptional cases detainees died from torture in prisons. Incidents of targeted attacks on individuals affiliated to the KNC by unknown attackers as well as arson attacks on KNC offices were also reported.

Persons with perceived links to ISIL

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 3, pp. 49-52]

The treatment of individuals with perceived links to ISIL, including by the SDF/YPG, is addressed in a separate profile [4.3. Persons with perceived links to ISIL](#).

It should also be noted that, while the SDF regularly claims to arrest ISIL affiliates, some of those arrested were reportedly civil activists, including activists involved in the uprising against the Assad government, and humanitarian workers.

Arabs and Christians in areas controlled by SDF

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 5.1, pp. 58-60, 5.2.1, pp. 60-62]

Arabs claimed to be marginalised under the SDF-rule. In Arab-majority areas, protests against SDF rule on issues such as poor services and high prices as well as the SDF's policy of forcibly conscripting, has become a common feature of life since 2017. While one source noted that 'protests generally occurred throughout the north-east without interference from local authorities', it was also reported that arbitrary arrests of protesters as well as violence against civilian protests took place on several occasions, leading on multiple instances to death. Hundreds of people were arrested in various Arab-majority areas controlled by the SDF for forced conscription. Owners of private schools as well as teachers were reportedly arbitrarily arrested over matters about the use of the GoS curriculum.

Concerning the situation of Sunni Arabs in Syria in general, see the profile [4.10.1. Sunni Arabs](#).

In 2018, disputes between the PYD-led Kurdish administration and **Christian** communities over the school curriculum led to the temporary closure of schools in the cities of Qamishli, Hasaka and Al-Malikiyeh. Christian activists complained in protests that the 'mandated



curriculum denied them their own unique ethnoreligious identities’ and that it aimed to promote Kurdish nationalism. Teachers who refused to fully implement the PYD curriculum were arrested. During relevant protests, demonstrators were also arrested or forcibly disappeared by PYD forces [Targeting 2020, 3.3, p. 43]. Disputes between the Kurdish administration and Christian communities over the school curriculum continued. In September 2021, several students, teachers and members of the Syriac Christian Orthodox Creed Council were arrested, mainly in Hasaka governorate and Ein Arab city in Aleppo governorate, by the SDF after they had criticised and refused to adopt the school curriculum introduced by the AANES [Targeting 2022, 11, pp. 95-97].

Concerning the situation of Christians in Syria in general, see the profile [4.10.5. Christians](#).

Persons associated with Türkiye and/or the SNA

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 5.2.3, pp. 62-64]

During the reference period, it was reported that the SDF and Asayish arrested individuals of various profiles on suspicion of collaboration with the SNA and Turkish forces, including espionage for Turkish intelligence services. More recently, in February 2022, a man and a woman were arrested in the city of Manbij for allegedly ‘communicating with ISIS and Turkish forces’. Individuals arrested for alleged espionage on behalf of Turkish intelligence included SDF personnel. Kurdish forces have also reportedly targeted civilians who were relatives of SNA members. There is little information on the treatment of those detained for their alleged links to Turkish forces. However, it was reported in December 2020 that one person died under torture while in detention.

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. enforced disappearance, torture, arbitrary arrest). When the acts in question are (solely) discriminatory measures, the individual assessment of whether discrimination could amount to persecution should take into account the severity and/or repetitiveness of the acts or whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: regional specifics (who is in control of the area of origin of the applicant, if the applicant was located in any of the IDP camps), the nature of activities and the degree of involvement in activities perceived by SDF/YPG as opposition, perceived affiliation with ISIL (see separate

profile [4.3. Persons with perceived links to ISIL](#)) or with Turkish-backed forces (see also [4.1.2. Members of anti-government armed groups](#)), being known to the Kurdish authorities (e.g. previous arrest), etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.



Exclusion considerations could be relevant to some sub-categories of this profile, such as ISIL members and members of the SNA (see the chapter [8. Exclusion](#)).

4.6 Persons fearing forced or child recruitment by Kurdish forces

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

This profile refers to the topic of recruitment under the ‘Duty of Self-Defence’ and the topic of child recruitment by Kurdish forces.

COI summary

a. ‘Duty of Self-Defence’ and forced recruitment

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2020](#), 3.3, pp. 42-43, 4.1, pp. 46-47, 4.2, pp. 47-48]

Compulsory recruitment continued in 2021 based on the conscription law passed by the Kurdish Administration in June 2019 about the ‘Duty of Self Defence’ [[Targeting 2022](#), 5.3, p. 64]. Geographically, the law applies to the areas of northern and eastern Syria under the control of the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration.

‘Conscription’ is mandatory for all male residents, including Syrian nationals and stateless Kurds, living in the territories under the Autonomous Administration. A May 2021 amendment expanded eligibility for conscription to those aged between 18 and 31 years [[Targeting 2022](#), 5.3, p. 64]. Syrians from other parts of the country who have resided in the area longer than five years are obliged to join as well. Men serve in the YPG, while women can join the YPJ on a voluntary basis. It has also been reported that persons who transit between areas held by GoS and SDF risk conscription by both parties since the identity documentation and military



deferments issued by one administration are not recognised by the other [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.5, p.29-30].

While under the Kurdish Administration law, members of ethnic and religious minorities are obliged to serve, the law was reportedly not enforced, and they rather joined on a voluntary basis.

The 'Duty of Self-Defence' has to be completed by the age of 40 years and it usually lasts six months. In the case of conscientious objection to join the Kurdish forces or arrest because of refusal to join, the 'Duty of Self-Defence' would be 15 months as a punitive measure. Late enlisters are obliged to serve for an additional month.

Deferrals can be granted by the Self-Defence Duty Department for: students, recent returnees to Syria, and persons with siblings younger than 18 years and a passed away or handicapped father. Exceptions to the 'Duty of Self-Defence' include medical reasons, disabilities, family members of martyrs holding a proving certificate thereof, or only sons. There is conflicting information as to whether the payment of a fee can exempt an individual from the 'Duty of Self-Defence'. However, according to Article 10 (2019) the payment of guaranty (*kafāla*) does not exempt from the mandatory service. Lists of people wanted for service in the YPG were issued in 2015.

SDF and YPG have used forced recruitment in addition to the 'conscription' system, in order to supplement their numbers. There were documented cases of arbitrary arrest for recruitment despite applicable postponements for education or medical reasons. The individuals recruited received basic training and were subsequently sent to the frontlines. Following the May 2021 amendment, large-scale campaigns by the SDF in various Arab-majority communities to arrest and forcibly recruit men and women aged between 18 and 31 years were reported. SDF units reportedly pursued young men in their homes and arrested anyone who refused to comply with these decisions [[Targeting 2022](#), 5.3, p. 64].

There were also reports that the SDF was asking returning families to volunteer one man per family to join YPG, which deterred some families from returning to their homes. Some families chose to move from the areas under SDF in order to avoid reprisals, including arrest, for not accepting recruitment.

b. Child recruitment

[Main COI references: [Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 41; [Targeting 2022](#), 5.3, pp. 64-66; [Targeting 2020](#), 4.3, pp. 48-49]

The SDF and its components, particularly the YPG, continued to recruit and use children in large numbers in 2021 and 2022. Moreover, recent sources noted that, notwithstanding the action plan signed in June 2019 with the UN that aimed to end the recruitment and use of children in conflict, SDF continued to recruit children, whose number increased in 2022, with most of the children being recruited into the YPG or the women's units YPJ. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 41]



Groups linked to the PKK such as the Kurdish Revolutionary Youth Movement and the Kurdistan Women Union (KWU) were also reported to recruit children in their ranks including through kidnappings.

IDP camps were a source for recruiting children, on some occasions without the permission of their families. Parents usually had no contact with their children once they were recruited and only found out from authorities that their children were in training. After the training period, children were deployed in combat operations [[Targeting 2020](#), 4.3, p. 49]. Recent sources also noted that the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG and YPJ) recruited and used boys and girls as young as 12 years old from IDP camps in north-eastern Syria [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 41]. See also the subsection [4.12.2. Child recruitment](#) concerning child recruitment by other groups.

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

SDF/YPG are non-State armed forces, therefore, non-voluntary recruitment by SDF/YPG, even if imposed under the 'Duty of Self-Defence', is considered as forced recruitment. Forced recruitment and child recruitment are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: gender, age, falling within an exception ground, ethno-religious background, being in an IDP situation, etc.

For men of recruitment age, see also [4.2.2. Draft evaders](#) in relation to the GoS military service.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

While the risk of forced recruitment as such may not generally imply a nexus to a reason for persecution, the consequences of refusal, could, depending on individual circumstances, substantiate such a nexus, among other reasons, to (imputed) political opinion.

In the case of child recruitment, the individual circumstances of the applicant need to be taken into account to determine whether a nexus to a reason for persecution can be substantiated. For example, in the case of children who refuse to join the Kurdish forces, persecution may be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.





4.7 Persons associated with the Government of Syria

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

This profile refers to members of the GoS and Baath party officials, members of government armed forces and pro-government armed groups and to civilians perceived to be supporting the government. The section focuses on targeting by non-State actors. The consequences of leaving Syria and return are addressed under the section [2. The implications of leaving Syria](#).

4.7.1 Government of Syria officials, members of the SAA and pro-government armed groups

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

COI summary

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 6, pp. 67-72]

Reported attacks and other acts of violence targeted a variety of individuals affiliated with the GoS. These incidents included (attempted) assassinations of mayors, members of city councils, and of the Dar'a Central Committee. Attacks and assassinations also targeted government employees, including members of intelligence services, police officers, former members of the Baath Party, and persons affiliated with the GoS armed forces or pro-Assad militias. In many of the cases found, the acts were carried out by unidentified armed men in the countryside of Dar'a, (where security deteriorated from June 2019 onwards), and Quneitra governorate. Between January 2020 and the end of 2021, at least nine mayors and one deputy mayor were targeted in assassinations or attempted assassinations. Assassinations of members of pro-GoS forces in Dar'a included the June 2021 killing of a senior Hezbollah leader. Assassination attempts and targeted killings of members of GoS security forces, and of other pro-GoS representatives continued to be reported in Dar'a by recent sources [[Security 2023](#), 2.12.3, p. 149]. It has been reported that security incidents, including attacks on GoS forces, increased in GoS-controlled areas since mid-2022 as the government conducted security and retaliatory policies, forced conscriptions and arbitrary arrests [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.1, p. 12].

Besides attacks by unidentified armed men, ISIL selectively targeted SAA soldiers and other members of the GoS security forces, government employees, Baath Party officials and tribal notables. Such incidents were mostly reported in Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor (including the Badia region). ISIL reportedly also carried out attacks in Dar'a governorate, where it claimed responsibility for at least 37 attacks between January 2020 and April 2022, which targeted SAA soldiers, members of the intelligence services, Baath Party officials, former opposition fighters, and civilians.





Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. assassination, kidnapping). Certain risks for members of armed forces are inherent to their military status and the ongoing civil war and those would not amount to persecution. However, actions outside the conduct of war could be of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution (e.g. assassination and kidnapping).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, in particular the regional specifics (depending on the presence and activity of anti-government armed groups) and the position and visibility of the individual.

With regard to the risk associated with leaving Syria, in addition to considerations related to [2. The implications of leaving Syria](#), see [4.2.3. Military deserters and defectors](#).



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

According to available information persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.



Exclusion considerations could be relevant to this profile (see the chapter [8. Exclusion](#)).

4.7.2 Civilians perceived to be supporting the government

Last update: February 2023

COI summary

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 6.2.3, p. 71]

Civilians perceived to be collaborating or supporting the government or (pro-)government armed forces and/or to oppose anti-government armed groups are targeted by several groups, mainly HTS and ISIL.



In territory controlled by HTS, a number of individuals were targeted based on allegations of collaboration with the GoS. Several executions and detentions on these grounds were reported in 2020, 2021 and 2022. Unclaimed assassinations, reported in autumn 2020 in Rural Damascus, targeted prominent civilian figures who had mediated reconciliation deals between the GoS and opposition fighters.

There were also reports indicating that HTS confiscated properties of minority groups such as Christians, individuals who fled the area or were perceived as political opponents, including alleged GoS supporters.

ISIL targeted and detained 'perceived enemies, including alleged supporters or members of armed opposition groups or the Government and its forces'. In the reference period several killings were attributed to ISIL, or were claimed by ISIL, in Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, Dar'a, Homs and south of Damascus.

There were several reports of members of the SDF arresting individuals with links to the GoS or on accusations of spying for or /collaborating with the GoS or Iranian militias, including civilians and members of the SDF or the Kurdish-led AANES.

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. detention, torture, killing).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: regional specifics (depending on the presence and activity of anti-government armed groups) and level of perceived support or collaboration, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.



4.8 Journalists, other media professionals and human rights activists

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

This profile refers to journalists, other media professionals and bloggers. It also refers to human rights activists, i.e. persons who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights. For guidance on political opposition activists, see [4.1.3. Political activists, opposition party members and protesters](#).

COI summary

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 7, pp. 73-79]

Journalists and media workers in Syria have been exposed to major risks and threats, including arrests and detention, abductions, attacks as well as killings. Freedom of press was reported to be restricted and journalists faced censorship, torture and death while in custody. Journalists and media workers were targeted by various parties involved in the conflict in Syria: the GoS, Turkish backed forces, forces affiliated with the Kurdish-led AANES, as well as groups such as HTS and ISIL. The situation for journalists remained extremely dangerous throughout Syria and the few areas that the GoS had not yet retaken reportedly posed a particularly high risk for them.

Human rights defenders in Syria have also been facing an increased risk of being targeted after 2011, including reports of arbitrary arrests and detention, abductions, enforced disappearance, torture, prosecution, death threats, restriction of movement, defamation, as well as other forms of intimidation and harassment [[Targeting 2020](#), 8, p. 69]. There were also reports of sexual violence while in detention in the case of women human rights defenders or activists [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.3.2, p. 116].

Different actors may be responsible for the targeting of journalists and of human rights activists in Syria.

Targeting by government forces and affiliated armed groups

[[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, pp. 15-16; [Targeting 2022](#), 7.2, pp. 75-76]

The Syrian Arab Republic is considered one of the most restrictive places for media and journalism. Since the 2011 civil war, the GoS has restricted press freedom even further [[Targeting 2022](#), 7.2, pp. 75]. In GoS-held areas, the authorities were reportedly controlling all forms of media- and internet-based expression, and independent media outlets did not exist [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 15]. The detention, arrest, harassment (e.g. intimidation, dismissal, banning individuals from the country) and killings of journalists and other writers by forces of the GoS for allegedly speaking critically of the state were reported. This was also the case for journalists associated with pro-GoS networks. The GoS forces routinely detained, intimidated, and tortured YouTubers and other citizen journalists. In March 2022, Syria's



president signed into law a bill imposing new restrictions on the media further limiting freedom of expression. In April 2022, Syria's President ratified Cybercrime Law No 20 of 2022 which classified certain acts as cybercrime, including 'publishing online content that the government finds objectionable'. The law imposes harsher punishments for publishing dissident content on the internet (up to 15 years in prison) [[Targeting 2022](#), 7.2, pp. 75-76]. According to the SNHR, the GoS arrested a variety of individuals based on the Cybercrime Law, including pro-government media workers and citizen journalists. These included persons who on social media called for the implementation of the Anti-Torture Act in GoS-controlled areas or voiced criticism of living conditions and corruption in GoS-held areas. The authorities also arrested one or several individuals for allegedly communicating news to external media. In the wake of the 6 February 2023 earthquake, sources reported that authorities arrested individuals who had criticised the GoS's aid distribution practices [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, pp. 15-16].

There were reports indicating that family members of journalists working for opposition media in Europe were arrested, detained for days, and allegedly tortured. [[Targeting 2022](#), 7.2, p. 76].

GoS continued to target human rights defenders and the authorities have kept extensive lists of persons wanted for arrest or questioning. These lists reportedly included the names of individuals suspected of involvement in perceived opposition activities, such as working for NGOs and human rights activists. [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.1.3, p. 21]

See also [4.1. Persons perceived to be opposing the government](#).

Targeting by the SDF

[[Targeting 2022](#), 7.5, pp. 78-79]

Although north-eastern Syria, controlled by the US-backed SDF, is considered to be marginally more open to media than other parts of Syria, SDF have continued to obstruct freedom of expression, to target civilians, including journalists, who were considered members of an opposing party or perceived to be critical of the de facto authorities, and to harass the media, including arrests of their personnel.

The SDF also continued to arbitrarily arrest persons who had links to political parties opposing the PYD or the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration or criticised their policies. These detainees included political activists, humanitarian workers and civil society activists. [[Targeting 2022](#), 5.1, p. 58]

See also [4.5. Persons perceived to be opposing the SDF/YPG](#).

Targeting by the SNA

[[Targeting 2022](#), 7.4, p. 78]



There were continuing reports of the SNA detaining civilians for criticising its factions and a source indicated that investigations into arbitrary detention of journalists were underway. Released detainees cited torture and ill-treatment in SNA detention centres in 2021.

Activists critical of Turkish-backed armed groups have also been victims of abductions by them [Targeting 2022, 10.2]. In October 2022, a social media activist and his pregnant wife were killed by SNA affiliates after having organised demonstrations against actions by the SNA [COI Update 2022, p. 8].

Targeting by HTS

[Targeting 2022, 7.3, pp. 77-78]

Reports on arrests of journalists and media activists for criticising HTS have continued. Media activists were arrested without judicial involvement and without clearly communicated charges, and at times were subjected to detention under harsh conditions, torture, and ill-treatment. In July 2020, the HTS-linked Syrian Salvation Government imposed a regulation which prescribed that journalists were not allowed to work in areas under its control without obtaining its permission. In order to obtain this card, journalists were required to provide a range of information to the Syrian Salvation Government. Journalists who did not carry a card risked restriction of movement as well as arrest.

In 2021, HTS continued to arbitrarily detain activists and humanitarian workers in Idlib. HTS targeted women media workers and activists for exercising freedom of expression, such as speaking out against the group's rule. Women activists were detained by the group without respect for judicial guarantees. [Targeting 2022, 13.4.2, p. 118]

Targeting by ISIL

[Targeting 2020, 7.6, p. 68]

Based on past reports, ISIL seized thousands of individuals, including journalists, whose fate remained unknown. Citizen journalists had also been pursued, arrested, threatened with torture and death, terrorised and forced to promote ISIL ideology and propaganda.

Furthermore, ISIL often focused on killing or abducting well-known personalities and activists with the aim of instilling as much fear as possible in the population, but also to deprive society of highly educated people. [Targeting 2022, 8.2, pp. 83-84]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. killing, arbitrary arrest, detention without trial, kidnapping, torture, enforced disappearance).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

In the case of journalists and human rights activists who are seen as critical by the actor in control of the particular area, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.

In the case of other journalists and human rights activists, the individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: the topic they report or work on, regional aspects (reach of the actors they report on), visibility, gender, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion. In the case of persecution by extremist groups such as the HTS, it may also be for reasons of religion.

4.9 Doctors, other medical personnel and civil defence volunteers

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

This profile refers to doctors and medical personnel in all parts of Syria. It also refers to members of the White Helmets, also known as Syria Civil Defence, a humanitarian organisation providing support to civilians in Syria, especially after airstrikes, attacks and clashes.

COI summary

[Main COI references: [Targeting 2022](#), 8, pp. 80-84; [Targeting 2020](#), 9, pp. 72-74]

Different actors have been reported to target individuals falling within the scope of this profile. The COI summary is structured by actor:

a. Targeting by government forces and affiliated armed groups

[[Targeting 2022](#), 8.1, pp. 80-83]

As of June 2022, the killing of 945 medical personnel since 2011 has been recorded, with 93 % of deaths attributed to GoS or their allied forces. As of March 2022, at least 167 health personnel have been executed or tortured before their death by GoS forces since the start of



the conflict. Detention and enforced disappearance of medical personnel aimed, not only at punishing medical professionals for helping injured opponents, but also to deprive non-government-controlled areas of access to medical care. The continued displacement of doctors and medical personnel in north-eastern Syria because of threats, abductions and being targeted by GoS and terrorist groups was noted in November 2021.

Attacks by GoS forces on medical personnel have been described as ‘calculated tactics’ since the start of the conflict. In 2022, a decrease in GoS attacks on such targets in areas controlled by other conflict parties was reported. However, the GoS continued to arrest, detain, or forcibly disappear medical personnel in the areas they held [[Security 2023](#), 1.5.1, p. 36].

GoS forces and allied militia were considered to be responsible for the death of nine medical workers and for at least nine attacks on medical facilities in 2020, as well as for the death of one medical worker and attacks on at least two medical facilities in 2021. Russian forces were held responsible for the death of four medical professionals as well as for at least 13 attacks on medical facilities in 2020. In February 2022, the extrajudicial killing of one medical worker by GoS forces has been reported. In February 2022, the UNCOI reported on the use of precision-guided artillery shells by pro-GoS forces in north-western Syria against medical personnel and facilities.

The members of the White Helmets are also targeted. Arrests of members of the group were, for example, reported in Douma [[Recaptured areas](#), 3.1.5.1, pp. 29-30]. The GoS considers the White Helmets as a terrorist organisation, because the group helps the opposition and anti-government armed groups. The group itself denies this, emphasising that it is impartial. However, it works only in the rebel-held parts of the country. Members of the group are usually evacuated to Idlib. In July 2018, there were a few hundred persons of this group, including family members, evacuated from the Golan Heights to Jordan by the Israeli military [[Recaptured areas](#), 2.5.3.3, p. 19]. No recent information could be found.

b. Targeting by non-state armed groups

[[Targeting 2022](#), 8.2, pp. 82-84]

Several reports pointed out that medical personnel were arbitrarily arrested and mistreated by non-state armed groups. Attacks, killings and kidnappings of medical personnel were also reported by different actors, including SNA, HTS, Turkish-backed militias and ISIL.

As of March 2022, the killings of at least 53 medical personnel by non-state armed groups since the beginning of the conflict have been recorded. At least 14 medical personnel detained or forcibly disappeared by SDF in the period March 2011 to February 2021, remained in detention or were unaccounted for. Other perpetrators included ISIL which was responsible for the detention or enforced disappearance of five medical personnel, as well as HTS and the SNA, with each presumably being responsible for eight detained or forcibly disappeared medical personnel. Verbal and physical abuses and abductions against medical personnel have also been recorded by non-state actors as well as attacks in health facilities.

In March 2021, SDF fighters reportedly raided the Public Surgical Hospital of Al-Shiheel city in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, where they verbally and physically abused medical personnel and



accused them of being ‘terrorists’. In June 2021, two medical personnel were killed and three more injured in a rocket attack on Al-Shifa hospital in the city of Afrin, which caused the death of all together 15 persons, while 43 were injured. Moreover, artillery shelling destroyed the emergency ward, as well as other parts of the hospital. Six other incidents in which medical personnel and facilities were involved/targeted, were reported to have taken place in the reference period. These took place in the territories controlled by SDF and HTS.

There were also reports of incidents or attacks, which could have been indiscriminate or unintended when being carried out in connection with other military activity.

c. Targeting by unspecified armed actors

[[Targeting 2022](#), 8.3, pp. 84-85]

As of March 2022, the killing of at least 43 medical personnel by unknown forces since the beginning of the conflict have been recorded and more than 20 attacks on medical facilities by unknown actors were recorded since the beginning of the conflict.

Eleven killings of medical professionals committed by unknown perpetrators in 2020 - 2021 were reported. In the first half of 2022, six attacks on medical facilities and the death of five medical personnel killed at the hands of unspecified parties were reported. During the reference period, an increase was observed in reports on targeted killings across Sweida and Dar’a Governorates, including where medical personnel were among the victims of targeted killings. Several local sources reported on the killing or attempted killing of medical personnel by unknown perpetrators during the reporting period in 2020, 2021 and 2022, in Dar’a governorate, Idlib city, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate, Al-Hol camp in Hasaka governorate and Al-Bab city in Aleppo governorate.

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. arbitrary arrest, kidnapping, killing).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: regional specifics (the risk is higher in areas affected by armed confrontations), perceived support for anti-government armed groups, the nature of activities (e.g. members of the White Helmets would generally be at higher risk), gender (especially with regard to targeting by ISIL and HTS), etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile may be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion, in particular when they are targeted by the GoS.

In cases where the well-founded fear is related to risks such as kidnapping for ransom, nexus to a reason for persecution would generally not be substantiated. However, individual circumstances always need to be taken into account.

4.10 Ethno-religious groups

This section addresses the situation of certain ethno-religious groups.



The contents of this section include:

[4.10.1. Sunni Arabs](#)

[4.10.2. Kurds](#)

[4.10.3. Druze](#)

[4.10.4. Alawites](#)

[4.10.5. Christians](#)

[4.10.6. Yazidis](#)

[4.10.7. Palestinians](#)

4.10.1 Sunni Arabs

Last update: February 2023

COI summary

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 9, pp. 85-88]

Sunni Arabs were the hardest hit by the war and the GoS' repressions and have experienced the greatest exodus/displacement from Syria. This group, who used to represent a clear



majority of Syria's population, estimated by one source to be at around 65 % in 2010 [Targeting 2020, 10.1, p. 75], was in 2020 estimated to make up only between 49 % and 52 % of the population [Targeting 2022, 9.1, p. 87]. Sunni Muslims reside throughout the country. There is a huge diversity among the members of the Sunni Arab community in Syria and they cannot be perceived as a unified group. Sunni Arabs vary according to their political affiliation, practice and identity, as well as regional and tribal loyalties [Targeting 2020, 10.3, p. 77].

According to various sources, even though the GoS forged strategic ties with prominent Sunni families and religious authorities, the majority of high-ranking officers in Syrian Army and the security apparatus were Alawites. This led to a sense of injustice among Sunni Arabs, especially in areas where Sunnis and Alawites lived in close proximity. As the conflict ensued, the percentage of Alawites in the military increased as a result of Sunnis' defections and sectarianism. Conditions for Sunni conscripts in the SAA were reportedly worse than those of the Alawite minority. Sunni soldiers were kept near the front lines for months, were poorly paid and insufficiently supplied [Actors, 2.3.1, p. 27]. As a result, Sunni Arabs suffered most casualties in the Syrian war. In 2021, it was reported that among the 40 highest-ranking officers heading various Syrian army units, either all were held by Alawites or only one Sunni was represented. Sunni officers who did retain high-ranking posts commanded less influential units and were put under close supervision of officially lower ranking Alawite colleagues [Targeting 2022, 9, p. 86].

Although the political elite included Sunnis, the Sunni majority makes up most of the anti-GoS opposition and has been the most heavily repressed by the authorities because of this perceived affiliation. Sunnis were reportedly found to be the group most frequently subjected to human rights abuses and violations by the GoS as well as the majority of those deemed opponents of the same. [Targeting 2022, 9.1, pp. 86-87]

It was reported that Syrian law required all religious groups to register with the GoS, and membership in an organisation considered by the GoS to be linked to Sunni fundamentalism, may result in arrest, torture and execution. In November 2021, President Bashar Al-Assad eliminated the position of Grand Mufti in Syria and transferred the tasks to a council appointed by the GoS. Experts reportedly assumed that the fatwas of the newly established council will not correspond to the wishes of the Syrian Sunnis [Targeting 2022, 9.1, p. 87]. Moreover, Sunni Arabs faced discrimination compared to ethno-religious minorities. According to a report, Sunni-populated areas in Damascus lacked essential services, such as electricity and water, while Shia-inhabited neighbourhoods did not face any of these issues. It was previously reported that Sunnis were warned by the GoS against any communication with any foreign adherents of Sunni Islam as it was perceived as an act of political opposition or military activity, while such communication was not banned for other ethno-religious groups [Targeting 2020, 10.3.1, p. 78].

The GoS continued to impede the return of Syrians through laws such as Law No. 10/2018, which was reportedly used for the confiscation of property and land of refugees and IDPs without due process. Sunnis suffered disproportionately from the negative impact of this Law. One source referred to the situation as a 'demographic swap in which Shiites from Iran and Afghanistan were transferred to the area once the Sunnis were expelled [from]' in order to

consolidate the Shiite presence and replace Sunni Arab communities. [[Targeting 2022](#), 9.2, p. 88]

Apart from the GoS, extremist groups like ISIL, HTS and Jaysh al-Islam who identified themselves as Sunni Arab, targeted Sunni Muslims who did not adhere to the group's interpretation of the Sharia. These groups killed hundreds of civilians, carrying out public executions, beheadings and crucifixions as a punishment for religious offences such as blasphemy, apostasy or cursing God. [[Targeting 2020](#), 10.3.4, p. 79]

Regarding the treatment of Arabs by SDF/YPG, see profile [4.5. Persons perceived to be opposing the SDF/YPG](#).

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against Sunni Arabs perceived to be affiliated with ISIL or to support anti-government armed groups are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. arbitrary arrest, death penalty, torture). When the acts in question are (solely) discriminatory measures, the individual assessment of whether discrimination could amount to persecution should take into account the severity and/or repetitiveness of the acts or whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

Being a Sunni Arab in itself would normally not lead to the level of risk required to establish well-founded fear of persecution. In most cases where a well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated, it would be related to circumstances falling under other profiles included in this guidance, such as [4.1. Persons perceived to be opposing the government](#). The individual assessment should also take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as the regional specifics (e.g. living in areas controlled by extremist groups or in areas considered by the GoS as opposition strongholds).



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that where well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated, it may be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion. In the case of persecution by extremist groups, it may also be for reasons of religion.



4.10.2 Kurds

Last update: February 2023

COI summary

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 10, pp. 89-94]

According to estimates from 2010, in terms of ethnic groups, around 15 % of the population of Syria were Kurdish [[Targeting 2020](#), 10.4, p. 80].

The census in October 1962 in Hasaka governorate resulted in a large part of the Kurdish population becoming stateless, and there were two categories of stateless Kurds, the ajnabis and the maktoumeen. In April 2011, Decree 49/2011, which granted citizenship to individuals registered as ajnabi, was issued. However, nearly 20 000 ajnabis remained stateless in 2021 and some refrained from submitting an application. Decree 49/2011 did not include maktoumeen who consequently were not able to apply for citizenship under this law. The only apparent way for maktoumeen to obtain citizenship is to register as ajnabi and then apply for naturalisation under Decree 49/2011. Due to their lack of citizenship and official identity documents, stateless persons faced numerous problems. In GoS-controlled areas, stateless Kurds were for example denied the right to work, form and join trade unions, and the right to social security, health care and education. The Kurdish-led AANES reportedly did not differentiate between stateless Kurds and those holding citizenship, and stateless individuals had equal access to services, institutions, and education. [[Targeting 2022](#), 10.1, pp. 89-91]

In the areas it controlled, GoS continued to restrict the use and teaching of the Kurdish language, the publication of books and other materials in Kurdish, as well as other forms of Kurdish cultural expressions. Kurds were frequently detained for teaching Kurdish or sentenced on different charges. [[Targeting 2022](#), 10.3, p. 94]

In March 2022, a siege was put in place by GoS around the Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh in Aleppo city. The siege lasted for three weeks and prevented the entry of necessities such as flour, fuel, and medical aid. The actors responsible for maintaining the siege reportedly ‘clamped down’ on the neighbourhoods’ residents. [[Security 2022](#), 2.2.3, p. 93]

Kurds also inhabit areas which came under the control of Turkish-backed SNA. Since 2018, thousands of internally displaced Syrian Arabs, fighters’ families and Turkmen were relocated to Afrin in Aleppo governorate, with Türkiye’s support, while more than half of the Kurdish population had left. The Kurdish population in Afrin drastically dropped from over 90% to about 25 %, as of May 2021. Shelter continued to be particularly problematic for Kurdish residents as their property was often looted or occupied by IDPs from GoS-controlled areas or families of SNA fighters. Others were forced to leave their homes through threats, extortion, detention and abduction by SNA-affiliated local militia groups. Similar incidents were reported in Raqqqa and Hasaka governorates. Further, the authorities in Afrin ceased to issue official documents in the Kurdish language, traffic signs and other institutional signs were changed

into Arabic and Turkish, and the Kurdish school curriculum was replaced. Kurdish neighbourhoods were reportedly discriminated when it came to the provision of services such as electricity supplies and road network maintenance. [[Targeting 2022](#), 10.2, pp. 91-93]

Sources reported that the SNA continued to commit abuses such as arbitrary detention, abduction, as well as torture and ill treatment against civilians, predominantly of Kurdish origin in Afrin and Ras al Ain (Kobane). One source reported that some detained people in Afrin 'were arrested for the simple fact that they were Kurds'. There was also information about Kurdish women in Afrin and Ras al Ain (Kobane) facing intimidation by SNA faction members that made them unable to leave home. Detained women were also reportedly subject to rape and sexual violence and some abducted or forced into marriage. [[Targeting 2022](#), 10.2, pp. 93-94]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. militia violence, illegal detention, kidnapping, killing, enforced disappearance). When the acts in question are (solely) discriminatory measures, the individual assessment of whether discrimination could amount to persecution should take into account the severity and/or repetitiveness of the acts or whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

For Kurds from areas under the control of the SNA, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.

In the case of other Kurds, the individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances such as: statelessness, identity document, area of origin and/or residency, etc.

See also the profile [4.4. Members of and persons perceived to be collaborating with the SDF and YPG](#).



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile may be for reasons of race, nationality (statelessness) and/or (imputed) political opinion.



4.10.3 Druze

Last update: September 2020

*Minor updates added: February 2023

COI summary

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2020](#), 10.5, pp. 81-82]

According to various sources, 3-4 % of Syrians are Druze. The Druze reside mainly in the Sweida governorate. They are described as an ethnicity that exists both as a tribe and a religious sect. The majority of the Druze remained neutral in the Syrian conflict although a source noted that there were groups of Druze who either supported the GoS or the opposition. [[Targeting 2020](#), 10.5, p. 81]

The Druze population in Sweida has been treated with 'caution' by the GoS as a 'politically sensitive minority', and large-scale mass arrests and bombings have largely been avoided in Sweida. The neutrality of the Druze during the conflict contributed to the cessation of compulsory and reserve recruitment by the government forces. However, 50 000 individuals were reportedly wanted for the military service and a large number of them joined local militias instead. Since mid-2018, the GoS and its allies were increasingly pressuring Sweida to resolve the issue of the Druze youths absconding from their military service. Following the July 2018 ISIL attacks in Sweida, the GoS temporarily stopped putting pressure on Sweida concerning this matter. [[Security 2020](#), 2.14.2. p. 230]

The Druze were targeted by the ISIL with an attack that resulted in the death of 300 people and the kidnapping of 20 women and 16 children, who were released later following negotiations, ransom and exchange of prisoners, while two died in captivity and 1 person was executed [[Security 2020](#), 2.14.2, pp. 231-232, [Targeting 2020](#), 10.5, p. 81; [Actors](#), 6.4, p. 62]. The Druze were also persecuted by *Jabhat al-Nusrah*, forcing large groups of Druze to flee from Jabal Al-Summaq in the Idlib governorate. Another source reported that the Druze of Qalb Lawza in Idlib were forced to convert to Islam by HTS [[Targeting 2020](#), 10.5, p. 82].

According to other sources, religious minorities such as Druze are treated fairly well by both the authorities and the opposition groups and were not subjected to any interrogation or checks at the checkpoints in Damascus. [[Targeting 2020](#), 10.5, p. 82]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. killing, kidnapping).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances such as: regional specifics (presence of extremist groups), perceived support for anti-government armed groups, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Where well-founded fear of persecution could be substantiated, available information indicates that it may be for reasons of race and/or religion and in some cases of (imputed) political opinion.

4.10.4 Alawites

Last update: September 2020

*Minor updates added: February 2023

COI summary

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2020](#), 10.6, pp. 82-84]

It is estimated that Alawites make up between 10 % and 13 % of Syria's population (around 2.1 million persons). They reside in the coastal side of Syria, but they are also located in Homs and Hama governorates, as well as in the city of Damascus. The Alawite community has close connection with the Assad regime [[Targeting 2020](#), 10.6, p. 82]. The president's family and large parts of the informal power structure around him are Alawites [[Security 2019](#), 1.1, p. 11]. They hold key regime positions, dominate the police and the army and have high-ranking positions in elite military and militia units. They have higher chances of obtaining employment in the public sector compared to other groups such as Christians, Sunni Arabs or Kurds. Generally, Alawites were seen by the GoS as loyal [[Targeting 2020](#), 10.6, p. 82].

According to sources, almost every Alawite family was affected by the war. Many Alawites died during the war which led many young Alawites to hide and avoid conscription. In some villages and towns, 60 % - 70 % of the Alawite young males were either killed or wounded during the war, especially in Latakia and Tartous governorates. [[Targeting 2020](#), 10.6, pp. 83-84]

Alawite opposition activists were targeted by the government forces for arbitrary arrest, torture, detention and killing. [[Targeting 2020](#), 10.6, p. 83]

Moreover, the Alawite community is targeted by different non-state actors. Alawi shrines and other sacred places and monuments were destroyed by Islamist groups. Throughout the conflict, Alawite civilians were executed by anti-government armed groups. In February 2018,



the anti-GoS group Ahrar Al-Sham launched mortars on a predominantly Alawite populated neighbourhood of Damascus, which resulted in the death of at least seven civilians.

[[Targeting 2020](#), 10.6, p. 83]

In the Kurdish-controlled areas in north-east Syria, sources indicate that Alawites are at risk of being treated as adversaries, based on their political affiliation with the Syrian government rather than their religious affiliation. [[Targeting 2020](#), 10.6, p. 83]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. killing, torture).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances such as: regional specifics (presence of anti-government and extremist groups), perceived opposition to the GoS, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Where well-founded fear of persecution could be substantiated, available information indicates that it may be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion. In the case of persecution by extremist groups, it may also be for reasons of religion.

4.10.5 Christians

Last update: February 2023

COI summary

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 11, pp. 95-97; [Targeting 2020](#), 10.7, pp. 84-85]

According to estimations, 10 % of the Syrian population are Christians. Christians live in and around the cities of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Latakia and in Hasaka governorate. Few Christians remain in areas that are or have been under the control of Islamist groups

[[Targeting 2022](#), 11, p. 95]. Prior to the conflict, Christians in Syria numbered around two



million people. The number dropped down to 450 000, with many of them migrating to Europe and to the United States [[Targeting 2020](#), 10.7, p. 84].

A Muslim man may marry a Christian woman, but a Muslim woman may not marry a Christian man. A Christian woman marrying a Muslim is not entitled to inherit property or wealth from her husband, even if she converts. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is prohibited by law. [[Targeting 2022](#), 11, p. 95]

Christians are targeted by various actors. More than 100 attacks by the GoS forces, opposition armed groups, ISIL, HTS and other parties on Christian churches were reported since the beginning of the conflict. In July 2019, ISIL claimed responsibility for suicide attacks in a church, killing 12 people in Qamishli and for the death of a pastor in Deir Ez-Zor governorate in November 2019 [[Targeting 2020](#), 10.7, p. 84]. Recent information on the targeting of Christians in GoS controlled areas could not be found. Individuals converted to Christianity reportedly faced threats in areas under control by Turkish forces and the SNA [[Targeting 2022](#), 11, pp. 95-97].

In Idlib, HTS seized properties and churches of Christians and restricted their right to worship and prohibited Christians who fled their homes in Idlib from appointing someone to appeal against rulings handed by Sharia courts regarding their property. 'Islamist factions' operating in Idlib governorate imposed so-called 'jizya' taxes (a tax historically imposed on non-Muslims by Muslim rulers) on Christians, to pressure them to leave their homes. [[Targeting 2022](#), 11, p. 96]

Christians are allowed to operate some public schools. In Kurdish-controlled areas, ethno-religious minorities were generally able to openly express and exercise their religious beliefs, including converting to other religion. Closure of Christian schools after their refusal to teach courses according to the Kurdish curriculum was reported from 2020 [[Targeting 2022](#), 5.2.1, p. 62]. Concerns were expressed by Syriac Christians regarding the school curriculum. Students, teachers and members of the Syriac Christian Orthodox Creed Council were arrested by SDF in September 2021 after having criticised the Kurdish curriculum and refused to adopt it [[Targeting 2022](#), 11, pp. 95-96]. For further information, see [4.5. Persons perceived to be opposing the SDF/YPG](#).

Christians also faced threats in areas under Turkish control. Detention and charges with apostasy were reported in Afrin. [[Targeting 2022](#), 11, p. 96]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. killing, kidnapping). When the acts in question are (solely) discriminatory measures, the individual assessment of whether discrimination could amount to persecution should take into account the severity and/or repetitiveness of the acts or whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures.





What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances such as: regional specifics (e.g. Christians in areas where opposition armed groups or ISIL operate are at higher risk), being critical to the Kurdish curriculum, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of religion and/or (imputed) political opinion.

4.10.6 Yazidis

Last update: September 2020
*Minor updates added: April 2024

COI summary

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2020](#), 10.8, pp. 85-86]

The Yazidi minority consisted of around 550 000 people mainly present in Iraq, but with a substantial number residing in northern Syria, mostly around Hasaka and Aleppo and in the Jabal Sim'an and Afrin valley. Following ISIL attacks on Yazidis in Iraq, the majority of Syrian Yazidis were estimated to have fled. [[Targeting 2020](#), 10.8, p. 85]

In 2014, thousands of Yazidi women were abducted by ISIL in Iraq and brought to Syria to be sold as sex slaves, solely for their religious belief. Many of them are considered to have been found dead in mass graves after the SDF offensive in the last ISIL-held territory in Syria. In March 2019, a large number of Yazidi women were found and taken to Al-Hol camp by the SDF, together with ISIL families. Many of these women had to conceal their ethnic and religious identities fearing retaliation by ISIL supporters. In April 2019, the Yazidi Supreme Spiritual Council issued a declaration accepting Yazidi women survivors into their community, but excluding children born to ISIL fighters as a result of rape. [[Targeting 2020](#), 10.8, pp. 85-86]. A 2022 USDOS report estimated that approximately 6 000 women and children, mainly Yazidis, who had been previously abducted and transferred to Syria by ISIL, have been sold into sex trafficking [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 37].

Different sources stated that in Afrin region, Aleppo governorate, the Yazidi minority was targeted by local actors. FSA forces reportedly rounded up Yazidis and forced them to convert to Islam and demolished their places of worship. [Targeting 2020, 10.8, p. 86]

Following the Turkish-led incursion in northeast Syria in October 2019, many Yazidi villages were deserted, forcing more than 50 000 Yazidis to leave. Yazidi community leaders condemned the bad treatment of minorities including Yazidis at the hands of radical groups allied with Türkiye, alleging that various temples and religious sites were destroyed in Afrin and thousands of Yazidis were displaced. [Targeting 2020, 10.8, p. 86]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. forced conversion, physical assault, sexual abuse, killing).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: regional specifics (presence and activity of extremist groups), gender, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of race/nationality and/or religion.

4.10.7 Palestinians

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

COI summary

[Main COI reference: Targeting 2022, 12, pp. 98-107; Targeting 2020, 11, pp. 87-91]

As of December 2020, 569 000 Palestinians were registered with UNRWA in Syria, of whom an estimated 438 000 remained in the country. [Targeting 2022, 12.1, p. 98]

85 % of Palestinian refugees in Syria are those that fled to the country in or before 1956 and their descendants [Targeting 2020, 11, p. 87]. They have the same rights as Syrian citizens in terms of residence, freedom of movement, work, trade and access to civil service positions and public services. However, they do not have the right to vote, hold public office, own agricultural land or more than one house per person. Those who fled in 1948 are required to perform compulsory military service in the Palestinian Liberation Army, a Palestinian unit within the Syrian Armed Forces [Targeting 2020, 11, p. 87]. Those who arrived in the period between 1948 and 1956 were registered as ‘Palestinian refugees’ by the governmental General Administration for Palestinian Arab Refugees (GAPAR) [Targeting 2022, 12, pp. 99-100]. Palestinians who fled to Syria after 1956 and their descendants were registered with UNRWA in other countries or the occupied Palestinian Territories and are treated as Arab foreigners. They have a 10-year renewable residence permit, and have to apply for a work permit. They have access to UNRWA-services, but have restricted access to employment - as they do not, for example, have the right to work in the public sector, education and health-service [Targeting 2022, 12.2, pp. 99-100; Targeting 2020, 11, p. 87].

UNRWA provides services in nine official and three unofficial Palestinian refugee camps in Syria [Targeting 2020, 11, p. 87]. 96% of the Palestinians in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance. UNRWA is unable to cover the needs [Targeting 2022, 12.3, p. 101]. Operations in Syria include mainly cash and food assistance, education and healthcare services. UNRWA does not administer or police the refugee camps, as this is the responsibility of the GoS. While UNRWA has continued to deliver cash assistance and to provide education and healthcare services in most camps in Syria throughout the conflict, in November 2019 the organisation stated that it ‘continues to face a financial crisis that is affecting its ability to deliver essential services, including humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees in Syria’ [Targeting 2020, 11.2, pp. 87-88]. UNRWA’s funding gap has continued to grow and has resulted in limited services in recent years assistance. As of 31 October 2021, 49.6 % of the total UNRWA funding requirements in Syria for 2021 were pledged or received from donors and partners [Targeting 2022, 12.3, p. 101].

Most of the approximately 100 UNRWA-managed schools in Syria were located within the Palestinian refugee camps. Several UNRWA schools were damaged or destroyed during the conflict. There were 50 000 students in those that remained open. It was easier for those residing in camps to access UNRWA education than for those living outside, as most of UNRWA’s services are located nearby or inside camps. [Damascus 2022, 3.7.2, p. 57]

Palestinian refugee camps have been affected by hostilities and conflict-related displacement, albeit to varying degrees. Around 40% of the Palestinians in Syria are still displaced [Targeting 2022, 12.1, p. 98]. According to UNOCHA, Palestinian refugees in Syria were still vulnerable to displacement, loss of property and the destruction of their neighbourhoods in 2019. More than 180 000 were estimated to have had their homes severely damaged or destroyed, as was the case with Yarmouk, Dar’a and Ein el Tal camps that were hosting 30 % of the Palestinian population [Targeting 2020, 11.2, p. 88].

Yarmouk camp in Damascus, which housed almost 160 000 UNRWA-registered Palestinian refugees prior to the conflict, was the scene of heavy fighting and siege during the conflict [Recaptured areas, 3.1.8, p. 32]. More than 80% of housing and infrastructure was destroyed



[[Damascus 2022](#), 2.4.2, p. 27]. By mid-2021, approximately 480 vulnerable families were living in Yarmouk according to UNOCHA, lacking basic infrastructure and services [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.4.2, p. 28; [Targeting 2022](#), 12.5, pp. 104-105].

The GoS reportedly had for several years prevented the return of residents of the Yarmouk camp to their homes. Residents wishing to return were required to obtain a security approval and had to prove the ownership and structural safety of their houses, even though most of the buildings had been affected by the large-scale destruction of the camp. According to UNRWA estimates, close to 4 000 individuals (1 200 families) had returned as of June 2022, including about 800 Palestinian families [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.5, pp. 49-50]. Despite the establishment of the mechanism for those willing to return to the camp, it was reported that security branches purposefully banned returns to the camp [[Damascus 2021](#), 2.3.6, p. 32]. Persons with pending security cases or who had previously been arrested were denied the right to return. Similarly, persons with children wanted by the government, living in northern Syria or having links to the armed groups controlling the area, or who were wanted for conscription, were banned from returning to their homes. In April 2023, 15 people were reportedly detained by a Military Intelligence patrol in Yarmouk for allegedly entering the area without having security approvals to return to or visit the area for more than 24 hours [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.5, p. 50].

The security situation was reported as calm in the refugee camps of Rural Damascus governorate, specifically in the camps of Sbeineh, Khan Al-Shieh and Qabr Al-Sit where it had been possible to rebuild clinics, schools, and the sewage and water networks. While returns of Palestinian refugees are reported to some of refugee camps in Rural Damascus, refugees from Yarmouk remained displaced [[Security 2021](#), 2.11.3, pp. 245-247]. Looting by pro-GoS militias and GoS forces on a large scale has reportedly happened in Yarmouk camp [[Targeting 2022](#), 12.7, p. 107]. Palestinians residing in towns located to the south of Damascus were required to obtain certificates of good conduct from 'regime-affiliates in the area' and security clearances to enter Damascus, but Palestinian IDPs residing in Damascus were banned from traveling to those southern towns despite the fact that they had applied for status settlement [[Damascus 2021](#), 2.3.3, p. 30]. It was reported that *Liwa Al-Quds*, a pro-government militia consisting of Palestinians, confiscated homes and shops of perceived pro-opposition Palestinians in Neirab, a Palestinian refugee camp in the northern governorate of Aleppo [[Returnees from abroad](#), 4.3, p.26].

GoS repression of Palestinians for supporting the anti-GoS opposition in the conflict has been reported since the outbreak of hostilities. Various organisations report abductions, arrests and detention of Palestinian refugees, including women, girls, returnees and individuals who had signed reconciliation agreements, by the GoS forces, as well as torture of Palestinians in government prisons, often for unknown reasons. [[Targeting 2022](#), 12.7, p. 106; [Targeting 2020](#), 11.3, pp. 88-90]

The number of Palestinians returning to Syria had decreased in 2021 and until August 2022. [[Targeting 2022](#), 12.5, p. 103]



Conclusions and guidance with regard to Article 12(1)(a) QD [Article 1D Geneva Convention]

Article 1D of the 1951 Geneva Convention states that, ‘the Convention shall not apply to persons who are at present receiving from organs or agencies of the United Nations other than the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees protection or assistance. When such protection or assistance has ceased for any reason, without the position of such persons being definitively settled in accordance with the relevant resolutions adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, these persons shall ipso facto be entitled to the benefits of this Convention’.

The provisions of Article 1D are reflected in [Article 12\(1\)\(a\) QD](#), which applies to Palestinian refugees who have actually availed themselves of UNRWA protection or assistance. Where such protection or assistance has ceased for a reason beyond the applicant’s control and independent of their volition, forcing them to leave the UNRWA area of operation or preventing them to re-avail themselves of such protection or assistance, the applicant should be granted ipso facto refugee status. ⁽¹¹⁾

In general, despite the occasional efforts of rebuilding lodgings in some of the Palestinian refugee camps, UNRWA protection or assistance is not available to Palestinian refugees in Syria at a level which would guarantee that the ‘living conditions in that area will be commensurate with the mission entrusted to that agency’. ⁽¹²⁾ An indication of this is also the large number of Palestinians who remain displaced, without being able to resettle in another of the refugee camps that operate in Syria. Moreover, there can be practical, legal and safety barriers as well as security threats preventing Palestinian refugees from accessing the UNRWA areas of operation in Syria, and thus from re-availing themselves of its protection or assistance.

Based on this, it is found that the protection or assistance from UNRWA in all of Syria can be considered to have ceased in the meaning of [Article 12\(1\)\(a\) QD](#). Therefore, Palestinians who had previously availed themselves of the protection or assistance of UNRWA in Syria are to be granted ipso facto refugee status. ⁽¹³⁾

⁽¹¹⁾ CJEU, [Bolbol v Bevándorlási és Állampolgársági Hivatal](#), C-31/09, judgment of 17 June 2010; CJEU, [Mostafa Abed El Karem El Kott and Others v Bevándorlási és Állampolgársági Hivatal](#), C-364/11, judgment of 19 December 2012 (*El Kott*);

⁽¹²⁾ CJEU, *El Kott*, paras. 63-65 and ruling.

⁽¹³⁾ According to CJEU, [Bundesrepublik Deutschland v XT](#), C-507/19, judgment of 13 January 2021, paras. 58, 60-62, and operative part, in order to determine whether the protection or assistance from UNRWA has ceased, it is necessary to take into account all fields of UNRWA’s area of operations (i.e. Gaza Strip, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Jordan, Lebanon and Syria), which the applicant has a concrete possibility of accessing and safely remaining therein. The examination should take into account all evidence, including indications with regard to the respective State or autonomous territory, such as the following: whether a stateless person has a right to obtain a residence permit; family ties, habitual residence in that area or previous actual residence, provided that the State or territory concerned consider that such elements are sufficient to enable a stateless person of Palestinian origin to access and safely remain on their territory, irrespective of the granting of any residence permit; declarations or practices of the authorities, which imply a change of attitude towards stateless persons of Palestinian origin, in particular



For Palestinians who have not availed themselves of UNRWA protection or assistance in Syria, the assessment should proceed with risk analysis and analysis of nexus to a reason for persecution.

Conclusions and guidance (for those outside the scope of Article 1D of the Geneva Convention)

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. militia violence, illegal detention, abduction, torture, killing, enforced disappearance). When the acts in question are (solely) discriminatory measures, the individual assessment of whether discrimination could amount to persecution should take into account the severity and/or repetitiveness of the acts or whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: area of habitual residence, identity documents, perceived involvement with a party in the conflict, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion and/or nationality (statelessness).

where, through such declarations and practices, they express an intention no longer to tolerate the presence on their territory of such stateless persons if they do not have a right of residence.



4.11 Women and girls

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024



The contents of this section include:

[4.11.1. The situation of women in the Syrian society](#)

[4.11.2. Violence against women and girls: overview](#)

[4.11.3. Forced and child marriage](#)

[4.11.4. Women perceived to have violated family honour](#)

[4.11.5. Single women and female-headed households](#)

4.11.1 The situation of women in the Syrian society

Last update: February 2023

Before the 2011 uprising, Syrian women had a relatively long history of emancipation and a relatively advanced status with regard to the rights of women, compared to other countries in the region. The Syrian constitution provides for equality between men and women; however, a number of laws are discriminating women, such as criminal, family, religious, personal status, labour, nationality, inheritance, retirement, and social security laws [[Situation of women](#), 1.2.3, p. 31].

Moreover, the authoritarian political system and the prevailing patriarchal values in Syrian society relegated women to a secondary position in society, including in their families, with the notion that 'the most appropriate sphere for women' was the sphere of home and family. Kurdish women are considered to have often experienced more liberal cultural norms generally held by Kurdish communities and promoted by political parties, but their situation was reportedly largely dependent on family and individual beliefs and customs, and adherence to traditional social norms was more common in more heavily religious or traditional communities [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.1, p. 108; [Situation of women](#), 1.2.2, pp. 31-32, 2.2, pp. 47-48].

During the conflict in Syria, the fundamental rights of Syrian women deteriorated severely in almost every aspect of their lives, including their security, as well as their social, economic and health-related situation [[Situation of women](#), 1.2.3. p. 32].



It should be noted that the different forms of violence against women in Syria are often significantly interlinked. Therefore, the following subsections should be read in conjunction.

4.11.2 Violence against women and girls: overview

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

COI summary

Gender-based violence (GBV) existed in Syria before 2011, but the ongoing conflict has reportedly increased the frequency of GBV, changing its nature, increasing its scope and multiplying the perpetrators involved. In 2021, women and girls in all governorates faced multiple forms of violence, such as physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, and domestic violence, as well as forced or early marriage, denial of economic resources or education, restrictions on movement and exploitation. Family status, poverty and displacement also exposed women and girls to the risk of sexual exploitation [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.1, pp. 108-109, 13.2.4, p. 113, 13.3.1, p. 115]. UNFPA noted an escalation in terms of exploitation of women and girls and a growing incidence of child labour among adolescent girls due to the deteriorating levels of poverty and food insecurity across the country. Moreover, the devastating earthquakes of February 2023 exacerbated the vulnerability to sex trafficking. Divorced and widowed women were reportedly more exposed to exploitation [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 36]. There were also recorded incidents of arbitrary arrests, torture, enforced disappearances and displacements as well as extrajudicial killings and executions against women [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.3.3, p. 117].

Domestic violence is common in Syria. It is not specifically prohibited by law and ‘men may discipline their female relatives in a form permitted by general custom’. Spousal rape is excluded as a punishable offence under the legal definition of rape. Due to the conflict, an increasing number of women have been forced to work outside the house and this change of traditional gender roles might have contributed to an increase of domestic violence, which was further intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly to intimate partner violence, family violence was ‘perceived as on the rise due to the combined effects of the economic crisis, COVID-19, unemployment and displacement [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.2.1, pp. 109-110; [Situation of women](#), 1.1.3, pp. 17-18].

Legal and cultural restrictions limited women’s freedom of movement in many areas. The law reportedly allowed certain male relatives to prohibit women from travelling, and UNFPA stated that women and girls faced movement restrictions imposed by male family members in the households, often justified with the fear of violence against females in public space and the social stigma placed on women, especially widows and divorcees [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, p. 47]. Restrictions in movement were either self-imposed or imposed on women and girls by their family members, wider community or actor(s) in control of the area [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.2.1, p. 110, 13.3.1, p. 115, 13.4.1, p. 117, 13.4.2, p. 117; [Situation of women](#), 1.1.3, p. 19].

Members of GoS and anti-government armed groups perpetrated sexual and gender-based violence. The use of sexual violence is reported to be much more common among GoS forces and their affiliated pro-government armed groups, and the GoS has used sexual violence as a 'strategic weapon of war' to obtain information, as punishment or to humiliate women and their families [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.1, p. 109, 13.2.1, p. 110; [Situation of women](#), 1.1.2, p. 14].

In SDF-controlled areas, incidents of killings, enforced disappearances and torture by SDF against women have been documented. Detention was also reported in cases of women who demanded their right to work and freedom of expression [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.4.1, p. 118]. The most prominent types of sexual violence among the SDF included harassment during searches and verbal sexual violence. Members of the SDF have also committed acts of sexual violence within the detention centres and camps managed and administered by them. Moreover, it has been reported that individuals in the Al Hol camp, in particular women and children, have suffered discrimination, including harassment, denial of healthcare, restricted movement due to security considerations, and looting at the hands of SDF forces, due to their familial links to ISIL [[Situation of women](#), 2.2, p. 48; [Security 2020](#), 2.7.3.3, p. 145].

In areas under its control, HTS had interfered in every aspect of civilian life, especially in the form of arbitrary arrests and detentions for violations of the strict dress code and restrictions on freedom of movement. In case of deviation from the imposed dress code and movement restrictions, punishments ranged from corporal punishments, such as lashing, to execution. In January 2022, incidents of harassment and intimidation aimed at forcing women involved in public affairs to leave their jobs were documented. There is further information on women killed and disappeared [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.4.2, pp. 118-119].

With regard to the situation of women in SNA-controlled areas, cases of sexual harassment, sexual violence, rapes, abuse, torture, detention and killings were reported. According to one source, there were sufficient grounds to believe that the SNA committed cruel treatment and violations of personal dignity amounting to war crimes during the reporting period [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.4.3, pp. 119-120].

Violence against women was reportedly treated as a social matter rather than a criminal one by security forces. Protection of women against violence is limited, with enforcement being either weak or non-existent. For example, rape and sexual assault are criminalised but the GoS does not enforce the law effectively. Moreover, Syrian law reduces or suspends punishment in the cases where the perpetrator marries the victim. There are also limited to no mechanisms available for women to file complaints. The absence of law enforcement, including judicial redress mechanisms, allows perpetrators to act with impunity. In addition, the general lawlessness has led to the corrosion of existing social protection mechanisms among Syrian communities. As a result, women and girls mainly resort to negative coping mechanisms such as early marriage, dropping out of school, staying at home, isolation, mental health problems, self-deprivation or suicide attempts [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.1, p. 108, 13.2.1, p. 109, 13.2.3, p. 112; [Situation of women](#), 1.1.3, p. 24, 1.2.4, p. 34].

Socio-cultural factors such as shame and stigma may also prevent women and girls from seeking justice against sexual violence. The experience of sexual violence may also lead to ostracism from the family and/or community, threats of divorce by the husbands, including

separation from their children or even to ‘honour’ killings carried out by family members, particularly in more conservative areas. For unmarried women and girls, the prospects of a future marriage can also be ruined. Sources note the lack of services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and the few opportunities to overcome the stigma and alienation, which exacerbate the situation of victims of sexual violence. Abortion is illegal under the Syrian Penal code, which places women and girls who have become pregnant as a result of rape in ‘an unenviable situation’. Under particular circumstances the penalties stated in the law might be reduced, for example if abortion is ‘performed by the woman to save her honour or another person performs the abortion to save the honour of a descendant or a relative to the second degree’ [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.2, pp. 21, 1.1.3, pp. 23-25, 1.1.4, p. 27].

It is also reported that a limited number of shelters and services for survivors of domestic violence operated in Syria. Those were available only in Damascus and might no longer be in operation due to the conflict [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.3, p. 23].

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against women and girls are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (sexual assault, abduction, enforced disappearance, killing).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: perception of traditional gender roles in the family, socio-economic situation, social status, family status (see also [4.11.5. Single women and female-headed households](#)), lack of documentation, area of origin or residence (e.g. in relation to presence of extremist groups), living in an IDP situation, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that violence against women may be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion (e.g. in case of perceived link to an anti-government armed group), religion (e.g. when persecution is by extremist groups), and/or membership of a particular social group (see examples below).



4.11.3 Forced and child marriage

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

COI summary

Forced and child marriages are harmful traditional practices intertwined in culture and tradition and associated with the belief that women need protection by men. For women and girls, it is not generally possible to make an autonomous decision about whom and when to marry, and 'honour' violence can be a consequence of such decisions (see [4.11.4. Women perceived to have violated family honour](#)). [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.3, pp. 23-24].

Child marriage is reportedly increasing due to the conflict, and it is widespread across the country. Around 84 % of children live in locations where child marriage is an issue for girls aged from 15 to 17 years. Unregistered customary marriage is also reportedly increasing, in some cases involving girls younger than 15 years old. Early marriage continued to increase while the age of marriage decreased for girls. Child marriage is used to face economic hardship and as a tool to mitigate reputational risks for family honour. It was also stated that child marriage was sometimes even regarded as a way out of family violence and became itself a coping mechanism [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, pp. 39-40; [Targeting 2022](#), 13.2.4, pp. 112-113].

There is information that ISIL has practised forced marriage extensively. Forced marriages have also reportedly been found in areas under the control of HTS and GoS [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.2.4, p. 113].

Widows and divorced women are considered to be particularly at risk of gender-based violence including the risk of forced marriage. Many of these women were reportedly re-married, for example to family members, such as the brother of a deceased husband, in order to increase their protection and to safeguard their honour [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.2.4, pp. 113-114].

In 2022, sources reported an increase in the number of customary marriages to avoid young men obtaining marriage licences from military recruitment centres. The increase was also attributed to the economic situation, taking advantage of women's need for financial support. [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.2.4, p. 114]

The Personal Status Law of 2019 put the legal age for marriage at 18 for women and 15 for marriages consented by the male guardian of the girl and authorized by a judge. However, different religious minorities such as Druze and various Christian sects follow their own laws of personal status, which, for example, permit child marriage [[Situation of women](#), 1.2.3, p. 33]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Forced and child marriage amount to persecution. They could, furthermore, be linked to other forms of violence, such as abductions, domestic violence, sexual abuse/exploitation. Refusing to enter into a forced or child marriage can lead to honour-based violence.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: (young) age, personal status, area of origin and residence, ethnicity, religion, perception of traditional gender roles in the family, socio-economic situation of the family, lack of documentation, living in an IDP situation, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile may be for reasons of membership of a particular social group. For example, refusal to enter into forced or child marriage may result in honour-based violence for reasons of membership of a particular social group in relation to a common background which cannot be changed (refusal to marry) and/or a characteristic or belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that a person should not be forced to renounce it (the right to choose whom to marry) and the distinct identity of such women and girls in Syria (as they would be considered as violating the honour of the family).

4.11.4 Women perceived to have violated family honour

Last update: February 2023

COI summary

In Syria's patriarchal culture, the honour of a family is closely connected to the honour of women and girls in the family. This concept of honour is based on notions of female virginity before marriage and sexual fidelity while in wedlock. Rape and/or other forms of sexual abuse targeting women and girls is seen as bringing shame to the family and to the wider community. Therefore, survivors of sexual violence may face repercussions as described under [4.11.2. Violence against women and girls: overview](#). In addition, girls may be forced to

marry the perpetrator or another man in an arrangement to cover up the ‘dishonour’ (see [4.11.3. Forced and child marriage](#)) [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.4, pp. 26-27, 1.2.2, pp. 31-32].

There is also a widespread assumption that women detainees have experienced sexual violence, which can be perceived by the family and the community as a stain on the victim’s dignity and honour. This stigma can reportedly lead to social isolation, rejection from employment, divorce, disownment by the family and even ‘honour’ killing [[Situation of women](#), 1.2.10, p. 41].

Generally speaking, most cases of ‘honour’ killings are connected to sexual violence (but not necessarily rape) and are committed by family members of the victim. ‘Honour’ killings can be a reaction to street harassment or assault, to assumed sexual violence during abduction and even to an autonomous decision made by a girl concerning whom and when to marry. So-called ‘honour’ killings are also shared through social media to demonstrate the cleansing of the family’s ‘shame’ [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.3, pp. 23-24]. According to sources, there were indications that ‘honour’ killings increased after the outbreak of the crisis in 2011. However, the actual extent is not known, as there are no official statistics on ‘honour’ being used as a justification in cases of murder and assault. Furthermore, the investigation of ‘honour’ killings is often not a priority as it is considered a family matter and is reportedly rarely prosecuted. In May 2022, a source stated that ‘honour’ killings occur mainly in areas where tribes play an important role, such as in Sweida or north-eastern Syria, but are not limited to a specific ethnic group [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.2.2, p. 111].

In March 2020, Legislative Decree No. 2 was issued, repealing Article 548 of the Penal Code, which was known as the ‘mitigating circumstances’. Article 548 had treated honour killings as provoked offences or non-premeditated murder and therefore resulted in lower sentences in murder cases. However, it is reported that in many regions practice has not yet adapted to the change in law. In addition, other articles of the Penal Code allow judges to reduce the sentence if there are mitigating circumstances, such as the events that can lead to an honour killing [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.2.2, p. 111].

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

‘Honour’ killings amount to persecution. When the repercussions of a perceived violation of family honour would normally not reach the level of persecution in themselves, such as rejection from employment, divorce, and disownment by the family, the individual assessment of whether they could amount to persecution should take into account the severity and/or repetitiveness of the acts or whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: age, personal status, area of origin and residence, perception of traditional gender roles in the family or community, situation of the family, lack of documentation, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile may be for reasons of membership of a particular social group. For example, women who have previously been subjected to sexual violence may be at risk of ‘honour’ crimes for reasons of membership in a particular social group, based on their common background which cannot be changed and their distinct identity, because they are perceived as being different by the surrounding society, due to the stigmatisation related to being a survivor of sexual violence.

4.11.5 Single women and female-headed households

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

This profile refers to women who are un-married, and women and girls who are widowed or divorced as well as to female-headed households.

COI summary

The number of female-headed households has been rapidly increasing as a result of the widespread and systematic arrests and enforced disappearances of men and boys above the age of 15 years. [[Situation of women](#), 1.2.1, p. 29]

The traditional gender norms in Syria confined the roles and responsibilities of Syrian women predominantly to their homes. The increasing number of female-headed households has led to women adopting new roles in addition to their customary roles as mothers and caregivers. This subjected them to stressful and complex living conditions that are difficult to cope with. Additional challenges include the need to provide for their families, for example by taking up work in the public sphere. In addition, women might face difficulties finding livelihood options deemed suitable for them according to the prevailing cultural and social norms. Other factors can further put burden on women and might expose them to risks of human rights violations. For example, the lack of civil registration with regard to divorce, custody, property rights and criminal matters, as well as movement restrictions imposed on women and girls, often justified with the fear of violence against females in public space and the social stigma placed on women, especially widows and divorcees. In addition, the lack of civil documentation can stop women from enjoying their legal and/or traditional rights provided by their marriage contracts

and block the access to other rights and services, including humanitarian aid [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, p. 47; [Targeting 2022](#), 13.3.1, p. 115; [Situation of women](#), 1.2.1, pp. 29-30, 1.2.6, p. 36, 1.2.7, p. 36].

Widows and divorced women and girls can be distinguished as a subcategory of female-headed households, which is highly stigmatised by the Syrian society. It is reported that widows and divorced women and girls were particularly at risk of sexual violence, emotional and verbal abuse, forced marriage, polygamy and serial temporary marriages, movement restrictions, financial exploitation, and deprivation of inheritance, among others [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 36; [Situation of women](#), 1.2.10, pp.39-40]. Female heads of households are in particular at increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence as well as higher risks of homelessness and eviction due to a lack of a male protector and face these heightened risks irrespective of the geographical area. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 37; [Targeting 2022](#), 13.3.1, p. 115; [Situation of women](#), 2.2, p.48]

There is also information about ‘widows camps’ in urban areas or larger displacement camps. Though women and children were supposed to be protected there, they were subjected to strong restrictions and limitations on their freedom and often even increased stigmatisation and violence. The overpopulation in IDP camps, informal settlements and collective centres further exposes girls and women to exploitation [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 37; [Targeting 2022](#), 13.3.1, p. 115; [Situation of women](#), 2.1.1, p. 45]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

The individual assessment of whether discrimination of single women and female-headed households could amount to persecution should take into account the severity and/or repetitiveness of the acts or whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures. It further enhances the risk for such women to be exposed to acts such as sexual violence and forced marriage, which would amount to persecution (see the sections [4.11.2. Violence against women and girls: overview](#) and [4.11.3. Forced and child marriage](#)).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, and in particular the fact of having a male relative who is able and willing to provide support and their marital status (widows and divorced women are particularly at risk),

Other risk impacting circumstances could include: area of origin and residence, perception of traditional gender roles in the family or community, economic situation, lack of documentation, education, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that, where well-founded fear of persecution could be substantiated, this may be for reasons of membership of a particular social group (e.g. divorced women or widows, due to their common background which cannot be changed and distinct identity in Syria, in relation to stigmatisation by society).

4.12 Children

Last update: April 2024

This profile refers to Syrian nationals under the age of 18.

In the following subsections, the focus is on certain child-specific circumstances of increased vulnerability and risks that children in Syria may be exposed to.



The contents of this section include:

[4.12.1. Violence against children: overview](#)

[4.12.2. Child recruitment](#)

[4.12.3. Child labour and child trafficking](#)

[4.12.4. Child marriage](#)

[4.12.5. Access to education](#)

[4.12.6. Lack of documentation](#)

4.12.1 Violence against children: overview

Last update: April 2024

COI summary

According to UNOCHA, children ‘continue to be greatly affected by the crisis in Syria’ and exposed to violations in the hostilities. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 37]

As indicated in the June 2023 report by the UN Secretary General, 2 438 grave violations against 2 407 children (2 059 boys, 312 girls, 36 sex unknown) occurred throughout 2022.



The same source reported that 711 children were either killed or maimed, mostly by unidentified actors, GoS and affiliated forces. The main reasons behind the casualties were explosive ordnance, ground shelling, air strikes and live ammunition. In the first half of 2023, SNHR recorded the killing of at least 71 children. Most of the casualties were the result of landmines, explosions and killings by unidentified actors. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 37]

Sexual violence against children perpetrated by different parties to the conflict has been a persistent issue throughout the conflict. Government forces used child rape as a weapon of war and were systematically abusing the children of opposition figures in GoS prisons, at checkpoints and during house raids, with impunity [[Situation of women](#), 2.4, p. 18]. Children were detained with adults and exposed to exploitation, torture, violence, including sexual violence perpetrated by prison guards, torturers and other prisoners [[Actors](#), 2.2.6, p. 23, 2.4, p. 38]. Cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated by the SNA were also reported [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 38].

The growing inability to meet basic needs and the widespread poverty induced households across the country to rely on negative coping mechanisms. In this context, female-headed households and children have been affected disproportionately [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 39].

The population of IDP children continued to grow due to the hostilities, facing increased vulnerability to abuses. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 38]

According to an International Labour Organization (ILO) study of 2012, children who worked outside of their homes and did not reside with their family became exposed to exploitation by gangs or to joining gangs, to smoking and drug abuse, and to health hazards stemming from handling dangerous equipment. Spending most of their day outside their home many working children returned home alone after dark, exposing them to harassment such as sexual harassment. A source also stated that ISIL was conducting kidnappings partly from orphanages, schools and family homes. [[Targeting 2020](#), 12.1, 12.2, pp. 93-94]

Other examples of violence against children include the internment of thousands of wives and **children of ISIL** fighters in makeshift camps under deplorable living conditions in areas under SDF control [[Targeting 2020](#), 3.2, p. 42; [Actors](#), 3.3, p. 48]. There were also reports of abductions of women and girls by different actors and motivated by various reasons, including organ trafficking, with children being especially affected [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.3, p. 21].

According to researchers, domestic violence was common in Syria even before the civil war and not criminalised in Syrian's legislation. The changes in the traditional ways of family life and gender roles might have resulted in further violence against women and children, without effective legal protection mechanisms. A lack of services to support survivors of domestic violence is also reported. [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.3, pp. 22-23]

Generally, effective protection against violence is limited and enforcement is either weak or non-existent (see profile of women, in particular under subsection [4.11.2. Violence against women and girls: overview](#)).



Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against children are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (sexual assault, abduction, torture, killing).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: family members perceived to be involved with the opposition or anti-government armed groups (see [4.1. Persons perceived to be opposing the government](#)), socio-economic situation (e.g. residing in IDP camps), family status, area of origin or residence, lack of documentation, religion, etc. Children without a male relative who is willing and able to provide support, would particularly be at risk.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile may be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion (e.g. in case of perceived link to an anti-government armed group), religion (e.g. when persecution is by extremist groups), and/or membership of a particular social group (see examples below).

4.12.2 Child recruitment

Last update: April 2024

COI summary

Children, most frequently boys, have been used in hostilities by parties to the conflict for combat roles, to act as spies or informants, or to serve at checkpoints. Both State forces, including NDF and pro-government militias, and non-State armed groups are reported to recruit minors to their forces. [[Targeting 2020](#), 12.1, pp. 92]

Recent figures shows that children in Syria are increasingly recruited, notwithstanding the de-escalating fighting in most parts of the country. The June 2023 report published by the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly stated that a total of 1 696 children (of whom 1 593 boys and 103 girls) were recruited in 2022. Cases of children as young as 14 being recruited were also reported. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, pp. 40-41]



The majority of children were recruited and used by the SDF and affiliated armed groups, and anti-government groups such as the SNA and HTS. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 40]

The recruitment of children by SNA is reportedly ‘very common’ in SNA-controlled areas, where the main target are poor children [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 41. See also the subsection ‘Child recruitment’ under [4.6. Persons fearing forced or child recruitment by Kurdish forces](#)].

Recruitment of children by HTS in IDP camps and by ISIL in the Al-Hoj and Roj camps has also been reported. Both HTS and ISIL have used children as ‘human shields, suicide bombers, snipers, and executioners’. Children recruited by armed groups can also be used to fight in Libya. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 41].

Fewer cases of recruitment by GoS and affiliated armed groups were reported. Recruitment of children is prohibited according to Act No. 11 of 2013 which amended the Syrian Penal Code. The law prescribes the criminalisation of all forms of recruitment under the age of 18 by armed forces and armed groups. However, the GoS did not take any evident action to prevent child recruitment by armed opposition groups and designated terrorist organisations. Moreover, the GoS reportedly showed official complicity in child recruitment, not undertaking any action to prosecute government officials and being itself an actor of recruitment. Pro-GoS militias also forcibly recruited children as young as six years old. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 40]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Child recruitment is of such severe nature that it would amount to persecution.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: socio-economic situation (for example, residing in IDP camps), family status, area of origin or residence, ethnicity, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

The individual circumstances of the applicant need to be taken into account to determine whether a nexus to a reason for persecution can be substantiated. For example, in the case of children who refuse to join armed groups, persecution may be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.



4.12.3 Child labour and child trafficking

Last update: April 2024

COI summary

The growing inability to meet basic needs and the widespread poverty induce households across the country to rely on negative coping mechanisms, with several sources reporting that child labour was generally used to alleviate financial constraints. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 39; [Damascus 2022](#), 3.2.2, p. 40]

The UNFPA noted an escalation in the exploitation of women and girls and a growing incidence of child labour among adolescent girls due to the deteriorating levels of poverty and food insecurity across the country. Child labour is particularly common among IDP living out of camps [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 36]. It was also stated that in northwest Syria households experiencing multiple displacement became exposed to an increased threat of resorting to child labour. A report also indicated that child labour was occurring in communities across northern Idlib, likely exposing children there to abuse and exploitation. Boys are reportedly at greater risk of becoming subject to child labour than girls [[Targeting 2020](#), 12.2, p. 94]. On the other hand, young girls are forced to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as prostitution or survival sex, because they are in need of money and goods [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.3, p. 26]. A higher reliance on child labour of children aged 15-17 years old (7 %) in female-headed households compared to male-headed households (2 %) has been reported [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 39].

Child labour has a devastating impact on children, including on their level of school attendance. Around 48 % of families surveyed by UNOCHA stated that the main reason their child was not attending school was to support the household. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, pp. 39, 42-43]

Child labour also exposed children to exploitation, sexual and psychological violence. Working outside of their homes and not residing together with their family also exposes children to exploitation by gangs, or to joining gangs, to smoking and drug abuse, and to health hazards stemming from handling dangerous equipment. Spending most of their day outside their home, many working children returned home alone after dark, further exposing them to harassment, including sexual harassment. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 36; [Targeting 2020](#), 12.2, p. 94]

The human trafficking market in Syria has been defined as ‘flourishing’ with forced labour and sexual exploitation as being ‘pervasive’ across the country. Trafficking in persons occurred all across the country, although Deir Ez-Zor and Al Qaim, an Iraqi town on the border with Syria, have been identified as the major trafficking hubs. USDOS observed that no measure has been taken by the GoS either to protect victims of trafficking or to prosecute traffickers. The same source highlighted the complicity of the state in human trafficking, as most criminal markets in Syria are run by actors affiliated with the GoS, including the NDF and the Tiger Forces. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 36]



Girls, boys and women were subjected to exploitation by armed groups, community members and criminal gangs. Moreover, the devastating earthquakes of February 2023 exacerbated the vulnerability to sex trafficking, forced labour, and recruitment or use of children by armed groups. Children, divorced and widowed women, and displaced persons were more exposed to exploitation. Out of school children are more likely to be exposed to child labour and trafficking. Unaccompanied minors were also more likely to be involved in forced child labour to access basic needs when compared to other children with caregivers. Displaced children were particularly exposed to forced labour, especially by organized begging rings. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 36, 1.4, pp. 39-40]

In areas where the ISIL exerted control, girls and women were forced into marriage with fighters, subjected to domestic servitude, sexual slavery and early marriage. An estimated 6 000 women and children, mainly Yazidis, who had been previously abducted and transferred to Syria by ISIL, have been sold into sex trafficking. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 37]

Children who have been victims of trafficking continued to be detained by the GoS, NDF, SDF, and SNA on the basis of their alleged association with armed or terrorist groups. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 37]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Child trafficking amounts to persecution.

Not all forms of child labour would amount to persecution. An assessment should be made in light of the nature and conditions of the work and the age of the child. Work that is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children could be considered to reach the severity of persecution. ⁽¹⁴⁾ The impact of child labour on access to education should also be taken into account (see the subsection [4.12.5. Access to education](#)). Other risks, such as involvement in criminal activities should also be considered.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: age, gender, socio-economic situation, being in an IDP situation, region of origin or residence, etc. Children without a male relative, who is willing and able to provide support, would particularly be at risk.

⁽¹⁴⁾ International Labour Organization (ILO), Minimum Age Convention, C138, 26 June 1973, available at http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C138; Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, C182, 17 June 1999, available at http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C182.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

The risk of child labour and child trafficking as such may not generally imply a nexus to a reason for persecution. However, the individual circumstances of the applicant need to be taken into account to determine whether a nexus to a reason for persecution can be substantiated.

4.12.4 Child marriage

Last update: February 2023

See the section on [4.11.3. Forced and child marriage](#) under the profile [4.11. Women and girls](#).

4.12.5 Access to education

Last update: April 2024

COI summary

Article 29 of the Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic stipulates that education is ‘a right guaranteed by the state, and it is free at all levels’ and that it ‘shall be compulsory until the end of basic education state’. Education is mandatory up to the 9th grade (between the ages of 6 and 15), which comprises six years of primary school and three years of lower level secondary school [[Damascus 2020](#), 3.6, p. 32]. For a child to be enrolled in formal education and to register for national exams, civil documentation is required [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.6, p. 32; see also [4.12.6. Lack of documentation](#)].

The GoS is the main provider of education in most areas of Syria, with the support of international NGOs and UN agencies in some areas. Schools providing primary and secondary education, including UNRWA and private schools, are under the supervision of the Syrian Ministry of Education. Public primary and secondary school are free and one source reported that ‘no child is denied access based on his or her area of origin or ethnic background’. In some areas of the northeast of Syria, the ‘self-administration’ provides most education, such as in Raqqa and parts of Deir Ez-Zor, Aleppo, and Hasaka [[Damascus 2020](#), 3.6, p. 34-35]. Because they are based on the Kurdish curriculum instead of the GoS’ school curriculum, Kurdish graduation certificates are not recognised in other parts of the country, therefore limiting the access of pupils to higher education [[Targeting 2022](#), 5.2.1, p. 62].

The conflict caused a decline in access to education. Sources stated that IDP children would be facing problems in accessing education, and the same was reported for children living in northern Idlib. In arrival locations, absorption capacity was overstretched for both IDP and host communities [[Targeting 2020](#), 12.3, pp. 95-96]. Moreover, Syrian girls and women were



denied access to education because of the harmful attitudes and customs (e.g. child marriage) exacerbated by the conflict. Movement restrictions have also affected the access to education for girls in Syria [[Situation of women](#), 1.2.8, p. 39].

The devastating impact of the prolonged conflict, the economic constraints and widespread poverty across the country are factors hindering access to education as the children are compelled to work to support their households. In 2023, UNICEF reported on the increase in the number of children engaged in child labour and child marriage. It assessed that 2.4 million children were out of school and that another 1.6 million children were at risk of dropping out. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 41]

Children with disabilities experience additional barriers to education due to restriction of movement, lack of tailored learning programmes and proper educational facilities. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 43]

Moreover, one in three schools in Syria were reportedly no longer used for educational purposes as they have been ‘destroyed, damaged, continue to shelter displaced families or are being used for military purposes’. For the year 2022, the UN verified 13 attacks on schools resulting from ground shelling, air strikes and live ammunition, which were mainly attributed to GoS and affiliated forces and unidentified perpetrators. Schools were also being used for military purposes, particularly by the YPG/YPJ. No confirmed attacks on educational facilities were reported between January and May 2023. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 42]

In north-western Syria, the devastating earthquakes of February 2023 also resulted in massive damage to school infrastructure. It was estimated that 54 % of schools and 37 % of teaching and learning spaces were affected by the earthquake in that area. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 43]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

The general deficiencies in the educational system as a consequence of the ongoing conflict cannot as such be considered persecution, as they are not the result of an actor’s deliberate actions. However, in the case of deliberate restrictions on access to education, it should be assessed whether it amounts to persecution.

The denial of documentation, which also may hinder access to basic education, may be linked to originating from a (former) opposition-held territory (see also [4.12.6. Lack of documentation](#)).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as:



identification documents, gender (girls are at a higher risk), perception of traditional gender roles in the family, socio-economic situation of the child and the family, being in an IDP situation, area of origin and residence, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Where well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated, the individual circumstances of the child should be taken into account to determine whether a nexus to a reason for persecution can be substantiated. For example, in the case of denied identity documentation due to origin from an opposition-held territory, (imputed) political opinion may apply.

4.12.6 Lack of documentation

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

COI summary

The lack of identity documentation equates to a lack of legal status of the child and impedes access to all services, including healthcare, education, humanitarian assistance, property rights, work opportunities, and reportedly also possibly citizenship. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.6, p. 32; [Targeting 2020](#), 12.4, p. 96]. It further exposes affected children to 'exploitation, abuse and trafficking' [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 39].

The lack of identity documentation was reportedly particularly critical in the areas out of the control of the GoS, where 25 % of adolescents did not have identity cards and a quarter of new-borns had not been registered since the beginning of the conflict. [[Targeting 2020](#), 12.4, p. 96]

The lack of documentation varies drastically across governorates. Whereas more than 80 % of Idlib's residents lack some official document, almost the entire population in the governorates of Sweida and Homs was able to obtain the desired documentation (about 99 %). In Damascus governorate, the percentage of persons lacking official GoS-issued documentation was said to be around 5 % of the host community. Lack of access to civil documentation was grave for the populations of Latakia, Tartous, and Raqqa (about 75 % for all three governorates). [[Damascus 2020](#), 2.5, p. 23]

The GoS reportedly does not accept non-state issued documentation [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.6, p. 32]. In recaptured areas, the GoS has not given priority to re-establishing the civil registration system. It was also reported that GoS has not devoted any special resources to recording births in opposition-held areas or to transferring registrations from opposition governance bodies. The government's policy was generally to reject opposition education records and civil registration records [[Targeting 2020](#), 12.4, p. 96]. Children born outside the



government-controlled areas may then be considered as undocumented [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.6, p. 32].

Syrians living in opposition-held areas might obtain birth documents at the central civil registry office in Damascus, but they would be confronted with various obstacles such as having to cross the front line, with the associated risks involved like being arrested by pro-government forces. Men of conscription age would run the risk of being arrested for evading military service and women would risk sexual assaults at checkpoints [[Targeting 2020](#), 12.4, pp. 96-97]. According to another source, Syrians in opposition-held areas may choose to give a third person in GoS-controlled area authorisation to apply and obtain a birth certificate, or use ‘intermediaries’ to obtain a birth certificate illegally ‘by means of bribery and a smuggling network’ [[Targeting 2020](#), 12.4, p. 97].

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) noted that ‘although women have the same rights as men to register the births of their children, nationality is only transferred from the father and therefore mothers must struggle to register the births of their infants’ [[Targeting 2020](#), 12.4, p. 97]. Another source noted that ‘if a father dies before he and his wife formally registered their marriage, the mother is unable to register her children, due to the inability to register the marriage after the father’s death’ [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.6, p. 32]. More frequently, in female-headed households, women are unable to transmit the nationality to their children, exposing them to risk of statelessness, mostly in areas outside GoS control and among IDPs in GoS-controlled areas. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 39].

Difficulties are often encountered in relation to the registration of the birth of children who were born out of wedlock, as a result of sexual violence, to parents in inter-faith marriages and parents who do not have proof of their marriage [[Targeting 2020](#), 12.4, p. 97]. Moreover, an increasing number of children born out of wedlock were abandoned by their mothers for fear of stigmatisation by the society [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 39].

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

The lack of documentation as consequence of the ongoing conflict cannot as such be considered persecution, as it is not the result of an actor’s deliberate actions. However, deliberate restrictions on access to documentation may amount to persecution.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: deceased or missing fathers, being born out of wedlock or as a result of sexual violence, area of origin and residence, gender, socio-economic situation of the child and the family, IDP situation, member of a female-headed household, etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Where well-founded fear of persecution can be substantiated, the individual circumstances of the child should be taken into account to determine whether a nexus to a reason for persecution can be substantiated. For example, in the case of children born as a result of sexual violence, persecution may be for reasons of membership of a particular social group due to their common background that cannot be changed and the distinct identity of such children, implying being seen as illegitimate in Syria.

4.13 LGBTIQ persons

Last update: February 2023

This profile refers to persons who are perceived as not conforming to social norms because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, including the treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) individuals in Syria. However, it should be noted that specific information on some of those communities was not available in the COI reports used for the purpose of this guidance.

COI summary

The Syrian legislation makes same-sex activities punishable by law, as stipulated in the Penal Code of 1949. Article 520 states: 'any sexual intercourse against the order of nature can be punished with up to three years of imprisonment'. Article 517 of the Penal Code states that also violations of public decency as defined under Article 208 of the Syrian Penal Code are punishable with imprisonment from three months to three years. The law makes no explicit reference to same-sex marriage. [[Targeting 2022](#), 14, p. 121; [Targeting 2020](#), 13.1, p. 98]

According to recent reliable information on the enforcement of laws, LGBTIQ persons are not prosecuted under the Penal Code, but rather charged with drug offences, prostitution or for violating social values. The Syrian law does not provide protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Since only the sexes male and female are acknowledged by the Syrian law, there is no legal basis for transgender people to change their documents accordingly. Surgeries are legally allowed only for intersex people who are in possession of a medical diagnosis. In this context, it is also reported that LGBTIQ persons are likely to have difficulties in accessing regular or specialised medical care. [[Targeting 2022](#), 14, p. 122]

This lack of legal protection has led to an environment of impunity for rampant, targeted threats and violence against LGBTIQ individuals. Syrian authorities and others use one's sexual orientation to blackmail, harass and eventually abuse LGBTIQ persons. [[Targeting 2022](#), 14.2, p. 122]



Sources indicate that the ongoing conflict has only exacerbated the already existing problem of targeting LGBTIQ persons by the authorities. According to a recent report, the number of incidents is reportedly high in both government and opposition areas. The violence occurs in various settings, such as Syrian detention centres, checkpoints, central prisons or in the ranks of the Syrian army. [[Targeting 2022](#), 14.2, p. 123]

With regard to the conflict, documented serious human rights violations against LGBTIQ individuals at the hands of GoS security forces and non-State armed groups included cases of summary execution, arbitrary detention, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as harassment, discrimination and exploitation. Information on the frequency of such incidents is not available. It is also reported that ISIL and HTS regularly detained, tortured and killed LGBTIQ individuals in the territories they controlled. Abductions of persons assumed or perceived as gay have also been documented. [[Targeting 2022](#), 14.2, pp. 122-124]

In addition, LGBTIQ persons were targeted and subjected to physical or verbal violence at the hands of the community and family members. It is reported that the sexual orientation of LGBTIQ persons is even more of a problem in society than with the authorities. Incidents include threats, harassment, loss of inheritance rights, discrimination and abuse in the workplace or even 'honour' killings. Women who openly profess their LGBTIQ identity are reportedly more stigmatised because of the widespread belief that women endanger the collective honour of the family. Consequences include being banned from contact outside the family, conversion therapy, forced marriage or even being kept as a domestic slave. [[Targeting 2022](#), 14.3, pp. 125-126]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. abduction, torture, arbitrary detention, (sexual) violence, killing).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

For individuals under this profile, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.

It has to be noted that an applicant cannot be expected to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid persecution. ⁽¹⁵⁾

⁽¹⁵⁾ CJEU, *Minister voor Immigratie en Asiel v X and Y and Z v Minister voor Immigratie en Asiel*, joined cases C-199/12 to C201/12 judgment of 7 November 2013, paras. 70-76.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that the persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of membership of a particular social group based on a shared characteristic which is so fundamental to their identity that they should not be forced to renounce it, and based on a distinct identity of LGBTIQ persons in Syria, because they are perceived as being different by the surrounding society. ⁽¹⁶⁾

⁽¹⁶⁾ CJEU, *X, Y and Z*, paras. 45-49.



5. Subsidiary protection

[Article 15 QD](#)

This chapter addresses the EU-regulated status of subsidiary protection. Where the applicant has not been found to qualify as a refugee, they may be eligible for subsidiary protection in accordance with Article 15 QD.



The contents of this chapter include:

Under the section [Article 15\(a\) QD](#), the analysis focuses on the applicable EU legal framework and the factual circumstances surrounding the ‘death penalty or execution’ in Syria.

The section on [Article 15\(b\) QD](#) looks into the risk of ‘torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment’ in relation to particular circumstances in Syria.

Under the section [Article 15\(c\) QD](#), the analysis covers the different elements of the provision, looking into: ‘armed conflict’, ‘qualification of a person as a ‘civilian’’, ‘indiscriminate violence’, ‘serious and individual threat’ (where further individualisation elements are discussed), ‘qualification of the harm as ‘threat to life or person’’, and the interpretation of the nexus ‘by reasons of’. The sub-section on ‘indiscriminate violence’ includes an assessment of [the situation in each governorate in Syria](#).



5.1 Article 15(a) QD: death penalty or execution

Last update: September 2020

*Minor updates added: April 2024

[Article 15\(a\) QD](#)

As noted in the chapter [4. Refugee status](#), some profiles of applicants from Syria may be at risk of death penalty or execution. In such cases, there could be a nexus to a reason for persecution falling under the definition of a refugee (for example, [4.1. Persons perceived to be opposing the government](#), [4.2.3. Military deserters and defectors](#)), and those individuals would qualify for refugee status.

In cases where there is no nexus to a Convention ground (for example, in case of offences related to drug trafficking), the need for subsidiary protection under Article 15(a) QD should be examined.

The death penalty is envisaged under the Syrian Penal Law and can be imposed for the following crimes: aggravated murder, military offences, terrorism-related offences, drug trafficking, treasonous acts, arson resulting in death, gang robbery resulting in death, as well as other offences not resulting in death, such as subjecting a person to torture or barbaric treatment during commission of a gang-robbery; attempting a crime punishable by the death penalty; being convicted for the second time for a felony punishable by forced labour for life. [[Actors](#), 2.2.3, pp. 19-20]

The acts of terrorism were broadly defined in the Counter-Terrorism Law No. 19, which was adopted by the Syrian government in 2012. The Counter-Terrorism Court was established to enforce the aforementioned law. The Counter-Terrorism Court is reported to impose harsh sentences, including from 10 to 20 years of hard labour, or the death penalty. [[Actors](#), 2.2.2, p. 18]

Military Field Courts were set up by Decree 25/2/1966 in order to try civilians and military personnel for 'crimes committed during wartime or during military operations'. The Military Field Courts do not apply the Syrian Criminal Code in their rulings and the punishments they impose include life imprisonment and death penalty. The President of Syria is responsible for the approval of death sentences issued by the Military Field Courts, having also the possibility of reducing a sentence, replacing it with another penalty or cancelling the case. [[Actors](#), 2.2.2, pp. 18-19]

Sources stated that thousands of people have been executed following sentences issued by military field courts throughout the conflict. Death sentences by these courts and executions were also reported between 2022 and 2023, albeit in smaller numbers. In September 2023, military field courts were abolished. It was reported that all cases would fall under the military judiciary and would be prosecuted according to the Military Penal code and Military procedure [[COI Update 2023](#), 3, p. 12].



Various organisations and former detainees report that death penalties and executions were extensively implemented in Syria's prisons. No official information regarding the death penalties imposed or the number of executions that have been carried out have been disclosed by the authorities of the GoS. Various amnesties, which among others removed the death penalty for certain categories of individuals, have been issued by the GoS [[COI Update 2023](#), 3, pp. 11-12; Targeting 2022, 2.5, pp. 42-44; [Actors](#), 2.2.3, pp. 19-20] The Syrian authorities reportedly continued to apply the death penalty and to carry out executions. [[Security 2022](#), 1.4.1, p.29]. Executions of civilians for allegedly not stopping at a checkpoint or because they refused to hand over their property or make any payments were also reported [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, p. 48].

In Kurdish-controlled areas, a legal code based on the 'Social Contract' is applied by the Kurdish authorities. According to Article 26 of the Social Contract, the death penalty has been abolished [[Actors](#), 3.1.4, pp. 43-44].

Extremist groups such as HTS and ISIL have carried out public executions, beheadings and crucifixions for transgressing the moral codes of the *sharia* law in areas under their control, killing hundreds of civilians. They also reportedly subjected women, girls, and minorities to illegal executions for breach of the imposed codes and for 'dishonouring' their families. [[Actors](#), 4.1.4, pp. 52-53, 6.4, p. 62]

If there is a reasonable degree of likelihood of death penalty or execution, subsidiary protection under Article 15(a) QD shall be granted, unless the applicant is to be excluded in accordance with Article 17 QD.



In some cases, the death penalty would have been imposed for a serious crime committed by the applicant, or for other acts falling within the exclusion grounds under Article 17 QD. Therefore, although the criteria of Article 15(a) QD would be met, exclusion considerations should be examined. See the chapter [8. Exclusion](#).



5.2 Article 15(b) QD: torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

[Article 15\(b\) QD](#)

As noted in the chapter [4. Refugee status](#), some profiles of applicants from Syria may be at risk of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In such cases, there would often be a nexus to a reason for persecution falling under the definition of a refugee, and those individuals would qualify for refugee status. However, with reference to cases where there is no nexus to a Convention ground, the need for subsidiary protection under Article 15(b) QD should be examined.



The contents of this chapter include:

[5.2.1. Healthcare and socio-economic conditions](#)

[5.2.2. Arbitrary arrests, prison conditions and treatment in detention](#)

[5.2.3. Criminal violence](#)

5.2.1 Healthcare and socio-economic conditions

Healthcare facilities have been destroyed or damaged in targeted attacks by actors in the conflict, therefore deliberately limiting access to healthcare in the respective areas [see for example [Security 2023](#), 1.5.4, p. 43; [Damascus 2020](#), 3.5, p. 28; [Security 2020](#), 1.6.1.2, p.34, 2.1.3, p. 60, 2.2.3.7, p. 85, etc.]. Sieges in Aleppo and Dar'a al-Balad restricted the supply of food, water and electricity as well as the entry of basic necessities such as flour, fuel, and medical aid [[Security 2022](#), 2.3.3, p. 93, 2.12.3, p. 210]. In such cases, the application of Article 15(b) QD may be considered where refugee status has not been found to apply.



It is important to note that serious harm must take the form of conduct of an actor ([Article 6 QD](#)). In themselves, the general unavailability of healthcare, education or other socio-economic elements (e.g. situation of IDPs, difficulties in finding livelihood opportunities, housing) are not considered serious harm meeting the requirements of inhuman or degrading treatment under Article 15(b) QD in relation to Article 6 QD, unless there is intentional conduct of an actor, such as the intentional deprivation of the applicant of appropriate healthcare.



5.2.2 Arbitrary arrests, prison conditions and treatment in detention

Special attention should be paid to the phenomena of arbitrary arrests and illegal detention, as well as to prison conditions. When assessing the conditions of detention, the following elements can, for example, be taken into consideration, cumulatively: number of detained persons in a limited space, adequacy of sanitation facilities, heating, lighting, sleeping arrangements, food, recreation or contact with the outside world.

Prison and detention centres have been reported as harsh and, in many instances, life-threatening, due to food shortages, gross overcrowding, physical and psychological abuse, and inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care. Reports mention that prisoners and detainees face the risk of ill-treatment and even execution, while deaths in custody resulting from torture or other ill-treatment have been documented. Various methods of torture have been reported, including physical violence, sexual torture, psychological torture, health neglect and harsh detention conditions, forced labour, torture in military hospitals. Children are not separated from adults and are held in the same prisons, suffering from the same types of torture. [Actors, 2.2.6, pp. 23-24, 2.3.3, p. 32, 2.4, p. 38]. Extrajudicial killings and deaths in detention centres due to torture and medical negligence continued to be reported according to recent sources [Security 2023, 1.4.1, p. 26].



In cases where the prosecution or punishment is grossly unfair or disproportionate, or where a person is subjected to prison conditions which are not compatible with respect for human dignity, a situation of serious harm under Article 15(b) QD can occur.

It should be highlighted that in some cases, there would be a nexus to a reason for persecution falling under the definition of a refugee, and those individuals would qualify for refugee status. If nexus to a reason for persecution is not substantiated, Article 15(b) QD would apply.

Exclusion considerations may be relevant. See [8. Exclusion](#).



See also [2. The implications of leaving Syria](#) and the profiles of [4.1. Persons perceived to be opposing the government](#), [4.2. Persons who evaded or deserted military service](#), [4.3. Persons with perceived links to ISIL](#), [4.7. Persons associated with the Government of Syria](#), [4.8. Journalists, other media professionals and human rights activists](#), [4.9. Doctors, other medical personnel and civil defence volunteers](#).



5.2.3 Criminal violence

Criminality in Syria is widely reported and is said to be a main driver behind the activities of pro-government militias. Pro-government militias are largely autonomous and free to exploit the population in the areas they control. Many have reportedly turned into a mafia known for extortion of civilians, stealing, looting, corruption, gun smuggling, drug smuggling and committing other violations against civilians. [[Security 2020](#), 1.5.1, p. 25]

In several governorates, a state of lawlessness was reported where persons were victims of theft, extortions, kidnappings, assassinations, looting, robberies, and human trafficking. Drug production and cross-border drug trafficking increased in the south of Syria, including in Dar'a governorate [[Security 2022](#), 2.12, p. 203-221, 2.14, pp. 233-247; [Actors](#), 5.2, pp. 58-59].

In Dar'a governorate, violent incidents including killings and assassination attempts were also reported in the context of drug trade and other criminal activities [[Security 2022](#), 1.5.1, p. 42]. GoS-forces, especially the Fourth Division assisted by Hezbollah and the Military Intelligence were reported to be important actors in the production and transport of drugs as well. Increasing criminal activities like '[t]heft, homicide, robbery, mugging, and profit kidnapping (especially of children)' were also reported in Dar'a governorate at the beginning of 2022 [[Security 2022](#), 2.12.3, p. 215].

In Sweida governorate, where 'lawlessness, chaos and rampant criminal and political violence' were reported, new armed groups involved in criminal activities such as kidnappings, had emerged [[Security 2022](#), 2.14.2, pp. 238-242]. Recent reports indicated an increase in kidnappings by pro-GoS militias and gangs as well as armed attacks and assassinations in the governorate. Unidentified gunmen targeted civilians as part of robberies or for unknown reasons. Several persons were also killed in armed disputes between individuals or rural families and altercations with a drug dealer or Bedouin tribesmen [[Security 2023](#), 2.14.3, pp. 163-164].

The security situation in Al-Hol camp, which houses suspected ISIL family members was described by UNOCHA as 'volatile' and was characterized by 'high levels of violence and criminality, with reports of killings by unidentified perpetrators. [[Security 2023](#), 2.7.3, p. 108]



A real risk of violent crime, such as kidnappings, robberies, murder, human trafficking would meet the requirements under Article 15(b) QD.

Where there is no nexus to a reason for persecution under the refugee definition, the risk of violent crime such as the above may qualify under Article 15(b) QD.

[The implications of leaving Syria](#) should also be given due consideration.



5.3 Article 15(c) QD: indiscriminate violence in situations of armed conflict

[Article 15\(c\) QD](#)

This section focuses on the application of the provision of Article 15(c) QD. Under [Article 2\(f\) QD](#) in conjunction with Article 15(c) QD, subsidiary protection is granted where ‘substantial grounds have been shown for believing that the person would face a real risk of suffering serious harm’ defined as **serious and individual threat to a civilian’s life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict**.

Each element of the provision is addressed in a separate subsection.



The contents of this chapter include:

[5.3.1. Preliminary remarks](#)

[5.3.2. Armed conflict \(international or internal\)](#)

[5.3.3. Qualification of a person as a ‘civilian’](#)

[5.3.4. Indiscriminate violence](#)

[5.3.5. Serious and individual threat](#)

[5.3.6. Qualification of the harm as a ‘threat to \(a civilian’s\) life or person’](#)

[5.3.7. Nexus/‘by reason of’](#)

5.3.1 Preliminary remarks

Last update: April 2024

In armed conflicts, the targeting of civilians may have nexus to one of the reasons for persecution according to the refugee definition. Therefore, refugee status may be granted as noted in the sections above.

See, for example, the profiles [4.4. Members of and persons perceived to be collaborating with the SDF and YPG](#), and [4.7. Persons associated with the Government of Syria](#). Such targeted violence, furthermore, would not be considered ‘indiscriminate’.

a) Reference period

The following assessment is primarily based on the [2023 EUAA COI report on the security situation in Syria](#), with the reference period 1 August 2022 – 31 July 2023. Some indicators are updated with information concerning the period 1 August 2023 – 30 November 2023 based on the EUAA [COI Update 2023](#). Background information regarding the conflict in Syria is also taken into account.



This guidance should be considered valid as long as current events and developments fall within the trends and patterns of violence observed within the reference period of the mentioned COI report. New events and developments that cause substantial changes, new trends or geographical shifts in the violence, may lead to a different assessment. The security situation in a given territory should always be assessed in light of the most up-to-date COI available.

b) Legal framework

[Article 15\(c\) QD](#) defines the third type of harm that constitutes a ground for qualification for subsidiary protection. It covers a more general risk of harm and the protection needs which may arise from armed conflict situations.

Figure 2. Article 15(c) QD: elements of the assessment.



All of these elements have to be fulfilled in order to grant subsidiary protection under [Article 15\(c\) QD](#).

Common analysis and assessment of the factual preconditions for the possible application of [Article 15\(c\) QD](#) with regard to the situation in Syria is provided in the sub-sections below.

5.3.2 Armed conflict (international or internal)

Last update: April 2024



There are multiple overlapping non-international (internal) and international armed conflicts taking place in Syria:

Syria continued to be involved in an international armed conflict with the US-led coalition against ISIL, due to the coalition's military intervention in Syria without the consent of the GoS.

Syria continued to be involved in an international armed conflict with Türkiye, who has carried out military operations against GoS, ISIL and Kurdish armed groups in Syria, and controls parts of northern Syria with the help of anti-GoS armed groups.

Syria continued to be involved in an international armed conflict with Israel as well, who has been conducting air strikes on Iranian targets in Syria without the consent of the GoS, and controls parts of Syria.

Syria continued to be involved in several non-international armed conflicts with various anti-GoS armed groups, most notably HTS, the SNA, the SDF and ISIL.

Non-international armed conflicts on Syrian territory further included ongoing infighting between various non-State armed groups.

Türkiye is engaged in a non-international armed conflict in Syria with Kurdish forces and with ISIL.

Israel is engaged in a non-international armed conflict in Syria with the Hezbollah.

[[Security 2023](#), 1.1, pp.16-17; [Security 2022](#), 1.1, p. 17]

The section [indiscriminate violence](#) provides further analysis and guidance with regard to the armed conflicts taking place on the territory of Syria at governorate level.

5.3.3 Qualification of a person as a 'civilian'

Last update: April 2024

Being a civilian is a prerequisite in order to be able to benefit from protection under Article 15(c) QD. The purpose of the provision is to protect only those who are not taking part in the conflict. This includes the potential application of Article 15(c) QD to former combatants who have genuinely and permanently renounced armed activity.



In the context of Syria, applications by persons falling under the following profiles should be examined carefully. Based on an individual assessment, such applicants may be found not to qualify as civilians under Article 15(c) QD. For example:

- **GoS military and security forces:** including the SAA, the navy, the air force, the police force, the intelligence services, and the NDF.
- **Pro-government militias:** local and foreign militias that are operating alongside the regular Syrian armed forces, e.g. the Tiger Forces, militias of wealthy and powerful Alawite businessmen. Foreign militias, mainly backed by Iran, include, among others, the Lebanese Hezbollah.
- **SDF and Asayish:** Kurdish-led multi-ethnic force that supported the US-led coalition in the war against ISIL.
- **SNA:** a collection of Turkish-backed armed opposition groups, being hostile towards the GoS and the SDF.
- **Other anti-government armed groups, particularly those based in the Idlib area:** HTS is described as the most important and powerful actor in the area.
- **ISIL and its predecessor groups**

[[Security 2023](#), 1.4, pp. 24-34; [Actors](#), 2.3, pp. 24-37, 3.2, pp. 45-47, 4, pp. 49-56, 5.1, pp. 57-58, 6., pp. 59-63]

See also the chapter [3. Actors of persecution or serious harm](#).

It should be noted that actively taking part in hostilities is not limited to openly carrying arms but could also include substantial logistical and/or administrative support to combatants.



Exclusion considerations may also apply (see the chapter [8. Exclusion](#)).

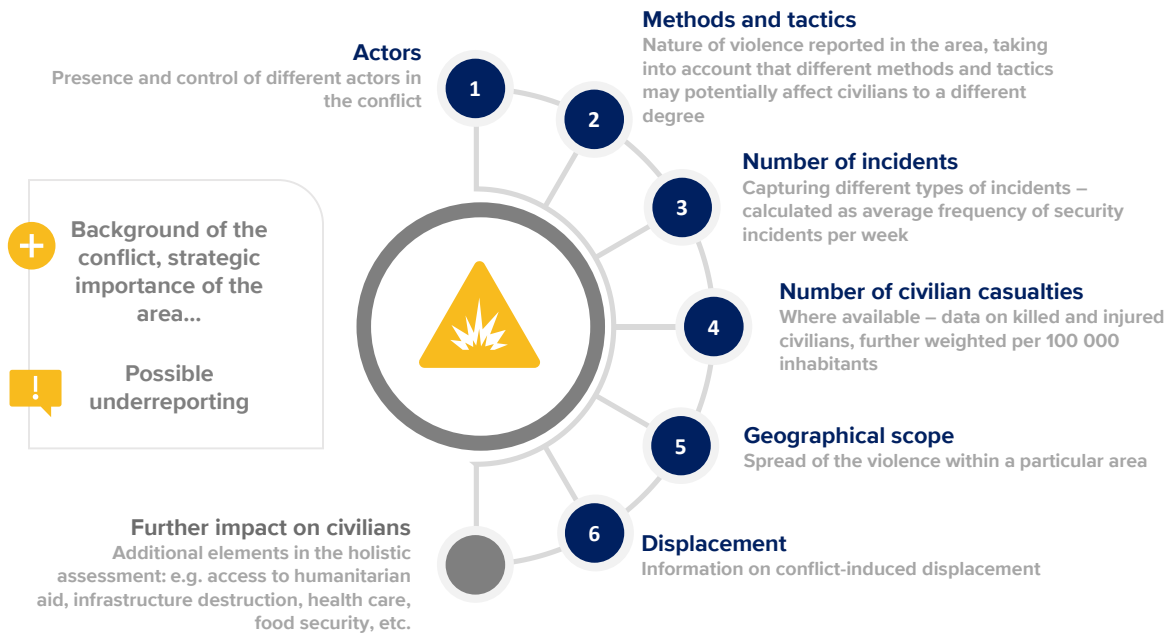
5.3.4 Indiscriminate violence

Last update: April 2024

The common analysis regarding the degree of indiscriminate violence combines quantitative and qualitative elements in a **holistic and inclusive assessment**. The security situation in the respective territories is assessed by taking into account the following elements ([Figure 3](#)).

Figure 3. Indicators in the assessment of the level of indiscriminate violence.





For general guidance on the approach on Article 15(c) QD in country guidance documents, see '[Country Guidance: explained](#)'.

The next sections provide detailed information and assessment of the level of indiscriminate violence and the risk it represents for civilians in Syria per governorate. Summaries are structured according to the following elements:

- **General information**

General information on the region/governorate includes the localisation of the region/governorate, the administrative built-up of the region/governorate, the estimation of the population, and, where relevant, the demographic composition of the region/governorate. Possible elements of strategic interest are also mentioned (for example, presence of important ports, factories, etc.).

- **Background and actors involved in armed confrontations**

This indicator looks into the presence of actors in the conflict in a region, including the presence of state and non-state armed groups. Furthermore, information regarding the territorial control of the region, to the degree possible, is included in the respective part of the COI summaries. See also Areas of control and influence.

- **Nature of violence and examples of incidents**

The methods and tactics used in the armed conflicts ongoing in Syria differ according to the actors involved. All actors are reported to engage in activities which may (indiscriminately) affect civilians. However, some acts are by their nature more indiscriminate than others and create a more substantial risk for civilians.



Continuing hostilities and military operations that included air and ground attacks, targeted killings, and attacks with various types of IEDs, resulting in civilians being killed and injured were reported during the reference period. Along the contact lines in the northwestern Syrian Arab Republic, non-state armed groups and government and pro-government forces reportedly continued to exchange mutual fire and shelling. They also engaged in limited clashes, including attacks on civilian targets resulting in civilian casualties. [Security 2023, 1.5.1, pp. 35-36].

GoS forces continued to employ ground-based and aerial attacks on populated areas resulting in civilian casualties [Security 2023, 1.4.1, p. 26]. Russian airstrikes in support of the Syrian government in which civilians were injured and killed and which reportedly targeted food and water sources were also reported [Security 2023, 1.5.2, p. 39].

Indiscriminate attacks were also committed by the SNA. SNA forces further engaged in hostilities with SDF forces resulting in civilian casualties [Security 2023, 1.4.2, p. 28]. Furthermore, there were clashes between the SDF and Turkish-backed SNA militias deployed in the Operation Peace Spring area. Turkish forces also targeted SDF-controlled territory, including civilian infrastructure with airstrikes, drones and artillery shelling. [COI update 2023, 2, p. 4; Security 2023, 1.4.3, pp. 28-29]

ISIL attacks continued to be reported, including abductions and killings on civilians in several areas of the country. [Security 2023, 1.5.1, pp. 36-37]

Iranian-backed militias also launched attacks on US military personnel in the northeast of the country using drone strikes, improvised missiles and mortar shells [COI update 2023, 2, p. 6; Security 2023, 1.3.2, p. 21]. US retaliatory attacks were also reported. The US also continued to support the SDF in areas under its control with carrying out raids against suspected ISIL elements. [Security 2023, 1.3.4, p. 23]

Israeli airstrikes targeted Iranian and Hezbollah military infrastructure as well as specific individuals. On certain occasions these attacks took place also in residential areas resulting in civilian casualties. [COI update 2023, 2, pp. 6-7; Security 2023, 1.3.5, p. 24]

The conflict was also reported to have directly resulted in the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure, including schools, health facilities, markets, IDP settlements and farms. [Security 2023, 1.5.4, p. 43]

For more information on the nature of methods and tactics used by the actors involved in armed conflicts, see also [Actors of persecution or serious harm](#).

● Incidents: data

The frequency of incidents is a useful indicator to assist in the assessment of the risk of indiscriminate violence. Based on available COI, derived from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) database, this indicator looks in particular at incidents coded as 'battles', 'violence against civilians', and 'explosions/remote violence', which are found to be of relevance in terms of their potential to indiscriminately affect civilians. They are further calculated as an average per week.



Data concerning this indicator are based on ACLED reporting on the period from 1st August 2022 to 28th July 2023, along with additional information included in the [COI Update](#) for the period 1st August – 30th November 2023.

- **Geographical scope**

This element looks into how widespread the violence within each region is, highlighting the areas which are particularly affected by indiscriminate violence and/or the areas which are relatively less affected, where relevant information is available.

- **Civilian fatalities: data**

The number of civilian fatalities (deaths) / casualties (injuries and fatalities) is considered a key indicator when assessing the level of indiscriminate violence and the associated risk for civilians in the context of Article 15(c) QD.

This indicator is based on data collected by the Syrian Network of Human Rights (SNHR). SNHR records only civilian fatalities. Data on injured civilians, which would also be relevant to take into account, are not systematically available. The available data correspond to the reporting period August 2022 – July 2023 and are further presented as an approximate number of civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants in the governorate. The estimation uses UNOCHA data on population. ⁽¹⁷⁾

- **Displacement**

This element refers to (internal) displacement from the area in question.

This indicator is based on UNOCHA data focusing on IDP movements for the period from 1st January 2022 until 31st May or 30th June 2023, depending on the governorate. These IDP figures do not refer solely to conflict-induced displacement and can include also IDP movements for other reasons (e.g. poverty). Furthermore, UNOCHA data on spontaneous returns for the same time period are also provided.

- **Further impact on civilians**

In addition to the indicators above, where available, some examples of further impact of the armed conflicts on the life of civilians (e.g. existence of checkpoints, infrastructure damage, forced evictions, humanitarian access incidents) are mentioned and taken into account in the assessment.

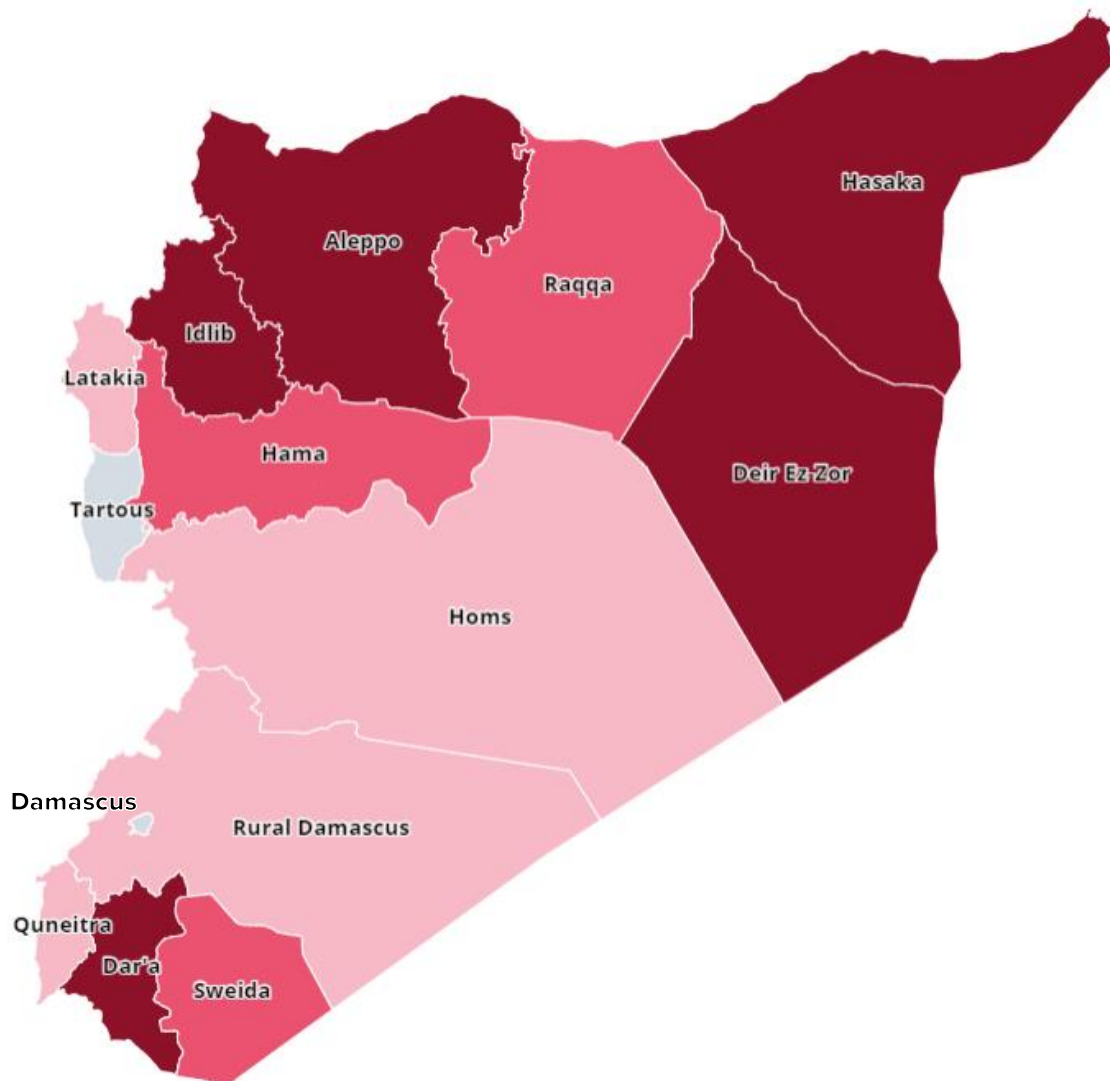
⁽¹⁷⁾ For certain governorates (Aleppo, Dar'a, Quneitra, Latakia, Rural Damascus, Sweida and Tartous) SNHR recorded number of civilian fatalities also include civilians who reportedly drowned during migratory routes. These numbers have been deducted, where possible, from the data on civilian fatalities and have not been taken into account in the analysis of this indicator for the governorates in question. For further information see the [EUAA Security 2023 COI report](#) and the [EUAA COI Update 2023](#) query response.



It should, furthermore, be noted that the COI used as a basis for this assessment cannot be considered a complete representation of the extent of indiscriminate violence and its impact on the life of civilians. Concerns with regard to underreporting should be underlined.

The map below summarises and illustrates the assessment of indiscriminate violence per governorate in Syria.

Figure 4. Level of indiscriminate violence in Syria, based on data up to 30 November 2023.



Areas where the degree of indiscriminate violence reaches such an exceptionally high level that substantial grounds are shown for believing that a civilian, returned to the relevant area, would, **solely on account of their presence there**, face a real risk of being subject to the serious threat referred to in Article 15(c) QD.

Accordingly, additional individual elements are not required in order to substantiate subsidiary protection needs under Article 15(c) QD.

Areas where 'mere presence' would not be sufficient to establish a real risk of serious harm under Article 15(c) QD, but where, indiscriminate violence reaches **a high level**.

Accordingly, **a lower level of individual elements** is required to show substantial grounds for believing that a civilian, returned to the area, would face a real risk of serious harm in the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

Areas where indiscriminate violence is taking place, however **not at a high level**.

Accordingly, **a higher level of individual elements** is required in order to show substantial grounds for believing that a civilian, returned to the area, would face a real risk of serious harm in the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

Areas where, in general, there is **no real risk** for a civilian to be personally affected within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

This may be because the criteria for an armed conflict within the meaning of this provision are not met, because no indiscriminate violence is taking place, or because the level of indiscriminate violence is so low, that in general there would be no real risk for a civilian to be affected by it.

Aleppo

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI references: [Security 2023](#), 2.2, pp. 61-75; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]

General information

The governorate of Aleppo is located in the north of Syria, bordering Idlib governorate to the west, Hama governorate to the south and Raqqa governorate to the east. In the north, it shares a 221-kilometre-long border with Türkiye. The governorate is divided in eight districts: Jebel Saman (where the largest city Aleppo is located), Afrin, A'zaz (Azaz), Al-Bab, Manbij (Manbij), Jarablus, Ain Al-Arab (Kobane), and As-Safira. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Aleppo governorate at 4 226 203 inhabitants. According to the same source the total population of those areas in northern Aleppo that are under Turkish control was approximately 1.4 million, of whom 850 000 were IDPs. [[Security 2023](#), 2.2.1, p. 61]

Minority communities present in the governorate include Christians, Kurds, Armenians and Turkmen. Both several different national and religious groups are present in Aleppo. Kurdish population is present in Aleppo governorate, in particular in the Aleppo city neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya and in Afrin district. It has been reported that Türkiye



carried out a demographic change in Afrin area by empowering the SNA in forcing the Kurdish inhabitants of Afrin to leave the area, while thousands of rebels and their families from Eastern Ghouta were settled in Afrin following reconciliation by forcing Kurds to leave the area and settling Arab rebels. [[Security 2021](#), 2.2.1, p. 81]

Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

Over the years of the conflict, control over different parts of Aleppo governorate fluctuated between GoS and anti-government armed groups, with international actors also playing a pivotal role. [[Security 2021](#), 2.2.2, pp. 81-87]

During the reference period, Aleppo governorate remained divided into areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups, areas controlled by the GoS, and several separate areas and enclaves controlled by the SDF/YPG.

The GoS controlled the central and southern parts of the governorate, including the Damascus Aleppo motorway (M5) and its immediate surroundings. In June 2023, large contingents of GoS forces were deployed to northern Aleppo governorate, while the number of GoS artillery strikes increased. GoS's Fourth Division continued a siege on the Kurdish-controlled Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya neighbourhoods of Aleppo city, which had been imposed since mid-March 2022. It reportedly deployed reinforcements in the vicinity of these neighbourhoods as well as in (likewise Kurdish-held) Al-Shahba Canton in northern Aleppo, which includes the Tall Rifaat region, 'to further intensify the siege on the area'. As of December 2022, Russian-backed Syrian troops controlled zones mainly to the south of Tall Rifaat.

SDF/YPG are in control of or have presence in Aleppo city (in the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya), in the Tall Rifaat area north of Aleppo city and in Manbij and Ain al-Arab (Kobane) in eastern Aleppo governorate. Reportedly, the local Kurdish military outfit Afrin Liberation Forces was also active in Aleppo governorate.

Foreign actors allied with GoS, including Russia and Iran, were reported to have a military presence in the governorate of Aleppo, in areas controlled by the GoS and in some areas controlled by the SDF/YPG. Russian forces continued to be stationed in Aleppo city while GoS and Russian forces have reportedly also re-opened the joint base al-Jarrah (or Jirah), east of Aleppo city. In November 2022, in the light of a possible Turkish incursion, Russia reportedly deployed forces to Tall Rifaat city, where Russian forces were already present. It was reported that Russian forces were still positioned in Tall Rifaat city as of June 2023.

The central Iranian military base was located in the Jabal Azzan area to the south of Aleppo. Iranian drone launch sites were placed at the Jirah and Kuweires airbases in eastern Aleppo governorate. Several local pro-Iranian militias, were also present in Aleppo governorate.

Turkish forces have a presence alongside anti-GoS armed groups in the so-called Operation Olive Branch and Operation Euphrates Shield areas controlled by these groups in the north of Aleppo governorate, with a high density in the north-west and along the border regions between Idlib and Aleppo governorates. Observation posts established by Turkish forces along the frontlines separating the areas west of Aleppo city controlled by anti-GoS armed



groups from the GoS-controlled central Aleppo governorate, remained the same as in the previous reference period. Turkish proxies controlled areas surrounding Tall Rifaat from the north.

In mid-October 2022, HTS took over the city of Afrin, including its surroundings, from the SNA for around two weeks. A minimum of 30 positions in the area reportedly had already been under the control of HTS before the takeover of Afrin. The group was reportedly tightening control over north-western Syria, such as via proxy groups and the formation of new alliances. In February 2023, the 'Shahba Gathering' was founded, uniting around 7 000 fighters of a number of SNA factions as well as HTS-affiliated groups. As of May 2023, territorial control was restored to what it had been prior to the takeover of Afrin, with the difference that Afrin and other bordering areas remained under the control of HTS-friendly SNA factions.

The presence of ISIL was also reported in the governorate.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

Sustained tensions in northern Aleppo continued particularly in frontline areas with airstrikes, rocket fire across front lines, shelling and limited clashes being reported.

Indiscriminate attacks by GoS and Russian forces on civilians in western Aleppo persisted in 2022. Between July and December 2022, 20 aerial and ground attacks were carried out by pro-GoS forces in western Aleppo and Idlib, according to the UNCOI. Shelling by GoS and pro-GoS forces reportedly also continued throughout 2022 in western Aleppo. In mid-2023, GoS forces and affiliated militias attacked the north-west more frequently, including civilian areas in Aleppo governorate, causing civilian casualties. HTS, meanwhile, clashed with GoS forces in northern Aleppo and attacked GoS positions in the governorate, joined by units from the HTS-affiliated al-Fatah al-Mubin coalition. Sporadic hostilities amongst GoS-affiliated militias, resulting in civilians casualties, including of children, were also reported.

Clashes between HTS and GoS forces in North-west Syria, including in western Aleppo, were reported in August and September 2023. In the aftermath of a drone strike on the Military College in Homs governorate in October 2023, which reportedly resulted in hundreds of casualties, GoS and Russian forces stepped up attacks on the HTS-controlled areas in North-west Syria, including in western Aleppo governorate. GoS and Russian forces used intense ground shelling and airstrikes, while HTS and allied groups reportedly responded with artillery and drone strikes, including in Aleppo city.

Targeted air strikes against airports in Aleppo occurred regularly. Strikes reportedly targeted civilian areas in A'zaz, Al-Bab, Afrin and other areas in northern rural Aleppo. Israeli airstrikes also occurred in Aleppo governorate, targeting Aleppo airport several times during the reference period, as well as a military airport in the Aleppo countryside.

Clashes between Türkiye and Kurdish armed groups occurred in Aleppo governorate in multiple instances. An operation named Claw-Sword was launched by Türkiye in November 2022 against positions of the SDF and GoS army in Aleppo governorate. With the start of Operation Claw-Sword, hostilities between Türkiye and SDF/YPG forces continued along the front line of Operation Peace Spring. Türkiye continued to periodically target SDF forces and



carried out artillery and drone strikes on Kurdish-held positions in the governorate such as on Kobane and Tall Rifaat in November 2022 or, after positions on the Turkish side of the border were attacked in June 2023, on Manbij and Tall Rifaat regions. Airstrikes ‘targeting vehicles, posts, different positions, and civilian infrastructure’ executed by Türkiye in 2022 were also reported. Airstrikes and mutual shelling were also reported in densely populated areas such as Ayn Al-Arab (Kobane). In September 2023, drone strikes attributed to Türkiye killed members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), while in October 2023, following a PKK attack in Ankara, Türkiye conducted a campaign of drone strikes which hit more than 150 locations including Aleppo governorate.

UNOCHA reported that the majority of IED attacks in 2022 in Syria were recorded in areas controlled by armed groups in Turkish operations in Aleppo and two other governorates.

Infighting between different anti-GoS armed groups in northern Aleppo was reported during the reference period, including in October 2022 between two SNA affiliated groups, causing civilian casualties. This infighting prompted HTS to launch an armed operation in northern Aleppo governorate and temporarily seize the city of Afrin, which had previously been controlled by SNA forces. Türkiye then reportedly deployed forces in the area to put an end to the clashes.

ISIL reportedly carried out a number of attacks in the governorate. Up to two confirmed ISIL attacks per month in Aleppo, including attacks on truffle pickers, were reported in August, October and December 2022 as well as in March, April and May 2023. Furthermore, the US-led coalition and Türkiye reportedly killed and captured senior ISIL leaders in Aleppo governorate.

Incidents in which civilians were shot and killed by an armed group, at a checkpoint or by unknown perpetrators were also reported.

In the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquakes, violent incidents decreased but did not stop completely.

Incidents: data

Aleppo recorded the highest number of security incidents out of all governorates [[Security 2023](#), 1.5.2, p. 37]. ACLED recorded 2 735 security incidents (average of 53 security incidents per week) in Aleppo governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, of which 551 were coded as ‘battles’, 1 717 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 467 as ‘violence against civilians’. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 1 077 out of the 4 381 security incidents reported in Syria took place in Aleppo. This represents an average of 62 security incidents per week.

Geographical scope

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in Jebel Saman, A’zaz and Afrin. By comparison, very few incidents were recorded in the district of As-Safira.



Civilian fatalities: data

Aleppo was the Syrian governorate most affected in terms of civilian casualties in 2022. Furthermore, since 2012, Aleppo has consistently been one of the five most dangerous Syrian governorates for civilians. Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 156 civilian fatalities. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 54 civilian fatalities. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented five civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 1 267 887 IDPs in Aleppo governorate.

Hostilities, HTS military operations, air strikes and mutual shelling after the launching of Operation Claw-Sword by Türkiye in northern rural Aleppo reportedly led to forced displacement during the reference period.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 18 000 persons were displaced from Aleppo governorate, as well as 26 000 within the governorate. Approximately 15 000 persons were displaced from other governorates to Aleppo. In the first five months of 2023, there were approximately 25 272 IDP movements out of Aleppo and 2 008 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 59 479 IDP movements within the governorate. The majority of IDP movements in Aleppo governorate in 2023 was recorded in February and attributed to the February earthquakes in the region. However, Russian airstrikes in June 2023 also reportedly induced displacement.

In terms of IDP returns, Aleppo governorate continued to be the main area of return in Syria, accounting for 34 % of IDP returns between January and mid-November 2022. UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 2 000 IDP returns to Aleppo and 3 000 returns from Aleppo to other governorates. In the first five months of 2023, 571 IDP returns were recorded into Aleppo and about 3 992 returns from Aleppo to other governorates.

Further impact on civilians

Massive destruction of infrastructure in the governorate of Aleppo has been documented as the result of the ongoing conflict. Schools, hospitals and markets in Aleppo governorate were damaged as the result of the ongoing conflict. UN Habitat reported in May 2023 that, as a result of the Syrian conflict, 14 % of residential properties had become uninhabitable in Aleppo governorate.

Aleppo was among the Syrian governorates with the highest percentages of some form of explosive contamination and among the governorates where contamination from unexploded ordnances (UXO)s represented a particularly major security concern. The SNHR noted that 26 % of all landmine-related deaths it documented in Syria between March 2011 and early April 2023 were recorded in Aleppo governorate. The UN Secretary General in June 2023 reported that '[d]isplaced persons and rubble removers faced increased risk of being exposed to explosive ordnance'. Furthermore, an increase in explosive-related incidents in



Aleppo governorate was reported after the February 2023 earthquakes in Aleppo governorate ‘as people moved back to or across contaminated areas.’

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that in the governorate of **Aleppo**, indiscriminate violence reaches such a high level that substantial grounds are shown for believing that a civilian, returned to the governorate, would, **solely on account of their presence on its territory**, face a real risk of being subject to the serious threat referred to in Article 15(c) QD.

Damascus

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.10, pp. 131-135; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]

General information

Damascus governorate, which includes Syria’s capital, is located in the south-western part of the country and is completely surrounded by Rural Damascus (Rif Damashq) governorate. The governorate is divided into two districts, Damascus city and Yarmouk. Damascus city itself comprises 15 sub-district-level areas. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Damascus governorate at 1 818 517 inhabitants.

Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

During the entire war, the GoS special forces were able to defend the capital, and while Sunni rebels captured the suburbs in the early stages of the conflict, they were never able to advance towards the central districts. The conflict inside Damascus city mainly played out in opposition-held areas, including the Jobar, Qaboun, Tishreen, and Barzeh neighbourhoods that were connected to eastern Ghouta, the opposition’s stronghold. The southern neighbourhoods of Yarmouk Camp and Tadamoun also frequently experienced conflict activity. In 2018, the GoS forces, backed by Iran and Russia, regained complete control of the capital. [[Security 2022](#), 2.10, p. 183]

GoS and affiliated groups were in control of Damascus governorate throughout the reference period. Iranian and Russian forces were also reportedly deployed at several sites within the governorate.

‘Some infrequent activity’ of ISIL in Damascus was also reported. In May 2023, ISIL claimed responsibility for a car bombing targeting a police station in Damascus.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

Although the capital has been ‘largely spared the violence that happens in other parts of the country’, car bomb attacks were reported in April and May 2023. The May 2023 incident involved a car bomb exploding at the Barzeh police station, whereby reportedly a lieutenant



colonel was killed and four others were wounded. The UNSC noted that three police officers were killed. ISIL claimed responsibility. In June 2023, four people were injured when attackers threw a bomb and stabbed a person in Dummar district.

Israeli airstrikes were mainly carried out near Damascus city or on Damascus International airport. On 19 February 2023, 15 people, including two civilian women, were killed in an Israeli air strike in Kafr Sousa district of the capital. On 30 March 2023, the area was hit again by Israeli missiles. Airstrikes by Israel on Damascus international airport, were also reported in mid-October and November 2023, putting the airport temporarily out of service.

Incidents: data

Damascus recorded the second lowest number of security incidents out of all governorates [[Security 2023](#), 1.5.2 p. 38]. ACLED recorded 36 security incidents (average of 0.7 security incidents per week) in Damascus governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 11 were coded as ‘battles’, 8 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 17 as ‘violence against civilians’. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 10 security incidents were recorded in Damascus representing an average of 0.6 security incident per week.

Geographical scope

All recorded security incidents took place in Damascus city.

Civilian fatalities: data

Damascus recorded the second lowest number of civilian fatalities out of all governorates [[Security 2023](#), 1.5.3 p. 40]. Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented three civilian fatalities. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 4 civilian fatalities. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented less than one civilian fatality per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 600 097 IDPs in Damascus.

According to UNOCHA, between January to December 2022, approximately 1 888 persons were displaced from Damascus governorate, as well as 112 within the governorate. Approximately 163 persons were displaced from other governorates to Damascus. In the first five months of 2023, there were approximately 68 IDP movements out of Damascus, and four IDP movements to Damascus.

In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 2 000 IDP returns to Damascus and 7 000 returns from Damascus to other governorates. In the first five months of 2023, 9 returns were recorded to Damascus and about 135 returns from Damascus to other governorates.



Further impact on civilians

In its February 2023 report, the UN Secretary-General noted that about a third of Syrian communities were affected by explosive contamination, with one of the highest percentages reported in Damascus neighbourhoods. The existence of explosive ordnance in residential buildings in Yarmouk (Damascus) was also reported by UNMAS in its annual report covering 2022.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that in the governorate of **Damascus**, there is, in general, **no real risk** for a civilian to be personally affected within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

Dar'a

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.12, pp. 145-155; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]

General information

Dar'a governorate is located in the southern part of Syria, below Damascus, sharing borders with the governorates of Quneitra to the west, Rural Damascus to the north, Sweida to the east and an international border with Jordan to its south. Dar'a governorate is comprised of the three administrative districts of Dar'a, Izra' and As-Sanamayn. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Dar'a governorate at 1 023 833 inhabitants.

Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

The governorate of Dar'a, where the first protests against the Assad government began in 2011, played a significant role in the conflict as an opposition stronghold. In 2018, however, the GoS was able to regain control over the area with the support of Russia through a combination of military campaigns, and reconciliation agreements with opposition factions. [[Security 2022](#), 2.12, pp. 203-204]

Since then, Dar'a governorate has been nominally under the control of GoS. In certain parts of the governorate, such as Busra al-Sham, Tafas and Dar'a al-Balad, GoS' control was limited, allowing locals and former opposition groups a de facto semi autonomy, including to maintain light arms, take care of 'local affairs and to continue to manifest opposition'. Despite carrying out several successful military operations against former opposition groups in between 2018-2021, GoS' control of Dar'a was still assessed to be tenuous as of 2023. In areas including Jasim, Dar'a al-Balad and Nawa the GoS was not able to maintain effective control.

The 8th Brigade, a Russian-backed local armed group made up of former opposition fighters and currently affiliated with the GoS Military Intelligence Directorate was reported to be the most influential armed group in Dar'a, particularly in the Busra al-Sham area of eastern Dar'a.



The presence of Russian and Iranian forces, including Hezbollah, was also reported in the governorate during the reference period.

ISIL maintained small cells including key leadership in Dar'a, reportedly targeting GoS and rebel figures, through assassinations, kidnappings, and bombings. Civilians were also targeted at times by ISIL. In October 2022, ISIL's leader Abu al-Hassan al-Hashemi alQurashi was killed during a GoS military operation in Jasim.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

During the second half of 2022 the security situation in Dar'a was assessed by the UNCOI as unstable, due to ongoing clashes involving GoS forces, armed opposition groups and ISIL, as well as targeted killings of civilians, members of pro-GoS forces and 'reconciled' opposition fighters. Between August and December 2022, the UN Security Council reported attacks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), targeted killings, kidnappings and limited clashes in Dar'a governorate.

In the first five months of 2023, pro-GoS and anti-GoS armed groups, ISIL and unidentified perpetrators continued to be involved in security incidents in Dar'a governorate, which took the form of IED attacks, limited armed clashes, attacks on checkpoints, targeted killings and kidnappings. In June 2023, sporadic clashes between the 8th Brigade and other pro-GoS units took place in the governorate. IED attacks allegedly perpetrated by small opposition groups and targeting members of GoS security forces were also reported, leading to fatalities among GoS soldiers and commanders. In early July 2023, GoS forces launched a military campaign on the area between Tafas and Yaboudeh, western Dar'a countryside, where it alleged that opposition factions, drug traffickers and ISIL elements were operating, and assassinations against GoS security forces were recurrent. Limited clashes between GoS forces and opposition fighters were reported in Tafas in the first week of July, leading to casualties among the combatants and displacement of residents. In August 2023, demonstrations against the GoS in the city of Nawa sparked confrontations between local fighters and GoS forces, the latter using artillery and mortar shelling. No civilian casualties were reported.

In October 2022, a GoS and Russian-led operation against ISIL cells in Dar'a governorate led to the killing of alleged ISIL fighters in the city of Jasim. Clashes between armed groups and suspected ISIL cells also took place in November 2022 in Dar'a al-Balad which led to several civilians being killed.

In addition, Iranian-backed groups, including the Lebanese Hezbollah, reportedly deployed forces to Quneitra and Dar'a governorates in October 2023 from where they launched rocket attacks at the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Retaliatory missile and airstrikes by Israel against GoS and Iranian-linked targets including in Quneitra were also reported.

Since 2018, when the GoS regained control of Dar'a, a high number of targeted killings have been documented in the governorate. Assassination attempts and targeted killings of civilians, former opposition fighters who have 'reconciled' with the GoS, members of GoS



security forces, and of other pro-GoS representatives continued to be reported in Dar'a during the reference period.

In recent years, drug production and cross-border drug trafficking increased in the south of Syria, including in Dar'a governorate. Experts and activists have stated that both GoS and opposition groups are directly involved in the drug production and trade that originates from Syria. Anti-drug smuggling operations carried out by proGoS armed groups in Dar'a were reported in the wake of Syria's readmission to the Arab League and the period that followed. In May 2023, airstrikes attributed to Jordan were carried out on suspected drug facilities allegedly run by the Lebanese Hezbollah in Dar'a governorate. Assassination attempts on persons involved in drug trafficking, including civilians, pro-GoS militia members and members of the SAA and intelligence services were also recorded in the governorate between January and August 2023.

Incidents: data

ACLED recorded 756 security incidents (average of 14.7 security incidents per week) in Dar'a governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 247 were coded as 'battles', 165 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 344 as 'violence against civilians'. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 220 security incidents were recorded in Dar'a representing an average of 12.7 security incident per week.

Geographical scope

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in Dar'a and Izra districts. As-Sanamayn recorded significantly lower number of security incidents than the other two districts.

Civilian fatalities: data

Dar'a was the Syrian governorate with the highest number of recorded civilian fatalities by SNHR during the reference period [[Security 2023](#), 1.5.3, pp. 40-41]. Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 178 civilian fatalities. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 70 civilian fatalities. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented twenty four civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 68 792 IDPs in Dar'a governorate.

According to the UN Security Council, clashes between GoS forces and opposition fighters in Tafas and the anti-ISIL operations during the reference period led to displacement.

UNOCHA recorded 2 271 IDP movements in 2022, the vast majority of which (around 2 000) occurred within the governorate, while the rest were IDP movements from other governorates to Dar'a. In the first five months of 2023, there were approximately 11 IDP movements out of Dar'a and 503 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 197 IDP movements within the governorate.



In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 7 352 IDP returns in 2022, the majority of which (around 7 000) occurred within the governorate, while around 200 were from Sweida to Dar'a. In the first five months of 2023, 2 140 IDP returns were recorded to Dar'a and about 30 returns from Dar'a to other governorates.

Further impact on civilians

Dar'a is one of the governorates where sources reported a high percentage of explosive ordnance contamination during the reporting period. Civilian casualties, including of children as a result of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) were reported in Dar'a in 2022 and 2023. Insecurity and the presence of ERW has also impeded access of farmers to agricultural land.

UN Habitat assessed that around 15 % of residential properties were uninhabitable in Dar'a governorate as a result of the conflict. A UN Habitat analysis from 2022 assessed the infrastructure in southern Dar'a to be severely damaged.

According to the UNCOI, during the clashes between GoS and armed groups which took place in Tafas and Jasim in the second half of 2022, farmers were reportedly extorted by GoS forces in exchange for being allowed to access their land and their equipment was looted.

Looking at the indicators, and in particular at the multitude of armed actors, general instability, as well as the high number of civilian fatalities, it can be concluded that in the governorate of **Dar'a**, indiscriminate violence reaches such a high level that substantial grounds are shown for believing that a civilian, returned to the governorate, would, **solely on account of their presence on its territory**, face a real risk of being subject to the serious threat referred to in Article 15(c) QD.

Deir Ez-Zor

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.9, pp. 121-130; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]

General information

Deir Ez-Zor governorate is located in eastern Syria. The governorate has an international border with Iraq to the east, and internal borders with Homs to the south, with Raqqqa to the west and with Hasaka to the north. The Euphrates River divides the governorate into a western part (al-Shamiya) and an eastern part (al-Jazeera). Deir Ez-Zor is administratively divided into three districts: Deir Ez-Zor, Al-Mayadin, and Al-Bukamal (alternatively Albu Kamal, Abu Kamal). The governorate's capital is Deir Ez-Zor city.

As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Deir Ez-Zor governorate at 1 096 528 inhabitants. The governorate's population is almost entirely Sunni Arab and its demographic structure has been described as heavily tribal-based.



Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, Deir Ez-Zor governorate witnessed anti-government protests. The Arab tribes in the governorate showed a division of affiliation. Some factions joined the SDF, others were aligned with GoS forces, and the rest pledged allegiance to ISIL. The GoS and its allies had captured most of the areas west of the Euphrates River from ISIL by the end of 2017. The SDF and the US-led coalition captured the last ISIL-held territorial enclave on the eastern side of the river in March 2019. [Security 2021, 2.9]

Deir Ez-Zor governorate was roughly divided into two areas of control: east and west of the Euphrates River.

The western part of the governorate was controlled by the GoS and its Iranian and Russian allies. This area covers the major cities of Deir Ez-Zor city, al-Mayadin and al-Bukamal.

Al-Bukamal hosted the Imam Ali base, the governorate's largest Iranian military site. The Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Iranian-backed militias reinforced their presence at military sites in the governorate, including in Deir Ez-Zor city and the al-Mayadin area. Iran-backed militias operated 30 local recruitment centres in areas west of the Euphrates and were backed by certain local tribes. Further Iranian and Russian sites were located in the desert areas west of the Euphrates.

Meanwhile, the areas east of the Euphrates River were mainly controlled by the Kurdish-led SDF although the GoS/Iran-backed militias held several towns in eastern Deir Ez-Zor.

Kurdish forces were located east of the Euphrates, including along the Euphrates and Khabour riverbanks and in the governorate's northern corner near the Raqqa and Hasaka borders. They were supported by forces of the US-led Coalition against ISIL, which operated several sites east of the Euphrates.

ISIL was still present and remained active in the first half of 2023, with pockets of the group's presence mapped in the desert areas west of the Euphrates. The group reportedly used this area as operational bases to rebuild cells, train its fighters and carry out attacks throughout the region [Security 2023, 1.4.6, p. 33]. Since early 2023, ISIL increased its attacks and coercive activities in the governorate's urban belt. A rise in activity of ISIL cells was also reported in the SDF-held northern Deir Ez-Zor countryside.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

The security situation in Deir Ez-Zor governorate is described as 'volatile', with continuing reports of targeted killings. These were carried out by means of firearms and IEDs.

Mutual strikes between US forces and IRGC forces/Iran-backed militias, as well as Israeli air bombing were reported. Deadly infighting between NDF and GoS forces, Air Force Intelligence Directorate and the IRGC, and between NDF members was also reported.

Following the eruption of the Israel-Hamas conflict in October 2023, Iran-backed armed groups have attacked U.S. forces in Syria with drone strikes, improvised missiles and mortar



shells, including in the countryside of Deir Ez-Zor governorate. Retaliatory airstrikes by the US on sites belonging to Iranian-backed armed groups in the governorate were also reported.

In August 2023, clashes between SDF and Arab tribal fighters, members of the Deir Ez-Zor Military Council, broke out resulting in several fighters and civilians killed. Clashes between protesters and SDF members resulted in two civilians killed when security forces fired shots to disperse protesters. The clashes continued in September in eastern Deir Ez-Zor as tribal forces attacked SDF positions, leading to casualties and displacement. Although SDF reestablished control over its territory in Deir Ez-Zor, attacks by Arab tribal groups on its positions were reported to continue in October, leading to casualties among combatants and civilians. Sporadic attacks by tribal groups against SDF were also reported in November 2023.

ISIL launched regular attacks in the governorate. It continued to conduct asymmetric attacks during the reference period, targeting GoS forces, SDF members and civilians. Moreover, ISIL attacks increasingly targeted IRGC and Iran-backed militias.

In early 2023, the group shifted its focus in GoS-held areas to military targets closer to the Euphrates. At the beginning of August 2023, ISIL claimed an attack on a bus carrying SAA soldiers near the Iraqi border south of Deir Ez-Zor city, leading to at least 33 deaths. Incidents targeting civilians included attacks on truffle hunters in the desert of western Deir Ez-Zor and on contractors and businessmen in the oil industry. Moreover, the group bombed several money exchange offices in al-Zar and al-Ghurba towns following their owners' refusal to pay Islamic 'zakat' (tax) to the group. An ISIL-attributed attack in November 2023 killed at least 34 GoS soldiers and members of the NDF in the desert area of al-Rasafah located between Raqqa, Homs and Deir Ez-Zor governorates.

GoS and affiliated/allied forces launched several operations against ISIL cells in western and eastern rural Deir Ez-Zor. The SDF/US forces likewise conducted several anti-ISIL operations resulting in the arrest/killing of ISIL leaders, including in the al-Kasrah area (western rural Deir Ez-Zor).

Incidents: data

ACLED recorded 1 089 security incidents (average of 21,1 security incidents per week) in Deir Ez-Zor governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 588 were coded as 'battles', 255 as 'violence against civilians' and 246 as 'explosions/remote violence'. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 742 security incidents were recorded in Deir Ez-Zor representing an average of 42.9 security incident per week.

Geographical scope

Security incidents were recorded in all districts during the reference period, with the significantly highest numbers being documented in Deir Ez-Zor district.



Civilian fatalities: data

Deir Ez-Zor recorded the second highest number of civilian fatalities out of all governorates [[Security 2023](#), 1.5.3, pp. 40-42]. Between August 2022 and July 2023, the SNHR recorded 167 civilian fatalities. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 70 civilian fatalities. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented twenty-two civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 153 814 IDPs in Deir Ez-Zor governorate.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 1 000 persons were displaced from Deir Ez-Zor, as well as 1 000 within the governorate. Approximately 1 000 persons were displaced from other governorates to Deir Ez-Zor. In the first five months of 2023, there were approximately 22 IDP movements out of Deir Ez-Zor. No displacement to or within the governorate has been documented in the same period.

In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 7 000 IDP returns to Deir Ez-Zor. No spontaneous IDP returns from Deir Ez-Zor to other governorates were recorded in the same period. In the first five months of 2023, 83 IDP returns were recorded into Deir Ez-Zor and about 11 returns from Deir Ez-Zor to other governorates.

Further impact on civilians

Deir Ez-Zor governorate witnessed significant destruction during the conflict years, both in urban and rural areas, with an estimated 75 % of Deir Ez-Zor city's infrastructure damaged or destroyed. Around 40 % of the city's sewage network has been damaged. There was also significant destruction of residential properties.

Deir Ez-Zor is considered one of Syria's most affected governorates with regard to explosive ordnance contamination. Areas previously controlled by ISIL showed the highest levels of contamination, as retreating ISIL forces left large quantities of improvised landmines and other IEDs.

During the first quarter of 2023, 127 deaths from remnants of war in Deir Ez-Zor were reported, more than in any other governorate.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that in the governorate of **Deir Ez-Zor**, indiscriminate violence reaches such a high level that substantial grounds are shown for believing that a civilian, returned to the governorate, would, **solely on account of their presence on its territory**, face a real risk of being subject to the serious threat referred to in Article 15(c) QD.





Hama

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.3, pp. 75-83; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]

General information

Hama governorate is in central Syria and has internal borders with the governorates of Latakia and Tartous to the west, Homs to the south and Aleppo, Idlib and Raqqa to the north. It comprises five districts: Hama, Misyaf, Muhardah, As-Suqaybiyah, and As-Salamiyeh.

As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Hama governorate at 1 485 590 inhabitants and the population of Hama city at 996 000. Hama city is predominantly inhabited by Sunni Muslims while the rest of the governorate is more diverse with a presence of Alawites, Ismailis and Christians [[Security 2022](#), 2.3.1, pp. 101].

Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

Between April 2019 and March 2020, the northwestern parts of Hama were reconquered by the GoS in a large-scale military offensive which left nearly a million people displaced. Nevertheless, conflict activity between the GoS and armed opposition groups remained high in those areas afterwards and included shelling/aerial bombardments by GoS and Russian forces. While the eastern areas of Hama had been free from ISIL activity for some time after October 2017, the group resumed its actions in mid-2020. Ultimately, however, ISIL lacked the capacity to hold on to these villages located 'on the periphery of core regime territory'.

During the reference period, most of Hama governorate was under the control of the GoS, except for a small strip of HTS-controlled land on its northwesternmost edge bordering Idlib and pockets of ISIL presence in areas east bordering Aleppo, Raqqa and Homs. Some of the main and best trained fighting GoS forces such as the Fifth Corps and 25th Special Tasks Division (previously Tiger Forces) were reportedly present in the governorate.

Russian forces were present in areas north and northwest of the city, their sites extending towards the opposition-held areas bordering Idlib. Further sites of Iranian/Iran-backed forces were located in southern and eastern Hama as well as in the west, where pro-Iranian militias were stationed in Masyaf.

ISIL continued to carry out attacks of an asymmetric nature, with small cells routinely conducting attacks in the governorate's east.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

The beginning of the reference period saw a continued intensification of bombardment by GoS forces and affiliated militias against a variety of military and civilian targets. Sometimes supported by Russian forces, these artillery attacks hit towns and villages in western and northern areas of Hama causing several civilian casualties. The positions of GoS forces in





western Hama were reportedly targeted by the armed opposition groups HTS and Jaysh al-Nasr.

Clashes between HTS and GoS forces in North-west Syria, including Hama countryside were reported in August and September 2023. In the aftermath of a drone strike on the Military College in Homs governorate in October 2023, which resulted in substantial casualties, GoS and Russian forces stepped up attacks on the HTS-controlled areas in North-west Syria, while HTS reportedly responded with artillery and drone strikes, including in the governorate of Hama.

ISIL activities, such as multiple ambush attacks on civilians and security forces, were still observed in the east of Hama governorate. Dozens of civilians were killed or injured in ISIL attacks in rural and desert areas of eastern Hama. Moreover, ISIL abducted several civilians during the reporting period. The largest attack took place when ISIL militants ambushed a group of truffle-searching civilians in the eastern Hama countryside resulting in several people killed. ISIL attacks were followed by heavy airstrikes jointly carried out by GoS and Russian forces targeting positions and movements linked to suspected ISIL cells.

Furthermore, Israeli airstrikes against targets in Hama governorate, including on scientific research centres as well as positions and weapons/ammunition depots of Iranian-backed militias in the Masyaf area took place.

Incidents: data

ACLED recorded 557 security incidents (average of 5 security incidents per week) in Hama governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 483 were coded as 'explosions/remote violence', 54 were coded as 'battles', and 20 as 'violence against civilians'. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 225 security incidents were recorded in Hama representing an average of 13 security incident per week.

Geographical scope

Security incidents were recorded in all Hama governorate districts during the reporting period, with the highest number recorded in As-Suqaylabiyah, followed by As-Salamiyeh district. By comparison, very few incidents were recorded in the districts of Muhradah, Hama and Masyaf.

Civilian fatalities: data

Between August 2022 and July 2023, the SNHR recorded 76 civilian fatalities in Hama. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 14 civilian fatalities. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented six civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 153 814 IDPs in Hama governorate.



According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 2 400 persons were displaced from Hama, as well as 600 within the governorate. About 1 400 persons were displaced from other governorates to Hama. In the first five months of 2023, there were approximately 200 IDP movements out of Hama and 140 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 115 movements within the governorate.

In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 2 000 IDP returns to Hama and 9 000 returns from Hama to other governorates. In the first five months of 2023, 380 IDP returns were recorded into Hama and about 6 000 returns from Hama to other governorates.

Further impact on civilians

Reports of damage to civilian infrastructure state that the conflict has left entire districts of Hama in ruins.

Hama was one of the governorates where contamination from UXOs was particularly widespread, including on roads, agricultural land and private property.

Notably, the governorate has experienced numerous conflict-related incidents that affected the condition of agricultural land (e.g., landmines, unexploded ordnance, shelling, arson and air/drone strikes). During the reference period, there were multiple reports of civilians, some of them children, being killed or injured by explosive remnants of war.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that ‘mere presence’ in the area would not be sufficient to establish a real risk of serious harm under Article 15(c) QD in the governorate of **Hama**, however indiscriminate violence reaches **a high level**. Accordingly, **a lower level of individual elements** is required in order to show substantial grounds for believing that a civilian, returned to the territory, would face a real risk of serious harm within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

It can further be noted that, at the time of writing, the indiscriminate violence primarily affects the district of As-Suqaylabiyah, and, to a lesser extent, As-Salamiyeh.

Hasaka

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.7, pp. 103-111; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]

General information

The governorate of Hasaka is located in the northeast end of Syria, bordering Türkiye to the north, Iraq to the east and the governorates of Raqqqa and Deir Ez-Zor to the west and southwest respectively. The governorate is divided into four districts: Hasaka, Ras al Ain,



Qamishli and al-Malikiya. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Hasaka governorate at 1 206 229 inhabitants.

The Hasaka governorate has an ethnic Kurdish majority. Areas north of Hasaka city are described as either Kurdish or mixed areas, while the southern Hasaka governorate is considered as populated mainly by Arabs.

The Tal Tamr area has a Christian population, with villages inhabited by Assyrians and Armenians. The governorate is also home to Yazidis.

Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

Following the retreat of GoS forces from large parts of northeast Syria in 2012, the Kurdish forces were able to take over Syria's northeast and established the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, creating their own institutions and security forces. Since 2014, the PYD and its armed wing, the YPG, have become the most essential political and military force on the ground in the US-led coalition campaign against ISIL in Syria. In October 2019, Türkiye launched its 'Operation Peace Spring' in order to oust the SDF/YPG from the Syrian side of the border and to establish a 'safe zone' for resettlement of Syrian refugees.

During the reference period, most of Hasaka was under the control of the Kurdish forces (SDF/YPG) which were supported by US-led coalition forces.

GoS forces controlled several security enclaves in and around the cities of Hasaka and Qamishli which also hosted sites of Iranian and Russian forces. In addition, GoS forces were granted permission by the SDF to pass between GoS held and Kurdish-controlled territories. In response to Türkiye's warnings of a potential new military campaign against Kurdish forces in border areas, the GoS reinforced its presence in northern Hasaka's borderlands in mid-2022.

Russian troops were present with GoS along the Syrian-Turkish border and the front lines between the Kurdish-controlled and Turkish-held areas.

Meanwhile, Türkiye controlled a part of northern Hasaka that belonged to a territory roughly delimited by Ras al-Ayn in the east, Tall Abyad (Raqqqa) in the west, the Syrian-Turkish border in the north and the M4 motorway in the south. This area has been referred to as the Operation Peace Spring area. The SNA operated in this area.

ISIL was reportedly increasingly present in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES).

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

The security situation in Hasaka governorate is described as 'volatile', with continuing reports of security incidents in the vicinity of SNA-controlled areas or the Syrian-Turkish border, including around Tal Tamr.



Hasaka's front line zones remained one of the most conflict-affected areas in Syria. Since Turkish forces seized control of Ras al-Ayn from the SDF in autumn 2019, the Ras al-Ayn area experienced frequent mutual bombing between Turkish forces/SNA and the SDF. There were also a number of reports of alleged Turkish drone strikes targeting SDF personnel, and several instances of drone strikes, heavy shelling and gunfire by Turkish forces which caused civilian casualties. In November 2022, Türkiye launched Operation Claw-Sword, carrying out a series of air, drone and artillery strikes targeting SDF and GoS military sites in the governorate. Turkish intelligence also launched a security operation early January 2023 that led to the killing of two officials of the PKK-allied Turkish Communist Party - Marxist-Leninist (TKP-ML) at their homes north of Hasaka city.

In the Operation Peace Spring area itself, there were a number of security incidents during the reference period such as several civilians shot dead by Turkish forces, attacks of members of Turkish forces/SNA, infighting among armed factions and IED attacks, mainly occurring in residential areas and markets.

Following a PKK attack in Ankara (Türkiye) on 1 October 2023, Türkiye conducted a campaign of drone strikes which hit more than 150 locations in Hasaka, Raqqqa and Aleppo governorates leading to several fatalities. Most attacks were concentrated on the border areas in northern Hasaka governorate as well as on Hasaka city, Qamishli and Tal Tamer. The attacks also targeted water and energy infrastructure, as well as oil installations in Hasaka governorate.

Infighting between GoS forces and the National Defence Forces (NDF) reportedly took place in September 2023 in neighbourhoods of Hasaka city, leading to several civilian casualties, damage to infrastructure and temporary displacement.

ISIL attacks in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) were reported to have increased significantly during the second half of 2022 and continued to occur in 2023. Incidents in Hasaka targeted members of the Kurdish Internal Security Forces (Asayish) and SDF as well as civilians in the governorate.

Meanwhile, the SDF conducted anti-ISIL security operations in rural areas in the governorate's south and south-east, as well as in Hasaka city, sometimes with the support of the US-led coalition.

The security situation in Al-Hol camp, which houses suspected ISIL family members, was described as 'volatile' and was characterized by 'high levels of violence, criminality and social tensions' among its residents, with reports of killings by unidentified perpetrators.

Following the eruption of the Israel-Hamas conflict in October 2023, Iran-backed armed groups have attacked U.S. forces in Syria with drone strikes, improvised missiles and mortar shells, including in Hasaka governorate, prompting US response strikes.

Incidents: data

ACLED recorded 1 104 security incidents (average of 21.4 security incidents per week) in Hasaka governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 686 were coded as 'explosions/remote violence', 551 as 'battles' and 467 as



‘violence against civilians’. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 497 security incidents were recorded in Hasaka representing an average of 28.8 security incident per week.

Geographical scope

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the districts of Hasaka and Ras Al Ain. Fewer incidents were recorded in the districts of Malikeyyeh.

Civilian fatalities: data

Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 52 civilian fatalities in Hasaka governorate. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded four civilian fatalities. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented five civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 331 573 IDPs in Hasaka governorate.

The UN noted that the negative impact of local hostilities on civilian lives and key civilian infrastructure prompted civilians to flee their homes and that residents’ conflict-related exposure to displacement persisted across the northern region in the first half of 2023.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 1 000 persons were displaced from Hasaka, as well as 3 000 within the governorate. Approximately 2 000 persons were displaced from other governorates to Hasaka. In the first five months of 2023, there were approximately 135 IDP movements out of Hasaka and 220 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 360 movements within the governorate.

In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 220 IDP returns to Hasaka and 3 640 returns from Hasaka to other governorates. In the first five months of 2023, 55 IDP returns were recorded into Hasaka and about 67 returns from Hasaka to other governorates.

Further impact on civilians

The governorate is largely contaminated with improvised mines and other improvised devices causing heavy damage to civilians. During the first quarter of 2023, 12 deaths from explosive remnants of war were reported in Hasaka governorate. Civilian casualties from landmine explosions were also recorded.

The Turkish strikes in November 2022 hit key infrastructure in parts of the governorate, including grain silos, oil fields and power stations, putting some installations out of service.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that in the governorate of **Hasaka**, indiscriminate violence reaches such a high level that substantial grounds are shown for believing that a civilian, returned to the governorate, would, **solely on account of their**





presence on its territory, face a real risk of being subject to the serious threat referred to in Article 15(c) QD.

Homs

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.6, pp. 94-101; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]

General information

The governorate of Homs is located in central Syria and has borders with Iraq to the east and Lebanon to the west. It also shares an international border with Jordan to the east as well. Homs has internal borders with Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa, Hama, Tartous, and Rural Damascus governorates. The governorate is divided into six districts: Homs, Al Makhrim, Al-Qusayr, Ar-Rastan, Tadmor (Palmyra) and Tall Kalakh. Homs was the largest governorate in Syria in terms of surface, and the third in terms of population, as of May 2014. The capital of the governorate is Homs city which is also the central city of Homs district. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Homs governorate at 1 502 706 inhabitants.

Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

The city of Homs was one of the most affected cities of the war. Its old city was besieged for two years until it became accessible again in May 2014. Sectarian violence and forced displacement occurred there in 2011, and only a few neighbourhoods retained their mixed sectarian elements. The recapture of Homs city by GoS in May 2017 and the military operation by SAA in northern rural Homs in April 2018, forcing rebel groups in the region to either negotiate their withdrawal to northern Syria or reconcile with the GoS, led to the mass evacuation of rebels and their families from the governorate [[Security 2022](#), 2.6.2, p. 130].

During the reference period, Homs governorate was under the control of the GoS.

A so-called US-declared 55-km deconfliction area stretching between the southeast of the governorate and neighbouring Rural Damascus governorate around AlTanf, was controlled by US troops and the Free Syrian Army (FSA), formerly known as Mughawir al-Thawra (MaT), a rebel group consisting of former Syrian military officers.

Homs was reportedly among the Syrian governorates under Iranian 'influence' and continued to house Iranian military positions. Lebanese Hezbollah and Iranian forces operated in the neighbourhood of the Al-Dabaa airbase near Al-Qusayr, an area which has been a centre of Hezbollah's activity since 2012.

Iranian-backed militias continued to have positions in Tadmor (Palmyra), where they were storing drones. It has also been reported that some Iranian-backed Iraqi militants reportedly had travelled to Homs governorate from other positions in the country.





ISIL presence in the east of the governorate has also been reported.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

ISIL regularly launched lethal attacks in various governorates, among which Homs, including attacks on civilians and against GoS forces in eastern Homs as well as attacks on pro-GoS militias, resulting in casualties. ISIL reportedly further clashed with NDF and SAA units near Arak village in February 2023. After a number of high-intensity attacks during the season of truffle harvesting, ISIL activity in central Syria decreased in May 2023 and the GoS downscaled major operations against ISIL in eastern Homs. Reportedly, ISIL fought GoS and Russian Wagner forces around Al-Kawm continuously until mid-April 2023. Airstrikes by Russia against ISIL positions in the governorate were also reported.

In June 2023, a GoS general was reportedly killed in an IED attack by ISIL in the city of Homs, which, according to a source, was the first attack in Homs city since 2017. According to a UN Security Council report of July 2023, ISIL continued to carry out asymmetric attacks in Homs governorate but ‘at a relatively lower frequency’ while regular attacks by small cells occurred on a regular basis in north Tadmor (Palmyra). An ISIL-attributed attack in November 2023 killed at least 34 GoS soldiers and members of the NDF in the desert area of al-Rasafah located between Raqqa, Homs and Deir Ez-Zor governorates.

On 5 October 2023, a drone strike on the Military College in Homs governorate reportedly killed at least 89 people and wounded 277 others. While the attack was not claimed by any group, the GoS attributed it to ‘armed terrorist organizations backed by known international parties’, with the HTS being the main group suspected.

Israeli airstrikes in areas near the city of Homs, the Shayrat air base, and an alleged drone development unit site belonging to Hezbollah at the Al-Qusayr airport were also reported. Some of these attacks resulted in casualties among civilians and military personnel.

Iranian-affiliated groups attacked the US-controlled Al-Tanf base in Homs governorate in August 2022, although no casualties were reported. Military personnel were reportedly injured in drone attacks on the base in January 2023 by undisclosed perpetrators.

Furthermore, it was reported that the IDP camp Al-Rukban, situated in the Al-Tanf area close to the borders with Jordan and Iraq, continued to be besieged by GoS and Russian forces.

Incidents: data

ACLED recorded 215 security incidents (average of 4.2 security incidents per week) in Homs governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 81 were coded as ‘explosions/remote violence’, 80 as ‘battles’, and 54 as ‘violence against civilians’. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 65 security incidents were recorded in Homs representing an average of 3.8 security incident per week.

Geographical scope

Security incidents were recorded in all Homs governorate districts during the reporting period, with the highest number of overall incidents being recorded in Tadmor district,



followed by Homs city, Ar-Rastan, Al-Makhrim, and Al Qusayr. By comparison, very few incidents were recorded in the district of Tall Kalakh.

Civilian fatalities: data

Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 73 civilian fatalities in Homs governorate. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 60 civilian fatalities. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented nine civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 299 525 IDPs in Homs governorate, including 189 147 in Homs district.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 1 960 persons were displaced from Homs, as well as 35 within the governorate. Approximately 960 persons were displaced from other governorates to Homs. No conflict-induced IDP movements were recorded in Homs governorate in the first five months of 2023.

In terms of IDP returns, no spontaneous IDP returns from Homs to other governorates were recorded by UNOCHA in 2022. On the contrary, some 6 000 IDP returns from other governorates into Homs were recorded in the same period. In the first five months of 2023, approximately 83 IDP returns were recorded into Homs and no returns from Homs to other governorates.

Further impact on civilians

Homs is among the Syrian governorates where contamination from UXOs represented a particularly major security concern. Civilians were killed and injured by explosive devices of war for example in Duwayzin, located on the border between Hama and Homs, such as in the area of Al-Haswiya. ERWs reportedly had not been yet removed from residential areas in Homs city and continued to claim the lives of civilians. Mines also reportedly existed along past contact lines as well as remnants of cluster bombs used by GoS forces in the northern rural areas of Homs and the Al-Houla plain against opposition factions and in the Badia desert against ISIL. Children and farmers were particularly affected by the dangers posed by them.

Increased attacks near the IDP camp Rukban in the Al-Tanf deconfliction area, including a drone attack on a health clinic critical for the camp residents in January 2023 were also reported.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that indiscriminate violence is taking place in the governorate of **Homs**, however **not at a high level**. Accordingly, **a higher level of individual elements** is required in order to show substantial grounds for believing that a civilian, returned to the territory, would face a real risk of serious harm within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.



Idlib

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.1, pp. 49-60; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]

General information

Idlib is located in north-west Syria, bordering Türkiye to the north, Hama governorate to the south, Aleppo governorate to the east, and Latakia governorate to the west. The governorate is divided into five districts: Idlib, Ariha, Jisr-Ash-Shughur, Harim and Al Mara. Idlib city is the capital of the governorate and in 2011 had a population of over 2 million inhabitants. The city is located on the strategic road between Aleppo and Damascus governorates. From 2014 to 10 July 2023, the Bab Al-Hawa crossing with Türkiye was the only UN authorised border crossing in Syria open to cross-border humanitarian aid destined for areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in north-west Syria. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Idlib governorate at 2 927 392 inhabitants, of whom 1 899 350 were IDPs. Population estimates vary greatly due to the majority of IDPs in the governorate and regular IDP movements.

Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

Idlib was among the first governorates to join the 2011 uprising against the Assad government. Control over Idlib city fluctuated for several years between GoS forces and anti-GoS armed groups, until anti-GoS armed groups managed to gain full control in 2015.

Idlib became the refuge for Syrians fleeing from GoS forces, including activists and fighters from areas recaptured by the SAA. Between 2016 and 2018, tens of thousands of opposition fighters and their families from southern Syria and Homs city, were transferred to Idlib after refusing the terms of the so-called reconciliation agreements with GoS.

Following an agreement between Russia, Iran and Türkiye in May 2017 which stipulated the cessation of hostilities and improved humanitarian access, Idlib governorate became a 'de-escalation' area. However, GoS forces continued military operations in the area, and recaptured half of the de-escalation area by mid-2018. In September 2018, a deal between Russia and Türkiye created a demilitarised zone in parts of Idlib governorate. By April 2019, the so-called Sochi agreement collapsed following military escalation by GoS, supported by Russia, further advancing the positions of the GoS forces. The military offensives that extended through March 2020 resulted in one of the worst displacement crises throughout the conflict [[Security 2021](#), 2.1.2, p. 65].

After the Turkish military deployment and/or incursion into areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib governorate (Operation Spring Shield) in early March 2020, a ceasefire was mediated by Russia and Türkiye between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups. The major frontlines have, since then, remained 'stagnant'.



Since March 2020, Idlib governorate has been divided into areas controlled by the GoS and allied militias and areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups. Anti-GoS armed groups control the western and northern parts of the governorate, which cover virtually all the areas north and immediately south of the M4 highway. The largest change regarding control was noted between Idlib and Aleppo governorates, where HTS briefly seized territory from armed groups allied with Türkiye. These clashes did not, however, lead to a formal redrawing of internal boundaries between opposition factions.

HTS has almost complete control over the wider Idlib de-escalation area, including most border crossings with Türkiye and is considered as the dominant armed group in the governorate.

The Idlib de-escalation zone has been described as ‘safe haven and holding pen’ for other Islamist and/or jihadist groups, including some made up of foreign fighters. HTS has ‘subdued’ the various jihadist groups previously present in Idlib. Some independent jihadist groups unreconciled to HTS, remained but with very limited military capacities.

The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), centred in northern Aleppo governorate, had also presence in Idlib governorate. The SNA-affiliated National Liberation Front (NLF) is part of the Fath al-Mubin Operations Room and fights alongside HTS on the Idlib frontlines. Turkish forces have also been present along the border regions between Idlib and Aleppo governorates.

The GoS and allied militias control the southern and eastern parts of Idlib governorate, including the Damascus-Aleppo highway (M5) and its immediate surroundings.

ISIL cells and leaders remain present in Idlib despite HTS’ ‘counter-terrorism’ efforts to render them entirely inoperable, and ISIL continues claiming attacks against HTS targets. However, ISIL’s position in Idlib has been ‘severely weakened’ by HTS suppression of the group.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

Security incidents remained regularly reported around frontline areas and caused civilian casualties, especially including in areas south of the M4 highway in Idlib. ‘Widespread breaches’ of the post-March-2020 ceasefire continued to occur in the second half of 2022 and the first half of 2023. Beyond Russian air raids, these consisted primarily of mutual shelling, rocket fire and limited clashes between opposition armed groups and GoS forces and allied militias across contact lines, causing civilian casualties.

Frequent alleged Russian airstrikes were the primary cause of documented civilian deaths. Airstrikes were notably recorded in September 2022 when they reportedly killed 14 civilians in two separate incidents and five air raids. Such strikes further stepped up from October 2022, with Russia reportedly killing at least nine civilians and injuring over 70 in a bombing of IDP camps near Idlib city on 6 November.

Raids by HTS on GoS forces and allied militias positions in September-October 2022 were followed by several months of escalation. In December 2022, HTS raids notably targeted GoS and allied militias positions in eastern Idlib. In January 2023, for ‘the first time’ groups within



the HTS-led Fath al-Mubin coalition joined these HTS raids, drawing GoS and allied militias shelling of towns in Idlib.

Among the deadliest incidents in the second half of 2022, shelling, airstrikes and clashes taking place in November 2022 in the vicinity of Idlib City destroyed the homes of hundreds of displaced families in three IDP camps supported by humanitarian organisations. At least nine civilians were killed and 75 were injured, including children. More than 400 families were displaced. In the deadliest single incident for civilians documented by the UNCOI in the second half of 2022, cluster munitions struck on 6 November 2022 the densely populated Maram displacement camp near Kafr Jalis, close to the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing, and impacted six other nearby camps. This use of cluster munitions was reported in Kafr Jalis, Murin and Kafr Ruhin in western rural Idlib and Sina'ah and Ariha areas in southern rural Idlib. According to the UN Security Council, violent incidents continued throughout the first five months of 2023, causing civilian casualties.

Clashes between HTS and GoS forces in North-west Syria, including southern Idlib governorate were reported in August and September 2023. In the aftermath of a drone strike on the Military College in Homs governorate in October 2023, which reportedly resulted in hundreds of casualties, GoS and Russian forces stepped up attacks on the HTS-controlled areas in North-west Syria, including in Idlib governorate. GoS and Russian forces used intense ground shelling and airstrikes, while HTS and allied groups responded with artillery. The use of cluster munitions by the GoS forces in an attack on a town in Idlib governorate which led to civilian casualties was also reported.

Idlib was the governorate hardest hit by the 6 February 2023 earthquake that 'devastated' Syria's northwest in particular. In the immediate aftermath of the February 2023 earthquake in the Idlib de-escalation area, violent incidents decreased as HTS ceased attacks on GoS and allied militias positions in Idlib. Following renewed GoS forces and allied post-earthquake shelling, however, HTS attacks also resumed. Clashes across contact lines in Idlib swiftly resumed, with civilian casualties recorded. In February and March 2023, frontlines in Idlib remained among the most affected by hostilities. In late May 2023, Russian airstrikes on anti-GoS-held areas in Idlib rose to a level unprecedented in 18 months causing civilian casualties. This included the bombing in June 2023 of a vegetable market in Jisr Ash-Shughur that killed at least nine and injured dozens more. Anti-government groups reportedly also mounted on 26 August 2023 the first tunnel bombing on SAA positions since 2016, killing at least 11 GoS soldiers.

Incidents: data

Idlib recorded the second highest number of security incidents out of all governorates [[Security 2023](#), 1.5.2, pp. 37-38]. ACLED recorded 1 837 security incidents (average of 35.6 security incidents per week) in Idlib governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 1 569 were coded as 'explosions/remote violence', 187 as 'battles', and 81 as 'violence against civilians'. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 1 030 security incidents were recorded in Idlib representing an average of 59.6 security incident per week.



Geographical scope

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in Ariha and al Ma'ra districts.

Civilian fatalities: data

Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 91 civilian fatalities in Idlib governorate. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 84 civilian fatalities. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented six civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 1 899 350 IDPs in Idlib governorate.

In 2022, Idlib governorate recorded the highest number of IDP movements in Syria by a considerable distance to other governorates. The UN cited a combination of 'push and pull factors related to changes in the security and economic situation in the place of origin and/or area of displacement' as the main reason for IDP return movements in 2022.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 13 000 persons were displaced from Idlib, as well as 105 000 within the governorate. Approximately 18 000 persons were displaced from other governorates to Idlib.

In the first six months of 2023, there were approximately 2 600 IDP movements from Idlib governorate, 68 200 IDP movements within the governorate and 25 800 IDP movements to the governorate. The majority of IDP movements were recorded in February 2023 when over 34 000 persons were displaced mostly within the governorate following the earthquakes. IDP movements recorded during the period January to June 2023 were mostly motivated by 'access to services and livelihoods'.

In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 11 000 IDP returns to Idlib and 1 000 returns from Idlib to other governorates. In the first six months of 2023, 10 000 IDP returns were recorded into Idlib and about 680 returns from Idlib to other governorates. The highest return numbers were recorded in February 2023 and were attributed to the earthquakes.

Further impact on civilians

Idlib is one of the governorates where sources reported the highest percentage of widespread explosive ordnance contamination during the reporting period. UXO contamination was identified most often on 'agricultural land, roads and private property, followed by schools, other public infrastructure and hospitals' and particularly affected Idlib governorate. Civilian casualties, including of children, as a result of ERW were reported in Idlib in 2022 and 2023. Insecurity and the presence of ERW has also impeded access of farmers to agricultural land.



Notably, attacks on crops and agricultural land were commonly reported, with such attacks in Idlib making up 18 % of the total between 2017 and 2022, second only to the percentage recorded for Hama governorate. The UNCOI reported on numerous instances of attacks on agricultural fields in the second half of 2022 that led to civilian casualties.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that in the governorate of **Idlib**, indiscriminate violence reaches such a high level that substantial grounds are shown for believing that a civilian, returned to the governorate, would, **solely on account of their presence on its territory**, face a real risk of being subject to the serious threat referred to in Article 15(c) QD.

Latakia

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.4, pp. 84-89; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]

General information

Latakia governorate is situated in north-western of Syria and it borders Türkiye to the north, Idlib governorate to the north-east, Hama governorate to the east, Tartous governorate to the south, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. Latakia is divided into four administrative districts, from north to south: Latakia, Al-Haffa, Al-Qardaha, Jablah. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Latakia governorate at 1 295 334 inhabitants.

Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

Most of Latakia governorate had been under government control since the start of the conflict. The city of Latakia has been a stronghold for the Alawites and the Assad family. Since 2013, the GoS managed to isolate rebel strongholds to the Kabani Mountain area in the northeast of Latakia. [[Security 2021](#), 2.4, p. 220]

Latakia governorate continued to be predominantly under the GoS control during the reporting period. However, antiGoS armed groups still controlled parts of the governorate as HTS controlled a strip of territory located in the north-eastern part of Latakia governorate. UN Security Council reported that Al-Qaida maintains a low-profile presence in the north of Latakia with its local branch, Hurras al-Din (HaD).

Iranian and Russian forces were also present in the governorate and deployed in several locations. Hmeimin Air Base, a Russia military base, was also operational in the governorate.

Some presence of Turkish forces has also been reported.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

HTS launched a series of raids on GoS positions in northern Latakia, which were temporarily interrupted due to the earthquakes. On 26 February 2023, the military operations have



resumed and HTS conducted new attacks on GoS positions in Latakia. In the same month, HTS attacked government headquarters in Jabal al-Akrad, northeast of Latakia city. Militants of the group infiltrated in the government premises and the clash resulted in 10 dead among GoS forces.

In late May 2023, in northern Latakia, HTS killed a Russian colonel, the highest-ranking Russian officer killed by anti-GoS since 2016. As a consequence, Russia intensified airstrikes on anti-GoS held areas in Idlib to an unprecedented level since late 2021 resulting in killing of civilians also in Latakia. In June 2023, Russian airstrikes were recorded hitting Wadi Khaled IDP camp and several villages in the north of Latakia resulting in at least 16 civilians killed and dozens severely injured.

GoS forces intensified attacks through artillery strikes targeting more than three dozen of towns across Idlib, Latakia and Aleppo provinces. In total, these attacks resulted in at least five civilian deaths and dozens of additional injuries, among which numerous children. Artillery attacks by GoS were also reported in Latakia suburbs, nearby the dividing lines with armed opposition groups.

In July 2023, a drone attack conducted by an unknown actor, likely to be identified in HTS, targeted the Russian base in Hmeimin. Moreover, several airstrikes attributed to Israel occurred in Latakia, resulting in the activation of the GoS anti-aircraft fire in response were also reported.

Clashes between HTS and GoS forces in North-west Syria, including Latakia governorate were reported in August and September 2023. In the aftermath of a drone strike on the Military College in Homs governorate in October 2023, which resulted in substantial casualties, GoS and Russian forces stepped up attacks on the HTS-controlled areas in North-west Syria, while HTS reportedly responded with drone strikes, including in Latakia.

Incidents: data

ACLED recorded 263 security incidents (average of 5.1 security incidents per week) in Latakia governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 185 were coded as ‘explosions/remote violence’, 74 as ‘battles’, and 4 as ‘violence against civilians’. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 146 security incidents were recorded in Latakia representing an average of 8.4 security incident per week.

Geographical scope

Nearly all security incidents were recorded in the districts of Al-Hafa and Latakia.

Civilian fatalities: data

Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented five civilian fatalities in Latakia governorate. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 3 civilian fatalities. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented one civilian fatality per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.



Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 447 947 IDPs in Latakia governorate.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 2 000 persons were displaced from Latakia, as well as 5 000 within the governorate. Roughly 5 000 persons were displaced from other governorates to Latakia. In the first six months of 2023, there were approximately 231 IDP movements out of Latakia. No movements to or within the governorate were recorded in the same period. Moreover, the displacement of approximately 172 000 people in Latakia as a result of the February 2023 earthquakes was also reported.

In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 2 000 IDP returns from Latakia to other governorates. In the first five months of 2023, 7 IDP returns were recorded into Latakia and about 39 returns from Latakia to other governorates.

Further impact on civilians

As reported by Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, all regions of Syria are affected by the presence of landmines. Moreover, as Latakia has been affected by cluster munitions attacks since 2012, the governorate is contaminated with unexploded ordnance, especially in the northern parts [[Security 2022](#), 2.4.3, pp. 121-122].

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that indiscriminate violence is taking place in the governorate of **Latakia**, however **not at a high level**. Accordingly, **a higher level of individual elements** is required in order to show substantial grounds for believing that a civilian, returned to the territory, would face a real risk of serious harm within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

Quneitra

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.13, pp. 155-159; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]

General information

The governorate of Quneitra is located in southern Syria, and borders Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. To the east, it borders Dar'a governorate and Rural Damascus. The governorate is divided into two districts: Quneitra and Al-Fiq. The city of Quneitra is part of the demilitarised buffer zone between Syria and Israel under the supervision of UN Disengagement Observer Forces. The provincial administrative centre is Baath city. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Quneitra governorate at 105 443 inhabitants.



Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

GoS control has been contested in Quneitra between 2013 and 2018 by different armed GoS opposition forces including the FSA and Jabhat al-Nusra. By mid-August 2018, the GoS had recaptured the parts of the governorate formerly held by rebels and ISIL through intense fighting and a withdrawal agreement negotiated with the armed opposition forces. [[Security 2022](#), 2.13.2, p. 223].

During the reporting period, Quneitra governorate was under the control of GoS. UNDOF was present in the demilitarized area between Golan Heights and Quneitra.

There were reports of a growing presence of pro-Iranian forces in Quneitra governorate, which continued to be an area of influence for Iran and its affiliated forces. Hezbollah military troops reportedly joined the northern area of Quneitra. The settling of a new observation point by Hezbollah in the southern countryside of Quneitra, near to the Golan Heights has also been reported. Moreover, a new group affiliated with IRGC, the Imam Brigade, is reportedly operational in the outskirts of Quneitra.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

Security incidents across Quneitra governorate reportedly involved non-state armed groups, government and pro-government forces, ISIL and unidentified elements. The security incidents consisted in attacks with IEDs, targeted killings, kidnappings, exchanges of fire and limited clashes affecting civilians and the movement of people and goods.

In addition, airstrikes by the Israeli Air Force were reported targeting groups linked to the GoS, Iranian forces and Hezbollah.

Attacks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), targeted killings, kidnappings and limited clashes attacks on checkpoints, and exchanges of fire were reported between February and May 2023.

Incidents: data

Quneitra was among the governorates where the lowest security incidents figures were recorded [[Security 2023](#), 1.5.2 p. 38]. ACLED recorded 49 security incidents (average of 1.0 security incidents per week) in Quneitra governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 24 were coded as 'explosions/remote violence', 16 as 'battles', and 9 as incidents of 'violence against civilians'. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 16 security incidents were recorded in Quneitra representing an average of 0.9 security incident per week.

Geographical scope

Most of the security incidents were recorded in the district of Quneitra.



Civilian fatalities: data

The SNHR did not record any civilian fatalities in Quneitra between August 2022 and July 2023. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 5 civilian fatalities in Quneitra. This included also civilians who drowned while on migration routes to Europe, without specifying their actual number. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented five civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 3 418 IDPs in Quneitra governorate.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 111 persons were displaced from Quneitra, as well as 18 within the governorate. Approximately 87 persons were displaced from other governorates to Quneitra. In the first five months of 2023, there were approximately 15 IDP movements out of Quneitra and 36 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 4 movements within the governorate.

In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 164 IDP returns to Quneitra and 31 returns from Quneitra to other governorates. In the first six months of 2023, 144 IDP returns were recorded into Quneitra and about 1 906 returns from Quneitra to other governorates.

Further impact on civilians

Although Quneitra has been spared major combat operations compared to other areas of Syria, military operations have reportedly resulted in areas contaminated with explosive remnants that still pose a threat to civilians [[Security 2022](#), 2.13.3., p. 231].

In February 2023, it was reported that Quneitra governorate recorded one of the highest percentage of communities affected by some form of explosive contamination, resulting in constraints in the access to agricultural fields, schools, markets, hospitals and roads.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that indiscriminate violence is taking place in the governorate of **Quneitra**, however **not at a high level**. Accordingly, **a higher level of individual elements** is required in order to show substantial grounds for believing that a civilian, returned to the territory, would face a real risk of serious harm within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

Raqqa

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.8, pp. 112-120; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]



General information

Ar-Raqqa (hereafter 'Raqqqa') governorate is located in the north-central part of Syria. The governorate has international borders with Türkiye to the north, and borders to the west with Aleppo governorate, to the east with Hasaka and Deir Ez-Zor governorates and to the south with Hama and Homs Governorates. The governorate is divided in three districts: Ar-Raqqa, Al-Thawra, and Tall Abyad. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population in Raqqqa at 754 295 inhabitants.

About 90 % of the population are Sunni Arabs. The vast majority live in areas controlled by the SDF.

Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

Raqqqa was the first governorate completely taken from the Syrian government's control. ISIL got control of the city at the end of December 2013. On 29 June 2014, ISIL declared a 'caliphate' with its capital in Raqqqa city. Towards the end of 2016, international coalition forces started offensives against ISIL in Raqqqa and, in 2017, Raqqqa came under SDF control. [[Security 2020](#), 2.8.2, pp. 148-149]

Following the Turkish-led incursion into northeast Syria in October 2019, the SNA together with Turkish armed forces was reported to be in control of the so called 'safe zone' established between Tall Abyad (Raqqqa governorate) and Ras al Ain (Hasaka governorate). [[Security 2021](#), 2.8.2, pp. 185-186]

In December 2019, Russian troops moved into Raqqqa, following an agreement with the SDF, to guarantee safety after the departure of the US forces. Russia, in collaboration with the GoS, also deployed forces to the Tabqa Dam on the Euphrates River west of Raqqqa city. [[Security 2022](#), 2.8.2, p. 158]

During the reference period, Kurdish forces (SDF/YPG) controlled about half of the territory of Raqqqa governorate, including its capital, Raqqqa city.

The SNA operated in the Operation Peace Spring area, within this northern section of the governorate under Turkish control.

GoS and its allies control the southern parts of the governorate. GoS forces were granted permission by the SDF to pass between GoS held and Kurdish-controlled territories. Along with Russian troops, they maintained presences along the Syrian-Turkish border and the front lines between the Kurdish-controlled and Turkish-held areas.

The Russian forces were present in the GoS-controlled parts of Raqqqa governorate and, to a limited extent, in the SDF-controlled parts of the governorate.

Iranian sites were situated along the contact line between the SDF-held territories and those held by the GoS.

ISIL had a presence in GoS-controlled southern Raqqqa governorate.



Nature of violence and examples of incidents

During the second half of 2022, in the context of the conflict between the SDF and Turkish forces/Turkish-backed armed groups, there were continuing reports of security incidents in the vicinity of the Syrian-Turkish border or SNA-controlled areas, including around Ayn Issa and Tall Abyad.

In November 2022, Turkey launched Operation Claw-Sword, carrying out a series of airstrikes in the northern countryside of Raqqqa, Hasaka and Aleppo governorates. Other attacks by Turkish forces were reported, such as drone and ground-based strikes, killing civilians and SDF-backed militia members.

Several incidents were reported in the Operation Spring Area, where Turkish Armed Forces and affiliated armed groups of SNA have troops and military sites.

Following a PKK attack in Ankara (Türkiye) on 1 October 2023, Türkiye conducted a campaign of drone strikes which hit more than 150 locations including in Raqqqa governorate leading to several fatalities.

On 26 December 2022, suspected ISIL members attacked an area of Raqqqa city housing the headquarters of the SDF's Internal Security Forces (Asayish), anti-terrorism units, and a military intelligence prison holding around 200 ISIL prisoners, resulting in several SDF members killed.

In response to this attack, the SDF launched a large-scale security operation ('Operation Retaliation for Raqqqa Martyrs') in late January 2023, targeting ISIL cells in the city and its surrounding rural areas. According to SDF, this operation resulted in dozens of possible ISIL hideouts raids, and the arrest of suspected ISIL members, including the ISIL governor for Raqqqa.

ISIL attacks against GoS security forces were also reported. In November 2023, an ISIL-attributed attack killed at least 34 GoS soldiers and members of the NDF in the desert area of al-Rasafah located between Raqqqa, Homs and Deir Ez-Zor governorates.

Incidents: data

ACLED recorded 751 security incidents (average of 14.6 security incidents per week) in Raqqqa governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 450 were coded as 'explosions/remote violence', 176 as 'violence against civilians' and 125 as 'battles'. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 234 security incidents were recorded in Raqqqa representing an average of 13.5 security incident per week.

Geographical scope

Security incidents were recorded in all districts of the governorate. Most security incidents were recorded in Tall Abyad district, which also had the highest number of remote violence incidents. The largest number of incidents of violence against civilians was recorded in Raqqqa district.



Civilian fatalities: data

Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 20 civilian fatalities in Raqqa governorate. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 1 civilian fatality. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented three civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 159 827 IDPs in Raqqa governorate, including 108 302 in Raqqa district.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 1 000 persons were displaced within the governorate. No IDP movements from and to Raqqa were recorded during the same period. Similarly, in the first five months of 2023, no IDP movements out of Raqqa or into or within the governorate were recorded.

In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 95 IDP returns to Raqqa and 1 275 returns from Raqqa to other governorates. In the first five months of 2023, 9 IDP returns were recorded into Raqqa and about 26 returns from Raqqa to other governorates, with all of these movements occurring in March 2023.

Further impact on civilians

Raqqa city was reportedly ‘still slowly recovering from the devastation’ caused by the battle that led to ISIL’s defeat in October 2017, with buildings still severely damaged.

Raqqa was one of the governorates where contamination from UXOs was most widespread, including on roads, agricultural land and private property, with areas previously controlled by ISIL showing the highest levels of contamination. Between March 2011 and early April 2023, Raqqa accounted for 22 % of all landmine-related deaths recorded in the country.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that ‘mere presence’ in the area would not be sufficient to establish a real risk of serious harm under Article 15(c) QD in the governorate of **Raqqa**, however indiscriminate violence reaches **a high level**. Accordingly, **a lower level of individual elements** is required in order to show substantial grounds for believing that a civilian, returned to the territory, would face a real risk of serious harm within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

Rural Damascus

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.11, pp. 136-144; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]



General information

Rural Damascus is a largely agricultural governorate surrounding Damascus city. It is located in the south-western part of Syria and has international borders with Jordan and Iraq to the south and east and Lebanon to the west. Internally, it borders Homs governorate to the north and Quneitra, Dar'a and Sweida governorates to the south. The governorate comprises nine administrative districts: Rural Damascus, Douma (Duma), Al Qutayfah, An Nabk, Yabroud (Yabrud), At Tall, Az-Zabadani, Darayya, and Qatana. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Rural Damascus governorate at 3 310 012 inhabitants.

Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

The GoS recaptured Rural Damascus governorate in 2018, defeating the armed opposition in Eastern Ghouta in a Russian-supported military offensive launched between February and April 2018, during which GoS forces used chemical weapons against Douma city, the largest opposition stronghold in the vicinity of the capital from 2011 to 2018. [[Security 2022](#), 2.11.2, p. 1]

Throughout the reference period, the GoS and affiliated groups were controlling all of the governorate's territory except for a zone in its eastern-most section (Al-Tanf).

Iranian and Russian forces were also present in the governorate and deployed in several locations. Iran-backed armed groups were reportedly stationed at Damascus International Airport. They also reportedly continued to strengthen their presence in areas near the Lebanese border by purchasing plots of land. Increasing numbers of purchases of real estate units by Hezbollah in and near Badda, north-east of Damascus city, were also reported.

International coalition forces were reportedly at Al-Tanf in the so-called US-declared 55-km deconfliction area which has been a base for counter-ISIL operations and training for anti-ISIL factions since 2016. Positioned near Iranian and Iran backed forces, the garrison occupied a strategic spot on the Baghdad-Damascus highway. They reportedly worked 'with vetted local partner forces', which controlled outposts around Al-Tanf Garrison, and provided protection against pro-regime and Iran-aligned forces surrounding the de-confliction zone.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

During the reference period, Israeli airstrikes were reported on Damascus International airport and other specific targets (being mainly Hezbollah and Iranian militias), mostly resulting in the killing of soldiers, but also of some civilians.

Members of the Fourth Division, the Military Intelligence Department and the NDF died in various attacks during the reference period, and there were reports of attacks targeting GoS checkpoints.

Clashes between a group affiliated with the Military Intelligence service and another group affiliated with the Fourth Division in Bait Jinn were reported in February 2023. In April and June 2023, several civilians were killed during clashes in which different families affiliated with the Fourth Division or the Military Intelligence Department and local residents were involved.



Several civilians were killed by members of the Fourth Division in the reference period. Civilians were also injured by members of the Military Intelligence branch. Bodies of civilians killed by unknown perpetrators were also found.

In July 2023, several people were reportedly killed in two explosions outside the Sayeda Zeinab shrine, for which ISIL reportedly claimed responsibility.

Incidents: data

ACLED recorded 211 security incidents (average of 4.1 security incidents per week) in Rural Damascus in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 79 were coded as 'battles', 88 as 'violence against civilians' and 44 as 'explosions/remote violence'. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 80 security incidents were recorded in Rural Damascus representing an average of 4.6 security incident per week.

Geographical scope

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the districts of At Tall and Rural Damascus.

Civilian fatalities: data

Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 18 civilian fatalities. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 10 civilian fatalities in Rural Damascus. This included also civilians who drowned while on migration routes to Europe in August 2023, without specifying their actual number. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented one civilian fatality per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 1 083 062 IDPs in Rural Damascus.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 8 000 persons were displaced from Rural Damascus, as well as 3 000 within the governorate. No IDP movements from other governorates to Rural Damascus were recorded in the same period. In the first five months of 2023, there were approximately 8 IDP movements out of Rural Damascus and 277 IDP movements into the governorate.

In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 6 000 IDP returns to Rural Damascus and 7 000 returns from Rural Damascus to other governorates. In the first five months of 2023, 19 IDP returns were recorded into Rural Damascus and about 109 returns from Rural Damascus to other governorates.

Further impact on civilians

UN Habitat assessed that around 48 % of residential properties were uninhabitable in Duma, in Rural Damascus, as a result of the conflict. The existence of explosive ordnance in residential buildings in Darayya (Rural Damascus) was also reported by UNMAS in its annual



report covering 2022. Within Darayya, the teams evaluated an area of around 2 million square meters of agricultural land, with 71 % of it being verified as hazardous.

In its February 2023 report, the UN Secretary-General noted that about a third of Syrian communities were affected by explosive contamination, with Rural Damascus showing one of the highest percentages among all governorates. SOHR reported on the explosion of war remnants in cities in the governorate resulting in deaths and injuries.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that indiscriminate violence is taking place in the governorate of **Rural Damascus**, however **not at a high level**. Accordingly, **a higher level of individual elements** is required in order to show substantial grounds for believing that a civilian, returned to the territory, would face a real risk of serious harm within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

Sweida

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.14, pp. 168-170; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]

General information

The governorate of Sweida is located in the southern part of Syria and has borders with the governorates of Dar'a and Rural Damascus and an international border with Jordan to its south. Sweida governorate comprises three districts: As-Sweida, Shahba and Salkhad. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Sweida at 379 223 inhabitants. The Druze community makes up 91 % of the governorate's total population.

Factors such as the geographical proximity to Jordan, the limited GoS-control, the considerable influence of armed gangs and high crime rate in the governorate have contributed to making Sweida one of Syria's smuggling hotspots [[Security 2022](#), 2.14.1, p. 234].

Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

During the conflict, the governorate of Sweida has officially remained under GoS control. However, the GoS has not exercised its power directly in Sweida, having mainly relied on local armed factions sponsored by intelligence agencies and security branches [[Security 2022](#), 2.14.2, p. 234].

Sweida remained formally under GoS control during the reference period and GoS security forces remained widely present in the governorate. Sites operated by the GoS, its allies, and pro-GoS militias were located in the western half of the governorate, with concentrations around Sweida city and along the governorate's western border with Dar'a.



A number of Russian and Iranian sites were clustered in the governorate's centre and west. Iranian-backed factions had a strong presence in the governorate and were 'heavily involved' in cross-border Captagon trade.

Multiple local forces were active in the governorate, some of which were reportedly tied to the GoS while others opposed it. Local factions were said to 'maintain channels of communication' with the GoS and its security services, although these channels 'differ from one military group to another'. On many occasions local factions have clashed with each other.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

The situation in Sweida governorate has been characterized as unstable and chaotic, with insecurity prevailing.

Attacks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), targeted killings, abductions, exchanges of fire as well as limited clashes have been recorded during the reporting period. Local disputes at times evolved into clashes between various armed groups and forces, sometimes including GoS-forces, or even the civilian population.

In December 2022, several months of daily protests due to the deteriorating living conditions led to the ransack of the governor's office and attempted seize of the city's police headquarters. The security forces responded with gun fire and two people were killed.

In July 2023, in the context of civilians being arrested by the security forces, armed groups and residents blocked roads and detained members of GoS forces in at least two instances.

In August 2023, large scale anti-GoS protests took place in Sweida, although the GoS reportedly refrained from cracking down on the demonstrations. The protests reportedly continued in September and October 2023, albeit on a smaller scale. On two documented incidents security forces reportedly opened fire at protesters who attempted to storm governorate buildings.

Criminal gang activities, including kidnapping and killings, have also been reported. Kidnappings of civilians were reported on the Damascus–Sweida road, frequently occurring around the al-Masmiyah security checkpoint, but also between al-Shahba city and as-Sweida. There were also 'retaliatory, tit-for-tat kidnappings' between rivalling gangs in Sweida and Dar'a that occasionally took a sectarian character. A rise in armed attacks and assassinations between January and mid-July 2023 has also been reported. Unidentified gunmen targeted civilians as part of robberies or for unknown reasons. Several persons were also killed in armed disputes between individuals or rural families and altercations with a drug dealer or Bedouin tribesmen.

Sweeping anti-smuggling raids have also been reported while, in May 2023, an alleged Jordanian military aircraft targeted the house of a prominent drug smuggler with links to Lebanese Hezbollah in the eastern Sweida countryside, killing eight civilians.



Incidents: data

ACLED recorded 80 security incidents (average of 1.6 security incidents per week) in Sweida governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 39 were coded as 'violence against civilians', 21 as 'battles' and 20 as 'explosions/remote violence'. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 34 security incidents were recorded in Sweida representing an average of 2 security incident per week.

Geographical scope

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of Sweida.

Civilian fatalities: data

Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 24 civilian fatalities in Sweida governorate. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 5 civilian fatalities in Sweida. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented eight civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 1 083 062 IDPs in Sweida governorate.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 360 persons were displaced from Sweida, as well as 440 within the governorate. Approximately 2 560 persons were displaced from other governorates to Sweida. In the first five months of 2023, there were approximately 120 IDP movements into Sweida, while UNOCHA did not record any IDP movements out of Sweida or within the governorate. However, following eviction raids by GoS forces and allied militias in late April 2023, many Bedouin families were reportedly displaced and moved into the Badia desert area of eastern Sweida.

In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 70 IDP returns to Sweida and 690 returns from Sweida to other governorates. In the first five months of 2023, 21 IDP returns were recorded into Sweida and about 313 returns from Sweida to other governorates.

Further impact on civilians

Lawlessness, chaos and rampant criminal and political violence impacted the security situation.

According to the UN Secretary-General, Sweida was one of the governorates with the highest percentages of communities affected by explosive contamination. The reference period witnessed civilian deaths from remnants of war in the northern Sweida countryside.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that 'mere presence' in the area would not be sufficient to establish a real risk of serious harm under Article 15(c) QD in the governorate of **Sweida**, however indiscriminate violence reaches a **high level**. Accordingly, a **lower level of individual elements** is required in order to show substantial grounds for believing that a





civilian, returned to the territory, would face a real risk of serious harm within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

Tartous

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.5, pp. 123-128; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]

General information

Tartous and Latakia governorates form the coastal region of Syria. Tartous governorate borders the Mediterranean Sea in the west, Latakia governorate in the north, the governorates of Hama and Homs to the east, and Lebanon to the south. Tartous consists of five administrative districts: Tartous City, Baniyas, Dreikish, Safita and Sheikh Badr. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Tartous governorate at 948 274 inhabitants.

Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

Since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, the governorate of Tartous has largely been controlled by GoS and experienced no major attacks. However, in 2016, the city of Tartous was targeted by ISIL and in 2017, the seaside promenade of the city was hit by several explosions carried out by suicide bombers [[Security 2020](#), 2.5.2., p. 112; 2.5.3, p. 114].

The governorate is considered a 'regime stronghold'. However, changes in the traditional pattern of loyalty expressed by Alawites towards the government have been observed, mainly consisting in a series of anti-government protests over the past few years.

During the reference period, the whole of Tartous governorate was under GoS control.

The Russian-led naval facility in the port of Tartous is still operational and it represents the only Russian naval foothold in the Mediterranean, in use since the days of the Soviet Union.

Anti-government armed groups were reportedly not present in the governorate of Tartous.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

Airstrikes by Israel were documented during the reference period. In August 2022, Israeli airstrikes hit Iranian targets with multiple attacks in proximity of Tartous military naval base. The airstrikes reportedly targeted an air defence base, where Iranian-backed groups were active, killing three soldiers and wounding another three. In March 2023, Israel reportedly launched rocket strikes hitting Tartous countryside. The attack resulted in three military personnel injured.

Few targeted attacks against GoS forces and civilians which led to casualties were also reported.





Incidents: data

Tartous recorded the lowest number of security incidents out of all governorates [[Security 2023](#), 1.5.2, p. 38]. ACLED recorded 6 security incidents (average of 0.1 security incidents per week) in Tartous governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 3 were coded as ‘explosions/remote violence’, 2 as incidents of ‘violence against civilians’ and 1 as ‘battle’. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 5 security incidents were recorded in Tartous representing an average of 0.3 security incident per week.

Geographical scope

Specific information about the geographical scope of the indiscriminate violence within Tartous was not available at the time of writing.

Civilian fatalities: data

The SNHR did not record any conflict-related civilian fatalities in Tartous between August 2022 and July 2023. Similarly, no civilian fatalities were recorded in August – November 2023 by the same source.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 180 735 IDPs in Tartous governorate.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 1 000 persons were displaced from Tartous governorate, as well as 3 000 within the governorate. Approximately 3 000 persons were also displaced from other governorates to Tartous. UNOCHA did not record any IDP movement from and to Tartous between January and June 2023. Likewise, no displacement within the governorate has been documented in the same period.

In terms of IDP returns, Tartous was one of the governorates with the fewest recorded returns in 2022. UNOCHA recorded 5 IDP returns to Tartous and 2 000 returnee movements from the governorate in 2022. From January to June 2023, 5 IDP returns from the governorate were recorded.

Further impact on civilians

Tartous is the only governorate where cluster munitions were not extensively used since 2012 [[Security 2022](#), 2.5.3, p. 127]. No death related to landmines have been recorded in Tartous during the reference period.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that in the governorate of **Tartous**, there is, in general, **no real risk** for a civilian to be personally affected within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.



5.3.5 Serious and individual threat

Last update: February 2023

In the context of the 'sliding scale', each case should be assessed individually, taking into account the nature and intensity of the violence in the area, along with the combination of personal circumstances present in the applicant's case. It is not feasible to provide exhaustive guidance about what the relevant personal circumstances could be and how those should be assessed.

The text below provides some indications concerning the relevant considerations and the nature of the assessment.

Indiscriminate violence, examples of relevant personal circumstances

- **Age:** when assessing the risk of indiscriminate violence, this personal circumstance would be of particular importance in relation to the ability of the person to assess the risks. For example, children may not be able to assess the risk associated with contamination with unexploded remnants of war. Children may also not be in a position to quickly assess a changing situation and avoid the risks it entails. In some cases, elderly age may also impact the person's ability to assess and avoid risks associated with an armed conflict.
- **Gender:** when assessing the applicability of [Article 15\(c\) QD](#), it is difficult to ascertain whether and in what circumstances men or women would be at a higher risk in general. It would also depend on other factors, such as the nature of the violence in the area. For example, men may be at higher risk of violence targeting local markets, banks, governmental institutions, as men are the ones more frequently being outside the home and visiting such locations. On the other hand, general gender norms in Syria suggest that women may have less information regarding the current security situation and the associated risks. Moreover, if the violence moves closer to the residence of people, e.g. in the case of airstrikes or ground engagements in populated areas, women may have a more limited ability to avoid it.
- **Health condition and disabilities, including mental health issues:** serious illnesses and disabilities may result in restricted mobility for a person, making it difficult for them to avoid immediate risks and, in the case of mental illnesses, it can make them less capable of assessing risks. In other cases, such conditions may require frequent visits to a healthcare facility. The latter may have different implications related to the assessment of the risk under [Article 15\(c\) QD](#). Taking into account road security, this may increase the risk of indiscriminate violence as the person would be required to travel. It may also increase the risk when health facilities themselves are reported to be targeted. Moreover, if healthcare facilities are damaged and closed because of fighting, such an applicant may be at a higher risk due to the indirect effects of the indiscriminate violence as they would not be able to access the health care they need.
- **Economic situation:** applicants in a particularly dire economic situation may also be less able to avoid the risks associated with indiscriminate violence. They may be forced to expose themselves to risks such as working in areas which are affected by



violence in order to meet their basic needs. They may also have less resources to avoid an imminent threat by relocating to a different area.

- **Knowledge of the area:** when assessing the risk of indiscriminate violence under [Article 15\(c\) QD](#), the relevant knowledge of the area concerns the patterns of violence it is affected by, the existence of areas contaminated by landmines, etc. Different elements may contribute to a person's knowledge of the area. It can relate to their own experience in the specific area or in areas similarly affected by indiscriminate violence, or to their connection to a support network which would insure they are informed of the relevant risks.
- **Occupation:** the occupation the person is likely to have when they return to their home area may also be relevant to assess the risk under Article 15(c) QD. It may, for example, be linked to the need for the applicant to travel through areas where road incidents are often reported, or to frequent locations known to be particularly targeted in the conflict. In Syria, incidents of landmines affecting agricultural workers ploughing the land are also reported [[Security 2020](#), 1.6.1.3, p. 35].

Individual elements related to the above can exist in combination. Other factors may also be relevant.

It is not feasible to provide general guidance on which individual circumstances would be sufficient to substantiate a real risk under [Article 15\(c\) QD](#) in areas with high level of violence compared to areas where the violence is considered not to be at a high level. Each case should be assessed individually.

5.3.6 Qualification of the harm as a 'threat to (a civilian's) life or person'

Last update: February 2023

Some of the commonly reported types of harm to civilians' life or person in Syria include killing, injury, abduction, child recruitment, explosive remnants of war, etc. A real risk of such serious harm would qualify a threat to a (civilian's) life or person in accordance with the provision of [Article 15\(c\) QD](#).

5.3.7 Nexus/'by reason of'

Last update: February 2023

The interpretation of the causation 'by reason of' may not be limited to harm which is directly caused by the indiscriminate violence or by acts that emanate from the actors in the conflict. To a certain extent, it may also include the indirect effect of indiscriminate violence in situations of armed conflict. As long as there is a demonstrable link to the indiscriminate violence, such elements may be taken into account in the assessments, for example: widespread criminal violence as a result of lawlessness, destruction of the necessary means





to survive, destruction of infrastructure, denial of or limited access of humanitarian aid, limited access to healthcare facilities.





6. Actors of protection

[Article 7 QD](#)



The contents of this chapter include:

[The State](#): outlining and analysing the capacity of the government of Syria to provide protection in accordance with Article 7 QD;

[Parties or organisations](#), including international organisations: analysing whether the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria could qualify as actors of protection under Article 7 QD.

6.1 The State

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

President Bashar al-Assad, who is also the leader of the ruling Baath Party, and Baath party leaders dominate all three branches of government as an authoritarian regime [[Actors](#), 2.1.2, p.14]. The president is elected for a seven-year mandate at a time in elections that are tightly controlled without any genuine opposing candidates [[Security 2019](#), 1.1, p. 11]. Assad has ruled Syria since he took over the presidency in 2000, following the rule of his father Hafez al-Assad who came into power in 1970. The last presidential elections were held in May 2021. Assad was re-elected for a fourth term as President of Syria in the May 2021 elections, the last presidential elections held in Syria, which were found to lack any form of credibility [[Security 2022](#), 1.2, p. 17; [Security 2021](#), 1.2, p. 15].

Syria's judicial system consists of civil, criminal, military, personal status courts, Counter - Terrorism Court, as well as a court of cassation, among others [[Actors](#), 2.1.4, p. 15].

According to the International Legal Assistance Consortium, there have been little systematic or structural changes to the justice system in areas controlled by the GoS in recent years. Institutions of justice persistently fell 'far short' of meeting international standards of impartiality and independence, especially in the running of the 'exceptional courts' (the Counter-Terrorism Court and Military Field Courts). The justice system was described to be highly political and under the control of the Baath Party, the President and the security services. Prosecutors and judges were in practice required to belong to the ruling party despite the Constitution providing for an independent judiciary. Corruption and bribery



continued diminishing the independence of the judiciary. Lawyers had to bribe court employees to ensure smooth processing of a case. It was uncommon to hold officials accountable for corruption. Many trials in the Counter-Terrorism Court were allegedly rushed, did not follow legal procedures and had no possibility of appeal. [\[Actors, 2.1.4, pp. 15-16\]](#) Recent sources also noted that cases involving political or national security offences were reportedly ‘assigned in an apparently arbitrary manner to the Counterterrorism Court (CTC), courts martial, or criminal courts’ and sentences against persons accused of anti-GoS activity were generally harsh [\[Country Focus 2023, 1.1.1, pp. 13-14\]](#).

In areas which had not been continuously under GoS control, such as Aleppo, Dar’a, Sweida and East Ghouta, efforts had been made to reinstall official state justice structures, but justice continued to remain largely absent. Sources noted the continued seizure of property through public auctions in areas retaken by GoS forces, with the majority of affected owners being displaced persons [\[Security 2022, 1.4.1, p. 28\]](#). Difficulties for women and LGBTIQ persons to access to justice have been reported [\[Targeting 2022, 13.1, p. 108; Targeting 2022, 14.1, 14.2, pp. 122-123\]](#). See also [4.11.2. Violence against women and girls: overview](#) and [4.13. LGBTIQ persons](#).

The **Syrian Armed Forces** consist of the SAA, the Naval Forces, the Air Forces, Air Defence Forces, the intelligence services and the NDF. Assad acts as the Supreme Commander of the SAA and the armed forces. All appointments of commanders, chiefs, directors and officers of all armed forces units are being carried out or approved by the President personally. In contrast to the situation before 2011, SAA leaders allegedly lack control over their divisions. Army divisions are said to be controlled by the government’s intelligence services and to be under the authority of Iranian and Russian influence. The army is no longer considered a cohesive force, but rather a coalition of regular forces and allied militias. [\[Security 2022, 1.4.1, pp. 25-26\]](#)

Syria’s security apparatus, composed of four main intelligence branches formally coordinated by the National Security Bureau, is overseen by the President’s office: Air Force Intelligence, Military Intelligence Department, General Intelligence Directorate, Political Security Directorate.

Since the outbreak of the conflict, the regime has relied on the intelligence agencies to maintain control of the country and focus on opponents of the regime. The four main intelligence agencies were responsible for most arrests and detentions of persons perceived to oppose the government, including peaceful demonstrators, human rights activists, and political dissidents and their families. Those agencies operate outside the law. The intelligence agencies were also reported to be corrupt and to engage in extortion. [\[Actors, 2.3.2, pp. 28-32\]](#)

The **police force**, formally under the control of the Ministry of the Interior, consists of four separate divisions: emergency police, traffic police, neighbourhood police and the riot police. Corruption was reportedly a widespread problem in the police forces. The police were reported to take part in arbitrary home raids and arrest warrants were rarely issued. [\[Actors, 2.3.3, p. 32\]](#)



There are various **pro-government militias**, both local and foreign, operating in Syria alongside the regular armed forces. Pro-government militias played a key role in the survival of Assad's government and have been involved in many military offensives and local security enforcement throughout the Syrian civil war. Pro-government militias are largely autonomous and free to exploit the population in areas they control. Violent clashes between pro-government militias for access to and control of territories, and for control of smuggling and extortion networks, have occurred throughout the conflict. Many have reportedly turned into a mafia known for stealing, looting, corruption, gun smuggling, drug smuggling, and committing violations against civilians. [[Actors](#), 2.3.4, pp. 32-37]

Since the beginning of the Syrian uprising in 2011, sources varyingly estimated that tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of people, including political activists, human rights defenders, journalists, humanitarian aid workers and lawyers have been arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared by the GoS [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.1.1, p. 18].

In March 2022, the GoS passed an anti-torture law (Law No. 16 of 2022), that prohibits authority from ordering torture and makes evidence gathered through torture invalid. However, the law's effectiveness and intention has been questioned as legislation protecting employees of the State Security Department from prosecution remains in force and the law cannot be applied retroactively [[Security 2022](#), 1.4.1, p. 28].

Recent sources indicated that GoS forces continued to arbitrarily arrest and detain people, with detention leading to torture, ill-treatment, and in some instances to death of detainees [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.1, p. 12; [Security 2023](#), 1.4.1, p. 26].

When assessing the availability of State protection for individual applicants, [the implications of leaving Syria](#) should also be taken into account.



In general, the GoS would not be considered an actor of protection meeting the criteria under [Article 7 QD](#).

6.2 Parties or organisations, including international organisations

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

Many areas in Syria are influenced by insurgent groups and some groups, in particular HTS, are currently in (contested) control of some territory. However, the Kurdish forces in northeast Syria are the only actor that may be considered to control substantial parts of the territory and could, therefore, be subject to analysis under [Article 7\(2\) QD](#).



Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria

Kurdish-controlled areas of north and east Syria

Following the retreat of the GoS forces from the northeast Syria, the predominantly Kurdish inhabited area was left abandoned. This allowed the Kurds to gain greater autonomy in 2014. In January 2014, the PYD adopted the so-called ‘Social Contract’ as a ‘provisional constitution’ for the Autonomous Administration. The Social Contract foresaw a federal, decentralised system by which the Autonomous region would remain a part of Syria, but with a regulated relationship with the central government in Damascus. The proclamation of a federal system in the Kurdish-controlled areas was rejected by the GoS, other Syrian opposition groups, the US and Türkiye. [[Actors](#), 3.1.1, pp. 39-41]

The SDF hold a demographically heterogeneous region of about 30 % of the Syrian territory, comprising most of Hasaka governorate as well as areas in Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqqa governorates and a small enclave in Aleppo countryside [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.3., p. 28]. In particular, SDF/YPG are in control of or have presence in Aleppo city (in the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya), in the Tall Rifaat area north of Aleppo city and in Manbij and Ain al-Arab (Kobane) in eastern Aleppo governorate [[Security 2023](#), 2.2.2., p. 63].

The AANES is led by the Syrian Democratic Council (the political wing of the SDF), with the Movement for a Democratic Society as the ruling coalition. The PYD is viewed as the dominant political actor in the Kurdish-controlled areas, where it exercises ultimate control, making decisions for the entire region. PYD’s system of governance is described by sources as authoritarian, and other political parties have been marginalised. [[Actors](#), 3.1.3, pp. 42-43]

Two justice systems continue to operate along each other, the system of GoS and the one of AANES, not recognised by GoS. The AANES justice system is based on the ‘Social Contract’, a document that lays out the essential aspects of coexistence. This has led to confusions on which law to apply as well as to the possibility for judges to ignore written law and use social justice principles instead. It was reported that practitioners within the court system were either trained in a different legal system or completely untrained in law. Further, most cases have to pass through a locally based non-judicial committee, made up of untrained persons, before being brought to court. The court system was described as suffering from a ‘fundamental lack of independence from the executive’. PYD, YPG and/or PKK reportedly interfered in the administration of justice, particularly if courts were perceived to interfere with security or military interests, as well as intervened in individual cases etc. Gaps in the legal system, which undermine due procedures and the right to a fair trial remained. [[Security 2022](#), 1.4.3, pp. 32-34; [Actors](#), 3.1.4, pp. 43-45]

In 2015, the YPG established the terrorism court - known as the ‘People’s Court’ - to prosecute ISIL fighters and affiliates. Thousands of Syrian ISIL suspects have reportedly been tried in flawed proceedings [[Actors](#), 3.1.4, p. 4]. The YPG does not allow the right to a defence and the applicable counter-terrorism law has not been made public [[Security 2022](#), 1.4.3, p.34]. Recent sources reported that thousands of ISIL fighters were still held by the SDF throughout the AANES territory [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 38].



It was reported that various tribes in Hasaka as well as in eastern Deir Ez-Zor governorates agreed to reaffirm a tribal judicial system, called Madbata, to resolve inter-clan disputes, such as robberies, lootings and actions of revenge, due to lack of judicial alternatives accepted by the population. [[Security 2022](#), 1.4.3, p.34]

The SDF reportedly engaged in extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearance as well as torture in detention centres [[Security 2023](#), 1.3.4., p. 30]. Cases of enforced disappearance, torture and sexual violence against women were also reported [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.4.1, pp. 117-118].



It can be concluded that AANES in the Kurdish-controlled areas in Syria does not qualify as an actor of protection who is able to provide effective, non-temporary and accessible protection.



7. Internal protection alternative

[Article 8 QD](#)



The contents of this chapter include:

[Preliminary remarks](#)

[7.1. Part of the country](#)

[7.2. Safety](#)

[7.3. Travel and admittance](#)

[7.4. Reasonableness to settle](#)

Preliminary remarks

Last update: April 2024

This chapter looks into the topic of internal protection alternative. It analyses the situation in Damascus City in relation to the requirements of [Article 8 QD](#).

In order to determine that internal protection is available in a particular part of the applicant's country of origin, three cumulative criteria have to be met: 'safety', 'travel and admittance' and 'reasonableness to settle'.

Figure 5. IPA: elements of the assessment.



In relation to these elements, when assessing the applicability of IPA, the case officer should consider the general situation in the respective part of Syria, as well as the individual circumstances of the applicant. [The implications of leaving Syria](#) should also be given due consideration.



This chapter analyses and provides guidance on the applicability of IPA only in relation to Damascus City. This is without prejudice to the possibility to apply IPA to other places in Syria.

7.1 Part of the country

Last update: April 2024

The first step in the analysis of IPA is to identify a particular part of the country with regard to which the criteria of [Article 8 QD](#) would be examined in the individual case. Existing ties with the place, such as previous stay or residence and/or availability of a support network could, for example, be taken into account when focusing on a particular part of the country.



For the purposes of this document, the analysis focuses on the possibility of applying IPA with regard to Damascus City - the capital and the most important economic centre in Syria.

7.2 Safety

Last update: April 2024

7.2.1 Absence of persecution or serious harm

When examining the element ‘absence of persecution or serious harm’, the decision-maker should refer to chapters 1 to 4 of this document. In addition, in particular when assessing whether there are potential new forms of persecution or serious harm, the section [the implications of leaving Syria](#) should be taken into account.

When assessing the requirement of safety with regard to the applicability of IPA in individual cases of applicants from Syria, the following elements should be taken into account:

► General security situation in relation to indiscriminate violence

The general security situation in Damascus City should be assessed in accordance with the analysis under the section on [Article 15\(c\) QD](#). In this regard, it has been concluded that in the governorate of Damascus, there is, in general, no real risk for a civilian to be personally affected within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

► Actor of persecution or serious harm and their reach

In case where the person fears persecution or serious harm by **State actors**, internal protection in Damascus would in general not be considered safe. This would also include State-affiliated actors, such as foreign allies and pro-regime militias.



With regard to persecution or serious harm by **SDF, YPG, ISIL, HTS or other anti-GoS armed groups**, it should be noted that these groups are active within certain regions and their operational capacity in Damascus City is currently limited. Therefore, the criterion of safety may be considered satisfied in most cases. However, particular consideration should be given to the individual circumstances of the applicant and whether they are perceived by the actor as a priority target.

In some cases, where the applicant faces persecution or serious harm for reasons related to the prevalent social norms in Syria and the actor of persecution or serious harm can be the **Syrian society** at large (e.g. for [4.11. Women and girls](#) and [4.13. LGBTIQ persons](#)), IPA would in general not be safe. It should also be underlined that it cannot be reasonably expected that the applicant abstains from practices fundamental to their identity, such as those related to their religion or sexual orientation and gender identity, in order to avoid the risk of persecution or serious harm.

For certain particularly vulnerable individuals, such as women and children, if the actor of persecution or serious harm is the **family or community** (e.g. forced marriage, honour crime), taking into account the lack of State protection and their vulnerability to potential new forms of persecution or serious harm, IPA would in general not be safe.

See also [3. Actors of persecution or serious harm](#).

► **Whether the profile of the applicant is considered a priority target and/or a threat by the actor of persecution or serious harm**

The profile of the applicant could make him or her a priority target, increasing the likelihood that the actor of persecution or serious harm would attempt to trace them in Damascus City.

► **Behaviour of the applicant**

It should be underlined that it cannot be reasonably expected that the applicant abstains from practices fundamental to his or her identity, such as those related to their religion or sexual orientation and gender identity, in order to avoid the risk of persecution or serious harm.

► **Other risk-enhancing circumstances**

The information under the section [4. Refugee status](#) should be used to assist in this assessment.

7.2.2 Availability of protection against persecution or serious harm

Alternatively, it may be determined that the requirement of safety is satisfied if the applicant would have access to protection against persecution or serious harm, as defined in [Article 7](#)

[QD](#), in the area where IPA is considered. However, in light of the analysis in the chapter [6. Actors of protection](#), there is in general no actor fulfilling the criteria of [Article 7 QD](#).



The requirement of **safety** may be satisfied in Damascus City, depending on the profile and the individual circumstances of the applicant. For those who have a well-founded fear of persecution by the GoS and/or by society at large, IPA in Damascus will generally not meet the criterion of safety.

7.3 Travel and admittance

Last update: April 2024

In case the criterion of ‘safety’ is satisfied, as a next step, it has to be established whether an applicant can safely and legally travel and gain admittance to Damascus City.

The general situation and the individual circumstances of the applicant should be taken into account in this assessment.

It should be noted that in the context of Syria and in particular the security measures related to State actors, the three requirements should be read in conjunction.

Safely travel

Damascus International Airport is located 30 kilometres south-east of downtown Damascus (about 30 minutes by car from the city centre). Damascus International Airport is controlled by Air Force Intelligence services, which are reported to conduct arrests and torture [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.1, pp. 16-17]. It is reported that several international routes are operated from the airport [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.1, p. 44]

Airstrikes by Israel on Damascus international airport, as well as areas close to the airport have been reported. For example, on 17 September 2022 an Israeli airstrike targeted Iranian-backed groups based near the airport. Another Israeli airstrike on the airport reportedly occurred on 2 January 2023 with sources noting that the airport was out of service for several hours but resumed operations later the same day. In mid-October and November 2023, Israeli airstrikes targeted again the airport, putting it temporarily out of service. The Syrian government reportedly also ‘routinely’ ordered the closure of the Damascus airport allegedly because of violence or the threat of violence. [[COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 6-7; [Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.1, p. 44].

The airport was generally accessible from and to the city. Efforts were reportedly also underway to improve and repair the roads leading to the airport. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.4, pp. 48-49]

Checkpoints at the entrances of urban centres, including Damascus by SAA’s Fourth Division were reported by different sources, where they also had the mandate to function as parallel



customs police. Moreover, the Fourth Division controlled checkpoints at international border crossings [Lebanon (Qalamoun/Bekaa Valley), Jordan (Naseeb), and Iraq (Abu Kamal)], at all border crossings into opposition-controlled areas as well as at the entrances of the ports of Latakia and Tartous. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, pp. 46-47]

The number of checkpoints in Damascus city has reportedly significantly decreased. However, checkpoints at the entry roads to Damascus city, in the vicinity of the capital and in towns across Rural Damascus governorate remained in place. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, pp. 46-47]

Several checkpoints controlled by different GoS security units and affiliated forces were reported along the main road connecting the capital cities of Beirut and Damascus which runs through the AlMasnaa (Lebanon) / Jdeidet Yabous (Syria) border crossing, located 60 km from Damascus and 110 km from Beirut, and constituting the largest border crossing between the two countries. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.2, pp. 45-46]

Checkpoints reportedly generally tended to focus on asking more questions (for example, on current address or occupation) to individuals coming from areas that were loosely controlled by the GoS, such as Dar'a governorate, or from rebel-held areas such as Idlib and northern Aleppo. Having identity documents, birth certificates and other personal documents was essential for being able to move freely. The practice of extorting money and fees from residents, public transport vehicles and others at check points was also reported. The SAA's Fourth Division as well as affiliated militia groups and businesses were reported to solely profit from this practice. Payments were reportedly demanded from many civilians as well as from entities and business owners for all cargo crossing the checkpoint, regardless of ownership, as well as for the release of civilians previously detained at checkpoints under the control of the Fourth Division and the Republican Guard. Threats, insults, physical and psychological violence, the robbery of personal property and executions of civilians for allegedly not stopping at a checkpoint or because they refused to hand over their property or make any payments were also reported. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, pp. 47-48]

People who had visible signs of belonging to a less affluent part of society and people who were from areas with a history of anti-government movements were generally treated worse than others. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.3.4, p. 22]

In its October 2022 report on arrests and detentions, SNHR indicated that it had recorded the detention of IDPs and returnees from abroad who were trying to return to their original places of residence in territory under control of the GoS. Most of the arrests reportedly took place at Damascus airport, Damascus city and at the border crossings with Lebanon. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, p. 47]

Particular risk profiles for arrest tend to be those who return to Syria without security permission or reconciliation in place prior to traveling, individuals who work or carry out activities believed to oppose the government, such as journalism, aid work, local councils, rescue workers, men of military age, and those with family members who were forcibly displaced to Idlib or Aleppo [[Damascus 2020](#), 2.4, p. 21]. Arrests of persons who have settled their security status have also been reported [[Returnees from abroad](#), 3., p. 27].



There is also information about harassment against LGBTIQ persons or against persons whose family members are wanted for criminal reasons, or against persons who have the same or a similar name as persons on wanted lists. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.3.4, pp. 23-24] It was reported that checkpoints were located at Damascus International Airport for passengers departing from Damascus, as well as for passengers arriving there. Airport staff are reportedly demanding bribes and threatening disruption or security problems in case of non-payment. In addition, the 'quadruple security check' is carried out to find out if an arriving person is on a wanted list [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.3.5, p. 24].

Legally travel

The Syrian Constitution provides for freedom of movement of citizens unless 'prevented by a decision from the competent court or the public prosecution office or in accordance with the laws of public health and safety'. However, in practice, freedom of movement in Syria was 'severely restricted' due to ongoing combat and 'proliferation of regime and militia checkpoints' [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.2, pp. 17-19]. The GoS restricted in-country movements and established checkpoints to monitor travels inside the areas under its control. Legal and cultural restrictions also limited women's freedom of movement in many areas [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, p. 47]. Syrian citizens were also allowed to travel internationally, but the government denied access to passports and civil documentation based on political views, association with the opposition, or geographical location associated with the opposition [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.2, pp. 17-19]. Journalists and human rights or civil society activists were often banned from travelling abroad, or were interrogated upon return [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, p. 47]. The GoS imposed exit visa requirements and at times closed Damascus Airport and border crossings. It was reported that the government enforced wide-ranging bans on international travel by opposition members, often targeting anyone attempting to travel. In addition, there was a nationwide problem with the issuing of passports, with citizens having to pay bribes and wait for months [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.2, pp. 17-19].

Gain admittance

According to a source, applying for security clearance was a prerequisite for establishing residence in any part of Damascus city. The security screening process for IDPs relocating to Damascus was stricter than that applied to existing Damascus residents undergoing intra-city moves. The approval of an individual's security clearance was influenced by various factors, including their background, place of origin, and activities over the past years. More often than not, the *mukhtar* played a role in the process. Prospective residents had to first submit their lease agreements and related documentation to the *mukhtar*, who subsequently forwarded these materials to the relevant security authorities for review. In some cases, prospected returnees submitted their applications directly to security services. Generally, returnees had to prove ownership of property to settle in the area in which they lived prior to displacement. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.6, pp. 52-53]

It has been reported that returning to their home remained difficult for forcibly displaced people. Apart from the need to fulfil a set of requirements, return also depended on whether the area had been rehabilitated and basic services installed. As part of the requirements, applicants had to submit documents proving ownership of their home, a familial civil registration extract and copies of each family member's ID cards. Based on these documents,



security services approved or rejected the application. In case of approval, applicants were required to obtain an engineering report for their house from the public safety committee, which was linked to the local administrative unit. The committee decided whether a house was in a stable condition and inhabitable. In case the house was declared safe, the potential returnee had to apply to the municipality for permission to do any necessary repair work. Reportedly, the role of public safety committees was not clearly defined, and critics claimed that security services were intervening in their work. In practice, however, it was these committees that made the final decision over the preservation or demolition of a building. It was reported that, given the conditions for security approval, only property owners who lived in areas under GoS-control and were not wanted by the security services would eventually be allowed to return. Other returnees had to agree to a 'security settlement' that may involve extensive investigations, arrest in case of pending search warrants and military conscription for men who had so far failed to do military service. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.6, pp. 52-53]

All procedures related to property required approval by the security authorities even if a person was absent or abroad. Security approvals were required when selling and leasing real estate. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.5, p. 29]

In the case of Palestinian refugees who wished to settle outside of a camp, it was reported that it was more difficult for them to be granted permission to reside, due to the sectarian make-up of the city. Many areas of Damascus were dominated by a particular sect and the relevant security branch might refuse to provide security clearance to a person belonging to a different sectarian group. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.5, p. 30]

Access and return to some areas of Damascus, such as Al-Qaboun, Yarmouk and Jobar, were restricted or almost completely prohibited due to significant destruction and security permission was required for entering those areas. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.5, pp. 49-52; [Damascus 2022](#), 2.4, pp. 25-29]



For those applicants who meet the 'safety' criterion, the assessment of the availability of IPA in Damascus City should proceed with an assessment of the requirements of safety and legality of travel and of gaining admittance.

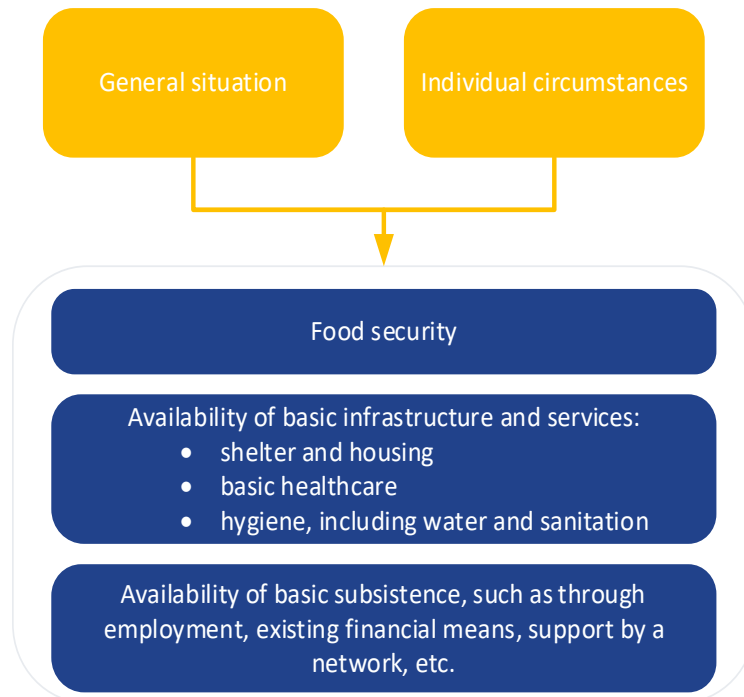
The profile and individual circumstances of the applicant should be taken into account in this regard. The individual conduct of the applicant is a relevant consideration in this regard, in particular possible contact with the Syrian authorities (e.g. issuance of passport), and previous travel back to Syria, modalities of entry/exit, etc. For individuals who would return to Syria without identity documents or without security clearance or status settlement in place prior to traveling, these requirements would not be satisfied.

7.4 Reasonableness to settle

According to Article 8(1) QD, IPA can only apply if the applicant ‘can reasonably be expected to settle’ in the proposed area of internal protection. In case the criteria of safety and travel and admittance are met, the assessment of the availability of IPA in Damascus City should proceed with an analysis of its reasonableness in light of the general situation in the city and the individual circumstances of the applicant.

The assessment should be based on the general situation in the country and the individual circumstances of the applicant.

Figure 6: IPA: assessment of the reasonableness requirement.



7.4.1 General situation

Last update: April 2024

In a speech to the UN Security Council in January 2023, the UN Special Envoy for Syria noted that, after 12 years of war, the financial collapse in Lebanon, the Covid-19 pandemic, sanctions and other events, the country was facing an economic crisis ‘of epic proportions’. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.1, p. 53]

In a March 2023 report, the World Bank indicated that currency devaluation and in particular the increase in food prices have contributed to rising inflation since early 2022. According to the World Bank, since the war on Ukraine, food prices in Syria have been increasing faster than global food prices, partly due to a reduction of state subsidies, a ‘record-low’ domestic agricultural production, and shortages caused by supply-chain interruptions, which also contributed to higher prices for some food and energy goods. Food prices, however, had been increasing already before: according to the WFP, they had increased by 532 % in the

period from 2020 to 2022, or by almost 12 times in the period from 2020 to 2023. Several sources reported of severe fuel shortages due to delayed fuel imports in the winter of 2022-2023. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.1, pp. 54-55]

Moreover, households in Damascus continued to face recurring electricity cuts, and difficulties in heating their homes, with some reportedly resorting to burning pistachio shells or old clothes, shoes and plastic bags (despite the health risks) to stay warm. Electricity remained in short supply in 2023, with people in the GoS-controlled areas reportedly getting just about one hour of electricity per day. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.1, p. 55].

Means of basic subsistence and employment

Years of conflict, displacement, the economic crisis, and prices that had risen 'stratospherically' contributed to growing levels of poverty among the population, forcing families to rely on measures such as reducing food consumption or sending children to work in order to survive [[Damascus 2022](#), 3.2.2, p. 40]. In a survey on the socio-economic situation in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and Homs, 10 % of respondents from Damascus stated that their children worked / contributed to the household income [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.4, p. 58]. According to UN data, 90 % of the Syrian population were living below the poverty line as of June 2023. UNOCHA pointed to the existence of and potential increase in 'working poor' households who were unable to cover living costs despite having an income: in areas under GoS control, incomes would need to increase by 67 % to cover the rising costs of basic needs. In Damascus governorate, 74 % of households reported being either completely unable or insufficiently able to meet basic needs. UNOCHA also pointed to the 'increasingly desperate' coping mechanisms to cover basic needs, including buying on credit, borrowing, and relying on protracted debt, remittances and humanitarian assistance. In Damascus governorate, 66 % of households reported relying on remittances, while particularly IDPs were relying on humanitarian aid needs. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.4, p. 57]

In August 2023, GoS doubled the minimum wage for public sector workers, the first increase of its kind since December 2021. Pensions were also doubled. At the same time, the GoS cut subsidies for fuel and bread as part of new austerity measures. Despite the increase, the new minimum wage could cover only 13 % of the July 2023 minimum expenditure basket (MEB) - a monetary threshold for what a family of five needs in a month to cover its essential needs, including goods, services, utilities, and resources. [[COI Update 2023](#), 4, p. 13]

Food security

As of April 2023, 12.1 million people were food insecure, according to the WFP. These included the 2 million people living in camps. Moreover, an additional 2.9 million people were estimated to be at risk of food insecurity. Food was the third-most reported unmet need in Damascus governorate, according to UNOCHA's 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview, while it was the most reported one in the majority of the other governorates. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.5, p. 58]

According to a survey conducted by the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) in six Syrian cities in 2022, food accounted for the largest share of the total consumption of families. In



Damascus, the rate of spending on food was 42 % of families' total consumption. 81 % of respondents in Damascus stated that their entire income (including money transfers and aid) was not sufficient to cover their basic needs. UNOCHA pointed to harmful changes in food consumption due to the economic crisis, including buying less expensive or less preferable food, and/or reducing the size of their meals at least once a week. These practices were particularly common among female-headed households, where 19 % also reported that at least one household member would go to bed hungry due to a lack of food. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.5 p. 59]

As of September 2023, the cost of the standard reference food basket price reached SYP 938 000 (USD 81 at the official exchange rate of SYP 11 557), doubling since the start of 2023. [[COI Update 2023](#), 4, p. 14]

In June 2023, the WFP announced that it would have to cut its assistance in Syria by about half – from 5.5 million to 3 million people – due to lack of funding and after exhausting other options, including the gradual downsizing of monthly rations to half the standard size [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.5, p. 59]. From July onwards, the WFP food assistance provided to Syrians was reportedly reduced by 40 % [[COI Update 2023](#), 4, p. 14].

Housing and shelter

According to UN-Habitat estimates, about 328 000 houses have been destroyed or damaged beyond repair as a result of the war, while a further 600 000 up to 1 million buildings have been 'moderately or lightly' damaged. In Damascus governorate, the estimated total damage of housing units was 12 %, or 56 792 housing units. The UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) pointed in its Annual Report for 2022 to the presence of explosives in 140 buildings in Damascus and Rural Damascus. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.6, p. 60]

Legislation on urban re-development was reportedly used by the GoS to confiscate or destroy property, mainly in pro-opposition informal settlements. Urban development projects often served to change the demographic composition of the affected neighbourhoods. Moreover, many residents who were displaced abroad were unable to return to Syria to claim ownership and consequently lost their property [[Damascus 2022](#), 3.5.2, p. 48]. Due to new regulatory measures related to real estate and property, anyone with a record of government opposition might face difficulties in buying or selling property [[Damascus 2022](#), 3.5.3, p. 49]. Pro-opposition IDPs and refugees, who owned property in development zones of Damascus were reportedly most likely to sell their properties in the near future, out of fear that they might not receive security clearance or might be expropriated [[Damascus 2022](#), 3.5.3, p. 50].

According to the survey conducted by the FES in six Syrian cities in 2022, the quality of housing and its assets, including the availability of electricity and furniture, was considered best in Damascus city. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.6, pp. 60-61].

An increase in house rents in Damascus by 300 % in recent years was also reported by UNOCHA. As a result of the high prices, around 600 000 IDPs were renting houses in slum areas. [[COI Update 2023](#), 4, p. 14]



Water and sanitation

The UN Secretary-General noted in a May 2023 report that the availability of drinking water in the country had decreased by 40 % since the beginning of the conflict. Moreover, access to water was hampered by a lack of electricity and fuel to run water pumping stations, as well as drought. An outbreak of cholera with thousands of suspected cases was related to poor water quality [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.6 p. 61]. As of March 2023, 43 suspected cases were reportedly recorded in Damascus governorate [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.6, p. 63].

UNOCHA stated in a report of August 2022 that 35 % of households had to spend more than 5 % of their monthly income to pay for water; some sub-districts in Damascus governorate were the most affected. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.6, pp. 61-62]

Sources further note that two of the main water springs in Syria and source of drinking water for the population of Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates have been severely damaged between 2015 and 2017. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.6, p. 62]

Basic healthcare

UNOCHA stated that countrywide people's access to basic services continued to decline, due to damaged infrastructure, lack of critical supplies, and lack of financial means as well as restrictions on free and safe movement. Particularly serious was the lack of technical personnel needed for delivery and maintenance of basic health services and to operate potable water supply systems. In December 2021, WFP reported that almost 23 % of interviewed households across Syria had difficulties in accessing medical care facilities, 48 % struggled with purchasing necessary medicines, mainly because they lacked financial means (55 %), but also due to shortages in pharmacies (17 %) [[Damascus 2022](#), 3.6.1, p.51]. Civilians perceived to be opposed to the government claimed to have been denied access to medical treatment in Damascus [[Damascus 2022](#), 3.6.1, p.52].

According to the latest WHO data available, as of December 2020, Damascus had 15 public hospitals, 11 of which were classified as 'fully functioning' and 4 as 'partially functioning' [[Damascus 2022](#), 3.6.2, p.51]. As of March 2022, public health care was reportedly generally available in Damascus city. However, people would often have to wait long to get treatment and would have to pay for all medical products. In addition, a general shortage of doctors has been noted, as many had left the country [[Damascus 2022](#), 3.6.1, p.52].

According to a report of May 2023 by the UN Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, only 53 % of health centres were operational in Syria. In December 2022, a representative of the World Health Organisation (WHO) noted that almost 30 % of the country's public health facilities remained non-functional. He also pointed to the 'chronic shortage of health care staff'. According to WHO estimates, up to 50 % of the health workforce had left the country and the remaining health workers were unequally distributed across the country, with Damascus being among the governorates with a comparably higher ratio of health personnel per population than other governorates such as Hasaka, Raqqqa or Dar'a. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.7, p. 62]



Moreover, prices of medicines had reportedly been increased several times during the last months, including an increase by 50 % in March 2023. A second 50 %-increase was decided in August 2023, probably motivated by a lack of hard currency and raw materials necessary for the production of medicines. According to UNOCHA's Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA), 94 % of households in Damascus (among other governorates) stated that high costs for consultations, laboratory and diagnostic procedures were a key barrier to health access. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.7, pp. 62-63]

In the context of a survey on the socio-economic situation in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and Homs, respondents in Damascus indicated that access to a doctor, medical specialist and hospital was generally available. However, a significant proportion of respondents could not afford the services: 33 % could not afford the services of a doctor, 43 % could not afford the services of a medical specialist and 41 % could not afford treatment/surgery in a hospital. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.7, pp. 62-63]



The general circumstances prevailing in Damascus assessed in relation to the factors above entail significant hardship. The person's ability to navigate the above circumstances will mostly depend on access to financial means and in exceptional cases, the reasonableness requirement may be satisfied. The assessment should take into account the individual circumstances of the applicant.

7.4.2 Individual circumstances

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

In addition to the general situation in the area of potential IPA, the assessment whether it is reasonable to settle in that part of the country should take into account the individual circumstances of the applicant, including his/her vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms.

Please note that this is a non-exhaustive list.

- **Civil documentation:** as mentioned before, civil documentation is essential to meet the criterion of [travel and admittance](#). It is also required for freedom of movement in general, and the lack of civil documentation results in inability to register births, marriage, death, to access basic services such as healthcare and school registration, to claim property, and to access humanitarian aid [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.6, p. 30; [Damascus 2021](#), 2.4, pp. 35-37]. The required civil documentation is the one issued by the GoS as it reportedly does not accept non-state issued documentation [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.6, p. 32]. Returning refugees or IDPs who do not have proper papers would not be issued a Smart Card, cannot be legally employed, cannot pass through checkpoints, cannot enrol their children in school, and cannot reclaim their old owned or rented home. Also, lack of documentation could have detrimental impact on children who could become stateless. The problem of documentation seems to affect women more than men for societal reasons, and the lack of documents may render a



widow unable to secure her inheritance or hold on to the family home [[Damascus 2021](#), 2.4, p. 36].

- **Gender:** there have been initial findings that women refugees may be returning at a larger scale than men, which has been attributed to men's fear of conscription and the high death rates caused by the conflict. On the other hand, sources reported that many women living in Lebanon do not want to return because they would have to leave their husbands or sons behind or, when returning together, see them conscripted in the army. [[IDPs and returnees](#), 4.1, pp. 36-37]

It has been reported that IDP returnees and refugees returning to their place of origin generally face a number of challenges in obtaining basic information to bolster their decision. This lack of information affects women more than men, increasing their risk of exploitation and abuse. [[IDPs and returnees](#), 4.1, p. 37]

The absence of civil registration and documentation has also proven to be particularly harmful to women and girls. The lack of civil documentation leads to lack of legal identity, without which asserting claims during civil proceedings concerning various types of affairs such as divorce, custody, property ownership and criminal matters becomes problematic. In addition, the lack of civil documentation can also stop women from enjoying their legal and/or traditional rights provided by their marriage contracts and block the access to other rights and services, including humanitarian aid. [[Situation of women](#), 1.2.6, p. 36]

Displaced women and girls without male support or protection, specifically those living in camps and shelters, are more susceptible to violence than men and boys, including sexual violence, child marriage and movement restrictions [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.3, pp. 18-20, 20-21, 24-25, 1.2.10, p. 40]. Women have also been coerced into marrying men at distribution centres, or distribution staff, for a short period of time – for sexual purposes – in order to receive assistance [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.3, p. 26]. Decline in international funding further reduces women's access to health services [[Situation of women](#), 1.2.1, p. 29]. Displacement and refugee life have negative consequences on women's mental health, often triggered by lack of food and livelihood opportunities, in addition to social burdens such as having to ensure care and education for their children [[Situation of women](#), 1.2.1, p. 30]. Women's access to mental health services is more limited in comparison to men [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.1, p. 13].

- **Age:** young age as well as elderly age could significantly limit the applicant's access to means of subsistence such as through employment, making him or her dependent on other providers. Therefore, this element should be seen in conjunction with the available support by family or a broader support network. In the case of children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration, for example, with regard to access to basic education. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.4., p. 58; [Damascus 2021](#), 3.7, pp. 51-53; [IDPs and returnees](#), 4.2, pp. 37-38]

In August 2019, UNICEF reported that 2.6 million children in Syria were displaced as a result of the conflict. The upheaval resulting from displacement has diminished the



capacity of many host communities to absorb and provide services to large numbers of IDPs, including children's access to education [IDPs and returnees, 4.2, p. 37]. It has been found that many children face challenges in accessing proper education, as the educational system in Damascus has not recovered from the impact of the conflict. Furthermore, due to widespread financial challenges, children have to contribute to their families' income. [Damascus 2021, 3.7.3, pp. 52-53]. Overcrowded classrooms (an average of 101 children for each one) and increasing prices for textbooks are relevant challenges too [Country Focus 2023, 2.2.8., p. 64-65]. According to the UNOCHA Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, in the governorate of Damascus, more than 470 000 children were found to be in need [Damascus 2021, 3.6, p. 34].

- **Support network:** sources report that it is important for returnees to go back to their area of origin where they can rely on a social network. Those returning from abroad lack such a safety net if they go to an area where they do not originate from. As the socio-economic divisions have been exacerbated by the war, finding employment in Damascus is reported to be increasingly difficult without *wasta* – nepotism or clout. [Damascus 2020, 5, p. 41]

The increasingly deteriorating economy has led to widespread poverty that has affected the majority of the Damascus population. As such, careful examination is needed in order to be determined whether the applicant will actually have access to a safety net and be able to receive assistance from their connections, even if they have a social network in the city.

- **Professional and educational background and financial means:** the professional background of the applicant, their level of education and available financial means should be taken into account when assessing the reasonableness of IPA, and in particular the access of the applicant to means of basic subsistence. Unemployment in Damascus is common and the situation regarding availability of employment has further deteriorated due to the collapse of the Syrian economy [Country Focus 2023, 2.2.3, pp. 56-57]. Moreover, goods and services have become increasingly unaffordable for the majority of the population, the available salaries are insufficient to meet needs, often even with a second job and individuals have to complement their income with remittances from abroad in order to access basic subsistence [Damascus 2021, 3.2.2, pp. 40-41].
- **Ethnoreligious and linguistic background:** accurate and updated information on the ethno-religious composition of Damascus is not available. Throughout the conflict, the city's demography has been subject to constant change marked by new arrivals and departures and ensuing overcrowding. Displaced communities from across the country have become packed together in the capital, giving rise to a larger, more 'segmented' and more 'heterogenous' population. Sunni communities in former opposition-held areas in Damascus have been subject to mass displacement to other parts of the country. Conversely, Shias from other parts of the country have become displaced to Damascus, including persons affiliated with Iran-backed militias. [Security 2021, 2.10.1, p. 224]



There are reports that there is also presence of Alawites, Druze, Twelver Shia, Ismaili, and Christians. Many districts and neighbourhoods of Damascus and its environs are formed according to the ethnicity and/or religion of their inhabitants, with Kurds largely residing in the districts of Rukn al-Din and Barzeh and poor informal settlements, for example in the Wadi al-Mashari neighbourhood in Dummar. [[Damascus 2021](#), 1.1, pp. 11-12]

- **State of health:** the already strained healthcare system in Damascus had been further overstretched due to the COVID-19 pandemic [[Damascus 2021](#), 3.6.3, pp.49-50]. The health care sector reportedly suffered not only from ‘a chronic shortage of healthcare personnel’ due to high emigration and retirement rates, but also from the low number of functional health facilities. Moreover, accessibility to healthcare is often unaffordable due to its high prices [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.7., p. 62]. Therefore, the health status of the applicant is an important consideration when assessing the reasonableness of IPA for those who require medical treatment. It should also be taken into account that their state of health may affect their ability to work. For those with disabilities, access to basic subsistence such as through employment would be further limited.

7.4.3 Conclusions on reasonableness

Last update: April 2024

The general conclusions on the reasonableness of IPA for particular profiles of applicants are based on an assessment of the general situation in Damascus City and the individual circumstances of such applicants, as outlined in the sections above.



For those applicants who meet the ‘safety’ and ‘travel and admittance’ requirements under Article 8(1) QD, the availability of IPA in Damascus City will depend on the assessment of the reasonableness to settle there.

Based on the general situation in the capital city, and taking into account the applicable individual circumstances, internal protection in Damascus City may be a reasonable alternative only in exceptional cases. Such exceptional cases would in particular include some adult applicants with significant financial means or who have a support network that is willing and capable of assisting them in accessing basic subsistence if they settle in the city.

In this regard, the rapidly deteriorating economic situation, the healthcare situation and food insecurity, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on those and on the healthcare system in Damascus, should also be considered.



8. Exclusion

[Article 12\(2\) QD](#)

[Article 17 QD](#)

This chapter looks into the potential applicability of the exclusion grounds in relation to acts committed by applicants from Syria.



The contents of this chapter include:

Factual circumstances in which exclusion may be relevant: [8.1. Relevant circumstances](#).

Conclusions and guidance concerning the application of the different exclusion grounds to these circumstances: [8.2. Guidance with regard to Syria](#).

8.1 Relevant circumstances

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

In the context of Syria, various circumstances may require consideration of the potential applicability of exclusion grounds. Under applicable law, there is no set time limit for the application of the grounds for exclusion. While the focus in this chapter is primarily on the recent events, it should be highlighted that applicants can be excluded from international protection for acts committed in the more distant past (e.g. during the Syrian Occupation of Lebanon (1976-2005) or in the context of the Muslim Brotherhood Uprising in Syria (1979-1982), or based on their involvement in other excludable acts of the Syrian regime). In the context of the different conflicts since 2011, most actors have been widely reported to engage in actions which may lead to exclusion.



The examples mentioned in this chapter are non-exhaustive and non-conclusive. Each case should be examined on its own merits.



8.1.1 The Syrian intervention in the Lebanese civil war and presence in Lebanon (1976-2005)

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*Minor updates added: February 2023

In June 1976, Syria intervened in the Lebanese civil war sending a force of 25 000 soldiers to Lebanon to prevent the defeat of its Maronite Christian allies. It maintained military presence in Lebanon for the next three decades and exerted significant influence on Lebanese politics. During its presence in Lebanon, Syria maintained up to 30 000 soldiers in the country. It had clashes with Israeli forces and various Lebanese factions. Syria lost thousands of soldiers. During Syria's military presence in Lebanon, excludable crimes such as enforced disappearances and torture were carried out against Lebanese nationals, Palestinian refugees, and others by the Syrian military and intelligence branches. In 2005, following the assassination of the Lebanese premier Rafiq al-Hariri, who was a critic of the Syrian presence in Lebanon, Syrian forces withdrew from Lebanon under international pressure. [[Security 2020](#), Annex II, pp. 242, 243]

8.1.2 The Muslim Brotherhood Uprising in Syria (1979-1982) which comprised the Hama Massacre (February 1982)

Last update: September 2020

Islamist resistance to the Assad government grew in 1979-1981. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Muslim groups instigated uprisings and riots in Aleppo, Homs and Hama. The Muslim Brotherhood attempted to topple the Assad regime with targeted killings, guerrilla warfare and large-scale uprisings. Between 1979 and 1981, Muslim Brotherhood militants killed over 300 Assad supporters in Aleppo alone; Syrian forces responded by killing 2 000 members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

In February 1982, the Muslim Brotherhood attacks on the government and the uprising in the city of Hama were suppressed in a month-long siege by the army. An estimated 10 000 to 25 000 civilians were killed. Special forces belonging to the intelligence services, in particular the 'Defence Brigades' (*Sirayat al-difa*) commanded by Rif'at al-Assad, President Hafez al-Assad's brother, are reported to have carried out massive arrests of civilians, as well as torture and executions. [[Security 2020](#), Annex II, pp. 242, 243]

8.1.3 Current conflicts (2011-ongoing)

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024



An overview of the most important actors who may have been involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity is given below.

The Government of Syria and associated armed groups

The implication of the regime and the associated armed groups in acts which fall under the exclusion provision of [Article 12\(2\)\(a\) QD](#) and [Article 17\(1\)\(a\) QD](#) has been noted repeatedly by the UN and other actors. More than 100 000 people have been detained, abducted or gone missing so far since the beginning of Syria's civil war in 2011, largely at the hands of the GoS's security forces, the police, the Army, pro-government militias and the different branches of the intelligence service [[Security 2022](#), 1.4.1, pp. 25-27; [Targeting 2020](#), 1.1, pp. 14-18; [Security 2019](#), 4.3, pp. 33-34]. There are multiple reports of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances at the hand of government forces, in particular by elite divisions such as the Fourth Division, the Special Forces (including the former Tiger Forces) and others, as well as pro-government militias [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.1, p. 12; [Security 2023](#), 1.4.1, p. 26, [Targeting 2022](#), 1.1.2, p. 20; [Actors](#), 2.4, pp. 37-39]. Those who were arrested were subjected to systematic torture in one of the intelligence services' many detention centres [[Security 2019](#), 4.3, p.33]. Most of the victims were men between the ages of 18 and 60, but torture of women and children was also reported [[Actors](#), 2.4, p. 38]. They were detained for days or months, often without being brought before a judge and without being told what they were accused of. In most cases, the detainees' families were not informed of their whereabouts. Detainees were held in crowded cells and without sufficient food. Many are assumed to have died while in detention as a result of torture, starvation or lack of adequate medical assistance [[Security 2019](#), 4.3, p. 33]. Tens of thousands of people remain disappeared, most of them since 2011, including peaceful activists, humanitarian workers, lawyers, journalists, peaceful critics and government opponents, as well as individuals detained in place of relatives wanted by the authorities [[Actors](#), 2.4, p. 37].

Throughout the conflict, government forces and associated armed groups have used a wide range of tactics to force opposition held areas into surrendering including sieges, blocking of humanitarian aid, denial of access to food and other basic services, and targeted attacks on medical facilities, schools and local markets. GoS attacks on opposition-held areas have been largely disproportionate, including attacks against protected objects and residential areas. The GoS not only used cluster bombs, which have an indiscriminate effect, but also weapons that have been banned internationally, such as some chemical and incendiary weapons. The Assad regime has been reported to deliberately and repeatedly target civilians in Syria with both conventional and chemical weapons. Reports range from 32 to about 330 chemical attacks attributed to the Syrian government [[Security 2022](#), 1.6.1 (d), p. 54; [Targeting 2022](#), 8.1, pp. 80-82 ; [Security 2020](#), 1.6.1.4, p. 35-36, Annex II, pp. 244, 245; [Actors](#), 2.4, pp. 38-39]. Sexual violence, including rape, of women, girls and occasionally men, committed by government forces and associated militias during ground operations, raids and in detention, was also reported [[Actors](#), 2.4, p. 38]. Recent sources indicated that, GoS forces continued to employ ground-based and aerial attacks on populated areas resulting in civilian casualties. They were further responsible for arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings and deaths in detention centres due to torture [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.1, p. 26].

Child recruitment by GoS armed forces, including NDF and other pro-government militias was also reported [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 40; [Targeting 2020](#), 12.1, pp. 92-93].



Anti-government armed groups

Exclusion considerations could be relevant with regard to (former) members of all anti-government armed groups.

In 2017, for example, Syria was ranked fifth in the world with regard to deaths resulting from terrorist attacks, after Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria and Somalia. ISIL, a UN- and EU-designated terrorist organisation, was responsible for 63 % of the registered deaths resulting from terrorist attacks in Syria in 2017 [[Actors](#), 6.1, p. 59; [Security 2019](#), 4.2, p.32].

Following the establishment of its so called ‘caliphate’ in Syria and Iraq, ISIL has killed hundreds of civilians, including women and children, and carried out public executions, beheadings and crucifixions. Furthermore, ISIL carried out assassinations, suicide attacks, and abductions. Religious minorities in Syria, such as Shias, Ismailis, Alawites and Christians, as well as Sunni Muslims who did not adhere to ISIL’s religious laws, were specifically targeted [[Security 2022](#), 1.4.6, pp. 37-40; [Targeting 2020](#), 5.3.2, pp. 56-57; [Security 2020](#), Annex II, pp. 244-247; [Actors](#), 6.4, pp. 61-63]. ISIL used civilians as human shield in its defence of Raqqa and other towns, and employed internationally banned landmines to hold off the advance of attacking forces [[Security 2020](#), Annex II, p. 246]. Recent sources noted that ISIL continued its ‘guerrilla warfare tactics’ launching hit and run attacks against GoS and SDF forces, but also against civilians [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.6, pp. 33-34].

HTS, also a UN- and EU-designated terrorist organisation, was formed in 2017 as a coalition of Islamist Sunni anti-government armed groups, through the merger of *Jabhat al-Nusrah* (also a UN-designated terrorist organisation since 2013) with other smaller factions [[Actors](#), 4.1.1, p. 49]. Attacks by HTS and affiliated armed groups on GoS positions were described as often indiscriminate in nature. These groups also terrorised, killed, and maimed dozens of civilians in the countryside of Aleppo, Hama, and elsewhere [[Security 2022](#), 7.3, pp. 77-78; [Security 2020](#), 1.6.1.2, p. 33]. The group has conducted formal military campaigns, assassinations, hostage takings, and ‘lone wolf’ operations, including suicide bombings. In areas where HTS is operating, civilians are unlawfully detained, kidnapped and tortured for expressing political dissent. It was reported that civilians, including humanitarian workers and media activists were targeted and received death threats for being critical of HTS, as well as extorted and kidnapped for ransom [[Actors](#), 4.1.4, p. 52]. In recent times, the group attempted to publicly distance itself from al-Qaeda and portray it as a legitimate civilian authority. Despite its legitimisation efforts, HTS continued to commit serious human rights violations [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.4, p. 31].

Groups operating under the SNA (the former NLF) were involved in kidnappings, abductions, torture, extortion and assassinations of civilians. It was reported that Turkish forces and the affiliated SNA were responsible for indiscriminate attacks on residential areas, summary killings and unlawful attacks that killed and injured civilians, among others, during the offensive in northeast Syria. The SNA-branded group Ahrar al-Sharqiya has been most frequently named as the perpetrator of summary killings and human rights abuses during the October 2019 offensive. According to recent sources, SNA forces continued to be responsible for extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, including rape, and pillage, ‘all of



which may amount to separate war crimes' [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.2, p. 28; [COI Update 2022](#), 3., pp. 8-9; [Security 2022](#), 1.4.2, pp. 29-30; [Actors](#), 5.2, pp. 58-59].

There were also reports of child recruitment by anti-government armed groups, such as Ahrar al Sham, groups affiliated with the FSA, ISIL, Army of Islam, HTS, and Nur al-Din al-Zanki [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 41; [Targeting 2020](#), 12.1, pp. 92-94].

Kurdish political actors (PYD) and security forces (SDF, YPG, Asayish)

The PYD and Asayish engaged in arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and torture of political opponents such as the KNC, arrests of journalists, members of human rights organisations, individuals who refused to cooperate with Kurdish groups or persons perceived to be affiliated with ISIL or armed opposition groups [[Actors](#), 3.3, p.48]. During anti-ISIL operations in Hasaka and Raqqah governorates, the YPG forces were reported to be engaged in razing of villages, confiscation of property and forced displacement of people in retaliation for perceived affiliation or sympathies to ISIL or other armed groups [[Targeting 2020](#), 3.2, pp. 41-42]. Thousands of women, men and children were reported to be unlawfully interned or detained in areas under the control of SDF, some of them held in deplorable conditions in makeshift camps unfit to meet their basic needs. The YPG/YPJ were also reported to recruit children [[Actors](#), 3.3, p. 48]. In the period April 2021 to July 2022, the SDF engaged in extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention of civilians [[Security 2022](#), 1.4.3., p. 32]. Recent sources noted that, the SDF engaged in extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearance as well as torture in detention centres [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.3., p. 30]. They also continued to recruit children, whose number increased in 2022 [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 41].

8.1.4 Criminality

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

Criminal activity in Syria is widely reported. Some of the crimes could trigger the consideration of exclusion, as they would qualify as serious (non-political) crimes and/or, depending on additional elements, as war crimes, crimes against humanity, or acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the UN.

Criminality is reported to be a main driver behind the activities of pro-government militias which are largely autonomous and free to exploit the population in the areas they control. Many have reportedly turned into a mafia known for stealing, looting, corruption, gun smuggling, drug smuggling and committing violations against civilians.

In several governorates, a state of lawlessness was reported where people were victim of extortions, kidnappings, assassinations, looting, robberies, and human trafficking [see for example: [Security 2022](#), 2.14.3., p. 238; [Security 2020](#), 1.5.1. p. 26, 2.3.3. p. 93-94, 2.6.3. p. 124, 2.9.3.5. p. 171, 2.11.3., 2.12.3.1. pp. 208-209, 2.14.3. p. 234].



In GoS-held areas in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, which have been recaptured from ISIL, militias were reported to be in control and engaging in criminality and extortion from civilians [[Security 2020](#), 1.5.1, p. 26].

The rise of militias, warlords and war profiteers, coupled with heavy influence and dependence on foreign involvement, are factors that experts assessed could potentially pose significant threats to maintaining centralised control by the State. Competing economic interests of militias linked to smuggling, looting, and criminality have reportedly led to occasional clashes between army branches and militias. [[Actors](#), 2.3.1, p. 28]

Looting, theft and expropriation of Kurdish properties by SNA factions in the aftermath of the capture of Afrin was also reported [[Actors](#), 5.2, p. 58].

8.1.5 Violence against women and children

Last update: April 2024

Violence against women and children (for example sexual violence, domestic violence, early/forced marriage) has been prevalent in both public and private spheres and could also potentially amount to a serious (non-political) crime. See also the profile [4.11. Women and girls](#). See also sections [5.2.3. Criminal violence](#) under [5.2. Article 15\(b\) QD](#).

8.2 Guidance with regard to Syria

8.2.1 Article 12(2)(a) and Article 17(1)(a) QD

[Article 12\(2\)\(a\) QD](#)

[Article 17\(1\)\(a\) QD](#)

Last update: February 2023

*Minor updates added: April 2024

It can be noted that the ground ‘crime against peace’ is not likely to be of relevance in the cases of applicants from Syria.

Reported crimes such as murder, torture, and rape by the different actors could amount to crimes against humanity when committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population. Crimes in the context of past events, such as the Muslim Brotherhood uprising could also trigger the consideration of exclusion in relation to ‘crimes against humanity’.



Violations of international humanitarian law by different parties in the current and in past conflicts in Syria could amount to war crimes, such as the deliberate and systematic attacks on hospitals, the use of prohibited weapons and the deliberate indiscriminate attacks on civilians, etc.

Some acts in the current conflicts, such as extrajudicial killings, torture, enforced disappearance, could amount to both war crimes and crimes against humanity.

According to COI, especially (former) members of the SAA, the GoS intelligence- and security services and associated armed groups (e.g. NDF), as well as anti-government armed groups (e.g. FSA, ISIL, *Jabhat al-Nusrah*/HTS, SNA), Kurdish political actors (PYD), and security forces (SDF, YPG, Asayish) can be implicated in acts that would qualify as war crimes and/or crimes against humanity.

In terms of qualifying the relevant acts as war crimes, the following classification of some of the conflicts taking place in Syria may be relevant:

- non-international armed conflicts between GoS and various anti-GoS armed groups, most notably HTS, SNA and ISIL;
- international armed conflict between the US-led coalition against ISIL and GoS (due to its military intervention in Syria without the consent of the GoS);
- international armed conflict between Syria and Türkiye, as the GoS has not accepted Turkish presence on its territory; military confrontations between Syrian and Turkish armed forces also took place during the conflict;
- international armed conflict between Syria and Israel, who has been conducting air strikes on Iranian targets in Syria without the consent of the GoS;
- non-international armed conflict between Türkiye and the YPG forces;

[[Security 2023](#), 1.3, p. 18; [Security 2022](#), 1.1, p. 17; [Security 2021](#), 1.1, p. 13]

8.2.2 Article 12(2)(b) and Article 17(1)(b) QD

[Article 12\(2\)\(b\) QD](#)

[Article 17\(1\)\(b\) QD](#)

Last update: September 2020

Criminal activity in Syria is widely reported, including kidnappings, assassinations, gun smuggling, drug smuggling, human trafficking and robberies. Such serious (non-political) crimes would trigger the application of [Article 12\(2\)\(b\)/Article 17\(1\)\(b\) QD](#).

Some serious (non-political) crimes could be linked to an armed conflict (e.g. if they are committed in order to finance the activities of armed groups) or could amount to fundamentally inhumane acts committed as a part of a systematic or widespread attack



against a civilian population, in which case they should instead be examined under [Article 12\(2\)\(a\)/Article 17\(1\)\(a\) QD](#).

8.2.3 Article 12(2)(c) and Article 17(1)(c) QD

[Article 12\(2\)\(c\) QD](#)

[Article 17\(1\)\(c\) QD](#)

Last update: September 2020

(Former) membership in terrorist groups such as ISIL and *Jabhat al-Nusrah*/HTS could trigger relevant considerations and require an examination of the applicant's activities under [Article 12\(2\)\(c\)/Article 17\(1\)\(c\) QD](#), in addition to the considerations under [Article 12\(2\)\(b\)/Article 17\(1\)\(b\) QD](#). The application of exclusion should be based on an individual assessment of the specific facts in the context of the applicant's activities within that organisation. The position of the applicant within the organisation would constitute a relevant consideration and a high-ranking position could justify a (rebuttable) presumption of individual responsibility. Nevertheless, it remains necessary to examine all relevant circumstances before an exclusion decision can be made.

Where the available information indicates possible involvement in crimes against peace, war crimes or crimes against humanity, the assessment would need to be made in light of the exclusion grounds under [Article 12\(2\)\(a\)/Article 17\(1\)\(a\) QD](#).

8.2.4 Article 17(1)(d) QD

[Article 17\(1\)\(d\) QD](#)

Last update: February 2023

In the examination of the application for international protection, the exclusion ground under [Article 17\(1\)\(d\) QD](#) (danger to the community or the security of the Member State) is only applicable to persons otherwise eligible for subsidiary protection.

Unlike the other exclusion grounds, the application of this provision is based on a forward-looking assessment of risk. Nevertheless, the examination takes into account the past and/or current activities of the applicant, such as association with certain groups considered to represent a danger to the security of the Member State or criminal activities of the applicant.



For general guidance on Exclusion, see [EUAA Practical Guide: Exclusion](#) and [EUAA Practical Guide on Exclusion for Serious \(Non-Political\) Crimes](#).



Annex I. Abbreviations and glossary

Term	Definition
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
Ahrar al-Sham	Sunni Salafist Jihadist armed group active in Syria, particularly Idlib Province; historical 'partner' of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham in Syria
Al-Yarmouk camp	Main refugee camp for Palestinians; located in Damascus
APD (Asylum Procedures Directive)	Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection
Baath Party (Syria)	Arab Socialist Baath Party; the ruling political party in Syria headed by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad
Badia	Desert located in Central Syria, south of the Euphrates, specifically in the part of rural Homs, eastern Hama, southern Aleppo, southern Raqqa, and western and southern Deir Ez-Zor
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
COI	Country of origin information
Col	See UNCOI.
Defector	A defector is a former member of the Syrian Armed Forces who has left the Syrian Armed Forces and joined an armed opposition group in Syria.
Deserter	A deserter is a former member of the Syrian Armed Forces (e.g. a conscript, a non-commissioned officer (corporal or sergeant) or an officer) who has left his post or unit in the Syrian Armed Forces without permission.



Term	Definition
Draft evader	A draft evader is a Syrian male, above the age of 18, who has avoided being drafted into the Syrian Armed Forces either by hiding from the Syrian authorities or by fleeing Syria.
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
FES	Friedrich Ebert Foundation
FSA	Free Syrian Army
GoS	Government of Syria
HAD	Hurras al-Din
Hezbollah	Lebanese Hezbollah; Lebanese Shia Islamist armed militant group backed by Iran and active on behalf of Assad in Syria
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
ID	Identification documentation
Idlib de-escalation area	The term 'Idlib de-escalation area' or 'Idlib de-escalation zone' covers the areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib governorate as well as the adjoining, similar areas in western Aleppo and northern Hama and Latakia governorates.
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IPA	International Protection Alternative
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State (IS), or Daesh



Term	Definition
Jaysh al-Islam	Sunni Salafist Jihadist armed opposition group active in Eastern Ghouta outside Damascus; rival of Faylaq al-Rahman
KNC	Kurdish National Council
LGBTIQ	LGBTIQ people are people: who are attracted to others of their own gender (lesbian, gay) or any gender (bisexual); whose gender identity and/or expression does not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth (trans, non-binary); who are born with sex characteristics that do not fit the typical definition of male or female (intersex); and whose identity does not fit into a binary classification of sexuality and/or gender (queer).
Military service	‘Military service’ is used broadly to cover both military service and reserve service in the Syrian Armed Forces.
mukhtar	Mayor or chief of a village/neighbourhood
NDF	National Defence Forces, <i>Quwat al Difa al Watani</i>
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NLF	National Liberation Front
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PKK	Kurdistan Workers’ Party (<i>Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê</i>)
PYD	Democratic Union Party (Kurdish)



Term	Definition
QD (Qualification Directive)	Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted
Reservist	A reservist is a Syrian male who has previously completed his mandatory military service in Syria and can still be called up for reserve service in the Syrian Armed Forces.
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
sharia	The religious law of Islam, Islamic canonical law
SNA	Syrian National Army
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
Suqour al-Sahara	Desert Hawks; former irregular armed group supportive of Assad in Syria backed by wealthy Syrian Alawites
Taqrir	A report, in the sense of reporting people to the security agencies
Taswiyat al-Wad'	The process of regulating one's status
UN	United Nations
UNCOI	Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNPFA	United Nations Population Fund





Term	Definition
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
US	United States of America
USDOS	United States Department of State
UXO	Unexploded ordnance
Wasta	Networks of support based on patronage
WFP	UN World Food Programme
YPG	Kurdish People's Protection Units
YPJ	Kurdish Women's Protection Units





Annex II. Country of origin information references

The main COI sources used in the common analysis are the following (listed alphabetically by reference used in the text).

Actors	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria - Actors (December 2019) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2019_12_EASO_COI_Report_Syria_Actors.pdf
COI Update 2022	EUAA Country of Origin Information Query: Syria - Major human rights, security, and humanitarian developments (November 2022) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2022_11_Q36_EUAA_COI_Query_Response_Syria_Major_human_rights_security_and_humanitarian_developments.pdf
COI Update 2023	EUAA Country of Origin Information Query: Syria - Major human rights, security, and socio-economic developments (December 2023) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2023_12_EUAA_COI_Query_Response_Q69_Syria_Major_human_rights_security_and_socio-economic_developments.pdf
Country Focus 2023	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria – Country Focus (October 2023) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2023_10_EUAA_COI_Report_Syria_Country_focus.pdf
Damascus 2020	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria - Socio-economic situation: Damascus City (February 2020)



	Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/02_2020_EASO_COI_Report_Syria_Socio_economic_situation_Damascus_City.pdf
Damascus 2021	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria - Socio-economic situation: Damascus City (April 2021) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2021_04_EASO_COI_Report_Syria_Socio_economic_situation_Damascus_city.pdf
Damascus 2022	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria - Socio-economic situation: Damascus City (August 2022) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2022_08_EUAA_COI_Report_Syria_Socio_economic_situation_in_Damascus_city.pdf
IDPs and returnees	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria - Internally displaced persons, returnees and internal mobility (April 2020) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/04_2020_EASO_COI_Report_Syria_IDPs_returnees_and_internal_mobility.pdf
Military service	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria - Military service (April 2021) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2021_04_EASO_COI_Report_Military_Service.pdf
Recaptured areas	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria – Exercise of authority in recaptured areas (January 2020) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/01_2020_EASO_COI_Report_Syria_Exercise_of_authority_in_recaptured_areas.pdf



Returnees from abroad	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria – Situation of returnees from abroad (June 2021) Available at: https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2021_06_EASO_Syria_Situation_returnees_from_abroad.pdf
Security 2019	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria – Security situation (November 2019) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/11_2019_EASO_COI_Report_Syria_Security_situation.pdf
Security 2020	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria – Security situation (May 2020) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/05_2020_EASO_COI_Report_Syria_Security_situation.pdf
Security 2021	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria – Security situation (July 2021) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2021_07_EASO_COI_Report_Syria_Security_situation.pdf
Security 2022	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria – Security situation (September 2022) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2022_09_EUAA_COI_Report_Syria_Security_situation.pdf
Security 2023	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria – Security situation (October 2023) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2023_10_EUAA_COI_Report_Syria_Security_situation.pdf





Situation of women	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria – Situation of women (February 2020) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/02_2020_EASO_COI_Report_Syria_Situation_of_women.pdf
Targeting 2020	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria – Targeting of individuals (March 2020) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/03_2020_Syria_Targeting_of_individuals.pdf
Targeting 2022	EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: Syria – Targeting of individuals (September 2022) Available at: https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2022_09_EUAA_COI_Report_Syria_Targeting_of_individuals.pdf



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