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- Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)
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The review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report, but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of the EUAA.





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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the [EUAA COI Report Methodology \(2023\)](#). The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

‘Refugee’, ‘risk’ and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither the EUAA, nor any person acting on its behalf, may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 31 August 2023. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the [Methodology](#) section of the [Introduction](#).



Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Definition
AANES	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
AOAV	Action on Armed Violence
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
EUI	European University Institute
GoS	Government of Syria
HAD	Hurras al-Din
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
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
NDF	National Defence Forces
NLF	National Liberation Front
NPA	North Press Agency
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party





Term	Definition
PYD	Democratic Union Party (Kurdish)
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SHRC	Syrian Human Rights Committee
SNA	Syrian National Army
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
SOHR	Syrian Observatory of Human Rights
SSG	Syrian Salvation Government
STJ	Syrians for Truth & Justice
TWI	Washington Institute for Near East Policy
UNCOI	Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
USDOD	United States Department of Defense
UXO	Unexploded ordnance
YPG	Kurdish People's Protection Units





Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide relevant information for the assessment of international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection, and in particular for use in updating EUAA's country guidance development on Syria.

In order to support the assessment of the application of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive on a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict, the security situation report examines the nature of armed conflicts taking place in the territory, the nature of the violence and presence of armed actors in different areas, and the impact on civilians, for example in terms of casualties/fatalities and conflict-linked displacement.

The report covers the period of August 2022 – August 2023, and provides an update of the EUAA COI report: [Syria - Security situation \(September 2022\)](#). The report should be read in conjunction with the [EUAA COI report: Syria - Country focus \(October 2023\)](#).

Methodology

This report was jointly drafted by EUAA, national COI departments in EU+ countries¹ and ACCORD and reviewed by EUAA and national COI departments in EU+ countries, as mentioned in the [Acknowledgements](#) section.

This report is produced in line with the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2023)² and the EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2023).³

Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference (ToR) of this report were defined by EUAA based on discussions held and input received from COI experts in the EUAA COI specialist network on Syria and from policy experts in EU+ countries within the framework of a Country Guidance development on Syria. The ToR also build on previous EUAA COI reports on Syria covering the same topics. The Terms of Reference for this report can be found in [Annex II](#) of this report.

Collecting information

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 8 August 2023. Some limited additional information was added during

¹ EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland.

² EUAA, EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, February 2023, [url](#)

³ EUAA, Writing and Referencing Guide for EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, February 2023, [url](#)



the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 31 August 2023.

Quality control

To ensure that the authors respected the EUAA COI Report Methodology and that the Terms of Reference were comprehensively addressed, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report, which was finalised on 31 August 2023. EUAA also performed the final quality review and editing of the text.

Sources

In accordance with EUAA COI methodology, a range of different published documentary sources have been consulted on relevant topics for this report. These include: COI reports by governments; information from civil society, advocacy groups, humanitarian organisations, and NGOs; international and NGO human rights reports; reports produced by various bodies of the United Nations; Syrian and regionally-based media and social media; academic publications and think tank reports and specialised sources covering Syria. All information from these sources was consulted within time constraints and within the research constraints posed by Syria's challenging information-gathering environment.

Sources on security incidents

For data on violent incidents, publicly available curated datasets from the organisation [Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project \(ACLED\)](#) have been used. ACLED is a project collecting, analysing and mapping information on crisis and conflict in Africa, south and south-east Asia and Middle East and provides datasets on conflict incidents. It collects data on violent incidents in Syria, coding each incident with the time and place, type of violent incident, the parties involved and the number of fatalities. The information is collected in a database that is openly accessible, searchable and kept continuously up to date. The data primarily come from secondary sources such as traditional media reports, but also from reports by international institutions and non-governmental organisations, targeted new media platforms, and data provided by local partners of ACLED.⁴ On Syria, ACLED incorporates data from a number of partners, including the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), Airwars, the Carter Center, Liveuamap, Syria Direct, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the London School of Economics' Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit, the International Security and Development Center and Clingendael Institute.⁵

⁴ ACLED, Methodology, April 2019, [url](#); ACLED, FAQs: ACLED Sourcing Methodology, March 2023, [url](#)

⁵ ACLED, Syria Partner Network, April 2019, [url](#); ACLED, ACLED Integrates New Partner Data on the War in Syria 5 April 2019, [url](#)



ACLED codes security incidents as follows:

- **Battles:** violent clashes between at least two armed groups. Battles can occur between armed and organised state, non-state, and external groups, and in any combination therein. Sub-events of battles are armed clashes, government regains territory and non-state actor overtakes territory.
- **Violence against civilians:** violent events where an organised armed group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants. It includes violent attacks on unarmed civilians such as sexual violence, attacks, abduction/forced disappearance.
- **Explosions/remote violence:** events where an explosion, bomb or other explosive device were used to engage in conflict. They include one-sided violent events in which the tool for engaging in conflict creates asymmetry by taking away the ability of the targets to engage or defend themselves and their location. They include air/drone strikes, suicide bombs, shelling/artillery/missile attack, remote explosive/landmine/IED, grenade, chemical weapon.
- **Riots:** a violent demonstration, often involving a spontaneous action by unorganised, unaffiliated members of society. They include violent demonstration, mob violence.
- **Protests:** public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them. It includes peaceful protests, protests with intervention, excessive force against protesters.
- **Strategic developments:** information regarding the activities of violent groups that is not itself recorded as political violence, yet may trigger future events or contribute to political dynamics within and across states. It includes agreements, change to group/activity, non-violent transfer of territory, arrests.⁶

For the purpose of this report only the following type of events were included in the analysis: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. Security incidents numbers and associated graphs/maps at country and governorate level are based on a publicly available ACLED dataset for Middle East.⁷

Additionally, ACLED codes actors involved in security incidents as follows: Actor1 is the 'named actor involved in the event' and Actor2 is the 'named actor involved in the event, while '[i]n most cases, an event requires two actors, noted in columns 'ACTOR1' and 'ACTOR2'. However, event types 'Explosions/Remote violence', 'Riots', 'Protests', and 'Strategic developments' can include 'one-sided events'.⁸ The ACLED coding of Actor1 and Actor2 does not necessarily indicate that one is the aggressor (e.g. Actor1) and the other one (e.g. Actor2) the target or victim.⁹ When focusing on the involvement of specific actors within certain regions, the drafters based their analysis on all those incidents, where ACLED coded the relevant actor either as 'Actor1' or as 'Actor2'. This approach aims to illustrate the general level of involvement of the respective actors in the conflict without distinguishing between Actor1 and Actor2, as these categories, according to ACLED's methodology, do not indicate any differentiation in terms of content/semantics.

Potential limits for COI use of ACLED data include:

⁶ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, 2023, [url](#), pp. 10-20

⁷ ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

⁸ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, 2023, [url](#), p. 22

⁹ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, 2023, [url](#), p. 4



- Data primarily come from secondary sources such as media reports. Secondary sources used by ACLED are of variable quality, may be politically biased, and may lack comprehensiveness.
- Certain secondary sources might be overrepresented in ACLED datasets covering security incidents in a specific country/province.
- Lack of reporting or underreporting for specific countries/provinces can occur.
- Geographical precision of security incidents is variable: the provincial capital will represent the region if no further precisions are available and may be over-represented.

To mitigate these challenges and limitations, ACLED data on security incidents has been corroborated/contrasted with information from other sources which were available over the reference period.

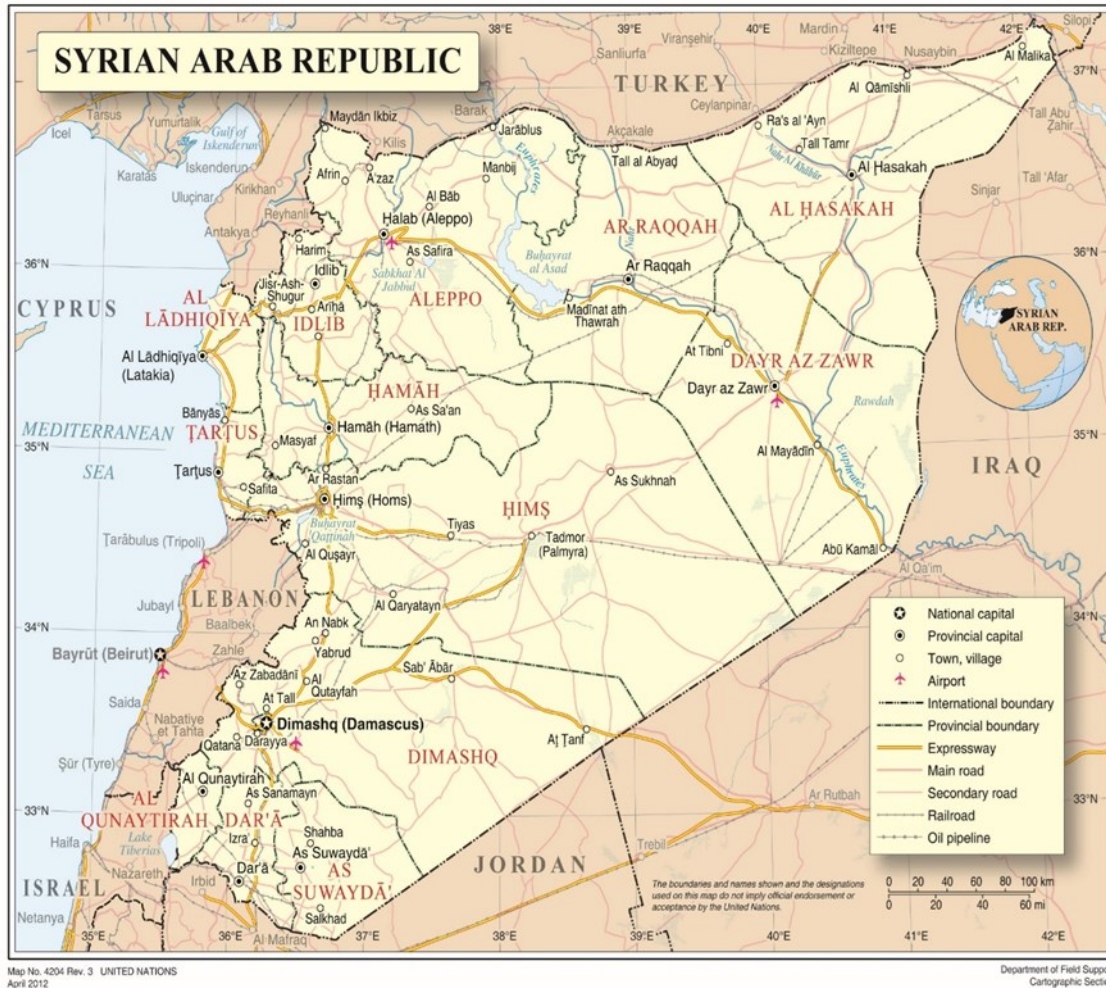
Sources on civilian casualties

The main source on civilian fatalities in Syria used in this report is the Syrian Network of Human Rights (SNHR). The [Syrian Network of Human Rights \(SNHR\)](#) is a non-profit human rights organisation founded in 2011 which works on documenting human rights violations in Syria. SNHR relies on a network of volunteers in each governorate to compile lists of civilian fatalities and verify victims' identities by photo or video and by speaking with family members, witnesses, and hospitals. SNHR reports fatalities by gender, age, perpetrator, governorate, and other classifications. It only records civilian fatalities – with the exception of the death toll among victims who died due to torture, which includes armed combatants and civilians.¹⁰ SNHR provided EUAA with its dataset on civilian fatalities for the period August 2022 – June 2023.

Where available, information from other sources documenting civilian casualties in the Syrian conflict (Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, the Syrian Human Rights Committee, Action on Armed Violence, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Uppsala Conflict Data Program) has been included.

¹⁰ For detailed information on SNHR's methodology see [url](#); SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 1,734 Civilians in Syria in 2020, Including 99 in December, 1 January 2021, [url](#), p. 4

Maps

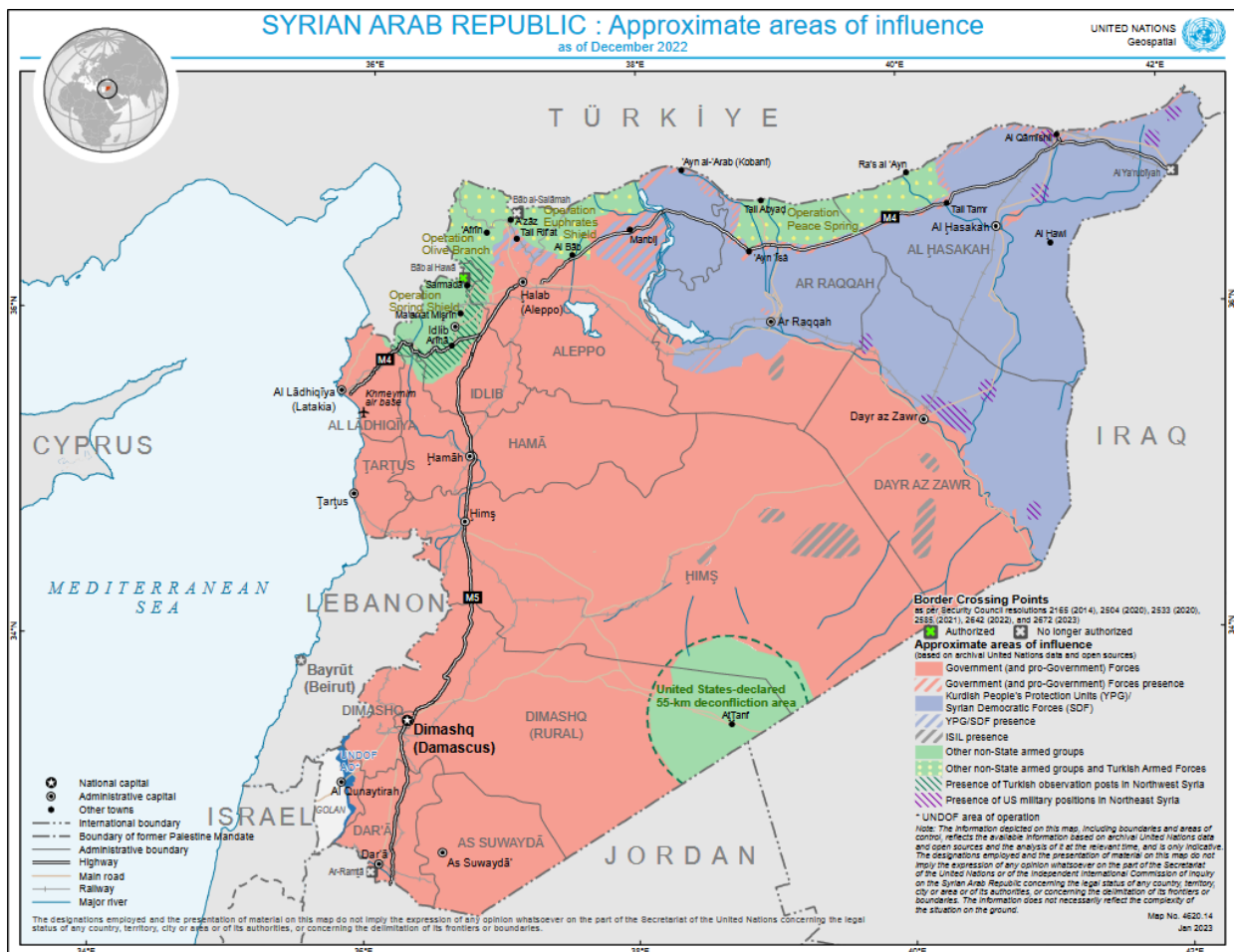


Map 1: Syrian Arab Republic, © United Nations ¹¹

¹¹ Syria, Map No. 4204 Rev. 3, April 2012, United Nations, [url](#)

1. General description of the security situation

1.1. Overview of conflicts



Map 2: Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022, © UN Geospatial¹²

Since a March 2020 ceasefire negotiated between Türkiye and Russia froze the last major frontline in Idlib province, the country has de facto been partitioned into four main areas controlled by different parties to the conflict: the GoS-controlled area with backing from Russia and Iran, the northeast controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) backed by the US, a territory in northern Syria under control of the Syrian National Army (SNA) backed by Türkiye and the area in the northwest controlled by the rebel group Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham

¹² UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022, January 2023, [url](#)



(HTS).¹³ While the frontlines have remained static, the conflict has changed from large-scale military clashes to localised clashes between armed groups and government forces.¹⁴

The UNCOI noted, for the period July until December 2022, an increase in mutual attacks between SDF forces on one side and Türkiye and SNA on the other side in the country's north, as well as ongoing instability in the southern governorate of Dar'a, with clashes between armed groups as well as attacks on civilians.¹⁵ It further reported airstrikes by Russian forces on areas held by HTS in the north-west, as well as Israeli airstrikes in several governorates.¹⁶ In the first half of 2023, ongoing hostilities including airstrikes, ground-based strikes and targeted attacks affected the North and Northwest in particular.¹⁷ ISIL cells continued to be active in the Syrian desert¹⁸ as well as in the southern governorate of Dar'a.¹⁹

1.2. Political developments

States from the region such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have re-established diplomatic relations with Syria²⁰ and the country was officially readmitted to the Arab League at the start of May 2023.²¹ President Bashar Al-Assad attended the Arab League Summit in Jeddah soon after.²² Efforts made by the Gulf states and Jordan to normalise ties were reportedly aimed at getting the Syrian government to stem the flow of drugs (such as Captagon pills) being trafficked from Syria across the region.²³ Multilateral efforts for a political solution to the Syrian conflict yielded no results,²⁴ namely the 20th round of the Astana talks, a forum bringing together the Syrian government and opposition delegations,²⁵ as well as Russia, Iran and Türkiye.²⁶ Meetings of the Syrian Constitutional Committee in Geneva under supervision of the UN special envoy to Syria similarly did not

¹³ IISS, Syria's frozen conflict and a wave of earthquake-related diplomacy, April 2023, [url](#); A more detailed description of the different armed actors and the conflicts they are involved in is provided by the Rule of Law in Armed Conflicts project (RULAC). It distinguishes between [non-international armed conflicts](#) and [international armed conflicts](#) in Syria.

¹⁴ Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 272

¹⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 12-13

¹⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 15-16

¹⁷ DW, What's behind the latest Russian airstrikes in Syria?, 2 July 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); para. 6-7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 3

¹⁸ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, January – March 2023, 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 1; BBC News, IS truffle picker attacks: At least 26 killed in Syrian desert ambush, 17 April 2023, [url](#)

¹⁹ NPA, Three dead including ISIS member in Syria's Daraa, 9 April 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, October – December 2022, 1 May 2023, [url](#), p. 2; Hassan, M., ISIS is back in the open in southern Syria, MEI, 29 November 2022, [url](#)

²⁰ VOA, Syria's Readmission to Arab League Just One Step in Long Process, 11 May 2023, [url](#)

²¹ Reuters, Arab League readmits Syria as relations with Assad normalise, 8 May 2023, [url](#)

²² Al Jazeera, Analysis: How important is Syria's return to the Arab League?, 19 May 2023, [url](#)

²³ AP News, A little white pill, Captagon, gives Syria's Assad a strong tool in winning over Arab states, 9 June 2023, [url](#); France 24, War on Captagon key to Syria's return to Arab League, 19 May 2023, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Saudi Arabia seizes 8 million Captagon pills as it courts Syria's Assad to clamp down, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

²⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 6

²⁵ Jusoor for Studies, Astana 20th round on Syria: What's new?, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

²⁶ Reuters, Kazakhstan unexpectedly proposes ending Syria talks in Astana, 21 June 2023, [url](#)



make any progress²⁷ and their latest round scheduled for July 2023 was postponed indefinitely.²⁸

The Bab Al-Hawa border crossing between Türkiye and Idlib governorate remained the only access gateway for international humanitarian aid due to the veto power of Russia and China in the UN Security Council.²⁹ In January 2023, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2672 extending the mandate to deliver aid into north-west Syria via this crossing for six months until 10 July 2023.³⁰ Following the failure of the Security Council to reach an agreement for further extension after 10 July 2023, a deal was reached with the GoS to keep the border crossing open for another six months.³¹ The GoS further allowed the UN to use the additional border crossings Bab Al-Salama and Al-Rai until 13 November 2023 to deliver assistance.³²

1.3. International involvement

Further information on involvement of international actors is available in section 1.3 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security Situation \(September 2022\)](#).

²⁷ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 118

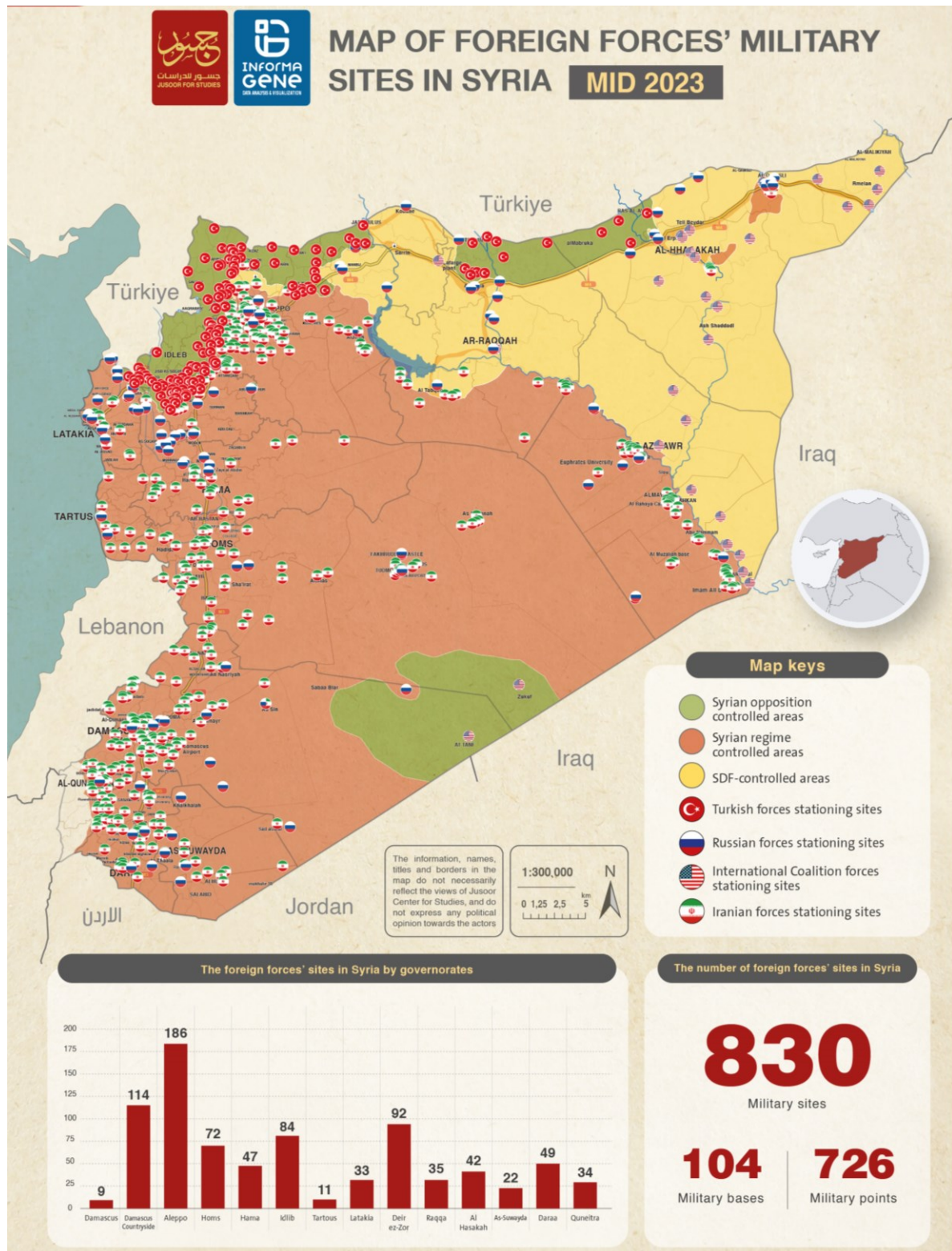
²⁸ New Arab (The), Syria Constitutional Committee's ninth session delayed, 16 July 2022, [url](#); Syrian Negotiations Commission, Ninth Session of Syrian Constitutional Committee Meetings is postponed, 16 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁹ CNN, 'Secondary disaster' looms as UN aid finally reaches survivors battling frozen conditions in Syria, 10 February 2023, [url](#)

³⁰ UN, Adopting Resolution 2672 (2023), Security Council Renews Cross-Border Aid Operations into North-West Syria for Six Months, Requests Special Report on Humanitarian Needs, 9 January 2023, [url](#)

³¹ UN News, UN: Deal reached with Syria to reopen main border crossing from Türkiye, 9 August 2023, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Syria tells UN it will grant aid access via Bab al-Hawa, 13 July 2023, [url](#)

³² VOA, Syria and UN Agree on Bab al-Hawa Crossing to Opposition Areas, 9 August 2023, [url](#)



Map 3: Map of Foreign Forces' Military Sites in Syria mid-2023, © Jusoor for Studies³³

³³ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

1.3.1 Russia

As of mid-2023, Russia controlled about 20 military bases and 85 military points in the country, scattered across GoS-held territory as well as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) region.³⁴ Important military strongholds are the Hmeymim air base in Latakia governorate, from which Russia launched air strikes as well as the naval base in Tartous.³⁵ An investigation by Novaya Gazeta into Russian presence in Syria estimated Hmeymim to host 20 000 Russian soldiers as well as mercenary fighters. The same source referring to a 2018 investigation by the Russian website Newizv estimated the size of Russian troops to be around 65 000, a third of them being members of the military police.³⁶ In April 2023, around 1 200 personnel of Russia's Wagner mercenary group were stationed in Palmyra in eastern Homs to assist GoS troops in fighting ISIL elements.³⁷

In light of the war in Ukraine, there were reports of Russia reducing the size of its combat troops in Syria and redeploying them as well as military equipment such as a missile system to Ukraine.³⁸ Two senior Western diplomats and a senior Israeli defence official interviewed by the New York Times gave varying estimates regarding the reduction in troop size, between 1 200 to 1 600 or more.³⁹ Meanwhile, other sources reported that Russian and GoS military reinforcements were sent to SDF-controlled areas in northern Aleppo governorate upon request of the SDF⁴⁰ and that Russian forces originally withdrawn and deployed in Ukraine had been sent back to Syria, leading to a resurgence of Russian military activity.⁴¹ A February 2023 article summarised Russia's activities as involving fewer military operations, continued undertaking of airstrikes⁴² as well as joint military exercises with the SAA.⁴³ Furthermore, Russia continued to be involved in joint military patrols with Türkiye in northern Syria.⁴⁴

³⁴ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

³⁵ Reuters, Syria's Assad would like more Russian bases and troops, 16 March 2023, [url](#); Novaya Gazeta Europe, Hmeimim pays no bills, 19 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁶ Novaya Gazeta Europe, Hmeimim pays no bills, 19 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁷ Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

³⁸ New York Times (The), Russia Shrinks Forces in Syria, a Factor in Israeli Strategy There, 19 October 2022, [url](#); Smagin, N., Moscow's Original "Special Operation": Why Russia Is Staying in Syria, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 7 February 2023, [url](#)

³⁹ New York Times (The), Russia Shrinks Forces in Syria, a Factor in Israeli Strategy There, 19 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰ France 24, موسكو ترسل تعزيزات عسكرية إلى مناطق في سوريا تحت سيطرة الأكراد والنظام وسط استمرار التهديدات التركية, 30 November 2022, [url](#); Kurdistan 24: Syrian government brings reinforcements to frontlines in Manbij: SOHR, 4 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹ Bousset, P., US Al-Tanf Military Garrison: The Epicenter of Tumult, EPC, 16 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴² Airwars continued to monitor the impact of Russian airstrikes and recorded civilian casualties. The continually updated tracker is available via the following link: [url](#)

⁴³ Smagin, N., Moscow's Original "Special Operation": Why Russia Is Staying in Syria, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 7 February 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Syria TV, تركيا تشارك روسيا بتسيير الدورية الـ138 في عين العرب, 22 May 2023, [url](#); NPA, Russia, Turkey conduct 129th joint patrol in Syria's Kobani, 6 March 2023, [url](#); AP News, Turkish, Russian forces could 'expand' Syria joint patrols, 4 January 2023, [url](#)



1.3.2 Iran and pro-Iranian militias

The goal behind Iran's involvement in the conflict is to help the GoS regain control over the entire Syrian territory as well as to establish a land corridor under its influence via which to supply the Lebanese Hezbollah with arms.⁴⁵ Jusoor for Studies in mid-2023 noted an increase in Iranian military sites compared to 2022 especially in the south of the country, reaching a total of 55 military bases and 515 military points.⁴⁶ According to a Lebanese military expert, there were about 1 800 Iranian military advisers in the country, most of whom were deployed with Syrian troops.⁴⁷ The Iranian presence consisted of the Quds force, a branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as well as of many affiliated militias.⁴⁸ Among these affiliated militias were local Syrian outfits such as Liwa Al-Baqir made up of members of the Baqara tribe⁴⁹ and Liwa Al-Quds consisting of Palestinian fighters⁵⁰, as well as foreign militias such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Iraqi groups Hezbollah Al-Nujaba, Kata'ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada and Abu Al-Fadl Al-Abbas⁵¹, the Afghan Fatemiyoun (Fatimid) Brigade and the Pakistani Zainebiyoun Brigade.⁵² These pro-Iranian militias were reportedly present along the Euphrates, in and around Aleppo city and the wider Damascus area, in the Syrian desert as well as in the south of the country,⁵³ together comprising about 40 000 personnel.⁵⁴ According to several sources, Iran extended its influence by moving into military positions previously vacated by Russian troops redeployed to Ukraine.⁵⁵

As indicated in a June 2023 article published by Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) Sentinel, the Quds Force was shifting its presence and weapons depots further north in order to avoid Israeli missile strikes as well as to be closer to Shiite areas such as Al-Zahraa and Nubl in Aleppo countryside and closer to disputed areas in Idlib, Tall Rifaat, Hasaka and Raqqa.⁵⁶ Furthermore, small groups of fighters were discreetly moved across the southern governorates to be stationed close to the Golan heights.⁵⁷ Iranian-backed militias launched sporadic attacks on US military personnel in the northeast of the country using drone strikes.⁵⁸

⁴⁵ Soufan Center (The), IntelBrief: Implications of Escalating U.S. Clashes with Iran-Backed Forces in Syria, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁶ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷ Arab Weekly (The), Israeli strikes on Syria intensify, raise tensions with Iran, 6 April 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸ Bousset, P., The Quds Force in Syria: Combatants, Units, and Actions, CTC Sentinel, June 2023, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁹ ORSAM Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Iran-backed militia in Syria: Profiles and Functions, 21 September 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁵⁰ Al-Ghazi, S., Serving Power: The Role of Loyalist Militias in Securing the Assad Regime, ISPI, 15 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹ ORSAM Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Iran-backed militia in Syria: Profiles and Functions, 21 September 2022, [url](#), pp. 8-9, 11

⁵² ORSAM Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Iran-backed militia in Syria: Profiles and Functions, 21 September 2022, [url](#), p. 10

⁵³ Galia, E., The Pro-Iranian Militias in Syria, ITIC, 29 March 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁴ Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 20

⁵⁵ Azizi, H., Syria's Militias: Continuity and Change After Regime Survival, ISPI, 22 March 2023, [url](#); Bousset, P., US Al-Tanf Military Garrison: The Epicenter of Tumult, EPC, 16 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶ Bousset, P., The Quds Force in Syria: Combatants, Units, and Actions, CTC Sentinel, June 2023, [url](#), p. 5

⁵⁷ Bousset, P., The Quds Force in Syria: Combatants, Units, and Actions, CTC Sentinel, June 2023, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁸ Arab News, US military downs Iranian-made drone in Syria, 15 February 2023, [url](#); VOA, Iranian-Backed Attacks on US Forces in Syria Caused 23 Traumatic Brain Injuries, Pentagon Says, 17 April 2023, [url](#)



One such drone strike in March 2023 on a US military base in Hasaka led to a series of clashes between US forces and militia linked to the IRGC.⁵⁹

1.3.3 Türkiye

As of mid-2023, Turkish military forces had 12 military bases and 113 military points in Syria,⁶⁰ especially in SNA-held territory as well as Idlib in the country's north and north-west,⁶¹ comprising an estimated 10 000 troops.⁶² Generally, Türkiye's policy regarding Syria has shifted from wanting to depose Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad to preventing the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Syria and keeping Kurdish armed groups at bay.⁶³ Meetings between the defence and intelligence chiefs of Türkiye and the GoS suggested a rapprochement between both countries. However, the demands of each side remained incompatible, such as Damascus insisting on the withdrawal of the Turkish military presence and Ankara maintaining relations with the Syrian opposition.⁶⁴

Airwars⁶⁵ continued to monitor Turkish airstrikes in Syria, which, between July 2022 and July 2023, were carried out in northern Aleppo, Raqqqa and Hasaka governorates and lead to several civilian deaths each month.⁶⁶ On 20 November 2022, the Turkish military as part of its military operation Claw-Sword carried out a series of drone and airstrikes targeting oil and energy infrastructure in SDF-controlled areas.⁶⁷ The attacks struck densely populated areas, displaced residents and, according to a local NGO, killed more than 10 civilians.⁶⁸ In the course of the operation, the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan further threatened another ground offensive of Turkish military in northeastern Syria and expressed his wish to create a 'security corridor' along his country's southern border.⁶⁹ The ground offensive was stalled because of Russian and US pressure,⁷⁰ according to a statement by the commander of the SDF at the beginning of December 2022.⁷¹

⁵⁹ Soufan Center (The), IntelBrief: Implications of Escalating U.S. Clashes with Iran-Backed Forces in Syria, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁰ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

⁶¹ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

⁶² International Crisis Group, Türkiye's Syria Policy after Erdoğan's Win , 20 July 2023, [url](#)

⁶³ Halabi, F., The Turkish Elections and the Future of Northwest Syria: Scenarios and Policy Implications, MEI, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁴ Jusoor for Studies, No political prospects for Türkiye - Syrian regime rapprochement talks, April 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Assad welcomes new Russian bases in Syria after Putin meeting, 16 March 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁵ Airwars is a non-profit watchdog organisation that promotes transparency by monitoring and investigating claims of civilian harm primarily due to the use of explosive weapons in conflict-affected countries, including Syria. For more information see Airwars, Who we are, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁶ Airwars, Turkish Military in Iraq & Syria, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁷ STJ, Northeastern Syria: Unprecedented Turkish Strikes on Energy Infrastructure, 19 January 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁸ HRW, Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Exacerbate Humanitarian Crisis, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁹ BBC News, Turkey will launch Syria ground operation after strikes – Erdogan, 23 November 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁰ IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 305

⁷¹ Newlines Institute, Operation Claw-Sword Exposes Blind Spots in the US' NE Syria Strategy [Timeline], 7 March 2023, [url](#)



In areas in northern Syria under Turkish control, administrative and governance structures took shape encompassing education, health, infrastructure and energy services, with supervision being carried out by the respective neighbouring Turkish provinces.⁷²

1.3.4 US-led Coalition against ISIL

The US forces comprise about 900 personnel deployed to support local partners in combatting ISIL in Syria.⁷³ Further aims of the deployment are to foil Russian and Iranian ambitions in the region.⁷⁴ As of mid-2023, US forces had 17 military bases and 13 military points in Syria, most of them in the territory under Kurdish administration.⁷⁵ Outside the SDF-controlled areas, the US army maintained a garrison at Al-Tanf near the borders of Iraq and Jordan,⁷⁶ housing 100-200 men as well as a small Syrian rebel group.⁷⁷ The US army continued to support the SDF in areas under its control with carrying out raids against suspected ISIL elements.⁷⁸ During the reference period, US troops together with SDF or Asayish internal security forces ran joint patrols in northeast Syria.⁷⁹ In May 2023, it was reported that the US-led coalition had started building a new military base in Raqqa governorate west of the city of Tabqa.⁸⁰ In July 2023, military and logistic reinforcements for US facilities in Rmelan, Tall Baydar and Al-Shaddadi in Hasaka governorate were sent through the Al-Waleed border crossing with Iraq.⁸¹ Due to Iranian attacks against US forces, anti-ISIL operations had to be intermittently put on hold⁸² in order to increase force protection and reallocate assets to monitor Iranian threats, for example, in March 2023, when one such attack killed a US contractor.⁸³ According to a January 2023 report by the Emirates Policy Center,⁸⁴ incidents involving Iranian drone strikes as well as US retaliatory attacks regularly occurred in the area of the Al-Tanf garrison.⁸⁵

⁷² Halabi, F., The Turkish Elections and the Future of Northwest Syria: Scenarios and Policy Implications, MEI, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 3

⁷³ Soufan Center (The), IntelBrief: Implications of Escalating U.S. Clashes with Iran-Backed Forces in Syria, 27 March 2023, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Iran plans to escalate attacks against U.S. troops in Syria, documents show, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁴ Washington Post (The), Iran plans to escalate attacks against U.S. troops in Syria, documents show, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁵ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁶ International Crisis Group, Al-Tanf, Syria, 31 July 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷ Bousset, P., US Al-Tanf Military Garrison: The Epicenter of Tumult, EPC, 16 January 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁸ SNHR, At Least 226 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in May, Including Six Children and 11 Women, 2 June 2023, [url](#), p. 4; ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, May 17, 2023, 19 May 2023, [url](#); ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, February 22, 2023, 24 February 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁹ NPA, US troops conduct patrols in Syria's Derbasiyah, 9 July 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Turkish deadline for SDF withdrawal from northern Syria: Source, 7 December 2022, [url](#); Rudaw, US-led forces resume normal patrols in Syria, 2 December 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁰ New Arab (The), US-led coalition against Islamic State building new base in northern Syria, 24 May 2023, [url](#)

⁸¹ MEMO, US army sends military, logistic reinforcements to Syria, 13 July 2023, [url](#)

⁸² International Crisis Group, Al-Tanf, Syria, 31 July 2023, [url](#)

⁸³ ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, June 28, 2023, 30 June 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁴ The Emirates Policy Center is an Abu Dhabi-based think tank focussing on the impact of geopolitical developments on the United Arab Emirates. See EPC, About us, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁵ Bousset, P., US Al-Tanf Military Garrison: The Epicenter of Tumult, EPC, 16 January 2023, [url](#)



1.3.5 Israel

Israel's military strategy in Syria aims to put an end to Iranian infiltration into the south of Syria close to its own borders as well as at preventing Iran from providing Hezbollah with sophisticated weapons.⁸⁶ Jusoor for Studies recorded 11 Israeli airstrikes between August 2022 and the end of 2022 targeting IRGC and Hezbollah facilities in Rural Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and further governorates.⁸⁷ In February 2023, Syrian state media reported a presumed Israeli airstrike on a Damascus residential area resulting in civilian casualties.⁸⁸ March and April 2023 saw an increase in suspected Israeli strikes targeting Iranian and Hezbollah military infrastructure as well as specific individuals.⁸⁹ Further airstrikes temporarily stopped operations at the country's two largest airports, in Damascus in January 2023⁹⁰ and Aleppo in May⁹¹ and August 2023.⁹²

1.4. Armed actors

1.4.1. Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

The Syrian armed forces consist of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) (which includes the Republican Guard), the Naval Forces, Air Forces, Air Defence Forces and National Defence Forces (NDF, a pro-government militia). The Syrian military was further supported by the Russian military, the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).⁹³

The commander in chief of the Syrian armed forces is the Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad,⁹⁴ who personally appoints commanders, chiefs and officers off all army units through presidential decrees and decisions.⁹⁵ According to estimated figures provided by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Military Balance of 2023, the Syrian armed forces comprised 169 000 active military personnel, 130 000 of whom formed the Syrian Arab Army, with its main and best trained fighting groups being the Fourth Division, the Republican Guard, the Special Forces (including the former Tiger Forces⁹⁶) and the Fifth Assault Corps. A further estimated 100 000 persons belonged to state-allied paramilitary militia, such as the NDF (50 000), foreign militias of Afghan, Pakistani and Iraqi origin (50 000), partially receiving

⁸⁶ Arab Weekly (The), Israeli strikes on Syria intensify, raise tensions with Iran, 6 April 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁷ Jusoor for Studies, The Israeli strikes in Syria during 2022, 28 December 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁸ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes, 20 February 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁸⁹ Al-Monitor, Israel shells Hezbollah targets in Syria in latest escalation, 24 April 2023, [url](#); Arab Weekly (The), Israeli strikes on Syria intensify, raise tensions with Iran, 6 April 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁰ DW, Syria says Israeli strike briefly paralyzed Damascus airport, 2 January 2023, [url](#)

⁹¹ France 24, Israeli air strikes kill one soldier, put Syria's Aleppo airport out of service, 2 May 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 8

⁹² AP News, Reported Israeli strike damages Aleppo airport and puts it out of service, 28 August 2023, [url](#)

⁹³ US, CIA, World Factbook, Syria, last updated: 1 August 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁴ SANA, President al-Assad issues administrative order to end military personnel retention of some soldiers, 17 July 2023, [url](#); Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁵ Omran Center for Strategic Studies, The Chain of Command in the Syrian Military: Formal and Informal Tracks, 9 November 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁶ The Tiger Forces in 2019 were renamed to 25th Special Tasks Division, Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023, [url](#), p. 14



Iranian support. The Lebanese Hezbollah was estimated to have between 7 000 and 8 000 fighters in the country.⁹⁷

Alawites hold the most important positions in the SAA,⁹⁸ and elite divisions such as the Republican Guard and the Fourth Division were reportedly mostly Alawite.⁹⁹ The Fourth Division led by Bashar Al-Assad's brother Maher reportedly amassed power and influence, expanding its military, economic and criminal activities.¹⁰⁰ The military core of this division consisted of 15 000-20 000 men, deployed throughout the country but mainly present near the capital and its western and southwestern peripheries.¹⁰¹ By strategically controlling checkpoints situated at international border crossings such as with Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq as well as checkpoints leading to rebel-controlled areas, the Fourth Division collected revenues by imposing taxes on licit and illicit goods.¹⁰² The Fifth Corps was established and is backed by Russia.¹⁰³ Its core brigades are stationed with Russian forces in Hama governorate, whereas the brigades deployed in the south are less well trained with its fighting force largely consisting of former rebels who reconciled with the government as well as of arrested petty criminals.¹⁰⁴

The government-allied Palestinian Al-Quds Brigade (Liwa Al-Quds) has come to dominate the Palestinian camps in Aleppo, Latakia, Hama and Homs as a political and military force.¹⁰⁵ The brigade was further deployed in the Syrian desert to fight ISIL elements.¹⁰⁶

Despite controlling about two thirds of the country, the GoS continued to be confronted with a low-level insurgency waged by ISIL cells in the central desert.¹⁰⁷ ISIL militants temporarily managed to capture uninhabited villages from government forces and control valleys (*wadis*) and unsettled lands in the desert region, especially in eastern Homs. The government fought back with ground forces mainly consisting of NDF, Al-Quds Brigade and Fourth Division fighters as well as limited airstrike support.¹⁰⁸ In the south of the country, particularly in Dar'a governorate, clashes and targeted killings were reported between GoS forces and armed groups.¹⁰⁹ There, the GoS forces employed raids, airstrikes and missile attacks to consolidate

⁹⁷ IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), pp. 354-356

⁹⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023, [url](#), p. 5; AlMustafa, M., The Syrian Regime Signals Legal and Military Shifts to the World, TIMEP, 17 October 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023, [url](#), p. 12; Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁰⁰ Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), pp. 3, 7, 18-21

¹⁰¹ Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), pp. 6-7

¹⁰² Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁰³ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, July 20, 2023, 20 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ Waters, G., From Tiger Forces to the 16th Brigade: Russia's evolving Syrian proxies, MEI, 12 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ Al-Ghazi, S., Serving Power: The Role of Loyalist Militias in Securing the Assad Regime, ISPI, 15 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ New Arab (The), [url](#) [Fighters from Al-Quds Brigade killed in ISIL attack in eastern Syria], 8 June 2023, [url](#); Al-Ghazi, S., Serving Power: The Role of Loyalist Militias in Securing the Assad Regime, ISPI, 15 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 273

¹⁰⁸ Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 23



power and force out armed opposition groups.¹¹⁰ They further employed siege tactics, such as in the town of Tafas in August 2022, in order to force settlements with local rebels.¹¹¹ Meanwhile, the GoS increased its presence in SDF-held areas by sending army reinforcements to eastern Aleppo countryside as well as Ain Issa in northern Raqqa, close to the frontlines with Turkish-backed armed groups.¹¹²

During the reporting period, GoS forces continued to employ ground-based and aerial attacks on populated areas resulting in civilian casualties.¹¹³ They were further responsible for extrajudicial killings and deaths in detention centres due to torture and medical negligence.¹¹⁴

1.4.2. The Syrian National Army

The Syrian National Army (SNA) is the umbrella organisation of a loose formation of militias backed by Türkiye¹¹⁵ and several Gulf states,¹¹⁶ and consists of former Free Syrian Army (FSA) groups, Islamist factions,¹¹⁷ Syrian Arab Army defectors, civilians,¹¹⁸ as well as Syrians who have sought refuge in Türkiye.¹¹⁹ The SNA controls two areas adjoining the Turkish border, the first covers the northern countryside of Aleppo from Afrin to Jarablus,¹²⁰ and the second one spans from Tall Abyad to Ras al-Ayn, in the north of Raqqa and Hasaka governorates.¹²¹

According to estimated figures provided by the IISS Military Balance of 2023, the SNA comprised 70 000 fighters.¹²² These fighters form more than 40 SNA factions¹²³ and receive their salaries from Türkiye,¹²⁴ but also by Qatar.¹²⁵ The SNA forces play an essential role in day-to-day matters in the areas under their control, 'impacting everything from the security

¹¹⁰ Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 273; Haid, H., Assad's strategy in southern Syria is fated to fail, Arab News, 13 August 2022, [url](#)

¹¹¹ New Arab (The), سورية: خسائر كبيرة لمزارعي "طفس" بسبب حصار قوات النظام, 20 August 2022, [url](#); NPA, Town in Syria's Daraa subjects to frequent operations by government forces, 15 September 2022, [url](#)

¹¹² Rozana Radio, النظام السوري يرسل تعزيزات عسكرية إلى عين عيسى لمساندة قسد [Syrian regime forces continue to send reinforcements to Manbij], 19 December 2022, [url](#); Syria TV, النظام السوري يرسل تعزيزات عسكرية إلى عين عيسى لمساندة قسد [Syrian regime sends military reinforcements to Ayn Aissa to help the SDF], 21 November 2022, [url](#)

¹¹³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 22

¹¹⁴ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 16

¹¹⁵ Arab News, Will Türkiye abandon Syria's rebels?, 3 February 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ Al Jazeera, Twelve years on from the beginning of Syria's war, 15 March 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ CEP, Armed Opposition Groups in Northwest Syria, 27 April 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁸ Al Jazeera, Twelve years on from the beginning of Syria's war, 15 March 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

¹²⁰ ACAPS, Syria: Assessing increased protection risks and vulnerabilities after the earthquakes, 16 June 2023, [url](#), p. 2

¹²¹ Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 3; Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria - June 2023 [Map], 10 July 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria - June 2023 [Map], 5 July 2023, [url](#)

¹²² IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 356

¹²³ HRW, Syria: Turkey-Backed Fighters Kill 4 Kurdish Civilians, 22 March 2023, [url](#); MEMO, Türkiye to restructure Syrian rebel military, disband SNA factions after HTS withdraws from Afrin, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁴ CEP, Armed Opposition Groups in Northwest Syria, 27 April 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁵ Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 6



situation to real estate sales, business dealings, the work of NGOs, and local governance institutions'.¹²⁶

Although the SNA formally reports to Hasan Hamade, the head of the Ministry of Defense of the oppositional Syrian Interim Government (SIG), it is in fact run by the Turkish intelligence service.¹²⁷ The SNA has several 'regional operation rooms', through which Turkish military and intelligence officers coordinate SNA activities.¹²⁸

The SNA is officially organised in legions with varying numbers of divisions subdivided into brigades.¹²⁹ In August 2022, the Rojava Information Center (RIC)¹³⁰ published a report on the SNA's structure focussing on 28 of its main militias. According to the report, SNA main components are the Al-Hamza Division, the Sultan Suleiman Shah Division, the Azm Unified Command Room and the National Front for Liberation, the latter two comprising each many individual factions and subdivisions.¹³¹ Arab as well as Turkmen factions can be found across the entire SNA area, with some factions occasionally clustering around certain geographic areas.¹³² Correspondingly, Orwa Ajjoub, senior analyst at the Cyprus-based Center for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR), commented in an October 2022 MEI article, '[u]nderstanding the SNA — its nature, organization, and the constantly shifting alliances between its factions — is a challenging task indeed'.¹³³

Several sources termed the SNA's internal conflicts and rivalries a major issue.¹³⁴ In October 2022, SNA infighting 'attracted considerable attention beyond the microcosm of Syria's armed opposition landscape'¹³⁵ when HTS entered SNA territory and intervened in the infighting by supporting one of the fighting factions,¹³⁶ reportedly leading to the emergence of two new alliances: the HTS alliance (comprising the Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade, Al-Hamzah Division and Ahrar al-Sham) and the Third Legion alliance (consisting of the Levant Front, Jaysh al-

¹²⁶ Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 5

¹²⁷ Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 5; RIC, The SNA Encyclopedia: A Guide to the Turkish Proxy Militias, August 2022, [url](#), pp. 10-11

¹²⁸ Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 5

¹²⁹ RIC, The SNA Encyclopedia: A Guide to the Turkish Proxy Militias, August 2022, [url](#), pp. 10-11

¹³⁰ The Rojava Information Center (RIC) is a pro-Kurdish volunteer organisation based in northeastern Syria that assists reporters and researchers from leading international news organisations with their work. RIC, Who we are, n.d., [url](#); TNH, Leaving Syria's notorious al-Hol camp, civilians find little to go home to, 14 January 2021, [url](#); BBC News, Syria war: 'One killed' as US troops clash with government loyalists near Qamishli, 12 February 2020, [url](#)

¹³¹ RIC, The SNA Encyclopedia: A Guide to the Turkish Proxy Militias, August 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹³² RIC, The SNA Encyclopedia: A Guide to the Turkish Proxy Militias [Figure], August 2022, [url](#), pp. 10-11

¹³³ Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁴ Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 10; Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#); MEMO, Turkiye to restructure Syrian rebel military, disband SNA factions after HTS withdraws from Afrin, 26 October 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria: Turkey to reorganise rebel groups as HTS withdraws from Afrin, 25 October 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁵ Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁶ MEMO, Turkiye to restructure Syrian rebel military, disband SNA factions after HTS withdraws from Afrin, 26 October 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria: Turkey to reorganise rebel groups as HTS withdraws from Afrin, 25 October 2022, [url](#)



Islam and the Liberation and Construction Movement).¹³⁷ In addition, the incident prompted Türkiye to move forward with restructuring plans for the SNA that included a centralised command structure and a unified force.¹³⁸

During the reference period, Amnesty International reported indiscriminate attacks committed by the SNA¹³⁹ and engaged in hostilities with SDF forces resulting in civilian casualties.¹⁴⁰ SNA forces were further responsible for extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances,¹⁴¹ torture, including rape, and pillage, 'all of which may amount to separate war crimes'.¹⁴²

1.4.3. Syrian Democratic Forces

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are the main military force of the AANES.¹⁴³ 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. According to estimated figures provided by the IISS Military Balance of 2023, the SDF comprises 50 000 fighters.¹⁴⁴ Another source put their number at more than 100 000.¹⁴⁵ The SDF hold a demographically heterogeneous region of about 30 % of the Syrian territory¹⁴⁶, comprising most of Hasaka governorate as well as areas in Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqa governorates and a small enclave in Aleppo countryside.¹⁴⁷ The Asayish are the police force of the AANES¹⁴⁸ and both SDF and Asayish forces have received funding from the US military to train, equip and pay their members.¹⁴⁹ Due to the threat of Turkish incursions, the SDF further had to negotiate with Russia and the GoS, requesting air defence systems from the former¹⁵⁰ and accepting SAA reinforcements into its territory near the contact lines with Turkish-backed forces in Tall Rifaat and Manbij.¹⁵¹

¹³⁷ Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁸ Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria: Turkey to reorganise rebel groups as HTS withdraws from Afrin, 25 October 2022, [url](#); MEMO, Türkiye to restructure Syrian rebel military, disband SNA factions after HTS withdraws from Afrin, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁹ AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/23 – Syria, 27 March 2023, [url](#), p. 352

¹⁴⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 105

¹⁴¹ HRW, Syria: Turkey-Backed Fighters Kill 4 Kurdish Civilians, 22 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 103

¹⁴³ Soz, J., Mazloum Abdi: Turkish Attacks Impact Fight Against ISIS, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 12 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 356

¹⁴⁵ Lister, C., There Are 13 Guantanamos in the Syrian Desert, Politico, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 274

¹⁴⁷ Newlines Institute, Operation Claw-Sword Exposes Blind Spots in the US' NE Syria Strategy [Map], 7 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸ AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/23 – Syria, 27 March 2023, [url](#), p. 352

¹⁴⁹ HRW, Syria: Repatriations Lag for Foreigners with Alleged ISIS Ties, 15 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ Newlines Institute, Operation Claw-Sword Exposes Blind Spots in the US' NE Syria Strategy, 7 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ Rozana Radio, النظام السوري يدفع بتعزيزات عسكرية إلى تل رفعت ومنبج [Syrian regime forces continue to send reinforcements to Manbij], 19 December 2022, [url](#); New Arab (The), النظام السوري يدفع بتعزيزات عسكرية إلى تل رفعت ومنبج [The Syrian regime sends military reinforcements to Tall Rifaat and Manbij], 12 June 2022, [url](#)



Throughout the AANES area, SDF continued to be confronted with an insurgency mounted by ISIL cells.¹⁵² They were supported in their anti-ISIL operations by about 900 US troops who assisted in stabilisation efforts and provided aerial surveillance.¹⁵³ The SDF routinely carried out security operations against ISIL cells in territories under their control, which included destroying hideouts,¹⁵⁴ dismantling recruitment and support networks¹⁵⁵ and confiscating weapons.¹⁵⁶ 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, according to Jusoor for Studies.¹⁵⁷ 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.¹⁵⁸ This vast amount of incarcerated ISIL members continued to be a source of insecurity. ISIL operatives repeatedly attempted to free fellow members, for example by trying to attack the Al-Hol detention facility in Hasaka¹⁵⁹ or by attacking a prison near Raqqa, killing six SDF and Asayish members.¹⁶⁰ In June 2023, the AANES announced that it would start trying suspected ISIL fighters who have been in its custody for years.¹⁶¹

Türkiye considers the YPG, the leading component of the SDF, to be an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).¹⁶² Turkish forces repeatedly targeted SDF-controlled territory with airstrikes, drones and artillery shelling.¹⁶³ This forced the SDF to temporarily halt operations against ISIL and to reassign forces in order to bolster defences against a potential Turkish ground offensive.¹⁶⁴ In response to a series of Turkish airstrikes in November 2022, the SDF shelled the SNA-held city of A'zaz in Aleppo countryside and a nearby Turkish military base as well targeting the Turkish border province Kilis with rocket-propelled grenades.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, there were clashes between the SDF and Turkish-backed SNA militias deployed

¹⁵² ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, May 17, 2023, 19 May 2023, [url](#); US, CRS, Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response, 8 November 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁵³ Lister, C., There Are 13 Guantanamos in the Syrian Desert, Politico, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ Jusoor for Studies, SDF Lunches wide-scale security operation against opponents in Raqqa, 16 February 2023, [url](#); NPA, SDF discovers old ISIS tunnel in Raqqa, 31 January 2023, [url](#); Diyaruna, 'Al-Jazeera Thunderbolt' smashes east Syria ISIS cells, 18 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵ NPA, SDF captures 2 ISIS operatives in Hasakah – Coalition, 2 May 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, SDF Lunches wide-scale security operation against opponents in Raqqa, 16 February 2023, [url](#); Diyaruna, 'Al-Jazeera Thunderbolt' smashes east Syria ISIS cells, 18 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶ NPA, SDF arrests ISIS militants in Syria's Hasakah, 9 April 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, SDF Lunches wide-scale security operation against opponents in Raqqa, 16 February 2023, [url](#); Diyaruna, 'Al-Jazeera Thunderbolt' smashes east Syria ISIS cells, 18 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷ Jusoor for Studies, SDF Lunches wide-scale security operation against opponents in Raqqa, 16 February 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁵⁹ Lister, C., There Are 13 Guantanamos in the Syrian Desert, Politico, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰ Shafaq News, Six SDF and Asayish members killed in surprise attack by ISIS on military prison in Al-Raqqa, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ Reuters, Syria's Kurds to begin trials for IS detainees, 11 June 2023, [url](#); NPA, AANES trials for foreign ISIS members... what is to be expected?, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶² HRW, Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Exacerbate Humanitarian Crisis, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶³ Soz, J., Mazloum Abdi: Turkish Attacks Impact Fight Against ISIS, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 12 December 2022, [url](#); Syria Direct, Days of airstrikes and rumblings of a long-threatened Turkish offensive in northern Syria after Istanbul bombing, 25 November 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ Newlines Institute, Operation Claw-Sword Exposes Blind Spots in the US' NE Syria Strategy, 7 March 2023, [url](#); TWI, The SDF Is Caught Between Turkey and the Islamic State Again, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ Syria Direct, Days of airstrikes and rumblings of a long-threatened Turkish offensive in northern Syria after Istanbul bombing, 25 November 2022, [url](#)



in the Operation Peace Spring area, a territory captured by Türkiye in a military operation in 2019.¹⁶⁶ In northern Aleppo governorate, the SDF and SNA used rocket and grenade shelling across the contact lines as well as IED attacks to target each other's respective areas of control.¹⁶⁷

During the reporting period, the SDF reportedly engaged in extrajudicial killings,¹⁶⁸ arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearance¹⁶⁹ as well as torture in detention centres.¹⁷⁰

1.4.4. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) or the Organization for the Liberation of the Levant¹⁷¹ is an Islamist¹⁷² anti-GoS armed group¹⁷³ and was formed in 2017 when Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, an offshoot of al-Qaida-linked Jabhat al-Nusra,¹⁷⁴ joined forces with several other hard-line groups.¹⁷⁵ HTS continued to be listed as a terrorist organisation by many countries,¹⁷⁶ including the United States,¹⁷⁷ Türkiye¹⁷⁸ and Russia.¹⁷⁹ According to estimates, HTS comprised between 7 000¹⁸⁰ and 10 000 fighters,¹⁸¹ including around 1 000 foreign fighters.¹⁸²

¹⁶⁶ Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 275

¹⁶⁷ See for example New Arab (The), [جاء قصف لـ"قسد" في ريف حلب](#) [SNA members killed and wounded by SDF shelling in Aleppo countryside], 10 July 2023, [url](#); Syria TV, [فصائل الجيش الوطني تقصف مواقع لكل من "قسد" والنظام رداً على مجزرة الباب](#) [SNA factions shell SDF and regime points in response to Al-Bab massacre], 20 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 59

¹⁶⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 120; SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), pp. 60-64

¹⁷⁰ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), pp. 64-65; SHRC, Two civilians killed under torture in SDF prisons in a week, 5 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ USCIRF, Factsheet: Religious Freedom in Syria, November 2022, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷² BBC News, Crisis upon crisis: Why it's hard to get help to Syria after earthquake, 11 February 2023, [url](#); Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes: Syria – July to December 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁷³ HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 18; RIC, The SNA Encyclopedia: A Guide to the Turkish Proxy Militias, August 2022, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁷⁵ IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 357

¹⁷⁶ TNH, Cholera worries grow in Syria's Idlib, 29 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 357

¹⁷⁸ BBC News, Crisis upon crisis: Why it's hard to get help to Syria after earthquake, 11 February 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹ Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰ UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 46

¹⁸¹ IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 357

¹⁸² UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 46



Under its leader Abu-Muhammad Al-Jawlani,¹⁸³ 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,¹⁸⁴ where it established the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) with 'conditional Turkish state assistance'.¹⁸⁵ According to the UN Security Council, 'HTS maintained a locally oriented focus and sought to expand its presence beyond Idlib'.¹⁸⁶ In October 2022, HTS fighters took control of the city of Afrin and surrounding areas before a Turkish-brokered truce led to their withdrawal.¹⁸⁷ HTS personnel, however, reportedly remained in the Afrin area,¹⁸⁸ but avoided being publicly visible.¹⁸⁹ HTS obtained most of its increasing¹⁹⁰ income through taxation at border crossings (affecting both aid delivery and trade),¹⁹¹ through its monopoly on public services and extortion in the territory it controlled.¹⁹²

In recent times, Al-Jawlani attempted to publicly distance HTS from al-Qaeda and portray it as a legitimate civilian authority,¹⁹³ which experts believe has created internal tensions.¹⁹⁴ Despite its legitimisation efforts, HTS reportedly continued to commit serious human rights violations.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸³ USCIRF, Factsheet: Religious Freedom in Syria, November 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁴ Enab Baladi, Shift in religious discourse, will al-Jolani clash with HTS Sharia scholars?, 17 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵ Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 46

¹⁸⁷ Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria: HTS militants partially withdraw from Afrin after Turkey steps in, 15 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ STJ, HTS Scales Up Its Presence in Afrin After the Türkiye/Syria Quake, 3 April 2023, [url](#); Netjes, R., Shifting Lines and IDPs: Azaz, Afrin, and the HTS Incursion, TWI, 19 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹ Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), pp. 19-20; Özkizilcik, Ö., How a former al-Qaeda affiliate became an existential threat and a wake-up call for the Syrian opposition, Atlantic Council, 14 November 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹¹ Solomon, C., HTS: Evolution of a Jihadi Group, Wilson Center, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹² UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 46

¹⁹³ Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ Enab Baladi, Shift in religious discourse, will al-Jolani clash with HTS Sharia scholars?, 17 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 81; USCIRF, Factsheet: Religious Freedom in Syria, November 2022, [url](#), p. 2



1.4.5. Other anti-government armed groups in the Idlib area

As of April 2023, the remaining militant groups in the rebel-held Greater Idlib area besides HTS were reported¹⁹⁶ to be: Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), Ajnad Kavkaz (AK), Katibat al Tawhid wal Jihad (KTJ), Katibat al-Imam al-Bukhari (KIB), Hurras al-Din (HaD), Jamaat Ansar al-Islam (JAI), Junud al-Sham, Ansar al-Tawhid (AaT), Jundallah, Jabhat Ansar al-Din (JaD), Tansiqiyat al-Jihad, Liwa al-Muqatileen al-Ansar (LMA).¹⁹⁷

While according to senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Natasha Hall, 'HTS has essentially defeated or co-opted all its Syrian armed opposition rivals in Idlib',¹⁹⁸ others report that the above listed Idlib factions fall under three general categories: 1) those who operate directly under HTS authority; 2) those who are allied with HTS as part of the 'HTS-led joint operations room, called al-Fatah al-Mubin'¹⁹⁹; and 3) those who remain in direct opposition to HTS.²⁰⁰ An example of the second category is the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), the 'largest remaining foreign jihadist group in Idlib', consisting mainly of Chinese Uighurs,²⁰¹ while Hurras al-Din (HaD) falls in the third category. Estimates of the Al-Qaida affiliated HaD's capacities varied greatly with some sources referring to 300-500 active fighters and others up to 2 000²⁰² or even 2 500 fighters.²⁰³ Constant HTS pressure impeded the group's 'operational capabilities' and reportedly pushed it further north, closer to the Turkish border.²⁰⁴ According to Stanford University research fellow Cole Bunzel, as of December 2022, HaD 'appeared to be defunct'.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁶ Please note that sources partly diverge on this topic. Other sources indicate that some of the groups listed above would no longer exist at all after a severe HTS crackdown. See e.g., on the group Jundallah: Al-Monitor, HTS makes rival jihadis in Syria's Idlib take Sharia courses, give up weapons, 20 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷ CEP, New CEP Resource: Armed Opposition Groups In Northwest Syria, 27 April 2023, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸ Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 274

¹⁹⁹ International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 6

²⁰⁰ CEP, Armed Opposition Groups in Northwest Syria, 27 April 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 6

²⁰¹ International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 10

²⁰² UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 49

²⁰³ IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 357

²⁰⁴ UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 49

²⁰⁵ Bunzel, C., Explainer: The Jihadi Threat in 2022, Wilson Center, 22 December 2022, [url](#)



1.4.6. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

In the reference period, ISIL was reported to ‘remain resilient’²⁰⁶ to be ‘taking advantage of political and military developments’ in Syria to regain presence²⁰⁷ but it was also reported that its capabilities in Syria ‘remained degraded’.²⁰⁸ ISIL fighters were present in the mountainous and hard-to-control Badia desert²⁰⁹ and along the Syrian-Iraqi border, especially in the areas of Deir Ez-Zor, Palmyra, Al-Sukhna,²¹⁰ and also in Al-Qaryatain.²¹¹ The group reportedly used these regions as operational bases to rebuild cells, train its fighters and carry out attacks throughout the region.²¹² In the reference period, ISIL cells and activities were moreover reported in Syria’s south,²¹³ particularly in Dar’a governorate.²¹⁴

According to a February 2023 UN Security Council report, there were an estimated 5 000 to 7 000 ISIL members in Iraq and Syria, about half of whom were reported to be fighters.²¹⁵ Statistics on ISIL fighters present in the Syrian desert are, however, not available. According to local sources, the group’s ranks also included foreign fighters.²¹⁶ In Syria’s northeast, about 10 000 ISIL fighters and around 55 000 persons linked to ISIL (mainly women and children) continued to be detained²¹⁷ in a ‘makeshift detention system’, inside which ISIL reportedly

²⁰⁶ UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 43

²⁰⁷ NPA, People of Syrian Desert fear ISIS’s re-emergence, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

²⁰⁸ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress April 1 2023 – June 30, 3 August 2023, [url](#), p. 11

²⁰⁹ Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

²¹⁰ NPA, People of Syrian Desert fear ISIS’s re-emergence, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

²¹¹ Al-Ghadhawi, A., ‘Revenge for the Two Sheikhs’: ISIS Renews Itself in the Syrian Desert, New Lines Institute, 8 August 2022, [url](#); UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 44

²¹² Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

²¹³ MEI, We’re abandoning Syria and our D-ISIS policy, 5 May 2023, [url](#)

²¹⁴ Tokmajyan, A., ISIS Resurgence in Daraa: Is the Group Making A Comeback in Syria’s Restive South?, EPC, 9 December 2022, [url](#); Hassan, M., ISIS is back in the open in southern Syria, MEI, 29 November 2022, [url](#); UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 44

²¹⁵ UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 43

²¹⁶ NPA, People of Syrian Desert fear ISIS’s re-emergence, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

²¹⁷ USDOS, The Importance of Detained Fighters and Displaced Persons in Northeast Syria to the Future of ISIS, 20 October 2022, [url](#); Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 275



‘appears to be regrouping’.²¹⁸ These prisoners posed a constant threat, as ISIL has already carried out prison breaks and reportedly intended to continue doing so.²¹⁹ In August 2023, ISIL confirmed the killing of its leader, making him the third ISIL leader killed in less than two years.²²⁰

The first quarter of 2023 saw an increase in ISIL activities in Syria. Since 2022, ISIL attacks within the Syrian desert have increased, but decreased in northeastern Syria.²²¹ Between January and mid-May 2023, ISIL claimed 49 attacks.²²² 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.²²³ During the reference period, ISIL continued its ‘guerrilla warfare tactics’²²⁴ launching hit and run attacks against military forces, but also against civilians.²²⁵ ISIL operations centered on Deir Ez-Zor and Homs, but also reached Hama, Hasaka, and Raqqqa governorates.²²⁶ The group’s attack zones reportedly expanded along both banks of the Euphrates River.²²⁷ As reported by NPA in May 2023, Al-Masrab desert (Deir Ez-Zor governorate) saw semi-daily ISIL assaults.²²⁸ ISIL, moreover, curtailed SDF control to gain the support of the local population,²²⁹ established ad-hoc checkpoints,²³⁰ engaged in intimidation and extortion practices,²³¹ recruited people living in poverty in the Badia region and Deir Ez-Zor, and attacked businesses and assassinated community leaders.²³²

²¹⁸ Lister, C., There Are 13 Guantanamos in the Syrian Desert, Politico, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

²¹⁹ Lister, C., There Are 13 Guantanamos in the Syrian Desert, Politico, 27 March 2023, [url](#); Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 274; USDOS, The Importance of Detained Fighters and Displaced Persons in Northeast Syria to the Future of ISIS, 20 October 2022, [url](#)

²²⁰ WSJ, Islamic State Confirms Top Leader Is Dead, 3 August 2023, [url](#)

²²¹ ISW and CPT, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, April 27, 2023, 28 April 2023, [url](#)

²²² NPA, People of Syrian Desert fear ISIS’s re-emergence, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

²²³ ISW and CPT, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, May 31, 2023, 31 May 2023, [url](#)

²²⁴ UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 44

²²⁵ New Arab (The), US-led coalition against Islamic State building new base in northern Syria, 24 May 2023, [url](#); NPA, People of Syrian Desert fear ISIS’s re-emergence, 15 May 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#); Al-Ghadhawi, A., ‘Revenge for the Two Sheikhs’: ISIS Renews Itself in the Syrian Desert, New Lines Institute, 8 August 2022, [url](#); USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress April 1 2023 – June 30, 3 August 2023, [url](#), p. 12

²²⁶ UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 44

²²⁷ ISW and CPT, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, June 28, 2023, 30 June 2023, [url](#)

²²⁸ NPA, People of Syrian Desert fear ISIS’s re-emergence, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

²²⁹ ISW and CPT, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, June 28, 2023, 30 June 2023, [url](#)

²³⁰ NPA, People of Syrian Desert fear ISIS’s re-emergence, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

²³¹ Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#); Al-Ghadhawi, A., ‘Revenge for the Two Sheikhs’: ISIS Renews Itself in the Syrian Desert, New Lines Institute, 8 August 2022, [url](#), p. 275

²³² Al-Ghadhawi, A., ‘Revenge for the Two Sheikhs’: ISIS Renews Itself in the Syrian Desert, New Lines Institute, 8 August 2022, [url](#)



1.5. Impact of violence on the civilian population

1.5.1. Tactics and weapons used

Between August 2022 and May 2023, sources reported 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.²³³ This particularly affected the north,²³⁴ northwest, northeast and south of the country.²³⁵ The months of October and November 2022 saw an upsurge in military operations and hostilities, according to the report by the UN Secretary-General.²³⁶

In its December 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview for the year 2023, UNOCHA indicated that there seemed to be a disregard for the obligation ‘to take all feasible precautions to spare civilians’ when carrying out attacks. Compliance with the ‘prohibition on direct attacks against civilians and indiscriminate attacks under international humanitarian law’ was called into question.²³⁷ During the reference period, indiscriminate attacks such as bombing and shelling resulting in civilian casualties were reported along the borders of the different areas of control.²³⁸

In its report on the human rights situation in Syria, the USDOS indicated that (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.²³⁹ During the reference period, 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 governorate²⁴⁰ and in the SDF-controlled

²³³ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 3; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 4; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 3; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 3; International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022–July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

²³⁴ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 4

²³⁵ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 3; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 3

²³⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 3

²³⁷ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 19-20

²³⁸ OHCHR, Don't look away: Syrian civilians face the prospect of a new escalation, 14 September 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, At least nine killed in Russian air strikes in Syria's Idlib, 25 June 2023, [url](#); VOA, UN Rights Officials Condemn Syrian Attacks, 9 November 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Civilians killed in northern Syria marketplace missile attack, 19 August 2022, [url](#);

²³⁹ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 31

²⁴⁰ SNHR, Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in January 2023, 4 February 2023, [url](#), pp. 6-7; New Arab (The), Aid organization ‘breaks siege’ on Syria al-Rukban IDP camp, 20 June 2023, [url](#)



neighbourhoods of Al-Ashrafiya and Al-Sheikh Maqsoud in Aleppo city, as well as in the Al-Shahba area, which includes the Tall Rifaat region²⁴¹ in northern Aleppo²⁴².

In its annual report for 2022, SNHR described attacks by GoS forces on medical personnel, equipment and facilities as ‘calculated tactics’ since the start of the conflict and mentioned that 2022 saw a decrease in GoS attacks on such targets in areas controlled by other conflict parties. However, according to the report, the GoS continued to arrest, detain, or forcibly disappear medical personnel in their own areas.²⁴³ For more detailed information on targeted groups, please see the [EUAA COI report: Syria - Country focus \(October 2023\)](#); for further information on damage of (medical) infrastructure, please see section [1.5.4](#).

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.²⁴⁴ They also engaged in limited clashes, including attacks on civilian targets²⁴⁵ resulting in civilian casualties²⁴⁶ between August 2022 and May 2023.²⁴⁷ In his report covering August and September 2022, the UN Secretary-General also mentioned kidnappings, IED attacks, targeted killings, shelling and limited clashes in Syria’s south-west.²⁴⁸ In November 2022, the use of banned cluster munitions was reported in western and southern rural Idlib, affecting three²⁴⁹ or four IDP camps and killing eight civilians and injuring at least 75 others.²⁵⁰

According to a December 2022 report by the Washington D.C.-based think tank New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, bomb attacks are a ‘major security challenge’ in SNA-controlled areas, with many resulting in civilian casualties. These attacks are mostly perpetrated by YPG networks loyal to the PKK, with some of the IEDs being smuggled into the area via routes controlled by the SNA.²⁵¹

ISIL’s strategy was reported to have shifted since it lost ground in most parts of Syria in 2019, with the group resorting to tactics that included surprise hit-and-run attacks²⁵² targeting sites held by GoS forces but also killing civilians.²⁵³ Between August 2022 and May 2023, ISIL

²⁴¹ VOA, Syrian Kurd Who Lost Hand in IS Battle Finds Passion for the Drums, 26 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁴² Kurdistan 24, Damascus continues to put a siege on Kurds in northern Aleppo, 29 April 2023, [url](#); Al, Syria: Vital earthquake aid blocked or diverted in Aleppo’s desperate hour of need, 6 March 2023, [url](#); Arab News, How one Aleppo neighborhood continues to defy siege of Syria’s Assad, 24 January 2023, [url](#); SNHR, Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in January 2023, 4 February 2023, [url](#), p. 3

²⁴³ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 33

²⁴⁴ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

²⁴⁵ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 4; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 4

²⁴⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 7

²⁴⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 4; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 5; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 4; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 4

²⁴⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 6

²⁴⁹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 4

²⁵⁰ HRW, Syria: Cluster Munitions Used in November 6 Attacks, 23 November 2022, [url](#)

²⁵¹ Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey’s Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 10

²⁵² SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 89

²⁵³ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 89; International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

reportedly carried out attacks, including abductions and killings,²⁵⁴ on civilians in several areas of the country,²⁵⁵ among them Deir Ez-Zor, Hasaka, Hama,²⁵⁶ Dar'a,²⁵⁷ and rural Homs.²⁵⁸

An April 2023, an Insecurity Insight²⁵⁹ publication mentioned that conflict parties intentionally torched farmland²⁶⁰ 'as a tactic to target and control civilians and farmers by destroying livelihoods in local communities' and stressed the urgent need to 'examine the consequences of military tactics' with regard to how they affect food security.²⁶¹ In the reference period, conflict incidents that negatively affected access to agricultural land or agricultural equipment were reported for the period between July and December 2022, for example, in Idlib²⁶² and Dar'a governorates.²⁶³ In June 2023, Turkish ground bombardment in northern Raqqa governorate reportedly caused the burning of farmland.²⁶⁴

In January 2023, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) concluded that 'there are reasonable grounds to believe' that GoS Air Forces carried out the April 2018 chemical weapons attack in Douma.²⁶⁵

1.5.2. Security incidents

EUAA used the publicly available ACLED dataset for Middle East (4 August 2023) for security incidents figures, graphs and maps.²⁶⁶ According to the aforementioned ACLED dataset,²⁶⁷ between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023 there were 9 689 security incidents recorded in Syria: 2 182 were coded as battles, 5 681 as explosions/remote violence, and 1 826 as violence against civilians. Most security incidents were recorded in Aleppo (2 735), Idlib (1 837)

²⁵⁴ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 9

²⁵⁵ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 9; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 5

²⁵⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 5

²⁵⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 7

²⁵⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 9; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 5

²⁵⁹ Insecurity Insight is a Swiss-based non-governmental, non-profit, politically independent organisation dedicated to supporting civil society and the aid sector. Insecurity Insight, Mission and Vision Statement, n.d., [url](#), p. 1

²⁶⁰ For more in-depth information on this tactic being used by ISIL in recent years, please see Jaafar, H. et al., 'Scorched earth tactics of the "Islamic State" after its loss of territory: intentional burning of farmland in Iraq and Syria', 1 October 2022, [url](#)

²⁶¹ Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria: Conflict, Hunger and Aid Access - April 2023, 19 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 3, 20

²⁶² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 27

²⁶³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 45

²⁶⁴ SOHR, SDF-held areas in June 2023 | Nearly 60 fatalities in acts of violence...deteriorating security situation...nearly 30 infightings and murder crimes...19 protests against deteriorating living conditions, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

²⁶⁵ OPCW, OPCW Releases Third Report by Investigation and Identification Team, 27 January 2023, [url](#)

²⁶⁶ ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

²⁶⁷ ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

and Hasaka (1 104) governorates. The lowest security incidents figures were recorded in Quneitra (49), Damascus (36) and Tartous (6) governorates.²⁶⁸

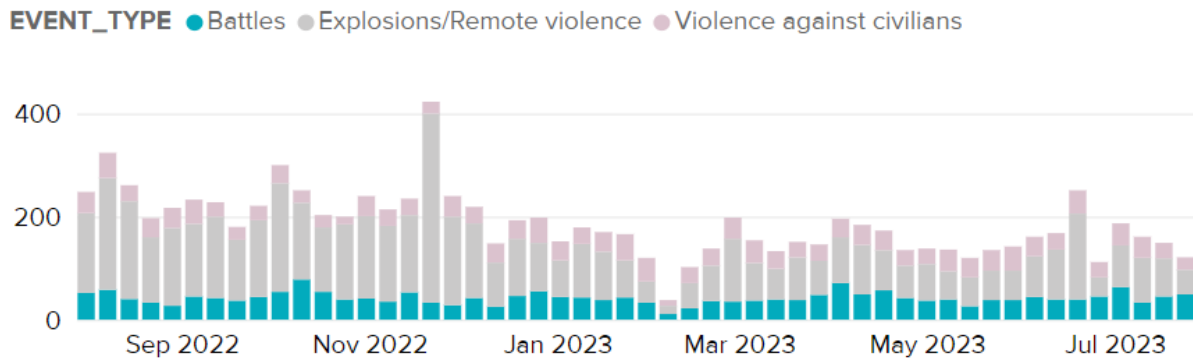


Figure 1: Evolution of security events coded ‘battles’, ‘explosions/remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023²⁶⁹

In addition to the above-presented ACLED data on security incidents, also other sources provide records of security-related incidents. Here, however, the reporting periods do not exactly correspond with the reference period of this report. Moreover, the definitions of such events differ across various sources. For more details, please see the explanatory footnotes in the following sections.

For 2022, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) recorded 940 incidents of state-based violence,²⁷⁰ 612 incidents of non-state violence²⁷¹ and 86 incidents of one-sided²⁷² violence.²⁷³

(a) Battles

Battles (armed clashes) is the category with the second most registered security incidents. During the reference period, there were 2 182 battles recorded by ACLED. Most of them were recorded in the governorates of Deir Ez-Zor (588), Aleppo (551), and Dar’a (247). The lowest numbers of battles were recorded in Tartous (1), Damascus (11), and Quneitra (16).²⁷⁴

(b) Explosions/remote violence

Explosions/remote violence, which includes explosive devices, artillery fire and air strikes, is by far the category with the highest number of individual incidents, with 5 681 incidents recorded by ACLED between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. The largest number of explosions/remote violence was registered in Aleppo (1 717), followed by Idlib (1 569) and Hasaka (686)

²⁶⁸ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

²⁶⁹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

²⁷⁰ UCDP defines ‘state-based violence’ as ‘violence between two organized actors of which at least one is the government of a state’. UCDP, UCDP Methodology, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

²⁷¹ UCDP defines ‘non-state violence’ as ‘violence between actors of which neither party is the government of a state’. UCDP, UCDP Methodology, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

²⁷² UCDP defines ‘one-sided violence’ as ‘[t]he deliberate use of armed force by the government of a state or by a formally organised group against civilians which results in at least 25 deaths in a year.’ UCDP, UCDP Definitions, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷³ UCDP, Syria [dashboard], as of 27 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁷⁴ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

governorates. The lowest number of explosions/remote violence were documented in Tartous (3), Damascus (8) and Sweida (20).²⁷⁵

For the period between 1 August 2022 and 24 August 2023, Airwars listed 194 airstrike incidents with civilian harm allegations in Syria, including one incident in which civilian harm allegations were classified as ‘confirmed’ and 97 incidents with allegations classified as ‘fair’. The 177 attacks were attributed to the following conflict parties: Russian military (78 incidents), Turkish military (75 incidents), Israeli military (8 incidents), US-led coalition (10 incidents), US forces (2 incidents), Iranian military (2 incidents); 17 incidents remained unattributed as of August 2023.²⁷⁶ In September 2022, UN Commissioner Lynn Welchman²⁷⁷ described ongoing operations by the above forces, specifically mentioning Russian airstrikes in support of the Syrian government in which civilians were injured and killed²⁷⁸ and which reportedly targeted food and water sources (for further information on infrastructure damage, please see section 1.5.4).²⁷⁹ In December 2022, Human Rights Watch highlighted the negative impact of late November Turkish airstrikes on the infrastructure and residents of densely populated areas in northeast Syria.²⁸⁰ According to Action on Armed Violence (AOAV),²⁸¹ in 2022, the number of airstrikes increased to 129²⁸² from 104 in 2021.²⁸³

For 2022, AOAV recorded a decrease in incidents of explosive violence²⁸⁴ in the country, declining from 709 in 2021 to 652 in 2022. Both ground-based as well as IED attacks fell from 334 to 303 and from 203 to 149, respectively. According to AOAV, state actors were responsible for 54 % of the recorded explosive violence incidents in 2022, non-state actors for 35 %.²⁸⁵

(c) Violence against civilians

The third largest category of incidents is violence against civilians with 1 826 incidents recorded by ACLED between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Most incidents during the year were recorded in Aleppo (467), Dar’a (344) and Deir Ez-Zor (270) governorates. The lowest number of incidents were recorded in Tartous (2), Latakia (4) and Quneitra (9) governorates.²⁸⁶

²⁷⁵ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

²⁷⁶ Airwars, Syria: Incidents with Civilian Harm Allegations: Aug 1 2022-Jul 31 2023, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷⁷ Lynn Welchman is a member of ‘the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic established by the Council in August 2011 to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law committed in the country since March 2011’. OHCHR, Human Rights Council President appoints Lynn Welchman of the United Kingdom to serve on Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 1 December 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁸ For a recent example from June 2023, please see Al Jazeera, At least nine killed in Russian air strikes in Syria’s Idlib, 25 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁷⁹ OHCHR, Don’t look away: Syrian civilians face the prospect of a new escalation, 14 September 2022, [url](#)

²⁸⁰ HRW, Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Exacerbate Humanitarian Crisis, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

²⁸¹ AOAV is a research and advocacy organisation that records incidents and resulting casualties caused by explosive weapons at the global level. For more information about AOAV see AOAV, What do we do to address the impact of weapons?, n.d., [url](#)

²⁸² Please note that in comparison to that, Airwars documented 226 airstrike incidents in 2022. Airwars, Syria: Incidents with Civilian Harm Allegations: Jan 1 2022-Dec 31 2022, n.d., [url](#)

²⁸³ AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), p. 20

²⁸⁴ AOAV uses a RSS reader to scan Google News for key terms which relate to explosive weapons use such as: air strike, artillery, bomb, bombing, cluster bomb, cluster munitions, explosion, explosive, grenade, IED, mine, missile, mortar, rocket, shell. AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), p. 44

²⁸⁵ AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), p. 20

²⁸⁶ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

1.5.3. Civilian fatalities

According to a May 2023 OHCHR publication, over the last decade, an average of 84 civilians have been killed each day as a direct consequence of the Syrian war. By 2022, a total of 306 887 civilians are estimated to have been killed since the beginning of the armed conflict.²⁸⁷

In May 2023, the UN Secretary-General mentioned a decrease in civilian casualties by 38 % in 2022 compared to 2021 in Syria.²⁸⁸ In its explosive violence monitor for 2022, AOAV states that the ‘continuing downward trend in numbers of civilian casualties raises hopes that the conflict, [...], will have a reduced impact on civilians’. However, at the same time, AOAV acknowledged that its data might be affected by a decline in media attention to and coverage of the Syrian conflict.²⁸⁹

OHCHR documented 1 874 civilian casualties in 2021 (747 civilian deaths and 1 127 civilians injured),²⁹⁰ a 11 % decrease from 2020 when it recorded 2 095 civilian casualties (1 036 civilian deaths and 1 059 civilians injured).²⁹¹ For the period between August 2022 and May 2023, OHCHR documented 311 civilian deaths and 256 civilians injured as a result of armed conflict in Syria.²⁹²

In 2022, SNHR recorded 1 271 civilian fatalities,²⁹³ a drop by 17 % compared to 2021 and by 39 % compared to 2020.²⁹⁴ Other organisations documenting civilian casualties in Syria had comparable figures for 2022. The Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC) recorded 1 133 civilian fatalities in 2022, although it did not provide information on their research methodology.²⁹⁵ For 2022, the UCDP recorded 1 638 deaths (civilians and combatants²⁹⁶).²⁹⁷

The SNHR provides a breakdown of civilian fatalities by the governorate in which they occurred (see [Figure 2](#)). Most civilian fatalities in 2022 were recorded by the SNHR in the governorates of Aleppo, Dar’a, Idlib and Deir Ez-Zor. The lowest number of civilian fatalities

²⁸⁷ OHCHR, Behind the data: Recording civilian casualties in Syria, 11 May 2023, [url](#)

²⁸⁸ UN Security Council, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, S/2023/345, 12 May 2023, [url](#), para. 6

²⁸⁹ AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), p. 21

²⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

²⁹¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, March 2021, [url](#), p. 12. Figures provided by OHCHR to UNOCHA. OHCHR provided the following disclaimer: ‘Civilian casualties and incidents included are not comprehensive but rather reflect what OHCHR could verify to reflect human rights concerns, patterns and the impact of the armed conflict and violence on civilians in Syria. Actual civilian casualties could be higher’. See p. 100.

²⁹² Figures based on total number of civilian injured reported by OHCHR to the UN Security Council between 1 August 2022 and 26 May 2023. UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 23; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para.20; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para.26; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para.26; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para.23

²⁹³ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 7

²⁹⁴ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7. For the year 2020 SNHR documented 1734 civilian fatalities in Syria. See EUAA, COI Report: Syria - Security situation, July 2021, [url](#), p. 55

²⁹⁵ SHRC, The 21st Annual Report on Human Rights in Syria 2022, January 2023, [url](#), p. 6

²⁹⁶ UCDP codes both civilians and combatants fatalities as battle related deaths. See [url](#)

²⁹⁷ UCDP, Syria [dashboard], as of 27 June 2023, [url](#)

recorded in 2022 by SNHR were in Latakia (4) Damascus (3) and Quneitra (1) governorates. In the first seven months of 2023, SNHR documented 574 civilian deaths across Syria, most of which were recorded in Dar'a and Deir Ez-Zor governorates. During the same period, no civilian fatalities were documented in Tartous and Quneitra governorates.²⁹⁸

During the reporting period (August 2022 and July 2023), the SNHR included in its civilian fatalities total the death of 125 civilians who drowned while on migration routes to Europe. These deaths were documented in September 2022 (62) and June 2023 (63 civilian fatalities) and were recorded under their governorates of origin: Tartous (60), Dar'a (48), Aleppo (15), and Latakia (2).²⁹⁹

Civilian fatalities by governorate	SNHR 2021 ³⁰⁰	SNHR 2022 ³⁰¹	SNHR 2023 ³⁰²
Damascus	1	3	2
Rural Damascus	13	80 ³⁰³	11
Idlib	245	147	43
Deir Ez-Zor	197	125	119
Aleppo	231	224	79
Dar'a	204	207	149

²⁹⁸ Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 7

²⁹⁹ EUAA email correspondence with SNHR, 4, 7 and 31 July 2023

³⁰⁰ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

³⁰¹ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

³⁰² Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

³⁰³ Out of the 80 civilian fatalities documented in 2022 in Rural Damascus, SNHR included the death of 54 persons for whom the GoS released death notifications in February 2022, although they were arrested in previous years and died in custody. Most of them were originally from Deir al-Asafir town. See SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

Civilian fatalities by governorate	SNHR 2021 ³⁰⁰	SNHR 2022 ³⁰¹	SNHR 2023 ³⁰²
Hama	88	36	61
Homs	28	37	55
Hasaka	154	74	28
Raqqa	84	27	12
Quneitra	10	1	-
Sweida	13	32	12
Latakia	2	4	3
Tartous	-	60	-
Total	1271	1057	574

Figure 2. Civilian fatalities in 2021, 2022 and the first seven months of 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data³⁰⁴

Civilian casualty figures caused by explosive violence decreased from 2 016 in 2021 to 1 304 (340 killed and 964 injured) in 2022. Civilian casualties resulting from ground-launched weapons and IEDs dropped from 1 176 to 702 and from 516 in 2021 to 152 in 2022, respectively.³⁰⁵ For 2022, SNHR documented 128 (50 men, 9 women, 69 children) civilian deaths caused by landmines; for the period between January and April 2023, SNHR documented 53 (33 men, 3 women, 17 children) civilian deaths.³⁰⁶ Between August 2022 and January 2023, SNHR listed nine ‘notable incidents of landmine explosions that resulted in

³⁰⁴ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11; SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10; Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

³⁰⁵ AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), p. 20

³⁰⁶ SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 19



casualties³⁰⁷ killing in total 17 civilians, including 9 children.³⁰⁸ In terms of civilian deaths caused by cluster munitions remnants, SNHR recorded 14 deaths (including 8 children) in 2022.³⁰⁹ An April 2023 news article mentioned that since the beginning of 2023 ‘hundreds of civilians have been killed or injured as a result of explosions of mines and ordnance across Syria’.³¹⁰

The number of civilian casualties due to airstrikes increased from 214 in 2021 to 297 in 2022. According to AOAV’s explosive violence monitor, in 2022, Türkiye was responsible for 25 % (330) of civilian casualties, followed by Syria (324), Russia (82), unknown state actors (53) and Israel (37).³¹¹ In terms of non-state actors, in 2022, ISIL caused 66 civilian casualties (compared to 80 in 2021) and SDF 43 (compared to 16 in 2021), according to AOAV.³¹²

1.5.4. Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

For the period between August 2022 and May 2023, the UN Security Council indicated that military operations and hostilities have taken a toll on civilian property and further worsened access to basic services and livelihoods.³¹³ In the reference period, the conflict was reported to have directly resulted in the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure, including schools, health facilities,³¹⁴ markets, IDP settlements and farms.³¹⁵ In the context of indiscriminate attacks on civilian infrastructure in the north, the GoS and Russian forces were particularly mentioned.³¹⁶

Schools in Syria were not a safe place to learn. They were destroyed, damaged or used for military or other purposes.³¹⁷ This reportedly affected one in three schools in the country.³¹⁸ Damage to health facilities was reported at least 11 times, negatively affecting health care access.³¹⁹

The conflict heavily impacted electricity service delivery and caused a shortage of fuel. Many cities were experiencing recurrent power outages, which sometimes lasted up to 15 hours per

³⁰⁷ Please note that SNHR does not specify on which grounds these examples were selected.

³⁰⁸ SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 26-27

³⁰⁹ SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 22

³¹⁰ New Arab (The), Eight dead in attacks, mine explosions across Syria, 12 April 2023, [url](#)

³¹¹ AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 20-21

³¹² AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), p. 21

³¹³ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 3; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 4; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 3; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 3

³¹⁴ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 19

³¹⁵ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 2

³¹⁶ HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#); USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 2

³¹⁷ World Bank, Syria - Joint Damage Assessment of Selected Cities, December 2022, [url](#), p. 101; HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

³¹⁸ HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

³¹⁹ Insecurity Insight, Syria – Violence Against Health Care in Conflict 2022, May 2023, [url](#), p. 3



day.³²⁰ Damage and destruction of water infrastructure and facilities, as well as the lack of electricity upon which many water pumps rely,³²¹ posed a serious humanitarian and health concern and have added to the scarcity of water for agriculture.³²² Between 2017 and 2022, 101 violent acts impacting water infrastructure were recorded, mostly in Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, and Idlib governorates. Many of these attacks were likely carried out by conflict parties 'as a deliberate strategy to enhance their control over target populations and territories'.³²³

In 2022, Syria, where an estimated one in three communities faced explosive ordnance contamination,³²⁴ was the country with the highest number of civilian casualties caused by mines, IEDs and ERWs.³²⁵ Explosive contamination was reported to be a 'leading source' of child death and maiming,³²⁶ as well as a significant security concern and impediment to the delivery of humanitarian aid.³²⁷ Unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination was identified most often on 'agricultural land, roads and private property, followed by schools, other public infrastructure and hospitals' and particularly affected the governorates of Idlib, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, Hasaka, Damascus, Quneitra and Dar'a.³²⁸

As reported at the end of 2022, the 'actual scale and scope' of the explosive contamination is not known.³²⁹ However, as of March 2022, the Mine Advisory Group (MAG) had registered 'approximately 64.92km² of mined area across a total of 830 suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) and confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs)' in northeast Syria alone³³⁰ and '241,900m² of (cluster munition remnants CMR) contamination across two suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) and three confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs)' in the governorates of Hasaka and Raqqa.³³¹

1.5.5. Displacement and return

UNHCR estimated that the conflict had driven some 5.2 million Syrian refugees out of the country by June 2023.³³² As of May 2023, the total number of IDPs in Syria was 6.8 million,³³³ making the country home to the highest number of IDPs in the world.³³⁴ Of these 6.8 million,

³²⁰ World Bank, Syria - Joint Damage Assessment of Selected Cities, December 2022, [url](#), p. 68

³²¹ World Bank, Syria - Joint Damage Assessment of Selected Cities, December 2022, [url](#), p. 73

³²² Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria: Conflict, Hunger and Aid Access - April 2023, 19 April 2023, [url](#), p. 3

³²³ Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria: Conflict, Hunger and Aid Access - April 2023, 19 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 14-15

³²⁴ UN Security Council, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, S/2023/345, 12 May 2023, [url](#), para. 12; UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 81

³²⁵ UN Security Council, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, S/2023/345, 12 May 2023, [url](#), para. 11

³²⁶ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 18

³²⁷ UNMAS, Annual Report 2022, 5 April 2023, [url](#), p. 105; UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

³²⁸ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

³²⁹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 82

³³⁰ Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2022, Syria [source: email from Fabrice Martin, Country Director - Mine Advisory Group, 9 March 2022], 1 October 2022, [url](#), p. 491

³³¹ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2022, Syria [source: email from Fabrice Martin, Country Director - Mine Advisory Group, 9 March 2022], 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 198

³³² UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, last updated 8 June 2023, [url](#)

³³³ UN Security Council, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, S/2023/345, 12 May 2023, [url](#), para. 31

³³⁴ UN Security Council, Humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic, S/2023/419, 9 June 2023, [url](#), para. 3; UN Security Council, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, S/2023/345, 12 May 2023, [url](#), para. 31



80% had been displaced for more than five years.³³⁵ In 2022, violence and instability remained the main driver of displacement.³³⁶

SNHR estimated that, in 2022, military operations by various conflict parties displaced approximately 75 000 civilians, including 11 000 civilians being displaced due to operations by Syrian-Russian alliance forces.³³⁷ Conflict-related displacement was reported, for example, for the city of Tafas (Dar'a governorate), where GoS bombings and clashes led to mass displacement in August 2022,³³⁸ or for Aleppo governorate, where about 13 000 people were displaced by a HTS offensive in October 2022 which directly affected 12 IDP camps.³³⁹

In 2022, a total of about 200 100 IDP movements were recorded by UNOCHA across Syria, of which 75 % were movements within governorates. Most IDP movements took place in the governorate of Idlib (13 000 from the governorate, 105 000 within the governorate and 18 000 to the governorate), followed by Aleppo (18 000 from the governorate, 26 000 within the governorate and 15 000 to the governorate).³⁴⁰ For more detailed information on IDP figures in each governorate, please see section [2. Governorate-level description of the security situation](#) and Map 4 below:

UNOCHA provides a full breakdown of the total IDP movements by governorate for 2022 (see Map 4):

³³⁵ UN Security Council, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, S/2023/345, 12 May 2023, [url](#), para. 31

³³⁶ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 65

³³⁷ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 11

³³⁸ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 84

³³⁹ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 86

³⁴⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)



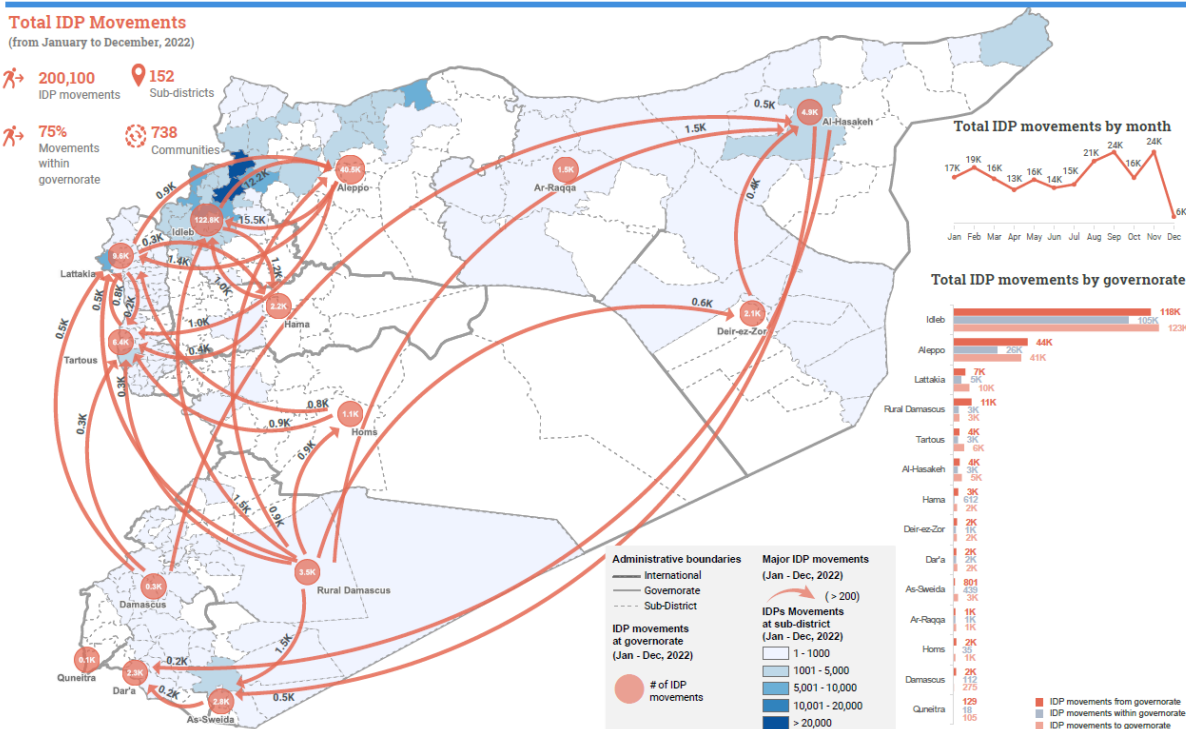


SYRIA ARAB REPUBLIC IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022

As of 31 December 2022

Total IDP Movements
(from January to December, 2022)

- 200,100 IDP movements
- 152 Sub-districts
- 75% Movements within governorate
- 738 Communities



The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
Creation date: 10 May 2023 Sources: Returnee movements data: IDP Task Force Feedback: ocha@un.org www.unocha.org www.reliefweb.int

Map 4. IDP movements by governorate in 2022, © UNOCHA³⁴¹

Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA documented 137 612 IDP movements across Syria,³⁴² with a significant peak (105 086 IDPs) in February due to the earthquake.³⁴³

According to a March 2023 publication, nearly 2.1 million IDPs were living in so-called 'last resort' sites in north-western and north-eastern Syria.³⁴⁴ As of April 2023, UNOCHA reported 2.9 million IDPs in Syria's north-west,³⁴⁵ of which 1.9 million were living in camps.³⁴⁶ Around 80 % of the IDPs were women and children, around 85 % were living in 'overcrowded camps and unplanned locations with dilapidated and unsafe shelters, which pose safety and protection risks'.³⁴⁷

In terms of IDP spontaneous returns in 2022, UNOCHA recorded a total of 115 500 spontaneous returns, 68 % of which were returns within governorates. The highest number of

³⁴¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (as of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

³⁴² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

³⁴³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#)

³⁴⁴ Care, 12 years on: Challenges caused by the Syrian conflict show no signs of abating, 15 March 2023, [url](#)

³⁴⁵ UNOCHA, North-west Syria: Situation report, last updated 28 April 2023, [url](#)

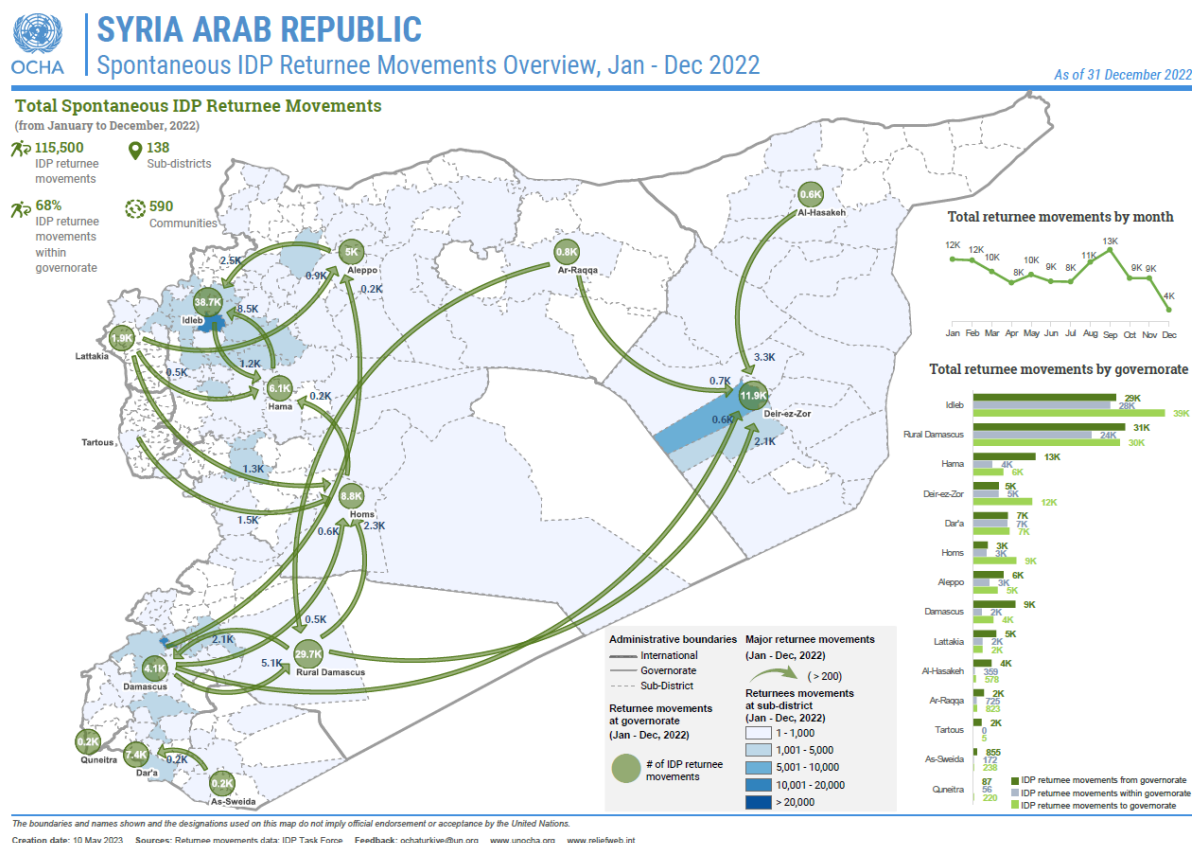
³⁴⁶ UN Security Council, Humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic, S/2023/419, 9 June 2023, [url](#), para. 36;

UNOCHA, North-west Syria: Situation report, last updated 28 April 2023, [url](#)

³⁴⁷ UN Security Council, Humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic, S/2023/419, 9 June 2023, [url](#), para. 36

IDP return movements were recorded in the governorates of Idlib (1 000 from the governorate, 28 000 within the governorate and 11 000 to the governorate), followed by Rural Damascus (7 000 from the governorate, 24 000 within the governorate and 6 000 to the governorate).³⁴⁸ For more detailed information on return figures in each governorate, please see section [2. Governorate-level description of the security situation](#).

UNOCHA provides a full breakdown of the total IDP spontaneous returnee movements by governorate for 2022 (see Map 5):



Map 5. Spontaneous IDP returnee movements by governorate in 2022, © UNOCHA³⁴⁹

Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA documented 42 704 spontaneous IDP return movements across Syria,³⁵⁰ with a significant peak (18 128 spontaneous IDP return movements) in February due to the earthquake.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (as of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

³⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (as of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

³⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#);

UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#);

UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#);

UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

³⁵¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#)

Regarding the above-mentioned return movements to the governorates of Idlib and Rural Damascus, ‘a mixture of push and pull factors related to changes in the security and economic situation in the place of origin and/or area of displacement’ was cited as the main reason. 72 % of returnee households interviewed during a Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (conducted between July and August 2022)³⁵² indicated that their primary reason for returning in 2022 was to ‘reclaim assets and properties at the place of origin’, followed by security situations improvements in the place of origin and/or a deterioration in the economic situation in their place of displacement.³⁵³

In general, IDPs' explicit intention for return continued to be low.³⁵⁴ The GoS was reported to not facilitate the secure and dignified voluntary return, resettlement or local integration of IDPs. In some cases, IDPs were denied the opportunity to return home; in others, IDPs were arrested upon their return in GoS-controlled areas.³⁵⁵

³⁵² UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 10

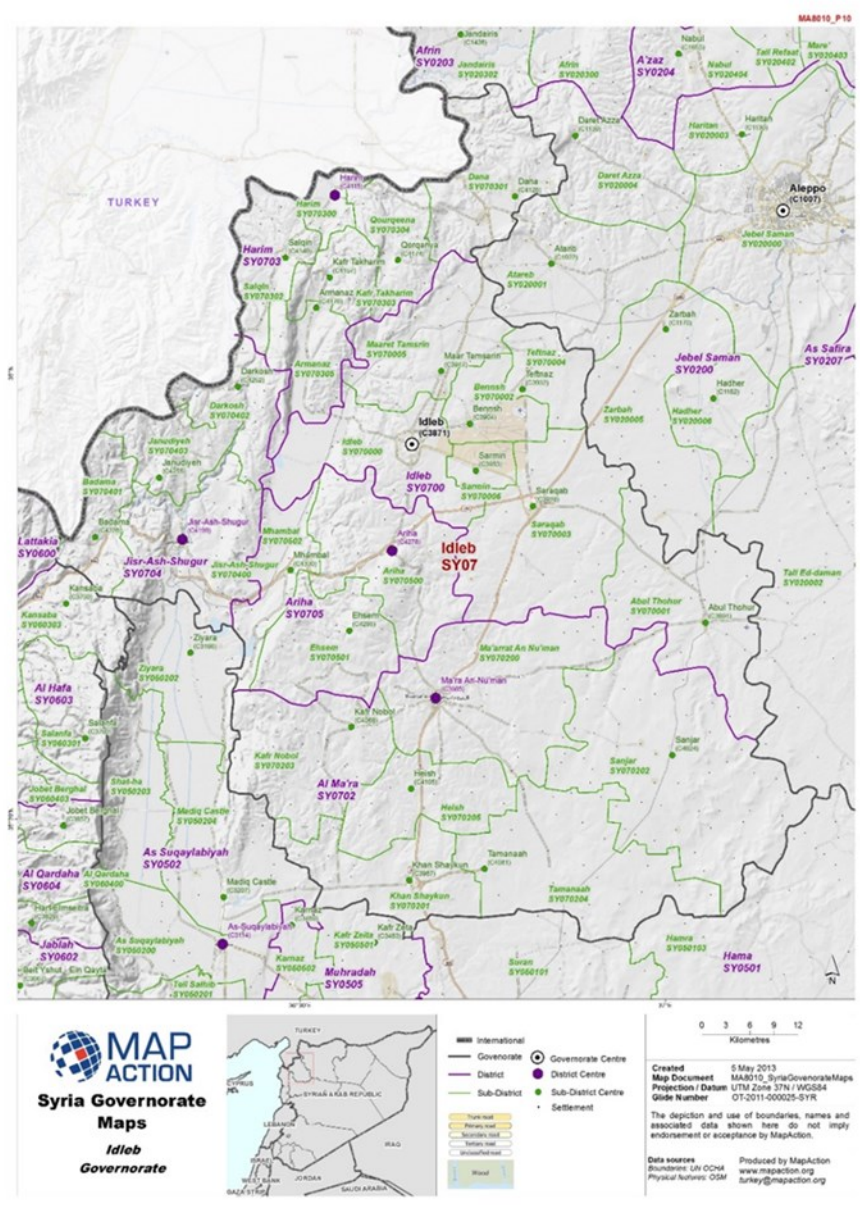
³⁵³ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 55

³⁵⁴ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 55

³⁵⁵ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 65

2. Governorate-level description of the security situation

2.1. Idlib governorate



Map 6: © MapAction, Idlib governorate³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ MapAction, Idlib governorate, 29 July 2016, url

2.1.1. General description of the governorate

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.³⁵⁷

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.³⁵⁸ 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.³⁵⁹ However, UN Security Council authorisation to use Bab Al-Hawa lapsed 10 July 2023, and at the time of writing had not been renewed. For further information on the humanitarian importance and status of the Bab Al-Hawa crossing, see section [1.2](#).

According to 2022 estimates by UNOCHA, the population of Idlib governorate was 2 927 392 inhabitants, of whom 1 899 350 were IDPs.³⁶⁰ Population estimates vary greatly due to the majority of IDPs in the governorate and regular IDP movements (see section [2.1.3\(h\)](#) below). For more information on the ethno-religious composition of Idlib's population, see the [EUAA COI Report Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

2.1.2. Conflict background and armed actors

2.1.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

Since March 2020³⁶¹ 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.³⁶² 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, Türkiye and Russia mediated a ceasefire³⁶³ between GoS and allied militias and anti-GoS armed groups³⁶⁴.

³⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic. Governorates Profiles, June 2014, [url](#), p. 22

³⁵⁸ REACH, Syria, Syrian Cities Damage Atlas, 16 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 45-46

³⁵⁹ UN Security Council, Security Council Renews Cross-Border Aid Operations into Syria's North-West for Six Months, Adopting Resolution 2642 (2022) as 'Compromise' amid Divisions, 12 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 45-46; USDOS, Attacks on Civilians in Syria, Press Statement, 22 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

³⁶¹ Information on the conflict background and armed actors in Idlib prior to August 2022 is available in the [EUAA COI report Syria – Security situation \(September 2022\)](#), [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security Situation \(July 2021\)](#), and [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

³⁶² Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#); UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#).

³⁶³ For details, see UN Security Council, Letter dated 6 March 2020 from the representatives of the Russian Federation and Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, 6 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁴ International Crisis Group, Türkiye's Syria Policy after Erdoğan's Win, 20 July 2023, [url](#)

Since the March 2020 ceasefire, the areas of control in and around the so-called ‘Idlib de-escalation area’³⁶⁵ have ‘stabilized’³⁶⁶, the major frontlines have remained ‘stagnant’³⁶⁷ and Syria has experienced a ‘period without significant frontline changes’.³⁶⁸ The largest change regarding control was noted between Idlib and Aleppo governorates, where HTS briefly seized territory from armed groups allied with Türkiye.³⁶⁹ These clashes did not, however, lead to a formal redrawing of internal boundaries between opposition factions.³⁷⁰ According to International Crisis Group, the 10 000 Turkish troops present in northern Syria including Idlib have allowed Ankara to enforce the Idlib ceasefire.³⁷¹ These are especially present along the border regions between Idlib and Aleppo governorates.³⁷²

(a) Anti-GoS armed groups

Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) controls those parts of Idlib governorate under the control of anti-GoS armed groups and has almost complete control over the wider Idlib de-escalation area, including most border crossings with Türkiye.³⁷³ HTS has been described as ‘a former al-Qaeda affiliate still designated as a terrorist group by the UN and many states’³⁷⁴ and as the dominant armed group in the governorate. HTS administers the governorate through the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG).³⁷⁵ Most sources concur that HTS has between 7 000³⁷⁶ and 10 000 fighters under its command,³⁷⁷ while sources interviewed by DIS in October 2022 cite between 30 000 and 80 000 fighters.³⁷⁸ Within Idlib, with respect to the situation prevailing before 2019 between anti-GoS factions, the security situation in the area dominated by HTS has been described as ‘four years of relative stability’.³⁷⁹ For further information on HTS, see section 1.4.4 above.

³⁶⁵ 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. On the establishment of the Idlib de-escalation area (and other similar areas) see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and Jaecke, G. & Labude, D., De-escalation zones in Syria, KAS, June 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁶ Clingendael, Turkey’s interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 7

³⁶⁷ FT, Syria: what is Turkey’s grand plan?, 25 July 2022, [url](#)

³⁶⁸ Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

³⁶⁹ IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 305; Syria TV, Through SNA Cracks: HTS Infiltrates Aleppo Countryside, Manipulates Loyalties, The Syrian Observer, 25 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁷⁰ Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey’s Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 19

³⁷¹ International Crisis Group, Türkiye’s Syria Policy after Erdoğan’s Win, 20 July 2023, [url](#)

³⁷² Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces’ military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

³⁷³ International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 5; Tsurkov, E., Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (Syria), European Council on Foreign Relations, n.d., [url](#); Solomon, C., HTS: Evolution of a Jihadi Group, Wilson Center, 13 July 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, التقديرات الراهنة والأفاق المستقبلية، 28 December 2022, [url](#)

³⁷⁴ International Crisis Group, Türkiye’s Syria Policy after Erdoğan’s Win, 20 July 2023, [url](#)

³⁷⁵ Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

³⁷⁶ UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 46

³⁷⁷ IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 357

³⁷⁸ DIS, Recruitment to opposition groups, December 2022, [url](#), p. 13

³⁷⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

The Idlib de-escalation zone has been described as ‘safe haven and holding pen’³⁸⁰ for other Islamist and/or jihadist groups, including some made up of foreign fighters.³⁸¹ For further information on other anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib, see section [1.4.5](#) above.

HTS has ‘subdued’ the various jihadist groups previously present in Idlib. In some cases it has eradicated them; in others, it has allowed only a few leaders or, in some cases, a few fighters to remain in the governorate.³⁸² During the reporting period, independent jihadist groups outside Fath Al-Mubin remained in Idlib, including HTS’ rival, al-Qaida-affiliated jihadist group Hurras al-Din (HaD), but were described as ‘tiny’.³⁸³ HaD was reportedly ‘defunct’.³⁸⁴ Among other jihadist groups unreconciled to HTS quasi-hegemony in Idlib, Jabhat Ansar Al-Din has only a few fighters left and Ansar Al-Islam is characterized as ‘miniscule, with very little military capability’.³⁸⁵ In late June 2023 a new insurgent group, ‘Revolutionary Shield Company’, emerged and claimed to fight HTS ‘criminality’ as opposed to GoS forces and allied militias.³⁸⁶

The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), centred in northern Aleppo governorate,³⁸⁷ had presence in Idlib governorate.³⁸⁸ The SNA-affiliated³⁸⁹ National Liberation Front (NLF) is part of the Fath al-Mubin Operations Room and fights alongside HTS on the Idlib frontlines.³⁹⁰ HTS aside, the two strongest SNA factions in Fath Al-Mubin are Ahrar al-Sham and Faylaq al-Sham.³⁹¹

For more information on anti-government armed groups in the Idlib area, see sections [1.4.4](#) to [1.4.6](#).

(b) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

The GoS and allied militias control the southern and eastern parts of Idlib governorate, including the Damascus-Aleppo highway (M5) and its immediate surroundings.³⁹² In April 2023, SNHR reported that the 25th Division (Special Tasks) (previously the Tiger Forces) is deployed across large sections of the fronts in Idlib governorate in particular.³⁹³ Prior to the reference period, the First, Second and Third brigades of the SAA’s Fifth Corps based in Hama governorate were extensively deployed in south Idlib.³⁹⁴

³⁸⁰ International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 3

³⁸¹ International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 10

³⁸² International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 8

³⁸³ International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 6

³⁸⁴ Bunzel, C., Explainer: The Jihadi Threat in 2022, Wilson Center, 22 December 2022, [url](#)

³⁸⁵ International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 10

³⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

³⁸⁷ Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey’s Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p.14

³⁸⁸ ACLED, Actor Profile: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), 26 July 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

³⁸⁹ Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022, [url](#), p. 8

³⁹⁰ Al-Monitor, Idlib sees new escalation between Syrian government, opposition forces, 22 June 2022, [url](#)

³⁹¹ International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

³⁹² See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁹³ Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units [source: SNHR], April 2023, [url](#), p.22

³⁹⁴ Waters, G, From Tiger Forces to the 16th Brigade: Russia’s evolving Syrian proxies, MEI, 12 September 2022, [url](#)

(c) ISIL

ISIL cells and leaders remain present in Idlib despite HTS' 'counter-terrorism'³⁹⁵ efforts to render them entirely inoperable³⁹⁶, and ISIL continues claiming attacks against HTS targets.³⁹⁷ However, ISIL's position in Idlib has been 'severely weakened' by HTS suppression of the group, even while HTS has yet to obtain the capacity to 'completely root out'³⁹⁸ ISIL's underground networks.³⁹⁹

(d) Security trends during the reporting period

Clashes involving GoS forces, opposition armed groups and ISIL

According to the International Crisis Group, the ceasefire in place since March 2020 remained in effect during the reference period but was regularly 'strain[ed]'⁴⁰⁰, notably by 'near daily' GoS forces and allied militias shelling and 'frequent' aerial bombing by GoS ally Russia that both 'uproot many people across the governorate time and again.'⁴⁰¹

The UNCOI reported that the conflict 'intensified' on several frontlines in the second half of 2022, including the frontline located in Idlib.⁴⁰² Between July and December 2022, the UNCOI recorded 20 aerial and ground attacks carried out by GoS forces and allied militias in western Aleppo and Idlib that resulted in 195 civilian casualties.⁴⁰³ The International Crisis Group reported that 'Russian and regime attacks fell off somewhat in 2022' in Idlib relative to previous years, but emphasised that, by March 2023, armed conflict still displaced 10 000 people each month.⁴⁰⁴ UNOCHA emphasised that, in 2022, active armed incidents and clashes remained regularly reported around frontline areas and caused civilian casualties, especially including in areas south of the M4 highway in Idlib.⁴⁰⁵ 'Widespread breaches' of the post-March-2020 ceasefire continued to occur in the second half of 2022⁴⁰⁶ and the first half of 2023.⁴⁰⁷ Beyond Russian air raids, these consisted primarily of mutual shelling, rocket fire and limited clashes

³⁹⁵ Zelin, A. Y., 'Jihadi "Counterterrorism": Hayat Tahrir al-Sham Versus the Islamic State', CTC Sentinel, February 2023, [url](#)

³⁹⁶ Zelin, A. Y., 'Jihadi "Counterterrorism": Hayat Tahrir al-Sham Versus the Islamic State', CTC Sentinel, February 2023, [url](#)

³⁹⁷ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

³⁹⁸ International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 12

³⁹⁹ International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 12; Nasr, W., 'Journey to Idlib: An Interview with Wassim Nasr', Journalist, France24, CTC Sentinel, May 2023, [url](#); Zelin, A. Y., 'Jihadi "Counterterrorism": Hayat Tahrir al-Sham Versus the Islamic State', CTC Sentinel, February 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁰¹ International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 20

⁴⁰² OHCHR, Don't look away: Syrian civilians face the prospect of a new escalation, 14 September 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 22

⁴⁰⁴ International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 21

⁴⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁴⁰⁶ Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, 2 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: June 2023, June 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para.4; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para.7

between opposition armed groups and GoS forces and allied militias across contact lines⁴⁰⁸, causing frequent civilian casualties.⁴⁰⁹

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.⁴¹⁰

Regarding ground military activity, 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'⁴¹¹, groups within the HTS-led Fath al-Mubin coalition joined these HTS raids, drawing GoS and allied militias shelling of towns in Idlib.⁴¹²

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.⁴¹³ The UNCOI reported on numerous instances of attacks on agricultural fields in the second half of 2022 that led to civilian casualties.⁴¹⁴

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.⁴¹⁵

In the deadliest single incident for civilians documented by the UNCOI in the second half of 2022, on 6 November 2022, the UNCOI documented that cluster munitions struck the densely populated Maram displacement camp near Kafr Jalis, close to the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing, and impacted six other nearby camps. UNCOI analysis determined that these cluster munitions were launched from GoS-held Nayrab airport, approximately 35 kilometres away. At least 7 civilians were killed in the incident, including 1 woman and 4 children, while at least 60 other civilians were injured.⁴¹⁶ 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.⁴¹⁷

⁴⁰⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para.7

⁴⁰⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), Annex IV, para.25

⁴¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁴¹¹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁴¹² International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁴¹³ Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria, April 2023, [url](#), p. 6

⁴¹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), paras 27-28, Annex IV, paras 10-17

⁴¹⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁴¹⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), Annex IV, para.25; HRW, Syria: Cluster Munitions Used in November 6 Attacks, 23 November 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 4



According to the UN Security Council, violent incidents continued throughout the first five months of 2023, causing civilian casualties.⁴¹⁸

Along with Aleppo governorate, Idlib was the governorate hardest hit by the 6 February 2023 earthquake that ‘devastated’ Syria’s northwest in particular.⁴¹⁹ 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,⁴²⁰ however, HTS attacks also resumed.⁴²¹

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.⁴²² In late May 2023, Russian airstrikes on anti-GoS held areas in Idlib rose to a level unprecedented in 18 months. According to Etana Syria, since the beginning of May 2023 Russian airstrikes on north-west Syria in general have ‘dramatically intensified’ and caused ‘the deadliest attacks on civilians in the region in over a year’, in a dynamic ‘towards greater confrontation and targeting of civilians’. This has included the bombing in June 2023 of a vegetable market in Jisr-Ash-Shughur that killed at least nine and injured dozens more.⁴²³ On 26 August 2023, SOHR reported that Ansar al-Tawhid (AaT) and the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) mounted the first tunnel bombing on SAA positions since 2016, killing at least 11 GoS soldiers⁴²⁴ in the most severe attack since 2020 according to pro-government Athr Press.⁴²⁵

(e) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 1 837 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Idlib governorate, of which 187 were coded as battles, 1 569 explosions/remote violence and 81 incidents of violence against civilians.⁴²⁶ Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in Ariha and al Ma’ra districts (see [Figure 3.](#)).

⁴¹⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 4

⁴¹⁹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para.3; Data Friendly Space, ‘Syria Earthquake February 2023 Government-controlled areas, Bi-Weekly Highlights - 17/02/2023’, 17 February 2023, [url](#)

⁴²⁰ Middle East Eye, Syria: Assad forces bombed areas hit by earthquake hours after disaster, 7 February 2023, [url](#)

⁴²¹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Para 7, 29

⁴²² UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Para 7, 29

⁴²³ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: June 2023, June 2023, [url](#)

⁴²⁴ Middle East Eye, Syria: Eleven soldiers killed in tunnel attack, 26 August 2023, [url](#)

⁴²⁵ Athr Press, Most Violent in Three Years: Armed Factions Attack Syrian Army in Idleb Countryside, The Syrian Observer, 28 August 2023, [url](#)

⁴²⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)



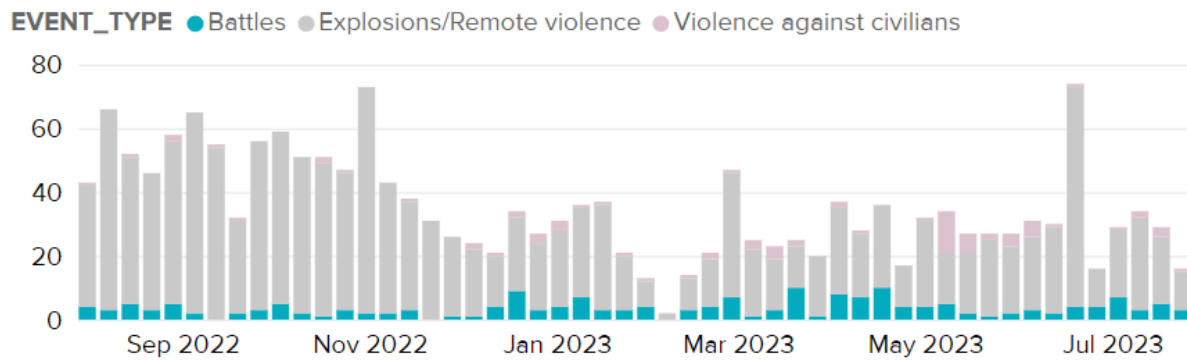


Figure 2. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Idlib governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data⁴²⁷

According to ACLED, GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were the main actor involved in security incidents (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2') during the reference period, accounting for around 73 % of all documented security incidents and around 83 % of all incidents coded as explosions/remote violence. Opposition armed groups, including HTS and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 23 % of all security incidents, the vast majority of which had GoS forces and affiliated armed groups as a party.

⁴²⁷ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Al Ma'ra	78	523	-
Ariha	29	621	11
Harim	5	25	26
Idlib	75	351	32
Jisr-Ash-Shugur	-	49	12
Total	187	1569	81

Figure 3. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Idlib governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data⁴²⁸

(f) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented 246 civilian fatalities in 2021⁴²⁹ and 147 in 2022.⁴³⁰ Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 91 civilian fatalities in Idlib governorate.⁴³¹ For the year 2022, AOAV documented 279 civilian casualties (killed and injured) in Idlib resulting from incidents of explosive violence.⁴³²

⁴²⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

⁴²⁹ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

⁴³⁰ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁴³¹ Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

⁴³² AOAV, Syria, updated 21 March 2023, [url](#)

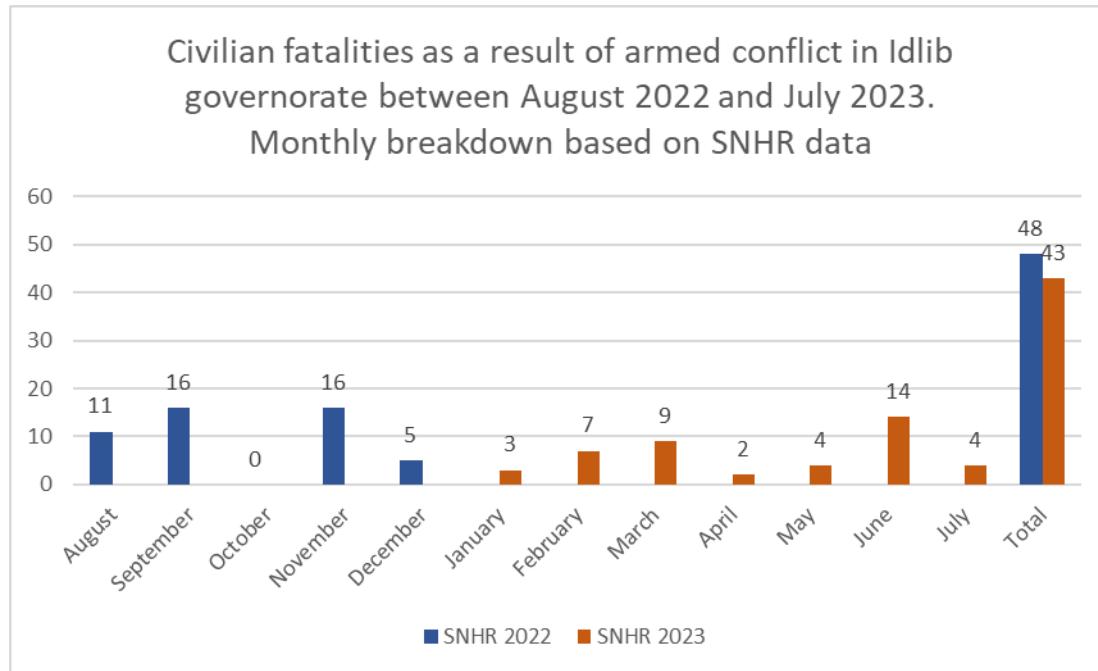


Figure 4. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Idlib governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

(g) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Idlib is one of the governorates where sources reported the highest percentage of widespread explosive ordnance contamination during the reporting period.⁴³³ 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.⁴³⁴

Civilian casualties, including of children, as a result of ERW were reported in Idlib in 2022⁴³⁵ and 2023.⁴³⁶ Insecurity and the presence of ERW has also impeded access of farmers to agricultural land.⁴³⁷

(h) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 1 899 350 IDPs in Idlib governorate.⁴³⁸ In 2022, Idlib governorate recorded the highest number of IDP movements in Syria by a considerable distance, at 122 807 movements: some 13 000 from the governorate, 105 000 within the governorate and 18 000 to the governorate. The highest numbers were recorded in

⁴³³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para.29; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para.33

⁴³⁴ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁴³⁵ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 24; Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria, April 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁴³⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), p. 19; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), p. 19

⁴³⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 30; Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria, April 2023, [url](#), p. 12

⁴³⁸ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33



November (16 024), September (15 477) and February (12 543).⁴³⁹ Two Idlib subdistricts, Dana (Harim district) and Maaret Tamsrin (Idlib district), recorded the highest number of IDP movements in Syria and were the only subdistricts to witness over 20 000 IDP movements per month over the course of 2022.⁴⁴⁰ In the first six months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded some 2 600 IDP movements from Idlib governorate, 68 200 IDP movements within the governorate and 25 800 IDP movements to the governorate.⁴⁴¹

The majority of IDP movements were recorded in February 2023 when over 34 000 persons were displaced mostly within the governorate following the earthquakes.⁴⁴² IDP movements recorded during the period January to June 2023 were mostly motivated by ‘access to services and livelihoods’.⁴⁴³

UNOCHA recorded 38 724 IDP spontaneous return movements in 2022, the highest numbers being recorded in September (6 017) and May (5 120). 1 000 were to the governorate, 28 000 within the governorate and 11 000 to the governorate.⁴⁴⁴ The majority of IDP return movements recorded by UNOCHA in 2022 (28 000 from a total of 39 000) occurred within the governorate, that saw the highest return movements figures across Syria.⁴⁴⁵ In 2022, 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.⁴⁴⁶ In the south of the governorate under GoS forces and allied militias control, SNHR reported on the continued auctioning of lands in Idlib governorate belonging to displaced persons and refugees⁴⁴⁷ as a factor precluding returns to the area⁴⁴⁸.

In the first six months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded some 10 000 IDP returns to Idlib governorate, 14 800 return movements within the governorate and 680 returns from the

⁴³⁹ UNOCHA, IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁰ UNOCHA, IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data December 2022, updated 26 April 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁴ UNOCHA, IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data December 2022, updated 26 April 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁵ UNOCHA, IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 55

⁴⁴⁷ SNHR, The Syrian Regime Announces New Auctions of Lands in Idlib Province Belonging to Displaced Persons and Refugees With the Aim of Seizing Them, 20 October 2022, [url](#); New Arab (The), ‘Syria regime auctioning off refugees’ land in Idlib’s Khan Sheikhoun, emptied after sarin gas attack’, 7 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁸ SNHR, The Syrian Regime Announces New Auctions of Lands in Idlib Province Belonging to Displaced Persons and Refugees With the Aim of Seizing Them, 20 October 2022, [url](#); New Arab (The), ‘Syria regime auctioning off refugees’ land in Idlib’s Khan Sheikhoun, emptied after sarin gas attack’, 7 October 2022, [url](#)





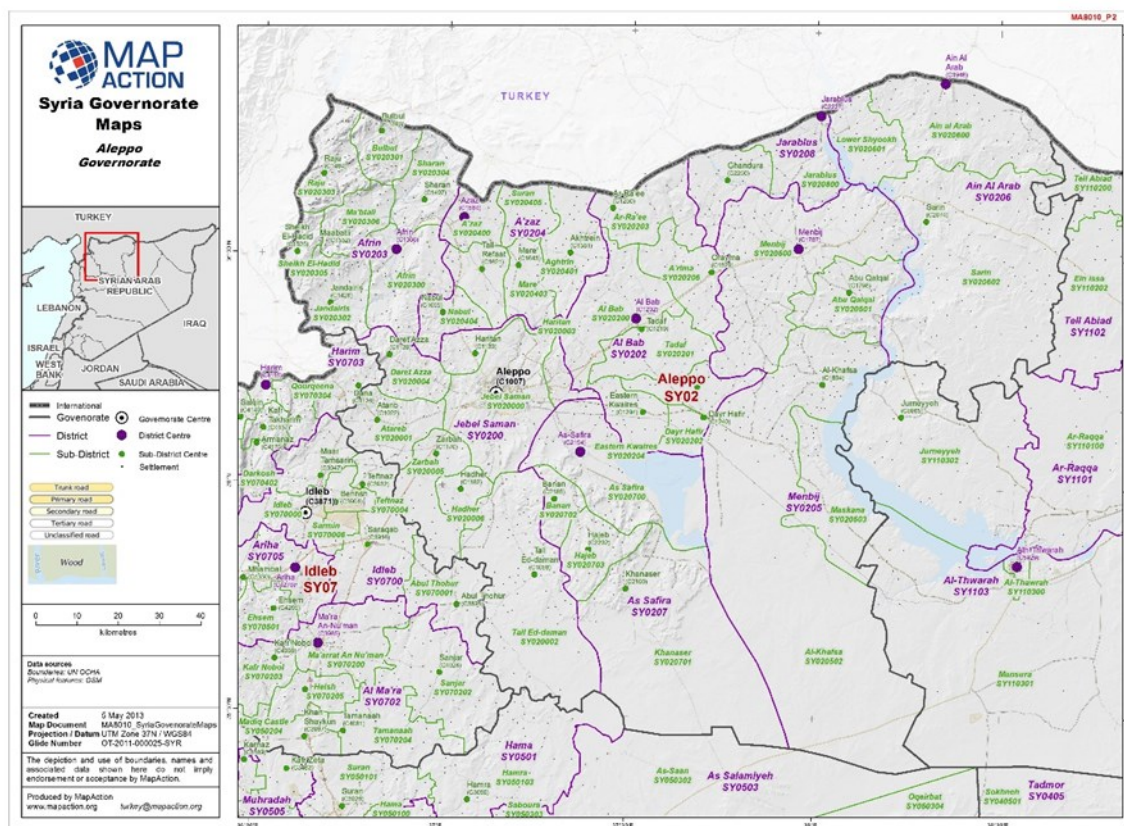
governorate.⁴⁴⁹ The highest return numbers were recorded in February and attributed to the earthquakes.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#)



2.2. Aleppo governorate



Map 7: © MapAction, Aleppo governorate⁴⁵¹

2.2.1. General description of the governorate

Aleppo governorate is located in the north of Syria, bordering Idlib governorate to the west, Hama governorate to the south and Raqqqa governorate to the east, and it shares an international border with Türkiye.⁴⁵² The governorate is divided into eight districts: Jebel Saman, Afrin (or Efrin), A'zaz (or Azaz), Al-Bab, Manbij (or Menbij), Jarablus, Ain Al Arab (or Kobane), and As-Safira.⁴⁵³ In a December 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Aleppo governorate at 4 226 203.⁴⁵⁴ According to UNOCHA, as of April 2023, the total population of those areas in northern Aleppo that are under Turkish control⁴⁵⁵ was approximately 1.4 million, of whom 850 000 were IDPs.⁴⁵⁶ For more information on the ethnic

⁴⁵¹ MapAction, Aleppo governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

⁴⁵² UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic [Map], January 2017, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁵³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic, Governorates profile (June 2014), 6 August 2014, [url](#), p. 5

⁴⁵⁴ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁴⁵⁵ The area discussed by UNOCHA as 'Turkish Operation Area' coincides with the areas captured by Turkish forces and affiliated anti-GoS armed groups during the so-called 'Euphrates Shield' and 'Olive Branch' military operations.

⁴⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Northwest Syria Factsheet (As of 30 April 2023), 5 May 2023, [url](#), p. 1

and religious composition of Aleppo's population, see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), section 2.2.1.

2.2.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Aleppo governorate is divided into areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups, areas controlled by the GoS, and several separate areas and enclaves controlled by the SDF⁴⁵⁷/YPG.⁴⁵⁸ Anti-GoS armed groups continued to control the northern parts of the governorate, including the areas adjacent to the Turkish border in Afrin, A'zaz, Al-Bab and Jarablus districts and areas west of Aleppo city adjoining the areas of Idlib governorate controlled by anti-GoS armed groups.⁴⁵⁹ Aleppo's countryside from Afrin to Al-Bab and Jarablus was reportedly controlled by the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA).⁴⁶⁰ Parts of western Aleppo governorate were under the control of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).⁴⁶¹

In the reference period of the previous [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(September 2022\)](#), ISIL had presence in the parts of Aleppo governorate controlled by Turkish-backed SNA and was active in GoS-controlled southern Aleppo governorate.⁴⁶² Gregory Waters, a researcher specialising in the Syrian conflict and extremist groups, elaborated in a January 2023 report that ISIL cells had always been present in south Aleppo, albeit with low levels of activity, but that the return of ambushes in the area in December 2022 indicated a 'strengthened and emboldened ISIS [ISIL] in this region'.⁴⁶³

(a) Anti-GoS armed groups

In mid-October 2022, HTS took over the city of Afrin,⁴⁶⁴ including its surroundings,⁴⁶⁵ from the SNA⁴⁶⁶ for around two weeks.⁴⁶⁷ According to the SOHR, a minimum of 30 positions in the

⁴⁵⁷ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 50

⁴⁵⁸ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#); UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Aleppo and June 2023.

⁴⁵⁹ Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#); UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Aleppo and June 2023.

⁴⁶⁰ TIMEP, So Close Yet So Far: The Political and Economic Isolation of Northwest Syria, 20 February 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁶¹ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), pp. 50, 96; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/51/45, 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 56

⁴⁶² EUAA, Syria: Security Situation, September 2022, [url](#), p. 86

⁴⁶³ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁴ Netjes, R., Shifting Lines and IDPs: Azaz, Afrin, and the HTS Incursion, TWI, 19 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁵ Enab Baladi, "تحرير الشام" تقتحم غفرين و"الفيلق الثالث" ينسحب نحو اعزاز [Tahrir al-Sham enters Afrin and the 'Third Corps' withdraws towards Azaz], 13 October 2022, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Recap: HTS and Opposition Agreement in Northern Syria Following Turkish Intervention, 21 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁶ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, October – December 2022, 1 May 2023, [url](#), pp. 10-11; VOA, Jihadist Group Takes Over Strategic Town in Northwest Syria, 13 October 2022, [url](#); Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria: HTS militants storm into Afrin as fighting rips through rebel-held areas, 13 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁷ MEE, Syria: Turkey to reorganise rebel groups as HTS withdraws from Afrin, 25 October 2022, [url](#)

area had already been under the control of HTS before the takeover of Afrin.⁴⁶⁸ A January 2023 article by opposition-affiliated Syria TV indicated that HTS was tightening control over north-western Syria, such as via proxy groups and the formation of new alliances, and was active in Afrin ‘in a hidden way’, holding ‘the Hamran crossing between Manbij and Jarabulus’.⁴⁶⁹ In February 2023, reportedly, the ‘Shahba Gathering’ was founded, uniting around 7 000 fighters of a number of SNA factions as well as HTS-affiliated groups.⁴⁷⁰ 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.⁴⁷¹

(b) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

The GoS controls the central and southern parts of the governorate, including the Damascus-Aleppo motorway (M5) and its immediate surroundings.⁴⁷² As of April 2023, the pro-government Russia-affiliated and pro-Iranian⁴⁷³ Palestinian⁴⁷⁴ Liwa Al-Quds brigade, which had been present in Aleppo governorate in the past, was subsequently transferred to Deir Ez-Zor governorate.⁴⁷⁵ The International Crisis Group and Etana Syria indicated, in June 2023, that large contingents of GoS forces were deployed to northern Aleppo governorate,⁴⁷⁶ while the number of GoS artillery strikes increased.⁴⁷⁷

According to a US Congress report, GoS and Russian forces in late January 2023 re-opened the joint base al-Jarrah (or Jirah), east of Aleppo city, reportedly, ‘as an additional option for forward deploying aircraft for air patrols along the northern Syrian border’.⁴⁷⁸ In the reference period, the presence of GoS’s 25th Special Forces Mission Division was reported in Aleppo governorate.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁶⁸ VOA, Jihadist Group Takes Over Strategic Town in Northwest Syria, 13 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁹ Syria TV, Through SNA Cracks: HTS Infiltrates Aleppo Countryside, Manipulates Loyalties, The Syrian Observer, 25 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁰ Enab Baladi, ريف حلب: ‘الشهابا جاثرة’ [Rural Aleppo: ‘Al-Shahba Gathering’ strengthens its ranks and denies its affiliation with any party], 28 February 2023, [url](#), Shahba Gathering: Is HTS organizing its own militia in north Aleppo? Part I, 1 May 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷¹ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, October – December 2022, 1 May 2023, [url](#), p. 11

⁴⁷² Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#); UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Aleppo and June 2023.

⁴⁷³ Bousset, P., The Quds Force in Syria: Combatants, Units, and Actions, CTC Sentinel, June 2023, [url](#), pp. 3, 6

⁴⁷⁴ Galia, E., The Pro-Iranian Militias in Syria, ITIC, 29 March 2023, [url](#), p. 24

⁴⁷⁵ Al Arabiya, فصیل لواء القدس یثبتي قصف الجولان.. فمن هو؟ [Liwa al-Quds faction claims responsibility for bombing of Golan heights, but who is Liwa al-Quds?], 9 April 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁶ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – June 2023, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁷ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁷⁸ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 54

⁴⁷⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

In the reference period, GoS's Fourth Division continued a siege on the Kurdish-controlled Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya neighbourhoods of Aleppo city,⁴⁸⁰ which had been imposed since mid-March 2022.⁴⁸¹ 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,⁴⁸² 'to further intensify the siege on the area'.⁴⁸³ According to a January 2023 Orient XII article, the Kurdish-controlled Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhood and Tall Rifaat region had been facing a particularly strict siege by the GoS since August 2022.⁴⁸⁴ As of December 2022, Russian-backed Syrian troops controlled zones mainly to the south of Tall Rifaat.⁴⁸⁵

(c) Kurdish armed groups (SDF/YPG)

SDF/YPG are in control of or have presence in Aleppo city (in the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya),⁴⁸⁶ in the Tall Rifaat area north of Aleppo city⁴⁸⁷ and in Manbij⁴⁸⁸ and Ain al-Arab (Kobane) in eastern Aleppo governorate.⁴⁸⁹ Reportedly, the local Kurdish military outfit Afrin Liberation Forces (HRE; Kurdish: [Hezen Rizgariya Efrine](#)) was also active in Aleppo governorate in the reference period.⁴⁹⁰

(d) Türkiye

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,⁴⁹¹ with a high density in the north-west and along the border regions between Idlib and Aleppo governorates.⁴⁹² 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, as of January 2023, remained

⁴⁸⁰ Kurdistan24, Two Kurdish children die in Aleppo due to Syrian government siege, 5 January 2023, [url](#); Shaam Network, Residents of Aleppo's Ashrafiya and Sheikh Maqsoud Pay for Conflict Between PKK and 4th Division, The Syrian Observer, 6 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸¹ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 32

⁴⁸² VOA, Syrian Kurd Who Lost Hand in IS Battle Finds Passion for the Drums, 26 July 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁸³ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 32

⁴⁸⁴ Ali, A. and Ledeganck, I., Dans le nord de la Syrie, les rivalités régionales réveillent l'organisation de l'État islamique, Orient XXI, 31 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁵ France 24, Russia sends troop reinforcements to Kurdish-controlled northern Syria, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁶ Kurdistan24, Two Kurdish children die in Aleppo due to Syrian government siege, 5 January 2023, [url](#); Shaam Network, Residents of Aleppo's Ashrafiya and Sheikh Maqsoud Pay for Conflict Between PKK and 4th Division, The Syrian Observer, 6 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁷ Ali, A. and Ledeganck, I., Dans le nord de la Syrie, les rivalités régionales réveillent l'organisation de l'État islamique, Orient XXI, 31 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁸ Netjes, R., Arab Syrian IDPs of Tal Rifaat also Want to Go Home, TWI, 12 August 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁹ France 24, Russia sends troop reinforcements to Kurdish-controlled northern Syria, 1 December 2022, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Syrian opposition gears up for Turkish ground operation, 2 December 2022, [url](#); MEE, Turkey 'gives Russia time to broker a deal' on Syria's Tal Rifaat, 29 November 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁰ AFN News, Afrin Liberation Forces publish balance sheet of actions they carried out in July, 1 August 2023, [url](#);

NPA, 92 Kurdish soldiers killed in Syria's Afrin – Kurdish armed force, 4 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹¹ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹² Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

the same as in the previous reference period, according to the UN.⁴⁹³ Turkish proxies controlled areas surrounding Tall Rifaat from the north.⁴⁹⁴

(e) Russia

According to Jusoor for Studies, as of July 2023, Russian forces were deployed in areas controlled by the GoS and in some areas controlled by the SDF/YPG, such as Manbij.⁴⁹⁵ Russian forces continued to be stationed in Aleppo city.⁴⁹⁶ 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.⁴⁹⁷ With reference to confidential sources interviewed by the pro-GoS newspaper Athr Press, it was reported that Russian forces were still positioned in Tall Rifaat city as of June 2023.⁴⁹⁸

(f) Iran

According to Jusoor for Studies, as of July 2023, Iranian forces were deployed in Aleppo governorate in the areas controlled by GoS as well as in areas in north-western Aleppo governorate controlled by the SDF/YPG.⁴⁹⁹ A government source indicated that the central Iranian military base was located in the Jabal Azzan area to the south of Aleppo.⁵⁰⁰ According to an article by researcher and political analyst Pierre Bousset published in June 2023, several local pro-Iranian militias, among which the Aleppo Defenders Corps, were present in Aleppo governorate. Furthermore, military reinforcements from the Iraqi Badr Brigade were present at the bases of the 80th Brigade near Aleppo International Airport.⁵⁰¹ With reference to various sources, Bousset further indicated that IRGC Quds force units were moving towards northern Syria, among others in order to get closer to Shiite cities in Aleppo governorate such as Al-Zahraa and Nubl northwest of Aleppo. Furthermore, Iranian drone launch sites were placed at the Jirah and Kuweires airbases in eastern Aleppo governorate.⁵⁰² In 2022, pro-Iranian militias reportedly established bases near the cities of Deir Hafir and Maskanah in Manbij district, located along the road to Raqqa governorate.⁵⁰³

⁴⁹³ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁴ France 24, Russia sends troop reinforcements to Kurdish-controlled northern Syria, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁵ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁶ Athr Press, Truth of News of Withdrawal of Russian Members from Tal Rifaat Base in Northern Syria, The Syrian Observer, 7 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁷ AFP, Russia sends reinforcements to northern Syria, 30 November 2022

⁴⁹⁸ Athr Press, Truth of News of Withdrawal of Russian Members from Tal Rifaat Base in Northern Syria, The Syrian Observer, 7 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁹ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁰ Syria TV, Syria Earthquake Reveals Extent of Iranian Influence in Aleppo, The Syrian Observer, 2 March 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁰¹ Bousset, P., The Quds Force in Syria: Combatants, Units, and Actions, CTC Sentinel, June 2023, [url](#), pp. 4-5

⁵⁰² Bousset, P., The Quds Force in Syria: Combatants, Units, and Actions, CTC Sentinel, June 2023, [url](#), p. 5

⁵⁰³ Galia, E., The Pro-Iranian Militias in Syria, ITIC, 29 March 2023, [url](#), p. 23

2.2.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

In the reference period, civilian casualties in Aleppo governorate occurred as a result of ground-based strikes,⁵⁰⁴ drone strikes⁵⁰⁵ and stray bullets.⁵⁰⁶ Furthermore, airstrikes,⁵⁰⁷ rocket fire across front lines, shelling⁵⁰⁸ and limited clashes were reported.⁵⁰⁹ Incidents in which civilians were shot and killed by an armed group,⁵¹⁰ at a checkpoint⁵¹¹ or by unknown perpetrators⁵¹² were also reported. Sustained tensions in northern Aleppo continued particularly in frontline areas.⁵¹³ Overall, the reported incidents occurred in northern⁵¹⁴ and north-western Aleppo,⁵¹⁵ eastern, north-eastern and western Aleppo governorate.⁵¹⁶ Airstrikes and mutual shelling were also reported in densely populated areas such as Ayn Al-Arab (Kobane).⁵¹⁷ 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.⁵¹⁸ According to UNOCHA, 'targeted air strikes against airports' in Aleppo occurred regularly.⁵¹⁹ Strikes reportedly targeted civilian areas in A'zaz, Al-Bab, Afrin and other areas in northern rural Aleppo.⁵²⁰ Clashes occurred in the reference period in areas north of Aleppo such as Ayn Al-Arab, Afrin and Tall Rifaat.⁵²¹ Artillery shelling by GoS and Russian forces was for example reported in June 2023 in Kafr Nouran, Kaframa and Kafrtaal in western Aleppo.⁵²² In October 2022, hostilities escalated in Al-Bab, Afrin and Kafr Jannah, after a social media activist and his wife were killed,⁵²³ between two SNA factions, namely the Third Legion

⁵⁰⁴ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 17; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, pp. 19-20

⁵⁰⁵ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 17; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 20

⁵⁰⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), Annex I, p. 19

⁵⁰⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 6

⁵⁰⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 5; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 3

⁵⁰⁹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 8; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 3

⁵¹⁰ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 20

⁵¹¹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 20

⁵¹² UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 17; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), Annex I, p. 19

⁵¹³ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 29

⁵¹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 82; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 6; UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁵¹⁵ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 20

⁵¹⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Annex I, pp. 20-21; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 20

⁵¹⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 6

⁵¹⁸ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 20

⁵¹⁹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁵²⁰ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 3

⁵²¹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁵²² Al Jazeera, Syrian gov't bombs kill three people near Aleppo: White Helmets, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

⁵²³ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 5



and the Hamza Division. Reportedly, HTS and SNA's Sultan Suleiman Shah Division joined the clashes in support of the Hamza Division⁵²⁴ and other SNA factions and SNA-affiliated groups joined the clashes in support of different sides of the conflict.⁵²⁵ In the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquakes, violent incidents decreased but did not stop completely.⁵²⁶

The conflict between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups

Indiscriminate attacks by GoS and Russian forces on civilians in western Aleppo persisted in 2022.⁵²⁷ The USDOS reported that shelling by GoS and pro-GoS forces in western Aleppo continued throughout 2022.⁵²⁸ 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.⁵²⁹ The number of airstrikes carried out by pro-GoS forces had decreased as of August 2022.⁵³⁰ However, in mid-2023, GoS forces and affiliated militias attacked the north-west more frequently, including civilian areas in Aleppo governorate, causing civilian casualties.⁵³¹ HTS, meanwhile, clashed with GoS forces in northern Aleppo⁵³² and attacked GoS positions in the governorate, joined by units from the HTS-affiliated al-Fatah al-Mubin coalition.⁵³³

Sporadic hostilities amongst GoS-affiliated militias, such as clashes between the Liwa Al-Quds and National Defence Forces (NDF), resulting in civilians casualties, including of children, were reported in the reference period in the governorate.⁵³⁴

The conflict between Türkiye and Kurdish armed groups (SDF/YPG)

Clashes between Türkiye and Kurdish armed groups occurred in Aleppo governorate in multiple instances.⁵³⁵ The USDOS indicated that Aleppo was one of three Syrian governorates affected by a total of over 50 airstrikes 'targeting vehicles, posts, different positions, and civilian infrastructure' executed by Türkiye in 2022.⁵³⁶ According to Jusoor for Studies, as of January 2023, two air operations were launched by Türkiye against the SDF in the reference

⁵²⁴ Syria Direct, 'Accountability, or fall': Syrian National Army's Hamza Division under fire after assassination of opposition activist in northern Aleppo, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵²⁵ Syria Direct, 'Accountability, or fall': Syrian National Army's Hamza Division under fire after assassination of opposition activist in northern Aleppo, 12 October 2022, [url](#); Rudaw, US calls on radical group to leave Afrin 'immediately', 18 October 2022, [url](#); Arab Weekly (The), In Syria's northwest, rebel infighting threatens a fragile calm, 4 November 2022, [url](#)

⁵²⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 8

⁵²⁷ HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵²⁸ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 34

⁵²⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 22

⁵³⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/51/45, 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 7, 39

⁵³¹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – June 2023, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵³² International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁵³³ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – June 2023, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵³⁴ Baladi News, جرحى مدنيون باقتتال ميليشيات النظام في حلب [Civilian casualties as a result of fighting amongst pro-government militias in Aleppo city], 28 March 2023, [url](#)

⁵³⁵ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Reuters, Turkey says military 'neutralised' 53 Kurdish militants in northern Syria, 14 June 2023, [url](#)

⁵³⁶ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 35



period.⁵³⁷ As indicated by other sources, an operation named Claw-Sword was launched by Türkiye in November 2022 against positions of the SDF and GoS army in Aleppo governorate.⁵³⁸ With the start of Operation Claw-Sword, hostilities between Türkiye and SDF/YPG forces continued along the front line of Operation Peace Spring.⁵³⁹ Türkiye continued to periodically target SDF forces⁵⁴⁰ and carried out artillery and drone strikes on Kurdish-held positions in the governorate,⁵⁴¹ such as on Kobane and Tall Rifaat in November 2022⁵⁴² or, after positions on the Turkish side of the border were attacked in June 2023,⁵⁴³ on Manbij and Tall Rifaat regions.⁵⁴⁴ In June 2023, a senior SDF/YPG commander was killed by a Turkish drone west of Manbij⁵⁴⁵ and the SDF/YPG answered by shelling a Turkish base east of A'zaz city the day after the drone attack, prompting further clashes between the two parties. According to the International Crisis Group, '[a]ttacks on both sides somewhat subsided late June' 2023.⁵⁴⁶

Infighting among anti-GoS armed groups

Infighting between different anti-GoS armed groups in Turkish-controlled northern Aleppo was reported during the reference period,⁵⁴⁷ including in October 2022 between two SNA-affiliated groups,⁵⁴⁸ causing civilian casualties.⁵⁴⁹ The situation reportedly escalated when political activist Muhammad Abu Ghanoum and his pregnant wife were killed in al-Bab city in eastern Aleppo in the first week of October 2022 by members of the al-Hamzah Division, which was subsequently attacked multiple times by the Third Legion.⁵⁵⁰ This infighting prompted HTS to launch an armed operation in northern Aleppo governorate⁵⁵¹ and

⁵³⁷ Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵³⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 6; UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 31; SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 133

⁵³⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁴⁰ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – June 2023, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁴¹ Reuters, Turkey says military 'neutralised' 53 Kurdish militants in northern Syria, 14 June 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁴² International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁴³ Reuters, Turkey says military 'neutralised' 53 Kurdish militants in northern Syria, 14 June 2023, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Russian soldier allegedly killed in northern Aleppo: SOHR, 12 June 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁴ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – June 2023, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁵ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – June 2023, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁶ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁴⁷ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, October – December 2022, 1 May 2023, [url](#), p. 10; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 5; VOA, Jihadist Group Takes Over Strategic Town in Northwest Syria, 13 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁸ Jamus, A. R., Syrian jihadist group HTS, armed groups agree to uneasy truce, Al-Monitor, 23 October 2022, [url](#); Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 5

⁵⁵⁰ Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁵¹ Syrian Observer (The), Recap: HTS and Opposition Agreement in Northern Syria Following Turkish Intervention, 21 October 2022, [url](#)

temporarily seize the city of Afrin,⁵⁵² which had previously been controlled by SNA forces.⁵⁵³ Türkiye then reportedly deployed forces in the area to put an end to the clashes.⁵⁵⁴

ISIL activities

As reported by the Counter Extremism Project analyst Gregory Waters, in the reference period ISIL carried out attacks in a number of Syrian governorates, including Aleppo.⁵⁵⁵ According to a June 2023 article of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards-affiliated Tasnim News Agency, ISIL attacks had increased in northern Aleppo in the course of May and June 2023.⁵⁵⁶ In August, October and December 2022 as well as March, April and May 2023, up to two confirmed ISIL attacks occurred per month in Aleppo,⁵⁵⁷ including attacks on truffle pickers.⁵⁵⁸ No incidents were reported in July 2023 according to Gregory Waters.⁵⁵⁹ Furthermore, the US-led coalition and Türkiye reportedly killed and captured senior ISIL leaders in Aleppo governorate.⁵⁶⁰

Israeli airstrikes

Israeli airstrikes occurred in Aleppo governorate, targeting Aleppo airport several times during the reference period, as well as a military airport in the Aleppo countryside.⁵⁶¹

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 2 735 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Aleppo governorate, of which 551 were coded as battles,

⁵⁵² Syrian Observer (The), Recap: HTS and Opposition Agreement in Northern Syria Following Turkish Intervention, 21 October 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria: Turkey to reorganise rebel groups as HTS withdraws from Afrin, 25 October 2022, [url](#); Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, October – December 2022, 1 May 2023, [url](#), pp. 10-11; International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 47

⁵⁵³ VOA, Jihadist Group Takes Over Strategic Town in Northwest Syria, 13 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁴ Syrian Observer (The), Recap: HTS and Opposition Agreement in Northern Syria Following Turkish Intervention, 21 October 2022, [url](#); Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁵ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in August 2022, CEP, 6 September 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in October 2022, CEP, 4 November 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁶ Tasnim News Agency, Syrian Military Reinforces North of Damascus As Tensions Grow in SDF-Controlled Areas, 20 June 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁷ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in May 2023, CEP, 2 June 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in October 2022, CEP, 4 November 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in August 2022, CEP, 6 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁸ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁹ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in July 2023, CEP, 2 August 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁰ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Al-Araby al-Jadeed, مقتل قيادي [Killing of important ISIL leader during security operation in northern Aleppo], 29 April 2023, [url](#); Shafaq News, Killing of ISIL leader and kidnapping of another during air raid in northern Syria, [مقتل قيادي من "داعش" واعتقال آخر بانزال جوي شمال سوريا], 17 April 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶¹ Independent (The), Israel's air force attacks Syria and Syrian air defense missile explodes over northern Israel, 2 July 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Al Jazeera, Israel launches missile attack on Syria's Aleppo airport: Gov't, 22 March 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Israel launches deadly air raid on Aleppo airport: media, 1 May 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syria says Israeli air raid takes Aleppo airport out of service, 7 March 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Second Israeli attack in a week damages Aleppo airport: Syria, 6 September 2022, [url](#); AP News, Reported Israeli strike damages Aleppo airport and puts it out of service, 28 August 2023, [url](#)

1 717 explosions/remote violence and 467 incidents of violence against civilians.⁵⁶² 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 (see [Figure 6](#)).

Evolution of events by type

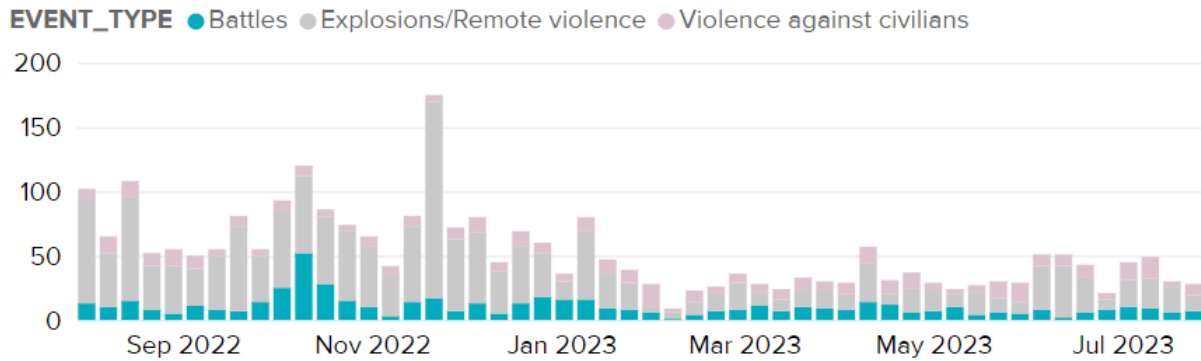


Figure 5. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Aleppo governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data⁵⁶³

According to ACLED, GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 49 % of all recorded security incidents (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2') during the reference period, particularly in incidents coded as explosions/remote violence and battles. Military forces of Türkiye were involved in around 30 % of all security incidents, the majority coded as explosions/remote violence. Opposition armed groups (HTS and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 17 % of all security incidents, SNA in around 17 % incidents, while SDF and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 12 % of all security incidents.

⁵⁶² EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

⁵⁶³ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Afrin	97	157	261
Ain Al Arab	10	169	13
Al Bab	125	95	63
As-Safira	2	1	3
A'zaz	128	461	57
Jarablus	16	34	9
Jebel Saman	145	737	19
Menbij	28	63	42
Total	551	1717	467

Figure 6. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Aleppo governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data⁵⁶⁴

(c) Civilian fatalities

According to the AOAV Explosive Violence Monitor for 2022, Aleppo was the Syrian governorate most affected in terms of civilian casualties in 2022, accounting for 34 % or 447 incidents of civilian casualties. Furthermore, since 2012, Aleppo had consistently been one of the five most dangerous Syrian governorates for civilians.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

⁵⁶⁵ AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), p. 21

SNHR documented 231 civilian fatalities in 2021⁵⁶⁶ and 224 in 2022.⁵⁶⁷ Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 171 civilian fatalities in Aleppo governorate.⁵⁶⁸ Of the 171 civilian fatalities total recorded by SNHR between August 2022 and July 2023 in Aleppo governorate, around 15 were civilians originating from the governorate who drowned in June 2023 while on migration routes to Europe.⁵⁶⁹

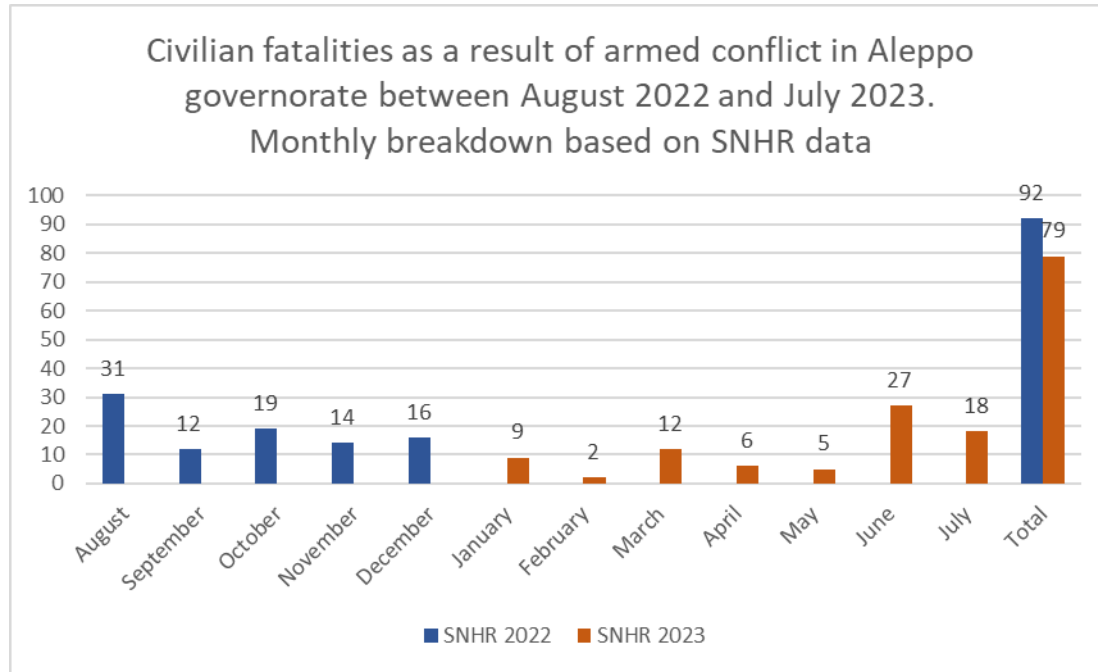


Figure 7. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Aleppo governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

UN Habitat reported in May 2023 that, as a result of the Syrian conflict, 14 % of residential properties had become uninhabitable in Aleppo governorate.⁵⁷⁰ In January 2023, Human Rights Watch reported that ‘indiscriminate attacks by Syrian-Russian military forces on [...] critical civilian infrastructure persisted in 2022’ in western Aleppo governorate.⁵⁷¹ In the reference period, conflict-related damage to civilian infrastructure and objects,⁵⁷² including

⁵⁶⁶ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

⁵⁶⁷ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁵⁶⁸ Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8.

⁵⁶⁹ Syrian Network for Human Rights, email correspondence 7, 24 and 25 July 2023. See also SNHR, 501 Civilians, Including 71 Children, 42 Woman, and 20 Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in Syria, in the First Half of 2023, 2 July 2023, [url](#), pp. 5, 10

⁵⁷⁰ UN-Habitat, Syria Country Profile, 4 June 2023, [url](#), p.1

⁵⁷¹ HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁷² UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 8; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 5

schools,⁵⁷³ health facilities⁵⁷⁴ and markets⁵⁷⁵ was also reported. Damage as a result of air strikes, furthermore, led to the suspension of flights at the Aleppo airport in March,⁵⁷⁶ April and May 2023.⁵⁷⁷

According to UN sources, Aleppo was among the Syrian governorates with the highest percentages of some form of explosive contamination⁵⁷⁸ and among the governorates where contamination from UXOs represented a particularly major security concern and continued to be reported in 2022.⁵⁷⁹ 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.⁵⁸⁰ 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.'⁵⁸¹

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 1 267 887 IDPs in Aleppo governorate,⁵⁸² including 231 095 in A'zaz, 193 548 in Afrin, 106 324 in Al-Bab and 257 689 in Jebel Saman districts.⁵⁸³ Over the year 2022, there were approximately 18 000 IDP movements out of Aleppo and 15 000 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 26 000 movements within the governorate.⁵⁸⁴ Between January and May 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 movements within the governorate.⁵⁸⁵ The majority of IDP movements in Aleppo governorate in 2023 was recorded in February and attributed to the February earthquakes in the region.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁷³ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 30; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 26

⁵⁷⁴ Guardian (The), Turkey confirms deadly airstrikes in Syria and Iraq targeting Kurdish groups, 20 November 2022, [url](#); Shafaq News, Operation Claw-Sword: Turkey strikes in Iraq, Syria a week after Istanbul bombing, 20 November 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 26, 82; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), Annex I, p. 20

⁵⁷⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 11

⁵⁷⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 8

⁵⁷⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 33; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 29

⁵⁷⁹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 12, 30

⁵⁸⁰ SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 20

⁵⁸¹ UN Security Council, Humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic, S/2023/419, 9 June 2023, [url](#), para. 20

⁵⁸² UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁵⁸³ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 24

⁵⁸⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#)

The SNHR, according to USDOS, reported that more than 10 000 persons were displaced in Aleppo and Idlib governorates in August 2022 as a result of hostilities.⁵⁸⁷ SNHR further reported that the HTS military operations carried out in mid-October 2022 in western Aleppo cities, such as Ghazawiya and Deir Al-Ballout, led to forced displacement of around 13 000 persons and directly affected more than 12 IDP camps.⁵⁸⁸ Air strikes and mutual shelling after the launching of Operation Claw-Sword by Türkiye in northern rural Aleppo and other governorates in November 2022,⁵⁸⁹ and Russian airstrikes in June 2023 also induced displacement.⁵⁹⁰ Most of the IDP movements in February 2023 occurred in earthquake affected areas, especially in Idlib and Aleppo governorates.⁵⁹¹

As regards returns, in 2022, UNOCHA recorded approximately 3 000 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from Aleppo to other governorates and some 2 000 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Aleppo as well as about 3 000 movements within Aleppo.⁵⁹² Furthermore, Aleppo governorate continued to be the main area of return in Syria, accounting for 34 % of returns between January and mid-November 2022.⁵⁹³ Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA recorded approximately 571 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Aleppo and about 3 992 returnee movements from Aleppo to other governorates as well as about 12 520 movements within the governorate.⁵⁹⁴ No further information on the reasons behind the return movements was found.

⁵⁸⁷ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 65

⁵⁸⁸ SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 86

⁵⁸⁹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 6

⁵⁹⁰ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁹¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁹² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁹³ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 58

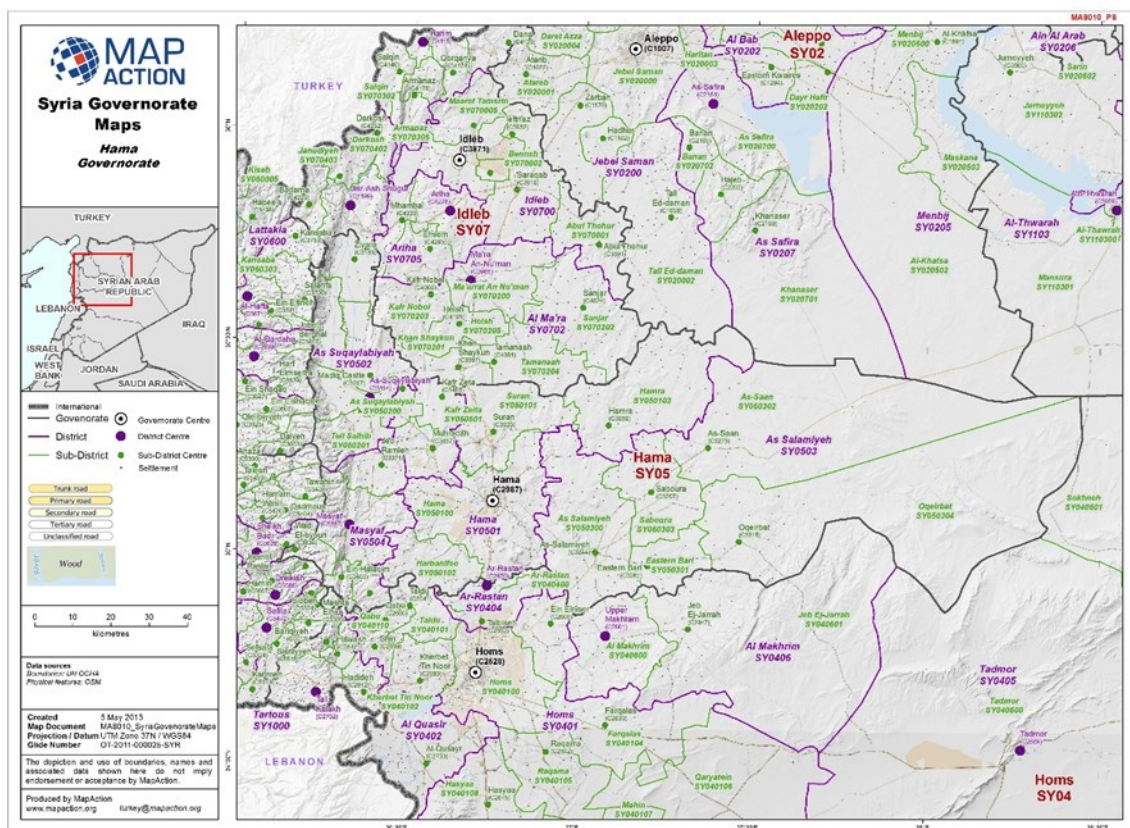
⁵⁹⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#);

UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#);

UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#);

UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

2.3. Hama governorate



Map 8: © MapAction, Hama governorate⁵⁹⁵

2.3.1. General description of the governorate

Hama governorate is located in west-central Syria⁵⁹⁶ and has internal borders with the governorates of Latakia and Tartous to the west, Idlib and Aleppo to the north, Raqqqa to the north-east and Homs to the south and south-east.⁵⁹⁷ The governorate comprises five administrative districts: Hama, Misyaf (Masyaf), Muhardah (Muhradah), Suqailbiya (As-Suqaylabiyah), and Salamiyah (As-Salamiyah).⁵⁹⁸ A December 2022 UNOCHA report estimated the population of Hama governorate to be 1 485 590.⁵⁹⁹ Hama city's population was estimated by the CIA in 2023 at 996 000.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁵ MapAction, Hama governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁶ NPA, 3 people killed in Israeli attack on Syria's Hama – Russia, 13 March 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁷ UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁸ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 135

⁵⁹⁹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁶⁰⁰ US, CIA, World Factbook, Syria, last updated: 1 August 2023, [url](#)

Information on the governorate's religious composition can be found in an earlier issue of this report: EUAA COI Report: [Syria - Security situation \(September 2022\)](#).

2.3.2. Conflict background and armed actors

During the reference period, most of Hama governorate was under the control of the GoS,⁶⁰¹ except for a small strip of HTS-controlled land on its northwesternmost edge bordering Idlib⁶⁰² and pockets of ISIL presence in areas east bordering Aleppo, Raqqa and Homs.⁶⁰³

Although the northwestern parts of Hama were reconquered by the GoS in a large-scale military offensive between April 2019 and March 2020 (which left nearly a million people displaced),⁶⁰⁴ conflict activity between the GoS and armed opposition groups⁶⁰⁵ remained high in those areas afterwards⁶⁰⁶ and included shelling/aerial bombardments by GoS⁶⁰⁷ and Russian forces.⁶⁰⁸ While the eastern areas of Hama had been free from ISIL activity for some time after October 2017⁶⁰⁹ when ISIL fighters encircled by GoS forces moved northward into south-eastern Idlib,⁶¹⁰ the group resumed its actions in mid-2020, attacking and capturing villages⁶¹¹ and re-engaging in fighting with GoS forces and affiliated militias.⁶¹² Ultimately, however, ISIL lacked the capacity to hold on to these villages located 'on the periphery of core regime territory'.⁶¹³ Furthermore, the governorate experienced isolated Israeli attacks in recent years,⁶¹⁴ including on targets tied to the GoS administration and armed forces.⁶¹⁵

A map on areas of control published by the Carter Center showed that as of June 2023, there were 671 control points in the governorate that could be attributed to the GoS and its allies (including Russian forces, Iranian forces, and pro-government militias).⁶¹⁶

⁶⁰¹ Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁰² Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#); iMMAP and USAID, Context Update: Northwestern Syria [Map], 4 May 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁰³ Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁴ AI, UN must continue cross-border aid regardless of UN Security Council or Syrian government approval, 12 May 2023, [url](#), p. 6

⁶⁰⁵ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | October-December 2021, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁰⁶ UN Security Council, Escalating Conflict, Deepening Economic Crisis in Syria Pushing Humanitarian Needs to Highest Levels Since Start of Conflict, Senior Officials Tell Security Council, 24 August 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁷ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | October-December 2021, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁰⁸ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | October-December 2021, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 4; SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2022, 7 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 3, 20; ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 11-17 September 2021, 22 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁹ Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

⁶¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 14

⁶¹¹ Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

⁶¹² See, for example, SOHR, ISIS attack | Four pro-regime militants killed in eastern countryside of Hama, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

⁶¹³ Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

⁶¹⁴ MEE, Syria: Israeli air strikes reportedly kill 11 pro-government fighters, 9 June 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Israeli attacks in 2022 | 33 targets destroyed and nearly 70 people killed and wounded in 12 attacks so far, 15 May 2022, [url](#)

⁶¹⁵ SOHR, Israeli attacks in 2022 | 33 targets destroyed and nearly 70 people killed and wounded in 12 attacks so far, 15 May 2022, [url](#)

⁶¹⁶ Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#) Set filters to Hama and June 2023.



Hama city hosts the base of the SAA's new 25th Special Tasks Division (previously Tiger Forces),⁶¹⁷ while the First, Second and Third brigades of the SAA's Fifth Corps – extensively involved in military offensives there and in south Idlib – were based in northern Hama.⁶¹⁸ The 25th division, the Fifth Corps, as well as units of the NDF were reported to patrol the eastern Hama countryside.⁶¹⁹ Moreover, the SAA's Fourth Division operated a base in central Hama as well as checkpoints in the south, north-west and north-east⁶²⁰ and along the road connecting Hama city with Saraqib in Idlib.⁶²¹ The Division recruited fighters from marginalised communities in villages located in the governorate's north and in Salamiyah.⁶²²

As of mid-2023, Jusoor for Studies mapped concentrations of sites of Russian and Iranian/Iran-backed forces around Hama city. Mainly 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,⁶²³ where pro-Iranian militias were stationed in Masyaf.⁶²⁴

2.3.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

Military operations in northern and western Hama governorate

The beginning of the reference period saw a continued intensification of bombardment by GoS forces and affiliated militias.⁶²⁵ Regular artillery attacks by these forces against a variety of military and civilian targets throughout the reference period up until May 2023,⁶²⁶ and these instances of shelling continued into June 2023. Sometimes supported by Russian forces,⁶²⁷ these attacks hit towns and villages in western⁶²⁸ and northern areas of Hama, including the towns of Ziyara⁶²⁹ and Qastoun,⁶³⁰ causing several civilian casualties.⁶³¹ On 19 January 2023,

⁶¹⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units [source: SNHR], April 2023, [url](#), p. 22; Waters, G, From Tiger Forces to the 16th Brigade: Russia's evolving Syrian proxies, MEI, 12 September 2022, [url](#)

⁶¹⁸ Waters, G, From Tiger Forces to the 16th Brigade: Russia's evolving Syrian proxies, MEI, 12 September 2022, [url](#)

⁶¹⁹ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁶²⁰ Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 5

⁶²¹ Rozana Radio, In Hama and Idlib: Exploitation of Human and Robbery of Land and Crops, 4 April 2022, [url](#)

⁶²² Shahhoud, A., Inside an Elite Syrian Military Unit's Power Grab, New Lines Magazine, 16 May 2023, [url](#)

⁶²³ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

⁶²⁴ Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 20; VOA, Syrian State Media: Israel Fires Missiles at Western City, 12 March 2023, [url](#)

⁶²⁵ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 08 September 2022, 8 September 2022, [url](#)

⁶²⁶ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – May 2023, 5 June 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 06 April 2023, 6 April 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 05 December 2022, 5 December 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 03 November 2022, 3 November 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 04 October 2022, 4 October 2022, [url](#)

⁶²⁷ Al Jazeera, Syrian gov't bombs kill three people near Aleppo: White Helmets, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶²⁸ SNHR, Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May 2023, June 2023, [url](#), p. 1; SNHR, Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2023, 5 May 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁶²⁹ Al Jazeera, Syrian gov't bombs kill three people near Aleppo: White Helmets, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶³⁰ SNHR, Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in January 2023, 4 February 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁶³¹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 20; SHRC, Five civilians, including children, wounded by Assad artillery shelling, 20 January 2023, [url](#)



GoS forces⁶³² launched ground-based strikes that hit a residential area in Qastoun in the western countryside of Hama, injuring five civilians.⁶³³

The positions of GoS forces in western Hama were reportedly targeted by, the armed opposition groups HTS⁶³⁴ (in April 2023) and Jaysh al-Nasr (in July 2023).⁶³⁵

ISIL insurgency

ISIL continued to carry out attacks⁶³⁶ of an asymmetric nature, with small cells routinely conducting attacks in the governorate's east.⁶³⁷ According to Gregory Waters, these attacks peaked in March (10 incidents)⁶³⁸ and April 2023 (7),⁶³⁹ with the average monthly rate increasing from 1.6 attacks in the final five months of 2022⁶⁴⁰ to 4.7 during the first half of 2023.⁶⁴¹ Meanwhile, NPA recorded an average rate of two attacks per month in the first six months of 2023.⁶⁴² Dozens of civilians were killed or injured in ISIL attacks in rural and desert areas of eastern Hama.⁶⁴³ Moreover, ISIL abducted several civilians during the reporting period.⁶⁴⁴

Multiple suspected ISIL attacks targeted civilians searching for truffles, notably in the Salamiyah area.⁶⁴⁵ The largest such attack took place on 16 April 2023, when ISIL militants ambushed a group of truffle-searching civilians in the village of Duwaizan in the eastern Hama countryside. According to state media, 26 people were killed in the attack,⁶⁴⁶ whereas the

⁶³² SHRC, Five civilians, including children, wounded by Assad artillery shelling, 20 January 2023, [url](#)

⁶³³ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 20

⁶³⁴ NPA, HTS targets government forces in Syria's Hama, Aleppo, 15 April 2023, [url](#)

⁶³⁵ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – July 2023, 10 August 2023, [url](#)

⁶³⁶ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12; UN Security Council, Letter dated 24 July 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2023/549, 25 July 2023, [url](#), para. 52

⁶³⁷ UN Security Council, Letter dated 24 July 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2023/549, 25 July 2023, [url](#), para. 52

⁶³⁸ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

⁶³⁹ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁰ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in November 2022, CEP, 5 December 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in October 2022, CEP, 4 November 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in September 2022, CEP, 4 October 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴¹ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in June 2023, CEP, 6 July 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in May 2023, CEP, 2 June 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in February 2023, CEP, 3 March 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁴² NPA, 552 people in Syria fall victim to ISIS attacks in first half of 2023, 8 July 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁴³ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 31; BBC News, IS truffle picker attacks: At least 26 killed in Syrian desert ambush, 17 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Hama desert in April | 54 people killed including 36 civilians by ISIS attacks and landmine explosions, 22 April 2023, [url](#); New Arab (The), Islamic State group kills 15 truffle hunters in Syria: war monitor, 24 March 2023, [url](#); NPA, 552 people in Syria fall victim to ISIS attacks in first half of 2023, 8 July 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁵ SOHR, Hama desert in April | 54 people killed including 36 civilians by ISIS attacks and landmine explosions, 22 April 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁶ BBC News, IS truffle picker attacks: At least 26 killed in Syrian desert ambush, 17 April 2023, [url](#)

SOHR put the number of deaths at 36, 17 of whom - it said - were NDF militia members.⁶⁴⁷ ISIL attacks were followed by heavy airstrikes jointly carried out by GoS and Russian forces targeting positions and movements linked to suspected ISIL cells.⁶⁴⁸

Israeli strikes

There were several reports of Israeli strikes against targets in Hama governorate,⁶⁴⁹ including on scientific research centres in the towns of Masyaf⁶⁵⁰ and al-Safsafah⁶⁵¹ as well as positions and weapons/ammunition depots of Iranian-backed militias in the Masyaf area.⁶⁵² At least one attack (in March 2023) resulted in deaths of GoS soldiers.⁶⁵³ There were no reports of civilian casualties from Israeli attacks in the governorate.

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 557 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Hama governorate, of which 54 were coded as battles, 483 explosions/remote violence and 20 incidents of violence against civilians.⁶⁵⁴

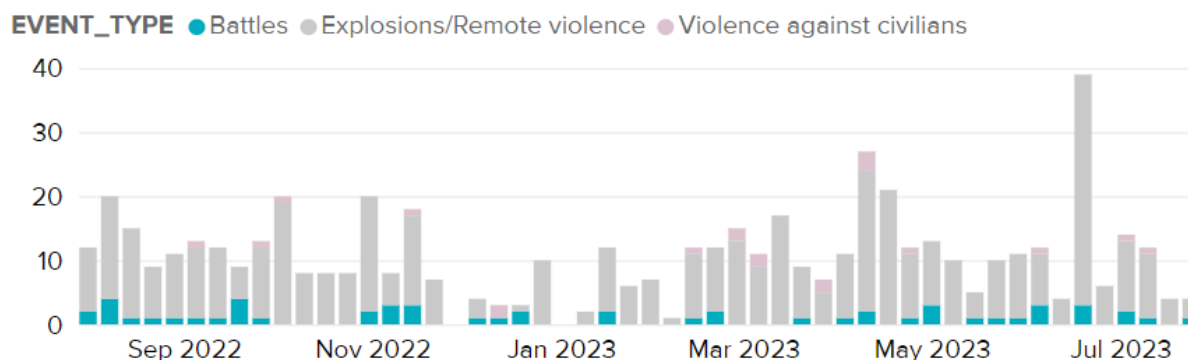


Figure 8. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hama governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁴⁷ SOHR, Hama desert in April | 54 people killed including 36 civilians by ISIS attacks and landmine explosions, 22 April 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁸ Syrian Observer (The), More than 20 Raids: Russian-Syrian Air Force Intensifies Raids on Locations East of Hama, 6 April 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 16; NPA, Russia reveals number of intercepted Israeli missiles in Syria's Masyaf, 27 August 2022, [url](#); NPA, 3 people killed in Israeli attack on Syria's Hama – Russia, 13 March 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Israeli attacks on Syria in the past year: Timeline, 10 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, 2022 | Israel attacks Syria on 32 occasions, destroying 91 targets and killing and injuring nearly 235 people, 22 December 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁰ NPA, Russia reveals number of intercepted Israeli missiles in Syria's Masyaf, 27 August 2022, [url](#); NPA, 3 people killed in Israeli attack on Syria's Hama – Russia, 13 March 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁵¹ NPA, 3 people killed in Israeli attack on Syria's Hama – Russia, 13 March 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁵² Al Jazeera, Israeli attacks on Syria in the past year: Timeline, 10 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, 2022 | Israel attacks Syria on 32 occasions, destroying 91 targets and killing and injuring nearly 235 people, 22 December 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵³ NPA, 3 people killed in Israeli attack on Syria's Hama – Russia, 13 March 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

⁶⁵⁵ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of As-Suqaylabiyah. By comparison, very few incidents were recorded in the districts of Muhradah, Hama and Masyaf (see [Figure 9](#)). According to ACLED data, GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were the main actor involved in around 77 % of all recorded security incidents (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’) during the reference period, particularly in incidents coded as explosions/remote violence. Opposition armed groups (HTS and affiliated armed groups) were involved in around 22 % of all security incidents, particularly in incidents where GoS and affiliated armed groups were also an actor. Unidentified armed groups and ISIL were involved in around 11 % and 4 % of all security incidents, respectively.

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
As-Salamiyeh	8	47	14
As-Suqaylabiyah	42	416	1
Hama	3	4	5
Masyaf	1	9	-
Muhradah	-	7	-
Total	54	483	20

Figure 9. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hama governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data⁶⁵⁶

(c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented 88 civilian fatalities in 2021⁶⁵⁷ and 36 in 2022.⁶⁵⁸ Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 76 civilian fatalities in Hama governorate.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

⁶⁵⁷ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

⁶⁵⁸ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁶⁵⁹ Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

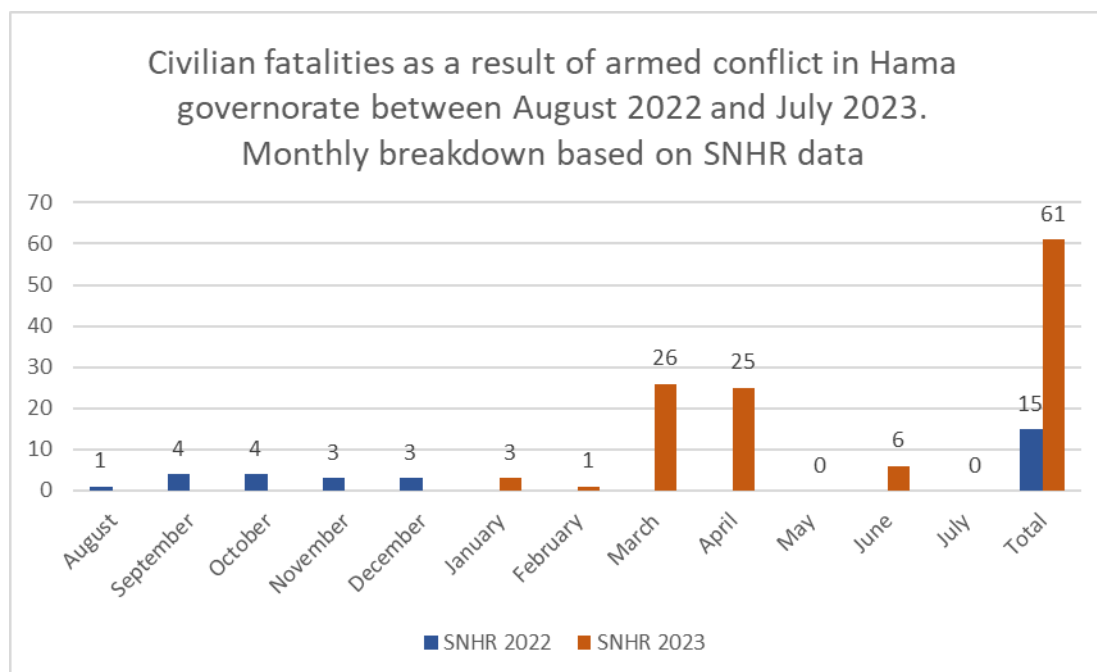


Figure 10. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Hama governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to the International Crisis Group, the conflict has left entire districts of Hama in ruins.⁶⁶⁰ Furthermore, Hama was one of the governorates where contamination from UXOs was particularly widespread, including on roads, agricultural land and private property.⁶⁶¹ 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).⁶⁶²

The SNHR noted that 9 % of all landmine-related deaths it documented in Syria between March 2011 and early April 2023 were recorded in Hama.⁶⁶³ During the reference period, there were multiple reports of civilians, some of them children, being killed or injured by explosive

⁶⁶⁰ International Crisis Group, Syria: Ruling over Aleppo's Ruins, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁶¹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁶⁶² Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria: Conflict, Hunger and Aid Access - April 2023, 19 April 2023, [url](#), p. 6

⁶⁶³ SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 20

remnants of war,⁶⁶⁴ including in Hama city's eastern suburbs⁶⁶⁵ and in the northern,⁶⁶⁶ western,⁶⁶⁷ eastern⁶⁶⁸ and south-eastern⁶⁶⁹ countryside of the governorate.

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 214 036 IDPs in Hama governorate,⁶⁷⁰ including 162 317 in Hama district.⁶⁷¹ Over the year 2022, there were approximately 2 400 IDP movements out of Hama and 1 400 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 600 movements within the governorate.⁶⁷² During 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 115 movements within the governorate.⁶⁷³ No information on the reasons behind the displacement movements was found.

As regards returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded approximately 2 000 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Hama and about 9 000 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from Hama to other governorates as well as about 4 000 movements within Hama.⁶⁷⁴ During the first five months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded approximately 380 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Hama and about 6 000 IDP returnee movements from Hama to other governorates as well as about 80 movements within Hama.⁶⁷⁵

⁶⁶⁴ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 18; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 20; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 20; NPA, Remnants of war kill child, injure others in Syria's Hama, 24 June 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Hama desert in April | 54 people killed including 36 civilians by ISIS attacks and landmine explosions, 22 April 2023, [url](#); SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 26-27

⁶⁶⁵ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 18

⁶⁶⁶ NPA, Remnants of war kill child, injure others in Syria's Hama, 24 June 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 20

⁶⁶⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 20; SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 27

⁶⁶⁸ SOHR, Hama desert in April | 54 people killed including 36 civilians by ISIS attacks and landmine explosions, 22 April 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 18

⁶⁷⁰ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁶⁷¹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 24

⁶⁷² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁷³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, April 2023, 7 August 2023, https://reliefweb.int/attachments/e950ec2a-6ef1-4d8b-9538-6e4d14e4df9a/IDPspontReturns_202304_Apr_FV_En.pdf; UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#)



As for factors possibly affecting returns, the USDOS reported that in Hama, IDPs were often denied access to their places of origin due to GoS-imposed restrictions.⁶⁷⁶ Moreover, starting from mid-2020, GoS-affiliated administrative bodies seized plots of land owned by refugees and IDPs, offering it in public auctions, a practice reported as being especially prevalent in the western and northern countryside of Hama.⁶⁷⁷ Some former residents also feared being arrested in retaken or previously besieged areas.⁶⁷⁸ No further information on reasons behind the returns movements was found.

More recent data on conflict-induced displacement and spontaneous returns by UNOCHA was not available at the time of writing this report. UN Security Council reports covering the first five months of 2023 did not contain any further information on displacement from or returns to Hama governorate.⁶⁷⁹

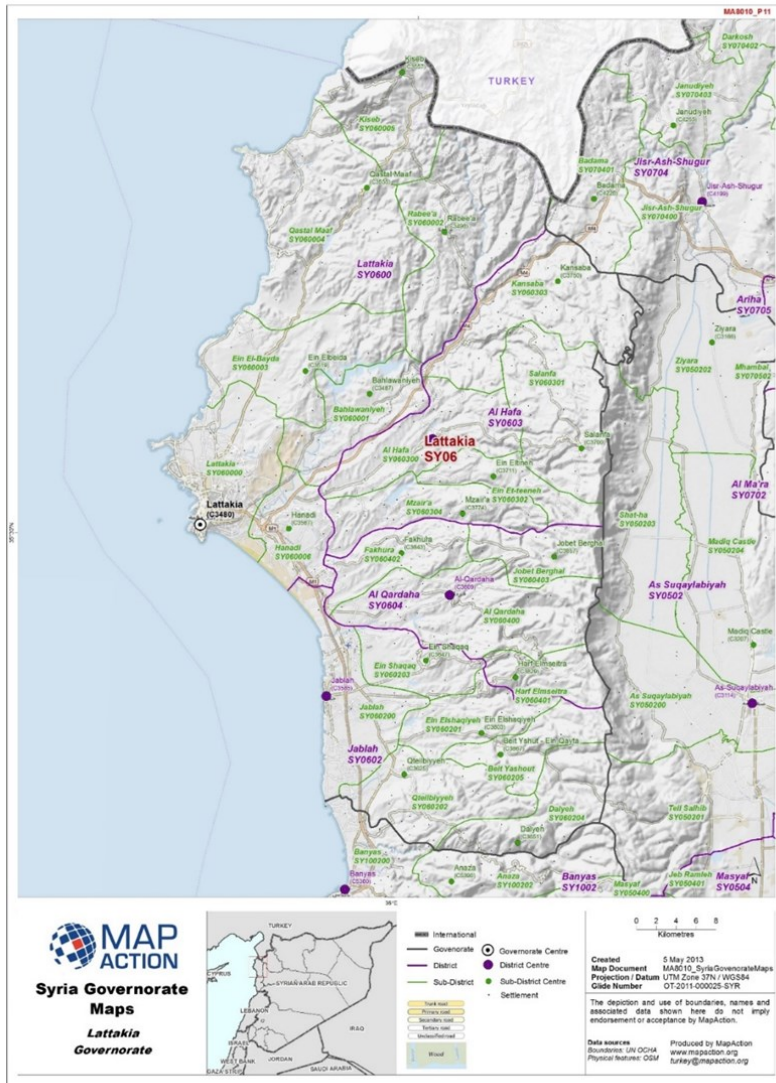
⁶⁷⁶ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 65

⁶⁷⁷ STJ, Syria/Hama: The Security Committee Usurps IDPs and Refugees' Properties, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#)



2.4. Latakia governorate



Map 9: © MapAction, Latakia governorate⁶⁸⁰

2.4.1. General description of the governorate

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.⁶⁸¹ Latakia is divided into four administrative districts, from north to south: Latakia, Al-Haffa, Al-Qardaha, Jablah.⁶⁸² In a report published in

⁶⁸⁰ MapAction, Syria 2013-2015, Latakia Governorate [map], last updated: 29 July 2016, [url](http://www.mapaction.org)

⁶⁸¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Latakia Governorate Reference Map (as of February 2016), 29 February 2016, [url](http://www.unocha.org)

⁶⁸² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic. Governorates Profiles, June 2014, [url](http://www.unocha.org), p. 19

December 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Latakia governorate to be of 1 295 334.⁶⁸³

For more information on the ethnic and religious composition of Latakia's population, see the EUAA COI Report: [Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

2.4.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Latakia governorate continues to be predominantly under the GoS control.⁶⁸⁴ However, anti-GoS armed groups still control parts of the governorate⁶⁸⁵ as HTS controls a strip of territory located in the north-eastern part of Latakia governorate.⁶⁸⁶ 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).⁶⁸⁷ Jusoor Studies reported that, as of July 2022, Iranian forces were deployed in 15 locations; Russian military posts were present in 14 locations; Turkish forces in 2 positions.⁶⁸⁸ The same source observed that, as of mid-2023, there are 33 foreign forces sites in the governorate.⁶⁸⁹

Hmeimin Air Base, a Russia military base, is operational in the governorate.⁶⁹⁰ In an article published in February 2023, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace noted that the Russian forces had withdrawn from some areas of Latakia. Such areas were reportedly swiftly reoccupied by pro-Iranian Hezbollah fighters. Moreover, the same source observed that the most experienced Russian military personnel has been gradually transferred to Ukraine while less qualified soldiers are being replaced in Syria.⁶⁹¹ Meanwhile, some sources stated that Russian forces, originally withdrawn and transferred to Ukraine, had been sent back to Syria, leading to a resurgence of Russian military activity since the beginning of the war in Ukraine.⁶⁹²

⁶⁸³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁶⁸⁴ Jusoor Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, 2 January 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁵ Mehr News, Terrorists renew bomb attacks on Hama, Idlib, Latakia, 24 January 2023, [url](#); see the Map in OHCHR – UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: Syrian Arab Republic : Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022, [map], January 2023, [url](#); VOA news, Jihadis Kill 11 Soldiers in Northwest Syria, Monitor Says, 1 February 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁶ (The) Defence Post, Jihadists Kill 11 Soldiers in Northwest Syria Attacks: Monitor, 2 February 2023, [url](#); (The) Carter Centre, Exploring historical control in Syria, [interactive map], [url](#); DIS, DIS – Danish Immigration Service, Syria - Recruitment to opposition groups, December 2022, [url](#), p. 24

⁶⁸⁷ UN Security Council, Thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2023/95], 13 February 2023, [url](#), para.49, p. 12

⁶⁸⁸ Jusoor Studies, Map of foreign forces' points in Syria- mid 2022, 22 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁹ Jusoor Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria – mid 2023, 3 July 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁰ NPA, Terrorist groups prepare to attack Russian base in Syria – Khmeimim, 5 November 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁹¹ Smagin, N., Moscow's Original "Special Operation": Why Russia Is Staying in Syria, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 7 February 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁹² Bousset, P., US Al-Tanf Military Garrison: The Epicenter of Tumult, EPC, 16 January 2023, [url](#)

2.4.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

As indicated by UNCOI report covering the period between 1 July and 31 December 2022, several airstrikes attributed to Israel occurred in Latakia,⁶⁹³ resulting in the activation of the GoS anti-aircraft fire in response.⁶⁹⁴ UNOCHA also reported of ‘targeted’ airstrikes in 2022 hitting airports and ports, including in Latakia governorate.⁶⁹⁵ In December 2022, 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.⁶⁹⁶

In January 2023 clashes were also documented between GoS and HTS in northern Latakia,⁶⁹⁷ whereby anti-GoS armed groups of the Fath al-Mubin Operations Room conducted attacks against GoS troops using infiltration tactics.⁶⁹⁸ In February 2023, SOHR reported shelling fired by the anti-GoS forces in GoS-controlled areas in Nahshaba surroundings in northern Latakia.⁶⁹⁹ 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 forces⁷⁰⁰

In April 2023, SNHR reported on GoS forces conducting artillery attacks in Latakia suburbs, nearby the dividing lines with armed opposition groups.⁷⁰¹ In late May 2023, in northern Latakia, HTS killed a Russian colonel,⁷⁰² the highest-ranking Russian officer killed by anti-GoS since 2016.⁷⁰³ Etana reported that some Russian sources claimed that the colonel had been killed by ISIL in Homs.⁷⁰⁴ 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.⁷⁰⁵ Likewise, Etana noted an intensified airstrikes attacks by Russia forces involving also the northern Latakia governorate,⁷⁰⁶ targeting the so-called de-escalation zone.⁷⁰⁷ In June

⁶⁹³ AP, UN envoy: Military escalation in Syria is ‘dangerous’, 30 November 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para.16, p. 4

⁶⁹⁴ UN News, UN envoy warns against ‘worrying and dangerous’ military escalation in Syria, 29 November 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁶⁹⁶ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁹⁷ SNHR, Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in January 2023, 4 February 2023, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁹⁸ Al Monitor, Turkey faces tough options on Syrian rebel allies amid Damascus thaw, 20 January 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁹ SOHR, “Putin-Erdogan” area | Factions target positions of regime forces in Hama, Aleppo and Lattakia, 24 February 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁰ The Cradle, Clashes erupt between Syrian army and HTS in Latakia, 05 February 2023, [url](#); New Arab (The), HTS claims attack against Syrian regime soldiers in Latakia province, 4 February 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁰¹ SNHR Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2023, 5 May 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁷⁰² SOHR, “De-escalation zone” | Commander-in-chief of Russian Special Tasks Forces killed in HTS attack in rural Latakia, 29 May 2023, [url](#); Memri, Syrian Opposition Sources: Russian Colonel Killed By Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) In Northwest Syria, 29 May 2023, [url](#); Newsweek (The), Russian Colonel Killed After Direct Strike on His Command Post—Reports, 29 May 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁰³ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁰⁴ Etana, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – May 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁵ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁰⁶ Etana, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria, June 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁷ SOHR, “Putin-Erdogan” area in May 2023 | Resumption of airstrikes by Russian fighter jets...Russian officer among 29 fatalities in acts of violence...escalation of anti-HTS protests, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

2023, Russian airstrikes were recorded hitting Idlib countryside, 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 them numerous children.⁷⁰⁸ In July 2023, a drone attack conducted by unknown actor, likely to be identified in HTS, targeted the Russian base in Hmeimin.⁷⁰⁹

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 263 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Latakia governorate, of which 74 were coded as battles, 185 explosions/remote violence and 4 incidents of violence against civilians.⁷¹⁰

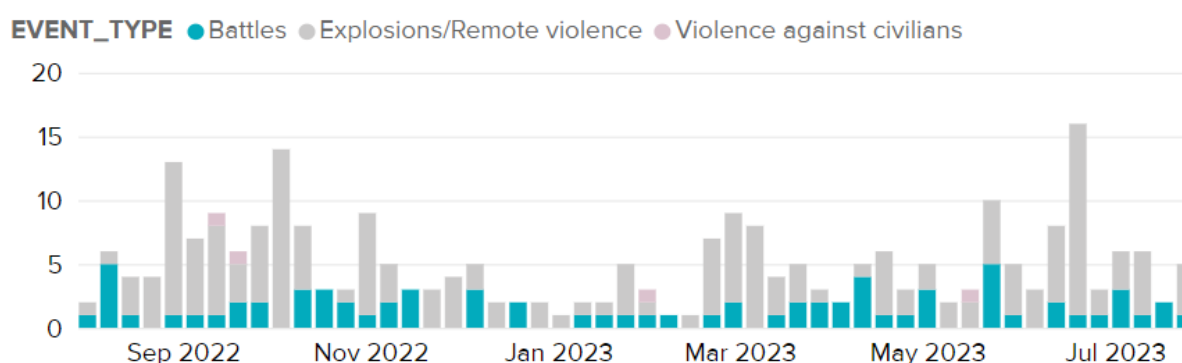


Figure 11. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Latakia governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data⁷¹¹

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of Al-Hafa and Latakia. By comparison, very few incidents were recorded in the districts of Al-Qardaha and Jableh (see [Figure 12](#)). According to ACLED, GoS and Russian forces were the main actor (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2') involved in around 93 % of all security incidents, particularly in incidents coded as explosions/remote violence. Anti-GoS armed groups were involved in around 64 % of all recorded security incidents during the reference period, particularly in incidents where GoS and affiliated armed groups were also an actor.

⁷⁰⁸ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁰⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁷¹⁰ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

⁷¹¹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Al-Hafa	55	105	-
Al-Qardaha	1	2	1
Jablah	3	1	1
Latakia	15	77	2
Total	74	185	4

Figure 12. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Latakia governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data⁷¹²

(c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented two civilian fatalities in 2021⁷¹³ and four civilian fatalities in 2022.⁷¹⁴ Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented seven civilian fatalities in Latakia governorate (four were documented in the period August – December 2022 and three between January and July 2023).⁷¹⁵ Of the seven civilian fatalities documented by SNHR during the reference period, two were civilians who drowned in September 2022 while on migration routes from Syria to Europe.⁷¹⁶

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

As reported by Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, all regions of Syria are affected by the presence of landmines, either commercially manufactured or improvised. The type of

⁷¹² EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

⁷¹³ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

⁷¹⁴ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁷¹⁵ Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

⁷¹⁶ EUAA email correspondence with SNHR, 4 and 7 July 2023.

landmines varies according to the armed groups present in the area.⁷¹⁷ UNOCHA confirmed that the conflict resulted in a wide ordnance contamination throughout the country.⁷¹⁸

World Food Programme outlined Latakia governorate as one of the most affected governorates by the two earthquakes occurred in February 2023.⁷¹⁹

No further information on conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war in Latakia for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 447 947 IDPs in Latakia governorate.⁷²⁰ In the period between January and December 2022, UNOCHA reported 2 000 IDP movements from Latakia governorate, 5 000 displaced within the governorate and 5 000 IDP movements to the governorate.⁷²¹ For the period between January and June 2023, UNOCHA recorded a total of 231 movements of IDP from Latakia, while IDP movements to or within the governorate were recorded.⁷²² As of 18 February 2023, UNOCHA reported of 172 000 people who have been displaced in Latakia as a result of the February earthquakes.⁷²³

In terms of returns, UNOCHA recorded the spontaneous return of 2 000 IDP from Latakia governorate and 2 000 return movements within the governorate in 2022.⁷²⁴ In its Humanitarian Needs Overview, UNOCHA observed that the pace of return to areas bordering the frontline in northern part of Latakia will likely continue.⁷²⁵ Nonetheless, during the period between January and June 2023, UNOCHA recorded 7 IDP returns to the governorate and 39 returns of IDP from governorate. For the same period, UNOCHA did not record any returns within the governorate.⁷²⁶

⁷¹⁷ Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, Syria impact, last updated: 15 November 2021, [url](#)

⁷¹⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 81

⁷¹⁹ World Food Programme, WFP Syria Situation Report #2, February 2023, 28 February 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁷²⁰ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁷²¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec. 2022, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

⁷²² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

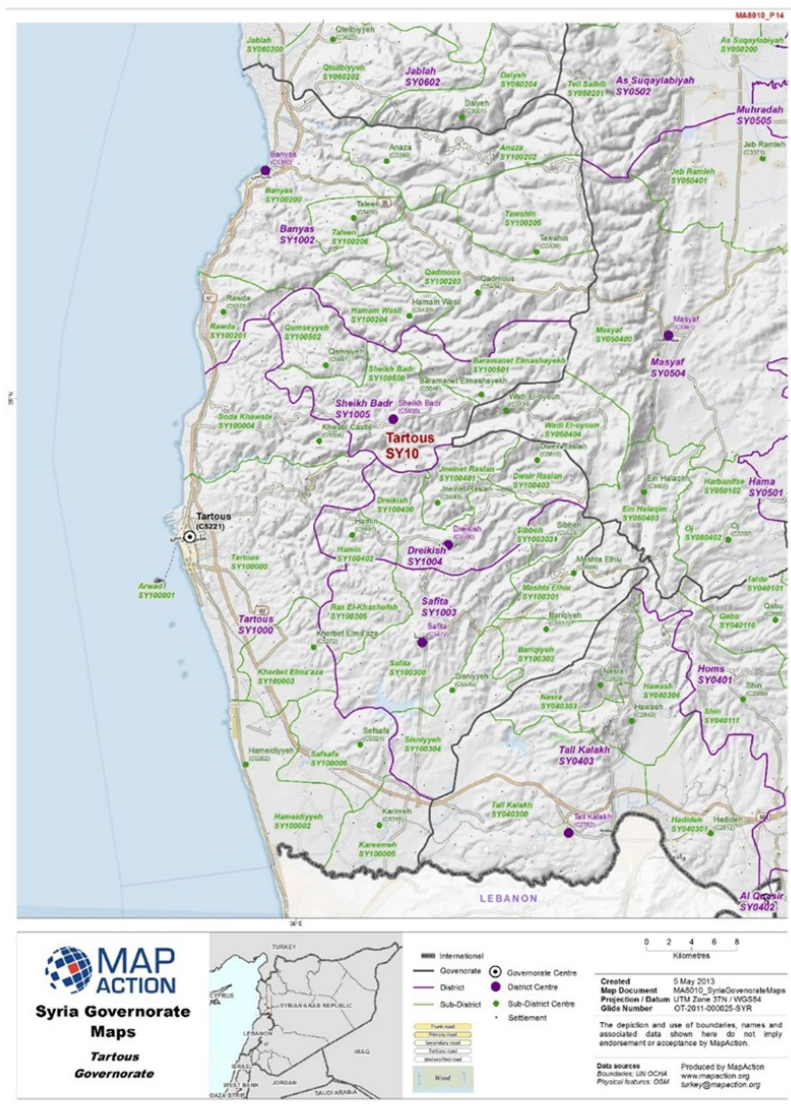
⁷²³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic - Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) Coordinated Response Flash Update #13 – Earthquake (As of 18 February 2023), 18 February 2023, [url](#)

⁷²⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 18 May 2023, [url](#)

⁷²⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan, [url](#), p. 87

⁷²⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

2.5. Tartous governorate



Map 10: © MapAction, Tartous governorate map⁷²⁷

2.5.1. General description of the governorate

The governorate of Tartous borders Latakia governorate to the north, the governorates of Hama and Homs to the east, the Mediterranean Sea to the west and Lebanon to the south.⁷²⁸ The governorate is divided into five administrative districts: Banyas (Baniyas), Sheikh Badr,

⁷²⁷ MapAction, Syria Governorate Maps – Tartous Governorate, last updated on 29 July 2019, [url](http://www.mapaction.org)

⁷²⁸ UNOCHA Reference Map, 9 May 2016, [url](http://www.unocha.org)

Dreikish, Safita, and Tartous City⁷²⁹ which are in turn subdivided into 27 sub-districts.⁷³⁰ In a December 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Tartous governorate to be 948 274.⁷³¹

The governorate is considered a ‘regime stronghold’.⁷³² However, changes in the traditional pattern of loyalty expressed by Alawites toward the government have been observed,⁷³³ consisting mainly in a series of anti-government protests over the past few years. This is reportedly due to the high inflation, unappealing government employments, spread of poverty and criminality, remarkable number of deaths caused by the war among the Alawite community.⁷³⁴

2.5.2. Conflict background and armed actors

For the reference period, Tartous governorate was under the control of GoS.⁷³⁵ The Russian-led naval facility in Tartous is still operational and it represents the only Russian naval foothold in the Mediterranean, in use since the days of the Soviet Union.⁷³⁶

2.5.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

In August 2022, Israeli airstrikes hit Iranian targets with multiple attacks in proximity of Tartous military naval base with the aim of preventing Iran from expanding its influence. According to SOHR, airstrikes in Tartous targeted an air defence base, where Iranian-backed groups are active. Reportedly, three soldiers were killed and three were wounded.⁷³⁷ In March 2023, Israel reportedly launched rocket strikes hitting Tartous countryside. The attack resulted in three military personnel injured. Strikes are reportedly part of an escalation of a low-intensity conflict aimed at limiting Iran’s influence in the area.⁷³⁸

During the reference period there were few reports of targeted attacks against GoS forces and civilians which led to casualties.⁷³⁹

⁷²⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Governorates Profiles, June 2014, [url](#), p. 31

⁷³⁰ UNHCR, UNHCR Syria / Tartous FO, End of year 2017 / Factsheet, January – December 2017, [url](#), p. 1

⁷³¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁷³² (The) Arab reform initiative, Protest Movements in Tartous: Dynamics and Implications, 27 June 2023, [url](#)

⁷³³ Financial Times (The), Economic crisis begins to crack the bedrock of Assad’s Alawi support, 13 April 2021, [url](#)

⁷³⁴ (The) Arab Reform Initiative, Protest Movements in Tartous: Dynamics and Implications, 27 June 2023, [url](#)

⁷³⁵ (The) Carter Centre, Exploring historical control in Syria, [interactive map], [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 June 2023, [url](#); iMMAP (Author), published by ReliefWeb: Context Update: Northwestern Syria | October 4, 2022, 4 October 2022, [url](#), p. 1; Jusoor Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, December 2022, [map], [url](#)

⁷³⁶ Al Jazeera, Assad welcomes new Russian bases in Syria after Putin meeting, 16 March 2023, [url](#)

⁷³⁷ Al Jazeera, Three Syrian soldiers killed in Israeli missile attacks: Report, [url](#), 15 August 2022; Reuters, Israeli strikes hit Iranian targets near Russia’s Mediterranean bases, 15 August 2022, [url](#); VOA News, Syrian State Media Says 3 Killed in Israeli Attacks, 14 August 2022, [url](#)

⁷³⁸ Business Standard (The), Israel hits areas in Hama and Tartous countryside, 12 March 2023, [url](#)

⁷³⁹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were six security incidents recorded by ACLED in Tartous governorate, of which one was coded as battles, three were coded as explosions/remote violence and two as incidents of violence against civilians. According to ACLED, unidentified armed groups were involved (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’) in the incidents coded as violence against civilians, while Israeli forces were involved in the incidents coded as explosions/remote violence.⁷⁴⁰

(c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR did not document any civilian fatalities in 2021 and 60 civilian fatalities in 2022. However, all 60 civilian fatalities documented in 2022 were civilians originating from Tartous governorate who drowned while on migration routes from Syria to Europe.⁷⁴¹ There were no civilian fatalities documented by SNHR in Tartous governorate during the first seven months of 2023.⁷⁴²

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

SNHR reported that no death related to landmines have been recorded in Tartous during the period between March 2011 and 4 April 2023.⁷⁴³ As reported in the UN Syria Multi-sector Needs Assessment of 2022, the Global Shelter Cluster assessed that 1 % of the assessed shelters in Tartous governorate consisted of damaged buildings.⁷⁴⁴

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 180 735 IDPs in Tartous governorate.⁷⁴⁵ Between January and December 2022, UNOCHA recorded 1 000 IDP movements from the governorate, 3 000 IDP within the governorate and 3 000 IDP to the governorate. Most of IDP movements to Tartous governorate originate from Aleppo (around 1 000) and Homs (around 900), while most of the IDP movements from Tartous were to Latakia (around 800).⁷⁴⁶ For the period between January and June 2023, UNOCHA did not record any IDP movement from and to Tartous. Likewise, no displacement within the governorate has been documented.⁷⁴⁷

⁷⁴⁰ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

⁷⁴¹ Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

⁷⁴² Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA.

⁷⁴³ SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#) p. 20

⁷⁴⁴ Global Shelter Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter and NFI Sector Humanitarian Needs Overview, 14 February 2023, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁴⁵ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁷⁴⁶ UNOCHA, IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2022, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)



However, UN Security Council reported that Tartous is one of the most affected governorates by the February earthquakes resulting in displacement of individuals fleeing both in GoS-held areas and in anti-GoS held in north-western areas.⁷⁴⁸

In terms of return, UNOCHA indicated that, in 2022, Tartous was one of the governorates with the fewest recorded returns together with Raqqqa and Quneitra.⁷⁴⁹ UNOCHA recorded 5 IDP returns to Tartous and 2 000 returnee movements from the governorate in 2022.⁷⁵⁰ During the period between January and June 2023, UNOCHA recorded 5 IDP returns from the governorate.⁷⁵¹ No further information on displacement or returns could be found within the constraints of the research. No information on the reasons behind the displacement or returns movements was provided by the sources.

⁷⁴⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para.3

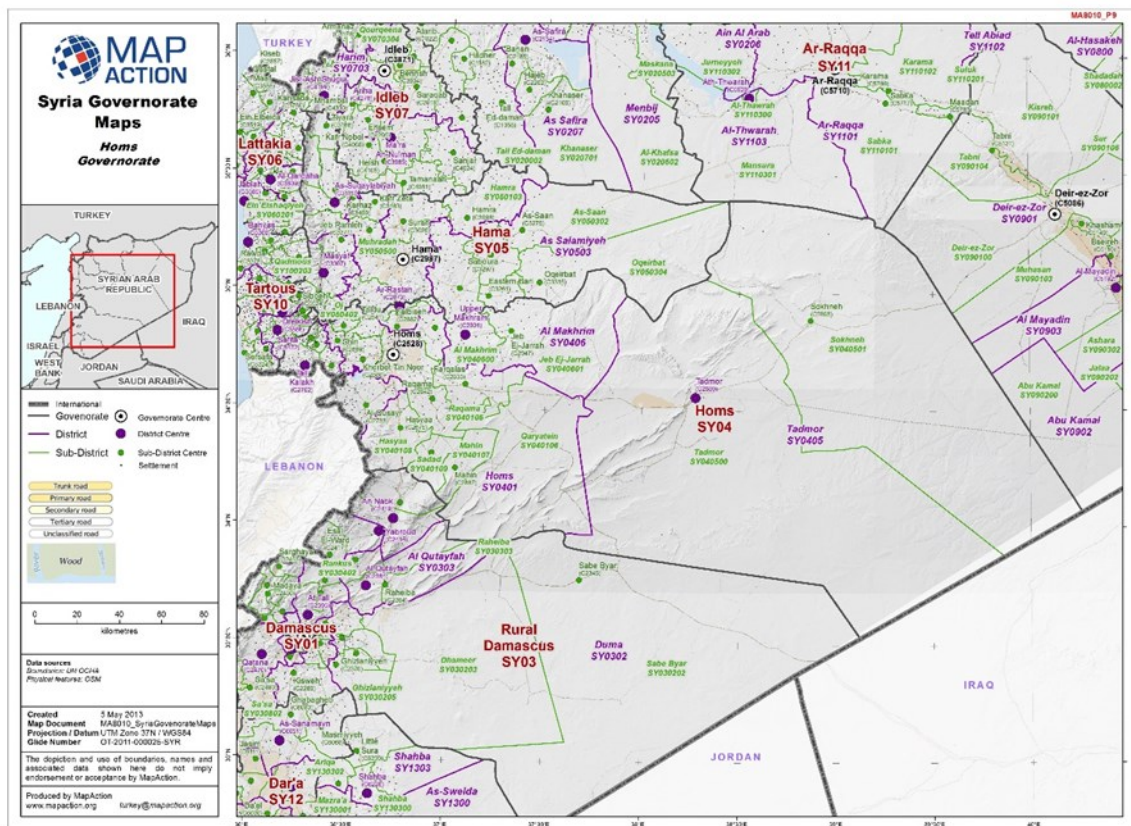
⁷⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 23

⁷⁵⁰ UNOCHA, IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁵¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)



2.6. Homs governorate



Map 11: © MapAction, Homs governorate map⁷⁵²

2.6.1. General description of the governorate

Homs governorate is located in central Syria and has borders with Iraq to the east and Lebanon to the west. It has internal borders with Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa, Hama, Tartous, and Rural Damascus governorates.⁷⁵³ The Syrian E-Government website stated that Homs governorate shares an international border with Jordan to the east as well.⁷⁵⁴ UNOCHA mentioned in a December 2022 report that Homs governorate comprises six administrative districts: Homs, Al Makhrim, Al-Qusayr, Ar-Rastan, Tadmor (Palmyra) and Tall Kalakh.⁷⁵⁵ 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.⁷⁵⁶ In a December 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Homs governorate at 1 502 706.⁷⁵⁷ For information on the ethnic and religious composition of the population of Homs, see the EUAA COI Report: [Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

⁷⁵² MapAction, Homs Governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

⁷⁵³ UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁴ Syria, E-Government, سورية [About Syria], n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁵⁵ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 135

⁷⁵⁶ UN-Habitat, City Profile – Homs: Multi Sector Assessment, May 2014, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁵⁷ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

2.6.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Different maps produced by various sources show that Homs governorate is under GoS control.⁷⁵⁸ A map produced by the UN further shows some ISIL presence in the east of the governorate and a so-called US-declared 55-km deconfliction area⁷⁵⁹ stretching between the southeast of the governorate and neighbouring Rural Damascus governorate around Al-Tanf,⁷⁶⁰ controlled by US troops and the Free Syrian Army (FSA),⁷⁶¹ formerly known as Mughawir al-Thawra (MaT),⁷⁶² a rebel group⁷⁶³ consisting of former Syrian military officers.⁷⁶⁴

In the reference period, the Fourth Armoured Division of the GoS army was deployed in several Syrian governorates, including Homs.⁷⁶⁵ As noted in an October 2022 Enab Baladi article, the Fourth Division had no large military sites in Homs governorate, but security offices and military roadblocks along with some military points deployed in the eastern part of the governorate, where there was ISIL cell activity.⁷⁶⁶ Furthermore, the 25th Special Tasks Division was also reported to have recruitment offices in Homs governorate.⁷⁶⁷ In the first half of 2023, Enab Baladi articles indicated that the GoS had deployed reinforcements to Talbiseh city⁷⁶⁸ in the context of unrest and armed confrontations in the city related to drug dealing groups.⁷⁶⁹

Homs governorate, according to a DIS interview with SNHR in August 2022, was among the Syrian governorates under Iranian ‘influence’⁷⁷⁰ and continued to house Iranian military positions.⁷⁷¹ According to a Jerusalem Post article, Lebanese Hezbollah and Iranian forces operated in the neighbourhood of the Al-Dabaa airbase near Al-Qusayr in the reference

⁷⁵⁸ Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#); UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Homs and June 2023.

⁷⁵⁹ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁰ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁶¹ Syria TV, Coalition Commander Meets Free Syrian Army Command at Al-Tanf Base, The Syrian Observer, 26 January 2023, <https://syrianobserver.com/uncategorized/81433/coalition-commander-meets-free-syrian-army-command-at-al-tanf-base.html>

⁷⁶² New Arab (The), US-backed Syrian opposition militia changes name amid reforms, 25 October 2022, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Drone attack hits Tanf US base in Syria, 20 January 2023, [url](#); Syria Direct, US-backed Maghawir al-Thawra commander replaced, amid internal disagreements and corruption allegations, 5 October 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁶³ Edwards, M., and Al-Homsi, O., Jordan returns refugees to desolate Syrian border camp, rights groups cry foul, TNH, 16 September 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁴ TWI, The Future of al-Tanf Garrison in Syria, 6 December 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units [source: SNHR], April 2023, [url](#), p. 21

⁷⁶⁶ Enab Baladi, “الفرقة الرابعة” تستغل أشجار الحراج على أبواب الشتاء [Homs: The Fourth Division exploits forest trees at the gates of winter], 28 October 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units [source: SNHR], April 2023, [url](#), p. 22

⁷⁶⁸ Enab Baladi, “توتر أمني وتعزيزات عقب مواجهات” تليسية [Homs: The regime sends military reinforcements to the vicinity of Talbiseh], 25 May 2023, [url](#); Enab Baladi, “توتر أمني وتعزيزات عقب مواجهات” تليسية [Security tensions and reinforcements after confrontations in Talbiseh in rural Homs], 24 March 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁹ Enab Baladi, “محص.. قتل وجرحى بمواجهات بين مجموعات من تجار المخدرات” [Homs: Injuries and deaths during confrontations between drug dealing groups], 1 December 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, “محص.. قطع طرقات على خلفية” [Homs: Blocked roads due to the arrest of renown men in Talbiseh (Video)], 5 January 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units [source: online interview with SNHR on 23 August 2022], April 2023, [url](#), p. 21

⁷⁷¹ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, March 1, 2023, 1 March 2023, [url](#)

period,⁷⁷² an area which has been a centre of Hezbollah's activity since 2012.⁷⁷³ According to The Jerusalem Post, Hezbollah had a drone development unit in the area.⁷⁷⁴ In April 2023, Al-Qusayr was reportedly under the complete control of Hezbollah, while the Al-Dabaa airbase, about 20 km southwest of Homs city and 10 km north of Al-Qusayr, constituted 'a major land crossing route of the corridor from Syria to Lebanon'.⁷⁷⁵ Meanwhile, an April 2023 Reuters article indicated that Hezbollah was the dominant actor in Al-Qusayr city.⁷⁷⁶ ISW and CTP reported that some Iranian-backed Iraqi militants, in February 2023, had travelled to Homs governorate from other positions in the country.⁷⁷⁷ As of March 2023, Iranian-backed militias continued to have positions in Tadmor (Palmyra), where they were storing drones.⁷⁷⁸

Moreover, as of spring 2023, ISIL was still in control of Wadi Doubayat,⁷⁷⁹ south of Al-Sukhnah,⁷⁸⁰ as well as the western and eastern mountains around Al-Kawm and briefly managed to take over the control of Khirbet al-Muqam village in early April 2023, north of Al-Kawm,⁷⁸¹ and an unspecified key oil field town in Homs governorate from GoS and Russian forces in October 2022.⁷⁸² The Carter Center in June 2023 reported that ISIL, notwithstanding the February 2023 earthquakes in Syria and Türkiye and the overall reduction in violence, continued to remain active in the Badia desert region.⁷⁸³ A July 2023 UN Security Council report indicated that 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).⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁷² Jerusalem Post (The), Second IRGC adviser dead in third airstrike in Syria in a week, 2 April 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷³ Jerusalem Post (The), Alleged Israeli airstrikes target Homs in Syria, injure three civilians, 29 April 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁴ Jerusalem Post (The), Alleged Israeli airstrikes target Hezbollah drone unit in west Syria – report, 22 December 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁵ Alma, Syria – Four Days (March 30-April 02), Three Airstrikes (Damascus and Homs), Two Iranian IRGC Casualties, 2 April 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁶ Reuters, Syria says Israel hits Homs outposts, sources say air bases bombed, 2 April 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁷ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 27, 2023, 27 February 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁸ ISW and CT, Iran Update, March 31, 2023, 31 March 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁹ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in February 2023, CEP, 3 March 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁰ Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁸¹ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁸² USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 October 2022 – 31 December 2022, 7 February 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁷⁸³ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, January – March 2023, 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁷⁸⁴ UN Security Council, Letter dated 24 July 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2023/549, 25 July 2023, [url](#), para. 52



2.6.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

In the reference period, ISIL regularly launched lethal attacks in various governorates, among which Homs,⁷⁸⁵ including attacks on civilians and against GoS forces⁷⁸⁶ in eastern Homs⁷⁸⁷ as well as attacks on pro-GoS militias.⁷⁸⁸ ISIL reportedly further clashed with NDF and SAA units near Arak village in February 2023.⁷⁸⁹ In November 2022, Russia reportedly resumed airstrikes against ISIL positions in the governorate.⁷⁹⁰ ISIL attacks in Homs governorate were further reported, for example, near the city of Al-Sukhnah⁷⁹¹ and south of Al-Kawm village.⁷⁹² Gregory Waters in the summer of 2023 reported that ISIL activity in Homs governorate continued⁷⁹³ and that ISIL apparently had an intention to ‘re-enter Homs via the southern countryside around Maheen [Mahin, Mheen] and Qaryatayn’.⁷⁹⁴

According to the International Crisis Group, 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.⁷⁹⁵ Reportedly, ISIL fought GoS and Russian Wagner forces around Al-Kawm continuously until mid-April 2023,⁷⁹⁶ when the month-long GoS offensive with the aim of securing the strategic village in northeast Homs from ISIL came to an end.⁷⁹⁷ An ISIL attack on 9 April 2023 on the outskirts of Jubb Al-Jarrah, 30 miles (or around 48 km) from Homs city, according to Gregory Waters, was ‘one of the western-most ISIS [ISIL] attacks in more than a year’.⁷⁹⁸ In June 2023, a GoS general was reportedly killed in an IED attack by ISIL in the city of Homs, which, according to the International Crisis Group, was the first attack in Homs city since 2017.⁷⁹⁹ In one major attack carried out by ISIL in

⁷⁸⁵ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁷⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in October 2022, CEP, 4 November 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in September 2022, CEP, 4 October 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in August 2022, CEP, 6 September 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 5; Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁸ ACLED, ACLED Regional Overview - Middle East (10 - 16 September 2022), 22 September 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁹ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in February 2023, CEP, 3 March 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁰ ACLED, ACLED Regional Overview - Middle East (29 October - 4 November 2022), 10 November 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁹¹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁹² Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in May 2023, CEP, 2 June 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁹³ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in May 2023, CEP, 2 June 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁴ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in June 2023, CEP, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁵ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁹⁶ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁷ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in May 2023, CEP, 2 June 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁸ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)



February 2023 on truffle pickers in Homs governorate in Al-Sukhnah, 53⁸⁰⁰ to 68 individuals,⁸⁰¹ mainly civilians and some military personnel, were killed.⁸⁰²

In the reference period, Israel carried out airstrikes in Homs governorate.⁸⁰³ Israeli airstrikes reportedly occurred in areas near the city of Homs,⁸⁰⁴ the Shayrat air base,⁸⁰⁵ and an alleged drone development unit site belonging to Hezbollah at the Al-Qusayr airport.⁸⁰⁶ Reportedly, some of the attacks resulted in casualties among civilians⁸⁰⁷ and military personnel.⁸⁰⁸

In August 2022, Iranian-affiliated groups reportedly attacked the US-controlled Al-Tanf base in Homs governorate,⁸⁰⁹ although no casualties were reported.⁸¹⁰ Military personnel was reportedly injured in drone attacks on the base in January 2023 by undisclosed perpetrators.⁸¹¹ Furthermore, it was reported that the IDP camp Al-Rukban, situated in the Al-Tanf area close to the borders with Jordan and Iraq,⁸¹² continued to be besieged by GoS and Russian forces.⁸¹³

(b) Security incidents

During the period 1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023, there were 215 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Homs governorate, of which 80 were coded as battles, 81 explosions/remote violence and 54 incidents of violence against civilians.⁸¹⁴

⁸⁰⁰ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, January – March 2023, 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 1; Guardian (The), Syria: at least 53 people killed while truffle hunting in suspected IS attack, 17 February 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁰¹ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes, 20 February 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁸⁰² Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes, 20 February 2023, [url](#), p. 10; BBC News, Islamic State accused of killing truffle hunters in Syria, 17 February 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁰³ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Independent (The), Israel's air force attacks Syria and Syrian air defense missile explodes over northern Israel, 2 July 2023, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 16; ISW and CTP, Iran Crisis Update, November 13, 13 November 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁴ Independent (The), Israel's air force attacks Syria and Syrian air defense missile explodes over northern Israel, 2 July 2023, [url](#); SNHR, Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2023, 5 May 2023, [url](#), p. 3; ISW and CTP, Iran Update, April 3, 2023, 3 April 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁵ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); ISW and CTP, Iran Crisis Update, November 13, 13 November 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁶ Jerusalem Post (The), Alleged Israeli airstrikes target Hezbollah drone unit in west Syria – report, 22 December 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁷ SANA, Three civilians injured during Israeli attack on locations near Homs [إصابة ثلاثة مدنيين جراء عدوان إسرائيل], 29 April 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁸ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); CBS News, Israeli airstrike on Syrian base kills 2 soldiers, wounds 3 others, 13 November 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁸¹⁰ AP News, US: Drone attack targets US base in Syria, no casualties, 15 August 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-group-middle-east-iran-syria-324b3753c01dc8f6056ecbf7570ffa4>

⁸¹¹ International Crisis Group, Al-Tanf, Syria, 31 July 2023, [url](#)

⁸¹² NPA, Syria's Rukban IDPs face long bumpy road towards self-sufficiency, 12 July 2023, [url](#)

⁸¹³ Al Jazeera, Assad normalisation leaves Syrians in Rukban camp fearing future, 28 May 2023, [url](#); SETF, Rukban, n.d., [url](#)

⁸¹⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

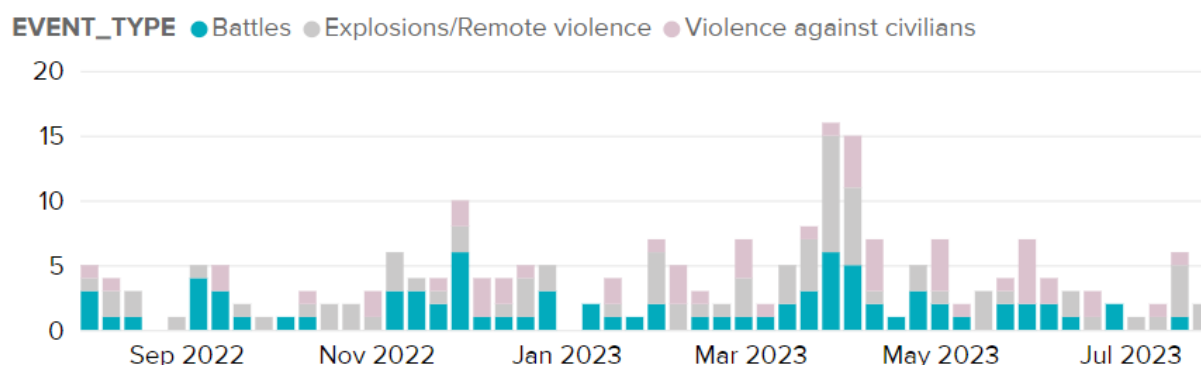


Figure 13. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Homs governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data⁸¹⁵

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of Tadmor. By comparison, very few incidents were recorded in the district of Tall Kalakh (see [Figure 14](#)). According to ACLED, GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 61 % of all incidents (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’). Unidentified armed groups participated in around 47 % of all recorded security incidents during the reference period; in more than half, civilians were also involved as an actor. ISIL was involved in 38 % of all security incidents, particularly in incidents coded as ‘battles’ where GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were the other actor.

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Al Makhrim	2	8	6
Al Qusayr	4	5	6
Ar Rastan	8	5	15
Homs	16	20	17
Tadmor	49	42	10
Tall Kalakh	1	1	-
Total	80	81	54

⁸¹⁵ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

Figure 14. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Homs governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data

(c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented 28 civilian fatalities in 2021⁸¹⁶ and 37 in 2022.⁸¹⁷ Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 73 civilian fatalities in Homs governorate.⁸¹⁸

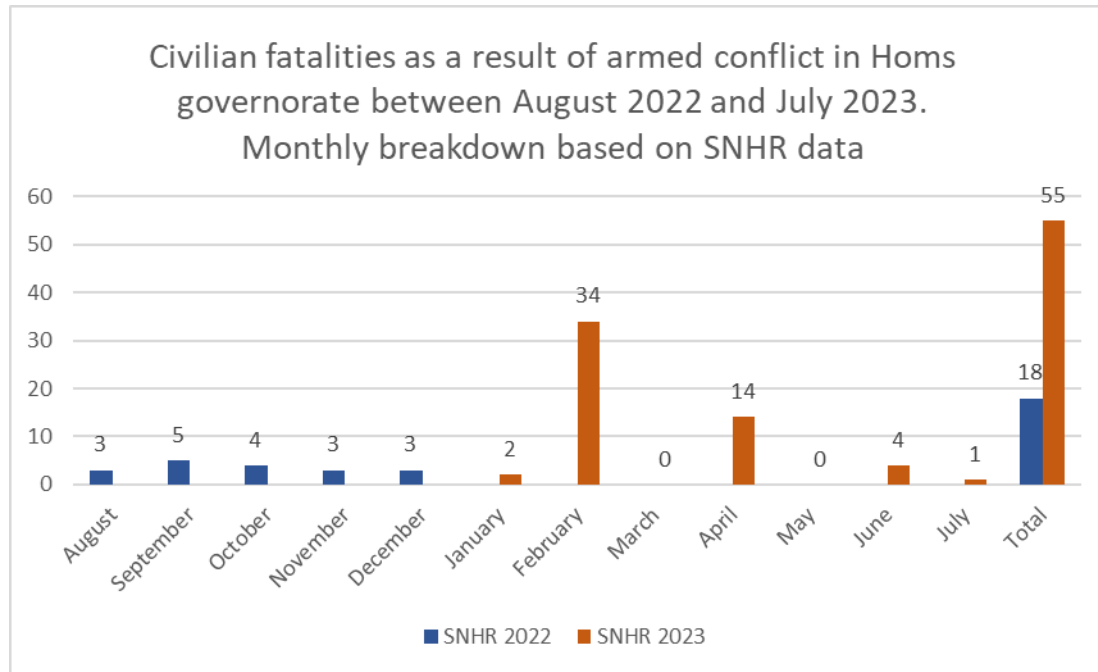


Figure 15. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Homs governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Al Jazeera reported on 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 2023.⁸¹⁹ Within the time constraints of this report, no further information on attacks on health facilities or civilian infrastructure and objects in Homs governorate in the reference period was found.

⁸¹⁶ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

⁸¹⁷ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁸¹⁸ Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

⁸¹⁹ Al Jazeera, Assad normalisation leaves Syrians in Rukban camp fearing future, 28 May 2023, [url](#)

In the reference period, civilians were killed and injured by explosive devices of war for example in Duwayzin, located on the border between Hama and Homs,⁸²⁰ such as in the area of Al-Haswiya.⁸²¹ According to UNOCHA, Homs is among the Syrian governorates where contamination from UXOs represents a particularly major security concern and continued to be reported in 2022.⁸²² A November 2022 Enab Baladi article indicates that ERWs in Homs city continued to claim the lives of civilians, although the city has been entirely in control of GoS forces since 2018. Reportedly, ERWs were not yet removed from residential areas. They included mines which were planted 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 as well as in the Badia desert against ISIL. The article indicates that children and farmers were particularly affected by the dangers posed by ERW and that they have ‘become a constant concern for the residents’ in the area.⁸²³

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022, there were 299 525 IDPs in Homs governorate,⁸²⁴ including 189 147 in Homs district.⁸²⁵ Over the year 2022, there were approximately 1 960 IDP movements out of Homs and 960 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 35 movements within the governorate.⁸²⁶ No information on the reasons behind the displacement movements was found. No conflict-induced IDP movements were recorded in Homs governorate by UNOCHA between January and May 2023.⁸²⁷

As regards returns, in 2022, UNOCHA recorded no spontaneous IDP returnee movements from Homs to other governorates and some 6 000 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Homs as well as 3 000 movements within Homs.⁸²⁸ Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA recorded approximately 83 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Homs and no returnee movements from Homs to other governorates, as well as about 233 movements within the governorate. The movements occurred in January and March, while in the other months no movements were recorded.⁸²⁹ No further information on the reasons behind the returns movements was found.

⁸²⁰ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

⁸²¹ SNHR, 99 Civilians, Including Eight Children, and Seven Women Documented Killed in Syria, in April 2023, 1 May 2023, [url](#), p. 5

⁸²² UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁸²³ Enab Baladi, Mines and war remnants in Homs still fatal danger, no response, 9 November 2022, [url](#)

⁸²⁴ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁸²⁵ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 24

⁸²⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

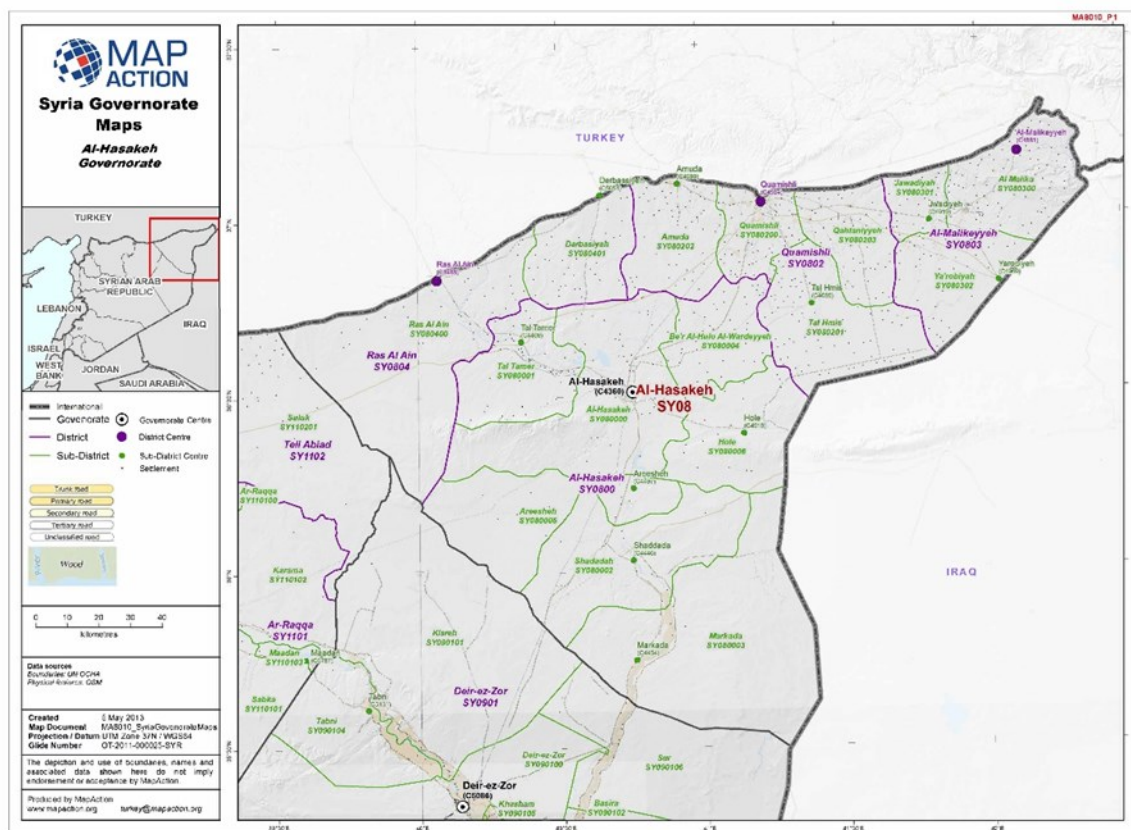
⁸²⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

⁸²⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

⁸²⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#)



2.7. Hasaka governorate



Map 12: © MapAction, Hasaka governorate⁸³⁰

2.7.1. General description of the governorate

Hasaka (Al-Hasakah) governorate is located in the north-eastern corner of Syria and shares borders with the governorates of Raqqqa to the west and Deir Ez-Zor to the south-west. It also shares international borders with Türkiye to its north and Iraq to its east.⁸³¹ Its capital, Hasaka, is located in the centre of the governorate.⁸³² The governorate comprises four administrative districts: Hasaka, al-Malikiya (al-Malikeyyeh), Qamishli (Quamishli) and Ras al-Ayn (Ras al-Ain).⁸³³ A December 2022 UNOCHA report estimated the governorate's population at 1 206 229.⁸³⁴

The governorate has an ethnic Kurdish majority. Most areas north of the Hasaka city have a predominantly Kurdish population (like Qamishli and al-Malikiya) or a mixed Kurdish-Arab

⁸³⁰ MapAction, Al-Hasakeh governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

⁸³¹ UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 12

⁸³² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas: Al Hasakeh Governorate Reference Map, 2017, [url](#)

⁸³³ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 133-134

⁸³⁴ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

population (like Ras al-Ayn).⁸³⁵ The governorate's south is mainly inhabited by Arabs.⁸³⁶ The Tal Tamr area has a Christian population, with villages inhabited by Assyrians⁸³⁷ and Armenians.⁸³⁸ The governorate is also home to Yazidis.⁸³⁹ The cities of Qamishli and Hasaka are divided into Kurdish and Arab districts, with Kurds forming a majority in Qamishli but a minority in Hasaka.⁸⁴⁰

Information on the governorate's political landscape, as well as its economic and strategic importance can be found in an earlier issue of this report: [Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), section. 2.7.1.

2.7.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Since Turkish forces seized control of Ras al-Ayn from the SDF in autumn 2019,⁸⁴¹ the Ras al-Ayn area experienced frequent mutual bombing between Turkish forces/SNA and the SDF.⁸⁴² In the rear of the Turkish incursion, ISIL cells resumed organising attacks,⁸⁴³ staging a large-scale attack on Hasaka city's Ghwaryan prison in January 2022.⁸⁴⁴ Kurdish forces launched anti-ISIL operations in Hasaka city⁸⁴⁵ and its countryside.⁸⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the GoS, supported by its allies Russia⁸⁴⁷ and Iran,⁸⁴⁸ sought to strengthen its influence and military presence in the region.

⁸³⁵ Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, TWI, 2018, [url](#), pp. 52, 56

⁸³⁶ Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, TWI, 2018, [url](#), p. 52; Balanche, F., *The Fragile Status Quo in Northeast Syria*, TWI, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

⁸³⁷ Holmes, A. A., *Despite Ceasefire Agreement, Turkey Implicated In More Than Eight Hundred Violations*, CFR, 13 October 2020, [url](#)

⁸³⁸ ANHA, *Armenians and Syriacs: Turkish threats spares neither component*, 3 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸³⁹ Syria Direct, *Yazidis' long struggle against landlessness and discrimination in rural Hasakah*, 4 April 2023, [url](#); Ya'qoubé, L., *Afrin's Yazidis: an ancient culture edges toward the precipice*, KCS, 20 January 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁰ Balanche, F., *Iraq and Syria: Kurdish Autonomous Regions Under Threat*, Groupe d'études géopolitiques, 4 March 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁴¹ TWI, *The SDF Is Caught Between Turkey and the Islamic State Again*, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁴² UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/51/45, 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 83

⁸⁴³ Balanche, F., *Iraq and Syria: Kurdish Autonomous Regions Under Threat*, Groupe d'études géopolitiques, 4 March 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁴ Washington Post (The), *Prison break: ISIS fighters launched a brazen attack to free their comrades*, 3 February 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁵ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/51/45, 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 82

⁸⁴⁶ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/51/45, 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 82; Syria Direct, *When the sun sets, SDF control over northeastern Syria's highways wanes*, 14 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁷ Al-Khateb, K., *Syrian government reportedly building tribal force in Hasakah*, Al-Monitor, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁸ Al-Khateb, K., *Syrian government reportedly building tribal force in Hasakah*, Al-Monitor, 22 April 2021, [url](#); Al-Ahmed, S., *"Carpet weaving" east of the Euphrates: Iranian proxy groups expand their influence in Syria's Hasakah Province*, MEI, 12 September 2022, [url](#)

During the reference period, Kurdish forces (SDF/YPG) controlled most of Hasaka governorate⁸⁴⁹ and were supported by US-led coalition forces.⁸⁵⁰ US troops patrolled the countryside near the Syrian-Turkish border.⁸⁵¹

Meanwhile, Türkiye controlled a part of northern Hasaka that belonged to a territory roughly delimited by Ras al-Ayn in the east, Tall Abyad (Raqqa) in the west, the Syrian-Turkish border in the north and the M4 motorway in the south⁸⁵². This area has been referred to as the Operation Peace Spring area.⁸⁵³ The SNA operated in this area⁸⁵⁴ and controlled the stretch of border between Ras al-Ayn and Tall Abyad.⁸⁵⁵

GoS forces controlled several zones (security enclaves)⁸⁵⁶ in and around the cities of Hasaka and Qamishli⁸⁵⁷ which also hosted sites of Iranian and Russian forces.⁸⁵⁸ In addition, GoS forces were granted permission by the SDF to pass between GoS held and Kurdish-controlled territories.⁸⁵⁹ Along with Russian troops,⁸⁶⁰ they maintained presences along the Syrian-Turkish border and the front lines between the Kurdish-controlled and Turkish-held areas.⁸⁶¹ 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-2022.⁸⁶²

2.7.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

The conflict between the SDF and Turkish forces/Turkish-backed armed groups

The UN Secretary-General in February 2023 characterised the security situation in Hasaka governorate as 'volatile'.⁸⁶³ The UNCOI, reporting on the second half of 2022, noted that there

⁸⁴⁹ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of influence and crossings in the Syrian opposition areas [as of December 2022], 31 January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁰ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 50

⁸⁵¹ Al Arabiya, Attacks on Iran-linked targets in Syria will draw prompt response, Tehran warns, 25 March 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁵² UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of influence and crossings in the Syrian opposition areas [as of December 2022], 31 January 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁵³ Al-Hilu, K., The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, EUI, 14 January 2021 [first published in Arabic on 21 December 2020], [url](#), p. 6

⁸⁵⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria: Recruitment to Opposition Groups [source: Suhail Al-Ghazi], December 2022, [url](#), p. 16

⁸⁵⁵ Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 14

⁸⁵⁶ Al-Khateb, K., Syrian government reportedly building tribal force in Hasakah, Al-Monitor, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁷ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of influence and crossings in the Syrian opposition areas [as of December 2022], 31 January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁸ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁹ Al Shami, I., How the Autonomous Administration Leadership and Civilians Will View a Turkish Incursion into Northeast Syria, TWI, 18 July 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁰ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁶¹ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁶² BasNews, Syrian Regime Deploys Reinforcement to North of Hasakah amid Turkish Threats, 17 July 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁶³ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 30

were continuing reports of security incidents in the vicinity of SNA-controlled areas or the Syrian-Turkish border, including around Tal Tamr.⁸⁶⁴

These frontline incidents included ground-bases strikes,⁸⁶⁵ airstrikes⁸⁶⁶ and drone strikes.⁸⁶⁷ The intensity of these attacks varied over time, with a significant decrease recorded by the UN in February/March 2023. However, Hasaka's front line zones remained one of the most conflict-affected areas in Syria.⁸⁶⁸ There were a number of reports of alleged Turkish drone strikes targeting SDF personnel,⁸⁶⁹ and several instances of drone strikes,⁸⁷⁰ heavy shelling⁸⁷¹ and gunfire⁸⁷² by Turkish forces which caused civilian casualties.⁸⁷³

Attacks by Turkish forces reportedly intensified in northeastern Syria during the second half of 2022.⁸⁷⁴ In November 2022, Türkiye launched Operation Claw-Sword,⁸⁷⁵ carrying out a series of air, drone and artillery strikes⁸⁷⁶ targeting SDF and GoS military sites in the governorate.⁸⁷⁷ Some strikes also hit non-military infrastructure such as grain silos, oil fields and power stations,⁸⁷⁸ including in the al-Jawadiya, Qamishli⁸⁷⁹ and al-Malikiya (Derik) areas, killing at least one civilian.⁸⁸⁰ During the first half of 2023, NPA recorded 11 Turkish drone strikes in the governorate.⁸⁸¹ In what Jusoor for Studies viewed as a shift of *modus operandi*,⁸⁸² targets of

⁸⁶⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 109

⁸⁶⁵ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Appendix I, p. 18; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), Appendix I, p. 20

⁸⁶⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 6

⁸⁶⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 109

⁸⁶⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 8, 29

⁸⁶⁹ See, for example, Rudaw, SDF says two fighters killed by Turkish drone in Hasaka, 5 May 2023, [url](#); Asharq Al-Awsat, SDF Commander Killed in Turkish Drone Attack, 15 April 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁰ SOHR, SDF-held areas in January 2023 | Nearly 50 deaths in acts of violence...21 attacks by ISIS cells...over 15 infightings and crimes...deteriorating security, 7 February 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 21

⁸⁷¹ SOHR, SDF-held areas in May 2023 | Nearly 30 fatalities in acts of violence...deteriorating security...over 25 infightings and murder crimes...11 protests against deteriorating living conditions, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁷² SOHR, SDF-held areas in February 2023 | 35 fatalities in acts of violence...seven attacks by ISIS cells...over ten infightings and murder crimes...deteriorating security, 5 March 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁷³ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 21; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 112; SOHR, SDF-held areas in February 2023 | 35 fatalities in acts of violence...seven attacks by ISIS cells...over ten infightings and murder crimes...deteriorating security, 5 March 2023, [url](#); SOHR, SDF-held areas in May 2023 | Nearly 30 fatalities in acts of violence...deteriorating security...over 25 infightings and murder crimes...11 protests against deteriorating living conditions, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁴ Synergy Association For Victims (Hevdesti), The Increase of Turkish Attacks on Northeast Syria Threatens Civilians' Lives and Jeopardizes their Basic Rights, 9 January 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁵ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 6

⁸⁷⁶ Atlantic Council, the risks and rewards of Erdogan's next military operation, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁷ SOHR, SOHR: Turkish airstrikes in Syria kill pro-regime soldiers and Kurdish forces, 20 November 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁸ SOHR, Alarming living crises | Turkish airstrikes on vital institutions and infrastructure affect civilians in Al-Hasakah countryside, 26 November 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁹ Syria Direct, Days of airstrikes and rumblings of a long-threatened Turkish offensive in northern Syria after Istanbul bombing, 25 November 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁰ HRW, Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Exacerbate Humanitarian Crisis, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁸¹ NPA, North Press records 34 Turkish drone strikes on north Syria in 2023, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁸² Jusoor for Studies, Turkish pinpoint operations in Syria against the PKK: Details and indications, 2 February 2023, [url](#)

Turkish drone strikes since early 2023 also included vehicles carrying PKK⁸⁸³ and SDF members.⁸⁸⁴ Moreover, attacks were conducted deeper within SDF-controlled territory (more than 60 km south of the Syrian-Turkish border). 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.⁸⁸⁵

Operation Peace Spring area

In the Operation Peace Spring area itself, several civilians were shot dead by Turkish forces during the reference period.⁸⁸⁶ Moreover, there were a number of security incidents affecting various armed actors, including attacks of members of SNA, Turkish police and Civil Police, as well as instances of infighting among military police, SNA⁸⁸⁷ and other armed factions.⁸⁸⁸ There were also reports of IED attacks in this zone, mainly occurring in residential areas and markets.⁸⁸⁹

ISIL insurgency

ISIL attacks in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) were reported to have increased significantly during the second half of 2022⁸⁹⁰ and continued to occur in 2023. Incidents in Hasaka targeted members of the Kurdish Internal Security Forces⁸⁹¹ (Asayish⁸⁹²) and SDF⁸⁹³ as well as civilians in the governorate.⁸⁹⁴ Over the first half 2023, the NPA recorded an average rate of two ISIL attacks per month,⁸⁹⁵ with three attacks in June 2023.⁸⁹⁶

⁸⁸³ Jusoor for Studies, Turkish pinpoint operations in Syria against the PKK: Details and indications, 2 February 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁴ Al-Monitor, Turkey conducts drone strike against Kurdish forces in Syria, 4 August 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁵ Jusoor for Studies, Turkish pinpoint operations in Syria against the PKK: Details and indications, 2 February 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁶ SOHR, “Peace Spring” areas in June 2023 | Public protests against corruption and violations committed by Turkish-backed factions...dreadful living conditions...nearly 30 cases of kidnapping and arbitrary arrests, 2 July 2023, [url](#); SOHR, “Peace Spring” areas in February 2023 | Assassinations target “National Army” militiamen and ongoing violations by Turkish-backed factions, 2 March 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁷ SOHR, “Peace Spring” areas in April 2023 | Public uprising against Turkish forces...ongoing violations by Turkish-backed factions...nearly 55 cases of arbitrary arrests, 4 May 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁸ SOHR, “Peace Spring” areas in March 2023 | Turkish-backed factions continues their violations against civilians, amid ongoing infightings over property and revenue-sharing, 2 April 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 20

⁸⁹⁰ TWI, The SDF Is Caught Between Turkey and the Islamic State Again, 12 October 2022, [url](#); SOHR, ISIS attacks in SDF-held areas | 11 people, including nine SDF members, killed in 16 operations and attacks by ISIS since early December 2022, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁹¹ SOHR, ISIS attacks since early 2023 | 25 people, mostly combatants, killed and injured in over 14 operations in SDF-held areas, 14 January 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁹² Enab Baladi, SDF operations in al-Hol camp: The “dismemberment plan”, 6 September 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁹³ SOHR, ISIS attacks in SDF-held areas | 11 people, including nine SDF members, killed in 16 operations and attacks by ISIS since early December 2022, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁴ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 5; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 7; SOHR, ISIS attacks in SDF-held areas | 11 people, including nine SDF members, killed in 16 operations and attacks by ISIS since early December 2022, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁵ NPA, 552 people in Syria fall victim to ISIS attacks in first half of 2023, 8 July 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁶ NPA, 678 people killed, injured in Syria in June, 2 July 2023, [url](#)

Meanwhile, the SDF conducted anti-ISIL security operations in rural areas in the governorate's south (Dashisha town)⁸⁹⁷ and south-east,⁸⁹⁸ as well as in Hasaka city,⁸⁹⁹ sometimes with the support of the US-led coalition.⁹⁰⁰

Al-Hol camp

The security situation in Al-Hol camp, which houses suspected ISIL family members was described by UNOCHA as 'volatile'⁹⁰¹ and was characterized by 'high levels of violence, criminality and social tensions' among its residents,⁹⁰² with reports of killings by unidentified perpetrators.⁹⁰³ ISIL was present in the camp and its surroundings while the AANES (which oversees and manages the camp) and the SDF had limited capabilities to address petty crime, riots and clashes between camp residents and against guards.⁹⁰⁴ Moreover, SDF leadership claimed that Turkish airstrikes targeted its forces in the camp in November 2022.⁹⁰⁵

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 1 104 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Hasaka governorate, of which 148 were coded as battles, 686 explosions/remote violence and 270 incidents of violence against civilians.⁹⁰⁶

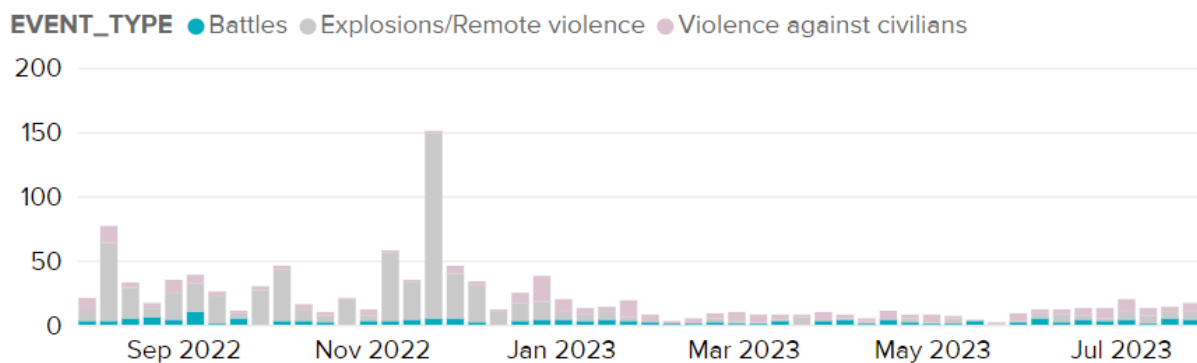


Figure 16. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hasaka governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data⁹⁰⁷

⁸⁹⁷ NPA, SDF captures ISIS leader in southern Hasakah, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁸ SOHR, Supported by International Coalition | SDF storms a house in Al-Hasakah and kills person accused of "belonging to ISIS", 11 June 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁹ Kurdistan 24, SDF arrests suspected ISIS financier in Hasakah city, 6 September 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁰ SOHR, Supported by International Coalition | SDF storms a house in Al-Hasakah and kills person accused of "belonging to ISIS", 11 June 2023, [url](#); NPA, SDF captures ISIS leader in southern Hasakah, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁰¹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁹⁰² UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 30

⁹⁰³ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 21

⁹⁰⁴ RAND Corporation, In the Wreckage of ISIS: An Examination of Challenges Confronting Detained and Displaced Populations in Northeastern Syria, 2023, [url](#), p. 52

⁹⁰⁵ France 24, Turkish strikes target Kurdish forces guarding Syrian detention camp, 23 November 2022, [url](#);

Rudaw, Turkish attack on camp, prison holding ISIS families kills 8 security members: SDF, 24 November 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

⁹⁰⁷ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the districts of Hasaka and Ras Al Ain. By comparison, very few incidents were recorded in the district of Malikeyyeh (see [Figure 17](#)). According to ACLED, Turkish forces and affiliated armed groups (SNA) were involved (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2') in around 64 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as explosions/remote violence and where SDF and affiliated armed groups were also an actor. SDF and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 59 % of all security incidents, the vast majority being coded as explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. Unidentified armed groups and ISIL were involved in around 10 % and 6 % of all security incidents, respectively.

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Hasaka	86	313	171
Malikeyyeh	3	38	7
Qamishli	20	98	27
Ras Al Ain	39	237	65
Total	148	686	270

Figure 17. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hasaka governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data

(c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented 154 civilian fatalities in 2021⁹⁰⁸ and 74 in 2022⁹⁰⁹ in Hasaka governorate. Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 52 civilian fatalities in Hasaka governorate.⁹¹⁰ For the year 2022, AOAV documented 190 civilian casualties (killed and injured) in Hasaka resulting from incidents of explosive violence.⁹¹¹

⁹⁰⁸ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

⁹⁰⁹ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁹¹⁰ Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

⁹¹¹ AOAV, Syria, updated 21 March 2023, [url](#)

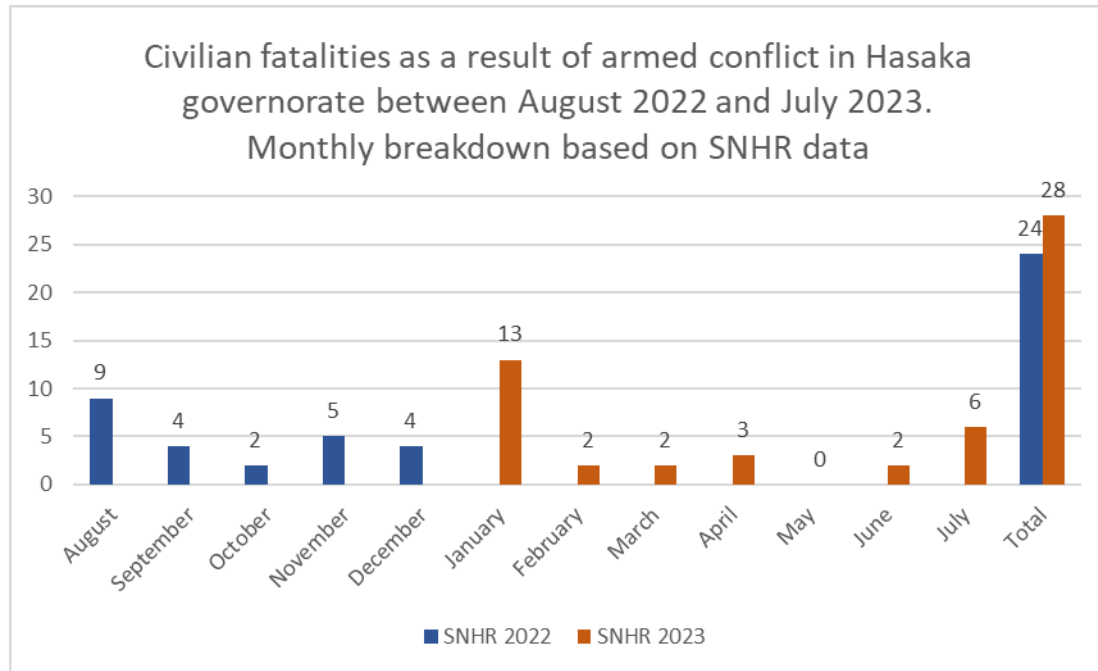


Figure 18. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Hasaka governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Hasaka was one of the governorates where contamination from UXOs was most widespread, including on roads, agricultural land and private property,⁹¹² with areas previously controlled by ISIL showing the highest levels of contamination.⁹¹³ 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.⁹¹⁴ During the first quarter of 2023, NPA recorded 12 deaths from explosive remnants of war in Hasaka governorate.⁹¹⁵ Civilian casualties from landmine explosions were recorded in the vicinity of Ras al-Ayn⁹¹⁶ and in the eastern⁹¹⁷ and north-western countryside of Hasaka,⁹¹⁸ amongst others.

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 331 573 IDPs in Hasaka governorate,⁹¹⁹ including 126 030 in Hasaka subdistrict.⁹²⁰ Over the year 2022, there were approximately

⁹¹² UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁹¹³ SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 8

⁹¹⁴ SOHR, Alarming living crises | Turkish airstrikes on vital institutions and infrastructure affect civilians in Al-Hasakah countryside, 26 November 2022, [url](#); HRW, Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Exacerbate Humanitarian Crisis, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

⁹¹⁵ NPA, Remnants of war kill 331 people in 1st quarter of 2023 in Syria, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

⁹¹⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 22; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), Annex I, p. 21

⁹¹⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 22

⁹¹⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 18

⁹¹⁹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁹²⁰ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 24



1 000 IDP movements out of Hasaka and 2 000 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 3 000 movements within the governorate.⁹²¹ During the first five months of 2023, there were 135 IDP movements out of Hasaka, most of them (86) occurring in May, while there were no IDP movements into the governorate and within the governorate reported.⁹²²

The UN noted that the negative impact of local hostilities on civilian lives and key civilian infrastructure prompted civilians to flee their homes⁹²³ and that residents' conflict-related exposure to displacement persisted across the northern region in the first half of 2023.⁹²⁴ For example, in June 2023, local residents were displaced when heavy artillery fire by Turkish forces and their proxies hit the villages of Al-Sousah, Farhiyah Ramo and Tel Al-Laban in the Tal Tamr area.⁹²⁵

As regards returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded approximately 3 640 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from Hasaka to other governorates and about 220 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Hasaka as well as about 360 movements within Hasaka.⁹²⁶ During the first five months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded 55 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Hasaka and 67 IDP returnee movements from Hasaka to other governorates, all of these movements occurring in March and May 2023. Returnee movements within the governorate were not reported.⁹²⁷

No further information on conflict-induced displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

⁹²¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

⁹²² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

⁹²³ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁹²⁴ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 63

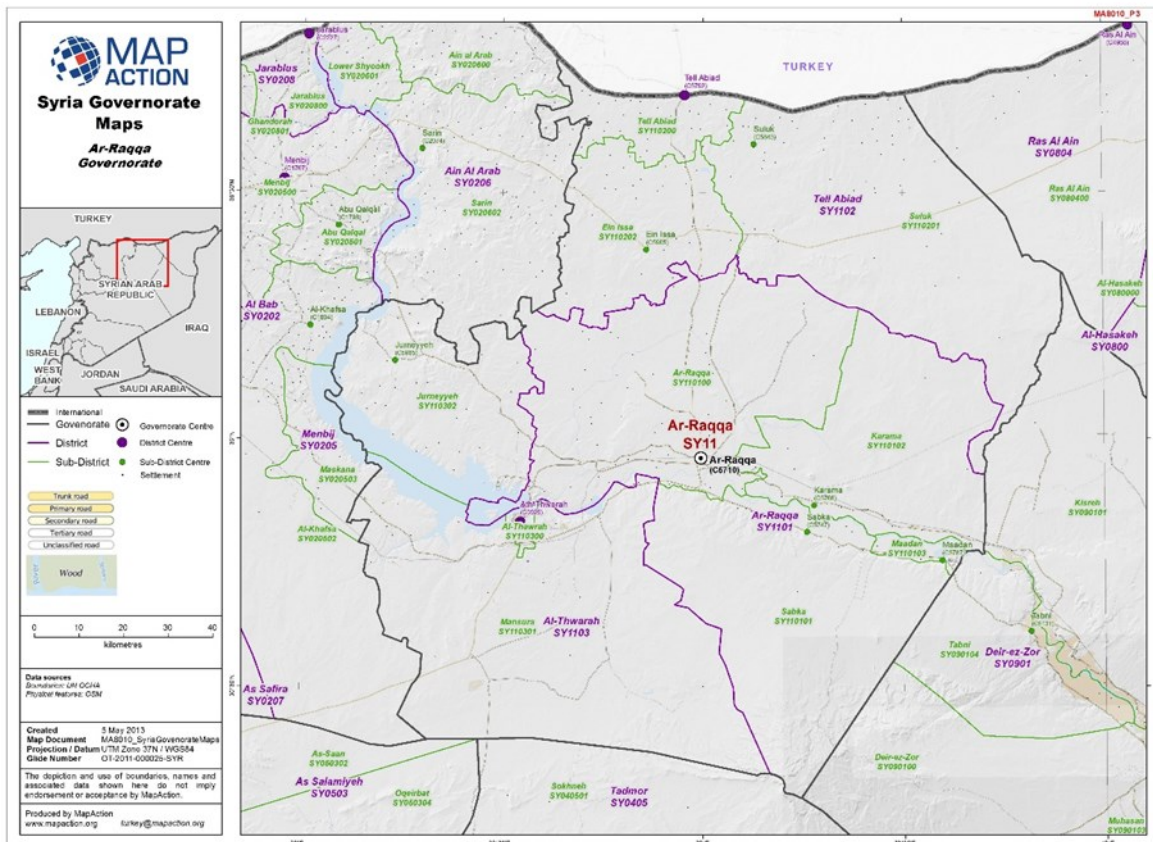
⁹²⁵ SOHR, SDF-held areas in June 2023 | Nearly 60 fatalities in acts of violence...deteriorating security situation...nearly 30 infightings and murder crimes...19 protests against deteriorating living conditions, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

⁹²⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

⁹²⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#)



2.8. Raqqa governorate



Map 13: © MapAction, Raqqa governorate⁹²⁸

2.8.1. General description of the governorate

Raqqa (Ar-Raqqa) governorate is located in the north-central part of Syria. The governorate borders Aleppo governorate to the west, Hasaka and Deir Ez-Zor governorates to the east, and Hama and Homs governorates to the south. It also shares an international border with Türkiye to its north.⁹²⁹ The governorate comprises three administrative districts: Raqqa, al-Thawra (Ath-Thawrah) and Tall Abyad (Tell Abiad).⁹³⁰ A December 2022 UNOCHA report estimated the governorate's population at 754 295.⁹³¹

The majority of Raqqa governorate's population is ethnic Arab.⁹³² Further information on the governorate's ethnic composition can be found in an earlier issue of this report: [Syria - Security situation \(September 2022\)](#).

⁹²⁸ MapAction, Ar Raqqa Governorate [map], 29 July 2016, [url](#)

⁹²⁹ UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 15

⁹³⁰ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 134

⁹³¹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

⁹³² Kurdistan 24, Protests erupt in Arab-majority Raqqa over deteriorating living conditions, 11 January 2022, [url](#)



2.8.2. Conflict background and armed actors

During the reference period, Kurdish forces (SDF/YPG) controlled about half of the territory of Raqqqa governorate, including its capital, Raqqqa city.⁹³³ SDF operations were supported by US-led coalition forces⁹³⁴ who also maintained a presence in Raqqqa city.⁹³⁵

Most of the northern section of the governorate was part of a Turkish-controlled territory roughly delimited by Tall Abyad in the west, Ras al-Ayn (Hasaka) in the east, the Syrian-Turkish border in the north and the M4 motorway in the south.⁹³⁶ This area has been referred to as the Operation Peace Spring area.⁹³⁷ The SNA operated in this area⁹³⁸ and controlled the stretch of border between Tall Abyad and Ras al-Ayn.⁹³⁹ In July 2023, Türkiye reinforced its military presence in the Ayn Issa area at the contact line between Turkish/SNA forces and the SDF.⁹⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the governorate's southern portion was controlled by the GoS.⁹⁴¹ GoS forces were granted permission by the SDF to pass between GoS held and Kurdish-controlled territories.⁹⁴² Along with Russian troops,⁹⁴³ they maintained presences along the Syrian-Turkish border and the front lines between the Kurdish-controlled and Turkish-held areas.⁹⁴⁴

A number of additional Russian military sites were located the town of Ayn Issa as well as along the stretch of the river basin between the M4 motorway and Raqqqa city, as depicted on a mid-July 2023 map by Jusoor for Studies. Further south, numerous Iranian sites were situated along the contact line between the SDF-held territories and those held by the GoS.⁹⁴⁵

⁹³³ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of influence and crossings in the Syrian opposition areas [as of December 2022], 31 January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

⁹³⁴ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 50

⁹³⁵ NPA, US-led Coalition returns to Syria's Raqqqa after years of withdrawal, 23 October 2022, [url](#)

⁹³⁶ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of influence and crossings in the Syrian opposition areas [as of December 2022], 31 January 2023, [url](#)

⁹³⁷ Al-Hilu, K., The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, EUI, 14 January 2021 [first published in Arabic on 21 December 2020], [url](#), p. 6

⁹³⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria: Recruitment to Opposition Groups [source: Suhail Al-Ghazi], December 2022, [url](#), p. 16

⁹³⁹ Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 14

⁹⁴⁰ NPA, Turkey sends military reinforcements to contact lines with SDF in Raqqqa, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁴¹ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of influence and crossings in the Syrian opposition areas [as of December 2022], 31 January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁴² Al Shami, I., How the Autonomous Administration Leadership and Civilians Will View a Turkish Incursion into Northeast Syria, TWI, 18 July 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁴³ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁴ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁵ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)



South of Raqqa city, in GoS-controlled territory, there was a zone with ISIL presence.⁹⁴⁶ The Critical Threats project stated that ISIL cells in the governorate were likely ‘lying low’ to avoid pressure from SDF and US-led coalition forces.⁹⁴⁷

2.8.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

The conflict between the SDF and Turkish forces/Turkish-backed armed groups

During the second half of 2022, there were continuing reports of security incidents in the vicinity of the Syrian-Turkish border or SNA-controlled areas, including around Ayn Issa⁹⁴⁸ and Tall Abyad.⁹⁴⁹ These front line incidents included ground-based strikes⁹⁵⁰ and drone strikes.⁹⁵¹ The intensity of these attacks varied over time, with a significant decrease recorded by the UN in February/March 2023.⁹⁵² However, the UN Secretary-General emphasised that Raqqa’s front line zones remained one of the areas most affected by hostilities.⁹⁵³

Attacks by Turkish forces reportedly intensified in northern Syria during the second half of 2022.⁹⁵⁴ In November 2022, Türkiye launched Operation Claw-Sword, carrying out a series of airstrikes in the northern countryside of Raqqa, Hasaka and Aleppo governorates,⁹⁵⁵ one of which targeted an SDF site in the Ayn Issa area.⁹⁵⁶

Alleged Turkish drone strikes between September and December 2022 killed several civilians⁹⁵⁷ and SDF-backed militia members⁹⁵⁸ in northern Raqqa’s Tall Abyad district/Ayn Issa area. However, the first half of 2023 only saw one Turkish drone strike, according to the

⁹⁴⁶ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁷ CTP, ISIS Will Leverage Improved Attack Capabilities to Generate Forces in Syria, 2 December 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 109

⁹⁴⁹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁹⁵⁰ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 18; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 22

⁹⁵¹ SOHR, Death toll update | Three civilians killed including child in Turkish drone attack on car in Al-Raqqa, 17 December 2022, [url](#); SOHR, After issuing death sentences against 13 Turkish informants | Turkish drone attack on Al-Raqqa countryside leaves four fighters killed, 16 September 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁵² UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 8

⁹⁵³ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 29

⁹⁵⁴ Synergy Association For Victims (Hevdesti), The Increase of Turkish Attacks on Northeast Syria Threatens Civilians’ Lives and Jeopardizes their Basic Rights, 9 January 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁵ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 6

⁹⁵⁶ Al Mayadeen, Turkey launches Operation Claw-Sword against SDF, PKK, YPG, 20 November 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁷ SOHR, Third Turkish drone attack in 2023 | Child injured in Al-Raqqa countryside, 7 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Death toll update | Three civilians killed including child in Turkish drone attack on car in Al-Raqqa, 17 December 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁸ SOHR, After issuing death sentences against 13 Turkish informants | Turkish drone attack on Al-Raqqa countryside leaves four fighters killed, 16 September 2022, [url](#)



NPA.⁹⁵⁹ Meanwhile, ground-based attacks in the same area also caused several casualties among civilians⁹⁶⁰ and the SDF.⁹⁶¹

Operation Peace Spring area

In the Operation Peace Spring area, at least one civilian man was shot dead by Turkish Jandarma, while unidentified gunmen killed members of Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyyah⁹⁶²/ the SNA near the town of Tall Abyad.⁹⁶³ In April 2023, an explosion in the same area killed a Turkish police officer and a Syrian member of the Civil Police and wounded 11 other members of these entities.⁹⁶⁴

ISIL insurgency

ISIL continued to conduct asymmetric attacks in the governorate as of the first half of 2023.⁹⁶⁵ From August 2022, attacks attributed to ISIL intensified in Raqqa,⁹⁶⁶ reflecting a wider trend across the AANES.⁹⁶⁷ According to Gregory Waters, incidents in the governorate peaked August⁹⁶⁸ and December,⁹⁶⁹ with an average monthly rate of 2.8 over the last five months of 2022.⁹⁷⁰ On 26 December 2022, suspected ISIL members, some wearing explosive belts, attacked an area of Raqqa 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. Six SDF members were killed in the attack.⁹⁷¹ While incidents attributed to ISIL, including IED attacks, continued in rural Raqqa during the first half of 2023,⁹⁷² Waters

⁹⁵⁹ NPA, North Press records 34 Turkish drone strikes on north Syria in 2023, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁰ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 18; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 22

⁹⁶¹ BasNews, Turkish Shelling Kills SDF Member in North of Raqqa: SOHR, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁶² SOHR, "Peace Spring" areas in June 2023 | Public protests against corruption and violations committed by Turkish-backed factions...dreadful living conditions...nearly 30 cases of kidnapping and arbitrary arrests, 2 July 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁶³ SOHR, "Peace Spring" areas in February 2023 | Assassinations target "National Army" militiamen and ongoing violations by Turkish-backed factions, 2 March 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁴ SOHR, "Peace Spring" areas in April 2023 | Public uprising against Turkish forces...ongoing violations by Turkish-backed factions...nearly 55 cases of arbitrary arrests, 4 May 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁵ UN Security Council, Letter dated 24 July 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2023/549, 25 July 2023, [url](#), para. 52

⁹⁶⁶ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, ISIS attacks in SDF-held areas | 11 people, including nine SDF members, killed in 16 operations and attacks by ISIS since early December 2022, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁷ TWI, The SDF Is Caught Between Turkey and the Islamic State Again, 12 October 2022, [url](#); SOHR, ISIS attacks in SDF-held areas | 11 people, including nine SDF members, killed in 16 operations and attacks by ISIS since early December 2022, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁸ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in August 2022, CEP, 6 September 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁹ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁰ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in August 2022, CEP, 6 September 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in September 2022, CEP, 4 October 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in October 2022, CEP, 4 November 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in November 2022, CEP, 5 December 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁷¹ Al Jazeera, Attacks in Syria's Raqqa kill several Kurdish security officers, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁷² NPA, ISIS attacks in 2023, so far, 21 January 2023, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Two SDF members killed by IED in Raqqa: SOHR, 28 April 2023, [url](#)



recorded a drop in intensity, with a maximum of 3 incidents in a single month (March)⁹⁷³ and an average monthly rate of 1.17 attacks. In July 2023, the same source recorded three ISIL attacks, the same number recorded between April and June 2023.⁹⁷⁴ However, other sources recorded as many as seven ISIL attacks in early January⁹⁷⁵ and an average rate of 3.33 attacks per month over the same six-month period.⁹⁷⁶ In early August 2023, an ISIL attack on GoS forces led to the killing of at least 10 soldiers and militiamen in northern Raqqa.⁹⁷⁷

The SDF arrested several suspected ISIL members in autumn 2022, including in the northern⁹⁷⁸ and western⁹⁷⁹ countryside of Raqqa. Following the December 2022 attack in Raqqa city, the SDF launched a large-scale security operation ('Operation Retaliation for Raqqa Martyrs') in late January 2023, targeting ISIL cells in the city and its surrounding rural areas.⁹⁸⁰ At the conclusion of this operation in early February 2023,⁹⁸¹ the SDF stated that it had raided dozens of possible ISIL hideouts in Raqqa and neighbouring regions,⁹⁸² and arrested 127 suspected ISIL members, including the ISIL governor for Raqqa.⁹⁸³ According to an assessment by the Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), which comprises the countries contributing troops to the US-led coalition against ISIL, the SDF's anti-ISIL operations resulted in a steady decline in ISIL activity in the region over the first quarter of 2023.⁹⁸⁴

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 751 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Raqqa governorate, of which 125 were coded as battles, 450 explosions/remote violence and 176 incidents of violence against civilians.⁹⁸⁵

⁹⁷³ Waters, G., *ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023*, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁴ Waters, G., *ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in January 2023*, CEP, 3 February 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., *ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023*, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., *ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023*, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., *ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in May 2023*, CEP, 2 June 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., *ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in July 2023*, CEP, 2 August 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁵ SOHR, *ISIS attacks since early 2023 | 25 people, mostly combatants, killed and injured in over 14 operations in SDF-held areas*, 14 January 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁶ NPA, *552 people in Syria fall victim to ISIS attacks in first half of 2023*, 8 July 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁷ Al Monitor, *Islamic State attack in Raqqa kills 10 Syrian soldiers, second in a week*, 8 August 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁸ Kurdistan 24, *SDF arrests three ISIS suspects with coalition support in Raqqa*, 23 September 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁹ ANHA, *SDF arrest a mercenary from ISIS in Raqqa*, 8 October 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁰ Rudaw, *SDF launch anti-ISIS operation in response to deadly attack*, 25 January 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁸¹ NPA, *SDF releases statement on end of anti-ISIS operation in Raqqa*, 2 February 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁸² USDOD, *Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023*, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 57

⁹⁸³ NPA, *SDF releases statement on end of anti-ISIS operation in Raqqa*, 2 February 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁴ USDOD, *Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023*, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 57

⁹⁸⁵ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

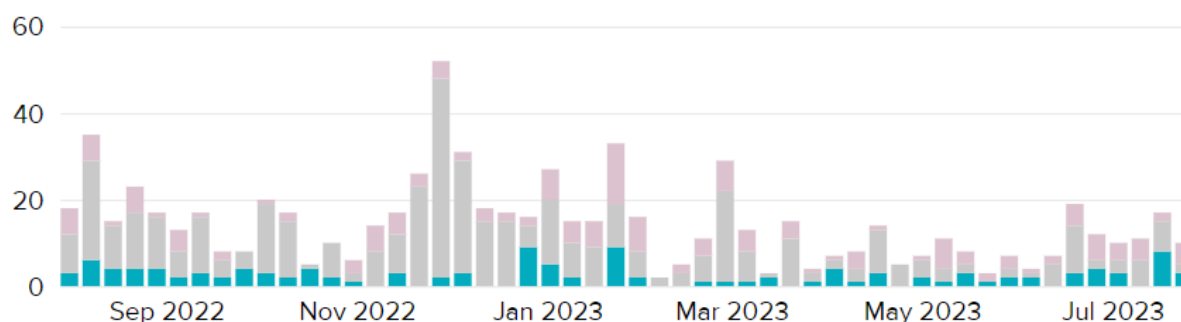


Figure 19. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Raqqqa governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data⁹⁸⁶

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of Tall Abyad (see [Figure 20](#)). According to ACLED, SDF and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 66 % of all security incidents (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’), the majority being coded as violence against civilians and explosion/remote violence. Turkish forces and affiliated armed groups (SNA) were involved in around 50 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as explosions/remote violence and where SDF and affiliated armed groups were also an actor. ISIL was involved in around 15 % of all security incidents, while GoS and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 13 % of all security incidents.

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Raqqqa	62	29	94
Ath-Thawrah	35	61	34
Tall Abyad	28	360	48
Total	125	450	176

Figure 20. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Raqqqa governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data

⁹⁸⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

(c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented 84 civilian fatalities in 2021⁹⁸⁷ and 27 in 2022.⁹⁸⁸ Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 20 civilian fatalities in Raqqqa governorate.⁹⁸⁹ AOA V reported that explosive violence caused 84 civilian casualties in Raqqqa during the year 2022.⁹⁹⁰

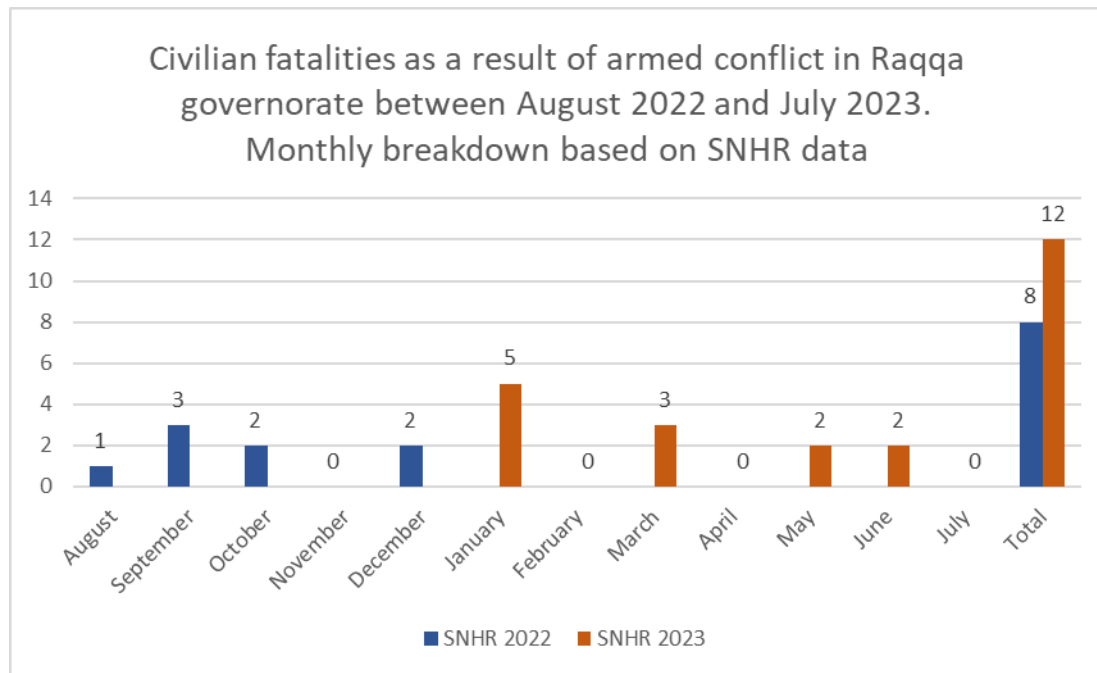


Figure 21. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Raqqqa governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Raqqqa city is ‘still slowly recovering from the devastation’ caused by the battle that led to ISIL’s defeat in October 2017, with buildings still severely damaged. According to a local resident, a good amount was rebuilt after 2017 but reconstruction efforts have since slowed down due to a collapse of the Syrian pound.⁹⁹¹ In northern Raqqqa, shelling of the M4 road near Ayn Issa by Turkish forces caused fires on wheat crops in June 2023.⁹⁹²

⁹⁸⁷ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

⁹⁸⁸ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁹⁸⁹ Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

⁹⁹⁰ AOA V, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

⁹⁹¹ Reuters, Syria’s Raqqqa in slow rebound 5 years since Islamic State defeat, 20 October 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁹² SOHR, SDF-held areas in June 2023 | Nearly 60 fatalities in acts of violence...deteriorating security situation...nearly 30 infightings and murder crimes...19 protests against deteriorating living conditions, 5 July 2023, [url](#)



Raqqa was one of the governorates where contamination from UXOs was most widespread, including on roads, agricultural land and private property,⁹⁹³ with areas previously controlled by ISIL showing the highest levels of contamination.⁹⁹⁴ Between March 2011 and early April 2023, Raqqa accounted for 22 % of all landmine-related deaths recorded in the country.⁹⁹⁵ During the first quarter of 2023, NPA recorded 19 deaths from explosive remnants of war in Raqqa governorate.⁹⁹⁶ Areas where civilians were killed or injured by UXOs during the reference period included Tall Abyad town⁹⁹⁷ and the northern⁹⁹⁸ and eastern⁹⁹⁹ Raqqa countryside.

(e) Displacement and return

The UN Secretary-General noted that hostilities in northern Syria, including an increase in airstrikes, continued to expose civilians to displacement.¹⁰⁰⁰ According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 159 827 IDPs in Raqqa governorate,¹⁰⁰¹ including 108 302 in Raqqa district.¹⁰⁰² Over the year 2022, there were no IDP movements out of Raqqa and no IDP movements into the governorate. There were about 1 000 movements within the governorate.¹⁰⁰³ Similarly, during the first five months of 2023, there were no recorded IDP movements out of Raqqa or into or within the governorate.¹⁰⁰⁴ No further information on reasons behind displacement movements was found.

As regards returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded approximately 1 275 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from Raqqa to other governorates and about 95 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Raqqa as well as about 725 movements within Raqqa.¹⁰⁰⁵ As the USDOS noted, the SDF and the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) ‘generally facilitated the safe and voluntary return of IDPs’ to Raqqa.¹⁰⁰⁶ No further information on the reasons behind the returns movements was found.

During the first five months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded 9 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Raqqa and 26 IDP returnee movements from Raqqa

⁹⁹³ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁹⁹⁴ SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 8

⁹⁹⁵ SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 20

⁹⁹⁶ NPA, Remnants of war kill 331 people in 1st quarter of 2023 in Syria, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁷ SOHR, “Peace Spring” areas in February 2023 | Assassinations target “National Army” militiamen and ongoing violations by Turkish-backed factions, 2 March 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁸ SOHR, “Peace Spring” areas in March 2023 | Turkish-backed factions continues their violations against civilians, amid ongoing infightings over property and revenue-sharing, 2 April 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 18

¹⁰⁰⁰ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 63

¹⁰⁰¹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

¹⁰⁰² UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 24

¹⁰⁰³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁶ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 66

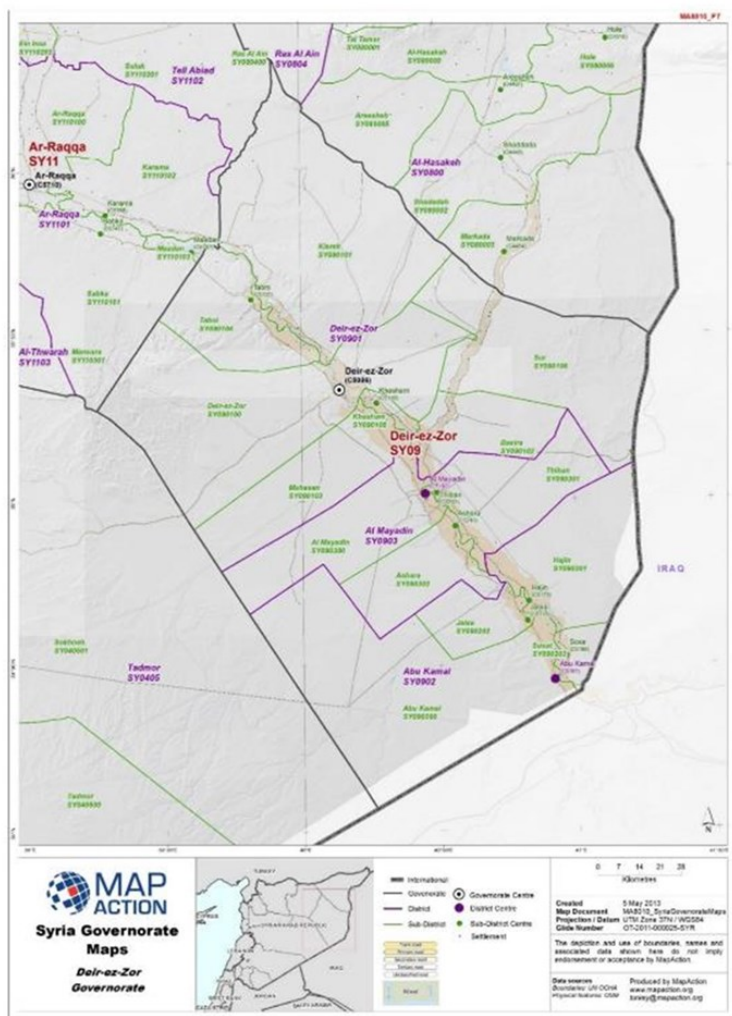


to other governorates, all of these movements occurring in March 2023. There were no recorded IDP returnee movements within the governorate.¹⁰⁰⁷ UN Security Council reports covering the first five months of 2023 did not contain any further information on displacement from or returns to Raqqa governorate.¹⁰⁰⁸ No further information on conflict-induced displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

¹⁰⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#)

2.9. Deir Ez-Zor governorate



Map 14: © MapAction, Deir Ez-Zor governorate map¹⁰⁰⁹

2.9.1. General description of the governorate

Deir Ez-Zor governorate is located in eastern Syria. It shares internal borders with Homs to the south-west, Raqqa to the north-west and Hasaka to the north as well as an international border with Iraq to its east.¹⁰¹⁰ The Euphrates River divides the governorate into a western part (al-Shamiya) and an eastern part (al-Jazeera).¹⁰¹¹ Administratively, Deir Ez-Zor comprises three

¹⁰⁰⁹ MapAction, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁰ UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁰¹¹ SACD, Deir ez-Zor sees few options as widely rejected 'reconciliation' starts, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

districts: Deir Ez-Zor, al-Mayadin, and al-Bukamal (Abu Kamal).¹⁰¹² The governorate's capital is Deir Ez-Zor city.¹⁰¹³

A December 2022 UNOCHA report estimated the governorate's population at 1 096 528.¹⁰¹⁴ The governorate's population is almost entirely Sunni Arab¹⁰¹⁵ and its demographic structure has been described as heavily tribal-based.¹⁰¹⁶ Further information on the governorate's ethnic and religious composition can be found in an earlier issue of this report: [Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

2.9.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Deir Ez-Zor governorate is roughly divided into two areas of control. The western part – that is, mainly the areas west of the Euphrates River – is controlled by the GoS¹⁰¹⁷ and its Iranian and Russian allies. This area includes the major cities of Deir Ez-Zor, al-Mayadin and al-Bukamal.¹⁰¹⁸ Meanwhile, the areas east of the Euphrates River are mainly controlled by Kurdish forces (SDF),¹⁰¹⁹ although the GoS/Iran-backed militias held several towns in eastern Deir Ez-Zor.¹⁰²⁰

Iran-backed militias and GoS forces were present in the region stretching from Deir Ez-Zor city to al-Bukamal on the Syrian/Iraqi border. Al-Bukamal hosted the Imam Ali base, the governorate's largest Iranian military site. Moreover, GoS forces and Iranian proxies controlled seven strategic towns in the eastern Deir Ez-Zor countryside.¹⁰²¹ Activity of the Russian-backed Fifth Corps of the SAA was reported in the eastern Deir Ez-Zor countryside around Jadid Akidat.¹⁰²² Further Iranian and Russian sites were located in the desert areas west of the Euphrates,¹⁰²³ with the IRGC reported to have been redeploying some of its forces from the riverside towards the Badia.¹⁰²⁴ In spring 2023, IRGC and Iranian-backed militias reinforced their presence at military sites in the governorate, including in Deir Ez-Zor city¹⁰²⁵ and the al-Mayadin area.¹⁰²⁶ Iran-backed militias operated 30 local recruitment centres in areas west of

¹⁰¹² UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 134-135

¹⁰¹³ SACD, Deir ez-Zor sees few options as widely rejected 'reconciliation' starts, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁴ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

¹⁰¹⁵ iMMAP, Northeastern Syria: Return and Reintegration Area Profiles Central and Eastern Deir-ez-Zor Cantons, November 2021, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁰¹⁶ SACD, Deir ez-Zor sees few options as widely rejected 'reconciliation' starts, 11 January 2022, [url](#); iMMAP, Northeastern Syria: Return and Reintegration Area Profiles Central and Eastern Deir-ez-Zor Cantons, November 2021, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁰¹⁷ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁸ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁹ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁰ NPA, Iran controls Syria's Deir ez-Zor by persuasion, intimidation, 21 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰²¹ NPA, Iran controls Syria's Deir ez-Zor by persuasion, intimidation, 21 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰²² Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – May 2023, May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰²³ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁴ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria - June 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁵ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria - May 2023, 8 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁶ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria - June 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

the Euphrates and were backed by certain local tribes such as the al-Baggara, Mashahda, and al-Marasima.¹⁰²⁷

Meanwhile, sites of 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.¹⁰²⁸ They were supported by forces of the US-led Coalition against ISIL,¹⁰²⁹ which operated several sites east of the Euphrates, including on the eastern bank opposite Deir Ez-Zor city¹⁰³⁰ and south of the Euphrates/Khabour confluence.¹⁰³¹

ISIL remained active in the governorate¹⁰³² and continued to conduct asymmetric attacks as of the first half of 2023,¹⁰³³ with pockets of the group's presence mapped in the desert areas west of the Euphrates.¹⁰³⁴ Since early 2023, ISIL increased its attacks and coercive activities in the governorate's urban belt, including by installing a nighttime shadow rule in Musayrib (north of Deir Ez-Zor city).¹⁰³⁵ Moreover, a rise in activity of ISIL cells was reported in the SDF-held northern Deir Ez-Zor countryside around the towns of Tayyeb al-Fal, al-Hajnah, al Harijiyah and al-Hariji.¹⁰³⁶

2.9.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

The UN Secretary-General, in a February 2023 report, described the security situation in Deir Ez-Zor governorate as 'volatile', with continuing reports of targeted killings.¹⁰³⁷ These were carried out by means of firearms¹⁰³⁸ and IEDs.¹⁰³⁹ In a number of attacks with civilian

¹⁰²⁷ NPA, Iran controls Syria's Deir ez-Zor by persuasion, intimidation, 21 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁸ Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Deir Ez-Zor and July 2023.

¹⁰²⁹ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress. 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 50

¹⁰³⁰ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress. 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 51; Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰³¹ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰³² Rudaw, SDF denies reports of military movement in eastern Deir ez-Zor, 12 July 2023, [url](#); Molina, L.M., Deir Ezzor, at a crossroads with Daesh [Opinion], Atalayar, 18 November 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰³³ UN Security Council, Letter dated 24 July 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2023/549, 25 July 2023, [url](#), para. 52

¹⁰³⁴ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁵ ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Update Special Edition: Iran, Russia, and Syrian Prioritization of Challenging the United States over ISIS Will Present ISIS with Space to Grow Its Capabilities, Rest, and Refit, 21 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁶ SOHR, SOHR: ISIS cells continue to spread terror in northeast Syria, 29 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 30

¹⁰³⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 18; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 21

¹⁰³⁹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 21; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 21

casualties¹⁰⁴⁰ or kidnappings of civilians¹⁰⁴¹ the perpetrators were unknown or could not be confirmed. Moreover, the governorate experienced mutual strikes between US forces and IRGC forces/Iran-backed militias,¹⁰⁴² as well as Israeli air bombing.¹⁰⁴³

In August 2023, clashes between SDF and Arab tribal fighters, members of the Deir Ez-Zor Military Council, broke out after SDF detained the commander and some members of the Military Council.¹⁰⁴⁴ According to sources, at least 10 tribesmen and three SDF fighters were killed, as well as eight civilians.¹⁰⁴⁵

ISIL insurgency

ISIL launched regular attacks in the governorate.¹⁰⁴⁶ It continued to conduct asymmetric attacks during the reference period,¹⁰⁴⁷ targeting GoS forces, SDF members and civilians and using the Badia desert for the purposes of remobilisation and training.¹⁰⁴⁸

Incidents targeting civilians included attacks on truffle hunters in the desert of western Deir Ez-Zor¹⁰⁴⁹ and on contractors¹⁰⁵⁰ and businessmen in the oil industry.¹⁰⁵¹ 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.¹⁰⁵² Among those attacked by ISIL were members of the Albu Saraya tribe in the GoS controlled parts of northern Deir Ez-Zor, including NDF fighters, shepherds, and truffle harvesters.¹⁰⁵³

¹⁰⁴⁰ See, for example, SNHR, 501 Civilians, Including 71 Children, 42 Woman, and 20 Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in Syria, in the First Half of 2023, 2 July 2023, [url](#), p. 19; SNHR, 99 Civilians, Including Eight Children, and Seven Women Documented Killed in Syria, in April 2023, 1 May 2023, [url](#), p. 5; Al Arabiya, At least 10 workers killed in attack near oil field in Syria's Deir Ezzor, 30 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴¹ SOHR, Including two children | Unknown gunmen kidnap eight shepherds and steal nearly 200 sheep in Al-Masrab desert in western Deir Ezzor, 3 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴² USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), pp. 52-53; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 16

¹⁰⁴³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 16

¹⁰⁴⁴ Al Jazeera, Several killed in fighting between SDF and tribesmen in eastern Syria, 30 August 2023, [url](#); Lister, C., A dangerous escalation in Syria's Deir ez-Zor, 30 August 2023, MEI, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁵ Al Jazeera, Several killed in fighting between SDF and tribesmen in eastern Syria, 30 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁶ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰⁴⁷ UN Security Council, Sixteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2023/76, 1 February 2023, [url](#), para. 27; UN Security Council, Letter dated 24 July 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2023/549, 25 July 2023, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4016440/files/S_2023_549-EN.pdf?ln=en, para. 52

¹⁰⁴⁸ UN Security Council, Sixteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2023/76, 1 February 2023, [url](#), para. 27

¹⁰⁴⁹ ANF News, 8 killed, over 40 injured in ISIS landmine blast in Deir ez-Zor, 2 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁰ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – April 2023, 11 April 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵¹ NPA, ISIS attacks oil businessman in Syria's Deir ez-Zor, 19 March 2023, <https://npasyria.com/en/94975/>; SOHR, New assassination | ISIS cells kill oil investor in Deir Ezzor countryside, 23 February 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵² Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – 02 November 2022, 2 November 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵³ ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, March 22, 2023, 24 March 2023, [url](#)

ISIL carried out multiple attacks on SDF members, targeting checkpoints¹⁰⁵⁴ and military patrols in the eastern Deir Ez-Zor countryside¹⁰⁵⁵ and carrying out assassinations.¹⁰⁵⁶ Moreover, in addition to GoS forces¹⁰⁵⁷ and NDF members,¹⁰⁵⁸ ISIL attacks increasingly targeted IRGC and Iran-backed militias,¹⁰⁵⁹ with incidents reported in al-Mayadin¹⁰⁶⁰ and al-Bukamal.¹⁰⁶¹ In early 2023, the group shifted its focus in GoS-held areas to military targets closer to the Euphrates.¹⁰⁶² 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.¹⁰⁶³

According to Gregory Waters, during the final five months of 2022, incidents in the governorate attributed to ISIL peaked in September¹⁰⁶⁴ (5 attacks) and December (5 attacks),¹⁰⁶⁵ with an average monthly rate of 2.4.¹⁰⁶⁶ In the first half of 2023, incident numbers rose significantly in March (12)¹⁰⁶⁷ and April (18), reaching their highest level since early 2018,¹⁰⁶⁸ with an average monthly rate of 7.17 attacks.¹⁰⁶⁹ Other sources even recorded average rates as high as 10.67 (NPA)¹⁰⁷⁰ or 11 attacks per month (SOHR)¹⁰⁷¹ over the same six-month period.

¹⁰⁵⁴ See, for example, SOHR, Earlier ISIS attack | Member of “SDF” checkpoint killed in Deir Ezzor countryside, 5 March 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Earlier “ISIS” attack | Member of SDF killed in eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor, 2 March 2023, [url](#); SOHR, ISIS resurgence | Asayish member killed and others injured in attack on checkpoint in eastern Deir Ezzor, 26 February 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁵ See, for example, SOHR, ISIS attack | Five SDF members killed and injured east of Deir Ezzor, 10 August 2022, [url](#); ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, April 12, 2023, 14 April 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁶ See, for example, SOHR, ISIS attack | SDF member killed west of Deir Ezzor in retaliation for anti-ISIS campaign in Al-Hawl camp, 19 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁷ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – May 2023, May 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Two anti-regime attacks | 30 regime soldiers killed in Rif Dimashq and Deir Ezzor desert in less than 24 hours, 13 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁸ SOHR, More seven bodies found | The number of NDF members killed by ISIS cells in Deir Ezzor desert jumps to 12, 27 March 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Missing for 15 days | Four NDF members found dead in Deir Ezzor desert, 25 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria - June 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – May 2023, May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁰ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria - June 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶¹ SOHR, ISIS resurgence | Member of Iran-backed militias killed in an attack in Deir Ezzor, 13 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶² ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, March 8, 2023, 10 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶³ BBC News, Islamic State attack on army bus kills 33 Syrian soldiers, 12 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁴ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in September 2022, CEP, 4 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁵ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁶ EUAA analysis based on Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in August 2022, CEP, 6 September 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in September 2022, CEP, 4 October 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in October 2022, CEP, 4 November 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in November 2022, CEP, 5 December 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁷ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁸ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁹ EUAA analysis based on Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in January 2023, CEP, 3 February 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in February 2023, CEP, 3 March 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in May 2023, CEP, 2 June 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in June 2023, CEP, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁰ NPA, 552 people in Syria fall victim to ISIS attacks in first half of 2023, 8 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷¹ Kurdistan 24, Female security police killed in Deir ez-Zor: SOHR, 29 June 2023, [url](#)

GoS and affiliated/allied forces launched several operations against ISIL cells in western¹⁰⁷² and eastern¹⁰⁷³ rural Deir Ez-Zor, although the Critical Threats Project (CTP) and the ISW claimed that Iranian forces and their proxies ‘increasingly struggled’ to counter ISIL operations since March 2022.¹⁰⁷⁴ The SDF/US forces likewise conducted several anti-ISIL operations resulting in the arrest/killing of ISIL leaders,¹⁰⁷⁵ including in the al-Kasrah area (western rural Deir Ez-Zor).¹⁰⁷⁶

Infighting among GoS forces and affiliated groups

Several instances of deadly infighting were reported, including between members of the NDF and GoS forces (Deir Ez-Zor city),¹⁰⁷⁷ the Air Force Intelligence Directorate and the IRGC (al-Bukamal city),¹⁰⁷⁸ and between NDF members (eastern Deir Ez-Zor countryside).¹⁰⁷⁹

Protests

Civilians attacked SDF members in al-Shanan village (eastern rural Deir Ez-Zor) in September 2022 after SDF fighters had stabbed a young man.¹⁰⁸⁰ In February 2023, in Sabhah village in Basirah area of eastern rural Deir Ez-Zor, two civilians were killed when security forces fired shots to disperse protesters.¹⁰⁸¹

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 1 089 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, of which 588 were coded as battles, 246 explosions/remote violence and 255 incidents of violence against civilians.¹⁰⁸²

¹⁰⁷² Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – May 2023, May 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – 02 November 2022, 2 November 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷³ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria - May 2023, 8 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁴ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, March 3, 2023, 3 March 2023, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁷⁵ SOHR, SOHR: SDF arrests ISIS members, leader in Syria's Deir ez-Zor, 30 April 2023, [url](#); VOA, US Hammers Islamic State With Multiple Raids, 17 February 2023, [url](#); NPA, SDF Arrests ISIS Leader in Syria's Deir-ez-Zor, The Syrian Observer, 21 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁶ NPA, SDF Arrests ISIS Leader in Syria's Deir-ez-Zor, The Syrian Observer, 21 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁷ SOHR, Deir Ezzor | Member close to “NDF” leader killed during armed clash with regime forces, 16 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁸ SOHR, Dispute over drug trade | “Airforce Intelligence” member shot dead by IRGC in Al-Bokamal city, 21 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁹ SOHR, Disputes over narcotics | Two “National Defence” members killed in clashes at checkpoint in Deir Ezzor, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁰ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – 04 October 2022, 4 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸¹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 21

¹⁰⁸² EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

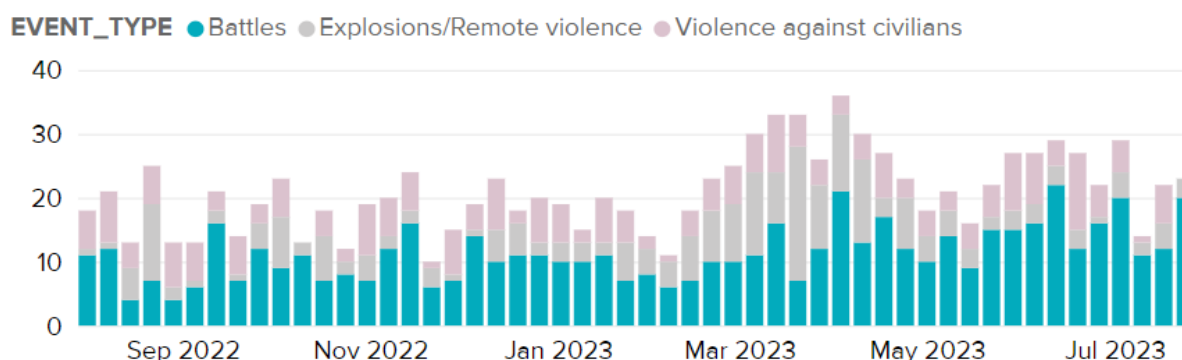


Figure 22. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Deir Ez-Zor governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data¹⁰⁸³

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of Deir Ez Zor (see [Figure 23](#)). According to ACLED, GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were involved (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2') in around 38 % of all security incidents. SDF and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 36 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as battles and violence against civilians. Unidentified armed groups were involved in around 35 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as battles and violence against civilians. ISIL was involved in around 28 % of all security incidents, the vast majority being coded as battles and violence against civilians. Tribal militias/actors were involved in around 18 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as battles.

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Albu Kamal	79	36	37
Al Mayadin	110	57	48
Deir Ez-Zor	399	153	170
Total	588	246	255

Figure 23. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Deir Ez-Zor governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data

¹⁰⁸³ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

(c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented 197 civilian fatalities in 2021¹⁰⁸⁴ and 125 in 2022.¹⁰⁸⁵ Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 167 civilian fatalities in Deir Ez-Zor governorate.¹⁰⁸⁶

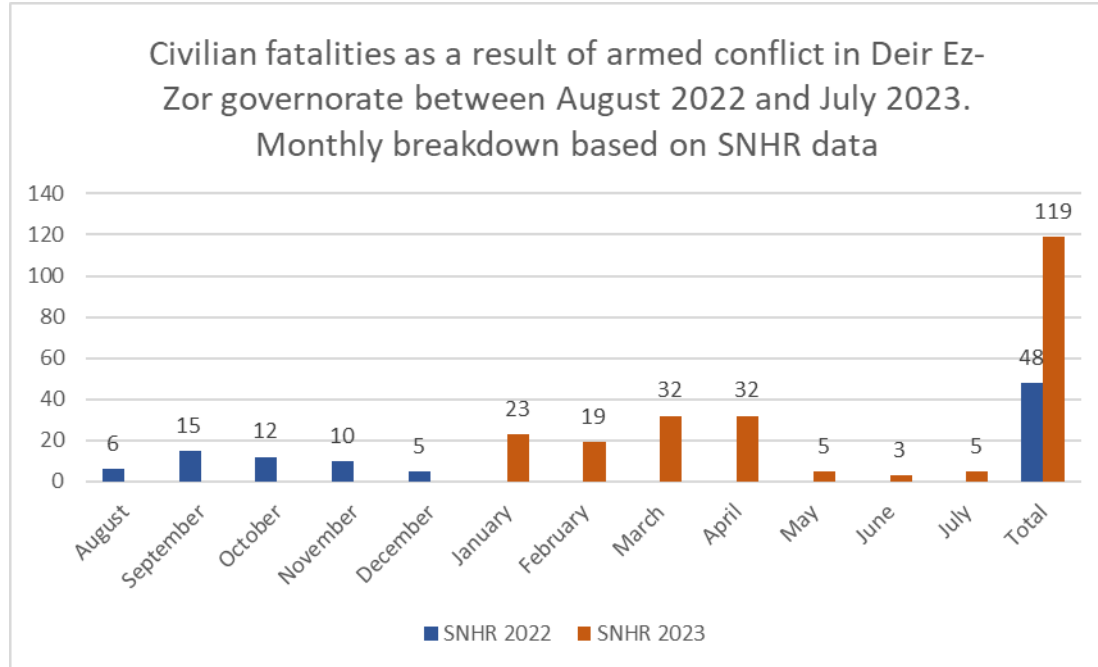


Figure 24. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Deir Ez-Zor governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Deir Ez-Zor governorate witnessed significant destruction during the conflict years, both in urban and rural areas,¹⁰⁸⁷ with an estimated 75 % of Deir Ez-Zor city's infrastructure damaged or destroyed.¹⁰⁸⁸ Around 40 % of the city's sewage network has been damaged. There was also significant destruction of residential properties.¹⁰⁸⁹

Deir Ez-Zor was one of the governorates where contamination from UXOs was widespread, including on roads, agricultural land and private property.¹⁰⁹⁰ Areas previously controlled by ISIL showed the highest levels of contamination,¹⁰⁹¹ as retreating ISIL forces left large

¹⁰⁸⁴ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁰⁸⁵ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁰⁸⁶ Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁰⁸⁷ UN-Habitat, Call for Proposal No. 1-2022, May 2022, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁰⁸⁸ UNHCR, Deir-ez-Zor residents find help to rebuild lives from the city's ruins, 10 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁹ UN-Habitat, Syria Country Profile, 4 June 2023, [url](#), pp. 1-2

¹⁰⁹⁰ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰⁹¹ SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 8

quantities of improvised landmines and other IEDs.¹⁰⁹² A map published by the SNHR on the basis of data collected between March 2011 and April 2023 shows a particularly high density of civilian deaths from landmines in the middle section of the stretch of the Euphrates valley crossing the governorate.¹⁰⁹³ During the first quarter of 2023, NPA recorded 127 deaths from remnants of war in Deir Ez-Zor, more than in any other governorate.¹⁰⁹⁴

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 153 814 IDPs in Deir Ez-Zor governorate.¹⁰⁹⁵ Over the year 2022, there were approximately 1 000 IDP movements out of Deir Ez-Zor and 1 000 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 1 000 movements within the governorate.¹⁰⁹⁶ During the first five months of 2023, there were 22 recorded IDP movements out of Deir Ez-Zor and no movements into or within the governorate.¹⁰⁹⁷ No information on the reasons behind the displacement movements was found.

As regards returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded no spontaneous IDP returnee movements from Deir Ez-Zor to other governorates and about 7 000 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Deir Ez-Zor as well as about 5 000 movements within Deir Ez-Zor.¹⁰⁹⁸ During the first five months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded 83 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Deir Ez-Zor, most of them (74) occurring in March, and 11 IDP returnee movements (all in May) from Deir Ez-Zor to other governorates. There were no recorded returnee movements within the governorate.¹⁰⁹⁹

As the USDOS noted, the SDF and the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) ‘generally facilitated the safe and voluntary return of IDPs’ to Deir Ez-Zor.¹¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, the UNCOI reported that as of the first half of 2022, the SAA, including the Fourth Division, continued to seize private properties of perceived GoS opponents in the governorate, thus preventing them from returning,¹¹⁰¹ although more recent information could not be found in this regard. More recent data on conflict-induced displacement and spontaneous returns by UNOCHA was not available at the time of writing this report. UN Security Council reports covering the first five

¹⁰⁹² Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2022, 1 October 2022, [url](#), p. 490

¹⁰⁹³ SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions [Map], 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁰⁹⁴ NPA, Remnants of war kill 331 people in 1st quarter of 2023 in Syria, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁵ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

¹⁰⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁰ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 66

¹¹⁰¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/51/45, 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 31



months of 2023 did not contain any further information on displacement from or returns to Deir Ez-Zor governorate.¹¹⁰² No further information on conflict-induced displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

¹¹⁰² UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#)



Syria Governorate Maps
Damascus Governorate

Legend:

- International
- Governorate
- Governorate Centre
- District
- District Centre
- Sub-District
- Sub-District Centre
- Settlement

Roads:

- Trunk road
- Primary road
- Secondary road
- Tertiary road
- Unclassified road

Wood

Scale: 0 0.75 1.5 2.25 3 Kilometres

Data source: Boundaries: UN OCHA
Physical features: GDM

Created: 5 May 2013
Map Document: MA0210_SyriaGovernorateMaps
Projection / Datum: UTM Zone 37N / WGS84
Globe Number: OT-2011-00025-SYR

The depiction and use of boundaries, names and associated data shown here do not imply endorsement or acceptance by MapAction.

Produced by: MapAction
www.mapaction.org **turkey@mapaction.org**

2.10.1. General description of the governorate

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.¹¹⁰⁴ In a December 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Damascus governorate to be 1 818 517.¹¹⁰⁵ For more background information, see the EUAA COI Report: [Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), section 2.10.1.

¹¹⁰⁵ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

2.10.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Maps published by several sources indicated that the GoS and affiliated groups were in control of Damascus governorate throughout the reference period of this report.¹¹⁰⁶

Damascus has been ‘relatively free from the civil war for years’,¹¹⁰⁷ as the GoS regained full control of the capital in May 2018.¹¹⁰⁸ The GoS has since sought to present Damascus city as a ‘haven of calm’ within Syria, although this view was contested in a March 2023 article by Haid Haid, a Syrian columnist and consulting fellow with Chatham House’s Middle East and North Africa programme, who described a significant increase in the number of security incidents in and around Damascus, ‘raising questions about the stability of areas held by the government.’¹¹⁰⁹ For more information on the background of the conflict in Damascus governorate up until April 2021, see the EUAA COI Report: [Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), section 2.10.2.

As of June 2023, a map on historical control by the Carter Center showed 124 control points in Damascus, which were attributed to the GoS and its allies (including Russian forces, Iranian forces, and pro-government militias).¹¹¹⁰ In an April 2023 report, DIS quoted SNHR stating that ‘more than half of the Special Forces regiments’ were located near Damascus.¹¹¹¹ The Fourth Armoured Division’s presence was concentrated in Damascus and its suburbs, but it had offices and small branches outside the capital.¹¹¹² Its main task was to protect the GoS in Damascus.¹¹¹³

As of mid-2022, Jusoor for Studies reported that Iranian forces were deployed at six sites; Russian military posts were present at four sites within the governorate.¹¹¹⁴ The same source observed that, as of mid-2023, there were nine foreign forces sites in Damascus governorate.¹¹¹⁵

A Reuters article in February 2023 cited residents claiming that several Iranian security agencies were located in Kafr Sousa neighbourhood.¹¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰⁶ Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, January – March 2023 [Map], 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 3; Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Damascus and June 2023; UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces’ military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁷ Al-Monitor, Islamic State claims Damascus car bomb as Assad invited to Saudi, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁸ BBC News, Syria war: Army takes full control of Damascus after ousting IS, 21 May 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁹ Haid, H., Damascus instability proof that war is far from over, Opinion, Al Majalla, 11 March 2023, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁰ Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Damascus and June 2023.

¹¹¹¹ DIS, Syria: The Special Forces and the elite units [source: SNHR], April 2023, [url](#), p. 20

¹¹¹² DIS, Syria: The Special Forces and the elite units [source: SNHR], April 2023, [url](#), p. 21

¹¹¹³ DIS, Syria: The Special Forces and the elite units [source: SNHR], April 2023, [url](#), p. 24

¹¹¹⁴ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces’ points in Syria- mid 2022 [Map], 22 July 2022, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁵ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces’ military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁶ Reuters, Exclusive: Rocket strike in Damascus hit Iranian military experts, sources say, 22 February 2023, [url](#)

A July 2022 report by the UN Security Council mentioned ‘some infrequent activity’ of ISIL in Damascus.¹¹¹⁷ In May 2023, ISIL claimed responsibility for a car bombing targeting a police station in Damascus.¹¹¹⁸

2.10.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

Although the capital has been ‘largely spared the violence that happens in other parts of the country’,¹¹¹⁹ car bomb attacks were reported in April 2023¹¹²⁰ and May 2023.¹¹²¹ The May 2023 incident involved a car bomb exploding at the Barzeh police station. According to Al Arabiya, a lieutenant colonel was killed and four others were wounded.¹¹²² The UNSC noted that three police officers were killed.¹¹²³ ISIL claimed responsibility.¹¹²⁴

In June 2023, four people were injured when attackers threw a bomb and stabbed a person in Dummar district.¹¹²⁵

Israeli airstrikes were mainly carried out near Damascus city or on Damascus International airport (see section 2.11.3 Rural Damascus). However, on 19 February 2023, 15 people, including two civilian women, were killed in an Israeli air strike in Kafr Sousa district of the capital.¹¹²⁶ On 30 March 2023, the area was hit again by Israeli missiles.¹¹²⁷

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 36 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Damascus governorate, of which 11 were coded as battles, 8 as explosions/remote violence and 17 as incidents of violence against civilians.¹¹²⁸

¹¹¹⁷ UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2022/547, 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 43

¹¹¹⁸ Al-Monitor, Islamic State claims Damascus car bomb as Assad invited to Saudi, 10 May 2023, [url](#); AFP, Policeman killed in Damascus car bombing claimed by IS, 10 May 2023

¹¹¹⁹ Al Jazeera, Car bomb rocks a suburb of Syria’s capital Damascus, 3 April 2023, [url](#)

¹¹²⁰ Al Jazeera, Car bomb rocks a suburb of Syria’s capital Damascus, 3 April 2023, [url](#); New Arab (The), Rare car bombs rocks upscale Mezzeh area of Damascus, 3 April 2023, [url](#)

¹¹²¹ AFP, Policeman killed in Damascus car bombing claimed by IS, 10 May 2023, [url](#); AP News, Explosion near Syrian capital Damascus kills 1, injures 4, 10 May 2023, [url](#); SOHR, SOHR: Second Syrian policeman dead after Damascus car bomb attack, 12 May 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), p. 18

¹¹²² AFP, Policeman killed in Damascus car bombing claimed by IS, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

¹¹²³ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), p. 18

¹¹²⁴ AFP, Policeman killed in Damascus car bombing claimed by IS, 10 May 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹²⁵ NPA, Four people injured in bomb attack in Damascus, 11 June 2023, [url](#)

¹¹²⁶ France 24, More than a dozen killed in Israel’s ‘deadliest attack’ on Syrian capital Damascus, 19 February 2023, [url](#)

¹¹²⁷ SOHR, Second attack in 24 hours | Successive explosions rock south-western Damascus following Israeli rocket fire, 30 March 2023, [url](#)

¹¹²⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

According to ACLED, GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were involved in 69 % of all security incidents (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2'). Unidentified armed groups were involved in around 39 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. Israeli forces were involved in around 28 % of all security incidents, the vast majority being coded as battles.

In March 2023, Syrian columnist Haid Haid noted that 11 security incidents were reported in Damascus in 2021 and 47 incidents in 2022, representing a more than 400 % increase. According to him, 14 security incidents were reported in the first two months of 2023.¹¹²⁹

(c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented one civilian fatality in 2021¹¹³⁰ and three civilian fatalities in 2022.¹¹³¹ Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented three civilian fatalities in Damascus governorate (one civilian fatality was documented in the period August – December 2022 and two between January and July 2023).¹¹³²

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

In its annual report covering 2022, UNMAS noted that it had assessed more than 4 200 residential buildings in Darayya (Rural Damascus) and Yarmouk (Damascus). UNMAS verified the existence of explosive ordnance in 140 buildings and identified 800 buildings suspected to be tainted by explosives.¹¹³³

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.¹¹³⁴

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 600 097 IDPs in Damascus.¹¹³⁵ In 2022, UNOCHA recorded approximately 1 888 IDP movements out of Damascus governorate and 163 IDP movements into Damascus governorate as well as 112 IDP movements within the governorate.¹¹³⁶ UNOCHA noted that, as of May 2022, Old Damascus sub-district was one of the sub-districts hosting the highest shares of IDPs and returnees (33 % of the sub-district's total population), with a population of 1 215 856 residents, 2 550 returnees and 600 097

¹¹²⁹ Haid, H., Damascus instability proof that war is far from over, Opinion, Al Majalla, 11 March 2023, [url](#)

¹¹³⁰ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

¹¹³¹ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

¹¹³² Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

¹¹³³ UNMAS, Annual Report 2022, 5 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 107-108. No separate numbers for Damascus governorate could be found.

¹¹³⁴ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 33

¹¹³⁵ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

¹¹³⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)



IDPs.¹¹³⁷ Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA recorded 68 IDP movements out of Damascus, and four IDP movements to Damascus.¹¹³⁸ No information on the reasons behind the displacement movements was found.

As regards returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded approximately 7 000 spontaneous IDP returnee movements out of Damascus governorate and about 2 000 IDP returnee movements into the governorate and 2 000 movements within.¹¹³⁹ Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA recorded nine spontaneous IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Damascus and about 135 returnee movements from Damascus to other governorates.¹¹⁴⁰ No information on the reasons behind the returns movements was found.

More recent data on conflict-induced displacement and spontaneous returns by UNOCHA was not available at the time of writing this report. UN Security Council reports covering the first five months of 2023 did not contain any further information on displacement from or returns to Damascus governorate.¹¹⁴¹ No further information on conflict-induced displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

Please also see the EUAA COI report: [Syria - Country focus \(October 2023\)](#) for further information on restrictions and requirements regarding return to Damascus city.

¹¹³⁷ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 24

¹¹³⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

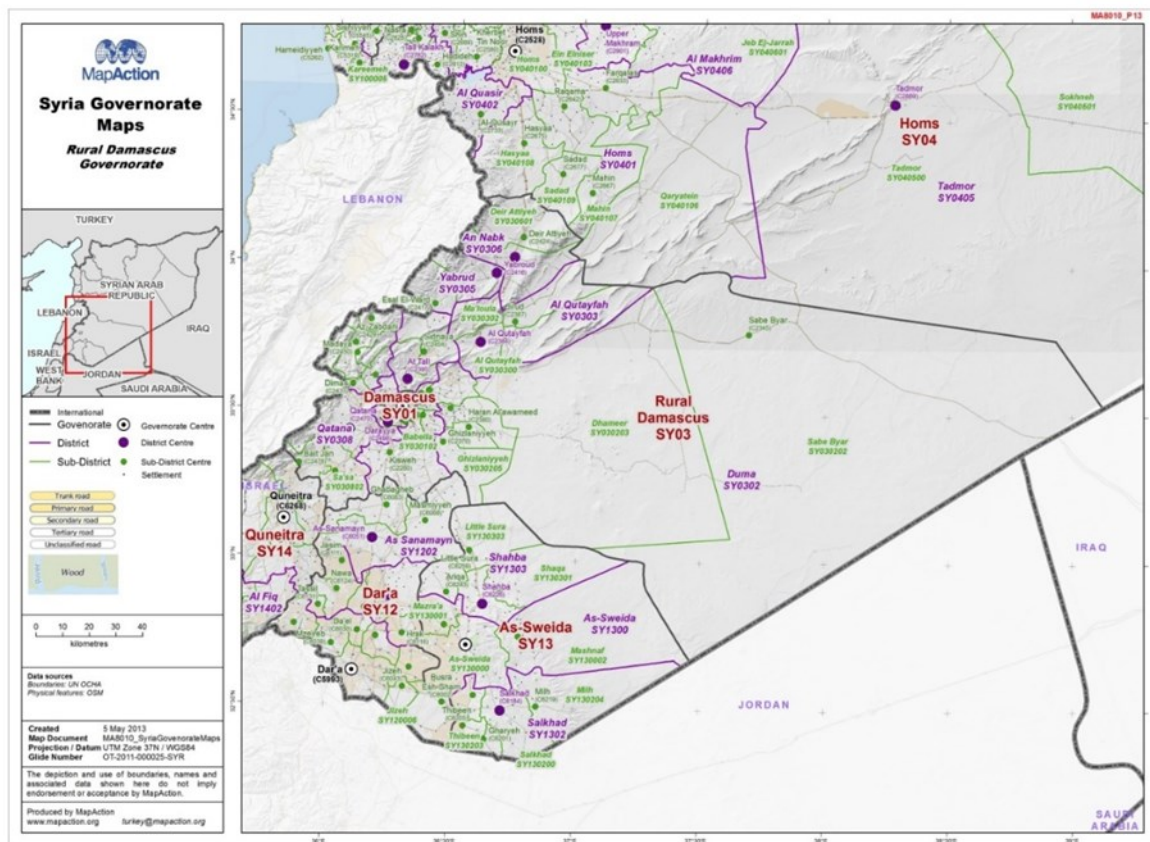
¹¹³⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁴¹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#)



2.11. Rural Damascus



Map 16. MapAction, Rural Damascus governorate¹¹⁴²

2.11.1. General description of the governorate

Rural Damascus (*Rif Dimashq* in Arabic) is a largely agricultural governorate surrounding Damascus city.¹¹⁴³ 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.¹¹⁴⁴ The governorate comprises nine¹¹⁴⁵ administrative districts: Rural Damascus, Douma (Duma), Al Qutayfah, An Nabk, Yabroud (Yabrud), At Tall, Az-Zabadani, Darayya, and Qatana.¹¹⁴⁶ In a December 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Rural Damascus governorate to

¹¹⁴² Mapaction, Syria 2013-2015, Rural Damascus Governorate [map], last updated:29 July 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁴³ REACH, Rural Damascus Governorate, April 2018, Humanitarian Situation Overview in Syria (HSOS), April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹⁴⁴ UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁵ Please note that some sources mention Qudsaya as another administrative districts of Rural Damascus. HLP, Confusion About Government Plans for Wadi Barada, 19 May 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Accused of "filming police station" | Police officers arrest two civilians in Qudsaya district in Rif Dimashq, 12 January 2023, [url](#); Mapcarta, Qudsaya [Map], n.d., [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁶ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 136-137

be 3 310 012.¹¹⁴⁷ For more background information on the governorate, see the EUAA COI Report: [Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), section 2.11.1.

2.11.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Maps published by several sources indicated that, throughout the reference period of this report, the GoS and affiliated groups were controlling all of the governorate's territory except for a zone in its easternmost section.¹¹⁴⁸ For more information on the background of the conflict in Rural Damascus governorate up until April 2021, see the EUAA COI Report: [Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), section 2.11.2.

As of June 2023, a map on historical control, published by the Carter Center, showed 289 control points in Rural Damascus, which were attributed to the GoS and its allies (including Russian forces, Iranian forces and pro-government militias).¹¹⁴⁹

According to a March 2023 report by Annsar Shahhoud and Muhanad Abulhusn, published by the New Lines Institute, the influence of the Fourth Division (see section [1.4.1](#)) was concentrated in the vicinity of Damascus city and its peripheries to the west and southwest. The 40th and 138th brigades were based around Moadamyeh, and the 41st and 42nd brigades around Yafour and Ass'aboura west of the capital. The security office of the Fourth Division was situated close to the Mezzeh Military Airbase. Attached regiments (333, 555, 666 and 154) were described as special forces, and some of them were stationed in Moadamyeh.¹¹⁵⁰ The report also contains a map (as of February 2023) showing various Fourth Division checkpoints and bases, the locations of the Security Bureaus of the Fourth Division and the Republican Guard, and the National Security Bureau in or near Damascus city.¹¹⁵¹ Activities of members of the NDF were also reported in the reference period.¹¹⁵²

As of mid-2022, Jusoor for Studies reported that Iranian forces were deployed at 93 sites; Russian military posts were present at seven sites within the governorate.¹¹⁵³ The same source observed that, as of mid-2023, there were 114 foreign forces sites in Rural Damascus governorate.¹¹⁵⁴ Iran-backed armed groups were reportedly stationed at Damascus International Airport.¹¹⁵⁵ Iran-backed militias reportedly continued to strengthen their presence

¹¹⁴⁷ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

¹¹⁴⁸ Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics [Map], January - March 2023, 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 3; UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁹ Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Rural Damascus and June 2023.

¹¹⁵⁰ Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

¹¹⁵¹ Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹⁵² SOHR, After refusing to rent his farm | "National Defence" members arrest civilian and his son in Rif Dimashq, 11 December 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Rif Dimashq | National Defence checkpoints arrest civilians near Syrian-Lebanese borders, 31 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, For belonging to National Defence | Military Intelligence releases two thieves in Al-Galmon countryside, 1 February 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Volunteer of General Intelligence Administration shoots and intimidates residents, 16 April 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁵³ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' points in Syria- mid 2022 [Map], 22 July 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁴ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁵ AFP, Israeli strikes on Syrian capital's airport kill four: monitor, 2 January 2023

in areas near the Lebanese border by purchasing plots of land in Az-Zabadani and Al-Tufayl areas north of Damascus city since early 2021. The Lebanese Hezbollah facilitated those operations.¹¹⁵⁶ In January 2023, SOHR reported on increasing numbers of purchases of real estate units by Hezbollah in and near Badda, north-east of Damascus city.¹¹⁵⁷

A map published by Jusoor for Studies as of mid-2023 showed International coalition forces stationing point at Al-Tanf.¹¹⁵⁸ The so-called US-declared 55-km deconfliction area¹¹⁵⁹ around Al-Tanf also extends into Homs governorate¹¹⁶⁰ and 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.¹¹⁶¹ According to the US Department of Defense (USDOD), the US forces worked ‘with vetted local partner forces’, including the FSA, which controlled outposts around Al-Tanf Garrison, and provided protection against pro-regime and Iran-aligned forces surrounding the deconfliction zone.¹¹⁶²

No information on activities by Anti-GoS armed groups during the reference period could be found within the time constraints of this report.

2.11.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

During the reference period sources reported Israeli airstrikes on Damascus International airport,¹¹⁶³ mostly resulting in the killing of soldiers. Besides Damascus International Airport, targeted areas included Khirbet Al-Shayab, Dimas airport,¹¹⁶⁴ Al-Sayyida Zainab,¹¹⁶⁵ Al-Kiswah,¹¹⁶⁶ Jebel el Mania¹¹⁶⁷, Hafir Al-Foka, and Al-Hamah.¹¹⁶⁸ According to state news agency

¹¹⁵⁶ SOHR, Iran’s presence in Syria in May 2023 | Frequent meetings by commanders...noticeable escalation of cultural centres’ activities in west Euphrates...ongoing recruitment and taking over of properties in Aleppo and Rif Dimashq, 4 June 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁷ SOHR, Ongoing oppression | Hezbollah commander force civilian to sell his farmland in Rif Dimashq, 26 January 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁸ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces’ military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁹ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁰ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁶¹ International Crisis Group, Al-Tanf, Syria, 31 July 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁶² USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 50

¹¹⁶³ Reuters, Israel attacks Damascus airport, five soldiers killed, Syria says, 17 September 2022, [url](#); SOHR, 28 Israeli attacks in 2022 | Violent explosions rock areas nearby Damascus airport and southern Rif Dimashq, 26 October 2022, [url](#); Rudaw, Damascus airport out of service following Israeli airstrikes, 2 January 2023, [url](#); Le Monde, Israeli airstrike in central Damascus kills 15 people, 19 February 2023, [url](#); MEE, Syria says Israeli strikes on Damascus airport leave two dead, 2 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, 17th attack in 2023 | Israeli missiles hit positions of Lebanese Hezbollah in vicinity of Damascus, 28 May 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁴ SOHR, 28 Israeli attacks in 2022 | Violent explosions rock areas nearby Damascus airport and southern Rif Dimashq, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁵ SOHR, Israeli airstrikes | Three non-Syrian fighters backed by Lebanese Hezbollah killed in Al-Sayyida Zainab area in Rif Dimashq, 20 December 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), p. 18

¹¹⁶⁷ Jerusalem Post (The), Alleged Israeli airstrike hits Syria, 4th in under a week, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁸ SOHR, 17th attack in 2023 | Israeli missiles hit positions of Lebanese Hezbollah in vicinity of Damascus, 28 May 2023, [url](#)

SANA, in April 2023, two civilians were killed.¹¹⁶⁹ Civilians were also reportedly killed in an attack in February 2023.¹¹⁷⁰ However, Hezbollah and Iranian militias reportedly were the main targets of the air attacks.¹¹⁷¹

In July 2023, several people were reportedly killed in a car bomb explosion outside the Sayeda Zeinab shrine. Some days earlier, two people were wounded in a separate explosion at the shrine.¹¹⁷² ISIL reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack.¹¹⁷³

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 2023.¹¹⁷⁴ In April 2023, five people, including a civilian, were killed when clashes between the ‘Hamada family’ supported by the Fourth Division and residents of Bait Jinn broke out.¹¹⁷⁵ Clashes between two families affiliated to the Military Intelligence Department and the Fourth Division were also reported in June 2023 in Bait Jinn. Three people, including a civilian, were killed.¹¹⁷⁶ Following the clashes, the Military Intelligence Department and affiliated gunmen of the ‘Hamada Family’ shelled the town.¹¹⁷⁷ End of June 2023, a person working for the military intelligence division was reportedly killed by members of the Fourth Division near the Lebanese border, after the victim had written a ‘malicious report’ against the attackers.¹¹⁷⁸

In April 2023, a civilian was killed in an old dispute between families in Muadamiyat Al-Qalamun. According to SOHR, since early 2023, ‘14 murder crimes left a woman, 13 men and a child dead’ in Rural Damascus governorate.¹¹⁷⁹ Armed clashes between two families were also reported in March 2023, in Madaya town. No casualties were reported.¹¹⁸⁰

¹¹⁶⁹ AFP, New Israeli strike on Syria kills two civilians: state media, 4 April 2023

¹¹⁷⁰ Le Monde, Israeli airstrike in central Damascus kills 15 people, 19 February 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁷¹ SOHR, 28 Israeli attacks in 2022 | Violent explosions rock areas nearby Damascus airport and southern Rif Dimashq, 26 October 2022, [url](#); Rudaw, Damascus airport out of service following Israeli airstrikes, 2 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Israeli airstrikes | Three non-Syrian fighters backed by Lebanese Hezbollah killed in Al-Sayyida Zainab area in Rif Dimashq, 20 December 2022, [url](#); NPA, 5 Syrians Killed in Israeli airstrike near Damascus, 19 February 2023, [url](#); SOHR, 17th attack in 2023 | Israeli missiles hit positions of Lebanese Hezbollah in vicinity of Damascus, 28 May 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁷² Reuters, Bomb blast kills several people at shrine near Damascus, Syrian state media report, 27 July 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁷³ Gregory Waters, [Twitter], posted on: 28 July 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁴ SOHR, Growing tension | Clashes between two groups affiliated with 4th Division and military intelligence services in Rif Dimashq leave casualties, 4 February 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁵ SOHR, After five killed in clashes | Alarming calm spread among residents of Bait Jinn in Rif Dimashq, 8 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Ongoing tension | Four people killed in armed clashes in Bait Jinn in Rif Dimashq, 7 April 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁶ SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Three people killed in clashes between two families of Military Intelligence and 4th Division Security, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁷ SOHR, More than 30 shells | Military Intelligence Department shells Bait Jinn town in Rif Dimashq, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁸ SOHR, Following quarrel | Members of 4th Division kill collaborator with military intelligence division near Syrian-Lebanese border in Rif Dimashq, 26 June 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁹ SOHR, Rif Dimashq security chaos | Elder man in his 70s shot dead, 25 April 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁰ SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Renewal of old vendetta sparks clashes between two families, 28 March 2023, [url](#)

Several civilians were killed by members of the Fourth Division in the reference period.¹¹⁸¹ Civilians were also injured by members of the Military Intelligence branch.¹¹⁸² Bodies of civilians killed by unknown perpetrators were also found in the reference period.¹¹⁸³

Several members of the Fourth Division,¹¹⁸⁴ the Military Intelligence Department,¹¹⁸⁵ the NDF,¹¹⁸⁶ died in various attacks during the reference period, and there were reports of attacks targeting GoS checkpoints¹¹⁸⁷.

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 211 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Rural Damascus, of which 79 were coded as battles, 44 as explosions/remote violence and 88 as incidents of violence against civilians.¹¹⁸⁸

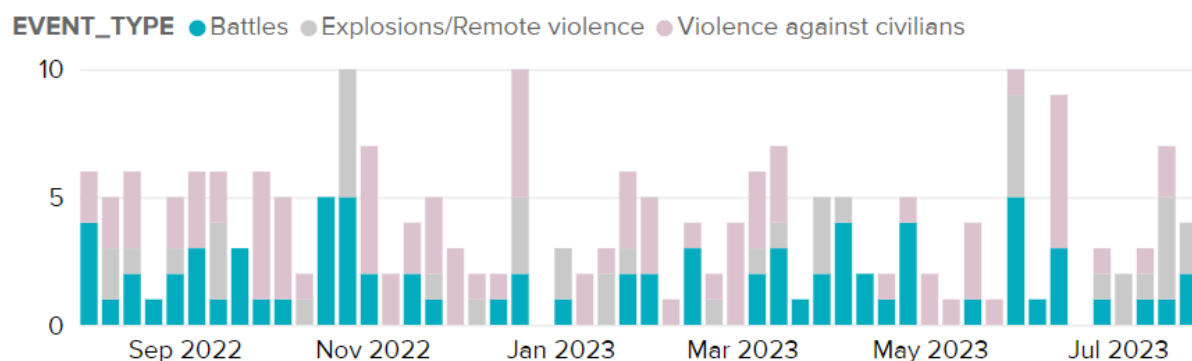


Figure 25. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Rural Damascus governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data¹¹⁸⁹

¹¹⁸¹ SOHR, Rif Dimashq security chaos | Civilian killed by stray bullet near 4th Division checkpoint, 13 August 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Murders in regime-held areas | Woman shot dead by 4th Division member in Rif Dimashq, 5 September 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Civilian shot dead by 4th Division near Syria-Lebanon border, 8 October 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁸² SOHR, Amid high alert | Members of military intelligence branch storm Madaya town and arrest several young men, 19 June 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Ongoing arbitrary arrests | Members of military intelligence branch arrest six people in Rif Dimashq, 13 March 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁸³ SOHR, Murders in regime-held areas | Residents of Al-Kiswah area in Rif Dimashq found civilian's body, 22 November 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Head and limbs separated | Cleaners find body of unidentified man in southern Rif Dimashq, 24 October 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Escalating crimes in regime areas | Residents find body of young man killed in Rif Dimashq, 8 October 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁴ SOHR, IED attack | Commander in 4th Division killed in Rif Dimashq, 27 June 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Targeted by unknown people | Leader of armed group in "4th Division" killed in western Rif Dimashq, 30 June 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Death toll update | Nearly 40 people killed and injured in IED attack on 4th Division military bus in Rif Dimashq, 13 October 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁵ SOHR, IED explosion | Local commander of Military Intelligence Department assassinated in Rif Dimashq, 30 May 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁶ SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Five people mistakenly kill member of National Defence while seeking revenge, 17 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Armed clashes | "National defence" member killed in Jaramana city in Rif Dimashq, 28 January 2023, [url](#) ;

¹¹⁸⁷ SOHR, Amid high security mobilization | Gunmen attack regime checkpoint in Rif Dimashq and kill member, 27 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Arrests campaign | Regime patrols arrest 14 civilians in Rif Dimashq following attack on Republican Guard checkpoint and anti-regime graphics, 10 January 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the districts of At Tall and Rural Damascus (see [Figure 26](#)). According to ACLED, GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were involved (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’) in around 84 % of all security incidents, particularly in incidents coded as ‘battles’ and ‘violence against civilians’. Unidentified armed groups were involved in around 32 % of all security incidents, particularly in incidents where GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were also an actor. Israeli forces were involved in around 20 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as battles and explosions/remote violence, where GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were also an actor.

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Al Qutayfah	2	1	1
An Nabk	2	-	2
At Tall	11	-	48
Az-Zabadani	6	4	4
Darayya	1	-	1
Duma	18	14	5
Qatana	16	4	6
Rural Damascus	21	19	20
Yabroud	2	2	1
Total	79	44	88

Figure 26. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Rural Damascus governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data

(c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented 13 civilian fatalities in 2021¹¹⁹⁰ and 80 in 2022.¹¹⁹¹ Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 18 civilian fatalities in Rural Damascus governorate (seven civilian fatalities were documented in the period August – December 2022 and 11 between January and July 2023).¹¹⁹²

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

In its annual report covering 2022, UNMAS noted that it had assessed more than 4 200 residential buildings in Darayya (Rural Damascus) and Yarmouk (Damascus). UNMAS confirmed the existence of explosive ordnance in 140 buildings and identified 800 buildings suspected to be tainted by explosives.¹¹⁹³ In its country profile on Syria, UN-Habitat estimated that the conflict has left approximately 48 % of the residential properties in Duma, in Rural Damascus, uninhabitable.¹¹⁹⁴

Within Darayya, the teams evaluated an area of around 2 million square meters of agricultural land, with 71 % of it being verified as hazardous.¹¹⁹⁵ From December 2021 to November 2022, the Armenian Center for Humanitarian Demining and Expertise (ACHDE), an implementing partner of UNMAS, cleared approximately two million square meters of agricultural land, and conducted 55 demolitions to eliminate a total of 518 pieces of explosive ordnance.¹¹⁹⁶

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.¹¹⁹⁷ SOHR reported on the explosion of war remnants in Zamalka town,¹¹⁹⁸ in Yabroud city in western Qalamoun,¹¹⁹⁹ and in Al-Sabinah, south of Damascus city,¹²⁰⁰ resulting in deaths and injuries.¹²⁰¹

¹¹⁹⁰ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

¹¹⁹¹ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10. Out of the 80 civilian fatalities documented in 2022 in Rural Damascus, SNHR included the death of 54 persons for whom the GoS released death notifications in February 2022, although they were arrested in previous years and died in custody. Most of them were originally from Deir al-Asafir town. See SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹⁹² Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

¹¹⁹³ UNMAS, Annual Report 2022, 5 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 107-108

¹¹⁹⁴ UN-Habitat, Syria Country Profile, 4 June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹⁹⁵ UNMAS, Annual Report 2022, 5 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 107-108

¹¹⁹⁶ UNMAS, Press release: UNMAS in Syria completes the first handover of cleared land in Darayya, Rural Damascus, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 33

¹¹⁹⁸ SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Child killed by landmine explosion of war remnants, 29 May 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁹ SOHR, Old ordnance | Landmine explosion kills young man and injures another in Rif Dimashq, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁰ SOHR, Old ordnance | Five civilians, including two children, injured in Rif Dimashq, 24 December 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁰¹ SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Child killed by landmine explosion of war remnants, 29 May 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Old ordnance | Landmine explosion kills young man and injures another in Rif Dimashq, 23 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Old ordnance | Five civilians, including two children, injured in Rif Dimashq, 24 December 2022, [url](#)

In November 2022, several people were killed when a building collapsed in the city of Al-Hajar Al-Aswad. The victims had tried to extract iron from the damaged building located in a war-torn neighbourhood.¹²⁰²

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 1 083 062 IDPs in Rural Damascus.¹²⁰³ In 2022, UNOCHA recorded approximately 8 000 IDP movements out of the governorate and no IDP movements into Rural Damascus governorate. 3 000 IDP movements within the governorate were recorded.¹²⁰⁴ Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA recorded eight IDP movements out of Rural Damascus and 277 IDP movements to the governorate.¹²⁰⁵

UNOCHA noted that, as of May 2022, At Tall, Jaramana, Qatana and Qudsaya (sub-)districts of Rural Damascus governorate were amongst the areas hosting the highest shares of IDPs and returnees (75 % of the district's total population in At Tall, 50 % in Jaramana, 49 % in Qatana and 29 % in Qudsaya). The population of Jaramana was reported at 304 230 residents, 175 returnees and 299 146 IDPs, while the population of Qudsaya consisted of 243 346 residents, 404 returnees and 99 476 IDPs.¹²⁰⁶ In January 2023, no IDP movements were recorded in Rural Damascus governorate.¹²⁰⁷ In February 2023, there were approximately 8 IDP movements out of Rural Damascus.¹²⁰⁸ In January 2023, SOHR reported that members of the Fourth Division set a deadline for civilians to evacuate their houses near Moadamiya Al-Sham, claiming that the paramilitary area might become a target for Israeli air strikes.¹²⁰⁹ No further information on the reasons behind the displacement movements was found.

As regards returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded approximately 7 000 spontaneous IDP returnee movements out of 6 000 IDP returnee movements into and 24 000 within the governorate.¹²¹⁰ Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA recorded 19 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Rural Damascus and about 109 returnee movements from Rural Damascus to other governorates.¹²¹¹ No information on the reasons behind the returns movements was found.

¹²⁰² Syria Report (The), Building Collapses, Killing Seven, During Looting in Damascus Suburb, 17 January 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁰³ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

¹²⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁶ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁹ SOHR, Fortifying their military positions | "4th Division" forces civilians to evacuate their homes in Rif Dimashq, 5 January 2023, [url](#)

¹²¹⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

¹²¹¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

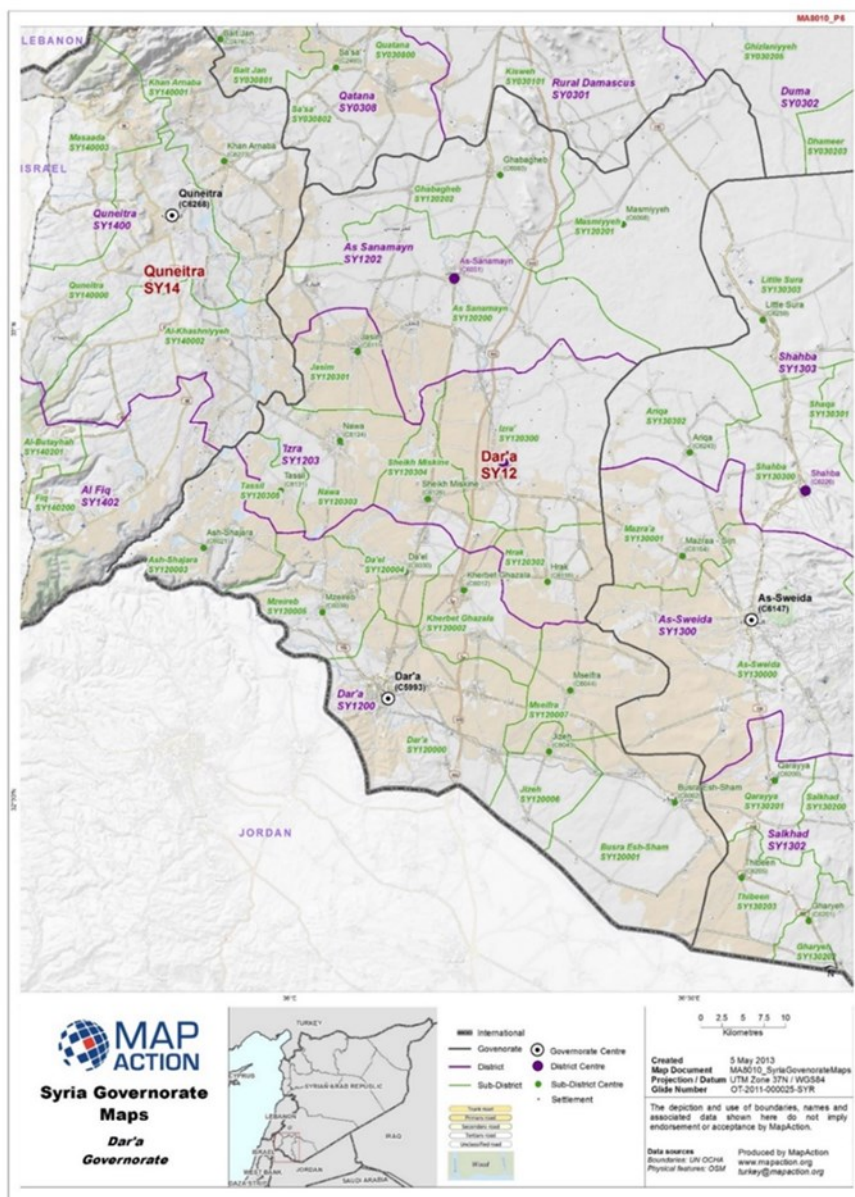


UN Security Council reports covering the first five months of 2023 did not contain any further information on displacement from or returns to Rural Damascus governorate.¹²¹² No further information on conflict-induced displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

¹²¹² UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#)



2.12. Dar'a governorate



Map 17: © MapAction, Dar'a governorate¹²¹³

2.12.1. General description of the governorate

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

¹²¹³ MapAction, Dar'a governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

the three administrative districts of Dar'a, Izra' and As-Sanamayn.¹²¹⁴ According to 2022 estimates by UNOCHA, the population of Dar'a governorate was 1 023 833 inhabitants.¹²¹⁵

Information on the strategic importance of Dar'a and its role in cross-border drug trafficking is available in the EUAA COI report: [Syria - Security situation \(September 2022\)](#).

2.12.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Since July 2018¹²¹⁶ Dar'a governorate has been nominally under the control of GoS.¹²¹⁷ In certain parts of the governorate, such as Busra al-Sham¹²¹⁸, Tafas¹²¹⁹ and Dar'a al-Balad¹²²⁰, GoS' control was limited, allowing locals and former opposition groups de facto semi-autonomy, including to maintain light arms, take care of 'local affairs and to continue to manifest opposition'.¹²²¹

Despite carrying out several successful military operations against former opposition groups in between 2018-2021¹²²², GoS' control of Dar'a was still assessed to be tenuous as of 2023.¹²²³ In areas including Jasim, Dar'a al-Balad and Nawa the GoS was not able to maintain effective control.¹²²⁴

The SAA's Fourth Armoured Division was reported to be present in the governorate¹²²⁵, particularly in Dar'a city¹²²⁶ and the border area with Jordan, controlling the Nassib border

¹²¹⁴ Based on UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas. Syrian Arab Republic, n.d., [url](#)

¹²¹⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

¹²¹⁶ Information on the conflict background and armed actors in Dar'a prior to August 2022 is available in the [EUAA COI report Syria – Security situation \(September 2022\)](#), [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security Situation \(July 2021\)](#), and [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

¹²¹⁷ Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, 2 January 2023, [url](#); Tokmajyan, A. and Khaddour, K., A Fractured Border: Syria, Türkiye, and Cantonization, Carnegie Middle East Center, XCEPT, March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

¹²¹⁸ Tokmajyan, A. and Khaddour, K., A Fractured Border: Syria, Türkiye, and Cantonization, Carnegie Middle East Center, XCEPT, March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

¹²¹⁹ Haid, H., Assad's strategy in southern Syria fated to fail, Asia Times, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

¹²²⁰ Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 4; Tokmajyan, A. and Khaddour, K., A Fractured Border: Syria, Türkiye, and Cantonization, Carnegie Middle East Center, XCEPT, March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

¹²²¹ Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹²²² Tokmajyan, A. and Khaddour, K., A Fractured Border: Syria, Türkiye, and Cantonization, Carnegie Middle East Center, XCEPT, March 2023, [url](#), p. 7; STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-12; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 5, 32

¹²²³ Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, 2 January 2023, [url](#); Tokmajyan, A. and Khaddour, K., A Fractured Border: Syria, Türkiye, and Cantonization, Carnegie Middle East Center, XCEPT, March 2023, [url](#), p. 7; Al-Jabassini, A. and Ezzi, M., Troubled solidarity: how communities in Southern Syria responded to the 2023 earthquake disaster, EUI, 8 June 2023, [url](#), p. 12

¹²²⁴ Tokmajyan, A. and Khaddour, K., A Fractured Border: Syria, Türkiye, and Cantonization, Carnegie Middle East Center, XCEPT, March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

¹²²⁵ DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023 [source: SNHR], [url](#), p. 21

¹²²⁶ Syria Direct, 4th Division redeploys in Syria's south in the wake of the US Captagon Act and Arab normalization, 3 February 2023, [url](#)

crossing.¹²²⁷ The 8th Brigade, a Russian-backed local armed group made up of former opposition fighters¹²²⁸ and currently affiliated with the GoS Military Intelligence Directorate¹²²⁹ was reported to be the most influential armed group in Dar'a, particularly in the Busra al-Sham area of eastern Dar'a.¹²³⁰ The presence of Russian and Iranian forces, including Hezbollah,¹²³¹ was also reported in the governorate during the reference period.¹²³²

ISIL maintained small cells including key leadership¹²³³ in Dar'a,¹²³⁴ reportedly targeting GoS and rebel figures, through assassinations, kidnappings, and bombings.¹²³⁵ Civilians were also targeted at times by ISIL.¹²³⁶ In October 2022, ISIL's leader Abu al-Hassan al-Hashemi al-Qurashi was killed during a GoS military operation in Jasim.¹²³⁷

2.12.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

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.¹²³⁸ 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.¹²³⁹

¹²²⁷ Tokmajyan, A. and Khaddour, K., A Fractured Border: Syria, Türkiye, and Cantonization, Carnegie Middle East Center, XCEPT, March 2023, [url](#), p. 8; Syria Direct, 4th Division redeploys in Syria's south in the wake of the US Captagon Act and Arab normalization, 3 February 2023, [url](#)

¹²²⁸ Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 6

¹²²⁹ Syria Direct, Wave of new Daraa settlements amid Arab normalization efforts, 9 June 2023, [url](#)

¹²³⁰ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 18 January 2023, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Governor of Daraa Beaten by Members of Eighth Brigade, 6 June 2023, [url](#)

¹²³¹ VOA, Jordan Strikes Iran-Linked Drugs Factory in Southern Syria, Sources Say, 8 May 2023, [url](#)

¹²³² Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

¹²³³ UN Security Council, Thirty-second report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2023/549], 25 July 2023, [url](#), para.48

¹²³⁴ UN Security Council, Sixteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2023/76], 1 February 2023, [url](#), para.27; Tokmajyan, A., ISIS Resurgence in Daraa: Is the Group Making A Comeback in Syria's Restive South?, EPC, 9 December 2022, [url](#)

¹²³⁵ Independent (The), Isis, drug smugglers and regime forces unravel fragile peace in southern Syria, 5 January 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 18 January 2023, [url](#); Hassan, M., ISIS is back in the open in southern Syria, 29 November 2022, [url](#)

¹²³⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para.7; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para.47

¹²³⁷ UN Security Council, Sixteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2023/76], 1 February 2023, [url](#), para.7; Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 18 January 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 9 May 2023, [url](#)

¹²³⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para.13

¹²³⁹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para.8

Following GoS' demands that former opposition fighters would be expelled from Tafas, Dar'a district, clashes ensued between local fighters and GoS forces and a blockade of the town was enforced by GoS between 27 July and 13 August 2022. The clashes led to the displacement¹²⁴⁰ of around 2 500 persons from Tafas to other nearby areas in August.¹²⁴¹ On 13 August the blockade was lifted after an agreement was reached between GoS and local representatives from Tafas to expel the wanted individuals.¹²⁴² Additionally, in September 2022, limited raids by GoS forces and clashes with local forces were reported in the city of Jasim, Izra district.¹²⁴³

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.¹²⁴⁴

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.¹²⁴⁵

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.¹²⁴⁶ 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,¹²⁴⁷ drug traffickers and ISIL elements¹²⁴⁸ were operating, and assassinations against GoS security forces were recurrent.¹²⁴⁹ 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.¹²⁵⁰ The fighting stopped after the GoS forces and prominent clans in the area reached a truce.¹²⁵¹

¹²⁴⁰ NPA, Town In Syria's Daraa Witnesses Bombardment, Displacement, 10 August 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁴¹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 6

¹²⁴² Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics July-September 2022, 7 November 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹²⁴³ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics July-September 2022, 7 November 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹²⁴⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para.45

¹²⁴⁵ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para.10; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para.7

¹²⁴⁶ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria - June 2023, 4 July 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁷ Syrian Observer (The), Regime Military Campaign in Western Countryside of Daraa: What are its Objectives?, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁸ Asharq Al-Awsat, Syrian Regime Prepares for Military Operation in Western Countryside of Daraa, 4 July 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁹ Asharq Al-Awsat, Syrian Regime Prepares for Military Operation in Western Countryside of Daraa, 4 July 2023, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Regime Military Campaign in Western Countryside of Daraa: What are its Objectives?, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁰ New Arab (The), Clashes displace civilians in Tafas as Syrian regime attempt to storm town, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁵¹ New Arab (The), Syria: Truce agreed between prominent clan, regime forces after Tafas clashes, 7 July 2023, [url](#); NPA, Killings continue amid negotiations with government in Syria's Daraa, 7 July 2023, [url](#)

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.¹²⁵²

ISIL insurgency

ISIL activity was reported in Dar'a governorate in the period between October and November 2022.¹²⁵³ In October 2022, a GoS and Russian-led operation against ISIL cells in Dar'a governorate led according to Russian claims to the killing of at least 20 alleged ISIL fighters in the city of Jasim. Local sources mentioned however, that the operation left 10 persons, including two leaders, dead.¹²⁵⁴ ISIL leader Abu al-Hassan al-Hashemi al-Qurashi was killed in Jasim in October following armed clashes.¹²⁵⁵ Clashes between armed groups and suspected ISIL cells also took place in November 2022 in Dar'a al-Balad¹²⁵⁶ which led to several civilians being killed and the evacuation of 6 750 persons to Dar'a city and western rural Dar'a.¹²⁵⁷

Targeted killings

Since 2018 when the GoS regained control of Dar'a, a high number of targeted killings have been documented in the governorate.¹²⁵⁸ According to a June 2023 analysis by the pro-opposition Daraa Martyrs Documentation Office, around 2 000 attempted or successful targeted killings took place in Dar'a since 2018.¹²⁵⁹ Between January and end of July 2023, SOHR documented 241 fatalities resulting from attacks targeting civilians and combatants in Dar'a.¹²⁶⁰ Assassination attempts and targeted killings of civilians,¹²⁶¹ 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.¹²⁶² UNOCHA reported that 110 persons were killed in targeted killings between January and September 2022 in Dar'a and SDF-controlled areas. In the vast majority of cases the perpetrators of the

¹²⁵² Syrian Observer (The), Daraa: Shelling and Clashes Following Protests Demanding Fall of Regime, 23 August 2023, [url](#); NPA, Government forces shell Syria's Daraa in tandem with protests, 22 August 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁵³ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), paras 7, 24

¹²⁵⁴ Enab Baladi, Russia claims killing 20 IS fighters in Daraa; What is the truth behind?, 18 October 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para.13; UN Security Council, Sixteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2023/76], 1 February 2023, [url](#), para.7

¹²⁵⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), paras 8, 24; Syria Direct, Former opposition and military security-linked groups battle 'IS cells' in Daraa, 3 November 2022, [url](#); New Arab (The), 'IS cell' flee southern Syria stronghold after Daraa assault by former rebels, 16 November 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para.8

¹²⁵⁸ Al Monitor, South Syria increasingly unstable even as normalization proceeds with Assad, 24 June 2023, [url](#); Al Monitor, Who's to blame for ongoing assassinations in Syria's Daraa province?, 10 August 2022, [url](#); Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹²⁵⁹ Al Monitor, South Syria increasingly unstable even as normalization proceeds with Assad, 24 June 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁰ Of the 231 casualties, the majority were GoS soldiers or collaborators (109), followed by civilians (78), and persons accused on drug trafficking (23). SOHR did not provide details regarding the type of attacks which lead to these casualties or who were the perpetrators. SOHR, Security chaos in Daraa | 16 civilians among 39 people killed in 46 attacks since early July, 24 July 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁶¹ Syrian Observer (The), Daraa: Four, Including a Woman and Child, Assassinated After Deadly Clashes, 23 June 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 9 May 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁶² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para.13; Enab Baladi, Daraa not the same after anti-IS campaign, 12 January 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 9 May 2023, [url](#)

killings remained unknown.¹²⁶³ At times, local activists, analysts and residents have attributed the responsibility for the targeted killings occurring in Dar'a to GoS and affiliated armed groups, and to ISIL elements.¹²⁶⁴

Drug trafficking

In recent years drug production and cross-border drug trafficking increased in the south of Syria, including in Dar'a governorate.¹²⁶⁵ Anti-drug smuggling operations carried out by pro-GoS armed groups in Dar'a were reported in the wake of Syria's readmission to the Arab League and the period that followed.¹²⁶⁶ In May 2023, airstrikes attributed to Jordan were carried out on suspected drug facilities¹²⁶⁷ allegedly run by the Lebanese Hezbollah in Dar'a governorate.¹²⁶⁸ Experts and activists have stated that both GoS¹²⁶⁹ and opposition groups¹²⁷⁰ are directly involved in the drug production and trade that originates from Syria. Etana Syria assessed that 63 % of the total drug network in Dar'a is associated with the Military Intelligence.¹²⁷¹ Individuals reportedly involved in drug trafficking were killed in targeted attacks in Dar'a during the reporting period.¹²⁷² According to Syrian columnist Haid Haid citing local media reports, there were 22 assassinations attempts on persons involved in drug trafficking recorded in the governorate between January and August 2023. The assassinations targeted civilians, pro-GoS militia members and members of the SAA and intelligence services involved in drug trafficking.¹²⁷³

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 756 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Dar'a governorate, of which 247 were coded as battles, 165 as

¹²⁶³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 20

¹²⁶⁴ NPA, Who is responsible for the constant insecurity in Syria's Daraa?, 17 April 2023, [url](#); Al Monitor, Who's to blame for ongoing assassinations in Syria's Daraa province?, 10 August 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Attacks & Assassinations in South-West Syria, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁵ Syria Direct, Southern Syria's drug war: Jordan's options 'limited' as Iran expands, 6 June 2022, [url](#); OCCRP, A 'Drug War': Syria's Neighbors Fight a Flood of Captagon Across Their Borders, 27 June 2023, [url](#); France24, Captagon connection: how Syria became a narco state, 3 November 2022, [url](#); see also section 2.12 of the EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation, September 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁶ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 4 April 2023, [url](#); New Arab (The), Syrian regime raids on 'small-time drug dealers' a 'cynical move' to appease Arab League, 22 May 2023, [url](#); Syria Direct, Wave of new Daraa settlements amid Arab normalization efforts, 9 June 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁷ AP News, Airstrikes kill well-known Syrian drug kingpin, 8 May 2023, [url](#); VOA, Jordan Strikes Iran-Linked Drugs Factory in Southern Syria, Sources Say, 8 May 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁸ VOA, Jordan Strikes Iran-Linked Drugs Factory in Southern Syria, Sources Say, 8 May 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁹ AP News, A little white pill, Captagon, gives Syria's Assad a strong tool in winning over Arab states, 9 June 2023, [url](#); France24, War on Captagon key to Syria's return to Arab League, 19 May 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, South Syria's Drug Supply Chains, June 2023, [url](#); BBC News, Syria: New Captagon drug trade link to top officials found, 27 June 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁰ AP News, A little white pill, Captagon, gives Syria's Assad a strong tool in winning over Arab states, 9 June 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁷¹ Etana Syria, South Syria's Drug Supply Chains, June 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁷² Al Monitor, Who's to blame for ongoing assassinations in Syria's Daraa province?, 10 August 2022, [url](#); NPA, 4 people killed in Syria's Daraa for drug trafficking, 8 March 2023, [url](#); NPA, Drug trafficker killed in Syria's Daraa, 11 June 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Two separate operations | Drug dealer and collaborator with regime security services killed in Daraa, 26 June 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁷³ Haid, H., In Syria's South, Drug-Related Assassinations Add to Regional Instability, 11 August 2023, Syndication Bureau, [url](#)

explosions/remote violence and 344 as incidents of violence against civilians.¹²⁷⁴ 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 (see [Figure 28](#)).

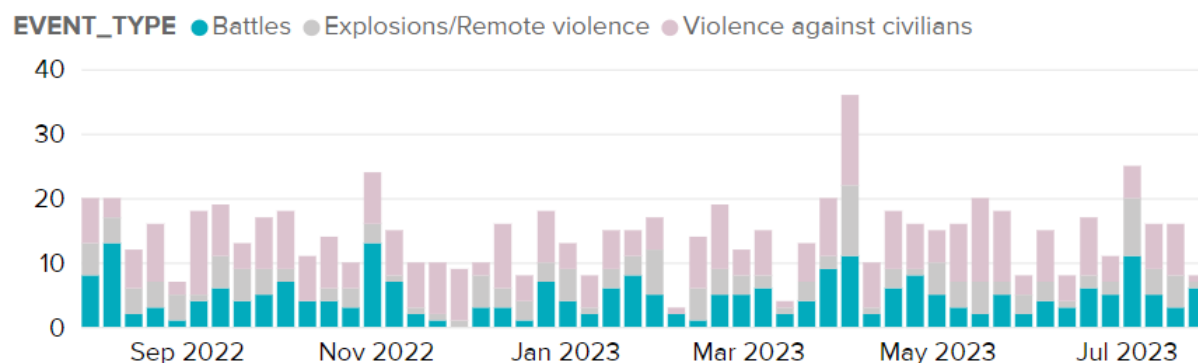


Figure 27. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Dar'a governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data¹²⁷⁵

According to ACLED, unidentified armed groups were the main actor involved in security incidents (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2') during the reference period, accounting for around 83 % of all documented security incidents. In most of security incidents featuring unidentified armed actors, the other parties involved were civilians (45 % of all documented security incidents) and GoS forces and affiliated armed groups (around 47 % of all documented security incidents). ISIL was involved in around 5 % of all reported security incidents.

¹²⁷⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

¹²⁷⁵ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
As-Sanamayn	43	17	26
Dar'a	142	100	196
Izra	62	48	122
Total	247	165	344

Figure 28. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Dar'a governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data

(c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented 204 civilian fatalities in 2021,¹²⁷⁶ 207 in 2022.¹²⁷⁷ Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 226¹²⁷⁸ civilian fatalities in Dar'a governorate.¹²⁷⁹ Of the 226 civilian fatalities total recorded by SNHR between August 2022 and July 2023 in Dar'a, around 48 (mostly originating from Dar'a governorate) were civilians who drowned in June 2023 while on migration routes to Europe.¹²⁸⁰

For the year 2022, AOA V documented 115 civilian casualties (killed and injured) in Dar'a resulting from incidents of explosive violence.¹²⁸¹

¹²⁷⁶ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁷ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁸ For the month of June 2023, SNHR included in its civilian fatalities reporting the deaths of 48 individuals who were mostly from Daraa governorate and drowned off the coast of Greece while trying to reach Europe. SNHR, 501 Civilians, Including 71 Children, 42 Woman, and 20 Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in Syria, in the First Half of 2023, 2 July 2023, [url](#), pp. 5, 10

¹²⁷⁹ Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

¹²⁸⁰ Syrian Network for Human Rights, email correspondence 7, 24 and 25 July 2023. See also SNHR, 501 Civilians, Including 71 Children, 42 Woman, and 20 Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in Syria, in the First Half of 2023, 2 July 2023, [url](#), pp. 5, 10

¹²⁸¹ AOA V, Syria, updated 21 March 2023, [url](#)

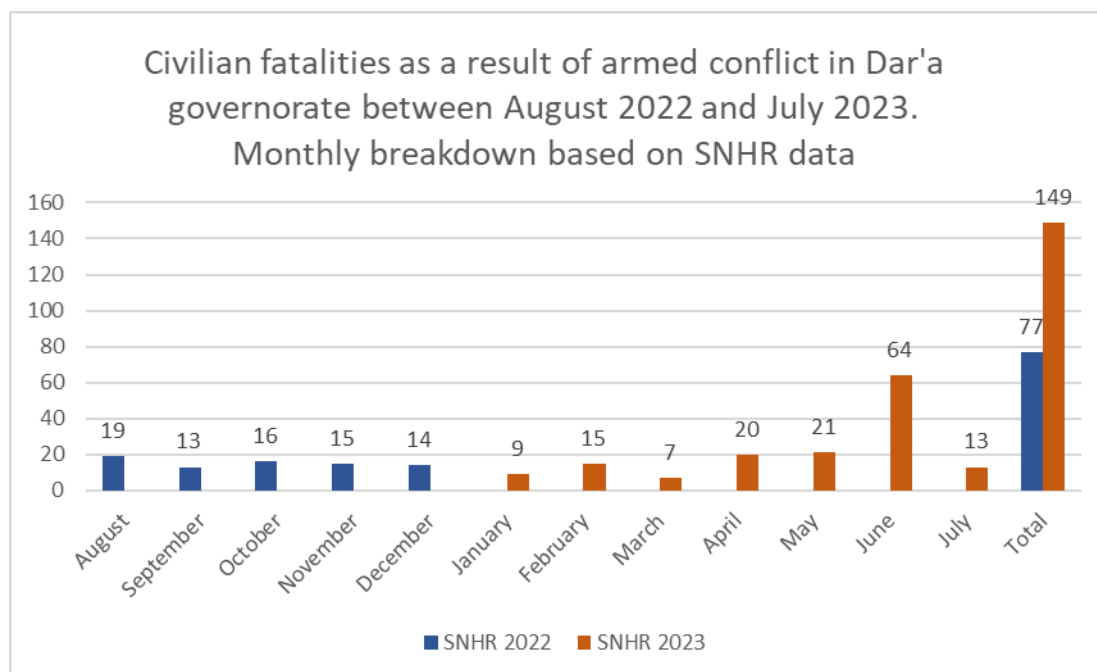


Figure 29. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Dar'a governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Dar'a is one of the governorates where sources reported a high percentage of explosive ordnance contamination during the reporting period.¹²⁸² Civilian casualties, including of children¹²⁸³ as a result of ERW were reported in Dar'a in 2022¹²⁸⁴ and 2023.¹²⁸⁵ Insecurity and the presence of ERW has also impeded access of farmers to agricultural land.¹²⁸⁶

UN Habitat assessed that around 15 % of residential properties were uninhabitable in Dar'a governorate as a result of the conflict.¹²⁸⁷ According to a June 2023 analysis, the scale of destruction of homes and infrastructure caused by the conflict in the neighbourhoods of southern Dar'a al-Balad was assessed to be of 90 % in the neighbourhoods Al-Manshiya, Al-Bihar and Al-Karak, 50 % in the neighbourhood of Al-Arbreen, while in the other neighbourhoods the destruction levels varied.¹²⁸⁸

¹²⁸² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para.29; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para.33

¹²⁸³ Enab Baladi, Unexploded ordnance: A fatal threat for Daraa children, 14 July 2023, [url](#); NPA, Child killed in landmine explosion in western Daraa, 4 May 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁴ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 24; Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria, April 2023, [url](#), p. 10

¹²⁸⁵ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), p. 21; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), p. 19

¹²⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 30; Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria, April 2023, [url](#), p. 12

¹²⁸⁷ UN Habitat, Syria Country Profile, 4 June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

¹²⁸⁸ Enab Baladi, Daraa al-Balad residents search for livelihoods despite destruction, 19 June 2023, [url](#)

A UN Habitat analysis from 2022 assessed the infrastructure in southern Dar'a to be severely damaged. It further assessed the building damage rate to be severe in the neighbourhoods of Al-Manshiya, Al Yarmouk, Alabbasiah and Al-Sad. The structural damage was assessed to be partial in the neighbourhoods of Al-Karak and Quneitra, while in Shuhada and Ghernata there were minor damage to structures.¹²⁸⁹

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 68 792 IDPs in Dar'a governorate.¹²⁹⁰ UNOCHA recorded 2 271 IDP movements in 2022, the highest numbers being recorded in May (508), October (490) and November (685).¹²⁹¹ Around 2 000 IDP movements recorded by UNOCHA in 2022 occurred within the governorate, while the rest were IDP movements from other governorates to Dar'a.¹²⁹²

According to the UN Security Council, clashes between GoS forces and opposition fighters in Tafas during July and August 2022 led to the displacement of around 2 500 persons to neighbouring areas.¹²⁹³ The same source noted that during the anti-ISIL operations which took place in November 2022 in Dar'a al-Balad, around 6 750 persons were evacuated to other areas in the governorate.¹²⁹⁴ In the first six months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded 11 IDP movements from Dar'a governorate, 197 IDP movements within the governorate and 503 IDP arrivals to the governorate.¹²⁹⁵ Clashes between GoS forces and opposition fighters which occurred in Tafas at the end of June 2023 reportedly led to unspecified number of residents being displaced to neighbouring areas in the governorate.¹²⁹⁶

UNOCHA recorded 7 352 IDP return movements in 2022, the highest numbers being recorded in November (2 512) and December (2 710).¹²⁹⁷ Around 7 000 IDP return movements recorded by UNOCHA in 2022 occurred within the governorate, while around 200 were from Sweida to Dar'a.¹²⁹⁸ In the first six months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded 2 140 IDP returns to Dar'a governorate, 3 348 return movements within the governorate and 30 returns from the governorate.¹²⁹⁹ The highest number of returns was recorded to As-Sanamayn district which

¹²⁸⁹ UN Habitat, Recovery of Services and Infrastructure in Syria. "Not If, But How?", July 2022, [url](#), p. 71

¹²⁹⁰ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

¹²⁹¹ UNOCHA, IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data December 2022, updated 26 April 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁹² UNOCHA, IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁹³ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 6

¹²⁹⁴ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para.8

¹²⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁶ New Arab (The), Clashes displace civilians in Tafas as Syrian regime attempt to storm town, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁷ UNOCHA, IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data December 2022, updated 26 April 2023, [url](#)

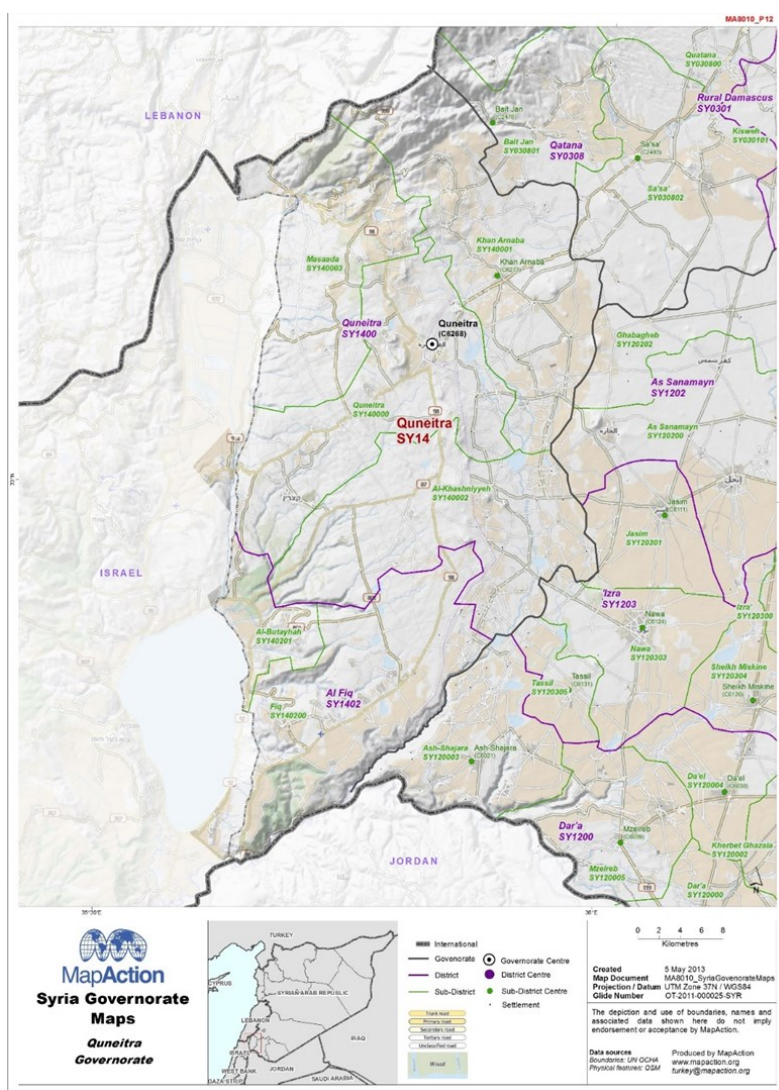
¹²⁹⁸ UNOCHA, IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

registered around 2 200 returns in May and June 2023, the majority coming from within the governorate.¹³⁰⁰ No information on the reasons behind the returns movements was provided by the sources.

UN Security Council reports covering the first five months of 2023 did not mention any displacement from or returns to Dar'a governorate.¹³⁰¹ No further information on displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

2.13. Quneitra governorate



¹³⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁰¹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#)

Map 18: © MapAction, Quneitra governorate¹³⁰²

2.13.1. General description of the governorate

The governorate of Quneitra is situated in southern Syria and it borders Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel. To the east, Quneitra governorate borders Dar'a governorate and Rural Damascus governorate.¹³⁰³ The governorate is divided into two districts: the district of Quneitra, which comprises the sub-districts of Quneitra, Masaada, Khan Arnaba and al-Khashniyyeh, of which large parts are under Israeli control or administered by UNDOF (UN Disengagement Observer Forces). Especially Masaada is almost entirely under Israeli or UNDOF administration. The second district, al-Fiq, is divided into the sub-districts of Fiq and Al-Butayhah, with the latter being completely under Israeli control, while only a small part of Fiq is still under Syrian control.¹³⁰⁴

The city of Quneitra remained abandoned after it was destroyed by Israel in 1974 and is part of the demilitarised buffer zone between Syria and Israel under the supervision of UNDOF.¹³⁰⁵ The new provincial administrative centre is Madinat al-Baath (Baath city).¹³⁰⁶ According to the latest UNOCHA figures published in December 2022, the estimated population of Quneitra is of 105 443 inhabitants.¹³⁰⁷

For more information on the ethnic and religious composition of Quneitra's population, see the EUAA COI Report: [Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

2.13.2. Conflict background and armed actors

During the reporting period, Quneitra governorate was under the control of GoS. UNDOF was present in the demilitarized area between Golan Heights and Quneitra.¹³⁰⁸

Etana observed that southern Syria continues to be an area of influence for Iran¹³⁰⁹ and its affiliated forces.¹³¹⁰ In April 2023, about 150 Hezbollah military troops joined the northern area of Quneitra. Moreover, in the same period, a new observation point has been settled by Hezbollah in the southern countryside of Quneitra, near to the Golan Heights.¹³¹¹

¹³⁰² MapAction, Syria Governorate Maps – Quneitra Governorate, last updated 29 July 2016, [url](#)

¹³⁰³ Based on UNOCHA, Quneitra Governorate Reference Map, February 2016, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁴ Based on UNOCHA, Quneitra Governorate Reference Map, February 2016, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, Al-Qunaytirah, n.d., [url](#)

¹³⁰⁶ Reuters, Syrian insurgents attack government-held town near Israel, 20 November 2014, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

¹³⁰⁸ Based on the reading of the following maps: UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022, January 2023, [url](#); Map in Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, 2 January 2023, [url](#); Carter Center, Exploring Historical Control in Syria Overview, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria, July 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 9 May 2023, [url](#)

¹³¹⁰ Al Arabya News, Israel shells pro-Iran group positions near Golan Heights: War monitor, [url](#), 24 April 2023

¹³¹¹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 9 May 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria – mid 2023, 3 July 2023, [url](#)

A new group affiliated with IRGC, the Imam Brigade, is reportedly operational in the outskirts of Quneitra. The Imam Brigade has been created by Iranian-backed Al Quds in 2022 ‘to adapt to the pressure of Israeli airstrikes’.¹³¹²

2.13.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

In the reference period, military attacks attributed to Israel have been reported in August 2022, resulting in the wounding of two civilians,¹³¹³ and in late April 2023 without reporting any casualties.¹³¹⁴ The attacks targeted Iran-backed groups and Hezbollah-linked militias.¹³¹⁵

In 2022, UNOCHA and UN Security Council reported regular security incidents across Quneitra governorate consisting of ‘IED attacks, targeted killings, kidnappings, exchanges of fire and limited clashes’ affecting civilians and the movement of people and goods.¹³¹⁶ For the period between February and May 2023, UN Security Council observed enduring security incidents across Quneitra governorate involving non-state armed groups, government and pro-government forces, ISIL and unidentified elements. The security incidents consisted in attacks with IEDs, targeted killings, kidnappings and limited clashes, attacks on checkpoints, and exchanges of fire.¹³¹⁷

In April 2023, an Iranian drone has been shot down by Israel in northern Quneitra countryside shortly after Iran’s IRGC transferred several ground-to-air missiles in the area.¹³¹⁸ In July 2023, Israel military tanks reportedly entered at a depth of 150 meters inside Syrian areas under GoS’ control¹³¹⁹ Sources did not report any civilian casualties.¹³²⁰

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 49 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Quneitra governorate, of which 16 were coded as battles, 24 as

¹³¹² CTC Sentinel, the Quds Force in Syria: Combatants, Units, and Actions, Pierre Bousset, Volume 11, Issue 6, June 2023, [url](#), p. 3

¹³¹³ Jusoor for Studies, The Israeli strikes in Syria during 2022, 28 December 2022, [url](#); Al Arabya News, Israeli shelling wounds 2 near Golan Heights: Syrian state media, 12 August 2022, [url](#)

¹³¹⁴ AP News, Syrian pro-government media say Israel shelled border town, 24 April 2023, [url](#); Al Arabya News, Israel shells pro-Iran group positions near Golan Heights: War monitor, 24 April 2023, [url](#); Syria, Liveuamap, 19 April 2023, [url](#); The Jerusalem Post (The), Israeli artillery targets Hezbollah site in southwest Syria – report, 24 April 2023, [url](#)

¹³¹⁵ Al Arabya News, Israeli shelling wounds 2 near Golan Heights: Syrian state media, 12 August 2022, [url](#); Security Council Report, June 2023, Monthly Forecast, 31 May 2023, [url](#); Al Arabya News, Israel shells pro-Iran group positions near Golan Heights: War monitor, 24 August 2022, [url](#)

¹³¹⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), p. 3, para.8

¹³¹⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para.10; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), p. 2, para.7

¹³¹⁸ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 9 May 2023, [url](#)

¹³¹⁹ MEMO, Israel forces enter Syria regime areas in Quneitra, 20 July 2023, [url](#)

¹³²⁰ Times of Israel (The), Israel said to shell Hezbollah position in southern Syria, drop threatening flyers, 24 April 2023, [url](#); Crisis 24, Syria: Suspected Israeli artillery fire targets Qars al-Nafl area in Quneitra Governorate late April 23, 23 April 2023, [url](#)

explosions/remote violence and 9 as incidents of violence against civilians.¹³²¹ Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of Quneitra (see [Figure 30](#)).

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Quneitra	16	22	9
Al Fiq	-	2	-
Total	16	24	9

Figure 30. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Quneitra governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data

According to ACLED, GoS and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 76 % of all recorded incidents (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’). Unidentified armed groups were involved in around 69 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as battles and explosions/remote violence where GoS and affiliated armed groups were also an actor. Israeli forces were involved in around 27 % of all security incidents, the vast majority being coded as explosions/remote violence.

(c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented 10 civilian fatalities in 2021¹³²² and one civilian fatality in 2022.¹³²³ There were no civilian fatalities documented by SNHR between August 2022 and July 2023 in Quneitra governorate.¹³²⁴

¹³²¹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

¹³²² SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

¹³²³ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

¹³²⁴ Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8



(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

In its Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023, UNOCHA confirmed the trend observed in the previous years, documenting Quneitra governorate as one of the areas with highest percentages of communities affected by explosive contamination.¹³²⁵ The UN Security Council report published in February 2023 also 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.¹³²⁶

As reported in the UN Syria Multi-sector Needs Assessment of 2022, the Global Shelter Cluster assessed that 54 % of the assessed shelter in Quneitra governorate consisted of damaged buildings.¹³²⁷

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 3 418 IDPs in Quneitra governorate.¹³²⁸ Between January and December 2022, UNOCHA recorded 111 IDP movements from the governorate, 18 IDP within the governorate and 87 IDP to the governorate.¹³²⁹ For the period between January and June 2023, UNOCHA recorded a total of 15 IDP movements from the governorate and 36 IDP movements to Quneitra, while 4 IDP movements were recorded within the governorate.¹³³⁰ In terms of spontaneous returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded 164 IDP returnee movements to the governorate, 56 IDP returnees movements within the governorate and 31 returnee movements from the governorate.¹³³¹ During the period between January and June 2023, UNOCHA recorded 144 IDP returns to the governorate, 21 returns within the governorate and 1 906 returns of IDP from governorate.¹³³²

No further information on displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

¹³²⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 81

¹³²⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para.33, p. 7

¹³²⁷ Global Shelter Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter and NFI Sector Humanitarian Needs Overview, 14 February 2023, [url](#), p. 6

¹³²⁸ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

¹³²⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), [url](#), 10 May 2023

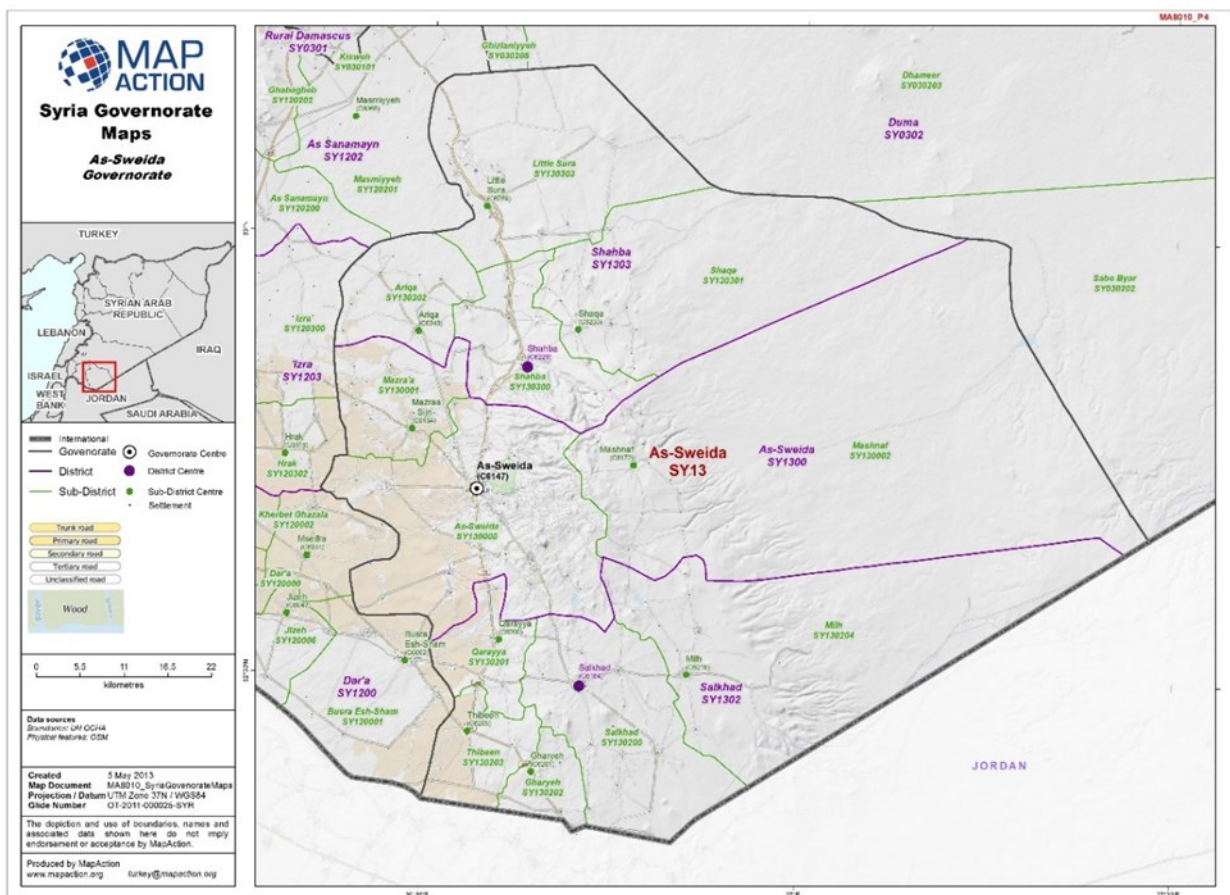
¹³³⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

¹³³¹ UNOCHA, Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022, [url](#), 10 May 2023

¹³³² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)



2.14. Sweida governorate



Map 19: © MapAction, Sweida governorate¹³³³

2.14.1. General description of the governorate

Sweida (Suwayda) governorate is located in the southernmost corner of Syria.¹³³⁴ It shares internal borders with the governorates of Rural Damascus to the north and north-east and Dar'a to the west as well as an international border with Jordan to its south.¹³³⁵ The governorate comprises three administrative districts: as-Sweida, Shahba, and Salkhad.¹³³⁶ A December 2022 UNOCHA report estimated the population of Sweida governorate to be 379 223.¹³³⁷

¹³³³ MapAction, Sweida Governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

¹³³⁴ Al Shami, I., Insight into As-Suwayda's Position in the Syrian Situation, TWI, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

¹³³⁵ UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 17

¹³³⁶ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 134

¹³³⁷ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

The residents of Sweida governorate are predominantly Druze.¹³³⁸ Further information on the governorate's religious composition, as well as information on its societal structure and the prevalence of armed gangs and crime, including drug trafficking, can be found in an earlier issue of this report: EUAA COI report: [Syria - Security situation \(September 2022\)](#), section 2.14.1.

2.14.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Sweida remained formally under GoS control¹³³⁹ and GoS security forces remained widely present in the governorate.¹³⁴⁰ However, the governorate, which largely escaped fighting during the conflict years, enjoys semi-autonomous rule where responsibility for security largely lies with Druze militiamen known as 'Men of Dignity' (*Rijal al-Karamah*).¹³⁴¹ The GoS supported several loyal militia groups, although these acted independently.¹³⁴² Further background information on the governorate can be found in an earlier issue of this report: EUAA COI report: [Syria - Security situation \(September 2022\)](#), section 2.14.2.

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.¹³⁴³ The presence of the 15th division of the First Corps was concentrated in Sweida governorate, where its troops were deployed in a number of sites in the countryside.¹³⁴⁴ The Russian-backed Fifth Corps was active in the governorate through its Eighth Brigade,¹³⁴⁵ as was the elite Fourth Armoured Division of the SAA.¹³⁴⁶ The NDF conducted patrols in the governorate.¹³⁴⁷ While the GoS was previously reported to have 'fueled' the Military Intelligence Directorate to conduct surveillance in the governorate,¹³⁴⁸ in September 2022 it reportedly transferred the security file for Sweida to Hussam Louka, who heads the General Intelligence Directorate.¹³⁴⁹

¹³³⁸ Makki, D., After deadly unrest in Sweida, Syria asks: Is there more to come?, MEE, 10 December 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, At least 17 dead in rare clashes in Syria's Sweida, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

¹³³⁹ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁰ Omran Center for Strategic Studies, The Security Scene in Sweida: Context and Expected Outcomes, 26 August 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁴¹ Makki, D., After deadly unrest in Sweida, Syria asks: Is there more to come?, MEE, 10 December 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁴² Omran Center for Strategic Studies, The Security Scene in Sweida: Context and Expected Outcomes, 26 August 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁴³ Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Sweida and July 2023.

¹³⁴⁴ NPA, Government forces withdraw from checkpoints in Syria's Suwayda, 8 February 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁵ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 04 April 2023, 4 April 2023, [url](#); Al Shami, I., Insight into As-Suwayda's Position in the Syrian Situation, TWI, 12 October 2022, [url](#); HLP Syria, Raids Target Displaced Bedouin Communities in Daraa and Suweida, 2 May 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁶ TWI, To Ease Syria's Energy Crisis, Assad Must Return to the Negotiating Table, 22 December 2022, [url](#); NPA, Locals say government exploits insecurity in Suwayda for increased control, 31 May 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁷ SOHR, By force I Gunmen free a detainee at prisons of National Defence Forces in Al-Suwaydaa, 19 April 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁸ Omran Center for Strategic Studies, The Security Scene in Sweida: Context and Expected Outcomes, 26 August 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁴⁹ Syria Direct, Is Damascus reaping the fruits of local factions' campaign against military security-linked 'gangs' in Suwayda?, 13 October 2022, [url](#)

A number of Russian and Iranian sites were clustered in the governorate's centre and west.¹³⁵⁰ Iranian-backed factions had a strong presence in the governorate and were 'heavily involved' in cross-border Captagon trade. The Sweida Military Security branch, though formally affiliated with Syria's Russian-backed Military Intelligence Directorate, was reportedly under Iranian influence.¹³⁵¹

Multiple local forces were active in the governorate. According to Syrian writer and activist Ishtar Al Shami,¹³⁵² some were tied to the GoS while others were opposed to it.¹³⁵³ Meanwhile, according to Rayan Maarouf, director of the local Suwayda 24 network, the local factions 'maintain channels of communication' with the GoS and its security services, although these channels 'differ from one military group to another'.¹³⁵⁴ These factions have clashed with each other on many occasions,¹³⁵⁵ including in August 2022 when local factions mobilised against the Al-Fahd Forces, a militia group reportedly backed by the Military Intelligence Directorate.¹³⁵⁶ As of October 2022, major local factions in Sweida governorate included the following:

- Men of Dignity Movement (*Rijal al-Karamah*),¹³⁵⁷ largely seen as the faction 'closest' to Sweida's residents.¹³⁵⁸ It declared that its operations aimed to 'pursue the gangs trafficking drugs and kidnapping and extorting people, especially those affiliated with military security',¹³⁵⁹
- Sheikhs of Dignity Forces (a GoS opposition faction);
- NDF (a pro-GoS militia with close links to Iran and the Military Intelligence Directorate);
- Ahrar Jabal al-Arab Gathering (opposed to GoS);
- As-Suwayda Popular Resistance (the pro-GoS faction with the closest links to Iran and groups tied to the Military Intelligence Directorate);
- Al-Fahd Forces;
- Al-Fajr Forces (a pro-GoS faction with close links to Iran and Military Intelligence, known for drug trafficking and responsible for a number of killings).¹³⁶⁰

2.14.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

The situation in Sweida governorate has been characterized as unstable and chaotic,¹³⁶¹ with insecurity prevailing.¹³⁶² The UN Secretary-General noted that as of late summer and autumn

¹³⁵⁰ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁵¹ Al Shami, I., Insight into As-Suwayda's Position in the Syrian Situation, TWI, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁵² TWI, Ishtar Al Shami, n.d., [url](#)

¹³⁵³ Al Shami, I., Insight into As-Suwayda's Position in the Syrian Situation, TWI, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁴ Syria Direct, Suwayda factions: Uprooting 'the gangs' or consolidating power?, 13 September 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁵ Al Shami, I., Insight into As-Suwayda's Position in the Syrian Situation, TWI, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁶ Syria Direct, Suwayda factions: Uprooting 'the gangs' or consolidating power?, 13 September 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁷ Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁸ Al Shami, I., Insight into As-Suwayda's Position in the Syrian Situation [Table], TWI, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁹ Syria Direct, Suwayda factions: Uprooting 'the gangs' or consolidating power?, 13 September 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁰ Al Shami, I., Insight into As-Suwayda's Position in the Syrian Situation [Table], TWI, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁶¹ NPA, Locals say government exploits insecurity in Suwayda for increased control, 31 May 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁶² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 23

2022, the southwestern governorates of Sweida, Dar'a and Quneitra continued to witness security incidents such as IED attacks, targeted killings, abductions, exchanges of fire¹³⁶³ and limited clashes.¹³⁶⁴

Tensions between local residents/forces and the GoS

On 4 December 2022, following several months of daily protests,¹³⁶⁵ dozens of protesters decrying deteriorating living conditions stormed and ransacked the office of the governor in Sweida city.¹³⁶⁶ According to the Ministry of Interior, protesters also attempted to seize the city's police headquarters. One policeman¹³⁶⁷ and one protester were killed in the ensuing clashes¹³⁶⁸ during which security forces responded with gunfire.¹³⁶⁹ This event was followed by large-scale security deployment in the area.¹³⁷⁰ In August 2023, large scale anti-GoS protests over the deterioration of living conditions took place in Sweida.¹³⁷¹ The GoS reportedly refrained from cracking down on the demonstrations.¹³⁷² The protests were ongoing at the time of finalising this report.

Tensions in July 2023 in the context of civilians being arrested by the security forces prompted residents¹³⁷³ and armed group members¹³⁷⁴ to block roads and detain members of GoS forces in at least two instances.

Criminal gang activities, including kidnapping and killings

Syrian Association for Citizen's Dignity, an association formed by a group of displaced people from Syria, noted an increase in kidnappings by pro-GoS militias and gangs in the governorate.¹³⁷⁵ Kidnappings of civilians were reported on the Damascus–Sweida road, frequently occurring around the al-Masmiyah security checkpoint,¹³⁷⁶ but also between al-Shahba city and as-Sweida.¹³⁷⁷ Several civilians were kidnapped inside the city of as-

¹³⁶³ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 8; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 6

¹³⁶⁴ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 6

¹³⁶⁵ Ezzi, M., What's New About the Sweida Protests in Southern Syria?, EUI MEDirections Blog [Blog], 12 December 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁶ Reuters, Protesters storm governor's office in southern Syrian city, two killed in clashes, 5 December 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁷ Arab Weekly (The), Syrian regime cracks down on protests in Druze-majority Sweida, 5 December 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁸ Ezzi, M., What's New About the Sweida Protests in Southern Syria?, EUI MEDirections Blog [Blog], 12 December 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 49

¹³⁷⁰ Al Jazeera, Rare anti-government protest turns deadly in southern Syria, 4 December 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁷¹ Al Monitor, New protest in regime-held south Syria over living conditions, 21 August 2023, [url](#); Al Monitor, Will Syria's Assad resort to violence as Suwayda protests grow?, 31 August 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁷² Al Monitor, New protest in regime-held south Syria over living conditions, 21 August 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, MEMO: Anti-Regime Protests Expand Across Suwayda, 29 August 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁷³ MEMO, Residents detain regime officers in Syria's As-Suwayda, 18 July 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁴ SOHR, Non-compliance by the regime | Armed gang kidnaps regime officer on road between Damascus and Al-Suwaydaa, 25 July 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁵ SADC, Kidnappings, murders, repression: Al-Suwayda reveals the price of normalising Assad, 24 August 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁶ NPA, Locals say government exploits insecurity in Suwayda for increased control, 31 May 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁷ SOHR, Al-Suwaydaa | Kidnapping gang demands huge ransoms and threatens to execute civilian, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

Sweida.¹³⁷⁸ There were also ‘retaliatory, tit-for-tat kidnappings’ between rivalling gangs in Sweida and Dar’a that occasionally took a sectarian character.¹³⁷⁹

Moreover, the SOHR in January 2023 reported a rise in armed attacks and assassinations¹³⁸⁰ and recorded 19 murders between January and mid-July 2023.¹³⁸¹ Unidentified gunmen targeted civilians as part of robberies¹³⁸² or for unknown reasons¹³⁸³ while there were reports of killings of persons affiliated with the GoS forces¹³⁸⁴ or factions linked to the Military Intelligence Directorate.¹³⁸⁵ Several persons were killed in armed disputes between individuals¹³⁸⁶ or rural families¹³⁸⁷ and altercations with a drug dealer¹³⁸⁸ or Bedouin tribesmen.¹³⁸⁹ In March 2023, clashes erupted between local armed men (supported by NDF militiamen) and Bedouin gunmen after the latter had attacked farmers in Al-Qarya village in the Sweida countryside.¹³⁹⁰

Sweeping anti-smuggling raids were carried out by the Eighth Brigade in March 2023 in western Sweida and eastern Dar’a, an area known for drug and weapons smuggling, with several arrests reported.¹³⁹¹ 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,¹³⁹² killing eight civilians.¹³⁹³

¹³⁷⁸ SOHR, Amid gathering | Gunmen kidnap a young man in Al-Suwaydaa province, 12 June 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Kidnapping for ransoms | Unidentified men kidnap civilian in Al-Suwaydaa, 14 December 2022, [url](#); SOHR, In 24 hours | Two civilians kidnapped by unidentified gunmen in Al-Suwaydaa, 1 October 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 06 November 2022, 6 November 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁰ SOHR, Security chaos | Armed gang kidnaps three civilians in regime-held areas Al-Suwaydaa, 16 January 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁸¹ SOHR, New murder | Young man shot dead in western Al-Suwaydaa, 12 July 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁸² SOHR, Ongoing security chaos | Young man sustains injuries in armed attack in Al-Suwaydaa countryside, 27 July 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Lack of security | Unidentified gunmen kidnap civilian on road between Damascus and Al-Suwaydaa, 14 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Regime-held areas | Farmer shot dead in Al-Suwaydaa in light of escalating murder rate, 15 August 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁸³ SOHR, New murder crime in regime-held areas | Unknown person kills shepherd in western countryside of Al-Suwaydaa, 4 May 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁴ SOHR, Corruption cases | Regime soldier killed after members and commanders were exposed in Al-Suwaydaa, 7 June 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁵ SOHR, New assassination | Unidentified gunman shot head of armed group working for “Military Intelligence” in Al-Suwaydaa, 7 March 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Latest development of Al-Suwaydaa clashes | Falhout prominent member found dead, bringing death toll of Falhout fighters to seven, 2 August 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁶ SOHR, New murder | Young man shot dead in western Al-Suwaydaa, 12 July 2023, [url](#); SOHR, New murder | Man in his fifties shot dead in Al-Suwaydaa, 7 July 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁷ SOHR, Tribal infighting | One killed and another injured in armed clashes between two families in Al-Suwaydaa, 25 May 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Family infighting | Three people killed and injured in Al-Suwaydaa countryside, 2 March 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁸ SOHR, For unknown reasons | Drug dealer kills young man in eastern Al-Suwaydaa countryside, 20 July 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁹ SOHR, Tribal clashes | Two civilians killed in Al-Suwaydaa countryside, 8 September 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁰ SOHR, Following armed attack | National Defence forces join local gunmen in combatting Bedouins, 31 March 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁹¹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 04 April 2023, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁹² SOHR, Accompanied by his wife and six children | Most prominent drug dealer killed by airstrike at Syrian-Jordanian border east of Al-Suwaydaa, 8 May 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁹³ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 19

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 80 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Sweida governorate, of which 21 were coded as battles, 20 as explosions/remote violence and 39 as incidents of violence against civilians.¹³⁹⁴ Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of Sweida (see [Figure 31](#)).

According to ACLED, unidentified armed groups were involved (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’) in around 76 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as violence against civilians. GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 24 % of all security incidents, mainly in security incidents coded ‘battles’. Israeli forces were involved in around 8 % of all security incidents, the vast majority being coded as explosions/remote violence.

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Sweida	13	13	29
Salkhad	5	3	2
Shahba	3	4	8
Total	21	20	39

Figure 31. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Sweida governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data

(c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented 13 civilian fatalities in 2021¹³⁹⁵ and 32 in 2022.¹³⁹⁶ Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 24 civilian fatalities in Sweida governorate (12 civilian fatalities were documented between August – December 2022 and 12 between January – July 2023).¹³⁹⁷

¹³⁹⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

¹³⁹⁵ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

¹³⁹⁶ SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

¹³⁹⁷ Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to the UN Secretary-General, Sweida was one of the governorates with the highest percentages of communities affected by explosive contamination.¹³⁹⁸ During the first quarter of 2023, the NPA reported two deaths from remnants of war in the governorate.¹³⁹⁹ The reference period witnessed civilian deaths from remnants of war in the northern Sweida countryside.¹⁴⁰⁰

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 70 931 IDPs in Sweida governorate.¹⁴⁰¹ Over the year 2022, there were approximately 360 IDP movements out of Sweida and 2 560 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 440 movements within the governorate.¹⁴⁰² During the first five months of 2023, there were 120 recorded IDP movements into Sweida, nearly all them occurring in February (44) and May (74), while UNOCHA did not record any IDP movements out of Sweida or within the governorate.¹⁴⁰³ However, following eviction raids by GoS forces and allied militias on encampments of displaced Bedouins in the area between Sama al-Henaidat (western Sweida) and al-Mliha (eastern Dar'a) in late April 2023, many Bedouin families were displaced and moved into the Badia desert area of eastern Sweida.¹⁴⁰⁴ Further information on reasons behind displacements could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

As regards returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded approximately 690 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from Sweida to other governorates and about 70 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Sweida as well as about 170 movements within Sweida.¹⁴⁰⁵ During the first five months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded 21 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Sweida (all of them occurring in April) and 313 IDP returnee movements from Sweida to other governorates, most of which occurred in March (168) and May (113). In addition, there were 21 recorded returnee movements within the governorate.¹⁴⁰⁶ No information on the reasons behind these return movements was provided.

¹³⁹⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 33

¹³⁹⁹ NPA, Remnants of war kill 331 people in 1st quarter of 2023 in Syria, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁰ SOHR, Two separate incidents | Explosions of old landmines in regime-controlled areas kill five young men, 26 February 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Old ordnance | Landmine explosion kills young man in Al-Suwaydaa desert, 2 November 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰¹ UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

¹⁴⁰² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁴ HLP Syria, Raids Target Displaced Bedouin Communities in Daraa and Suweida, 2 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#)



More recent data on conflict-induced displacement and spontaneous returns by UNOCHA was not available at the time of writing this report. UN Security Council reports covering the first five months of 2023 did not contain any further information on displacement from or returns to Sweida governorate.¹⁴⁰⁷ No further information on conflict-induced displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

¹⁴⁰⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#)



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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The research should focus on the period between August 2022 – August 2023. Background information and older trends should be kept very brief and crosslinked as much as possible with previous reports published: [Security situation \(September 2022\)](#) and [Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

Research should cover the following:

☐ General description of the security situation

- **Overview of the conflict**
 - Political developments
 - International involvement
 - Recent security trends and armed confrontations during the reference period
- **Actors in conflict**
 - Brief description and capacity
 - Presence and areas of control/influence of the different actors
 - Type of weapons and tactics used
- **Impact of violence on the civilian population**
 - Tactics and weapons used
 - Security incidents
 - Civilian casualties
 - Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war
 - Conflict-induced displacement and return

☐ Security situation and conflict impact on civilians by governorates

The below structure is to be replicated for each governorate.

- General description of the governorate
- Actors involved in the conflict during the reference period
- Recent security trends
- Impact of the security situation on the civilian population
 - Security incidents
 - Civilian casualties
 - Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war
 - Conflict-induced displacement and return



