

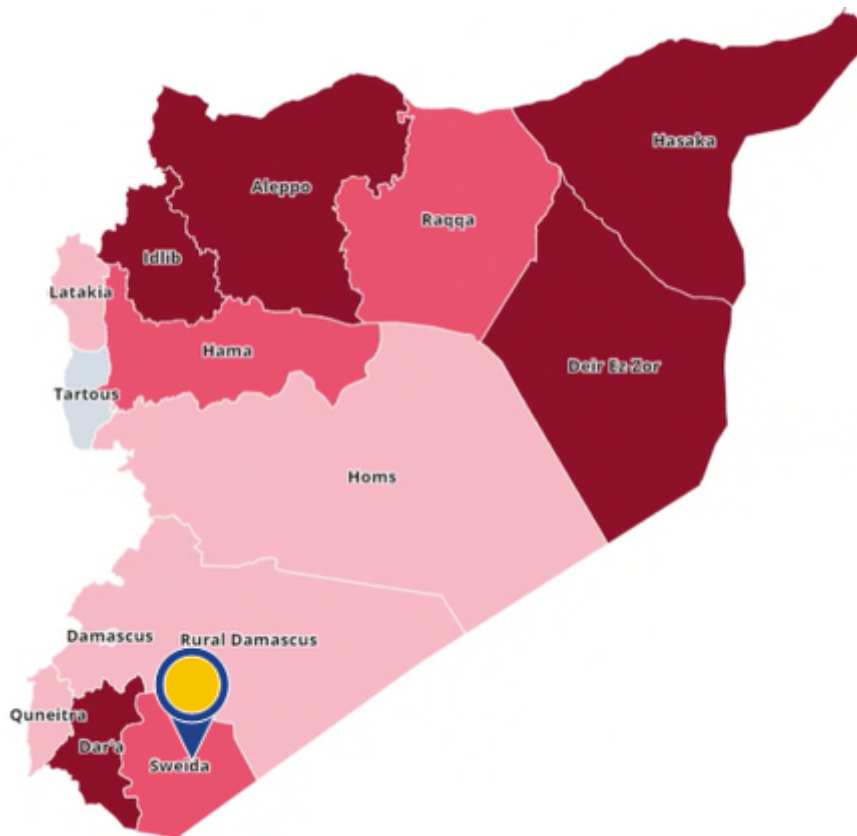
# Sweida

Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, this document has been reviewed and updated.  
Please consult '[Interim Country Guidance: Syria \(2025\)](#)'

## COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: April 2024

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.14, pp. 168-170; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]



## General information

The governorate of Sweida is located in the southern part of Syria and has borders with the governorates of Dar'a and Rural Damascus and an international border with Jordan to its south. Sweida governorate comprises three districts: As-Sweida, Shahba and Salkhad. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Sweida at 379 223 inhabitants. The Druze community makes up 91 % of the governorate's total population.

Factors such as the geographical proximity to Jordan, the limited GoS-control, the considerable influence of armed gangs and high crime rate in the governorate have contributed to making Sweida one of Syria's smuggling hotspots [[Security 2022](#), 2.14.1, p. 234].

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

During the conflict, the governorate of Sweida has officially remained under GoS control. However, the GoS has not exercised its power directly in Sweida, having mainly relied on local armed factions sponsored by intelligence agencies and security branches [[Security 2022](#), 2.14.2, p. 234].

Sweida remained formally under GoS control during the reference period and GoS security forces remained widely present in the governorate. Sites operated by the GoS, its allies, and pro-GoS militias were located in the western half of the governorate, with concentrations around Sweida city and along the governorate's western border with Dar'a.

A number of Russian and Iranian sites were clustered in the governorate's centre and west. Iranian-backed factions had a strong presence in the governorate and were 'heavily involved' in cross-border Captagon trade.

Multiple local forces were active in the governorate, some of which were reportedly tied to the GoS while others opposed it. Local factions were said to 'maintain channels of communication' with the GoS and its security services, although these channels 'differ from one military group to another'. On many occasions local factions have clashed with each other.

#### **Nature of violence and examples of incidents**

The situation in Sweida governorate has been characterized as unstable and chaotic, with insecurity prevailing.

Attacks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), targeted killings, abductions, exchanges of fire as well as limited clashes have been recorded during the reporting period. Local disputes at times evolved into clashes between various armed groups and forces, sometimes including GoS-forces, or even the civilian population.

In December 2022, several months of daily protests due to the deteriorating living conditions led to the ransack of the governor's office and attempted seizure of the city's police headquarters. The security forces responded with gun fire and two people were killed.

In July 2023, in the context of civilians being arrested by the security forces, armed groups and residents blocked roads and detained members of GoS forces in at least two instances.

In August 2023, large scale anti-GoS protests took place in Sweida, although the GoS reportedly refrained from cracking down on the demonstrations. The protests reportedly continued in September and October 2023, albeit on a smaller scale. On two documented incidents security forces reportedly opened fire at protesters who attempted to storm governorate buildings.

Criminal gang activities, including kidnapping and killings, have also been reported. Kidnappings of civilians were reported on the Damascus–Sweida road, frequently occurring around the al-Masmiyah security

checkpoint, but also between al-Shahba city and as-Sweida. There were also ‘retaliatory, tit-for-tat kidnappings’ between rivalling gangs in Sweida and Dar’a that occasionally took a sectarian character. A rise in armed attacks and assassinations between January and mid-July 2023 has also been reported. Unidentified gunmen targeted civilians as part of robberies or for unknown reasons. Several persons were also killed in armed disputes between individuals or rural families and altercations with a drug dealer or Bedouin tribesmen.

Sweeping anti-smuggling raids have also been reported while, in May 2023, an alleged Jordanian military aircraft targeted the house of a prominent drug smuggler with links to Lebanese Hezbollah in the eastern Sweida countryside, killing eight civilians.

#### **Incidents: data**

ACLED recorded 80 security incidents (average of 1.6 security incidents per week) in Sweida governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 39 were coded as ‘violence against civilians’, 21 as ‘battles’ and 20 as ‘explosions/remote violence’. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 34 security incidents were recorded in Sweida representing an average of 2 security incident per week.

#### **Geographical scope**

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of Sweida.

#### **Civilian fatalities: data**

Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 24 civilian fatalities in Sweida governorate. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 5 civilian fatalities in Sweida. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented eight civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

#### **Displacement**

As of May 2022, there were 1 083 062 IDPs in Sweida governorate.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 360 persons were displaced from Sweida, as well as 440 within the governorate. Approximately 2 560 persons were displaced from other governorates to Sweida. In the first five months of 2023, there were approximately 120 IDP movements into Sweida, while UNOCHA did not record any IDP movements out of Sweida or within the governorate. However, following eviction raids by GoS forces and allied militias in late April 2023, many Bedouin families were reportedly displaced and moved into the Badia desert area of eastern Sweida.

In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 70 IDP returns to Sweida and 690 returns from Sweida to other governorates. In the first five months of 2023, 21 IDP returns were recorded into Sweida and about 313 returns from Sweida to other governorates.

#### **Further impact on civilians**

Lawlessness, chaos and rampant criminal and political violence impacted the security situation.

According to the UN Secretary-General, Sweida was one of the governorates with the highest percentages of

communities affected by explosive contamination. The reference period witnessed civilian deaths from remnants of war in the northern Sweida countryside.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that ‘mere presence’ in the area would not be sufficient to establish a real risk of serious harm under Article 15(c) QD in the governorate of **Sweida**, however indiscriminate violence reaches **a high level**. Accordingly, **a lower level of individual elements** is required in order to show substantial grounds for believing that a civilian, returned to the territory, would face a real risk of serious harm within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

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