

7.4.2. Individual circumstances

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: February 2023

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In addition to the general situation in the area of potential IPA, the assessment whether it is reasonable to settle in that part of the country should take into account the individual circumstances of the applicant, including his/her vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms.

Please note that this is a non-exhaustive list.

Civil documentation

As mentioned before, civil documentation is essential to meet the criterion of [travel and admittance](#). It is also required for freedom of movement in general, and the lack of civil documentation results in inability to register births, marriage, death, to access basic services such as healthcare and school registration, to claim property, and to access humanitarian aid [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.6, p. 30; [Damascus 2021](#), 2.4, pp. 35-37]. The required civil documentation is the one issued by the GoS as it reportedly does not accept non-state issued documentation [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.6, p. 32]. Returning refugees or IDPs who do not have proper papers would not be issued a Smart Card, cannot be legally employed, cannot pass through checkpoints, cannot enrol their children in school, and cannot reclaim their old owned or rented home. Also, lack of documentation could have detrimental impact on children who could become stateless. The problem of documentation seems to affect women more than men for societal reasons, and the lack of documents may render a widow unable to secure her inheritance or hold on to the family home [[Damascus 2021](#), 2.4, p. 36].

Gender

There have been initial findings that women refugees may be returning at a larger scale than men, which has been attributed to men's fear of conscription and the high death rates caused by the conflict. On the other hand, sources reported that many women living in Lebanon do not want to return because they would have to leave their husbands or sons behind or, when returning together, see them conscripted in the army. [[IDPs and returnees](#), 4.1, pp. 36-37]

It has been reported that IDP returnees and refugees returning to their place of origin generally face a number of challenges in obtaining basic information to bolster their decision. This lack of information affects women more than men, increasing their risk of exploitation and abuse. [[IDPs and returnees](#), 4.1, p. 37]

The absence of civil registration and documentation has also proven to be particularly harmful to women and girls. The lack of civil documentation leads to lack of legal identity, without which asserting claims during civil proceedings concerning various types of affairs such as divorce, custody, property ownership and criminal matters becomes problematic. In addition, the lack of civil documentation can also stop women from enjoying their legal and/or traditional rights provided by their marriage contracts and block the access to other rights and services, including humanitarian aid. [[Situation of women](#), 1.2.6, p. 36]

Displaced women and girls without male support or protection, specifically those living in camps and shelters, are more susceptible to violence than men and boys, including sexual violence, child marriage and movement restrictions [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.3, pp. 18-20, 20-21, 24-25, 1.2.10, p. 40]. Women have also been coerced into marrying men at distribution centres, or distribution staff, for a short period of time - for sexual purposes - in order to receive assistance [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.3, p. 26]. Decline in international funding further reduces women's access to health services [[Situation of women](#), 1.2.1, p. 29]. Displacement and refugee life have negative consequences on women's mental health, often triggered by lack of food and livelihood opportunities, in addition to social burdens such as having to ensure care and education for their children [[Situation of women](#), 1.2.1, p. 30]. Women's access to mental health services is more limited in comparison to men [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.1, p. 13].

Age

Young age as well as elderly age could significantly limit the applicant's access to means of subsistence such as through employment, making him or her dependent on other providers. Therefore, this element should be seen in conjunction with the available support by family or a broader support network. In the case of children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration, for example, with regard to access to basic education [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.4., p. 58; [Damascus 2021](#), 3.7; [IDPs and returnees](#), 4.2].

In August 2019, UNICEF reported that 2.6 million children in Syria were displaced as a result of the conflict. The upheaval resulting from displacement has diminished the capacity of many host communities to absorb and provide services to large numbers of IDPs, including children's access to education [[IDPs and returnees](#), 4.2, p. 37]. It has been found that many children face challenges in accessing proper education, as the educational system in Damascus has not recovered from the impact of the conflict. Furthermore, due to widespread financial challenges, children have to contribute to their families' income. [[Damascus 2021](#), 3.7.3, pp. 52-53]. Overcrowded classrooms (an average of 101 children for each one) and increasing prices for textbooks are relevant challenges too [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.8., p. 64-65]. According to the UNOCHA Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, in the governorate of Damascus, more than 470 000 children were found to be in need [[Damascus 2021](#), 3.6, p. 34].

Support network

Sources report that it is important for returnees to go back to their area of origin where they can rely on a social network. Those returning from abroad lack such a safety net if they go to an area where they do not originate from. As the socio-economic divisions have been exacerbated by the war, finding employment in Damascus is reported to be increasingly difficult without wasta - nepotism or clout. [[Damascus 2020](#), 5, p. 41]

The increasingly deteriorating economy has led to widespread poverty that has affected the majority of the Damascus population. As such, careful examination is needed in order to be determined whether the applicant will actually have access to a safety net and be able to receive assistance from their connections, even if they have a social network in the city.

Professional and educational background and financial means

The professional background of the applicant, their level of education and available financial means should be taken into account when assessing the reasonableness of IPA, and in particular the access of the applicant to means of basic subsistence. Unemployment in Damascus is common and the situation regarding availability of employment has further deteriorated due to the collapse of the Syrian economy [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.3, pp. 56-57]. Moreover, goods and services have become increasingly unaffordable for the majority of the population, the available salaries are insufficient to meet needs, often even with a second job and individuals have to complement their income with remittances from abroad in order to access basic subsistence [[Damascus 2021](#), 3.2.2, pp. 40-41].

Ethnoreligious and linguistic background

Accurate and updated information on the ethno-religious composition of Damascus is not available. Throughout the conflict, the city's demography has been subject to constant change marked by new arrivals and departures and ensuing overcrowding. Displaced communities from across the country have become packed together in the capital, giving rise to a larger, more 'segmented' and more 'heterogenous' population. Sunni communities in former opposition-held areas in Damascus have been subject to mass displacement to other parts of the country. Conversely, Shias from other parts of the country have become displaced to Damascus, including persons affiliated with Iran-backed militias. [[Security 2021](#), 2.10.1, p. 224]

There are reports that there is also presence of Alawites, Druze, Twelver Shia, Ismaili, and Christians. Many districts and neighbourhoods of Damascus and its environs are formed according to the ethnicity and/or religion of their inhabitants, with Kurds largely residing in the districts of Rukn al-Din and Barzeh and poor informal settlements, for example in the Wadi al-Mashari neighbourhood in Dummar. [[Damascus 2021](#), 1.1, pp. 11-12]

State of health

The already strained healthcare system in Damascus had been further overstretched due to the COVID-19 pandemic [[Damascus 2021](#), 3.6.3, pp.49-50]. The health care sector reportedly suffered not only from 'a chronic shortage of healthcare personnel' due to high emigration and retirement rates, but also from the low number of functional health facilities. Moreover, accessibility to healthcare is often unaffordable due to its high prices [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.7., p. 62]. Therefore, the health status of the applicant is an important consideration when assessing the reasonableness of IPA for those who require medical treatment. It should also be taken into account that their state of health may affect their ability to work. For those with disabilities, access to basic subsistence such as through employment would be further limited.

See other topics concerning internal protection alternative:

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