

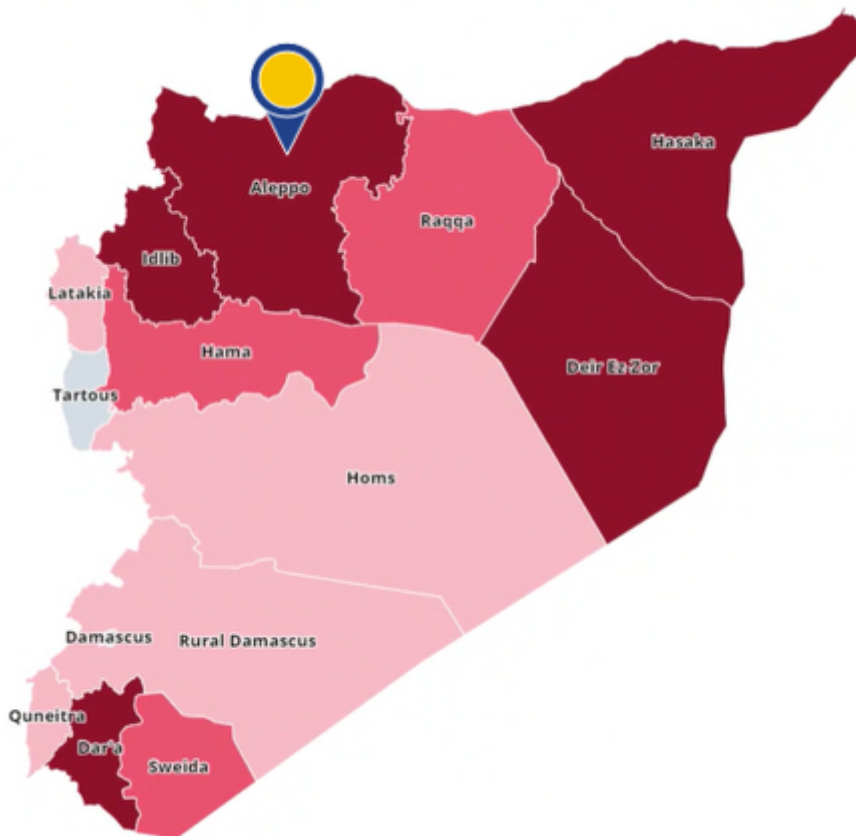
# Aleppo

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](#), 2.10, pp. 61-75; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]



## General information

The governorate of Aleppo is located in the north of Syria, bordering Idlib governorate to the west, Hama governorate to the south and Raqqqa governorate to the east. In the north, it shares a 221-kilometre-long border with Türkiye. The governorate is divided in eight districts: Jebel Saman (where the largest city Aleppo is located), Afrin, A'zaz (Azaz), Al-Bab, Menbij (Manbij), Jarablus, Ain Al-Arab (Kobane), and As-Safira. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Aleppo governorate at 4 226 203 inhabitants. According to the same source the total population of those areas in northern Aleppo that are under Turkish

control was approximately 1.4 million, of whom 850 000 were IDPs. [[Security 2023](#), 2.2.1, p. 61]

Minority communities present in the governorate include Christians, Kurds, Armenians and Turkmen. Both several different national and religious groups are present in Aleppo. Kurdish population is present in Aleppo governorate, in particular in the Aleppo city neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya and in Afrin district. It has been reported that Türkiye carried out a demographic change in Afrin area by empowering the SNA in forcing the Kurdish inhabitants of Afrin to leave the area, while thousands of rebels and their families from Eastern Ghouta were settled in Afrin following reconciliation by forcing Kurds to leave the area and settle Arab rebels. [[Security 2021](#), 2.2.1, p. 81]

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

Over the years of the conflict, control over different parts of Aleppo governorate fluctuated between GoS and anti-government armed groups, with international actors also playing a pivotal role. [[Security 2021](#), 2.2.2, pp. 81-87]

During the reference period, Aleppo governorate remained divided into areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups, areas controlled by the GoS, and several separate areas and enclaves controlled by the SDF/YPG.

The GoS controlled the central and southern parts of the governorate, including the Damascus Aleppo motorway (M5) and its immediate surroundings. In June 2023, large contingents of GoS forces were deployed to northern Aleppo governorate, while the number of GoS artillery strikes increased. GoS's Fourth Division continued a siege on the Kurdish-controlled Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya neighbourhoods of Aleppo city, which had been imposed since mid-March 2022. It reportedly deployed reinforcements in the vicinity of these neighbourhoods as well as in (likewise Kurdish-held) Al-Shahba Canton in northern Aleppo, which includes the Tall Rifaat region, 'to further intensify the siege on the area'. As of December 2022, Russian-backed Syrian troops controlled zones mainly to the south of Tall Rifaat.

SDF/YPG are in control of or have presence in Aleppo city (in the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya), in the Tall Rifaat area north of Aleppo city and in Manbij and Ain alArab (Kobane) in eastern Aleppo governorate. Reportedly, the local Kurdish military outfit Afrin Liberation Forces was also active in Aleppo governorate.

Foreign actors allied with GoS, including Russia and Iran, were reported to have a military presence in the governorate of Aleppo, in areas controlled by the GoS and in some areas controlled by the SDF/YPG. Russian forces continued to be stationed in Aleppo city while GoS and Russian forces have reportedly also re-opened the joint base al-Jarrah (or Jirah), east of Aleppo city. In November 2022, in the light of a possible Turkish incursion, Russia reportedly deployed forces to Tall Rifaat city, where Russian forces were already present. It was reported that Russian forces were still positioned in Tall Rifaat city as of June 2023.

The central Iranian military base was located in the Jabal Azzan area to the south of Aleppo. Iranian drone launch sites were placed at the Jirah and Kuweires airbases in eastern Aleppo governorate. Several local pro-Iranian militias, were also present in Aleppo governorate.

Turkish forces have a presence alongside anti-GoS armed groups in the so-called Operation Olive Branch and Operation Euphrates Shield areas controlled by these groups in the north of Aleppo governorate, with a high density in the north-west and along the border regions between Idlib and Aleppo governorates. Observation posts established by Turkish forces along the frontlines separating the areas west of Aleppo city controlled by anti-GoS armed groups from the GoS-controlled central Aleppo governorate, remained the

same as in the previous reference period. Turkish proxies controlled areas surrounding Tall Rifaat from the north.

In mid-October 2022, HTS took over the city of Afrin, including its surroundings, from the SNA for around two weeks. A minimum of 30 positions in the area reportedly had already been under the control of HTS before the takeover of Afrin. The group was reportedly tightening control over north-western Syria, such as via proxy groups and the formation of new alliances. In February 2023, the 'Shahba Gathering' was founded, uniting around 7 000 fighters of a number of SNA factions as well as HTS-affiliated groups. As of May 2023, territorial control was restored to what it had been prior to the takeover of Afrin, with the difference that Afrin and other bordering areas remained under the control of HTS-friendly SNA factions.

The presence of ISIL was also reported in the governorate

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

Sustained tensions in northern Aleppo continued particularly in frontline areas with airstrikes, rocket fire across front lines, shelling and limited clashes being reported.

Indiscriminate attacks by GoS and Russian forces on civilians in western Aleppo persisted in 2022. Between July and December 2022, 20 aerial and ground attacks were carried out by pro-GoS forces in western Aleppo and Idlib, according to the UNCOI. Shelling by GoS and pro-GoS forces reportedly also continued throughout 2022 in western Aleppo. In mid-2023, GoS forces and affiliated militias attacked the north-west more frequently, including civilian areas in Aleppo governorate, causing civilian casualties. HTS, meanwhile, clashed with GoS forces in northern Aleppo and attacked GoS positions in the governorate, joined by units from the HTS-affiliated al-Fatah al-Mubin coalition. Sporadic hostilities amongst GoS-affiliated militias, resulting in civilians casualties, including of children, were also reported.

Clashes between HTS and GoS forces in North-west Syria, including in western Aleppo, were reported in August and September 2023. In the aftermath of a drone strike on the Military College in Homs governorate in October 2023, which reportedly resulted in hundreds of casualties, GoS and Russian forces stepped up attacks on the HTS-controlled areas in Northwest Syria, including in western Aleppo governorate. GoS and Russian forces used intense ground shelling and airstrikes, while HTS and allied groups reportedly responded with artillery and drone strikes, including in Aleppo city.

Targeted air strikes against airports in Aleppo occurred regularly. Strikes reportedly targeted civilian areas in A'zaz, Al-Bab, Afrin and other areas in northern rural Aleppo. Israeli airstrikes also occurred in Aleppo governorate, targeting Aleppo airport several times during the reference period, as well as a military airport in the Aleppo countryside.

Clashes between Türkiye and Kurdish armed groups occurred in Aleppo governorate in multiple instances. An operation named Claw-Sword was launched by Türkiye in November 2022 against positions of the SDF and GoS army in Aleppo governorate. With the start of Operation Claw-Sword, hostilities between Türkiye and SDF/YPG forces continued along the front line of Operation Peace Spring. Türkiye continued to periodically target SDF forces and carried out artillery and drone strikes on Kurdish-held positions in the governorate such as on Kobane and Tall Rifaat in November 2022 or, after positions on the Turkish side of the border were attacked in June 2023, on Manbij and Tall Rifaat regions. Airstrikes 'targeting vehicles, posts, different positions, and civilian infrastructure' executed by Türkiye in 2022 were also reported. Airstrikes and mutual shelling were also reported in densely populated areas such as Ayn Al-Arab (Kobane). In September 2023, drone strikes attributed to Türkiye killed members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), while in October 2023, following a PKK attack in Ankara, Türkiye conducted a campaign of drone strikes which hit more than 150 locations including Aleppo governorate.

UNOCHA reported that the majority of IED attacks in 2022 in Syria were recorded in areas controlled by armed groups in Turkish operations in Aleppo and two other governorates.

Infighting between different anti-GoS armed groups in northern Aleppo was reported during the reference period, including in October 2022 between two SNA affiliated groups, causing civilian casualties. This infighting prompted HTS to launch an armed operation in northern Aleppo governorate and temporarily seize the city of Afrin, which had previously been controlled by SNA forces. Türkiye then reportedly deployed forces in the area to put an end to the clashes.

ISIL reportedly carried out a number of attacks in the governorate. Up to two confirmed ISIL attacks per month in Aleppo, including attacks on truffle pickers, were reported in August, October and December 2022 as well as in March, April and May 2023. Furthermore, the USled coalition and Türkiye reportedly killed and captured senior ISIL leaders in Aleppo governorate.

Incidents in which civilians were shot and killed by an armed group, at a checkpoint or by unknown perpetrators were also reported.

In the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquakes, violent incidents decreased but did not stop completely

#### **Incidents: data**

Aleppo recorded the highest number of security incidents out of all governorates [[Security 2023](#), 1.5.2, p. 37]. ACLED recorded 2 735 security incidents (average of 53 security incidents per week) in Aleppo governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, of which 551 were coded as ‘battles’, 1 717 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 467 as ‘violence against civilians’. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 1 077 out of the 4 381 security incidents reported in Syria took place in Aleppo. This represents an average of 62 security incidents per week.

#### **Geographical scope**

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in Jebel Saman, A’zaz and Afrin. By comparison, very few incidents were recorded in the district of As-Safira.

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

Aleppo was the Syrian governorate most affected in terms of civilian casualties in 2022. Furthermore, since 2012, Aleppo has consistently been one of the five most dangerous Syrian governorates for civilians. Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 156 civilian fatalities. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 54 civilian fatalities. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented five civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period

#### **Displacement**

As of May 2022, there were 1 267 887 IDPs in Aleppo governorate.

Hostilities, HTS military operations, air strikes and mutual shelling after the launching of Operation Claw-Sword by Türkiye in northern rural Aleppo reportedly led to forced displacement during the reference period.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 18 000 persons were displaced from Aleppo governorate, as well as 26 000 within the governorate. Approximately 15 000 persons were displaced from other governorates to Aleppo. In the first five months of 2023, there were approximately 25 272 IDP movements out of Aleppo and 2 008 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 59 479 IDP movements within the governorate. The majority of IDP movements in Aleppo governorate in 2023 was recorded in February and attributed to the February earthquakes in the region. However, Russian airstrikes in June 2023 also reportedly induced displacement.

In terms of IDP returns, Aleppo governorate continued to be the main area of return in Syria, accounting for 34 % of IDP returns between January and mid-November 2022. UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 2 000 IDP returns to Aleppo and 3 000 returns from Aleppo to other governorates. In the first five months of 2023, 571 IDP returns were recorded into Aleppo and about 3 992 returns from Aleppo to other governorates.

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

Massive destruction of infrastructure in the governorate of Aleppo has been documented as the result of the ongoing conflict. Schools, hospitals and markets in Aleppo governorate were damaged as the result of the ongoing conflict. UN Habitat reported in May 2023 that, as a result of the Syrian conflict, 14 % of residential properties had become uninhabitable in Aleppo governorate.

Aleppo was among the Syrian governorates with the highest percentages of some form of explosive contamination and among the governorates where contamination from unexploded ordnances (UXO)s represented a particularly major security concern. The SNHR noted that 26% of all landmine-related deaths it documented in Syria between March 2011 and early April 2023 were recorded in Aleppo governorate. The UN Secretary General in June 2023 reported that ‘[d]isplaced persons and rubble removers faced increased risk of being exposed to explosive ordnance’. Furthermore, an increase in explosive-related incidents in Aleppo governorate was reported after the February 2023 earthquakes in Aleppo governorate ‘as people moved back to or across contaminated areas.’

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that in the governorate of **Aleppo**, indiscriminate violence reaches such a high level that substantial grounds are shown for believing that a civilian, returned to the governorate, would, **solely on account of their presence on its territory**, face a real risk of being subject to the serious threat referred to in Article 15(c) QD.