

7.3. Travel and admittance

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

In case the criterion of 'safety' is satisfied, as a next step, it has to be established whether an applicant can safely and legally travel and gain admittance to Damascus City.

The general situation and the individual circumstances of the applicant should be taken into account in this assessment.

It should be noted that in the context of Syria and in particular the security measures related to State actors, the three requirements should be read in conjunction.

Safely travel

Damascus International Airport is located 30 kilometres south-east of downtown Damascus (about 30 minutes by car from the city centre). Damascus International Airport is controlled by Air Force Intelligence services, which are reported to conduct arrests and torture [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.1, pp. 16-17]. It is reported that several international routes are operated from the airport [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.1, p. 44]

Airstrikes by Israel on Damascus international airport, as well as areas close to the airport have been reported. For example, on 17 September 2022 an Israeli airstrike targeted Iranian-backed groups based near the airport. Another Israeli airstrike on the airport reportedly occurred on 2 January 2023 with sources noting that the airport was out of service for several hours but resumed operations later the same day. In mid-October and November 2023, Israeli airstrikes targeted again the airport, putting it temporarily out of service. The Syrian government reportedly also 'routinely' ordered the closure of the Damascus airport allegedly because of violence or the threat of violence. [[COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 6-7; [Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.1, p. 44].

The airport was generally accessible from and to the city. Efforts were reportedly also underway to improve and repair the roads leading to the airport. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.4, pp. 48-49]

Checkpoints at the entrances of urban centres, including Damascus by SAA's Fourth Division were reported by different sources, where they also had the mandate to function as parallel customs police. Moreover, the Fourth Division controlled checkpoints at international border crossings [Lebanon (Qalamoun/Bekaa Valley),

Jordan (Naseeb), and Iraq (Abu Kamal)], at all border crossings into opposition-controlled areas as well as at the entrances of the ports of Latakia and Tartous. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, pp. 46-47]

The number of checkpoints in Damascus city has reportedly significantly decreased. However, checkpoints at the entry roads to Damascus city, in the vicinity of the capital and in towns across Rural Damascus governorate remained in place. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, pp. 46-47]

Several checkpoints controlled by different GoS security units and affiliated forces were reported along the main road connecting the capital cities of Beirut and Damascus which runs through the AlMasnaa (Lebanon) / Jdeidet Yabous (Syria) border crossing, located 60 km from Damascus and 110 km from Beirut, and constituting the largest border crossing between the two countries. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.2, pp. 45-46]

Checkpoints reportedly generally tended to focus on asking more questions (for example, on current address or occupation) to individuals coming from areas that were loosely controlled by the GoS, such as Dar'a governorate, or from rebel-held areas such as Idlib and northern Aleppo. Having identity documents, birth certificates and other personal documents was essential for being able to move freely. The practice of extorting money and fees from residents, public transport vehicles and others at check points was also reported. The SAA's Fourth Division as well as affiliated militia groups and businesses were reported to solely profit from this practice. Payments were reportedly demanded from many civilians as well as from entities and business owners for all cargo crossing the checkpoint, regardless of ownership, as well as for the release of civilians previously detained at checkpoints under the control of the Fourth Division and the Republican Guard. Threats, insults, physical and psychological violence, the robbery of personal property and executions of civilians for allegedly not stopping at a checkpoint or because they refused to hand over their property or make any payments were also reported. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, pp. 47-48]

People who had visible signs of belonging to a less affluent part of society and people who were from areas with a history of anti-government movements were generally treated worse than others. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.3.4, p. 22]

In its October 2022 report on arrests and detentions, SNHR indicated that it had recorded the detention of IDPs and returnees from abroad who were trying to return to their original places of residence in territory under control of the GoS. Most of the arrests reportedly took place at Damascus airport, Damascus city and at the border crossings with Lebanon. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, p. 47]

Particular risk profiles for arrest tend to be those who return to Syria without security permission or reconciliation in place prior to traveling, individuals who work or carry out activities believed to oppose the government, such as journalism, aid work, local councils, rescue workers, men of military age, and those with family members who were forcibly displaced to Idlib or Aleppo [[Damascus 2020](#), 2.4, p. 21]. Arrests of persons who have settled their security status have also been reported [[Returnees from abroad](#), 3., p. 27].

There is also information about harassment against LGBTIQ persons or against persons whose family members are wanted for criminal reasons, or against persons who have the same or a similar name as persons on wanted lists. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.3.4, pp. 23-24]

It was reported that checkpoints were located at Damascus International Airport for passengers departing from Damascus, as well as for passengers arriving there. Airport staff are reportedly demanding bribes and threatening disruption or security problems in case of non-payment. In addition, the 'quadruple security check' is carried out to find out if an arriving person is on a wanted list [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.3.5, p. 24].

[Legally travel](#)

The Syrian Constitution provides for freedom of movement of citizens unless ‘prevented by a decision from the competent court or the public prosecution office or in accordance with the laws of public health and safety’. However, in practice, freedom of movement in Syria was ‘severely restricted’ due to ongoing combat and ‘proliferation of regime and militia checkpoints’ [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.2, pp. 17-19]. The GoS restricted in-country movements and established checkpoints to monitor travels inside the areas under its control. Legal and cultural restrictions also limited women’s freedom of movement in many areas [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, p. 47]. Syrian citizens were also allowed to travel internationally, but the government denied access to passports and civil documentation based on political views, association with the opposition, or geographical location associated with the opposition [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.2, pp. 17-19]. Journalists and human rights or civil society activists were often banned from travelling abroad, or were interrogated upon return [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.3, p. 47]. The GoS imposed exit visa requirements and at times closed Damascus Airport and border crossings. It was reported that the government enforced wide-ranging bans on international travel by opposition members, often targeting anyone attempting to travel. In addition, there was a nationwide problem with the issuing of passports, with citizens having to pay bribes and wait for months [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.2, pp. 17-19].

Gain admittance

According to a source, applying for security clearance was a prerequisite for establishing residence in any part of Damascus city. The security screening process for IDPs relocating to Damascus was stricter than that applied to existing Damascus residents undergoing intra-city moves. The approval of an individual’s security clearance was influenced by various factors, including their background, place of origin, and activities over the past years. More often than not, the mukhtar played a role in the process. Prospective residents had to first submit their lease agreements and related documentation to the mukhtar, who subsequently forwarded these materials to the relevant security authorities for review. In some cases, prospected returnees submitted their applications directly to security services. Generally, returnees had to prove ownership of property to settle in the area in which they lived prior to displacement. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.6, pp. 52-53]

It has been reported that returning to their home remained difficult for forcibly displaced people. Apart from the need to fulfil a set of requirements, return also depended on whether the area had been rehabilitated and basic services installed. As part of the requirements, applicants had to submit documents proving ownership of their home, a familial civil registration extract and copies of each family member’s ID cards. Based on these documents, security services approved or rejected the application. In case of approval, applicants were required to obtain an engineering report for their house from the public safety committee, which was linked to the local administrative unit. The committee decided whether a house was in a stable condition and inhabitable. In case the house was declared safe, the potential returnee had to apply to the municipality for permission to do any necessary repair work. Reportedly, the role of public safety committees was not clearly defined, and critics claimed that security services were intervening in their work. In practice, however, it was these committees that made the final decision over the preservation or demolition of a building. It was reported that, given the conditions for security approval, only property owners who lived in areas under GoS-control and were not wanted by the security services would eventually be allowed to return. Other returnees had to agree to a ‘security settlement’ that may involve extensive investigations, arrest in case of pending search warrants and military conscription for men who had so far failed to do military service. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.6, pp. 52-53]

All procedures related to property required approval by the security authorities even if a person was absent or abroad. Security approvals were required when selling and leasing real estate. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.5, p. 29]

In the case of Palestinian refugees who wished to settle outside of a camp, it was reported that it was more difficult for them to be granted permission to reside, due to the sectarian make-up of the city. Many areas of

Damascus were dominated by a particular sect and the relevant security branch might refuse to provide security clearance to a person belonging to a different sectarian group. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.5, p. 30]

Access and return to some areas of Damascus, such as Al-Qaboun, Yarmouk and Jobar, were restricted or almost completely prohibited due to significant destruction and security permission was required for entering those areas. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.1.5, pp. 49-52; [Damascus 2022](#), 2.4, pp. 25-29]

For those applicants who meet the ‘safety’ criterion, the assessment of the availability of IPA in Damascus City should proceed with an assessment of the requirements of safety and legality of travel and of gaining admittance.

The profile and individual circumstances of the applicant should be taken into account in this regard. For individuals who would return to Syria without identity documents or without security clearance or status settlement in place prior to traveling, these requirements would not be satisfied.

See other topics concerning internal protection alternative:

- [Preliminary remarks](#)
- [7.1. Part of the country](#)
- [7.2. Safety](#)
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- [7.4. Reasonableness to settle](#)

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