

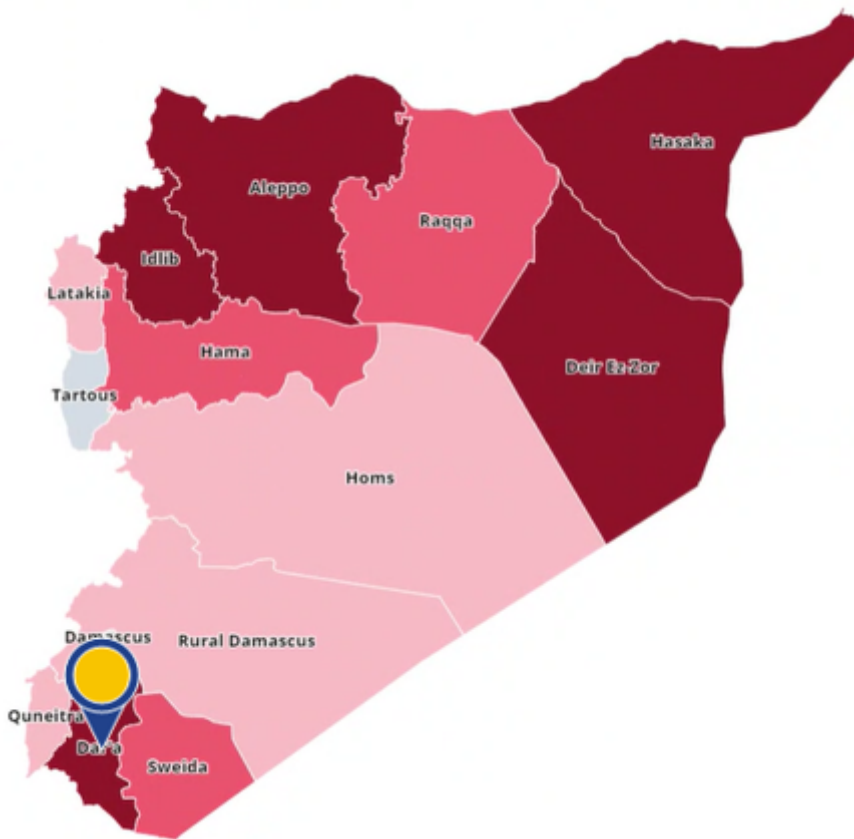
Dar'a

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](#), 2.12, pp. 145-155; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]



General information

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 the three administrative districts of Dar'a, Izra' and As-Sanamayn. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Dar'a governorate at 1 023 833 inhabitants.

Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

The governorate of Dar'a, where the first protests against the Assad government began in 2011, played a significant role in the conflict as an opposition stronghold. In 2018, however, the GoS was able to regain control over the area with the support of Russia through a combination of military campaigns, and reconciliation agreements with opposition factions. [[Security 2022](#), 2.12, pp. 203-204]

Since then, Dar'a governorate has been nominally under the control of GoS. In certain parts of the governorate, such as Busra al-Sham, Tafas and Dar'a al-Balad, GoS' control was limited, allowing locals and former opposition groups a de facto semi autonomy, including to maintain light arms, take care of 'local affairs and to continue to manifest opposition'. Despite carrying out several successful military operations against former opposition groups in between 2018-2021, GoS' control of Dar'a was still assessed to be tenuous as of 2023. In areas including Jasim, Dar'a al-Balad and Nawa the GoS was not able to maintain effective control.

The 8th Brigade, a Russian-backed local armed group made up of former opposition fighters and currently affiliated with the GoS Military Intelligence Directorate was reported to be the most influential armed group in Dar'a, particularly in the Busra al-Sham area of eastern Dar'a. The presence of Russian and Iranian forces, including Hezbollah, was also reported in the governorate during the reference period.

ISIL maintained small cells including key leadership in Dar'a, reportedly targeting GoS and rebel figures, through assassinations, kidnappings, and bombings. Civilians were also targeted at times by ISIL. In October 2022, ISIL's leader Abu al-Hassan al-Hashemi alQurashi was killed during a GoS military operation in Jasim.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

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. 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.

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. 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. 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, drug traffickers and ISIL elements were operating, and assassinations against GoS security forces were recurrent. 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. 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.

In October 2022, a GoS and Russian-led operation against ISIL cells in Dar'a governorate led to the killing of alleged ISIL fighters in the city of Jasim. Clashes between armed groups and suspected ISIL cells also took place in November 2022 in Dar'a al-Balad which led to several civilians being killed.

In addition, Iranian-backed groups, including the Lebanese Hezbollah, reportedly deployed forces to Quneitra and Dar'a governorates in October 2023 from where they launched rocket attacks at the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Retaliatory missile and airstrikes by Israel against GoS and Iranian-linked targets including in Quneitra were also reported.

Since 2018, when the GoS regained control of Dar'a, a high number of targeted killings have been documented in the governorate. Assassination attempts and targeted killings of civilians, 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.

In recent years, drug production and cross-border drug trafficking increased in the south of Syria, including in Dar'a governorate. Experts and activists have stated that both GoS and opposition groups are directly involved in the drug production and trade that originates from Syria. 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. In May 2023, airstrikes attributed to Jordan were carried out on suspected drug facilities allegedly run by the Lebanese Hezbollah in Dar'a governorate. Assassination attempts on persons involved in drug trafficking, including civilians, pro-GoS militia members and members of the SAA and intelligence services were also recorded in the governorate between January and August 2023.

Incidents: data

ACLED recorded 756 security incidents (average of 14.7 security incidents per week) in Dar'a governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 247 were coded as 'battles', 165 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 344 as 'violence against civilians'. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 220 security incidents were recorded in Dar'a representing an average of 12.7 security incident per week.

Geographical scope

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.

Civilian fatalities: data

Dar'a was the Syrian governorate with the highest number of recorded civilian fatalities by SNHR during the reference period [[Security 2023](#), 1.5.3, pp. 40-41]. Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 178 civilian fatalities. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 70 civilian fatalities. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented twenty four civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 68 792 IDPs in Dar'a governorate.

According to the UN Security Council, clashes between GoS forces and opposition fighters in Tafas and the anti-ISIL operations during the reference period led to displacement.

UNOCHA recorded 2 271 IDP movements in 2022, the vast majority of which (around 2 000) occurred within the governorate, while the rest were IDP movements from other governorates to Dar'a. In the first five months of 2023, there were approximately 11 IDP movements out of Dar'a and 503 IDP movements into the

governorate as well as about 197 IDP movements within the governorate.

In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 7 352 IDP returns in 2022, the majority of which (around 7 000) occurred within the governorate, while around 200 were from Sweida to Dar'a. In the first five months of 2023, 2 140 IDP returns were recorded to Dar'a and about 30 returns from Dar'a to other governorates.

Further impact on civilians

Dar'a is one of the governorates where sources reported a high percentage of explosive ordnance contamination during the reporting period. Civilian casualties, including of children as a result of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) were reported in Dar'a in 2022 and 2023. Insecurity and the presence of ERW has also impeded access of farmers to agricultural land.

UN Habitat assessed that around 15 % of residential properties were uninhabitable in Dar'a governorate as a result of the conflict. A UN Habitat analysis from 2022 assessed the infrastructure in southern Dar'a to be severely damaged.

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.

Looking at the indicators, and in particular at the multitude of armed actors, general instability, as well as the high number of civilian fatalities, it can be concluded that in the governorate of **Dar'a**, 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.

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