

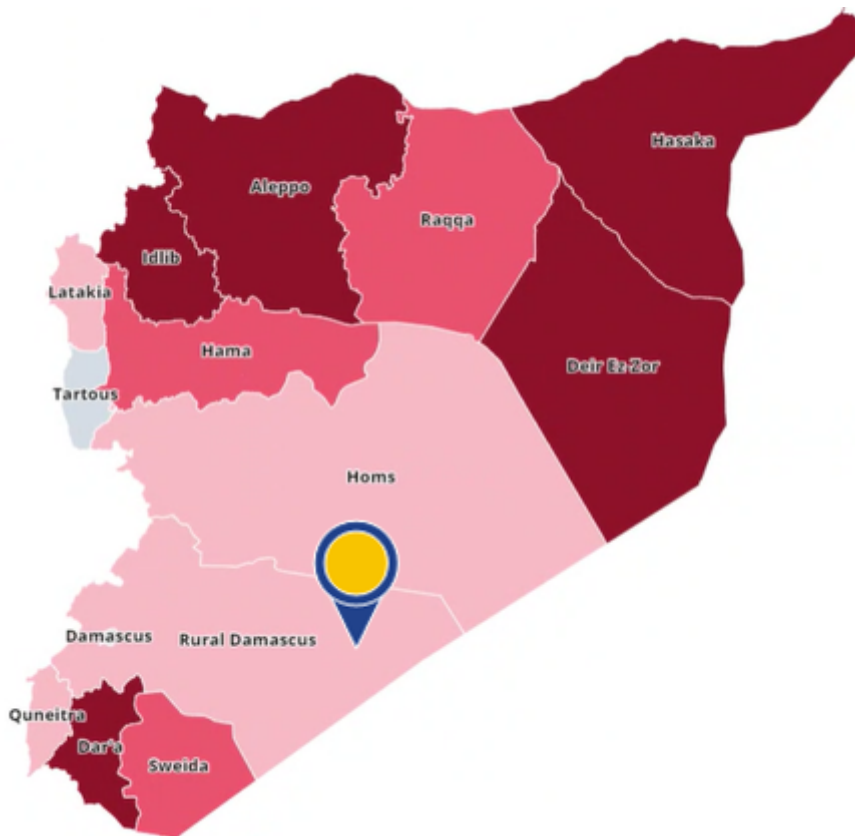
Rural Damascus

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](#), 2.11, pp. 136-`44; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]



General information

Rural Damascus is a largely agricultural governorate surrounding Damascus city. It is located in the south-western part of Syria and has international borders with Jordan and Iraq to the south and east and Lebanon to the west. Internally, it borders Homs governorate to the north and Quneitra, Dar'a and Sweida governorates to the south. The governorate comprises nine administrative districts: Rural Damascus, Douma (Duma), Al Qutayfah, An Nabk, Yabroud (Yabrud), At Tall, Az-Zabadani, Darayya, and Qatana. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Rural Damascus governorate at 3 310 012 inhabitants.

Background and actors involved in armed confrontations

The GoS recaptured Rural Damascus governorate in 2018, defeating the armed opposition in Eastern Ghouta in a Russian-supported military offensive launched between February and April 2018, during which GoS forces used chemical weapons against Douma city, the largest opposition stronghold in the vicinity of the capital from 2011 to 2018. [[Security 2022](#), 2.11.2, p. 1]

Throughout the reference period, the GoS and affiliated groups were controlling all of the governorate's territory except for a zone in its eastern-most section (Al-Tanf).

Iranian and Russian forces were also present in the governorate and deployed in several locations. Iran-backed armed groups were reportedly stationed at Damascus International Airport. They also reportedly continued to strengthen their presence in areas near the Lebanese border by purchasing plots of land. Increasing numbers of purchases of real estate units by Hezbollah in and near Badda, north-east of Damascus city, were also reported.

International coalition forces were reportedly at Al-Tanf in the so-called US-declared 55-km deconfliction area which has been a base for counter-ISIL operations and training for anti-ISIL factions since 2016. Positioned near Iranian and Iran backed forces, the garrison occupied a strategic spot on the Baghdad-Damascus highway. They reportedly worked 'with vetted local partner forces', which controlled outposts around Al-Tanf Garrison, and provided protection against pro-regime and Iran-aligned forces surrounding the de-confliction zone.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

During the reference period, Israeli airstrikes were reported on Damascus International airport and other specific targets (being mainly Hezbollah and Iranian militias), mostly resulting in the killing of soldiers, but also of some civilians.

Members of the Fourth Division, the Military Intelligence Department and the NDF died in various attacks during the reference period, and there were reports of attacks targeting GoS checkpoints.

Clashes between a group affiliated with the Military Intelligence service and another group affiliated with the Fourth Division in Bait Jinn were reported in February 2023. In April and June 2023, several civilians were killed during clashes in which different families affiliated with the Fourth Division or the Military Intelligence Department and local residents were involved.

Several civilians were killed by members of the Fourth Division in the reference period. Civilians were also injured by members of the Military Intelligence branch. Bodies of civilians killed by unknown perpetrators were also found.

In July 2023, several people were reportedly killed in two explosions outside the Sayeda Zeinab shrine, for which ISIL reportedly claimed responsibility.

Incidents: data

ACLED recorded 211 security incidents (average of 4.1 security incidents per week) in Rural Damascus in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 79 were coded as 'battles', 88 as

‘violence against civilians’ and 44 as ‘explosions/remote violence’. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 80 security incidents were recorded in Rural Damascus representing an average of 4.6 security incident per week.

Geographical scope

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the districts of At Tall and Rural Damascus.

Civilian fatalities: data

Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 18 civilian fatalities. In August –November 2023, the SNHR recorded 10 civilian fatalities in Rural Damascus. This included also civilians who drowned while on migration routes to Europe in August 2023, without specifying their actual number. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented one civilian fatality per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

Displacement

As of May 2022, there were 1 083 062 IDPs in Rural Damascus.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 8 000 persons were displaced from Rural Damascus, as well as 3 000 within the governorate. No IDP movements from other governorates to Rural Damascus were recorded in the same period. In the first five months of 2023, there were approximately 8 IDP movements out of Rural Damascus and 277 IDP movements into the governorate.

In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 6 000 IDP returns to Rural Damascus and 7 000 returns from Rural Damascus to other governorates. In the first five months of 2023, 19 IDP returns were recorded into Rural Damascus and about 109 returns from Rural Damascus to other governorates.

Further impact on civilians

UN Habitat assessed that around 48 % of residential properties were uninhabitable in Duma, in Rural Damascus, as a result of the conflict. The existence of explosive ordnance in residential buildings in Darayya (Rural Damascus) was also reported by UNMAS in its annual report covering 2022. Within Darayya, the teams evaluated an area of around 2 million square meters of agricultural land, with 71 % of it being verified as hazardous.

In its February 2023 report, the UN Secretary-General noted that about a third of Syrian communities were affected by explosive contamination, with Rural Damascus showing one of the highest percentages among all governorates. SOHR reported on the explosion of war remnants in cities in the governorate resulting in deaths and injuries.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that indiscriminate violence is taking place in the governorate of **Rural Damascus**, however **not at a high level**. Accordingly, **a higher 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.