

## 4.1.4. Civilians originating from areas associated with opposition to the government

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

This sub-profile refers to civilians from areas associated with opposition to the government, in particular (former) opposition-held areas in Dar'a, Rural Damascus, Idlib, Latakia, Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Quneitra. It addresses the situation of civilians from recaptured areas as well as, briefly, areas which continue to be under the control of anti-government armed groups.

### COI summary

The government's territorial gains over the course of the Syrian conflict were followed by continued arbitrary arrests and detention [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.2.3, p. 21].

There were numerous reports of deliberate targeting, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances of civilians in GoS-controlled areas, including those reconquered by the GoS. Among those detained were IDPs, including some who had signed settlement agreements with the GoS upon their return to GoS-held territory. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 17. For more detailed information on reconquered areas see [Recaptured areas COI report](#)]

GoS treats individuals from former opposition-held areas with a heavy degree of suspicion. The intelligence agencies created a wide network of informants and surveillance to ensure that the government kept a close watch of all aspects of Syrians' everyday life and restricted criticism of the GoS [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.1.1, p. 15]. The scrutiny of individuals from former opposition-held areas is the highest in Damascus, given the concentration of security personnel in the city as well as the importance of the capital to the government. The GoS also restricted the access of civilians that wished to return to Damascus and Rural Damascus and unlawfully demolished houses of residents [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.2.3, p. 23]. Persons in GoS-controlled areas whose origin is from areas controlled by anti-government groups may also be perceived as disloyal [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.3, p. 25].

Furthermore, GoS security forces in recent years have also been harassing, detaining and extorting individuals who had relatives in armed opposition-controlled areas [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 18]. Civilians were arrested for communicating with their relatives or friends in rebel-held territory or abroad and they were prevented from establishing further contact [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.1.1, p. 15]. Similarly, civilians were arrested for travelling between GoS-held areas and areas controlled by other parties [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 18].

GoS also punished family members of alleged opposition supporters by applying a number of laws that violate their individual property rights. Women with familial ties to opposition fighters were reportedly detained for intelligence-gathering purposes or retribution [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.2.3, p. 21].

There were also reports of indiscriminate attacks such as bombing and shelling from GoS forces resulting in civilian casualties along the borders of the different areas of control, including areas held by opposition groups. Pro-GoS forces targeted civilians in hospitals, residential areas, schools, and IDP settlements throughout 2022. These forces reportedly employed the ‘deliberate killing of civilians, as well as their forced displacement, starvation, and protracted siege-like conditions’. [[Security 2023](#), 1.5.1, p. 35]

## Conclusions and guidance

### Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. arbitrary arrests, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance).



### What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: regional aspects (who is in control in the area, whether it was considered an opposition stronghold, etc.), and level of perceived support or collaboration with anti-government forces, familial ties or other connection to suspected members of anti-government armed groups and/or political opposition members, perceived support for the government, ethno-religious background (e.g. being [Sunni Arab](#)), etc.



### Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.

See other topics concerning persons perceived to be opposing the government:

- [4.1.1. Political dissent and opposition in Syria](#)
- [4.1.2. Members of anti-government armed groups](#)
- [4.1.3. Political activists, opposition party members and protesters](#)
- *4.1.4. Civilians originating from areas associated with opposition to the government*

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