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5.8.2. Idlib governorate

937_map4_mapaction_Idlib_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Map 4: © MapAction, Idlib governorate937

☐ (a) Administrative division and population estimates

Idlib governorate is divided into five administrative districts (Al Ma'ra, Ariha, Harim, Idlib, and Jisr-Ash-Shugur), which are further divided into a total of 26 sub-districts.938 The governorate's capital is Idlib city.939 As of March 2025, the population of Idlib governorate was 2 848 168, including residents, IDPs, and returnees from abroad, according to IOM estimates.940 In comparison, the WHO estimated Idlib's population at 3 179 920 as of March 2025.941 For further background information on Idlib governorate, see section 2.1.1. of the EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation (October 2024).

☐ (b) Territorial control and main armed actors

As of 30 May 2025, a map by the ISW and the CTP showed Idlib governorate as being under control of the HTS-led interim government. A few pockets of territory in the southern and western border regions were shown as having a 'Pro-Regime Insurgent Presence'.942

The GPC noted in March 2025 that while a transitional government had been established, the country remained 'fragmented among various armed actors', with Idlib governorate being dominated by HTS and other armed groups formed within the SNA.943 Asharq Al-Awsat mentioned a battalion of mainly Uyghur fighters headed by a former leader of the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), that was now integrated into the armed forces under the MoD and was stationed between Idlib and rural Latakia.944

New Lines Magazine similarly mentioned ‘foreign jihadists’ having settled in Idlib city.[945] The Al-Ghuraba (‘The Foreigners') division, led by a French jihadist, was reportedly based in Harem town in the north of the governorate.[946]

(c) Security trends

In early March 2025, transitional government forces launched targeted security operations and created checkpoints across the governorate to increase security in the region. The Harmoon Center noted that Idlib, compared to other governorates, appeared ‘relatively stable’, with the new security forces keeping ‘firm control’, despite occasional external threats.[947] Pro-Assad insurgents presumably killed an HTS commander and two fighters loyal to the interim government in two separate incidents on 22 and 24 March 2025, respectively.[948] At the same time, GSS launched security operations targeting ‘regime remnants’,[949] including in Khan Sheikhoun town, arresting several individuals loyal to the former government who had refused to disarm,[950] and in Jisr Al-Shughur, where they arrested about 15 individuals accused of collaborating under the former government. In Jisr Al-Shughur pro-Assad forces had killed about 25 people, mostly interim government forces, in a ‘coordinated attack’ at the beginning of March 2025.[951] Security operations were also reported from the Jabal al-Zawiya area in southern Idlib governorate,[952] where operations intensified in early April 2025, resulting in the eventual arrest of several pro-Assad fighters. Moreover, following information from intelligence sources, security forces increased the number of checkpoints around Idlib city to block the entry of ‘dangerous elements’. By mid-April, however, security forces had reportedly managed to improve relations with the local population and opened recruitment for local individuals.[953]

In May 2025, the MAG pointed to the high number of landmine and UXO casualties (see section 5.8.2(f)) with one clinic in Idlib reportedly having treated 500 victims since December 2024.[954]

A former leader of Hurras Al-Din, an armed group affiliated with Al-Qaeda, was reportedly killed in a drone strike by the US-led International Coalition in early March 2025,[955] and in May 2025, the director of the Idlib Security Directorate reported on a security operation against an ISIL cell in the governorate, killing one member of the group and injuring another.[956] For further information on the events in early March 2025, see section 4 of the EUAA COI Report Syria – Country Focus (March 2025).

☐ (d) Security incidents

Between 9 December 2024 and 31 May 2025, ACLED recorded 136 security incidents in Idlib governorate (see Figure 11). In the period between 1 March and 31 May 2025, ACLED recorded 62 security incidents (defined as battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) in Idlib governorate. Of these incidents, 4 were coded as battles, 47 as explosions/remote violence, and 11 as violence against civilians.957

958_evolution_security_events_Idlib_dec24_may25_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Figure 11: Evolution of security events coded 'battles', 'explosions/remote violence' and 'violence against civilians' in Idlib governorate between 9 December 2024 and 31 May 2025, based on ACLED data.958

During the reference period, security incidents were recorded in all five districts of the governorate. The highest number of such incidents was recorded in Al Ma'ra (33 security incidents), followed by Idlib district (16 security incidents), while the fewest security incidents were recorded in Ariha and Harim districts (3 and 4 security incidents, respectively). According to ACLED data, unidentified armed groups were involved as a main actor (coded as either 'Actor 1' or 'Actor 2') in slightly more than 95 % of all security incidents recorded during the reference period, particularly in incidents coded as explosions/remote violence, which, in most cases, referred to the detonation of landmines or other explosive ordnances left behind from previous battles, affecting civilians, as well as in incidents coded as violence against civilians. Miliary and Police Forces were involved in slightly more than 11 % of security incidents. In the majority, these were incidents coded as battles or explosions/remote violence also involving unidentified armed groups and referred to incidents where police or military forces were attacked by unknown gunmen or affected by the detonation of explosives previously planted by unknown armed groups.959

☐ (e) Civilian casualties

In March 2025, the SNHR recorded 17 civilian fatalities in Idlib governorate.960 In April 2025, SNHR recorded 21 civilian fatalities in the governorate.961 In May 2025, the number of civilian fatalities recorded by SNHR decreased to 6.962 SNHR does not provide more detailed information on these fatalities. For the period between March

and May 2025, UCDP recorded 22 civilian fatalities in Idlib governorate.963

964_civilian_fatalities_Idlib_mar_may25_snhr_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Figure 12: Civilian fatalities in Idlib governorate between March and May 2025. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data.964

☐ (f) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Parts of rural Idlib were reportedly of particular concern in terms of the presence of remnants of war, such as landmines965 and ammunition.966 In one incident reported by TNH, an unexploded rocket was found in a village.967 Between 1 March 2025 and 31 May 2025, various sources reported on civilians being killed or injured by the explosion of a landmine or remnant of war.968 The victims included children,969 and, for example, civilians herding sheep,970 collecting firewood,971 or cleaning a well.972 The Syrian Civil Defence explained to Enab Baladi that the rural areas of Idlib were among those with the highest number of incidents involving war remnants between 27 November 2024 and 14 March 2025.973 According to the GPC, the agricultural sector was particularly affected, especially in areas such as rural Idlib and other former frontline areas, where mine clearing actors faced challenges to access them.974

Refugees International noted in a report of May 2025 that only 500 families had returned to Mar'at Numman town since December 2024, since the town lacked basic infrastructure such as a water management system, a bakery, or a hospital, which had been destroyed in airstrikes. Water and food had to be delivered to the residents from Idlib City, more than 15 kilometres away.975 A survey of March 2025 found that among IDPs planning to return to frontline districts in Idlib and Hama governorates (Al Ma'ra and Suqaylabiyah, respectively), 95 % reported that their homes were 'severely damaged or destroyed'.976

☐ (g) Conflict-induced displacement and return

According to UNHCR estimates, as of 12 June 2025, there were 1 208 927 IDPs living inside IDP sites and 753 696 IDPs residing outside of IDP sites in Idlib governorate, as

well as 175 161 individuals who had returned to areas of the governorate from internal displacement since 27 November 2024.977 UNHCR further estimated that a total of 87 646 returnees who had returned from abroad since the beginning of 2024 were living in the governorate by 15 May 2025, with the vast majority of them returning to Idlib district (60 817), followed by Harim district (11 748 individuals). Since 8 December 2024, 66 447 individuals had returned to Idlib governorate from abroad, the majority of them to Idlib city.978

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