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5.8.10. Damascus governorate

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Map 12: © MapAction, Damascus governorate1393

☐ (a) Administrative division and population estimates

Damascus governorate, including Syria's capital city, is located in the country's south-west and is completely surrounded by Rural Damascus (Rif Dimashq) governorate.1394 The governorate is divided in two parts, Damascus city (which is divided into 15 sub-districts) and Yarmouk,1395 the Palestinian refugee camp south of Damascus city.1396 As of March 2025, IOM estimated the governorate's population at 1 881 146, including residents, IDPs and IDP returnees as well as arrivals from abroad.1397 In comparison, the WHO estimated Damascus' population at 1 812 584 as of March 2025.1398 For further background information on Damascus governorate, see section 2.10.1 of the EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation (October 2024).

☐ (b) Territorial control and main armed actors

As of the end of May 2025, a map by the ISW and the CTP showed Damascus governorate as being controlled by the HTS-led interim government.1399 In early May 2025, leading Druze sheiks reportedly agreed with the interim government to cede control of the Damascus-Sweida road to the state.1400

Israeli forces launched airstrikes on targets in Damascus city during the reference period.1401

☐ (c) Security trends

The International Crisis Group noted in March 2025 that the newly created GSS forces managed to quickly establish control over Damascus and some other parts of the country. In these areas, the new administration successfully restored trust and maintained public order,1402 thereby contributing to a nascent sense of security that reportedly motivated up to one million of displaced Syrians to return to their homes. 1403 In a report of April 2025 assessing conditions of return, IOM similarly noted that at the time of assessment, Damascus governorate was one of the governorates achieving 'partially conducive' conditions (scoring 3.2 on a 0-5 scale) for returning IDPs to return and reintegrate.1404 In terms of safety and security (including freedom of movement, perceptions of safety, atmosphere of public life, mine and explosive risks and reported security incidents), conditions in Damascus were identified as 'mostly conducive' (scoring 4.3/5 based on 42 assessed communities).1405 According to two sources interviewed by DIS in May, Damascus remains the most stable area in Syria, with a generally secure environment, a reduction in checkpoint arrests and a noticeable decline in security incidents.1406 SJAC assessed that there is a good level of security in Damascus and that security forces have a strong presence in the city.1407

The Harmoon Center pointed to an increase in security incidents in April such as kidnappings or armed attacks in and around Damascus governorate.1408 SOHR similarly reported on incidents of kidnapping civilians in the capital.1409 Security forces reportedly responded with the establishment of checkpoints, raids and other targeted interventions.1410 In May 2025, Etana Syria reported on a series of attacks on nightclubs in Damascus by armed men or Islamist groups, targeting venues with a mixed clientele1411 and serving alcohol.1412 In one incident, a woman was killed, 1413 and business reportedly declined in the aftermath of these incidents as customers stayed away for fear of attacks or a government crackdown on establishments serving alcohol.1414

On 22 June, a suicide bomber with apparent ties to ISIL attacked the Greek Orthodox Church in Dweila neighbourhood located on the outskirts of Damascus, leaving at least 22 persons killed and 63 wounded.1415

Sources reported on Israeli airstrikes during the reporting period: airstrikes on Damascus city on 13 March 2025 reportedly targeted facilities in the Marshrou Dummar area linked to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) movement, according to some sources. 1416According to the SNHR, four civilians were injured in the attack.1417 Renewed airstrikes on Damascus city in early April targeted alleged military infrastructure sites near the scientific research centre in Barzeh neighbourhood,1418 while an attack in early May 2025 on the area near the presidential palace was,

according to an Israeli statement, aimed at deterring threats against the Syrian Druze community and preventing the Syrian transitional government to send forces to Syria's southern areas.[1419] 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 58 security incidents in Damascus governorate (see Figure 26). For the period between 1 March and 31 May 2025, ACLED recorded 27 security incidents (defined as battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) in Damascus governorate. Of these 27 incidents, 4 were coded as battles, 5 as explosions/remote violence and 18 as incidents of violence against civilians.[1420]

1421_evolution_security_events_Damascus_dec24_may25_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Figure 26: Evolution of security events coded 'battles', 'explosions/remote violence' and 'violence against civilians' in Damascus governorate between 9 December 2024 and 31 May 2025, based on ACLED data.[1421]

According to ACLED data, unidentified armed groups were involved as main actor (coded as either 'Actor 1' or 'Actor 2') in around 67 % of all security incidents recorded during the reference period (in 18 of the 27 recorded incidents), particularly in incidents coded as violence against civilians. Police forces were involved in slightly more than 22 % of all security incidents, predominantly in incidents coded as battles, where unidentified armed groups or anti-military operations command militia were also an actor. Israeli forces were involved in around 15 % of all recorded security incidents, all of them coded as explosions/remote violence and specified as air drone strikes.[1422]

☐ (e) Civilian casualties

SNHR recorded no civilian fatalities in Damascus governorate in March[1423] and May 2025.[1424] In April 2025, SNHR recorded 2 civilian fatalities, with perpetrators unknown in both cases.[1425] SNHR does not provide further information on these fatalities. For the period between March and May 2025, UCDP recorded 15 civilian fatalities in

Damascus governorate.1426

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

As of April 2025, TNH noted that only a few streets of Jobar district had been declared safe while large parts of the area remain contaminated by landmines and other remnants of war.1427 NPA reported on the removal and controlled detonation of an unexploded missile that had been found in the basement of Jobar's grand mosque in March 2025.1428 Damascus was one of the areas where most of incidents involving war remnants occurred between 27 November 2024 and 14 March 2025, according to the Syria Civil Defence quoted by Enab Baladi.1429

The International Crisis Group noted that 'entire neighbourhoods' of Damascus city and other cities had been destroyed and that, according to an education ministry official, 30-50 % of school buildings remained unusable.1430 Enab Baladi pointed to remaining remnants of war in Yarmouk camp, as well as to the lack of electricity, water or services.1431

☐ (g) Conflict-induced displacement and return

Reuters reported on forced evictions predominantly of Alawite families in Damascus. According to two government officials quoted by Reuters, many of the affected families were former state employees living in government houses and were no longer entitled to stay as they were no longer working for state institutions. Others, however, were evicted from their private homes because of their Alawite identity, according to Reuters.1432 SOHR similarly mentioned threats of being forcibly evicted to Alawite families in a settlement near the Al-Mazzah military airbase.1433

According to UNHCR estimates, as of 15 May 2025, there were 589 271 IDPs living in Damascus governorate, as well as 5 935 individuals who had returned to areas of the governorate from internal displacement since 27 November 2024.1434 UNHCR further estimated that a total of 83 510 returnees who had returned from abroad since the beginning of 2024 were living in the governorate by 15 May 2025. No further information on the distribution of returnees at sub-district level was provided by the

source. Since 8 December 2024, 63 652 individuals had returned to Damascus governorate from abroad.1435

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