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7. Internal protection alternative

COMMON ANALYSIS | Last update: December 2025

For general guidance on the country guidance approach to this chapter, see 'EUAA, 'Internal protection alternative', in *Country Guidance Explained*, February 2025'.

Part of the country

Safety

Travel and admittance

Reasonableness to settle

General conclusion on the availability of IPA in the city of Damascus

The first step in the analysis of IPA is to identify a particular part of the country with regard to which the criteria of Article 8 QD/QR would be examined in the individual case. The example of **the city of Damascus** has been selected as it is the capital of the country and it remained the most stable area in Syria, with a generally secure environment. Following the fall of the Assad regime, the Transitional Government successfully restored trust and maintained public order.

This is without prejudice to the possibility to apply IPA to other places in Syria, provided that all criteria described hereunder are met.

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI reports: Country Focus July 2025, 1.3., 2.1., 3., 5.8.10.; Country Focus March 2025, 2.5.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as

a source of COI.

Absence of persecution or serious harm

Availability of protection against persecution or serious harm

Conclusion on safety

Absence of persecution or serious harm

When examining the element ‘absence of persecution or serious harm’, the decision-maker should refer to chapters 1 - 5 of this document.

When assessing the requirement of safety with regard to the applicability of IPA in individual cases of applicants from Syria, the following elements should be taken into account:

- **General security situation in relation to indiscriminate violence**

The general security situation in the city of Damascus should be assessed in accordance with the analysis under the section on Article 15(c) QD/QR. In this regard, it has been concluded that in the governorate of Damascus, including the city of Damascus, there is, in general, no real risk for a civilian to be personally affected within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD/QR.

- **Actor of persecution or serious harm and their reach**

There is a good level of security in Damascus and security forces have a strong presence in the city. However, in case where the applicant fears persecution or serious harm by the Transitional Government, including the factions that might have integrated into the new Syrian military, internal protection in Damascus would in general not be considered safe (please refer to The Transitional Government for further information about the potential integration of armed factions).

With regard to persecution by other actors, such as The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or other armed groups, it should be noted that there was one targeted attack on a Greek Orthodox church in Damascus' Dweila neighbourhood in June 2025. However, generally these groups are active within certain regions and their operational capacity in the city Damascus remains limited.

Therefore, the criterion of safety may be considered satisfied in most cases where the applicant fears persecution or serious harm by other actors than the Transitional Government. However, particular consideration should be given to the individual circumstances of the applicant.

- **Whether the profile of the applicant is considered a priority target and/or a threat by the actor of persecution or serious harm**

The applicant's profile could make him or her a priority target, increasing the likelihood that the actor of persecution or serious harm would attempt to trace them in the potential IPA location.

- **Behaviour of the applicant**

It is recalled that an applicant cannot be reasonably expected to abstain from practices fundamental to his or her identity, such as those related to religion or sexual orientation (16)and gender identity, in order to avoid the risk of persecution or serious harm.

- **Other risk-enhancing circumstances**

The information under 4. Refugee status should be used to assist in this assessment.

Availability of protection against persecution or serious harm

Alternatively, it may be determined that the requirement of safety is satisfied if the applicant would have access to protection against persecution or serious harm, as defined in Article 7 QD/QR, in the area where IPA is considered. In the case of persecution by the State, a presumption of non-availability of State protection applies.

Additionally, since it has been assessed that the Transitional Government does not meet the criteria of an actor of protection under Article 7 QD/QR who is able to provide effective, non-

temporary and accessible protection (see 6. Actors of protection), the requirement of safety can only be satisfied when there is an absence of persecution or serious harm in Damascus.

For example, in the case of persecution or serious harm by the **Syrian society at large**, these actors would likely have the reach necessary to target the applicant in any part of the country. Therefore, and in light of the lack of State protection, the safety requirement would in general not be met. It can be the case when the applicant faces persecution or serious harm for reasons related to the prevalent social norms in Syria (e.g. Persons with diverse SOGIESC).

Careful consideration must be given to whether, in the event of persecution or serious harm by the **family** or the **community**, these actors have the reach necessary to target the applicant in other parts of the country than their home area. If that is the case and in light of the lack of State protection, the safety requirement would in general not be met. It would apply to certain particularly vulnerable individuals, such as Women and girls and Children, in case, for example, of forced or child marriage and/or 'honour' crime.

See also 3. Actors of persecution or serious harm.

Conclusion on safety

The requirement of safety may be satisfied in the city of Damascus, depending on the profile and the individual circumstances of the applicant.

For those who have a well-founded fear of persecution or real risk of serious harm by the Transitional Government and/or by the society at large, the criterion of safety will in general not be met.

For those who have a well-founded fear of persecution or real risk of serious harm by the family and/or the community, the requirement of safety may be satisfied depending on the reach of the specific actor.

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI report: Country Focus July 2025, 3.9., 4.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

If the criterion of 'safety' is satisfied, as a next step, it has to be established whether an applicant can **safely** and **legally travel** and **gain admittance** in the city of Damascus. The general situation and the individual circumstances of the applicant should be taken into account in this assessment.

- **Safely travel**

As of January 2025, international flights to Damascus International Airport (DAM) resumed. Domestic flights between Damascus and Aleppo had already resumed on 18 December 2024. In the second half of June 2025, the military escalation in the Middle East led to the

temporary closure of airspace and air corridors leading to DAM. Aleppo airport was not affected and ground transportation between Aleppo and DAM would be provided regularly.

Freedom of movement has improved since the fall of the Assad regime and no violations regarding the freedom of movement in the country in general have been reported. Civilians can generally travel between major cities without facing restrictions. Most fixed checkpoints within urban areas have been removed and the remaining ones, mainly on intercity highways, are fewer and conduct less stringent checks. The road from Damascus airport to the city is well secured.

- **Legally travel**

Syrians returning to the country must present a national passport or ID card to enter. Passports and ID cards issued by the former government are deemed valid. Those without documents but registered in Syria's civil registries may still be allowed entry after their identity is verified through the Civil Affairs database at border checkpoints, at which point they are issued a civil record extract for entry. Additionally, Syrian diplomatic missions abroad are authorised to issue temporary travel documents and passports to facilitate the return of nationals who had lost them.

Children entering Syria must present a birth certificate and have to be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. For children born abroad who have not been registered in Syrian civil records either through diplomatic missions or domestic civil affairs offices, a birth certificate from the country of birth is required. In exceptional cases, hospital-issued birth notifications may be accepted for unregistered children at the border.

- **Gain admittance**

The Transitional Government has annulled all arrest warrants issued by Assad-era security agencies for political reasons but retained those related to criminal cases. With the judiciary still not functioning, many returnees remain in legal limbo due to unresolved criminal charges and are often prevented from leaving the country again. The authorities are working to establish a mechanism to revoke such warrants issued on false grounds by the former criminal police. Any mistreatment or targeting of returnees from abroad has not been documented.

There are no legal requirements for individuals wishing to settle in Damascus by renting or purchasing property.

It is concluded that, in general, a person can access the city of Damascus without risk, legally travel and settle there.

If the criteria of safety and travel and admittance are met, the next step in assessing the existence of an IPA in the city of Damascus is to consider the reasonableness to settle in light of the general situation in the city and the individual circumstances of the applicant. According to

Article 8(1) QD/QR, IPA can only apply if the applicant ‘can reasonably be expected to settle’ in the area of internal protection under consideration.

General situation

Individual circumstances

Conclusion on reasonableness

General situation

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI report: COI Update, 6.; Country Focus July 2025, 1.4., 3.1., 3.3., 3.4., 3.5., 3.6., 3.7., 3.9.3.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

Means of basic subsistence and employment

Despite the lifting of several sanctions, and the easing or the waiving of other sanctions by the UK, the US and/or EU in May 2025 and the clearence of Syria's arrears to the World Bank, Syria continued to face severe economic hardship. Damascus' ovrall socio-economic situation is considered just above the threshold of sustainability.

The cost of living had risen by 21 % in 2024 and more than tripled in the last two years. One in four Syrians lives in extreme poverty on less than USD 2.15 a day, while 67 % fall below the lower middle-income poverty line of USD 3.65. The minimum monthly cost of living for a family of five in Damascus had reached SYP 8 million at the end of March 2025. Household expenditures continued to exceed income levels.

According to UNDP in February 2025, 90 % of the Syrian population could no longer afford essential goods and 75 % depended on some form of humanitarian assistance. 66 % of the population lived in condition of extreme poverty, with poverty rates highest among female headed households and displaced households.

Starting in December 2024, the Transitional Government dismissed tens to hundreds of thousands of public sector employees. Civil servants working in areas previously controlled by the Syrian government faced the most severe economic challenges, with wages covering only 5.6 % of basic needs. Unemployment in Syria reached 24 % in 2024 and access to livelihoods in Damascus is considered challenging. In Damascus, 25 % of the industry and manufacturing sectors were described as non-operational.

The lack of economic opportunities and essential services pose the greatest challenge for returnees. Many households resorted to borrowing money, selling productive assets, or engaging in high-risk, degrading jobs. Many are forced into low paid and insecure informal jobs.

Cash liquidity remained limited with continued restrictions on bank withdrawals and disruptions to online payment systems. In April 2025 the Ministry of Finance introduced the digital salary directing public institutions to pay their employees through the Sham Cash electronic application starting from May 2025.

Food security

Syria remained highly dependent on food imports, making it vulnerable to fluctuations in global commodity prices and exchange rates. Soaring inflation and the depreciation of the Syrian Pound have significantly reduced purchasing power, rendering food unaffordable for large segments of the population. According to UNDP in February 2025, 60 % of the population (equal to 13.8 million) faced extreme food insecurity. As of April 2025, UN World Food Program (WFP) indicated that Damascus registered the highest Minimum Expenditure Basket in the country for the third consecutive month (equal to SYP 2 403 097), driven by elevated prices for potatoes, apples, eggplants and white beans.

Housing and shelter

About one-third of the housing units in Syria have been either destroyed or severely damaged over the conflict. This created in the suburbs of Damascus a severe shortage of housing and limited availability of residential areas. Additionally, high property prices in the city of Damascus make renting or purchasing unaffordable for most returnees, while some housing on the outskirts or in more remote areas have generally poor living conditions.

There is a certain degree of social discrimination against individuals relocating to Damascus from other parts of the country. Locals are often reluctant to rent to newcomers or charge them higher prices, based on the perception that they may not properly maintain the property.

Water and sanitation

For the first time in 50 years, Damascus faces a severe water shortage, prompting the strictest rationing since the 1950s. Residents now receive water once every three days, while many rely on costly private tankers charging USD 35–70 per 1 000 litres. In surrounding rural areas such as Qudsia, Jabal al-Ward, and al-Arein, households endure water cuts of over 90 hours, leaving families torn between thirst and financial strain. Syria is experiencing severe drought-like conditions, the worst in over 36 years, further compounding an already fragile humanitarian situation. The drought has had devastating impacts on staple crops, livestock, water access, and public health. In an assessment conducted by IOM between March and April 2025, 26 % of key

informants in Damascus lacked access to drinking water, 21 % lacked water for hygiene and 19 % did not have access to a sewage system.

Basic healthcare

More than 65 % of the Syrian population were in need of humanitarian health assistance. There is a shortage of medications for emergency conditions such as pain and infections. Maternal and child health services were found to be lacking in 48 % of cases.

In areas like Damascus, hospitals remained largely non-operational. According to IOM, 7 % of key respondents in Damascus did not have access to primary health facilities, 69 % did not have access to specialised health facilities and 19 % did not have access to emergency health facilities. In Damascus, 34 % of health centres (29 out of 86) were affected by underfunding, with an impact on approximately 712 000 individuals. Syria also faces a critical shortage of health workers, exacerbated by low salaries, which significantly hinders access to health services. Doctors working in areas like Damascus reportedly received monthly salaries as low as 30 USD.

The **general circumstances** prevailing in the city of Damascus assessed in relation to the factors above entail significant hardship. However, they **do not preclude the reasonableness to settle in the city of Damascus as such**. The person's ability to navigate the above circumstances will mostly depend on access to financial means and in some cases, the reasonableness requirement may be satisfied. The assessment should take into account the individual circumstances of the applicant.

Individual circumstances

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI report: Country Focus July 2025, 2.6., 3., 4.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

In addition to the general situation in the area of potential IPA, the assessment whether it is reasonable to settle in that part of the country should take into account the individual circumstances of the applicant, including his/her vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms. A non-exhaustive list of relevant considerations is provided below:

- **Civil documentation:** access to documentation is needed for legal employment, housing, to reclaim property and to access basic services. Individuals without documentation such as IDPs might be more vulnerable and socio-economically disadvantaged.

- **Gender:** women, particularly single women or female-headed households might face more socio-economic hardship. Female headed households including divorced and widowed women were particularly vulnerable to housing, land and property issues. Poverty rates are highest among members of this category. Girls are particularly affected by educational challenges such as curriculum gaps, language barriers and integration challenges.

- **Age:** young and elderly age could limit the applicant's access to means of subsistence such as through employment, making him or her dependent on other providers. Therefore, this element should be seen in conjuction with the available support by family or a broader support network. In the case of children, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration, for example, with regard to access to basic education. Damaged infrastructure and displacement severely disrupted access to education. Children are more at risk of malnutrition caused by the elevated prices of food.

- **Support network:** the lack of economic opportunities, the shortage of housing and high property prices in Damascus, make purchasing or renting unaffordable for most returnees. Community ties in Damascus, the support from relatives, or having access to savings or remittances, can improve access to housing, employment and support.

- **Professional and educational background and financial means:** access to livelihood in Damascus is considered challenging, with 25 % of the industry and manufacturing sectors non-operational. There is a general lack of employment opportunities and essential services. Unskilled labour is underpaid. Many households resorted to borrowing money, selling productive assets, or engaging in high-risk or degrading jobs.

- **Ethnoreligious background:** Damascus is a diverse city with minority groups. There is a degree of social discrimination against individuals relocating to Damascus from other parts of the country. While not driven by state policy, the bias stems from longstanding distinction between Damascenes and non-locals. Locals are often reluctant to rent to newcomers or charge them higher prices, based on the perception that they may not properly maintain the property.

- **State of health:** healthcare facilities are limited. In Damascus hospitals remained largely non-operational. Persons who need specialised health facilities, may not receive adequate treatment. There is limited capacity to address chronic illnesses, injuries and disabilities, particularly among vulnerable groups such as children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

These factors would often intersect, leading to different conclusions on the reasonableness of IPA. In some cases, more than one element of vulnerability would indicate that IPA is not

reasonable for the particular applicant (e.g. person with a disability without support network), while in other cases the relevant factors may balance each other (e.g. single woman with a strong support network).

Conclusion on reasonableness

The general conclusion on the reasonableness of IPA for particular profiles of applicants are based on an assessment of the general situation in the city of Damascus and the individual circumstances of such applicants, as outlined in the sections above.

Based on the general situation in the city of Damascus, and taking into account the applicable individual circumstances, internal protection in the city of Damascus may be a reasonable alternative in some cases. Such cases would include adult applicants with sufficient financial or other means or who have a support network that is willing and capable of assisting them in catering for their basic needs if they settle in the city. In this regard, the economic situation, the healthcare situation and food insecurity, should also be considered.

Taking into account the assessment with regard to the three criteria under Article 8 QD/QR, it can be concluded that internal protection alternative in the city of Damascus may be applicable in some cases.

This assessment pertaining to the city of Damascus is without prejudice to the possibility to apply IPA to other places in Syria, provided that all criteria described above are met.

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  CJEU, *X, Y and Z*, paras.70-76; CJEU, *Y and Z*, para.80.; Art.10 par.3 QR

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