



# Syria - Security Situation



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# Acknowledgements

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- Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)
- France, Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA), Information, Documentation and Research Division.

The following departments and organisations have reviewed respective parts of this report:

Belgium, Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS), Centre for Documentation and Research (Cedoca).

The review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report, but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of the EUAA.





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## Disclaimer

This report was written according to the [EUAA COI Report Methodology \(2023\)](#). The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

'Refugee', 'risk' and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither the EUAA, nor any person acting on its behalf, may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 31 August 2023. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the [Methodology](#) section of the [Introduction](#).







## Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Definition
<b>AANES</b>	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
<b>ACLED</b>	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
<b>AOAV</b>	Action on Armed Violence
<b>ERW</b>	Explosive Remnants of War
<b>EUI</b>	European University Institute
<b>GoS</b>	Government of Syria
<b>HAD</b>	Hurras al-Din
<b>HTS</b>	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>IED</b>	Improvised Explosive Device
<b>IRGC</b>	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
<b>ISIL</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State (IS), or Daesh
<b>NDF</b>	National Defence Forces
<b>NLF</b>	National Liberation Front
<b>NPA</b>	North Press Agency
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights
<b>PKK</b>	Kurdistan Workers' Party





<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>PYD</b>	Democratic Union Party (Kurdish)
<b>SAA</b>	Syrian Arab Army
<b>SDF</b>	Syrian Democratic Forces
<b>SHRC</b>	Syrian Human Rights Committee
<b>SNA</b>	Syrian National Army
<b>SNHR</b>	Syrian Network for Human Rights
<b>SOHR</b>	Syrian Observatory of Human Rights
<b>SSG</b>	Syrian Salvation Government
<b>STJ</b>	Syrians for Truth & Justice
<b>TWI</b>	Washington Institute for Near East Policy
<b>UNCOI</b>	Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic
<b>UNOCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>USDOD</b>	United States Department of Defense
<b>UXO</b>	Unexploded ordnance
<b>YPG</b>	Kurdish People's Protection Units





# Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide relevant information for the assessment of international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection, and in particular for use in updating EUAA's country guidance development on Syria.

In order to support the assessment of the application of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive on a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict, the security situation report examines the nature of armed conflicts taking place in the territory, the nature of the violence and presence of armed actors in different areas, and the impact on civilians, for example in terms of casualties/fatalities and conflict-linked displacement.

The report covers the period of August 2022 – August 2023, and provides an update of the EUAA COI report: [Syria - Security situation \(September 2022\)](#). The report should be read in conjunction with the [EUAA COI report: Syria - Country focus \(October 2023\)](#).

## Methodology

This report was jointly drafted by EUAA, national COI departments in EU+ countries<sup>1</sup> and ACCORD and reviewed by EUAA and national COI departments in EU+ countries, as mentioned in the [Acknowledgements](#) section.

This report is produced in line with the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2023)<sup>2</sup> and the EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2023).<sup>3</sup>

## Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference (ToR) of this report were defined by EUAA based on discussions held and input received from COI experts in the EUAA COI specialist network on Syria and from policy experts in EU+ countries within the framework of a Country Guidance development on Syria. The ToR also build on previous EUAA COI reports on Syria covering the same topics. The Terms of Reference for this report can be found in [Annex II](#) of this report.

## Collecting information

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 8 August 2023. Some limited additional information was added during

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<sup>1</sup> EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland.

<sup>2</sup> EUAA, EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>3</sup> EUAA, Writing and Referencing Guide for EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, February 2023, [url](#)





the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 31 August 2023.

## Quality control

To ensure that the authors respected the EUAA COI Report Methodology and that the Terms of Reference were comprehensively addressed, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report, which was finalised on 31 August 2023. EUAA also performed the final quality review and editing of the text.

## Sources

In accordance with EUAA COI methodology, a range of different published documentary sources have been consulted on relevant topics for this report. These include: COI reports by governments; information from civil society, advocacy groups, humanitarian organisations, and NGOs; international and NGO human rights reports; reports produced by various bodies of the United Nations; Syrian and regionally-based media and social media; academic publications and think tank reports and specialised sources covering Syria. All information from these sources was consulted within time constraints and within the research constraints posed by Syria's challenging information-gathering environment.

### Sources on security incidents

For data on violent incidents, publicly available curated datasets from the organisation [Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project \(ACLED\)](#) have been used. ACLED is a project collecting, analysing and mapping information on crisis and conflict in Africa, south and south-east Asia and Middle East and provides datasets on conflict incidents. It collects data on violent incidents in Syria, coding each incident with the time and place, type of violent incident, the parties involved and the number of fatalities. The information is collected in a database that is openly accessible, searchable and kept continuously up to date. The data primarily come from secondary sources such as traditional media reports, but also from reports by international institutions and non-governmental organisations, targeted new media platforms, and data provided by local partners of ACLED.<sup>4</sup> On Syria, ACLED incorporates data from a number of partners, including the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), Airwars, the Carter Center, Liveuamap, Syria Direct, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the London School of Economics' Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit, the International Security and Development Center and Clingendael Institute.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> ACLED, Methodology, April 2019, [url](#); ACLED, FAQs: ACLED Sourcing Methodology, March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> ACLED, Syria Partner Network, April 2019, [url](#); ACLED, ACLED Integrates New Partner Data on the War in Syria 5 April 2019, [url](#)





ACLED codes security incidents as follows:

- **Battles:** violent clashes between at least two armed groups. Battles can occur between armed and organised state, non-state, and external groups, and in any combination therein. Sub-events of battles are armed clashes, government regains territory and non-state actor overtakes territory.
- **Violence against civilians:** violent events where an organised armed group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants. It includes violent attacks on unarmed civilians such as sexual violence, attacks, abduction/forced disappearance.
- **Explosions/remote violence:** events where an explosion, bomb or other explosive device were used to engage in conflict. They include one-sided violent events in which the tool for engaging in conflict creates asymmetry by taking away the ability of the targets to engage or defend themselves and their location. They include air/drone strikes, suicide bombs, shelling/artillery/missile attack, remote explosive/landmine/IED, grenade, chemical weapon.
- **Riots:** a violent demonstration, often involving a spontaneous action by unorganised, unaffiliated members of society. They include violent demonstration, mob violence.
- **Protests:** public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them. It includes peaceful protests, protests with intervention, excessive force against protesters.
- **Strategic developments:** information regarding the activities of violent groups that is not itself recorded as political violence, yet may trigger future events or contribute to political dynamics within and across states. It includes agreements, change to group/activity, non-violent transfer of territory, arrests.<sup>6</sup>

For the purpose of this report only the following type of events were included in the analysis: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. Security incidents numbers and associated graphs/maps at country and governorate level are based on a publicly available ACLED dataset for Middle East.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, ACLED codes actors involved in security incidents as follows: Actor1 is the ‘named actor involved in the event’ and Actor2 is the ‘named actor involved in the event, while [i]n most cases, an event requires two actors, noted in columns ‘ACTOR1’ and ‘ACTOR2’. However, event types ‘Explosions/Remote violence’, ‘Riots’, ‘Protests’, and ‘Strategic developments’ can include ‘one-sided events’.<sup>8</sup> The ACLED coding of Actor1 and Actor2 does not necessarily indicate that one is the aggressor (e.g. Actor1) and the other one (e.g. Actor2) the target or victim.<sup>9</sup> When focusing on the involvement of specific actors within certain regions, the drafters based their analysis on all those incidents, where ACLED coded the relevant actor either as ‘Actor1’ or as ‘Actor2’. This approach aims to illustrate the general level of involvement of the respective actors in the conflict without distinguishing between Actor1 and Actor2, as these categories, according to ACLED's methodology, do not indicate any differentiation in terms of content/semantics.

Potential limits for COI use of ACLED data include:

<sup>6</sup> ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, 2023, [url](#), pp. 10-20

<sup>7</sup> ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>8</sup> ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, 2023, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>9</sup> ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, 2023, [url](#), p. 4





- Data primarily come from secondary sources such as media reports. Secondary sources used by ACLED are of variable quality, may be politically biased, and may lack comprehensiveness.
- Certain secondary sources might be overrepresented in ACLED datasets covering security incidents in a specific country/province.
- Lack of reporting or underreporting for specific countries/provinces can occur.
- Geographical precision of security incidents is variable: the provincial capital will represent the region if no further precisions are available and may be over-represented.

To mitigate these challenges and limitations, ACLED data on security incidents has been corroborated/contrasted with information from other sources which were available over the reference period.

## Sources on civilian casualties

The main source on civilian fatalities in Syria used in this report is the Syrian Network of Human Rights (SNHR). The [Syrian Network of Human Rights \(SNHR\)](#) is a non-profit human rights organisation founded in 2011 which works on documenting human rights violations in Syria. SNHR relies on a network of volunteers in each governorate to compile lists of civilian fatalities and verify victims' identities by photo or video and by speaking with family members, witnesses, and hospitals. SNHR reports fatalities by gender, age, perpetrator, governorate, and other classifications. It only records civilian fatalities – with the exception of the death toll among victims who died due to torture, which includes armed combatants and civilians.<sup>10</sup> SNHR provided EUAA with its dataset on civilian fatalities for the period August 2022 – June 2023.

Where available, information from other sources documenting civilian casualties in the Syrian conflict (Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, the Syrian Human Rights Committee, Action on Armed Violence, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Uppsala Conflict Data Program) has been included.

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<sup>10</sup> For detailed information on SNHR's methodology see [url](#); SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 1,734 Civilians in Syria in 2020, Including 99 in December, 1 January 2021, [url](#), p. 4



# Maps

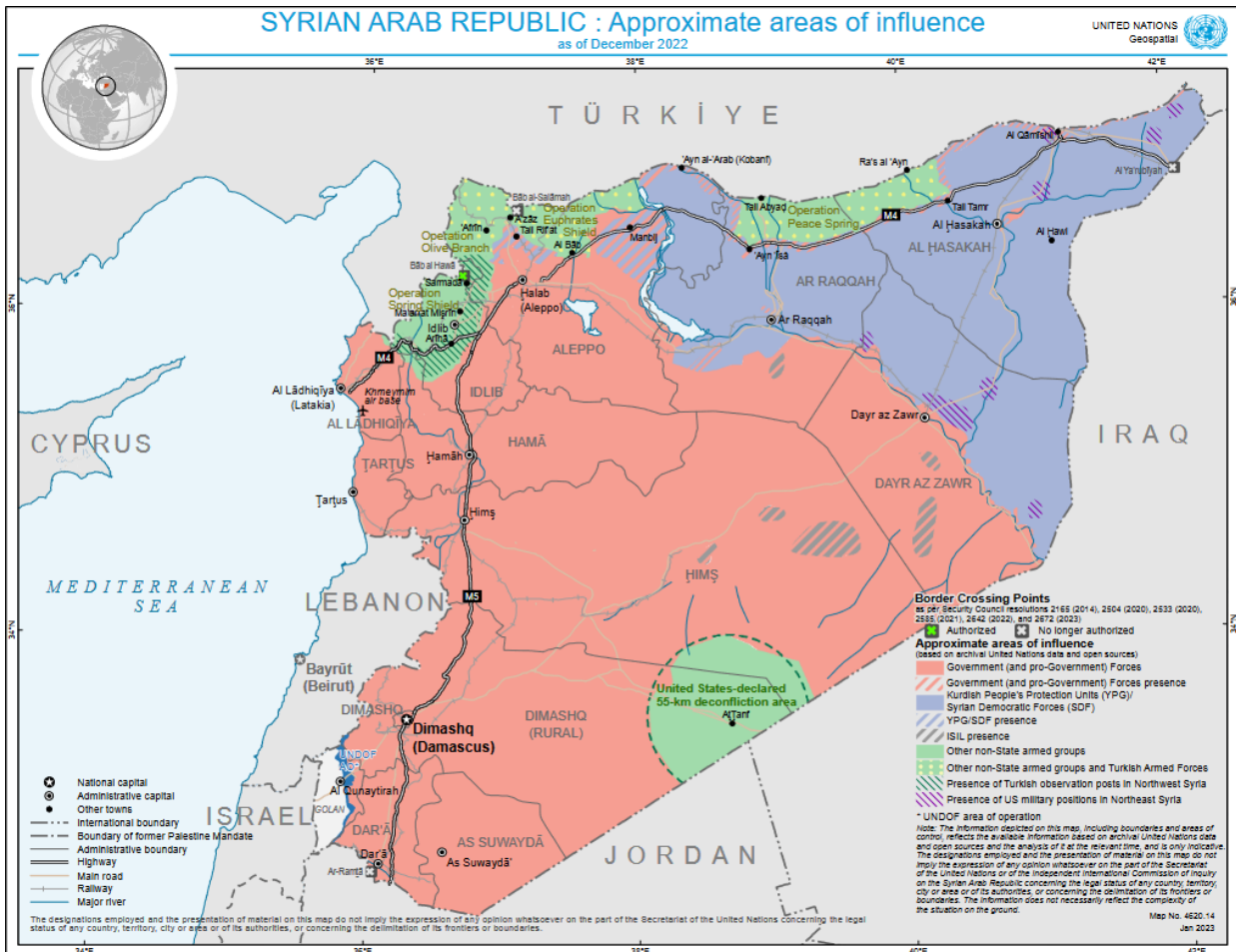


Map 1: Syrian Arab Republic, © United Nations <sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Syria, Map No. 4204 Rev. 3, April 2012, United Nations, [url](#)

# 1. General description of the security situation

## 1.1. Overview of conflicts



**Map 2: Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022, © UN Geospatial<sup>12</sup>**

Since a March 2020 ceasefire negotiated between Türkiye and Russia froze the last major frontline in Idlib province, the country has de facto been partitioned into four main areas controlled by different parties to the conflict: the GoS-controlled area with backing from Russia and Iran, the northeast controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) backed by the US, a territory in northern Syria under control of the Syrian National Army (SNA) backed by Türkiye and the area in the northwest controlled by the rebel group Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham

<sup>12</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022, January 2023, [url](#)





(HTS).<sup>13</sup> While the frontlines have remained static, the conflict has changed from large-scale military clashes to localised clashes between armed groups and government forces.<sup>14</sup>

The UNCOI noted, for the period July until December 2022, an increase in mutual attacks between SDF forces on one side and Türkiye and SNA on the other side in the country's north, as well as ongoing instability in the southern governorate of Dar'a, with clashes between armed groups as well as attacks on civilians.<sup>15</sup> It further reported airstrikes by Russian forces on areas held by HTS in the north-west, as well as Israeli airstrikes in several governorates.<sup>16</sup> In the first half of 2023, ongoing hostilities including airstrikes, ground-based strikes and targeted attacks affected the North and Northwest in particular.<sup>17</sup> ISIL cells continued to be active in the Syrian desert<sup>18</sup> as well as in the southern governorate of Dar'a.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.2. Political developments

States from the region such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have re-established diplomatic relations with Syria<sup>20</sup> and the country was officially readmitted to the Arab League at the start of May 2023.<sup>21</sup> President Bashar Al-Assad attended the Arab League Summit in Jeddah soon after.<sup>22</sup> Efforts made by the Gulf states and Jordan to normalise ties were reportedly aimed at getting the Syrian government to stem the flow of drugs (such as Captagon pills) being trafficked from Syria across the region.<sup>23</sup> Multilateral efforts for a political solution to the Syrian conflict yielded no results,<sup>24</sup> namely the 20<sup>th</sup> round of the Astana talks, a forum bringing together the Syrian government and opposition delegations,<sup>25</sup> as well as Russia, Iran and Türkiye.<sup>26</sup> Meetings of the Syrian Constitutional Committee in Geneva under supervision of the UN special envoy to Syria similarly did not

<sup>13</sup> IISS, Syria's frozen conflict and a wave of earthquake-related diplomacy, April 2023, [url](#); A more detailed description of the different armed actors and the conflicts they are involved in is provided by the Rule of Law in Armed Conflicts project (RULAC). It distinguishes between [non-international armed conflicts](#) and [international armed conflicts](#) in Syria.

<sup>14</sup> Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 272

<sup>15</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 12-13

<sup>16</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 15-16

<sup>17</sup> DW, What's behind the latest Russian airstrikes in Syria?, 2 July 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); para. 6-7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>18</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, January – March 2023, 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 1; BBC News, IS truffle picker attacks: At least 26 killed in Syrian desert ambush, 17 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>19</sup> NPA, Three dead including ISIS member in Syria's Daraa, 9 April 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, October – December 2022, 1 May 2023, [url](#), p. 2; Hassan, M., ISIS is back in the open in southern Syria, MEI, 29 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>20</sup> VOA, Syria's Readmission to Arab League Just One Step in Long Process, 11 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>21</sup> Reuters, Arab League readmits Syria as relations with Assad normalise, 8 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>22</sup> Al Jazeera, Analysis: How important is Syria's return to the Arab League?, 19 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> AP News, A little white pill, Captagon, gives Syria's Assad a strong tool in winning over Arab states, 9 June 2023, [url](#); France 24, War on Captagon key to Syria's return to Arab League, 19 May 2023, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Saudi Arabia seizes 8 million Captagon pills as it courts Syria's Assad to clamp down, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>24</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>25</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Astana 20th round on Syria: What's new?, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>26</sup> Reuters, Kazakhstan unexpectedly proposes ending Syria talks in Astana, 21 June 2023, [url](#)





make any progress<sup>27</sup> and their latest round scheduled for July 2023 was postponed indefinitely.<sup>28</sup>

The Bab Al-Hawa border crossing between Türkiye and Idlib governorate remained the only access gateway for international humanitarian aid due to the veto power of Russia and China in the UN Security Council.<sup>29</sup> In January 2023, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2672 extending the mandate to deliver aid into north-west Syria via this crossing for six months until 10 July 2023.<sup>30</sup> Following the failure of the Security Council to reach an agreement for further extension after 10 July 2023, a deal was reached with the GoS to keep the border crossing open for another six months.<sup>31</sup> The GoS further allowed the UN to use the additional border crossings Bab Al-Salama and Al-Rai until 13 November 2023 to deliver assistance.<sup>32</sup>

### 1.3. International involvement

Further information on involvement of international actors is available in section 1.3 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security Situation \(September 2022\)](#).

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<sup>27</sup> SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 118

<sup>28</sup> New Arab (The), Syria Constitutional Committee's ninth session delayed, 16 July 2022, [url](#); Syrian Negotiations Commission, Ninth Session of Syrian Constitutional Committee Meetings is postponed, 16 July 2022, [url](#)

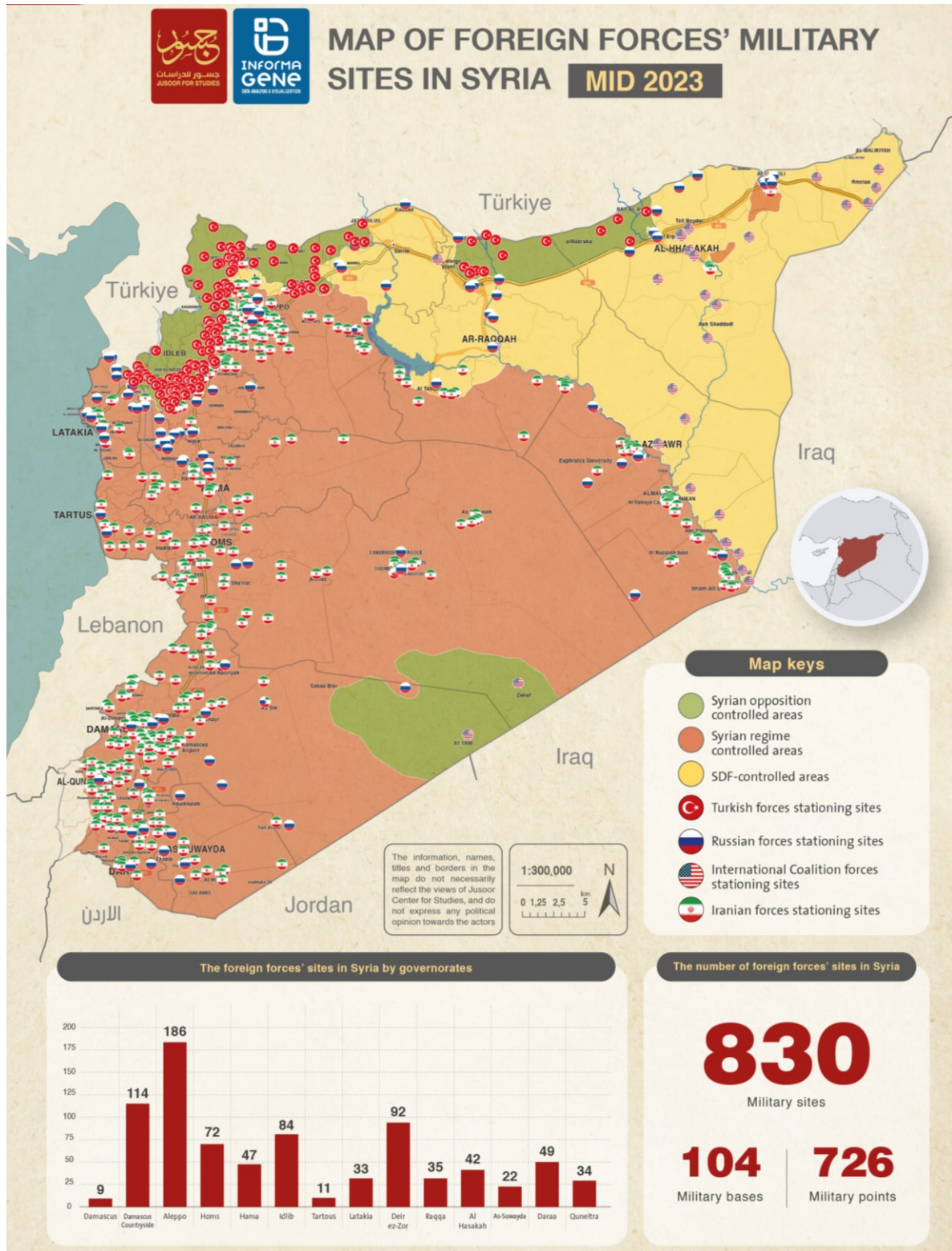
<sup>29</sup> CNN, 'Secondary disaster' looms as UN aid finally reaches survivors battling frozen conditions in Syria, 10 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>30</sup> UN, Adopting Resolution 2672 (2023), Security Council Renews Cross-Border Aid Operations into North-West Syria for Six Months, Requests Special Report on Humanitarian Needs, 9 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> UN News, UN: Deal reached with Syria to reopen main border crossing from Türkiye, 9 August 2023, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Syria tells UN it will grant aid access via Bab al-Hawa, 13 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>32</sup> VOA, Syria and UN Agree on Bab al-Hawa Crossing to Opposition Areas, 9 August 2023, [url](#)





Map 3: Map of Foreign Forces' Military Sites in Syria mid-2023, © Jusoor for Studies<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

### 1.3.1 Russia

As of mid-2023, Russia controlled about 20 military bases and 85 military points in the country, scattered across GoS-held territory as well as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) region.<sup>34</sup> Important military strongholds are the Hmeimim air base in Latakia governorate, from which Russia launched air strikes as well as the naval base in Tartous.<sup>35</sup> An investigation by Novaya Gazeta into Russian presence in Syria estimated Hmeimim to host 20 000 Russian soldiers as well as mercenary fighters. The same source referring to a 2018 investigation by the Russian website Newizv estimated the size of Russian troops to be around 65 000, a third of them being members of the military police.<sup>36</sup> In April 2023, around 1 200 personnel of Russia's Wagner mercenary group were stationed in Palmyra in eastern Homs to assist GoS troops in fighting ISIL elements.<sup>37</sup>

In light of the war in Ukraine, there were reports of Russia reducing the size of its combat troops in Syria and redeploying them as well as military equipment such as a missile system to Ukraine.<sup>38</sup> Two senior Western diplomats and a senior Israeli defence official interviewed by the New York Times gave varying estimates regarding the reduction in troop size, between 1 200 to 1 600 or more.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, other sources reported that Russian and GoS military reinforcements were sent to SDF-controlled areas in northern Aleppo governorate upon request of the SDF<sup>40</sup> and that Russian forces originally withdrawn and deployed in Ukraine had been sent back to Syria, leading to a resurgence of Russian military activity.<sup>41</sup> A February 2023 article summarised Russia's activities as involving fewer military operations, continued undertaking of airstrikes<sup>42</sup> as well as joint military exercises with the SAA.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Russia continued to be involved in joint military patrols with Türkiye in northern Syria.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>35</sup> Reuters, Syria's Assad would like more Russian bases and troops, 16 March 2023, [url](#); Novaya Gazeta Europe, Hmeimim pays no bills, 19 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>36</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe, Hmeimim pays no bills, 19 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>37</sup> Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>38</sup> New York Times (The), Russia Shrinks Forces in Syria, a Factor in Israeli Strategy There, 19 October 2022, [url](#); Smagin, N., Moscow's Original "Special Operation": Why Russia Is Staying in Syria, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 7 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>39</sup> New York Times (The), Russia Shrinks Forces in Syria, a Factor in Israeli Strategy There, 19 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>40</sup> France 24, موسكو ترسل تعزيزات عسكرية إلى مناطق في سوريا تحت سيطرة الأكراد والنظام وسط استمرار التهديدات التركية, 30 November 2022, [url](#); Kurdistan 24: Syrian government brings reinforcements to frontlines in Manbij: SOHR, 4 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>41</sup> Bousset, P., US Al-Tanf Military Garrison: The Epicenter of Tumult, EPC, 16 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>42</sup> Airwars continued to monitor the impact of Russian airstrikes and recorded civilian casualties. The continually updated tracker is available via the following link: [url](#)

<sup>43</sup> Smagin, N., Moscow's Original "Special Operation": Why Russia Is Staying in Syria, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 7 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>44</sup> Syria TV, تركيا تشارك روسيا بتسيير الدورية الـ138 في عين العرب, 22 May 2023, [url](#); NPA, Russia, Turkey conduct 129th joint patrol in Syria's Kobani, 6 March 2023, [url](#); AP News, Turkish, Russian forces could 'expand' Syria joint patrols, 4 January 2023, [url](#)



### 1.3.2 Iran and pro-Iranian militias

The goal behind Iran's involvement in the conflict is to help the GoS regain control over the entire Syrian territory as well as to establish a land corridor under its influence via which to supply the Lebanese Hezbollah with arms.<sup>45</sup> Jusoor for Studies in mid-2023 noted an increase in Iranian military sites compared to 2022 especially in the south of the country, reaching a total of 55 military bases and 515 military points.<sup>46</sup> According to a Lebanese military expert, there were about 1 800 Iranian military advisers in the country, most of whom were deployed with Syrian troops.<sup>47</sup> The Iranian presence consisted of the Quds force, a branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as well as of many affiliated militias.<sup>48</sup> Among these affiliated militias were local Syrian outfits such as Liwa Al-Baqir made up of members of the Baqara tribe<sup>49</sup> and Liwa Al-Quds consisting of Palestinian fighters<sup>50</sup>, as well as foreign militias such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Iraqi groups Hezbollah Al-Nujaba, Kata'ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada and Abu Al-Fadl Al-Abbas<sup>51</sup>, the Afghan Fatemiyoun (Fatimid) Brigade and the Pakistani Zainebiyoun Brigade.<sup>52</sup> These pro-Iranian militias were reportedly present along the Euphrates, in and around Aleppo city and the wider Damascus area, in the Syrian desert as well as in the south of the country,<sup>53</sup> together comprising about 40 000 personnel.<sup>54</sup> According to several sources, Iran extended its influence by moving into military positions previously vacated by Russian troops redeployed to Ukraine.<sup>55</sup>

As indicated in a June 2023 article published by Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) Sentinel, the Quds Force was shifting its presence and weapons depots further north in order to avoid Israeli missile strikes as well as to be closer to Shiite areas such as Al-Zahraa and Nubl in Aleppo countryside and closer to disputed areas in Idlib, Tall Rifaat, Hasaka and Raqqa.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, small groups of fighters were discreetly moved across the southern governorates to be stationed close to the Golan heights.<sup>57</sup> Iranian-backed militias launched sporadic attacks on US military personnel in the northeast of the country using drone strikes.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Soufan Center (The), IntelBrief: Implications of Escalating U.S. Clashes with Iran-Backed Forces in Syria, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>46</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>47</sup> Arab Weekly (The), Israeli strikes on Syria intensify, raise tensions with Iran, 6 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>48</sup> Bousset, P., The Quds Force in Syria: Combatants, Units, and Actions, CTC Sentinel, June 2023, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>49</sup> ORSAM Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Iran-backed militia in Syria: Profiles and Functions, 21 September 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>50</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Serving Power: The Role of Loyalist Militias in Securing the Assad Regime, ISPI, 15 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>51</sup> ORSAM Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Iran-backed militia in Syria: Profiles and Functions, 21 September 2022, [url](#), pp. 8-9, 11

<sup>52</sup> ORSAM Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Iran-backed militia in Syria: Profiles and Functions, 21 September 2022, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>53</sup> Galia, E., The Pro-Iranian Militias in Syria, ITIC, 29 March 2023, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>54</sup> Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>55</sup> Azizi, H., Syria's Militias: Continuity and Change After Regime Survival, ISPI, 22 March 2023, [url](#); Bousset, P., US Al-Tanf Military Garrison: The Epicenter of Tumult, EPC, 16 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>56</sup> Bousset, P., The Quds Force in Syria: Combatants, Units, and Actions, CTC Sentinel, June 2023, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>57</sup> Bousset, P., The Quds Force in Syria: Combatants, Units, and Actions, CTC Sentinel, June 2023, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>58</sup> Arab News, US military downs Iranian-made drone in Syria, 15 February 2023, [url](#); VOA, Iranian-Backed Attacks on US Forces in Syria Caused 23 Traumatic Brain Injuries, Pentagon Says, 17 April 2023, [url](#)



One such drone strike in March 2023 on a US military base in Hasaka led to a series of clashes between US forces and militia linked to the IRGC.<sup>59</sup>

### 1.3.3 Türkiye

As of mid-2023, Turkish military forces had 12 military bases and 113 military points in Syria,<sup>60</sup> especially in SNA-held territory as well as Idlib in the country's north and north-west,<sup>61</sup> comprising an estimated 10 000 troops.<sup>62</sup> Generally, Türkiye's policy regarding Syria has shifted from wanting to depose Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad to preventing the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Syria and keeping Kurdish armed groups at bay.<sup>63</sup> Meetings between the defence and intelligence chiefs of Türkiye and the GoS suggested a rapprochement between both countries. However, the demands of each side remained incompatible, such as Damascus insisting on the withdrawal of the Turkish military presence and Ankara maintaining relations with the Syrian opposition.<sup>64</sup>

Airwars<sup>65</sup> continued to monitor Turkish airstrikes in Syria, which, between July 2022 and July 2023, were carried out in northern Aleppo, Raqqa and Hasaka governorates and lead to several civilian deaths each month.<sup>66</sup> On 20 November 2022, the Turkish military as part of its military operation Claw-Sword carried out a series of drone and airstrikes targeting oil and energy infrastructure in SDF-controlled areas.<sup>67</sup> The attacks struck densely populated areas, displaced residents and, according to a local NGO, killed more than 10 civilians.<sup>68</sup> In the course of the operation, the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan further threatened another ground offensive of Turkish military in northeastern Syria and expressed his wish to create a 'security corridor' along his country's southern border.<sup>69</sup> The ground offensive was stalled because of Russian and US pressure,<sup>70</sup> according to a statement by the commander of the SDF at the beginning of December 2022.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Soufan Center (The), IntelBrief: Implications of Escalating U.S. Clashes with Iran-Backed Forces in Syria, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>60</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>61</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>62</sup> International Crisis Group, Türkiye's Syria Policy after Erdoğan's Win , 20 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>63</sup> Halabi, F., The Turkish Elections and the Future of Northwest Syria: Scenarios and Policy Implications, MEI, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>64</sup> Jusoor for Studies, No political prospects for Türkiye - Syrian regime rapprochement talks, April 2023, [url](#);

Al Jazeera, Assad welcomes new Russian bases in Syria after Putin meeting, 16 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>65</sup> Airwars is a non-profit watchdog organisation that promotes transparency by monitoring and investigating claims of civilian harm primarily due to the use of explosive weapons in conflict-affected countries, including Syria. For more information see Airwars, Who we are, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>66</sup> Airwars, Turkish Military in Iraq & Syria, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>67</sup> STJ, Northeastern Syria: Unprecedented Turkish Strikes on Energy Infrastructure, 19 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>68</sup> HRW, Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Exacerbate Humanitarian Crisis, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>69</sup> BBC News, Turkey will launch Syria ground operation after strikes – Erdogan, 23 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>70</sup> IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 305

<sup>71</sup> Newlines Institute, Operation Claw-Sword Exposes Blind Spots in the US' NE Syria Strategy [Timeline], 7 March 2023, [url](#)



In areas in northern Syria under Turkish control, administrative and governance structures took shape encompassing education, health, infrastructure and energy services, with supervision being carried out by the respective neighbouring Turkish provinces.<sup>72</sup>

### 1.3.4 US-led Coalition against ISIL

The US forces comprise about 900 personnel deployed to support local partners in combatting ISIL in Syria.<sup>73</sup> Further aims of the deployment are to foil Russian and Iranian ambitions in the region.<sup>74</sup> As of mid-2023, US forces had 17 military bases and 13 military points in Syria, most of them in the territory under Kurdish administration.<sup>75</sup> Outside the SDF-controlled areas, the US army maintained a garrison at Al-Tanf near the borders of Iraq and Jordan,<sup>76</sup> housing 100-200 men as well as a small Syrian rebel group.<sup>77</sup> The US army continued to support the SDF in areas under its control with carrying out raids against suspected ISIL elements.<sup>78</sup> During the reference period, US troops together with SDF or Asayish internal security forces ran joint patrols in northeast Syria.<sup>79</sup> In May 2023, it was reported that the US-led coalition had started building a new military base in Raqqa governorate west of the city of Tabqa.<sup>80</sup> In July 2023, military and logistic reinforcements for US facilities in Rmelan, Tall Baydar and Al-Shaddadi in Hasaka governorate were sent through the Al-Waleed border crossing with Iraq.<sup>81</sup> Due to Iranian attacks against US forces, anti-ISIL operations had to be intermittently put on hold<sup>82</sup> in order to increase force protection and reallocate assets to monitor Iranian threats, for example, in March 2023, when one such attack killed a US contractor.<sup>83</sup> According to a January 2023 report by the Emirates Policy Center,<sup>84</sup> incidents involving Iranian drone strikes as well as US retaliatory attacks regularly occurred in the area of the Al-Tanf garrison.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Halabi, F., The Turkish Elections and the Future of Northwest Syria: Scenarios and Policy Implications, MEI, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>73</sup> Soufan Center (The), IntelBrief: Implications of Escalating U.S. Clashes with Iran-Backed Forces in Syria, 27 March 2023, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Iran plans to escalate attacks against U.S. troops in Syria, documents show, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>74</sup> Washington Post (The), Iran plans to escalate attacks against U.S. troops in Syria, documents show, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>75</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>76</sup> International Crisis Group, Al-Tanf, Syria, 31 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>77</sup> Bousset, P., US Al-Tanf Military Garrison: The Epicenter of Tumult, EPC, 16 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>78</sup> SNHR, At Least 226 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in May, Including Six Children and 11 Women, 2 June 2023, [url](#), p. 4; ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, May 17, 2023, 19 May 2023, [url](#); ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, February 22, 2023, 24 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>79</sup> NPA, US troops conduct patrols in Syria's Derbasiyah, 9 July 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Turkish deadline for SDF withdrawal from northern Syria: Source, 7 December 2022, [url](#); Rudaw, US-led forces resume normal patrols in Syria, 2 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>80</sup> New Arab (The), US-led coalition against Islamic State building new base in northern Syria, 24 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>81</sup> MEMO, US army sends military, logistic reinforcements to Syria, 13 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>82</sup> International Crisis Group, Al-Tanf, Syria, 31 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>83</sup> ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, June 28, 2023, 30 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>84</sup> The Emirates Policy Center is an Abu Dhabi-based think tank focussing on the impact of geopolitical developments on the United Arab Emirates. See EPC, About us, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>85</sup> Bousset, P., US Al-Tanf Military Garrison: The Epicenter of Tumult, EPC, 16 January 2023, [url](#)



### 1.3.5 Israel

Israel's military strategy in Syria aims to put an end to Iranian infiltration into the south of Syria close to its own borders as well as at preventing Iran from providing Hezbollah with sophisticated weapons.<sup>86</sup> Jusoor for Studies recorded 11 Israeli airstrikes between August 2022 and the end of 2022 targeting IRGC and Hezbollah facilities in Rural Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and further governorates.<sup>87</sup> In February 2023, Syrian state media reported a presumed Israeli airstrike on a Damascus residential area resulting in civilian casualties.<sup>88</sup> March and April 2023 saw an increase in suspected Israeli strikes targeting Iranian and Hezbollah military infrastructure as well as specific individuals.<sup>89</sup> Further airstrikes temporarily stopped operations at the country's two largest airports, in Damascus in January 2023<sup>90</sup> and Aleppo in May<sup>91</sup> and August 2023.<sup>92</sup>

## 1.4. Armed actors

### 1.4.1. Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

The Syrian armed forces consist of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) (which includes the Republican Guard), the Naval Forces, Air Forces, Air Defence Forces and National Defence Forces (NDF, a pro-government militia). The Syrian military was further supported by the Russian military, the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).<sup>93</sup>

The commander in chief of the Syrian armed forces is the Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad,<sup>94</sup> who personally appoints commanders, chiefs and officers of all army units through presidential decrees and decisions.<sup>95</sup> According to estimated figures provided by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Military Balance of 2023, the Syrian armed forces comprised 169 000 active military personnel, 130 000 of whom formed the Syrian Arab Army, with its main and best trained fighting groups being the Fourth Division, the Republican Guard, the Special Forces (including the former Tiger Forces<sup>96</sup>) and the Fifth Assault Corps. A further estimated 100 000 persons belonged to state-allied paramilitary militia, such as the NDF (50 000), foreign militias of Afghan, Pakistani and Iraqi origin (50 000), partially receiving

<sup>86</sup> Arab Weekly (The), Israeli strikes on Syria intensify, raise tensions with Iran, 6 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>87</sup> Jusoor for Studies, The Israeli strikes in Syria during 2022, 28 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>88</sup> Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes, 20 February 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>89</sup> Al-Monitor, Israel shells Hezbollah targets in Syria in latest escalation, 24 April 2023, [url](#); Arab Weekly (The), Israeli strikes on Syria intensify, raise tensions with Iran, 6 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>90</sup> DW, Syria says Israeli strike briefly paralyzed Damascus airport, 2 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>91</sup> France 24, Israeli air strikes kill one soldier, put Syria's Aleppo airport out of service, 2 May 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 8

<sup>92</sup> AP News, Reported Israeli strike damages Aleppo airport and puts it out of service, 28 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>93</sup> US, CIA, World Factbook, Syria, last updated: 1 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>94</sup> SANA, President al-Assad issues administrative order to end military personnel retention of some soldiers, 17 July 2023, [url](#); Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>95</sup> Omran Center for Strategic Studies, The Chain of Command in the Syrian Military: Formal and Informal Tracks, 9 November 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>96</sup> The Tiger Forces in 2019 were renamed to 25<sup>th</sup> Special Tasks Division, Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023, [url](#), p. 14





Iranian support. The Lebanese Hezbollah was estimated to have between 7 000 and 8 000 fighters in the country.<sup>97</sup>

Alawites hold the most important positions in the SAA,<sup>98</sup> and elite divisions such as the Republican Guard and the Fourth Division were reportedly mostly Alawite.<sup>99</sup> The Fourth Division led by Bashar Al-Assad's brother Maher reportedly amassed power and influence, expanding its military, economic and criminal activities.<sup>100</sup> The military core of this division consisted of 15 000-20 000 men, deployed throughout the country but mainly present near the capital and its western and southwestern peripheries.<sup>101</sup> By strategically controlling checkpoints situated at international border crossings such as with Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq as well as checkpoints leading to rebel-controlled areas, the Fourth Division collected revenues by imposing taxes on licit and illicit goods.<sup>102</sup> The Fifth Corps was established and is backed by Russia.<sup>103</sup> Its core brigades are stationed with Russian forces in Hama governorate, whereas the brigades deployed in the south are less well trained with its fighting force largely consisting of former rebels who reconciled with the government as well as of arrested petty criminals.<sup>104</sup>

The government-allied Palestinian Al-Quds Brigade (Liwa Al-Quds) has come to dominate the Palestinian camps in Aleppo, Latakia, Hama and Homs as a political and military force.<sup>105</sup> The brigade was further deployed in the Syrian desert to fight ISIL elements.<sup>106</sup>

Despite controlling about two thirds of the country, the GoS continued to be confronted with a low-level insurgency waged by ISIL cells in the central desert.<sup>107</sup> ISIL militants temporarily managed to capture uninhabited villages from government forces and control valleys (*wadis*) and unsettled lands in the desert region, especially in eastern Homs. The government fought back with ground forces mainly consisting of NDF, Al-Quds Brigade and Fourth Division fighters as well as limited airstrike support.<sup>108</sup> In the south of the country, particularly in Dar'a governorate, clashes and targeted killings were reported between GoS forces and armed groups.<sup>109</sup> There, the GoS forces employed raids, airstrikes and missile attacks to consolidate

<sup>97</sup> IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), pp. 354-356

<sup>98</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023, [url](#), p. 5; AIMustafa, M., The Syrian Regime Signals Legal and Military Shifts to the World, TIMEP, 17 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>99</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023, [url](#), p. 12; Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>100</sup> Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), pp. 3, 7, 18-21

<sup>101</sup> Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>102</sup> Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>103</sup> ISW and CTP, Iran Update, July 20, 2023, 20 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>104</sup> Waters, G., From Tiger Forces to the 16th Brigade: Russia's evolving Syrian proxies, MEI, 12 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>105</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Serving Power: The Role of Loyalist Militias in Securing the Assad Regime, ISPI, 15 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>106</sup> New Arab (The), قتلى من مليشيا "لواء القدس" في هجوم لـ"داعش" شرقي سورية [Fighters from Al-Quds Brigade killed in ISIL attack in eastern Syria], 8 June 2023, [url](#); Al-Ghazi, S., Serving Power: The Role of Loyalist Militias in Securing the Assad Regime, ISPI, 15 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>107</sup> Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 273

<sup>108</sup> Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>109</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 23



power and force out armed opposition groups.<sup>110</sup> They further employed siege tactics, such as in the town of Tafas in August 2022, in order to force settlements with local rebels.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, the GoS increased its presence in SDF-held areas by sending army reinforcements to eastern Aleppo countryside as well as Ain Issa in northern Raqqa, close to the frontlines with Turkish-backed armed groups.<sup>112</sup>

During the reporting period, GoS forces continued to employ ground-based and aerial attacks on populated areas resulting in civilian casualties.<sup>113</sup> They were further responsible for extrajudicial killings and deaths in detention centres due to torture and medical negligence.<sup>114</sup>

#### 1.4.2. The Syrian National Army

The Syrian National Army (SNA) is the umbrella organisation of a loose formation of militias backed by Türkiye<sup>115</sup> and several Gulf states,<sup>116</sup> and consists of former Free Syrian Army (FSA) groups, Islamist factions,<sup>117</sup> Syrian Arab Army defectors, civilians,<sup>118</sup> as well as Syrians who have sought refuge in Türkiye.<sup>119</sup> The SNA controls two areas adjoining the Turkish border, the first covers the northern countryside of Aleppo from Afrin to Jarablus,<sup>120</sup> and the second one spans from Tall Abyad to Ras al-Ayn, in the north of Raqqa and Hasaka governorates.<sup>121</sup>

According to estimated figures provided by the IISS Military Balance of 2023, the SNA comprised 70 000 fighters.<sup>122</sup> These fighters form more than 40 SNA factions<sup>123</sup> and receive their salaries from Türkiye,<sup>124</sup> but also by Qatar.<sup>125</sup> The SNA forces play an essential role in day-to-day matters in the areas under their control, 'impacting everything from the security

<sup>110</sup> Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 273; Haid, H., Assad's strategy in southern Syria is fated to fail, Arab News, 13 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>111</sup> New Arab (The), "طفس" بسبب حصار قوات النظام [Syria: Great losses for farmers of Tafas because of siege by regime forces], 20 August 2022, [url](#); NPA, Town in Syria's Daraa subjects to frequent operations by government forces, 15 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>112</sup> Rozana Radio, قوات النظام السوري تواصل إرسال تعزيزاتها إلى منبج [Syrian regime forces continue to send reinforcements to Manbij], 19 December 2022, [url](#); Syria TV, النظام السوري يرسل تعزيزات عسكرية إلى عين عيسى لمساندة قسد [Syrian regime sends military reinforcements to Ayn Aissa to help the SDF], 21 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>113</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 22

<sup>114</sup> SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>115</sup> Arab News, Will Türkiye abandon Syria's rebels?, 3 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>116</sup> Al Jazeera, Twelve years on from the beginning of Syria's war, 15 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>117</sup> CEP, Armed Opposition Groups in Northwest Syria, 27 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>118</sup> Al Jazeera, Twelve years on from the beginning of Syria's war, 15 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>119</sup> Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>120</sup> ACAPS, Syria: Assessing increased protection risks and vulnerabilities after the earthquakes, 16 June 2023, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>121</sup> Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 3; Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria - June 2023 [Map], 10 July 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria - June 2023 [Map], 5 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>122</sup> IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 356

<sup>123</sup> HRW, Syria: Turkey-Backed Fighters Kill 4 Kurdish Civilians, 22 March 2023, [url](#); MEMO, Türkiye to restructure Syrian rebel military, disband SNA factions after HTS withdraws from Afrin, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>124</sup> CEP, Armed Opposition Groups in Northwest Syria, 27 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>125</sup> Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 6



situation to real estate sales, business dealings, the work of NGOs, and local governance institutions'.<sup>126</sup>

Although the SNA formally reports to Hasan Hamade, the head of the Ministry of Defense of the oppositional Syrian Interim Government (SIG), it is in fact run by the Turkish intelligence service.<sup>127</sup> The SNA has several 'regional operation rooms', through which Turkish military and intelligence officers coordinate SNA activities.<sup>128</sup>

The SNA is officially organised in legions with varying numbers of divisions subdivided into brigades.<sup>129</sup> In August 2022, the Rojava Information Center (RIC)<sup>130</sup> published a report on the SNA's structure focussing on 28 of its main militias. According to the report, SNA main components are the Al-Hamza Division, the Sultan Suleiman Shah Division, the Azm Unified Command Room and the National Front for Liberation, the latter two comprising each many individual factions and subdivisions.<sup>131</sup> Arab as well as Turkmen factions can be found across the entire SNA area, with some factions occasionally clustering around certain geographic areas.<sup>132</sup> Correspondingly, Orwa Ajjoub, senior analyst at the Cyprus-based Center for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR), commented in an October 2022 MEI article, '[u]nderstanding the SNA — its nature, organization, and the constantly shifting alliances between its factions — is a challenging task indeed'.<sup>133</sup>

Several sources termed the SNA's internal conflicts and rivalries a major issue.<sup>134</sup> In October 2022, SNA infighting 'attracted considerable attention beyond the microcosm of Syria's armed opposition landscape'<sup>135</sup> when HTS entered SNA territory and intervened in the infighting by supporting one of the fighting factions,<sup>136</sup> reportedly leading to the emergence of two new alliances: the HTS alliance (comprising the Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade, Al-Hamzah Division and Ahrar al-Sham) and the Third Legion alliance (consisting of the Levant Front, Jaysh al-

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<sup>126</sup> Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>127</sup> Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 5; RIC, The SNA Encyclopedia: A Guide to the Turkish Proxy Militias, August 2022, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>128</sup> Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>129</sup> RIC, The SNA Encyclopedia: A Guide to the Turkish Proxy Militias, August 2022, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>130</sup> The Rojava Information Center (RIC) is a pro-Kurdish volunteer organisation based in northeastern Syria that assists reporters and researchers from leading international news organisations with their work. RIC, Who we are, n.d., [url](#); TNH, Leaving Syria's notorious al-Hol camp, civilians find little to go home to, 14 January 2021, [url](#); BBC News, Syria war: 'One killed' as US troops clash with government loyalists near Qamishli, 12 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>131</sup> RIC, The SNA Encyclopedia: A Guide to the Turkish Proxy Militias, August 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>132</sup> RIC, The SNA Encyclopedia: A Guide to the Turkish Proxy Militias [Figure], August 2022, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>133</sup> Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>134</sup> Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 10; Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#); MEMO, Turkiye to restructure Syrian rebel military, disband SNA factions after HTS withdraws from Afrin, 26 October 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria: Turkey to reorganise rebel groups as HTS withdraws from Afrin, 25 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>135</sup> Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>136</sup> MEMO, Turkiye to restructure Syrian rebel military, disband SNA factions after HTS withdraws from Afrin, 26 October 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria: Turkey to reorganise rebel groups as HTS withdraws from Afrin, 25 October 2022, [url](#)



Islam and the Liberation and Construction Movement).<sup>137</sup> In addition, the incident prompted Türkiye to move forward with restructuring plans for the SNA that included a centralised command structure and a unified force.<sup>138</sup>

During the reference period, Amnesty International reported indiscriminate attacks committed by the SNA<sup>139</sup> and engaged in hostilities with SDF forces resulting in civilian casualties.<sup>140</sup> SNA forces were further responsible for extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances,<sup>141</sup> torture, including rape, and pillage, ‘all of which may amount to separate war crimes’.<sup>142</sup>

### 1.4.3. Syrian Democratic Forces

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are the main military force of the AANES.<sup>143</sup> They are a coalition of Arab and Kurdish militias as well as tribal groups, among which the Kurdish components form the People’s Protection Units (YPG). The YPG are the strongest fighting component and constitute the military leadership of the SDF. According to estimated figures provided by the IISS Military Balance of 2023, the SDF comprises 50 000 fighters.<sup>144</sup> Another source put their number at more than 100 000.<sup>145</sup> The SDF hold a demographically heterogeneous region of about 30 % of the Syrian territory<sup>146</sup>, comprising most of Hasaka governorate as well as areas in Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqa governorates and a small enclave in Aleppo countryside.<sup>147</sup> The Asayish are the police force of the AANES<sup>148</sup> and both SDF and Asayish forces have received funding from the US military to train, equip and pay their members.<sup>149</sup> Due to the threat of Turkish incursions, the SDF further had to negotiate with Russia and the GoS, requesting air defence systems from the former<sup>150</sup> and accepting SAA reinforcements into its territory near the contact lines with Turkish-backed forces in Tall Rifaat and Manbij.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>137</sup> Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria’s north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>138</sup> Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria: Turkey to reorganise rebel groups as HTS withdraws from Afrin, 25 October 2022, [url](#); MEMO, Turkiye to restructure Syrian rebel military, disband SNA factions after HTS withdraws from Afrin, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>139</sup> AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/23 – Syria, 27 March 2023, [url](#), p. 352

<sup>140</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 105

<sup>141</sup> HRW, Syria: Turkey-Backed Fighters Kill 4 Kurdish Civilians, 22 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>142</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 103

<sup>143</sup> Soz, J., Mazloum Abdi: Turkish Attacks Impact Fight Against ISIS, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 12 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>144</sup> IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 356

<sup>145</sup> Lister, C., There Are 13 Guantanos in the Syrian Desert, Politico, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>146</sup> Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 274

<sup>147</sup> Newlines Institute, Operation Claw-Sword Exposes Blind Spots in the US’ NE Syria Strategy [Map], 7 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>148</sup> AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/23 – Syria, 27 March 2023, [url](#), p. 352

<sup>149</sup> HRW, Syria: Repatriations Lag for Foreigners with Alleged ISIS Ties, 15 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>150</sup> Newlines Institute, Operation Claw-Sword Exposes Blind Spots in the US’ NE Syria Strategy, 7 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>151</sup> Rozana Radio, النظام السوري يدفع بتعزيزات عسكرية إلى تل رفعت ومنبج [Syrian regime forces continue to send reinforcements to Manbij], 19 December 2022, [url](#); New Arab (The), النظام السوري يدفع بتعزيزات عسكرية إلى تل رفعت ومنبج [The Syrian regime sends military reinforcements to Tall Rifaat and Manbij], 12 June 2022, [url](#)



Throughout the AANES area, SDF continued to be confronted with an insurgency mounted by ISIL cells.<sup>152</sup> They were supported in their anti-ISIL operations by about 900 US troops who assisted in stabilisation efforts and provided aerial surveillance.<sup>153</sup> The SDF routinely carried out security operations against ISIL cells in territories under their control, which included destroying hideouts,<sup>154</sup> dismantling recruitment and support networks<sup>155</sup> and confiscating weapons.<sup>156</sup> However, as part of such operations they also reportedly targeted people opposed to the SDF, conducting home raids, imposing curfews or partial lockdowns and carrying out sweeping arrests, according to Jusoor for Studies.<sup>157</sup> Throughout the AANES territory, the SDF held about 10 000 ISIL fighters in more than 20 detention facilities, the largest of them located in Hasaka city.<sup>158</sup> This vast amount of incarcerated ISIL members continued to be a source of insecurity. ISIL operatives repeatedly attempted to free fellow members, for example by trying to attack the Al-Hol detention facility in Hasaka<sup>159</sup> or by attacking a prison near Raqqa, killing six SDF and Asayish members.<sup>160</sup> In June 2023, the AANES announced that it would start trying suspected ISIL fighters who have been in its custody for years.<sup>161</sup>

Türkiye considers the YPG, the leading component of the SDF, to be an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).<sup>162</sup> Turkish forces repeatedly targeted SDF-controlled territory with airstrikes, drones and artillery shelling.<sup>163</sup> This forced the SDF to temporarily halt operations against ISIL and to reassign forces in order to bolster defences against a potential Turkish ground offensive.<sup>164</sup> In response to a series of Turkish airstrikes in November 2022, the SDF shelled the SNA-held city of A'zaz in Aleppo countryside and a nearby Turkish military base as well targeting the Turkish border province Kilis with rocket-propelled grenades.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, there were clashes between the SDF and Turkish-backed SNA militias deployed

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<sup>152</sup> ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, May 17, 2023, 19 May 2023, [url](#); US, CRS, Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response, 8 November 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>153</sup> Lister, C., There Are 13 Guantanamos in the Syrian Desert, Politico, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>154</sup> Jusoor for Studies, SDF Lanches wide-scale security operation against opponents in Raqqa, 16 February 2023, [url](#); NPA, SDF discovers old ISIS tunnel in Raqqa, 31 January 2023, [url](#); Diyaruna, 'Al-Jazeera Thunderbolt' smashes east Syria ISIS cells, 18 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>155</sup> NPA, SDF captures 2 ISIS operatives in Hasakah – Coalition, 2 May 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, SDF Lanches wide-scale security operation against opponents in Raqqa, 16 February 2023, [url](#); Diyaruna, 'Al-Jazeera Thunderbolt' smashes east Syria ISIS cells, 18 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>156</sup> NPA, SDF arrests ISIS militants in Syria's Hasakah, 9 April 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, SDF Lanches wide-scale security operation against opponents in Raqqa, 16 February 2023, [url](#); Diyaruna, 'Al-Jazeera Thunderbolt' smashes east Syria ISIS cells, 18 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>157</sup> Jusoor for Studies, SDF Lanches wide-scale security operation against opponents in Raqqa, 16 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>158</sup> USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>159</sup> Lister, C., There Are 13 Guantanamos in the Syrian Desert, Politico, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>160</sup> Shafaq News, Six SDF and Asayish members killed in surprise attack by ISIS on military prison in Al-Raqqa, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>161</sup> Reuters, Syria's Kurds to begin trials for IS detainees, 11 June 2023, [url](#); NPA, AANES trials for foreign ISIS members... what is to be expected?, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>162</sup> HRW, Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Exacerbate Humanitarian Crisis, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>163</sup> Soz, J., Mazloum Abdi: Turkish Attacks Impact Fight Against ISIS, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 12 December 2022, [url](#); Syria Direct, Days of airstrikes and rumblings of a long-threatened Turkish offensive in northern Syria after Istanbul bombing, 25 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>164</sup> Newlines Institute, Operation Claw-Sword Exposes Blind Spots in the US' NE Syria Strategy, 7 March 2023, [url](#); TWI, The SDF Is Caught Between Turkey and the Islamic State Again, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>165</sup> Syria Direct, Days of airstrikes and rumblings of a long-threatened Turkish offensive in northern Syria after Istanbul bombing, 25 November 2022, [url](#)



in the Operation Peace Spring area, a territory captured by Türkiye in a military operation in 2019.<sup>166</sup> In northern Aleppo governorate, the SDF and SNA used rocket and grenade shelling across the contact lines as well as IED attacks to target each other's respective areas of control.<sup>167</sup>

During the reporting period, the SDF reportedly engaged in extrajudicial killings,<sup>168</sup> arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearance<sup>169</sup> as well as torture in detention centres.<sup>170</sup>

#### 1.4.4. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) or the Organization for the Liberation of the Levant<sup>171</sup> is an Islamist<sup>172</sup> anti-GoS armed group<sup>173</sup> and was formed in 2017 when Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, an offshoot of al-Qaida-linked Jabhat al-Nusra,<sup>174</sup> joined forces with several other hard-line groups.<sup>175</sup> HTS continued to be listed as a terrorist organisation by many countries,<sup>176</sup> including the United States,<sup>177</sup> Türkiye<sup>178</sup> and Russia.<sup>179</sup> According to estimates, HTS comprised between 7 000<sup>180</sup> and 10 000 fighters,<sup>181</sup> including around 1 000 foreign fighters.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>166</sup> Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 275

<sup>167</sup> See for example New Arab (The), [الجيش الوطني السوري "جاء قصف لـ"قسد" في ريف حلب](#) [SNA members killed and wounded by SDF shelling in Aleppo countryside], 10 July 2023, [url](#); Syria TV, [فصائل الجيش الوطني تقصف مواقع لـ"قسد" والنظام رداً على مجزرة الباب](#) [SNA factions shell SDF and regime points in response to Al-Bab massacre], 20 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>168</sup> SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 59

<sup>169</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 120; SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), pp. 60-64

<sup>170</sup> SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), pp. 64-65; SHRC, Two civilians killed under torture in SDF prisons in a week, 5 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>171</sup> USCIRF, Factsheet: Religious Freedom in Syria, November 2022, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>172</sup> BBC News, Crisis upon crisis: Why it's hard to get help to Syria after earthquake, 11 February 2023, [url](#); Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes: Syria – July to December 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>173</sup> HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>174</sup> Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 18; RIC, The SNA Encyclopedia: A Guide to the Turkish Proxy Militias, August 2022, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>175</sup> IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 357

<sup>176</sup> TNH, Cholera worries grow in Syria's Idlib, 29 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>177</sup> IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 357

<sup>178</sup> BBC News, Crisis upon crisis: Why it's hard to get help to Syria after earthquake, 11 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>179</sup> Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>180</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 46

<sup>181</sup> IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 357

<sup>182</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 46



Under its leader Abu-Muhammad Al-Jawlani,<sup>183</sup> HTS exercised military and security control within its territory in Idlib governorate, parts of Aleppo's western countryside and Latakia's countryside as well as the Al-Ghab Plain located northwest of Hama,<sup>184</sup> where it established the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) with 'conditional Turkish state assistance'.<sup>185</sup> According to the UN Security Council, 'HTS maintained a locally oriented focus and sought to expand its presence beyond Idlib'.<sup>186</sup> In October 2022, HTS fighters took control of the city of Afrin and surrounding areas before a Turkish-brokered truce led to their withdrawal.<sup>187</sup> HTS personnel, however, reportedly remained in the Afrin area,<sup>188</sup> but avoided being publicly visible.<sup>189</sup> HTS obtained most of its increasing<sup>190</sup> income through taxation at border crossings (affecting both aid delivery and trade),<sup>191</sup> through its monopoly on public services and extortion in the territory it controlled.<sup>192</sup>

In recent times, Al-Jawlani attempted to publicly distance HTS from al-Qaeda and portray it as a legitimate civilian authority,<sup>193</sup> which experts believe has created internal tensions.<sup>194</sup> Despite its legitimisation efforts, HTS reportedly continued to commit serious human rights violations.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> USCIRF, Factsheet: Religious Freedom in Syria, November 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>184</sup> Enab Baladi, Shift in religious discourse, will al-Jolani clash with HTS Sharia scholars?, 17 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>185</sup> Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>186</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 46

<sup>187</sup> Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria: HTS militants partially withdraw from Afrin after Turkey steps in, 15 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>188</sup> STJ, HTS Scales Up Its Presence in Afrin After the Türkiye/Syria Quake, 3 April 2023, [url](#); Netjes, R., Shifting Lines and IDPs: Azaz, Afrin, and the HTS Incursion, TWI, 19 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>189</sup> Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), pp. 19-20; Özkizilcik, Ö., How a former al-Qaeda affiliate became an existential threat and a wake-up call for the Syrian opposition, Atlantic Council, 14 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>190</sup> Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>191</sup> Solomon, C., HTS: Evolution of a Jihadi Group, Wilson Center, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>192</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 46

<sup>193</sup> Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>194</sup> Enab Baladi, Shift in religious discourse, will al-Jolani clash with HTS Sharia scholars?, 17 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>195</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 81; USCIRF, Factsheet: Religious Freedom in Syria, November 2022, [url](#), p. 2



### 1.4.5. Other anti-government armed groups in the Idlib area

As of April 2023, the remaining militant groups in the rebel-held Greater Idlib area besides HTS were reported<sup>196</sup> to be: Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), Ajnad Kavkaz (AK), Katibat al Tawhid wal Jihad (KTJ), Katibat al-Imam al-Bukhari (KIB), Hurras al-Din (HaD), Jamaat Ansar al-Islam (JAI), Junud al-Sham, Ansar al-Tawhid (AaT), Jundallah, Jabhat Ansar al-Din (JaD), Tansiqiyat al-Jihad, Liwa al-Muqatileen al-Ansar (LMA).<sup>197</sup>

While according to senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Natasha Hall, 'HTS has essentially defeated or co-opted all its Syrian armed opposition rivals in Idlib',<sup>198</sup> others report that the above listed Idlib factions fall under three general categories: 1) those who operate directly under HTS authority; 2) those who are allied with HTS as part of the 'HTS-led joint operations room, called al-Fatah al-Mubin'<sup>199</sup>; and 3) those who remain in direct opposition to HTS.<sup>200</sup> An example of the second category is the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), the 'largest remaining foreign jihadist group in Idlib', consisting mainly of Chinese Uighurs,<sup>201</sup> while Hurras al-Din (HaD) falls in the third category. Estimates of the Al-Qaida affiliated HaD's capacities varied greatly with some sources referring to 300-500 active fighters and others up to 2 000<sup>202</sup> or even 2 500 fighters.<sup>203</sup> Constant HTS pressure impeded the group's 'operational capabilities' and reportedly pushed it further north, closer to the Turkish border.<sup>204</sup> According to Stanford University research fellow Cole Bunzel, as of December 2022, HaD 'appeared to be defunct'.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Please note that sources partly diverge on this topic. Other sources indicate that some of the groups listed above would no longer exist at all after a severe HTS crackdown. See e.g., on the group Jundallah: Al-Monitor, HTS makes rival jihadis in Syria's Idlib take Sharia courses, give up weapons, 20 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>197</sup> CEP, New CEP Resource: Armed Opposition Groups In Northwest Syria, 27 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>198</sup> Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 274

<sup>199</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>200</sup> CEP, Armed Opposition Groups in Northwest Syria, 27 April 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>201</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>202</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 49

<sup>203</sup> IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 357

<sup>204</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 49

<sup>205</sup> Bunzel, C., Explainer: The Jihadi Threat in 2022, Wilson Center, 22 December 2022, [url](#)





### 1.4.6. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

In the reference period, ISIL was reported to ‘remain resilient’<sup>206</sup> to be ‘taking advantage of political and military developments’ in Syria to regain presence<sup>207</sup> but it was also reported that its capabilities in Syria ‘remained degraded’.<sup>208</sup> ISIL fighters were present in the mountainous and hard-to-control Badia desert<sup>209</sup> and along the Syrian-Iraqi border, especially in the areas of Deir Ez-Zor, Palmyra, Al-Sukhna,<sup>210</sup> and also in Al-Qaryatayn.<sup>211</sup> The group reportedly used these regions as operational bases to rebuild cells, train its fighters and carry out attacks throughout the region.<sup>212</sup> In the reference period, ISIL cells and activities were moreover reported in Syria’s south,<sup>213</sup> particularly in Dar’a governorate.<sup>214</sup>

According to a February 2023 UN Security Council report, there were an estimated 5 000 to 7 000 ISIL members in Iraq and Syria, about half of whom were reported to be fighters.<sup>215</sup> Statistics on ISIL fighters present in the Syrian desert are, however, not available. According to local sources, the group’s ranks also included foreign fighters.<sup>216</sup> In Syria’s northeast, about 10 000 ISIL fighters and around 55 000 persons linked to ISIL (mainly women and children) continued to be detained<sup>217</sup> in a ‘makeshift detention system’, inside which ISIL reportedly

<sup>206</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 43

<sup>207</sup> NPA, People of Syrian Desert fear ISIS’s re-emergence, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>208</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress April 1 2023 – June 30, 3 August 2023, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>209</sup> Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>210</sup> NPA, People of Syrian Desert fear ISIS’s re-emergence, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>211</sup> Al-Ghadhawi, A., ‘Revenge for the Two Sheikhs’: ISIS Renews Itself in the Syrian Desert, New Lines Institute, 8 August 2022, [url](#); UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 44

<sup>212</sup> Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>213</sup> MEI, We’re abandoning Syria and our D-ISIS policy, 5 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>214</sup> Tokmajyan, A., ISIS Resurgence in Daraa: Is the Group Making A Comeback in Syria’s Restive South?, EPC, 9 December 2022, [url](#); Hassan, M., ISIS is back in the open in southern Syria, MEI, 29 November 2022, [url](#); UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 44

<sup>215</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 43

<sup>216</sup> NPA, People of Syrian Desert fear ISIS’s re-emergence, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>217</sup> USDOS, The Importance of Detained Fighters and Displaced Persons in Northeast Syria to the Future of ISIS, 20 October 2022, [url](#); Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 275





‘appears to be regrouping’.<sup>218</sup> These prisoners posed a constant threat, as ISIL has already carried out prison breaks and reportedly intended to continue doing so.<sup>219</sup> In August 2023, ISIL confirmed the killing of its leader, making him the third ISIL leader killed in less than two years.<sup>220</sup>

The first quarter of 2023 saw an increase in ISIL activities in Syria. Since 2022, ISIL attacks within the Syrian desert have increased, but decreased in northeastern Syria.<sup>221</sup> Between January and mid-May 2023, ISIL claimed 49 attacks.<sup>222</sup> In spring 2023, ISIL reportedly launched two separate operations in the Badia region involving more than 100 fighters, indicating the group’s coordinating and tactical capacity.<sup>223</sup> During the reference period, ISIL continued its ‘guerrilla warfare tactics’<sup>224</sup> launching hit and run attacks against military forces, but also against civilians.<sup>225</sup> ISIL operations centered on Deir Ez-Zor and Homs, but also reached Hama, Hasaka, and Raqqqa governorates.<sup>226</sup> The group’s attack zones reportedly expanded along both banks of the Euphrates River.<sup>227</sup> As reported by NPA in May 2023, Al-Masrab desert (Deir Ez-Zor governorate) saw semi-daily ISIL assaults.<sup>228</sup> ISIL, moreover, curtailed SDF control to gain the support of the local population,<sup>229</sup> established ad-hoc checkpoints,<sup>230</sup> engaged in intimidation and extortion practices,<sup>231</sup> recruited people living in poverty in the Badia region and Deir Ez-Zor, and attacked businesses and assassinated community leaders.<sup>232</sup>

<sup>218</sup> Lister, C., There Are 13 Guantanos in the Syrian Desert, Politico, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>219</sup> Lister, C., There Are 13 Guantanos in the Syrian Desert, Politico, 27 March 2023, [url](#); Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#), p. 274; USDOS, The Importance of Detained Fighters and Displaced Persons in Northeast Syria to the Future of ISIS, 20 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>220</sup> WSJ, Islamic State Confirms Top Leader Is Dead, 3 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>221</sup> ISW and CPT, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, April 27, 2023, 28 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>222</sup> NPA, People of Syrian Desert fear ISIS’s re-emergence, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>223</sup> ISW and CPT, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, May 31, 2023, 31 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>224</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 44

<sup>225</sup> New Arab (The), US-led coalition against Islamic State building new base in northern Syria, 24 May 2023, [url](#); NPA, People of Syrian Desert fear ISIS’s re-emergence, 15 May 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#); Al-Ghadhawi, A., ‘Revenge for the Two Sheikhs’: ISIS Renews Itself in the Syrian Desert, New Lines Institute, 8 August 2022, [url](#); USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress April 1 2023 – June 30, 3 August 2023, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>226</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 44

<sup>227</sup> ISW and CPT, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, June 28, 2023, 30 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>228</sup> NPA, People of Syrian Desert fear ISIS’s re-emergence, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>229</sup> ISW and CPT, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, June 28, 2023, 30 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>230</sup> NPA, People of Syrian Desert fear ISIS’s re-emergence, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>231</sup> Hall, N., Syria: The Not So Frozen Crisis, IEMed, 2022, [url](#); Al-Ghadhawi, A., ‘Revenge for the Two Sheikhs’: ISIS Renews Itself in the Syrian Desert, New Lines Institute, 8 August 2022, [url](#), p. 275

<sup>232</sup> Al-Ghadhawi, A., ‘Revenge for the Two Sheikhs’: ISIS Renews Itself in the Syrian Desert, New Lines Institute, 8 August 2022, [url](#)





## 1.5. Impact of violence on the civilian population

### 1.5.1. Tactics and weapons used

Between August 2022 and May 2023, sources reported continuing hostilities and military operations that included air and ground attacks, targeted killings, and attacks with various types of IEDs, resulting in civilians being killed and injured.<sup>233</sup> This particularly affected the north,<sup>234</sup> northwest, northeast and south of the country.<sup>235</sup> The months of October and November 2022 saw an upsurge in military operations and hostilities, according to the report by the UN Secretary-General.<sup>236</sup>

In its December 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview for the year 2023, UNOCHA indicated that there seemed to be a disregard for the obligation ‘to take all feasible precautions to spare civilians’ when carrying out attacks. Compliance with the ‘prohibition on direct attacks against civilians and indiscriminate attacks under international humanitarian law’ was called into question.<sup>237</sup> During the reference period, indiscriminate attacks such as bombing and shelling resulting in civilian casualties were reported along the borders of the different areas of control.<sup>238</sup>

In its report on the human rights situation in Syria, the USDOS indicated that (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, rape, and starvation, and protracted siege-like conditions that occasionally forced local surrenders’ as military tactics.<sup>239</sup> During the reference period, siege-like conditions imposed by the GoS were reported in Al-Rukban IDP Camp, which shelters between 7 500 and 10 000 IDPs in eastern Homs governorate<sup>240</sup> and in the SDF-controlled

<sup>233</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 3; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 4; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 3; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 3; International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>234</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>235</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 3; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>236</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>237</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 19-20

<sup>238</sup> OHCHR, Don't look away: Syrian civilians face the prospect of a new escalation, 14 September 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, At least nine killed in Russian air strikes in Syria's Idlib, 25 June 2023, [url](#); VOA, UN Rights Officials Condemn Syrian Attacks, 9 November 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Civilians killed in northern Syria marketplace missile attack, 19 August 2022, [url](#);

<sup>239</sup> USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>240</sup> SNHR, Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in January 2023, 4 February 2023, [url](#), pp. 6-7; New Arab (The), Aid organization ‘breaks siege’ on Syria al-Rukban IDP camp, 20 June 2023, [url](#)



neighbourhoods of Al-Ashrafiya and Al-Sheikh Maqsoud in Aleppo city, as well as in the Al-Shahba area, which includes the Tall Rifaat region<sup>241</sup> in northern Aleppo<sup>242</sup>.

In its annual report for 2022, SNHR described attacks by GoS forces on medical personnel, equipment and facilities as ‘calculated tactics’ since the start of the conflict and mentioned that 2022 saw a decrease in GoS attacks on such targets in areas controlled by other conflict parties. However, according to the report, the GoS continued to arrest, detain, or forcibly disappear medical personnel in their own areas.<sup>243</sup> For more detailed information on targeted groups, please see the [EUAA COI report: Syria - Country focus \(October 2023\)](#); for further information on damage of (medical) infrastructure, please see section [1.5.4](#).

Along the contact lines in the northwestern Syrian Arab Republic, non-state armed groups and government and pro-government forces reportedly continued to exchange mutual fire and shelling.<sup>244</sup> They also engaged in limited clashes, including attacks on civilian targets<sup>245</sup> resulting in civilian casualties<sup>246</sup> between August 2022 and May 2023.<sup>247</sup> In his report covering August and September 2022, the UN Secretary-General also mentioned kidnappings, IED attacks, targeted killings, shelling and limited clashes in Syria’s south-west.<sup>248</sup> In November 2022, the use of banned cluster munitions was reported in western and southern rural Idlib, affecting three<sup>249</sup> or four IDP camps and killing eight civilians and injuring at least 75 others.<sup>250</sup>

According to a December 2022 report by the Washington D.C.-based think tank New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, bomb attacks are a ‘major security challenge’ in SNA-controlled areas, with many resulting in civilian casualties. These attacks are mostly perpetrated by YPG networks loyal to the PKK, with some of the IEDs being smuggled into the area via routes controlled by the SNA.<sup>251</sup>

ISIL’s strategy was reported to have shifted since it lost ground in most parts of Syria in 2019, with the group resorting to tactics that included surprise hit-and-run attacks<sup>252</sup> targeting sites held by GoS forces but also killing civilians.<sup>253</sup> Between August 2022 and May 2023, ISIL

<sup>241</sup> VOA, Syrian Kurd Who Lost Hand in IS Battle Finds Passion for the Drums, 26 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>242</sup> Kurdistan 24, Damascus continues to put a siege on Kurds in northern Aleppo, 29 April 2023, [url](#); Al, Syria: Vital earthquake aid blocked or diverted in Aleppo’s desperate hour of need, 6 March 2023, [url](#); Arab News, How one Aleppo neighborhood continues to defy siege of Syria’s Assad, 24 January 2023, [url](#); SNHR, Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in January 2023, 4 February 2023, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>243</sup> SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>244</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>245</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 4; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>246</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 7

<sup>247</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 4; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 5; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 4; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>248</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>249</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>250</sup> HRW, Syria: Cluster Munitions Used in November 6 Attacks, 23 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>251</sup> Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey’s Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>252</sup> SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 89

<sup>253</sup> SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 89; International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

reportedly carried out attacks, including abductions and killings,<sup>254</sup> on civilians in several areas of the country,<sup>255</sup> among them Deir Ez-Zor, Hasaka, Hama,<sup>256</sup> Dar'a,<sup>257</sup> and rural Homs.<sup>258</sup>

An April 2023, an Insecurity Insight<sup>259</sup> publication mentioned that conflict parties intentionally torched farmland<sup>260</sup> 'as a tactic to target and control civilians and farmers by destroying livelihoods in local communities' and stressed the urgent need to 'examine the consequences of military tactics' with regard to how they affect food security.<sup>261</sup> In the reference period, conflict incidents that negatively affected access to agricultural land or agricultural equipment were reported for the period between July and December 2022, for example, in Idlib<sup>262</sup> and Dar'a governorates.<sup>263</sup> In June 2023, Turkish ground bombardment in northern Raqqa governorate reportedly caused the burning of farmland.<sup>264</sup>

In January 2023, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) concluded that 'there are reasonable grounds to believe' that GoS Air Forces carried out the April 2018 chemical weapons attack in Douma.<sup>265</sup>

## 1.5.2. Security incidents

EUAA used the publicly available ACLED dataset for Middle East (4 August 2023) for security incidents figures, graphs and maps.<sup>266</sup> According to the aforementioned ACLED dataset,<sup>267</sup> between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023 there were 9 689 security incidents recorded in Syria: 2 182 were coded as battles, 5 681 as explosions/remote violence, and 1 826 as violence against civilians. Most security incidents were recorded in Aleppo (2 735), Idlib (1 837)

<sup>254</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 9

<sup>255</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 9; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>256</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>257</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 7

<sup>258</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 9; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>259</sup> Insecurity Insight is a Swiss-based non-governmental, non-profit, politically independent organisation dedicated to supporting civil society and the aid sector. Insecurity Insight, Mission and Vision Statement, n.d., [url](#), p. 1

<sup>260</sup> For more in-depth information on this tactic being used by ISIL in recent years, please see Jaafar, H. et al., Scorched earth tactics of the "Islamic State" after its loss of territory: intentional burning of farmland in Iraq and Syria, 1 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>261</sup> Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria: Conflict, Hunger and Aid Access - April 2023, 19 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 3, 20

<sup>262</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 27

<sup>263</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 45

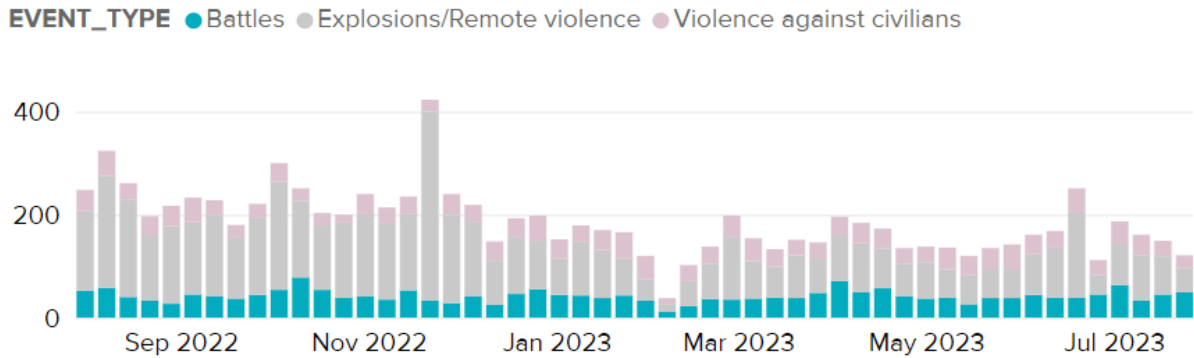
<sup>264</sup> SOHR, SDF-held areas in June 2023 | Nearly 60 fatalities in acts of violence...deteriorating security situation...nearly 30 infightings and murder crimes...19 protests against deteriorating living conditions, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>265</sup> OPCW, OPCW Releases Third Report by Investigation and Identification Team, 27 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>266</sup> ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>267</sup> ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

and Hasaka (1 104) governorates. The lowest security incidents figures were recorded in Quneitra (49), Damascus (36) and Tartous (6) governorates.<sup>268</sup>



**Figure 1: Evolution of security events coded ‘battles’, ‘explosions/remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023<sup>269</sup>**

In addition to the above-presented ACLED data on security incidents, also other sources provide records of security-related incidents. Here, however, the reporting periods do not exactly correspond with the reference period of this report. Moreover, the definitions of such events differ across various sources. For more details, please see the explanatory footnotes in the following sections.

For 2022, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) recorded 940 incidents of state-based violence,<sup>270</sup> 612 incidents of non-state violence<sup>271</sup> and 86 incidents of one-sided<sup>272</sup> violence.<sup>273</sup>

**(a) Battles**

Battles (armed clashes) is the category with the second most registered security incidents. During the reference period, there were 2 182 battles recorded by ACLED. Most of them were recorded in the governorates of Deir Ez-Zor (588), Aleppo (551), and Dar’a (247). The lowest numbers of battles were recorded in Tartous (1), Damascus (11), and Quneitra (16).<sup>274</sup>

**(b) Explosions/remote violence**

Explosions/remote violence, which includes explosive devices, artillery fire and air strikes, is by far the category with the highest number of individual incidents, with 5 681 incidents recorded by ACLED between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. The largest number of explosions/remote violence was registered in Aleppo (1 717), followed by Idlib (1 569) and Hasaka (686)

<sup>268</sup> EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>269</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>270</sup> UCDP defines ‘state-based violence’ as ‘violence between two organized actors of which at least one is the government of a state’. UCDP, UCDP Methodology, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>271</sup> UCDP defines ‘non-state violence’ as ‘violence between actors of which neither party is the government of a state’. UCDP, UCDP Methodology, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>272</sup> UCDP defines ‘one-sided violence’ as ‘[t]he deliberate use of armed force by the government of a state or by a formally organised group against civilians which results in at least 25 deaths in a year.’ UCDP, UCDP Definitions, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>273</sup> UCDP, Syria [dashboard], as of 27 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>274</sup> EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)



governorates. The lowest number of explosions/remote violence were documented in Tartous (3), Damascus (8) and Sweida (20).<sup>275</sup>

For the period between 1 August 2022 and 24 August 2023, Airwars listed 194 airstrike incidents with civilian harm allegations in Syria, including one incident in which civilian harm allegations were classified as ‘confirmed’ and 97 incidents with allegations classified as ‘fair’. The 177 attacks were attributed to the following conflict parties: Russian military (78 incidents), Turkish military (75 incidents), Israeli military (8 incidents), US-led coalition (10 incidents), US forces (2 incidents), Iranian military (2 incident); 17 incidents remained unattributed as of August 2023.<sup>276</sup> In September 2022, UN Commissioner Lynn Welchman<sup>277</sup> described ongoing operations by the above forces, specifically mentioning Russian airstrikes in support of the Syrian government in which civilians were injured and killed<sup>278</sup> and which reportedly targeted food and water sources (for further information on infrastructure damage, please see section 1.5.4).<sup>279</sup> In December 2022, Human Rights Watch highlighted the negative impact of late November Turkish airstrikes on the infrastructure and residents of densely populated areas in northeast Syria.<sup>280</sup> According to Action on Armed Violence (AOAV),<sup>281</sup> in 2022, the number of airstrikes increased to 129<sup>282</sup> from 104 in 2021.<sup>283</sup>

For 2022, AOAV recorded a decrease in incidents of explosive violence<sup>284</sup> in the country, declining from 709 in 2021 to 652 in 2022. Both ground-based as well as IED attacks fell from 334 to 303 and from 203 to 149, respectively. According to AOAV, state actors were responsible for 54 % of the recorded explosive violence incidents in 2022, non-state actors for 35 %.<sup>285</sup>

### (c) Violence against civilians

The third largest category of incidents is violence against civilians with 1 826 incidents recorded by ACLED between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Most incidents during the year were recorded in Aleppo (467), Dar’a (344) and Deir Ez-Zor (270) governorates. The lowest number of incidents were recorded in Tartous (2), Latakia (4) and Quneitra (9) governorates.<sup>286</sup>

<sup>275</sup> EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>276</sup> Airwars, Syria: Incidents with Civilian Harm Allegations: Aug 1 2022-Jul 31 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>277</sup> Lynn Welchman is a member of ‘the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic established by the Council in August 2011 to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law committed in the country since March 2011’. OHCHR, Human Rights Council President appoints Lynn Welchman of the United Kingdom to serve on Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 1 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>278</sup> For a recent example from June 2023, please see Al Jazeera, At least nine killed in Russian air strikes in Syria’s Idlib, 25 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>279</sup> OHCHR, Don’t look away: Syrian civilians face the prospect of a new escalation, 14 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>280</sup> HRW, Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Exacerbate Humanitarian Crisis, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>281</sup> AOAV is a research and advocacy organisation that records incidents and resulting casualties caused by explosive weapons at the global level. For more information about AOAV see AOAV, What do we do to address the impact of weapons?, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>282</sup> Please note that in comparison to that, Airwars documented 226 airstrike incidents in 2022. Airwars, Syria: Incidents with Civilian Harm Allegations: Jan 1 2022-Dec 31 2022, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>283</sup> AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>284</sup> AOAV uses a RSS reader to scan Google News for key terms which relate to explosive weapons use such as: air strike, artillery, bomb, bombing, cluster bomb, cluster munitions, explosion, explosive, grenade, IED, mine, missile, mortar, rocket, shell. AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), p. 44

<sup>285</sup> AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>286</sup> EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)



### 1.5.3. Civilian fatalities

According to a May 2023 OHCHR publication, over the last decade, an average of 84 civilians have been killed each day as a direct consequence of the Syrian war. By 2022, a total of 306 887 civilians are estimated to have been killed since the beginning of the armed conflict.<sup>287</sup>

In May 2023, the UN Secretary-General mentioned a decrease in civilian casualties by 38 % in 2022 compared to 2021 in Syria.<sup>288</sup> In its explosive violence monitor for 2022, AOAV states that the ‘continuing downward trend in numbers of civilian casualties raises hopes that the conflict, [...], will have a reduced impact on civilians’. However, at the same time, AOAV acknowledged that its data might be affected by a decline in media attention to and coverage of the Syrian conflict.<sup>289</sup>

OHCHR documented 1 874 civilian casualties in 2021 (747 civilian deaths and 1 127 civilians injured),<sup>290</sup> a 11 % decrease from 2020 when it recorded 2 095 civilian casualties (1 036 civilian deaths and 1 059 civilians injured).<sup>291</sup> For the period between August 2022 and May 2023, OHCHR documented 311 civilian deaths and 256 civilians injured as a result of armed conflict in Syria.<sup>292</sup>

In 2022, SNHR recorded 1 271 civilian fatalities,<sup>293</sup> a drop by 17 % compared to 2021 and by 39 % compared to 2020.<sup>294</sup> Other organisations documenting civilian casualties in Syria had comparable figures for 2022. The Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC) recorded 1 133 civilian fatalities in 2022, although it did not provide information on their research methodology.<sup>295</sup> For 2022, the UCDP recorded 1 638 deaths (civilians and combatants<sup>296</sup>).<sup>297</sup>

The SNHR provides a breakdown of civilian fatalities by the governorate in which they occurred (see [Figure 2](#)). Most civilian fatalities in 2022 were recorded by the SNHR in the governorates of Aleppo, Dar’a, Idlib and Deir Ez-Zor. The lowest number of civilian fatalities

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<sup>287</sup> OHCHR, Behind the data: Recording civilian casualties in Syria, 11 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>288</sup> UN Security Council, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, S/2023/345, 12 May 2023, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>289</sup> AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>290</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>291</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, March 2021, [url](#), p. 12. Figures provided by OHCHR to UNOCHA. OHCHR provided the following disclaimer: ‘Civilian casualties and incidents included are not comprehensive but rather reflect what OHCHR could verify to reflect human rights concerns, patterns and the impact of the armed conflict and violence on civilians in Syria. Actual civilian casualties could be higher’. See p. 100.

<sup>292</sup> Figures based on total number of civilian injured reported by OHCHR to the UN Security Council between 1 August 2022 and 26 May 2023. UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 23; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para.20; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para.26; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para.26; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para.23

<sup>293</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>294</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7. For the year 2020 SNHR documented 1734 civilian fatalities in Syria. See EUAA, COI Report: Syria - Security situation, July 2021, [url](#), p. 55

<sup>295</sup> SHRC, The 21st Annual Report on Human Rights in Syria 2022, January 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>296</sup> UCDP codes both civilians and combatants fatalities as battle related deaths. See [url](#)

<sup>297</sup> UCDP, Syria [dashboard], as of 27 June 2023, [url](#)





recorded in 2022 by SNHR were in Latakia (4) Damascus (3) and Quneitra (1) governorates. In the first seven months of 2023, SNHR documented 574 civilian deaths across Syria, most of which were recorded in Dar'a and Deir Ez-Zor governorates. During the same period, no civilian fatalities were documented in Tartous and Quneitra governorates.<sup>298</sup>

During the reporting period (August 2022 and July 2023), the SNHR included in its civilian fatalities total the death of 125 civilians who drowned while on migration routes to Europe. These deaths were documented in September 2022 (62) and June 2023 (63 civilian fatalities) and were recorded under their governorates of origin: Tartous (60), Dar'a (48), Aleppo (15), and Latakia (2).<sup>299</sup>

Civilian fatalities by governorate	SNHR 2021 <sup>300</sup>	SNHR 2022 <sup>301</sup>	SNHR 2023 <sup>302</sup>
Damascus	1	3	2
Rural Damascus	13	80 <sup>303</sup>	11
Idlib	245	147	43
Deir Ez-Zor	197	125	119
Aleppo	231	224	79
Dar'a	204	207	149

<sup>298</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>299</sup> EUAA email correspondence with SNHR, 4, 7 and 31 July 2023

<sup>300</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>301</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>302</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>303</sup> Out of the 80 civilian fatalities documented in 2022 in Rural Damascus, SNHR included the death of 54 persons for whom the GoS released death notifications in February 2022, although they were arrested in previous years and died in custody. Most of them were originally from Deir al-Asafir town. See SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 5



Civilian fatalities by governorate	SNHR 2021 <sup>300</sup>	SNHR 2022 <sup>301</sup>	SNHR 2023 <sup>302</sup>
Hama	88	36	61
Homs	28	37	55
Hasaka	154	74	28
Raqqa	84	27	12
Quneitra	10	1	-
Sweida	13	32	12
Latakia	2	4	3
Tartous	-	60	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>1271</b>	<b>1057</b>	<b>574</b>

**Figure 2. Civilian fatalities in 2021, 2022 and the first seven months of 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data<sup>304</sup>**

Civilian casualty figures caused by explosive violence decreased from 2 016 in 2021 to 1 304 (340 killed and 964 injured) in 2022. Civilian casualties resulting from ground-launched weapons and IEDs dropped from 1 176 to 702 and from 516 in 2021 to 152 in 2022, respectively.<sup>305</sup> For 2022, SNHR documented 128 (50 men, 9 women, 69 children) civilian deaths caused by landmines; for the period between January and April 2023, SNHR documented 53 (33 men, 3 women, 17 children) civilian deaths.<sup>306</sup> Between August 2022 and January 2023, SNHR listed nine ‘notable incidents of landmine explosions that resulted in

<sup>304</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11; SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10; Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>305</sup> AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>306</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 19



casualties<sup>307</sup> killing in total 17 civilians, including 9 children.<sup>308</sup> In terms of civilian deaths caused by cluster munitions remnants, SNHR recorded 14 deaths (including 8 children) in 2022.<sup>309</sup> An April 2023 news article mentioned that since the beginning of 2023 ‘hundreds of civilians have been killed or injured as a result of explosions of mines and ordnance across Syria’.<sup>310</sup>

The number of civilian casualties due to airstrikes increased from 214 in 2021 to 297 in 2022. According to AOAV’s explosive violence monitor, in 2022, Türkiye was responsible for 25 % (330) of civilian casualties, followed by Syria (324), Russia (82), unknown state actors (53) and Israel (37).<sup>311</sup> In terms of non-state actors, in 2022, ISIL caused 66 civilian casualties (compared to 80 in 2021) and SDF 43 (compared to 16 in 2021), according to AOAV.<sup>312</sup>

#### 1.5.4. Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

For the period between August 2022 and May 2023, the UN Security Council indicated that military operations and hostilities have taken a toll on civilian property and further worsened access to basic services and livelihoods.<sup>313</sup> In the reference period, the conflict was reported to have directly resulted in the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure, including schools, health facilities,<sup>314</sup> markets, IDP settlements and farms.<sup>315</sup> In the context of indiscriminate attacks on civilian infrastructure in the north, the GoS and Russian forces were particularly mentioned.<sup>316</sup>

Schools in Syria were not a safe place to learn. They were destroyed, damaged or used for military or other purposes.<sup>317</sup> This reportedly affected one in three schools in the country.<sup>318</sup> Damage to health facilities was reported at least 11 times, negatively affecting health care access.<sup>319</sup>

The conflict heavily impacted electricity service delivery and caused a shortage of fuel. Many cities were experiencing recurrent power outages, which sometimes lasted up to 15 hours per

<sup>307</sup> Please note that SNHR does not specify on which grounds these examples were selected.

<sup>308</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 26-27

<sup>309</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>310</sup> New Arab (The), Eight dead in attacks, mine explosions across Syria, 12 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>311</sup> AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 20-21

<sup>312</sup> AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>313</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 3; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 4; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 3; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>314</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>315</sup> USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>316</sup> HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#); USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>317</sup> World Bank, Syria - Joint Damage Assessment of Selected Cities, December 2022, [url](#), p. 101; HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>318</sup> HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>319</sup> Insecurity Insight, Syria – Violence Against Health Care in Conflict 2022, May 2023, [url](#), p. 3



day.<sup>320</sup> Damage and destruction of water infrastructure and facilities, as well as the lack of electricity upon which many water pumps rely,<sup>321</sup> posed a serious humanitarian and health concern and have added to the scarcity of water for agriculture.<sup>322</sup> Between 2017 and 2022, 101 violent acts impacting water infrastructure were recorded, mostly in Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, and Idlib governorates. Many of these attacks were likely carried out by conflict parties ‘as a deliberate strategy to enhance their control over target populations and territories’.<sup>323</sup>

In 2022, Syria, where an estimated one in three communities faced explosive ordnance contamination,<sup>324</sup> was the country with the highest number of civilian casualties caused by mines, IEDs and ERWs.<sup>325</sup> Explosive contamination was reported to be a ‘leading source’ of child death and maiming,<sup>326</sup> as well as a significant security concern and impediment to the delivery of humanitarian aid.<sup>327</sup> Unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination was identified most often on ‘agricultural land, roads and private property, followed by schools, other public infrastructure and hospitals’ and particularly affected the governorates of Idlib, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, Hasaka, Damascus, Quneitra and Dar’a.<sup>328</sup>

As reported at the end of 2022, the ‘actual scale and scope’ of the explosive contamination is not known.<sup>329</sup> However, as of March 2022, the Mine Advisory Group (MAG) had registered ‘approximately 64.92km<sup>2</sup> of mined area across a total of 830 suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) and confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs)’ in northeast Syria alone<sup>330</sup> and ‘241,900m<sup>2</sup> of (cluster munition remnants CMR) contamination across two suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) and three confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs)’ in the governorates of Hasaka and Raqqa.<sup>331</sup>

## 1.5.5. Displacement and return

UNHCR estimated that the conflict had driven some 5.2 million Syrian refugees out of the country by June 2023.<sup>332</sup> As of May 2023, the total number of IDPs in Syria was 6.8 million,<sup>333</sup> making the country home to the highest number of IDPs in the world.<sup>334</sup> Of these 6.8 million,

<sup>320</sup> World Bank, Syria - Joint Damage Assessment of Selected Cities, December 2022, [url](#), p. 68

<sup>321</sup> World Bank, Syria - Joint Damage Assessment of Selected Cities, December 2022, [url](#), p. 73

<sup>322</sup> Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria: Conflict, Hunger and Aid Access - April 2023, 19 April 2023, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>323</sup> Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria: Conflict, Hunger and Aid Access - April 2023, 19 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 14-15

<sup>324</sup> UN Security Council, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, S/2023/345, 12 May 2023, [url](#), para. 12; UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 81

<sup>325</sup> UN Security Council, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, S/2023/345, 12 May 2023, [url](#), para. 11

<sup>326</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>327</sup> UNMAS, Annual Report 2022, 5 April 2023, [url](#), p. 105; UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>328</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>329</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 82

<sup>330</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2022, Syria [source: email from Fabrice Martin, Country Director - Mine Advisory Group, 9 March 2022], 1 October 2022, [url](#), p. 491

<sup>331</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2022, Syria [source: email from Fabrice Martin, Country Director – Mine Advisory Group, 9 March 2022], 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 198

<sup>332</sup> UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, last updated 8 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>333</sup> UN Security Council, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, S/2023/345, 12 May 2023, [url](#), para. 31

<sup>334</sup> UN Security Council, Humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic, S/2023/419, 9 June 2023, [url](#), para. 3; UN Security Council, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, S/2023/345, 12 May 2023, [url](#), para. 31



80% had been displaced for more than five years.<sup>335</sup> In 2022, violence and instability remained the main driver of displacement.<sup>336</sup>

SNHR estimated that, in 2022, military operations by various conflict parties displaced approximately 75 000 civilians, including 11 000 civilians being displaced due to operations by Syrian-Russian alliance forces.<sup>337</sup> Conflict-related displacement was reported, for example, for the city of Tafas (Dar'a governorate), where GoS bombings and clashes led to mass displacement in August 2022,<sup>338</sup> or for Aleppo governorate, where about 13 000 people were displaced by a HTS offensive in October 2022 which directly affected 12 IDP camps.<sup>339</sup>

In 2022, a total of about 200 100 IDP movements were recorded by UNOCHA across Syria, of which 75 % were movements within governorates. Most IDP movements took place in the governorate of Idlib (13 000 from the governorate, 105 000 within the governorate and 18 000 to the governorate), followed by Aleppo (18 000 from the governorate, 26 000 within the governorate and 15 000 to the governorate).<sup>340</sup> For more detailed information on IDP figures in each governorate, please see section [2. Governorate-level description of the security situation](#) and Map 4 below:

UNOCHA provides a full breakdown of the total IDP movements by governorate for 2022 (see Map 4):

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<sup>335</sup> UN Security Council, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, S/2023/345, 12 May 2023, [url](#), para. 31

<sup>336</sup> USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 65

<sup>337</sup> SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>338</sup> SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 84

<sup>339</sup> SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 86

<sup>340</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

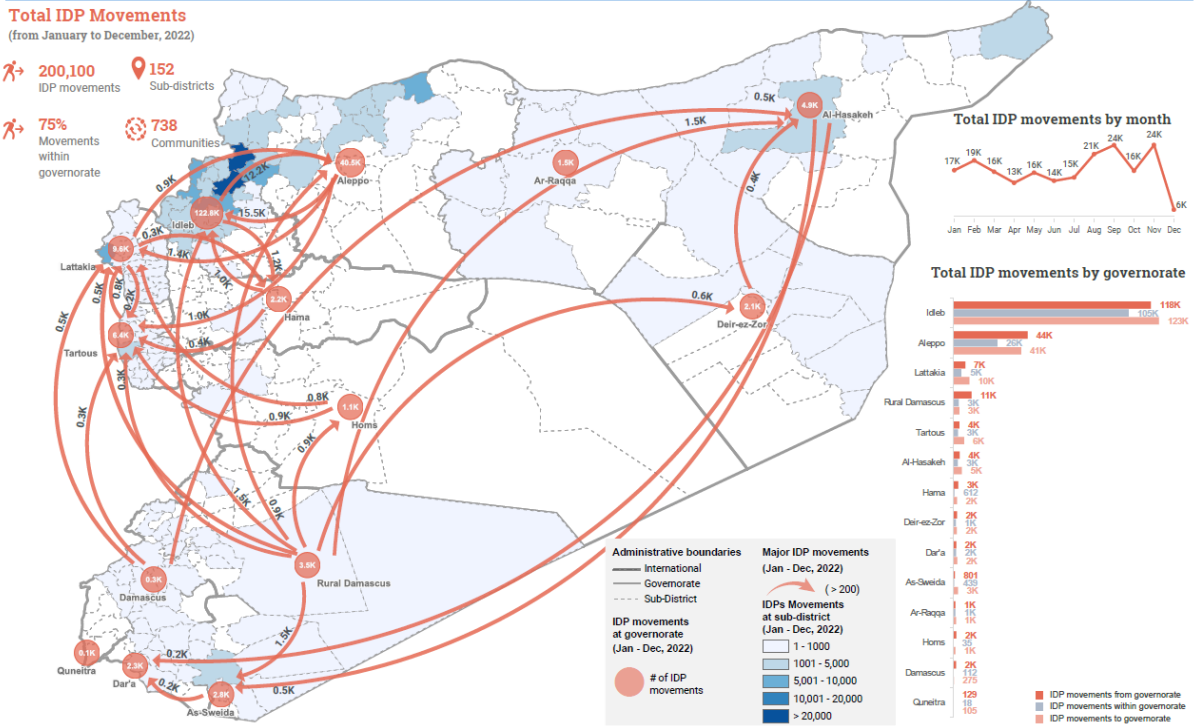


**SYRIA ARAB REPUBLIC**  
IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022

As of 31 December 2022

**Total IDP Movements**  
(from January to December, 2022)

- 200,100** IDP movements
- 152** Sub-districts
- 75%** Movements within governorate
- 738** Communities



The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.  
Creation date: 10 May 2023 Sources: Returnee movements data: IDP Task Force Feedback: ocha@un.org www.unocha.org www.reliefweb.int

**Map 4. IDP movements by governorate in 2022, © UNOCHA<sup>341</sup>**

Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA documented 137 612 IDP movements across Syria,<sup>342</sup> with a significant peak (105 086 IDPs) in February due to the earthquake.<sup>343</sup>

According to a March 2023 publication, nearly 2.1 million IDPs were living in so-called ‘last resort’ sites in north-western and north-eastern Syria.<sup>344</sup> As of April 2023, UNOCHA reported 2.9 million IDPs in Syria’s north-west,<sup>345</sup> of which 1.9 million were living in camps.<sup>346</sup> Around 80 % of the IDPs were women and children, around 85 % were living in ‘overcrowded camps and unplanned locations with dilapidated and unsafe shelters, which pose safety and protection risks’.<sup>347</sup>

In terms of IDP spontaneous returns in 2022, UNOCHA recorded a total of 115 500 spontaneous returns, 68 % of which were returns within governorates. The highest number of

<sup>341</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (as of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>342</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>343</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>344</sup> Care, 12 years on: Challenges caused by the Syrian conflict show no signs of abating, 15 March 2023, [url](#)

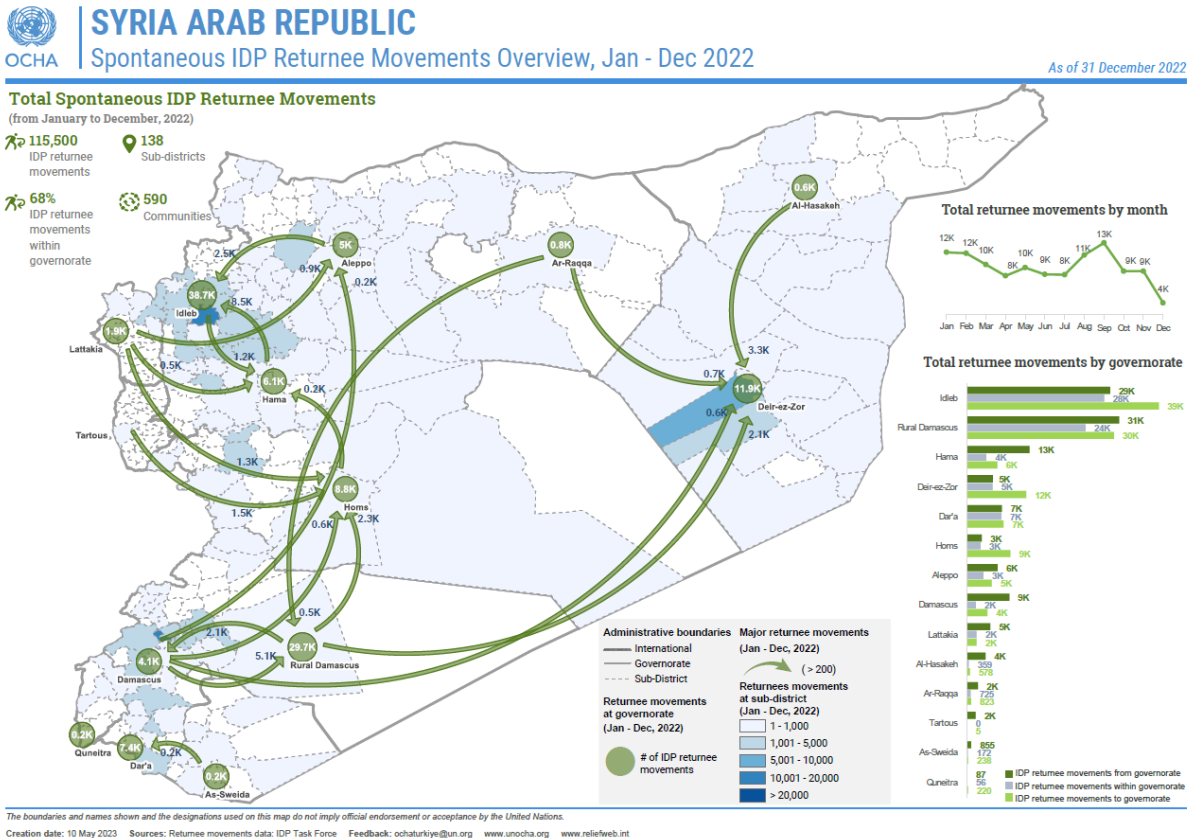
<sup>345</sup> UNOCHA, North-west Syria: Situation report, las updated 28 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>346</sup> UN Security Council, Humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic, S/2023/419, 9 June 2023, [url](#), para. 36; UNOCHA, North-west Syria: Situation report, las updated 28 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>347</sup> UN Security Council, Humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic, S/2023/419, 9 June 2023, [url](#), para. 36

IDP return movements were recorded in the governorates of Idlib (1 000 from the governorate, 28 000 within the governorate and 11 000 to the governorate), followed by Rural Damascus (7 000 from the governorate, 24 000 within the governorate and 6 000 to the governorate).<sup>348</sup> For more detailed information on return figures in each governorate, please see section [2. Governorate-level description of the security situation](#).

UNOCHA provides a full breakdown of the total IDP spontaneous returnee movements by governorate for 2022 (see Map 5):



**Map 5. Spontaneous IDP returnee movements by governorate in 2022, © UNOCHA<sup>349</sup>**

Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA documented 42 704 spontaneous IDP return movements across Syria,<sup>350</sup> with a significant peak (18 128 spontaneous IDP return movements) in February due to the earthquake.<sup>351</sup>

<sup>348</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (as of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>349</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (as of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>350</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>351</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#)



Regarding the above-mentioned return movements to the governorates of Idlib and Rural Damascus, ‘a mixture of push and pull factors related to changes in the security and economic situation in the place of origin and/or area of displacement’ was cited as the main reason. 72 % of returnee households interviewed during a Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (conducted between July and August 2022)<sup>352</sup> indicated that their primary reason for returning in 2022 was to ‘reclaim assets and properties at the place of origin’, followed by security situations improvements in the place of origin and/or a deterioration in the economic situation in their place of displacement.<sup>353</sup>

In general, IDPs' explicit intention for return continued to be low.<sup>354</sup> The GoS was reported to not facilitate the secure and dignified voluntary return, resettlement or local integration of IDPs. In some cases, IDPs were denied the opportunity to return home; in others, IDPs were arrested upon their return in GoS-controlled areas.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>353</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 55

<sup>354</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 55

<sup>355</sup> USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 65

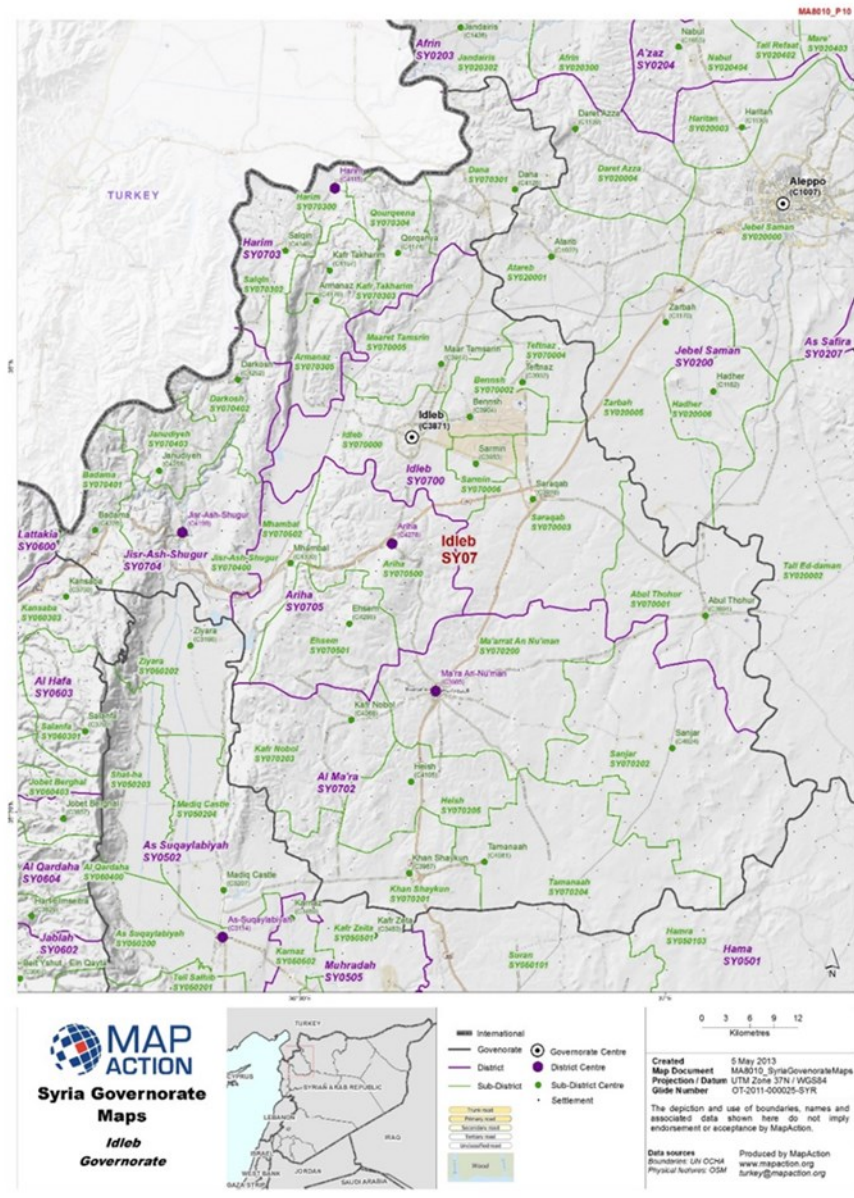






## 2. Governorate-level description of the security situation

### 2.1. Idlib governorate



Map 6: © MapAction, Idlib governorate<sup>356</sup>

<sup>356</sup> MapAction, Idlib governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)



### 2.1.1. General description of the governorate

Idlib is located in north-west Syria, bordering Türkiye to the north, Hama governorate to the south, Aleppo governorate to the east, and Latakia governorate to the west. The governorate is divided into five districts: Idlib, Ariha, Jisr-Ash-Shughur, Harim and Al Mara.<sup>357</sup>

Idlib city is the capital of the governorate and in 2011 had a population of over 2 million inhabitants. The city is located on the strategic road between Aleppo and Damascus governorates.<sup>358</sup> From 2014 to 10 July 2023, the Bab Al-Hawa crossing with Türkiye was the only UN authorised border crossing in Syria open to cross-border humanitarian aid destined for areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in north-west Syria.<sup>359</sup> However, UN Security Council authorisation to use Bab Al-Hawa lapsed 10 July 2023, and at the time of writing had not been renewed. For further information on the humanitarian importance and status of the Bab Al-Hawa crossing, see section [1.2](#).

According to 2022 estimates by UNOCHA, the population of Idlib governorate was 2 927 392 inhabitants, of whom 1 899 350 were IDPs.<sup>360</sup> Population estimates vary greatly due to the majority of IDPs in the governorate and regular IDP movements (see section [2.1.3\(h\)](#) below). For more information on the ethno-religious composition of Idlib's population, see the [EUAA COI Report Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

### 2.1.2. Conflict background and armed actors

### 2.1.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

Since March 2020<sup>361</sup> Idlib governorate has been divided into areas controlled by the GoS and allied militias and areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups. Anti-GoS armed groups control the western and northern parts of the governorate, which cover virtually all the areas north and immediately south of the M4 highway.<sup>362</sup> After the Turkish military deployment and/or incursion into areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib governorate (Operation Spring Shield) in early March 2020, Türkiye and Russia mediated a ceasefire<sup>363</sup> between GoS and allied militias and anti-GoS armed groups<sup>364</sup>.

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<sup>357</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic. Governorates Profiles, June 2014, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>358</sup> REACH, Syria, Syrian Cities Damage Atlas, 16 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 45-46

<sup>359</sup> UN Security Council, Security Council Renews Cross-Border Aid Operations into Syria's North-West for Six Months, Adopting Resolution 2642 (2022) as 'Compromise' amid Divisions, 12 July 2022, [url](#), paras. 45-46; USDOS, Attacks on Civilians in Syria, Press Statement, 22 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>360</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>361</sup> Information on the conflict background and armed actors in Idlib prior to August 2022 is available in the [EUAA COI report Syria – Security situation \(September 2022\)](#), [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security Situation \(July 2021\)](#), and [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

<sup>362</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#); UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#).

<sup>363</sup> For details, see UN Security Council, Letter dated 6 March 2020 from the representatives of the Russian Federation and Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, 6 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>364</sup> International Crisis Group, Türkiye's Syria Policy after Erdoğan's Win, 20 July 2023, [url](#)

Since the March 2020 ceasefire, the areas of control in and around the so-called ‘Idlib de-escalation area’<sup>365</sup> have ‘stabilized’<sup>366</sup>, the major frontlines have remained ‘stagnant’<sup>367</sup> and Syria has experienced a ‘period without significant frontline changes’.<sup>368</sup> The largest change regarding control was noted between Idlib and Aleppo governorates, where HTS briefly seized territory from armed groups allied with Türkiye.<sup>369</sup> These clashes did not, however, lead to a formal redrawing of internal boundaries between opposition factions.<sup>370</sup> According to International Crisis Group, the 10 000 Turkish troops present in northern Syria including Idlib have allowed Ankara to enforce the Idlib ceasefire.<sup>371</sup> These are especially present along the border regions between Idlib and Aleppo governorates.<sup>372</sup>

#### (a) Anti-GoS armed groups

Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) controls those parts of Idlib governorate under the control of anti-GoS armed groups and has almost complete control over the wider Idlib de-escalation area, including most border crossings with Türkiye.<sup>373</sup> HTS has been described as ‘a former al-Qaeda affiliate still designated as a terrorist group by the UN and many states’<sup>374</sup> and as the dominant armed group in the governorate. HTS administers the governorate through the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG).<sup>375</sup> Most sources concur that HTS has between 7 000<sup>376</sup> and 10 000 fighters under its command,<sup>377</sup> while sources interviewed by DIS in October 2022 cite between 30 000 and 80 000 fighters.<sup>378</sup> Within Idlib, with respect to the situation prevailing before 2019 between anti-GoS factions, the security situation in the area dominated by HTS has been described as ‘four years of relative stability’.<sup>379</sup> For further information on HTS, see section [1.4.4](#) above.

<sup>365</sup> The term ‘Idlib de-escalation area’ or ‘Idlib de-escalation zone’ covers the areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib governorate as well as the adjoining, similar areas in western Aleppo and northern Hama and Latakia governorates. On the establishment of the Idlib de-escalation area (and other similar areas) see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and Jaecke, G. & Labude, D., De-escalation zones in Syria, KAS, June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>366</sup> Clingendael, Turkey’s interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>367</sup> FT, Syria: what is Turkey’s grand plan?, 25 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>368</sup> Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>369</sup> IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 305; Syria TV, Through SNA Cracks: HTS Infiltrates Aleppo Countryside, Manipulates Loyalties, The Syrian Observer, 25 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>370</sup> Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey’s Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>371</sup> International Crisis Group, Türkiye’s Syria Policy after Erdoğan’s Win, 20 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>372</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces’ military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>373</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 5; Tsurkov, E., Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (Syria), European Council on Foreign Relations, n.d., [url](#); Solomon, C., HTS: Evolution of a Jihadi Group, Wilson Center, 13 July 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, التقديرات الراهنة والأفاق.. موارد هيئة تحرير الشام، 28 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>374</sup> International Crisis Group, Türkiye’s Syria Policy after Erdoğan’s Win, 20 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>375</sup> Al-Abdeh, M. and Hauch, L., Rebel infighting foreshadows the next phase of the Syrian conflict, Atlantic Council, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>376</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 13 February 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2023/95, 13 February 2023, [url](#), para. 46

<sup>377</sup> IISS, The Military Balance, Volume 123, 2023, [url](#), p. 357

<sup>378</sup> DIS, Recruitment to opposition groups, December 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>379</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)



The Idlib de-escalation zone has been described as ‘safe haven and holding pen’<sup>380</sup> for other Islamist and/or jihadist groups, including some made up of foreign fighters.<sup>381</sup> For further information on other anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib, see section [1.4.5](#) above.

HTS has ‘subdued’ the various jihadist groups previously present in Idlib. In some cases it has eradicated them; in others, it has allowed only a few leaders or, in some cases, a few fighters to remain in the governorate.<sup>382</sup> During the reporting period, independent jihadist groups outside Fath Al-Mubin remained in Idlib, including HTS’ rival, al-Qaida-affiliated jihadist group Hurras al-Din (HaD), but were described as ‘tiny’.<sup>383</sup> HaD was reportedly ‘defunct’.<sup>384</sup> Among other jihadist groups unreconciled to HTS quasi-hegemony in Idlib, Jabhat Ansar Al-Din has only a few fighters left and Ansar Al-Islam is characterized as ‘miniscule, with very little military capability’.<sup>385</sup> In late June 2023 a new insurgent group, ‘Revolutionary Shield Company’, emerged and claimed to fight HTS ‘criminality’ as opposed to GoS forces and allied militias.<sup>386</sup>

The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), centred in northern Aleppo governorate,<sup>387</sup> had presence in Idlib governorate.<sup>388</sup> The SNA-affiliated<sup>389</sup> National Liberation Front (NLF) is part of the Fath al-Mubin Operations Room and fights alongside HTS on the Idlib frontlines.<sup>390</sup> HTS aside, the two strongest SNA factions in Fath Al-Mubin are Ahrar al-Sham and Faylaq al-Sham.<sup>391</sup>

For more information on anti-government armed groups in the Idlib area, see sections [1.4.4](#) to [1.4.6](#).

#### **(b) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups**

The GoS and allied militias control the southern and eastern parts of Idlib governorate, including the Damascus-Aleppo highway (M5) and its immediate surroundings.<sup>392</sup> In April 2023, SNHR reported that the 25<sup>th</sup> Division (Special Tasks) (previously the Tiger Forces) is deployed across large sections of the fronts in Idlib governorate in particular.<sup>393</sup> Prior to the reference period, the First, Second and Third brigades of the SAA’s Fifth Corps based in Hama governorate were extensively deployed in south Idlib.<sup>394</sup>

<sup>380</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>381</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>382</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>383</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>384</sup> Bunzel, C., Explainer: The Jihadi Threat in 2022, Wilson Center, 22 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>385</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>386</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>387</sup> Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey’s Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p.14

<sup>388</sup> ACLED, Actor Profile: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), 26 July 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>389</sup> Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>390</sup> Al-Monitor, Idlib sees new escalation between Syrian government, opposition forces, 22 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>391</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>392</sup> See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>393</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units [source: SNHR], April 2023, [url](#), p.22

<sup>394</sup> Waters, G, From Tiger Forces to the 16th Brigade: Russia’s evolving Syrian proxies, MEI, 12 September 2022, [url](#)





### (c) ISIL

ISIL cells and leaders remain present in Idlib despite HTS' 'counter-terrorism'<sup>395</sup> efforts to render them entirely inoperable<sup>396</sup>, and ISIL continues claiming attacks against HTS targets.<sup>397</sup> However, ISIL's position in Idlib has been 'severely weakened' by HTS suppression of the group, even while HTS has yet to obtain the capacity to 'completely root out'<sup>398</sup> ISIL's underground networks.<sup>399</sup>

### (d) Security trends during the reporting period

#### *Clashes involving GoS forces, opposition armed groups and ISIL*

According to the International Crisis Group, the ceasefire in place since March 2020 remained in effect during the reference period but was regularly 'strain[ed]'<sup>400</sup>, notably by 'near daily' GoS forces and allied militias shelling and 'frequent' aerial bombing by GoS ally Russia that both 'uproot many people across the governorate time and again.'<sup>401</sup>

The UNCOI reported that the conflict 'intensified' on several frontlines in the second half of 2022, including the frontline located in Idlib.<sup>402</sup> Between July and December 2022, the UNCOI recorded 20 aerial and ground attacks carried out by GoS forces and allied militias in western Aleppo and Idlib that resulted in 195 civilian casualties.<sup>403</sup> The International Crisis Group reported that 'Russian and regime attacks fell off somewhat in 2022' in Idlib relative to previous years, but emphasised that, by March 2023, armed conflict still displaced 10 000 people each month.<sup>404</sup> UNOCHA emphasised that, in 2022, active armed incidents and clashes remained regularly reported around frontline areas and caused civilian casualties, especially including in areas south of the M4 highway in Idlib.<sup>405</sup> 'Widespread breaches' of the post-March-2020 ceasefire continued to occur in the second half of 2022<sup>406</sup> and the first half of 2023.<sup>407</sup> Beyond Russian air raids, these consisted primarily of mutual shelling, rocket fire and limited clashes

<sup>395</sup> Zelin, A. Y., 'Jihadi 'Counterterrorism:' Hayat Tahrir al-Sham Versus the Islamic State, CTC Sentinel, February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>396</sup> Zelin, A. Y., 'Jihadi 'Counterterrorism:' Hayat Tahrir al-Sham Versus the Islamic State, CTC Sentinel, February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>397</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>398</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>399</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 12; Nasr, W., 'Journey to Idlib: An Interview with Wassim Nasr, Journalist, France24, CTC Sentinel, May 2023, [url](#); Zelin, A. Y., 'Jihadi 'Counterterrorism:' Hayat Tahrir al-Sham Versus the Islamic State, CTC Sentinel, February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>400</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>401</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>402</sup> OHCHR, Don't look away: Syrian civilians face the prospect of a new escalation, 14 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>403</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 22

<sup>404</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>405</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>406</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, 2 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>407</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: June 2023, June 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para.4; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para.7





between opposition armed groups and GoS forces and allied militias across contact lines<sup>408</sup>, causing frequent civilian casualties.<sup>409</sup>

Frequent alleged Russian airstrikes were the primary cause of documented civilian deaths. Airstrikes were notably recorded in September 2022 when they reportedly killed 14 civilians in two separate incidents and five air raids. Such strikes further stepped up from October 2022, with Russia reportedly killing at least nine civilians and injuring over 70 in a bombing of IDP camps near Idlib city on 6 November.<sup>410</sup>

Regarding ground military activity, raids by HTS on GoS forces and allied militias positions in September-October 2022 were followed by several months of escalation. In December 2022, HTS raids notably targeted GoS and allied militias positions in eastern Idlib. In January 2023, for 'the first time'<sup>411</sup>, groups within the HTS-led Fath al-Mubin coalition joined these HTS raids, drawing GoS and allied militias shelling of towns in Idlib.<sup>412</sup>

Notably, attacks on crops and agricultural land were commonly reported, with such attacks in Idlib making up 18 % of the total between 2017 and 2022, second only to the percentage recorded for Hama governorate.<sup>413</sup> The UNCOI reported on numerous instances of attacks on agricultural fields in the second half of 2022 that led to civilian casualties.<sup>414</sup>

Among the deadliest incidents in the second half of 2022, shelling, airstrikes and clashes taking place in November 2022 in the vicinity of Idlib City destroyed the homes of hundreds of displaced families in three IDP camps supported by humanitarian organisations. At least nine civilians were killed and 75 were injured, including children. More than 400 families were displaced.<sup>415</sup>

In the deadliest single incident for civilians documented by the UNCOI in the second half of 2022, on 6 November 2022, the UNCOI documented that cluster munitions struck the densely populated Maram displacement camp near Kafr Jalis, close to the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing, and impacted six other nearby camps. UNCOI analysis determined that these cluster munitions were launched from GoS-held Nayrab airport, approximately 35 kilometres away. At least 7 civilians were killed in the incident, including 1 woman and 4 children, while at least 60 other civilians were injured.<sup>416</sup> This use of cluster munitions was reported in Kafr Jalis, Murin and Kafr Ruhin in western rural Idlib and Sina'ah and Ariha areas in southern rural Idlib.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para.7

<sup>409</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), Annex IV, para.25

<sup>410</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>411</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>412</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>413</sup> Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria, April 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>414</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), paras 27-28, Annex IV, paras 10-17

<sup>415</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>416</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), Annex IV, para.25; HRW, Syria: Cluster Munitions Used in November 6 Attacks, 23 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>417</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 4





According to the UN Security Council, violent incidents continued throughout the first five months of 2023, causing civilian casualties.<sup>418</sup>

Along with Aleppo governorate, Idlib was the governorate hardest hit by the 6 February 2023 earthquake that ‘devastated’ Syria’s northwest in particular.<sup>419</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the February 2023 earthquake in the Idlib de-escalation area, violent incidents decreased as HTS ceased attacks on GoS and allied militias positions in Idlib. Following renewed GoS forces and allied post-earthquake shelling,<sup>420</sup> however, HTS attacks also resumed.<sup>421</sup>

Clashes across contact lines in Idlib swiftly resumed, with civilian casualties recorded. In February and March 2023, frontlines in Idlib remained among the most affected by hostilities.<sup>422</sup> In late May 2023, Russian airstrikes on anti-GoS held areas in Idlib rose to a level unprecedented in 18 months. According to Etana Syria, since the beginning of May 2023 Russian airstrikes on north-west Syria in general have ‘dramatically intensified’ and caused ‘the deadliest attacks on civilians in the region in over a year’, in a dynamic ‘towards greater confrontation and targeting of civilians’. This has included the bombing in June 2023 of a vegetable market in Jisr-Ash-Shughur that killed at least nine and injured dozens more.<sup>423</sup> On 26 August 2023, SOHR reported that Ansar al-Tawhid (AaT) and the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) mounted the first tunnel bombing on SAA positions since 2016, killing at least 11 GoS soldiers<sup>424</sup> in the most severe attack since 2020 according to pro-government Athr Press.<sup>425</sup>

#### (e) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 1 837 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Idlib governorate, of which 187 were coded as battles, 1 569 explosions/remote violence and 81 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>426</sup> Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in Ariha and al Ma’ra districts (see [Figure 3.](#))

<sup>418</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>419</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para.3; Data Friendly Space, ‘Syria Earthquake February 2023 Government-controlled areas, Bi-Weekly Highlights - 17/02/2023’, 17 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>420</sup> Middle East Eye, Syria: Assad forces bombed areas hit by earthquake hours after disaster, 7 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>421</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Para 7, 29

<sup>422</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Para 7, 29

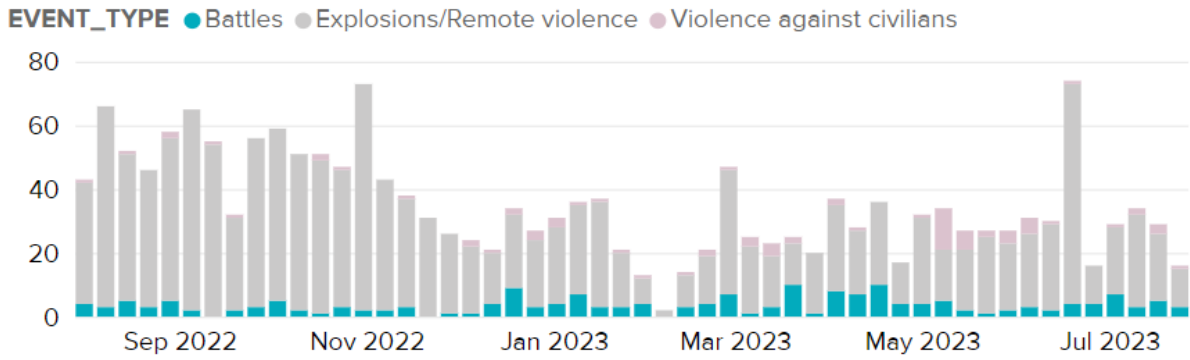
<sup>423</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: June 2023, June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>424</sup> Middle East Eye, Syria: Eleven soldiers killed in tunnel attack, 26 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>425</sup> Athr Press, Most Violent in Three Years: Armed Factions Attack Syrian Army in Idleb Countryside, The Syrian Observer, 28 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>426</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)





**Figure 2. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Idlib governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data<sup>427</sup>**

According to ACLED, GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were the main actor involved in security incidents (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2') during the reference period, accounting for around 73 % of all documented security incidents and around 83 % of all incidents coded as explosions/remote violence. Opposition armed groups, including HTS and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 23 % of all security incidents, the vast majority of which had GoS forces and affiliated armed groups as a party.

<sup>427</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)





District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Al Ma'ra	78	523	-
Ariha	29	621	11
Harim	5	25	26
Idlib	75	351	32
Jisr-Ash-Shugur	-	49	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>1569</b>	<b>81</b>

**Figure 3. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Idlib governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>428</sup>**

**(f) Civilian fatalities**

SNHR documented 246 civilian fatalities in 2021<sup>429</sup> and 147 in 2022.<sup>430</sup> Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 91 civilian fatalities in Idlib governorate.<sup>431</sup> For the year 2022, AOA V documented 279 civilian casualties (killed and injured) in Idlib resulting from incidents of explosive violence.<sup>432</sup>

<sup>428</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

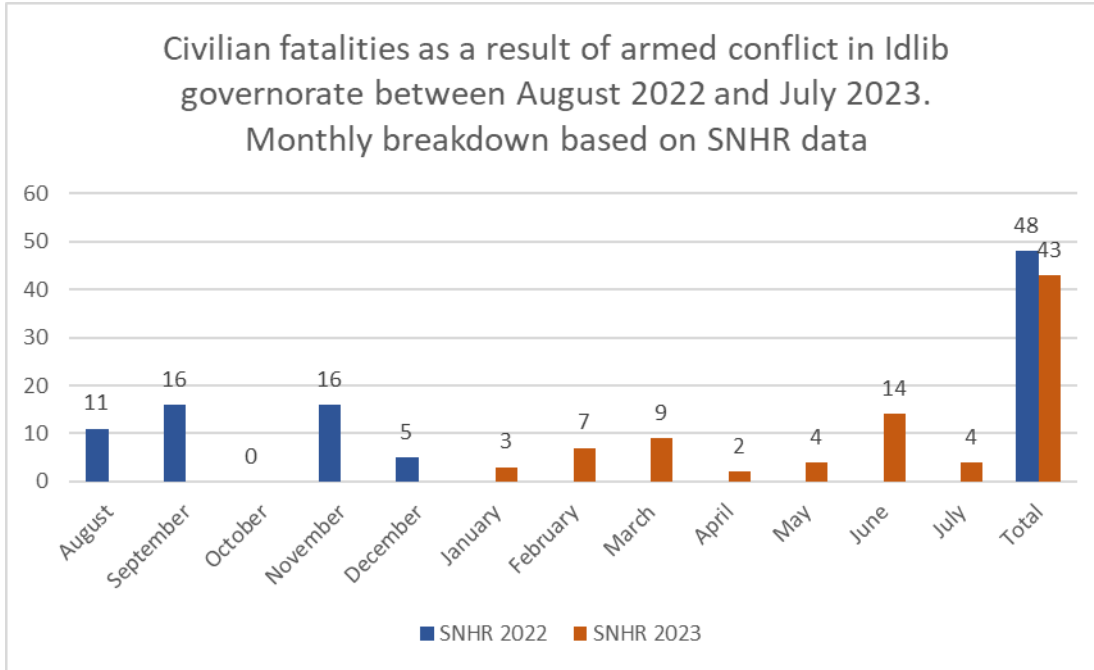
<sup>429</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>430</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>431</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Women, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>432</sup> AOA V, Syria, updated 21 March 2023, [url](#)





**Figure 4. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Idlib governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

**(g) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

Idlib is one of the governorates where sources reported the highest percentage of widespread explosive ordnance contamination during the reporting period.<sup>433</sup> UXO contamination was identified most often on ‘agricultural land, roads and private property, followed by schools, other public infrastructure and hospitals’ and particularly affected Idlib governorate.<sup>434</sup>

Civilian casualties, including of children, as a result of ERW were reported in Idlib in 2022<sup>435</sup> and 2023.<sup>436</sup> Insecurity and the presence of ERW has also impeded access of farmers to agricultural land.<sup>437</sup>

**(h) Displacement and return**

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 1 899 350 IDPs in Idlib governorate.<sup>438</sup> In 2022, Idlib governorate recorded the highest number of IDP movements in Syria by a considerable distance, at 122 807 movements: some 13 000 from the governorate, 105 000 within the governorate and 18 000 to the governorate. The highest numbers were recorded in

<sup>433</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para.29; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para.33

<sup>434</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>435</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 24; Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria, April 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>436</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), p. 19; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>437</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 30; Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria, April 2023, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>438</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33



November (16 024), September (15 477) and February (12 543).<sup>439</sup> Two Idlib subdistricts, Dana (Harim district) and Maaret Tamsrin (Idlib district), recorded the highest number of IDP movements in Syria and were the only subdistricts to witness over 20 000 IDP movements per month over the course of 2022.<sup>440</sup> In the first six months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded some 2 600 IDP movements from Idlib governorate, 68 200 IDP movements within the governorate and 25 800 IDP movements to the governorate.<sup>441</sup>

The majority of IDP movements were recorded in February 2023 when over 34 000 persons were displaced mostly within the governorate following the earthquakes.<sup>442</sup> IDP movements recorded during the period January to June 2023 were mostly motivated by ‘access to services and livelihoods’.<sup>443</sup>

UNOCHA recorded 38 724 IDP spontaneous return movements in 2022, the highest numbers being recorded in September (6 017) and May (5 120). 1 000 were to the governorate, 28 000 within the governorate and 11 000 to the governorate.<sup>444</sup> The majority of IDP return movements recorded by UNOCHA in 2022 (28 000 from a total of 39 000) occurred within the governorate, that saw the highest return movements figures across Syria.<sup>445</sup> In 2022, the UN cited a combination of ‘push and pull factors related to changes in the security and economic situation in the place of origin and/or area of displacement’ as the main reason for IDP return movements.<sup>446</sup> In the south of the governorate under GoS forces and allied militias control, SNHR reported on the continued auctioning of lands in Idlib governorate belonging to displaced persons and refugees<sup>447</sup> as a factor precluding returns to the area<sup>448</sup>.

In the first six months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded some 10 000 IDP returns to Idlib governorate, 14 800 return movements within the governorate and 680 returns from the

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<sup>439</sup> UNOCHA, IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>440</sup> UNOCHA, IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data December 2022, updated 26 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>441</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>442</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>443</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>444</sup> UNOCHA, IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data December 2022, updated 26 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>445</sup> UNOCHA, IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>446</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 55

<sup>447</sup> SNHR, The Syrian Regime Announces New Auctions of Lands in Idlib Province Belonging to Displaced Persons and Refugees With the Aim of Seizing Them, 20 October 2022, [url](#); New Arab (The), ‘Syria regime auctioning off refugees’ land in Idlib’s Khan Sheikhoun, emptied after sarin gas attack’, 7 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>448</sup> SNHR, The Syrian Regime Announces New Auctions of Lands in Idlib Province Belonging to Displaced Persons and Refugees With the Aim of Seizing Them, 20 October 2022, [url](#); New Arab (The), ‘Syria regime auctioning off refugees’ land in Idlib’s Khan Sheikhoun, emptied after sarin gas attack’, 7 October 2022, [url](#)





governorate.<sup>449</sup> The highest return numbers were recorded in February and attributed to the earthquakes.<sup>450</sup>

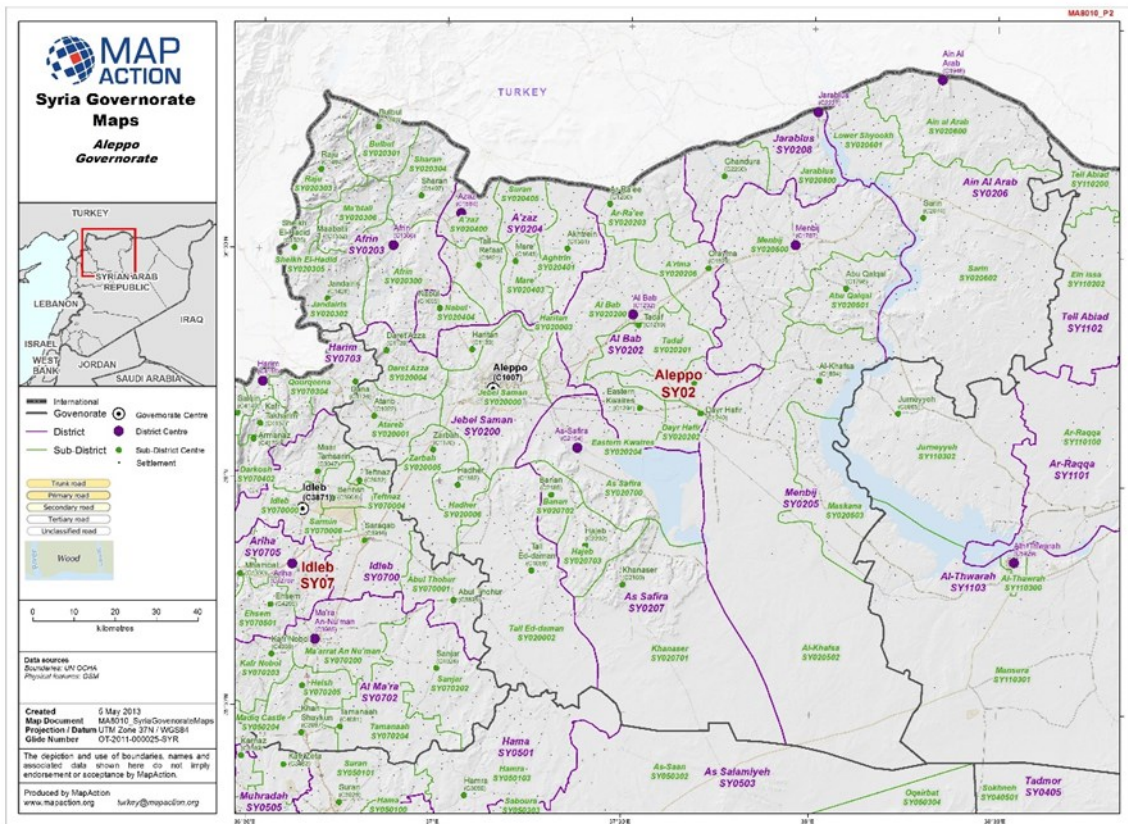
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<sup>449</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>450</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#)



## 2.2. Aleppo governorate



Map 7: © MapAction, Aleppo governorate<sup>451</sup>

### 2.2.1. General description of the governorate

Aleppo governorate is located in the north of Syria, bordering Idlib governorate to the west, Hama governorate to the south and Raqqah governorate to the east, and it shares an international border with Türkiye.<sup>452</sup> The governorate is divided into eight districts: Jebel Saman, Afrin (or Efrin), A'zaz (or Azaz), Al-Bab, Manbij (or Menbij), Jarablus, Ain Al Arab (or Kobane), and As-Safira.<sup>453</sup> In a December 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Aleppo governorate at 4 226 203.<sup>454</sup> According to UNOCHA, as of April 2023, the total population of those areas in northern Aleppo that are under Turkish control<sup>455</sup> was approximately 1.4 million, of whom 850 000 were IDPs.<sup>456</sup> For more information on the ethnic

<sup>451</sup> MapAction, Aleppo governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>452</sup> UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic [Map], January 2017, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>453</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic, Governorates profile (June 2014), 6 August 2014, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>454</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>455</sup> The area discussed by UNOCHA as 'Turkish Operation Area' coincides with the areas captured by Turkish forces and affiliated anti-GoS armed groups during the so-called 'Euphrates Shield' and 'Olive Branch' military operations.

<sup>456</sup> UNOCHA, Northwest Syria Factsheet (As of 30 April 2023), 5 May 2023, [url](#), p. 1

and religious composition of Aleppo's population, see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), section 2.2.1.

## 2.2.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Aleppo governorate is divided into areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups, areas controlled by the GoS, and several separate areas and enclaves controlled by the SDF<sup>457</sup>/YPG.<sup>458</sup> Anti-GoS armed groups continued to control the northern parts of the governorate, including the areas adjacent to the Turkish border in Afrin, A'zaz, Al-Bab and Jarablus districts and areas west of Aleppo city adjoining the areas of Idlib governorate controlled by anti-GoS armed groups.<sup>459</sup> Aleppo's countryside from Afrin to Al-Bab and Jarablus was reportedly controlled by the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA).<sup>460</sup> Parts of western Aleppo governorate were under the control of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).<sup>461</sup>

In the reference period of the previous [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(September 2022\)](#), ISIL had presence in the parts of Aleppo governorate controlled by Turkish-backed SNA and was active in GoS-controlled southern Aleppo governorate.<sup>462</sup> Gregory Waters, a researcher specialising in the Syrian conflict and extremist groups, elaborated in a January 2023 report that ISIL cells had always been present in south Aleppo, albeit with low levels of activity, but that the return of ambushes in the area in December 2022 indicated a 'strengthened and emboldened ISIS [ISIL] in this region'.<sup>463</sup>

### (a) Anti-GoS armed groups

In mid-October 2022, HTS took over the city of Afrin,<sup>464</sup> including its surroundings,<sup>465</sup> from the SNA<sup>466</sup> for around two weeks.<sup>467</sup> According to the SOHR, a minimum of 30 positions in the

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<sup>457</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>458</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#); UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Aleppo and June 2023.

<sup>459</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#); UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Aleppo and June 2023.

<sup>460</sup> TIMEP, So Close Yet So Far: The Political and Economic Isolation of Northwest Syria, 20 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>461</sup> SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), pp. 50, 96; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/51/45, 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 56

<sup>462</sup> EUAA, Syria: Security Situation, September 2022, [url](#), p. 86

<sup>463</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>464</sup> Netjes, R., Shifting Lines and IDPs: Azaz, Afrin, and the HTS Incursion, TWI, 19 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>465</sup> Enab Baladi, "تحرير الشام" "نقتحم عفرين و"الفيلق الثالث" ينسحب نحو اعزاز ["Tahrir al-Sham' enters Afrin and the 'Third Corps' withdraws towards Azaz], 13 October 2022, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Recap: HTS and Opposition Agreement in Northern Syria Following Turkish Intervention, 21 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>466</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, October – December 2022, 1 May 2023, [url](#), pp. 10-11; VOA, Jihadist Group Takes Over Strategic Town in Northwest Syria, 13 October 2022, [url](#); Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria: HTS militants storm into Afrin as infighting rips through rebel-held areas, 13 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>467</sup> MEE, Syria: Turkey to reorganise rebel groups as HTS withdraws from Afrin, 25 October 2022, [url](#)

area had already been under the control of HTS before the takeover of Afrin.<sup>468</sup> A January 2023 article by opposition-affiliated Syria TV indicated that HTS was tightening control over north-western Syria, such as via proxy groups and the formation of new alliances, and was active in Afrin ‘in a hidden way’, holding ‘the Hamran crossing between Manbij and Jarabulus’.<sup>469</sup> In February 2023, reportedly, the ‘Shahba Gathering’ was founded, uniting around 7 000 fighters of a number of SNA factions as well as HTS-affiliated groups.<sup>470</sup> As of May 2023, territorial control was restored to what it had been prior to the takeover of Afrin, with the difference that Afrin and other bordering areas remained under the control of HTS-friendly SNA factions.<sup>471</sup>

### (b) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

The GoS controls the central and southern parts of the governorate, including the Damascus-Aleppo motorway (M5) and its immediate surroundings.<sup>472</sup> As of April 2023, the pro-government Russia-affiliated and pro-Iranian<sup>473</sup> Palestinian<sup>474</sup> Liwa Al-Quds brigade, which had been present in Aleppo governorate in the past, was subsequently transferred to Deir Ez-Zor governorate.<sup>475</sup> The International Crisis Group and Etana Syria indicated, in June 2023, that large contingents of GoS forces were deployed to northern Aleppo governorate,<sup>476</sup> while the number of GoS artillery strikes increased.<sup>477</sup>

According to a US Congress report, GoS and Russian forces in late January 2023 re-opened the joint base al-Jarrah (or Jirah), east of Aleppo city, reportedly, ‘as an additional option for forward deploying aircraft for air patrols along the northern Syrian border’.<sup>478</sup> In the reference period, the presence of GoS’s 25<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Mission Division was reported in Aleppo governorate.<sup>479</sup>

<sup>468</sup> VOA, Jihadist Group Takes Over Strategic Town in Northwest Syria, 13 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>469</sup> Syria TV, Through SNA Cracks: HTS Infiltrates Aleppo Countryside, Manipulates Loyalties, The Syrian Observer, 25 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>470</sup> Enab Baladi, ريف حلب.. “تجمع الشهباء” يعزز صفوفه وينفي تبعيته لأي جهة [Rural Aleppo: ‘Al-Shahba Gathering’ strengthens its ranks and denies its affiliation with any party], 28 February 2023, [url](#), Shahba Gathering: Is HTS organizing its own militia in north Aleppo? Part I, 1 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>471</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, October – December 2022, 1 May 2023, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>472</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#); UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Aleppo and June 2023.

<sup>473</sup> Bousset, P., The Quds Force in Syria: Combatants, Units, and Actions, CTC Sentinel, June 2023, [url](#), pp. 3, 6

<sup>474</sup> Galia, E., The Pro-Iranian Militias in Syria, ITIC, 29 March 2023, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>475</sup> Al Arabiya, فصائل لواء القدس يتبنون قصف الجولان.. فمن هو؟ [Liwa al-Quds faction claims responsibility for bombing of Golan heights, but who is Liwa al-Quds?], 9 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>476</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – June 2023, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>477</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>478</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 54

<sup>479</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

In the reference period, GoS's Fourth Division continued a siege on the Kurdish-controlled Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya neighbourhoods of Aleppo city,<sup>480</sup> which had been imposed since mid-March 2022.<sup>481</sup> It reportedly deployed reinforcements in the vicinity of these neighbourhoods as well as in (likewise Kurdish-held) Al-Shahba Canton in northern Aleppo, which includes the Tall Rifaat region,<sup>482</sup> 'to further intensify the siege on the area'.<sup>483</sup> According to a January 2023 Orient XII article, the Kurdish-controlled Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhood and Tall Rifaat region had been facing a particularly strict siege by the GoS since August 2022.<sup>484</sup> As of December 2022, Russian-backed Syrian troops controlled zones mainly to the south of Tall Rifaat.<sup>485</sup>

### (c) Kurdish armed groups (SDF/YPG)

SDF/YPG are in control of or have presence in Aleppo city (in the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya),<sup>486</sup> in the Tall Rifaat area north of Aleppo city<sup>487</sup> and in Manbij<sup>488</sup> and Ain al-Arab (Kobane) in eastern Aleppo governorate.<sup>489</sup> Reportedly, the local Kurdish military outfit Afrin Liberation Forces (HRE; Kurdish: [Hezen Rizgariya Efrine](#)) was also active in Aleppo governorate in the reference period.<sup>490</sup>

### (d) Türkiye

Turkish forces have a presence alongside anti-GoS armed groups in the so-called Operation Olive Branch and Operation Euphrates Shield areas controlled by these groups in the north of Aleppo governorate,<sup>491</sup> with a high density in the north-west and along the border regions between Idlib and Aleppo governorates.<sup>492</sup> Observation posts established by Turkish forces along the frontlines separating the areas west of Aleppo city controlled by anti-GoS armed groups from the GoS-controlled central Aleppo governorate, as of January 2023, remained

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<sup>480</sup> Kurdistan24, Two Kurdish children die in Aleppo due to Syrian government siege, 5 January 2023, [url](#); Shaam Network, Residents of Aleppo's Ashrafiyah and Sheikh Maqsoud Pay for Conflict Between PKK and 4th Division, The Syrian Observer, 6 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>481</sup> SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>482</sup> VOA, Syrian Kurd Who Lost Hand in IS Battle Finds Passion for the Drums, 26 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>483</sup> SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>484</sup> Ali, A. and Ledeganck, I., Dans le nord de la Syrie, les rivalités régionales réveillent l'organisation de l'État islamique, Orient XXI, 31 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>485</sup> France 24, Russia sends troop reinforcements to Kurdish-controlled northern Syria, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>486</sup> Kurdistan24, Two Kurdish children die in Aleppo due to Syrian government siege, 5 January 2023, [url](#); Shaam Network, Residents of Aleppo's Ashrafiyah and Sheikh Maqsoud Pay for Conflict Between PKK and 4th Division, The Syrian Observer, 6 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>487</sup> Ali, A. and Ledeganck, I., Dans le nord de la Syrie, les rivalités régionales réveillent l'organisation de l'État islamique, Orient XXI, 31 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>488</sup> Netjes, R., Arab Syrian IDPs of Tal Rifaat also Want to Go Home, TWI, 12 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>489</sup> France 24, Russia sends troop reinforcements to Kurdish-controlled northern Syria, 1 December 2022, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Syrian opposition gears up for Turkish ground operation, 2 December 2022, [url](#); MEE, Turkey 'gives Russia time to broker a deal' on Syria's Tal Rifaat, 29 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>490</sup> AFN News, Afrin Liberation Forces publish balance sheet of actions they carried out in July, 1 August 2023, [url](#);

NPA, 92 Kurdish soldiers killed in Syria's Afrin – Kurdish armed force, 4 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>491</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>492</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)



the same as in the previous reference period, according to the UN.<sup>493</sup> Turkish proxies controlled areas surrounding Tall Rifaat from the north.<sup>494</sup>

#### (e) Russia

According to Jusoor for Studies, as of July 2023, Russian forces were deployed in areas controlled by the GoS and in some areas controlled by the SDF/YPG, such as Manbij.<sup>495</sup> Russian forces continued to be stationed in Aleppo city.<sup>496</sup> In November 2022, in the light of a possible Turkish incursion, Russia reportedly deployed forces to Tall Rifaat city, where Russian forces were already present.<sup>497</sup> With reference to confidential sources interviewed by the pro-GoS newspaper Athr Press, it was reported that Russian forces were still positioned in Tall Rifaat city as of June 2023.<sup>498</sup>

#### (f) Iran

According to Jusoor for Studies, as of July 2023, Iranian forces were deployed in Aleppo governorate in the areas controlled by GoS as well as in areas in north-western Aleppo governorate controlled by the SDF/YPG.<sup>499</sup> A government source indicated that the central Iranian military base was located in the Jabal Azzan area to the south of Aleppo.<sup>500</sup> According to an article by researcher and political analyst Pierre Boussel published in June 2023, several local pro-Iranian militias, among which the Aleppo Defenders Corps, were present in Aleppo governorate. Furthermore, military reinforcements from the Iraqi Badr Brigade were present at the bases of the 80<sup>th</sup> Brigade near Aleppo International Airport.<sup>501</sup> With reference to various sources, Boussel further indicated that IRGC Quds force units were moving towards northern Syria, among others in order to get closer to Shiite cities in Aleppo governorate such as Al-Zahraa and Nubl northwest of Aleppo. Furthermore, Iranian drone launch sites were placed at the Jirah and Kuweires airbases in eastern Aleppo governorate.<sup>502</sup> In 2022, pro-Iranian militias reportedly established bases near the cities of Deir Hafir and Maskanah in Manbij district, located along the road to Raqqa governorate.<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>493</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>494</sup> France 24, Russia sends troop reinforcements to Kurdish-controlled northern Syria, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>495</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>496</sup> Athr Press, Truth of News of Withdrawal of Russian Members from Tal Rifaat Base in Northern Syria, The Syrian Observer, 7 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>497</sup> AFP, Russia sends reinforcements to northern Syria, 30 November 2022

<sup>498</sup> Athr Press, Truth of News of Withdrawal of Russian Members from Tal Rifaat Base in Northern Syria, The Syrian Observer, 7 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>499</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>500</sup> Syria TV, Syria Earthquake Reveals Extent of Iranian Influence in Aleppo, The Syrian Observer, 2 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>501</sup> Boussel, P., The Quds Force in Syria: Combatants, Units, and Actions, CTC Sentinel, June 2023, [url](#), pp. 4-5

<sup>502</sup> Boussel, P., The Quds Force in Syria: Combatants, Units, and Actions, CTC Sentinel, June 2023, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>503</sup> Galia, E., The Pro-Iranian Militias in Syria, ITIC, 29 March 2023, [url](#), p. 23

## 2.2.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

In the reference period, civilian casualties in Aleppo governorate occurred as a result of ground-based strikes,<sup>504</sup> drone strikes<sup>505</sup> and stray bullets.<sup>506</sup> Furthermore, airstrikes,<sup>507</sup> rocket fire across front lines, shelling<sup>508</sup> and limited clashes were reported.<sup>509</sup> Incidents in which civilians were shot and killed by an armed group,<sup>510</sup> at a checkpoint<sup>511</sup> or by unknown perpetrators<sup>512</sup> were also reported. Sustained tensions in northern Aleppo continued particularly in frontline areas.<sup>513</sup> Overall, the reported incidents occurred in northern<sup>514</sup> and north-western Aleppo,<sup>515</sup> eastern, north-eastern and western Aleppo governorate.<sup>516</sup> Airstrikes and mutual shelling were also reported in densely populated areas such as Ayn Al-Arab (Kobane).<sup>517</sup> UNOCHA reported that the majority of IED attacks in 2022 in Syria were recorded in areas controlled by armed groups in Turkish operations in Aleppo and two other governorates.<sup>518</sup> According to UNOCHA, ‘targeted air strikes against airports’ in Aleppo occurred regularly.<sup>519</sup> Strikes reportedly targeted civilian areas in A’zaz, Al-Bab, Afrin and other areas in northern rural Aleppo.<sup>520</sup> Clashes occurred in the reference period in areas north of Aleppo such as Ayn Al-Arab, Afrin and Tall Rifaat.<sup>521</sup> Artillery shelling by GoS and Russian forces was for example reported in June 2023 in Kafr Nouran, Kaframa and Kafrtaal in western Aleppo.<sup>522</sup> In October 2022, hostilities escalated in Al-Bab, Afrin and Kafr Jannah, after a social media activist and his wife were killed,<sup>523</sup> between two SNA factions, namely the Third Legion

<sup>504</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 17; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, pp. 19-20

<sup>505</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 17; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 20

<sup>506</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), Annex I, p. 19

<sup>507</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>508</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 5; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>509</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 8; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>510</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 20

<sup>511</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 20

<sup>512</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 17; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), Annex I, p. 19

<sup>513</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 29

<sup>514</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 82; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 6; UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>515</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 20

<sup>516</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Annex I, pp. 20-21; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 20

<sup>517</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>518</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>519</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>520</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>521</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>522</sup> Al Jazeera, Syrian gov’t bombs kill three people near Aleppo: White Helmets, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>523</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 5



and the Hamza Division. Reportedly, HTS and SNA's Sultan Suleiman Shah Division joined the clashes in support of the Hamza Division<sup>524</sup> and other SNA factions and SNA-affiliated groups joined the clashes in support of different sides of the conflict.<sup>525</sup> In the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquakes, violent incidents decreased but did not stop completely.<sup>526</sup>

#### *The conflict between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups*

Indiscriminate attacks by GoS and Russian forces on civilians in western Aleppo persisted in 2022.<sup>527</sup> The USDOS reported that shelling by GoS and pro-GoS forces in western Aleppo continued throughout 2022.<sup>528</sup> Between July and December 2022, 20 aerial and ground attacks were carried out by pro-GoS forces in western Aleppo and Idlib, according to the UNCOI.<sup>529</sup> The number of airstrikes carried out by pro-GoS forces had decreased as of August 2022.<sup>530</sup> However, in mid-2023, GoS forces and affiliated militias attacked the north-west more frequently, including civilian areas in Aleppo governorate, causing civilian casualties.<sup>531</sup> HTS, meanwhile, clashed with GoS forces in northern Aleppo<sup>532</sup> and attacked GoS positions in the governorate, joined by units from the HTS-affiliated al-Fatah al-Mubin coalition.<sup>533</sup>

Sporadic hostilities amongst GoS-affiliated militias, such as clashes between the Liwa Al-Quds and National Defence Forces (NDF), resulting in civilian casualties, including of children, were reported in the reference period in the governorate.<sup>534</sup>

#### *The conflict between Türkiye and Kurdish armed groups (SDF/YPG)*

Clashes between Türkiye and Kurdish armed groups occurred in Aleppo governorate in multiple instances.<sup>535</sup> The USDOS indicated that Aleppo was one of three Syrian governorates affected by a total of over 50 airstrikes 'targeting vehicles, posts, different positions, and civilian infrastructure' executed by Türkiye in 2022.<sup>536</sup> According to Jusoor for Studies, as of January 2023, two air operations were launched by Türkiye against the SDF in the reference

<sup>524</sup> Syria Direct, 'Accountability, or fall': Syrian National Army's Hamza Division under fire after assassination of opposition activist in northern Aleppo, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>525</sup> Syria Direct, 'Accountability, or fall': Syrian National Army's Hamza Division under fire after assassination of opposition activist in northern Aleppo, 12 October 2022, [url](#); Rudaw, US calls on radical group to leave Afrin 'immediately', 18 October 2022, [url](#); Arab Weekly (The), In Syria's northwest, rebel infighting threatens a fragile calm, 4 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>526</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 8

<sup>527</sup> HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>528</sup> USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 34

<sup>529</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 22

<sup>530</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/51/45, 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 7, 39

<sup>531</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – June 2023, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>532</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>533</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – June 2023, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>534</sup> Baladi News, جرحى مدنيون باقتتال ميليشيات النظام في حلب [Civilian casualties as a result of fighting amongst pro-government militias in Aleppo city], 28 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>535</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Reuters, Turkey says military 'neutralised' 53 Kurdish militants in northern Syria, 14 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>536</sup> USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 35



period.<sup>537</sup> As indicated by other sources, an operation named Claw-Sword was launched by Türkiye in November 2022 against positions of the SDF and GoS army in Aleppo governorate.<sup>538</sup> With the start of Operation Claw-Sword, hostilities between Türkiye and SDF/YPG forces continued along the front line of Operation Peace Spring.<sup>539</sup> Türkiye continued to periodically target SDF forces<sup>540</sup> and carried out artillery and drone strikes on Kurdish-held positions in the governorate,<sup>541</sup> such as on Kobane and Tall Rifaat in November 2022<sup>542</sup> or, after positions on the Turkish side of the border were attacked in June 2023,<sup>543</sup> on Manbij and Tall Rifaat regions.<sup>544</sup> In June 2023, a senior SDF/YPG commander was killed by a Turkish drone west of Manbij<sup>545</sup> and the SDF/YPG answered by shelling a Turkish base east of A'zaz city the day after the drone attack, prompting further clashes between the two parties. According to the International Crisis Group, '[a]ttacks on both sides somewhat subsided late June' 2023.<sup>546</sup>

### *Infighting among anti-GoS armed groups*

Infighting between different anti-GoS armed groups in Turkish-controlled northern Aleppo was reported during the reference period,<sup>547</sup> including in October 2022 between two SNA-affiliated groups,<sup>548</sup> causing civilian casualties.<sup>549</sup> The situation reportedly escalated when political activist Muhammad Abu Ghanoum and his pregnant wife were killed in al-Bab city in eastern Aleppo in the first week of October 2022 by members of the al-Hamzah Division, which was subsequently attacked multiple times by the Third Legion.<sup>550</sup> This infighting prompted HTS to launch an armed operation in northern Aleppo governorate<sup>551</sup> and

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<sup>537</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>538</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 6; UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 31; SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 133

<sup>539</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>540</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – June 2023, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>541</sup> Reuters, Turkey says military 'neutralised' 53 Kurdish militants in northern Syria, 14 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>542</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>543</sup> Reuters, Turkey says military 'neutralised' 53 Kurdish militants in northern Syria, 14 June 2023, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Russian soldier allegedly killed in northern Aleppo: SOHR, 12 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>544</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – June 2023, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>545</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – June 2023, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>546</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>547</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, October – December 2022, 1 May 2023, [url](#), p. 10; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 5; VOA, Jihadist Group Takes Over Strategic Town in Northwest Syria, 13 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>548</sup> Jamus, A. R., Syrian jihadist group HTS, armed groups agree to uneasy truce, Al-Monitor, 23 October 2022, [url](#); Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>549</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>550</sup> Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>551</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Recap: HTS and Opposition Agreement in Northern Syria Following Turkish Intervention, 21 October 2022, [url](#)

temporarily seize the city of Afrin,<sup>552</sup> which had previously been controlled by SNA forces.<sup>553</sup> Türkiye then reportedly deployed forces in the area to put an end to the clashes.<sup>554</sup>

### *ISIL activities*

As reported by the Counter Extremism Project analyst Gregory Waters, in the reference period ISIL carried out attacks in a number of Syrian governorates, including Aleppo.<sup>555</sup> According to a June 2023 article of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards-affiliated Tasnim News Agency, ISIL attacks had increased in northern Aleppo in the course of May and June 2023.<sup>556</sup> In August, October and December 2022 as well as March, April and May 2023, up to two confirmed ISIL attacks occurred per month in Aleppo,<sup>557</sup> including attacks on truffle pickers.<sup>558</sup> No incidents were reported in July 2023 according to Gregory Waters.<sup>559</sup> Furthermore, the US-led coalition and Türkiye reportedly killed and captured senior ISIL leaders in Aleppo governorate.<sup>560</sup>

### *Israeli airstrikes*

Israeli airstrikes occurred in Aleppo governorate, targeting Aleppo airport several times during the reference period, as well as a military airport in the Aleppo countryside.<sup>561</sup>

## **(b) Security incidents**

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 2 735 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Aleppo governorate, of which 551 were coded as battles,

<sup>552</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Recap: HTS and Opposition Agreement in Northern Syria Following Turkish Intervention, 21 October 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria: Turkey to reorganise rebel groups as HTS withdraws from Afrin, 25 October 2022, [url](#); Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, October – December 2022, 1 May 2023, [url](#), pp. 10-11; International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 47

<sup>553</sup> VOA, Jihadist Group Takes Over Strategic Town in Northwest Syria, 13 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>554</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Recap: HTS and Opposition Agreement in Northern Syria Following Turkish Intervention, 21 October 2022, [url](#); Ajjoub, O., HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north, MEI, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>555</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in August 2022, CEP, 6 September 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in October 2022, CEP, 4 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>556</sup> Tasnim News Agency, Syrian Military Reinforces North of Damascus As Tensions Grow in SDF-Controlled Areas, 20 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>557</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in May 2023, CEP, 2 June 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in October 2022, CEP, 4 November 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in August 2022, CEP, 6 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>558</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

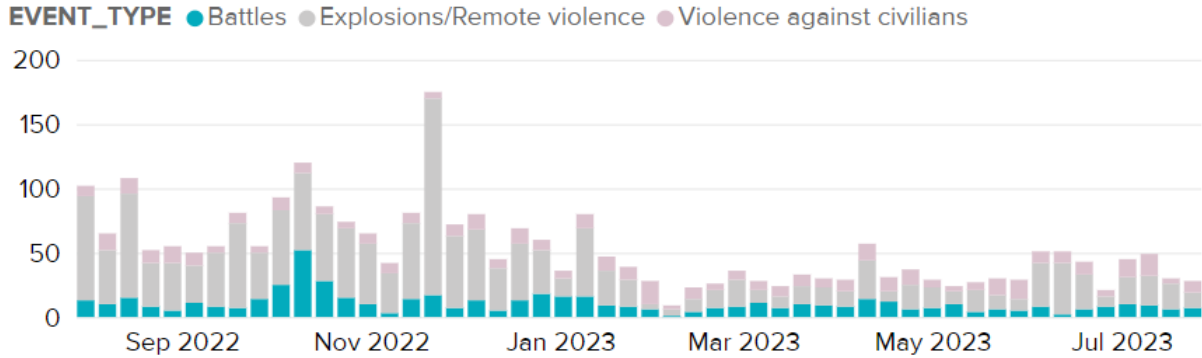
<sup>559</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in July 2023, CEP, 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>560</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Al-Araby al-Jadeed, مقتل قيادي "داعش" بعملية أمنية شمال حلب [Killing of important ISIL leader during security operation in northern Aleppo], 29 April 2023, [url](#); Shafaq News, Killing of ISIL leader and kidnapping of another during air raid in northern Syria, [مقتل قيادي من "داعش" واعتقال آخر بانزال جوي شمال سوريا], 17 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>561</sup> Independent (The), Israel's air force attacks Syria and Syrian air defense missile explodes over northern Israel, 2 July 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Al Jazeera, Israel launches missile attack on Syria's Aleppo airport: Gov't, 22 March 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Israel launches deadly air raid on Aleppo airport: media, 1 May 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syria says Israeli air raid takes Aleppo airport out of service, 7 March 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Second Israeli attack in a week damages Aleppo airport: Syria, 6 September 2022, [url](#); AP News, Reported Israeli strike damages Aleppo airport and puts it out of service, 28 August 2023, [url](#)

1 717 explosions/remote violence and 467 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>562</sup> Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in Jebel Saman, A'zaz and Afrin. By comparison, very few incidents were recorded in the district of As-Safira (see [Figure 6](#)).

Evolution of events by type



**Figure 5. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Aleppo governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data<sup>563</sup>**

According to ACLED, GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 49 % of all recorded security incidents (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’) during the reference period, particularly in incidents coded as explosions/remote violence and battles. Military forces of Türkiye were involved in around 30 % of all security incidents, the majority coded as explosions/remote violence. Opposition armed groups (HTS and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 17 % of all security incidents, SNA in around 17 % incidents, while SDF and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 12 % of all security incidents.

<sup>562</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>563</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Afrin	97	157	261
Ain Al Arab	10	169	13
Al Bab	125	95	63
As-Safira	2	1	3
A'zaz	128	461	57
Jarablus	16	34	9
Jebel Saman	145	737	19
Menbij	28	63	42
<b>Total</b>	<b>551</b>	<b>1717</b>	<b>467</b>

**Figure 6. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Aleppo governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>564</sup>**

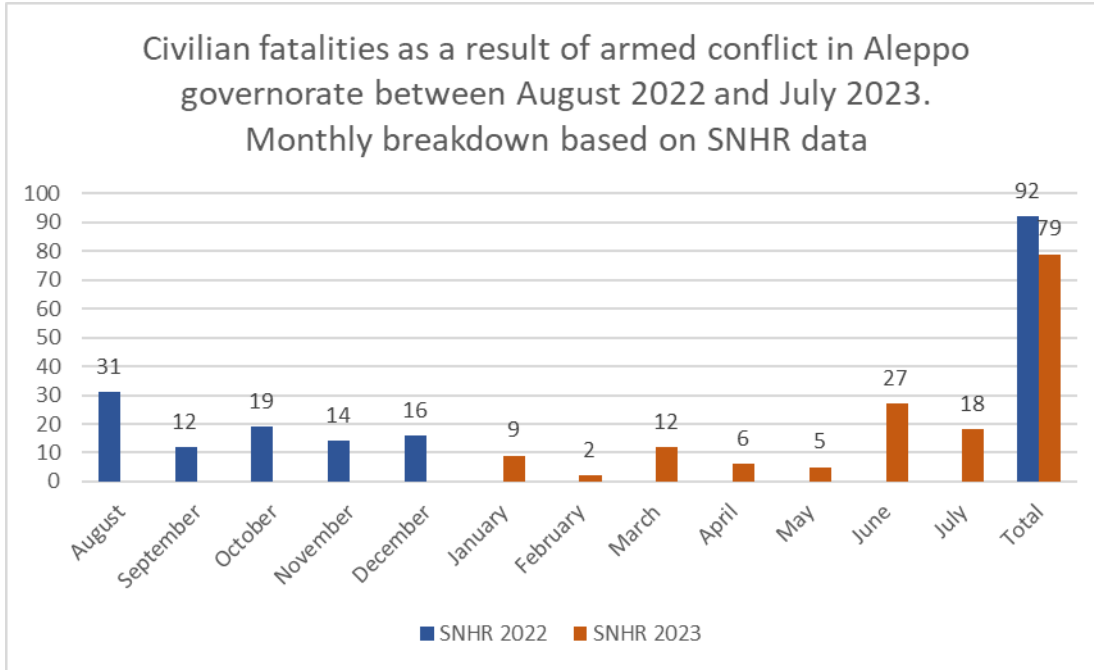
### (c) Civilian fatalities

According to the AOAV Explosive Violence Monitor for 2022, Aleppo was the Syrian governorate most affected in terms of civilian casualties in 2022, accounting for 34 % or 447 incidents of civilian casualties. Furthermore, since 2012, Aleppo had consistently been one of the five most dangerous Syrian governorates for civilians.<sup>565</sup>

<sup>564</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>565</sup> AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2022, 24 April 2023, [url](#), p. 21

SNHR documented 231 civilian fatalities in 2021<sup>566</sup> and 224 in 2022.<sup>567</sup> Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 171 civilian fatalities in Aleppo governorate.<sup>568</sup> Of the 171 civilian fatalities total recorded by SNHR between August 2022 and July 2023 in Aleppo governorate, around 15 were civilians originating from the governorate who drowned in June 2023 while on migration routes to Europe.<sup>569</sup>



**Figure 7. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Aleppo governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

**(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

UN Habitat reported in May 2023 that, as a result of the Syrian conflict, 14 % of residential properties had become uninhabitable in Aleppo governorate.<sup>570</sup> In January 2023, Human Rights Watch reported that ‘indiscriminate attacks by Syrian-Russian military forces on [...] critical civilian infrastructure persisted in 2022’ in western Aleppo governorate.<sup>571</sup> In the reference period, conflict-related damage to civilian infrastructure and objects,<sup>572</sup> including

<sup>566</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>567</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>568</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8.

<sup>569</sup> Syrian Network for Human Rights, email correspondence 7, 24 and 25 July 2023. See also SNHR, 501 Civilians, Including 71 Children, 42 Woman, and 20 Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in Syria, in the First Half of 2023, 2 July 2023, [url](#), pp. 5, 10

<sup>570</sup> UN-Habitat, Syria Country Profile, 4 June 2023, [url](#), p.1

<sup>571</sup> HRW, World Report 2023 – Syria, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>572</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 8; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 5





schools,<sup>573</sup> health facilities<sup>574</sup> and markets<sup>575</sup> was also reported. Damage as a result of air strikes, furthermore, led to the suspension of flights at the Aleppo airport in March,<sup>576</sup> April and May 2023.<sup>577</sup>

According to UN sources, Aleppo was among the Syrian governorates with the highest percentages of some form of explosive contamination<sup>578</sup> and among the governorates where contamination from UXOs represented a particularly major security concern and continued to be reported in 2022.<sup>579</sup> The SNHR noted that 26 % of all landmine-related deaths it documented in Syria between March 2011 and early April 2023 were recorded in Aleppo governorate.<sup>580</sup> The UN Secretary General in June 2023 reported that '[d]isplaced persons and rubble removers faced increased risk of being exposed to explosive ordnance'. Furthermore, an increase in explosive-related incidents in Aleppo governorate was reported after the February 2023 earthquakes in Aleppo governorate 'as people moved back to or across contaminated areas.'<sup>581</sup>

### (e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 1 267 887 IDPs in Aleppo governorate,<sup>582</sup> including 231 095 in A'zaz, 193 548 in Afrin, 106 324 in Al-Bab and 257 689 in Jebel Saman districts.<sup>583</sup> Over the year 2022, there were approximately 18 000 IDP movements out of Aleppo and 15 000 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 26 000 movements within the governorate.<sup>584</sup> Between January and May 2023, there were approximately 25 272 IDP movements out of Aleppo and 2 008 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 59 479 movements within the governorate.<sup>585</sup> The majority of IDP movements in Aleppo governorate in 2023 was recorded in February and attributed to the February earthquakes in the region.<sup>586</sup>

<sup>573</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 30; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 26

<sup>574</sup> Guardian (The), Turkey confirms deadly airstrikes in Syria and Iraq targeting Kurdish groups, 20 November 2022, [url](#); Shafaq News, Operation Claw-Sword: Turkey strikes in Iraq, Syria a week after Istanbul bombing, 20 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>575</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 26, 82; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), Annex I, p. 20

<sup>576</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 11

<sup>577</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 8

<sup>578</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 33; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 29

<sup>579</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 12, 30

<sup>580</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>581</sup> UN Security Council, Humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic, S/2023/419, 9 June 2023, [url](#), para. 20

<sup>582</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>583</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>584</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>585</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>586</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#)





The SNHR, according to USDOS, reported that more than 10 000 persons were displaced in Aleppo and Idlib governorates in August 2022 as a result of hostilities.<sup>587</sup> SNHR further reported that the HTS military operations carried out in mid-October 2022 in western Aleppo cities, such as Ghazawiya and Deir Al-Ballout, led to forced displacement of around 13 000 persons and directly affected more than 12 IDP camps.<sup>588</sup> Air strikes and mutual shelling after the launching of Operation Claw-Sword by Türkiye in northern rural Aleppo and other governorates in November 2022,<sup>589</sup> and Russian airstrikes in June 2023 also induced displacement.<sup>590</sup> Most of the IDP movements in February 2023 occurred in earthquake affected areas, especially in Idlib and Aleppo governorates.<sup>591</sup>

As regards returns, in 2022, UNOCHA recorded approximately 3 000 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from Aleppo to other governorates and some 2 000 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Aleppo as well as about 3 000 movements within Aleppo.<sup>592</sup> Furthermore, Aleppo governorate continued to be the main area of return in Syria, accounting for 34 % of returns between January and mid-November 2022.<sup>593</sup> Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA recorded approximately 571 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Aleppo and about 3 992 returnee movements from Aleppo to other governorates as well as about 12 520 movements within the governorate.<sup>594</sup> No further information on the reasons behind the return movements was found.

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<sup>587</sup> USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 65

<sup>588</sup> SNHR, 12th Annual Report: Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2022, 17 January 2023, [url](#), p. 86

<sup>589</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>590</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>591</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>592</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>593</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 58

<sup>594</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#);

UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#);

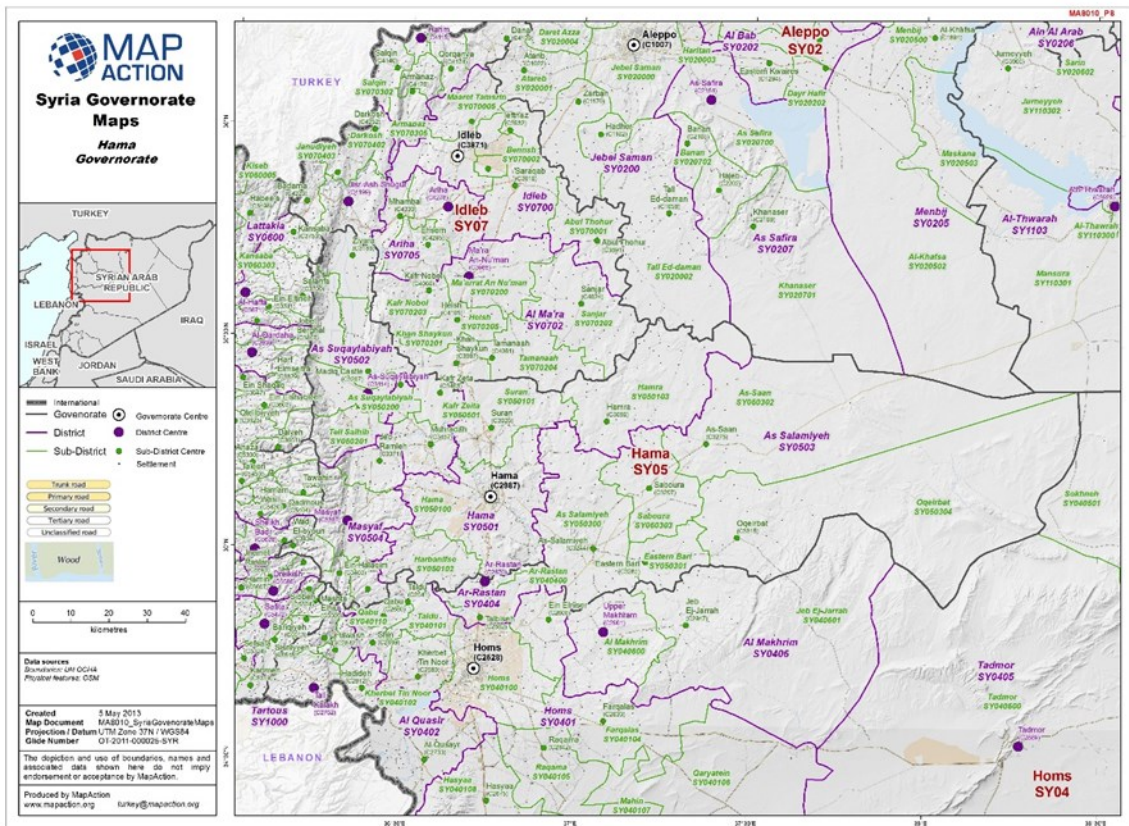
UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#);

UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA,

Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)



## 2.3. Hama governorate



Map 8: © MapAction, Hama governorate<sup>595</sup>

### 2.3.1. General description of the governorate

Hama governorate is located in west-central Syria<sup>596</sup> and has internal borders with the governorates of Latakia and Tartous to the west, Idlib and Aleppo to the north, Raqqa to the north-east and Homs to the south and south-east.<sup>597</sup> The governorate comprises five administrative districts: Hama, Misyaf (Masyaf), Muhardah (Muhradah), Suqailbiya (As-Suqaylabiyah), and Salamiyah (As-Salamiyah).<sup>598</sup> A December 2022 UNOCHA report estimated the population of Hama governorate to be 1 485 590.<sup>599</sup> Hama city’s population was estimated by the CIA in 2023 at 996 000.<sup>600</sup>

<sup>595</sup> MapAction, Hama governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>596</sup> NPA, 3 people killed in Israeli attack on Syria’s Hama – Russia, 13 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>597</sup> UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#)

<sup>598</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 135

<sup>599</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>600</sup> US, CIA, World Factbook, Syria, last updated: 1 August 2023, [url](#)

Information on the governorate's religious composition can be found in an earlier issue of this report: EUAA COI Report: [Syria - Security situation \(September 2022\)](#).

### 2.3.2. Conflict background and armed actors

During the reference period, most of Hama governorate was under the control of the GoS,<sup>601</sup> except for a small strip of HTS-controlled land on its northwesternmost edge bordering Idlib<sup>602</sup> and pockets of ISIL presence in areas east bordering Aleppo, Raqqa and Homs.<sup>603</sup>

Although the northwestern parts of Hama were reconquered by the GoS in a large-scale military offensive between April 2019 and March 2020 (which left nearly a million people displaced),<sup>604</sup> conflict activity between the GoS and armed opposition groups<sup>605</sup> remained high in those areas afterwards<sup>606</sup> and included shelling/aerial bombardments by GoS<sup>607</sup> and Russian forces.<sup>608</sup> While the eastern areas of Hama had been free from ISIL activity for some time after October 2017<sup>609</sup> when ISIL fighters encircled by GoS forces moved northward into south-eastern Idlib,<sup>610</sup> the group resumed its actions in mid-2020, attacking and capturing villages<sup>611</sup> and re-engaging in fighting with GoS forces and affiliated militias.<sup>612</sup> Ultimately, however, ISIL lacked the capacity to hold on to these villages located 'on the periphery of core regime territory'.<sup>613</sup> Furthermore, the governorate experienced isolated Israeli attacks in recent years,<sup>614</sup> including on targets tied to the GoS administration and armed forces.<sup>615</sup>

A map on areas of control published by the Carter Center showed that as of June 2023, there were 671 control points in the governorate that could be attributed to the GoS and its allies (including Russian forces, Iranian forces, and pro-government militias).<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>602</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#); iMMAP and USAID, Context Update: Northwestern Syria [Map], 4 May 2023, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>603</sup> Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>604</sup> AI, UN must continue cross-border aid regardless of UN Security Council or Syrian government approval, 12 May 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>605</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | October-December 2021, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>606</sup> UN Security Council, Escalating Conflict, Deepening Economic Crisis in Syria Pushing Humanitarian Needs to Highest Levels Since Start of Conflict, Senior Officials Tell Security Council, 24 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>607</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | October-December 2021, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>608</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | October-December 2021, 28 March 2022, [url](#), p. 4; SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2022, 7 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 3, 20; ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 11-17 September 2021, 22 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>609</sup> Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>610</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, 7 March 2023, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>611</sup> Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>612</sup> See, for example, SOHR, ISIS attack | Four pro-regime militants killed in eastern countryside of Hama, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>613</sup> Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>614</sup> MEE, Syria: Israeli air strikes reportedly kill 11 pro-government fighters, 9 June 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Israeli attacks in 2022 | 33 targets destroyed and nearly 70 people killed and wounded in 12 attacks so far, 15 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>615</sup> SOHR, Israeli attacks in 2022 | 33 targets destroyed and nearly 70 people killed and wounded in 12 attacks so far, 15 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>616</sup> Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#) Set filters to Hama and June 2023.



Hama city hosts the base of the SAA's new 25th Special Tasks Division (previously Tiger Forces),<sup>617</sup> while the First, Second and Third brigades of the SAA's Fifth Corps – extensively involved in military offensives there and in south Idlib – were based in northern Hama.<sup>618</sup> The 25<sup>th</sup> division, the Fifth Corps, as well as units of the NDF were reported to patrol the eastern Hama countryside.<sup>619</sup> Moreover, the SAA's Fourth Division operated a base in central Hama as well as checkpoints in the south, north-west and north-east<sup>620</sup> and along the road connecting Hama city with Saraqib in Idlib.<sup>621</sup> The Division recruited fighters from marginalised communities in villages located in the governorate's north and in Salamiyah.<sup>622</sup>

As of mid-2023, Jusoor for Studies mapped concentrations of sites of Russian and Iranian/Iran-backed forces around Hama city. Mainly Russian forces were present in areas north and northwest of the city, their sites extending towards the opposition-held areas bordering Idlib. Further sites of Iranian/Iran-backed forces were located in southern and eastern Hama as well as in the west,<sup>623</sup> where pro-Iranian militias were stationed in Masyaf.<sup>624</sup>

### 2.3.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

##### *Military operations in northern and western Hama governorate*

The beginning of the reference period saw a continued intensification of bombardment by GoS forces and affiliated militias.<sup>625</sup> Regular artillery attacks by these forces against a variety of military and civilian targets throughout the reference period up until May 2023,<sup>626</sup> and these instances of shelling continued into June 2023. Sometimes supported by Russian forces,<sup>627</sup> these attacks hit towns and villages in western<sup>628</sup> and northern areas of Hama, including the towns of Ziyara<sup>629</sup> and Qastoun,<sup>630</sup> causing several civilian casualties.<sup>631</sup> On 19 January 2023,

<sup>617</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units [source: SNHR], April 2023, [url](#), p. 22; Waters, G, From Tiger Forces to the 16th Brigade: Russia's evolving Syrian proxies, MEI, 12 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>618</sup> Waters, G, From Tiger Forces to the 16th Brigade: Russia's evolving Syrian proxies, MEI, 12 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>619</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>620</sup> Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>621</sup> Rozana Radio, In Hama and Idlib: Exploitation of Human and Robbery of Land and Crops, 4 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>622</sup> Shahhoud, A., Inside an Elite Syrian Military Unit's Power Grab, New Lines Magazine, 16 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>623</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>624</sup> Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria's 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 20; VOA, Syrian State Media: Israel Fires Missiles at Western City, 12 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>625</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 08 September 2022, 8 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>626</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – May 2023, 5 June 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 06 April 2023, 6 April 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 05 December 2022, 5 December 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 03 November 2022, 3 November 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 04 October 2022, 4 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>627</sup> Al Jazeera, Syrian gov't bombs kill three people near Aleppo: White Helmets, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>628</sup> SNHR, Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May 2023, June 2023, [url](#), p. 1; SNHR, Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2023, 5 May 2023, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>629</sup> Al Jazeera, Syrian gov't bombs kill three people near Aleppo: White Helmets, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>630</sup> SNHR, Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in January 2023, 4 February 2023, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>631</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 20; SHRC, Five civilians, including children, wounded by Assad artillery shelling, 20 January 2023, [url](#)



GoS forces<sup>632</sup> launched ground-based strikes that hit a residential area in Qastoun in the western countryside of Hama, injuring five civilians.<sup>633</sup>

The positions of GoS forces in western Hama were reportedly targeted by, the armed opposition groups HTS<sup>634</sup> (in April 2023) and Jaysh al-Nasr (in July 2023).<sup>635</sup>

### *ISIL insurgency*

ISIL continued to carry out attacks<sup>636</sup> of an asymmetric nature, with small cells routinely conducting attacks in the governorate's east.<sup>637</sup> According to Gregory Waters, these attacks peaked in March (10 incidents)<sup>638</sup> and April 2023 (7),<sup>639</sup> with the average monthly rate increasing from 1.6 attacks in the final five months of 2022<sup>640</sup> to 4.7 during the first half of 2023.<sup>641</sup> Meanwhile, NPA recorded an average rate of two attacks per month in the first six months of 2023.<sup>642</sup> Dozens of civilians were killed or injured in ISIL attacks in rural and desert areas of eastern Hama.<sup>643</sup> Moreover, ISIL abducted several civilians during the reporting period.<sup>644</sup>

Multiple suspected ISIL attacks targeted civilians searching for truffles, notably in the Salamiyah area.<sup>645</sup> The largest such attack took place on 16 April 2023, when ISIL militants ambushed a group of truffle-searching civilians in the village of Duwaizan in the eastern Hama countryside. According to state media, 26 people were killed in the attack,<sup>646</sup> whereas the

<sup>632</sup> SHRC, Five civilians, including children, wounded by Assad artillery shelling, 20 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>633</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 20

<sup>634</sup> NPA, HTS targets government forces in Syria's Hama, Aleppo, 15 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>635</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – July 2023, 10 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>636</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12; UN Security Council, Letter dated 24 July 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2023/549, 25 July 2023, [url](#), para. 52

<sup>637</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 24 July 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2023/549, 25 July 2023, [url](#), para. 52

<sup>638</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>639</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>640</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in November 2022, CEP, 5 December 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in October 2022, CEP, 4 November 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in September 2022, CEP, 4 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>641</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in June 2023, CEP, 6 July 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in May 2023, CEP, 2 June 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in February 2023, CEP, 3 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>642</sup> NPA, 552 people in Syria fall victim to ISIS attacks in first half of 2023, 8 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>643</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 31; BBC News, IS truffle picker attacks: At least 26 killed in Syrian desert ambush, 17 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Hama desert in April | 54 people killed including 36 civilians by ISIS attacks and landmine explosions, 22 April 2023, [url](#); New Arab (The), Islamic State group kills 15 truffle hunters in Syria: war monitor, 24 March 2023, [url](#); NPA, 552 people in Syria fall victim to ISIS attacks in first half of 2023, 8 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>645</sup> SOHR, Hama desert in April | 54 people killed including 36 civilians by ISIS attacks and landmine explosions, 22 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>646</sup> BBC News, IS truffle picker attacks: At least 26 killed in Syrian desert ambush, 17 April 2023, [url](#)

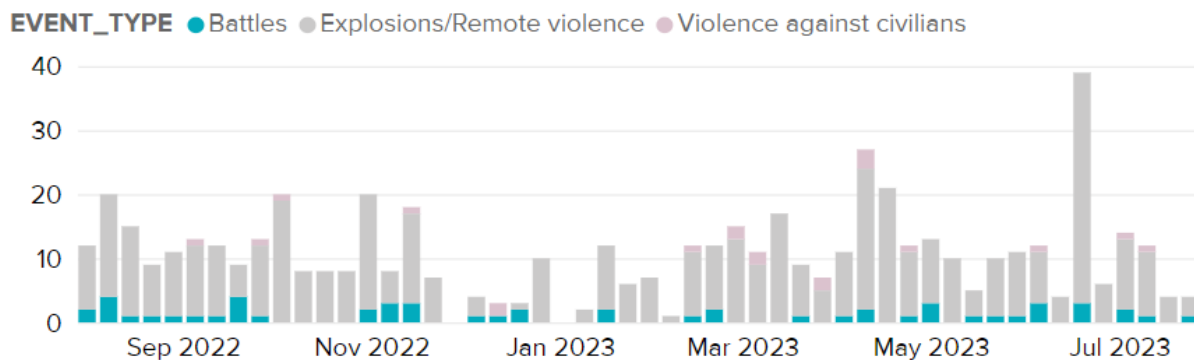
SOHR put the number of deaths at 36, 17 of whom - it said - were NDF militia members.<sup>647</sup> ISIL attacks were followed by heavy airstrikes jointly carried out by GoS and Russian forces targeting positions and movements linked to suspected ISIL cells.<sup>648</sup>

### Israeli strikes

There were several reports of Israeli strikes against targets in Hama governorate,<sup>649</sup> including on scientific research centres in the towns of Masyaf<sup>650</sup> and al-Safsafah<sup>651</sup> as well as positions and weapons/ammunition depots of Iranian-backed militias in the Masyaf area.<sup>652</sup> At least one attack (in March 2023) resulted in deaths of GoS soldiers.<sup>653</sup> There were no reports of civilian casualties from Israeli attacks in the governorate.

### (b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 557 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Hama governorate, of which 54 were coded as battles, 483 explosions/remote violence and 20 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>654</sup>



**Figure 8. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hama governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data<sup>655</sup>**

<sup>647</sup> SOHR, Hama desert in April | 54 people killed including 36 civilians by ISIS attacks and landmine explosions, 22 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>648</sup> Syrian Observer (The), More than 20 Raids: Russian-Syrian Air Force Intensifies Raids on Locations East of Hama, 6 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>649</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 16; NPA, Russia reveals number of intercepted Israeli missiles in Syria's Masyaf, 27 August 2022, [url](#); NPA, 3 people killed in Israeli attack on Syria's Hama – Russia, 13 March 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Israeli attacks on Syria in the past year: Timeline, 10 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, 2022 | Israel attacks Syria on 32 occasions, destroying 91 targets and killing and injuring nearly 235 people, 22 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>650</sup> NPA, Russia reveals number of intercepted Israeli missiles in Syria's Masyaf, 27 August 2022, [url](#); NPA, 3 people killed in Israeli attack on Syria's Hama – Russia, 13 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>651</sup> NPA, 3 people killed in Israeli attack on Syria's Hama – Russia, 13 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>652</sup> Al Jazeera, Israeli attacks on Syria in the past year: Timeline, 10 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, 2022 | Israel attacks Syria on 32 occasions, destroying 91 targets and killing and injuring nearly 235 people, 22 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>653</sup> NPA, 3 people killed in Israeli attack on Syria's Hama – Russia, 13 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>654</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>655</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of As-Suqaylabiyah. By comparison, very few incidents were recorded in the districts of Muhradah, Hama and Masyaf (see [Figure 9](#)). According to ACLED data, GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were the main actor involved in around 77 % of all recorded security incidents (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’) during the reference period, particularly in incidents coded as explosions/remote violence. Opposition armed groups (HTS and affiliated armed groups) were involved in around 22 % of all security incidents, particularly in incidents where GoS and affiliated armed groups were also an actor. Unidentified armed groups and ISIL were involved in around 11 % and 4 % of all security incidents, respectively.

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
As-Salamiyeh	8	47	14
As-Suqaylabiyah	42	416	1
Hama	3	4	5
Masyaf	1	9	-
Muhradah	-	7	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>20</b>

**Figure 9. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hama governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>656</sup>**

### (c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented 88 civilian fatalities in 2021<sup>657</sup> and 36 in 2022.<sup>658</sup> Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 76 civilian fatalities in Hama governorate.<sup>659</sup>

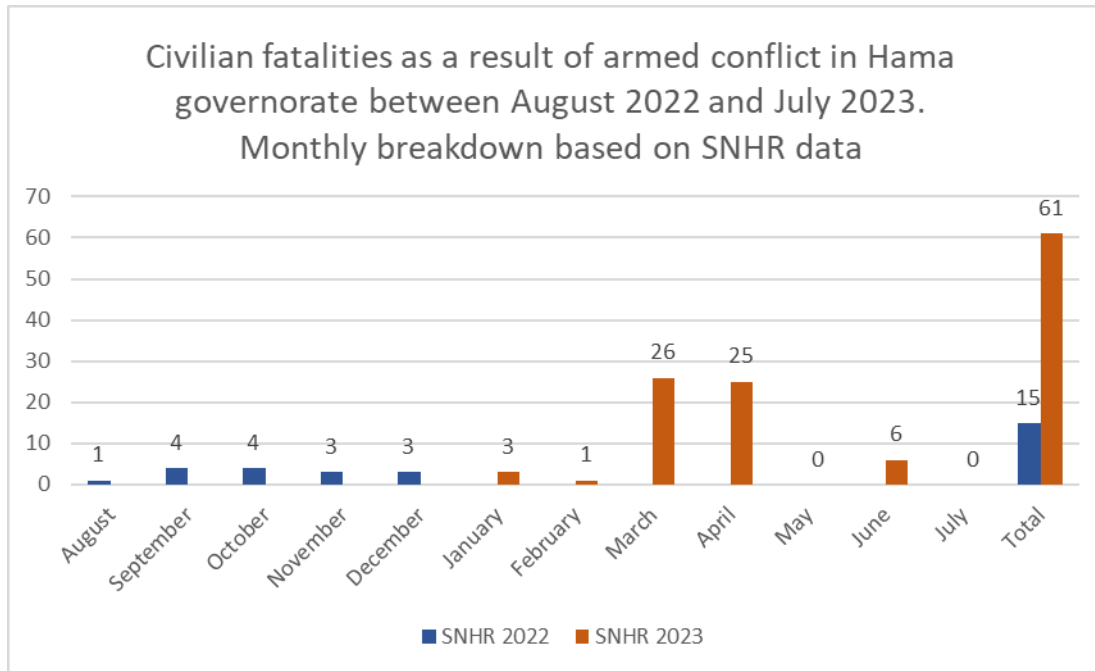
<sup>656</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>657</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>658</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>659</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8





**Figure 10. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Hama governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

**(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

According to the International Crisis Group, the conflict has left entire districts of Hama in ruins.<sup>660</sup> Furthermore, Hama was one of the governorates where contamination from UXOs was particularly widespread, including on roads, agricultural land and private property.<sup>661</sup> Notably, the governorate has experienced numerous conflict-related incidents that affected the condition of agricultural land (e.g., landmines, unexploded ordnance, shelling, arson and air/drone strikes).<sup>662</sup>

The SNHR noted that 9 % of all landmine-related deaths it documented in Syria between March 2011 and early April 2023 were recorded in Hama.<sup>663</sup> During the reference period, there were multiple reports of civilians, some of them children, being killed or injured by explosive

<sup>660</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Ruling over Aleppo's Ruins, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>661</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>662</sup> Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria: Conflict, Hunger and Aid Access - April 2023, 19 April 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>663</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 20



remnants of war,<sup>664</sup> including in Hama city's eastern suburbs<sup>665</sup> and in the northern,<sup>666</sup> western,<sup>667</sup> eastern<sup>668</sup> and south-eastern<sup>669</sup> countryside of the governorate.

### (e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 214 036 IDPs in Hama governorate,<sup>670</sup> including 162 317 in Hama district.<sup>671</sup> Over the year 2022, there were approximately 2 400 IDP movements out of Hama and 1 400 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 600 movements within the governorate.<sup>672</sup> During the first five months of 2023, there were approximately 200 IDP movements out of Hama and 140 IDP movements into the governorate as well as 115 movements within the governorate.<sup>673</sup> No information on the reasons behind the displacement movements was found.

As regards returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded approximately 2 000 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Hama and about 9 000 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from Hama to other governorates as well as about 4 000 movements within Hama.<sup>674</sup> During the first five months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded approximately 380 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Hama and about 6 000 IDP returnee movements from Hama to other governorates as well as about 80 movements within Hama.<sup>675</sup>

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<sup>664</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 18; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 20; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 20; NPA, Remnants of war kill child, injure others in Syria's Hama, 24 June 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Hama desert in April | 54 people killed including 36 civilians by ISIS attacks and landmine explosions, 22 April 2023, [url](#); SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 26-27

<sup>665</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 18

<sup>666</sup> NPA, Remnants of war kill child, injure others in Syria's Hama, 24 June 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 20

<sup>667</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 20; SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>668</sup> SOHR, Hama desert in April | 54 people killed including 36 civilians by ISIS attacks and landmine explosions, 22 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>669</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex 1, p. 18

<sup>670</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>671</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>672</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>673</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>674</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>675</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [https://reliefweb.int/attachments/e950ec2a-6ef1-4d8b-9538-6e4d14e4df9a/IDPspontReturns\\_202304\\_Apr\\_FV\\_En.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/attachments/e950ec2a-6ef1-4d8b-9538-6e4d14e4df9a/IDPspontReturns_202304_Apr_FV_En.pdf); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#)





As for factors possibly affecting returns, the USDOS reported that in Hama, IDPs were often denied access to their places of origin due to GoS-imposed restrictions.<sup>676</sup> Moreover, starting from mid-2020, GoS-affiliated administrative bodies seized plots of land owned by refugees and IDPs, offering it in public auctions, a practice reported as being especially prevalent in the western and northern countryside of Hama.<sup>677</sup> Some former residents also feared being arrested in retaken or previously besieged areas.<sup>678</sup> No further information on reasons behind the returns movements was found.

More recent data on conflict-induced displacement and spontaneous returns by UNOCHA was not available at the time of writing this report. UN Security Council reports covering the first five months of 2023 did not contain any further information on displacement from or returns to Hama governorate.<sup>679</sup>

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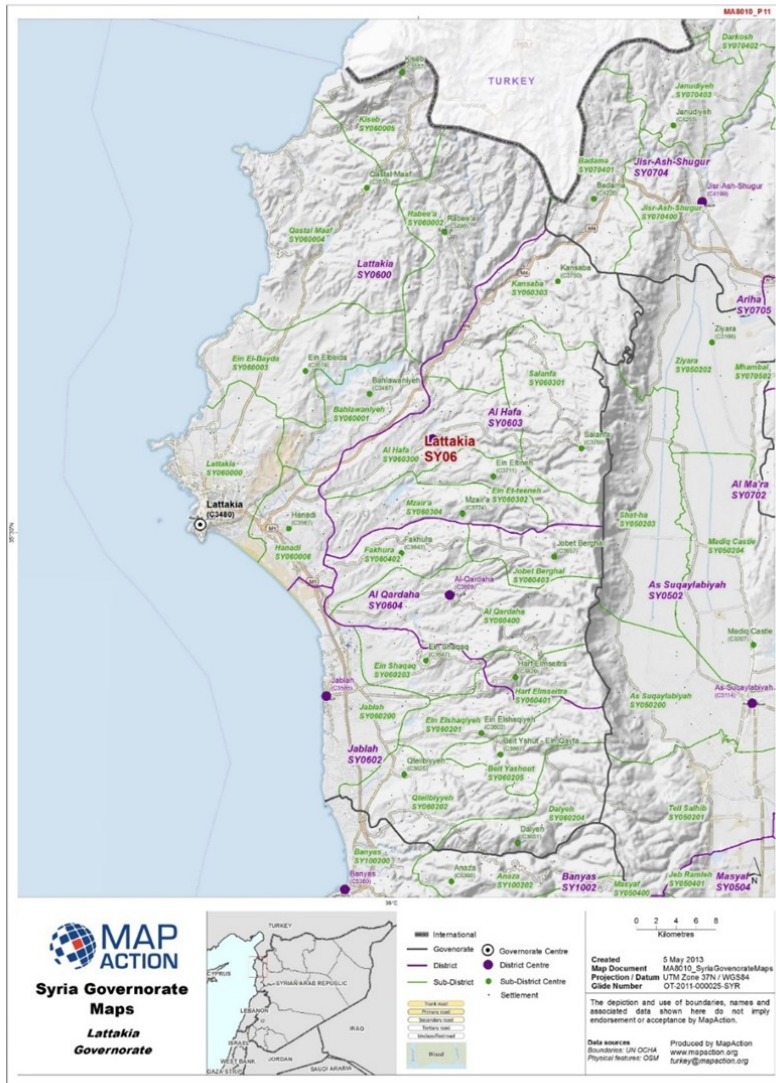
<sup>676</sup> USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 65

<sup>677</sup> STJ, Syria/Hama: The Security Committee Usurps IDPs and Refugees' Properties, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>679</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#)



## 2.4. Latakia governorate



Map 9: © MapAction, Latakia governorate<sup>680</sup>

### 2.4.1. General description of the governorate

Latakia governorate is situated in north-western of Syria and it borders Türkiye to the north, Idlib governorate to the north-east, Hama governorate to the east, Tartous governorate to the south, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west.<sup>681</sup> Latakia is divided into four administrative districts, from north to south: Latakia, Al-Haffa, Al-Qardaha, Jablah.<sup>682</sup> In a report published in

<sup>680</sup> MapAction, Syria 2013-2015, Latakia Governorate [map], last updated: 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>681</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Latakia Governorate Reference Map (as of February 2016), 29 February 2016, [url](#)

<sup>682</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic. Governorates Profiles, June 2014, [url](#), p. 19

December 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Latakia governorate to be of 1 295 334.<sup>683</sup>

For more information on the ethnic and religious composition of Latakia's population, see the EUAA COI Report: [Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

## 2.4.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Latakia governorate continues to be predominantly under the GoS control.<sup>684</sup> However, anti-GoS armed groups still control parts of the governorate<sup>685</sup> as HTS controls a strip of territory located in the north-eastern part of Latakia governorate.<sup>686</sup> UN Security Council reported that Al-Qaida maintains a low-profile presence in the north of Latakia with its local branch, Hurras al-Din (HaD).<sup>687</sup> Jusoor Studies reported that, as of July 2022, Iranian forces were deployed in 15 locations; Russian military posts were present in 14 locations; Turkish forces in 2 positions.<sup>688</sup> The same source observed that, as of mid-2023, there are 33 foreign forces sites in the governorate.<sup>689</sup>

Hmeimin Air Base, a Russia military base, is operational in the governorate.<sup>690</sup> In an article published in February 2023, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace noted that the Russian forces had withdrawn from some areas of Latakia. Such areas were reportedly swiftly reoccupied by pro-Iranian Hezbollah fighters. Moreover, the same source observed that the most experienced Russian military personnel has been gradually transferred to Ukraine while less qualified soldiers are being replaced in Syria.<sup>691</sup> Meanwhile, some sources stated that Russian forces, originally withdrawn and transferred to Ukraine, had been sent back to Syria, leading to a resurgence of Russian military activity since the beginning of the war in Ukraine.<sup>692</sup>

<sup>683</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>684</sup> Jusoor Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, 2 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>685</sup> Mehr News, Terrorists renew bomb attacks on Hama, Idlib, Latakia, 24 January 2023, [url](#); see the Map in OHCHR – UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: Syrian Arab Republic : Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022, [map], January 2023, [url](#); VOA news, Jihadis Kill 11 Soldiers in Northwest Syria, Monitor Says, 1 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>686</sup> (The) Defence Post, Jihadists Kill 11 Soldiers in Northwest Syria Attacks: Monitor, 2 February 2023, [url](#); (The) Carter Centre, Exploring historical control in Syria, [interactive map], [url](#); DIS, DIS – Danish Immigration Service, Syria - Recruitment to opposition groups, December 2022, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>687</sup> UN Security Council, Thirty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2023/95], 13 February 2023, [url](#), para.49, p. 12

<sup>688</sup> Jusoor Studies, Map of foreign forces' points in Syria- mid 2022, 22 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>689</sup> Jusoor Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria – mid 2023, 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>690</sup> NPA, Terrorist groups prepare to attack Russian base in Syria – Khmeimim, 5 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>691</sup> Smagin, N., Moscow's Original "Special Operation": Why Russia Is Staying in Syria, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 7 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>692</sup> Bousset, P., US Al-Tanf Military Garrison: The Epicenter of Tumult, EPC, 16 January 2023, [url](#)

## 2.4.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

As indicated by UNCOI report covering the period between 1 July and 31 December 2022, several airstrikes attributed to Israel occurred in Latakia,<sup>693</sup> resulting in the activation of the GoS anti-aircraft fire in response.<sup>694</sup> UNOCHA also reported of ‘targeted’ airstrikes in 2022 hitting airports and ports, including in Latakia governorate.<sup>695</sup> In December 2022, HTS launched a series of raids on GoS positions in northern Latakia, which were temporarily interrupted due to the earthquakes. On 26 February 2023 the military operations have resumed and HTS conducted new attacks on GoS positions in Latakia.<sup>696</sup>

In January 2023 clashes were also documented between GoS and HTS in northern Latakia,<sup>697</sup> whereby anti-GoS armed groups of the Fath al-Mubin Operations Room conducted attacks against GoS troops using infiltration tactics.<sup>698</sup> In February 2023, SOHR reported shelling fired by the anti-GoS forces in GoS-controlled areas in Nahshaba surroundings in northern Latakia.<sup>699</sup> In the same month, HTS attacked government headquarters in Jabal al-Akrad, northeast of Latakia city. Militants of the group infiltrated in the government premises and the clash resulted in 10 dead among GoS forces<sup>700</sup>

In April 2023, SNHR reported on GoS forces conducting artillery attacks in Latakia suburbs, nearby the dividing lines with armed opposition groups.<sup>701</sup> In late May 2023, in northern Latakia, HTS killed a Russian colonel,<sup>702</sup> the highest-ranking Russian officer killed by anti-GoS since 2016.<sup>703</sup> Etana reported that some Russian sources claimed that the colonel had been killed by ISIL in Homs.<sup>704</sup> As a consequence, Russia intensified airstrikes on anti-GoS held areas in Idlib to an unprecedented level since late 2021 resulting in killing of civilians also in Latakia.<sup>705</sup> Likewise, Etana noted an intensified airstrikes attacks by Russia forces involving also the northern Latakia governorate,<sup>706</sup> targeting the so-called de-escalation zone.<sup>707</sup> In June

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<sup>693</sup> AP, UN envoy: Military escalation in Syria is ‘dangerous’, 30 November 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para.16, p. 4

<sup>694</sup> UN News, UN envoy warns against ‘worrying and dangerous’ military escalation in Syria, 29 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>695</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>696</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>697</sup> SNHR, Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in January 2023, 4 February 2023, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>698</sup> Al Monitor, Turkey faces tough options on Syrian rebel allies amid Damascus thaw, 20 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>699</sup> SOHR, “Putin-Erdogan” area | Factions target positions of regime forces in Hama, Aleppo and Lattakia, 24 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>700</sup> The Cradle, Clashes erupt between Syrian army and HTS in Latakia, 05 February 2023, [url](#); New Arab (The), HTS claims attack against Syrian regime soldiers in Latakia province, 4 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>701</sup> SNHR Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2023, 5 May 2023, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>702</sup> SOHR, “De-escalation zone” | Commander-in-chief of Russian Special Tasks Forces killed in HTS attack in rural Latakia, 29 May 2023, [url](#); Memri, Syrian Opposition Sources: Russian Colonel Killed By Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) In Northwest Syria, 29 May 2023, [url](#); Newsweek (The), Russian Colonel Killed After Direct Strike on His Command Post—Reports, 29 May 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>703</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>704</sup> Etana, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>705</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

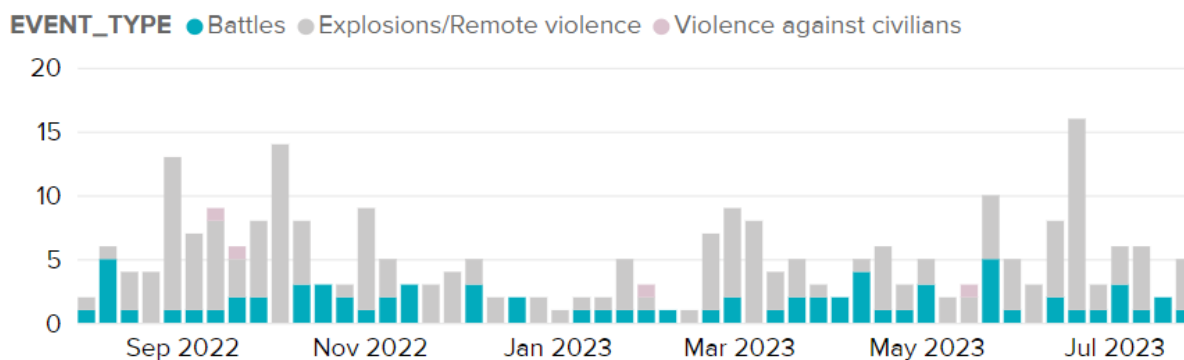
<sup>706</sup> Etana, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria, June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>707</sup> SOHR, “Putin-Erdogan” area in May 2023 | Resumption of airstrikes by Russian fighter jets...Russian officer among 29 fatalities in acts of violence...escalation of anti-HTS protests, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

2023, Russian airstrikes were recorded hitting Idlib countryside, Wadi Khaled IDP camp and several villages in the north of Latakia resulting in at least 16 civilians killed and dozens severely injured. GoS forces intensified attacks through artillery strikes targeting more than three dozen of towns across Idlib, Latakia and Aleppo provinces. In total, these attacks resulted in at least five civilian deaths and dozens of additional injuries, among them numerous children.<sup>708</sup> In July 2023, a drone attack conducted by unknown actor, likely to be identified in HTS, targeted the Russian base in Hmeimin.<sup>709</sup>

### (b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 263 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Latakia governorate, of which 74 were coded as battles, 185 explosions/remote violence and 4 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>710</sup>



**Figure 11. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Latakia governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data<sup>711</sup>**

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of Al-Hafa and Latakia. By comparison, very few incidents were recorded in the districts of Al-Qardaha and Jableh (see [Figure 12](#)). According to ACLED, GoS and Russian forces were the main actor (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’) involved in around 93 % of all security incidents, particularly in incidents coded as explosions/remote violence. Anti-GoS armed groups were involved in around 64 % of all recorded security incidents during the reference period, particularly in incidents where GoS and affiliated armed groups were also an actor.

<sup>708</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>709</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>710</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>711</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Al-Hafa	55	105	-
Al-Qardaha	1	2	1
Jablah	3	1	1
Latakia	15	77	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>4</b>

**Figure 12. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Latakia governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>712</sup>**

**(c) Civilian fatalities**

SNHR documented two civilian fatalities in 2021<sup>713</sup> and four civilian fatalities in 2022.<sup>714</sup> Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented seven civilian fatalities in Latakia governorate (four were documented in the period August – December 2022 and three between January and July 2023).<sup>715</sup> Of the seven civilian fatalities documented by SNHR during the reference period, two were civilians who drowned in September 2022 while on migration routes from Syria to Europe.<sup>716</sup>

**(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

As reported by Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, all regions of Syria are affected by the presence of landmines, either commercially manufactured or improvised. The type of

<sup>712</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>713</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>714</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>715</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>716</sup> EUAA email correspondence with SNHR, 4 and 7 July 2023.





landmines varies according to the armed groups present in the area.<sup>717</sup> UNOCHA confirmed that the conflict resulted in a wide ordnance contamination throughout the country.<sup>718</sup>

World Food Programme outlined Latakia governorate as one of the most affected governorates by the two earthquakes occurred in February 2023.<sup>719</sup>

No further information on conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war in Latakia for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

### (e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 447 947 IDPs in Latakia governorate.<sup>720</sup> In the period between January and December 2022, UNOCHA reported 2 000 IDP movements from Latakia governorate, 5 000 displaced within the governorate and 5 000 IDP movements to the governorate.<sup>721</sup> For the period between January and June 2023, UNOCHA recorded a total of 231 movements of IDP from Latakia, while IDP movements to or within the governorate were recorded.<sup>722</sup> As of 18 February 2023, UNOCHA reported of 172 000 people who have been displaced in Latakia as a result of the February earthquakes.<sup>723</sup>

In terms of returns, UNOCHA recorded the spontaneous return of 2 000 IDP from Latakia governorate and 2 000 return movements within the governorate in 2022.<sup>724</sup> In its Humanitarian Needs Overview, UNOCHA observed that the pace of return to areas bordering the frontline in northern part of Latakia will likely continue.<sup>725</sup> Nonetheless, during the period between January and June 2023, UNOCHA recorded 7 IDP returns to the governorate and 39 returns of IDP from governorate. For the same period, UNOCHA did not record any returns within the governorate.<sup>726</sup>

<sup>717</sup> Landmine and Cluster Muniton Monitor, Landmine & Cluster Muniton Monitor, Syria impact, last updated: 15 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>718</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 81

<sup>719</sup> World Food Programme, WFP Syria Situation Report #2, February 2023, 28 February 2023, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>720</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>721</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec. 2022, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>722</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>723</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic - Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) Coordinated Response Flash Update #13 – Earthquake (As of 18 February 2023), 18 February 2023, [url](#)

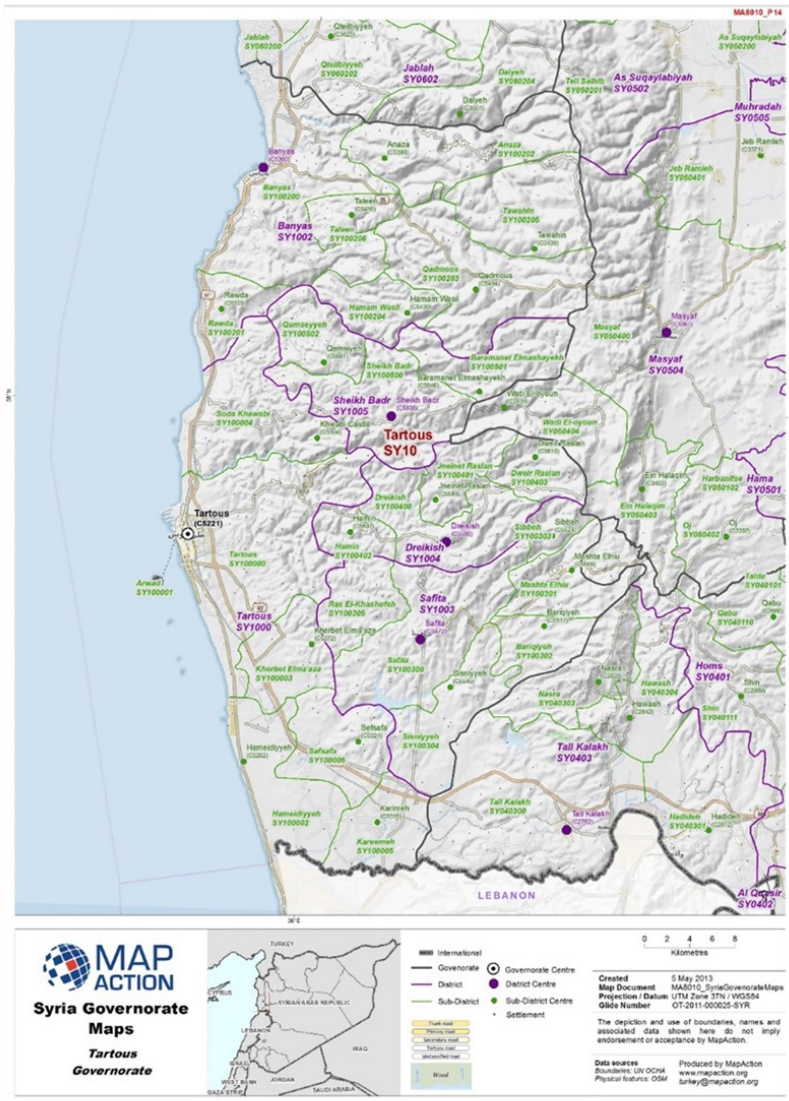
<sup>724</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 18 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>725</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan, [url](#), p. 87

<sup>726</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)



## 2.5. Tartous governorate



Map 10: © MapAction, Tartous governorate map<sup>727</sup>

### 2.5.1. General description of the governorate

The governorate of Tartous borders Latakia governorate to the north, the governorates of Hama and Homs to the east, the Mediterranean Sea to the west and Lebanon to the south.<sup>728</sup> The governorate is divided into five administrative districts: Banyas (Baniyas), Sheikh Badr,

<sup>727</sup> MapAction, Syria Governorate Maps – Tartous Governorate, last updated on 29 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>728</sup> UNOCHA Reference Map, 9 May 2016, [url](#)



Dreikish, Safita, and Tartous City<sup>729</sup> which are in turn subdivided into 27 sub-districts.<sup>730</sup> In a December 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Tartous governorate to be 948 274.<sup>731</sup>

The governorate is considered a ‘regime stronghold’.<sup>732</sup> However, changes in the traditional pattern of loyalty expressed by Alawites toward the government have been observed,<sup>733</sup> consisting mainly in a series of anti-government protests over the past few years. This is reportedly due to the high inflation, unappealing government employments, spread of poverty and criminality, remarkable number of deaths caused by the war among the Alawite community.<sup>734</sup>

## 2.5.2. Conflict background and armed actors

For the reference period, Tartous governorate was under the control of GoS.<sup>735</sup> The Russian-led naval facility in Tartous is still operational and it represents the only Russian naval foothold in the Mediterranean, in use since the days of the Soviet Union.<sup>736</sup>

## 2.5.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

In August 2022, Israeli airstrikes hit Iranian targets with multiple attacks in proximity of Tartous military naval base with the aim of preventing Iran from expanding its influence. According to SOHR, airstrikes in Tartous targeted an air defence base, where Iranian-backed groups are active. Reportedly, three soldiers were killed and three were wounded.<sup>737</sup> In March 2023, Israel reportedly launched rocket strikes hitting Tartous countryside. The attack resulted in three military personnel injured. Strikes are reportedly part of an escalation of a low-intensity conflict aimed at limiting Iran’s influence in the area.<sup>738</sup>

During the reference period there were few reports of targeted attacks against GoS forces and civilians which led to casualties.<sup>739</sup>

<sup>729</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Governorates Profiles, June 2014, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>730</sup> UNHCR, UNHCR Syria / Tartous FO, End of year 2017 / Factsheet, January – December 2017, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>731</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>732</sup> (The) Arab reform initiative, Protest Movements in Tartous: Dynamics and Implications, 27 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>733</sup> Financial Times (The), Economic crisis begins to crack the bedrock of Assad’s Alawi support, 13 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>734</sup> (The) Arab Reform Initiative, Protest Movements in Tartous: Dynamics and Implications, 27 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>735</sup> (The) Carter Centre, Exploring historical control in Syria, [interactive map], [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 June 2023, [url](#); iMMAP (Author), published by ReliefWeb: Context Update: Northwestern Syria | October 4, 2022, 4 October 2022, [url](#), p. 1; Jusoor Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, December 2022, [map], [url](#)

<sup>736</sup> Al Jazeera, Assad welcomes new Russian bases in Syria after Putin meeting, 16 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>737</sup> Al Jazeera, Three Syrian soldiers killed in Israeli missile attacks: Report, [url](#), 15 August 2022; Reuters, Israeli strikes hit Iranian targets near Russia’s Mediterranean bases, 15 August 2022, [url](#); VOA News, Syrian State Media Says 3 Killed in Israeli Attacks, 14 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>738</sup> Business Standard (The), Israel hits areas in Hama and Tartous countryside, 12 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>739</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)



### **(b) Security incidents**

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were six security incidents recorded by ACLED in Tartous governorate, of which one was coded as battles, three were coded as explosions/remote violence and two as incidents of violence against civilians. According to ACLED, unidentified armed groups were involved (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2') in the incidents coded as violence against civilians, while Israeli forces were involved in the incidents coded as explosions/remote violence.<sup>740</sup>

### **(c) Civilian fatalities**

SNHR did not document any civilian fatalities in 2021 and 60 civilian fatalities in 2022. However, all 60 civilian fatalities documented in 2022 were civilians originating from Tartous governorate who drowned while on migration routes from Syria to Europe.<sup>741</sup> There were no civilian fatalities documented by SNHR in Tartous governorate during the first seven months of 2023.<sup>742</sup>

### **(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

SNHR reported that no death related to landmines have been recorded in Tartous during the period between March 2011 and 4 April 2023.<sup>743</sup> As reported in the UN Syria Multi-sector Needs Assessment of 2022, the Global Shelter Cluster assessed that 1 % of the assessed shelters in Tartous governorate consisted of damaged buildings.<sup>744</sup>

### **(e) Displacement and return**

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 180 735 IDPs in Tartous governorate.<sup>745</sup> Between January and December 2022, UNOCHA recorded 1 000 IDP movements from the governorate, 3 000 IDP within the governorate and 3 000 IDP to the governorate. Most of IDP movements to Tartous governorate originate from Aleppo (around 1 000) and Homs (around 900), while most of the IDP movements from Tartous were to Latakia (around 800).<sup>746</sup> For the period between January and June 2023, UNOCHA did not record any IDP movement from and to Tartous. Likewise, no displacement within the governorate has been documented.<sup>747</sup>

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<sup>740</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>741</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>742</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA.

<sup>743</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#) p. 20

<sup>744</sup> Global Shelter Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter and NFI Sector Humanitarian Needs Overview, 14 February 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>745</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>746</sup> UNOCHA, IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2022, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>747</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)



However, UN Security Council reported that Tartous is one of the most affected governorates by the February earthquakes resulting in displacement of individuals fleeing both in GoS-held areas and in anti-GoS held in north-western areas.<sup>748</sup>

In terms of return, UNOCHA indicated that, in 2022, Tartous was one of the governorates with the fewest recorded returns together with Raqqa and Quneitra.<sup>749</sup> UNOCHA recorded 5 IDP returns to Tartous and 2 000 returnee movements from the governorate in 2022.<sup>750</sup> During the period between January and June 2023, UNOCHA recorded 5 IDP returns from the governorate.<sup>751</sup> No further information on displacement or returns could be found within the constraints of the research. No information on the reasons behind the displacement or returns movements was provided by the sources.

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<sup>748</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para.3

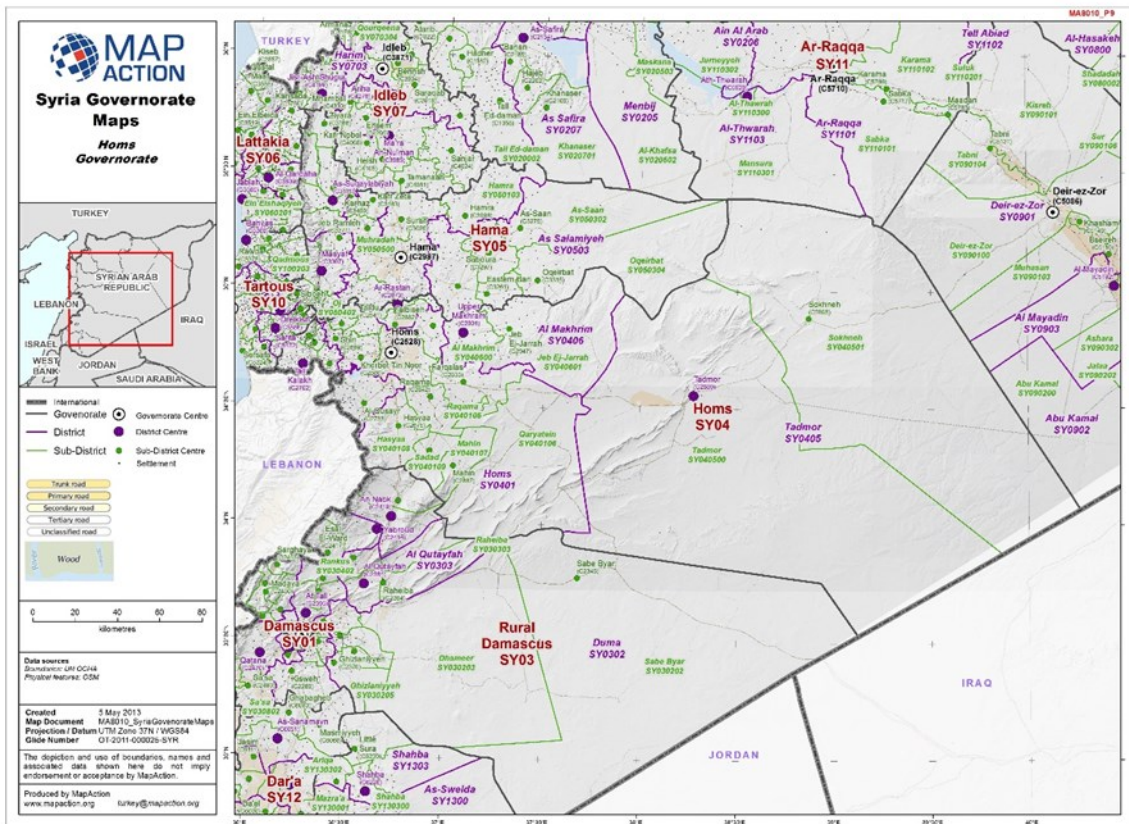
<sup>749</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>750</sup> UNOCHA, IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>751</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)



## 2.6. Homs governorate



Map 11: © MapAction, Homs governorate map<sup>752</sup>

### 2.6.1. General description of the governorate

Homs governorate is located in central Syria and has borders with Iraq to the east and Lebanon to the west. It has internal borders with Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa, Hama, Tartous, and Rural Damascus governorates.<sup>753</sup> The Syrian E-Government website stated that Homs governorate shares an international border with Jordan to the east as well.<sup>754</sup> UNOCHA mentioned in a December 2022 report that Homs governorate comprises six administrative districts: Homs, Al Makhrim, Al-Qusayr, Ar-Rastan, Tadmor (Palmyra) and Tall Kalakh.<sup>755</sup> Homs was the largest governorate in Syria in terms of surface, and the third in terms of population, as of May 2014. The capital of the governorate is Homs city which is also the central city of Homs district.<sup>756</sup> In a December 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Homs governorate at 1 502 706.<sup>757</sup> For information on the ethnic and religious composition of the population of Homs, see the EUAA COI Report: [Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

<sup>752</sup> MapAction, Homs Governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>753</sup> UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#)

<sup>754</sup> Syria, E-Government, عن سورية [About Syria], n.d., [url](#)

<sup>755</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 135

<sup>756</sup> UN-Habitat, City Profile – Homs: Multi Sector Assessment, May 2014, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>757</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

## 2.6.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Different maps produced by various sources show that Homs governorate is under GoS control.<sup>758</sup> A map produced by the UN further shows some ISIL presence in the east of the governorate and a so-called US-declared 55-km deconfliction area<sup>759</sup> stretching between the southeast of the governorate and neighbouring Rural Damascus governorate around Al-Tanf,<sup>760</sup> controlled by US troops and the Free Syrian Army (FSA),<sup>761</sup> formerly known as Mughawir al-Thawra (MaT),<sup>762</sup> a rebel group<sup>763</sup> consisting of former Syrian military officers.<sup>764</sup>

In the reference period, the Fourth Armoured Division of the GoS army was deployed in several Syrian governorates, including Homs.<sup>765</sup> As noted in an October 2022 Enab Baladi article, the Fourth Division had no large military sites in Homs governorate, but security offices and military roadblocks along with some military points deployed in the eastern part of the governorate, where there was ISIL cell activity.<sup>766</sup> Furthermore, the 25<sup>th</sup> Special Tasks Division was also reported to have recruitment offices in Homs governorate.<sup>767</sup> In the first half of 2023, Enab Baladi articles indicated that the GoS had deployed reinforcements to Talbiseh city<sup>768</sup> in the context of unrest and armed confrontations in the city related to drug dealing groups.<sup>769</sup>

Homs governorate, according to a DIS interview with SNHR in August 2022, was among the Syrian governorates under Iranian ‘influence’<sup>770</sup> and continued to house Iranian military positions.<sup>771</sup> According to a Jerusalem Post article, Lebanese Hezbollah and Iranian forces operated in the neighbourhood of the Al-Dabaa airbase near Al-Qusayr in the reference

<sup>758</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#); UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Homs and June 2023.

<sup>759</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>760</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>761</sup> Syria TV, Coalition Commander Meets Free Syrian Army Command at Al-Tanf Base, The Syrian Observer, 26 January 2023, <https://syrianobserver.com/uncategorized/81433/coalition-commander-meets-free-syrian-army-command-at-al-tanf-base.html>

<sup>762</sup> New Arab (The), US-backed Syrian opposition militia changes name amid reforms, 25 October 2022, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Drone attack hits Tanf US base in Syria, 20 January 2023, [url](#); Syria Direct, US-backed Maghawir al-Thawra commander replaced, amid internal disagreements and corruption allegations, 5 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>763</sup> Edwards, M., and Al-Homsi, O., Jordan returns refugees to desolate Syrian border camp, rights groups cry foul, TNH, 16 September 2020, [url](#)

<sup>764</sup> TWI, The Future of al-Tanf Garrison in Syria, 6 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>765</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units [source: SNHR], April 2023, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>766</sup> Enab Baladi, [Homs: The Fourth Division exploits forest trees at the gates of winter](#), 28 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>767</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units [source: SNHR], April 2023, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>768</sup> Enab Baladi, [Homs: The regime sends military reinforcements to the vicinity of Talbiseh](#), 25 May 2023, [url](#); Enab Baladi, [Security tensions and reinforcements after confrontations in Talbiseh in rural Homs](#), 24 March 2023, [url](#);

<sup>769</sup> Enab Baladi, [Homs: Injuries and deaths during confrontations between drug dealing groups](#), 1 December 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, [Homs: Blocked roads due to the arrest of renown men in Talbiseh \(Video\)](#), 5 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>770</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units [source: online interview with SNHR on 23 August 2022], April 2023, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>771</sup> ISW and CTP, Iran Update, March 1, 2023, 1 March 2023, [url](#)



period,<sup>772</sup> an area which has been a centre of Hezbollah's activity since 2012.<sup>773</sup> According to The Jerusalem Post, Hezbollah had a drone development unit in the area.<sup>774</sup> In April 2023, Al-Qusayr was reportedly under the complete control of Hezbollah, while the Al-Dabaa airbase, about 20 km southwest of Homs city and 10 km north of Al-Qusayr, constituted 'a major land crossing route of the corridor from Syria to Lebanon'.<sup>775</sup> Meanwhile, an April 2023 Reuters article indicated that Hezbollah was the dominant actor in Al-Qusayr city.<sup>776</sup> ISW and CTP reported that some Iranian-backed Iraqi militants, in February 2023, had travelled to Homs governorate from other positions in the country.<sup>777</sup> As of March 2023, Iranian-backed militias continued to have positions in Tadmor (Palmyra), where they were storing drones.<sup>778</sup>

Moreover, as of spring 2023, ISIL was still in control of Wadi Doubayat,<sup>779</sup> south of Al-Sukhnah,<sup>780</sup> as well as the western and eastern mountains around Al-Kawm and briefly managed to take over the control of Khirbet al-Muqam village in early April 2023, north of Al-Kawm,<sup>781</sup> and an unspecified key oil field town in Homs governorate from GoS and Russian forces in October 2022.<sup>782</sup> The Carter Center in June 2023 reported that ISIL, notwithstanding the February 2023 earthquakes in Syria and Türkiye and the overall reduction in violence, continued to remain active in the Badia desert region.<sup>783</sup> A July 2023 UN Security Council report indicated that ISIL continued to carry out asymmetric attacks in Homs governorate but 'at a relatively lower frequency' while regular attacks by small cells occurred on a regular basis in north Tadmor (Palmyra).<sup>784</sup>

<sup>772</sup> Jerusalem Post (The), Second IRGC adviser dead in third airstrike in Syria in a week, 2 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>773</sup> Jerusalem Post (The), Alleged Israeli airstrikes target Homs in Syria, injure three civilians, 29 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>774</sup> Jerusalem Post (The), Alleged Israeli airstrikes target Hezbollah drone unit in west Syria – report, 22 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>775</sup> Alma, Syria – Four Days (March 30-April 02), Three Airstrikes (Damascus and Homs), Two Iranian IRGC Casualties, 2 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>776</sup> Reuters, Syria says Israel hits Homs outposts, sources say air bases bombed, 2 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>777</sup> ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 27, 2023, 27 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>778</sup> ISW and CT, Iran Update, March 31, 2023, 31 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>779</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in February 2023, CEP, 3 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>780</sup> Waters, G., ISIS beats back Wagner offensive in central Syria, MEI, 21 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>781</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>782</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 October 2022 – 31 December 2022, 7 February 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>783</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, January – March 2023, 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>784</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 24 July 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2023/549, 25 July 2023, [url](#), para. 52







## 2.6.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

In the reference period, ISIL regularly launched lethal attacks in various governorates, among which Homs,<sup>785</sup> including attacks on civilians and against GoS forces<sup>786</sup> in eastern Homs<sup>787</sup> as well as attacks on pro-GoS militias.<sup>788</sup> ISIL reportedly further clashed with NDF and SAA units near Arak village in February 2023.<sup>789</sup> In November 2022, Russia reportedly resumed airstrikes against ISIL positions in the governorate.<sup>790</sup> ISIL attacks in Homs governorate were further reported, for example, near the city of Al-Sukhnah<sup>791</sup> and south of Al-Kawm village.<sup>792</sup> Gregory Waters in the summer of 2023 reported that ISIL activity in Homs governorate continued<sup>793</sup> and that ISIL apparently had an intention to ‘re-enter Homs via the southern countryside around Maheen [Mahin, Mheen] and Qaryatayn’.<sup>794</sup>

According to the International Crisis Group, after a number of high-intensity attacks during the season of truffle harvesting, ISIL activity in central Syria decreased in May 2023 and the GoS downscaled major operations against ISIL in eastern Homs.<sup>795</sup> Reportedly, ISIL fought GoS and Russian Wagner forces around Al-Kawm continuously until mid-April 2023,<sup>796</sup> when the month-long GoS offensive with the aim of securing the strategic village in northeast Homs from ISIL came to an end.<sup>797</sup> An ISIL attack on 9 April 2023 on the outskirts of Jubb Al-Jarrah, 30 miles (or around 48 km) from Homs city, according to Gregory Waters, was ‘one of the western-most ISIS [ISIL] attacks in more than a year’.<sup>798</sup> In June 2023, a GoS general was reportedly killed in an IED attack by ISIL in the city of Homs, which, according to the International Crisis Group, was the first attack in Homs city since 2017.<sup>799</sup> In one major attack carried out by ISIL in

<sup>785</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>786</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in October 2022, CEP, 4 November 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in September 2022, CEP, 4 October 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in August 2022, CEP, 6 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>787</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 7; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 5; Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>788</sup> ACLED, ACLED Regional Overview - Middle East (10 - 16 September 2022), 22 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>789</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in February 2023, CEP, 3 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>790</sup> ACLED, ACLED Regional Overview - Middle East (29 October - 4 November 2022), 10 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>791</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>792</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in May 2023, CEP, 2 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>793</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in May 2023, CEP, 2 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>794</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in June 2023, CEP, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>795</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>796</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>797</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in May 2023, CEP, 2 June 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>798</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>799</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)



February 2023 on truffle pickers in Homs governorate in Al-Sukhnah, 53<sup>800</sup> to 68 individuals,<sup>801</sup> mainly civilians and some military personnel, were killed.<sup>802</sup>

In the reference period, Israel carried out airstrikes in Homs governorate.<sup>803</sup> Israeli airstrikes reportedly occurred in areas near the city of Homs,<sup>804</sup> the Shayrat air base,<sup>805</sup> and an alleged drone development unit site belonging to Hezbollah at the Al-Qusayr airport.<sup>806</sup> Reportedly, some of the attacks resulted in casualties among civilians<sup>807</sup> and military personnel.<sup>808</sup>

In August 2022, Iranian-affiliated groups reportedly attacked the US-controlled Al-Tanf base in Homs governorate,<sup>809</sup> although no casualties were reported.<sup>810</sup> Military personnel was reportedly injured in drone attacks on the base in January 2023 by undisclosed perpetrators.<sup>811</sup> Furthermore, it was reported that the IDP camp Al-Rukban, situated in the Al-Tanf area close to the borders with Jordan and Iraq,<sup>812</sup> continued to be besieged by GoS and Russian forces.<sup>813</sup>

## (b) Security incidents

During the period 1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023, there were 215 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Homs governorate, of which 80 were coded as battles, 81 explosions/remote violence and 54 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>814</sup>

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<sup>800</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, January – March 2023, 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 1; Guardian (The), Syria: at least 53 people killed while truffle hunting in suspected IS attack, 17 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>801</sup> Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes, 20 February 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>802</sup> Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes, 20 February 2023, [url](#), p. 10; BBC News, Islamic State accused of killing truffle hunters in Syria, 17 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>803</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); Independent (The), Israel's air force attacks Syria and Syrian air defense missile explodes over northern Israel, 2 July 2023, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 16; ISW and CTP, Iran Crisis Update, November 13, 13 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>804</sup> Independent (The), Israel's air force attacks Syria and Syrian air defense missile explodes over northern Israel, 2 July 2023, [url](#); SNHR, Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2023, 5 May 2023, [url](#), p. 3; ISW and CTP, Iran Update, April 3, 2023, 3 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>805</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); ISW and CTP, Iran Crisis Update, November 13, 13 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>806</sup> Jerusalem Post (The), Alleged Israeli airstrikes target Hezbollah drone unit in west Syria – report, 22 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>807</sup> SANA, Three civilians injured during Israeli attack on locations near Homs [إصابة ثلاثة مدنيين جراء عدوان], 29 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>808</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#); CBS News, Israeli airstrike on Syrian base kills 2 soldiers, wounds 3 others, 13 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>809</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

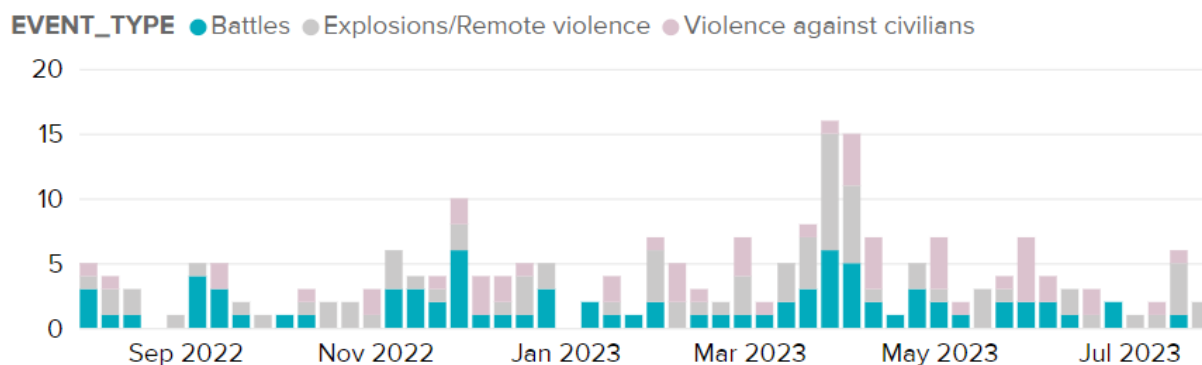
<sup>810</sup> AP News, US: Drone attack targets US base in Syria, no casualties, 15 August 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-group-middle-east-iran-syria-324b3753c01dc8f6056ecbf7570ffa4>

<sup>811</sup> International Crisis Group, Al-Tanf, Syria, 31 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>812</sup> NPA, Syria's Rukban IDPs face long bumpy road towards self-sufficiency, 12 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>813</sup> Al Jazeera, Assad normalisation leaves Syrians in Rukban camp fearing future, 28 May 2023, [url](#); SETF, Rukban, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>814</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)



**Figure 13. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Homs governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data<sup>815</sup>**

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of Tadmor. By comparison, very few incidents were recorded in the district of Tall Kalakh (see [Figure 14](#)). According to ACLED, GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 61 % of all incidents (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’). Unidentified armed groups participated in around 47 % of all recorded security incidents during the reference period; in more than half, civilians were also involved as an actor. ISIL was involved in 38 % of all security incidents, particularly in incidents coded as ‘battles’ where GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were the other actor.

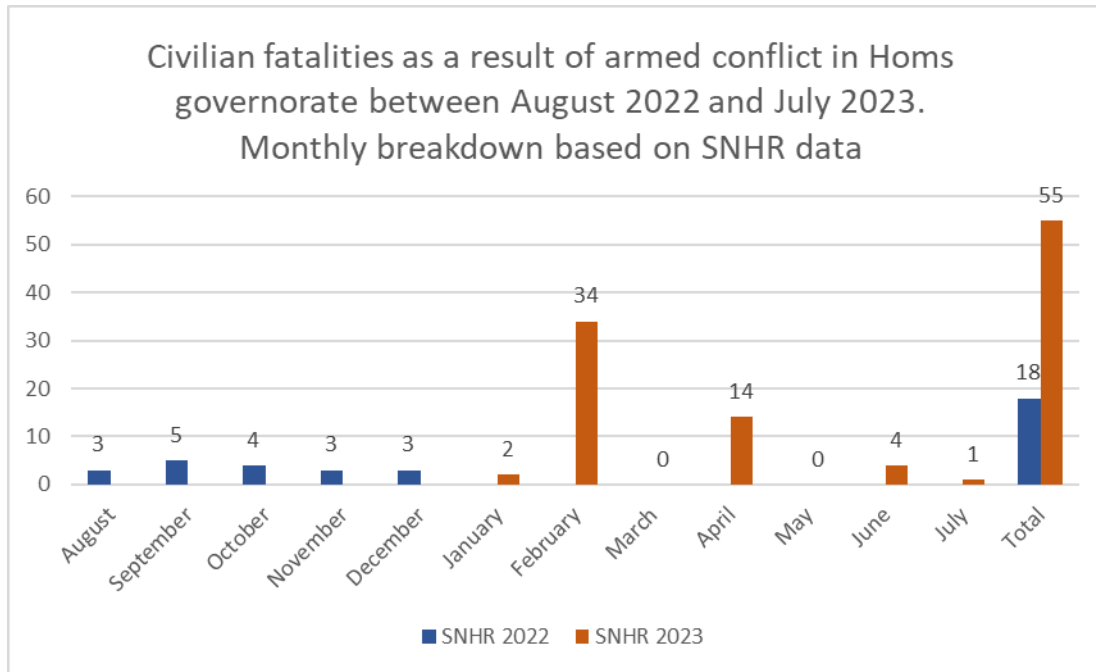
District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Al Makhrim	2	8	6
Al Qusayr	4	5	6
Ar Rastan	8	5	15
Homs	16	20	17
Tadmor	49	42	10
Tall Kalakh	1	1	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>54</b>

<sup>815</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

**Figure 14. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Homs governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data**

**(c) Civilian fatalities**

SNHR documented 28 civilian fatalities in 2021<sup>816</sup> and 37 in 2022.<sup>817</sup> Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 73 civilian fatalities in Homs governorate.<sup>818</sup>



**Figure 15. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Homs governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

**(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

Al Jazeera reported on increased attacks near the IDP camp Rukban in the Al-Tanf deconfliction area, including a drone attack on a health clinic critical for the camp residents in January 2023.<sup>819</sup> Within the time constraints of this report, no further information on attacks on health facilities or civilian infrastructure and objects in Homs governorate in the reference period was found.

<sup>816</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>817</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>818</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>819</sup> Al Jazeera, Assad normalisation leaves Syrians in Rukban camp fearing future, 28 May 2023, [url](#)



In the reference period, civilians were killed and injured by explosive devices of war for example in Duwayzin, located on the border between Hama and Homs,<sup>820</sup> such as in the area of Al-Haswiya.<sup>821</sup> According to UNOCHA, Homs is among the Syrian governorates where contamination from UXOs represents a particularly major security concern and continued to be reported in 2022.<sup>822</sup> A November 2022 Enab Baladi article indicates that ERWs in Homs city continued to claim the lives of civilians, although the city has been entirely in control of GoS forces since 2018. Reportedly, ERWs were not yet removed from residential areas. They included mines which were planted along past contact lines as well as remnants of cluster bombs used by GoS forces in the northern rural areas of Homs and the Al-Houla plain against opposition factions as well as in the Badia desert against ISIL. The article indicates that children and farmers were particularly affected by the dangers posed by ERW and that they have ‘become a constant concern for the residents’ in the area.<sup>823</sup>

### (e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022, there were 299 525 IDPs in Homs governorate,<sup>824</sup> including 189 147 in Homs district.<sup>825</sup> Over the year 2022, there were approximately 1 960 IDP movements out of Homs and 960 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 35 movements within the governorate.<sup>826</sup> No information on the reasons behind the displacement movements was found. No conflict-induced IDP movements were recorded in Homs governorate by UNOCHA between January and May 2023.<sup>827</sup>

As regards returns, in 2022, UNOCHA recorded no spontaneous IDP returnee movements from Homs to other governorates and some 6 000 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Homs as well as 3 000 movements within Homs.<sup>828</sup> Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA recorded approximately 83 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Homs and no returnee movements from Homs to other governorates, as well as about 233 movements within the governorate. The movements occurred in January and March, while in the other months no movements were recorded.<sup>829</sup> No further information on the reasons behind the returns movements was found.

<sup>820</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>821</sup> SNHR, 99 Civilians, Including Eight Children, and Seven Women Documented Killed in Syria, in April 2023, 1 May 2023, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>822</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>823</sup> Enab Baladi, Mines and war remnants in Homs still fatal danger, no response, 9 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>824</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>825</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>826</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>827</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

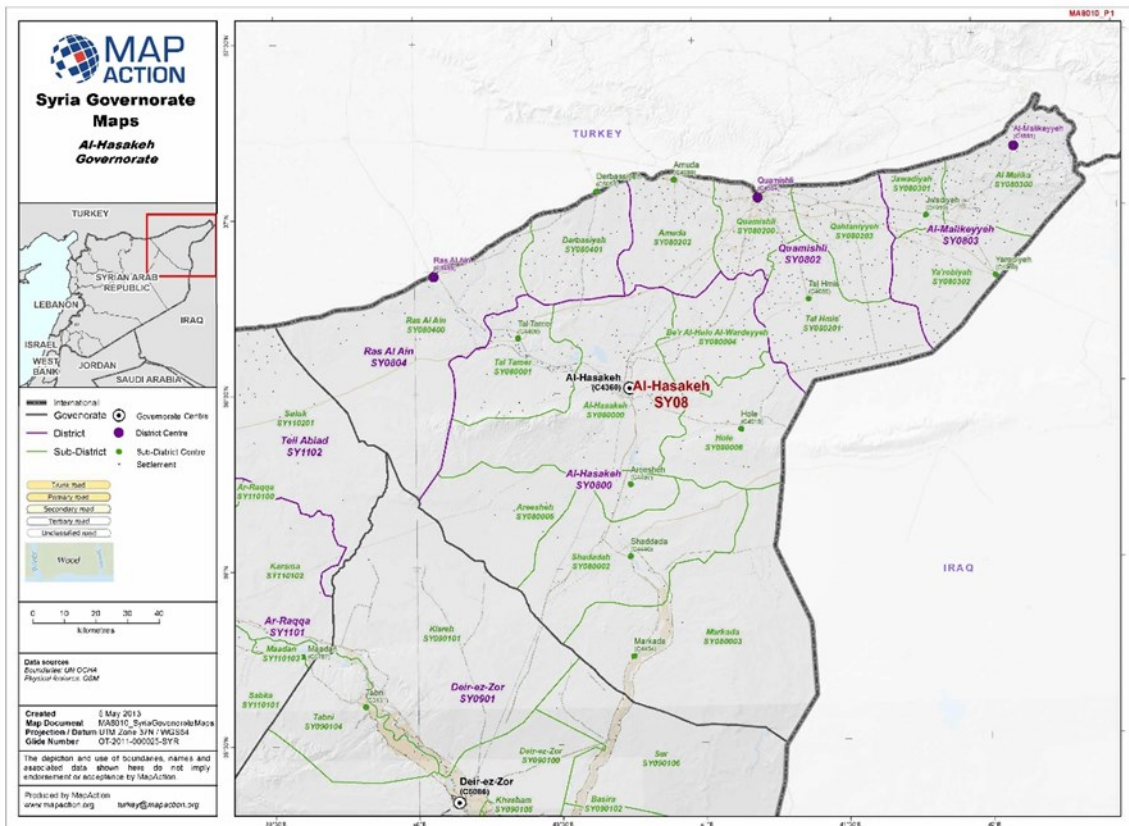
<sup>828</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>829</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#)





## 2.7. Hasaka governorate



Map 12: © MapAction, Hasaka governorate<sup>830</sup>

### 2.7.1. General description of the governorate

Hasaka (Al-Hasakah) governorate is located in the north-eastern corner of Syria and shares borders with the governorates of Raqqa to the west and Deir Ez-Zor to the south-west. It also shares international borders with Türkiye to its north and Iraq to its east.<sup>831</sup> Its capital, Hasaka, is located in the centre of the governorate.<sup>832</sup> The governorate comprises four administrative districts: Hasaka, al-Malikiya (al-Malikeyyeh), Qamishli (Quamishli) and Ras al-Ayn (Ras al-Ain).<sup>833</sup> A December 2022 UNOCHA report estimated the governorate's population at 1 206 229.<sup>834</sup>

The governorate has an ethnic Kurdish majority. Most areas north of the Hasaka city have a predominantly Kurdish population (like Qamishli and al-Malikiya) or a mixed Kurdish-Arab

<sup>830</sup> MapAction, Al-Hasakeh governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>831</sup> UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>832</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas: Al Hasakeh Governorate Reference Map, 2017, [url](#)

<sup>833</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 133-134

<sup>834</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

population (like Ras al-Ayn).<sup>835</sup> The governorate's south is mainly inhabited by Arabs.<sup>836</sup> The Tal Tamr area has a Christian population, with villages inhabited by Assyrians<sup>837</sup> and Armenians.<sup>838</sup> The governorate is also home to Yazidis.<sup>839</sup> The cities of Qamishli and Hasaka are divided into Kurdish and Arab districts, with Kurds forming a majority in Qamishli but a minority in Hasaka.<sup>840</sup>

Information on the governorate's political landscape, as well as its economic and strategic importance can be found in an earlier issue of this report: [Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), section. 2.7.1.

## 2.7.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Since Turkish forces seized control of Ras al-Ayn from the SDF in autumn 2019,<sup>841</sup> the Ras al-Ayn area experienced frequent mutual bombing between Turkish forces/SNA and the SDF.<sup>842</sup> In the rear of the Turkish incursion, ISIL cells resumed organising attacks,<sup>843</sup> staging a large-scale attack on Hasaka city's Ghwaryan prison in January 2022.<sup>844</sup> Kurdish forces launched anti-ISIL operations in Hasaka city<sup>845</sup> and its countryside.<sup>846</sup> Meanwhile, the GoS, supported by its allies Russia<sup>847</sup> and Iran,<sup>848</sup> sought to strengthen its influence and military presence in the region.

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<sup>835</sup> Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, TWI, 2018, [url](#), pp. 52, 56

<sup>836</sup> Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, TWI, 2018, [url](#), p. 52; Balanche, F., *The Fragile Status Quo in Northeast Syria*, TWI, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>837</sup> Holmes, A. A., *Despite Ceasefire Agreement, Turkey Implicated In More Than Eight Hundred Violations*, CFR, 13 October 2020, [url](#)

<sup>838</sup> ANHA, *Armenians and Syrians: Turkish threats spares neither component*, 3 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>839</sup> Syria Direct, *Yazidis' long struggle against landlessness and discrimination in rural Hasakah*, 4 April 2023, [url](#); Ya'qoube, L., *Afrin's Yazidis: an ancient culture edges toward the precipice*, KCS, 20 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>840</sup> Balanche, F., *Iraq and Syria: Kurdish Autonomous Regions Under Threat*, Groupe d'études géopolitiques, 4 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>841</sup> TWI, *The SDF Is Caught Between Turkey and the Islamic State Again*, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>842</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/51/45, 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 83

<sup>843</sup> Balanche, F., *Iraq and Syria: Kurdish Autonomous Regions Under Threat*, Groupe d'études géopolitiques, 4 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>844</sup> Washington Post (The), *Prison break: ISIS fighters launched a brazen attack to free their comrades*, 3 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>845</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/51/45, 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 82

<sup>846</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/51/45, 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 82; Syria Direct, *When the sun sets, SDF control over northeastern Syria's highways wanes*, 14 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>847</sup> Al-Khateb, K., *Syrian government reportedly building tribal force in Hasakah*, Al-Monitor, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>848</sup> Al-Khateb, K., *Syrian government reportedly building tribal force in Hasakah*, Al-Monitor, 22 April 2021, [url](#); Al-Ahmed, S., *"Carpet weaving" east of the Euphrates: Iranian proxy groups expand their influence in Syria's Hasakah Province*, MEI, 12 September 2022, [url](#)





During the reference period, Kurdish forces (SDF/YPG) controlled most of Hasaka governorate<sup>849</sup> and were supported by US-led coalition forces.<sup>850</sup> US troops patrolled the countryside near the Syrian-Turkish border.<sup>851</sup>

Meanwhile, Türkiye controlled a part of northern Hasaka that belonged to a territory roughly delimited by Ras al-Ayn in the east, Tall Abyad (Raqqqa) in the west, the Syrian-Turkish border in the north and the M4 motorway in the south<sup>852</sup> This area has been referred to as the Operation Peace Spring area.<sup>853</sup> The SNA operated in this area<sup>854</sup> and controlled the stretch of border between Ras al-Ayn and Tall Abyad.<sup>855</sup>

GoS forces controlled several zones (security enclaves)<sup>856</sup> in and around the cities of Hasaka and Qamishli<sup>857</sup> which also hosted sites of Iranian and Russian forces.<sup>858</sup> In addition, GoS forces were granted permission by the SDF to pass between GoS held and Kurdish-controlled territories.<sup>859</sup> Along with Russian troops,<sup>860</sup> they maintained presences along the Syrian-Turkish border and the front lines between the Kurdish-controlled and Turkish-held areas.<sup>861</sup> In response to Türkiye's warnings of a potential new military campaign against Kurdish forces in border areas, the GoS reinforced its presence in northern Hasaka's borderlands in mid-2022.<sup>862</sup>

### 2.7.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

##### *The conflict between the SDF and Turkish forces/Turkish-backed armed groups*

The UN Secretary-General in February 2023 characterised the security situation in Hasaka governorate as 'volatile'.<sup>863</sup> The UNCOI, reporting on the second half of 2022, noted that there

<sup>849</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of influence and crossings in the Syrian opposition areas [as of December 2022], 31 January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>850</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>851</sup> Al Arabiya, Attacks on Iran-linked targets in Syria will draw prompt response, Tehran warns, 25 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>852</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of influence and crossings in the Syrian opposition areas [as of December 2022], 31 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>853</sup> Al-Hilu, K., The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, EUI, 14 January 2021 [first published in Arabic on 21 December 2020], [url](#), p. 6

<sup>854</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Recruitment to Opposition Groups [source: Suhail Al-Ghazi], December 2022, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>855</sup> Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>856</sup> Al-Khateb, K., Syrian government reportedly building tribal force in Hasakah, Al-Monitor, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>857</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of influence and crossings in the Syrian opposition areas [as of December 2022], 31 January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>858</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>859</sup> Al Shami, I., How the Autonomous Administration Leadership and Civilians Will View a Turkish Incursion into Northeast Syria, TWI, 18 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>860</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>861</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>862</sup> BasNews, Syrian Regime Deploys Reinforcement to North of Hasakah amid Turkish Threats, 17 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>863</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 30



were continuing reports of security incidents in the vicinity of SNA-controlled areas or the Syrian-Turkish border, including around Tal Tamr.<sup>864</sup>

These frontline incidents included ground-bases strikes,<sup>865</sup> airstrikes<sup>866</sup> and drone strikes.<sup>867</sup> The intensity of these attacks varied over time, with a significant decrease recorded by the UN in February/March 2023. However, Hasaka's front line zones remained one of the most conflict-affected areas in Syria.<sup>868</sup> There were a number of reports of alleged Turkish drone strikes targeting SDF personnel,<sup>869</sup> and several instances of drone strikes,<sup>870</sup> heavy shelling<sup>871</sup> and gunfire<sup>872</sup> by Turkish forces which caused civilian casualties.<sup>873</sup>

Attacks by Turkish forces reportedly intensified in northeastern Syria during the second half of 2022.<sup>874</sup> In November 2022, Türkiye launched Operation Claw-Sword,<sup>875</sup> carrying out a series of air, drone and artillery strikes<sup>876</sup> targeting SDF and GoS military sites in the governorate.<sup>877</sup> Some strikes also hit non-military infrastructure such as grain silos, oil fields and power stations,<sup>878</sup> including in the al-Jawadiya, Qamishli<sup>879</sup> and al-Malikiya (Derik) areas, killing at least one civilian.<sup>880</sup> During the first half of 2023, NPA recorded 11 Turkish drone strikes in the governorate.<sup>881</sup> In what Jusoor for Studies viewed as a shift of modus operandi,<sup>882</sup> targets of

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<sup>864</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 109

<sup>865</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Appendix I, p. 18; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), Appendix I, p. 20

<sup>866</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>867</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 109

<sup>868</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 8, 29

<sup>869</sup> See, for example, Rudaw, SDF says two fighters killed by Turkish drone in Hasaka, 5 May 2023, [url](#); Asharq Al-Awsat, SDF Commander Killed in Turkish Drone Attack, 15 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>870</sup> SOHR, SDF-held areas in January 2023 | Nearly 50 deaths in acts of violence...21 attacks by ISIS cells...over 15 infightings and crimes...deteriorating security, 7 February 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>871</sup> SOHR, SDF-held areas in May 2023 | Nearly 30 fatalities in acts of violence...deteriorating security...over 25 infightings and murder crimes...11 protests against deteriorating living conditions, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>872</sup> SOHR, SDF-held areas in February 2023 | 35 fatalities in acts of violence...seven attacks by ISIS cells...over ten infightings and murder crimes...deteriorating security, 5 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>873</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 21; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 112; SOHR, SDF-held areas in February 2023 | 35 fatalities in acts of violence...seven attacks by ISIS cells...over ten infightings and murder crimes...deteriorating security, 5 March 2023, [url](#); SOHR, SDF-held areas in May 2023 | Nearly 30 fatalities in acts of violence...deteriorating security...over 25 infightings and murder crimes...11 protests against deteriorating living conditions, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>874</sup> Synergy Association For Victims (Hevdesti), The Increase of Turkish Attacks on Northeast Syria Threatens Civilians' Lives and Jeopardizes their Basic Rights, 9 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>875</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>876</sup> Atlantic Council, he risks and rewards of Erdogan's next military operation, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>877</sup> SOHR, SOHR: Turkish airstrikes in Syria kill pro-regime soldiers and Kurdish forces, 20 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>878</sup> SOHR, Alarming living crises | Turkish airstrikes on vital institutions and infrastructure affect civilians in Al-Hasakah countryside, 26 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>879</sup> Syria Direct, Days of airstrikes and rumblings of a long-threatened Turkish offensive in northern Syria after Istanbul bombing, 25 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>880</sup> HRW, Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Exacerbate Humanitarian Crisis, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>881</sup> NPA, North Press records 34 Turkish drone strikes on north Syria in 2023, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>882</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Turkish pinpoint operations in Syria against the PKK: Details and indications, 2 February 2023, [url](#)



Turkish drone strikes since early 2023 also included vehicles carrying PKK<sup>883</sup> and SDF members.<sup>884</sup> Moreover, attacks were conducted deeper within SDF-controlled territory (more than 60 km south of the Syrian-Turkish border). Turkish intelligence also launched a security operation early January 2023 that led to the killing of two officials of the PKK-allied Turkish Communist Party - Marxist-Leninist (TKP-ML) at their homes north of Hasaka city.<sup>885</sup>

### *Operation Peace Spring area*

In the Operation Peace Spring area itself, several civilians were shot dead by Turkish forces during the reference period.<sup>886</sup> Moreover, there were a number of security incidents affecting various armed actors, including attacks of members of SNA, Turkish police and Civil Police, as well as instances of infighting among military police, SNA<sup>887</sup> and other armed factions.<sup>888</sup> There were also reports of IED attacks in this zone, mainly occurring in residential areas and markets.<sup>889</sup>

### *ISIL insurgency*

ISIL attacks in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) were reported to have increased significantly during the second half of 2022<sup>890</sup> and continued to occur in 2023. Incidents in Hasaka targeted members of the Kurdish Internal Security Forces<sup>891</sup> (Asayish<sup>892</sup>) and SDF<sup>893</sup> as well as civilians in the governorate.<sup>894</sup> Over the first half 2023, the NPA recorded an average rate of two ISIL attacks per month,<sup>895</sup> with three attacks in June 2023.<sup>896</sup>

<sup>883</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Turkish pinpoint operations in Syria against the PKK: Details and indications, 2 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>884</sup> Al-Monitor, Turkey conducts drone strike against Kurdish forces in Syria, 4 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>885</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Turkish pinpoint operations in Syria against the PKK: Details and indications, 2 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>886</sup> SOHR, “Peace Spring” areas in June 2023 | Public protests against corruption and violations committed by Turkish-backed factions...dreadful living conditions...nearly 30 cases of kidnapping and arbitrary arrests, 2 July 2023, [url](#); SOHR, “Peace Spring” areas in February 2023 | Assassinations target “National Army” militiamen and ongoing violations by Turkish-backed factions, 2 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>887</sup> SOHR, “Peace Spring” areas in April 2023 | Public uprising against Turkish forces...ongoing violations by Turkish-backed factions...nearly 55 cases of arbitrary arrests, 4 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>888</sup> SOHR, “Peace Spring” areas in March 2023 | Turkish-backed factions continues their violations against civilians, amid ongoing infightings over property and revenue-sharing, 2 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>889</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>890</sup> TWI, The SDF Is Caught Between Turkey and the Islamic State Again, 12 October 2022, [url](#); SOHR, ISIS attacks in SDF-held areas | 11 people, including nine SDF members, killed in 16 operations and attacks by ISIS since early December 2022, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>891</sup> SOHR, ISIS attacks since early 2023 | 25 people, mostly combatants, killed and injured in over 14 operations in SDF-held areas, 14 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>892</sup> Enab Baladi, SDF operations in al-Hol camp: The “dismemberment plan”, 6 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>893</sup> SOHR, ISIS attacks in SDF-held areas | 11 people, including nine SDF members, killed in 16 operations and attacks by ISIS since early December 2022, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>894</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 5; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 7; SOHR, ISIS attacks in SDF-held areas | 11 people, including nine SDF members, killed in 16 operations and attacks by ISIS since early December 2022, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>895</sup> NPA, 552 people in Syria fall victim to ISIS attacks in first half of 2023, 8 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>896</sup> NPA, 678 people killed, injured in Syria in June, 2 July 2023, [url](#)



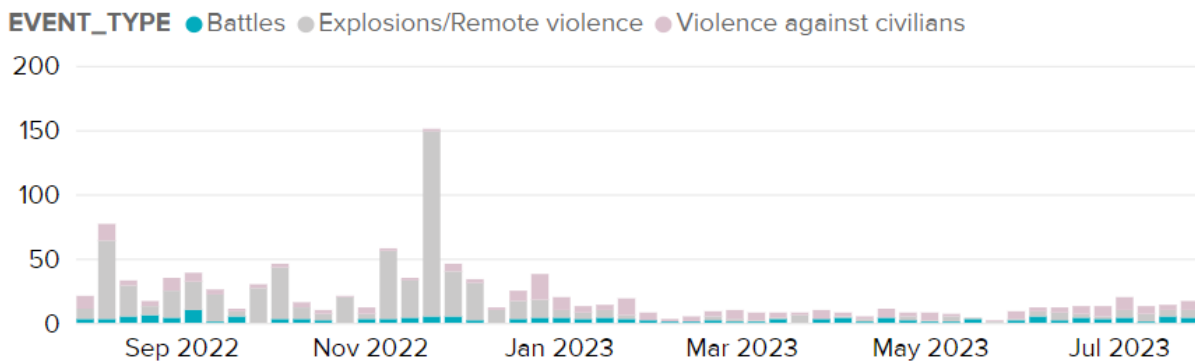
Meanwhile, the SDF conducted anti-ISIL security operations in rural areas in the governorate’s south (Dashisha town)<sup>897</sup> and south-east,<sup>898</sup> as well as in Hasaka city,<sup>899</sup> sometimes with the support of the US-led coalition.<sup>900</sup>

*Al-Hol camp*

The security situation in Al-Hol camp, which houses suspected ISIL family members was described by UNOCHA as ‘volatile’<sup>901</sup> and was characterized by ‘high levels of violence, criminality and social tensions’ among its residents,<sup>902</sup> with reports of killings by unidentified perpetrators.<sup>903</sup> ISIL was present in the camp and its surroundings while the AANES (which oversees and manages the camp) and the SDF had limited capabilities to address petty crime, riots and clashes between camp residents and against guards.<sup>904</sup> Moreover, SDF leadership claimed that Turkish airstrikes targeted its forces in the camp in November 2022.<sup>905</sup>

**(b) Security incidents**

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 1 104 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Hasaka governorate, of which 148 were coded as battles, 686 explosions/remote violence and 270 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>906</sup>



**Figure 16. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hasaka governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data<sup>907</sup>**

<sup>897</sup> NPA, SDF captures ISIS leader in southern Hasakah, 15 May 2023, [url](#)  
<sup>898</sup> SOHR, Supported by International Coalition | SDF storms a house in Al-Hasakah and kills person accused of “belonging to ISIS”, 11 June 2023, [url](#)  
<sup>899</sup> Kurdistan 24, SDF arrests suspected ISIS financier in Hasakah city, 6 September 2022, [url](#)  
<sup>900</sup> SOHR, Supported by International Coalition | SDF storms a house in Al-Hasakah and kills person accused of “belonging to ISIS”, 11 June 2023, [url](#); NPA, SDF captures ISIS leader in southern Hasakah, 15 May 2023, [url](#)  
<sup>901</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12  
<sup>902</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 30  
<sup>903</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 21  
<sup>904</sup> RAND Corporation, In the Wreckage of ISIS: An Examination of Challenges Confronting Detained and Displaced Populations in Northeastern Syria, 2023, [url](#), p. 52  
<sup>905</sup> France 24, Turkish strikes target Kurdish forces guarding Syrian detention camp, 23 November 2022, [url](#); Rudaw, Turkish attack on camp, prison holding ISIS families kills 8 security members: SDF, 24 November 2023, [url](#)  
<sup>906</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)  
<sup>907</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the districts of Hasaka and Ras Al Ain. By comparison, very few incidents were recorded in the district of Malikeyyeh (see [Figure 17](#)). According to ACLED, Turkish forces and affiliated armed groups (SNA) were involved (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’) in around 64 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as explosions/remote violence and where SDF and affiliated armed groups were also an actor. SDF and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 59 % of all security incidents, the vast majority being coded as explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. Unidentified armed groups and ISIL were involved in around 10 % and 6 % of all security incidents, respectively.

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Hasaka	86	313	171
Malikeyyeh	3	38	7
Qamishli	20	98	27
Ras Al Ain	39	237	65
<b>Total</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>686</b>	<b>270</b>

**Figure 17. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hasaka governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data**

### (c) Civilian fatalities

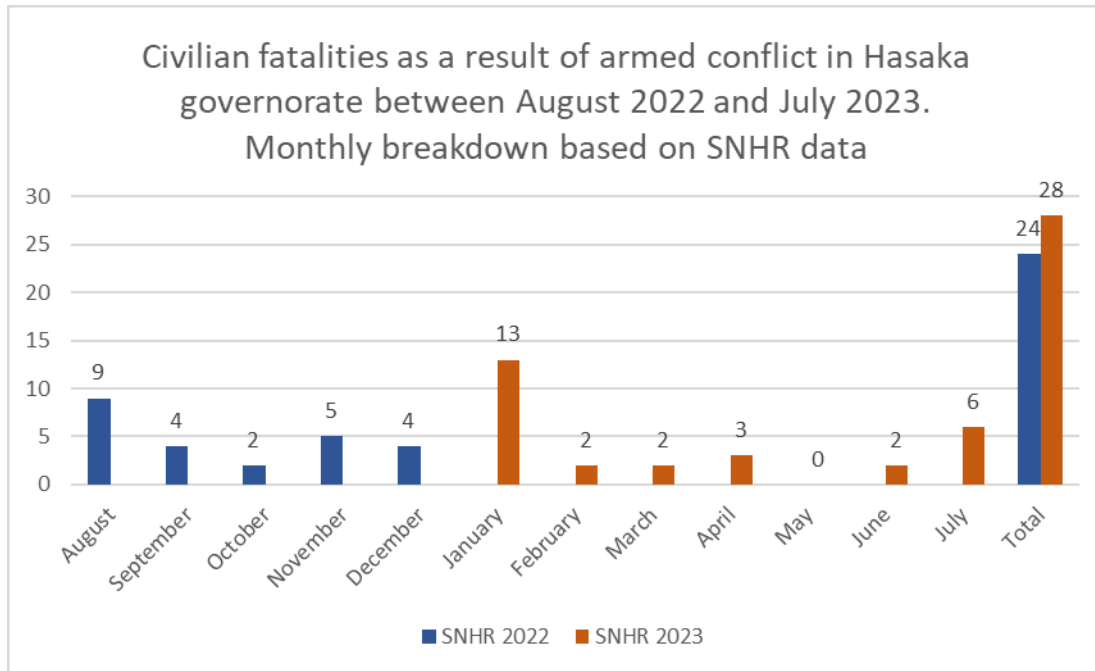
SNHR documented 154 civilian fatalities in 2021<sup>908</sup> and 74 in 2022<sup>909</sup> in Hasaka governorate. Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 52 civilian fatalities in Hasaka governorate.<sup>910</sup> For the year 2022, AOAV documented 190 civilian casualties (killed and injured) in Hasaka resulting from incidents of explosive violence.<sup>911</sup>

<sup>908</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>909</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>910</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>911</sup> AOAV, Syria, updated 21 March 2023, [url](#)



**Figure 18. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Hasaka governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

**(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

Hasaka was one of the governorates where contamination from UXOs was most widespread, including on roads, agricultural land and private property,<sup>912</sup> with areas previously controlled by ISIL showing the highest levels of contamination.<sup>913</sup> The Turkish strikes in November 2022 hit key infrastructure in parts of the governorate, including grain silos, oil fields and power stations, putting some installations out of service.<sup>914</sup> During the first quarter of 2023, NPA recorded 12 deaths from explosive remnants of war in Hasaka governorate.<sup>915</sup> Civilian casualties from landmine explosions were recorded in the vicinity of Ras al-Ayn<sup>916</sup> and in the eastern<sup>917</sup> and north-western countryside of Hasaka,<sup>918</sup> amongst others.

**(e) Displacement and return**

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 331 573 IDPs in Hasaka governorate,<sup>919</sup> including 126 030 in Hasaka subdistrict.<sup>920</sup> Over the year 2022, there were approximately

<sup>912</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>913</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>914</sup> SOHR, Alarming living crises | Turkish airstrikes on vital institutions and infrastructure affect civilians in Al-Hasakah countryside, 26 November 2022, [url](#); HRW, Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Exacerbate Humanitarian Crisis, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>915</sup> NPA, Remnants of war kill 331 people in 1st quarter of 2023 in Syria, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>916</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 22; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), Annex I, p. 21

<sup>917</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 22

<sup>918</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 18

<sup>919</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>920</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 24



1 000 IDP movements out of Hasaka and 2 000 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 3 000 movements within the governorate.<sup>921</sup> During the first five months of 2023, there were 135 IDP movements out of Hasaka, most of them (86) occurring in May, while there were no IDP movements into the governorate and within the governorate reported.<sup>922</sup>

The UN noted that the negative impact of local hostilities on civilian lives and key civilian infrastructure prompted civilians to flee their homes<sup>923</sup> and that residents' conflict-related exposure to displacement persisted across the northern region in the first half of 2023.<sup>924</sup> For example, in June 2023, local residents were displaced when heavy artillery fire by Turkish forces and their proxies hit the villages of Al-Sousah, Farhiyah Ramo and Tel Al-Laban in the Tal Tamr area.<sup>925</sup>

As regards returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded approximately 3 640 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from Hasaka to other governorates and about 220 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Hasaka as well as about 360 movements within Hasaka.<sup>926</sup> During the first five months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded 55 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Hasaka and 67 IDP returnee movements from Hasaka to other governorates, all of these movements occurring in March and May 2023. Returnee movements within the governorate were not reported.<sup>927</sup>

No further information on conflict-induced displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

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<sup>921</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>922</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>923</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>924</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 63

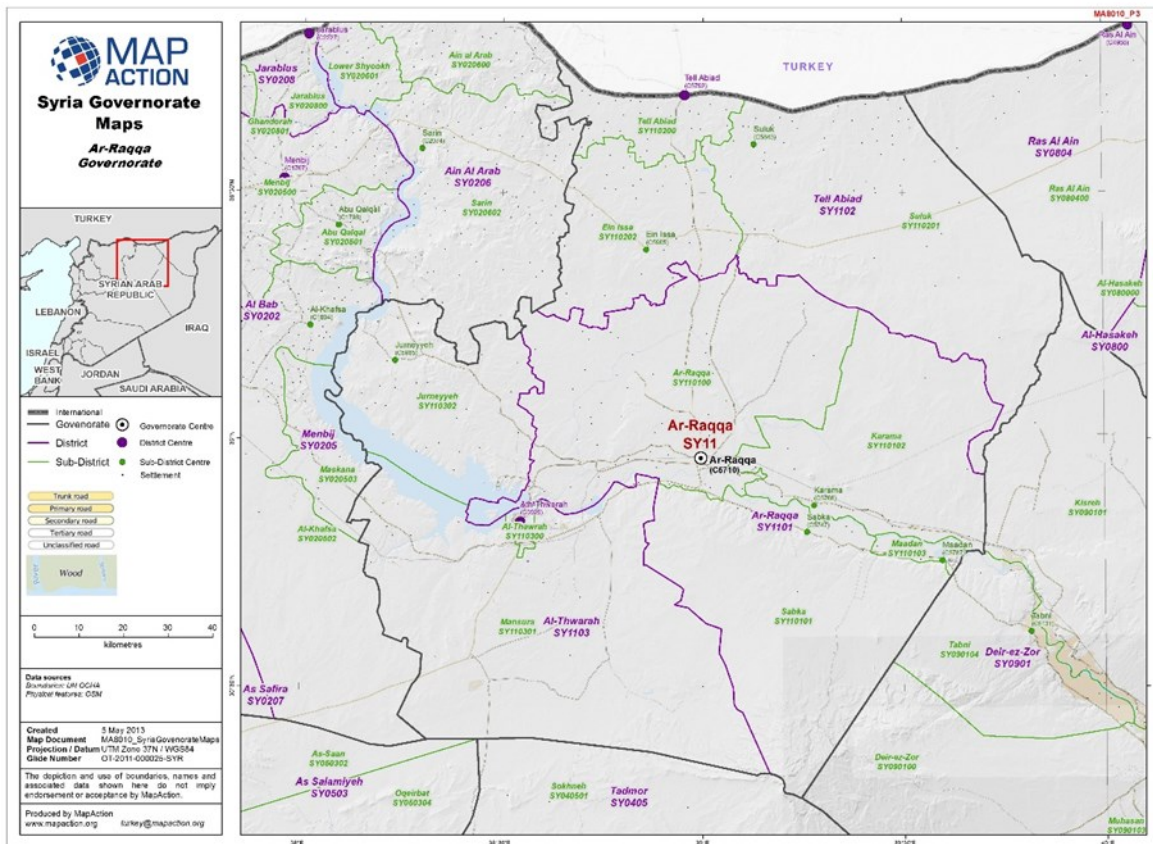
<sup>925</sup> SOHR, SDF-held areas in June 2023 | Nearly 60 fatalities in acts of violence...deteriorating security situation...nearly 30 infightings and murder crimes...19 protests against deteriorating living conditions, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>926</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>927</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#)



## 2.8. Raqqa governorate



Map 13: © MapAction, Raqqa governorate<sup>928</sup>

### 2.8.1. General description of the governorate

Raqqa (Ar-Raqqa) governorate is located in the north-central part of Syria. The governorate borders Aleppo governorate to the west, Hasaka and Deir Ez-Zor governorates to the east, and Hama and Homs governorates to the south. It also shares an international border with Türkiye to its north.<sup>929</sup> The governorate comprises three administrative districts: Raqqa, al-Thawra (Ath-Thawrah) and Tall Abyad (Tell Abiad).<sup>930</sup> A December 2022 UNOCHA report estimated the governorate’s population at 754 295.<sup>931</sup>

The majority of Raqqa governorate’s population is ethnic Arab.<sup>932</sup> Further information on the governorate’s ethnic composition can be found in an earlier issue of this report: [Syria - Security situation \(September 2022\)](#).

<sup>928</sup> MapAction, Ar Raqqa Governorate [map], 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>929</sup> UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>930</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 134

<sup>931</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>932</sup> Kurdistan 24, Protests erupt in Arab-majority Raqqa over deteriorating living conditions, 11 January 2022, [url](#)





## 2.8.2. Conflict background and armed actors

During the reference period, Kurdish forces (SDF/YPG) controlled about half of the territory of Raqqa governorate, including its capital, Raqqa city.<sup>933</sup> SDF operations were supported by US-led coalition forces<sup>934</sup> who also maintained a presence in Raqqa city.<sup>935</sup>

Most of the northern section of the governorate was part of a Turkish-controlled territory roughly delimited by Tall Abyad in the west, Ras al-Ayn (Hasaka) in the east, the Syrian-Turkish border in the north and the M4 motorway in the south.<sup>936</sup> This area has been referred to as the Operation Peace Spring area.<sup>937</sup> The SNA operated in this area<sup>938</sup> and controlled the stretch of border between Tall Abyad and Ras al-Ayn.<sup>939</sup> In July 2023, Türkiye reinforced its military presence in the Ayn Issa area at the contact line between Turkish/SNA forces and the SDF.<sup>940</sup>

Meanwhile, the governorate's southern portion was controlled by the GoS.<sup>941</sup> GoS forces were granted permission by the SDF to pass between GoS held and Kurdish-controlled territories.<sup>942</sup> Along with Russian troops,<sup>943</sup> they maintained presences along the Syrian-Turkish border and the front lines between the Kurdish-controlled and Turkish-held areas.<sup>944</sup>

A number of additional Russian military sites were located the town of Ayn Issa as well as along the stretch of the river basin between the M4 motorway and Raqqa city, as depicted on a mid-July 2023 map by Jusoor for Studies. Further south, numerous Iranian sites were situated along the contact line between the SDF-held territories and those held by the GoS.<sup>945</sup>

<sup>933</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of influence and crossings in the Syrian opposition areas [as of December 2022], 31 January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>934</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>935</sup> NPA, US-led Coalition returns to Syria's Raqqa after years of withdrawal, 23 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>936</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of influence and crossings in the Syrian opposition areas [as of December 2022], 31 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>937</sup> Al-Hilu, K., The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, EUI, 14 January 2021 [first published in Arabic on 21 December 2020], [url](#), p. 6

<sup>938</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Recruitment to Opposition Groups [source: Suhail Al-Ghazi], December 2022, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>939</sup> Tsurkov, E., The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey's Proxies, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, December 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>940</sup> NPA, Turkey sends military reinforcements to contact lines with SDF in Raqqa, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>941</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of influence and crossings in the Syrian opposition areas [as of December 2022], 31 January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>942</sup> Al Shami, I., How the Autonomous Administration Leadership and Civilians Will View a Turkish Incursion into Northeast Syria, TWI, 18 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>943</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>944</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>945</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)



South of Raqqa city, in GoS-controlled territory, there was a zone with ISIL presence.<sup>946</sup> The Critical Threats project stated that ISIL cells in the governorate were likely ‘lying low’ to avoid pressure from SDF and US-led coalition forces.<sup>947</sup>

## 2.8.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

#### *The conflict between the SDF and Turkish forces/Turkish-backed armed groups*

During the second half of 2022, there were continuing reports of security incidents in the vicinity of the Syrian-Turkish border or SNA-controlled areas, including around Ayn Issa<sup>948</sup> and Tall Abyad.<sup>949</sup> These front line incidents included ground-based strikes<sup>950</sup> and drone strikes.<sup>951</sup> The intensity of these attacks varied over time, with a significant decrease recorded by the UN in February/March 2023.<sup>952</sup> However, the UN Secretary-General emphasised that Raqqa’s front line zones remained one of the areas most affected by hostilities.<sup>953</sup>

Attacks by Turkish forces reportedly intensified in northern Syria during the second half of 2022.<sup>954</sup> In November 2022, Türkiye launched Operation Claw-Sword, carrying out a series of airstrikes in the northern countryside of Raqqa, Hasaka and Aleppo governorates,<sup>955</sup> one of which targeted an SDF site in the Ayn Issa area.<sup>956</sup>

Alleged Turkish drone strikes between September and December 2022 killed several civilians<sup>957</sup> and SDF-backed militia members<sup>958</sup> in northern Raqqa’s Tall Abyad district/Ayn Issa area. However, the first half of 2023 only saw one Turkish drone strike, according to the

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<sup>946</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>947</sup> CTP, ISIS Will Leverage Improved Attack Capabilities to Generate Forces in Syria, 2 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>948</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 109

<sup>949</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>950</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 18; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 22

<sup>951</sup> SOHR, Death toll update | Three civilians killed including child in Turkish drone attack on car in Al-Raqqa, 17 December 2022, [url](#); SOHR, After issuing death sentences against 13 Turkish informants | Turkish drone attack on Al-Raqqa countryside leaves four fighters killed, 16 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>952</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 8

<sup>953</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para. 29

<sup>954</sup> Synergy Association For Victims (Hevdesti), The Increase of Turkish Attacks on Northeast Syria Threatens Civilians’ Lives and Jeopardizes their Basic Rights, 9 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>955</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>956</sup> Al Mayadeen, Turkey launches Operation Claw-Sword against SDF, PKK, YPG, 20 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>957</sup> SOHR, Third Turkish drone attack in 2023 | Child injured in Al-Raqqa countryside, 7 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Death toll update | Three civilians killed including child in Turkish drone attack on car in Al-Raqqa, 17 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>958</sup> SOHR, After issuing death sentences against 13 Turkish informants | Turkish drone attack on Al-Raqqa countryside leaves four fighters killed, 16 September 2022, [url](#)



NPA.<sup>959</sup> Meanwhile, ground-based attacks in the same area also caused several casualties among civilians<sup>960</sup> and the SDF.<sup>961</sup>

### *Operation Peace Spring area*

In the Operation Peace Spring area, at least one civilian man was shot dead by Turkish Jandarma, while unidentified gunmen killed members of Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyyah<sup>962</sup>/ the SNA near the town of Tall Abyad.<sup>963</sup> In April 2023, an explosion in the same area killed a Turkish police officer and a Syrian member of the Civil Police and wounded 11 other members of these entities.<sup>964</sup>

### *ISIL insurgency*

ISIL continued to conduct asymmetric attacks in the governorate as of the first half of 2023.<sup>965</sup> From August 2022, attacks attributed to ISIL intensified in Raqqa,<sup>966</sup> reflecting a wider trend across the AANES.<sup>967</sup> According to Gregory Waters, incidents in the governorate peaked August<sup>968</sup> and December,<sup>969</sup> with an average monthly rate of 2.8 over the last five months of 2022.<sup>970</sup> On 26 December 2022, suspected ISIL members, some wearing explosive belts, attacked an area of Raqqa city housing the headquarters of the SDF's Internal Security Forces (Asayish), anti-terrorism units, and a military intelligence prison holding around 200 ISIL prisoners. Six SDF members were killed in the attack.<sup>971</sup> While incidents attributed to ISIL, including IED attacks, continued in rural Raqqa during the first half of 2023,<sup>972</sup> Waters

<sup>959</sup> NPA, North Press records 34 Turkish drone strikes on north Syria in 2023, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>960</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 18; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 22

<sup>961</sup> BasNews, Turkish Shelling Kills SDF Member in North of Raqqa: SOHR, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>962</sup> SOHR, "Peace Spring" areas in June 2023 | Public protests against corruption and violations committed by Turkish-backed factions...dreadful living conditions...nearly 30 cases of kidnapping and arbitrary arrests, 2 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>963</sup> SOHR, "Peace Spring" areas in February 2023 | Assassinations target "National Army" militiamen and ongoing violations by Turkish-backed factions, 2 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>964</sup> SOHR, "Peace Spring" areas in April 2023 | Public uprising against Turkish forces...ongoing violations by Turkish-backed factions...nearly 55 cases of arbitrary arrests, 4 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>965</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 24 July 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2023/549, 25 July 2023, [url](#), para. 52

<sup>966</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, ISIS attacks in SDF-held areas | 11 people, including nine SDF members, killed in 16 operations and attacks by ISIS since early December 2022, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>967</sup> TWI, The SDF Is Caught Between Turkey and the Islamic State Again, 12 October 2022, [url](#); SOHR, ISIS attacks in SDF-held areas | 11 people, including nine SDF members, killed in 16 operations and attacks by ISIS since early December 2022, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>968</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in August 2022, CEP, 6 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>969</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>970</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in August 2022, CEP, 6 September 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in September 2022, CEP, 4 October 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in October 2022, CEP, 4 November 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in November 2022, CEP, 5 December 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>971</sup> Al Jazeera, Attacks in Syria's Raqqa kill several Kurdish security officers, 26 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>972</sup> NPA, ISIS attacks in 2023, so far, 21 January 2023, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Two SDF members killed by IED in Raqqa: SOHR, 28 April 2023, [url](#)





recorded a drop in intensity, with a maximum of 3 incidents in a single month (March)<sup>973</sup> and an average monthly rate of 1.17 attacks. In July 2023, the same source recorded three ISIL attacks, the same number recorded between April and June 2023.<sup>974</sup> However, other sources recorded as many as seven ISIL attacks in early January<sup>975</sup> and an average rate of 3.33 attacks per month over the same six-month period.<sup>976</sup> In early August 2023, an ISIL attack on GoS forces led to the killing of at least 10 soldiers and militiamen in northern Raqqa.<sup>977</sup>

The SDF arrested several suspected ISIL members in autumn 2022, including in the northern<sup>978</sup> and western<sup>979</sup> countryside of Raqqa. Following the December 2022 attack in Raqqa city, the SDF launched a large-scale security operation ('Operation Retaliation for Raqqa Martyrs') in late January 2023, targeting ISIL cells in the city and its surrounding rural areas.<sup>980</sup> At the conclusion of this operation in early February 2023,<sup>981</sup> the SDF stated that it had raided dozens of possible ISIL hideouts in Raqqa and neighbouring regions,<sup>982</sup> and arrested 127 suspected ISIL members, including the ISIL governor for Raqqa.<sup>983</sup> According to an assessment by the Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), which comprises the countries contributing troops to the US-led coalition against ISIL, the SDF's anti-ISIL operations resulted in a steady decline in ISIL activity in the region over the first quarter of 2023.<sup>984</sup>

## (b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 751 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Raqqa governorate, of which 125 were coded as battles, 450 explosions/remote violence and 176 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>985</sup>

<sup>973</sup> Waters, G., *ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023*, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>974</sup> Waters, G., *ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in January 2023*, CEP, 3 February 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., *ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023*, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., *ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023*, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., *ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in May 2023*, CEP, 2 June 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., *ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in July 2023*, CEP, 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>975</sup> SOHR, *ISIS attacks since early 2023 | 25 people, mostly combatants, killed and injured in over 14 operations in SDF-held areas*, 14 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>976</sup> NPA, *552 people in Syria fall victim to ISIS attacks in first half of 2023*, 8 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>977</sup> Al Monitor, *Islamic State attack in Raqqa kills 10 Syrian soldiers, second in a week*, 8 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>978</sup> Kurdistan 24, *SDF arrests three ISIS suspects with coalition support in Raqqa*, 23 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>979</sup> ANHA, *SDF arrest a mercenary from ISIS in Raqqa*, 8 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>980</sup> Rudaw, *SDF launch anti-ISIS operation in response to deadly attack*, 25 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>981</sup> NPA, *SDF releases statement on end of anti-ISIS operation in Raqqa*, 2 February 2023, [url](#)

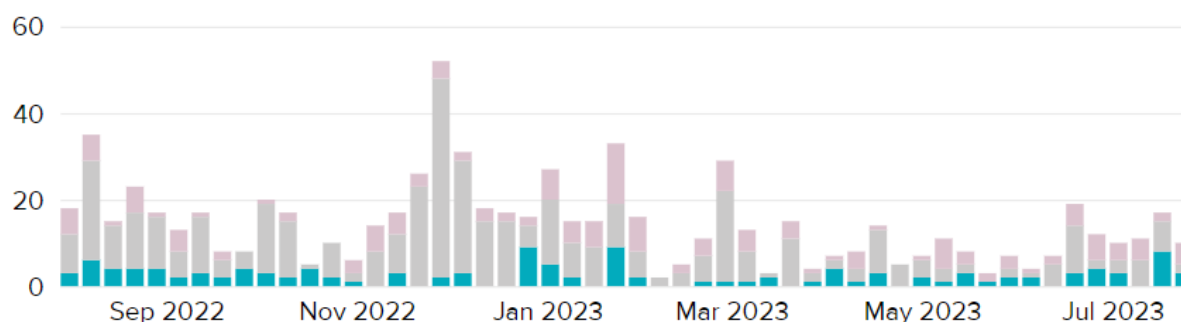
<sup>982</sup> USDOD, *Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023*, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 57

<sup>983</sup> NPA, *SDF releases statement on end of anti-ISIS operation in Raqqa*, 2 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>984</sup> USDOD, *Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023*, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 57

<sup>985</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, *Data Export Tool, Middle East* (4 August 2023), [url](#)





**Figure 19. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Raqqa governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data<sup>986</sup>**

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of Tall Abyad (see [Figure 20](#)). According to ACLED, SDF and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 66 % of all security incidents (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’), the majority being coded as violence against civilians and explosion/remote violence. Turkish forces and affiliated armed groups (SNA) were involved in around 50 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as explosions/remote violence and where SDF and affiliated armed groups were also an actor. ISIL was involved in around 15 % of all security incidents, while GoS and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 13 % of all security incidents.

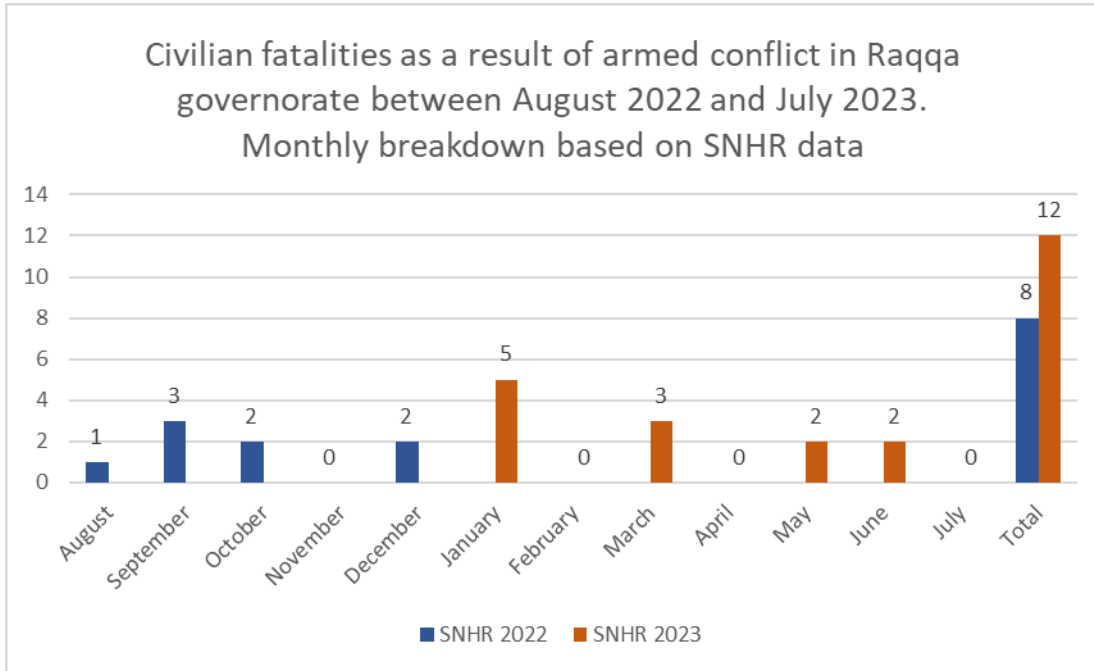
District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Raqqa	62	29	94
Ath-Thawrah	35	61	34
Tall Abyad	28	360	48
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>176</b>

**Figure 20. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Raqqa governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data**

<sup>986</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

**(c) Civilian fatalities**

SNHR documented 84 civilian fatalities in 2021<sup>987</sup> and 27 in 2022.<sup>988</sup> Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 20 civilian fatalities in Raqqa governorate.<sup>989</sup> AOA reported that explosive violence caused 84 civilian casualties in Raqqa during the year 2022.<sup>990</sup>



**Figure 21. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Raqqa governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

**(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

Raqqa city is ‘still slowly recovering from the devastation’ caused by the battle that led to ISIL’s defeat in October 2017, with buildings still severely damaged. According to a local resident, a good amount was rebuilt after 2017 but reconstruction efforts have since slowed down due to a collapse of the Syrian pound.<sup>991</sup> In northern Raqqa, shelling of the M4 road near Ayn Issa by Turkish forces caused fires on wheat crops in June 2023.<sup>992</sup>

<sup>987</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>988</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>989</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>990</sup> AOA, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>991</sup> Reuters, Syria’s Raqqa in slow rebound 5 years since Islamic State defeat, 20 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>992</sup> SOHR, SDF-held areas in June 2023 | Nearly 60 fatalities in acts of violence...deteriorating security situation...nearly 30 infightings and murder crimes...19 protests against deteriorating living conditions, 5 July 2023, [url](#)



Raqqa was one of the governorates where contamination from UXOs was most widespread, including on roads, agricultural land and private property,<sup>993</sup> with areas previously controlled by ISIL showing the highest levels of contamination.<sup>994</sup> Between March 2011 and early April 2023, Raqqa accounted for 22 % of all landmine-related deaths recorded in the country.<sup>995</sup> During the first quarter of 2023, NPA recorded 19 deaths from explosive remnants of war in Raqqa governorate.<sup>996</sup> Areas where civilians were killed or injured by UXOs during the reference period included Tall Abyad town<sup>997</sup> and the northern<sup>998</sup> and eastern<sup>999</sup> Raqqa countryside.

#### (e) Displacement and return

The UN Secretary-General noted that hostilities in northern Syria, including an increase in airstrikes, continued to expose civilians to displacement.<sup>1000</sup> According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 159 827 IDPs in Raqqa governorate,<sup>1001</sup> including 108 302 in Raqqa district.<sup>1002</sup> Over the year 2022, there were no IDP movements out of Raqqa and no IDP movements into the governorate. There were about 1 000 movements within the governorate.<sup>1003</sup> Similarly, during the first five months of 2023, there were no recorded IDP movements out of Raqqa or into or within the governorate.<sup>1004</sup> No further information on reasons behind displacement movements was found.

As regards returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded approximately 1 275 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from Raqqa to other governorates and about 95 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Raqqa as well as about 725 movements within Raqqa.<sup>1005</sup> As the USDOS noted, the SDF and the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) ‘generally facilitated the safe and voluntary return of IDPs’ to Raqqa.<sup>1006</sup> No further information on the reasons behind the returns movements was found.

During the first five months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded 9 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Raqqa and 26 IDP returnee movements from Raqqa

<sup>993</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>994</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>995</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>996</sup> NPA, Remnants of war kill 331 people in 1st quarter of 2023 in Syria, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>997</sup> SOHR, “Peace Spring” areas in February 2023 | Assassinations target “National Army” militiamen and ongoing violations by Turkish-backed factions, 2 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>998</sup> SOHR, “Peace Spring” areas in March 2023 | Turkish-backed factions continues their violations against civilians, amid ongoing infightings over property and revenue-sharing, 2 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>999</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 18

<sup>1000</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para. 63

<sup>1001</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>1002</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>1003</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1004</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1005</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1006</sup> USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 66





to other governorates, all of these movements occurring in March 2023. There were no recorded IDP returnee movements within the governorate.<sup>1007</sup> UN Security Council reports covering the first five months of 2023 did not contain any further information on displacement from or returns to Raqqa governorate.<sup>1008</sup> No further information on conflict-induced displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

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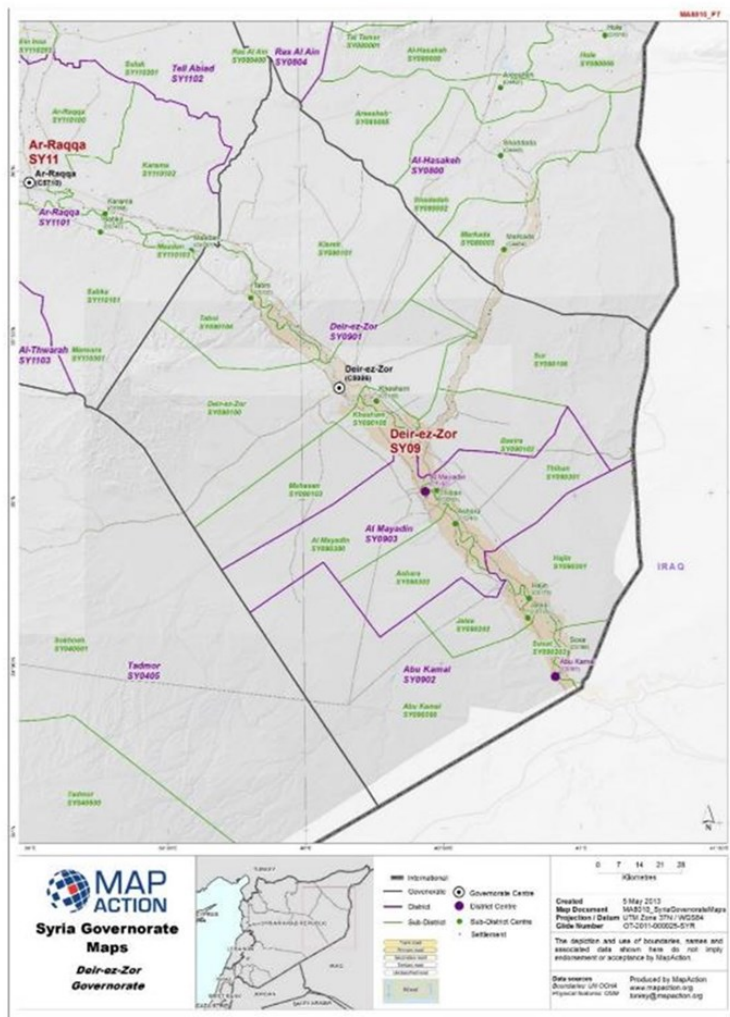
<sup>1007</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1008</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#)





## 2.9. Deir Ez-Zor governorate



Map 14: © MapAction, Deir Ez-Zor governorate map<sup>1009</sup>

### 2.9.1. General description of the governorate

Deir Ez-Zor governorate is located in eastern Syria. It shares internal borders with Homs to the south-west, Raqqa to the north-west and Hasaka to the north as well as an international border with Iraq to its east.<sup>1010</sup> The Euphrates River divides the governorate into a western part (al-Shamiya) and an eastern part (al-Jazeera).<sup>1011</sup> Administratively, Deir Ez-Zor comprises three

<sup>1009</sup> MapAction, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1010</sup> UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1011</sup> SACD, Deir ez-Zor sees few options as widely rejected 'reconciliation' starts, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

districts: Deir Ez-Zor, al-Mayadin, and al-Bukamal (Abu Kamal).<sup>1012</sup> The governorate's capital is Deir Ez-Zor city.<sup>1013</sup>

A December 2022 UNOCHA report estimated the governorate's population at 1 096 528.<sup>1014</sup> The governorate's population is almost entirely Sunni Arab<sup>1015</sup> and its demographic structure has been described as heavily tribal-based.<sup>1016</sup> Further information on the governorate's ethnic and religious composition can be found in an earlier issue of this report: [Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

## 2.9.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Deir Ez-Zor governorate is roughly divided into two areas of control. The western part – that is, mainly the areas west of the Euphrates River – is controlled by the GoS<sup>1017</sup> and its Iranian and Russian allies. This area includes the major cities of Deir Ez-Zor, al-Mayadin and al-Bukamal.<sup>1018</sup> Meanwhile, the areas east of the Euphrates River are mainly controlled by Kurdish forces (SDF),<sup>1019</sup> although the GoS/Iran-backed militias held several towns in eastern Deir Ez-Zor.<sup>1020</sup>

Iran-backed militias and GoS forces were present in the region stretching from Deir Ez-Zor city to al-Bukamal on the Syrian/Iraqi border. Al-Bukamal hosted the Imam Ali base, the governorate's largest Iranian military site. Moreover, GoS forces and Iranian proxies controlled seven strategic towns in the eastern Deir Ez-Zor countryside.<sup>1021</sup> Activity of the Russian-backed Fifth Corps of the SAA was reported in the eastern Deir Ez-Zor countryside around Jadid Akidat.<sup>1022</sup> Further Iranian and Russian sites were located in the desert areas west of the Euphrates,<sup>1023</sup> with the IRGC reported to have been redeploying some of its forces from the riverside towards the Badia.<sup>1024</sup> In spring 2023, IRGC and Iranian-backed militias reinforced their presence at military sites in the governorate, including in Deir Ez-Zor city<sup>1025</sup> and the al-Mayadin area.<sup>1026</sup> Iran-backed militias operated 30 local recruitment centres in areas west of

<sup>1012</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 134-135

<sup>1013</sup> SACD, Deir ez-Zor sees few options as widely rejected 'reconciliation' starts, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1014</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>1015</sup> iMMAP, Northeastern Syria: Return and Reintegration Area Profiles Central and Eastern Deir-ez-Zor Cantons, November 2021, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1016</sup> SACD, Deir ez-Zor sees few options as widely rejected 'reconciliation' starts, 11 January 2022, [url](#); iMMAP, Northeastern Syria: Return and Reintegration Area Profiles Central and Eastern Deir-ez-Zor Cantons, November 2021, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1017</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1018</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1019</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1020</sup> NPA, Iran controls Syria's Deir ez-Zor by persuasion, intimidation, 21 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1021</sup> NPA, Iran controls Syria's Deir ez-Zor by persuasion, intimidation, 21 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1022</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – May 2023, May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1023</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1024</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria - June 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1025</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria - May 2023, 8 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1026</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria - June 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

the Euphrates and were backed by certain local tribes such as the al-Baggara, Mashahda, and al-Marasima.<sup>1027</sup>

Meanwhile, sites of Kurdish forces were located east of the Euphrates, including along the Euphrates and Khabour riverbanks and in the governorate’s northern corner near the Raqqa and Hasaka borders.<sup>1028</sup> They were supported by forces of the US-led Coalition against ISIL,<sup>1029</sup> which operated several sites east of the Euphrates, including on the eastern bank opposite Deir Ez-Zor city<sup>1030</sup> and south of the Euphrates/Khabour confluence.<sup>1031</sup>

ISIL remained active in the governorate<sup>1032</sup> and continued to conduct asymmetric attacks as of the first half of 2023,<sup>1033</sup> with pockets of the group’s presence mapped in the desert areas west of the Euphrates.<sup>1034</sup> Since early 2023, ISIL increased its attacks and coercive activities in the governorate’s urban belt, including by installing a nighttime shadow rule in Musayrib (north of Deir Ez-Zor city).<sup>1035</sup> Moreover, a rise in activity of ISIL cells was reported in the SDF-held northern Deir Ez-Zor countryside around the towns of Tayyeb al-Fal, al-Hajnah, al Harijiyah and al-Hariji.<sup>1036</sup>

### 2.9.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

The UN Secretary-General, in a February 2023 report, described the security situation in Deir Ez-Zor governorate as ‘volatile’, with continuing reports of targeted killings.<sup>1037</sup> These were carried out by means of firearms<sup>1038</sup> and IEDs.<sup>1039</sup> In a number of attacks with civilian

<sup>1027</sup> NPA, Iran controls Syria’s Deir ez-Zor by persuasion, intimidation, 21 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1028</sup> Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Deir Ez-Zor and July 2023.

<sup>1029</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress. 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>1030</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress. 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 51; Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces’ military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1031</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces’ military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1032</sup> Rudaw, SDF denies reports of military movement in eastern Deir ez-Zor, 12 July 2023, [url](#); Molina, L.M., Deir Ezzor, at a crossroads with Daesh [Opinion], Atalayar, 18 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1033</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 24 July 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2023/549, 25 July 2023, [url](#), para. 52

<sup>1034</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1035</sup> ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Update Special Edition: Iran, Russia, and Syrian Prioritization of Challenging the United States over ISIS Will Present ISIS with Space to Grow Its Capabilities, Rest, and Refit, 21 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1036</sup> SOHR, SOHR: ISIS cells continue to spread terror in northeast Syria, 29 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1037</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 30

<sup>1038</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 18; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 21

<sup>1039</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 21; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 21



casualties<sup>1040</sup> or kidnappings of civilians<sup>1041</sup> the perpetrators were unknown or could not be confirmed. Moreover, the governorate experienced mutual strikes between US forces and IRGC forces/Iran-backed militias,<sup>1042</sup> as well as Israeli air bombing.<sup>1043</sup>

In August 2023, clashes between SDF and Arab tribal fighters, members of the Deir Ez-Zor Military Council, broke out after SDF detained the commander and some members of the Military Council.<sup>1044</sup> According to sources, at least 10 tribesmen and three SDF fighters were killed, as well as eight civilians.<sup>1045</sup>

### *ISIL insurgency*

ISIL launched regular attacks in the governorate.<sup>1046</sup> It continued to conduct asymmetric attacks during the reference period,<sup>1047</sup> targeting GoS forces, SDF members and civilians and using the Badia desert for the purposes of remobilisation and training.<sup>1048</sup>

Incidents targeting civilians included attacks on truffle hunters in the desert of western Deir Ez-Zor<sup>1049</sup> and on contractors<sup>1050</sup> and businessmen in the oil industry.<sup>1051</sup> Moreover, the group bombed several money exchange offices in al-Zar and al-Ghurba towns following their owners' refusal to pay Islamic 'zakat' (tax) to the group.<sup>1052</sup> Among those attacked by ISIL were members of the Albu Saraya tribe in the GoS controlled parts of northern Deir Ez-Zor, including NDF fighters, shepherds, and truffle harvesters.<sup>1053</sup>

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<sup>1040</sup> See, for example, SNHR, 501 Civilians, Including 71 Children, 42 Woman, and 20 Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in Syria, in the First Half of 2023, 2 July 2023, [url](#), p. 19; SNHR, 99 Civilians, Including Eight Children, and Seven Women Documented Killed in Syria, in April 2023, 1 May 2023, [url](#), p. 5; Al Arabiya, At least 10 workers killed in attack near oil field in Syria's Deir Ezzor, 30 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1041</sup> SOHR, Including two children | Unknown gunmen kidnap eight shepherds and steal nearly 200 sheep in Al-Masrab desert in western Deir Ezzor, 3 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1042</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), pp. 52-53; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 16

<sup>1043</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 16

<sup>1044</sup> Al Jazeera, Several killed in fighting between SDF and tribesmen in eastern Syria, 30 August 2023, [url](#); Lister, C., A dangerous escalation in Syria's Deir ez-Zor, 30 August 2023, MEI, [url](#)

<sup>1045</sup> Al Jazeera, Several killed in fighting between SDF and tribesmen in eastern Syria, 30 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1046</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>1047</sup> UN Security Council, Sixteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2023/76, 1 February 2023, [url](#), para. 27; UN Security Council, Letter dated 24 July 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2023/549, 25 July 2023, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4016440/files/S\\_2023\\_549-EN.pdf?ln=en](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4016440/files/S_2023_549-EN.pdf?ln=en), para. 52

<sup>1048</sup> UN Security Council, Sixteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2023/76, 1 February 2023, [url](#), para. 27

<sup>1049</sup> ANF News, 8 killed, over 40 injured in ISIS landmine blast in Deir ez-Zor, 2 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1050</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – April 2023, 11 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1051</sup> NPA, ISIS attacks oil businessman in Syria's Deir ez-Zor, 19 March 2023, <https://npasyria.com/en/94975/>; SOHR, New assassination | ISIS cells kill oil investor in Deir Ezzor countryside, 23 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1052</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – 02 November 2022, 2 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1053</sup> ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, March 22, 2023, 24 March 2023, [url](#)



ISIL carried out multiple attacks on SDF members, targeting checkpoints<sup>1054</sup> and military patrols in the eastern Deir Ez-Zor countryside<sup>1055</sup> and carrying out assassinations.<sup>1056</sup> Moreover, in addition to GoS forces<sup>1057</sup> and NDF members,<sup>1058</sup> ISIL attacks increasingly targeted IRGC and Iran-backed militias,<sup>1059</sup> with incidents reported in al-Mayadin<sup>1060</sup> and al-Bukamal.<sup>1061</sup> In early 2023, the group shifted its focus in GoS-held areas to military targets closer to the Euphrates.<sup>1062</sup> At the beginning of August 2023, ISIL claimed an attack on a bus carrying SAA soldiers near the Iraqi border south of Deir Ez-Zor city, leading to at least 33 deaths.<sup>1063</sup>

According to Gregory Waters, during the final five months of 2022, incidents in the governorate attributed to ISIL peaked in September<sup>1064</sup> (5 attacks) and December (5 attacks),<sup>1065</sup> with an average monthly rate of 2.4.<sup>1066</sup> In the first half of 2023, incident numbers rose significantly in March (12)<sup>1067</sup> and April (18), reaching their highest level since early 2018,<sup>1068</sup> with an average monthly rate of 7.17 attacks.<sup>1069</sup> Other sources even recorded average rates as high as 10.67 (NPA)<sup>1070</sup> or 11 attacks per month (SOHR)<sup>1071</sup> over the same six-month period.

<sup>1054</sup> See, for example, SOHR, Earlier ISIS attack | Member of “SDF” checkpoint killed in Deir Ezzor countryside, 5 March 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Earlier “ISIS” attack | Member of SDF killed in eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor, 2 March 2023, [url](#); SOHR, ISIS resurgence | Asayish member killed and others injured in attack on checkpoint in eastern Deir Ezzor, 26 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1055</sup> See, for example, SOHR, ISIS attack | Five SDF members killed and injured east of Deir Ezzor, 10 August 2022, [url](#); ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, April 12, 2023, 14 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1056</sup> See, for example, SOHR, ISIS attack | SDF member killed west of Deir Ezzor in retaliation for anti-ISIS campaign in Al-Hawl camp, 19 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1057</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – May 2023, May 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Two anti-regime attacks | 30 regime soldiers killed in Rif Dimashq and Deir Ezzor desert in less than 24 hours, 13 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1058</sup> SOHR, More seven bodies found | The number of NDF members killed by ISIS cells in Deir Ezzor desert jumps to 12, 27 March 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Missing for 15 days | Four NDF members found dead in Deir Ezzor desert, 25 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1059</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria - June 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – May 2023, May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1060</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria - June 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1061</sup> SOHR, ISIS resurgence | Member of Iran-backed militias killed in an attack in Deir Ezzor, 13 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1062</sup> ISW and CTP, Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, March 8, 2023, 10 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1063</sup> BBC News, Islamic State attack on army bus kills 33 Syrian soldiers, 12 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1064</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in September 2022, CEP, 4 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1065</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1066</sup> EUAA analysis based on Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in August 2022, CEP, 6 September 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in September 2022, CEP, 4 October 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in October 2022, CEP, 4 November 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in November 2022, CEP, 5 December 2022, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in December 2022, CEP, 10 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1067</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1068</sup> Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1069</sup> EUAA analysis based on Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in January 2023, CEP, 3 February 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in February 2023, CEP, 3 March 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in March 2023, CEP, 4 April 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in April 2023, CEP, 3 May 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in May 2023, CEP, 2 June 2023, [url](#); Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in June 2023, CEP, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1070</sup> NPA, 552 people in Syria fall victim to ISIS attacks in first half of 2023, 8 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1071</sup> Kurdistan 24, Female security police killed in Deir ez-Zor: SOHR, 29 June 2023, [url](#)



GoS and affiliated/allied forces launched several operations against ISIL cells in western<sup>1072</sup> and eastern<sup>1073</sup> rural Deir Ez-Zor, although the Critical Threats Project (CTP) and the ISW claimed that Iranian forces and their proxies ‘increasingly struggled’ to counter ISIL operations since March 2022.<sup>1074</sup> The SDF/US forces likewise conducted several anti-ISIL operations resulting in the arrest/killing of ISIL leaders,<sup>1075</sup> including in the al-Kasrah area (western rural Deir Ez-Zor).<sup>1076</sup>

#### *Infighting among GoS forces and affiliated groups*

Several instances of deadly infighting were reported, including between members of the NDF and GoS forces (Deir Ez-Zor city),<sup>1077</sup> the Air Force Intelligence Directorate and the IRGC (al-Bukamal city),<sup>1078</sup> and between NDF members (eastern Deir Ez-Zor countryside).<sup>1079</sup>

#### *Protests*

Civilians attacked SDF members in al-Shanan village (eastern rural Deir Ez-Zor) in September 2022 after SDF fighters had stabbed a young man.<sup>1080</sup> In February 2023, in Sabhah village in Basirah area of eastern rural Deir Ez-Zor, two civilians were killed when security forces fired shots to disperse protesters.<sup>1081</sup>

### **(b) Security incidents**

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 1 089 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, of which 588 were coded as battles, 246 explosions/remote violence and 255 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>1082</sup>

<sup>1072</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – May 2023, May 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – 02 November 2022, 2 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1073</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria - May 2023, 8 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1074</sup> ISW and CTP, Iran Update, March 3, 2023, 3 March 2023, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1075</sup> SOHR, SOHR: SDF arrests ISIS members, leader in Syria’s Deir ez-Zor, 30 April 2023, [url](#); VOA, US Hammers Islamic State With Multiple Raids, 17 February 2023, [url](#); NPA, SDF Arrests ISIS Leader in Syria’s Deir-ez-Zor, The Syrian Observer, 21 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1076</sup> NPA, SDF Arrests ISIS Leader in Syria’s Deir-ez-Zor, The Syrian Observer, 21 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1077</sup> SOHR, Deir Ezzor | Member close to “NDF” leader killed during armed clash with regime forces, 16 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1078</sup> SOHR, Dispute over drug trade | “Airforce Intelligence” member shot dead by IRGC in Al-Bokamal city, 21 January 2023, [url](#)

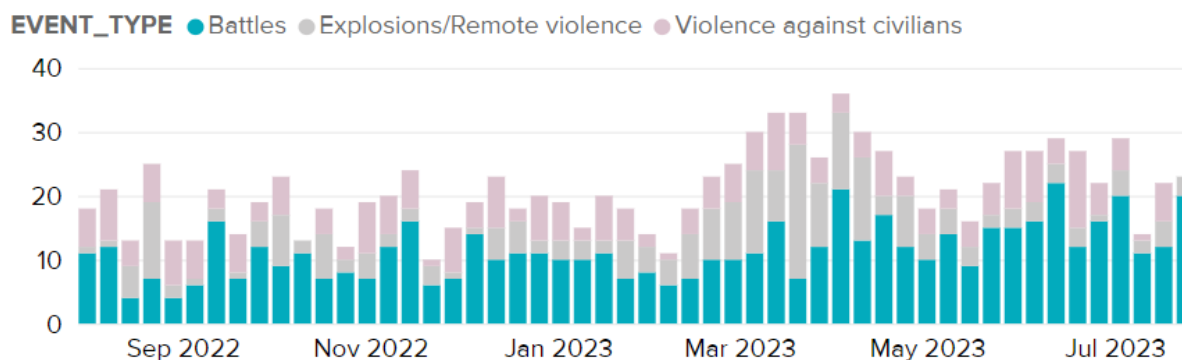
<sup>1079</sup> SOHR, Disputes over narcotics | Two “National Defence” members killed in clashes at checkpoint in Deir Ezzor, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1080</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – 04 October 2022, 4 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1081</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 21

<sup>1082</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)





**Figure 22. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Deir Ez-Zor governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data<sup>1083</sup>**

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of Deir Ez Zor (see [Figure 23](#)). According to ACLED, GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were involved (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2') in around 38 % of all security incidents. SDF and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 36 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as battles and violence against civilians. Unidentified armed groups were involved in around 35 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as battles and violence against civilians. ISIL was involved in around 28 % of all security incidents, the vast majority being coded as battles and violence against civilians. Tribal militias/actors were involved in around 18 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as battles.

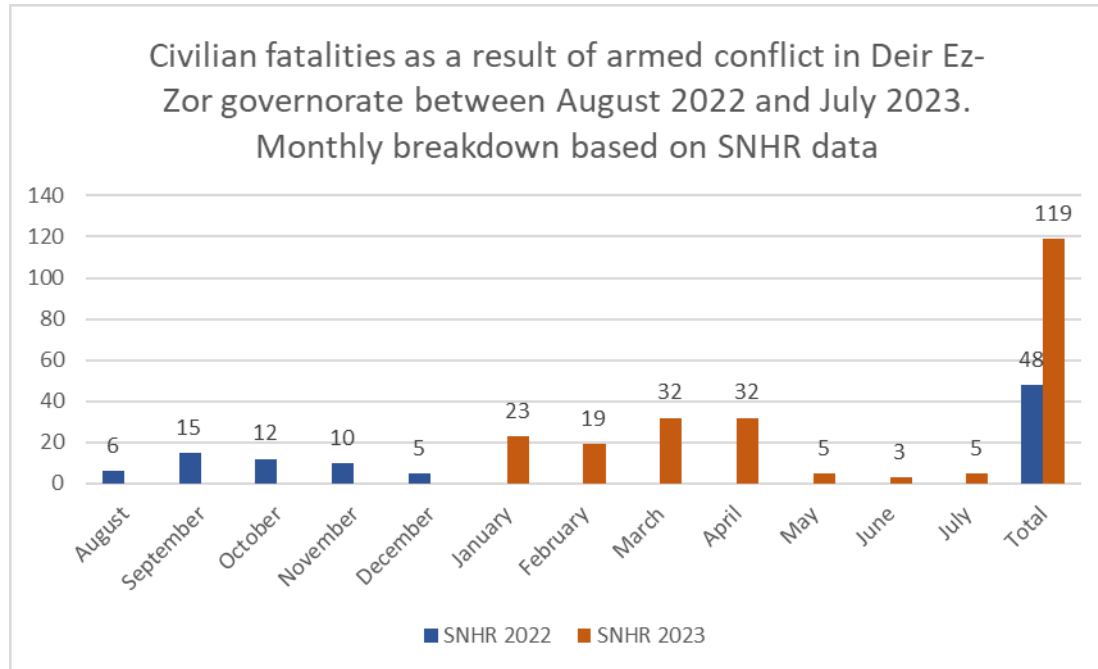
District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Albu Kamal	79	36	37
Al Mayadin	110	57	48
Deir Ez-Zor	399	153	170
<b>Total</b>	<b>588</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>255</b>

**Figure 23. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Deir Ez-Zor governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data**

<sup>1083</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

**(c) Civilian fatalities**

SNHR documented 197 civilian fatalities in 2021<sup>1084</sup> and 125 in 2022.<sup>1085</sup> Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 167 civilian fatalities in Deir Ez-Zor governorate.<sup>1086</sup>



**Figure 24. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Deir Ez-Zor governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

**(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

Deir Ez-Zor governorate witnessed significant destruction during the conflict years, both in urban and rural areas,<sup>1087</sup> with an estimated 75 % of Deir Ez-Zor city’s infrastructure damaged or destroyed.<sup>1088</sup> Around 40 % of the city’s sewage network has been damaged. There was also significant destruction of residential properties.<sup>1089</sup>

Deir Ez-Zor was one of the governorates where contamination from UXOs was widespread, including on roads, agricultural land and private property.<sup>1090</sup> Areas previously controlled by ISIL showed the highest levels of contamination,<sup>1091</sup> as retreating ISIL forces left large

<sup>1084</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1085</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1086</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1087</sup> UN-Habitat, Call for Proposal No. 1-2022, May 2022, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1088</sup> UNHCR, Deir-ez-Zor residents find help to rebuild lives from the city's ruins, 10 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1089</sup> UN-Habitat, Syria Country Profile, 4 June 2023, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>1090</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>1091</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions, 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 8



quantities of improvised landmines and other IEDs.<sup>1092</sup> A map published by the SNHR on the basis of data collected between March 2011 and April 2023 shows a particularly high density of civilian deaths from landmines in the middle section of the stretch of the Euphrates valley crossing the governorate.<sup>1093</sup> During the first quarter of 2023, NPA recorded 127 deaths from remnants of war in Deir Ez-Zor, more than in any other governorate.<sup>1094</sup>

### (e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 153 814 IDPs in Deir Ez-Zor governorate.<sup>1095</sup> Over the year 2022, there were approximately 1 000 IDP movements out of Deir Ez-Zor and 1 000 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 1 000 movements within the governorate.<sup>1096</sup> During the first five months of 2023, there were 22 recorded IDP movements out of Deir Ez-Zor and no movements into or within the governorate.<sup>1097</sup> No information on the reasons behind the displacement movements was found.

As regards returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded no spontaneous IDP returnee movements from Deir Ez-Zor to other governorates and about 7 000 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Deir Ez-Zor as well as about 5 000 movements within Deir Ez-Zor.<sup>1098</sup> During the first five months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded 83 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Deir Ez-Zor, most of them (74) occurring in March, and 11 IDP returnee movements (all in May) from Deir Ez-Zor to other governorates. There were no recorded returnee movements within the governorate.<sup>1099</sup>

As the USDOS noted, the SDF and the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) ‘generally facilitated the safe and voluntary return of IDPs’ to Deir Ez-Zor.<sup>1100</sup> Meanwhile, the UNCOI reported that as of the first half of 2022, the SAA, including the Fourth Division, continued to seize private properties of perceived GoS opponents in the governorate, thus preventing them from returning,<sup>1101</sup> although more recent information could not be found in this regard. More recent data on conflict-induced displacement and spontaneous returns by UNOCHA was not available at the time of writing this report. UN Security Council reports covering the first five

<sup>1092</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2022, 1 October 2022, [url](#), p. 490

<sup>1093</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: Landmines Continue to Plague Large Areas of Syria and Threaten the Lives of Millions [Map], 4 April 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1094</sup> NPA, Remnants of war kill 331 people in 1st quarter of 2023 in Syria, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1095</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>1096</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1097</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1098</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1099</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1100</sup> USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 66

<sup>1101</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/51/45, 17 August 2022, [url](#), para. 31



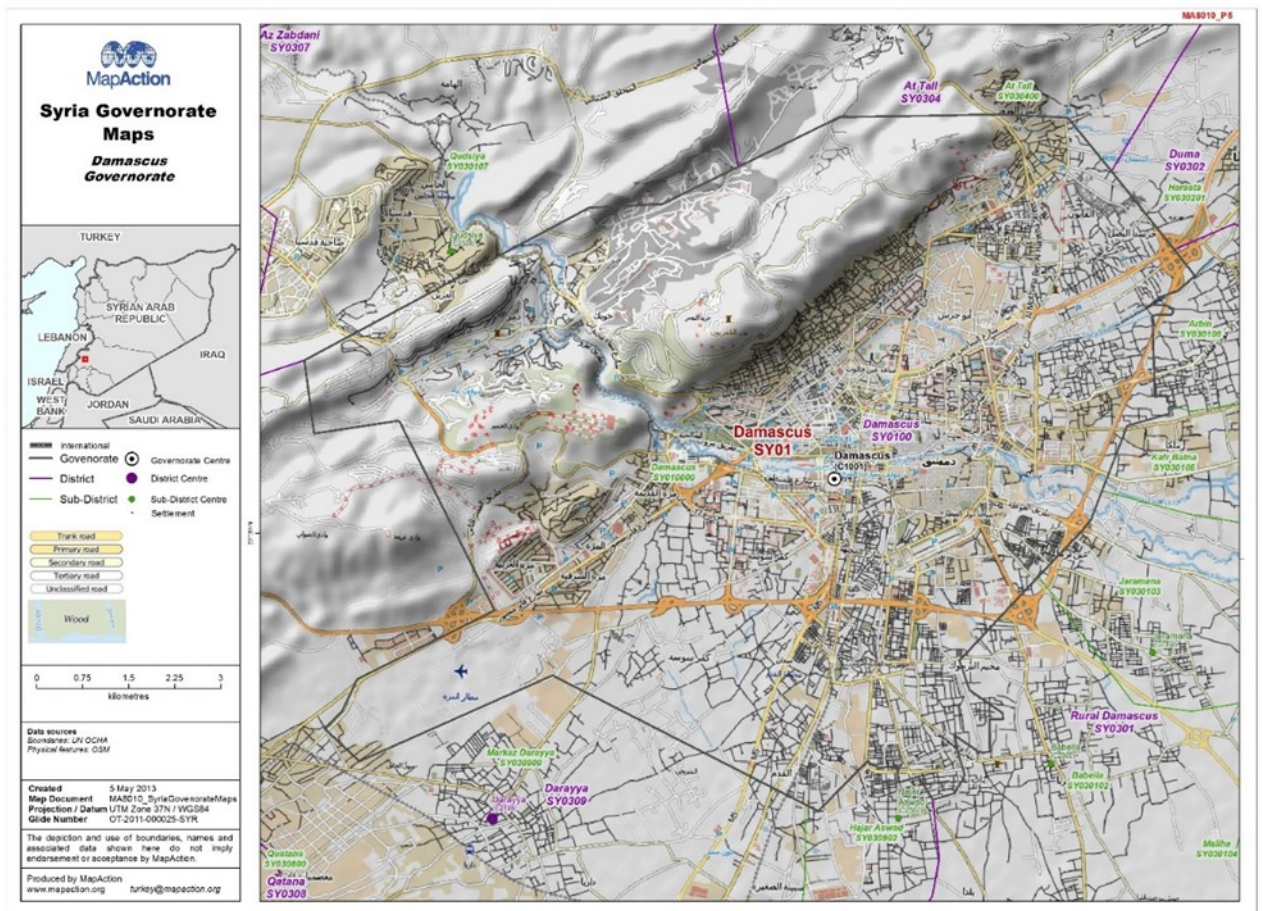
months of 2023 did not contain any further information on displacement from or returns to Deir Ez-Zor governorate.<sup>1102</sup> No further information on conflict-induced displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

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<sup>1102</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#)



## 2.10. Damascus governorate



Map 15: © MapAction, Damascus governorate<sup>1103</sup>

### 2.10.1. General description of the governorate

Damascus governorate, which includes Syria's capital, is located in the south-western part of the country and is completely surrounded by Rural Damascus (Rif Damashq) governorate. The governorate is divided into two districts, Damascus city and Yarmouk. Damascus city itself comprises 15 sub-district-level areas.<sup>1104</sup> In a December 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Damascus governorate to be 1 818 517.<sup>1105</sup> For more background information, see the EUAA COI Report: [Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), section 2.10.1.

<sup>1103</sup> UNOCHA, Syria sub-districts maps [maps], n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1104</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic, Governorates profile (June 2014), 6 August 2014, [url](#), pp. 2-3

<sup>1105</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

## 2.10.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Maps published by several sources indicated that the GoS and affiliated groups were in control of Damascus governorate throughout the reference period of this report.<sup>1106</sup>

Damascus has been ‘relatively free from the civil war for years’,<sup>1107</sup> as the GoS regained full control of the capital in May 2018.<sup>1108</sup> The GoS has since sought to present Damascus city as a ‘haven of calm’ within Syria, although this view was contested in a March 2023 article by Haid Haid, a Syrian columnist and consulting fellow with Chatham House’s Middle East and North Africa programme, who described a significant increase in the number of security incidents in and around Damascus, ‘raising questions about the stability of areas held by the government.’<sup>1109</sup> For more information on the background of the conflict in Damascus governorate up until April 2021, see the EUAA COI Report: [Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), section 2.10.2.

As of June 2023, a map on historical control by the Carter Center showed 124 control points in Damascus, which were attributed to the GoS and its allies (including Russian forces, Iranian forces, and pro-government militias).<sup>1110</sup> In an April 2023 report, DIS quoted SNHR stating that ‘more than half of the Special Forces regiments’ were located near Damascus.<sup>1111</sup> The Fourth Armoured Division’s presence was concentrated in Damascus and its suburbs, but it had offices and small branches outside the capital.<sup>1112</sup> Its main task was to protect the GoS in Damascus.<sup>1113</sup>

As of mid-2022, Jusoor for Studies reported that Iranian forces were deployed at six sites; Russian military posts were present at four sites within the governorate.<sup>1114</sup> The same source observed that, as of mid-2023, there were nine foreign forces sites in Damascus governorate.<sup>1115</sup>

A Reuters article in February 2023 cited residents claiming that several Iranian security agencies were located in Kafr Sousa neighbourhood.<sup>1116</sup>

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<sup>1106</sup> Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, January – March 2023 [Map], 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 3; Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Damascus and June 2023; UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces’ military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1107</sup> Al-Monitor, Islamic State claims Damascus car bomb as Assad invited to Saudi, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1108</sup> BBC News, Syria war: Army takes full control of Damascus after ousting IS, 21 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1109</sup> Haid, H., Damascus instability proof that war is far from over, Opinion, Al Majalla, 11 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1110</sup> Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Damascus and June 2023.

<sup>1111</sup> DIS, Syria; The Special Forces and the elite units [source: SNHR], April 2023, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>1112</sup> DIS, Syria; The Special Forces and the elite units [source: SNHR], April 2023, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>1113</sup> DIS, Syria; The Special Forces and the elite units [source: SNHR], April 2023, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>1114</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces’ points in Syria- mid 2022 [Map], 22 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1115</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces’ military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1116</sup> Reuters, Exclusive: Rocket strike in Damascus hit Iranian military experts, sources say, 22 February 2023, [url](#)

A July 2022 report by the UN Security Council mentioned ‘some infrequent activity’ of ISIL in Damascus.<sup>1117</sup> In May 2023, ISIL claimed responsibility for a car bombing targeting a police station in Damascus.<sup>1118</sup>

### 2.10.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

Although the capital has been ‘largely spared the violence that happens in other parts of the country’,<sup>1119</sup> car bomb attacks were reported in April 2023<sup>1120</sup> and May 2023.<sup>1121</sup> The May 2023 incident involved a car bomb exploding at the Barzeh police station. According to Al Arabiya, a lieutenant colonel was killed and four others were wounded.<sup>1122</sup> The UNSC noted that three police officers were killed.<sup>1123</sup> ISIL claimed responsibility.<sup>1124</sup>

In June 2023, four people were injured when attackers threw a bomb and stabbed a person in Dummar district.<sup>1125</sup>

Israeli airstrikes were mainly carried out near Damascus city or on Damascus International airport (see section 2.11.3 Rural Damascus). However, on 19 February 2023, 15 people, including two civilian women, were killed in an Israeli air strike in Kafr Sousa district of the capital.<sup>1126</sup> On 30 March 2023, the area was hit again by Israeli missiles.<sup>1127</sup>

#### (b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 36 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Damascus governorate, of which 11 were coded as battles, 8 as explosions/remote violence and 17 as incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>1128</sup>

<sup>1117</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [containing thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities], S/2022/547, 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 43

<sup>1118</sup> Al-Monitor, Islamic State claims Damascus car bomb as Assad invited to Saudi, 10 May 2023, [url](#); AFP, Policeman killed in Damascus car bombing claimed by IS, 10 May 2023

<sup>1119</sup> Al Jazeera, Car bomb rocks a suburb of Syria’s capital Damascus, 3 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1120</sup> Al Jazeera, Car bomb rocks a suburb of Syria’s capital Damascus, 3 April 2023, [url](#); New Arab (The), Rare car bombs rocks upscale Mezzeh area of Damascus, 3 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1121</sup> AFP, Policeman killed in Damascus car bombing claimed by IS, 10 May 2023, [url](#); AP News, Explosion near Syrian capital Damascus kills 1, injures 4, 10 May 2023, [url](#); SOHR, SOHR: Second Syrian policeman dead after Damascus car bomb attack, 12 May 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1122</sup> AFP, Policeman killed in Damascus car bombing claimed by IS, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1123</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1124</sup> AFP, Policeman killed in Damascus car bombing claimed by IS, 10 May 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: August 2022-July 2023, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1125</sup> NPA, Four people injured in bomb attack in Damascus, 11 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1126</sup> France 24, More than a dozen killed in Israel’s ‘deadliest attack’ on Syrian capital Damascus, 19 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1127</sup> SOHR, Second attack in 24 hours | Successive explosions rock south-western Damascus following Israeli rocket fire, 30 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1128</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)



According to ACLED, GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were involved in 69 % of all security incidents (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2'). Unidentified armed groups were involved in around 39 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. Israeli forces were involved in around 28 % of all security incidents, the vast majority being coded as battles.

In March 2023, Syrian columnist Haid Haid noted that 11 security incidents were reported in Damascus in 2021 and 47 incidents in 2022, representing a more than 400 % increase. According to him, 14 security incidents were reported in the first two months of 2023.<sup>1129</sup>

### **(c) Civilian fatalities**

SNHR documented one civilian fatality in 2021<sup>1130</sup> and three civilian fatalities in 2022.<sup>1131</sup> Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented three civilian fatalities in Damascus governorate (one civilian fatality was documented in the period August – December 2022 and two between January and July 2023).<sup>1132</sup>

### **(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

In its annual report covering 2022, UNMAS noted that it had assessed more than 4 200 residential buildings in Darayya (Rural Damascus) and Yarmouk (Damascus). UNMAS verified the existence of explosive ordnance in 140 buildings and identified 800 buildings suspected to be tainted by explosives.<sup>1133</sup>

In its February 2023 report, the UN Secretary-General noted that about a third of Syrian communities were affected by explosive contamination, with one of the highest percentages reported in Damascus neighbourhoods.<sup>1134</sup>

### **(e) Displacement and return**

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 600 097 IDPs in Damascus.<sup>1135</sup> In 2022, UNOCHA recorded approximately 1 888 IDP movements out of Damascus governorate and 163 IDP movements into Damascus governorate as well as 112 IDP movements within the governorate.<sup>1136</sup> UNOCHA noted that, as of May 2022, Old Damascus sub-district was one of the sub-districts hosting the highest shares of IDPs and returnees (33 % of the sub-district's total population), with a population of 1 215 856 residents, 2 550 returnees and 600 097

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<sup>1129</sup> Haid, H., Damascus instability proof that war is far from over, Opinion, Al Majalla, 11 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1130</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1131</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1132</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1133</sup> UNMAS, Annual Report 2022, 5 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 107-108. No separate numbers for Damascus governorate could be found.

<sup>1134</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 33

<sup>1135</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>1136</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)





IDPs.<sup>1137</sup> Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA recorded 68 IDP movements out of Damascus, and four IDP movements to Damascus.<sup>1138</sup> No information on the reasons behind the displacement movements was found.

As regards returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded approximately 7 000 spontaneous IDP returnee movements out of Damascus governorate and about 2 000 IDP returnee movements into the governorate and 2 000 movements within.<sup>1139</sup> Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA recorded nine spontaneous IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Damascus and about 135 returnee movements from Damascus to other governorates.<sup>1140</sup> No information on the reasons behind the returns movements was found.

More recent data on conflict-induced displacement and spontaneous returns by UNOCHA was not available at the time of writing this report. UN Security Council reports covering the first five months of 2023 did not contain any further information on displacement from or returns to Damascus governorate.<sup>1141</sup> No further information on conflict-induced displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

Please also see the EUAA COI report: [Syria - Country focus \(October 2023\)](#) for further information on restrictions and requirements regarding return to Damascus city.

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<sup>1137</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>1138</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

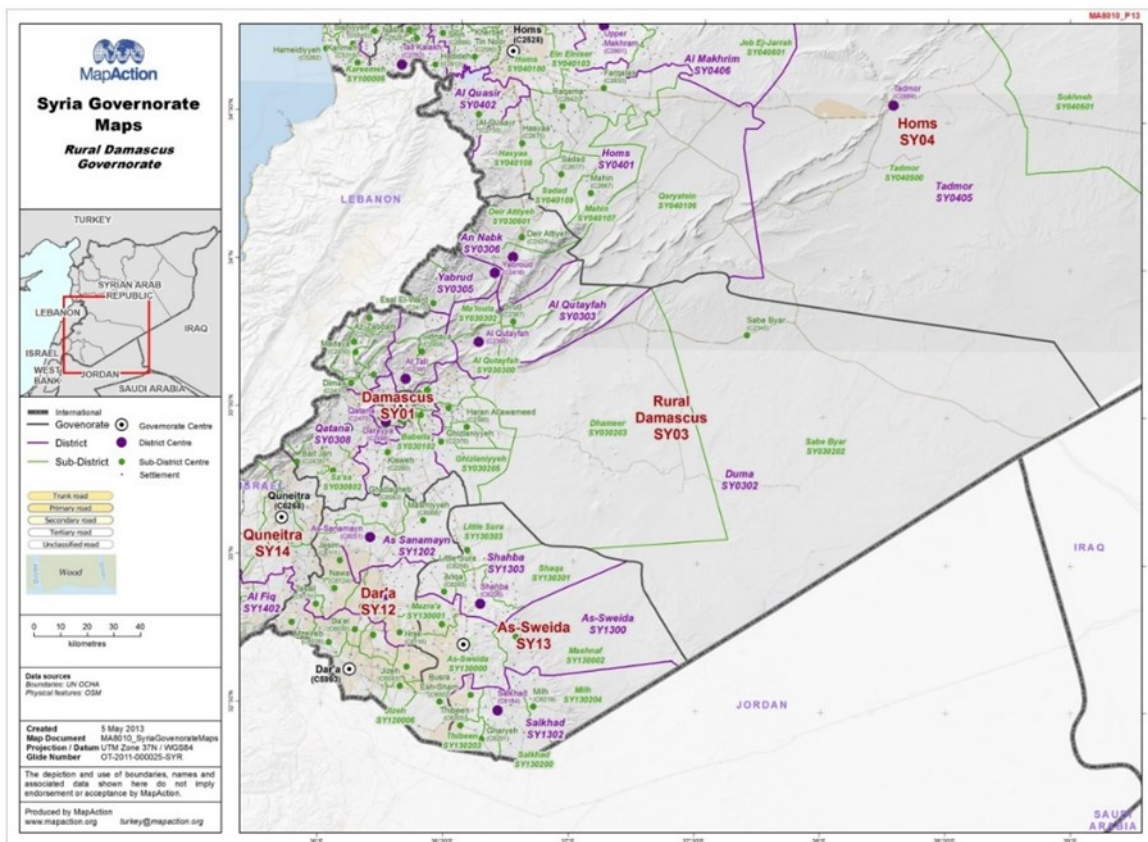
<sup>1139</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1140</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1141</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#)



## 2.11. Rural Damascus



Map 16. MapAction, Rural Damascus governorate<sup>1142</sup>

### 2.11.1. General description of the governorate

Rural Damascus (*Rif Dimashq* in Arabic) is a largely agricultural governorate surrounding Damascus city.<sup>1143</sup> 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.<sup>1144</sup> The governorate comprises nine<sup>1145</sup> administrative districts: Rural Damascus, Douma (Duma), Al Qutayfah, An Nabk, Yabroud (Yabrud), At Tall, Az-Zabadani, Darayya, and Qatana.<sup>1146</sup> In a December 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Rural Damascus governorate to

<sup>1142</sup> Mapaction, Syria 2013-2015, Rural Damascus Governorate [map], last updated:29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1143</sup> REACH, Rural Damascus Governorate, April 2018, Humanitarian Situation Overview in Syria (HSOS), April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1144</sup> UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#)

<sup>1145</sup> Please note that some sources mention Qudsaya as another administrative districts of Rural Damascus. HLP, Confusion About Government Plans for Wadi Barada, 19 May 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Accused of “filming police station” | Police officers arrest two civilians in Qudsaya district in Rif Dimashq, 12 January 2023, [url](#); Mapcarta, Qudsaya [Map], n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1146</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), pp. 136-137



be 3 310 012.<sup>1147</sup> For more background information on the governorate, see the EUAA COI Report: [Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), section 2.11.1.

## 2.11.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Maps published by several sources indicated that, throughout the reference period of this report, the GoS and affiliated groups were controlling all of the governorate’s territory except for a zone in its easternmost section.<sup>1148</sup> For more information on the background of the conflict in Rural Damascus governorate up until April 2021, see the EUAA COI Report: [Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), section 2.11.2.

As of June 2023, a map on historical control, published by the Carter Center, showed 289 control points in Rural Damascus, which were attributed to the GoS and its allies (including Russian forces, Iranian forces and pro-government militias).<sup>1149</sup>

According to a March 2023 report by Annsar Shahhoud and Muhanad Abulhusn, published by the New Lines Institute, the influence of the Fourth Division (see section [1.4.1](#)) was concentrated in the vicinity of Damascus city and its peripheries to the west and southwest. The 40<sup>th</sup> and 138<sup>th</sup> brigades were based around Moadamyeh, and the 41<sup>st</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> brigades around Yafour and Ass’aboura west of the capital. The security office of the Fourth Division was situated close to the Mezzeh Military Airbase. Attached regiments (333, 555, 666 and 154) were described as special forces, and some of them were stationed in Moadamyeh.<sup>1150</sup> The report also contains a map (as of February 2023) showing various Fourth Division checkpoints and bases, the locations of the Security Bureaus of the Fourth Division and the Republican Guard, and the National Security Bureau in or near Damascus city.<sup>1151</sup> Activities of members of the NDF were also reported in the reference period.<sup>1152</sup>

As of mid-2022, Jusoor for Studies reported that Iranian forces were deployed at 93 sites; Russian military posts were present at seven sites within the governorate.<sup>1153</sup> The same source observed that, as of mid-2023, there were 114 foreign forces sites in Rural Damascus governorate.<sup>1154</sup> Iran-backed armed groups were reportedly stationed at Damascus International Airport.<sup>1155</sup> Iran-backed militias reportedly continued to strengthen their presence

<sup>1147</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>1148</sup> Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics [Map], January - March 2023, 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 3; UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 [Map], 2 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1149</sup> Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Rural Damascus and June 2023.

<sup>1150</sup> Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria’s 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1151</sup> Shahhoud, A. and Abulhusn, M., Syria’s 4th Division: A Threat to Stability, New Lines Institute, March 2023, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1152</sup> SOHR, After refusing to rent his farm | “National Defence” members arrest civilian and his son in Rif Dimashq, 11 December 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Rif Dimashq | National Defence checkpoints arrest civilians near Syrian-Lebanese borders, 31 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, For belonging to National Defence | Military Intelligence releases two thieves in Al-Galmon countryside, 1 February 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Volunteer of General Intelligence Administration shoots and intimidates residents, 16 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1153</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces’ points in Syria- mid 2022 [Map], 22 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1154</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces’ military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1155</sup> AFP, Israeli strikes on Syrian capital's airport kill four: monitor, 2 January 2023

in areas near the Lebanese border by purchasing plots of land in Az-Zabadani and Al-Tufayl areas north of Damascus city since early 2021. The Lebanese Hezbollah facilitated those operations.<sup>1156</sup> In January 2023, SOHR reported on increasing numbers of purchases of real estate units by Hezbollah in and near Badda, north-east of Damascus city.<sup>1157</sup>

A map published by Jusoor for Studies as of mid-2023 showed International coalition forces stationing point at Al-Tanf.<sup>1158</sup> The so-called US-declared 55-km deconfliction area<sup>1159</sup> around Al-Tanf also extends into Homs governorate<sup>1160</sup> and 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.<sup>1161</sup> According to the US Department of Defense (USDOD), the US forces worked ‘with vetted local partner forces’, including the FSA, which controlled outposts around Al-Tanf Garrison, and provided protection against pro-regime and Iran-aligned forces surrounding the deconfliction zone.<sup>1162</sup>

No information on activities by Anti-GoS armed groups during the reference period could be found within the time constraints of this report.

### 2.11.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

During the reference period sources reported Israeli airstrikes on Damascus International airport,<sup>1163</sup> mostly resulting in the killing of soldiers. Besides Damascus International Airport, targeted areas included Khirbet Al-Shayab, Dimas airport,<sup>1164</sup> Al-Sayyida Zainab,<sup>1165</sup> Al-Kiswah,<sup>1166</sup> Jebel el Mania<sup>1167</sup>, Hafir Al-Foka, and Al-Hamah.<sup>1168</sup> According to state news agency

<sup>1156</sup> SOHR, Iran’s presence in Syria in May 2023 | Frequent meetings by commanders...noticeable escalation of cultural centres’ activities in west Euphrates...ongoing recruitment and taking over of properties in Aleppo and Rif Dimashq, 4 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1157</sup> SOHR, Ongoing oppression | Hezbollah commander force civilian to sell his farmland in Rif Dimashq, 26 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1158</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces’ military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1159</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1160</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1161</sup> International Crisis Group, Al-Tanf, Syria, 31 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1162</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>1163</sup> Reuters, Israel attacks Damascus airport, five soldiers killed, Syria says, 17 September 2022, [url](#); SOHR, 28 Israeli attacks in 2022 | Violent explosions rock areas nearby Damascus airport and southern Rif Dimashq, 26 October 2022, [url](#); Rudaw, Damascus airport out of service following Israeli airstrikes, 2 January 2023, [url](#); Le Monde, Israeli airstrike in central Damascus kills 15 people, 19 February 2023, [url](#); MEE, Syria says Israeli strikes on Damascus airport leave two dead, 2 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, 17th attack in 2023 | Israeli missiles hit positions of Lebanese Hezbollah in vicinity of Damascus, 28 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1164</sup> SOHR, 28 Israeli attacks in 2022 | Violent explosions rock areas nearby Damascus airport and southern Rif Dimashq, 26 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1165</sup> SOHR, Israeli airstrikes | Three non-Syrian fighters backed by Lebanese Hezbollah killed in Al-Sayyida Zainab area in Rif Dimashq, 20 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1166</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1167</sup> Jerusalem Post (The), Alleged Israeli airstrike hits Syria, 4th in under a week, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1168</sup> SOHR, 17th attack in 2023 | Israeli missiles hit positions of Lebanese Hezbollah in vicinity of Damascus, 28 May 2023, [url](#)



SANA, in April 2023, two civilians were killed.<sup>1169</sup> Civilians were also reportedly killed in an attack in February 2023.<sup>1170</sup> However, Hezbollah and Iranian militias reportedly were the main targets of the air attacks.<sup>1171</sup>

In July 2023, several people were reportedly killed in a car bomb explosion outside the Sayeda Zeinab shrine. Some days earlier, two people were wounded in a separate explosion at the shrine.<sup>1172</sup> ISIL reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>1173</sup>

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.<sup>1174</sup> In April 2023, five people, including a civilian, were killed when clashes between the ‘Hamada family’ supported by the Fourth Division and residents of Bait Jinn broke out.<sup>1175</sup> Clashes between two families affiliated to the Military Intelligence Department and the Fourth Division were also reported in June 2023 in Bait Jinn. Three people, including a civilian, were killed.<sup>1176</sup> Following the clashes, the Military Intelligence Department and affiliated gunmen of the ‘Hamada Family’ shelled the town.<sup>1177</sup> End of June 2023, a person working for the military intelligence division was reportedly killed by members of the Fourth Division near the Lebanese border, after the victim had written a ‘malicious report’ against the attackers.<sup>1178</sup>

In April 2023, a civilian was killed in an old dispute between families in Muadamiyat Al-Qalamun. According to SOHR, since early 2023, ‘14 murder crimes left a woman, 13 men and a child dead’ in Rural Damascus governorate.<sup>1179</sup> Armed clashes between two families were also reported in March 2023, in Madaya town. No casualties were reported.<sup>1180</sup>

<sup>1169</sup> AFP, New Israeli strike on Syria kills two civilians: state media, 4 April 2023

<sup>1170</sup> Le Monde, Israeli airstrike in central Damascus kills 15 people, 19 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1171</sup> SOHR, 28 Israeli attacks in 2022 | Violent explosions rock areas nearby Damascus airport and southern Rif Dimashq, 26 October 2022, [url](#); Rudaw, Damascus airport out of service following Israeli airstrikes, 2 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Israeli airstrikes | Three non-Syrian fighters backed by Lebanese Hezbollah killed in Al-Sayyida Zainab area in Rif Dimashq, 20 December 2022, [url](#); NPA, 5 Syrians Killed in Israeli airstrike near Damascus, 19 February 2023, [url](#); SOHR, 17th attack in 2023 | Israeli missiles hit positions of Lebanese Hezbollah in vicinity of Damascus, 28 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1172</sup> Reuters, Bomb blast kills several people at shrine near Damascus, Syrian state media report, 27 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1173</sup> Gregory Waters, [Twitter], posted on: 28 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1174</sup> SOHR, Growing tension | Clashes between two groups affiliated with 4th Division and military intelligence services in Rif Dimashq leave casualties, 4 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1175</sup> SOHR, After five killed in clashes | Alarming calm spread among residents of Bait Jinn in Rif Dimashq, 8 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Ongoing tension | Four people killed in armed clashes in Bait Jinn in Rif Dimashq, 7 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1176</sup> SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Three people killed in clashes between two families of Military Intelligence and 4th Division Security, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1177</sup> SOHR, More than 30 shells | Military Intelligence Department shells Bait Jinn town in Rif Dimashq, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1178</sup> SOHR, Following quarrel | Members of 4th Division kill collaborator with military intelligence division near Syrian-Lebanese border in Rif Dimashq, 26 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1179</sup> SOHR, Rif Dimashq security chaos | Elder man in his 70s shot dead, 25 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1180</sup> SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Renewal of old vendetta sparks clashes between two families, 28 March 2023, [url](#)

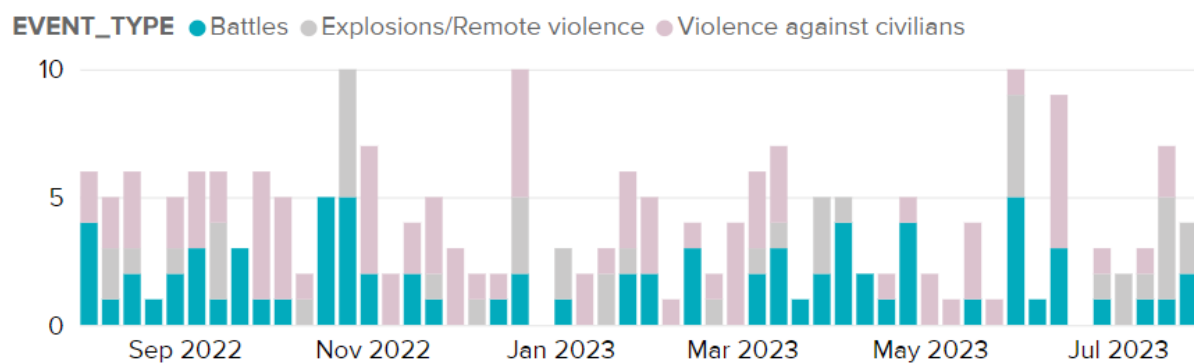


Several civilians were killed by members of the Fourth Division in the reference period.<sup>1181</sup> Civilians were also injured by members of the Military Intelligence branch.<sup>1182</sup> Bodies of civilians killed by unknown perpetrators were also found in the reference period.<sup>1183</sup>

Several members of the Fourth Division,<sup>1184</sup> the Military Intelligence Department,<sup>1185</sup> the NDF,<sup>1186</sup> died in various attacks during the reference period, and there were reports of attacks targeting GoS checkpoints<sup>1187</sup>.

## (b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 211 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Rural Damascus, of which 79 were coded as battles, 44 as explosions/remote violence and 88 as incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>1188</sup>



**Figure 25. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Rural Damascus governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data<sup>1189</sup>**

<sup>1181</sup> SOHR, Rif Dimashq security chaos | Civilian killed by stray bullet near 4th Division checkpoint, 13 August 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Murders in regime-held areas | Woman shot dead by 4th Division member in Rif Dimashq, 5 September 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Civilian shot dead by 4th Division near Syria-Lebanon border, 8 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1182</sup> SOHR, Amid high alert | Members of military intelligence branch storm Madaya town and arrest several young men, 19 June 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Ongoing arbitrary arrests | Members of military intelligence branch arrest six people in Rif Dimashq, 13 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1183</sup> SOHR, Murders in regime-held areas | Residents of Al-Kiswah area in Rif Dimashq found civilian's body, 22 November 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Head and limbs separated | Cleaners find body of unidentified man in southern Rif Dimashq, 24 October 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Escalating crimes in regime areas | Residents find body of young man killed in Rif Dimashq, 8 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1184</sup> SOHR, IED attack | Commander in 4th Division killed in Rif Dimashq, 27 June 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Targeted by unknown people | Leader of armed group in "4th Division" killed in western Rif Dimashq, 30 June 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Death toll update | Nearly 40 people killed and injured in IED attack on 4th Division military bus in Rif Dimashq, 13 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1185</sup> SOHR, IED explosion | Local commander of Military Intelligence Department assassinated in Rif Dimashq, 30 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1186</sup> SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Five people mistakenly kill member of National Defence while seeking revenge, 17 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Armed clashes | "National defence" member killed in Jaramana city in Rif Dimashq, 28 January 2023, [url](#);

<sup>1187</sup> SOHR, Amid high security mobilization | Gunmen attack regime checkpoint in Rif Dimashq and kill member, 27 April 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Arrests campaign | Regime patrols arrest 14 civilians in Rif Dimashq following attack on Republican Guard checkpoint and anti-regime graphics, 10 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1188</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>1189</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the districts of At Tall and Rural Damascus (see [Figure 26](#)). According to ACLED, GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were involved (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’) in around 84 % of all security incidents, particularly in incidents coded as ‘battles’ and ‘violence against civilians’. Unidentified armed groups were involved in around 32 % of all security incidents, particularly in incidents where GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were also an actor. Israeli forces were involved in around 20 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as battles and explosions/remote violence, where GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were also an actor.

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Al Qutayfah	2	1	1
An Nabk	2	-	2
At Tall	11	-	48
Az-Zabadani	6	4	4
Darayya	1	-	1
Duma	18	14	5
Qatana	16	4	6
Rural Damascus	21	19	20
Yabroud	2	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>88</b>

**Figure 26. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Rural Damascus governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data**

### (c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented 13 civilian fatalities in 2021<sup>1190</sup> and 80 in 2022.<sup>1191</sup> Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 18 civilian fatalities in Rural Damascus governorate (seven civilian fatalities were documented in the period August – December 2022 and 11 between January and July 2023).<sup>1192</sup>

### (d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

In its annual report covering 2022, UNMAS noted that it had assessed more than 4 200 residential buildings in Darayya (Rural Damascus) and Yarmouk (Damascus). UNMAS confirmed the existence of explosive ordnance in 140 buildings and identified 800 buildings suspected to be tainted by explosives.<sup>1193</sup> In its country profile on Syria, UN-Habitat estimated that the conflict has left approximately 48 % of the residential properties in Duma, in Rural Damascus, uninhabitable.<sup>1194</sup>

Within Darayya, the teams evaluated an area of around 2 million square meters of agricultural land, with 71 % of it being verified as hazardous.<sup>1195</sup> From December 2021 to November 2022, the Armenian Center for Humanitarian Demining and Expertise (ACHDE), an implementing partner of UNMAS, cleared approximately two million square meters of agricultural land, and conducted 55 demolitions to eliminate a total of 518 pieces of explosive ordnance.<sup>1196</sup>

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.<sup>1197</sup> SOHR reported on the explosion of war remnants in Zamalka town,<sup>1198</sup> in Yabroud city in western Qalamoun,<sup>1199</sup> and in Al-Sabinah, south of Damascus city,<sup>1200</sup> resulting in deaths and injuries.<sup>1201</sup>

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<sup>1190</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1191</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10. Out of the 80 civilian fatalities documented in 2022 in Rural Damascus, SNHR included the death of 54 persons for whom the GoS released death notifications in February 2022, although they were arrested in previous years and died in custody. Most of them were originally from Deir al-Asafir town. See SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1192</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1193</sup> UNMAS, Annual Report 2022, 5 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 107-108

<sup>1194</sup> UN-Habitat, Syria Country Profile, 4 June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1195</sup> UNMAS, Annual Report 2022, 5 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 107-108

<sup>1196</sup> UNMAS, Press release: UNMAS in Syria completes the first handover of cleared land in Darayya, Rural Damascus, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1197</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 33

<sup>1198</sup> SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Child killed by landmine explosion of war remnants, 29 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1199</sup> SOHR, Old ordnance | Landmine explosion kills young man and injures another in Rif Dimashq, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1200</sup> SOHR, Old ordnance | Five civilians, including two children, injured in Rif Dimashq, 24 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1201</sup> SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Child killed by landmine explosion of war remnants, 29 May 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Old ordnance | Landmine explosion kills young man and injures another in Rif Dimashq, 23 January 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Old ordnance | Five civilians, including two children, injured in Rif Dimashq, 24 December 2022, [url](#)



In November 2022, several people were killed when a building collapsed in the city of Al-Hajar Al-Aswad. The victims had tried to extract iron from the damaged building located in a war-torn neighbourhood.<sup>1202</sup>

#### (e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 1 083 062 IDPs in Rural Damascus.<sup>1203</sup> In 2022, UNOCHA recorded approximately 8 000 IDP movements out of the governorate and no IDP movements into Rural Damascus governorate. 3 000 IDP movements within the governorate were recorded.<sup>1204</sup> Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA recorded eight IDP movements out of Rural Damascus and 277 IDP movements to the governorate.<sup>1205</sup>

UNOCHA noted that, as of May 2022, At Tall, Jaramana, Qatana and Qudsaya (sub-)districts of Rural Damascus governorate were amongst the areas hosting the highest shares of IDPs and returnees (75 % of the district's total population in At Tall, 50 % in Jaramana, 49 % in Qatana and 29 % in Qudsaya). The population of Jaramana was reported at 304 230 residents, 175 returnees and 299 146 IDPs, while the population of Qudsaya consisted of 243 346 residents, 404 returnees and 99 476 IDPs.<sup>1206</sup> In January 2023, no IDP movements were recorded in Rural Damascus governorate.<sup>1207</sup> In February 2023, there were approximately 8 IDP movements out of Rural Damascus.<sup>1208</sup> In January 2023, SOHR reported that members of the Fourth Division set a deadline for civilians to evacuate their houses near Moadamiya Al-Sham, claiming that the paramilitary area might become a target for Israeli air strikes.<sup>1209</sup> No further information on the reasons behind the displacement movements was found.

As regards returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded approximately 7 000 spontaneous IDP returnee movements out of 6 000 IDP returnee movements into and 24 000 within the governorate.<sup>1210</sup> Between January and May 2023, UNOCHA recorded 19 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Rural Damascus and about 109 returnee movements from Rural Damascus to other governorates.<sup>1211</sup> No information on the reasons behind the returns movements was found.

<sup>1202</sup> Syria Report (The), Building Collapses, Killing Seven, During Looting in Damascus Suburb, 17 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1203</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>1204</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1205</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1206</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1207</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1208</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1209</sup> SOHR, Fortifying their military positions | "4th Division" forces civilians to evacuate their homes in Rif Dimashq, 5 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1210</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1211</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)





UN Security Council reports covering the first five months of 2023 did not contain any further information on displacement from or returns to Rural Damascus governorate.<sup>1212</sup> No further information on conflict-induced displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

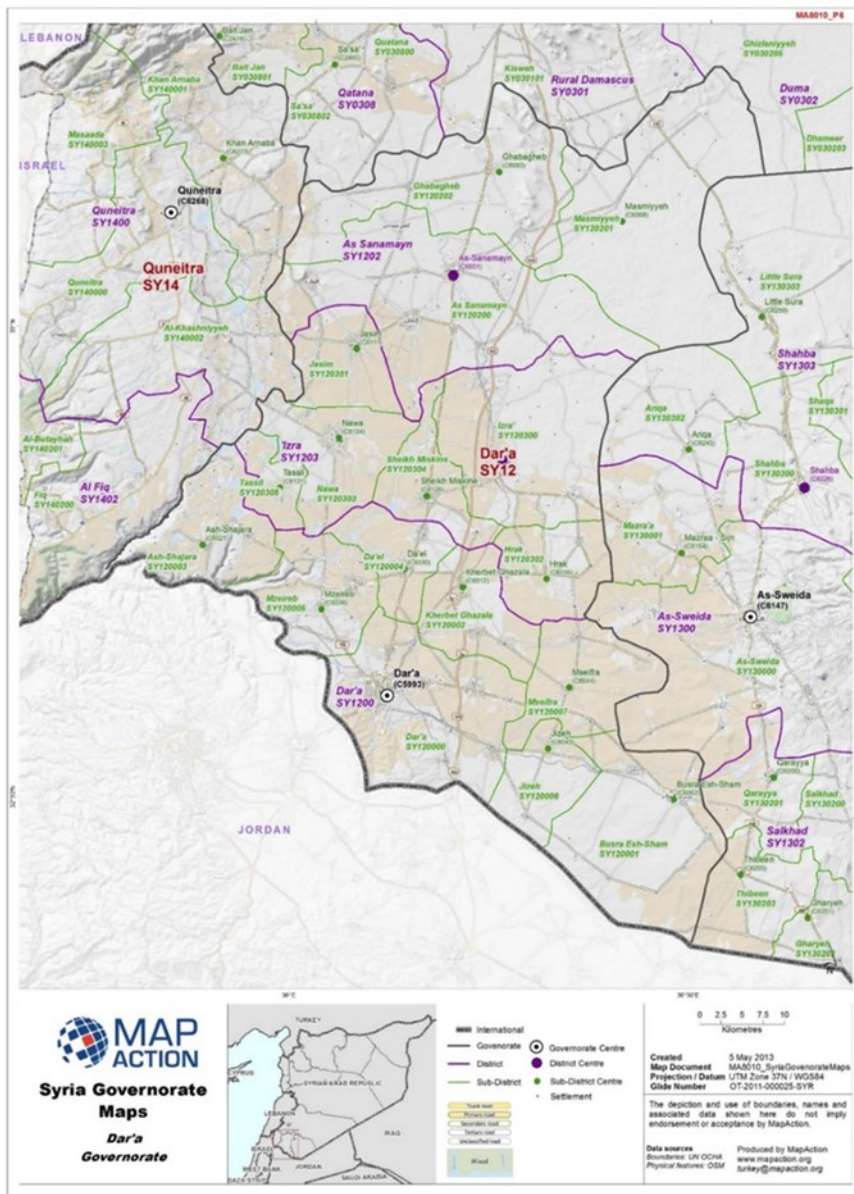
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<sup>1212</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#)





## 2.12. Dar'a governorate



Map 17: © MapAction, Dar'a governorate<sup>1213</sup>

### 2.12.1. General description of the governorate

Dar'a governorate is located in the southern part of Syria, below Damascus, sharing borders with the governorates of Quneitra to the west, Rural Damascus to the north, Sweida to the east and an international border with Jordan to its south. Dar'a governorate is comprised of

<sup>1213</sup> MapAction, Dar'a governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

the three administrative districts of Dar'a, Izra' and As-Sanamayn.<sup>1214</sup> According to 2022 estimates by UNOCHA, the population of Dar'a governorate was 1 023 833 inhabitants.<sup>1215</sup>

Information on the strategic importance of Dar'a and its role in cross-border drug trafficking is available in the EUAA COI report: [Syria - Security situation \(September 2022\)](#).

## 2.12.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Since July 2018<sup>1216</sup> Dar'a governorate has been nominally under the control of GoS.<sup>1217</sup> In certain parts of the governorate, such as Busra al-Sham<sup>1218</sup>, Tafas<sup>1219</sup> and Dar'a al-Balad<sup>1220</sup>, GoS' control was limited, allowing locals and former opposition groups de facto semi-autonomy, including to maintain light arms, take care of 'local affairs and to continue to manifest opposition'.<sup>1221</sup>

Despite carrying out several successful military operations against former opposition groups in between 2018-2021<sup>1222</sup>, GoS' control of Dar'a was still assessed to be tenuous as of 2023.<sup>1223</sup> In areas including Jasim, Dar'a al-Balad and Nawa the GoS was not able to maintain effective control.<sup>1224</sup>

The SAA's Fourth Armoured Division was reported to be present in the governorate<sup>1225</sup>, particularly in Dar'a city<sup>1226</sup> and the border area with Jordan, controlling the Nassib border

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<sup>1214</sup> Based on UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas. Syrian Arab Republic, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1215</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>1216</sup> Information on the conflict background and armed actors in Dar'a prior to August 2022 is available in the [EUAA COI report Syria – Security situation \(September 2022\)](#), [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security Situation \(July 2021\)](#), and [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

<sup>1217</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, 2 January 2023, [url](#); Tokmajyan, A. and Khaddour, K., A Fractured Border: Syria, Türkiye, and Cantonization, Carnegie Middle East Center, XCEPT, March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1218</sup> Tokmajyan, A. and Khaddour, K., A Fractured Border: Syria, Türkiye, and Cantonization, Carnegie Middle East Center, XCEPT, March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1219</sup> Haid, H., Assad's strategy in southern Syria fated to fail, Asia Times, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1220</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 4; Tokmajyan, A. and Khaddour, K., A Fractured Border: Syria, Türkiye, and Cantonization, Carnegie Middle East Center, XCEPT, March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1221</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1222</sup> Tokmajyan, A. and Khaddour, K., A Fractured Border: Syria, Türkiye, and Cantonization, Carnegie Middle East Center, XCEPT, March 2023, [url](#), p. 7; STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-12; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 5, 32

<sup>1223</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, 2 January 2023, [url](#); Tokmajyan, A. and Khaddour, K., A Fractured Border: Syria, Türkiye, and Cantonization, Carnegie Middle East Center, XCEPT, March 2023, [url](#), p. 7; Al-Jabassini, A. and Ezzi, M., Troubled solidarity: how communities in Southern Syria responded to the 2023 earthquake disaster, EUI, 8 June 2023, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>1224</sup> Tokmajyan, A. and Khaddour, K., A Fractured Border: Syria, Türkiye, and Cantonization, Carnegie Middle East Center, XCEPT, March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1225</sup> DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023 [source: SNHR], [url](#), p. 21

<sup>1226</sup> Syria Direct, 4th Division redeploys in Syria's south in the wake of the US Captagon Act and Arab normalization, 3 February 2023, [url](#)



crossing.<sup>1227</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade, a Russian-backed local armed group made up of former opposition fighters<sup>1228</sup> and currently affiliated with the GoS Military Intelligence Directorate<sup>1229</sup> was reported to be the most influential armed group in Dar'a, particularly in the Busra al-Sham area of eastern Dar'a.<sup>1230</sup> The presence of Russian and Iranian forces, including Hezbollah,<sup>1231</sup> was also reported in the governorate during the reference period.<sup>1232</sup>

ISIL maintained small cells including key leadership<sup>1233</sup> in Dar'a,<sup>1234</sup> reportedly targeting GoS and rebel figures, through assassinations, kidnappings, and bombings.<sup>1235</sup> Civilians were also targeted at times by ISIL.<sup>1236</sup> In October 2022, ISIL's leader Abu al-Hassan al-Hashemi al-Qurashi was killed during a GoS military operation in Jasim.<sup>1237</sup>

### 2.12.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

During the second half of 2022 the security situation in Dar'a was assessed by the UNCOI as unstable, due to ongoing clashes involving GoS forces, armed opposition groups and ISIL, as well as targeted killings of civilians, members of pro-GoS forces and 'reconciled' opposition fighters.<sup>1238</sup> Between August and December 2022, the UN Security Council reported attacks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), targeted killings, kidnappings and limited clashes in Dar'a governorate.<sup>1239</sup>

<sup>1227</sup> Tokmajyan, A. and Khaddour, K., A Fractured Border: Syria, Türkiye, and Cantonization, Carnegie Middle East Center, XCEPT, March 2023, [url](#), p. 8; Syria Direct, 4th Division redeploys in Syria's south in the wake of the US Captagon Act and Arab normalization, 3 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1228</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1229</sup> Syria Direct, Wave of new Daraa settlements amid Arab normalization efforts, 9 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1230</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 18 January 2023, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Governor of Daraa Beaten by Members of Eighth Brigade, 6 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1231</sup> VOA, Jordan Strikes Iran-Linked Drugs Factory in Southern Syria, Sources Say, 8 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1232</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1233</sup> UN Security Council, Thirty-second report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2023/549], 25 July 2023, [url](#), para.48

<sup>1234</sup> UN Security Council, Sixteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2023/76], 1 February 2023, [url](#), para.27; Tokmajyan, A., ISIS Resurgence in Daraa: Is the Group Making A Comeback in Syria's Restive South?, EPC, 9 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1235</sup> Independent (The), Isis, drug smugglers and regime forces unravel fragile peace in southern Syria, 5 January 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 18 January 2023, [url](#); Hassan, M., ISIS is back in the open in southern Syria, 29 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1236</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para.7; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para.47

<sup>1237</sup> UN Security Council, Sixteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2023/76], 1 February 2023, [url](#), para.7; Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 18 January 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 9 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1238</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para.13

<sup>1239</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para.8





Following GoS' demands that former opposition fighters would be expelled from Tafas, Dar'a district, clashes ensued between local fighters and GoS forces and a blockade of the town was enforced by GoS between 27 July and 13 August 2022. The clashes led to the displacement<sup>1240</sup> of around 2 500 persons from Tafas to other nearby areas in August.<sup>1241</sup> On 13 August the blockade was lifted after an agreement was reached between GoS and local representatives from Tafas to expel the wanted individuals.<sup>1242</sup> Additionally, in September 2022, limited raids by GoS forces and clashes with local forces were reported in the city of Jasim, Izra district.<sup>1243</sup>

According to the UNCOI, during the clashes between GoS and armed groups which took place in Tafas and Jasim in the second half of 2022, farmers were reportedly extorted by GoS forces in exchange for being allowed to access their land and their equipment was looted.<sup>1244</sup>

In the first five months of 2023, pro-GoS and anti-GoS armed groups, ISIL and unidentified perpetrators continued to be involved in security incidents in Dar'a governorate, which took the form of IED attacks, limited armed clashes, attacks on checkpoints, targeted killings and kidnappings.<sup>1245</sup>

In June 2023, sporadic clashes between the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade and other pro-GoS units took place in the governorate. IED attacks allegedly perpetrated by small opposition groups and targeting members of GoS security forces were also reported, leading to fatalities among GoS soldiers and commanders.<sup>1246</sup> In early July 2023, GoS forces launched a military campaign on the area between Tafas and Yaboudeh, western Dar'a countryside, where it alleged that opposition factions,<sup>1247</sup> drug traffickers and ISIL elements<sup>1248</sup> were operating, and assassinations against GoS security forces were recurrent.<sup>1249</sup> Limited clashes between GoS forces and opposition fighters were reported in Tafas in the first week of July, leading to casualties among the combatants and displacement of residents.<sup>1250</sup> The fighting stopped after the GoS forces and prominent clans in the area reached a truce.<sup>1251</sup>

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<sup>1240</sup> NPA, Town In Syria's Daraa Witnesses Bombardment, Displacement, 10 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1241</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>1242</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics July-September 2022, 7 November 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1243</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics July-September 2022, 7 November 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1244</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para.45

<sup>1245</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para.10; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), para.7

<sup>1246</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria - June 2023, 4 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1247</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Regime Military Campaign in Western Countryside of Daraa: What are its Objectives?, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1248</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Syrian Regime Prepares for Military Operation in Western Countryside of Daraa, 4 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1249</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Syrian Regime Prepares for Military Operation in Western Countryside of Daraa, 4 July 2023, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Regime Military Campaign in Western Countryside of Daraa: What are its Objectives?, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1250</sup> New Arab (The), Clashes displace civilians in Tafas as Syrian regime attempt to storm town, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1251</sup> New Arab (The), Syria: Truce agreed between prominent clan, regime forces after Tafas clashes, 7 July 2023, [url](#); NPA, Killings continue amid negotiations with government in Syria's Daraa, 7 July 2023, [url](#)





In August 2023, demonstrations against the GoS in the city of Nawa, sparked confrontations between local fighters and GoS forces, the latter using artillery and mortar shelling. No civilian casualties were reported.<sup>1252</sup>

### *ISIL insurgency*

ISIL activity was reported in Dar'a governorate in the period between October and November 2022.<sup>1253</sup> In October 2022, a GoS and Russian-led operation against ISIL cells in Dar'a governorate led according to Russian claims to the killing of at least 20 alleged ISIL fighters in the city of Jasim. Local sources mentioned however, that the operation left 10 persons, including two leaders, dead.<sup>1254</sup> ISIL leader Abu al-Hassan al-Hashemi al-Qurashi was killed in Jasim in October following armed clashes.<sup>1255</sup> Clashes between armed groups and suspected ISIL cells also took place in November 2022 in Dar'a al-Balad<sup>1256</sup> which led to several civilians being killed and the evacuation of 6 750 persons to Dar'a city and western rural Dar'a.<sup>1257</sup>

### *Targeted killings*

Since 2018 when the GoS regained control of Dar'a, a high number of targeted killings have been documented in the governorate.<sup>1258</sup> According to a June 2023 analysis by the pro-opposition Daraa Martyrs Documentation Office, around 2 000 attempted or successful targeted killings took place in Dar'a since 2018.<sup>1259</sup> Between January and end of July 2023, SOHR documented 241 fatalities resulting from attacks targeting civilians and combatants in Dar'a.<sup>1260</sup> Assassination attempts and targeted killings of civilians,<sup>1261</sup> former opposition fighters who have 'reconciled' with the GoS, members of GoS security forces, and of other pro-GoS representatives continued to be reported in Dar'a during the reference period.<sup>1262</sup> UNOCHA reported that 110 persons were killed in targeted killings between January and September 2022 in Dar'a and SDF-controlled areas. In the vast majority of cases the perpetrators of the

<sup>1252</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Daraa: Shelling and Clashes Following Protests Demanding Fall of Regime, 23 August 2023, [url](#); NPA, Government forces shell Syria's Daraa in tandem with protests, 22 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1253</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), paras 7, 24

<sup>1254</sup> Enab Baladi, Russia claims killing 20 IS fighters in Daraa; What is the truth behind?, 18 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1255</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para.13; UN Security Council, Sixteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2023/76], 1 February 2023, [url](#), para.7

<sup>1256</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), paras 8, 24; Syria Direct, Former opposition and military security-linked groups battle 'IS cells' in Daraa, 3 November 2022, [url](#); New Arab (The), 'IS cell' flee southern Syria stronghold after Daraa assault by former rebels, 16 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1257</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para.8

<sup>1258</sup> Al Monitor, South Syria increasingly unstable even as normalization proceeds with Assad, 24 June 2023, [url](#); Al Monitor, Who's to blame for ongoing assassinations in Syria's Daraa province?, 10 August 2022, [url](#); Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1259</sup> Al Monitor, South Syria increasingly unstable even as normalization proceeds with Assad, 24 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1260</sup> Of the 231 casualties, the majority were GoS soldiers or collaborators (109), followed by civilians (78), and persons accused on drug trafficking (23). SOHR did not provide details regarding the type of attacks which lead to these casualties or who were the perpetrators. SOHR, Security chaos in Daraa | 16 civilians among 39 people killed in 46 attacks since early July, 24 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1261</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Daraa: Four, Including a Woman and Child, Assassinated After Deadly Clashes, 23 June 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 9 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1262</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para.13; Enab Baladi, Daraa not the same after anti-IS campaign, 12 January 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 9 May 2023, [url](#)



killings remained unknown.<sup>1263</sup> At times, local activists, analysts and residents have attributed the responsibility for the targeted killings occurring in Dar'a to GoS and affiliated armed groups, and to ISIL elements.<sup>1264</sup>

### *Drug trafficking*

In recent years drug production and cross-border drug trafficking increased in the south of Syria, including in Dar'a governorate.<sup>1265</sup> Anti-drug smuggling operations carried out by pro-GoS armed groups in Dar'a were reported in the wake of Syria's readmission to the Arab League and the period that followed.<sup>1266</sup> In May 2023, airstrikes attributed to Jordan were carried out on suspected drug facilities<sup>1267</sup> allegedly run by the Lebanese Hezbollah in Dar'a governorate.<sup>1268</sup> Experts and activists have stated that both GoS<sup>1269</sup> and opposition groups<sup>1270</sup> are directly involved in the drug production and trade that originates from Syria. Etana Syria assessed that 63 % of the total drug network in Dar'a is associated with the Military Intelligence.<sup>1271</sup> Individuals reportedly involved in drug trafficking were killed in targeted attacks in Dar'a during the reporting period.<sup>1272</sup> According to Syrian columnist Haid Haid citing local media reports, there were 22 assassinations attempts on persons involved in drug trafficking recorded in the governorate between January and August 2023. The assassinations targeted civilians, pro-GoS militia members and members of the SAA and intelligence services involved in drug trafficking.<sup>1273</sup>

### **(b) Security incidents**

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 756 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Dar'a governorate, of which 247 were coded as battles, 165 as

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<sup>1263</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>1264</sup> NPA, Who is responsible for the constant insecurity in Syria's Daraa?, 17 April 2023, [url](#); Al Monitor, Who's to blame for ongoing assassinations in Syria's Daraa province?, 10 August 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Attacks & Assassinations in South-West Syria, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1265</sup> Syria Direct, Southern Syria's drug war: Jordan's options 'limited' as Iran expands, 6 June 2022, [url](#); OCCRP, A 'Drug War': Syria's Neighbors Fight a Flood of Captagon Across Their Borders, 27 June 2023, [url](#); France24, Captagon connection: how Syria became a narco state, 3 November 2022, [url](#); see also section 2.12 of the EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation, September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1266</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 4 April 2023, [url](#); New Arab (The), Syrian regime raids on 'small-time drug dealers' a 'cynical move' to appease Arab League, 22 May 2023, [url](#); Syria Direct, Wave of new Daraa settlements amid Arab normalization efforts, 9 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1267</sup> AP News, Airstrikes kill well-known Syrian drug kingpin, 8 May 2023, [url](#); VOA, Jordan Strikes Iran-Linked Drugs Factory in Southern Syria, Sources Say, 8 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1268</sup> VOA, Jordan Strikes Iran-Linked Drugs Factory in Southern Syria, Sources Say, 8 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1269</sup> AP News, A little white pill, Captagon, gives Syria's Assad a strong tool in winning over Arab states, 9 June 2023, [url](#); France24, War on Captagon key to Syria's return to Arab League, 19 May 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, South Syria's Drug Supply Chains, June 2023, [url](#); BBC News, Syria: New Captagon drug trade link to top officials found, 27 June 2023, [url](#)

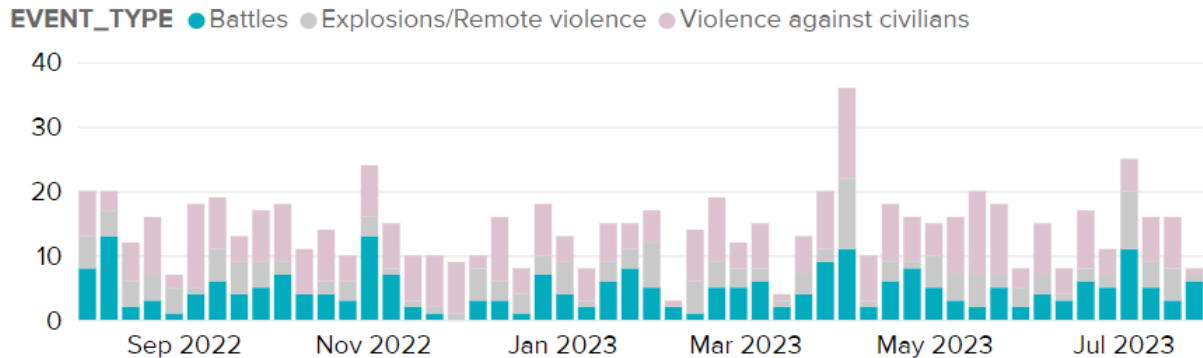
<sup>1270</sup> AP News, A little white pill, Captagon, gives Syria's Assad a strong tool in winning over Arab states, 9 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1271</sup> Etana Syria, South Syria's Drug Supply Chains, June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1272</sup> Al Monitor, Who's to blame for ongoing assassinations in Syria's Daraa province?, 10 August 2022, [url](#); NPA, 4 people killed in Syria's Daraa for drug trafficking, 8 March 2023, [url](#); NPA, Drug trafficker killed in Syria's Daraa, 11 June 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Two separate operations | Drug dealer and collaborator with regime security services killed in Daraa, 26 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1273</sup> Haid, H., In Syria's South, Drug-Related Assassinations Add to Regional Instability, 11 August 2023, Syndication Bureau, [url](#)

explosions/remote violence and 344 as incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>1274</sup> Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in Dar’a and Izra districts. As-Sanamayn recorded significantly lower number of security incidents than the other two districts (see [Figure 28](#)).



**Figure 27. Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Dar’a governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023, based on ACLED data<sup>1275</sup>**

According to ACLED, unidentified armed groups were the main actor involved in security incidents (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’) during the reference period, accounting for around 83 % of all documented security incidents. In most of security incidents featuring unidentified armed actors, the other parties involved were civilians (45 % of all documented security incidents) and GoS forces and affiliated armed groups (around 47 % of all documented security incidents). ISIL was involved in around 5 % of all reported security incidents.

<sup>1274</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>1275</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
As-Sanamayn	43	17	26
Dar'a	142	100	196
Izra	62	48	122
<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>344</b>

**Figure 28. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Dar'a governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data**

**(c) Civilian fatalities**

SNHR documented 204 civilian fatalities in 2021,<sup>1276</sup> 207 in 2022.<sup>1277</sup> Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 226<sup>1278</sup> civilian fatalities in Dar'a governorate.<sup>1279</sup> Of the 226 civilian fatalities total recorded by SNHR between August 2022 and July 2023 in Dar'a, around 48 (mostly originating from Dar'a governorate) were civilians who drowned in June 2023 while on migration routes to Europe.<sup>1280</sup>

For the year 2022, AOA V documented 115 civilian casualties (killed and injured) in Dar'a resulting from incidents of explosive violence.<sup>1281</sup>

<sup>1276</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1277</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#)

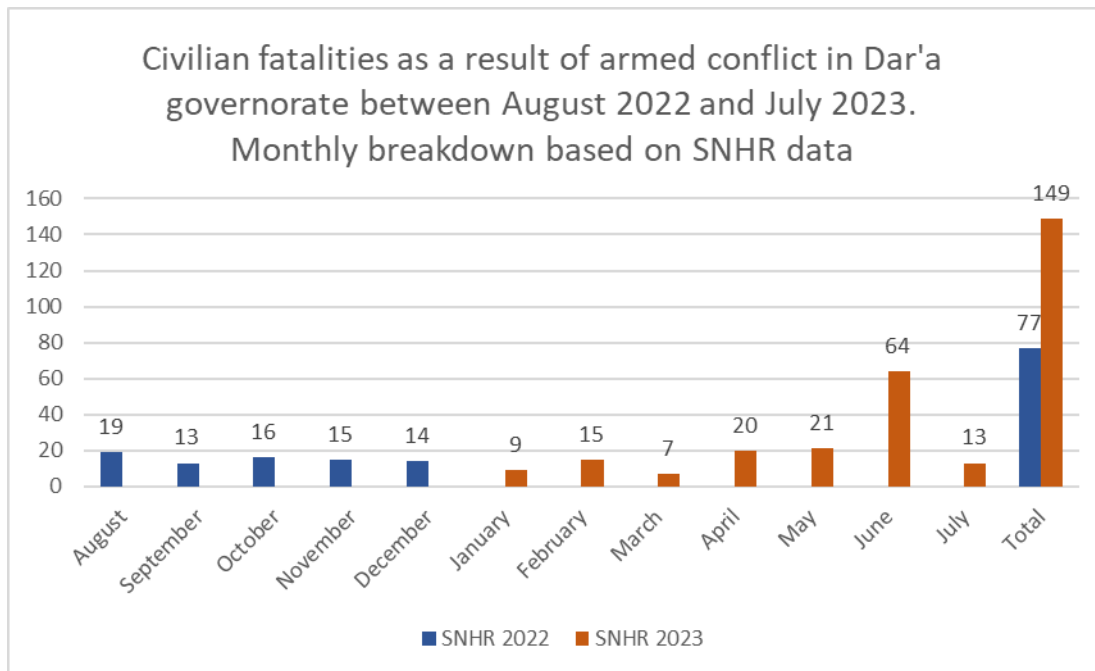
<sup>1278</sup> For the month of June 2023, SNHR included in its civilian fatalities reporting the deaths of 48 individuals who were mostly from Daraa governorate and drowned off the coast of Greece while trying to reach Europe. SNHR, 501 Civilians, Including 71 Children, 42 Woman, and 20 Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in Syria, in the First Half of 2023, 2 July 2023, [url](#), pp. 5, 10

<sup>1279</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1280</sup> Syrian Network for Human Rights, email correspondence 7, 24 and 25 July 2023. See also SNHR, 501 Civilians, Including 71 Children, 42 Woman, and 20 Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in Syria, in the First Half of 2023, 2 July 2023, [url](#), pp. 5, 10

<sup>1281</sup> AOA V, Syria, updated 21 March 2023, [url](#)





**Figure 29. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Dar'a governorate between August 2022 and July 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

**(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

Dar'a is one of the governorates where sources reported a high percentage of explosive ordnance contamination during the reporting period.<sup>1282</sup> Civilian casualties, including of children<sup>1283</sup> as a result of ERW were reported in Dar'a in 2022<sup>1284</sup> and 2023.<sup>1285</sup> Insecurity and the presence of ERW has also impeded access of farmers to agricultural land.<sup>1286</sup>

UN Habitat assessed that around 15 % of residential properties were uninhabitable in Dar'a governorate as a result of the conflict.<sup>1287</sup> According to a June 2023 analysis, the scale of destruction of homes and infrastructure caused by the conflict in the neighbourhoods of southern Dar'a al-Balad was assessed to be of 90 % in the neighbourhoods Al-Manshiya, Al-Bihar and Al-Karak, 50 % in the neighbourhood of Al-Arbaeen, while in the other neighbourhoods the destruction levels varied.<sup>1288</sup>

<sup>1282</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para.29; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para.33

<sup>1283</sup> Enab Baladi, Unexploded ordnance: A fatal threat for Daraa children, 14 July 2023, [url](#); NPA, Child killed in landmine explosion in western Daraa, 4 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1284</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 24; Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria, April 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1285</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), p. 21; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>1286</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 30; Insecurity Insight, The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria, April 2023, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>1287</sup> UN Habitat, Syria Country Profile, 4 June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1288</sup> Enab Baladi, Daraa al-Balad residents search for livelihoods despite destruction, 19 June 2023, [url](#)



A UN Habitat analysis from 2022 assessed the infrastructure in southern Dar'a to be severely damaged. It further assessed the building damage rate to be severe in the neighbourhoods of Al-Manshiya, Al Yarmouk, Alabbasiah and Al-Sad. The structural damage was assessed to be partial in the neighbourhoods of Al-Karak and Quneitra, while in Shuhada and Ghernata there were minor damage to structures.<sup>1289</sup>

### (e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 68 792 IDPs in Dar'a governorate.<sup>1290</sup> UNOCHA recorded 2 271 IDP movements in 2022, the highest numbers being recorded in May (508), October (490) and November (685).<sup>1291</sup> Around 2 000 IDP movements recorded by UNOCHA in 2022 occurred within the governorate, while the rest were IDP movements from other governorates to Dar'a.<sup>1292</sup>

According to the UN Security Council, clashes between GoS forces and opposition fighters in Tafas during July and August 2022 led to the displacement of around 2 500 persons to neighbouring areas.<sup>1293</sup> The same source noted that during the anti-ISIL operations which took place in November 2022 in Dar'a al-Balad, around 6 750 persons were evacuated to other areas in the governorate.<sup>1294</sup> In the first six months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded 11 IDP movements from Dar'a governorate, 197 IDP movements within the governorate and 503 IDP arrivals to the governorate.<sup>1295</sup> Clashes between GoS forces and opposition fighters which occurred in Tafas at the end of June 2023 reportedly led to unspecified number of residents being displaced to neighbouring areas in the governorate.<sup>1296</sup>

UNOCHA recorded 7 352 IDP return movements in 2022, the highest numbers being recorded in November (2 512) and December (2 710).<sup>1297</sup> Around 7 000 IDP return movements recorded by UNOCHA in 2022 occurred within the governorate, while around 200 were from Sweida to Dar'a.<sup>1298</sup> In the first six months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded 2 140 IDP returns to Dar'a governorate, 3 348 return movements within the governorate and 30 returns from the governorate.<sup>1299</sup> The highest number of returns was recorded to As-Sanamayn district which

<sup>1289</sup> UN Habitat, Recovery of Services and Infrastructure in Syria. "Not If, But How?", July 2022, [url](#), p. 71

<sup>1290</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>1291</sup> UNOCHA, IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data December 2022, updated 26 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1292</sup> UNOCHA, IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1293</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>1294</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para.8

<sup>1295</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1296</sup> New Arab (The), Clashes displace civilians in Tafas as Syrian regime attempt to storm town, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1297</sup> UNOCHA, IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data December 2022, updated 26 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1298</sup> UNOCHA, IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1299</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

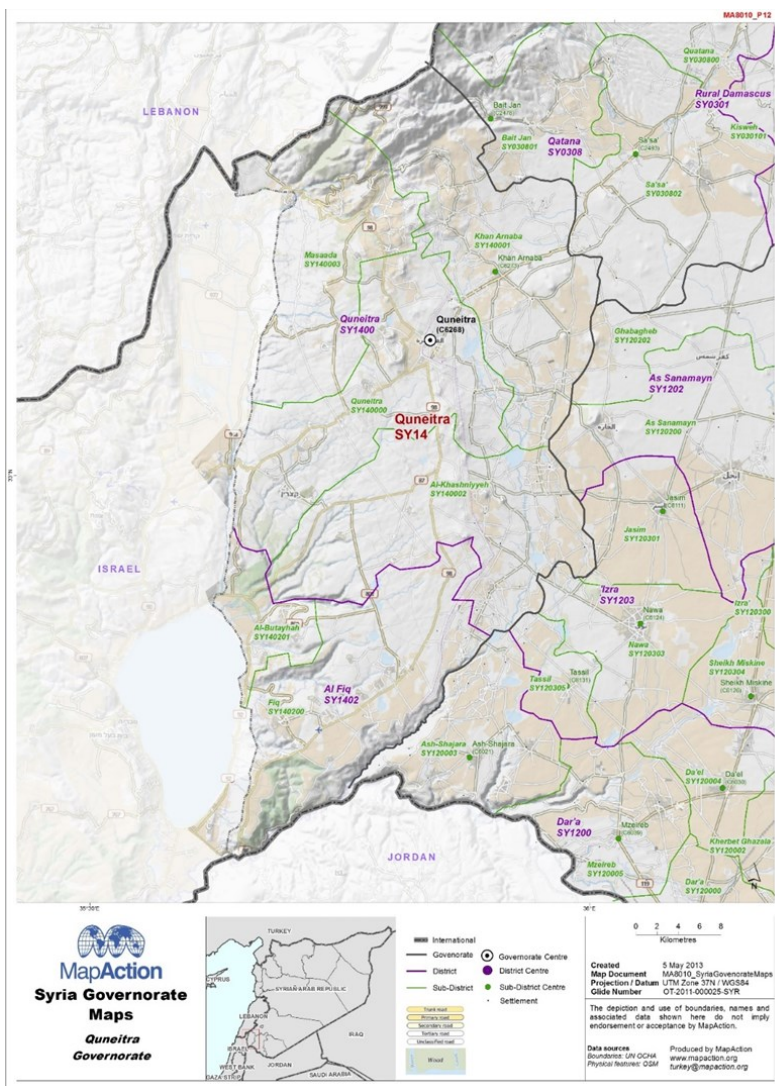




registered around 2 200 returns in May and June 2023, the majority coming from within the governorate.<sup>1300</sup> No information on the reasons behind the returns movements was provided by the sources.

UN Security Council reports covering the first five months of 2023 did not mention any displacement from or returns to Dar'a governorate.<sup>1301</sup> No further information on displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

## 2.13. Quneitra governorate



<sup>1300</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1301</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#)



**Map 18: © MapAction, Quneitra governorate<sup>1302</sup>**

### 2.13.1. General description of the governorate

The governorate of Quneitra is situated in southern Syria and it borders Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel. To the east, Quneitra governorate borders Dar'a governorate and Rural Damascus governorate.<sup>1303</sup> The governorate is divided into two districts: the district of Quneitra, which comprises the sub-districts of Quneitra, Masaada, Khan Arnaba and al-Khashniyyeh, of which large parts are under Israeli control or administered by UNDOF (UN Disengagement Observer Forces). Especially Masaada is almost entirely under Israeli or UNDOF administration. The second district, al-Fiq, is divided into the sub-districts of Fiq and Al-Butayhah, with the latter being completely under Israeli control, while only a small part of Fiq is still under Syrian control.<sup>1304</sup>

The city of Quneitra remained abandoned after it was destroyed by Israel in 1974 and is part of the demilitarised buffer zone between Syria and Israel under the supervision of UNDOF.<sup>1305</sup> The new provincial administrative centre is Madinat al-Baath (Baath city).<sup>1306</sup> According to the latest UNOCHA figures published in December 2022, the estimated population of Quneitra is of 105 443 inhabitants.<sup>1307</sup>

For more information on the ethnic and religious composition of Quneitra's population, see the EUAA COI Report: [Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

### 2.13.2. Conflict background and armed actors

During the reporting period, Quneitra governorate was under the control of GoS. UNDOF was present in the demilitarized area between Golan Heights and Quneitra.<sup>1308</sup>

Etana observed that southern Syria continues to be an area of influence for Iran<sup>1309</sup> and its affiliated forces.<sup>1310</sup> In April 2023, about 150 Hezbollah military troops joined the northern area of Quneitra. Moreover, in the same period, a new observation point has been settled by Hezbollah in the southern countryside of Quneitra, near to the Golan Heights.<sup>1311</sup>

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<sup>1302</sup> MapAction, Syria Governorate Maps – Quneitra Governorate, last updated 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1303</sup> Based on UNOCHA, Quneitra Governorate Reference Map, February 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1304</sup> Based on UNOCHA, Quneitra Governorate Reference Map, February 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1305</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, Al-Qunaytirah, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1306</sup> Reuters, Syrian insurgents attack government-held town near Israel, 20 November 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1307</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>1308</sup> Based on the reading of the following maps: UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022, January 2023, [url](#); Map in Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control across Syria at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, 2 January 2023, [url](#); Carter Center, Exploring Historical Control in Syria Overview, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria, July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1309</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 9 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1310</sup> Al Arabya News, Israel shells pro-Iran group positions near Golan Heights: War monitor, [url](#), 24 April 2023

<sup>1311</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 9 May 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria – mid 2023, 3 July 2023, [url](#)

A new group affiliated with IRGC, the Imam Brigade, is reportedly operational in the outskirts of Quneitra. The Imam Brigade has been created by Iranian-backed Al Quds in 2022 ‘to adapt to the pressure of Israeli airstrikes’.<sup>1312</sup>

### 2.13.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

In the reference period, military attacks attributed to Israel have been reported in August 2022, resulting in the wounding of two civilians,<sup>1313</sup> and in late April 2023 without reporting any casualties.<sup>1314</sup> The attacks targeted Iran-backed groups and Hezbollah-linked militias.<sup>1315</sup>

In 2022, UNOCHA and UN Security Council reported regular security incidents across Quneitra governorate consisting of ‘IED attacks, targeted killings, kidnappings, exchanges of fire and limited clashes’ affecting civilians and the movement of people and goods.<sup>1316</sup> For the period between February and May 2023, UN Security Council observed enduring security incidents across Quneitra governorate involving non-state armed groups, government and pro-government forces, ISIL and unidentified elements. The security incidents consisted in attacks with IEDs, targeted killings, kidnappings and limited clashes, attacks on checkpoints, and exchanges of fire.<sup>1317</sup>

In April 2023, an Iranian drone has been shot down by Israel in northern Quneitra countryside shortly after Iran’s IRGC transferred several ground-to-air missiles in the area.<sup>1318</sup> In July 2023, Israel military tanks reportedly entered at a depth of 150 meters inside Syrian areas under GoS’ control<sup>1319</sup> Sources did not report any civilian casualties.<sup>1320</sup>

#### (b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 49 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Quneitra governorate, of which 16 were coded as battles, 24 as

<sup>1312</sup> CTC Sentinel, the Quds Force in Syria: Combatants, Units, and Actions, Pierre Bousel, Volume 11, Issue 6, June 2023, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1313</sup> Jusoor for Studies, The Israeli strikes in Syria during 2022, 28 December 2022, [url](#); Al Arabya News, Israeli shelling wounds 2 near Golan Heights: Syrian state media, 12 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1314</sup> AP News, Syrian pro-government media say Israel shelled border town, 24 April 2023, [url](#); Al Arabya News, Israel shells pro-Iran group positions near Golan Heights: War monitor, 24 April 2023, [url](#); Syria, Liveuamap, 19 April 2023, [url](#); The Jerusalem Post (The), Israeli artillery targets Hezbollah site in southwest Syria – report, 24 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1315</sup> Al Arabya News, Israeli shelling wounds 2 near Golan Heights: Syrian state media, 12 August 2022, [url](#); Security Council Report, June 2023, Monthly Forecast, 31 May 2023, [url](#); Al Arabya News, Israel shells pro-Iran group positions near Golan Heights: War monitor, 24 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1316</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 12; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), p. 3, para.8

<sup>1317</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#), para.10; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), p. 2, para.7

<sup>1318</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria, 9 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1319</sup> MEMO, Israel forces enter Syria regime areas in Quneitra, 20 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1320</sup> Times of Israel (The), Israel said to shell Hezbollah position in southern Syria, drop threatening flyers, 24 April 2023, [url](#); Crisis 24, Syria: Suspected Israeli artillery fire targets Qars al-Nafl area in Quneitra Governorate late April 23, 23 April 2023, [url](#)

explosions/remote violence and 9 as incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>1321</sup> Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of Quneitra (see [Figure 30](#)).

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Quneitra	16	22	9
Al Fiq	-	2	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>9</b>

**Figure 30. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Quneitra governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data**

According to ACLED, GoS and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 76 % of all recorded incidents (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’). Unidentified armed groups were involved in around 69 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as battles and explosions/remote violence where GoS and affiliated armed groups were also an actor. Israeli forces were involved in around 27 % of all security incidents, the vast majority being coded as explosions/remote violence.

### (c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented 10 civilian fatalities in 2021<sup>1322</sup> and one civilian fatality in 2022.<sup>1323</sup> There were no civilian fatalities documented by SNHR between August 2022 and July 2023 in Quneitra governorate.<sup>1324</sup>

<sup>1321</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>1322</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1323</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1324</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8



#### (d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

In its Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023, UNOCHA confirmed the trend observed in the previous years, documenting Quneitra governorate as one of the areas with highest percentages of communities affected by explosive contamination.<sup>1325</sup> The UN Security Council report published in February 2023 also reported that Quneitra governorate recorded one of the highest percentage of communities affected by some form of explosive contamination, resulting in constraints in the access to agricultural fields, schools, markets, hospitals and roads.<sup>1326</sup>

As reported in the UN Syria Multi-sector Needs Assessment of 2022, the Global Shelter Cluster assessed that 54 % of the assessed shelter in Quneitra governorate consisted of damaged buildings.<sup>1327</sup>

#### (e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 3 418 IDPs in Quneitra governorate.<sup>1328</sup> Between January and December 2022, UNOCHA recorded 111 IDP movements from the governorate, 18 IDP within the governorate and 87 IDP to the governorate.<sup>1329</sup> For the period between January and June 2023, UNOCHA recorded a total of 15 IDP movements from the governorate and 36 IDP movements to Quneitra, while 4 IDP movements were recorded within the governorate.<sup>1330</sup> In terms of spontaneous returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded 164 IDP returnee movements to the governorate, 56 IDP returnees movements within the governorate and 31 returnee movements from the governorate.<sup>1331</sup> During the period between January and June 2023, UNOCHA recorded 144 IDP returns to the governorate, 21 returns within the governorate and 1 906 returns of IDP from governorate.<sup>1332</sup>

No further information on displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

<sup>1325</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 81

<sup>1326</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para.33, p. 7

<sup>1327</sup> Global Shelter Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter and NFI Sector Humanitarian Needs Overview, 14 February 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1328</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>1329</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), [url](#), 10 May 2023

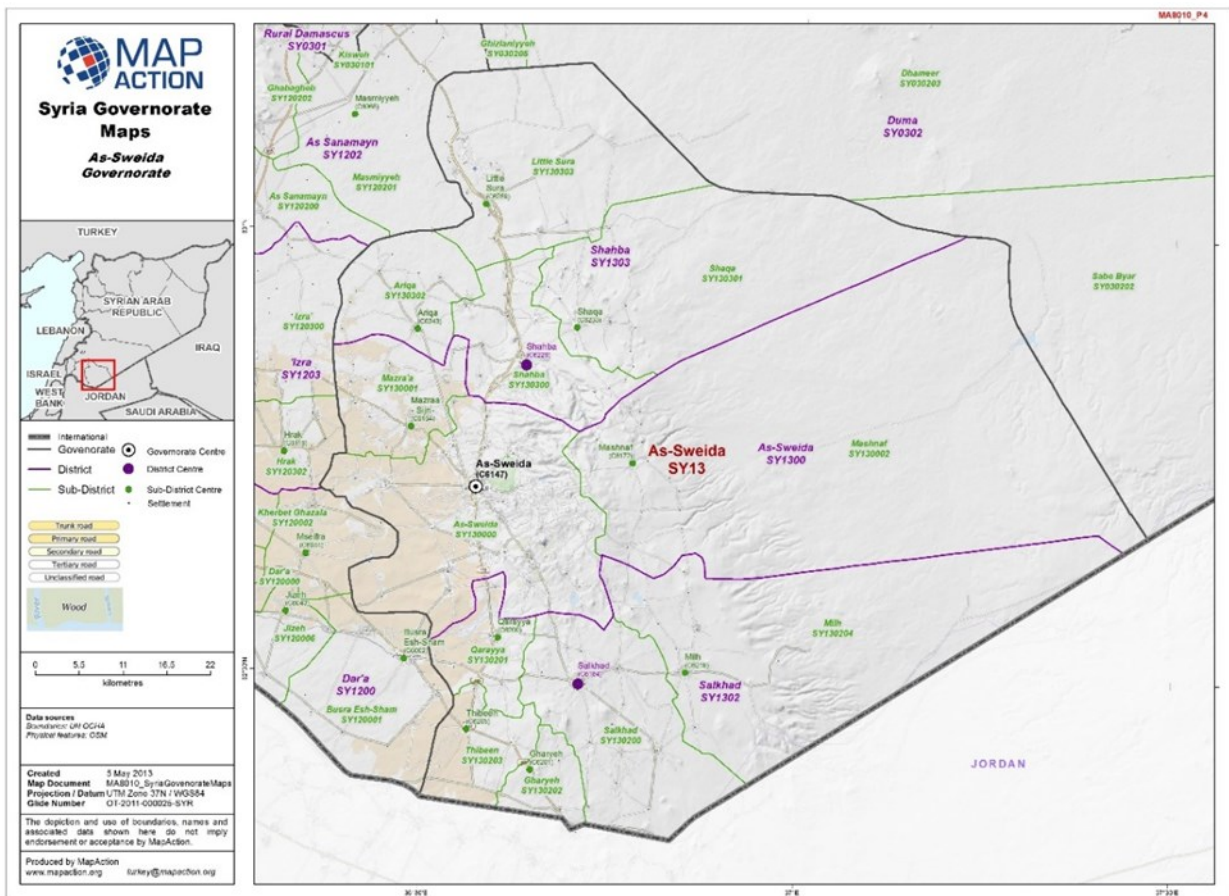
<sup>1330</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1331</sup> UNOCHA, Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022, [url](#), 10 May 2023

<sup>1332</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2023), 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2023), 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2023), 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2023), 9 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2023), 17 August 2023, [url](#)



## 2.14. Sweida governorate



Map 19: © MapAction, Sweida governorate<sup>1333</sup>

### 2.14.1. General description of the governorate

Sweida (Suwayda) governorate is located in the southernmost corner of Syria.<sup>1334</sup> It shares internal borders with the governorates of Rural Damascus to the north and north-east and Dar'a to the west as well as an international border with Jordan to its south.<sup>1335</sup> The governorate comprises three administrative districts: as-Sweida, Shahba, and Salkhad.<sup>1336</sup> A December 2022 UNOCHA report estimated the population of Sweida governorate to be 379 223.<sup>1337</sup>

<sup>1333</sup> MapAction, Sweida Governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1334</sup> Al Shami, I., Insight into As-Suwayda's Position in the Syrian Situation, TWI, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1335</sup> UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>1336</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 134

<sup>1337</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33





The residents of Sweida governorate are predominantly Druze.<sup>1338</sup> Further information on the governorate's religious composition, as well as information on its societal structure and the prevalence of armed gangs and crime, including drug trafficking, can be found in an earlier issue of this report: EUAA COI report: [Syria - Security situation \(September 2022\)](#), section 2.14.1.

## 2.14.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Sweida remained formally under GoS control<sup>1339</sup> and GoS security forces remained widely present in the governorate.<sup>1340</sup> However, the governorate, which largely escaped fighting during the conflict years, enjoys semi-autonomous rule where responsibility for security largely lies with Druze militiamen known as 'Men of Dignity' (*Rijal al-Karameh*).<sup>1341</sup> The GoS supported several loyal militia groups, although these acted independently.<sup>1342</sup> Further background information on the governorate can be found in an earlier issue of this report: EUAA COI report: [Syria - Security situation \(September 2022\)](#), section 2.14.2.

Sites operated by the GoS, its allies, and pro-GoS militias were located in the western half of the governorate, with concentrations around Sweida city and along the governorate's western border with Dar'a.<sup>1343</sup> The presence of the 15<sup>th</sup> division of the First Corps was concentrated in Sweida governorate, where its troops were deployed in a number of sites in the countryside.<sup>1344</sup> The Russian-backed Fifth Corps was active in the governorate through its Eighth Brigade,<sup>1345</sup> as was the elite Fourth Armoured Division of the SAA.<sup>1346</sup> The NDF conducted patrols in the governorate.<sup>1347</sup> While the GoS was previously reported to have 'fueled' the Military Intelligence Directorate to conduct surveillance in the governorate,<sup>1348</sup> in September 2022 it reportedly transferred the security file for Sweida to Hussam Louka, who heads the General Intelligence Directorate.<sup>1349</sup>

<sup>1338</sup> Makki, D., After deadly unrest in Sweida, Syria asks: Is there more to come?, MEE, 10 December 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, At least 17 dead in rare clashes in Syria's Sweida, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1339</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022 [Map], January 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria [Map], as of 2 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1340</sup> Omran Center for Strategic Studies, The Security Scene in Sweida: Context and Expected Outcomes, 26 August 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1341</sup> Makki, D., After deadly unrest in Sweida, Syria asks: Is there more to come?, MEE, 10 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1342</sup> Omran Center for Strategic Studies, The Security Scene in Sweida: Context and Expected Outcomes, 26 August 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1343</sup> Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to Sweida and July 2023.

<sup>1344</sup> NPA, Government forces withdraw from checkpoints in Syria's Suwayda, 8 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1345</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 04 April 2023, 4 April 2023, [url](#); Al Shami, I., Insight into As-Suwayda's Position in the Syrian Situation, TWI, 12 October 2022, [url](#); HLP Syria, Raids Target Displaced Bedouin Communities in Daraa and Suweida, 2 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1346</sup> TWI, To Ease Syria's Energy Crisis, Assad Must Return to the Negotiating Table, 22 December 2022, [url](#); NPA, Locals say government exploits insecurity in Suwayda for increased control, 31 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1347</sup> SOHR, By force | Gunmen free a detainee at prisons of National Defence Forces in Al-Suwaydaa, 19 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1348</sup> Omran Center for Strategic Studies, The Security Scene in Sweida: Context and Expected Outcomes, 26 August 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1349</sup> Syria Direct, Is Damascus reaping the fruits of local factions' campaign against military security-linked 'gangs' in Suwayda?, 13 October 2022, [url](#)



A number of Russian and Iranian sites were clustered in the governorate's centre and west.<sup>1350</sup> Iranian-backed factions had a strong presence in the governorate and were 'heavily involved' in cross-border Captagon trade. The Sweida Military Security branch, though formally affiliated with Syria's Russian-backed Military Intelligence Directorate, was reportedly under Iranian influence.<sup>1351</sup>

Multiple local forces were active in the governorate. According to Syrian writer and activist Ishtar Al Shami,<sup>1352</sup> some were tied to the GoS while others were opposed to it.<sup>1353</sup> Meanwhile, according to Rayan Maarouf, director of the local Suwayda 24 network, the local factions 'maintain channels of communication' with the GoS and its security services, although these channels 'differ from one military group to another'.<sup>1354</sup> These factions have clashed with each other on many occasions,<sup>1355</sup> including in August 2022 when local factions mobilised against the Al-Fahd Forces, a militia group reportedly backed by the Military Intelligence Directorate.<sup>1356</sup> As of October 2022, major local factions in Sweida governorate included the following:

- Men of Dignity Movement (*Rijal al-Karameh*),<sup>1357</sup> largely seen as the faction 'closest' to Sweida's residents.<sup>1358</sup> It declared that its operations aimed to 'pursue the gangs trafficking drugs and kidnapping and extorting people, especially those affiliated with military security',<sup>1359</sup>
- Sheikhs of Dignity Forces (a GoS opposition faction);
- NDF (a pro-GoS militia with close links to Iran and the Military Intelligence Directorate);
- Ahrar Jabal al-Arab Gathering (opposed to GoS);
- As-Suwayda Popular Resistance (the pro-GoS faction with the closest links to Iran and groups tied to the Military Intelligence Directorate);
- Al-Fahd Forces;
- Al-Fajr Forces (a pro-GoS faction with close links to Iran and Military Intelligence, known for drug trafficking and responsible for a number of killings).<sup>1360</sup>

### 2.14.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

The situation in Sweida governorate has been characterized as unstable and chaotic,<sup>1361</sup> with insecurity prevailing.<sup>1362</sup> The UN Secretary-General noted that as of late summer and autumn

<sup>1350</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria - mid 2023 [Map], 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1351</sup> Al Shami, I., Insight into As-Suwayda's Position in the Syrian Situation, TWI, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1352</sup> TWI, Ishtar Al Shami, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1353</sup> Al Shami, I., Insight into As-Suwayda's Position in the Syrian Situation, TWI, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1354</sup> Syria Direct, Suwayda factions: Uprooting 'the gangs' or consolidating power?, 13 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1355</sup> Al Shami, I., Insight into As-Suwayda's Position in the Syrian Situation, TWI, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1356</sup> Syria Direct, Suwayda factions: Uprooting 'the gangs' or consolidating power?, 13 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1357</sup> Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1358</sup> Al Shami, I., Insight into As-Suwayda's Position in the Syrian Situation [Table], TWI, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1359</sup> Syria Direct, Suwayda factions: Uprooting 'the gangs' or consolidating power?, 13 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1360</sup> Al Shami, I., Insight into As-Suwayda's Position in the Syrian Situation [Table], TWI, 12 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1361</sup> NPA, Locals say government exploits insecurity in Suwayda for increased control, 31 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1362</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 23



2022, the southwestern governorates of Sweida, Dar'a and Quneitra continued to witness security incidents such as IED attacks, targeted killings, abductions, exchanges of fire<sup>1363</sup> and limited clashes.<sup>1364</sup>

#### *Tensions between local residents/forces and the GoS*

On 4 December 2022, following several months of daily protests,<sup>1365</sup> dozens of protesters decrying deteriorating living conditions stormed and ransacked the office of the governor in Sweida city.<sup>1366</sup> According to the Ministry of Interior, protesters also attempted to seize the city's police headquarters. One policeman<sup>1367</sup> and one protester were killed in the ensuing clashes<sup>1368</sup> during which security forces responded with gunfire.<sup>1369</sup> This event was followed by large-scale security deployment in the area.<sup>1370</sup> In August 2023, large scale anti-GoS protests over the deterioration of living conditions took place in Sweida.<sup>1371</sup> The GoS reportedly refrained from cracking down on the demonstrations.<sup>1372</sup> The protests were ongoing at the time of finalising this report.

Tensions in July 2023 in the context of civilians being arrested by the security forces prompted residents<sup>1373</sup> and armed group members<sup>1374</sup> to block roads and detain members of GoS forces in at least two instances.

#### *Criminal gang activities, including kidnapping and killings*

Syrian Association for Citizen's Dignity, an association formed by a group of displaced people from Syria, noted an increase in kidnappings by pro-GoS militias and gangs in the governorate.<sup>1375</sup> Kidnappings of civilians were reported on the Damascus–Sweida road, frequently occurring around the al-Masmiyah security checkpoint,<sup>1376</sup> but also between al-Shahba city and as-Sweida.<sup>1377</sup> Several civilians were kidnapped inside the city of as-

<sup>1363</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/956], 15 December 2022, [url](#), para. 8; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>1364</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/775], 19 October 2022, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>1365</sup> Ezzi, M., What's New About the Sweida Protests in Southern Syria?, EUI MEDirections Blog [Blog], 12 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1366</sup> Reuters, Protesters storm governor's office in southern Syrian city, two killed in clashes, 5 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1367</sup> Arab Weekly (The), Syrian regime cracks down on protests in Druze-majority Sweida, 5 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1368</sup> Ezzi, M., What's New About the Sweida Protests in Southern Syria?, EUI MEDirections Blog [Blog], 12 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1369</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/52/69, 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 49

<sup>1370</sup> Al Jazeera, Rare anti-government protest turns deadly in southern Syria, 4 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1371</sup> Al Monitor, New protest in regime-held south Syria over living conditions, 21 August 2023, [url](#); Al Monitor, Will Syria's Assad resort to violence as Suwayda protests grow?, 31 August 2023, [url](#)

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<sup>1373</sup> MEMO, Residents detain regime officers in Syria's As-Suwayda, 18 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1374</sup> SOHR, Non-compliance by the regime | Armed gang kidnaps regime officer on road between Damascus and Al-Suwaydaa, 25 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1375</sup> SADC, Kidnappings, murders, repression: Al-Suwayda reveals the price of normalising Assad, 24 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1376</sup> NPA, Locals say government exploits insecurity in Suwayda for increased control, 31 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1377</sup> SOHR, Al-Suwaydaa | Kidnapping gang demands huge ransoms and threatens to execute civilian, 5 June 2023, [url](#)



Sweida.<sup>1378</sup> There were also ‘retaliatory, tit-for-tat kidnappings’ between rivalling gangs in Sweida and Dar’a that occasionally took a sectarian character.<sup>1379</sup>

Moreover, the SOHR in January 2023 reported a rise in armed attacks and assassinations<sup>1380</sup> and recorded 19 murders between January and mid-July 2023.<sup>1381</sup> Unidentified gunmen targeted civilians as part of robberies<sup>1382</sup> or for unknown reasons<sup>1383</sup> while there were reports of killings of persons affiliated with the GoS forces<sup>1384</sup> or factions linked to the Military Intelligence Directorate.<sup>1385</sup> Several persons were killed in armed disputes between individuals<sup>1386</sup> or rural families<sup>1387</sup> and altercations with a drug dealer<sup>1388</sup> or Bedouin tribesmen.<sup>1389</sup> In March 2023, clashes erupted between local armed men (supported by NDF militiamen) and Bedouin gunmen after the latter had attacked farmers in Al-Qarya village in the Sweida countryside.<sup>1390</sup>

Sweeping anti-smuggling raids were carried out by the Eighth Brigade in March 2023 in western Sweida and eastern Dar’a, an area known for drug and weapons smuggling, with several arrests reported.<sup>1391</sup> In May 2023, an alleged Jordanian military aircraft targeted the house of a prominent drug smuggler with links to Lebanese Hezbollah in the eastern Sweida countryside,<sup>1392</sup> killing eight civilians.<sup>1393</sup>

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<sup>1378</sup> SOHR, Amid gathering | Gunmen kidnap a young man in Al-Suwaydaa province, 12 June 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Kidnapping for ransoms | Unidentified men kidnap civilian in Al-Suwaydaa, 14 December 2022, [url](#); SOHR, In 24 hours | Two civilians kidnapped by unidentified gunmen in Al-Suwaydaa, 1 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1379</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 06 November 2022, 6 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1380</sup> SOHR, Security chaos | Armed gang kidnaps three civilians in regime-held areas Al-Suwaydaa, 16 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1381</sup> SOHR, New murder | Young man shot dead in western Al-Suwaydaa, 12 July 2023, [url](#)

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<sup>1383</sup> SOHR, New murder crime in regime-held areas | Unknown person kills shepherd in western countryside of Al-Suwaydaa, 4 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1384</sup> SOHR, Corruption cases | Regime soldier killed after members and commanders were exposed in Al-Suwaydaa, 7 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1385</sup> SOHR, New assassination | Unidentified gunman shot head of armed group working for “Military Intelligence” in Al-Suwaydaa, 7 March 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Latest development of Al-Suwaydaa clashes | Falhout prominent member found dead, bringing death toll of Falhout fighters to seven, 2 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1386</sup> SOHR, New murder | Young man shot dead in western Al-Suwaydaa, 12 July 2023, [url](#); SOHR, New murder | Man in his fifties shot dead in Al-Suwaydaa, 7 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1387</sup> SOHR, Tribal infighting | One killed and another injured in armed clashes between two families in Al-Suwaydaa, 25 May 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Family infighting | Three people killed and injured in Al-Suwaydaa countryside, 2 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1388</sup> SOHR, For unknown reasons | Drug dealer kills young man in eastern Al-Suwaydaa countryside, 20 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1389</sup> SOHR, Tribal clashes | Two civilians killed in Al-Suwaydaa countryside, 8 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1390</sup> SOHR, Following armed attack | National Defence forces join local gunmen in combatting Bedouins, 31 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1391</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 04 April 2023, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1392</sup> SOHR, Accompanied by his wife and six children | Most prominent drug dealer killed by airstrike at Syrian-Jordanian border east of Al-Suwaydaa, 8 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1393</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#), Annex I, p. 19



### (b) Security incidents

During the reporting period (1 August 2022 – 28 July 2023), there were 80 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Sweida governorate, of which 21 were coded as battles, 20 as explosions/remote violence and 39 as incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>1394</sup> Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in the district of Sweida (see [Figure 31](#)).

According to ACLED, unidentified armed groups were involved (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’) in around 76 % of all security incidents, mostly in incidents coded as violence against civilians. GoS forces and affiliated armed groups were involved in around 24 % of all security incidents, mainly in security incidents coded ‘battles’. Israeli forces were involved in around 8 % of all security incidents, the vast majority being coded as explosions/remote violence.

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Sweida	13	13	29
Salkhad	5	3	2
Shahba	3	4	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>39</b>

**Figure 31. Security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Sweida governorate between 1 August 2022 and 28 July 2023. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data**

### (c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR documented 13 civilian fatalities in 2021<sup>1395</sup> and 32 in 2022.<sup>1396</sup> Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 24 civilian fatalities in Sweida governorate (12 civilian fatalities were documented between August – December 2022 and 12 between January – July 2023).<sup>1397</sup>

<sup>1394</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (4 August 2023), [url](#)

<sup>1395</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1396</sup> SNHR, 1,057 Civilians, Including 251 Children, 94 Women, and 133 Victims Who Died due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria, in 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1397</sup> Monthly civilian fatalities figures for August 2022 – June 2023 shared by SNHR with EUAA; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Four Woman, and Three Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in July 2023 in Syria, 1 August 2023, [url](#), p. 8



#### (d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to the UN Secretary-General, Sweida was one of the governorates with the highest percentages of communities affected by explosive contamination.<sup>1398</sup> During the first quarter of 2023, the NPA reported two deaths from remnants of war in the governorate.<sup>1399</sup> The reference period witnessed civilian deaths from remnants of war in the northern Sweida countryside.<sup>1400</sup>

#### (e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of May 2022 there were 70 931 IDPs in Sweida governorate.<sup>1401</sup> Over the year 2022, there were approximately 360 IDP movements out of Sweida and 2 560 IDP movements into the governorate as well as about 440 movements within the governorate.<sup>1402</sup> During the first five months of 2023, there were 120 recorded IDP movements into Sweida, nearly all them occurring in February (44) and May (74), while UNOCHA did not record any IDP movements out of Sweida or within the governorate.<sup>1403</sup> However, following eviction raids by GoS forces and allied militias on encampments of displaced Bedouins in the area between Sama al-Henaidat (western Sweida) and al-Mliha (eastern Dar'a) in late April 2023, many Bedouin families were displaced and moved into the Badia desert area of eastern Sweida.<sup>1404</sup> Further information on reasons behind displacements could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

As regards returns, in 2022 UNOCHA recorded approximately 690 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from Sweida to other governorates and about 70 IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Sweida as well as about 170 movements within Sweida.<sup>1405</sup> During the first five months of 2023, UNOCHA recorded 21 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from other governorates into Sweida (all of them occurring in April) and 313 IDP returnee movements from Sweida to other governorates, most of which occurred in March (168) and May (113). In addition, there were 21 recorded returnee movements within the governorate.<sup>1406</sup> No information on the reasons behind these return movements was provided.

<sup>1398</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#), para. 33

<sup>1399</sup> NPA, Remnants of war kill 331 people in 1st quarter of 2023 in Syria, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1400</sup> SOHR, Two separate incidents | Explosions of old landmines in regime-controlled areas kill five young men, 26 February 2023, [url](#); SOHR, Old ordnance | Landmine explosion kills young man in Al-Suwaydaa desert, 2 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1401</sup> UNOCHA, 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>1402</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1403</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2023, 10 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2023, 28 July 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2023, 7 August 2023, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2023, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1404</sup> HLP Syria, Raids Target Displaced Bedouin Communities in Daraa and Suweida, 2 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1405</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2022 (As of 31 December 2022), 10 May 2023, [url](#)

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More recent data on conflict-induced displacement and spontaneous returns by UNOCHA was not available at the time of writing this report. UN Security Council reports covering the first five months of 2023 did not contain any further information on displacement from or returns to Sweida governorate.<sup>1407</sup> No further information on conflict-induced displacement or returns for 2023 could be found within the constraints of the research.

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<sup>1407</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/464], 22 June 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/284], 20 April 2023, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2023/127], 21 February 2023, [url](#)





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## Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The research should focus on the period between August 2022 – August 2023. Background information and older trends should be kept very brief and crosslinked as much as possible with previous reports published: [Security situation \(September 2022\)](#) and [Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

Research should cover the following:

### □ **General description of the security situation**

#### ▪ **Overview of the conflict**

- Political developments
- International involvement
- Recent security trends and armed confrontations during the reference period

#### ▪ **Actors in conflict**

- Brief description and capacity
- Presence and areas of control/influence of the different actors
- Type of weapons and tactics used

#### ▪ **Impact of violence on the civilian population**

- Tactics and weapons used
- Security incidents
- Civilian casualties
- Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war
- Conflict-induced displacement and return

### □ **Security situation and conflict impact on civilians by governorates**

The below structure is to be replicated for each governorate.

- General description of the governorate
- Actors involved in the conflict during the reference period
- Recent security trends
- Impact of the security situation on the civilian population
  - Security incidents
  - Civilian casualties
  - Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war
  - Conflict-induced displacement and return



