

Syria

Security and socio-economic situation in the government-controlled areas



Ministry of Immigration
and Integration

The Danish
Immigration Service

This brief report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects or the issues addressed in the brief report. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The brief report at hand does not include any policy recommendations or analysis. The information in the brief report does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service.

Furthermore, this brief report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

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The Danish Immigration Service
Farimagvej 51A
4700 Næstved
Denmark

Executive summary

In September 2020, most of Syria was under the control of the Government of Syria (GoS) after nine years of conflict. Although there continued to be an armed conflict in Syria, especially in the north-west, the lines of control had remained more or less stable since March 2020.

In GoS-controlled South and Central Syria, frequent attacks against GoS officials and against former opposition fighters took place in spring 2020. Also, increased infighting between GoS-forces, GoS-backed forces and Russian-backed forces was reported; and there were widespread protests calling for the fall of the Assad government. Moreover, Israeli airstrikes had become common by summer 2020.

In 2020, there were reports of human rights violations and abuses in South and Central Syria, including reports of detainees dying while in GoS custody, without their families being given information about the circumstances of their death.

The Islamic State (IS) increased its activities in Syria in the beginning of 2020; while the period between April and June saw a decrease in IS attacks. In September 2020, however, it was reported that IS operations against GoS and pro-Iranian targets had intensified in Badiya desert in central and eastern Syria.

In 2020, several traffic hubs opened, e.g. Aleppo International Airport and the M5 highway connecting Damascus and Aleppo. However, travel to and within GoS-controlled areas was once again curtailed due to COVID-19.

The Syrian economy has been under pressure throughout 2020. Looking at the official exchange rate, the currency has lost almost two-thirds of its value vis-à-vis the US dollar. Food prices have gone up more rapidly than wages, which has made it more difficult to sustain a living. In addition, it was estimated that up to half of the population was unemployed.

About half of the public hospitals and public health clinics in all of Syria were fully functioning. There was a shortage of health workers and medicine, and healthcare facilities have been targets of armed attacks. Recent months have seen a surge in COVID-19 cases.

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Introduction

When the uprising against the Government of Syria (GoS) broke out in 2011, Syria had a population of around 22 million people. Today, around 6.8 million were internally displaced, 6.6 million were refugees,¹ and 380,000 to 580,000 have been killed.² More than 80% of the Syrian population live below the poverty line.³

The aim of this brief report is to provide an overview of the security situation as well as the socio-economic situation in the GoS-controlled areas in Syria in 2020. Therefore, north-western⁴ and north-eastern Syria, where the major military operations and armed conflicts recently have taken place,⁵ are outside the scope of this brief report. The reference period is 1 January to 17 September 2020.

The brief report was written in accordance with the EASO COI Report Methodology.⁶

The brief report is divided into three parts. The first part provides a general outline of the security situation in the GoS-controlled parts of Syria, followed by an outline of the security situation in the governorates of Suweida, Daraa, Homs, Hama, Latakia, Tartous and Quneitra. The brief report does not look into the security situation in Damascus and Rural Damascus, as the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) is publishing a separate report on the security situation in the Syrian capital and its surroundings.

The second part of the brief report looks into the freedom of movement between governorates in GoS-controlled areas of Syria, as well as the access to Syria from abroad. The third part deals with the socio-economic situation.

Finally, attention should be called to the volatile situation in Syria and the fact that the information provided may quickly become outdated. Therefore, the issues addressed in this brief report should be monitored periodically and brought up to date accordingly.

The research and editing of this brief report was finalised on 1 October 2020.

The brief report can be accessed from the website of DIS, <http://www.newtodenmark.dk>, and is thus available to all stakeholders in the refugee status determination process as well as to the general public.

¹ New York Times (The), *At Syrian Aid Summit, a Struggle to Raise Enough to End "Downward Spiral"*, 30 June 2020, [url](#)

² BBC, *Syria conflict: 'Flagrant' war crimes committed in Idlib battle, UN says*, 18 August 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), *At Syrian Aid Summit, a Struggle to Raise Enough to End "Downward Spiral"*, 30 June 2020, [url](#); SOHR, *Nearly 585,000 people have been killed since the beginning of the Syrian Revolution*, 4 January 2020, [url](#); Political Geography Now, *Syrian Civil War Map & Timeline: New Ceasefire Lines in Northwest – March 2020*, 22 March 2020, [url](#)

³ New York Times (The), *At Syrian Aid Summit, a Struggle to Raise Enough to End "Downward Spiral"*, 30 June 2020, [url](#); UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 – Humanitarian Update No. 17*, 1 September 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁴ I.e. Idlib, northern Hama, north-eastern Latakia and western Aleppo, where military violence escalated after June 2019. Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), p. 10

⁵ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), p. 8

⁶ EASO, *EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology*, June 2019, [url](#)

Abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
IS	Islamic State
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
GoS	Government of Syria
SHRC	Syrian Human Rights Committee
SYP	Syrian Pound
USD	US Dollar
VDC	Violations Documentation Center in Syria
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

1. The security situation

1.1. The general security situation

After nine years of conflict, most of Syria is now under Government of Syria (GoS) control.⁷ By the end of 2019, the GoS was in control of around 62% of the Syrian territory. The remaining parts of the country were either under the control of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) or armed opposition groups, such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the Syrian National Army (SNA)⁸, controlling 26% and 12% of the country respectively.⁹

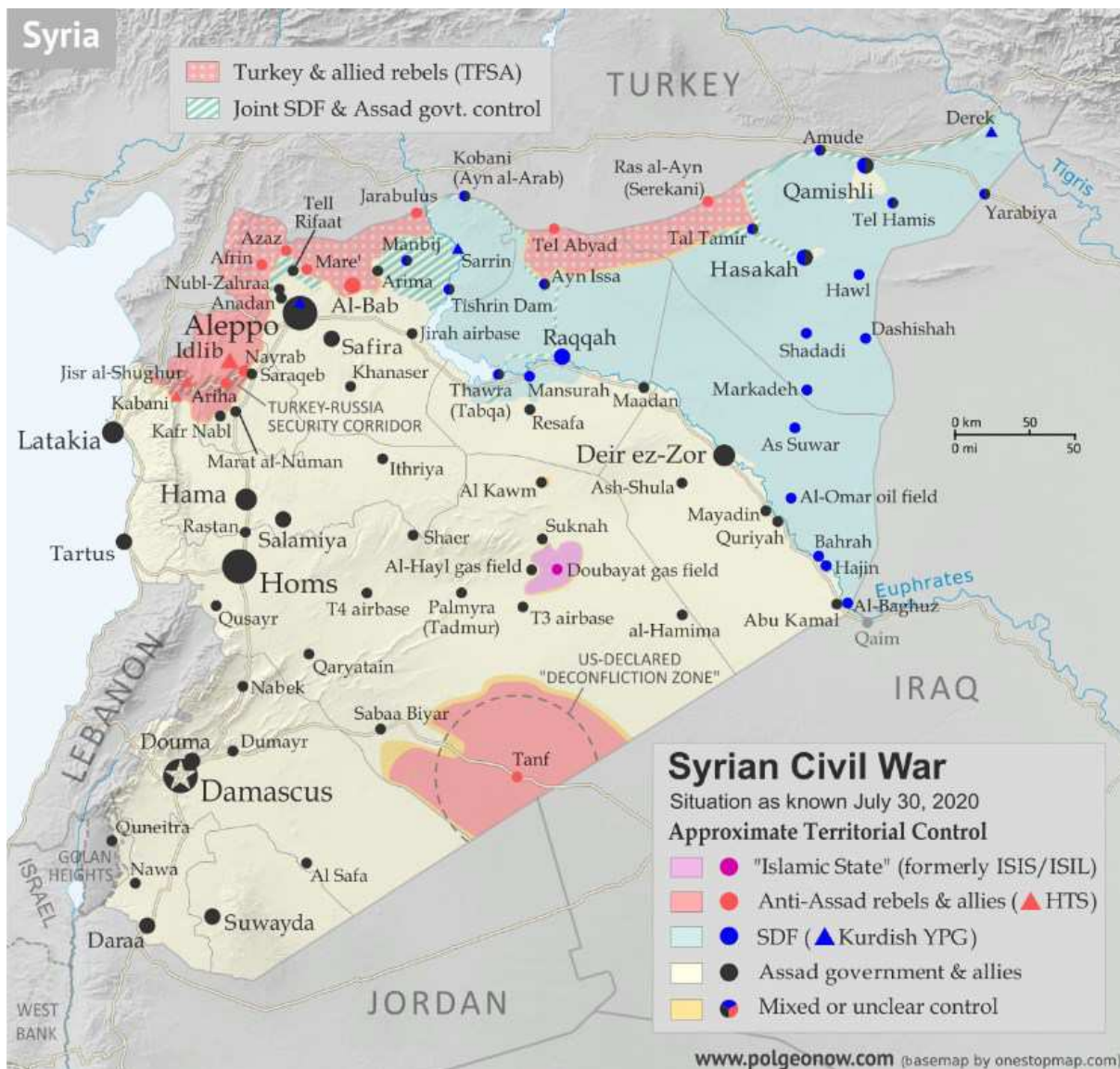


Figure 1: Syria Control Map as of 30 July 2020¹⁰

⁷ UK, Home Office, *Syria: the Syrian Civil War*, August 2020, [url](#), p. 11

⁸ Syrian National Army is an alliance of armed opposition groups that are backed by Turkey. EASO, *Syria – Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), pp. 54-58

⁹ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8, 9, 11

¹⁰ Political Geography Now, *Syria Control Map & Report: Frontlines Stable – July 2020*, 31 July 2020, [url](#)

There continues to be an armed conflict in Syria.¹¹ However, since March 2020, there has been a kind of military stalemate, and fighting between the warring parties has not led to lasting territorial change.¹² An exception is the area controlled by the Islamic State (IS), which has been reduced to include only the area around Doubayat gas field.¹³

In southern Syria, there was an increase in the use of improvised explosive devices (IED) and attacks against GoS officials and former opposition fighters, with most attacks occurring in Daraa governorate.¹⁴ From January to July 2020, there were at least 101 reported attacks against GoS officials or former opposition fighters. These attacks continued during the summer with an increase throughout August and a decrease in the beginning of September.¹⁵

In April and May, there were reports of tensions and escalating conflicts between GoS forces and armed groups that had reconciled with the GoS.¹⁶ Local cells of former opposition fighters were reportedly conducting attacks by small arms and explosive devices against GoS forces; and GoS forces were shelling towns and conducting seek-and-arrest operations to find individuals with former links to opposition armed groups.¹⁷

In July 2020, the US NGO The Carter Center likewise reported on increased infighting between GoS forces, GoS-supported and Russian-supported militias in southern and central Syria; tensions between various pro-GoS factions had reportedly increased the past months and had occasionally erupted into armed clashes.¹⁸

Israeli airstrikes targeting GoS forces and Iranian-backed militias, like Hezbollah, had become common by summer 2020.¹⁹ As of the beginning of September, Israel had reportedly conducted 49 airstrikes in South and Central Syria since 1 January 2020.²⁰

Additionally, anti-GoS protests reportedly increased in the south-western part of the country in 2020.²¹

¹¹ UK, Home Office, *Syria: the Syrian Civil War*, August 2020, [url](#), pp. 9, 10

¹² New York Times (The), *At Syrian Aid Summit, a Struggle to Raise Enough to End "Downward Spiral"*, 30 June 2020, [url](#); Political Geography Now, *Syria Control Map & Report: Frontlines Stable – July 2020*, 31 July 2020, [url](#)

¹³ Political Geography Now, *Syria Control Map & Report: Frontlines Stable – July 2020*, 31 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴ Carter Center (The), *Analyzing Shifts in Territorial Control within Syria Offers Glimpse of Future Challenges*, May 13, 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 27 July – 2 August 2020, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁵ UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018) and 2504 (2020); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/576]*, 24 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5; UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/813]*, 20 August 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 1 June – 7 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 3-4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 6 July – 12 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 4-5; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 10 August – 16 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 3; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 17 August – 23 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 3; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 24 August – 30 August 2020, [url](#), p. 3; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 31 August – 6 September 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4

¹⁶ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), p. 8; UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018) and 2504 (2020); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/327]*, 23 April 2020, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁷ UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018) and 2504 (2020); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/327]*, 23 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-4

¹⁸ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 6 July – 12 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4

¹⁹ Political Geography Now, *Syria Control Map & Report: Frontlines Stable – July 2020*, 31 July 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 22 June – 28 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 20 July – 26 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 3 August – 9 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4

²⁰ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 31 August – 6 September 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²¹ Carter Center (The), *Analyzing Shifts in Territorial Control within Syria Offers Glimpse of Future Challenges*, May 13, 2020, [url](#), p. 4; UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393*

Throughout June 2020, protests were reported in southern Syria²² and across the country,²³ although the number of protests reportedly decreased in the south around the beginning of July.²⁴ In August 2020, however, the UN reported of continued popular unrest and tensions in the south-west, where protests remained at a high level and included protests against arbitrary detention.²⁵

Meanwhile, GoS deployed reinforcements, increasing their presence across the south-western region.²⁶

Civilians in southern and central Syria continued to face violence in 2020. From 1 January to 9 May 2020, 159 attacks against civilians were recorded across South and Central Syria.²⁷

In spring and summer 2020, there were continued reports of civilians being detained in GoS-controlled areas, without them or their families being given reasons for their detention.²⁸ The UN reported on continued cases of detainees dying while in GoS custody and raised concerns of enforced disappearance, as relatives of those detained by the authorities or non-state armed groups were not informed of, or were denied information of, what had happened to their family members.²⁹

IS increased its activities in Syria in the beginning of 2020, while the period between April and June saw a decrease in IS attacks.³⁰ In September, however, it was reported that IS operations against GoS and pro-Iranian targets had intensified in the Badiya desert³¹ in central Syria, causing further losses among those forces. IS has reportedly been launching attacks on a weekly basis, in spite of the military operation against IS launched by Russia on 25 August 2020. According to one source quoted by news outlet Al-Monitor, IS still has a last enclave in the desert, and “IS has turned Badiya into a black hole that swallows [GoS] soldiers.”³²

(2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018) and 2504 (2020); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/576], 24 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 15 June – 21 June 2020, [url](#), p. 4;

²² Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 1 June – 7 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 8 June – 14 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 3-4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 15 June – 21 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4

²³ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 22 June – 28 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

²⁴ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 29 June – 5 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 3

²⁵ UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020)*; Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/813], 20 August 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²⁶ UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018) and 2504 (2020)*; Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/576], 24 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 10 August – 16 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 3; UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020)*; Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/813], 20 August 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²⁷ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 4 May – 10 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²⁸ UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018) and 2504 (2020)*; Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/327], 23 April 2020, [url](#), p. 5

²⁹ UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018) and 2504 (2020)*; Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/327], 23 April 2020, [url](#), p. 5; UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018) and 2504 (2020)*; Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/576], 24 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5; UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020)*; Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/813], 20 August 2020, [url](#), p. 6

³⁰ During the first three months of 2020, IS launched attacks in Homs, Aleppo, Quneitra and Daraa and used smuggling networks and clandestine cells in Suweida and Daraa to conduct sporadic attacks and move personnel and material. Denmark, DIS, *Islamic State in Syria*, 29 June 2020, [url](#)

³¹ “[Badiya desert] extends to the countryside of Suwayda, the countryside of Damascus, the countryside of Hama and Homs in the west, and reaches the Syrian-Iraqi border in the east. It also extends to the Syrian-Jordanian border in the south and the outskirts of the provinces of Raqqqa and Deir ez-Zor in the north.” Al-Monitor, *How the Islamic State found a haven in Syrian desert*, 15 September 2020, [url](#)

³² Al-Monitor, *How the Islamic State found a haven in Syrian desert*, 15 September 2020, [url](#)

1.2. The security situation in the GoS-controlled governorates

This section will look at the security situation in GoS-controlled areas of Syria. Information will not be provided about Damascus and Rural Damascus as DIS is publishing a separate report on the security situation in the capital and its surroundings; nor will the governorates of Aleppo, Raqqa, Hasakah and Idlib be included as large parts of these governorates are not under GoS control.

1.2.1. Suweida

The governorate of Suweida is mainly inhabited by the religious minority the Druze who has remained neutral throughout the conflict or even been “broadly aligned” with the GoS.³³ Suweida has mostly been shielded from large-scale armed conflicts since the beginning of the civil war.³⁴

In the period from 1 January to 1 September 2020, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)³⁵ recorded 11 security incidents³⁶ in Suweida: two incidents of explosions/remote violence; three battles, e.g. clashes between an unknown local armed group and GoS forces; and six incidents of violence against civilians.³⁷

Anti-GoS protests have been widely reported in Suweida in 2020. Better living conditions, overthrow of the GoS, withdrawal of Iranian and Russian forces and release of political prisoners were among the demands of the protesters.³⁸ There were reports of GoS security forces responding violently to the protests and arresting protesters in June 2020.³⁹ Protests continued in Suweida throughout June, however, and from Suweida, they spread to other parts of southern Syria.⁴⁰

Furthermore, there were reports of more than 20 abductions and detentions in Suweida by unidentified actors in February 2020. Some young people were ostensibly arrested on suspicion of links with Israel and

³³ ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: May 13 – 26, 2020*, 30 May 2020, [url](#); Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), p. 17

³⁴ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), p. 17

³⁵ ACLED describes itself as “a disaggregated data collection, analysis, and crisis mapping project. ACLED collects the dates, actors, locations, fatalities, and types of all reported political violence and protest events across Africa, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Southeastern and Eastern Europe and the Balkans.” ACLED, *About ACLED*, n.d., [url](#)

³⁶ ACLED uses the term ‘event’ when registering these incidents. ‘Security incident’ is used here in accordance with the way ACLED data is referred to in the EASO report: EASO, *Syria – Security Situation*, May 2020, [url](#)

³⁷ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, n.d., [url](#)

³⁸ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), p. 18; ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: May 13 – 26, 2020*, 30 May 2020, [url](#); ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, n.d., [url](#); ³⁸ ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: May 27 – June 9, 2020*, 11 June 2020, [url](#); HRW, *Syria: Protesters Describe Beatings, Arrests*, 28 June 2020, [url](#); AI, *Syria: Peaceful protesters detained in Sweida must be released immediately*, 24 June 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 1 June – 7 June 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 8 June – 14 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 15 June – 21 June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

³⁹ ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: June 10 – 23, 2020*, 25 June 2020, [url](#); HRW, *Syria: Protesters Describe Beatings, Arrests*, 28 June 2020, [url](#); AI, *Syria: Peaceful protesters detained in Sweida must be released immediately*, 24 June 2020, [url](#); UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020)*; *Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/813]*, 20 August 2020, [url](#), p. 22; ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁰ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 8 June – 14 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 22 June – 28 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4

hostility towards the GoS.⁴¹ In March 2020, it was reported that unidentified GoS forces had shot members of a local Druze militia in southern Suweida.⁴² Finally, Israeli airstrikes were reported in Suweida in 2020.⁴³

1.2.2. Daraa

In the period from 1 January to 1 September 2020, ACLED recorded 53 security incidents in Daraa: 22 battles; 12 incidents of explosions/remote violence; and 19 cases of violence against civilians.⁴⁴

The security situation in Daraa reportedly deteriorated in the period between June 2019 and March 2020, with indications of armed conflicts escalating between GoS forces and armed groups, and reports of attacks and abductions.⁴⁵ In March, heavy fighting between GoS forces and rebels was reported across Daraa.⁴⁶ On 8 May 2020, the UN Human Rights Office reported on 52 documented cases of ostensibly targeted killings in Daraa since the start of March 2020, which resulted in the death of 17 civilians.⁴⁷

Attacks against GoS officials, pro-GoS forces and former opposition fighters continued throughout the period from March to September 2020.⁴⁸ IS was behind some of these attacks.⁴⁹ Overall, attacks against GoS officials and former opposition fighters in Daraa have been common⁵⁰ and steadily increased⁵¹ since the GoS regained control of the whole governorate in August 2018.

⁴¹ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), p. 18

⁴² ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: March 18 – 31, 2020*, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

⁴³ Political Geography Now, *Syria Control Map & Report: Frontlines Stable – July 2020*, 31 July 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 22 June – 28 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4; ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: June 24 – July 6, 2020*, 9 July 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁵ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8, 17

⁴⁶ The fighting ended with some rebels being transported to rebel-held Idlib, while others stayed and reconciled with the GoS. Political Geography Now, *Syrian Civil War Map & Timeline: New Ceasefire Lines in Northwest – March 2020*, 22 March 2020, [url](#); Middle East Eye, *Syria Rebels transported to Idlib as heavy fighting in Daraa ends*, 4 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁷ OHCHR, *Syria: Bachelet warns of 'ticking time-bomb' as civilian killings mount*, 8 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, n.d., [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: February 19 – March 3, 2020*, 5 March 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: April 1 – 14, 2020*, 16 April 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: April 15 – 28, 2020*, 30 April 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 11 May – 17 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 3; ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: May 13 – 26, 2020*, 30 May 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: May 27 – June 9, 2020*, 11 June 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 1 June – 7 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 3-4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 15 June – 21 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 29 June – 5 July 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 6 July – 12 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 4-5; ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: July 7 – 21, 2020*, 23 July 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 20 July – 26 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 4-5; ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: July 22 – August 4, 2020*, 6 August 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 27 July – 2 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 3 August – 9 August 2020, [url](#), p. 4; UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/813]*, 20 August 2020, [url](#), p. 6; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 10 August – 16 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 17 August – 23 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 24 August – 30 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 3-4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 31 August – 6 September 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁹ ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: April 1 – 14, 2020*, 16 April 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: April 15 – 28, 2020*, 30 April 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: May 13 – 26, 2020*, 30 May 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: May 27 – June 9, 2020*, 11 June 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: July 22 – August 4, 2020*, 6 August 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁰ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 31 August – 6 September 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁵¹ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 10 August – 16 August 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 24 August – 30 August 2020, [url](#), p. 4

Israel also conducted a number of airstrikes in Daraa in 2020 targeting GoS and pro-GoS forces, including Iranian-backed militias.⁵² There were also reports of infighting between GoS forces, Russian-backed militias, and GoS-backed militias in Daraa in 2020.⁵³ The GoS has responded to attacks and security threats by deploying reinforcements to Daraa and conducting security operations in the governorate.⁵⁴

Violence against civilians was reported in Daraa in 2020. Throughout June, civilians reportedly continued to be victims of targeted violence, mostly perpetrated by unidentified actors.⁵⁵ In the first six months of 2020, violence against civilians in Daraa increased compared to 2019. From 1 January to 20 June 2020, there were 266 incidents in which civilians were targeted or harmed, while there were 145 incidents in the same period in 2019.⁵⁶

According to the Syrian NGO Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC), Daraa was among the three governorates in Syria with most people killed throughout February to August 2020.⁵⁷ The Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC), a human rights organisation based in London has documented 125 civilian deaths in Daraa from January to August 2020.⁵⁸

During 2020, protests were held in Daraa against the deteriorating economic conditions, with protesters calling for the overthrow of the GoS and demanding the release of political prisoners as well as the withdrawal of Iranian-backed militias.⁵⁹

1.2.3. Homs

In the period from 1 January to 1 September 2020, ACLED recorded five security incidents in Homs: one incident of violence against a civilian, referring to the finding of a girl's body; three incidents of explosions/remote violence, referring to a landmine explosion, rocket shelling by an unknown group, and

⁵² ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: February 5 – 18, 2020*, 21 February 2020, [url](#); Political Geography Now, *Syrian Civil War Map & Timeline: Assad Retakes Key Highway – February 2020*, 14 February 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: April 29 – May 12, 2020*, 14 May 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: May 13 – 26, 2020*, 30 May 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 31 August – 6 September 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁵³ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 22 June – 28 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 6 July – 12 July 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 17 August – 23 August 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁴ Political Geography Now, *Syria Control Map & Report: Frontlines Stable – July 2020*, 31 July 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 10 August – 16 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 3; ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁵ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, n.d., [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 1 June – 7 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 15 June – 21 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4-5; UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/813]*, 20 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 6, 22-23

⁵⁶ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 15 June – 21 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 4-5

⁵⁷ VDC, *Monthly Statistical Report on Casualties in Syria*, February 2020, [url](#), p. 5; VDC, *Monthly Statistical Report on Casualties in Syria*, March 2020, [url](#), p. 5; VDC, *Monthly Statistical Report on Casualties in Syria*, April 2020, [url](#), p. 5; VDC, *Monthly Statistical Report on Casualties in Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), p. 5; VDC, *Monthly Statistical Report on Casualties in Syria*, June 2020, [url](#), p. 5; Of all governorates in Syria, the largest number of deaths documented in July 2020 took place in Daraa. VDC, *Monthly Statistical Report on Casualties in Syria*, July 2020, [url](#), p. 5; VDC, *Monthly Statistical Report on Casualties in Syria*, August 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁵⁸ SHRC, *320 people killed in January 2020*, 1 February 2020, [url](#); SHRC, *SHRC documents 277 deaths in February*, 2 March 2020, [url](#); SHRC, *SHRC documents the killing of 161 people in March*, 2 April 2020, [url](#); SHRC, *SHRC documents the killing of 110 people in April*, 1 May 2020, [url](#); SHRC, *SHRC documents the killing of 90 people in May – 20*, 1 June 2020, [url](#); SHRC, *SHRC documents 174 people killed in June*, 1 July 2020, [url](#); SHRC, *110 people Killed in July*, 3 August 2020, [url](#); SHRC, *SHRC documents the killing of 115 people in August 20*, 1 September 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁹ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, n.d., [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: February 19 – March 3, 2020*, 5 March 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 1 June – 7 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 8 June – 14 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 3-4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 15 June – 21 June 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 22 June – 28 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4; ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: July 22 – August 4, 2020*, 6 August 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 31 August – 6 September 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 3

Israeli air raids targeting the local Hezbollah headquarters; and one battle, referring to Israeli air raids against a Hezbollah ammunition warehouse.⁶⁰

In 2020, there were a number of IS attacks against GoS forces and its allies in the governorate. Clashes between GoS forces and IS fighters resulted in a number of casualties on both sides. Hostilities between IS and GoS were concentrated in the Badiya desert region.⁶¹

Attacks against GoS positions by unidentified actors were likewise reported in Homs governorate in 2020.⁶² Finally, Israel has conducted a number of air raids in Homs in 2020, with the last incident taking place in September.⁶³

1.2.4. Hama

Not all of Hama is under GoS control as the northern part of the governorate is dominated by opposition groups (see figure 1). This section only deals with the security situation in the GoS-controlled parts of Hama.

In the period from 1 January to 1 September 2020, ACLED recorded eight security incidents in Hama governorate: six incidents of explosions/remote violence; one incident of violence against a civilian, referring to a civilian killed by a GoS fighter following a disagreement; and one battle, referring to a clash between GoS forces and unidentified gunmen. The explosions refer primarily to shelling of GoS positions by Turkish forces, one “explosion of unknown nature”, and one refers to GoS shelling of areas in Hama countryside, presumably outside of GoS-controlled areas and thus outside the scope of this brief report.⁶⁴

In June 2020, Israel conducted airstrikes against a GoS research centre as well as against GoS and Hezbollah positions in Hama.⁶⁵ Likewise in June, there were reports of IS attacks and GoS operations against IS in Hama governorate.⁶⁶ As of 2 August 2020, there had been 17 IS-related conflicts in the governorate in 2020

⁶⁰ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, n.d., [url](#)

⁶¹ Political Geography Now, *Syria Control Map & Report: Frontlines Stable – July 2020*, 31 July 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: April 1 – 14, 2020*, 16 April 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: April 29 – May 12, 2020*, 14 May 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: May 13 – 26, 2020*, 30 May 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 27 July – 2 August 2020, [url](#), p. 5; Political Geography Now, *Syria Control Map & Report: Frontlines Stable – July 2020*, 31 July 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 29 June – 5 July 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 27 July – 2 August 2020, [url](#), p. 5; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 3 August – 9 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 24 August – 30 August 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁶² ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: February 19 – March 3, 2020*, 5 March 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 29 June – 5 July 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 31 August – 6 September 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁶³ Political Geography Now, *Syrian Civil War Map & Timeline – January 2020*, 22 January 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: March 18 – 31, 2020*, 2 April 2020, [url](#); ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, n.d., [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: April 15 – 28, 2020*, 30 April 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: April 29 – May 12, 2020*, 14 May 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: June 24 – July 6, 2020*, 9 July 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, *Israeli airstrikes target T4 base, Syrian regime says*, 2 September 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 31 August – 6 September 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁴ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁵ Al Arabiya, *Nine Syria regime loyalists killed in Israeli air strikes: Monitor*, 4 June 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: May 27 – June 9, 2020*, 11 June 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 1 June – 7 June 2020, [url](#), p. 2; ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: June 24 – July 6, 2020*, 9 July 2020, [url](#); SOHR, *SOHR reveals | Civilian killed in earlier Israeli shelling, and Russian forces inform factory director to evacuate it just before shelling*, 28 June 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁶ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 8 June – 14 June 2020, [url](#), p. 3

which continued in August.⁶⁷ There were also reports of three landmine explosions in Hama governorate in summer 2020 that resulted in civilian casualties.⁶⁸

1.2.5. Latakia

Apart from the northern part of Latakia, where fighting continued to be reported,⁶⁹ the rest of the governorate was under GoS-control. In 2020, only few security incidents have been reported in Latakia.

In the period from 1 January to 1 September 2020, ACLED recorded eight security incidents in all of Latakia governorate: one battle, referring to the stabbing of a Russian soldier in his house; and seven incidents of explosions/remote violence, three of which were GoS shelling, three shellings of GoS positions by rebel groups, and one explosion of unknown nature.⁷⁰

Furthermore, three rebel drone attacks against the Russian-operated Hmeimim Airbase on the coast of Latakia were reported in 2020.⁷¹

1.2.6. Tartous

The governorate of Tartous has been under GoS-control throughout the entire conflict which has spared it “from the direct violence of war”.⁷² Correspondingly, only few incidents have been reported in Tartous.

In the period from 1 January to 1 September 2020, ACLED recorded one security incident in Tartous: one incident of violence against civilians, which refers to a civilian from Rural Damascus who died in a GoS prison in Tartous.⁷³

Additionally, it was reported in January 2020 that an unidentified actor had detonated an explosive device in Tartous, which caused damage to an underwater pipeline leading to Baniyas Oil Refinery.⁷⁴

1.2.7. Quneitra

In the period from 1 January to 1 September 2020, ACLED recorded three security incidents in Quneitra. All three are classified as explosions/remote violence, referring to an IED attack against a GoS checkpoint, and two Israeli airstrikes.⁷⁵ Other Israeli airstrikes were reported in Quneitra in 2020, including in August.^{76,77}

⁶⁷ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 27 July – 2 August 2020, [url](#), p. 3; SOHR, *Hama | Fierce clashes erupt between ISIS and NDF in the wake of kidnapping four persons*, 4 August 2020, [url](#); SOHR, *Second attack in 48 hours | Clashes renew between ISIS cells and regime forces in east Hama desert*, 6 August 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁸ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 15 June – 21 June 2020, [url](#), p. 3; UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/813]*, 20 August 2020, [url](#), p. 19

⁶⁹ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 3 August – 9 August 2020, [url](#), p. 3; Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 17 August – 23 August 2020, [url](#), p. 3; Political Geography Now, *Syrian Civil War Map & Timeline: New Ceasefire Lines in Northwest – March 2020*, 22 March 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁰ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, n.d., [url](#)

⁷¹ ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: January 21 – February 4, 2020*, 7 February 2020, [url](#); ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: March 18 – 31, 2020*, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

⁷² Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), p. 10

⁷³ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁴ ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: January 21 – February 4, 2020*, 7 February 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁵ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁶ ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: April 29 – May 12, 2020*, 14 May 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 20 July – 26 July 2020, [url](#), p. 4; ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: July 22 – August 4, 2020*, 6 August 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 3 August – 9 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 4-5; ISW and Syria Direct, *Syria Situation Report: July 22 – August 4, 2020*, 6 August 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁷ These airstrikes are, however, for unknown reasons not included in the data from ACLED.

Additional security incidents reported in 2020 were the following: a former opposition commander and his wife were killed, which was the first recorded killing of a former opposition fighter in the governorate;⁷⁸ unidentified gunmen attacked a state security detachment and seized their weapons;⁷⁹ and an unidentified group attacked a checkpoint and killed two GoS military intelligence officers.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 17 August – 23 August 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁷⁹ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 17 August – 23 August 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁰ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 31 August – 6 September 2020, [url](#), p. 4

2. Freedom of movement

The general freedom of movement in Syria is influenced by various factors, including the security and health situation. On the one hand, changes in the security situation in recent years has allowed for easier movement into GoS-controlled areas of Syria and between governorates. On the other hand, the GoS has introduced restrictions on national and international travel as a precaution to prevent COVID-19.

At the time of writing this brief report (September 2020), most land borders were closed for ordinary traffic as a preventive measure to curb COVID-19.⁸¹ On 10 March 2020, the Jordanian authorities banned ordinary travel to and from Syria.⁸² However, entry from Lebanon was possible, with some restrictions.⁸³ The two border crossings to Turkey that were controlled by the GoS were either closed (Nusaybin) or running with limited access (Kasab) as of 17 September 2020.⁸⁴ All crossing points at the Iraqi border were closed for civilian traffic.⁸⁵

See section 2.2. for information on entry via international airports.

2.1. Freedom of movement between governorates

Changes in territorial control has allowed for opening of several strategic roads connecting Syria's major cities. In the beginning of 2020, the GoS took control of the entire M5 highway connecting Damascus and Aleppo for the first time since 2012.⁸⁶

The M4 highway connects Latakia with Aleppo and continues to Hasakah. The stretch from Aleppo to Latakia is currently contested with Turkey and Russia having patrolled it in cooperation since March 2020. This has, however, often resulted in clashes with opposition fighters.⁸⁷ The part of the M4 highway that connects Aleppo and Hasakah opened for civilian use on 26 May 2020 after seven months of closure due to security issues.⁸⁸ Parts of this stretch were closed again for more than two months until September 2020.⁸⁹

⁸¹ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 – Humanitarian Update No. 18*, 17 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

⁸² UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 – Humanitarian Update No. 02*, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 3; UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/813]*, 20 August 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Al-Monitor, *Jordan closes border with Syria due to virus concerns*, 12 August 2020, [url](#)

⁸³ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 10 August - 16 August 2020, [url](#), p. 4; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 – Humanitarian Update No. 17*, 1 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 – Humanitarian Update No. 18*, 17 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁴ UN OCHA, *Turkey | Syria: Border Crossings Status*, 16 September 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁵ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 – Response Update No. 10*, 23 September 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁸⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Name in the News: Syria's key M4 and M5 motorways*, 31 January 2019, [url](#); Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), p. 11; Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *20th report of the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic - A/HRC/44/61*, 7 July 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁸⁷ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *20th report of the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic - A/HRC/44/61*, 7 July 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), p. 12

⁸⁸ Carter Center (The), *Weekly Conflict Summary*, 25 May – 31 May 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁸⁹ SOHR, *Russian forces reopen M4 highway between Ain Issa and Tal Tamr, after closure for over two months*, 12 September 2020, [url](#); UNSC, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/813]*, 20 August 2020, [url](#), p. 12

On 29 March 2020, the Syrian authorities banned travels between governorates.⁹⁰ This ban was lifted on 26 May 2020.⁹¹ Domestic passenger flights were running between Damascus and Qamishli. These continued to run in spite of COVID-19 restrictions that have stopped all international flights (see section 2.2).⁹²

Checkpoints continued to exist throughout Syria, which limited the freedom of movement between governorates.⁹³ However, it is outside the scope of this report to give a comprehensive overview of the location of these checkpoints and the procedures that take place there.

In addition, Syrian authorities have restricted the amount of cash that a person can carry when traveling between governorates to five million SYP (4,000 USD using the official currency rate as of July 2020).⁹⁴

2.2. Entry via international airports

Syria's four international airports are located in Aleppo, Damascus, Latakia and Qamishli.⁹⁵

The international airport in Aleppo was closed for eight years and had its first scheduled flight landing on 19 February 2020 after eight years of closure.⁹⁶

International flights have been halted since spring due to COVID-19 restrictions; however, there have been repatriation flights, e.g. from Doha, Cairo and Sharjah in August 2020. By 17 September 2020, 4,812 Syrian nationals had been repatriated via Damascus and Latakia airports.⁹⁷ The GoS announced on 15 September 2020 that Damascus airport would reopen on 1 October 2020.⁹⁸ However, at the time of writing this brief report, it was unknown whether this actually would happen.

⁹⁰ Middle East Eye, *Coronavirus: Syria reports first death from pandemic*, 29 March 2020, [url](#); Reuters, *Syria bans most domestic travel in coronavirus lockdown*, 27 March 2020, [url](#)

⁹¹ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 Response Update No. 5*, 5 June 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁹² Syria Direct, *'A ticking time bomb': COVID-19 spike catches northeast Syria unprepared*, 31 August 2020, [url](#); UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 – Humanitarian Update No. 17*, 1 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

⁹³ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 58-59

⁹⁴ Middle East Monitor, *Syria imposes restrictions on carrying cash between provinces*, 3 June 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 Update No. 01*, 2 March 2020, [url](#), p. 2

⁹⁶ Reuters, *Syria's Aleppo airport receives first scheduled flight in eight years*, 19 February 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁷ SANA, *Plane transporting 249 Syrians from Doha Airport arrives at Damascus Airport*, 23 August 2020, [url](#); UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 – Humanitarian Update No. 17*, 1 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2; UN Security Council, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020)*; Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/813], 20 August 2020, [url](#), p. 9; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 – Humanitarian Update No. 18*, 17 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

⁹⁸ SANA, *المقبل الشهر من الأول من بدءاً الدولي دمشق مطار عبر المسافرين أمام الطيران حركة تشغيل إعادة على يوافق الوزراء مجلس* [*The cabinet approves restarting flight traffic for travellers via Damascus International Airport, starting from the first of next month*], 15 September 2020, [url](#)

3. The socio-economic situation

Syria has experienced an economic downturn in the first nine months of 2020, which has led to increases in food prices and unemployment. The Syrian pound (SYP) lost much of its value against the US dollar (USD) throughout the year.

The formal rate of the SYP was devalued twice in 2020, most recently from 700 SYP to 1,250 SYP for 1 USD on 16 June 2020. Meanwhile, the informal rate averaged 2,505 SYP to 1 USD in June 2020. In comparison, the formal exchange rate in December 2019 was 434 SYP to 1 USD, and the informal rate 875 SYP to 1 USD.⁹⁹

The deterioration is a consequence of several factors, among them the Caesar Act,¹⁰⁰ the economic crisis in Lebanon, internal strife within Syria's elites and the COVID-19 situation.¹⁰¹

In order to build up foreign currency reserves, the GoS announced in July 2020 that, with few exceptions, all Syrian citizens above the age of 18 had to exchange 100 USD or its equivalent in other currencies into SYP using the official rate (125,000 SYP) before entering Syria.¹⁰² Later, the Syrian Prime Minister stated that Syrians who were unable to pay this fee would be allowed into Syria anyway.¹⁰³ There were, however, no reports on whether this exception is being enforced.

The socio-economic situation in the country varied depending on the geographical area. For example, the price of a food basket¹⁰⁴ in July 2020 was 79,685 Syrian pounds (SYP) in Homs governorate, while the same collection of goods costed 92,504 SYP in Latakia governorate.¹⁰⁵ As the purpose of this brief report is to give a general overview of the situation, the numbers used in this chapter are national averages unless otherwise specified.¹⁰⁶

According to World Food Programme (WFP), an unskilled worker earned on average 4,022 SYP per day in July 2020, varying geographically with the salary being 6,111 SYP in Damascus and 2,500 SYP in Suweida.¹⁰⁷

Sources provided different numbers on the wage for government officials. One source put wages between 25,000 SYP and 60,000 SYP. Two other sources put the highest official wage at 80,240 SYP and 120,000 SYP, respectively. A fourth source mentioned a median state salary at around 50,000 SYP per month.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁹ WFP, *Syria Country Office: Market Price Watch Bulletin (issue 61)*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 4; WFP, *Syria Country Office: Market Price Watch Bulletin (issue 67)*, June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁰ The Caesar Act is a new round of economic sanctions that were introduced by the US on 17 June 2020. Middle East Eye, *Caesar Act sanctions are crippling Syria's beleaguered health sector*, 28 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ Carnegie Middle East Center, *The Wrath of Caesar*, 1 June 2020, [url](#); ECFR, *Economic meltdown in the Middle East: How Europe can soften the impact*, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰² HRW, *Syria's 100 Dollar Barrier to Return*, 23 September 2020, [url](#); New Arab (The), *Syrians forced to 'convert \$100 to local currency' upon return*, 10 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰³ Sy-24, *الرفقة فاضل على تعرف.. سوريا إلى بد الدخول \$100 دفع بد سد تط يع لامن بد سمدح ال نظام* [*The regime allows those who are unable to pay 100 \$ to enter Syria... Learn more about the details*], 24 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ A food basket is a country specific collection of goods that covers the essential nutritional needs of a family of five in a month.

¹⁰⁵ WFP, *Syria Country Office: Market Price Watch Bulletin (issue 68)*, July 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁰⁶ Sources used in this section are not always clear on what areas of Syria their information covers. It is therefore possible that some figures cover wider areas than those controlled by the GoS; however, to the largest extent possible, care has been taken to provide information that is valid only for GoS-held areas.

¹⁰⁷ WFP, *Syria Country Office: Market Price Watch Bulletin (issue 68)*, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 5, 7

¹⁰⁸ Enab Baladi, *How do employees earn their living in Damascus these days? Through legitimate or twisted ways?*, 21 February 2020, [url](#); MEI, *Syria is facing a COVID-19 catastrophe*, 6 August 2020, [url](#); Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of*

3.1. Access to food, healthcare and schools¹⁰⁹

3.1.1. Food

WFP estimated in August 2020 that 9.3 million persons in all of Syria were food insecure while further 2.2 million were at risk of becoming food insecure.¹¹⁰ According to sources consulted in an October 2020 report by DIS, there were no shortage of food as such; however, food prices were high, which made it difficult to buy basic food items.¹¹¹

The price of a standard food basket in Syria reached 86,571 SYP in July 2020, up from 33,238 SYP in December 2019.¹¹² As an indicator for the actual purchasing power, UN OCHA provided numbers on the terms of trade between the daily wage of an unskilled worker and a kilogram of wheat flour. In December 2019, one could buy 7.1 kg of wheat flour with this daily wage whereas the numbers for July 2020 were 3.91 kg.¹¹³

Some basic commodities were being subsidised and rationed through the so-called *smart card*-system. On 1 February 2020, this system was expanded to cover e.g. tea, rice and sugar. Yet, the quantities available through the *smart card* have been criticised for being too small to cover the needs of a family.¹¹⁴

3.1.2. Healthcare

A report from World Health Organization (WHO) showed that in December 2019¹¹⁵, 50% of the 113 public hospitals in all of Syria were fully functional, while 25% were reported to be partially functional and 25% not functional. The degree of functionality varied across governorates: in Quneitra, Tartous, Damascus, Latakia and Suweida, all hospitals were either fully or partly functional, while only one out of seven hospitals in Daraa was assessed to be fully functional.¹¹⁶ A June 2020 update by WHO showed that there was little development with regard to functionality since December 2019 as 49% of the 113 public hospitals were fully functional, 27% partly functional and 25% not functional.¹¹⁷

As of December 2019, medical equipment was limited; however, all types of equipment on WHO's lists of both essential and specialised equipment were available in at least 71% of the functional public hospitals.¹¹⁸ The availability of essential medicines varied with 93% of public hospitals having antiseptics available while

origin information report Syria, May 2020, [url](#), p. 27; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 – Humanitarian Update No. 18*, 17 September 2020, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰⁹ It has not been possible to find reliable and up-to-date information on water and sanitation; hence this brief report does not cover these topics. The data portal of UN Water provides statistics on water and sanitation; however most information is from either 2018, earlier or completely missing.

¹¹⁰ WFP, *WFP Syria Country Brief*, August 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹¹ Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 27

¹¹² WFP, *Syria Country Office: Market Price Watch Bulletin (issue 61)*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; WFP, *Syria Country Office: Market Price Watch Bulletin (issue 68)*, July 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹³ WFP, *Syria Country Office: Market Price Watch Bulletin (issue 61)*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 5; WFP, *Syria Country Office: Market Price Watch Bulletin (issue 68)*, July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹⁴ Enab Baladi, "Smart Card" brokers in Homs... serving or exploiting people, 20 August 2020, [url](#); Syria Direct, *Smart cards for rationing: how the Syrian government is outsmarting accountability*, 17 February 2020, [url](#); Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), pp. 27-28

¹¹⁵ It was not possible to find detailed information about the availability of medicines and specialised medical treatment covering 2020; therefore, some of the below numbers are from December 2019.

¹¹⁶ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report: January – December 2019: Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-8

¹¹⁷ WHO, *WHO Summary of Key Indicators – WHO Syria*, June 2020, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹⁸ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report: January – December 2019: Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, 2020, [url](#), p. 49

only 16% had cancer-related medicine.¹¹⁹ The economic sanctions and the devaluation of the Syrian pound have resulted in most medication being either inefficient or unavailable.¹²⁰

A WHO report on public health centres in all of Syria shows that as of December 2019 out of 1,813 centres in all of Syria, 47% were fully functional, 22% partially functional and 31% were completely out of service. The numbers varied between governorates with all 168 health centres in Tartous being completely functional, whereas only 27 out of 229 health centres in Aleppo were categorised as fully functional.¹²¹ In June 2020, 48% of public health centres were fully functional, 22% partly functional and 30% not functional.¹²²

Up to 70% of healthcare workers have left Syria since the beginning of the conflict.¹²³ Numbers from WHO show that from 1 January to 17 September 2020, there were 22 probable or confirmed attacks on healthcare facilities¹²⁴ in all of Syria (including in areas not controlled by the government) resulting in 12 deaths and 41 injuries.¹²⁵

COVID-19

As of 14 September 2020, the GoS-controlled areas of Syria had 3,576 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 157 COVID-19-related deaths, according to the Syrian Ministry of Health. The highest number of confirmed cases was found in the governorates of Damascus (1,288), Aleppo (790) and Latakia (400).¹²⁶ These numbers reflect an increase from 1,515 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 58 deaths one month earlier.¹²⁷

The actual number of COVID-19-cases is likely to be much higher; some estimates from early August 2020 suggest that between 85,000 and 112,500 persons have been infected in the Damascus governorate alone. It is reported that among countries with available data, Syria is the country that has conducted the fewest COVID-19 tests relative to the population.¹²⁸

3.2.3. Schools

According to a report from June 2020 by No Lost Generation, an initiative co-led by UNICEF and World Vision, two-thirds of children attended school in Syria, whereas the last one-third was out of school.¹²⁹ All areas in Damascus and Rural Damascus have schools that provide education to children.¹³⁰ It has not been

¹¹⁹ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report: January – December 2019: Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, 2020, [url](#), p. 51

¹²⁰ Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 49

¹²¹ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report: January – December 2019: Public Health Centres in the Syrian Arab Republic*, 2020, [url](#), p. 5

¹²² WHO, *WHO Summary of Key Indicators – WHO Syria*, June 2020, [url](#), p. 3

¹²³ UN OCHA, *Syria anniversary press release*, 6 March 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁴ An attack on healthcare is defined as any act of healthcare is defined as any act psychological violence, or obstruction that interferes with the availability, access and delivery of curative and/or preventive health services (WHO, *Stopping attacks on health care*, n.d., [url](#)).

¹²⁵ WHO, *Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA)*, [17 September 2020], [url](#)

¹²⁶ Syrian Ministry of Health, *الجمهورية العربية السورية: حالات الإصابة المسجلة بفيروس كورونا* [*The Syrian Arab Republic: Recorded cases of Corona virus*], 14 September 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁷ Enab Baladi, *Fundraising campaign to rehabilitate “Busra al-Sham National Hospital”*, 22 August 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁸ Al-Monitor, *Syria could have 2 million cases of coronavirus by Aug. 31*, 20 August 2020, [url](#); COAR, *Syria Update (vol. 3, no. 30)*, 3 August 2020, [url](#); Syria Direct, *Update: Syria’s official COVID-19 caseload passes 2,000*, 19 August 2020, [url](#); Syria in Context, *Syria in Context Investigation: COVID-19 Spreads out of Control in Damascus*, 6 August 2020, [url](#); Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p.27

¹²⁹ No Lost Generation, *We Don’t Give Up: Continuous Learning for Syrian Children and Youth*, June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁰ Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 27

possible to find up-to-date information on the actual availability of education in other GoS-controlled governorates. However, it was assessed in 2018 that more than one in three schools in all of Syria was damaged, destroyed, no longer accessible or used for other purposes than schooling.¹³¹

Many schools closed in spring 2020 due to COVID-19, sometimes with classes taking place online instead.¹³² Schools re-opened on 13 September 2020 as the new school year started.¹³³ UNICEF assessed that more children will stop their education due to the economic consequences of COVID-19 with families possibly resorting to child labour or child marriage to ease their economic situation.¹³⁴

3.2. Housing

Syrians who want to move from one area to another need to get a security approval as part of the registration process, regardless of whether he/she is renting or buying a property. There have been cases of people who have circumvented this process. Returnees from abroad have already had a security approval as part of their return and would not need a new one when settling in Syria.¹³⁵

Another issue regarding housing is the lack of documentation proving ownership rights of a property. Widows face particular obstacles as they rarely can have death certificates issued which prevents them from inheriting properties owned by their deceased husbands.¹³⁶ There were reports about returnees who experienced that their properties had been confiscated during their absence from Syria.¹³⁷

In 2018, Law no. 10 was introduced which gave the Syrian authorities the possibility to design an area as a new urban zone, which allows for expropriating the land and forcibly evicting its residents. In theory, the residents could receive compensation, but many have been facing obstacles to receive this. The persons who faced obstacles included displaced persons, people wanted by the authorities and those who used to live in informal housing.¹³⁸

3.3. Jobs

Unemployment in Syria continued to be high. In an August 2020 report by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, the unemployment rate was set to be 43.5%,¹³⁹ while the European Council of Foreign Relations estimated in July 2020 that the unemployment rate was around 50%.¹⁴⁰

The consequences of COVID-19 are expected to have a severe negative effect on the service sector that in 2018 constituted 47% of the total work force.¹⁴¹ The Syrian Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour stated that

¹³¹ Humanitarian Needs Overview, *2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview – Syrian Arab Republic*, March 2019, [url](#), pp. 36, 61

¹³² UNICEF, *UNICEF's innovative distant-learning method provides education to children during lockdown*, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

¹³³ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 – Humanitarian Update No. 18*, 17 September 2020, [url](#), p. 3

¹³⁴ UNICEF, *Whole of Syria: Humanitarian Situation Report: Mid-Year 2020*, 2 August 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁵ Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 22-23

¹³⁶ PAX, *Violations of Housing, Land and Property Rights: An Obstacle to Peace in Syria*, 10 March 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 7

¹³⁷ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, *Länderbericht: Syrien – Entwicklungen im Schatten von Corona [Country report: Syria – Developments in the Shadows of Corona]*, August 2020, [url](#), p. 5

¹³⁸ HRW, *Q&A: Syria's New Property Law*, 29 May 2018, [url](#); PAX, *Violations of Housing, Land and Property Rights: An Obstacle to Peace in Syria*, 10 March 2020, [url](#), pp. 3, 6-7; Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *21st report of the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic – A/HRC/45/31*, 15 September 2020, [url](#), p. 8

¹³⁹ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, *Länderbericht: Syrien – Entwicklungen im Schatten von Corona [Country report: Syria – Developments in the Shadows of Corona]*, August 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴⁰ ECFR, *Economic meltdown in the Middle East: How Europe can soften the impact*, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ COAR, *Syria after COVID-19: No relief for an ailing economy*, April 2020, [url](#), p. 7

more than 320,000 people registered for assistance because they lost work due to COVID-19. Most of them, 91%, were daily labourers.¹⁴² The GoS has promised to continue to pay employees in the public sector.¹⁴³

¹⁴² UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 – Humanitarian Update No. 18*, 17 September 2020, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁴³ COAR, *Syria after COVID-19: No relief for an ailing economy*, April 2020, [url](#), p. 6

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