

Dar'a

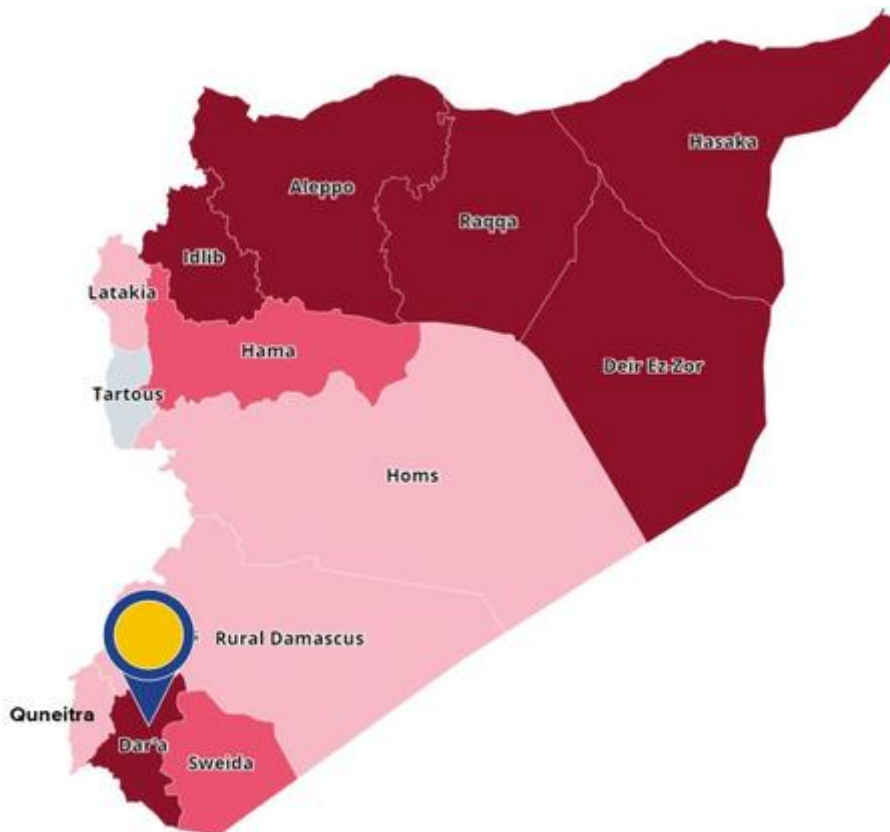
COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: February 2023

[Main COI reference: [Security 2022](#), 2.12, pp. 203-221; [COI Update 2022](#), 2., pp. 3-8]

General information

Dar'a governorate is located in the southern part of Syria and shares an international border with Jordan to its south. As of February 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Dar'a governorate to be 1 025 484 inhabitants.



In recent years drug production and cross-border drug trafficking increased in the south of Syria, including in Dar'a governorate. Dar'a governorate is strategically important as a transit route between Syria, Jordan, and Gulf states, because of the border to the Golan Heights

Background of the conflict

The governorate of Dar'a, where the first protests against the Assad government began in 2011, played a significant role in the conflict as an opposition stronghold. In 2018, however, the GoS was able to regain control over the area with the support of Russia through a combination of military campaigns, and reconciliation agreements with opposition factions. From June 2019 onwards, through 2020 as well as 2021, the governorate's strategic geographical location combined with a 'weak regime control' in the south led to an increase of assassinations, clashes and overall insecurity.

Actors: control and presence

Since 2018, the governorate was nominally under the control of the GoS, while its control in certain parts of the governorate, such as Tafas and Dar'a al-Balad, was limited by the de facto semi-autonomy, allowing locals to take care of 'local affairs and to continue to manifest opposition.

The following actors were present in Dar'a: Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups (4th Division, Tiger Forces, Air Force Intelligence and Military Security Branch), Russia and Russian-backed 5th Corps of the SAA, Iran and Iranian-backed armed groups (notably Hezbollah). ISIL reportedly still has a presence in Dar'a. ISIL-linked groups reportedly conducted a number of assassinations within Dar'a in 2022.

Nature of violence and examples of incidents

The security situation in Dar'a governorate deteriorated during the reporting period, while the security control remained fragmented with GoS having 'only tenuous control'. During the reporting period high numbers of assassinations and attacks on individuals were reported, mostly targeting GoS officials and former opposition fighters with local influence.

In June 2021, GoS-forces started to blockade roads and supply routes to Dar'a al-Balad, a neighbourhood of Dar'a city where reconciled opposition groups have been in partial control. The resulting siege of the area that restricted the supply of food, water and electricity, lasted for ten weeks while the GoS increased pressure

by military shelling. At the end of July 2021, fighting broke out between local forces and GoS-forces in numerous towns and villages in the governorate, resulting in several deaths, and the usage of highly inaccurate munitions and rocket artillery by GoS-affiliated forces was reported. Reportedly more than 40 locals, mostly civilians, were killed in the siege.

On 27 July 2022, GoS-troops encircled and cut off the town of Tafas and started shelling Tafas as well as the town of al-Yadoudah, following the demand for surrender of several wanted people from the governorate, which was refused by the population. Tafas was cut off by road blockades and shelled by GoS-forces for more than two weeks in August 2022. The blockade of Tafas led to the displacement of around 2 500 persons.

Violent incidents decreased significantly in September 2021, when reconciliation agreements were reached between GoS and opposition forces. Reports estimated that more than 12 000 people from Dar'a governorate reconciled through those processes and approximately 1 700 weapons were surrendered.

Following the increase of violence between opposition groups and pro-GoS forces in Dar'a al-Balad, tensions were rising in communities all over the governorate in November and December 2021 with numerous reported improvised explosive device attacks and instances of targeted or retaliatory killings on both sides.

The security situation was further aggravated by the prevalence of drugs. GoS-forces, especially the 4th Division are reportedly linked to the drug trafficking assisted by the Military Intelligence and Hezbollah. Different sources reported about targeted killings and increasing criminal activities like theft, homicide, robbery, mugging, and profit kidnapping (especially of children) at the beginning of 2022.

Attacks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), targeted killings, kidnappings and clashes were reported in August - September 2022. Raids by GoS forces and clashes with local forces were reported in the city of Jassim in September 2022. In October 2022, a GoS and Russian led-operation against ISIL reportedly led to the killing of ISIL fighters.

Incidents: data

ACLED recorded 965 security incidents (average of 13.9 security incidents per week) in Dar'a governorate in the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 July 2022. The majority of the reported incidents were coded as 'battles' (383), while 314 incidents were coded as 'violence against civilians' and 268 as 'explosions/remote

violence'. In the period 1 August – 31 October 2022, 195 security incidents were recorded in Dar'a representing an average of 15.5 security incidents per week.

Geographical scope

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.

Civilian fatalities: data

The SNHR recorded 159 civilian fatalities in Dar'a in the nine months between April and December 2021. In January – October 2022, the SNHR recorded 187 civilian fatalities. This represented 18 civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the first ten months of 2022.

Displacement

As of January 2022, the number of IDPs in Dar'a governorate was stated to be 103 155 IDPs.

UNOCHA recorded approximately 43 055 IDP movements in Dar'a governorate in 2021, with a peak of 42 673 movements in August 2021. This correlates with the time of the siege and shelling in Dar'a al-Balad, where two thirds of the inhabitants, approximately 38 000 people, fled the escalation of violence. Almost all IDP movements recorded in 2021 took place within the governorate. In 2022, UNOCHA registered 508 IDP movements in the governorate, the majority being within the governorate.

Throughout 2021, 17 517 IDP return movements were recorded in Dar'a, with a peak of 15 367 movements in September 2021, when violence declined in several communities in the governorate. Hence, most of these movements took place primarily inside the governorate itself. In 2022, the return numbers were peaking as high as 634 in February and 585 in May.

Further impact on civilians

According to UNOCHA, during the shelling and siege in 2021 an estimated 18 000 people were affected by fighting causing damage to approximately 1 198 residential buildings in Dar'a al-Balad. Reportedly in Dar'a governorate 22.6 % of the population live in damaged buildings. During the shelling in 2021, the Dar'a National Hospital in Dar'a al-Balad was damaged. After several years of conflict,

only two hospitals in the governorate are fully functioning.

The area around Dar'a city was especially estimated to be contaminated by explosive remnants. Different actors in the conflict have used explosive munition and ordnances including landmines, especially in areas that have witnessed military operations. It has been reported that 18 children were killed or injured by explosive remnants in the governorate of Dar'a from the beginning of 2022 until 16 June 2022.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that in the governorate of **Dar'a**, indiscriminate violence reaches such a high level, that substantial grounds are shown for believing that a civilian, returned to the governorate, would, **solely on account of their presence on its territory**, face a real risk of being subject to the serious threat referred to in Article 15(c) QD.

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