

7.3. Travel and admittance

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: February 2023

In case the criterion of 'safety' is satisfied, as a next step, it has to be established whether an applicant can safely and legally travel and gain admittance to Damascus City.

The general situation and the individual circumstances of the applicant should be taken into account in this assessment.

It should be noted that in the context of Syria and in particular the security measures related to State actors, the three requirements should be read in conjunction.

Safely travel

Damascus International Airport is located 30 kilometres south-east of downtown Damascus (about 30 minutes by car from the city centre). Damascus International Airport is controlled by Air Force Intelligence services, which are reported to conduct arrests and torture. It is reported that several international routes are operated from the airport. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.1, pp. 16-17]

The airport region witnessed several security incidents during the reporting period. In 2021 and 2022, sites inside and around Damascus International Airport were hit by Israeli airstrikes on various occasions, such as in February and June 2022, when Damascus International Airport was attacked, injuring a civilian and damaging the runways. Israeli media claimed that the attack was aimed at weapon depots of Iranian-backed armed groups, as military and ammunition

depots of Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah are located near the airport. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.1, p.16]

Information on the number and location of checkpoints was difficult to find and confirm during the reporting period. There were checkpoints on all roads into Damascus, on the main roads to and from Dar'a, Homs and Beirut, at the entrance to Damascus as well as inside the city near the security departments and on the way to the presidential palace. Most of the checkpoints within the city of Damascus were mobile checkpoints, mainly manned by the military police, whose aim was to identify young men eligible for military service. It was reported in December 2020 that the military intelligence branch established 'dozens of mobile checkpoints' in various neighbourhoods of the city. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.3.1, p. 19; [Damascus 2021](#), 2.3.1, p. 27]

Sources further reported that in February 2022, security checks at military checkpoints were intensified. All passers-by, even women, the elderly and students were searched. Students were randomly stopped and their IDs were checked. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.3.1, pp. 20-21]

The procedure at the checkpoints reportedly depends on the location of the checkpoint and the personnel deployed there. Passing through them requires identification documents. In general, the presentation of an ID card is mandatory; men of compulsory military age must also show their military service booklet. In addition, it is reported that in areas controlled by the GoS, people may be asked to present their reconciliation cards as well as their mobile phones. According to further reports, young people are being photographed without known reason. Sources stated that each of the four major security services had its own database of 'wanted lists' and that names were checked not only for the individual but also for their family members as part of the so-called 'quadruple security check'. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.3.2, p. 21]

In 2021, most arrests in Syria were reportedly carried out at checkpoints. Arrests during security checks were as well reported in 2022. The treatment at the checkpoints also included threats, provocations, harassment, extrajudicial detention and the obligation to pay bribes for passage. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.3.3, pp. 22-23]

People who had visible signs of belonging to a less affluent part of society and people who were from areas with a history of anti-government movements were generally treated worse than others. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.3.4, p. 22]

Particular risk profiles for arrest tend to be those who return to Syria without security permission or reconciliation in place prior to traveling, individuals who work

or carry out activities believed to oppose the government, such as journalism, aid work, local councils, rescue workers, men of military age, and those with family members who were forcibly displaced to Idlib or Aleppo [[Damascus 2020](#), 2.4, p. 21]. Arrests of persons who have settled their security status have also been reported [[Returnees from abroad](#), 3., p. 27].

There is also information about harassment against LGBTIQ persons or against persons whose family members are wanted for criminal reasons, or against persons who have the same or a similar name as persons on wanted lists. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.3.4, pp. 23-24]

It was reported that checkpoints were located at Damascus International Airport for passengers departing from Damascus, as well as for passengers arriving there. Airport staff are reportedly demanding bribes and threatening disruption or security problems in case of non-payment. In addition, the 'quadruple security check' is carried out to find out if an arriving person is on a wanted list. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.3.5, p. 24]

Legally travel

The Syrian Constitution provides for freedom of movement of citizens unless 'prevented by a decision from the competent court or the public prosecution office or in accordance with the laws of public health and safety'. However, in practice, freedom of movement in Syria in 2021 was 'severely restricted' due to ongoing combat and 'proliferation of regime and militia checkpoints'. Syrian citizens were also allowed to travel internationally, but the government denied access to passports and civil documentation based on political views, association with the opposition, or geographical location associated with the opposition. The GoS imposed exit visa requirements and at times closed Damascus Airport and border crossings. It was reported that the government enforced wide-ranging bans on international travel by opposition members, often targeting anyone attempting to travel. In addition, there was a nationwide problem with the issuing of passports, with citizens having to pay bribes and wait for months. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.2, pp. 17-19]

Gain admittance

All procedures related to property required approval by the security authorities even if a person was absent or abroad. Security approvals were required when selling and leasing real estate. An application for security clearance was required to settle in any area of Damascus. Reportedly, the applicant's profile, background and behaviour over the last ten years had an impact on the outcome of the security clearance. The security check conducted on IDPs moving into Damascus is stricter than the one for residents of Damascus moving between different houses or areas. In most cases, a mukhtar was required to be involved in the security check. According to recent estimates, 60 % of the applications were rejected, in many cases because of unresolved security issues. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.5, p. 29]

In the case of Palestinian refugees who wished to settle outside of a camp, it was reported that it was more difficult for them to be granted permission to reside, due to the sectarian make-up of the city. Many areas of Damascus were dominated by a particular sect and the relevant security branch might refuse to provide security clearance to a person belonging to a different sectarian group. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.5, p. 30]

Access and return to some areas of Damascus, such as Al-Qaboun, Yarmouk and Jobar, were restricted or almost completely prohibited due to significant destruction and security permission was required for entering those areas. [[Damascus 2022](#), 2.4, pp. 25-29]

For those applicants who meet the 'safety' criterion, the assessment of the availability of IPA in Damascus City should proceed with an assessment of the requirements of safety and legality of travel and of gaining admittance.

The profile and individual circumstances of the applicant should be taken into account in this regard. For individuals who would return to Syria without identity documents or without security clearance or status settlement in place prior to traveling, these requirements would not be satisfied.

See other topics concerning internal protection alternative:

- [Preliminary remarks](#)
- [7.1. Part of the country](#)
- [7.2. Safety](#)

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- [7.4. Reasonableness to settle](#)

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