

Country Talks: Syria

Country of Origin Information and Country Guidance



Country Guidance: Syria

Country Guidance

Common analysis and guidance note

This country guidance document provides an in-depth analysis of the situation in Syria, focussing on the key elements of qualification for international protection.

General guidance and methodological remarks



Country Guidance: explained

Outlines the general guidance relied upon in this analysis, as well as the methodological framework, approach and indicators used in CG docs.



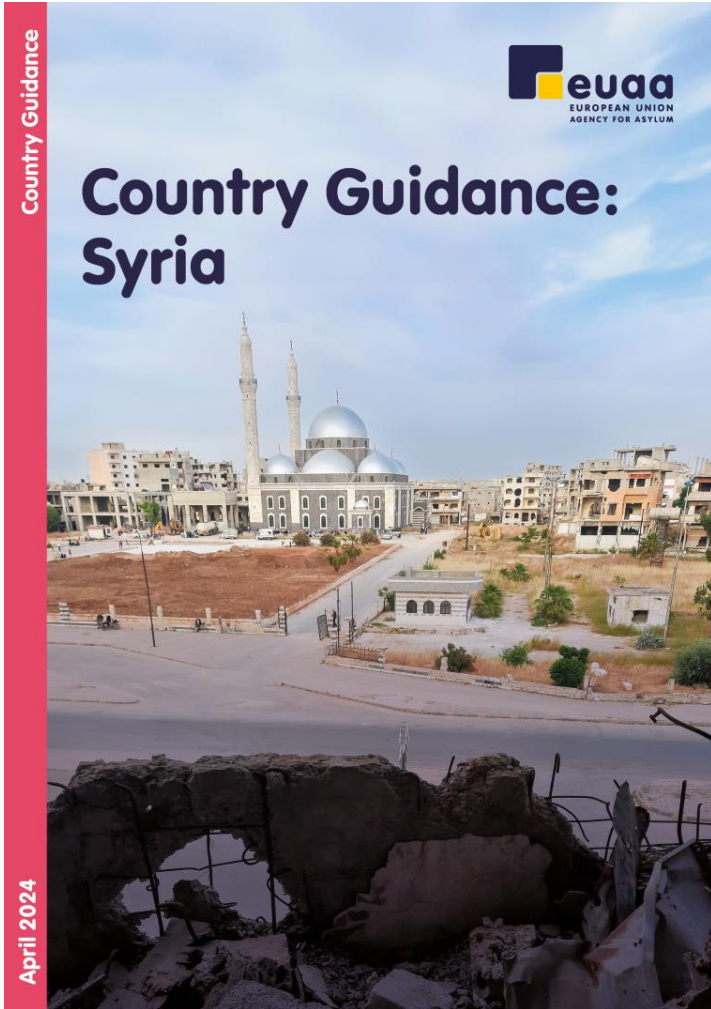
Country Guidance: Syria

Publication date: 15 April 2024

The '**Country Guidance: Syria**' represents Member States' joint assessment of the situation in the country of origin in relation to the applicable international and EU legislation on international protection. The guidance note, accompanied by the common analysis, was agreed by the Country Guidance Network of senior policy officials in February 2024 and was endorsed by the EUAA Management Board in April 2024.

In addition to this electronic publication, the '**Country Guidance: Syria**' (April 2024) is available in pdf format.

[Read more online](#) [Download the PDF](#)



Scope of this update

The current version of the guidance updates and replaces the 'Country Guidance: Syria' (February 2023).

This update mainly focuses on the potential refugee status protection needs of **persons perceived to be opposing the government of Syria, children and profiles related to military service**, the section on **Article 15(c) QD** under the subsidiary protection chapter, as well as the **internal protection alternative** chapter.

It is primarily based on country information concerning the period from **1 August 2022 to 30 November 2023**.

Guidance note

The guidance note is the first part in the structure of the document.

It outlines the key conclusions of the common analysis in a light user-friendly format.

Common analysis

The common analysis is the second, more detailed, part.

It, firstly, summarises the relevant factual basis according to the available COI and, secondly, analyses this factual basis in accordance with the applicable legislation, relevant jurisprudence and general guidance.

In accordance with **Article 11(3) EUAA Regulation**, MS have the obligation to take into account the CG docs when examining applications for international protection, without prejudice to their competence to decide on individual applications.

COI production



Syria COI production

- Country focus: socio-economic situation in Damascus city, selected profiles (Perceived opponents of GoS, Military service in the SAA, Children, Trafficking in human beings) (published Oct. 2023)
- Security situation (published Oct. 2023)
- Query response (published Dec. 2023)
- Reference period (August 2022 – November 2023)

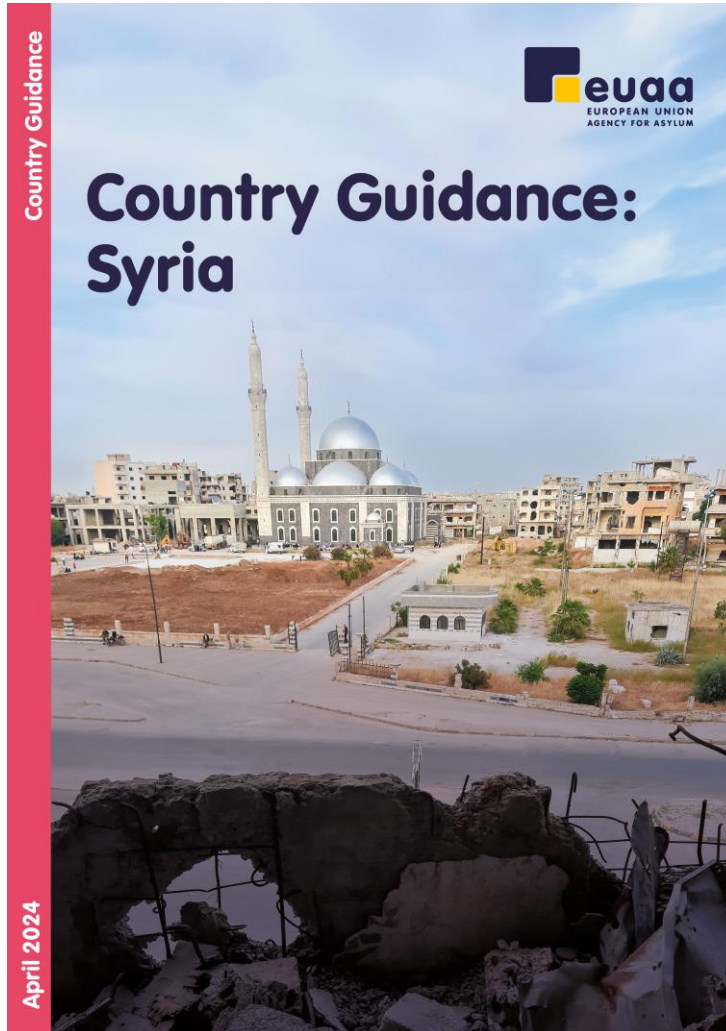
Drafted by EU+ MS COI units, ACCORD and EUAA.

Peer reviewed by EU+ MS COI units and EUAA.

4 EU+ MS contributed to the joint production

Terms of reference

Developed jointly with EU+ COI and CGN



Common analysis

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4.10. Ethno- religious groups

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Persons perceived to be opposing the Government of Syria

- **Wide categories of individuals:** protesters, political activists, members of opposition armed groups, civilians from (former) opposition-held areas, journalists, online activists, humanitarian workers, draft evaders, military deserters.
- **Human rights violations:** arrests, detention, torture, enforced disappearance, use of mass casualty weapons/sieges, targeting of civilian infrastructure etc.
- **Repression of (perceived) dissent was reported in 2022-2023** including of persons who made critical statements against the GoS, persons linked to political dissidents and activists, persons who underwent ‘reconciliation’, persons with relatives in opposition-controlled areas.
- **Arbitrariness and lack of predictability.** Increasingly, some detentions by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic appear driven by monetary gain.

CG Syria (profiles)

4.1. Persons perceived to be opposing the government

4.1.1. Political dissent and opposition in Syria

4.1.2. Members of anti-government armed groups

4.1.3. Political activists, opposition party members and protesters

4.1.4. Civilians originating from areas associated with opposition to the government

The GoS continues to target **wide categories of individuals, whose activities are perceived as political dissent** such as human rights activists, journalists, protesters, humanitarian workers, etc.



Profiles

4.1.2. Members of anti-government armed groups



Exclusion considerations could be relevant to this profile

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

In itself, the prosecution of criminal acts committed by members of anti-government armed groups and their potential targeting in accordance with the rules of international humanitarian law would not amount to persecution. However, acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. assassination, torture, arbitrary arrest).

What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

For members of anti-government armed groups, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated. In case of reconciliation agreement, well-founded fear of persecution would also be substantiated in general, as those are often broken in practice and the reconciled fighters may furthermore face a risk of targeting by other actors.

Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.



Profiles

4.1.3. Political activists, opposition party members and protesters



The GoS continues to target **wide categories of individuals, whose activities are perceived as political dissent** such as human rights activists, journalists, protesters, humanitarian workers, etc.

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. detention, torture, killing).

What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

For individuals considered by the government as opposing it, such as political activists, opposition party members, persons who took part in protests, and persons who expressed criticism towards the regime, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.

Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.



Profiles

4.1.4. Civilians originating from areas associated with opposition to the government



This sub-profile refers to civilians from areas associated with opposition to the government, in particular (former) opposition-held areas in Dar'a, Rural Damascus, Idlib, Latakia, Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Quneitra.

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. arbitrary arrests, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance).

What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: regional aspects (who is in control in the area, whether it was considered an opposition stronghold, etc.), and level of perceived support or collaboration with anti-government forces, familial ties or other connection to suspected members of anti-government armed groups and/or political opposition members, perceived support for the government, ethno-religious background (e.g. being [Sunni Arab](#)), etc.

Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.





Profiles

Persons who evaded or deserted military service

Terminology used in the COI and CG document

Draft evader:

A draft evader is a Syrian male, above the age of 18, who has avoided being drafted into the Syrian Armed Forces either by hiding from the Syrian authorities or by fleeing Syria.

Deserter:

A deserter is a former member of the Syrian Armed Forces (e.g. a conscript, a non-commissioned officer (corporal or sergeant) or an officer) who has left his post or unit without permission.

Defector:

A defector is a former member of the Syrian Armed Forces who has left the Syrian Armed Forces and joined an armed opposition group in Syria.

'Military service' is used broadly to cover both military service and reserve service in the Syrian Armed Forces.



Country focus – selected findings

Military service in the SAA

- **Male citizens between the ages of 18 and 42** are required by law to perform their military service for 18 to 21 months. In practice, conscripts ended up serving for an unspecified period (7-9 years).
- The right to **conscientious objection is not recognised**. The law does not provide for substitute or alternative service.
- Recruitment of **conscripts and reservists** continues to take place. The call-up of reservists has decreased.
- In general, conscripts and reservists cannot choose their place of **deployment**. Sending conscripts to take part in active fighting is done irrespective of fighting experience or military skills.
- The practice of **paying bribes** for avoiding deployment to frontlines, serving in non-field position or not serving at all is widespread.
- **Legal exemptions and deferrals** from military service are generally enforced in practice. At times, the GoS resorts to **blackmail and extortion** of individuals seeking to obtain or renew exemptions.



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad visits Syrian army troops in war-torn Idlib province, Syria, Oct. 22, 2019. - Syrian Arab News Agency/via REUTERS



Country focus – selected findings

Military service in the SAA

- **Draft evaders** who are apprehended are ultimately sent to military service.
- The **treatment of deserters and defectors** depends on their individual situation (e.g. rank and previous activities) and the penalties imposed by the Penal Code. Arrests, detention and torture of defectors was reported during the reference period.
- Deserters and defectors usually have to enter **‘reconciliation’ agreements** with the GoS whereby they would ultimately serve back in the units of the SAA or affiliated militias.
- **Amnesties** are usually partial and selective in nature. Those who benefit from them are still required to perform military service.





Profiles

✓ 4.2. Persons who evaded or deserted military service

4.2.1. Military service: overview

4.2.2. Draft evaders

4.2.3. Military deserters and defectors



4.2.1. Military service: overview

- > Recruitment of conscripts and reservists
- > Conscientious objection
- > Exemptions and deferrals
- > Amnesties
- > Discharge
- > Regional specifics
- > Deployment
- > Conduct of the Syrian army

Conclusions and guidance

4.2.2. Draft evaders

4.2.3. Military deserters and defectors



Exclusion considerations could be relevant to deserters and defectors



Profiles

4.2.2. Draft evaders



Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Subjecting **conscientious objectors** to military service in itself would constitute a form of persecution in the meaning of Article 9(1) QD.

For others, the conscription itself, which is a legitimate right of a state, would in general not meet the requirements of Article 9 QD. However, in the context of the various excludable acts committed by the Syrian Armed Forces, **evading conscription** should be analysed in relation to **Article 9(2)(e) QD**, according to which ‘prosecution or punishment for refusal to perform military service in a conflict, where performing military service would include crimes or acts falling within the scope of the grounds for exclusion as set out in Article 12(2)’ would be considered a form of persecution. There is no requirement to further assess the nature and proportionality of the prosecution or punishment and extrajudicial punishment may also qualify as persecution in this context.

Moreover, **other acts reported to be committed against draft evaders** are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution (e.g. arbitrary arrest along with other forms of mistreatment such as physical violence and the risks associated with the treatment in detention facilities, including torture).



Profiles

4.2.2. Draft evaders



Conclusions and guidance

What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

For conscientious objectors, taking into account that there are no provisions for alternative service, and there is no right to conscientious objection except for Christian and Muslim religious leaders, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.

The level of violence in the context of the ongoing conflict in Syria has decreased in recent years. Nevertheless, various excludable acts continued to be committed by the Syrian Armed Forces. Individual recruits generally have no control over their role within the armed forces, their place of deployment and assignment of specific tasks, well-founded fear of persecution in relation to Article 9(2)(e) QD would in general be substantiated for draft evaders.

Amnesty decrees are limited in time and do not remove the obligation to perform military service.

In addition to being sent to active service, **other acts of ill treatment** reported to be committed **against draft evaders take place arbitrarily** and well-founded fear of persecution in this regard would also in general be substantiated.

In relation to reservists, the need for reservist manpower has largely decreased. Therefore, the individual assessment would depend on the likelihood to be called into active service e.g. due to the specific skills of the individual (e.g. tank crewmen) and their area of origin (former opposition-held areas).

Certain (permanent) exemptions from military service (e.g. the exemption of individuals residing abroad based on payment of a fee) are reported to be **generally respected**. Where the applicant has been exempted the individual assessment should take into account the nature of the exemption.



Profiles

4.2.2. Draft evaders



Conclusions and guidance

Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is **highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion**. In the case of **conscientious objectors**, persecution may **also be for reasons of religion**. In the individual case, **it is always for the national authorities to ascertain whether a nexus under Article 10 QD is plausible**, in light of relevant up-to-date information about the situation in the country of origin and the personal circumstances of the applicant.

See CJEU *EZ judgement*, para 60 and para. 61:

[...] in the context of armed conflict, particularly civil war, and where there is no legal possibility of avoiding military obligations, **it is highly likely that the authorities will interpret the refusal to perform military service as an act of political opposition**, irrespective of any more complex personal motives of the person concerned.

[...] **there is a strong presumption that refusal to perform military service** under the conditions set out in Article 9(2)(e) of that directive **relates to one of the five reasons** set out in Article 10

[...] It is for the competent national authorities to ascertain, in the light of all the circumstances at issue, whether that connection is plausible.



Profiles

4.2.3. Military deserters and defectors



Exclusion considerations could be relevant to this profile

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts of ill-treatment reported to be committed against military deserters and defectors are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. detention, enforced disappearance, torture, death penalty).

Moreover, the desertion from the Syrian Armed Forces should be also analysed in relation to **Article 9(2)(e) QD**, according to which 'prosecution or punishment for refusal to perform military service in a conflict, where performing military service would include crimes or acts falling within the scope of the grounds for exclusion as set out in Article 12(2)' would be considered a form of persecution. There is no requirement to further assess the nature and proportionality of the prosecution or punishment and extrajudicial punishment may also qualify as persecution in this context.

Subjecting **conscientious objectors** to active military service under the conditions of conscription constitutes a severe violation of their rights meeting the requirements of Article 9(1) QD.



Profiles

4.2.3. Military deserters and defectors



Exclusion considerations could be relevant to this profile

What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

For military deserters and defectors, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated in relation to reported acts of **ill-treatment**, such as torture and in some cases death penalty.

According to available country information, military deserters and defectors are also returned to active service. It is noted that the level of violence in the context of the ongoing conflict in Syria has decreased in recent years. Nevertheless, various excludable acts continued to be committed by the Syrian Armed Forces. Taking this into account, and in conjunction with the fact that individuals generally have no control over their role within the armed forces, neither with regard to their place of deployment nor with regard to the assignment of specific tasks, for military deserters and defectors, well-founded fear of persecution in relation to **Article 9(2)(e) QD** would also in general be substantiated.

With regard to **conscientious objectors**, taking into account the absence of a procedure for obtaining, or recognition of, the status of conscientious objector and the absence of alternative service in Syria, in the case of individuals who have deserted military service on grounds of conscience, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.

Taking into account that amnesty decrees concerning deserters are limited in time and do not remove the obligation to perform military service, they would generally not impact the level of risk associated with the desertion of military service. Therefore, in the case of military deserters and defectors, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.

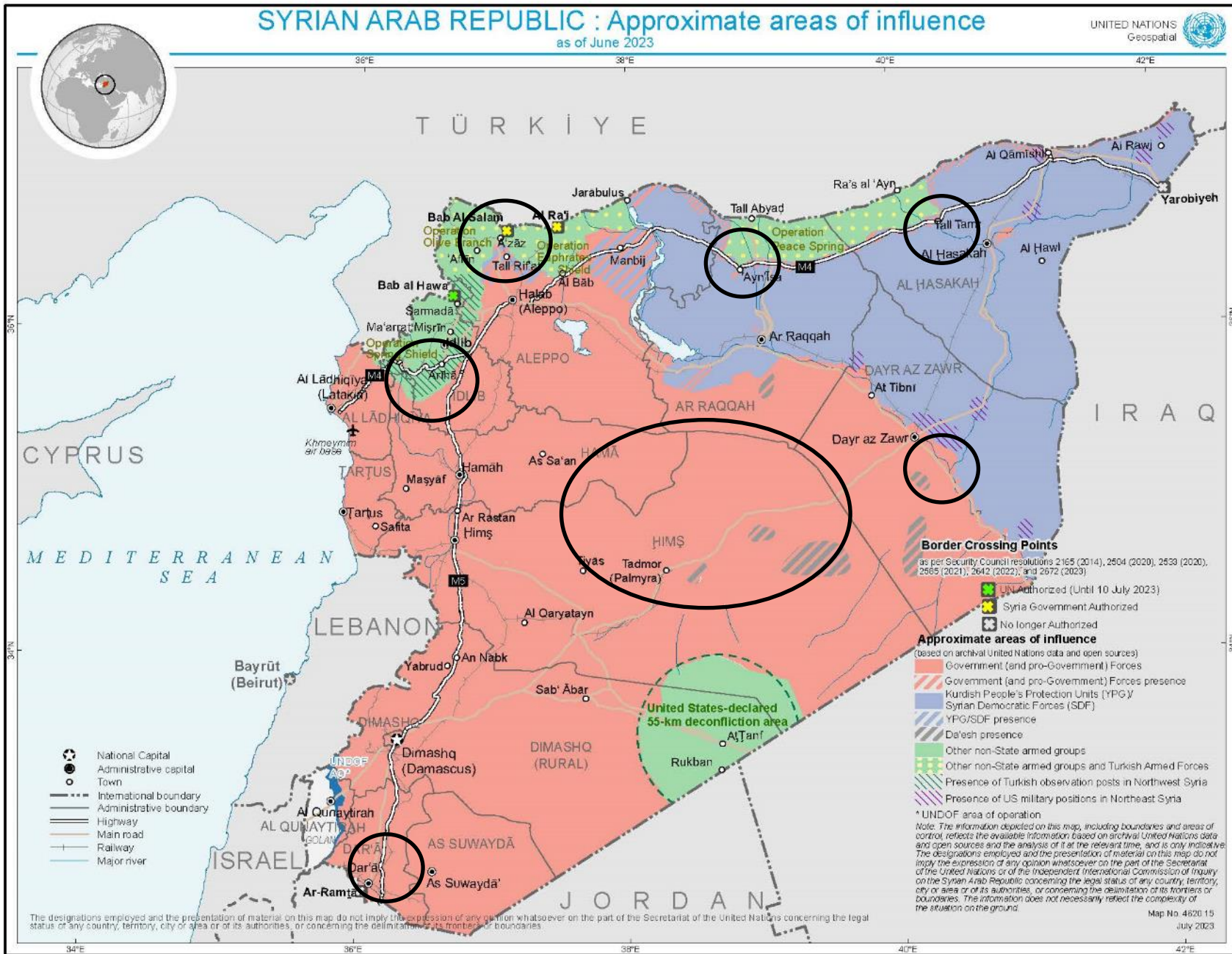
Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion. In the case of conscientious objectors, persecution may also be for reasons of religion..





Subsidiary protection



Conflict hotspots

1. Southern Idlib, western Aleppo, north-west Hama, north-east Latakia
2. Contact lines between areas of control in Aleppo, Hasaka, Raqqa governorates
3. Central Syrian desert (Hama, Homs, Deir-Ez-Zor)
4. Euphrates River Valley (Deir Ez-Zor)
5. Southern Syria (particularly Dar'a)

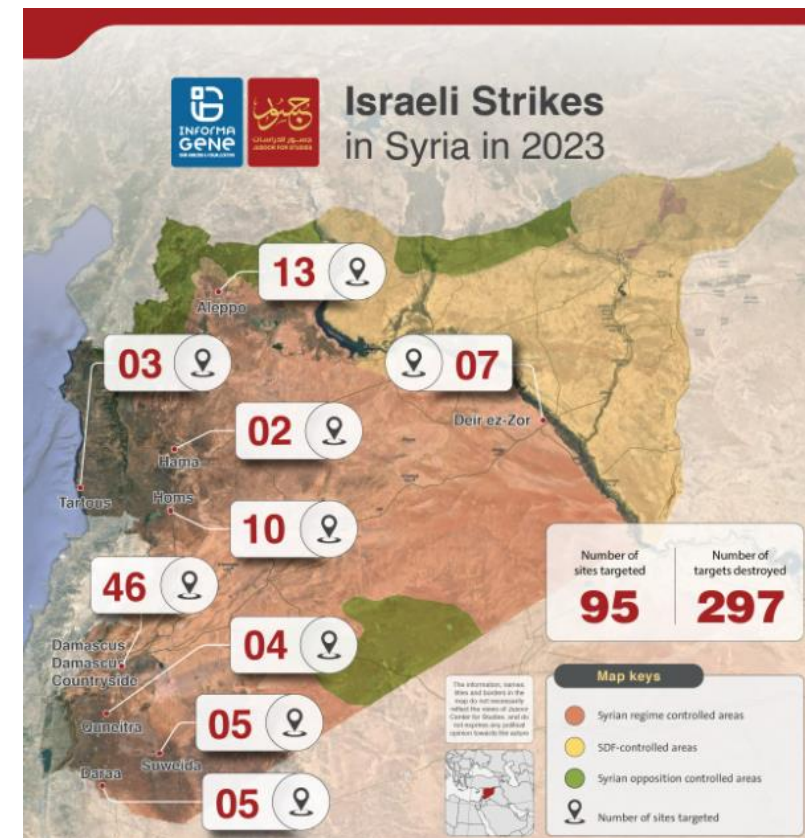
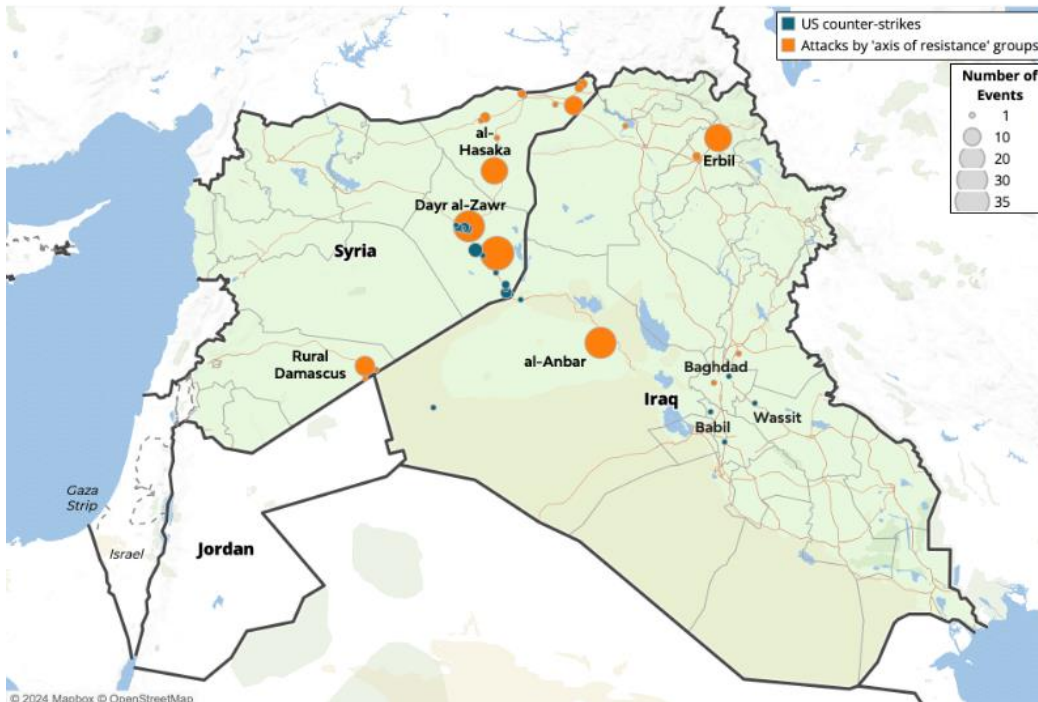
Impact of Israel-Hamas conflict



- Attacks by Iran-backed armed groups on U.S. forces present in Syria. U.S. retaliatory airstrikes.
- Israeli missile and airstrikes on GoS and Iranian-linked targets in Syria.
- Attacks by Iranian-backed armed groups on Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

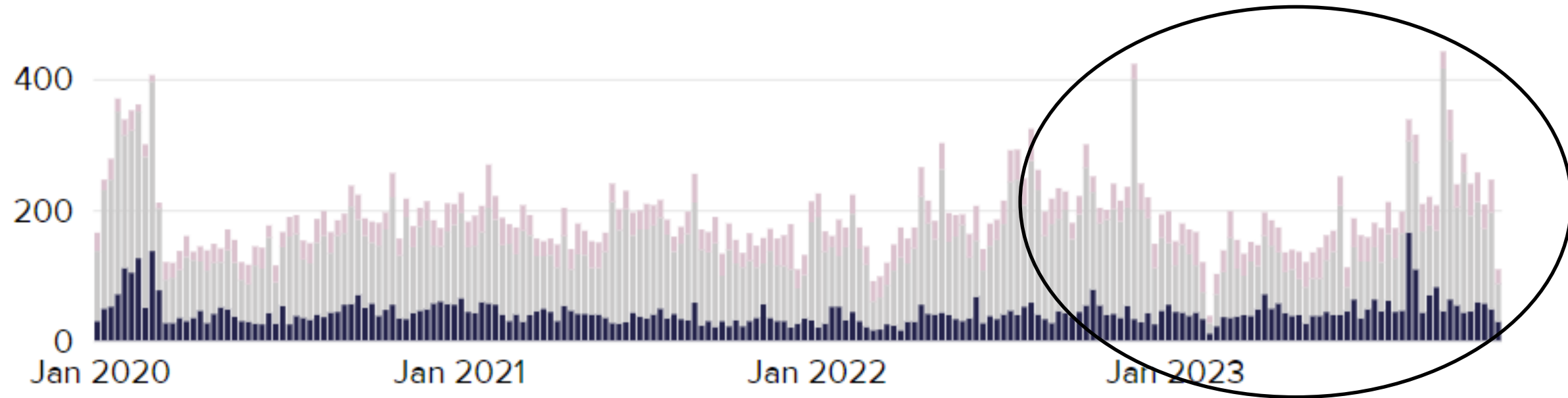
Attacks by 'Axis of Resistance' Groups and US Counter-strikes in Iraq and Syria

7 October 2023 - 4 February 2024

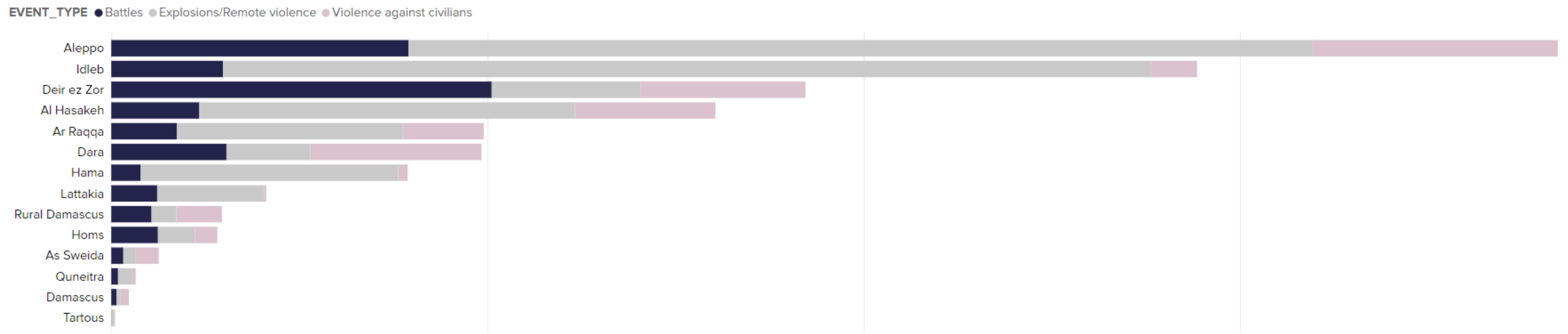


Evolution of security incidents at country-level (1 January 2020 – 30 November 2023). ACLED data

EVENT_TYPE ● Battles ● Explosions/Remote violence ● Violence against civilians

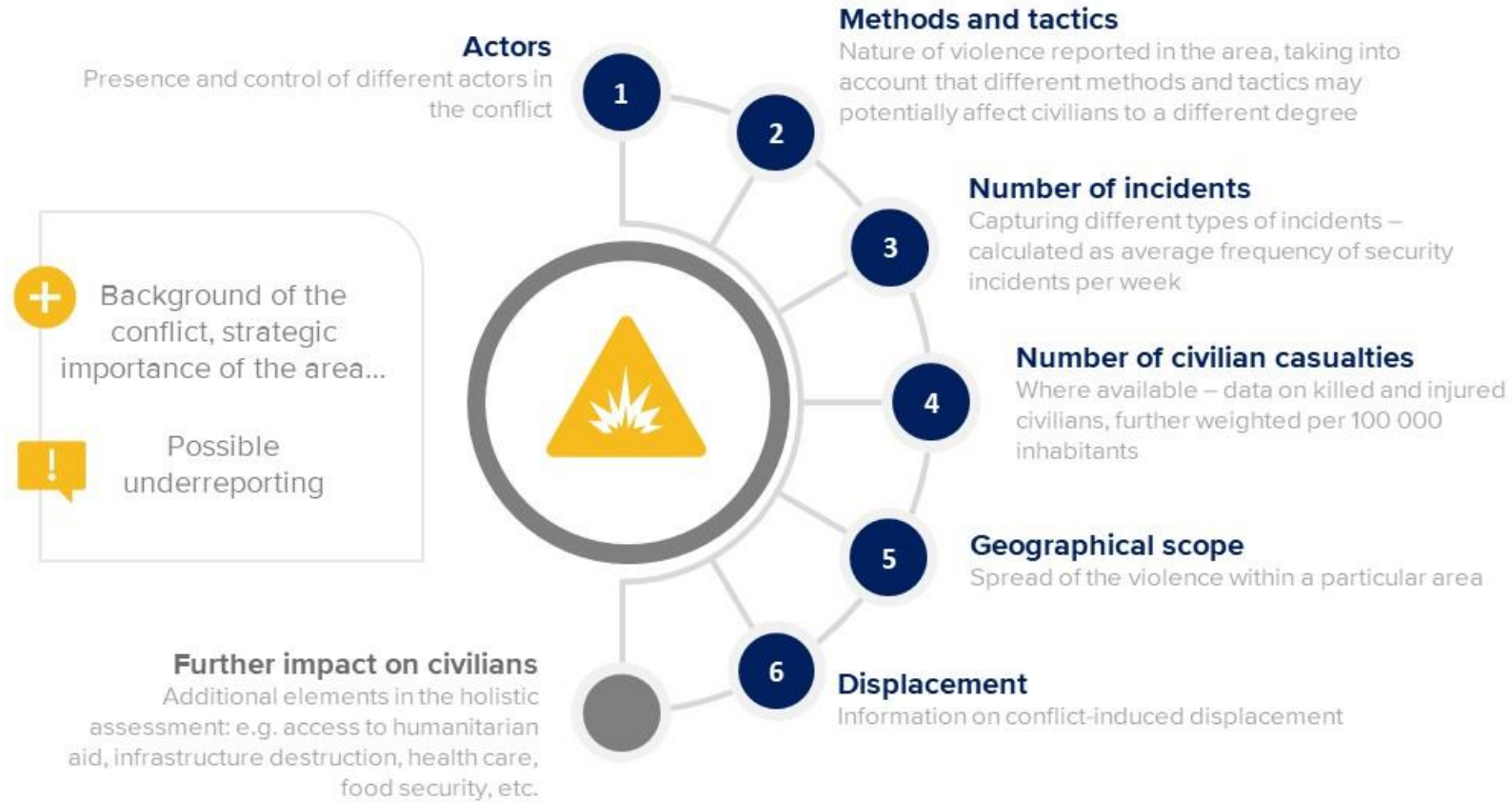


Number of security incidents by governorate (1 August 2022 – 30 November 2023). ACLED data



Subsidiary protection

Article 15(c) QD: Indicators in the assessment of the level of indiscriminate violence



Subsidiary protection

Article 15(c) QD: Indiscriminate violence in Syria

In the governorates of **Aleppo**, **Dar'a**, **Deir Ez-Zor**, **Hasaka**, and **Idlib** it is assessed that the degree of indiscriminate violence reaches such an exceptionally high level that substantial grounds are shown for believing that a civilian, returned to the relevant territory, would, **solely on account of their presence there**, face a real risk of being subjected to the serious threat referred to in Article 15(c) QD.

It is assessed that in the governorates of **Hama**, **Raqqa** and **Sweida** the level of indiscriminate violence is high.

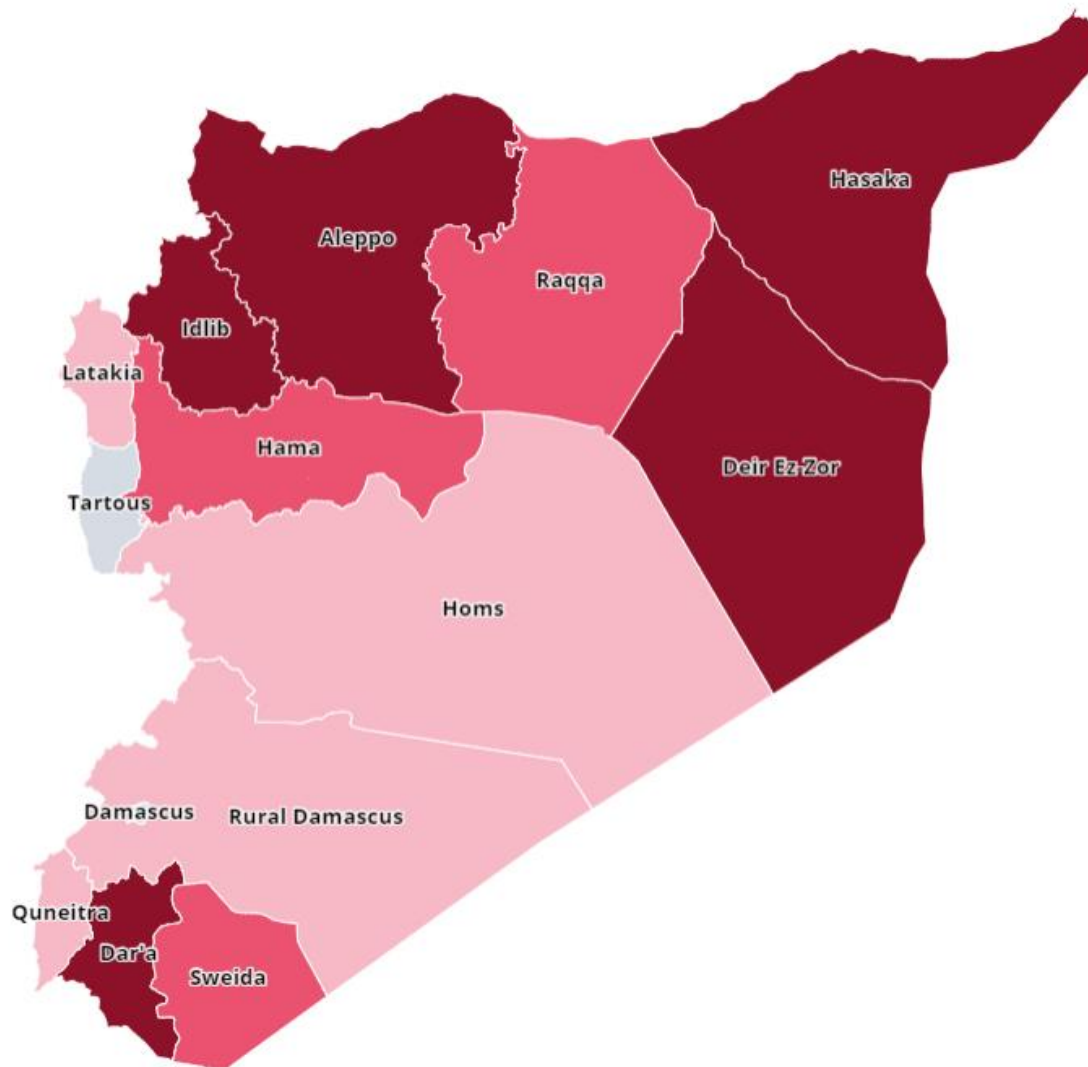
Accordingly, a **lower level of individual elements** is required to show substantial grounds for believing that a civilian, returned to the area, would face a real risk of serious harm in the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

Indiscriminate violence is also taking place in the governorates of **Homs**, **Latakia**, **Quneitra**, and **Rural Damascus**. However, this violence does not reach a high level.

Accordingly, a **higher level of individual elements** is required in order to show substantial grounds for believing that a civilian, returned to the area, would face a real risk of serious harm in the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

In the remaining two governorates of Syria, namely **Damascus** and **Tartous**, it is assessed that there is currently **no real risk** for a civilian to be personally affected by indiscriminate violence within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

This category is applied where the criteria for an armed conflict within the meaning of this provision are not met, where no indiscriminate violence is taking place, or where the level of indiscriminate violence is so low, that in general there would be no real risk for a civilian to be affected by it.



A woman in a long orange dress and a light-colored headscarf is walking away from the camera down a dirt path in a makeshift settlement. The settlement consists of numerous tents made of white and grey fabric, some with laundry hanging on lines between them. In the background, other people are visible, including a child in a pink jacket standing to the right. The ground is dusty and uneven, with some white markings. The overall atmosphere is one of a temporary, crowded living space.

Internal protection alternative

Socio-economic situation

- **Economic conditions** are deteriorating. Around **90 %** of the country's population lives below the poverty line (UNOCHA) and **12.1 million** (>50% of population) are food insecure (WFP). The Syrian pound lost over **80 %** of its value since May 2023.
- **Cost of living** in Syria almost doubled in the first nine months of 2023. **Prices** increased significantly: subsidised petrol (167 %), food basket prices (41 %).
- WFP food assistance for 3.2 mil. persons ended in 2023 due to lack of funding.
- **Minimum wage** is the equivalent of 22 USD. The national average of the **food basket** is the equivalent of 98 USD (August 2023).
- Millions of Syrians lack reliable access to sufficient and safe **water**. Up to **50 % of the health workforce** had left the country (WHO).
- **74 %** of households in Damascus reported being either completely unable or insufficiently able to meet basic needs. Around **66 %** of households were relying on remittances (UNOCHA).
- **Protests** criticising the handling of the economic situation took place in 2023, particularly in southern Syria.



Travel and admittance – Damascus city



- **DAM airport** is generally accessible. Periodic Israeli airstrikes temporarily disrupt operations.
- **Checkpoints were common at main entrances.** Extortion/paying bribes at checkpoints is a common practice.
- **Access, return and settling of inhabitants** in certain areas (Yarmouk, Jobbar, Qaboun) is still prohibited due to level of destruction, new urban developments and status of the area in the conflict (pro-opposition).
- Obtaining a **security clearance** is a prerequisite for settling in Damascus.



Internal Protection Alternative [1]

Damascus city



IPA **may be safe** depending on the profile and the individual circumstances of the applicant.

IPA **would not be safe** for those who have a well-founded fear of persecution by the GoS (ex. Political dissidents) and/or by society at large (ex. Women under certain circumstances and LGBTIQ persons).



The profile **and individual circumstances** of the applicant should be taken into account in this regard.

The **individual conduct** of the applicant is relevant (possible contact with the Syrian authorities and previous travel back to Syria etc).

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**.



Internal Protection Alternative [2]

IPA: Conclusions on reasonableness to settle

Reasonable-
ness to settle

Internal protection in Damascus City may be reasonable only in exceptional cases:

- some adult applicants with significant financial means or who have a support network that is willing and capable of assisting them in accessing basic subsistence



In this regard, the rapidly deteriorating economic situation, the healthcare situation and food insecurity, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on those and on the healthcare system in Damascus, should also be considered.



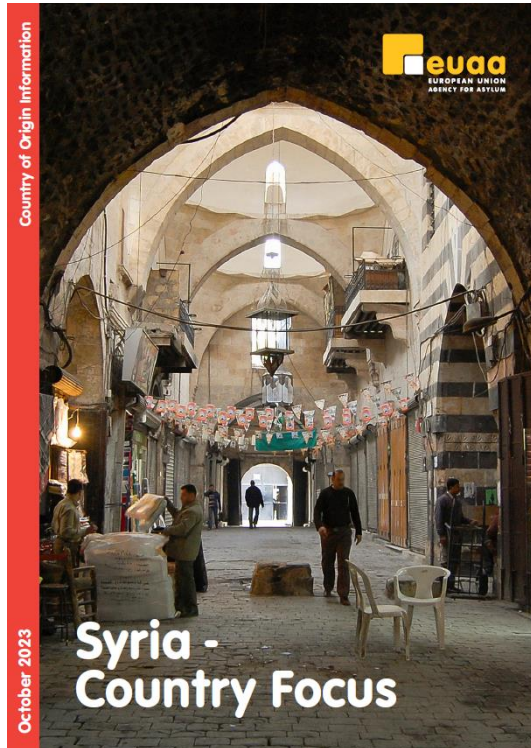
Questions

Do you have any specific questions concerning the EUAA COI reports on Syria ?

Do you have any specific questions concerning the 'CG: Syria'?

Country of Origin Information Reports and Queries

To access EUAA COI products, visit <https://euaa.europa.eu/coi-publications> and <https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/>

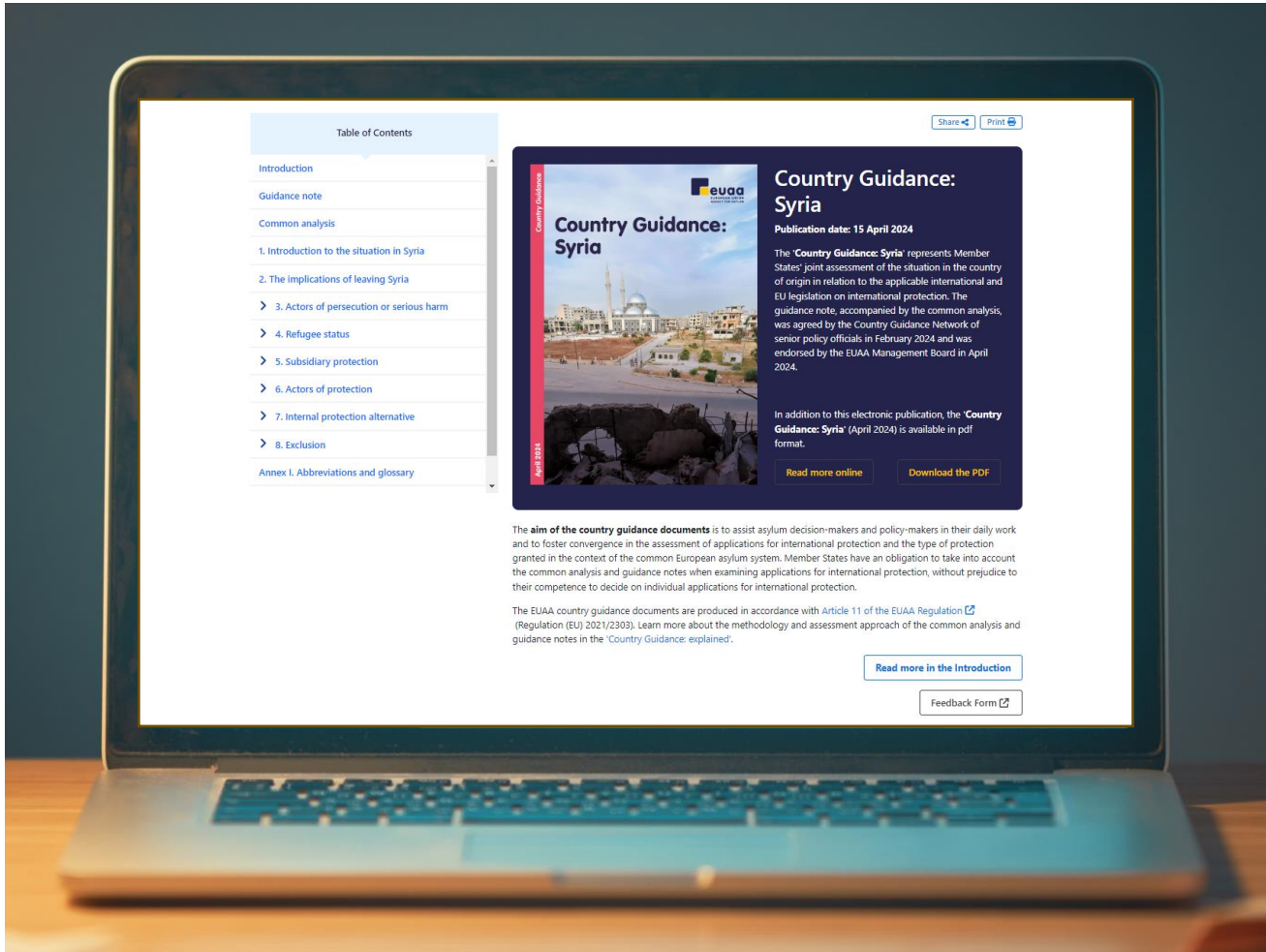



COI QUERY	
Country of Origin	SYRIA
Title	Major human rights, security, and socio-economic developments
Reference period	1 August to 30 November 2023
Topics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Territorial control 2. Security situation 3. Human rights developments in areas under Government of Syria control 4. Socio-economic situation
Date of completion	6 December 2023
Query Code	Q69-2023
Contributing EU+ COI units	N/A

Disclaimer	
<p>This response to a COI query has been elaborated according to the EUAA COI Report Methodology and EUAA Writing and Referencing Guide.</p> <p>This query response was produced in response to COI information requests received from the EUAA Country Guidance drafting team in the development on country guidance on Syria. Query responses are produced within a limited time period, typically within 5 to 10 days. Within these time constraints, the information provided in this response has been researched, evaluated and processed with utmost care.</p> <p>All sources used are referenced and cited in the bibliography section. A quality review has been performed in line with the above mentioned COI methodology. This document does not claim to be exhaustive or conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. If a certain 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. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.</p> <p>The information in the response does not necessarily reflect the opinion of EUAA and makes no political statement whatsoever. The target audience is policy makers, caseworkers, COI researchers, and decision-making authorities. Any event taking place after the reference period is not included in this query response.</p>	

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Please provide your feedback on CG Syria (April 2024)!



Feedback form 

Your feedback

6. Do you consider the content of this Country Guidance useful for your work?

6A. Suggestions on how to improve the content of the document:

7. Do you consider the format of this Country Guidance user-friendly?

7A. Suggestions on how to improve the format of the document:

8. In which language would you prefer to use this Country Guidance, if translations were made available?

- English
- National language
- Both would be useful for me

9. Overall, how would you rate the quality of this Country Guidance document on a scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high).

Country Guidance: Somalia (August 2023) ★★★★★



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