

Syria: Socio-economic situation in Damascus city

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Country of Origin Information Report

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- Belgium, Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, Cedoca (Centre for Documentation and Research)
- Denmark, Danish Immigration Service

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





Contents

Acknowledgements.....	5
Contents.....	6
Disclaimer.....	8
Glossary and abbreviations.....	9
Introduction.....	10
Methodology.....	10
Defining the terms of reference.....	10
Collecting information.....	10
Quality control.....	11
Sources.....	11
Structure and use of the report.....	11
Map of the Syrian Arab Republic.....	12
1. City overview.....	13
1.1. Demographics, ethno-religious composition.....	14
2. Internal mobility.....	16
2.1. Airports and flights connections.....	16
2.2. Freedom of movement.....	17
2.3. Travel by road and through checkpoints.....	19
2.3.1. Number and location of checkpoints.....	19
2.3.2. Procedures at checkpoints.....	21
2.3.3. Treatment at checkpoints.....	22
2.3.4. Factors influencing scrutiny at checkpoints.....	23
2.3.5. Damascus International Airport and Damascus-Beirut roads.....	24
2.4. Restrictions on access and return to certain areas in Damascus.....	25
2.4.1. Al-Qaboun.....	25
2.4.2. Yarmouk.....	26
2.4.3. Jobar.....	28
2.5. Settling in Damascus.....	29
2.6. Civil documentation required for travel and access to services.....	30
3. Key socio-economic indicators.....	34





3.1. Economic overview.....	34
3.1.1. Economic situation.....	34
3.1.2. Impact of economic sanctions.....	38
3.1.3. Impact of Covid-19.....	39
3.2. Employment.....	39
3.2.1. Employment and unemployment.....	39
3.2.2. Means of basic subsistence	40
3.3. Poverty.....	42
3.4. Food Security.....	43
3.4.1. Availability of food.....	43
3.4.2. Food security levels.....	45
3.5. Housing, water, and sanitation.....	46
3.5.1. Availability of housing.....	46
3.5.2. Reconstruction projects	48
3.5.3. Legal issues affecting the housing situation	49
3.5.4. Availability of water and sanitation	50
3.6. Health care	51
3.6.1. Availability and access to treatment and medicines	51
3.6.2. Healthcare facilities capacity and quality	52
3.6.3. Impact of Covid-19.....	53
3.7. Education.....	55
3.7.1. Legal background.....	55
3.7.2. Availability of education.....	55
3.7.3. Access to education.....	57
3.8. Humanitarian situation and assistance.....	59
Annex 1: Bibliography.....	61
Oral sources, including anonymous sources	61
Public sources	61
Annex 2: Terms of Reference	87



Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2019). The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

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

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

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

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

On 19 January 2022, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) became the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). All references to EASO, EASO products and bodies should be understood as references to the EUAA.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 23 August 2022. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the [Introduction](#).



Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Definition
DAM	International airport code for Damascus International Airport
GoS	Government of Syria
HLP	Housing, Land and Property
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
MoEFT	Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade
MoF	Ministry of Finance
<i>mukhtar</i>	Mayor or chief of a village/neighbourhood
NCC	National Coordination Committee
PHC	Public Health Centre
PRS	Palestinian Refugees from Syria
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
SYP	Syrian Pound
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Yarmouk camp	Main refugee camp for Palestinians; located in Damascus city



Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide relevant information for the assessment of international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection.

The report covers the period of April 2021 - July 2022, and it is an update of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Socio-economic situation: Damascus City](#), published in April 2021. It provides relevant information regarding the socio-economic situation in the city of Damascus, including information about internal mobility and freedom of movement. This will inform the update of the chapter on Internal Protection Alternative within the EUAA Country Guidance on Syria 2022.

Methodology

This report was jointly drafted by EUAA and ACCORD, and reviewed by EUAA and national COI departments in EU+ countries¹ mentioned in the [Acknowledgements](#) section.

This report is produced in line with the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2019)² and the EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Guide (2019).³

Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference (ToR) of this report were defined by the EUAA based on discussions held and input received from COI experts in the EUAA COI specialist network on Syria and from policy experts in EU+ countries⁴ within the framework of a Country Guidance development on Syria.

The ToR for this report can be found in the [Annex II: Terms of Reference](#).

Collecting information

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 20 July 2022. Some additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received from the peer review and quality control process, up until 23 August 2022.

Value of Syrian currency

During the reference period for this report Syria has witnessed multiple large-scale fluctuations in the exchange rate between the Syrian pound (SYP) and US dollar. Throughout

¹ EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland.

² EUAA, EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

³ EUAA, Writing and Referencing Guide for EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, June 2019, [url](#)

⁴ All EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland



this document, Syrian currency was converted to US dollars according to the informal exchange rate valid in Damascus at the time each respective source was published. This was done to provide information as close to reality as possible on the actual purchasing power of the Syrian pound at the respective time of writing. Information on applicable exchange rates was taken from the United Nations World Food Programme's (WFP) monthly Market Price Watch Bulletins (see [url](#)), which include a table indicating the informal exchange rates valid in each governorate in the respective month, since these rates slightly vary per governorate and month. In case a source has already made its own conversion into USD, the figures were taken from the respective source and the conversion based on the informal exchange rate was indicated in a footnote. However, due to the rapidly fluctuating exchange rate, converted currency data presented in the document is not guaranteed to be completely current/accurate.

Quality control

To ensure that the authors respected the EUAA COI Report Methodology and that the Terms of Reference were comprehensively addressed, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and almost all of them were implemented in the final draft of this report, which was finalised on 23 August 2022. EUAA also performed the final quality review and editing of the text.

Sources

This report largely relied on open-source information available through online desk-based research, including from local media sources in Arabic. Among others, the report draws from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) Humanitarian Needs Overview on Syria published in February 2022.

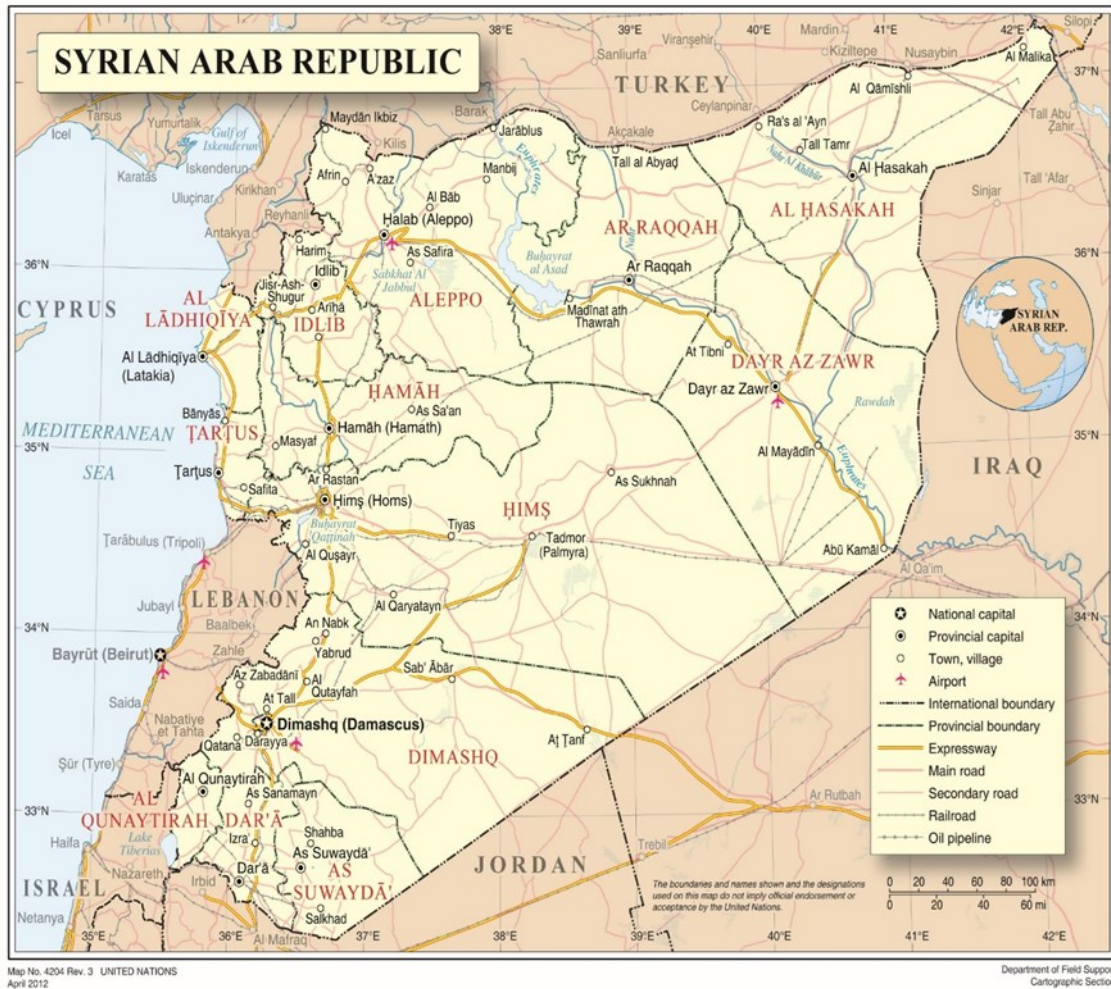
In addition to the paper-based and electronic sources that were consulted, drafters conducted an extensive interview in English with a Syrian academic from Damascus, who has rare access to state military and security actors as well as employees at various government institutions in the capital. The source preferred anonymity for security reasons and to ensure the safety of his contacts.

Structure and use of the report

The report is structured in line with the [Terms of Reference](#). The first chapter provides a brief overview of the city of Damascus; the second chapter covers issues related to freedom of movement and settling in the city, and the third chapter provides an overview of key socio-economic indicators for Damascus.



Map of the Syrian Arab Republic

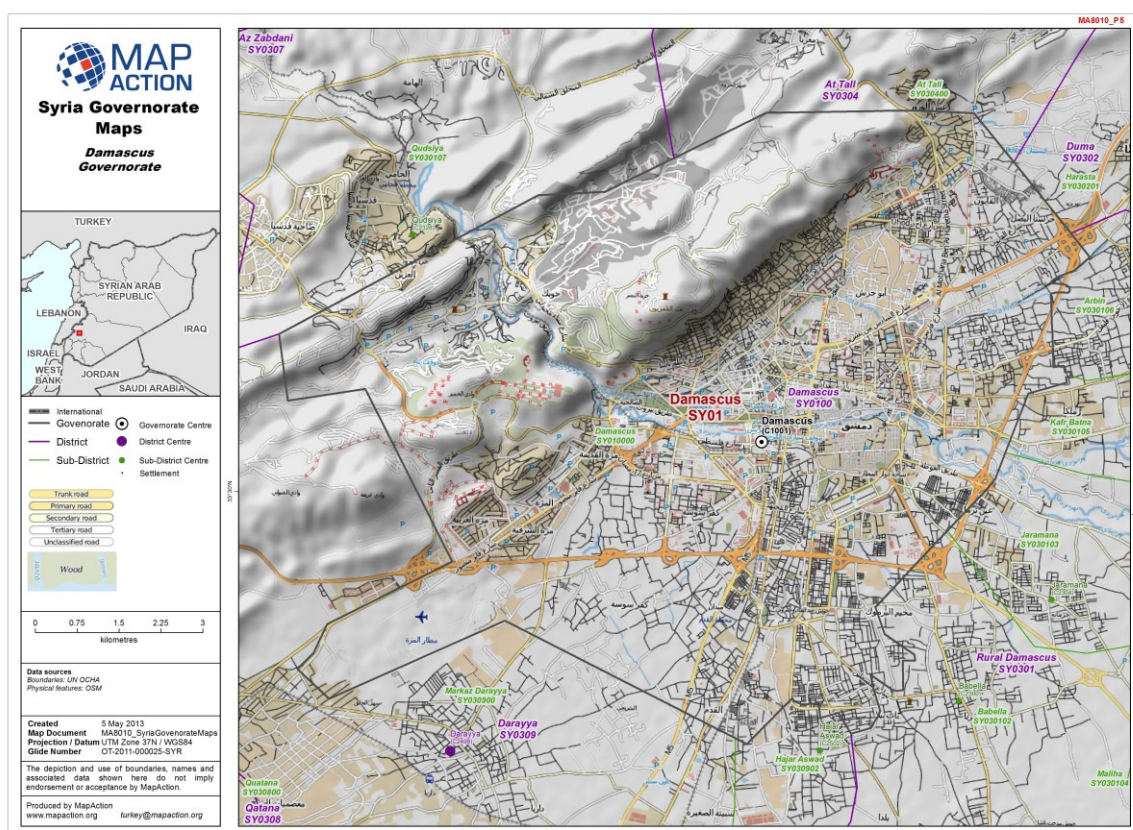


Map 1: Syrian Arab Republic, © United Nations⁵

⁵ Syrian Arab Republic, Map No. 4204 Rev. 3, April 2012, United Nations, [url](#)

1. City overview

Damascus is the capital of the Syrian Arab Republic, located in the south-west of the country. It is surrounded by the territories of the Governorate of Rural Damascus (or Rif Dimashq).⁶ The city and the governorate of Damascus cover the same area and are divided into 16 main administrative districts: Barzeh, Qaboun, Jobar, Al-Shaghour, Al-Midan, Al-Qadam, Kafr Sousa, Dummer, Al-Mazzeah, Rukn Al-Din, Al-Salihyah, Al-Mouhajireen, Saroujah, Al-Qanawat, Old Damascus, and Yarmouk camp.⁷ The administrative boundaries between the city of Damascus and Rural Damascus have been disputed and boundaries may vary according to different sources.⁸



Map 2: Damascus governorate, © MapAction⁹

⁶ Abdin, Y., The Fragility of Community Security in Damascus and its Environs, International Review of the Red Cross, (IRRC No. 906), April 2019, [url](#), pp. 901-902

⁷ Abdin, Y., The Fragility of Community Security in Damascus and its Environs, International Review of the Red Cross, (IRRC No. 906), April 2019, [url](#), p. 901

⁸ Ezzi, M., On the Edge of the Capital: Social Engineering in North-Eastern Damascus, EUI, 5 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8

⁹ Mapaction, Syria 2013-2015, Rural Damascus Governorate [map], last updated: 29 July 2016, [url](#)

1.1. Demographics, ethno-religious composition

The latest obtainable official figures released by the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of the Governorate of Damascus at 2 103 405 as of 2021.¹⁰ The US government's CIA World Factbook gave an estimate of 2 503 000 million as of 2022¹¹, while UNOCHA estimated the population to be of be 1 828 845.¹²

Accurate and updated information on the ethno-religious composition of Damascus could not be found. In its report on religious freedoms in Syria for 2021, the US Department of State (USDOS) reported on the presence of Sunni Arabs, Alawites, Twelver Shia, and Christians in Damascus, without specifying the size of the communities.¹³

A Syrian academic from Damascus, who has access to state military and security actors as well as employees at various government institutions in the capital, explained that the various neighbourhoods of Damascus generally have a mixed ethno-religious make up. However, there are certain areas of the city where a specific ethnic, religious, or sect compose the majority of its residents.¹⁴ The area of Rukn al-Din for instance is known for its Kurdish population and residents of Circassian origin.¹⁵ While Kurds live in all areas of Damascus, they considered the neighbourhood of Rukn al-Din as their 'capital', next to the neighbourhood of Zorava (Wadi Al-Mashari').¹⁶ The area of Bab Touma is the historic Christian neighbourhood of Damascus. Christians, including Christian IDPs, are further known to live in Jaramana and Dwel'a, where many live in poverty.¹⁷ Alawites make up the majority of residents in neighbourhoods such as Mazzeh 86¹⁸, Nahr Aisha,¹⁹ Ish al-Warwar²⁰ and the Baath neighbourhood of the Tishreen settlement,²¹ among others. The past ten years of war have caused demographic shifts in the ethno-religious composition of Damascus.²²

Sources allege that the Government of Syria (GoS) has been influencing demographic change in Damascus²³ with the aim to reduce the Sunnis' majority share of the population. Eviction

¹⁰ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the Population in Syria by Governorates, Chapter 2, Table 4/2, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹ US, CIA, The World Factbook, Middle East: Syria, people and society, last updated 24 June 2022, [url](#)

¹² UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹³ USDOS, 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-4

¹⁴ A Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

¹⁵ COAR, Left Behind: Family Separation and Its Impacts in Three Damascus Neighbourhoods, 26 January 2022, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁶ Raseef22, عاصمة أكراد دمشق ... ركن الدين [Rukn al-Din... Capital of the Kurds of Damascus], 13 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷ ACN, Syria: The Christian Hope Centre in Damascus, 12 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸ Syria Report (The), Alternative Housing for Owners of Properties at Risk of Collapse in Informal Settlement Mazzeh 86, 21 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹ COAR, Left Behind: Family Separation and Its Impacts in Three Damascus Neighbourhoods, 26 January 2022, [url](#), p. 5

²⁰ Ezzi, M., On the Edge of the Capital: Social Engineering in North-Eastern Damascus, EUI, 5 November 2021, [url](#), p. 17

²¹ Ezzi, M., On the Edge of the Capital: Social Engineering in North-Eastern Damascus, EUI, 5 November 2021, [url](#), p. 15

²² Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

²³ Alma, The Ousting of the Sunni Mufti of Syria, 5 December 2021, [url](#); Ezzi, M., On the Edge of the Capital: Social Engineering in North-Eastern Damascus, EUI, 5 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 10-11, 14-15; New Arab (The), تغيير ديموغرافي [Demographic change for Damascus: Regime expands real estate]



and expropriation procedures occurred in tightly occupied areas on the peripheries of large cities, such as Damascus. Less affluent Sunnis moved to the cities' outskirts from the countryside prior to the start of the war. Over time, areas such as Ghouta, east of Damascus, became strongholds against the GoS. Since the areas were recaptured by the GoS, it has started dispensing real estate among its followers. The [Exceptional Planning and Urbanization] Law No. 10, issued in April 2018, provides GoS' authorities the ability to appropriate property, if home owners do not submit ownership documents to the Syrian authority within one year²⁴ making it particularly difficult for refugees to assert ownership claims.²⁵ One area where expropriation was allegedly happening is the area of Al-Qaboun [in northern Damascus]²⁶ (For additional information see subsection [2.4.Restrictions on access and return to certain areas in Damascus](#)). The GoS has reportedly used Law No. 10 and the reorganisation of northern Damascus as a way to empty all of the areas that played an important role in the revolution and to replace the population with supporters of Bashar Al-Assad.²⁷ For further information on Law No. 10, see section 3.6 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Socio-economic situation: Damascus City \(February 2020\)](#).

Noon Post, a website specialised in reports and analyses on the Arab world, reported that Iran had been buying real estate in Damascus' old neighbourhoods, including in Al-Amara, Al-Amin, Al-Shaghour and Al-Jura, with an Iranian housing project set up in the neighbourhood of Al-Mazze, and encouraged Iranian companies and citizens to buy property in Damascus.²⁸

takeover], 26 September 2021, [url](#); Buchen, S. and Tadmory, S., Mass expropriation in Syria, How Assad is preventing the return of refugees, 31 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴ Initially the law stipulated a period of one month for submission of ownership documents. The Day After, Reality of Housing, Land, and Property Rights in Syria, December 2020, [url](#), p. 90

²⁵ Buchen, S. and Tadmory, S., Mass expropriation in Syria, How Assad is preventing the return of refugees, 31 March 2021, [url](#)

In theory, the law allows an owner's relatives (up to 4th degree relatives) to submit documents on behalf of the owner, although sources have been sceptical about the applicability. (see: The Day After, Reality of Housing, Land, and Property Rights in Syria, December 2020, [url](#), p. 90)

²⁶ Ezzi, M., On the Edge of the Capital: Social Engineering in North-Eastern Damascus, EUI, 5 November 2021, [url](#), p. 11

²⁷ New Arab (The), [تغيير ديموغرافي لدمشق: النظام يوسع نطاق الاستيلاء على العقارات](#) [Demographic change for Damascus: Regime expands real estate takeover], 26 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁸ Noon Post, [سوريا: عائلات عناصر الميليشيات الشيعية يستوطنون بيوت المهجرين](#) [Syria: families of shiite militiamen settle in homes for displaced people], 23 December 2021, [url](#); EPC, Dealing with Iran's Demographic and Soft-Power Programs in Syria, 8 February 2022, [url](#)



2. Internal mobility

2.1. Airports and flights connections

Damascus International Airport (DAM) is located 30 km south-east of downtown Damascus; about 30 minutes by car.²⁹ The Air Force Intelligence Service is responsible for all matters concerning aviation. Air Force Intelligence personnel are stationed at all civilian and military airports in Syria. The service falls under the Ministry of Defence and is connected to the National Security Bureau.³⁰ According to a confidential source cited by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Air Force Intelligence Service is known for arrests and for conducting torture.³¹

Several security incidents occurred near the airport during the reporting period. Sites inside and around Damascus International Airport were targeted by Israeli air strikes on different occasions in 2021³² and 2022.³³ The airport is situated in the vicinity of Iranian militias' ammunition sites³⁴ and Lebanese Hezbollah bases.³⁵ News articles stated that Iran is believed to transfer arms through Damascus International Airport.³⁶

On 10 June 2022 Israeli airstrikes hit Damascus International Airport, injuring one civilian and causing damage to runways. The following day, the airport suspended all flights.³⁷ Israeli media claimed the attack sought to target arms depots belonging to Iranian-backed armed groups.³⁸ Syrian authorities announced the reopening of the airport and resumption of flights on 23 June 2022.³⁹

²⁹ Damascus International airport, Maps of Damascus Airport, n.d., [url](#)

³⁰ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 16

³¹ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 16

³² Asharq Al-Awsat, US Report Confirms Israel's Targeting of Damascus Int'l Airport Runway, 19 December 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, [النظام السوري يعلن تصديده لهجوم صاروخي إسرائيلي في محيط دمشق](#) [The Syrian regime announces its response to an Israeli missile attack in the vicinity of Damascus], 3 September 2021, [url](#); Jerusalem Post (The), 4 Syrian soldiers injured in alleged Israeli airstrikes on Damascus, 8 April 2021, [url](#)

³³ Reuters, Iran says Israel will pay for Syria attack that killed 2 Revolutionary Guards, 9 March 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syria: Two civilians killed in Israeli attack near Damascus, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

³⁴ France24, Israeli strike kills three Syrian soldiers near Damascus, Syrian ministry, 22 July 2022, [url](#); Jerusalem Post (The), 4 Syrian soldiers injured in alleged Israeli airstrikes on Damascus, 8 April 2021, [url](#); Arab Weekly (The), Israeli missiles target Iranian militia sites near Damascus, 17 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵ Syria TV, [أنشطة لحزب الله غربي مطار دمشق وإسرائيل تتابع الطائرات الإيرانية](#) [Hezbollah activities west of Damascus airport and Israel tracks Iranian planes], 8 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁶ Times of Israel (The), Israel said to target army base near Damascus used by Iranian forces, 17 February 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Iran's network of influence increasing at eastern Aleppo country's airports, 6 October 2021, [url](#)

³⁷ Al Jazeera, 'Heavy' damage to Damascus airport confirmed after Israeli attack, 11 June 2022, [url](#); Syria's Damascus airport flights suspended after Israeli attack, 10 June 2022, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Syria says Damascus airport operations suspended after Israeli strikes, 14 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria, Imran Riza statement on the closure of Damascus Airport [EN/AR], 13 June 2022, [url](#)

³⁸ Times of Israel, Flights resume at Damascus airport nearly 2 weeks after strike attributed to Israel, 24 June 2022, [url](#)

³⁹ Reuters, Syria's Damascus airport to resume operations on June 23 -state media, 22 June 2022, [url](#); Asharq Al-Awsat, Damascus Airport Resumes Operations, 23 June 2022, [url](#)



The Damascus Airport Website shows flights arriving from Iran (Mashhad, Tehran), Iraq (Al-Najaf, Baghdad, Basra, Erbil), Kuwait, Lebanon (Beirut), Oman (Muscat), Pakistan (Karachi), Qatar (Doha), Russia (Moscow), Sudan (Khartoum) and UAE (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah).⁴⁰ According to different sources, Jordan agreed to resume flights to Damascus as of 3 October 2021.⁴¹ Asharq Al-Awsat reported that Iran resumed flights for pilgrimage purposes to Damascus as of 2 January 2022.⁴²

The flight tracker FlightConnections which provides information about flights for the current month, indicated that as of August 2022 international flight routes from Damascus were being operated to Dubai, Erbil, Baghdad, Al-Najaf, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Basra, Doha, Karachi, and Khartoum. Airlines flying to Damascus include Fly Baghdad, Syrian Air, Pakistan and Badr Airlines. No internal flights were operated from Damascus.⁴³

With regards to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as of 30 June 2022 fully vaccinated travellers to the country are exempt from providing a negative PCR test result, as long as they can provide an official certification proving that they were fully vaccinated a minimum of 7 days before departure. Passengers younger than 12 years of age are also exempt from having to provide a PCR test.⁴⁴ Unvaccinated travellers continue to have to test negative for COVID-19 with sources disagreeing on the time frame; either not more than 96 hours before arrival,⁴⁵ or a maximum of 96 hours before departure from their first embarkation point. In addition, a completed passenger locator form must be presented upon arrival.⁴⁶

For information on access to Damascus airport see section [2.3.5 Damascus International Airport and Damascus-Beirut roads](#).

2.2. Freedom of movement

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’.⁴⁷ However, according to Freedom House, freedom of movement in Syria in 2021 was ‘severely restricted’ due to ongoing combat and ‘proliferation of regime and militia checkpoints’.⁴⁸ The US Department of State (USDOS) noted that the GoS ‘expanded security checkpoints into civilian areas to monitor and limit movement’.⁴⁹ According to a Bertelsmann Stiftung report from 2022, restrictions of movement were influenced by perceived political affiliation. Communities perceived as disloyal were restricted more severely

⁴⁰ Damascus international airport, Damascus airport timetable, n.d., accessed on 23 February 2022, [url](#); Damascus international airport, Destinations, n.d., accessed on 5 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹ MEMO, Jordan to resume flights to Damascus, 28 September 2021, [url](#); Crisis24, Jordan: Authorities to resume flights to Damascus, Syria, from Oct. 3 /update 76, 29 September 2021, [url](#)

⁴² Asharq Al-Awsat, Iran Resumes Religious Flights to Damascus, 3 January 2022, [url](#)

⁴³ FlightConnections, Direct flights to Damascus (DAM), last updated 23 August 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴ ICAO, Status of Airports Operability and Restriction Information – Mid Region, 30 June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁵ Crisis24, Syria: Authorities maintain precautionary COVID-19 measures as of Aug. 1 /update 22, 31 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶ ICAO, Status of Airports Operability and Restriction Information – Mid Region, 30 June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁷ Syria, Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, 2012, [url](#), art. 38/3

⁴⁸ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Syria, 28 February 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹ USDOS, 2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 49



than those in areas perceived as loyal.⁵⁰ The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic reported that the GoS imposed restrictions on freedom of movement⁵¹ and deprived individuals of their property in areas previously held by the opposition.⁵² According to confidential sources interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in February and March 2022, in practice persons could not travel freely between GoS-controlled territory and territories under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) or the Syrian National Army (SNA). Travel between GoS-controlled territory and areas under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) was possible for those residing in the cities of Hasaka and Qamishli, where GoS retains some presence and control.⁵³

A lack of civil documentation, especially for IDPs, prevented people from moving through checkpoints, thereby inhibiting their freedom to move, and to seek essential services.⁵⁴ About 33 % of the returnees in GoS areas⁵⁵ interviewed by Voices for Displaced Syrians (VDSF) and (Operations & Policy Centre (OPC) ⁵⁶ field teams during September 2021 reported that they considered military checkpoints the main reason for restricted movement. Additional reasons included the absence of rule of law (more than 13 %), general concerns about safety (almost 11 %), active conflict (about 10 %) and kidnapping (about 8,5 %).⁵⁷

Information on COVID-19 related measures restricting the freedom of movement of residents in Damascus during the reporting period was scarce. As of December 2021, people who were not vaccinated against COVID-19 were not allowed to enter certain public premises in Damascus, such as the General Administration of Immigration and Passports building.⁵⁸ The ministers of education and culture also announced limited access for certain groups of unvaccinated people into their buildings and to certain events.⁵⁹

⁵⁰ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report — Syria, 2022, [url](#), p. 32

⁵¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), paras 20-21, 28

⁵² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), paras 38, 42; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras 45, 50

⁵³ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria], May 2022, [url](#), p. 16

⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 58

⁵⁵ Interviewees in GoS-controlled areas were interviewed in Damascus and Jaramana, with a sample of 300 respondents, divided equally between residents, IDPs and returnees included. (See: VDSF and OPC, Is Syria Safe for Return? Returnees' Perspective, November 2021, [url](#), p. 13)

⁵⁶ Operations and Policy Center (OPC, formerly Orient Policy Center) is a Syrian-led and owned 'independent think tank and service provider. Established in 2014, OPC conducts original research and provides consulting services to enhance policymaking, development programs, and humanitarian response projects'.

The report was conducted together with Voices for Displaced Syrians Forum (VDSF), which 'gathers 40+ Syrian civil society organizations operating in Syria and refugee-hosting countries, including Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq. Established in 2019, the VDSF advocates for the achievement of durable solutions to protect, respond to, and improve the quality of life of displaced Syrians inside Syria and abroad'. (See: VDSF and OPC, Is Syria Safe for Return? Returnees' Perspective, November 2021, [url](#), p. 2)

⁵⁷ VDSF and OPC, Is Syria Safe for Return? Returnees' Perspective, November 2021, [url](#), pp. 38-39

⁵⁸ Tayyar, سوريا.. وزارة الداخلية تصدر تعميماً يمنع دخول المراجعين غير المطعمين ضد كورونا إلى دوائرها [Syria.. Ministry of Interior issues circular prohibiting people unvaccinated against corona from entering its buildings], (Source: SANA), 23 December 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, سوريا.. الهجرة والجوازات تشترط تلقي لقاح "كورونا" للدخول إلى مراكزها [Syria.. Immigration and Passports agencies require corona vaccine to enter their centres], 23 December 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁹ Enab Baladi, سوريا.. الهجرة والجوازات تشترط تلقي لقاح "كورونا" للدخول إلى مراكزها [Syria.. Immigration and Passports agencies require corona vaccine to enter their centres], 23 December 2021, [url](#)



Citizens were allowed to travel internationally but the GoS reportedly denied access to passports and civil documentation based on political views, association with the opposition, or geographical location associated with the opposition. USDOS stated that the GoS imposed exit visa requirements and at times closed Damascus airport and border crossings. The same source reported that the government ‘comprehensively banned international travel of opposition members, often targeting any such individual who attempted to travel’ and cited human rights groups which reported that activists and their families feared being attacked at airports and border crossings upon attempting to leave.⁶⁰ There was a nation-wide problem of issuing passports, affecting the entire population, with citizens having to pay bribes to book appointments to apply for a passport and having to wait for months to receive a new passport.⁶¹

2.3. Travel by road and through checkpoints

2.3.1. Number and location of checkpoints

Information on the number and location of checkpoints was difficult to find and corroborate during the reference period of this report.

There were checkpoints located on all roads going to Damascus,⁶² on the main highways from and to Dar’a, Homs and Beirut, at the entry of Damascus,⁶³ as well as within the city.⁶⁴ Inside Damascus there were checkpoints near the security branches and on the way to the presidential palace.⁶⁵ As explained by a Syrian academic interviewed for this report, the majority of checkpoints within the city of Damascus today are mobile checkpoints, which are mainly staffed by the military police. It is their main aim to find young men, eligible for military service. For this reason, mobile checkpoints are often positioned in areas, where it is known that young men will gather.⁶⁶ A driver interviewed by the New Arab⁶⁷ explained that it was possible in some parts of Damascus to use side roads to avoid checkpoints, but there were still major areas within Damascus, which were impossible to pass through without going through checkpoints.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ USDOS, 2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 50

⁶¹ COAR, Syria’s Passport Crisis Continues as ‘Reforms’ Create New Platform for Corruption, 28 February 2022, [url](#)

⁶² Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [Source: Musaab Balchi, Palestinian consultant, MENA real-time information analyst and former journalist based in Washington D.C.], October 2021, [url](#), p. 67

⁶³ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

⁶⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [Source: Musaab Balchi, Palestinian consultant, MENA real-time information analyst and former journalist based in Washington D.C.], October 2021, [url](#), p. 67

⁶⁵ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

⁶⁶ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

⁶⁷ The New Arab is a pan-Arab media outlet headquartered in London.

⁶⁸ New Arab (The), إتاوات حواجز النظام ترهق السوريين [The royalties of the regime's barriers exhaust Syrians], 18 March 2021, [url](#)



According to the Syrian media platform 7al⁶⁹, several checkpoints in Damascus have been grouped and merged to form big checkpoints located around and at the entrances of Damascus. These include the checkpoints of:

- Centre (southern entrance of Damascus, controlled by the military security branch 227, the general intelligence department and state security branch 251),
- Najha (south-eastern entrance, controlled by the air force intelligence and the Palestine branch),
- Sumariyya (western entrance, controlled by the air force intelligence and the military security branch 215),
- Baghdad Bridge (northern entrance, controlled by the air force intelligence) and
- Yafour (eastern entrance, controlled by the 4th division security office).⁷⁰

In March 2022, Syria TV, a Istanbul-based television network, reported on the removal of one of the biggest checkpoints of Damascus on the outskirts of Midan neighbourhood.⁷¹

The news network SY24 documented checkpoints in the following areas of Damascus city in 2021 and 2022: 'Tropicana' checkpoint in the area of Al-Adawi,⁷² a checkpoint in Bab Al-Jabiya,⁷³ a checkpoint in the neighbourhood of Bab Sharqi⁷⁴ and a checkpoint on the road leading from the area of Al-Adawi to Barzeh.⁷⁵ Residents described widespread patrols and roadblocks in the area of Dwel'a.⁷⁶ In December 2021, government forces set up a temporary checkpoint in the neighbourhood of Al-Shaghour, with several arrests recorded at the checkpoint in less than an hour.⁷⁷ A further checkpoint was located at the entrances of Yarmouk Camp.⁷⁸

According to SY24, a temporary checkpoint close to the Al-Nofra Café in Al-Qaymariya neighbourhood was set up in September 2021.⁷⁹ In December 2021, army personnel was stationed next to the Al-Nofra Café in Al-Qaymariya neighbourhood, searching citizens who

⁶⁹ 7al is a Syrian news source that covers the local, regional and international news. 7al states that it is an independent news source with no stated political agenda and it describes its purpose as providing non-biased news and objective analyses. It is financed by Syrian Expatriates.

⁷⁰ 7al, "النصر؟"، الحواجز الأمنية في دمشق: هل ستقوم الحكومة السورية بإزالة حواجزها بعد "النصر"؟, 18 January 2022, [url](#)

⁷¹ Syria TV, النظام السوري يزيل أحد أكبر حواجزه الأمنية في العاصمة دمشق, [Syrian regime removes one of its largest security barriers in Damascus], 23 March 2022, [url](#)

⁷² SY24, طابور جديد من السيارات في دمشق, [A new queue of cars in Damascus], 21 February 2022, [url](#)

⁷³ SY24, رصد أحد الحواجز العسكرية في حي باب الجابية بدمشق, [Monitoring one of the military checkpoints in Bab al-Jabiya neighborhood in Damascus], 1 February 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁴ SY24, عدسة مراسلنا ترصد الحاجز العسكري للنظام في حي باب شرقي بمدينة دمشق، والذي يقوم بإخضاع جميع المارة لعمليات تفتيش, [Our correspondent's lens monitors the regime's military checkpoint in the bab sharqi neighborhood of damascus, which subjects all passers-by to searches that residents describe as "degrading."], 31 December 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁵ SY24, سيئ الصيت.. حاجز أمني بدمشق يضيق الخناق على أبناء الغوطة الشرقية, [Notorious. Security checkpoint in Samascus tightens the noose on the young men of Eastern Ghouta], 4 November 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁶ SY24, عملية خطف جديدة لطفل في دمشق.. هل باتت مناطق النظام وكرًا للمافيات؟, [New kidnapping of a child in Damascus. Have the regime's areas become a mafia den?], 22 February 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁷ SY24, حملة جديدة للنظام في مدينة دمشق, [A new regime campaign in Damascus], 31 December 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [Source: Musaab Balchi, Palestinian consultant, MENA real-time information analyst and former journalist based in Washington D.C.], October 2021, [url](#), p. 67

⁷⁹ SY24, أمن النظام يلاحق الشبان والدراجات النارية في دمشق وريفها, [Regime security pursues young men and motorcycles in Damascus and its countryside], 27 September 2021, [url](#)



passed through the area, including women and the elderly. Furthermore, a bus carrying military personnel from the security branch was stationed for several days in the Baramka area, opposite the entrance of Damascus University. Students were randomly stopped and their IDs checked.⁸⁰ Security checks were intensified at military checkpoints in February 2022. Patrols increased and temporary checkpoints were set up in neighbourhoods of Damascus as well as in the suburbs of the city.⁸¹

2.3.2. Procedures at checkpoints

The procedure conducted at checkpoints depends on the location of the checkpoint, as well as the personnel staffing it, as explained by the Syrian academic interviewed for this report. It is generally mandatory to show an ID and men of military age should have their military booklet on them. At checkpoints within the city borders, procedures are less strict than at the major checkpoints surrounding the city. The checkpoints surrounding the city check names of people passing through the checkpoint against a database of wanted persons by the four major security branches of the government (military security, air force intelligence, state security, and political security). This security check is known as ‘the quadruple’ security check. Searches would not only result in information on the particular individual, but also on their family members. Smaller checkpoints would generally not be able to conduct this ‘quadruple’ check, but rather a security check on one or some of the existing wanted lists.⁸² Every intelligence branch maintains their own wanted lists. In order for checkpoint security officers to be able to search for a person’s name against their database, checkpoints are equipped with computers. If a person’s name appears in the wanted list, the person gets arrested.⁸³

Interviewees told Human Rights Watch that in GoS-controlled areas people must show their ID cards and might be asked to provide their reconciliation card (for those from retaken areas) and telephone, for their caller history to be checked.⁸⁴

The specific procedure conducted at a checkpoint on the road leading from al-Adawi neighbourhood to Barzeh in November 2021 was described by SY24 as follows: all passers-by were checked, including university and school students. Checkpoint personnel requested to see IDs, deferral cards and renewed settlement cards. In addition, mobile phones were searched. After the search, the youths were photographed without known reason. According to SY24, a student at Damascus University was arrested, due to his university postponement card having expired two days earlier.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ SY24, [إجراءات أمنية مكثفة في دمشق](#) [A new siege. Intensive security measures in Damascus], 1 December 2021, [url](#)

⁸¹ SY24, [إطابور جديد من السيارات في دمشق](#) [A new queue of cars in Damascus], 21 February 2022, [url](#)

⁸² Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

⁸³ HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death” [Source: Suhail al-Ghazi, researcher, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Istanbul], 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 50

⁸⁴ HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death”, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 30

⁸⁵ SY24, [سيئ الصيت.. حاجز أمني بدمشق يضيق الخناق على أبناء الغوطة الشرقية](#) [Notorious. Security checkpoint in Damascus tightens the noose on the young men of Eastern Ghouta], 4 November 2021, [url](#)



2.3.3. Treatment at checkpoints

The Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC)⁸⁶ and the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)⁸⁷ reported that in 2021 most arrests in Syria were carried out while individuals were passing through GoS checkpoints or during raids.⁸⁸ SNHR documented the arrests of a Sheikh from the Druze sect as well as the arrest of Bassam Safar, editor at the North Press Agency and member of the National Coordination Committee's⁸⁹ executive office, at checkpoints in Damascus city in June 2021.⁹⁰ Further arrests at checkpoints in Damascus suburbs throughout 2021 were reported of individuals who had settled their security status⁹¹, of citizens who did not participate in the presidential elections,⁹² and of young men wanted for compulsory military service or reserve service.⁹³ Arrests at checkpoints in Damascus were also reported in 2022.⁹⁴

Feelings of unease when passing through checkpoints were particularly reported by men residing in GoS-controlled areas, including Damascus city, who were interviewed by Refugee Protection Watch (RPW).⁹⁵ Interviewees described being worried about being detained at checkpoints because of military service.⁹⁶ Interviewees further spoke about threats and provocations at checkpoints.⁹⁷ They had to deal with 'unpredictable mood' and patronizing attitude of soldiers at checkpoints, as well as long waiting times.⁹⁸

SY24 quoted residents describing searches at a checkpoint in the Bab Sharqi neighbourhood of Damascus as 'degrading'.⁹⁹ The checkpoint on the road leading from Al-Adawi neighbourhood to Barzeh was described to be one of the most 'notorious' checkpoints in

⁸⁶ The SHRC is a London-based human rights organisation concerned with defending the general liberties and human rights of the Syrian people.

⁸⁷ The SNHR is, according to its website, 'an independent, non-profit and non-governmental organization'. It documents human rights violations in Syria.

⁸⁸ SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 46; SNHR, At Least 2,218 Arbitrary Arrests/ Detentions Documented in Syria in 2021, 242 of Them in December, 2 January 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁹ The National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC) is a Syrian bloc consisting of left-wing political parties and independent political and youth activists. It is considered an opposition body in Syria.

⁹⁰ SNHR, At Least 2,218 Arbitrary Arrests/ Detentions Documented in Syria in 2021, 242 of Them in December, 2 January 2022, [url](#), p. 18

⁹¹ SNHR, Eleventh Annual Report, 21 January 2022, [url](#), p. 24

⁹² SNHR, At Least 2,218 Arbitrary Arrests/ Detentions Documented in Syria in 2021, 242 of Them in December, 2 January 2022, [url](#), p. 5

⁹³ Al-Arabiya, [ادفع وإلا، حواجز النظام في سوريا دجاجات تبيض ذهباً](#) [The regime's checkpoints in Syria are chickens that lay golden eggs...pay or else], 6 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁴ SNHR, At Least 227 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in July 2022, Including 16 Children and Nine Women, 2 August 2022, [url](#), p. 15

⁹⁵ Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) is a coalition formed in 2019 by the Lebanese, Syrian and European organisations ALEF – Act for Human Rights, Basmeh and Zeitooneh, PAX, Upinion and 11.11.11. 'Since 2019, RPW has conducted research and advocacy on protection issues facing Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as well as on the conditions for safe, voluntary, informed and dignified return to Syria'. (see: RPW, About, n.d., [url](#))

⁹⁶ SADC, Is Damascus really safe as the Assad regime claims?, 10 January 2022, [url](#); RPW, "I have not known the taste of safety for ten years", November 2021, [url](#), pp. 46-47

⁹⁷ RPW, "I have not known the taste of safety for ten years", November 2021, [url](#), p. 47

⁹⁸ RPW, "I have not known the taste of safety for ten years", November 2021, [url](#), p. 46

⁹⁹ SY24, [عدسة مر اسلنا ترصد الحاجز العسكري للنظام في حي باب شرقي بمدينة دمشق، والذي يقوم بإخضاع جميع المارة لعمليات تفتيش](#). [Our correspondent's lens monitors the regime's military checkpoint in the Bab Sharqi neighborhood of Damascus, which subjects all passers-by to searches that residents describe as "degrading."], 31 December 2021, [url](#)



Damascus, due to the conduct of its personnel.¹⁰⁰ In February 2022, SY24 correspondents observed a tightening of security measures at the ‘Tropicana’ checkpoint in the area of Al-Adawi. Cars were stopped and searched, in addition to security checks conducted on all passers-by. Civilians were allegedly insulted during their search.¹⁰¹

Amnesty International reported the harassment of a 17-year-old girl at a checkpoint in Damascus. The soldier allegedly told the mother that he wanted her daughter and that he intended to ‘take’ her ‘by force’.¹⁰²

Sources reported difficulties transporting goods and paying bribes for passage through checkpoints.¹⁰³ According to a 49-year-old man from Damascus interviewed by Human Rights Watch in March 2021, security officers at checkpoints would generally ask for bribes to pass. Bribes would be between 1 000 and 2 000 Syrian pounds, which added up when forced to travel through a high number of checkpoints.¹⁰⁴

2.3.4. Factors influencing scrutiny at checkpoints

According to the Syrian academic from Damascus interviewed for this report, young men of military age are generally questioned the most at checkpoints, as they are wanted for military service.¹⁰⁵

Residents of Damascus city interviewed by RWP explained that treatment at checkpoints varied according to the person conducting the inspection. 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.¹⁰⁶ The region of origin of the person passing through was considered to be an influential factor when it came to scrutiny at checkpoints. People from a different province, where the security situation is volatile, were likely to have to answer questions regarding their address in Damascus, work, and their intended destination.¹⁰⁷ SY24 reported that GoS security forces subjected residents of Eastern Ghouta (a region perceived by the GoS as pro-opposition) to thorough searches, insults and arrest on a daily basis, when crossing the checkpoint for entering Damascus city.¹⁰⁸

Additional scrutiny or harassment by checkpoint personnel was further likely, if a family member was wanted for a criminal or security reason,¹⁰⁹ or if a person had the same or similar names as a person on a wanted list. Interviewees told the New Arab of mistreatment at the hands of security personnel as well as the necessity to pay bribes, as a result of their names.

¹⁰⁰ SY24, [سبي الصيت.. حاجز أمني بدمشق يضيق الخناق على أبناء الغوطة الشرقية](#) [Notorious. Security checkpoint in Damascus tightens the noose on the young men of Eastern Ghouta], 4 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ SY24, [إطابور جديد من السيارات في دمشق](#) [A new queue of cars in Damascus], 21 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰² AI, “You’re going to your death”, 7 September 2021, [url](#), p. 25

¹⁰³ New Arab (The), [إتاوات حواجز النظام ترهق السوريين](#) [The royalties of the regime's barriers exhaust Syrians], 18 March 2021, [url](#); RPW, “I have not known the taste of safety for ten years”, November 2021, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁰⁴ HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death”, 20 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 60-61

¹⁰⁵ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

¹⁰⁶ RPW, “I have not known the taste of safety for ten years”, November 2021, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁰⁷ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

¹⁰⁸ SY24, [حواجز النظام تضيق على أبناء الغوطة في دمشق](#) [Regime barriers narrow in on Ghouta residents in Damascus], 13 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022



Some felt pressured to leave the country, as they felt incapable to solve the problem in a different way.¹¹⁰

Human Rights Watch and the Lebanese LGBT organization Helem described a particular risk for members of the LGBT community when passing checkpoints. Men who dressed differently from the norm, such as wearing tight trousers, perfume or arranging their hair, were verbally and sexually harassed and abused for looking 'soft'.¹¹¹

Men reportedly experienced more interference at checkpoints than women on a daily basis¹¹², however, according to SNHR, women were also arrested by GoS forces while passing through checkpoints.¹¹³ One in five households interviewed by UNOCHA nationwide for its Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) 2022 indicated that girls and women felt unsafe when crossing checkpoints in their area of residence.¹¹⁴

2.3.5. Damascus International Airport and Damascus-Beirut roads

Checkpoints are located at Damascus International Airport for passengers departing from Damascus, as well as arriving in Damascus.¹¹⁵ Employees at the airport were said to ask for bribes, threatening disruption or security problems, in case of no payment.¹¹⁶ In the case of passengers arriving in Damascus, the Syrian academic interviewed for this report explained that checkpoints at the airport perform the described quadruple security check, in order to find out if a person arriving is on a wanted list.¹¹⁷ Other sources have also reported that persons passing through checkpoints, including at the airport, are checked by the security forces against databases containing wanted lists.¹¹⁸

Checkpoints are further located at most entrances to cities and on major highways, such as highways to and from Lebanon, to and from Damascus International Airport and on the M5 Motorway.¹¹⁹

Sources report the presence of checkpoints on the highway connecting Damascus and Beirut, without specifying the number and precise location.¹²⁰ According to the interviewed academic,

¹¹⁰ New Arab (The), تشابه الأسماء... رعب يلاحق السوريين عند حواجز النظام [Similar names... Terror haunts Syrians at regime checkpoints], 3 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹¹ HRW and Helem, They Treated Us in Monstrous Ways: Sexual Violence Against Men, Boys, and Transgender Women in the Syrian Conflict, July 2020, [url](#), p. 27

¹¹² Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

¹¹³ SNHR, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 25 November 2021, [url](#), p. 16

¹¹⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 29

¹¹⁵ Syrian Today, سوريون: مطار دمشق الدولي.. مصيدة يصعب الخروج منها دون أضرار [Syrians: Damascus international airport a trap that's hard to get out of without damage], 29 August 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ Syrian Today, سوريون: مطار دمشق الدولي.. مصيدة يصعب الخروج منها دون أضرار [Syrians: Damascus international airport a trap that's hard to get out of without damage], 29 August 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

¹¹⁸ HRW, "Our Lives Are Like Death" [Source: Suhail al-Ghazi, researcher, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Istanbul], 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 50; EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, p. 25

¹¹⁹ HRW, "Our Lives Are Like Death", 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 30

¹²⁰ Canada, Syria Travel Advice, last updated 28 June 2022, [url](#); OCCRP, People Smugglers in Syria Take to TikTok, 23 June 2021, [url](#)



the number of checkpoints on the Damascus-Beirut roads is unclear and constantly change. They are generally staffed by the Fourth Division.¹²¹

2.4. Restrictions on access and return to certain areas in Damascus

For background information on the evolution of the conflict in Damascus see section 2.10 of the [EUAA COI report: Syria – Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

Sources indicated that access and return to certain neighbourhoods in Damascus was restricted.¹²² Developments which took place during the reference period of the report are covered in the sections below.

2.4.1. Al-Qaboun

Al-Qaboun had been under the control of anti-GoS armed groups between 2013-2017. The use of high explosive during the GoS offensive for its recapture had left the area with few habitable buildings.¹²³ Syrian researcher and journalist Mazen Ezzi stated that extensive demolition of the Al-Qaboun area took place up until October 2018. The Damascus Governorate prevented people from returning to their homes, and properties were demolished before property rights could be established. In August 2019, the Damascus Governorate prepared a new zoning plan for the residential area of Al-Qaboun (No. 105), under the Planning and Urban Development Law No. 23 of 2015, which allows authorities to seize up to 40 % of private property. Objections to the zoning plan had to be handed in within one month. Only those with valid title deeds and present in person or represented by a legal representative could submit an objection. However, most property owners were forcibly displaced. By November 2021, the plan was still under review and awaiting ratification.¹²⁴

In September 2021, President Bashar Al-Assad issued Decree No. 237, which created ‘new “zoning” restrictions’ in northern Damascus,¹²⁵ extending from Harasta to the Panorama Circle in Al-Qaboun.¹²⁶ According to The Syria Report, a website specialised on covering economic information on Syria, the decree was based on Law No. 10 of 2018 and approved in June 2019.¹²⁷ Law No. 10 allows the state to confiscate property of owners who fail to prove

¹²¹ The Fourth Division is an elite military unit with strong Iranian support, which controls various territories of the country and is led by Maher Al-Assad, the brother of Bashar Al-Assad. (See: MEI, The Fourth Division: Syria's parallel army, 24 September 2021, [url](#)); Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

¹²² EUAA, COI Report: Syria - Socio-economic situation: Damascus City, April 2021, [url](#), section 2.3.6

¹²³ Ezzi, M., On the Edge of the Capital: Social Engineering in North-Eastern Damascus, EUI, 5 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 10-11

¹²⁴ Ezzi, M., On the Edge of the Capital: Social Engineering in North-Eastern Damascus, EUI, 5 November 2021, [url](#), p. 11

¹²⁵ STJ, Syria: Qaboun and Harasta Zoning Decree No. 237 Hails New Series of Property Confiscations near Damascus, November 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹²⁶ STJ, Syria: Qaboun and Harasta Zoning Decree No. 237 Hails New Series of Property Confiscations near Damascus, November 2021, [url](#), p. 4; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 49

¹²⁷ Syria Report (The), Law No. 10 Goes into Effect at the Northern Entrance to Damascus, 18 January 2022, [url](#)



ownership within a specified time period.¹²⁸ According to Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), an independent NGO documenting human rights violations in Syria, property owners had 30 days to submit property declarations.¹²⁹ As many previous residents were displaced and/or lack access to title deeds, they were unable to submit declarations in time and were at risk of having their properties confiscated.¹³⁰ The Syria Report reported that Damascus governorate granted rights holders one year, commencing October 2021, to prove ownership to the Directorate for Implementation of Decree No. 66.¹³¹

Al-Qaboun was also reported to be uninhabitable due to the prevalence of mines and the high level of destruction.¹³² According to a report by the European University Institute, in July 2021 previous inhabitants were allowed to return to Al-Balad in Al-Qaboun, if they could provide a security clearance from the Air Force Intelligence as well as a report from a 'specialised technical committee' confirming that their property is habitable. Few were however able to return in practice.¹³³ As of January 2022, GoS forces were allowing former residents to enter the area to inspect their property, but not to live there, on the condition of obtaining security clearance and upon providing identification papers.¹³⁴

2.4.2. Yarmouk

Yarmouk is an 'unofficial' refugee camp for Palestinians refugees.¹³⁵ According to Palestinian consultant Musaab Balchi, interviewed by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) in 2021, every person entering and exiting Yarmouk Camp had to pass through a checkpoint controlled by the Syrian military, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC) and a few other smaller Palestinian factions, such as the Free Palestine Movement.¹³⁶

It was possible for Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) to enter and reside in Yarmouk Camp, subject to conditions. In order to visit the camp, a person had to provide proof of ownership (or water or electricity payments that prove an attachment to the camp), as well as an ID card. They further needed to complete a security check. According to Balchi, the security check was conducted directly at the checkpoint in front of the camp. People whose names were found

¹²⁸ COAR, 'Northern Gate' Project Slams a Door in the Face of Displaced Damascenes, 27 September 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁹ STJ, Syria: Qaboun and Harasta Zoning Decree No. 237 Hails New Series of Property Confiscations near Damascus, November 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹³⁰ STJ, Syria: Qaboun and Harasta Zoning Decree No. 237 Hails New Series of Property Confiscations near Damascus, November 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹³¹ Syria Report (The), Law No. 10 Goes into Effect at the Northern Entrance to Damascus, 18 January 2022, [url](#)

¹³² NPA, عقبات تمنع نازحي حي القابون في دمشق من العودة لمنازلهم [Obstacles prevent displaced people in al-Qaboun neighborhood in Damascus from returning home], 4 January 2022, [url](#)

¹³³ Ezzi, M., On the Edge of the Capital: Social Engineering in North-Eastern Damascus, EUI, 5 November 2021, [url](#), p. 12

¹³⁴ NPA, عقبات تمنع نازحي حي القابون في دمشق من العودة لمنازلهم [Obstacles prevent displaced people in al-Qaboun neighborhood in Damascus from returning home], 4 January 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁵ UNRWA, Yarmouk (unofficial camp), n.d., [url](#)

¹³⁶ Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [Source: Musaab Balchi, Palestinian consultant, MENA real-time information analyst and former journalist based in Washington D.C.], October 2021, [url](#), p. 68



on wanted lists faced detention, while relatives of wanted individuals were denied access to the camp, with some also being subject to arbitrary arrests.¹³⁷

People who wished to return to live in Yarmouk Camp needed to be able to prove ownership in the camp, provide security clearance, the family book and IDs for every family member above 14 years of age. It was further required that the house was not at risk of collapsing. Deeds to prove ownership were only recognised if issued by the GoS, but records of ownership had been destroyed inside the camps, which made it impossible to have a deed reissued. Many individuals who had fled Yarmouk Camp were missing ownership documents and/or were afraid of approaching the authorities to receive security clearance, therefore hampering their return.¹³⁸ These requirements were reported to be in place as of the beginning of 2022, with the security clearance reportedly taking place at the checkpoint or at Yarmouk municipality office, rather than at a security branch.¹³⁹

In June 2021, Quds Press, a UK-based media agency focused on Palestinian issues, reported that the Damascus Provincial Council issued a resolution to allow residents of Yarmouk camp to return to their homes. The new resolution was intended to include more families, but was still based on the necessity to obtain security clearance as well as an application process as part of which title deeds need to be provided.¹⁴⁰ The Syrian official news agency SANA reported in July 2021 that thousands of displaced had returned to Yarmouk camp. According to the secretary-general of the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front cited by SANA, returning families needed to submit property deeds so that the restoration of their homes could start, following the outcome of the safety inspection. He added that the infrastructure in the camp was being rehabilitated.¹⁴¹ While the government continued to publicly promote the return of residents, Mahmoud Zaghumt, a member of the Action Group for Palestinians of Syria (AGPS), a London-based human rights organisation that monitors the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria, explained that in practice it was impossible for a large proportion of the previous residents of Yarmouk to return to their homes, as the government did not allow any family, whose members are accused of belonging to the opposition, or of participating in the revolutionary movement – often including families of detainees and missing persons – to return. Eligible families were also required to provide ownership papers and pay for electricity, water and the telephone line. More than 80 % of housing and infrastructure was reportedly destroyed, with residents of uninhabitable homes not allowed to return. Those who were

¹³⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [Source: Musaab Balchi, Palestinian consultant, MENA real-time information analyst and former journalist based in Washington D.C.], October 2021, [url](#), p. 69

¹³⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [Source: Musaab Balchi, Palestinian consultant, MENA real-time information analyst and former journalist based in Washington D.C.], October 2021, [url](#), pp. 69-70

¹³⁹ Palestinian Refugees Portal, الموافقة الأمنية لدخول مخيم اليرموك لم تلغ.. وبلدية اليرموك تستقبل طلبات العودة [Security approval to enter Yarmouk camp has not been revoked. Yarmouk municipality receives requests for return], 15 December 2021, [url](#); Palestinian Press Agency, استئناف تقديم طلبات العودة لمخيم اليرموك [Applications for return to Yarmouk camp resume], 3 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ Quds Press, ما حقيقة السماح بعودة أهالي مخيم اليرموك إلى منازلهم؟ [What is the reality of allowing Yarmouk residents to return to their homes?], 14 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ SANA, عودة مئات العائلات المهجرة إلى منازلها في منطقة اليرموك بدمشق [Hundreds of displaced families return to their homes in Yarmouk area of Damascus], 18 July 2021, [url](#)



allowed to access to rebuild their homes face a lack of electricity, water and sanitation in the area.¹⁴²

In September 2021, residents were allowed to access the area during daytime only to remove debris from their houses. As reported by Asharq Al-Awsat,¹⁴³ they were obliged to gather at the security checkpoint daily to obtain security approval to enter the area. The majority had to wait for hours to be individually checked, being questioned about their family members, work and other affiliations. Only few were granted access. Some allegedly received permission to enter after paying a bribe.¹⁴⁴

According to the pro-opposition newspaper Enab Baladi, permanent return was further complicated by the fact that forms of real estate ownership vary in the area. While some were registered under the general authority of the Palestinian Arab Refugees Foundation, other properties were registered with judicial agencies, under judicial decision, through contracts of sale of agricultural land or on the land registry. The overlap of real estate ownership of the camp increases the complexity for owners to prove ownership.¹⁴⁵

Al Jazeera reported in February 2022 that the GoS was further complicating the return of residents to Yarmouk camp by requesting family members living abroad who were wanted for military service to obtain a power of attorney from the Syrian representation abroad before their families are provided with the required paperwork to be able to return. Many of such requests were reportedly rejected, although in some exceptional cases, refugees were able to obtain the document.¹⁴⁶

UNOCHA reported in February 2022 that since the end of 2020, around 2 000 government approvals have been granted to Palestinians to return to Yarmouk camp. By mid-2021 UNOCHA recorded that 480 vulnerable Palestine refugee families had returned to Yarmouk, while noting that the camp lacked basic infrastructure and services.¹⁴⁷

2.4.3. Jobar

According to the New Arab, residents of Jobar were still prevented from returning to their homes as of December 2021, due to government measures to organise the neighbourhood and demolish destroyed property. Many of the previous residents were lacking papers to prove ownership. The government further required security approval for those wishing to apply for new ownership papers, but many were afraid to approach the security branch, in case they got arrested. Brokers were able to collect the required paperwork needed for a sale

¹⁴² Orient, *Yarmouk camp is on the front page again and a Palestinian activist exposes the lies of the regime*, 12 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴³ Asharq Al-Awsat is pan-Arab international newspaper headquartered in London.

¹⁴⁴ Asharq Al-Awsat, *«نازحون من مخيم اليرموك يشكون عرقلة «حق العودة»* [Displaced people from Yarmouk camp complain of obstruction of the "right of return"], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵ Enab Baladi, *العودة إلى "اليرموك" يعطلها مخطط يأكل 60% من المساحة ومواقف أمنية* [Returning to "Yarmouk" is disrupted by a plan that consumes 60% of the area and security approvals], 31 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ Al Jazeera, *سوريا.. النظام يحرم أسر المتخلفين عن الخدمة العسكرية من منازلهم بمخيم اليرموك* [Syria.. regime deprives families of those who failed to serve of their homes in Yarmouk camp], 8 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic*, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 45



for ‘exorbitant’ amounts.¹⁴⁸ As of July 2022, the Syria Report noted that Jobar was empty and that former residents have not been allowed to return or check their properties.¹⁴⁹

2.5. Settling in Damascus

All procedures related to property were subject to security approval. Security approvals were required when selling and leasing real estate, including in the case of a person being absent or abroad. According to Enab Baladi, applications for security approval took approximately three months to be processed and professionals working in real estate estimated that 60 % were rejected, in many cases because the owner of the property was abroad or had an unresolved security issue, such as being wanted by a security branch.¹⁵⁰

An application for security clearance is required when wanting to settle in any area of Damascus. As explained by the Syrian academic interviewed for this report, the security check conducted on IDPs moving into Damascus is stricter than the one for residents of Damascus moving between different houses or areas. The profile of the applicant, where they come from and their actions during the past ten years, will have an effect on the outcome of the security clearance. Normally a *mukhtar*, or mayor, is involved in the security check. In some areas, the lease and other documents need to be presented to the *mukhtar* first, who then forwards them to the responsible security service. In other areas, there are small kiosks in which a member of a security service handles the documents and asks the applicant to come back in 10-15 days.¹⁵¹

Since November 2018, a lease signed by a tenant and a landlord in a GoS area should be registered at a citizen service centre. The centre then sends two copies of the contract to the police station of the area to check the legal status of the tenant and whether they were required to take actions against the tenant for security reasons. Prior to this change, tenants had gone to the nearest police station to submit an application to obtain approval for housing.¹⁵²

An international organisation explained to DIS on the example of Palestinian residents living in camps that security clearance was ‘specific to each rented accommodation, and thus one security clearance does not cover all camps or gatherings’, meaning that even in the case of moving to the neighbouring apartment, a new security clearance would have to be obtained. In order to apply for security clearance, a person had to submit proof of the landlord’s name and a copy of his/her ID, the name of the tenant and a copy of his/her ID, as well as proof of the landlord’s ownership of the house, including a power of attorney in case the landlord was

¹⁴⁸ New Arab (The), أهالي حي جوبر في دمشق ممنوعون من العودة لمنزلهم [Residents of Jobar neighborhood in Damascus are prevented from returning home], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ Syria Report (The), Zoning Plan Draws New Borders to the Jobar Neighbourhood of Damascus, 12 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ Enab Baladi, المواقة الأمنية لوكالة الغائب والمفقود.. أداة جديدة للسيطرة على ممتلكات السوريين [Security approval of the absent and missing agency. A new tool to control Syrian property], 4 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

¹⁵² Enab Baladi, محافظة دمشق “توقف تسجيل عقود الإيجار في عدة مراكز خدمية” [“Damascus governorate” suspends registration of leases in several service centers], 5 May 2021, [url](#)



absent.¹⁵³ In the case of Palestinian refugees who wished to settle outside of a camp, Musaab Balchi explained that there were areas in Damascus, such as downtown Damascus, where it was more difficult for Palestinian refugees 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. According to Balchi, Palestinians were likely to have a request for security clearance to live in Alawi-majority areas, such as Mazzeh 86, rejected.¹⁵⁴

Returnees have to approach the Ministry of Interior for security approval and will generally have to prove ownership of property to settle in their area of origin.¹⁵⁵ VDSF and OPC reported that nearly one in four (24 %) of the 100 returnees interviewed in Damascus and Jaramana (Rural Damascus governorate) had been unable to reclaim their property. In 55 % of the cases, the house had been destroyed or was deemed uninhabitable. In 15 % of the cases it was reported that the house had been appropriated by an armed group, which prevented the owners from reclaiming it. The remaining interviewees did not wish to provide details. Of those who were able to reclaim their properties 65 % were worried that they might lose their home in the future.¹⁵⁶

For further information on administrative requirements for settling in individual areas of Damascus, see section [2.4.Restrictions on access and return to certain areas in Damascus.](#)

2.6. Civil documentation required for travel and access to services

A confidential source interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Syrian citizens are legally required to identify themselves, including when obtaining services from the government. The main documents to prove identification include the identity card, passport, family booklet and driving licence. Due to the crisis situation, authorities are said to have started recognising other documents, such as military ID cards, civil registry extracts and the military booklet as a proof of identity.¹⁵⁷ Identifying documents are required when travelling through checkpoints, as well as to obtain services from government institutions, such as schools, courts, land registries and municipalities,¹⁵⁸ when conducting trade or real estate transactions, as well as for accessing healthcare and humanitarian aid.¹⁵⁹

The national ID card is issued by the civil registrar, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Interior. It must be obtained in person and can only be obtained in Syria. Citizens must be

¹⁵³ Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [Source: international organisation], October 2021, [url](#), p. 62

¹⁵⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [Source: Musaab Balchi, Palestinian consultant, MENA real-time information analyst and former journalist based in Washington D.C.], October 2021, [url](#), p. 71

¹⁵⁵ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

¹⁵⁶ VDSF and OPC, Is Syria Safe for Return? Returnees' Perspective, November 2021, [url](#), p. 46

¹⁵⁷ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 46

¹⁵⁸ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 46

¹⁵⁹ Sosnowski, M. and Hamadeh, N., "The Right to Have Rights", GIGA, October 2021, [url](#), pp. 1, 6



recorded in a family booklet before applying for an identity card.¹⁶⁰ Any other document, including the passport,¹⁶¹ may also be applied for by another person holding a power of attorney for that purpose.¹⁶² All Syrians are required to hold an identity card from the age of 15¹⁶³ and must apply in time to receive the ID card within one year from turning 15.¹⁶⁴ The family booklet records all members of a family. A newly married couple moves from their parents' booklet to their own. This involves the transmission of the wife's records from the registry of her area of residence to that of the husband. A copy of the marriage certificate, ID cards, photographs and the military service booklet are required for an application.¹⁶⁵ Non-citizens residing in Syria, such as Ajanib Kurds, Maktum Kurds and Palestinians are provided with alternative identity documents.¹⁶⁶

The Syrian academic interviewed for this report stated that when applying for a new passport, the person's name would be submitted for a security check. If an ID card is lost, the person would be interrogated by the police before having a new ID card issued.¹⁶⁷ According to the Syrian Ministry of Interior website, a police file has to be opened in the event of a lost ID.¹⁶⁸

In March 2021, the Syrian parliament amended the Civil Status Law. Article 54 stipulates that ID cards remain valid for 10 years, and that they must be replaced no less than 30 days and no more than six months prior to their expiry.¹⁶⁹ A confidential source interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March 2022 stated that the Syrian authorities have subsequently announced that the 10 year validity would not enter into force due to lack of sufficient resources, and that the ID card will not have an expiry date.¹⁷⁰

Syrian law requires that all changes of personal status such as birth, death, marriage and divorce, must be registered with the Civil Affairs Directorate (*Nofous*) within three months (or nine months if residing abroad) of their occurrence.¹⁷¹ Reportedly, it could take months for the data to be processed if Syrians register changes in personal or family status through a diplomatic mission.¹⁷² Registration of personal or family status events and obtaining of civil documents can occur at any civil registry centre in the country.¹⁷³ If the ID is obtained for the first time, this has to be done at the registry office where the person is registered.¹⁷⁴ Syrians who do not have a national identity number (*al-raqm al-watani*) because they were born in an

¹⁶⁰ ISI and NRC, Syrian Documents, 15 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁶² Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 46

¹⁶³ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 48

¹⁶⁴ Syria, Ministry of Interior, الخدمات التي تقدمها الشؤون المدنية [Services provided by Civil Affairs], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ ISI and NRC, Syrian Documents, 15 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶ ISI and NRC, Syrian Documents, 15 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

¹⁶⁸ Syria, Ministry of Interior, الخدمات التي تقدمها الشؤون المدنية [Services provided by Civil Affairs], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ COAR, New Civil Status Law Raises Concerns Over Identity Cards and HLP Rights, 8 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria], May 2022, [url](#), p. 36

¹⁷¹ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 48; NRC and UNHCR, Legal Identity and Housing, December 2021, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁷² Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 49

¹⁷³ NRC and UNHCR, Legal Identity and Housing, December 2021, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁷⁴ Syria, Ministry of Interior, الخدمات التي تقدمها الشؤون المدنية [Services provided by Civil Affairs], n.d., [url](#)



opposition area can obtain one at a later date, as long as they are entered in the civil register. Without a birth registration, it can be problematic to obtain Syrian nationality.¹⁷⁵

Many administrative acts require a declaration of residence (*sanad iqama*) or a written declaration from a *mukhtar* stating where the person lives.¹⁷⁶

Civil documentation is further required to enrol in formal education and to register for national exams. In order to register a child for school, parents or a legal guardian must submit a copy of the family booklet and the parents' ID cards.¹⁷⁷

Parents who do not have proof of their marriage often face difficulties in registering their children's births.¹⁷⁸ The GoS reportedly does not accept non-state –issued documentation. This may result in children born and marriages conducted outside the government-controlled areas being considered as undocumented or invalid.¹⁷⁹ Female-headed households are particularly vulnerable to the effects of missing documentation, as a woman's legal identity in Syria is linked to that of her husband or father. It follows that the absence of an official marriage registration or death certificate for the husband affects women's abilities to exercise parental, inheritance and property rights. As explained by a former Syrian mayor, if a father dies before he and his wife formally registered their marriage, the mother is unable to register her children, due to the inability to register the marriage after the father's death. If children are not documented, they are unable to access education, healthcare, travel documents, property rights, work opportunities and possibly citizenship.¹⁸⁰

A further barrier to accessing or applying for documents may be a reluctance or unwillingness to approach the Syrian authorities, because of concerns related to compulsory military conscription, detention or being perceived as being affiliated with the opposition.¹⁸¹ In interviews conducted by OPC field teams, some returnees in GoS areas declared that missing official documentation restricted them in their freedom of movement, prevented students from studying, made it impossible to prove identity and ownership of property, as well as provided difficulties in case of legal liability and prevented them from receiving aid.¹⁸²

Access to documentation is critical to assert land, housing, and property rights. In Syria, physical records were often not supported by an electronic land registry. Damage to land registries, courts and notary records might therefore complicate the possibility of reissuing documents, if lost. Furthermore, in the case of informal settlements, alternative papers were often used in the absence of a title deed (*tabou*) to demonstrate ownership. This might further complicate the possibility of asserting property claims.¹⁸³ It is often men who are the registered owners of property. Women, whose husbands were killed, displaced or disappeared, risk losing their property, if they lack identity documents or a formal marriage certificate. In

¹⁷⁵ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 52

¹⁷⁶ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 52

¹⁷⁷ NRC, Documentation for education, March 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁷⁸ NRC and UNHCR, Legal Identity and Housing, December 2021, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁷⁹ Sosnowski, M. and Hamadeh, N., "The Right to Have Rights", GIGA, October 2021, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁸⁰ Sosnowski, M. and Hamadeh, N., "The Right to Have Rights", GIGA, October 2021, [url](#), p. 4; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 56

¹⁸¹ NRC and UNHCR, Legal Identity and Housing, December 2021, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁸² VDSF and OPC, Is Syria Safe for Return? Returnees' Perspective, November 2021, [url](#), p. 50

¹⁸³ NRC and UNHCR, Legal Identity and Housing, December 2021, [url](#), p. 19



addition, security clearances are required for many property sales under the Syrian government. Security clearances are withheld from those living outside of government controlled areas, forcing many property sales to be conducted informally.¹⁸⁴ For further information on challenges in accessing property, see section [2.4.Restrictions on access and return to certain areas in Damascus](#) and section [2.5.Settling in Damascus](#).

¹⁸⁴ Sosnowski, M. and Hamadeh, N., "The Right to Have Rights", GIGA, October 2021, [url](#), p. 5



3. Key socio-economic indicators

3.1. Economic overview

3.1.1. Economic situation

Middle East Eye (MEE) reported in December 2021 that government spending had been cut by more than 40 % over the past two years,¹⁸⁵ while the UN special envoy for Syria stated that the country's economy had 'collapsed'.¹⁸⁶

The value of the Syrian pound (SYP) continued to decline during the reference period. In a June 2022 report the World Bank stated that the exchange rate of the SYP against the USD weakened by 26 % in 2021, after depreciating by 224 % in 2020.¹⁸⁷ In April 2021, the governor of the central bank was dismissed, and the central bank devalued the currency to bring it closer to the black-market exchange rate. The Syrian pound was now officially valued at SYP 2 512 to the US dollar from around SYP 1 250 beforehand, while at the beginning of the conflict in March 2011, the exchange rate had been SYP 47 to one US-Dollar.¹⁸⁸ This was the third currency devaluation since November 2019.¹⁸⁹ Overall, as of early 2022, the Syrian pound had lost about 70 % of its value since 2011, with a sharp depreciation in 2019, after the beginning of the Lebanese financial crisis. US economic sanctions implemented in June 2020 further added to the decline, and the Syrian pound lost at least 36 % of its value since September 2020 alone.¹⁹⁰

In comparison, the average informal USD exchange rate in April 2021 was SYP 3 146, but higher in Damascus governorate, with SYP 3 175.¹⁹¹ While the official exchange rate remained stable until February 2022, the average informal exchange rate rose to SYP 3 634 to the US dollar.¹⁹² The highest informal exchange rate in April 2022 was again¹⁹³ reported in Damascus Governorate with SYP 3 916 to the US dollar, which constituted a 19 % loss of value compared with one year prior.¹⁹⁴

The discrepancy between official and informal exchange rates was used by the Syrian government to profit from foreign aid money sent to Syria. Banks used by UN and other international aid agencies to transfer money for aid operations to Syria were required to charge these agencies the official exchange rate, which was considerably lower than the

¹⁸⁵ MEE, Syria approves \$5.3bn budget for 2022 as economic crisis hits finances, 15 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ UN Special envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen: Briefing to the security council on Syria, 26 January 2022, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁸⁷ World Bank, Syria Economic Monitor, Spring 2022 : Lost Generation of Syrians, 14 June 2022, [url](#), p. xi

¹⁸⁸ Arab Weekly (The), Syria devalues its currency after sacking central bank governor, 16 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, April 2021, Issue 77, 31 May 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁹¹ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, April 2021, Issue 77, 31 May 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁹² WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, February 2022, Issue 87, 16 March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁹³ See, for example: WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, May 2021, Issue 78, 31 May 2021, [url](#), p. 4; WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, July 2021, Issue 80, 31 July 2021, [url](#), p. 4; WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, September 2021, Issue 82, 21 October 2021, [url](#), p. 4; WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, February 2022, Issue 87, 16 March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁹⁴ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, April 2022, Issue 89, 13 June 2022, [url](#), p. 5



exchange rate on the black market. The same banks were subsequently required to sell 50 % of their foreign currency to the Central Bank. Thereby the GoS retained roughly half of the international aid money coming to Syria in 2020, according to Central for Strategic and International Studies¹⁹⁵ researchers estimates.¹⁹⁶

US government sources stated that ‘the Russian invasion of Ukraine exacerbated dire economic and humanitarian conditions’ in Syria. The disruption in the supply of wheat (of which Syria is heavily dependent on imports) and other food staples led to increased food prices and higher costs for humanitarian organizations in Syria.¹⁹⁷

(a) Fuel and Energy

In August 2021, Damascus governorate set specific opening and closing times for all commercial markets, shops, restaurants, and various economic activities in the governorate with the aim of saving energy and providing it to the governorate’s residential users.¹⁹⁸

Fuel prices continued to increase due to ongoing fuel shortages, reportedly leading some public transport drivers to discontinue their services and to sell their subsidised fuel supply in the informal markets instead.¹⁹⁹ Prices for subsidised and unsubsidised oil derivative products such as gas oil (mazut), Octane 90 diesel oil and fuel oil have continually increased since October 2020.²⁰⁰ The increase in diesel oil prices in July 2021 led to transport fees rising by up to 200-300 %. For example, the monthly transport costs for taxis and other services for a family of three in Damascus rose by about 138 %, from approximately SYP 42 000 (about USD 16.7)²⁰¹ to 100 000 per month (USD 39.8).²⁰² The high transport costs also reportedly led some public employees to resign from their jobs as transport fees to reach their workplace would take up a too large share of their salaries.²⁰³ In some cases, public transport drivers reportedly were accused of charging higher tariffs than the official fees, while drivers claimed that the official fees would not suffice to make a living.²⁰⁴ In a report of February 2022, MEE quoted a taxi driver in Damascus saying that he spent most of his time ‘either queuing up for petrol, cooking gas and diesel, or arguing with customers over fares’. In an attempt to regulate taxi fares, Damascus governorate set an hourly rate of SYP 5 000 (roughly USD 1.4) in January

¹⁹⁵ The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is a US non-profit policy research organization.

¹⁹⁶ Hall, N. et al., How the Assad Regime Systematically Diverts Tens of Millions in Aid, CSIS, 20 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve I Quarterly Report to the United States Congress 1 January 1, 2022 – March 31, 2022, 3 May 2022, [url](#), Message from the Lead Inspector General, p. 79

¹⁹⁸ WFP, Syrian Arab Republic, mVAM Bulletin Issue no. 58: August 2021, 21 September 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁹⁹ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, October 2021, Issue 83, 31 October 2021, [url](#), p. 2; Daher, J., Policy Brief: Cuts to Oil Derivative Subsidies: Consequences for Syria, EUI, Issue 2021/45, October 2021, 12 November 2021, [url](#), p. 6

²⁰⁰ Daher, J., Policy Brief: Cuts to Oil Derivative Subsidies: Consequences for Syria, EUI, Issue 2021/45, October 2021, 12 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 3-4

²⁰¹ USD 12.9, if calculated with the informal exchange rate valid in Damascus in October 2021.

²⁰² USD 30.6, if calculated with the informal exchange rate valid in Damascus in October 2021.

²⁰³ Daher, J., Policy Brief: Cuts to Oil Derivative Subsidies: Consequences for Syria, EUI, Issue 2021/45, October 2021, 12 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 3, 6

²⁰⁴ New Arab (The), سورية: تعرفه النقل تثير نزاعات في دمشق [Syria: Transport tariff sparks disputes in Damascus], 12 August 2021, [url](#)



2022, which, however, reportedly was often the minimum amount passengers had to pay for even the shortest trips.²⁰⁵

The amount of subsidised oil derivatives allocated to individual consumers via the government's subsidy programme – the so-called smart card system - has steadily gone down. Even those having managed to register for a smart card received less than the officially allocated amount, or received it only with delay, forcing them to buy these products at much higher prices on the black market.²⁰⁶ The smart card system was first established in 2014 by the Ministry of Oil and Mineral Resources to distribute fuel for government agencies, and later expanded to regulate the distribution of subsidised oil derivatives and heating oil to citizens. In 2020, it was further expanded to include food items, such as tea, rice, and sugar,²⁰⁷ as well as bread.²⁰⁸

Moreover, in order to register for the smart card system in the first place, individuals needed to meet certain requirements such as providing a social security number or documentation showing they were registered at their place of residence, thus excluding large groups of IDPs and others not living at their official place of residence,²⁰⁹ as well as children of Palestinian refugees, who receive temporary residency only at the age of fourteen. Divorced and widowed women were reportedly also excluded.²¹⁰

Electricity shortages and rationing were common across the country, including due to damage to the electricity infrastructure and fuel shortages.²¹¹ As of early 2022, per capita consumption of state electricity in Syria was 15 % of what it had been in 2010.²¹² Returnees in Damascus city reported that access to electricity had deteriorated since March 2021; while it had been intermittently available for up to 12 hours per day until then, availability had dropped to 2 to 5 hours per day in August 2021.²¹³ Similarly, UNOCHA noted that in the first half of 2021, Damascus had five hours of power cut for every hour of electricity, while Aleppo had ten hours of rationing for every hour or half an hour of power.²¹⁴

In January 2022, energy and fuel shortages became so acute that President Assad announced a five-day public holiday to save energy for household consumption.²¹⁵ MEE reported on families in Damascus who were unable to heat their homes due to the limited amounts of subsidised diesel available and the high costs on the free market. While 50 litres of subsidised diesel were reportedly sold for SYP 37 000 (about USD 10), the same amount

²⁰⁵ MEE, 'Life is unbearable': Syrians endure nightmarish winter amid economic collapse, 10 February 2022, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ Daher, J., Policy Brief: Cuts to Oil Derivative Subsidies: Consequences for Syria, EUI, Issue 2021/45, October 2021, 12 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 3-4

²⁰⁷ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, February 2020, Issue 63, n.d., [url](#), p. 2; Szakola, A., Asma al-Assad's cousin owns firm running Syria's Smart Card system, 17 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁸ Syria Direct, Anger and confusion erupt over the Syrian government's decision to ration bread through the smart card, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁹ Al Shami, I., Facing Syria's Food Crisis, WINEP, 14 February 2022, [url](#)

²¹⁰ NPA, Smart card deprives single and divorced women of supplies in Syria's Damascus, 7 April 2021, [url](#)

²¹¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 19; Enab Baladi, 'Damascus Electricity' unable to meet total power needs amid frequent outages, 28 February 2022, [url](#)

²¹² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 19

²¹³ RPW, "I have not known the taste of safety for ten years", November 2021, [url](#), p. 51

²¹⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 19

²¹⁵ New Arab (The), Syria regime announces government holiday amid snowfall, lack of heating, 23 January 2022, [url](#)



would cost ten times more on the free market, with the average monthly salary being roughly SYP 70 000 (roughly USD 20).²¹⁶

(b) Price-wage spiral

In July 2021, the GoS increased the prices per litre of Octane 95 gasoline from SYP 2 500 to 3 000 (USD 0.77 to 0.90) and of subsidised diesel from SYP 187 (USD 0.06) to SYP 500 (USD 0.15). Moreover, the GoS increased the prices for bread (doubling from SYP 100 (USD 0.03) to SYP 200 (USD 0.06))²¹⁷, as well as for sugar, rice, medicines, and public transport fees.²¹⁸

Likewise, in July 2021, the GoS announced a 50 % increase of salaries for workers in the public sector and raised pensions for retirees by 40 %, effective as of August 2021.²¹⁹ Moreover, it increased the minimum wage from SYP 47 000 (USD 37)²²⁰ to SYP 71 515 per month (USD 57)²²¹.²²² However, UNOCHA noted that hyperinflation and the devaluation of the SYP undermined the real value of salaries and significantly reduced households' purchase power.²²³ Similarly, the Center for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR) noted that due to inflation and currency depreciation, salaries were effectively shrinking. Whereas the minimum salary for a person holding a PhD was SYP 86 243 (about USD 26.4) per month in July 2021, it had been almost twice as much (about USD 50) in July 2016. COAR noted that shrinking salaries, economic deterioration, and loss of opportunities in Syria bore the risk of ever more Syrians leaving the country or engaging in war economy such as narcotraffic or being recruited by armed groups.²²⁴

A second increase in salaries and pensions, by 30 % and 25 %, respectively, as well as a rise of the general minimum wage for the private sector to SYP 92 970 (about USD 26) per month in December 2021, was again announced by the government shortly after it had increased prices for subsidised fuel, food and non-food items.²²⁵

The economist and director of the Syrian Economic Taskforce²²⁶, Dr. Aussama al-Qadi, noted in an interview with Enab Baladi that the government's economic plans were basically to equally increase prices and salaries. Raising wages would, however, not solve the problem but rather make it worse as, eventually, inflation levels would rise, causing an even higher increase of consumer goods' prices.²²⁷

²¹⁶ MEE, 'Life is unbearable': Syrians endure nightmarish winter amid economic collapse, 10 February 2022, [url](#)

²¹⁷ WFP, Syrian Arab Republic, mVAM Bulletin Issue no. 57: July 2021, 16 August 2021, [url](#), p. 1

²¹⁸ Enab Baladi, Syrians wrestling with ever declining living conditions: Any solutions?, 8 August 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁹ WFP, Syrian Arab Republic, mVAM Bulletin Issue no. 57: July 2021, 16 August 2021, [url](#), p. 1

²²⁰ USD 14.4, if calculated with the informal exchange rate valid in Damascus in July 2021.

²²¹ USD 21.9, if calculated with the informal exchange rate valid in Damascus in July 2021.

²²² MEMO, Syria: Assad regime raises public sector salaries by 50%, 11 July 2021, [url](#)

²²³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 21

²²⁴ COAR, Spotlight on Aid Sector Wages as Damascus Increases Salaries, 19 July 2021, [url](#)

²²⁵ WFP, Syrian Arab Republic, mVAM Bulletin Issue no. 62: December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 1

²²⁶ The Syrian Economic Taskforce is an independent economic advisory group cooperating with the International Working Group on Economic Recovery and Development (co-chaired by UAE and Germany) of the 'Friends of the Syrian People'. The Taskforce aims to represent the Syrian side in planning Syria's economy and reconstruction after a change of government and envisions the implementation of a 'Syrian Marshall Plan'. See [url](#)

²²⁷ Enab Baladi, Syrians wrestling with ever declining living conditions: Any solutions?, 8 August 2021, [url](#)



Enab Baladi quoted Syrian economist Dr. Firas Shaabo by saying that the increase of salaries would not improve people's living conditions, as government-affiliated figures estimated that an average family needed a monthly income of about SYP 400 000 to 500 000 (about USD 110.5 to 138.2) to cover costs of living.²²⁸

The difficult economic and humanitarian situation intensified the desire to emigrate. In a study conducted among 600 Damascus residents in late 2020 and early 2021, more than two thirds said they wanted to leave Syria, 60 % of them naming the difficult living conditions as the main reason for their desire.²²⁹ In September 2021, several media reported on the emigration of thousands of industrialists (manufacturers) from Damascus and Aleppo,²³⁰ although COAR noted that some reports were 'exaggerated'.²³¹

3.1.2. Impact of economic sanctions

UNOCHA stated in a February 2022 report that US economic sanctions imposed in June 2020 'added to depreciation pressure' of the SYP.²³² On the other hand, researchers Wael Alalwani and Karam Shaar argued in a report of August 2021 that sanctions were not the only reason for the economic crisis, since some sanctions such as the Caesar Act came into force only after years of institutional corruption, mismanagement, aid diversion and war economy.²³³ Similarly, the news magazine Foreign Policy (FP) stated that Syria's economic downfall was caused by war, 'decades-long corruption' by the government of president Assad and the collapse of the Lebanese banking sector. Western sanctions, however, had exacerbated the populations dire situation and erased any chance of recovery, according to Foreign Policy.²³⁴ With regard to humanitarian work, sanctions did have an impact on Syrian NGOs operating inside or outside of Syria. Many NGOs saw access to their bank accounts closed or were not allowed to perform any financial transactions, often with no or vague justification, and often attributed to over-compliance. Syrians living abroad were reportedly similarly affected.²³⁵

With Lebanon's decision to freeze deposits and block transfers abroad due to its own economic crisis, including those of many Syrians who had left their money in Lebanese banks due to the economic sanctions on Syria, reportedly not only individuals lost their private savings, but also businesspeople who operated via Lebanon. Moreover, many companies, including shipping companies, stopped doing business with Syria for fear of being affected by

²²⁸ Enab Baladi, In Syria, price hikes precede salary raises diminishing their impact and increasing inflation, 3 January 2022, [url](#)

²²⁹ Jalabi, S., Attitudes Toward Emigration in the Syrian Capital of Damascus, OPC, 5 May 2021, [url](#), pp. 8-9

²³⁰ NPA, Closure of facilities, immigration of industrialists, Syrian government keeps silent, 6 October 2021, [url](#); Sawt Al-Asima, "نحو 50 ألف صناعي سوري هاجروا في أسبوعين" ['We lost hope'. About 50 000 Syrian industrialists migrated in two weeks], 25 September 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, هجرة غير مسبوقه لصناعيين وحرفيين سوريين [An unprecedented migration of Syrian industrialists and craftsmen], 26 September 2021, [url](#)

²³¹ COAR, Damascus Puts Destroyed Factories on the Auction Block, 4 October 2021, [url](#)

²³² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 12

²³³ Alalwani, W. and Shaar, K., A Comprehensive Review of the Effectiveness of US and EU Sanctions on Syria, MEI, 6 August 2021, [url](#)

²³⁴ FP, The Pointlessness of America's Syria Sanctions, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

²³⁵ Daher, J., Invisible Sanctions: How Over-Compliance Limits Humanitarian Work on Syria, IMPACT-Civil Society Research and Development, 2020, [url](#), pp. 27-30



the sanctions, or charged higher prices for deliveries of goods, including food, even though food was not included in the sanctions.²³⁶

3.1.3. Impact of Covid-19

For information on this topic up until April 2021 see subsection 3.1.3 of the [EUAA COI report: Syria - Socio-economic situation: Damascus city \(April 2021\)](#). No further information could be found.

3.2. Employment

3.2.1. Employment and unemployment

According to RPW's report of November 2021, the overall unemployment rate in Syria was 50 %, with more than 300 000 jobs being lost since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. With reference to data by the Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme (HNAP) of September 2021, RPW noted that unemployment among women of 18 to 64 years of age was even higher, at 81 %.²³⁷ A report by the Arab Reform Initiative²³⁸ and the Brookings Doha Center estimated the youth unemployment rate in Syria at 78 % in 2020 (prior to the Covid-19 pandemic).²³⁹

Syrian media reports indicated overall unemployment rates beyond 50 to 60 %, ²⁴⁰ or even up to 82 %.²⁴¹ However, according to World Bank calculations,²⁴² unemployment rates in 2021 stood at 4% for males and 37% for females.²⁴³

In 2019, the last year the Central Bureau of Statistics published labour-related data, 257 214 people of 15 years and above were without work in Damascus, including 145 702 people who had never worked before and 111 512 who did have a job previously.²⁴⁴ Damascus' total population at that time was estimated to be around 2.1 million people.²⁴⁵

²³⁶ Heller, S., Syrians Are Going Hungry. Will the West Act?, TCF, 7 June 2021, [url](#), Daher, J., Invisible Sanctions: How Over-Compliance Limits Humanitarian Work on Syria, IMPACT-Civil Society Research and Development, 2020, [url](#), p. 16

²³⁷ RPW, "I have not known the taste of safety for ten years", November 2021, 17 November 2021, [url](#), p. 48

²³⁸ The Arab Reform Initiative is a Paris-based think tank providing research on the Middle East and North Africa region.

²³⁹ Arab Reform Initiative and Brookings Doha Center, Youth Employment and Livelihood in Syria, July 2021, 9 August 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁴⁰ Enab Baladi, هجرة غير مسبوقة للصناعيين وحرفيين سوريين [An unprecedented migration of Syrian industrialists and craftsmen], 26 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁴¹ New Arab (The), 2021 سورية بصور قاتمة للأوضاع المعيشية في 2021 [Syria: Bleak images of living conditions in 2021], 31 December 2021, [url](#)

²⁴² World Bank data is based on Labor Force Survey 2010 and HNAP household survey data (Summer 2021). See World Bank, Syria Economic Monitor, Spring 2022: Lost Generation of Syrians, 14 June 2022, [url](#), p. 35 Figure 32

²⁴³ World Bank, Syria Economic Monitor, Spring 2022: Lost Generation of Syrians, 14 June 2022, [url](#), p. 35

²⁴⁴ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Distribution of Unemployed (15 years & over) by sex & Governorate 2019, Chapter 3, Table 11/3, n.d., [url](#)

²⁴⁵ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the Population in Syria by Governorates in Mid Years 2016-2019 (000), Chapter 2, Table 4/2, n.d., [url](#). More detailed data on the 2019 size of the population aged 15 and above, or of 0-15 years of age was not available.



More recent figures on employment / unemployment rates for Damascus city could not be found.

3.2.2. Means of basic subsistence

According to a statement by UN representatives in Syria on the occasion of World Food Day, years of conflict, displacement, the economic crisis, and prices that had risen ‘stratospherically’ contributed to growing levels of poverty among the population, forcing families to rely on measures such as reducing food consumption or sending children to work in order to survive.²⁴⁶

Based on data collected by UNOCHA for its 2022 HNO on Syria,²⁴⁷ as of August 2021, average household expenses were exceeding income by 50 %. Given the fact that at the same time 64.1 % of households reported to have at least one person working, UNOCHA noted a growing number of ‘working poor’ among the population as well as an increase in negative coping mechanisms, including child labour, child marriage, or the sale of productive assets, i.e., any kind of asset able to generate income, thus further increasing households’ economic vulnerability.²⁴⁸ One in four households reported to have sold such assets.²⁴⁹ Moreover, more than two thirds of households (69 %) reported increasing debts, including due to borrowing money to cover basic needs. At the same time, debt repayment accounted for about 6 % of household expenditures, further reducing the amount available to cover basic needs.²⁵⁰ In RPW’s study on the situation of returnees, 41 % of respondents said they were not able to cover their basic needs, 33 % could somewhat cover them and only 29 % said they were able to cover basic needs with their income.²⁵¹

Joseph Daher, a professor and analyst at the European University Institute, noted in a report of October 2021 that average living costs for a family of five in Damascus almost doubled in the period July to September 2021, from SYP 1 240 000 (USD 494)²⁵² to SYP 1 847 200 (USD 735)²⁵³, while the monthly minimum wage remained SYP 72 000 (USD 28.7)²⁵⁴.²⁵⁵ By the end of 2021, costs had further risen to slightly over two million Syrian pounds (SYP 2 026 976, about USD 807)²⁵⁶, while the minimum wage was SYP 92 970 (about USD 37)²⁵⁷ – an amount that would cover only about 4.5 % of the average cost of living, as Daher noted.²⁵⁸

²⁴⁶ UN Syria, Joint Statement occasion of World Food Day and the Syria Crisis [sic], 16 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁷ The report covers the period January 2021 to February 2022 and is based on secondary data review as well as on primary data collected across the country in the framework of the Multisectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA), including interviews with over 33 170 households in August and September 2021, and of other complementary sectoral assessments. UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 89

²⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8

²⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 25

²⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 28

²⁵¹ RPW, “I have not known the taste of safety for ten years”, November 2021, 17 November 2021, [url](#), p. 50

²⁵² USD 353.7, if calculated with the informal exchange rate valid in Damascus in October 2021.

²⁵³ USD 526.9, if calculated with the informal exchange rate valid in Damascus in October 2021.

²⁵⁴ USD 20.5, if calculated with the informal exchange rate valid in Damascus in October 2021.

²⁵⁵ Daher, J., Policy Brief: Cuts to Oil Derivative Subsidies: Consequences for Syria, EUI, Issue 2021/45, October 2021, 12 November 2021, [url](#), p. 7

²⁵⁶ USD 553.6, if calculated with the informal exchange rate valid in Damascus in February 2022.

²⁵⁷ USD 25.4, if calculated with the informal exchange rate valid in Damascus in February 2022.

²⁵⁸ Daher, J., Expelled from the Support System: Austerity Deepens in Syria, EUI [Blog], 15 February 2022, [url](#)



Currency devaluation contributed to the loss of purchasing power: an employee who had a monthly income of about USD 500 before the war, would only earn the equivalent of about USD 20 in 2021, according to a report by the Arab Reform Initiative and the Brookings Doha Center.²⁵⁹ In February 2022, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) noted in a survey among 961 respondents across 13 governorates (except Idlib) that 27 % of the interviewed households had reportedly lost one or more sources of income over the previous month, Damascus being above the average with 34 % of the interviewed households. For Damascus, the numbers marked 10 % points increase compared to the previous month.²⁶⁰

In a survey conducted in late December 2020 and early January 2021, coordinated by researchers Orwa Khalifa and Karam Shaar of the Operations and Policy Centre (OPC)²⁶¹ among 600 participants in three neighbourhoods of Damascus,²⁶² 43.7 % of respondents considered their standard of living to be 'low', although the average full-time working week of respondents was 52.2 hours, and 24.4 % of respondents reported to work even more than 60 hours per week.²⁶³ More than two thirds of respondents (67.1 %) of age 18 and above reported to have one or more jobs.²⁶⁴ Salon Syria²⁶⁵, an online media platform, quoted several persons, including a ministry employee working in Damascus, a teacher and others, who all worked in more than one job to earn enough for a living. Additional jobs such as driving a taxi, working in a restaurant or giving private lessons after school, helped supplement the income, although even then earnings were not always enough to cover all costs, apart from the health risks the population faced by having to work for up to 15 hours per day to secure their livelihood.²⁶⁶

The Syrian economist Youssef Ammar estimated in a report of August 2021 that about 70 % of families in government-controlled regions were living of remittances sent from abroad. Most of these remittances were relatively small sums of up to a maximum of 200 Euros, and were sent through informal channels, due to the large difference between the official and the informal exchange rate of about 20 % [in August 2021], as reported by the Syrian media portal Arab Hashtag.²⁶⁷ According to UNOCHA's 2022 HNO of February 2022, almost half of the overall population relied on remittances, an increase of 10 % compared to mid-2020.²⁶⁸ This percentage was even higher among IDP households outside of sites/camps (62 %), and especially in government-controlled areas with more than 70 % of IDP households relying on

²⁵⁹ Arab Reform Initiative and Brookings Doha Center, Youth Employment and Livelihood in Syria, July 2021, 9 August 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁶⁰ WFP, Syrian Arab Republic, mVAM Bulletin Issue no. 64: February 2022, 29 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 4-5

²⁶¹ The Operations and Policy Centre (formerly Orient Policy Centre) is a Syrian-led and owned, independent think tank and service provider, established in 2014 and based in Gaziantep, Turkey.

²⁶² The three neighbourhoods were Nahr Aisha, considered an area with a low living standard, Al-Zahirah (average living standard), and the residential area between Rukn al-Din and Al-Mazra'a neighbourhoods (relatively high living standard). [url](#), p. 5

²⁶³ Khalifa, O. and Shaar, K., Living in Damascus After a Decade of War: Employment, Income, and Consumption, OPC, 22 June 2021, [url](#), pp. 8-9

²⁶⁴ Khalifa, O. and Shaar, K., Living in Damascus After a Decade of War: Employment, Income, and Consumption, OPC, 22 June 2021, [url](#), p. 11

²⁶⁵ Salon Syria is an online media platform, that offers articles, reports, and news bulletins, as well as trainings for journalists. Its editorial board is composed of journalists, designers, and administrators inside and outside of Syria.

²⁶⁶ Salon Syria, المعركة العيش السوري [The Syrian and the battle of living], 7 January 2022, [url](#)

²⁶⁷ Arab Hashtag, أرقام هائلة للحوالات الخارجية التي يتعايش عليها السوريين بمناطق النظام (صورة) [Huge figures for the external transfers on which Syrians coexist in regime areas (photo)], 23 August 2021, [url](#); Osoul Financial Trading [Facebook], Percentage of Syrians living on foreign remittances, posted on: 21 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 28



money sent from abroad. Nine in ten returnees reported that they relied on borrowing money to cover basic needs, followed by remittances and the spending of savings and over two thirds reported that their debts had increased in 2021.²⁶⁹

3.3. Poverty

Specific information on poverty levels in Damascus city could not be found during the reporting period.

Over 90 % of the Syrian population were currently living below the poverty line, as the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator stated in a briefing to the Security Council in October 2021.²⁷⁰ This figure was again confirmed in a June 2022 briefing delivered by the UN Syria Commission Chair.²⁷¹

According to the 2022 UNOCHA HNO's findings, about 14.6 million Syrians (of an overall population of 21.7 million) were assessed to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2022, including 9.2 million of the resident population, 3.3 million IDPs living outside camps and 2 million living in camps, as well as about 56 700 returnees. Of the overall population of 21.7 million, UNOCHA estimated 44.4 % to be in severe²⁷², 22.5 % in extreme and 0.3 % in catastrophic need of humanitarian assistance in 2022.²⁷³ As of the beginning of 2022, about half of Damascus' population of 1.8 million (as estimated by UNOCHA) was in need of humanitarian assistance, with about 40 000 in extreme or catastrophic need.²⁷⁴

Based on primary data collected in mid-2021 for UNOCHA's 2022 HNO report, more than three out of four households (76 %) in Syria reportedly were insufficiently or not at all able to meet basic needs, and an average household income covered only 51 % of expenses.²⁷⁵ More than two thirds of households (69 %) reported that their debts had increased since mid-2020, and about one third of households stated that their child dropped out of school because it had to work and contribute to the family income.²⁷⁶ UNOCHA noted that some population segments which so far had not been in humanitarian need were now in need of assistance due to currency devaluation and high prices, loss of livelihoods and growing household debts.

²⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 39, 41

²⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Under-Secretary-General For Humanitarian Affairs And Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths: Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria, New York, 27 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁷¹ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic - Statement by UN Syria Commission Chair Paulo Pinheiro, Chair at 50th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, 29 June 2022, [url](#)

²⁷² Factors indicating severe, extreme, and catastrophic need include the percentage of communities reporting child labour, the percentage of household groups reporting signs of psychological distress, the percentage of household members lacking valid civil documentation, the percentage of households having access to a sufficient quantity of water and their ability to meet basic needs, as well as other indicators. For detailed information on the relevant indicators for each category, see UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 95

²⁷³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 3, 7

²⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 48

²⁷⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 26

²⁷⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 6, 28



Only 10 % of households earned more than the cost of the minimum expenditure basket²⁷⁷, although in more than two thirds (64.1 % of households) at least one member was working.²⁷⁸ In Damascus city, 63 % of households reported an insufficient ability to meet the basic needs of all household members, 29 % said it was adequate, and 8 % indicated they were completely unable to meet basic needs.²⁷⁹

In a report from Damascus, Reuters mentioned a woman living in Damascus who was granted a monthly allowance of 30 000 SYP in 2013 (then worth around USD 150); in February 2022 that same amount was worth about USD 6. A journalist and a state employee working in Damascus interviewed for the same report, stated that their salaries would not cover their monthly expenses.²⁸⁰

According to UNOCHA's 2022 HNO, nationwide, over 70 % of the IDP population living in residential areas indicated that they were unable to meet the basic needs of all household members, with the largest parts of their income needed to pay for food, rent and clothing. In Damascus city, income insufficiency among IDP households was 'alarmingly increasing' by 125 %, as UNOCHA noted.²⁸¹ Damascus had among the country's highest number of IDPs, with 33 % of the overall population of 1 828 845 (as estimated by UNOCHA) being either IDPs (609,682) or returnees (599).²⁸²

3.4. Food Security

3.4.1. Availability of food

WFP noted in December 2021 that food security continued to deteriorate in 2021 due to the ongoing economic decline, protracted conflict, hyperinflation, and fuel shortages.²⁸³ Moreover, in 2021, the harvestable area of cereals was significantly diminished due to insufficient and erratic rainfall, several heatwaves, lack of irrigation water and the high cost of input as well as high costs of fuel for pumping.²⁸⁴ According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), wheat production in 2021 was estimated to yield around 1.05 million tonnes, less than half of the amount produced in 2020 (2.8 million tonnes) and only a quarter of the pre-war production of an average of 4.1 million tonnes in the period 2002 to 2011.²⁸⁵ FAO expected that continued shortfall of rain as well as farmers' limited financial resources and increasing production costs - such as high prices for fertilizers, diesel, and wheat seeds on the free market and lack of subsidised products -, would also limit the 2022 wheat production.²⁸⁶ The

²⁷⁷ A minimum expenditure basket is what a household needs to cover basic or essential needs and its overall costs. It is a monetary threshold and includes only those essential needs (items and services) that households can cover through the market and that are accessible in adequate quality. See: [url](#)

²⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8

²⁷⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 27

²⁸⁰ Reuters, Hardship deepens amidst Syria's frozen conflict, 13 February 2022, [url](#)

²⁸¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 38

²⁸² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 16

²⁸³ WFP, Syrian Arab Republic, mVAM Bulletin Issue no. 62: December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁸⁴ FAO, GIEWS Country Brief, The Syrian Arab Republic, 21 December 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁸⁵ FAO, GIEWS Country Brief, The Syrian Arab Republic, 21 December 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁸⁶ FAO, GIEWS Country Brief, The Syrian Arab Republic, 21 December 2021, [url](#), pp. 1-2



rising diesel prices affected transport costs for agricultural products as well as farmers' ability to irrigate their land, causing many small farmers to cease production. Reportedly, the cultivation of fruits and vegetables in 2021 declined by between 60 % and 70 % due to high production costs.²⁸⁷ Moreover, farmers sold part of their herd to gain funds for feeding the remaining animals, leading to a reduction of meat prices, while prices for eggs and dairy products increased, as they became less available.²⁸⁸

At the same time, imports of essential goods such as wheat needed for bread and fuel declined. The lack of fuel further limited food supply and drove up prices.²⁸⁹ In August 2021, the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade (MoEFT) introduced a six-month ban on the import of specific commodities (including items such as cell phones, residential air conditioners, construction materials like tiles and stone, some vehicles, and different kinds of food items such as cheddar cheese, almonds, raisins and walnuts, as well as physiotherapy equipment)²⁹⁰ in order to reduce import expenditures and save foreign reserves for the import of essential goods such as wheat flour.²⁹¹ In December 2021, Syria reportedly reached an agreement with Russia to import one million tons of wheat.²⁹² In February 2022, the GoS decided to ration reserves of several basic goods, including wheat, to prepare for supply shortages following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Likewise, the government announced it would limit public spending to prepare for increasing wheat prices given the impact of the invasion on global markets. Syria was highly dependent on wheat imports, with imports from Russia reportedly accounting for the largest part of the 1.5 million tons of wheat imported in 2021.²⁹³

Shortage of wheat and, subsequently, of flour and bread led to long lines of people queuing for hours to buy bread at public bakeries, as residents and visitors in Damascus reported in spring 2021.²⁹⁴ Moreover, wheat shortages also affected the quality of bread, as bakeries had to use more local hard durum wheat instead of softer wheat, usually imported from Russia.²⁹⁵ The situation was exacerbated by the fact that many families have taken to replace other, more costly food items with bread, thus increasing consumption and demand.²⁹⁶

Subsidised bread allocations through the smart card system decreased in amount and weight since late October 2020.²⁹⁷ As of December 2021, in GoS-held areas each person was entitled to one bundle of bread every two days while a family of three was entitled to 30 bundles per

²⁸⁷ Daher, J., Policy Brief: Cuts to Oil Derivative Subsidies: Consequences for Syria, EUI, Issue 2021/45, October 2021, 12 November 2021, [url](#), p. 5

²⁸⁸ FAO, 2021 FAO crop and food supply assessment mission to the Syrian Arab Republic, December 2021, 14 December 2021, [url](#), p. 69

²⁸⁹ Heller, S., Syrians Are Going Hungry. Will the West Act?, TCF, 7 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁰ COAR, Import Ban Aims to Curb Reserve Losses as Syrians Protest, 23 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁹¹ WFP, Syrian Arab Republic, mVAM Bulletin Issue no. 58: August 2021, 21 September 2021, [url](#), p. 1

²⁹² COAR, Syria's Wheat Crisis Foreshadows Famine, 10 January 2022, [url](#)

²⁹³ New Arab (The), Syria to ration wheat, basic goods in response to Ukraine crisis, 25 February 2022, [url](#); Oxfam, 'Before we feared dying of war, now we fear dying of hunger': Ukraine crisis propelling hunger in Syria, 15 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁹⁴ Heller, S., Syrians Are Going Hungry. Will the West Act?, TCF, 7 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁵ Heller, S., Syrians Are Going Hungry. Will the West Act?, TCF, 7 June 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Syria's wheat crisis foreshadows a famine, 30 December 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁶ ORSAM Center for Middle Eastern Studies, The wheat and bread crisis in Syria and its impact on the population, Policy Brief 179, July 2021, 13 July 2021, [url](#), pp. 8-9

²⁹⁷ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, August 2021, Issue 81, 31 August 2021, [url](#), p. 2; FAO, GIEWS Country Brief, The Syrian Arab Republic, 22 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2



month, but not more than two per day,²⁹⁸ with one bundle containing seven loaves of bread, a total of 1.1 kg per bundle.²⁹⁹ Subsidised bread had to be bought at preselected bakeries and no bread was distributed on Fridays.³⁰⁰ As of September 2021, state-controlled bread distributors were allowed to take a commission of SYP 50 (USD 0.014), raising the price per bundle of subsidised bread in Damascus to SYP 250 (USD 0.07).³⁰¹

In November 2021, the government announced that it would exclude around 500 000 families from its subsidies programme, mainly individuals belonging to middle and high-income groups of society. In February 2022, however, the GoS expanded the list to exclude also state employees, retirees, military staff, owners of small shops and other groups. Exclusion was based on criteria such as owning certain kinds of cars, a commercial licence or having a family member abroad. European University Institute professor and analyst Joseph Daher estimated that the decision would affect roughly 15 % of all smart card holders, thus further raising costs of living.³⁰² A government speaker reportedly noted that the entire family would be excluded if the family member abroad was the ‘head of the family’, while otherwise only the subsidies of the absent family member would be cut.³⁰³ Card holders would be informed about the reason for their exclusion from the subsidy programme on a specific website, where they would also be offered the possibility to submit an objection.³⁰⁴ Later the government reconsidered some disqualifications and announced that permanent or temporary state employees, military staff and retired civilian or military employees would not be excluded because of their ownership of a car; also owners of small shops with only one employee would be re-included in the subsidiary programme.³⁰⁵

As of February 2022, 39 % of households interviewed by WFP in Syria reported difficulties in reaching markets, mainly due to ‘diminished purchasing power vis-à-vis commodity and transportation prices’. In Damascus, 28 % of households reportedly faced challenges to access markets during the previous six months.³⁰⁶

3.4.2. Food security levels

According to WFP, as of early 2021, 12.4 million people in Syria were food insecure and 81 700 children between 6 and 59 months were suffering from chronic malnutrition.³⁰⁷ By mid-2021, Syria ranked amongst the ten most food-insecure countries globally.³⁰⁸

²⁹⁸ Enab Baladi, Syria’s wheat crisis foreshadows a famine, 30 December 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁹ Al Shami, I., Facing Syria’s Food Crisis, WINEP, 14 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁰ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, August 2021, Issue 81, 31 August 2021, [url](#), p. 2; COAR, Import Ban Aims to Curb Reserve Losses as Syrians Protest, 23 August 2021, [url](#)

³⁰¹ Enab Baladi, Syria’s wheat crisis foreshadows a famine, 30 December 2021, [url](#)

³⁰² Daher, J., Expelled from the Support System: Austerity Deepens in Syria, EUI [Blog], 15 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁰³ MEE, Syria: Protests mount amid anger over ‘unfair’ cuts to government subsidies, 12 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁴ Qasioun News, النظام يرفع سعر كيلو الخبز إلى 1300 ليرة لغير المدعومين [The system raises the price of a kilo of bread to 1300 lira for the unsupported], 1 February 2022, [url](#); Syria TV, النظام السوري يستبعد نحو 600 ألف شخص من الدعم [The Syrian regime excludes about 600,000 people from support], 2 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁵ Daher, J., Expelled from the Support System: Austerity Deepens in Syria, EUI [Blog], 15 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁶ WFP, Syrian Arab Republic, mVAM Bulletin Issue no. 64: February 2022, 29 March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

³⁰⁷ WFP, WFP Syria - Country Brief, November 2021, 22 December 2021, [url](#), p. 1

³⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8



In April 2022, food prices were reported by WFP to be 59 % higher than six months prior and 84 % higher than in April 2021. The increase was mainly attributed to 'the ongoing fuel shortage countrywide, as well as to an increase in global food prices, inflation and the Ukraine crisis'.³⁰⁹ By June 2022, the price of the average reference food basket increased by 45 % since the start of the year to SYP 318 726 (USD 80.14). In Damascus, the price for the reference basket was slightly above average, with SYP 330 058 (USD 82.99), which constituted an increase of 90 % compared with one year prior.³¹⁰ Notable price increase on food items between February and June 2022 were recorded for vegetable oil (up 55 %), wheat flour (up 38 %), sugar (up 32 %) and rice (up 23 %).³¹¹

While the average monthly income in Syria amounted to roughly SYP 70 000 (about USD 20) at the end of December 2021, a family in Damascus needed the equivalent of about USD 275 to survive, according to local residents.³¹²

In February 2022, more than half the households (52 %) of overall 961 respondents interviewed by WFP by phone and across the country (except Idlib), reported poor or borderline food consumption. In Damascus, about 42 % of households reported inadequate food consumption. Nationwide, poor or food consumption was more frequently reported by IDPs and returnees (58 % and 54 %, respectively) than by residents (47 %).³¹³ 90 % of interviewed households said they applied at least one food-based coping mechanism. 72 % of all interviewed households reported having bought food on credit in the last month.³¹⁴

3.5. Housing, water, and sanitation

3.5.1. Availability of housing

Housing shortage continued to exist across the country, and especially in urban centres, noted UNOCHA in its 2022 report on humanitarian needs in Syria.³¹⁵ Over a third of the country's population lived in substandard, damaged and / or inadequate shelters, including almost half (3.37 million people) of the estimated 6.92 million IDPs across Syria.³¹⁶

The chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, observed in a statement to the UN Human Rights Council that

'[a]cross the country, and acutely in Government controlled areas, civilians continuously face deprivation of housing, land and property rights. Government security forces have destroyed houses in recently retaken areas for monetary gain. Vacated properties of thousands of displaced civilians have been auctioned without the involvement of their owners. In and around Damascus, large numbers of

³⁰⁹ WFP, WFP Syria Situation Report #5, May 2022, [url](#), p. 1

³¹⁰ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, April 2022, Issue 90, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 1

³¹¹ WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, April 2022, Issue 90, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 1

³¹² MEE, Syria: Protests mount amid anger over 'unfair' cuts to government subsidies, 12 February 2022, [url](#)

³¹³ WFP, Syrian Arab Republic, mVAM Bulletin Issue no. 64: February 2022, 29 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 1-2

³¹⁴ WFP, Syrian Arab Republic, mVAM Bulletin Issue no. 64: February 2022, 29 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 1, 3

³¹⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 12

³¹⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 27



individuals are still being prevented from accessing their homes, without compensation.³¹⁷

Soaring rents have further aggravated the population's living conditions. According to the owner of a real estate office quoted by Al Jazeera, monthly rents in low-income areas such as Dwel'a, Al-Tadamon, Daff Al-Shouk, and Daff Al-Sakhr ranged between SYP 200 000 and SYP 300 000 (USD 75 to 85)³¹⁸ and up to SYP 500 000 (USD 143)³¹⁹, depending on the state and size of the apartment and its location. Rents for one room in the Old Damascus area, in neighbourhoods such as Bab Touma, Bab Sharqi, and Al-Qaymariya ranged from SYP 250 000 to SYP 350 000 (USD 71 to 100)³²⁰, noting that such numbers were 'four and five times an employee's salary'.³²¹ According to report by Sawt Al-Asima, a pro-opposition media outlet that covers Damascus and Rural Damascus, rents in areas with better infrastructure and closer to the city centre, such as Al-Mazzeh, reportedly ranged from SYP 400 000 to SYP 1 million (USD 124.4 to 311.8),³²² but could go as high as SYP 1.5 million (roughly USD 468) and above in rich neighbourhoods.³²³

The GoS' decision in February 2022 to exclude about 600 000 families from its subsidiary 'smart card' programme further aggravated the situation on an already tense housing market. The New Arab reported on an increase in rents in Damascus, as house owners who were deprived of access to subsidised goods searched for other ways to generate an additional income. An IDP living in the southern outskirts of Damascus saw his rent doubled from SYP 75 000 to 150 000 (USD 20.5 to 41), an amount that corresponded to his monthly salary. A real estate broker observed that many families might move to slum areas on the city's outskirts because of the rising rents or might move to rural areas despite poor communal and transportation services.³²⁴

In Damascus, in some cases, residents were reportedly put under pressure to sell their property to members of Hezbollah and Iranian militias. Other reported violations of HLP rights included the destruction of civil registries and property documents. In some cases, persons living in areas outside GoS control reportedly faced problems in reaching their properties or civil registries, because checkpoint staff would not let them pass, or would confiscate property or identification documents, including marriage certificates. The latter was particularly

³¹⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Statement by Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, to the 47th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, 6 July 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁸ USD 56 to 84, if calculated with the informal exchange rate valid in Damascus in December 2021.

³¹⁹ USD 140, if calculated with the informal exchange rate valid in Damascus in December 2021.

³²⁰ USD 70 to 98, if calculated with the informal exchange rate valid in Damascus in December 2021.

³²¹ Al Jazeera, أقبية ومحال تجارية وبيوت غير جاهزة. ملاذ السوريين لمواجهة ارتفاع الإيجارات في دمشق وريفها [Basements, shops and houses that are not ready. Syrians' haven to cope with rising rents in Damascus and its countryside], 26 December 2021, [url](#)

³²² Sawt Al-Asima, قانون البيوع العقارية يرفع إيجار المنازل بنسبة 20 % في دمشق ومحيطها [Al-baywa real estate law increases house rent by 20% in Damascus and its surroundings], 13 June 2021, [url](#); Syria TV, ارتفاع كبير في إيجارات المنازل بمدينة دمشق وريفها [A significant increase in house rents in Damascus and its countryside], 29 August 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, أقبية ومحال تجارية وبيوت غير جاهزة. ملاذ السوريين لمواجهة ارتفاع الإيجارات في دمشق وريفها [Basements, shops and houses that are not ready. Syrians' haven to cope with rising rents in Damascus and its countryside], 26 December 2021, [url](#)

³²³ Sawt Al-Asima, قانون البيوع العقارية يرفع إيجار المنازل بنسبة 20 % في دمشق ومحيطها [Al-baywa real estate law increases house rent by 20% in Damascus and its surroundings], 13 June 2021, [url](#); Salon Syria, حلم مستحيل... إيجار شقة في دمشق [Rent an apartment in Damascus... impossible dream], 17 December 2021, [url](#)

³²⁴ New Arab (The), سورية: إلغاء الدعم يرفع إيجارات المساكن في دمشق [Syria: Elimination of subsidies raises housing rents in Damascus], 15 February 2022, [url](#)



problematic for women, as it would put them at threat of losing access to properties registered under their husband's name.³²⁵

3.5.2. Reconstruction projects

The Arab Reform Initiative described that within Damascus city multiple parts of the city have been designated for reconstruction, most of them areas that include informal housing. The most prominent districts include Al-Qaboun, Yarmouk, Jobar and Barzeh. More areas with informal settlements are expected to follow. The parts of the city which were prioritised, including Al-Qaboun and Yarmouk, were strongholds of the opposition and witnessed severe destruction.³²⁶

Researchers Suhail al-Ghazi and Noor Hamadeh noted that laws on urban redevelopment such as Decree 66 (2012) and its amended version, Law No. 10 (2018), were used by the GoS to confiscate or destroy property, mainly in pro-opposition informal settlements. Decree 66 initially authorised the GoS to redevelop areas of informal settlements in Damascus, while Law No. 10 was extended to apply to the whole of Syria. Moreover, the sources alleged that such urban development projects often served to change the demographic composition of the affected neighbourhoods. For example, Marota City, an urban development project under Decree 66, would extend over the former pro-opposition neighbourhood of Basateen Al-Razi. About 50 000 residents had to give up their homes since they lacked formal property documents and were not able to prove ownership of their properties. Moreover, many residents who were displaced abroad were unable to return to Syria to claim ownership and consequently lost their property, too. At the same time, many of the businesses involved in the project were owned by wealthy elites who were closely connected to the government and who were presumably likely to stay in the neighbourhood after the project's completion.³²⁷

The Basilia City project³²⁸, another urban development project based on Decree 66, would be situated in the neighbourhoods of Al-Mazzeah, Kafr Sousa, Qanawat Basteen, Daraya, and Al-Qadam –areas that were predominantly inhabited by government opponents who fled or were expelled during the war. The same situation applied to development projects under Law No. 10, including the mostly informal Tadamon neighbourhood in Al-Midan district - only about 10 % of residents held formal ownership of their properties, and Yarmouk. Yarmouk was³²⁹ home to the largest PRS community in Syria and largely destroyed during the war.³³⁰ For further information on Decree 66 and Law No. 10, see subsection 3.5.3 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Socio-economic situation: Damascus city \(April 2021\)](#).

Researcher Mazen Ezzi assessed that zoning plans and reconstruction projects in Al-Qaboun district, including the residential area Qaboun Al-Balad, the Al-Qaboun Industrial Zone and the

³²⁵ Al-Ghazi, S. and Hamadeh, N., Part 1: Violations in Government-Held Areas, TIMEP, 2 April 2021, [url](#)

³²⁶ Arab Reform Initiative, Informal Settlements in Syria: What approach after the conflict?, 28 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 12-14

³²⁷ Al-Ghazi, S. and Hamadeh, N., Part 1: Violations in Government-Held Areas, TIMEP, 2 April 2021, [url](#)

³²⁸ In June 2021, the government announced the beginning of the construction work of Basilia City, according to the Syrian Observer quoting an article by pro-government website Hashtag Syria. See: [url](#)

³²⁹ Until 2011, about 160 000 Palestinian refugees were living in Yarmouk, however, the majority fled during the years of war. As of early 2021, a few hundred families have returned to live in the camp. See: [url](#)

³³⁰ Al-Ghazi, S. and Hamadeh, N., Part 1: Violations in Government-Held Areas, TIMEP, 2 April 2021, [url](#)



Tishreen informal settlement, constituted ‘social engineering’. In Al-Qaboun and parts of Tishreen, residents had supported the opposition, and informal settlements in these districts had been largely destroyed during the war.³³¹

3.5.3. Legal issues affecting the housing situation

For information on Decree 66 and Law No. 10, see subsection 3.5.3 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Socio-economic situation: Damascus city \(April 2021\)](#).

In 2021, the GoS adopted several laws and regulatory measures related to real estate and property. These laws and measures, according to The Syria Report, would increase the government’s control over the real estate market and further reduce access to housing for some population groups. In March 2021, the government adopted Law No. 15 of 2021, which regulated the mechanism for calculating property sales taxes. According to the new law, taxes that were due at any kind of transfer of real estate ownership, would henceforth be calculated based on the property’s market price, instead of on the price agreed upon between seller and buyer. The respective property’s market price would be estimated by specialised committees formed by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and established at local, governorate and central level.³³² Article 10 of Law No. 15/2021 was deemed particularly problematic as it prohibited the official registration of any sale before the parties involved received financial clearance from their governorate’s financial directorate. This, in turn, required the payment of all outstanding taxes and bills – even those unrelated to the transaction – to the state authorities within 30 days after the transaction.³³³

The Syria Report estimated that residents in informal settlement areas were particularly affected by the law, as many of them had only sales contracts to prove ownership, or court rulings and agricultural deeds, but did not have them officially recorded in the real estate registry. In informal settlements, many houses lacked water or electricity meters. To obtain official registration, any potential buyer would therefore have to request the installation of such meters and subsequently pay local administrative fees or a lump sum to receive the necessary financial clearance.³³⁴

The law did not extend to public institutions or real estate development projects, allowing these institutions to buy or expropriate real estate without paying owners the current market value.³³⁵ Moreover, obtaining financial clearance also required a security approval. Consequently, anyone with a record of government opposition might face difficulties in buying or selling property.³³⁶

Other property-related legislation included Law No. 17, stipulating that also fees for cadastral services had to be calculated according to the market value of properties, or Decree No. 28

³³¹ Ezzi, M., On the edge of the capital: Social Engineering in North-Eastern Damascus, EUI, 5 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 7, 16

³³² Syria Report (The), Explained: New Real Estate Tax Law Raises New HLP Rights Concerns, 17 March 2021, [url](#); Syria Report (The), The Exclusionary Measures of the Damascus Real Estate Market, 29 September 2021, [url](#)

³³³ Syria Report (The), Explained: New Real Estate Tax Law Raises New HLP Rights Concerns, 17 March 2021, [url](#)

³³⁴ Syria Report (The), Explained: New Real Estate Tax Law Raises New HLP Rights Concerns, 17 March 2021, [url](#)

³³⁵ Syria Report (The), Explained: New Real Estate Tax Law Raises New HLP Rights Concerns, 17 March 2021, [url](#)

³³⁶ Syria Report (The), The Exclusionary Measures of the Damascus Real Estate Market, 29 September 2021, [url](#)



requiring sellers to have defined amounts of funds on their bank accounts before the sale could be registered: at least SYP 1 million (USD 288) for the sale of land and at least SYP 5 million (USD 1 440.5) for the sale of a residential or commercial property.³³⁷

The Syria Report estimated that following the enactment of the aforementioned laws, pro-opposition IDPs and refugees, who owned property in development zones of Damascus were those most likely to sell their properties in the near future, out of fear that they might not receive security clearance or might be expropriated.³³⁸ No further information on the implementation of these laws was found.

3.5.4. Availability of water and sanitation

After ten years of war, only about half of Syria's water and sanitation systems functioned properly, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), due to damages to the infrastructure, lack of maintenance, and loss of more than a third of technical staff, who either retired or emigrated. Water supply was further affected by the lack of electricity, as the country's power generation capacity was down by 60 % to 70 %. ICRC also pointed to environmental damages as a consequence of the war, giving the Damascus city wastewater treatment plant as an example. Since it was left inoperable in 2012, wastewater entered the environment untreated, leading to groundwater contamination and increased risks to public health.³³⁹

UNOCHA estimated that about 70 % of sewage was released untreated and at least half of sewerage systems across Syria were not functional. Consequently, waterborne diseases were on the rise.³⁴⁰

According to a Syrian academic interviewed for this report, water cuts in Damascus city varied according to the area. In the past, there had been water cuts for up to 24 hours in some areas. Although tap water was potable, people would buy bottled water to have provisioning at home in case of water cuts or water shortages. Due to water and electricity shortages, doing the laundry could take up to three days, as electric washing machines worked only when both water and electricity were available.³⁴¹

In December 2021, the Damascus Water Supply and Sewerage Authority published a water supply programme for the city, according to which water was supplied for periods of 6 to 9 hours per night or day, depending on the neighbourhood. In some areas, supply was available for up to 12 hours per day.³⁴² In February 2022, the office stated that there was a significant improvement in the water flow of Al-Fijeh spring – the main source of drinking water for the

³³⁷ Syria Report (The), The Exclusionary Measures of the Damascus Real Estate Market, 29 September 2021, [url](#)

³³⁸ Syria Report (The), The Exclusionary Measures of the Damascus Real Estate Market, 29 September 2021, [url](#)

³³⁹ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Syria water crisis: Up to 40% less drinking water after 10 years of war, 1 October 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 9

³⁴¹ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

³⁴² D.A.W.S.S.A, 2021-12-19 برنامج تزويد المياه في مناطق مدينة دمشق اعتباراً من 12/19-2021], undated, [url](#)



population residing in the capital. Consequently, Damascus and the surrounding areas fed by the spring would likely witness an easing or lifting of the rationing measures.³⁴³

3.6. Health care

3.6.1. Availability and access to treatment and medicines

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that 12.2 million people would be in need of health services in 2022 in Syria, among them 4.4 million IDPs and 1.33 million children under the age of five years.³⁴⁴

UNOCHA stated that countrywide people's access to basic services continued to decline, due to damaged infrastructure, lack of critical supplies, and lack of financial means as well as restrictions on free and safe movement. Particularly serious was the lack of technical personnel needed for delivery and maintenance of basic health services and to operate potable water supply systems. Shortage of technical staff was due to displacement during the war, death or impairment, but also due to a lack of technical training.³⁴⁵ The ratio of healthcare workers to population had crossed emergency thresholds in more than half of the country's subdistricts (a third-level administrative unit) as of 2022.³⁴⁶ Moreover, all across Syria at least 3 364 health care personnel were still detained or forcibly disappeared, including 744 health workers in Damascus.³⁴⁷

The health care sector reportedly suffered not only from shortage of personnel due to high emigration and retirement rates, but also limited availability of medicines and low-quality of available products.³⁴⁸

In December 2021, WFP reported that almost 23 % of interviewed households³⁴⁹ across Syria had difficulties in accessing medical care facilities, 48 % struggled with purchasing necessary medicines, mainly because they lacked financial means (55 %), but also due to shortages in pharmacies (17 %).³⁵⁰

Based on the latest WHO data available of December 2020, Damascus had 15 public hospitals, 12 of which were classified as 'accessible', while 3 were 'hard to access'.³⁵¹ Of 61 public health centres, 53 were 'accessible' and 2 'hard to access'.³⁵²

³⁴³ Al-Baath Newspaper, إلغاء تقنين المياه عن دمشق ومحيطها [coming soon. abolition of water rationing for Damascus and its surroundings], 27 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁴⁴ WHO, Syrian Arab Republic, Emergency Appeal 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#), p. 1

³⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), pp.8-9

³⁴⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 20

³⁴⁷ SNHR, At least 3 364 health care personnel still arrested / forcibly disappeared, 98 % by the Syrian regime, 27 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7

³⁴⁸ NPA, Syria's poor healthcare system claims victims, 12 July 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁹ WFP interviewed 1 081 households by phone in December 2021 in 13 governorates (except Idlib).

³⁵⁰ WFP, Syrian Arab Republic, mVAM Bulletin Issue no. 62: December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 4

³⁵¹ WHO, HeRAMS Annual Report, January – December 2020, Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic, 2020, [url](#), p. 14

³⁵² WHO, HeRAMS Annual Report, January – December 2020, Public Health Centres in the Syrian Arab Republic, 2020, [url](#), p. 14



According to a Syrian academic interviewed for this report, as of March 2022 public health care was generally available in Damascus city, however, people often would have to wait long to get treatment. Treatment and stay in a public hospital were free, however, people would have to pay for all medical products needed for treatment, like for example, a catheter needed for heart surgery, which would cost about SYP 1.5 million to 2.5 million (USD 414.6 to 691). The same operation would cost about SYP 4-5 million (USD 1 106 to 1 382) in a private hospital, including the stay and the doctor's fee. There was, however, a general shortage of doctors, as many had emigrated.³⁵³

According to a March 2022 DIS report, specialised medical treatment and medicines are available in Damascus for the following chronic diseases: cancer, cardiac complications, diabetes type I and II, haematological diseases, kidney diseases, rheumatic diseases and chronic obstructive lung diseases.³⁵⁴

Civilians perceived to be opposed to the government claimed to have been denied access to treatment in Damascus, according to a report by the Human Rights Institute of the Georgetown University Law Institute. One woman reported that she had been pressed to sign a reconciliation agreement with the government before receiving medical care for her father, which she refused.³⁵⁵

No specific information on the situation of IDPs with regard to access to treatment and medicines could be found.

3.6.2. Healthcare facilities capacity and quality

According to the latest WHO data available, as of December 2020, Damascus had 15 public hospitals, 11 of which were classified as 'fully functioning' and 4 as 'partially functioning'.³⁵⁶ Two hospitals were 'partially damaged', nevertheless, one of them (Damascus kidney hospital) was reported to be fully functioning.³⁵⁷

Inpatient capacity in Damascus' public hospitals has increased from originally (that is, pre-war) 2 840 to 3 246 beds, which signifies a 114 % increase in available beds, probably due to the increased demand for medical treatment related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Bed availability per 10 000 population amounted to 18 in Damascus' public hospitals.³⁵⁸ With regard to public hospitals offering Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care (CEmONC) services, Damascus was below the benchmark of one hospital per 500 000 people providing these services, with mathematically only half a hospital for half a million people, or, conversely,

³⁵³ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

³⁵⁴ Denmark, DIS, Health care services availability and accessibility in Damascus, Rural Damascus, Tartous and Latakia, March 2022, [url](#), pp. 28-45

³⁵⁵ HRI, No choice: Attacks on health as a driver of forced displacement in Syria, May 2021, [url](#), p. 36. HRI's report is based on 39 interviews conducted in the academic year 2020-2021 with Syrians who were either living outside at the time of the interview or were living in opposition-held areas and had previously spoken publicly against the government. For details on the methodology used, see pp. 4-5.

³⁵⁶ WHO, HeRAMS Annual Report, January – December 2020, Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic, 2020, [url](#), p. 10

³⁵⁷ WHO, HeRAMS Annual Report, January – December 2020, Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic, 2020, [url](#), pp. 16-17

³⁵⁸ WHO, HeRAMS Annual Report, January – December 2020, Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic, 2020, [url](#), pp. 19-20



one hospital for a population of one million.³⁵⁹ As of the third quarter of 2021, that number had slightly changed to one hospital providing CEmONC services for statistically 833 333 people.³⁶⁰

As of December 2020, the total number of medical doctors working at public hospitals in Damascus amounted to 3 849, including 43 orthopaedic surgery, 47 general surgery, 19 neurological surgery, 772 other specialists, 15 emergency physicians, 2 874 resident doctors, and 79 dentists. Other medical staff included 3 752 nurses, 391 laboratory staff, 154 midwives, 83 pharmacists, 505 health workers with university degree, 1 326 technicians and 2 890 other staff. There were no general practitioners.³⁶¹

According to WHO data of the period July to September 2021, health staff in all of Damascus' medical facilities (hospitals, PHCs, and others) included 25 doctors (general practitioners, specialists, emergency physicians, resident doctors, and dentists), 23 nurses and one midwife per 10 000 people.³⁶²

During December 2020, Damascus' public hospitals carried out 3 078 elective surgeries and 1 039 emergency surgeries. 981 patients were treated at intensive care units (ICUs), and 287 children with severe diseases received treatment at public hospitals. Moreover, 2 358 patients were treated for cancer, and 1 650 patients received cardiovascular treatment. Damascus has two cardiovascular specialised hospitals. Damascus public hospitals reported 19 psychiatric inpatients in December 2020.³⁶³

The salary of a resident doctor – a medical graduate who was doing his specialisation training in a hospital - was reportedly about SYP 50 000 (about USD 12) for a working week of up to 96 hours. This amount would often not even pay for rent and food, leading many to take up a second job or leave the country.³⁶⁴ Similarly, the monthly salary of a doctor at a public hospital was reportedly SYP 100 000 (about USD 30)³⁶⁵ at best. An anaesthesiologist in Damascus was quoted that due to emigration of doctors and medical graduates only four anaesthesiologists under the age of 30 years were left in government-controlled areas.³⁶⁶

3.6.3. Impact of Covid-19

As of 5 July 2022, Syria had officially recorded 55 940 confirmed cases of Covid-19, including 1 712 health workers, and 3 150 deaths, among them 44 health workers. The city of Damascus

³⁵⁹ WHO, HeRAMS Annual Report, January – December 2020, Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic, 2020, [url](#), p. 43

³⁶⁰ Calculation based on data provided by WHO. See: WHO, Health Cluster Whole of Syria, Syrian Arab Republic, Snapshot on WoS Health Resources and Services Availability Monitoring System (HeRAMS), 2021 Q 3: Jul-Sep, 13 January 2022, [url](#), p. 1

³⁶¹ WHO, HeRAMS Annual Report, January – December 2020, Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic, 2020, [url](#), pp. 24-25

³⁶² WHO, Health Cluster Whole of Syria, Syrian Arab Republic, Snapshot on WoS Health Resources and Services Availability Monitoring System (HeRAMS), 2021 Q 3: Jul-Sep, 13 January 2022, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶³ WHO, HeRAMS Annual Report, January – December 2020, Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic, 2020, [url](#), pp. 38, 40, 46, 49, 53

³⁶⁴ NPA, Low salaries force doctors to moonlight in Syria's Damascus, 15 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁵ USD 28.8, if calculated with the informal exchange rate valid in Damascus in September 2021.

³⁶⁶ NPA, Only 4 anesthiologists [sic] under 30 left in Syrian government areas: health official, 14 September 2021, [url](#)



had officially recorded a total number of 10 744 confirmed cases of Covid-19, including 612 health workers. Up to that date, 901 deaths were officially recorded, including the death of 22 health workers. Damascus had 22 treatment (isolation) hospitals with a total number of 527 beds, including 367 treatment (isolation) beds and 160 ICU beds, as well as 130 ventilators available for the treatment of Covid-19.³⁶⁷

A Syrian academic interviewed for this report noted that the actual numbers of Covid-19 cases were uncertain. An overall debilitated health care system as well as limited testing capacity (e.g., shortage of Covid-19 testing kits) had hidden the scale of the Covid-19 outbreak in Syria. Besides, the high cost of the test had prevented many people taking it.³⁶⁸ Similarly, WHO reported that the percentage of samples testing positive for Covid-29 had decreased by 58.9 % in January 2022 compared to December 2021 due to a shortage of lab supplies in areas under GoS control. Incident rates all across Syria were underestimated due to low tested numbers.³⁶⁹

According to the GoS, 10.4 % of the population had received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine by the end of January 2022, including 5.3 % percent, who were fully vaccinated.³⁷⁰ In February 2022, the head of the Damascus health department was quoted that 140 747 people had been fully vaccinated in Damascus up to that date, while 239 118 people had received at least one dose, and 791 had received a third (booster) dose.³⁷¹

In GoS-controlled areas, a fourth wave of Covid-19 infections peaked in October 2021 but declined until the end of the year.³⁷² By the end of September 2021, bed occupancy of ICU beds in Damascus had reached 100 % with suspected and confirmed Covid-19 patients, as a government official reportedly confirmed. Several patients had to be transferred to hospitals in other governorates to receive intensive care,³⁷³ including to far-away cities such as Homs and Hama, 140km and 180km, respectively, from Damascus.³⁷⁴

Relatives of Covid-19 patients reported that a private hospital in Damascus required them to pay SYP 4 million (roughly USD 1 225),³⁷⁵ or, in another case, SYP 7 million (roughly USD 2 017) per day during their stay in an ICU or an isolation centre. Moreover, patients were reportedly required to pay SYP 10 million (USD 2 881) in advance to be accepted into an isolation centre at a private hospital.³⁷⁶

³⁶⁷ WHO Syrian Arab Republic, COVID-19 Dashboard, 5 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 1, 4, 12

³⁶⁸ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

³⁶⁹ WHO Syrian Arab Republic, Monthly COVID-19 Bulletin, January 2022, 15 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 4-5

³⁷⁰ WHO Syrian Arab Republic, Monthly COVID-19 Bulletin, January 2022, 15 February 2022, [url](#), p. 6

³⁷¹ SANA, Nearly 140,000 persons completely received Corona vaccine in Damascus, 6 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁷² WHO Syrian Arab Republic, Monthly COVID-19 Bulletin, January 2022, 15 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷³ Syrian Observer (The), 100% ICU Bed Occupancy for COVID-19 Patients in Damascus [source: Al-Baath newspaper], 22 September 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁴ Reuters, Syrians face common enemy across frontlines: surging COVID-19, 30 September 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁵ NPA, Syria's poor healthcare system claims victims, 12 July 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁶ Sawt Al-Asima, 7 ملايين ليرة الليلة الواحدة. المشافي الخاصة ترفع تكاليف الإقامة في مراكز العزل بدمشق

[7 million liras per night. private hospitals raise the cost of accommodation in isolation centres in Damascus], 26 September 2021, [url](#)



Medical equipment such as oxygen tanks were reportedly in short supply at some medical facilities, and some people resorted to buying oxygen tanks through social media channels or on the black market to treat sick family members at home.³⁷⁷

In order to increase the vaccination rate, the GoS introduced mandatory Covid-19 vaccination in many public sectors in December 2021.³⁷⁸ Following this decision, some people reportedly paid up to SYP 200 000 (USD 55.3) for a fraudulent vaccination certificate, as they were required to obtain it to access their workplace or a government department but had little confidence in the vaccine and were reluctant to get it.³⁷⁹

3.7. Education

3.7.1. Legal background

Article 29 of the Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic stipulates that education is ‘a right guaranteed by the state, and it is free at all levels’, with the exception of cases where the law regulates fees at university level and at government institutes adding that ‘education shall be compulsory until the end of basic education state’.³⁸⁰ Education is compulsory between the age of 6 and 15, which comprises primary education and lower secondary education.³⁸¹ The Syrian official news agency SANA reported in January 2022 that more than 3.6 million pupils and students were receiving free education in the Education Ministry’s schools and institutes, spreading over 13 660 kindergartens, public schools and colleges across all provinces.³⁸² The Syrian Ministry of Education is responsible for the supervision of basic and secondary education, both in the public and private sectors, and is in charge of the curriculum and the distribution of learning materials, provided for free for the first nine grades. While pro-government agencies stated that students in grades one to four receive new books, with the percentage decreasing for higher grades, North Press Agency (NPA), a Kurdish news agency, reported that parents in Damascus were forced to buy new books, as the books provided to the children were so worn-out, they could not be used.³⁸³

3.7.2. Availability of education

According to the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics there were 520 ‘basic education schools (1st & 2nd cycle)’ in Damascus in 2019, 402 of which were public, 97 private and 21 run by

³⁷⁷ Syria Direct, With healthcare out of reach, Syrians turn to the black market for oxygen, 15 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁸ WHO Syrian Arab Republic, Monthly COVID-19 Bulletin, December 2021, n.d., [url](#), p. 7

³⁷⁹ Syrian Observer (The), Syria: Fraud in Vaccine Centres, Cards Sold in Damascus, 19 January 2022, [url](#)

³⁸⁰ Syria, Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, 2012, [url](#), art.29

³⁸¹ Nuffic, Facts: Syria and education, n.d., [url](#)

³⁸² SANA, More than 3,6 million students receive free education, 30 January 2022, [url](#)

³⁸³ NPA, Schools in Syria’s Damascus: overcrowding, worn-out books, 14 September 2021, [url](#)



UNRWA.³⁸⁴ In the same year, there were 107 secondary schools in Damascus, 78 of which were public and 29 were private.³⁸⁵

According to the Director of Education in Damascus, Suleiman Al-Younis, the number of schools in Damascus had decreased to merely 610 from 1 075 pre-war because of ‘acts of terrorism’ carried out during the conflict. The small number of schools, in addition to students from neighbouring provinces enrolling in schools in the city, has led to a high student density in classrooms.³⁸⁶ The Director of Education in Damascus stated in December 2021 that 85 additional schools would be needed in Damascus to end the operation of shift schools in the capital. The existing 85 schools in densely populated areas were operating in two shifts to accommodate all students. The schooling situation was reported to differ across neighbourhoods of Damascus.³⁸⁷

Schools in Syria generally suffer from overcrowded classrooms and buildings lacking sufficient electricity, heating, ventilation, water and sanitation. According to SHRC, the problems were more prevalent in areas which accommodate a larger number of IDPs, such as Damascus.³⁸⁸ Pupils in Damascus reported to suffer as a result of the rationing and shortage of fuel, which has led to a lack of heating in schools.³⁸⁹ A director of education in Damascus reportedly asked residents to contribute to the maintenance of local schools.³⁹⁰

According to UNOCHA, the formal education system is unable to accommodate all school age children. In Damascus there was one operational classroom for every 101 school-aged children. Nationally over a third of schools operated in shifts. Existing services were said to be unable to meet the various learning needs.³⁹¹ A parent from the area of Al-Mazzeah in Damascus reported that his children, who were in grade six and seven, shared a classroom with over 60 other pupils.³⁹² According to a teacher from a public school in the neighbourhood of Al-Midan in Damascus, crowdedness was a particular problem in the classroom, with 40 to 50 students having to study in the same classroom. There was a lack of teachers, which resulted in some courses being suspended or course materials being taught by unspecialised staff.³⁹³

As a consequence of war and corruption, teaching in GoS-controlled areas is poor, as reported by the New Arab. Course units were removed from the curriculum during the

³⁸⁴ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Number of basic education schools (1st & 2nd cycle) by ownership of school & sex of pupils, Chapter 11, Table 1/11, n.d., [url](#)

³⁸⁵ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Number of secondary schools by ownership of school & sex of students, Chapter 11, Table 5/11, n.d., [url](#)

³⁸⁶ Syria Scope, مدير تربية دمشق لسكوب: عدد المدارس انخفض إلى 610 فقط والكثافة الطلابية لا تتناسب مع العدد [Director of Damascus Education to Scope: The number of schools is only 610, and the student density is not commensurate with the number], 23 September 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁷ Al-Baath Newspaper, دمشق بحاجة إلى 85 مدرسة جديدة لالتهاء من معضلة الدوام النصفى [Damascus needs 85 new schools to end shift dilemma], 21 December 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁸ SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 37

³⁸⁹ Syrian Observer (The), Education in the Cold; Damascus Schools Without Fuel [Source: Syria TV], 21 December 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁰ NPA, مديرية التربية في دمشق: على السكان أن يكونوا شركاء في صيانة المدارس [Directorate of Education in Damascus: Residents must be partners in school maintenance], 13 September 2021, [url](#)

³⁹¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 68

³⁹² NPA, Schools in Syria's Damascus: overcrowding, worn-out books, 14 September 2021, [url](#)

³⁹³ Enab Baladi, Left behind: public schools in Syrian regime control areas, 17 April 2021, [url](#)



2020/2021 school year and parents complained about children's educational level dropping. Some resorted to private lessons, already at primary school level, to make up for the loss. Parents told about teachers not being present at school and the level of school exams being downgraded, so that pupils were able to receive good marks, despite limited knowledge on the subject matter. According to the director of a private tutoring centre, there were pupils in grade six or eight, who had difficulties reading and writing.³⁹⁴

Private schools were an expensive alternative for families. According to Syria TV, private schools raised their fees between 100 and 150 % for the school year 2021/2022. This meant an increase at primary school level from SYP 300 000-450 000 (USD 88-132) to SYP 800 000 to SYP one million (USD 234-293), while the fees of middle and secondary schools increased to between SYP 1 500 000 and over SYP 2 000 000 (USD 440-over 586) depending on the school, its name and location, without including any other services such as school uniform, books or transportation.³⁹⁵ According to the Syrian news platform Damas2day, fees for private schools reach more than one million SYP per school year on average³⁹⁶, with some private schools having fees of two million SYP per year, according to Enab Baladi.³⁹⁷

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provided education services to Palestinian refugee students from grade 1 to 9, with approximately 51 000 Palestine refugee pupils attending 102 UNRWA schools located in Damascus, Rural Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Latakia and Dar'a. The majority of UNRWA schools were located within the Palestinian refugee camps. Some UNRWA schools were severely damaged and destroyed, among others in Yarmouk camp in Damascus.³⁹⁸ The Palestinian Refugees Portal, an independent media organization whose aim it is to draw attention to the situation of the Palestinians and their humanitarian situation and everyday experiences, wrote about the situation of previous residents of Yarmouk camp who continued to have their children enrolled in UNRWA schools in the camp, despite living in different parts of Damascus. A father living in this situation talked about the struggle of high cost of transportation to send his children to school and asked UNRWA for assistance.³⁹⁹

3.7.3. Access to education

Education in Damascus is generally accessible, as explained by the Syrian academic interviewed for this report. Children are able to attend school in their own neighbourhood as well as in a neighbourhood different from their place of residence. It is possible for IDPs to register their children at school in the same way as original residents of the area, providing that they have identification documents, including the family booklet. The number of pupils in individual schools is problematic, which might lead to some schools not accepting children

³⁹⁴ New Arab (The), سوريايون يشكون من تدهور التعليم المدرسي [Syrians complain of poor schooling], 6 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁵ Syria TV, مدارس خاصة في دمشق تلزم الأهالي بأقساط مليونية [Private schools in damascus commit parents to millions in installments], 11 August 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁶ Damas2day, أقساط المدارس الخاصة.. خلية على الورق وفلكية في الواقع [private school fees. It's on paper and astronomical], 10 June 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁷ Enab Baladi, Left behind: public schools in Syrian regime control areas, 17 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁸ UNRWA, Education in Syria, n.d. [url](#)

³⁹⁹ Palestinian Refugees Portal, مطالب لـ "أونروا" بتوفير بدل نقل لطلاب مخيم اليرموك النازحين [Demand for UNRWA transport allowance for displaced Yarmouk camp students], 6 December 2021, [url](#)



from outside the area, due to lack of capacity. Wealthy families tend to choose private education or home education over public schools.⁴⁰⁰

Even though compulsory state schooling in Syria is for free, school uniforms and required stationery was reported to be so expensive that families were either forced to take out loans to pay for school supplies or decided not to send their children to school at all, as they could not afford the necessary supplies, particularly in the case of displaced families.⁴⁰¹ In addition, the need to travel to school was named as a possible limitation to access education. Damascus was the governorate with the highest rate of students (49 %) travelling longer than 20 minutes to school.⁴⁰²

(a) Enrolment rates

According to the UNOCHA, as of 2022 an estimated 6.6 million people, 97 % of whom children, are in need of education services nationwide. In Damascus city, the need was considered by UNOCHA to be on severity level 3⁴⁰³ out of 5.⁴⁰⁴ At a national level there was a self-reported attendance level of 82 %.⁴⁰⁵ No enrolment rates for Damascus city could be found during the reporting period. The interviewed Syrian academic noted that when it comes to enrolment numbers it has to be considered that some children are enrolled in school but are nevertheless not attending due to having to work to financially support their families.⁴⁰⁶

There were also no official numbers on drop-out rates.⁴⁰⁷ NPA stated in an article on the schooling situation in Damascus that drop-out rates were rising, due to poverty and insecurity in light of the collapse of the Syrian Pound and the deterioration of living conditions.⁴⁰⁸ According to UNOCHA, nationwide there was a steep increase in drop-outs from the age of 11, impacting boys more than girls.⁴⁰⁹ Half of the children who were out of school had never been enrolled.⁴¹⁰

(b) Impact of COVID-19

At the beginning of April 2021, schools in the GoS-controlled parts of Syria closed to limit the spread of COVID-19. At the end of April, students from grade five to high school started to take their end of year exams a month earlier than scheduled, as schools intended to close

⁴⁰⁰ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

⁴⁰¹ Rozana Radio, *المستلزمات المدرسية كابوس يؤرق أيام السوريين* [School supplies are a nightmare that haunts the days of Syrians.], 13 August 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 68

⁴⁰³ The education severity scale developed by UNOCHA was 'informed by the JIAF [Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework] indicators and past indicators framed around the No Lost Generation framework and lessons learned from past processes. The scale has six weighted indicators that cover access to, and quality of, education services, displacement, returns and the intensity of the conflict.' (see: UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 69)

⁴⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 67

⁴⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 67

⁴⁰⁶ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

⁴⁰⁷ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

⁴⁰⁸ NPA, *مديرية التربية في دمشق: على السكان أن يكونوا شركاء في صيانة المدارس* [Directorate of Education in Damascus: Residents must be partners in school maintenance], 13 September 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 68

⁴¹⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 67



early due to the pandemic.⁴¹¹ No reports of school closures in Damascus due to the COVID-19 pandemic could be found for the school year 2021/2022.

3.8. Humanitarian situation and assistance

According to the UNOCHA humanitarian needs overview, 900 000 million people are in need in Damascus city,⁴¹² 40 000 of whom are said to be in extreme and catastrophic need.⁴¹³ 600 000 of the overall population of 1.8 million in the city (as estimated by UNOCHA) are IDPs.⁴¹⁴ UNOCHA considered that 8 % of households in Damascus city were completely unable to meet the basic needs of all members, 63 % suffered from insufficient ability to meet basic needs and 29 % were able to adequately meet their needs.⁴¹⁵ Over 40 % of IDP households in Damascus city reported safety and security concerns related to discrimination, considerably more than the average of 27 % across all of Syria.⁴¹⁶ IDPs in Damascus city were further reported to suffer particularly from loss of income and income insufficiency.⁴¹⁷ Of the households interviewed by UNOCHA in Damascus, only 15 % received assistance in the three months prior to the assessment in August 2021. From the households who did not receive aid, merely 7 % on average stated that they did not require assistance, with the main reason for not receiving aid being lack of information. Of those who received assistance, 100 % in Damascus reported that the aid received was not enough or of bad quality.⁴¹⁸ To demonstrate the level of need within the population, a confidential source told the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs that small children, young people and entire families could be seen in Damascus city searching through rubbish containers for waste to use. The source did not know of such incidents prior or during the war.⁴¹⁹

According to UNOCHA, 52 of its partner organisations implemented humanitarian activities in Damascus in the first half of 2021, of which 7 were UN organisations, 28 NGOs (National Non-Governmental Organizations), 9 INGOs (International Non-Governmental Organizations), 7 GoS as well as the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC). 24 of these organisations implemented programs related to health, 20 related to protection, 9 to education, 9 to nutrition, 7 to ER&L, 7 to food and agriculture, 6 to NFIs and 4 related to WASH.⁴²⁰ A complete list of organisations by name can be found on UNOCHA's [website](#).

The Syrian academic interviewed for this report explained that in Damascus, there are local charities who work independently from the government and provided support within their own neighbourhoods. These charities were often funded by merchants and other residents of the area they were operating in and mainly focus on supporting people with medical needs as

⁴¹¹ AP, Syria schools begin final exams weeks early because of virus, 25 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴¹² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁴¹³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 48

⁴¹⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

⁴¹⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 27

⁴¹⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 39

⁴¹⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 47

⁴¹⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 50

⁴¹⁹ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 10

⁴²⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic, Organizations implementing humanitarian activities based within Syria, January – July 2021, 7 September 2021, [url](#)



well as women and children. Their work had proven vital in assisting IDPs to get off the streets (especially in the period between 2015-2017), providing support to access food, clothing, medications and rent support. Local support varied according to the neighbourhood, the funds available and the network available to an individual.⁴²¹

The smart card system was run by the GoS to support residents in need⁴²², although it was reportedly not accessible to all who require assistance.⁴²³ More information on the smart card system can be found in subsections Economic situation and Availability of food.

It was reported that the GoS used international aid to finance itself, while directing assistance only to those areas it deemed loyal.⁴²⁴ A former Damascus-based aid worker told the Atlantic Council that aid was denied by the GoS to areas which were formerly under the rule of opposition forces. Areas in Damascus city, among others, had become 'wastelands', without electricity, water, health facilities and other services, despite people living in the areas, allegedly because of the GoS viewing them as 'enemies' or 'terrorists'.⁴²⁵ According to VDSF and OPC, returnees within GoS controlled areas, particularly in Damascus city, reported that they experienced discrimination in accessing basic services as well as humanitarian assistance, followed by perceived discrimination in accessing work and livelihood opportunities.⁴²⁶

No information about eligibility criteria and ways to apply for assistance programmes could be found.

⁴²¹ Syrian academic from Damascus, interview, 3 March 2022

⁴²² Al Shami, I., Facing Syria's Food Crisis, WINEP, 14 February 2022, [url](#)

⁴²³ Al Shami, I., Facing Syria's Food Crisis, WINEP, 14 February 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria: Protests mount amid anger over 'unfair' cuts to government subsidies, 12 February 2022, [url](#); Hall, N. et al., How the Assad Regime Systematically Diverts Tens of Millions in Aid, CSIS, 20 October 2021, [url](#)

⁴²⁴ Hall, N. et al., How the Assad Regime Systematically Diverts Tens of Millions in Aid, CSIS, 20 October 2021, [url](#)

⁴²⁵ Atlantic Council, Syrian Lives in Peril, June 2021, [url](#), p. 10

⁴²⁶ VDSF and OPC, Is Syria Safe for Return? Returnees' Perspective, November 2021, [url](#), p. 41



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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

This report should focus on Damascus city. The report should address the following key socioeconomic indicators: housing, food security, water and sanitation, health care, education, livelihood opportunities such as employment. Internal mobility issues relating to accessibility (travel and admittance) are also to be included.

City overview

- Demographics
- Ethno-religious composition

Internal mobility

- Airports and flights connections
- Freedom of movement, including impact of ethnic/religious background, gender, place of origin, age, (perceived) affiliation with opposition groups and being on wanted lists, and Covid-19
- Travel by road and through checkpoints
- Information on accessibility from Damascus airport to the city
- Restrictions on access and return to certain areas in Damascus
- Administrative requirements for settling in Damascus
- Civil documentation required for travel and access to services

Socio-economic overview

- Economic overview
- Employment
- Poverty
- Food security
- Housing, water, and sanitation
- Health care
- Education
- Humanitarian situation and assistance

