

Syria

Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate



Ministry of Immigration
and Integration

The Danish
Immigration Service

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

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

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

The brief report is a synthesis of information gathered from different sources, and it brings together condensed information in a relevant manner for the reader's COI needs and it organises information together thematically to form a coherent whole of the topic in question, instead of listing or quoting information source by source.

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Executive summary

The security situation in Homs Governorate has remained stable throughout the reporting period between August 2021 to April 2022, with the exception of the desert Badia area in eastern Homs Governorate, which has seen a resurgence in attacks by the Islamic State group and retaliatory strikes by Syrian and Russian government forces.

The situation in the western part of the governorate has by and large improved in the last year, especially in urban areas, such as Homs City, where security incidents have decreased. In the northern part of the Governorate, tensions and attacks by former rebel groups against Syrian government forces have been reported.

There have been few security related incidents and civilian casualties in the last couple of years in western Homs Governorate where the M5 and M1 highways connect Damascus to the coastal areas of Tartous and Latakia.

Permits from the authorities are not required for ordinary Syrians to move and travel on the roads in Homs Governorate. Public busses transport civilians hourly between Damascus and Tartous/Latakia. There is freedom of movement for civilians in the city of Homs.

Inhabitants in Homs Governorate are to a large extent affected by the deteriorating economic situation and poor living conditions. There is access to medical and educational services in the governorate, however these services are highly impacted by the conflict and Covid-19.

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Introduction

This brief report focuses on the security situation, freedom of movement and socioeconomic situation in Homs Governorate.

The report was written in accordance with the EASO COI Report Methodology.¹

The purpose of the report was to collect updated information on issues relevant for the processing of asylum cases. The Terms of Reference (ToR) is included at the end of the report (Appendix 2).

This report is based on relevant written sources supplemented with information collected through in-person- and Skype interviews with an international security organisation and a Syrian human rights organisation. The two sources were selected by virtue of their expertise on the topics of this report.

Minutes from the interviews were forwarded to each source for their approval, giving them a chance to amend, comment or correct their statements. Both sources approved their statements. The two sources, the international security organisation and the Syrian Human rights organisation, requested anonymity.

For the sake of reader-friendliness, transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the meeting minutes in Appendix 1 have been given consecutive numbers, which are used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes.

The report is a synthesis of the information obtained from oral and written sources and does not include all details and nuances provided by the sources. In the report, care has been taken to present the views of the sources as accurately and transparently as possible.

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

The research and editing of this brief report was finalised on 25 May 2022.

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

¹ EASO, *EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology*, June 2019, [url](#)

Abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
COI	Country of Origin Information
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
GoS	Government of Syria
IAF	Israeli Air force
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IS	Islamic State
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SOHR	Syrian Observatory for Human Rights
SYP	Syrian Pound
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UN OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WHO	World Health Organization
UN ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNOSAT	United Nations Satellite Centre

1. Background

In May 2018, the Syrian army took control of the last opposition-held enclave in Homs Governorate following a large military operation in northern Homs Governorate. The Syrian authorities have been in control of the governorate ever since, except for the Al-Tanf area in southeastern Homs Governorate. Rebel-fighters and their families were forced to evacuate to opposition controlled areas in northern Syria or enter into reconciliation agreements with Syrian authorities in order to stay in Homs Governorate.²

The city of Homs was among the cities in Syria impacted the hardest by the war in Syria. From 2012 until May 2014, Syrian government forces imposed a siege on the city. The siege was particularly forceful against rebel-held neighborhoods such as Baba Amr and it was accompanied by indiscriminate attacks by Syrian armed forces in 2012.³

Sectarian violence and forced displacement occurred in the city of Homs in 2011 and only a few neighborhoods were able to maintain their mixed sectarian elements.⁴ Homs has historically been a divided city inhabited by a variety of religious groups in Syria, most predominately, Sunnis, Alawites and Christians.⁵

In 2020, UN-ESCWA and University of St. Andrews concluded that Homs Governorate had been one of the hardest hit governorates in terms of the physical destruction of public and private construction, housing stock, hospitals and factories, with 81.8 percent of the aforementioned infrastructure sustaining damage. Although buildings and other infrastructure sustained heavy damage the damage was localized in areas where heavy fighting occurred during the war in Syria.⁶

² EASO, *Syria Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 142-143; Carter Center (The), *The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics | January-March 2022*, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9

³ EASO, *Syria Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 142

⁴ EASO, *Syria Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 142;

⁵ Fabrice Balanche: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, 2018, [url](#), pp. 8-9

⁶ EASO, *Syria Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 153-154; For a graphic illustration of the levels of destruction in Homs City based on satellite data obtained in 2014 please see: REACH & UNITAR & UNOSAT, *Syria- Syrian Damage Atlas: EIGHTH year anniversary of the Syrian Civil war: Thematic assessment of satellite identified damage*, 16 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 41-44

2. Security situation in Homs Governorate

The security situation in Homs Governorate has remained stable throughout the reporting period, between August 2021 to April 2022, with the exception of the Badia desert area in eastern Homs Governorate which has seen a resurgence in attacks by the Islamic State (IS) group and retaliatory strikes by Syrian and Russian government forces.⁷ (For a more detailed description of the security situation in eastern Homs Governorate, see section 2.3 in this report below).

According to the international security organization and the Syrian human rights organization consulted by DIS in April 2022, the main roads and highways linking the city of Homs to Damascus, Latakia and Aleppo, particularly the M5, are all controlled by the security services of the Syrian government. Only one checkpoint is located on the road between Tartous and the city of Homs. The Military Intelligence Service controls that checkpoint.⁸

The main roads (i.e. M5 and M1) connecting Damascus and Tartous through Homs are generally considered to be safe. The (M5) road linking the city of Homs to Damascus has not seen any security incidents within the last year and is considered 100% safe by the international security organization. The international security organisation has not recorded any security related incidents on the (M1) road connecting Homs to Tartous Governorate.⁹

The Syrian human rights organization said that 1-2 money extortion attacks on the (M1) road connecting Homs City to Tartous occurred last year. These attacks were conducted by paramilitary Shabiha forces at flying checkpoints, as reprisals for attacks conducted by Syrian government forces against the group.¹⁰

In December 2021, the Swedish Migration Agency's COI unit, Lifos, reported that the security situation in Homs Governorate had generally remained unchanged between April-November 2021. The most predominant security issues in Homs Governorate in 2021 continued to be the widespread lawlessness, which according to Lifos and EASO attributed to tensions between local residents and the many GoS - and Iranian backed militias who have a dominating presence in the governorate. The tension has often led to clashes with locals. In addition, some armed attacks from local resistance cells or groups against GoS forces and GoS-affiliated militias have been reported.¹¹

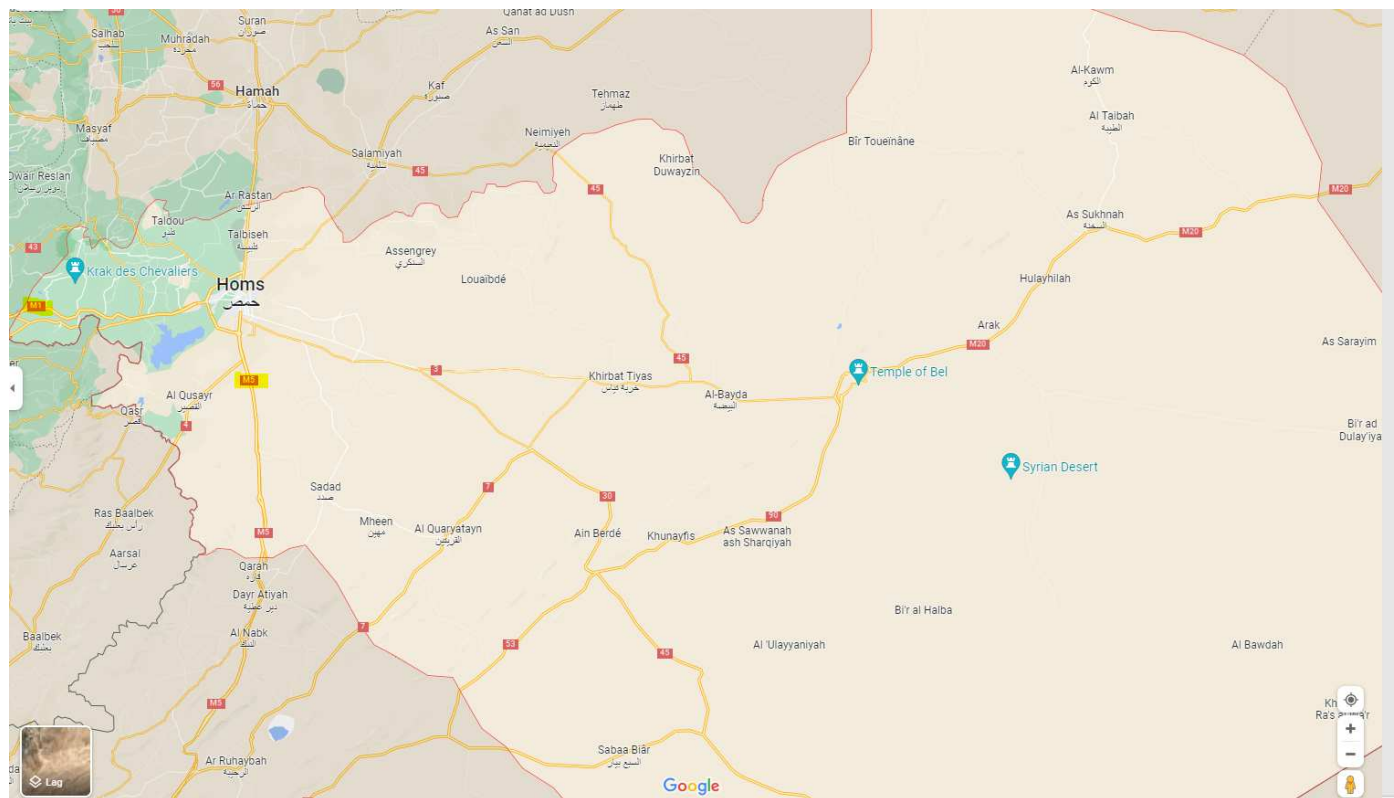
⁷ International security organisation: 1-6; Syrian human rights organisation: 1, 9; Lifos-Migrationsverket, *Syrien: Säkerhetssituationen och civilas utsatthet april–november 2021 [The security situation and the vulnerability of civilians April – November 2021]*, December 2021, [url](#), pp. 29-30

⁸ Syrian human rights organisation: 4, 6

⁹ Syrian human rights organisation: 5; International security organisation: 3

¹⁰ Syrian human rights organisation: 5; Shabiha groups can be described Government loyal militias and paramilitary groups involved in criminality (Carnegie Middle East Center, *Who Are the Pro-Assad Militias?*, 2 March 2015, [url](#))

¹¹ Lifos-Migrationsverket, *Syrien: Säkerhetssituationen och civilas utsatthet april–november 2021 [The security situation and the vulnerability of civilians April – November 2021]*, December 2021, [url](#), p. 29; EASO, *Syria Security situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 150-151



Map of Homs governorate.¹²

2.1. Security situation in western Homs Governorate

The situation in the western part of the governorate has by and large improved in the last year, especially in urban areas such as Homs City, where security incidents have decreased.¹³ Similarly, Lifos, reported in December 2021 that few security related incidents and civilian casualties had taken place in western Homs Governorate.¹⁴

GoS-affiliated militias and paramilitary forces do not play a role with regards to controlling the city of Homs or providing security in the city. In the old city of Homs different districts are controlled by the Syrian intelligence agencies. Syrian authorities have been arresting members of pro-government paramilitary groups that have been associated with influential Syrian businessman Rami Makhlof, after he fell out of favor with the Syrian government.¹⁵

The Israeli Air Force (IAF) airstrikes have continued targeting military areas and sites, belonging to Iranian forces and pro-Iranian militias operating in Homs Governorate. These attacks do not target civilian areas.¹⁶

¹² Google Maps, *Homs governorate*, n.d., [url](#)

¹³ International security organisation: 1-3, 6; Syrian human rights organisation: 1, 5

¹⁴ Lifos-Migrationsverket, *Syrien: Säkerhetssituationen och civilas utsatthet april–november 2021 [The security situation and the vulnerability of civilians April – November 2021]*, December 2021, [url](#), p. 30

¹⁵ Syrian human rights organisation: 1-3

¹⁶ Syrian human rights organisation: 7; International security organisation: 8; SOHR, *Syria says Israel struck near Homs, Tartus in the third alleged attack in 2 weeks*, 10 November 2021, [url](#); SOHR, *Israeli airstrikes kill civilians in Homs*, 25 November 2021, [url](#); SOHR, *Intensive bombardment | Missiles hit positions of regime military and Iranian-backed militias in Homs*, 8 November 2021, [url](#); SOHR, *Syria reports Israel airstrikes on central province of Homs*, 18 October

2.2. Security situation in northern Homs Governorate

In the area around Rastan City, located in northern Homs and southern Hama governorate, the security situation is more complicated due to the presence of anti-government armed groups.¹⁷ Attacks on the road toward the city of Talbiseh occasionally occur, according to the Syrian human rights organisation. However, the international security organisation stated that attacks had not occurred on the main road, and it is the villages in the area that can be subject to military activities every now and then. This has included frequent shelling between anti-government armed groups and GoS-forces.¹⁸

The Syrian human rights organisation mentioned that GoS forces are in control of police stations and government buildings in the above-mentioned area, but the rest of the area and cities are in fact controlled by former rebel fighters. Former rebels have committed kidnappings and extorted money from businessmen using the roads in the area.¹⁹

Between April and November 2021, tensions were the highest in the northern part of Homs Governorate, where elements of formerly active rebel groups i.e. Jaish Al-Tawhid continued to conduct attacks and assassinations against GoS forces and GoS-allied groups. The instability reached its peak in the area around the town of Talbiseh, which is located north of the city of Homs and on the M5 highway.²⁰ Some incidents that affected civilians typically occurred because of a lapse in security situation due to the presence and clashes between various militias.²¹

The volatile situation reached its peak in the summer of 2021 after a series of kidnappings and assassinations had occurred in the area. A GoS intelligence-service envoy²² was sent to the area to negotiate and proposed three possible solutions to the situation: the handover of weapons and 600 individuals from Jaish Al-Tawhid; an evacuation and resettlement of fighters to rebel controlled areas in northern Syria; or a Syrian military intervention. In December 2021, Lifos reported that none of the three

2021, [url](#); SOHR, *Israeli Airstrike Kills Two in Syria's Homs*, 10 October 2021, [url](#); SOHR, *6 troops wounded in airstrike in Homs province*, 9 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷ Syrian human rights organisation: 7; International security organisation: 7; SOHR, *Journalist shot dead by unidentified gunfire in northern Homs countryside*, 26 February 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *Returning from Al-Rukban to Homs | Regime security services arrest three people from shelter centre*, 12 December 2021, [url](#); SOHR, *Attack in north Homs | Four of National Defense forces killed and wounded in armed attack on frontline in al-Rasteen village*, 24 October 2021, [url](#); SOHR, *Pro-regime civilians block Tartus-Homs highway, protesting death sentence against regime soldier*, 4 October 2021, [url](#); SOHR, *Regime forces threaten to launch military operation in north Homs countryside*, 4 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸ Syrian human rights organisation: 7; International security organisation: 7

¹⁹ Syrian human rights organisation: 7

²⁰ Lifos-Migrationsverket, *Syrien: Säkerhetssituationen och civilas utsatthet april–november 2021 [The security situation and the vulnerability of civilians April – November 2021]*, December 2021, [url](#), p. 30

²¹ Lifos-Migrationsverket, *Syrien: Säkerhetssituationen och civilas utsatthet april–november 2021, [The security situation and the vulnerability of civilians April – November 2021]*, December 2021, [url](#), p. 30

²² The envoy was the same individual that negotiated the reconciliation agreement between anti-government groups in Daraa Al-Balad in Daraa governorate in the summer of 2021, Lifos-Migrationsverket, *Syrien: Säkerhetssituationen och civilas utsatthet april–november 2021 [The security situation and the vulnerability of civilians April – November 2021]*, December 2021, [url](#), p. 30

options outlined by the GoS had transpired. The DIS has not obtained information, if any of the three options outlined by the GoS transpired.²³

As of March 2022 the security situation in the Hama-Homs corridor remained relatively stable after a month without any serious insurgent activities.²⁴

2.3. Security situation in eastern Homs Governorate

The Syrian government has control of towns in eastern part of Homs Governorate such as Palmyra/Tadmor and Al-Sukhna. But outside of towns and urban areas in the Badia desert-region, IS has a presence and operates around Abu Rajmin, northeast of Palmyra/Tadmor. This includes areas 30-50 km east of the city of Homs. Roads in that area are safe during the day, but not at night, according to the Syrian human rights organisation. The road between Deir-ez-Zor and Homs is controlled by Iranian IRGC-officers commanding Afghan and Iraqi militias. The road from the city of Homs to Palmyra/Tadmor is controlled by the Syrian army's 4th division. There were 12 attacks on the road between Deir-ez-Zor and Homs in 2021. The Syrian Arab Army forces and oil workers were the targets in those attacks.²⁵

Contrary to the development of the security situation in other parts of Homs Governorate mentioned earlier, the Badia desert area in the eastern part of Homs Governorate has seen an escalation of military conflict in the reported period. Throughout the reporting period, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported of continued IS attacks in eastern Homs Governorate, Russian and Syrian airstrikes against the group as well as a number of IED-explosions targeting government or pro-government forces in the eastern Homs Governorate.²⁶

Especially in the first three months of 2022, IS started a new campaign of violence in this area, which has provoked a military response from Syrian and Russian air and ground forces. Particularly in areas east of

²³ Lifos-Migrationsverket, *Syrien: Säkerhetssituationen och civilas utsatthet april–november 2021*, [The security situation and the vulnerability of civilians April – November 2021], December 2021, [url](#), p. 30

²⁴ International security organisation: 6

²⁵ Syrian human rights organisation: 9-10

²⁶ SOHR, *20 Russian airstrikes hit ISIS hideouts in Al-Raqqah and Homs deserts amid escalation in ISIS activity*, 26 April 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *ISIS attacks positions of regime forces and affiliated militias in eastern Homs*, 26 April 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *Russian jets target ISIS hideouts in Al-Sokhnah desert in eastern Homs countryside*, 11 April 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *Casualties among Iranian militias in Homs desert in an ISIS attack*, 10 April 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *Russia carries out 10 airstrikes in Syria's Raqqa and Homs*, 6 April 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *Ten casualties among Iranian-backed militias in Al-Sokhna eastern of Homs*, 3 April 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *Russian airstrikes hit ISIS hideouts in Palmyra desert, east of Homs*, 31 March 2022 [url](#); SOHR, *Ambush on Syrian army bus in Homs Governorate kills at least 15 soldiers*, 12 March 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *13 members of regime forces killed and wounded in explosion of old landmine eastern Homs*, 10 March 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *Ambush on Syrian army bus in Homs Governorate kills at least 15 soldiers*, 7 March 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *Three regime soldiers killed in car attack*, 4 March 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *Two prominent pilots of Al-Shayrat airfield squadron killed*, 15 February 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *One killed and others injured | Explosion targets regime military bus in Homs countryside*, 14 February 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *ISIS ambush kills and injures regime members in Homs desert*, 10 February 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *ISIS members target Iranian proxies' bus in central Syria*, 29 January 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *Landmine explosion in rural Homs kills civilian and injures another*, 19 January 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *Five Russian fighter jets target ISIS hotbeds in Homs, Deir Ezzor and Al-Raqqah deserts*, 18 January 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *Russian jets bomb ISIS hideouts in Al-Sokhnah desert, east Homs*, 25 December 2021, [url](#); SOHR, *Four Russian fighter jets strike ISIS positions in Homs and Deir Ezzor*, 16 November 2021, [url](#); SOHR, *ISIS mercenaries attack Damascus government's positions in Homs's eastern desert*, 15 November 2021, [url](#); SOHR, *DOZENS OF RUSSIAN AIRSTRIKES HIT ISIS CELLS IN RESPONSE TO ATTACK ON EASTERN HOMS, HAMA*, 12 November 2021, [url](#); SOHR, *Four members of Liwaa al-Quds killed by ISIS attacks in Homs desert*, 26 September 2021, [url](#); SOHR, *Russian fighters target ISIS cells posts in east Homs desert*, 30 August 2021, [url](#)

Palmyra/Tadmor on the road to Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, there have been weekly attacks by IS. On 6 March, IS militants attacked a Syrian army convoy south of Palmyra killing at least 12 Syrian army soldiers. The attacks by IS include all types of insurgent attacks, including massive attacks on convoys with machine guns, rocket propelled grenades, roadside bombs and in general all the asymmetric attacks and technics which IS usually uses when attacking GoS and its allies. Russian air strikes were frequent in the first three days of March 2022, and in mid-March, the Russian and Syrian air force daily conducted airstrikes against IS targets in eastern Homs over a period of seven days.²⁷

2.4. Overview of security incidents in Homs Governorate

In its December 2021 report on the security situation in Syria, Lifos reported, based on data generated from the conflict monitoring database ACLED²⁸ that incidents of clashes and fighting remained in the single digits throughout 2021. Reported incidents of violence against civilians displayed similar numbers of single digit. The number of recorded incidents of remote violence, which include incidents such as bombings, improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, mortar and missile attacks fluctuated between a high of 17 recorded incidents in June to a low of three reported incidents in August 2021.²⁹

ACLED recorded 127 security incidents³⁰ from 1 August 2021 to 29 April 2022 in Homs Governorate, as illustrated in figure 1 below:

²⁷ International security organisation: 4-5

²⁸ The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) describes itself as 'a disaggregated data collection, analysis and crisis mapping project. ACLED collects the dates, actors, locations, fatalities, and types of all reported political violence and protests events'. ACLED, About ACLED, n.d., [url](#)

²⁹ Lifos-Migrationsverket, *Syrien: Säkerhetssituationen och civilas utsatthet april–november 2021*, [The security situation and the vulnerability of civilians April – November 2021], December 2021, p. 29, [url](#)

³⁰ ACLED uses the term 'security event' when registering these security incidents. In accordance with EASO's (now EUAA) use of ACLED data (e.g. see the EASO-report [Syria - Security situation](#), July 2021, p. 50), the term 'security incident' is used here which solely includes three ACLED event categories: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians.

2.4.1. Security incidents in Homs Governorate, 1 August 2021 - 29 April 2022

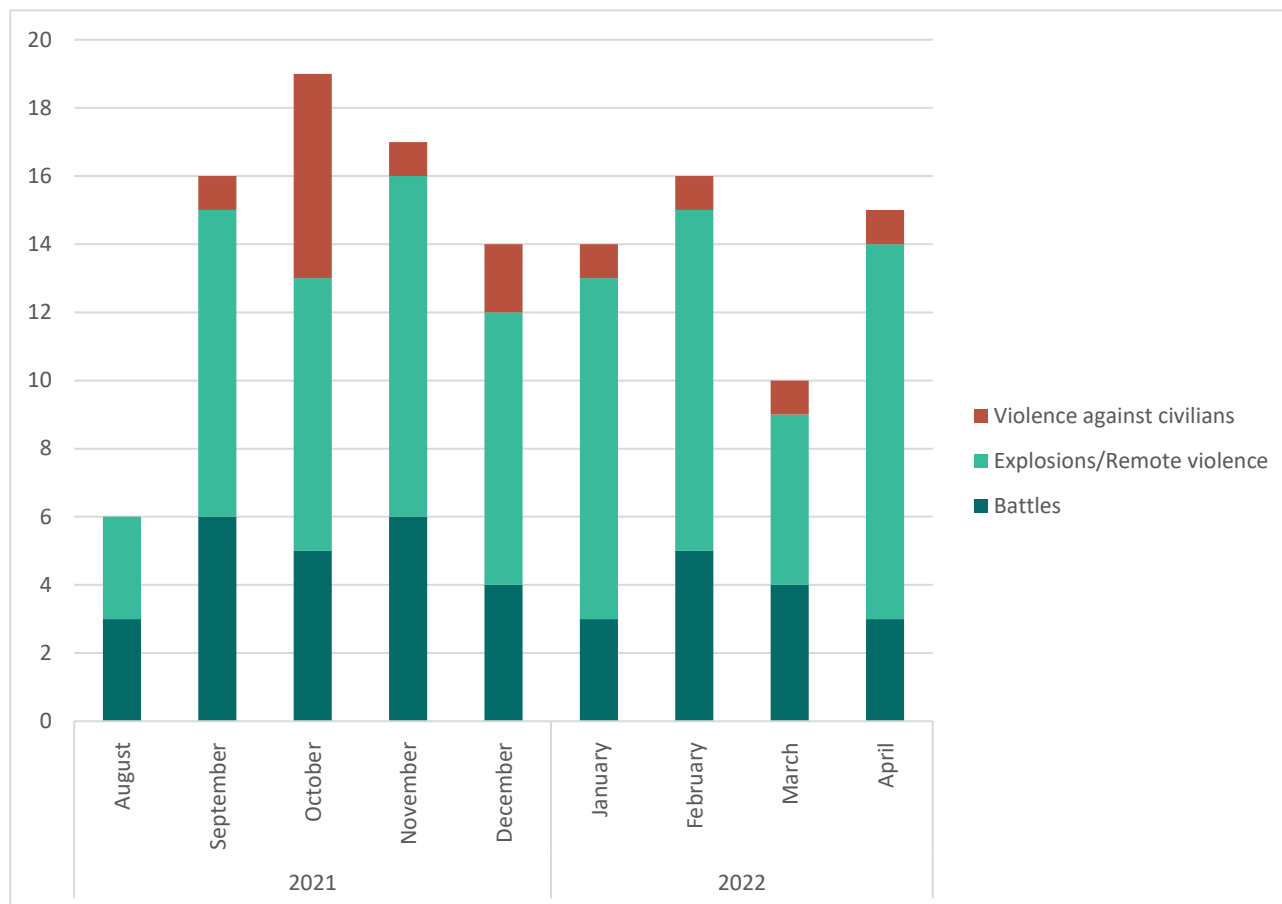


Figure 1: Security incidents in Homs Governorate, 1 August 2021 - 29 April 2022, based on ACLED data.³¹

³¹ ACLED, *curated data files, Syria*, 29 April 2022), [url](#)

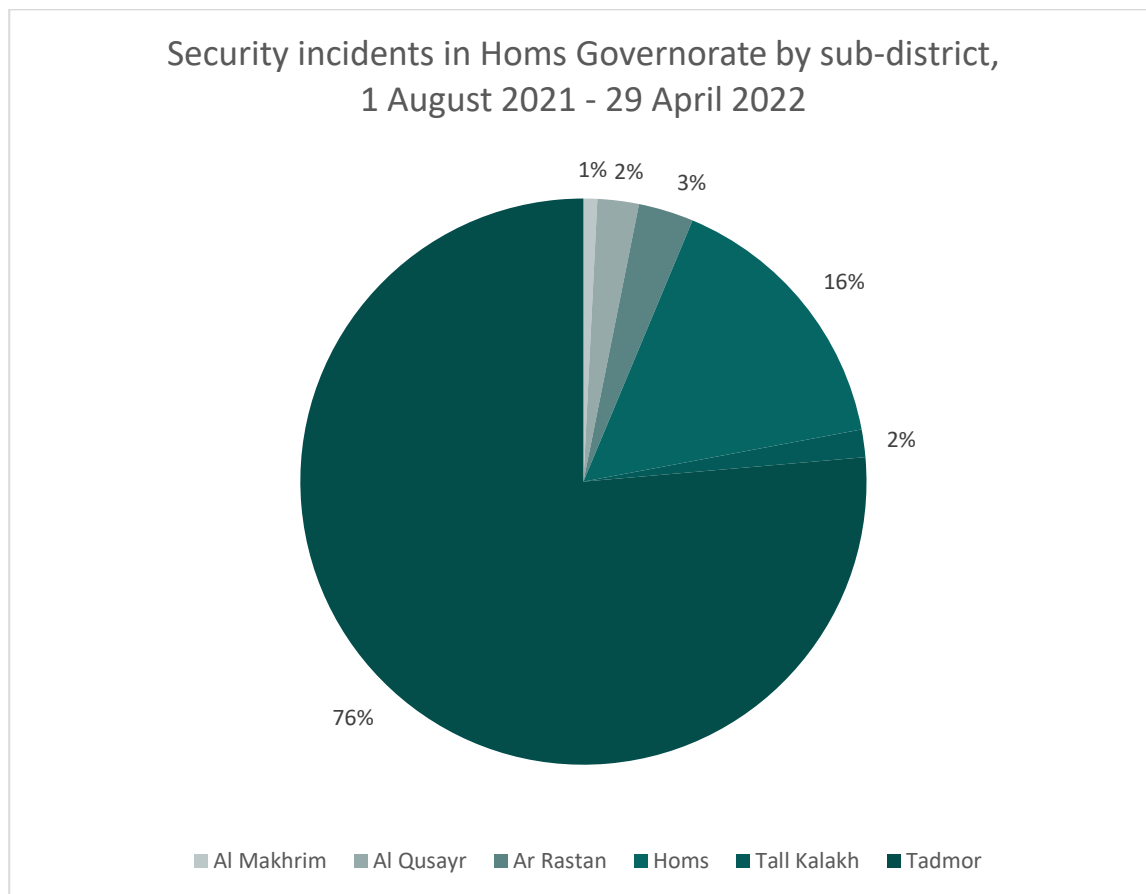


Figure 2: Security incidents in Homs Governorate by Sub-district, 1 August 2021 - 29 April 2022, based on ACLED data.³²

The Carter Center reported 41 conflict events in Homs for the 1st quarter of 2022 which constitutes a 20% decrease in conflict related events in Homs compared to the 4th quarter of 2021.³³

2.5 Presence of foreign forces in Homs Governorate³⁴

In April and the beginning of May 2022, Russian forces began to withdraw or regroup from some of their existing positions to elsewhere in Syria. In Homs Governorate, this included the T4 airport. According to the Paris-based media-site Syria Direct, it was not clear if these withdrawals had occurred from Syria to Ukraine or Russia at the time of writing. In early April 2022, Russian forces did turn over the large Mahin military arms depot east of Homs City to Hizbollah after withdrawing to Palmyra military airport. In mid-April Russian forces also withdrew from the Palmyra military airport in favor of Iranian backed militias.³⁵

The area in and around the city of Al-Qusayr, southwest of the city of Homs, is controlled by the Lebanese Hizbollah militia. The international security organisation had not recorded any security incidents

³² ACLED, *curated data files, Syria*, 29 April 2022, [url](#)

³³ Carter Center (The), *The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics | January-March 2022*, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 10

³⁴ For an additional overview of armed actors present in Homs Governorate, please see EASO, *Syria Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 142-148

³⁵ Syria Direct, *Amid war in Ukraine - Russia withdraws and Iran expands in Syria*, 4 May 2022, [url](#)

perpetrated by Hezbollah in the area around Al-Qusayr in southwestern Homs Governorate since August 2021.³⁶

The United States controls the Al-Tanf region on the border with Iraq in southeast Homs Governorate together with non-state organised armed groups.³⁷

³⁶ Syrian human rights organisation: 8; International security organisation: 9

³⁷ EASO, *Syria Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 143

3. Freedom of movement

There is freedom of movement for civilians in the city of Homs.³⁸ According to the international security organisation there are no restricted areas in the city including the old city of Homs.³⁹

However, the Syrian human rights organisation stated that fixed check points are located in the old city of Homs in order to prevent people from returning. There are only flying checkpoints in the rest of Homs City. Generally speaking, the local population is not harassed when passing through checkpoints in the city. There have, however, been reports of isolated incidents of individuals from former opposition-controlled areas being stopped, questioned and harassed at checkpoints in the city.⁴⁰

Permits from the authorities are not required for ordinary Syrians to move and travel on the roads in Homs Governorate. Public busses transport civilians hourly between Damascus and Tartous/Latakia. The roads are safe and these civilian forms of transportation do not face any security issues on the roads. IDs of civilian passengers traveling on inter-city-busses through Homs Governorate from Damascus to other major cities in Syria, are checked prior to departure from Damascus and they are not usually checked at checkpoints in Homs Governorate.⁴¹

There are fixed checkpoints at all major roads in Homs Governorate managed by the Syrian military and Syrian intelligence services. Flying checkpoints manned by Syrian authorities can be found on the road between Palmyra/Tadmor and Deir-Ez-Zor Governorate due to IS presence in the area.⁴²

The purpose of checkpoints along the main roads in Homs Governorate is to check if individuals are on wanted lists. However, many checkpoints in Homs Governorate do not have access to computers that provide access to the electronic wanted lists of the Syrian intelligence services. Instead, personal documents could be checked individually; for instance, to determine the origin of an individual, or if their last name is known to be associated with the Syrian opposition or rebels. Due to the amount of traffic on the main roads in Homs Governorate, not all cars or individuals are checked at checkpoints.⁴³

In addition, the checkpoints are a source of revenue for the GoS' personnel manning the checkpoints who demand bribes. Private cars or busses transporting between Damascus and Tartous/Latakia through Homs are not required to pay bribes. Only trucks and vehicles associated with businesses or trade are subject to money extortion on the roads. Private cars or buses carrying civilians, for instance between Damascus and Tartous/Latakia through Homs, are not required to pay bribe on these roads.⁴⁴

³⁸ Syrian human rights organisation: 12; International security organisation: 10

³⁹ International security organisation: 10, 12

⁴⁰ Syrian human rights organisation: 12

⁴¹ International security organisation: 14-15; Syrian human rights organisation: 14

⁴² International security organisation: 13

⁴³ Syrian human rights organisation: 13-14

⁴⁴ Syrian human rights organisation: 13

4. Socioeconomic situation in Homs Governorate

Like most governorates under GoS control in Syria, the inhabitants in Homs Governorate are to a large extent affected by the deteriorating economic situation and poor living conditions.⁴⁵

The Swedish Migration Agency's COI unit, Lifos, cites UN-OCHAS *Humanitarian needs overview* from March 2021, which stated that humanitarian concerns in Homs Governorate were mostly related to access to food supplies and a large income deficit. The strained humanitarian situation in the governorate has chiefly been caused by Syria's deteriorating economic situation and the extensive forest fires that occurred in GoS-controlled areas in 2020, which has led to a decrease in livelihoods.⁴⁶

Many Syrians originating from Homs are currently moving back to Homs due to worsening living conditions in other areas of Syria, where they have previously been living as IDPs. A large part of the city of Homs is demolished due to the conflict. The international security organisation estimates that around 30-40% of the pre-war city is destroyed. There is no restricted access to the destroyed areas of the city. No reconstruction of destroyed neighborhoods in Homs is currently taking place. If individuals still have a house in Homs, they are required to obtain a security clearance from the authorities in order to reinhabit it.⁴⁷

In April 2022, UN-OCHA assessed that 303,000 individuals were in need of humanitarian assistance in Homs Governorate. In an infographic, UN-OCHA highlighted areas in eastern and southwestern Homs Governorate to be in high to moderate need of humanitarian assistance.⁴⁸

In Homs Governorate, 40% of households reported that their children including adolescents, were working in order to create additional income and reduce household expenses.⁴⁹ According to UN-OCHA, 934,000 Syrians in Homs Governorate are in need of humanitarian assistance with regard to food security. 381,000 need assistance with regards to education and 699,000 are in need of healthcare assistance.⁵⁰ In March 2021, UN-OCHA estimated the population of Homs Governorate to be 1,465,616.

4.1. Food security

In its February 2022 report, UN-OCHA highlights that Homs Governorate is experiencing an unacceptably high percentage of the population in the governorate not being food secured (only 51% food secure).⁵¹ 87% of the population in Homs Governorate reported high limitations in meeting their basic needs sufficiently. Factors driving this trend are related to the sharp decline of the Syrian economy with 88% of households across Syria reporting a lack of income or an inability to access a source of income to meet their basic needs.⁵²

⁴⁵ Lifos-Migrationsverket, *Syrien: Säkerhetssituationen och civilas utsatthet april–november 2021*, [The security situation and the vulnerability of civilians April – November 2021], December 2021, [url](#), p. 30

⁴⁶ Lifos-Migrationsverket, *Syrien: Säkerhetssituationen och civilas utsatthet april–november 2021*, [The security situation and the vulnerability of civilians April – November 2021] December 2021, [url](#), pp. 30-31,

⁴⁷ International security organisation: 11; Syrian human rights organisation: 15, 16

⁴⁸ UN-OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Access Severity Overview (April 2022)*, April 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁹ UN-OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs overview Syrian Arab Republic*, February 2022, [url](#), p. 28

⁵⁰ UN-OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs overview Syrian Arab Republic*, February 2022, [url](#) p. 49

⁵¹ UN-OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs overview Syrian Arab Republic*, February 2022, [url](#), p. 72

⁵² UN-OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs overview Syrian Arab Republic*, February 2022, [url](#), pp. 26-27

In March 2022, the national average food basket⁵³ price in Syria was 286,757 SYP (114.7 USD)⁵⁴, which constituted a 24% increase since February 2022 and a 59% rise since September 2021. All 14 governorates in Syria recorded a month-on-month increase of the average food basket price in March 2022 due to the war in Ukraine, which has increased global food prices. In Homs Governorate a food basket cost 27% more in March than in February 2022 and 50% more than in February 2021.⁵⁵

4.2. Access to healthcare services

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 2.4 million medical procedures were delivered by Syrian healthcare providers across the whole of Syria in March 2022. In an infographic, WHO described the number of medical procedures delivered in the Homs city sub-district by Syrian healthcare providers in March 2022 to be between 10,000-50,000. For other sub-districts in western Homs Governorate, the number of medical procedures provided in March 2022 were between 1-10,000.⁵⁶

According to WHO, 28% of public hospitals in Syria relied on generators to meet their electricity needs, including hospitals in Homs Governorate. 10% of functioning hospitals in Homs Governorate relied on generators to meet their electricity needs.⁵⁷ The Syrian Ministry of Health operated 16 hospitals across Homs Governorate by the end of 2020. Of the 16 hospitals, five were fully functioning, another five were partially functioning while the remaining six hospitals were non-functioning.⁵⁸ In Homs Governorate, 13 hospitals were accessible to the population and three hospitals were inaccessible.⁵⁹ Two public hospitals were fully damaged, six were partially damaged and eight hospitals were not damaged. The Al-Qusayr General Hospital and the Taldaw Hospital in the Al-Quabu district in Homs Governorate were reported as having fully damaged buildings.⁶⁰

⁵³ The standard food basket is a group of essential food commodities. In Syria, the food basket is set at a group of dry goods providing 2,060 kcal a day for a family of five during one month. The basket includes 37 kg bread, 19 kg rice, 19 kg lentils, five kg of sugar, and seven litres of vegetable oil (WFP, *Syria Country Office-Market Price Watch Bulletin February 2022 issue 87*, 27 April 2022, [url](#))

⁵⁴ 286,757 SYP amounted to (114.7 USD) at the official exchange rate of 2,500 SYP/USD, in March 2022 (WFP, *Syria Country office-Market price watch bulletin February 2022 issue 87*, 27 April 2022, [url](#))

⁵⁵ World Food Programme (WFP), *Syria Country Office-Market Price Watch Bulletin February 2022 issue 87*, 27 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶ WHO-Health Cluster Whole of Syria, *Snapshot of whole of Syria health sector response (4Ws)*, March 2022, 10 May, [url](#), p. 1, According to WHO, medical procedures include sum of outpatient consultations, trauma consultations, mental health consultations, physical rehabilitation sessions, vaginal deliveries, C-sections, and referral cases.

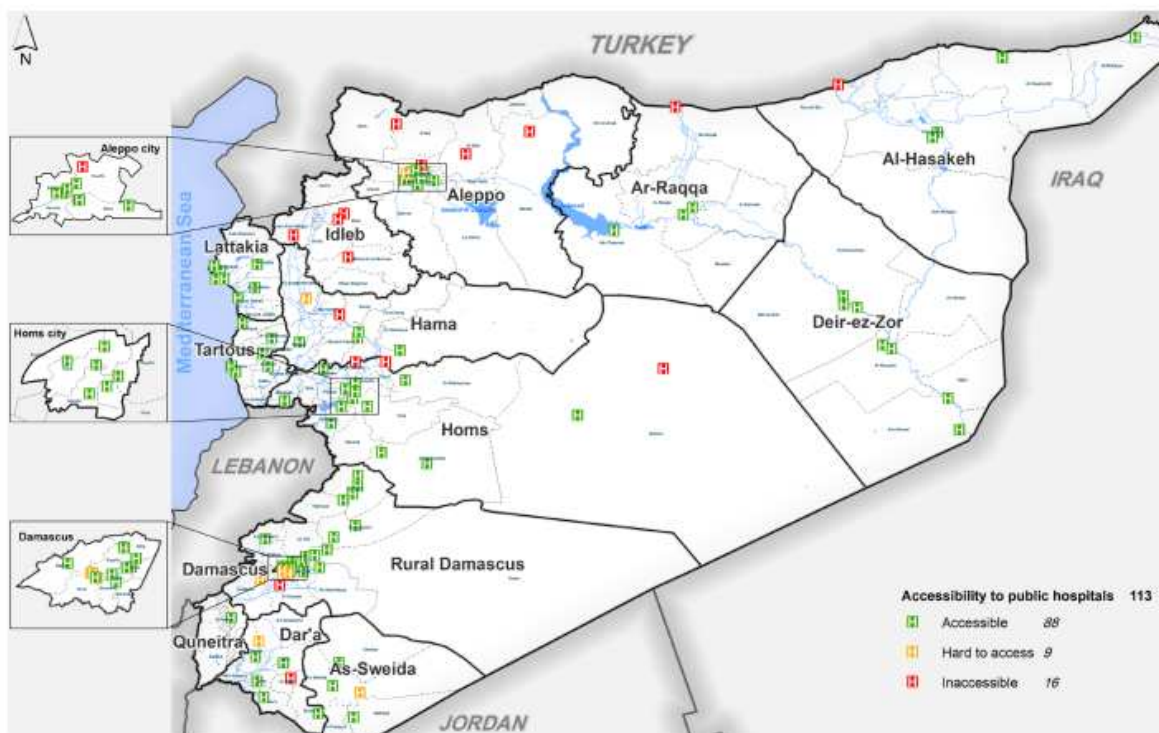
⁵⁷ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report January – December 2020 – Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2020, [url](#), pp. 7, 22

⁵⁸ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report January – December 2020 – Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-10

⁵⁹ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report January – December 2020 – Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2020, [url](#), p. 14

⁶⁰ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report January – December 2020 – Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2020, [url](#), pp. 17-18

Map 4: Accessibility to public hospitals [MoH & MoHE], December 2020



Trend analysis on accessibility to public hospitals [MoH & MoHE] from January to December 2020, is presented in Figure 8.

Figure 3. Accessibility to public hospitals December 2020⁶¹

Public hospitals in Homs Governorate had an inpatient capacity of 831 beds by the end of 2020 compared to 722 before the beginning of hostilities in Syria.⁶² Nine public hospitals had a fully functioning water supply and one hospital had a partially functioning water supply.⁶³

According to WHO, the following number of doctors and medical professionals were available in functioning public hospitals in Homs Governorate:

General practitioners: 13, orthopedic surgeons: 33, general surgeons: 39, neurological surgery: 5, other specialists: 239, emergency physicians: 15, resident doctors: 244, dentists: 9, nurses: 1,730, laboratory personnel: 163, midwives: 225, pharmacists: 13, university educated personnel: 65, technicians: 721,

⁶¹ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report January – December 2020 – Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2020, [url](#), p. 14

⁶² WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report January – December 2020 – Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2020, [url](#), p. 19

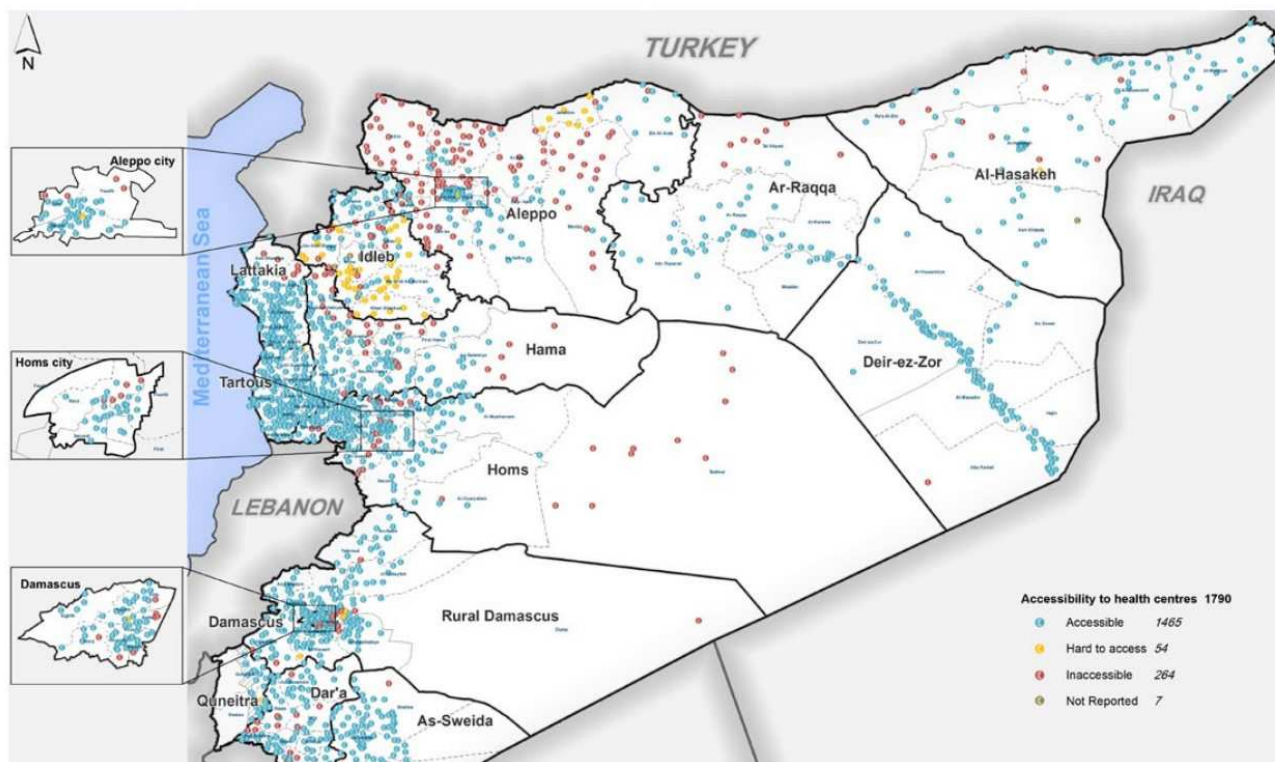
⁶³ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report January – December 2020 – Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2020, [url](#), p. 21

others: 434.⁶⁴ There were 7.5 doctors, 11.9 nurses and 1.5 midwives per 10,000 inhabitants in public hospitals in Homs Governorate.⁶⁵

Public hospitals in Homs Governorate had zero psychiatric inpatients in December 2020, compared to a national average of 674 psychiatric inpatients in December 2020 in all public hospitals in Syria.⁶⁶

With regards to the type of treatments available at public health centres and the number of patients being treated, WHO reported that 226 public health centres existed in Homs Governorate by the end of 2020. Of those, 150 were fully functioning, 39 partially functioning and 37 were non-functioning.⁶⁷ 194 health centres were accessible and 32 health centres were inaccessible. Seven public health centres were fully damaged, another 17 partially damaged and 119 had not sustained any damages as of the 4th quarter 2020.⁶⁸

Map 4: Accessability to public health centres , 4th Quarter 2020



⁶⁴ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report January – December 2020 – Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2020, [url](#), p. 24

⁶⁵ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report January – December 2020 – Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2020, [url](#), p. 30

⁶⁶ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report January – December 2020 – Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2020, [url](#), pp. 44,46

⁶⁷ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report January – December 2020 – Public Health Centres in the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9

⁶⁸ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report January – December 2020 – Public Health Centres in the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2020, [url](#), pp. 14-17

Figure 4: Accessibility to public health centres, 4th quarter 2020 ⁶⁹

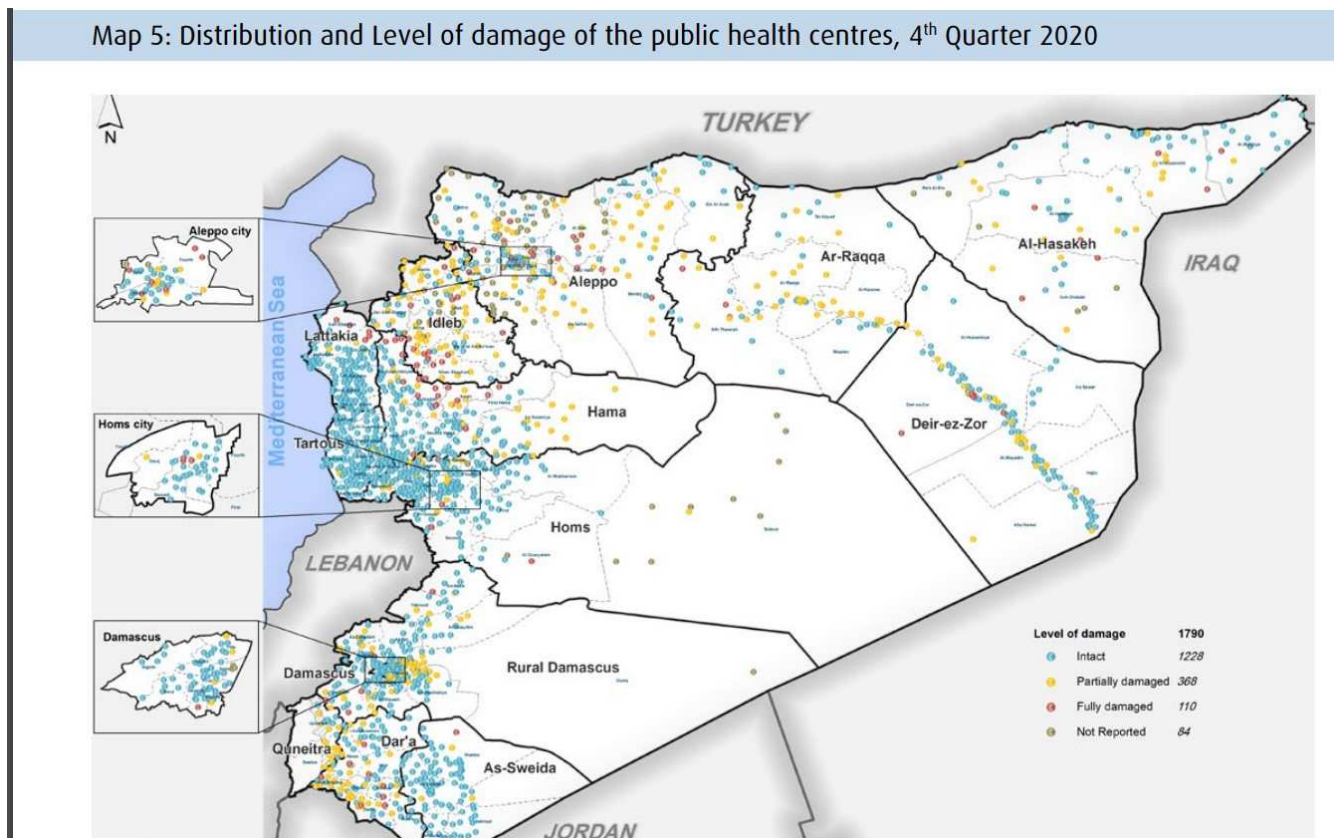


Figure 5: Distribution and level of damage of the public health centres, 4th quarter 2020.⁷⁰

4.3. Access to education

Across Syria, 2.45 million children were out of school in 2021 due to the effects of the conflict and the worsening economic conditions, damaged schools and educational facilities and reduced learning hours due to COVID-19. Since the beginning of 2021, UNICEF supported 1,832,439 children (917,136 girls) with educational services and supplies. UNICEF rehabilitated 115 schools supporting 51,670 students (25,232 girls) and trained 29,388 temporary teachers (22,431 women) on child-centred pedagogy and positive classroom management.⁷¹

As of March 2022, UNICEF supported 170,101 children (84,957 girls) in formal school settings in Syria. UNICEF had engaged 117,032 children (58,944 girls) in non-formal education services.⁷²

UNICEF co-led the education sector together with the Ministry of Education, coordinating 93 partners who reached 2,394,124 children (1,184,206 girls), including 1,692,525 children (817,018 girls) supported with formal education and 701,599 children (364,345 girls) with non-formal education. Meanwhile, 437,700

⁶⁹ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report January – December 2020 – Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2020, [url](#), p. 15

⁷⁰ WHO, *HeRAMS Annual Report January – December 2020 – Public Hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2020, [url](#), p. 17

⁷¹ UNICEF, *Whole of Syria Humanitarian Situation Report End of Year 2021*, 9 February 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁷² UNICEF, *UNICEF Whole of Syria Humanitarian Situation Report: March 2022*, 15 May 2022, [url](#), p. 6

children (209,521 girls) have benefitted from school feeding programmes and 1,410 classrooms have been rehabilitated for 64,120 students (32,267 girls).⁷³

Due to the continued spread of COVID-19, GoS had called an early end to the school year in 2021. As a response, UNICEF launched a summer school program, which reached more than 2,000 students in 30 schools across Homs Governorate.⁷⁴

⁷³ UNICEF, *Whole of Syria Humanitarian Situation Report End of Year 2021*, 9 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8

⁷⁴ UNICEF, *Children in Homs inspire their teachers to continue supporting their education journey*, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

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Annex 1: Meeting minutes

Skype meeting with an international security organisation, 19 April 2022

Development of the general security situation in Homs Governorate since August 2021

Generally speaking the security situation in Homs Governorate remains stable. In urban areas, security incidents have decreased. In the city of Homs the situation remains stable and calm in terms of the number of conflict related incidents in the area.

In the city of Talbiseh, north of the city of Homs on the M5 highway, the security situation has been stable at least within the last 1.5 years, even compared to the coastal areas such as Tartous and Latakia governorates

The roads connecting Damascus to Tartous via Homs (i.e. M5 and M1) are safe. There have been no records of any security related incidents in the last two years on the road (M1) connecting Homs to Tartous governorate. The road connecting Homs to the Syrian capital Damascus (M5) is also 100 % safe.

As opposed to the stable security situation in the cities, the unstable situation in the desert area in the eastern part of the governorate has further deteriorated in recent months. In this area, called the Desert of Homs or *Badia*, the Islamic state has been active and it has steadily increased its targeted attacks against GoS forces and its allies, particularly in the first three months of 2022. The attacks by the Islamic State include all types of insurgent attacks, including massive attacks on convoys with machine guns, RPG, roadside bombs and in general all the asymmetric attacks and techniques which the Islamic State usually uses when attacking GoS and its allies. Especially in areas east of Palmyra/Tadmor on the road to Deir ez-Zor Governorate, have seen weekly attacks by the Islamic State. On March 6, Islamic State militants attacked a Syrian army convoy South of Palmyra killing at least 12 Syrian army soldiers. The pro GoS National Defense Forces were also involved in a number of landmine incidents which killed five NDF-members.

The Russian air force has responded by increasing the amount of airstrikes against the Islamic State targets in the area. The number of Russian airstrikes in the area is high. Russian air strikes were frequent in the first three days of March 2022, and in mid-March the Russian and Syrian air forces daily conducted airstrikes against the Islamic State targets in eastern Homs over a period of seven days.

As of March 2022, the security situation in the Hama-Homs corridor remained relatively stable after a month without any serious insurgent activity.

In the area around Rastan city (located in northern Homs Governorate and southern Hama Governorate) the security situation is complicated. There is still a presence of anti-government armed groups in the area and frequent shelling between GoS-forces and anti-GoS groups occur.

There are no security incidents on the road, but the villages in the area can be subject to military activities every now and then.

Israeli Air Force (IAF) airstrikes have continued targeting military areas and sites around the city of Homs belonging to Iranian forces and pro-Iranian militias operating in Homs Governorate. These attacks do not target civilian areas.

The international security organization has not recorded any security incidents perpetrated by Hezbollah in the area around Al-Qusayr in southwest Homs Governorate since August 2021.

Freedom of movement on the roads in Homs Governorate

There is freedom of movement for Syrians in Homs City with no restrictions of movement in the city. There are no restricted areas in the city.

A large part of the city of Homs is demolished due to the conflict. The organisation estimates that around 30 - 40 % of the pre-war city is destroyed. There is no restricted access those destroyed areas of the city.

There are no restrictions of movements in the old city of Homs.

There are fixed checkpoints at all major roads in Homs Governorate managed by the Syrian authorities. Checkpoints are managed by the Syrian military and the Syrian intelligence services. Flying checkpoints manned by Syrian authorities can be found on the road between Palmyra/Tadmor and Der Ez-Zor governorate due to the Islamic State's presence in the area.

Permits from the authorities are not required for ordinary Syrians to move and travel on the roads in Homs Governorate.

There are public busses transporting civilians hourly between Damascus and Tartous/Latakia. As mentioned, the roads are safe and these civilian forms of transportation do not face any security issues on the roads.

Meeting with a Syrian human rights organisation, 6 April 2022

Development of the general security situation in Homs Governorate since August 2021

The security situation in Homs Governorate has by and large improved in the last year. In Homs Governorate, the Syrian authorities have been arresting members of Shabiha-groups associated with the influential Syrian businessman, Rami Makhlouf, after he fell out of favor with the Government of Syria (GoS).

In the old city of Homs, different districts are controlled by different Syrian intelligence services. In order to return to and resettle in a district, a permission from the intelligence service in charge of the district is needed. If an individual wishes to rebuild a house in one of the old districts of Homs, that were previously held by the Syrian opposition, s/he also needs the permission from the Homs Governor's office.

In the city of Homs, GoS affiliated militias do not play any role with regards to the security situation and control of the city.

The main roads and highways linking the city of Homs to Damascus, Latakia and Aleppo, particularly the M5 are all controlled by the security services of the Syrian government.

The main road connecting Damascus to Tartous and further to Latakia through Homs (M5 and M1) is generally safe. There have not been any security incidents on the M5 road connecting the city of Homs to Damascus within the last year. There were 1-2 money extortion attacks on the road connecting Tartous and the city of Homs (M1) last year. These attacks were conducted at mobile checkpoints by Shabiha-forces as a reprisal to the attacks of GoS forces against the group.

There is only one checkpoint between Tartous and the city of Homs. The military intelligence service controls that checkpoint.

In the area north of the city of Homs towards Rastan in southern Hama/northern Homs Governorate, and on the way to the city of Talbiseh, attacks on the road occasionally do occur. These areas used to be opposition-controlled, and most of the former rebel fighters in these areas entered into reconciliation agreements with the Syrian government, with Russia as a mediator, but they were allowed to keep their light weapons as part of the agreements. The Syrian government controls the police stations and government buildings in the area, but the rest of the area and cities are in fact controlled by former rebel fighters. Former rebels have committed kidnappings and extorted money from businessmen using the roads in the area.

The area in and around the city of Al-Qusayr, southwest of the city of Homs, is controlled by the Lebanese Hizbollah militia.

GoS has control of towns in eastern part of Homs Governorate such as Palmyra/Tadmor and Al-Sukhna but outside of the towns in the desert area, IS has a presence and operate in the Badia-area and around Abu Rajmin northeast of Palmyra/Tadmor. This includes areas 30-50 kmeast of the city of Homs. Roads in the area are safe during the day, but not at night. There were 12 attacks on the road between Deir- ez-Zor and Homs last year. The Syrian Arab Army (SAA)-forces and oil workers were the targets in those attacks.

The road between Deir- ez-Zor and Homs is controlled by Iranian IRGC-officers commanding Afghan and Iraqi militias. The road from the city of Homs to Palmyra/Tadmor is controlled by the Syrian army's 4th division.

Freedom of movement on the roads in Homs Governorate

Except for the old city, where permanent checkpoints are located in order to prevent people from returning, there are only flying (temporary) checkpoints in the city of Homs.

People can move around freely in the city of Homs. The individuals manning the checkpoints in the city know the people that live in the different local areas. Generally, the local population is not harassed when passing through checkpoints in the city. However, there have been reports of isolated incidents of persons from the former opposition-controlled areas of the city being stopped, questioned and harassed at the checkpoints.

The purpose of checkpoints along the main roads in Homs Governorate is to check if individuals are on wanted lists. In addition, the checkpoints are a source of revenue for the GoS personnel manning the checkpoints who demand bribes. It is only trucks and cars associated with businesses and cargo/trade that are subjected to money extortion. Private cars or buses carrying civilians, for instance between Damascus and Tartous/Latakia through Homs, are not demanded to pay bribe on these roads.

Many checkpoints in Homs Governorate do not have access to computers that provide access to the electronic wanted lists of the Syrian intelligence services. Instead, individuals' personal documents are used to check, for instance, where they are from, or if their last name is known to be associated with the Syrian opposition or rebels. Due to the large number of cars and passengers using the roads, it is not all cars and individuals that are checked at checkpoints. As regards buses transporting civilians between Damascus and other big cities through Homs, the IDs of the passengers are checked prior to departure from Damascus and the passengers' IDs are thus usually not checked at the checkpoints.

The socioeconomic situation

Many Syrians originating from Homs are currently moving back to Homs because of worsening living conditions in areas in Syria where they have previously been living as IDPs.

No reconstruction of destroyed neighborhoods in Homs is taking place. If individuals still have a house in Homs, they are required to obtain a security clearance from the authorities in order to re-inhabit the house gain.

Annex 2: Terms of Reference

1. General security situation in Homs Governorate August 2021 - April 2022

- 1.1. Development of the general security situation in Homs Governorate since August 2021
- 1.2. Prevalence of security incidents and the extent and type of casualties
- 1.3. Presence of ISIS and anti-government armed groups in Homs Governorate

2. Freedom of movement in Homs Governorate

- 2.1 Security and freedom of movement on the roads connecting Homs Governorate with Damascus and Tartous Governorates
- 2.2 Prevalence of checkpoints and types of checks

3. Access to healthcare and education

- 3.1. General access to hospitals and medical treatment in Homs Governorate
- 3.2 General access to schools and education