

# Homs

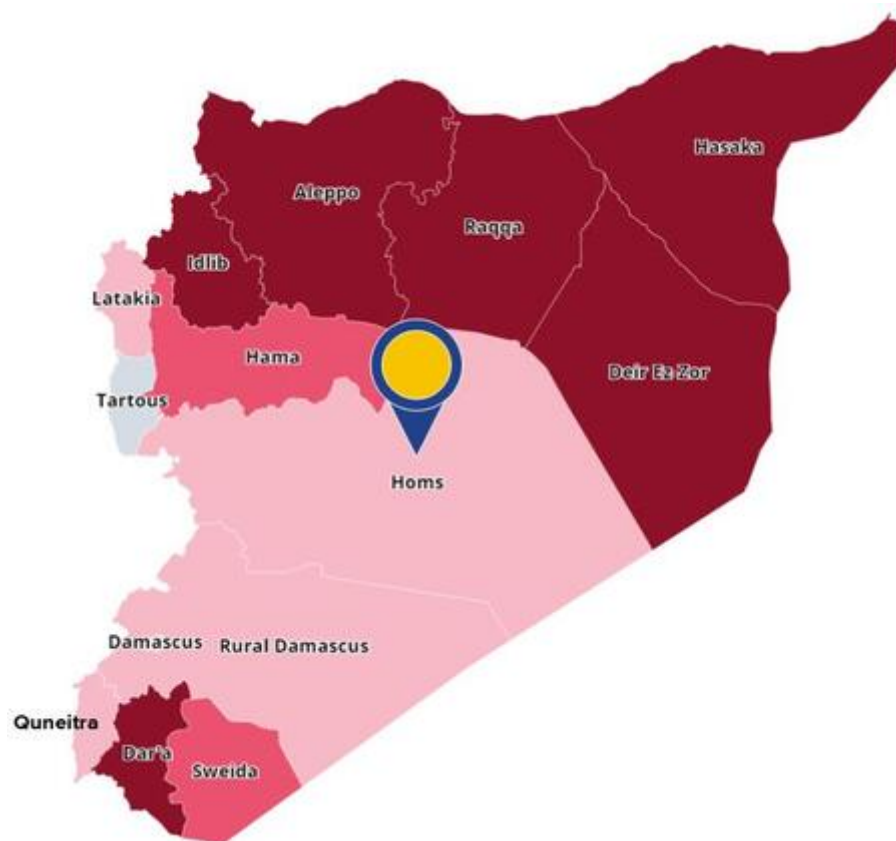
## COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: February 2023

[Main COI reference: [Security 2022](#), 2.6, pp. 129-142; [COI Update 2022](#), 2., pp. 3-8]

## General information

The governorate of Homs is located in central Syria and has borders with Iraq to the east and Lebanon to the west. Homs governorate shares an international border with Jordan to the east as well. It has internal borders with Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa, Hama, Tartous, and Rural Damascus governorates. The governorate is divided in six administrative districts: Homs (where its capital Homs is also located), Al-Qusayr, Tall Kalakh, Ar-Rastan, Al-Makhrim and Tadmor. As of February 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population of Homs governorate to be of 1 520 596 inhabitants. The governorate is characterised by natural resources such as oil and gas fields. Homs has a strategic importance to GoS because it connects the capital Damascus with coastal GoS strongholds.



### **Background of the conflict**

The city of Homs was one of the most affected cities of the war. Its old city was besieged for two years until it became accessible again in May 2014. Sectarian violence and forced displacement occurred there in 2011, and only a few neighbourhoods retained their mixed sectarian elements. The recapture of Homs city by GoS in May 2017 and the military operation by SAA in northern rural Homs in April 2018, forcing rebel groups in the region to either negotiate their withdrawal to northern Syria or reconcile with the GoS, led to the mass evacuation of rebels and their families from the governorate. A state of lawlessness was reported in 2019. Especially in the eastern parts of the governorate, there were reportedly numerous incidents involving ISIL and SAA/pro-government forces. There were also reports of escalating clashes between government forces and pro-GoS militias for economic interests and conflicting agendas.

### **Actors: control and presence**

In December 2021, most of Homs governorate was under the control of the GoS with some ISIL presence in the east and a 55km exclusion zone between the southeast and neighbouring Rural Damascus controlled by US forces and the rebel group Mughawir al-Thawra. The GoS had control of towns in eastern parts of

the governorate. The old city of Homs was controlled by different GoS intelligence services. Furthermore, in northern Homs governorate, GoS forces were in control of government buildings and police stations, while former rebel fighters who had reconciled with the government were in control of the rest of that area and the cities. On the government side, the presence of SAA and pro-government militias was reported and Iranian as well as Iranian-backed forces were deployed in several military sites and strategically important posts in the governorate. In March 2022, for example, it was reported that Iran controlled parts of the border along Homs governorate to the east, particularly in Tadmor and its surroundings. In early 2022, Russian forces and Russian-backed forces reportedly started withdrawing or redeploying from some positions in Homs governorate.

### **Nature of violence and examples of incidents**

The security situation in Homs governorate remained stable, with a decrease of security incidents in urban centres. There were reports about attacks on and by militias and ISIL in the Badiya desert region. ISIL was reported to use insurgent tactics, while another source reported that activities had shifted to a defensive approach, relying on mines, other explosive devices and harassing fire to slow down regime patrols and keep them out of the region. There was information about operations against ISIL hideouts, last in March 2022, carried out by Russian and Iranian forces and the GoS. Russian airstrikes were reportedly frequent. In May 2022, fighting between pro-Iranian militias and Russian troops was also reported in this area. ISIL attacks, including against civilians, were reported in eastern rural Homs in the period from August to October 2022.

In addition, military areas and sites belonging to Iranian forces and Iran-affiliated militias have reportedly been hit by Israeli airstrikes. In the northern part of Homs governorate, frequent shelling between anti-GoS forces and GoS forces was reported. In this part of the governorate, the security situation was described as complicated due to the presence of former GoS armed groups, many of whom have reconciled with the GoS. There was also information on civilian casualties from landmines or unexploded ordnance in Homs governorate.

### **Incidents: data**

ACLED recorded 256 security incidents (average of 3.7 security incidents per week) in Homs governorate in the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 July 2022. Of the reported incidents, 157 were coded as 'explosions/remote violence', 72 as 'battles', and 27 as incidents of 'violence against civilians'. In the period 1 August – 31 October 2022, 34 security incidents were recorded in Homs representing an

average of 2.7 security incidents per week.

### **Geographical scope**

Security incidents were recorded in all Homs governorate districts during the reporting period, with the highest number of overall incidents being recorded in Tadmor district.

### **Civilian fatalities: data**

The SNHR recorded 18 civilian fatalities in Homs in the nine months between April and December 2021. In January – October 2022, the SNHR recorded 26 civilian fatalities. This represented two civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the first ten months of 2022.

### **Displacement**

As of February 2022, the number of IDPs in Homs governorate was stated to be 303 971, of which about 4 500 lived in camps.

UNOCHA recorded approximately 2 040 IDP movements from Homs governorate, as well as 961 movements within the governorate. Approximately 40 IDP movements from other governorates to Homs were reported. In the first five months of 2022, UNOCHA registered 780 IDP movements from Homs governorate and 10 IDP movements within the governorate.

In 2021, 16 000 IDP return movements were recorded to Homs governorate, most of which being within the governorate. In the first five months of 2022, 3 788 IDP return movements were registered by UNOCHA, 807 of which being within the governorate.

### **Further impact on civilians**

In terms of property damage, Homs governorate is one of the most impacted areas. According to estimates from April 2022, 30-40% of the city of Homs has been destroyed by the conflict, mainly in the old neighbourhoods, but also in the newer ones. The destroyed buildings also include educational facilities. In 2021, 9.22 % of the total population in Homs governorate was assumed to live in damaged buildings. According to recent reports, the cost of rebuilding the houses was far too high for most residents. Sources stated that kidnappings occurred in Homs governorate as well as extortions of businessmen on the roads in the northern Homs area. In addition, contamination with explosive ordnance

remained widespread.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that indiscriminate violence is taking place in the governorate of **Homs**, however **not at a high level**.

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

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