TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

pcgn
The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Syria

Country name	Syria
State title	Syrian Arab Republic
Name of citizen	Syrian
Official language	Arabic (*ara*)[1]
Country name in official language	Sūrīyah (سورية) [also seen as Sūriyā (سوريا)]
State title in official language	Al Jumhūrīyah al ʻArabīyah as Sūrīyah (الجمهورية العربية السورية)
Script	Arabic
Romanization System	[BGN/PCGN Romanization system for Arabic 1956](#)
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	SY/SYR
Capital (conventional name)	Damascus
Capital in official language	Dimashq (دمشق)
Area/Population	187,437 sq km/23,865,423 [2]

Introduction

Syria is located in the area of the Middle East known as the Levant[3] in English and as Ash Shām in Arabic. The name Ash Shām may be used to refer to the country of Syria but is also applied to the wider Levant region. Syria is bordered by Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east and Jordan to the south. To the north-west Syria has a coastline on the Mediterranean Sea, south of which Syria borders Lebanon, and further south still the Golan Heights[4] form the border with Israel.

After World War I, France acquired a mandate over the northern part of the former Ottoman province of Syria, which it administered until 1946, when it granted Syria independence. From 1958 to 1961, Syria and Egypt united to form the United Arab Republic. When the two nations separated, the Syrian Arab Republic was reestablished.

---

[1] ISO 639 language codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

[2] https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria/

[3] The Levant is an approximate geographical region of the eastern Mediterranean.

[4] The Golan Heights is known in Arabic as Murtafaʻāt al Jawlān or Al Jawlān. The Hebrew name should not be shown on UK products. HMG considers the Golan Heights to be Syrian territory, occupied by Israel. (see page 8 for more details on the Golan Heights.)
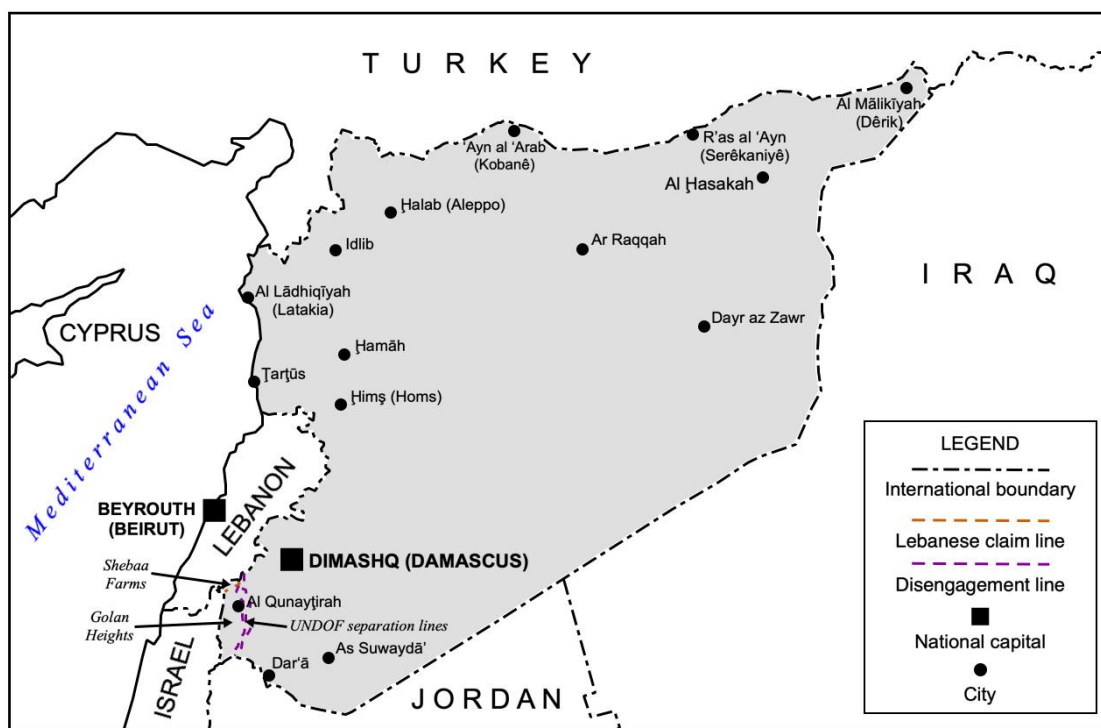
1

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

Geographical names policy and sources

Geographical names in Syria are found written in Arabic, which is the country's official language. Where possible names should be taken from official Syrian sources and romanized using the BGN/PCGN Romanization system for Arabic. Arabic script names can be taken from Syrian government mapping, documents and websites. The Syrian government has produced Arabic-script mapping of the country at 1:200,000 and 1:50,000 scales. The US Geographic Names Server (GNS) has used official Syrian mapping and includes Arabic script and romanization, and as such can be used as a source of both Arabic and romanized Arabic Names.

Although Arabic is the sole official language in Syria, Kurdish (*kur*) is widely spoken in the northern parts of the country. Features may have alternative Kurdish names that differ from the official Arabic names. For cross reference, these Kurdish names can be romanized using the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Kurdish and included in brackets after the official name on HMG mapping. See map below and table on page 6 for examples.

It should also be noted that Roman-script forms may be encountered which differ from those arising from the application of the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic. Older Roman-script sources may employ a French-style romanization system, similar to that still used in Lebanon.

Map of Syria[5]

Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

---

[5] The primary names recommended by PCGN for Syria are the romanized Arabic names. Alternative names are included in brackets for reference. These may be English conventional spellings or romanized Kurdish spellings.

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

Israeli Settlements
Since its occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights in 1967, Israel has followed a policy of establishing what are known as settlements in these territories. Although these settlements are considered illegal under international law, their existence on the ground is clear. Currently settlements remain in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Following the fall of the Asad Regime in Syria in December 2024, Israel announced plans to expand its settlements in the Golan Heights.

PCGN recommends use of the Hebrew names (romanized according to the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Hebrew) as the principal names for Israeli settlements in all contexts. When settlements are shown on mapping they should be clearly differentiated from other features, i.e. through the use of different fonts and symbology and a disclaimer stating HMG's position regarding Israeli settlements. It should be noted that the US Geographic Names Server is not up to date as regards names of Israeli Settlements.

Refugee Camps[6]
Many Palestinians were displaced by the 1948 and 1967 wars and the creation of Israel. Generations of Palestinian refugees live in refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and surrounding countries, most of which are run by UNRWA, which began operating in 1950. Although many refugee camps consist of tents, this is not the case with the UNRWA camps, which have been in existence for decades and now look more like city neighbourhoods with permanent buildings and some amenities. Many of the residents were born and have lived their whole lives in the camps.

PCGN advises taking a similar approach for the names of refugee camps as for other toponyms, i.e. show the local language name first (romanized if necessary) followed by any conventional name in brackets, where this differs. Often there will be an anglicised or conventional name used for the camp by aid organisations and/or the media. The local Arabic name of camps in Syria should be romanized using the BGN/PCGN Arabic Romanization System.

The US Geographic Names Server (GNS) contains names for some refugee camps (feature type: CMPRF). In the GNS the conventional/anglicised names and the Arabic names for these camps are recorded as approved names, with the conventional name being accorded name rank 1 and the Arabic name rank 2.

List of PCGN recommended names for UNRWA camps in Syria:
'Ayn at Tall (Ein el Tal)/Ḥandarāt Camp *
Al Lādhiqīyah (Latakia) Camp *
Al Yarmūk (Yarmouk) Camp *
An Nayrab (Neirab) Camp
Darʿā (Dera'a) Camp
Ḥamāh (Hama) Camp
Ḥims (Homs)/Al ʿĀʾidīn (al-Aideen) Camp
Jaramānā Camp

---

[6] For further details of the names of UNRWA camps see PCGN's paper *Refugee Camp Names Policy*, July 2023 (available on request)

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

pcgn The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Khān as Shīḥ (Khan Eshieh) Camp

Khān Dunnūn (Khan Dunoun) Camp

Qabr as Sitt (Qabr Essit) Camp

Subaynah (Sbeineh) Camp

* unofficial camps

Languages

Arabic

Arabic is the official language of Syria. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is used for official written purposes. The principal dialect spoken in Syria is Levantine Arabic. Arabic is a Semitic language and is written from right to left. The Arabic alphabet consists of 28 letters, in addition to which there are several vocalisation marks which are not usually written. For further information on Arabic see the PCGN *Guide to Understanding Toponyms in the Arab World*[7] and the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic.

Kurdish

Kurdish (in its Kurmanji form (*kmr*), also known as Northern Kurdish) is widely spoken in the Kurdish regions of Syria, though the language lacks standardization. Kurdish is a Northwestern Iranian language, part of the Indo-European language family. In Syria, it may be written in Roman script (using the Hawar alphabet[8]) or in a modified Arabic script, which can be romanized using the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Kurdish. In January 2026, Presidential Decree No.13 accorded the status of 'national language' on Kurdish, affirming that the language could be taught in areas where Kurds constitute a significant percentage of the population.

Other languages

Many educated Syrians also speak English and/or French. Armenian (*hyw (Western Armenian)*) and Turkish (*tur*) are spoken among the Armenian and Turkmen minorities respectively. Circassian languages are also spoken.

Western Neo-Aramaic (*amw*), a semitic language, is spoken among Arameans and Assyrians. Syriac is used as the liturgical language of various Syriac denominations. Neo-Aramaic is written using Modern Syriac Script. There is a BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Modern Syriac.

Syrian Toponyms

Many Syrian toponyms have their origins in languages other than Arabic, and therefore may contain sounds not present in Arabic or have spellings which may look unusual to an Arabic speaker. For example, toponyms of Kurdish origin may contain the sounds *p*, *ch*, and *v*, which are not present in the Arabic alphabet. These sounds may be written in Arabic using the characters ب (b), ح (j) and ف (f) respectively; or when available the modified Arabic-script characters corresponding to these sounds (چ, پ and ڤ respectively) may be used. Provision is made in the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic for the romanization of these modified characters. Kurdish toponyms are most likely to be encountered in the north of the country (see below).

---

[7] Available on request

[8] https://www.omniglot.com/writing/kurdish.htm

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

Place names of Aramaic origin may also be encountered in Syria, particularly in the area close to the border with Lebanon. These often contain initial consonant clusters, such as those consisting of *b* plus another consonant such as *l* or *h*. In romanization, the clusters *bl*, *bh*, etc., should be represented accordingly. For Example, بلفسة → Blaqsah; سقوبين → Sqūbīn.

Kurdish Toponymy in Northern Syria

The Kurdish areas of northern Syria are known in Kurmanji Kurdish as Rojavayê Kurdistanê (Western Kurdistan) or simply Rojava. Other commonly used terms are 'li ser xeta' and 'le bin xeta'. Kurds in Syria call the Kurdish regions of Turkey 'li ser xeta', which means 'above the line'; that is, north of the Syria-Turkey border. While the Kurdish areas in Syria are known as 'le bin xeta,' meaning 'below the line'.

The emblem of the self-styled Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), giving the name in Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish and Aramaic.

Following the 2011 Arab Uprisings and subsequent Syrian Civil War, an unofficial Kurdish administration has developed in the Kurdish region of Syria. The self-styled Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) is a *de facto* autonomous region in northeastern Syria. It was initially known as Rojava (meaning West), and this name is still widely used. The new name for the administration is intended to be more inclusive of all the ethnicities resident in the region. The AANES consists of seven self-governing sub-regions (sometimes called cantons or regions). The Kurdish names of these are (Arabic in brackets): Efrînê ('Afrīn), Cizîrê (Al Jazīrah), Firat (Al Furāt), Reqa/Reqayê (Ar Raqqah), Tebqa (Aţ Ţabqah), Minbic/Minbicê (Manbij), and Dêre Zûr/Dêra Zorê (Dayr az Zawr).

The AANES administration promotes the use of Kurdish language (in education, on signs etc.) and the Kurdish Language Institute (SZK) is attempting to standardise the language. Kurmanji is considered the official language of the AANES. Former Kurdish names have begun to be restored to many villages in northern Syria, names which had been Arabicised by the Syrian government in the 1960s and 1970s. An example is the village of Joldara, which in Kurdish means 'a plain covered in trees'. The name of the village was Arabicised by the Syrian government in 1962 and changed to Shajarah, which means 'tree' in Arabic.

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

Kurdish names of some significant towns in northern Syria

Official Arabic Name	Kurdish Name	Location
‘Ayn al ‘Arab	Kobanê	33° 30' 45" N 036° 16' 41" E
Ra's al ‘Ayn	Serêkaniyê	36° 34' 59" N 038° 21' 39" E
Ad Darbasīyah	Dirbêsiyê	37° 04' 22" N 040° 39' 07" E
Al Qamishlī	Qamişlo	37° 03' 08" N 041° 13' 53" E
Al Mālikīyah	Dêrik	37° 10' 37" N 042° 08' 24" E

The future of the autonomous Kurdish area is uncertain, since Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) overthrew the Assad regime and seized power in December 2024. The new Syrian government, led by President al-Sharaa, wants the Kurdish military and civil institutions to integrate into the Syrian state and has called for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to lay down arms and integrate into the new Syrian defence ministry. The Kurdish administration wants to maintain some level of autonomy in the north-eastern Kurdish areas and has called for a decentralised Syrian state, recognising the rights of the diverse ethnic and religious populations.

Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings[9]):

The BGN/PCGN Romanization system for Arabic contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script. These can be reproduced using the Unicode encodings shown below:

Upper case	Unicode encoding	Lower case	Unicode encoding
Á	00C1	á	00E1
Ā	0100	ā	0101
Ḍ	1E10	ḍ	1E11
Ḥ	1E28	ḥ	1E29
Ī	012A	ī	012B
Ş	015E	ş	015F
Ţ	0162	ţ	0163
Ū	016A	ū	016B
Ẕ	005A+0327*	ẕ	007A+0327*
‘	2018 or 02BB	’	2019 or 02BC

*Note, the z + cedilla is not available as a single encoding.

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

The BGN/PCGN Romanization system for Kurdish contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script. These can be reproduced using the Unicode encodings shown below:

Upper case	Unicode encoding	Lower case	Unicode encoding
'	2018/02BB	'	2019/02BC
Ç	00C7	ç	00E7
Ḍ	1E0C	ḍ	1E0D
Ê	00CA	ê	00EA
Ḧ	0048+0308*	ḧ	0068+0308*
Î	00CE	î	00EE
Ł	0141	ł	0142
Ö	00D6	ö	00F6
Ṟ	1E5E	ṟ	1E5F
Ş	015E	ş	015F
Ṣ	1E62	ṣ	1E63
Ṭ	1E6C	ṭ	1E6D
Û	00DB	û	00FB
Ü	00DC	ü	00FC
Ẍ	1E8C	ẍ	1E8D

* There is no single Unicode encoding for these letter-diacritic combinations.

The BGN/PCGN Romanization system for Modern Syriac contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script. These can be reproduced using the Unicode encodings shown below:

Upper case	Unicode encoding	Lower case	Unicode encoding
'	2019	'	2018
Ā	0100	ā	0101
Ē	0112	ē	0113
Ī	012A	ī	012B
Ḥ	0048+0323*	ḥ	0068+0323*
Ṣ	0053+0323*	ṣ	0073+0323*
Ṭ	0054+0323*	ṭ	0074+0323*
Ū	016A	ū	016B

* There is no single Unicode encoding for these letter-diacritic combinations.

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

Boundary disputes

Golan Heights

The Golan Heights area is Syrian territory captured by Israel in 1967 (Six Day War) and later annexed in 1981. The 1923 line between the British Mandate for Palestine and the French Mandate for Syria is to be shown as the *de jure* line between Israel and Syria. The 1949 Armistice Line should be shown as such, where scale permits (where it differs to the 1923 line). The current Israeli-occupied area of Golan Heights and the UNDOF Separation Zone should be coloured on HMG maps so that both pertain to Syria. Since April 2019, the US has recognised the Golan Heights as being under Israeli sovereignty. Consequently, the NGA Geographic Names Server is not recommended for as a names source for this area, for HMG purposes.

Lebanon-Syria boundary

Lacking a treaty or other documentation describing the boundary, portions of the Lebanon - Syria boundary are unclear with several sections in dispute:

1. **Shebaa Farms** is a strip of land at the intersection of the Lebanon - Syria boundary, at the northern limit of Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, measuring approximately 10 km by 2 km. In the first instance this dispute is between Lebanon and Syria. However, Israel is implicated in the dispute as it considers the Shebaa Farms area to be part of Golan Heights, which is disputed between Israel and Syria. On UK products, the Shebaa Farms area is to be shown as being inclusive to Syrian territory currently occupied by Israel in the wider Golan Heights territory. A *de jure* boundary should be shown for the Lebanon - Syria boundary. The English name Shebaa Farms should be used.

2. Five villages (and their surrounding territories) are disputed between Syria and Lebanon. These are Aarsâl (34° 10' 48" N 36° 25' 12" E), Deïr El Aachâyer (33° 33' 27" N, 36° 00' 39" E), Kfar Qoûq (33° 32' 00" N, 35° 53' 32" E), Qasr (34° 28' 52" N, 36° 26' 24" E) and Tfaïl (33° 51' 00" N, 36° 22' 05" E). This dispute is primarily caused by the lack of any complete demarcation along the boundary. The villages are generally considered as pertaining to Lebanon (and certainly are in the *de facto* sense) and should be shown as part of Lebanon on UK products.

Administrative structure

Prior to the Syrian Civil War, Syria was divided into 14 first-order administrative divisions (ADM1), known as governorates or provinces (Arabic: *Muḥāfaẓah*), subdivided at second-order (ADM2) level into 61 districts, (Arabic: *Minţaqah*)[10]. These districts are further divided into sub-districts (*Nāḥiyah* in Arabic). This structure continues to be used by the Syrian central government.

As mentioned above, the self-styled Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), a *de facto* autonomous region in northeastern Syria, consists of seven self-governing sub-regions (sometimes called cantons or regions). These are: Efrînê ('Afrīn), Cizîrê (Al Jazīrah), Firat (Al Furāt),

---

[10] The Roman script spelling of the generics *Muḥāfaẓah* and *Minţaqah* changes to *Muḥāfaẓat* and *Minţaqat* respectively when they are followed by the place name e.g. Muḥāfaẓ**at** al Ḥasakah. This reflects the pronunciation of the words in this construction.

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

pcgn
The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Reqa/Reqayê (Ar Raqqah, Tebqa (Aţ Ţabqah), Minbic/Minbicê (Manbij), and Dêre Zûr/Dêra Zorê (Dayr az Zawr).

When the self-styled Islamic State changed its name to the 'Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant' and expanded into Syria in April 2014, it claimed nine Syrian provinces, covering most of the Syria and mostly aligning with the existing governorate boundaries: Al Barakah, Al Khayr, Raqqah, Ḥims, Ḥalab, Idlib, Ḥamāh, Dimashq, and Al Lādhiqīyah. It later subdivided the territory under its control to create new provinces of Al Furāt, Al Fallūjah, Dijlah and Al Jazīrah.

The 14 governorates of the central Syrian administrative structure are listed below.

Al Ḥasakah (36° 30' 00" N 041° 00' 00" E)

Name in Arabic script	الحسكة
Long form name	Muḥāfaẓat al Ḥasakah
Long form name in Arabic script	محافظة الحسكة
Variant names	Al-Hasakeh, Hasaka, El Haseke, Hassetche Hesîçe (kur), Al Barakah
ISO 3166-2 code	SY-HA
Centre	Al Ḥasakah (36° 30' 09" N 040° 44' 52" E)
Centre in Arabic script	الحسكة
Consists of 4 districts	

Al Lādhiqīyah (Latakia) (35° 30' 00" N 036° 10' 00" E)

Name in Arabic script	اللاذقية
Long form name	Muḥāfaẓat al Lādhiqīyah
Long form name in Arabic script	محافظة اللاذقية
Variant names	Latakiyah, Lattakia, El Lādhaqiyé, El Lādhiqīya, Ladhiqiye, Latakieh, Ladikiya, Latakieh, Lattaquié
ISO 3166-2 code	SY-LA
Centre	Al Lādhiqīyah (Latakia)[11] (35° 31' 54" N 035° 47' 24" E)
Centre in Arabic script	اللاذقية
Consists of 4 districts	

---

[11] Al Lādhiqīyah (Latakia) and Ţarţūs are Syria's main ports.

9

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

Al Qunayţirah[12] (33° 00' 00" N 035° 50' 00" E)

Name in Arabic script	القنيطرة
Long form name	Muḥāfaẓat al Qunayţirah
Long form name in Arabic script	محافظة القنيطرة
Variant names	Quneitra, Qnnaytrah, El Kuneitra, El Qnaïtra, Kuneïtra, Qnaïtra, Qunayţirah
ISO 3166-2 code	SY-QU
Centre	Al Qunayţirah[13] (33° 07' 33" N 035° 49' 29" E)
Centre in Arabic script	القنيطرة
Consists of 2 districts	

Ar Raqqah (36° 00' 00" 039° 00' 00" E)

Name in Arabic script	الرقة
Long form name	Muḥāfaẓat ar Raqqah
Long form name in Arabic script	محافظة الرقة
Variant names	Al-Rakka, Raqqa, Rakka, Raqa
ISO 3166-2 code	SY-RA
Centre	Ar Raqqah (35° 57' 10" 039° 00' 28" E)
Centre in Arabic script	الرقة
Consists of 3 districts	

As Suwaydā' (32° 45' 00" N 036° 45' 00" E(

Name in Arabic script	السويداء
Long form name	Muḥāfaẓat as Suwaydā'
Long form name in Arabic script	محافظة السويداء
Variant names	Al-Sweida, Souydaa, As Suwaydah, Es Suweida, Soueïda, Suwaydah
ISO 3166-2 code	SY-SU
Centre	As Suwaydā' (32° 42' 32" N 036° 34' 10" E(
Centre in Arabic script	السويداء
Consists of 3 districts	

Dar'ā (33° 00' 00" N 036° 10' 00" E)

Name in Arabic script	درعا
Long form name	Muḥāfaẓat Dar'ā
Long form name in Arabic script	محافظة درعا
Variant names	Dera, Dara'a, Deraa, Daraa, Der'ā, Adraa, Deraâ
ISO 3166-2 code	SY-DR
Centre	Dar'ā (32° 37' 08" N 036° 06' 08" E)
Centre in Arabic script	درعا
Consists of 3 districts	

---

[12] Part of Muḥāfaẓat al Qunayţirah falls into the area known as the Golan Heights.

[13] The city of Al Qunayţirah, located in the Golan Heights, is largely destroyed and abandoned.

10

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

Dayr az Zawr (35° 30' 00" N 039° 00' 00" E)

Name in Arabic script	دير الزور
Long form name	Muḥāfaẓat Dayr az Zawr
Long form name in Arabic script	محافظة دير الزور
Variant names	Deir ez Zor, Der Zor, Deir Zzor, Deir al Zour, Deir Ezzour, Ad-Deir, Al Dayr, Dayr al-Zor, Dayr az Zūr, Deir ez Zoar, Der-Ezzor, Al Furāt, Euphrates, Al-Khayr, Al-Khair State, Wilayat al Khayr
ISO 3166-2 code	SY-DY
Centre	Dayr az Zawr (35° 20' 02" N 040° 08' 31" E)
Centre in Arabic script	دير الزور
Consists of 3 districts	

Dimashq (Damascus) (33° 30' 00" N 036° 18' 00" E)

Name in Arabic script	دمشق
Long form name	Muḥāfaẓat Dimashq
Long form name in Arabic script	محافظة دمشق
Variant names	Madīnat Dimashq, Damascus City
ISO 3166-2 code	SY-DI
Centre	Dimashq (Damascus) (33° 30' 45" N 036° 16' 41" E)
Centre in Arabic script	دمشق
Consists of 1 district	

Ḥalab (Aleppo) (36° 00' 00" N 037° 00' 00" E)

Name in Arabic script	حلب
Long form name	Muḥāfaẓat Ḥalab
Long form name in Arabic script	محافظة حلب
Variant names	Alep, Aleppe, Allepp, Haleb
ISO 3166-2 code	SY-HL
Centre	Ḥalab (Aleppo) (36° 12' 04" N 037° 09' 40" E)
Centre in Arabic script	حلب
Consists of 8 districts	

Ḥamāh (35° 10' 00" N 037° 00' 00" E)

Name in Arabic script	حماة
Long form name	Muḥāfaẓat Ḥamāh
Long form name in Arabic script	محافظة حماة
Variant names	Hama, حماه
ISO 3166-2 code	SY-HM
Centre	Ḥamāh (35° 07' 54" N 036° 45' 28" E)
Centre in Arabic script	حماة
Consists of 5 districts	

11

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

Ḩimş (Homs) (34° 15' 00" N 038° 00' 00" E)

Name in Arabic script	حمص
Long form name	Muḩāfaẕat Ḩimş
Long form name in Arabic script	محافظة حمص
Variant names	Hums, Humus, Houmous
ISO 3166-2 code	SY-HI
Centre	Ḩimş (Homs) (34° 43' 37" N 036° 43' 24" E)
Centre in Arabic script	حمص
Consists of 6 districts	

Idlib (35° 50' 00" N 036° 40' 00" E)

Name in Arabic script	إدلب
Long form name	Muḩāfaẕat Idlib
Long form name in Arabic script	محافظة إدلب
Variant names	Idleb, Edleb
ISO 3166-2 code	SY-ID
Centre	Idlib (35° 55' 50" N 036° 38' 02" E)
Centre in Arabic script	إدلب
Consists of 5 districts	

Rīf Dimashq (Rural Damascus) (33° 30' 00" N 037° 45' 00" E)

Name in Arabic script	ريف دمشق
Long form name	Muḩāfaẕat Rīf Dimashq
Long form name in Arabic script	محافظة ريف دمشق
Variant names	Damascus, Ash Sham, Ech Cham, Damas, Damascus Countryside
ISO 3166-2 code	SY-RD
Centre	Dimashq (Damascus) (33° 30' 45" N 036° 16' 41" E)
Centre in Arabic script	دمشق
Consists of 9 districts	

Ţarţūs (35° 00' 00" N 036° 10' 00" E)

Name in Arabic script	طرطوس
Long form name	Muḩāfaẕat Ţarţūs
Long form name in Arabic script	محافظة طرطوس
Variant names	Tartous, Tartoûs Tartouss,
ISO 3166-2 code	SY-TA
Centre	Ţarţūs[8] (34° 53' 20" N 035° 53' 12" E)
Centre in Arabic script	طرطوس
Consists of 5 districts	

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

pcgn
The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Other significant locations

PCGN Recommended Name	Name in Arabic script	Variant Names	Feature Type	Location
Ālbū Kamāl[14]	آلبوكمال	Abū Kamāl, Āl Bū Kamāl, Al-Bokamal, Al Boukamal, Qashla ابو كمال آل بوكمال	Populated place	34° 27' 00" N 040° 55' 07" E
Al Jawlān (Golan Heights)	الجولان	Ramat HaGolan רמת הגולן (heb) Murtafaʿāt al Jawlān, مرتفعات الجولان (ara) Djaulân, El Jaulān, Hagolan, Jaoulane, Jaulan	Region	32° 54' 17" N, 035° 48' 26" E
Al Qāmishlī (Qamişlo)	القامشلي	Al Kamishly, Al Qamishly, Alkamishly	Populated place	37° 03' 05" N 041° 13' 42" E
Al Qaryatayn	القريتين	El Qaryatein, Kariatein, Kariateine, Karyatein. Kuriatein, Kuryatein, Qariateïne, Qaryatayn	Populated place	34° 13' 46" N, 037° 14' 26" E
An Nahr al Kabīr	النهر الكبير	Kabir River, Nahr al Kabir, Nahr el Kebir	River	35° 29' 59" N 035° 48' 41" E (Syria-Lebanon border)
Ash Shaddādah	الشدادة	Chaddâde, Chaddâdi, Shedadi	Populated place	36° 03' 27" N 040° 44' 05" E
At Tall	التل	Tel, Tall, Tal, Et Tel	Populated place	33° 36' 36" N 036° 18' 35" E
At Tanf	التنف	Tanff, Al Tanaf	Populated place	33° 29' 18" N 038° 39' 25" E

---

[14] The name of this town is Ālbū Kamāl which means "People of Kamal". However, it is increasing seen written erroneously as Abū Kamāl, meaning "Father of Kamal".

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

PCGN Recommended Name	Name in Arabic script	Variant Names	Feature Type	Location
ʿAyn al ʿArab (Kobanê)	عين العرب	Aïn el Aarab, Ein-al-Arab Kobanî, Kubani, Kobane, Kubanê, كوباني	Populated place	33° 30' 45" N 036° 16' 41" E
Bāniyās	بانياس	Banias, Banyas	Populated place	35° 10' 55" 035° 56' 55" E
Buḥayrat al Asad	بحيرة الاسد	Lake Asad, Lake Assad, Buḥayrat ath Thawrah, Revolution Lake	Lake/Reservoir	35° 59' 57" N 038° 10' 05" E
Buḥayrat Qaţţīnah	بحيرة قطينة	Bahret Qattīne, Baḥrat Ḥimş, Bahrat Houmous, Homs Lake	Lake/Reservoir	34° 38'247" N 036° 34' 02" E
Buşrá	بصرى	Bosra	Ancient site	32° 31' 04" N 036° 28' 54" E
Dāʿil	داعل	Dael	Populated place	32° 45' 17" N 036° 07' 47" E
Ḥawrān	حوران	Houran, Hourane, Haourâne, Hauran	Area/Region	Area in southern Syria around Darʿā 32° 43' 48" N 036° 22' 05" E
Ibtaʿ	ابتع	Ibtaa	Populated place	32° 47' 34" N 036° 09' 06" E
Jabal al ʿArab (also known as Jabal ad Durūz)	جبل العرب	Jabal ad Duruz, Djebel Al-Arab, Jabal Druze, Jabal El Druze Djebel ed Drouz, جبل الدروز	Mountainous area	32° 40' 00" N, 036° 47' 00" E
Jablah	جبلة	Jabla, Jableh, Jebleh, Jablé, Djéblé	Populated place	35° 21' 41" N 035° 55' 32" E

14

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

PCGN Recommended Name	Name in Arabic script	Variant Names	Feature Type	Location
Madīnat ath Thawrah	مدينة الثورة	Revolution City, Ath Thawrah, At Tabaqah	Populated place	35° 50' 49" N 038° 32' 39" E
Mūḥ Ḥasan	موح حسن	Mohassen, Mouhassane, Mūḥasan, Muḥassan, موحسن	Populated place	35° 14' 01" N, 040° 19' 00" E
Nahr al ʻĀşī (Orontes) [Name for use in Syria]	نهر العاصي	Asi Nehri/Asi (TU) Nahr el Aassi / El Aassi(LE) Nahr el Aâssi, Nahr al ʻĀş, Nahr el Assi, Nehir Oronte	River	36° 02' 52" N, 035° 58' 01" E
Nahr al Furāt (Euphrates)	نهر الفرات	Al Furat Fırat (tur)	River	33° 05' 00" N 043° 29' 00" E
Nahr al Khābūr	نهر الخابور	Nahr Khabour, Khabur River, Habur Nehri [TU]	River	35° 07' 39" N 040° 25' 40" E
Nahr al Yarmūk	نهراليرموك	Yarmouk	River	32° 38' 31" N 035° 34' 24" E (Syria-Jordan border)
Qalʻat al Ḥişn (Crac des Chevaliers)	قلعة الحصن	Husn el Akrād, Kalaat Hosson el Akrad, Krak des Chevaliers, Qalaat el Hosn, Qalʻat al Ḥuşn, Qalʻat el Hasn, Qalʻat el Husn	Crusader castle	34° 45' 41" N, 036° 18' 05" E
Qalʻat Şalāḥ ad Dīn	قلعة صلاح الدين	Saône, Şahyūn, Saladin castle, Citadel of Salah Ed-Din	Historic fort	35° 35' 45" N, 036° 03' 26" E
Ra's Shamrā (Ugarit)	رأس شمرا	Ra's ash Shamrah, Râs Chamra, Ras Shamra, Ra's Shamrah, Ūghārīt, اوغاريت , رأس الشمرة	Ancient site	35° 36' 07" N, 035° 47' 07" E
Sabʻ Biyār	سبع بيار	Sabaa Biâr, Saba Biar, As Sabʻ Biyār, As Sabʻ Ābār, SabʻĀbār	Populated place	33° 46' 47" N, 037° 41' 01" E

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

PCGN Recommended Name	Name in Arabic script	Variant Names	Feature Type	Location
Sadd ath Thawrah or Sadd aţ Ţabqah	سد الثورة سد الطبقة	Kurdish: Bendava Tebqa/Bendava Tewra Euphrates Dam, سد الفرات, Sadd al Furāt	Dam	35° 52' 10" N 038° 33' 49" E
Sadd Tishrīn	سد تشرين	Kurdish: Bendava Tişrînê Tishrin Dam	Dam	36° 22' 51" N 038° 10' 43" E
Tadmur	تدمر	Tedmor, Palmyra	Populated place	34° 33' 39" N 038° 16' 50" E
Tadmur (Palmyra)	تدمر	Tedmor	Ancient site	34° 33' 11" N 038° 16' 02"E
Ţafas	طفس	Tafas	Populated place	32° 44' 08" N 036° 04' 01" E
Tall Kalakh	تل كلخ	Tel Kalakh, Telkalakh	Populated place	34° 40' 16" N 036° 15' 35" E (on Syria-Lebanon border)

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

Useful references

- Aramaic language in Syria: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/14/aramaic-revival-syria
- BBC Golan Heights Profile: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14724842 (no longer updated)
- BBC Syria Country Profile: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/801669.stm (no longer updated)
- BGN/PCGN Romanization of Modern Syriac Script (Neo-Aramaic language): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/637df1aae90e076b73e074c7/ROMANIZATION_OF_ARABIC_-_Nov_22.pdf
- BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/637df1aae90e076b73e074c7/ROMANIZATION_OF_ARABIC_-_Nov_22.pdf
- BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Kurdish: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/636cd877e90e07618b9f499c/ROMANIZATION_OF_KURDISH_2022.pdf
- CIA World Factbook: https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria/
- Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com (for information on the languages of Syria)
- International Organization for Standardization (ISO), Online Browsing Platform (OBP): https://www.iso.org/obp/ui
- *ISIS Governance in Syria* (2014): http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISIS_Governance.pdf
- *Kurdish Toponymy*, PCGN paper, 34th BGN/PCGN Conference (available on request)
- Kurdish Writing: https://kurdishwriting.com/
- Library of Congress, Syria country study: https://www.loc.gov/item/87600488/
- Omniglot: http://www.omniglot.com/writing/arabic.htm (for information on the Arabic language & alphabet)
- Omniglot: https://www.omniglot.com/writing/kurdish.htm (for information on the Kurdish language & alphabets)
- PCGN *Guide to Understanding Toponyms in the Arab World* (available on request)
- Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics: http://www.cbssyr.sy/index-EN.htm
- Syrian Ministry of Information: http://www.moi.gov.sy (Arabic)
- UN Second Administrative Level Boundaries (SALB): https://salb.un.org/en
- US Board on Geographic Names Geographic Names Server: https://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/

Compiled by PCGN
www.gov.uk/pcgn
updated January 2026