

Derna Rapid Situation Overview

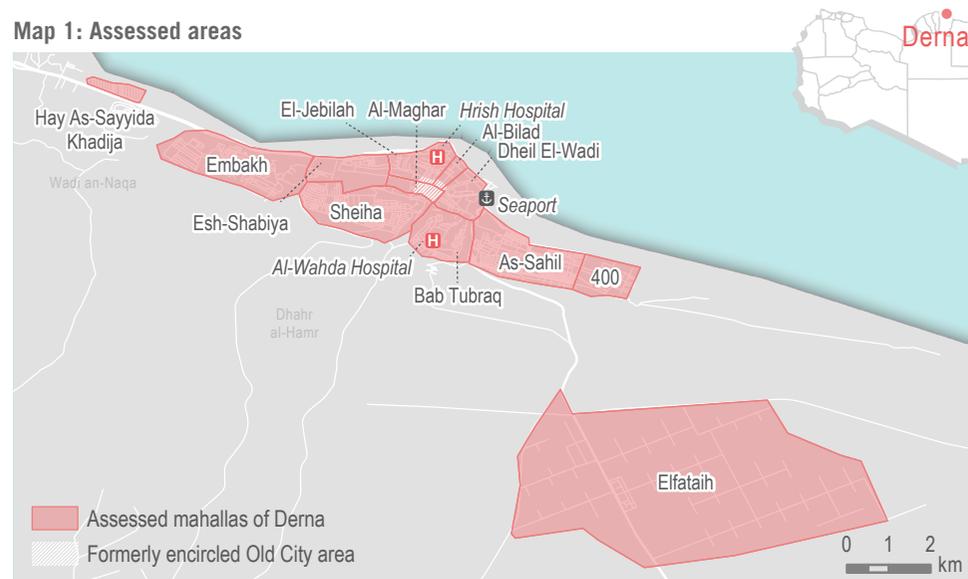
Libya, 28 March 2019

BACKGROUND

In mid-February 2019, the military encirclement of Derna's Old City was lifted, bringing to an end 19 months of heavy armed group activity in and around the city. Movement restrictions were largely lifted, and displaced households continued the slow process of return. However, returnees faced heavy damage to shelters and infrastructure, along with contamination by landmines and ERW (explosive remnants of war)¹ in some areas. In addition, the Derna Department of Social Affairs reported in February that 1,800 families remained displaced within the city, with an additional 670 displaced elsewhere in Libya.²

To inform humanitarian response plans for Derna residents, including IDP, returnee, and non-displaced households, REACH conducted a rapid assessment to provide a snapshot of humanitarian needs. Between 17 and 25 March, REACH assessed the humanitarian situation across all 12 of the city's mahallas. Data was collected through 44 multi-sector key informant (KI) interviews, conducted with community leaders, medical professionals, and IDPs, among others. Results were compared with those from the [2018 ISCG MSNA](#) and REACH's previous [Derna Rapid Situation Overview](#)³ to provide perspective on how humanitarian needs had developed. The information in this document refers only to the situation during the data collection period and should be considered indicative only.

Map 1: Assessed areas



KEY FINDINGS

- Within a month after the end of active conflict in Derna's Old City, **many households displaced by the fighting had returned to the Old City area**. These returnees confronted **heavy damage** to shelters, community buildings, and municipal infrastructure, especially streets and power grids, as well as **contamination by landmines and ERW**.
- At the time of data collection, KIs reported few restrictions on freedom of movement throughout Derna, apart from **permanent and ad hoc checkpoints**. While these checkpoints did not prevent most residents from moving around the city, their presence was correlated with reports of **safety and security incidents** in the mahallas where they were located.
- **Most IDPs reportedly used their own resources to find and retain shelter**, with roughly equal proportions of IDPs in most mahallas estimated to either be renting their own accommodation or staying with friends or family. In some mahallas, sizable groups of IDPs and returnees were reportedly **constructing their own houses** without authorisation.
- **Bakeries and markets** both reportedly functioned in all mahallas **except for Al-Maghar**, where nearly all bakeries and the central market had been damaged by the conflict. However, bread was not always widely available to consumers due to a **shortage of flour**.
- Though **healthcare facilities were reportedly functional and operational** in most of Derna's mahallas, more complex healthcare services, such as surgery and maternity care, were only available in El-Jebilah, Bab Tubraq, and Dheil el-Wadi.
- In most mahallas, the public water network functioned as residents' primary source of drinking water. Yet KIs reported that in practice, **many residents only had access to water from the public network 1-3 days per week**.
- **The waste disposal situation was of serious concern in Derna**, with large amounts of waste reportedly being buried, burned, or dumped in inappropriate spots.
- **Among Derna's non-displaced population**, the top humanitarian need reported by KIs was **cash**, specifically linked to the lack of liquidity in banks. **Among IDPs**, the primary needs were related to **shelter and non-food items (NFIs)**, including housing, in-home latrines, and core NFIs (specifically furniture, bedding, blankets, and pillows).

¹ Information provided by Libya Humanitarian Access Team, February 2019.

² *Ibid.*

³ Data collection for the 2018 ISCG MSNA took place in July and August 2018. Data collection for REACH's Derna Rapid Situation Overview from 1 June 2018 took place between 27 and 30 May 2018.

FINDINGS BY SECTOR

Displacement

- Within a month after the end of active conflict in Derna's Old City, **many households displaced by the fighting had returned to formerly encircled areas of Al-Bilad and Al-Maghar**. Most of these returnees had previously been displaced to other parts of Al-Bilad or to Derna's outer mahallas, particularly Embakh, Sheiha, As-Sahil, and 400.
- Returnees to the Old City area confronted **heavy damage to shelters, community buildings, and municipal infrastructure**, especially streets and power grids.
- **Returnees also reportedly continued to resettle in other areas of central Derna**, in particular El-Jebilah, Esh-Shabiya, and Dheil el-Wadi, arriving mostly from Benghazi and Albayda. As of mid-March, returnees also continued to trickle back into the heavily damaged mahalla of Hay as-Sayyida Khadija, primarily from Albayda and Shahhat. Though all of these mahallas had been accessible since mid-2018, **return was a slow process for many households** due to heavy damage to shelters and lingering contamination by explosive remnants of war (ERW).
- In addition to the ongoing returns, KIs in Al-Bilad and El-Jebilah reported IDPs leaving these mahallas for other areas of east Libya, particularly Albayda, Shahhat, Alqubba, and Tobruk.
- According to KIs, as of March, **most of the IDPs who remain displaced throughout Derna city were unable to return** because their shelters had been damaged or destroyed. Though some KIs also cited the risk of further conflict or specific threats against households, both concerns were less commonly reported than they were in July-August 2018 during the ISCG Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA).²

Freedom of Movement

- At the time of data collection, KIs reported **few restrictions on freedom of movement throughout Derna, apart from checkpoints**. Most **permanent checkpoints** were located in the vicinity of the Old City, still marking the former perimeter of encirclement. In addition, **ad hoc checkpoints** were often set up by armed groups to perform more stringent searches and identification checks.
- While checkpoints did not prevent most residents from moving around the city, their presence, and the armed group activity that surrounded them, was correlated with reports of **safety and security incidents** in the mahallas where they were located (see Protection). KIs in most mahallas with checkpoints reported that those who transited them were occasionally **at risk of verbal harassment and detention**.
- **Freedom of movement was additionally constrained by the presence of ERW**, especially in

and around the Old City.

- **Movement into the Old City had become difficult for drivers**, as many streets were destroyed or littered with rubble during the active fighting; there was reportedly little access for larger commercial vehicles.

Shelter

- **Extensive damage was reported to Derna's Old City and surrounding areas**, particularly parts of Al-Bilad and Al-Maghar mahallas, little of which has yet been repaired. This damage affected not only **shelters**, but also key **community infrastructure**, including, but not limited to, three mosques, a clinic, and a central market.
- **The city's power grid was also reportedly damaged**, partly due to the conflict and partly due to theft of power cables that had not been replaced. KIs across all mahallas reported experiencing 3 to 6 hours of power cuts per day, a situation unchanged from July-August 2018.³ **Telecommunications infrastructure** was in turn affected, with phone and internet connectivity in the city remaining limited.
- **Most IDPs who remained displaced within Derna used their own resources to find and retain shelter**. Across most assessed mahallas, KIs estimated that roughly equal numbers of IDPs were renting their own accommodations and being hosted by friends or family (excepting the 400 mahalla, where an estimated 75% were being hosted, and As-Sahil, where 75% were renting). In El-Jebilah, an estimated 60% of the IDP population was reported to be living in shelters they owned, whether permanent or makeshift; the same was reported to a lesser extent in Esh-Shabiya, El-Fataih, and Hay As-Sayyida Khadija (20-35%).
- Meanwhile, in Embakh and Sheiha, an estimated 20-25% of IDPs and 10% of returnees were reportedly living in **empty houses or unfinished buildings**. These were largely self-constructed structures built without authorisation, most of which provided shelter from the elements but were neither fully completed nor connected to municipal utilities.
- **Overcrowding in most mahallas of Derna had eased significantly since the summer of 2018**, when many of the city's internal IDPs began to return home. According to KIs, IDPs in Sheiha and returnees in El-Fataih were the only groups in which more than half of households lived in overcrowded conditions.
- At the time of data collection, KIs had not received reports of any new rounds of **evictions** within the previous 30 days, reporting only isolated cases of IDP households who were evicted due to difficulty paying rent.

² Libya Inter-Sector Coordination Group and REACH, *Multi-Sector Needs Assessment: Derna*, November 2018, available from <http://bit.ly/2V2QpKz>.

³ *Ibid.*

Food Security

- KIs reported conflicting opinions on whether there had been a change in Derna residents' ability to access enough food over the 30 days prior to data collection. However, **issues with the availability and affordability of core food items were widely acknowledged**, particularly in Bab Tubraq, Dheil el-Wadi, Embakh, and Sheiha.
- As elsewhere in Libya, residents of Derna relied primarily on stores and markets for their food, with own production, fishing, and food aid most frequently reported as alternatives.
- Bakeries reportedly functioned in all mahallas except for **Al-Maghar, where nearly all bakeries had been damaged by the conflict**. Yet bread was not always widely available due to a **shortage of flour**, particularly in Al-Bilad, As-Sahil, Bab Tubraq, Dheil el-Wadi and Sheiha. According to KIs, bread prices in Derna tended to fall between 0.25 and 0.5 Libyan dinars (LYD) per piece, with bread increasingly perceived as unaffordable.

Cash and Markets

- Like bakeries, **markets were functioning in all mahallas of Derna except for Al-Maghar**. Apart from there, all other mahallas witnessed a sharp increase in trade compared to the situation in May 2018, with KIs in all other mahallas reporting that 50-100% of local traders were operating as normal.⁴
- In most mahallas, KIs reported that **residents faced difficulty purchasing core food and non-food items**, due either to a lack of liquidity or to items becoming too expensive. This was specifically the case in Embakh, Al-Maghar, Bab Tubraq, Dheil el-Wadi and Sheiha.
- In addition, **some residents of Embakh reportedly faced issues with physical access to markets**, which were too far away for low-income residents without their own transportation to access easily.
- **Flour and rice** were reported as the items **most frequently unavailable**, the first one having repercussions on the availability of bread (see Food Security). Other items were more widely available, but **meat, fruit, and vegetables** were repeatedly mentioned as **too expensive to afford**.
- During the month prior to data collection, it had reportedly become more challenging to access cash throughout Derna. **A continuing lack of liquidity in the city's banks** made it difficult for residents to withdraw sufficient amounts of money from their accounts. KIs in Embakh and Sheiha in particular reported that this **had led some banks to suspend their operations**.
- Despite these problems, it was clear that **the availability of cash in Derna had improved since May 2018**, when a severe lack of liquidity led most merchants and consumers to switch to

certified cheques, vouchers, and bank transfers as their primary means of payment.⁵ At the time of data collection, hard cash had again become the most widely used modality for transactions.

Health

- **Healthcare facilities were reportedly functional and operational in most of Derna's mahallas**, but were generally limited to basic healthcare services such as diagnostics, dental care and blood transfusions.
- **More complex healthcare services**, such as surgery and maternity care, **were only available in El-Jebilah, Bab Tubraq, and Dheil el-Wadi**, the first two of which host Derna's two main hospitals: Hrish (in El-Jebilah) and Al-Wahda (in Bab Tubraq). Hrish Hospital closed briefly in 2018 due to damage from shelling,⁶ and was subsequently converted to a military hospital, but has since reopened its doors to civilians.⁷
- **Healthcare reportedly remained unavailable in the mahallas of Al-Maghar and 400**, with residents having to travel to other mahallas to receive treatment. According to medical KIs, **robust emergency care remained largely unavailable throughout the city**.
- Medical KIs reported that **conflict had negatively affected the provision of diagnostics, surgery, dental care and antenatal care** across multiple mahallas. This was exacerbated by **continued and severe shortages** of insulin and medications to treat chronic diseases, including high blood pressure, as well as of medical supplies such as antibiotics, eye drops, and syringes.
- **The most needed health care services across Derna**, according to KIs, were emergency care, chronic disease treatments, surgery, and skilled childbirth care.

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

- In most mahallas, the public water network functioned as residents' primary source of drinking water. Yet KIs reported that in practice, **many residents only had access to water from the public network 1-3 days per week**. Other major drinking water sources were, in order of use, water trucking (the primary source in 400 and Al-Maghar), protected wells, and bottled water.
- Water from the public network reportedly had a bad taste in 6 of Derna's 12 mahallas, but KIs did not report any evidence of water-borne illnesses.
- Despite residents' restricted access to the public network, **most KIs deemed the overall water supply to be sufficient, except in El-Fataih**, where drinking water was mainly sourced from protected wells.
- **The waste disposal situation was of serious concern in Derna**. The city's volunteer-driven collection service⁸ had been discontinued, and the municipality only collected waste once per week. This led to large amounts of waste being buried, burned, or dumped in inappropriate spots.

⁴ REACH, *Derna Rapid Situation Overview*, 1 June 2018, available from <http://bit.ly/2LdgVeo>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *'Al-Hareesh Hospital in Derna closes down due to shelling'*, *The Libya Observer*, 7 June 2018.

⁷ Information provided by Libya Humanitarian Access Team, February 2019.

Education

- In comparison to the situation in May 2018,⁹ the education situation in Derna had improved in nearly all mahallas, **with most formal education facilities having reopened**. However, **some schools in Al-Bilad, Al-Maghar, El-Jebilah, and Sheiha remained closed** after having been destroyed, damaged, or otherwise affected by the conflict.
- In Al-Bilad, **some school buildings were reportedly being used for non-educational purposes** and were thus inaccessible to local students.

Protection

- In the mahallas of 400, Al-Bilad and El-Jebilah, KI reports of **safety and security incidents** within the 30 days prior to data collection **appeared to be correlated with the presence of armed group checkpoints**. This is consistent with previous reports of harassment and detention at Derna's checkpoints,¹⁰ as well as with KIs' reports on the risks of transiting through these checkpoints (see Freedom of Movement).
- Protection concerns reported in these mahallas included **arrests, detentions, and family separations**, as well as **verbal and physical harassment**. **Robberies and destruction of property** were also reported in the Old City area, particularly in Al-Bilad and El-Jebilah. According

to KIs, **young men** were the ones most commonly affected by these security incidents, along with people of **certain perceived political or tribal affiliations**.

- In the Old City mahallas of Al-Bilad and Al-Maghar, KIs shared reports of people who had gone missing or been injured within the 30 days prior to data collection, linking these issues to **destroyed dwellings, armed violence and the presence of explosive hazards**.

Priority Needs and Assistance

- **Among Derna's non-displaced population**, the top humanitarian need reported by KIs was **cash**, specifically linked to liquidity in banks. This was followed by **health** (access to healthcare and medicines), **food** (availability of certain products including flour and rice), and **water** (access to the public water network).
- **Among IDPs in Derna**, the primary needs were related to **shelter and NFIs** (including housing, in-home latrines, and core NFIs, specifically furniture, bedding, blankets, and pillows). The other significant needs were identical to those reported by the non-displaced population.
- Overall, KIs reported that **both mixed-modality and purely cash-based interventions would be equally useful** in their mahallas. Only in Dheil el-Wadi did there seem to be a clear preference for cash. This corroborates analysis from the 2018 MSNA, which showed a slight preference for cash-based (49.2%) over mixed-modality interventions (38.1%) in Derna city overall.¹¹

About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions. REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For further information on this document, contact libya@reach-initiative.org.

⁸ REACH, *Derna Rapid Situation Overview*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ 'Libya: Civilians Caught in Tightening Siege', *Human Rights Watch*, 22 February 2019.

¹¹ Libya ISCG and REACH, 2018 MSNA.