

Ar-Raqqa City, Syria - Situation Overview II

6 July 2017

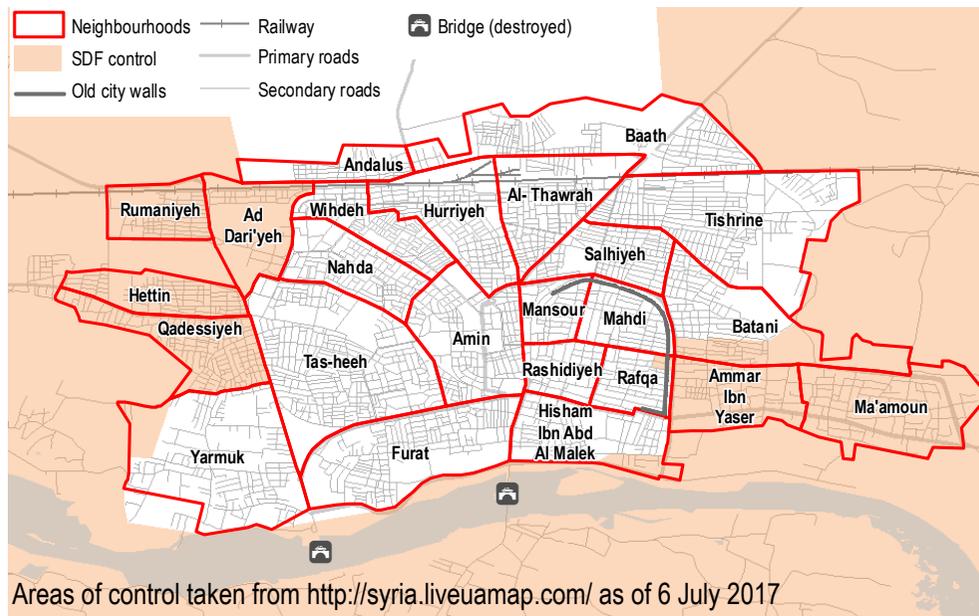
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SUMMARY

On 6 June 2017, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced the start of an offensive aiming at taking control of Ar-Raqqa city from the group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This marked the latest phase of operations to expel ISIL from Ar-Raqqa governorate, and has so far comprised ground advancement that has reached the walls of the old city (see Map 1) supported by airstrikes in and around the city.

This report is the second rapid assessment conducted by REACH to monitor the humanitarian situation in Ar-Raqqa city. Findings are based on primary data collected between 2 and 4 July through qualitative interviews and mapping exercises with 22 Key Informants (KIs) who had left the city since the beginning of June, reporting on all 24 neighbourhoods in Ar-Raqqa.

Map 1: Assessed neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city



Key findings:

- The first REACH rapid assessment, conducted between 19 and 22 June 2017, found that safety, security and protection of civilians were a primary concern. Furthermore, food stocks were running low as conflict blocked supply routes, health services were limited to basic first aid treatment in parts of the city only, access to electricity was impeded by fuel shortages and water was not available at all times. The full assessment can be found [here](#).
- **Over the past two weeks, there has been further significant outflux of people from all neighbourhoods of the city: it is estimated that just 20,000-50,000 people remain which is less than half the population of two weeks ago.** People have primarily been leaving through two primary routes, southwards across the Euphrates river and westwards towards Al-Thawrah sub-district. Populations in certain areas continue to face movement challenges due to a combination of imposed restrictions, and safety and security concerns, though there are increased reports of the use of smugglers to leave the city. It is estimated that 40% of the remaining population will leave in the next two weeks.
- **There has been a continued deterioration in the humanitarian situation across sectors. Access to water (for all purposes including drinking) is now a major issue for the majority of the remaining population.** Although the water network was providing water in parts of the city at the time of the last assessment two weeks ago, it is no longer functioning and KIs reported that almost no one has sufficient water to meet their household needs. Further, KIs reported a rise in the incidence of water borne diseases due to increasing reliance on river water for drinking.
- **Access to food has further decreased due to declining food stocks and the conflict blocking supply routes into the city.** Markets and stores, as well as reliance on previously stored food, remain a common source of food due to a lack of alternatives. However, core food items such as lentils and cooking oil are no longer available across the city and all assessed core items with the exception of bread are reportedly unaffordable for the majority of the population.
- **Protection incidents remain prevalent across Ar-Raqqa city, as does the risk of being caught in direct conflict.** The situation for women and children is particularly severe: women face difficulties moving around the city alone and children are at particular risk from improvised explosive devices (IEDs), landmines and targeted recruitment by armed groups.
- **Health facilities and services are still extremely limited,** with no facilities in most areas and only emergency care and first aid available elsewhere.
- **Access to electricity has also decreased over the past two weeks.** The main network has not been functioning since mid-May and the use of generators has been prevented in the past two weeks by a lack of fuel. Residents are increasingly relying on car batteries or going without electricity entirely.
- **While sanitation issues were not a major issue two weeks ago, they have become increasingly common.** In some areas, digging of tunnels and trenches has destroyed sewage systems, while rats and pests are reportedly prevalent in some neighbourhoods.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of November 2016, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced the start of operations aiming at expelling the group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from Ar-Raqqa governorate. On 6 June 2017, following SDF advancement in the countryside surrounding the city, the campaign entered its latest phase, aiming at taking control of Ar-Raqqa city. The offensive started in the eastern and western neighbourhoods of the city and has currently reached the walls of the old city (see Map 1), with ground fighting in these neighbourhoods supported by airstrikes in and around the city.

Since ISIL takeover, humanitarian access as well as information on the humanitarian situation of civilians living in the city has been extremely limited, due to strict movement restrictions and controls on information flows. To fill these information gaps, REACH conducted a [first rapid assessment](#) between 19 and 22 June 2017. This second assessment aims to monitor and highlight developments over the past two weeks concerning access to food and markets, shelter, NFIs, basic WASH and health services, and the protection situation within the city.

Information was collected through direct qualitative interviews and participatory mapping exercises with 22 Key Informants (KIs) reporting on the neighbourhood they previously resided in. KIs included engineers, teachers, medical professionals and shop owners. KIs reported on all 24 neighbourhoods of the city and should be considered as indicative only.

DISPLACEMENT

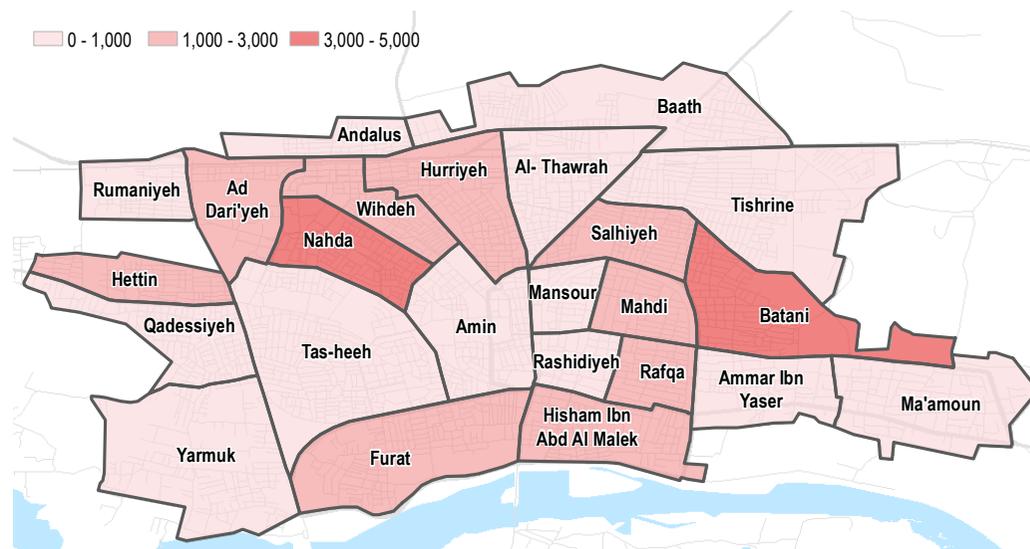
Population remaining in the city

- **There has been a further outflux of population from Ar-Raqqa city, with population halving in the past two weeks.** Population estimations two weeks ago were between 50,000 and 100,000; now, KIs estimate that between 20,000 and 50,000 people remain across the city, primarily due to a lack of resources to pay for movement, to protect assets and due to restrictions imposed in certain areas of the city.

Top five most common reasons for remaining (number of KIs reporting each)¹

Lack of money to pay for movement	13	██████████
Protect assets	12	██████████
Not permitted to leave	10	██████████
Lack of safe routes to elsewhere	5	██████
Too difficult for elderly and children to travel	3	████

Map 2: Estimated remaining population in neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city



Current and intended movement

- **It remains difficult for civilians in certain areas to leave the city due to movement restrictions imposed by ISIL.** There are increased reports of the use of smugglers to flee the city, with total movement costs estimated at 40,000 SYP per person (300 USD²) which includes compensation to smugglers and amounts paid at checkpoints.
- **Primary routes out of the city are reportedly across conflict lines to the west and via boat across the Euphrates River to the south.** KIs also reported additional secondary routes to the north, though it is reportedly challenging to cross the city safely. All routes present significant security risks to fleeing persons, including targeted killings, mines and aerial bombardment.
- **KIs reported that approximately 40% of remaining residents would likely leave the city in the next two weeks.** The most commonly reported push factor for leaving Ar-Raqqa is direct escalation of the conflict, with increased aerial bombardment the most commonly reported trigger factor that would prompt further movement.

Top five most common trigger events that would cause populations to leave (number of KIs reporting each)¹

Increased aerial bombardment	20	██████████
Destruction of home	10	██████████
Advancement of or increased ground incursion	9	██████████
Increased personal safety issues	5	██████
Opening of safe passages to other places	5	██████

1. KIs could select more than one option.

2. Exchange rate used is UN Operational Rates of Exchange, \$1 = 515 SYP.

- Two weeks ago, Ein Issa and Tell Abiad sub-districts in the north of Ar-Raqqa governorate were the most commonly reported intended destinations.³ **Currently, due to the opening of relatively safe routes to the west, KIs reported that Al-Thawrah sub-district is the most common intended destination**, followed by Tell Abiad and Ein Issa sub-districts with smaller numbers intending to head towards Aleppo, Hama and Al-Hasakeh governorates.

WASH

Access to water

- Access to water (for all purposes including cooking, household use and drinking) has sharply decreased as the main water network in Ar-Raqqa city is no longer functioning** due to damage to water pumps from airstrikes as well as a lack of electricity to keep pumps running. Previously, the majority of neighbourhoods received water via the main network every few days. Currently, residents fill water supply gaps via boreholes or by taking water directly from the Euphrates River.
- In contrast to two weeks ago, KIs reported that almost no one has sufficient water to meet their basic needs.** The majority or all residents are resorting to coping strategies to deal with this, including reducing drinking water consumption and drinking river water.

Most common reported source of water (for all purposes) in the last two weeks (number of KIs reporting each)

Water transported from Euphrates river via car or truck		
Neighbourhood boreholes	7	
Water taken directly from the Euphrates river	6	
Bottled water	6	
Surface water	2	
	1	

Top reported statements describing access to water in the last two weeks (number of KIs reporting each)

Almost no one has enough water for their needs		
Less than half of the population has enough water for their needs	19	
About half of the population has enough water for their needs	2	
	1	

Top reported water coping strategies in the last two weeks (number of KIs reporting each)⁴

Modifying hygiene practices	20	
Reducing drinking water consumption	14	
Drinking water normally used for other purposes	9	
Spending money usually spent on other things to buy water	3	

Drinking water quality

- Neighbourhood boreholes are the most common source of drinking water where available**; elsewhere, residents primarily rely on water from the Euphrates river.
- People are increasingly getting sick as they rely more heavily on river water for drinking.** All KIs reported problems with the drinking water in their neighbourhoods.

Most common source of drinking water in the last two weeks (number of KIs reporting each)

Neighbourhood boreholes	11	
Euphrates river	6	
Water trucking	4	

Reported problems with water used for drinking in the last two weeks (number of KIs reporting each)⁴

Water has a bad colour	16	
People get sick after drinking the water	15	
Water tastes bad	12	
Water smells bad	12	

Sanitation

- In the past two weeks, sanitation issues have become common with KIs reporting that in some areas the digging of tunnels and trenches has destroyed sewage systems.** In other neighbourhoods, garbage, rodents and flies are reportedly prevalent.

Reported sanitation issues in the last two weeks (number of KIs reporting each)⁴

Rats and pests contaminating food and people	15	
Garbage in the streets	15	
Sewage flowing on the streets	3	
Flooding in the streets	1	

FOOD AND MARKETS

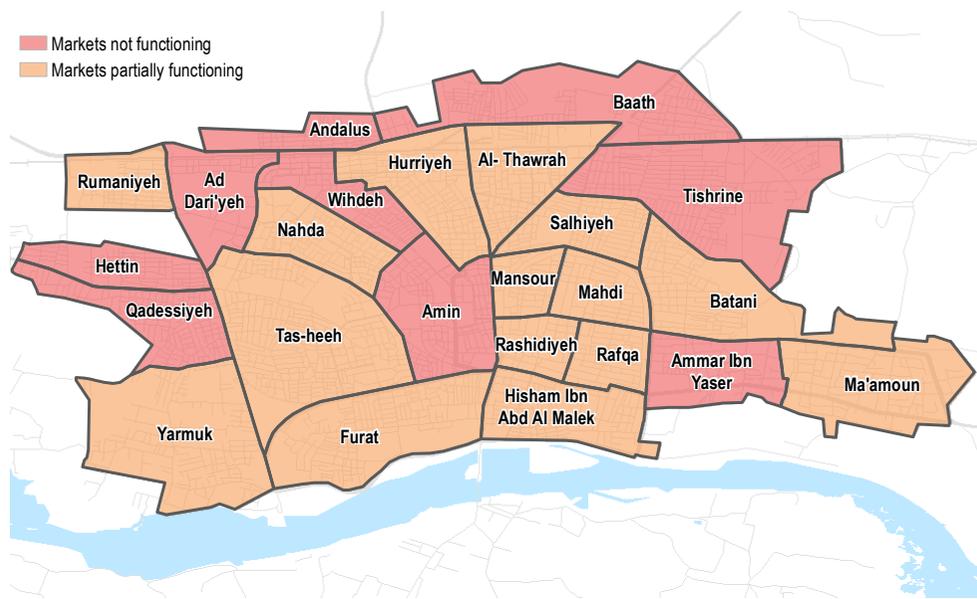
Market functionality and access

- **Market functionality in the city remains severely disrupted.** In at least eight neighbourhoods, markets are not functioning at all due to a lack of residents or insecurity. In other areas, markets are functioning sporadically and with insufficient amounts of food.
- **Residents continue to face challenges to accessing food markets.** When markets are open, dirt berms⁵ and security concerns continue to impede residents' ability to access them.

Top five most common challenges to accessing food markets (number of KIs reporting each)⁶

Markets do not function during times of conflict	14	■
Physical constraints preventing access	9	■
Safety/security concerns at markets	8	■
Lack of transportation to markets	6	■
Safety/security concerns restricting movement	5	■

Map 3: Market functionality in neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city



Access to food

- **Despite limited functionality and access challenges, markets and stores remain a critical source of food for city residents due to a lack of alternative sources.** Populations are also increasingly relying on food stored previously in anticipation of increased conflict.

Top five most common means of accessing food (number of KIs reporting each)⁶

Purchasing from stores and markets	15	■
Relying entirely on food stored from previous weeks for emergencies	15	■
Own production farming	4	■
Borrowing	2	■
Begging / Bartering	1	■

- **In the past two weeks, availability of core food items has drastically decreased across the city.** Core food items such as lentils, cooking oil, meat, chicken and cucumbers are no longer available in many parts of the city.
- **As a result of shortages, prices were increasing across the city.** 8 out of 10 assessed core food items were reported to be increasing in price.
- **Bread is reportedly the only affordable core food item in the city, though it is less available than in previous weeks.** 13 of 22 KIs reported that bakeries are either not functioning or producing insufficient amounts of bread in their neighbourhoods.

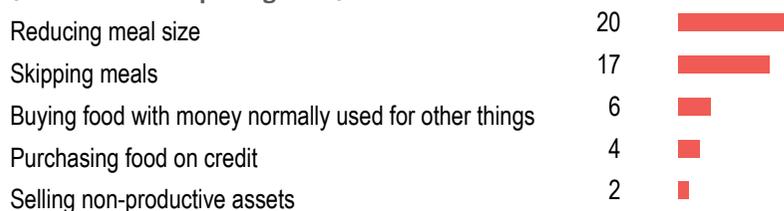
Reported availability, affordability, average price and price trend (last two weeks) of core food items in markets:

	Available	Affordable	Price (SYP)	Price change	
Bread (pack)	✓	✓	150	↑	Generally available / affordable
Rice (kg)	✓	✓	810	↑	
Flour (kg)	✓	✗	240	↑	
Lentils (kg)	✗	✓	510	◇	Some reports of lack of availability / affordability
Cooking Oil (litre)	✗	✗	1,020	◇	Not available / affordable
Sugar (kg)	✓	✓	580	↑	Reported price increase
Meat (kg)	✗	✗	4,700	↑	
Chicken (kg)	✗	✓	1,510	↑	No change in price
Tomatoes (kg)	✓	✓	210	↑	
Cucumbers (kg)	✗	✓	180	↑	Reported price decrease

5. These are large dirt barriers intended to impede vehicle and pedestrian movement.
6. KIs could select more than one option.

- **Residents continue to resort to coping strategies to deal with the reduced access to food.** Prevalence of skipping meals has reportedly increased over the past two weeks.

Top five reported food coping strategies used in the last two weeks (number of KIIs reporting each)⁷



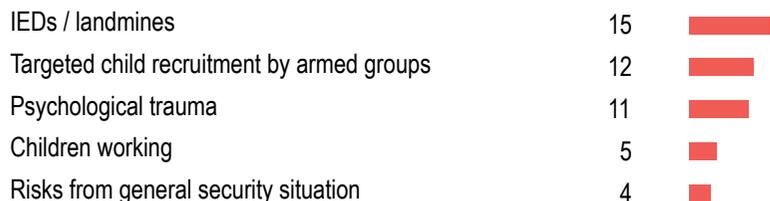
PROTECTION

- **Protection issues and risk of being caught in direct conflict remain prevalent across Ar-Raqqa city,** particularly for women and children. Restrictions on movement and access to services for women are common and they are often unable to move around the city alone. Landmines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and targeted recruitment by armed groups are reportedly a significant danger for children.

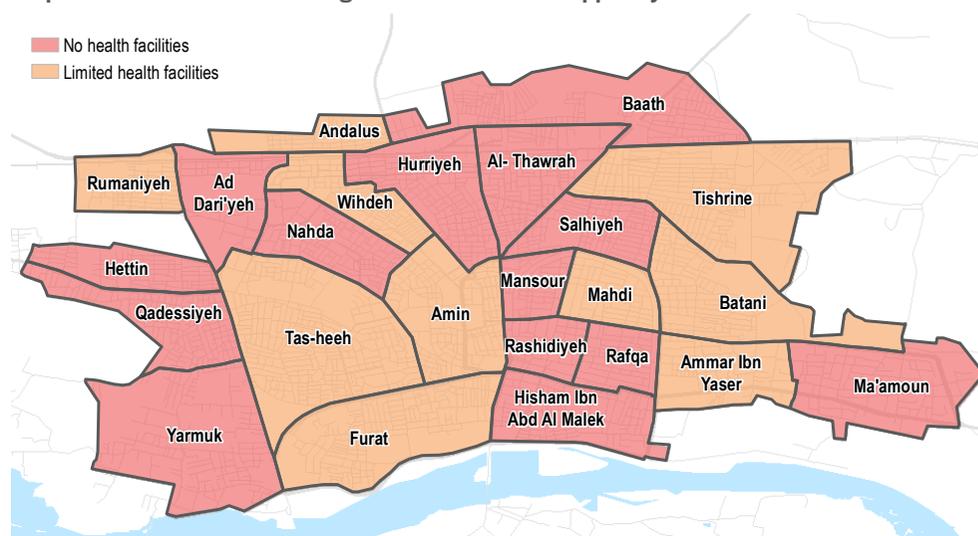
Top three most commonly reported female protection issues (number of KIIs reporting each)⁷



Top three most commonly reported child protection issues (number of KIIs reporting each)⁷



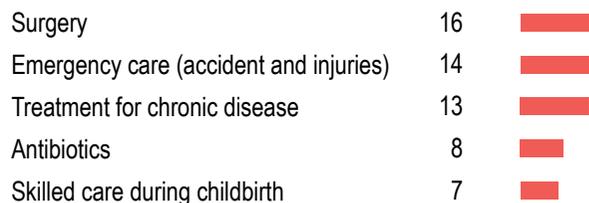
Map 4: Health facilities in neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city



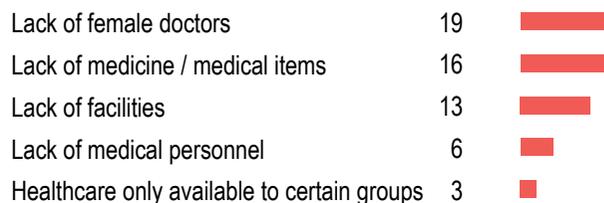
HEALTH

- **Health services and facilities remain extremely limited throughout the city.** Though one hospital is reportedly functioning, it offers only basic emergency first aid and can be difficult for civilians to access. Most areas have no health facilities at all.

Top five most needed health services and items (number of KIIs reporting each)⁷



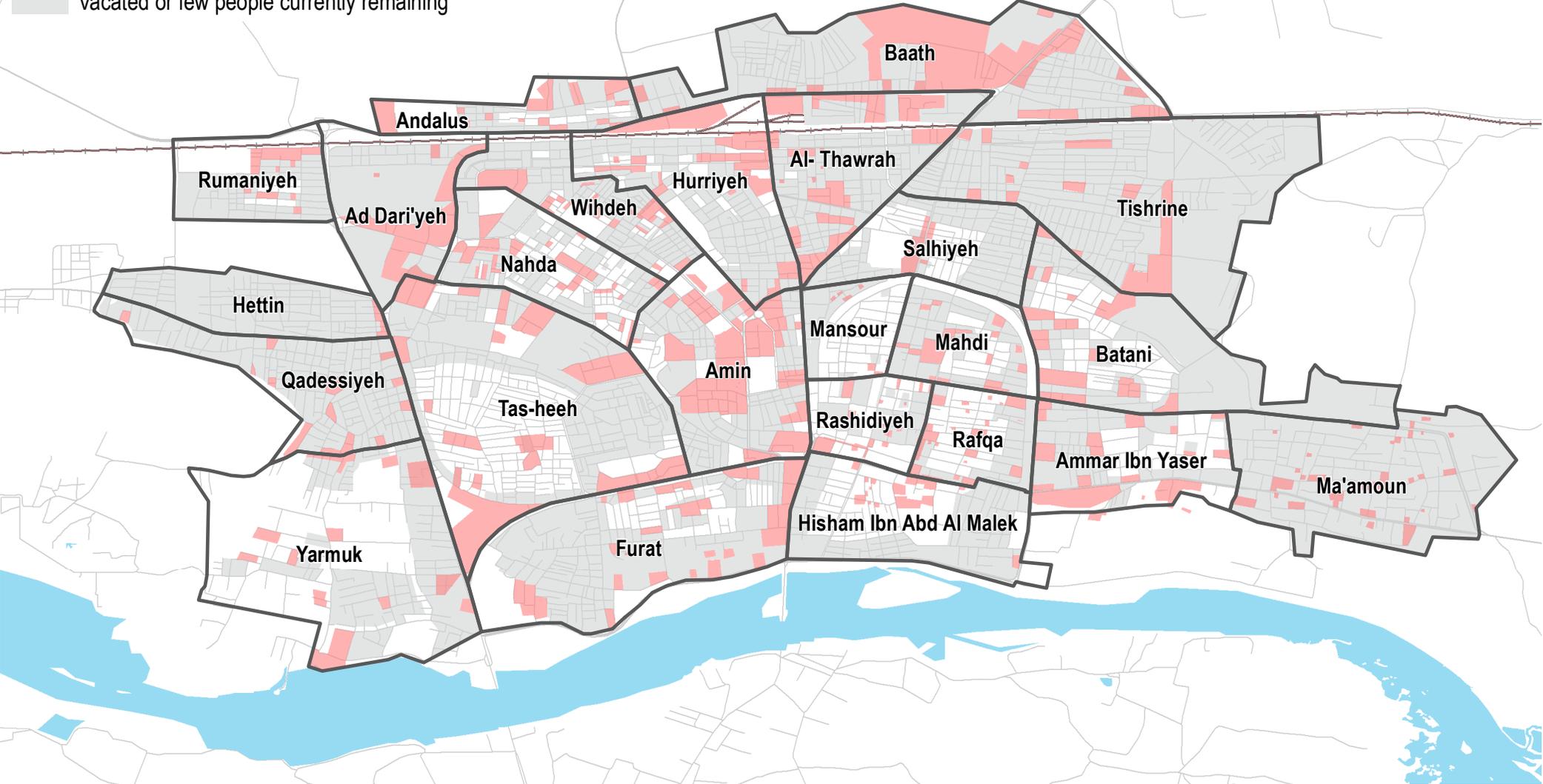
Top five most common barriers to accessing healthcare in the last two weeks (number of KIIs reporting each)⁷



7. KIIs could select more than one option.

Map 5: Damaged and vacated areas in Ar-Raqqa city

- Destroyed or heavily damaged areas
- Vacated or few people currently remaining



SHELTER

Shelter adequacy and damage

- There has been increased damage across the city over the past two weeks, reportedly primarily caused by airstrikes, indirect artillery fire and other conflict-related gunfire.
- However, residents are rarely living in damaged shelters due to the abundance of abandoned homes. The majority of KIs reported that only a few or no households in their neighbourhoods are living in moderately to heavily damaged housing.

NFIs

Electricity

- Ar-Raqqa has been without main network power since fighting at Tabqa Dam stopped electricity flows in mid-May.⁸ Whilst residents previously filled this gap with neighbourhood generators, these are becoming increasingly unavailable as a source of electricity across the city due to a lack of availability and affordability of fuel. Residents are increasingly relying on car batteries or going without electricity entirely.
- Looting is also reducing access to electricity. KIs reported widespread stealing of electrical wires, cables, and transformers across the city.

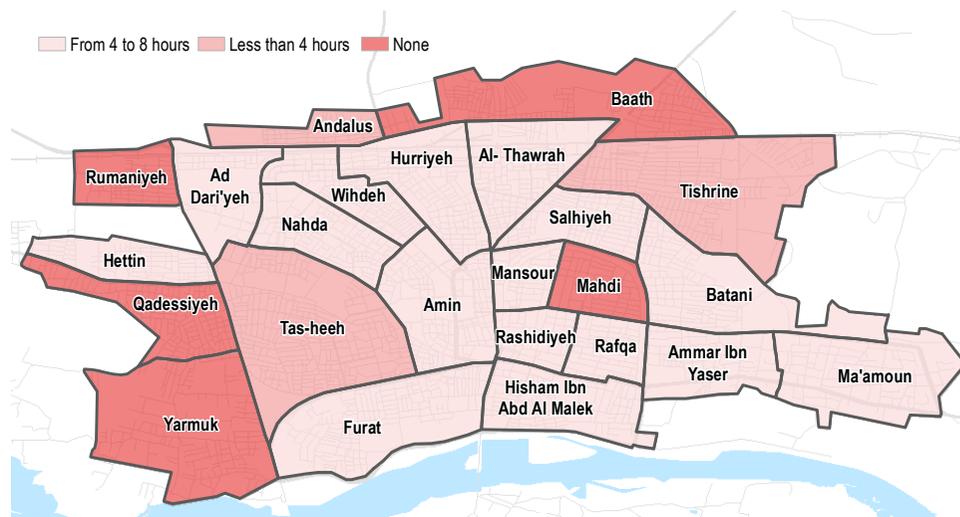
Top reported source of electricity in the last two weeks (number of KIs reporting each)⁹

Generator	8	■
Car batteries	8	■
No source of electricity	5	■
Other batteries	1	■

Top five reported barriers to accessing electricity in the last week (number of KIs reporting each)⁹

Main network not functioning due to damage	15	■
Fuel too expensive	12	■
Generators not available	11	■
Not enough fuel for generators	6	■
Main network not functioning due to disrepair	4	■

Map 6: Access to electricity in Ar-Raqqa city



Core NFI accessibility

- KIs reported that most core non-food items are available in stores. However, prices are reportedly increasing for items such as adult and baby diapers, batteries, cooking fuel, sanitary pads, washing powder, and water containers.

Top five needed items reported as unavailable⁹ (number of KIs reporting each)

Solar lamps	9	■
Torches	9	■
Cooking fuel	7	■
Soap	7	■
Solar panels	6	■

Reported change in price of key non-food items in markets over the last two weeks:

Cooking fuel	↑	Sanitary pads	↑
Water containers	↑	Soap	↗
Batteries	↑	Washing powder	↑
Disposable diapers	↑	Cleaning liquid	↑

↑ Price increase across city
↗ Price increase in some neighbourhoods

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