Secondary Displacement among IDPs from Halfaya

Displacement Profile

October 2015

INTRODUCTION

Having entered its fifth year, the conflict in Syria is estimated to have left a third of the country's population (7.6 million people) internally displaced.[1] The vast majority of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Syria live in non-camp settings, often in towns or villages of varying distance from their areas of origin. Based on data collected for the 2014 Multi Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) over three-quarters of IDPs (76%) lived with host families for free or in rented homes or apartments.[2]

While humanitarian actors have been able to track and acquire a baseline of information about populations living in camps and collective shelters in Syria since the start of the conflict, far less is known about IDPs in non-camp settings, and numerous information gaps persist.[3] This challenge is not unique to Syria, but one that humanitarian actors face globally.[4] Accordingly, finding ways to better assist non-camp populations has also been the subject of overall concern for humanitarian actors.

Communities in Syria hosting IDPs may suffer from the effects of conflict themselves, and in many cases may have also faced challenges related to insufficient livelihoods opportunities, poor housing stock, and limited access to services and utilities before the crisis began. The severity of each of these challenges can vary significantly by location, affecting host communities' ability to accommodate IDPs, and ultimately, their attitudes towards hosting them.

According to interviews with key informants conducted during the MSNA, in most cases host communities are willing to help IDPs, but only for a limited period of time. Only 21% reported being willing to help indefinitely, while 66% percent expressed a willingness to help for a limited period only. At the same time, 12% of key informants reported instances of tensions with IDPs.[5] Similarly, research from Syria and other settings has shown that support for hosting IDPs may decline either as conflict intensifies[6] or as displacement becomes increasingly protracted.[7] Humanitarian organisations may also inadvertently create or exacerbate tensions by providing assistance solely to the displaced while ignoring the needs of local residents.[8]

Information about the causes and the effects of IDP-host community tensions is scarce and while it is possible to conjecture the factors that contribute to tensions across settings, how these factors play out in specific contexts and at a micro-level are less well known. They may nevertheless, be increasingly important in understanding situations of protracted displacement.

In extreme cases, tensions with host communities may prompt further displacement. Overall, at least half of IDPs in Syria have experienced multiple displacements.[9] Whether motivated by violence, the depleted capacities of host communities, or difficulties in accessing livelihoods, each displacement further reduces households' resources.[10] While information on the needs of displaced communities is disparate and incomplete,[11] our understanding of multiple displacements also represents an important information gap.[12]

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Information collected during the course of this assessment sought to shed light on multiple displacement and IDP-host community tensions by analysing some of the factors that may contribute to tensions and multiple displacements in some settings and the relatively successful integration of IDPs into host communities in others. In keeping with the emphasis on providing a micro-level approach to understanding tensions and multiple displacement, two groups from a single area of origin were interviewed.

This case study specifically seeks to understand the intentions and humanitarian needs of two groups of IDPs in northern Syria from Halfaya, a city of approximately 21,000 people in Hama Governorate, who fled to two different locations in Idlib Governorate over the course of a year and a half, starting in April 2012. One group fled to Kafrsajna, a community of about 9,000 people,[13] while another fled to the adjacent village of Maar Tahroma, a community of approximately 7,200 people three kilometres to the northwest. Following a period of protracted tension with the host community in Maar Tahroma, the majority of IDPs who fled there joined IDPs from Halfaya in nearby Kafrsajna.

Displacement from Halfaya to Kafrsajna and Maar Tahroma began in April 2012, in response to increasing conflict in rural

[1] UNHCR Website, "Syrian Arab Republic", 2015 UNHCR country operations profile, Syrian Arab Republic
[2] MSNA Data.
[3] Under the Radar: Internally Displaced Persons in Non-Camp Settings. The Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement
[4] Ibid
[5] Syria Multi-Sector Needs Assessment. REACH, SNAP, and OCHA. 21.
[6] Syria Multi-Sector Needs Assessment; Op., cit.
[7] Syria Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, Op cit., 20; Haider, Huma. Refugee, IDP, and host community radicalization. GSDRC.

[8] Haider, Huma. Refugee, IDP, and host community radicalization. GSDRC.
[9] "2015 UNHCR country operations profile, Syrian Arab Republic." UNHCR.
[10] Ibid., 74
[11] "Syria IDP Figures Analysis." IDMC, 2015.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Population figures based on the latest population figures available, the 2004 Syrian census data

KEY EVENTS

March 2011: Beginning of the conflict in Syria

April 2012: The first large group of IDPs to flee to Kafrasajna and Maar Tahroma as levels of conflict rise in rural Hama

December 2012: An attack on a bakery leaves approximately 200 people in Halfaya dead; displacement accelerates

May 2013 and August 2014: Rounds of heavy aerial bombardment prompt additional displacement

February 2015: IDPs that fled from Maar Tahroma relocate to Kafrasajna following a period of protracted displacement

Hama. On December 23, 2012, dozens of residents of Halfaya were killed in an aerial bombardment on a bakery, with some estimates placing the death toll above 200.[14] This event set into motion subsequent large-scale movements from Halfaya to villages in Hama such as Kafrsajna and Maar Tahroma.

Three substantial subsequent movements of IDPs from Halfaya to Kafrsajna and Maar Tahroma occurred in 2013 and 2014 in response to escalating conflict. In total, approximately 3,500 IDPs left from Halfaya and went to Kafrsajna and 1,000 went to Maar Tahroma over the course of a year and half.

In February 2015, nearly all of the households from Halfaya that had sought refuge in Maar Tahroma left and relocated to Kafrsajna. Although they departed as a community, they were not forced to leave. In total, only approximately 200 individuals, out of the original 1,000 individuals that initially fled to Maar Tahroma, had chosen not to relocate to Kafrsajna at the time the interviews were being conducted.

METHODOLOGY

REACH designed a multi-stage assessment to analyse factors that motivated some households from the same community to seek refuge in two separate locations and their subsequent decisions to stay or leave. Two main elements played a role in site selection and the number of interviews conducted: the large size of both the IDP and returnee communities, and the ability to access both Key Informants (KIs) and individual households for interviews. Triangulation of the data was possible through access to media sources, as well as through verification with other sources in the area.

Data collection was undertaken in two stages. In the first stage, REACH conducted KI interviews with local leaders regarding the dynamics between IDPs and host community members. These interviews used open-ended questions, and were intended to provide an overview of initial key trends and patterns. KIs also provided contact information for individual households that could subsequently be interviewed in the second stage of the assessment. In total, REACH conducted seven KI interviews.

In the second stage, REACH interviewed individual households. These interviews sought to provide a structured approach to understanding dynamics at a household and community level. For example, the reasons why IDPs chose specific communities and subsequently decided to stay or leave were analysed in terms of "pull" and "push" factors – broadly speaking positive or negative circumstances drawing or repelling IDPs to or from a certain location.

Using snowball sampling techniques, the households that were interviewed provided the contact information of other households that could be interviewed. While the IDPs were relatively homogeneous socioeconomically, enumerators were instructed to seek out as broad a cross-section of households as possible. In total REACH conducted 52 household interviews with households from Halfaya: 24 were with households that went to Maar Tahroma and then relocated to Kafrsajna, 17 interviews with households that went to Kafrsajna directly, and 11 interviews with households that fled to Maar Tahroma and remained after February 2015.

IDP POPULATIONS INTERVIEWED

- **Households that fled directly to Kafrasajna**
- **Households that fled to Maar Tahroma and relocated to Kafrasajna in February 2015**
- **Households that remained in Maar Tahroma after February 2015**

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[14] "Dozens killed in air strike on bakery in central Syria." Reuters.

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LIMITATIONS

Although IDPs from Halfaya fled to many different locations, for the purposes of this case study, REACH focused on understanding and comparing the dynamics present in two different locations. Given that the focus of this research was on collecting qualitative information, specifically identifying trends within several specific contexts, REACH did not attempt to interview a larger or statistically significant sample of households.

Information was collected using a questionnaire that was structured around key issues identified during key informant interviews. While potential responses were included, it also provided the opportunity for respondents to provide answers not included in the questionnaire and to elaborate on specific issues. Mobile data collection technology was used to conduct the survey, specifically Android smartphones equipped with the data collection application KoBoCollect. Although focus group discussions may have yielded additional insights or offered an alternative means of collecting information, it was not possible to conduct them due to a number of constraints associated with sampling, and conditions in the field.

Accessibility issues, the stability of the populations being sampled, and the lack of reliable population figures in the communities also informed the purposive sampling approach used for data collection. While special attention was given to identifying a diverse sample of households for interviews, it is likely that certain strata of the population were not interviewed. Because household selection was based on snowball sampling, interviews may have been prone to community bias. REACH enumerators sought to interview households until patterns or trends emerged, but the small sample size, in some settings, was a product of limited population sizes where the interviews took place, as well as differing conditions in the field, which included security constraints as well as challenges identifying IDPs living amongst the host community population.

KEY FINDINGS

HOUSEHOLDS THAT FLED DIRECTLY TO KAFRSAJNA

According to KI interviews, approximately 700 families from Halfaya went to Kafrsajna between April 2012 and August 2014. The first group, which left in April 2012, consisted of 50 households, with larger groups following. A second group of 150 households arrived in December 2012, a third group of 200 households arrived in May 2013, and a fourth group of 300 households arrived in August 2014. Most arrived in waves and with groups of other families. In total,

approximately 3,500 IDPs from Halfaya lived in Kafrsajna at the end of 2014.

IDPs from Halfaya reported being drawn to Kafrsajna for a number of reasons. While many households mentioned that they felt that it was simply not possible to go to other locations, they were more likely to mention positive, "pull" factors that made Kafrsajna seem more attractive than other villages. Security and the ability to access aid were important factors for some households. However respondents also emphasized the role that communities played, especially a community from Halfaya as well as the existence of a supportive host community.

	Factors cited for selecting and remaining in Kafrsajna
Pull	**Security**
	Community from home
	Ability to access aid
	Supportive host community
Push	**Other locations not possible**

Notably, households did not mention housing, livelihoods, or services as factors which affected their decisions. In fact, IDPs reported difficulties in accessing water, electricity, and income-generating opportunities when they first arrived. However finding adequate shelter for the large number of IDPs presented the greatest challenge. Along these lines, most households that moved to Kafrsajna directly changed residence at least once after arriving. For the host community, finding shelter to house increasing numbers of IDPs was also the greatest challenge, and collective shelters were set up until more permanent solutions could be found. Despite the fact that large groups of IDPs continued to arrive through August 2014, most households noted that the average cost of rent had actually gone down over time.

Although it was not frequently mentioned during the interviews one major factor that may have affected households' decisions to stay in Kafrsajna, is the fact that IDPs were eventually able to access livelihood opportunities. The heads of households who went directly to Kafrsajna tended to be agricultural workers, but some held positions in construction, service industries, or worked as day labourers. Of the households interviewed, a majority eventually found work, generally in small shops or as traders; some even reported earning incomes that were higher than before displacement.

Despite initial difficulties in accommodating IDPs, the community's ability to address critical shelter and livelihoods needs of IDPs over time ensured that tensions did not

escalate. According to KI interviews, tensions between host community members and IDPs escalated at times, particularly during specific moments when resources were strained (for example, when bread was scarce), but they quickly dissipated.

IDPS IN MAAR TAHROMA

IDP households from Halfaya arrived in Maar Tahroma in waves at approximately the same times as households sought refuge in Kafrsajna. In total, as many as 1,000 individuals from Halfaya moved to Maar Tahroma Between April 2012 and August 2014. At the time of the interviews, approximately 200 remained with most having left as a group in February 2015.

Households that went to Maar Tahroma, were similar in many ways to those that gone to Kafrsajna. There were three notable differences however between the two groups, both before and after their initial displacement. These being namely, their ability to obtain income generating opportunities, the manner in which they arrived (in groups, rather than individually), and the challenges they faced after arriving.

IDP households that sought refuge in Maar Tahroma reported feeling less positive about their initial choice of location than households that went to Kafrsajna. Households that fled to Maar Tahroma first reported that they chose the village over other because they thought that there were no other options available. For some households, safety and the presence of a community from Halfaya already in the village played a secondary or tertiary role. These sentiments were largely consistent among both those households that relocated to Kafrsajna in February 2015, and those that chose to remain.

Factors cited for leaving Maar Tahroma for Kafrsajna	
Pull	Ability to access services Ability to access aid
Push	**Tensions with the host community** **Inability to access livelihoods** **Inability to access aid** **Insecurity** **Inability to access services**

In contrast to IDPs that fled directly to Kafrsajna, who appeared to flee just as often as individual households as in larger groups of households, all but one of the households that went to Maar Tahroma reported fleeing with other people – typically, family, neighbours or work colleagues. These households tended to remain together, including during and after their subsequent relocation to Kafrsajna.

A broader set of problems confronted IDPs in Maar Tahroma, including limited access to water, electricity, livelihoods, and access to health care. In contrast to Kafrsajna, finding shelter was not a challenge as there were plenty of vacant homes that could accommodate IDPs. Accordingly almost none of the families that moved to Maar Tahroma lived with host families. In contrast to the dynamic in Kafrsajna, many respondents reported that the cost of rent increased over time.

Before the crisis, most IDPs from Halfaya that fled to Maar Tahroma held similar occupations as those that went to Kafrsajna – farmers, service workers, smiths, or tradesmen. Despite the similarities, IDPs that fled to Maar Tahroma were better off on average and tended to report significantly higher pre-crisis incomes. Despite similarities and socioeconomic advantages, at least in terms of income, almost none of the households from Halfaya that went to Maar Tahroma were able to find work. According to KIs, some IDPs from Halfaya were able to find jobs as carpenters, mechanics or smiths while they were in Maar Tahroma, however they represented exceptions to overall trends.

Tensions and Departure

Approximately four-fifths of the IDPs from Halfaya that went to Maar Tahroma left together for Kafrsajna in February 2015. Until they could find accommodation, they stayed with other households from Halfaya already living in Kafrsajna. Those that left cited tensions with the host community as the primary reason for leaving, but limited access to aid, livelihoods, housing, and services were also important factors. Almost all reported choosing Kafrsajna over other locations simply because they felt other locations were not possible.

Despite the existence of tensions, there was no evidence that IDPs that went to Maar Tahroma were forced to leave. The fact that some households stayed also showed that remaining in Maar Tahroma was still an option, and households that did stay in Tahroma reported experiencing similar tensions as households that left.

Small disputes regarded rising crime rates, the costs of goods and services, and access to aid led to the rise in tensions over time. Perceptions of a spike in crime, particularly theft, were common among IDPs as well as host community members. When crimes such as theft occurred, host community members accused IDPs of being the perpetrators, while IDPs blamed the local population, adding that authorities failed to prosecute crimes committed by local residents.

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Map 1 – IDP displacement routes from Halfaya to Maar Tahroma and Kafrsajna
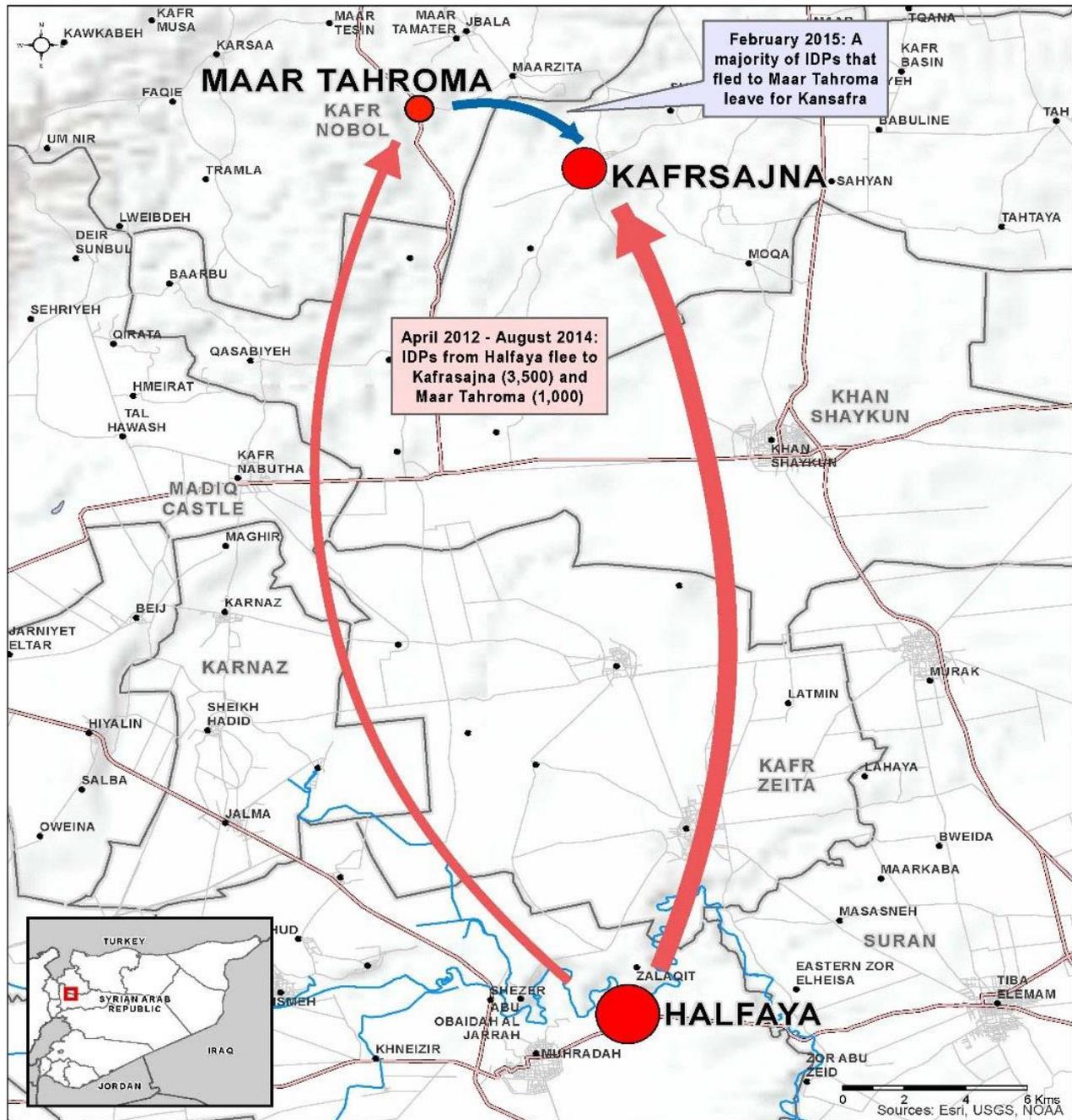
In addition to crime, tensions escalated as the IDPs and host community members competed with one another for resources and humanitarian aid. Short-term food and housing shortages may have fed into perceptions of economic exploitation, with IDP households reporting that they felt local landlords and storeowners overcharged them when goods were no longer scarce. IDPs also reported that they felt that host community members monopolized humanitarian assistance that was intended for all residents.

As discussed in the previous section, IDPs in Maar Tahroma struggled to access affordable shelter and livelihoods.

However, it is unclear whether the move to Kafrsajna allowed IDPs to better meet their basic needs, particularly livelihoods and shelter.

According to households interviewed, these factors were not pull factors that drew them to Kafrsajna. Most households that left Maar Tahroma immediately found shelter with other families from Halfaya in shared, rented accommodation. While this offered households an opportunity to save money, it stands in contrast to households' situations in Maar Tahroma, where many families lived independently.

	Factors cited for remaining in Maar Tahroma
Pull	Shelter
	Security
Push	**Other locations not possible**

None of the households that moved to Kafrsajna noted improvements with regard to income or employment. While income-generating opportunities were the most frequently mentioned need of IDPs in Maar Tahroma and almost all households were unemployed, none that moved reported finding work in Kafrsajna either. Still the fact that other IDPs in Kafrsajna appeared to have found work and housing may have made it seem attractive in comparison with conditions in Maar Tahroma.

	Factors cited choosing Kafrsajna after leaving Maar Tahroma
Pull	**Community from home**
	Ability to access livelihoods
	Security
Push	**Other locations not possible**

CONCLUSION

IDPs from Halfaya that left Maar Tahroma departed due to tensions with the host community, rising rents, and a failure to obtain livelihood opportunities. They joined IDPs from their area of origin that had been more successful by many measures, having built strong relationships with the local host community, finding affordable accommodations, and securing income-generating opportunities.

Understanding the root of some of these differences, particularly tensions, may be more difficult, however. Based on information collected, there were some differences between IDP communities in Maar Tahroma and Kafrsajna that could have played a role in shaping relationships with the host community. Social cohesion may have been one factor. For example, Households that went directly to Kafrsajna were less likely to have arrived and stayed in groups of other IDPs whereas households that fled to Maar Tahroma arrived with other households and tended to stay together. Social cohesion amongst IDPs in Maar Tahroma may have helped IDPs, but it may have also made them more reliant on their own groups and potentially, less inclined to participate in the host community.

It is also likely that Maar Tahroma may have had limited resources before the crisis, although this does not appear as a factor in KI or household interviews.

Initially, one advantage of comparing IDPs in Kafrsajna and Maar Tahroma was that the villages, due to their proximity, size, and economic base were quite similar. This suggests that differences within the IDP communities may have played a more important role. The fact that IDPs who went to Maar Tahroma tended to report relatively higher pre-crisis incomes may have also exacerbated tensions with host community members feeling that IDPs had the means to contribute more for rent and goods and services, or that they did not need aid.

For IDPs as well as the host community, the consequences of missed opportunities and the diminished resources associated with living in Maar Tahroma may have longer-term consequences for their overall wellbeing and their ability to withstand further shocks. An apparent lack of effective dispute resolution mechanisms likely exacerbated problems that might have been addressed through greater dialogue and mediation. Regardless of the root causes of tensions, cases such as this one indicate a need for mechanisms to address the needs of displaced populations and host communities alike.

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