

Situation Overview: Displacement in Northern Aleppo Governorate towards A'zaz

21 April 2016

REACH Informing
more effective
humanitarian action

Summary

Since 31 January 2016, ongoing conflict in northern Aleppo Governorate has resulted in complex displacement in the area between Aleppo City to the south and the border with Turkey to the north.

Starting on 13 April, escalating conflict concentrated around the al-Rai border crossing prompted the displacement of approximately 31,000 individuals from nearby camps and villages along the border.¹ Many of these individuals had been previously displaced from elsewhere in northern Aleppo Governorate only two months earlier and represent a particularly vulnerable population.

By 14 April, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that 35,989 individuals had initially fled from areas around Zayzafun village and Ekkdeh camp in Suran subdistrict.² The vast majority of IDPs traveled towards the west and southwest, primarily towards A'zaz and Afrin.³ In addition, some 500-1000 individuals had reportedly traveled to the east or southeast.

Building upon previous assessments of displacement in Northern Aleppo Governorate, REACH collected information from twelve communities in A'zaz Subdistrict in order to understand the priority needs, intentions

and displacement trends of IDPs arriving in these areas. It is important to note that this assessment concentrates primarily on areas which have received new IDPs. Due to ongoing insecurity, key informants were largely unable to access communities from which people had reportedly left, and some others where IDPs have arrived. The humanitarian situation and conditions in these areas may therefore be different to that presented here.

Findings presented in this document are drawn from primary data collected through key informants between 15 and 18 April 2016, triangulated with data from CCCM Cluster and its partners, other sources of secondary data and social media. The 26 key informants interviewed for this study come from communities with the highest numbers of new arrivals and include local relief workers, local council members, teachers, nurses, camp administrators, local authorities and traders.

Initial findings suggest that approximately 75% of the recently displaced population will remain for at least two weeks as they assess the security situation and determine whether return is feasible. However, in the immediate term, the situation remains fluid with many families facing challenges finding

adequate shelter and others moving within and between communities in search of better shelter.

Displacement

According to the CCCM Cluster, Al Hareem and surrounding camps (9,969 residents prior to April 13, 2016), Ekkdeh camp (7,763 residents), and Shamarik camps (population unavailable) had been completely evacuated by April 15, 2016. In addition, Bab al Iman (7,616 residents) and Sharmarin-Qatari (5,864 residents) were almost empty and Bab al Nour (12,092 residents) had only 20% of its former population remaining.

During the same period, the camps of Sujjo, Bab al Salame, al Resala, and al Rayan have all reportedly increased in population. As in February following large scale displacement from Northern Aleppo Governorate, IDPs have concentrated in settlements near the border with Turkey, motivated by perceptions of relative security.

Escalating conflict and insecurity, both anticipated and in response to actual events, were reported as the main drivers for displacement. Key informants in communities receiving IDPs reported that a large proportion of new arrivals had also been displaced in February 2016—in all assessed locations, over 50% of new arrivals had



Map 1: Location of new displacement in Northern Aleppo Governorate

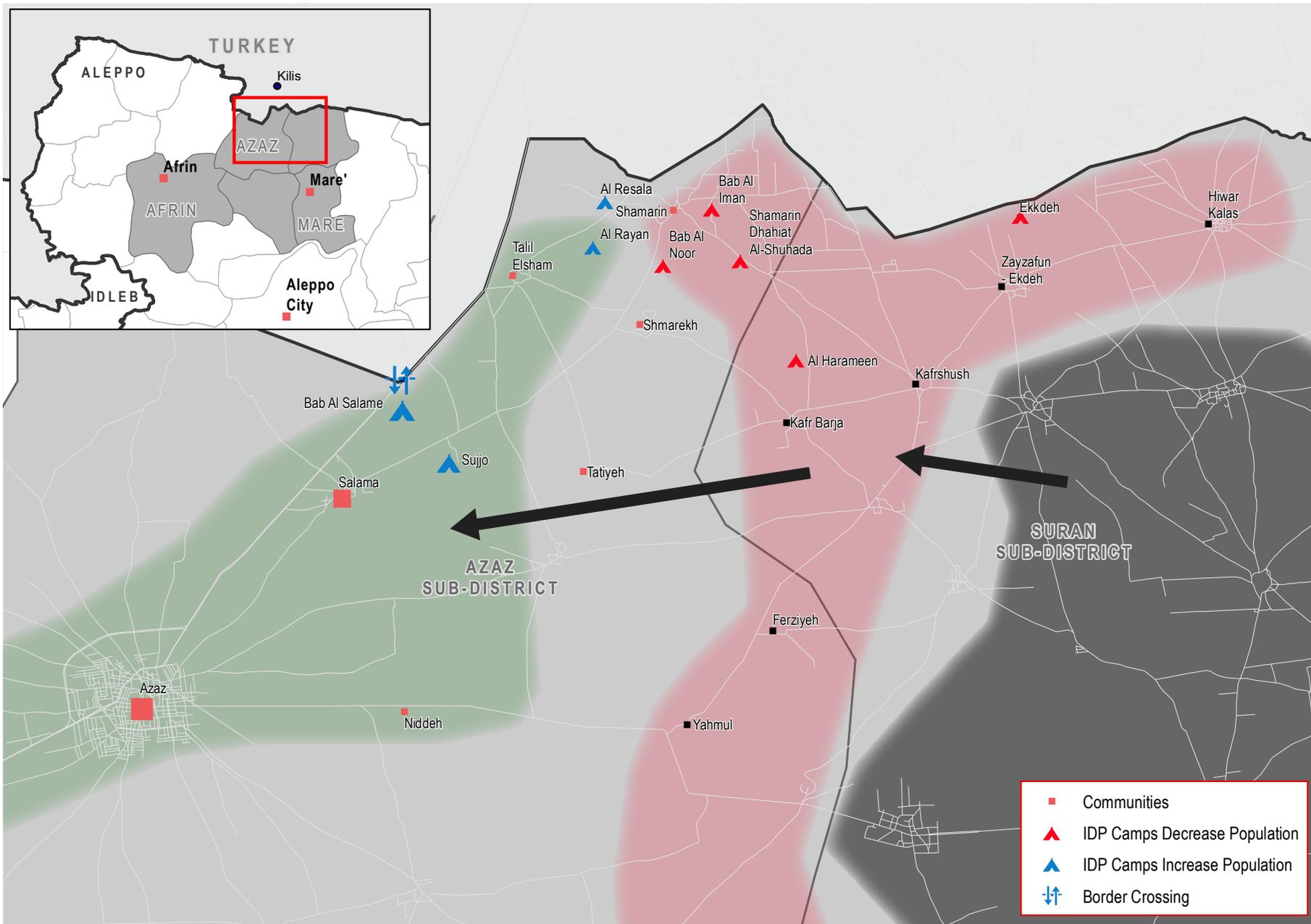
experienced multiple displacement, ranging from 50% of arrivals in Shamarin (50%) to 90% in A'zaz City.

In some cases, displaced populations returned to areas they had fled in February, either due to the lack of availability of other options, or because they perceived these areas as relatively safer given the changing conflict dynamics. One such example an estimated 6,000 IDPs who reportedly returned to the village of Mare', despite the threat of conflict.⁴

The most recent wave of displacement occurred much more quickly than witnessed February and concerned largely camp populations in rural areas. As a result, key informants reported that local authorities were largely unable to assist evacuations.

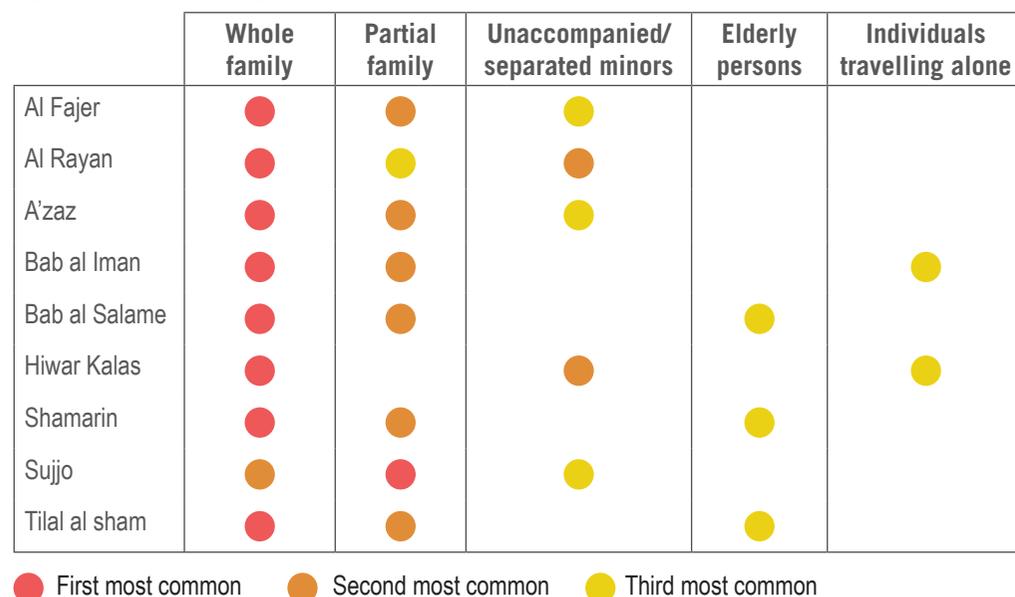
1. CCCM data
2. OCHA. Aleppo Flash Update.

3. Ibid
4. OCHA. Aleppo Flash Update.



Map 2: Reported displacement trends from West to East, towards A'zaz and the border with Turkey

Figure 1: Most common reported profile of IDPs arriving in assessed communities



Instead, households traveled by foot, or paid between 5-15 USD per person for private transportation, including cars, tractors and trucks. Given the short time frame and limited resources available for evacuation, many residents had no option but to travel by foot.

In most cases, key informants reported that displaced populations consisted of entire families of five to seven people who travelled in large groups of six to ten families. Across all locations it was also commonly reported that married women arrived with their children, having left their husbands behind. A significant number of cases of separated or unaccompanied minors were also reported, as shown in figure 1, above.

Intentions

Across the communities assessed, it is estimated that approximately 75% of IDPs will remain for at least two weeks and potentially longer. Some variations were observed across assessed communities, with 70% of IDPs reportedly intending to remain in Azaz for at least two weeks, compared to 100% of those in Shamarin.

Most families are reportedly keen to assess the security situation before they commit to returning to their previous camps and villages. In addition to a lack of security in their previous locations, other obstacles to return include damaged shelters and lack of services, both requiring time and resources to address.

However, anecdotal evidence suggests that only limited numbers of people have already returned to their pre-displacement location due to concerns over safety.

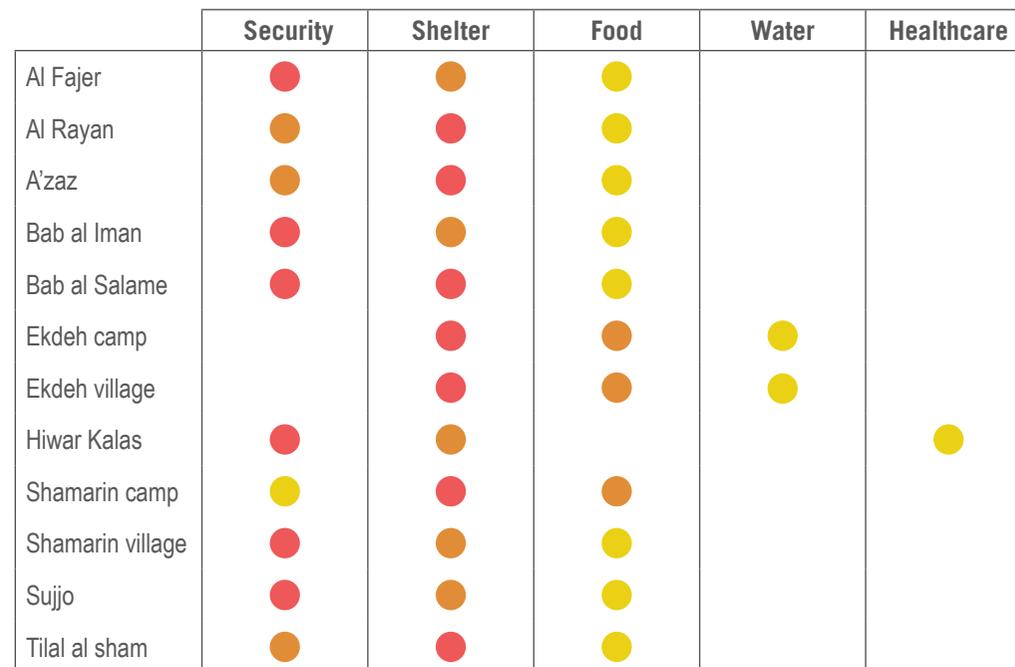
Camps close to the Turkish border were once perceived as a staging point from which to eventually cross to Turkey,⁵ however, with the now border closed, key informants report that IDPs no longer view the potential to cross as a main pull factor. Instead, findings suggest that the relative security of these areas is now the primary pull factor for IDPs coming to these areas. In addition, these areas offer access to aid and other services, both factors which are likely to encourage people to stay in their current location.

Humanitarian Needs

The most commonly reported need for recently displaced populations was safety and security, as shown in Figure 2. Shelter was the next most commonly reported, reflecting the fact that many households are still living in temporary collective shelters, or sleeping with no shelter in open air settlements or camps.

In addition, key informants consistently reported that IDPs do not have sufficient food. While markets are still functioning throughout the areas assessed and displaced populations are primarily relying on food they purchase themselves, price spikes suggest that sufficient amounts of food are

Figure 2: Primary reported needs of new IDP arrivals



5. REACH, Rapid Assessment of Displacement from Northern Aleppo Governorate, February 2016.

likely out of reach or unaffordable to most of the population. Accordingly, expense was the most commonly reported obstacle to accessing food, followed by a lack of cooking fuel and a lack of cooking facilities. Insufficient quantities of food, poor quality food, as well as a lack of utensils were less commonly cited as food challenges.

In approximately half of assessed areas, IDPs were reportedly receiving aid in the form of food baskets, as shown in Figure 3, below. Despite this, the quantity of food provided was not reported to be adequate to meet needs.

Since most newly arriving IDPs have been displaced previously, their resources and

Figure 3: Communities where food assistance was reported among top three sources of food

	Food assistance
Al Fajer	✓
Al Rayan	✗
A'zaz	✗
Bab al Iman	✓
Bab al Salame	✗
Ekdeh camp	✓
Ekdeh village	✓
Hiwar Kalas	✗
Shamarin camp	✓
Shamarin village	✗
Sujjo	✗
Tilal al sham	✓

coping mechanisms have been eroded. Most commonly, IDPs were daily labourers, farmers, and small traders. Deprived of their livelihood since displacement, most were already dependent on assistance as their primary source of income and as a result have limited access to cash with which to purchase food or pay for shelter. **In Tilal al Sham camp and in informal settlements outside of A'zaz City, begging was reported as the primary means of obtaining food**, although this was not common in other assessed communities.

IDPs' vulnerability has been compounded by rising food prices, with all assessed communities reporting price increases over the past week due to increasing demand. In spite of this however, no shortages were noted for rice, bulgur, flour, or fuel, although shortages of sugar and cooking oil were reported around Bab al Salame camp.

In all areas assessed, key informants reported that bread is available and bakeries are functioning. In most cases, recently displaced populations are able to obtain bread for free from NGOs or local relief actors. In some areas, particularly A'zaz city, there are concerns that supplies needed to produce bread, particularly flour and fuel, will run out in the next 7-10 days due to increasing demand.

Water is generally provided by trucking services or obtained at closed wells and was reported as sufficient to meet IDPs' needs across all areas assessed. At a household level, IDPs have been accessing water from large tanks used by multiple families (if living in

a collective shelter, for example) and in some cases, have brought water containers with them as they fled.

Shelter

Recently displaced households have struggled to find adequate shelter or to find better shelter conditions, although shelter conditions varied widely between assessed locations. Upon arrival, many IDP households reportedly slept in farms, fields, under trees or in vehicles. By the time of assessment, some families had moved to collective shelters or to tents, most commonly seeking refuge in informal settlements close to existing camps. Others have moved to collective shelters housed in mosques and schools, particularly in A'zaz City, but their capacity is limited and households are expected to depart within a fixed period of time, generally two weeks. **However, small numbers of IDPs reportedly remained with no shelter at all at the time of assessment.**

Aside from a lack of access to shelter of any kind, both informal settlements and collective shelters were commonly reported to be overcrowded. Despite the fact that IDPs brought only limited possessions with them as they fled—typically clothes and blankets—NFIs were not named as a top priority need in any of the locations assessed.

In recent days, other IDPs that were reportedly living in tents or collective shelters prior to 13 April are reported to have moved to unfinished buildings or rented accommodation,

causing movement both within and between communities in the area. In recent years, A'zaz has seen considerable outward displacement, meaning that accommodation is available in town, albeit at a price too high for new IDPs to afford.

Conclusion

The escalation of conflict in northern Aleppo Governorate has led to the displacement of approximately 36,000 people. The vast majority of new arrivals have experienced multiple displacement, having first left their homes in Northern Aleppo Governorate as a result of escalating conflict in February 2016. As a result, many have few resources with which to pay for food and shelter in their current location, and are reliant on a variety of coping mechanisms which are likely to further increase their vulnerability in the longer term.

Such a large influx of new arrivals places a significant burden on both host communities and humanitarian actors, who are still responding to the needs of those displaced in February. While the majority of IDPs reported the intention to return after two weeks, the likelihood of continued insecurity means that many are likely to stay in their current locations, where they require urgent assistance to meet their immediate needs.

Shelter assistance should be considered a priority in areas experiencing inward displacement, where large numbers of people are currently living in inadequate conditions. Access to shelter has also

been seen to affect movement within and between assessed communities, causing the caseload of displaced individuals to remain fluid. In addition, inadequate shelter in IDPs' previous location—often due to conflict related damage—was also reported as a major barrier to return and strategies should be considered to address this in the medium term.

So far, food shortages due to increased demand or disrupted supply chains do not appear to have had a severe impact on people's ability to access food. With markets still functioning, most households have been able to meet some basic food needs through a combination of food assistance and cash. However, the combination of rising prices and limited resources, conditions could have a severe adverse effect on food security in the near future.

REACH will continue to monitor the displacement of populations throughout Aleppo Governorate, in order to provide updated information related to displacement, needs and access to humanitarian assistance.

About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. All REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information, you can write to our global office: geneva@reach-initiative.org.

Visit www.reach-initiative.org and follow us @REACH_info.