

REACH Situation Overview: Needs Assessment Quneitra Governorate, Syria

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Conflict across Dar'a governorate, southern Syria, has intensified significantly in recent weeks. As a result, large numbers of civilians have fled from conflict-affected communities to relatively safer areas, both in Dar'a Governorate and elsewhere. While exact numbers of affected people have not been confirmed, OCHA estimates that more than 43,000 people had been displaced as of 24 February.^{1,32}

In recent weeks, large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been arriving in Quneitra governorate, as well as moving south towards the border with Jordan and to other unaffected communities within Dar'a governorate itself.^{1,3} Communities assessed in this report are Khan Arnaba, Rafid, Sayda, Baath, Nabe Elsakher, Beir Ajam, Mashara, Sweisa and Breiqa (see Map 1).

On 22-25 February REACH conducted a rapid assessment of displaced populations recently arrived in the east of Quneitra governorate, in order to understand displacement to date, available services and priority needs of the displaced population. Information presented in this document was drawn from qualitative interviews with 22 key informants in nine communities in Quneitra. Key informants included teachers, nurses, IDPs, local authorities, self-employed and activists.

Assessed communities were selected based on displacement patterns previously reported by populations leaving conflict-affected communities in Dar'a.⁴ However, it was not possible to assess all affected communities, due to inability to obtain information from KIs during the timeframe of the assessment, and difficulties communicating with KIs due to network coverage within their communities. Therefore, findings in this document are specific to communities assessed and should be considered indicative, rather than generalisable across communities.

Key Findings

All communities assessed reported that recently displaced populations had arrived within the last two weeks. As shown on map 2, the number of new arrivals varied considerably by community, ranging from an estimated 5000–6000 in Beir Ajam, to 135–150 in Sayda.

Almost one in three new arrivals had already been displaced twice or more. These IDPs most commonly reported having moved three or four times since leaving home. Around two thirds, 69%, had been displaced for the first time.

Newly displaced households typically arrived

as families (average of 5 people), travelling in small groups of between 2 and 9 households. On average, 36% of newly arrived populations were children under the age of 18 years, however this figure ranged between 65% reported in Kahn Arnaba to 20% in Sweisa. In all assessed communities, newly displaced households also commonly included elderly people.

Many of those displaced were forced to flee at short notice and were unable to pack or carry numerous belongings. Most commonly it was reported displaced populations brought with them winter clothing and blankets, and some food items where possible. Among the arriving populations, the most common sources of income prior to displacement were agriculture, trade and remittances from outside of Syria.

Routes taken by the recently displaced varied depending on starting location, however **all IDPs originated from conflict-affected communities in Dar'a governorate and moved west into Quneitra.** Selected routes were chosen based on perceived safety and security. Some IDPs reported using agricultural roads, while others reported using main roads to avoid landmines and potential theft on smaller routes. Private cars and tractors were commonly used to travel, while some arrivals reported walking to their destinations.

The average cost of travel was estimated to be 3000 SYP (USD \$9) per person and 25,000 SYP (USD \$78) per family, ranging from



Map 1: Location of assessed areas in Quneitra Governorate, Syria

10,000 SYP (USD \$34) to 75,000 SYP (USD \$22) depending on location.

In all communities assessed, people received assistance from local authorities in the form of advice on the safest routes to take and the provision of assistance such as food, shelter, water and transport. During the last two weeks, unexploded ordinance devices were reported in the communities of Khan Arnaba, Sweisa and Breiqa, however reportedly, specialists were able to remove them in Sweisa and Breiqa.

Push factors

In all communities assessed, it was reported that the primary reason IDPs left their areas of origin was due to the recent escalation of

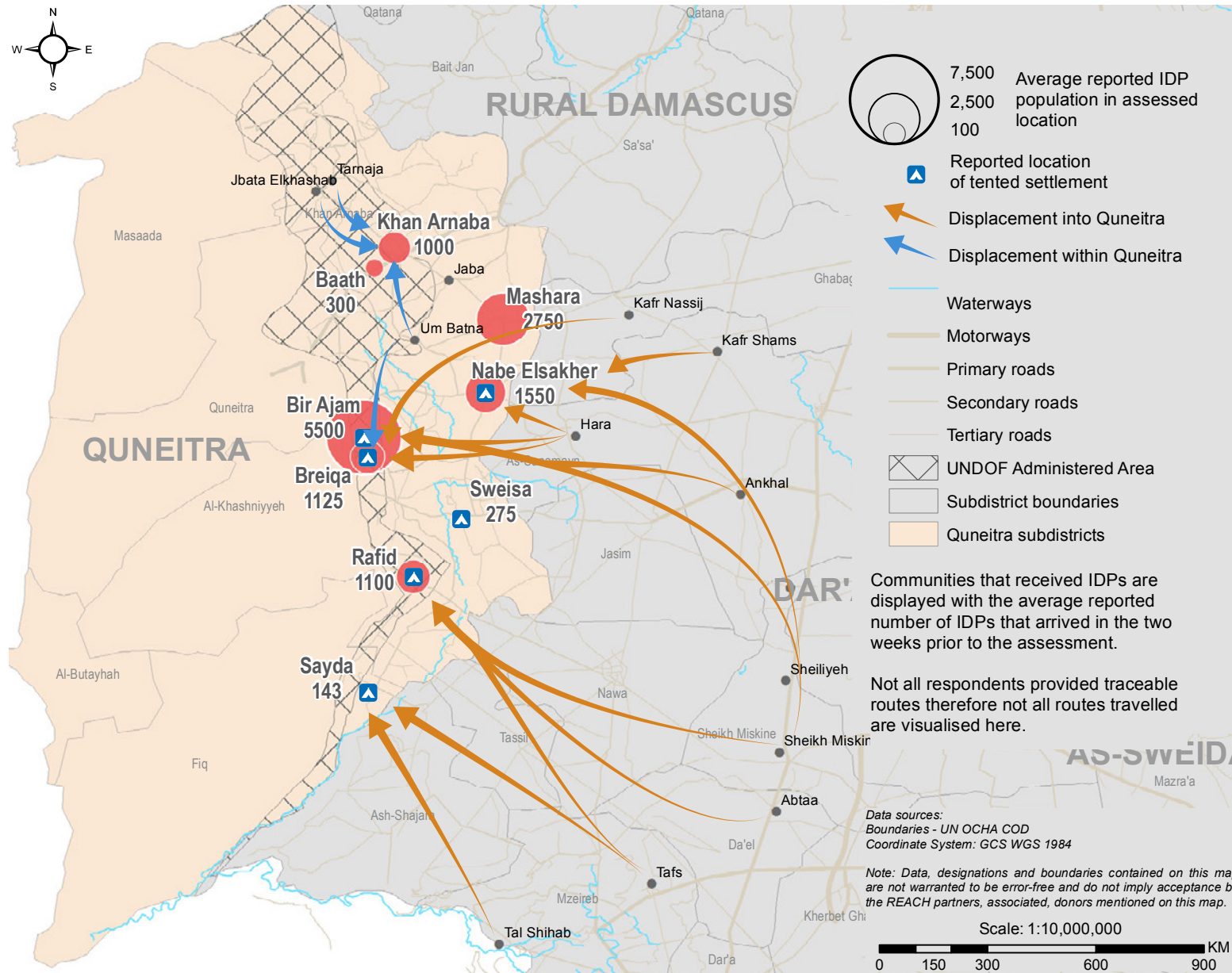
¹ UNHCR. 'Flash Update on Aleppo, Idlib and Dar'a'. February 24, 2016

² OCHA (ISWG). 'Displacement since Sheikh Miskine Offensive: Humanitarian Response Update'. February 14, 2016

³ UNHCR. 'Flash Update on Aleppo, Idlib and Dar'a'. February 14, 2016.

⁴ REACH. 'Situation Overview: Displacement from Dar'a Governorate, Syria' 18 February, 2016

Map 2: Reported displacement routes and IDP caseload in assessed communities



conflict, whether reactively due to conflict in the direct proximity, or in anticipation of increasing conflict. Secondary and tertiary push factors were also commonly reported across all communities, with IDPs citing a lack of livelihoods and access to basic needs (food, shelter and healthcare) in their areas of origin.

The majority of KIIs reported that IDPs left after basic infrastructure was destroyed as a result of recent fighting. A minority of communities reported that the presence of direct conflict had triggered outward movement.

Pull factors

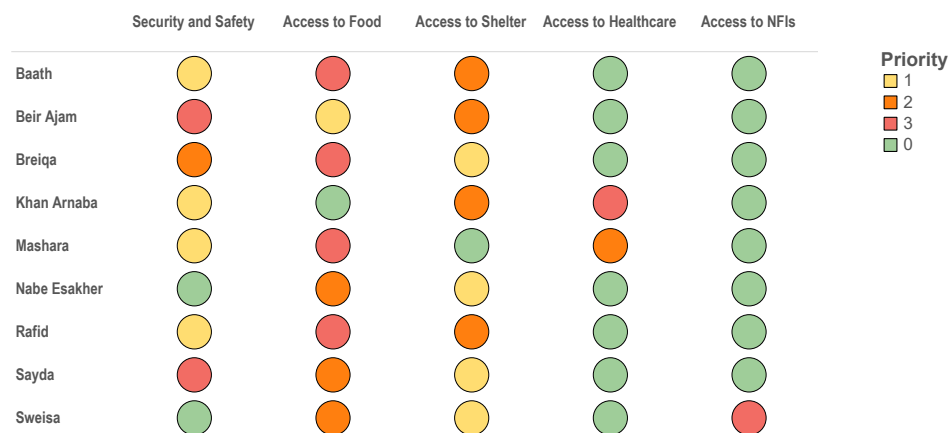
Reported pull factors were similar across assessed communities. All KIIs reported that the absence of conflict and feeling of relative safety and security were reasons for selecting their destination location. **Proximity to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) administered area was an important factor for IDPs choosing to come to Quneitra governorate:** KIIs in the majority of villages (Sayda, Beir Ajam, Nabe Elsakher and Breiqa) reported that UNDOF presence led these communities to be perceived as more secure than others in Dar'a governorate.

The majority of assessed communities also reported that access to food, shelter, employment and education as pull factors.

Intentions

An estimated average of 82% of those recently displaced intend to stay in their current location in the short-term (this varies from 60% in Baath to 100% in Breiqa). IDPs reportedly perceive

Figure 1: Reported priority needs of IDPs, by community



that these locations as safer as other areas and are likely to remain so. In addition, access to employment and shelter were commonly reported reasons for intending to remain.

The amount of time people will stay is highly dependent upon the evolving conflict. **In the majority of communities, it was reported that people would be willing to return home in as little as one month, if conflict in their area of displacement were to subside.**

However, if the situation does not improve, some IDPs in all communities apart from Breiqa would reportedly leave for other locations. Estimates for the number who would leave range from 15% of IDPs in Beir Ajam, Sayda and Nabe Elsakher to 40% of those in Baath. In all of these communities, IDPs reported the same intended locations: either camps along the Jordanian border, or travel to Turkey.

For IDPs in Khan Arnaba, Rafid, Sweisa and Nabe Elsakher, camps represented their preferred destination; while in Sayda, Baath and Mashara, travel to Turkey was a more commonly reported option. Perceived security, access to food, shelter, employment, assistance, and options of onward movement to Europe were all reported as factors affecting the decision to travel to these locations.

Priority Needs

Safety and security was the highest ranked priority short-term need for assessed IDP populations across nearly all assessed communities. In order of priority, these were followed by food items, shelter and healthcare (see Figure 1).

IDPs reported similar priority needs across communities: food, medicine, baby formula, heaters and fuel. NFIs such as mattresses,

cooking equipment, winter clothing and blankets were commonly reported as needed but unavailable across all assessed communities. Tents were reportedly needed but unavailable in Sweisa, Rafid, Beir Ajam and Nabe Elsakher.

Food Security

While displaced populations were able to purchase food in all assessed communities, IDPs reported problems doing so in the majority of communities. Reported problems include limited availability of some items in markets, particularly cooking oil. Distributions from aid actors in Baath, Rafid and Mashara were reported to be common sources of food for IDPs, while assistance from host communities was reported in all locations assessed.

Rice, bulgur, bread and flour were reportedly available across assessed locations. However, the majority of communities reported price increases in recent weeks, which were making some of these staples more difficult to access.

Particular challenges were reported in relation to access to bread, which was only accessed every day in a minority of communities, Khan Arnaba and Sayda. In addition to rising prices, a lack of electricity or fuel were commonly reported barriers to accessing bread on a daily, together with a lack of public and private bakeries.

Shelter

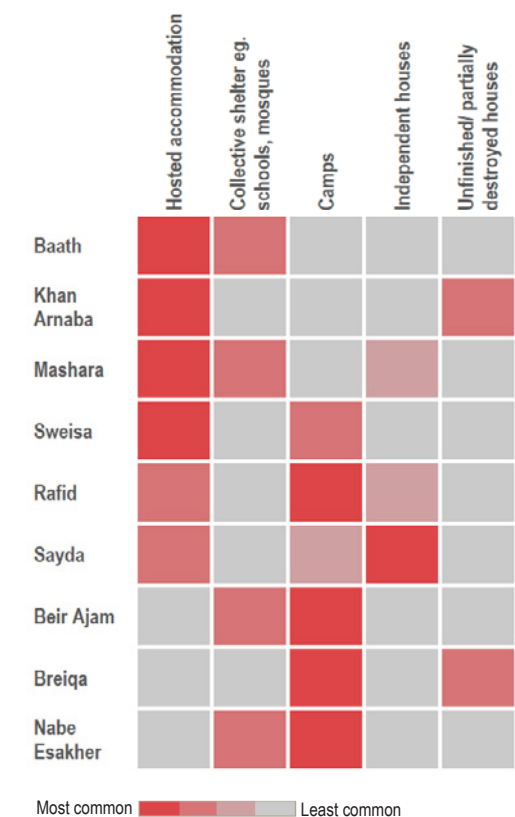
The type of shelter available to displaced populations was found to vary within the

communities assessed, as shown in Figure 2.

Hosted accommodation, camps and collective shelter represent the most common shelter types. However, IDPs in Breiqa and Khan Arnaba IDPs are reportedly living in partially destroyed and partially constructed buildings, and in farms in Beir Ajam and Khan Arnaba.

Tented settlements for IDPs were reported in Rafid, Sayda, Nabe Elsakher, Beir Ajam and Breiqa. Population figures vary among

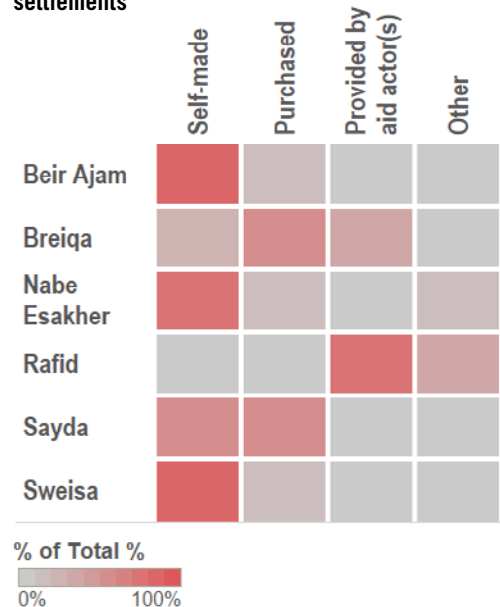
Figure 2: IDP Shelter types by community



communities; there are an estimated 1000 IDPs in the tented settlement in Nabe Elsakher, 800 in Beir Ajam, 250 in Breiqa, 200 in Sayda. An estimate was not provided for Rafid. **On average, newly arrived IDPs constitute 45% of the population of tented settlements.** The most common source of tents varied within communities, however in Sweisa, 85% of shelters in the tented settlement had reportedly been made by IDPs themselves from plastic sheeting or mud and stones.

Collective shelters, including mosques and/or schools, were reportedly common in the majority of communities. On average, two schools in each community have temporarily stopped operating in order to house IDPs.

Figure 3: Sources of shelter in reported tented settlements



NFIs

IDPs are reported to have access to cooking fuel (butane) in all but one community assessed (Rafid). However, the majority of communities reported insufficient quantities of available fuel, with inadequate stocks reported in all but two communities, Baath and Mashara. In Breiqa, some IDPs are reportedly using firewood as butane is too expensive to purchase.

Fuel was reportedly available everywhere except Mashara and increases in fuel prices were only reported in Baath, where data indicates prices have increased from 400 SYP to 600 SYP* per litre since December 2015.⁵ IDPs generally have access to water through trucking, though in Mashara there is only enough for basic needs. In Baath, IDPs can access water from the main network.

Health facilities

The majority of assessed communities reported functioning health facilities, apart from Sweisa, Nabe Elsakher and Beir Ajam, where no pre-conflict health facilities existed. Medical personnel (including doctors, surgeons, nurses and midwives) were also reportedly available, with trained volunteers assisting health professionals in Breiqa.

While still continuing to function, health facilities in Mashara, Breiqa and Baath were reportedly damaged. In Rafid, the population was served by a mobile clinic, following damage to its health centre.

Despite functioning facilities, all assessed communities reported insufficient access to medicines and medical equipment.

Specifically, medicines which are reportedly needed but unavailable across communities include; antibiotics, painkillers, vaccinations and medicine for chronic diseases (diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure). In addition, KIs raised concerns that the number of trained medical personnel was not sufficient to meet population needs.

Conclusion

The escalation of conflict within Dar'a governorate in recent weeks has triggered the displacement of an estimated 43,000 people. While some IDPs have reportedly moved south towards the Jordanian border, large numbers have moved west to communities in Quneitra governorate, with some communities reporting up to 6,000 new arrivals.

Having fled quickly with few belongings, newly displaced households face limited access to food, and shelter. While the majority have been displaced for the first time, around one third had already experienced two or more displacements and represent a particularly vulnerable group. While some IDPs are currently housed by host communities, many are living in precarious conditions, such as semi-destroyed buildings, makeshift shelters and collective accommodation.

In the immediate term, **emergency shelter and food should be considered a priority to meet lifesaving humanitarian needs.**

With many displaced households reportedly intending to return home as soon as the conflict subsides, and others reporting to travel to other locations, caseloads remain difficult to predict in the medium term.

The possibility of returns is highly dependent on changing conflict dynamics, leaving some communities likely to host a considerable IDP caseload for a prolonged period. In this situation, assistance should also include food, transitional shelter and livelihoods support, taking into account the needs of the hosting community as well. **With social tensions already reported between host communities and IDPs in Rafid, Sayda and Breiqa, the need for interventions to ease pressure on limited resources will become increasingly important over time.**

REACH will continue to monitor the displacement of populations across southern Syria, 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.

*\$1 = 334 SYP, UN operational rates of exchange as of 1 Feb 2016

⁵'Humanitarian Situation Overview in Syria: Governorate Factsheets' REACH. January 2016