

REACH Situation Overview: Displacement and Needs in Southwest Dar'a, Syria

7 April 2016

REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

Introduction

Since 21st March, intensified on-the-ground conflict in southwestern Dar'a has resulted in increased vulnerability of populations in affected areas, as well as displacement of people to neighbouring communities in the governorate. **As of 26th March, over 8,200 people are estimated to have been displaced by recent events¹. This adds to the over 80,000 already displaced in Dar'a and Quneitra between November 2015 and February 2016².**

Recent conflict has affected the communities of Sheikh Saed, Tassil, Edwan, Sahm el Golan, Hit, Msakin Jlein and Jlein, as well as the surrounding countryside, causing people to flee these areas. Despite reported problems with travel related to insecurity, people have managed to flee both northwards to Nawa, and southwards towards communities and the open countryside around the Jordanian border.

From 4 - 6 April 2016, REACH conducted a rapid assessment to identify displacement patterns and priority needs across the seven conflict-affected communities listed above, as well as four communities that have been receiving IDPs. Communities receiving displaced persons include Nawa, Tal Shihab, Zayzoun and Mzeireb, while IDPs have also arrived in the countryside surrounding Zayzoun, Tal Shihab and Mzeireb.

Other camps outside the direct vicinity of these areas, such as Ja'ara, could not be specifically assessed due to a lack of Key Informants in the area. Information was drawn from qualitative interviews with 32 Key Informants, including nurses, teachers, farmers, shop owners and local council workers. Findings are specific to communities assessed and cannot be generalised further.

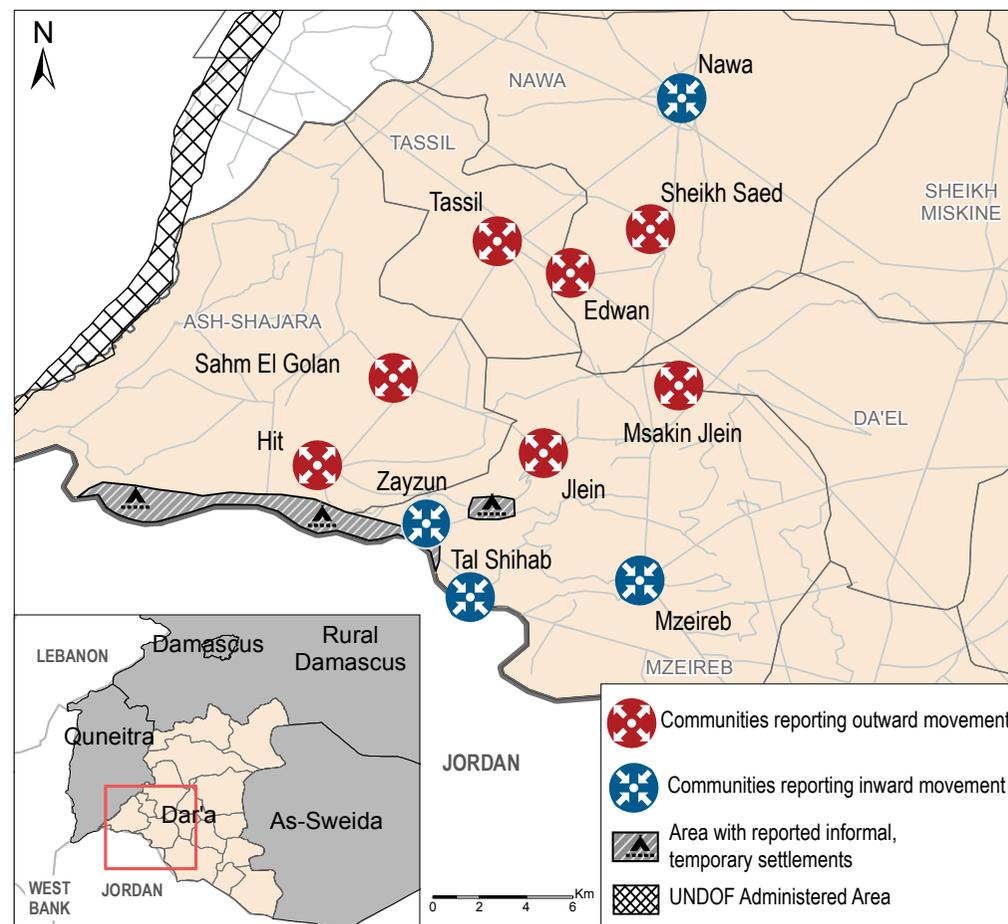
Key findings

Over the past two weeks, escalating conflict has led to increasing humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities in affected communities in Dar'a Governorate. People remaining in affected communities suffer continued insecurity, while some health and education services have also been disrupted. Where possible, people have fled from conflict-affected communities to nearby villages and the open countryside. People who have fled to the Yarmuk Valley represent a particularly vulnerable population, with many living in cars and open spaces. Future movement is dependent upon the evolving security situation; for now, IDP priority needs are immediate shelter and food assistance.

Displacement

Insecurity is the primary reported reason for displacement. People have relocated to avoid being caught in conflict, sometimes as a result of pre-emptive warnings by armed opposition groups that clashes

Map 1: Assessed communities in Dar'a governorate



1 UNOCHA, SW Dar'a Flash Update 1, 26 March 2016

2 UNHCR, Syria: Flash Update on Recent Events, 31 March 2016

are imminent (as reported in Tassil, Sahn el Golan, Jlein and Mzeireb). In some communities, conflict has made relocation difficult, with reported restrictions on people leaving Jlein and Msakin Jlein. Further, security issues caused by changes in the control of nearby roads has inhibited movement from Sheikh Saed, Tassil and Edwan. Some people were reportedly hesitant to leave Tassil due to fear of being denied re-entry upon return.

Since 21 March, over 100 households (600 individuals) are estimated to have left Tassil, Hit, Shekh Saed, Jlein, Msakin Jlein and Sahn el Golan communities, and 50-100 households are estimated to have left Edwan. The largest outflows were reportedly from Tassil (which has the largest estimated population of communities assessed around 30,000 individuals) and Hit, followed by Jlein and Msakin Jlein. People have travelled in two primary streams: northwards to Nawa, and southwards towards Mzeireb and the Yarmuk Valley (Zayzun and Tal Shihab communities, including Ja'ara camp). Reports suggest that people have also moved east towards

Tafas and Da'el, although routes to these communities have often been restricted and caseloads are much smaller.

People fled northwards to Nawa due to the perception that it is a safe community with access to goods and services. It has a substantial existing IDP population, estimated to be a third of the approximately 25,000-35,000 people. The existence of IDP camps in and around the Yarmuk Valley reportedly attracted people to Zayzoun and Tal Shihab, as did the proximity to the Jordanian border. Whilst Tal Shihab is a town of similar size to Nawa with an even greater proportion of IDPs, Zayzoun has an estimated population of just 5,000-7,000 people. Mzeireb, close to Zayzoun and Tal Shihab is a large town of 45,000-50,000 people, with IDP population estimated to be a quarter of this. In Nawa, recently displaced people are primarily staying in existing shelters, whilst many in the Yarmuk Valley around Zayzoun are staying in the open countryside, some sheltering in cars or tents and others with no shelter at all. This temporary shelter situation reflects the

nature of intentions: **an estimated 50% of new arrivals in and around Tal Shihab and Zayzoun are expected to leave in the next two weeks, compared to less than 30% in Nawa and Mzeireb.**

The most common profile of recent IDPs is whole families of 5-6 people, travelling in small groups of 2-9 households. An estimated 40% of the recently displaced are children, although KIs reported that instances of separated or unaccompanied children were not common. The majority of IDPs used private vehicles to travel, though many heading to the Yarmouk Valley were forced to travel on foot. People fled with few possessions, generally bringing only documentation, a few clothes and blankets. The average cost of travel is estimated to be around 15,000 SYP (\$43) for a group of 5-6 people.

Ultimately, future movement depends on the evolving security situation, with further outward displacement currently expected from Hit, Sheikh Saed and Sahn el Golan. The majority (more than 70%) of those who left Hit, Jlein, Msakin Jlein and Edwan are estimated to return in the next month if conflict subsides; however, those leaving Tassil, Sheikh Saed and Sahn el Golan are reportedly much less likely to do so, with people from these locations indicating that they do not anticipate the security situation to improve significantly.

NEEDS: RECENTLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

Priority needs

The top reported priority needs for IDPs are shelter (specifically reported to be tents for

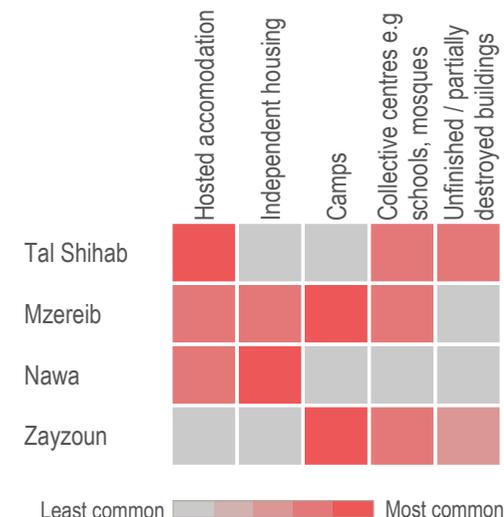


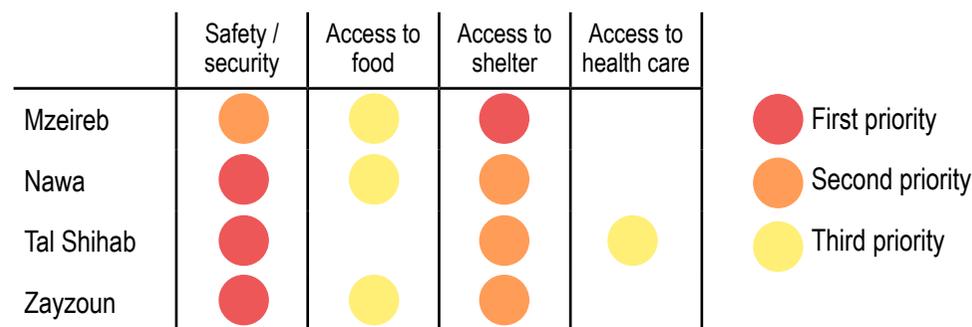
Figure 2: Shelter types of the recently displaced

those in temporary informal settlements, and spaces in collective shelters) and safety/security. Both were stated among the top three needs in all communities assessed (see figure 1). Food is the next most commonly reported priority need, particularly staple items such as flour, rice, bulgur, meat and cooking oil. KIs reported that some assistance had been received by IDPs in the Yarmuk Valley, with food aid provided by local authorities. However, distributions have reportedly been problematic as insufficient quantities of aid caused tensions amongst those in need.

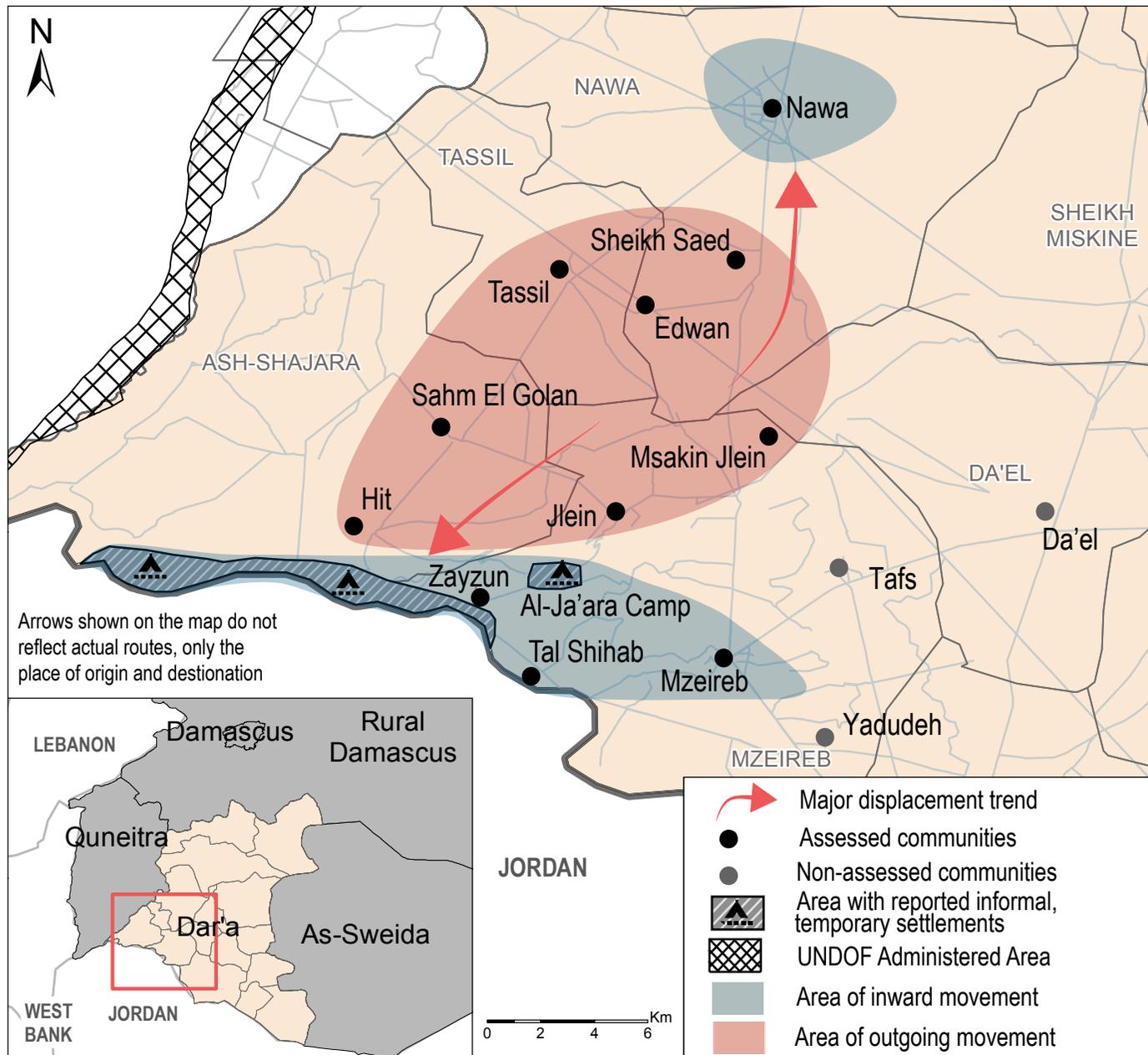
Shelter

Recently displaced people around Mzeireb and Zayzoun commonly shelter in informal camps. **Around 50% of people recently displaced to these areas are estimated to be living outside, in cars or in tents, with a**

Figure 1: Reported priority needs of the recently displaced



Map 2: Patterns of displacement in Southwest Dar'a governorate



further 30-40% in collective centres. Shared houses are common in Tal Shihab, whilst those in Nawa are reportedly staying in independent houses.

In tented settlements around Mzeireb, tents are reportedly primarily provided by aid actors, whilst those in Zayzun are either self-made, purchased, provided by aid actors or created from existing shelters in old camps. Tents are reportedly available in markets in and around Zayzun, but are prohibitively expensive for much of the IDP population, costing around 100,000 SYP or \$289.

Across the communities assessed, an estimated 20% of households are hosting IDPs. All communities with the exception of Nawa reported that shelters are overcrowded, with limited further shelter available in Mzeireb and Tal Shihab. With the exception of Nawa, collective shelters are also common in all communities assessed, primarily schools. Three schools in are reportedly used as collective shelter in Zayzun, two in Tal Shihab. and six in Mzeireb, with the latter at full capacity. As a result, the operation of schools has been affected, with schools in Mzeireb, Tal Shihab and Zayzun reportedly suspending classes in the past two weeks in order to host IDPs.

Food security

IDPs primarily obtain food through purchase, with some food provided by host communities in Tal Shihab and Nawa. Due to a general lack of available items in markets, prices are high, leaving IDPs particularly vulnerable because of the lack of cash brought with them and suspension

of their normal income generating activities. Prices of core food items (rice, bulgur, flour and bread) have reportedly risen in the past two weeks across the assessed communities, particularly in **Mzeireb and Zayzoun where prices of some items are estimated to have increased by more than 50%**. The situation in Zayzoun is particularly severe, with some IDPs reportedly resorting to eating local plants and weeds. Across communities assessed, rice was reported as a primary food need by IDPs, as was meat and cooking oil.

The most common source of bread across assessed communities is from private bakeries; however, bread provided is reportedly insufficient to meet community needs. This is largely due to the lack of availability and high cost of flour and electricity or cooking fuel, reported as challenges in all communities assessed. Access to flour is particularly difficult in Nawa, where it is frequently unavailable.

NFIs

IDPs generally do not have access to cash in Mzeireb and Nawa as they were unable

Figure 3: Recently displaced access to water, cash and cooking fuel

	IDP access to water	IDP access to cash	IDP access to cooking fuel	
Mzeireb	✓	✗	✗	✗ No access ✓ Access (currently with sufficient quantity to meet HH needs) ✓ Access (insufficient quantity to meet HH needs)
Nawa	✓	✗	✓	
Tal Shihab	✓	✓	✓	
Zayzoun	✓	✓	✓	

to bring much with them; in Tal Shihab and Zayzoun cash is estimated to be sufficient for 2-4 weeks only. The recently displaced are using their savings, as well as attempting to access remittances from outside, selling personal belongings and bartering.

Water is primarily provided by trucking and is generally sufficient to meet IDP needs, with the exception of Mzeireb which has an existing large population to provide for. IDPs staying outside in the Yarmuk Valley area primarily obtain water from natural springs.

Although recently displaced people are reportedly able to access fuel in all communities apart from Mzeireb, this is not sufficient to meet household needs. Prices of fuel have risen in all assessed communities except for Nawa, with particularly high increases reported in Mzeireb (estimated 30% increase).

Health

Although there functioning healthcare facilities were reported in all assessed communities, these are reportedly insufficient to meet

Figure 4: Priority needs of people remaining in conflict affected communities

	Safety / security	Access to food	Access to shelter	Access to health care	
Hit	●	●	●	●	● First priority ● Second priority ● Third priority
Jlein	●	●	●		
Msakin Jlein	●	●	●		
Sahm el Golan	●		●	●	
Sheikh Saed	●	●			
Tassil	●			●	

the needs of the population and have been stretched by recent displacements. Across assessed communities, antibiotics and treatment for injuries were the most needed health services for the recently displaced. Injuries are common amongst the recently displaced in Mzeireb, Nawa and Zayzoun, and presence of IDPs with disabilities was reported in all communities, most commonly physical disabilities caused by injury and amputation, requiring assistive devices. Further, influenza and similar communicable diseases are reportedly prevalent in Zayzoun and Tal Shihab, with concern that disease is spreading through water-borne channels in Zayzoun.

NEEDS: PEOPLE REMAINING IN CONFLICT AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

This section refers to Tassil, Sheikh Saed, Sahm el Golan and Edwan, where whole families are the most common profile of

people remaining, followed by single men. Conflict affected communities also include Hit, Jlein, and Msakin Jlein, where single men are reportedly the most common profile of people remaining.

Priority needs

Safety and security is ranked a top priority need in all communities assessed, referring to the recent conflict and the desire to not be caught in the violence. Shelter and food were also ranked highly, with those remaining requiring safe shelters and basic food items such as rice, bread and bulgur. There are no reports of knowledge of assistance in any of the communities assessed, although it is possible that some aid entered communities but was not considered to be formal assistance. People remaining are vulnerable as their main source of income is predominantly existing savings, with some agriculture and access to remittances from outside Syria.

Food security

The most commonly reported challenges to obtaining food were prohibitively expensive prices and the general lack of available cooking fuel. In the past two weeks, prices of rice, flour, bread and bulgur have reportedly increased in the majority of communities assessed, particularly in Jlein, Msakin Jlein and Sheikh Saed where food prices are estimated to have risen by 50% in the past two weeks.

The most common sources of bread are private bakeries and shops, however the amount of bread produced is reportedly insufficient to meet needs in all communities assessed. The lack of availability and high reported cost of electricity, fuel and flour are the main reported barriers affecting the availability of bread.

Shelter

Problems with shelter were reported in all communities assessed: commonly, shelters are overcrowded or partially destroyed. Tassil and Sahm el Golan host significant numbers of IDPs relative to their populations; in these communities, large numbers of people live in collective shelters, shared accommodation and unfinished buildings. Collective centres, primarily schools, are used to host people in all assessed communities apart from Edwan, and use of schools for shelter has become increasingly common in the past two weeks as people within the communities seek to avoid conflict. KIs report that classes in schools in all communities apart from Edwan

Map 3: Most common displacement routes

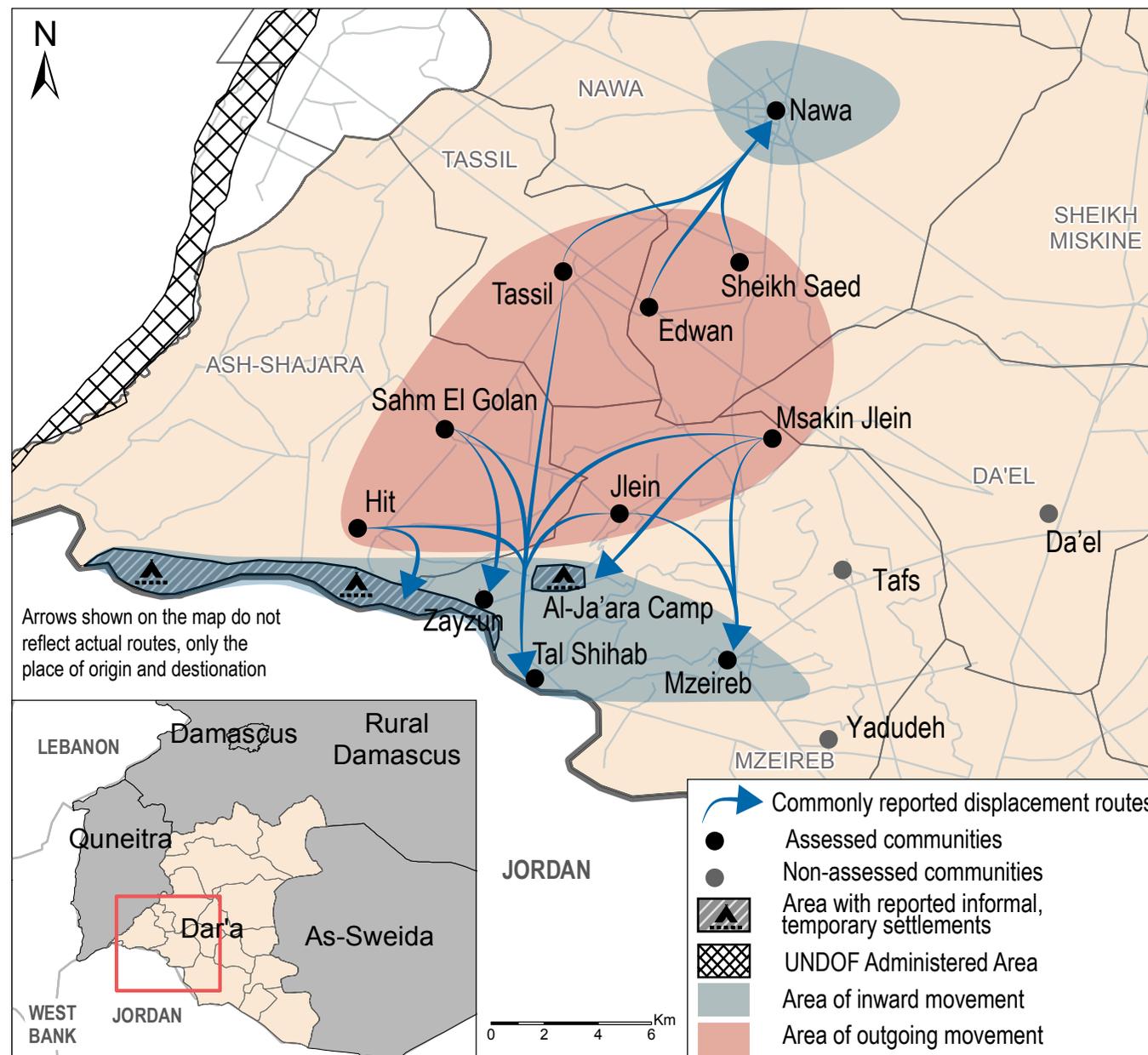


Figure 5: Access to water, cash and cooking fuel in conflict affected communities

	Access to water	Access to cash	Access to cooking fuel	
Hit	✓	✓	✓	
Jlein	✓	✗	✗	✗ No access
Msakin Jlein	✓	✗	✓	✓ Access (currently with sufficient quantity to meet HH needs)
Sahm el Golan	✓	✗	✗	✓ Access (insufficient quantity to meet HH needs)
Sheikh Saed	✓	✗	✗	
Tassil	✓	✓	✓	

have been affected in the past two weeks, due to ongoing conflict and the use of schools for shelter.

NFIs

Remaining populations in Hit, Sheikh Saed, Jlein and Msakin Jlein lack access to cash; elsewhere, cash is estimated to be sufficient for around one month only. People are commonly relying on their savings as well as remittances from outside Syria, as income generation has been affected by conflict. Across assessed communities there is a lack of access to cooking fuel; where available, quantities are reportedly insufficient to meet household needs. In the past two weeks, prices of fuel in Tassil, Jlein, Sahm el Golan and Edwan have reportedly increased. Although communities have access to water through trucking, this is reportedly insufficient to meet needs in Hit, Jlein and Msakin Jlein.

Health

In the past two weeks, health facilities in Tassil, Sheikh Saed and Sahm el Golan have reportedly been affected by conflict, causing some facilities to suspend services. The price of medicine in some locations has also reportedly increased, and in all assessed communities health services are reportedly insufficient to meet the needs of the community. Antibiotics are reportedly the most needed medical service, followed by treatment for heart disease and diabetes, and surgery.

The most common reported health problems faced include chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, though recently, sickness attributed to a lack of food has reportedly started becoming more common in Sheikh Saed, Jlein and Msakin Jlein.

Conclusion

Recent conflict has led to movement of people

from locations in Southwest Dar'a (primarily Tassil, Edwan, Sheikh Saed, Jlein, Masakin Jlein, Sahm el Golan and Hit) into nearby communities that are perceived to be relatively safe, as well as to areas in the countryside along the southern border with Jordan. If the security situation does not stabilise, it is likely that many will remain in these locations.

In the immediate term, emergency shelter relief to the recently displaced should be considered a priority, in particular tents for those in the countryside around Zayzun and near Mzeireb. In both communities receiving IDPs and communities affected by conflict, assisting with provision of safe spaces within communities without further disrupting education facilities is important. Further, people remaining in conflict affected communities are facing increasing food and fuel prices, a lack of available cooking fuel and disrupted services. In these locations, as well as ensuring shelters are protected from ongoing conflict, assisting with access to staple foods should be considered a top humanitarian priority.

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