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SYRIA

Rapid displacement in southern Syria



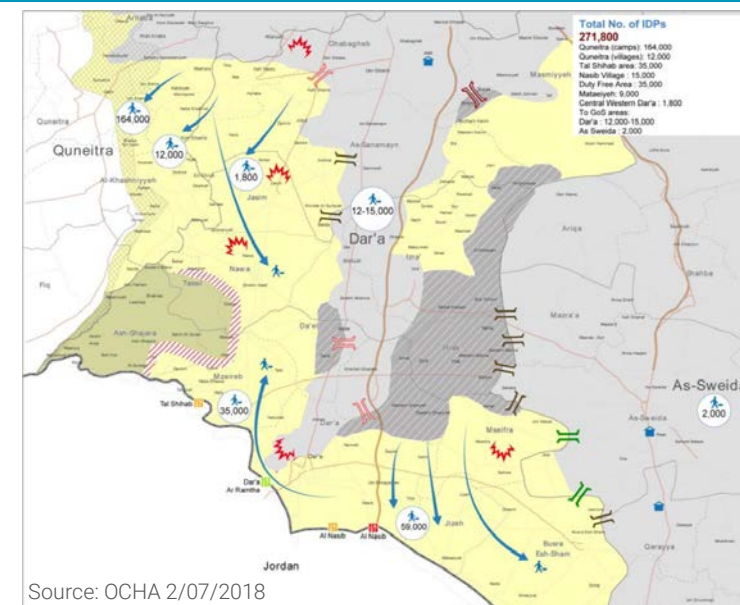
Briefing note – 4 July 2018

Escalation of hostilities between the Government of Syria and armed opposition groups have been ongoing since 17 June in Dar'a governorate, driving displacement within Dar'a and into neighbouring governorates. As of 2 July, over 270,000 people have been displaced, including at least 164,000 to Quneitra and 60,000 to the areas near Jordanian border. Urgent humanitarian needs, including shelter, food, WASH, and health, are reported, particularly in the areas bordering Jordan and Golan Heights. Fighting has resulted in casualties, disruption of services, and very limited humanitarian access.

NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE



IMPACT



Anticipated scope and scale

Fighting is likely to continue in Dar'a and **expand** to Quneitra governorate, driven by the government's aim to recapture all opposition-held territories and the **failure of truce negotiations**.

Further escalation is likely to bring **more displacement, casualties, and infrastructure losses**. Secondary displacement is likely to occur due to shifting areas of control.

The needs are likely to slowly decrease in the **areas reclaimed by the government**, but protection concerns due to retaliation mechanisms are very likely to persist.

Key priorities



+270,000
displaced



IDPs
sleeping in the open



Shortages
of food and water



Health facilities
targeted and damaged

Humanitarian constraints



Ongoing hostilities have hampered cross-border aid delivery, limited cross-line access to the affected areas, and resulted in closure of roads and crossings. The access is likely to improve once the military offensive has been completed.

Limitations

The reported figures of IDPs and people in need change daily due to the crisis dynamics. Assessment capacities are limited in the affected areas due to insecurity and limited access. More detailed information on the needs and locations of the displaced population is needed.

Crisis impact

Hostilities between the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and armed opposition groups have been ongoing since 17 June in Dar'a governorate and driving displacement to southern governorates including Dar'a, Quneitra, and As-Sweida. Over 270,000 individuals have been internally displaced from and within Dar'a as of 2 July. The number has increased rapidly (up from 50,000 reported on 26 June) following an escalation in hostilities since 28 June (OCHA 3/07/2018).

Reported displacement figures are difficult to verify and it's likely that numbers are higher. The displaced population is in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Over 80% of the estimated 525,000 people (including IDPs) living in affected areas were expected to need humanitarian assistance as of 28 June. Approximately 750,000 people living in southern Syria are considered at risk of being affected by the military offensive (Reuters 29/06/2018, Union of Medical Care and Relief Organisations 29/06/2018, OCHA 29/06/2018, WHO 28/06/2018).

Since 19 June more than 150 people have been killed and at least 350 wounded due to heavy shelling and airstrikes. Al-Hirak city has been particularly affected by the heavy bombardment (Union of Medical Care and Relief Organisations 29/06/2018).

Dar'a: Most of the IDPs have been displaced from areas east, northeast, and northwest of Dar'a city and from the heavily populated Nawa town in the northwest. Large numbers of IDPs have moved towards the border with Jordan, which remained closed. Estimated 60,000 people were reported in proximity to the Nasib/Jaber area, where the border crossing and the free zone are located (Reuters 29/06/2018).

On 27 June, the Government of Syria (GoS) announced the opening of four 'corridors' allowing displaced people to cross into GoS-controlled parts of Dar'a, where at least three IDP sites had been established (in Ezraa city, Qerfah town, and Jbab town) (OCHA 29/06/2018, The Syrian Observer 29/07/2018). As of 3 July, 12,000 to 15,000 individuals have moved through the corridors to IDP camps in Dar'a; up to 2,500 of whom are reported to remain in the Jbab camp. Some families have been reported to move onwards to Rural Damascus. Camp conditions, confirmed number of IDPs, and needs of the displaced in the camps remain unknown (OCHA 3/07/2018).

Displacement towards territory in southwest Dar'a held by Islamic State-affiliated groups including Khalid ibn al-Walid Army (Jaysh Khalid Ibn al-Walid) have been reported as well (Reuters 29/06/2018).

Quneitra: Estimated 176,000 people have been displaced into Quneitra governorate since 17 June and new arrivals are reported every day. Many have moved towards Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, and remain near the Israeli border, which is closed. 164,000 are estimated to shelter in camps, and 12,000 with host community (OCHA 3/07/2018, Reuters 1/07/2018).

On 28 June, one additional Quneitra IDP camp was established by the local council in Rafid, with a capacity to host 200 IDP families. IDPs reportedly started building a new makeshift site in the town of Braiqa (The Syrian Observer 27/06/2018).

as-Sweida: Smaller-scale IDP movement was also reported towards as-Sweida governorate, with two sites identified in Rassas and Qurraya. An estimated 2,000 people have crossed into the government-held areas of as-Sweida since 17 June (OCHA 3/07/2018).

Attempted truce negotiations between the opposition groups and Russian representatives have already failed twice despite the Jordanian mediation and continue to be unsuccessful. However, a number of towns in Dar'a governorate have surrendered to the government and the SAA has retaken most of the territory in the east of the governorate. As of 2 July, the main clashes were reported in Dar'a city and Tefas town (Live map 2/07/2018). The opposition remain in control of southern Dar'a city and the majority of areas bordering Jordan and Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

The failure of truce negotiations means further clashes are expected, likely expanding into rebel-held Quneitra (SOHR 2/07/2018, Arab News 24/06/2018).

Shelter and NFIs: IDPs report significant shelter needs, with IDPs in Quneitra sheltering in the open and in makeshift shelters composed of unstable materials and blankets. IDPs in Dar'a are also struggling to secure accommodation, as rental prices have nearly doubled since the beginning of the offensive. Hosting capacity of the communities in southern Syria is likely to be overwhelmed and many of the IDPs are unlikely to secure adequate shelter (OCHA 29/06/2018, OCHA 22/06/2018).

Indiscriminate attacks against civilian infrastructure have been reported across Dar'a governorate, with no information on the scope of damages and losses. However, attacks are likely to further exacerbate the housing situation (OCHA 26/06/2018).

Acute NFI needs are reported, particularly concerning fuel and electricity. The prices of gas and diesel have increased up to 20% and the price of cooking gas up to 100% since the beginning of the offensive. Further fighting is likely to result in increased prices and affect WASH, food, and health services. Up to 100,000 people in Dar'a city and surrounding villages suffered complete electricity blackout when the SAA launched an assault. The electricity delivery is likely to be unstable, as people abandon their houses equipped in solar panels, which are a primary source of electricity across the governorate (OCHA 27/06/2018, Reach 04/2018).

Food: IDPs in Dar'a and Quneitra have reported shortages of food. Livelihoods have been disrupted by the advancing offensive, as the wheat and potato harvesting season was underway. Commercial access routes between Dar'a, Quneitra, and as-Sweida have been suspended, preventing market replenishment and limiting access to food (OCHA 29/06/2018,

FAO 21/06/2018). The GoS has been blocking the delivery of food items to opposition-held areas since prior to the escalation (ECHO 26/06/2018).

WASH: IDPs in Dar'a and Quneitra have reported shortages of potable water and IDP sites are reported to lack the most basic WASH services. Lack of clean drinking water and insufficient hygiene practices are likely to lead to waterborne disease and dehydration, particularly in the hot summer conditions (CARE 27/06/2018).

Health: The escalation of conflict has led to multiple casualties including over 150 fatalities since 19 June. At least 15 people including 12 children have died in areas close to the Jordanian border due to scorpion bites, dehydration, and water borne diseases (OCHA 3/07/2018).

Access and availability of medical services have been affected by the military offensive. Majority of the health facilities in affected governorate have been forced to temporarily close due to airstrikes and hostilities on the ground (Union of Medical Care and Relief Organisations 29/06/2018, OCHA 29/06/2018).

The health sector in Dar'a has been heavily affected with repeated attacks on health facilities. At least six hospitals are reported to be damaged and majority is out of service. Medical personnel has been displaced and availability of medicine is low. In Quneitra, the capacity of the health sector has been overwhelmed by the scale of the influx, with acute shortages of medical supplies and medicine reported. Medical evacuations to Jordan are conditional upon access approval by the government of Jordan (Union of Medical Care and Relief Organisations 29/06/2018, OCHA 29/06/2018).

Protection: Ongoing hostilities include use of artillery, barrel bombs, rockets, and airstrikes, which indiscriminately target civilians and civilian infrastructure. Among the casualties and IDPs are many women and children, who are particularly exposed to SGBV and negative psychosocial consequences of the conflict and trauma. The elderly IDPs and children have been reported to be particularly sensitive to overcrowding conditions in the IDP sites and lack of food and water (CARE 27/06/2018, Reuters 23/06/2018).

Education: Educational facilities in southern Syria have been forced to close due to insecurity. There were reports of educational facilities and personnel losses due to escalating violence (CARE 27/06/2018).

Humanitarian and operational constraints

Several areas across Dar'a and Quneitra governorates are considered hard-to-reach, particularly southwest of Dar'a. The majority of Quneitra governorate is under Israeli control (Golan Heights) since 1967 and inaccessible. Most of the remaining territory is administered by the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), whose mandate was renewed for six months on 29 June (UN Security Council 29/06/2018, OCHA 20/06/2018).

Ongoing hostilities in Dar'a have hampered the access of cross-border convoys from Jordan with no delivery reported since 27 June. However, the access routes remain open, which is likely to allow for the delivery of humanitarian assistance once the security situation improves.

Humanitarian cross-line access is limited because of lack of permission from the GoS. Escalating fighting further decreases the possibility of delivery from within Syria due to lack of security guarantees from the involved parties.

Commercial and civilian access routes between Dar'a, Quneitra, and Sweida have been suspended, as many roads and crossings connecting the three governorates are either closed or inaccessible (OCHA 29/06/2018).

Humanitarian responders and health facilities have been targeted. Displacement of humanitarian workers and high fuel prices or lack of fuel hamper the relocation of humanitarian supplies to the areas recording highest influx of IDPs. (OCHA 3/07/2018, Union of Medical Care and Relief Organisations 29/06/2018).

Aggravating factors

Seasonal information

June and July are hot and dry months in the south of Syria, with temperatures rising up to 45 degrees Celsius. The area affected by the recent displacement is subject to dusty desert winds and very dry weather conditions, which expose the affected population to dehydration, waterborne diseases, and scorpion bites (OCHA 3/07/2018).

The wheat harvest should be concluded in mid-July and potato harvest by early October. The military offensive advancing through Dar'a governorate is expected to have affected both harvests and resulted in disrupted livelihoods. This is likely to further deteriorate the food insecurity in the region (FAO 21/06/2018).

Islamic State

The IS-affiliated groups, including Jaysh Khalid Ibn al-Walid remain in control of southwestern Dar'a (Ash-Shajara, Tassil) and a fragment of territory in southern Quneitra. Travelling IDPs are at risk of being trapped between the government forces, opposition fighters, and IS militants. The presence of IS-affiliated groups is being used by the GoS as a justification of their offensive on the governorate.

Additionally, there were reported of the IS fighters in the western part of Dar'a, where they hamper the freedom of movement of civilians attempting to flee the fighting (OHCHR 29/06/2018, Reuters 29/06/2018).

Regional instability

The security situation in the south of Syria bears the risk of further aggravation by the political and security dynamics between Israel and Iran. During the Syrian conflict, Israel has conducted multiple airstrikes against the Syrian government and Iranian positions in the Golan Heights, Quneitra governorate, and in the south of Damascus in order to limit the Iranian influence in the proximity of Israel.

Iranian militias were supposed to withdraw from the southern governorates, however their presence in the area continues to be reported. At the end of June Israel reinforced its tank and artillery deployment on the Golan Heights. Conflict escalation including Israel, US, Syria, Iran, and Russia is unlikely, but any escalation including Israeli and Iranian forces would aggravate the situation of IDPs who shelter in the proximity of the Golan Heights (Gulf News 3/07/2018, Middle East Eye 1/07/2018).

Contextual information

History of conflict and past displacement

Dar'a has been a strategic location in the Syrian conflict, as the first anti-Assad protests emerged in this governorate in 2011 and it remains one of three major areas currently under the control of the opposition (with Idleb and the northeastern governorates). Reclaiming control over southern Syria would be a major political victory for the GoS in addition to facilitating the resumption of international trade with Jordan.

The southern Syria ceasefire (covering large parts of As-Sweida, Quneitra, and Dar'a) began on 9 July 2017, brokered by the United States, Russia, and Jordan. As the agreement has largely held, there had been little displacement reported during the past year. Over 70,000 people have been reported displaced from affected areas of Damascus, Rural Damascus, as-Sweida, and Dar'a to northern Syria since June 2017. Over 25,000 people displaced into Dar'a and over one thousand displaced into Quneitra in the first four months of 2018 (IDP task force access 3/07/2018, UNHCR 28/06/2018).

As of 30 April 2018, there were up to 320,000 IDPs in Dar'a and Quneitra, representing over 30% of the population. However, including protracted displacement, the IDP population estimate in 2018 according to UNHCR was: 330,000 in Dar'a, 63,000 in as-Sweida, and 49,000 in Quneitra (OCHA 30/04/2018, UNHCR 28/02/2018).

Over 13,500 returnees were recorded in Dara and Quneitra in April and almost 15,000 in March 2018 (see map on page 8). IDP returnees are particularly vulnerable to rapidly increasing needs and secondary displacement (OCHA 30/04/2018, OCHA 31/03/2018).

International and neighbouring countries' relationship to the conflict

Jordan has closed its borders to prevent the influx of new Syrian refugees into its territory. The Jordanian army has been delivering humanitarian aid to IDPs on the Syrian territory. Jordanian authorities attempted to mediate the talks between the opposition and Russia for a truce. The negotiations have so far not been successful. Jordan's economy has suffered from up to 1.3 million Syrian refugees hosted by the country and the kingdom would benefit from a resumption of cross-border trade once the GoS retakes the control of southern governorates (Middle East Eye 19/06/2018, Reuters 30/06/2018).

Israeli borders have been closed to prevent the influx of Syrian refugees into its territory and occupied Golan Heights. Israeli authorities have been delivering humanitarian assistance to IDPs on the Syrian territory. Additionally, Israel reinforced their military positions in Golan Heights and warned Syrian authorities against the SAA entering the occupied territory (Reuters 1/07/2018, Reuters 29/06/2018). Israel is not likely to intervene in the conflict unless there is a risk of a permanent Iranian-Hezbollah presence in the south of Syria, especially along the occupied Golan Heights. Sharp increase in Israeli-Iranian hostilities have been reported in 2018 (Middle East Eye 19/06/2018).

The United States, which supported the opposition groups in the past, has since withdrawn its support which allowed for the SAA to advance (The Syrian Observer 28/06/2018).

Russia's airplanes have been involved in the military offensive supporting the SAA. Russian authorities have been also involved in the truce negotiations with opposition groups (Syria Direct 24/06/2018).

Response capacity

Local and national response capacity

As the Government of Syria is an active side of this conflict, national response to needs of the displaced population in opposition-held areas is unlikely. There are humanitarian corridors opened for civilians to cross into government-held territory, where the IDPs might face serious protection concerns. Civilians in newly retaken and post-surrender communities were often reported vulnerable to reprisals and abuse from the authorities (PAX 19/03/2018). No information is currently available on the conditions inside the newly retaken territories (The Syrian Observer 29/06/2018).

As of April, there were five national NGOs implementing humanitarian activities in Dar'a, one in Quneitra, and eight in as-Sweida. Most NGOs focus on protection activities, followed by food assistance (OCHA 04/2018).

International response capacity

UN agencies present in the south of Syria in 2018 included UNHCR, UNRWA, and WHO. The presence on INGOs was very limited (OCHA 04/2018).

In response to the recent crisis, the food assistance has been delivered to IDPs stranded on the Jordanian border. Reportedly, IDPs residing on the border with the Golan Heights have not been reached by UN agencies although the Israeli military delivered at least 300 tents and 58 tonnes of food and NFI supplies (Middle East Eye 29/06/2018, WFP 26/06/2018, OCHA 04/2018).

Medical supplies were dispatched and prepositioned in late June including operating tables, intravenous fluids, antibiotics, trauma supplies, and emergency health kits sufficient to provide 135,000 treatments. WHO has deployed three mobile clinics providing health care services for IDPs, and has been aiming to deploy four more (WHO 28/06/2018).

On 1-2 July, the UN provided humanitarian assistance to displaced individuals at the Jaber/Nasib border area in Jordan. Delivered assistance included water and NFIs covering needs of an estimated 35,000 people (OCHA 2/07/2018). Further deliveries of assistance from Jordan depend on the physical access constraints due to ongoing insecurity.

Shelter kits, NFI kits, and hygiene kits have been distributed and prepositioned. Mobile teams have been providing psycho-social support and psychological first aid. Activities focusing on GBV and child protection concerns have been undertaken by the mobile teams as well (OCHA 29/06/2018). However, the scope of the undertaken activities and distributions remains well below the reported IDPs caseload, which is likely to result in severe unmet needs.

Information gaps and needs

- Lack of information on specific locations and numbers of the displaced population.
- Lack of information on the conditions in IDP sites.
- Lack of information on the conditions in the territories newly retaken by the GoS.
- Lack of information on the current state of healthcare sector in the affected governorates.

Lessons learned

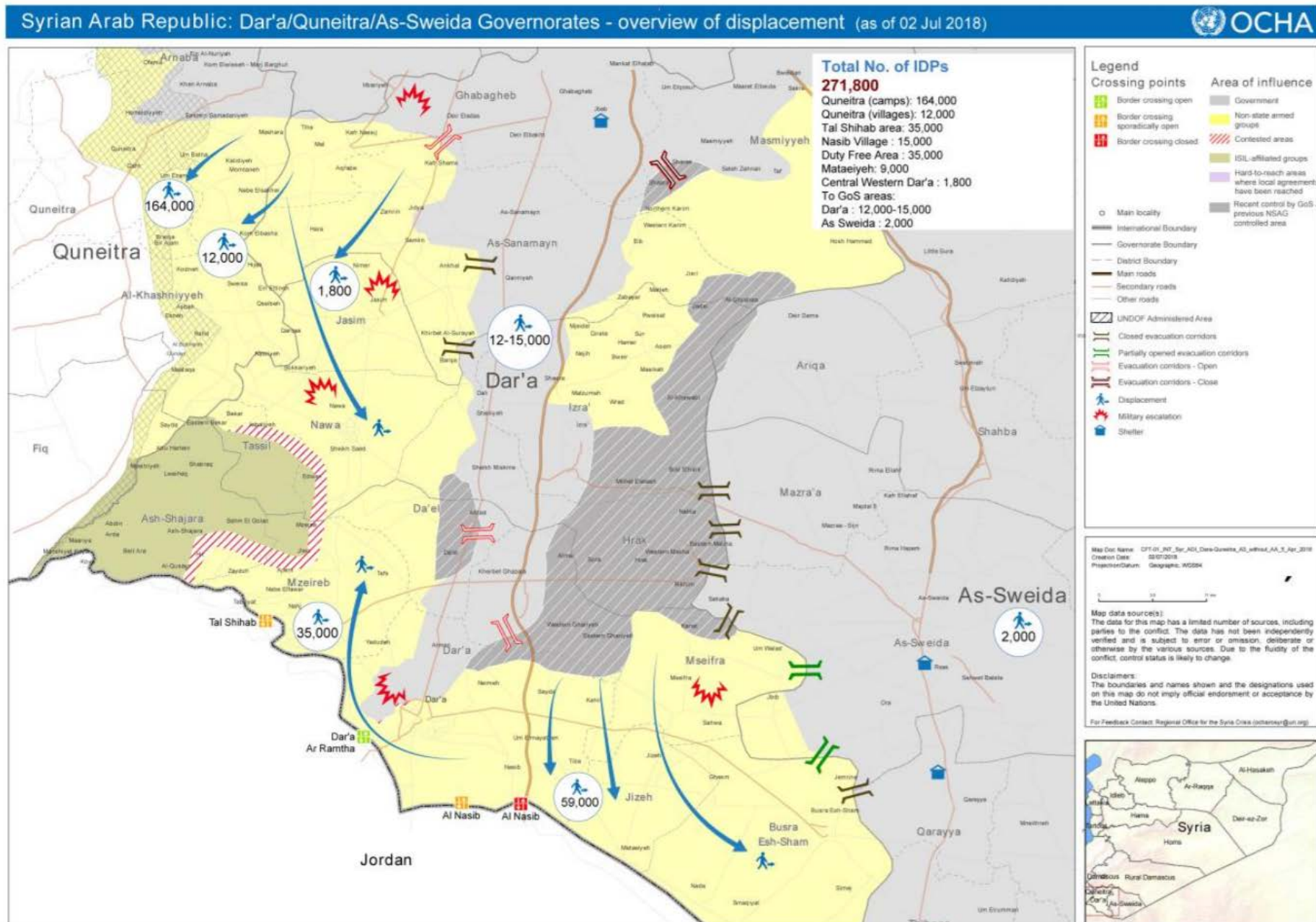
- A similar situation was observed in Idleb where 212,000 people were displaced between 15/12/2017 and 15/01/2018 causing increased pressure on the local markets quickly followed by availability issues and price increases, affecting both IDPs and host communities. A growing number of people, especially children suffering from mental health conditions could not access the necessary healthcare and an increase in waterborne diseases was reported. Documentation concerns are likely to arise, either related to personal or property documents lost during the displacement or confiscated at the checkpoints. The situation was made more complex by multiple displacements as IDPs fled the moving frontline.
- In past displacements in Dar'a, the most affected groups across all sectors were reported to be 1) IDPs living in collective centres 2) the resident population who have not been displaced 3) IDPs living with host families and 4) IDPs living in unfinished or vacated structures. Within these categories, children, the elderly and pregnant and lactating women were identified as the most vulnerable (ACAPS 2014).
- In order to preserve agricultural livelihoods it is recommended to provide appropriate support with inputs to farmers with various land holdings and adapted to different wealth groups as well as build their capacities and support farmers' associations/groups. Supporting the livestock sector with an integrated approach of restocking along with feed, fodder and veterinary services has been identified as a priority as well (Food security sector 04/2018).
- Larger scale gardening and vegetable production/processing should be encouraged through support to large/medium farms and communal gardening along with income generation activities during the harvest from the home garden will need processing to reach markets (Food security sector 04/2018).
- Negotiating humanitarian access is extremely challenging in Syria, and blocking of humanitarian aid has been used as a tactic of war by various parties to the conflict. International organisations have frequently operated through Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) as a result of the access constraints faced by international organisations (OCHA 29/12/2015).

Key characteristics

Key indicators	Dar'a	As-Sweida	Quneitra	Total
PIN 2018	595,265	181,879	65,498	842,642
Acute PIN 2018	305,601	380	21,153	327,134
IDPs (estimates, Aug 2017)	327,969	63,004	47,004	438,977
Returnees (estimates, Aug 2017)	17,526	190	1,001	18,717
Education PIN (2018)	313,487	93,169	33,494	440,150
Health PIN (2018)	558,125	165,863	72,339	796,327
Nutrition PIN (2018)	185,175	70,617	23,431	279,223
Nutrition rates	GAM:0,8%, SAM 0,4%	GAM: 0.4%, SAM: 0,0%	GAM: 2,9%, SAM: 0,4%	-
NFI PIN (2018)	262,870	40,471	24,867	328,208
Shelter PIN (2018)	246,304	38,805	28,687	413,796
WASH Acute PIN (2018)	368,260	63,344	48,720	480,324
WASH Total PIN (2018)	768,304	238,746	88,064	1,095,114
Protection PIN (2018)	701,304	172,173	83,321	956,798
Food Security Livelihoods PIN (2018)	628,861	124,727	79,659	833,247
Early Recovery PIN (2018)	600,090	132,602	24,237	756,929

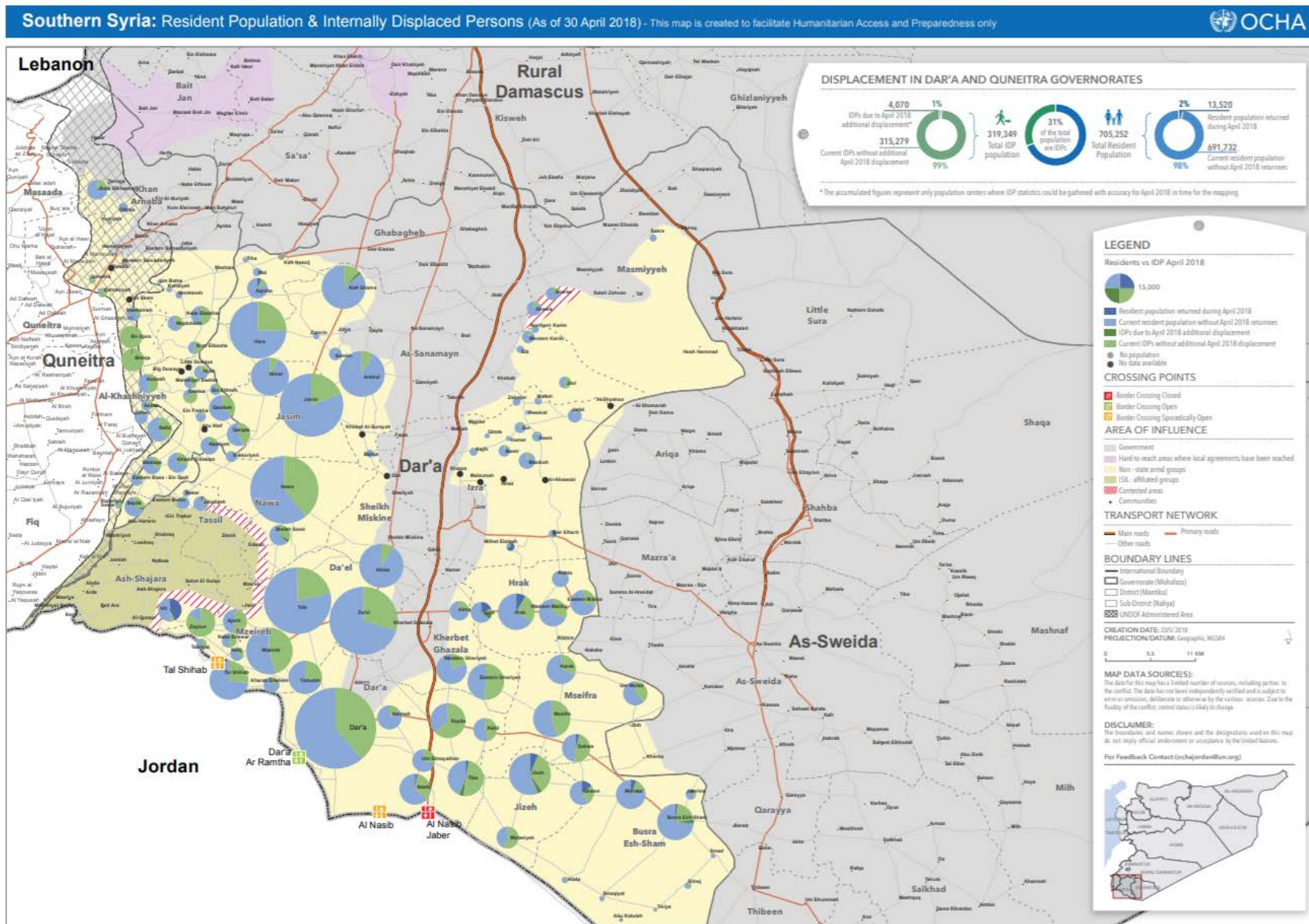
Source: [HNO 2018](#), Nutrition Sector

Rapid displacement in Dar'a, Quneitra, and As-Sweida governorates as of 2 July



Source: OCHA 2/07/2018

Resident Population & Internally Displaced Persons in Southern Syria as of 30 April 2018



Source: OCHA 30/04/2018