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Regional Analysis Syria - BRIEF

6 August 2014

This RAS Brief supplements the [quarterly RAS reports](#) and seeks to highlight current key issues. The quarterly RAS provides a more comprehensive, coherent analysis of the overall situation in the region as well as in each of the affected countries. The Syria Needs Analysis Project welcomes all information that could complement these reports. For additional information, comments or questions please email SNAP@ACAPS.org.

Syria

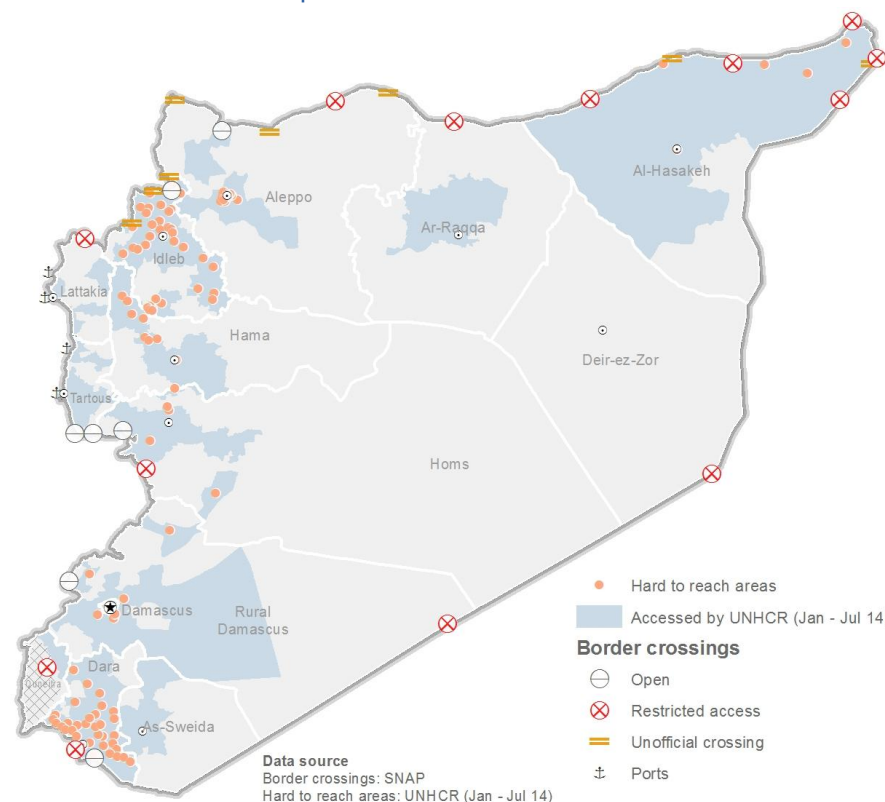
For a comprehensive overview of the humanitarian needs and possible developments, please see the latest [quarterly RAS \(July\)](#).

UN Security Council Resolution 2165

On 14 July, the UN Security Council passed resolution 2165 authorising the UN and its implementing parties to use 4 crossings (Bab Al-Salam, Bab Al-Hawa, Al-Ramtha and Yarobiyah) along Syria's borders with Iraq, Jordan and Turkey without acquiring prior approval from the Government of Syria (GoS) to deliver aid into Syria. The UN committed to notify the GoS 48 hours in advance of the scheduled departure times of the convoys. The resolution also established a framework for a UN monitoring system of the loading and passage of humanitarian convoys into Syria, currently being implemented by a deployment of UN emergency teams. The only other UN policy – resolution 2139 - focused on improving humanitarian access passed in late February; however since then, the number of people in hard to reach areas has grown to an estimated 3.5 million people. ([UN 2014/07/16](#), [UNSC 2014/07/14](#))

On 24 July, 9 trucks with humanitarian assistance for 26,000 people in Aleppo and Idlib governorates had crossed the border into Syria through the Bab Al-Salam crossing in Turkey. The convoy did not carry any UN staff and delivered the assistance to the UN's implementing partners for distribution, although it was not confirmed whether the aid reached the intended beneficiaries. The second phase of the operation started the first week of August from Turkey and Jordan, and latest reports indicate that trucks successfully went through on 6 August. Due to heightened insecurity in Iraq, there were no immediate plans to use the Yarobiyah crossing. (PI 2014/08/01, [OCHA 2014/07/30](#), [PI 2014/08/06](#))

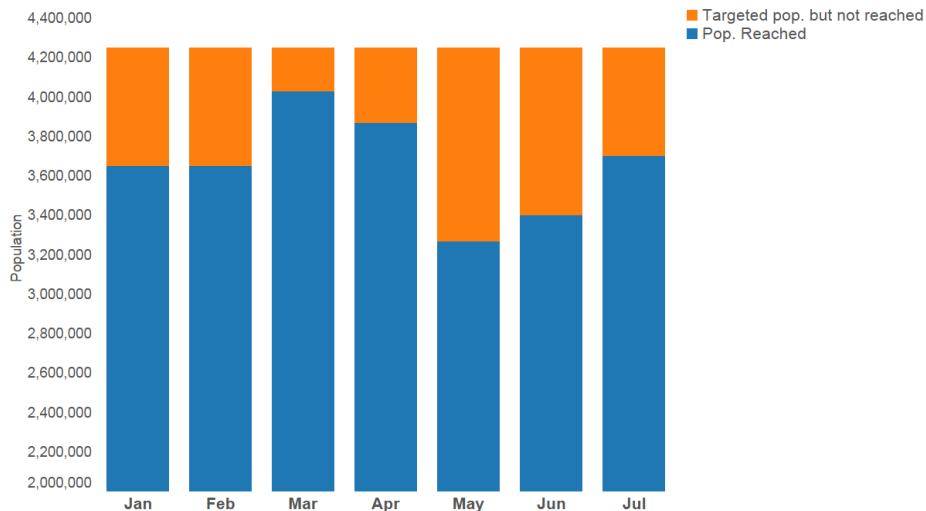
UNHCR-reported access and hard-to reach areas



The UN estimates that up to 2.9 million additional people could be reached under the resolution. However, this is unlikely due to ongoing sieges and insecurity. WFP reported that it expects to be able to reach 652,000 people in Aleppo, Dar'a and Idlib governorates. The UN is reportedly scaling up negotiations with armed groups to ensure safe access to all affected areas. ([WFP 2014/07/22](#), [OCHA 2014/07/30](#))

For WFP and its partners, who have perhaps the widest reach across Syria, access for food distributions declined in April and May since reaching a peak of over 4 million food rations distributed in March. The decrease in distributions is attributed to new GoS guidelines on the loading of convoys issued in May, however it appears that distributions are again increasing. While there has been scepticism about the humanitarian impact of resolution 2165, it may also increase pressure on the GoS to increase aid from within the country, as it generally does not approve of cross-border assistance. ([WFP 2014/04/29](#))

WFP food rations distributed, Jan-Jul 2014



Islamic State (IS) advances

Armed conflict: IS in Syria launched several offensives against opposition and GoS forces throughout July, making territorial gains in the east and northeast. In early July, IS took over most of Deir-ez-Zor governorate, including the Al-Omar oil field from Jabhat Al-Nusra. Towards the latter half of July, IS attacked the Shaar oil field in Homs governorate, as well as GoS units in Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh governorates. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), an estimated 270 people, including GoS soldiers and oil field workers, were killed by IS; while dozens of GoS soldiers were reportedly summarily executed, with some beheadings, in the Ar-Raqqa attacks. The Shaar oil field was re-taken by the GoS the following week. Direct confrontations between the GoS and IS have been relatively rare, and recent attacks may indicate a possible strategic shift for IS, particularly when fighting over oil fields that provide a significant source of income for IS. ([Daily Star 2014/07/25](#), [Daily Star 2014/07/28](#), [Reuters 2014/07/03](#), [AJE 2014/07/30](#), [Syria Deeply 2014/07/28](#), [Reuters 2014/07/28](#))

Despite the group's recent gains, local communities, including powerful tribes, could increasingly turn against IS. In July, a local protest against IS occurred in the border town of Abu Kamal and was dispersed by gunfire. IS was also forced out of the villages of Abu Hamam, Ghranij and Kishkiyeh in eastern Deir-ez-Zor governorate by local tribes in early August due to IS' detention of 3 locals. IS is reportedly sending in reinforcements from nearby

Iraq, raising fears of harsh retaliation against the local population. ([Al Jazeera 2014/08/02](#), [SOHR 2014/07/07](#))

Humanitarian needs: In Deir-ez-Zor, the recent IS advances come with continued human rights concerns amid a severe humanitarian crisis, in which 250,000 people have been displaced in recent months. Since mid-June, an estimated 60,000 residents in eastern Deir-ez-Zor city (about one-quarter of its pre-conflict population) have been under siege with extremely limited access to humanitarian aid or other commodities. According to a REACH assessment of eastern Deir-ez-Zor city, the health situation has reached critical levels due to the lack of health staff, electricity, medicine and medical supplies. Food security is also a high priority, as there are insufficient goods available on the market due to the siege, and high prices mean that few people are able to access food. The lack of clean water, fuel and electricity supplies in the city have further exacerbated the spread of communicable diseases. Meanwhile, IS-controlled areas of the city have been subject to SAF airstrikes. ([UNICEF 2014/07/03](#), [REACH 2014/06](#))

Protection: Human rights violations have been reported in IS-controlled areas such as Deir-ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa governorates. In Ar-Raqqa governorate, IS' primary stronghold within Syria, two women were reportedly stoned to death in July. In several towns in Deir-ez-Zor (Khasham, Shiheil and Tabiyet Jazira) recently taken over from Jabhat Al-Nusra by IS, IDPs were not allowed to return to their homes unless they swore allegiance to IS. IS also announced a strict dress code for women forbidding them from showing their eyes and requiring activists to recognise IS and send all reports, photos and videos to IS for approval. ([AFP 2014/07/31](#), [Reuters 2014/08/01](#), [Long War Journal 2014/07/19](#), [NYT 2014/07/24](#), [BBC 2014/08/02](#))

Typhoid

Damaged water infrastructure, hot weather, overcrowded shelters and frequent power cuts have caused increasing water shortages and polluted water supplies, leading to recent outbreaks of waterborne diseases across the country. Typhoid and hepatitis A are reportedly increasing, especially in areas which have witnessed high levels of violence like Deir ez-Zor, Idleb, Ar-Raqqa, Aleppo, Homs and Rural Damascus. ([IFRC 2014/07/24](#)) WHO reported that the current availability of safe water supplies is one-third of pre-crisis levels and one-third of water treatment plants are no longer functioning. These conditions, along with densely populated and highly unsanitary shelters inside and outside Syria, where some 70 people share a single toilet, have facilitated the rapid spread of such diseases.

The contamination of water in the Euphrates river and the heavy violence witnessed in Deir-ez-Zor, along with factors affecting other Syrian governorates, made the governorate more susceptible to the spread of communicable diseases. WHO reported almost 2,000 cases of typhoid (76% of the 2,600 reported typhoid cases in Syria) in the governorate during a reporting period that extends from the start of the year until mid-July. ([WHO 2014/07/01, WHO 2014/05/31](#))

Refugee hosting countries

Protection concerns in Jordan

Given increasing restrictions by the Government of Jordan (GoJ) along its border with Syria, 90 makeshift shelters have been identified by the UN satellite agency (UNOSAT) on the Syrian side of the Rubkan border crossing. In addition, hundreds of Syrians are reportedly being held at transit sites in the militarised buffer zone along the eastern border for extended periods of time, with limited assistance and inadequate shelter. The authorities are reportedly holding refugees at the border to screen them, however, Raba Sarhan transit centre was established for this purpose. In the past year, the vast majority of Syrians entering Jordan must use the eastern border crossings, as the western border along Dar'a governorate has largely been closed. In July, an average of about 140 Syrians were allowed to enter the country each day, which is about half the number of daily arrivals reported in January. ([PI 2014/07/24, IOM 2014/08/01, UNHCR 2014/01/16, UNOSAT 2014/07/25](#))

The Government of Jordan (GoJ) instructed UNHCR to stop providing asylum seeker certificates to Syrian refugees who have left the camp outside of the official 'bailout' procedures. As of 14 July, those who leave the camps and approach UNHCR for asylum seeker certificates in urban areas for the first time must show bailout documentation to obtain an appointment. Without the asylum seeker certificate and a Ministry of Interior (MoI) service card, refugees outside of the camps will be unable to access free education or health services and will not be provided with WFP food vouchers. An estimated 200,000 Syrians have left the camps outside of the bailout process. In recent months, credible sources report that the number of refugees forcibly returned to the camp due to lack of bailout documents has increased. There are strong indications that the GoJ may crackdown on refugees who left the camp unofficially, particularly those who are found working without permits, rather than just those seeking UNHCR certificates after 14 July. ([PWG 2014/07/16, PI 2014/07/10, Jordan Times 2014/08/02](#))

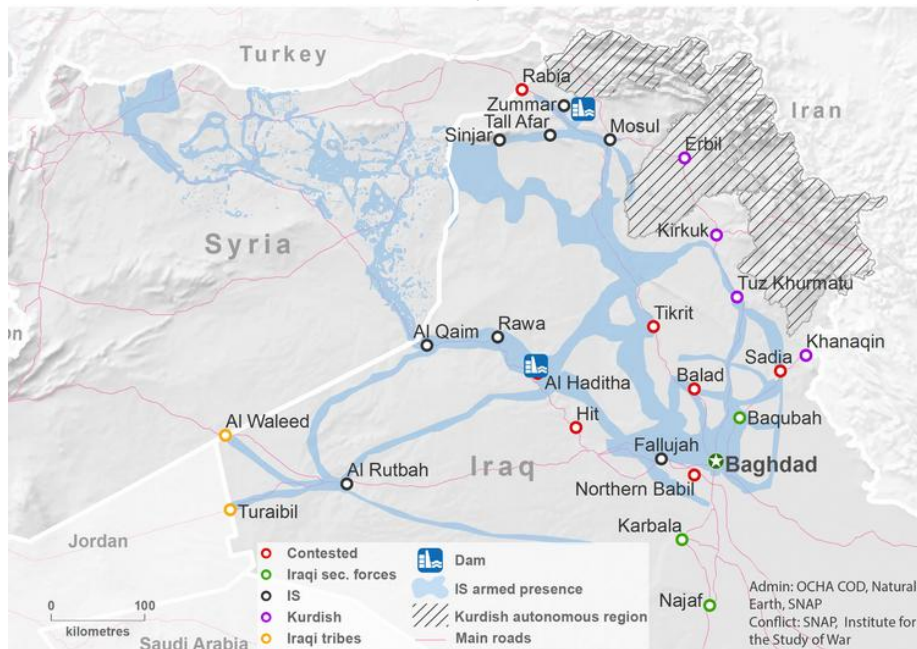
Since early 2014, GoJ authorities have significantly reduced the number of approved bailouts from the camps. Coupled with recent evictions of over 1,200 refugees residing in informal tented settlements (ITS) and the upcoming MoI verification of all Syrian refugees in non-camp areas, it appears that the GoJ is moving towards a more restrictive refugee encampment policy. This would also lead to a significant proportion of Syrians in host communities subjected to a number of protection issues, including limited access to basic services, unclear legal status, arrest, refoulement and/or separation of families.

Iraq

IS advances: Paralleling developments in Syria, IS made major strategic territorial gains in Iraq, such as the takeover of 2 small oil fields, Mosul Dam, (the country's largest) and encroaching on Haditha, while also attempting to institute its extremist religious views in areas under its control. As Ramadan ended, IS attacked Zummar and Sinjar in Ninewa governorate and Jalawlah in Diyala governorate in early August; all of which had been defended by Kurdish peshmerga forces. The peshmerga had been controlling more expansive territories and reportedly received limited external assistance due to various disputes with the central government, although Baghdad has now offered air support in response to IS' recent gains. In recent weeks, the peshmerga had also called in fighters from their Syrian Kurdish rivals for back-up support. As of 5 August, the Rabia'a/Yarobiya border crossing and Zummar were contested by IS and peshmerga forces. The border crossing was one of those authorised for cross-border assistance by the UN Security Council, however, it is unlikely to be used due to the upsurge in violence. ([BBC 2014/07/24, Washington Post 2014/08/03, AFP 2014/08/04](#))

Humanitarian needs: The withdrawal of the peshmerga from Sinjar caused up to 200,000 people to be displaced and a potentially dire humanitarian situation in Sinjar district. According to the UN, about 4,000 IDPs are reportedly under siege by IS forces in the nearby Sinjar mountains, with REACH reporting that there may be up to 200,000 people in the area. There is reportedly little to no food, water or shelter available and the humanitarian situation is reportedly dire, with rumours of several children dying due to the lack of assistance. A humanitarian airdrop occurred around 5 August but it was reported that assistance was inadequate. An additional 35,000-50,000 people are also hiding in 9 locations around Sinjar and 100 people are reportedly trapped at the Tal Afar airport. An estimated 30,000 IDPs have fled to Dohuk governorate and up to 6,000 mainly Yezidi IDPs have reportedly entered Syria. Many of the IDPs are minorities, such as Yezidi,

Christian and Shabak, or had previously been displaced, feeding fears of targeted sectarian violence. Dohuk officials are looking at expanding 2 sites established for Syrian refugees (Bajet Kandela and Gawilan), expanding the Garmawa transit camp and establishing a temporary camp in Zakho to accommodate the latest influx of IDPs. ([OCHA 2014/08/04](#), [Washington Post 2014/08/03](#), [AFP 2014/08/04](#), [REACH 2014/08/05](#))



Protection: In Mosul, IS issued a decree ordering the city's Christian population to convert to Islam or pay a tax, known as *jizya*, or face death. It was estimated that prior to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, 100,000 Christians resided in Mosul. However, in recent years, the Christian community had dwindled to 3,000-5,000 people and the recent takeover in June is believed to have virtually eliminated Mosul's Christian population. Meanwhile, other reports of IS' extremist policies, namely an IS decree requiring female genital mutilation, proved to be fraudulent. ([The Guardian 2014/07/23](#), [Al Jazeera 2014/07/19](#), [UN 2014/08/03](#), [Washington Post 2014/07/24](#))

Political developments: The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), already overstretched in its recent territorial gains, faced another political setback to its increasing autonomy when a US judge ruled in favour of the Government of Iraq (GoI) and ordered a tanker, holding USD 100 million of crude oil piped from the KR-I, to be seized if it entered US waters. Lawyers for the GoI filed a suit in US state courts in July, arguing that the 100 million barrels of oil was

sold without its permission. Negotiations between Baghdad and the KR-I over oil revenue sharing collapsed early this year; the KR-I went ahead and exported oil via a Turkish pipeline, leading Baghdad to stop all budget payments to the KR-I. Since the IS offensive in June, the KR-I has increased its territorial control over disputed, oil-rich areas and is inching towards secession, bringing the ire of Iraq's central government. However, without access to its oil wealth, the KR-I will continue to be dependent on Baghdad for its survival, particularly with resources overstretched militarily and with the humanitarian crisis. ([Reuters 2014/07/29](#))

Lebanon

Overview: The security situation has deteriorated over the last few weeks in and around the predominantly Sunni town of Arsal, with a surge in clashes between the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and armed opposition groups (AOGs) on 2-5 August. The town is home to thousands of Syrian refugees residing mostly in makeshift camps. Many refugees are also reportedly scattered in informal tented settlements (ITS) on the surrounding hills.

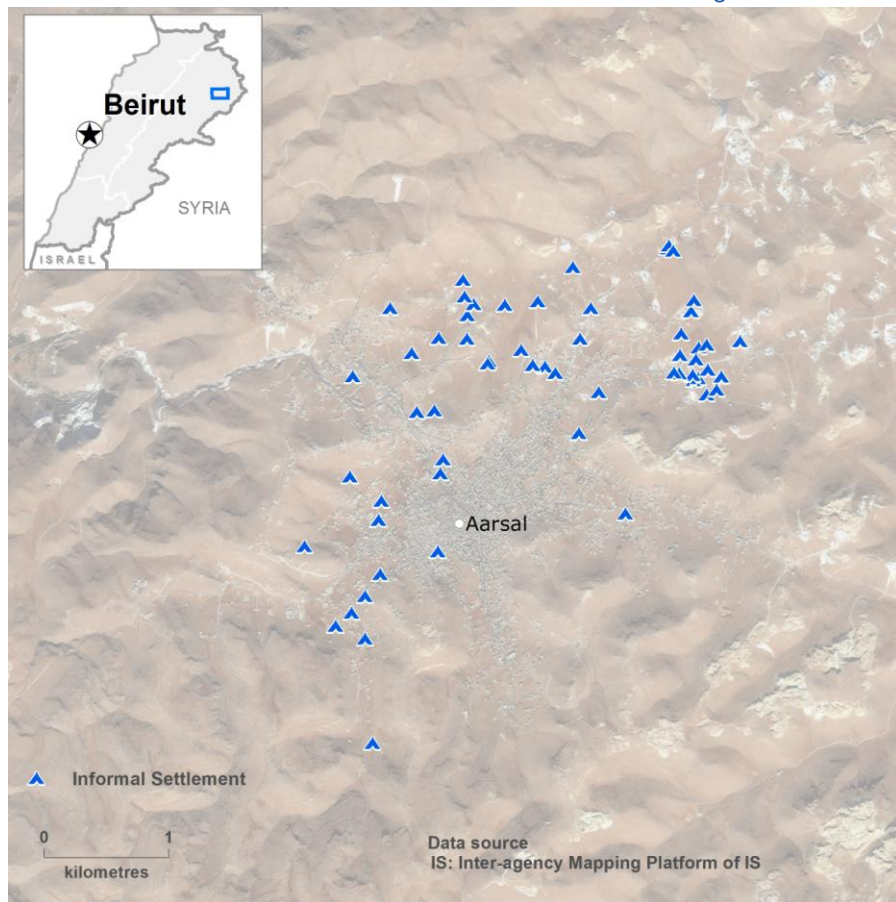
Armed violence: Fighting ignited after the Lebanese security forces arrested an opposition leader popular among Islamist fighters, including Jabhat Al Nusra and fighters suspected to be linked to the Islamic State (IS), who are present in the Lebanese area between Arsal and the Syrian border. There were allegations of around 2 thousand opposition fighters in and around the town. AOGs retaliated by seizing a police station, attacking army checkpoints and taking several members of the Lebanese security force captive. This event represents the biggest push by militants so far into Lebanese territory since the beginning of Syria's civil war, and security forces asserted that militants had planned the attack beforehand. The area has witnessed IS and Syrian opposition groups' incursions in the past, which are allegedly related to Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict and its control of North Bekaa.

LAF deployed north and west of Arsal, where it continues to reinforce its air and artillery support. From the east and south, militants are loosely surrounded by the Syrian Armed Forces (SAF) and Hezbollah. The western and eastern outskirts were attacked by both Lebanese and Syrian forces, with the latter using airstrikes. As of 6 August, LAF and AOGs agreed a 24-hour ceasefire to allow the evacuation of wounded civilians. Local sources indicated that opposition fighters had suffered big losses, and a large number of them withdrew from Arsal overnight as mediation efforts continued.

Negotiations are heading toward a complete withdrawal by AOGs and the release of Lebanese soldiers held captive, but incidents continue to be

reported due to disagreements between armed groups over whether they should leave or stay and continue fighting the LAF. To date, the death toll for conflicting parties amounts to 17 Lebanese soldiers and over 50 militants. ([Daily Star 2014/08/05](#), [Trust 2014/08/04](#), [AFP 2014/08/04](#), [Daily Star 2014/04/08](#), [SSCL 2014/08/02-04](#), [PI 2014/08/04](#), [UNHCR 2014/08/03](#), [OCHA 2014/07/15](#), [UNHCR 2014/02/25](#), [Daily Star 2014/08/06](#), [Daily Star 2014/08/06](#))

Informal Settlements in Arsal and surroundings



Humanitarian impact: Over 100,000 refugees are estimated to be living in makeshift camps in Arsal and surrounding hills. Up to 50,000 of them are located in the town which originally recorded a population of 40,000 Lebanese residents and ranks as one of the areas most affected by the

Syrian crisis, with a high concentration of displaced Syrians and vulnerable Lebanese nationals.

An unknown number of Arsal civilians fled the town at the beginning of the clashes, but reports indicated that civilians were targeted by AOGs' fire, forcing them to return and confining them to their homes. On 5 August, unconfirmed local sources indicated that LAF advised all Syrians living in ITS to leave the camps immediately. However, LAF also reportedly prevented Syrian nationals from leaving Arsal to seek refuge in other towns in North Bekaa, fearing unarmed opposition fighters were among the displaced. UNHCR reported that most refugees living in informal settlements in and around the town sought refuge in private houses, collective shelters and schools.

So far, local health authorities recorded 12 civilians killed, including refugees hit by the shelling, and 150 people wounded, up to 15 of whom were reportedly fighters. The ceasefire declared on 6 August allowed Lebanese Red Cross ambulances to enter the town and transport wounded civilians to nearby hospitals.

Earlier reports also indicated that rockets landed westward in Labwe, while clashes between Hezbollah and AOGs were reported northward in Ras Baalbek, 2 locations which also host a large number of refugees. These areas could see further displacement, however it is likely that movement for many Syrian refugees will be restricted due to checkpoints and lack of updated documentation.

Although there is no updated information regarding needs, medical assistance to the injured is a pressing issue. Before the latest surge in violence, main needs in Arsal included shelter, WASH, health and protection. ([UNHCR 2014/08/03](#), [SSCL 2014/08/02-04](#), [Jaddaliyya 2014/05/05](#), [UNHCR 2014/02/25](#), [Associated Press 2014/08/04](#), [PI 2014/08/05](#), [Daily Star 2014/08/06](#))

Possible developments: Despite the ceasefire, renewed clashes remain a possibility, as not all AOGs have agreed to stop fighting. Hundreds of fighters are allegedly still inside Arsal and in hideouts in the eastern and southern outskirts where LAF ground operations will be challenging due to difficult terrain. Also, on 5 August, unconfirmed local sources suggested that SAF and Hezbollah forces are assembling in Yunin and Nahle, North Bekaa, suggesting they may move towards Arsal in the coming days, in an attempt to push the AOGs from the southern outskirts toward the center of Arsal or northeast away from the town.

Mediation efforts are ongoing, and some fighters have agreed to withdraw if LAF return to checkpoints outside Arsal and do not enter the town itself. Initially, AOGs requested the release of their leader arrested on 2 August, but

also the release of Islamist inmates detained in Lebanon. On the other side, demands of LAF included the release of abducted Lebanese soldiers and security personnel (over 35 reported missing, 6 released so far) and withdrawal of fighters from the area.

If a significant number of AOG fighters remain in Aarsal and surroundings, and in the event of a tightening of the eastern and southern front, additional fighters could withdraw from their strongholds in the southern and eastern outskirts and move inside the town, creating the conditions for potential besiegement.

On 6 August, local authorities in Aarsal also indicated a risk of friction between Aarsal residents and Syrian refugees, resulting from accusations that AOG fighters were residing in ITS before the conflict started.

Elsewhere in Lebanon, security forces are reportedly taking action against AOG members, which raises concerns of civil unrest, localised violence or attacks on military checkpoints and patrols in areas such as Tripoli, Saida and Baalbek. ([Daily Star 2014/08/04](#), [SSCL 2014/08/02-05](#), [PI 2014/08/04-05](#), [Daily Star 2014/08/06](#), [Daily Star 2014/08/06](#), [Daily Star 2014/08/06](#), [Assafir 2014/08/06](#))