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# Al-Hasakeh Governorate profile

## Syria Needs Analysis Project

February 2014

*This document is the second governorate profile published by the Syria Needs Analysis Project (SNAP). The profile describes the current situation in Al-Hasakeh, with regards to the conflict, the subsequent displacement situation and the humanitarian needs, where available per district.*

*The Syria Needs Analysis Project welcomes all information that could complement this report. For additional information, comments or questions please email [SNAP@ACAPS.org](mailto:SNAP@ACAPS.org)*

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### Overview

The north-eastern Syrian governorate of Al-Hasakeh borders Turkey and Iraq and boasts a high percentage of Syria's agricultural land and oil fields. The governorate's geographic location lends itself to highly tense political relations with the neighbouring countries, while it also hosts vital trade routes for supplies, smugglers and arms. Given its complex political make-up and desirable oil fields, many groups have vied to control Al-Hasakeh. The governorate is hemmed in by Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor governorates, which are both controlled by extremist Islamist groups and have seen heavy fighting over the course of the conflict, making Al-Hasakeh one of the most difficult governorates for humanitarian assistance to reach. In recent months, aid supplies have been airlifted into the governorate, reaching beneficiaries that the UN has stated would be otherwise unreachable, although the extent to which it is distributed throughout the governorate is unclear.

Over the course of the conflict, the population of Al-Hasakeh have been increasingly vulnerable to severe poverty. Despite its wealth of natural resources, the governorate has long been one of Syria's poorest regions. Al-Hasakeh suffered years of consecutive drought between 2004 and 2010; severely impacting the economy, food security and health in the region and leading to widespread displacement both to urban centres and out of the governorate.

The governorate is home to the largest concentration of Kurds in Syria, the largest ethnic minority in the country, making up 10-15% of the Syrian population.

Accurate population figures are unavailable due to the Government of Syria (GoS) denying citizenship to thousands of Kurds during the 1960s and recent censuses not taking ethnicity into account. The minority groups in Al-Hasakeh were long-oppressed under the GoS and the region has seen little development. The current nationwide conflict has deeply impacted the agriculture-based economy in Al-Hasakeh, leaving large segments of the population near-destitute.

In November 2012, fighting broke out between the Kurdish People Protection Units (YPG) and the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Although the two groups signed a peace treaty in Feb 2013, with the opposition becoming increasingly fragmented violence in the governorate has increased since May 2013 with fighting between the YPG and various factions of the opposition expanding to new frontlines. As insecurity spread, aid delivery to the region diminished, with WFP, for example, being unable to deliver food assistance between June and September 2013 and only resuming delivery in December through airlifts from Iraq. The airlifted aid that has arrived in Quamishli cannot travel to other hard to reach areas in the governorate due to insecurity.

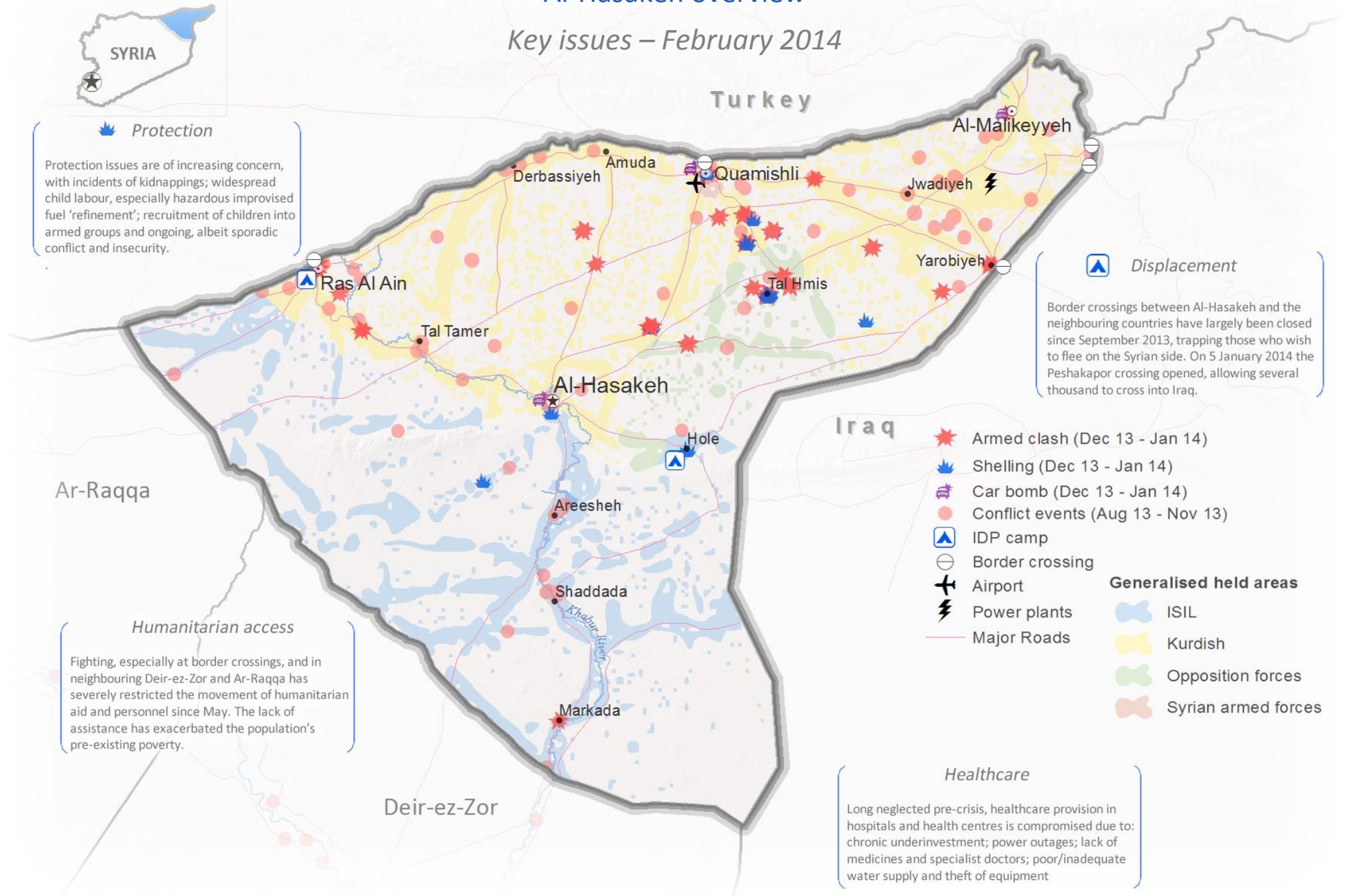
Amid the violence and economic stagnation, Al-Hasakeh is hosting over 350,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) from neighbouring governorates and within Al-Hasakeh, and also returning economic migrants who had left during the drought only to return fleeing violence elsewhere. Many are at risk of severe poverty. The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate with an inter-agency mission in the last week of January estimating half a million people in the governorate (including 250,000 IDPs) to be in critical need of food, medicines, clothes and shelter.

Since GoS forces withdrew from Kurdish territories in mid-July 2012, local Kurdish councils have administered the Kurdish regions. While Kurdish political parties are subject to internal divisions and factions, they are united in their bid to gain more autonomy and better rights. Both the Syrian National Coalition opposition and the GoS fear that the Kurdish are pushing for self-rule and a separate state.

With border crossings into Turkey and Iraq being predominantly closed, many people have been trapped within Al-Hasakeh. In August 2013, around 60,000 Syrians poured into the Kurdistan Region in Iraq (KR-I) in a matter of days when its borders were temporarily opened, fleeing the violence and also economic hardship. Towards the end of January and the beginning of February 2014, insecurity along the access routes and unofficial fees for the passage of goods increased the costs for transporting commodities into the governorate significantly raising the prices of food and non-food items. Furthermore, Al Hasakeh is becoming an increasingly dangerous place to live with widespread hazardous child labour, recruitment of children to armed groups and kidnappings.

# Al-Hasakeh overview

Key issues – February 2014



## Future risks and forecasts

**Political developments:** The powerful Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), having taken advantage of the current unrest to further their long-held ambitions of Kurdish self autonomy by consolidating the power of the Kurdish local councils and declaring a Kurdish administrative autonomy in late November 2013, is fast dominating the political landscape. While numerous Kurdish groups vie for political power and influence within Al-Hasakeh, the likelihood of any armed conflict between them remains remote. The armed conflict between Kurdish groups and hard-line Islamist fighters, after declining in most areas towards the end of 2013, has concentrated in opposition pockets in southern Quamishli and re-ignited in Ras Al Ain since the beginning of 2014. The sporadic fighting between YPG and ISIL and the security incidents such as suicide bombings, especially in the border areas and main cities are most likely to continue in 2014.

The opposition parties in the area, headed by the Islamic Front and Jabhat al-Nusra allegedly submitted several of their strongholds in southern Al-Hasakeh to ISIL without any fighting in February. The recent infighting flaring in early 2014 among opposition groups in Aleppo and Idlib is not likely to move to Al-Hasakeh governorate in the short-term.

**Access:** Access both within the governorate and across the borders with Iraq and Turkey will continue to be highly problematic, restricting the exodus of people and hampering the import of humanitarian and commercial goods and internal trade. Turkish borders close to Kurdish territories are considered highly restricted for civilian movement. Incidents were reported of Turkish authorities shooting at people trying to cross the border close to the town of Derbasiyeh in January. Incidents of harsher and reactive border control, particularly with regards to civilians crossing the borders irregularly have increased in the last months, resulting in isolated casualties. Turkey's border restrictions are likely to become stricter for Syrians trying to leave the country and for humanitarian aid to enter. Ad-hoc openings of the border with Iraq are likely, allowing limited numbers of people to enter KR-I, as happened on 5 January. Airlifts from Damascus or the KR-I to Quamishli will continue to be the main form of external humanitarian assistance as insecurity incidents and the opposition blockade of the PYD-controlled Al-Hasakeh will continue to prevent movement of supplies by road.

**Livelihoods and Food Security:** Reduced agriculture yields combined with restrictions on the movement of produce to markets will result in lower income to farmers. The low rainfall levels in the Middle East are also an alarming sign of a coming drought affecting the north-eastern region which will further reduce the agriculture production. Cases of malnutrition and starvation are likely in hard-to-read areas where the humanitarian situation is already critical. The PYD control of smuggling activities, humanitarian aid and oil fields is likely to increase the

wealth of politically-affiliated individuals while others are increasingly stricken by poverty.

**Displacement:** As access issues continue to restrict the provision of assistance to many rural areas, people in sub-districts in critical conditions are expected to increasingly move to urban centres where aid convoys will bring periodically supplies, particularly Quamishli. However, as the overall livelihood conditions are continuously deteriorating and as the security incidents in urban centres, though sporadic, continue to take place, many people will attempt to flee to the neighbouring countries while others will remain trapped amid the conflict.

**Health:** Existing health services, supplemented by limited humanitarian health provision, will struggle to prevent further deterioration of the health situation in the governorate. The first case of polio in the governorate was confirmed in January 2014, signifying low vaccination coverage. Given the deteriorating WASH conditions and the governorate's proximity to Deir-ez-Zor, where the virus was first detected, the governorate is at high risk of further polio cases. Other communicable diseases will emerge with the deteriorating services driving people to seek health services in KR-I. The situation for people with chronic diseases will be worsened due to lack of medicines.

## Data sources

**J-RANS I/ II and SINA:** In the first Joint Rapid Assessment of Northern Syria (JRANS), undertaken in January 2013, 6 of Al-Hasakeh's 16 sub-districts were assessed. Several pertinent issues were highlighted, particularly pertaining to food security and nutrition. The JRANS II assessment was carried out in March 2013 and covered 13 sub-districts with a total population of 1.8 million including local communities and IDPs. The SINA assessment conducted in November 2013 covered 11 out of 16 sub-districts in and a population of 1.4 million.

**Other major data sources:** Include NGOs and INGOs assessments and reports, GoS sources such as the Syrian Central Bureau of statistics data and Civil Affairs records, local and international newspapers, academic articles, and think tank and other reports.

**Map data sources:** Conflict: UNMAS and SNAP. Conflict data presented is collected from open sources and has not been verified by the United Nations. The data does not claim to be a complete record of all incidents across Syria. Oil and gas: Copyright Lynx Information Systems Ltd, not to be reproduced without permission of the owner. Infrastructure: Global Energy Observatory, OCHA. Administration: OCHA Common Operational Datasets. Displacement: SINA. Land use: GlobCover project (ESA). Population: OCHA (2011). Interpolation of held areas: SNAP.

## Information gaps and data limitations

**Baseline:** Due to the GoS having denied citizenship to more than 300,000 Kurds in Al-Hasakeh and the lack of an up-to-date census, population figures are more difficult to estimate than for other governorates. Little sectoral information on Al-Hasakeh is available, particularly concerning education and shelter.

**Crisis Information:** Access has been problematic for a long time, resulting in the undertaking of few assessments and a consequent lack of current data. Assessments that have been undertaken, such as the J-RANS I and II and the SINA have only been able to access certain areas of the governorate and therefore there large data gaps remain and the available data lacks regular updating.

**Sectoral coverage:** As for much of Syria, in-crisis statistical data is very limited across all the sectors, especially with the CBS and related ministries not updating or publishing available data. In Al-Hasakeh, the access difficulties limit the data available from humanitarian organisations. The WFP price monitoring system, for example, was only able to provide data on diesel fuel prices in the governorate between May and June 2013.

**Geographical coverage:** WFP and other agencies have at times carried out assessments in the north-east, but often the data is not disaggregated at the governorate level, let alone the district and sub-district levels. Conflict data is available, although gaps exist. With armed groups acting as the authorities in several regions, often information is not shared. Less information is generally available from hard-to-reach rural areas, which are assumed to be more vulnerable, due to both their distance from urban centres and the access constraints within the governorate.

**Relevance of the data:** As the information in this report takes into account the humanitarian situation before the crisis and the most updated sectoral information as of February 2014, the report will become less relevant with time and will require updating.

## Governorate profile pre-2011

### Geography and demography

Al-Hasakeh, the oil-rich north-eastern governorate of Syria, is largely agricultural land and oil fields. Known as the country's breadbasket, Al-Hasakeh traditionally produced most of Syria's wheat, with over 800,000 hectares sown in an average year, and half the country's oil. Although it is one of the most resource rich regions in the country, the governorate is steeped in poverty due to the low levels of development and the GoS's institutional oppression of the minorities with the oil revenues not supporting most of the local communities.

The administrative capital is Al-Hasakeh city, with a population of 223,155 at the end of 2011. Since the start of the crisis, there has been a call to split the governorate into two, making Quamishli city (218,456 residents) another administrative capital of a new governorate. Other significant urban centres are the border towns of Ras Al Ain (34,799 residents) and Al Malikeyyeh (31,199 residents). (OCHA CODS)

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the population of Al-Hasakeh was estimated at 1.6 million at the beginning of 2011. There are no accurate figures about the distribution of ethnicities in the governorate and estimates of the number of Kurds vary widely, from 40% to 70% of the governorate's population. Arabs and other minorities (Assyrians, Chaldeans, Turkmen and Armenians) constitute the remaining population. ([Eqtisad 2013/09/29](#), [Al-Jazeera 2011/04/22](#), [Civil Affairs Records 2010](#), [CTC 2013/10/24](#), [Daily Star 2013/11/12](#))

Al-Hasakeh is mostly Sunni (70%-80%). Christians (Orthodox, Catholic, and Church of the East sects) are also present in the governorate (20 -30%). Other minorities such as the Yazidi faith reside in and around the city of Ras Al Ain. ([emaratalyoum 2012/03/20](#), [CTC 2013/10/24](#))

**Syrian Kurds:** The Kurds in Al-Hasakeh reside in 4 main districts: Al Malikeyyeh (Dêrika in Kurdish), Quamishli (Qamişlo), Ras Al Ain (Serêkaniyê), and Al-Hasakeh (Hesekê). Other Kurdish communities in Syria can be found in Ar-Raqqa, Aleppo and Damascus. The Kurds in Syria have strong ethnic bonds with Kurdish populations in neighbouring Iraq, Turkey and Iran. They share a common language, despite the multiple dialects and customs. ([MERIP 2011/08/31](#), [Global Security 2013/08/09](#), [Al-monitor 2013/03/23](#), [Tejel 2009](#), [Jadaliyya 2013/09/07](#))

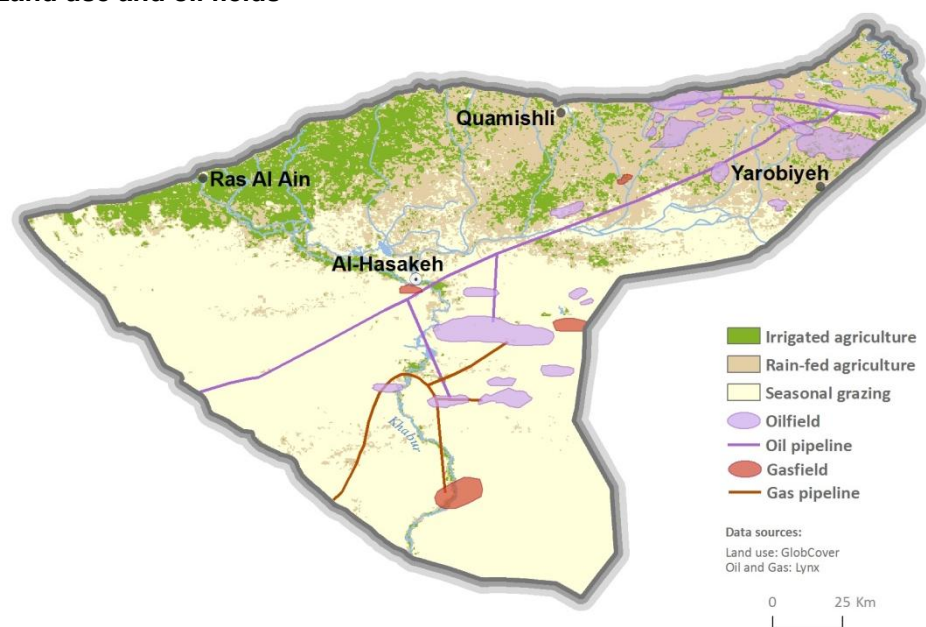
### Economy

The economy of Al-Hasakeh relies primarily on agriculture and oil production although animal husbandry is also significant to the local economy. More than 60% of the population reportedly work in agriculture and animal husbandry.

However, the GoS labour force survey in 2010 identified 26% of the population as working in agriculture, 23% in services, 18% in building and construction, 16% in hotels and restaurants, 9% in industry and 8% in others. While 27% of employed work in the public sector, 32% work in the private formal sector and 42% work in the private informal sector. The unemployment rate during the pre-crisis period was estimated at 15%, far higher than the national average of 8.4% in 2010. (*Al Waref 2009, CBS 2010*)

Half of all Syrian oil production takes place in Al-Hasakeh (about 370,000 barrels/day in 2010) yet oil revenues did not benefit the majority of the local communities, with the GoS (Syrian Petroleum Company) and foreign companies monopolizing this sector. (*Jadaliyya 2013/09/07, Al-Monitor 2013/01/23, Al-Akbar 2013/03/12*)

### Land use and oil fields



**Livelihoods and Food Security:** Al-Hasakeh produces the bulk of Syria's agricultural produce. Crops include a variety of grains, cotton sugar beet, dairy products, vegetables and very few fruit trees. Al-Hasakeh is the so-called breadbasket, with 75% of total national wheat production. Al-Hasakeh is the country's largest wheat producer, with over 800,000 hectares sown on average, of which 45% irrigated. (*ACF and ACSAD 2010, CBS 2010, USDA 2012/06, Tishreen 2008/11/05, FAO/WFP 2012/06, RAS 2013/07, USDA 2012/06/12USDA 2012/06/12*)

### Pre-crisis Al-Hasakeh cultivated areas out of total Syria (ha)

|            | Wheat and barley | Other crops (lentils, etc.) | Vegetables | Trees   |
|------------|------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------|
| Al-Hasakeh | 1,101,082        | 107,893                     | 12,616     | 1,044   |
| Syria      | 3,125,700        | 239,000                     | 178,419    | 992,700 |
|            | 35%              | 45%                         | 7%         | 0%      |

Source: *JRFSNA 2012/06 and CBS 2011*

From 2004, north-eastern Syria experienced successive years of drought with rain falls below the average twinned with above average summer temperatures, which significantly reduced agriculture and livestock production. The number of heads of livestock dropped 75% during the drought's peak of 2007/2008. The area for cotton cultivation also shrank due to the drought and lack of development by over 30% between 2005 and 2010, and then another 30% from 2009 to 2010 due to disease. The resultant fall in livelihood opportunities drove thousands of people to the governorate's major cities as well as to Aleppo and Damascus. (*Levant News 2010/08/27, ACF and ACSAD 2010, WFP 2009, IRIN 2010/02/07, ACSAD 2010, FAO 2013/07/05, Tishreen 2012/08/28, SNS 2010/09/22*)

**Poverty:** Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor historically have the greatest incidence and severity of poverty in Syria. The north-eastern area accounted for over half of the Syrian poor identified in 2007. Poverty is more prevalent in rural areas, with 20% of the rural population of the north-east living below the national lower poverty line (unable to meet their basic food and non-food needs) compared to 10% in urban areas. Specific disaggregated data for Al-Hasakeh is not available, though it is known that many people were in debt due to loans accumulated during the drought years. (*UNDP 2005, UNDP 2010, UN 2009*)

### Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFIs)

While people in cities primarily live in concrete buildings, the houses in rural areas, such as Amuda, Derbassiyeh and Ras Al Ain are mainly made of clay. Poor maintenance has left some of these houses vulnerable to collapsing during heavy rains and floods.

In 2010, 6% of Syria's dwellings were identified in the governorate while Al-Hasakeh hosts 6.5% of the country's population. The average size of a dwelling in the governorate is 12% smaller than the national average, while the average per capita space per person in Al-Hasakeh is one third less than the average in Syria. Al-Hasakeh dwellings are more densely populated and than in other parts of the country because of extended families living together in smaller dwellings compared to other Syrian governorates. (*SCBS 2010*)

## WASH

In Al-Hasakeh there are two main rivers: the Khabour (400 km) and the Jaghiagh (100 km). The Jaghiagh, which is subject to wastewater pollution, intersects with the Khabour in the city of Hasakeh. In terms of water resources, Al-Hasakeh was considered the richest governorate in Syria. Water only flowed through the Khabour river 3 or 4 times at best during summer, diminishing a vital source of crop irrigation. The uncontrolled development of irrigated cultivation in semi-arid areas and digging of new wells overburdened groundwater sources. The excessive water use in addition to the construction of dams upstream in Turkey and Syria caused the rivers to dry up. Though no water is flowing through the Khabour River, wells have continued to be dug in its basin. (ACF and ACSAD 2010, eSyria 2012/04/08, al-Monitor 2013/12)

## Education

In 2010, Al-Hasakeh had 2,238 primary and secondary schools (public and private). Functional learning spaces in the governorate mostly received children in a single class. This was one of the main reasons, especially in rural areas, for children not being sent to schools. The drop-out rate from basic compulsory education increased from 2.5% to 3% of total students enrolled between 2010 and 2011. This was mainly attributed to the increased use of child labour as a coping mechanism to support their families facing the worsening economic conditions. (CBS 2010, Tishreen 2011/01/29, SINA 2013)

## Health

The GoS had long neglected the north-eastern regions of Syria, excluding them from investment and development across all sectors. Hence, most medical equipment in the governorate is out-dated and of poor quality. (Guardian 2013/11/01)

Malnutrition is common in the north-eastern governorates. 14% of the children under 5 were underweight in Al-Hasakeh in 2009 compared to a national average of 10% according to a CBS household survey using weight-for-height as a measurement indicator. This percentage varied widely across governorates; the lowest being in As-Sweida (1.2%) and the highest in Deir-ez-Zor 15.2%. A 2010 UNICEF report found children in Al-Hasakeh were facing increased rates of malnutrition due to the drought and common misconceptions concerning nutrition. (UNICEF 2010/08)

In 2009 the percentage of children (12-23 months) who received the necessary vaccinations was 77%, slightly above the national average of 76%. The most common diseases among children were respiratory diseases and diarrhoea. (SCBS 2009)

In 2009, around 12% of citizens in Al-Hasakeh suffered from chronic diseases such as blood pressure, diabetes and heart diseases compared to 11% on the national level. (SCBS 2009)

## Protection

The north-eastern governorates have the highest rates of child labour in Syria, with higher incidence than the average figure of two-thirds of children in rural areas working. There is a higher prevalence in poor households. (UN Children's Fund 2013/09)

**Strong military presence and arrests:** As in other governorates, the GoS security and police presence was strong despite the limited deployment of armed forces in Al-Hasakeh. In 1998, the GoS signed a security agreement with Turkey under which Syria labelled the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) in Turkey a terrorist organisation and prohibited its activities and those of its affiliates. Since then, the GoS has often detained the PKK affiliated-PYD leaders and other Kurdish politicians. (MERIP 2011/08/31) In 2004, inspired by Saddam's fall, a Kurdish uprising started in Quamishli following a football match between Arab and Kurdish teams. The Syrian army responded quickly, deploying thousands of troops and launching a crackdown in which many civilians were killed and hundreds arrested. (ISW 2012/12/06, Washingtonpost 1999, Dailymail 2003/12/04, BBC 2011/04/19, KRG 2013)

**Oppression:** After the Kurdish revolution in Turkey in 1925, around 22,000 Kurds fled Turkey and settled in Al-Hasakeh. When the Baath party came to power in 1963, Syria was declared an Arab republic and Kurds were marginalised. The names of Kurdish villages and sites were replaced with Arabic ones. In the 1962 census in Syria, an estimated 120,000 to 200,000 Kurds, mostly agricultural workers, were not registered and so were stripped of their Syrian citizenship and lost their right to education, voting, employment in the public sector, travelling, marriage and owning property. The number of stateless Kurds is estimated to have grown to more than 300,000 by 2011. A number were granted the Syrian nationality after the start of 2011 uprising, though estimates as to how many vary widely.

Several employment positions are prohibited from Kurds and other ethnic minorities in the public sector. Elements of Kurdish cultural identity, such as language, music and publications, were banned (1986 decree). As in other governorates in Syria, formation of political parties, associations or social gatherings were not allowed. As such, members of secret political parties were regularly incarcerated. (HRW 1996, USIP 2009, HRW 1996)

## Governorate profile post-conflict

### Economy

The impact of the crisis compounded by the economic sanctions has particularly aggravated the economic situation in Al-Hasakeh, specifically with the decreased fuel and agriculture production, increase in prices and shortages of goods, long-term and frequent power outages, and reduced resources and lack of jobs. Lack of security and employment and depleted financial resources have led to emigration and reliance on remittances as basic income sources. (ARA News 2013/09/07)

Of the 1.4 million people assessed in 11 districts of Al-Hasakeh, 538,000 people were reported to be in-need of food assistance. (SINA 2014/01)

### Livelihoods

**Agriculture:** According to the SINA, the main sources of income in the governorate remain primarily food crop and livestock production and sales. Nevertheless, the agriculture sector has been mostly affected which aggravates the livelihood problems. (SINA 2014/01)

**Wheat and Cotton:** The cultivation of cotton in Al-Hasakeh has fallen to the lowest levels on record, largely due to the high costs of inputs and transportation. The quantity received by the end of November 2013 by the General Establishment of Cotton Ginning and Marketing (Hoboub) centres dropped to less than 75% of the pre-crisis level. The crisis has also had a severe impact on the wheat supply chain, traditionally managed by the GoS. Wheat production has declined from 1.1 million tons in 2012 to 690 thousand tons in 2013 for a variety of reasons: Only 6 of Al-Hasakeh's 40 wheat collection centres are currently operated by the Hoboub Establishment in Al-Hasakeh and Quamishli as the remaining centres in other sub-districts were mainly closed because due to the looting and armed violence. The reduced agriculture production is aggravated by the farmers' inability to sell their production to the GoS centres because of the access constraints. Farmers complain that the GoS has resorted to importing wheat, mainly to supply the capital and other governorates) while large quantities of wheat remains stored in silos in Al-Hasakeh. In addition, those farmers fear that the GoS centres would deduct their unpaid loans from their revenues. (Tishreen 2013/09/02, Al Binaa 2013/12/09, FAO 2013/07/05, Tishreen 2013/11/25, Aliqtisadi 2013/12/03, Aliqtisadi 2013/09/14, Aliqtisadi 2012/12/26, DP 2013/08/26, Tishreen 2012/05/14, Tishreen 2008/11/05, SANA 2010/11/03)

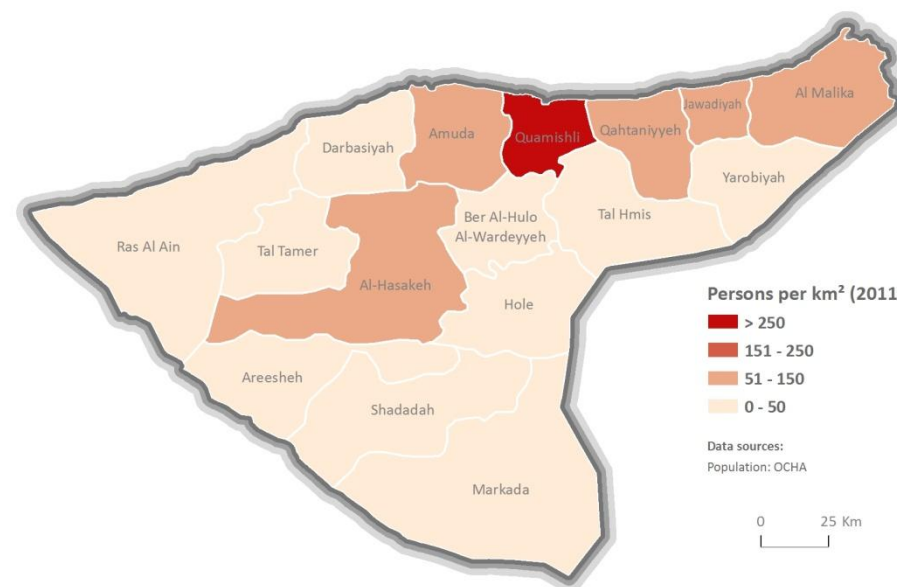
**Livestock:** The population in the sub-districts such as Shaddada, Jawadiyeh and Quamishli making up 40% of Al-Hasakeh population still rely on livestock production and sales for living. The hike in fuel, fodder and feed prices has forced the herders and small farmers to sell a part of their flock at reduced price to meet

their growing expenditures. No estimations are available about the reduced production of goat and sheep meat in the governorate. (SINA 2014/01)

**Trade and the informal market:** Before the crisis, Al-Hasakeh used to rely on the markets of Aleppo and Damascus for the supply of goods. With access to these domestic markets and potential markets in Iraq and Turkey blocked, the population is more reliant on goods smuggled via informal routes. Recently, smuggling has been increasingly monitored by Turkish and Iraqi authorities, who have attempted to tighten their respective borders. In October, Turkey started building a two-metre high wall along its border with Quamishli to prevent the informal crossing of people and goods. A large number of traders used to rely on informal crossings for the export and import of goods and the stricter measures have curtailed smuggling in the region. (As Safir 2013/08/05)

According to the SINA, makeshift oil refineries are reportedly increasing across northern Syria, as an income activity, due to reduction in livelihoods and in reaction to reduced fuel availability. In Al-Hol and Ber el Helou Alwardiyeh sub-districts, for example, people, including children, are working in oil extraction due to the lack of other livelihoods. (SINA 2014/01)

### Population density



**Poverty:** The population of Al-Hasakeh, relying mainly on agricultural production, has been known for its high poverty rates, especially after the drought which hit the region between 2004 and 2010. According to a November 2013 joint rapid food security and agricultural needs assessment, 68% of the assessed population in Al-Hasakeh reported having insufficient income to buy food. The most affected groups were farmers and relocated populations. Mainly because of the ongoing conflict and the associated disruption to peoples' lives, livelihoods, and security, food availability has become more difficult compared to 2012. Negative coping strategies included: lower consumption of preferred food, reductions in the number of meals/day, limited portions of food, and selling of assets. (WFP/FAO 2013/11)

**Fuel shortages:** Following the withdrawal of GoS forces from the governorate in July 2012, oil has been distributed by the PYD to stations in several areas in the governorate though availability is very limited. The PYD-linked People's Council allocated a ration of 2 barrels of diesel fuel for purchase per family. It is reported that the PYD and the GoS made an agreement to maintain security in Al-Hasakeh and especially in the oil-rich Rmeilan. This agreement entails the distribution of revenues from the sale of fuel between the two parties. Oil will allegedly be exported through a pre-existent pipeline extending from the oil field to Iraqi territories. (Eqtisad 2013/11/22, ARA News 2013/11/20)

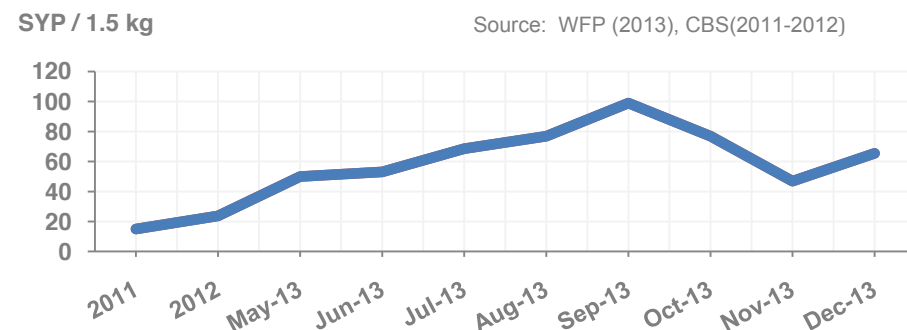
**Food Security:** According to J-RANS II, the high food prices, specifically bread, were a major concern in Al-Hasakeh compared to other northern governorates. According to the SINA, IDPs in collective shelters (such as schools and mosques) are considered the most vulnerable group, not having sufficient food given the considerable challenge to humanitarian access. IDPs living with host communities are the second-most affected. Within these vulnerable groups, pregnant and breast-feeding women are at the greatest risk. While women mostly rely on breast-feeding for feeding their babies of less than 6 months, these women are not generally eating as much as they need to. (SINA 2014/01)

**Flour shortage:** Bakeries have been facing a shortage in flour because of access difficulties. This has been compounded by the shortages of water and electricity, which affect bakeries' operations, particularly in hard-to-reach areas. Moreover, the traders' monopoly in distributing the bread across various regions of the governorate caused the prices to increase in some places and a lack of available bread in other areas. (Tishreen 2013/08/14, Aliqtisadi 2013/10/13)

According to key informants interviewed by the SINA, the insufficient purchasing power to buy the available food which is perceived as too expensive is the first reported problem in the governorate. Unavailability of food is the second-largest priority need with the problem partially attributed to a mixture of local agriculture and livestock loss of production caused by loss of inputs and reduced cultivated land. (SINA 2013)

**Increase in prices:** The high cost of food products and construction materials were subject to further increases in August 2013 due to the closure of border crossings with Iraq and Turkey. (WFP 2013/11/17, Assafir 2013/08/05) Due to armed groups controlling the main entry points into the governorate, market supplies have been also prevented from entering and the prices of dairy products and vegetables have soared; currently 7 times higher than pre-crisis levels. The price of 1 Kilo of tomatoes, for example, increased from SYP 20 in 2010 to SYP 200-250 in Quamishli. (WFP 2013/11/17)

### Bread (shop) price



**Fuel:** Al-Hasakeh has witnessed a sharp increase in the price of fuel, supposedly due to the lack of regulation. A litre of fuel (pre-crisis around SYP 9) is now sold for SYP 31 per litre in some sub districts, if available at all. In Quamishli city it has been reported that some traders are quoting prices 3 times higher to IDPs than those offered to locals, further eroding the IDPs limited financial resources. Some of the oil is also smuggled to Turkey to be sold at a higher rate than in Syria. (WFP 2013/11/17, ARA News 2013/11/06)

**Bread:** The price of a bag of bread once available varies considerably across districts and sub-districts, ranging between SYP 20 to SYP 150.

In the end of 2013, commodity price reductions have also been observed in the north-eastern governorates despite severe deterioration of the security situation. In Al-Hasakeh, prices of commodities such as wheat, flour, rice, sugar, oil and diesel registered reductions ranging from 25 to 37% according to WFP. This is mainly the result of a growing informal security business, where different armed groups offer safe passage to the north-eastern governorates at discounted rates, thus improving the flow of goods. (WFP 2013/11/20)

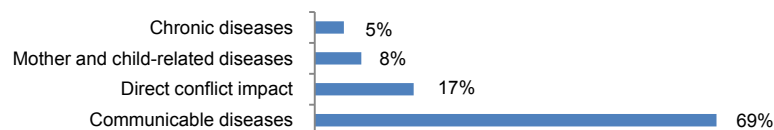
With the severe snowstorm that hit the region on 11 December, a bread crisis was witnessed in the governorate as automated bakeries went out of service as in Ghweiran due to electricity outages and disruption of roads. (Tishreen 2013/12/23)

**Coping mechanisms:** The main coping mechanisms of people responding to food shortages include: borrowing or depending on charities or help from relatives (remittances), reducing the number of meals eaten per day or eating less preferred and less expensive food and limiting portion size at mealtimes. (SINA 2014/01)

## Health

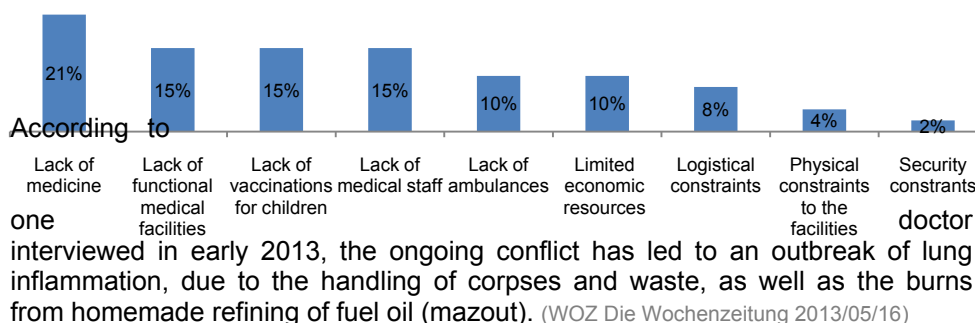
A case of polio was confirmed in Al-Hasakeh in January, indicating the low coverage of vaccinations. The SINA showed that 69% of reported health issues in Al-Hasakeh are related to communicable diseases; higher than in any other of the assessed northern governorates, suggesting that the population in Al-Hasakeh is particularly vulnerable. Leishmaniasis was the cause of 12% of reported health issues, again higher than in any other assessed governorate. (UNHCR 2014/01/27)

### Most reported diseases (SINA)



Hospitals and health centres are operating under exceedingly difficult conditions due to power outages, a lack of medicines and specialist doctors, the poor water supply water and thefts at hospitals and health centres. (Tishreen 2013/06/28) The SINA report found that in 15% of the assessed sub-districts in Al-Hasakeh, the lack of medical staff was a problem. This was higher than the regional average of 11%. In Al-Hol, the one clinic is not open to civilians; it is reserved for fighters. The nearest place they can reach is a 90-minute drive away in Al-Hasakeh. (Tishreen 2013/06/28, SINA 2014/01)

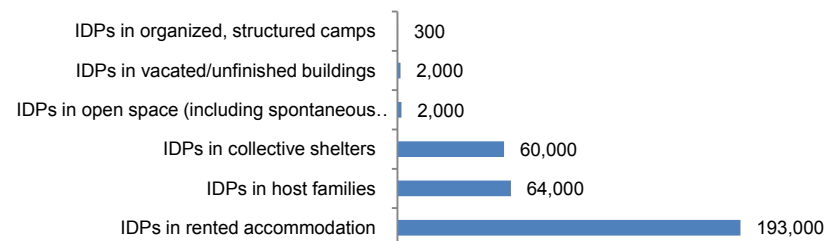
### Most reported issues (SINA)



## Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFIs)

**Shelter:** A high number of people were assessed, at the end of 2013, to be in life threatening situations because of lack of shelter, as in Al-Hol sub-district. The most vulnerable groups in need of shelter and NFIs in the governorate, in the order of importance, were found to be IDPs, mainly children and elderly, living in host families, in collective shelter and vacated/unfinished apartments and buildings. (SINA 2014/01)

### IDPs shelter (SINA)



In order to cut down on living expenses, most displaced families rent unfurnished apartments in the immediate outskirts of big cities where costs are lower. In most cases, several families share the same apartment (each family may have up to seven members living in one room) and live in overcrowded conditions. A number of cases were reported of families living in animal stables. (WFP 2013/09)

Most sub-districts of Al-Hasakeh suffer from major electricity outages. Access to electricity is 1-2 hours/day in most of Hasakeh city and countryside and is completely non-functional in Ber Al-Hulo Al-Wardeyyeh. (SINA 2014/01)

Most of the heavy and complete damages to the infrastructure took place in Ras Al Ain and Al-Hol sub-districts. No destruction was reported in Al Malkiyeh. With time, people's living conditions in the majority of the governorate have been getting worse. The major shelter problems include: the protection from weather conditions (cold, heat, snow, rain) and the increase in rental prices. Because of the cold weather, people are relying on burning fuel to warm up as in Ras Al Ain. These problems are aggravated by the shortages in rented apartments and collective shelters with limited financial resources to rent shelter. (SINA 2014/01)

**NFIs:** With the harsh winter conditions in northern Syria generally and in Al-Hasakeh specifically, the need of NFIs becomes a serious concern. Recently with Alexa snowstorm hitting the region on 11 December, the situation in the governorate has worsened with an increased need for heating. Data collected by a government council in rural areas of Al-Qahtanieh (eastern Al-Hasakeh), indicated widespread damage in an area already subject to high levels of

vulnerability and food insecurity. Four villages were affected, with over 50 houses destroyed and heavy losses sustained to crops and livestock. Because of the storm also, the UN airlifted convoys to the governorate were halted and the Quamishli airport was closed for several days. ([WFP 2013/12/16](#), [OCHA 2013/12/19](#))

According to the SINA, the most reported NFI problems are those related to clothing/ shoes issues, skin diseases, and dirty/unhygienic shelter environment. Most families of Shaddada for example are not buying clothes anymore and children lack winter clothes. There are also shortages in fuel and gas for cooking or heating purposes in addition to child clothes and water containers. This scarcity of goods is exacerbated by high prices of available goods. IDPs in the governorate as in Amuda and Jawadiyeh are particularly vulnerable as they lack hygiene NFIs, mattresses, blankets, winter clothes and cleaning products. ([SINA 2014/01](#))

## WASH

The frequent power outages in the governorate led to a drinking water crisis in the cities of Hasakeh and Quamishli during the summer months of 2013 when the pumps stopped bringing water from the wells. No up-to-date information has been published on the issue, but power outages are still a regular occurrence, so it can be presumed water is still not consistently available. A November news article reported that for almost a year electricity has been often cut, sometimes only running for a few hours a day. ([Tishreen 2013/08/05](#), [El Eqtisad 2013/11/22](#))

According to the SINA, 72% of respondents in the 11 assessed sub-districts of Al-Hasakeh, which relies mainly on wells as water sources, reported serious problems with water. The situation regarding access to drinkable water was described as a critical by 73% of the respondents.

Regarding sanitation, the most recent reported problems include: rubbish and garbage accumulation in public places, increase in flies and mosquitoes, and waste causing environmental pollution. This is due to lack of regular rubbish collection, the cessation of sewage treatment and dislodging service. The SINA report highlighted the disparity between different areas in the governorate. In Shaddada district, for example, public water networks are not functioning and neither is the sewage system. In other areas, the public water network is functioning well, but water in homes is only available during the 4 hours a day when there is electricity. Nearly all areas reported solid waste issues; contaminating water sources in some regions. IDPs are particularly vulnerable to water shortages and the high prices of bought water. ([SINA 2014/01](#))

## Protection

**Vulnerable groups, children, women and political opponents:** during the current crisis, incidents of kidnappings and killings have increased in northern Syria, where mainly Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups and Kurdish fighters have clashed repeatedly in recent months. Kidnapping, including the kidnapping of children and random arrests by armed groups were reported as protection concerns in the SINA report. ([Rudaw 2013/12/15](#), [Guardian 2013/12/13](#), [Assafir 2013/08/17](#), [RT 2013/12/14](#))

Child labour is also a considerable concern, particularly when the labour is hazardous such as improvised fuel and diesel processing and smuggling products across the border for sale. Reported child labour also included selling goods at checkpoints; selling cigarettes, fuel and guns; and sifting through landfills for food and valuables. Within the groups that were interviewed for the assessment, children were reported to be the most vulnerable group in Al-Hasakeh. ([SINA 2014/01](#))

Due to violence and lack of basic supplies resulting from the clashes that continued for months between Al-Qaeda linked fighters and with GoS troops, thousands an estimated 209,000 people have been displaced, of whom more than 160,000 are from Quamishli. 64% of those leaving Al-Hasakeh fled abroad to Turkey, KR-I or Europe while 18% fled to other governorates such as Lattakia and Damascus. The remaining 18% were displaced within the governorate. ([SINA 2014/01](#))

In a UN Children's Fund assessment of 7 governorates carried out in June, Al-Hasakeh had the joint highest rate of recruitment of children into armed groups (along with Rural Damascus). Al-Hasakeh had by far the highest reports of an increase in the number of children labouring. ([UN Children's Fund 2013/09](#))

Local human rights campaigners have said that sexual violence against women has significantly increased since the start of the crisis. Reportedly, fighters from Al-Qaeda linked groups were known to kidnap women for ransom purposes and to sexually abuse them. ([VoA 2013/11/28](#))

Several opponents of the PYD have been allegedly randomly arrested, specifically during anti-GoS protests. Between June 27 and 28, several civilians were shot by YPG following protests in Amuda and KDP offices were vandalized and several other rivals beaten and arrested. ([Al Monitor 22/06/2013](#))

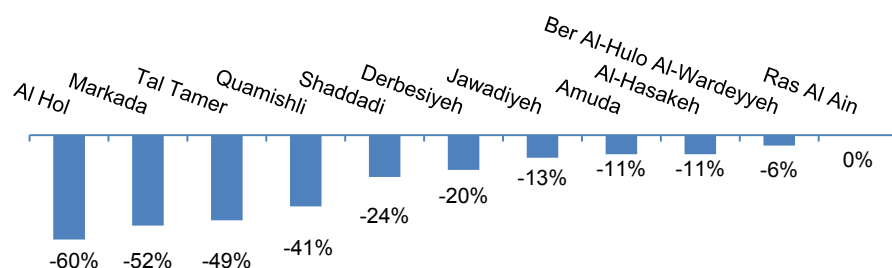
**Crime:** Incidents of looting of wheat silos, fuel and other kinds of goods have been reported in the governorate. After Al-Hasakeh oil fields went out of the control of the GoS, these fields were exposed to significant lootings with the aim of selling the fuel to Turkey. A percentage of crude oil has also been refined by primitive methods which produce low quality gasoline and diesel fuel. These primitive methods and lack of safety precautions carries a high risk of explosions

and is expected to lead to dangerous soil and water pollution and to prevalence of skin diseases and congenital malformations in children. ([Assafir 2013/10/28](#), [ARA News 2013/06/03](#), [BreakingNews 2012/12/15](#))

## Education

According to UNRWA's socio-economic report published in June 2013, 195 of Al-Hasakeh's 1,162 schools had been damaged by March 2013. According to SINA assessment, 263 of the 1,112 functional learning spaces in 11 (of the 16) sub-districts are no longer functional. These spaces are compromised in terms of quality, with classes taking place in damaged classrooms or alternative buildings (such as mosques) and with reduced or refitted education facilities and insufficient materials and teachers. In many assessed locations, secondary schools were not operating, leaving adolescents vulnerable to child labour and child recruitment. ([UNRWA 2013/06](#), [SINA 2014/01](#))

**Decrease in functional learning spaces per sub-district (SINA)**



**Primary Education:** According to SINA, the average percentage of primary school age children (6-14 yrs) going to a learning space at least 4 days per week is 42% for boys and 39% for girls across Al-Hasakeh. Attendance levels vary widely between sub-districts. Only 5% boys and 3% girls are estimated to attend functional learning spaces in the highly deprived sub-district Al-Hol, either because they are working or are scared of shelling. There are only 3 available schools in the sub district. The highest rate of school attendance is 70% for boys and girls in Amuda sub-district. ([SINA 2014/01](#))

| Functional learning spaces (SINA)                                   |            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Number of functional learning spaces (pre-conflict)                 | 1,162      |
| Number of functional learning spaces (currently used for education) | 899        |
| <b>% decline in functional learning spaces</b>                      | <b>23%</b> |

**Secondary Education:** According to SINA, the average percentage of secondary school age children (15-18 yrs) going to a learning space at least 4 days per week in the assessed sub-districts of the governorate is 40% for boys and 39% for girls. Major gender gaps exist in some sub-districts, such as Jawadiyeh and Ber Al-Hulo Al-Wardeyyeh (20% for boys and 10% for girls). Secondary-school children in Ber Al-Hulo Al-Wardeyyeh could not attend schools because of the already limited number of schools in the region and the long distances they need to travel daily to reach the schools in the urban centre. ([SINA 2014/01](#))

Displaced school-age children are the most affected by education problems, as most of them are not generally attending schools, as in Quamishli.

As in other parts of the country, many university students have stopped attending university due to security issues and accessibility. Because of access difficulties to the faculties operating in Al-Furat University in Deir-ez-Zor and other Syrian universities, 40,000 students were able to apply for examinations in the university's branch in Al-Hasakeh in January. ([Tishreen 2014/01/28](#))

The Kurdish language has been introduced in public universities on December 18. In November 2012, the Ministry of Education had ordered the temporary closure of all schools where the Kurdish language had been introduced upon an initiative of the Kurdish parties in the north-eastern province of Al-Hasakeh. ([Al-Monitor 2014/01/17](#))

## Displacement

In 2010, drought in eastern and north-eastern Syria drove some 300,000 families to urban settlements such as Aleppo, Damascus and Deir-ez-Zor in search of work. In some villages, up to 50% of the population left for nearby cities.

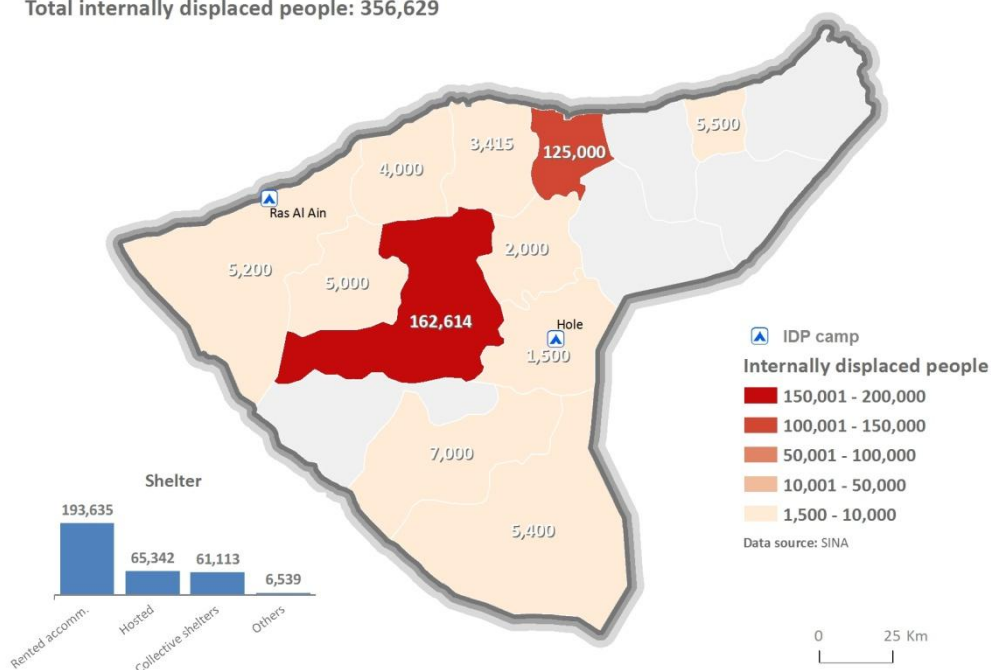
In September 2013, SARC reported an estimated total of 95,000 IDPs in Al-Hasakeh governorate. At this time, the figures SARC provided indicated that 29,000 (30%) were from the neighbouring governorates of Deir-ez-Zor, Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa and Homs; 33,000 were internal to Al-Hasakeh fleeing sectarian fighting particularly in the north and in rural Quamishli; and 33,000 were returnees, economic migrants that had left Al-Hasakeh in previous years and had returned owing to increasing insecurity in the areas they had moved to. According to UNHCR, 33,000 displaced families (approximately 115,000 IDPs) were registered in Al-Hasakeh in 2013 including 23,000 families who came from Deir-ez-Zor. The majority of these registered IDPs were residing in the main cities of Quamishli and Al-Hasakeh, which together host 75% of the IDP population. Most IDP families had lost their jobs, had no fixed source of income and were only occasionally employed in casual labour for 200 SYP a day. ([UNHCR 2013/12/02](#))

An inter-agency mission to Al-Hasakeh at end of January estimated 250,000 IDPs in the governorate. The reason for this discrepancy between the September figures and the current one are unclear. IDPs in the governorate are in critical need of food, medicines, clothes and shelter. Earlier in the year, 7,500 people had fled clashes that erupted in rural parts of the governorate, with some finding refuge in Quamishli city and others fleeing towards the Iraqi border. (WFP 2104/02/10, WFP 2014/02/04)

The SINA showed there to be IDPs in all the assessed sub-districts; living in a range of conditions from with relatives to out in the open (see chart in shelter section). Access issues affect them greatly. The estimated 5,000 IDPs in an unofficial camp near the border in Ras al Ain, for example, receive no assistance. Another IDP camp in Al-Hol houses roughly 1,500 people displaced from the surrounding areas. All sub-districts reported that there were no tensions between the host community and the displaced. (SINA 2014/01)

## Internally displaced people

Total internally displaced people: 356,629



**Displacement from Al-Hasakeh:** There are roughly 222,500 Syrian refugees in the Iraq, over 95% of whom are in the Kurdistan Region. 61.5% of the refugees in Iraq are from Al-Hasakeh. (UNHCR 2014/02/13, UNHCR 2014/02/13)

## Humanitarian access

Restriction of movement in Al-Hasakeh is predominantly caused by 2 factors: border restrictions imposed by the Turkish authorities and a combination of live conflict and policies of blockade imposed by armed opposition groups at all surrounding access points to northern PYD-controlled Al-Hasakeh, primarily in sub-districts such as Jawadiyeh, Al Malikeyyeh and Quamishli. WFP, for example, reported in August that opposition groups in control of areas in Deir-ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa refused to allow trucks carrying food to pass into Al-Hasakeh. (SINA 2014/01)

The Government of Turkey (GoT) started construction of a wall between Nusaybeen and Quamishli, stating a wish to prevent smuggling, though work remains pending after being objected to by Kurds on both sides of the border. The closure of border crossings with Turkey and Iraq essentially blocked access to Al-Hasakeh.

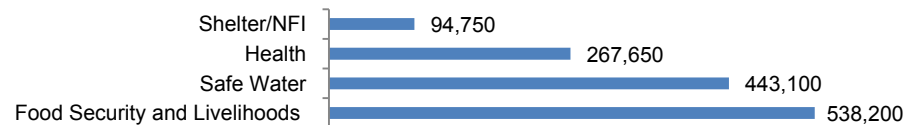
The SINA revealed that for many sub-districts, little assistance, if any arrived. In Al-Hole, for example, the key informants reported that there had been no distributions of aid, and no NGO presence. In Shaddada, food baskets had been provided by the ACU, but the assistance was irregular. (SINA 2014/01)

Al-Hasakeh is the only governorate to which the UN and partners have had to airlift aid. The first cargo plane carrying food took off from Erbil in KR-I to Al-Hasakeh in December after the governorate had had no significant aid deliveries since May. (Daily Star 2013/12/16)

Within the governorate there are no specific restrictions of movement for actors. The aid delivery process was reportedly controlled by de-facto authorities who allegedly manipulate beneficiary lists as well as defer aid. (SINA 2014/01)

The PYD has started to import food from the Yaroubiya crossing with Iraq into Syria to feed the local population. (Al-Monitor 2014/02/16)

## Number of people in need per sector (SINA)

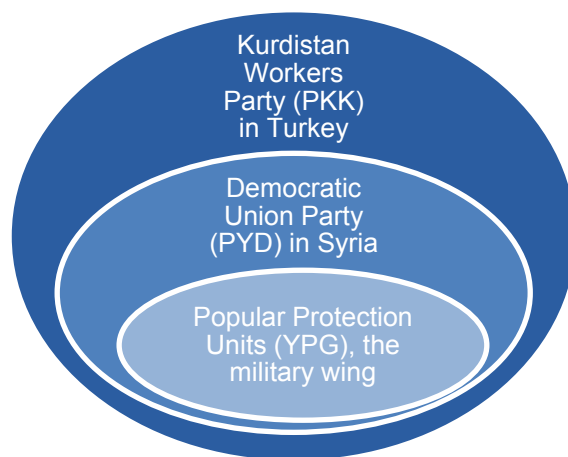


## Conflict developments and political stakeholders

**Major Stakeholders:** In an effort to unify the Kurdish political voice, a large coalition of 9 political parties was formed in December 2009 under the name of the Kurdish National Council (KNC), with the involvement of Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) that is linked to President Barzani of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In June 2012, more than a year into the Syrian conflict, the KNC brought other parties, including the PYD, into an expanded coalition known as the Kurdish Supreme Committee. In July 2012, the PYD signed the Erbil Agreement with the KNC to prevent Kurdish infighting and to jointly administer the Kurdish areas of Syria with the newly-created Supreme Kurdish Committee (SKC). The Erbil Agreement has not been entirely successful, with reports emerging alleging that PYD fighters have kidnapped KNC activists at times.

Following the retreat of the GoS troops from Kurdish towns in July 2012, the PYD, the prominent Kurdish militarized political party affiliated with the PKK have filled the vacuum of power. The SAF in the cities of Al-Hasakeh and Quamishli still operate in tandem with the new Kurdish transitional administration, officially announced by the PYD at the end of November and supported implicitly by the GoS.

The transitional administration declared by the PYD in late 2013 was put in place without consulting other Kurdish parties and without a referendum. These parties express concerns about the monopoly of power that might be practiced by the PYD in the region with diverse social structure and political formations. On one hand, the PYD's ability to build institutions is limited by the lack of financial resources and on the other hand, the GoS, which approved the Kurdish civil administration, might have a different reaction to a Kurdish sought self-autonomy after the crisis. Turkey and KRG Barzani has also opposed the PYD's administrative autonomy declaration. However, the PYD has proved successful in establishing an administrative autonomy while working towards a self-autonomy for the whole Kurdish. Discussions around the formation of a constitutional court and the High Election Board have been ongoing with a possibility of a general



election taking place in the few coming months. ([ARA News 2013/12/01](#), [WSJ 2013/11/15](#), [ekurd 2014/02/09](#), [Al-Monitor 2014/02/16](#))

**Conflict developments in 2013:** After signing a peace agreement with the FSA in February 2013, YPG clashes with the FSA and other hard-line fighters resumed in May-June. Starting June 2013, the Kurdish-majority regions in the north have been witnessing fierce fighting between YPG and extremists, especially after the split of ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra. The YPG managed to control most of the Kurdish region in Al-Hasakeh while expelling extremists out of Ras Al Ain bordering Turkey and Ya'roubiyah bordering Iraq in October 2013.

**Recent armed Conflict:** The fighting between the PYD and opposition groups has concentrated in Tal Hmis and Tal Brak in the beginning of 2014. Yet the Kurdish troops were forced to withdraw from the majority Arab opposition-held region in the southwest. In late January, the fighting re-ignited in Ras Al Ain. The 2 main cities of Quamishli and Al-Hasakeh have remained generally safe despite the opposition sporadic shelling of missiles. ([Al-Jazeera 2013/11/13](#), [AFP 2013/11/15](#), [Al-Akhbar 2013/11/26](#), [Daily Star 2013/11/27](#), [ARA News 2013/09/14](#), [Assafir 2013/12/30](#), [Daily Star 2013/12/28](#), [AFP 2014/01/26](#))

On 7 February 2014, ISIL has controlled the town of Hole and Khatooniah lake on the borders with Iraq without any fighting with other opposition groups. On 12 February, ISIL was able to control the last opposition-stronghold of Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front in southern Al-Hasakeh, specifically in Shaddada. This took place after ISIL fighters withdrew from the governorate of Deir-ez-Zor on 11 February. ([Assafir 2014/02/08](#), [El-Nashra 2014/02/12](#))

Despite the semi-stability of the Kurdish regions, ISIL is very likely to renew their assault against the PYD-dominated areas from their strongholds in the governorate itself and supported by redeployments from Ar-Raqqa. With the political tensions among the Kurdish political parties and expected offensives by ISIL, coupled with the geopolitical dynamics with Iraq and Turkey, the north-eastern region remains at risk of insecurity incidents. ([Al-monitor 2013/03/23](#), [MERIP 2011/08/31](#), [Al-monitor 2013/03/23](#), [Open Democracy 2013/07/22](#), [Daily Star 2013/10/17](#), [Henry Jackson Society 2012/10](#))

## Armed Conflict Timeline: 2012 - 2014

