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SYRIA

Displacement in northwestern Syria

Conflict between the Government of Syria (GoS) and armed opposition groups has intensified since November 2017 in northern Hama governorate, southern Idlib governorate, and southern Aleppo governorate, causing a wave of displacement. Some 212,000 people have been displaced since 15 December, the majority into central and northern Idlib. The humanitarian situation in the affected governorates is deteriorating, with ongoing clashes, airstrikes, and shelling. The majority of IDPs live in makeshift settlements and report acute multi-sectoral needs.

NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

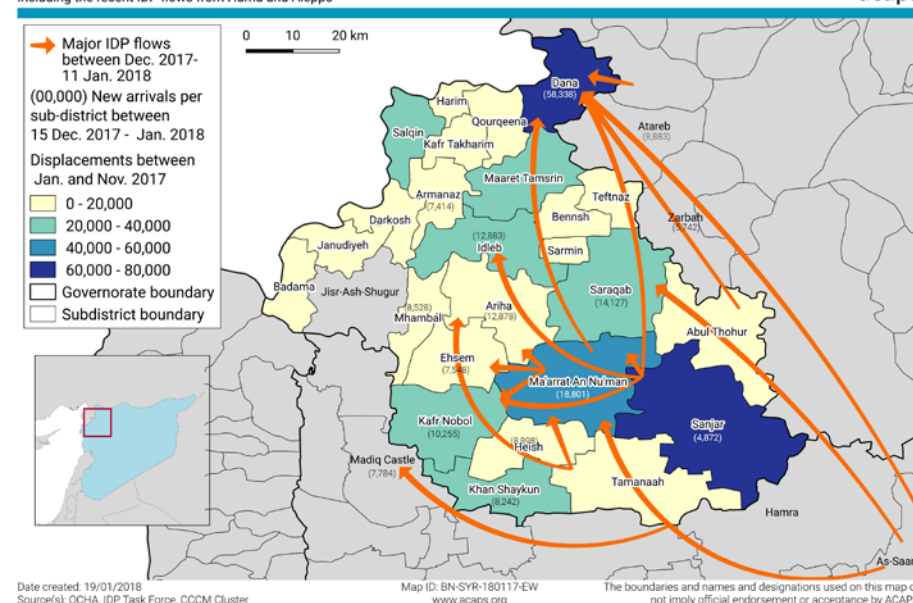


IMPACT



SYRIA: DISPLACEMENT IN IDLEB SINCE JANUARY 2017

Including the recent IDP flows from Hama and Aleppo



Anticipated scope and scale

The ongoing hostilities are likely to **further escalate** and cause significantly more displacement. Due to congestion in IDP sites, IDPs are likely to continue travelling and therefore expose themselves to **protection issues** and insecurity. **Winter conditions** increase acute shelter and NFI needs, which are likely to affect the majority of the newly displaced population. **International negotiations** are not likely to find a political solution to this crisis.

Key priorities



+212,000
in need of Shelter/NFIs



+212,000
in urgent need of protection



+1,130,000
previously displaced in the area

Humanitarian constraints



Ongoing hostilities limit access to the affected areas, leading to suspension of aid activities and incidents of violence against humanitarian aid and actors. Ongoing response efforts are stretched and do not meet needs of the displaced population.

Limitations

Displacement figures in Syria are difficult to assess, especially in the area of ongoing hostilities. ACAPS is not in the position to independently verify the figures.

Crisis impact

Hostilities between the Government of Syria (GoS) and armed opposition groups escalated in northwestern Syria in the fourth quarter of 2017, when the GoS began an offensive to recapture territory controlled by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Since November, hostilities have intensified in northern Hama and southern Idlib governorates, alongside a parallel GoS offensive in southern Aleppo governorate. Both offensives are advancing into Idlib, one of the last governorates controlled mostly by opposition groups. The conflict-affected areas are covered by the de-escalation agreement, however HTS, a leading group in the area, was not included in the negotiations (SOHR 15/01/2017, TSI 12/01/2017).

The humanitarian situation in the affected governorates is rapidly deteriorating. Military operations have caused a high number of civilian casualties and widespread displacement. Since 15 December, around 212,000 people have been reported displaced in northern Hama, southern Idlib, and southern Aleppo. Most of the displaced from the three governorates are arriving in central and northern Idlib, with a high IDP influx in sub-districts Dana (almost 60,000 IDPs), Ma'arrat An Nu'man (19,000), Saraqeb (14,000), Idlib (13,000), and Ariha (13,000). Numbers are likely to be underreported and to include people displaced multiple times. In addition to IDPs moving in to Idlib, the displaced are also moving to areas held by the GoS in northern Hama, as well as to Atareb sub-district in southern Aleppo, and to areas near the Turkish border (OCHA 17/01/2017).

The situation for IDPs remains volatile and chaotic due to heavy airstrikes and artillery shelling in parts of southern and southeastern Idlib. Insecurity has influenced displacement routes by causing movement restrictions and secondary displacement. Parts of southern Idlib, southern Aleppo, and northern Hama have reportedly been emptied of civilians (OCHA 17/01/2017).

As of 16 January, more than 1.1 million IDPs are in the opposition-controlled areas of Idlib, Hama and Aleppo, including over 273,000 living in IDP sites (OCHA 17/01/2017). The majority of IDPs are staying in informal IDP settings and are in need of multi-sector assistance. The large increase in IDPs is exacerbating the vulnerabilities of IDPs already present. Resources are extremely limited and the coping mechanisms of host and displaced communities have further eroded (OCHA 11/2017, OCHA 10/01/2018, JAPAN TIMES 11/01/2018).

GoS forces reached the area of Abu Duhur military airport in southeastern Idlib and reportedly recaptured the airport on 20 January. As the GoS advances, fighting is likely to drive further displacement and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis. In northeastern

Hama governorate, fighting continues between the GoS and Islamic State (IS), and between opposition groups and IS. (Middle East Eye 20/01/2018, Reuters 5/01/2018)

Shelter: Many of the newly displaced are reported to have no shelter, exposing them to various protection risks and harsh winter conditions. IDPs are reported to live in makeshift tent settlements without sanitation and lack winterisation equipment (IRC 12/01/2018). IDP sites are often targeted by airstrikes causing damage, which exacerbates shelter needs and causes further displacement (UNHCR).

Over 40 IDP sites in Idlib, providing shelter for over 20,000 people, have been heavily affected by fighting and the influx of the newly displaced. The IDP sites in the governorate report serious congestion, which increases pressure on host communities (UNHCR 11/01/2018, OCHA 11/2017). Infrastructure damage in Idlib is extensive and therefore shelter capacity is weak (OCHA 10/01/2018, JAPAN TIMES 11/01/2018).

NFI: Fuel and other non-food items, such as warm clothing, are among the most pressing needs for IDPs displaced during winter. Many IDP sites in Idlib lack basic services, heating, and other winterisation equipment (OHCHR 12/2017). Idlib governorate suffers from lack of electricity as the main power plant has been affected by airstrikes. Coping mechanisms, including burning clothes in place of fuel or wood, are reported in northwestern Syria (IRC 12/01/2018, Syria Direct 7/12/2017).

Protection: The intensity of clashes, shelling, and airstrikes in northern Hama, southern Idlib, and southern Aleppo heightens the protection needs of the displaced. Civilians are exposed to indiscriminate attacks, with increasing airstrikes on populated areas, including Idlib city (OHCHR 12/ 2017). Multiple attacks on IDP sites have been reported, most recently in January in both Idlib and Aleppo governorates (SOHR 15/01/2018, SOHR 15/01/2018).

Additional protection concerns arise due to hardline policies of HTS and the law enforcement bodies it has imposed, which are often not equipped to deliver appropriate services. Robberies, lootings, and killings are regularly reported in Idlib governorate (OHCHR December 2017).

Many of the newly displaced are without identification documents, either because these have been lost or were confiscated at checkpoints or at transit centres (OCHA 11/2017).

Health: Hospitals and health facilities have been repeatedly targeted since December, reducing the capacity to provide health assistance. At least three hospitals and three other healthcare facilities have been impacted by airstrikes and put out of service in January in Idlib and Hama (OCHA 10/01/2017, OCHA 17/01/2017).

Since September 2017, a growing number of children are reported to suffer from mental health conditions (Save the children 06/10/2017). An increase in waterborne diseases has been reported in the past months in Idlib and Aleppo (OCHA 11/2017). Ongoing violence,

the targeting of IDP sites, and increasing displacement will result in a severe need for additional health assistance.

WASH: Idleb governorate suffers from water shortages, as the water infrastructure has been affected by the conflict. IDPs have been reporting lack of drinking water in opposition-controlled areas (OCHA 3/01/2017, OHCHR December 2017). In northern Hama governorate, an airstrike on Latmana town on 26 December rendered the only functioning borehole out of service (OCHA 3/01/2017, OHCHR December 2017).

Newly-established IDP sites often lack WASH services. The sites in northern Idleb reported WASH needs in January, particularly a lack of adequate latrines (Syria Direct 5/12/2018, UNHCR 11/01/2018).

Violence and displacement are likely to have led to increased need for WASH assistance in Idleb, Hama, and Aleppo, especially in informal IDP sites. An increase in waterborne diseases has been reported in the past months in Idleb and Aleppo (OCHA 11/2017)..

Food: IDP sites in northern Idleb have reported food needs, including cooked meals and ready-to-eat rations. The IDP influx has increased demand on local markets, which is likely to result in price increases. This is likely to negatively impact both IDPs and the host community, which is already experiencing widespread unemployment and high inflation rates (OHCHR 12/2017). Negative coping mechanisms relating to food consumption are often reported in IDP camps in Syria (REACH 12/01/18).

Nutrition: In Idleb governorate acute malnutrition is of concern. Among IDPs screened in recent weeks, almost 2% were severely malnourished (SAM), and over 6% suffered from moderate acute malnutrition (MAM), significantly higher than the overall rates in the governorate (SAM, 0.5%; MAM: 1.7%) (OCHA 3/01/2017, Nutrition Cluster). Children in Idleb show high rates of anaemia at 35.3%. The proportion of malnourished pregnant or lactating women among IDPs is 6.5%. This raises concerns about the possibility of other serious levels of micronutrient deficiencies among women and children (OCHA 11/2017).

Education: Multiple attacks on educational facilities have been reported since December, most recently on 12 January in Khan Elsobol town, in the southeast of Idleb governorate. Over 500 schools in Idleb were forced to close (Save the Children 17/01/2017). Many schools are being used as IDP sites, disrupting access to education (OCHA 17/01/2017).

Vulnerable groups affected

Women: Adult women constitute 24% of the IDP population in Idleb and Aleppo governorates. Displaced women are often more exposed to sexual and gender based violence and to harmful survival mechanisms, such as sexual exploitation. Practices

imposed by extremist groups in some areas of Syria, such as the mandatory use of a chaperone, limit women's freedom of movement (OCHA 11/2017).

Children: Over half of the IDP population is under-18 (OCHA 11/2017). Displaced children are especially vulnerable, as they are more at risk of exposure to exploitation, including recruitment by government forces or armed groups, child labour, and early and forced marriage. Displaced children are often deprived of access to certified education (OCHA 10/12/2017; Save the children 06/10/2017).

Humanitarian and operational constraints

Humanitarian access to Idleb, northern Hama, and southern Aleppo is constrained by the insecurity and the presence of checkpoints, which has impacted the response capacities (OHCHR December 2017). Recent conflict developments are likely to have further deteriorated humanitarian access. Ongoing fighting has forced some humanitarian responders to suspend their operations in Idleb (UNHCR 11/01/2018). The areas recently retaken by the GoS remain inaccessible due to continuing conflict. At least six incidents of violence against humanitarian aid and actors were reported in Idleb and Hama in December (Insecurity Insight December 2017).

Areas along the Idleb-Hama border were particularly difficult to access even before the recent escalation of violence. Foah and Kafraya, two villages in northern Idleb have been besieged since 2015 (est. population: 8,000) (OCHA 19/12/2017).

The reliability of telecommunications is heavily impacted by the conflict: internet and mobile network blackouts are common (Emergency telecommunications cluster 05/11/2017).

Aggravating factors

Seasonal information

Syria is in the midst of winter (normally December – February), which brings prolonged periods of snow and freezing temperatures (IFRC 14/01/2018). IDPs are particularly exposed to harsh conditions due to lack of adequate shelter, NFIs, and limited winterisation support.

Evacuation agreements

The GoS reclaimed significant territory in 2017. Opposition forces and civilians residing in contested areas are often presented with 'evacuation agreements', likely constituting a form of forced displacement into governorates controlled by the opposition. Such agreements have led to additional new displacements into opposition held Idleb in particular. For instance, 108 people from Beit Jinn enclave (Rural Damascus) arrived to Idleb on 30 December. Further GoS advancements elsewhere in the country are likely to induce more forced displacement to Idleb in the upcoming months (OCHA 3/01/2018).

International intervention

Turkey, Iran and Russia act as guarantors to the de-escalation zone in Idlib. In mid-October 2017 Turkey deployed its military in the governorate in a move that was considered illegal by the GoS. The Turkish military has maintained its position in the governorate and it has also extended its presence in to Aleppo in order to isolate the Kurdish-controlled Afrin region. This has further aggravated the security situation as shelling and clashes in the Afrin area between the Turkish military and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) were reported in January (Middle East Eye).

Turkey has called on Russia and Iran, which are the main supporters of the GoS, to contain the ongoing offensive in Idlib. However, the operation continues despite Turkish objections. Opposing political interests of guarantors of the Astana process risk destabilising it which is likely to bring more conflict and instability (AI Monitor 11/01/2018).

Other factors of vulnerability

Host community resources in Idlib governorate are overburdened, as IDPs make up a substantial portion of the population (UNHCR 11/01/2018). Prolonged displacement of IDPs can deteriorate social cohesion in local communities.

Contextual information

Drivers of the current conflict

The GoS lost control of Idlib in 2015 (Reuters 7/01/2018). Currently the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham alliance (HTS), known for its hardline Islamic policies and previous association with al-Qaeda, controls the area. HTS, considered a 'terrorist group', was excluded from the Astana talks and not included in the de-escalation agreement.

Islamic State (IS) has been present in Hama since 2014. Since being largely eliminated from Deir-ez-Zor, their former stronghold in the end of 2017, some IS fighters moved to northeastern Hama governorate in an attempt to gain territory from HTS. Clashes between the two groups have been reported regularly since October 2017 (SOHR 15/01/2018).

In the last quarter of 2017, the government renewed its offensives on northern Hama, southern Idlib, and southern Aleppo, aiming to end the presence of HTS. HTS called on other armed opposition groups to unite and join the counter-offensive against the GoS as well as the fight against IS (OHCHR 12/2017).

IS captured territory along the border of Idlib and Hama in January, after HTS clashed with government troops and withdrew (TSI 10/01/2018, Syria Direct). Clashes between IS and the GoS have been reported in January in northeastern Hama. The GoS is likely to advance in order to end the IS presence in Hama governorate (SOHR 15/01/2018). The

possible presence of sleeper IS cells in Idlib governorate could further complicate the volatile situation (OHCHR 12/2017).

Idlib is strategic territory due to its proximity to Turkey, which deployed its military in the governorate in late 2017. The GoS denounced this deployment as illegal. Other strategic locations in the area include portions of the railway connecting Aleppo and Damascus, and Abu Dhuhur military airport in southeast Idlib, a major government military site (Syria Direct, Syria Direct).

Past displacement

Displacement in recent weeks follows the trend of increasing movements recorded since October. Over 190,000 people were displaced to Idlib in October and November, mostly from Hama (79,000) due to the escalation of hostilities. This includes displacement of about 44,000 people within Idlib governorate (44,000) (IDP Task Force, OCHA 17/01/2017).

From the beginning of 2017 until 30 November, 510,000 displacements were recorded in Idlib, 597,000 in Aleppo, and 91,000 in Hama. These numbers include displacements both to and within the governorates.

The numbers of people reported in long-term, protracted displacement as of November are 984,000 in Idlib, 962,000 in Aleppo and 287,000 in Hama (IDP Task Force, OCHA 11/2017).

There are over 1.13 million IDPs present in the contested areas of Idlib, Hama, and Aleppo. The governorates are also host to many IDPs from other parts of Syria. Communities and sites that accommodate the newly displaced in Idlib are struggling with the congestion. 55% of communities in the area are overburdened. In 10% of these communities, IDPs constitute more than 70% of the population. It is likely that majority of the affected population has been displaced more than once (Reuters 5/01/2018, UNHCR 11/01/2018).

Stakeholders

The Syrian Arab Army (SAA): the Government armed forces, currently trying to regain control of territories taken by opposition armed groups. At the end of 2017 government forces control over 55% of the country (Al Jazeera 29/11/2017).

Hay'at Tahir al-Sham (HTS): including Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra. HTS is an Islamist coalition that formally split from al-Qaeda in 2016 and currently counts around 31,000 fighters (TSI 30/11/2017, Wilson Centre 24/04/2017). As part of a coalition with other armed groups, they captured Idlib in 2015. HTS achieved full control of the majority of the governorate in 2017 (Middle East Eye).

Key characteristics

Demographic profile - Syria population: 18,430,000; affected areas of northwestern Syria: 2,650,000 (WORLD POPULATION REVIEW 51/01/2018; (OCHA 3/01/2018).

Nutrition – Idleb: 2.2% GAM, 0.5% SAM; Aleppo: 2.7% GAM, 0.6% SAM; Hama: 1.1% GAM, no SAM cases reported (Nutrition Cluster).

Health - [countrywide] infant mortality rate: 14/1,000; under-5 mortality rate: 18/1,000 (UNICEF 2017).

WASH - [countrywide] 94% use of basic drinking water services: 99% urban, 94% rural. 93% use of basic sanitation services: 96% urban, 89% rural (UNICEF 2017).

Literacy - [countrywide] adult literacy rate 81%; youth (15-24) literacy rate: 95% male, 90% female (UNICEF 2017).

Response capacity

International and local response capacity

The response to the crisis is ongoing. As of January, CCCM, Protection, WASH, Shelter/NFI, Nutrition, and Food Security and Livelihoods clusters are present in Idleb with their partners. However, several organisations have had to suspend operations due to insecurity and some areas remain inaccessible due to insecurity (OCHA 17/01/2017).

The number of newly displaced is overwhelming the capacities of responding agencies (OCHA 17/01/2017).

Locally, the HTS-controlled emergency response committee provides assistance for IDPs. Turkish Red Crescent is putting up new camps along the Turkish border, however the capacity in this area is very low (Syria Direct 11/01/2018).

Hard-to-reach areas are targeted by Inter-Agency Humanitarian Operation via convoys, airlifts or airdrops (OCHA 31/12/2017).

Information gaps and needs

- Access is difficult in some areas due to the volatile security situation, therefore figures of most recent displacement are often incomplete (OCHA 11/2017).
- No information on the number of casualties among the IDP population.
- There is no information available regarding the specific sectoral needs of the recently displaced.

Key characteristics

Key indicators	Idleb	Aleppo	Hama
Total population	2,584,430	4,870,000	1,600,000
Long-term displaced	984,000	962,000	287,000
IDP arrivals in 2017 (until December)	510,000	597,000	91,000
IDP departures in 2017 (until December)	205,000	490,000	229,000
WASH (PIN)	992,615	961,845	306,930
Health (PIN)	1,424,444	1,803,923	752,518
Food security (PIN)	1,357,744	2,141,454	715,115
Nutrition (PIN)	494,380	831,936	381,223
Shelter (PIN)	637,050	765,972	216,912
Protection (PIN)	1,545,600	2,395,708	844,273

Sources: OCHA 11/2017, UNHCR 11/01/2018, FOOD SECURITY SECTOR 01/01/2018; IDP Task Force

Including the recent IDP flows from Hama and Aleppo



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