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This report is produced by the OCHA Syria Crisis offices with the contribution of all sectors in the hubs and at the Whole of Syria (WoS) level. The situation overview covers the period from 15 July – 31 August 2018. The next report will be issued on or around 5 October 2018.

Highlights

- An estimated 152,360 individuals returned to Ar-Raqqa city since October 2017, although conditions remain uncondusive for returns due to high levels of destruction and explosive hazard contamination. Sub-standard living conditions in IDP sites, protracted displacement, movement restrictions and a lack of information on the scale and scope of explosive hazard risks in Raqqa city may all be factors leading IDPs to return
- Although humanitarian actors are gradually increasing their presence and operations in major areas of return in Ar-Raqqa city and in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, explosive hazard contamination remains is also hampering humanitarian access and operations, assessments in both governorates.
- On 18 August, a non-governmental organization was targeted by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attack in Raqqa city. The last vehicle of the convoy was hit by a remote controlled IED, injuring one person. While an investigation is ongoing, this is the first time an international organization is targeted in such an attack. The security situation is being closely monitored by all humanitarian organizations.
- An estimated 204,950 people have returned to their areas of origin within Deir-ez-Zor Governorate since November 2017. The situation of civilians who remain trapped in the final ISIL-held enclave in Syria along the east bank of the Euphrates River in southern rural Deir-ez-Zor remains a significant concern amidst ongoing reports of airstrikes, ground offensives, explosive hazard contamination.
- Between the 23 June and the end of August some 500 cases of typhoid was reported in Al-Hasakeh Governorate. This outbreak of typhoid is in addition to ongoing reports of acute bloody diarrhea in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, with some 451 cases reported over the reporting period.

152,360

returnees to Ar-Raqqa city since October 2017.



204,950

returnees to Deir-ez-Zor governorate since November 2017.



207,543

protection interventions conducted in Ar-Raqqa, Al-Hasakeh and Deir-ez-Zor governorates in June and July 2018.



1.09 million

people reached with food baskets and emergency food rations in Ar-Raqqa, Aleppo, Al-Hasakeh and Deir-ez-Zor governorates in June and July 2018.



599,980

People reached with improved access to life-saving/emergency WASH facilities and services in Ar-Raqqa, Al-Hasakeh and Deir-ez-Zor governorates in June and July 2018.



96,481

boys and girls and pregnant and lactating women reached with nutrition assistance in Ar-Raqqa, Aleppo, Al-Hasakeh and Deir-ez-Zor governorates, as well as in Menbij sub-district in Aleppo governorate in June and July 2018.



Situation Overview

Explosive hazard contamination remains a significant threat to civilians returning to Ar-Raqqa city. Despite a gradual reduction in the average number of blast-related cases reported by health facilities, significant concerns persist around the safety and security of people returning to their homes in Ar-Raqqa city.

In response to the extensive risks presented by explosive hazard contamination to both the returnee population as well as humanitarian organizations and basic services providers operating in Ar-Raqqa city, efforts have been made to scale up the mine action response efforts since January 2018. In addition to mine risk education activities,

including the provision of risk education and training of trainers in IDP sites in Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh governorates, humanitarian mine action organizations conduct explosive hazard surveys and removal in contaminated areas of Ar-Raqqa Governorate and have started area-based operations in Ar-Raqqa city in June 2018. Stabilization actors continue clearance operations in Ar-Raqqa city, focusing on key infrastructure, with a coordination mechanism available to include sites prioritized by the humanitarian community.

Significant challenges persist with regards to explosive hazard survey and removal operations in Ar-Raqqa city, including the overall security situation, the significant level of destruction and contamination, the nature of the contamination and the availability of assets required to safely operate in such an environment. Increased efforts are required over the short and longer term to ensure the safe return of displaced populations.

Following the first United Nations (UN) inter-agency assessment mission to Raqqa City in April 2018, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) conducted a follow-up visit in June to further assess the security environment - including the explosive hazard threats - in order to inform the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) regarding the situation and mitigation measures required for the deployment of UN humanitarian support to the city. A longer mission with Humanitarian Mine Action experts is being planned to conduct explosive hazards risk assessment and mapping of safe sites and areas which will be used for UN humanitarian deployment in the near future. Humanitarian organizations which are already operating in Ar-Raqqa city have implemented a number of mitigating measures to reduce explosive hazard risks. These include thorough mapping of areas of operation (e.g. delineating marked routes), mitigation measures at distribution sites (e.g. identify safe distribution locations and procedures with mine action operators), and extensive coordination with local interlocutors and risk education activities (targeting humanitarian personnel and civilians).

While overall conditions are still not in place for the safe, dignified and sustainable return of IDPs to most parts of Ar-Raqqa city, between October 2017 and August 2018 an estimated 152,360 individuals have returned to Ar-Raqqa city, including approximately 3,765 over the current reporting period. The difficult and challenging conditions in areas of displacement, particularly IDP sites, the lack of resilience opportunities, the ongoing limitations in movement, particularly in certain IDP sites in Al-Hasakeh Governorate, are believed to be push factors, prompting people to return to Ar-Raqqa city despite the considerable risks to personal safety.

According to the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) cluster, 322,100 displacements from and within Ar-Raqqa Governorate were recorded during 2017, largely from Ar-Raqqa city. Displacement is likely to become more protracted, as indicated by consultations undertaken earlier this year with IDPs in major sites in Al-Hasakeh and Ar-Raqqa governorates. Despite the aforementioned returns to Ar-Raqqa city, a significant number of people continue to be displaced and face challenging conditions. As of 28 July an estimated 90,000 people remain displaced in IDP sites¹ across northeast Syria. The conditions in many of these IDP sites remains difficult, with numerous reports of restrictions on the freedom of movement of civilians, with the complex and onerous system of sponsorship hampering the ability of IDPs to move to non-camp locations and limiting access to services outside the camp. Humanitarian conditions in many of these sites are also reported to be challenging, with over 100 cases of typhoid reported in Areesha camp in Al-Hasakeh Governorate during the first week of August alone. At the same time, the referral of medical cases from IDP sites in Al-Hasakeh to receive medical treatment in Ar-Raqqa Governorate remains limited, with damage to the Ar-Raqqa-Samra bridge preventing such movements. These challenges may lead people to return to Ar-Raqqa city before conditions are in place for safe return.

Access to basic services within Ar-Raqqa city continues to gradually improve. The number of health facilities in Ar-Raqqa city has increased over the first half of the year with at least six hospitals operational, including five private hospitals where services are provided for a fee and one primary healthcare facility. This primary healthcare facility opened at the beginning of June and, supported by an NGO, has a capacity to receive 100 patients per day. Despite these improvements, as of July 2018 the Health sector continued to highlight major gaps in primary and secondary health care, nutrition services as well as comprehensive emergency obstetric and newborn care (CEmONC) in Ar-Raqqa city. The constant increase in the number of victims of explosive hazards also contribute to increase the needs of the health sector, especially for emergency trauma care, physical rehabilitation and psychosocial support.

Although Ar-Raqqa city has still not seen its electricity supply network restored (with people reliant on generators), during the reporting period electricity supply was restored to the northern rural areas of Ar-Raqqa governorate following seven years without access to electricity. Power supply lines were installed across the villages of Al-Khnezat, Kalata, Al-Abbara, Al-Rahiyat, and Mezila, providing an estimated 50,000 individuals with access to electricity for between five and eight hours a day. The resumption of electricity has also facilitated a restoration of other basic services and livelihoods such as water pumping stations and bakeries. Reports continue to be received with regards the gradual restoration of livelihoods in Ar-Raqqa Governorate, with maize and cotton cultivation in rural Ar-Raqqa having reportedly resumed while several poultry farms have also reportedly been rehabilitated during the reporting period.

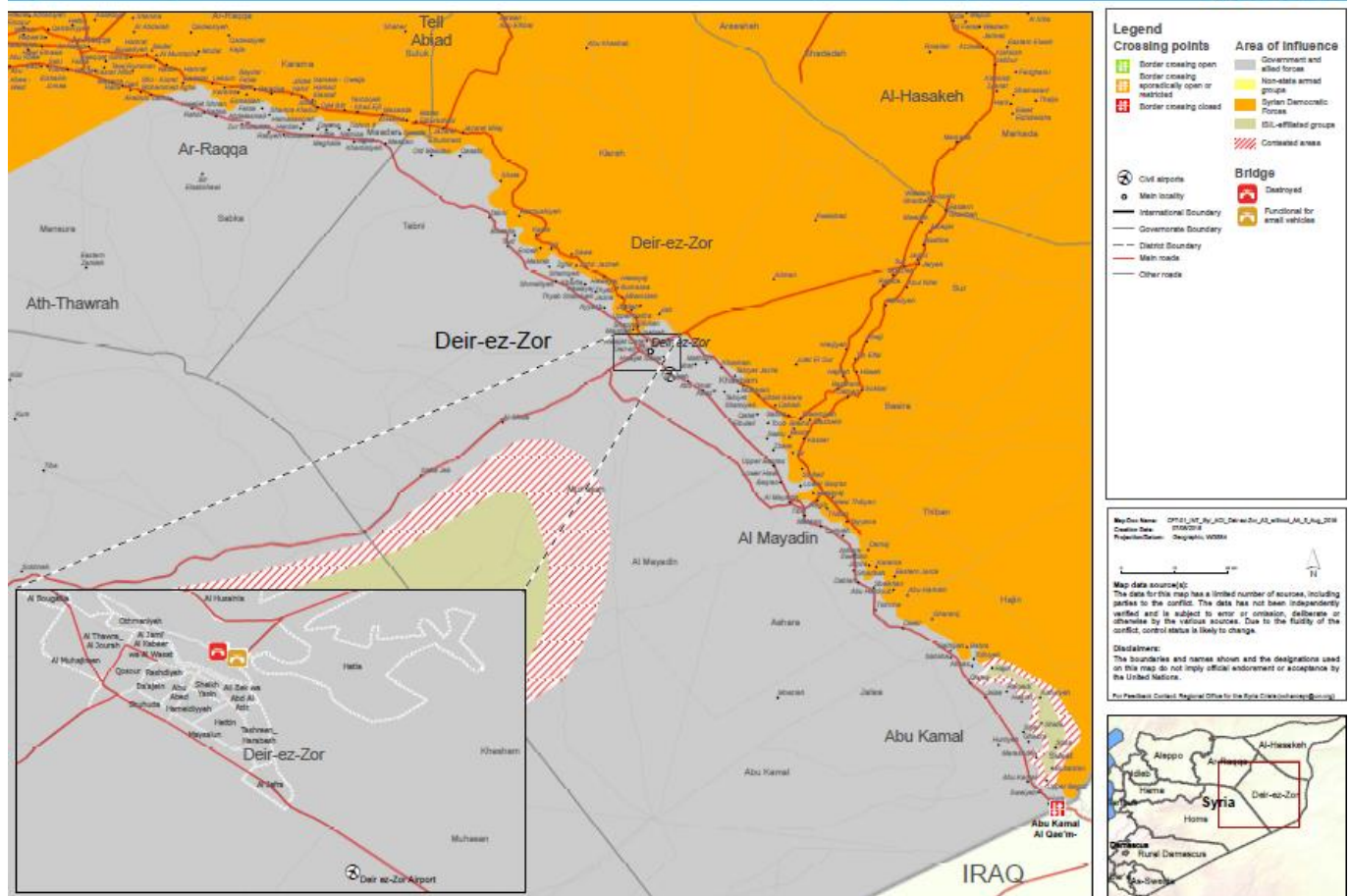
¹ This includes both IDPs living in camps and informal settlements as well as IDPs living in host communities.

However, overall water supply particularly in Ar-Raqqa city continues to be a challenge with ongoing concerns around water quality. On the 26 August, some 500 people in Ar-Raqqa city reportedly exhibited signs of water-borne illness and were taken to medical facilities in the city. These cases are reportedly due to consumption of contaminated water, with some reports that the poisoning may have resulted from poor chlorination and/or lack of chlorination supplies. To address this one NGO is procuring six water pumps, a second NGO is planning to conduct an awareness campaign around the chlorination of water stations, while a third NGO has committed to provide two tons of chlorination supplies. WASH partners have committed to improving water trucking to Ar-Raqqa city by augmenting monitoring and chlorination.

Deir-ez-Zor Governorate

On the 5 August the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced the complete takeover of ISIL-controlled areas in the eastern Deir-ez-Zor countryside along the border with Iraq and is reportedly undertaking a 'security sweep' of the entire area to root out remaining ISIL fighters who may be scattered across the area. Following the culmination of the SDF operations, tens of families unable to move under ISIL reportedly fled the area and have subsequently sought refuge in safe villages in the Deir-ez-Zor countryside where some assistance and basic services are available, either living with local families or makeshift camps. Although the SDF have reportedly provided these people with some life-saving assistance, they are reportedly in need of sustained multi-sectoral assistance.

Syrian Arab Republic: Deir-ez-Zor Governorate - overview of humanitarian access (as of 5 Aug 2018)



With the SDF having taken control of the areas of the eastern Deir-ez-Zor countryside previously controlled by ISIL, and some families already returning to those areas after a short-time displacement, attention has now turned to the last remaining ISIL enclave in Syria along the east bank of the Euphrates river in southern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. This includes the towns of Hajin, Al-Souseh, Al-Sha'afa and Al-Baghouz. There are significant concerns for the safety and security of civilians living in these areas. During the first week of August there were reports of leaflets being dropped on the area, warning civilians to leave before the start of the offensive and demanding ISIL to surrender. Reportedly, airstrikes in the area have already led several civilian casualties, while reports have also been received of civilians being caught in the cross-fire. As the SDF gears up for a military offensive to expel ISIL from its final enclave, civilians remaining in the area are at risk of becoming further caught up in skirmishes/ ground hostilities.

The deteriorating security situation in this area has reportedly led to significant levels of displacement. Over a two-week period between the end of July and beginning of August, there are reports that some 21,650 people (4,330

families) have fled ISIL areas and settled in makeshift tented settlements in SDF-controlled areas on the east bank of the Euphrates, while fewer families may have reached the IDP sites in Hassakeh, after crossing checkpoints. These displaced people are reportedly in a dire humanitarian situation, with humanitarian actors so far unable to reach them. For those civilians remaining in the ISIL-controlled enclave, a number of commercial trucks have reportedly been able to reach the area, providing some basic items, including food and hygiene kits. The humanitarian situation for an estimated 20,000 civilians who remain under ISIL-control is reportedly dire, following limited access to assistance and basic services for over two months since the enclave became militarily encircled in June.

The ability of humanitarian actors to reach people in need across large swathes of Deir-ez-Zor remains constrained due to a combination of insecurity related to the risk that continues to be posed by ISIL and reported explosive hazard contamination; the remoteness of these areas and; in some cases, long processes for project approvals. That being said, during the reporting period OCHA and UNHCR conducted a joint field visit to several informal settlements around villages located in SDF-controlled areas along the Euphrates River valley. During this visit the joint team identified an estimated 5,960 people (1,192 IDP families) living across 70 informal settlements, most of whom originated from GoS or ISIL-controlled areas. Many people who had sought safety in these informal settlements have since reportedly returned to GoS areas as some semblance of security and stability has returned. The joint team highlighted a dire humanitarian situation across the informal settlements, with limited access to safe water and food. The team identified suspected cases of skin diseases and diarrhea. In addition, the majority of schools in the area were reportedly being used as collective shelters. Nine INGOs are working along the west line (Jazrat to Busayrah) and north line (Markada to Busayrah), of Deir-ez-Zor, but are unable to meet the full needs of the affected population in this area. The east line, where the ongoing military offensive is occurring, remains inaccessible to INGOs.

Amidst the dire humanitarian situation reported in IDP sites in Deir-ez-Zor and Al-Hasakeh governorates as well as the restoration of some security and stability following the expulsion of ISIL, reports of returns continue to be received. On 5 August, an estimated 250 IDPs reportedly left the SDF-administered Areesha Camp, returning to their areas of origin in eastern rural Deir-ez-Zor following the expulsion of ISIL. This is in addition to approximately 500 IDPs who reportedly returned to their homes in northern rural Deir-ez-Zor and southern rural Al-Hasakeh (348 from Hole Camp, 150 from Areesha camp) after their homes and villages were cleared of ISIL presence.

Despite the risks posed by the reported presence of explosive hazards, some 204,950 people are also estimated to have returned to their places of origin in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, including returnees from sites in Al-Hasakeh. This follows the displacement of some 255,700 people from Deir-ez-Zor Governorate over the course of 2017, the majority of whom were from Deir-ez-Zor city. Explosive hazard contamination continues to present a daily risk for thousands of children, women and men, with frequent reports of blast casualties. Combined with unsuitable conditions and a lack of services in Deir-ez-Zor, explosive hazard contamination is thought to be significant factor leading some IDPs to go back to sites in Al-Hasakeh after having returned to their areas of previous residence. In the absence of explosive hazard surveys, no detailed information is currently available on the actual scope and scale of contamination in areas of return. Further efforts are needed to increase the level of awareness of local communities, IDPs and returnees through risk education campaigns, in addition to systematic surveys, and the marking and removal of explosive hazards. Current humanitarian mine action interventions have increased their coverage to Deir-ez-Zor Governorate and will be further strengthened, access permitting, and progressively extended to explosive hazards survey and removal.

According to a June 2018 assessment, access to basic services across Deir-ez-Zor Governorate remains limited, including in Deir-ez-Zor city, where a process of recovery is ongoing but still insufficient to meet present needs. While there are accessible health facilities, specialized health services, including surgery and treatment for chronic diseases, are lacking. In 52 of the 112 locations assessed, primary health services, including first aid and treatment for conditions, such as diarrhea, were identified as key needs. There are also significant shelter concerns, especially for those people who remain displaced. During the reporting period some 42 IDP families residing in a school which had been transformed into a collective centre in Deir-ez-Zor city, were given notification by the Directorate of Education to evacuate the school to enable light rehabilitation to be undertaken before the school reopens in advance of the new academic year. With these IDPs unable to afford local rents, they essentially have nowhere to go and the provision of alternative accommodation by authorities may be seriously limited.

Reports have also been received of a typhoid outbreak, with a total of 500 cases identified between 23 June and 31 August. During the month of August, 150 new suspected cases were identified in the Areesha and Al Hole IDP camps. This outbreak is thought to be due to the consumption of unsafe water and follows the ongoing acute bloody diarrhea outbreak in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.

Between 15 July and 30 August, 451 cases of acute bloody diarrhea have been reported due to consumption from contaminated water sources, with the majority of cases reported in Kasra, Zugier Jazera and Alassaoh.

Treatment with antibiotics has been offered for all identified typhoid cases, in accordance with WHO guidelines. A dedicated inter-sector working group comprising health and WASH actors (including WHO, UNICEF and UNHCR)

has been established by northeast Syria partners to address the typhoid outbreak. In addition, as part of the wider efforts to address the acute bloody diarrhea outbreak, WHO and UNICEF have continued to implement a campaign to distribute aqua-tablets and raise awareness around risks. Since 6 August, approximately 20,000 households across 20 villages located on the east bank of the Euphrates river in Deir-ez-Zor have been assisted. The campaign will run until the end of September, with some 102 local volunteers trained around key messages and the usage of aqua-tablets. Some 200,000 aqua-tablets, 20 boxes of brochures and 200 awareness posters have been provided to support response efforts.

On 18 April, the Directorate of School Health reported a measles outbreak particularly affecting school-aged children, with 390 suspected cases of measles reported between 14 July and end of August in Ar-Raqqa Governorate in addition to 338 suspected cases from Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.

Further to the four cases of Tuberculosis (TB) confirmed in the Roj camp during the previous reporting period, resulting in two deaths, a further three cases of pulmonary tuberculosis were reported in the Areesha camp as of the beginning of August.

Leishmaniasis also continues to affect people across Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor governorates. Between 15 July and end of August, 570 cases of leishmaniasis were reported in Ar-Raqqa Governorate, with a further 573 cases reported in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. Leishmaniasis has largely spread due to a lack of healthcare and health actors operating in affected areas.



Access

In July, UN agencies transported humanitarian supplies by road to Qamishli via 112 trucks (109; 2 UNHCR; 1 UNICEF) from Aleppo, Damascus, Latakia and Tartous governorates. During the same period, WFP transported food supplies by road to Deir-ez-Zor via 4 trucks from Homs. In August, WFP transported food supplies to Qamishli via 44 trucks from Aleppo, Latakia and Tartous governorates. During the same period, UN agencies transported humanitarian supplies by road to Deir-ez-Zor via 22 trucks (4 UNICEF and 18 WFP) from Damascus and Homs governorates. Organizations were able to deliver assistance to Qamishli and Deir-ez-Zor without significant delays during the months of July and August.

25 INGOs working cross-border continue to deliver life-saving assistance, reaching some 339,000 people over the month of June.

On the 14 August a fourth transshipment through the Rabiaa/Yarubiyah border-crossing into Syria took place, comprising 4 WHO trucks carrying a variety of health supplies including trauma kits.



Protection

Protection needs and risks remain numerous in north-east Syria. The continuation of hostilities in the last ISIL pockets of east/ south-east Deir-ez-Zor raised several concerns on the protection of civilian and the due respect of IHL by all parties engaged in hostilities. The sudden displacement due to hostilities, often to areas with no services and sub-standard living conditions, have likely generated a series of protection concerns (family separation, distress, challenges for persons with specific needs, exposure to hazardous areas) that cannot be assessed and addressed largely due to the lack of access and presence of humanitarian actors in the affected areas.

Returns towards Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor continue to gradually decrease the population size and ease the overcrowding in the various IDP sites. However, the protection environment remains challenging due to the protracted displacement in camp-like environments still affected by restrictions on freedom of movement. The lack of resilience continues to have repercussions on the coping strategies of the displaced population, with episodes of recruitment still being reported as consequence of the economic and social distress of adolescents, and an overall risk of other forms harassment and exploitation of vulnerable individuals. The movement regime varies across sites. Reportedly, IDPs in Ain Issa site have been able to routinely exit the site, including for working purposes, upon receiving permission from the camp administration and arranging an external sponsorship, often from the employer. Reportedly, hundreds of IDPs have been able to periodically exit the Ain Issa site to work in agricultural activities. On the contrary, such possibilities remain restricted in IDP sites located in Hassakeh Governorate (Areesha, Al Hole), where movements remain constrained.

Protection actors working in the IDP sites continue their activities to support persons with specific needs. During the reporting period, protection partners have organized numerous activities supporting the psychological well-being of children and adolescents (art works and recreational activities, other sensitization and child rights awareness activities). Awareness sessions on available services and on women and girls protection concerns have also been organized in Al-Hole site. Community-based initiatives have been supported to engage IDPs in interventions benefitting their communities (e.g. creation of spaces for sport or recreational activities, information boards, road safety campaign for children). Training sessions have taken place for the outreach volunteers of protection partners active in Ain Issa site to identify persons with specific needs and refer them appropriately to the services in the site. Site coordination meetings amongst protection partners working in Areesha took place to improve coordination and information sharing on protection issues and strengthen referral mechanisms. Partners have been able to complete service mapping at both camp level and across northeast Syria more widely. In order to streamline referrals, an interagency referral form (English and Arabic) has been finalized and shared with partners for future interagency referrals. Two northeast Syria partners that they have been able to provide some basic protection services (activities through a child friendly space and women support activities) for families of foreigners residing in Ain Issa and Roj site. On another note, some actors reported a temporary discontinuation of protection activities in Hassakeh City and Areesha demanded by the local entities. The issue was however resolved with the resumption of the activities.

As IDP returns continue, there is a need for steady presence and analysis of the circumstances in which these movements occur. This is important especially considering some delays in distributions or decreasing level of assistance and services provided in the IDP sites, which may prompt the departure of families regardless of the challenges anticipated in areas of return. During the reporting period, protection partners have been able to monitor some of the return processes coordinated by the camp administration/management from Al Hole site to Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. Reportedly, before departure, returning IDPs had received information sessions on the return process, mine risk awareness sessions, including the distribution of education materials, as well as information sessions on family separation. While the camp administration organized the movement, returnees were responsible for the organization of their transport. IDPs can use different modalities of transport, mostly agreeing to rent car at the exit of the site for a non-negligible sum of money (up to US\$130).

Through advocacy by all protection actors, some improvements were noticed in the modalities and conditions of the departure process. Most notably, the unwelcomed practice by the civil administration and escorting local police of retaining the personal document of the returnees until the Basira crossing point on the way to Deir-ez-Zor seems to have decreased. The families returning in the reporting period were largely provided the documents at the time of departure (instead of the time of return). According to camp administration, returnees' documentation would be transported to Basira with the military police for distribution when the movement concluded for the June return. However, indications were also received that IDPs without any civil documentation cannot leave IDP sites, unless a relative from Deir-ez-Zor obtains a letter from the local GoS-controlled court, confirming proof of identity.

During the reporting period, protection actors have been involved in consulting some 1,900 IDP families in a spontaneous settlement in Twahini. The initiative came after a request by the civil administration in Ar-Raqqa province to provide assistance in relocating the IDPs to an organized site in Mahmoudi, closer to Ar-Raqqa city. In line with humanitarian and protection standards, humanitarian actors conducted a series of consultations to gather information on the general profile and intention of the population. A representative of each household was interviewed (65 per cent women). IDPs on the site had been displaced since 2017 and originated mainly from the eastern rural areas of Hama (50 per cent), particularly from Oqerbayat district, previously earlier affected by clashes against extremist groups; from Homs (40 per cent), particularly the area around Tadmor; and from Aleppo (40 per cent), largely around Menbij. Fleeing hostilities was the most commonly reported reason for displacement (93 per cent of the respondents). During consultations, the lack of civil status documentation was highlighted, with almost 60 per cent of the consulted population missing at least some of the key personal documents, particularly family booklets, marriage and birth certificates. Reportedly the loss of document was a result of the prior confiscation of documents by ISIL, with no confiscation reported in the current makeshift site. The overwhelming majority of the interviewed households (84 per cent) reported that they have no source of stable income and are reliant on humanitarian assistance. Some families reported that they were able to engage in farming activities in the area, but only after receiving permission from the civil authorities in the areas and upon payment of a fee (500 SP). Consulted IDPs largely expressed their intention to remain in the area, including in the new relocation sites in the short term, and only 10 per cent expressed the intention to return in the next three months. The desire to return increased to almost half of the population in the longer term, i.e. after one year or more. The lack of information on the situation in areas of return and the secondary occupation of houses were seen as the major obstacle to return. Overall, some 64 per cent of the IDPs expressed their immediate readiness to move, and more than 20 per cent would have waited to see the conditions of the new settlement. While assisting such relocation can only be a joint effort of multiple humanitarian actors in the area, protection partners continue to advocate for freedom of movement for IDPs and non-confiscation of documents as a condition to support the move and the establishment of the new site.

As detailed above, explosive hazard contamination remains one of the most critical protection concerns in northeast Syria. While operations are progressing, the reported scale and scope of contamination requires significant efforts

and resources on a longer-term basis to prevent incidents, enable safe return of displaced people and improve humanitarian access. Humanitarian mine action efforts continue across the northeast of Syria, with risk education campaigns conducted across the four Governorates, including in IDP sites. It includes risk education sessions delivered by mine action organizations as well as the distribution of awareness material by other humanitarian organizations as part of their activities. NGO staff members are also receiving explosive hazards risk awareness training and training of trainers, and contributing to safer humanitarian access. A second aspect of the mine action response is the surveying, marking and clearance of hazardous areas identified with humanitarian partners, local communities and local authorities across accessible areas. Survey and clearance activities are prioritized by the humanitarian community as a precondition for the safe return of the population. Lastly, support is also provided to survivors of explosive hazards, through the delivery of emergency trauma care and physical rehabilitation support by the health actors.



Cross-Cutting Operational Challenges

Humanitarian actors face significant challenges in responding to needs in northeast Syria. Key challenges include:

- **Access and insecurity:** Access to vulnerable communities remains challenging due among others to lack of project approvals, continued ISIL threat. Numerous areas where needs are assumed to be acute, particularly in East and South-East Deir-ez-Zor, remain out of reach for humanitarian actors.
- **High levels of explosive hazard contamination:** The contamination levels in areas that shifted control continues to be considered very high, particularly in Ar-Raqqa city and on Deir-ez-Zor roads and towns, although all population centres and rural areas, more generally where there were military operations or armed groups, are also of concern. In addition, due protracted interruption of humanitarian assistance and services in the IDP sites IDPs may decide to return to areas of Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor governorates where their safety – particularly from explosive hazards – can be at risk.
- **Policy environment:** Although there have been some improvements, humanitarian actors remain concerned for the policies being implemented by local authorities with regards to the treatment of the displaced population, particularly those subjected to restricted freedom of movement and confiscation of personal documentation, more frequent in certain areas. The intermittent bureaucratic impediments to operate in IDP sites and conduct certain activities are also of concern for humanitarian actors as it hinders planning, implementation and predictable provision of services to the population. The process of return needs to remain fully voluntary, safe and well informed. It should not be triggered by sub-standard living conditions, lack of assistance or constrained freedom of movement.
- **Scalability:** The scalability of the assistance and local capacity remain limited and unpredictable, including for any possible increase of humanitarian activities in Ar-Raqqa city. Increasing humanitarian needs will further strain current capacities and require a scale-up of supplies, humanitarian partners and reach. The availability of certain supplies – such as life-saving trauma kits - has been particularly hard hit because of access issues. The delivery of specialized services, particularly for protection partners, also remains a challenge due to limited resources and capacity of local actors.
- **Funding limitations:** In the wake of other competing emergencies in other areas of the country, funding for the projects included in the 2018 HRP are an essential necessity for key humanitarian actors to be able to continue operations throughout the second half of the year, amidst competing emergencies elsewhere in the country.

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