

# Ar-Raqqa City, Syria - Situation Overview IV

17 August 2017

**REACH** Informing  
more effective  
humanitarian action

## SUMMARY

Since 6 June 2017, conflict between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has been ongoing across Ar-Raqqa city, comprising a ground advancement within the city as well as airstrikes in and around the area. Since the start of the fighting, the SDF has taken control of the outer neighbourhoods of the city, recently entering neighbourhoods in Ar-Raqqa's Old City.

This report is the fourth rapid assessment conducted by REACH to monitor the humanitarian situation in Ar-Raqqa city. Findings are based on primary data collected between 14 and 16 August through qualitative interviews and participatory mapping exercises with 8 Key Informants (KIs) who had left the city since 31 July reporting on all 24 neighbourhoods in Ar-Raqqa.

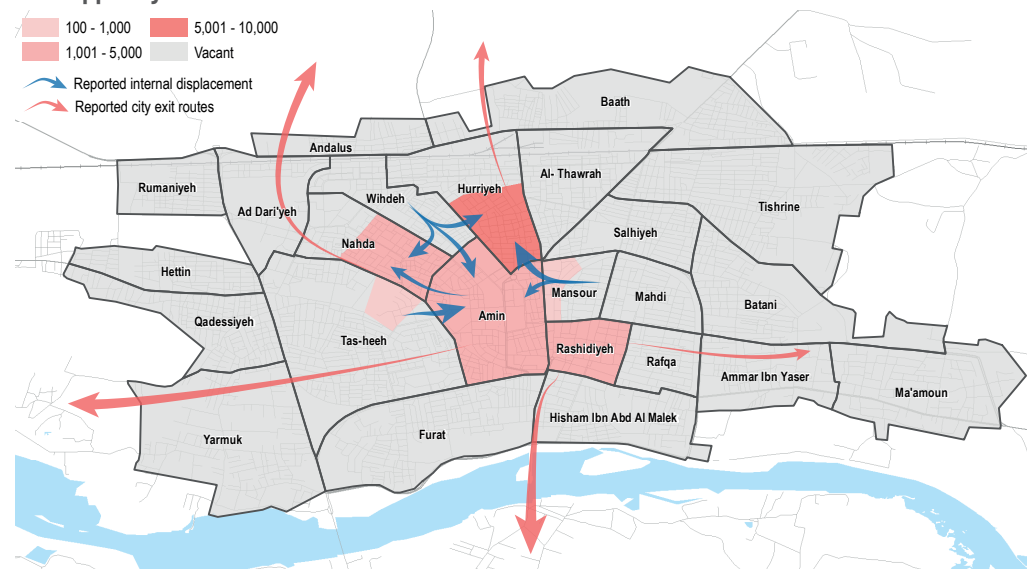
Previous assessments can be found here:

[Ar-Raqqa City Situation Overview III – 28 July 2017](#)

[Ar-Raqqa City Situation Overview II – 6 July 2017](#)

[Ar-Raqqa City Situation Overview I – 23 June 2017](#)

**Map 1: Estimated populated areas, population per neighbourhood and reported movement in Ar-Raqqa city**



## KEY FINDINGS:

- **Since the last assessment three weeks ago, civilians have continued to leave Ar-Raqqa city, though departure rates have reduced as the remaining population has decreased.** KIs estimate that currently up to 22,000 people remain, and 18 of Ar-Raqqa's 24 neighbourhoods are now completely depopulated. KIs reported that the SDF continues to facilitate civilians' movement from the city via multiple exit routes, while ISIL has forcibly concentrated the civilians remaining in areas under its control.
- **Although many of those who have left the city reportedly hope to return as soon as possible, returns have not been observed thus far and are not expected prior to a de-escalation of conflict and mine clearance.**
- **The situation across the six remaining populated neighbourhoods of the city continues to deteriorate.** Residents face constant threats to their safety including airstrikes, indirect fire, improvised explosives, mines, and sniper fire.
- **Food markets are reportedly only functioning in two neighbourhoods in the city and residents are relying primarily on food stored previously – either by themselves or by neighbours who have since departed.** Meat and fresh produce is not available.
- **Access to water remains extremely limited, with KIs reporting that almost no one has sufficient water for their needs.** With the main water network not functioning for months, the remaining population is relying exclusively on recently-drilled boreholes for water, of which all with the exception of one reportedly caused sickness. There are reportedly long queues to access water from the boreholes. These expose civilians to significant conflict-related safety risks.
- **Access to healthcare has also deteriorated.** Informal emergency care points are reportedly no longer providing services and the only functioning health facility, a hospital, was reported recently damaged in an airstrike, though it has only provided the most basic first aid services for weeks and is typically inaccessible to civilians.<sup>1</sup>
- **Electricity produced by generators is reportedly available for 2-6 hours per day in five of the remaining six populated neighbourhoods of the city.**
- **Damage to shelters continues in frontline neighbourhoods primarily due to airstrikes and indirect fire.**
- **Overall, risk of being caught in conflict, forced relocation of civilians in ISIL-controlled neighbourhoods, as well as the lack of fresh food and potable water pose significant threats to the safety and well-being of those remaining in Ar-Raqqa city.**

1. "Syria Crisis: North East Syria - Situation Report No. 13 (1-31 July 2017)," OCHA

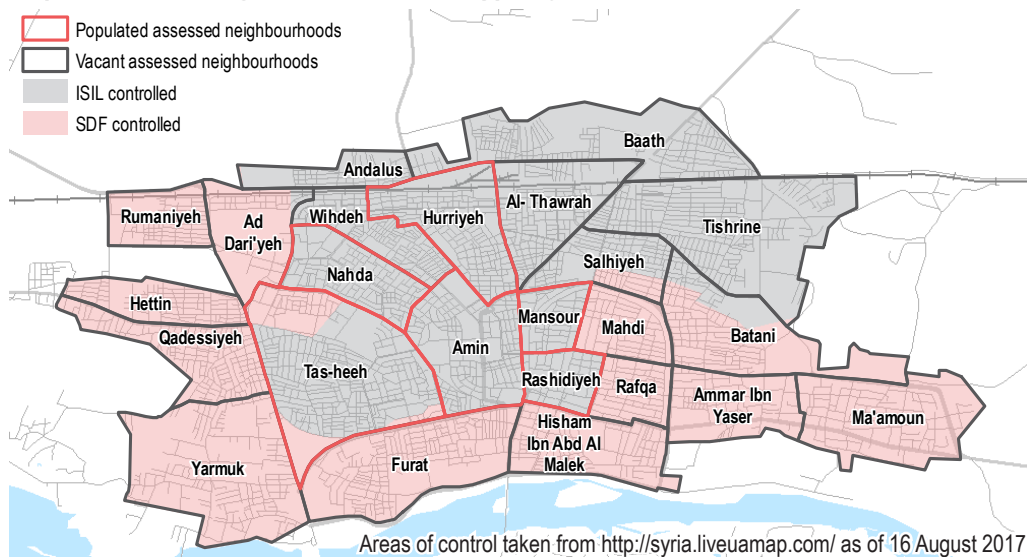
## INTRODUCTION

In November 2016, the SDF announced the start of operations aiming at expelling ISIL from Ar-Raqqa governorate. On 6 June 2017, following SDF advancement in the countryside surrounding Ar-Raqqa city, the campaign entered its latest phase, with the SDF aiming to take full control of the city. Since then, an ongoing ground offensive has been supported by airstrikes in and around the city. The SDF has taken control of the outer neighbourhoods of the city, and most recently entered Ar-Raqqa's Old City neighbourhoods of Mahdi and Rafqa and merged eastern and western battle lines across the areas of Furat and Hisham Ibn Abd Al Malek along the Euphrates river.

Since ISIL takeover of Ar-Raqqa city in 2014, humanitarian access as well as information on the humanitarian situation of civilians living in the city has been extremely limited, due to strict movement restrictions and controls on information flows. To fill these information gaps, REACH has been conducting rapid assessments aiming to monitor and highlight developments in the humanitarian situation. This is the fourth assessment conducted, covering population movements (including returns), access to food and markets, shelter, non-food items (NFIs), WASH and health services, and the protection situation within the city.

Information was collected between 14 and 16 August through direct qualitative interviews and participatory mapping exercises with 8 Key Informants (KIs) who had recently left the city, reporting at the neighbourhood level on all 24 neighbourhoods of the city. KIs included doctors, local council members, medical professionals, and local civil society representatives. The information in this situation overview should be considered as indicative only.

Map 2: Assessed neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city



## DISPLACEMENT

### Population remaining in the city

- **Residents continue to leave Ar-Raqqa city, though departure rates have reduced as the remaining population has decreased. KIs estimate that there are currently up to 22,000 persons remaining in the city.** An additional four neighbourhoods were reported to have been completely abandoned since the previous assessment, leaving only six still populated (see Map 1). Population estimates are extremely hard to verify due to the dynamic situation on the ground and tight controls on information flows from ISIL-controlled areas.
- **For those intending to remain in their neighbourhoods, the most common reasons cited related to movement restrictions,** including an absence of safe routes to elsewhere and not having permission to leave.

### Movement restrictions

- **Primary exit routes out of the city are across conflict lines to the north and west, facilitated by SDF forces (see Map 1).** Most departures are to the north of the city towards villages south of Ein Issa. The western route is the second most used, towards Al-Thawrah. Smaller flows were reported out of the south of the city, with people reportedly crossing the Euphrates river on boats before settling in villages nearby. Others are departing to the east, although this route is reportedly more dangerous.
- **It is reportedly very dangerous and difficult to leave the city.** Civilians are reportedly putting themselves at extreme risk to flee during air-strikes, during which times ISIL forces are less able to restrict movement. While departing ISIL areas, civilians encounter threats from mines, unexploded ordinance, crossfire, and snipers.
- **KIs also indicated significant internal movement within the city,** as civilians are either moving towards outer neighbourhoods to try and obtain assistance to leave, or being forcibly relocated by ISIL to central neighbourhoods of Nahda and Hurriyeh.

### Intentions

- **KIs reported that the majority of the remaining population in each neighbourhood intend to leave the city over the next two weeks, if possible to do so.** Primary reported reasons for leaving were related to direct escalation of conflict, as well as reduced access to water.
- **Aerial bombardment was the most commonly reported trigger that would cause further displacement, followed by the opening of safe passages to other locations.** Movement restrictions are reportedly preventing residents that would prefer to leave from doing so.

- **Civilians planning to leave the city are expected to remain within Ar-Raqqa governorate**, with primary intended destinations reported as elsewhere in Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ath-Thawrah sub-district, and north towards Tell Abiad. **Safety and security was the most commonly reported factor affecting intended destination**, followed by access to food, water, health services, and humanitarian assistance.

### Returns

- **Although many of those who have left the city reportedly want to return, none have done so within the last two weeks or are expected to do so in the coming month.** KIs reported that returns have not been possible for the last two months and are not expected prior to de-escalation of fighting in the city and removal of mines.

### PROTECTION

- **Protection issues remain prevalent across Ar-Raqqa city, with reported threats most commonly directly relating to ongoing conflict.** Remaining residents face the threat of mines, airstrikes, sniper fire, indirect fire, family separation and movement restrictions.
- Forced recruitment by armed groups was also a reported issue. Children remain particularly vulnerable to the threat from IEDs and landmines as well as psychological trauma.

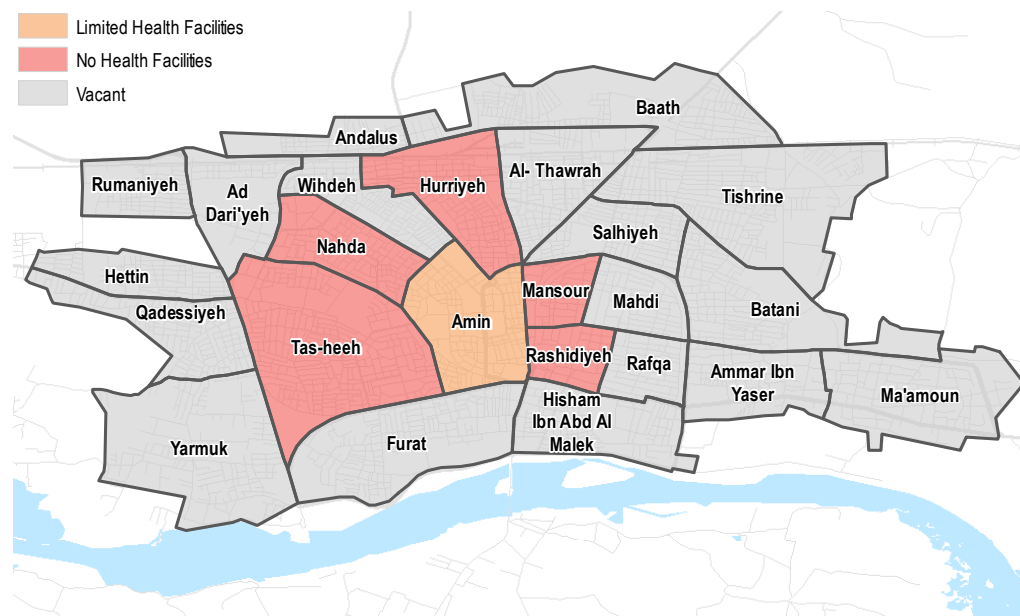
### SHELTER

- **Damage to shelters has continued, particularly in areas directly affected by conflict,** primarily caused by airstrikes and indirect fire (see Map 4).
- **Remaining residents are reportedly not sheltering in damaged buildings or collective centres.** As reported in previous assessments, because a large number of homes are abandoned, residents are reportedly able to find undamaged buildings in which they can shelter.
- In certain areas, such as parts of Amin and Nahda neighbourhoods, **people are reportedly living in basements below damaged buildings** as these are perceived to provide more cover from airstrikes in comparison to undamaged buildings.

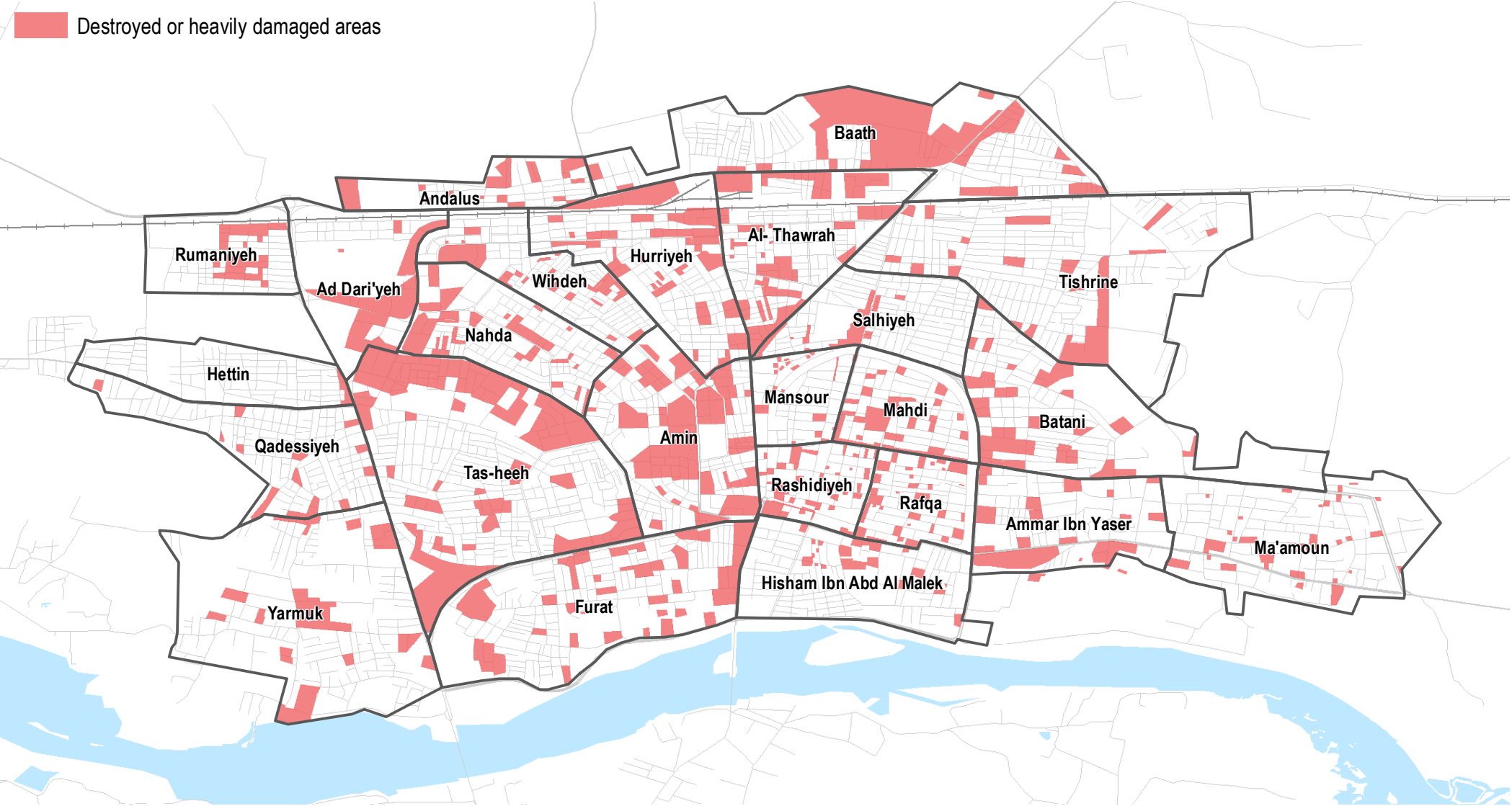
### HEALTH

- **As in previous assessments, health services and facilities remain extremely limited.** The one functioning wing of National Hospital was reportedly struck by an airstrike in early August. Since then, some functionality has been restored, though it offers only basic emergency first aid and is not intended for civilian use (see Map 3).
- **The availability of informal emergency care points established in people's homes reported in previous assessments has reportedly declined.** First aid and emergency care is now primarily provided by civilians that are not medical professionals nor in formal care facilities, with the majority of those injured reportedly preferring to attempt to leave the city.
- **Need for health services is high.** KIs most commonly reported that residents need treatment for chronic diseases, surgery, and emergency care.

Map 3: Health facilities in neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city



Map 4: Damaged areas in Ar-Raqqa city based on participatory mapping with KIs

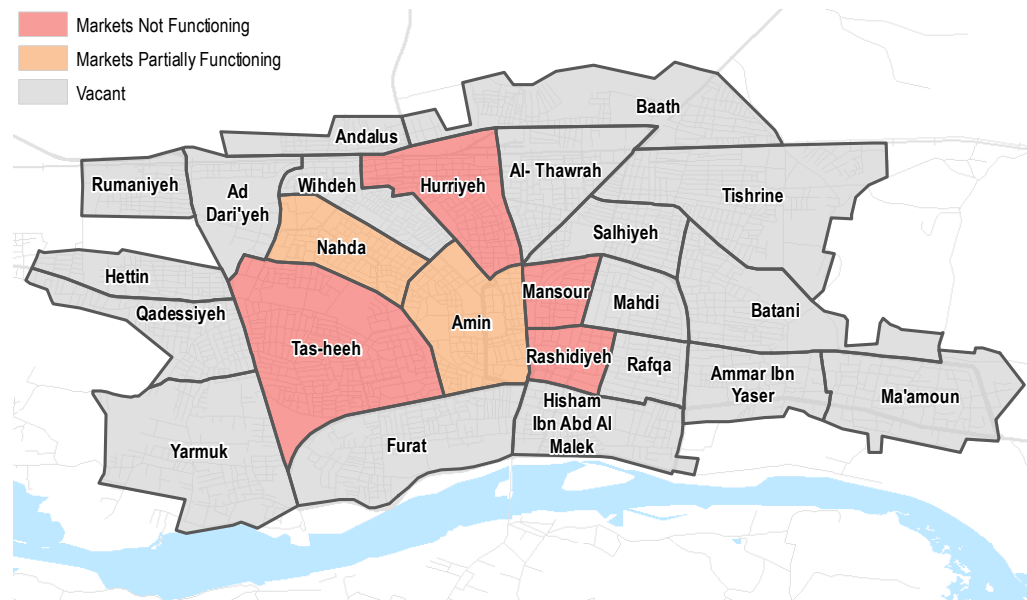


## FOOD AND MARKETS

### Access to food and market functionality

- **As reported in the assessment three weeks ago, residents are primarily relying on food stored prior to escalation of conflict.** There are anecdotal reports of departing neighbours giving away their stored food to supplement the supplies of those remaining behind.
- **Although markets are reportedly sometimes functioning in two neighbourhoods in Ar-Raqqa city (Amin and Nahda - see Map 5), available food is limited** and meat and fresh produce are not available in the city.
- **Humanitarian actors have not been able to fill the food gap due to access and security constraints.** KIs reported that ISIL was providing some limited food assistance to the most vulnerable in areas under their control.
- **All KIs reported that residents use strategies to cope with reduced access to food.** As in previous assessments, people are reportedly reducing meal size, skipping meals and purchasing food on credit.

Map 5: Market functionality in neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city



### Core food items

- **In the remaining populated neighbourhoods, bread is reportedly available and affordable.** At least one ISIL-run bakery is functioning in Amin neighbourhood and selling bread at a price of 100 SYP (0.20 USD<sup>2</sup>) per pack to those who can afford it. The bakery continues to function due to anticipatory ISIL stockpiling of fuel.
- **Prices remain high for other core food items, with flour reportedly doubling in price since the last assessment.**
- **The availability of core food items remains low.** Non-perishable food items such as rice, flour, lentils, cooking oil, and sugar are only sometimes available. Meat and fresh produce are completely unavailable in the remaining populated neighbourhoods of the city.

Reported availability, affordability, estimated price and price trend (last two weeks) of core food items in markets:

	Available	Affordable	Price (SYP)	Price change	
Bread (pack)	✓	✓	100	◊	
Rice (kg)	✓	✗	800	◊	
Flour (kg)	✓	✓	450	↑	✓ Generally available / affordable
Lentils (kg)	✓	✓	500	◊	✓ Sometimes available / affordable
Cooking Oil (litre)	✓	✓	1000	◊	
Sugar (kg)	✓	✓	650	◊	✗ Not available / affordable
Meat (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	
Chicken (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	↑ Reported price increase
Tomatoes (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	◊ No change in price
Cucumbers (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	↓ Reported price decrease

## WASH

### Water sources

- **Residents continue to rely exclusively on neighbourhood boreholes** as the main water network remains non-functioning and it is no longer possible to access water from the Euphrates river due to movement restrictions and safety and security concerns.
- **KIs reported that almost no one has sufficient water to meet their needs.** Despite the presence of boreholes, civilians are only able to access water at certain times due to a high threat of snipers and aerial bombardment, and there are reportedly long queues to obtain water from the boreholes. In one neighbourhood the borehole was reported to be damaged.
- **All KIs reported that residents are resorting to coping strategies, primarily modifying hygiene practices,** followed by reducing drinking water consumption and drinking water normally used for other purposes.

#### Top reported water coping strategies in the last two weeks (number of KIs reporting each)<sup>3</sup>

Modifying hygiene practices	6	■
Reducing drinking water consumption	4	■
Drinking water normally used for other purposes	4	■
Buying water with money usually spent on other things	1	■

### Drinking water quality

- **Drinking water pumped from neighbourhood boreholes is reportedly causing sickness in the majority of populated neighbourhoods.** Amin was the only neighbourhood in which residents were reportedly not getting sick from the water due to the use of a filter and access to chlorine.

## NFIs

### Core NFIs

- **Many core non-food items are now completely unavailable in stores.** Reportedly unavailable items include: Cooking fuel, water containers, batteries, diapers, sanitary pads, soap and detergent.

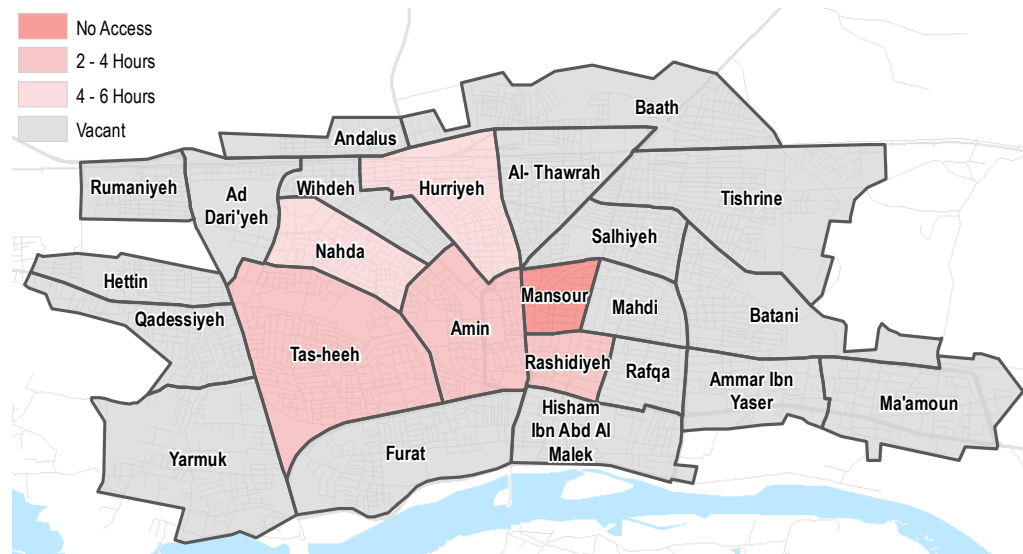
### Availability of key non-food items in markets in Ar-Raqqa city:

	Availability prior to last two weeks	Availability in last two weeks	
Cooking fuel	✓	✗	
Water containers	✓	✗	
Batteries	✗	✗	
Diapers	✓	✗	
Sanitary pads	✓	✗	✓ Generally available
Soap	✗	✗	✓ Sometimes available
Detergent	✗	✗	✗ Not available

## Electricity

- **Ar-Raqqa city remains without main network power.** In five neighbourhoods, residents fill this gap by running generators, as in previous weeks. In these areas, electricity is reportedly available for two to six hours per day (see Map 6). In the neighbourhood of Mansour, however, there is no electricity of any kind due to ongoing clashes and the low population remaining.

Map 6: Access to electricity in Ar-Raqqa city



3. KIs could select more than one option

### About REACH

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