

Derna Rapid Situation Overview

Libya, 15 November 2017

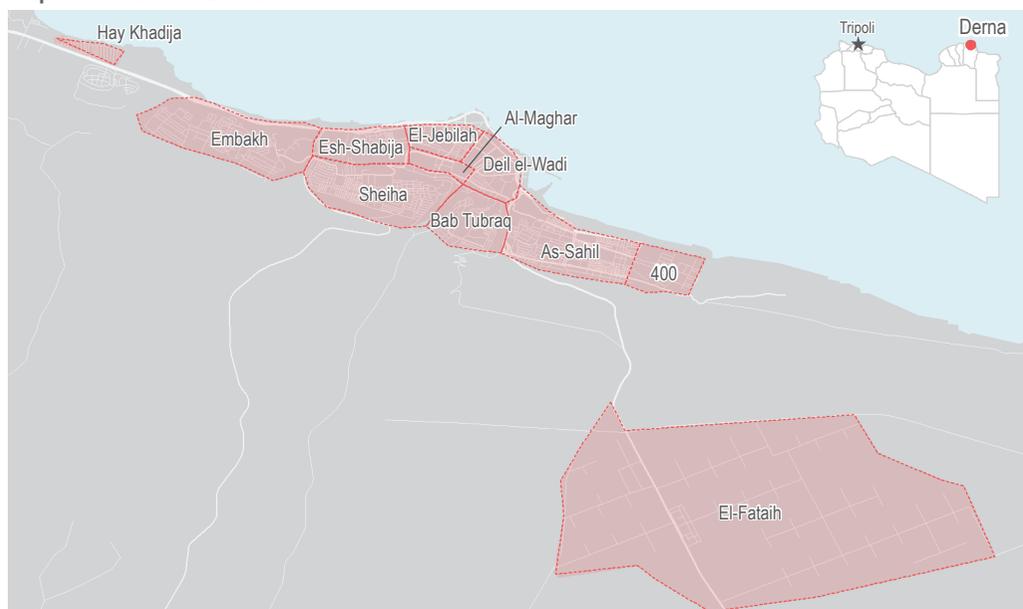
LIBYA RRM

BACKGROUND

Since 30 July 2017, the eastern Libyan city of Derna has been subject to tight military encirclement. The closure of access points has made it difficult to supply markets, banks and health facilities, which has led to a deteriorating humanitarian situation for those remaining in the city. On 30 October, the ongoing conflict briefly escalated as airstrikes hit the mahalla (neighbourhood) of El-Fataih.¹

To inform humanitarian response plans regarding the situation in Derna, the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) in Libya (DRC and ACTED), with the support of REACH, conducted a rapid assessment to provide a snapshot of needs. Between 7 and 9 November, with data collection support from Ofoq, the RRM assessed the humanitarian situation in all 11 mahallas of Derna city. Data was collected through 33 key informant (KI) interviews, 28 of them face-to-face and 5 remote, conducted with community leaders, NGO staff, medical professionals and others. The information in this situation overview should be considered indicative only.

Map 1: Mahallas of Derna



KEY FINDINGS

- **Formal entry and exit points into and out of Derna remained almost entirely closed, with only limited access to the city via informal entry and exit points.** Transit through these informal points, always risky, has decreased over the last two weeks due to airstrikes in the vicinity, making it more difficult for people and goods to move in and out.
- All mahallas except for Deil el-Wadi and Sheiha reportedly **lacked a functional, accessible market.** Accessing these central markets from outlying districts was reportedly **difficult due to a lack of petrol and public transportation.** Even so, KIs in several areas reported that residents relied almost exclusively on stores and markets for their food.
- KIs in every part of Derna reported that **residents were unable to access food consistently** over the two weeks prior to data collection, due largely to the lack of access to markets and the unavailability of staple market items. **Widespread shortages of bread and flour were reported, as well as of every assessed type of fuel.**
- Due to severe restrictions on the amount of cash circulating in local markets, **certified cheques** had reportedly become one of the main payment modalities in use. As banks were mostly non-functional, **hawala shops** had become the main financial service providers.
- **No medical facilities were functioning in 3 of Derna's 11 mahallas** (Esh-Shabija, 400 and El-Fataih), including 2 of the areas farthest from the centre. Combined with the lack of petrol or transport to access facilities elsewhere, this implies that many Derna residents lacked physical access to healthcare. KIs reported particularly high need for emergency care, chronic disease treatment and rehabilitation treatment.
- **Only three mahallas** (Deil el-Wadi, Bab Tubraq and Hay Khadija) **reportedly retained widespread access to Derna's main water network.** Residents of other mahallas relied on bottled water and public boreholes, the latter of which provided poor-quality water.
- **Municipal trash collection services in Derna had reportedly broken down.** Residents left their trash in designated, though unofficial, public spaces, where it often remained in place for over a week before being collected and burned by volunteers.
- **The top two humanitarian needs in Derna,** as reported by KIs, were **healthcare and cash:** specifically, more healthcare facilities, a wider array of available health services and better access to hard cash.

² OCHA: [Derna Flash Update #3](#), as of 6 November 2017.

FINDINGS BY SECTOR

Demographics

- There were notable demographic differences between Derna's more stable western mahallas and its outlying mahallas, which were more affected by displacement. In mid-November, according to KI estimates, the western mahallas of El-Jebilah, Al-Maghar, Esh-Shabija, Sheiha and Embakh consisted of 70-80% non-displaced persons and 20-30% IDPs, returnees, refugees and migrants combined. The outlying mahallas of El-Fataih, 400, As-Sahil and Hay Khadija, however, consisted of 60-90% returnees alone.
- While IDPs, refugees and migrants were evenly distributed throughout the city, **returnees were heavily concentrated in outlying mahallas** (Hay Khadija, El-Fataih, As-Sahil and 400).
- The IDP and returnee categories include those who were displaced within the city of Derna.

Freedom of Movement

- **Formal entry and exit points into and out of Derna, including marine ports, were almost entirely closed.** It remained possible, though difficult, for residents to enter and exit the city via **informal crossing points**, which involved a long and risky trip over poor roads. However, due to airstrikes in the vicinity of these informal crossing points, the number of people moving in and out of the city has reportedly decreased over the last two weeks.
- Those attempting to transit through any entry or exit point, formal or informal, faced **risks including sniper fire, detention, verbal/physical harassment and confiscation of their documents.** KIs in El-Fataih additionally reported **shelling** as a major safety risk.
- Though the number of people entering and leaving Derna has decreased, most KIs still reported **noticeable movement into and out of their home mahallas.** Those moving in tended to be coming from other parts of Derna, whereas those moving out tended to be leaving for other parts of Libya via informal entry and exit points. **Movement restrictions around El-Fataih and Esh-Shabija were reportedly stricter than those elsewhere.**

Shelter

- According to KIs, residents of the eastern mahallas of 400, As-Sahil, Al-Maghar and Deil el-Wadi lived almost exclusively (80-100%) in **rented accommodation.** In other mahallas, a large proportion of residents was reportedly being **hosted by friends or family:** generally 30-50%, except in El-Fataih, where an estimated 80% of the returnee-heavy population was hosted by others.

- In Embakh, Sheiha and Hay Khadija, 10-20% of residents were reportedly sheltering in **unfinished buildings.** In all mahallas except As-Sahil and Deil el-Wadi, 5-20% of the population was reported to be **living in camps.**
- **The mahalla of El-Jebilah,** central and relatively distant from frontlines, **was most prone to overcrowding,** with over half of households reported to live in shared or overcrowded housing.
- **The public power grid remained the main source of electricity in Derna, though it was showing increasing signs of disrepair,** particularly in El-Fataih and El-Jebilah. **Power cuts were frequent,** leading many residents to rely on generators to compensate. Among those who used generators, the expense and unavailability of fuel were reportedly the main barriers to accessing electricity.

Food Security

- KIs in every part of Derna reported that residents of their mahallas were **unable to access food consistently** over the two weeks prior to data collection.
- **Nonetheless, residents continued to most commonly rely on stores and markets to access food,** according to KIs. In some eastern mahallas, particularly As-Sahil and 400, they reportedly relied on stores and markets almost exclusively, though these mahallas themselves lacked any functional, accessible markets. **Access to food was closely related to residents' ability to access transport to commercial districts.**
- **Alternative food sources, in particular borrowing, hunting and self-production, have reportedly become more common** in the western mahallas of Derna, though some of these strategies are inherently less viable in urban areas.

Cash and Markets

Functionality, accessibility and availability

- KIs from 9 of Derna's 11 mahallas—all except Deil el-Wadi and Sheiha—reported that there was **no functional, accessible market in their mahalla,** as the markets tend to be concentrated in commercial districts. Throughout the city, between one-quarter and one-half of traders had reportedly stopped operating.
- Outside Deil el-Wadi and Sheiha, **distance and lack of transport were both frequently reported as physical barriers to accessing markets.** There is no public transportation connecting outlying areas with the commercial districts, and petrol for personal vehicles is scarce.

- **Nearly all KIs also reported difficulty accessing items in the markets**, whether this was due to high prices, item shortages or lack of a means of payment. This was the case even in mahallas where markets remained functional.
- Availability of bread, flour, eggs and sugar decreased over the two weeks prior to data collection, with **widespread shortages reported for bread and flour** in particular. Chickpeas, chicken and rice were generally present in markets, but were too expensive for many households to afford. Pasta, tomato paste and cooking oil, on the other hand, remained almost fully available and affordable.
- **Widespread shortages were also reported throughout Derna for all types of fuel, including petrol, heating fuel and cooking gas**; petrol, in particular, has been absent from formal markets for the past two years and is only available on the informal market. Heaters and water containers were also reported to be difficult to find in markets.
- During the two weeks prior to data collection, **nearly all other non-food items (NFIs) became less available in Derna's eastern mahallas**, particularly in 400, As-Sahil and Al-Maghar. Where these NFIs were still present, they were frequently reported to be too expensive for many households.

Modalities and financial services

- The amount of hard cash (Libyan dinars) circulating in local markets was severely limited, with all KIs reporting that **no cash was available from banks or ATMs. As a result, certified cheques had become the most common means of payment in Derna markets**, though cash, vouchers and bank transfers were all reportedly still in use. Transactions completed with certified cheques generally involved a 30-50% mark-up.
- Credit and debit cards were rarely used due to infrequently present and often non-functional points of sale. Mobile money and foreign currency were reported to be completely unavailable.
- In most mahallas of Derna, **hawala shops, both formal and informal, were reported to be the main financial service providers**. Only in Embakh and Hay Khadija were banks reported to be consistently functional.
- According to KIs, the most common strategy used by households to deal with a lack of liquidity or income was to spend their savings. Borrowing money and selling family gold were also common coping mechanisms.

Health

- KIs in the mahallas of El-Fataih, Esh-Shabija and 400 reported that **no medical facilities were functioning in these areas**. All other mahallas had at least one operational medical facility,

including primary care facilities in Embakh and Hay Khadija, private clinics in Deil El-Wadi and Sheiha, and a hospital in El-Jebilah.

- Emergency care, treatments for chronic diseases (diabetes, high blood pressure, heart problems, etc.) and rehabilitation treatment were the three **most needed medical services**.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

- **Only three mahallas—Deil el-Wadi, Bab Tubraq and Hay Khadija—reportedly retained widespread access to Derna's main water network**. Residents of most other mahallas generally had to pay for bottled water as their main water source, with the exception of El-Fataih, where boreholes were more common.
- **Most KIs reported that the water consumed was safe to drink**, apart from those in El-Fataih, where the borehole water was reported to have a bad taste.
- **Solid waste disposal was reported as a major problem across Derna. Municipal collection services had reportedly broken down**, and nearly all trash collection was volunteer-driven. Residents left their trash in designated, though unofficial, public spaces, including streets and schoolyards, where it often remained in place for over a week before being collected and burned by volunteers.

Education

- KIs from all mahallas reported that **formal schools remained operational. However, access to education had decreased** since July in all mahallas except for As-Sahil and El-Fataih, primarily due to decreasing economic means and liquidity among residents of those areas.

Protection

- **No tensions were reported between IDPs and other community members**, due in part to the limited influx of new IDPs into Derna.
- **The presence of explosive hazards**, a category including landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW), **was reported in the eastern mahallas of El-Fataih, 400 and As-Sahil**. Though KIs from 400 and As-Sahil reported that local residents had received information on ERW risk awareness; this was not the case in El-Fataih.

Priority Needs and Assistance

- **The top two humanitarian needs in Derna by far, as reported by KIs, were healthcare and cash**: specifically, more healthcare facilities, a wider array of healthcare services and better

access to hard cash.

- **KIs were generally not aware of any humanitarian aid that had been distributed in their mahallas**, except in Esh-Shabija, where food aid had reportedly been given out by local NGOs and community groups. Additional distributions of food aid were expected in Embakh within the next month.
- Across most assessed mahallas, KIs reported **a strong preference for cash-based interventions**. The only exceptions were in the eastern mahallas of 400, As-Sahil and Al-Maghar, where some respondents preferred in-kind aid due to the difficulty of accessing cash or markets in these areas.

CONCLUSION

Despite periodic escalations, most recently with the airstrikes on El-Fataih in late October, the dynamics of the conflict in Derna have remained consistent since late July 2017. However, the humanitarian situation continues to worsen due to the cumulative effects of four months of military encirclement. Some of the most pressing needs—a lack of access to markets and healthcare, shortages of fuel and staple foods, and widespread food insecurity—can be traced back to the military encirclement itself and the difficulty of moving people and goods into and out of Derna. Municipal infrastructure, including the power grid, water network and trash collection services, also continues to deteriorate. All of these issues have been exacerbated by Libya's ongoing banking and liquidity crisis, which has severely restricted the amount of cash available to Derna residents. In their roles as members of the RRM inter-agency response mechanism, DRC, ACTED and REACH will continue to monitor the situation in Derna to further inform humanitarian planning.

About the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM)

This rapid assessment is a product of the RRM, an inter-agency response mechanism funded by ECHO, implemented by ACTED and DRC, and facilitated by REACH that aims to inform the rapid delivery of cash-based interventions in response to conflict developments in Libya. For further information, contact geneva@reach-initiative.org.



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