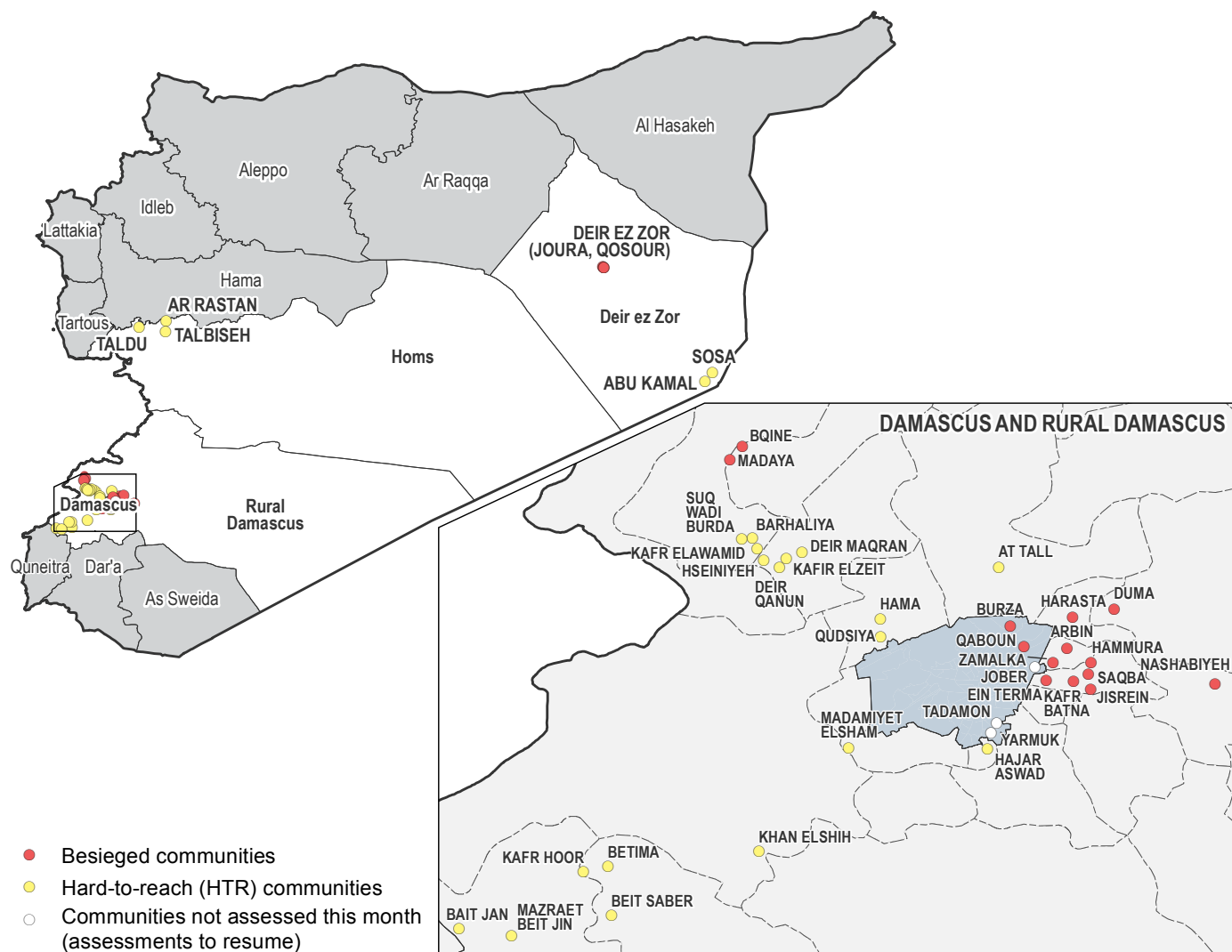




COMMUNITY PROFILES UPDATE: Besieged and Hard-to-Reach Communities

SYRIA

SITUATION OVERVIEW

JULY 2017

Executive Summary

Between 27 July and 4 August, REACH, in collaboration with the Syria INGO Regional Forum (SIRF), assessed the humanitarian situation in 38 communities in Syria currently facing movement and access restrictions, 14 of which are classified as besieged and 24 as hard-to-reach by the United Nations (UN).¹ The data gathered refers to the humanitarian situation in July. All profiled communities were located in Damascus, Deir ez Zor, Homs and Rural Damascus governorates, and information was collected through a total of 161 community representatives (CRs). In July, Jobar, Tadamon and Yarmuk communities in Damascus could not be assessed, due to access limitations, though coverage is expected to resume in August.

In July:

- **The humanitarian situation improved in both Burza and Qaboun, though the situation in Qaboun remained critical.** In Burza, civilian movement and commercial vehicle entry remained unrestricted for the second consecutive month. Food security continued to improve, and access to medical care increased, with the opening of new private clinics, expansion of services and a reported increase in availability of medical items. In Qaboun, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) were reportedly able to provide medical services in the community, in contrast to previous months, while access to food, water and electricity also improved. However, the overall situation in the neighbourhood remained critical, access restrictions on commercial vehicle and civilian movement remained in place, and no educational facilities were available.
- **Aid entered the community of Duma in Eastern Ghouta, delivering food, hygiene and medical items.** However, supplies were reportedly insufficient, and did not reach other communities in the area. A humanitarian delivery was also reported in Nashabiyeh on 30 July, but the contents of this delivery or its impact on the humanitarian situation could not be assessed for the July round of Community Profiles, as it occurred outside of the data collection period.
- **Madaya was reclassified by the UN from besieged to hard-to-reach at the end of June.** Improved access to medical care was reported, following the return of medical professionals to the community, and an increase in the availability of medicine and supplies, which contributed to growing stockpiles and medical resources. Water sufficiency and increased access to electricity were also reported for the majority of the community, though parts of the population still reported insufficient water supplies and no change in electricity access.²
- **Access to basic services improved in many assessed communities in July, while it worsened in others.** Beit Saber, Betima, Kafr Hoor, Khan Elshih, and the Wadi Burda communities reported varying degrees of increased access to electricity, while access to both the water and electricity networks in Qaboun and Madaya improved. Water availability increased in Ar Rastan and Talbiseh, due to the installation of bio-fuel pumps, though supplies remained insufficient to meet household needs. Conversely, Taldu and Qudsiyeh reported a decrease in access to water, due to pumps breaking in the former, and power outages that affected the functionality of water pumps in the latter.
- Food security improved in the Wadi Burda communities, following price decreases of some food items. **Conversely, in Harasta (Eastern Ghouta), the first case of death due to a lack of food was reported in the community since assessments began in the Eastern Ghouta area in June 2016.**

Of the 38 communities assessed:

- Humanitarian aid reached Taldu, Deir ez Zor city (Joura, Qosour), Hama and Qudsiya, Duma and Nashabiyeh.
- Three communities reported no civilian movement (Joura and Qosour, Qaboun), while in 12 communities, only 1-10% of populations could exit or enter without restrictions. Of the assessed communities, eight reported unrestricted civilian movement, upon presentation of identification.

Based on data regarding the humanitarian situation in July, critical levels of vulnerability were indicated in the communities of Joura and Qosour (Deir ez Zor city) and Qaboun in Damascus, despite the situation in the latter having improved. Conversely, Burza, Beit Saber, Betima, Kafr Hoor, Madaya and the Wadi Burda communities experienced notable improvements, although ongoing monitoring will be required to assess any further developments.

Assessed communities in July 2017, by classification¹

Besieged	Damascus (Burza, Qaboun), Deir ez Zor city (Joura, Qosour) Eastern Ghouta (Arbin, Duma, Ein Terma, Hammura, Harasta, Jisrein, Kafr Batna, Nashabiyeh, Saqba, Zamalka).
Hard-to-reach	Madaya, Bqine, ² At Tall, Bait Jan region (Bait Jan, Beit Saber, Betima, Kafr Hoor, Mazraet Beit Jin), Abu Kamal, Sosa, Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Taldu, Hajar Aswad, Hama, Qudsiya, Khan Elshih, Madamiyet Elsham, Wadi Burda (Barhaliya, Deir Maqran, Deir Qanun, Hseiniyeh, Kafr Elawamid, Kafir Elzeit, Suq Wadi Burda).

Overview

In order to inform a more evidence-based response to address the needs of vulnerable communities across Syria, REACH, in support of the Syria INGO Regional Forum (SIRF) and other humanitarian actors, regularly monitors the humanitarian situation within communities facing restrictions on civilian movement and humanitarian access. The Syria Community Profiles, which commenced in June 2016, intend to provide aid actors with an understanding of the humanitarian situation within these communities, by assessing availability of and access to food, healthcare, water, education and humanitarian assistance, as well as the specific conditions associated with limited freedom of movement. The list of assessed communities is not intended to be exhaustive of all the areas in Syria facing limited freedom of movement and access. With greater partner input and collaboration, the list of profiled communities will be expanded, when feasible. This overview presents a summary of overarching trends across communities assessed.

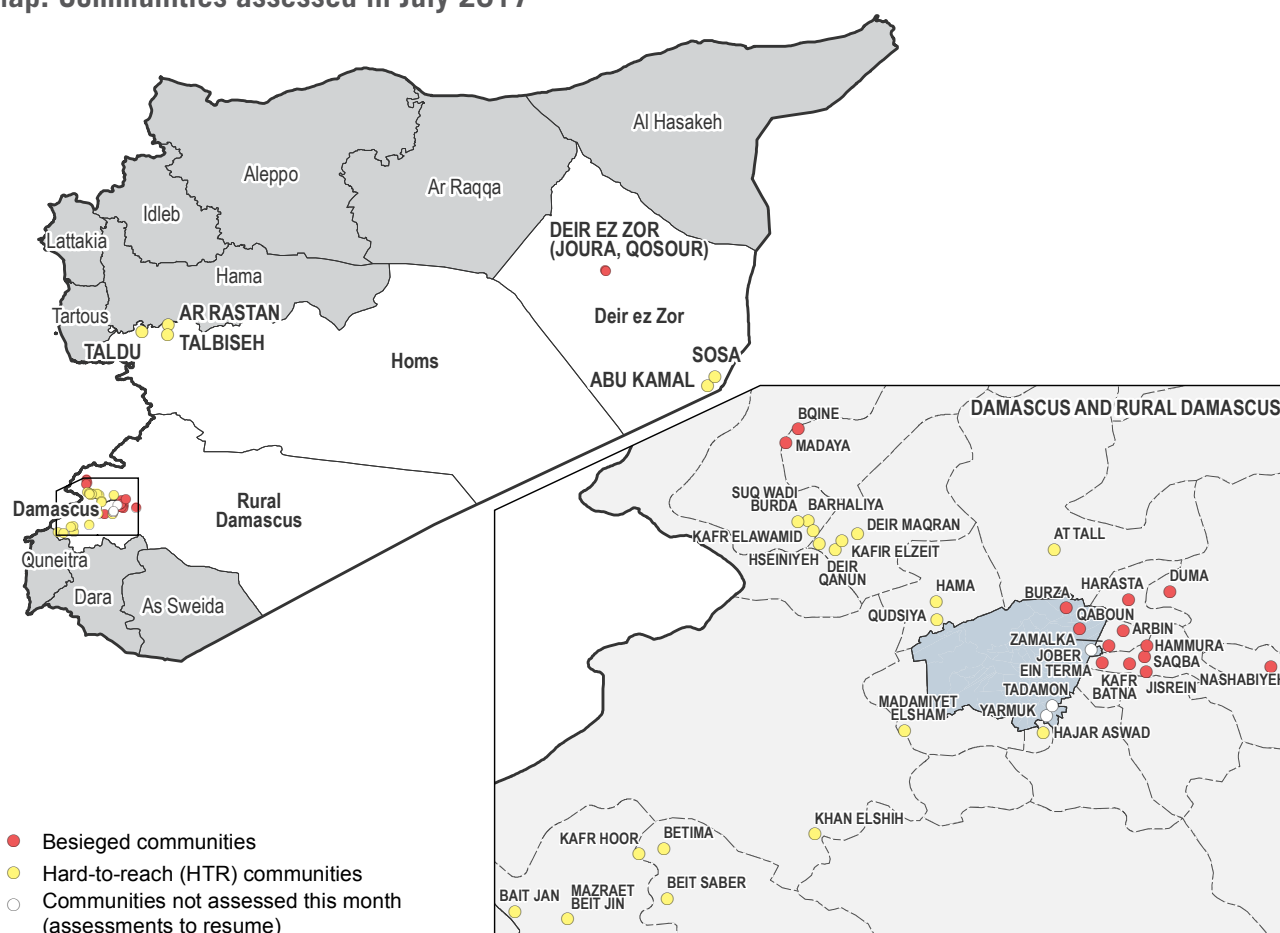
Methodology and Limitations

Data presented in the Community Profiles is collected through contact with community representatives (CRs) residing within assessed communities, who are responsible for gathering sector-specific data on their areas of expertise (e.g. health, education and so forth). Data for this round was gathered during the end of July and early August 2017, and refers to the situation in July 2017. Each community has a minimum of three and up to six CRs. The network continues to expand with ongoing collaboration with SIRF and other partners.

During analysis, data is triangulated through secondary information, including humanitarian reports, news and social media monitoring, and partner verification. Comparisons are made to findings from previous assessments (where possible) and follow up is conducted with CRs to build a thorough understanding of situational developments within communities. In the case of some profiles, multiple communities are presented together; decisions to do so are based on geographical proximity, or on similarities in the access restrictions faced by populations.

Due to the inherent challenges of data collection inside Syria, representative sampling, entailing larger-scale data collection, remains difficult. Consequently, information is to be considered indicative rather than generalisable across the population of each assessed community. Furthermore, an improvement or deterioration of the situation between months may not necessarily indicate a trend, but rather a distinct development specific to the month assessed. The exclusion or inclusion of assessed communities is influenced by the availability of CRs within communities and, therefore, should not be considered representative of all areas within Syria facing acute vulnerability. Finally, the level of information presented in each profile varies due to difficulties in obtaining data from certain communities.

Map: Communities assessed in July 2017



Key Findings

Movement of Civilians

In July, restrictions tightened on movement of civilians in some communities and improved slightly in others, but remained largely unchanged for the majority of assessed communities (28).

- Abu Kamal and Sosa, Burza, Hama and Qudsiya, and Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor were the only communities where residents could move unrestricted upon presenting identification, as was the case in June.
- Only 1-10% of the populations of Bait Jan, Mazraet Beit Jin and Duma (Eastern Ghouta) were able to use formal access points in July, as had also been reported in May and June.
- With the exception of the Rastan area in Homs, all other assessed communities reported access to formal entry and exit points between 26% and 50% of the time, though verbal harassment, detention and conscription persisted as associated risks for civilians utilising these routes.

Negative developments since June

Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Taldu (Increased restrictions at the formal access point restricting the entry of goods to the community via individuals)

No civilian movement allowed

Joura, Qosour (June 2016)

Qaboun (other than planned evacuations in May 2017, no movement permitted since assessments began - April 2017)

Movement of Commercial Vehicles

While commercial vehicle movement had increased slightly in June, access remained unchanged in July, with existing restrictions persisting.

- Commercial vehicles remained unable to enter 7 of the assessed communities during July.
- A limited number of commercial vehicles were allowed to enter Abu Kamal and Sosa, At Tall, Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin, Bqine and Madaya, Khan Elshih, Hama and Qudsiya, Madamiyet Elsham, the Eastern Ghouta communities and the Wadi Burda area, as was the case in June. The most common restrictions on commercial vehicle access in these communities included searches, fees, documentation requirements, partial confiscation of loads and permission to enter only on certain days.
- **Unrestricted commercial access was only reported in Burza, Betima, Beit Saber and Kafr Hoor, as was the case in June.**

No commercial vehicles allowed

Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Taldu (since June 2016)

Hajar Aswad (since June 2016)

Joura, Qosour (since June 2016)

Qaboun (since assessments began - April 2017)

Movement of Humanitarian Vehicles

In July, the number of reported aid deliveries remained the same for the second consecutive month, with 7 of the assessed communities receiving aid, **and the remaining 31 not receiving any humanitarian assistance.**

- Humanitarian vehicles entered Duma (Eastern Ghouta), delivering food, hygiene and medical items, for the first time since May 2017. However, the aid was reportedly insufficient to meet population needs, and was not distributed across other assessed communities in Eastern Ghouta.*
- Food, hygiene and medical items were also delivered to Taldu, for the first time since April 2017, with no restrictions reported and all population groups able to access aid equally. In Qaboun, medical supplies and assistance entered via SARC vehicles.
- Air drops to Joura and Qosour in July delivered food, non-food and medical items, the latter of which had not been included since January 2017. However, items were reportedly sold or not distributed to people in need. In Hama and Qudsiya, aid deliveries mainly reached economically disadvantaged families, as was the case in June.

No aid entering

Abu Kamal, Sosa (since assessments began - April 2017)

At Tall (since January 2017)

Bait Jan area (since assessments began - November 2016)

Hajar Aswad (since assessments began - June 2016)

Talbiseh and Ar Rastan (since June 2017)

Khan Elshih (since February 2017)

Madamiyet Elsham (since October 2016)

Madaya (since March 2017)

Wadi Burda communities (since May 2017)

Burza (since May 2017)

Eastern Ghouta communities (varies by community, but no consistent humanitarian access reported since assessments began in June 2016)

Health Situation

In July, the health situation remained critical in communities facing the tightest access restrictions, while it improved in some communities where restrictions were eased.

- The health situation in Qaboun improved considerably with the entry of SARC vehicles containing medical supplies, as well as the entry of medical personnel and the opening of an emergency care point in the community. In Burza, increased numbers of medical personnel and access to services were also reported, while all medical items were locally available and in sufficient supply.
- Meanwhile, in Joura and Qosour, the situation remained critical. Despite the reported entry of medical aid, medical items were not distributed to civilians, while the majority of the population could not seek medical services or obtain medicine from the single military hospital. This led to the persistence of extreme coping strategies.
- In Duma and Madaya, the number of medical personnel and availability of medical items reportedly increased.

Negative developments since June

Eastern Ghouta other than Duma (continued depletion of medical stocks)

Critical health situation

Joura, Qosour (majority of population unable to access facilities or medical items, extreme coping strategies)

Food Security

In July, decreases in prices of food items were reported for some communities. However, the food situation deteriorated or remained critical in communities with increased or persisting access restrictions.

- In Burza and Qaboun, food security improved for the second consecutive month, and all items were reported as being generally available in markets. Additionally, in the Wadi Burda area, prices of some food items decreased at the source, leading to price decreases in assessed communities.
- Conversely, in Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin, availability decreased, due to increased restrictions on the entry of commercial vehicles to the communities.
- **Food security remained critical in Joura and Qosour, due to prohibitive prices and the unavailability of the majority of core items, as was the case in June. Meanwhile, the first case of death caused by a lack of food was reported in July in Harasta.**

Negative developments since June

Harasta (first reported death in Harasta / Eastern Ghouta due to a lack of food)

Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin (decrease in availability due to new access restrictions on commercial vehicles)

Talbiseh and Taldu: price increases of 13%

Critical food situation

Joura, Qosour (majority of core food items unavailable, extreme coping strategies reported such as eating non-edible plants, deaths due to lack of food reported since at least June 2016)

Access to Services

In July, as was the case in June, some communities reported better access to water and electricity, following structural repairs and decreased rationing by authorities. Conversely, other communities reported insufficient access. Children remained on summer break in most assessed communities.

- In Qaboun, water availability increased, following loosened rationing restrictions. Similarly, the installation of bio-fuel pumps in Ar Rastan and Talbiseh led to improved water availability.
- In Taldu and Qudsiya, access to water decreased, due to water pumps breaking in the former and power outages at the main water source for the latter. In both communities, water was reported as insufficient, as well as in Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Joura and Qosour, Madaya, Hajar Aswad, At Tall and Khan Elshih (9 communities).
- **Access to electricity increased in Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor as a result of further decreases in electricity rationing. In addition, residents of the Wadi Burda communities, Khan Elshih and Qaboun reported having increased access to the electricity network.**

Negative developments since June

Qudsiya (decreased access to water resulting in insufficient supplies)

Taldu (decreased access to water)

Critically poor access to services

Joura, Qosour (insufficient water, 80% of community has no access to electricity, schools closed since at least June 2016)

Qaboun (no educational facilities, children unable to seek education outside of Qaboun)

Hajar Aswad (water supplies insufficient, residents purchasing water with money intended for other things, extremely limited access to electricity, barriers to education)

Communities that signed truce agreements

Since September 2016, truce agreements have been signed in 19 of the communities assessed by REACH. These include Al Waer³, At Tall, Burza, Hama, Qudsiya, Khan Elshih, Madamiyet Elsham, Madaya, Qaboun, Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor, and the seven Wadi Burda communities. In July, the humanitarian situation improved in varying degrees in some communities, while it remained stable in others.

Significantly improved humanitarian situation: Burza, Wadi Burda, Qaboun, Madaya, Beit Saber, Kafr Hoor and Betima

- The situation in Burza improved for the second consecutive month in July, after the signing of a truce agreement on 22 May and significant improvements to the situation in June. Civilian and commercial vehicle movement remained unrestricted, leading to an increase in the availability of food and medical items. In addition, the health situation improved further in July, with increased access to medical and other services reported. However, humanitarian vehicles were still not permitted to enter the community, while the last aid delivery in May 2017 reportedly only included bread. Additionally, security risks reported in June persisted in July, including detention, conscription and reprisals.
- In the Wadi Burda communities, usage of formal access points increased among male residents of the community in July, as they had reportedly been able to develop a good rapport with official authorities at checkpoints with the passing of time after the truce agreement in January 2017. Meanwhile, the prices of some food items decreased, as a result of lower prices at their source. Access to the electricity network reportedly increased from 1-2 to 2-4 hours due to repairs and loosened rationing restrictions. Although there have been no reports of detention and conscription in the community, the fear of detention and surveillance reportedly persisted among parts of the population.
- In Qaboun, the availability of food and hygiene items increased, due to items entering informally. Access to medical services also improved with the entry of SARC vehicles and the establishment of an informal emergency care point.
- In Madaya, though the overall situation remained unchanged, access to water and electricity reportedly improved, while access to electricity also improved in the Bait Jan communities of Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor.

Unchanged humanitarian situation: At Tall, Hama and Qudsiya, Khan Elshih, Madamiyet Elsham, Madaya

- There were no substantive changes reported in July in **Hama and Qudsiya** and **Madamiyet Elsham**, where truce agreements were signed in October and September 2016, respectively. Residents remained required to show documentation when entering and exiting the community, while restrictions on the movement of commercial vehicles persisted, as was the case in June. Humanitarian aid targeting the most vulnerable families continued to enter Hama and Qudsiya in July, while no vehicles have reportedly entered Madamiyet Elsham since October 2016.
- The situation also remained largely unchanged in **At Tall** and **Khan Elshih**, where agreements were implemented in November and December 2016, respectively. Only a minimal increase in the availability of electricity was reported in Khan Elshih in July. While no humanitarian aid was delivered to either community in July, food, fuels, hygiene and medical items continued to enter via commercial vehicles and civilians traveling to nearby locations. Risks of detention and conscription were reported in both communities in July, and since the truces came into effect.

Critical humanitarian situation: Qaboun

- Despite the improvements in access to medical care and food reported in July, the situation in Qaboun remained critical, with limited medical services available, no civilian or commercial movement permitted and no access to education.

Conclusion

- Restrictions on civilian and vehicle movement continued to negatively affect populations across assessed communities in July. The implementation of truce agreements and subsequent lifting of access restrictions resulted in an overall improvement to the humanitarian situations in Burza, Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor, Wadi Burda, Qaboun and Madaya, while severe restrictions continued to negatively affect Deir ez Zor city (Joura, Qosour) and Qaboun, despite relative improvements in the latter.
- **Based on data regarding the humanitarian situation in July, populations in Deir ez Zor city (Joura, Qosour) and Qaboun indicated critical levels of vulnerability. Conversely, Burza, Duma and Madaya experienced relative improvements, although ongoing monitoring will be required to assess further developments in these communities.**

About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. All REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information, you can write to our global office (geneva@reach-initiative.org) or to our Syria Assessment Officer (laurel.mcdonald@reach-initiative.org).

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