

- Besieged communities
- Hard-to-reach (HTR) communities

# COMMUNITY PROFILE UPDATE: Besieged and Hard to Reach Community Profiles

**SYRIA**

**SITUATION OVERVIEW**

**JANUARY 2017**

## Executive Summary

Between 26 January 2016 and 7 February 2017, REACH, in collaboration with SIRF, assessed the humanitarian situation in 39 communities in Syria currently facing restrictions in movement and access, 16 of which are classified by the UN as besieged and 23 as hard to reach.<sup>1</sup> Data gathered refers to the humanitarian situation in January. All profiled communities were located in Rural Damascus, Homs, Dar'a and Damascus governorates and information was gathered through a total of 157 community representatives (CRs). Deir ez Zor (Joura and Quosour), which had been assessed in December, was not assessed in January due to ongoing hostilities at this location. Also, the communities of Bseimeh and Ein Elfijeh, Wadi Burda area, were not profiled as no population remained in January following developments in local conflict dynamics. Further, in January Hajar Aswad and Madamiyet Elsham were deemed to no longer meet the criteria of besieged locations and were reclassified by the UN as hard to reach.

### In January:

- **A truce agreement was reached in Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor, within the Bait Jan area, this month.** This resulted in the lifting of all access restrictions into the wider Bait Jan area, positively affecting all communities, including those (Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin) where no agreement had been signed. Similarly, after the signing of truce agreements in At Tall and Khan Elshih, the humanitarian situation reportedly improved in these locations for the second consecutive month.
- Among communities that reached a truce agreement between September and October 2016 (Hama, Qudsiya and Madamiyet Elsham), **Hama and Qudsiya experienced a worsening of the overall situation in January, for the second consecutive month, and despite the delivery of aid.** This was mainly due to increasing risks of detention, conscription and reprisals, as well as reduced access to safe drinking water.
- **The humanitarian situation further worsened in Al Waer, Ash Shajara, Az Zabdani and Madaya, and the Wadi Burda communities, due to ongoing hostilities, as well as persisting, tight restrictions on movement. Conflict also escalated in Nashabiyeh,** Eastern Ghouta, this month, causing displacement and a significant deterioration of the humanitarian situation.
- Despite an agreement in mid-January, whereby repairs were to be made to the Ein Elfijeh pumping facilities in Wadi Burda, the network had yet to be reinstated at the end of the month. As such, Burza, Jober, Tadamon, Hama, Qudsiya and the Wadi Burda communities experienced a further deterioration in access to safe drinking water.

### Of the 39 communities assessed:

- **Only At Tall reported receiving humanitarian aid in January,** while most other communities had received no aid since at least two months.
- **22 reported that less than 10% of the resident population was able to move outside the community or of a wider area.** This number was lower in January, compared to December, as a result of the partial or total lifting of restrictions in several locations.
- **The food and health situation remained critical in 11 of the communities assessed,** mostly due to escalating conflict combined with persisting, tight access restrictions on civilian and vehicle movement. In all 11 communities, the food situation was already critical in December.

Based on data referring to the humanitarian situation in January, in the communities of Al Waer, Ash Shajara, Az Zabdani, Madaya, Nashabiyeh and Wadi Burda, populations indicated critical levels of vulnerability. Conversely, the communities of At Tall, the Bait Jan area and Khan Elshih experienced marginal improvements after the signing of truce agreements, although on-going monitoring will be required to assess further developments in these locations.

### Assessed communities in January 2017, by classification<sup>1</sup>

<b>Besieged</b>	Al Waer, Az Zabdani, Madaya, Bqine, <sup>2</sup> Damascus (Jober, Yarmouk), Eastern Ghouta (Arbin, Duma, Ein Terma, Hammura, Harasta, Jisrein, Kafr Batna, Nashabiyeh, Saqba, Zamalka), Khan Elshih.
<b>Hard to reach</b>	Ash Shajara, At Tall, Damascus (Burza, Tadamon), Bait Jan region (Bait Jan, Beit Saber, Beitema, Kafr Hoor, Mazraet Beit Jin), Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Taldu, Hajar Aswad, Hama, Qudsiya, 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 addressing 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 and access to food, healthcare, water, education and humanitarian assistance, price data, as well as the specific conditions associated with limited freedom of movement. The list of assessed communities is not intended to be exhaustive of the total areas in Syria facing limited freedom of movement and access. With greater partner inputs and collaboration, the list of profiled locations will be expanded. This overview presents a summary of the overarching observations identified across communities assessed.

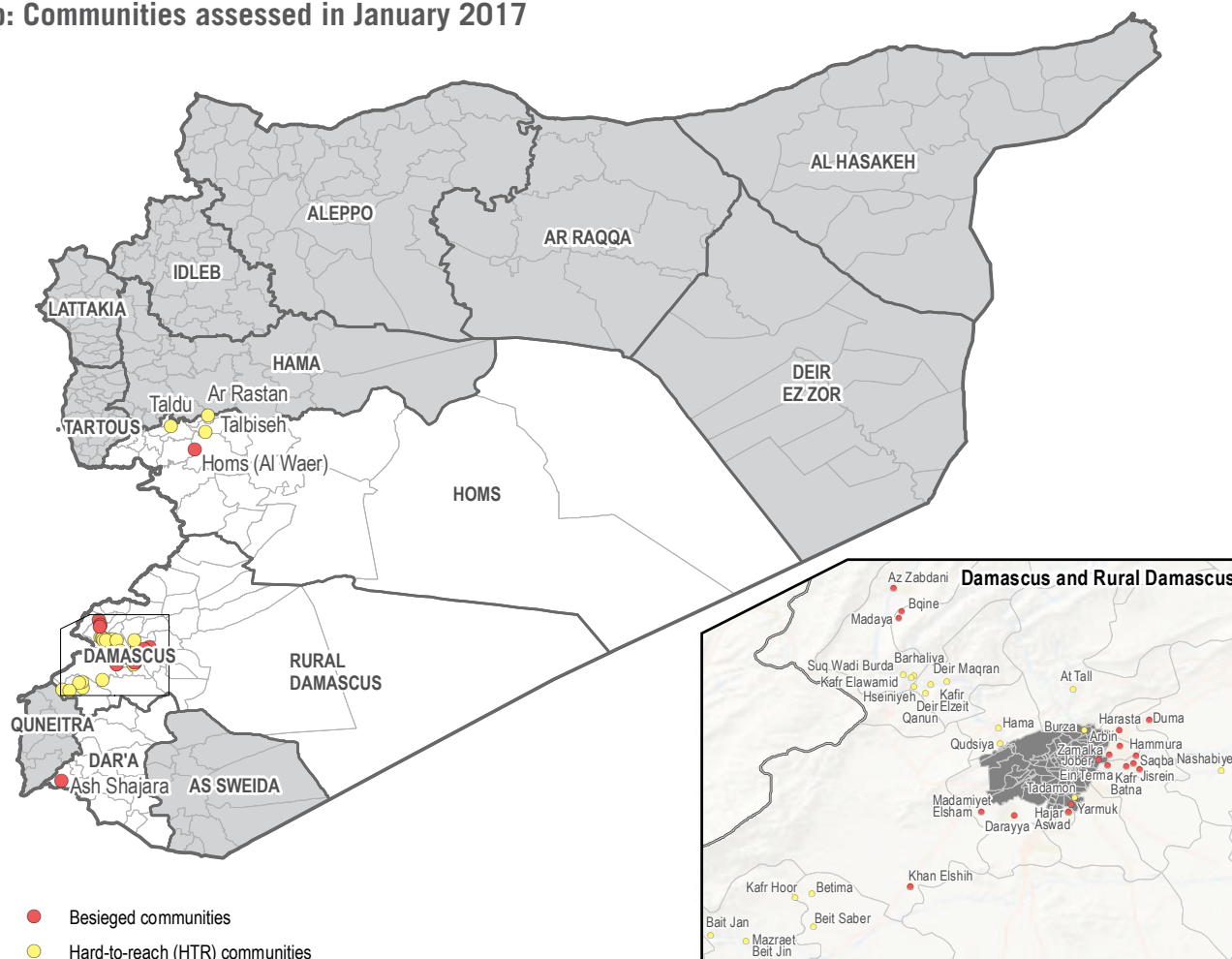
## Methodology and Limitations

Data presented in the Community Profiles is collected through contact with community representatives (CRs) residing within assessed locations, who are responsible for gathering sector-specific data from their areas of expertise (i.e. health, education). Data for this round was gathered during the end of January and early February 2017, referring to the situation in January 2017. Each community has a minimum of three CRs, with up to six depending on the location. 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 (if any) and follow up is conducted with CRs to build a thorough understanding of situational developments within locations. In the case of some profiles, multiple communities are presented together; decisions to do so are based on their geographical proximity to one another or similarities in the access restrictions faced by populations.

Due to the challenges of data collection inside Syria, representative sampling, entailing larger-scale data collection, remains a barrier. Consequently, information is to be considered indicative rather than generalisable across the population of each assessed community. Further, an improvement or deterioration in circumstances 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 locations 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 locations.

Map: Communities assessed in January 2017



## Key Findings

### Movement of Civilians

After increasing across several communities in December, mostly due to the signing of truce agreements, restrictions on movement of civilians remained largely unchanged in January.

- Civilian movement remained limited in all communities assessed in January, with the exception of Burza and Bait Jan, where all civilians were reportedly able to enter and leave without restrictions. In Burza, this had been the case since August 2016.
- Only 1-10% of residents were able to move through formal checkpoints in Al Waer, Ar Rastan and the Eastern Ghouta communities, as had been the case in December, and, for the first time since June 2016, in Yarmouk neighbourhood.
- **Improvements were reported in At Tall and Khan Elshih, where, following truce agreements, progressively higher numbers of people were allowed through checkpoints, and in Ash Shajara, where a better security situation resulted in more civilian movement. As previously mentioned, all civilians could move outside of the Bait Jan area after a truce agreement was signed in Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor this month.**

#### Negative developments since December

Yarmouk (new restrictions at checkpoints)

#### No civilian movement allowed

Az Zabdani, Madaya (since September 2016)

Wadi Burda area (since December 2016)

### Movement of Commercial Vehicles

Movement of commercial vehicles remained limited in January.

- Commercial vehicles were entirely prevented from accessing 19 of the communities assessed; in a majority of cases this had been the case since the communities were first assessed in June or September 2016.
- Some vehicles were allowed into the Eastern Ghouta communities, and into Khan Elshih, with restrictions. This had been the case since August and December 2016, respectively.
- **Improvements were reported in At Tall, due to the dismantling of a trading monopoly this month, as well as in the Bait Jan communities, where access restrictions were lifted after the signing of a truce agreement in Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor.**

#### No commercial vehicle allowed

Al Waer (since October 2016)

Ash Shajara (since December 2016)

Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Taldu (since June 2016)

Az Zabdani, Madaya (since September 2016)

Burza, Jober, Tadamon (since June 2016)

Hajar Aswad (since June 2016)

Wadi Burda area (since December 2016)

Yarmouk (since June 2016)

### Movement of Humanitarian Vehicles

In January, none of the assessed communities received humanitarian aid, with the exception of At Tall.

- In a majority of cases, no aid had been delivered since the communities were first assessed in June, August or September 2016.
- Although no aid was delivered to Khan Elshih this month, in contrast to December, this reportedly did not negatively affect the community, where access to goods and services had sufficiently improved in the aftermath of the truce agreement.
- **An aid convoy entered At Tall on 11 January and delivered food, NFIs, and medical aid. This was the first reported instance of an aid convoy entering the community since assessments began in June 2016. Similarly, an inter-agency convoy entered Ar Rastan on 13 February, for the first time since November 2016; however as the delivery occurred after the assessment period, its impact on the humanitarian situation could not be assessed.**

#### No aid entering

Al Waer (since October 2016)

Ash Shajara (since September 2016)

Az Zabdani, Madaya (since November 2016)

Bait Jan (since November 2016)

Burza (since October 2016)

Eastern Ghouta area (since October 2016)

Hajar Aswad (since June 2016)

Jober, Tadamon (since June 2016)

Khan Elshih (since December 2016)

Talbiseh, Taldu (since October 2016)

Wadi Burda area (since August 2016)

Yarmouk (since June 2016)

### Health Situation

In January, the health situation worsened across several of the communities assessed. This was most commonly due to ongoing access restrictions on medical items, as well as to a volatile security situation affecting both the availability and accessibility of healthcare.

- No medical facilities, services or personnel were reportedly available in Madaya, Tadamon and in a majority of communities within the Wadi Barada area, as had been the case in December.
- **Improvements were reported in At Tall and the Bait Jan communities, where availability of medical items significantly increased this month, as well as in across several communities in Eastern Ghouta. In particular, new facilities were opened in Ein Terma and Duma, and medical services expanded in Hammura. Greater availabilities of medical items were also reported across a majority of Eastern Ghouta communities.**

\*These communities experienced a critical health situation this month, as had been the case in December 2016.

### Negative developments since December

- Al Waer\* (depleting stocks of medical items)
- Ash Shajara\* (fewer personnel and facilities, depleting stocks of medical items)
- Az Zabdani, Madaya\* (increasing barriers to accessing medical facilities)
- Nashabiyeh (fewer personnel, services and items, increasing barriers to accessing care)
- Wadi Burda area\* (security concerns over travelling to facilities, depleting stocks of medical items)
- Yarmouk (fewer medical items entering)

### Food Security

All assessed communities except the Bait Jan area, Yarmouk, Hajar Aswad and Tadamon reported prices significantly higher than in nearby communities not considered besieged or hard to reach.

- Ongoing access restrictions, combined with high security risks, affected in particular Al Waer, Ash Shajara, Az Zabdani and Madaya, and Wadi Burda, where most or no food items were available for purchase.
- As civilians leaving and bringing back items remained the main source of food in several communities, volatility of availability and prices were reported at these locations, depending on the availability and prices of items that residents could access in nearby areas.
- **In At Tall, the opening of a road to access the nearby Al Assad suburb and the related increase in commercial vehicle access, along with the delivery of humanitarian aid this month, led to greater food item availabilities.**

\*\* The functionality of bakeries is heavily dependent on the availability of electricity and fuel.

### Negative developments since December

- Burza (new restrictions on fuel and electricity affecting population's access to bread\*\*)
- Nashabiyeh (fewer goods entering due to security risks)

### Critical food situation

- Al Waer (no food entering, depleting stocks, rising prices)
- Ash Shajara (no food entering, depleting stocks, rising prices)
- Az Zabdani, Madaya (no food entering, shops closed, no items available for purchase)
- Wadi Burda area (no food entering, shops closed)

### Access to Services

Similarly to December, access to services remained extremely limited in a majority of the communities assessed, with either the water or the power network, or both, being unavailable in all communities except the Bait Jan area, and barriers to education being reported in all communities except Ar Rastan, the Bait Jan area, Burza and Eastern Ghouta.

- Despite an agreement in mid-January, whereby repairs were to be made to the Ein Elfijeh pumping facilities, the network had yet to be reinstated at the end of the month. As such, Burza, Jober, Tadamon, Hama and Qudsyia, and the Wadi Burda area experienced worse access to drinking water for the second consecutive month.
- **Increased access to drinking water was reported in Ein Terma, where an experimental water network connecting households to closed wells was built. The use of the network was reportedly free of charge during the initial testing phase.**

### Negative developments since December

- Ar Rastan (partial breakdown of water pumps, lower fuel availability)
- Burza (less fuel entering, more frequent power cuts, lower water availability)
- Jober, Tadamon (lower water availability)
- Nashabiyeh (no electricity source, security concerns over sending children to school)
- Talbiseh (dismantling and selling of electricity cables)

### Critically poor access to services

- Az Zabdani, Madaya (insufficient water, 1-2 hour access to electricity, no schools available)
- Wadi Burda area (insufficient water, low availability of fuel, schools closed)

## Communities that signed truce agreements

Since September 2016, eight communities in Rural Damascus have signed truce agreements: At Tall, Hama, Qudsiya, Khan Elshih, Madamiyet Elsham, Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor. The humanitarian outcomes of these agreements have varied, with some communities seeing overall improvements in their humanitarian situation and others experiencing further problems.

### Improved humanitarian situation: At Tall, Khan Elshih, Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor

- Following the signing of a truce agreement in At Tall on 2 December 2016, the situation in the community had marginally improved in December. In January, restrictions on civilian and vehicle movement further eased, due to the re-opening of the Dahyet Al Asad road. This resulted in greater amounts of food, non-food and medical items entering. However, movement remained limited. Aid entered the community on 11 January, carrying food, NFIs and medicine, which were reportedly insufficient to meet needs. The health situation, as well as access to services, remained unchanged compared to December.
- Similarly, in Khan Elshih, restrictions on civilian movement further eased this month, while remaining comparatively tighter, compared to other communities where truce agreements had been signed. No other changes were reported in January.
- In Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor, the signing of a truce agreement in January resulted in the complete lifting of movement restrictions into the wider Bait Jan area. All people and vehicles could freely circulate, resulting in an overall increase in the amounts of food, non-food, fuel and medical items entering the communities.

### Worsening humanitarian situation: Hama, Qudsiya

- While aid entered the two communities in January, including food and non-food items, the number of reported deaths in Qudsiya increased this month and, reportedly, the risk of detention and conscription, as well as new risks of reprisal against parts of the population increased in both communities. In addition, access to safe drinking water further reduced this month, as the Elfijeh network feeding Hama and Qudsiya had not yet been repaired at the end of the month. Restrictions on commercial vehicles, which had been re-introduced in December for the first time since September 2016, remained unchanged this month.

**No significant change was reported in Madamiyet Elsham**, after restrictions on commercial vehicles were re-introduced in December, for the first time since September 2016. Access to services, and availability and prices of all assessed market items remained comparatively worse in this community, compared to other communities where truce agreements had been signed.

## Conclusion

- In January 2017, limitations on civilian and vehicle movement continued to negatively affect populations across assessed communities. While remaining tight across a majority of communities, restrictions on vehicles reportedly did not worsen at any of the locations assessed. Conversely, movement of civilians was further restrained in Yarmouk.
- Persisting malfunctioning of the Ein Elfijeh source, in the Wadi Burda area, continued to negatively affect access to water in 13 of the communities assessed.
- Among the communities where a truce agreement had been signed since September 2016, a worsening of the situation was reported in Hama and Qudsiya for the second consecutive month. A significant improvement of the humanitarian situation was reported in Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor, while few or no changes were reported in At Tall, Khan Elshih and Madamiyet Elsham.
- **Based on data referring to the humanitarian situation in January, in the communities of Al Waer, Ash Shajara, Az Zabdani, Madaya, Nashabiyeh and Wadi Burda, populations indicated critical levels of vulnerability. Conversely, the communities of At Tall, the Bait Jan area and Khan Elshih experienced marginal improvements after the signing of truce agreements, although on-going monitoring will be required to assess further developments in these locations.**

### 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](mailto:geneva@reach-initiative.org)) or to our Syria Regional Coordinator ([zulfiye.kazim@reach-initiative.org](mailto:zulfiye.kazim@reach-initiative.org)).

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