

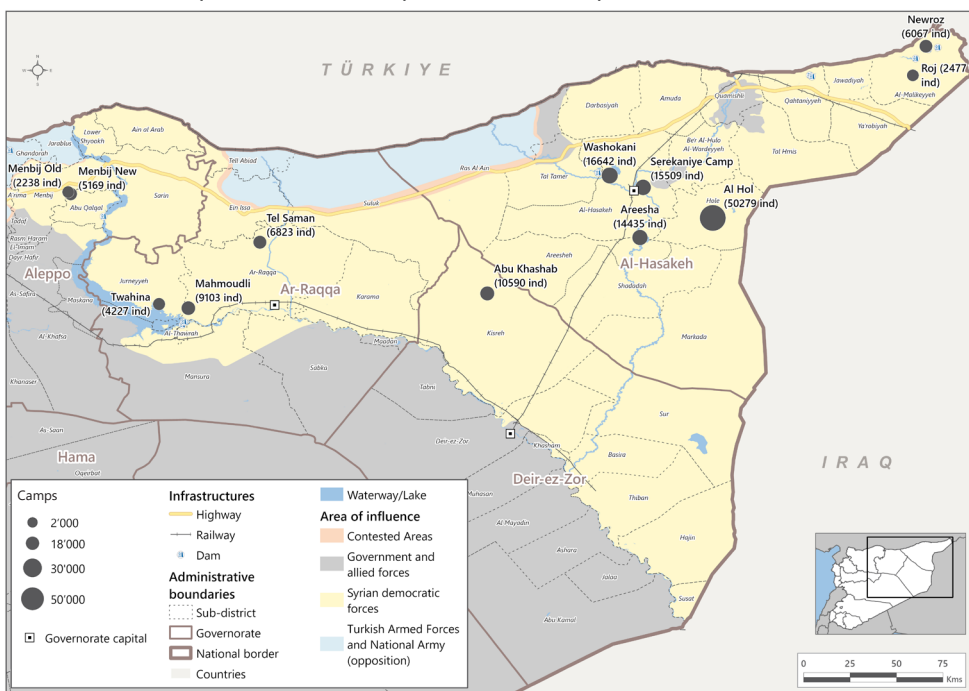
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Camps in Northeast Syria - Humanitarian Needs

October 2023 | Syria

Northeast Syria has twelve camps housing around 140,000 internally displaced people (IDPs).¹ A further 520,000 IDPs² are estimated to be living in host communities, collective centres, or informal settlements. The camps primarily host populations that were displaced by conflict events since the beginning of the Syrian crisis. They have not been able to leave, primarily because they cannot return to their areas of origin. Households also rely on the life-saving aid provided in camps as their individual circumstances and the economic crisis in Syria prevent households from meeting their basic needs. However, even at the level of aid currently being provided, households face serious gaps in access to essential goods and services. The incomes they earn are insufficient to bridge this gap, forcing households to rely on borrowed money. Even so, food insecurity is high, shelter conditions are poor, and households lack access to healthcare.

Location of Camps in Northeast Syria and Their Population Sizes



KEY FINDINGS

85%

of households in camps had no intention to leave in the next year*

50%

of households in camps had a poor or borderline food consumption score*

90%

of households in camps who needed medicine in the month before data collection were not able to access it*

*Excluding Roj Expansions

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

REACH assessed all camps in Northeast Syria (NES). Data was collected in June 2023 in nine out of twelve camps; the remaining three³ were assessed in November 2022. Data collection included household interviews, which were representative with 95% confidence and 10% margin of error;⁴ interviews with a camp manager; and infrastructure mapping. Factsheets and maps for each camp can be found [here](#). Findings below are summarised across camps.

Please note that in Al Hol Annex, households accessing the training and distribution centre were interviewed, providing a non-random sample. Data collection in Roj camp was only conducted in the Syrian and Iraqi zone of the camp, excluding the expansions hosting third country nationals.

This brief presents the findings of these two rounds of data collection in twelve camps, indicated by superscript ^R.

➔ Camps are likely to stay: IDPs had no intention of leaving camps in the near future.

Households have been in camps for multiple years, with households having reported arriving in camps as early as 2015.^R In a few camps, opportunities to leave are limited and dependent on lengthy bureaucratic procedures – for Syrians – or repatriations – for Iraqi and third country nationals.^{5,6} These restrictions apply to over a third of all camp residents in NES. For the other two thirds, almost all households reported no intention to leave in the next year. The main reasons given were the lack of safety in their areas of origin, and to a lesser extent the safety provided in camps. Access to aid, specifically food distributions, water, and NFIs were among the most common reasons.^R

The duration of displacement and lack of intention to leave suggest that **camps are likely to persist**, at least until the areas of origin become safe or alternative arrangements are found.

🍲 Food insecurity was high across camps despite access to aid.

Most households had access to food assistance in the form of bread distributions and food baskets, a key motivator for IDPs to remain in camps. Yet, distributions and hence access to food are subject to administrative hurdles and limited funding. For instance, two camps did not receive food baskets for four months while the activities of a WFP partner remained suspended.^{7,8} Even for households who received food assistance, there are clear signs that access to food was insufficient. **Over a quarter of households in four of the camps had poor food consumption scores,^R suggesting they were not eating enough.⁹** Across all camps, less than half of households had an acceptable food consumption score. Negative coping strategies were also prevalent - **the average household had to reduce the number of meals and eat smaller meals at least one day in the week prior to data collection.^R**

🚰 Improved sources of drinking water were available, though risks to access and quality of water persisted.

Access to water in camps is usually provided by shared taps (public taps or standpipes),^R

considered to be “improved” source as they tend to provide continuous access to safe water.¹⁰ This is not always guaranteed – Roj camp, for instance, was affected by disruptions to the electricity network, which limited the pumping capacity of the water system¹¹ and **left some households without access to water for two consecutive days.^R** Households also often used their own containers to store water.^R **These containers may be unclean or unsafe with households having no money to replace them,** meaning that even where high-quality drinking water is available, it may become contaminated at a later stage. This was noted in at least one camp.¹¹

🚽 Latrines did not meet minimum humanitarian standards, increasing the protection risks and the risk of spread of diseases.

Latrines were often shared between households, though some camps provided household latrines.^R These are generally preferable as they provide higher levels of safety, security, convenience, and dignity to users.¹² Communal latrines also often did not meet minimum humanitarian standards. **The majority of households reported that none of the latrines had lighting,^R** which may increase the perceived risk of gender-based violence and discourage individuals from accessing facilities after dark;¹³ some households reported that their female or elderly household members were unable to access facilities.^R **Four camps had an insufficient number of latrines, and in one camp, some households reported practicing open defecation.^R** This risks the spread of diseases, increases protection risks such as gender-based violence, and can lead to a loss of dignity.¹⁴

🏥 Lack of financial resources limited access to health services.

Health facilities were available in almost every camp,^R though they may lack resources to adequately address the needs of all residents'.¹⁵ However, access to alternative healthcare was limited by households' economic situation. For those who reported that they needed medication in the past 30 days, **in almost every camp¹⁶ over 60% of households reported that they could not access all the medicines needed as they were unaffordable.** Generally, the high cost of health services as well as the high cost and lack of transportation were the main barriers reported to accessing healthcare in these camps.^R

Child protection concerns were present in all camps, impacting education.

Protection risks were varied, but cases of **child labour and early marriage were reported in all camps**. Child labour included those under the age of 11 who often went through rubbish to find items they could sell, transport goods and people, or work in agriculture. In few cases, older boys were reported to have been working in support of armed groups.^R The causes of child labour are complex, including parents seeing work as an important skills-building activity, or the quality of education being low. However, the leading cause of child labour is poverty.¹⁷

Work often conflicts with education, leading children to drop out of school.¹⁸ Education is vital for the health and well-being of children, and for their long-term prospects of gaining employment and escaping poverty. Reducing child labour and improving access to safe and accredited education is hence an essential humanitarian concern.¹⁹

Forced marriage of children has been increasing in camps across Syria, and while this too has many causes, parents' inability to support their daughters is a key contributor.²⁰

Households lived in tents which provide little protection from weather and crime.

Households primarily lived in tents, with relatively few having built mudbrick shelters.^R **Tents provide limited protection from heat,²¹ cold,²² and storms.^{23,24}** They also provide little protection from crime, as suggested by a protection cluster assessment which found that **girls felt they were exposed to greater risk of gender based violence.²⁰ Most tents need to be replaced regularly.²⁵** However, in a number of camps there are gaps in tent maintenance and replacement activities.¹¹ Correspondingly, almost all households reported needing new or additional tents and plastic sheeting or tarpaulins.^R However, given the limited protection provided by tents, the expectation of persistent displacement, and the need for regular replacements of tents, alternative shelter solutions may be more effective in meeting humanitarian needs.

Access to livelihoods was insufficient to cover basic needs.

Access to stable employment opportunities makes IDPs less vulnerable to shortfalls in humanitarian funding while providing and maintaining skills that can be essential for re-integration. It also helps to maintain a sense of dignity, contributing to improved psycho-social outcomes.^{12,26,27} **In NES, most households in camps reported receiving some income from employment or cash-for-work programmes. Mostly, this was daily labour inside or outside the camp,** followed by private business inside the camp.^R The problem with daily labour is that it provides little income security, leaving households uncertain whether they will be able to earn money the following day. Incomes were also insufficient to meet households' basic needs. Instead, their **largest source of money was borrowing.^R** While borrowing may be effective in the short-run, households eventually need to repay their debts, placing an additional burden on their already insufficient incomes.

Conclusions

Despite a stabilisation over the past few years,²⁸ conflict and insecurity persist across Syria.²⁹ In camps, IDPs are still waiting for their areas of origin to become safe. Even where returns would be possible, the weak economic situation in the country²⁹ has made households dependent on aid provided in the camp. Despite this aid, there are clear gaps in access to the most fundamental goods and services. Many households are eating insufficient quantities of food and lack dietary diversity. They are unable to afford healthcare and necessary medicines. They live in tents, some of which have deteriorated and need replacement, all of which offer only limited protection against weather and crime. All of this is affecting the outlook for children, who face various protection risks and may have to work to support their families, limiting their access to education.

In the immediate term, it is clear that sustained access to life-saving aid is essential. However, the through-line is that sustainable solutions need to be found. This may include supporting access to livelihoods,²⁶ optimising modalities of aid distributions to maximise their effectiveness and increase the agency of beneficiaries,^{31,32} and finding new shelter solutions that improve the safety, security, and living conditions of residents.^{33,34}

ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative 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. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).

ENDNOTES

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- ² Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme (June 2022). MNM June 2022 - Dataset with AoC.
- ³ Abu Khashab, Mahmoudli, and Serekaniye.
- ⁴ For each indicator, we are 95% confident that the true value is within 10% of the value we measured. For instance, 15% of households that REACH interviewed in Abu Khashab reported having a female head of household. We are very confident that if we interviewed every single household in Abu Khashab, between 5-25% of them would report having a female head of household.
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- ⁸ Data in Mahmoudli camp was collected in November 2022, before the disruptions to food supplies. In Twahina, households were mainly relying on markets present in the camp and outside of it, with almost all households reporting having to borrow money for food while also relying on cheaper, lower-quality foods.
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- ¹⁵ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) (November 2022). Between two fires – Danger and desperation in Syria’s Al-Hol camp. <https://www.msf.org/>
- ¹⁶ Residents of Al Hol more commonly reported inaccessibility of medication rather than unaffordability.
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- ²⁰ Protection Cluster, UN Protection Fund (March 2023). Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility: Voices from Syria 2023 – Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview. <https://reliefweb.int/>
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