

Comparing Access to Services: Tabqa (Al-Thawra), Ar-Raqqa, Northeast Syria

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KEY MESSAGES

- **Distance from the Tabqa city centre is reportedly correlated with lower access to services**, possibly due to services not keeping up with the rapid expansion of the city.
- Community representatives reported that the main **barriers to accessing markets** are **weak purchasing power, high cost of transportation**, and for some located on the outskirts of Tabqa, **distance to markets**.
- While **healthcare** is available in Tabqa, accessing it can reportedly be difficult due to the **cost of medical care, medication, and transportation to reach healthcare centres**, particularly for those residing far from the city centre.
- Difficulties accessing **education** are reportedly faced mainly by **those residing in areas far from the city centre** as well as by those **residing in crowded neighbourhoods**.
- **Functionality of water and sanitation systems reportedly varies by neighbourhood**. For example, areas such as Ayed Sagheer and Ayed Kabeer lack sufficient connectivity to the water network.
- Respondents reported that **electricity is rationed to a few hours a day** in Tabqa. Areas such as Ayed Sagheer and Ayed Kabeer reportedly lack connectivity to the electricity network.

CONTEXT & RATIONALE

Tabqa (or Al-Thawra) is an urban area with a population of approximately 56,000 people, located in Ar-Raqqa Governorate in Northeast Syria (NES). It is located at the junction of Lake Assad and the Euphrates river, next to the Tabqa hydroelectric dam, which is an important supplier of power and water throughout Syria. Around 32% of Tabqa's population (i.e., approximately 18,000 people) are Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).¹

This brief is part of REACH's Service Area Mapping of Tabqa, conducted in support of the NES Early Recovery and Livelihoods (ERL) Working Group's Area-Based Coordination Mechanism (ABCM). The ABCM aims to engage partners in working toward early recovery objectives and identifying sustainable solutions to displacement in targeted areas of Northeast Syria, using Tabqa city as a pilot area. In support of the ABCM's work, REACH conducted two Mapping Focus Group Discussions (MFGDs) in February 2024, one with local authorities and one with community representatives, to better understand the current basic services infrastructure in Tabqa and how access to services varies by neighbourhood.

Map 1: Tabqa and its neighbouring community, Ayed Saghir



This brief provides a summary of feedback from an MFGD with community representatives in relation to access to basic services provision in Tabqa, which included seven individuals representing a range of socio-demographic groups, including youth, women, persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, and CSO leaders. The participants were purposively selected based on their in-depth knowledge of basic services or of the experiences of certain demographic groups. Thus, the findings presented here should be considered indicative, not representative.

This brief is intended to complement the Tabqa Service Area Maps, which identify the relevant neighbourhoods and indicate the location and functionality of basic services infrastructure within Tabqa city. Specifically, the sectoral maps cover infrastructure related to **agriculture, food security, education, electricity, health, markets & major businesses, water, sanitation, and displacement.**

Whereas the maps focus on the infrastructure, this brief identifies differential access to services in Tabqa at a neighbourhood level. Together, the maps and this brief are intended to inform operational and programmatic planning for partners engaged in the ABCM in Tabqa. The maps were created primarily based on findings from the local authorities MFGD, but also with some input from the community representatives MFGD.

For operational safety reasons, the maps are not publicly available. However, they can be shared bilaterally with partners upon request by contacting daron.mackie@impact-initiatives.org or daniel.davies@impact-initiatives.org.

ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

When asked whether there are groups of people in Tabqa facing barriers accessing services, all community representative participants agreed that IDPs and returnees (especially those from Al-Hol camp) are vulnerable when it comes to accessing basic services. This is reportedly because IDPs and returnees are required to register with the Self-Administration of North-East Syria (SANES), but in order to do so they need to have identification documents, which many do not. Further, registration reportedly requires that they have a sponsor in the area, which some are unable to establish.

¹ Markets and bakeries were considered as separate infrastructure points for this assessment as they are managed by separate government bodies.

MARKETS & BAKERIES

Community representatives reported that residents face several barriers to accessing markets (food and non-food) and / or bakeries.¹ These include:

- **Weak purchasing power**, as a large portion of the population reportedly struggle to afford food and basic needs.
- **High cost of transportation**, especially for residents who reside in areas that public transportation does not reach. The cost of private transportation is also high, making it difficult for residents to travel to relevant markets.
- **Distance to markets**, as residents located in areas far from the main roads in Tabqa struggle to reach markets due to distance.

The neighbourhoods identified by community representatives with most difficulties accessing such markets include Ayed Sagheer, Granada, Ayed Kabeer, and Al Misaher, as participants reported that these neighbourhoods had particularly high concentrations of people living in poverty.

AGRICULTURE

As an urban area, Tabqa contains only small agricultural areas, while neighbouring communities such as Sefsafa, Albu Assi, Jabaar, Swediya, and Safian have much more agricultural land. According to MFGD participants, there are no obstacles to accessing agricultural land, but the agricultural sector around Tabqa faces difficulties: fuel is difficult to acquire due to its low availability and high cost, and roads to agricultural lands are in poor condition.

HEALTHCARE

Issues accessing healthcare in Tabqa, according to community representatives, are generally related to affordability: the high cost of medical services, medications, and also of transportation to reach healthcare centres, can make medical care inaccessible for many people in Tabqa. Respondents noted that no social group in particular lacks access to healthcare. The general hospital reportedly lacks specialists, and free medical services are unavailable at nighttime. In both cases, when such care is needed, patients reportedly must seek private medical care at a very high cost. Respondents again agreed that residents of Ayed Sagheer, Granada, Ayed Kabeer, and Al Misaher face lower access to healthcare services, as they are far from the city centre.

EDUCATION

Difficulties accessing education, according to community representatives, are faced primarily by those residing neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Tabqa, as well as some residents of crowded neighbourhoods where there are not many schools. Further, participants noted that some girls in middle and secondary schools residing in areas far from their schools are forced to stop their schooling due to risks related to harassment or kidnapping on their way to and from school. Participants also noted some concerns about some schools being located on main streets that are busy with traffic, which can put children in danger when arriving and departing from school.

Further, there are reportedly not enough schools in Tabqa beyond the primary school level. Local authorities reported in a separate MFGD that there are 22 functioning primary schools in Tabqa, while there are three functioning middle schools and four functioning high schools. According to community representatives, this motivates residents to pursue private education, which can be financially inaccessible for many. However, recently, private institutes were forbidden by the Self Administration of Northeast Syria (SANES) from receiving licenses to operate. Finally, certificates granted by schools in Tabqa are reportedly not recognized internationally nor in other parts of Syria.

Participants highlighted two neighbourhoods particularly lacking access to schools: Al-Manghiya and Al-Misaher, as there are no middle or high schools in these areas and

they are far from existing schools.

LIVELIHOODS

Participants again noted that there is no particular group of people who lack access to livelihoods in Tabqa, however there are several challenges that residents in Tabqa struggle with collectively. As highlighted in prior sections, difficulty accessing public transportation and the high cost of private transportation are challenges, especially for those living in Ayed Sagheer, Granada, Al Misaher, and Ayed Kabeer. Participants also highlighted low wages and a lack of job opportunities in general (particularly a lack of long-term job opportunities). They also highlighted the risk of conscription, which reportedly limits freedom of movement (especially for young people) to pursue livelihood opportunities freely.

WATER

Participants reported that access to water within Tabqa varies depending on the area they live in. For example, participants shared that there is no water network in Ayed Sagheer and Ayed Kabeer because these are areas where urban expansion and population density have increased in recent years. They further highlighted Beheira, Western Maqasim, Eastern Maqasim, and Alexandria as areas lacking sufficient access to water, as they are connected to an older water network with weak water pressure.

ELECTRICITY

While Tabqa is located next to a hydro-electric dam, respondents reported that electricity is rationed to a few hours a day. Additionally, residents of Ayed Sagheer and Ayed Kabeer lack connectivity to the electricity network as a result of urban expansion and increasing population in the area. Transformers in the area also frequently malfunction, interrupting electricity services. As such, residents rely on community generators as a backup to the electricity grid, although not all residents have access to community generators.

ELECTRICITY (CONTINUED)

The below diagram displays the four scenarios Tabqa residents may fall under in relation to their access to electricity. While it is unclear what percentage of residents fall under each category, it may be relevant to include such a question in future assessments or to target certain types of programming in areas where households electricity access falls under square four. Further, the services area mapping produced information on the location of community generators, which provide an indication of areas that may have better connectivity to community generators than others.

1. Access to the electricity grid & community generators	2. Access to the electricity grid, but not to community generators
3. No access to the electricity grid, but access to community generators	4. No access to the electricity grid, nor to community generators

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Respondents pointed out a few areas of Tabqa facing difficulties accessing waste management services. Neighbourhoods with malfunctioning sewer systems, in need of permanent repair, include: Western Maqasim, Granada, Eastern Maqasim, Al-Misaher, and Sanobri. Other waste management issues reportedly include littering on public streets (which, in their view, is a societal practice) and an insufficient number of garbage containers in most neighbourhoods. Reportedly, the only landfill in Tabqa is in Sanobri, which operates beyond its capacity and results in odours, heightened risk of disease, and general inconvenience to the residents of this area.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the MFGD, community representatives highlighted the general difficulties that the general population in Tabqa face in affording basic needs, which limits access to basic services for many people, even if such services are available. These challenges are particularly pronounced for those who are economically vulnerable and for the large IDP population residing in and around Tabqa. In addition to economic constraints, respondents highlighted that some central neighbourhoods generally have greater access to certain infrastructures, while neighbourhoods located on the periphery of Tabqa have less proximity and connectivity to basic services, such as Ayed Sagheer, Ayed Kabeer, and Al Misaher.

While the findings from this brief are indicative, they can provide further context for actors planning to implement programming in Tabqa through the ABCM from the viewpoints of a diverse group of community representatives.

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).