

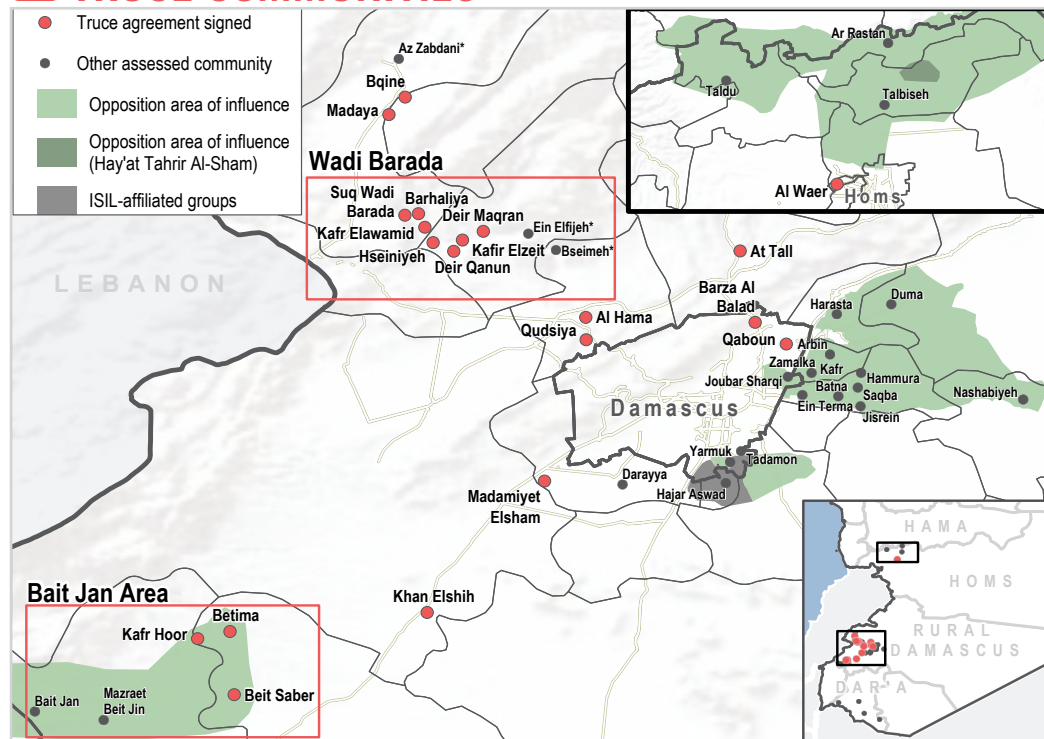
Community Profiles: Truce Community Trends Analysis

Syria - 2016 & 2017



REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

TRUCE COMMUNITIES*



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between October 2016 and May 2017, 20 of the hard-to-reach and besieged communities in Syria that are covered by REACH's Community Profiles assessments reached truce agreements. **While humanitarian conditions seemingly improved significantly following these truce agreements, most of them were preceded by months of escalated violent conflict and severely deteriorated humanitarian conditions.**

The humanitarian situation was generally the most critical in the two months leading up to each truce: humanitarian and civilian access to each community was severely limited, food insecurity was high, access to water and electricity reached unprecedented lows, and, in some communities, crucial facilities such as medical centres and schools had to close their doors due to escalations in conflict. **These findings suggest that humanitarian conditions deteriorated to untenable levels prior to truce agreements being signed.**

Following each truce agreement, humanitarian conditions did improve. Some elements of the humanitarian situation, such as access to the water and electricity networks, returned to the level they were at before the escalations. In some other aspects, like movement between communities and the entry of goods, access surpassed previous levels. However, there were also reports of post-truce conscription, detention and reprisals affecting young men and individuals perceived to have certain political affiliations.

*Sourced from Live UA Map, 30 November 2017. Ein Elfijeh, Bseimeh and Az Zabdani were also included in truce agreements, but only after REACH's coverage of these communities had ceased.

METHODOLOGY

Data presented in this situation overview was collected between June 2016 and November 2017 as part of REACH's Community Profiles project. Information was gathered from Community Representatives (CRs) residing within assessed communities who have sector-specific knowledge. Each community assessed had a minimum of three and up to six CRs contributing to data collection each month. Where available, the data covers the six months before and after each truce agreement was signed.

Due to the inherent challenges of data collection inside besieged and hard-to-reach (HTR) communities, representative sampling and larger-scale data collection remains difficult. Coverage is influenced by the availability of CRs.

As the months in which each community signed a truce agreement vary, an alternative time frame was used where "month 0" represents the month in which a truce agreement was signed in a given community, regardless of the actual calendar month. Data was aggregated across communities and comparisons were made between two main categories: pre-truce conditions (before month 0) and post-truce conditions (after month 0). In this way, trends could be shown across communities that signed truce agreements at different points in time. The phrase "truce community" refers to any community where a truce was signed while data collection by REACH was ongoing. As coverage fluctuated across months, findings are presented in terms of percentages of all assessed truce communities in a given month. Please see annex A for the number of communities assessed each month, and annex B for a list of all truce communities.

KEY FINDINGS

ACCESS & MOVEMENT

- In all assessed communities, civilian access to formal routes into and out of their areas decreased sharply just before truce agreements were signed, and improved afterwards.
- Overall, risks associated with civilians movement peaked in the months before truce agreements were signed, decreased immediately afterwards, and later returned.
- In the majority of assessed communities, commercial vehicles were reportedly banned from entering in the month before truces were signed. In contrast, nearly all communities regained commercial vehicle access after signing truces, albeit with tougher restrictions.
- Overall, humanitarian vehicle access improved after truce agreements, although deliveries remained infrequent. Meanwhile, some local NGOs had to cease operations, reportedly due to their political affiliations.

MARKETS

- High levels of food insecurity were reported in the months preceding most truces, but not in the post-truce period.
- The prices and availability of most hygiene items were also influenced by the deteriorating conditions leading up to the truces, though some remained unaffected.
- After fuel was unavailable in more than half of all assessed communities prior to the truce agreements, availability and prices reportedly improved significantly following the truces.

SERVICES

- Access to the electricity network was slowly restored to previous levels in most post-truce communities after decreasing sharply in these communities prior to truce agreements due to conflict damage and rationing restrictions.
- Meanwhile, access to the water network returned more quickly after more than 60% of all assessed communities reportedly had insufficient access to water in the months directly preceding their truces. However, the pre-truce level of access was not always fully restored.
- Overall, access to healthcare was restored to previous levels following each truce agreement, while the average number of available medical items was higher than before.
- Similar to other services, access to education deteriorated sharply in the months before truce agreements were signed but improved significantly afterwards, even compared to the months prior to the escalations.

POST-TRUCE PROTECTION CONCERNS

- Post-truce conscription and detention were reported in 40% of all truce communities and mostly targeted young men and people perceived to have certain political affiliations.
- Because the risks of conscription and detention were commonly reported at formal checkpoints, men's access to services in nearby communities, most notably healthcare, remained severely limited.
- Reprisals related to property were reported in 32% of assessed communities, and mostly affected people with perceived to have certain political affiliations.

TIMELINE

Al-Hama ¹ & Qudsiya Madamiyet Elsham	Khan Elshih	At Tall	Bait Jan area: Beit Saber, Betima & Kafr Hoor	Wadi Barada area: Barhaliya, Deir Maqran, Deir Qanun, Hseiniyeh, Kafir Elzeit, Kafr Elawamid & Souq Wadi Barada	Al Waer	Madaya & Bqine	Damascus: Barza Al Balad ² Qaboun
October 2016	Late November 2016	Early December 2016 ³	January 2017	Late January 2017 ⁴	Mid-March 2017 ⁵	Mid-April 2017	May 2017

CONTEXT

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 2.9 million people are in need of humanitarian support in besieged and hard-to-reach areas of Syria as of 19 December 2017⁶. Besieged and hard-to-reach areas are characterised by low levels of humanitarian, commercial and civilian access, which affects the entry of goods and restricts residents' access to services.

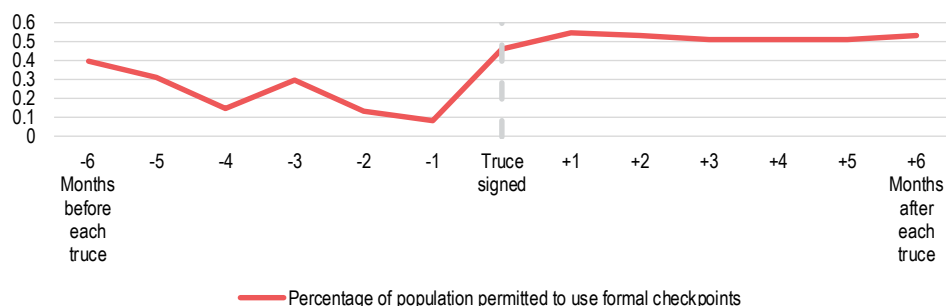
Some of these communities signed truce agreements in 2016 and 2017, which included deals regarding the suspension or termination of hostilities, evacuations of fighters, and improvements to access. REACH covered 20 communities⁷ that reached such agreements in the months before and after their truces came into effect, mostly in areas now under the control of the the Government of Syria (see annex B for a list of all communities included in this assessment).

In those communities, the truce agreements were often preceded by escalations in violent conflict and critical humanitarian conditions. In May 2017, then-United Nations Humanitarian Chief Stephen O'Brien referred to the agreements in communities including At Tall, Khan Elshih, the Wadi Barada area, Madaya, Barza and Qaboun as “surrender’ or ‘evacuation’ agreements” that resulted from “restricted access and increased attacks”⁷.

After the agreements, humanitarian conditions often improved to varying degrees, as will be discussed in this assessment. This document focuses on the six months before, as well as after, each agreement was signed, for as far as data is available.

Although parties to the conflict have attempted to set up ‘de-escalation zones’⁸ through the so-called Astana process in order to limit escalations in violence in some areas of Syria, these zones and the truce agreements have thus far had little overlap.

PROPORTION OF RESIDENTS REPORTEDLY PERMITTED TO USE FORMAL CHECKPOINTS ACROSS TRUCE COMMUNITIES



ACCESS & MOVEMENT

Communities that are classified as besieged or hard-to-reach are characterised by distinct access restrictions that impact civilian movement into and out of the community, commercial and humanitarian vehicle access, entry of goods, and protection issues. The economy cannot function normally due to the inaccessibility of usual trade routes and the absence of genuine competition. Furthermore, in areas of conflict or contested control, the average resident faces heightened protection concerns. Risks associated with crossing checkpoints can also limit mobility by creating barriers for certain residents to access services in other areas.

Overall, access to the assessed communities was worst in the months preceding a truce agreement and improved significantly afterwards. Across communities, civilian and commercial movement rose to levels not seen in the months prior to the truces. However, this was accompanied by an increase in reported risks, as well as restrictions for specific demographics. Humanitarian deliveries have also happened most frequently after a truce agreement is signed, but have remained relatively infrequent.

CIVILIAN MOVEMENT

Two thirds of all 20 assessed truce communities did not have any formal entry or exit points that were open to residents in the month before their truces. In only two of the communities where checkpoints did remain open, Al-Hama (Rural Damascus) and Souq Wadi Barada, could more than half of residents reportedly enter and exit their respective communities via these formal access points. **In all communities, the proportion of residents who were reportedly permitted to enter and exit formally increased after truce agreements were signed.**

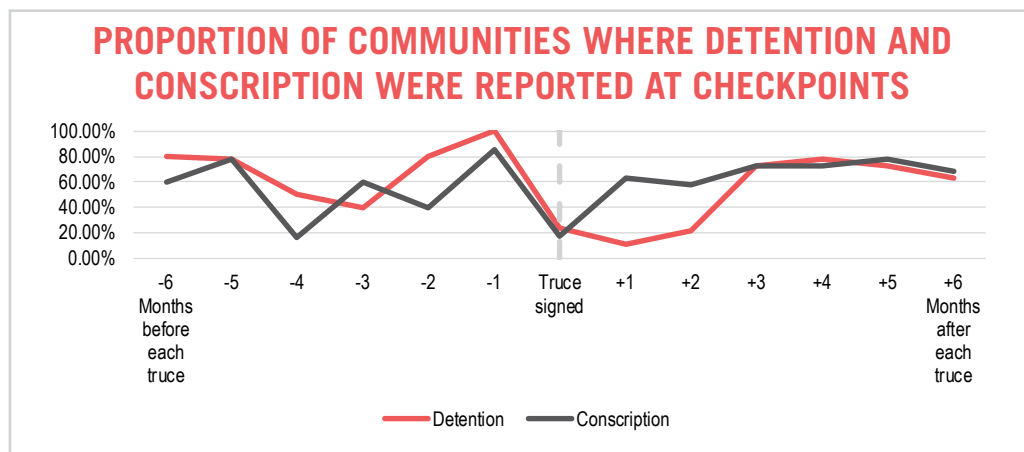
In the first month after each truce agreement, all 20 communities had a formal access point that, on average, 55% of the population was reportedly permitted to pass through. As can be seen in the graph to the left, this was higher than in any previous month, and this percentage remained relatively stable in subsequent months. Only in Madamiyet Elsham did access via formal checkpoints deteriorate again in the following months, as detentions of men at the checkpoints were reported.

The use of informal routes to enter and exit was rare in the assessed communities.

RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH MOVEMENT

In all of the six assessed months before each truce agreement, **protection risks associated with passing through formal checkpoints were reported in between 80% and 100% of all future truce communities where such checkpoints were open to residents** (between seven and ten communities each month). After truce agreements were signed, the number of communities where these risks were reported decreased temporarily, **but 78% of the 18 communities with truce agreements and access to formal entry points once again reported risks associated with movement** in the fourth month after their truce went into effect.

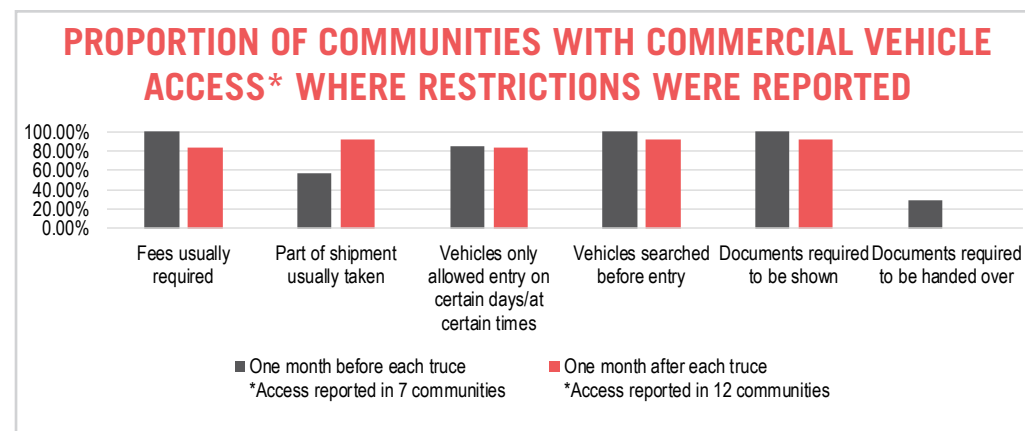
Two types of risk saw the most significant return in the months after agreements were signed: **detention and conscription**. As can be seen in the graph below, both risks were reported most commonly two months before each truce agreement was signed, dropped off temporarily in relation to the decrease in outward movement, but returned to pre-truce levels shortly afterwards.



COMMERCIAL VEHICLE ACCESS

In most assessed communities, **access for commercial vehicles reportedly deteriorated significantly in the months leading up to the truce agreements**. The percentage of communities where no commercial vehicles were permitted to enter increased from 33% (of 12 assessed communities) six months before truce agreements were signed to approximately 65% (of 20 communities) one month before. **One month after truce agreements were signed, commercial vehicle access was permitted in 19 of the 20 assessed communities, which continued to be the case in subsequent months**. Only in Qaboun was commercial vehicle access significantly delayed; access was reportedly not permitted until seven months after the agreement was put in place.

However, the increased commercial vehicle access came with restrictions. Such restrictions were reported in 63% of the 19 communities with commercial vehicle access in the month after truce agreements were signed, and in around 78% of the 18 communities where such access was reported after six months. Common issues that were reported included parts of shipments being taken (reported in between 10 and 13 communities in each post-truce month) and time limits on entry and exit (in 9 to 10 communities each month).



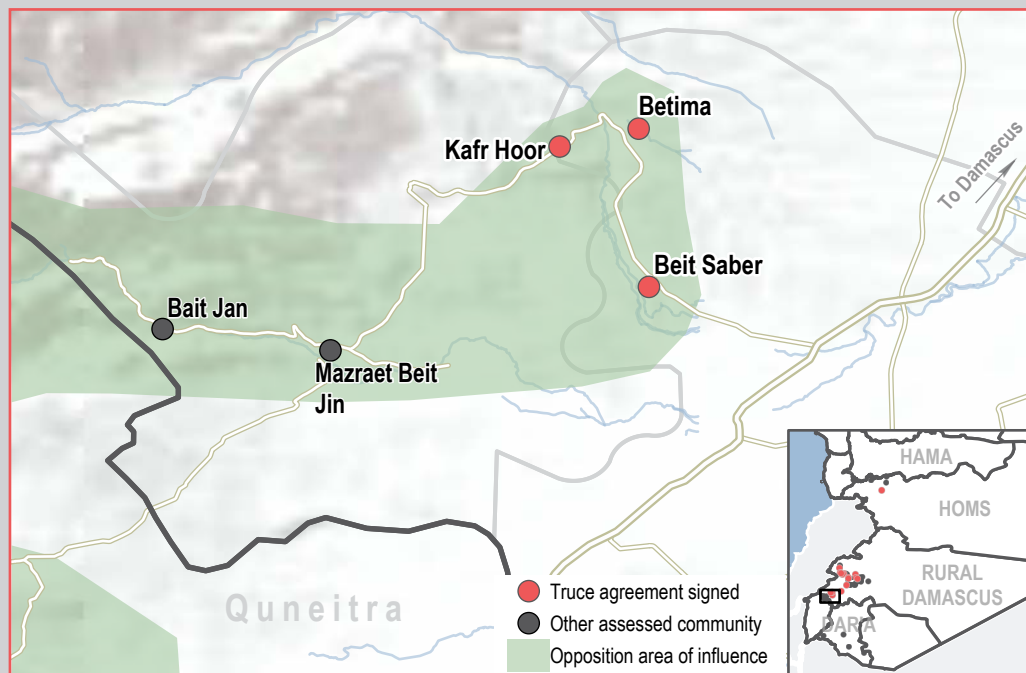
HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Findings indicate that humanitarian deliveries in besieged and hard-to-reach communities occur relatively infrequently, regardless of whether or not there is a truce agreement in place. Nonetheless, it does appear that the truce agreements had some impact on the number of deliveries that were able to take place.

In the last three months preceding each truce agreement, only 15% of all 20 communities reportedly received humanitarian aid deliveries (all in the last month before truces, with no deliveries reported in the preceding two months). **In contrast, one month after signing truce agreements, a small majority of communities received humanitarian aid**, and 45% (of 20 communities) did so without restrictions. **However, in the long term, humanitarian aid remained inconsistent**. Only 21% of 19 assessed communities received humanitarian deliveries in the sixth month after their truce agreements were signed⁹.

However, while access for NGOs improved in some communities, local charitable organisations in Madaya, Madamiyet Elsham and the Wadi Barada area that were perceived to be affiliated with political groups reportedly had to cease operations following the truce agreements in those communities.

BAIT JAN AREA (RURAL DAMASCUS)*



*Sourced from Live UA Map, 30 November 2017

CASE STUDY: BAIT JAN COMMUNITIES

The communities of Bait Jan, Beit Saber, Betima, Kafr Hoor and Mazraet Beit Jin of the Bait Jan area were first assessed in November 2016. Two months later, three of those communities – Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor – would sign truce agreements with the Government of Syria. **While the humanitarian situation in all five communities improved for a number of months after the truces came into effect, conditions began to diverge after negotiations in Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin broke down in April 2017 and access restrictions were re-introduced.**

Due to their proximity and similarities at the start of assessments, the Bait Jan communities can be used to illustrate the possible impacts of truce agreements. In the communities where truces were agreed to, access increased straight away and was upheld, which led to increased availability of goods. Other improvements, such as reduced restrictions on the water and electricity networks, followed gradually. Once it became clear that a truce agreement in Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin was not realistic, access to the wider area was cut off, conditions deteriorated rapidly, and a clear rift between the two groups of communities became apparent. This shows that access is imperative for a stable humanitarian situation.

Prior to the truce agreements, humanitarian conditions were roughly similar in all five communities. Access to the area was severely limited; **only 1-10% of the population was able to make use of the two official entry points** one month before the truces, both because of official restrictions and due to the reported risks of detention and conscription. Commercial vehicles were permitted to enter the area, but faced limitations, including a ban on transporting fuel, document requirements, fees and restrictions on the times and dates of entry. No humanitarian aid deliveries took place. The main difference between the communities before the truce agreements was that only residents of Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor were able to use the relevant networks as their main sources of water and electricity.

Once the truce agreements in Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor were signed on 30 January 2017, access to all five communities improved equally. **All residents were permitted to enter and exit the wider Bait Jan area via formal access points**, as long as they were not considered to be fighters, although detention and conscription of men continued to be reported at the checkpoints. Additionally, commercial vehicles were able to enter and exit the area without restrictions. **The improvements in access led to better availability, and thus lower prices, of several key goods such as fuel and medical items.** In February and March, humanitarian conditions continued to improve, as the amount of goods that entered increased further.

However, truce negotiations in Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin broke down in April. **Subsequently, shelling reportedly resumed and all but 1-10% of the residents in these two communities were banned from entering and exiting the area via formal routes.** Access for commercial vehicles was also restricted. As a result, the availability of medicine, hygiene items and fuel decreased, while the prices of fuel and food increased. Residents reportedly had to resort to skipping meals and reducing their meal sizes in April in order to cope. **In subsequent months, movement to and from Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin was gradually restricted further, which led to additional shortages in goods.**

Meanwhile, conditions in the truce communities improved. Rationing restrictions on the electricity network were eased gradually. By July, all three communities had access to the electricity network for 8-12 hours per day, while the communities without truce agreements continued to lack access to the network. In Beit Saber, the reduced access restrictions allowed residents to gather the resources required to resume farming. There were no reports of reprisals or detentions and very few reports of conscription.

Clashes in the two communities without truce agreements escalated again in September, causing mass displacement within the Bait Jan area. Commercial access to Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin was halted. Additionally, residents reportedly avoided traveling to other communities to bring back goods due to the risk presented by shelling. **At the time of writing (January 2018), the majority of residents from Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin communities have been evacuated.**

MARKETS

This section looks at the prices¹⁰ and availability of food, hygiene items and fuel before and after the truce agreements. **As commercial, humanitarian and civilian access to truce communities improved, the opportunities for goods to be brought into those communities also increased. As a result, the prices of basic necessities across all assessed categories reportedly decreased.**

FOOD

Across most assessed months, food prices were lower in communities with truce agreements than in those without. As can be seen in the graph below, **most items in a standard basket of dry goods, as defined by the World Food Programme¹¹, increased in price in the month before each truce, and decreased modestly in the following month.** Bread is somewhat of an exception, as its price decreased in the months prior to the truce agreements, and subsequently remained relatively stable.

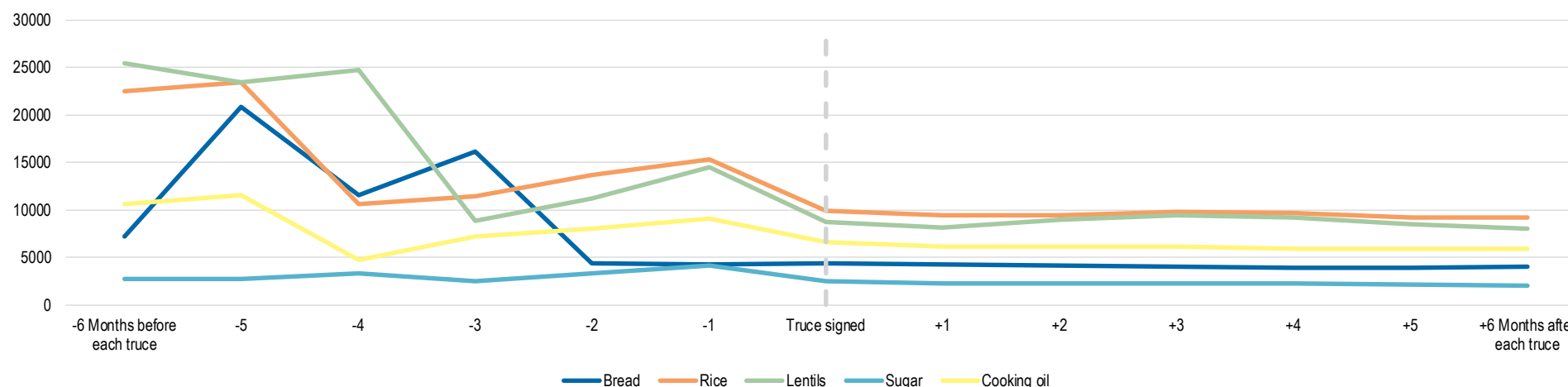
Food availability also improved following truce agreements. One month before truces came into effect in Madaya, Bqine and the seven Wadi Barada communities, **all shops and markets in these communities were closed due to conflict-related security concerns.** In the 11 other

truce communities, the average number of food items that were either sometimes (7-20 days per month) or generally (21+ days per month) available in the month prior to the truces was 9 out of a total of 14 assessed items¹². Wherever data is available, **each truce community reportedly had access to all 14 assessed items in every month after their truce agreement**, except for Qaboun and Khan Elshih where 11 and 13 items were available in the first months after their truces, respectively.

Similarly, the use of negative strategies to cope with a lack of food peaked in the months before truce agreements were signed, when they were reported in 85% of all 20 communities. The most common strategy was for both men and women to eat less so that children could eat more, although the strategy of skipping meals altogether was also reported in some cases. Reports of coping strategies declined sharply in subsequent months; only 30% of all 20 communities saw the use of such strategies one month after their truces came into effect. By the sixth month, Qaboun was the only one out of 19 assessed communities where a food-related coping strategy (reducing meal sizes) was reported.

These findings indicate that severe food insecurity induced by access restrictions was likely a factor influencing the signing of truce agreements.

AVERAGE REPORTED PRICES OF FOOD BASKET ITEMS ACROSS TRUCE COMMUNITIES (SYP)*



* Exchange rate: \$1 = 515 SYP across most assessed months. Prices are based on the quantities in a standard basket of dry foods, as defined by the World Food Programme.

HYGIENE ITEMS

The availability of hygiene items also deteriorated sharply in the months before truce agreements were signed. REACH assessments cover five types of hygiene items: soap, laundry powder, sanitary pads, toothpaste and disposable diapers. As the graph on the right shows, on average, just over two of these items were sometimes or generally available in all 20 truce communities one month before truces would come into effect.

In communities where shops remained open in the last month before the truce agreements, the average number of available hygiene items was significantly higher, at 4.4. However, when the truce agreements took effect, only 3.7 items were available, on average, in these communities. Two months later, all communities had access to all five assessed items, which continued to be the case in subsequent months.

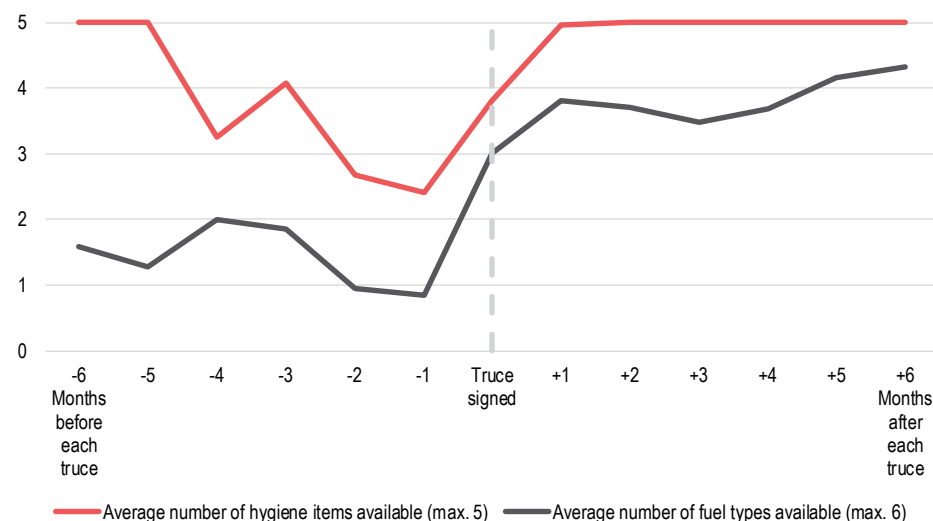
The prices of three of the assessed hygiene items (sanitary pads, toothpaste and soap) show a similar trend. Where these items were available, prices spiked one month before each truce agreement, decreased in the next month, and remained stable afterwards. Prices of diapers and laundry powder developed differently: the price of diapers seemed to decrease prior to truce agreements, after which it stayed relatively stable and decreases again after three months. The price of laundry powder appeared to be more subject to fluctuations overall.

FUEL

The availability and price of fuel also seemed to be influenced by the signing of truce agreements. In the month before their truce agreement would enter into effect, residents in the 20 assessed communities had access to less than one type of fuel on average; the average was 1.5 in the communities where shops remained open. Fuel was completely unavailable in 12 of the 20 communities. The most common types of fuel available in the other communities were diesel, butane and firewood. Propane and kerosene were not available in any of the assessed communities.

Following the truce agreements, the average number of available fuel types across communities increased to 3.5 or more in each month. Concurrently, prices changed significantly. The price of coal decreased by as much as 85% after truce agreements came into effect, and that of butane by as much as 73%. However, as fuel availability was so low in the months directly preceding the truce agreements, these decreases may also be attributable to fuel becoming available again in areas with lower prices overall. At the same time, fuel prices remained relatively stable throughout the remainder of the assessed period, and generally lower than at any point during the pre-truce period.

REPORTED HYGIENE ITEM AND FUEL AVAILABILITY ACROSS TRUCE COMMUNITIES



WADI BARADA CASE STUDY

Ein Elfijeh, one of the communities in the Wadi Barada area, contains the primary water source for Damascus city. As a result, the community is of key strategic importance. Prior to December 2016, parties to the conflict adhered to a pair of agreements which sought to end the shelling in the Wadi Barada area and secure limited access to certain goods for residents of the area, provided that the Wadi Barada communities continued to ensure an uninterrupted supply of water to Damascus. However, from late December onward, damage to the Ein Elfijeh water processing facility and the contamination of the Damascus water supply led to the breakdown of these agreements, sparking a sharp escalation in conflict and bringing even more stringent restrictions on both civilian access and the entry of goods. As a result, the availability of goods in the Wadi Barada area deteriorated, and prices rose. The imposed access restrictions were likely the primary factor leading to the signing of a truce agreement in the Wadi Barada area in late January 2017.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

While basic services such as electricity, water, healthcare and education did improve following most truce agreements, these improvements followed rapid declines in access in prior months. In fact, it took six months for the proportion of truce communities with access to the electricity network to return to the level it had been at the start of the assessed period. Following the signing of truce agreements, access to both water and healthcare improved in some aspects but worsened in other ways. Only access to education improved entirely.

ELECTRICITY

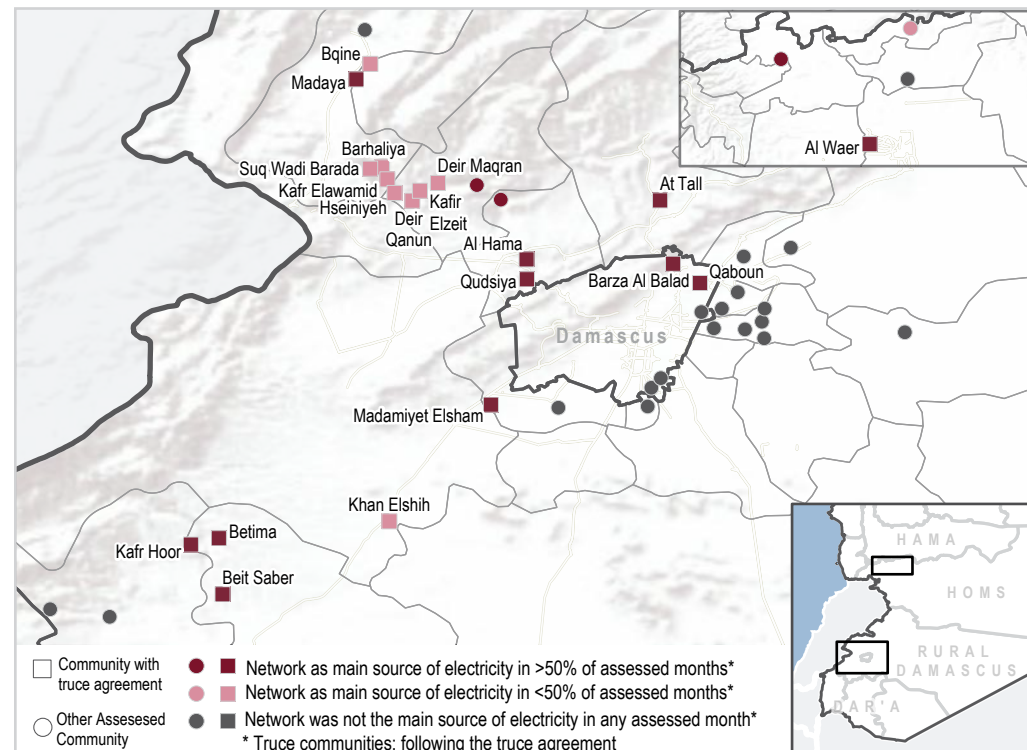
Access to electricity shows patterns similar to those highlighted in the previous sections. In the months before truce agreements were signed, access to all sources of electricity, but especially to the main network, decreased sharply. However, in contrast with access to movement or the availability of goods, in many cases it took months for access to electricity to be restored to previous levels.

Five months before they signed agreements, the average truce community had access to its main source of electricity (i.e. the electricity network, generators, solar panels and other sources) for approximately **six hours per day**. That number dropped sharply in subsequent months; **in the last two months before each truce agreement, communities had access to electricity for less than two hours, on average**. While access increased again after the truces came into effect, **the previous average of six hours per day was only reached again (and surpassed) in the sixth month after each truce**.

Similarly, around **85% of 13 assessed truce communities were still able to use the network as their main source of electricity three months before their truce agreements**. In contrast, when each truce was signed, 65% of 20 communities were relying mainly on generators. In some cases, the electricity infrastructure was damaged by **conflict-related violence**. In other communities, **rationing restrictions** were placed on the network. As the graph on the next page shows, **access was restored relatively slowly in both scenarios**. Eight of the assessed truce communities (including some in the Wadi Barada area) were only able to switch from generators to the network as their main source of electricity after their truce agreements had already been in place for five months.

Nonetheless, communities with truce agreements tend to have significantly better access to the electricity network than other assessed besieged and hard-to-reach communities. **Each month in 2017, an average of approximately 9% of the 16 to 22 assessed communities that never signed truce agreements was able to use network as their main source of electricity each month, compared with 73% of communities with truce agreements.**

ACCESS TO THE ELECTRICITY NETWORK¹³



WATER

Conversely, access to water was restored more rapidly after each truce agreement was signed. In the two months leading up to the truce agreements, residents of up to 40% of the 19 to 20 assessed communities had access to sufficient amounts of water to meet household needs. This reportedly did not include any of the seven communities in the Wadi Barada area. One month after each truce came into force, the overall proportion of communities with sufficient access to water had doubled to 80% (of 20), which included the Wadi Barada communities. Of the 19 communities where data was available **six months after their truce agreements, 17 (or nearly 90%) had sufficient access to water** at that point in time. The available water was fine to drink¹⁴ in nearly all assessed months and communities.

Prior to the truce agreements, the most commonly reported strategy used to cope with a lack of access to water was for people to bathe less. This strategy was reported in more than 57% of the 19 to 20 assessed communities in the two months before they signed truce agreements.

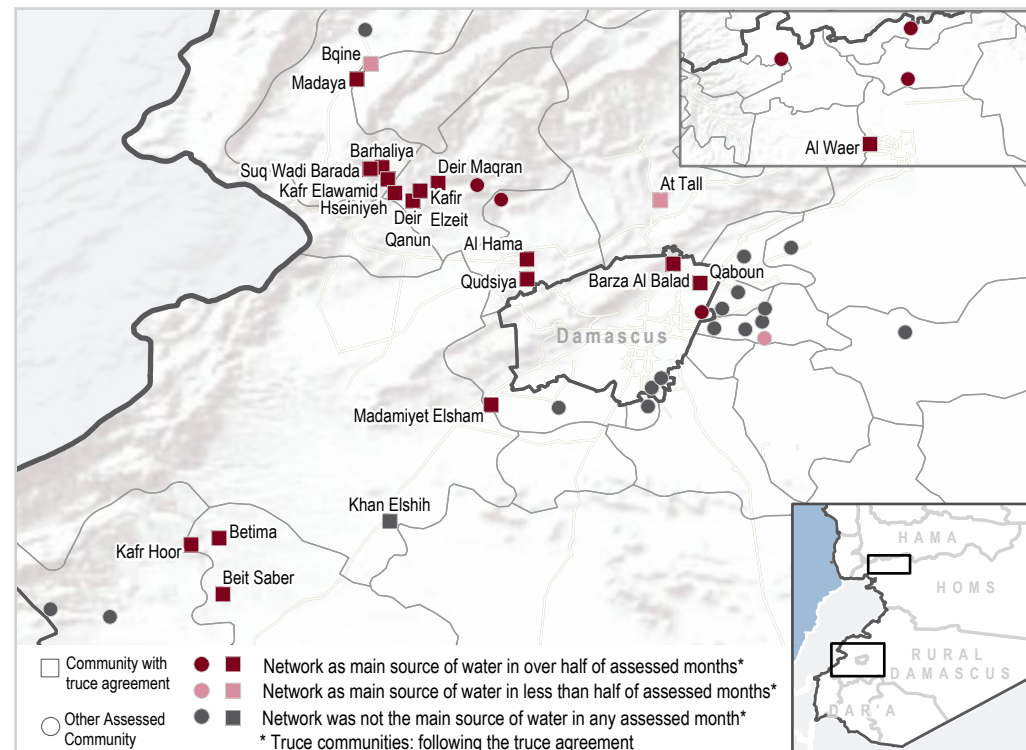
Afterwards, it was only reported in one or two of the assessed communities each month, along with buying water with money usually spent on other things.

Similar to the electricity network, access to the water network was restricted in some communities in the last two months preceding the truce agreements, as can be seen in the graph below. Of the 19-20 assessed truce communities, 50% did not have access to the water network, including the Wadi Barada area, which encompassed the primary source of water for Damascus. In subsequent months, the percentage of communities with access to the water network increased to 90% of all 20 assessed communities, which was slightly higher than levels reported at the start of the assessment period. In most months, the remaining communities were split between relying on closed wells and on private water trucking.

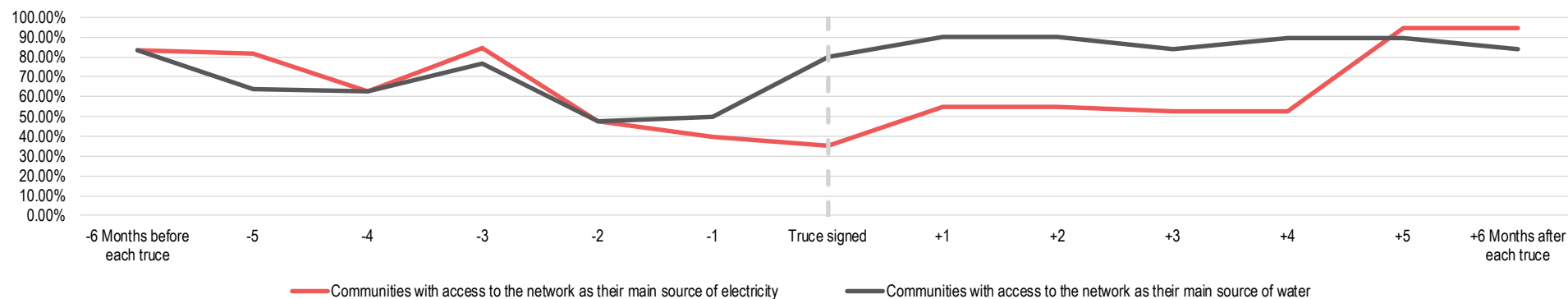
However, not all communities received the same level of access to the water network. Six months prior to the truce agreements, the average community that used the network as its main source of water could do so for approximately seven days a week. Conversely, in the month when truce agreements came into effect, even communities that were still able to rely on the water network were only able to access it for approximately 2.5 days a week. Thereafter, the average rose to around four days, where it remained stable. Thus, while access to the water network was restored somewhat, it did not return to the same level reported at the start of the assessed period.

Given the low level of access to the electricity and water networks in the months preceding each truce agreement, it is likely that regaining access to basic services served as an incentive for communities to agree to truces.

ACCESS TO THE WATER NETWORK¹³



PROPORTION OF TRUCE COMMUNITIES WITH REPORTED ACCESS TO THE WATER AND ELECTRICITY NETWORKS



HEALTHCARE

Access to healthcare also appears to have been influenced by truce agreements, both positively in some aspects and negatively in others.

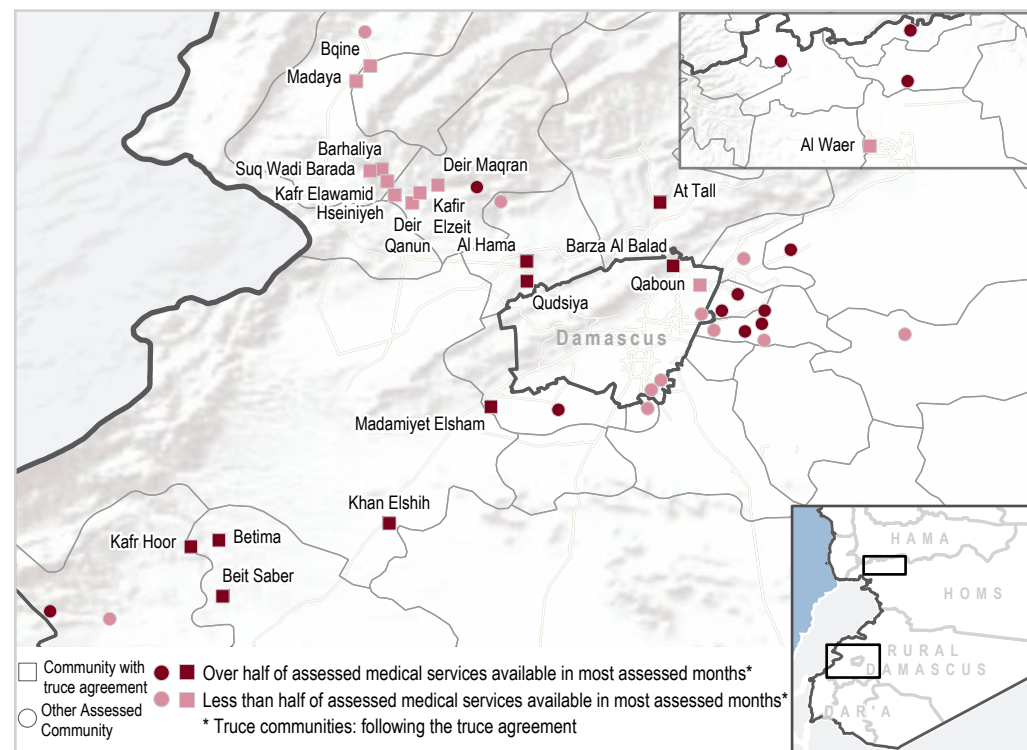
Firstly, the number of communities with access to healthcare facilities did increase following a truce agreement, but only insofar as the situation from previous months was restored. Most truce communities had access to at least one type of healthcare facility in all assessed months. However, all health facilities in five of the Wadi Barada communities (Barhaliya, Deir Maqran, Hseiniyeh, Kafr Elawamid and Souq Wadi Barada) closed down due to conflict-related insecurity in December 2016, two months before these communities would sign truce agreements. While facilities did remain open in the two communities in the area that were considered to be relatively safe, Deir Qanun and Kafir Elzeit, access from other communities was complicated by risks associated with travel. **Following the truces, healthcare facilities returned to all communities in the area.** Outside of the Wadi Barada area, four other communities in Rural Damascus also lacked any medical facilities in the months when they signed their truces, but regained them afterwards: Madamiyet Elsham, Madaya, Bqine and Qaboun.

The availability of specific medical services also seems to have been restored following truce agreements. Of the six assessed medical services (child immunisations, diarrhoea management, emergency care, childbirth care, surgery and diabetes services), approximately four were available on average in each of the 12 assessed truce communities at the start of the assessed period. However, two months before each community would sign a truce agreement, this number decreased to 2.3 (across the 19 assessed communities). It only increased again in the post-truce period, when it returned to the previous level of four.

Meanwhile, the number of available medicines and medical items was higher in the post-truce period than in any assessed month before the truces. The average number of available medical items per community increased from 1.3 (out of 11 assessed items¹⁵) just before each truce to 6.1 directly afterwards (across 20 assessed communities). Two months later it had increased to 10, which was also almost twice as high as the average in communities without truce agreements, across 2017

Curiously, although the average number of medical items available across communities was relatively low in all of the assessed pre-truce months, the use of strategies to cope with a lack of medical items was reported in less than 10% of the 12 communities assessed in the sixth month before each truce agreement. After increasing to 70% of the 19 to 20 assessed communities in the two months leading up to each truce, this proportion was reduced to between 0% and 10% in each subsequent month - likely because of the increased availability of medical items. Thus, similar to medical services, **the truces seem to have restored the use of coping strategies to the levels reported before humanitarian conditions deteriorated.**

AVAILABILITY OF MEDICAL SERVICES¹³



Lastly, some aspects of medical care were seemingly worse in truce communities than in communities that never signed truce agreements. For instance, **healthcare facilities in communities without truce agreements were reportedly more accessible to all parts of the population (men, women, boys and girls).** In communities that never signed truce agreements, a lack of income and/or resources was more than ten times less likely to pose a barrier to accessing medical care (reported in 4.1% of communities without truce agreements in 2017, versus 56.3% of truce communities). However, the accessibility of existing medical facilities in communities with truce agreements did not seem to change much in the months preceding or following those agreements, so this discrepancy may be attributable to characteristics specific to each truce community rather than to the truces themselves.

EDUCATION

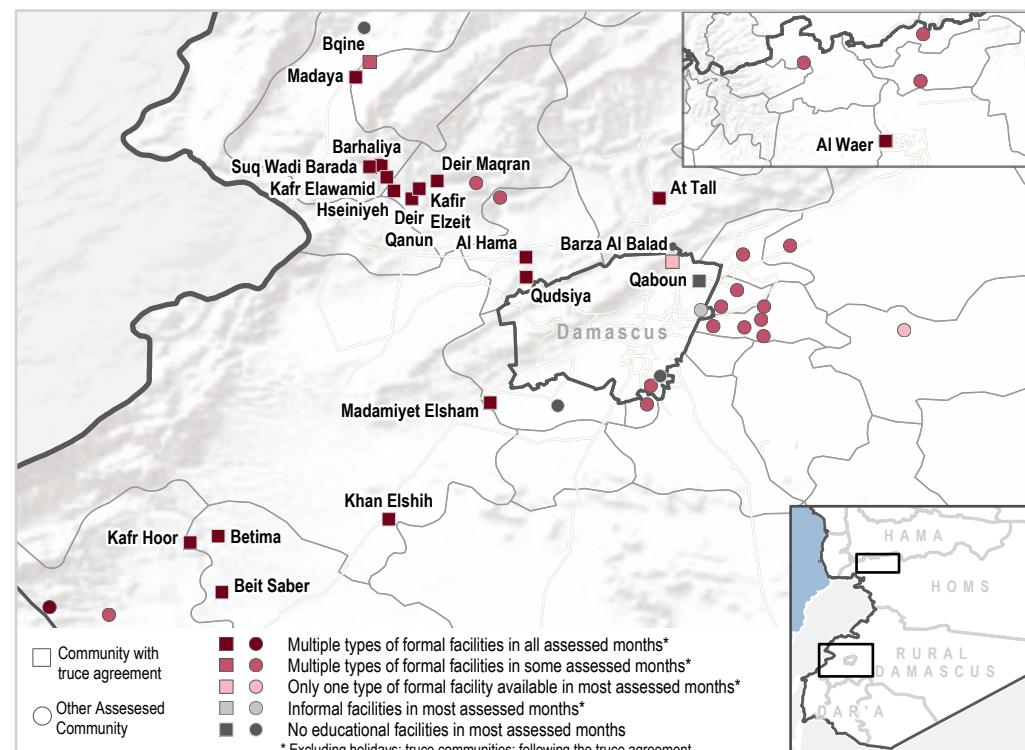
Similar to the developments discussed in previous sections, access to education across truce communities decreased sharply in the two months before each truce came into force. Afterwards, the number of available facilities was restored to previous levels. Meanwhile, school attendance improved significantly.

In 11 of the 20 assessed communities, access to education reached a low point when no educational facilities whatsoever were available¹⁶ in the month before their truce due to the security situation. This included the seven communities in the Wadi Barada area. In all those communities, it was reportedly too unsafe for children to travel to school. In some, educational facilities had been destroyed. As can be seen in the graph on the right, access was restored shortly afterwards. Only in Qaboun did facilities remain absent, although students were able to attend school in a neighbouring community.

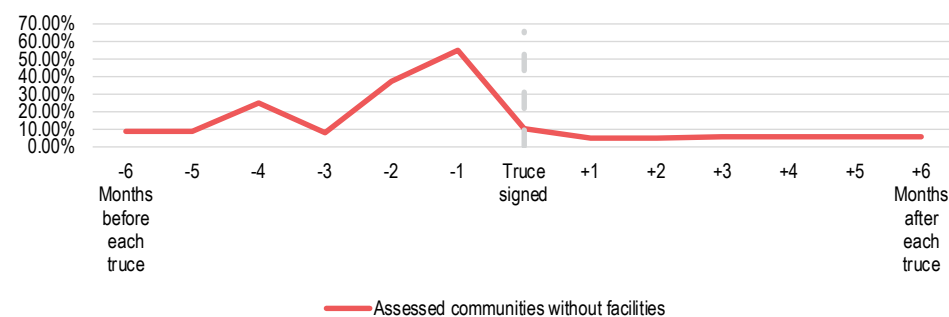
Educational facilities were available in all assessed truce communities except Bqine up until five months before each truce agreement was signed. However, the facilities were often not accessible to all potential students. In the pre-truce period, the percentage of communities where all children could attend school never rose above 32% in any month. The most commonly reported reasons why some children were not attending school were destroyed facilities and the routes to services being unsafe. Similarly, the average percentage of communities where a truce was never signed but where all children were able to attend school was only 24% per month (of the 16 to 22 communities assessed each month) in 2017. Conversely, 85% of the 20 truce communities saw all children attend school in the first month after their agreement. After six months, this percentage had risen to 100% (of 19). This improvement can still be observed when excluding the seven Wadi Barada communities from the analysis.

Additionally, as the map shows, communities with truce agreements had, overall, access to more types of formal education than communities where a truce was never signed.

AVAILABILITY OF EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES¹³



PROPORTION OF TRUCE COMMUNITIES REPORTING NO FUNCTIONING EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES



POST-TRUCE PROTECTION CONCERNS

In the aftermath of a truce agreement, the risk of violence towards civilians heightened. Individuals were reportedly at risk because of their perceived political affiliations or, in the case of young men, because they could be conscripted into the military. In three communities,

women and girls reportedly also faced additional risks in the post-truce period⁸: sexual and other types of harassment were reported in Al-Hama and Qudsiya. In Qaboun, women and girls were reportedly especially at risk of being arrested and robbed.

Specific data was collected on three types of risk in the post-truce period: conscription, detention and reprisals. As can be seen in the map on the right, these risks were most commonly reported in the communities nearest Damascus city.



CONSCRIPTION

Post-truce conscription was reported in 40% of the 20 assessed communities by the second month after each truce agreement and did not occur in any new communities in subsequent months. Men aged 19-50 were primarily affected.

Conscription was reportedly particularly common at formal checkpoints leading into and out of communities or sectors. As a result, many men were limited in accessing services offered outside their own areas, such as specialised medical care. In Al-Hama and Qudsiya, there were also reports of homes being raided in search of individuals wanted for conscription.

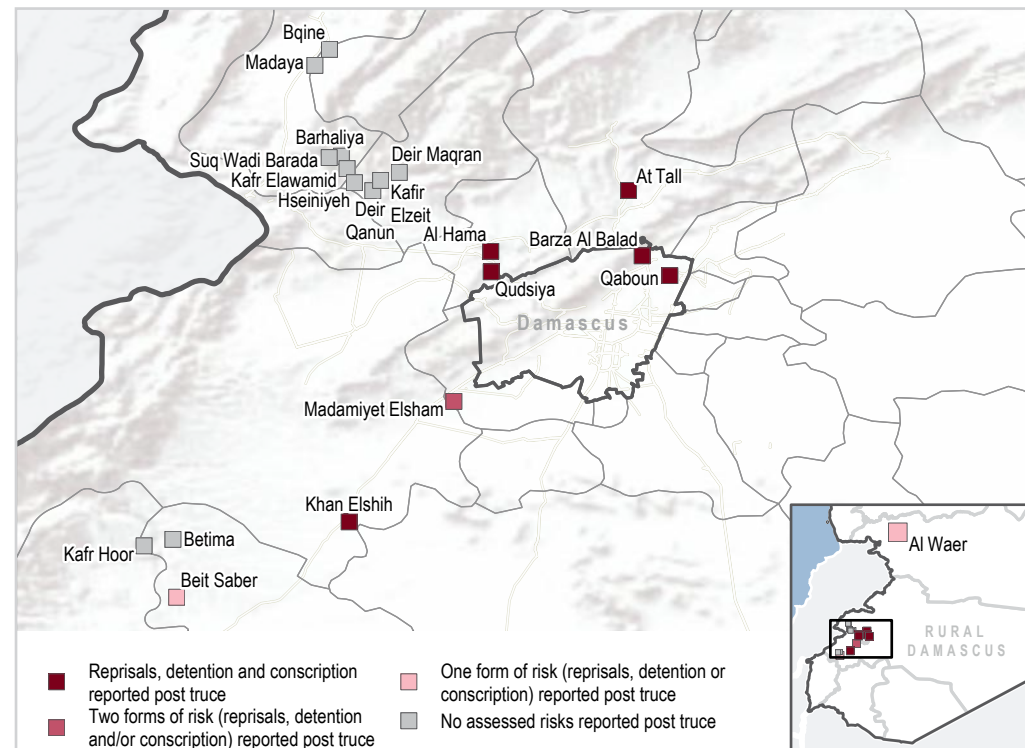


DETENTION

Detention was also reported as a post-truce risk in approximately 37% of assessed communities following the third month after the agreements (19 communities assessed). As was the case with conscription, detention happened most commonly at formal checkpoints, which limited the mobility of those most at risk of being detained, such as young men wanted for conscription and individuals perceived to have opposing political affiliations.

In some cases, these detentions reportedly violated elements of the truce agreements in place, such as promises to grant certain individuals free passage out of the community. Similarly, in some communities, residents who had previously taken steps towards reconciliation were reportedly detained. It is unclear whether or not those reportedly detained were eventually released.

REPORTED PROTECTION CONCERNS



REPRISALS

Reprisals were reported in 35% of all 20 truce communities. They included acts of looting, as well as the destruction or confiscation of property. Reportedly, the main targets were the properties of individuals with certain perceived political affiliations. For instance, there were reports of individuals who had left in the pre-truce period and who had subsequently returned taking over the houses of residents with opposing political affiliations, some of whom had fled following the truce agreement. In other communities, the cars or productive assets of people with certain perceived political affiliations were reportedly burned. In Barza Al Balad neighbourhood in Damascus, all residents were reportedly banned from accessing their land in the post-truce period.

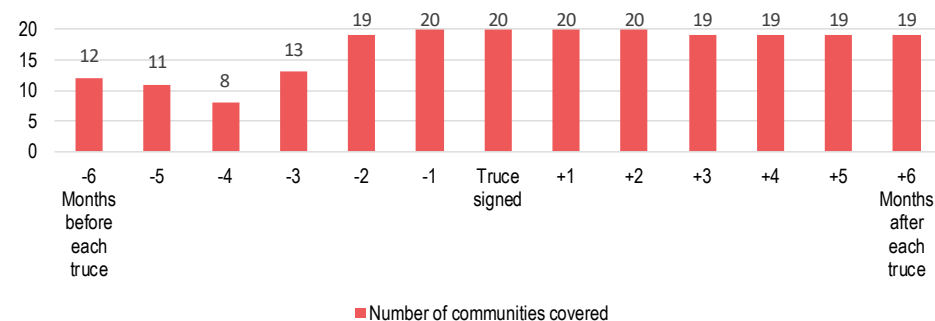
ENDNOTES

- 1) Al-Hama has at times been referred to as 'Hama' in previous Community Profiles factsheets.
- 2) Barza Al Balad has at times been referred to as 'Burza' in previous Community Profiles factsheets.
- 3) Some sources report that this agreement was signed in late November 2016. However, as the effects did not start to materialise until early December 2016, this is considered to be the 'truce month' for this community.
- 4) As the truce agreement was signed in late January 2017, the effects did not start to materialise until early February 2017. As a result, for the purposes of this assessment, the latter month is considered to be the 'truce month' for this community group.
- 5) While some sources report that the truce agreement in Al Waer was signed as early as September 2016, significant effects were not reported until mid-March 2017.
- 6) UN OCHA, besieged and hard-to-reach locations and data set, 19 December 2017.
- 7) An additional community, Az Zabdani, was last assessed in March 2017. After the community signed a truce agreement in April 2017, evacuations caused REACH to become unable to carry out further assessments. As there is no way to compare the situation before and after the truce agreement in this community, it was not included in this assessment.
- 8) Note: a gender-disaggregated question about additional post-truce risks was first included in the survey in December 2016.
- 7) UN OCHA, Syria: "Astana produced a promising step. This agreement simply has to succeed" - UN Humanitarian Chief, 30 May 2017. (<https://www.unocha.org/story/syria-astana-produced-promising-step-agreement-simply-has-succeed-un-humanitarian-chief>)
- 8) For the details of which areas were encompassed in the de-escalation zones, see the following article from the New York Times:
A. Barnard and R. Gladstone, "Russia Reaches Deal for Syria Safe Zones, but Some Rebels Scoff", The New York Times, 4 May 2017. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/04/world/middleeast/russia-iran-turkey-syria-de-escalation-zones.html>)
- 9) While this may also indicate that humanitarian deliveries were no longer needed, findings on the availability and prices of food, hygiene items, fuel and medicine show that improvements were likely not significant enough to warrant this conclusion.
- 10) A note on price data: where an item was unavailable, no data was included for that community in that specific month. As a result, in months when many items were unavailable, average prices may be less reliable than in months with a lot of availability. The price of bread was calculated by taking the lowest available price from the three types of bread assessed: bread from public bakeries, bread from private bakeries and bread from shops. The prices of all food items are based on the quantities in a standard basket of dry goods, as determined by the World Food Programme (see the next endnote).
- 11) The food basket includes 37 kg of bread, 19 kg of rice, 19 kg of lentils, 5 kg of sugar, and 7 kg of vegetable oil, and provides 1,930 kcal a day for a family of five for a month. More information can be found here.
- 12) The 14 assessed food items are: bread, rice, bulgur, lentils, chicken, mutton, tomatoes, cucumbers, milk, flour, eggs, iodised salt, sugar and cooking oil.
- 13) For truce communities, the map only reflects the situation in the months following the truce agreements.
- 14) As reported by Community Representatives.
- 15) The 11 assessed medical items are: anti-anxiety medication, contraceptives, clean bandages, blood transfusion bags, heart medicine, diabetes medicine, blood pressure medicine, antibiotics, burn treatment, anaesthetics and medical scissors).
- 16) Assessed types of formal educational facilities: pre-conflict primary, secondary and high schools.

About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organisations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives - and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH aims to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid actors through efficient data collection, management and analysis before, during and after an emergency. By doing so, REACH contributes to ensuring that communities affected by emergencies receive the support they need. All REACH activities are conducted in support to, and within the framework of, inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information, please visit our website: www.reach-initiative.org. You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on Twitter: @REACH_info.

ANNEX A: NUMBER OF ASSESSED COMMUNITIES PER MONTH



ANNEX B: ASSESSED COMMUNITIES WITH TRUCE AGREEMENTS

