

Syria Community Profile Update: Bait Jan (Rural Damascus)

October 2017

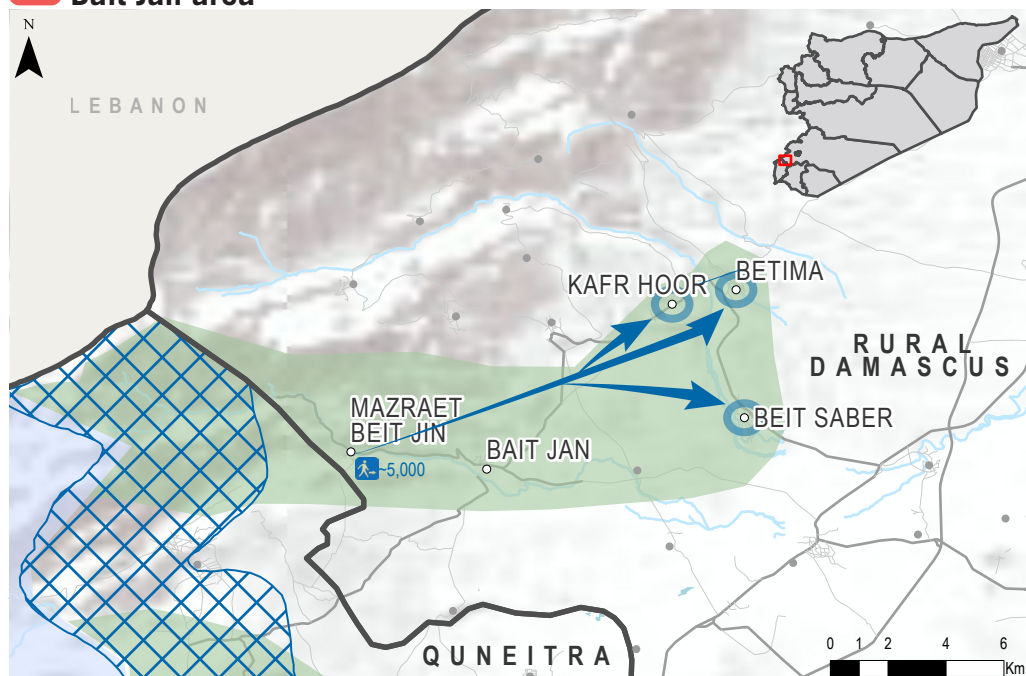


REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

CONTEXT

The Bait Jan area is located in the southwest of Rural Damascus governorate, close to the Lebanese border, and has faced access restrictions since early 2013. Assessments of the communities by REACH began in November 2016. After a truce agreement was signed in Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor in January 2017, restrictions on people and vehicles entering and exiting these communities were lifted. This led to a substantial improvement in humanitarian conditions throughout the Bait Jan area. However, in the communities of Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin, truce negotiations broke down in April, and humanitarian conditions have gradually deteriorated as new access restrictions were imposed and conflict has been renewed.

Bait Jan area*



- Community Covered in Profile
- Community Not Covered in Profile
- Governorate Boundary
- Truce Community
- Opposition Area of Influence
- Golan Heights
- UNDOF Zone
- ➔ Displacement Movement
- ➔ Internally Displaced Persons

*Sourced from Live UA Map: 31 October, 2017



DEMOGRAPHICS

	BAIT JAN	MBJ*	BEIT SABER	BETIMA	KAFR HOOR
UN classification:	Besieged	Besieged	Hard-to-reach	Hard-to-reach	Hard-to-reach
Estimated Population ¹	2000-2300	150-200	6500-6700	6500-6800	5500-5700
Of which estimated IDPs ²	180-200	50-100	1500-1700	1500-1600	1500-1700
% of pre-conflict population	26-50%	1-25%	76-100%	76-100%	76-100%
% of female-headed households	1-25%	1-25%	1-25%	1-25%	1-25%

*Mazraet Beit Jin

SUMMARY

The two communities in the Bait Jan area not covered by any truce agreements, Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin, continued to be affected by renewed conflict in October. In mid-September 2017, conflict intensified between government and opposition forces in Mazraet Beit Jin, which caused the majority of residents to flee, mostly to the communities with truce agreements (Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor). Only approximately 150 of the 5000 residents who were present in August remained in the community, reportedly because they were unwilling to leave their land and property. Most shops and schools in the community also closed. Similarly, approximately 100 people from Bait Jan community who expected the conflict to spread left for the same destinations.

In October, clashes were reportedly still ongoing in Mazraet Beit Jin, and no movement outside of the Bait Jan area was permitted for the second consecutive month. As a result, the humanitarian situation in Mazraet Beit Jin remained critical. Meanwhile, the situation in Bait Jan community worsened, as commercial vehicle access was forbidden in October, which led to a decrease in the availability of medical services and in access to commodities.

Meanwhile, in truce communities, the humanitarian situation remained overall unchanged and was comparatively better in terms of civilian freedom of movement, commercial vehicle access, access to healthcare, and access to food.

No humanitarian vehicle access was reported in any of the five communities.

1. Population estimates provided by Community Representatives. Population estimates from the HNO 2018 population data (September 2017) were reportedly 1,120 (Bait Jan), 4,950 (Beit Saber), 5,400 (Betima), 4,500 (Kafr Hoor), and 2,380 (Mazraet Beit Jin).
 2. Population estimates provided by Community Representatives. Population estimates from the HNO 2018 population data (September 2017) were reportedly 15 (Bait Jan), 357 (Beit Saber), 80 (Betima) and 100 (Kafr Hoor) IDPs. No data was available for Mazraet Beit Jin.

1. ACCESS & MOVEMENT

Communities that are classified as besieged or hard-to-reach are characterised by unique access restrictions that impact civilian movement in and out of the community, commercial and humanitarian vehicle access, entry of goods, supply chains, power and control dynamics, and protection issues. The economy is unable to function normally due to the inability to use usual trade routes or foster competition. Prices soar and supplies dwindle, leading to an unsustainable and ultimately precarious situation that hits the most vulnerable the hardest. Furthermore, in areas of conflict or contested control, the average resident faces increased protection concerns. These can include risks such as conflict-related violence, physical, psychological, or gender-based violence, increased surveillance, harassment, detention, and conscription. Risks associated with crossing checkpoints can also limit or decrease mobility and create constraints for certain residents to access services in other areas. For this reason, this profile first considers access restrictions and their impact on other sectors.



MOVEMENT OF CIVILIANS

Civilian movement in the Bait Jan area has been largely defined by the success or failure of truces. Movement in Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin decreased following the breakdown of truce negotiations in April, and restrictions on residents of Mazraet Beit Jin tightened in September and October. In October, residents of Mazraet Beit Jin were banned from using formal routes to enter and exit the Bait Jan area for the second consecutive month. Movement within the Bait Jan area was also limited due to active conflict, although people could reportedly still go to nearby Bait Jan to procure crucial goods. Meanwhile, in Bait Jan community, only 1-10% of the population was permitted to enter and exit the wider area via formal routes, which reportedly included individuals who had good relationships with the authorities.

Conversely, no restrictions on utilising formal access routes were reported in Betima, Beit Saber, and Kafr Hoor in October, as has been the case since January 2017. Residents of these communities have reportedly not faced any risks when entering and exiting the Bait Jan area since March 2017. Similarly, movement between Bait Jan communities remained unrestricted in October.

Regardless of truce status, no one has reportedly used informal access routes to enter or exit the Bait Jan area since assessments began. However, residents of Mazraet Beit Jin reportedly used informal routes within the Bait Jan area to flee to one of the other communities in September.



MOVEMENT OF GOODS AND ASSISTANCE

Mazraet Beit Jin and Bait Jan: In Mazraet Beit Jin, no commercial vehicle access was permitted for the second consecutive month. Instead, residents brought back items from Bait Jan community. Meanwhile, commercial vehicles planning to access Bait Jan community continued to be forced to travel via one of the other communities in the area. Residents continued to produce food locally, and some traders were able to bring fuel, hygiene and medical items from Beit Saber in smaller vehicles that were already inside the area. In both communities, the amount of goods that entered decreased in October due to these restrictions.

Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor: Commercial vehicle access has been unrestricted in all three communities since January 2017. Local food production was also reported in Beit Saber and Kafr Hoor.

No humanitarian vehicles have reportedly entered the Bait Jan area since assessments began.

2. FOOD & MARKETS



ACCESS TO FOOD




Across communities, purchasing food from markets and shops was a commonly-reported source of food in October. Additionally, residents of all communities were able to produce their own food, and sourcing from local farmers was an option in all communities except Mazraet Beit Jin. Nonetheless, in Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin, men and women have reportedly been reducing their meal sizes so that children could eat more since April 2017.

Residents of all communities reportedly purchased bread from shops, and no barriers to accessing bread were reported.

COMMONLY REPORTED STRATEGIES

TO COPE WITH A LACK OF FOOD	BAIT JAN	MBJ	BEIT SABER	BETIMA	KAFR HOOR
Reducing meal size	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Skipping meals	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Days without eating	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Eating non-edible plants	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Eating food waste	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
CHANGE SINCE SEPTEMBER	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆

CORE FOOD ITEM/NFI PRICE AND AVAILABILITY INDEX⁴

	Item	Communities without a truce	Price change since September ⁵	Truce Communities	Price change since September ⁵	Nearby non-hard-to-reach areas ⁶
 Food Items	Bread private bakery (pack)	Not available	◆ No info	Not available	◆ No info	94
	Bread public bakery (pack)	Not available	◆	60	◆	63
	Rice (1kg)	525 ⁷	◆	550 ⁹	◆	525
	Bulgur (1kg)	275 ⁷	◆	275 ⁹	▲ +6%	275
	Lentils (1kg)	500 ⁷	◆	500 ⁹	▼ -9%	358
	Chicken (1kg)	850 ⁷	▼ -11%	850 ⁹	▼ -9%	1042
	Mutton (1kg)	3500 ⁷	◆	3533 ⁹	◆	4350
	Tomatoes (1kg)	135 ⁷	◆	125 ⁹	▲ +6%	125
	Cucumbers (1kg)	213 ⁷	▲ +18%	232 ⁹	▲ +32%	212
	Milk (1L)	200 ⁷	◆	200 ⁹	◆	250
	Flour (1kg)	275 ⁷	▲ +7%	267 ⁹	▲ +7%	172
	Eggs (1 unit)	50 ⁷	◆	50 ⁹	◆	49
	Iodised salt (500g)	50 ⁷	◆	50 ⁹	◆	58
	Sugar (1kg)	400 ⁷	▼ -15%	325 ⁹	▼ -15%	354
	Cooking oil (1L)	1750 ⁷	◆	1750 ⁹	◆	1025
 WASH Items	Soap (1 bar)	100 ⁷	◆	100 ⁹	◆	107
	Laundry powder (1kg)	500 ⁷	▲ +11%	450 ⁹	◆	1025
	Sanitary pads (9 pack)	500 ⁷	▲ +11%	450 ⁹	◆	441
	Toothpaste (125ml)	500 ⁷	▲ +11%	450 ⁹	◆	354
	Disposable diapers (24 pack)	1100 ⁷	◆	1050 ⁹	◆	441
 Fuel Items	Butane (cannister)	4000 ⁷	◆	3000 ⁹	◆	2883
	Diesel (1L)	250 ⁷	◆	215 ⁹	◆	243
	Propane (cannister)	Not available	◆ No info	Not available	◆ No info	2000
	Kerosene (1L)	Not available	◆ No info	Not available	◆ No info	288
	Coal (1kg)	Not available	◆ No info	Not available	◆ No info	425
	Firewood (1T)	61000 ⁷	◆	62667 ⁹	◆	79333

4. \$1 = 515 SYP (UN operational rate of exchange as of 1 October 2017).

5. Price fluctuations of 5% or less were not reported.

6. Nearby communities in Rural Damascus governorate which are not considered besieged/hard-to-reach: Deir Ali, Sahnaya and Kisweh. Due to different data collection cycles in these areas, price data from nearby communities is from the month prior to the month featured in this profile and is only meant to serve as a reference point.



ACCESS TO MARKETS

The price of a standard food basket in all Bait Jan communities remained stable in October and was only slightly higher in truce communities, likely due to the higher price of bread in these communities. A standard food basket was on average 35% more expensive in truce communities than in nearby areas not classified as hard-to-reach or besieged⁶, and 29% more expensive in communities without truce agreements.

AVERAGE COST OF A STANDARD FOOD BASKET⁸

	COMMUNITIES WITHOUT A TRUCE	TRUCE COMMUNITIES	NEARBY AREAS
Average cost (SYP) ⁴	36336	38055	28216

CHANGE SINCE SEPTEMBER⁵



FOOD ITEM AVAILABILITY & PRICES

Mazraet Beit Jin and Bait Jan: Other than bread from bakeries, all assessed foods have been only sometimes available⁷ in Mazraet Beit Jin and Bait Jan since July 2017. Despite the ongoing conflict in the former community, and reduced vehicle access in the latter, food prices were not yet significantly affected in October. In Mazraet Beit Jin this was likely because there was little demand for food as few people remained in the community. Notable price changes included an 11% decrease in the price of chicken, reportedly due to fluctuations in markets, and an 18% increase in the price of cucumbers, reportedly due to a seasonal decrease in availability.

Betima, Beit Saber, and Kafr Hoor: Overall, assessed foods other than bread from bakeries have been generally available⁹ in the truce communities since assessments began. Food prices remained overall stable in all three communities, with no notable changes other than a 32% increase in the price of cucumbers and a 15% decrease in the price of sugar.



WASH ITEM AVAILABILITY & PRICES

Mazraet Beit Jin and Bait Jan: Similar to food, hygiene items were less frequently available in communities without truces than in truce communities in October. Access restrictions in both communities, as well as the conflict in Mazraet Beit Jin reportedly led to decreases in availability. Nevertheless, all assessed items still remained sometimes available in both communities, as was the case in September. On average, prices in Mazraet Beit Jin and Bait Jan were only 50 SYP higher than in truce communities,

Betima, Beit Saber, and Kafr Hoor: Items were generally available in markets in October, and prices remained largely unchanged compared to September.

Items were 13% cheaper across Bait Jan communities than in nearby areas not classified as besieged or hard-to-reach.



FUEL ITEM AVAILABILITY & PRICES

Access to fuel is critical for the transport of goods via commercial vehicles, the provision of medical services such as ambulances, the functionality of bakeries, and to power well pumps and electric generators in the absence of functioning water and electricity networks.

Mazraet Beit Jin and Bait Jan: Butane and diesel were only sometimes available in both communities in October, while firewood was only available in Bait Jan. Butane and diesel were 33% and 16% higher in Mazraet Beit Jin and Bait Jan than in truce communities, respectively.

Betima, Beit Saber, and Kafr Hoor: Butane, diesel and firewood remained generally available, and prices were stable.

Strategies to deal with a lack of fuel:

Truce status did not appear to have an effect on the usage of coping strategies to deal with a lack of fuel, as Betima and Kafr Hoor and Bait Jan did not report any usage of coping strategies. Meanwhile, burning furniture not in use, agricultural or other productive assets, and waste was reported in both Beit Saber and Mazraet Beit Jin.

3. LIVELIHOODS



ACCESS TO LIVELIHOODS

The most common forms of generating income across communities (regardless of truce status) were livestock production and trade. In Beit Saber and Kafr Hoor (truce communities) manufacturing and production were also cited as common sources of income, while Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin reported farming and crop production as a main source.

7. Sometimes available in markets (7-20 days per month).

8. Calculation of the average cost of a food basket is based on the World Food Programme's standard basket of dry goods (link here). 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. In communities where bread from bakeries is not available, the price of bread from shops is used to calculate the food basket price.

9. Generally available in markets (21+ days per month).

4. ACCESS TO SERVICES

Access to healthcare, education, electricity, and water is critical for residents of besieged and hard-to-reach areas. These services are often affected by access restrictions on civilian movement, limitations on the entry of goods and vehicles, as well as rationing of the main water and electricity networks.

HEALTHCARE

MEDICAL SERVICES AVAILABLE	BAIT JAN	MBJ	BEIT SABER	BETIMA	KAFR HOOR
Child immunisation ¹⁰	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Diarrhoea management	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Emergency care	✓	✓*	✓	✓	✓
Skilled childbirth care	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
Surgery ¹¹	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Diabetes care	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
CHANGE SINCE SEPTEMBER	◆	◆*	◆	◆	◆

*Informal emergency care facilities and services only available to non-civilians; as such, no change marked.

Mazraet Beit Jin and Bait Jan: An informal emergency care point opened in Mazraet Beit Jin, but was reportedly not accessible to civilians. Residents continued to be able to access healthcare in Bait Jan community, but movement was dangerous due to active conflict in the community. In this community, the availability of services and medical supplies decreased as a result of tightened access restrictions on commercial vehicles and clashes in nearby Mazraet Beit Jin. Although there was no change in the number or type of medical facilities, personnel or services available, fewer people were able to receive care, and stocks of medical supplies were reportedly being depleted.

Beit Saber, Betima, and Kafr Hoor: The health situation remained largely unchanged in October. Surgery continued to be unavailable in Beit Saber, Betima, and Kafr Hoor, and skilled childbirth care was unavailable in the latter two communities. However, residents from all three communities could access healthcare services in other areas of Bait Jan, or in other regions, as movement was unrestricted.

The most needed medical items¹² across communities were antibiotics, diabetes, and heart medicine, while anaesthetics and medical scissors remained unavailable. Blood transfusion bags

and burn treatment were unavailable in Bait Jan, and no medical items were available in Mazraet Beit Jin. No strategies to cope with a lack of medical supplies were reported in any community.

AVAILABLE MEDICAL FACILITIES	BAIT JAN	MBJ	BEIT SABER	BETIMA	KAFR HOOR
Mobile clinics/field hospitals	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Informal emergency care points	✗	✓	✓*	✓	✓
Pre-conflict hospitals	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Primary healthcare facilities	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
CHANGE SINCE SEPTEMBER	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆

Informal emergency care facilities and services were only available to non-civilians; as such, no change marked.

AVAILABILITY OF MEDICAL PERSONNEL

In all communities except for Mazraet Beit Jin, the following professionally trained medical personnel was available: doctors, nurses, midwives; dentists, veterinarians; and pharmacists. Additionally, volunteers with informal or no medical training were reported present in all communities in October.

EDUCATION

ACCESS TO EDUCATION	BAIT JAN	MBJ	BEIT SABER	BETIMA	KAFR HOOR
Available education facilities	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Barriers to education	✗	N/A	✗	✗	✗
CHANGE SINCE SEPTEMBER	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆

Mazraet Beit Jin: no schools functioning for the second consecutive month, as there were reportedly no school-aged children left in the community.

Bait Jan and truce communities: Pre-conflict primary, secondary and high schools were functioning with no barriers to education reported.

10. The absence of child immunisations in a given month does not necessarily indicate a decline in access to medical services, as vaccinations in Syria are commonly administered in rounds and therefore may not be available on a monthly basis.

11. The availability of surgery does not mean that procedures were carried out by formally trained medical personnel or that anaesthetics and appropriate surgical equipment were used.

12. An item being listed as among the 'most needed' does not necessarily indicate that it is unavailable in the community.

ELECTRICITY

ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY	BAIT JAN	MBJ	BEIT SABER	BETIMA	KAFR HOOR
Access to electricity network	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Main source of electricity	Generator	Generator	Network	Network	Network
Access to main source/day	1-2 hours	1-2 hours	8-12 hours	8-12 hours	8-12 hours
CHANGE SINCE SEPTEMBER	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆

Access to electricity across communities has differed substantially depending on truce status.

Mazraet Beit Jin and Bait Jan: Residents of both communities continued to rely on generators for electricity, while the use of solar panels was also reported in Bait Jan community. Electricity was only accessible for 1-2 hours a day, as has been the case since assessments began.

Beit Saber, Betima, and Kafr Hoor: The main source of electricity was the electricity network, which was available 8-12 hours per day, as has been the case since June 2017.

WATER

Regardless of truce status, all communities continued to have access to the water network 1-2 days per week, which was sufficient to meet household needs. Residents of Bait Jin and Mazraet Beit Jin also relied on closed wells. In all cases, water was reportedly safe to drink.

ACCESS TO WATER	BAIT JAN	MBJ	BEIT SABER	BETIMA	KAFR HOOR
Access to water network	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Main source of water	Network/ Closed wells	Network/ Closed wells	Network	Network	Network
Water safe to drink ¹³	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Access to water network/week	1-2 days	1-2 days	1-2 days	1-2 days	1-2 days
Sufficiency of water for HH needs	Sufficient	Sufficient	Sufficient	Sufficient	Sufficient
Coping strategies used	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
CHANGE SINCE SEPTEMBER	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆

5. SUMMARY OF CHANGES SINCE PREVIOUS MONTH

	BAIT JAN	MBJ	TRUCE COMMUNITIES		BAIT JAN	MBJ	TRUCE COMMUNITIES
Movement of Civilians	◆	◆	◆	Core Food Item Prices	◆	◆	◆
Commercial Vehicle Access	↓	◆	◆	Access to Healthcare	↓	◆	◆
Humanitarian Vehicle Access	◆	◆	◆	Access to Education	◆	◆	◆
Core Food Item Availability	↓	↓	◆	Access to Electricity	◆	◆	◆
Access to Water	◆	◆	◆	Overall Humanitarian Situation	↓	◆	◆

13. As reported by Community Representatives.

BACKGROUND

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

METHODOLOGY

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

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

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

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's mission is 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](https://twitter.com/REACH_info).