

OVERVIEW

Intensification of conflict across southern Idleb and western Aleppo between December 2019 and March 2020 displaced nearly 1 million people to locations along the Syrian-Turkish border.¹ The announcement of a ceasefire on 5 March temporarily halted hostilities and sparked the spontaneous return of some 200,000 people between 5 March and 12 June.² During this period, families returned to their home communities as conditions in displacement had become increasingly dire due to the high cost of rent and the lack of livelihood opportunities, shelter, and humanitarian assistance. Moreover, families reportedly returned to protect their assets and to prepare for the harvest season. However, damaged infrastructure, a lack of basic services, the continued threat of renewed conflict, and rapidly deteriorating economic conditions place continued strain on families in communities of return.³ In response to the lack of information on the complex humanitarian context across locations experiencing returns, REACH conducted a multi-sectoral needs assessment to support operational actors in planning the humanitarian response.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Communities of return have been severely impacted by economic hardship, a volatile security situation, and heavily damaged infrastructure resulting from conflict. Findings indicate that the humanitarian context in communities receiving large numbers of returnees calls for the targeting of these locations with multi-sectoral assistance.

- **The conflict has damaged and destroyed vital infrastructure** across communities of return. In over 70% of the assessed communities a proportion of households were reportedly living in shelters that were completely destroyed. The high levels of damage forced households to move in with relatives resulting in overcrowding (reported in 30% of communities). Repairs were reportedly hindered by the high costs of materials and services as well as by insecurity. Challenges were also reported for WASH⁴ and electricity infrastructure as water and electricity from the network were widely unavailable to households.

- **Reduced purchasing power** was shown in the reported priority needs for households, resulting from a sharp increase in inflation and a parallel depreciation of the Syrian Pound (SYP) coupled with stagnant wages and limited employment opportunities.² Food and livelihoods were the most commonly reported priority needs as families struggled to meet basic needs and afford essential food items. Bread and flour in particular were noted as priorities. Based on the reported daily wages and data collected by [REACH's Market Monitoring exercise](#), the average daily labourer would need to work approximately three months in order to earn the equivalent value of June's Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB). Relatedly, households in over half of communities were forced to rely on loans and remittances to meet their basic needs.

- **A lack of personal documentation**, often lost as a result of the conflict, was the most commonly reported protection risk and was also cited as a key barrier to accessing humanitarian assistance and education. Moreover, without personal documentation, households reportedly are at increased risk of arrests and loss of property.

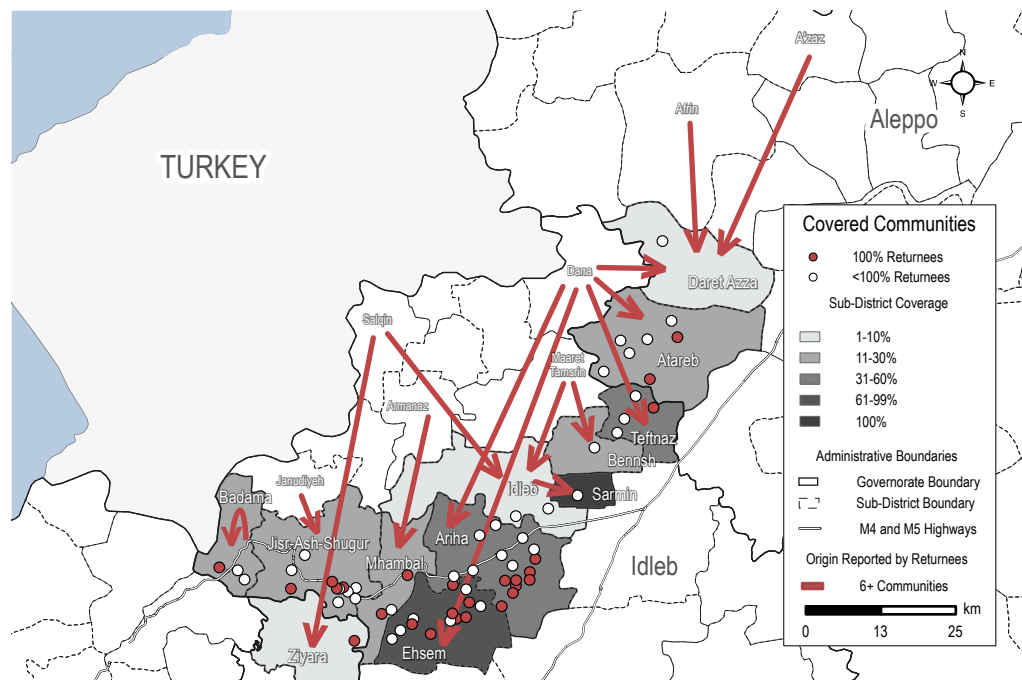
- While the 5 March ceasefire is largely upholding, localised clashes as well as airstrikes around the M4 highway continued to pose a **significant security threat to households** residing in surrounding communities. The threat from airstrikes was reported in 40% of communities, while the threat from explosive hazards was reported in 20% of communities. The volatile security environment, which also includes an increase in crime and a rise in protests, reportedly resulted in severe psychological stress among families.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this assessment was collected via REACH's Humanitarian Situation Overview of Syria (HSOS) assessment between 5 and 17 June 2020. HSOS is a monthly assessment that provides comprehensive, multi-sectoral information about the humanitarian conditions and priority needs inside northern Syria. REACH enumerators remotely interviewed 3 to 5 key informants (KIs) per assessed location, selected based on their knowledge of the local situation and sectors. This analysis covers a list of 63 communities across 12 sub-districts in Idleb, western Aleppo and northern Hama governorates in Northwest Syria (NWS) that experienced large number of returnees and that are located around recent frontlines. Locations were included in the analysis if: 1) returnees between 5 March and 31 May made up at least 30% of the total population or there were more than 1,000 returnees; and 2) the community was located within a 2 km radius of battles or events of violence observed between 1 December and 5 March. In 26 of 63 communities, 100% of the population was a returnee.

Key patterns are noticeable in the humanitarian context of areas near the frontline. However, all findings are only indicative of the situation in assessed locations at the time of data collection. The coverage list can be found with [the complete dataset](#).

Assessed areas with return movements



¹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (17 April 2020). *Recent Developments in Northwest Syria -Situation Report No. 12.* - As of 17 April 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.reliefweb.int>
² UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (12 June 2020). *Recent Developments in Northwest Syria. Situation Report No. 15.* - As of 12 June 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.reliefweb.int>

³ Reported by REACH field teams
⁴ Water, sanitation, and hygiene

SECTORAL FINDINGS



Humanitarian Assistance: Households were reportedly unable to access aid in 38% of communities (compared to 24% across NWS as a whole), mainly because aid was unavailable, while information on how to register for aid was not provided to households in over half of communities.



Protection: The most commonly reported protection issue was the loss or lack of civil documentation, which reportedly prevented households from accessing aid as well as basic services, posed risks such as arrest at check points, and, caused issues with property ownership.



Shelter: Damaged and destroyed occupied shelters were prevalent across the assessed communities, while repairs to shelters were reportedly hampered by the unaffordability of materials and services as well as the volatile security environment.



Non-food items (NFIs): The most commonly reported NFI needs were cooking fuel, solar panels, batteries, and clothing.



WASH: Households in communities of return faced substantial barriers to accessing sufficient water, both resulting from damage to public infrastructure as well as unaffordability of alternative sources.



Electricity: All assessed communities of return reportedly experienced challenges in accessing electricity, mainly related to the high cost of solar panels and fuel for generators, as well as the functionality of the main network. Electricity was most commonly reported to be accessible to households between 5-6 hours per day.



Food Security: While markets were generally accessible, households across assessed communities of return reportedly struggled to access sufficient food following a sharp increase in prices.



Livelihoods: Daily waged labour was reportedly a main source of livelihoods in nearly all assessed communities of return, while a lack of employment opportunities and low wages reportedly pushed households to rely on loans and remittances to meet their basic needs in over half of communities.



Health: Access to clinical health services was reportedly challenging for households across assessed communities of return as households reportedly relied on pharmacies and non-professional care. Families were also reported to take a lower than the recommended dosage of medication following shortages of medicines.



Education: Where education was indicated as a priority, the provision of personal documentation was the most commonly reported education need. A lack of personal documentation, for example as a result of displacement and conflict, hindered children's enrollment in schools and ability to obtain certificates.

PRIORITY NEEDS

Top ranked priority needs

(by % of 63 communities where KIs selected a first, second, and third priority need):

	1st	2nd	3rd	Overall	
Food		37%	37%	27%	70%
Livelihoods	19%		19%	43%	67%
Health	30%		14%	14%	52%
NFIs	10%		33%	21%	51%
Shelter	24%		13%	11%	43%
WASH	8%		19%	17%	33%
Education	6%		2%	6%	11%
Protection	3%		8%	3%	10%

Top three most commonly reported Food needs

(by % of 44 communities where food was reported as a priority need)⁵:

- 1 Bread 93%
- 2 Rice 68%
- 3 Flour 32%

Top three most commonly reported Livelihoods needs

(by % of 42 communities where livelihoods was reported as a priority need)⁵:

- 1 Access to humanitarian programmes supporting livelihoods 93%
- 2 Tools or equipment for production 50%
- 3 Access to credit for entrepreneurial investment 48%

Top three most commonly reported Health needs

(by % of 33 communities where health was reported as a priority need)⁵:

- 1 First aid or emergency care 70%
- 2 Skilled care during childbirth (general obstetric care, normal deliveries) 55%
- 3 Skilled care during childbirth (emergency obstetric care, c-section, blood transfusion) 42%

⁵ KIs could select multiple answers, thus findings might exceed 100%.



HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Households across the assessed communities struggled to access humanitarian assistance. Households were reportedly unable to access aid in 38% of communities, compared to 24% across NWS as a whole. The lack of access was primarily due to aid being unavailable. In Al Hamki and Al Karnaza communities in Jisr-Ash-Shugur sub-district, households were unable to access aid because distribution points were inaccessible. Where assistance was accessible, aid was often insufficient or poorly targeted according to KIs. The lack of personal documentation was a key barrier faced by households in accessing assistance, as was mostly seen in Ariha sub-district. Additionally, information on how to register for aid was reportedly not provided to households in over half of communities.

Most commonly reported barriers that households faced in accessing humanitarian assistance (by % of 39 communities where access was reported, and by % of 24 communities where no access was reported)⁵:

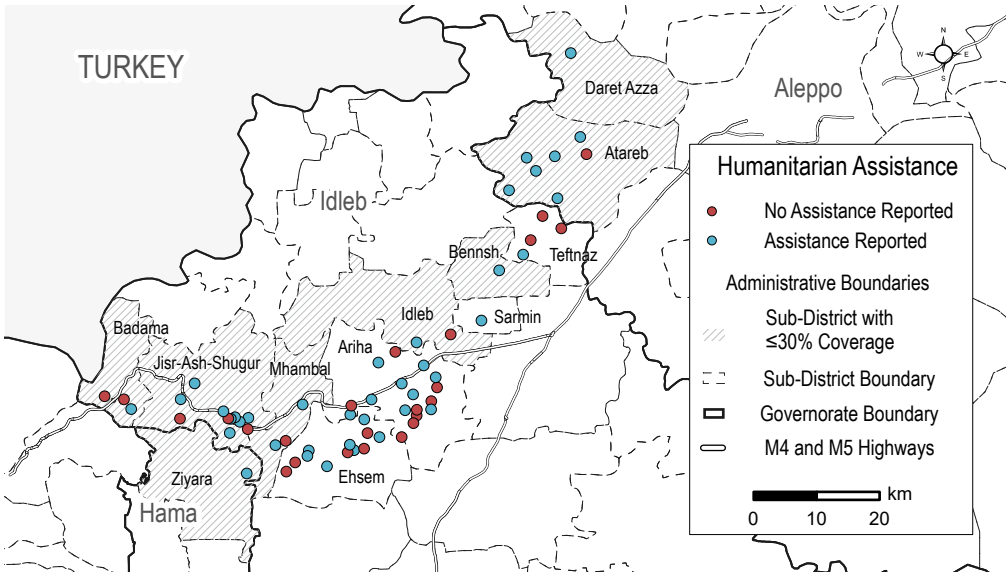
Communities reporting access to humanitarian assistance (62%)

- Assistance provided was insufficient 86% ①
- Poor targeting of beneficiaries who receive assistance 22% ②
- Did not have the necessary personal documents to receive assistance 14% ③

Communities reporting no access to humanitarian assistance (38%)

- No humanitarian assistance was available 79%
- Distribution points were too far or routes were inaccessible 8%
- Not aware of the procedures to follow to receive assistance 8%

Reported access to humanitarian assistance



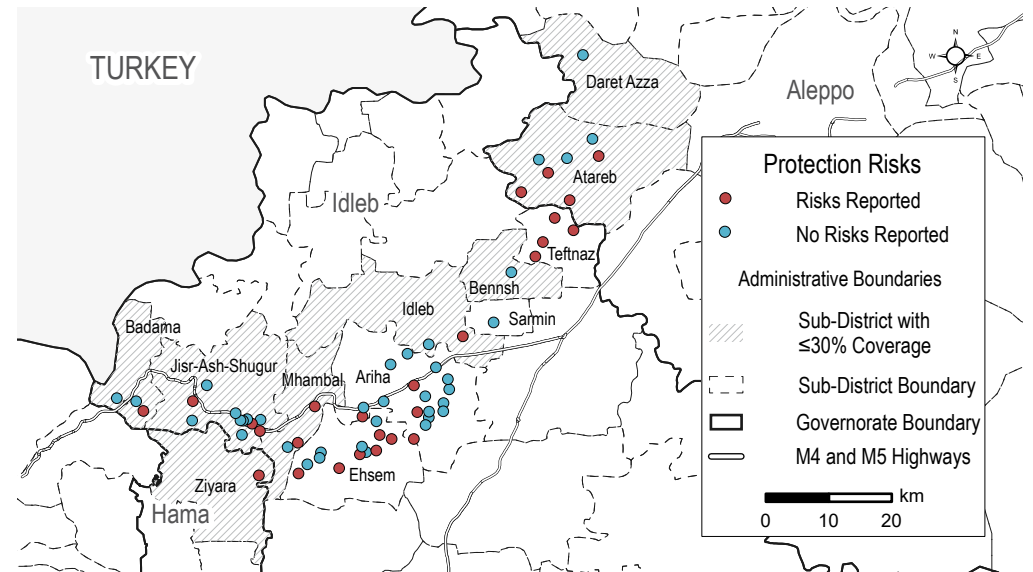
PROTECTION

Serious protection concerns threatened the safety, well-being, and dignity of households across assessed communities. The most commonly reported protection issue was the loss or lack of civil documentation, as a result of conflict and displacement, including identity documents as well as birth and marriage certificates. The lack of civil documentation poses multiple risks to households, such as arrest at check points, issues with property ownership, and inability to register for aid.³ Tensions around the M4 and M5 highways were also reflected in the protection findings, particularly in Ariha sub-district. For example, the threat from airstrikes was a reported protection risk in 40% of communities. Other reported protection concerns included risks faced by children such as child labour and forced and early marriage, which were reported in nearly half and 31% of communities, respectively.

Most commonly reported protection risks (by % of 55 communities where risks reported)⁵:

- Lack or loss of civil documentation 69% ① 5 20% Threat from explosive hazards
- Child labour 49% ② 6 13% Housing, land, and property issues
- Threat from airstrikes 40% ③ 7 11% Threat from sniper gunfire
- Forced and early marriage 31% ④ 8 9% Exploitation

Reported threats from airstrikes, explosive hazards, and sniper gunfire



SHELTER

Conflict severely affected shelter conditions for households residing in the assessed communities of return. The presence of completely destroyed occupied shelters and severely damaged occupied shelters was reported in 72% and 79% of communities, respectively. Notably, between 20% and 40% of occupied shelters were completely destroyed in Sarmin and Kafr Shalaya communities. Relatedly, doors, windows, and concrete were the three most commonly reported shelter needs. Yet, unaffordability of materials and construction services as well as the volatile security situation limited widespread repair efforts. Insecurity was also highlighted in the shelter inadequacy findings following the perceived increase in crime resulting from economic decline. In fact, the lack of lighting around the shelter and the inability of households to lock their home securely were reported in 68% and 43% of communities, respectively. Overcrowding and a lack of privacy were other commonly reported shelter inadequacies as families were reportedly forced to move in with relatives due to the high levels of damage to shelters.

Most commonly reported shelter inadequacy issues (by % of 63 communities where issues were reported)⁵:

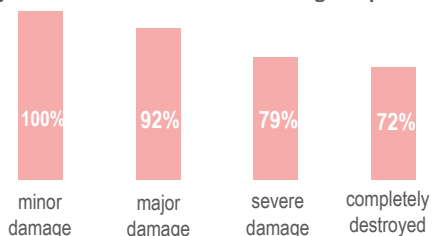
- Lack of lighting around shelter 68% ①
- Lack of privacy inside shelter 49% ②
- Unable to lock home securely 43% ③
- Overcrowding 30% ④
- Lack of lighting inside shelter 27% ⑤
- Lack of bathing facilities 16% ⑥

Most commonly reported barriers to households wishing to repair their shelters (by % of 62 communities where barriers were reported)⁵:

- Repair materials are too expensive 84% ①
- Cannot afford repair services 76% ②
- Security situation 50% ③
- Repair materials are unavailable 16% ④
- Fear of unexploded ordnances 11% ⑤
- Lack of authorization to do repairs 5% ⑥

Reported presence of occupied shelters with damage across communities⁶

(by % of 62 communities where damages reported):



Top three most commonly reported shelter needs

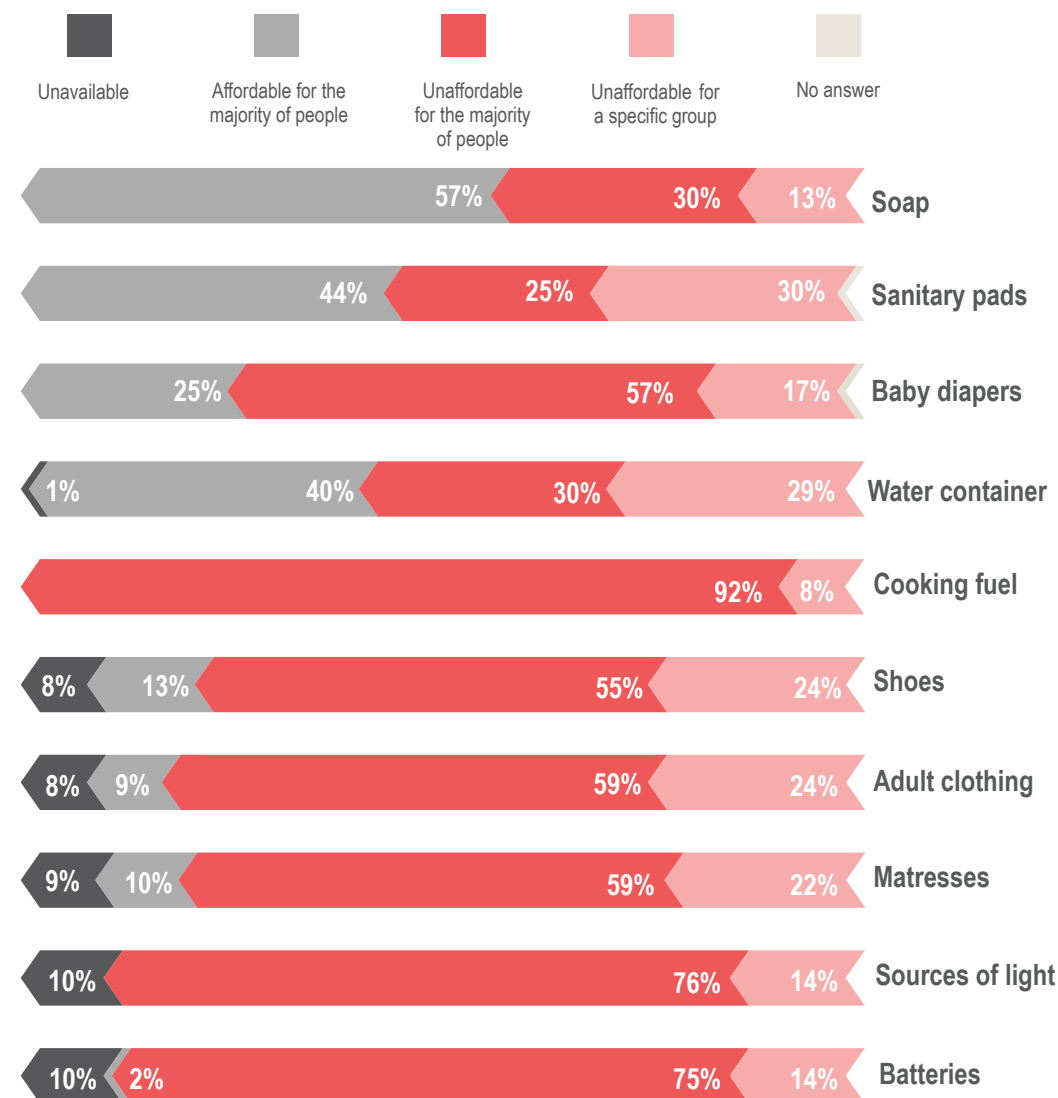
(by % of 27 communities where needs were reported)⁵:

- ① Doors or door frames 89%
- ② Windows or window frames 85%
- ③ Concrete 30%
- ④ Cash for rent 26%

NFI NFIs

Reported household item availability and affordability

(by % of all 63 communities):



⁵Minor (cracks in walls, leading roof, need of new doors and window repairs, etc.), major (extensive damage to window frames and doors, but no structural damage to columns, slabs, or loadbearing walls), severe (significant structural damage to column slabs, or loadbearing walls; cracking, steel elements and deformations visible in concrete; the building would require extensive repairs), completely destroyed (structural damage so significant that rehabilitation is not possible).

WASH

Households in communities of return faced substantial barriers to accessing sufficient water, both resulting from damage to public infrastructure as well as unaffordability of alternative sources. A proportion of households in more than half of assessed communities reportedly had insufficient access to water. Main water sources included private water trucking and, to a lesser extent, closed protected wells. However, the high cost of water trucking was the most commonly cited barrier for households to access sufficient water. Although communities were generally connected to a water network (45/63), water from the network was not available in over 80% of those communities, while in the remaining communities water from the network was available maximum 2 days per week. To cope with a lack of water, households reportedly resorted to buying water with money they would usually spend on other things or to bathing less. Additionally, KIs in over 80% of communities (36/44) stated that either the sewage system needed repair or that there was no sewage system present in the community.

Most commonly reported barriers to accessing sufficient water

(by % of 32 communities where barriers reported)⁵:

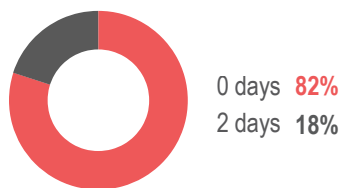
- 1 High price of water trucking **97%**
- 2 Main network not functioning **59%**
- 3 Alternative sources too expensive **31%**

51%

% of communities in which reportedly not all households had access to sufficient water

Days per week water from the network was reportedly available

(by % of 45 communities connected to a water network):



Most commonly reported sanitation issues

(by % of 44 communities where sanitation issues reported)⁵:

- 1 Sewage system needs repair **61%**
- 2 Sewage needs cleaning **57%**
- 3 No sewage system **20%**

Most commonly reported coping strategies for a lack of water

(by % of 32 communities where coping strategies reported)⁵:

- 1 Spend money on water usually spent on other things **78%**
- 2 Bathe less frequently **56%**
- 3 Do laundry less frequently **50%**

Most commonly reported ways people disposed of solid waste

(by % of 63 communities where top disposal method reported)⁵:

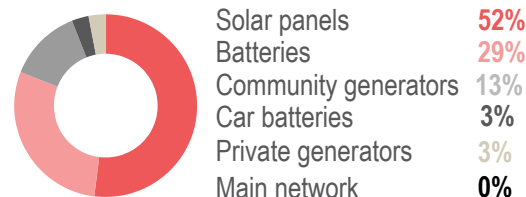


ELECTRICITY

Households most commonly relied on solar panels to access electricity, followed by batteries and community generators. Yet, all assessed communities of return experienced challenges in accessing electricity, mainly related to the high cost of solar panels and fuel for generators as well as the functionality of the main network. Relatedly, electricity was most commonly reported to be accessible to households between 5-6 hours per day. Households in Abin Samaan and Kafr Amma communities (Atareb sub-district) and in Nijeyeh community (Badama sub-district) reportedly had access to electricity less than 2 hours per day.

Most commonly reported main source of electricity

(by % of 63 communities where main source reported):

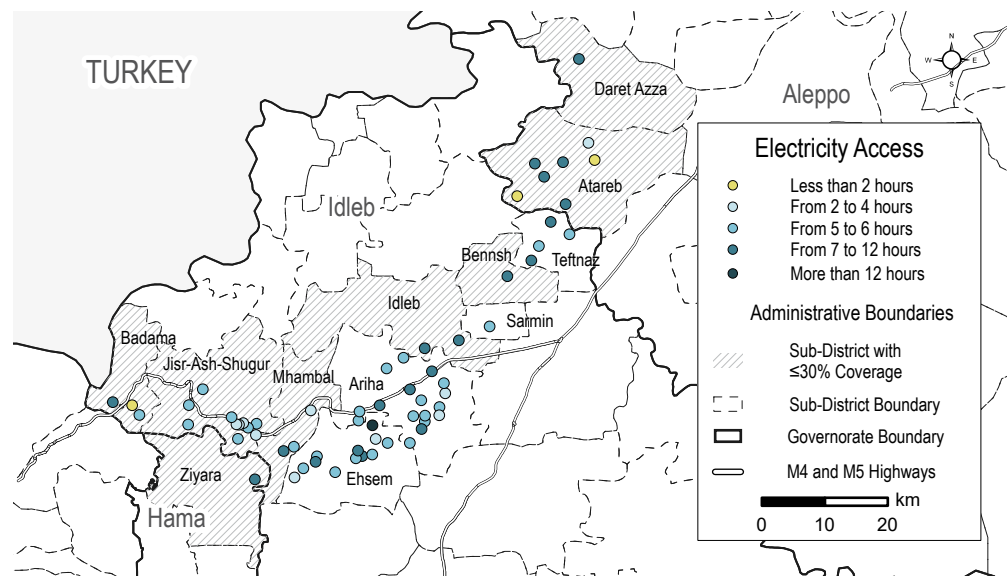


Most commonly reported barriers to accessing electricity

(by % of 63 communities where barriers reported)⁵:

- 1 Solar panels too expensive **67%**
- 2 Fuel for generators too expensive **65%**
- 3 Main network partially completely not functioning **65%**
- 4 Electricity too expensive **37%**

Average number of hours of electricity access per day



FOOD

Although markets were generally accessible, households across assessed communities reportedly faced food insecurity resulting from sharp increase in prices. Households in 75% of communities were unable to afford essential food items and in one third of assessed communities not all food items were reportedly available. According to KIs, key barriers to markets not functioning included security concerns, insufficient electricity, disruptions to prior supply routes, and lack of space to store food items. To cope with a lack of food, families in over half of communities reportedly borrowed money, reduced meal sizes, or even skipped meals.

Most commonly reported sources of food for households (by % of 63 communities where food sources reported)⁵:



14%

% of communities in which households reportedly were unable to access markets in the assessed location

Most commonly reported barriers to accessing sufficient food

(by % of 63 communities where barriers reported)⁵:

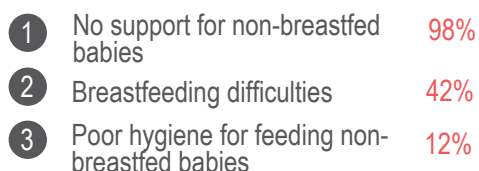
Most commonly reported barriers to physically accessing food markets

(by % of 63 communities where barriers reported)⁵:



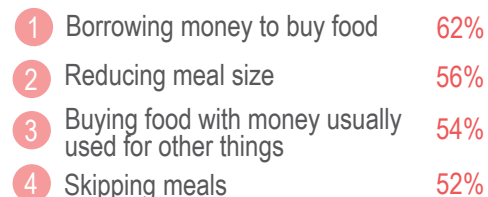
Most commonly reported barriers to feeding babies

(by % of 59 communities where challenges reported for babies under 6 months)⁵:



Most commonly reported coping strategies for a lack of food

(by % of 63 communities where coping strategies reported)⁵:



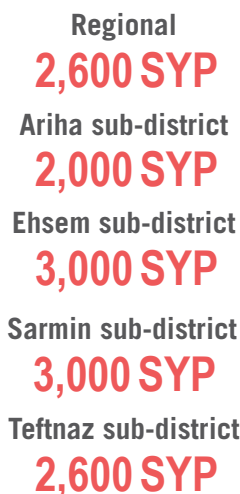
LIVELIHOODS

Daily waged labour was reportedly a main source of livelihoods in nearly all assessed communities of return. However, a lack of employment opportunities and low wages reportedly pushed households to rely on loans and remittances to meet basic needs in over half of communities. Low wages coupled with heightened inflation resulted in decreased purchasing power among households. With an estimated daily wage rate of 2,600 SYP, the average labourer would need to work around 86 days in order to earn the equivalent value of the June Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB)⁷ set at 224,385 SYP, according to data collected by REACH's Market Monitoring exercise. Relatedly, KIs in nearly 70% of communities reported on households using extreme coping strategies to meet basic needs, such as sending children to work or beg.

Percentage of communities where KIs reported the following sources of livelihoods (by % of 63 communities where reported)⁵:

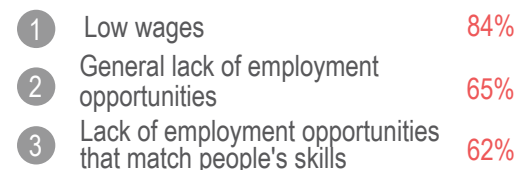


Estimated median daily wage for unskilled labour⁸



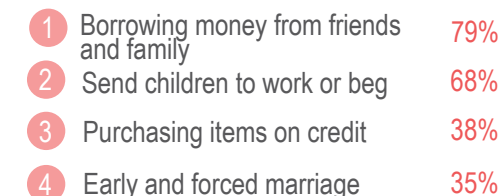
Most commonly reported barriers to accessing livelihoods to meet basic needs

(by % of 63 communities where barriers reported)⁵:



Most commonly reported coping strategies to meet basic needs

(by % of 63 communities where coping strategies reported)⁵:



⁷ Excluding the costs of rent, utilities, or other necessary expenditures.

⁸ Information about the estimated median daily wage for unskilled labour at the sub-district level was only included if the sub-district had an assessment coverage of at least 30%.

HEALTH

Barriers to accessing healthcare were reported in all assessed communities of return. Households reportedly struggled to access primary care in their own communities and generally had to travel to other or nearby communities to access clinical care (see map on page 8). However, the high cost or lack of transportation to health facilities were the most commonly reported barriers to accessing healthcare across assessed communities. In fact, going to a pharmacy instead of a clinic was a strategy used by households to cope with a lack of access to healthcare in over 80% of communities. Of particular concern, seeking non-professional care was a coping strategy for a lack of access to health services reported in about 30% of communities. A shortage of medicines was also a concern for households in assessed communities. Households reportedly resorted to taking a lower than the recommended dosage of medication and to using non-medical items for treatment in 38% and 24% of communities, respectively.

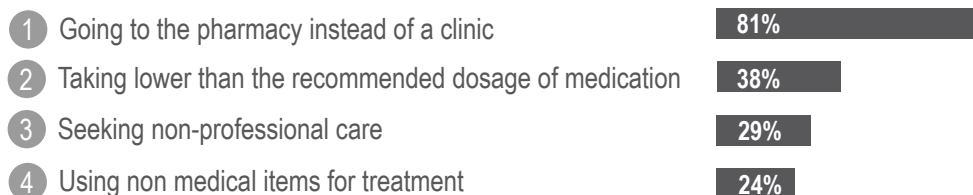
Most commonly perceived barriers to healthcare access

(by % of 63 communities where barriers reported)⁵:



Most commonly reported coping strategies for a lack of access to healthcare services

(by % of 63 communities where coping strategies reported)⁵:



EDUCATION

Children in nearly all assessed communities were reportedly unable to access education facilities in their own or nearby communities. During the reporting period, access to education facilities was primarily hindered by the closure of schools as a result of preventative measures against the spread of COVID-19 implemented by local authorities since mid-March.^{3,9} Yet, schools in about 67% of communities were reportedly able to continue classes remotely through improvised online methods such as WhatsApp. Additionally, where education was indicated as a priority need (5/63 communities), the provision of personal documentation was the most commonly reported education need. A lack of personal documentation can hinder children's enrollment in schools and ability to obtain certificates.

97%

% of communities where children were unable to access education facilities within their own or nearby communities

100%

% of communities without access to education facilities where schools were closed by local authorities due to COVID-19 preventative measures

64%

% of communities without access to education facilities where children were able to access online education

About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. 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). 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).

⁹ Schools across NWS started to reopen mid-June.

Reported locations where households accessed healthcare facilities outside of their own community

Analysis of the map

As clinical healthcare was generally inaccessible in the assessed locations, households reportedly travelled to larger cities, such as Idleb and Ariha city, to access essential healthcare including emergency care, pregnancy and child birth care, laboratory services, and treatment for chronic and infectious diseases. Renewed conflict would likely cut off the access to health facilities in these cities for households residing in communities in close proximity to the contested areas as certain routes may be disrupted based on changing territorial control. This is especially a concern for communities located under the M4 highway currently accessing health facilities in Idleb city. Additionally, a loss of access to health facilities around the M4 highway may increase strain on other health facilities, such as in Idleb city, further complicating an already challenging operational environment for health workers and potentially increase overcrowding.

