

# Ar-Raqqa City, Syria - Situation Overview VI

13 October 2017

**REACH** Informing  
more effective  
humanitarian action

## SUMMARY

Since 6 June 2017, conflict aiming to expel the group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has been ongoing across Ar-Raqqa city. Following four months of ground fighting supported by airstrikes, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have taken control of all but a handful of locations in the innermost parts of the city, including National Hospital and the stadium.

This report is the sixth rapid assessment conducted by REACH to monitor the humanitarian situation in Ar-Raqqa city and assess the status of shelters, infrastructure and services in anticipation of decreased conflict and the onset of returns. Findings are based on primary data collected between 8 and 10 October through qualitative interviews and participatory mapping exercises with 12 Key Informants (KIs) who had left the city since 1 October, reporting on all 24 neighbourhoods in Ar-Raqqa.

Previous assessments can be found here:

[Ar-Raqqa City Situation Overview V – 25 September 2017](#)

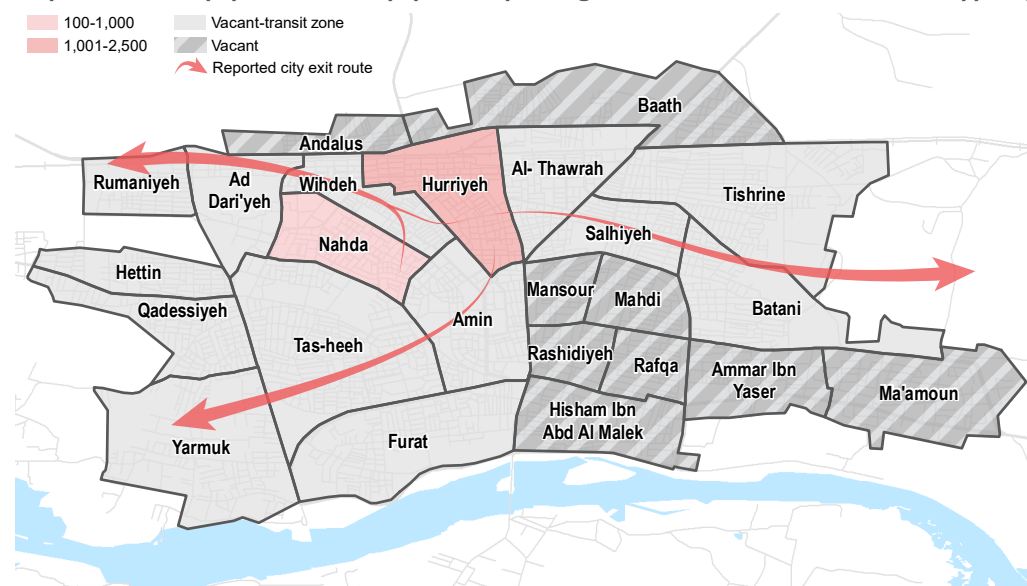
[Ar-Raqqa City Situation Overview IV – 17 August 2017](#)

[Ar-Raqqa City Situation Overview III – 28 July 2017](#)

[Ar-Raqqa City Situation Overview II – 6 July 2017](#)

[Ar-Raqqa City Situation Overview I – 23 June 2017](#)

**Map 1: Estimated populated areas, population per neighbourhood and exit routes in Ar-Raqqa city**



## KEY FINDINGS:

- **Residents continue to depart from the two remaining inhabited neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city.** The population of the city has now dropped to an estimated 2-3,000 persons living solely in the neighbourhoods of Hurriyeh and Nahda.
- **There have been no recorded permanent returns to the city.** However, the SDF continue to facilitate daytime visits to neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city to enable residents to check on property.
- **Residents remain directly at risk from the conflict,** facing threats such as airstrikes, sniper fire, shelling, mines and improvised explosives.
- **The food situation has continued to deteriorate and remaining residents are now reportedly suffering from malnutrition.**<sup>1</sup> The last functioning bakery in the city has been destroyed by conflict and remaining residents continue to rely entirely on stored food to survive.
- **Health services are not available in the city.** The National Hospital, which had ceased to provide medical services prior to the previous assessment, is now the site of major clashes. Emergency care points are reportedly functioning on the far edges of the city and provide medical care to departing persons.
- **There are reportedly only three boreholes providing water to remaining residents, in insufficient amounts.** Damage from conflict has rendered many boreholes inoperable and almost no one has enough water for their needs. Remaining residents are reducing drinking water consumption and modifying hygiene practices to cope with the shortages.
- **There is no longer any electricity in the city.** Previously, residents were accessing two hours of electricity per day via generators. However, KIs reported that the supply of diesel has been exhausted and that communal generators are no longer running.
- **Shelter damage remains high, though remaining residents are reportedly able to shelter in undamaged abandoned homes.** KIs reported that more than half of shelters were unsafe to use due to damage in 16 out of 24 neighbourhoods in the city.

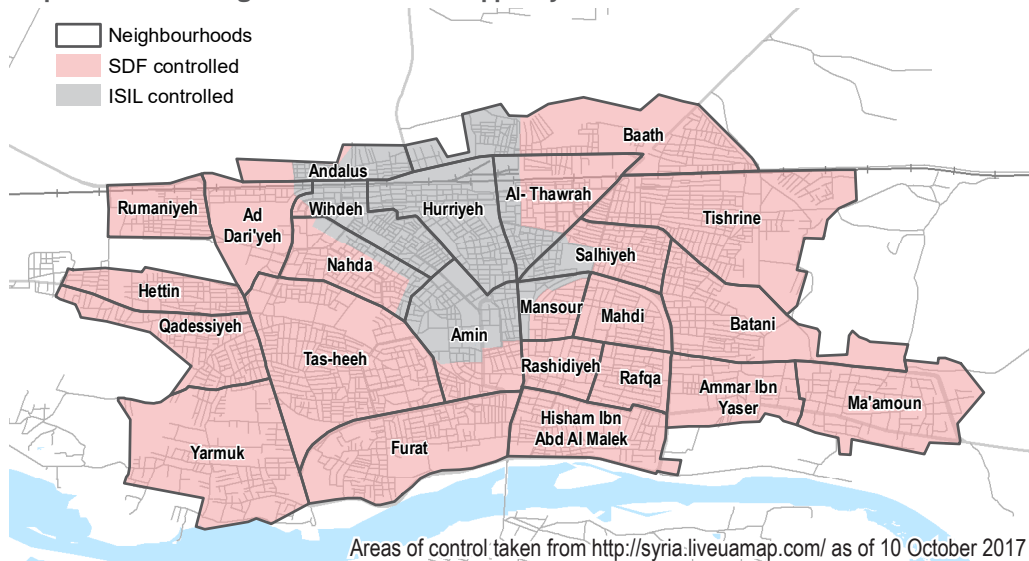
1. Cases are reported by KIs and are not confirmed by medical professionals. Both KIs and members of the data collection team reported witnessing individuals arriving from the city that seemed to be exhibiting signs of malnutrition, such as shivering.

## INTRODUCTION

In November 2016, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced the start of operations aiming at expelling the group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from Ar-Raqqa governorate. On 6 June 2017, following SDF advancement in the countryside surrounding Ar-Raqqa city, the campaign entered its latest phase, with the SDF initiating operations to take full control of the city. Since then, an ongoing ground offensive supported by airstrikes in and around the city has resulted in the SDF taking control of Ar-Raqqa's outer neighbourhoods and the Old City (see Map 2e). As the SDF have advanced, the vast majority of the population has vacated the city, with only two neighbourhoods still inhabited (Hurriyeh and Nahda) by an estimated total of 2-3,000 persons. The humanitarian situation has deteriorated significantly as conflict has intensified in these last remaining ISIL-held areas.

Since ISIL takeover of Ar-Raqqa city in 2014, humanitarian access, as well as information on the humanitarian situation of civilians living in the city has been extremely limited due to strict movement restrictions and controls on information flows. To fill these information gaps, REACH has conducted regular rapid assessments aiming to monitor and highlight developments in the humanitarian situation. This is the sixth assessment conducted, covering population movements (including potential returns), access to food and markets, shelter, non-food items, water, and health services, and the protection situation within the city.

Map 2: Assessed neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city



Information was collected between 8 and 10 October through direct qualitative interviews and participatory mapping exercises with 12 Key Informants (KIs) who had recently left the city, reporting at the neighbourhood level on all 24 neighbourhoods of the city. KIs included local council members, pharmacists, traders, and teachers. The information in this situation overview should be considered as indicative only.

## DISPLACEMENT

### Population remaining in the city

- **Despite significant risks faced during movement, residents continue to leave the two remaining populated neighbourhoods of the city.** KIs estimate that the city's remaining population is now 2-3,000 people, a decrease from up to 8,000 three weeks ago. Remaining residents are living in just two of Ar-Raqqa's 24 neighbourhoods, with an estimated 1,200 in Hurriyeh and 850 in Nahda. Population estimates are hard to verify due to the dynamic situation on the ground and tight controls on flows of information from ISIL-controlled areas. Population estimates are also difficult as KIs reported that they did not see any civilians in the city other than those waiting in lines to gather water from boreholes.

### Movement restrictions

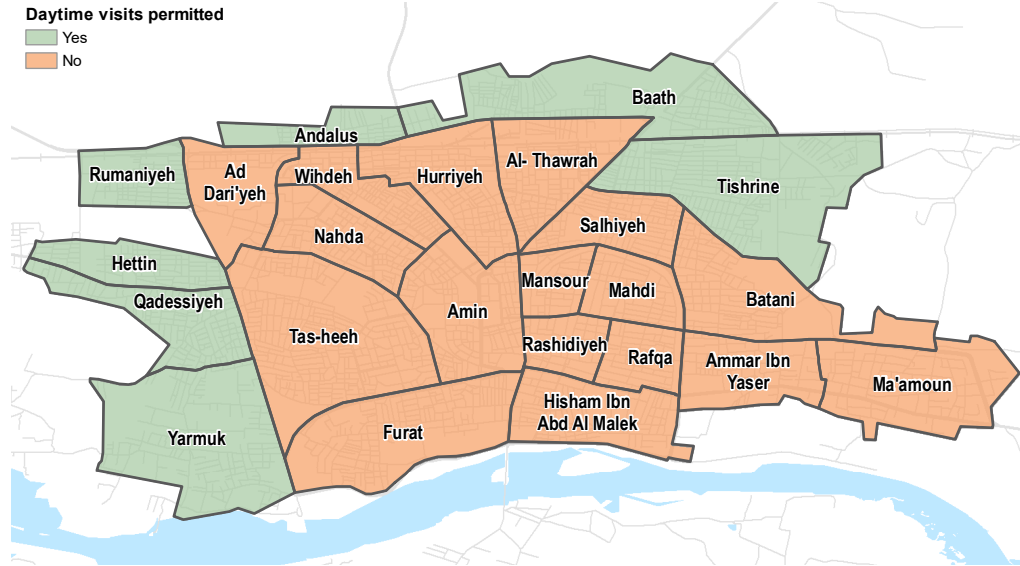
- As reported in previous assessments, **movement restrictions and limited safe routes out of the city are the main reasons for staying for those who have not yet departed the city.** KIs reported that civilians are being forcefully prevented from leaving ISIL-held areas – those who do manage to flee do so at great risk to their lives.
- **The SDF has reportedly continued to facilitate visits of some residents** to check on property in neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city, including Andalus, Baath, Hettin, Qadessiyeh, Rumaniyeh, Tishrine, and Yarmuk.
- **There is still no humanitarian or commercial access to the city.** The presence of mines, barriers from dirt and rubble, and armed actors preventing movement are the main barriers to access cited by KIs. However, within the last thirty days, some civilian passenger vehicles were reportedly able to access the edges of the outermost neighbourhoods of the city with the permission of local authorities.

### Intentions

- **Those remaining in the city reportedly intend to leave – regardless of barriers to movement.** KIs reported that 76-100% of the remaining population in both Nahdeh and Hurriyeh neighbourhoods intend to depart in the next two weeks. This is reportedly due to direct escalation of conflict, increased personal safety risks and reduced access to water.

- As reported previously, most departing persons reportedly intend to stay in Ar-Raqqa governorate. KIs reported that intended destinations included areas just outside of Ar-Raqqa city and Ein Issa and Tabqa (Al-Thawrah) sub-districts.
- KIs reported the safety and security situation and access to food, health services, water, and humanitarian assistance, in addition to ties with the host community, as primary reasons for choosing intended destinations.

Map 3: Neighbourhoods in Ar-Raqqa city in which visits were reportedly permitted by authorities?



## Returns

- There have been no recorded returns to the city. Many of the neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city remain restricted to military access only and returns are not allowed. In other areas, the extensive presence of mines and other unexploded ordnance (UXO) prevents displaced persons from returning to their homes.
- Returns are generally not expected in the next month. KIs reported that the safety and security situation and the extent of shelter rehabilitation and mine clearing were the main factors affecting future returns. KIs reported that a small number of returns could be possible in neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city.

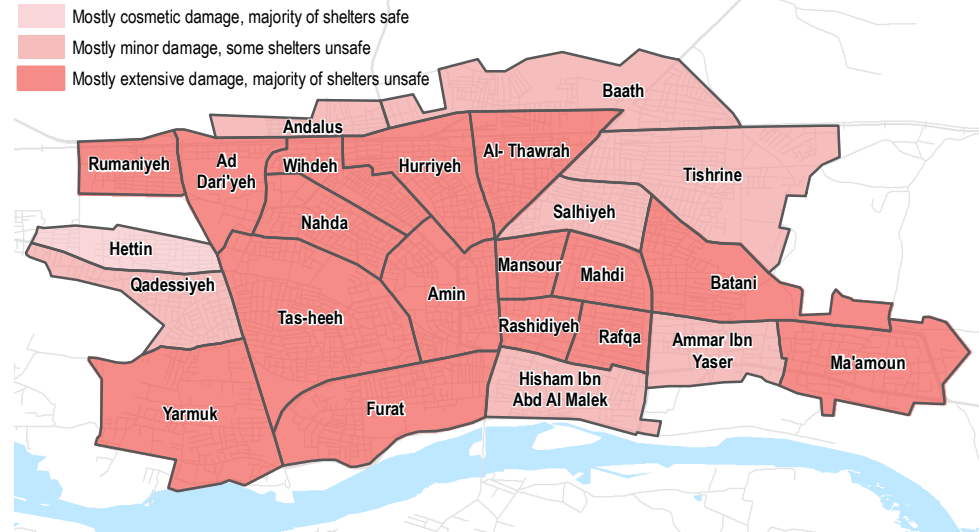
## PROTECTION

- Protection issues related directly to the conflict remain the most prevalent. Threats to residents reportedly include sniper fire, airstrikes, mines, shelling and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Threat from mines and other UXOs reportedly remains substantial across all neighbourhoods, including those that have already been vacated.
- Children reportedly remain at risk of being targeted for recruitment by armed groups. Further risks faced by children include IEDs and landmines as well as psychological trauma.

## SHELTER

- Direct conflict has continued to cause damage to shelters in both the populated and vacant neighbourhoods of the city. KIs reported that more than half of shelters were unsafe to use due to damage in 16 out of 24 neighbourhoods in the city.
- Despite the reportedly extensive shelter damage, because the city is nearly completely empty, remaining residents are able to shelter in undamaged abandoned homes. In the previous assessment, around half of remaining households in Nahda were reportedly living in damaged buildings. However, that is reportedly no longer the case, with KIs reporting that only a few households were living in overcrowded or damaged shelters in the neighbourhoods of Hurriyeh and Nahda.

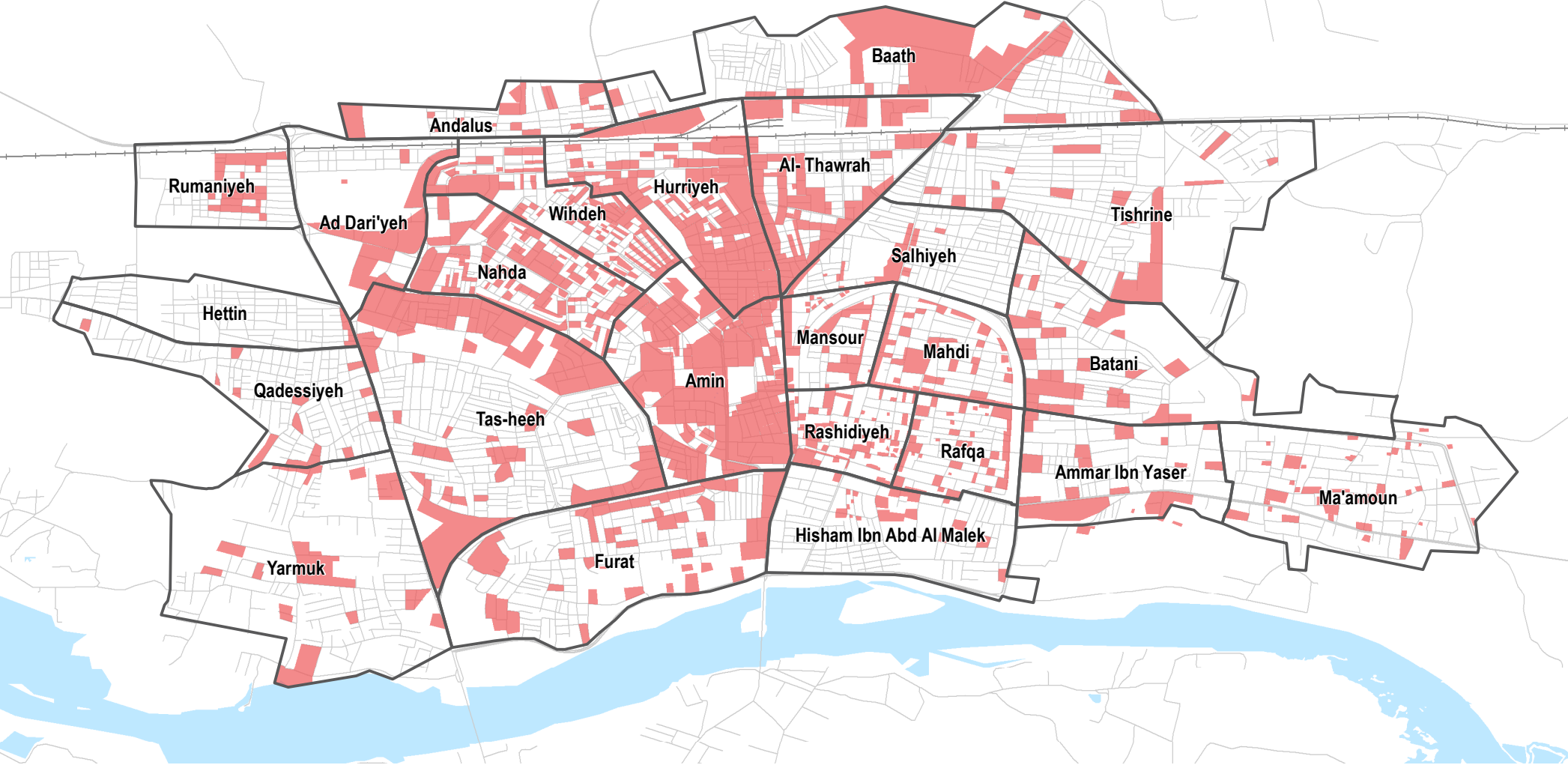
Map 4: Reported proportion of shelters in need of repair in neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city



2. KIs reported that the SDF was permitting civilians to visit these neighbourhoods during daylight hours to check on the status of property and other assets.

Map 5: Damaged areas in Ar-Raqqa city based on participatory mapping with KIs

Destroyed or heavily damaged areas



## HEALTH

- **Health services are not available in the city.** KIs reported that there are no longer any functioning health facilities in the city and there are no trained medical personnel, equipment or supplies. National Hospital remains out of service.
- **The need for health services remains high.** Remaining residents' primary health needs are reportedly emergency care, surgery and treatment for chronic disease.
- **Emergency care points are reportedly functioning outside of the city.** According to KIs, there are at least two medical points run by non-governmental organisations on the far western and eastern edges of the city, providing medical assistance to those departing the area.

## FOOD AND MARKETS

### Access to food and market functionality

- **Remaining residents continue to rely almost exclusively on stored food.** KIs reported that only a single small shop selling exclusively rice and bulgur is functioning in Hurriyeh neighbourhood. The price of a kilogram of rice is 400 SYP (0.78 USD<sup>3</sup>) – significantly less than the reported price of rice in previous weeks. This reduced price is reportedly due to the limited availability of both cash and customers. The shop is reportedly extremely difficult to access due to damaged and blocked roads and safety concerns both en route and at the location. No shops or markets are reportedly functioning in Nahda.
- **KIs reported that the primary barriers to markets reopening in the city are the lack of demand and the security situation.** Further barriers reported by KIs are the lack of functioning supply routes and physical damage due to the conflict (Figure 1).
- **The food situation continues to deteriorate in the city with some residents reportedly starting to suffer from malnutrition.** Residents have been skipping meals and reducing meal sizes in order to cope with limited access to and availability of food for months. However, KIs reported witnessing some residents exhibiting signs of suffering from malnutrition, such as shivering.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1: Main reported barriers to markets reopening (one response per neighbourhood,<sup>5</sup> select all that apply)**

Not enough demand for markets to reopen	20	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e34a33;"></div>
Security situation prevents markets from reopening	19	<div style="width: 95%; height: 10px; background-color: #e34a33;"></div>
Markets unable to restock due to lack of supply routes	11	<div style="width: 55%; height: 10px; background-color: #e34a33;"></div>
Markets are too damaged to reopen	8	<div style="width: 40%; height: 10px; background-color: #e34a33;"></div>

## Core food items

- According to KIs, **there are no longer any functioning bakeries in the city and bread is not available.** Previously, KIs reported that bread production had been relocated to Hurriyeh following the destruction of the previous location of the bakery (in Nahda). However, the relocated bakery has reportedly also been destroyed in conflict and no fresh bread is available in the city.

**Table 1: Reported availability, affordability, estimated price and change in price (last two weeks) of core food items in markets:**

	Available	Affordable	Price (SYP)	Price change	
Bread (pack)	✗	✗	NA	NA	✓ Generally available / affordable
Rice (kg)	✓	✓	400	↓	✓ Sometimes available / affordable
Flour (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	✗ Not available / affordable
Lentils (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	✗ Not available / affordable
Cooking oil (litre)	✗	✗	NA	NA	↑ Reported price increase
Sugar (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	◇ No change in price
Meat (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	↓ Reported price decrease
Chicken (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	
Tomatoes (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	
Cucumbers (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	

## NFIs

### Core NFIs

- With markets not functioning, KIs reported a number of needed core non-food items that are not available in the city: cooking fuel, torches, batteries, diapers, sanitary pads, soap and detergent.

### Electricity

- **Due to lack of diesel to run generators, electricity is now completely unavailable in the city.** The main network is not providing power and, although remaining residents were previously accessing two hours of electricity per day via community generators, diesel is reportedly no longer available to run them.

3. Exchange rate used is UN Operational Exchange Rate of 1 USD = 514.85 SYP as of 1 October 2017.

4. Cases are reported by KIs and are not confirmed by medical professionals. Both KIs and members of the data collection team reported witnessing individuals arriving from the city that seemed to be exhibiting signs of malnutrition, such as shivering.

5. Data was collected for each individual neighbourhood once. In some cases, KIs reported on multiple neighbourhoods.

## WASH

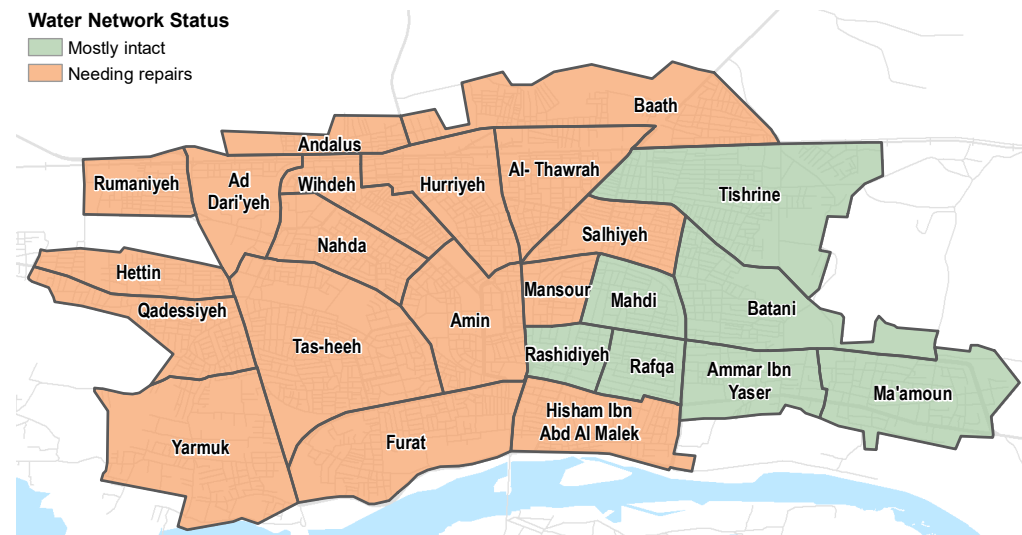
### Water access and quality

- As reported previously, **the sole source of water in Ar-Raqqa is neighbourhood boreholes**. There are now reportedly only two functioning boreholes in Hurriyeh and only one functioning borehole in Nahda. In both neighbourhoods, because there is no longer access to community electricity, the submersible pumps that enable boreholes to pump water can only run if residents provide their own supply of fuel and private generators.
- The availability of water has reportedly decreased and almost no one has enough water for their needs**. In both Hurriyeh and Nahda neighbourhoods KIs reported that residents are reducing drinking water consumption, modifying their hygiene practices and drinking water usually used for other purposes, like washing.
- The quality of the water is reportedly poor**. In both remaining populated neighbourhoods, KIs reported that people are getting sick from the water.

### Water infrastructure

- The main water network is reportedly in need of repairs in many parts of the city**, due to damage caused by the digging of trenches, airstrikes and shelling and despite the fact that most infrastructure is underground. KIs reported that the network has only partial functionality and is in need of repairs in 17 out of 24 neighbourhoods, an increase of three neighbourhood since the last assessment.

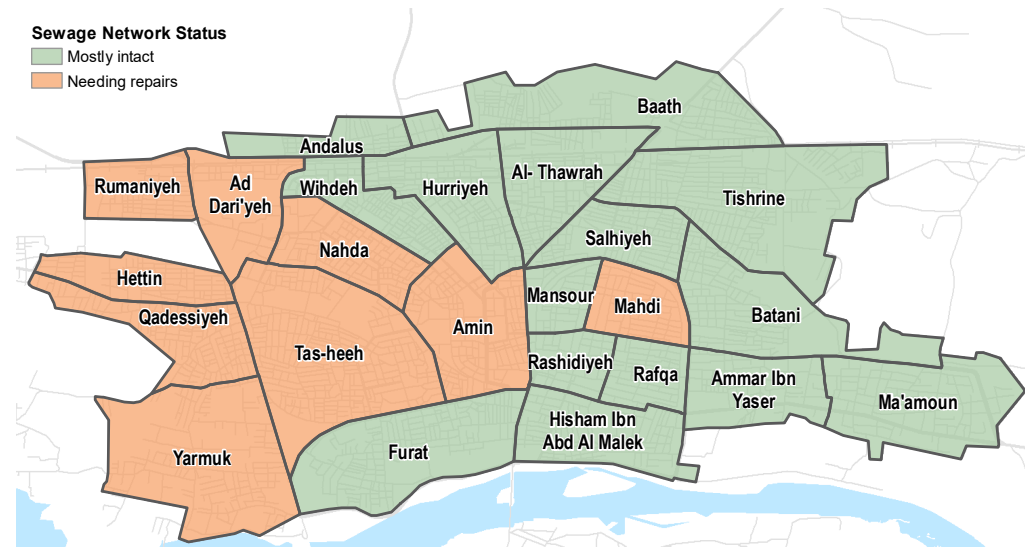
Map 6: Reported status of water network in neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city



## Sanitation

- In both Hurriyeh and Nahda neighbourhoods, KIs reported the presence of garbage in the streets**. Garbage is not collected or disposed of in either neighbourhood.
- The sewage infrastructure is reportedly in adequate condition**. KIs reported that major sewer lines were in place and functional in 15 out of 24 neighbourhoods in the city.

Map 7: Reported status of sewage networks in neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city



### 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.

For more information, visit [www.reach-initiative.org](http://www.reach-initiative.org)