

# Ar-Raqqa City, Syria - Situation Overview V

25 September 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 three and a half months of ground fighting supported by airstrikes, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have taken control of all but a few of Ar-Raqqa city's inner neighbourhoods, recently seizing control of the entirety of the Old City (see Map 2).

This report is the fifth 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 19 and 20 September through qualitative interviews and participatory mapping exercises with nine key informants (KIs) who had left the city since 1 September, reporting on all 24 neighbourhoods in Ar-Raqqa.

Previous assessments can be found here:

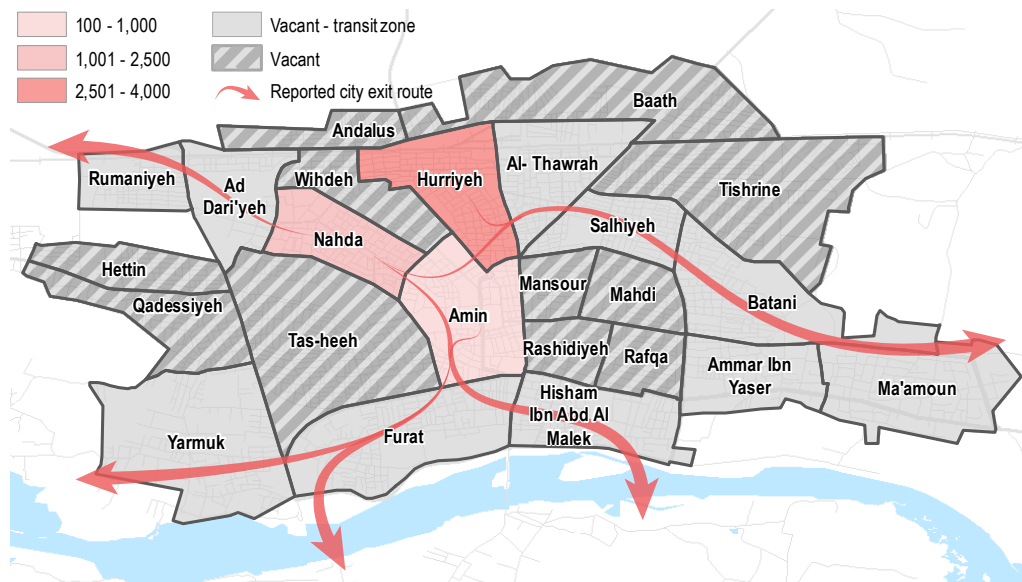
[Ar-Raqqa City Situation Overview IV – 17 August 2017](#)

[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:

- **Since the previous assessment one month ago, departures from Ar-Raqqa city have continued, with KIs estimating that the remaining population has decreased from up to 22,000 persons to a maximum of 8,000 persons.** The conflict has led to the depopulation of four more neighbourhoods since the last assessment, leaving just two out of 24 inhabited by civilians (Nahda and Hurriyeh, see Map 1).<sup>1</sup>
- **The SDF has continued to facilitate civilians' departure from the city through a number of exit routes (see Map 1),** while also allowing temporary visits for civilians living in ten of the city's neighbourhoods to check on property and assets.
- **There have been no recorded returns to the city.** Many neighbourhoods are restricted to military access only and are heavily contaminated with mines and unexploded ordnance. KIs reported that a small number of returns to neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city may be possible in the next month.
- **Those left in the city remain directly at risk from the conflict,** facing threats such as airstrikes, sniper fire, mines and improvised explosives, while children are also reportedly being targeted for recruitment by armed groups.
- **There is just one functioning bakery in the city and there are no longer any functioning markets.** Residents are reportedly taking food from the abandoned houses of those who have already fled the city. This food is rarely sufficient to meet the needs of those who remain. Access and security restrictions continue to prevent commercial and humanitarian access into the city.
- **Health services are effectively non-existent in the city.** The one facility that was functioning (National Hospital) one month ago is no longer providing services. Civilians are completely unable to meet medical needs.
- **Boreholes are the sole source of water, but do not provide sufficient volumes to meet the needs of those who remain in the city.** To cope, residents are reducing water consumption and modifying hygiene practices. The available water is of poor quality and has reportedly led to sickness. Repairs to the water network are reportedly needed in 14 out of 24 neighbourhoods.
- **Private generators provide up to two hours of electricity per day in the two remaining populated areas.** The main power network is not functioning and much of the infrastructure (wires, transformers etc.) is damaged.
- **There is a high level of shelter damage across the city, especially in central areas.** In 14 of the 24 neighbourhoods, the damage was reported by KIs as extensive (i.e. more than half of the shelters are unsafe to live in).

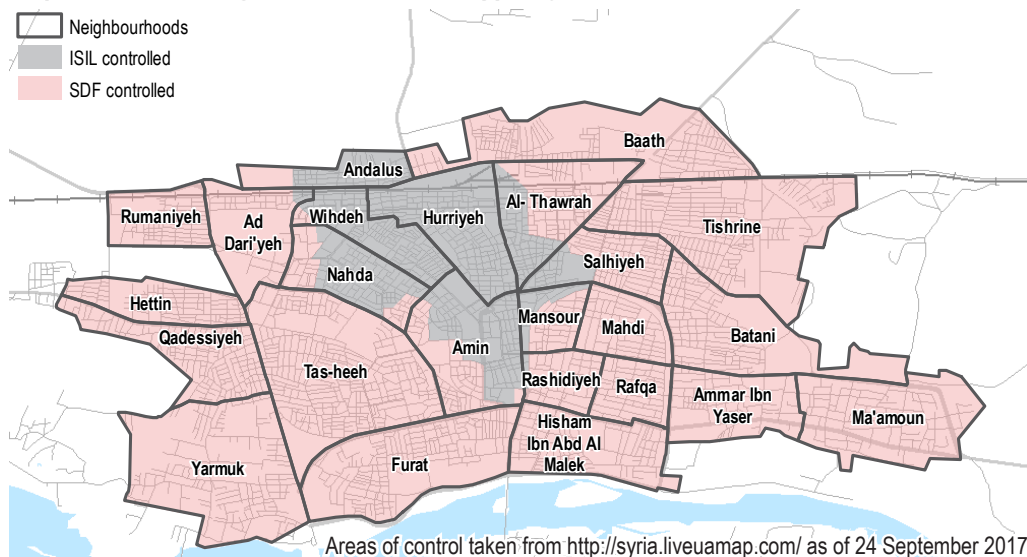
1. At the time of data collection, three neighbourhoods were inhabited. However, reports indicate that the neighbourhood of Amin is now fully depopulated.

## 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 2). As the SDF has advanced, the vast majority of the population has vacated Ar-Raqqa city, with only two neighbourhoods<sup>2</sup> still inhabited (Hurriyeh and Nahda) by an estimated total of 5,000 – 8,000 persons. The humanitarian situation has deteriorated significantly as conflict has intensified in these last remaining ISIL-controlled 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 fifth assessment conducted, covering population movements (including potential returns), access to food and markets, shelter, non-food items (NFIs), WASH and health services, and the protection situation within the city.

Map 2: Assessed neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city



Information was collected between 19 and 20 September through direct qualitative interviews and participatory mapping exercises with nine Key Informants (KIs) who had recently left the city, reporting at the neighbourhood level on all 24 neighbourhoods of the city. KIs included civil society leaders and local council members. The information in this situation overview should be considered as indicative only.

## DISPLACEMENT

### Population remaining in the city

- **Residents continue to leave the city.** KIs estimate that the city's remaining population is now between 5,000 and 8,000 people, a decrease from up to 22,000 one month ago. Those who remain are living in just two of Ar-Raqqa's 24 neighbourhoods, indicating four additional neighbourhoods have been completely vacated since the last assessment in August (see Map 1). Population estimates are extremely hard to verify due to the dynamic situation on the ground and tight controls on flows of information from ISIL-controlled areas.
- **Movement restrictions, absence of safe routes out of the city and protection of assets** are reportedly the main reasons for staying for those who remain in the city.

### Movement restrictions

- **The SDF was reportedly facilitating day visits for some residents**, to check on property in the following neighbourhoods: Ammar Ibn Yaser, Andalus, Baath, Hettin, Hisham Ibn Abd Al Malek, Ma'amoun Qadessiyeh, Rumaniyeh, Tishrine, Yarmuk.
- **There is still no humanitarian or commercial access to the city.** The presence of mines, dirt and rubble, and armed actors preventing movement are the main barriers to access cited by KIs.

### Intentions

- **Nearly all of those remaining in the city reportedly want to leave.** KIs reported that, given no barriers to movement, 76-100% of the remaining population in both Nahda and Hurriyeh neighbourhoods would depart. KIs also reported that, despite current movement restrictions and ongoing conflict, 26-50% of the remaining population in Hurriyeh and 76-100% of the remaining population in Nahda intended to leave in the next two weeks.
- **Departing persons generally intend to stay in Ar-Raqqa governorate.** KIs reported that intended destinations include Tabqa city, Tell Abiad, and Ein Issa. Qamishli city, in Al-Hasakeh governorate, was also a reported intended destination.

2. At the time of data collection, three neighbourhoods were inhabited. However, reports indicate that the neighbourhood of Amin is now fully depopulated.

- **KIs reported access to food, health services, water, and humanitarian assistance**, in addition to the safety and security situation and ties with the host community, as primary reasons for choosing intended destinations.

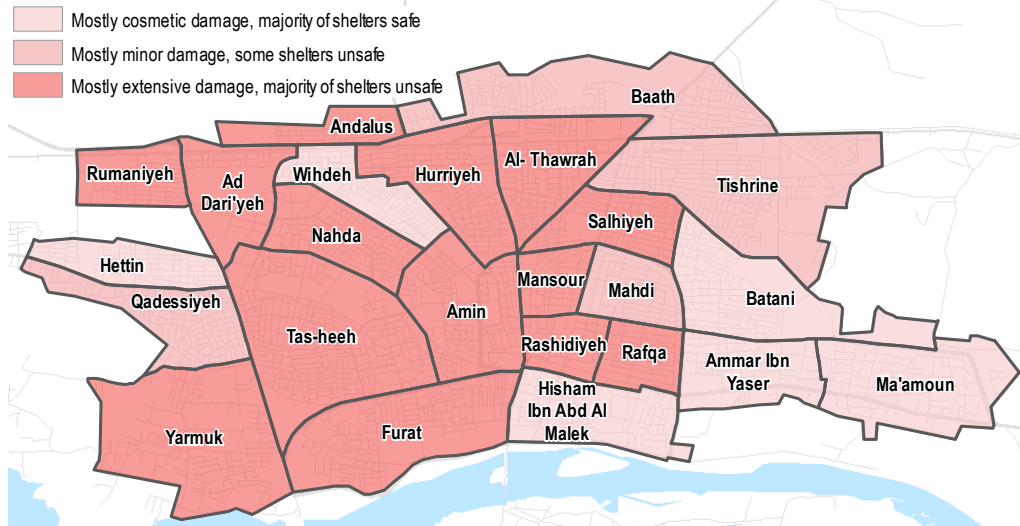
### Returns

- **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 unexploded remnants of war (URWs) 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 continue to be the most commonly reported.** Threats to residents include sniper fire, airstrikes, mines and indirect fire from mortars and artillery.
- **Children are reportedly at risk of being targeted for recruitment by armed groups.** Further risks faced by children include improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and landmines as well as psychological trauma.

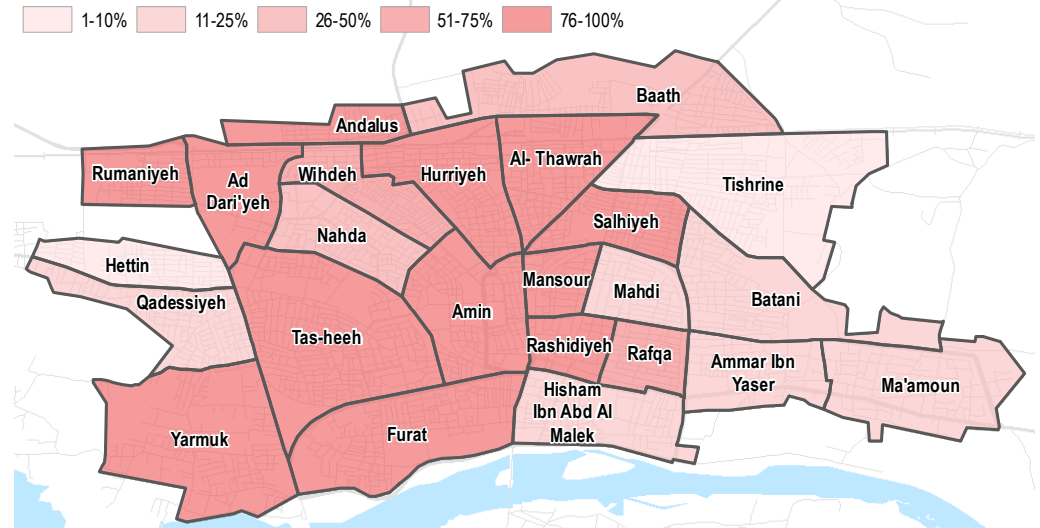
Map 3: Reported shelter damage in neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city



### SHELTER

- **Ongoing conflict has continued to damage shelters in the populated areas of the city.** There is reportedly a high level of shelter damage in central and western areas of the city. KIs reported that more than 75% of shelters are in need of repair in around half of the city's neighbourhoods (see Map 4).
- **Remaining residents are reportedly staying in houses or apartments rather than collective shelters or informal settlements.** The high number of departures from the city means the remaining residents have been able to find shelter in abandoned damaged homes. In Nahda neighbourhood, half of remaining households are reportedly living in damaged buildings and sharing with other households or in overcrowded conditions.

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

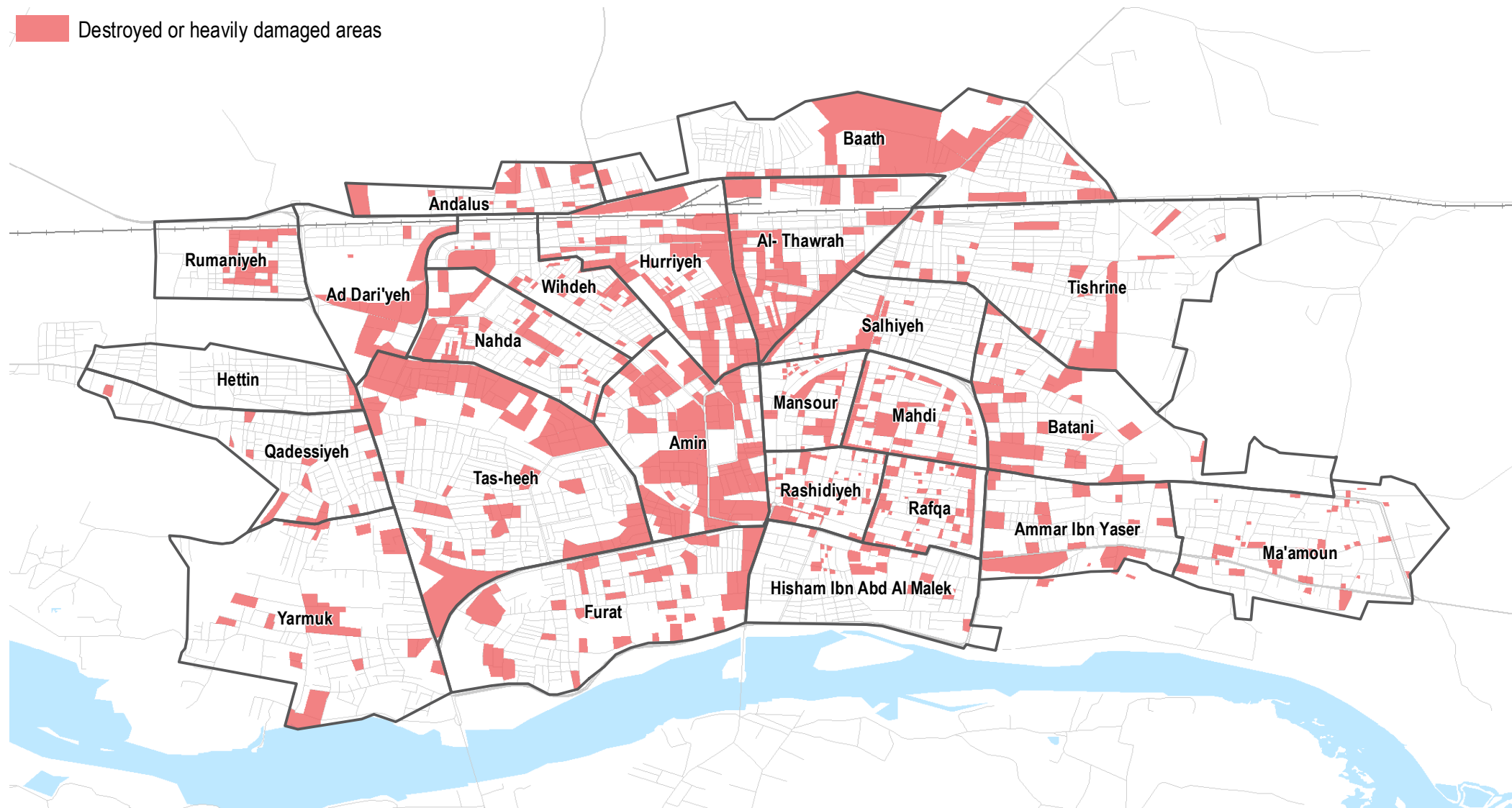


### HEALTH

- **Health services are now essentially non-existent in the city.** KIs reported that there are no health facilities available in any neighbourhood; the National Hospital, which was still providing health services one month ago, is no longer functioning.
- **KIs also reported that there are no medical personnel, equipment or supplies available to civilians in the city.** As reported in the previous assessment, there are also no informal emergency care points providing basic first aid to the population.
- **The need for health services remains high.** Residents' primary health needs are reportedly surgery, emergency care and treatment for chronic conditions.

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

Destroyed or heavily damaged areas

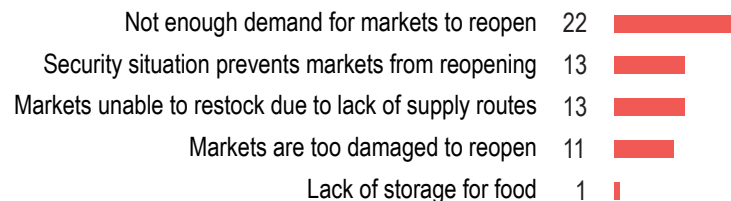


## FOOD AND MARKETS

### Access to food and market functionality

- **Similarly to the last assessment one month ago, residents are relying on food stored prior to the escalation of the conflict.** Those still in the city are able to find food in abandoned homes and shelters, but this is rarely sufficient to meet their needs.
- **There are no longer any functioning markets in the city. There is one functioning bakery.** Humanitarian actors also remain unable to provide food assistance for those who are still inside the city due to access and security issues.
- **Nearly all KIs reported that the primary barrier to markets reopening in the city is the lack of demand.** Further barriers reported by KIs are the ongoing security risks, physical damage incurred by the conflict, and the inability of markets to restock due to a lack of supply routes (see Figure 1).
- **Remaining residents continue to use food rationing strategies.** In particular, residents are skipping meals and reducing meal sizes in order to cope with limited access to and availability of food.

Figure 1: Main reported barriers to markets reopening (one response per neighbourhood<sup>3</sup>, select all that apply)



### Core food items

- **Bread is the only staple food still being produced,** though KIs reported that there is not enough to meet the needs of the remaining population. Some residents have been able to find small quantities of other staple foods such as rice and bulgur in abandoned houses.
- **Bread prices remain stable but production levels are low.** Although there is only one functioning bakery in the city, bread prices remain at 100 SYP (0.20 USD<sup>4</sup>). The bakery has reportedly been relocated to Hurriyeh neighbourhood in the past month following the destruction of the previous location during the conflict.

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)	✓	✓	100	◊	✓ Generally available / affordable
Rice (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	
Flour (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	✓ Sometimes available / affordable
Lentils (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	
Cooking Oil (litre)	✗	✗	NA	NA	✗ Not available / affordable
Sugar (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	
Meat (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	↑ Reported price increase
Chicken (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	◊ No change in price
Tomatoes (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	↓ Reported price decrease
Cucumbers (kg)	✗	✗	NA	NA	

## NFIs

### Core NFIs

- **The majority of core NFIs are now reportedly unavailable in the city as there are no longer any markets or shops selling these items.** Items reported as needed and unavailable include batteries, water containers, baby diapers, sanitary pads, and soap and detergent.

### Electricity

- **There is very limited access to electricity for those still living in the city.** The main network is not providing power and residents of Nahda and Hurriyeh can now only access two hours of electricity per day using private generators, a reduction from the two to six hours of electricity per day reported one month ago. KIs also reported that the availability of fuel for generators is very low, especially in Hurriyeh neighbourhood.

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

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

## WASH

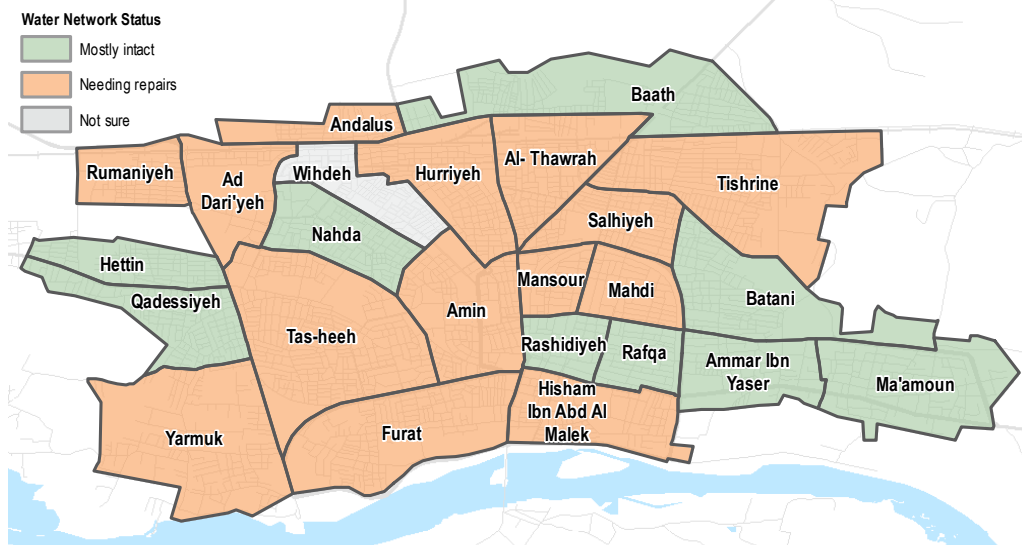
### Water access and quality

- With the main water network not functioning, **the sole source of water in Ar-Raqqa is neighbourhood boreholes.** In Nahda, most of the boreholes have reportedly been damaged in the conflict, reducing output volume and water quality.
- **The supply of water is insufficient and remaining residents are using coping mechanisms.** In Hurriyeh neighbourhood, KIs reported that almost no one has enough water for their needs. KIs reported that residents in both populated neighbourhoods are reducing water consumption and modifying hygiene practices. In Hurriyeh, residents are resorting to drinking water normally used for other purposes, like washing.
- **The quality of the water is also poor.** In both populated neighbourhoods, KIs reported the water tastes bad. In Hurriyeh, people are reportedly getting sick from the water.

### Water infrastructure

- **The main water network is reportedly in need of repairs in 14 out of 24 neighbourhoods of the city,** due to damage caused by the conflict (see Map 6).

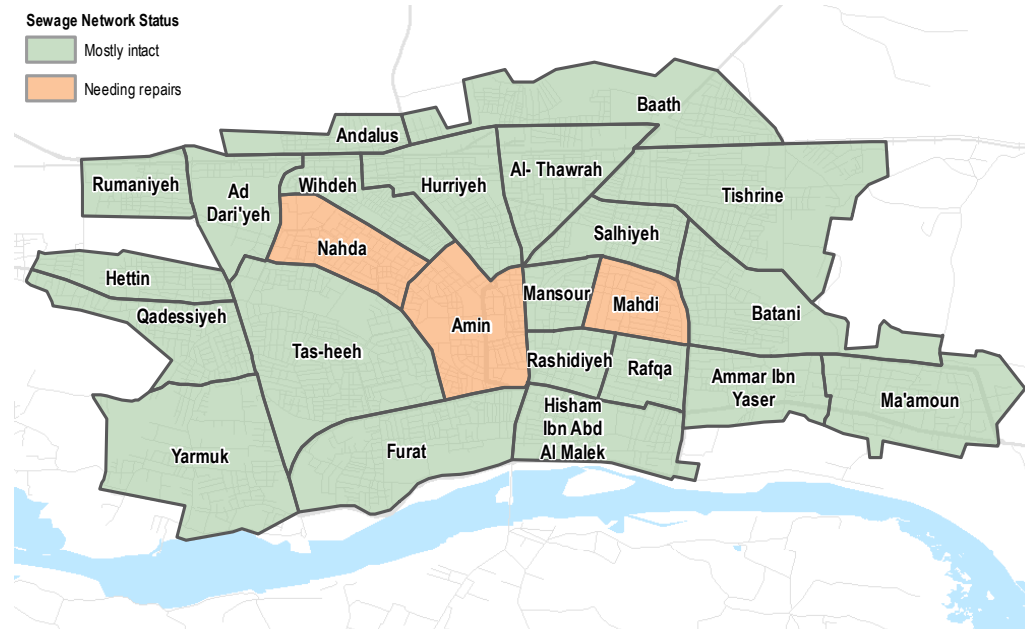
Map 6: Reported status of water network in neighbourhoods of Ar-Raqqa city



## Sanitation

- **In Nahda neighbourhood, KIs reported garbage in the streets and an infestation of rats and pests.** In Hurriyeh, garbage is not being collected or disposed of.
- **The sewage infrastructure is reportedly in good condition.** KIs reported that the main sewer lines were functional in 21 out of 24 neighbourhoods in the city.

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



### About REACH

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