

Situation Overview: Displacement and Intentions of IDPs from Afrin

March 2018

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INTRODUCTION

On 20 January, a military operation was launched in Afrin district of Aleppo governorate in north-western Syria.¹ According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 324,000 persons, including 126,000 internally displaced people (IDPs), were living in the district as of 24 January 2018.² However, following the beginning of the offensive, the intensification of conflict has reportedly resulted in large-scale displacement from the area.³

Ongoing clashes in the district have significantly exacerbated the humanitarian situation in recent weeks. By late March 2018, tens of thousands of civilians reportedly left Afrin district to communities in nearby Tell Refaat sub-district, while thousands more have moved to other areas in Aleppo or to Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh governorates. As a result of the large number of arrivals to often already over-burdened communities in a short amount of time, many IDPs are in need of the most basic goods and services.⁴

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Between 27 and 29 March 2018, REACH enumerators interviewed key informants (KIs) in four communities in Ain Al Arab and Menbij sub-districts in north-eastern Aleppo governorate that had recent IDP arrivals from areas affected by the escalation of conflict in Afrin district and Tall Refaat sub-district to gather basic information about IDP arrivals from Afrin district in the two weeks prior to data collection, IDP movement patterns, and IDP intentions. KIs were selected based on their knowledge of assessed communities and IDPs from Afrin, and data was triangulated through secondary sources, where available. Between one and five KIs were interviewed per assessed community. Findings are indicative and cannot be generalised beyond the IDP population from Afrin in the assessed communities.

¹ UNOCHA, [Turkey | Syria: Recent Developments in Northwestern Syria \(Idleb Governorate and Afrin District\) \(as of 23 January 2018\)](#)

² UNHCR, [Syria: Flash Update on Recent Events, 24 January 2018](#).

³ UNOCHA, [Turkey | Syria: Recent Developments in Northwestern Syria \(Idleb Governorate and Afrin District\) \(as of 30 January 2018\)](#)

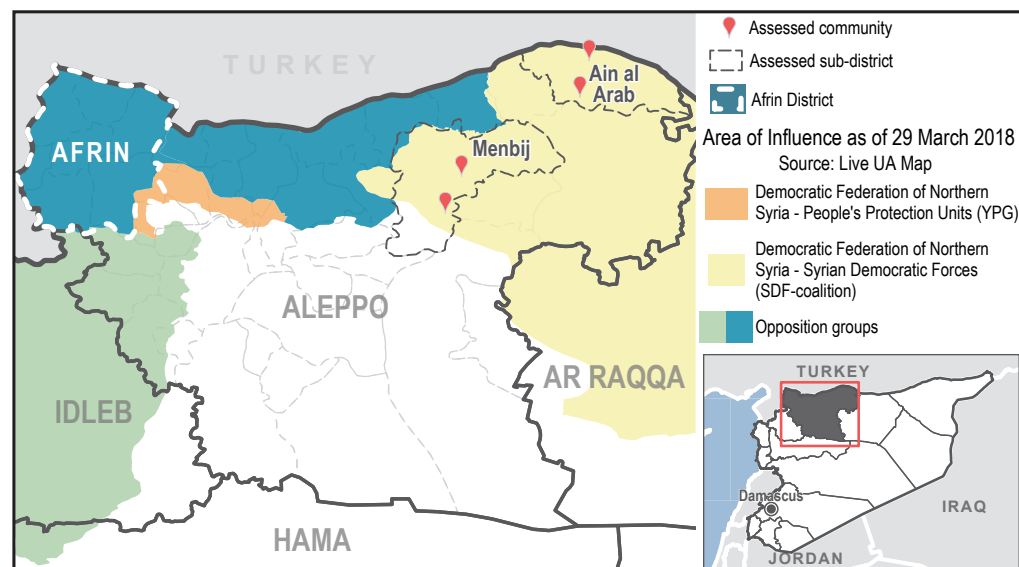
⁴ UNOCHA, [Turkey | Syria: Latest Developments in Afrin District \(as of 19 March 2018\)](#)

⁵ This refers to Afrin district and part of Tall Refaat and Nabul sub-districts.

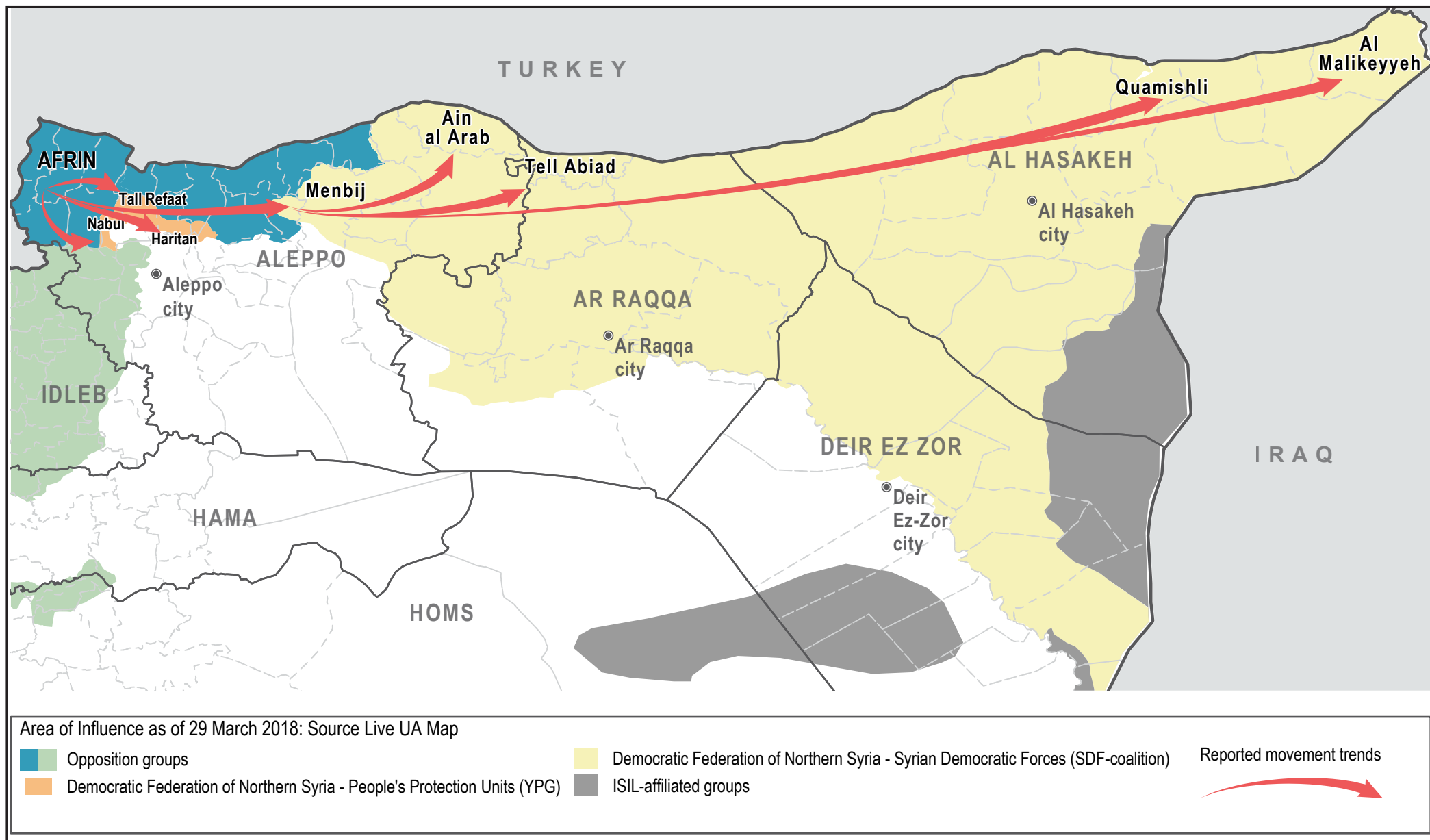
KEY FINDINGS

- Escalation of conflict was the main reported push factor driving displacement out of the Afrin region.⁵
- The main priority needs of recent IDP arrivals were reportedly healthcare, NFIs, hygiene-related items, cash-assistance and shelter.
- No IDP departures were expected in the two weeks following data collection based on the current situation and movement restrictions.
- KIs expected a large majority of IDPs to leave in case of the spread of conflict or in case of reduced access to food and health services in the assessed communities.

Assessed communities and areas of influence in northern Aleppo governorate



REPORTED MAIN DESTINATIONS FOR IDPS (15-29 March)⁶



DISPLACEMENT AND INTENTIONS

REACH enumerators interviewed KIs in four communities in north-eastern Aleppo governorate that recently had IDPs arrive from areas affected by the escalation of conflict in Afrin district and Tall Refaat sub-district. KIs were interviewed in Tafsho and Ain Al Arab in Ain Al Arab sub-district, and Big Kharufiyeh and Menbij in Menbij sub-district. Out of the four assessed communities, Big Kharufiyeh had the largest number of IDP arrivals in the last two weeks, with 220 IDP households (approximately 1,254 individuals), followed by Menbij with 85 IDP households (approximately 485 individuals).

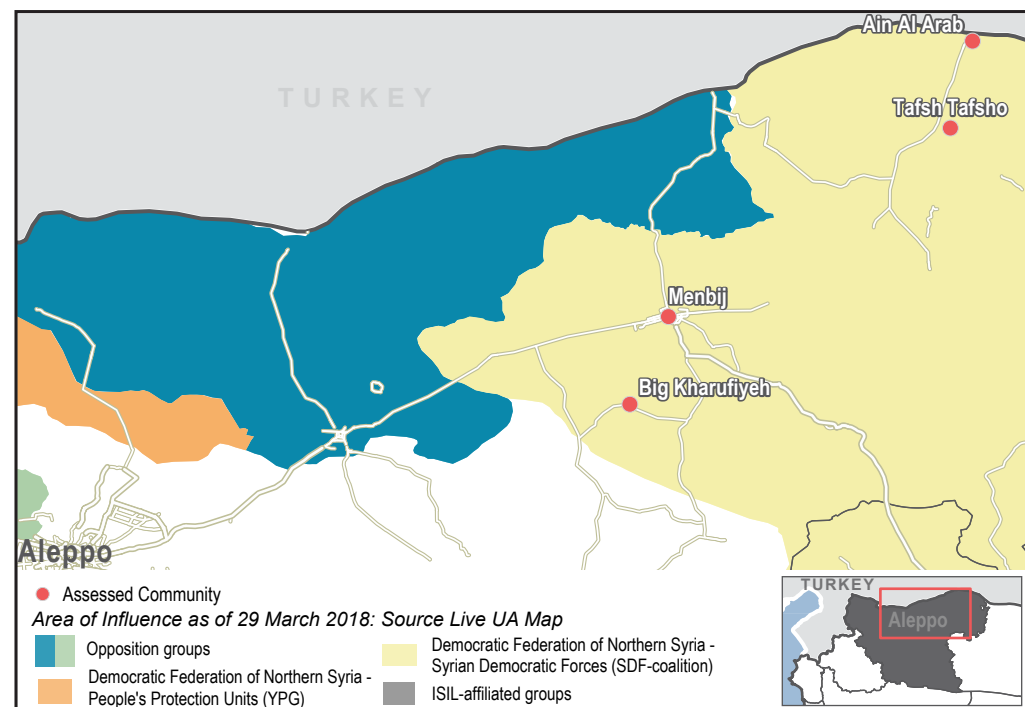
The most common profiles of recent IDP arrivals in all assessed communities were married men with their families, followed by married women with their families (children and other immediate family members) but without their husband, and the elderly. IDPs in Big Kharufiyeh most commonly lived in collective centres, while IDPs in other assessed communities most commonly lived in solid/finished houses or apartments.

The most commonly reported push factors that drove displacements from Afrin district and Tall Refaat sub-district were the escalation of conflict, the opening of safe passages out of these areas to other locations (after restrictions imposed by local authorities had previously prevented civilians from leaving the area)⁷, as well as loss of income and reduced access to food, water, and health services. According to KIs, some displacements from Tall Refaat to Menbij were secondary displacements of IDPs who had previously left communities in Idlib governorate to live in Tall Refaat.

The most common pull factors for IDPs to move to the assessed communities included the relative safety and security in the destination, the availability of safe passages to these locations, and the availability of humanitarian assistance in the destination community. The other main reported destinations were Menbij, Nabul, and Tall Refaat sub-districts in Aleppo governorate, as well as Al-Malikeyyeh and Quamishli sub-districts in Al-Hasakeh governorate and Tell Abiad sub-district in Ar-Raqqa governorate.

While travelling to the assessed communities, IDPs faced several risks and barriers. The most commonly reported challenges were gunfire and shelling. Other reported risks included detention and movement restrictions in certain areas of northern Aleppo governorate. UN reports indicated that IDPs were prevented from movement to Aleppo city for medical or other reasons by local authorities,⁸ and KIs reported that onward movement to other areas was often subject to expensive fees.

Assessed communities in Menbij and Ain Al Arab sub-districts



The most pressing priority needs for IDPs in assessed communities were healthcare, NFIs, food, hygiene-related items, cash-assistance, and shelter. Other reported priority needs included water, baby formula,⁹ as well as care for the elderly.¹⁰ KIs also reported that even when shelter was available, IDPs were not always able to pay for it as some landlords reportedly exploited the heightened demand for shelter, due to the influx of vulnerable IDPs, by charging higher rents.

In terms of movement intentions, KIs did not expect IDPs to leave assessed communities within the two weeks following data collection, based on the current situation in assessed communities and in the areas of origin. However, KIs indicated that the large majority of IDPs would leave their current location in case of an escalation of conflict or in case of reduced access to food and reduced access to health services in the community. Most commonly, KIs expected IDPs to move further east to communities in Al-Hasakeh or Ar-Raqqa governorates in case of a deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

⁷ UNOCHA, [Turkey | Syria: Latest Developments in Afrin District \(as of 19 March 2018\)](#)

⁸ UNOCHA, [Syrian Arab Republic: Afrin Flash Update No. 2](#), 29 March 2018

⁹ According to the Whole of Syria Nutrition Sector, the distribution of breast milk substitutes should be avoided at all costs, and breastfeeding should be encouraged unless it has been determined via objective methods that there are infants in a given area that cannot be fed with breast milk.

¹⁰ KIs were able to report up to three main priority needs per assessed community