

REACH Situation Overview: Displacement from Dar'a Governorate, Syria

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REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

Introduction

Conflict in Dar'a governorate, southern Syria, has rapidly escalated over the past three months. **Conflict intensification and spread in recent weeks have resulted in complex displacement of civilians across the area**¹. While exact numbers of affected people are not confirmed, OCHA estimates that more than 43,000 people had been displaced as of 10 February.¹ The Food Security Cluster has estimated that up to 100,000 will be displaced as conflict continues.²

Over the course of the past three months, there has been significant movement between eastern and western Dar'a as conflict has shifted. **Populations from the various conflict areas have reportedly moved south towards the border with Jordan, east towards Quneitra and to other unaffected communities within Dar'a governorate**³. Communities reportedly affected by the escalation of conflict include Dar'a, Sheikh Miskine, Dar'a al Balad, Tafas, Eastern Ghariyeh, Western Ghariyeh, Nawa, Abtaa, Jomleh, Kherbet Ghazala, Izra, al-Sanamayn, Jizeh, Busra esh Sham, Da'el, Hrak and Neimeh. Currently, communities receiving IDPs include Tassil, Sheik Saed, Sayda, Nasib, Ash Sharaja, Tiba, Moraba, Sahwa and Tal Shihab.^{1,2,3,4}

Hospitals and schools within affected areas have been targeted, resulting in the disruption of vital services for populations. Although

humanitarian actors have continued cross-border distributions, the rapid increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and fluctuating caseload is posing challenges for the planning and delivery of assistance.

On 15-16 February REACH conducted a rapid assessment of displacement patterns across the south of Dar'a governorate, in order to understand displacement to date, intentions and priority needs of those recently displaced, as well as those remaining in conflict-affected areas. Information presented in this document was drawn from qualitative interviews with 25 key informants in 18 communities in Dar'a. Key informants included local community workers, teachers, engineers, traders, farmers and social workers. In this assessment, targeted communities are grouped according to whether they have experienced significant inward or outward movement in the last two weeks (Tables 1 and 2).

Assessed communities include those which were most affected by the recent escalation in conflict, as well as those receiving IDPs as a result. However, it was not possible to assess all affected communities, due to inability to obtain information from KIs during the timeframe of the assessment, and difficulties communicating with KIs due to network coverage within their communities. Therefore, findings in this document are specific to communities assessed and cannot be generalised further.

Table 1: Reported outward displacement from assessed communities*

| Severity tier and estimated pop change | Community | Displacement since | Movement to |
|---|------------------|---|---|
| Tier 1 Significant outward movement (greater than 50% population decrease) | Ataman | Not assessed as no people reportedly remaining. | 1) Tal Shihab 2) Jlein 3) Hit |
| | Western Ghariyeh | 1 Feb | 1) Karak 2) Sahwa 3) Sayda |
| Tier 2 Substantial outward movement (30-50% population decrease) | Tafas | 7 Feb | 1) Hit 2) Jlein 3) Sahn el Golan |
| | Sheikh Miskine | 1 Feb | 1) Abtaa 2) Da'el 3) Nawan |
| | Eastern Ghariyeh | 1 Feb | 1) Karak 2) Sayda 3) Sahwa |
| | Dar'a al Balad | 1 Feb | 1) Tal Shihab 2) Tiba 3) Ash Shajara |
| Tier 3 Some outward movement (5-20% population decrease) | Nawa | 9 Feb | 1) Tassil 2) Quneitra 3) Jlein |
| | Sura | 10 Feb | 1) Western Maliha 2) Western Ghariyeh 3) Mataeiye |
| | Busra esh Sham | 8 Feb | 1) Moraba 2) Tiba 3) Tal Shihab |

*Based on difference between estimated no. of households prior to January 31st and following inward/outward movement, as reported by KIs

1 OCHA (ISWG). 'Displacement since Sheikh Miskine Offensive: Humanitarian Response Update'. February 14, 2016

2 Food Security Cluster. 'Food Security Flash Update 3: Displacement in Dar'a, Syria'. February 12, 2016

3 UNHCR. 'Flash Update on Aleppo, Idlib and Dar'a'. February 14, 2016.

4 Unassessed communities; A Abtaa, Alma, Atman, Da'el, Edwan, Izra, Jaber, Jassim, Jizeh, Kahil, Karak, Kherbet Ghazala, Maroba, Mataiye, Msreib, Msreifa, Neimeh, Sahn al Golan, Sahwa, Tafas, Yadudeh, Zayzun. Unassessed communities receiving IDPs; Quneitra governorate, Ruwashed

Map 1: Reported displacement in assessed communities in Dar'a Governorate

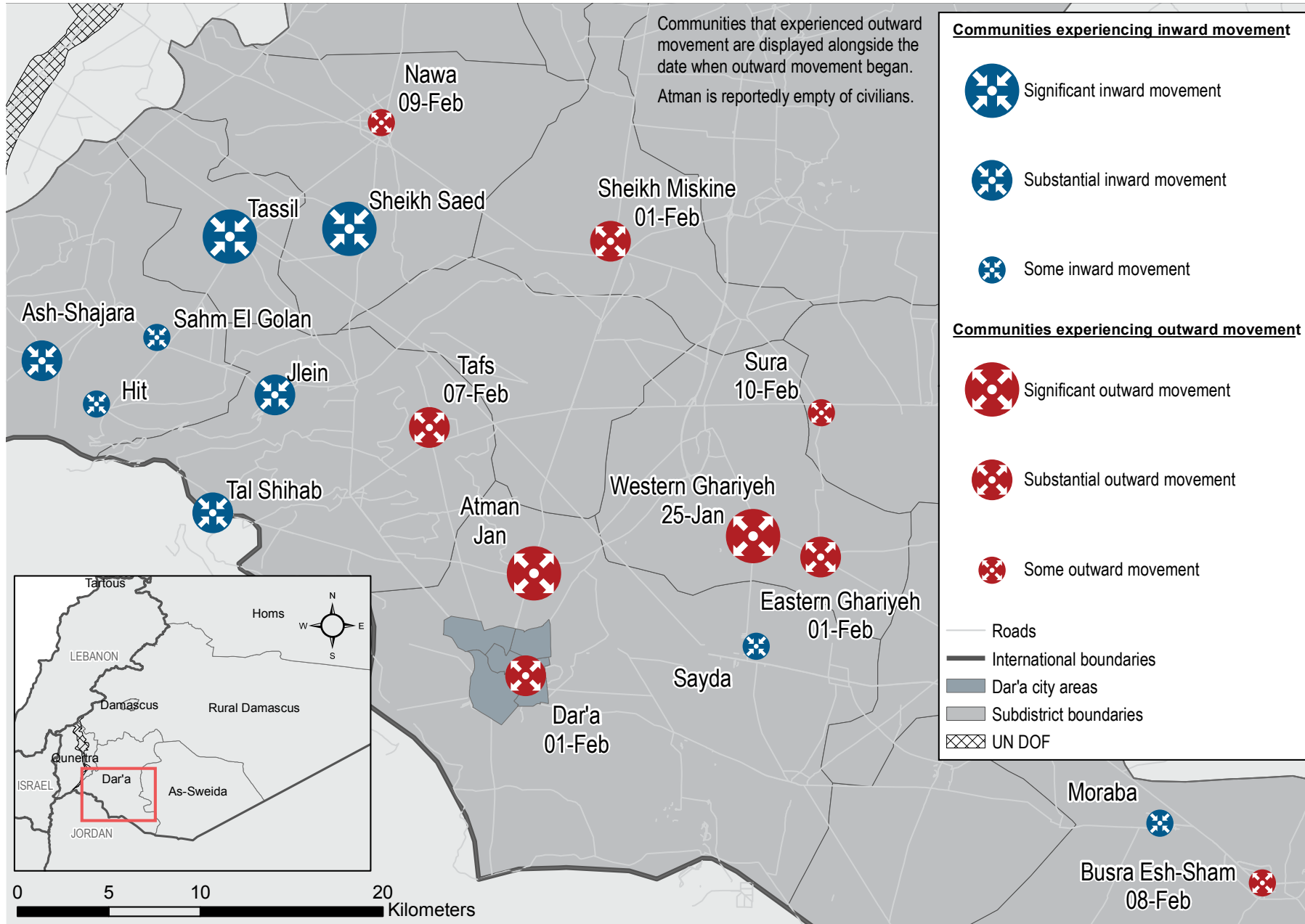


Table 2: Reported inward displacement to assessed communities*

| Severity tier and estimated pop change | Community | Displacement since | Movement from |
|---|---------------|--------------------|--|
| Tier 1 Significant inward movement (greater than 8% increase) | Tassil | 2 Feb | 1) Sheikh Miskine 2) Tafas 3) Abtaa |
| | Sheikh Saed | 1 Feb | 1) Sheikh Miskine 2) Abtaa 3) Tafas |
| Tier 2 Substantial inward movement (4-8% increase) | Jlein | 8 Feb | 1) Tafas 2) Ataman 3) Sheikh Miskine |
| | Tal Shihab | 8 Feb | 1) Ataman 2) Yadudeh 3) Sheikh Miskine |
| | Ash Shajara | 5/6 Feb | 1) Abtaa 2) Nawa 3) Dar'a al Balad |
| Tier 3 Some inward movement (up to 4% increase) | Sahm el Golan | 1 Feb | 1) Sheikh Miskine 2) Da'el 3) Nawa |
| | Hit | 6 Feb | 1) Tafas 2) Ataman 3) Sheikh Miskine |
| | Moraba | 9 Feb | 1) Busra esh Sham 2) Jizeh |
| | Sayda | 4 Feb | 1) Sahwa 2) Neimeh 3) Alma |

*Based on difference between estimated no. of households prior to January 31st and following inward/outward movement, as reported by KIs

Key findings

Escalating conflict across Dar'a has led to complex movements of people. As the situation changes on a daily basis, key informants reported that **displaced and remaining populations are continually assessing the conflict situation** to determine whether to remain within their present location, return to their villages, or move to another area within the governorate.

Displacement

Between 20-30% of households in the assessed conflict-affected communities are estimated to have fled since January 31st, with escalating conflict and insecurity reported as the main reasons for displacement. In the majority of locations, reactive displacement occurred as people moved to escape violence, though some migrated in anticipation of armed conflict.

Typically, recently displaced groups consist of whole families fleeing together (on average 4-8 people), travelling in small groups of between 2 and 9 households. Many were forced to flee at short notice, leaving goods and assets behind either as they were unable to pack and carry many belongings, or because they were intending to return soon. Profiles of those remaining in conflict-affected communities differ from those who have left; people remaining are typically single men and the elderly, with an average household size between 2 and 4 people.

Displacement routes have mirrored conflict dynamics, with **end locations determined primarily by their relative safety**, and the security of available routes to reach them. IDPs reportedly used both main roads and smaller agricultural trails to access their location of displacement.

One large movement occurred from areas affected by significant conflict since the end of January in the centre of the governorate, east of the M5 highway, including Eastern Ghariyeh and Western Ghariyeh. People from these locations generally headed south-east towards Karak, Sayda and Sahwa. More recently, as conflict reached nearby locations such as Sayda, people from these locations have also begun to head south towards communities near the border with Jordan such as Mataeyeh. However, patterns of movement have become less clear-cut, with people also reportedly heading northwards to communities on the border of As Sweida governorate, such as Western Maliha.

A second major displacement flow occurred from areas west of the M5 highway. People affected by conflict in Sheikh Miskine have been moving outwards since January, heading to nearby areas in the south such as Abtaa and Da'el, and westwards towards Nawa. More recently, people have started moving away from communities to the west of Sheikh Miskine (both northwards such as Nawa and southwards such as Dar'a al Balad and Tafs). These people are primarily heading westwards, towards communities perceived to be relatively safe such as Tassil, Sahm el Golan, Jlein, Tal Shihab (also popular due to the proximity to the Jordanian border), Ash Shajara and Hit. KIs also reported IDPs intending to move further west, towards Quneitra governorate.

Private cars and tractors were commonly used to travel, with some use of motorcycles, vegetable trucks and public transportation. The average cost of travel was estimated to be 25,000 SYP (\$73)⁵, ranging from 7,000 SYP (\$30)⁵ to 70,000 SYP (\$210)⁵ depending on location. In half of locations assessed, people received assistance from local authorities, in the form of advice on the safest routes to take (in some cases securing roads or ensuring roads were safe to travel) and assistance in obtaining transport (in some places providing the transport).

INTENTIONS

Recently displaced people

On average, **three quarters of recently displaced people are reportedly not in**

⁵ \$1 = 334 SYP, UN operational rates of exchange as of 1 Feb 2016

location in the immediate term. Across assessed communities, between 50% and 100% of recently displaced people intend to stay, primarily due to the relative safety in these locations, a key pull factor common to all communities assessed. Between 20 and 35% of people in Tal Shihab, Jlein and Hit are reportedly in transit, with their intended destinations being Jordan, locations near the Jordanian border or other villages. Many IDPs are still unsure of future movements and did not specify an intended location.

The amount of time that people are planning to stay in their current locations is highly dependent on the evolving conflict. The majority would be willing to leave in 1-3 months if the conflict were to subside in their previous location. KIs reported that some IDPs in Hit, Sayda and Tall Shihab would be willing to stay for up to one year, due to good relationships with the host community and the perception that there are services, shelter and livelihood opportunities in these locations.

For the small proportion of IDPs planning to return to their pre-February locations in the immediate term (between 10% and 40% across assessed communities), the security situation is the main factor affecting their ability and decision to do so. If the security situation stabilises, these people will reportedly return to their pre-February locations within the next month.

INTENTIONS

Remaining populations

Across communities assessed, it is estimated that **45% of the remaining population plans to leave in the next two weeks.** This varies across communities: in those which the largest proportion of the population are planning to leave, Sheikh Miskine (90%) and Western Ghariyeh (50%), conflict has been ongoing since January is a key push factor. In communities which report a lower proportion planning to leave (Tafas, Nawa, Sura), escalation of conflict has occurred more recently and a trigger factor would be the fear of direct proximity with ground troops towards the village or further escalation of conflict. Therefore, it is likely that the proportion of people planning to leave will change depending on the evolution of the conflict.

Those that are planning to remain are **primarily staying to protect property and other assets, remain with relatives or due to a lack of financial capacity.** Their main income sources are from agriculture and remittances. No groups were reportedly restricted from leaving the community.

NEEDS

Communities with inward displacement

The most commonly reported priority short-term need for recently arrived IDPs in communities assessed was shelter (reported in Sheikh Saed, Tassil, Jlein, Tall Shihab, Hit and Sahm el Golan), followed by food, and then blankets and clothing. At the time of the assessment, only one community experiencing

significant inward movement (Sayda) reported that aid organisations are assisting IDPs.

Before the influx of IDPs, the shelter situation in assessed communities was relatively stable, with IDPs most commonly living in independent or shared houses / apartments⁶. However, the recently arrived are resorting to living in tents in Tal Shihab and Sheikh Saed, and collective shelters in Jlein, Tall Shihab, Hit, Tassil and Sayda. In Tassil, which has received a significant amount of IDPs relative to the pre January 31st population, there is no further space in collective shelters.

Goods are able to enter into all communities assessed, and in all communities with the exception of Tal Shihab, core food and non-food items were available, including rice, bulgur, flour, bread and fuel. However, prices of some items have reportedly increased in the past two weeks (prices of all items have increased in Hit, Jlein and Tal Shihab). Further, **the recently displaced generally do not have access to cash; some are receiving remittances from outside of the country, but the majority do not, which is likely to further reduce access to goods.**

Across communities assessed, the recently displaced reportedly had access to water, primarily through trucking. However, in Sayda and Tal Shihab the amount available was reportedly insufficient. The quality of water in these locations may also be an issue, as before the influx, water in Tal Shihab reportedly made some people sick when drinking, while in Sayda there were reports of water tasting or

smelling bad.⁶

Health facilities were generally functioning, with the exception of Sheikh Saed and Sayda communities, where more than 50% of facilities have reportedly been destroyed. Medical personnel (including doctors, surgeons and nurses) are available in the majority of communities assessed. However, **certain medicines were unavailable across all communities, in particular antibiotics, painkillers and medicine for chronic diseases** (diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure). In Ash Shajara and Jlein, medicine was reported as a top priority need.

NEEDS

Communities with outward movement

The priority short-term needs for the remaining population differ across communities that have seen significant outwards movement. Aid agencies are assisting the remaining population in Tafs, though not elsewhere.

In Sheikh Miskine, Dar'a al Balad, Western Ghariyeh and Eastern Ghariyeh, which have seen the most significant outward movement, food assistance was a top reported priority short-term need. In Nawa, Sura and Busra esh Sham, where households have begun to leave relatively recently, items such as cooking utensils, plastic sheeting, and clothing were the top reported short-term needs.

Although all communities reportedly had access to water, again primarily through trucking, the quantity of available water in Dar'a al Balad,

Western Ghariyeh, Eastern Ghariyeh and Sheikh Miskine was reportedly not sufficient to meet the needs of the remaining population. In Nawa, Sura, Busra esh Sham and Tafs, sufficient water was reportedly available.

Goods were able to enter all communities assessed, with the exception of Sheikh Miskine. Core food items and fuel were also widely available, with the exception of Sheikh Miskine, Western Ghariyeh and Tafas, which have seen the most significant decrease in population of communities assessed. With the exception of those in Tafs and Sheikh Miskine, all remaining populations are reported to have access to cash and cooking fuel. However, all communities have seen an increase in prices over the past two weeks. The prices of all items has reportedly increased in Tafas, Western Ghariyeh, Busra esh Sham, Eastern Ghariyeh and Dar'a al Balad.

Health facilities were fully or partially destroyed in Sheikh Miskine, Western Ghariyeh and Busra esh Sham. With the exception of Sheikh Saed and Sayda, some medical personnel (including doctors, surgeons and nurses) were available to the assessed communities. However, **certain medicines were unavailable across communities, in particular antibiotics, painkillers and medicine for chronic diseases** (diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure). Medicine was reported by KIs to be a top short-term priority need in Tafas, Nawa and Sheikh Miskine.

Conclusion

Widespread conflict across Dar'a governorate has caused **complex and volatile displacement patterns**. There have been two major streams of movement: one westward, split into people migrating towards to communities close to Quneitra governorate and people migrating to communities close to the border with Jordan; and one eastward, towards areas that are perceived as relatively safe. **Many families have stayed within Dar'a governorate***, relocating to safer communities in the hope that conflict will subside and they will be able to return to their pre-January 31st locations.

Future movement from conflict affected communities is highly dependent on the continually evolving security situation; communities which have been under bombardment for a longer period of time are emptier and remaining populations are planning to continue to leave. Populations remaining in more recently targeted locations have less specific plans to leave, however key informants are confident that **new displacement could occur were the conflict to worsen**.

The capacity of communities hosting recently displaced arrivals is being stretched, with price rises evident within the last couple of weeks and use of collective shelters and tents becoming increasingly common in certain communities. **Shelter assistance is a top priority across assessed communities with incoming IDPs**, and the recently displaced may also be unable

to access goods due to a lack of cash and increasing prices. **In communities which have experienced significant outward movement over a longer period, food is the top short-term priority need.** For communities where outward displacement began more recently, top reported needs are clothing and household items.

REACH will continue to monitor the situation in Dar'a governorate in order to provide more detailed information on needs in hosting communities, as well assess the situation of those who have been displaced to Quneitra governorate.

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. All REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information, you can write to our global office: geneva@reach-initiative.org.

Visit www.reach-initiative.org and follow us @REACH_info.

*Note: displacement of those to Quneitra governorate has not been assessed; the situation here is reportedly very different