

Situation Overview: Menbij Displacement and Intentions

Aleppo Governorate, Syria - April 2018

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INTRODUCTION

Intensification of conflict in northwestern Aleppo governorate since January 2018¹ has led to increased uncertainty in Menbij sub-district and surrounding area, raising the potential for increased displacement in northern Syria in the coming months. Menbij has received internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Afrin district and the neighbouring sub-districts (estimated at 600-800 households in the 30 days preceding data collection), adding to the high proportion of IDPs in the sub-district (24% of the total sub-district population of 265,649 individuals).^{2,3} This, coupled with the overall scale of displacement from Afrin since the start of the year (which the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates to total 130,070 individuals),⁴ indicates that the emergence of conflict in Menbij could lead to a further increase in displacement from the region.

The fluidity of population movements has created significant information gaps on recent displacement and displacement intentions, limiting humanitarian actors' capacity to prepare their response. In order to address these information gaps and support with humanitarian planning, REACH has conducted a rapid displacement and intentions assessment in Menbij, following a [March 2018 assessment of displacement and intentions of IDPs from Afrin](#). The assessment seeks to understand recent movement and displacement intentions, as well as analyse the factors that would cause these intentions to change, with regard to scale of displacement, duration of displacement, profiles of those who would be displaced, and intended locations.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Menbij is reportedly a key transit point for IDPs between Aleppo governorate and northeast Syria, and is generally perceived to be safe relative to nearby areas.**
- **KIs reported that 600-800 households have arrived in Menbij sub-district from northwestern areas of Aleppo governorate in the 30 days preceding data collection**, specifically from Afrin district (400-500 households) and Tal Refaat/Nabul sub-districts (200-300 households).
- **Of those arrivals, around 400-500 households reportedly departed east to Ain Al Arab (Kobane) sub-district and into Ar-Raqqa governorate, rather than remaining in Menbij.**
- KIs indicated that although the preference of most of the Menbij population is to remain in the sub-district, **up to 5% may leave in the 30 days following data collection** in anticipation of conflict or future transfer of control.
- **KIs reported that the emergence of conflict could lead to the displacement of an estimated 20-40% of households in the 30 days following data collection.** The scale of the displacement would primarily depend on the intensity of the conflict as well as the parties involved.
- **Estimated movement patterns outside of the sub-district would reportedly be similar regardless of anticipated contextual developments.** The first movement phase for the majority of displaced households would be east to the nearest towns across the Euphrates river and potentially to towns in Ar-Raqqa governorate. If displacement was likely to be long-term, households would then reportedly travel further east into Ar-Raqqa governorate or to Al-Hasakeh governorate.

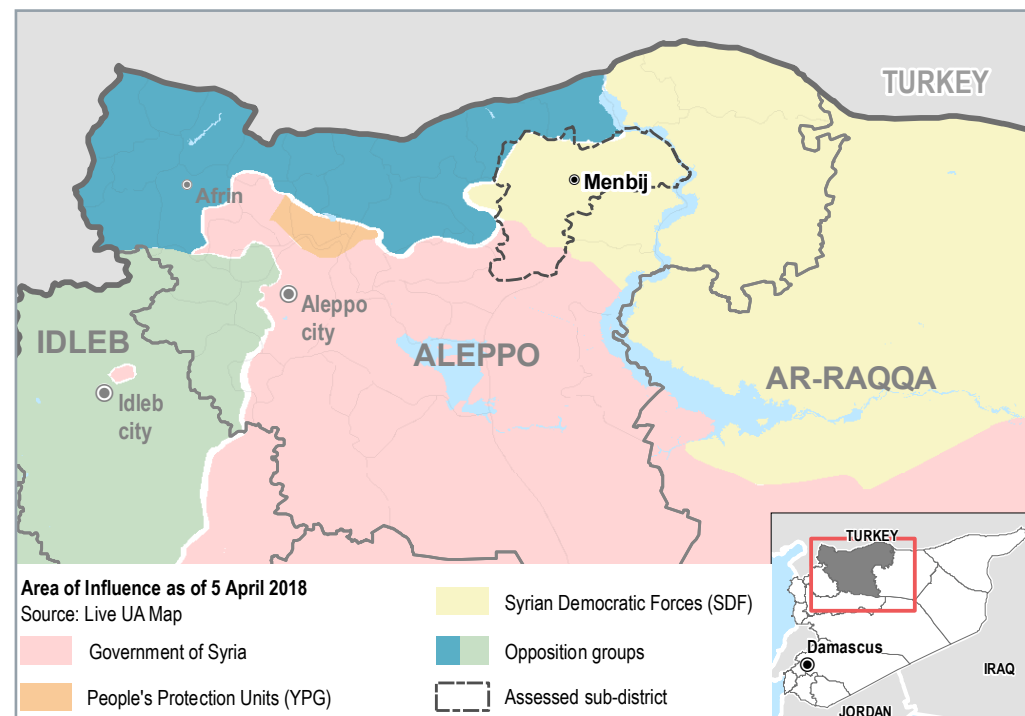
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METHODOLOGY

REACH conducted qualitative data collection for this assessment between 19 and 22 April 2018 through interviews with 10 key informants (KIs) in Menbij sub-district. KIs were selected based on their knowledge of the local population and displacement trends to, from and within the sub-district. KIs were asked to provide information about current population characteristics, recent displacement from Menbij and recent arrivals into Menbij. Further, KIs provided information on likely movement patterns according to their own understanding of the context.

Data was triangulated through secondary sources where possible. Displacement intentions were estimated by KIs; given the decision to displace is often reactionary to a constantly changing context, **the findings of this assessment should be considered as indicative only.**

Map 1: Areas of influence in northern Aleppo governorate



1. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), [Turkey | Syria: Recent Developments in Northwestern Syria \(Idleb Governorate and Afrin District\)](#), 23 January 2018.

2. UNOCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018: Syrian Arab Republic](#), November 2017.

3. The population of Menbij town was estimated to be 119,130 in the Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018. As of March 2018, local sources estimate the population was around 250,000, indicating that the overall sub-district population may have been higher at the time of data collection than the estimate shown.

4. UNOCHA, [Afrin Crisis Situation Report No.1](#), 5 April 2018.

RECENT DISPLACEMENT TRENDS

Arrivals and departures

- In the 30 days preceding data collection, **approximately 600-800 households have reportedly arrived in Menbij sub-district from northwestern areas of Aleppo**, specifically Afrin district (400-500 households) and Tal Refaat/Nabul sub-districts (200-300 households). These areas have featured heightened displacement following an escalation of conflict in the area since January 2018.
- Of those arrivals, around 400-500 households have reportedly departed east to **Ain Al Arab (Kobane) sub-district and into Ar-Raqqa governorate**, rather than remaining in Menbij. KIs also noted that a small number of host community households have departed in the 30 days preceding data collection (50-60 households) and a small number of IDPs displaced from Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor governorates have returned to their areas of origin (30-40 households).

Barriers to movement

- KIs reported that there have been no restrictions on movement within or out of Menbij sub-district in the 30 days preceding data collection, except for in front-line areas and areas that are yet to be cleared of mines.
- The high cost of transport to other governorates is reportedly impeding poorer families' ability to leave the sub-district.

Pull factors

- As a major city in the area, Menbij is reportedly a key transit point for IDPs between Aleppo governorate and northeast Syria, and also serves as a centre of trade activity between the two regions.
- KIs reported that Menbij is generally perceived to be relatively safe in comparison with nearby areas, which has been a key factor for many of the IDPs who have displaced to the sub-district.
- Although overcrowding is reportedly widespread, KIs indicated that the perceived availability of shelters (including collective shelters) is a further pull factor to the sub-district.

Push factors

- KIs reported that the high number of IDP arrivals in the sub-district since 2011 has led to widespread overcrowding in both urban and rural areas, particularly in Menbij town.
- As a result of overcrowding, households reportedly face difficulties in accessing employment and income-earning opportunities. For IDP households and poorer host community households with few assets or property, this has reportedly been a key driver for departures in the 30 days preceding data collection.

Map 2: Reported displacement movements to and from Menbij sub-district in the 30 days preceding data collection



INTENTIONS

Current movement intentions

- If the current situation remains stable and there is no emergence of conflict, **KIs indicated a preference of the population to remain in Menbij.**
- However, **KIs reported that up to 5% of the population may leave Menbij sub-district in the 30 days following data collection** in anticipation of potential conflict or future transfer of control. This anticipatory displacement would be particularly likely if any event signalled an increased probability of conflict. For host community households, displacement would be to nearby locations to the east of the Euphrates river and would potentially be short-term depending on subsequent contextual developments.
- **KIs reported that the main profiles of those to be displaced would be households consisting of women, children, and elderly household members.** Male household members would reportedly be more likely stay in Menbij to protect property and assets unless there was a perceived threat of mandatory conscription.

Scale of potential displacement

- In general, KIs were very uncertain as to how the context will change in the area, noting that the population has limited information and does not know what to expect.
- However, **KIs indicated that the emergence of conflict in Menbij sub-district would likely trigger an immediate displacement of 20-40% of the population.**

Factors affecting scale of potential displacement

- KIs indicated that, in the event of conflict, **the number of displaced persons would be primarily dependent on the likelihood of several protection-related factors:**
 - KIs reported that conflict involving parties perceived to have stringent mandatory conscription policies would lead to larger scale, longer-term displacement of households and particularly adult males. Elderly household members would reportedly be the most likely population group to remain, to protect property and assets.
 - KIs reported that conflict in which populations were treated poorly by parties to the conflict would lead to greater levels of displacement. Protection concerns reported by KIs that would increase displacement are forcible looting and theft, physical violence and detention.
- KIs also reported that in the event of conflict, households currently displaced to Menbij would be more likely to displace than host community households due to a lack of property and assets.

Locations of displacement

- In the event of conflict, there is reportedly a preference for short-term, localised movement so that households can return to properties, assets and income-generating activities.
- In general, **estimated movement patterns outside of the sub-district would reportedly be similar regardless of anticipated contextual developments.** KIs reported displacement would mostly occur in two phases:
 - **The first movement phase out of the sub-district for the majority of displaced households would reportedly be to travel eastwards across the Euphrates river, to nearby towns such as Ain Al Arab (Kobane), Tell Abiad, Jurneyyeh and Ein Issa.** The Euphrates river is perceived to be a natural barrier to the conflict and areas to the east are reportedly considered to be safer. If displacement is expected to be short-term, households will reportedly stay in these areas until it is deemed safe to return.
 - **The second phase of displacement would be to elsewhere in Ar-Raqqa governorate or areas in Al-Hasakeh governorate such as Tal Tamer, Quamishli and Al-Malikeyyeh.** The end destination would be determined following development in the conflict situation after the first phase of displacement and would be dependent on family ties and social networks. It is more likely that households will displace to these locations if short-term returns are not feasible, due to positive perceptions regarding the stability and availability of services in these areas, and proximity to border crossing points into Iraq.
- Most households reportedly perceive that they are able to access any SDF-controlled areas without restrictions. KIs also noted that a small proportion of households without adult males would potentially travel to GoS-controlled areas such as Aleppo and Damascus.

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