

# Situation Overview: Northwest Syria

NOVEMBER 2020

**REACH** Informing  
more effective  
humanitarian action

## OVERVIEW

The following situation overview aims to inform the humanitarian response through highlighting the context of residents and internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in communities, sites and settlements across non-government-held areas of Northwest Syria (NWS). To do so, multi-sector findings on key humanitarian needs are presented within broader contextual findings, such as increasing numbers of IDPs living in camps and settlements, and ongoing economic deterioration. Findings are extracted from four REACH assessments all undertaken in October and November 2020: the [Humanitarian Situation Overview in Syria \(HSOS\)](#) (data collected between 1-17 October); the [Emergency Needs Tracking \(ENT\) System](#) (data collected throughout November); the Shelter Count exercise in Dana and Jandaris sub-districts (analysis of images taken on 18 and 24 August); and the [Market Monitoring \(MM\) exercise](#) (data collected between 2-11 November). More information on data sources and methodologies can be found at the end of the overview.

## CONTEXT

**Multiple shocks over the past year have led to a socio-economic context where the people of NWS are faced with eroded employment opportunities, shortages of basic goods and services, and the resultant deterioration of household coping mechanisms.<sup>1</sup>** Extreme volatility of the Syrian Pound (SYP) to the United States Dollar (USD) exchange rate has resulted in a significant devaluation of the SYP. Currency devaluation has further led to reductions in household purchasing power, as seen through an 87% increase in the cost of the regional Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) since May 2020.

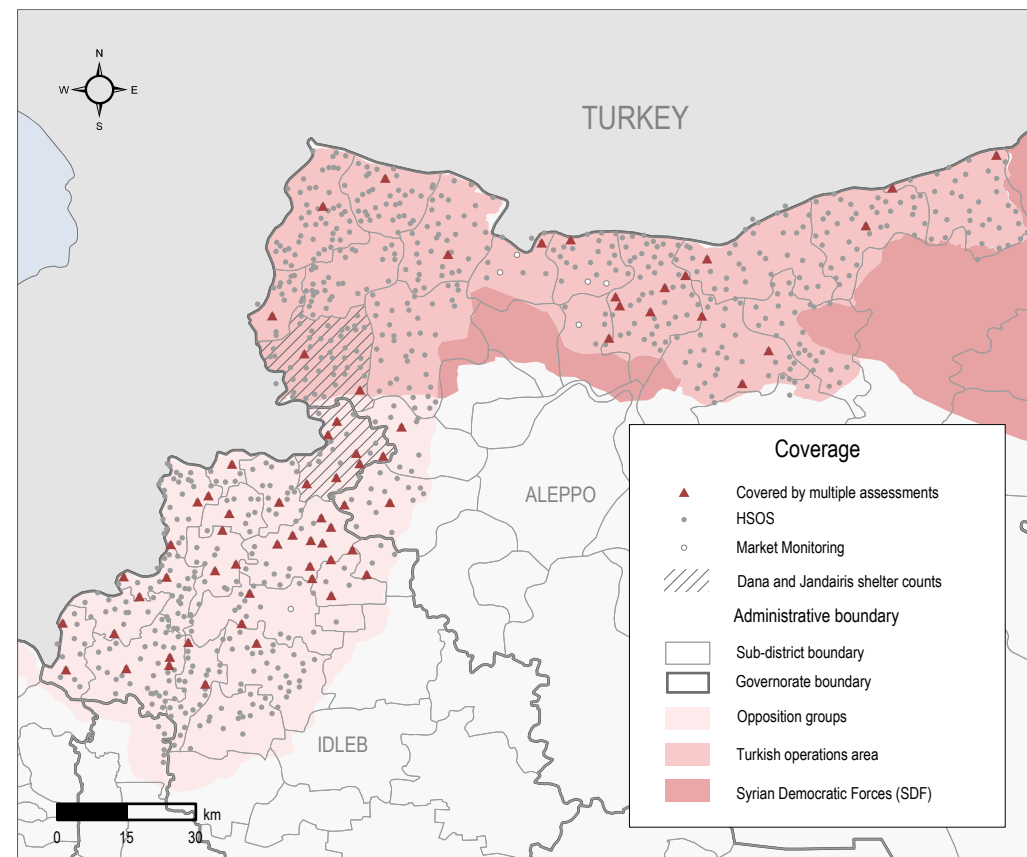
COVID-19 has had a disproportionately negative impact on households given the aforementioned context of socio-economic disintegration. COVID-19 has resulted in further supply-chain disruptions, panic buying, and restrictions on trade, industry and agriculture.<sup>2</sup> Households have also experienced COVID-19 related disruptions in access to both livelihoods and basic services. HSOS data from October shows that all livelihood sectors have been impacted, but trade-related jobs were the most impacted; key informants (KIs) in 74% of assessed communities in northern Aleppo and 56% in Idlib stated trade was either partially or totally affected. The same period saw KIs report education services closed entirely in 64% of assessed communities in Idlib and 60% in northern Aleppo.<sup>3</sup>

**Overall, the volatility of the SYP and the economic impacts of COVID-19 have made households extremely vulnerable to anticipated shocks in the coming months,** such as the onset of the winter season, an increase in violence and displacement, and/or a disruption in aid provision as a result of further loss of access.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **A lack of financial resources was found to be preventing households from meeting basic needs.** With daily labour as the most common sources of income, low wages was reported as a barrier to meeting basic needs in over 90% of assessed communities. The lack of financial resources was exacerbated by an increased regional SMEB value, reaching +87% since May.

Assessed areas and coverage (for HSOS, MM and the Shelter Count exercise):



- **The expansion and overcrowding of camps and sites create challenges in the provision of basic services, while also raising concerns over the further spread of COVID-19.** REACH shelter counts estimate an increase of roughly 13,000 IDP shelters housing 78,000 individuals in camps and sites between February and August 2020 in Dana Sub-district alone.
- **The onset of winter will be extremely challenging for newly displaced households due a reported inability to afford non-food items (NFIs).** KIs reported that new IDP arrivals primarily rely on markets or private means to purchase basic needs, and IDPs were unable to afford key NFIs in 93% of assessed locations. Connected, 85% of KIs in assessed communities stated that the preferred modality of support for newly displaced households was cash or voucher assistance.
- **Economic deterioration has forced households to resort to negative coping strategies, leading to severe protection concerns among children.** For instance, child labour and early or forced marriage were widely reported coping strategies due to a lack of household income.

<sup>1,2</sup> UNOCHA. (23 September 2020). COVID-19 Humanitarian Update No. 21. Retrieved from <https://www.reliefweb.int>.

<sup>3</sup> For further details, see Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme's (HNAP) [Regional COVID-19 Vulnerability Map](#).

### PRIORITY NEEDS<sup>4</sup>

Most commonly reported priority needs in assessed communities:

Residents (by proportion of 848 assessed communities where reported)			IDPs (by proportion of 820 assessed communities where reported)		
1	Livelihoods	76%	1	Food	66%
2	Food	53%	2	NFIs	60%
3	Health care	52%	3	Livelihoods	59%

# 81%

Livelihoods was the overall most reported priority need (indicated as first, second, or third priority need for residents and/or IDPs) in 81% of assessed communities.

In a context of low wages and high prices of basic goods, **assessed communities in NWS faced multiple livelihoods-related challenges**, while KIs in only 3% reported access to livelihood assistance. **Sectoral findings largely relate to unaffordability with barriers to accessing basic needs.** For instance, health services were reportedly unaffordable due to high transportation costs in over 50% of assessed communities. In relation to COVID-19, unaffordability of water reportedly caused many households to modify typical hygiene practices, despite communities largely recognizing the importance of hygiene practices and social distancing.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, **households were reportedly resorting to negative coping strategies for lack of income that lead to severe protection concerns**, such as child labour and early and forced marriage.

### SECTORAL FINDINGS (1)



KIs in **97%** of assessed communities reported that households were **able to access markets** within their own communities or in nearby communities (825/854).

**Food Security and Livelihoods:** Access to livelihoods was a key concern for assessed communities in NWS. While daily waged labour remained the most common source of income in the region, low wages and high prices negatively impacted the purchasing power of households, including for food. IDPs in 15% of the assessed communities reportedly accepted high risk or illegal work as a coping strategy for lack of income. However, KIs in only 3% of communities receiving aid (21/637) indicated that livelihoods support was available to households, suggesting a remaining gap between needs and the type of aid provided.



KIs in **58%** of assessed communities reported **lack of medicine at health facilities** as a barrier to accessing healthcare (470/854).

**Health:** Assessed communities in NWS experienced high prices of health services, scarcity of medical supplies, and overcrowding at health facilities. Transportation to hospitals and clinics was unavailable or unaffordable in more than half of the assessed communities, and in 40%, households reportedly could not afford health services. In nearly half of the assessed communities, KIs also indicated that overcrowding in health facilities was a barrier to accessing health care, which may complicate efforts by public health officials to promote social distancing.



**Child labour** and **early and forced marriage** were widely reported across assessed communities, either as protection risks for children or as common coping strategies for lack of income.

**Protection:** Children were particularly impacted by protection risks in NWS, including child labour and forced and early marriage. Where protection risks were reported (646 of the assessed communities), about a quarter indicated a threat from mines, unexploded ordnances, and other explosive hazards. While nearly half of assessed communities in northern Aleppo were reportedly threatened by airstrikes, fewer than 25% in Idlib experienced the same.



KIs in **46%** of assessed communities reported **unfinished or abandoned residential buildings** as one of the most common shelter types for IDPs.

**Shelter:** KIs reported shelter inadequacies in 98% of assessed communities, and lack of lighting around the shelter was the most common inadequacy for both residents and IDPs. Among the 757 assessed communities in which challenges to shelter repair were reported, 90% faced a common issue in the unaffordability of repair materials. KIs in 11% of assessed communities indicated that the security situation was a barrier to repairing shelters.

### SECTORAL FINDINGS (2)



**Cooking fuel, sources of light, and winter items** were reported as **unaffordable** for the majority of people in 90%, 81% and 78% of assessed communities, respectively.

**Electricity & NFI:** Unaffordability of basic items was a key issue indicated by KIs. Cooking fuel, batteries, and sources of light were widely unaffordable, and winter items were cited as unaffordable in about three-quarters of assessed communities. High prices of fuel and solar panels and damage to physical infrastructure limited households' ability to access electricity.



In **88%** of assessed communities where not all households had access to sufficient water, KIs reported that the **high price of water trucking** was a barrier to accessing sufficient water.

**Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH):** Unaffordability of water trucking and poor network function were barriers to accessing sufficient water. In 20% of assessed communities, KIs indicated issues with water quality. Of the 60% of assessed communities reporting coping strategies to deal with a lack of sufficient water, KIs in nearly half indicated that households were bathing or washing laundry less frequently. Additionally, KIs in 15% of the assessed communities reported that households were reducing drinking water consumption.



In **55%** of assessed communities where school was not in session for at least some of the previous 30 days, KIs reported that schools had been **closed by local authorities due to COVID-19**.

**Education:** KIs in 89% of assessed communities reported that schools were not in session for the entirety of the month prior to assessment. In 55% of these communities, schools were reportedly closed by local authorities due to COVID-19. In two communities (both in Idlib), escalation of conflict was reported as a reason for school closures. Children in less than half of the assessed communities where schools had been closed were able to access online learning, and there was a significant gap in terms of access between Idlib (65% of assessed communities) and northern and western Aleppo (22% and 8%, respectively).

### ACUTE HUMANITARIAN NEEDS OF NEW IDP ARRIVALS<sup>6</sup>

In November, 458 communities, including 67 camps, were assessed across northern Aleppo and Idlib governorates, representing a total of 5,098 newly-arrived IDP households.<sup>6</sup> The following sector-specific findings highlight the situation and acute humanitarian needs of newly displaced IDP households.

**WASH:** KIs in 5% of assessed communities stated that new IDP arrivals did not have access to a sufficient quantity of drinking water, while 8% did not have access to water for other purposes such as cooking, bathing, and washing. In addition, KIs in 43% of assessed communities reported that soap and other hygiene items were unaffordable for some new IDPs arrivals.

**Food Security:** 3% of newly arrived IDP households were reportedly eating less than one meal per day.

**Shelter:** KIs reported that 54% of newly arrived IDP households were residing in tents (37%) or unfinished / damaged buildings (17%). 44% were reported as living in solid or finished buildings.

**Protection:** KIs in 67% of assessed communities/camps reported the presence of vulnerable groups. The most commonly reported vulnerability types were women-headed households (50%), elderly-headed households (42%), and women travelling alone (6%).

**Humanitarian assistance:** KIs in 85% of the assessed communities stated that the preferred modality of assistance for newly-arrived IDPs was cash or voucher assistance, while they preferred in-kind assistance in the remaining 15%.

#### Most commonly reported food sources for newly-arrived IDPs

- 1 Stores or markets in this community 82%
- 2 Stores or markets in other communities 61%
- 3 Relying on food stored previously 55%

#### Most commonly reported drinking water sources for newly-arrived IDP households

- 1 Informal water trucking conducted by private citizens 57%
- 2 Formal water trucking conducted by authorities or an NGO 38%
- 3 Piped water network 18%



### 3. IDP SITES AND SETTLEMENTS

#### SITES OVERVIEW

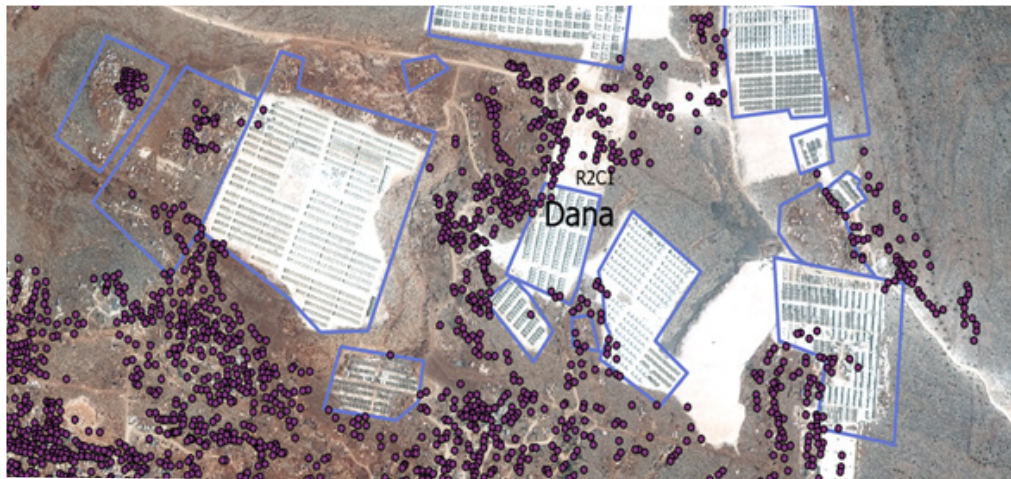
As of October 2020, the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster identified 1,172 IDP camps and sites in NWS in its monthly IDP Sites Integrated Monitoring Matrix (ISIMM) list.<sup>7</sup> These camps and sites host almost one and a half million IDPs. Of the camps and sites, 92% are informal self-settled sites.

TYPE OF SITES		DEMOGRAPHICS	
Planned Camp	■ 71	Boys under-18	29%
Informal Settled Site	■ 1,078	Girls under-18	29%
Collective Centre	17	Women	22%
Transit/Reception Centre	6	Men	20%

Mass movement of civilians occurred in Idlib governorate following the large-scale escalation of conflict in northwest Syria beginning in December 2019. Displacement continued throughout early 2020 as conflict continued and areas of control shifted, until a ceasefire was reached by parties to the conflict on the 5th of March, 2020.<sup>8</sup>

While many newly displaced IDPs moved northwards to the relative safety of northern Aleppo governorate, the majority remained within Idlib governorate and instead moved toward the Turkish border. Sub-districts in northern Idlib therefore remained the most common destination for IDPs. Arrivals to Dana were forced to seek shelter in and around already overcrowded camps and villages, some even settling in open fields.<sup>9</sup>

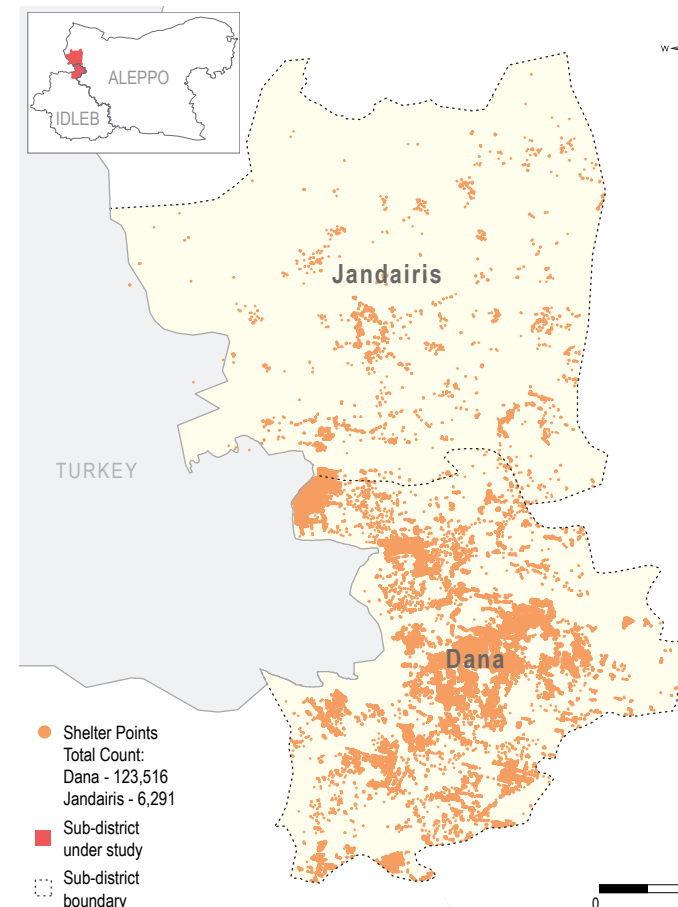
**Image 1: Shelter count exercise conducted in Dana sub-district identifying a marked increase in new shelters (August 2020).**



#### SHELTER COUNT FINDINGS

Following an initial shelter count conducted in Dana sub-district in February 2020, REACH conducted several other shelter count exercises in order to help triangulate the locations of IDPs across NWS. Most recently, REACH conducted a shelter count exercise for the area of Jandairis sub-district using images taken on the 18 and 24 August 2020. REACH identified 6,291 shelters in this area, with most IDPs residing in the Jandairis, Mhamadia and Deir Ballut communities. Agricultural activities could be a reason for IDP settlements in these areas due to a river flowing through the above mentioned communities.

**Image 2: Shelter count exercise conducted in Dana and Jandairis sub-districts (August 2020).**



REACH also conducted a follow-up shelter count exercise in Dana sub-district in order to assess the current situation with regards to IDP populations in Idlib's most densely populated sub-district. In total, the shelter count using images from August 2020 estimated 123,516 shelters. Further, the analysis identified 155 camp expansions, and in some cases entirely new informal settlements, with an increase of roughly 13,000 shelters. Considering an average Syrian household of roughly 6 people, this amounts to an estimated 78,000 additional individuals having arrived in Dana sub-district between February and August 2020.

Source: © OpenStreetMap contributors

Disclaimer: The boundaries in this map are for informational/graphical purposes only and does not represent a legal survey.

<sup>7</sup> For further information, see the CCCM Cluster's [IDP Integrated Monitoring Matrix \(ISIMM\)](#).

<sup>8,9</sup> REACH (March 2020). Northwest Syria - Situation Overview. Retrieved from <https://www.reachresourcecentre.info/>.

### KEY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHWEST SYRIA<sup>10</sup>

#### Highest regional SMEB cost recorded by REACH since November 2014

In November, the value of the regional SMEB reached 254,413 SYP after an 8% increase from October and an 87% increase since May. The SMEB in USD increased from 104 to 107 USD in November, alongside a slight depreciation of the SYP against the USD.<sup>10</sup>

#### Depreciation of the SYP against the USD

In November, the informal USD/SYP regional median exchange rate increased by 6% since October and reached a regional median of 2,385 USD/SYP. The six-month change of 51% increase since May 2020 demonstrates that the USD/SYP informal exchange rate remained extremely high.

#### MOST COMMONLY UNAVAILABLE WINTER ITEMS

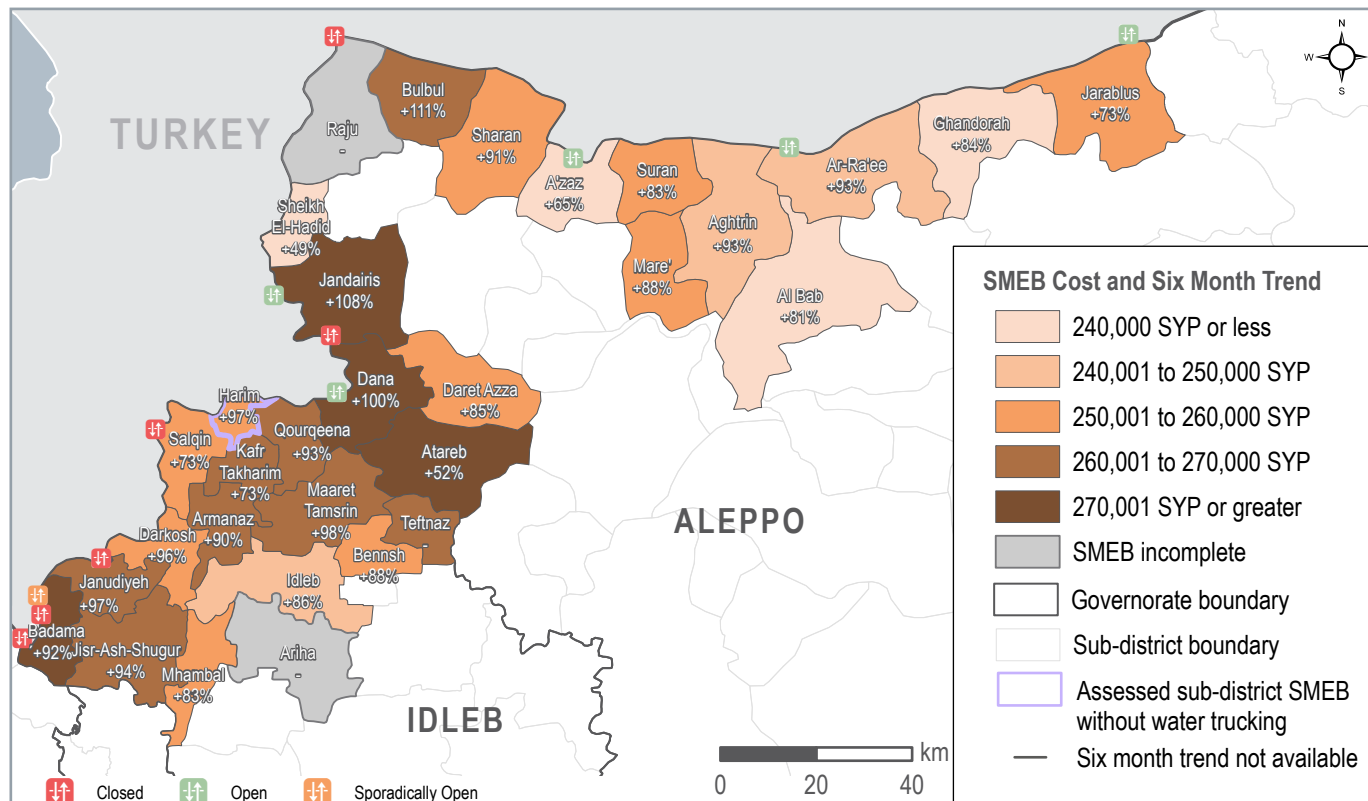
% of surveyed vendors reporting items as unavailable in their community/neighbourhood

Fire-blankets:	87%
Manually refined petrol:	77%
Fire extinguishers:	55%
Manually refined kerosene:	62%

#### SMEB COMPONENTS MEDIANS

Food SMEB:	178,543 SYP
Cooking Fuel SMEB:	35,000 SYP
Hygiene SMEB:	14,775 SYP
Cellphone data SMEB:	775 SYP
Water SMEB:	9,923 SYP

### SMEB COST & SIX MONTH % CHANGE



#### MEDIAN SMEB COST IN SYP (USD)

254,413 SYP  
(107 USD)

NORTHWEST SYRIA

#### MARKET FUNCTIONALITY Northwest Syria



82% of surveyed vendors reported price inflation as a supply challenge



42% of surveyed vendors reported that they would run out of stock in less than 3 days



95% of surveyed vendors reported significant shortages of USD banknotes



26% of surveyed vendors reported accepting only Turkish Lira in their shops

<sup>10</sup> Findings relating to market prices are taken from REACH's November [Market Monitoring exercise](#).

<sup>11</sup> For further information on affected populations, see WFP's [mVAM Bulletin Issue no. 49: October 2020](#).

### Methodology

This report provides an overview of REACH outputs on the humanitarian situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and residents across northwest Syria (NWS). Its aim is to inform the overall humanitarian response through highlighting the multi-sectoral challenges faced by populations living in the area of interest as well as displacement trends and the economic context. The Situation Overview does so through providing a synthesis of data collected by REACH via different assessments over the months of October and November.

#### Specific objectives:

1. Identify sector-specific needs and overall priority needs for residents and IDPs in both communities and sites and settlements across NWS and across the following sectors: shelter, food, livelihoods, NFIs, WASH, healthcare, education and protection.
2. Identify common destinations for IDPs, the expansion of existing camps and the formation of new informal settlements.
3. Provide consumer prices of key commodities, information on the availability of key commodities and vendor conditions, and information on the cost of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) in assessed markets across NWS.

While HSOS provides a monthly overview of the situation for all populations in communities via multiple KIs interview, ENT tracks the key priority needs of newly arrived IDPs in NWS, also via KIs interviews. The shelter count exercise, conducted through satellite images, helps triangulate the locations of IDPs across NWS. Finally, market monitoring monthly assessment provides consumer price and vendor-side information for key commodities and seasonal items in assessed markets.

More details on the methodology for each assessment included in this report can be found below.

### REACH HUMANITARIAN SITUATION OVERVIEW IN SYRIA (HSOS):

HSOS is a monthly assessment that provides comprehensive, multi-sectoral information about the humanitarian conditions and priority needs inside Syria. Data is collected through an enumerator network in accessible locations. REACH enumerators are based inside Syria and interview KIs located in the communities that they are reporting on. KIs are chosen based on their community-level and sector-specific knowledge. The HSOS project has monitored the situation in Syria since 2013, and its methodology and procedures have evolved significantly since that time.

In October, data was collected between 1-17 October 2020, in 854 communities in Aleppo, Idlib and Hama governorates. All indicators quoted in this report refer to the situation in the 30 days prior to data collection (September/October 2020). Findings are indicative rather than representative, and should not be generalized across the region.

[October 2020: Northwest Dataset](#)

### REACH EMERGENCY NEEDS TRACKING (ENT) SYSTEM:

The aim of the ENT is to track the key priority needs of IDPs, as well as identifying communities with households in direct need of humanitarian assistance. This Emergency Needs Tracking (ENT) System was activated following the increase in airstrikes and shelling in southern Idlib and western Aleppo since December 2019 and further intensification of violence throughout January causing

mass displacement across northwest Syria. Communities are included in the coverage for the daily ENT assessment if they meet one of following triggers: communities witnessing more than 40 IDP arrivals in the past 72 hours, communities directly affected by armed or aerial conflict, communities affected by natural disasters such as flood, storms or fires. Data is collected daily (Sunday-Thursday) via a Key Informant (KI) methodology, with one KI interview conducted per community. Findings should be considered indicative only.

[ENT Weekly Bulletin 16-22 November 2020](#); [ENT Weekly Bulletin 23-29 November 2020](#)

### REACH SATELLITE-DETECTED SHELTERS AND OTHER STRUCTURES:

The shelter count exercise was conducted in Dana and Jandairis sub-districts in October and November 2020. The objective of this assessment was to identify IDP shelters, new camps, camps expansion and associated structures within sub-districts that host the largest number of IDPs in NWS. The analysis was conducted by REACH on images provided by UNOSAT, which worked to visually identify new shelters by interpreting different WorldView satellite images from different dates with mostly 0.5m ground sample distance. In this analysis, two classes of shelters were identified: shelters that were likely made of wood or metal frames, or those that resembled tents, and administrative structures that were present in areas where structured IDP camps and informal sites were identified.

### REACH MARKET MONITORING (MM):

To inform humanitarian cash programming, REACH, in partnership with the Cash Working Group (CWG), conducts monthly MM exercises in northern Syria to assess the availability and prices of 36 basic commodities that comprise of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB), that are typically sold in markets and consumed by average Syrian households, including food and non-food items, water, fuel, and cell phone data. Each enumerator aims to assess three to five shops of each type in the main market in their assigned sub-district, using surveys to collect information about the three cheapest prices of each item. In sub-districts where direct surveying by enumerators is not possible, data collection is conducted remotely through interviews with KIs such as shop owners, suppliers and consumers.

In November 2020, REACH and partners covered 31 sub-districts and 2,408 individual shops in NWS for the MM Exercise. Prices should be seen as representative only of the dates when information was collected (2-11 November) and in the communities where shops were assessed.

[October 2020: Northwest Factsheet](#); [November 2020: Dataset](#)

### 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. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT). For more information please visit our website: [www.reach-initiative.org](http://www.reach-initiative.org). You can contact us directly at: [geneva@reach-initiative.org](mailto:geneva@reach-initiative.org) and follow us on Twitter [@REACH\\_info](https://twitter.com/REACH_info).