

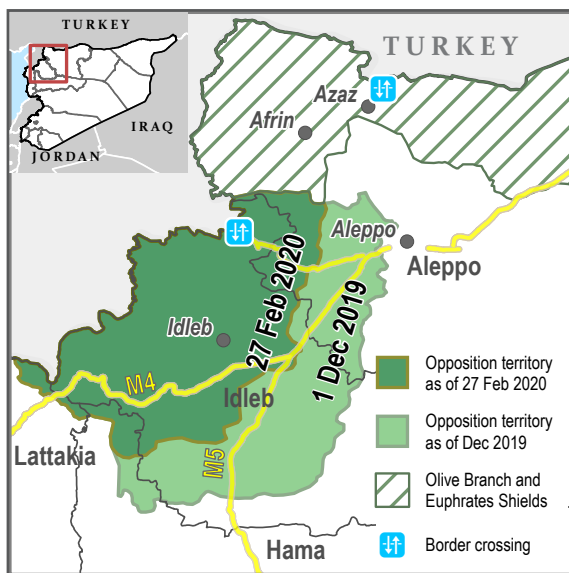
NORTHWEST SYRIA - SITUATION OVERVIEW

27 February 2020

Context

Since the escalation of conflict in December 2019, **the humanitarian situation in the opposition-controlled enclave of Idlib has reached an intolerable level.** The area, which was already highly vulnerable and dependent on aid, has seen the **displacement of more than 950,000 people in just over two months.** While some of the newly displaced are moving northwards to the relative safety of Azaz, Afrin, and other sub-districts in northern Aleppo, most are remaining within Idlib governorate, moving towards the border in and around already overcrowded camps and villages, as well as settling in open fields.

Even when displaced, **civilian populations are not safe.** As stated by the Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock: “They arrive in a place thought to be safe, only for the bombs to follow”.¹ With **sub-zero temperatures**, reports continue of children freezing to death and people huddling in caves and under plastic sheets to keep warm and safe.² **Local service providers and humanitarian actors working in the area have rapidly mobilised to respond to the escalating crisis.** However, they lack the required resources to meet the exponential increase in need, and are facing significant logistic and security challenges that inhibit their operations.



As conflict continues to encroach upon highly populated areas such as Idlib city, the catastrophic humanitarian situation is at risk of deteriorating even further. In these unprecedented times, and with no time to waste, the international community must step up its response to the crisis. Specifically, **humanitarian actors must be supported to upscale their operations in both Idlib and northern Aleppo through increased funding and improved access.** They must be able to operate safely beyond border areas, to respond to the needs of affected populations while avoiding creating a dangerous pull factor that would further congest the camps, sites and villages close to the Bab Al Hawa border crossing.

Overview of key REACH findings

This situation overview aims at supporting humanitarian planning in the northwest of Syria. Based on recent information collected by REACH and its partners, **this document provides an overview of: 1) the displacement trends since December 2019; 2) some of the key needs and vulnerabilities of the crises-affected population; 3) the impact of the crisis on markets, and the availability and affordability of basic items.**

Among the key findings highlighted in the following pages:

- **Mass displacement continues.** So far, over 950,000 people (50% of them children) have been displaced since 18 December 2019 within Idlib enclave and towards 'Olive Branch' and 'Euphrates Shield' areas. This has led to an overcrowding of Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps, collective sites and villages, with **39% of newly displaced households sleeping in the open, in tents, or makeshift shelters** (see part 3 of this report for further information).
- **The population displaced since December 2019 is extremely vulnerable.** 85% of them are reportedly not intending to leave their current location in the coming two weeks mostly due to **not being able to afford further movement.** The prevalence of vulnerable populations is common among newly displaced, with **presence of unaccompanied children reported in 91% of assessed communities in Idlib governorate** (see part 4).
- **Shelter, winter items (notably heating fuel), and food are priority needs.** Lack of access to shelters and heating fuel is of particular concern given the **harsh winter conditions.** In addition, most households displaced since December are resorting to negative coping strategies with, for example, **25% of the population reported as eating one meal or less per day** (see part 4).
- **These needs are compounded by high inflation** and a parallel depreciation of the Syrian Pound (SYP) against the US Dollar (USD), causing the purchasing power of households to drop significantly. **The cost of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) has increased by 65% between October 2019 and February 2020**, with prices of items such as bread increasing by 80% and heating fuel by 129% (see part 5).
- **Humanitarian actors are facing significant challenges in effectively responding to these rapidly escalating needs.** In addition to lacking the required resources, they face access challenges because of overcrowding, difficult terrain, as well as ongoing insecurity (see part 4).

In part 6, the reader will find an annotated list of relevant information products used for this situation overview. All REACH products are available on our resource centre (<https://www.reachresourcecentre.info/country/syria/>).

1) Mark Lowcock, [Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria, 29 January 2019.](#)

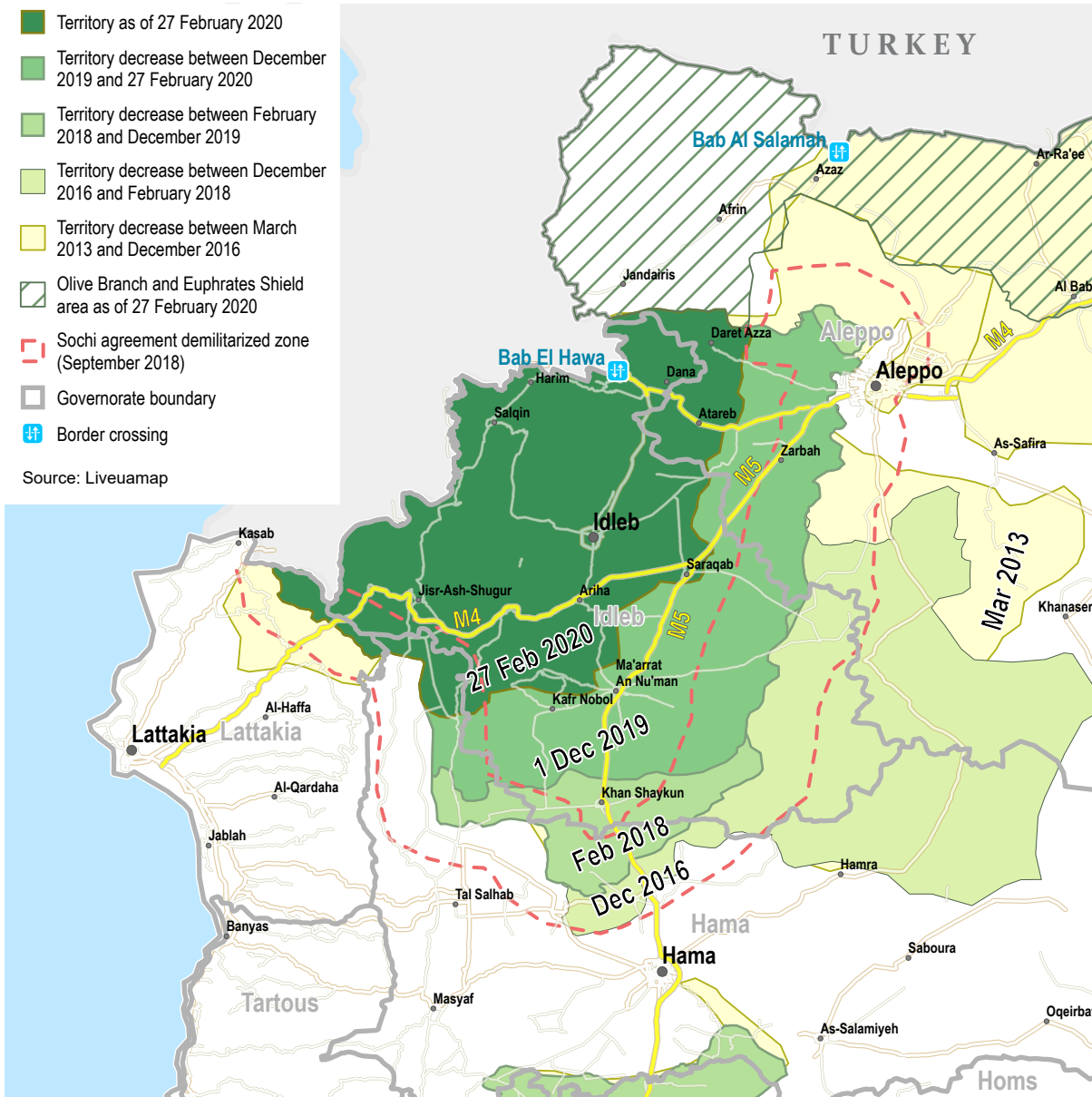
2) CBS Observer, [Syrians are forced to camp in freezing conditions, 15 February 2020.](#)

2. BACKGROUND

Change in opposition-controlled areas

- Territory as of 27 February 2020
- Territory decrease between December 2019 and 27 February 2020
- Territory decrease between February 2018 and December 2019
- Territory decrease between December 2016 and February 2018
- Territory decrease between March 2013 and December 2016
- Olive Branch and Euphrates Shield area as of 27 February 2020
- Sochi agreement demilitarized zone (September 2018)
- Governorate boundary
- Border crossing

Source: Liveuamap



Timeline

- **March 2011:** Protests in southern Syria begin, spreading to Idleb governorate in September and intensifying in Aleppo the following year.¹
- **Early 2013:** Opposition-controlled areas include most of Idleb and northern Aleppo governorates (including east Aleppo city), as well as parts of Hama and Latakia governorates.²
- **Mid-2014:** So-called ISIL starts expanding its areas of control in northern and eastern Syria. By May 2015, the territory under ISIL control includes large parts of northern and eastern Aleppo governorate.³
- **December 2016:** The Government of Syria retakes control of the entire city of Aleppo, following six months of besiegement.
- **March 2017:** Turkish-backed opposition forces conclude operation 'Euphrates Shield', controlling areas between Afrin and Menbij districts in northern Aleppo.
- **October 2017-February 2018:** The Government of Syria makes significant territorial gains in Hama, Aleppo and southern Idleb governorates.
- **January-March 2018:** Turkish forces and Turkish-backed opposition groups enter Afrin in operation 'Olive Branch'.⁴
- **September 2018:** The Sochi agreement leads to the announcement of a demilitarised zone around the front line, guaranteed by Russia and Turkey.⁵ Idleb and surrounding areas of western Aleppo and north-western Hama are some of the last remaining opposition-held areas in Syria.
- **18 December 2019 - 27 February 2020:** Conflict intensifies, leading to a significant reduction in opposition-controlled territory.

1) [ALEPPO – Governorate profile, Syria Needs Analysis Project, March 2013](#)

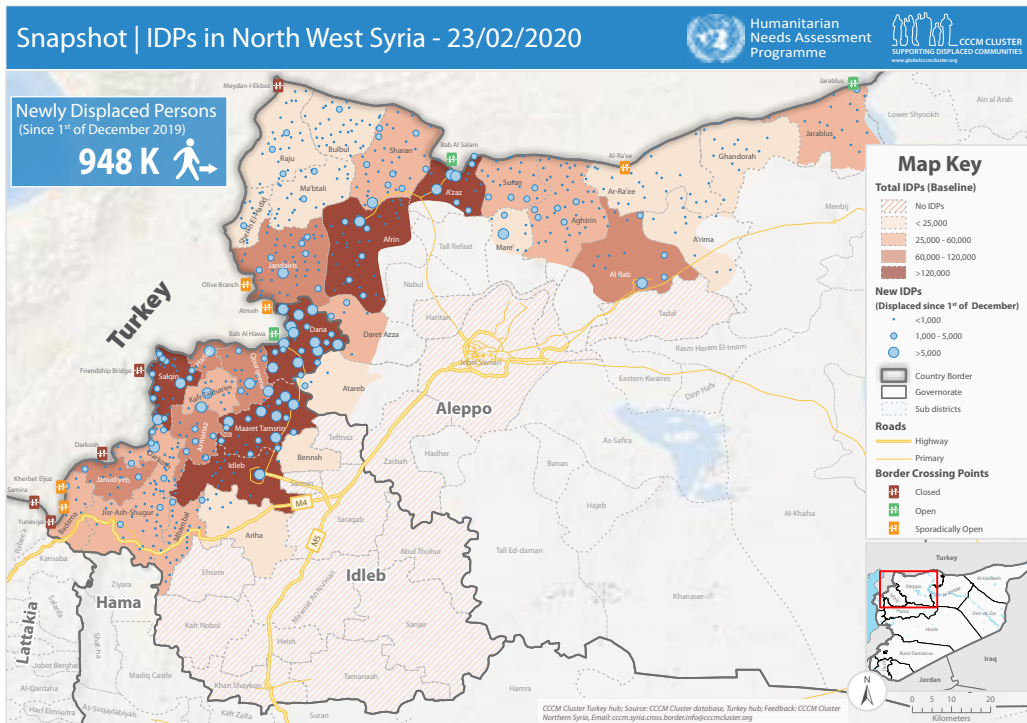
2) [Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State, October 28, 2019](#)

3) [OCHA \(15 June 2018\), Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian situation update in Afrin District and for IDPs in surrounding communities](#)

4) [OCHA \(15 June 2018\), Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian situation update in Afrin District and for IDPs in surrounding communities](#)

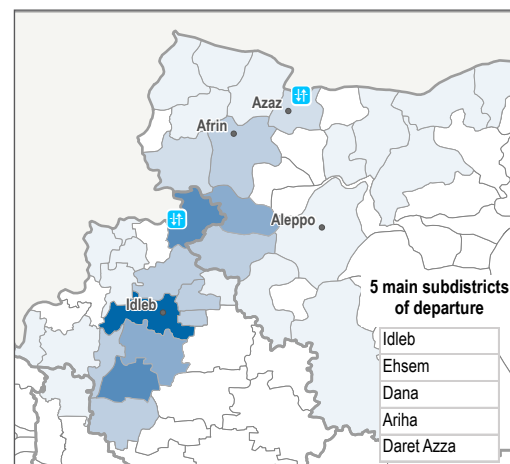
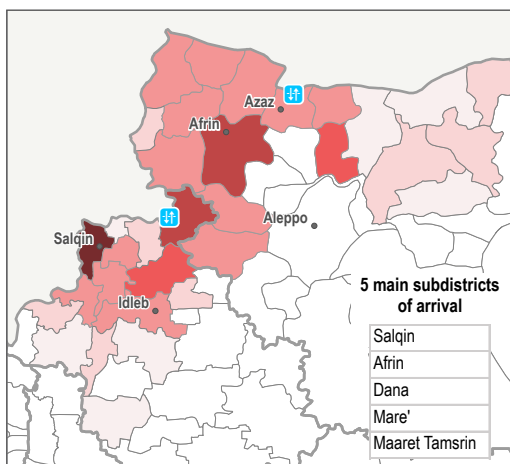
5) [OCHA \(8 May 2018\), Situation in North-western Syria Situation Report No.4](#)

3. DISPLACEMENT TRENDS (SINCE DEC 2019)



Main sub-districts of arrival (20 to 26 Feb)

Main sub-districts of departure (20 to 26 Feb)



- In November 2019, prior to the recent escalation of conflict, the opposition-controlled area of Idlib (including parts of neighbouring governorates - see map in part 2) had a total population of approximately 2.5 million, including just over 1.12 million IDPs (45% of the total population).
- Between 18 December 2019 and 23 February 2020, an estimated 948,088 people (50% of them children) were newly displaced from the area: 560,626 within Idlib and 387,462 in Aleppo governorate.¹ It is estimated that among the newly displaced, 40% may be secondarily displaced, having already been displaced at some point before December 2019.
- Within the shrinking opposition-controlled area of Idlib, the increase in displacement has caused significant overcrowding. The total population remaining in Idlib enclave is now at approximately 2.1 million, an estimated 70% (1.45 million) of whom are IDPs. In a territory of just 3,500 km², this means that the current population density is of approximately 600 inhabitants per km². Within the area, most are concentrated towards Idlib city and around the border crossing of Bab Al Hawa (see satellite imagery in part 3.1 and 3.2).
- The most common areas of departure of IDPs displaced since December include Idlib, Ma'arrat An Nu'man, Saraqab, Ehsem and Atareb sub-districts. IDPs are moving to areas within Idlib enclave towards the Turkish border (mainly to Maaret Tamsrin and Dana sub-districts), as well as to 'Olive Branch' and 'Euphrates Shield' areas of northern Aleppo (mainly to Afrin, Jandairis, Azaz, Sharan, Aghtrin and Al Bab sub-districts).
- Lack of access to shelter, coupled with anticipation of future conflict escalation, are likely to trigger further displacement. According to the latest ENT assessment, an estimated 15% of newly arrived IDP households intend to leave their current community in the coming two weeks, with IDPs predominantly intending to move towards northern Aleppo governorate. However, the vast majority (85%) of IDPs intend to remain in their current location, mainly due to a lack of money to pay for further movement.

Data sources (for more information on the methodology, please refer to part 6):

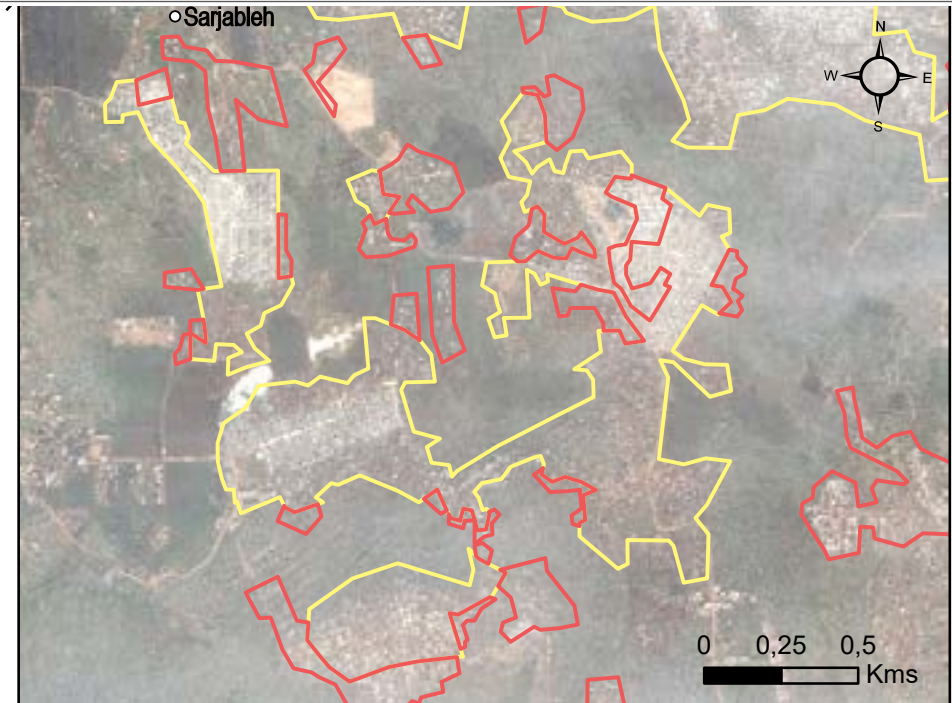
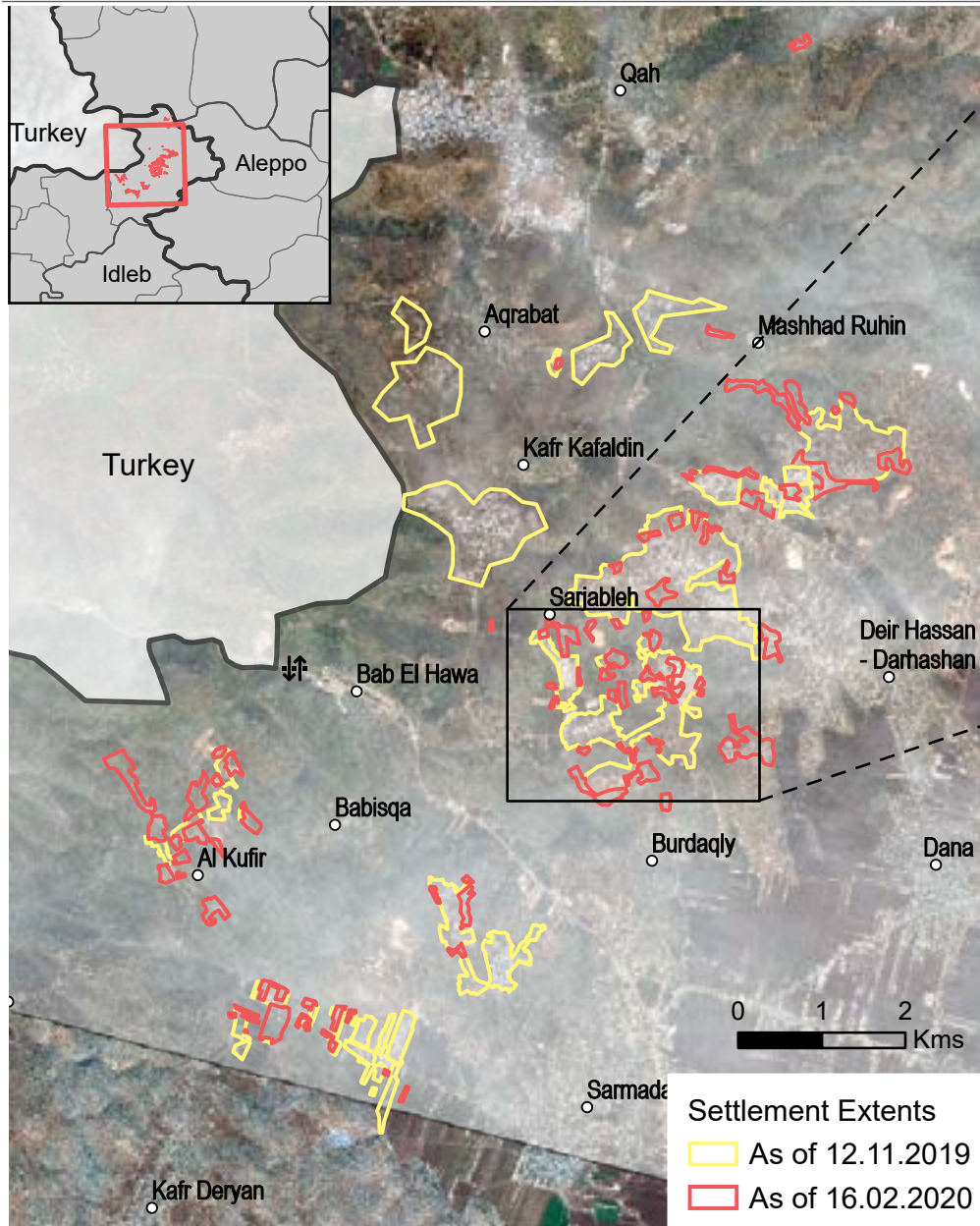
REACH Emergency Needs Tracking (ENT): Assessment conducted by REACH on 24 February 2020 through Key Informant (KI) interviews in 101 communities in Idlib governorate, and 77 in northern Aleppo, known to have had over 300 IDP arrivals since 15 January 2020.

Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster's IDP Situation Monitoring Initiative (ISMI) to which REACH, HNAP and other CCCM partners provide daily displacement figures: Following a baseline assessment conducted at the end of 2016, weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, and now daily rapid displacement monitoring (RDM) data collection cycles were initiated. Displacements are identified through an extensive KI network, either from alerts initiated by KIs or from follow-up by enumerators. At least two KIs are interviewed in each assessed community.

1) Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme (HNAP) and CCCM IDP snapshot, 23 February 2020

3.1 IDP SETTLEMENT EXPANSION: DANA SUB-DISTRICT

IDP Settlement Expansion in Dana Sub-District between 12 November 2019 and 16 February 2020



Data sources:
Settlement Delineation - REACH
Satellite Imagery: WorldView 3 from 12 November 2019 and 16 February 2020, Imagery courtesy of DigitalGlobe,
Source: US Department of State Humanitarian Information Unit, NextView License

Note: Data, designations and boundaries contained on this map are not warranted to be error-free and do not imply acceptance by the REACH partners, associates, donors mentioned on this map.

Analysis:

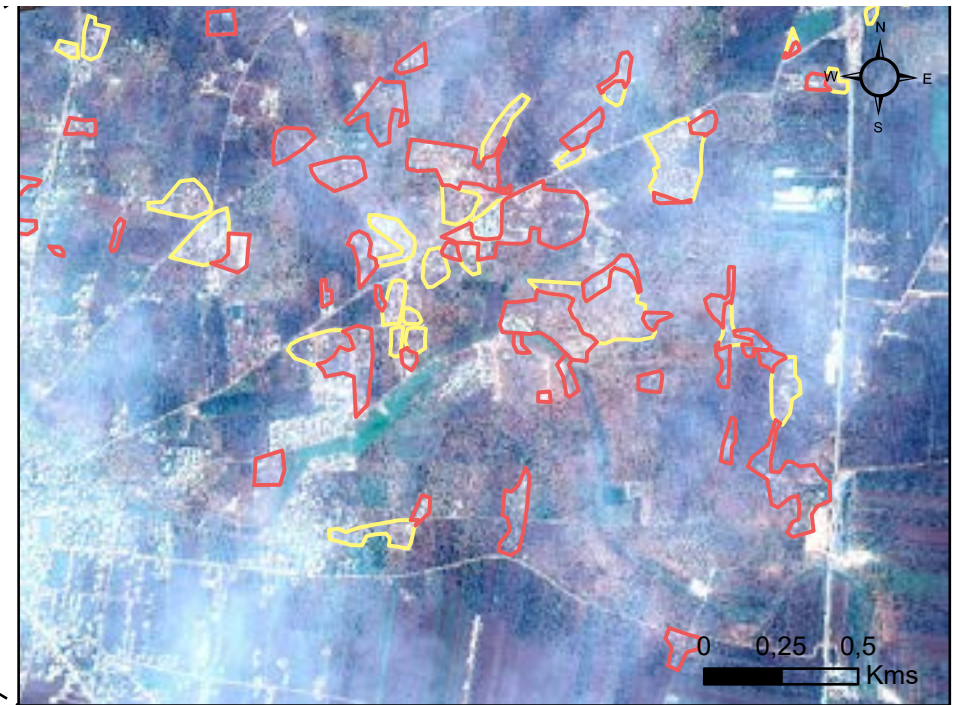
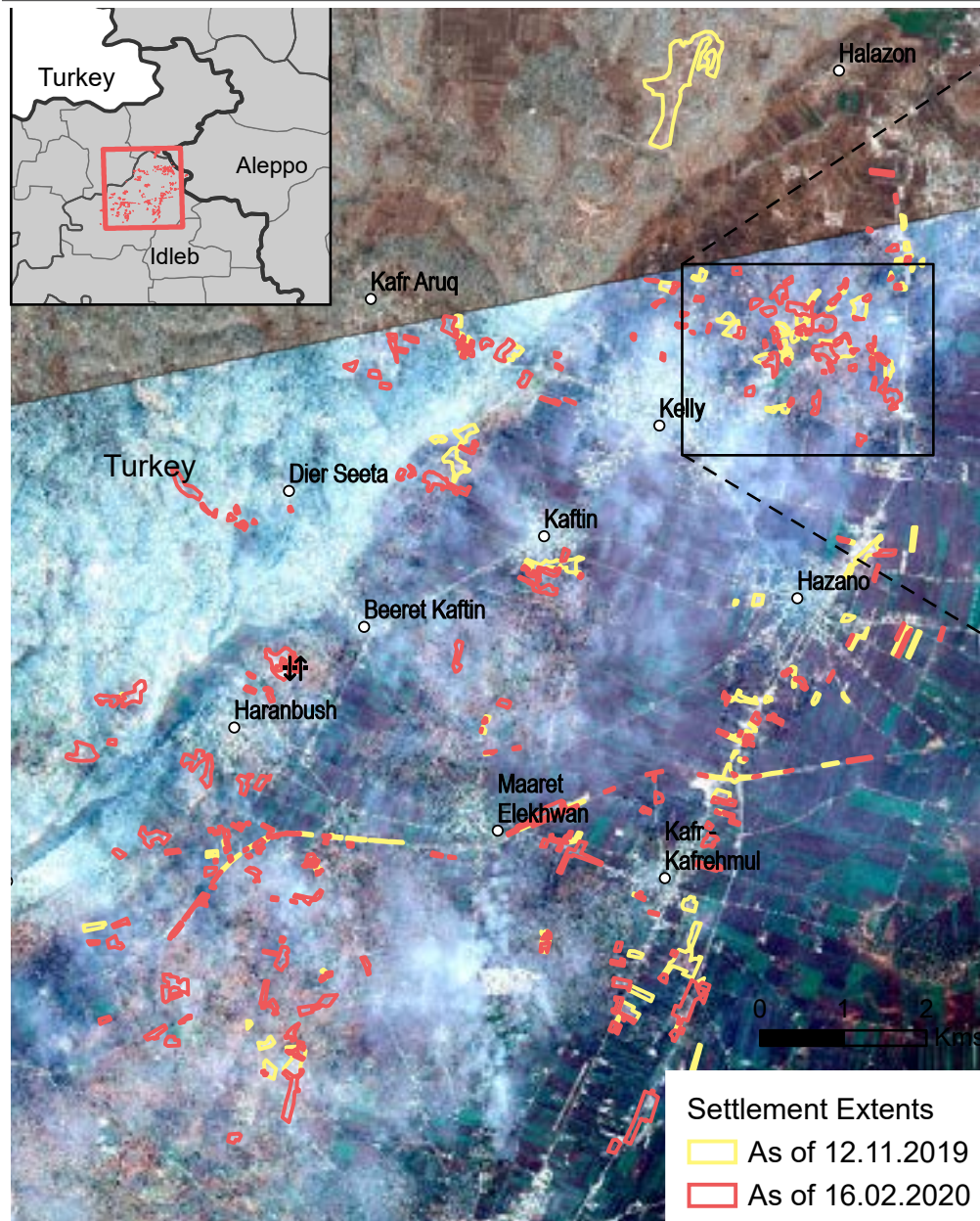
Rapid analysis of satellite imagery from November 2019 and February 2020 has pointed to considerable expansion of IDP settlements in Dana sub-district in northwest Syria.

Initial calculations indicate a **45% increase** in settled areas between the two dates within the analysis area, from over 530 hectares in November 2019 (outlined in imagery in yellow) to over 770 hectares in February 2020 (additional extent outlined in imagery in red).

Note: This analysis should not be considered exhaustive or comprehensive as it aims to provide a cursory look at easily identifiable areas demonstrating the greatest change.

3.2 IDP SETTLEMENT EXPANSION: MAARET TAMSRIN

IDP Settlement Expansion in Maaret Tamsrin Sub-District between 12 November 2019 and 16 February 2020



Data sources:
Settlement Delineation - REACH
Satellite Imagery: WorldView 3 from 12 November 2019 and 16 February 2020, Imagery courtesy of DigitalGlobe,
Source: US Department of State Humanitarian Information Unit, NextView License

Note: Data, designations and boundaries contained on this map are not warranted to be error-free and do not imply acceptance by the REACH partners, associates, donors mentioned on this map.

Analysis:

Rapid analysis of satellite imagery from November 2019 and February 2020 has pointed to considerable expansion of IDP settlements in Maaret Tamsrin sub-district in northwest Syria. Initial calculations indicate a **140% increase** in settled areas between the two dates within the analysis area, from nearly 160 hectares in November 2019 (outlined in imagery in yellow) to over 380 hectares in February 2020 (additional extent outlined in imagery in red). Note: This analysis should not be considered exhaustive or comprehensive as it aims to provide a cursory look at easily identifiable areas demonstrating the greatest change.

4. NEEDS AND VULNERABILITIES

- Prior to December 2019, the population of opposition-controlled areas of Idleb (including parts of neighbouring governorates - see map in part 2) was already extremely vulnerable, hosting large numbers of IDPs, and dependent on humanitarian assistance to meet the most basic needs.
- The rapid deterioration of the situation since December 2019 has further exacerbated the needs of the displaced and non-displaced populations. The presence of particularly vulnerable groups among displaced populations is common, with for example the presence of unaccompanied minors reported among new arrivals in 91% of assessed communities in Idleb governorate (ENT).
- Most of the newly displaced face extremely difficult living conditions, due to overcrowding, lack of access to adequate shelters, and exposure to continued bombardment. More than a third (39%) of households displaced since December are sleeping in the open, in tents or makeshift shelters, according to key informants in assessed communities in Idleb and northern Aleppo governorates (ENT). This is particularly concerning given harsh winter conditions, including snow and sub-zero temperatures (see maps and charts below).
- The reported priority needs for the recently displaced populations are shelter, winter items (notably heating fuel), and food. Shelter has been cited as the number one priority need for newly-arrived IDPs for four consecutive weeks, including in 58% of assessed communities in

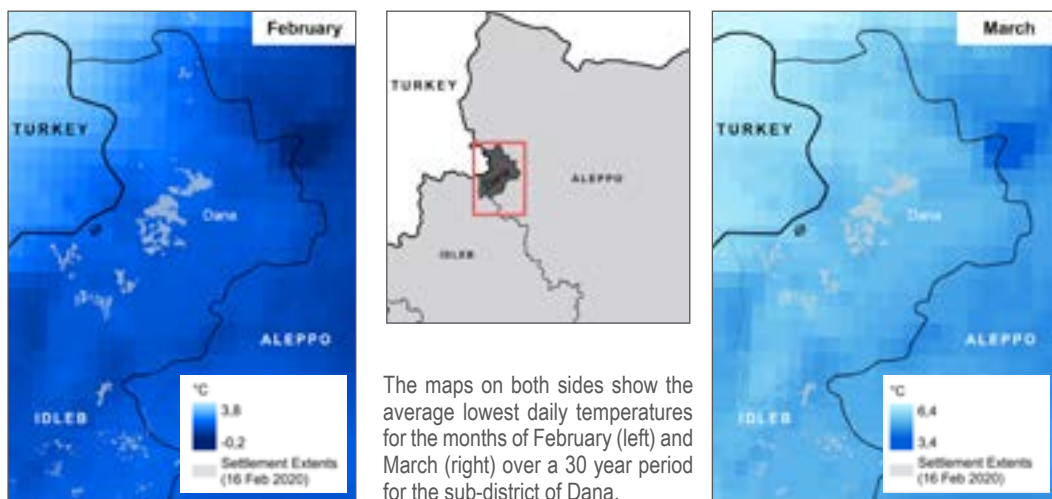
Idleb and 42% in northern Aleppo, in the latest ENT assessment. Winterisation was also reported among the top 3 priority needs in 72% and 53% of assessed communities in Idleb and northern Aleppo governorates, respectively.

- 15% of recent IDPs intend to continue their travel northwards, mostly towards Dana (within Idleb) and Azaz, Afrin, and other sub-districts in northern Aleppo, in the coming 2 weeks. However, the majority (85%) of newly displaced intend to remain in their current location mostly because they lack money to pay for further movement (ENT).
- High inflation and unaffordability of basic items have led to a widespread use of negative coping mechanisms, with a quarter of the population estimated to be eating one meal or less per day across assessed communities in Idleb and Aleppo governorates (ENT).
- Humanitarian actors are facing significant challenges in effectively responding to these rapidly escalating needs. In addition to lacking the required resources, they face access challenges because of overcrowding, difficult terrain, as well as ongoing insecurity (ENT).

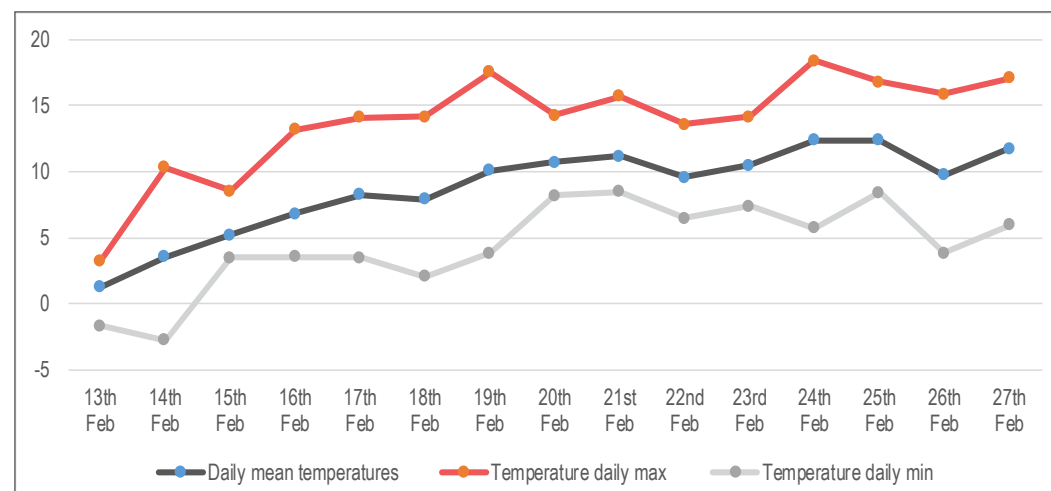
Data source (for more information on the methodology, please refer to part 6):

REACH Emergency Needs Tracking (ENT): Assessment conducted by REACH on 24 February 2020 through Key Informant (KI) interviews in 101 communities in Idleb governorate, and 77 in northern Aleppo, known to have had over 300 IDP arrivals since 15 January 2020.

Historical average monthly minimum temperatures for February and March (WorldClim)



Daily temperatures (2 m above ground) in Idleb, Syria - 13-27 Feb 2020 (Meteoblue)

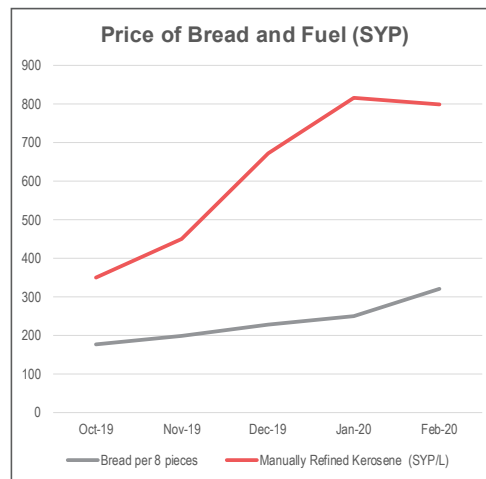
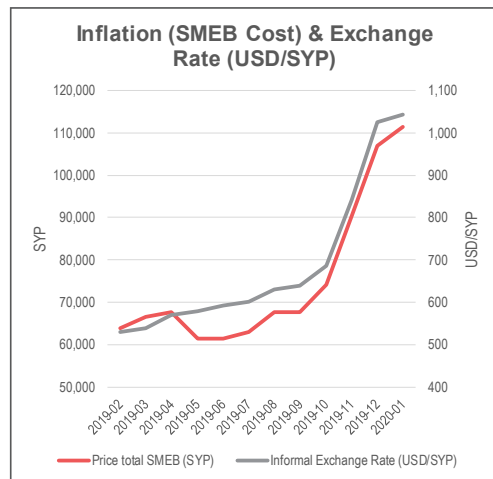


1) Heating fuel in particular was reported as a priority need in 97% and 98% of the assessed communities which reported winter items as a priority need in Idleb and northern Aleppo, respectively.

2) Reduced access to shelter and anticipation of future conflict escalation in their current communities were the two most common reasons for newly-arrived IDPs to intend to leave their current communities in the two weeks following data collection, reported by KIs in 58% and 44%, respectively, of assessed communities in Idleb governorate.

5. MARKETS

- **Markets are still operating and functional across northwest Syria.** According to the 24 February ENT assessment, IDPs reportedly relied on stores and markets as their main source of food in 88% of assessed communities in Idlib and 85% in northern Aleppo governorates.
- **However, prices of basic items have been soaring in recent months.** In mid-February 2020, the regional Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB)¹ value reached 111,416 SYP, a 65% increase since October 2019 and the **highest recorded** by the REACH/CBR Market Monitoring (MM) since data collection began in 2015.
- **The increase in prices has been paralleled by a depreciation of the Syrian Pound (SYP) against the US Dollar (USD).** The median unofficial USD/SYP exchange rate was recorded by the MM at a whopping 1,043 SYP to 1 USD in February 2020 (a 63% increase from 640 SYP in October 2019).²



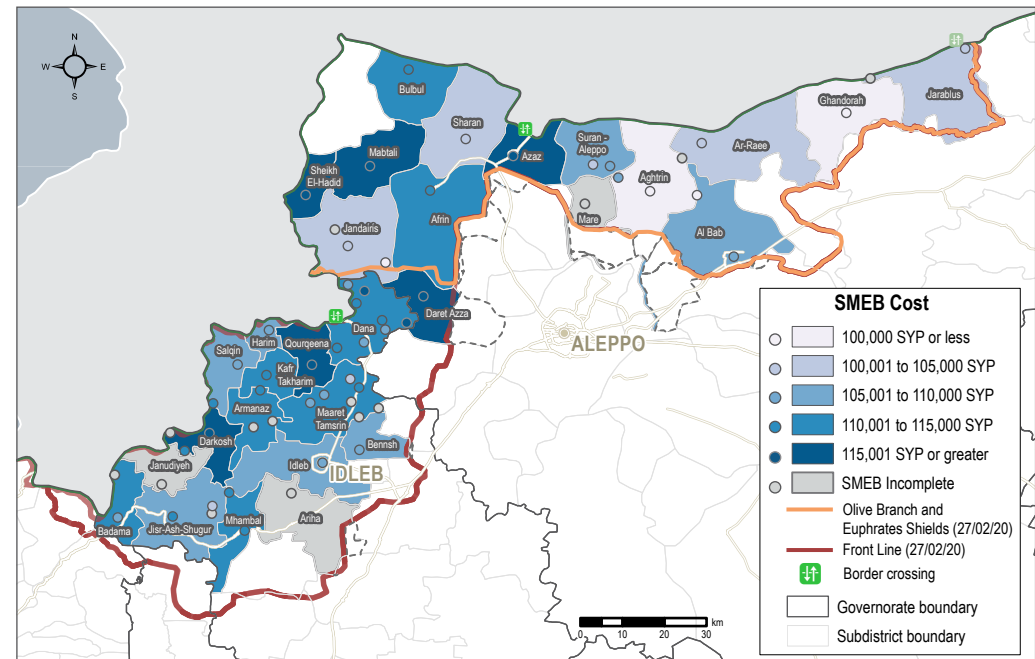
Data sources (for more information on the methodology, please refer to part 6):

REACH Emergency Needs Tracking (ENT): assessment conducted by REACH on 24 February 2020 with Key Informant (KI) interviews in 101 communities in Idlib governorate, and 77 communities in northern Aleppo, known to have had over 300 IDP arrivals since 15 January 2020.

REACH/Cash Based Response Technical Working Group (CBR-TWG) Market Monitoring (MM): Data collected from 10-17 February 2020 through KI interviews with market vendors on availability and prices of 36 basic commodities, some of which are components of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB),² sold in markets and consumed by an average Syrian household.

REACH Daily Wage and Employment Sector Assessment (DWESA): Data collected on 22 January 2020 through KIs interviewed chosen based on their knowledge of economic conditions in the assessed community. 158 communities were assessed in Idlib and Aleppo governorates.

Cost of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) by Sub-District



- **High inflation, and economic disruption have caused the purchasing power of households to drop significantly.** Based on an average daily wage of unskilled labour of 1,742 SYP recorded in January (DWESA),³ it would take a head of household around 64 working days to earn the equivalent of the SMEB to cover basic needs for one month.
- **The price of bread, in particular, has drastically increased over the past few months.** The regional median cost of eight pieces of bread was recorded at 320 SYP in February 2020, a 80% increase since October 2019 (MM).
- **Access to heating fuel is also concerning,** particularly during the cold winter months, with both availability and high prices an issue. Prices of manually refined kerosene (used for heating and cooking) have soared to 800 SYP/L in February 2020 (a 129% increase since October 2019) and was reportedly unavailable in 77% of assessed sub-districts in February 2020 (MM).
- **Fuel availability and prices are impacted by supply disruptions,** with more than a quarter (26%) of assessed fuel vendor key informants in the latest MM assessment reporting that fuel supply routes have changed since October 2019 due to challenges in importing fuel from northeast Syria and Government of Syria-controlled areas.

1) The SMEB outlines the minimum culturally-adjusted items (food, water, hygiene items, cell phone data, and cooking fuel) that an average six-person household in Syria needs to purchase in one month.

2) As reported by assessed informal exchange shops in northwest Syria.

3) Median daily wage of unskilled labour recorded at 1,200 SYP.

REACH Emergency Needs Tracking (ENT):

The ENT mechanism is activated following large displacement waves. Assessment coverage is determined by IDP arrival numbers from the IDP Situation Monitoring Initiative (ISMI), which tracks displacement in northwest Syria on a 24 to 72-hour basis. The threshold for determining whether a community is assessed is contingent on the number of IDP arrivals witnessed in a given timeframe. As of 24 February, the threshold for determining coverage is whether a community has witnessed over 300 individual IDP arrivals since 15 January when the most recent conflict escalation began.¹

Data collection is conducted remotely through REACH's network of Key Informants (KIs) in Northwest Syria with one key informant (KI) interviewed per community (communities also refers to camps and sites where there are sites within or near the community). KIs are chosen based on their knowledge of IDP populations and their needs.

Round 1 (3 February 2020): [Aleppo](#); [Idleb](#)

Round 2 (10 February 2020): [Aleppo](#); [Idleb](#)

Round 3 (18 February 2020): [Aleppo](#); [Idleb](#)

Round 4 (24 February 2020): [Aleppo](#); [Idleb](#)

REACH Daily Wage and Employment Sector Assessment:

Following requests from humanitarian partners for up-to-date data on the average daily wage for unskilled labourers in northwest Syria and the most common employment sectors, REACH conducted an ad-hoc assessment across 158 accessible communities in opposition-controlled areas in northern and western Aleppo and Idleb governorates. Enumerators conducted interviews remotely with one KI per assessed community. KIs were chosen based on their knowledge of economic conditions in the assessed community. Data was collected on 22 January 2020.

[January 2020 Factsheet](#)

REACH and Cash Based Response Technical Working Group (CBR-TWG) Market Monitoring (MM)

To inform humanitarian cash programming, REACH, in partnership with the Cash-Based Responses Technical Working Group (CBR-TWG), conducts monthly Market Monitoring Exercises in northern Syria to assess the availability and prices of 36 basic commodities that are typically sold in markets and consumed by average Syrian households, including food and non-food items, water, fuel, and cellphone 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 KIs such as shop owners, suppliers and consumers.

[Northeast Syria MM, December 2019](#); [Northwest Syria MM, December 2019](#); [Northeast Syria MM, January 2020](#); [Northwest Syria MM, January 2020](#)

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 for the HSOS through an enumerator network in accessible locations throughout Idleb, Aleppo, and Hama governorates. Data for this assessment is collected over a 10 day period at the beginning of the month, and refers to the situation in the previous month.

REACH enumerators are based inside Syria and interview, either directly or remotely (via phone) depending on security, 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.

[October 2019 HSOS Situation Overview \(SO\)](#); [December 2019 HSOS SO](#)

Findings from all aforementioned assessments are indicative rather than representative, and should not be generalised across the region.

IDP Situation Monitoring Initiative (ISMI):

ISMI is an initiative of the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, implemented by REACH, which tracks displacement movements in northwest Syria on a 24-72-hour basis.

Following a baseline assessment conducted at the end of 2016, weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, and now daily rapid displacement monitoring (RDM) data collection cycles were initiated. Displacements are identified through an extensive KI network, either from alerts initiated by KIs or from follow-up by enumerators. At least two KIs are interviewed in each assessed community, and collected information is further triangulated through other sources, and humanitarian updates.

[September 2019 ISMI Factsheet](#); [October 2019 ISMI Factsheet](#); [November 2019 ISMI Factsheet](#)

Humanitarian Needs Assessment Program (HNAP) and CCCM IDP snapshot

In response to rapid displacements following an increase in hostilities HNAP conducts population assessments in north-west Syria, using a team of enumerators to collect data at the community level. This data is disaggregated by those displaced since 1 December 2019 as well as total IDP stock. Findings referenced in this situation overview is from [23 February 2020](#).

1) Although there has been more than 300 IDP arrivals reported since 15 January in a given community, it is possible that the current number of IDPs in this community is below 300 due to the fluid movements of IDPs.