Deir-ez-Zor Governorate - Situation Overview

Syria, 23 November 2017

SUMMARY

Since the beginning of September 2017, conflict has escalated in Deir-ez-Zor governorate as multiple parties have attempted to expel the group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from the governorate. The ongoing conflict has sparked large-scale displacement across the governorate, with an estimated 320,000 persons displaced in September and October alone.[1]

This report aims to assess the current humanitarian situation in communities in Deir-ez-Zor governorate that have been affected by recent conflict. Findings are based on primary data collected between 7 and 12 November through interviews with 62 Key Informants (KIs) reporting on 53 communities across the governorate. This follows a previous assessment, conducted prior to escalation of conflict in May 2017 when the majority of the governorate was controlled by ISIL, which gives an indication of the situation prior to the recent escalation of conflict, as well as an overview of displacement following initial movements from the governorate.

Map 1: Assessed communities and areas of control[2] in Deir-ez-Zor governorate

Legend:
- ○ Assessed communities
- ● Unassessed communities
- ● Community reported empty
- GoS
- ISIL
- SDF
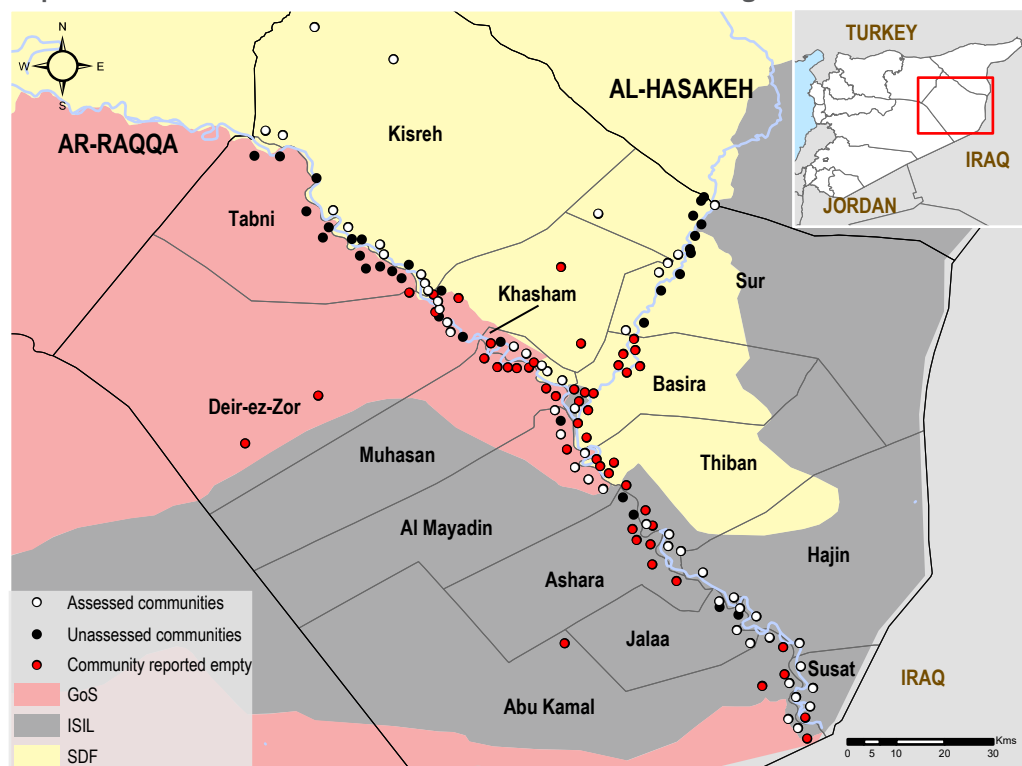
KEY FINDINGS:

- **Since the escalation of conflict in Deir-ez-Zor governorate in September 2017, more than 320,000 people have been displaced.** 200,000 displacements were recorded in October alone and, according to KIs, outward movement is expected to continue from 35 assessed communities across the governorate over the next two weeks. Although exact populations are difficult to confirm due to shifting IDP flows, KIs estimated that 58 of 135 communities in Deir-ez-Zor governorate are uninhabited.

- **Residents are living in damaged and vulnerable shelter types across the governorate.** KIs reported that residents are sheltering in damaged buildings in 18 of 53 assessed communities. In 31 assessed communities there are reportedly residents sheltering in either unfinished buildings, collective centres or informal tented settlements.

- **Nearly all assessed communities are reportedly unable to access the main water network, and most face issues with water quality.** Prior to the escalation of conflict, approximately half of communities in the governorate accessed water via the main network,[3] which was reportedly the case in just six assessed communities at the time of assessment. To cope with reduced access to water, communities are relying on previously stored water, purchasing water with cash usually reserved for other purposes, and in some instances reducing water consumption or drinking unsafe water.

- **Although markets are reportedly operating in the majority of assessed communities, most are not fully functional and access is challenging.** Safety and security concerns both at markets and when travelling to markets are the primary challenges to accessing food, while disrupted supply routes are limiting the quantity of food available. Communities are therefore relying on personal farming for food and in most cases are engaging in coping strategies such as limiting portion sizes and skipping meals.

- **Challenges accessing stable income sources have increased.** Prior to escalation of conflict, the most commonly reported sources of income related to agricultural production. At the time of the assessment, however, KIs reported that the primary sources of income are remittances from outside of Syria and savings. Income from employment is mostly from high risk illegal work or unstable daily jobs.

- **Although the majority of assessed communities have some health facilities available, KIs reported a major lack of qualified medical personnel and equipment.** Most health facilities are private clinics, primary care facilities or informal emergency care points. The two hospitals identified by KIs, in Deir-ez-Zor and Abu Kamal cities, are reportedly not fully functional. The main health service needs are surgery, emergency care and skilled care for childbirth.

- **Deir-ez-Zor city is reportedly the only location in the governorate in which formal education is available.** Schools and universities are reportedly functioning normally in the city. Although informal ad hoc education was reportedly available in a handful of communities, KIs reported that no education of any kind was available in 42 of the assessed communities.

- **Conflict presents the most pressing threat to the safety of the population of Deir-ez-Zor governorate and freedom of movement is severely curtailed.** Other issues reportedly faced in the last two weeks include threat from airstrikes, indirect fire, improvised explosive devices, errant gunfire and forced recruitment.

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1. Mobility Dynamic and Service Monitoring: September, October 2017.

2. Areas of control taken from http://syria.liveuamap.com/ as of 10 November 2017.
3. "Deir-ez-Zor: Governorate Profile," REACH, May 2017.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2014, the vast majority of Deir-ez-Zor governorate had been under the control of the group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), with only the neighbourhoods of Joura and Qosour (classified as besieged in January 2015) in Deir-ez-Zor city remaining under the control of the Government of Syria (GoS). In September 2017, both GoS and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) initiated ground offensives in Deir-ez-Zor governorate along multiple axes of advance, following separate successful advances into ISIL-held territory in Ar-Raqqa governorate. Throughout September and October, GoS-aligned forces gained control of the majority of Deir-ez-Zor governorate to the west of the Euphrates river, breaking the siege of Deir-ez-Zor city and taking control of Al-Mayadin city. GoS forces reportedly reached the outskirts of Abu Kamal city, the last remaining ISIL stronghold, in early November. Simultaneously, the SDF advanced south from Al-Hasakeh governorate, gaining control of formerly ISIL-held territory north of the Euphrates along the Khabur river (see Map 1).[4]

The escalation in conflict since September has caused large-scale displacement within and from Deir-ez-Zor governorate. The situation is highly dynamic, with communities emptying and repopulating sometimes on a daily basis. This, in addition to restrictions on movement imposed by armed actors, has resulted in the deterioration of the humanitarian situation across the governorate. To fill information gaps and highlight key humanitarian needs, REACH has conducted a rapid assessment aiming to assess the humanitarian situation in communities affected by conflict in Deir-ez-Zor governorate. This assessment covers population movements (including push and pull factors), access to food and markets, shelter, non-food items (NFI), water and sanitation (WASH), health services, the protection situation (including freedom of movement) and education.[5]

Methodology

Information was collected between 7 and 12 November through a combination of 14 remote and 39 direct semi-structured interviews with Key Informants (KIs) either still present in their communities in Deir-ez-Zor or who had departed their communities since 1 October. A total of 62 KIs reported on the humanitarian situation in 53 communities across the governorate. KIs included shop owners, traders, farmers, medical professionals, engineers, salesmen, mechanics and teachers. Communities were selected on the basis of accessibility and suitability (in terms of time of displacement and knowledge of community) of KIs. Additional KIs contributed to REACH enumerators identifying 58 communities believed to be uninhabited at the time of data collection. Findings are specific to communities assessed and cannot be generalized further, and the information in this situation overview should be considered as indicative only.

DISPLACEMENT

- **The escalation of conflict across Deir-ez-Zor governorate has triggered waves of large-scale displacement: more than 320,000 persons are reported to have displaced from their communities during September and October.**[6]

- In September, the majority of displacements occurred in western Deir-ez-Zor governorate. More than 53,000 persons (out of a total of 120,000) were displaced from Tabni sub-district alone, the majority of whom fled to Kisreh or Deir-ez-Zor sub-districts. Kisreh was also a major destination for those fleeing Deir-ez-Zor sub-district. Of the 21,000 IDPs departing Deir-ez-Zor sub-district, 12,000 arrived in Kisreh in September.[7]

- In October, the vast majority of displacements were departing Deir-ez-Zor governorate – with most IDPs arriving in the sub-districts where major IDP camps in Al-Hasakeh and Ar-Raqqa governorates are located. Around 68,000 IDPs departed Deir-ez-Zor to Areesheh sub-district, 62,000 to Al-Hasakeh, 23,000 to Ein Issa, 17,000 to Ras Al Ain, and 8,000 to Al Hol.[8]

- **KIs estimated that 58 of the 135 communities in Deir-ez-Zor are currently uninhabited.** Confirming which communities are empty is challenging given ongoing dynamic population flows, and many empty villages are reportedly temporarily occupied by travelling IDPs seeking to depart from the governorate.

Intentions

- **KIs reported that escalation of conflict and the corresponding deterioration of the security situation are the primary reasons for displacement across the governorate.** In 36 communities, KIs reported that arriving IDPs had left their previous location due to escalation of conflict. In communities that had seen departures over the last two weeks, KIs most commonly reported escalation of conflict and increased safety risks as reasons for leaving.

Top 5 most commonly reported reasons residents left their community

1. Direct escalation of conflict
2. - Increased risk to personal safety
   - Opening of safe passages to elsewhere
   - Lack of access to healthcare
5. Anticipation of escalation of conflict in future

4. Syria.Liveuamap, November 2017.
5. OCHA, Syria Crisis: Northeast Syria Situation Report No. 18, November 2017.
6. Mobility Dynamic and Service Monitoring: September, October 2017.
7. Mobility Dynamic and Service Monitoring: September 2017.
8. Mobility Dynamic and Service Monitoring: October 2017.

Map 2: Displacement trends from Deir-ez-Zor governorate, September and October 2017[9]

Major displacement trends

↪ External
🚶 Internal
☐ Inward
☐ Outward
☐ Inward & Outward
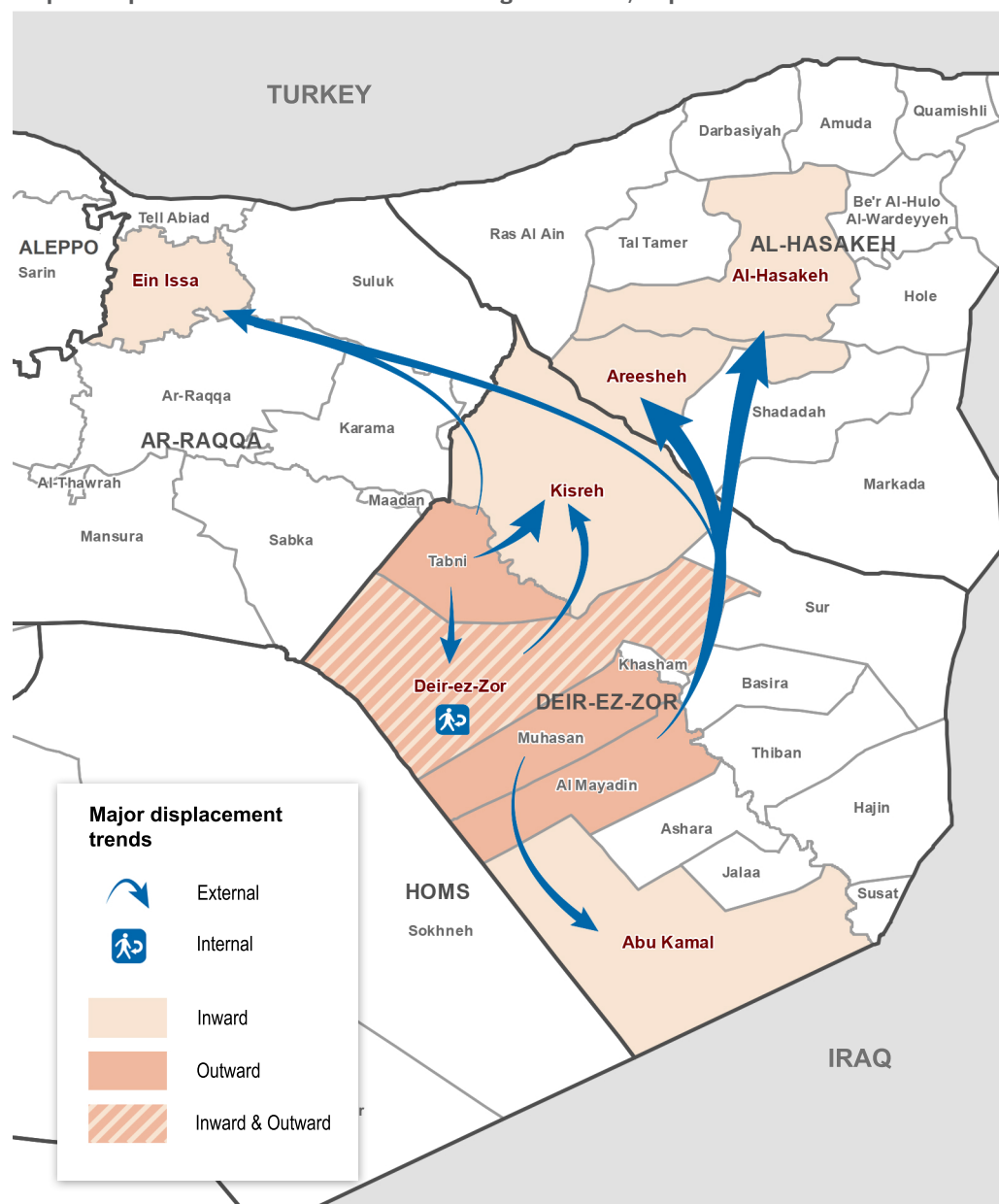
- **In choosing displacement destinations, IDPs are reportedly prioritizing either the convenience of the location for additional future movement or the proximity of the location to assets, which they hope to protect.**

Top 5 most commonly reported reasons IDPs selected destination community (number of communities reporting each)[10]

Convenience of location for transit purposes	25
Proximity to assets to facilitate protection	24
Safety and security situation	13
Availability of safe passages	11
Relationship with the host community	10

- **Further displacement is expected in the coming weeks.** KIs reported that in 12 assessed communities 76-100% of the remaining population intend to depart over the next two weeks. Departures are reportedly expected from an additional 23 communities.

- **An increase in active conflict, specifically aerial bombardment and ground incursions, is the factor most commonly reported as likely to trigger additional future displacement.**

Top 5 most commonly reported factors that would trigger additional displacement (number of communities reporting each)[11]

Increase in aerial bombardment	44
Increase in ground incursions	24
Change in administrative authority	21
Destruction of home	15
Opening of safe passages elsewhere	6

Returns

- **IDPs are returning to their homes in a minority of communities.** KIs reported that those who had displaced to Al-Hasakeh governorate had returned in nine assessed communities across Deir-ez-Zor and Kisreh sub-districts over the last two weeks. Additionally, according to KIs, mine removal operations were reportedly ongoing in Sur to enable future returns to the community.

SHELTER

- **The majority of residents in Deir-ez-Zor governorate are reportedly sheltering in owned or rented homes or apartments.** However, a significant number of communities additionally reported that residents were sharing homes or sheltering in collective centres or unfinished buildings.

- Although vulnerable shelter types were not generally reported to be the most common shelter type in communities, **at least one of unfinished buildings, collective centres or tented settlements were reportedly present in the majority of assessed communities.**

- **Some residents in the majority of communities in the governorate are sheltering in damaged buildings.** KIs reported that in 18 of 53 assessed communities up to 10% of residents were living in damaged shelters.

Map 3: Reported informal tented settlements in Deir-ez-Zor governorate

Legend:
- Informal tented settlement(s)
- No informal tented settlement(s)
- Assessed subdistricts
- Unassessed subdistricts
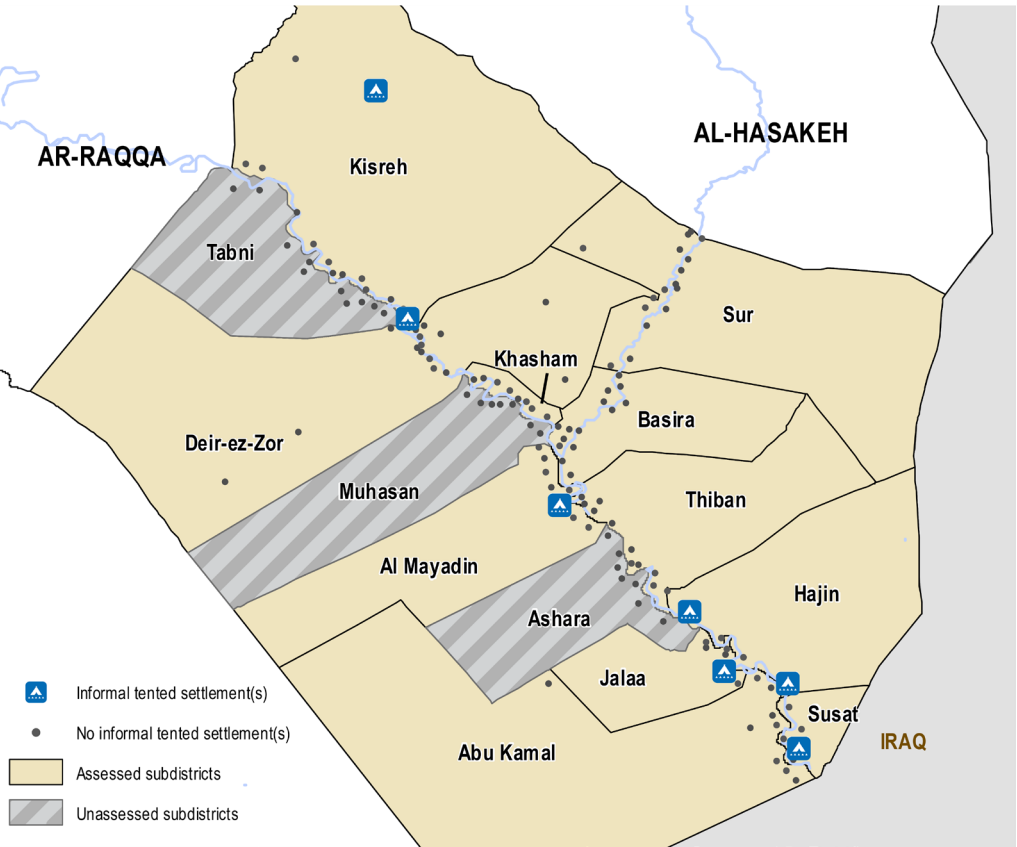
Top 5 most commonly reported shelter types in assessed communities (number of communities reporting each)[12]

Shelter type	Count
Owned homes or apartments	40
Rented homes or apartments	23
Shared accommodation	21
Collective centres	16
Unfinished buildings	9

NFIs

- **Items related to cooking and bedding are reportedly the most needed across the governorate.** KIs most commonly reported cooking fuel as a needed item. Cooking fuel was also frequently unavailable, with 17 assessed communities reporting that cooking fuel was only sometimes available and an additional 10 reporting it was not available at all. Sources of light were also reportedly unavailable in 11 of 53 assessed communities.

- **Winterization needs are severe across Deir-ez-Zor governorate.** KIs reported that winter blankets were needed in 40 of 53 assessed communities. Heating fuel and heaters were also needed in the majority of assessed communities, with heating fuel reportedly completely unavailable in 24 communities.

Reported availability of key non-food items in markets in Deir-ez-Zor governorate:

	# of communities needing item	Generally available	Sometimes available	Not available
Cooking fuel	34	7	17	10
Bedding	24	14	9	1
Sources of light	19	1	7	11
Mattresses	15	8	6	1
Cooking utensil	10	6	4	0
Cooking stoves	8	2	4	2
Batteries	8	1	3	4

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12. KIs could select up to three options.

Electricity

- **There is no available main network power across the entirety of Deir-ez-Zor governorate.** Prior to the escalation of conflict, approximately 25% of communities in the governorate had access to the main power network. Currently, the vast majority of assessed communities (42 of 53) rely exclusively on private generators for electricity. KIs reported that in 10 assessed communities residents relied on car batteries or had no access to electricity at all. Thirty of 53 assessed communities reportedly had access to electricity for four hours or less per day (see Map 4).

Map 4: Reported access to electricity in Deir-ez-Zor governorate
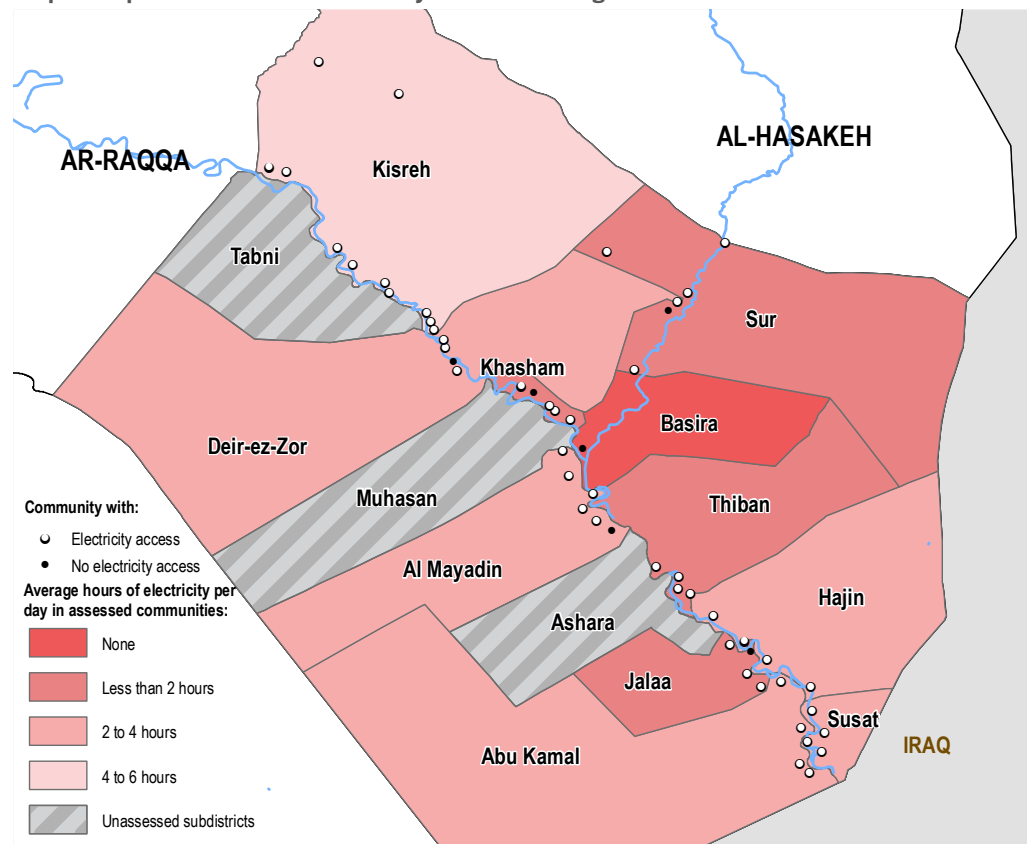
WASH

Map 5: Reported access to water in Deir-ez-Zor governorate
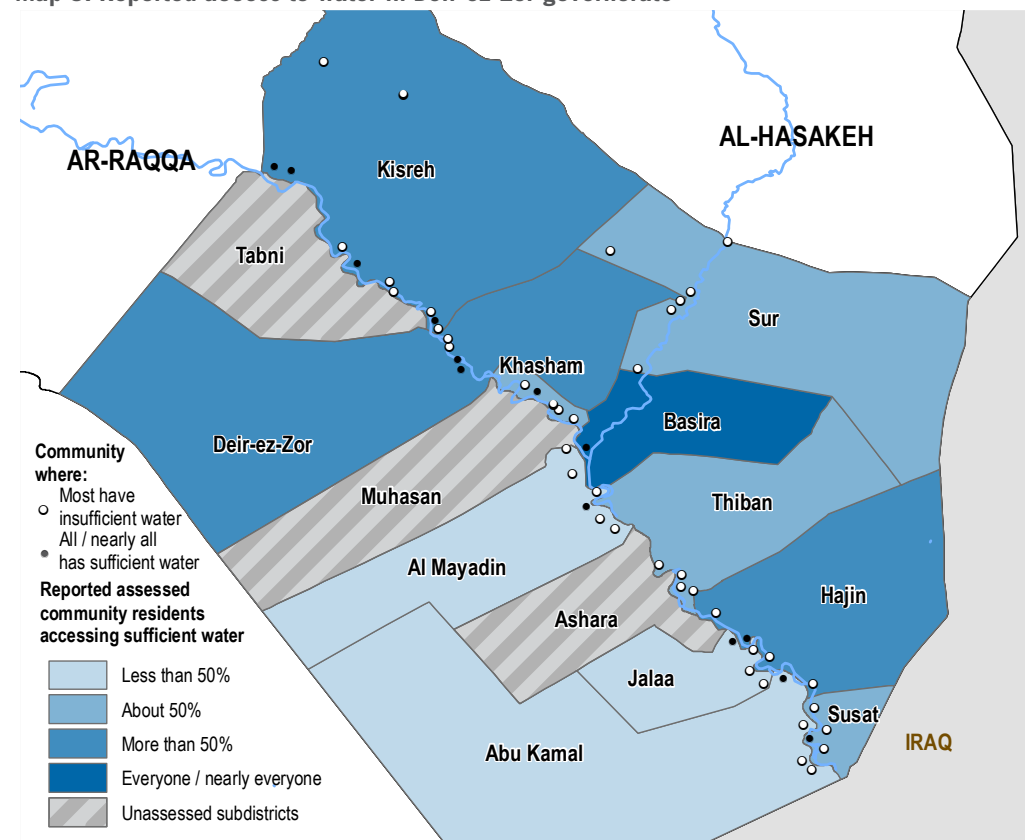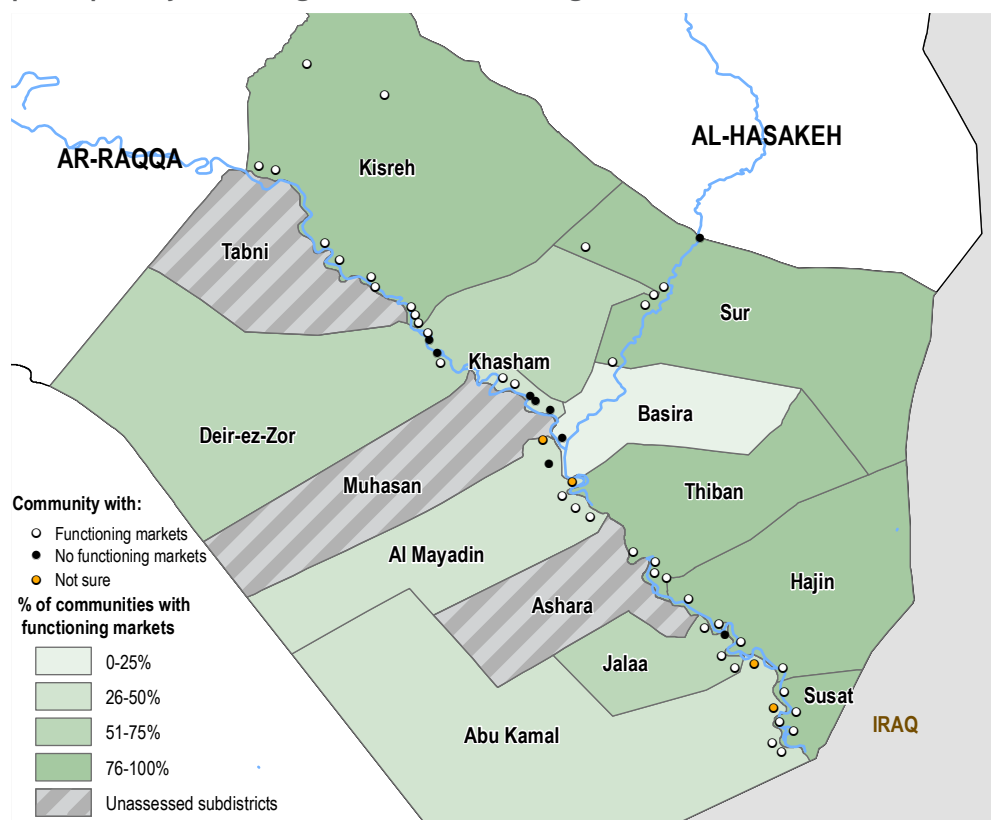

Water access and quality

- **Most communities have reportedly been unable to access the main water network.** In 43 of 53 assessed communities, KIs reported that no water has been available from the main network for the past two weeks. This represents a major reduction from prior to the escalation of conflict, when around half of assessed communities reported that the main network was their primary source of water.

- **In order to cope with reduced water access, communities have been modifying hygiene practices, relying on previously stored water, and purchasing water with cash usually reserved for other purposes.** KIs reported that there has also been increased reliance on more extreme water consumption coping strategies, such as reducing drinking water consumption and drinking water normally used for washing or other purposes.

- **There are reportedly problems with water quality in nearly all assessed communities** (45 of 53), with issues including water with an unusual taste and smell as well as discolouration. KIs also reported that individuals are falling sick after drinking water in 21 of the assessed communities.

Sanitation

- **Pipelines and other major sewage infrastructure are reportedly in need of repair in 40 of the 53 assessed communities.** Communities with reportedly damaged or non-existent infrastructure are mostly located in the southwestern sub-districts of Abu Kamal, Susat, Hajin, Jalaa, Thiban and Al Mayadin.

- **Burning garbage is the most widely used modality of solid waste disposal across the governorate,** reported as the primary means in 39 of 53 assessed communities.

Map 6: Reportedly functioning markets in Deir-ez-Zor governorate

AR-RAQQA

AL-HASAKEH

Kisreh

Tabni

Sur

Khasham

Basira

Deir-ez-Zor

Muhasan

Thiban

Al Mayadin

Hajin

Ashara

Jalaa

Susat

IRAQ

Abu Kamal

Community with:
- ○ Functioning markets
- ● No functioning markets
- ● Not sure

% of communities with functioning markets
- 0-25%
- 26-50%
- 51-75%
- 76-100%
- Unassessed subdistricts

FOOD AND MARKETS

- **The main sources of food across the governorate are personal farming, food purchased from stores and markets, and previously stored emergency rations.** Food assistance is reportedly a main food source in only two of the assessed communities: Abu Khashab, a major IDP transit site in Kisreh sub-district, and Deir-ez-Zor city.

- **The primary challenges with accessing food are directly related to the conflict.** KIs reported that the main challenges faced by residents with accessing food concerned travelling to markets (too unsafe to travel or not physically able to travel due to blocked or damaged roads) as well as the markets themselves (too unsafe or not functioning in times of conflict). KIs reported no challenges with accessing food in 16 of the assessed communities.

- **Food items are reportedly available in markets in the majority of assessed communities (40 of 53) but most are not fully functional (see Map 6).** KIs reported that food market opening times are often unpredictable due to the security situation while markets stock insufficient quantities of food and have high prices because of limited supply routes for commercial actors.

- **Indicative of reduced access to food, households are resorting to coping strategies in the majority of assessed communities.** In particular, households are reportedly reducing meal size and skipping meals, while there are also reports of households selling productive and non-productive assets, as well as spending entire days without eating.

Core food items

- **In more than half of assessed communities (28 of 53) there are no functioning bakeries.** KIs reported several reasons for this, including damaged equipment, a lack of supply routes for ingredients to be delivered, and a lack of electricity or fuel. As a result, bread is primarily made at home in the majority of assessed communities (41 of 53).

- Bread and lentils were the most commonly reported unavailable core food items, while rice and cooking oil also had limited availability.

Reported availability and median price[13] of core food items in markets:

Subdistrict	Bread (1 pack) Availability	Bread (1 pack) Median reported price in SYP (USD)	Rice (1 kg) Availability	Rice (1 kg) Median reported price in SYP (USD)	Flour (1 kg) Availability	Flour (1 kg) Median reported price in SYP (USD)	Lentils (1 kg) Availability	Lentils (1 kg) Median reported price in SYP (USD)	Cooking oil (1 litre) Availability	Cooking oil (1 litre) Median reported price in SYP (USD)
Abu Kamal	✓	600 (1.17)	✓	1050 (2.04)	✓	275 (0.53)	✗	775 (1.50)	✓	1000 (1.94)
Al Mayadin	✓	350 (0.68)	✗	1200 (2.33)	✓	350 (0.68)	✗	800 (1.55)	✗	2500 (4.85)
Basira	✓	N/A	✗	N/A	✓	500 (0.97)	✗	N/A	✗	N/A
Deir-ez-Zor	✗	800 (1.56)	✓	400 (0.78)	✓	250 (0.49)	✓	600 (1.17)	✓	600 (1.17)
Hajin	✓	350 (0.68)	✓	750 (1.46)	✓	250 (0.49)	✓	700 (1.36)	✓	1000 (1.94)
Jalaa	✓	500 (0.97)	✓	1200 (2.33)	✓	250 (0.49)	✗	800 (1.55)	✓	2000 (3.88)
Khasham	✗	300 (0.58)	✓	800 (1.55)	✓	300 (0.58)	✓	1200 (2.33)	✓	2500 (4.85)
Kisreh	✗	200 (0.39)	✓	400 (0.78)	✓	250 (0.49)	✓	600 (1.17)	✓	650 (1.26)
Sur	✓	350 (0.68)	✓	650 (1.26)	✓	300 (0.58)	✓	750 (1.36)	✓	800 (1.55)
Susat	✓	325 (0.63)	✓	800 (1.55)	✓	250 (0.49)	✓	650 (1.26)	✓	1100 (2.14)
Thiban	✓	300 (0.58)	✓	775 (1.50)	✓	250 (0.49)	✓	800 (1.55)	✓	1200 (2.33)

Legend ✓ Generally available ✓ Limited availability ✗ Not generally available

CASH AND LIVELIHOODS

- **Fewer than half of assessed communities have functioning hawala systems[14] (19 of 53)**, the majority of which are not functioning properly with KIs reporting insufficient quantities of cash and sporadic operating hours.

- **Households face difficulties accessing stable livelihood sources.** Prior to escalation of conflict, the most commonly reported sources of income related to agricultural production. However, with the deterioration of the security situation across much of the governorate, the main reported sources of income are remittances from outside Syria and savings. Income from employment is mostly from high risk illegal work or unstable daily jobs.

- **KIs reported that the main barriers to accessing livelihoods are the overall security situation,** restrictions by local authorities, and difficulties accessing to key resources required for the job. KIs in 21 of 53 assessed communities also reported that there is a general lack of employment opportunities**.**

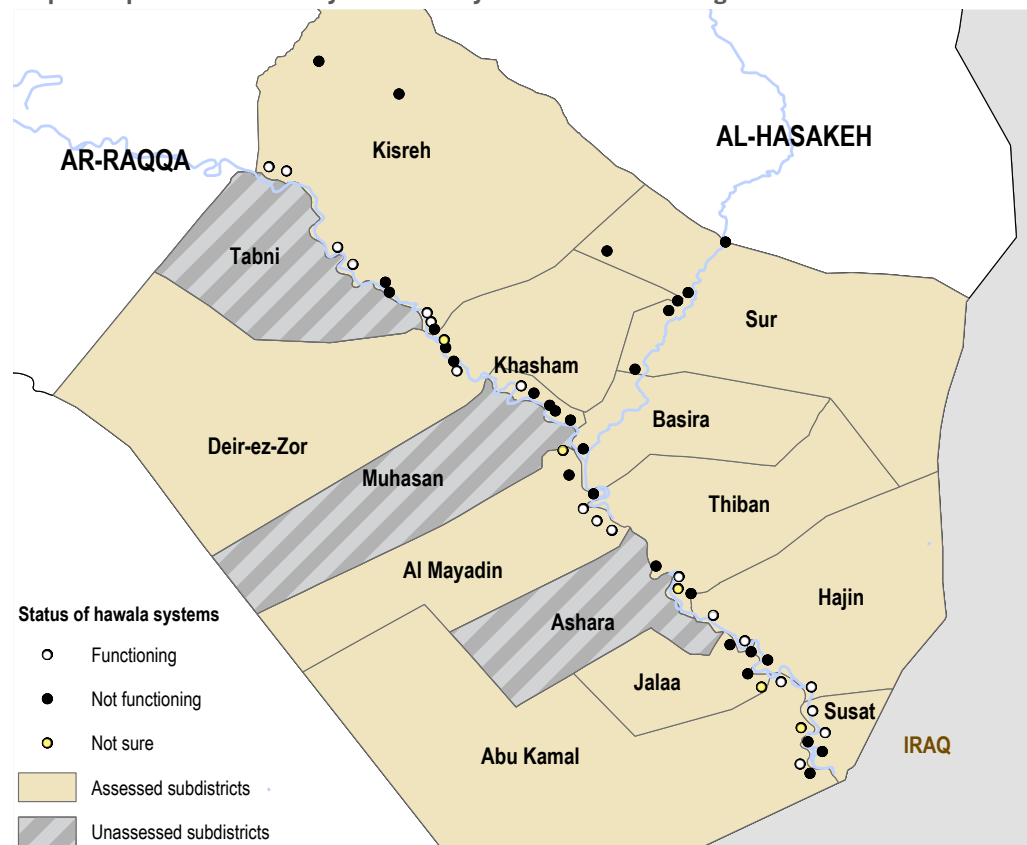**Most commonly reported sources of income (number of communities reporting each)[15]**

Remittances from outside Syria	26
Savings	22
High risk illegal work	20
Business trade	16
Sale of household assets	15
Farm owner	11
Unstable daily employment	10

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13. xe.com as of 17 November 2017: 1 USD = 515 SYP.
14. Hawala is a traditional system of transferring money whereby money is paid to an agent who then instructs an associate in the relevant country or area to pay the final recipient.
15. KIs could select more than one option.

Map 7: Reported functionality of hawala systems in Deir-ez-Zor governorate

Status of hawala systems

○ Functioning
● Not functioning
○ Not sure (yellow)

Assessed subdistricts
Unassessed subdistricts

Labels on map: AR-RAQQA, Kisreh, AL-HASAKEH, Tabni, Sur, Khasham, Basira, Deir-ez-Zor, Muhasan, Thiban, Al Mayadin, Hajin, Ashara, Jalaa, Susat, Abu Kamal, IRAQ

PROTECTION

- **Freedom of movement is reportedly limited throughout Deir-ez-Zor governorate.** KIs reported that in 41 assessed communities civilian movement is either significantly restricted by local authorities or completely banned by armed groups. The overall safety and security situation, in addition to limited or too expensive transportation options, was also reported as a factor limiting freedom of movement.

- **KIs reported that protection issues had occurred in the last two weeks in nearly every assessed community in the governorate.** These issues were primarily directly related to conflict and included threat from airstrikes, indirect fire, improvised explosive devices, errant gunfire and forced recruitment.

- **Women in particular were reported to have faced movement restrictions that prevented them from accessing key services such as healthcare.** KIs reported that children suffered from psychological trauma and face recruitment into armed groups and risk from mines.

Top 5 most commonly reported women's protection issues (number of communities reporting each)[16]

Restrictions on movement	37
Restrictions preventing access to essential services	27
Violence against women	14

EDUCATION

- **Schooling was reportedly completely unavailable in 42 of the assessed communities.** Informal schooling, such as ad-hoc education administered outside the bounds of governmental institutions or gatherings in homes, was reportedly occurring in five communities in the governorate. The only assessed community in which formal schooling was reportedly available was Deir-ez-Zor city, where KIs reported that schools and universities are functioning normally.
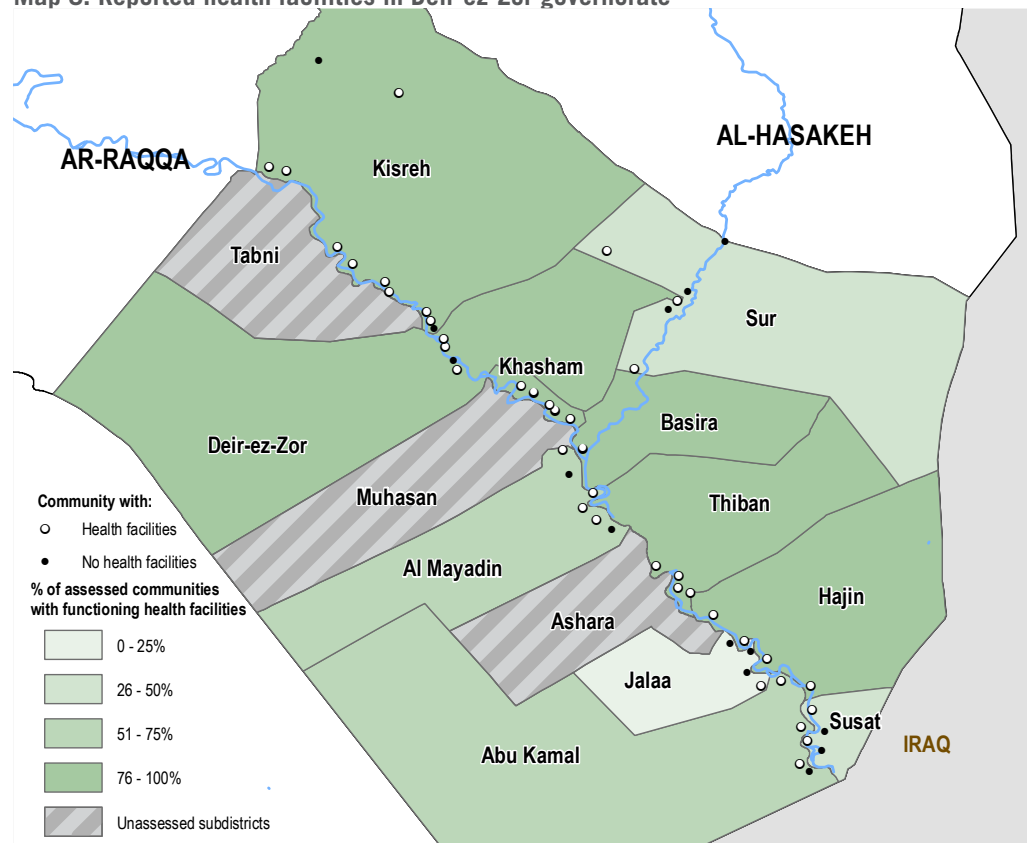
HEALTH

- **Although the majority of assessed communities have health facilities (39 of 53), these are mostly private clinics, primary care facilities and informal emergency care points.** There are two hospitals in the assessed communities (Abu Kamal and Deir-ez-Zor) neither of which is fully operational.

- **KIs reported a major lack of qualified medical personnel and equipment.** Healthcare services are reportedly sufficient to meet the needs of the population in just 2 of 53 assessed communities. The most needed health services are surgery, emergency care for accidents and injuries, and skilled care for childbirth.

Most commonly reported barriers to accessing healthcare (number of communities reporting each)[17]

Lack of medical personnel	43
Lack of female doctors	34
Lack of medicine or medical items	30
Healthcare is provided by unqualified community members	21

16. KIs could select more than one option.
17. KIs could select more than one option.

Map 8: Reported health facilities in Deir-ez-Zor governorate

AR-RAQQA

AL-HASAKEH

Kisreh

Tabni

Sur

Khasham

Deir-ez-Zor

Basira

Muhasan

Thiban

Al Mayadin

Hajin

Ashara

Jalaa

Susat

Abu Kamal

IRAQ

Community with:
○ Health facilities
● No health facilities

% of assessed communities with functioning health facilities

- 0 - 25%
- 26 - 50%
- 51 - 75%
- 76 - 100%
- Unassessed subdistricts

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