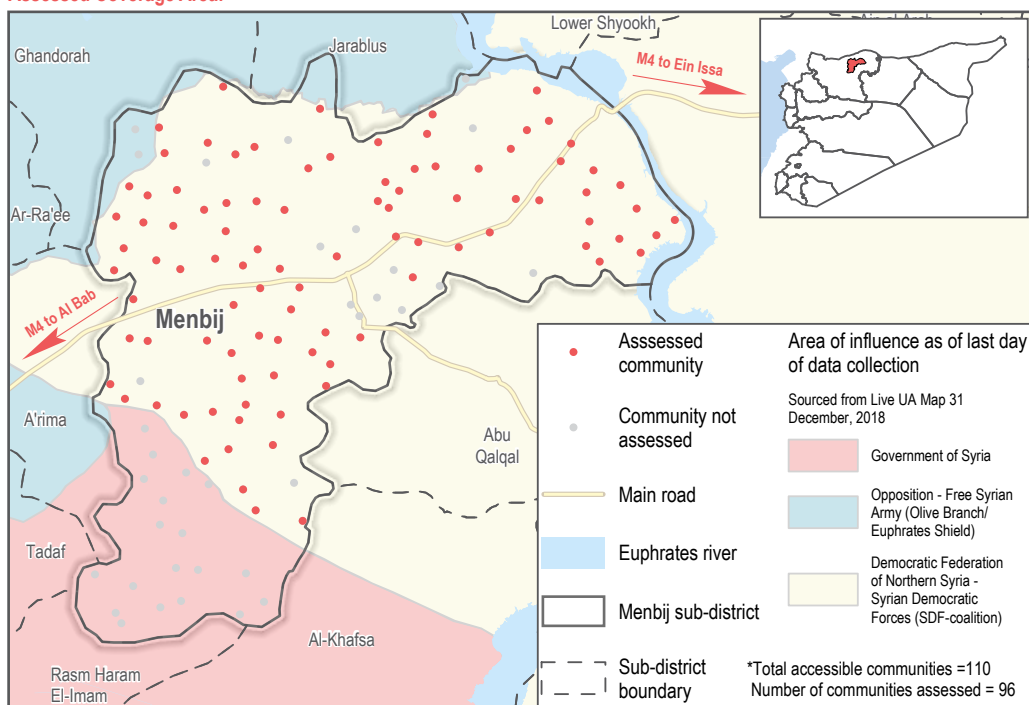


Menbij Sub-district: IDP and Spontaneous Returnee Situation Overview

Aleppo Governorate, North-east Syria, December 2018

REACH Informing
more effective
humanitarian action

Assessed Coverage Area:



Introduction

Since August 2016, Menbij sub-district in north-eastern Aleppo governorate has experienced less conflict-related violence than previously, following the expulsion of the group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from the region.¹ Between then and December 2018, many people are believed to have spontaneously returned to Menbij city and the surrounding areas, following a perceived stabilisation in the sub-district.² Over this period, the sub-district has also witnessed the arrival of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom were reportedly displaced by clashes in other parts of Aleppo governorate but have remained in the sub-district since.³ More recently, as of December 2018, populations in Menbij sub-district face renewed instability and uncertainty over the future. With the announced departure of some international military actors from Menbij expected in the coming months, many fear that a withdrawal may result in a major escalation of conflict and a power vacuum, leading to further displacements and deteriorating civilian living conditions.⁴ While humanitarian assistance is reaching the sub-district, major gaps remain. There is limited information on current spontaneous returnee (SR) and IDP population numbers, demographics and shelter settings, as well as on the priority needs of displaced populations in the sub-district. To address these gaps, REACH has conducted a population assessment via community-level key informant interviews (KIs) in 96 out of 110 accessible communities⁶ in Menbij sub-district.* This situation overview provides an outline of findings from the assessment.

Key Findings

Demographics and Displacement^{7,8}

- As of 31 December 2018, an estimated 215,000 individuals (35,900 households) were reported by Key Informants (KIs) to be residing in 95 assessed communities in Menbij sub-district, of whom 148,000 were resident/pre-conflict population members (in 95 assessed communities) and 67,000 were IDPs (in 96 assessed communities).**
- An estimated 146,000 (99%) of the reported residents were spontaneous returnees (SRs).⁹ More than two thirds (69%) of SRs had returned to their communities of origin before 2018.¹⁰
- IDPs were found to be living in 46 (48%) assessed communities. IDP numbers were highest in Menbij community (57,800),⁸ and communities with IDPs are concentrated in the western part of Menbij sub-district. This could be due to IDPs having relatively greater access to goods and services in these communities,¹¹ as well as the proximity of these locations to IDPs' reported areas of origin.
- KIs reported that almost two thirds (64%) of IDPs were from other parts of Aleppo governorate to the west of Menbij – most commonly from Al Bab (34%), Afrin (14%), As-Safira (14%) districts.

Shelter

- KIs reported that a majority of SR (76%) and IDP (65%) populations live in solid/finished houses.¹² In addition, KIs reported that three shelter adequacy issues most commonly affected both population groups: many shelters being slightly damaged, a lack of insulation from the cold, and leaking during rain. These issues indicate that both SRs and IDPs were affected by winter weather.¹³
- Of an estimated 62,500 SRs in 41 assessed locations where information on the number of returns to former homes was provided, approximately 99% were reportedly living in their former homes.¹⁴
- Almost a quarter (24%) of IDPs in assessed communities were reportedly residing in unfinished/damaged buildings as of 31 December 2018.

Priority Needs for IDPs

- In 32% of assessed communities, KIs reported winterisation and healthcare, respectively, to be among the top three sectoral priority needs of IDPs. Food and non-food items (NFIs) were also commonly reported priority needs. Given the challenging winter conditions,¹³ heating fuel was the most commonly reported specific need of IDPs, reported by KIs in 29 (30%) communities.¹⁵

Methodology

Findings presented in this situation overview are based on data collected remotely by REACH as part of an assessment focused on IDP and SR populations living in accessible opposition-held communities in Menbij sub-district in north-eastern Aleppo governorate. Data was collected between 13 and 31 January 2019 in 96 out of a total of 110 accessible communities in the sub-district.⁸ Data was collected at the community level, with enumerators interviewing two key informants (KIs) per assessed location. KIs were selected based on their knowledge of SR and IDP populations in their respective locations. The selection of communities to be assessed was based on the availability of REACH enumerator and KI networks. Collected primary data was triangulated through available REACH and external secondary sources. Information should be considered as reflective of the situation at the time of data collection, given the dynamic situation in the region. In addition, findings are not statistically representative and should only be considered as indicative of the situation in the wider sub-district. For more information, please refer to the assessment [methodology note](#) and [full data set](#).

* This is out of a total of 132 populated communities in Menbij sub-district, as listed on the [United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(UNOCHA\) Syrian administrative p-code list](#), as of 31 December 2018.

** Estimated household figures in this overview are rounded to the nearest 100, while estimated individual figures are rounded to the nearest 1,000.

Menbij Sub-district: IDP and Spontaneous Returnee Situation Overview



DEMOGRAPHICS AND DISPLACEMENT

As of 31 December 2018, KIs reported that **an estimated 146,000 SRs (24,600 households)** were living in 94 assessed communities, **2,000 non-displaced residents (300 households)** were living in 95 assessed communities and **67,000 IDPs (11,000 households)** were living in 96 assessed communities in Menbij sub-district.^{7,8} Within these 67,000 IDPs, 57,800 were reported in Menbij community.

146,000 Estimated number of SRs in 94 assessed communities.*

67,000 Estimated number of IDPs in 96 assessed communities.*

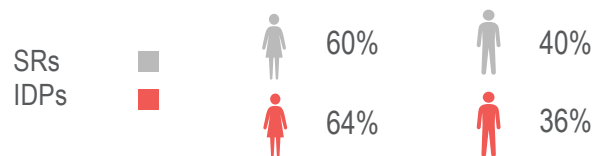
Estimated population distribution in assessed communities (in which total populations were reported), as of 31 December 2018:⁸



Spontaneous returnees
Internally displaced persons
Non-displaced residents

In the 95 assessed communities where both resident and IDP population estimates were available, **IDPs represented, on average, approximately 6% of the total population.****

Estimated gender distribution of SR and IDP populations in assessed communities, as of 31 December 2018:¹⁶



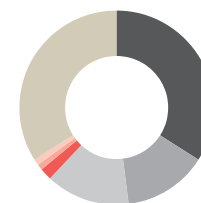
KIs reported that both SR and IDP populations typically had a **higher number of women and girls than men and boys**. The ratio of females to males was notably higher among IDPs.

Estimated age distribution of SR and IDP populations in assessed communities, as of 31 December 2018:¹⁶



Most common district of origin of IDPs in assessed communities (% IDPs):¹⁹

Al Bab (Aleppo) **34%**
Afrin (Aleppo) **14%**
As-Safira (Aleppo) **14%**
Tadmor (Homs) **2%**
A'zaz (Aleppo) **1%**
Jarablus (Aleppo) **<1%**
Other/unknown **34%**



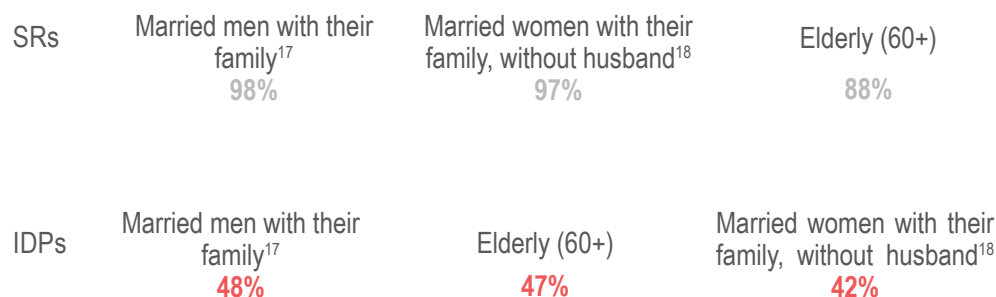
Almost two thirds (64%) of IDPs reportedly originated from districts elsewhere in Aleppo governorate, all of which have experienced significant levels of conflict in recent years.³

Distribution of IDPs by estimated duration of stay in current host community:²⁰



A majority of IDPs (86%) had reportedly been living in their current locations for a duration of one year or longer.***

Top three most commonly reported household profiles (by percentage of communities):



* KIs reported data on IDPs in 96 assessed communities, residents in 95 assessed communities and SRs in 94 assessed communities. The total population number is based on the 95 communities where KIs were able to report data on IDPs and resident populations.

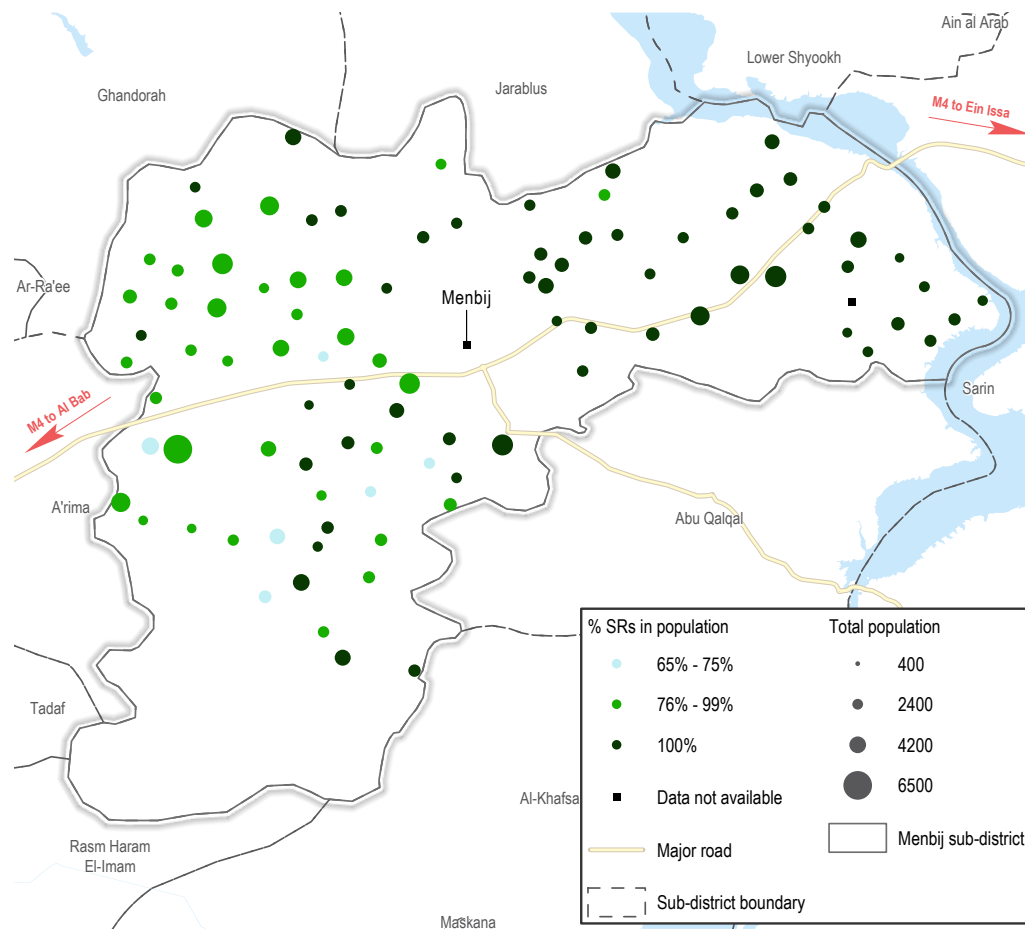
** This calculation does not include the 57,800 IDPs reported in Menbij community (C1767), for which total population estimates (including residents) were not available.

*** Information on IDPs' duration of stay in current locations was provided by KIs in 24 out of 46 communities in which IDPs were reported to be living. In the remaining communities KIs reported that they did not know how long IDPs had been residing in the community.

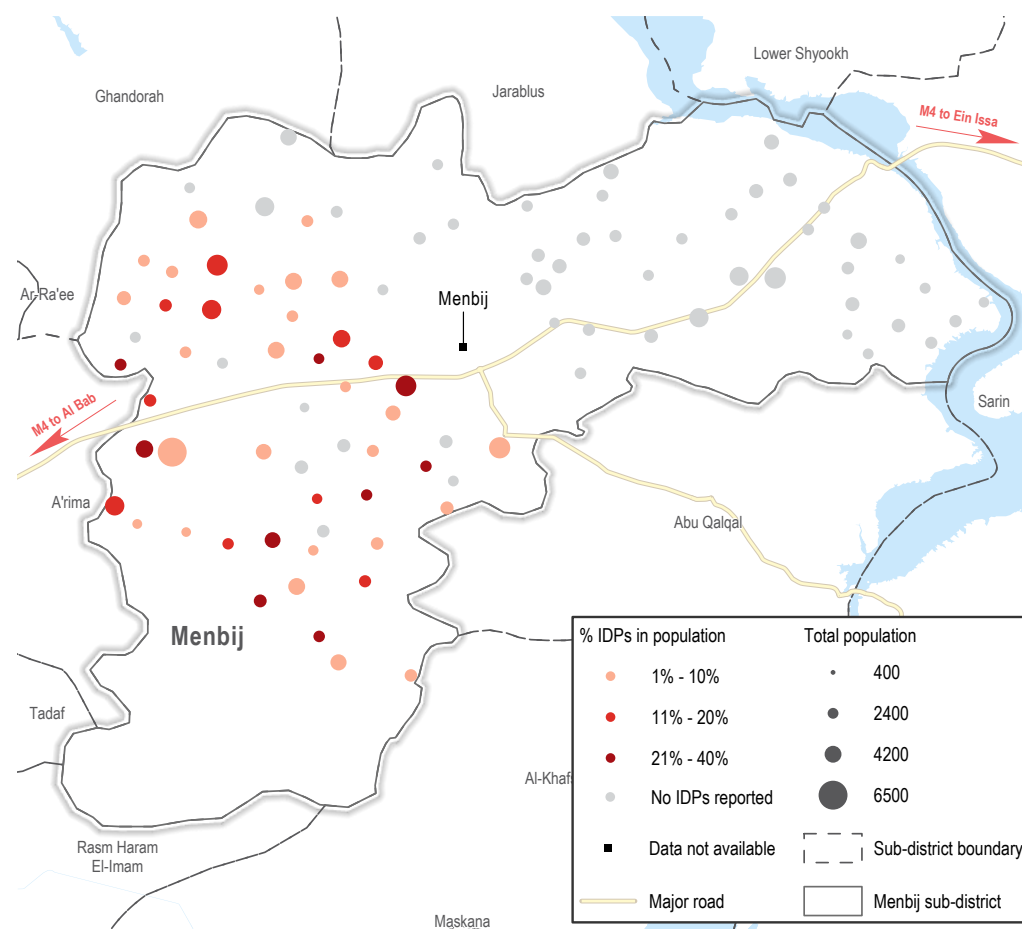
Menbij Sub-district: IDP and Spontaneous Returnee Situation Overview

DEMOGRAPHICS AND DISPLACEMENT

Estimated SR populations in assessed communities, as of 31 December 2018:



Estimated IDP populations in assessed communities, as of 31 December 2018:

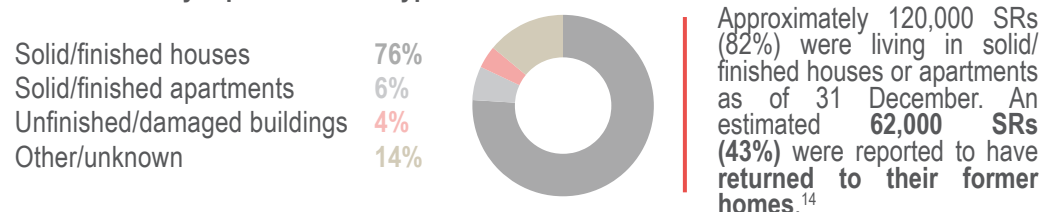


Menbij Sub-district: IDP and Spontaneous Returnee Situation Overview

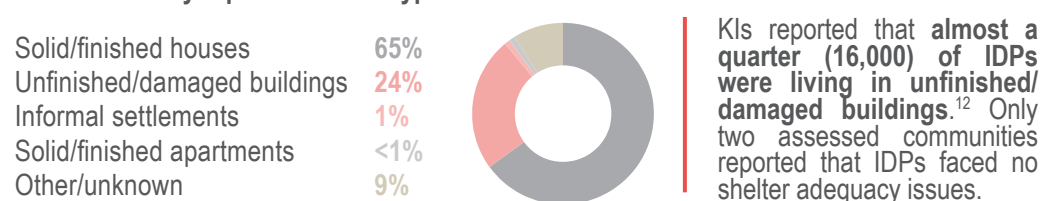
SHELTER

Despite a majority of both SR and IDP populations reportedly living in solid/finished houses as of 31 December 2018,¹² KIs indicated that three shelter adequacy issues were commonly faced by both groups, namely: **shelter damage, lack of insulation, and leaking** – all of which render populations in assessed communities particularly vulnerable to harsh winter conditions.¹³

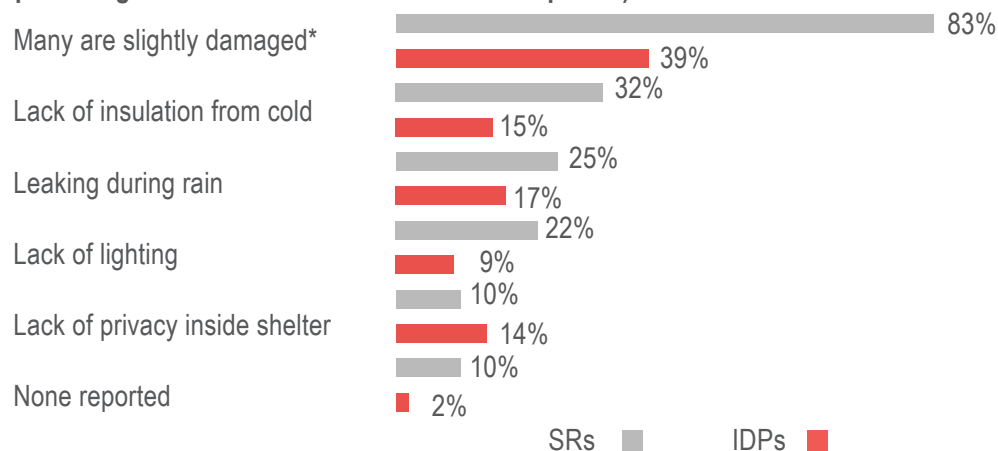
Most commonly reported shelter types of SRs in assessed communities:²¹



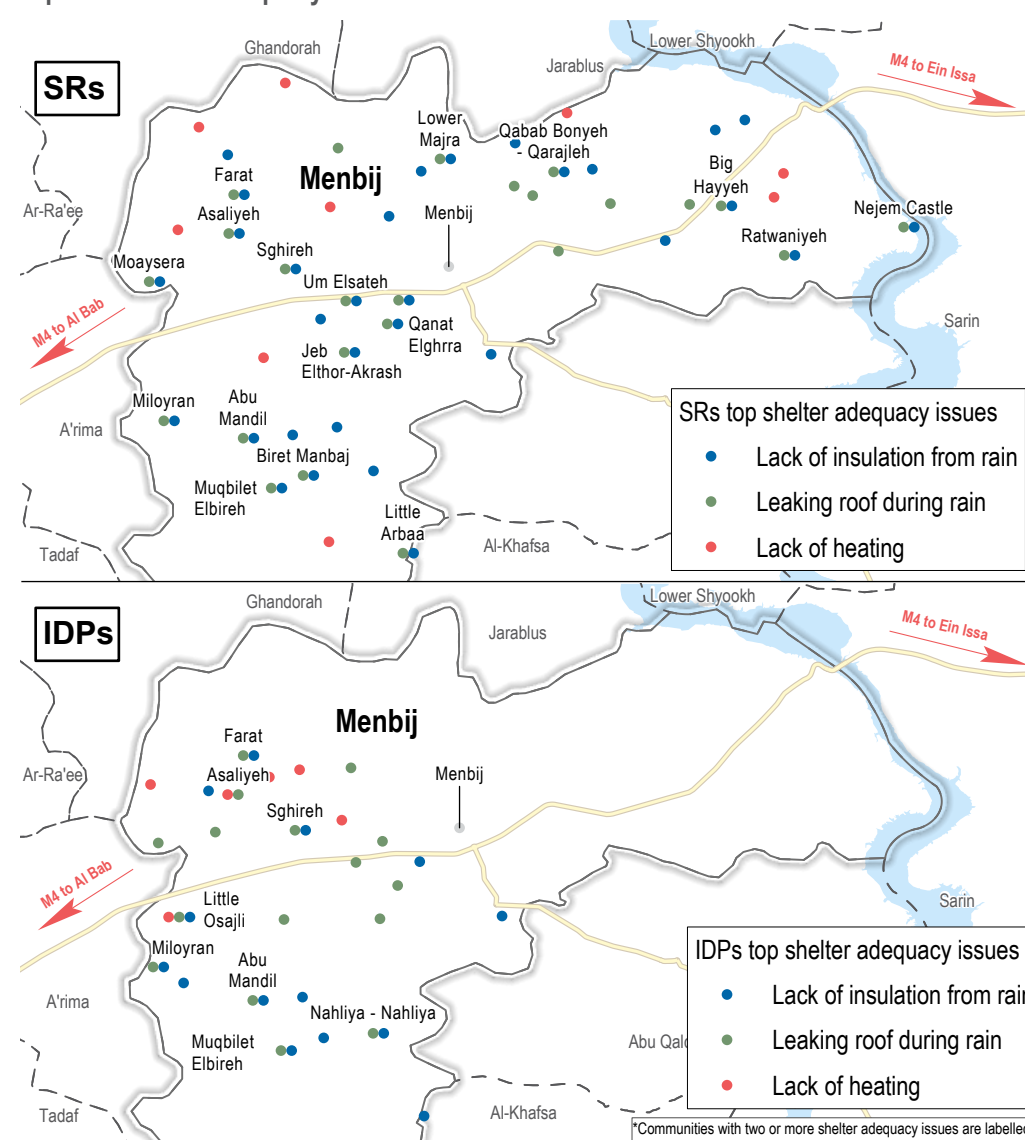
Most commonly reported shelter types of IDPs in assessed communities:²¹



Most commonly reported shelter adequacy issues of SR and IDP populations (by percentage of communities where each was reported):¹⁹



Reported shelter adequacy issues in assessed communities as of 31 December 2018:^{**}



* Slightly damaged was described as a building which is still structurally stable but may have some cosmetic damage e.g. cracks in walls.

** Communities with two or more top priority shelter adequacy issues have been labelled.

Menbij Sub-district: IDP and Spontaneous Returnee Situation Overview












PRIORITY NEEDS OF IDPs*

In the 46 assessed communities where IDPs were reported to be present, **KIs were asked to rank their top three sectors whose items or services were priority needs**, and to provide the **three most needed items or services** in each of these sectors.¹⁵

In 67% of communities with IDPs (32% of all assessed communities), **both winterisation and healthcare, respectively, were reported to be among the top three needs of displaced populations**. This is in keeping with trends across northeast Syria where healthcare is frequently cited as a top priority need. In addition, KIs reported that **non-food items (NFIs)** were a priority need in half of all assessed communities that had IDP populations, followed by **food (33%)** and **water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) (28%)**.

Despite **food** not being reported as a second or third priority need, it **was the most commonly reported first priority need among all sectors**, reported by KIs in 15 assessed communities (33%) that had IDP populations.

Top 3 reported priority needs of IDPs, by number of assessed communities:**

| | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | Total |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-------|
|  Winterisation or equivalent | 13 | 18 | 1 | 32 |
|  Healthcare | 10 | 20 | 1 | 31 |
|  NFI | 0 | 3 | 20 | 23 |
|  Food | 15 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
|  WASH | 0 | 1 | 12 | 13 |
|  Safety and security | 7 | 1 | 0 | 8 |
|  Education | 0 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
|  Shelter | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
|  Cash/voucher assistance | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |

It is likely that there is **significant overlap in several of the priority needs** reported by KIs for IDP populations in assessed locations. For example, a **lack of adequate heating in IDP shelters or warm clothing may compound the health needs of affected populations**, particularly during cold and wet seasons such as those experienced throughout December.²²

Top 5 specific sector needs of IDPs, by number and proportion of assessed communities:***

| Winterisation needs | # | % | Healthcare needs | # | % |
|------------------------------|----|-----|--------------------------------|----|-----|
| Heating fuel | 29 | 30% | Treatment for chronic diseases | 25 | 26% |
| Thermal blankets | 16 | 17% | Skilled care during childbirth | 22 | 23% |
| Floor mats | 14 | 15% | First aid/emergency care | 13 | 14% |
| Winter clothes | 12 | 13% | Diarrhoea treatment | 8 | 8% |
| Winter shoes/boots | 9 | 9% | Antibiotics | 7 | 7% |
| NFI needs | # | % | WASH needs ²³ | # | % |
| Clothing | 21 | 22% | Drinking water | 13 | 14% |
| Mattresses/sleeping mats | 18 | 19% | Functioning latrines | 6 | 6% |
| Bedding items/sheets/pillows | 17 | 18% | Water purification tablets | 5 | 5% |
| Cooking fuel | 6 | 6% | Disposable diapers | 3 | 3% |
| Water containers | 4 | 4% | Plastic garbage bags | 1 | 1% |
| Education needs | # | % | Shelter needs | # | % |
| Qualified teachers | 4 | 4% | New/additional tents | 2 | 2% |
| School equipment | 3 | 3% | Rope | 2 | 2% |
| School stationery | 3 | 3% | Doors/door frames | 2 | 2% |
| Additional classrooms | 2 | 2% | Basic electrical items | 2 | 2% |
| Teacher training | 1 | 1% | Tarpaulins/plastic sheeting | 1 | 1% |

Endnotes

¹ Reuters, '[Timeline: The rise and fall of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria](#)', 10 March 2019; The Guardian, '[US-backed fighters take town of Manbij from ISIS](#)', 6 August 2016; Al Jazeera, '[Syria war: Manbij celebrates liberation from ISIL](#)', 14 August 2016

² Reuters, '[Thousands return to Manbij after IS militants flee city](#)', 13 August 2016; Syria Deeply, '[Thousands Return to Manbij After Islamic State Militants Flee City](#)', 15 August 2016; Syria Deeply, '["I just had to go back": Syrian repatriates speak of return](#)', 21 July 2017

³ BBC News, '[IS conflict: Turkey-backed Syrian rebels take Jarablus](#)', 24 August 2016; BBC News, '[Syria war: Turkish forces "push into IS-held al-Bab"](#)', 9 February 2017; Al Jazeera, '[Turkey ends "Euphrates Shield" operation in Syria](#)', 30 March 2017; BBC News, '[Syria war: Turkish-led forces oust Kurdish fighters from heart of Afrin](#)', 18 March 2018; UNOCHA, '[Syrian Arab Republic: Afrin, Flash Update No. 2](#)', 29 March 2018; UNHCR, '[Syria Situation Report for the Eastern Ghouta and Afrin Humanitarian Emergencies](#)', 29 May 2018

⁴ Reuters, '[With U.S. departure, Syria's Manbij braces for upheaval](#)', 30 December 2018; BBC News, '[War-weary Syrians in Kurdish-held Manbij wait to learn fate](#)', 7 January 2019; Al Jazeera, '[Manbij residents in limbo amid US withdrawal uncertainty](#)', 5 January 2019

⁵ REACH, '[Humanitarian Situation Overview of Syria, 'Situation Overview: Menbij District](#)', October 2018

⁶ Based on area of influence data retrieved from [Syria Live UA Map](#), and the [UNOCHA Syrian administrative p-code list](#), as of 31 December 2018.

⁷ For population numbers, KIs were asked to provide the numbers of IDP, resident and SR households and individuals present in the community as of 31 December 2018, if known. Where KIs were unable to provide both household and individual figures, a calculated average household size of 5.8 individuals per IDP household and an average of 6.0 individuals per resident and SR household were used to calculate the unreported household or individual estimates. After following up on and clarifying discrepancies and outliers, figures were then triangulated using a system of KI weighting outlined below, and cross-checked against available secondary sources, including REACH Humanitarian Situation Overview of Syria and REACH Raqqa Area Based Assessments. KIs were also asked whether the IDP figures reported in their location included IDP populations in any nearby camps, informal settlements or other sites. Estimated household figures in this overview are rounded to the nearest 100, while estimated individual figures are rounded to the nearest 1,000.

The definition of IDPs used by enumerators for this assessment was 'Individuals or groups of people who have been forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights, or natural or man-made disasters, and who have not crossed an international border'. The definition of resident/pre-conflict population was 'Individuals or groups of people who currently reside in their communities of origin, or communities of permanent residence prior to the Syrian conflict. This includes populations

that were never displaced as well as previously displaced populations that have returned to their communities of origin'. The definition of SRs used was 'Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) or refugees who return to their community of origin that they left due to conflict but not necessarily to their places of habitual residence (their former homes); who intend to remain in the community for a prolonged period of time; and who do not necessarily enjoy the full spectrum of rights afforded to them prior to their displacement'.

Discrepancies with other available population data may be the result of any of the following: differences in assessment coverage dates; differences in definitions of population sub-groups (IDPs, residents and SRs); differences in geographic scope of assessed locations (e.g. included/excluded nearby camps and sites); differences in KI profiles interviewed; and differences in average household sizes used in calculations, among others.

⁸ Total population numbers as of 31 December 2018, including IDP and resident/pre-conflict populations, were assessed for 95 communities in Menbij sub-district. While IDP population estimates were available for 96 assessed communities, resident/pre-conflict population estimates were only reported for 95 assessed communities (excluding Menbij (C1767) community). SR population estimates were only available for 94 assessed communities (excluding Menbij (C1767) and Jeb Elqader (C1684)).

Please note that resident and SR population numbers were not reported for Menbij community (C1767), which is known to be the largest urban centre in the sub-district. This means that the total population numbers (aggregated resident and IDP population numbers) in this situation overview do not include this community. However, information on the demographic, shelter settings and priority needs of the estimated 57,800 individual IDPs (9,420 households) reported to be living in Menbij community is included in this overview.

⁹ The definition of SRs used for this assessment includes all resident/pre-conflict population members who have been displaced and spontaneously returned at any point in time to their community of origin, and who were living in that community of origin as of 31 December 2018. As such, SRs are a sub-group of residents.

¹⁰ KIs estimated that roughly 100,000 SRs had most recently returned to their community of origin before 2018, and that 1,000 SRs had returned between 1 January and 31 December 2018. Information on the period of return was unknown for approximately 45,000 (31%) of the SRs reported in assessed communities.

¹¹ REACH, '[Syria Market Monitoring Exercise Northeast Syria](#)', December 2018; Al-Monitor, '[Trade grows as Souq al-Hal market thrives in Syria](#)', 15 October 2018

¹² Although KIs interviewed for this assessment primarily reported on IDPs known to be living in host communities, displaced populations living in camps, informal settlements and other sites are also included. For further information on IDPs in camps and sites, please see REACH, '[Northeast Syria Camp and Informal Site Profiles](#)', December 2018.

¹³ IFRC, '[Winter in Syria](#)'; IFRC, '[Syria: Red Crescent brings hope and warmth to communities affected by harsh winter](#)', 14 January 2019; ANHA, '[Manbij farmers talk about damage in](#)

winter, summer crops', 2 June 2018; Al Jazeera, ['Heavy rains, floods displace thousands of refugees in Syria'](#), 30 December 2018; IOM, ['Over 80,000 people affected by recent floods in northern Syria receive relief'](#), 5 February 2019

¹⁴ The definition of 'former homes' used for this assessment was 'a pre-conflict place of habitual residence', i.e. the dwelling in which a person resided prior to the outbreak of the Syrian conflict. Please note that KIs reported that an estimated 62,317 SRs (42.6%) had returned to their former homes, while 249 SRs (0.2%) had not returned to their former homes. Information on returns to former homes was unknown for the remaining 57.2% of SRs reportedly living in assessed communities.

¹⁵ For further information on the needs and conditions of overall populations in the sub-district, including residents and SRs, please see REACH, [Humanitarian Situation Overview of Syria, 'Situation Overview: Menbij District'](#), October 2018 and REACH, [Humanitarian Situation Overview of Syria, 'Northeast Regional Factsheet'](#), December 2018.

¹⁶ Percentages only reflect assessed communities in which demographic information on gender and age for SR and IDP populations were reported.

¹⁷ The household profile 'married men with their family' includes married men with their wife, children, and/or other immediate family.

¹⁸ The household profile 'married women with their family, without husband' includes married women with their children and/or other immediate family, but without their husband.

¹⁹ KIs were asked to report the shelter adequacy issues in the assessed communities. The question allowed for multiple answers to be selected.

²⁰ Percentages only reflect assessed communities in which information on IDPs' duration of stay in current locations (24 communities accounting for 6% of all IDPs) was reported.

²¹ KIs were asked to report the three most common shelter types of SR and IDP populations, respectively, in assessed communities, and the estimated percentage range of these populations in each shelter type (within ten percentage ranges). Aggregated numbers and proportions of populations living in each shelter type were then calculated by multiplying the total reported SR/IDP populations in assessed communities by the average percentage range in each shelter category.

²² MSF, ['Tens of thousands struggle for survival in the winter cold'](#), 24 January 2018; Huffington Post, ['What winter will mean for the Syrian refugee crisis'](#), 10 August 2015; The Guardian, ['Displaced Syrian infants dying from lack of healthcare, UN says'](#), 15 January 2019; UN Security Council, ['Harsh winter conditions, ongoing hostilities have forced even greater displacement of civilians in Syria, Emergency Relief Coordinator tells Security Council'](#), 30 January 2019

²³ KIs could select both or either of water and hygiene as a top three priority need. Specific items and services within these categories were then grouped under 'WASH needs'.

About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organisations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives - and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH aims to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid actors through efficient data collection, management and analysis before, during and after an emergency. By doing so, REACH contributes to ensuring that communities affected by emergencies receive the support they need. All REACH activities are conducted in support to, and within the framework of, inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information, please visit our website: www.reach-initiative.org. You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on Twitter: @REACH_info.