

Western Anbar (Ana, Ru'ua and Qa'im), Iraq - Rapid Humanitarian Overview

22 September 2017

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Overview

The towns of Ana, Ru'ua and Qa'im (collectively referred to here as West Anbar) in Anbar governorate are among the last areas of territory in Iraq still held by the armed group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Adjacent to the Syria border, this area was taken by ISIL in June 2014.¹ The offensive by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to retake these areas began on 19 September 2017.² The fighting is likely to trigger displacement as households leave for the relative safety of areas controlled by the ISF.

Located along the Euphrates river in the sparsely-populated far west of Iraq, Ana, Ru'ua and Qa'im have been inaccessible to humanitarian actors since ISIL gained control of the area in 2014. In 2016 and 2017, the territory was gradually cut off from the rest of the country during consecutive military operations by the ISF to retake areas controlled by ISIL in eastern Anbar, and Salah al Din and Ninewa governorates. However, there is still an open trade route through the porous border with Syria's Deir-ez-Zor governorate, which is partially controlled by ISIL.

From January to early September 2017, the United Nations (UN) estimates that 38,000 people have displaced from West Anbar. In recent weeks, the pace of displacement has increased rapidly with 4,000 people from West Anbar arriving at Kilo 18 screening site, west of Ramadi, between 30 August and 10 September.³ This was likely due to apprehension of the upcoming military offensive and the worsening humanitarian situation in the area. The UN predicts that due to the financial cost and difficulty of displacing from these isolated areas, there will be a high concentration of

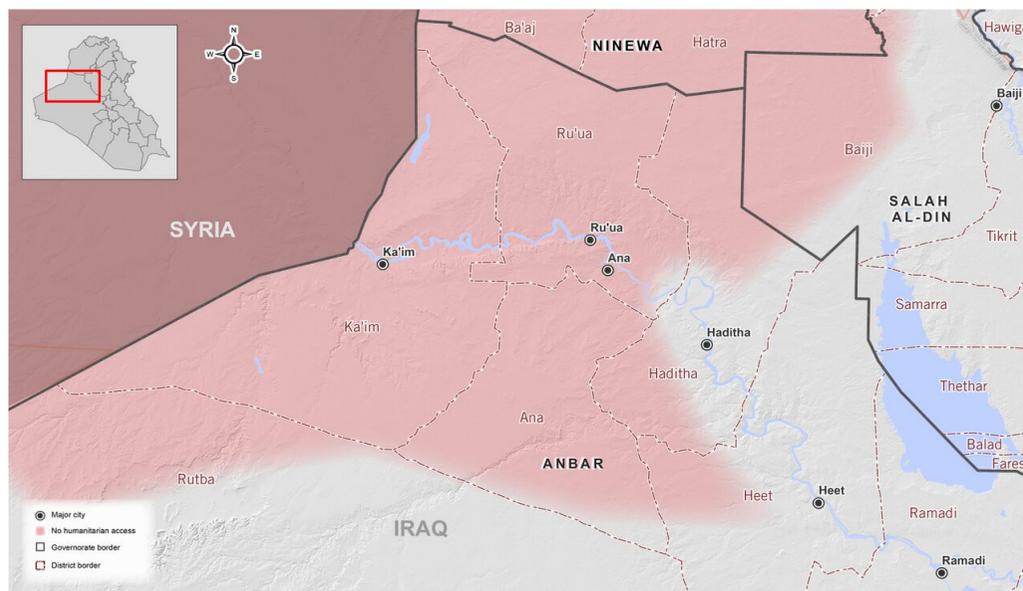
vulnerable groups – the elderly, the sick and female-headed households – remaining.⁴ The U.N. estimates that there are up to 75,000 individuals remaining within ISIL-controlled areas of Anbar.⁵

According to the assessed individuals who left ISIL-controlled territory since June 2017, those remaining in West Anbar are in severe humanitarian need. There is no access to education or clean drinking water, and there is only very limited access to healthcare and livelihood opportunities. Food security is also a major concern. Due to this situation, those who are able to are leaving despite the security risks and the financial cost.

Methodology

In order to inform preparations for a humanitarian response in West Anbar, REACH collected in-depth information from 15 recently displaced male respondents, aged 25 to 75, from the towns of Ana, Ru'ua and Qa'im as well as surrounding villages. Four respondents were from Ru'ua town and surrounding villages, five from Ana town and surrounding villages, and six from Qa'im town and surrounding villages. All respondents had displaced from their area of origin since June 2017, with the vast majority (14) displacing in July and August. Data was collected between 13–19 September 2017. Due to the inherent limitations of qualitative data collection, presented findings should be understood as indicative only, rather than statistically representative of the target population or the wider geographical area.

Map 1: West Anbar Reference Map



Key Findings

- **Clean drinking water is reportedly not accessible.** Water is coming directly from the Euphrates river and is not being treated. There were reports of residents becoming ill from drinking unclean water.
- **Healthcare is largely unavailable to civilians.** Smuggled medicines are available, but they are very expensive. There were reports of people dying due to the lack of access to healthcare – especially those with chronic diseases.
- **Food is accessible, but increasingly scarce.** Food is smuggled in, mostly from Syria, though residents are also growing food to supplement their diets. However, stored food is reportedly running out, and households are eating fewer meals per day.
- **There are no functioning schools, and no children are studying.** This has largely been the case for up to three years. However, there were some reports from respondents that ISIL-run schools operated in the past.
- **Little to no livelihood opportunities are available,** with residents of West Anbar relying on pensions, savings and subsistence agriculture.
- **Shelter is not a major area of humanitarian need** as most locations reported heavy depopulation. There appears to be only a low level of shelter damage – except in the centres of Ru'ua, Ana and Qa'im.

Sectoral Overviews

Healthcare

- Medicines are smuggled in from Syria or elsewhere in Iraq and are reportedly very expensive. Residents with chronic diseases – such as heart conditions, high blood pressure or diabetes – are most at risk, as they cannot afford the regular medication they need. There were reports of people dying due to the inaccessibility of healthcare.
- Hospitals are reportedly present in all three urban centres still under ISIL control – Ana, Ru'ua and Qa'im – but they are not functioning due to either damage or lack of medical staff. The availability of medical professionals varied across assessed areas. In Qa'im, there are private doctors who can provide trauma and midwifery care, but care is very expensive and therefore inaccessible to most. In Ana, it was reported that doctors have not been available for over a year as they had all displaced.
- Health conditions are growing increasingly prevalent due to the lack of healthcare, poor diet and unhygienic conditions, including leishmaniasis and diarrhoea.
- Respondents reported that children have not been vaccinated for over three years.

Water

- Respondents indicated that drinking water is almost entirely sourced from the Euphrates river, and is not being treated.
- Across all assessed sites, respondents reported that residents are contributing around 5,000 IQD (4 US dollars (USD))⁶ to ISIL, which uses the funds to purchase fuel to run the generators necessary to power the pumps. The pumped water is available for several hours per day. In several locations, to supplement the water supply, respondents mentioned going to the river themselves to fetch water in buckets or having trucks bring additional water to their village or town.
- All three areas reported that the water was not clean as it comes directly from the river, which is leading to health problems among the population, including diarrhoea and skin conditions.

Food Security

- Food is reportedly available to residents, though it is expensive and available in limited quantities. Food and NFIs are largely smuggled in from Syria or elsewhere in Iraq, and are sold directly by smugglers or by the limited number of open shops and markets. Respondents reported a range of 10-50% of shops being open and operational in these areas. While the bulk of food is smuggled in from outside, rye wheat, certain vegetables such as tomatoes and aubergines, meat and other animal products are reportedly available locally and generally more affordable than smuggled items.
- Many residents are also supplementing their diets with food grown on their land and from their livestock. However, agricultural capacity has reportedly reduced significantly across

assessed areas, with fields left fallow due to a lack of resources such as water, fertilizer and seeds.

- When trade routes were less restricted in 2016 and before, residents stockpiled food supplies but these stores have now largely depleted.
- Some respondents reported that residents are eating fewer meals a day to cope with the lack of food and are losing weight as a result.

Education

- Across all assessed areas, respondents indicated there are no functioning schools and no children are receiving a formal education.
- For most children this has been the case for three years. However, some respondents mentioned that in the past there were schools run by ISIL with an adapted curriculum, though few children attended these schools due to the violent content of the aforementioned curriculum. This is consistent with reports from other areas of ISIL-held territory.
- In Qa'im, it was reported that school buildings are damaged and/or being used by ISIL for military purposes.

Livelihoods

- Generally, residents are not receiving salaries and people are not working. However, some retirees are reportedly receiving their pensions by giving their key cards to smugglers who collect their money outside of ISIL-held territory and smuggle it back to them. The smugglers are reportedly charging commission.
- In terms of income, some farmers are reportedly selling produce and paying workers a daily wage to work on their land. However, this was not widely reported.
- Some residents are relying on savings, but these were reported to be running out. There are unofficial hawalas that smuggle money to residents from relations living outside of ISIL-held territory. As with pensions, they are reported to charge commission.
- Some households with no form of income are reportedly receiving loans from family and friends both inside and outside of ISIL-controlled areas of western Anbar.
- Respondents reported that some residents are selling their possessions to afford food to eat and/or to prepare for their displacement.

Shelter

- Shelter needs were not reported as severe. Across all three areas, residents are living in houses, and there are no barriers to accessing safe and affordable shelter.

- Generally, households are not paying rent due to it being a mostly rural area, as well as the amount of housing stock available because of the high level of displacement.
- Damage was reported across all assessed areas. However, damage is higher in the larger urban centres of Ana, Ru'ua and Qa'im than in the surrounding villages. Generally, public and government buildings were most likely to be damaged, with some damage to housing stock reported. Most of the damage to buildings was caused by airstrikes over the past three years, but some respondents also reported that ISIL had destroyed homes belonging to members of the police or army.

Displacement

Overview

Respondents indicated that the vast majority – if not all – of internally displaced persons (IDPs) leaving ISIL-controlled areas of western Anbar are taking southern routes through the desert to the city of Rutba, before continuing on to IDP camps near the cities of Ramadi and Falluja.⁷ Respondents' descriptions of their journeys were remarkably consistent from June onwards. Whether leaving from the vicinity of Ana, Ru'ua or Qa'im, all reported hiring smugglers to drive them south across the desert, traveling at night and avoiding main roads in order not to be detected by ISIL. This journey was reported to take anywhere between 4-8 hours – depending on whether the smugglers spotted ISIL patrols – and cost between 200-300 USD per person.

The only respondents reporting slightly different paths were those whose areas of origin were on the north side of the Euphrates, as they first had to walk to the river and take boats across before meeting with smuggler cars.

After traveling through the desert, all respondents reported arriving at the village of Nadhraa, approximately 50km northwest of Rutba city. Depending on their time of arrival, some reported continuing immediately on to Rutba, hiring taxis or private cars to transport them. Those who arrived during the night could rent empty houses for between 50,000-100,000 IQD (43-85 USD)⁶ for the night, before traveling on to Rutba in the morning. After arriving at Rutba, all IDPs were screened by the ISF, with most indicating that this process took no more than two hours.

Following screening, respondents reported hiring private vehicles – including taxis, buses, pick-up trucks and vans – and being led in convoys by the ISF along the main highway to Kilo 18 screening site and IDP camp west of Ramadi. This trip reportedly took between 8-12 hours depending on the checkpoints on the route, and cost anywhere from 100,000-180,000 IQD (85-154 USD)⁶ depending on the size of the vehicle.

At Kilo 18 screening site and camp, IDPs were registered by Iraqi authorities, and then waited between 1-10 days before being designated their future camp of residence. After being assigned to a residence camp, some respondents reported being transported by Iraqi government buses. However, others reported that only women and children were transported by bus, with men hiring taxis or other vehicles that were then escorted by the ISF to other nearby IDP camps, including

Amiryat al Fallujah and Habbaniya Tourist City camps. Some also reported periods when no IDPs were transported by bus, with all having to rent vehicles. According to respondents, this depended on the availability of buses at the given time. For those hiring vehicles to the camps, the cost was between 10,000-25,000 IQD (8-21 USD)⁶, depending on the size of the vehicle and the final destination. All respondents reported that IDPs from western Anbar were not able to move on their own, and were always transported in convoys accompanied by the ISF in order to clear checkpoints.

Respondents reported that the route to the east along the main road to Haditha was widely considered too dangerous, as it is a conflict zone between ISIL and the ISF. They also reported that this area is thought to be mined by ISIL.

Table 1: Estimated Cost of Displacement⁶

Stage of travel	IQD	USD
Smuggler (West Anbar - Nadhraa)	234-351,000	200-300
Nightly house rental (Nadhraa village)	50-100,000	43-85
Vehicle hire (Rutba - Kilo 18 camp)	100-180,000	85-154
Vehicle hire (Kilo 18 camp - future camp)	10-25,000	8-21
Total cost	384-514,000	328-439

Intentions

When asked whether those remaining in their areas of origin would displace if they have the opportunity, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they would do so. While a small number would reportedly stay behind to protect property, respondents indicated that even those with property to lose would choose to leave if fighting occurred in close proximity to their location.

Concerning return, respondents reported that nearly all of those currently displaced from ISIL-controlled areas of western Anbar will return to their areas of origin as soon as security is restored. They indicated that the resumption of services and the return of livelihood opportunities were largely secondary pull factors upon which they would base decisions to return.

Endnotes

1. CNN, '4 western Iraqi towns fall to advancing ISIS militants', 22 June 2014.
2. Iraqi News, 'Iraqi troops launch operation to liberate more IS-held regions in Anbar', 19 September 2017.
3. UNHCR, Iraq: Flash Update, 13 September.
4. OCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Bulletin – August, 1 September 2017.
5. UNHCR Iraq, Center and South Weekly Protection Update, 1-7 September 2017.
6. Exchange rate of 1 USD = 1,172 IQD, taken from www.xe.com on 21 September 2017.
7. This coincides with other reports on displacement routes from West Anbar, see OCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Bulletin – August, 1 September 2017.

Map 2: Displacement Routes - West Anbar

