

Turkey | Syria: Flash Update

Developments in Aleppo Governorate

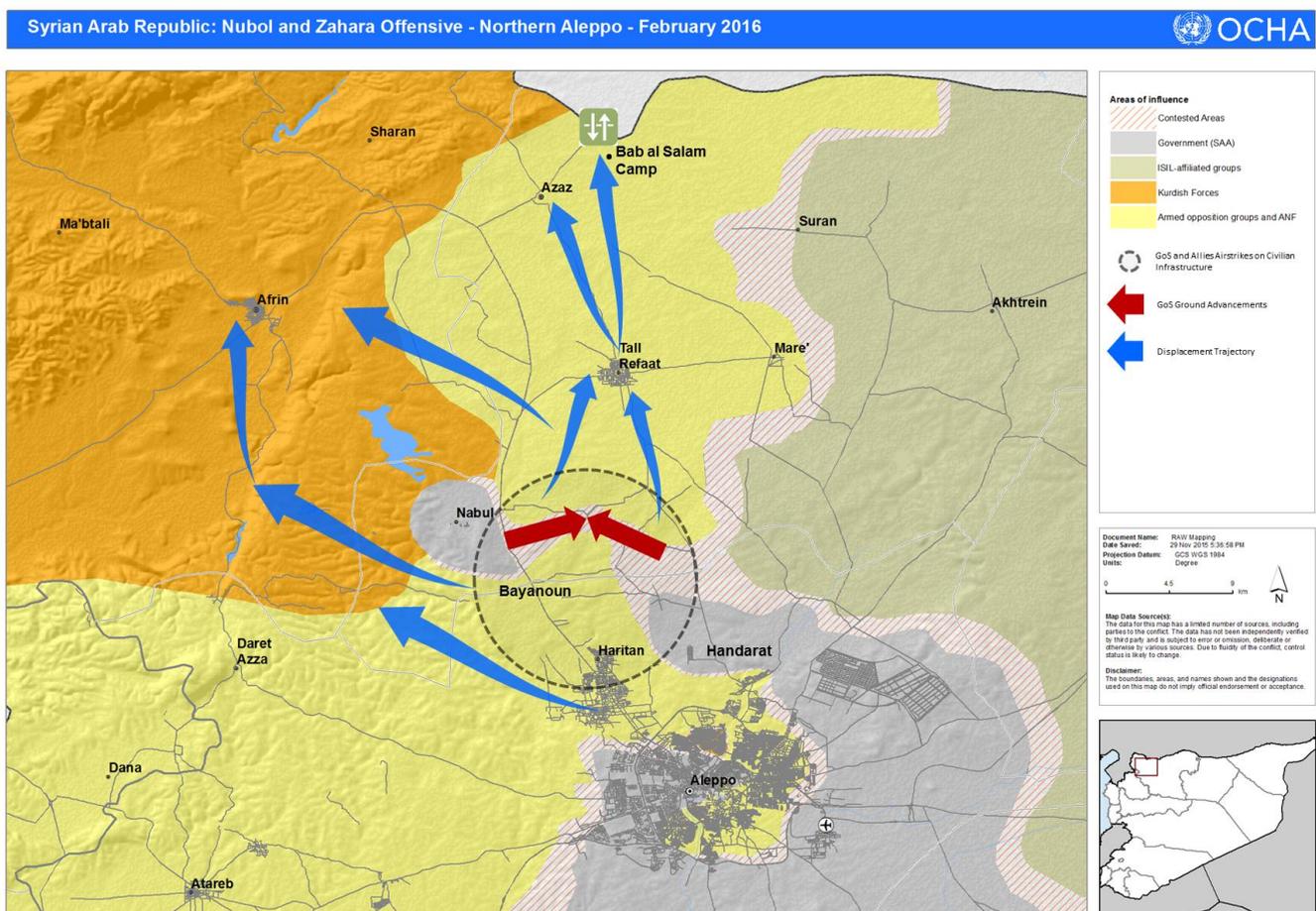
(as of 08 February 2016)



Highlights

- Intensified fighting between the Government of Syria (GoS) and its allies and Non-State Armed Opposition Groups (NSAG) in Aleppo governorate cause displacements of tens of thousands of people
- Humanitarian assistance affected by fighting and border closures; aid organisations are working to respond to the thousands of internally displaced and in need. According to initial assessments up to 80 percent of the displaced are women and children
- OCHA launched a Humanitarian Pooled Fund (HPF) allocation for USD10 million to scale up assistance to areas with high IDP influx

The map below illustrates areas of concentration of Government of Syria (GoS) and allied forces airstrikes on civilian infrastructure as of 08 February 2016;



Thousands Displaced in Aleppo Governorate as GoS Forces Advance

Last week GoS and allied forces launched a major military offensive against NSAG-held positions in the northern Aleppo countryside. A surprise offensive, started from the eastern flank of Aleppo city, linked GoS held territories to the NSAG-surrounded villages of Nubul and Zahra. This action severed main supply routes to NSAG-controlled eastern Aleppo City, and surrounding areas, from the Bab al Salam border crossing point.

According to sources in the area, while troops advanced on the ground, GoS and allied forces intensified airstrikes over key territory north of the city; thousands of households were displaced from Tel Rifaat, Hariyatan, and Azaz sub-districts.

Currently, the GoS and GoR air campaign is focusing on Haritan and Bayanoun, just south of the newly-established corridor linking western Aleppo city to government-held Nubul and Zahara. The campaign is expected to continue until the GoS take Haritan and the last remaining access route from NSAG-controlled areas into the city. The Al Nusra Front (ANF) and allies are launching a counter-offensive towards Aleppo prison in order to defend Haritan.

Current dynamics mean the conflict is difficult to predict but continued fighting between NSAG and GoS and its allies is expected over the next few weeks.

Humanitarian Response

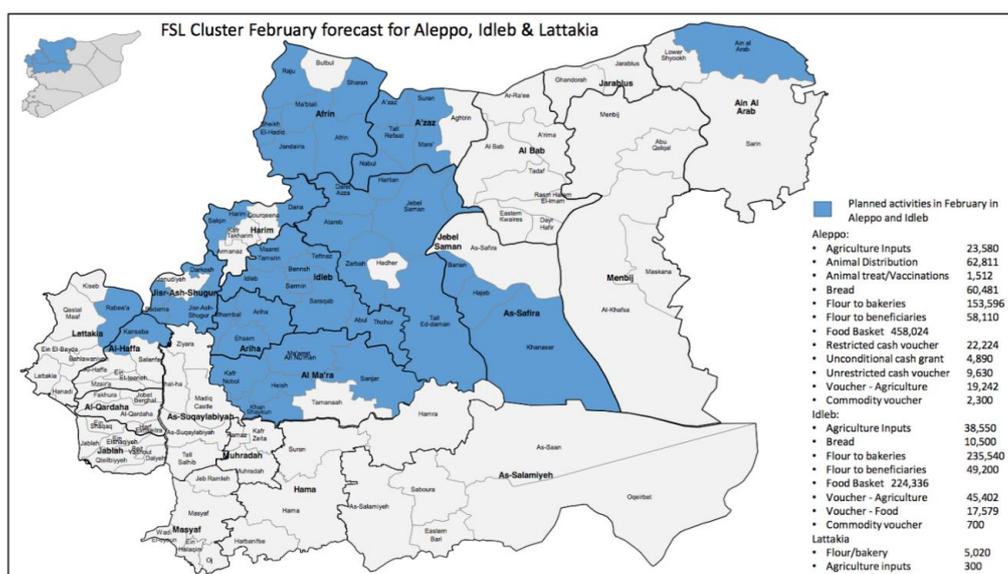
Camp Coordination Camp Management (CCCM): The CCCM cluster reports that new displacements from Anadan, Aleppo city, ISIS controlled areas in Al Bab and from Deir Jamal area total 30,700 people.

Of those IDPs, 7,500 IDPs are being accommodated in the existing eight IDP camps near the Bab Al-Salam border crossing. Another 7,500 IDPs have moved into the ad hoc camp in Bab Al Salam. (Numbers of IDPs are changing and verification of numbers is ongoing.)

Movements around Aleppo and Idlib are fluid. The number of IDPs in Azaz town was assessed at 9,000; 500 IDPs have moved to Daret Izza in western rural Aleppo, passing through Afrin; 200 arrived in Daret Izza from eastern Aleppo City; 3,000 IDPs are in Afrin and 3,000 in Idlib governorate.

A Turkish NGO (IHH) is establishing a ninth IDP camp in Azaz, 5 km from the Bab al-Salam border crossing. This camp has raised concerns as the CCCM guidelines on the establishment of camps prescribe that settlement in camps needs to be voluntary, a principle that cannot be upheld as long as the Turkish border is closed for those wanting to seek asylum. The same NGO provides ready-to-eat food for up to 20,000 people in the border region and distributes 100,000 loaves of bread per day. IHH is reported to be mobilizing tents, blankets and other Non-Food Items (NFI). The CCCM cluster suggest that IDPs sheltering outside of camps need tents, Non-Food Items (NFI), fuel, heating, water, hygiene and sanitation services. Humanitarian partners are assessing the situation to enable them to coordinate their response. They are stockpiling tents and will mobilize these as soon as possible. Humanitarian agencies are planning to scale up activities to respond to the population's needs in a volatile security situation; lack of access constrain their ability to respond to needs immediately.

Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL): Most of the affected areas are well covered by FSL actors who have been providing regular assistance. The map below shows the forecast for February. The FSL Cluster partners are responding to the IDPs influx with scaling up their response/stocks where possible and in adopting a flexible approach: the general agreement is to apply the appropriate modality according to the context, social environment, IDPs conditions and capabilities. The modalities include: Ready to eat rations (RTE) and cooked meals; the use of mobile kitchens, especially while covering those people temporarily living in open areas (under trees or improvised shelters), destroyed/unfinished buildings or collective centers; and support to bakeries where IDPs arrive in host communities and bakeries do not run on full capacity because of lack of support. Distribution and stocking of Food Baskets remains one of the priorities. That recommendation concerns Aleppo City in particular, though not exclusively. FSL partners are also supporting IDPs with cash and voucher distributions; where the environment is conducive and food is available.



Health: Health partners are trying to access IDPs with mobile clinics and additional medical supplies and are trying to support hospital and ambulance services in northern Aleppo, western Aleppo and Aleppo City. Scarcity of fuel was mentioned as a major concern for running of generators in hospitals and of ambulances. Partners are responding to two priorities: increasing access to IDPs with mobile clinics and additional supplies to primary and secondary health facilities and supporting health referral networks such as hospital and ambulance referral systems in northern Aleppo, western Aleppo and Aleppo city. Partners have already started to deploy supplies and resources to different locations. For example, WHO will be sending surgical supply kits, UNICEF is working on the distribution of essential kits, and another partner has 70,000 litres of fuel pre-positioned in Aleppo city for the running of hospital generators.

Nutrition: Nutrition partners are working to deliver nutrition supplies, via WFP and UNICEF, into eastern Aleppo city. Meanwhile WFP are waiting for details on possible consignments of supplements to prevent malnutrition. A medical NGO has also been trying to get emergency nutrition supplies via Bab al Salam into eastern Aleppo city.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH): Partners have increased WASH services to new arrivals at the camps near BAS crossing.

Pumping of existing wells within Bab Al Noor and Ekdah Camp were increased to provide for the 3700 and 200 new individuals respectively. Additional tap stands and water tanks are being installed to improve access to water. The people to latrine ratio is now 1:30 so new latrines are not needed.

Water trucking is being maintained at Harameen, Sujio, Rujan, Shamarin and Bab al Salame Camps. In addition, a limited number of water bottles are being distributed to IDPS in the general area.

A limited expansion of camp areas is in progress. With this expansion, partners plan to install new water points, 6 water storage tanks and emergency latrine facilities.

1.7 million aquatabs for household water treatment were shipped to Aleppo City and were delivered in the City as of 07 February, enough for one month for approximately 50,000 families.

In terms of gaps, a general lack of hygiene items was reported. Partners had difficulty in shipping hygiene items across the border due to the BAS border crossing being intermittently closed. WASH partners are moving quickly to meet needs, but have not yet caught up with the growing demand for WASH services.

Education: Due to heightened insecurity, children do not go to school. Some partners have arranged awareness sessions for children and teachers to advise them on their safety during and after the airstrikes. UNICEF is looking into providing school-in-a-box kits to Azaz town and other areas in north Aleppo.

Protection: Partners report that up to 80 percent of the newly displaced IDPs are women and children. Humanitarian organisations are operating services on a 'day-by-day' basis, depending on the security situation and demand for services. In some locations, services are available (women's center) but have few admissions as people have fled or are waiting until the situation on the ground improves. Mobile protection teams are operating in eastern Aleppo city but they do not travel to affected areas on the outskirts, so support is limited. In Azaz, protection teams are preparing for a potential influx.

Shelter/NFI: Shelter/NFI partners are prioritizing new arrival kits and shelter kits for newly displaced IDPs. Already 5,200 IDPs from Aleppo to Azaz have found shelter in community centres, rented accommodation and family homes, as well as Bab Al Noor and Bab Al Iman camps. Several partners are providing NFI including blankets and mattresses to IDPs and have reported on contingency stocks in eastern Aleppo city.

Humanitarian partners face three main challenges:

- (1) Scaling up in areas where they have ongoing assistance programmes, including the IDP camps around the border and areas of high IDP influx such as Azaz, Afrin, Tel Rifat and other. Main needs are shelter (including tents), food and health. The availability of fuel is heavily constrained and risks impacting essential services such as the running of ambulances, generators for hospitals, bakeries and water treatment facilities.
- (2) The closure of border points. BAS border crossing was closed for humanitarian and commercial shipments, intermittently, since escalation of the crisis last week. Humanitarian partners are concerned that the ongoing conflict might result in the closure of further crossings; other border points (i.e. BAH) may experience capacity problems; and movements of staff might be suspended due to security concerns.
- (3) Assistance to areas close to conflict lines, in particular eastern Aleppo city where the majority of the population is highly dependent on assistance. GoS and allies are likely to continue to encircle and eventually cut off eastern Aleppo city from cross-border assistance. The level of needs in the NSAG-controlled east of the city are already high and cutting-off of cross-border access could result in a rapid deterioration of humanitarian conditions for the remaining population. Feasibility of cross-line convoys via western Aleppo need to be explored but cannot be taken for granted.

Contingency Planning

If the GoS and allies sever the last remaining flight route out of eastern Aleppo City it would leave up to 300,000 people, still residing in the city, cut off from humanitarian aid unless cross-line access could be negotiated. If the GoS advances around the city continue, local councils in the city estimate that some 100,000 – 150,000 civilians may flee towards Afrin and the western countryside of Aleppo governorate. Latest gains by the GoS have impacted on programming. However, the fact that the PYD and the local authorities are allowing unhindered access is encouraging for those looking to send commercial and humanitarian relief through the BaS crossing in the coming days. Transporters may be able to come through Afrin canton with assistance and with commercial cargo for Aleppo City and rural Aleppo as well as for the new IDPs in Azaz and Afrin.

Some humanitarian organisations had contingency plans in place for an escalation of needs in eastern Aleppo city and surrounding area. A response plan had also been developed earlier in 2015, but logistics and funding constraints did not allow to attain or maintain the planned stock level within the eastern part of the city.

Partners are identifying key facilities to support; taking stock of supplies and staff available; identifying priority needs; and evaluating the security situation. Emergency stockpiles in Turkey are being activated.

OCHA

Given that the BAS-Aleppo city route is now cut off, OCHA is engaging with the clusters, partners, the Government of Turkey, and the Turkish Red Crescent on flexible arrangements to urgently allow fuel, staff, and supplies in through the Bab al-Hawa crossing. Donors have expressed support for flexible programming arrangements.

The DRHC and OCHA have decided to activate an HPF emergency allocation of USD10.5million. Given the volatile security situation and ongoing displacements over the course of last week, the HPF has prepared a USD 10.5 million reserve allocation for rapid response to meet increasing humanitarian needs in areas of high concentration of IDPs. The CCCM, FSL, Health, Shelter/NFI and WASH clusters will receive USD 2 million each and the Mine Action Sub-Cluster (Protection) will receive USD 500,000. The allocation will be launched on 8 February with a submission deadline on 14 February. The geographic focus of the Reserve Allocation covers sub-districts and areas along the Turkish Border, including Afrin, Azaz and neighbouring districts where needs have increased and further displacements are likely.

Discussions with Damascus-based colleagues on potential cross-line access have started. Since the GoS established the corridor from western Aleppo to Nubul and Zahra, where around 26,000 people are in need, assistance to these two hard to reach locations has come from the Damascus operation. SARC is distributing 1200 bread bundles daily for 1200 families in Nubul and Zahra; 600 of these are financed by the Syria HPF, the rest by ICRC. The GoS and SARC delivered a number of items including food, fuel and medical supplies in the last few days.

Access to eastern Aleppo may be more difficult as it would depend both on GoS authorizations and negotiations with the NSAG in eastern Aleppo city.

Information on Humanitarian Needs and Response Is Limited

Because of the intensity of the ongoing fighting in parts of northwestern Syria, information on humanitarian needs and response is limited and will be compiled over the next period. Partners working in the areas affected have been asked to report through their respective clusters and share information on needs assessments and response.¹

For further information, please contact:

Arzu Hatakoy, OCHA Turkey Deputy Head of Office, hatakoy@un.org, Tel: +90 342 211 8617

Ali Gokpinar, Humanitarian Affairs Officer, gokpinar@un.org, Tel:+90 342 211 8617

¹ Partners are invited to use the Rapid Assessment Tool developed by the intercluster coordination group: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/stima/document/rapid-assessment-tool-questionnaires-enar>