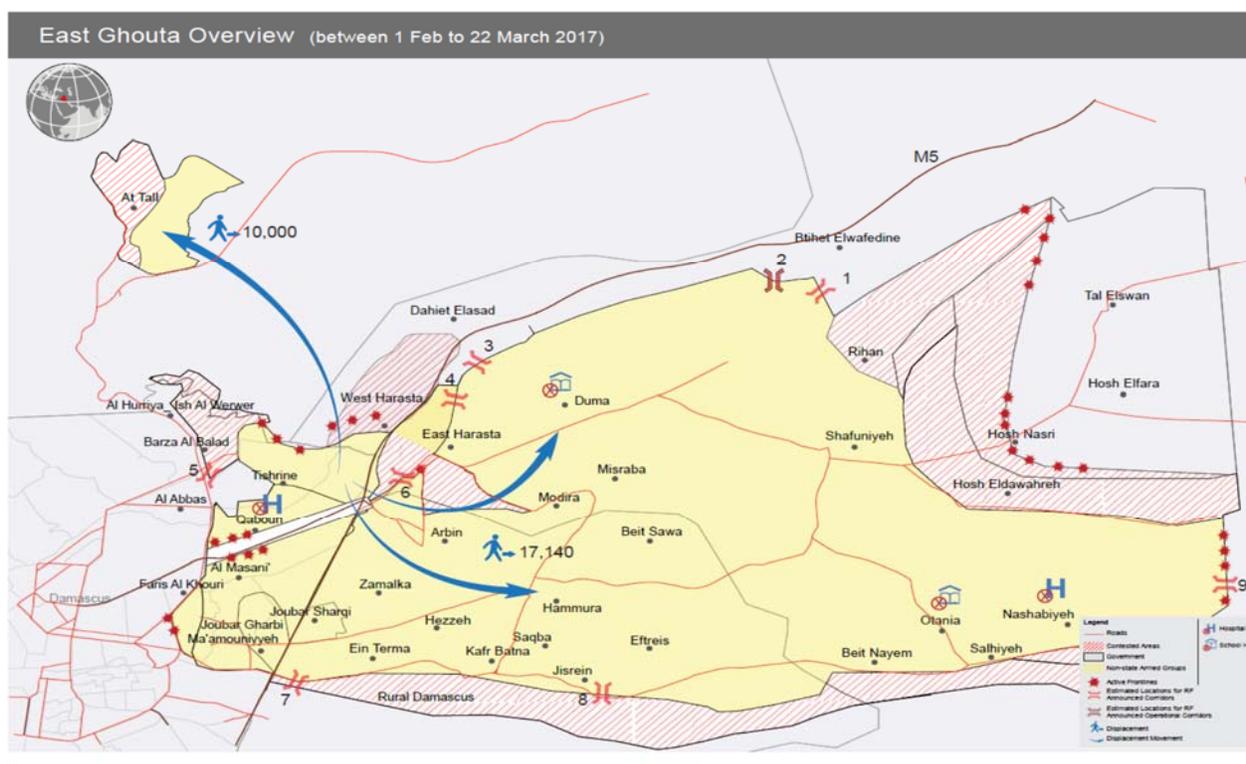


## 1. Highlights

- The escalation of hostilities since the beginning of February has put hundreds of thousands of people living in the besieged eastern Ghouta enclave and up to 25,000-30,000 people remaining in Barzeh and Qaboun at risk, and led to a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in these areas.
- Since 19 March, civilians in the eastern parts of Damascus city have also been affected by the operation launched by Non-state Armed Groups (NSAGs) in Jobar and Qaboun.
- The closure of formal and informal access routes to eastern Ghouta has led to sharp price hikes, limiting people's access to basic commodities.
- Over 27,000 people have been displaced from Barzeh, Qaboun and West Harasta to At Tall and to locations within Eastern Ghouta to date.



## 2. Humanitarian Situation

The escalation of fighting has led to the deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation for hundreds of thousands of people trapped in eastern Ghouta, as well as multiple deaths and injuries there. Meanwhile, deadly mortar attacks in Damascus coupled with a string of terror attacks have resulted in dozens of deaths and injuries and the closure of schools in surrounding areas in the last two weeks.

On 23 January, the Russian Federation unilaterally announced the intention to establish nine “corridors” to facilitate the exit of civilians from besieged areas in eastern Ghouta. However, only one corridor was operationalized near Wafideen Camp. This corridor closed in mid-March due to the escalation of hostilities, with reports indicating that nobody used the corridor while it was open.

On 6 March, the Russian Federation announced a cessation of hostilities for eastern Ghouta from 7-20 March. Shelling, sniping and aerial strikes continued after the announcement and on 19 March, a joint NSAG operation further affected northeastern parts of Damascus city.

Increased fighting has led to significant displacement in recent weeks. As of 22 March, more than 10,000 people have been displaced from Qaboun, Barzeh and West Harasta to At Tall, while 17,000 others have been displaced within eastern Ghouta. Many displaced families could face further displacement due to the growing insecurity inside the besieged area, particularly around Duma, East Harasta, Arbin and Nashabiyeh. Some demonstrators have asked for improved assistance for the incoming internally displaced people (IDPs) and price controls. Also, the needs of the estimated 25,000 to 30,000 civilians remaining in Qaboun and Barzeh continue to increase.

Parts of eastern Ghouta have been declared besieged by the UN since November 2013, with the entire enclave being declared besieged in November 2016. Since the escalation of hostilities, both formal and informal commercial access has been significantly curtailed. In February, restrictions were imposed on the formal transport of gas and fuel. More recently, on 21 March, the Government of Syria closed access to the enclaved area for commercial trucks that had been delivering commercial goods. Although smuggling tunnels may still be operational, the flow of supplies from Damascus through Qaboun and Barzeh has reportedly been interrupted over the last weeks. As a result the prices of various commodities in local markets has more than doubled. A kilo of sugar, for example, increased from 600 SYP to 1,500 SYP, or approximately 1.16 USD to 2.90 USD.

Even before the most recent escalation of military operations, civilian facilities had reportedly been attacked in eastern Ghouta and adjacent areas. Reports indicate that on 23 February, a school was hit in Duma; on 24 February a hospital was hit in Qaboun; on 27 February a medical point was hit in Nashabiyeh; and on 7 March a school was hit in Otaya. In addition to putting civilians at risk of injury or death, these actions limit people's access to education and medical treatment. After schools were damaged, there have been reports of reduced student attendance due to safety concerns for children.

### **3. Humanitarian Response**

The last UN humanitarian delivery to eastern Ghouta was on 29 October 2016 through an inter-agency convoy to East Harasta with multi-sectoral assistance for 11,000 people. A convoy was ready to be dispatched to Duma on 28 February 2017, but it could not proceed due to insecurity in the mission area.

Following the deaths of 3 dialysis patients in February and March and a measles outbreak, SARC was able to deliver a portion of the health supplies planned for the convoy on 9 March, including 250 dialysis kits, vaccines and baby milk, to its sub-branch in Duma. Humanitarian activities conducted by cross-border partners have also been affected by the tighter constraints, hindering both response and preparedness efforts.

Under the March Inter-Agency Convoy plan, the UN request to reach Qaboun was denied by the Syrian Government, and no convoys to the approved locations (i.e. Arbin, Zamalka, Duma, East Harasta, Misraba, Modira, Kafr Batna and Nashabiyeh) have been able to proceed yet due to the security situation and lack of facilitation letters. The UN and its partners stand ready to deliver much need assistance through inter-agency convoys as soon as guarantees of safe passage are obtained and conditions on the ground permit.

As of 21 March, the IDPs in At Tall received, WFP food for 10,750 people. Distribution by a local NGO partner is ongoing.

*For further information, please contact:  
Sebastien Trives, Head of OCHA Syria, [trives@un.org](mailto:trives@un.org)*