

Situation Overview

The security and humanitarian situation in Idleb city continues to deteriorate following the escalation of fighting on 24 March between the Government of Syria (GoS) forces and Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs).

As of 28 March, NSAGs reportedly took control of Idleb city's inner and outer limits. There have been open source reports of around 150 casualties during the last 24 hours. While fighting continues to the south of the city, reports of aerial bombardments and shelling of rural areas under NSAG-control have been reported throughout the week. The safety of civilians who remained in areas now controlled by NSAGs is a concern especially that military activities are expected in these areas.

In addition, further escalation of hostilities has been reported in other locations, such as the Shia majority villages of Foha and Kafraya to the North of the city that have been surrounded by NSAGs since 24 March, where an estimated 20,000 live. Despite statements made by some NSAGs calling its forces to treat civilians humanely, concerns over possible retaliation by NSAGs against these Shia enclaves remains high. Humanitarian needs are reportedly arising due to the recent fighting dire.

Displacement

Despite the ongoing hostilities, the great majority of the Idleb city population (estimated at 600,000 people) remains inside the city. While it is unclear how many people have been displaced within and from the city, an estimated 2,500 people have allegedly been displaced from Idleb city to Ariha (to the South west, under Government control). Another nearly 2,000 families have been displaced from NSAG-controlled areas around Idleb City, the majority towards IDP settlements in the northern part of the governorate, or to other villages where they are being hosted by friends and family.

On 26 March, SARC opened three temporary collective shelters for families who were displaced from the conflict areas, namely in Al-Wehda school in the city center, and in both Al-Fourkan and Bilal mosques in the western part of the city. Although relief supplies have been prepositioned inside Idleb city, SARC warehouses are located in conflict areas and available stocks cannot be accessed for the time being.

Should conflict continue to escalate, the United Nations and partners estimated that up to 240,000 people could be displaced into Government-controlled areas of Idleb, Lattakia, Tartous and Hama governorates and an additional 100,000 people could be displaced into NSAG-controlled areas and along the Turkish border. People could potentially also be displaced from NSAG-controlled areas towards the Turkish border and towards Maarat al-Numan. The CCCM Cluster is investigating the necessity of establishing a reception center in Salqin, depending on movements to the area.

Humanitarian partners are continuing to closely monitor the onset of displacement and triangulation is taking place between Syria and Turkey based actors.

Humanitarian Situation and Response

The humanitarian situation in Idleb city has dramatically deteriorated, due to shortages in electricity, communications, closure of public buildings, such as schools, hospitals. The National Hospital has stopped working and patients have either evacuated or left. To date only the SARC health centre is operational. Limited supplies are available, with the great majority of shops reportedly closed due to the intense hostilities. Protection concerns for the civilian population to access basic services and supplies as well as exposure to injuries due to the intensity of the fighting remain a primary concern.

UN agencies and partners have pre-positioned humanitarian supplies in Tartous and Lattakia, as well as in Ariha for an estimated 40,000 people in all sectors, and stand ready to respond to the possible displacement in these areas. Preparedness activities, including the identification of shelter alternatives, are underway.

As part of the agencies regular programmes, already food for up to 150,000 people and large quantities of medicines, medical supplies and equipment, as well as WASH and NFIs have been prepositioned inside Idleb city, however distributions remain on hold for the time being due to the conflict. Further attempts by UN agencies to bring additional supplies to the city in the last week have not been successful due to insecurity along the road.

A rocket attack in Maaret Misreen, north of Idleb city, reportedly killed 17 people, with more than 50 wounded requiring surgery. 135 emergency surgeries were conducted on 27 March in a health facility along the border OCHA Turkey and the health cluster are following up with the Turkish authorities to arrange for possible evacuations of the injured people. In other areas, the health response has reportedly been adequate so far.

NFI/Shelter partners are planning distributions in the coming days to at least eight sub-districts in Idleb targeting more than 3,000 households. Cluster partners reported that they have more than 57,000 NFI kits in stock or in the pipeline, over 4,000 tents, 63,000 blankets, 7 tons of clothes, cash transfers or vouchers for 7,000 households, 3,300 cooking sets, 5,000 jerricans, 3,750 mattresses, and over 4,000 plastic sheets.

In terms of food assistance, 4,100 cooked meals have already been provided in Bennish and Sarmin and another 5,000 meals are ready to be provided if needed. Two partners confirmed their stock capacity of 36,922 Food Baskets (FBs) in at least 8 Idleb sub-districts. 756 kg of flour are also stocked in 6 sub-districts. Another partner has the capacity to move some of the stocked food baskets from Aleppo governorate to its Idleb area of intervention if needed. In case of major displacement, cooked meals and ready-to-eat food will be prioritized where possible in order to give an immediate response to the needs of people. WASH partners declared an estimated 50,000 family hygiene kits (also catering for females and children special needs), 47,000 Jerry Cans for household water storage and one million Aqua tabs ready for immediate distribution. Some of the agencies that are already very active in Idleb governorate have shown capacity to make bulk potable water quantities available through the several water systems that are already being supported by rehabilitation and/or operations/maintenance activities. Some of these agencies would be looking for a partner to facilitate a water trucking operation to transport to target beneficiaries.

Safety and Security of humanitarian workers

On 25 March, one SARC volunteer incurred a gunshot wound while on his way back home from the SARC centre; he is currently in stable condition. Subsequently, SARC expressed concern about the safety and security of their volunteers and appealed to all parties to respect and protect them and to allow all volunteers to continue conducting their duties.

In addition, three NGO staff were injured during the shelling in Marat Misreen on 27 March; two of them have been evacuated to Turkey and are in critical condition.

On 25 March the UN Department of Safety and Security recommended the relocation of staff and suspension of UN missions to Idlib City.

For further information, please contact:

Sebastien Trives, Head of Office, Syria, trives@un.org, +963 958 800 075

Barbara Shenstone, Head of Office, Turkey, shenstone@un.org, +90 530 041 9152

Josephine Guerrero, Public Information Officer, guerreroj@un.org, +963968 888 389

www.unocha.org/syria | [twitter: ocha_syria](https://twitter.com/ocha_syria) | [facebook: UNOCHA.Syria](https://www.facebook.com/UNOCHA.Syria)