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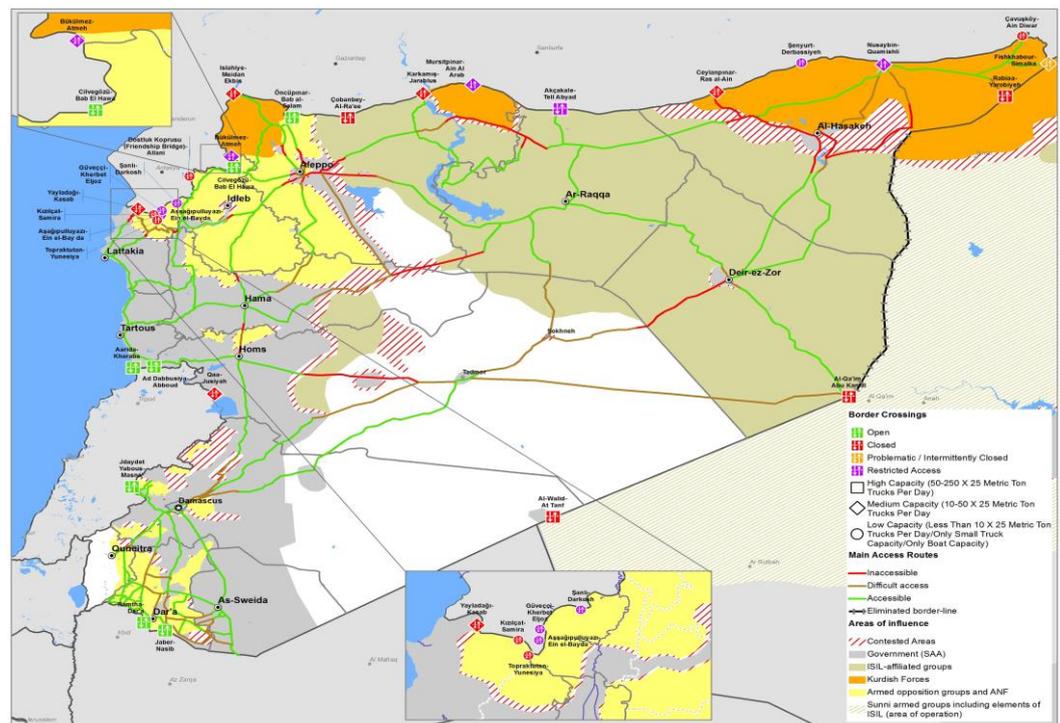
HIGHLIGHTS

- Opposition groups seize control of Idlib City from the Government of Syria on 28 March 2015.
- Humanitarian partners review contingency stocks and respond to humanitarian needs of IDPs in Idlib.
- Government of Syria forces manage to retake Handarat village from opposition forces causing fear about closure of access route from Bab al-Salam to Aleppo City.
- Between 12 February and 27 March 2015, UN cross-border shipments under Security Council Resolution 2165/2191 targeted 486,700 people in Aleppo, Idlib, Latakia and Hama governorates with at least one form of assistance.



Humanitarian Access Constraints

Despite an escalation of fighting across the northern Governorates over the last few weeks, the map below indicates that the broad areas of control by all the parties to the conflict remain roughly the same during the reporting period.



FIGURES

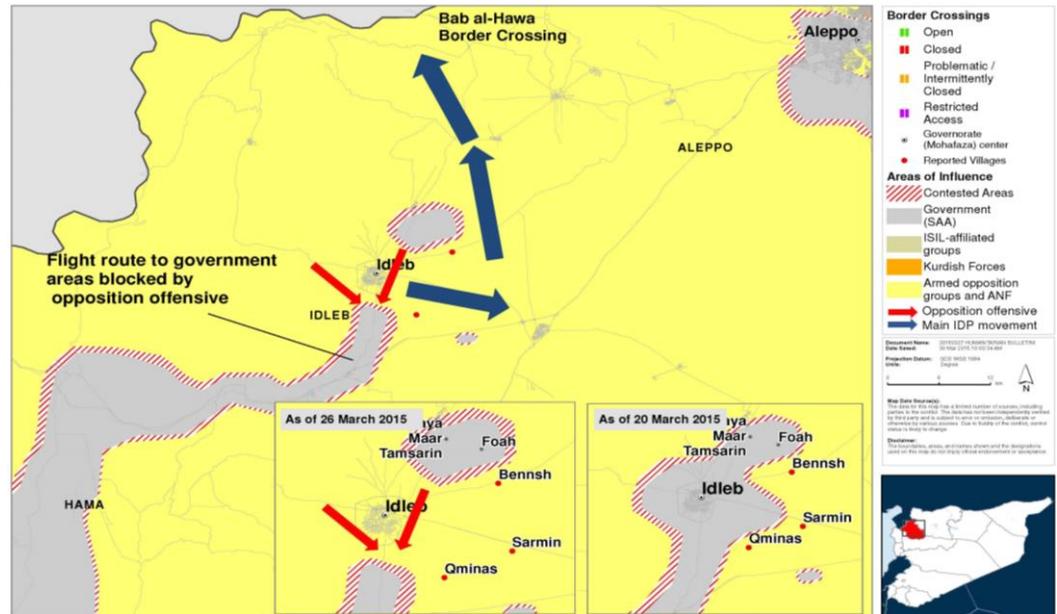
# of People in Need (PiN)	12.2 m
# of IDPs	7.6 m
# of reported camps in northern Syria	234
# of IDPs in reported camp settlements	192,548

Humanitarian Context

Opposition groups seize control of Idlib city:

Several armed opposition groups in Idlib – principally Ahrar al-Sham and Al Nusra Front – launched a major offensive to take Idlib city from Government of Syria (GoS) control. On 28 March 2015, opposition forces took full control of Idlib city, after a few days of combat. Initial reports suggested that displacement was relatively small, with only a few thousands households displaced, out of an estimated total population of 350,000 to 400,000 people in Idlib city. There are now fears that government forces will increase barrel-bombardment of the city, prompting much greater displacement. Initially, IDPs fleeing the city fled towards both rural opposition-controlled areas of Idlib and government-controlled areas of Latakia.

However, the latter route is largely blocked as of 28 March, when opposition forces cut the Idleb-Lattakia highway and are now focused on seizing Mastumeh. There have been some reports of IDPs accessing government-controlled areas by heading into Hama and crossing frontlines. However, in the event of further displacement, the most direct route is expected to be into rural opposition-controlled Idleb and then towards the Turkish border. There are also protection concerns over civilians in the two government-controlled villages of Foua and Kefraya, north of Idleb city, who are now militarily surrounded by opposition groups who have long accused the Shiite residents of supporting the GoS. There are initial reports of negotiations in which Sharia courts of opposition factions would allow civilians safe passage out of the villages, or whereby relations would be normalized. However, Ahrar al-Sham – one of the largest opposition factions involved in the offensive - released a statement on 29 March indicating that, if government forces bombard Idleb city, they would respond by shelling Foua and Kefraya. The below map demonstrates ongoing fighting in Idleb and potential IDP movement as of 30 March 2015.



Reports of chemical weapons attacks on opposition-controlled Idleb:

Humanitarian partners submitted reports on several alleged chlorine bombs launched by Government of Syria forces in Idleb. The first attack reportedly took place on 17 March, in which bombardment on the villages of Sarmeen and Qmeinis, with a substance believed to be chlorine, caused anywhere between 70-120 casualties and 6-7 fatalities. During the first few days of the offensive on Idleb, from 24 March, further reports emerged of alleged chlorine attacks on the village of Binnish, reportedly causing a few dozen injuries and no fatalities. Heavy barrel bombardment of Idleb city including on a SARC field hospital and the national hospital were reported on 30 March. Substantive information on the precise nature and number of attacks remains unconfirmed.

GoS forces reverse opposition gains in Handarat after seizing hills:

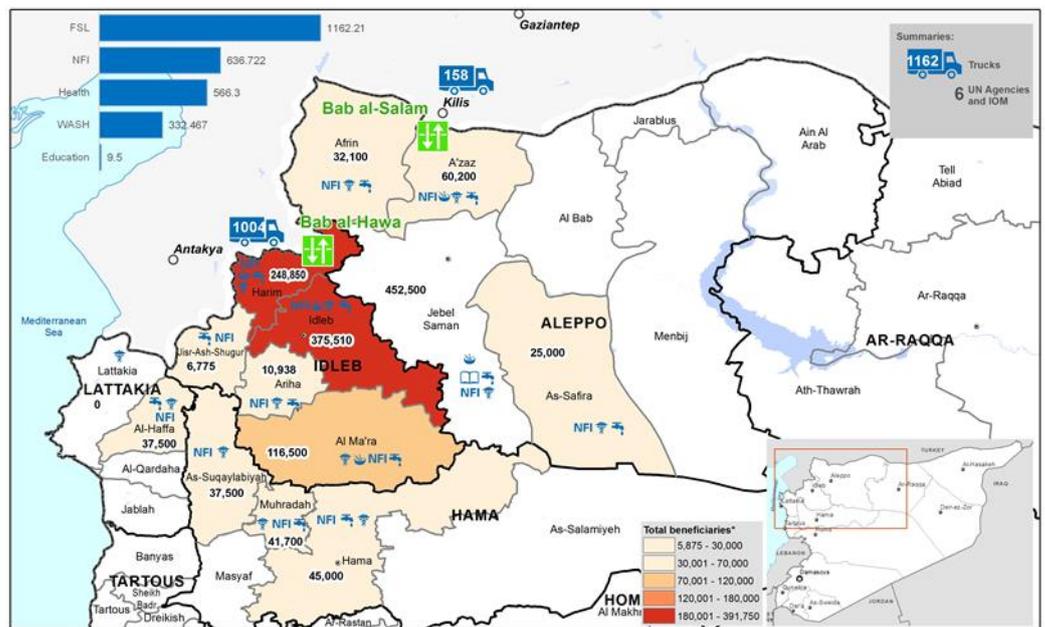
On 19 March 2015, GoS forces retook Handarat village, Handarat hill, and Madafah hill from opposition forces, who had seized the strategic locations on 10 March. This strengthens government forces hold in Northern rural Aleppo, sustaining fears of them advancing further to reconnect with the besieged government-held villages Nubul and Zahra. Such a move would effectively cut humanitarian access routes between Aleppo City and Bab Al Salam border and further compromise the last remaining supply line into Aleppo City from the western Aleppo countryside, increasing the probability of government forces encircling Aleppo city.

Response Update

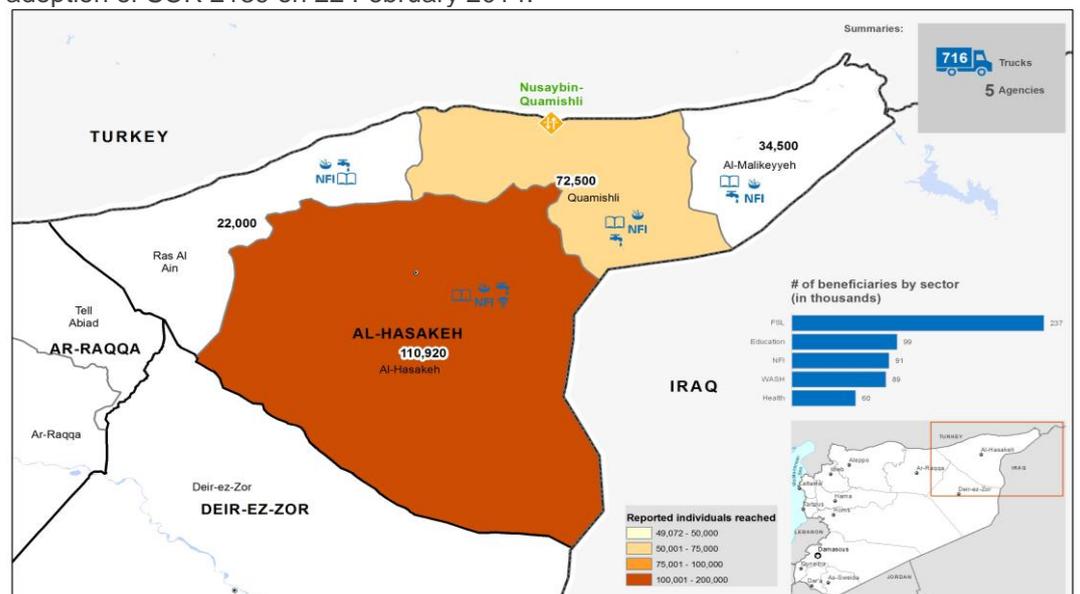
Under UN Security Council Resolution 2191, UN agencies continue to ship humanitarian assistance to Syria targeting 486,700 people with at least one form of assistance during the reporting period.

On 17 December 2014, the Security Council decided through its unanimous adoption of resolution 2191 (formerly UNSC 2165) that United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners could continue, with notification to Syrian authorities, to use the border crossings at Bab al-Salam, Bab al-Hawa, Al Yarubiyah and Al Ramtha.

Between 12 February-27 March 2015, WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA, FAO and IOM shipped 446 truckloads of humanitarian supplies consisting from Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam border crossings. The assistance is to target 486,700 people with food assistance, 160,529 people with NFIs, 112,351 people with WASH and 2,100 people with Health assistance in the governorates of Aleppo, Idleb, Hama and Lattakia. The below map demonstrates the sectoral breakdown of the assistance provided through UN cross border assistance from Turkey since the adoption of SCR 2165 14 July 2014.



Furthermore, during the reporting period, WFP shipped 120 truckloads of food assistance through Nusaybin/Qamishli to target 230,000 beneficiaries in Al-Hasakeh Governorate under Security Council Resolution 2139. The below map shows the sectoral breakdown of the assistance provided through UN cross border assistance from Turkey since the adoption of SCR 2139 on 22 February 2014.



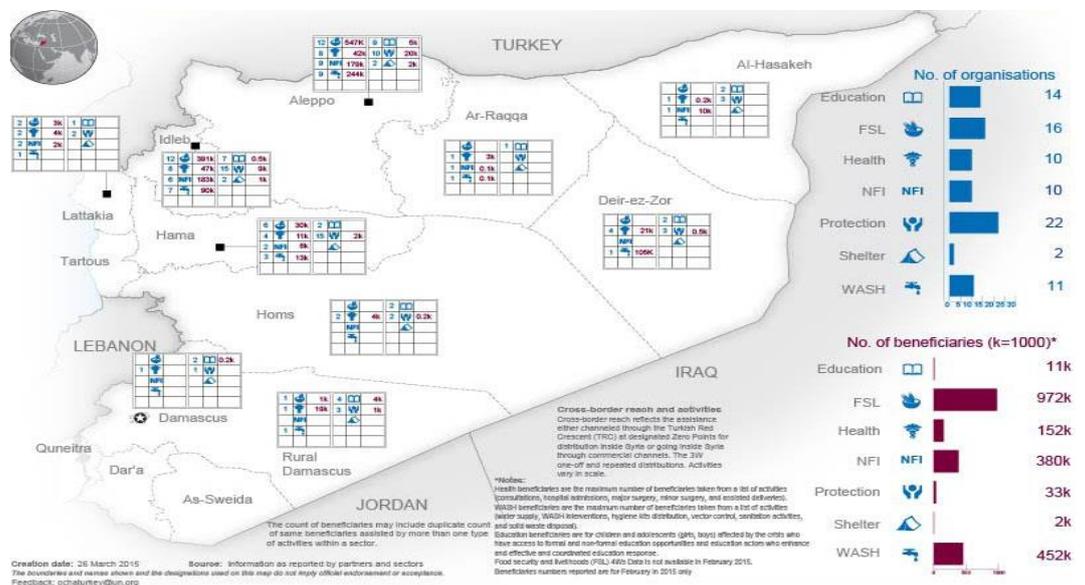
The Turkish Red Crescent facilitated the crossing of 751 truckloads of humanitarian assistance between 12 February and 25 March 2015.

In addition to UN shipments, the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) is facilitating the crossing of humanitarian shipments by NGOs and other actors through designated zero points along the Turkish border.

For the month of February 2015, the TRC facilitated the crossing of 632 truckloads of humanitarian supplies consisting of Health, FSL, NFIs, WASH and Shelter items from 35 NGOs and other actors with a total value of approximately USD 13 million using seven border crossings along the Turkish-Syrian border. NFIs represented the largest proportion of supplies with 49 percent of the total amount followed by FSL assistance with 30 percent, Health supplies with 10 percent and other supplies with 11 percent.

The 4W (who is doing what, where, and when,) map below highlights the number of beneficiaries reached in February 2015 by humanitarian organizations operating from Turkey. The highest concentration of sectoral interventions can be found in Aleppo and Idleb, followed by Deir-ez-Zor, Hama, Al-Hasakeh and Ar-Raqqa governorates.

More than 972,000 people were reached with FSL interventions in ten governorates in the month of February 2015. WASH and NFI assistance were provided to 452,000 and 380,000 people, respectively, for February 2015.



Humanitarian Response in Idleb

Displacements from Idleb city have increased following the escalation of hostilities since 24 March.

Following the escalation of fighting between opposition and government forces in Idleb, humanitarian partners conducted coordination meetings on 19, 23 and 25 March 2015 to review contingency scenarios and stocks. 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 opposition-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. As of 30 March, the CCCM cluster tracked a total of 15,993 reported people as IDPs, whereas reports from civil defense units in Idleb city indicate that the actual number of IDPs might be anywhere between 30,000 and 50,000 people. Humanitarian partners are continuing to closely monitor the onset of displacement and triangulation is taking place between Syria and Turkey based actors.

According to local sources in Syria, 135 emergency surgeries were conducted on 27 March in a health facility along Bab al-Hawa border. 15 injured people including three staff members of an NGO were admitted to Turkey through Bab al-Hawa border crossing on 28 March. 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.

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. Large quantities of medicine, medical supplies, WASH items and NFIs have been prepositioned in Idleb City. Cooked meals are already being provided to displaced families in the Sarmeen area, with reported capacity for scaling up if a further influx occurs. Nevertheless, 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.

FSL partners report that 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 six sub-districts. 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.

NFI/Shelter partners are planning to target eight sub-districts in Idleb with the aim of reaching to 3,000 households. Cluster partners have arranged 57,000 NFI kits, 63,000 blankets, 4,000 tents, seven tons of clothes, 3,300 cooking sets, and 3,750 mattresses for approximately 7,000 households.

UXO Removal remains Priority in Kobane

YPG (People's Protection Forces) and FSA (Free Syrian Army) forces expelled ISIL from Kobane (Ayn al-Arab) on 27 January 2015. FSA and YPG forces have pushed ISIL to the Western side of the Euphrates River, retaking stretches of the highway south, and pushing ISIL to areas West of Tell Abyad. These developments reduce the likelihood of ISIL retaking any of the areas it lost and re-entering Kobane town. Kobane can only be accessed from Turkey through the Mürşitpınar/Ayn al-Arab border crossing.

As a result of the fighting, unexploded ordinance and booby traps remain widespread in Kobane causing significant protection concerns for returnees. The Humanitarian Liaison Group endorsed a position paper prepared by the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group calling on humanitarian partners to prioritize the clearance of explosives during the first phase of the response.

Despite the danger posed by UXOs and booby traps, returns to Kobane have been observed over the course of the last few weeks albeit at reduced pace. Local Kurdish authorities report 12 people were killed with unexploded ordinance and at least 20 people were injured in such accidents since ISIL was expelled from the town. As of 27 March 2015, local Turkish authorities report that approximately 37,000 people have returned to Kobane since late January through the Mursitpinar/Ayn al-Arab border crossing. Yet, an anonymous source familiar with refugee returns told OCHA that "the number of returnees have significantly dropped over time." A Kurdish NGO representative based in Southern Turkey thinks "whether more refugees will return to Kobane or not depend on mine clearing and availability and delivery of services in Kobane city." Local Turkish authorities stated that 18,000 Kobane refugees currently reside in the Suruç camp and approximately 25,000 refugees live in camps run by the Suruç municipality.

Several NGOs have started mine risk awareness trainings for civilians and NGO staff and a number of NGOs with expertise in clearance of explosives stated their interest in working in Kobane as soon as funds can be secured and authorizations from national and local authorities can be obtained. A Kurdish NGO representative in Suruc stated that while mine clearing is the first priority, it is not the only need on the ground. He maintained that "water wells are contaminated with sewage or need generators, fuel is in short supply, and health facilities need equipment and medical staff." He added that these "water, sanitation, health assistance and fuel supplies are key to rebuilding Kobane but human security comes first." We need to ensure civilians can safely return, live in a safe environment, and receive basic services in Kobane."

Local Turkish authorities report approximately 37,000 refugees have returned to Kobane since late January.

"Water, sanitation, health assistance and fuel supplies are key to rebuilding Kobane but human security comes first." A Kurdish NGO representative

For the time being, humanitarian NGOs and local municipalities send three to five trucks into Kobane each day providing food, water, sanitation, and health assistance as well as reconstruction materials including sending cranes and bulldozers to clear the debris.

Staff Crossing Challenges

“We continue to work on our projects thanks to the mechanism established by deputy governors. Yet, we can only cross a limited number of people and that limits our ability to effectively respond to humanitarian needs.” A Syrian NGO representative

The Government of Turkey announced on 09 March 2015 until further notice the closure of the Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam border crossings for regular traffic of vehicles and pedestrians to and from Syria. However, commercial and humanitarian cargoes destined for Syria are not affected by this closure.

New procedures do restrict the crossing back and forth to Syria of Syrian NGO staff based in Turkey. NGOs that have registered with the Turkish authorities at the border and have put their staff on a special list are allowed to continue to cross back-and-forth.

The real issue for the NGOs is the restricted number of staff they can currently put on the list of staff going back and forth. Most NGOs have been given at least five spots, but many need many more staff to be able to cross back and forth regularly, they say. Frustration is mounting and NGOs say their operations in Syria are being adversely affected by these limited lists.

Turkish border authorities, instructed to manage the borders strictly, may not have a full understanding of why the NGOs (many of whom are delivering services in Syria, not only supplies, that require significant numbers of staff -- for project implementation, monitoring, training, etc--) require more than a minimum number of cross-border passes.

There is currently also a temporary difficulty for NGO staff crossing at Bab al Hawa because the Turkish border authorities there are revisiting their process and introducing biometric registration that the NGO staff will have to go through in the next few days/weeks to validate the lists of those needing to go back and forth.

As a Syrian medical worker employed by an NGO told OCHA, “These closures make it quite difficult for us to respond to humanitarian needs in Idleb especially in the context of the recent chemical attacks and ongoing fighting. Syrian physicians and medical staff can cross into Syria but they are very reluctant because they have families in Turkey. They fear they will not be able to return and be with their families if they cross into Syria. Thus, we lack qualified personnel on the ground.”

A Syrian NGO representative whose staff was allowed to cross in and out of Syria using the humanitarian staff crossing mechanism added further, “We continue to work on our projects thanks to the mechanism established by deputy governors. Yet, we can only cross a limited number of people and that limits our ability to effectively respond to humanitarian needs.”

NGO partners request the expansion of the staff crossing lists to allow adequate numbers of humanitarian staff access across the border. OCHA continues to liaise with Turkish Government authorities at national and local levels to clarify rules and procedures and to facilitate humanitarian access.

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