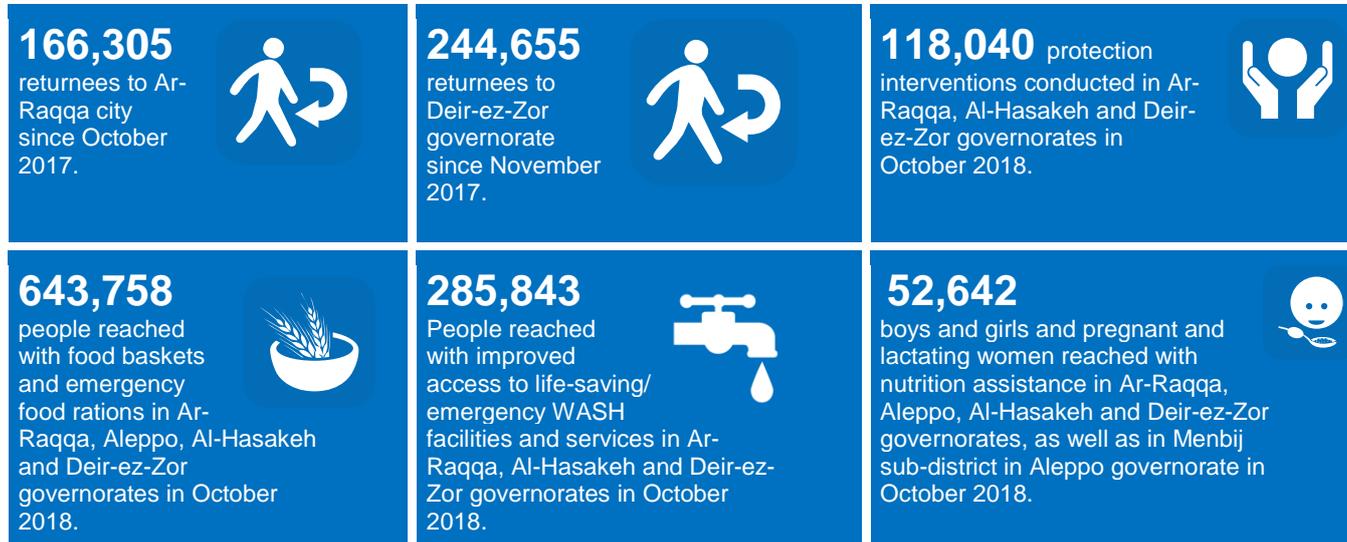




This report is produced by the OCHA Syria Crisis offices with the contribution of all sectors in the hubs and at the Whole of Syria (WoS) level. The situation overview covers the period from 1 November- 14 December 2018. The next report will be issued on or around 1 February 2019.

Highlights

- The United Nations (UN) and partners have significant concerns for the civilian population impacted by recent hostilities in south-east Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, with airstrikes reportedly contributing to significant civilian casualties and destruction of civilian infrastructure.
- On the 1 December the SDF opened a security corridor which reportedly resulted in over 3,000 people, mostly women and children, fleeing the ISIL-held Hajin enclave. The UN is concerned by reports that some of the subsequent movements of these IDPs to Al Hole camp as well as the Abu Khashab informal settlement and Al Busrayiah transit site were reportedly not voluntary. These movements follow the displacement of an estimated 6,000 people from the ISIL-held Hajin enclave to surrounding areas between September and November.
- The UN in Syria strongly condemned the 29 November attack on a joint humanitarian mission in south-east Deir-ez-Zor Governorate which resulted in the shooting and wounding of a Syrian driver from a local NGO (*see 30 November statement from UN in the Syrian Arab Republic*). The UN calls on all parties to the conflict to uphold their responsibilities under International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law to take all possible measure to protect civilians, including aid workers. Following this incident humanitarian actors suspended their activities in the area.
- Despite improvements in access, reports of disruption to education provision in northeast Syria continued during the reporting period, with almost half of the 102,000 children enrolled in GoS schools in northeast Syria affected by deliberate obstructions preventing them from attending GoS schools. This includes some 10,000 children who have reportedly been unable to attend school since later September.
- Across northeast Syria there continue to be reports of insufficient winterization assistance among IDP populations. As of the end of November NGOs operating in northeast Syria reported a 39.7 per cent gap in required funding, leaving some 142,000 people targeted for winterization assistance not covered.



Situation Overview

During the reporting period there have been increased reports of civilian casualties due to air-strikes and ground-based fighting in south-east Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. There are concerns for the estimated 6,000 people who remain in ISIL-controlled areas in the vicinity of Hajin, where hostilities have reportedly been concentrated. Unconfirmed reports indicate that airstrikes have contributed to numerous civilian deaths, including of children. Civilians remaining in areas under ISIL-control are also exposed to high-levels of deprivation. During the reporting period critical gaps in food and medical supplies were reported, with the price of flour in Al Shafa town allegedly reaching as high as 6,000

SYP, almost sixty times higher than in neighboring SDF areas. Recently displaced people arriving in SDF-held areas have allegedly reported a dire situation in ISIL-controlled areas with extensive infrastructure damage- including to the main hospital which is reportedly destroyed- as well as lack of food and basic services. People in the Hajin-enclave have reportedly been relying on food stockpiled by ISIL.

As of July 2018, an estimated 25,000-30,000 people resided in the ISIL-controlled Hajin enclave. An estimated 10,000-12,000 of these people fled the enclave between July and August. Since 11 September the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), with the support of the International Coalition Forces (ICF), have scaled up their military operations as part of an effort to clear ISIL from its last strongholds in Syria. Between September and the end of November an estimated 6,000 people were displaced from the Hajin enclave to a number of informal IDP makeshift settlements in the area.

On 1 December, the SDF reportedly established a security corridor linking ISIL-controlled areas. In the first 12 days of December over 3,000 people, mostly women and children, reportedly left through this corridor. However, reports of restrictions on the freedom of movement of civilians living in the Hajin enclave persist, with ISIL reportedly obstructing civilians from leaving the enclave. There have been reports of civilians paying smugglers extremely high fees to transport them to SDF areas. Of the more than 3,000 people who have exited the ISIL-held Hajin enclave to SDF areas between the 1 and 12 December, 2,800 have arrived at the Al Hole camp and 500 to the Abu Khashab informal settlement. Many of these people transited through the Al Busrayiah transit site.

IDPs displaced from Hajin over previous months continue to be dispersed across the surrounding areas, living in informal settlements/ makeshift camps, more formal IDP sites in Gharanij and amongst the host community. Overall there are an estimated 15 informal settlements hosting IDPs, with the main sites located in the Gharanij and Bahra areas. Reports from the field continue to indicate that there are serious barriers to civilian movement in communities in Hajin and neighboring sub-districts of Sur, Basira, Thiban, and Susat, with women and girls reportedly most affected by the obstacles to basic services such as health, water and sanitation. Amidst limited humanitarian access to affected areas, the situation of these IDPs reportedly remains dire.

Across SDF-controlled areas of northeast Syria there are an estimated 35,800 people living in IDP/ refugee sites as of the end of November 2018, of whom some 26,650 are IDPs¹. This represents a slight increase in the estimated IDP population from the previous month. While returns continue to occur towards Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor from all sites, new arrivals during the month have largely come from Deir-ez-Zor. Since November 2017 some 18,178 refugees have returned to Iraq with further movements anticipated.

There continue to be significant concerns for the situation of IDPs, many of whom are reportedly not adequately equipped for winter. Heavy rains during the reporting period allegedly caused damage and destruction of shelters in several locations. In an IDP site near Al-Jayef village in western rural Ar-Raqqa heavy rains on 14 November damaged at least 13 tents, with the camp administration highlighting a lack of winter preparedness in the camp. Similarly, further heavy rains on the 29 November reportedly resulted in damage/ destruction of roughly 30 tents in makeshift camps across northern and western rural Ar-Raqqa Governorate. Heavy rains throughout the end of November caused flooding in parts of Areesha camp, which could potentially affect 9,000 IDPs (there is continued resistance from the camp population and administration around a possible relocation to the Al Hole or Mabrouka camps).

Against this backdrop, there continue to be significant funding gaps for the winterization response in northeast Syria. According to the Whole of Syria Shelter/NFI sector, as of 26 November international NGOs responding in northeast Syria were facing a US\$4.75 million funding gap for their winterization plan, and part of the overall US\$19 million funding gap for the Syria hub is also likely to affect activities in northeast Syria. The INGO funding gap alone would likely leave approximately 142,000 of the 568,000-people targeted under the overall plan not covered with winterization assistance.

There continues to be an urgent and immediate need to scale up winter aid distribution (including sleeping bags, thermal blankets, winter clothes, plastic sheeting, winter NFI kits, heaters, stoves and fuel), particularly given the large number of IDPs living in inadequate shelters in IDP sites (including informal settlements and unfinished buildings) which are unable to withstand the harsh winter conditions. Of the most commonly reported NFI needs, a majority were for winter items, alongside light and energy sources. Rental prices have also been reported to be rising across Ar-Raqqa Governorate, presenting further challenges in accessing sufficient shelter during the winter. Across locations key informants have also reported limited access to electricity, with a reliance on expensive private generators potentially limiting access particularly for low-income households.

During November, thousands of children across northeast Syria reportedly continued to face barriers to accessing education. The Kurdish Self Administration (KSA) issued a decree in September preventing children from accessing

¹ Source: UNHCR

GoS schools (teaching the national curriculum). As of the end of the November approximately half of the 102,000 children in northeast Syria enrolled in some 360 GoS schools (41 per cent of school age children in northeast Syria) reportedly faced obstructions to attending including an estimated 10,000 children who have not been able to attend school since later September. Humanitarian partners engaged with authorities, resulting in some improvements with the school attendance rate increasing. Recent assessments indicate, however, that 10 per cent of students in Hassakeh city and 23 per cent of students in Qamishli still do not regularly access education. Attendance rates remain erratic, with continued frequent reports of challenges in crossing checkpoints. These restrictions were particularly burdensome around Qamishli, with the KSA establishing road checkpoints that continue in some cases to prevent children from accessing their schools. The situation in Hassakeh city has reportedly improved since the end of November, with only one remaining checkpoint restricting access. In northeast Syria education continues to be reported as a significant gap, with reports that secondary education is almost non-existent across large swathes of Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor governorates. There is a widespread need for the restoration and rehabilitation of schools, many of which have been damaged due to hostilities. The military use of schools also continues to be reported as a barrier to education in northeast Syria, particularly in areas around south-east Deir-ez-Zor

There were no new infectious disease outbreaks confirmed for northeast Syria in November. Caseloads in previously reported outbreaks have generally declined. The acute bloody diarrhea outbreak in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate has been contained, but continued water treatment is required to ensure that the situation remains under control. Between 1-30 November a total of 845 new cases of acute bloody diarrhea (ABD) were reported through the consolidated EWARS and EWARN surveillance sites, of which 171 were reported in Ar-Raqqa Governorate, 410 in Al-Hasakeh Governorate and 264 in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. The number of new cases recorded continues to show an overall decline. Similarly, over the last month the number of new typhoid cases reported across the three governorates has also reduced, from approximately 3,430 in October to 2,595 in November. Nonetheless, in view of heavy rains reported over the last month resulting in flooding in some IDP sites, there exists an increased risk of outbreaks of water-borne diseases including typhoid and acute bloody diarrhea. As previously reported, conditions across many IDP sites are already dire. During November, local reports highlighted a challenging situation in the Jazra Abu Hameed IDP camp located in Al-Kasra district in northeast Deir-ez-Zor, where scores of children are reportedly suffering from acute bloody diarrhea and infectious diseases. According to the camp administration, some 3,500 people (700 families) have not received any assistance for three months.

On 18 April, the Directorate of School Health reported a measles outbreak particularly affecting school-aged children. However, following several vaccination campaigns conducted across all governorates, the overall prevalence of new measles cases has declined sharply since a peak in May, and caseloads are currently at the lowest level recorded this year.

The number of cases of leishmaniasis has experienced an upsurge in November, although numbers remain lower as compared to the start of the year. In January 2018 approximately 1,700 new cases of leishmaniasis were reported on average each week across all three governorates. By October this had decreased to approximately 500 new cases. During November, however, caseloads increased to an average of 1,135 new cases on average per week, 70 per cent of which were reported in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, marking a dramatic increase in cases since October. Leishmaniasis has largely spread due to a lack of healthcare and health actors operating in affected areas.

Humanitarian Response

Sustained access to the civilian population displaced by ongoing hostilities in the vicinity of the Hajin area has remained challenging due to a combination of insecurity, difficult terrain and distance from operational hubs. While the UN has been able to provide assistance to IDPs in Gharanij, Bahra and areas around Hajin remain largely inaccessible. The UN remains committed to conducting further joint assessments with partners and monitors to provide a more reliable estimate of the total number of IDPs and settlements in these areas and identify / respond to critical needs.

In November a deteriorating security situation, marked by shifting frontline, prevented the UN and its partners from delivering assistance. The 29 November shooting and wounding of a Syrian driver working for a local NGO during a joint humanitarian assessment mission in the Shihiel-Busayrah sub-district is indicative of the security risks humanitarian actors are exposed to, and resulted in humanitarian actors suspending their humanitarian activities in the areas. Recent IDP arrivals from the Hajin enclave to the Al Hole camp were provided with food, NFIs and hygiene kits upon their arrival.

Against this backdrop the response in Deir-ez-Zor remains centered in north and west line areas², with limited and sporadic deliveries to the so called east line areas around Hajin where active hostilities are ongoing and recent displacements have been recorded. In north and west line areas UN and NGO partners have been able to deliver regular and sustained programmes. However, adverse weather conditions during the reporting period have presented challenges in accessing some camps. For instance, the road between Qamishli and Abu Khashab reportedly remains closed due to recent heavy rainfalls that washed away a bridge, preventing UN agencies from accessing the Abu Khashab makeshift settlement where approximately 3,000 IDPs are staying. International NGOs have been able to provide some limited humanitarian assistance to IDPs in Abu Khashab, including water trucking, supplementary food, ready-to-eat-rations as well as UN provided tents and NFIs.

The response to the various infectious disease outbreaks reported in northeast Syria is also ongoing. On the 4 November the Directorate of Health in collaboration with UNICEF launched a polio vaccination campaign targeting children aged between one and five in both SDF and GoS controlled areas. The campaign lasted until the 11 November and was preceded by a five-day awareness campaign. Some 110,000 children between one and five were immunized against polio. The campaign was conducted through primary healthcare centres in Deir-ez-Zor city as well as mobile clinics in SDF controlled areas. This follows the announcement from the Outbreak Response Assessment (OBRA) team, following their mission to Syria in October, that the 2017 outbreak of Vaccine-Derived Poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2) has now been contained.

Northeast Syria NGOs continue to scale up humanitarian assistance in Ar-Raqqa city where 11 NGOs and several Syrian NGOs are implementing programmes. These NGOs are also providing assistance in Deir-ez-Zor. NGOs are providing winterization assistance, including cash and in-kind, across northeast Syria in key response locations.

Given the harsh winter conditions in northern areas of Syria as well as the large-number of IDPs, northeast Syria is a priority geographic area for winterization assistance. Area based assessments and planning have been conducted, and while most areas of NES will receive winterization support, planning from UN and INGOs to date is largely focused on winter NFIs, with major gaps in emergency and winter shelter support. NGOs are currently in the process of finalizing and implementing these winterization plans, including cash and in-kind response across northeast Syria in key response locations, in addition to the ongoing regular distribution and shelter rehabilitation programming

Explosive hazard clearance efforts continue in Ar-Raqqa Governorate. Two international humanitarian demining organizations have made good progress in establishing additional presence. One organization will start clearance operations in January 2019 and the other will start in March 2019. This will have a significant impact on the scale of mine action work carried out in northeast Syria in 2019.

Access

In November, WFP transported humanitarian supplies by road to Qamishli via 79 trucks from Aleppo, Homs, Latakia and Tartous governorates. During the same period, UN agencies transported child protection, food and health supplies by road to Deir-ez-Zor via 23 trucks (1 UNICEF, 21 WFP and 1 WHO) from Aleppo, Damascus, Homs and Latakia governorates. Organizations were able to deliver assistance to Qamishli and Deir-ez-Zor without significant delays during the month of October.

During November, two consignments with humanitarian relief were delivered through the Yarubiyah border-crossing into Syria, including six trucks on 15 November and five trucks on 28 November.

Northeast Syria NGOs continued to support service delivery and distribute supplies across northeast Syria, without major access impediments to most areas during this period. As mentioned in the previous section, access to areas of south-east Deir-ez-Zor which have recently witnessed displacement and hostilities remains challenging for NGOs as well as UN agencies and their local implementing partners.

Protection

The Protection Sector continues to receive credible reports of civilians, including women and children, being injured and killed as a result of air strikes and ground strikes. At the same time, reports continue to be received that the

² The north, west and east line areas refer to geographic units of analysis and operations to inform a coordinated response in SDF-held areas of Deir-ez-Zor north/ east of the Euphrates River. The north line (along the Khabur river) encompasses Basira and Sur sub-districts; the west line of the Euphrates encompasses Kisreh and Khashab sub-districts and; the east line of the Euphrates covers Thiban, Hajin and Susat sub-districts.

efforts of the population in Hajin to leave ISIL-controlled areas in search of safety is being obstructed, with concerns that civilians may be used by ISIL to shield armed group movements.

Under current circumstances, the Protection Sector continues to advocate at the highest level for the respect for basic principles of International Humanitarian Law during the conduct of hostilities, including the importance of warnings; the designation of screening points as far as possible from the line of fire/ frontline; the unimpeded and safe movement of civilians from areas of hostilities to destinations of their own choosing. The sector also continues to advocate for parties to the conflict to ensure due process in security screening in line with the SOPs already disseminated.

During the end of November and into the first week of December first hand reports from Al-Busayrah area have indicated the ongoing arrival of displaced population from areas in the Hajin enclave witnessing ongoing hostilities. IDPs were gathered by the SDF in Al-Busayrah in collective accommodations before being transferred to Abu Khashab informal settlement and Al Hole camp. According to eye witnesses, some of these relocation movements were met with resistance by the displaced population, due to their preference to remain in Al-Busayrah, relatively far from areas of fighting, but still in proximity to their areas of origin to enable a swift return when the situation allows. While it was not possible to reach IDPs in Al-Busayrah due to imposed security measures, it was observed that the refusal/ reluctance of IDPs to be relocated provoked some aggressive reactions by the SDF.

Protection partners managed to conduct some consultations with relocated families in Al Hole camp. Most of the IDP population comprised women and children, as well as people with disabilities and medical conditions. Cases of family separation due to the challenges in leaving the Hajin enclave – particularly for men – were reported. Reportedly, the involuntary separation of families was also caused by the difficulty of the journey, with some vulnerable persons not able to move rapidly. Cases of unaccompanied children were also identified and immediately referred to child protection actors for follow up. The account of the journey was particularly distressing, with groups of people fleeing ISIL-controlled areas at night, walking 7 to 15 kilometers and sleeping in the open with no food or heating. In Al-Busayrah, displaced people were sheltered in collective accommodations and reportedly faced movement restrictions before being rapidly relocated to the IDP sites. While in the sites they had been able to receive humanitarian assistance, including protection services (psychological first aid, child protection services and referral for assistance), however, following arrival in the site, displaced people were reportedly subjected to confiscation of personal documentation, impeding their ability to safely move towards areas of their choosing. Consultations with some groups of new arrivals revealed a desire in some cases to leave the site towards other SDF controlled areas in rural Deir-ez-Zor (e.g. Dheban, Al-Busayrah, Shuhayl) where they had family relations. The Protection sector continues to express concerns around policies of involuntary relocation to IDP sites and restriction of freedom of movement.

While there are different situations in the various IDP sites, freedom of movement continues to be identified as a key concern. In Mabrouka site, such restrictions were again voiced by the displaced population, as they have a direct impact on the ability of IDPs to seek livelihoods opportunities outside the site. Restrictions sometimes also applied to medical referrals. Protection actors at a local level continue their dialogue to sensitize authorities in control on protection and human rights principles, to enhance the protection space for persons of concern. Higher level advocacy with parties with influence also continues, including through civil military coordination channels, albeit with limited results. However, after eight months of access restrictions, UNICEF managed to access and provide services to foreign families in Ein Issa. The camp authorities agreed to a weekly schedule for such services, in addition to access reportedly already granted to some other humanitarian actors.

The UN protection agencies continue their efforts to mitigate protection risks in the sites by ensuring presence and maintaining established activities (consultations, psychosocial support (PSS), case management, mine risk education, gender-based violence (GBV) awareness), in line with an action plan to enhance protection in the IDP sites agreed from the beginning of the year. During November, a two-day training session on GBV mainstreaming was organized for 22 focal points from all the sectors operating in northeast Syria, including some of the UN facilitators engaged in the field. The purpose of the training was to provide basic practical guidance for humanitarians to coordinate, plan, design, implement, monitor and evaluate essential actions for the prevention and risk mitigation of gender-based violence, throughout the humanitarian response. In parallel, events related to the “16 Days of Activism”, both inside the IDP sites and in communities, helped to raise awareness on numerous issues, including sexual harassment, early marriages (accompanied by legal awareness sessions), and domestic violence.

The process of IDP return continued from the majority of sites, albeit at a slower pace. Most of the returnees were directed to Al-Busayrah, as a transit point. Challenges already observed in previous movements periodically resurfaced. Some confiscation of items continued to be reported by returnees once en route to areas of origin, with protection actors discouraging the practice. Another key advocacy issue for protection actors, including through civil-military coordination channels, has been around the requests of payment from returning IDPs to support Asayesh security escorts from the IDP sites to Al-Busayrah. Allegedly, this protects returning IDPs from being assaulted by ISIS. Due to the alleged lack of vehicles to accompany the convoys, the practice has been to charge the returnees

for the cost of the vehicle rent. The negative effects of this practice have been highlighted, as it results in the depletion of the already scarce resources of the returnees and hinders their reintegration and resilience in areas of origin/return.

Cross-Cutting Operational Challenges

Humanitarian actors face significant challenges in responding to needs in northeast Syria. These challenges include:

- **Active hostilities and insecurity:** Active hostilities and insecurity particularly in south-east Deir-ez-Zor continue to present a significant barrier to scaling up humanitarian programmes, particularly amidst a fluid situation resulting in frequent changes in control. On 29 November a joint humanitarian assessment mission in the Shihiel-Busayrah sub-district in south-east Deir-ez-Zor was attacked, with a Syrian driver from a local NGO was shot. During November the security situation in Ar-Raqqa city reportedly also deteriorated, with reports of assassinations and attacks on checkpoints. This has contributed to a challenging and unpredictable operational environment, resulting in some disruption to assistance and basic service provision in the city
- **High levels of explosive hazard contamination:** The contamination levels in areas that shifted control continues to be considered very high. Although blast casualty cases in Ar-Raqqa have decreased from approximately 40 per week at the end of 2017, to approximately four per week as of November, casualty levels remain high by international standards. Extensive explosive hazard contamination continues to present a barrier to scaling up assistance and basic service provision, particularly in Ar-Raqqa city and Deir-ez-Zor city which have experienced high-levels of return. In addition, limited demining and clearance capacity- particularly in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate where only one humanitarian Mine Action NGO is active in clearance operation- has presented a further challenge. At the same time, the lack of a system for documenting, prioritizing and implementing clearance activities in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate (unlike in Ar-Raqqa Governorate) have impeded the effectiveness of Mine Action operations
- **Policy environment:** Although there have been some improvements, humanitarian actors remain concerned for the policies being implemented by local authorities with regards to the treatment of the displaced population, particularly those subjected to restricted freedom of movement and confiscation of personal documentation, more frequent in certain areas. The intermittent bureaucratic impediments to operate in IDP sites and conduct certain activities are also of concern for humanitarian actors as it hinders planning, implementation and predictable provision of services to the population. Interference by local authorities in staff recruitment, procurement processes, beneficiary selection and needs-based targeting have also presented challenges to humanitarian operations in Syria.
- **Scalability:** Although the ability to scale up assistance and local capacity remain limited, the capacity of local actors continues to increase, creating opportunities to scaling up assistance and service delivery in Ar-Raqqa city and Deir-ez-Zor. At the same time, the sheer geographic scale of affected areas over which people in need, including IDPs, are dispersed as well as the distance of existing NGO and UN operational setups from affected areas (particularly in south-east Deir-ez-Zor) represents a significant challenge to meeting needs.
- **Funding limitations:** Additional funding is essential particularly in view of seasonal needs which require timely interventions. In the context of northeast Syria, additional funding is needed to scale up winterization assistance to those people targeted under the Shelter/ Non-Food Items (S-NFI) winterization plan. In addition, according to recent assessments, 2018 witnessed the lowest wheat and barley production in Syria since 1989, with only 30 per cent of production this year compared to pre-conflict averages. With Al-Hasakeh traditionally contributing between 50 to 75 per cent of national wheat production, the low wheat crop production could contribute to shortages of bread as well as price increases. This could have national implications on food consumption scores and could lead to increased recourse to harmful and unsustainable coping strategies. Additional attention and support is needed to mitigate the worse effects of these developments on vulnerable segments of the population in the area.

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