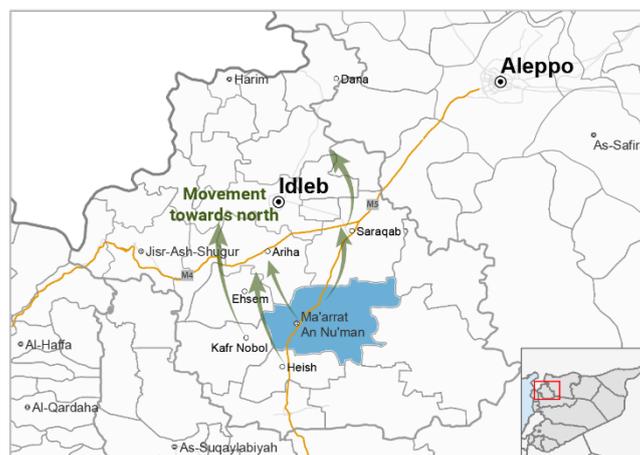


HIGHLIGHTS

- Since 16 December, tens of thousands of civilians have fled from Ma'arrat An-Nu'man area in southern Idlib governorate, moving further north due to renewed hostilities. Thousands of others in southern Idlib are reportedly waiting for the bombardment to ease and find transportation to flee, fearing that hostilities would affect their communities next.
- Volatile security situation along the access routes north and the shortage of fuel in Idlib area are limiting the movement of civilians fleeing the hostilities. Most of the recently displaced people are going to urban centres such as Idlib city, Saraqab and Ariha and to IDP camps in northwestern Idlib. A smaller number of civilians are reportedly heading to areas in northern Aleppo governorate.
- Displacement happening in winter months is further exacerbating the vulnerability of people in need. Many of those who fled are in urgent need of humanitarian support, particularly shelter, food, health, non-food and winterization assistance.



Source: Field sources
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

With the latest escalation of violence in northwest Syria, civilians in Idlib governorate are again suffering from the devastating consequences of hostilities. Since 16 December, aerial bombardment has once again intensified in southern Idlib, affecting large population centres such as Saraqab and Ma'arrat An-Nu'man as well as towns and villages in the countryside of Ma'arrat An-Nu'man, which further accelerated displacement from the area that began in November. Moreover, ground fighting between NSAGs and GoS forces also resumed on 19 December along the frontlines in southern Idlib governorate, amplifying this wave of displacement as civilians are fleeing in anticipation of fighting directly affecting their communities next.

As a result of hostilities, tens of thousands of families fled their homes to get out of harm's way and to reach safety. While the exact numbers of those displaced are difficult to ascertain at this early stage, the humanitarian community tracked 130,000 displacements since 11 December. The majority of those displaced are moving north to urban centers such as Ariha, Saraqab and Idlib city, and to IDP camps in northwest Idlib governorate along the Turkish-Syrian border. Moreover, as the aerial bombardment affected towns further north such as Saraqab, those who thought that they had made it out of harm's way once again decided to move even further to northwestern Idlib. On 21 December, a UN negotiated humanitarian pause in airstrikes between 06:00 and 12:00 which facilitated the movement of thousands of people to flee.

Many of these displaced families had been under aerial bombardment for several days and risked using the road regularly affected by airstrikes and shelling to move. Therefore, immediate humanitarian assistance including food, shelter, winterization as well as health and psychosocial support is essential to support displaced individuals. In particular, ready-to-eat rations and cooked meals are a priority since many of the newly displaced do not have any means to cook the ingredients provided in food baskets.

Thousands of families in towns and villages in southeastern Idlib want to move north but are scared to do so due to airstrikes and shelling in their vicinity and along the roads. The situation is further compounded by severe shortage of fuel for private vehicles as well as the limited number of drivers and vehicles who are willing to take the risk. Efforts by local communities and NGOs are ongoing to assist civilians who are fleeing while those who remain in the area, waiting to secure

transportation, are likely the most vulnerable among the population with little resources. Moreover, internet and phone services are subject to frequent disruptions, leading to communication gaps with the remaining population who would like to move as well as with the humanitarian workers remaining on the ground.

The majority of humanitarian actors in southeastern Idlib have suspended their operations, and many of them are moving their services to areas further north that receive high numbers of IDPs. This new wave of displacement is compounding on the ongoing emergency situation in northwest Syria that resulted in the displacement of an estimated 400,000 people since May 2019. Moreover, the displacement is taking place during winter, exacerbating the vulnerability of IDPs and stressing further the importance of swift provision of winterization assistance.

Among the affected population are extra vulnerable people, such as the elderly, the ill, and people who have moved multiple times. In addition to the people who are moving, there are families who have chosen to stay behind. Some have assets and animals they want to tend, others have expressed that they have given up hope and will stay. Some families have split and sent their children and women ahead, while the men and older children find ways to move the family's worldly possessions.

On 23 December, twenty families fleeing Ma'arrat An-Nu'man in Idlib Governorate arrived in the eastern suburbs of Jibreen in GoS-controlled Aleppo City through Al-Tayha crossing point in Menbij district. These were the first group of families arriving in Aleppo since the escalation of hostilities. Assistance is being provided. No civilian movement has reportedly been observed through Abul Thohur crossing point in Aleppo.

The M5 road connecting southern Idlib to northern areas was damaged as a result of airstrikes; with traffic down to one lane at least in one location. The lack of vehicles is compounded by the lack of fuel in Idlib Roads out of Ma'arrat An-Nu'man, including the M5 highway, and other secondary roads to the north are reportedly being hit by airstrikes.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Humanitarian partners in areas that are receiving newly displaced people activated a response immediate to support people as they arrived. Based on the operational humanitarian readiness planning, the humanitarian responders activated their expanded activities. The organisations activated coordination mechanisms to provide essential assistance such as distribution of ready-to-eat rations, water and blankets, as well as protection interventions.

Many humanitarian workers are now among the affected population as they have been displaced with their communities. The staff care/ self-care network has been activated to support humanitarian workers who are responding to the emergency.

Displacing people from Idlib who have taken shelter with host families in Jibreen suburb of Aleppo city will receive urgent assistance, including NFIs, through SARC who is assessing their needs. WHO in Homs has prepositioned critical items for national hospitals in Hama governorate in case of emergency requests due to increase number of injuries.

Members of the Red Cross/ Red Crescent movement have commenced a response. SARC, Idlib commenced daily distribution of 10,000 cooked meals to IDPs in Idlib city and neighboring villages. SARC is assisting 200 families in Abul Thohur community in southeastern rural Idlib.

The Turkish Red Crescent distributed cooked food for people fleeing north and for families as they arrived to settlement sites. They have provided different non-food item commodities, such as baby diapers, mattress, and pray mats.

Camp Coordination and Camp Management

Needs:

- Initial information indicates that as much as 80 percent of those recently displaced are seeking shelter outside of IDP settlements. Comprehensive and integrated shelter support is needed for recently displaced families as well as others who had been displaced over the summer who could not find adequate shelter.

Response:

- Cluster members are working on identifying opportunities to extend shelter options for newly displaced people.

Gaps & Constraints:

- Identifying sufficient and legally available space to host new IDPs is a constraint.
- Provision of comprehensive and integrated programming to ensure a holistic approach to addressing needs.

Education**Needs:**

- An estimated 20,000 school-aged children are displaced to northern Idlib, Ariha, Harim and Salqin areas. This is in addition to, more than 10,000 school-aged children in Dana sub-district who are reportedly out of school.
- Immediate needs for education are the following:
 - Provision of tents to schools to host the newly displaced students.
 - Support to displaced children to sit their mid-term exams on 14 January 2020.

Response:

- Education Cluster members began enrolling newly displaced children in schools at Atma, Sarmada, Qah and Bab al Hawa camps. Some Cluster members are also conducting flexible and mobile education activities to reach out-of-school children in smaller informal settlements.

Gaps & Constraints:

- The lack of safe and available spaces for education activities remain a gap. At least two school buildings have reportedly been affected by airstrikes and shelling in December.
- In northern Idlib governorate, schools are used as shelter for IDPs, which disrupts education activities. With the new wave of displacement from southern Idlib, the use of schools -like all other public buildings such as mosques- for emergency shelter is likely to increase.
- Frequent suspensions of education activities are being reported due to heavy rainfall resulting in flooding in the camps in northern Idlib and due to increased hostilities in southern Idlib.

Food Security**Needs:**

- As people are recently displaced, they are in need of ready-to-eat and cooked meals, including as they transit.
- Given the rural nature of southern Idlib countryside, livestock husbandry is critical including para-vet support.

Response:

- During the early part of the response, efforts are mainly focused on ready-to-eat meals.

Gaps & Constraints:

- These are still being assessed given the dynamic nature of the displacement.
- Adequate support for animals and livestock, including fodder provision and para-vet support.

Health**Needs:**

- Main health issues reported by some partners are linked to winter season such as respiratory and intestinal issues.
- First aid along the roads used by civilians to flee from hostilities.
- Respiratory infection care given the winter conditions, the lack of adequate shelter and heating support.
- Comprehensive, integrated health care support for these vulnerable families.
- Mental health and psychosocial support for the affected population is needed.
- Of the population moving, the estimated number of pregnant women is 2,800. Moving the available reproductive health kits and obstetric support with new born kits and safe deliveries is critical.

Response:

- Mobile clinics are providing services where possible.
- Health Cluster members are moving services to areas that are receiving newly displaced people.

- One health cluster member has 25 mobile clinics including health, reproductive health, mental health and psychosocial support services, nutrition and protection services integrated. supporting ambulances for emergency and non-emergency cases so the plan is to establish “emergency point”, at the “zero reception point” in Azaz, with available ambulance and psychosocial support team.
- Another health cluster member responded with mobilize clinics to meet people’s health needs as they moved to Maaaret Misreen, Idleb city, Ariha countryside.
- Another health cluster member provided primary health care services through three mobile clinics and provided general medicine, nutrition, Community Health, and Psychosocial Services. Recently, the mobile clinics provided services in Idleb, Maaret Tamsrin and Atareb.

Gaps & Constraints:

- Medicines and pharmaceutical supplies will be a constraint with the increase in number of IDPs in the new arrival locations.
- The high number of people will place addition pressure on existing health services.
- An NGO supported EPI center in Kafr Omiem/Saraqeb was suspended work due to the heavy shelling on the area.
- The need for medicine and medical equipment will increase at locations receiving new IDPs.

Nutrition

Response:

- Since 22 December, Nutrition Cluster members reached 2,354 mothers and children with life-saving nutrition services through its 24 rapid response teams.
- The pipeline is being replenished to reach around 50,000 mothers and children with nutrition supplies while the availability of ready-to-eat rations is confirmed for 70,000 children between 6 to 59 months.
- Nutrition Cluster also mobilized all its rapid response teams and instructed them not to limit their role to delivering nutrition supplies and services but also to support referrals, to facilitate movement of mothers and children to safer places as well as to identify protection issues such as child separation and violence against children and mothers. Such protection issues will be reported through the Protection Cluster channels. Nutrition actors will also fully take health services onboard.

2,354

Mothers and Children
reached since 22
December

Gaps & Constraints:

- Major gaps are identified in the availability of supplies especially lipid-based nutrient supplements, high energy biscuits and fortified food.
- Nutrition Cluster might expect an increase in malnutrition cases. If there is a need for increasing stocks, additional funding will be required to support the Cluster to intervene as a last resort provider of stocks.

Protection

Needs:

- The continued shelling and airstrikes in the south of Idleb, particularly in civilian populated areas, puts the lives of women, men, girls and boys at risk and has resulted in significant numbers of deaths and injuries, including of children, and significantly impacting children’s and caregivers’ psychosocial well-being.
- Safety and security concerns severely restrict civilians’ freedom of movement, while damage to basic civilian infrastructure in many parts of Ma’arrat An Nu’mān prevents IDPs from fleeing the area and accessing essential services. Meanwhile, displaced people remain particularly vulnerable, and access for IDPs from Idleb to northern Aleppo governorate for physical safety and shelter remains restricted.
- Immediate protection needs identified include family tracing and reunification, psychological first aid, dignity kits, civil documentation information, and support to persons with specific needs, including older persons and persons with disabilities and serious medical conditions.
- Multiple displacements and the lack of access to basic services further exacerbate individual and community needs, increasing risks for death, injuries, disabilities, gender-based violence (GBV) and trauma, particularly among children.
- Grave violations against children and other child protection issues, in particular for unaccompanied and separated children, are increasing due to displacement, death of caregivers and disrupted transportation.

11,479

People reached with
protection services from
16 to 23 December

- Child protection case management is critically needed as the displaced children and their caregivers are facing a severe shortage of their basic needs.
- Donor flexibility is urgently needed to redirect the routine programming funds for the new emergency and displacements to avoid long-term consequences for the population.

Response:

- From 16 December until 23 December, 13 Protection Cluster members provided emergency response services for civilians recently displaced from southern Idleb due to the ongoing hostilities. Cluster members provided 17,613 protection services to IDPs and affected host community members in 29 communities within 13 sub-districts in Idleb and Aleppo reaching 11,479 individuals (2,966 girls, 3,022 boys, 2,769 women, and 2,722 men). The main services protection actors provided are as follows: Psychological First Aid (PFA) and Psychosocial Support (PSS), Information about other services, Dignity kits distribution, Individual Protection Assistance, Child Protection Case management, Referrals to other basic services, including health, shelter, and NFI.

Gaps & Constraints:

- 7 Cluster members in Ma'arrat An Nu'man reported the closure of protection static and mobile service points, with services suspended due to active conflict and leaving a huge population living in these areas without access to the services. These suspensions include partners implementing specialized and non-specialized services, case management for child protection and GBV, psychosocial support, specialized child protection and GBV services, GBV awareness raising and women empowerment activities, and Mine Action awareness raising activities.
- All protection organizations in Ma'arrat An Nu'man reported losing communication with their staff as they fled from the city due to the heavy bombardment and clashes.
- Protection Cluster members working in Ma'arrat An Nu'man reported that people including IDPs and members of host communities, are stuck in the city and cannot go out toward northern Idleb due to lack of transportation in the city.
- Protection Cluster members reported direct attacks on the civilian vehicles fleeing from Ma'arrat An Nu'man using the only available road.
- Lack of multi-sectoral response hinders the delivery of protection services. Protection actors report challenges in the provision of PFA, PSS and referrals when these services are not accompanied by other basic services to meet IDPs' needs.
 - Rapid Response teams to include child protection issues and/or child protection specialist/teams when assessing/distributing food/NFIs, shelter and other sectors to the displaced people.
 - Integrate child protection emergency referral pathways into the provision of education in schools currently being used as shelters.
- Donors are recommended to increase funding for all basic needs services in order for humanitarian organizations to help meet the survival needs of rapidly growing IDP populations and to exercise, as mentioned above, flexibility in the re-allotment of funds to emergency response.

Shelter / Non-Food Items (NFI)

Needs:

- Shelter / Non-Food Items (SNFI) Cluster members reported at least 5000 households need shelter.
- Five organisations have requested NFI from the contingency stocks.

Response:

- The SNFI Cluster has activated the emergency reporting tool. Data shared by the Cash Working Group (Multi-Purpose Cash) will be included in the reporting file and shared with the partners.
- Needs assessments are collected and shared with Cluster members that have the capacity to respond.
- Cluster members are distributing emergency NFI assistance to 63,000 people and Shelter support to 11,400 individuals.
- At the same time, SNFI members are reaching 405,000 people with winter assistance in December only.

Gaps & Constraints:

- SNFI Cluster members have stock of tents or shelter kits to accommodate 130,000 people, however, they struggle to identify lands to setup camps.
- SNFI Cluster is anticipating the replenishment of the tent and NFI stocks and will need additional funding.
- Housing, land and property rights will remain a critical issue for legal access to land for people to live.
- Additional funding is needed to provide winter assistance to the new IDPs.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Needs:

- WASH cluster field facilitators reported that WASH needs are constantly increasing with increased displacement. This includes demand for domestic water, solid waste management, community latrines, wastewater management including increasing desludging activities, hygiene kits and jerry cans.
- Lack of adequate shelter complicates the response as people move to find available shelter.
- In camps there is a huge need to increase the quantity of water distribution and ensure a continuous access of displaced people to clean safe water.
- A comprehensive WASH response is required for displaced people across all locations including in camps and communities.

Response:

- WASH response has outreached 30,100 displaced people in 30 locations, through 5 Cluster members.
- Due to the management of wells and support of water systems across the majority of areas in northwest Syria, specifically in communities, the systems were able to handle the increase of displaced people. As a result, no major water need is identified while this might change as more displaced people settle.
- Ongoing projects especially in camps, have reported to the cluster that they are responding to the displaced people as they are coming. However, with the limited flexibility and availability of funding, it is a matter of time before the Cluster members can no longer cope with the increase in population, efforts should be made to sustain and increase support.
- 101,000 people in camps and informal settlements receive WASH assistance while Cluster members are preparing to increase the response to meet at least the need of additional 57,000 displaced people in their areas of operation. They will scale up the response with their available supplies and services, water distribution via water trucking, provision of hygiene kits, construction and maintenance of latrines, provision of Jerry cans, desludging.

Gaps & Constraints:

- WASH cluster members are constantly facing challenges in providing supplies and services to the displaced people along the displaced routes, because of the wide geographical spread and continuous movement of displaced people.
- Challenges in access to many locations especially camps due to muddy roads which is preventing the service providers from entering the camps and targeted locations.
- Fuel prices remain a constrain for many organizations as the prices of service delivery increases.
- The cluster members responding to the situation are looking for additional resources to enhance much needed WASH supplies and services, such as to procure hygiene kits, carry out water trucking, build new latrines and maintain existing latrines, increase desludging activities and support solid waste management.
- Need for a timely response to displaced people and increase advocacy for additional funds. Additional flexibility from donors and UN agencies to reprogram activities, prioritizing the emergency response.
- As a live saving response and to reduce the probability of any outbreak of water related diseases. WASH sector needs to be given priority in the ongoing response.

GENERAL COORDINATION

Coordination of response efforts on the ground are ongoing by humanitarian actors guided by the cluster coordination mechanism. Local initiatives in areas close to the frontlines have emerged to support the movement of civilians out of areas heavily affected by hostilities. Participants of these initiatives are cluster members.

On 23 December, an ad hoc meeting of the Inter-Cluster Coordination was convened to discuss the needs and gaps in the emergency response to the evolving situation. Cluster reported the activation of their internal emergency coordination mechanisms. Most of the Clusters have now convened ad hoc meetings with their members to coordinate response efforts while inter-cluster initiatives are being taken forward to facilitate a timely response to urgent needs of newly displaced IDPs including shelter.

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