

HIGHLIGHTS

- Commitments made at Munich enabled humanitarian assistance into five besieged areas. Building on this, sustained, regular access is needed.
- On 15 February, seven health facilities were damaged or destroyed by airstrikes.
- The UN and NGOs are making contingency plans and stockpiling in case eastern Aleppo city is cut off.

In Daraya, the first thought in the morning is who got killed last night, whose house was burnt?

Local councillor



Eastern Aleppo City, February 2016

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Airstrikes, bombing, missiles don't stop at night. For normal life, for food and water, it's very hard here. There is no water at all. We have wells that are too dirty to drink from. There are many people who lost their family; they went to Turkey. So it's very hard to find the whole family. Resident, eastern Aleppo city

After five years hardship defines life for too many in Syria

Faces young, old, gaunt, stared out of newspapers across the world and Madaya became the reality of life under siege. As the war reaches the end of its fifth year, millions of people in towns and villages throughout Syria do not have enough water, food, or shelter. They live in fear, controlled by armies and armed groups, unable to move freely. Nor is it possible for sufficient humanitarian assistance to reach them. Access to besieged areas was the focus of the humanitarian strand to the recent discussions about Syria in Munich. [Statement of the International Syria Support Group, February 12, 2016](#) This has created some momentum and on February 17 a convoy of 125 trucks, with aid for 82,000 people, made its way into five besieged towns. More will be needed, and soon. Humanitarians will always insist that siege as a tactic of war is never acceptable and that the ongoing effort to get access for regular, sustained delivery of humanitarian assistance needs to continue.

The responsibility to protect civilians is established under [International Humanitarian Law](#) as well as human rights treaties, but clear breaches have left communities vulnerable. In Syria, over 13 million people need humanitarian assistance. Around four and a half million live in hard-to-reach areas with restricted movement and limited access to services and humanitarian assistance. Almost half a million of these are living in besieged areas: 274,200 besieged by the Government of Syria; 200,000 people by ISIL; 12,500 people by non-State armed groups and the Nusra Front. Although in this ongoing conflict numbers can change daily.

Behind numbers “are the individual and personal stories of girls, boys, women and men whose lives have been uprooted; whose dreams for the future have been shattered; and who have witnessed and been subjected to unspeakable fear and suffering”. [Stephen O'Brien Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, address to UN Security Council, January 27, 2016](#)

If you want to go to another place you still think of your family at home because of airstrikes. You never know what happens to your family, your house, if you are coming back or not. Your mind keeps busy because of airstrikes and barrel bombs. Income is very low and everything is very expensive. This is the real suffering. Resident, eastern Aleppo city

I am married with two children. We are trying to provide for our families as well as we can. There are medical centres, but we are afraid to go there because they are hit by airstrikes. Villager Idlib.

Living under siege- pressed beyond endurance and still out of reach

Five years on, people in Syria are pressed beyond endurance. Those living in besieged areas are surrounded by armed groups; humanitarian assistance cannot enter regularly; and civilians, the sick and wounded cannot regularly enter or exit the area. Every besieged place, such as Madaya, Mouadhimiyeh, Darayya, Deir Ez-Zor, has its own situation and story but hardship is a shared experience.

Ongoing fighting, barrel bombing and airstrikes damage homes and buildings but these torn buildings are still used for shelter. The electricity and water supply is gone. In Darayya, food comes in surges, depending on checkpoints and access roads, and is rationed to one meal a day. Large tracts of agricultural land and harvests have been lost. There is one field hospital with five doctors, operating as surgeons, and nurses; they work with a shortage of medicine and equipment.

Deir Ez-Zor

Part of the humanitarian assistance outlined in Munich is the delivery of humanitarian aid, by airdrops, into besieged Deir Ez-Zor. WFP preparations are underway, as are plans for distributing the aid on the ground.

Every morning I go foraging for food, not from the market, but from the garbage. I also look for pieces of wood or fabric or plastic to light the fire because there is no fuel. Nobody in these besieged neighbourhoods have food or fuel so I don't find anything. My wife burnt her clothes for the fire. We don't think about the future, just about staying alive. Deir Ez-Zor resident

This Syrian city made international news with reports of civilians caught between armed groups. Located 450 km to the northeast of the capital Damascus, around 214,000 people live there; 200,000 in the Government controlled areas. ISIL fighters closed access to the city in January 2015. The only access was by air and via an airport controlled by GoS. Another offensive on the city, by ISIL in January 2016, has made the situation worse and left the 14,000 people under ISIL control very vulnerable.

Living in the middle of a military presence means living under sustained gunfire, fighting and military patrols, with strict control over movement. Trying to leave can lead to arrest, kidnapping, targeted killing and separation from families. Those sick and wounded cannot be evacuated for medical conditions and die for lack of treatment. Local hospitals, along with roads, houses, hospitals and schools, are destroyed. Or buildings have been seized and repurposed to support the military force. One civilian hospital remains but is short of medicine, fuel, supplies and health workers. The town has not had any electricity supply for over ten months. And while Deir Ez-Zor is an oil-rich location, since the siege there is not enough fuel to operate bakeries, generators and water pumps. Water is available only once a week for three hours. Sometimes people have flour but no firewood; they eat dough and only eat bread if there is wood for fuel to bake. Families queue for hours to get their share of bread and most inhabitants are surviving on bread and water. Due to ISIL advances, agricultural areas are no longer accessible and informal transportation of food and other basic necessities, via the river, has been interrupted. Airstrikes, insecurity and problems with access hinder aid delivery. Two routes out of the city are lined with anti-personnel mines. Before the siege there were markets, medical equipment and supplies. Now, stranded and hungry, there are reports by health personnel of severe malnutrition among adults and children. Prices have risen: a kilo of sugar or a kilo of rice can cost SYP5,000 (US\$12) – ten times the price in neighbouring areas; a litre of diesel costs five or six times that in nearby towns.

The bakery allows a family eight loaves of bread per day. It opens at 4 am but you queue from 1 am. There is enough for 20 families but there are 200 in the queue. Young men are taken from the bread queue to serve in the military. So the bread is tainted with blood.

Deir Ez-Zor
resident

Cross-border assistance into Syria an ongoing challenge

In an effort to ensure that humanitarian assistance reached people in need throughout Syria by the most direct routes, the Security Council adopted resolution 2258 (2015)

In February 2016, cross-border assistance is needed more than ever but is becoming more difficult and restricted. To reach people in Syria living in desperate conditions, UN organisations and NGOs based in Turkey must cross international borders and negotiate checkpoints; deal with intermittent border closures; arrange access back and forth for staff. Today 50 International NGOs and more than 100 Syrian NGOs are actively providing aid to Syria from Turkey. In addition to material aid, such as food, nutrition, water, shelter, they continue to support a wide range of services for millions of people. Staff also cross for training and to support ongoing programmes within Syria.



Because of the difficulty in bringing vital food and supplies, [UN Security Council Resolution 2258](#) was passed on December 22, 2015 renewing earlier resolutions ([UN Security Council Resolution 2165](#)) that authorized the passage of aid by the UN into Syria. This has enabled a steady increase in aid delivered by UN agencies. Shifting conflict lines and the blocking of key routes, once inside Syria, continue to hinder access, compelling humanitarian organisations to adapt.

Today the challenges for humanitarians are as great as they have ever been. Systematic airstrikes and regular shelling by GoS forces and its allies destroy NGO health facilities and education centres, bakeries, mills and grain storage. In ISIL-held territories, the air campaign by international coalition forces has damaged infrastructure and displaced people. Air strikes by GoS and allies in ISIL territories have also degraded infrastructure and led to fuel and water shortages.

Airstrikes have increased in number and intensity since September 2015. This has hampered movement around Syria and undermined facilities and services supported by the humanitarian community.

Health

Health workers are operating in an environment of increased military activity. In November and December 2015 there were reports of 41 airstrikes that hit health facilities; 36 of them were hospitals. The conflict and forced displacement of thousands in northern Syria has created more demand for medical attention. MSF reports that, in 2015, women and children represented between 30 and 40 per cent of the victims of violence in Syria, indicating that civilian areas were consistently hit by aerial bombardments and fighting. [MSF Syria 2015: Documenting war-wounded and war-dead in MSF-supported medical facilities in Syria](#)

Despite these conditions health practitioners attend patients, deliver babies and carry out major surgeries in the underground trauma hospitals they have established.

We will have to move everything underground. Everything - markets, schools, hospitals, bakeries. Dr. Abdul Salam Daif, Baghdad Hospital, Idlib

The Halab Almarkazie hospital in eastern Aleppo city was hit many times, then totally destroyed by barrel bombs in April 2014. So the doctors went underground and set up a trauma hospital in rural Aleppo. The hospital has 72 health staff, 11 are doctors, but a shortage of health care workers is still a problem. Doctors work around the clock, many of their families have moved to Turkey. The hospital has 3 operating rooms, laboratories and

It's very hard to live here; there's no security or safety. People won't go to hospital because of airstrikes.

Villager, Idlib

X-Ray facility. Because of continued fighting and insecurity, last week the doctors moved again to another underground building in rural Idlib. Here they can attend to those displaced from eastern Aleppo city.

Hospitals hit by airstrikes

In February 2016, the number of hospitals hit by airstrikes and put out of commission has increased. On 30 January 2016, airstrikes hit Anadan Charitable Hospital, eastern Aleppo city, effectively closing it down. The hospital served around 45,000 people. On 1 February 2016, Tall Rifaat Pediatric Hospital in Aleppo governorate, supported by an NGO, was hit and sustained material damage. Al Hakeem medical centre in Kafr Batna, which has received funding through the Turkey Humanitarian Pool Fund (HPF), was hit in an airstrike on 12 February 2016. The hospital attended to 7,000 patients per month and is now out of service. On 15 February 2016, GoS and allies airstrikes damaged six hospitals and one primary health care facility in northern and southern Syria. [UN Joint Statement on Attacks on Hospitals and Schools in Syria](#) Five of these were NGO-supported hospitals in Aleppo and Idlib governorates. Two were in Azaz town, Aleppo governorate. The Azaz Maternity Hospital was the last hospital to remain operational in the town and was supported by the UN Humanitarian Pooled Fund. The National Hospital of Azaz, which had been evacuated the previous week because of its proximity to frontlines, was hit and sustained major damage. More than 200,000 people are without the services provided by these hospitals. In Idlib governorate, two NGO-supported hospitals were hit in Maarat al-Numan and one in Abu Duhour. The MSF-supported hospital in Maaret al-Numan had 30 beds, two operating theaters, an outpatient department and an emergency room with 54 staff. It served a population of 40,000. [MSF states](#) that seven civilians, including a hospital guard, were killed while eight staff members are missing and presumed dead. In total, 26 people were reported killed (including six medical staff) in the incidents and 38 wounded (including nine medical staff).

School unsafe and too risky

Two schools were also damaged by airstrikes on 15 February 2016.

I prefer to stop my children going to school right now. We know that learning is important but we are too afraid for our children. Father, eastern Aleppo city

Like the hospitals, schools have gone underground in Aleppo, Idlib and Hama. The security situation, particularly air strikes, is interrupting education. One in four schools (more than 6,000) is damaged, destroyed, occupied by the military or used as shelter for internally displaced people. According to UNICEF, there were 47 specific attacks on schools last year. After five years of conflict the number of Syrian children not attending school has increased, especially in hard-to-reach and besieged locations.



When I say please send your child to school, they say can you guarantee no airstrikes? I have to say 'no'.

Muhammad Kalae,

Syrian NGO
worker

Life generally for children in Syria is driven by the war and the harsh economic situation, keeping them away from education. Children are working in restaurants and factories, smuggling and begging to help the family survive. There are many separated and unaccompanied children and when recruited by armed groups there is no way to get information or to find them. Child marriage, mostly affecting girls, is on the rise, also driven by economic need. As the war drags on a whole generation may be lost to learning and academic qualifications.

I'm a father of six children. I work in a small shop and the income doesn't match the daily cost. Food is available right now but is very expensive. People now are dealing in US dollars. For those without the dollar it's very hard to find food. Fuel is very expensive

because of the war in northern and rural Aleppo; it's higher if the roads are closed. And now we are living in winter. Father, eastern Aleppo city

Cross border operations, from Turkey into Syria, are continuing and serving several million people. The two main hindrances are military activity close to the border and restrictions on border crossing. Two vital crossing points, which provided the main access routes into northern Syria, are under threat due to fighting and airstrikes. The one at Bab al-Salam enabled a corridor down to Aleppo; although the crossing is in jeopardy and fighting along the route means it is very difficult to go all the way to Aleppo. As a result, traffic through the second crossing, at Bab al-Hawa, has increased. While humanitarian organisations are looking for alternative routes into Syria, access from Turkey is still uncertain. Keeping border crossings open now is vitally important when the needs of the people in Syria are urgent.

The once great city of Aleppo devastated

Aleppo city has turned into an airport. We only see aircraft, we don't see the blue colour in the sky. Resident, eastern Aleppo city

This kind of hardship is affecting our life. We are in fear, afraid to go to work. Even in work you think of your family, afraid you can lose them in an airstrike. Everyone is leaving the top floors and moving down to lower floors or basements. Resident, eastern Aleppo city

Encircling Aleppo

Aleppo, once the largest city in Syria, was, until the war, the country's industrial and commercial centre. One of the oldest, continually inhabited cities in the world, it is divided; the GoS controls the west while opposition groups mainly control the east. In early February, Government of Syria (GoS) and allied forces launched a major military offensive against Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) in the northern Aleppo countryside. This compromised access to eastern Aleppo city and the 300,000 people who live there. Up to 80% depend on food aid, most of which is provided by cross border operators. As fighting and airstrikes continue, eastern Aleppo city may be cut off from cross border access.

I live in Aleppo, we are all living in the worst circumstances. We depend on aid from NGOs. We take this aid, sell half and keep the other half. We sell half to pay for electricity because prices are expensive. This is a war situation; we have to bear it. We are still living under fear, under destruction, under airstrikes. We ask God to support us, that's all we can do. Resident, eastern Aleppo city.

"Since the latest offensive by Government forces began last week in the Governorate of Aleppo, reportedly accompanied by numerous airstrikes by Russian and Syrian aircraft, some 51,000 civilians have been displaced and a further 300,000 are at risk of being placed under siege." [Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, statement 11 February, 2016](#). Just over a week later the number displaced had increased to 75,000, although a small percentage were from eastern Aleppo city.

The 75,000 displaced have fled to areas within Syria and around the Syria/Turkey border. The number of people internally displaced in Syria is estimated at 6.5 million. When people flee, it is often sudden, frightening and chaotic. Documents left behind make it more difficult to move freely and the road may be lined with mines. Some try to settle in safer areas while others cross the border to surrounding countries. People have been displaced several times as the conflict lines keep shifting. Some moved to places within Syria and made makeshift shelters; others crossed into Turkey until the border was closed to those seeking asylum. They need shelter,



Makeshift shelter

How long are we going to stay in this situation, we are so tired?

Resident, eastern Aleppo city

I was displaced and I'm a stranger in this area. There is no stability.

IDP rural Idleb

blankets, food and other assistance. The communities inside Syria where displaced people arrive are often under pressure themselves and in need of support. Camps are a last resort after those fleeing have exhausted all of their options and assets. UN agencies and NGOs track these movements to get urgent assistance to those who have just left their homes and communities. As the fighting continues and people keep fleeing space in the camps is cramped and many do not have adequate food, shelter, fuel, heating or sanitation. Tents distributed two years ago (designed to last eight months) need replacing. There is a lack of health and education services.

Humanitarian organisations are dealing with the need in eastern Aleppo city itself; with those who have fled the city and are displaced; and with the communities, already hard-pressed, that have had to absorb the new arrivals. UN agencies and NGOs are making contingency plans and stockpiling assistance in case eastern Aleppo city is cut off. Truckloads of food, fuel and supplies are being shipped in via the two border crossings at Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa.

UN Humanitarian Pooled Fund to allocate US \$ 20 million for emergency assistance

UN Humanitarian Pooled Fund

To deal with the deteriorating situation in Aleppo and northern Syria, US\$20 million is being allocated from the Turkey Humanitarian Pooled Fund (HPF) for emergency assistance. The fund was established in 2014 because of the magnitude and complexity of the Syria crisis. Its aim is to strengthen the capacity of Syrian NGOs, assist besieged areas and support the resilience effort of communities. The latest allocation will prioritise emergency humanitarian activities in the places worst affected by the recent armed violence, assist those internally displaced and help to stockpile supplies. The projects being funded include those supporting hospitals, ambulances and mobile clinics; provision of water and sanitation systems; provision of food and shelter. The Shafak Organisation, a Syrian NGO that raises awareness about mines, says ‘the top priority is to protect civilians’ and that ‘the emergency allocation of HPF is important’ in carrying out their work.

“Civil society will rebuild Syria so it is essential that we are included”

Peace is a humanitarian issue

Peace talks on Syria are scheduled for later this month. Away from the limelight a small delegation, representing Syrian civil society, will also attend. They want to bring the voice of the Syrian people to where the big decisions are made and will be at hand to advise and to promote the rights of civilians. The five delegates are from different NGO networks but have put together an agreed agenda. Their main concerns are protection of civilians and infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and markets; open access to besieged areas; the unacceptable issue of starvation. Jomana M. Khair, one of the members of the delegation, hopes they can get training in the role of civil society in peace negotiations. “Civil society”, she says, “will rebuild Syria so it is essential that we are included”.

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