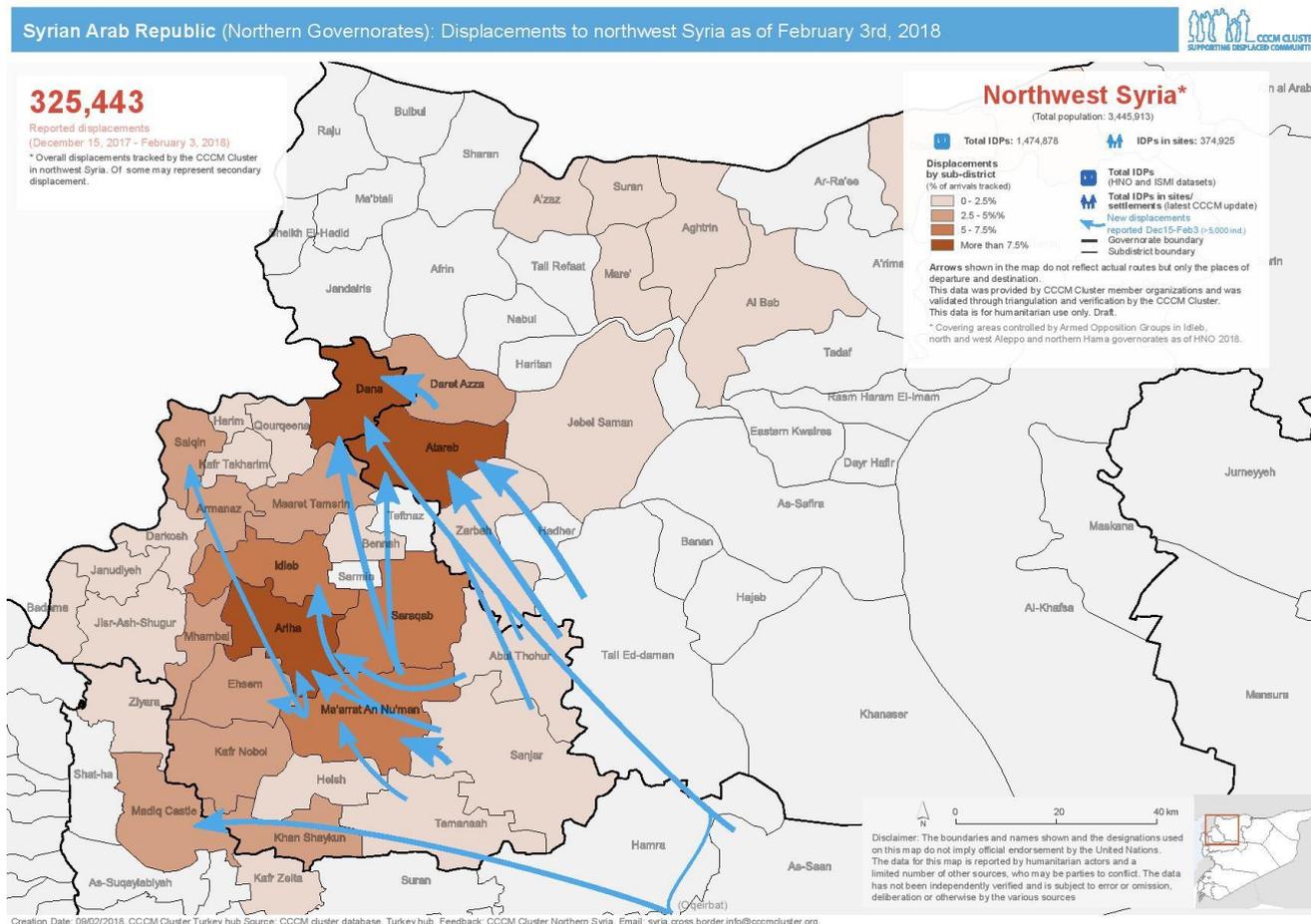


Turkey | Syria: Recent Developments in North-western Syria (Idleb Governorate and Afrin District) (as of 13 February 2018)



Highlights

- Between 07 and 10 February, hostilities in Idleb governorate continued primarily in eastern and southern rural Idleb, where several aerial attacks and incidents of shelling were reported.
- Since 11 February, conflict intensity in parts of Idleb governorate reduced significantly. However, fighting between non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and the Islamic State in Iraq and Levan (ISIL) erupted in southern rural Idleb, threatening more displacement from southern rural Idleb governorate.
- Between 15 December and 03 February, the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster tracked 325,443 displacements (some may be secondary displacements) in north-western Syria, mainly towards Dana, Salqin, Kafr Nobol, Ariha and Atareb sub-districts. An ad hoc report issued by the Cluster on displacement in Idleb governorate showed that 20,010 people were displaced from Saraqab sub-district between 21 January and 03 February.
- The situation in Afrin district remains of high concern. While the district saw a decrease in hostilities between 04 and 07 February, during which civilian life seemingly resumed in Afrin town, hostilities recommenced on 8 February.



Situation Overview

1.1. Idleb Governorate:

Between 07 and 10 February, hostilities in Idleb governorate continued primarily in eastern and southern rural Idleb, where several aerial attacks and incidents of shelling were reported during the reporting period. Ground hostilities were concentrated in eastern rural Idleb where Government of Syria (GoS) forces advanced east of Saraqab town.

While no aerial attacks or ground-based hostilities are reported in the northern parts of the governorate, reports indicate that most communities are overcrowded with the current displacement putting further strain on the host communities. Shelter absorption capacity has already been exhausted and it is extremely difficult to find an affordable place to rent. IDPs who have been able to find places to rent are forced to pay large amounts of money, up to 300 – 400 USD. One NGO who built several mud housing units to host the most vulnerable IDPs in northern rural Idleb, reported that these housing units were taken over by newly arriving IDPs, rather than the targeted group.

With regards to hostilities in the other parts of Idleb governorate, the White Helmets reported the death of one of their members in an aerial attack on Ghafa village near Ma'arrat An Nu'man town in southern rural Idleb on 06 February. On 07 February, airstrikes and artillery shelling on Ma'arrat An Nu'man town killed eight people and wounded at least 15 persons. The Kafr Nobol Local Council reported that airstrikes on 07 February rendered the council's building out of service.

On 08 February, multiple airstrikes on Meshmshan village in western rural Idleb reportedly resulted in eight deaths and more than 20 injuries. Furthermore, two schools and a primary health care center, located next to each other, sustained structural damage, rendering them out of service. In eastern rural Idleb, airstrikes reportedly struck the Grains Center in Saraqab town, causing significant structural damage with no casualties reported. In southern rural Idleb, airstrikes struck a White Helmets center in Khan Shakyun town, reportedly killing three White Helmets workers, wounding four and rendering the center out of service. The airstrikes also reportedly damaged the nearby Al-Rahma hospital.

On 09 February, airstrikes on Has village in southern rural Idleb reportedly resulted in the death of 15 people and the wounding at least 25. The village's local council building and a mosque sustained medium damage as a result of the attack. On the same day, airstrikes were reported on Ariha, Jisr Ash-Shugur and communities in southern rural Idleb. As a result, the religious authorities in Ariha, Jisr Ash-Shugur and Kafr Nobol sub-districts cancelled the Friday prayer. Additionally, airstrikes on Kfar Sejneh village in northern Khan Shaykhun reportedly killed two people and wounded many. In the northern part of the governorate, indirect fire shelling on IDP settlements in Dana, Atma and Qah towns was reported, following an intensification of hostilities in the southern part of Afrin district. No casualties were reported but localized and temporary displacement from these settlements was observed.

Since 10 February, the number of airstrikes on Idleb governorate decreased significantly with less incidents reported in southern rural Idleb. Local sources reported some returnees to the communities surrounding Ma'arrat An Nu'man and Saraqab towns from northern rural Idleb. Most of these families were unable to find shelter alternatives in northern rural Idleb and stayed at houses of relatives and acquaintances.

Another source of insecurity during the month of February was the increased numbers of improvised explosive devices (IED) attacks in Idleb governorate. Since the beginning of February, at least 21 attacks were reported. This includes an attack on 10 February in a market in Idleb city, which reportedly killed seven people, including a woman, and wounded 20. On 12 February, an IED explosion in Maaret Tamsrin town in northern rural Idleb was reported. Initial reports indicate that eight people were killed and 15 were wounded as a result of this attack.

Following the suspension of the United Nations (UN) cross-border humanitarian shipments between on 20 January, measures to ensure the safety of staff and personnel were taken and the UN subsequently recommenced humanitarian shipments through Bab Al-Hawa crossing point as of 31 January. The number of trucks per day is limited to 15 pending ongoing assessment of the security situation. UN shipments through Bab Al-Salameh crossing resumed on 13 February with 13 trucks crossing into Syria. Similar to Bab Al-Hawa crossing, a limit of 15 trucks per day is in place for UN shipments through Bab Al-Salameh crossing.

Challenges facing humanitarian organizations operating in north-western Syria include increased interference by local authorities in humanitarian work. A number of humanitarian organizations reported incidents of interference in the implementation of projects and reported demands from local authorities to hand over a percentage of aid to them. Consequently, some organizations were forced to suspend projects across different sectors.

1.2. Afrin district:

The situation in Afrin district remains of high concern. While the district saw a decrease in hostilities between 04 and 07 February, hostilities recommenced on 8 February. On 05 February, shelling on Raju sub-district reportedly damaged a medical center that belongs to the Kurdish Red Crescent. No casualties were reported.

Reports indicate that local authorities continue to prevent people trying to leave Afrin except for critical medical cases allowed by both the Afrin authorities and the Government of Syria (GoS). Reports of people reaching GoS-controlled areas through unofficial means continue to emerge. With regards to movement into Afrin district, the Nabul - Ziyara crossing is mostly open for civilians, commercial movement, and humanitarian supplies by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC).

With regards to the availability of commercial goods in the district, residents in Afrin rely mostly on the fuel and food supplies from GoS areas through the Nabul – Ziyara crossing point, in addition to existing warehouse stocks. No changes in of the prices of food commodities were reported except for the bread, which decreased from SYP 250 to SYP 200 for a two-kilogram bag. The reason for the decrease remains unclear but is most probably linked to the renewed availability of fuel through commercial movement from GoS controlled areas.

Concerns were raised about the availability of water in Afrin town and surrounding communities as one out of the six purification basins of the water treatment plant outside of Doha village (known as Matineh and Matenli) in the northern parts of Afrin district was damaged on 06 February. This resulted in the temporary discontinuation of water services and a decreased of water being treated. Water is reportedly being pumped twice a week through the general network to Afrin city; other villages depend mainly on wells for water supply. This comes following the reported airstrikes near the 17 April Dam, which happened on 24 January. Electricity remains unavailable. Health facilities are functioning but they lack trauma kits.

2. Displacement and Humanitarian Response

2.1. Idleb Governorate:

Between 15 December and 03 February, the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster tracked 325,443 displacements (some may be secondary displacements) in north-western Syria, mainly towards Dana, Salqin, Kafr Nobol, Ariha and Atareb sub-districts. Recent arrivals have increased particularly in Ariha sub-district. The Cluster reported that the NGO-supported reception center in Maaret Elekhwan town and the Umut camp near Harim town reached their full capacity. In Idleb governorate, there is an availability of 300 new tents for distribution as needed, while another 400 new tents are available in Gaziantep. Overall, there are 11 IDP sites and reception centers in north-western Syria that the CCCM Cluster reports on, of which three are under preparation. The total capacity of these 11 sites and centers is 22,125 people of which 10,171 spaces are still available. Despite the availability of spaces at these sites and reception centers, IDPs often opt for other shelter options (staying with relatives or acquaintances) as the majority are travelling with personal belongings and, sometimes, livestock.

An ad hoc report issued by CCCM Cluster indicate that 59,866 IDPs arrived to 155 communities in Idleb governorate between 21 January and 3 February. The majority of these IDPs were displaced from Saraqab sub-district (20,010 people), Ma'arrat An Nu'man (12,578), Abul Thohur (8,413), Sanjar (5,478) and Tall Ed-daman (4,835) sub-districts. The high number of displacement in Saraqab sub-district is indicative of the intensify of clashes the sub-district witnessed in late January and early February. Should the respite in hostilities witnessed on 10 and 11 February continue, it is expected that more of the inhabitants of Saraqab sub-district that were recently displaced will return.

The Shelter/NFI Cluster reported that IDPs are still on the move, making it difficult for humanitarian organizations to provide assistance. Shelter and winter NFIs, particularly winter clothes, remain the most urgent needs. During the month of December and January, partners of the Shelter/NFI Cluster provided assistance to a total of 124,389 individuals. The provided assistance includes cash vouchers, clothing kits, NFI kits, blankets, stoves, tents, plastic sheets, as well as solid and liquid fuel.

Between 01 and 08 February, partners of the Nutrition Cluster increased their preventive and curative response in Idleb governorate through the mobilization of eight mobile clinics and 46 teams of community health workers to the camps, reception centers and districts that received large numbers of IDPs. A total of 3,641 children aged 6-59 months were screened for malnutrition. 77 children were found to be moderately malnourished (MAM) and 16 severe acute malnourished (SAM) cases were detected. MAM and SAM cases were treated and registered in the regular response programme. In addition, 894 pregnant and lactating women (PLW) were screened for malnutrition. 139

cases were identified as moderately malnourished and referred to the health facility to receive treatment. The proportion of malnourished PLWs is 15.5 % and the proportion of malnourished children aged 6-59 months is 2.5 %. The rapid response team also provided preventative nutrition services. A total of 3,134 children 6-59 months and 1,519 children received high energy biscuits. 1,198 received Plumpy DOZ, and 417 PLW received micronutrients. In addition, 244 infants under six months were assessed for breastfeeding and supported as per the standard operating procedures for breast milk substitute, and 995 PLW received counseling on infant and young child feeding.

2.2. Afrin District:

Some reports indicate that 833 IDP families reached GoS controlled areas through unofficial unmonitored routes since 20 January. This includes 174 families arriving in Nabul, Zahraa and surrounding areas and 659 families arriving in Aleppo city, the majority of whom are staying in Al-Ashrafieh and Old Sirian neighbourhoods. Most IDPs in Nabul and Zahraa are being prevented IDPs to reach Aleppo city. Supported by UNHCR, WFP and ICRC, SARC is providing the IDPs in GoS areas with ready to eat rations and NFI items.

With regards to medical facilities, there are currently five operational hospitals in Afrin district, all of which are located in Afrin town. Local authorities run two of these hospitals and provide free treatment to war-related casualties, while two other hospitals are private. A Health Cluster partner operates the fifth hospital in the district, which offers a variety of medical services to the population, free of charge.

A partner of the Health Cluster is operating two mobile clinics for the displaced people in Robar and Al Shahba camps. The same partner is looking to activate a third mobile clinic, which will potentially cover IDP collective centers in Afrin town. There is a need to expand and improve the capability of the health system in the district to respond to the current and potential future displacement, and to mitigate the risk of the collapse of the health system in Afrin town if large waves of displacement occur.

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