



Highlights

- Following a significant decrease in hostilities between Government of Syria forces and non-state armed groups in north-western Syria on 10 February, inter-factional fighting between Hayyat Tahrir Al-Sham and the Syria Liberation Front broke out on 20 February.
- The infighting in north-western Syria, which has so far been concentrated in southern and northern rural Idleb, as well as western rural Aleppo, caused casualties among civilians and localized and temporary displacement in certain areas, and disrupted humanitarian work.
- On 08 March, a two-day truce succeeded in stopping the infighting between the warring parties. However, hostilities resumed on the evening of 11 March, indicating that efforts to reach a permanent truce have stalled.
- The humanitarian situation in Afrin district continues to be exacerbated by the ongoing hostilities, with Afrin town and surrounding communities almost militarily encircled. Thousands have been displaced in Afrin and to nearby communities in Government of Syria held areas. The water supply to Afrin town has been cut off since 07 March, following a change in control of the 17th April Dam, north-east of Afrin town.

Situation Overview

1.1. Idleb governorate

Following weeks of heavy fighting between the Government of Syria (GoS) forces and non-state armed groups (NSAGs) in north-western Syria, conflict activity between these two sides decreased significantly as of 10 February. The decrease in conflict activity came after the Turkish Armed Forces established three ceasefire observation posts along the frontlines in southern rural Aleppo, as well as eastern and southern rural Idleb. The latest update from the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster on the displacement that happened as a result of the military operations between 15 December and 10 February, showed that 384,744 displacements (some may be secondary displacements) have taken place.

Since hostilities subsided on 10 February, some IDPs began returning to the communities from which they displaced in NSAG-held north-western Syria, in Saraqab and Ma'arrat An Nu'man sub-districts. On 04 March, a new crossing point between GoS and NSAG areas in eastern rural Idleb was established in Tal Sultan village between GoS and NSAG held territories to allow those who were displaced from the areas east of Al-Hijaz railway line to return to their homes. Prominent figures from the communities east of the Al-Hijaz railway are reportedly coordinating the return process. During the initial days after the opening of the crossing, between 150 – 200 families reportedly returned to their homes in eastern rural Idleb and southern rural Aleppo. Military aged men are reportedly hesitant to return to their communities due to the absence of protection guarantees.

Since 10 February, hostilities between GoS forces and NSAGs became limited to intermittent aerial and ground-based bombardment. And while this decrease in hostilities was expected to help the affected population regain a sense of normality, the outbreak of inter-factional fighting between Hayyat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) and the Syria Liberation Front (SLF) (a merger between Ahrar Al-Sham and Nouredine Al-Zinki groups) on 20 February denied civilians this opportunity. Reports indicate the occurrence of localized and temporary displacements from the communities witnessing inter-factional fighting, as was seen in the IDP settlements around Atma and Qah villages in northern rural Idleb and several communities in western rural Aleppo. Furthermore, at least ten humanitarian organizations reported suspension of projects and activities due to road closures and overall tension in the north-west. UN cross-border shipments had to be put on hold between 27 February and 02 March, as trucks from within Syria were unable to reach the Bab Al-Hawa crossing point due to tension along the roads.

On 08 March, local sources in Idleb governorate reported heavy shelling on the besieged towns of Foah and Kafraya towns in northern rural Idleb. The shelling was reportedly carried out in retaliation to the ongoing bombardment on Eastern Ghouta. Media sources reported the death of two children and the wounding of others as a result of the attack.

Fuel prices in north-western Syria continued to increase as the fuel supply routes to north-western Syria remain cut off due to the ongoing military operation in Afrin district. Despite the entry of fuel supplies through Bab Al-Hawa crossing to north-western Syria on multiple occasions since 07 February, the amounts have failed to meet the growing needs on the ground. Due to the absence of electricity through the official network in the north-west, all activities across the different sectors rely on fuel-operated generators. Reports indicate that some NGOs were forced to scale back some of their activities such as bakery, hospital and water network support. Furthermore, a slight increase in the prices of vegetables was noted.

1.2. Afrin district:

The humanitarian situation in Afrin district continues to be exacerbated by the ongoing hostilities. Over the past 48 hours, Turkish Armed Forces and Free Syrian Army (FSA) groups made large advances. At the time of writing, Afrin town and surrounding communities are almost militarily encircled. Reports indicate some supply routes have been disrupted and that thousands of civilians have left Afrin district to the nearby communities in Tell Refaat sub-district. Tens of thousands of IDPs remain in Afrin, with reports that the authorities are preventing large scale movement of civilians out of the district. Those that have been able to leave have found shelter with family members, the host community, and in public buildings, including schools.

Reports indicate that Robar IDP camp in Afrin district which had hosted an estimated 5,000 IDPs, emptied after FSA groups established control over the nearby town of Baselhaya. According to local sources, some of the IDPs fled to Tell Refaat sub-district, while others fled to Afrin town. In addition to the displacement to Tell Refaat sub-district, an estimated 40 families reportedly arrived in A'zaz sub-district from Afrin district. These families are IDPs from southern rural Aleppo, who were passing through Afrin district to Azaz around the outbreak of hostilities on 20 January, and have been unable to leave Afrin district since then.

In Afrin town and surrounding communities, the people's situation is concerning. Reports indicate that people are seeking refuge in basement accommodation, and there are protection concerns with people living in such close quarters. Apparently, many females experience difficulties when attempting to undertake the necessary hygiene arrangements. Women also face compromises when seeking to feed their babies in privacy. Markets are reportedly functional, however, the financial resources of the IDPs residing in the town are depleted. Following a change in control over the 17th of April Dam north-east of Afrin town, local workers were unable to access the dam controls to pump water. The water supply has been cut off since 07 March. Civilians in Afrin town are currently relying on six boreholes whose water is not chlorinated, which puts civilians at risk of contracting waterborne diseases.

On 1 March, a humanitarian convoy comprised of 29 trucks loaded with relief aid, enough for 50,000 people, reached Afrin and Tall Refaat districts. The convoy carried food parcels, canned food parcels, hygiene kits, kitchen kits, mattresses, blankets, diapers for babies and adults, winter clothes for women and children, solar energy lamp, mats, medical supplies and water and sanitation items.

On 11 March, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) stated that in response to the increasing humanitarian needs in Afrin and Tell Refaat in northern Syria. An Interagency convoy is planned with SARC to send emergency humanitarian aid and supplies to the area.

In areas now under the control of the Government of Turkey and their allies, humanitarian support is being provided to the local population by humanitarian actors on the ground. This includes a range of support to vulnerable families, many of whom are elderly and/or infirm.

For further information, please contact:

Trond Jensen, UNOCHA Turkey Head of Office, jensen8@un.org, Tel: (+90) 342 8602211, Cell (+90) 530 041 9152

Annette Hearn, UNOCHA Turkey Deputy Head of Office, hearns@un.org, Tel: (+90) 342 211 8604, Cell (+90) 535 021 9574