



This report is produced by the OCHA Syria Crisis offices in collaboration with the Whole of Syria Inter-sector Group. It covers the period from November 2016 to end of January 2017. The next report will be issued end of March 2017.

Highlights

- On 6 November 2016, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) initiated Operation Wrath of Euphrates and advanced towards Ar-Raqqa city.
- An estimated 35,000 to 40,000 people were displaced during advances, yet, most displacement has been short-term.
- Reportedly, vital infrastructure has been destroyed by ISIL upon their withdrawal and levels of UXO contamination are high.



 **35-40,000**
people displaced,
most of them temporarily

 **50,000**
people reached with
winter-related assistance in
various areas across Ar-Raqqa

 **8,428**
people were
supported with food
assistance

 **\$79m**
funding gap for the
Ar-Raqqa preparedness plan
and response efforts

Situational Overview

In early November 2016, the SDF announced Operation Wrath of Euphrates to retake the northern parts of Ar-Raqqa governorate. By the end of November, significant areas were re-taken from ISIL, including the strategic town of Tal Elsamen, which resulted in the displacement of more than 10,000 civilians. SDF troops, backed by US-led coalition's airstrikes, were able to advance in most of the western countryside with a focus on clearing and holding villages along a number of key supply lines north, west and east of Ar-Raqqa City.

On 10 December 2016, the SDF launched the second phase of the operation, with the aim of capturing the north-western and western countryside of Ar-Raqqa governorate, and ultimately to reach and secure Tabqa Dam. Fighting ceased on 20 January once SDF reached the Dam of Euphrates. Recent reports indicate that SDF forces are currently near Raqqa City.

On 4 February 2017, the SDF announced the third phase of Euphrates Wrath Operation aiming at cutting communications between Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor while continuing to advance on the ISIL "capital".

Displacement trends

As frontlines moved, since the beginning of the offensive in November, an estimated 35,000 to 40,000 people have been displaced within the north of Ar-Raqqa governorate, especially in the villages of Tal Abyad and from northwest and northeast of Ain Issa, including hundreds of families from Menbij and Surren. Of those, 15,000 have been confirmed by the Camp Coordination/Camp Management cluster (CCCM). The current IDP flow is mostly composed of women and children.

Displacement is mostly temporary. Communities living in the northern and western countryside of Ar-Raqqa have been regularly displaced behind conflict lines as the SDF advanced through ISIL-held areas. Once the SDF regained control over areas, displaced families were mostly permitted to return to their areas of origin, contrary to earlier practices by the YPG in 2015 east of Tel Abiyad. As such, residents in areas affected by clashes have been setting up makeshift camps near their villages to monitor their belongings and have mostly returned to their villages after the advance of SDF to the south. An estimated 8,000 people have remained with sponsors/relatives. Furthermore, advances have mostly taken place in sparsely populated areas north west of Ar-Raqqa City, so only a few hundred are being displaced on a daily basis as opposed to thousands that were previously displaced from more densely populated areas, like Menbij and its countryside.

In response to SDF advancement, however, ISIL is severely restricting the movement of people wanting to flee to SDF-controlled areas. As the SDF advances, people are often left up to their own devices and are able to leave under volatile circumstances.

Vital infrastructure

As ISIL have retreated from towns and villages in territories newly seized by the SDF, an increase in deliberate destruction of vital infrastructure by the group has been reported. For example, in the first three weeks of January, three water stations and five water towers have been destroyed amid ISIL withdrawals. There are also reports of significant destruction of homes, especially in the villages around Ain Issa.

ISIL has reportedly mined water pumping stations on the Euphrates River which hinders the pumping of water and residents are resorting to untreated water from the Euphrates River.

Electricity has been significantly reduced in ISIL-held areas as hostilities have moved in proximity of the Tabqa dam, with power cuts up to 19 hours. An estimated 40,000 people living in AlJerniyeh have been particularly affected by these cuts.

US-led coalition airstrikes have also resulted in some damage to infrastructure. For example, on 16 January 2017, airstrikes on the western countryside of Ar-Raqqa impacted the entrance of the Euphrates Dam, which, if further damaged, could lead to massive scale flooding across Ar-Raqqa and as far away as Deir- ez-Zor. Additionally, the area of AlJerniyeh is facing challenged with regular water supply following the US-led Coalition strikes against the Water Unit in AlJerniyeh over a month ago.

Unexploded ordinance (UXO) and booby-traps

The contamination levels of unexploded ordinance (UXO) and booby-traps in newly-seized areas is reportedly very high, particularly in the area south of Ain Issa town and around Ar-Raqqa city. No clear records are available on the number of casualties but humanitarian actors indicate an estimate of 40 persons killed by mines while fleeing the area. A lack of capacity to clear rural areas, vacated residential buildings or secondary unpaved roads of UXOs means that most devices are left *in situ* and remain fully armed. People injured by such devices cannot be adequately treated in light of the lack of health services.

An estimated 150 IDP families (approximately 750 people) are hosted in ten collective shelters across Ain Issa and Suluk sub-districts of Ar-Raqqa Governorate. Collective shelters /facilities are reported to be in urgent need of upgrading, and residents urgently require comprehensive protection services.

Tabqa Dam

Since 24 January, water levels of the Euphrates River have increased by an estimated 10 meters, partly due to heavy rainfall and snow and partly due to ISIL opening three turbines of the Tabqa Dam, flooding riverside areas downstream. The water has since flooded agricultural lands and also limit the mobility of residents and their vehicles in rural Deir-ez-Zor on both sides of the river banks in some thirteen ISIL-controlled towns.

Since late September 2016, when airstrikes struck and destroyed the two main bridges connecting the eastern and western bank of the Euphrates River in Mayadeen (45km from Deir-ez-Zor city) and Al-Eshara (60km from Deir-ez-Zor city), residents and merchants in Deir-ez-Zor had relied on barges (flat-bottomed boats) to transport goods, and small rafts for individuals to get from one river site to the other. The sudden water flows and the rise of the water levels, however, have brought such activities to a halt.

As per local experts, any further rise of the water level would submerge huge swathes of agricultural land along the river and could potentially damage the Tabqa Dam, which would have catastrophic humanitarian implications in all areas downstream from the Tabqa Dam. ISIL forces seized control of the Tabqa Dam from the Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighters in 2014. Tabqa Dam, also known as Euphrates Dam, is an earth-filled dam, located some 40 kilometers up-stream from Ar-Raqqa city.

Humanitarian response:



Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM)

The CCCM Cluster members continue to track IDP movements and compare tracked IDP numbers and destinations with planned scenarios. The majority of IDP movements reported to/by CCCM are towards Menbij and Ain Issa. CCCM members are establishing three reception centres of which two are dedicated to Ar-Raqqa displacement (Jarablus and Azaz). Discussions are ongoing to establish another center in Menbij. Cluster members moved 200 tents to Jarablus and additional tents will be moved for contingency stock inside Syria.



Shelter and NFIs

Procurement and distribution of winter-related assistance for up to 50,000 people has been ongoing in various areas. From the Turkey hub eleven organizations have been prepositioning items in anticipation to respond in 28 sub-districts. As part of an immediate response to the urgent needs of Ar-Raqqa IDPs in Tal Abyad and the Ain Issa areas, 50 tents, 200 blankets, 200 sleeping bags and 50 carpets were provided at the transit point of Ain Issa. UN agencies and the Self-Administration have also agreed to expand the capacity Mabrouka camp to host IDPs who will not be able to return to their place of origin. The camp will host 5,000 individuals with the possibility to expand its capacity to up to 10,800 individuals. Fencing of the camp has begun and the tendering process for the needed infrastructure has been completed. To date, a total of 127 tents have been erected in Mabrouka. Tents and CRIs are to be prepositioned in Tal Abyad, and camp management arrangements with an INGO are being put in place. NFIs are purchased through the Emergency Turkey HF allocation for pre-positioning. The most pressing needs are currently winter NFIs, including clothing, stoves/heaters, and heating fuel. All efforts are being made to identify feasible/accessible supply and replenishment routes.



Protection monitoring and material assistance has been provided to IDPs from areas surrounding Ar-Raqqa city and arriving to Ain Issa and Tal Abiad. Initial protection responses are foreseen through mobile units, to be followed by the possible establishment of “static” protection capacity, depending on the capacity of partners.

Key safety messages for the population – particularly children- have been developed to promote mine risk awareness. The distribution of mine risk education materials to children through intermediaries in ISIL-controlled areas in Raqqa is underway. No clearance is taking place yet, but training and capacity building efforts are underway to prepare teams to be able to carry out initial contamination surveys and clearance efforts- funding, access and security permitting. Additional IED disposal capacity, however, will be required.



As of end of January 2017, some 8,428 people were supported with food assistance (7,768 for a month and 660 for 10 days) in Menbij and 4,026 people received food assistance for ten days in Tal Abyad (2,934 in Ain Issa sub-district, 120 in Suluk sub-district and 972 in Tal Abyad sub-district). With inputs from eight partners, the sector response strategy is planned in two phases: (1) an estimated 279,144 people can be assisted immediately for 1 – 4 weeks with ready-to-eat-rations, and (2) an estimated 438,010 people can be assisted through a further scale-up with a mix of monthly food rations and ready-to-eat-rations. Livelihoods assistance will target to reach 14,100 households.



Three PHCs delivering primary and reproductive health care services in Tal Abyad city, Turkman, and Kourmazah; one mobile clinic is delivering basic primary health services in Alhisha, Ain Issa. All health activities provided are integrated with protection services. The planned scale-up of activities includes the transition of existing mobile clinics into full service static clinics in Alhisha, Ain Issa, new mobile clinics serving western Tal Abyad (14,000 catchment population presently with no health services), community health programming attached to all static PHCs, health promotion, outreach, community-based surveillance, and basic PSS activities linked to women’s protection.



As of end January 2017, three primary health care facilities in Jarablus city, AlGandurda and Dahria sub districts are providing nutrition services. So far, 28 children under five years were diagnosed as malnourished in Jarablus city and received treatment. Three mobile teams started providing integrated health and nutrition services, in 18 Al Khafsa. Preparedness efforts are ongoing aimed at responding to the needs of 150,000 people, including 25,000 children under five years and 12,000 pregnant and lactating women. Nutrition supplies were repositioned in Azaz and will be transported to Jarablus, Menbij and TalAbyiad in the coming weeks. Nutrition partners in the Damascus hub are also making preparations to respond to the needs of IDPs. The sector has repositioned nutrition supplies in Qamishli where eight partners are currently operating and in a position to respond to IDPs from ArRaqqa. Nevertheless, access constraints remain.

Access

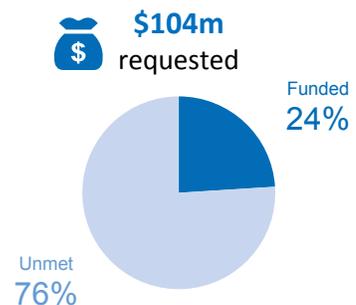
- Access constraints to Deir-ez-Zor, ArRaqqa and its countryside have prevailed for humanitarian actors since ISIL took control of the areas. Shifting frontlines and other ongoing offensives in areas to which IDPs might move additionally hampers the assistance provision capacity.
 - The road between Menbij and Jarablus is currently closed, which inhibits the transportation of materials and movement of staff to various areas in ArRaqqa Governorate.
 - Security limitations (as assessed by UNDSS) do not allow for full access to all areas where IDPs reside.
 - NGO access through Free Syrian Army (FSA)-controlled areas to reach northern Raqqa remains challenging and has to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis. The most convenient border crossing points to the SDF areas (i.e. Kobane, Ain Al Arab/Mursitpinar, Tal Abiad/Akcaale are closed and as they are not included in the UN Security Council resolution they cannot be used by the UN). The political and security situation in Menbij is tense and very few NGOs are able to operate in the town.
- Since the closure of the Nyuseybin crossing by Turkey in December 2015, supplies received via Qamishli have to be airlifted from Damascus. Less costly alternatives need to be identified. The UN is piloting possibilities to supply Qamishli via Dohuk using the Fishkabour crossing.
- The movement of supplies from GoS-held areas to Ar-Raqqa Governorate is currently challenging as it requires central approval of Damascus which is still pending. Securing this approval is a prerequisite for the Qamishli hub to be able to respond to these areas. Ideally, and to facilitate an adequate response to the emerging needs, GoS approval to reopen the Nyuseybin crossing point and to transfer already available supplies from Hassakeh to Ar-Raqqa Governorate would be secured.

Funding

- Some 24 per cent of the \$104 million needed for Ar-Raqqa preparedness plan and response efforts have so far been secured.
- Additionally, in December 2016, the Gaziantep Humanitarian Fund issued an emergency allocation of \$12.2 million for both the Aleppo outflow and Ar-Raqqa contingency plans.

Projects were approved as follows:

- \$1.72 million for the establishment of emergency transit and reception centres benefiting approximately 43,000 individuals
- \$1.75 million for the procurement and distribution of emergency NFIs and winter clothing benefiting approximately 50,000 individuals
- \$1.25 million for the procurement and distribution of emergency hygiene kits benefiting approximately 130,000 individuals
- \$2 million for the prepositioning of medicines and medical supplies
- \$5.5 million for the prepositioning of 10,000 tents



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