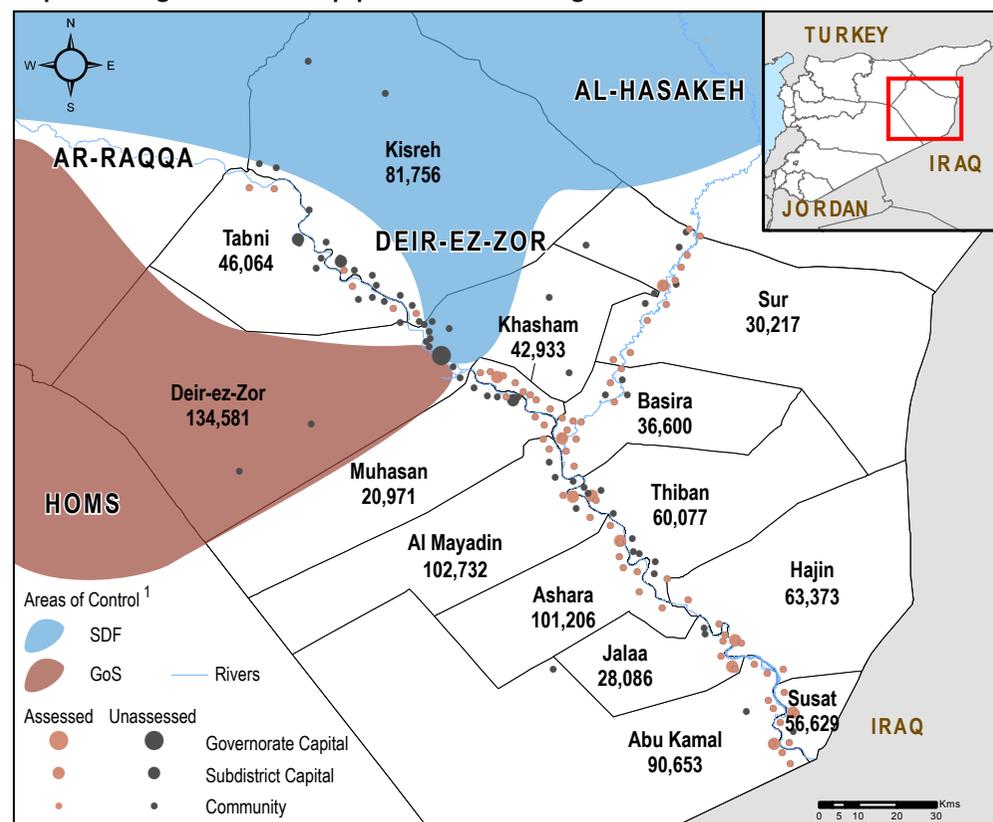


Deir-ez-Zor Governorate Situation Overview: Displacement and Intentions

Syria, September 2017

Map 1: Coverage and estimated population (HNO 2018 figures)



Methodology

Information in this assessment comes from a combination of sources. Primary data was collected between 6 and 14 September through a) in-depth qualitative interviews with 11 purposively selected focal points with in-depth knowledge of movements within the area reporting on displacement and intentions of populations at the sub-district level; and b) quantitative community-level interviews with 23 focal points reporting on 72 communities across Deir-ez-Zor. Displacement data was taken from the ongoing CCCM IDP Situation Monitoring Initiative (ISMI) covering all communities across Deir-ez-Zor governorate, collected between 1 August and 15 September 2017. Findings are specific to communities assessed and cannot be generalised further (see Map 1).

¹ Areas of control taken from <http://syria.liveuamap.com/> as of 19 September 2017.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Over the last two months, conflict has escalated across Deir-ez-Zor governorate as multiple actors attempt to expel the group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from north-east Syria. Areas across the governorate have been affected by an increase in airstrikes, and since the end of August, Government of Syria (GoS) and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) ground forces have advanced into the governorate from the west and north respectively (see Map 1).
- Escalation of conflict has resulted in rapid displacement from and within the governorate, estimated at 30-35,000 people since the beginning of July 2017. Daily flows of people have increased, with outflows from the governorate growing larger at the end of August.
- Three main patterns of movement have been identified: the largest northwards to Al-Hasakeh governorate, with smaller numbers north-westwards to Ar-Raqqa governorate and internally within Deir-ez-Zor. Although Al-Hasakeh and Ar-Raqqa are the first locations of displacement from Deir-ez-Zor, travel onwards to elsewhere in Syria is common, as it is reportedly difficult to obtain the sponsorship required to remain in host communities in Al-Hasakeh governorate, and many do not want to stay in the transit camps available.
- Routes and destinations have been heavily influenced by movement restrictions, as people are exposed to multiple risks if caught attempting to leave, and need to adjust their routes to avoid security threats. Civilians face extreme restrictions and challenges while attempting to leave, including risk of detention, landmines, forced conscription, airstrikes, document confiscation and gunfire.
- Interviewees indicated that within the next 30 days, based on the current situation and movement restrictions, displacement is likely to continue at a similar rate, with an estimated 10% of the remaining population leaving in the next 30 days. People are expected to continue to head northwards to Al-Hasakeh and then onwards to elsewhere in Syria, and increased displacement within the governorate is also expected.
- Interviewees reported that numbers of people displacing and intended destinations are dependent on a few key factors. An expansion of the current ground offensives will increase numbers of people moving outside the governorate, and also likely to cause displacement of those who prefer not to leave the governorate, to other areas within the governorate not affected by direct conflict. Similar movement will also reportedly be exacerbated due to a current lack of clarity about the intentions of parties involved in the conflict, due to fear of forced conscription, imposed regulations and policies, and potential detention. Finally, a reduction of health services, as well as impact on food and water sources would reportedly trigger increased displacement, as would loss of assets and income.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2014, the majority of Deir-ez-Zor governorate has been under the control of ISIL, though neighbourhoods (Joura and Qosour) within the capital city have been held by the Government of Syria (GoS) and have been classified as besieged since January 2015. Over the past two months, conflict has escalated across Deir-ez-Zor governorate as multiple actors attempt to expel ISIL from north-east Syria. The governorate has been heavily affected by airstrikes, and since the end of August, GoS ground forces have advanced into the governorate from the west, reportedly breaking the siege on Deir-ez-Zor city on 5 September. In the second week of September, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) advanced from the north towards Deir-ez-Zor city (see Map 1).

This escalation of conflict has led to large displacement from and within the governorate, estimated at 30-35,000² people since the beginning of July 2017; this is expected to increase significantly in the coming months. Restrictions on communication and information flows as well as extremely limited humanitarian access have led to a lack of information on movement patterns thus far. This assessment aims to provide an overview of current and intended displacement trends from and within Deir-ez-Zor, as well as analyse the factors affecting people's decision to move and intended destinations. Future intentions and preferences of affected populations are also assessed, to help provide an indication of future movement.

DISPLACEMENT

Recent displacement patterns (Map 2)

- **Prior to July 2017, movement from Deir-ez-Zor governorate was minimal due to a combination of movement restrictions on populations and a lack of trigger factors prompting movement.**³ Following intensification of airstrikes across the governorate, and the GoS and SDF ground offensives at the beginning of September, the scale of displacement increased significantly despite continued movement restrictions.
- **The total number of people displacing from communities in Deir-ez-Zor governorate since 1 July is estimated at 30-35,000, with 10-15,000 moving before the end of August and 20-25,000 in the first two weeks of September.**
- **Overall, the highest levels of movement have been reported from Deir-ez-Zor sub-district as well as southern sub-districts (Abu Kamal, Al-Mayadin and Ashara);** although these locations have not yet been affected by ground offensives, there has been an increase in airstrikes since July. Following the ground offensives at the end of August and beginning of September, outflows of population from northern sub-districts increased significantly.

- **Three main patterns of movement have been identified: the largest northwards to Al-Hasakeh governorate, with smaller numbers north-westwards to Ar-Raqqa governorate, and internally within Deir-ez-Zor.** Although Al-Hasakeh and Ar-Raqqa are the first locations of displacement from Deir-ez-Zor, many people do not intend to remain in these locations and instead prefer to travel on to elsewhere in Syria. Movement within Deir-ez-Zor has increased since the advance of ground forces at the beginning of September, with those unable or unwilling to leave the governorate instead heading to nearby locations not directly affected by conflict; so far this has primarily comprised movement from Deir-ez-Zor and Tabni sub-districts eastwards and southwards.

Most commonly reported push factors causing people to displace in the past 30 days (number of assessed communities reporting each as a factor)

Escalation of aerial bombardment	71	
Escalation of ground-based conflict	71	
Reduced access to health services	55	
Loss of assets	27	
Loss of income	18	
Reduced access to water	17	
Access to money to pay for movement	14	

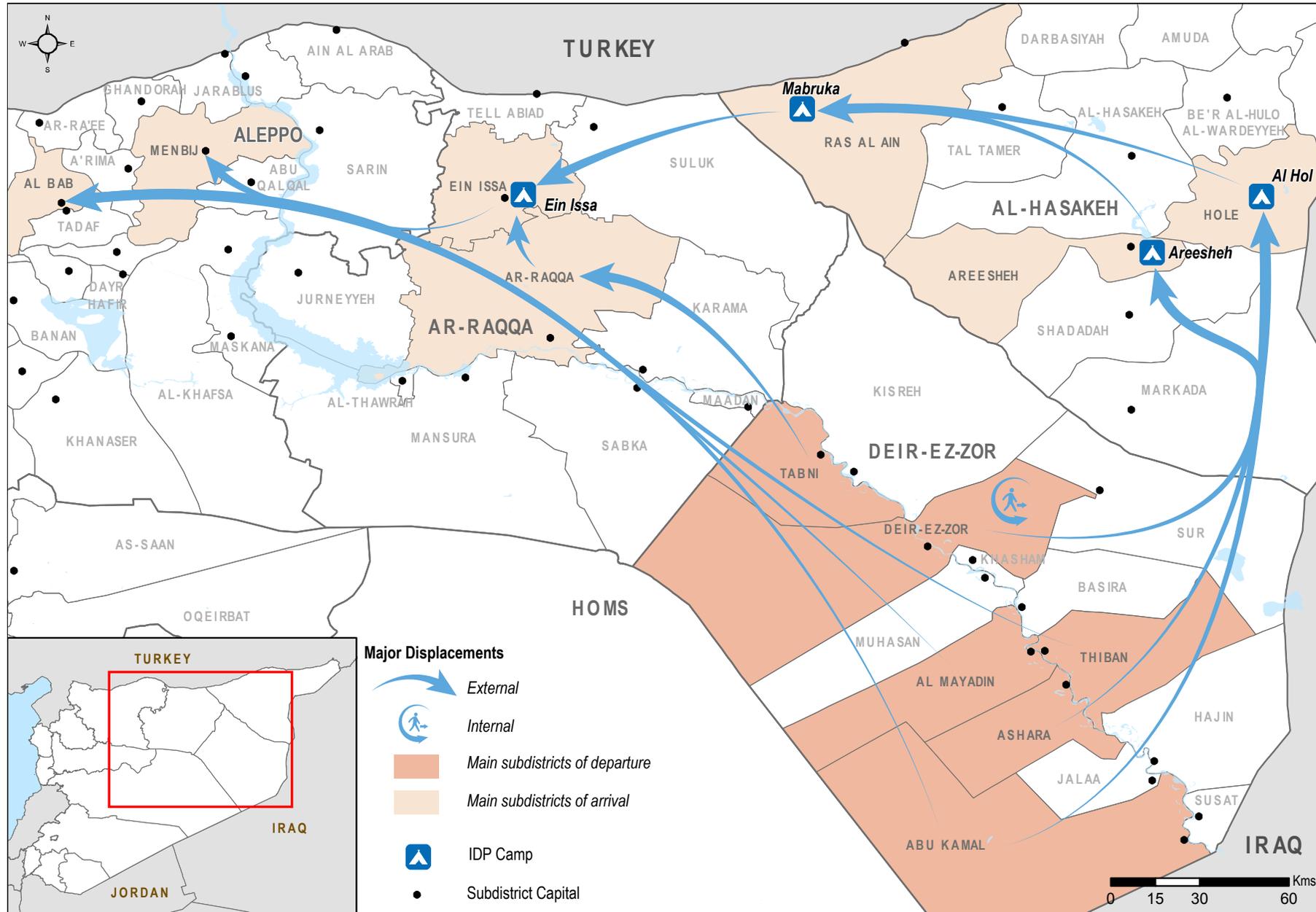
Displacement dynamics

- **Movement restrictions:** although people are generally able to move within ISIL-controlled Deir-ez-Zor, those attempting to leave the governorate face severe punishment if caught. In addition, roads have been heavily mined, physical barricades built in certain areas prevent people from leaving, and identity document confiscation and detention are reportedly common. Whilst earlier in the year these risks acted as deterrents to leaving the governorate, with the escalation of conflict, a greater number of people are willing to face them.
- **Routes:** routes used to leave the governorate are dictated by movement restrictions. Civilians are not able to leave through formal checkpoints, as such, informal routes are the only way out of the governorate. This typically involves paying for transportation through countryside routes to near the Al-Hasakeh border, where people then walk to SDF-controlled areas; those who are unable to pay for transportation walk the entire way. Routes taken are reportedly fluid, changing to avoid detection and security threats. A secondary route out of the governorate into Karama sub-district in Ar-Raqqa governorate is less commonly used as it is considered more dangerous and difficult.

² REACH, Deir-ez-Zor governorate profile, May 2017.

³ Estimates are from triangulation of ISMI data from 15 June to 15 September, CCCM data from July 1 to September 15, NPM flash updates and reported numbers of people into camps in Al-Hasakeh governorate.

Map 2: Displacement overview



- **Risks and challenges faced en-route:** those using informal routes to leave face extreme risks and challenges, including risk of detention, landmines, forced conscription and being caught in airstrikes (see graph below). The routes taken from al-Mayadin and Abu Kamal towards al-Hasakeh also present challenges due to the length and time of travel. The direct route from al-Mayadin to Al-Hasakeh is roughly 210 kilometres long, which takes at least 3 days walking. From Abu Kamal, the direct route is 290 kilometres long. Those who are unable to pay for transportation have reportedly suffered hunger and dehydration, with reports of elderly and children casualties as a result.
- **Destinations:** initial destinations, either southern Al-Hasakeh, eastern Ar-Raqqa, or elsewhere within Deir-ez-Zor, are determined by the availability of routes. However, those travelling to Al-Hasakeh and Ar-Raqqa do not commonly stay in one place: those travelling to Al-Hasakeh are first screened in Areesheh camp in the south of the governorate, and then commonly move to Al-Hol or Mabruka camps in Al-Hasakeh governorate, or Ein Issa camp in northern Ar-Raqqa. From all of these locations, many then go on to elsewhere in Syria. Similarly, the smaller numbers going towards eastern Ar-Raqqa commonly move to Ein Issa, or westwards out of the governorate.

Most commonly reported pull factors affecting intended destinations in the past 30 days (number of assessed communities reporting each as a factor)

Safety / security in intended destination	68	
Access to health services	58	
Family ties / host community relationship	34	
Assumed possibility for cross-border movement	29	
Availability of safe passages to locations	26	
Intention to stay for transit only	25	
Access to humanitarian assistance	21	

Most commonly reported risks faced by those leaving in the past 30 days (number of assessed communities reporting each as a risk)

Detention in intended destination	55	
Detention in community of departure	51	
Landmines	44	
Forced conscription	42	
Shelling / airstrikes	42	
Document confiscation	30	

INTENTIONS

Anticipated movement: future outward movement

- **Across all communities assessed, interviewees estimated that 10% of the population in areas affected by conflict would displace over the next 30 days.** They indicated that this amounts to similar outflows as currently, and that the majority of these people would remain displaced for longer than one month.
- **Interviewees estimated that if conflict were to intensify further, the proportion of people displacing would increase to up to 20% of the remaining population in the next 30 days.** They reported that parties involved in the conflict and type of conflict (aerial or ground-based) will likely affect proportions of people displaced as well as their intended destinations.
- **Interviewees also estimated that if there were no restrictions on freedom of movement, up to 30% of the remaining population would leave in the next 30 days.** This indicates that the number of people wishing to leave their places of residence is actually much higher than the displacements recorded so far.

Factors affecting the decision to leave

The number and nature of displacements are dependent upon the following factors, ranked in decreasing order of importance as reported by interviewees:

1. **Severity and nature of conflict:** interviewees indicated that whilst people are currently moving outside of the governorate due to the risk of being caught in airstrikes, an expansion of ground offensives will likely cause displacement of those who prefer not to leave the governorate, to other areas within the governorate not directly affected by conflict.
2. **Parties involved in the conflict:** Interviewees indicated that if displacement to safe nearby areas within the governorate was possible, populations would generally prefer short-term, localised displacement. However, a lack of clarity about the intentions of parties involved in the conflict (including likelihood of civilian conscription, imposed regulations and policies, and civilian detention), is expected to result in people continuing to leave the governorate.
3. **Reduced access to health services:** health facilities have reportedly been significantly affected by recent conflict; Interviewees indicated that if this were to continue, populations would leave to whichever areas are perceived to offer access to healthcare.
4. **Reduced access to food and water:** interviewees reported fearing that markets and water sources would be targeted by conflict, which was another trigger to increased displacement.

5. Loss of assets and income: whilst people would prefer to stay near their homes to protect their existing assets and income, interviewees indicated more people would leave if this became impossible.

Intended destinations

- Interviewees reported that the most common intended destinations in the next month were locations in Al-Hasakeh and Aleppo governorates, followed by elsewhere in Deir-ez-Zor. Smaller proportions are expected to go towards areas in Idleb and elsewhere in Syria.
- Within Al-Hasakeh governorate, the most commonly reported intended destinations were Al-Hasakeh, Areesh and Ras al Ain sub-districts. Within Aleppo governorate, this was A'zaz, Jarablus and Al-Bab sub-districts, and within Deir-ez-Zor governorate, Ashara and Hajin sub-districts.
- Although there was a preference to remain nearby to protect assets, interviewees indicated that safety and security considerations will cause people to continue to leave the governorate, unless the situation stabilises and is perceived to be safe in areas in Deir-ez-Zor governorate taken by GoS or SDF.
- Interviewees reported that the proportion of people moving within Deir-ez-Zor governorate is likely to increase in the coming month. They reported that people unwilling or unable to leave the governorate may still leave their communities if the security situation escalates significantly. These people would reportedly go to the areas as close as possible to their communities not directly affected by conflict, and try to stay with host communities until safe for them to return.

Most commonly reported pull factors affecting intended destinations in the next 30 days (number of assessed communities reporting each as a factor)

Proximity to protection of assets	48	
Safety and security in intended destinations	28	
Family ties / host community relationship	28	
Access to health services	25	
Distance to location	14	
Availability of safe passages to location	9	
Access to food	7	

CONCLUSION

Since the escalation of conflict in Deir-ez-Zor governorate, observed movement has largely been dictated by movement restrictions and available routes. Movement has primarily been northwards towards Al-Hasakeh governorate, with smaller numbers heading west towards Ar-Raqqa or remaining within Deir-ez-Zor. Many moving first to Al-Hasakeh governorate subsequently move to elsewhere in Syria rather than remaining in Al-Hasakeh.

Leaving the governorate is extremely challenging and populations doing so face multiple risks en-route, including risk of detention, landmines, forced conscription, airstrikes, document confiscation and gunfire. Furthermore, much of the remaining population prefer to stay within the governorate close to their homes. **Whilst these two factors previously acted as a deterrent to movement, the escalation of conflict and lack of perceived safe destinations within Deir-ez-Zor has led to people displacing outside of the governorate.**

Future displacement will continue to be influenced by the changing conflict dynamics in the governorate. Whilst it is expected that over the next month, displacement will continue at a similar rate as that observed since the end of August, certain factors will affect exact numbers and intended destinations. A large proportion of people still remain within the governorate and are either unwilling or unable to leave, though with an increase in ground offensives, interviewees indicate that these people will likely relocate to elsewhere within the governorate, if possible; otherwise, they may eventually also leave the governorate. Furthermore, perception of parties involved in the conflict continues to affect people's decision to leave – in particular, whether there is a perceived risk of forced conscription, unpopular regulations and policies, and potential detention.

About ISMI

The IDP Situation Monitoring Initiative (ISMI) is an initiative of the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, implemented by REACH and supported by Syria Relief Network (SRN) and other cluster members. Following a baseline assessment conducted between 23 October and 21 November 2016, weekly data collection cycles have been initiated to provide regular updates on IDP movements.

Displacement was identified through an extensive network of focal points, either through alert initiated by focal points or follow-up by enumerators. A range of 2-3 focal points were interviewed in each community, while collected information was further triangulated through other sources, including CCCM member data and humanitarian updates. This approach allows for regular updates on IDP movements at a community level across ISMI coverage areas. However, movement updates are limited to areas covered by ISMI and there are, therefore, potential displacements not reported here.