

REACH Situation Overview: Displacement from Aleppo Governorate, Syria

18 February 2016

REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

Introduction

Since January 31st, intensified conflict in Aleppo governorate has prompted the displacement of at least 70,000 people from rural villages in northern Aleppo governorate, and from eastern Aleppo city. Seeking protection and assistance, the vast majority fled to areas close to the border with Turkey.

Following previous assessments of displacement from Aleppo governorate, REACH conducted a third rapid assessment to monitor the situation and provide updates on displacement. Based on primary data collected from a total of 60 key informants from 8-17 February, this document provides a summary of displacement from Aleppo city and its surroundings since January 31, including an update on recent developments in the past days.

Key Findings

While patterns of displacement from northern Aleppo governorate and Aleppo city are very different, in both cases movement has been motivated by a fear of increasing proximity to ongoing conflict.

A number of villages in northern Aleppo governorate are reportedly empty following the rapid displacement of at least 47,400 people. These IDPs travelled northwards towards the Turkish border, the vast majority staying in IDP camps and host communities in A'zaz and Bab al Salame. An estimated

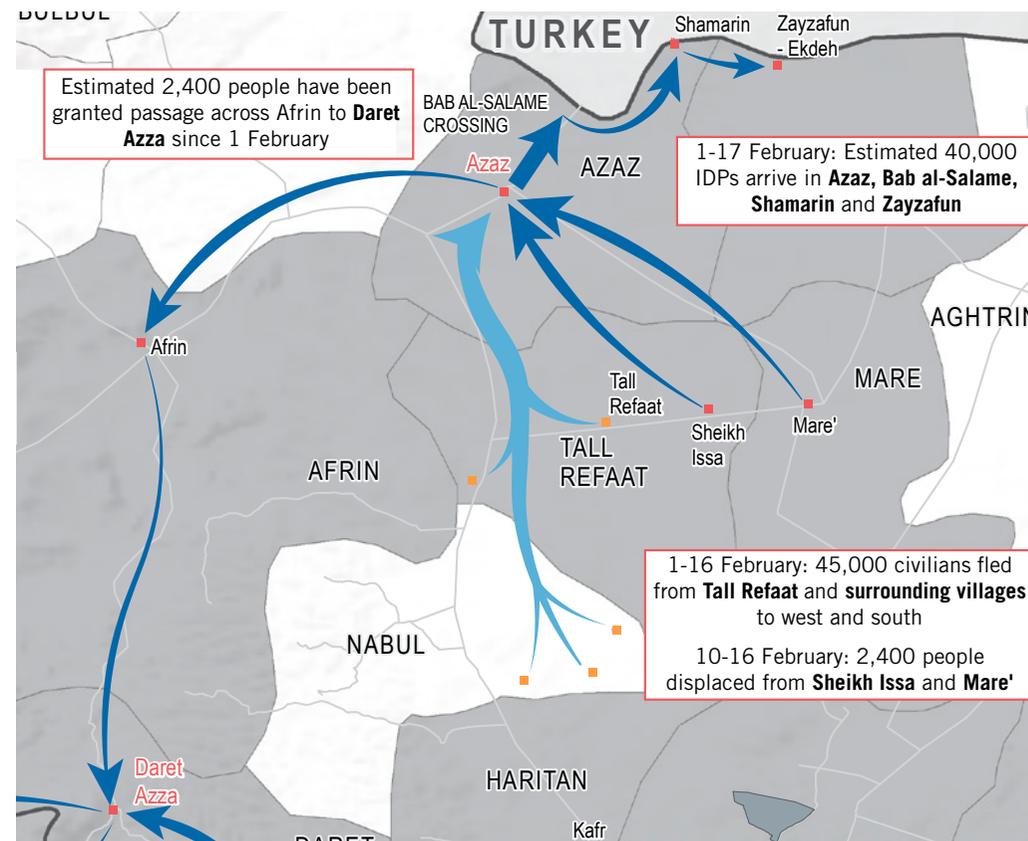
2,400 IDPs then travelled onwards to Idleb or Daret Azza, after gaining permission to cross southwest from Afrin.

Since January 31st, departures from the eastern part of Aleppo city are estimated at between 10-15% of the population, corresponding to 30,000 - 45,000 individuals. All households leaving eastern Aleppo city travelled via Daret Azza, to the west, and onward to camps near the Turkish border, rural Idleb, or Idleb city. Should conditions in eastern Aleppo city continue to deteriorate, between 50-70% of the remaining population, corresponding to 127,500 to 178,500 individuals, would reportedly consider leaving.

Rural Aleppo

IDPs fleeing conflict-affected villages in rural Aleppo travelled north towards A'zaz and camps near the Bab al Salame border crossing, since direct access routes to the south were not accessible. During the past week, approximately 2,400 individuals from Mare' and Sheikh Issa have joined populations from Retyan, Hardatnin, Diar Ajman, Manaq, Tall Refaat, and Bayanoun, the majority of which were displaced between 1-5 February.

The trigger for both movements has been the advance of conflict to nearby villages. While local councils in some villages were able to provide assistance to families trying to leave, authorities in Mare' and Sheikh Issa reportedly lacked the capacity to assist with

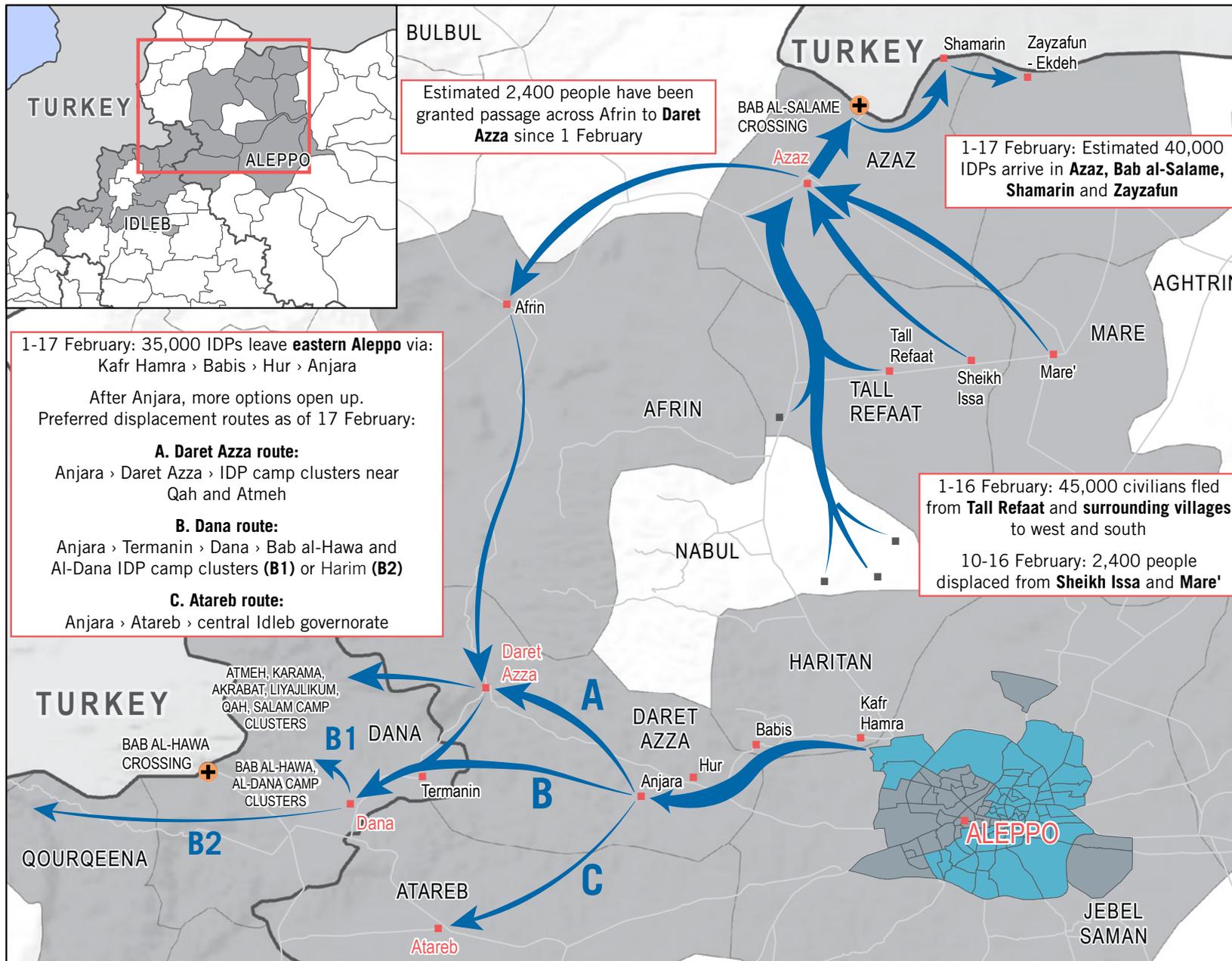


Map 1: Reported displacement from northern Aleppo governorate

evacuations. IDPs were forced to leave quickly using their own transportation (private vehicles or minibuses) and took only a few personal possessions with them.

Once near the border, new arrivals congregated in A'zaz and Bab al Salame. IDPs have preferred to go to Bab al Salame due to its proximity to the border, enabling the

quickest passage to Turkey in the event that the border opens. **Approximately one fifth of IDPs travelled to A'zaz, motivated by support from the host community and the possibility to rent accommodation.** While few services were initially available in informal settlements near Bab al Salame, aid agencies reacted quickly, providing cooked meals, tents, clothing, and NFIs since the second of February.



Map 3: Reported displacement from Aleppo governorate

About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. All REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms.

For more information, you can write to our global office:

geneva@reach-initiative.org or visit www.reach-initiative.org

While many households have been able to access services and assistance in Bab al Salame and A'zaz, some travelled further east to the camps at Shamarin and Ekdeh. For these IDPs, primary pull factors include the provision of services and improved chances to cross to Turkey. However, this group is considerably smaller than the number remaining in Bab al Salame.

Signs of strain are apparent in host communities, partly driven by the rapid inflation that accompanied the sudden increase in demand. The price of key commodities, particularly red lentils, bulgur, eggs and butane, was reportedly double that in other districts. The cost of rented accommodation has also increased, with average monthly rents rising significantly, from around 85 USD to 200 USD.

For the past two weeks, some IDP families have been able to cross through Afrin to Daret Azza to the southwest, although the number of households that have made this journey remains limited. 170 households had travelled this route by 8 February, and 400 households by 17 February, accounting for a total of 2,400 individuals. Most IDPs taking this route have tended to remain in Daret Azza, although some have continued on to the villages of Sarmada, Dana, Harem and Khrbet Al Jouz, where they have been staying in camps and collective centres and sharing houses.

Aleppo City

As in rural Aleppo, the fear of escalating conflict has also been the major trigger

prompting displacement. **As of February 10th, key informants estimated that approximately 10-15% of households had already fled from eastern Aleppo city** (corresponding to some 30-45,000 individuals), fearing that entry points and supply lines will be cut off in the near future.

Small numbers of families have continued to leave urban Aleppo throughout the past week. Despite fears of increasingly restricted access, the road to access eastern Aleppo has remained safe and functional to date, allowing both for families to leave, and for goods and supplies to enter the city.

Unable to travel directly to the border to the north, people leaving have travelled via Daret Azza, to the west of the city. From here IDPs have travelled onward to camps along the border with Turkey, where they can access food and shelter, some intending to continue to Turkey in the event the border opens. These locations are already highly vulnerable and home to large numbers of IDPs, including some individuals from northern Aleppo governorate, who travelled here from A'zaz and Bab al Salame. Increasing displacement is likely to place these IDP camps under further pressure.

Households that have already left have typically done so as complete family units, rather than in groups, using their own private transportation to leave the city.

If the conflict spreads further towards Haritan and Kafr, key informants estimate that 50-70% of the current population of

Reported prices in Aleppo city in December 2015 and February 2016

Commodity	Price (SYP)		
	Dec 2015	Feb 2016	
Bulgur (1kg)	125	225	↑
Flour (1kg)	100	350	↑
Bread (1kg)	125	200	↑
Chicken (1kg)	600	1,100	↑
Cooking oil (1L)	800	450	↓
Butane (canister)	7,000	6,000	↓

eastern Aleppo would be likely to leave, corresponding to between 127,500 and 178,500 individuals. Those who stay are likely to fall into two groups: those who remain to protect their assets; and those cannot afford to leave—the latter representing a particularly vulnerable group.

Prices of food items are rapidly increasing in eastern Aleppo city. Key informants reported markedly higher prices for bulgur, bread, chicken and flour, the latter currently 3.5 times as expensive as it was two months ago. At the same time, other commodities, such as cooking oil and Butane have decreased in price.

Eastern Aleppo's local councils and relief committees are reportedly stockpiling flour and other goods. These include food, fuel, and medical supplies, and may be partly responsible for driving recent price increases.

Conclusion

Following large scale displacement at the start of the month, the rate of new displacement in Aleppo governorate appears to have slowed somewhat in the past week. Despite this, the situation remains fragile, with new displacement likely to mirror conflict dynamics. Areas close to the Turkish border have received large numbers of IDPs, which is placing strain on the already meagre existing resources and assistance, as exemplified by price inflation in A'zaz and Bab al Salame. While the provision of assistance has helped to address lifesaving needs of new arrivals, the current situation is likely to be exacerbated by further displacement.

Meanwhile, **the situation in eastern Aleppo city continues to be of concern.** The high degree of uncertainty among the remaining population makes it difficult to predict whether people will stay or leave, while both scenarios would have dramatic consequences for the provision of humanitarian assistance. With local councils beginning to stockpile goods and price increases already recorded, the situation in Aleppo remains precarious. The spread of conflict to Haritan is likely to represent a key trigger for further displacement and should be monitored carefully.

REACH will continue to monitor the situation in eastern Aleppo and Aleppo Governorate, in order to provide updated information on trends related to displacement and access to humanitarian assistance.