

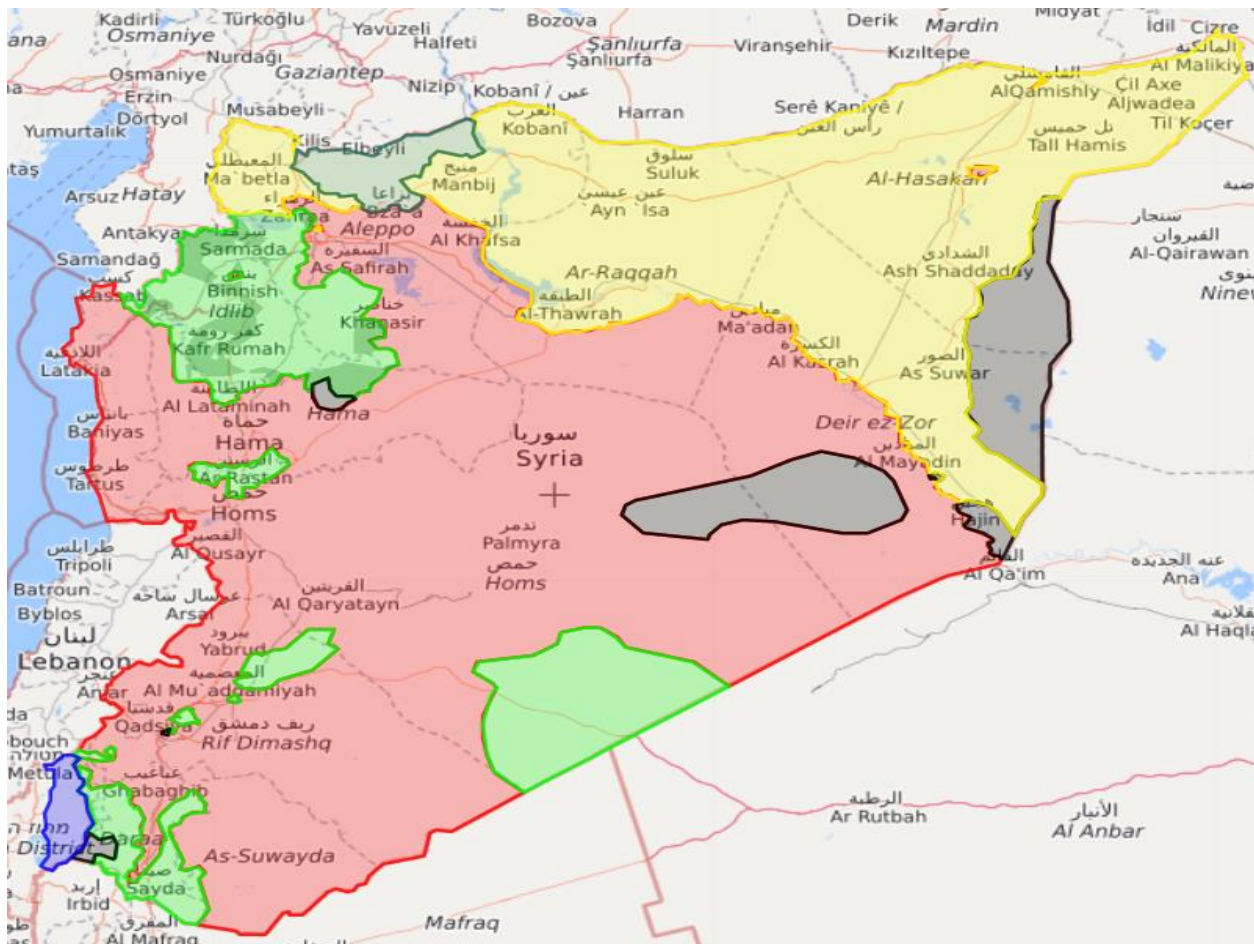
Displacement in Northeast Syria

A Spiral of Unrelieved Suffering

This report documents IDP camp conditions in December 2017

I. Introduction:

Military operations in the northeast of Syria, which have been ongoing for nearly one year, have led to the expulsion of ISIS from the city of Raqqa, and the withdrawal of the rest of fighters towards the city of Deir Ezzor and its countryside. This has led to the expansion of military operations to reach Deir Ezzor in order to pursue ISIS fighters. As such, military operations are taking place on two axes; the first by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) supported by the US-led coalition to the north of the Euphrates River, the second by the Syrian government and its militia backed by Russia to the south of the river.



These battles have led to massive waves of internally displaced people (IDPs). According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) the initial estimates exceed 380,000 IDPs, most of whom are children and women. They suffer from extremely difficult humanitarian situations, which are summarized as follows:

- IDPs are being hit by Russian and Syrian aircraft, as well as the coalition air force. The Syrian government targets water crossings on the Euphrates River which are the only way for IDPs to cross the river, after the destruction of bridges connecting the two banks of the river.
- The proliferation of ISIS-planted mines in the area.

- Large amounts paid by civilians to smugglers to secure access to SDF-held areas, by means of homemade boats that can sink at any moment.

In general, IDPs have moved in two directions: towards SDF-held areas, and towards the Euphrates Shield areas. In addition, only a small number of IDPs have moved to Syrian government-held areas as a result of people's fear of human rights violations by the Syrian government and its militias.

"We left our area and walked for two days. Then we met one of the 'smugglers', who drove us on his motorcycle for roughly eight kilometers. And then we reached a road where he asked us to remain calm and silent so as not to be caught by ISIS fighters. Next, we continued moving, but my elderly uncle could not continue walking, so we paid 16,000 SYP to rent a mule from one of the smugglers, so that we could deliver my uncle to safety with minimal losses. The shoe I was wearing was torn and no longer fit for walking, due to the roughness of the road, from the moment we left our area until we reached Hassakeh city. "

Suleiman, a 43 year old man who survived battles and left the town of al-Huseineah in Deir Ezzor.

II. Camps located in the SDF-held areas

SDF-held areas contain six formal camps to hold IDPs under the pretext of security concerns:

i. Al-Saad Camp

- Al-Saad Camp is located near the town of al-Shadadi, northeast of Deir Ezzor. The SDF is responsible for the direct management of the camp, while the United Nations offices, in the city of Damascus, along with other organizations such as the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) provide assistance to IDPs to cover their basic needs such as tents, mattresses and blankets.
- The main suffering of IDPs living in camp is the lack of WASH facilities, as there are neither garbage containers nor bathrooms. Therefore, IDPs perform their physical needs in the open air - away from the camp - and wash in a nearby swamp, causing the spread of infectious diseases such as lice and scabies as well as other epidemics.
- Regarding the health situation in the camp, NGOs such as SARC and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), provide limited health services to the camp residents, while integrated health care services are unavailable due to a shortage of equipment. In addition, doctors attend daily for only a few hours, which forces patients to wait for a long time for their turn to receive treatment. Given that medications are unavailable, patients buy their medicines illegally outside the camp, through the camp administration, which receives double amounts for securing medications. The camp administration prevents the exit of emergency cases, which forces patients to try to leave via irregular ways or pay bribes to camp guards to secure an exit outside the camp.
- After IDPs enter the camp, which contains more than 20,000 IDPs, they hand over their identity documents and other personal documentations to SDF military officers. Then they stand in lines waiting to receive their tents and food baskets. As a result of inadequate relief provided to the camp, IDPs remain four days without sleeping mats, blankets or pillows.
- Many camp residents, who are shocked by its harsh reality, try to get out of it, either in regular ways or by smuggling; IDPs have only the following options to secure exit:
 - Provide proof of a sponsor outside the camp to the administration, guaranteeing housing for the displaced person. The sponsor and the displaced person should be relatives and should have the same family name as well as the same place of civil registration. After that, the sponsor

applies to the local authorities of the People's Protection Units (YPG), a mainly-Kurdish militia in Syria and the primary component of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria's Syrian Democratic Forces. The sponsor must wait several days, during which he/she pays up to 100,000 SYP to facilitate the transaction.

- IDPs could have another option by applying for a medical exit in order to receive treatment in hospitals. However, most of these requests are rejected by the camp administration, on the grounds that not all medical cases necessitate leaving the camp.
- The third option, which is the most common one, is illegal exit either by escape, which is risky, as IDPs may be arrested or shot by the camp guards, or by paying bribes to the management of the camp, which could reach to up to 250,000 SYP.

In a testimony about her experience in the al-Saad camp, Abeer, a 26-year-old woman, stated that:

“At first, I tried to leave with my family to the city of Damascus, but the camp administration refused to grant us permission to leave and enter the city of Hassakeh without a sponsor. So we accepted the fait accompli and remained in the camp. It has been more than a month and I have only received one food basket for my family of 6. What is more, some materials in food baskets are expired and unsuitable for human consumption, and others need cooking but we have no fire in the camp. As a result, many of the camp residents sell these materials to brokers in the camp, so they get some money to buy bread. Only one bread is distributed to each person per day, which is not enough to satisfy one's hunger. Therefore, my family and I have recently initiated a request to return to Deir Ezzor. However, the request was rejected and laughed at. Yesterday, there was a pregnant woman who went into labor late at night. Her family asked for a permission to transfer her to the hospital, but the administration refused. The woman was in a critical condition, as she was not able to give birth naturally. The birth lasted for more than 20 hours, sadly, she did not survive,”

She added, “Even animals cannot live in such conditions. As for the camp administration, they just don't care. By the beginning of August 2017, the administration had filled some of the reservoirs with water that was polluted with fuel. I would frankly say that my family and I are more ready to return and die in our city, rather than to live here. Can you imagine that the organizations operating in the camp offer only one basket per month?! We cannot afford to buy anything from the booths in the camp due to the high prices of materials sold there. Even bathrooms are not available in the camp, so men perform their physical needs in the open air-away from the camp, while women wait for the sun set in order to conceal themselves.”

ii. Al-Mabroukeh camp:

In early 2016, the Kurdish self-administration established a camp in town of al-Mabroukeh; in the Jazira region-Hassakeh city for IDPs who came from towns and villages in Raqqa and Deir Ezzor. The camp is located 40 km southwest of the town of Ras al-Ein. The geographical location of the town has made it the only crossing point to enter the Jazira region. However, following the recent battles in which the SDF seized large areas in the region, all roads and other land crossings were blocked.

Al-Mabroukeh camp received roughly 8,000 IDPs, mostly from the cities of Deir Ezzor and Raqqa. The Kurdish self-administration is currently transferring new IDPs from Hassakeh's southern countryside to this camp, after IDPs overfilled the Qana camp in the Arisha subdistrict, south of Hassakeh.

The camp lacks the basic necessities of life and there is a severe shortage of health supplies. IDPs purchase water and food from traders at high prices.

Both the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF have provided Sanitation and preventive services, in addition to securing drinkable water, but they are inadequate to cover IDPs needs.

The camp administration issues a temporary travel permit "for up to 24 hours, non-renewable except in cases of illness" for those who have a proof of travel from the Qamishli International Airport. Or it demands that IDPs willing to leave must provide proof of a sponsor outside the camp. However, this policy was suspended for unspecified reasons. These complications drive displaced people wishing to travel to Hassakeh to pay huge amounts of money to smugglers and truck drivers, sometimes amounting to more than \$300 per person.

iii. Al-Houl Camp:

The al-Houl Camp is located to the west of the town of al-Houl, 5 km away from Hassakeh. It includes 130 houses with a capacity of 200 families. It was established after 2004, during the US-led war in Iraq, to receive Palestinian and Iraqi refugees fleeing the war. The camp is now receiving thousands of Iraqis and Syrians fleeing from ISIS-held areas. The camp suffers from a severe shortage of basic supplies and services. IDPs rely on smuggling of food and some medicines from the Iraqi border in order to secure their needs.

iv. Rajim Salibi Camp:

The Rajim Salibi Camp is located in the town of al-Hawl, 50 km from Hassakeh, on the Syrian-Iraqi border. The area is semi-desert with no services. This camp has more than 4,000 IDPs who came from the city of Deir Ezzor.

This camp was established near the Rajim Salibi checkpoint, which prevent the passage of civilians, resulting in the gathering of a large number of civilians who were detained for a limited period of time, then transferred to the camp.

- The camp residents live either in old tents or beehive houses, both of which are uninhabitable. Limewater is the only available water, and food is being provided for each person per day, but it is cheap and non-nutritious. The price of one liter of drinking water is 600 SYP; one bread bundle is 1500 SYP, and a small can of meat is 1000 SYP.
- With regard to the health situation in the camp, medical services are not sufficient (there is a mobile health center with intermittent services as well as one general practitioner). Two cases of death were documented in the the Rajim Salibi camp, one child and a 36-year old woman who was displaced from the Hassakeh countryside and was detained with a number of her relatives for more than twenty days, under harsh conditions. The woman suffered from a heart disease and lost her life.

v. Qana Camp:

The Qana Camp is located near the town of al-Shidadi in Hassakeh in the northeast of Syria. It hosts more than 12,000 IDPs from the city of Deir Ezzor. The Qana Camp was established on land which was previously used as a place for oil refining.

The camp residents suffer from various restrictions imposed by the camp administration. No one is allowed to leave except under the critical conditions mentioned above, which has resulted in the death of many displaced people suffering from health problems.

Between June 1, 2017 and August 23, 2017, ten people died, including two women and four children. Most suffered from chronic diseases such as heart, lung, kidneys and ischemia, in addition to other diseases.

IDPs suffer from the lack of adequate provision of water as well as WASH services. This has led to the spread of many diseases, especially among children, such as scabies and diarrhea. In order to get one bucket of water the camp residents are beaten and insulted and they wait for many hours to receive what meets their multiple needs. The camp administration distributes one water tank to more than 13,000 IDPs. SDF members extort IDPs, as they demand large amounts of money - \$200 to \$500 per person - in return for securing a way out the camp.

vi. Ein Essa Camp

The Ein Essa Camp is located in the northwest of Raqqa, in the town of Ein Essa, which is administratively part of the Tell Abyad subdistrict. The status of the camp is not different from other camps located in the areas controlled by the SDF.

Up to 40,000 IDPs live in harsh conditions in the camp as well as in the additional camps that have been recently established nearby. Most of the camp residents are displaced from the cities of Raqqa and Deir Ezzor.

IDPs suffer from increased monitoring by SDF, under the pretext of security concerns related to infiltration attempts by ISIS sleeper cells. In addition, they suffer from poor living conditions in general due to the international community's blatant disregard for the suffering of IDPs in the camp.

There are no humanitarian organizations operating in the camp, although it is located in a relatively secure area. In addition, IDPs are not allowed to leave the camp without providing proof of a sponsor. However, sponsorship has been suspended with the excuse that ISIS members are undercover in the camp.

Sandstorms, coupled with a lack of water and medical care, have resulted in 23 deaths, mostly children and women. The situation is further exacerbated by the long distances between the camps and the nearest hospital; the nearest hospitals in Tell Abyad and Ein Essa are 40 kilometers away. It is not possible to transport patients to those areas due to the lack of an ambulance, in addition to large sums of money for transportation.

III. IDPs in the Euphrates Shield areas

According to IOM, 156,000 IDPs have left the SDF-held areas and reached the Euphrates Shield areas as well as the city of Idlib. The reason for this is the poor humanitarian conditions in the camps located in the SDF-held areas.

i. Camps in the town of Jarablus

Jarablus is a Syrian city administratively belonging to Aleppo city in northern Syria, on the border with Turkey. It lies on the western bank of the Euphrates River.

More than 10,900 IDPs, almost half of them children, have moved to the town. IDPs are distributed according to the areas from which they have been displaced:

- More than 3,600 IDPs from the cities of Homs and Hama.
- More than 3,500 IDPs from the Aleppo countryside, especially from the town of al-Safira, which is under control of the Syrian government.
- More than 3,700 IDPs from the city of Deir Ezzor.

IDPs have concentrated throughout Jarablus and its countryside in 20 camps and assembly points. Some IDPs live in collective centers such as schools, and some of them live in buildings under construction. Each school or building contains at least 40 IDP families. Jarablus has three main camps which are:

a) Al-Malaab Camp

b) The Agricultural Bank Camp

c) The Fourth Camp which is also named the Death Camp due to its proximity to a cemetery. This camp is considered one of the worst camps in the country, as the living conditions are very poor. Recently, after the clashes between ISIS and a number of Free Syrian Army brigades, the flow of IDPs displaced to this camp has increased.

The overall humanitarian situation in the camp is very poor. IDPs in Jarablus depend mainly on humanitarian assistance provided to them, which does not cover 50% of their needs. In addition, the health situation is dire, as there is a shortage of medical supplies as well as medicines. As a result more than ten people have died, including a child. The camp suffers from a lack of vaccines, and there is only one Red Crescent clinic which only provides Setamol tablets for critical cases.

Nine cases of poliomyelitis have been documented, in addition to several cases of scabies; one case of skin cancer; and about 500 cases requiring insulin. Births are being transferred to Manbij National Hospital in the town of Manbij.

IDPs suffer from high house rents, forcing many families to sleep in the open air or buy tents at their own expense, which led to establishing four random camps, each containing 50 to 70 tents, without health or medical facilities.

ii. Camps in the town of al-Bab

The town of al-Bab along with its suburbs host more than 35,000 IDPs, the majority of whom are from the cities of Homs, Raqqa and Deir Ezzor. Roughly 9,100 IDPs are from Deir Ezzor, most of whom are children and women. Some IDPs in al-Bab live in ordinary houses. Some have been able to rent houses. In addition, many live in houses under construction, while thousands live in schools. In al-Bab's suburbs, the majority of IDPs have taken shelter in farms, and they rely on humanitarian assistance provided by various sources.

IDPs who were unable to secure accommodation in houses have set up tents, which led to the establishment of three camps on the al-Bab/al-Rai Road by IDPs from Deir Ezzor. These camps were established by their personal efforts and they lack basic services, thus increasing the tragic situation for IDPs, especially in winter.

The health status of IDPs in the town of al-Bab is relatively good, compared to other camps and assembly points. This is because al-Bab has a national hospital, where medicines are distributed free of charge, and a charity pharmacy where vaccines are available. However, there is a prevalence of cutaneous leishmaniasis, with 30 cases documented among children, especially those living in farms. In addition, activists also documented 40 cases of meningitis among IDPs.

iii. Camps in the town of al-Rai

A total of 4,700 IDPs from the city of Deir Ezzor have arrived to al-Rai, which is a small town with not enough houses to accommodate all IDPs. IDPs took shelter in buildings, schools and public departments. Al-Rai contains two informal camps, which were created by the displaced themselves. The Turkish government has set up a medical point which transfers critical medical conditions to the Turkish hospitals in the city of Gaziantep.

Al-Rai residents suffer from difficult living conditions, due to their long displacement and the exacerbation of their diseases caused by it. Scabies and leishmaniasis are widespread among IDPs. Activists are trying to secure new camps for IDPs in the Euphrates Shield areas. However, they have not yet been able to obtain approvals.

IV. Recommendations

- i. Secure safe corridors for the departure of IDPs from ISIS-held areas.
- ii. Remove mines planted on the roads, which have led to the death of dozens.
- iii. Facilitate the return of IDPs to their areas, especially to areas which are considered secure and mine-free.
- iv. Exert pressure on the SDF forces to treat IDPs properly, to give them back their identity documents and other personal documentation, and to facilitate the departure procedures from the camps.
- v. Allow the entry of international organizations to monitor the general situation in the camps.
- vi. Provide the camps with medical staff, as well as food, tents, health services, medicines and other adequate services, which cover all IDPs.
- vii. Establish additional camps in the Euphrates Shield areas, in line with the increasing number of IDPs.
- viii. Provide special care for women and children.
- ix. Improve the health situation in these areas to reduce the spread of epidemics mentioned above.
- x. Improve education to overcome the bad educational situation of students who have dropped out of school.
- xi. Provide rehabilitation programs for children, as they suffer from fear, anxiety or other problems related to mental health and wellbeing.