

SYRIA

A snapshot of humanitarian access and response capacity in areas affected by the Kahramanmaras earthquakes

OVERVIEW

On 6 February 2023, a 7.8 and then a 7.5 earthquake hit southeastern Türkiye and northwestern Syria, with many aftershocks following. As at mid-March, the death toll throughout Syria had reached 5,800, with the majority (around 4,500) recorded in northwestern Syria. 10,000 were injured (WRC 28/02/2023; OCHA 08/03/2023 a). Overall, the earthquakes have affected more than 8.8 million people in the country displaced over 360,000, mostly in Aleppo and Lattakia (OCHA 08/03/2023 a; OCHA 09/03/2023).

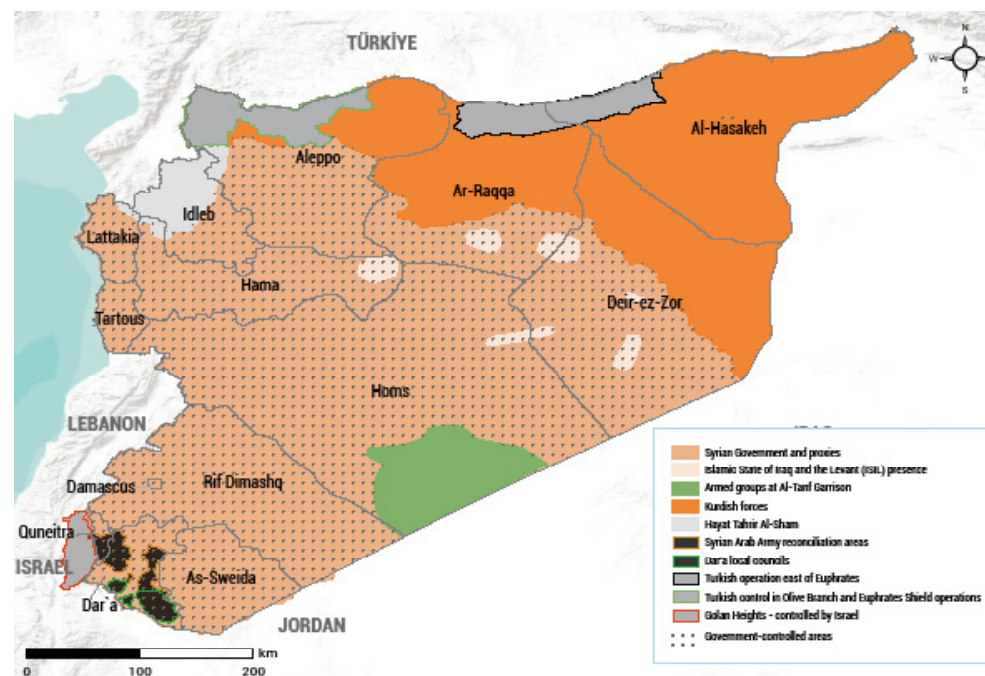
The fact that different authorities control the earthquake-affected areas, among other restrictions, is the main factor challenging the access of people in need to assistance and the delivery of humanitarian aid. This has made negotiating access more time-consuming and challenging for humanitarian responders. Prior to the earthquakes, northwestern Syria was already facing operational challenges such as difficulties in obtaining approvals from the Government, the presence of checkpoints, insecurity caused by armed group clashes or landmines, and weak internet infrastructures. Combined with underfunding, these challenges have been amplified by the impact of the earthquakes (ACAPS 12/2022).

In the government-controlled areas (GCAs) of Aleppo city, Hama, Homs, Lattakia, and Tartous, international sanctions banning assistance and trade, the confiscation and looting of aid, the loss of civil documentation, and a lack of funding are the main access restrictions affecting humanitarian operations.

In the non-government-controlled areas (NGCAs) of Idleb and northern Aleppo, the main access constraint is the presence of different authorities, including armed groups affiliated with the different parties to the conflict, including the Turkish Government, the Syrian Government, and the Kurdish Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. This causes delays in obtaining approvals to reach people in need. There are also limited border crossings available for aid delivery to northwestern Syria. Aside from Bab Al Hawa, two new crossings, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai (both on the Turkish border), have been opened to facilitate aid delivery. Road damage caused a temporary disruption to movement from Gaziantep province in Türkiye to the UN transshipment hub in Hatay, but the UN was able to resume cross-border operations on 9 February (OCHA 08/03/2023 a; UNRWA 09/02/2023). The presence of landmines and fuel scarcity

are additional access constraints on the movement of people and humanitarian workers.

Territorial control in Syria



Source: ACAPS using data from Liveuamap (accessed 13/02/2023).

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See full and more detailed map on page 5.

Damage to facilities, roads, bridges, and telecommunication infrastructure is constraining access to services such as healthcare and education in all the earthquake-affected governorates (both in GCAs and NGCAs) (OCHA 06/02/2023; IRC 07/02/2023). In northwestern Syria, the disaster has destroyed more than 10,000 buildings. Access to health services is likely the most challenging, as more than 171 health facilities have been damaged or destroyed, including 54 in Lattakia, 48 in Hama, 14 in Aleppo, and 55 in other localities of northwestern Syria (OCHA 08/03/2023 a and 09/03/2023).

Though the earthquake response has been continuous in northwestern Syria, the level of response capacity likely differs between GCAs and NGCAs because of the aforementioned access constraints. Access constraints in NGCAs, aside from challenging the humanitarian response to the earthquakes, also contribute to a lack of information on humanitarian needs for affected people. Prior to the conflict, at least 15 million people were already in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria following 12 years of conflict and economic distress (OCHA 09/03/2023).

About this report

Aim: the report provides a snapshot of the humanitarian access situation and response capacity in northwestern Syria since 6 February, in both GCAs and NGCAs affected by the earthquakes. It is directed at informing humanitarian operational responders and decision makers to support response-planning.

Methodology: the report is based on the ACAPS Humanitarian Access Methodology and the data collection of access events since 6 February in the affected governorates. The Access Events dataset will be publicly available soon. This report combines a secondary data review and analysis of access events and other publicly available information from media and humanitarian sources.

Limitations/information gaps

- There is a lack of information about access constraints and response capacity specific to each governorate of northwestern Syria.
- Limited information on response capacity is related to access constraints in Syria, especially in NGCAs.
- It is challenging to verify the reliability of sources and to assess whether a source is being neutral or biased.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

GCAs

Despite the US announcement of a 180-day exemption on sanctions imposed on Syria, political interference by the Syrian Government in humanitarian operations and the diversion of aid continue to restrain humanitarian access. Damage to infrastructure is also a main constraint, preventing people from accessing services.

Comprehensive sanctions have been imposed on Syria since the start of the civil war in 2011 and continues to limit humanitarian access in the country, particularly in GCAs. The sanctions ban all types of assistance and trade with the Government of Syria. They are not intended for humanitarian organisations but do affect their operations indirectly, as the sanctions include restrictions on bank transfers and the import of goods like fuel (OSF 21/02/2023; The Intercept 19/02/2023). Following the earthquakes, these sanctions have restricted the transfer of funds needed to launch humanitarian programmes via banks and cash transfers from Syrians in diaspora to their families. Sanctions have also limited the movement of supplies (including medical equipment) and humanitarian personnel in and out of GCAs (WRC 28/02/2023; OHCHR 10/02/2023; STC 13/02/2023). On 9 February, the US issued a 180-day exemption on sanctions, allowing aid to enter GCAs without legal repercussions (The Guardian 10/02/2023; The Intercept 19/02/2023).

That said, there have been reports of government officials and armed groups allied with the Government of Syria, who are overseeing aid shipment to the affected governorates, diverting and confiscating the aid reaching GCAs. People in need have reported receiving less amounts of aid compared to the international aid being delivered to GCAs in Syria, while others have reported the selling of aid in markets (Al Jazeera 10/02/2023; El Dorar 12/02/2023; Al Araby 20/02/2023). In neighbourhoods recognised by the authorities as not being supportive of the Government, aid is also extremely limited, as it is often blocked from reaching the people in need. For example, this is being reported in the Sunni localities in the government-controlled parts of Aleppo city (AI 06/03/2023).

On 12 March, Israel launched further air strikes on Hama and Tartous governorates. Air strikes or other armed attacks are likely to further limit the access of humanitarians to earthquake-affected communities and limit people's movement towards services (Reuters 12/03/2023).

People's access to services is affected by infrastructure damage. Nearly 1,600 school buildings were destroyed, and 150 are used as temporary shelters, hindering access to education (UNICEF 03/03/2023). About 115 healthcare facilities have been destroyed in GCAs (mostly in Lattakia), restricting access to health services (OCHA 08/03/2023; OCHA 09/03/2023).

A lack of civil documentation was already an obstacle for some people in need of accessing government and non-government services prior to the disaster. Following the earthquakes, more people have lost their civil documentation or housing and land property documentation, and they will likely face difficulties to obtain much needed services (Protection Cluster/UNHCR 09/02/2023; OCHA 14/02/2023).

NGCAs

The presence of different authorities controlling different parts of the governorates is highly affecting humanitarian access in NGCAs of Idlib and Aleppo, with increased bureaucratic restrictions and interference in aid delivery restricting the movement of people and humanitarian workers. Damage to infrastructure in Northwest Syria has been severe, hindering people's access to services.

Humanitarian access in northwestern Syria has slightly improved following the opening of border crossings other than Bab Al Hawa. On 13 February, two new crossings, Bab Al-Salam (on the Turkish border) and al-Rai (on the Iraqi border) were opened following the approval of the Syrian Government. These crossings have been facilitating aid delivery to northwestern Syria (UN 13/02/2023; BBC 14/02/2023). Between 6 February and 13 March, more than 700 aid trucks were able to cross into northwestern Syria (OCHA accessed 13/03/2023; OCHA 08/03/2023 a).

Before the earthquake, aid was delivered from Türkiye only through Bab Al Hawa. The earthquakes resulted in damage to roads on that crossing, making the delivery of aid difficult. The earthquakes also affected Turkish customs officials operating at the border, leaving them unable to facilitate aid delivery (MEE 08/02/2023; UNRWA 09/02/2023).

Despite the opening of two other crossings, Bab Al Hawa remains a key corridor for the access of aid and assistance. Cancer patients in northwestern Syria who need urgent medical attention or who used to receive regular treatment at Turkish hospitals have been unable to cross into Türkiye through Bab Al Hawa since the disaster. This is because of damage on the roads from or to the crossing point, as well as the loss of documentation (such as IDs and medical reports) following the earthquakes (Arab News 07/03/2023; Al Jazeera 02/03/2023). Damage to roads will likely continue to cause supply chain delays for at least eight months, hindering people's access to services and humanitarian aid delivery (Cips 06/03/2023).

Political affiliations and interference in the delivery of aid to the NGCAs of Aleppo (mostly northern Aleppo) are among the most severe access constraints affecting humanitarian operations in the area. The Syrian Government has blocked at least 100 aid trucks between 9–22 February from reaching Kurdish neighbourhoods in Aleppo, while the Syrian National Army (the Türkiye-backed armed opposition) has blocked 30 trucks from entering Afrin city (AI 06/03/2023; BBC 08/02/2023).

Israeli air strikes led to the closure of the Aleppo International Airport between 7–10 March, further hindering the delivery of aid to Aleppo governorate. The closure also suspended UNHAS flights, affecting the movement of humanitarian workers (OCHA 08/03/2023 b; OCHA/UN RC/HC Syria 08/03/2023; VOA 07/03/2023; UNFPA 11/03/2023).

Over 10,600 buildings were destroyed in Northwest Syria, leaving rubble that restricts the movement of people and humanitarian workers. The healthcare sector is overwhelmed following the destruction of at least 55 facilities, hindering access to health services. Access to education is also restricted, as over 220 schools were damaged and about 20 school buildings are being used as temporary shelters (OCHA 08/03/2023; RI 20/02/2023; UNICEF 03/03/2023). Damage to water infrastructure, including the sewage system and tools used to elevate water tanks to rooftops of houses, is highly restricting access to clean water. Aleppo is the most affected area, as its water system is already old (ICRC 06/03/2023).

The presence of landmines that might have moved following the earthquakes is likely to affect the movement of people and humanitarian workers (Protection Cluster/UNHCR 09/02/2023; ICRC 06/03/2023). Fuel scarcity was also already hampering humanitarian operations before the earthquake. As at the beginning of March, it continued to challenge the delivery of aid to Syria (Health Cluster/WHO 07/03/2023; OCHA 14/02/2023).

Response capacity

A humanitarian response plan for northwestern Syria was launched to cover the February–May period, but it was only nearly 30% funded as at the beginning of March. The previous humanitarian response plan was also nearly 50% underfunded by the end of 2022 (Global Shelter Cluster accessed 05/03/2023). The Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund has launched a reserve allocation of USD 30 million to respond to humanitarian needs following the earthquakes (OCHA 07/03/2023).

The Camp Coordination and Camp Management cluster has drafted a multisectoral reception centre operation checklist for the coordination of assistance to reception centres (OCHA 08/03/2023 a). As at 13 March, a total of 730 trucks carrying humanitarian assistance from IOM, UNHCR, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, and FAO were able to cross into northwestern Syria from Türkiye (OCHA accessed 13/03/2023). In-kind assistance from the EU Civil Protection Mechanism has also been directed through Beirut to Syria (EC 17/02/2023). There is a lack of information on specific distribution areas.

Sectoral and multisectoral assessments are underway, with a total of 79 assessments conducted as at 9 March. The majority of assessments have been conducted in Harim and Idlib districts of Idlib governorate and Afrin, Al Bab, A'zaz, and Jarablus districts of Aleppo governorate (ReliefWeb accessed 09/03/2023). The sampled population for assessments varies from community level to subdistrict and district levels (NWS AAWG accessed 09/03/2023).

Given the differing methodologies used in assessments, the data is not always comparable over time or space. One rapid protection assessment has found a specific lack of services targeted for the youth and elderly (OCHA accessed 09/03/2023).

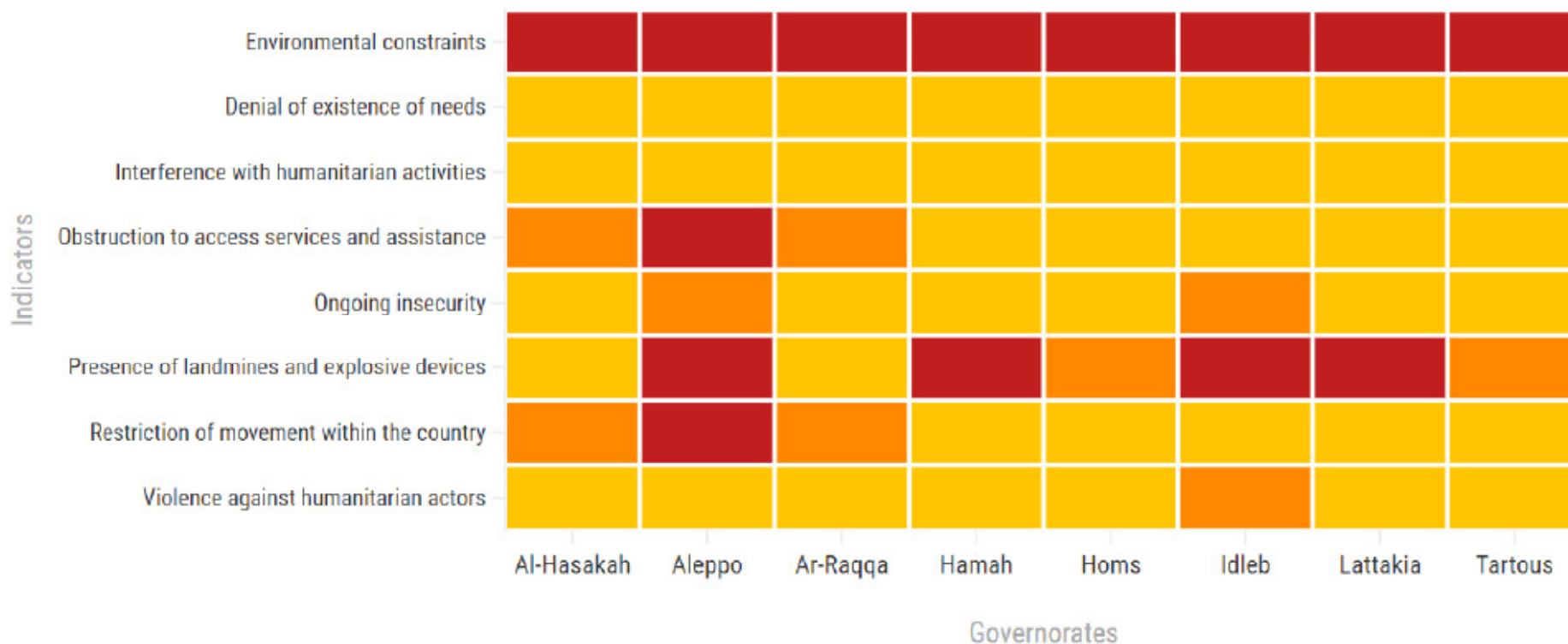
According to publicly available information, the majority of the earthquake response is located in Idleb governorate, with some in Aleppo governorate. There is a lack of information on the response capacity in affected areas of Hama, Homs, Latakia, and Tartous. As at 7 March, around 1,250 people in the affected areas of Dana, Harim, Idleb, and Salquin districts of Idleb governorate and Jandarisi district of Aleppo governorate had received short-term work opportunities to support the emergency response as part of the Early Recovery and Livelihoods cluster. As at 7 March, 115 mobile clinics were operational across seven affected districts, though most were located in Idleb governorate (Dana, Harim, and Maaret Tamsrin

districts) and in Jandarisi district in Aleppo. 93% of health facilities have also been reported to be functional, with over 4.4 million medical supplies having been distributed to 245 health facilities (OCHA accessed 09/03/2023). That said, it is unclear whether people are able to access these facilities and where they are located.

Because of access constraints in NGCAs, information on their earthquake response capacity is limited and may vary from area to area. Internet connection in northwestern Syria was already strained prior to the earthquakes, and further damage to internet infrastructure is hindering coordination and response operations across the region (DFS 07/03/2023).

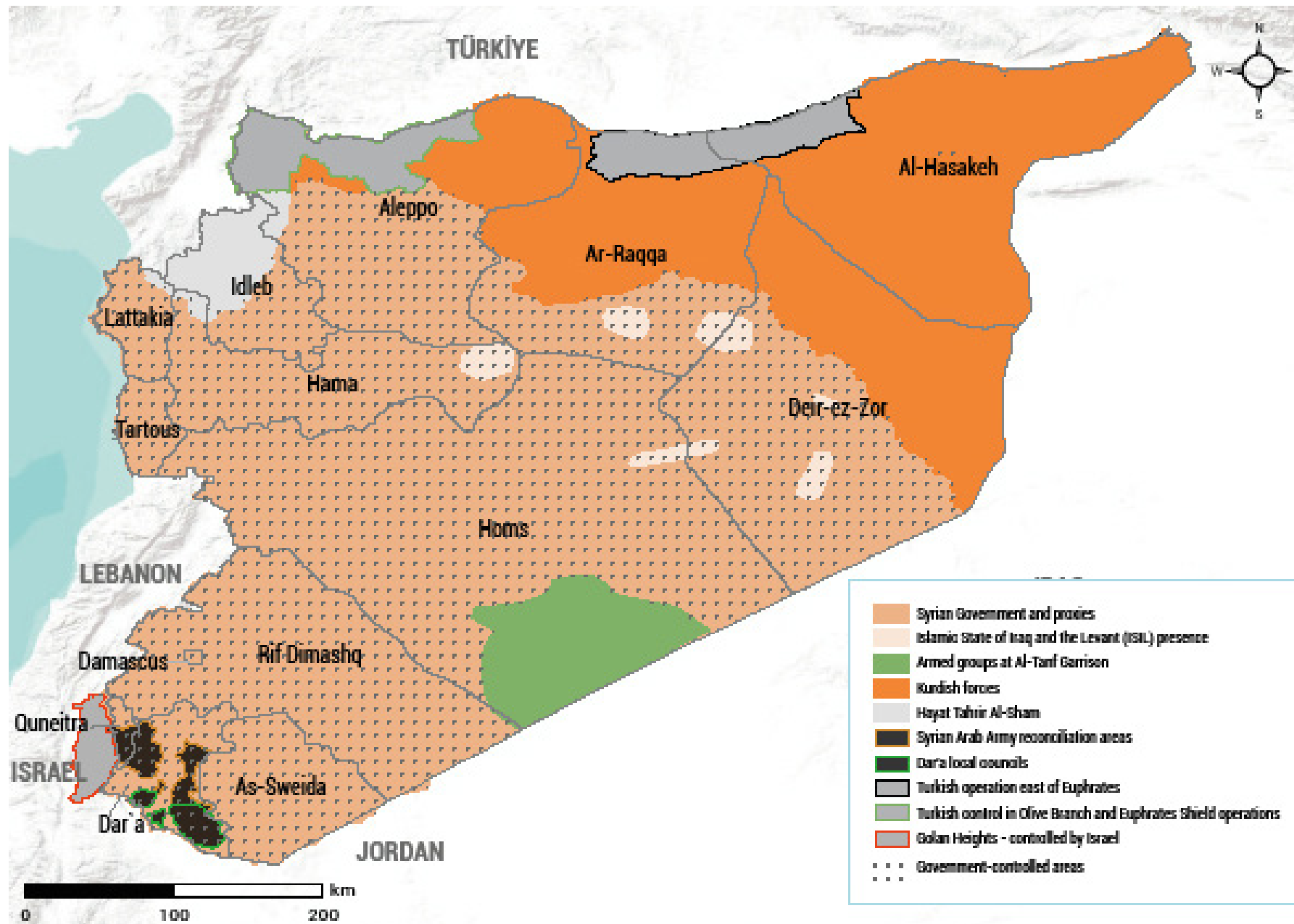
Events tracked in ACAPS Access Events Dataset

Volume of events tracked ■ Low ■ Medium ■ High



Source: ACAPS Access Events Dataset

TERRITORIAL CONTROL IN SYRIA



Source: ACAPS using data from Liveuamap (accessed 13/02/2023).

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