

# SYRIA

## Displacement in ar Raqqa



	Not required	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major
Need for international assistance	Very low	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major
Expected impact	Very low	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major

### Crisis overview

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) campaign to retake areas of ar Raqqa governorate currently under IS control has been ongoing since November 2016. The operation is supported by airstrikes by the US-led coalition. On 6 June, the SDF entered ar Raqqa city from the eastern neighbourhood of al Mashlab. The campaign has generated considerable, mostly short-term displacement. As of end-May, over 205,000 had been displaced, mostly within ar Raqqa governorate. IDPs residing in organised camps and makeshift settlements have irregular access to food, drinking water, and sanitation facilities, as well as health services. Anecdotal evidence suggests similar needs among those still in IS-held ar Raqqa city.

### Key findings

#### Anticipated scope and scale

In the coming months the additional caseload of people that will require humanitarian assistance in ar Raqqa and surrounding governorates as a result of the SDF campaign is projected to reach 440,000, including 340,000 people newly displaced and 100,000 people estimated in Raqqa city currently. The increasing number of people in need will likely put a strain on current capacities. Moreover, widespread fighting and airstrikes are likely to damage or destroy vital civilian infrastructure, such as health centres, water towers and pumping stations, and power stations, thereby making needs more acute.

#### Key priorities

- **Health:** More than 400,000 people in and around ar Raqqa governorate face increasingly limited access to health services.
- **Protection:** Civilians are indiscriminately targeted, particularly by IEDs and UXOs, and are exposed to violations such as torture, sexual violence and restriction of movement.
- **WASH:** Clean drinking water and sanitation is a major concern in IDP camps and areas of return, as well as ar Raqqa city. There is a high risk for water-borne diseases to spread.

#### Humanitarian constraints

The main humanitarian access constraints are related to insecurity, restrictions imposed by conflict parties, and the destruction of transport infrastructure as a result of fighting. The presence of IEDs and UXOs make it dangerous for aid agencies to provide adequate response.

#### Limitations

Some of the information presented is from activist groups and cannot be independently verified by ACAPS. Little concrete information is available concerning the needs and gaps for the population within IS-controlled areas, including Raqqa city.

## Crisis impact

A campaign to retake areas of Raqqa governorate under IS control by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) has been ongoing since November 2016. The operation is supported by airstrikes by the US-led coalition. On 6 June, the SDF entered ar Raqqa city from its eastern neighbourhood of al Mashlab (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights 07/06/2017). It has cut land access and supply routes to the city. The campaign has generated considerable, mostly short-term displacement. As of end-May, over 205,000 had been displaced. Of the newly displaced, 140,000 remain in ar Raqqa governorate, while the rest have been displaced to Aleppo, Idlib, Deir-ez-Zor, and Hama governorates. Of these, over 160,000 have been displaced since April (OCHA 26/05/2017). Overall, an estimated 400,000 people are in need of humanitarian assistance as military operations in populated areas continue (UNHCR 18/05/2017). With the continuation of the campaign in ar Raqqa city, an additional 440,000 people will be in need of assistance, including 340,000 newly displaced from the governorate and 100,000 people who are currently in the city either by force or by choice (UNHCR 24/04/2017).

Daily fighting and airstrikes have damaged civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, markets and water groundwork (OCHA 26/05/2017). IDPs residing in organised camps and makeshift settlements have irregular access to food, drinking water and sanitation facilities, as well as health services. While definitive information on conditions in ar Raqqa city and other IS-held areas is not available due to a lack of access, anecdotal evidence suggests water shortages, the unavailability of health care facilities, and high food prices. As a result, an increased influx of IDPs would put pressure on the sectors where resources are already limited. There are also protection concerns, including issues related to freedom of movement and documentation (OCHA 26/05/2017).

## Health

The health situation in ar Raqqa governorate continues to deteriorate, with more than 400,000 people in and around the governorate facing increasingly limited access to health services. All four public hospitals in the governorate are only partially functioning and facing shortages in health staff, medicines, electricity, and safe water supplies (WHO 23/05/2017). Ar Raqqa city's main National Hospital was closed in early April and its patients evacuated. Access to health care is limited due to a general lack of personnel and reliable medicines, inadequate trauma treatment, and safety and security concerns (OCHA 06/03/2017; OCHA 08/04/2017; OCHA 23/05/2017).

In IDP camps, health is a pressing need, mostly due to a lack or very low number of facilities, irregular and/or limited presence of staff, and inadequate supply of medicines (OCHA 26/05/2017). Hundreds of pregnant women, people with disabilities, and patients

suffering from chronic diseases are in urgent need of medical care, and there is also an increased demand for mental health services (WHO 23/05/2017). There have been reports of children dying due to a lack of medical care. Cases of acute flaccid paralysis (AFP), diarrhoea, and measles have been detected. (UN 24/04/2017; OCHA 20/05/2017; OCHA 26/05/2017). As displacement increases, including from the city itself where people have had limited access to health care for months, pressure on health facilities is likely to increase as the campaign unfolds. In ar Raqqa city, it is expected that the majority of civilian infrastructure, including health facilities, will likely be looted and destroyed (Raqqa Emergency Response Plan 17/05/2017, PI).

## Protection

Safety remains a major concern for civilians. Several incidents were reported in April and May with high numbers of civilian casualties due to an escalation of indiscriminate airstrikes and ground-based shelling. The escalation of attacks also resulted in repeated displacements, with some killed while on the move. In some areas, the SDF has imposed curfews. Many IDPs remain stranded in the desert as they are prevented from entering SDF-controlled areas unless they have a local Kurdish guarantor. Some displaced Arab civilians have reported that SDF commanders had prevented them from returning home, reinforcing fears of Kurdish-Arab ethnic tensions or land grabs.

Civilians in IS-controlled areas are also exposed to violations such as deprivations of freedom, including of movement, torture, sexual violence, and exposure to sniper fire, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and unexploded ordinances (UXOs), which are widespread. Civilians have been used as human shields and executions are common, sometimes of children as young as 13. Those caught smuggling civilians outside IS-controlled areas may be executed or held and forced to pay fines, while those fleeing are exposed to risks of smuggling routes, such as recruitment and sexual violence.

Protection concerns will remain and possibly increase as the campaign continues, both for civilians in SDF and IS-controlled areas. In areas newly captured from IS, populations will likely be at risk of violence and detention due to perceived affiliation with IS. As IS retreats, it is likely to plant additional IEDs. Moreover, the group could revert to car and suicide attacks against civilian targets as it weakens (Syria Direct 07/06/2017; IRIN 06/06/2017; OHCHR 01/06/2017; IRC 22/05/2017; OCHA 26/05/2017; UNHCR 01/06/2017). Forced recruitment, including of children, by armed groups is also a growing concern with increasing reports of instances of house-searches to conscript men of fighting age (OCHA 08/04/2017). The practice of confiscating identity documents persists. Documentation is not always returned on time to IDPs allowed to leave, due to the lack of an efficient process of tracking and restitution (OCHA 15/05/2017).

## WASH

Access to the water network is systematically decreasing due to conflict and as a result more people will be relying on unsafe water trucking filled directly from the river or irrigation canals (Raqqqa Emergency Response Plan 17/05/2017). Contamination of the Euphrates River has also reduced the availability of clean drinking water (IRC 22/05/2017). Several villages where IDPs are returning have no running water. Sanitation is concerning as the availability of hygienic latrines is limited (OCHA 26/05/2017).

In ar Raqqqa city, water is available for four hours per day on average and is not adequately purified. In the western countryside, water is unavailable as Al-Asadiyah water pumping station is out of service (OCHA 26/05/2017). WASH infrastructure such as pumping stations, towers and drainage systems are likely to be significantly damaged by fighting and airstrikes, putting increased pressure on limited water resources. Drainage ditches may be filled in by the parties of the conflict to allow for movement of heavy machinery (Raqqqa Emergency Response Plan 17/05/2017). Overcrowding in IDP camps increases the risk of water-borne diseases spreading quickly, particularly problematic given inadequate state of health facilities.

## Shelter and NFIs

Electricity is a need in both areas of returns and in ar Raqqqa city, where civilians are relying on generators due to the lack of access to electricity. Lack of cooking materials, heaters, and fuel for heating and cooking in IS-controlled areas have been reported (OCHA 08/04/2017; 26/05/2017). Fighting is likely to damage and destroy electricity stations in the coming months, causing an increased need.

There are not enough available shelters to accommodate newly displaced persons (Shelter Sector 04/2017). IDPs in some makeshift camps around ar Raqqqa have no shelter and live in the open air (UN 24/04/2017). The availability of tents is an increasing concern, especially as the number of IDPs is expected to rise. Across IDP camps, at least 34,400 children lack clothing (OCHA 26/05/2017).

## Food

Food security needs both in and outside of camps are not being fully met due to the increasing number of IDPs, and this trend is likely to continue as the conflict unfolds (OCHA 08/04/2017). According to the latest HNO, 77% of people in ar Raqqqa governorate reported food consumption gaps (HNO 01/12/2016). Access to food is limited due to

scarcity, high prices, increasing conflict and constrained market availability (FAO 20/05/2017). The majority of the population rely on food distributions (OCHA 01/05/2017; IRC 22/05/2017). As of March, 80% of markets in the governorate were inaccessible, with main commodities not available in sufficient quantities (OCHA 08/04/2017). In ar Raqqqa city, anecdotal evidence suggested price increases of 25% within a week in mid-May. A large number of people have not received any food or livelihoods assistance over the past two years and are believed to be vulnerable to future shocks (Raqqqa Emergency Response Plan 17/05/2017). In IDP camps, distribution has been irregular (OCHA 26/05/2017).

## Humanitarian constraints

The main humanitarian access constraints are related to insecurity, restrictions imposed by conflict parties, and the destruction of transport infrastructure as a result of fighting. The presence of unexploded ordnance and booby traps in newly seized areas, as well as besieged and hard to reach areas, and challenging physical access make it dangerous for aid agencies to adequately respond (IRC 22/05/2017; NFI Sector 01/04/2017). Explosive hazard contamination will likely increase in the coming months, including on major roadways, urban centres, water systems and agricultural areas, and the ability to respond will therefore be further hampered (OCHA 26/05/2017). As of April, the number of local NGOs authorised to partner with UN agencies in ar Raqqqa had decreased (NFI Sector 04/2017). IS-held areas are completely inaccessible, including ar Raqqqa city.

## Contextual information

As the Syrian civil war continues in its sixth year, conflict developments have been marked by the late 2016 peace agreement between government and opposition forces (excluding the SDF, IS, and Jabhat Fatah al Sham), which was recently renewed, and a sustained effort by both government and opposition forces in seizing IS-held territories. While fighting is ongoing in large parts of Syria, conflict intensity has decreased following the implementation of the truce. More than 300,000 people are estimated to have been killed since the beginning of the conflict, and 13.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance across the country (HNO 01/12/2016).

Ar-Raqqqa has served as the de facto capital of IS in Syria since 2014. Since the beginning of 2015, SDF, supported by US airstrikes, has seized more than 6,000 km<sup>2</sup> of former IS-held territory, and entered ar Raqqqa city in early June. The offensive to seize the city completely is expected to last for months (IRIN 06/06/2017; BBC 10/05/2017).

## Past displacement

Frequent airstrikes in ar Raqqa governorate in the last years have led to hundreds of thousands of people becoming displaced. Since May 2016, an estimated 200,000 people have been displaced in the governorate, including over 160,000 in the last two months (UNHCR 01/06/2017).

## Stakeholders

**Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)** is an umbrella group composed of various armed opposition groups, and is led by the Kurdish armed group People's Protection Units (YPG). SDF has around 50,000 fighters, of whom 60% are Arabs, with the rest belonging to the Kurdish, Turkmen, and Armenian minority groups. The group is supported by the US both financially and military – US-led coalition airstrikes support SDF ground offensives in addition to deployment of special forces personnel to the group (The Guardian 06/05/2017; BBC 27/03/2017).

**Islamic State (IS)** seized large areas of Syria in 2013 and 2014, establishing their stronghold in ar Raqqa, in addition to seizing large areas in Aleppo, Al-Hasakeh, Deir-ez-Zor, and Homs governorates. The total number of IS fighters is not known, but in 2016 US intelligence officials estimated there were around 20,000-25,000 fighters (USA Today 03/02/2016). In the last year, IS has been pushed back both in Iraq and Syria, losing large areas, with the offensive to take over the IS stronghold in Iraq, Mosul, currently entering its last stages. For more information on the situation in Mosul, see the ACAPS briefing note Iraq Displacement from Mosul and Tal-Afar.

## Key characteristics

**Demographic profile:** As of end 2016, the total population of ar Raqqa governorate was estimated to be 650,000, including 230,000 in ar Raqqa city – both numbers are likely to have decreased following displacement (HNO data 01/12/2016).

**Food security:** 480,000 people in the governorate were estimated to be in need of food assistance at the end of 2016 (HNO data 01/12/2016).

**Nutrition:** An estimated 145,000 people were in need of nutrition assistance in the governorate at the end of 2016 (HNO data 01/12/2016).

**Health:** An estimated 440,000 people were in need of health assistance in the governorate at the end of 2016 (HNO data 01/12/2016).

**WASH:** An estimated 250,000 people were in need of adequate WASH facilities in the governorate end 2016 (HNO data 01/12/2016).

## Response capacity

The operational capacity of some sectors is insufficient to meet the needs (Shelter Sector 04/2017).

### Local and national response capacity

Local NGOs are central actors in the aid distribution system as they often have less difficulties than international actors in reaching some areas. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent has also been responding in the governorate (IFRC 31/03/2017).

### International response capacity

INGOs and UN organisations are supporting response for Raqqa, both directly and through local partners.

The WFP Damascus-Qamishly airlift operation to deliver relief items to areas in northern Syria, including Raqqa governorate, continues operating (OCHA 24/05/2017; USAID 31/05/2017)

### Health

WHO has responded with vaccination campaigns, a disease surveillance and reporting system, as well as shipments of medical supplies (WHO 23/05/2017).

### Protection

UNHCR and its partners have been able to increase consultations with the affected population and provide protection interventions in IDP camps, on top of assistance already provided in these sites (OCHA 26/05/2017).

### WASH

UNICEF supports emergency distribution of water and hygiene items in camps hosting IDPs from ar Raqqa, both in ar Raqqa and in neighbouring governorates (Ein Issa, Al Mabrouka, Karama). Latrines are being installed (OCHA 26/05/2017; UNICEF 30/04/2017).

### Food

WFP supports IDPs with life-saving food assistance. In northern Syria, WFP reached 152,000 newly displaced people in northern ar Raqqa and northern Deir Ezzor governorates who fled fighting in ar Raqqa (WFP 30/04/2017).

## Shelter & NFIs

UNHCR is providing tents and core NFI items in cooperation with UNICEF and Al-Birr Association. UNHCR is providing communal kitchens in Mabrouka and Ein Issa camps (NFI Sector 04/2017).

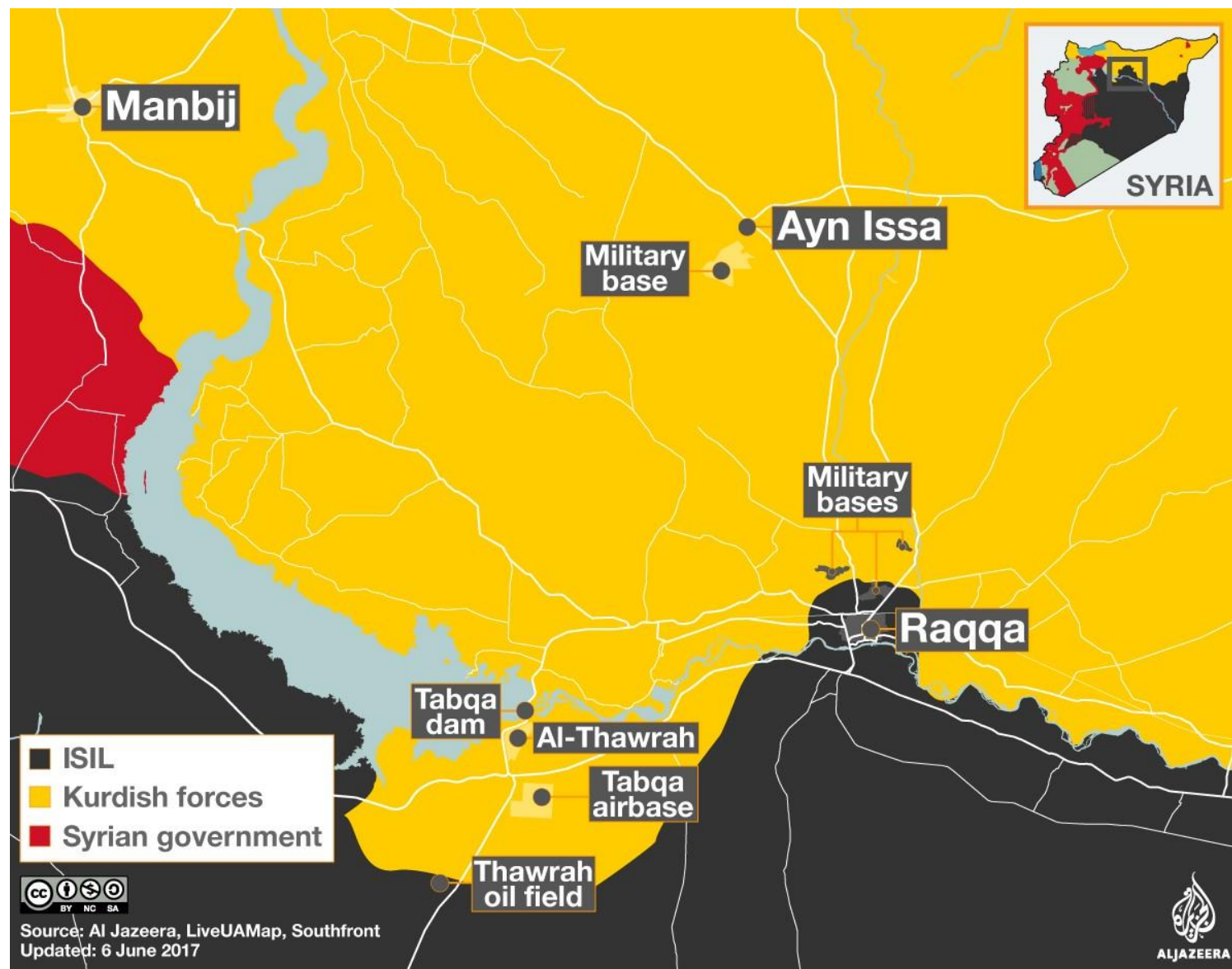
## Population coping mechanisms

Negative coping strategies have been reported, such as reducing food consumption, begging or borrowing, selling assets, and taking children out of schools. (Raqqqa Emergency Response Plan 17/05/2017, PI).

## Information gaps and needs

Little concrete information is available concerning the needs and gaps for the population within IS-controlled areas, including ar Raqqqa city, due to a lack of access (Raqqqa Emergency Response Plan 17/05/2017). Sensitivities around information and the absence of clear and effective feedback mechanisms to assess the population in need make it difficult for sectors to better determine effectiveness (NFI Subsector 04/2017). Information on specific needs for women and children required for proper planning and programming is unavailable (OCHA 20/04/2017). Some of the information presented is from activist groups and cannot be independently verified by ACAPS.

## Fighting lines in ar-Raqqa<sup>1</sup>



Source: Al Jazeera, LiveUAMap, Southfront.

<sup>1</sup> "Kurdish forces" here refers to the YPG-led SDF-forces.