

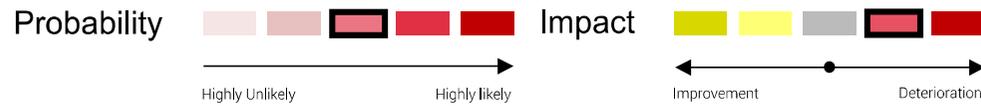
# MOVEMENT BACK TO SYRIA: **SCENARIOS**

POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS IN SYRIA AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES OVER THE NEXT NINE MONTHS

19 September 2017

## SUMMARY

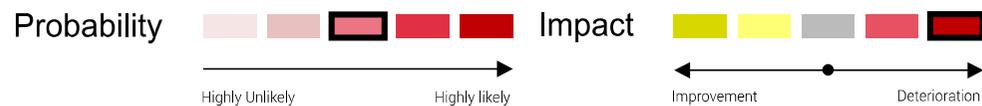
### Scenario 1: Insecurity in Syria continues; low-level movement to Syria



Security remains fragile within Syria while operations against Islamic State (IS) and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) continue in some areas. Ceasefires largely hold in the de-escalation zones, although they are not fully implemented and lack international policing. Basic infrastructure and services remain weak across most of the country, particularly in opposition-held areas. Meanwhile, conditions for refugees in neighbouring countries deteriorate as access to employment opportunities and services remain limited and tensions with host communities rise.

Onward movement towards Europe from neighbouring countries is minimal. Those moving back to Syria have limited access to services, infrastructure and humanitarian assistance, and many experience secondary displacement within Syria.

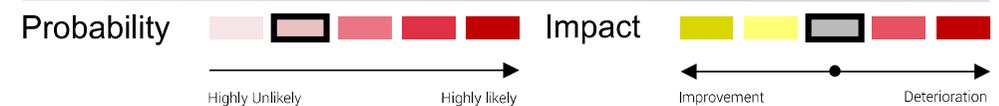
### Scenario 2: Insecurity in Syria continues; movement to Syria increases



The Government of Syria (GoS) hails the recapture of ar Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor from IS as a significant victory and turns its military attention to Idlib, while consolidating the areas under its control elsewhere. De-escalation zones in Dar'a and Homs become more established and the GoS and international governments portray the Syrian conflict as ending. International sympathy for Syrian refugees diminishes and European governments begin to reject Syrian asylum seekers' claims and deport them directly to areas deemed safe. The number of refugees forced back to Syria – predominantly to de-escalation zones – increases significantly, while assistance to refugees diminishes and forced evictions increase, particularly in Lebanon.

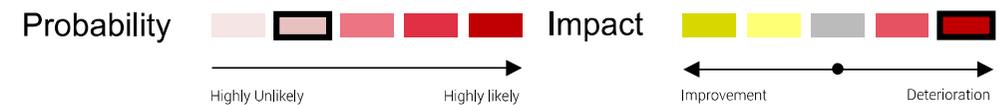
This forced movement to Syria occurs in a chaotic and disorganised manner. Humanitarian response capacity in Syria, both internal and cross-border, is overwhelmed in many areas. The momentum generated by the increased movement back to Syria precipitates further movement back with severe protection consequences.

### Scenario 3: Security in Syria improves; movement to Syria increases



De-escalation zones are implemented, with significant security provided and some basic services restored. Meanwhile, progress towards a political settlement is made. Improved security and living conditions inside Syria, coupled with a deterioration of conditions in hosting countries, convinces some refugees of the chance to build a new life inside Syria, although not necessarily in their areas of origin. The number of voluntary and forced returns increases.

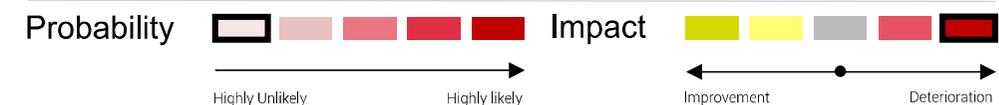
### Scenario 4: Insecurity increases; movement to Syria decreases



New offensives, insecurity and targeting of civilian populations in Syria cause the de-escalation zones to fail. Sudden large-scale internal displacement results, triggering a renewed humanitarian crisis. Neighbouring countries continue to restrict the entry of Syrians, while ceasing to move refugees to de-escalation zones.

Civilians, especially those in and around the de-escalation zones, are caught in the conflict. Humanitarian needs increase sharply as humanitarian access and space reduces in many opposition-held areas. Meanwhile, an increasingly hostile environment in neighbouring countries increases the vulnerability of refugees there whose living conditions and employment opportunities continue to deteriorate.

### Scenario 5: Sudden mass movement back to Syria



A sudden deterioration of the security situation in one or more neighbouring countries forces large numbers of refugees and members of the host communities into Syria, where they overwhelm the host population and humanitarian assistance providers.

## INTRODUCTION

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

While large numbers of Syrians wanting to leave Syria are unable to due to its closed borders with neighbouring countries, others are going back to Syria, either for a short visit or with the intention to stay. Some return voluntarily, some are induced or given incentives to go back, and others are coerced due to a lack of alternative viable alternatives, or forced back. Some return to their place of origin but many, especially those forced back, do not. The drivers of (or reasons for) movement back to Syria are too numerous and complex to capture here, but include both factors in neighbouring countries (such as increasing hostility from host populations, lack of income opportunities, inability to establish legal stay, and deals struck between parties to the conflict) and factors in Syria (such as the level of security, access to services, and desire to protect land and property).

While the movement of Syrians back to Syria remains small compared to the return movement and further displacement of internally displaced persons (IDPs), there has been growing interest in refugee 'returns' as the conflict is increasingly reported to be entering its final stages. As the interest around returns builds, it is crucial to emphasise that a countrywide cessation of hostilities has not yet been achieved, and that the humanitarian and protection crisis will not end immediately following a decrease in active conflict. The scenarios in this report consider how future military and policy decisions, combined with other relevant variables, could affect movement back to Syria over the coming nine months, and the potential humanitarian and protection consequences.

### SCENARIOS FOR SEPTEMBER 2017 – MAY 2018

These scenarios are not attempts to predict the future. Rather, they are a description of situations that *could* occur in the coming nine months, and are designed to highlight the possible impacts and humanitarian consequences associated with each scenario. The aim is to support strategic planning, create awareness and promote preparedness activities for those actors responding to the Syria crisis. See the Methodology section for more information on how these scenarios were developed.

### LIMITATIONS

Scenarios can seem to oversimplify an issue, as the analysis balances details against broader assumptions. But scenario-building is not an end in itself. It is a process for generating new ideas that should in turn lead to changes in project design or decision-making.

These scenarios focus primarily on the (potential) movement back to Syria from neighbouring countries. The impact this movement could have on neighbouring countries, on Syria itself and on other countries (e.g. in Europe) is considered, but not necessarily elaborated on in detail.

### HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

The five scenarios are summarised on page 2. Pages 6 to 10 provide more detail on the scenarios, including potential humanitarian consequences. Page 11 lists five factors that could compound the humanitarian consequences of any of the scenarios. Annexed is a summary of the trigger events that could lead towards the situations described in the scenarios, should they occur.

### TERMINOLOGY

The current discourse on 'return' movement of Syrians questions the voluntary nature of this movement. Refugees that move back to their country of origin cannot be understood to always do so voluntarily. Often, the environment refugees are leaving is highly coercive and the decision to move is based on there being no real alternative. Unless specifically stated otherwise, this report does not draw sharp distinctions between the various ways in which an individual may have gone back to Syria, nor does it distinguish between those who may have returned to their place of origin and those who have moved back to other locations within Syria. This report refers to the movement of Syrian refugees back to Syria.

## CURRENT SITUATION

### Syria

In 2017, Government of Syria (GoS) forces regained significant amounts of territory. Currently, Kurdish forces hold much of the northeast and opposition control has been reduced to Idlib governorate and pockets of the southwest. Islamic State (IS) presence inside Syria is weakening: it is under siege in Raqqa city while its siege on government-held Deir-ez-Zor city was broken in September. Consensus is building that Bashar al-Assad will remain in government, while international support for the opposition is waning. (The Guardian 31/08/2017; ISW 30/08/2016; Washington Post 04/09/2017; Reuters 04/09/2017)

Within Syria, GoS rhetoric has begun to emphasise post-conflict reconstruction, administrative reform, and a possible political settlement. As the GoS proceeds with reconstruction and development, land appropriation is increasing. Kurdish forces are similarly attempting to consolidate their hold of northern Syria, making plans for local and regional council elections in areas they control. Since concluding its operation Euphrates Shield in March 2017, Turkey has threatened further military intervention in Afrin, north of Idlib, to prevent Kurdish control along the length of the entire border. (Carnegie 05/09/2017; The Guardian 01/09/2017; Sana 20/06/2016; Reuters 29/07/2016; Alarby 08/08/2017)

The 'de-escalation' plan agreed by parties to the Astana process in May, outlines four potential zones in opposition held areas of Idlib, northern Homs, eastern Ghouta and Dar'a. The plan calls for a cessation of hostilities and commits the GoS to granting humanitarian access and restoring public services. Agreement on the implementation of the de-escalation zones is yet to be reached: the sixth round took place on 14-15 September and focused on mapping out de-escalation zones, deploying police and

prisoner exchange. Consensus is building but full implementation is yet to be achieved. (Al Jazeera 04/07/2017 & 14/09/2017; Foreign Affairs 06/07/2017; Reuters 05/05/2017 & 01/09/2017)

While violence has decreased since the announcement of de-escalation zones, it is unclear exactly where the ceasefire boundaries lie. Groups considered the 'moderate opposition' are included in the agreement, while IS and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS - formerly Jabat al Nusra) are excluded and remain targets of the government and its international backers. In Idlib governorate, where HTS has a significant presence and has controlled the capital city, Idlib, since late July, the potential for conflict remains particularly high. (BBC 03/08/2017; Syria Direct 29/08/2017; Foreign Affairs 10/08/2017; Al Jazeera 24/07/2017; Al Monitor 07/08/2017).

### **Movement back to and within Syria in 2017**

Despite the ongoing high level of insecurity, massive infrastructural damage and limited humanitarian access, refugee movement back to Syria and IDP returns have been increasing throughout 2017. As of the end of August 2017, 673,000 Syrians were reported to have 'returned' in 2017: 93% were IDPs and 7% were refugees. This figure for the first eight months of 2017 is similar to the total number of Syrians who were reported to have 'returned' in the whole of 2016. Displacement continues simultaneously: in the first six months of 2017 around 808,700 people were displaced, many for the second or third time. While most were displaced internally, the number displaced outside of Syria also increased, although largely due to new registrations rather than new arrivals. (IOM 11/08/2016; UNHCR 31/07/2016; UNHCR 06/09/2017)

Reports claiming increased numbers of 'returns', the establishment of de-escalation zones and growing rhetoric that the conflict may be in its final stages, have triggered momentum for pushing more Syrian refugees back, particularly by some politicians in neighbouring countries. (Foreign Affairs 06/07/2017; Reuters 05/05/2017)

### **Lebanon**

There are over 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon (of whom one million are registered), mostly in Bekaa and Baalbek-Hermel governorates. Long-standing public and government hostility towards Syrian refugees has intensified in the lead up to the May 2018 elections, in which some parties seek to gain local support by advocating for Syrian refugees to go back to Syria. Lebanese authorities claim that there are extremists who present a security threat amongst the refugees in Bekaa, thereby justifying frequent raids in the area. In recent months, raids inside refugee settlements, arrests and the threat of eviction have become more prevalent. Reports of refugees being attacked or feeling unsafe are growing. (The Guardian 14/08/2017; Reuters 12/07/2017; Al Jazeera 27/08/2017; NPR 02/09/2017; Amnesty International 25/07/2017)

Informal cross-border movement between the Bekaa valley and Syria has increased since the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Hezbollah intensified military activity to remove Syrian non-state armed groups from the border. Agreements between Hezbollah and the LAF resulted in four major movements from Lebanon to Syria between mid-June and early August 2017. In total, an estimated 10,000 people, including fighters, their families, and other refugees, were transported from Aarsal to Syria's Qalamoun region and Idlib. The movements were characterised by a lack of humanitarian access and oversight before,

during and after the process, as well as unclear levels of voluntariness. (AMN 10/06/2017; Syrian Voice 15/06/2017; UNHCR 31/07/2016; The Guardian 14/08/2017; Al Jazeera 27/07/2017 & 27/08/2017)

### **Turkey**

Despite the fact that conditions for many of the 3.1 million Syrian refugees in Turkey are considered better than in other neighbouring countries, significant numbers have moved back to Syria. Although estimates vary, Turkish authorities report that 70,000 Syrians have moved to northern Syria since Turkish military intervention in August 2016, including 45,000 to Jarablus and others to al-Raj and al-Bab (Aleppo governorate). Over Eid holidays in June and September 2017, Turkish authorities allowed Syrians temporary permits to visit their homes and re-enter Turkey within two weeks. An unknown number remained in Syria. (UNHCR 27/07/2016 & 30/06/2017; Al Monitor 23/06/2017; Hurriyet Daily News 07/08/2017; Daily Star 28/08/2016; Rudaw 13/06/2017)

### **Jordan**

The number of registered Syrian refugees in Jordan has remained relatively stable at over 600,000 since border controls tightened in 2015, however the Jordanian government says it hosts over one million Syrians. As a result, populations have built up along Syria's border with Jordan (in an area known as 'the Berm'). Some 50,000 people remain displaced in two sites, although conflict near the border was creating secondary displacement from Rukban and Hadalat in September 2017. To date, an average of 300 individuals are reported to have been deported or spontaneously returned each month throughout 2017 via the Nasib border crossing. The de-escalation zone in Dar'a is fuelling concerns that more Syrians could be deported or may spontaneously move back. (Jordan Times 01/04/2015; NPM 2017; UNHCR 30/06/2017; Washington Post 27/08/2017)

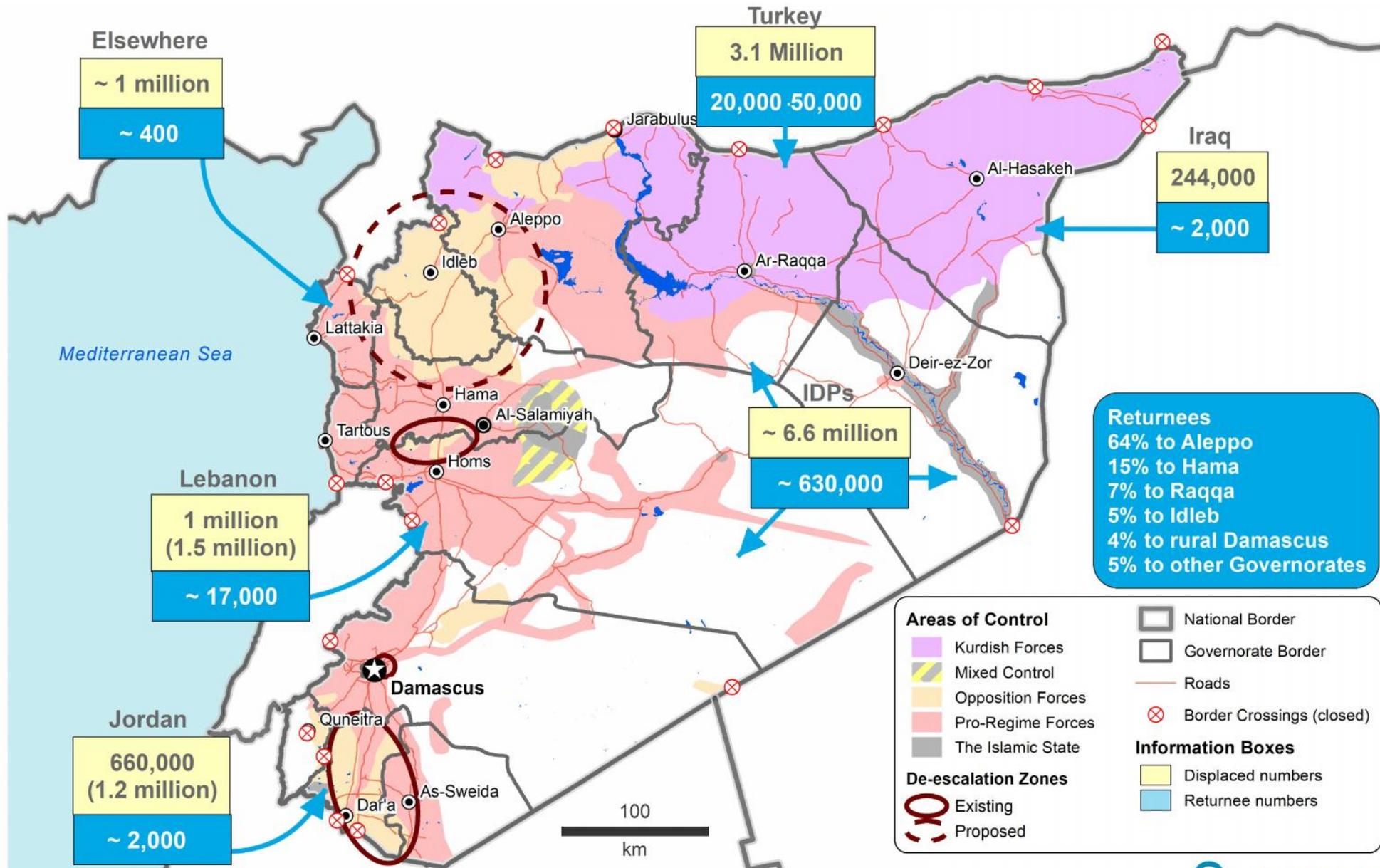
### **Iraq**

The number of Syrian refugees registered in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I) peaked in July 2015 at 252,000 – before the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) introduced tighter entry and resident permit rules. Since then, numbers have remained relatively stable. Between January and end May 2017, almost 1,900 refugees moved back to Syria from KR-I, mostly to Al-Hasakeh governorate. In recent months, the relative stability of KR-I – which has made it a safe haven for Syrian refugees – has deteriorated due to tensions between Erbil and Baghdad over post-Islamic State areas and the prospect of a Kurdish independence referendum. (UNHCR 31/07/2016 & 30/06/2017; Chatham House 04/07/2017; MERIA 2016)

### **Europe**

Europe's response to large inflows of refugees and other migrants in 2015-2016 has involved strengthening its borders, limiting protection and assistance, and promoting relocations, returns to safe countries and deportations. Unlike many Afghans and Iraqis, Syrians are yet to be encouraged or forced to move back to their country of origin from Europe. However, a lack of integration and family reunification prospects, as well as growing hostility to refugees are driving some Syrians to move back informally to Turkey. Meanwhile, other Syrians continue to attempt to reach Europe via both new and established routes: over 7,000 have arrived in 2017 as of September. (European Commission 06/09/2017; Irish Times 06/09/2017; UNHCR 31/08/2017; 31 InfoMigrants 23/06/2017)

# CURRENT SITUATION IN SYRIA: AREAS OF CONTROL AND DISPLACEMENT



Map created by MapAction (2017). Sources: Control Areas from ISW, Movement data from IOM & UNHCR. The depiction and use of boundaries, names and associated data shown here do not imply endorsement or acceptance by MapAction or ACAPS.

## SCENARIOS

### 1 Insecurity in Syria continues; low-level movement to Syria



Security remains fragile within Syria while government and opposition forces continue operations against IS and HTS in some areas. Ceasefires largely hold in the de-escalation zones but they are not fully implemented, lacking international policing, and the boundaries remain undefined. Basic infrastructure and services remain weak across most of the country, particularly in opposition-held areas. Meanwhile, conditions for refugees in neighbouring countries deteriorate as access to employment opportunities and services remain limited and tensions with host communities rise. In Lebanon specifically, the environment becomes increasingly hostile: Hezbollah's recent military successes and political rhetoric in the run up to elections exacerbate a sense of insecurity for refugees. New agreements between armed groups in Lebanon and Syria, combined with incentives from Turkish, and to a lesser extent Jordanian authorities, result in refugees being moved back to Syria.

#### Possible triggers/assumptions

Some or all of the following occur:

- J Prospect of a peace agreement remains remote
- J No significant progress is made in the Astana or Geneva talks
- J De-escalation zones are not properly implemented and remain unsafe and insecure
- J International police force to monitor de-escalation zones is not established
- J Continued high level of insecurity and displacement inside Syria
- J GoS negotiates with key leaders inside neighbouring countries to move Syrians back to Syria
- J The Syrian Democratic Forces led by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) continue to maintain a strong hold in northern Syria
- J Humanitarian funding to neighbouring countries reduces

#### Estimated additional caseload in Syria<sup>1</sup>

Up to 10,000 (a 20% increase from 5,500 to 6,600 people moving back to Syria per month over nine months).

#### Geographic areas of most concern

De-escalation zones, Lebanon, Turkish border areas

#### Impact

**Neighbouring countries:** The vulnerability of refugees in neighbouring countries continues to increase as living conditions continue to deteriorate. Movement away from neighbouring countries is minimal, therefore the strain on local infrastructure does not decrease. In an increasingly hostile environment in neighbouring countries, both the fear and the reality of detention, arrest and eviction becomes more commonplace.

**Syria:** Those moving back to Syria have limited access to services, infrastructure and humanitarian assistance, and many face secondary displacement within Syria. Syria's borders remain officially closed.

#### Humanitarian consequences

Protection concerns inside neighbouring countries worsen and refugees increasingly rely on negative coping mechanisms, as there is no indication of their living situation improving. Both the fear and the reality of arrest, detention and eviction lead to increased psychosocial needs. An increase in the number of refugees being evicted from settlements also leads to greater shelter needs inside neighbouring countries.

#### Priority needs

- J Protection concerns for Syrians in neighbouring countries and those moving back to Syria
- J Shelter, food and employment, especially for those forced back to Syria
- J Continued provision of assistance to those refugees remaining in neighbouring countries
- J Accurate and trustworthy information on the actual situation in Syria is available to refugees

#### Operational constraints

GoS constrains INGO and UN activities in Syria. It remains difficult to monitor evictions and the movement of populations in neighbouring countries, transit and Syria.

<sup>1</sup> See the Methodology section for information on the estimation of additional caseload

## 2 Insecurity in Syria continues; movement to Syria increases



The recapture of ar Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor from IS is hailed as a significant victory by the GoS, which subsequently turns its military attention to Idlib while consolidating the areas under its control elsewhere. Dar'a and Homs de-escalation zones become more established and the conflict in Syria is portrayed by the GoS and international governments as coming to an end. International sympathy for Syrian refugees diminishes and European governments begin to reject Syrian asylum seekers' claims and deport them directly to areas deemed safe. Encouraged by this trend, neighbouring countries start to facilitate or incentivise large-scale movements of refugees back to Syria, predominantly to the de-escalation zones. As donors switch the focus of their funding from neighbouring countries to activities within Syria, assistance to refugees diminishes and forced evictions from informal settlements continue, particularly in Lebanon. Many evictees are forced into de-escalation zones inside Syria and few reach their areas of origin.

### Possible triggers/assumptions

Some or all of the following occur:

- ] Astana talks result in deployment of international policing forces to one or more de-escalation zones
- ] Prospect of a peace deal/political settlement increases
- ] Public services begin to be restored in de-escalation zones
- ] Increased return of IDPs to their areas of origin
- ] GoS/Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) win control of Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor from IS
- ] GoS negotiates with key leaders in neighbouring countries to move Syrians back to Syria
- ] Increasing hostility of neighbouring governments towards refugees (reflected in detention, arrest, attacks, eviction and closure of businesses)
- ] Increased tensions with host communities
- ] A terrorist attack in a neighbouring country
- ] Deterioration of security in neighbouring countries
- ] EU asylum policy changes, resulting in the deportation of rejected asylum seekers to Syria or neighbouring countries
- ] Anti-refugee rhetoric in neighbouring countries grows

- ] Neighbouring country governments further restrict/reduce humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees
- ] Border policies become more flexible, allowing Syrians to temporarily visit Syria
- ] Access to services and employment opportunities decrease in neighbouring countries

### Estimated additional caseload in Syria

Up to 200,000 (a 400% increase from 5,500 to 22,000 people moving back to Syria per month over nine months). IDP movement would also increase significantly.

### Geographic areas of most concern

De-escalation zones, Lebanese and Turkish border areas

### Impact

Syria: Large-scale forced movement back to Syria occurs in a chaotic and disorganised manner. Humanitarian response capacity in Syria, both internal and cross-border, is overwhelmed in many areas. Momentum generated by the increased movement back to Syria results in the GoS negotiating more large-scale forced movement back with authorities in neighbouring countries. Most refugees move back to areas that are not their place of origin and tensions surface between current residents and new arrivals.

### Humanitarian consequences

Protection concerns are immense. Particularly in government-held territory, reprisals present a threat to people arriving from neighbouring countries, as they are perceived as being deserters of the regime. Humanitarian access remains extremely limited, particularly around Idlib, where insecurity is of the greatest concern, and access to all basic services in Syria is extremely limited. Inside neighbouring countries, the growing threat and fear of deportation causes immense psychosocial strain on refugees. A rise in forced deportations also enables authorities inside neighbouring countries to feel legitimate in closing down more Syrian-run businesses, significantly impacting refugee livelihoods.

### Priority needs

As for scenario 1 and:

- ] Psychosocial support services
- ] Legal assistance to resolve land rights disputes

### Operational constraints

As for scenario 1.

### 3 Security in Syria improves; movement to Syria increases



De-escalation zones are implemented, with significant security provided and some basic services restored. Meanwhile, progress towards a political settlement is made. Improved security and living conditions inside Syria, coupled with a deterioration of conditions in hosting countries, convinces refugees that the chance to build a new life inside Syria, although not necessarily in their areas of origin, outweighs the prospects of long-term displacement in increasingly hostile neighbouring countries. Most spontaneous returns are to de-escalation zones, where fears of reprisals for having fled are thought to be less.

#### Possible triggers/assumptions

Some or all of the following occur:

- J Astana talks result in the deployment of international policing forces to one or more de-escalation zones
- J Public services begin to be restored in de-escalation zones
- J GoS/SDF win control of Raqqqa and Deir-ez-Zor from IS
- J Prospect of a peace deal/political settlement increases
- J Announcement of elections and/or amnesty by GoS
- J Announcement of cessation of conflict by GoS
- J GoS enables access to civil documentation/re-employment
- J Public services begin to be restored in de-escalation zones
- J Increased movement of IDPs to their areas of origin
- J Return movement of refugees starts to be supported and facilitated by more organisations
- J Withdrawal of international military assets from Syrian conflict (except in de-escalation zones)
- J Increased reports of land appropriation by GoS
- J Refugees have access to accurate and trustworthy information on the situation in areas of arrival
- J Freedom of movement is permitted within and outside the de-escalation zones
- J Conflict becomes confined to specific areas
- J Increased humanitarian access
- J Border policies become more flexible, allowing Syrians to temporarily visit Syria

#### Estimated additional caseload in Syria

Up to 500,000 refugees (an increase from 5,500 to 55,000 people moving back to Syria per month over nine months) and over two million IDPs move to safer areas of Syria.

#### Geographic areas of most concern

De-escalation zones

#### Impact

Neighbouring countries: Authorities advocate for more movement back to Syria as the momentum builds and the focus on resilience programmes reduces. EU asylum policies tighten as the Syrian conflict begins to be portrayed as over. Neighbouring countries and GoS begin to negotiate larger-scale planned movements back.

Syria: A rise in the influx of refugees to de-escalation zones is coupled with a far larger influx of IDPs, resulting in a huge demand for public services and competition for shelter. Overcrowding and land/home ownership disputes occur; other tensions manifest in a lack of social cohesion, driving the socio-ethnic restructuring of communities. The need for employment drives urbanisation.

#### Humanitarian consequences

Humanitarian access inside Syria improves, at least within the de-escalation zones, for organisations permitted to work in Syria. The focus of humanitarian funding switches from refugees to people inside Syria, although humanitarian organisations in Syria are initially overwhelmed by the demand for assistance. Humanitarian assistance increases in the de-escalation zones. Smugglers take advantage of the increased demand to move back and the lack of agencies facilitating the movement in a coordinated manner, enhancing risks of trafficking and exploitation. A disproportionate number of women, children and elderly move back to Syria; many men fear reprisals, conscription or trial for avoiding military service. The number of people being forced back also increases.

#### Priority needs

As for scenario 2 and:

- J Shelter needs and reconstruction required in areas of arrival
- J WASH: reconstruction of water and sewage systems, especially in urban areas
- J Health: provision of health services in affected areas pending the rehabilitation of health structures
- J Education: support to re-establish schools
- J Legal assistance to advise on housing, land and property rights
- J Reintegration and livelihoods assistance

#### Operational constraints

Despite improvements access in Syria will remain a challenge.

## 4 Insecurity increases; movement to Syria decreases



The peace processes in Geneva and Astana stall as new offensives, insecurity and targeting of civilian populations results in sudden large-scale internal displacement, triggering a renewed humanitarian crisis inside Syria. While neighbouring countries continue to restrict the entry of Syrians seeking protection, they also do not move refugees back to de-escalation zones and the rhetoric of return to a stabilising Syria subsides. Movement back into Syria effectively reduces to a trickle. Conditions for refugees in hosting countries remain locked in a protracted situation, characterised by inadequate humanitarian and resilience funding as well as heavy reliance on negative coping mechanisms.

### Possible triggers/assumptions

Some or all of the following occur:

- J Syrian government forces launch a large-scale offensive against HTS in Idlib
- J Conflict between Turkish military and Kurdish forces
- J Resurgence of IS or other groups
- J Tensions with host communities decrease
- J Livelihood and economic opportunities for refugees in host countries improve
- J Refugees have access to accurate and trustworthy information on the situation in areas of arrival

### Estimated additional caseload in Syria

Reduction in movement back to Syria but an increase of more than one million displaced from Idlib.

### Geographic areas of most concern

Idlib, all opposition-held areas, Kurdish-held areas

### Impact

Syria: Any Syrian Arab Army (SAA) offensive against HTS in Idlib, or a resurgent IS elsewhere, rapidly results in significant casualties for other opposition groups and the

ceasefires necessary for the de-escalation zones collapse. The resultant insecurity substantially decreases movement back to Syria, while mass displacement from Idlib towards the Turkish border is followed by displacement within and from other de-escalation zones.

Meanwhile, an escalation of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict inside Syria reduces movement from Turkey to Jarablus and increases displacement in northern Syria.

Neighbouring countries: (Similar to scenario 1). The vulnerability of refugees in neighbouring countries continues to increase as living conditions deteriorate. A low number of refugees pursue movement towards Europe via irregular routes, but movement away from neighbouring countries is generally minimal. The strain on local infrastructure does not decrease. In an increasingly hostile environment, both the fear and the reality of detention, arrest and eviction become more commonplace in neighbouring countries.

### Humanitarian consequences

Civilians, including those who have already been forced back to Idlib in 2017, are caught in the conflict. Insecurity reduces humanitarian space and access in many opposition-held areas, further hampering the delivery of assistance. Humanitarian needs in Idlib increase. The few refugees voluntarily moving back are inadequately informed of the risks.

In neighbouring countries, protracted displacement continues to force increasing numbers of refugees to adopt negative coping strategies.

### Priority needs

- J Protection of civilians in conflict areas
- J Expansion of IDP sites and settlements to accommodate newly displaced
- J Shelter, food, health, WASH and protection for the newly displaced
- J Accurate and trustworthy information on the actual situation in Syria available to refugees

### Operational constraints

GoS continues to restrict INGO and UN access inside Syria; access reduces for those already present due to the rise in insecurity, particularly around Idlib. Conflict prevents or reduces access to cross-border assistance/humanitarian corridors.

As neighbouring countries become increasingly intolerant towards refugees they make it more difficult for humanitarian organisations to operate. Donor fatigue worsens as the refugee crisis becomes further protracted; meanwhile, prospects for local integration and resettlement fail to expand quickly enough.

## 5 Sudden mass movements back to Syria



Rapid deterioration of the security situation in one or more countries neighbouring Syria dramatically reduces Syrian refugees' access to protection and assistance, and increases the hostility of host communities. In Syria, de-escalation zones remain in place but are fragile, characterised by equally low levels of protection and services for those in need. Nevertheless, with increasingly limited options, large numbers of Syrian refugees have little choice but to cross involuntarily back into Syria, despite security and protection risks, as well as poor access to services and livelihoods.

### Possible triggers/assumptions

Some or all of the following occur:

- ⌋ A conflict between Israel and Lebanon, affecting refugees
- ⌋ Successful coup in Turkey, leading to the scapegoating of refugees
- ⌋ KR-I independence vote provokes tensions with central government

### Estimated additional caseload in Syria

Up to two million people are displaced back to Syria within a month. A conflict in Lebanon may also cause Lebanese displacement to Syria.

### Geographic areas of most concern

Homs and rural Damascus governorates, Idlib and Aleppo governorates, Al-Hasakeh governorate

### Impact

Although conflict along Lebanon's border with Israel is confined geographically, it has secondary economic and political impacts on refugees across the country. Efforts to force refugees back to Syria subside as other priorities arise, but many Syrians are forced to move around Lebanon in search of safety, increasingly scarce livelihoods and assistance, before eventually moving back to Syria due to a lack of viable alternatives.

Coup leaders' attempts to assert control in Turkey target Syrian refugees, whom they associate with supporters of the previous government. Public scapegoating of refugees worsens the protection environment in areas of large refugee populations and drives them back into Syria. Large-scale movement into northern Syria coupled with diversion of Turkish interests to domestic issues destabilises the areas under its military's control.

KR-I's September 2017 referendum demonstrates strong public and political support for independence. Tensions between Peshmerga forces and Iraqi government forces flare in contested areas across northern Iraq, triggering fear and unrest among the displaced populations in KR-I, and inducing many to move into Al-Hasakeh governorate.

### Humanitarian consequences

Immediate protection and humanitarian needs surge in host countries as needs rise and access becomes constrained. The sudden and unplanned nature of the movement back to Syria leads to urgent needs in difficult to access areas, as well as tensions between existing host and displaced communities.

### Priority needs

- ⌋ Protection will be an overwhelming need both as a direct result of conflict and as a result of mass displacement
- ⌋ Protection of vulnerable refugees from trafficking and exploitation, including forced recruitment
- ⌋ Health, shelter, food and WASH
- ⌋ Psychosocial services

### Operational constraints

In Lebanon, humanitarian agencies retreat or divert programming to support new caseloads of Lebanese IDPs and affected communities.

In Turkey, humanitarian space shrinks further with the remaining international NGOs de-registered.

Large humanitarian presence in KR-I is capable of expanding, but hard-to-access camps in Al-Hasakeh governorate become overwhelmed by new arrivals.

## COMPOUNDING FACTORS

The following developments can occur in parallel to any of the above scenarios and have the potential to significantly change the humanitarian situation.

### Major international conflict

An imminent or actual major international conflict, such as between the US and DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), would divert US, Russian and EU attention away from Syria. This could severely reduce international military presence in Syria and delay the provision of security for the de-escalation zones.

### Major humanitarian crisis

International attention and humanitarian funding could be diverted from Syria to other crises. With severe drought and famine in East Africa, flooding in West Africa and hurricanes in the Caribbean, an additional level 3 crisis could reduce international funding and humanitarian operations for Syrian in 2018.

### Major health outbreak

The outbreak of a major health emergency, such as polio or cholera, inside Syria or in a neighbouring country, risks compounding the severity of humanitarian need in areas where there is a large population of IDPs or refugees.

### UN Security Council does not extend cross-border resolution

UNSC resolution 2332 authorises the delivery of aid without the consent of the Syrian government into opposition-held areas through border crossings in Iraq, Jordan and Turkey. It is due to expire in January 2018. Failure of the UN to agree on an extension of the resolution would significantly impact aid delivery to Syria, including to de-escalation zones.

## STAKEHOLDERS

The following actors are present within Syria

**Syrian Arab Army (SAA)** is composed of the forces that remain loyal to President Assad. Hezbollah, the Lebanese political, military and social organisations, is fighting alongside the SAA.

**Free Syrian Army (FSA)** is a coalition of dozens of armed groups, with the common objective to oust Assad. This is not a homogeneous group, which has at times caused in-fighting.

**Ahrar al Sham** (also known as the Islamic Movement of the Free Men of the Levant) is a coalition of Salafist armed groups. They are ideologically close to the Muslim Brotherhood. Their main objective is the creation of an Islamist government in Syria to replace Assad's government. They often fight alongside the FSA.

**Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)** is an Islamist coalition, including Jabhat Fatah al Sham, formerly known as Jabhat al Nusra. It formally split from al Qaeda in 2016.

**Islamic State (IS)** aims to build a caliphate based in, but not limited to, Iraq and Syria. About two-thirds of its fighters are foreign.

**People's Protection Units (YPG)**: The YPG is a Kurdish armed group, and the main force in the **Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)**. They seek to create an autonomous region in northern Syria, which would include parts of Aleppo, ar Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh governorates, and possibly reach the Mediterranean Sea.

**The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)**: The SDF is a multi-ethnic coalition of armed groups, led by the YPG. The SDF has about 50,000 fighters. On 6 November 2017, the SDF launched an offensive to oust IS from ar Raqqa, and have been steadily advancing since. They besieged the city in late June 2017.

## HOW SCENARIOS CAN BE USED

Scenarios are a set of different ways in which a situation may develop. The aim of scenario building is not to try and accurately predict the future but rather to understand the range of possible futures and then select a few that result in distinct situations with, usually, differing humanitarian outcomes that can:

- J Support strategic planning for agencies and NGOs
- J Identify assumptions underlying anticipated needs and related interventions
- J Enhance the adaptability and design of detailed assessments
- J Influence monitoring and surveillance systems
- J Create awareness, provide early warning, and promote preparedness activities among stakeholders

For more information on how to build scenarios, please see the ACAPS Technical Brief on Scenario Development.

## METHODOLOGY

These scenarios were developed in September 2017, during a one-day workshop in Beirut. Staff from 17 organisations contributed to these scenarios through participation in the workshop or bilateral meetings.

During the workshop, the many variables that could cause change were mapped. By making assumptions as to how these variables might plausibly change, five scenarios were identified. These scenarios were then expanded and the major impact of each scenario and their humanitarian consequences identified.

These scenarios are not considered mutually exclusive; their elements can unfold simultaneously, or one scenario can be part of, or lead to, another scenario.

A list of individual triggers is given on pages 13 and 14. It should be noted that a combination, but not necessarily all, of the triggers are required to reach a scenario.

The estimated caseload for each scenario is an estimate of the additional caseload that could result in Syria should each scenario unfold. They are designed to give an order of magnitude only and are based on the current displacement figures of IDP and refugee movement back to Syria in 2017. The figures for scenario 3 are high, so as to differentiate from scenario 1, but remain small compared to the total number of displaced outside and inside Syria.

### Thank You

ACAPS would like to thank all organisations that provided input to these scenarios: both those who attended the workshop in Beirut and those who contributed via bilateral meetings.

**For additional information or to comment please email: [analysis@acaps.org](mailto:analysis@acaps.org).**

## SCENARIO TRIGGERS

Scenario 1 = Insecurity in Syria continues; low-level movement to Syria

Scenario 2 = Insecurity in Syria continues; movement to Syria increases

Scenario 3 = Security in Syria improves; movement to Syria increases

Scenario 4 = Insecurity increases; movement to Syria decreases

Scenario 5 = Sudden mass movements back to Syria

Compounding factors = CF

### People are likely to be encouraged to go back to Syria if:

The SDF led by the Kurdish YPG continue to maintain a stronghold in northern Syria

Astana talks result in deployment of international policing forces to one or more de-escalation zones

Prospect of peace deal/political settlement increases

Announcement of elections and/or amnesty by GoS

Announcement of cessation of conflict by GoS

GoS enables access to civil documentation/re-employment

Public services begin to be restored in de-escalation zones

Increased movement of IDPs to their areas of origin

GoS/SDF win control of Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor from IS

Withdrawal of international military assets from Syrian conflict (except in de-escalation zones)

Freedom of movement is permitted within and outside the de-escalation zones

Conflict becomes confined to specific areas

Increased humanitarian access

Return movement starts to be supported and facilitated by more organisations

### People are likely to be forced back to Syria if:

Humanitarian funding to neighbouring countries does not increase

GoS negotiates with key leaders inside neighbouring countries to move Syrians back to Syria

Deterioration of security in neighbouring countries

Increasing hostility of neighbouring governments to refugees (detention, arrest, attacks, eviction)

### 1 2 3 4 5 Background information

X

Syrian Kurdish groups are fighting to establish an autonomous or independent region in northern Syria. They have been in *de facto* control of Kurdish zones since government forces withdrew mid-2012.

X X

Astana talks began in January 2017 and the 'de-escalation plan' was announced during the fourth round of talks in May. The July talks failed to agree on the details of the de-escalation zones. The latest round took place in September. Although the final de-escalation zone in Idlib was agreed, it is too early to determine the extent of its implementation.

X X

X

X

X

X X

The 'de-escalation plan' stipulates that the GoS is to restore public services.

X X

Since the beginning of 2017 there has been an increase in IDP return movement. 93% of over 600,000 returns registered between January and August were IDPs. This amounts to same total for all of 2016.

X X

The battle for Raqqa began in July 2017. As of September, the SDF hold 60% of the city. Meanwhile the GoS and the SDF are fighting IS in the city of Deir-ez-Zor.

X

X

X

X

X

X

X X

X

X

	1	2	3	4	5	Background information
Neighbouring country governments further restrict/reduce humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees		X				
Access to services and employment opportunities decrease in neighbouring countries						
Increased tensions with host communities		X				
EU asylum policy changes resulting in the deportation of rejected asylum seekers to Syria or neighbouring countries		X				
Anti-refugee rhetoric in neighbouring countries grows		X				
Border policies become more flexible allowing Syrians to temporarily visit Syria		X	X			
Conflict between Israel and Lebanon affecting refugees					X	Tensions are growing between Israel and Hezbollah. Israeli military forces have become increasingly active along the border with Lebanon in recent months.
Successful coup in Turkey scapegoating refugees					X	
KR-I vote for independence provokes tensions with central government					X	
<b>People are likely to be deterred from going back to Syria if:</b>						
No significant progress is made in the Astana or Geneva talks		X				
Prospect of peace agreement remains remote		X				
De-escalation zones are not properly implemented and remain unsafe and insecure		X				
International police force to monitor de-escalation zones not established		X				The de-escalation plan stipulates that foreign troops are to be deployed in order to police de-escalation zones.
Continued high level of insecurity and displacement inside Syria		X				
Humanitarian funding to neighbouring countries increases		X		X		
Livelihood and economic opportunities for refugees in host countries improve				X		
Syrian government forces launch a large-scale offensive against HTS in Idlib				X		
Conflict between Turkish military and Kurdish forces				X		
Resurgence of IS				X		
Cross-border resolution not extended by Security Council					X	The resolution authorises the delivery of aid without the consent of the GoS to opposition-held areas via four border crossings from Iraq, Jordan and Turkey. It is due to expire in January 2018.
Tensions between refugees and host communities decrease					X	
<b>People may be encouraged to go or deterred from going back to Syria if:</b>						
Refugees have access to accurate and trustworthy information on situation in areas of arrivals			X	X		
Increased reports of land appropriation by GoS			X			The GoS is reportedly already appropriating land as plans for reconstruction and stabilisation gain momentum.