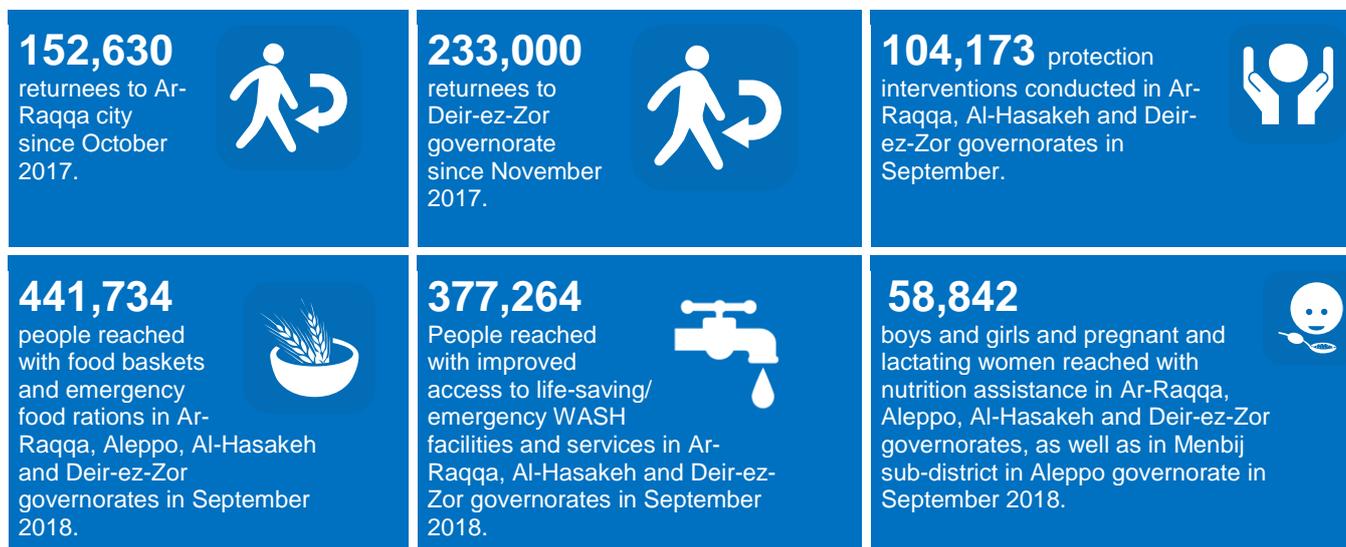




This report is produced by the OCHA Syria Crisis offices with the contribution of all sectors in the hubs and at the Whole of Syria (WoS) level. The situation overview covers the period from 1 October- 31 October 2018. The next report will be issued on or around 5 December 2018.

## Highlights

- The United Nations (UN) and partners have significant concerns for the civilian population impacted by recent fighting in south-east Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. At least 10,000 civilians reportedly remain trapped in the ISIL-controlled Hajin enclave in southern rural Deir-ez-Zor facing severe protection risks, and many of the estimated 27,000 civilians displaced since June continue to live in dire conditions, with some dangerously close to frontlines.
- Despite considerable challenges in accessing areas of displacement due to insecurity and geographic isolation, local UN humanitarian partners have continued to provide assistance to IDPs in the Gharanij and Bahra areas during the reporting period. This includes multi-sector assistance provided to 5,000 IDPs.
- During October there have been reports of disruption to education and life-saving health and nutrition programmes supported by the UN in Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh governorates due to interference by local authorities. The UN and partners continue to uphold the importance of independent humanitarian action driven exclusively by needs and calls for renewed access for people to critical education, health and nutrition services.
- As winter approaches there is an urgent need for increased winterization assistance to support the IDP population in northeast Syria. As of the end of October the shelter/NFI winterization plan for Syria required an additional US\$19.7 million (30 per cent of overall appeal). This support is particularly critical for IDPs living in sites, where many people are living in tents, some of them worn out. Over the reporting period, adverse weather conditions reportedly led to the destruction of a number of tents across the region.
- Against the backdrop of an unprecedented drought in northeast Syria, there are significant concerns around the food security and livelihoods situation particularly of people who live in Al-Hasakeh Governorate and rely on agriculture as a primary source of income.
- Reports of new returns to Ar-Raqqa city over the past month have been limited, reinforcing the downward trend witnessed over recent months as conditions remain inconducive for returns due to high levels of destruction and explosive hazard contamination as well as limited availability of basic services in the city as winter approaches.



## Situation Overview

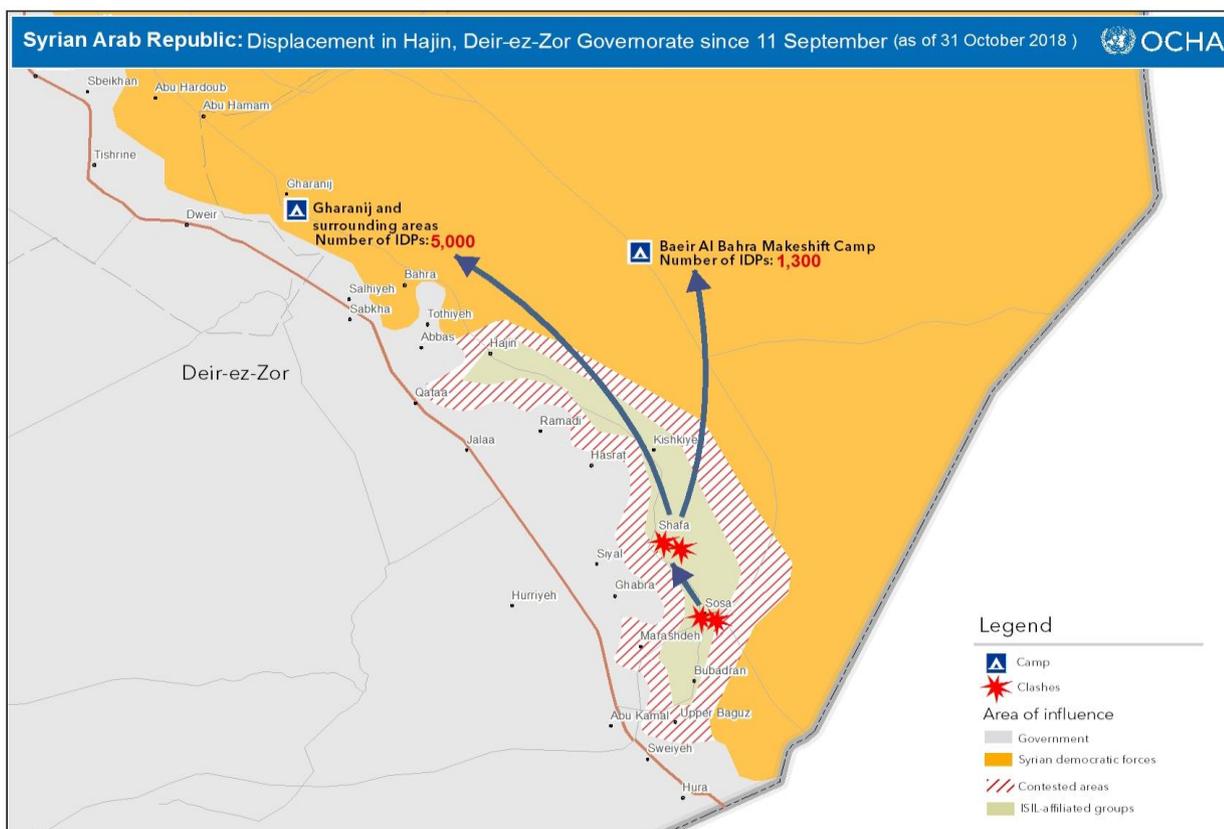
During the reporting period the third phase of the Al-Jazeera Storm military operation continued in south-east Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. The operation was launched on 11 September by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), backed by the International Coalition Forces (ICF), with the aim to clear ISIL elements from their last remaining strongholds in the Hajin enclave along the east bank of the Euphrates River. On the 31 October the SDF announced the

suspension of its military operations against ISIL in eastern rural Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. Overall, an estimated 15,000 people, including 5,000 ISIL fighters and their families remain in the Hajin enclave

There has been a marked escalation in hostilities during the reporting period, with numerous reports of air and ground-based strikes, allegedly resulting in scores of civilian deaths. There was reportedly a spike in hostilities between the 18-21 October, with reports of multiple strikes which resulted in the damage or destruction of civilian infrastructure as well as civilian casualties, including children. In addition, reports of restrictions on civilian movements continue to be reported, preventing civilians from both exiting ISIL-controlled areas and limiting movements in areas that have come under SDF control.

Despite a continuation of high intensity hostilities during October, the number of newly displaced people from the ISIL-controlled Hajin enclave to surrounding SDF controlled areas has been minimal and has largely been localized. However, reports from the field indicate that there are serious barriers to civilian movement in communities in Hajin and neighbouring sub-districts of Sur, Basira, Thiban, and Susat – women and girls reportedly being the most affected by the obstacles to basic services like health or water and sanitation. Since the beginning of the latest phase of military operations in September, some 7,000 civilians have reportedly been displaced from the Hajin-enclave to SDF controlled areas. The situation of these IDPs is of particular concern, with many sheltering in makeshift camps where conditions are reportedly dire due to limited access to humanitarian assistance and services. Indeed, insecurity remains both a principal barrier to humanitarian actors scaling up the response in these areas and a source of significant protection risks to the civilian population. According to multiple sources, on the 11 October ISIL fighters reportedly attacked the Hajin makeshift camp, reportedly resulting in the death and injury of civilians. During this attack ISIL allegedly destroyed tents and abducted an unconfirmed number of IDPs- reportedly more than 100 people. Some of those people who were abducted have since reportedly been killed. These families were reportedly transported to an ISIL-controlled village inside the Hajin enclave. At the time of writing, the Hajin makeshift camp remained empty.

Of the 7,000 IDPs displaced since the 11 September, some 5,000 are reportedly being hosted by local communities in Gharanij town as well as Bahra and surrounding villages. Some 1,300 people are also estimated to be sheltering in the makeshift Baeir Al-Bahra IDP site in the desert, approximately 15 km from Bahra village and 15 km north of Hajin. Overall there are an estimated 15 informal settlements hosting IDPs in the Gharanij and Bahra areas. The UN plans to conduct further joint assessments with partners and monitors to provide a more reliable estimate of the total number of IDPs and settlements in these areas and to identify priority needs.



The number of people residing in IDP sites across northeast Syria remains largely unchanged from the previous month. According to humanitarian sources, some 23,400 IDPs (4,850 families) still reside in the four main IDP sites (Ein Eissa, Mabrouka, Al Hole, Areesha), with a prevalence of children under 12 of 47 per cent and children under

18 of 61 per cent. In certain sites, such as Mabrouka, the majority of IDPs reportedly originate from Deir-ez-Zor. During October the challenging situation for IDPs across sites in northeast Syria has been exacerbated by the inclement and increasingly wintery weather conditions. On the 12 October a severe sandstorm reportedly damaged IDP sites in both Deir-ez-Zor and Al-Hasakeh governorates. Material damage was reported to the structures in Al-Hole Camp in Al-Hasakeh, while damage to tents was reported across multiple IDP sites in southeast Deir-ez-Zor which hosts many of those people recently displaced from the Hajin enclave. The sandstorm also reportedly resulted in increased incidences of respiratory problems, particularly affecting children, the elderly and those with pre-existing respiratory conditions such as asthma. On the 25 October torrential rains and strong winds also reportedly inflicted damage on several IDP sites in areas of rural Ar-Raqqa. Some thirty tents were reportedly destroyed in a makeshift camp near to Al-Rasheed and Al-Jayef villages, west of Ar-Raqqa city. In addition, Abu Khashab camp was reportedly flooded, with UNHCR providing replacement tents, relocating shelters towards areas at reduced flood risk and providing full winterization assistance,

As winter approaches there is an urgent need to scale up winter aid distribution (including sleeping bags, thermal blankets, winter clothes, plastic sheeting, winter NFI kits, heaters, stoves and fuel), particularly given the large number of IDPs living in inadequate shelters in IDP sites which are unable to withstand the harsh winter conditions. During the reporting period dozens of IDPs living in Areesha camp in southern rural Al-Hasakeh reportedly protested around the lack of winter items distributed. Given the harsh winter conditions in northern areas of Syria as well as the large number of IDPs, northeast Syria is a priority geographic area for winterization assistance. Area based assessments and planning have been conducted, and while most areas of NES will receive winterization support, planning from UN and INGOs to date is largely focused on winter NFIs, with major gaps in emergency and winter shelter support. As of the end of October the Shelter-NFI sector winterization plan for Syria remained underfunded by US\$19.7 million (or 30.5 per cent of the overall appeal).

In addition to winterization assistance there is also an urgent need to scale up livelihood support, specifically to those families who rely on agricultural as their primary source of income. Over the past year northeast Syria has witnessed an unprecedented drought which has had significant implications on the wheat harvest in Al-Hasakeh Governorate. Only 1.2 million tons of wheat was harvested in Al-Hasakeh this year, the lowest yield since 1989 and only 30 per cent of the pre-crisis average yield of 4.1 million tons. With some 45 per cent of Syria's wheat cultivated in Al-Hasakeh, the drought could have national implications on standard food basket prices and the food/ nutrition status of vulnerable groups.

While multiple infectious disease outbreaks continue to be reported across northeast Syria, the number of new cases recorded during the reporting period has declined. Over the last month the number of new typhoid cases has reduced from approximately 92 in September to 20 in October. This outbreak is thought to be due to the consumption of unsafe water and follows the ongoing acute bloody diarrhea outbreak in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. Between 1-15 October a total of 392 new cases of acute bloody diarrhea were reported, 74 of which were reported in Ar-Raqqa Governorate, 187 in Al-Hasakeh Governorate and 131 in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. While the outbreak continues, the number of new cases recorded continues to decline.

On 18 April, the Directorate of School Health reported a measles outbreak particularly affecting school-aged children, with a total of 139 new suspected cases of measles reported during between 1 and 15 October, 36 of which were in Ar-Raqqa Governorate, 35 of which were in Al-Hasakeh Governorate and 68 of which were in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. The overall prevalence of new measles cases also continues to decline.

The number of cases of leishmaniasis also continues to decrease. In January 2018 approximately 1,400 new cases of leishmaniasis were on average reported each week. By September this had decreased to approximately 220 new cases per week. In the first half October some 441 new cases of leishmaniasis were reported 162 of which were in Ar-Raqqa Governorate, 141 of which were in Al Hasakeh Governorate and 138 of which were in Deir-ez-Zor. Leishmaniasis has largely spread due to a lack of healthcare and health actors operating in affected areas.

During October, increasing reports were received of disruption to education and health services in Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh governorates. On the 24 October the Kurdish Self-Administration (KSA) reportedly closed four Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs) and immunization services centres supported by UNICEF and WHO. On 25 October a number of health and nutrition clinics treating cases of severe and acute malnutrition in Ar-Raqqa city were also closed. In addition, school attendance and access to education has been affected in Al-Hasakeh following the reported decision by the KSA to halt all buses transporting school children to and from KSA areas to attend GoS schools that are teaching the Syrian Government curriculum. In Al-Hasakeh, more than 380 schools are affected by the restrictions, preventing almost 60,000 students from accessing their schools on a daily basis. Similarly, in Qamishli, the attendance rate has dropped by 45 per cent.

## Humanitarian Response

Sustained access to the civilian population displaced by ongoing hostilities in the vicinity of the Hajin area remains challenging due to a combination of insecurity, difficult terrain and distance from operational hubs. However, humanitarian partners have been able to provide assistance to people living in areas around Gharanij and Baer Al-Bahra which are located further away from the frontlines and less exposed to the effect of ongoing hostilities. Assessments were conducted in some IDP settlements during the reporting period, identifying an urgent need for food rations, health interventions, nutrition supplies (both for children and pregnant and lactating women) and WASH services.

During October two local UN partners were able to respond to IDPs across multiple locations in the Hajin area (including those IDPs sheltering with host communities in the Gharanij area as well as in some of the makeshift camps closer to the frontlines), providing multi-sector assistance to an estimated 5,000 IDPs through a one-time distribution. In terms of WASH this distribution included 200 family hygiene kits and 96,000 aqua tablets. Preparations also began to install six water tanks. In terms of food and nutrition, some 1,800 food rations were distributed (300 in the Hajin makeshift settlement, 800 in Gharanij and 700 in Baer Al-Bahra), while an estimated 1,900 children under five as well as pregnant and lactating women were provided with 125 cartons of high energy biscuits and 50 cartons of PlumpyDoz. A mobile medical team has also been visiting IDP sites three times a week, providing consultations, medicine, paramedic services as well as mental health and psychosocial support.

Some local NGOs and international NGOs are also providing a sustained response to an estimated 2,900 IDPs sheltering at the Abu Khashab informal settlement providing a variety of assistance including hygiene kits, food rations and cooked meals. In addition, basic services such as water provision and health care are being provided, with a local health partner supporting a health clinic.

The response to the various infectious disease outbreaks reported in northeast Syria is also ongoing. Between the 7 and 11 October the Ministry of Health, in coordination with WHO and UNICEF, conducted a vaccination campaign in Al-Hasakeh Governorate. The campaign reportedly reached some 230,000 children including those living in IDP sites as well as rural and urban areas. In addition, following the confirmation of the circulating Vaccine-Derived Poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2) outbreak in Syria on 3 June 2017, the Outbreak Response Assessment (OBRA) team conducted its second mission to Syria between 29 September and 5 October. Following a detailed assessment of available evidence, the OBRA team has recommended that WHO formally declare the outbreak as over pending the laboratory analysis of all specimens collected up to 21 September 2018.

In terms of health care capacity inside Ar-Raqqa, a WHO mission to Ar-Raqqa city during September 2018 to assess the surgical and trauma response capacity of all functioning hospitals in the city or within two hours' drive of the city identified 'acute shortages of all levels of health care services in Ar-Raqqa city'. Across northeast Syria the WHO Health Resources Availability Monitoring System (HeRAMS) noted an acute lack of public health capacity, with only two of the 16 public hospitals fully functioning. Of the 278-public health centres across northeast Syria, only one is considered fully functional, with 103 considered partially functional and the rest not functioning.

Northeast Syria NGOs continue to scale up humanitarian assistance in Ar-Raqqa city where 11 NGOs and many Syrian NGOs are implementing programmes. These NGOs are also providing assistance in Deir-ez-Zor. NGOs are currently in the process of finalizing winterization plans, including cash and in-kind response across northeast Syria in key response locations.

## Access

In October, UN agencies transported humanitarian supplies by road to Qamishli via 91 trucks (1 UNICEF and 90 WFP) from Aleppo, Damascus, Latakia and Tartous governorates. During the same period, UN agencies transported food supplies by road to Deir-ez-Zor via 23 trucks (4 UNHCR, 2 UNICEF, 16 WFP and 1 WHO) from Damascus, Homs and Qamishli governorates. Organizations were able to deliver assistance to Qamishli and Deir-ez-Zor without significant delays during the month of October.

Northeast Syria NGOs continued to support service delivery and distribute supplies across northeast Syria, without major access impediments to most areas during this period. As mentioned in the previous section, access to areas of south-east Deir-ez-Zor which have recently witnessed displacement and hostilities remains challenging for NGOs as well as UN agencies and their local implementing partners.

## Protection

During the reporting period, the marked escalation of hostilities between the SDF and ISIL in Eastern Deir-ez-Zor heightened the protection concerns for the civilian population who remain in the ISIL-controlled Hajin pocket. There have been numerous reports from multiple sources of air and ground-based strikes, allegedly resulting in civilian deaths.

The freedom of movement of civilians has remained a critical protection concern during the reporting period. Despite the reported escalation in hostilities, the number of newly displaced people from ISIL-controlled Hajin to surrounding SDF-controlled areas has been relatively limited in October. This low-level of displacement may be in part due to the imposition of restrictions on freedom of movement. At the same time, there continue to be significant concerns around screening procedures and the proximity of makeshift camps to the frontlines. Concerns around the proximity of makeshift camps to frontlines have been exacerbated by the reported 11 October attack on the Hajin makeshift camp, which reportedly resulted in civilian deaths, injuries and abductions.

The UN and partners have expressed significant concerns around the proximity of some of these IDP sites/ gathering points to frontlines and have advocated with Kurdish entities – including through the Coalition - for several safeguarding measures to be implemented. Recommendations included (a) the necessity for screening points and mustering points to be as far as possible from frontlines to avoid direct attack and be removed from the range of ground strikes; (b) to remove any type of heavy military installations from the proximity of IDP sites/ spontaneous gatherings, to maintain distinction and reduce the threat to civilians; (c) to allow families – many of whom are women and children – to move freely to safer areas further north (e.g. towards Gharanij) where several of them may have relatives and acquaintances, and may benefit from hosting arrangements as well as enjoy greater access to markets, health services and humanitarian assistance (although reports indicate that some IDPs prefer to stay closer to home despite insecurity, while others lack the means or face restrictions which prevent them from moving towards Gharanij or further north) ; (d) for the SDF to follow the shared SOPs for implementing security processes (in cases where there is a security imperative for such screening), including avoiding the confiscation of documents at screening points.

Across northeast Syria concerns around the situation of civilians residing in IDP sites continues. Conditions in many sites have reportedly deteriorated against a backdrop of challenging weather conditions as well as decreasing assistance. This has fuelled anxiety amongst the resident population. There is a concern that the lower assistance may further increase recourse to harmful coping strategies such as child labour, early marriage, child begging, and recruitment. In the meantime, population movements in and out of sites remains regulated, particularly in the IDP sites located in Al-Hasakeh Governorate, and exit from the camps is bound by bureaucratic requirements, including those related to the sponsorship process.

An organised process of return continues from all IDP sites, with the overall trend of return slowing, likely due to the approaching winter season. However, concerns remain that the decision to return may be determined by the deteriorating situation in the sites and the diminishing levels of assistance. According to consultations, some of the returnees do not have a specific destination in mind when they embark on their southward journeys towards Deir-ez-Zor. Protection actors continue their advocacy and active vigilance to deter confiscation of NFIs from the returning families. In addition, protection actors continue to advocate with the site authorities to inform departing IDPs of the status of their confiscated personal documentation and to ensure it is returned to them before departure from the site. According to reports, departing IDPs continue to pay for the Asayeesh escorts along the routes.

Protection actors continue to support a variety of protection activities in the IDP sites, with service and facilities. Child protection actors are strengthening already ongoing efforts in assessing the presence and needs of separated and unaccompanied children in the Al Hole IDP site with plans to do the same in the Areesha site in the near future. On a positive note, it appears that in the Ain Issa site the administration has changed the procedures for certifying a marriage in order to deter the phenomenon of early marriages. To register a marriage, the camp administration now requires parents' presence, and not simply the presence of the bride and the groom with two witnesses.

Coordination efforts amongst protection actors in the sites continue. During the reporting period partners conducted periodic meetings in Al Hole and Areesha, with the aim of improving information sharing and strengthening referral mechanisms. In addition, a dedicated technical child protection meeting took place amongst Syria-based partners in Qamishli. The capacity of partners on the ground including, the lack of expertise in structured psychosocial support or case management as well as the lack of specialised rehabilitation interventions for children formerly recruited, continue to be identified as critical gaps in child protection.

A gradual expansion of protection activities in Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor cities has been reported. Some additional INGO partners started operating in Kobani, Salouk, Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor. In addition, a child protection partner established a child friendly space and a mobile team in the Al-Meshleb neighbourhood in Ar-Raqqa

to reach vulnerable children and parents. In Deir-ez-Zor protection partners are largely present in the west of the Governorate. In Deir-ez-Zor city, protection partners are able to deliver various protection services (legal aid/ civil documentation support), child protection, and GBV-integrated reproductive health and GBV). Concerns remain with regards the absence of adequate services in locations near areas of active hostilities.

Explosive hazards continue to cause casualties on a weekly basis in contaminated, hazardous locations throughout Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor. From data available to humanitarian actors operating in northeast Syria, which may be incomplete, the number of victims from explosive accidents appears to have decreased in places like -Ar-Raqqa city since November 2017. This is possibly due to increased risk education provided by humanitarian organisations, clearance operations, informal clearance and diminishing returns. However, it remains a significant concern and explosive hazard contamination still poses a major protection issue for IDPs and returnees in these areas. For instance, 580 suspected explosive hazards were reported in Deir-ez-Zor since 2016 and the area remains heavily contaminated, especially in areas south of Shadadah, Markada and Kisreh sub-districts. While the levels of explosive hazard contamination have been identified as major obstacles to the humanitarian response by NGOs operating in the northeast, it is hoped that clearance capacity will be scaled up in the coming year.

Between August and September 2018, risk education on explosive hazards was delivered to over 81,000 beneficiaries in Ar-Raqqa, Deir-ez-Zor and Al-Hasakeh. Some 35 per cent of recipients were in Ar-Raqqa sub-district (due to the scale of the explosive hazard contamination threat reported in the area) while 32 per cent of beneficiaries were located in Ras al-Ain, Ain Issa and Deir-ez-Zor sub-districts.

## Cross-Cutting Operational Challenges

Humanitarian actors face significant challenges in responding to needs in northeast Syria. These challenges include:

- **Access and insecurity:** Access to vulnerable communities remains challenging due to a lack of project approvals and a continued ISIL threat among others. Areas where needs are assumed to be acute, particularly in East and South-East Deir-ez-Zor, remain out of reach for humanitarian actors.
- **High levels of explosive hazard contamination:** The contamination levels in areas that shifted control continues to be considered very high, particularly in Ar-Raqqa city and on Deir-ez-Zor roads and towns, although all population centres and rural areas, more generally where there were military operations or armed groups, are also of concern. In addition, due protracted interruption of humanitarian assistance and services in the IDP sites IDPs may decide to return to areas of Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor governorates where their safety – particularly from explosive hazards – can be at risk.
- **Policy environment:** Although there have been some improvements, humanitarian actors remain concerned for the policies being implemented by local authorities with regards to the treatment of the displaced population, particularly those subjected to restricted freedom of movement and confiscation of personal documentation, more frequent in certain areas. The intermittent bureaucratic impediments to operate in IDP sites and conduct certain activities are also of concern for humanitarian actors as it hinders planning, implementation and predictable provision of services to the population. The process of return needs to remain fully voluntary, safe and well informed. It should not be triggered by sub-standard living conditions, lack of assistance or constrained freedom of movement.
- **Scalability:** Although the ability to scale up assistance and local capacity remain limited, the capacity of local actors continues to increase, creating opportunities to scaling up assistance and service delivery in Ar-Raqqa city and Deir-ez-Zor.
- **Funding limitations:** Additional funding is essential particularly in view of seasonal needs which require timely interventions. In the context of northeast Syria, additional funding is needed to scale up winterization assistance to those people targeted under the Shelter/ Non-Food Items (S-NFI) winterization plan. At the same time, in view of an unprecedented drought which has affected northeast Syria, additional funding is also urgently needed to support critical seasonal livelihood activities, particularly through the provision of key agricultural inputs.

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