



Rapid Protection Monitoring Report:

Evacuation of Al Wa'er, Homs Governorate

Background Information on Al Wa'er

Al Wa'er neighborhood, located in the west of Homs city, has been directly impacted by active hostilities since the beginning of the Syrian conflict. On 7 February 2016, the Government of Syria (GoS) began enforcing a siege that lasted over one year, until the first wave of evacuations began on 18 March 2017.

Methodology

This update is based on information collected by three members of the Protection Cluster, from April 2 to 4, 2017. A total of 11 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted (7 FGDs with 49 women and 4 FGDs with 20 men). In addition, 89 key informant interviews (73F / 16M) were conducted during the same period. 11% of the key informants had a disability. Nearly all participants were in Al-Ikhwan community of Maarrat Tamsrin sub-district of Idleb district and governorate. Remaining participants were interviewed in Mardikh, Kafr Jalis, central Idlib, Sheikh Baher and Maarrat al-Ikhwan communities.

85% of key informants self-identified as civilians, 3% as combatant, and 12% did not answer. The participants in the FGDs self-identified as civilians. Information about association of civilians with armed groups cannot be verified. 55% of participants identified themselves as housewives, whereas 27% stated they were unemployed and 2% were government employees.

Situation in Al Wa'er Prior to the Evacuation

Freedom of Movement: Employees of the GoS received special permission to leave Al Wa'er and travel to work. These individuals were able to bring in goods such as fuel, food items, cigarettes and medicine as they assured local authorities that the goods would be sold at a reasonable price. Students, teachers and those with written proof that

they are employed outside of Al Wa'er were able to leave the neighborhood. Other individuals in Al Wa'er were not afforded freedom of movement. They were unable to leave the besieged neighborhood.

Access to Physical Safety: The GoS intensified airstrikes between January 2017 and March 2017. Households interviewed reported that the strikes affected almost every building and killed both men and women: *"The barrel bombs were thrown on us like rain."* The strikes created a large number of IDPs. Families sought shelter with their friends, neighbors, and family members.

Access to Health Services: Medical care was limited during the besiegement. Households reported that there was only one functional hospital in Al Wa'er, which was hit by airstrikes but continued to operate. Doctors were not available at the hospital, and only one nurse remained, who responded to critical cases. There was a team of paramedics that responded to other war injuries; however, they did not have access to needed drugs, including painkillers. *"They would beg for death; there were no drugs to ease the pain."* The drugs that were available were very expensive, and individuals took out debts to pay the exorbitant prices. There was no access to required medical supplies. In fact, individuals reported that hospital medical staff resorted to re-using needles and washing them with water between uses.

Access to Education: Children continued to access school during the besiegement. However, in the last three months, airstrikes hit and damaged schools. The schools ceased to operate and parents kept children at home as a measure to ensure their safety.

Access to Basic Needs and Utilities: Households reported that there was electricity for approximately one hour per day in the beginning of the besiegement. However, electricity was no longer available during the last three months. Phone and internet networks continued to function. Residents reported that they had access to water for a few hours per day in quantities, which was insufficient for their daily needs. Fuel was prioritized for heating and running generators and was no longer used for vehicles. The price of fuel was prohibitively expensive but it was available

for purchase from the GoS employees. Mothers reported that they did not have access to diapers and had to use old clothing. Young children were often wrapped in blankets because they did not have access to sufficient warm clothes.

Access to Food: There were widespread reports of food shortages and concern of malnourishment. While limited food was available inside Al Wa'er, often families could not afford it.

The last aid convoy entered Al Wa'er on 20 September 2016; however, it was not sufficient to meet the needs of the population. Infants were particularly impacted by the limited access to food as respondents noted. Parents prepared infant food using rice and water which did not meet their nutritional needs. The table below indicates costs before and during the besiegement of the neighborhood. (These prices are not a result of market surveys. They are reported by the participants in the FGDs.)

Prices in Syrian Pounds	Infant Formula ½ kg	Eggs	Bread	Flour 1kg	Rice 1Kg
Before the siege	500	110	200	250	200
During the siege	1200	1500	3000	1700	1700

Access to Documentation: Residents were unable to obtain new documents from the GoS due to the movement restrictions during the besiegement period.

The Evacuation

The evacuation was negotiated by the local authorities and it was reported that civilians felt they had no say in the negotiations. The evacuations took place over a series of weeks. The first one was on 18 March where evacuees were transferred to Aleppo Governorate. The following information focuses on the evacuation on 1 April.

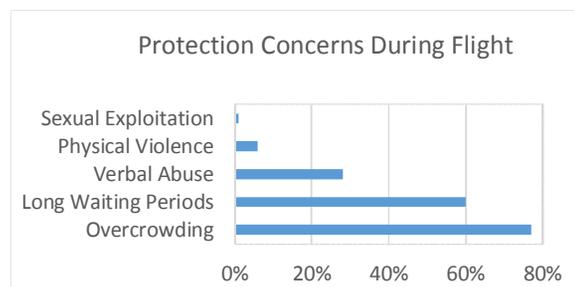
Loss of Documentation: The GoS gathered individuals and took copies of the residents' documents. 21% of individuals reported that their documents were taken or copied by armed forces during the displacement. 12% reported that they were unable to take their civil documents with them. A

number of families reported that their documents were destroyed when their homes were hit by the airstrikes, or they lost their documents prior to the evacuation. Those without documentation had to be approved by a four-member committee from the local authorities to confirm their identity.

Reasons for Staying in Al Wa'er or Leaving: The vast majority of men between 18 and 45 agreed to be evacuated, fearing of being drafted into the GoS army, while it appears men over the age of 45 chose to remain due to concerns related to living in camps or due to concerns of insecurity in Idlib. Concerns related to loss of property and/or occupation were also reported by men and women choosing to stay in Al Wa'er.¹

Accessing Evacuation Buses: Certain groups experienced difficulty in accessing the evacuation buses. 51% of the individuals interviewed reported that the elderly persons were unable to join the buses. 7% reported that female-headed households could not join, followed by separated and unaccompanied children.

Protection Risks Faced During Evacuation

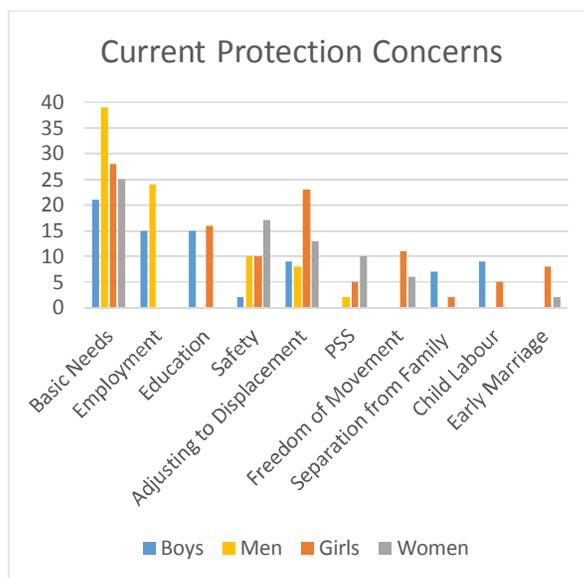


Overcrowding, long waiting periods and verbal and physical abuse were commonly reported incidents. 61% of participants reported having experienced overcrowding while boarding the buses and 47% experienced long waiting periods. 13 participants reported having experienced

physical violence either during the flight or while boarding the bus. 19% of the interviewed evacuees reported being separated from their family members during the evacuation process due to priority being given to vulnerable groups. However, all but one noted that they were reunited upon arrival to Idlib. 19% of participants reported that they encountered mines and explosive hazards on their way to their current location.

Protection Risks Faced Post-Evacuation

Challenges associated with the living conditions in the IDP site and lack of basic needs were widely reported problems by those displaced from Al Wa'er. All groups – men, women, boys and girls—reported lack of access to basic needs as the number one risk for them at the present time. For men, the unavailability of work was also a major concern. Women expressed difficulty in trying to make their children feel safe in the present conditions.



Findings as recorded by the organization were used to corroborate findings reflected in this report.

Psychological pressure, restriction of freedom and movement in the IDP site environment after evacuation were additional risks reported by women and girls. Both boys and girls experienced difficulty in adjusting to their new life in the camps and displacement conditions. Respondents reported that boys and girls fear separation from family members due to the conflict situation and difficult living conditions in the camps. Girls experienced challenges in adjusting to camp life more than any other demographic group. Risk of exploitation, child labor and early marriage were expressed as additional risks boys and girls face.

Additionally, IDPs reported concerns about health and hygiene in Sa'eed IDP site. IDPs reported concern about contagious diseases due to poor hygiene conditions and presence of pests in the camp. Concerns of cross-contamination were noted about the close placement of kitchen and bathroom facilities.

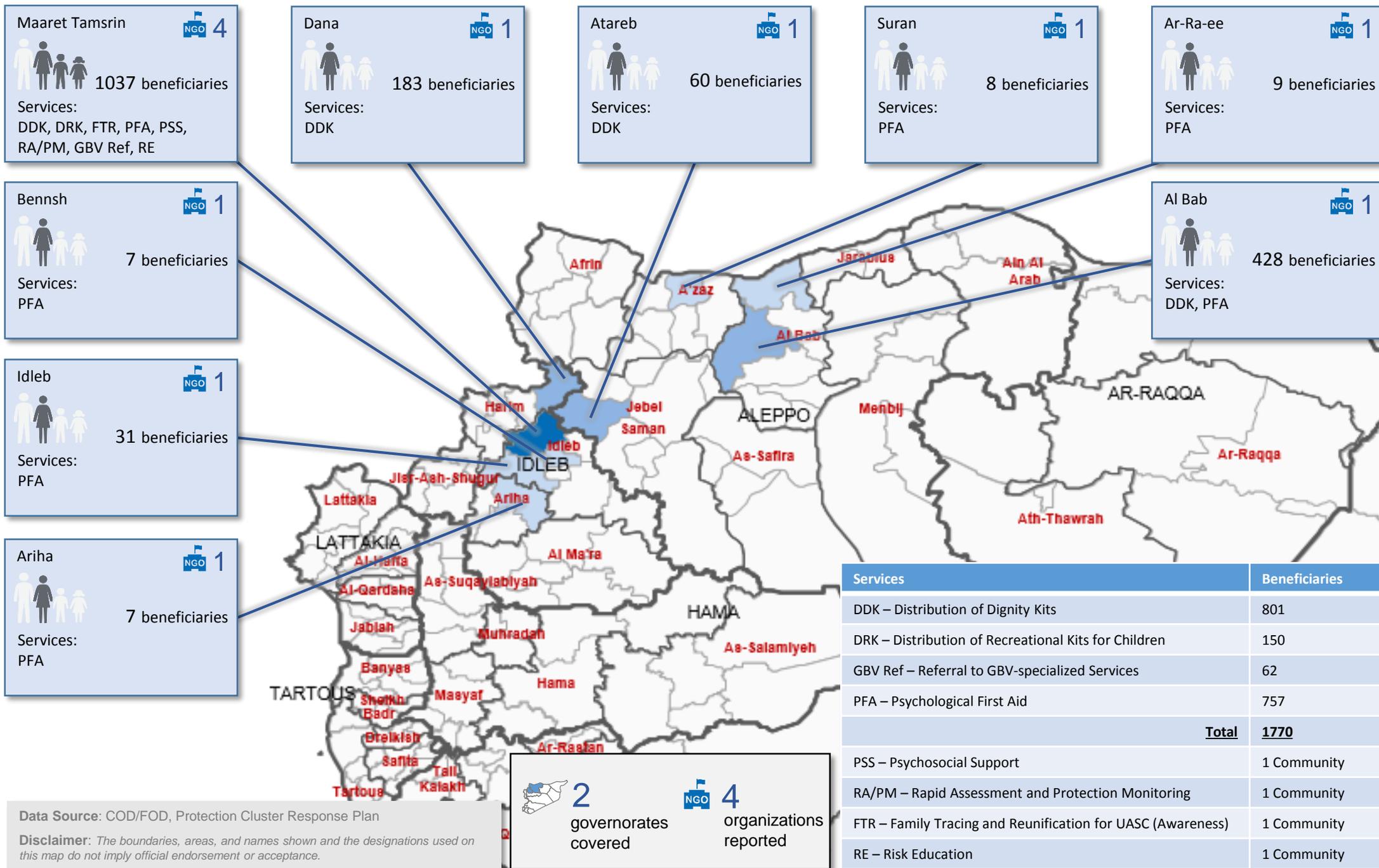
35% of survey participants reported that women and girls do not have access to basic hygiene supplies.

Intentions for Onward Movement

Of those interviewed, 45% stated that they do not intend to go somewhere else. 43% expressed their intention to move to another area. Of those intending to travel onwards, 32% wished to travel to a safer village without identifying the specific location. 27% intended to move onward to specific towns where they had friends and family such as Dana, Atmeh, Sarmada, Maarat al-Numan of Idlib governorate and Jarablus of Aleppo governorate. 25% expressed intention to travel to Turkey.

The Syria Protection Cluster (Turkey) is made up of the Protection Cluster as well as three Sub-Clusters: Child Protection, Gender-Based Violence, and Mine Action. For further information, please contact the Protection Cluster Coordinator, Sarah Khan (UNHCR) and NGO Co-Lead Victoria Shepard (IRC) at khansar@unhcr.org and Victoria.Shepard@rescue.org.

¹ A Protection Cluster member conducted one FGD with a group of people opting to evacuate and short interviews with 6 families opting to stay inside Al-Waer neighbourhood on 23 March.



Data Source: COD/FOD, Protection Cluster Response Plan
Disclaimer: The boundaries, areas, and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance.

2 governorates covered
4 organizations reported