

Key informant survey with newly displaced households on intentions & protection - Key findings

7 March 2020

From 17 to 23 February, six partners from the Protection Monitoring Task Force of the Syria Protection Cluster (Turkey) conducted 193 key informant interviews focusing on intentions of newly displaced populations as well as protection concerns.

Interviews were conducted across districts in Idlib governorate (Al Mara – 9; Ariha – 10; Harim – 65; Idlib – 63; Jisr-Ash-Shugur – 43), three interviews were conducted in Aleppo governorate. The majority of interviews took place in Dana and Maaret Tamsrin sub-districts (as of 23 February 2020 – the time of interviews – hosting 237,491 and 77,953 newly displaced individuals respectively according to the CCCM Cluster, in addition to protracted displaced individuals). 41% of key informants were male, 59% female; 88% identified themselves as internally displaced, while 12% were from hosting communities.¹ Interviews took place in olive groves, on the road, in informal IDP sites, in community centers, in schools, and urban/town areas. Constraints during the interview period included the prevailing security situation and large-scale movement of civilians, as well as limited internet connectivity.

Due to the nature of the survey, the information should be taken as indicative, while due to rapid evolutions in the humanitarian and protection environment, information presented is also timebound. Interviews were conducted prior to the 5 March 2020 agreement on the “Additional Protocol to the Memorandum on Stabilization of the Situation in the Idlib De-Escalation Area” which may influence perceptions and decision-making of displaced individuals and households.

Summary

- *Displaced civilians in western districts of Idlib, as survey findings show, face desperation and a grim reality: the fear of aerial bombardments and shelling pervades all aspects of life, while households feel like they have run out of options to seek safety and security. Some children are reported to show behavioural changes due to severe distress.*
- *Despite concerns related to security, most households intend to remain in their current location of displacement. Some of these households express hope that, if the situation reverses, they can return to their previous / original location of residence.*
- *A smaller group of households intends to move to areas in northern Aleppo. Some that would otherwise want to move there are indicated to be unable to do so due to a lack of resources (to cover both actual transport and the expected cost of living in Afrin or Azaz).*
- *Many households reportedly consider trying to reach Turkey a last-resort option, stating it was on the minds of people constantly; however, for many the journey was perceived as too costly and dangerous.*
- *According to humanitarian staff, moving to Government of Syria-controlled areas was deemed to be an option for a small group of households.*
- *For most households, however, key informants stated that due to the shift in frontlines it is unclear where to go to next, while fearing arrest, detention, and violence should there be further changes in territorial control.*

Intentions for upcoming 2-4 weeks

- According to interviewed key informants, most displaced households in sub-districts of Idlib intend to remain in their current location for the upcoming 2-4 weeks, while a smaller group reportedly plan to move to areas in northern Aleppo (Afrin and Azaz).

Informal settings / in host community (147 KIIs; 76% of total)	In IDP sites (46 KIIs; 24% of total)
Indicated intentions for upcoming 2-4 weeks – top 3 responses	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Remain in current location (51%) 2. Move to areas in northern Aleppo (20%) 3. Attempt to reach Turkey (14%) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Remain in current location (76%) 2. Move to areas in northern Aleppo (11%) 3. Move to another location in Idlib (9%)
Accommodation types in area of interview – top 4 responses	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Schools and mosques 2. Rental apartments 3. Unfinished buildings 4. Hosted with relatives 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Temporary shelters 2. Family tents 3. Improvised shelters 4. Unfinished buildings

¹ Key informants interviewed have positions in the community (such as teachers, local authorities, religious leaders, IDP community leaders, NGO staff, etc.) and were asked to give indicative answers for the majority of displaced individuals with whom they interact.

Remain in current location

- Reasons provided by key informants for households planning to stay in their current location are (reasons are interlinked as key informants provided the top three factors in decision-making):
 1. *Despite fears for safety in the current location, in areas covered by the survey households deemed their current area of settlement safer compared to their previous location of residence / settlement*
 2. *Households settled together with relatives and acquaintances (additionally, two key informants mentioned that acquaintances provided land to settle on free of charge)*
 3. *Households deem humanitarian assistance to be available or hope to access it in their current location in the future*
 4. *Households are faced with unaffordable expenses for households to move onwards (for example, one key informant indicated that renting transport would be too expensive)*
- Multiple key informants indicated that households felt there is no other choice than to settle in their current location for the time being. Some key informants expressed hope that a return to the previous location / place of origin in Idlib would become feasible in the short-term. One key informant indicated that it was crucial for households to be away from the sounds of regular shelling and conflict.

Moving onward

- Households that intend to move onwards from their current location in the coming weeks would do so for the following reasons:
 1. *Fear of armed conflict affecting the current location*
 2. *Lack of suitable space to settle / inhabit*
 3. *Lack of access to adequate shelter*
- Compared to responses in IDP sites, responses provided in informal settings mention more frequently that households do not have suitable/adequate space.
- Female key informants mentioned the lack of suitable space and access to shelter in a slightly higher ratio than men.
- In Dana sub-district the lack of suitable space, lack of shelter access, and increased costs of living were mentioned comparatively more frequently than in other districts (vis-à-vis Maaret Tamsrin, for example).
- Some households indicate they intend to move to other locations within Idlib governorate. They expect a better security situation and/or better shelter options and access to basic services, while some would move to join family and acquaintances.

Relocating to areas in northern Aleppo

- Key informants suggest that households who intend to move to areas in northern Aleppo decide to because of the following reasons:
 1. *Expectation of increased security and stability*
 2. *Access to accommodation and basic services despite expected higher costs*
 3. *To join family and acquaintances*
- Instances are reported where breadwinners (including those of humanitarian staff) bring family members to Afrin or Azaz after which they return to Idlib for livelihood purposes.
- According to key informants, households that choose not to move to northern Aleppo cannot afford the journey nor the cost of living in Afrin and Azaz. Moreover, households are hesitant due to unfamiliarity with the location and fear for safety and security due to (reports of/knowledge of) bombings, military operations, and detention in these areas. Some also hope to be able to return to their previous places of residence/places of origin when the security situation would improve and are reluctant to travel too far away.

Crossing to Turkey

- While some small number of households reported considering attempting to cross into Turkey, most households indicate that attempting to cross is too expensive and too dangerous. Some also indicate that they do not want to cross into Turkey but that it may become the last-resort option. According to key informants, this last resort is considered by nearly all households, as no other solutions seem available to them and it would guarantee their survival.

Moving to Government of Syria (GoS) controlled areas

- While it is expected no key informant would indicate that households are planning to move to GoS-controlled areas due to sensitivities and security concerns, it is expected that a small segment of the population may opt to do so.

- According to humanitarian staff in Idlib, households for which this would be a feasible option would have *inter alia* the following profiles: 1) households with members that are government employees and retirees who still receive salaries and 2) households with no male family members of military age (under 42 years old). It is also suggested that there may be a (smaller) group of households who expect the GoS to extend its area of control up to the Turkish border in Idlib, thereby surrounding them. In that scenario some may see moving to previous locations under GoS control as a desperate last-hope option. Humanitarian staff expects that households or individuals who would currently move to GoS-controlled areas mostly would travel via Afrin and Manbij as this is a less visible and deemed to be more secure route.

Alternative plans

- Key informants were asked what alternative plans for households would be in case they could no longer stay in their current location; the answers highlight the desperation amongst the displaced population. The response most frequently provided was that households have no alternative plans, while fearing encroaching frontlines. A slightly smaller number of key informants indicated that households would attempt to cross to Turkey despite the associated risks. A smaller number of households would attempt to move to northern Aleppo.
- No significant differences exist between in- and off-camp responses. However, preliminary analysis of the response data seems to suggest that displaced households with limited assets more frequently report a lack of plans, while those with more assets perceive more options available to them.

Reported threats in current location

- Key informants indicate that all households overwhelmingly perceive airstrikes as the main threat in their current location which *inter alia* results in severe distress. For example, some women are reported to fear being targeted while waiting in groups to collect water. Some children are reported to suffer from severe distress, with cases described by key informants where children stop communicating and develop stress-related skin rashes.
- Many key informants also indicated households have a strong fear of further shifts in the frontline, which would result in exposure to the risks of detention and violence, and therefore have a strong fear of having to flee again.
- A small number of key informants indicate a threat of exploitation and harassment, while others report a fear of tension between displaced households and host community members (as well as between newly and earlier displaced persons).
- Female key informants specifically mention overcrowding and resulting lack of privacy as well as consequences for personal hygiene. They also mentioned a fear of harassment.
- On the road to their current location households in overwhelming numbers perceived aerial strikes and shelling as the main threat. A smaller group feared gunfire and unexploded ordnances. A minor group of key informants indicated a fear of checkpoints.

Family separation

- Involuntary family separation was reported to occur sporadically. Boys and girls were reported to be separated infrequently, while separated adult and young men were most often reported to lose contact with families. Anecdotal evidence suggests that boys and girls are most often reunited with parents and caregivers through social support networks and separation is of relatively short duration. Instances are also reported where extended family take care of children when parents are in a different location. When unintentional separation was reported, informants indicated that communication between family members was frequently lost, which hinders reunification in a large-scale and chaotic displacement situation.
- Voluntary family separation is reported to occur on a small scale with predominantly adult and young men staying behind, primarily to protect property. Nearly all key informants indicated that communication between displaced family members and those who stayed behind voluntarily was possible.
- In a few instances (8 key informants), it was indicated that families had chosen to / were forced to leave older people behind, both men and women – reasons for older people to remain behind were indicated to be illness and injury and/or old age (2 key informants).

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