



Protection Monitoring Task Force

Rapid Protection Monitoring Report:

Movement: Arsal, Lebanon to Idleb & Aleppo, Syria, August 2017

Key Findings

- 72% of Key Informants (KIs) cited general insecurity as the primary reason for leaving Arsal city and Wadi Hmeid region. 10% cited the lack of distinction between civilians and combatants in Arsal by the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF).
- 54% of KIs stated that individuals leaving Arsal did not receive information about their final destination before departure, while 46% did. Data indicates that while Syrians in Arsal were given the option to leave or stay, those who decided to leave did not have any influence or choice regarding the destination.
- 21% of KIs reported that some people did not leave Arsal due to various security concerns, including fear of arbitrary arrest during the journey by Hezbollah or upon entry to Syria by the Syrian Armed Forces (SAF).
- Long waits at checkpoints was the most-cited problem during the journey. Many older persons, persons with disabilities, and those fearing retaliation were unable to board the buses. 82% of KIs were able to leave with their documents. The entire journey from Arsal to Idleb took almost two days to complete.
- KIs expressed concern about the future situation in Idleb and fear of harm by various groups involved in the conflict. However, KIs also expressed relief to be distanced from the pressures and security risks in Arsal.
- 69% of KIs had no plans for onward movement, while 31% planned to move elsewhere in Syria, including to Idleb city, Aqareb, Ariha, Jarablus, Sarmada, Al Bara, Maaret Al Numan and Rural Aleppo, or to Turkey. Many other KIs wished to move to any safe location.
- KIs primarily cited the below protection risks as affecting the following groups in their current locations:
 - Men – unemployment, lack of basic services, physical threats.

- Women – lack of privacy, risk of sexual assault and harassment, inadequate medical care.
- Boys – lack of education, physical threats, lack of health care, risk of exploitation, risk of recruitment.
- Girls – lack of education, lack of health care, risk of early marriage, risk of exploitation, risk of sexual harassment and assault.

- KIs identified the following needs at their present locations in Idleb and Aleppo: cash assistance, food baskets, cooking kits, baby formula, NFIs, hygiene kits, shelter, and mattresses. KIs hoped to receive assistance in establishing safe and secure housing, access to work and health care, and assistance for onward movement.

Methodology

This report is based on data gathered between 8 and 11 August 2017. KI interviews were conducted by four members of the Protection Cluster, and 16 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 31 household-level interviews were conducted by one member of the Protection Cluster in Afes, Dana, and Darkosh sub-districts of Idleb. The KI interviews took place in 7 communities in Idleb governorate (76%) and 2 communities in Aleppo governorate (24%). Cluster members interviewed 207 KIs, 125 (60%) were male and 82 (40%) were female. 15 KIs (7%) identified as having a disability. 178 (86%) KIs self-identified as civilian. 27 (13%) self-identified as combatant and 2 (1%) did not answer. Information about association of civilians with armed groups cannot be verified. 135 (65%) of KIs self-identified as unemployed. 42 (20%) self-identified as a skilled professional and 20 (10%) self-identified as *other*. 6 KIs identified as humanitarian workers, 3 KIs identified as government employees and 1 KI identified as a Local Council member. Among those with the

Location and Number of Interviews

| Idleb | # |
|-------------------|----|
| Idleb City | 64 |
| Maaret Al-Ikhwān | 31 |
| Hazano | 28 |
| Marata | 20 |
| Ma'arrat Tamasrin | 10 |
| Ariha | 3 |
| Orm Eljōz | 1 |
| Aleppo | # |
| Khan Al-Asal | 44 |
| Kafr Naha | 6 |

occupation of “*other*” were housewives, day laborers, a police officer, a driver, a farmer and students. According to the Protection Cluster member who conducted the FGDs and interviews, organizations responding to arrivals in Idleb noted around 100 individuals with injuries that predated the movement. Humanitarian organizations provided wheelchairs for those with mobility issues.

Background Information

Arsal is a Lebanese town located 50 kilometers from the Syrian-Lebanese border. Prior to movement, Bekaa governorate was home to 567,877 people, of whom 274,412 were registered Syrian refugees (UNHCR Inter-Agency Coordination: Lebanon Bekaa Governorate Profile, June 2015). According to FGDs with arrivals from Arsal, the majority of the Syrian population was displaced from Qusara town and surrounding areas in Homs in early 2014. The families had access to humanitarian assistance in Arsal but faced restricted movement and protection risks including arbitrary arrest at checkpoints, limited access to medical care, and limited employment opportunities.

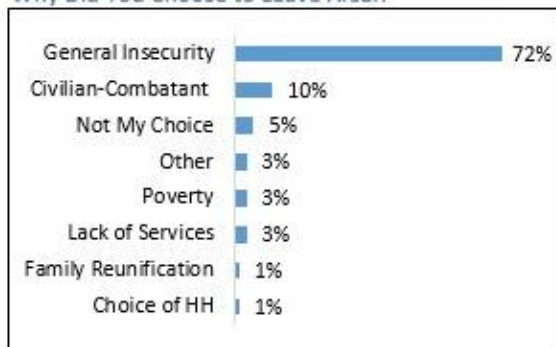
Participants in the FGDs cited violent incidents intermittent in Arsal since 2014 as one of the reasons for returning to Syria. Clashes between the LAF, Hezbollah forces, and groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) impacted their lives greatly. A participant of an FGD recalls the events that took place in his camp: “...many tents were burned, and many people were evicted, injured and killed, including women and children. My brother was helping people to stop tents from burning when he was killed.”

According to information from the FGDs, tensions again rose shortly before the movement when LAF conducted a raid of Al Nour camp. One FGD participant explained: “They raided Al Nour camp and crushed tents. Women and children were separated and physically searched. Women had to remove clothing for searches. Many women fainted under the pressure.” Security incidents and the subsequent withdrawal of humanitarian organizations from the area contributed to the community’s fears of insecurity and instability.

The agreement for the movement of civilians and HTS fighters from Arsal (Lebanon) and Flita Mountains (Syria) to

Northwestern Syria was reached between the Government of Syria (GoS) and the Lebanese government's General Security Directorate. Movement from the area began on 1 August and continued until 4 August 2017, during which 4,905 individuals moved to Idleb and Aleppo governorates

Why Did You Choose to Leave Arsal?



of Syria (OCHA Sitrep: Turkey | Syria: Response to the Evacuation from Arsal/Flita Mountains to North-western Syria, 11 August 2017; CCCM Cluster Turkey Hub: Cross-line displacements from Arsal Camps as of 14 August 2017).

Protection Risks Faced During Movement

Of the 207 respondents, 66% moved from Arsal City and 34% moved from Wadi Hmeid region of Arsal. The majority of KIs left due to general insecurity, followed by one or more of the following reasons: lack of distinction between civilians and combatants in Arsal by the LAF, not my choice, poverty, lack of services, family reunification, and because it was the

Reasons of Leaving Arsal - Response Breakdown by Gender



choice of the head of the household. 1 KI stated that they left due to mistreatment by the LAF.

Of those surveyed, male KIs were more likely to cite reasons of general insecurity, lack of distinction between civilians and combatants, and family reunification, while female KIs were more likely to cite poverty and lack of services. 3 female KIs reported that they left Arsal because it was the decision of their head of the household.

54% of KIs reported that they did not receive information about their destination in Idleb before leaving their location, while 46% of KIs reported that they did. Those who received information were mostly informed by armed actors and local committees. 34% of those who received information about their destination were told that they were "traveling to Idleb, a safe location, where families will have access to shelter, and food." 78% of KIs left with all members their family.

According to the FGD findings, Arsal residents waited for around 14 hours for the first buses to depart. The buses travelled from Arsal to Hama via the Arsal-Qalamun highway. At the exchange point in Hama, individuals transferred to different buses for the remainder of the journey to Idleb. Hezbollah forces accompanied the buses until Hama. Humanitarian organizations provided food and assistance during stops. The buses were received by humanitarian organizations upon arrival.

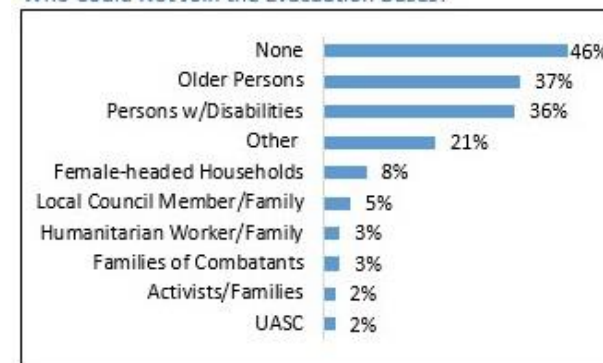
Problems Experienced While Boarding the Buses

19 KIs (9%) were separated from their family members during the journey from Arsal. KIs experienced separation due to crowding and chaos while boarding the buses as well as due to the prioritization of certain groups such as the injured, elderly, women and children during boarding. Separation of families also took place during the journey. Additionally, 2 KIs stated that they left Arsal alone because their families did not want to leave Arsal. 1 KI explained that he was separated from his family members during his initial displacement from Qalamun to Arsal and has not reunited with them since. While 15 KIs reported having found their family members at the time of the interview, 4 KIs were still in search of them.

58% of KIs were accompanied by children under the age of 18. Members of the Protection Cluster identified one

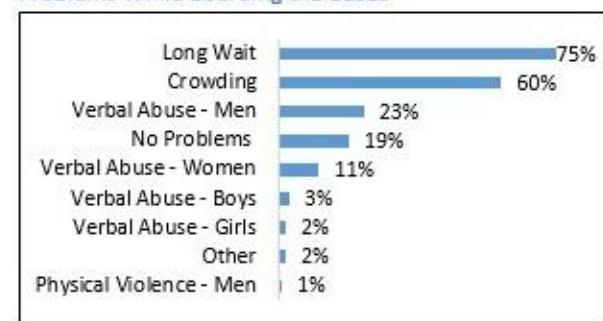
unaccompanied adolescent boy. This KI, a male between the ages of 15 and 18, reported that he left Lebanon fearing arrest while his family remained behind.

Who Could Not Join the Evacuation Buses?



The following groups experienced the most challenges in accessing buses: older persons (37%), persons with disabilities (36%), and *other groups*, who experienced fears about the journey (21%). KIs explained that although some individuals and families wanted to leave Arsal, they were concerned about facing security risks during the journey such as arbitrary arrest, and/or attacks on the buses. Some community members chose not to leave due to concerns about the conditions in Idleb. One KI explained that civilians feared arrest by Hezbollah or the GoS during the journey. Another KI explained that although some families wanted to leave, ultimately they remained in Arsal because they wish to remain close to their relatives detained in Lebanese prisons. One KI explained that several families in their community chose to stay because they were not allowed to

Problems While Boarding the Buses



take their belongings. Departing families were permitted to take only clothing with them.

19% of KIs stated that they did not experience any problems while boarding the buses. The remaining KIs described the following problems: long wait (75%), crowding (60%), verbal abuse toward men (23%) and verbal abuse toward women (11%). Verbal abuse towards boys (3%), and girls (2%) was also reported. 2% of KIs described severe heat and crowding while boarding the poor-quality buses.

Problems Experienced During the Bus Ride

Long waits at checkpoints was the primary problem during the trip mentioned by 61% of KIs. Male KIs were more likely to report long waits at checkpoints than female KIs (62% male and 48% female). During these long waits, individuals suffered from heat as they were often not permitted to open the windows and doors of buses. FGD participants expressed a greater fear of Hezbollah forces than of the SAF. A small number of KIs stated that men (4 KIs) and boys (1 KI) were pulled off of buses and were not allowed to re-board. In one case, a KI's 25-year-old son was taken by the SAF en-route to Arsal. 38% of KIs stated that they did not experience any problem during the bus ride.

Physical violence was reported by one KI, who witnessed an individual being subjected to physical violence and humiliation by the SAF at the Flita checkpoint near Homs. Participants in the FGD also indicated that individuals experienced humiliation and violence by Hezbollah forces during the journey to Idleb.

Documentation

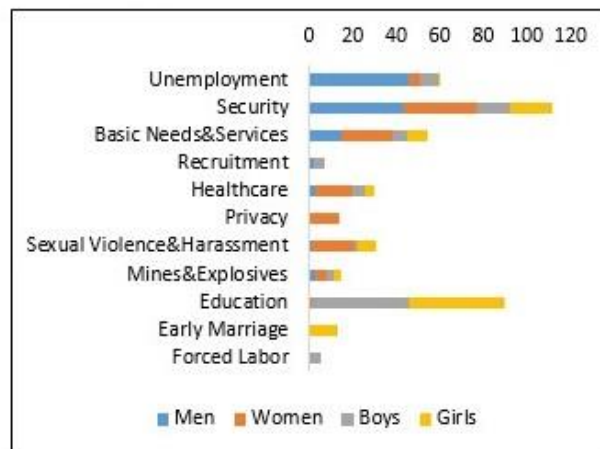
While 82% of KIs stated that they were able to leave with their identity documents, 18% stated that they were not. 47% of KIs hold a national ID, 18% hold a family booklet and 2% hold a passport. 14% have other types of documents such as civil registry records, marriage contracts, driver's licenses and UNHCR registration documents. The majority of KIs who stated that they left with their identity documents were male (55% male, 45% female). 3% stated that IDs were taken or photographed by armed forces. FGD participants indicated that some individuals lost their documents during the movement.

Explosive Hazards

3 KIs (1%) stated that they experienced mines or explosive hazards on their way to their present location, for example in the Khan Al-Asal community of Aleppo. Risk of mines and explosive hazards was identified as a current protection risk for all demographics in Jebel Saman community of Aleppo. These responses are consistent with findings which indicate that explosive hazards present risks in Al Shamali, Al Gharbi and Al Janoubi communities of Idleb and Kafr Naha and Khan Al-Asal communities of Aleppo (Update by UNMAS August 2017).

Protection Risks Faced Post-Movement

Main Risks at Present Time



Overall, many KIs have significant concerns about their future in Idleb. The following describes the main risks that women, girls, men, boys face at the present time, according to the perception of all KIs.

Men: The most frequently mentioned risk for men was unemployment. Both male and female KIs fear that men will be unable to find employment and provide for themselves and their families in Idleb. Although restrictions in freedom of movement in Arsal did present barriers, men still had some access to work in agriculture, construction, and labor in Arsal. KIs fear that they will not have any access to these types of work in Idleb. Lack of access to basic services such as food, shelter and health care was also frequently identified as a risk for men. Additionally, there were

concerns about security and safety due to aerial bombardments and clashes between armed groups. Men identified risks of kidnapping, detention, harassment, abuse, and murder as additional risks for men in Idleb. Recruitment as a risk for men was identified by female KIs.

Boys: Lack of education was the major risk identified for boys by KIs. Additional risks include lack of security due to aerial bombardment and clashes, and lack of access to health care. The risk of boys being recruited by armed groups was mentioned by 5 KIs: 4 female and 1 male.

Women: Risks of insecurity, poverty and lack of access to services were noted as primary concerns. Additional risks include lack of privacy at their new location and the risk of harassment, sexual assault, and exploitation. KIs believe that these issues may arise due to living in close quarters with many other people. Female KIs also reported concerns about women's access to maternal health care.

Girls: Just as with boys, lack of education was identified as the primary risk for girls. Lack of security and lack of access to basic services and health care were also identified by KIs. An additional risk identified for girls was early marriage. As with women, risks of exploitation, sexual assault and harassment were identified.

The majority (60%) of KIs stated that women and girls do not have access to goods to meet their basic hygienic needs.

Present Needs

KIs have identified the following needs at their current locations in Idleb and Aleppo: cash assistance, food baskets, cooking kits, baby formula, NFIs, hygiene kits, baby diapers, adult diapers for the disabled, shelter, and mattresses. KIs hope to receive support to identify safe and secure housing, access to work and health care, and assistance for onward movement. KIs request humanitarian organizations to ensure fair distribution of goods and services, to avoid duplication of services to some groups while others may not receive enough assistance. Many of the KIs who reported present needs were male, however, both male and female KIs reported the variety of needs mentioned above. KIs who reported most needs are located in Idleb city, Youth Housing being the most mentioned location. KIs in Aleppo were more likely to request assistance for onward movement to Turkey.

KIs also emphasized that they undertook their journey amidst fear and uncertainty, and they were aware of others from Arsal who chose not to leave due to the aforementioned concerns. One KI expressed hope that there would be additional movements from Arsal for remaining community members who wish to return to Syria.

Intentions for Onward Movement

69% of those who responded stated that they do not have plans for onward movement from their current location. 31% stated that they do have onward movement plans. KIs expressed plans to move to: Idleb city, Aqareb, Ariha, Jarablus, Sarmada, Al Bara, Maaret Al Numan and Rural Aleppo. Many other KIs wished to move to any safe location. 71% of KIs who planned to move onward did not specify the reason. 15% wanted better access to services, 3% wanted to reach the Turkish border, 3% wanted to be with family or friends, 4% sought physical safety and 4% stated *other*. 2 KIs who said "*other*" were concerned about the approaching academic year and their children's education. 2 KIs were seeking more reliable shelter, 2 KIs were seeking medical treatment, including treatment for cancer and 1 KI was concerned about earning for the family.

Recommendations

In light of continuous displacement and increased movement into Idleb, due to "local agreements" or other ad-hoc movement agreements, such as the most recent arrivals from Arsal, the humanitarian community works to provide emergency response services to ensure that the basic needs of IDPs are met with safety and dignity. Following initial emergency services, *integrating newly arrived IDPs and affected persons into existing humanitarian programming* is critical. *Sustained funding* for programming that addresses both immediate and medium-to-longer-term needs is essential for humanitarian actors in Idleb to be able to facilitate growing needs through their services and programs. This includes funding for *community-based protection services* that support integration and strengthen communities' ability to respond and support future arrivals, as well as funding for *suitable shelter and housing* options.

Further, as humanitarian actors often have little-to-no access to communities prior to their movement, *providing*

clear information about available services and support upon arrival is essential. Individuals who arrive in Idleb following "local agreements" may not have connections and community networks that facilitate and quicken adaptation to a new environment. Humanitarian actors are encouraged to prepare basic messaging and information on service availability and identified focal points that can be promptly disseminated to responding organizations.

The Syria Protection Cluster (Turkey) is composed of the Protection Cluster and three Sub-Clusters: Child Protection, Gender-Based Violence, and Mine Action. For additional information, please contact the Protection Cluster Coordinator, Victoria Shepard (UNHCR) at shepard@unhcr.org.