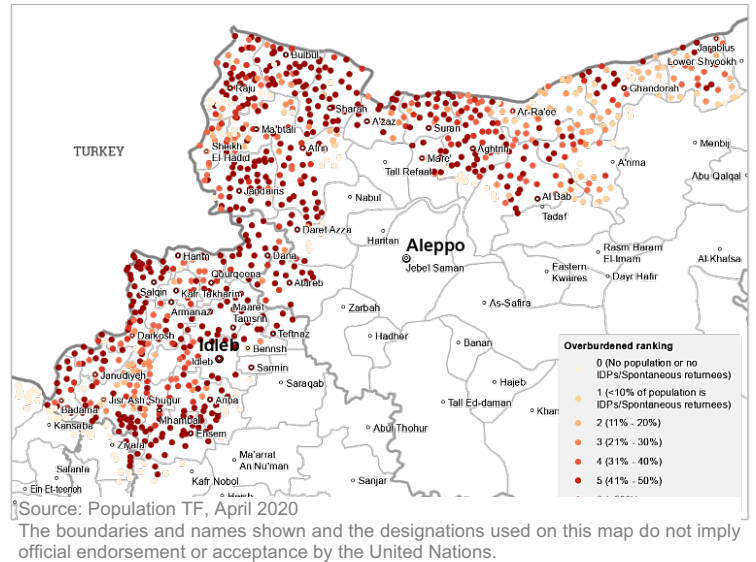


### HIGHLIGHTS

- 40 people tested positive for COVID-19 in northwest Syria as of 6 August. Response efforts focus on contact tracing, containing virus spread and raising awareness about COVID-19 risks and precautions.
- Increasing hostilities were reported in the Idleb area and northern Aleppo, especially in locations south of the M4 highway. Explosive hazards and tensions between armed groups further undermine the security situation and imperil civilians' lives.
- COVID-19 and economic deterioration compound existing major humanitarian needs across all sectors in all parts of northwest Syria. Protection issues are a grave concern, with increasing reports of gender-based violence such as early marriages, short-term marriages, forced abortions and domestic violence.



**4.1 M**

People in northwest Syria

**2.8 M**

People in need of humanitarian assistance

**2.7 M**

People internally displaced

**76%**

Women and children in the overall population

### SITUATION OVERVIEW

The ongoing COVID-19 outbreak and economic fragility compound an already dismal humanitarian situation for people in northwest Syria. Some 2.8 million people living in the northwest rely on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs, after nearly a decade of conflict characterised by multiple displacements, military operations and security hazards. In the face of multiple acute and protracted adversities, the resilience of the 4.1 million inhabitants of northwest Syria is rapidly eroding as new challenges aggravate existing struggles.

Of the multiple tests carried out to date, 40 people were tested positive for COVID-19 in northwest Syria as of 6 August. 26 patients have reportedly recovered – four in Idleb and 13 in Harim in Idleb governorate, and six in Al Bab and three in A'zaz in northern Aleppo governorate. No deaths have been reported. Of these, some 14 are active cases, nine are in Al Bab, three are in Idleb, and Harim and A'zaz have one each. None of those identified required acute hospital care, and some were asymptomatic. These people were identified through contact tracing, despite them having no symptoms. Efforts remain concentrated on contact tracing, interrupting virus transmissions and reducing secondary infections, with 3,704 samples tested as of 6 August. Health partners remain consistent in raising awareness about COVID-19 precautions among local communities and other stakeholders in the northwest, emphasising hygiene practices and physical distancing. Further transmission risk mitigation measures implemented since the identification of the first case on 9 July include limits on movements, gatherings, commercial activities and in-person education services. In terms of humanitarian assistance, precautions enacted by humanitarian actors prior to the identification of COVID-19 cases in northwest Syria continue to be implemented and strengthened, to safeguard both staff and local communities.

Increasing military hostilities have been observed in northwest Syria, particularly in vicinity of the frontlines south of the M4 highway in the Idleb area, with more frequent shelling reported since the last situation report on 24 July. On 3 August,

airstrikes were reported for the first time since mid-July, reportedly impacting areas in vicinity of the frontlines by the M4 in northern Latakia governorate as well as Bannash in eastern Idlib. According to local and NGO sources, the latter incident affected tents housing displaced families, killing three people and injuring seven others, including one child. In addition to these casualties, local sources reported that as a result of hostilities in northwest Syria between 24 July and 6 August, at least three children and three women were killed and 16 people were injured, including four children and four women. Tensions involving non-state armed groups continue to be reported in the northwest, further undermining the security situation. Concerns about the safety of civilians are deepened by increased incidents involving explosive hazards in northwest Syria. From 24 July to 6 August, local sources reported eight incidents in the Idlib and Afrin and A'zaz to Jarablus areas, involving five improvised explosive device (IED), two explosive remnants of war (ERW) and one landmine, in which at least one child and one adult were killed and 22 civilians were injured, including three children and one woman. Several other IED and ERW were reportedly dismantled over the same period.

The value of the Syrian Pound (SYP) in informal markets in northwest Syria hovered around 2,200 SYP per US Dollar for most of the last two weeks, following a momentary climb to 1,720 SYP/USD on 25 July. This is some 260 percent weaker than one year ago in early August 2019, and some 140 percent weaker than the beginning of this year. To mitigate against this devaluation, the Turkish Lira (TL) has been increasingly used as a transactional currency in northwest Syria, with basic commodities such as fuel, bread, transport and telecommunications services now priced in TL. Since 28 July, Idlib authorities have reportedly required that all commercial livestock trade in the Idlib area be transacted in TL. People without adequate access to certain currencies risk being excluded from markets or facing higher prices for the same goods and services because of exchange rate disparities – further marginalising the poorer and more vulnerable members of society. The devaluation of the SYP intensifies the precarity of people living in northwest Syria and is worsened by the impacts of COVID-19. According to a survey by a UN partner, income loss, price increases, loss of humanitarian assistance and forced business closures were communities' main concerns about the economic impact of COVID-19 in northwest Syria. 36 percent of community focal points reported that living conditions for their communities worsened since the start of the pandemic.

These circumstances come atop widespread humanitarian need driven by hostilities and displacement, with northwest Syria still hosting some 2.7 million displaced people. 204,000 spontaneous returns were recorded by a UN partner between January and June 2020, mostly to areas around the M4 and west of the M5 highway in the southern and eastern Idlib area – areas that have seen an increase in hostilities in recent weeks. Findings from an assessment by an NGO found that 72 percent of shelters in communities of return were destroyed, compared to 27 percent across northwest Syria, driving overcrowding in available shelters and illustrating the difficult conditions facing returnees. 75 percent of families in these areas reportedly cannot afford essential food items, and half have insufficient access to water. In the context of the COVID-19 outbreak, these conditions increase the risk of transmission among this highly vulnerable population. The dire conditions in these areas parallel the extreme needs prevalent across other parts of the northwest, where deteriorating circumstances continue to increase reliance on humanitarian assistance and diminish positive coping strategies. Concerns about weather conditions remain prominent. Needs related to coping with heat and sun exposure are presently increasing, and winter preparation efforts, soon to commence, are expected to further strain people's finances especially in light of rising costs.

Protection issues are reportedly escalating as the situation of people in northwest Syria grows more desperate. In addition to increasing psychosocial stress, significant increases in different types of gender-based violence (GBV) are reported, particularly incidences of domestic violence such as marital rape, physical and emotional violence and denial of resources, with girls and women with disabilities and pregnant women especially vulnerable. As the economic downturn increasingly impedes the ability of households to meet their basic needs, financially motivated negative coping mechanisms are increasingly being adopted, including child labour, forced prostitution, forced abortions and early and forced marriages.

In this context, humanitarian partners are working to meet the immense needs of people in northwest Syria while adapting to the closure of the Bab Al-Salam border crossing for UN transshipments under UN Security Council Resolution 2533. Efforts are ongoing to increase capacity at the one remaining point of entry for UN humanitarian assistance to northwest Syria, at Bab Al-Hawa, and to address new costs and mitigate risks and challenges associated with the longer distances that need to be travelled within northwest Syria in order to reach people in areas previously served via Bab Al-Salam.

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