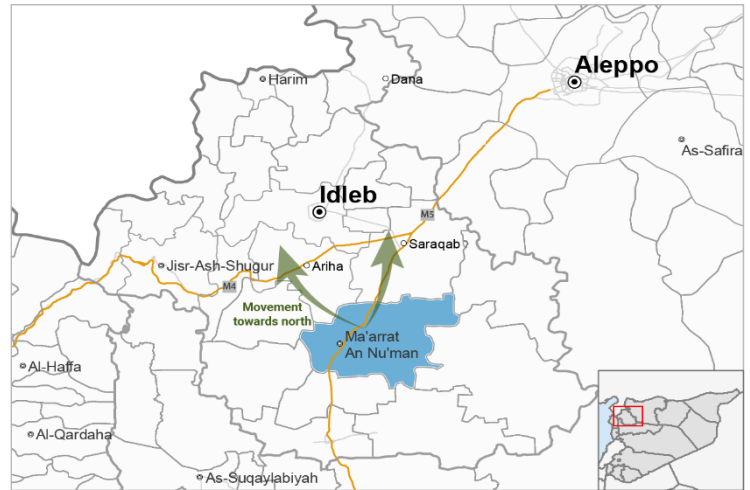


HIGHLIGHTS

- Following the intensification of airstrikes and shelling since 16 December in southern Idlib, tens of thousands of civilians are reportedly fleeing from Ma'arrat An-Nu'man area in southern Idlib governorate to north. Thousands of others are reportedly waiting for the bombardment to ease allowing them to move. The shortage of fuel in Idlib area is also limiting the movement of civilians fleeing from hostilities.
- As of 20 December, ground fighting also resumed along the frontlines in southern Idlib governorate, amplifying displacement from southern Idlib as civilians are fleeing in anticipation of fighting directly affecting their communities.
- Displacement happening in winter months is exacerbating the vulnerability of people in need. Many of those who fled are in urgent need of humanitarian support, particularly shelter, food, health, non-food and winterization assistance.



Source: field sources
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Following a week of decreased hostilities in Idlib area, airstrikes and shelling reportedly intensified in southern Idlib since 16 December, particularly affecting population centres such as Saraqab and Ma'arrat An-Nu'man as well as smaller towns and villages in the countryside of Ma'arrat An-Nu'man such as Maar Shurin, Maar Shamarin, Telamnas, Tah, Heish and Eastern Deir. Increased shelling is reportedly affecting civilians in GoS-controlled areas of Aleppo governorate.

Since the evening of 19 December, residents of Ma'arrat An-Nu'man town, including civilians already displaced to the town from surrounding villages, began to communicate to the humanitarian community that they wanted to move to safety, but were unable to move due to the heavy aerial bombardment. The situation is further compounded by severe shortage of fuel for private vehicles. The numbers of families who already fled in the past 72 hours are estimated to have reached tens of thousands and there are thousands of others who are potentially waiting for the airstrikes and bombardment to ease to allow them safety to move. In late October, the population of the Ma'arrat An-Nu'man city and communities in the surrounding area was estimated to be approximately 163,000 people, without accounting for those who returned to the area in October, which may have been as many as 40,000. An estimated 60,000 people left the area in the past few weeks, leaving an estimated 140,000 people potentially in the area until today. Hundreds of families are reported to have fled north today, and thousands more families have voiced that they want to follow.

The main routes connecting villages in countryside of Ma'arrat An-Nu'man, the M5 highway, and other secondary roads connecting Ma'arrat An-Nu'man town to north are reportedly being hit by airstrikes. These bombardments make movement along these routes extremely dangerous for civilians fleeing the violence, as well as for ambulances evacuating injured civilians to health facilities further north. Local authorities are organizing among themselves to help civilians move northwards out of the immediate reach of hostilities.

The majority of those fleeing want to move towards urban centres further north, where the local communities are making available public buildings such as schools and mosques to host IDP families, individual residents are making available empty houses and rooms. Some IDPs have not eaten or slept for several days due to sustained airstrikes and shelling, and need urgent humanitarian support such as food assistance, shelter, non-food items such as winter clothes and health services. However, the capacity may be surpassed rapidly should the displacement continue commensurate with the hostilities. Renewal of intensive fighting in the south-eastern sector of the Idlib province may result in more and more

people being displaced towards northern parts of Idlib. The humanitarian situation of newly displaced is further compounded by severe weather, need for winterization assistance and shortage of available space in many IDP camps.

Further north, there are reports of indiscriminate fire from within the greater Idlib de-escalation zone into GoS-controlled areas of Aleppo governorate. Six people were injured in Hamdanyah as a result between 16 Dec and 19 Dec.

For further information, please contact:

Markus Werne, Head of Office a.i., UNOCHA Turkey, werne@un.org, Tel: (+90) 342 211 8601, Cell +90 535 413 8159

Annette Hearn, Deputy Head of Office, UNOCHA Turkey, hearns@un.org, Tel: (+90) 342 211 8604, Cell +90 535 021 9574

For more information, please visit www.unocha.org | www.reliefweb.int | <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/stima>