

# SOUTHERN SYRIA

## Population Monitoring Initiative (PMI) Context Report

September 2017

### Key Findings:

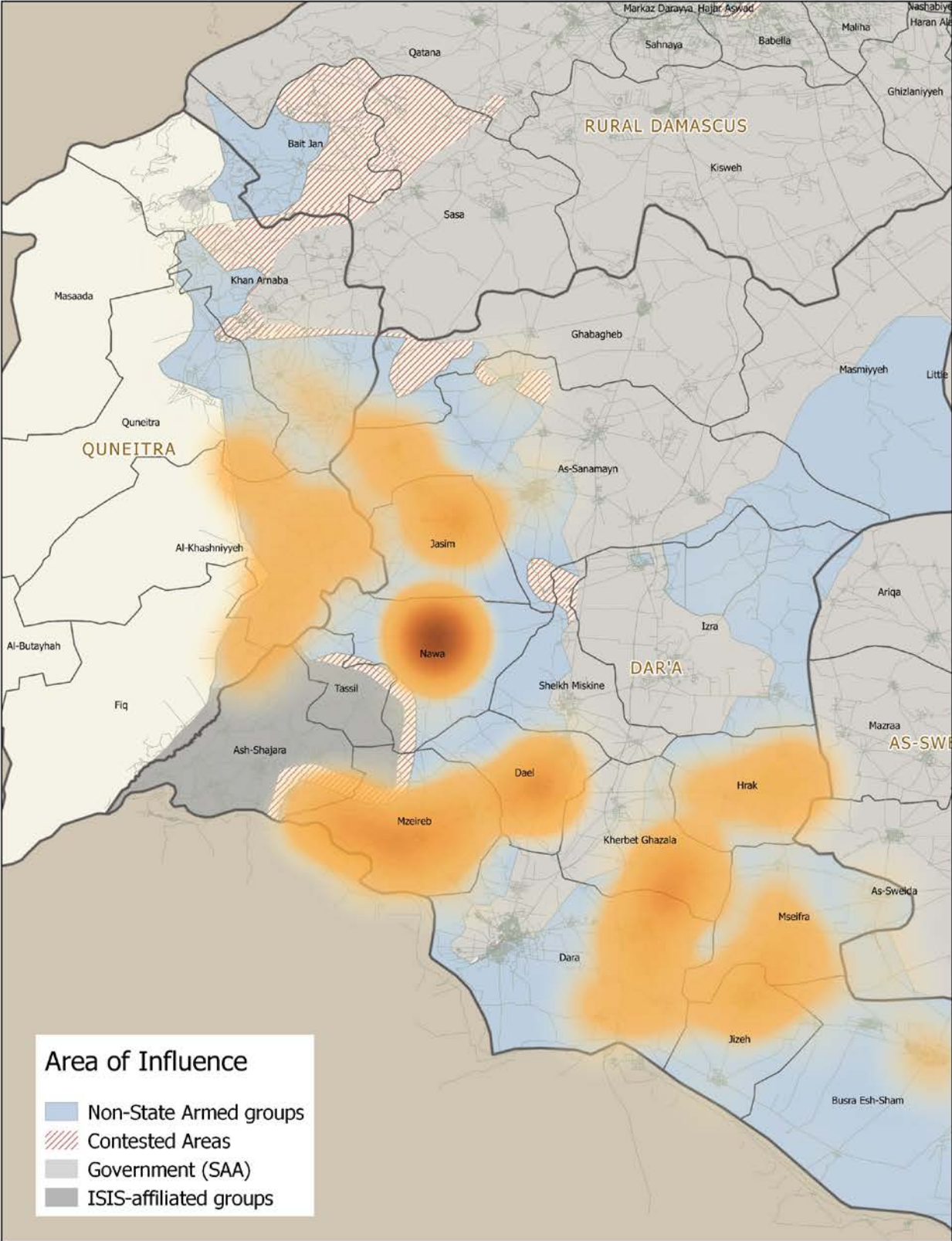
The 09 July ceasefire and accompanying commitment to establishing a De-Escalation Zone (DEZ) continues to hold in southern Syria with limited skirmishes and no air strikes. As a result, there was relative population stability throughout the reporting period with movements largely characterized as trickles of return and displacement movements from four areas: northern Jaydour, Yarmouk Valley, As-Sweida, and southwest Dar'a.

An estimated 900 to 1,100 individuals were reported to have moved in the northern Jaydour region in northwestern Dar'a between 23 July and 20 August. However, an estimated 2,250 individuals have returned to these regions since the onset of the ceasefire.

Due to fighting between Jaysh Khalid Bin Walid (JKW) and armed opposition groups (AOGs), approximately 500 to 700 individuals from Yarmouk valley were displaced north to Quneitra, and approximately 1,000 individuals were displaced east toward Mzeireb sub-district.

Many villages are experiencing return movements and some have commenced some degree of reporting on them. However, these are not standardized and further assessment of these monitoring mechanisms and types of return movement is necessary to further refine the reporting on the volume and nature of these movements.

IDP Density



# Situational Context

Excluding low-intensity, steady conflict in the Yarmouk valley between AOGs and the ISIS-affiliated JKW, the 09 July ceasefire remained the primary pacer of conflict dynamics during the period of coverage. Reports indicated a limited number of skirmishes and indirect fire between AOGs and Government of Syria (GoS) forces in northwestern Dar'a, Dar'a Al Balad and the Lajat region. This decrease, most strongly characterized by the absence of airstrikes, indicates an ongoing commitment to the agreement from all sides. The guarantors (Jordan, the United States, and Russia) and participating parties (the Syrian opposition and the GoS) continue moving forward in their negotiations for the establishment of an official DEZ. The key stipulations surrounding the DEZ include 1) the re-opening of the Nasib/Jaber border crossing between Jordan and Syria; 2) the removal of GoS aligned militias (e.g. Lebanese Hezbollah, Iranian advisors, and pro-GoS armed groups comprised of civilians) from their proximity to the Jordanian border; and 3) maintaining humanitarian access to the affected populations in Dar'a and Quneitra (albeit with competing interests over cross-border versus cross-line distribution of aid). Should the DEZ only allow for cross-line aid, serious protection concerns would arise if current operational actors were suddenly barred from implementing due to the lack of continuity in programming. In addition, lack of clarity remains with regards to the impact on presence-reliant humanitarian programmes. On 23 August, the Government of Jordan announced the establishment of the "Amman Center for Ceasefire Control" comprised of the three guarantors to monitor the ceasefire and reach a consensus on implementing the stipulations of the DEZ.

Since the ceasefire was announced, various fractured interest groups are vying for political control over the opposition controlled areas in Dar'a and Quneitra.

Provincial Councils (PCs) for both governorates are trying to expand their authority; however, their efforts have been met with resistance from other quasi-governance structures in the region.

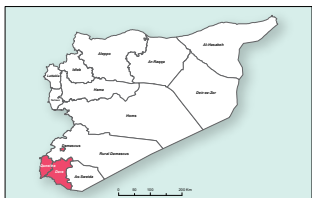
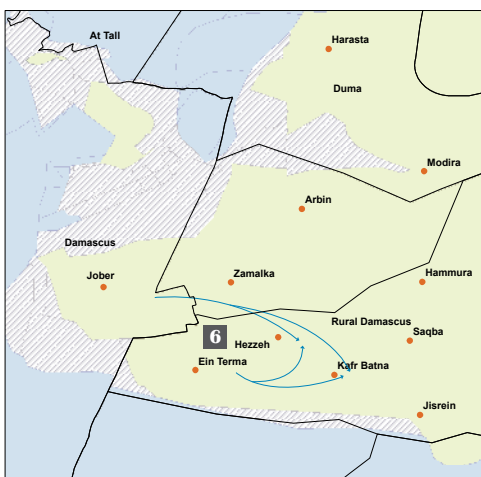
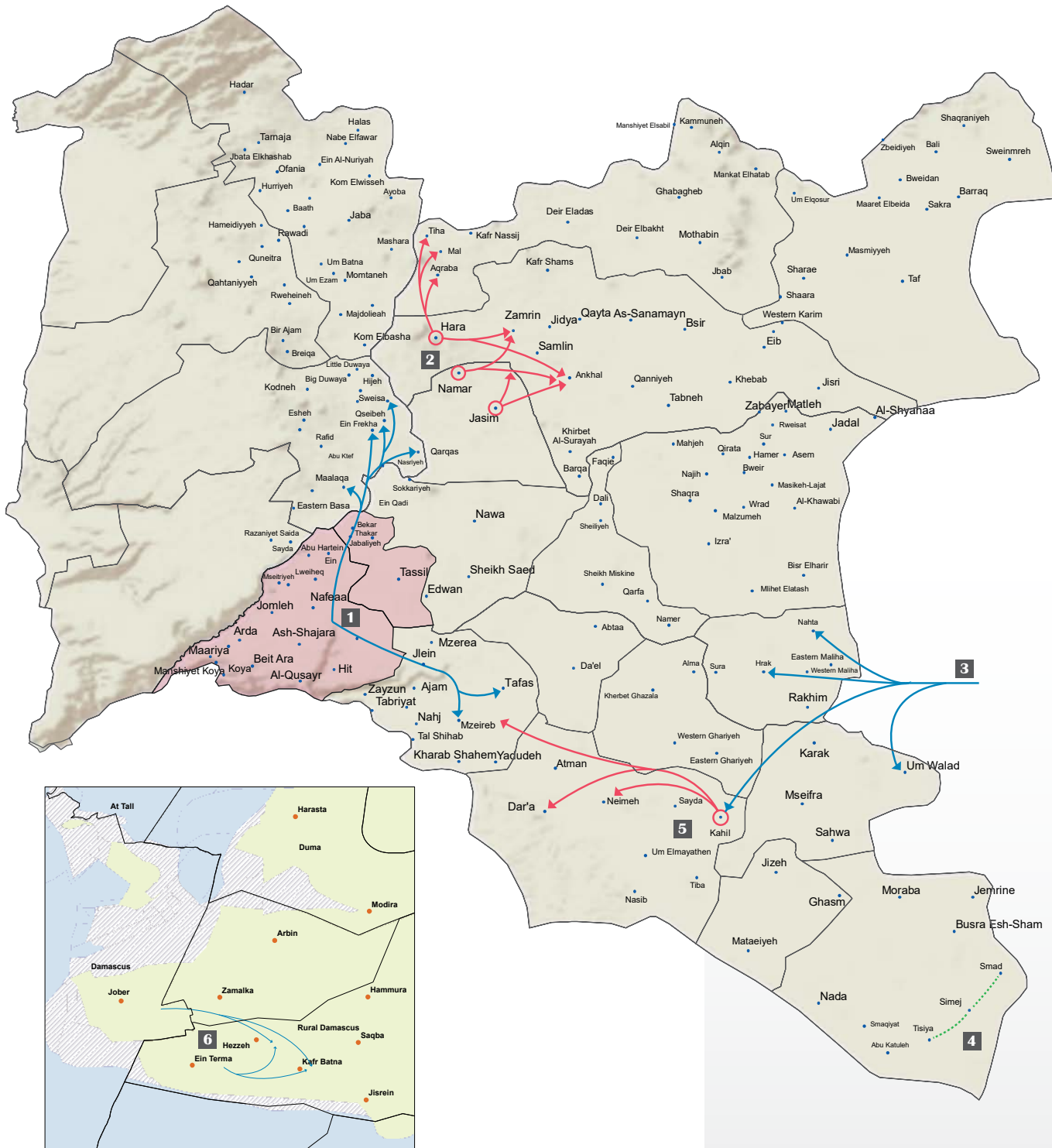
On 04 August, the Dar'a PC announced that all NGOs wishing to continue operations are required to register their organizations and staff. This announcement was perceived as a power grab in the wake of the ceasefire agreement, and an attempt to position the PC as the primary authority for DEZ negotiations. The PC invited NGOs to register on 25 August at the PC's headquarters in Nawa but sources report that no NGOs attended.

Rumors that the Nawa Local Council (LC) was negotiating with GoS authorities regarding cross-line assistance set off negative reactions from key stakeholders in the south. Such negotiations in the south have been historically perceived as a betrayal to the Syrian opposition's ideals and were met with outspoken disapproval. Both a notable tribe in the region and the Horan Court, which is an influential judicial structure in the region, issued separate statements publicly denouncing such negotiations.

A notable tribe, stated these negotiations would result in the discontinuation of their relationship with Nawa. These concerns over cross-line assistance stem from its potential to be used politically through the targeting of locations, which would represent a major shift from the current needs-based humanitarian response. In the wake of ceasefires, political infighting among opposition affiliated actors generally occurs between two types of entities: 1) groups that are historically legitimized through cross-border aid fighting against 2) less influential actors which attempt to advance their future standing by conducting negotiations with the GoS.

# Population Movements

23 July - 20 August - 2017



	Return Movement
	IDP Movement
	Seasonal Bedouin Movement
	Sub - District
	Villages

Areas of Influence	
	Contested Areas
	Government (SAA)
	Non-state armed groups
	ISIS Affiliates

“Return Movement” - Due to the challenge of verifying the nature and conditions of returns, the PMI has elected to use the term “return movement” to describe movement of individuals to their village of origin.

# Population Report

## The patterns are as follows:

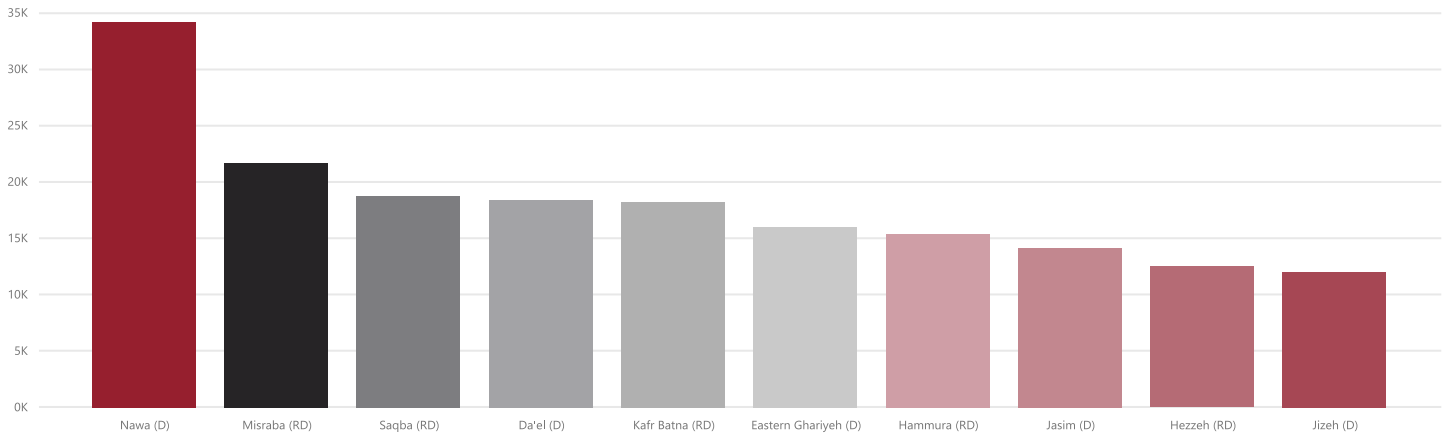
- 1** Multiple villages reported receiving individuals displaced from the Yarmouk valley due to increased fighting between JKW and AOGs. The perception that the ceasefire has created a stability outside the valley has resulted in steady, but minimal displacement since July. It is notable that some of the villages reporting the arrival of these Yarmouk IDPs define them as “newly displaced” regardless of the time of their arrival, and therefore may include families displaced for two months or more. Key Infomants (KIs) reported 500 to 700 individuals were displaced north into rural Quneitra, and approximately 1,000 individuals were displaced east toward Mzeireb sub-district.
- 2** In northern Jaydour, the towns of Hara, Nimer, and Jasim reported that IDPs left to return to their village of origin. The primary destinations of these reported return movements were Tiha, Mal, Aqraba, Zamrin, Samlin, and Ankhal, which were previously considered the front line for skirmishes between GoS forces and AOGs in northern Dar’a. However, since the onset of the ceasefire they have experienced little to no conflict. An estimated 900 to 1,100 individuals were reported to have returned to this region during the reporting period. Overall, an estimated 2,250 individuals have engaged in return movements to these villages since the onset of the ceasefire.
- 3** Return movements and displacements involving an estimated 550 to 600 individuals were reported from As-Sweida to eastern Dar’a, primarily Nahta, Eastern Maliha, Hrak, Kahil, and Um Walad. KIs reported that some of these were returns from Rukban camp on the north-eastern Jordanian border, some were returns from villages in As-Sweida, and some were seasonal movements for herding purposes that were misreported as displacements.
- 4** Seasonal nomadic movements of 60 to 70 livestock herders and their families in southeastern Dar’a, particularly transitioning between Smad, Simej, and Tisiya.
- 5** Return movements from Kahil and other eastern villages heading toward Dar’a Al Balad, Neimeh, and Mzeireb. Over 6000 individuals have reportedly returned to these villages.
- 6** Multiple reports cited movements in Rural Damascus from Jobar and Ein Terma towards Hezzeh and Kafr Batna due to conflict between GoS forces and AOG. According to sources, approximately 5,400 individuals were displaced.

Additional reports include elastic, temporary movements from the Yarmouk valley and Dar’a Al Balad. During these movements, it was reported that individuals leave their villages during the day to seek refuge and purchase supplies in other villages. However, at night, these individuals return to their village of origin.

During the period of coverage, two IDP settlements were transferred under the authority of different LCs. In Eastern Maliha, a settlement of approximately 300 to 500 individuals was transferred to the village’s IDP lists for distributions as the settlement is located within a reasonable proximity and was not registered by another LC. In the Jaydour region, 390 to 530 individuals in Tal Asman camp were transferred from Jasim’s LC to Nawa. Additionally, Nawa reported 1,122 newly registered IDPs from Yarmouk valley who had moved within the village and were subsequently removed from the LC list and then re-registered this month.

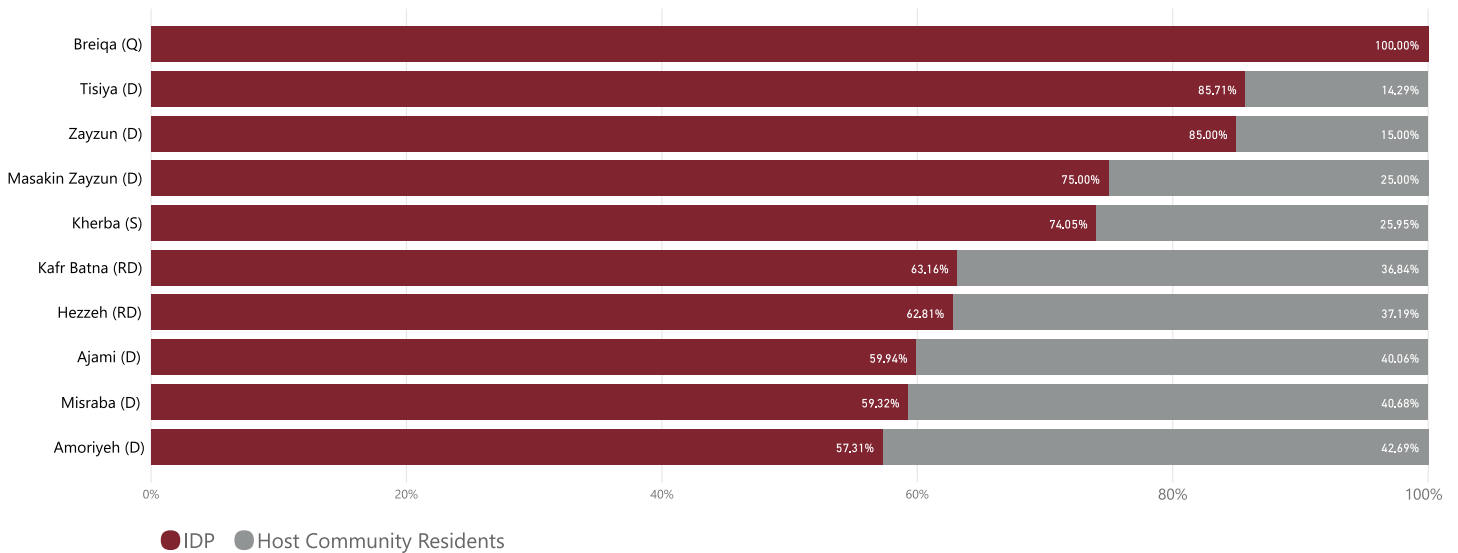
The PMI baseline was further refined due to improved reporting, clarification of definitions, and adjustments based on validation. These changes to baseline numbers are denoted in the data set comments and do not represent a change in population.

### Top Host Villages by # of IDP's Present



As both the IDP density map and graph above show, larger, more urban areas with relatively high access to services continue to be the biggest host villages for IDPs across southern Syria. Nawa reported hosting the highest number of IDPs with a total of 34,200 including some 1,122 IDPs from Yarmouk Valley. Five of the top ten villages shown here are large villages in Rural Damascus with high IDP populations. Many of the villages, such as Hammura, Misraba, and Saqba updated their IDP lists this month and reported lower but more updated numbers and as a result appear lower on this list than in the previous month's report.

### Top IDP Host Villages by % of Total Population



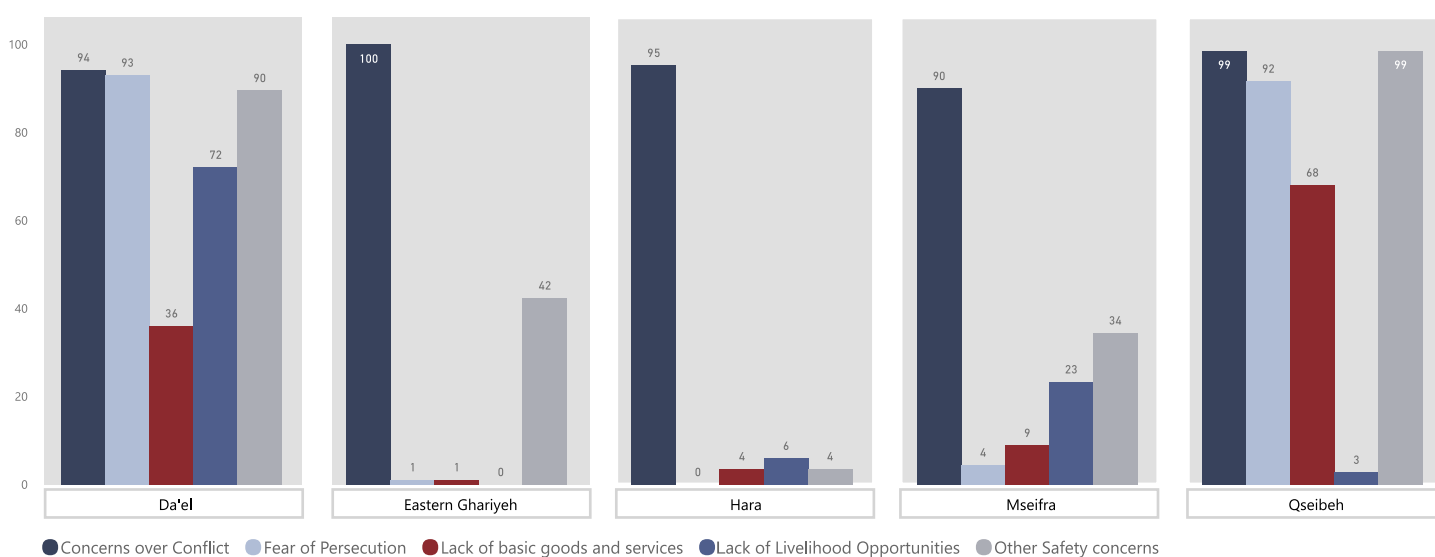
Breiqa remains the village with the highest percentage (100%) of IDPs as reported last month due to the evacuation of the local population and settlement by IDPs. In Tisiya only approximately 25 of the 1,300 pre-conflict resident population remain in the village, while approximately 150 IDPs have taken shelter in the village representing over 85% of the total population. In Zayzun and Masakin Zayzun, a large IDP settlement falls under the LC's jurisdiction representing a large percentage of the population of the area. Kherba, Hezzeh, Misraba, Kafr Batna, and large villages in Rural Damascus continue to host high percentages of IDPs. In Hezzeh and Kafr Batna new IDP arrivals were reported this month from Jobar, Ein Terma, and Al Marj.

## Household Analysis – Drivers of Displacement and Barriers to Return

The PMI conducted household level surveys in 5 villages following the completion of data collection. The purposes of these surveys were to 1) verify the IDP population reported through LCs; 2) utilize the verification pass/fail rate of the IDP lists as a proxy indicator for the effectiveness of LCs to monitor their populations; and 3) garner a better understanding of the displacement context and future intentions of the surveyed populations. In total, 461 households were surveyed with sampling calculated in order for the results to be statistically representative of each villages' reported IDP populations via a random sampling of IDP lists. In total, 36 households across the 5 villages were found not to be present. The village of Qseibeh in Quneitra had the highest fail rate, indicating a relatively low capacity of the local council to accurately count the population.

The top drivers for displacement of IDP populations across all villages were related to security concerns deriving from conflict, persecution, and other safety matters. In Eastern Ghariyeh, Hara, and Mseifra, very few IDPs cited economic or service based push factors, while in others such as Qseibeh and Da'el such factors were more common. The results of the survey showed that IDP households who reported being displaced multiple times were more likely to report livelihood and service based push factors. This indicates that conflict is the primary driver for initial displacements, while the causes for secondary displacement are more diverse, including the need to access aid, basic services, and livelihood opportunities.

### Reasons for Fleeing Village of Origin

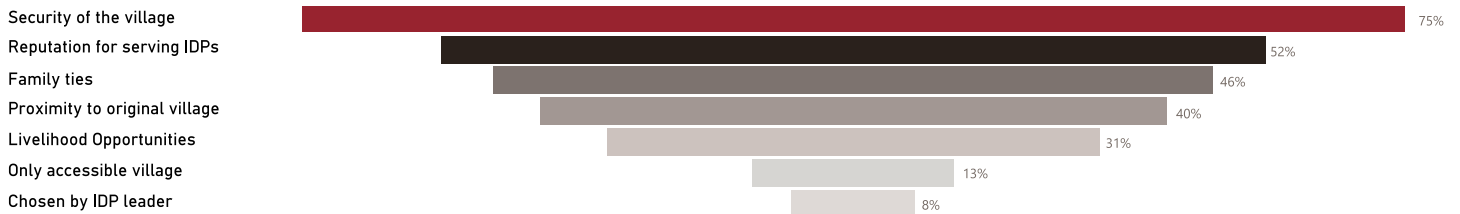


The survey examined each HH's top three reasons for seeking refuge in their current host village and found that the security of the host village as the most cited reason for host village selection (75% of HHs).

Regarding access to livelihoods (31%) and IDP services, e.g. aid distributions, utilities, and shelter (52%) also represent significant pull factors showing the importance of humanitarian assistance in host village environments. Family ties, often related to seeking shelter with relatives was indicated by 46% of HHs. This response was often reported by individuals hailing from rural villages with reputations of more prevalent tribal structures, which likely led them to emphasize host villages that have

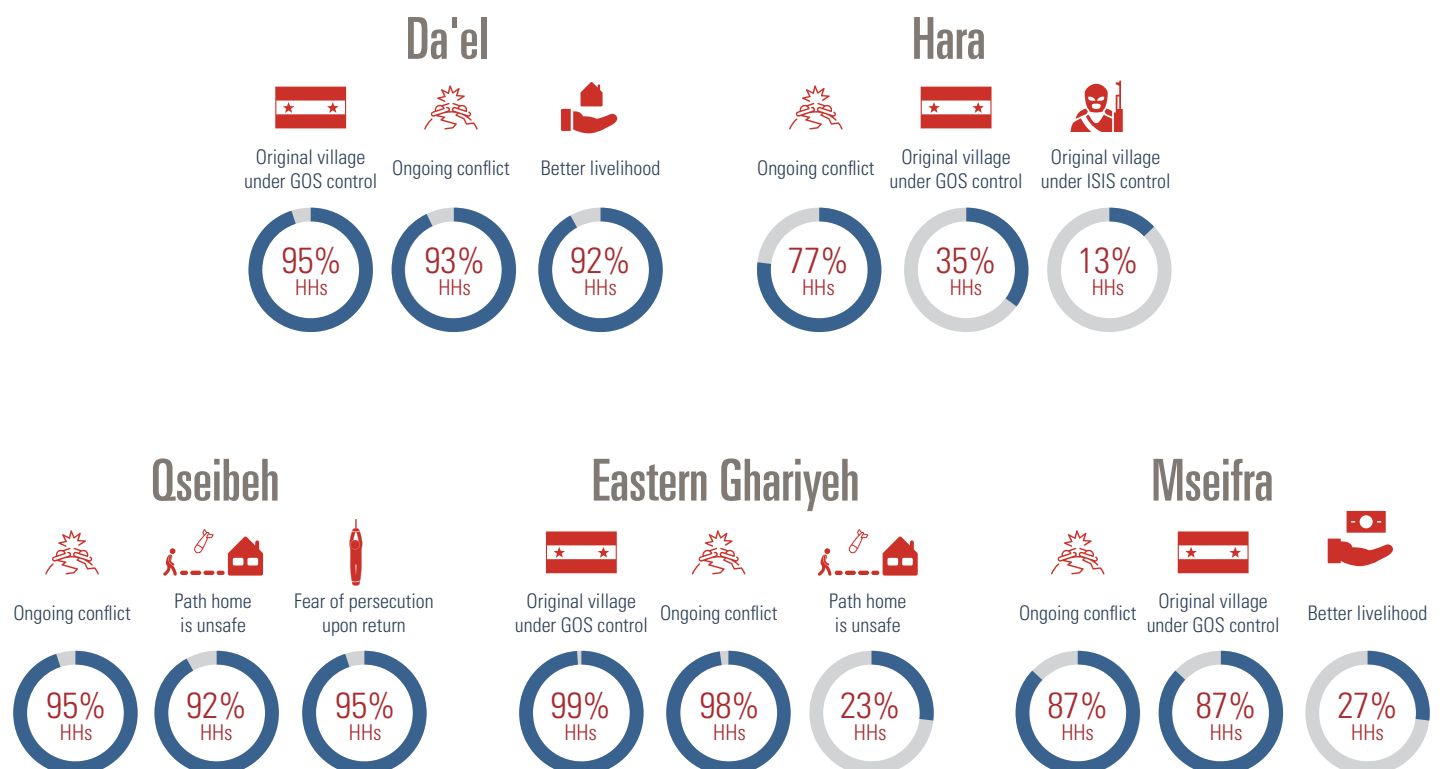
relatives from the same tribe. The relatively limited citations for geographic (40%) and logistical (13%) concerns for village selection indicated that IDPs will displace further than the nearest village in order to ensure their safety and access to humanitarian aid and shelter. The least common response (8%) was that the village was selected by an IDP leader. Of the 33 responses citing this reason, 30 of them (91%) were in the village of Da'el. These responses were divided in to two groups, with 66% hailing from Atman and 30% from Sheikh Miskine. It is likely that these individuals displaced as a large group, or series of groups, and followed the same IDP leaders when displacing.

## Reasons for Selecting Host Villages



## Reasons for Not Returning

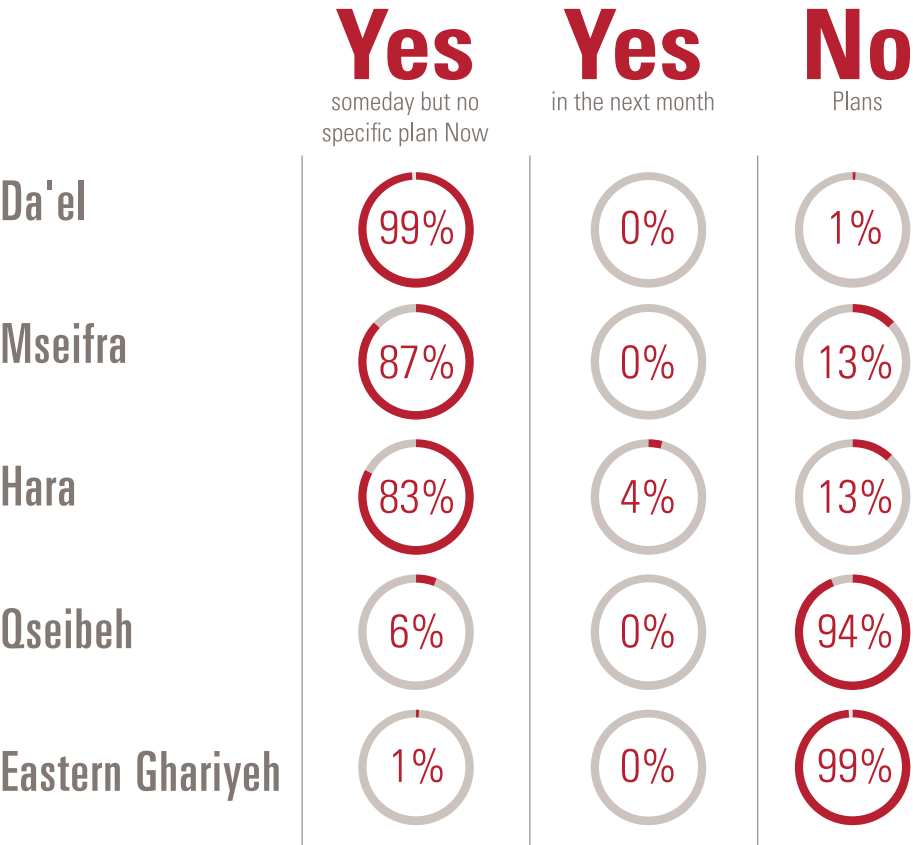
The surveyed HHs were also questioned about their top three barriers to return. In all five of the surveyed villages, the foremost reasons for not returning to their village of origin was ongoing conflict and/or that the area was under GoS control, with both reasons often being cited by the same HH. Notably, the village of Qseibeh, which hosts a large number of IDPs from diverse areas, cited that fear of persecution upon return and unsafe path home were tied as the second most common barriers. Curiously, 92% of the IDPs in Da'el indicate that they currently have greater access to livelihoods under their current living situation than they would in their villages of origin.





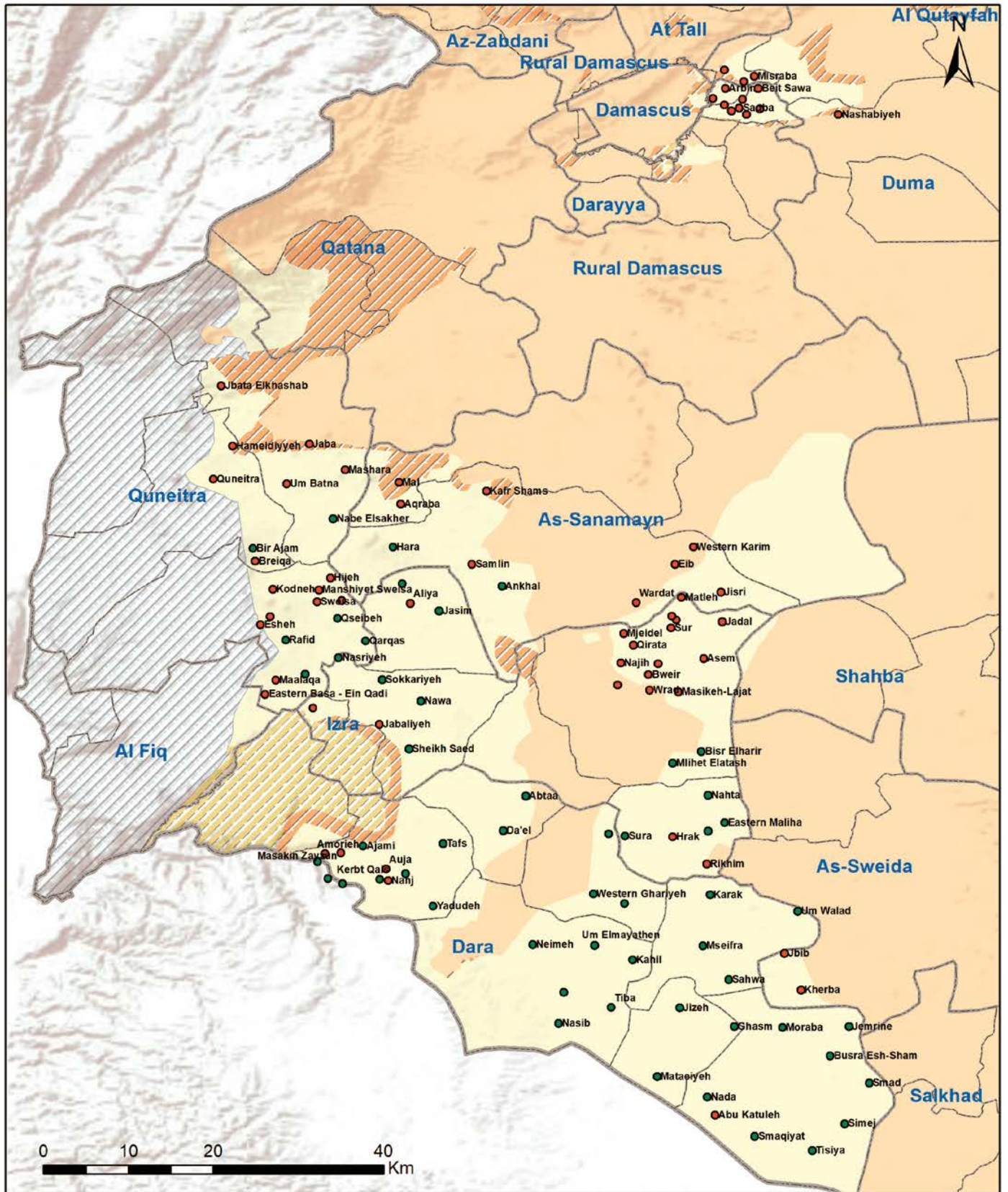
When surveyed on their current plans to return, the villages were primarily divided into two categories—the respondents either had no intention to return anytime soon, or intended to eventually return but lacked specific plans or a set timeline. The exception to these categories were three respondent households from Mal, Nawa, and Zamrin that currently reside in Hara. These three HH’s intentions match the return movement patterns to the return areas as observed during the reporting period. The two categories also divide neatly between geographical locations, with IDPs from Qseibeh and Eastern Ghariyeh both overwhelmingly claim that they do not intend to return. Whereas in Hara, Mseifra, and Da’el, the majority of IDPs have intentions to return someday but have not solidified plans.

Plans to Return





# POPULATION MONITORING INITIATIVE (PMI)

## Assessed Villages August 2017



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<p><b>Assessed Locations</b></p> <p># Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: red;">●</span> 1 Source</li> <li><span style="color: green;">●</span> 2 Sources</li> </ul>	<p><b>Administrative Boundaries</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Admin1</li> <li>- - - Admin2</li> <li>· · · Admin3</li> </ul>	<p><b>Areas of influence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="background-color: #f4a460; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> Contested Areas</li> <li><span style="background-color: #d3d3d3; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> Golan Heights</li> <li><span style="background-color: #fff9c4; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> Government (SAA)</li> <li><span style="background-color: #fff2cc; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> ISIS-affiliated groups</li> <li><span style="background-color: #fff2cc; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span> Non-state armed groups</li> </ul>	<p><b>Data Sources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IMMAP Population Monitoring -</li> <li>AFAK Population Monitoring -</li> <li>UNOCHA Area of Influence -</li> <li>UNOCHA Syrian Arab Republic (Administrative Boundaries) -</li> </ul> <p>GCS WGS 1984</p>	<p><b>Publication Date :</b> 05 May 17</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">   </div>
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