



## **Fact Sheet: Humanitarian Crisis in North and East Syria After Attacks on Aleppo and Shehba**

### **What began with the Aleppo offensive?**

On the 27th of November, Islamist-jihadist groups, mainly Hayat Tahir al-Sham (HTS), launched a major coordinated offensive on Aleppo. With the exception of the self-organised Kurdish and Christian districts of Sheikh Maqsood and Ashrafiyeh, the city was captured on the 29th of November. From there they spread their attacks via Hama to Damascus, mostly taking over areas previously controlled by the Syrian regime. On 8 December, the government of Bashar Al-Assad was overthrown.

At the same time as the attacks on Aleppo, the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) and other Islamist-jihadist groups attacked the cities and regions of Tel Rifat, Shehba and Minbij, which are part of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. Islamic State groups have also taken advantage of the situation to reorganise around Deir ez-Zor.

### **How hundred thousands were forced to flee?**

The attacks on Aleppo, Homs and Damascus caused many people to flee towards the DAANES. The first people from Aleppo reached the towns of Tebqa and Raqqa on the 29th of November. To prevent a massacre, the Autonomous Administration decided to evacuate the Shehba area. QSD and YPG/YPJ forces secured escape corridors for the people. Since the occupation of Afrin by the Turkish state and its mercenaries in 2019, around 200.000 people have been living in camps and temporary shelters in the Shehba region. They have built up self-organised collective living and defence structures, always hoping to one day return to their villages and the town of Afrin. Hundreds of thousands are currently fleeing for the second time, seeking shelter in the Autonomous Administration's cantons.

**About 120 000 people are registered as refugees  
in the region of North and East Syria in the last week until 9th of December 2024.**

<b>Raqqa</b>	<b>Tebqa</b>	<b>Hesseke</b>	<b>Qamishlo</b>	<b>Kobanê</b>
3001	8940	1717	1909	792

(Number of registered **families** [about 6 people] according to the local committees on 8 December 2024)

### **Why people are fleeing HTS and SNA?**

The Islamist group Hayat Tahir Al-Sham (HTS) may present itself as moderate in public, but it has a history with al-Qaida and Islamic State. They are a coalition of jihadist groups and fighters known for their cruelty and human rights abuses during the civil war in Syria. At the same time, according to their public speeches, they are pursuing the establishment of an Islamic state in Syria in accordance with their Salafi-Sunni leanings, in addition to the overthrow of the Assad regime. The impact this will have on a country where different religious and ethnic communities live together, such as Sunnis, Shiites, Alawites, Druze, Kurds, Assyrian Christians, Yezidis, Armenians, Turkmen, etc., and in particular what this could mean for women, is vividly remembered by many from their experiences during the rule of the Islamic State. The fear of a new regime of terror is enormous. The people of Shehba are already familiar with the methods of groups like HTS and SNA from the occupation of Afrin and the mercenary regime installed there by the Turkish state.



## Which eyewitness report?

As the attacks on Aleppo began, images of beheadings and Islamic State emblems spread on social media. The methods used in the attacks on the people of Tel Rifat and the Shehba region, as reported by refugees, paint a similar picture. They speak of harassment, detentions and massacres:

- people were deliberately prevented from fleeing by destroying vehicles or disrupting escape routes
- buses sent to evacuate were detained.
- vehicles full of civilians were shot at.
- men were abducted and separated from women and children. Their fate is still unknown.
- people were arbitrarily attacked and murdered in front of their families.
- telephones were taken from families so they could not report or call for help.

## What the current situation of refugees is like?

Flight is always a humanitarian crisis. Leaving one's home and the hope of returning is as traumatic as the attacks experienced. Add to this the conditions of a panicked escape in winter without adequate preparation and provisions. People arrive with what they can carry or what fits in the car. They report that

- newborn babies did not survive the journey due to the cold and lack of adequate care,
- families, including many children, have been separated from their relatives.
- many are still on the streets, in tents or cars, in poor hygienic conditions and with inadequate protection from the cold.

*We have seen pregnant women giving birth on the streets and in emergency shelters. People with diabetes, heart disease, cancer and skin diseases suffer from the poor hygienic conditions. We saw the tiredness, stress and pain of forced migration in the eyes of elderly people,"* reports Meryem Ibrahim, Co-Chair of the Social Affairs Department in North and East Syria.

## What is urgently needed?

The economic crisis in Syria, which has been going on for years, has worsened with the collapse of the Syrian state. The inflation rate has doubled in a few days. Prices are rising and many shops are closed. Together with the local administration, the people have organised the distribution of food, health care and accommodation in tents, empty flats and with families. Hundreds of thousands are now seeking shelter in a region that has been denied recognition and support. International organisations such as the UN are withdrawing their staff and border crossings are closed to international aid.

In these unstable times, it is important not to leave the people of Syria alone. Humanitarian aid is urgently needed to care for the refugees. Food, clothes, medicines, blankets and much more. At the same time, political solidarity with all democratic forces is needed, including recognition of the autonomous administration in North and East Syria, in order to contribute to a democratic future for Syria and prevent even worse crises.

On the other hand, a clear stance is also needed against the Islamist-jihadist forces and their crimes, as well as against the occupation policy of NATO state Turkey.