Potential cross-border assistance from Turkey to Syria

Syria Needs Analysis Project – April 2014

This thematic report examines the potential capacity to reach populations in need of humanitarian assistance via the main border crossings to Syria from Turkey. For more information on the current humanitarian situation in Syria see the SNAP Regional Analysis Reports which are published on a quarterly basis.

The Syria Needs Analysis Project welcomes all information that could complement this report. For additional information, comments or questions please email SNAP@ACAPS.org

Contents

Overview

This thematic report examines the potential capacity to reach populations in need of humanitarian assistance via the main border crossings to Syria from Turkey taking into consideration shrinking humanitarian space and volatile security along the border with Turkey while the severity of humanitarian needs continues to grow in the affected governorates in the north of Syria. Little concrete progress on increasing the humanitarian access has been achieved so far, despite the adoption of the non-binding UN Security Council that urges more humanitarian access (2 October 2013).

Borrowing the concept of 'catchment population' [1] from the health sector, the methodology of the thematic report is based on the assumption that catchment populations are more than mere counts of users: they are estimates of the number of potential users.

Through each of the border crossings potential populations between 500,000 and 2,500,000 could be assisted by humanitarian actors from the north, many of which are already facing life-threatening problems due to the lack of access to health care, adequate WASH and shelter facilities as well as due to the lack of food.

Should the current unrest continue, permanent closure of border crossings is likely with access to up to 9.5 million people compromised.

Bab al Salama is the primary crossing that serves Aleppo city and as a result is assessed to be the single crossing serving the largest catchment population and the potential to meet the highest number of people in need in the northern Syria. Bab al Hawa also serves in excess of 1 million people in need, primarily in Idleb Governorate. Both crossings are currently open, although data on daily opening/closing is incomplete. Should either of these crossings close for a significant period, impact on both humanitarian operations and commerce would be major.
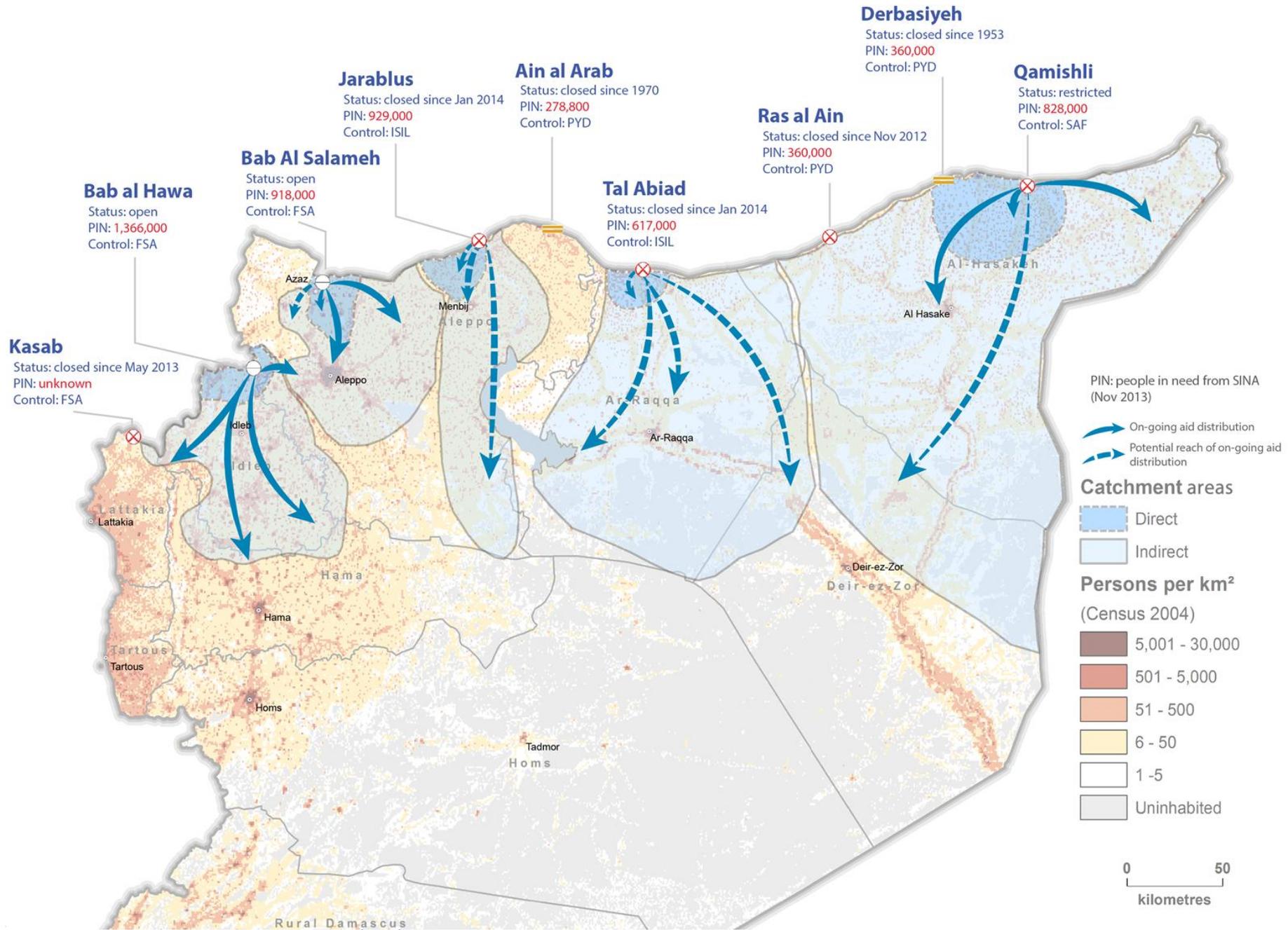
Already the closure of the 4 easternmost crossings is preventing the delivery of humanitarian assistance to a potential population of more than 3 million people. With almost all access (from Damascus, Iraq and Turkey) to the governorates of Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor blocked for the fourth consecutive month, concerns over the deteriorating humanitarian conditions are growing. According to WFP almost 1 million people are estimated to be at risk of food insecurity in these 2 governorates of whom 600,000 are considered in urgent need of assistance. Opening a border crossing either in Ar-Raqqa or Al Hasakeh will be crucial to reach people in need in the east of Syria who are currently inaccessible.

Between January and February the main 2 border crossings known to be used for commercial traffic were Bab al Salama and Bab al Hawa. These two crossings provide good access to active markets in opposition-controlled areas in the north of Syria such as A'zaz and Sarmada where almost all the goods are available in the markets.

Monitoring of the status of border crossings has been irregular although OCHA now produce a weekly update on the status of each crossing.

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[1] For a definition of catchment population see the methodology section on p3.

Population in need potentially reachable via each border crossing

Derbasiyeh
Status: closed since 1953
PIN: 360,000
Control: PYD

Qamishli
Status: restricted
PIN: 828,000
Control: SAF

Jarablus
Status: closed since Jan 2014
PIN: 929,000
Control: ISIL

Ain al Arab
Status: closed since 1970
PIN: 278,800
Control: PYD

Ras al Ain
Status: closed since Nov 2012
PIN: 360,000
Control: PYD

Bab Al Salameh
Status: open
PIN: 918,000
Control: FSA

Tal Abiad
Status: closed since Jan 2014
PIN: 617,000
Control: ISIL

Bab al Hawa
Status: open
PIN: 1,366,000
Control: FSA

Kasab
Status: closed since May 2013
PIN: unknown
Control: FSA

PIN: people in need from SINA (Nov 2013)

→ On-going aid distribution
⇢ Potential reach of on-going aid distribution

Catchment areas
- Direct
- Indirect

Persons per km²
(Census 2004)
- 5,001 - 30,000
- 501 - 5,000
- 51 - 500
- 6 - 50
- 1 -5
- Uninhabited

0   50
kilometres

Methodology

In light of the UN Security Council resolution 2139 (2014) adopted on 22 February, demanding that all parties in Syria allow the provision of humanitarian assistance, cease depriving civilians of food and medicine, and enable the rapid, safe, and unhindered evacuation of all civilians who wish to leave, this thematic report examines the potential capacity to reach populations in need of humanitarian assistance via the main border crossings to Syria from Turkey. On 2 October 2013, the Council adopted a non-binding statement urging more humanitarian access, but the statement produced little administrative progress. (UN News Service 2014/02/22)

For the population potentially served by such assistance two measurements are taken into consideration: **the number of people in need residing** in the areas potentially served with assistance through the crossing as well as the **total current population** residing in the areas of concern.

The concept of catchment population is borrowed from the health sector, where it is defined as the group of persons who would attend the hospital or unit were they to require treatment. It is significant to note that the language employed in this definition alludes to potential.

There are several different statistical approaches to measuring catchment population, discussion of which is beyond the scope of this document. **However, the important concept borrowed from this theory is that catchment populations are more than mere counts of users: they are estimates of the number of potential users.** Most approaches utilise the time it takes to travel to a designated health facility weighted by the number of people to give an average road time from ward to ward. A ward's 'neighbours' were then defined to be the five wards with the lowest average road travel time.[2]

The concept of catchment population is used in strategic planning at a tactical level. While the concept provides useful background information other factors will also have to be considered. Thus this document looks at the distance and obstacles present for the population as well as the humanitarian actors travelling to key distribution hubs where humanitarian assistance can be accessed.

The map on page 2 is an indication of the population potentially reachable via each border crossing ("catchment population") according to the population figures collected during SINA.

For the purpose of this document 2 categories of catchment population are considered:

- **Direct catchment population:** describing population living in an area close to the border crossing and able to reach the border crossing directly with no constraints (such as check points, geographic obstacles, roads, security constraints, etc.).

- **Indirect catchment population:** refers to populations required to travel long distances in order to reach the border crossing facing some difficulties in reaching it such as security conditions and logistical or geographic obstacles. Thus the indirect population is the population resident *further away* from the border crossings.
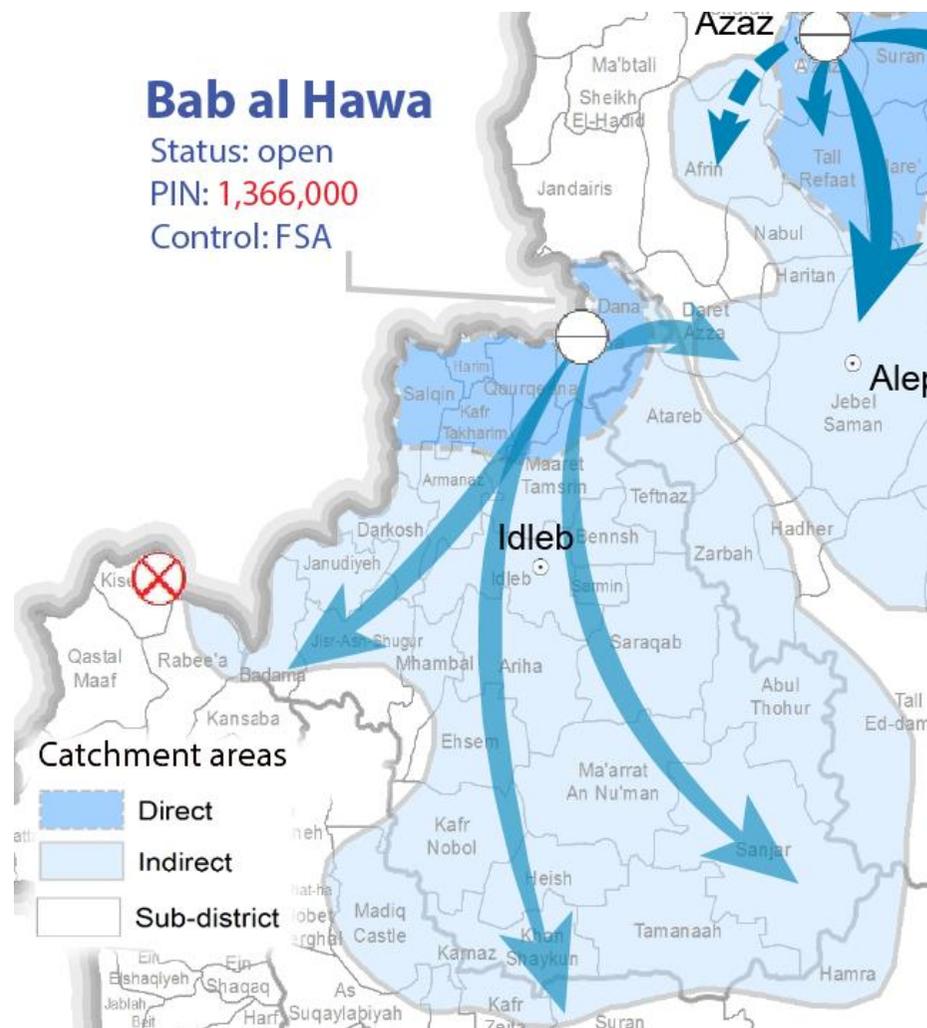
Although the above refers to the ability of people to access a particular crossing point, it is analogous with the ability of humanitarian service providers to access the population via the same crossing point as not everyone included in the catchment physically goes to the border to collect assistance.

An example is given on p4. Throughout this report both the people in need and catchment population figures are based on results from the SINA in November 2013 so should be used to give an order of magnitude only as population movement will have occurred.

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[2] Estimating Hospital Catchment Populations, Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Vol. 31, No 1, 1981, Senn, S. J., Samson, W.B; Estimations of Hospital Catchment Populations for Inpatient Activity in N Ireland, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Spotswood, Philip; Identification of Hospital Catchment Areas using Clustering: An Example from the NHS, Health Services Research 45:2, 2010, Gilmour, Stuart John

Example

Bab al Hawa border crossing can be reachable easily by people residing in Dana, Qurqanya, Harim, Salqin and Kafr Takharim and thus also by humanitarian organisations. People in these areas do not have to travel long distances and face limited geographic or security obstacles to reach the border crossing. They are considered to be reached directly through the border crossing (indicated by the dark blue shading on the map below). Some 449,000 people were reported to reside in the above-mentioned sub-districts in November 2013 [3], of whom 335,000 were reportedly in need of humanitarian assistance.

In contrast, people from Ma'arrat en Nu'aman sub-district must travel far and face several checkpoints and other security constraints to reach the border crossing meaning they are considered as population reachable indirectly. The total population of Ma'arrat en Nu'aman was reported to be 267,000 [4]. Indirectly through this border crossing a total catchment population of 2,113,000 can be reached (as indicated by the light blue shading on the map below).
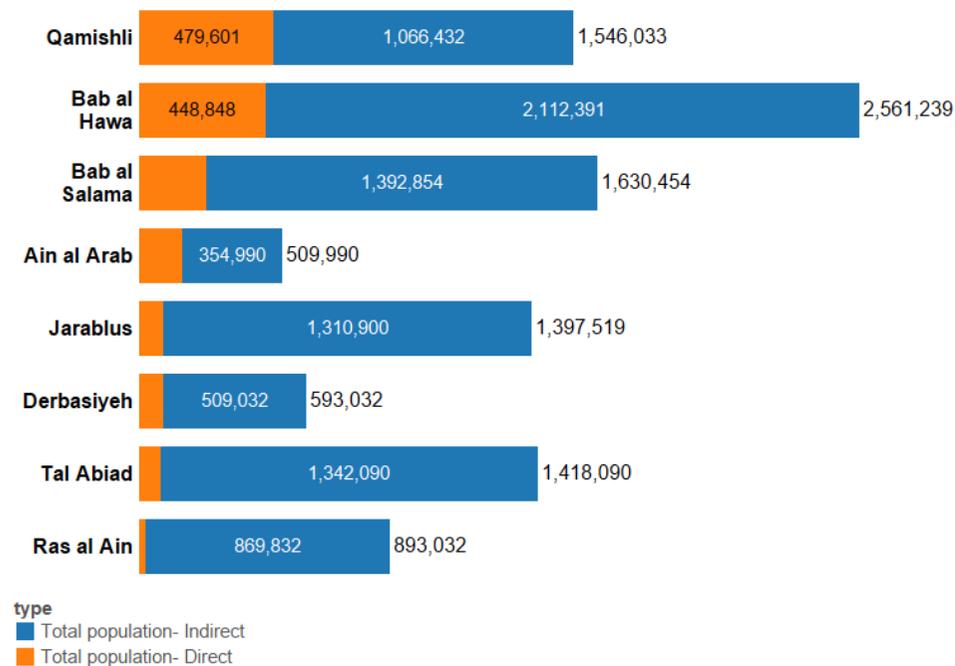

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[3] Syria Integrated Needs Assessment (SINA) November 2013
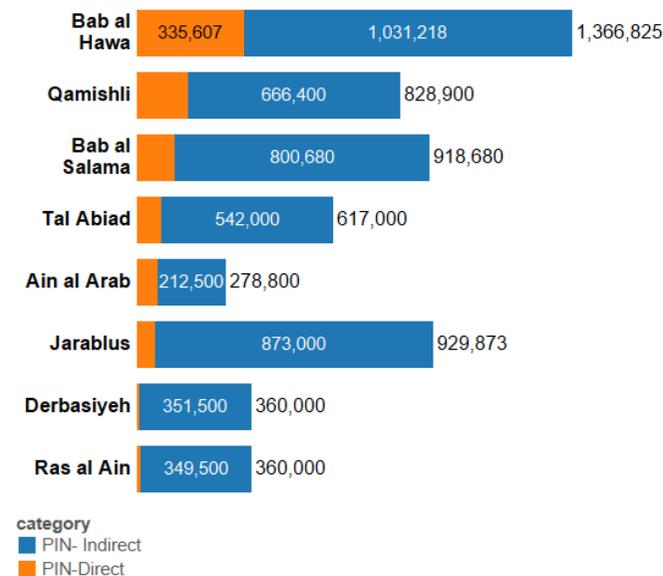[4] *Ibid*

Potential Access

The below graph gives an indication of the population that could be reached through each border crossing ("catchment population") according to the population figures collected during SINA (November 2013).

Total (catchment) population which could be accessed via each border crossing

Border crossing	Total population- Direct	Total population- Indirect	Total
Qamishli	479,601	1,066,432	1,546,033
Bab al Hawa	448,848	2,112,391	2,561,239
Bab al Salama		1,392,854	1,630,454
Ain al Arab		354,990	509,990
Jarablus		1,310,900	1,397,519
Derbasiyeh		509,032	593,032
Tal Abiad		1,342,090	1,418,090
Ras al Ain		869,832	893,032

type
- Total population- Indirect
- Total population- Direct

Number of people in need which could be accessed via each border crossing

Border crossing	PIN-Direct	PIN- Indirect	Total
Bab al Hawa	335,607	1,031,218	1,366,825
Qamishli		666,400	828,900
Bab al Salama		800,680	918,680
Tal Abiad		542,000	617,000
Ain al Arab		212,500	278,800
Jarablus		873,000	929,873
Derbasiyeh		351,500	360,000
Ras al Ain		349,500	360,000

category
- PIN- Indirect
- PIN-Direct

While the Bab al Hawa is shown to be the border crossing able to serve the largest number of people in need in the northern Syria, the SINA underestimated the current population of Aleppo city (as not all the city was assessed). Thus it is probable that Bab al Salama is the border crossing with the potential to reach the larger number of people in need.
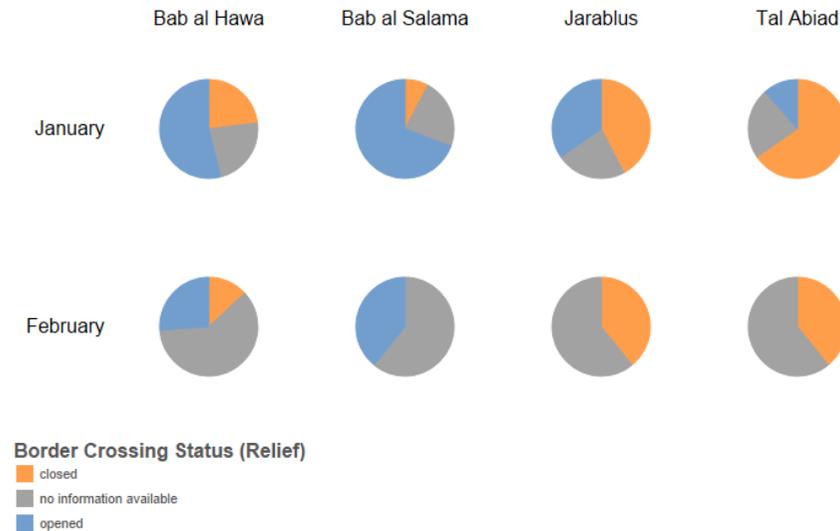
The Qamishli border crossing also has the potential to reach a large number of people in areas with high severity of needs which highlights the importance of having this border crossing open for humanitarian activities and the positive impact for that on the humanitarian situation in general in north-eastern Syria.

Jarablus is another crossing through which a significant number of people in need can be accessed.
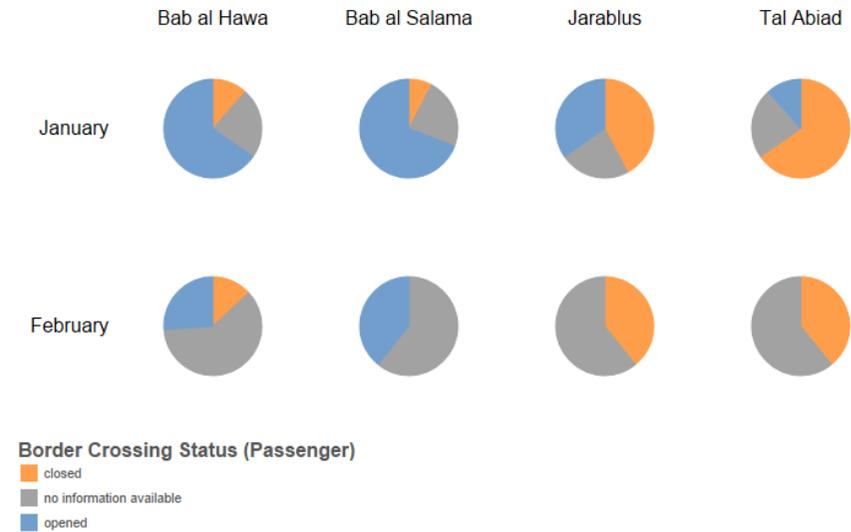
Frequency of closure

The frequency of closure varies between the four main border crossings (Bab al Hawa, Bab al Salama, Jarablus and Tal Abiad). A meaningful comparison between January and February 2014 is difficult due to the limited data available for February. However, it is clear the border crossings were open for relief activities on almost all the days they were open for the movement of passengers with the exception of Bab al Hawa border crossing.

Status of border crossings during 2014 – humanitarian assistance
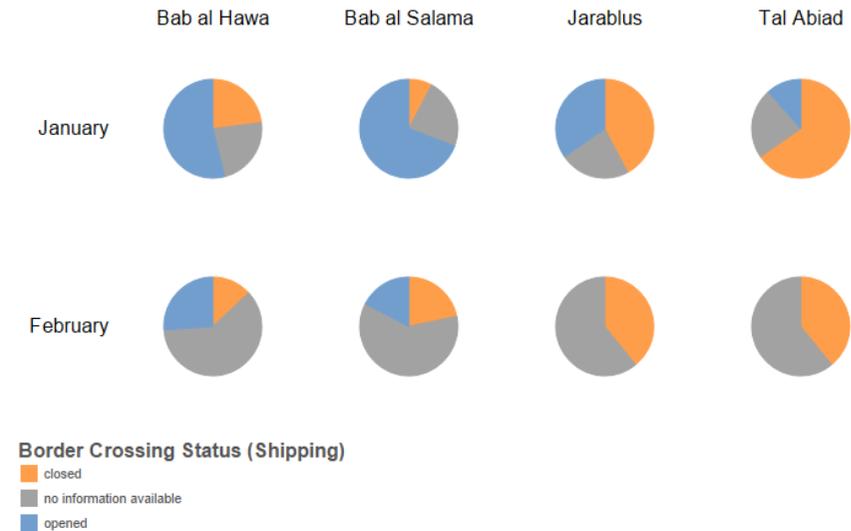

Between January and February the main 2 border crossings used for commerce were Bab al Salama and Bab al Hawa. These two border crossings provide good access to active markets in opposition-controlled areas in the north of Syria such as A'zaz and Sarmada where almost all the goods are available in the markets. They supply merchants from other markets in the north of Syria with various goods ranging from cars to medicines.

Status of border crossings during 2014 – passengers

Status of border crossings during 2014 – commercial goods

Analysis of crossings between Syria and Turkey

There are currently 9 main border crossing points operating at different frequencies on Syria's northern border with Turkey (from West to East): Kasab - Bab al Hawa - Bab al Salama - Jarablus – Ain al Arab – Tal Abiad – Ras al Ain - Derbasiyeh – Qamishli.

In each of the following profiles, the number of people in need and the catchment population[5] is calculated using figures collected in November 2013 during the SINA.

Kasab (Lattakia) – Yayladagi

Name of Syrian Town	Kasab
Name of Turkish Town	Yayladagi
Controlled By	Opposition
Catchment Population - Direct	Unknown
Catchment Population - Indirect	Unknown
# of People in Need - Direct	Unknown
# of People in Need - Indirect	Unknown

Status

Kasab crossing has been closed since 21 May 2013 although smuggling of goods and crossing of people was still reported in the area (Al Akhbar 2013/08/05). The crossing has been controlled by opposition groups since the 21 March 2014 however it is unlikely to reopen in the near future due to the continuing insecurity in the local area.

Significance

Opening this border crossing from the Turkish side for humanitarian traffic might allow humanitarian agencies to reach people in need in northern Lattakia especially in the areas of Turkmen and Kurdish Mountains due to the short distance between these areas and the Turkish borders compared to the border crossing currently in use: Bab al Hawa.

Bab al Hawa (Idleb) – Cilvegozu

Name of Syrian Town	Bab al Hawa
Name of Turkish Town	Cilvegozu
Controlled by	Opposition
Catchment Population - Direct	448,848
Catchment Population - Indirect	2,112,391
# of People in Need - Direct	335,607
# of People in Need - Indirect	1,031,218

Status

This crossing point is frequently closed, mainly due to security reasons including incidents such as car bombs and air strikes.

Having taken control of Bab al Hawa crossing in July 2012 the FSA subsequently lost control to ISIL. However, the crossing has been under control of the FSA since January 2014 following the withdrawal of ISIL from the area and its weak presence in the surrounding western Rural Aleppo towns and the northern towns of Idleb Governorate. It has been targeted several times by SAF air strikes and, recently, also by ISIL with car bombs and the risk of future attacks remains. Thus closures are expected to continue with direct implications on humanitarian efforts.

Significance

The main border crossing from Turkey into Idleb, Northern Hama and Eastern Rural Lattakia, is widely used by humanitarian organisations working from Turkey. The frequent closures have had a direct impact on humanitarian operations, predominantly those in Idleb and Northern Hama and some parts of Western Rural Aleppo.

There are currently approximately 80 IDP camps in Idleb Governorate hosting up to 89,000 IDPs. All those can be accessed with humanitarian assistance through Bab al Hawa border crossing.

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[5] For an explanation of catchment population see p3

Bab al Salama (Aleppo) – Oncupinar

Name of Syrian Town	Azaz
Name of Turkish Town	Oncupinar
Controlled by	Opposition
Catchment Population - Direct	237,600
Catchment Population - Indirect	1,392,854
# of People in Need - Direct	118,000
# of People in Need - Indirect	800,680

Status

Currently open, the closure of Bab al Salama in the past was linked to security incidents, mainly clashes between ISIL and FSA. Attempts from ISIL to control this border crossing caused a swift closure from the Turkish authorities: a pattern which suggests that every border crossing controlled by ISIL will be potentially closed by Turkish authorities. A closure of this very active border crossing would have major implications on the humanitarian operations in the Governorate of Aleppo in general and would prevent Syrians fleeing the war from being able to find refuge in Turkey. ISIL withdrew from A'zaz on the 4 March 2014 leaving the crossing under FSA control, resulting in safe access for people and humanitarian organisations. However a risk remains that the crossing can be targeted by car bombs attacks and aggression.

Significance

This is the main crossing point between Aleppo and Turkey, and the main route for humanitarian response into Aleppo. It is also used widely by Syrians seeking to cross into Turkey, due to its limited closure and proximity to Aleppo city. The crossing was the main destination for the large number of people who fled the eastern neighbourhoods of Aleppo city after the massive barrel-bombs attack in the first weeks of February (USAID 2014/02/13). The neighbouring town in Turkey, Kilis, hosts around 70,000 Syrian refugees as of 11 April 2014, compared to the local population of the town which is 90,000 (UNHCR 2014/03/06). There are also two major IDPs camps within Syria close to this border crossing hosting more than 20,000 people (Daily Star 2014/02/21). Both locations receive assistance via this crossing. Bab al Salama camp was targeted by ISIL with a car bomb resulting with the death of 14 IDPs, but Turkish authorities kept the border crossing open to facilitate evacuation of the wounded (ECHO 2014/02/21, Reuters 2014/02/20).

Ain al Arab (Aleppo) – Mursitpinar

Name of Syrian Town	Ain al Arab
Name of Turkish Town	Mursitpinar
Controlled by	YPG
Catchment Population - Direct	155,000
Catchment Population - Indirect	354,990
# of People in Need - Direct	66,300
# of People in Need - Indirect	212,500

Status

The only crossing point between Turkey and a Kurdish-majority area in Aleppo governorate, Ain al Arab crossing was closed in the 1970s, long before the conflict. However limited access for humanitarian assistance, such as moving sick and wounded people to Turkish hospitals and allowing limited amount of humanitarian assistance to enter the area was reported in December 2013. Security procedures against smuggling were tightened in early 2014: it was reported in February that Turkish authorities clashed with migrant smugglers while preventing them to cross the border (ARA News 2014/02/06). The crossing has been controlled by PYD since mid -2012. It is expected that restrictions on movement through this border crossing might ease, especially after the improved coordination between PYD and Turkish forces in fighting ISIL close to Jarablus in February 2014. With ISIL still controlling major towns such as Tal Abiad and Jarablus there might be pressure to use this border crossing increasingly for humanitarian reasons, particularly to reach eastern Rural Aleppo and Ar-Raqqa as continual closures of other border crossings controlled by ISIL or close to ISIL areas of control are observed.

Significance

The permanent closure of this border crossing might not have important implications since it was not used operationally for a long time, although humanitarian actors are trying to coordinate with Turkish authorities to increase activities and re-open the crossing. If this border crossing was opened permanently it will be the first border crossing with Turkey to allow humanitarian access to a Kurdish area in Syria. This is, however, unlikely and will depend on the relationship between PYD and Turkish authorities in combating ISIL.

Jarablus (Aleppo) – Karkamis

Name of Syrian Town	Jarablus
Name of Turkish Town	Karkamis
Controlled by	ISIL
Catchment Population - Direct	86,619
Catchment Population - Indirect	1,310,900
# of People in Need - Direct	56,873
# of People in Need - Indirect	873,000

Status

Since ISIL took control of the town in January 2014 this border crossing has been closed for both movements of goods and people with the exception of limited crossings of individuals fleeing local conflict to cross to Turkey.

Significance

Some humanitarian organisations had been using the crossing point to provide assistance to areas such as Maskaneh, Abu Qalqal, Khafseh, Menbij and Jarablus, although all the programs using the crossing have been subsequently shut down by INGOs due to threats from ISIL and the unstable security situation. To resume operations, humanitarian agencies require both an open border and safe operating environment both of which are dependent on the local security situation. As no immediate improvement in security is foreseen the crossing is likely to remain closed. Considering the high number of IDPs (497,000) in the areas mentioned above and the high severity of humanitarian needs, especially in health [6], the continued closure will have significant implications on the humanitarian situation in the area.

Tal Abiad (Ar Raqqa) – Akcakale

Name of Syrian Town	Tal Abiad
Name of Turkish Town	Akcakale
Controlled by	ISIL
Catchment Population - Direct	76,000
Catchment Population - Indirect	1,342,090
# of People in Need - Direct	75,000
# of People in Need - Indirect	542,000

Status

The Tal Abiad crossing has been closed since January 2014 due to heavy clashes in Tal Abiad between FSA and ISIL. Meanwhile the western rural parts of Tal Abiad are witnessing continuous fighting between PYD and ISIL. Despite this, Turkish authorities reportedly allowed some 4,000 people to return to Syria using this border crossing in February. (USAID 2014/02/13)

Significance

Tal Abiad is the only border crossing between Ar-Raqqa Governorate and Turkey; it has been used by various organisations based in Urfa (Turkey) to enter assistance to Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor governorates since the beginning of 2013. Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor governorates have a high number of people in need of more than 1,095,000 people (out of 3,181,000 current total population) and high severity of needs across all sectors.

If the current unrest continues, it is likely to result in the permanent border closure which will cut access to more than 3 million people who depend on the delivery of relief goods from Turkey. It is unlikely that humanitarian organisations will be able to use this border crossing to reach people in need in the east of Syria. With all access to the governorates of Ar Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor blocked for the fourth consecutive month concerns over the deteriorating humanitarian conditions are growing. Almost one million people are estimated to be at risk of food insecurity in these two governorates and 600,000 of them are considered in urgent need of assistance (WFP 2014/02/21)

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[6] SINA found that, in many of the sub-districts accessed by this border crossing, people to be facing critical, life-threatening health problems (mainly in Menbij, Abu Qalqal and Khafseh).

Ras al Ain (Al Hasakeh) – Ceylanpinar

Name of Syrian Town	Ras al Ain
Name of Turkish Town	Ceylanpinar
Controlled by	YPG
Catchment Population - Direct	23,200
Catchment Population - Indirect	869,832
# of People in Need - Direct	10,500
# of People in Need - Indirect	349,500

Status

This border crossing has been closed since 1999, although it used to be opened during Eids for relatives visits on both sides of the borders. Since November 2012, the YPG have controlled the town, its surrounds and the border crossing. Turkish authorities allowed refugees to cross during the battles at late 2012 and opened a refugee camp in Ceylanpinar, the Turkish border town.

Significance

The border crossing is not currently being used for humanitarian reasons. With the high severity of needs across sectors in Al Hasakeh Governorate in general and the limited access through the borders with Turkey, opening this border crossing is crucial to provide humanitarian assistance to people in the western parts of Al Hasakeh and the eastern parts of Ar-Raqqa governorates. At the end of February IOM reported that 230,000 IDPs and 319,000 other vulnerable people are residing in AL Hasakeh Governorate (IOM 2014/02/23). Similarly, SINA reported that 669,300 people in need are living in Al Hasakeh in 11 out of 16 assessed sub-districts with a total of 227,000 IDPs. Considering the unstable security situation in the area and the continuing fighting between YPG and Islamic groups (mainly ISIL and Jabhat al Nusra) it is unlikely that this border crossing will be used in the near future. Humanitarian access in Al Hasakeh remains severe problem, as reported during SINA in the majority of the assessed sub-districts (11 out of 16) and the limited access to the Governorate forced the UN to air lift aid in Qamishli since December 2013. (IOM 2014/02/23)

Derbasiyeh (Al Hasakeh) – Senyurt:

Name of Syrian Town	Derbasiyeh
Name of Turkish Town	Senyurt
Controlled by	YPG
Catchment Population - Direct	84,000
Catchment Population - Indirect	509,032
# of People in Need - Direct	8,500
# of People in Need - Indirect	351,500

Status

This border crossing has been closed since 1953 for traffic as there is no road and infrastructure and it is thus not suitable for cross-border operations, although it has been used in the past by civilians to enter Turkey. As the area is controlled by PYD, restrictions on the border crossing are high. It was recorded in January 2014 that the Turkish army shot at people trying to cross close from this border crossing (Al Akhbar 2014/01/11). It was not the only incident recorded since the beginning of the conflict in Syria.

Significance

It is not likely that this point will be qualified and rehabilitated to be suitable for using by humanitarian agencies, also given the unstable security situation in that area is another restriction.

Qamishli (Al Hasakeh) – Nusaybin:

Name of Syrian Town	Qamishli
Name of Turkish Town	Nusaybin
Controlled by	SAF
Catchment Population - Direct	479,601
Catchment Population - Indirect	1,066,432
# of People in Need - Direct	162,500
# of People in Need - Indirect	666,400

Status

Qamishli crossing was opened in 1953 and used for transporting goods and people in and out of Turkey. Access through this crossing has been highly restricted since the PYD took control of the majority of Qamishli district and the majority of the other Kurdish districts in Al Hasakeh Governorate. The town of Qamishli itself is under control of GoS forces with a noticeable presence of PYD, and the border crossing is closed.

In addition, Turkish authorities started building a two-meter high wall between Qamishli and the Turkish border town of Nuseiben in November 2013 – an indication of the desire to tighten control of this crossing.

The Security Council unanimously demanded the Syrian authorities and the opposition to promptly allow access for humanitarian supplies in the Northeast of Syria and arrangement with Turkish authorities are being made to open Nusaybin border crossing (Alertnet 2014/03/15). This effort resulted in Turkish and Syrian authorities allowing, in March 2014, a convoy of 78 trucks comprised of various UN agencies (WFP, UNHCR, WHO, UNICEF, IOM) to enter Syria through Nusaybin/Qamishli border crossing aiming to reach 268,000 people in need in Northeastern Syria. According to UN both the GoS and opposition need to continue to be reminded on their obligations to enable delivery of humanitarian aid across borders and cross lines wherever is needed (McClatchy DC 2014/03/25). However, it is still not clear what areas this convoy of humanitarian assistance reach. Trusted sources in the UN claimed that the distribution will take place mainly in areas under control of GoS which are already assisted by airlifts from Erbil and Damascus.

Significance

No humanitarian agencies are using this border crossing for cross-border operations (apart from the UN for their convoy in March 2014), despite the high number of people in need in the catchment area of this border crossing. Qamishli sub-district alone hosts 125,000 IDPs and a reported 131,000 people in need of humanitarian assistance, particularly food[7]. Permanent opening of this border crossing would give access to the majority of Al Hasakeh and Deir-ez-Zor governorates, but this might be related directly to a settlement between PYD and Turkish Government and also to the will of GoS to permit cross-border operations from Turkey to Syria. Opening a border crossing either in Ar-Raqqa or Al Hasakeh will be crucial to reach people in need in the east of Syria who are currently inaccessible according to WFP (WFP 2014/02/04). The limited access in the northeast of Syria forced the UN to airlift assistance to Qamishli in an attempt to reach up to 50,000 IDPs (UNHCR 2014/02/09)

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[7] SINA 2013