



# Water for Hasakeh

End the water war in Syria

March 2025



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# **1. *Background:* Alouk water pumping station's importance to Syria**

## ***1.1 Introducing the Hasakeh governorate in the North-East of Syria***

The Hasakeh governorate covers an area of 23,334 sq. km<sup>1</sup> in North-East Syria (NES). Prior to 2012, it was home to 1.6 million people, a religiously and ethnically diverse community made up mainly of Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Armenians and Yezidis. Although it is one of the most resource-rich regions in the country, with an economy dominated by arable agriculture and oil extraction, Hasakeh governorate was kept deliberately underdeveloped. As part of the former Government of Syria (GoS) policy of control and institutional oppression of the Kurdish minority, the oil revenue did not support any of the local communities<sup>2</sup>.

From 2004, and increasingly since 2020, North-East Syria experienced successive years of drought with rainfall below the average, twinned with above average summer temperatures, which significantly reduced agriculture and livestock production<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, the ongoing armed conflict has intensified issues such as water scarcity, wildfires, land and water source pollution, further degrading the environment<sup>4</sup>.

Since July 2012, this region has been administered by the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES), which has been operating an inclusive regional government, autonomous from the former GoS. However, due to the ongoing armed conflicts, the DAANES does not have full access to all the local natural reserves to ensure basic service provision to the local and displaced population living in Hasakeh governorate. Among these services, water access is one of the most critical.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2352409X22001493>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data\\_Product/Main\\_media/15\\_al\\_hasakeh\\_governorate\\_profile\\_february\\_2014.pdf](https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/15_al_hasakeh_governorate_profile_february_2014.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2

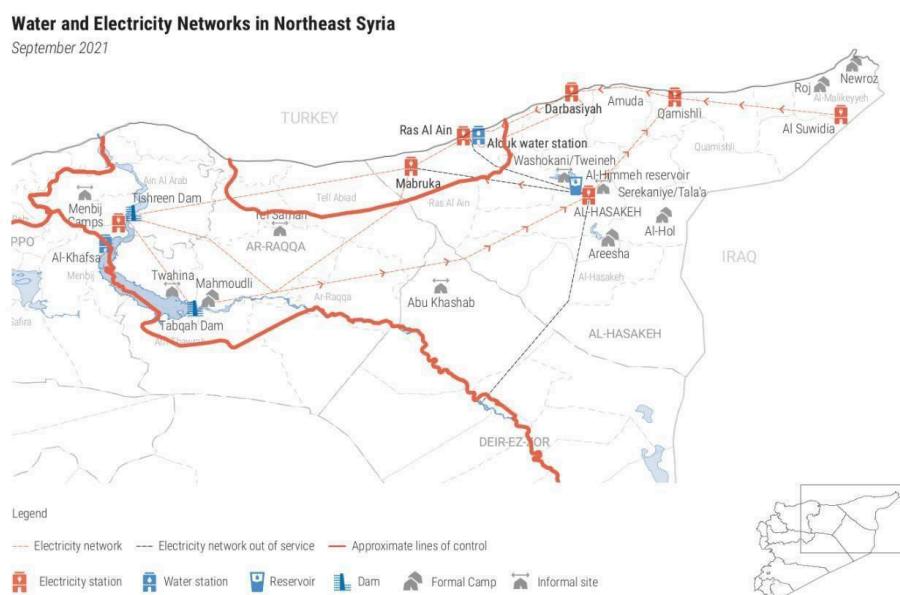
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/media/160481/file/Syria-Humanitarian-SitRep-30-June-2024.pdf>  
<https://turningpointnaq.org/2024/07/10/squashed-by-climate-change-and-turkeys-ecocidal-warfare-northern-syria-fights-the-worst-drought-in-70-years/>

Before the 2012 revolution and civil war, the people of Hasakeh relied on water for drinking, sanitation and irrigation from multiple sources, including groundwater, rivers and springs<sup>5</sup>. Electric water pumps are essential for the functioning of all these water sources. For example, wells in good condition require at least five hours of uninterrupted electricity to pump water, and a further two hours are needed to fill the tanks in the homes<sup>6</sup>.

The largest water source for Hasakeh governorate is the Alouk Water Pumping Station (WPS). Alouk is situated on the border with Türkiye near the city of Sere-Kaniye/Ras al-Ain. Commissioned in 2010, with a pump capacity of ~175,000 cubic meters of water per day<sup>7</sup>.

### *1.2 Attacks on Alouk Water Pumping Station since 2019 have deprived one million people of their main water source*

On 9 October 2019, Turkish armed forces and the Türkiye-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) launched the “Operation Peace Spring”, occupying the town of Sere-Kaniye, and 4,219 sq. km along the Syria-Turkey border, including the land where Alouk is situated, which was also hit with artillery strikes. Only a few hours after the start of this military operation, the first disruption of water supplies began<sup>8</sup>.



<sup>5</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/inside-syrias-water-crisis-cholera-outbreak-making>

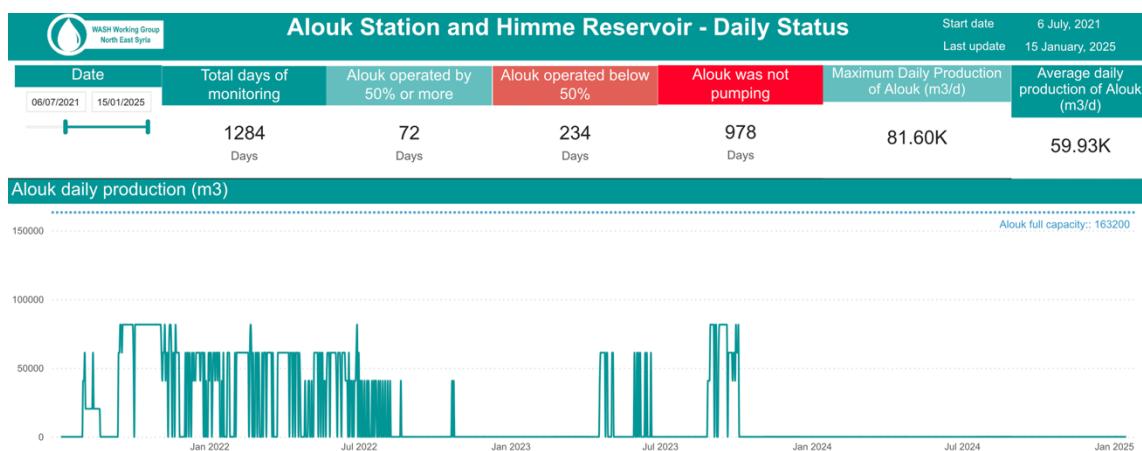
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/media/160481/file/Syria-Humanitarian-SitRep-30-June-2024.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://sti-sy.org/en/timeline-of-the-disruptions-series-of-aluk-water-pumping-station-north-east-syria/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/media/160481/file/Syria-Humanitarian-SitRep-30-June-2024.pdf>

According to data collected by the WASH Working Group of the NES Forum, from 17 November 2019 to 2 December 2024, the Alouk WPS was not in operation 57% of the time, therefore providing no water to the region. It operated at less than 50% of its full capacity 31% of the time, and at more than 50% of its capacity only 12% of the time. It was non-operational during most of the Covid-19 outbreak, making it even more difficult for the population living in Hasakeh to cope with the pandemic<sup>9</sup>.

Over the past years, the strictly limited access to Alouk affected the corrective and predictive maintenance process for the water pumping station, causing severe damage to many of its components, which now require maintenance and renovation. Maintenance work is hindered by the lack of safe access to the WPS for technical engineers and workers.



### 1.3 Efforts to restart the Alouk water pumping station have so far failed

Since 2019, there have been several negotiation efforts to ensure the functioning of the vital Alouk WPS. In April<sup>10</sup> and again in June<sup>11</sup> 2023, UNICEF negotiated a deal between Türkiye/SNA and the former GoS to allow engineers and technicians to access Alouk station. The main objective was to provide the needed maintenance works and to get the water flowing again. The DAANES were officially not parties to the negotiations but to have water flowing to Hasakeh they were asked to provide electricity to the plant and for other uses in the territory controlled by the SNA.

<sup>9</sup>

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiODFlZmU2NmQtMmMzMzC00MGRiLWJkYmMtZmFIOTY2MmRjMjBhIwidCl6Ijg1Njc0NTQyLWRINmUtNGUxZi04Nzg0LWM1NjBINTAzMTEyMyIsImMiQjh9>

<sup>10</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/northeast-syria-turkish-strikes-disrupt-water-electricity-enarkut>

<sup>11</sup> <https://npasyria.com/en/99771/>

Prior to 2019, Alouk WPS was powered by the Tishreen Dam via sub-stations at Tal Abiad, Mabrouka and Sere-Kaniye (Ras al-Ain). In 2019, this transmission route was damaged due to hostilities following Türkiye/SNA military operations.

Despite not being participants in the negotiations, in order to ensure NES population's access to clean water, DAANES agreed to provide electricity. Between 2019 and October 2023, Derbasiyah electrical sub-station, under DAANES authority, routed power to Alouk WPS from the Sweidiah Gas Turbines and later from the Euphrates (Tabqa) Dam. However, this backup electricity source provided only limited power and had several disruptions, for reasons including an electrical fire in April at the Derbasiyah electricity sub-station (as detailed in an OCHA Flash Update on 28 April<sup>12</sup>), and reduced overall electricity available in NES due to reduced water levels at Tishreen Dam<sup>13</sup> and the frequent Turkish Air Force (TAF) attacks on NES power and oil infrastructures. In January 2024, the Derbasiyah sub-station was damaged by the TAF bombing that targeted water and electricity infrastructure across the whole NES<sup>14</sup>.

As a result of this, Alouk WPS was taken completely out of service due to losing its last viable power source. The continuous TAF attacks to NES (in Oct 2023, December 2023, January 2024 and October 2024<sup>15</sup>) and the destruction of the power infrastructure have severely impacted the Syrian population's access to clean drinkable water<sup>16</sup>.

The fall of the former Syrian Government has ushered a period of opportunity and uncertainty, but to date there is no agreement in place for restarting Alouk WPS.

We believe that the main reason the plant is non-operational is that water has been used as a weapon of war. We invite you to agree that water must never be used as a weapon and must always be kept accessible to the civil population, as stated in Article 51 of the Geneva Convention and the UN General Assembly Resolution 64/292 of 28 July 2010.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syria-disruption-alouk-water-station-flash-update-01-28-april-2021>

<sup>13</sup> See footnote 10

<sup>14</sup> <https://npasyria.com/en/110076/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c79zj7rz3l4o>

<sup>16</sup> <https://ifl.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Water-Crisis-in-Al-Hasakeh-Assessment-of-Roles.pdf>



## ***2. Core messages:*** Restarting Alouk is vital for reconstruction

### **2.1 Severely damaged pumping station and power supply needs safety and repair**

Currently, the Alouk Water Pumping Station (WPS) has been out of service for more than one year. As reported by OCHA and the WASH Working Group of the NES Forum, Alouk stopped working due to a Turkish Air Force (TAF) airstrike on Amuda electricity transfer station on 5 October 2023<sup>17</sup>, which had transferred electricity to the Derbasiyah transfer sub-station, necessary to the functioning of Alouk WPS.

Furthermore, since 10 December 2024, a larger area of northern Syria is suffering from a severe water shortage, due to an ongoing armed conflict that is seriously impacting the important Tishreen Dam. In the aftermath of the former Syrian Government's fall, Türkiye/SNA have launched another military operation, called "Dawn of Freedom" against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Manbij. The Tishreen Dam is a hydroelectric dam on the Euphrates River that provides electricity to people across Syria, from Kobane down to Raqqa. The dam has repeatedly been shelled in the

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<sup>17</sup>See footnote 9

past weeks<sup>18</sup>, with a number of reported casualties of civilians who gathered to monitor the situation of the dam and protest its being targeted. There are very high risks of a catastrophic impact should the Tishreen Dam collapse. The immediate consequence of it being out of service has been a widespread lack of electricity and water for thousands of people for over thirty days. Attempts to provide an alternative source of electricity to water wells and stations have largely failed due to the ongoing military operation and the difficulty of providing maintenance to the power infrastructure.

## 2.2 Restarting Alouk for water, health and livelihoods of the suffering residents and IDPs

As of 8 October 2019, the day before Türkiye/SNA “Operation Peace Spring” and Sere-Kaniye occupation, Alouk WPS provided water to over 800,000 people, including locals and internally displaced people (IDPs)<sup>19</sup>. Since 2019, the severe water crisis has been considered an important driver of forced migration and continues to have an enormous humanitarian impact on the population of Hasakeh governorate, weakening the whole economy, and causing critical health risks.

- **Impact on Agriculture and Livestock:** The non-functioning of the Alouk Water Station has compounded the extreme water stress on agriculture caused by Türkiye’s ongoing South-Eastern Anatolia Development (GAP) Project<sup>20</sup>. Livestock owners have also faced challenges in ensuring sufficient water supply for animals, leading to reduced livestock health and, in some cases, losses. This has resulted in a decrease in agricultural output and an increase in the cost of locally grown produce, contributing to rising food insecurity. Agricultural production, which previously relied on water sources like Alouk, has suffered setbacks in rural and peri-urban areas, worsening food shortages.
- **Impact on Economy:** Given that Alouk Water Station is non-operational, there is reliance on alternative water sources, primarily water trucking. However, the increasingly high cost of water is impacting household budgets and is especially felt in the most vulnerable populations. Many households are forced to prioritise water costs over other essential goods, resulting in increased hardship and poverty levels. This is compounded by the critical

<sup>18</sup> <https://medyanews.net/double-turkish-strike-kills-four-civilian-tishreen-dam-protestors/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Res/Syria%20UPR%202022%20coauthors%20Final%202.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <https://globalvoices.org/2022/07/19/the-history-of-turkeys-unpopular-hydroelectricity-projects-in-southeastern-anatolia/>

situation of the Syrian pound and the rising cost of fuel, with the cost of 1000-liter tank reaching over 5 Euro in January 2025. In addition, local businesses that rely on water for their operations, such as those in the agricultural, industrial, and hospitality sectors, are facing operational challenges that negatively impact the broader regional economy.

- **Impact on Health:** The reliance on water trucking and the high cost of water suggest that households are receiving much less quantity of water than the recommended daily minimum of 15 litres per person per day (as per WHO standards). Furthermore, water scarcity has led to increased concerns over the quality of water available to the population. Given that many people are forced to use trucked water, there are risks of contamination and waterborne diseases, especially when water is stored improperly or transported without adequate safeguards. The reduction in the availability of water has led to insufficient hygiene and sanitation, contributing to an increase in health risks, including diarrhoea, skin infections, and respiratory illnesses, especially among children and the elderly. In the absence of adequate access to clean water, the likelihood of disease outbreaks such as cholera or other waterborne diseases increases. The situation is exacerbated in the IDP settlements, where living conditions are often overcrowded, with limited access to sanitation facilities, considering that 23% of Hasakeh population are IDPs.

Most people across all parts of Syria and all ethnic groups have celebrated the fall of the Assad regime. However, the changes in the governance of Syria have had a perverse effect on the people of the North-East, with the intensification of shelling and drone attacks on civilian infrastructure<sup>21</sup>. This has created a new IDP crisis, where more than 100,000 IDPs have either been newly created by or been forced to move a second or third time from IDP camps in central and North-West Syria<sup>22</sup>. These new IDPs have inflated the existing population of Hasakeh relying on water from Alouk.

We all want Syrian IDPs and refugees across the world to be able to return and to begin rebuilding their country and their homes and livelihoods, but without secure sources of water, especially with the intensified heat and droughts due to climate change, it will be impossible for this to begin to happen in North-East Syria. Alouk water station needs to operate at its full

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<sup>21</sup> [Syria - Escalation of hostilities, spillover effects in Northeast Syria \(DG ECHO Partners, UN OCHA, NES Forum\) \(ECHO Daily Flash of 04 December 2024\) - Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb](#)

<sup>22</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/northeast-syria-displacement-worsens-aid-crisis>

capacity again to serve the Syrian people, including the local and displaced population of Hasakeh governorate.



### 2.3 Concrete suggestions: third party intervention for safety, funding for repair, clear mandate for operating

It is important to recognize that getting Alouk to work again has engineering, security and political hurdles. All need to be addressed. Our concern is that just getting the station serviced, electricity supplied to it, and the taps opened is not a long-term solution if Türkiye is allowed to reduce or switch the flow off to serve its political agenda at any time in the future.

In general following actions are needed for the restart of Alouk water pumping station:

- **Ensure Safe Access:** Engineers must be granted unrestricted access to repair and maintain Alouk. Without immediate maintenance and restoration, the region's water crisis will continue to worsen.
- **Neutral Oversight:** A third party, such as the Red Cross, should manage operations to prevent water being used as a weapon of war. Water access should be recognised as a humanitarian necessity, safeguarded from political and military conflicts.
- **Sustainable Solutions:** Long-term international commitment is needed to secure water and electricity supply and prevent future disruptions. Funding for repair of the pumping station and its power supplies is the fastest and most cost-effective way to alleviate the water crisis in the Hasakeh Governorate

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Water for Hasakeh is a joint effort by a number of civil society groups in Europe and Syria. It was started in 2023 and now includes Un Ponte Per from Italy, Solidarity Economy Association from the UK, Amitiés Kurdes de Bretagne from France and Keziyen Kesk from North-East Syria.

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