Dozens of children die fleeing Isis caliphate

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<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-children-caliphate-syria-sdf-end-deaths-civilians-a8800046.html>

Aid agencies have raised the alarm after dozens of children have died after leaving the last territory held by [Isis](https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/isis) in eastern Syria.

Nearly 15,000 mostly women and children have fled the tiny enclave in the past week, overwhelming local Kurdish authorities who are dealing with the exodus.

The al-Hol displacement camp in northern [Syria](https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/Syria), where the fleeing civilians are being taken, has swelled to more than 50,000 people. Around 2,000 are now sleeping rough in the arrivals area in poor weather conditions.

Low temperatures, malnutrition and a lack of medical care have led to the deaths of at least 80 people – mostly children – who died on their journey to the camp or soon after arriving. Two thirds of deaths were of babies under the age of one, and the vast majority occurred in the past month.

“The sheer scale of the number of people arriving at al-Hol is overwhelming,” said Misty Buswell, Middle East Advocacy Director for the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which operates in the camp.

“Many of the children are having to cope without shoes or coats. Most of the mothers arrived with extremely young children, and many are in poor health after going for many weeks without enough food, water or receiving any medical care,” she added.

The IRC said there have been more than 100 cases of diarrhoea among the new arrivals.

The last piece of the Isis caliphate, in a small village called Baghouz in Deir ez-Zor, has been surrounded for months now, as the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces near the end of a military campaign to capture all of the group’s territory.

Hundreds of hardened Isis members have surrendered over the past few weeks as food and water has run low. Families of fighters, too, have left, realising the end is near.

Many escaping have arrived on the brink of starvation, and with injuries from the battle they left behind.

Earlier this week Human Rights Watch expressed [concern](https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/02/22/syria-concerns-civilians-escaping-isis-holdout) that not enough was being done to protect the welfare of fleeing civilians.

“Civilians leaving Baghouz is a relief but it should not obscure the fact that this battle appears to have been waged without sufficient consideration to their wellbeing,” said Nadim Houry, terrorism/counterterrorism director at Human Rights Watch.

“Just because they may be families of isis members or sympathised with them does not take away their protected status.”