

In Ar-Raqqa city, food availability and access has deteriorated because of dwindling food stocks and restricted supply routes

Key points:



Aleppo continues to report the poorest food consumption scores



The use of negative coping strategies has fallen in eastern Ghouta after an interagency convoy reached the besieged community



In Ar-Raqqa city and rural Deir-ez-Zor, food availability has worsened and food prices continue to rise



Respondents in Ar-Raqqa and hard-to-reach areas of Homs are mostly concerned about insecurity, the lack of clean water and high food prices



WFP Syria

Situation Update

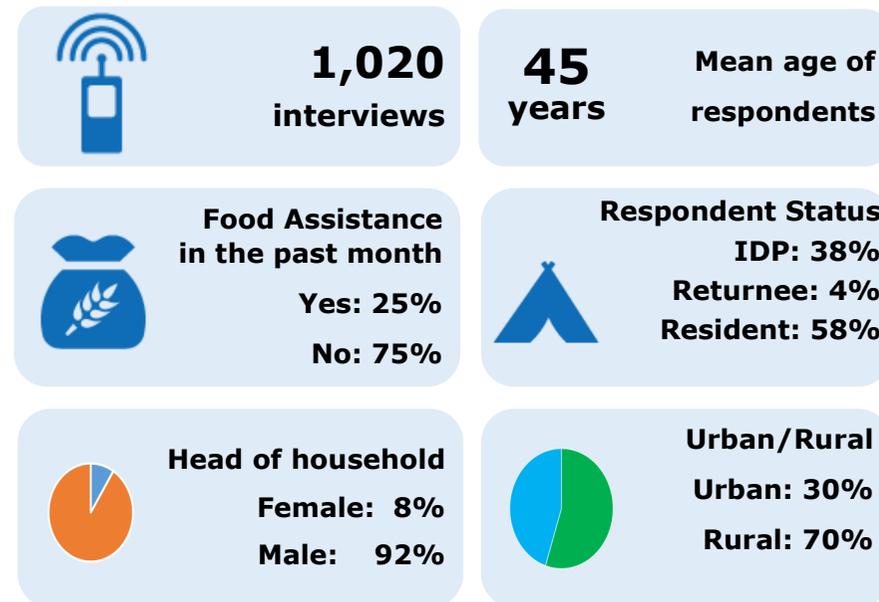
The security situation in Syria remains volatile. Fighting continues across many regions, particularly in the governorates of Homs and Ar-Raqqa. With ongoing fighting and severe restrictions, the protection of an estimated 20,000 to 50,000 civilians trapped in Ar-Raqqa city remains a grave concern as they face limited access to food, water and basic services. An estimated 200,000 people have been displaced from Ar-Raqqa since 1 April 2017, with an additional 5,000 people leaving the city each week. Humanitarian actors are providing lifesaving services to IDPs from Ar-Raqqa. Food access in Ar-Raqqa is at a critical point according to a new [REACH assessment](#), which indicates that food markets – which were functioning sporadically three weeks ago – are generally no longer operational. Food prices have skyrocketed, and residents are relying on dwindling personal stocks. [MSF has reported](#) that wounded civilians are often trapped in the city for days or even weeks without medical care.

In the Aarsal region along the Syria-Lebanon border, a ceasefire agreement has been reached and 7,000 Syrians are in the process of leaving the area peacefully and resettling in Idleb governorate. If the relocation is completed without incident, the conflict in the Aarsal region is expected to de-escalate.

Meanwhile, UNHCR has reported that half a million Syrians have returned to their homes so far this year, including 440,000 IDPs and more than 31,000 Syrian refugees returning from neighbouring countries.

Source: UNHCR, OCHA and WFP

Figure 1: Sample Household characteristics



¹ Food security data were not collected in June during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting.

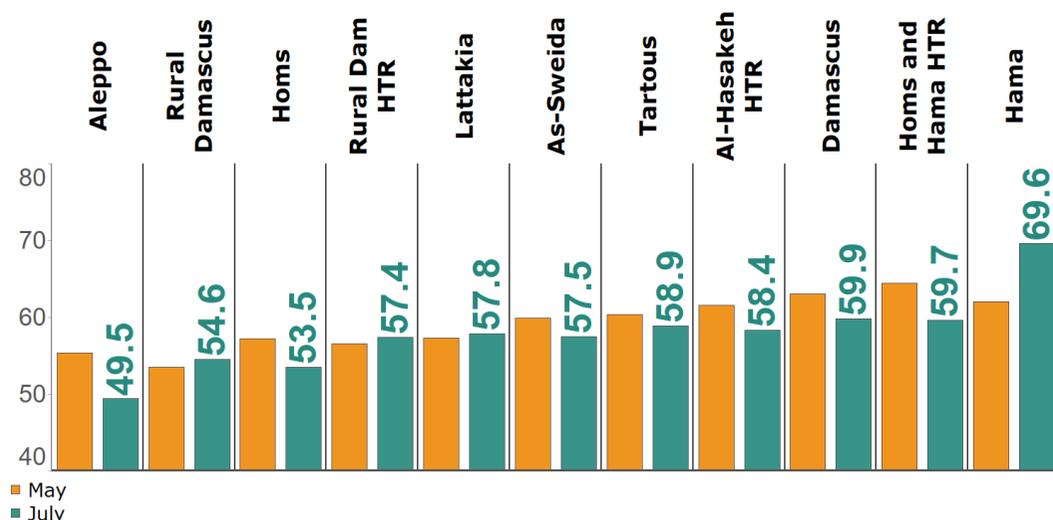


Food consumption among returnees deteriorates and is worst in Aleppo

According to the mVAM food security monitoring system, the overall mean Food Consumption Score (FCS) fell from 57.6 in May to 56.6 in July. This decline was observed in many governorates, especially in Aleppo where mean FCS dropped from 55.4 in May to 49.5 in July – the worst mean FCS of all surveyed locations (Figure 2). Field visits and key informants indicate that the situation in Aleppo reflects the vulnerable food security of returnee households who have come back to their original residences after losing their livelihoods, savings and assets. Key informant sources also show that the engagement of women and children in casual labour markets has increased markedly in the absence of male breadwinners. In Homs and Hama hard-to-reach (HTR) areas where the military conflict continues, FCS fell from 64.5 in May to 59.7 in July.

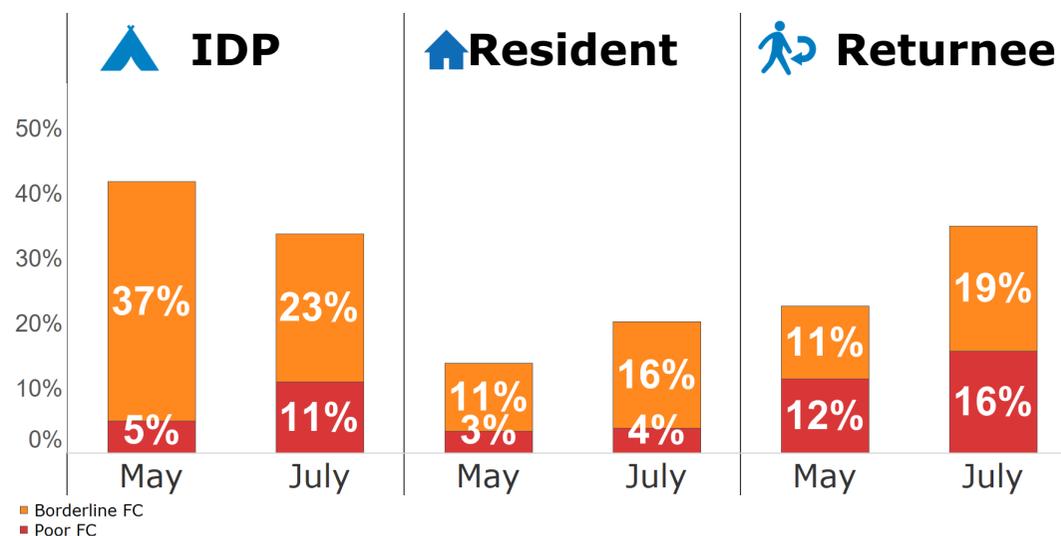
By contrast, FCS in Hama improved for the second consecutive month, reaching the highest score (69.6). This can be attributed to better access to fresh food and own production from livestock – Hama is considered one of Syria’s main livestock-producing areas. This analysis is supported by food source analysis that shows an increase of 15 percent in Hama for households depending on own production as their main food source. As Figure 3 illustrates, the proportion of returnee households with poor or borderline food consumption increased by 12 percentage points between May and July.

Figure 2: Mean FCS by aggregated locations, May to July 2017



WFP Syria

Figure 3: Inadequate food consumption by household resident status, May to July 2017



mVAM July data show marked differences in household food consumption patterns across the monitored provinces. In Aleppo, almost half the surveyed households reported inadequate food consumption – a worse situation than in Homs and rural Damascus. This is mainly due to a large increase in the prevalence of borderline food consumption, from 18 percent in May to 35 percent in July. The mean FCS of households in urban areas remains lower than that of rural households. However, the percentage of urban households with poor food consumption rose from 5 percent in May to 10 percent in July.

According to July mVAM data, there has been an overall improvement in the consumption of vitamin A-rich foods, particularly within IDP households: 77 percent reported daily consumption of these foods compared with 50 percent in May (Figure 5). This is mainly linked to better access to fruit and vegetables thanks to the ongoing harvest. Resident households reported lower consumption of protein-rich foods: 74 percent reported daily intake compared with 84 percent in May. Consumption of hem iron-rich foods remained poor in July, when almost half of the respondents reported no daily intake at all.

According to key informant interviews, in besieged eastern Ghouta² the agreement setting out de-escalation zones together with seasonal factors have improved food security for many households, who have better access to sufficient diverse and nutritious food of adequate quality. In Ar-Raqqa city and rural Deir-ez-Zor, food access for many households has deteriorated to critical levels, and residents are relying heavily on carry over food stock to survive. Only a bare minimum of food is sporadically available for purchase from traders at inflated prices. This is especially true for poor food-insecure households and households led by women, who are struggling in the face of a severe conflict and the total collapse of livelihoods and infrastructures. The proportion of households who reported food assistance as their main source of food increased from 11 percent in May to 16 percent in July. By contrast, the percentage of households relying on purchasing as primary source of food fell from 77 percent in May to 71 percent in July.

Figure 4: Inadequate food consumption by aggregated locations, July 2017

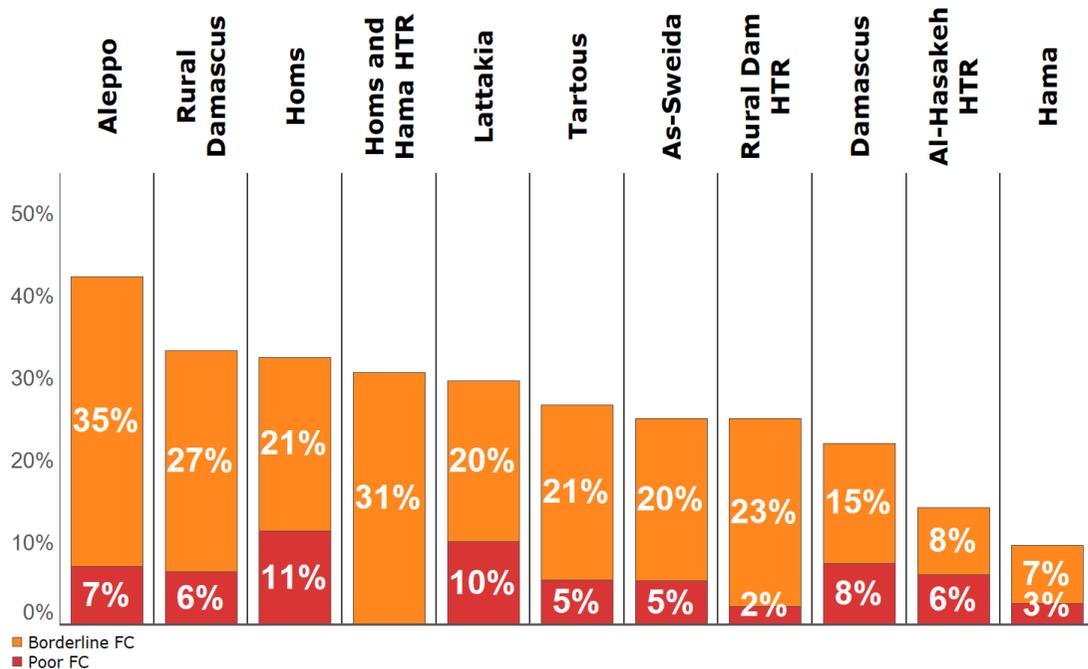
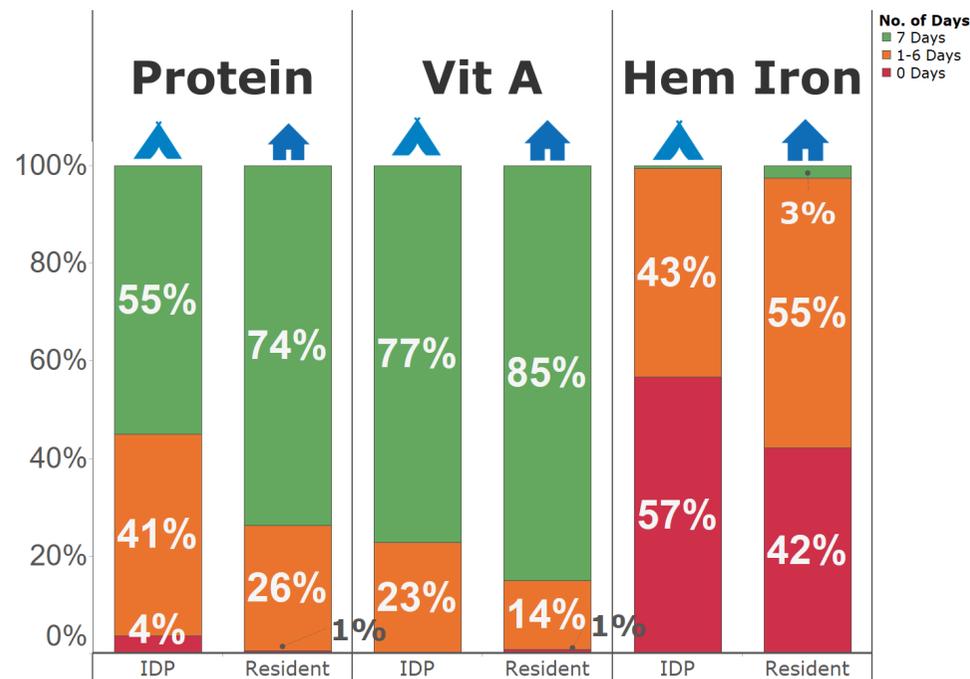


Figure 5: Frequency consumption of rich food groups by resident status, July 2017



² Eastern Ghouta consists of five sub-districts: Arbin, Harasta, Duma, Kafarbatna and Nashabieh. Approximately 400,000 people are living under the siege according to OCHA estimates from May.



Highest use of negative coping strategies among households in As-Sweida and Al-Hasakeh

In July, the mean reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) remained largely unchanged in most monitored locations, except in accessible parts of Hama where mean rCSI fell from 22.5 to 14. As cited above, in July the share of households with own production as their main food source rose by 15 percent in Hama, a key livestock-producing area of the country. The worst rCSI was reported by households in As-Sweida (16.8), followed by those in hard-to-reach areas of Al-Hasakeh (16.2).

As seen in Figure 7, displaced households are engaging more in negative coping strategies. In July, more IDP households (24 percent) spent their savings and a higher percentage of resident households (16 percent) sold assets to obtain money to buy food.

Key informants from Ar-Raqqa city and rural Deir-ez-Zor reported that many poor vulnerable households are surviving on nothing but bread, bulgur and other cheap cereals. Moreover, there has been an increase in food-related coping strategies including foregoing meals, prioritizing children’s meals over own food consumption, limiting portion sizes and in many severe cases, going to sleep hungry and joining armed groups to get food.

Key informants also reported a high use of negative coping strategies in besieged eastern Ghouta. However, the situation has improved slightly: the rates of borrowing food from relatives or friends and skipping meals have decreased, especially after the latest interagency convoy reached the besieged community. The use of severe coping strategies in besieged Deir-ez-Zor city has also improved in line with better access to food assistance and markets. By contrast, in besieged locations of Damascus –especially in Jobar, heavy clashes and an escalated offensive are significantly restricting food access for many households trapped inside. As a result, more households in these areas are resorting to food-related coping strategies such as eating fewer meals, limiting portion sizes, foregoing meals and restricting adult consumption so children can eat.

Figure 6: Mean rCSI, July 2017

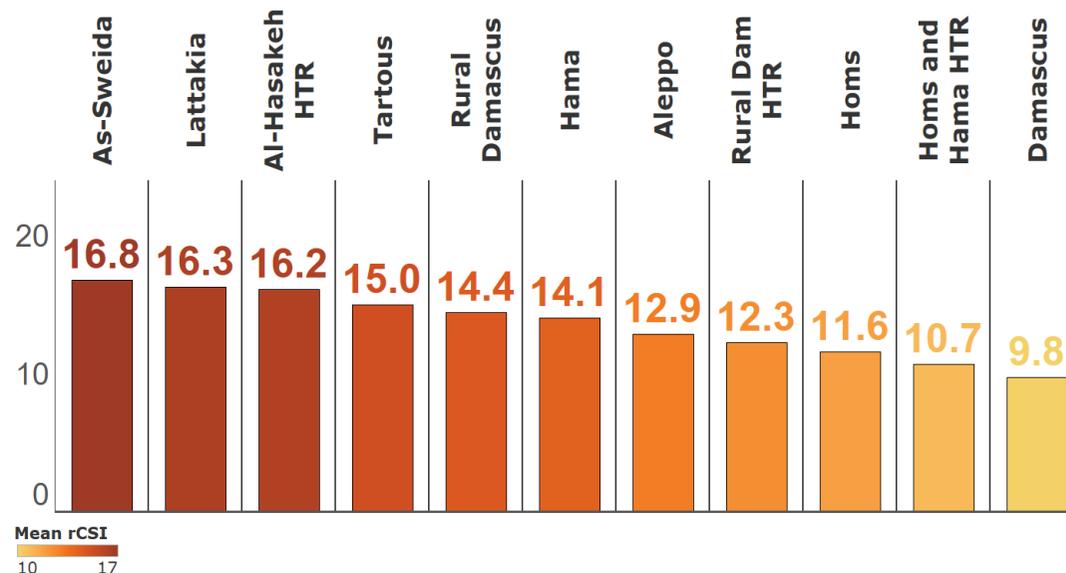
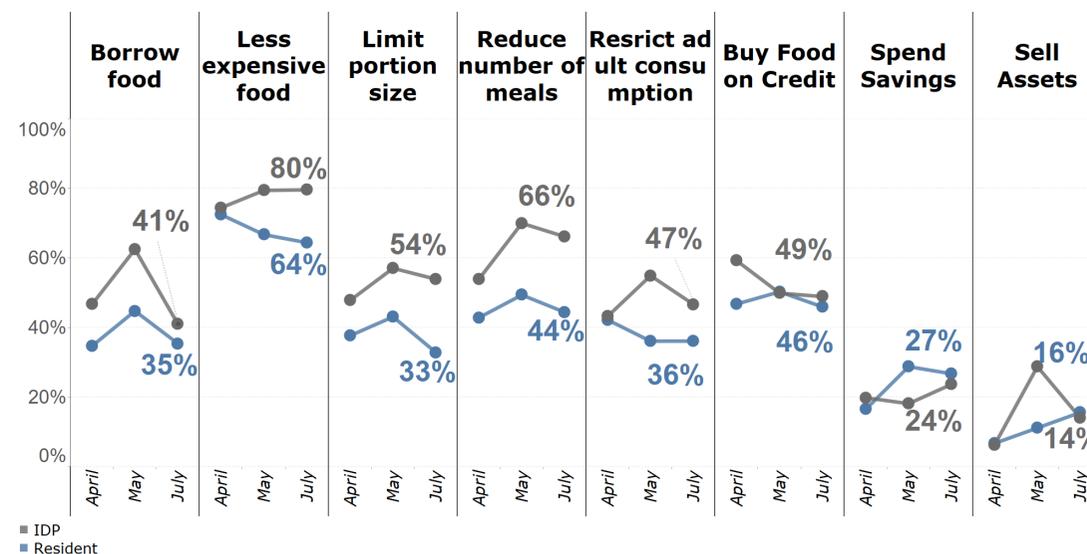


Figure 7: Use of coping strategies by resident status, April to July 2017





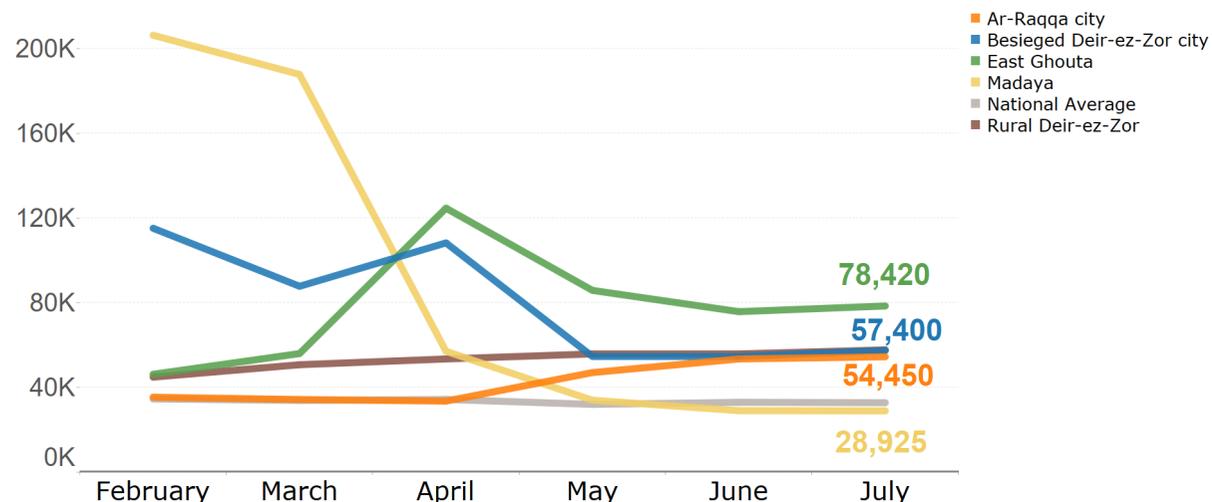
Food basket prices rise slightly in Ar-Raqqa city and rural Deir-ez-Zor

Market functionally has been severely disrupted in Ar-Raqqa city and rural Deir-ez-Zor, where most supply routes have been blocked. Shopkeepers have reported relying on scarce stores of commodities and being unable to restock. As a result, the cost of a standard food basket increased by 3 percent in rural Deir-ez-Zor and by 2 percent in Ar-Raqqa city.

In eastern Ghouta, food availability has improved and many fresh foods have become available in line with better commercial flows, better access to own production and humanitarian assistance. Even so, the standard food basket in July cost SYP78,420, a 4 percent increase from June. The cost of the food basket also increased in besieged Deir-ez-Zor city, rising 5 percent from June to SYP57,400.

Despite the minor increase in the cost of the food basket, multiple food items were reported to be cheaper than in June, especially sugar, oil and pulses. Even so, food prices in Madaya are well above the national average.

Figure 8: Cost of the standard food basket in eastern Ghouta city, Madaya, Ar-Raqqa city and Deir-ez-Zor vs. national average, February to July 2017



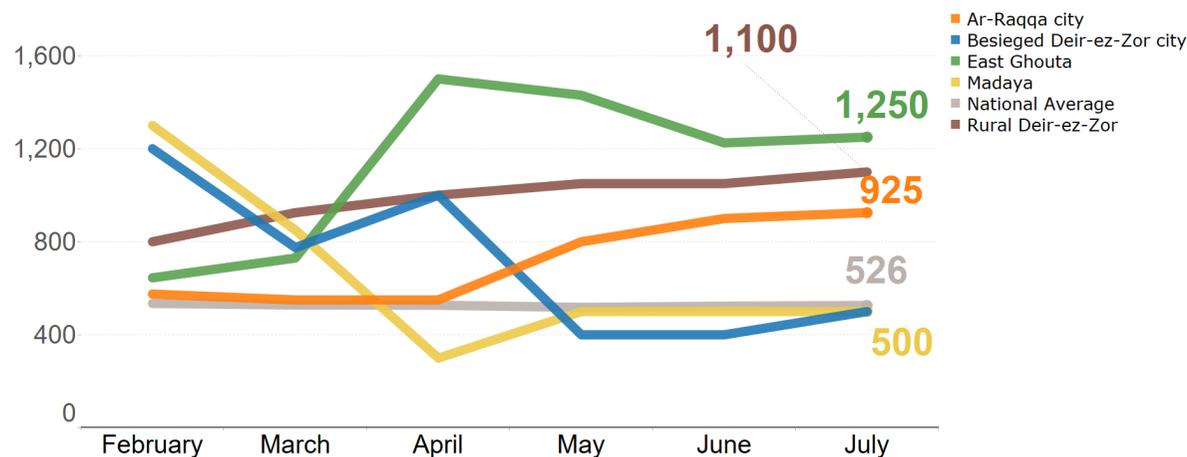
Rice prices in besieged areas remain well above the national average

As shown in Figure 9, in eastern Ghouta in July, rice retailed at SYP1,250/kg, which is 2 percent more than in June and 138 percent more than the national average. In rural Deir-ez-Zor, rice cost 5 percent more than in June and 109 percent more than the national average.

In Ar-Raqqa city, rice prices rose by 3 percent between June and July, reaching SYP925/kg, 76 percent higher than national average.

In besieged Deir-ez-Zor city, rice prices increased by 25 percent between June and July, but rice is still 5 percent cheaper than national average price and 55 percent of the price in rural Deir-ez-Zor.

Figure 9: Retail price of rice (SYP/kg) in eastern Ghouta, Madaya and Deir-ez-Zor vs. national average, February to July 2017





In the words of respondents

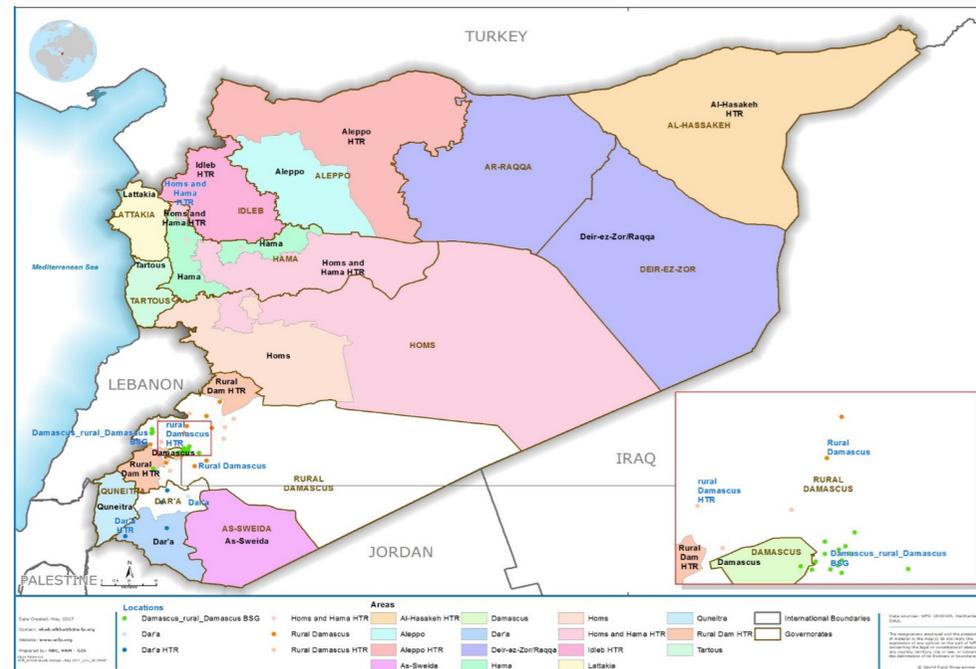
At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to describe the food security situation in their communities. Households from Ar-Raqqa and Homs hard-to-reach areas reported major concerns over safety, and the limited access to health services, clean drinking water and sanitation; there is a high risk of the spread of waterborne diseases in these locations. Key informant sources from As-Sweida said that access to clean drinking and cooking water is increasingly difficult for the majority of IDPs; the cost of extracting water from wells adds extra pressure on their food security. Water issues were also reported in some locations of Al-Hasakeh and in IDP camps in Aleppo. A lack of access to income and employment opportunities was mentioned by many respondents. Households in other hard-to-reach areas in cities such as Aleppo, Al-Hasakeh, Deir-ez-Zor and Idleb were mainly concerned about the high prices of medication and clothing as well as electricity cuts.



Methodology

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via telephone interviews in July from key informants and households. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1,020 completed surveys. The questionnaire contained questions on demographics, food assistance, household food consumption and nutrition, coping strategies and primary food sources. A final open-ended question gave respondents the chance to share additional information about the food situation in their communities. The data were weighted by the number of mobile phones owned by the household. Information collected through mobile phone interviews may be biased towards younger, somewhat better-off households who live in urban areas and have better access to electricity and phone-charging services.

Starting from May 2017, districts were combined into 18 strata reflecting on their accessibility in order to obtain more granular food security analysis. The accessible areas were Aleppo, As-Sweida, Damascus, Dar'a, Hama, Homs, Rural Damascus, Lattakia and Tartous. Besieged areas (BSG) were Rural Damascus BSG. Hard-to-reach (HTR) areas were Al-Hasakeh HTR, Aleppo HTR, Idleb HTR, Deir-ez-Zor/Raqqa HTR, Homs and Hama HTR, Rural Damascus HTR, Dar'a HTR and Quneitra HTR. This sampling frame groups together areas with similar geography and access status, allowing for a large enough sample size to make statistically significant comparisons. More details on the methodology can be found [here](#).



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mVAM Resources:

Website: http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/
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