

## Food security deteriorates in hard-to-reach areas

### Key points:



Food consumption has deteriorated for the third consecutive month in Aleppo and in hard-to-reach areas of Homs, Hama and Al-Hasakeh



Poor food security indicators were recorded for households led by women in all surveyed areas



Food prices continue to be highest in eastern Ghouta, despite improved access and a fall in the cost of the food basket



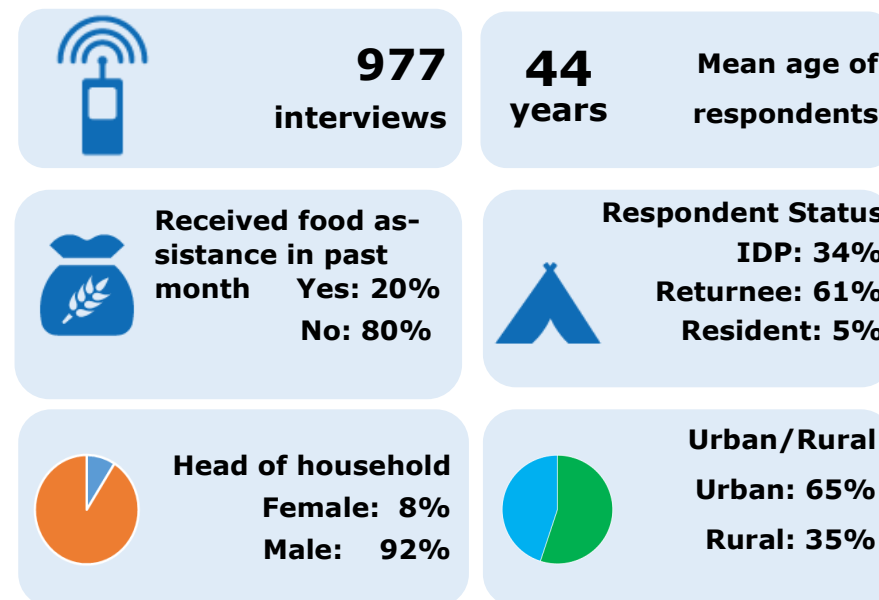
### Situation Update

Since the launch of the operation to recapture Ar-Raqqa on 6 June 2017, a reported [60 percent](#) of the city has been captured; the liberation of the city is planned to be complete within the next two months. According to the latest rapid assessment published by [REACH](#), civilians are residing in just 6 of the city's 24 neighbourhoods. Although many of those who have left the city hope to return as soon as possible, returnees have not been observed thus far and are not expected before the conflict de-escalates and mines are cleared.

In the meantime, clashes have escalated in Deir-ez-Zor city and surrounding neighbourhoods, and airstrikes continue to cause increasing numbers of civilian casualties.

In August, conflict intensified in the 'de-escalation zones' of eastern Ghouta, Damascus governorate (Zone 3), the Rastan and Talbiseh enclaves in northern Homs governorate (Zone 2), rural areas of eastern Hama and Zone 1 in Idlib governorate—despite the goal of achieving a ceasefire in these areas. The increased violence has trapped civilian populations and restricted humanitarian access.

Figure 1: Sample Household characteristics



Source: OCHA, REACH and WFP



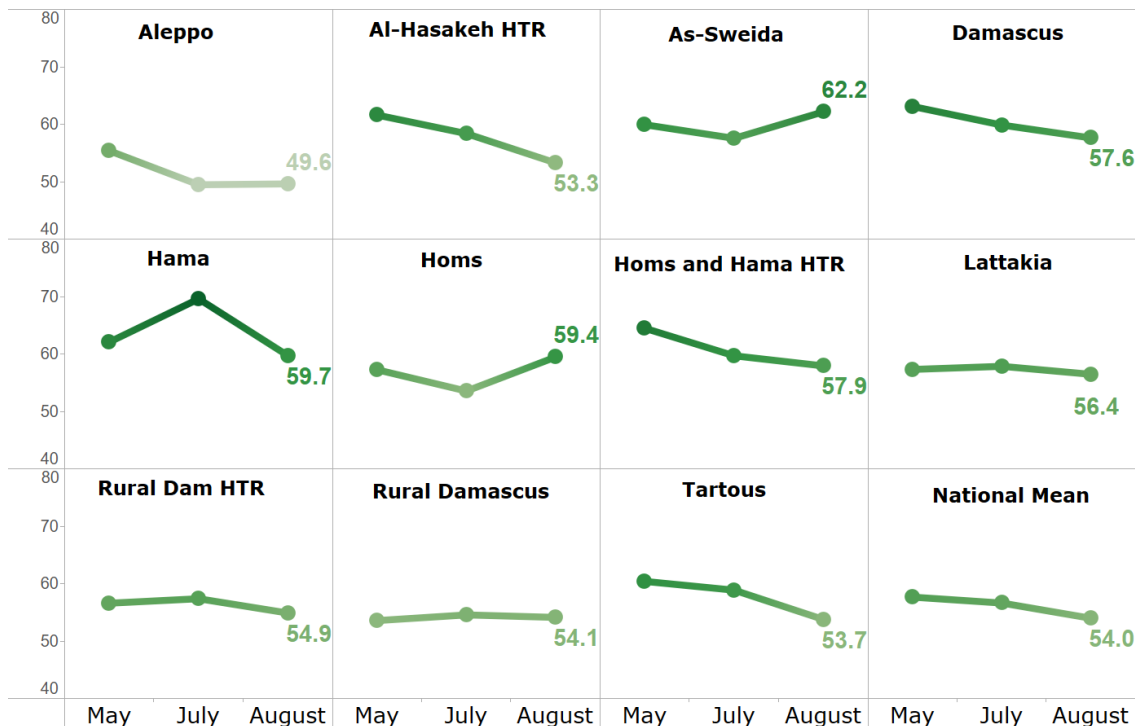
Mean FCS falls among households led by women

The overall mean Food Consumption Score (FCS) dropped for the third consecutive month, falling from 57.6 in May to 54 in August (Figure 2). This decline was seen in many governorates, especially in Hama, where mean FCS fell from 69.6 in July to 59.7 in August. In hard-to-reach (HTR) areas of Homs and Hama, where the military conflict continues to hamper supply routes, FCS fell from 59.7 in July to 57.9 in August (Figure 2).

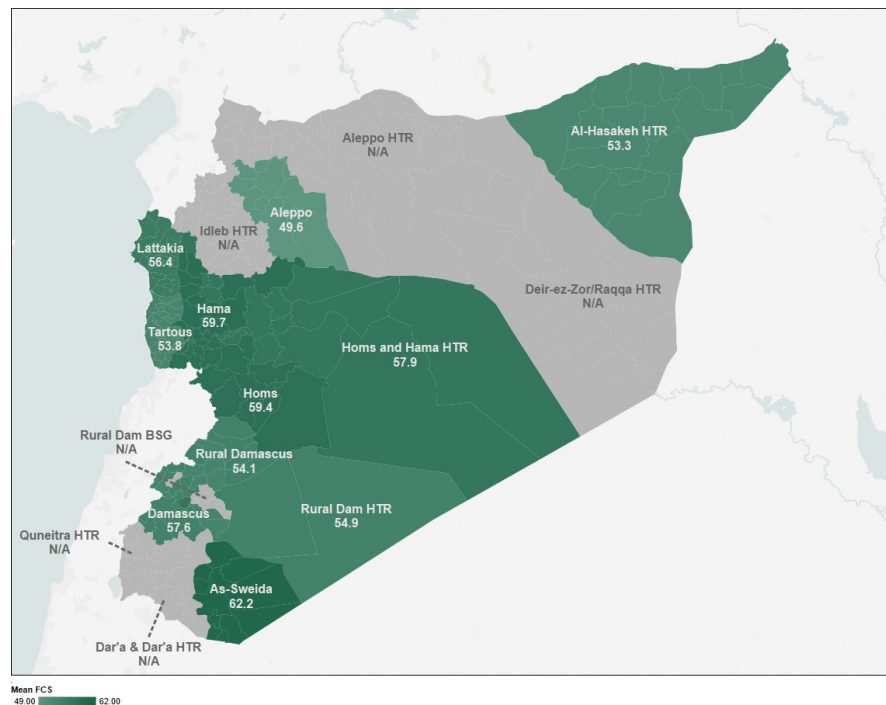
The worst mean FCS of all surveyed locations in August was recorded in Aleppo (FCS 49.6). According to key informants, this reflects the vulnerable food security of households who have returned to their homes following the stabilization of the security situation in the governorate and the beginning of the new school year.

By contrast, the FCS in As-Sweida improved, reaching the highest score (62.2) of the surveyed areas. This is thanks to the ongoing harvest in the southern governorates of Syria, which has lowered food prices, especially for fruit and vegetables.

Figure 2: Mean FCS by aggregated governorates, May to August 2017



Map 1: Mean FCS by aggregated governorates, August 2017



In all surveyed governorates, there was a sharp fall in the mean FCS for households led by women, from 59 in July to 40 in August (Figure 3).

The proportion of displaced and resident households with poor or borderline food consumption increased between July and August (Figure 4). The percentage of returnee households with borderline food consumption also increased in August compared to July, from 19 percent to 38 percent; however, the share of returnees with poor food consumption fell to 4 percent.

Across all surveyed governorates, more than one in three households reported consuming inadequate food in August. Food consumption patterns varied greatly by province. In Aleppo, the percentage of households with borderline consumption fell from 35 percent to 24 percent; however, the percentage of households with poor food consumption rose from 7 percent to 12 percent. In Hama, 10 percent more households reported inadequate food consumption in August compared to July.

Figure 3: Mean FCS by gender of head of household, July and August 2017

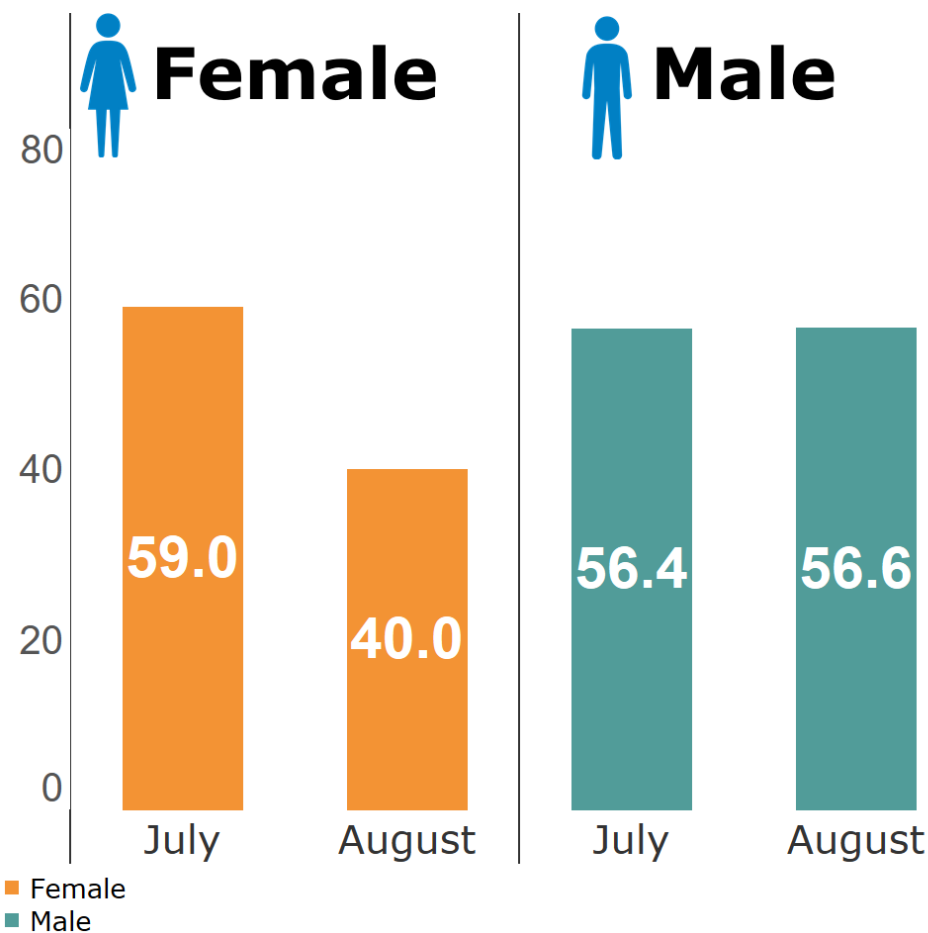
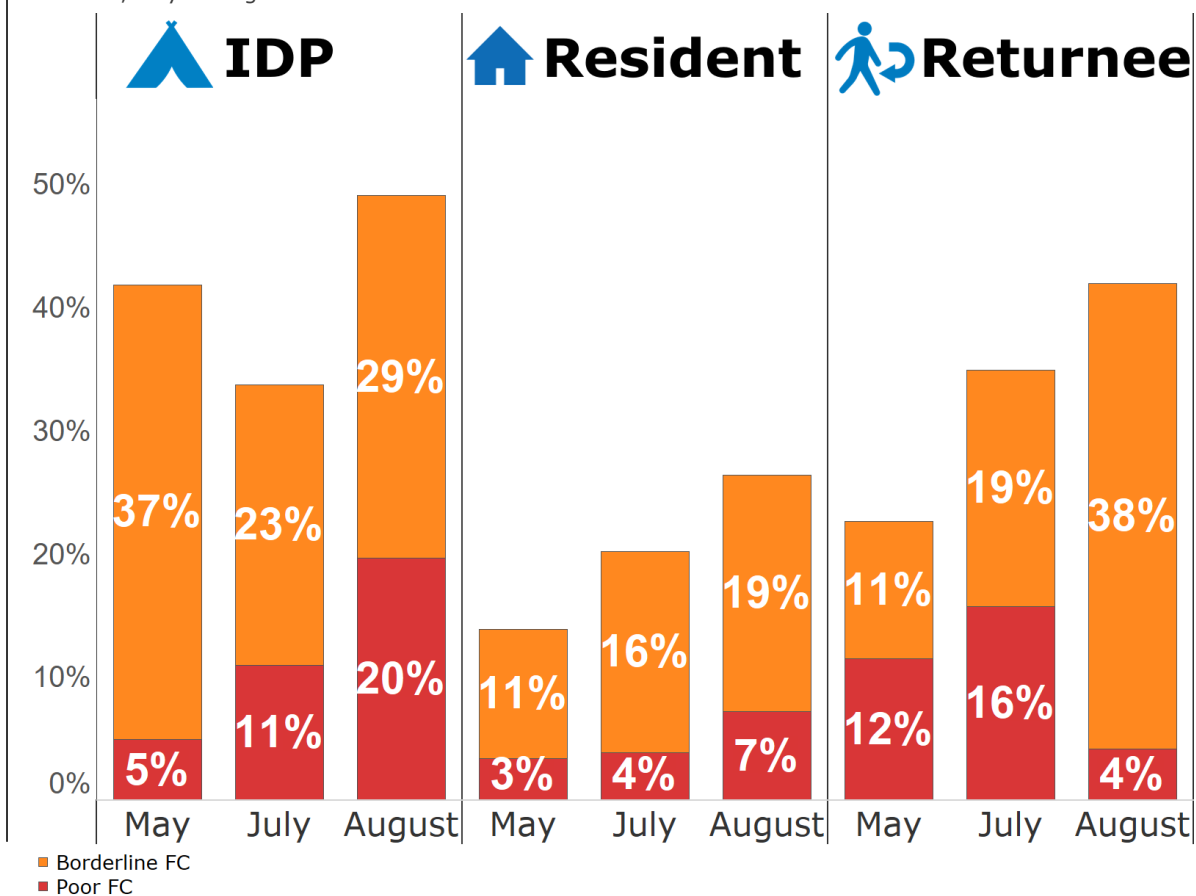


Figure 4: Percentage of households with inadequate food consumption by household residency status, May to August 2017



August mVAM data shows that IDPs have a less nutritious diet than residents and are consequently at high risk of suffering from nutrient deficiencies. As seen in Figure 6, in the week before the survey, 66 percent of households ate vitamin A-rich foods, which include orange fruit and vegetables as well as green leafy vegetables. Protein-rich food, such as pulses, nuts, fish, meat, eggs and dairy, were consumed daily by half the IDP households compared to 68 percent of resident households.

Only a small proportion of surveyed households regularly consumed hem iron-rich food items such as meat, organ meat and fish. Iron deficiency can cause anaemia and can contribute to adverse pregnancy outcomes, impaired physical and cognitive development, increased risk of morbidity and decreased work productivity.

Key informants reported that food security in rural Deir-ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa City has been heavily affected by the ongoing armed operations, and many households have been displaced with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Key informants in Salamyieh district in the eastern rural part of Hama, reported deteriorating food security in August; accessing sufficient nutritious food has become a challenge for many poor vulnerable households, who are struggling in an area that is almost under siege.

Figure 5: Percentage of households with inadequate food consumption by aggregated governorates, August 2017

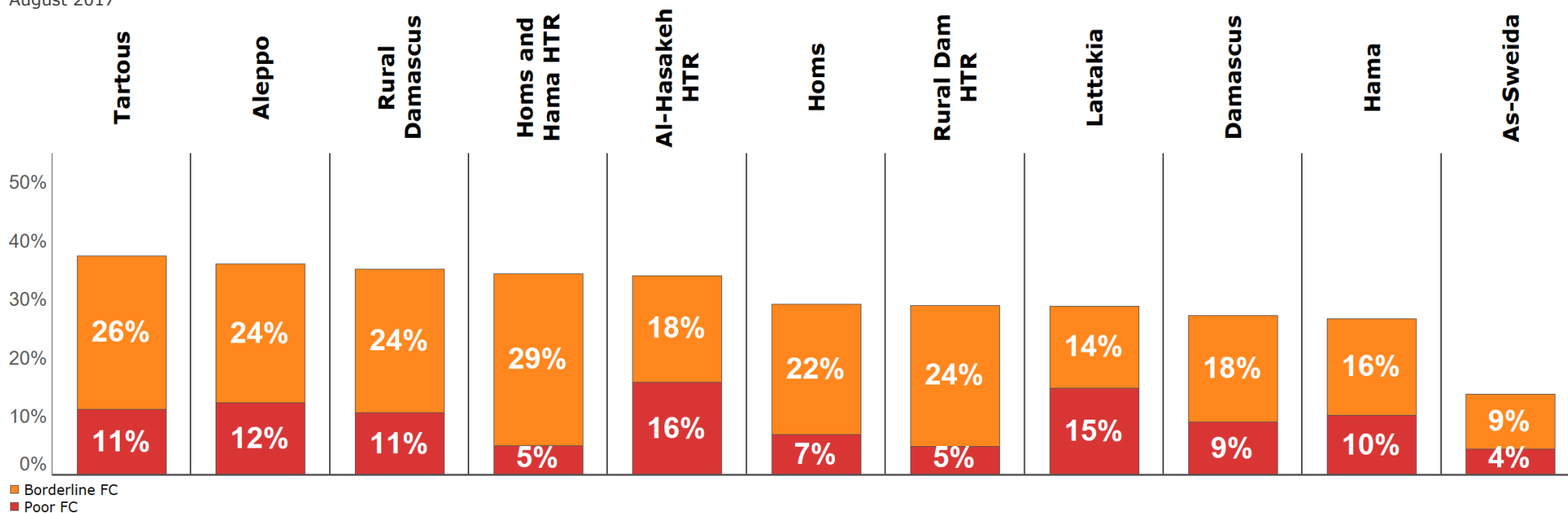
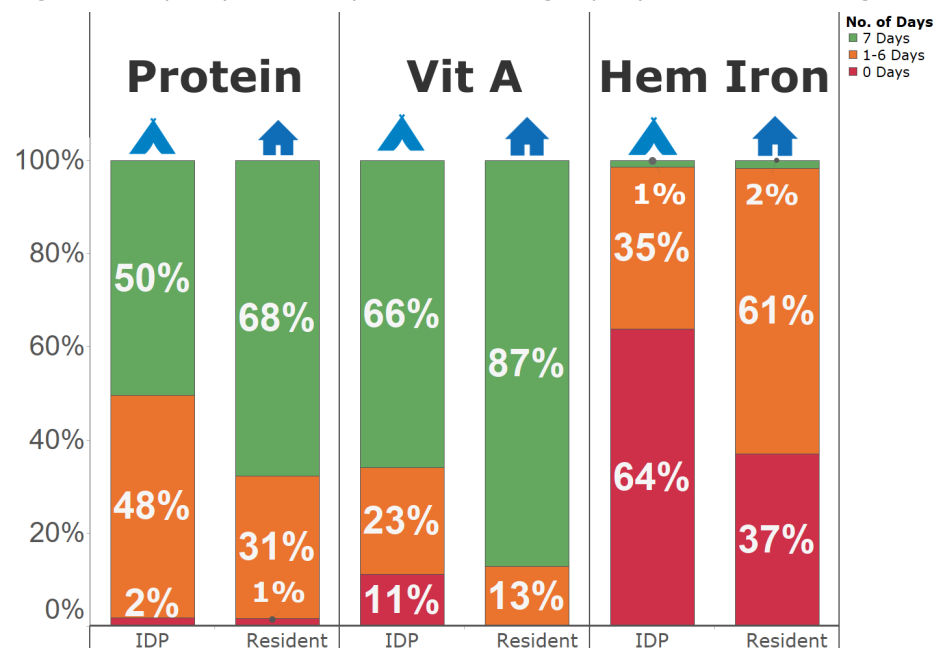


Figure 6: Frequency of consumption of rich food groups by resident status, August 2017





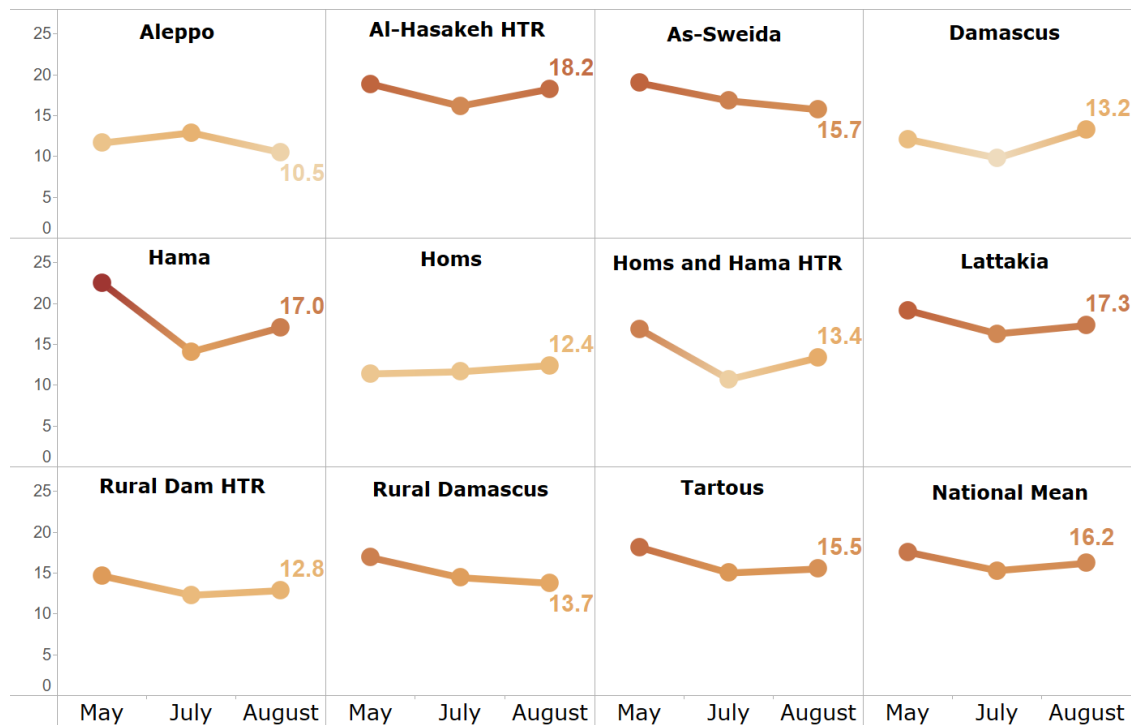
Highest use of negative coping strategies among households in Al-Hasakeh

In August, the mean reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) was largely unchanged, except in Hama and Damascus where the index increased. This, alongside the notable drop in mean FCS, reflects a stressed food security situation, especially in Hama. The escalated offensive and critical security situation has blocked most supply routes to eastern rural parts of Hama. This has severely disrupted market functionality, restricting food access for many households in the area.

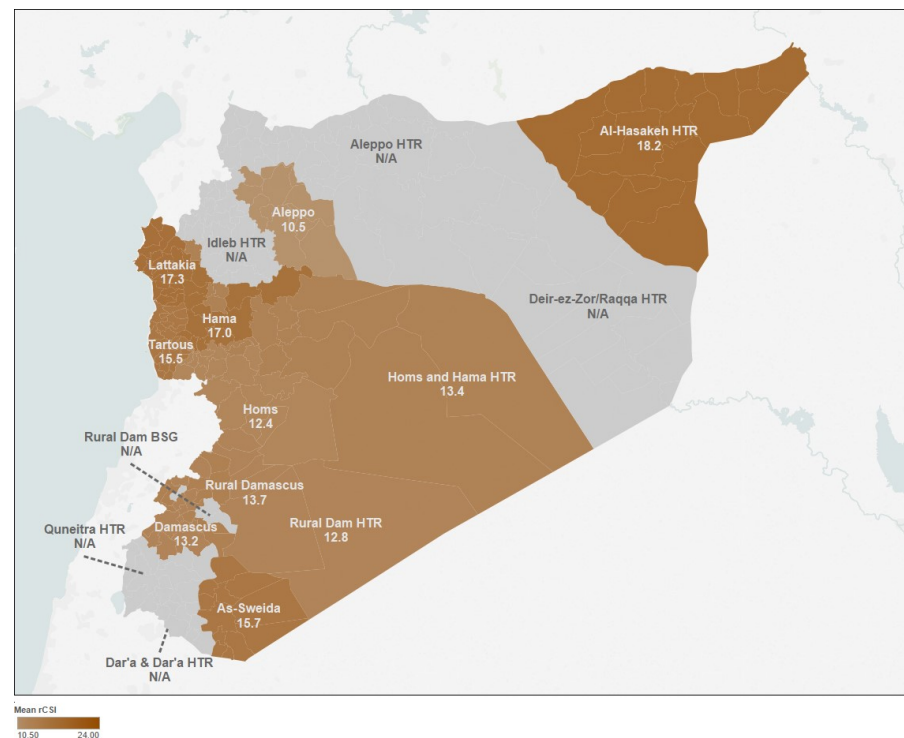
The worst rCSI was reported once again by households in hard-to-reach areas of Al-Hasakeh (18.2), followed by those in Lattakia (17.3). In Al-Hasakeh, over half the interviewed households reported reducing meal and portion sizes, buying food on credit, and restricting adult consumption so that children could eat.



Figure 7: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, May to August 2017



Map 2: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, August 2017



August saw a rise in mean rCSI for households led by women in all surveyed governorates (Figure 8). Worrying numbers of these households are resorting to negative food-based and livelihood coping strategies due to lack of food, especially in terms of borrowing food (82 percent), eating fewer meals (85 percent), restricting adult consumption to feed children (42 percent) and even spending/exhausting savings (64 percent).

The use of negative coping strategies remains higher among displaced households than residents (Figure 9). In August, more IDP households borrowed food (55 percent), reduced the number of meals eaten per day (73 percent), bought food on credit (58 percent) and/or spent their savings to obtain money to buy food (38 percent).

Key informants from eastern Ghouta indicated that the use of severe food-related coping strategies has decreased during the last two months thanks to better access to humanitarian assistance, which is one of the main food sources for many besieged households.

Figure 8: Mean rCSI by gender of head of household, July and August 2017

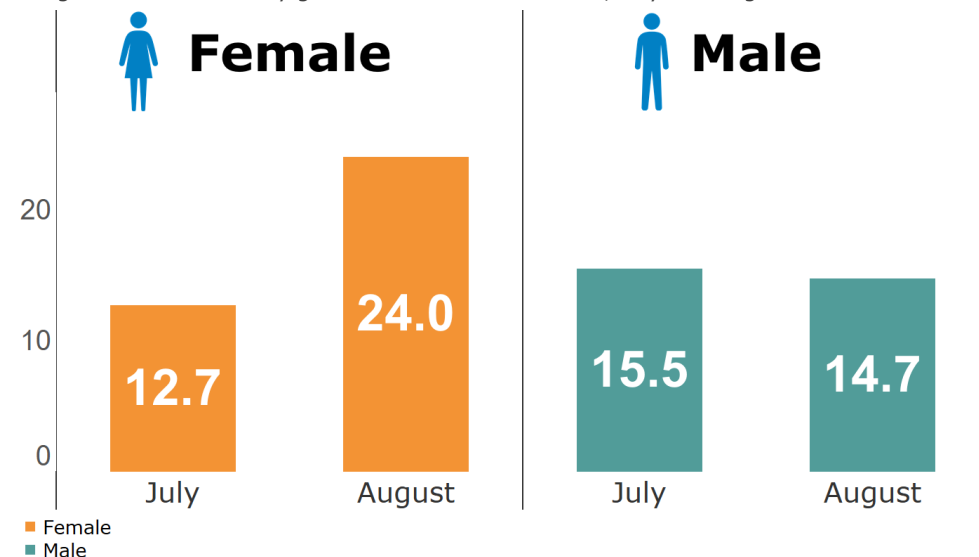
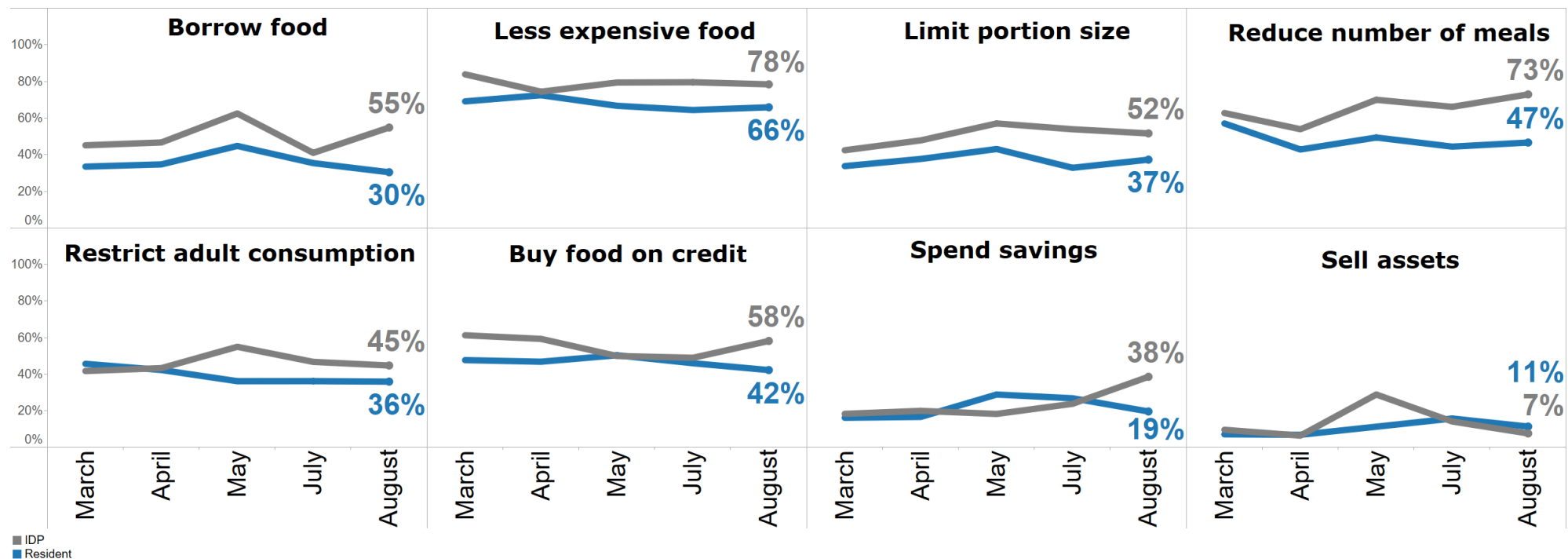


Figure 9: Use of coping strategies by resident status, March to August 2017



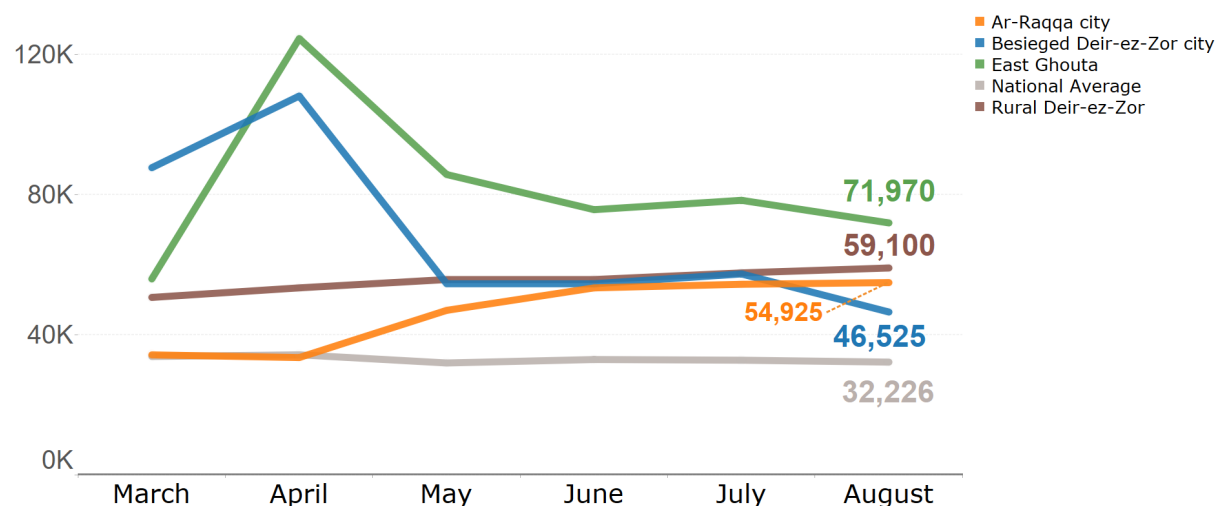


**Humanitarian assistance lowers food prices in eastern Ghouta and Deir-ez-Zor**

Food security continues to be a major concern in Ar-Raqqa city and rural Deir-ez-Zor markets. However, as the siege is expected to lift in Deir-ez-Zor city in the next couple of weeks, food supply to the area should improve.

In east Ghouta, food availability trends reflect a gradual improvement since the end of June. During August, the standard food basket cost was on average SYP71,970, representing an 8 percent decrease compared to last month, but still remaining very high compared to other regions in the country. Similarly, in Deir-ez-Zor city the food basket cost 19 percent less in August than it did in July and was 60 percent cheaper than in February 2017.

Figure 10: Cost of the standard food basket (SYP) in eastern Ghouta city, Madaya, Ar-Raqqa city and Deir-ez-Zor vs. national average, March to August 2017



**Lower food prices in Deir-ez-Zor city as land corridor opens**

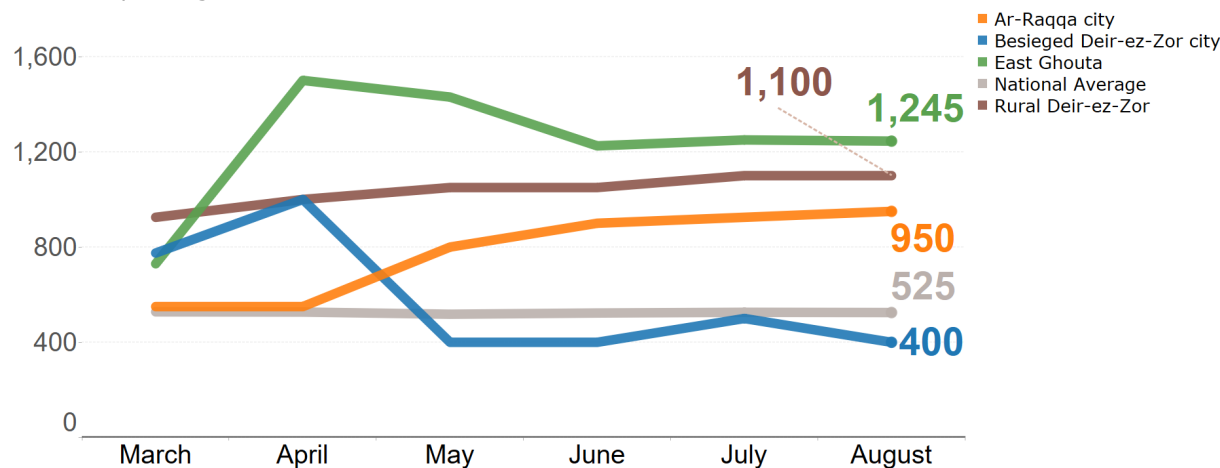
In August, rice (an imported commodity) retailed at SYP1,245/kg in eastern Ghouta. The price remained almost unchanged from July but was 93 percent higher than in February 2017.

In rural Deir-ez-Zor, rice was sold at SYP1,100/kg in August, around 109 percent more than the national average price and 38 percent more expensive than in February.

In Ar-Raqqa city, rice prices rose to SYP950/kg, up 3 percent from July and 81 percent higher than the national average.

In besieged Deir-ez-Zor city, rice prices dropped by 20 percent compared to July, falling to SYP400/kg – lower than the national average and 67 percent less than six months ago.

Figure 11: Retail price of rice (SYP/kg) in eastern Ghouta, Madaya and Deir-ez-Zor vs. national average, February to August 2017





**In the words of respondents**

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to identify the main problems their family was facing. The majority of respondents cited high food prices as the biggest issue, followed by unemployment, lack of jobs and income opportunities, high electricity costs and electricity shortages (Figure 12). Other challenges included difficulties in accessing health facilities and medicine because of a lack of health infrastructure and personnel coupled with increased medical costs that many families with sick members cannot afford.

Figure 12: Main problems faced by surveyed households, August 2017

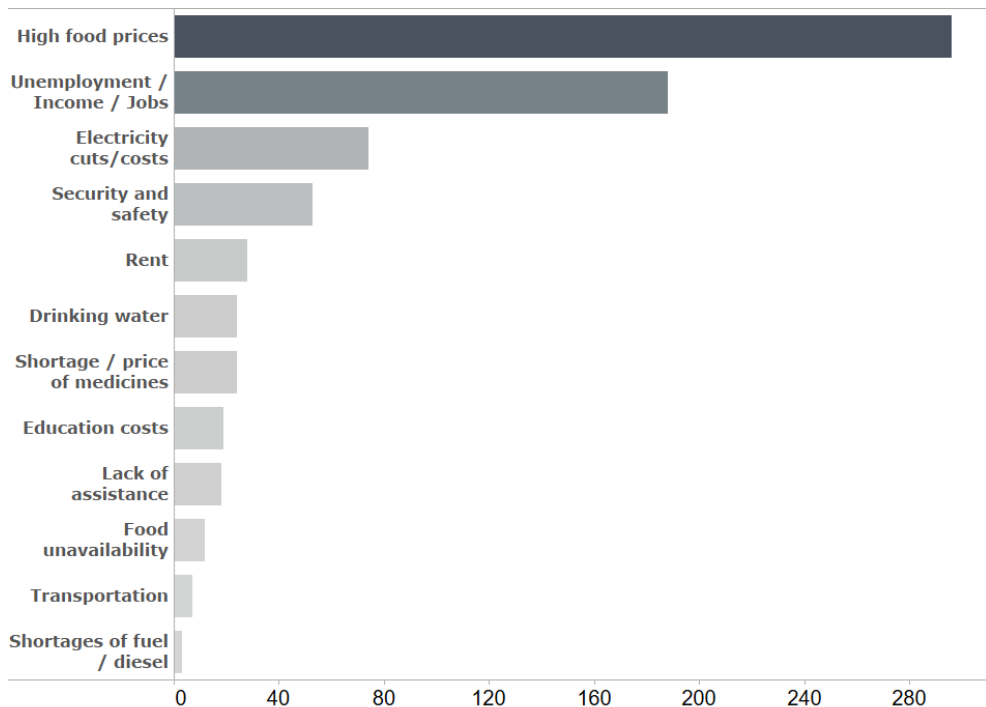


Figure 13: Word cloud of responses, August 2017



**Methodology**

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via telephone interviews in August from key informants and households. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 977 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, Idlib 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/](http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/)  
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