

Food security deteriorates in governorates affected by the recent escalation of violence

Key points:



Food security indicators deteriorate in Hama, which has seen heavy fighting for more than a month



Food security indicators improve for households receiving food assistance



Food prices continue to be highest in eastern Ghouta, where the food basket cost has increased by 50 percent since August



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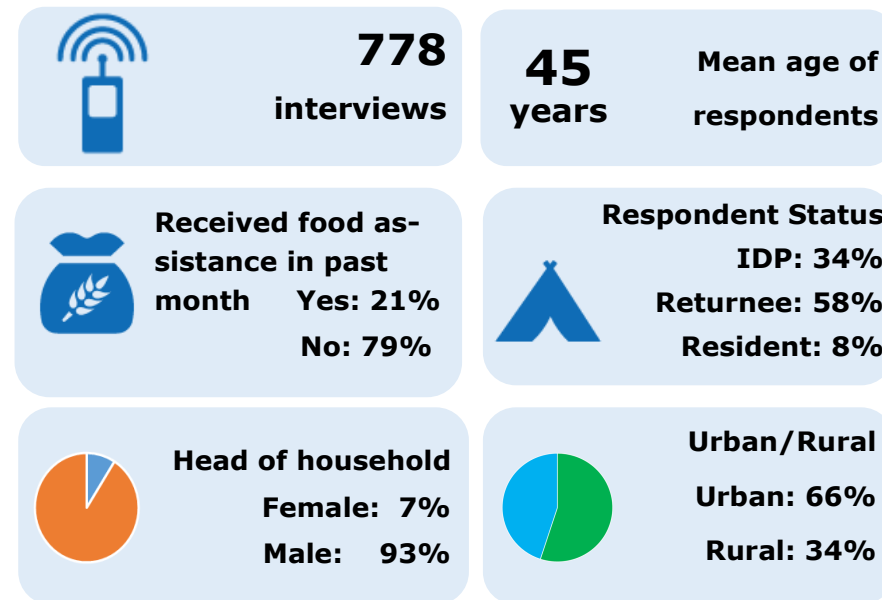
Situation Update

Over the past two months, the conflict has escalated across Deir-ez-Zor, triggering large displacements from and within the governorate. [Between 30,000 and 35,000 people are estimated](#) to have moved north towards Al-Hasakeh governorate, with smaller numbers travelling northwest to Ar-Raqqa governorate as well as internally within Deir-ez-Zor itself. On 24 September the western bank of the Euphrates River was retaken, breaking the three-year siege of Deir-ez-Zor city. Flights to and from the city have resumed and the land route via Salamiyah Road in western Syria is now open to commercial vehicles.

According to reports, 80 to 90 percent of Ar-Raqqa city has been captured since the offensive began in June 2017. The significant increase in conflict has sparked a mass exodus of civilians and the humanitarian situation has deteriorated for those remaining in the city. According to a September 2017 [REACH assessment of the area](#), the remaining population has fallen from 22,000 to a maximum of 8,000 people. Only 2 of Ar-Raqqa's 24 neighbourhoods are still inhabited by civilians. The assessment found that just one functioning bakery remained in the city and there were no functioning markets. Remaining residents are reportedly taking food from the abandoned houses of those who have already fled.

On 15 September, the boundaries of the fourth de-escalation zone in Idlib were agreed upon at the conclusion of the sixth round of Syria peace talks. Despite this, on 19 September, heavy fighting erupted in southern Idlib and northeast Hama, displacing 30,000 people in a week and leading to the suspension of WFP food distributions for 162,000 people in southern rural Idlib.

Figure 1: Sample Household characteristics



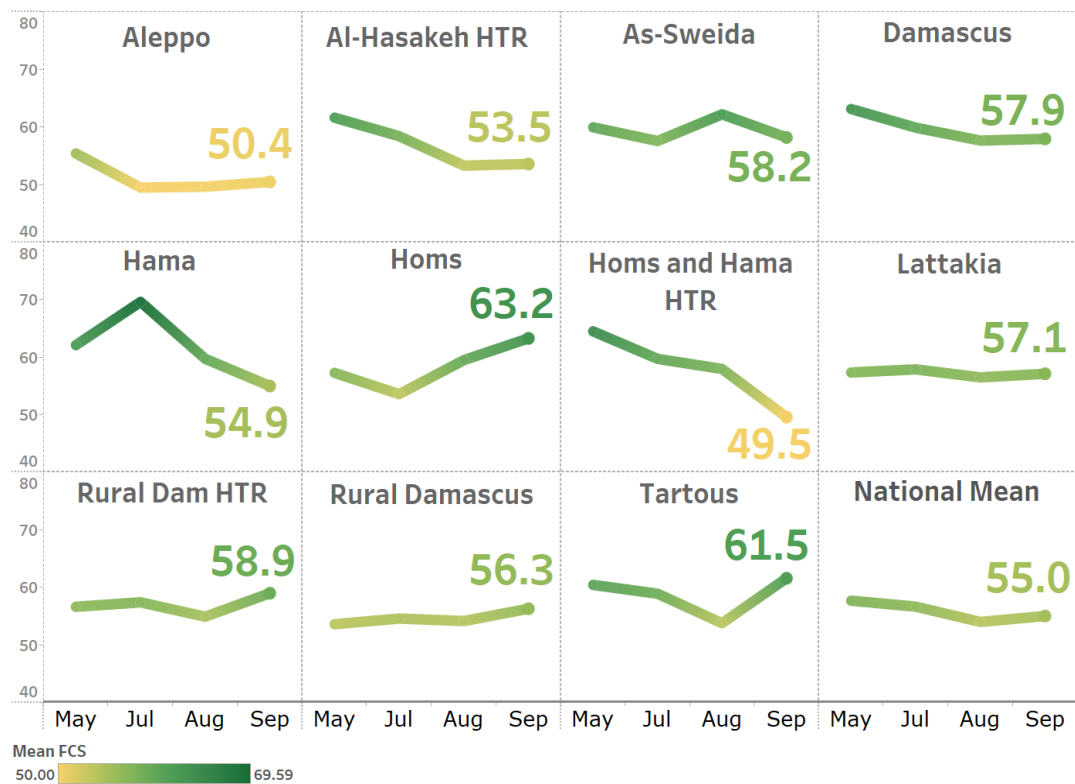


Mean FCS continues to fall in Hama

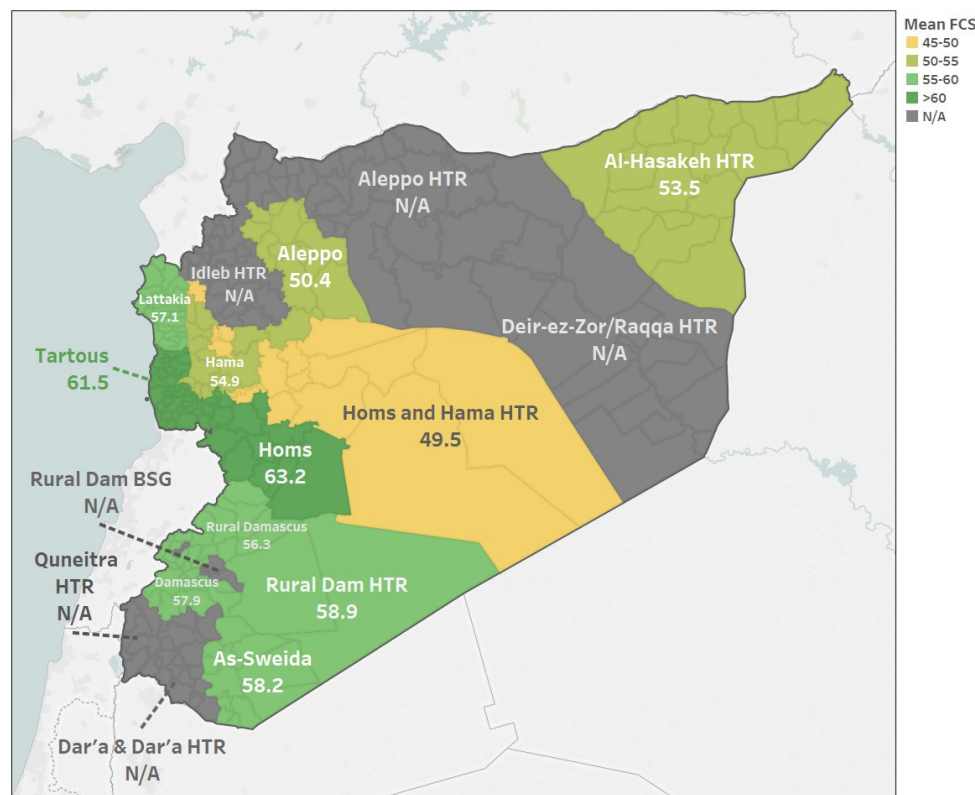
The overall mean Food Consumption Score (FCS) was stable at 55 in September, following three consecutive months of decline (Figure 2). A slight improvement was observed in hard-to-reach areas of rural Damascus, where mean FCS increased from 54.9 in August to 58.9 in September. However, in Hama, mean FCS continued to fall, dropping from 69.6 in July to 54.9 in September. In hard-to-reach areas of Homs and Hama, where the military conflict is disrupting supply routes, FCS fell from 59.7 in July to 49.5 in September, reaching the lowest mean FCS of all surveyed governorates (Figure 2). Widespread attacks and fighting have severely reduced food accessibility in these areas, especially in eastern rural Hama (As-Salamyah district).

Key informants and field visits indicate that the humanitarian and food security situation for many vulnerable displaced households in Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, As-Sweida and Tartous shelters/camps is a major concern, especially as winter approaches. A number of households in these areas have access to nothing but cheap cereals and pulses, and sometimes even safe drinking water is very limited.

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



Map 1: Mean FCS by aggregated governorates, September 2017



According to key informants, the offensive in Deir-ez-Zor is adding pressure to the already dire food security of households in the governorate, especially for those in active-conflict rural areas where it is difficult to access functioning markets. Key informants also reported stressed food security in besieged eastern Ghouta, in line with the worsening security situation and the severe breakdown of livelihoods. Many households are struggling with no or limited income, including many vulnerable households led by women.

The mean FCS for households who received food assistance increased from 47.6 in August to 51.7 in September (Figure 3). A much lower percentage of these households reported poor food consumption in September (8 percent) than in August (23 percent).

Figure 3: Mean FCS by households who received food assistance, July to September 2017

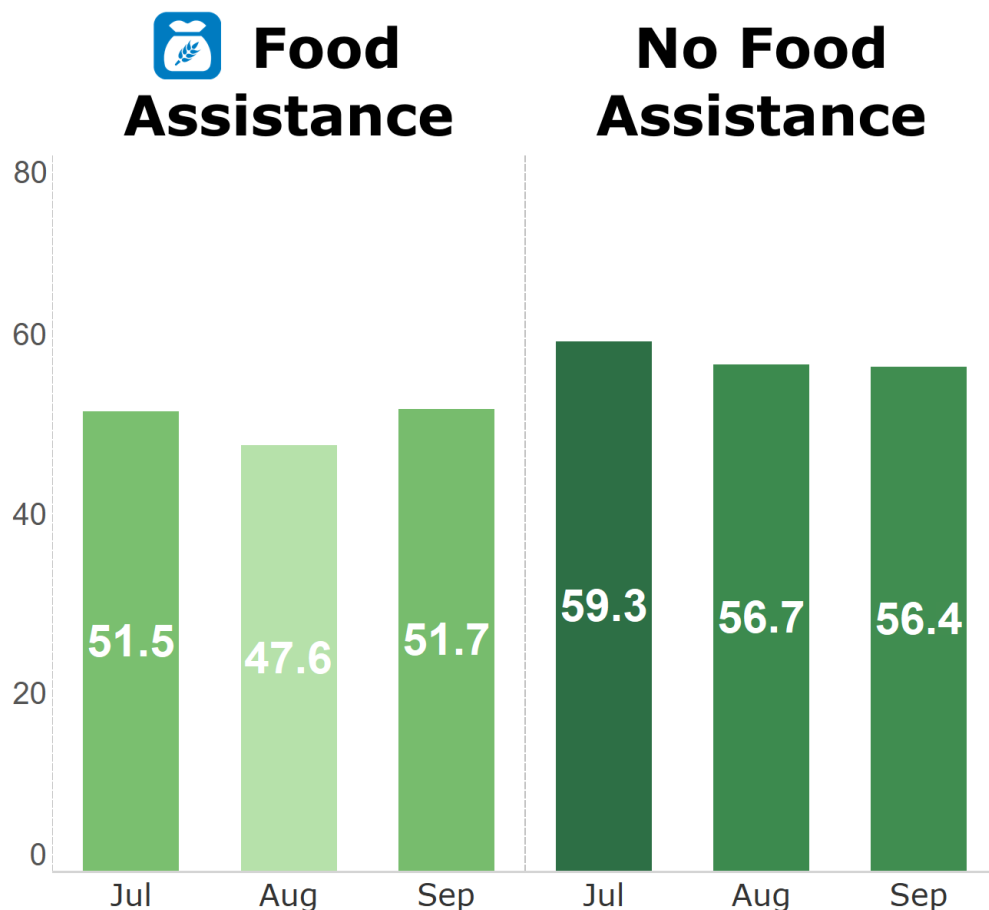
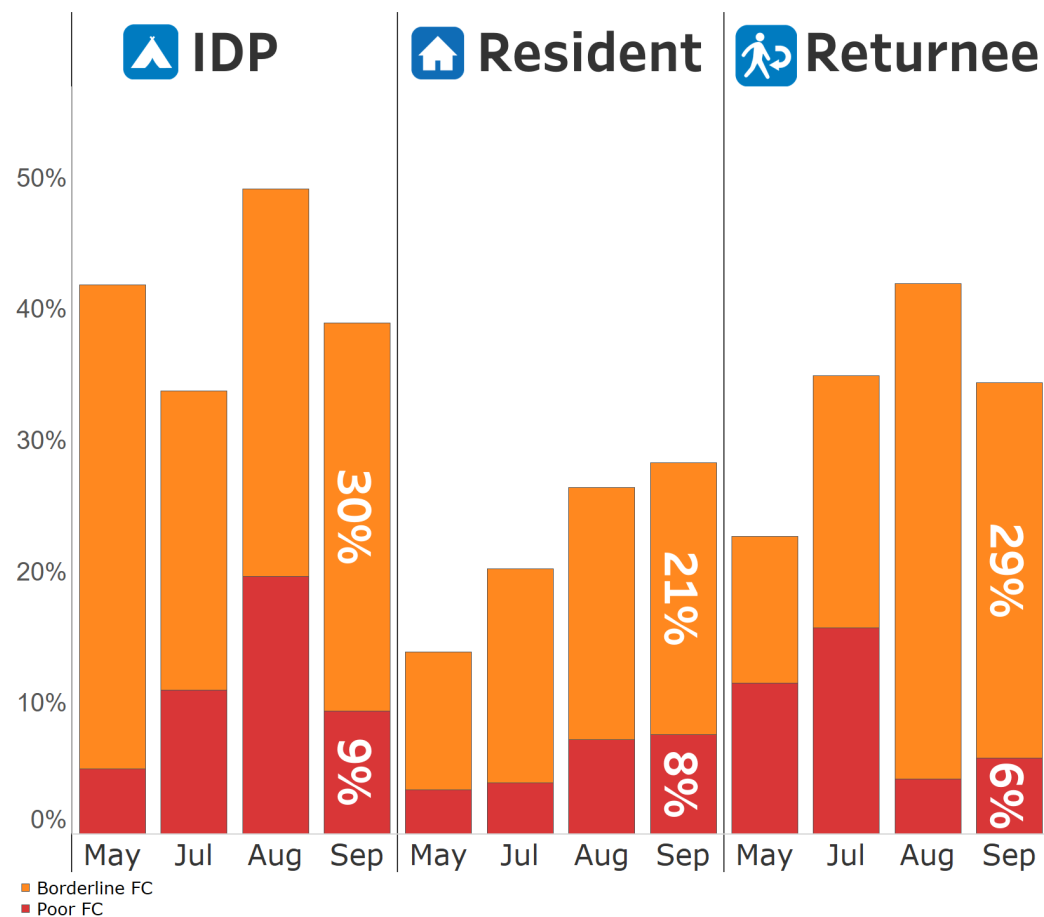


Figure 4: Percentage of households with inadequate food consumption by household residency status, May to September 2017



Food consumption patterns varied greatly by province in September. In hard-to-reach areas of Homs and Hama, the percentage of households with poor food consumption rose from 5 to 14 percent. In Hama, the percentage fell from 10 to 3 percent (Figure 5).

In September, most households had a diet rich in vitamin A, with almost 80 percent consuming vitamin-A rich foods every day in the week before the survey. Around half of the displaced households and 67 percent of resident households had eaten proteins daily in the week before the survey.

However, in general, displaced households are consuming inadequate levels of haem iron. More than 40 percent of the surveyed IDPs had eaten no food rich in haem iron in the week before the survey.

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

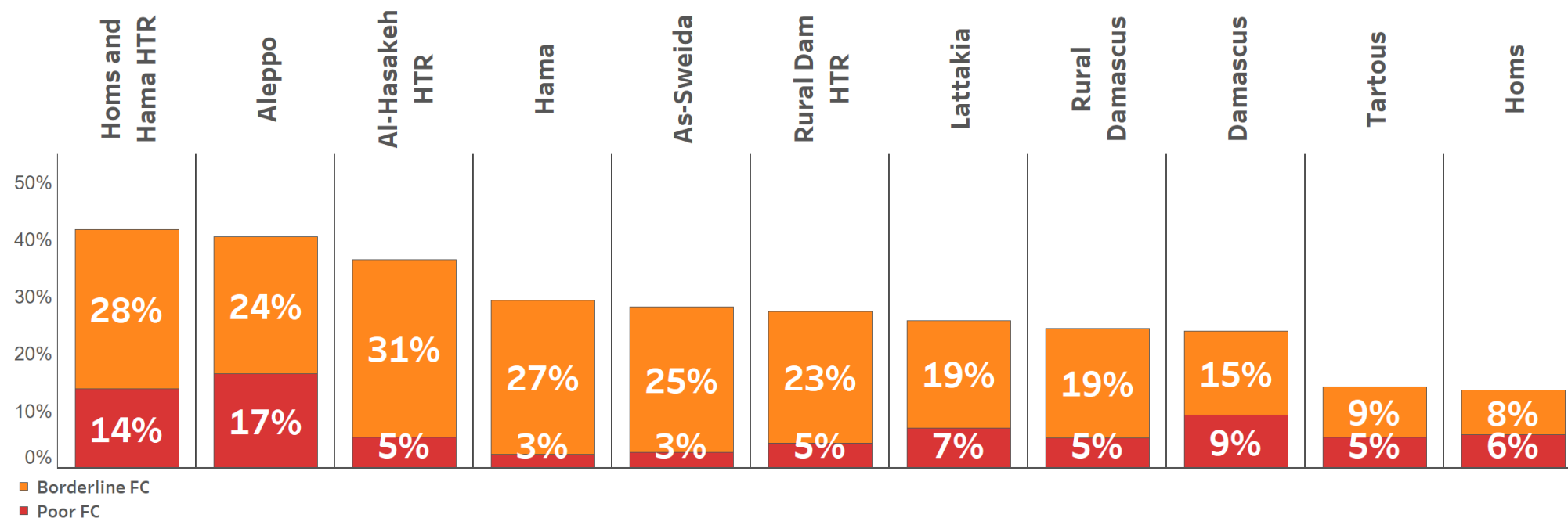
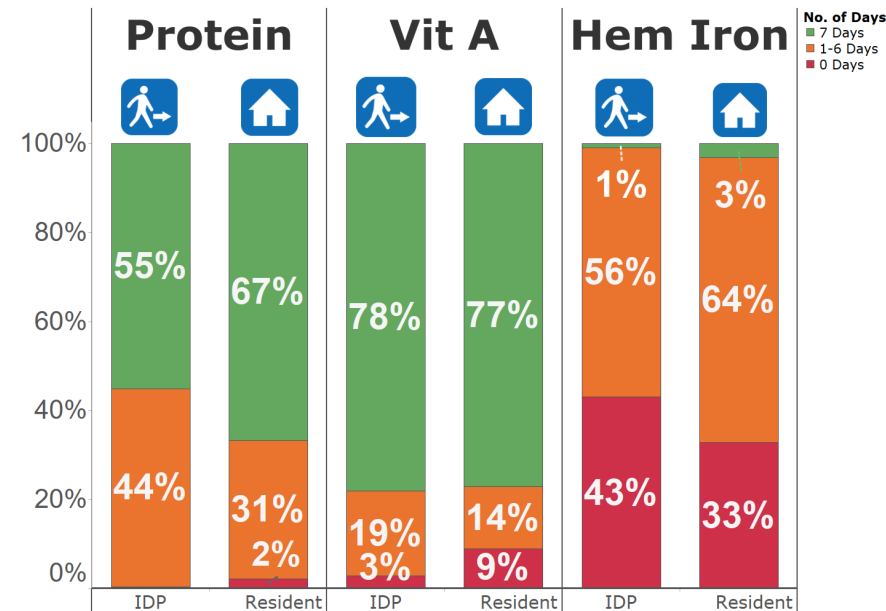


Figure 6: Frequency of consumption of rich food groups by resident status, September 2017



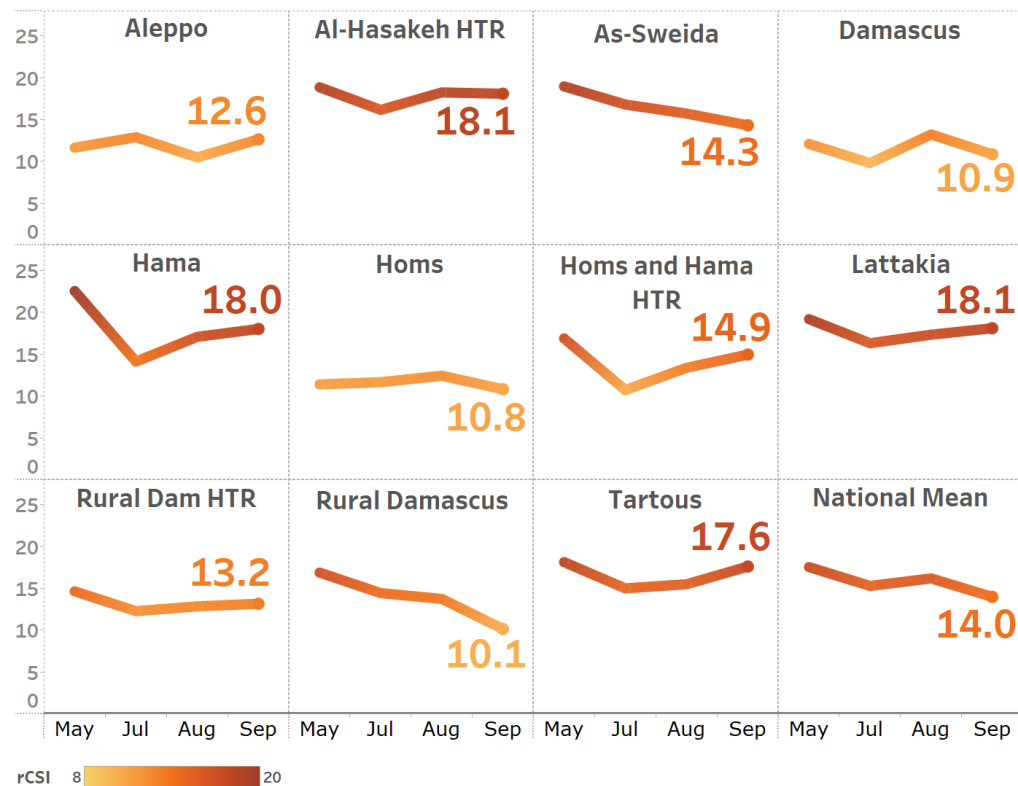


Highest use of negative coping strategies in Al-Hasakeh, Lattakia and Hama

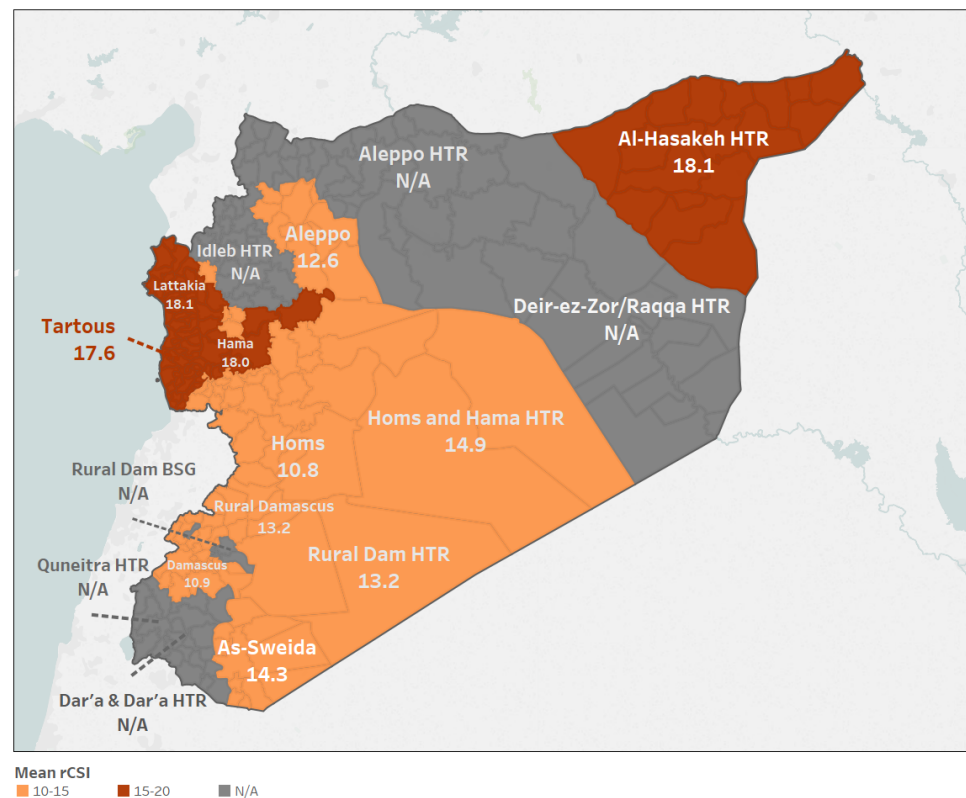
The mean reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) fell from 16.2 in August to 14.0 in September. At the governorate level, mean rCSI rose in Aleppo, Hama and in hard-to-reach areas of Homs and Hama, meaning that households were employing more negative coping strategies than in August. Conversely, households in rural Damascus, Damascus and Homs appeared to be resorting less to negative food-based coping strategies in September, a potential indication of improving food security.



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



Map 2: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, September 2017



In all surveyed governorates, September saw a fall in the mean rCSI for households who received food assistance. Fewer of these households reported borrowing food, buying less expensive food, limiting portion sizes, eating fewer meals, buying food on credit and spending savings to cope with a lack of food or money to buy food (Figure 8). A similar trend was observed among displaced households (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Use of coping strategies by households receiving food assistance, March to September 2017

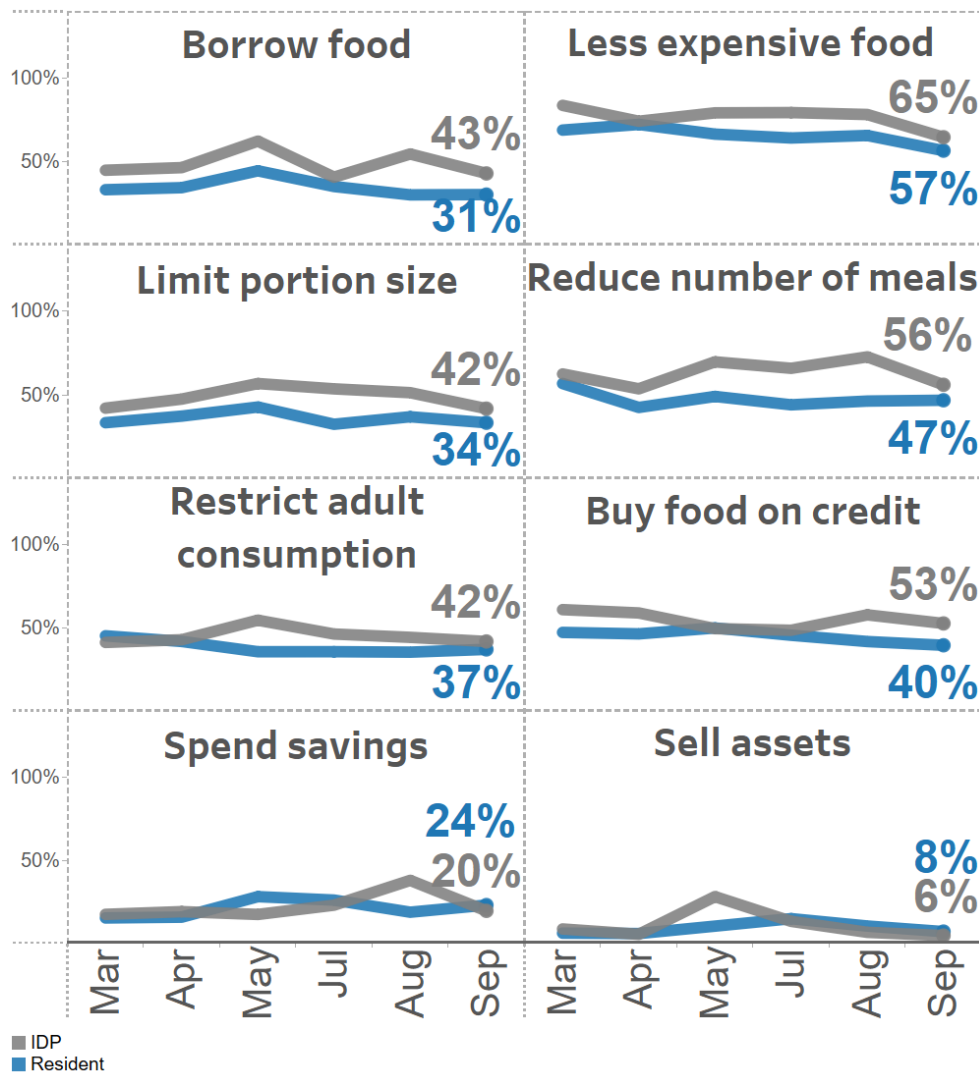
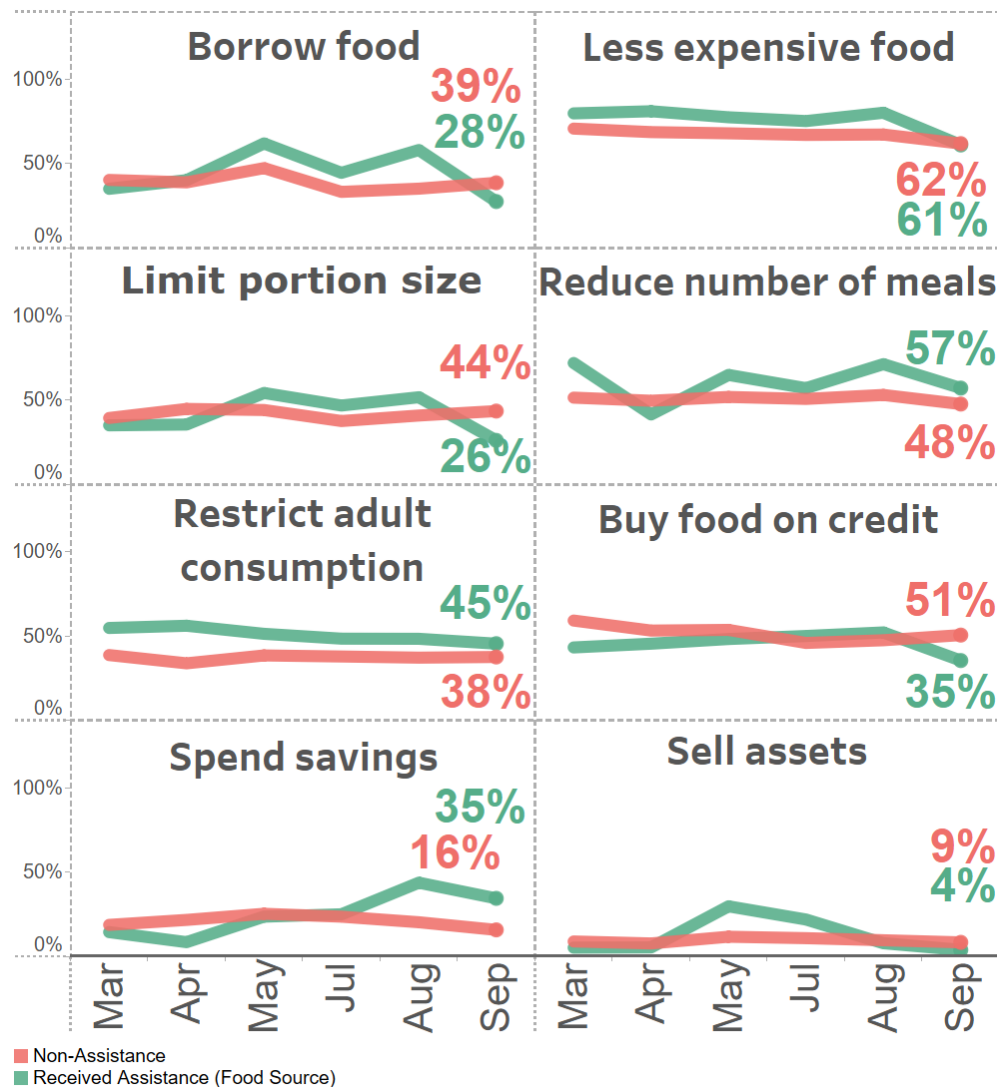


Figure 9: Use of coping strategies by resident status, March to September 2017





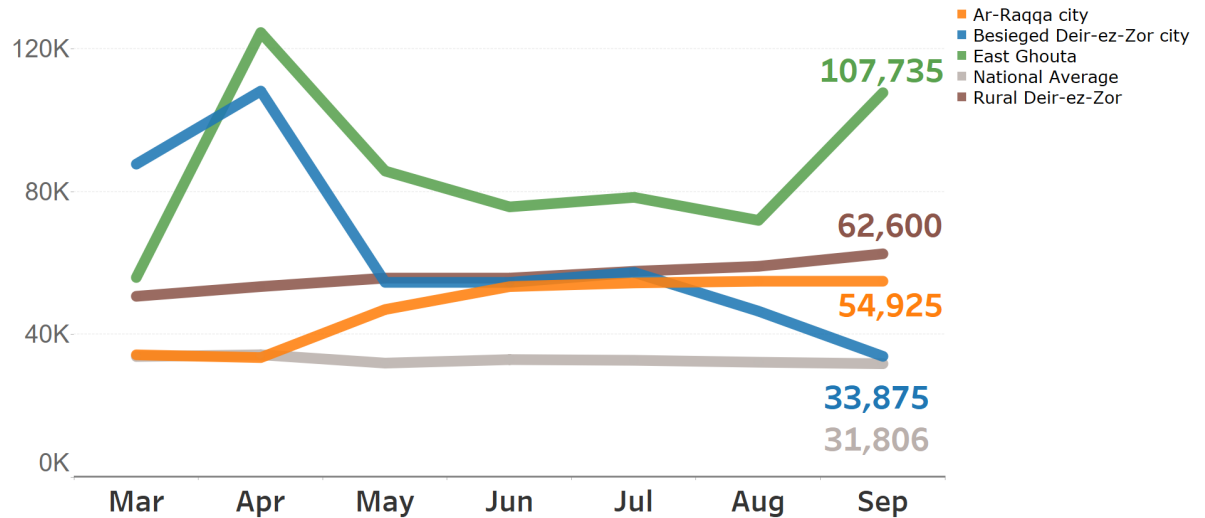
Food prices fall in Deir-ez-Zor city as siege comes to an end

In east Ghouta, food prices have been significantly impacted by the recent offensive escalation. Although inter-agency convoys have reached the besieged community and households have had better food access following the harvest, the cost of the standard food basket rose by 50 percent in September compared with August, reaching SYP107,735 (around US\$209).

In Deir-ez-Zor city, food prices have dropped, likely because the siege is ending and many traders have started releasing their stocks in markets. The average food basket now costs SYP33,875 (around US\$66). However, in rural Deir-ez-Zor, prices have continued to rise because of the ongoing conflict in many front-line locations. The cost of the food basket rose by 6 percent in September to SYP62,600 (US\$161).

In Ar-Raqqa city, the cost of the food basket has remained stable since August, but it is still 60 percent higher than in March 2017 (Figure 10).

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



High food prices in eastern Ghouta despite humanitarian access and the recent harvest

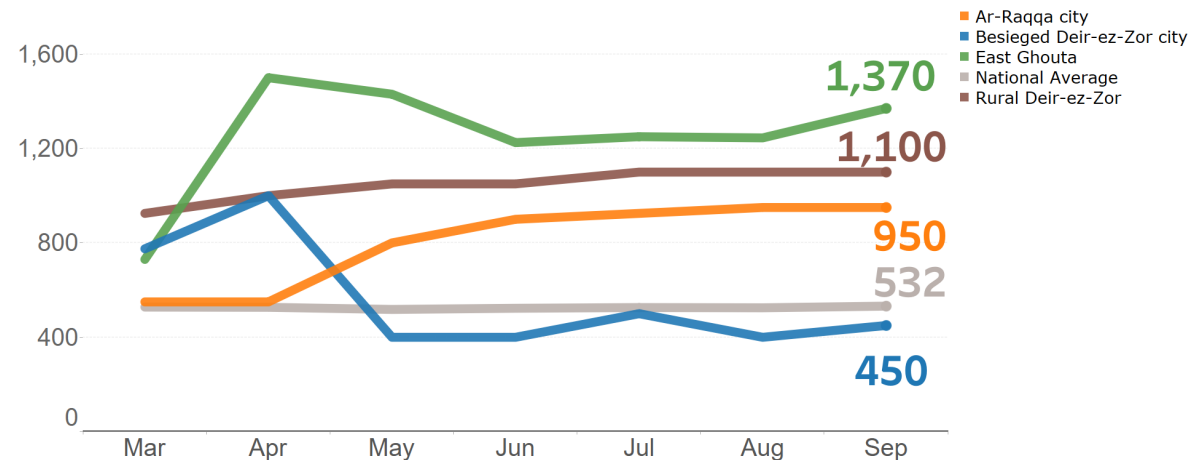
In besieged Deir-ez-Zor city, the price of rice increased by 13 percent in September compared with August, reaching SYP450/kg. Even so, rice is still 42 cheaper than six months ago.

In rural Deir-ez-Zor, rice retailed at SYP1,100/kg in September, remaining almost unchanged from August but still 19 percent higher than in March 2017.

In eastern Ghouta, rice retailed at SYP1,370/kg, 10 percent more than in August and 88 percent more than six months ago. Rice prices are also more than double the national average.

In Ar-Raqqa city, rice prices remained stable between August and September at SYP950/kg. They are 73 percent higher than in March 2017.

Figure 11: Retail price of rice (SYP/kg) in eastern Ghouta, Ar-Raqqa city, rural Deir-ez-Zor and Deir-ez-Zor city vs. national average, March to September 2017





In the words of respondents

Respondents were asked to identify the main problems facing their families. They cited access to food and non-food items as the biggest challenge, followed by access to healthcare. While most foods are available across assessed locations, the recent escalation of violence and population movements have reportedly placed strain on markets, pushing up prices and reducing the availability of core items in some areas. Unemployment was also mentioned as an issue, as many family breadwinners saw their wages cut or stopped entirely this month. High electricity, transportation and education costs and electricity shortages were also reported as major challenges (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Percentage of surveyed households reporting on the main selected issues, September 2017



Prices 40%

"Increased prices compared to income which makes living extremely hard." ~ Male respondent from As-Sweida



Lack of food 35%

"Our main source of food is through borrowed money." ~ Male respondent from Hama



Unemployment/Jobs 31%

"Tough living conditions due to the problem of unemployment and low income." ~ Male respondent from Al-Hasakeh



Rent 11%

"We live in a rented house shared with other families." ~ Female respondent from Rural Damascus



Electricity 10%

"Power and water cuts." ~ Female respondent from Tartous

Methodology

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via telephone interviews in September from key informants and households in locations across Syria. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 778 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, Latakia 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:

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