

Dire food security in eastern Ghouta as the siege tightens and all supply routes are closed

Key points



Food security indicators have deteriorated over the past six months in hard-to-reach areas of Homs and Hama



Compared to September 2017, more IDPs are buying food on credit and spending their savings to cope with a lack of food or money to buy food



Food prices have skyrocketed in eastern Ghouta in the face of severe shortages of essential goods



WFP/Hussam Al-Saleh

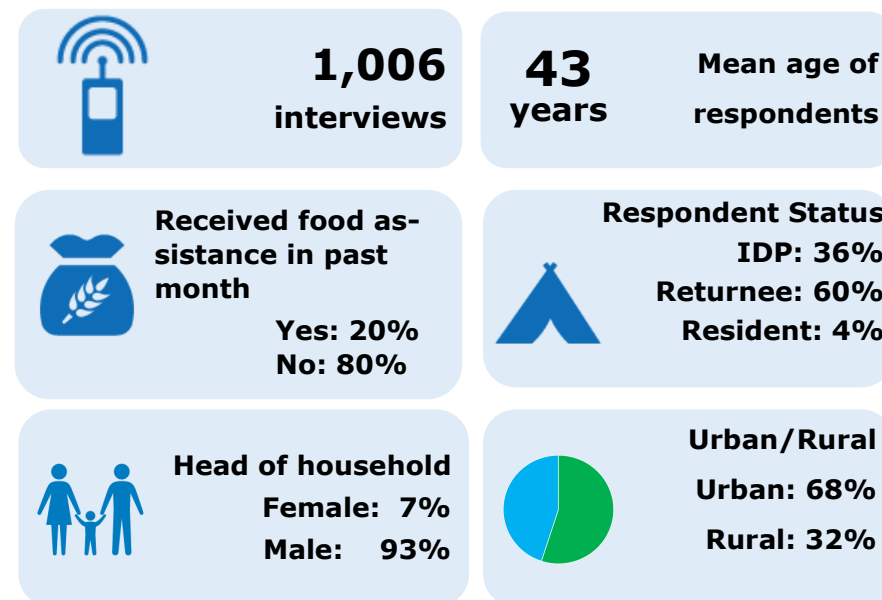
Situation Update

In October, despite the volatile security situation in Idleb, IDPs continued to arrive from Oqeirbat (southeast Hama), fleeing the ongoing fighting. The [Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster](#) estimates that more than 22,000 people have been displaced from Oqeirbat since July 2017. Fighting continues in Deir-ez-Zor governorate, where conflict has displaced nearly 100,000 people since late August 2012 to other locations within Deir-ez-Zor, as well as to Al-Hasakeh and Ar-Raqqa governorates. Many households remain cut off from humanitarian assistance.

After a four-month battle and following more than three years of siege, the city of [Ragqa](#) has been fully recaptured. Critical conditions are reported in IDP camps across Ar-Raqqa governorate, with shortages of food, water and medicine.

In eastern Ghouta, an enclave in rural Damascus, the humanitarian situation is deteriorating rapidly, with reports of a sharp decline in the nutrition and food security situation of the estimated 400,000 people living there. The enclave, which consists of five different sub-districts, has been under siege since 2012. Of the ten areas still under siege in Syria, five are in eastern Ghouta.

Figure 1: Sample Household characteristics



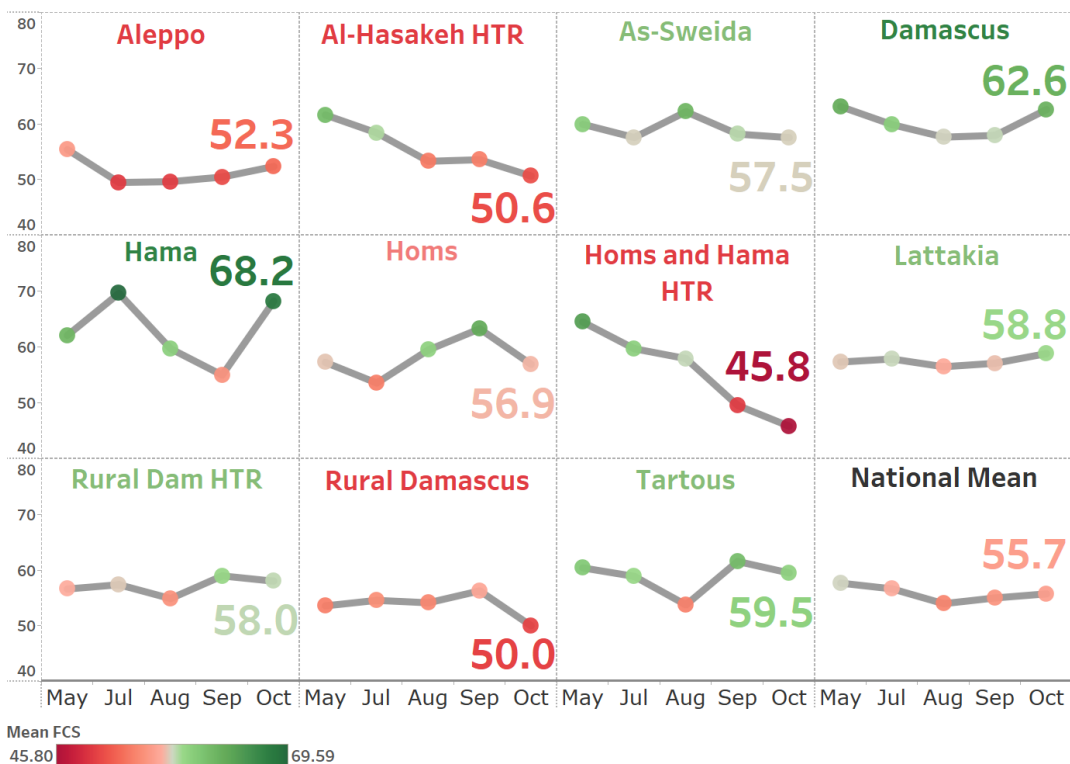


Mean FCS continues to fall in hard-to-reach areas of Hama and Homs

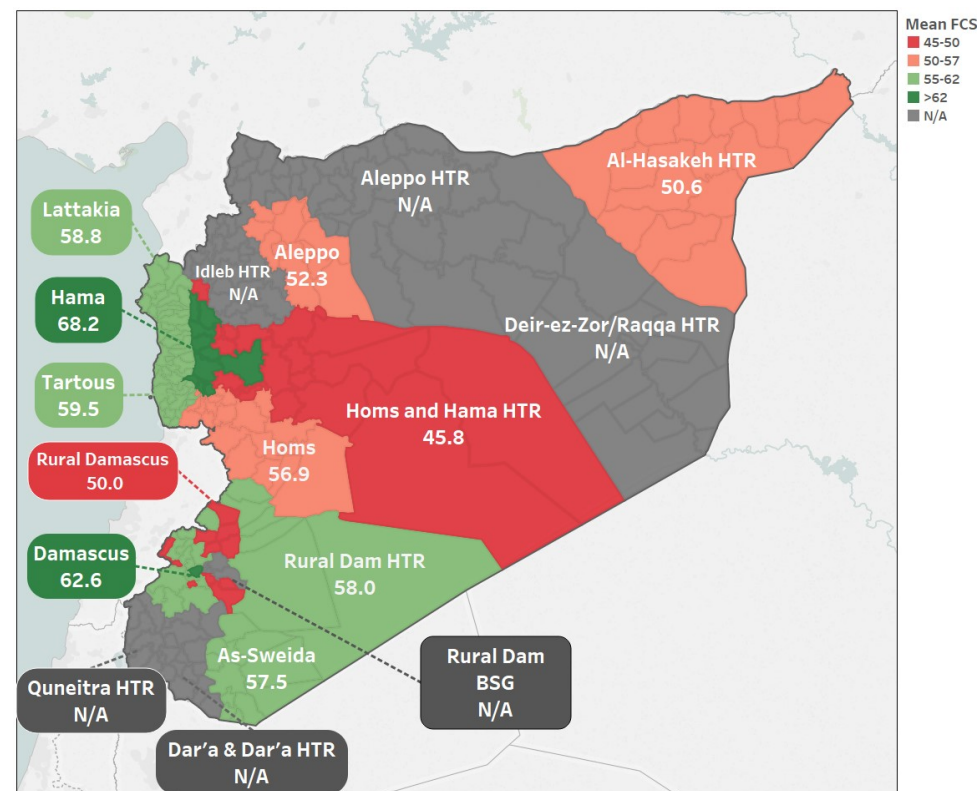
The overall mean Food Consumption Score (FCS) was the same in October as in September (55.7) (Figure 2). However, FCS fell in rural Damascus and in hard-to-reach areas of Homs and Hama, reaching the lowest levels of all surveyed governorates. The situation is particularly concerning in hard-to-reach areas of Homs and Hama, where ongoing conflict has driven FCS down from 64.5 in May to 45.8 in October (Figure 2).

In July, eastern Ghouta was established as a de-escalation zone. However, access constraints and the volatile security situation have left entire populations cut off from regular humanitarian assistance. Food availability has been severely impacted, especially after the total blockage of supply routes. Field visits and a recent rapid food security assessment indicate that since the intensification of the siege in eastern Ghouta, many residents have been forced to subsist on raw vegetables because of a lack of staple foods and a severe shortage of cooking fuel. Maize corn, cabbage and cauliflower were the main food items that households and key informants reported consuming daily, with most eating just one meal a day. Some families said they were drinking large quantities of water to mask their hunger. According to key informants, as bread was not easily available, most the population were deriving over 80 percent of their caloric intake from vegetables, reflecting poor access to a nutritious and balanced diet.

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



Map 1: Mean FCS by aggregated governorates, October 2017



The proportion of resident and returnee households with poor food consumption increased between September and October. It remained stable for displaced households (Figure 3). Food consumption patterns varied greatly by province in October (Figure 4). In line with the FCS results, the percentage of households with inadequate food consumption rose between September and October in Al Hasakeh (by 14 percentage points), rural Damascus (by 9 percentage points) and hard-to-reach areas of Homs and Hama (by 22 percentage points).

In October, most households had a diet rich in vitamin A, with 73 percent consuming vitamin-A rich foods every day in the week before the survey. More than 50 percent of displaced households and 66 percent of resident households had eaten proteins daily in the week before the survey. However, 3 percent of IDPs did not have access to proteins and around 30 percent of the households with poor food consumption had not eaten proteins in the week before the survey. Inadequate consumption of haem iron-rich food continues to be the main concern among both displaced and resident households, with 40 percent reporting zero consumption of foods rich in haem iron in the week before the survey.

Figure 3: Percentage of households with inadequate food consumption by residency status, May to October 2017

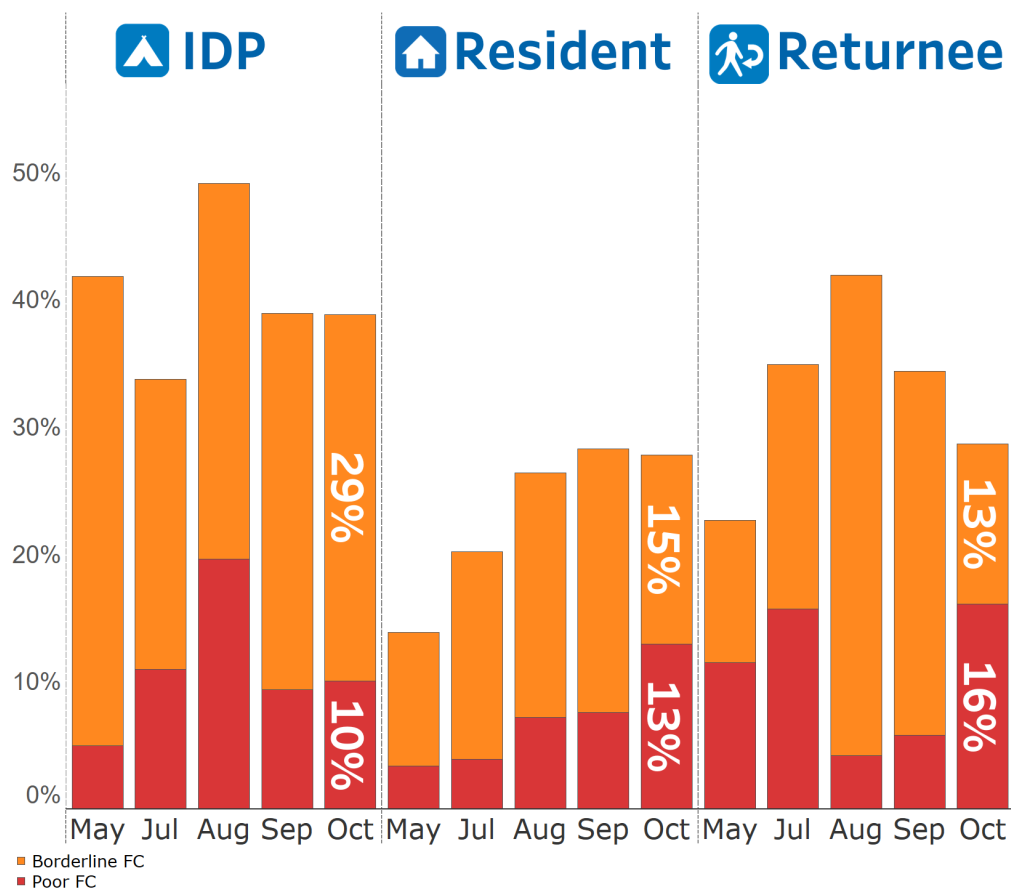


Figure 4: Percentage of households with inadequate food consumption by district, October 2017

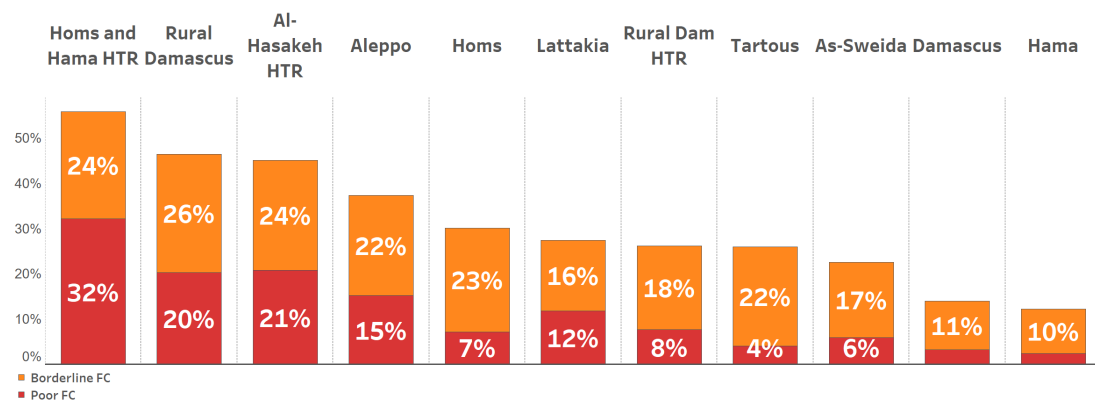
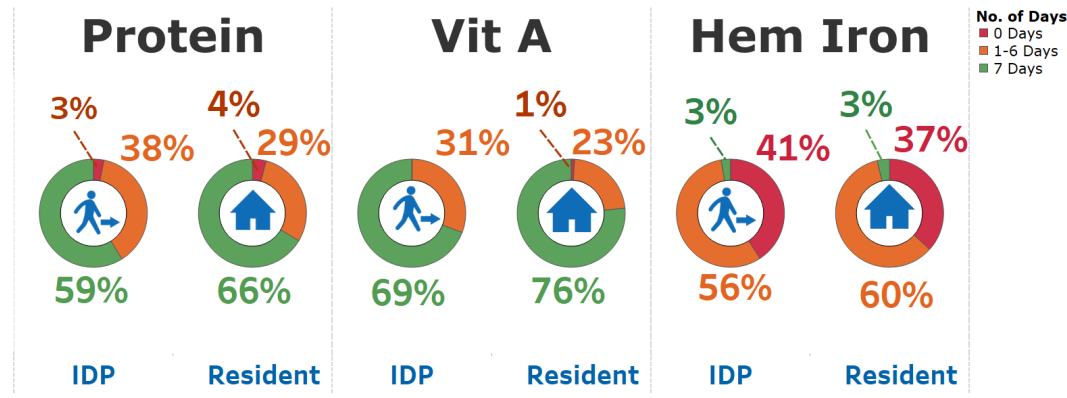


Figure 5: Frequency of consumption of nutrient-rich food groups by resident status, October 2017





Highest use of negative coping strategies in hard-to-reach-areas of Homs and Hama

The mean reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) increased from 14 in September to 15.9 in October, indicating that more households resorted to negative food-related coping strategies to survive. At the governorate level, mean rCSI rose in Homs, hard-to-reach areas of Homs and Hama, and rural Damascus. These are also the governorates with the highest rCSI.

In all surveyed governorates, October saw an increase in the mean rCSI for both displaced and resident households. More of these households reported reducing the number of meals eaten per day, buying food on credit and spending savings to cope with a lack of food or money to buy food (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, May to October 2017

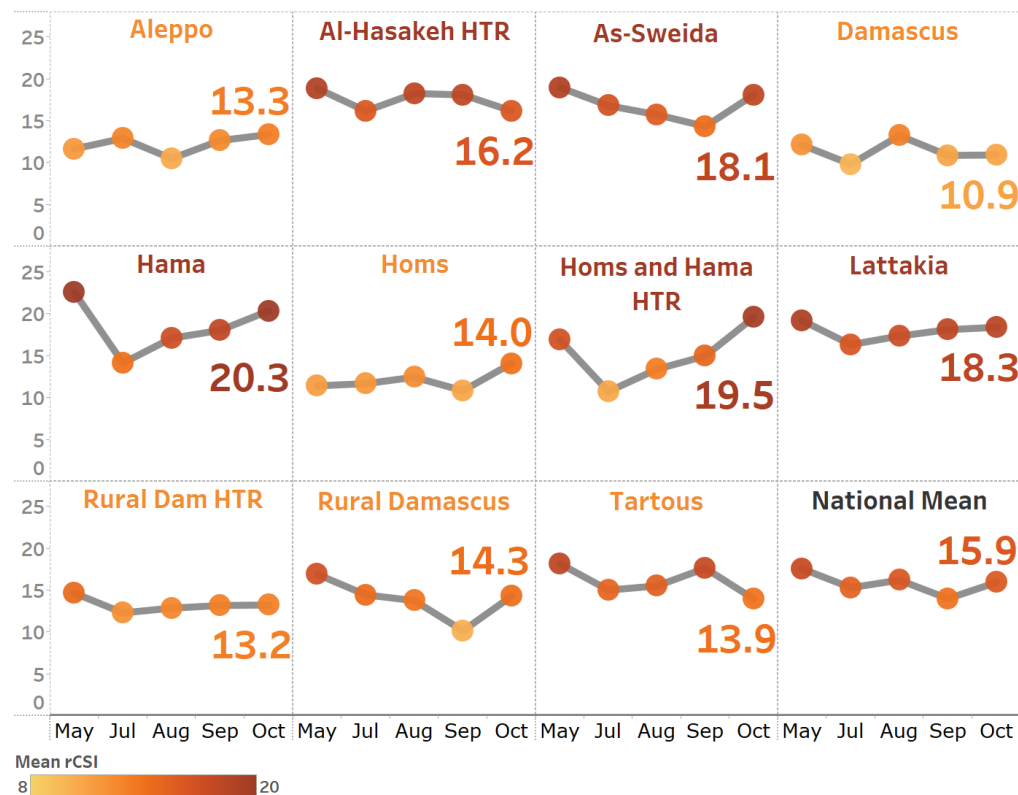
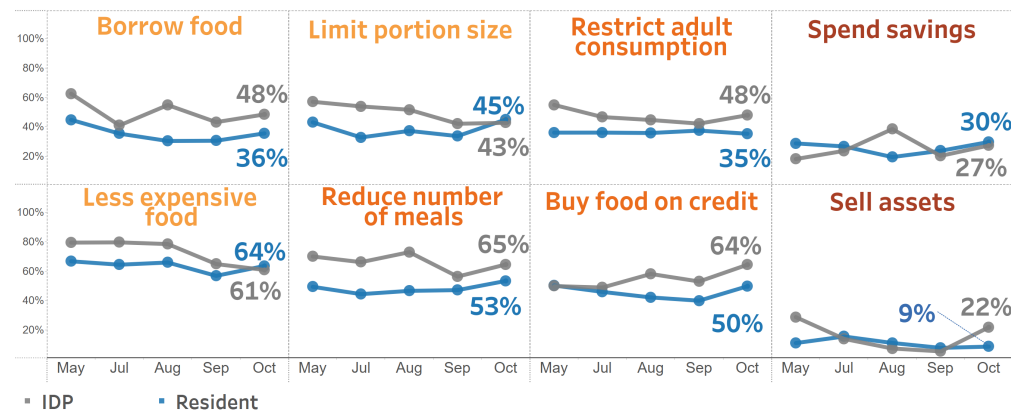
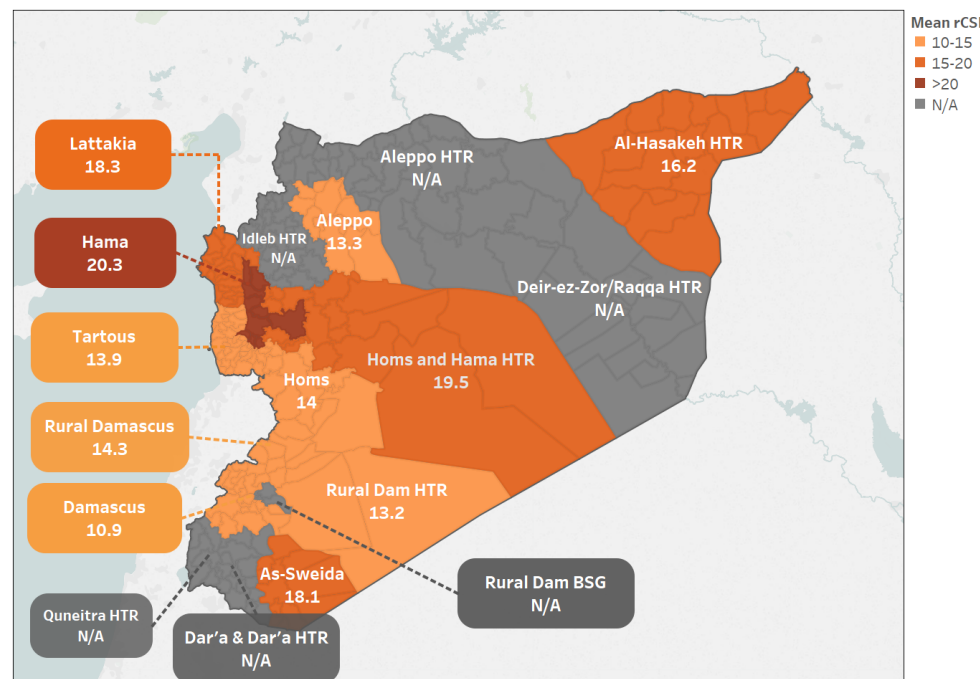


Figure 7: Use of coping strategies aggregated by resident status, May to October 2017



Map 2: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, October 2017





Skyrocketing food prices in eastern Ghouta

Since the Al-Wafideen crossing closed in September, all food supply routes to eastern Ghouta have been completely closed. Food prices have soared as a consequence, with particularly grave consequences for the poorest and most vulnerable people. During the WFP market assessment conducted in Kafr Batna (in eastern Ghouta) at the end of October, the remaining food stock was found to be very limited, with severe shortages of staple foods such as rice, pulses, sugar and oil.

Based on the market assessment data, the cost of the standard food basket in October 2017 reached SYP327,000, which is 204 percent higher than in September and more than five times higher than in August 2017 (before the crossing closed). The eastern Ghouta food basket currently is almost ten times more expensive than the national average.

According to key informants, the only available cooking fuel in eastern Ghouta is liquid melted plastic, which costs SYP 3,500/litre – ten times more than the national average price of diesel. Some households also reported burning animal remains and even used diapers to boil vegetables.

A bundle of bread in Kafr Batna is being sold at SYP2,000, which is more than 35 times the average price in accessible markets.

Food security is likely to deteriorate rapidly in the coming weeks if the siege continues. It is estimated that food stocks will be totally depleted by end November 2017.



Figure 8: Cost of the standard food basket (SYP) in eastern Ghouta, Ar-Raqqa city and Deir-ez-Zor vs. the national average, March to October 2017

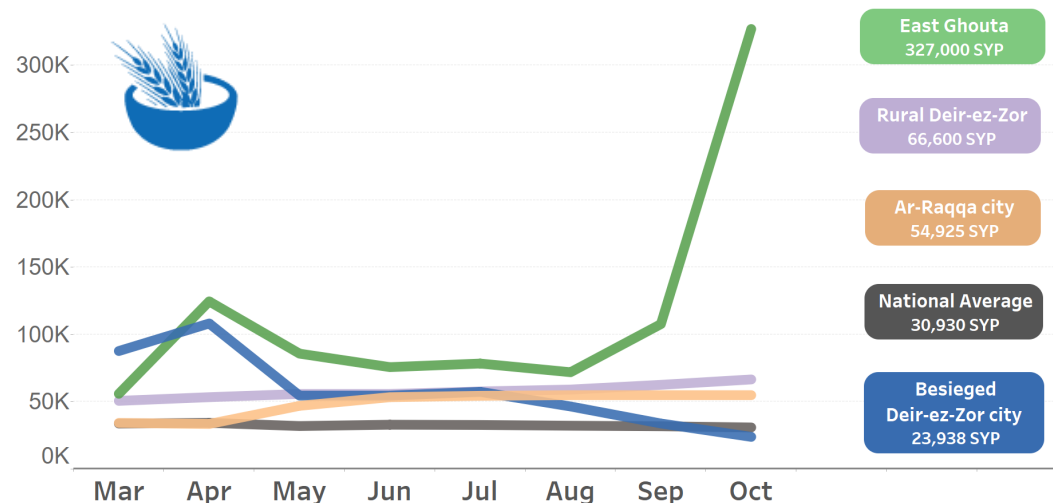
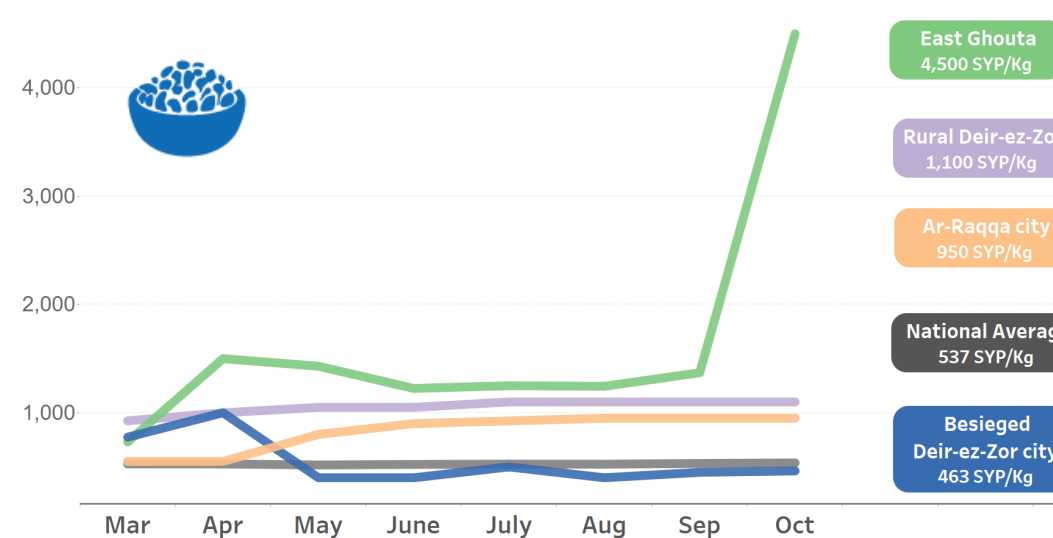


Figure 9: Retail price of rice (SYP/kg) in eastern Ghouta, Madaya and Deir-ez-Zor vs. national average, March to October 2017





In the words of respondents

Respondents were asked to identify the main problems facing their families. Figure 10 summarises their answers.

Figure 10: Number of surveyed households reporting on the main selected issues, October 2017



Number of respondents reporting
 5 240

Methodology

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via telephone interviews in October from key informants and households in locations across Syria. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1,006 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 are 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) comprised 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. The 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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