

Food security in Eastern Ghouta remains dire, but food access improves slightly following WFP distributions

Key points



Households with poor food consumption are consuming alarmingly low levels of protein and haem iron-rich food



Increasing numbers of IDPs are relying on negative food-related coping strategies



Food prices remain extremely high in Eastern Ghouta as the siege continues to hamper household access to food



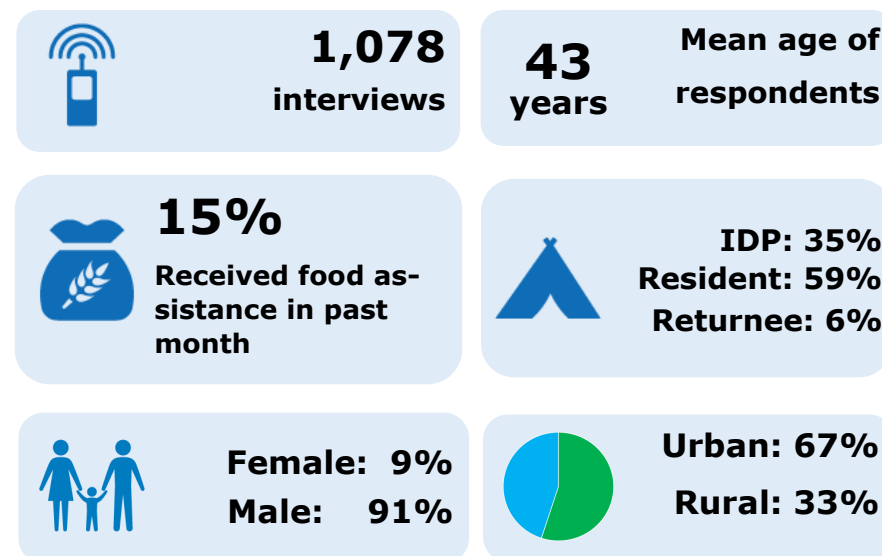
Situation Update

Heavy fighting in north-eastern Hama governorate continued in November, triggering population displacement into the Idleb countryside. Following the recapture of Ar-Raqqa, an estimated [20,000 people](#) have returned to three districts of Ar Raqqa city, however, basic services such as water, electricity and communications remain largely unavailable.

The intensification of the five-year siege on Eastern Ghouta has significantly undermined food security. [A survey](#) conducted by UNICEF in November in areas of Eastern Ghouta indicated that the proportion of children under 5 suffering from acute malnutrition has risen from 2.1 percent in January 2017 to 11.9 percent in November 2017. This is the highest rate of child acute malnutrition recorded in Syria since the beginning of the conflict.

WFP conducted a joint rapid food security and market assessment in the Duma sub-district of Eastern Ghouta, where a majority of its 175,000 residents, are in need of humanitarian assistance. Supply routes into Eastern Ghouta were completely closed-off for three months (since September 2017) causing food prices to increase dramatically. By mid-November, the price of bread (a daily staple) had increased to 85 times the price for the same commodity in Damascus just 15 kilometres away. Since end-November however, one trader has been allowed to trade some food items, causing a slight reduction in the price of food.

Figure 1: Sample Household characteristics





Food consumption worsens slightly in Hama and Homs

The overall mean Food Consumption Score (FCS) decreased slightly in November (53.5) compared with October (55.7) (Figure 2), indicating a deterioration in household food security. At the governorate level, mean FCS fell in Hama and in Homs. The share of households with poor and borderline food consumption reached 21 percent in Hama and 36 percent in Homs (Figure 4), an increase of 12 percentage points in Hama and 6 percentage points in Homs compared with October. The lowest FCS of all surveyed governorates continues to be reported in hard-to-reach areas of Homs, Hama and Al-Hasakeh.

The proportion of resident and returnee households with poor food consumption fell between October and November. It remained stable for displaced households (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Mean FCS by aggregated governorate, May to November 2017

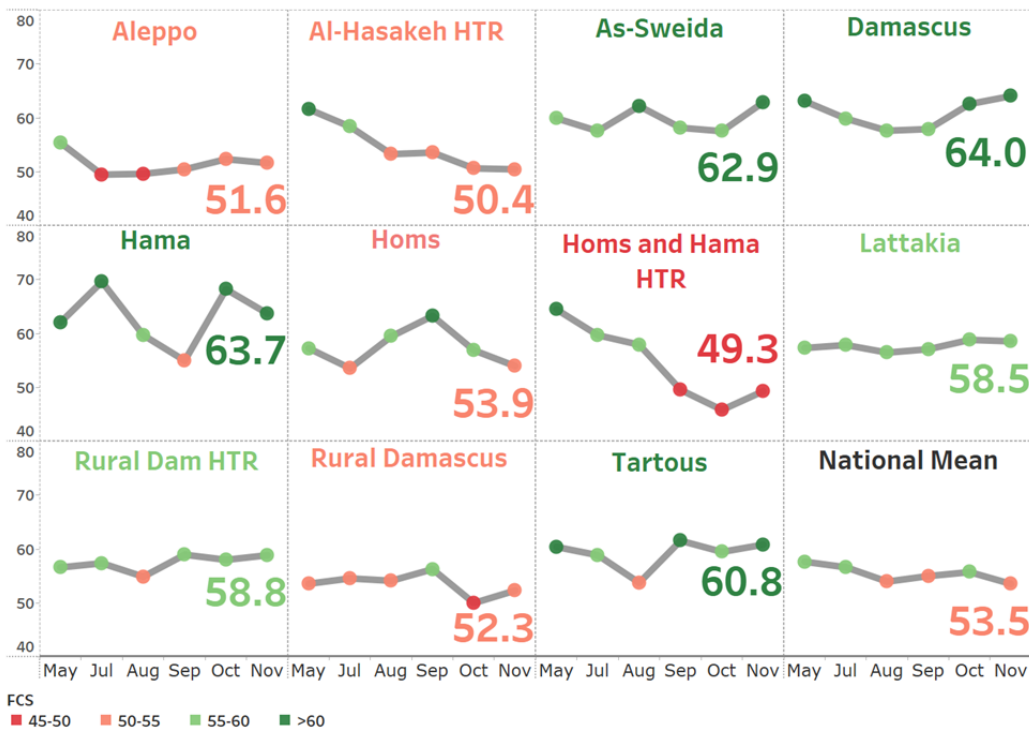
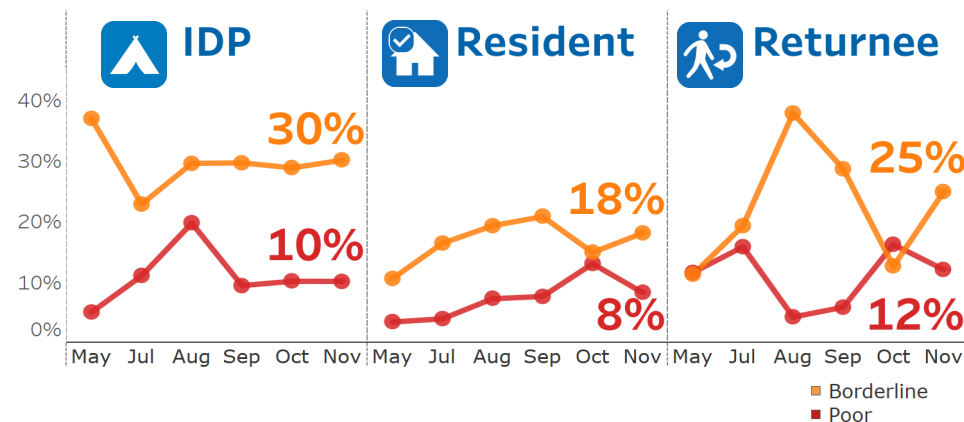
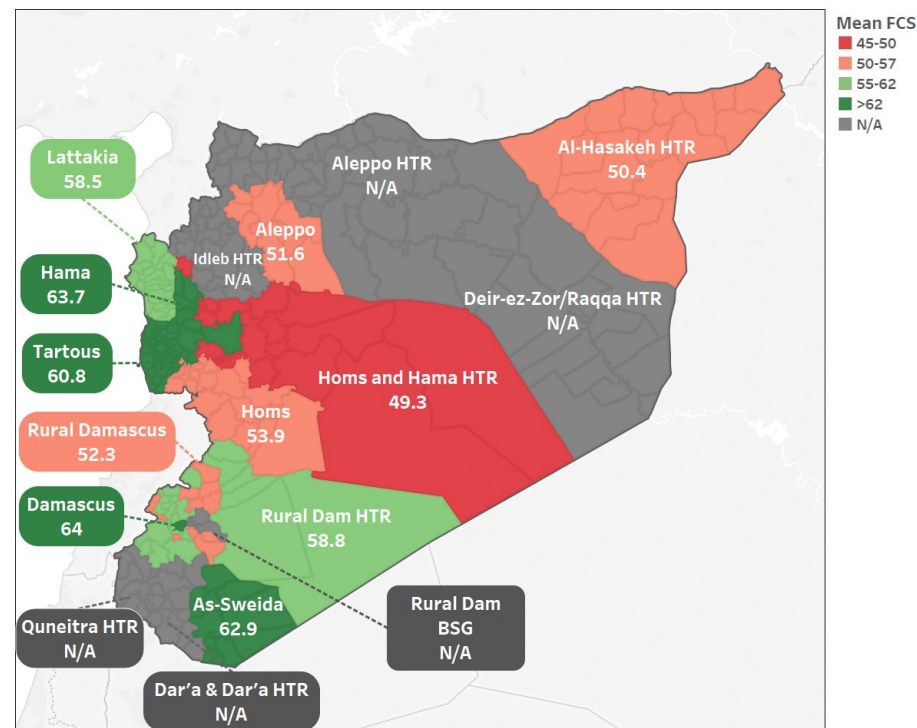


Figure 3: Percentage of households with inadequate food consumption by residency status, May to November 2017



Map 1: Mean FCS by aggregated governorate, November 2017



In November, 44 percent of households with borderline food consumption consumed vitamin A-rich foods every day, but only 7 percent of those with poor food consumption had consumed any vitamin A-rich food in the week before the survey. More than 20 percent of households with poor food consumption had not eaten any protein in the week before the survey.

Inadequate consumption of haem iron-rich food continues to be the biggest concern among surveyed households, with the majority of displaced and resident households reporting zero consumption of foods rich in haem iron in the week before the survey (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Percentage of households with inadequate food consumption by aggregated governorate, November 2017

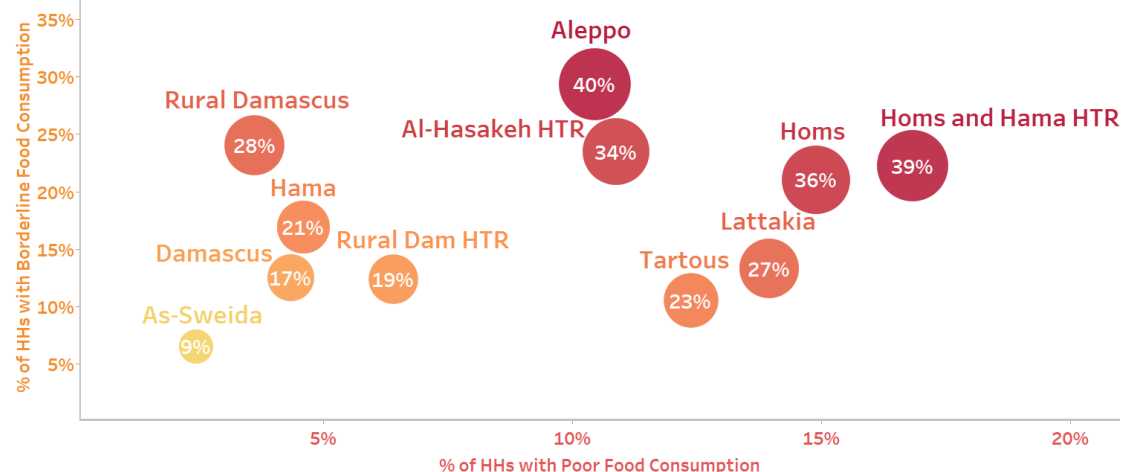
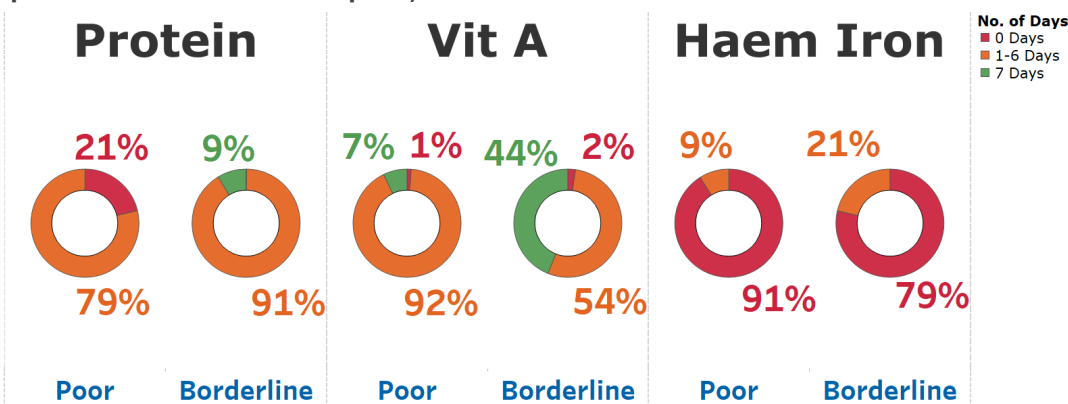


Figure 5: Frequency of consumption of nutrient-rich food groups by households with poor and borderline consumption, November 2017



Update on Eastern Ghouta

Food security in Eastern Ghouta has been significantly affected by the escalation of the siege, and key informants in the area report many cases of severe malnutrition. Fighting (including aerial bombing) intensified from 14 November onwards and is expected to worsen the dire food security of the 400,000 besieged people in Eastern Ghouta. The very limited food sources in the besieged area, skyrocketing food prices, and weak purchasing power are eroding people’s livelihoods and resilience. On 26 November, an agreement was activated to allow food supplies to enter Eastern Ghouta via the “Al-Manfoush” trade route at a tax of SYP 2,000/kg (US \$4.8/kg). As a result, food availability and prices slightly improved at the end of November but prices remain very expensive and unaffordable for many households living in the area. Many households are therefore depending on humanitarian food assistance as a main food source.

WFP conducted a [rapid food security and market assessment](#) in Duma (a suburb of Eastern Ghouta) in mid-November to monitor the situation in the besieged area. The assessment found that because of the scarcity of staple foods and severe shortage of cooking fuel, the majority of households have been surviving on raw vegetables, consuming no more than one meal per day. Due to the lack of wheat, bakeries in Duma are baking bread made from a mix of barley taken from animal fodder and, when available, maize flour. The situation improved slightly at the end of the month thanks to wheat flour provided by WFP plus two new bakeries that started working in the area.

The adoption of emergency livelihood and consumption coping strategies has dramatically increased. This includes eating expired food and animal fodder, spending days without eating, begging and engaging in high-risk activities to get food, including teenagers and children joining armed groups, as this is the sole way households can manage to feed their families. Key informants and interviewed teachers identified an increase in the number of cases of hunger-induced fainting among school children and teachers.



Increasing use of negative coping strategies among displaced households

In November, the mean reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) across surveyed areas was the same as in October, hovering at 16.1. Similarly, there were no significant changes at the governorate level, except in Hama where the mean rCSI dropped from 20.3 in October to 11.8 in November. The highest use of negative coping strategies was recorded in hard-to-reach-areas of Al-Hasakeh, in line with the FCS results.

In all surveyed governorates, mean rCSI increased for displaced households for the second consecutive month. More of these households reported coping with a lack of food or money to buy food by purchasing or consuming less expensive food, reducing the number of meals eaten per day, and restricting adult consumption so that children could eat (Figure 7).

More households reported relying on food assistance as their primary source of food compared with October, notably IDP households (7 percent in October and 13 percent in November). An additional 14 percent of surveyed households said they were relying on food assistance as their secondary or tertiary source of food.

Figure 6: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorate, May to November 2017

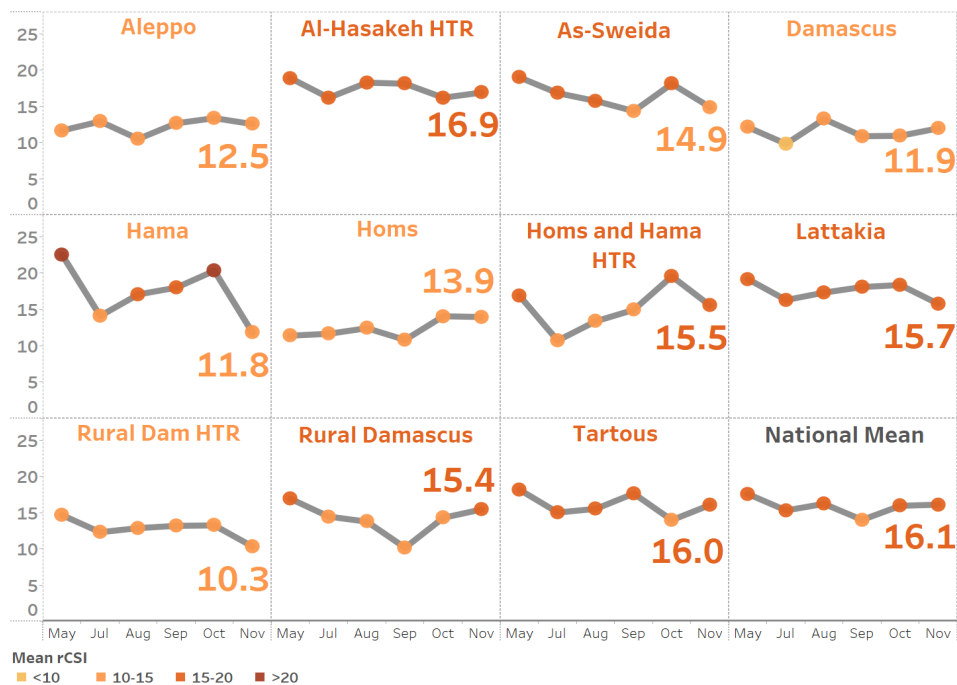
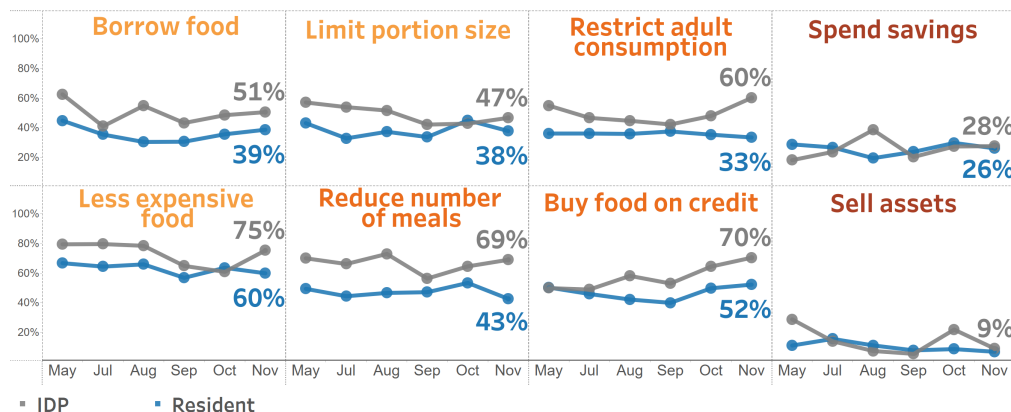
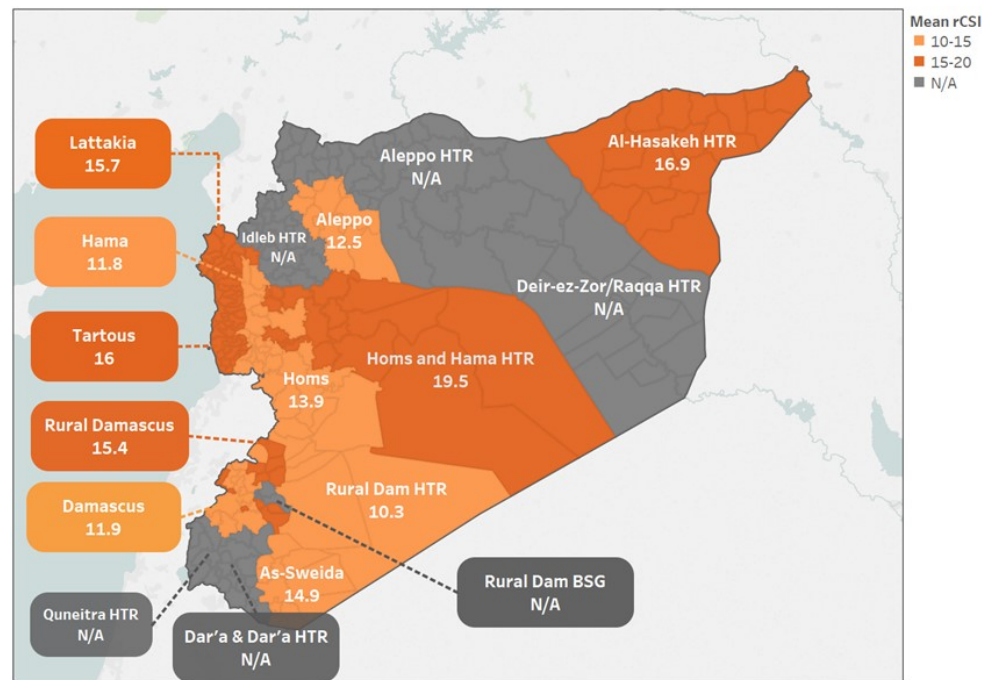


Figure 7: Use of coping strategies disaggregated by resident status, May to November 2017



Map 2: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorate, November 2017





Food prices in Eastern Ghouta are extremely high for the second consecutive month

The slight easing of the siege of Eastern Ghouta, slightly reduced food prices in the besieged area. Nevertheless, food prices remain dramatically high compared to other areas in Syria. According to market assessments and price monitoring data, the average cost of the standard food basket in November was SYP 268,744, which is 18 percent lower than in October but still more than 210 percent higher than six months ago, and more than eight times the national average food basket price (Figure 8). In the other monitored locations, the cost of the food basket has remained stable, with the cheapest basket found in previously besieged parts of Deir-ez-Zor city.

Rice prices for Eastern Ghouta followed a similar trend to the overall food basket, with rice retailing at SYP3,915/kg, a 13 percent decrease compared to October but still 174 percent higher than six months ago. Surveyed traders say there is no cooking fuel except melted plastic, which costs SYP 3,500/litre – ten times the national average price of diesel. High fuel prices are a significant constraint on household food utilization.

Prices in Eastern Ghouta were highly volatile across the month, peaking in the third week of November and then slightly decreasing after 26 November when the first commercial goods arrived in the area since September 2017.



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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 November 2017

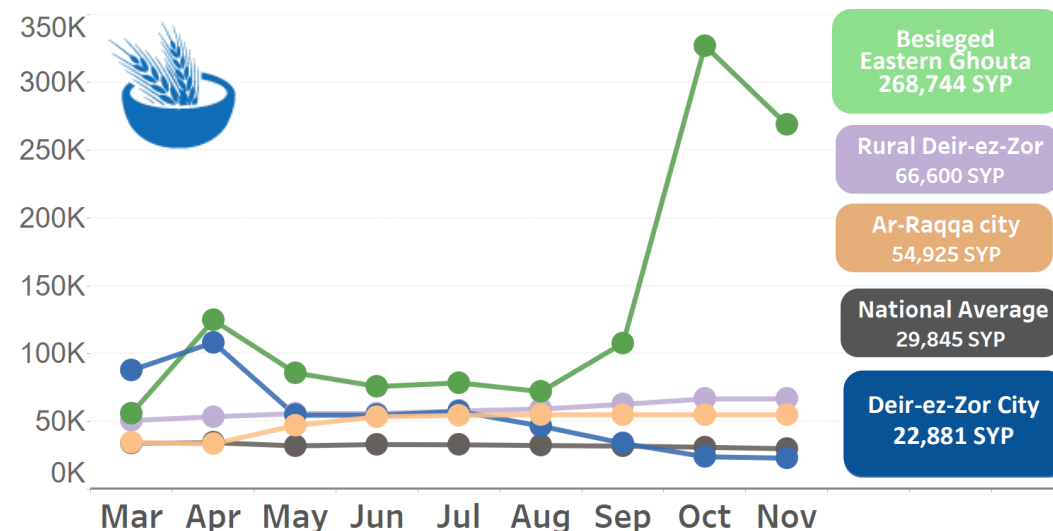
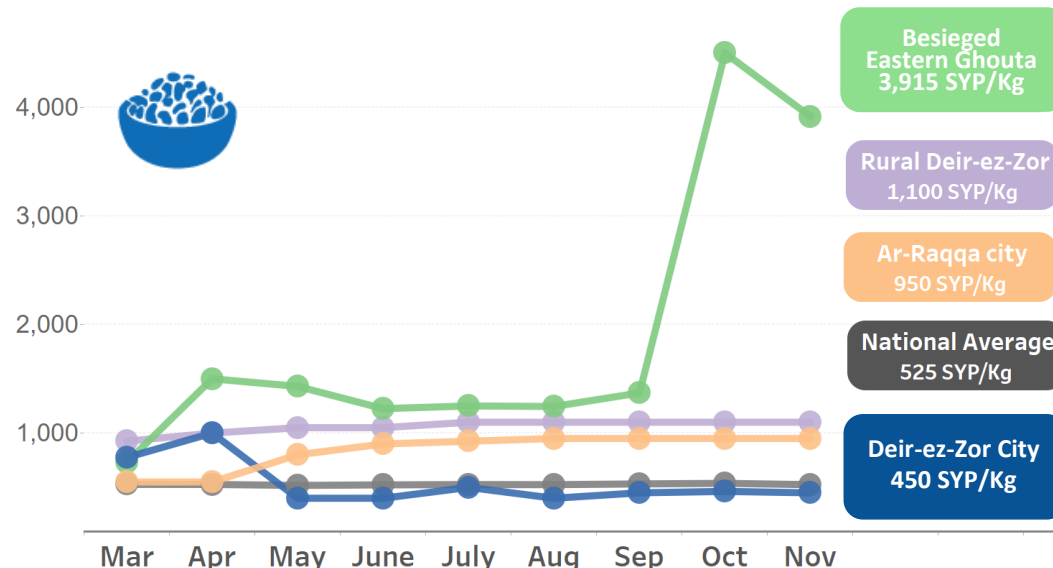


Figure 9: Retail price of rice (SYP/kg) in Eastern Ghouta, Madaya and Deir-ez-Zor vs. national average, March to November 2017

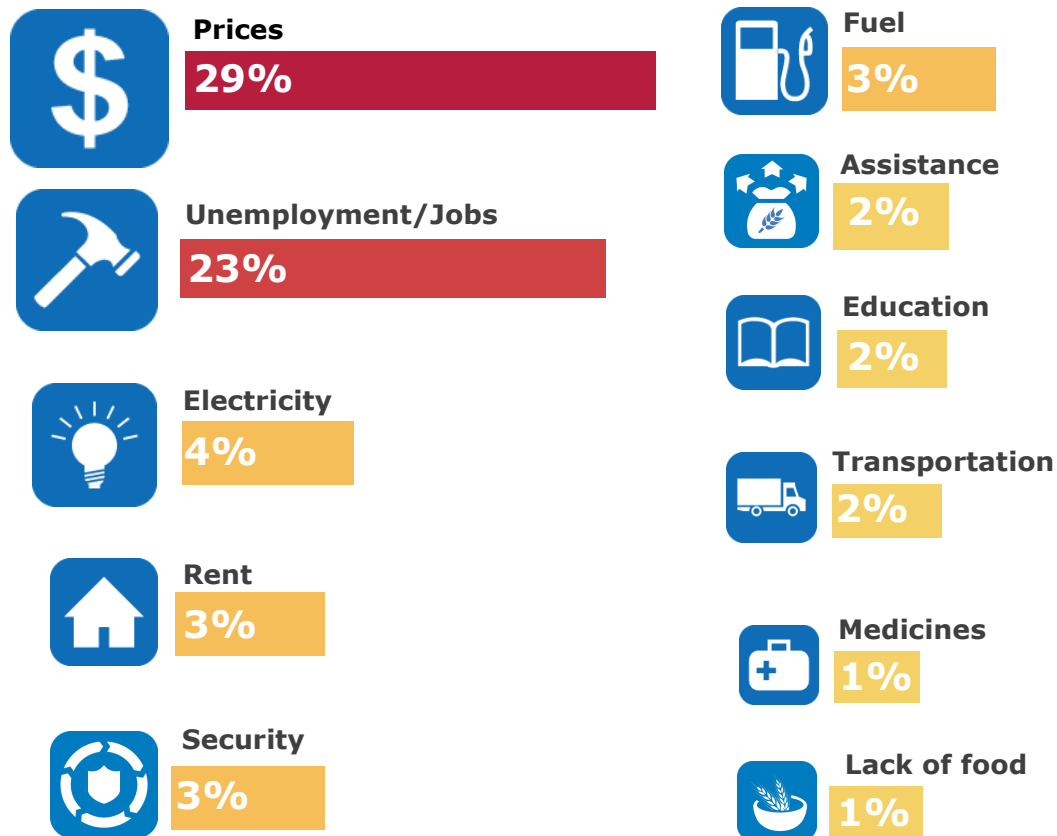




In the words of respondents

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

Figure 10: Main problems faced by surveyed households, November 2017



Methodology

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via live telephone interviews in November from key informants and households in locations across Syria. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1,078 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 is 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, based 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/Raqqqa 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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