

Food security deteriorates among returnee households and in hard-to-reach areas of rural Damascus

Key points



Inadequate food consumption is on the rise among returnee households



More households in hard-to-reach areas of Rural Damascus are relying on food-related coping strategies



In Eastern Ghouta, high food prices continue to limit household food access despite better food availability in markets



WFP/MENA

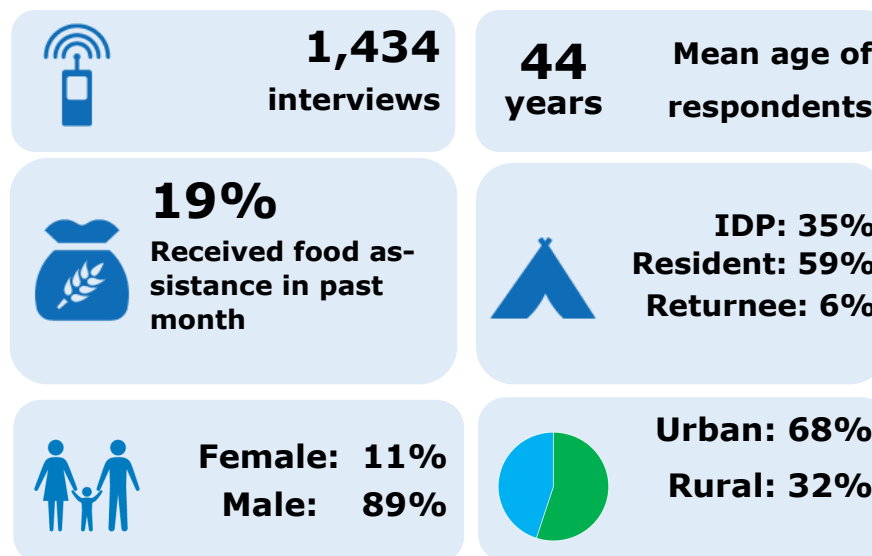
Situation Update

Access constraints continue to present significant challenges to humanitarian operations in Syria, impeding aid delivery and medical evacuations for populations in besieged parts of the country, particularly for an estimated 400,000 besieged people in Eastern Ghouta. The humanitarian situation in Eastern Ghouta remains dire despite a slight improvement in the food supply in December. Prices are still very high and unaffordable for the majority of the besieged population.

In December, food and water shortages [were also reported](#) among IDPs in Idleb and Hama governorates, and returnees in Ar-Raqqa city. Civilians in Ar-Raqqa city continue to face very difficult humanitarian and protection conditions, particularly because of explosive hazards. Between 20 October and 13 December, 209 civilians were reportedly killed and hundreds of others injured by explosive hazards in Ar-Raqqa city. Markets are only partially functional in the city, mainly due to blocked supply routes.

Ongoing military operations in Deir-ez-Zor and associated heavy aerial attacks have [reportedly resulted in hundreds of civilian casualties](#), as well as increased civilian displacement. During the reporting period, an alarming number of unconfirmed indiscriminate airstrikes against 15 IDP sites reportedly killed 166 civilians and injured hundreds more.

Figure 1: Sample Household characteristics





Food consumption worsens in Damascus

The overall mean Food Consumption Score (FCS) in December (54.3) differed little from November (53.5) (Figure 2). However, mean FCS fell in Damascus from 64 in November to 59.1 in December. Over the same period, the share of households with poor or borderline food consumption reached 23 percent in Damascus (up 6 percentage points) and 27 percent in hard-to-reach-areas of Rural Damascus (up 9 percentage points) (Figure 4). The worst FCS of all surveyed governorates continues to be reported in hard-to-reach areas of Homs, Hama and Al-Hasakeh.

Mean FCS fell for returnees from 52 in November to 40.2 in December, and the share of returnee households with poor or borderline food consumption rose from 37 percent to 61 percent. By contrast, fewer displaced households reported having inadequate food consumption in December (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Mean FCS by aggregated governorate, July to December 2017

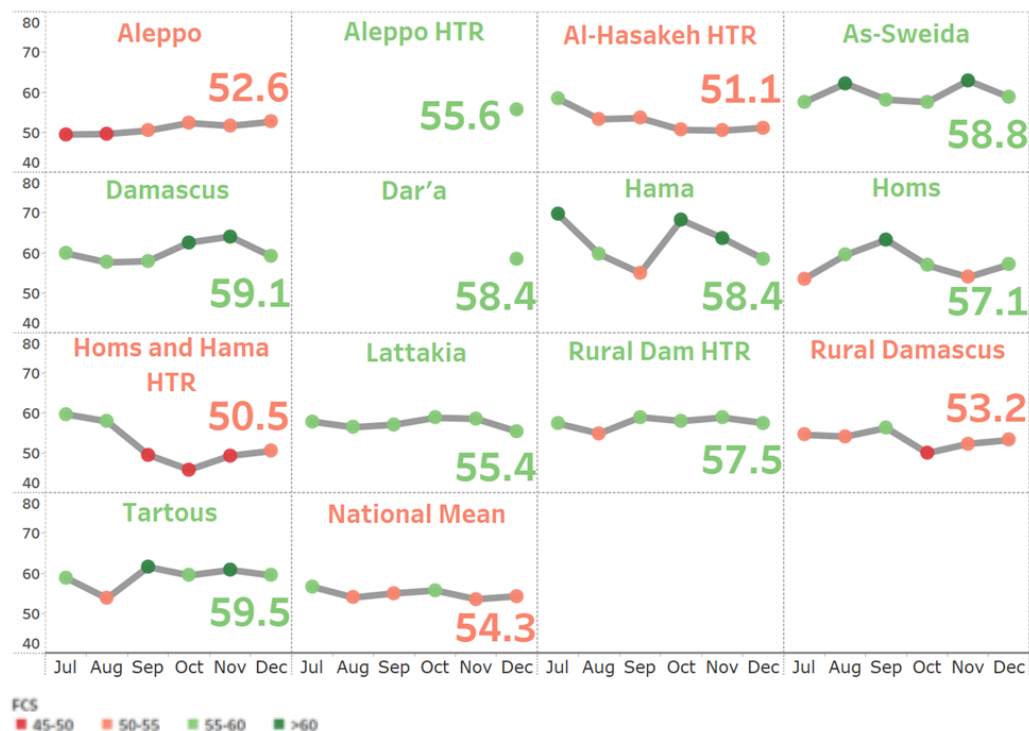
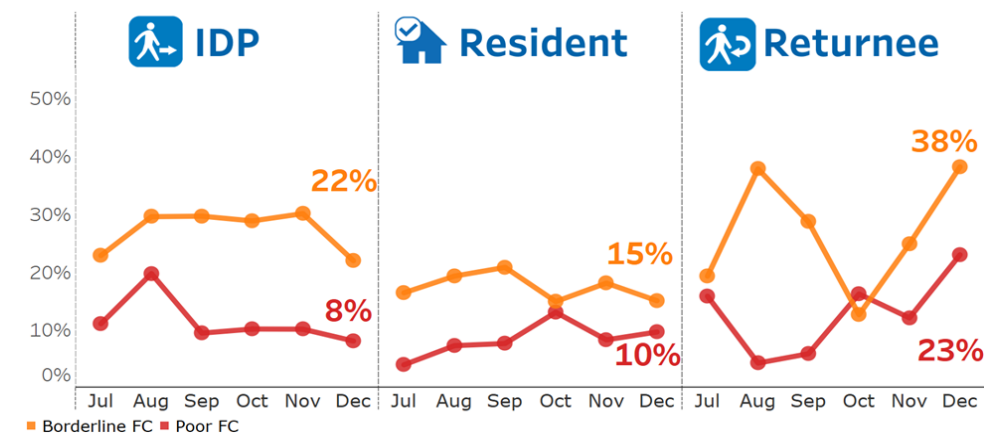


Figure 3: Percentage of households with inadequate food consumption by residency status, July to December 2017



Map 1: Mean FCS by aggregated governorate, December 2017

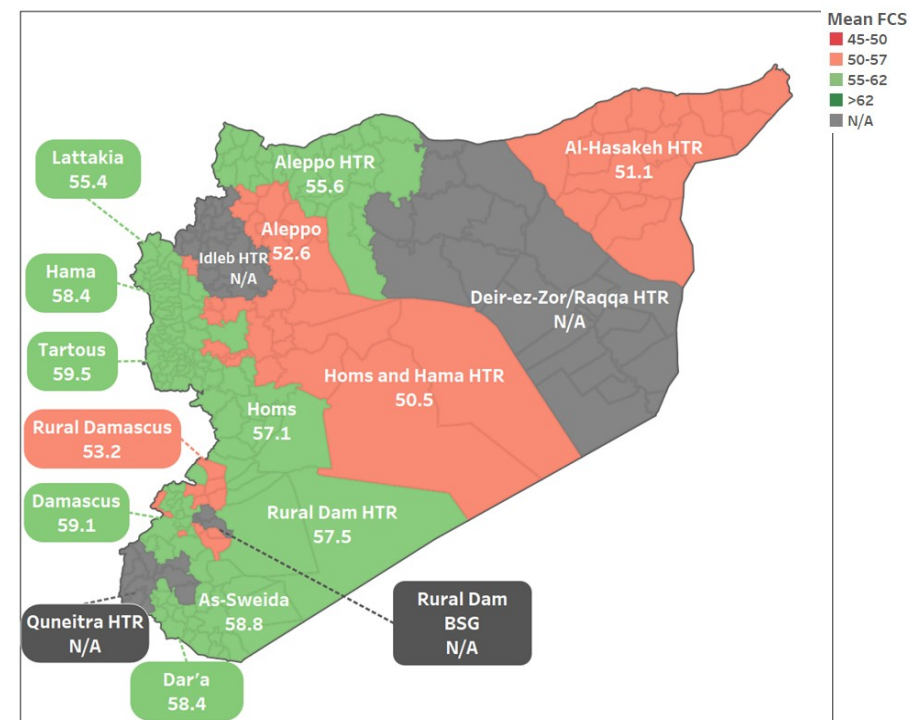


Figure 4: Percentage of households with inadequate food consumption by governorate, December 2017

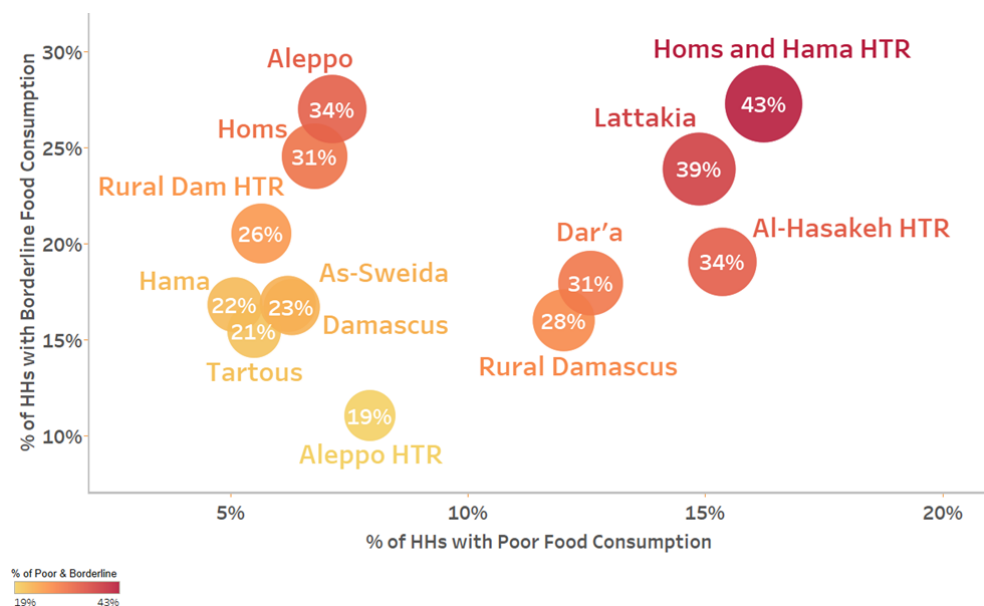
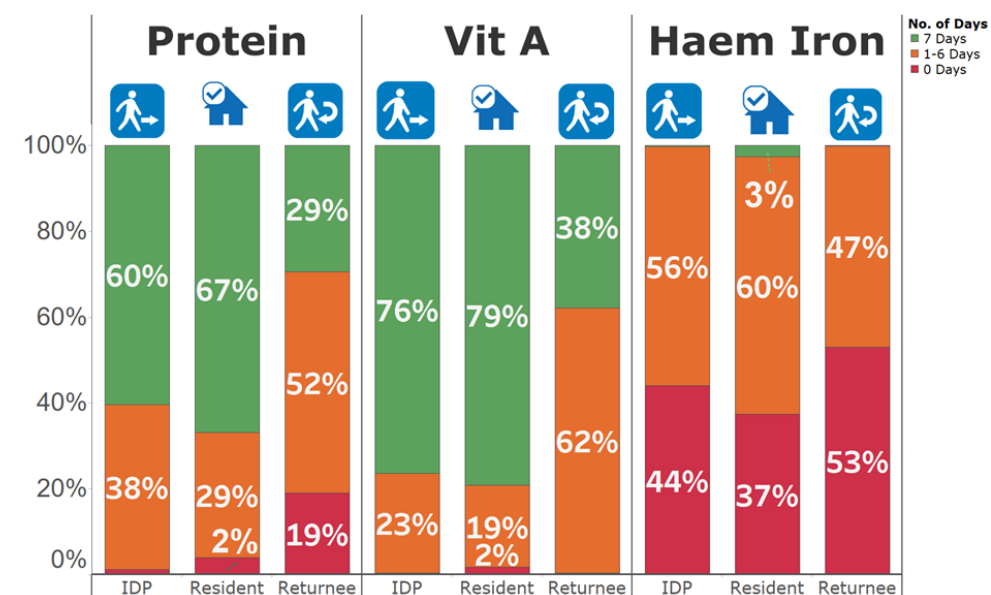


Figure 5: Frequency of consumption of nutrient-rich food groups by household residence status, December 2017



Protein-rich food items such as pulses, nuts, fish, meat, eggs and dairy were consumed daily by 60 percent of IDPs and 67 percent of resident households. In contrast, only 29 percent of returnee households had eaten protein daily during the week before the survey.

Only a small proportion of households consumed haem iron-rich food items such as meat, organ meat and fish/seafood regularly (1 to 6 days a week). December data also showed that over half of the surveyed returnees had not consumed any foods rich in haem iron in the 7 days preceding the survey (Figure 5).

Update on Eastern Ghouta

Following the partial resumption of commercial flows into besieged Eastern Ghouta, the availability of basic foods has improved somewhat, triggering a quick drop in prices. Nevertheless, prices remain too high for the majority of households. According to key informants, most inhabitants can only afford one meal a day, consisting mainly of seasonal vegetables, bread and bulgur.

The increased demand for fuel in the winter has pushed up prices, and families are reportedly burning books or plastic to heat homes and to cook. The lack of fuel is also affecting access to safe drinking water and electricity.

The use of severe negative food-related coping strategies has fallen slightly among households in besieged Eastern Ghouta. However, key informants reported that households remain under intense stress and are still limiting food intake, relying on debt and eating less nutritious food – in the worst cases, animal fodder. In the most severe cases, households are going entire days without eating, and they are sending children to beg or to join armed groups to support themselves. Key informants said that many households in Duma and Kafr Batna were heavily dependent on food assistance as their main source of food. The situation is expected to worsen as the lean season progresses, as own production remains limited leaving assistance as the only option for many households.



Increasing use of negative coping strategies in hard-to-reach areas of rural Damascus

In December, the mean reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) across surveyed areas was the same as in November, hovering at 15.4 (Figure 6). Similarly, there were no significant changes at the governorate level, except in hard-to-reach-areas of rural Damascus, where mean rCSI rose from 10.3 in November to 14.6 in December. The use of negative coping strategies also increased in hard-to-reach-areas of Al-Hasakeh, where it reached 19.6. The worst mean rCSI in December was recorded in Dar'a.

In all surveyed governorates and in line with the FCS findings, the mean rCSI for returnees rose from 17.1 in November to 22.9 in December. By contrast, displaced households resorted slightly less to food-related coping strategies: fewer of these households reported coping with a lack of food or money to buy food by borrowing food, asking family and relatives for help or restricting adult consumption so that children could eat (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Mean rCSI aggregated by governorate, July to December 2017

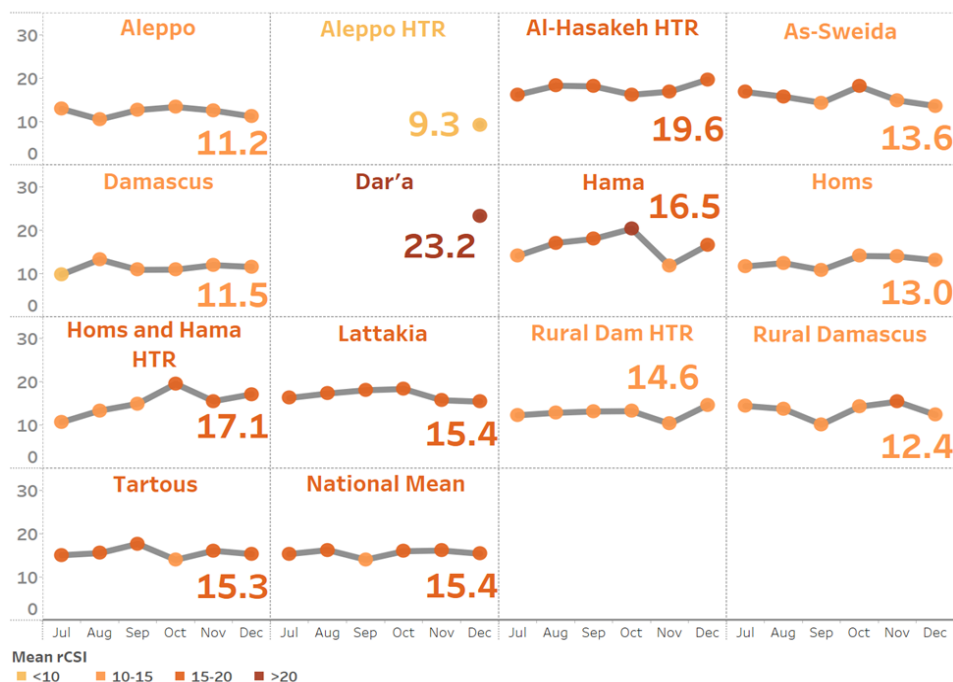
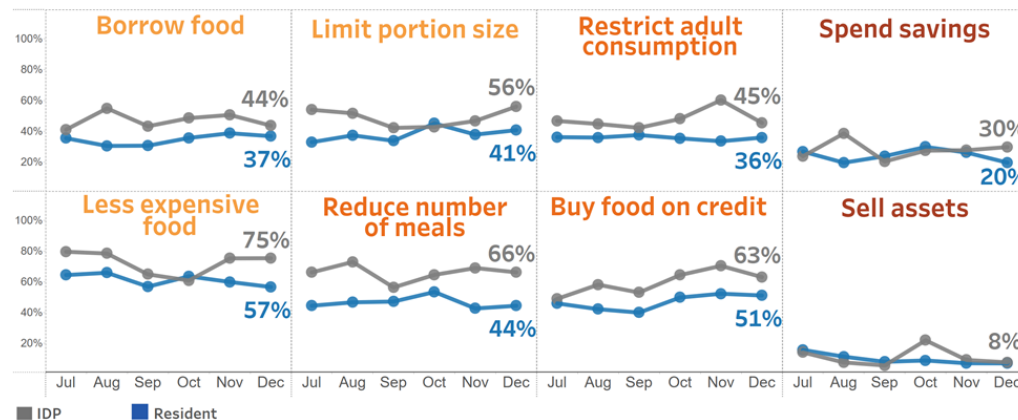
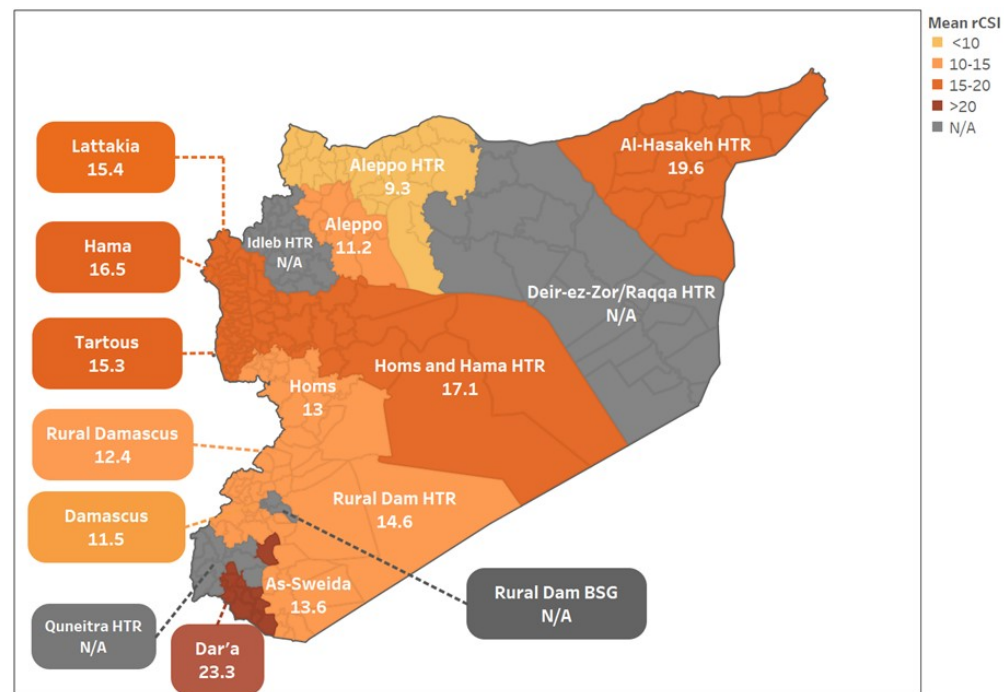


Figure 7: Use of coping strategies disaggregated by resident status, July to December 2017



Map 2: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorate, December 2017





Food availability improves in Eastern Ghouta but prices remain very high

Besieged Eastern Ghouta continues to endure restricted market functionality and constrained food availability even though some commercial flows resumed in December, bringing food prices down slightly. In December, the cost of a standard food basket was SYP186,025 – 31 percent less than in November but still more than five times the national average and 146 percent higher than six months ago. The massive tax imposed on traders of around SYP2,000 (US\$4) per kilogram of goods has directly impacted food access, especially among the most vulnerable and poor families.

Rice was sold at SYP2,900/kg in December, a drop of 26 percent compared to November but still 137 percent more than in June and around five times the national average. Bread availability has improved as the main trader in Eastern Ghouta has been allowed to bring in limited amounts of bread bundles three times a week at a price of SYP800 per bundle. The average price for locally produced bread in Eastern Ghouta was 1,670 SYP in Eastern Ghouta in December. This was 21.9 times the national average price for a bundle of bread (76 SYP).



WFP/MENA

Figure 8: Cost of the standard food basket in besieged Eastern Ghouta, Ar-Raqqa city and Deir-ez-Zor versus the national average, June to December 2017

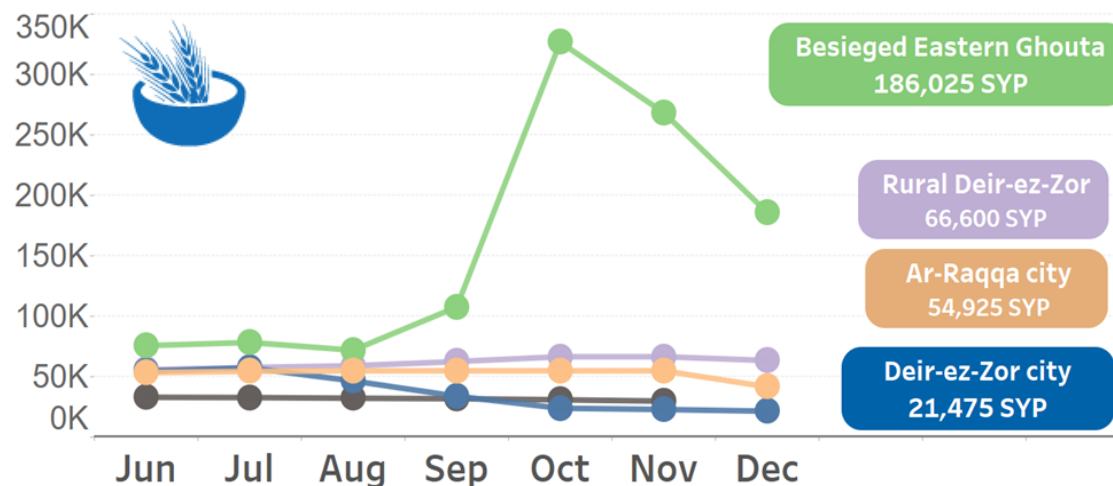
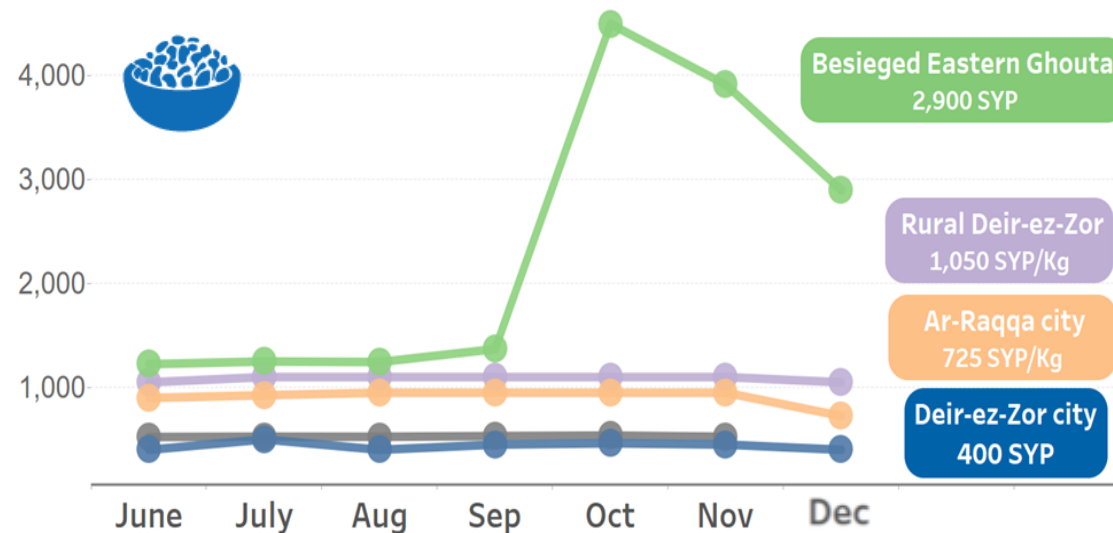


Figure 9: Retail price of rice (SYP/kg) in besieged Eastern Ghouta, Madaya and Deir-ez-Zor versus the national average, June to December 2017





In the words of respondents

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

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



% of respondents reporting
1% 40%

Methodology

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via live telephone interviews in December from key informants and households in locations across Syria. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1,434 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 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](#).



For further information:

Arif Husain
Jonathan Rivers

arif.husain@wfp.org
jonathan.rivers@wfp.org

mVAM Resources:

Website: http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/
Blog: mvam.org
Toolkit: <http://resources.vam.wfp.org/mVAM>



vam
food security analysis