

## Food security improves among residents and returnee households except in accessible areas of Rural Damascus

### Key points



Overall food consumption has improved, especially among resident and returnee households



Food security indicators deteriorated in accessible areas of Rural Damascus



In Idleb and Eastern Ghouta, intensified fighting and the critical security situation have reduced food access for many households



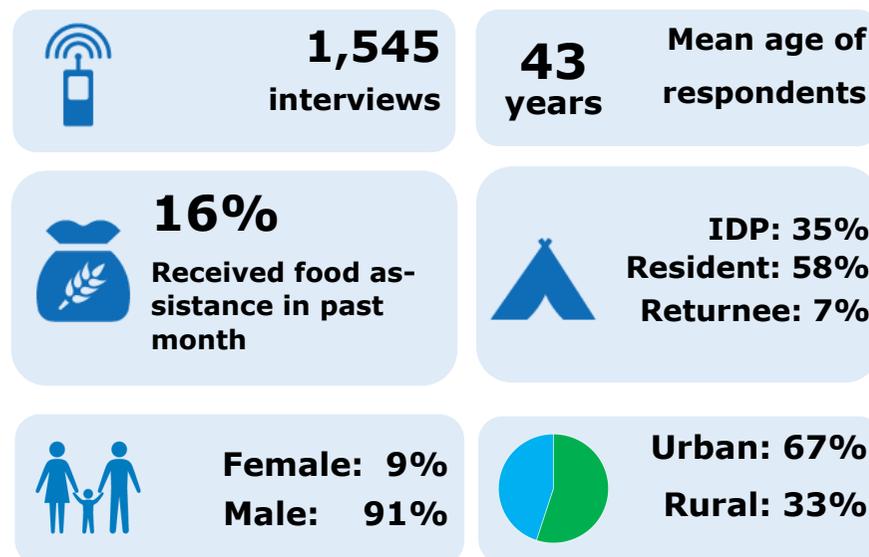
### Situation Update

The security and humanitarian situation has deteriorated in Idleb governorate, as well as in parts of northeast Hama and western rural Aleppo. Some 100,000 people have been displaced since 1 December and are moving north to safer areas of Idleb governorate, according to the [Camp Coordination and Camp Management \(CCCM\) Cluster](#). In the week starting 8 January, at least 30,000 IDPs moved into Idleb's densely populated cities or to sites along the Turkish border, crowding into existing camps.

[On 18 January](#), heavy rainfall was reported across many areas of Syria. The rain worsened the living conditions of IDPs, many of whom are staying in informal settlements or out in the open.

UN estimates from late December indicate that 2.9 million people are living in hard-to-reach parts of Syria, including 417,500 people in nine besieged locations. The neighbourhood of Qaboun in Damascus city is no longer considered under siege and is now classified as a hard-to-reach area. The largest number of besieged people remains in Eastern Ghouta in rural Damascus, where almost 400,000 people live.

Figure 1: Sample Household characteristics





Food consumption improves except in rural Damascus

The overall mean Food Consumption Score (FCS) increased in January, reaching its highest level of the past six months (57.8). Around 30 percent of the surveyed population reported having received food assistance this month, compared with 24 percent in December. mVAM data show a general improvement in mean FCS for all monitored areas, especially Aleppo, Dar'a, Lattakia and Tartous (Figure 2). In these governorates, the percentage of households reporting poor food consumption fell in January. The only areas where FCS worsened in January were accessible parts of Rural Damascus, where FCS (52.1) is the lowest of all surveyed governorates. In these areas, the share of households with borderline food consumption doubled between December (16 percent) and January (34 percent).

Figure 2: Mean FCS by aggregated governorate, August 2017 to January 2018

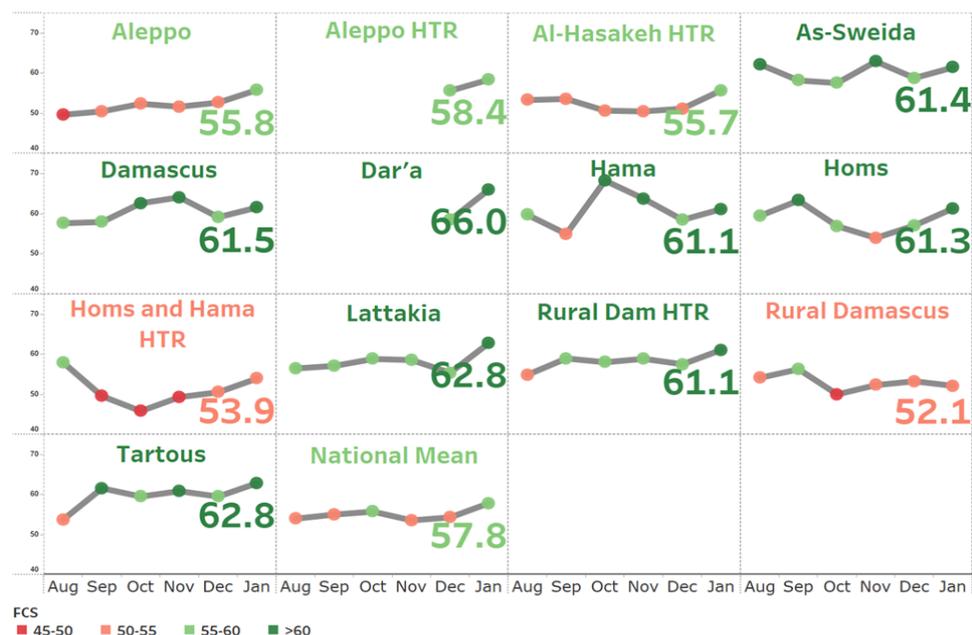
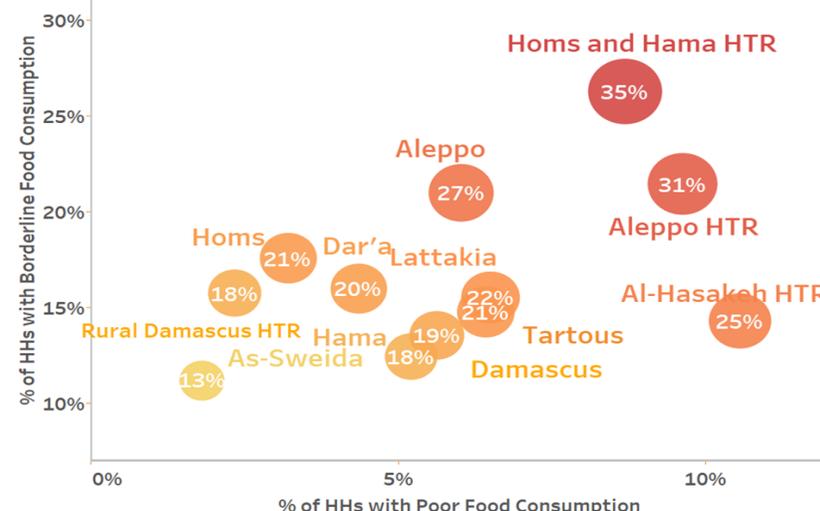
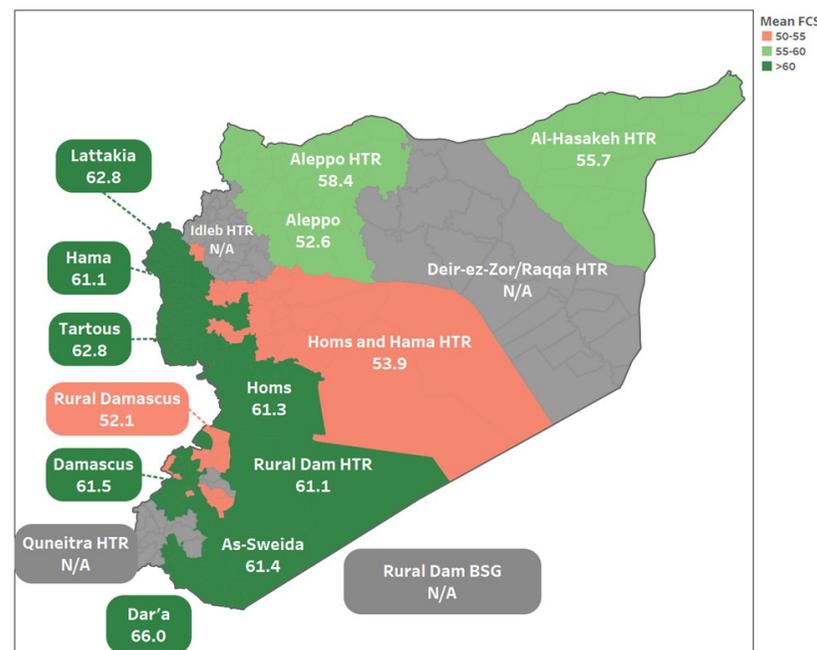


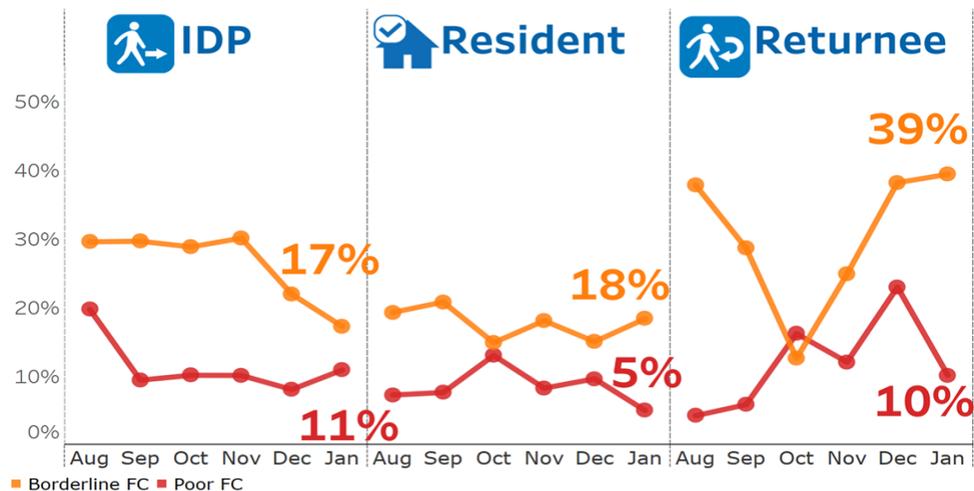
Figure 3: Percentage of households with poor or borderline food consumption by governorate, January 2018



Map 1: Mean FCS by aggregated governorate, January 2018



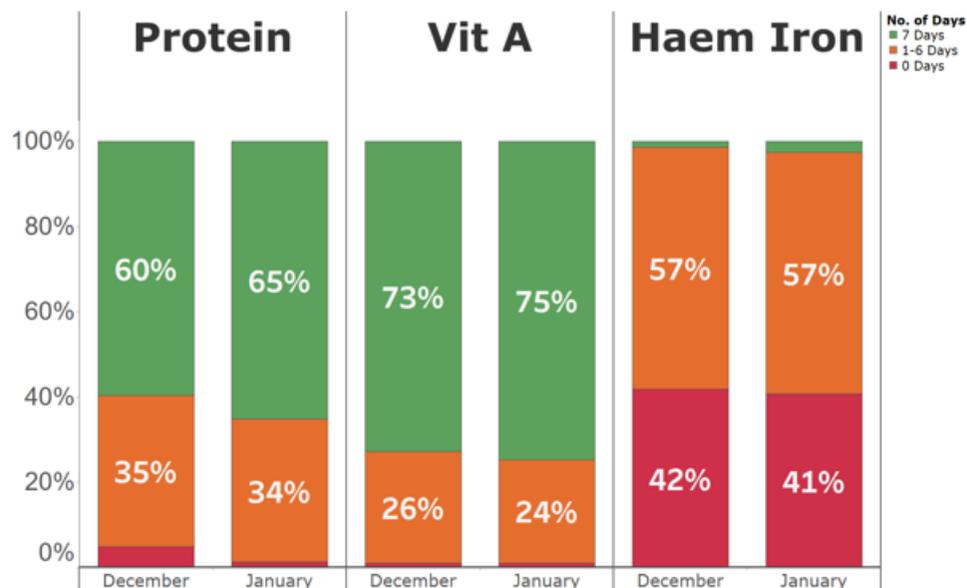
**Figure 4: Percentage of households with inadequate food consumption by residency status, August 2017 to January 2018**



Mean FCS rose for displaced, resident and returnee households in January, and the share of resident and returnee households with poor food consumption halved between December and January. For IDPs, the share of households with poor food consumption slightly increased; however, the percentage of households with borderline food consumption dropped from 22 percent in December to 17 percent in January (Figure 4).

The improvement in food consumption is reflected in households' micronutrient consumption. Protein-rich foods such as pulses, nuts, fish, meat, eggs and dairy were consumed daily by 65 percent of the surveyed households in January – a 5 percent increase from December. However, only 1 percent of surveyed households had eaten protein daily during the week before the survey, compared with 5 percent in December. Also in January, a small proportion of households consumed haem iron-rich foods such as meat, organ meat and fish/seafood regularly (1 to 6 days a week). However, the percentage of households who consumed haem iron-rich food every day in the seven days preceding the survey rose from 1 to 3 percent (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Frequency of consumption of nutrient-rich food groups among surveyed households, December 2017 and January 2018**



### Update on Eastern Ghouta

Fighting has escalated in Eastern Ghouta, significantly reducing food accessibility for many households in the besieged area. Key informants in Arbin and Harasta said that due to intensified shelling, most civilians are spending day and night in underground shelters. There has been a severe breakdown in livelihoods, crippling the already low purchasing power of most of the population. Own production has also been damaged as access to the remaining agricultural lands has become a daily challenge.

Key informants indicated that many poor households and women headed households had exhausted their stocks of food assistance – their main source of food. Consequently, the use of negative coping strategies is on the rise. Moreover, many injuries were reported among men who are the primary breadwinners of their households, increasing rates of child labour still further. These factors, together with the restricted humanitarian access, the lean season, high food prices and the lack of fuel have applied additional pressure on Eastern Ghouta's food security levels, imposing negative coping strategies as the only option for many destitute, food-insecure households to ensure they have something to eat.



Increasing use of negative coping strategies in rural Damascus and among displaced households

The mean reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) across surveyed areas has remained stable at 15.1 since November (Figure 6). There were no significant changes at the governorate level in January either, except in Rural Damascus, where mean rCSI rose from 12.4 in December to 14.9 in January, reflecting worse food consumption. In Tartous, rCSI fell from 15.3 in December to 13.6 in January.

In all surveyed governorates, the mean rCSI for returnees and resident households remained unchanged between December and January. Displaced households resorted slightly more to food-related coping strategies: more of these households reported borrowing food or restricting adult consumption so that children could eat (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Mean rCSI aggregated by governorate, August 2017 to January 2018

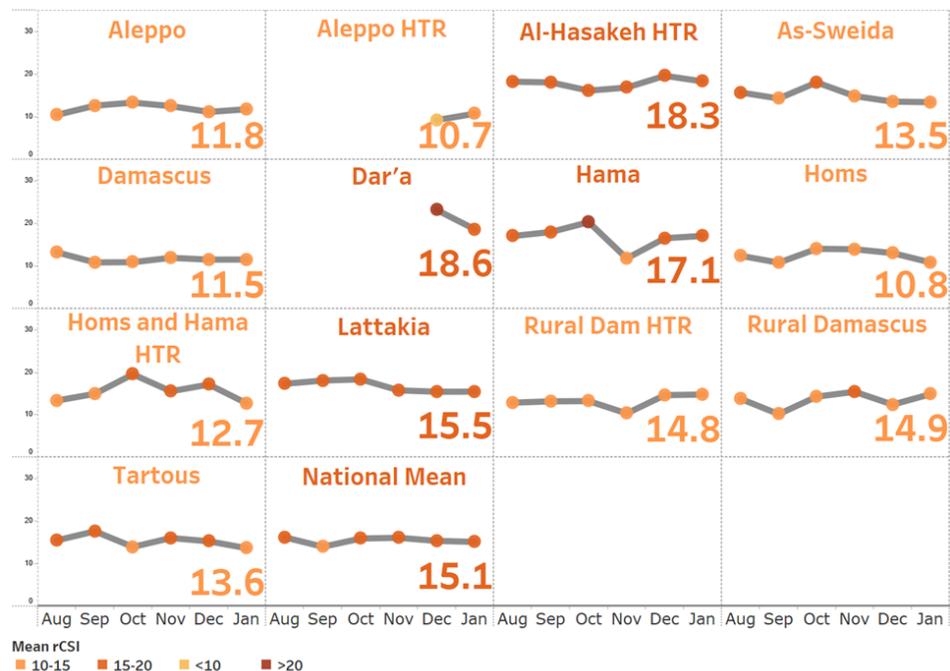
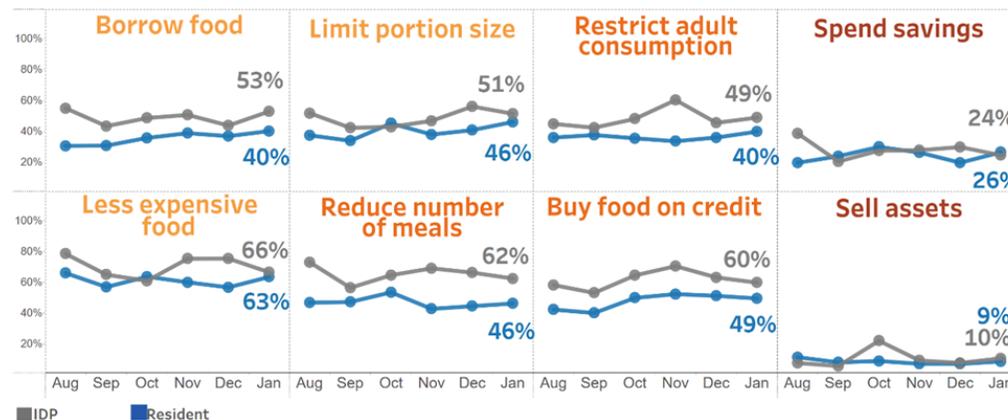
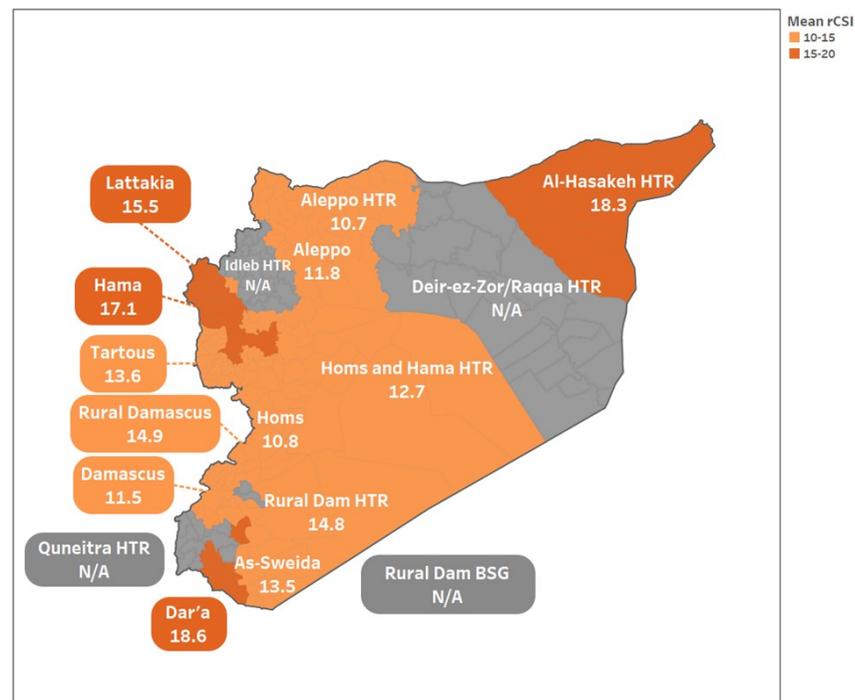


Figure 7: Use of coping strategies disaggregated by resident status, August 2017 to January 2018



Map 2: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorate, January 2018





Intense fighting, the lack of humanitarian assistance and high food taxes damage market functionality in Eastern Ghouta

Key informants from Eastern Ghouta reported that many shops are closed during shelling hours. The arrival of the lean season has meant that less fresh food is available in markets compared with December. Although trade flows continue, food prices remain very high and are unaffordable for many poor households. Some traders noted that more customers are buying on credit than in December, indicating lower purchasing power among the besieged population. This has also reduced the capacity of shopkeepers by reducing their cash liquidity.

In January 2018, the cost of the food basket in Eastern Ghouta was SYP 188,150, a 1 percent increase from December and possibly a sign that the trend of falling food prices seen over recent months has come to an end. Prices are 140 percent higher than six months ago and around six times higher than the national average. The main increase among staple food prices in January was registered for pulses – especially lentils, which were 47 percent more expensive than in December. Prices of fresh foods have increased markedly: the price of tomatoes rose by 157 percent from December, reaching SYP 1,800/kg. In January, rice retailed at SYP 2,750/kg – 5 percent less than December but still 120 percent more than six months ago. Public bread prices also fell compared with December, reaching SYP 1,300/bundle.



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Figure 8: Cost of the standard food basket in besieged Eastern Ghouta, Ar-Raqqa city and Deir-ez-Zor versus the national average, July 2017 to January 2018

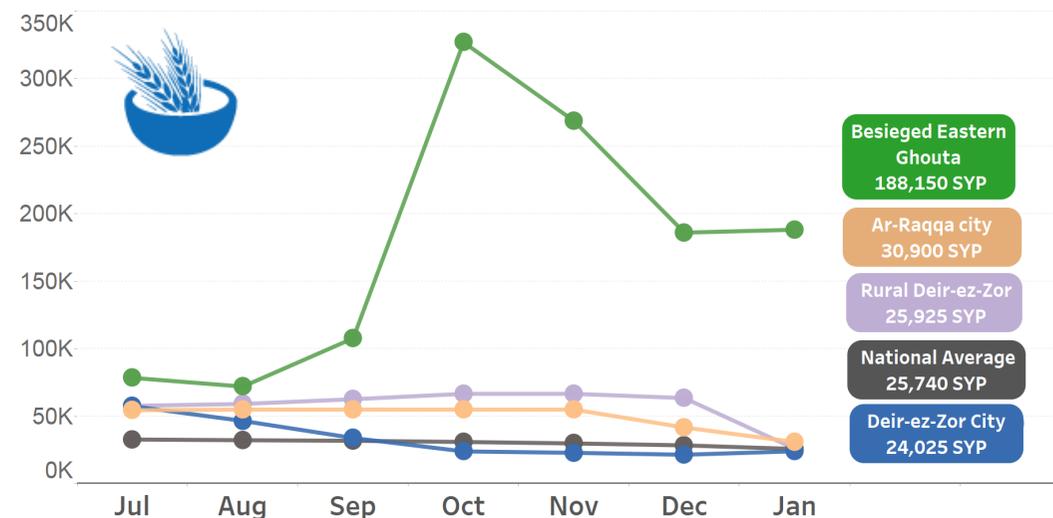
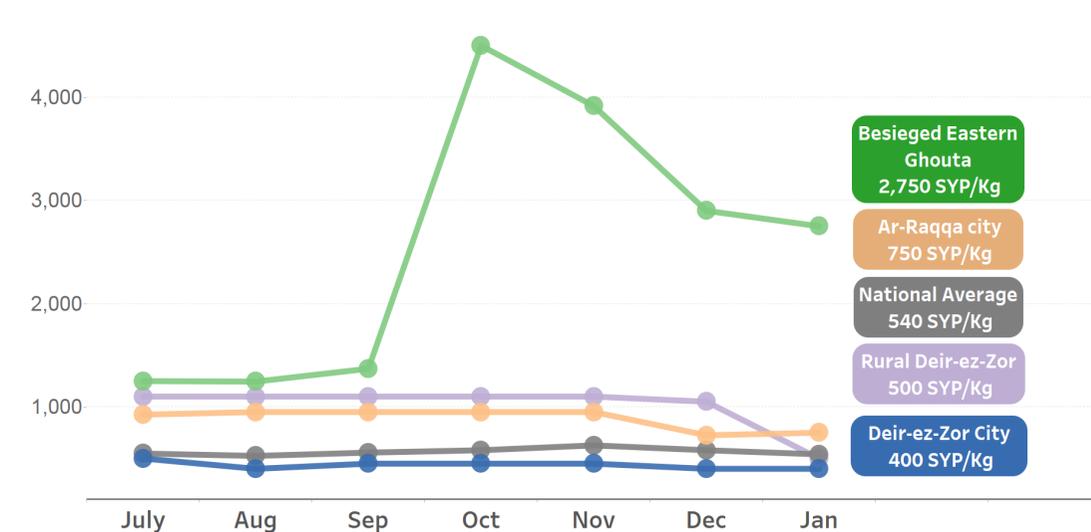


Figure 9: Retail price of rice (SYP/kg) in besieged Eastern Ghouta, Ar-Raqqa city and Deir-ez-Zor versus the national average, July 2017 to January 2018

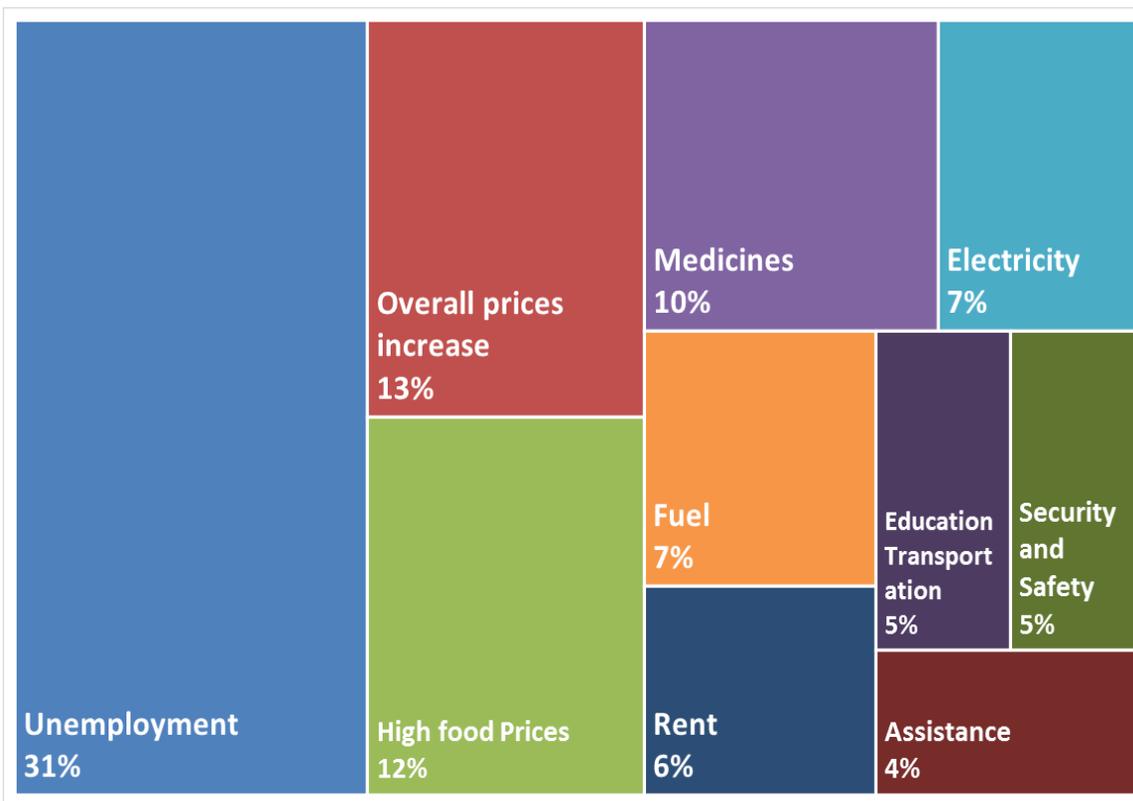




**In the words of respondents**

Respondents were asked to identify the main problems their families are facing. Figure 10 summarises the answers of households living in hard-to-reach and besieged areas.

**Figure 10: Main problems faced by surveyed households in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, January 2018**



**Methodology**

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via live telephone interviews in January 2018 from key informants and households in locations across Syria. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1,545 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](#).



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**mVAM Resources:**

**Website:** [http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam\\_monitoring/](http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/)  
**Blog:** [mvam.org](http://mvam.org)  
**Toolkit:** <http://resources.vam.wfp.org/mVAM>



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