

SYRIA - Deir-ez-Zor City WFP Assessment

Food Security Update: February 2018



vam
food security analysis



WFP team visit to SARC Medical Centre in Deir-ez-Zor city @Marwa Awad

KEY POINTS

- The overall food security situation in Deir-ez-Zor city has relatively improved after the lifting of the siege (September 2017) due to better commercial flows into the city, increased food availability and reduced food prices.
- Since September 2017, reports of people adopting severe coping strategies, mortality among new born babies, severe malnutrition cases and petty crimes for food (theft and burglaries from homes and warehouses) have significantly decreased. Moreover, the prevalence and frequency of practicing other negative coping mechanisms have declined especially for skipping days without eating and sleeping hungry. The situation however remains precarious due to the increasing influx of returnees and the limited available livelihood options.
- Market functionality was identified to be weak in Deir-ez-Zor city due to traders' lack of capital and consumers' low cash liquidity which resulted in limited food stock in the market. Key wholesalers reported that most of the warehouses in Deir-ez-Zor are empty as traders cannot afford to buy more than their daily sales levels.
- Despite the relative improvement in food accessibility, the daily diet for the majority of the population in Deir-ez-Zor city, is limited. A typical diet is largely based on starch foods and pulses while financial access to nutritious and fresh food items was identified to be poor, likely resulting in the many cases of night blindness among children, a condition exacerbated by deficiency in vitamin A.
- Due to the protracted years of besiegement and intensified offensive, the level of devastation and destruction of infrastructure in Deir-ez-Zor city is very high. As a result, areas conducive for accommodation are few and many returnees and IDP households are living together in tight spaces and under poor living conditions. Moreover, many bakeries, schools and medical centres remain out of service and generators are the only source of electricity for the entire city.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct a representative food security assessment in Deir-ez-Zor city to identify the food insecure prevalence level, better identify the needs and explore possible areas for WFP future interventions.
- Continue providing general food assistance for returnees, IDPs and highly vulnerable residents. Commence beneficiary targeting using WFP's vulnerability criteria.
- Coordinate closely with NGOs and government ministries in the city to review scenarios for supporting livelihood based programs such as to rehabilitate and support bakeries and restore clean water sources in the city.
- Targeted nutritious food interventions to be provided for those people found to be acutely malnourished in addition to school feeding and back to school programs to be started.
- WFP is advocating for interventions from other agencies regarding WASH, Education, Shelter, Protection and Health due to the high level of infrastructural damage, high prevalence of out of school children in addition to the urgent need for medicines and access to safe drinking water.

AREA PROFILE

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES



FOOD SOURCES



RESIDENCY STATUS



* Icons in blue highlight key areas for humanitarian intervention



Situation update

Deir-ez-Zor governorate is located in the south east of Syria and was controlled by ISIL from December 2014 till September 2017. Only the airport and five neighbourhoods in the city were under government control. The government held area became totally surrounded and was besieged by ISIL. During the besiegement, all supply routes to the city were cut and the only corridor to bring food to the besieged community of around 93,000 people, was via the airport. As a result, food accessibility significantly decreased in the city due to deteriorating market functionality, no access to farming fields, extremely limited food availability and overall breakdown of livelihoods. As a result, adoption of severe negative food consumption-based and livelihood coping strategies significantly increased in the area, with the worst situation in the last quarter of 2015 when food stocks were reported to be almost exhausted and some severe cases were registered of destitute households asking better-off families to adopt their malnourished children as they could not feed them. At that critical stage, food assistance airdrops were the only option to support the besieged population and save them from likely starvation. Between April 2016—August 2017, WFP conducted 309 airdrops to Deir-ez-Zor city, delivering 5,879 MTs of food aid.

As a result of the airdrops, overall food accessibility in the city remarkably improved and the prevalence of severe negative coping strategies declined. However, the general food security situation was identified to be still stressed as the needs were very high. Between June—September 2017 the government-led assault on ISIL in Deir-ez-Zor intensified and in September 2017, the siege was finally lifted hereby allowing the main supply route that links Deir-ez-Zor to other governorates (Ar-Raqqa, Homs, Damascus) to be re-opened. Commercial flows to Deir-ez-Zor city have now improved and have positively impacted the city's market overall functionality, food availability, food diversity and accessibility in the area as well as encouraging many displaced households to return to the city. An estimated 70,000 returnees have returned to the city since the siege. Key informants reported that most of the returnees are returning from Damascus and Homs and the rate of return is increasing daily especially among civil servants. The humanitarian situation for internally displaced people (IDPs) who escaped from rural areas of Deir-ez-Zor during the ISIL controlled period are indicated to be the worst-off in the city in terms of living conditions and food security situation, in particular regarding those who are residing in public shelters in the Harabish neighbourhood. The level of destruction in Deir-ez-Zor city is high and over 60 percent of the city is affected. The population density (160,000 people) is mainly concentrated in a few neighborhoods (Al-Qosur, Joura, Al-Muwzafeen and Harabish). As a result, expensive rent and accommodation was reported to be one of the main problems in Deir-ez-Zor city due to overpopulation of habitable areas in addition to the severe lack of electricity, insufficient clean water supply, heavy dependence on humanitarian assistance and dysfunctional sewage system.



Objective of the assessment

WFP VAM undertook a rapid food security and market assessment in Deir-ez-Zor city on 12-13th February 2018. The assessment aimed to:

- Assess Deir-ez-Zor's overall food security situation, market functionality, and also assess how people's livelihoods have been affected by the conflict.
- Identify the scale and food security priority needs in the city as well as possible areas for humanitarian intervention.



Devastation in Deir-ez-Zor @Marwa Awad



Children in Deir-ez-Zor "We collect and sell scrap items to live" @Marwa Awad



Food consumption and accessibility

The food security situation in Deir-ez-Zor city notably deteriorated during the siege period (December 2014 till September 2017) where ISIL surrounded the city and cut all supply routes into and out of the city. At the start of 2016, the situation reached alarming levels where reportedly wild foods and water became the only food for many households on a daily basis. In April 2016 WFP commenced food aid airdrops which become the main source of food for almost all households in the besieged area. Following the end of the siege on 17 September 2017, food accessibility remarkably improved among residents in Deir-ez-Zor city in-line with better functionality of supply routes, enhanced commercial flow to the city and increased food availability in markets, hereby reducing food prices. Mortality among new born babies and severe malnutrition cases among pregnant women and children due to lack of food, are reported to have significantly decreased compared to siege levels and many households reported access to better diets. However, the majority of the population are still unable to consume more than two meals per day. The majority of the population were reported to largely depend on starch foods such as (bread, bulgur, potato and rice) and pulses (lentil and white beans) as their daily diet, while access to fresh foods (fruits, vegetables and milk/dairy products) and meat was identified to be low by many interviewed households due to their high prices which not everyone can afford. This was also confirmed by local key informants and interviewed doctors in medical centres who reported many cases of night blindness among children, an indication of likely vitamin A deficiency. Many residents reported to have exhausted all their assets during the siege and many returnees have lost their house, income and assets during years of displacement. Among the large in need population in Deir-ez-Zor city, the population residing in the Harabish neighbourhood was reported to be the worst-off. Malnutrition cases among residents and IDPs in this neighbourhood were documented to be higher than those of returnees as the residents struggled against severe shortage of food during the siege and need longer-term support to recover. On the other hand, due to the high level of devastation in Deir-ez-Zor city, increased number of returnees and high demand on accommodation has caused rent to become very expensive as it is the only option for many returnees. As a result, the majority of returnees' expenditure was reportedly spent on rent leaving them with little money with which to buy food. In some cases, returnees were reported to be either living in open spaces or in partially destroyed buildings under poor living conditions, putting further pressure on their food security situation especially for poor vulnerable and female households. @Um Taha: **"We returned to Deir-ez-Zor three weeks ago, we live here and we dry this bread to consume it whenever we don't have enough food"**.

Food assistance and buying food from markets was reported to be the main food sources in the city while local agriculture and livestock production which used to be the main food source to the city from rural areas of Deir-ez-Zor before 2014 are now minimal and inaccessible. Access to clean drinking water was reported to be a problem in they city as water is currently only available for three days a week and is not safe for drinking.



Livelihood profile

Livelihoods in Deir-ez-Zor city have been significantly impacted by the protracted siege. The area is affected by complete electricity outage, serious shortage of fuel and water and significant devastation of infrastructure. Which alongside the low cash liquidity and lack of capital among traders have rendered starting a new business an extreme challenge in Deir-ez-Zor city. The unemployment rate was reported to be high and the only remaining income sources were salaries for civil servants, representing not more than 20 percent of the current population, and casual labour. Moreover, due to low wages and high needs, child labour was observed to be rife. Many interviewed children reported that they do not go to school as they have to work to support their families. @Mustafa **"I have been displaced with my family from rural Deir-ez-Zor during the conflict and I am not in school anymore. I come here to this street with my uncle to collect scrap metal and sell it. It is dangerous as we do not know if any unexploded ordinances are still here. I wish I could be a normal child again and go to school with clean clothes and learn but my family can't afford buying even a notebook for me to go to school"**.

In rural areas of Deir-ez-Zor, mines have made farming land inaccessible. Households are therefore dependent on the little remaining livestock production to survive. Moreover, households in these areas have been particularly stricken by the conflict and massive displacement. IDPs who fled from the fighting to neighbouring areas are struggling to survive in host communities whose own capacity to cope are over-stretched especially in the Harabish neighbourhood.



Interview with returnees in Deir-ez-Zor city, Um Taha
"We don't have money to rent, we live in this abandoned front yard" @Hamed Hijazi



"If the supply route gets blocked again, my whole rice stock will be exhausted in 10 days". Interview with a main wholesaler in Al-Wadi market in Deir-ez-Zor city.



Mustafa an IDP child from rural D.Z **"I wish I can go back to school but I have to work to feed myself and I don't have money to even buy a school notebook"**.



Food and livelihood based coping strategies

During the siege, adoption of severe negative food consumption-based and livelihood coping strategies significantly increased among the besieged households. Skipping days without eating, consuming wild foods and sleeping hungry were reported to be widely practiced by the majority of the households with many households reaching complete asset depletion levels. Moreover, doctors in medical centres identified that many pregnant women were choosing to have abortions as they could not afford feeding themselves.

Since the WFP airdrops and end of the siege, the situation has generally improved and the severity of practiced negative coping strategies have declined especially for skipping meals, limiting meal portion sizes, prioritizing feeding children over adults due to lack of food, borrowing food and sleeping hungry. Key sources in the city identified that the rate of theft, and home and warehouse burglaries have also declined. However, the overall food security situation remains highly stressed as living conditions in Deir-ez-Zor city are still highly precarious. With an increasing returnee influx and limited services and poor infrastructure, there is still a high need on humanitarian assistance. Respondents reported that were the food assistance to end that many people in Deir-ez-Zor city would find it very difficult to find food for their families.

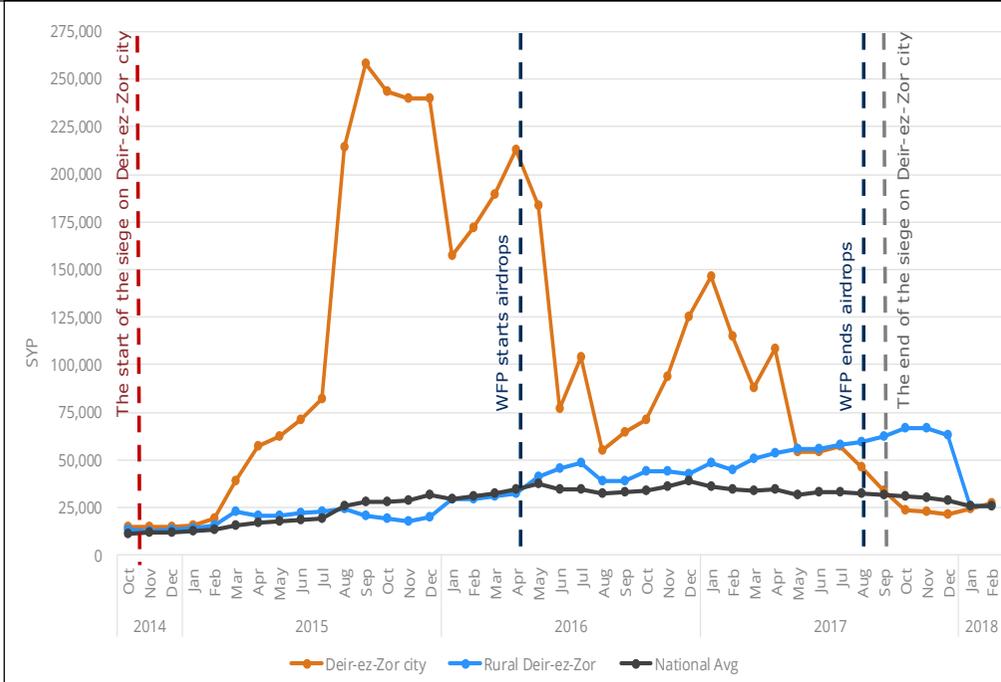


Markets and food prices

During the protracted years of the siege, market functionality in Deir-ez-Zor city was very weak with traders dealing with severely disrupted supply routes. Many food items were limited or very scarce leading to extremely high food prices. Moreover, accessibility to market became a challenge due to intensified shelling in addition to households' poor financial access. The situation was reported to have improved somewhat during the airdrop phase as food assistance was seen to have released pressure on markets leading to relatively lower demand on food and decline of some food prices. However, overall market functionality during the whole blockade period was reported to be very weak.

Following the lifting of the siege and hence the re-opening of the main supply route that links Deir-ez-Zor to Damascus through Homs, commercial flows to the markets in Deir-ez-Zor city have remarkably increased and many food items including fruits, vegetables and dairy products have become available once again. Nevertheless, interviewed traders in Deir-ez-Zor city markets identified that their capacity remained limited due to their low levels of capital and consumers' low levels of cash liquidity. This was also confirmed by key wholesalers who identified that most of the warehouses in Deir-ez-Zor city are currently empty as traders cannot afford to buy more than their day-to-day needs.

The average stock wholesalers reported to have for cereals (rice and bulgur) lasts on average no more than ten days while for pulses and other staples like vegetable oil, sugar, and wheat flour, stock on average lasts up to 30 days due to lower demand. Due to the high level of damage in the city it was also observed that the majority of traders in the market are roadside vendors and many of them indicated that were the food assistance support to stop the market would not be able to respond to the increased demand of food and food prices would likely rise again. Moreover, the price of WFP equivalent food provided in the general food assistance baskets were found to be lower than other commodities the food aid reduced the demand for these products on the market hereby helping others access food at a cheaper price. Moreover, two out of three public government bakeries and seven out of ten private bakeries are operative in the city. There is however an overall need for yeast, fuel and salt to improve the productive capacity of bakeries.



Average Cost of a standard food basket in Deir-ez-Zor city, rural Deir-ez-Zor vs National average from 2014 to 2018. The cost of a standard basket of dry goods providing 1,930 kcal a day for a family of five during a month. The basket includes 37 kg of bread, 19 kg rice, 19 kg lentils, 5 kg of sugar, and 7 kg of vegetable oil.

Based on market assessment data, the cost of the standard food basket in February 2018 was SYP 26,960 which represents an increase of 12 percent compared to last month, but is 42 percent less than in August 2017. Deir-ez-Zor city's food basket price is higher than national average food basket cost in January 2018 by around four percent. Moreover, one kg of rice was sold at SYP 500, a increase of 25 percent compared to both last month and six months ago. Hereby highlighting that even though food prices are falling, that the price reductions differ by commodity and that they remain volatile.

Methodology

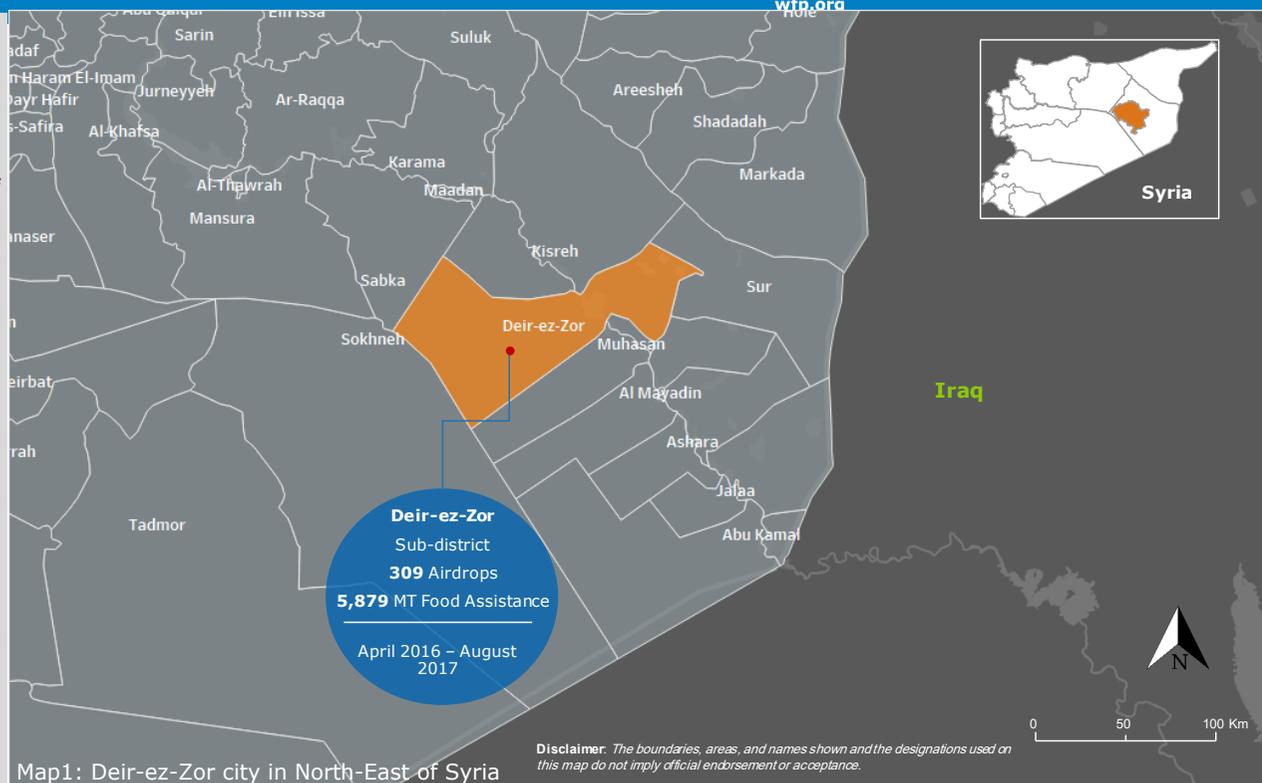
The assessment employed qualitative data collection instruments and secondary data analysis (mVAM, FSA, HNO, WFP market price monitoring). Data collection took place on February 13-14, 2018.

Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with the key informants, medical teams, government actors in Deir-ez-Zor including representatives from the Ministries of Supply and Trade, Social Affairs, with representatives from the SARC branch and with bakeries. The interviews included a mix of males and females beside representatives from sub-groups. A number of individual interviews were also conducted with key traders and households. The following topics/indicators were included in the survey:

1. Food sources, consumption patterns, coping strategies, community-level priorities, shocks and livelihood/ income activities.
2. Market volumes, flows, constraints and capacity, supply routes beside food stocks and prices.
3. The impact the lifting of the siege had on market functionality, food availability and prices of main staple commodities through secondary information and FGD.
4. Population estimation, food security profile, health, nutrition and sanitation through secondary information (FSA, HNO, mVAM).

Limitations

Due to limited available time, an unstable security situation and movement restrictions, household and market interviews with a sufficient sample size were not possible. The findings are therefore only indicative of the food security situation in the assessed area.



Household interview with returnees @Marwa Awad



"WFP saved many children's lives during the siege" @Marwa Awad



Market visited by WFP —Deir-ez-Zor city @Marwa Awad



Household interview with residents @Marwa Awad

For further information:

