

Levels of food insecurity remain high especially among displaced and returnee households

Key points



In April, one in four of the surveyed Syrian households had inadequate food consumption, reflecting a diet of low and medium diversity – mainly consisting of bread, rice, sugar and oil.



Food consumption is worsening in both accessible and hard-to-reach areas of Dar'a governorate.



Those most affected by food insecurity include the displaced, households headed by women, large households and households living in rented accommodation.

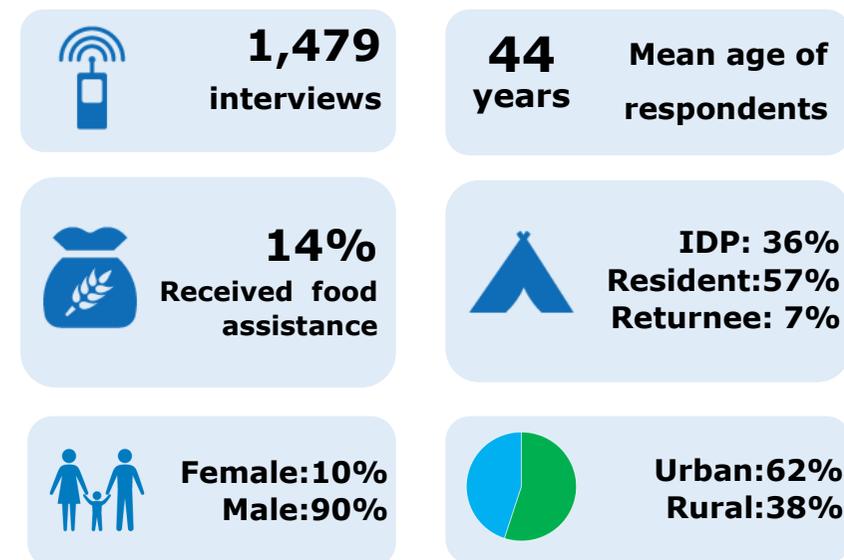


Situation Update

In April, the government retook control of Eastern Ghouta, after an intense period of fighting, airstrikes, and a ground offensive, which started in February. While 120,000 people still remain in the area, facing dire humanitarian needs, around 162,000 people have left [Eastern Ghouta](#): 92,000 left for sites set up to accommodate internally displaced people in Rural Damascus and around 70,000 were relocated to Idleb and Aleppo governorates and are finding accommodation in unfinished houses, camps, mosques and public buildings. As the fighting in Eastern Ghouta winds down, Idleb is now considered the most likely next area of focus. It is estimated that 2.2 million people live in the governorate, of which 1.5 million people are displaced. Many of these people have been displaced multiple times. Meanwhile, the UN has not yet been granted access to Duma, where people remain in need of humanitarian assistance after years of siege and months living under intense shelling and airstrikes. An inter-agency UN convoy last reached Duma on 15 March, carrying food assistance for only [26,100 people](#). Residents are facing severe lack of food, fuel, sanitation, health services and supplies, and education.

Following the military operation in Eastern Ghouta, escalation of violence south of Damascus led to aggravated protection concerns for up to 12,000 Palestinian refugees in [Yarmouk camp](#) and surrounding areas.

Figure 1: Sample Household characteristics





Food consumption worsened in Dar'a governorate

The overall mean Food Consumption Score (FCS) in April remained at the same levels as March (58.8). At governorate level, mean FCS increased in accessible areas of Aleppo, Dar'a and Al-Hasakeh, and decreased in accessible areas of As-Sweida, Hama, Lattakia, Rural Damascus and Tartous (Figure 2). Rural Damascus saw the largest decrease in borderline FCS, falling from 19 percent in March to 9 percent in April.

The hard-to-reach parts of Dar'a continue to report the worst levels of food consumption, with 37 percent of surveyed respondents having poor or borderline food consumption.

Mean FCS decreased for returnee households, falling from 58 in March to 51.9 in April, highlighting increased food insecurity levels for this group (Figure 3). In April there was a significant increase in the share of returnees with borderline food consumption. Instead displaced households reported an increase in poor food consumption levels in April.

Map 1: Percentage of households with inadequate food consumption by aggregated governorates, April 2018

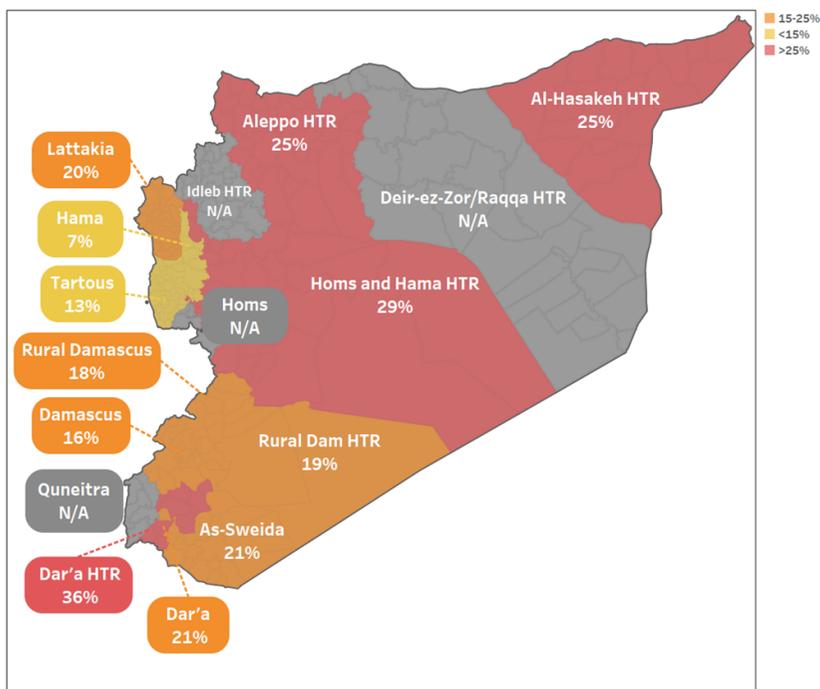


Figure 2: Percentage of households with inadequate food consumption in aggregated governorates, November 2017 to April 2018

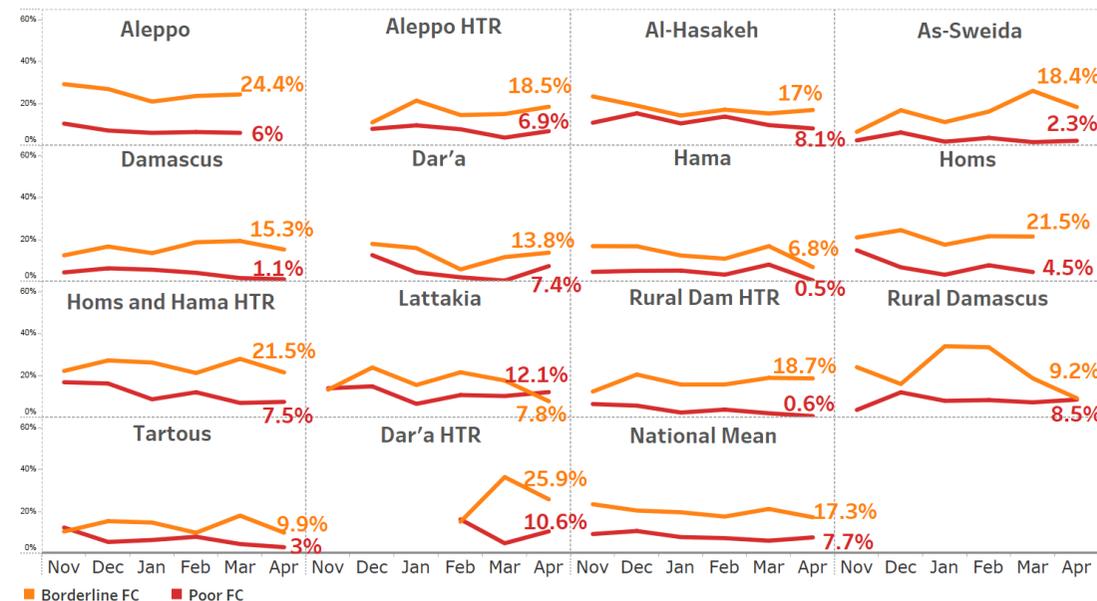
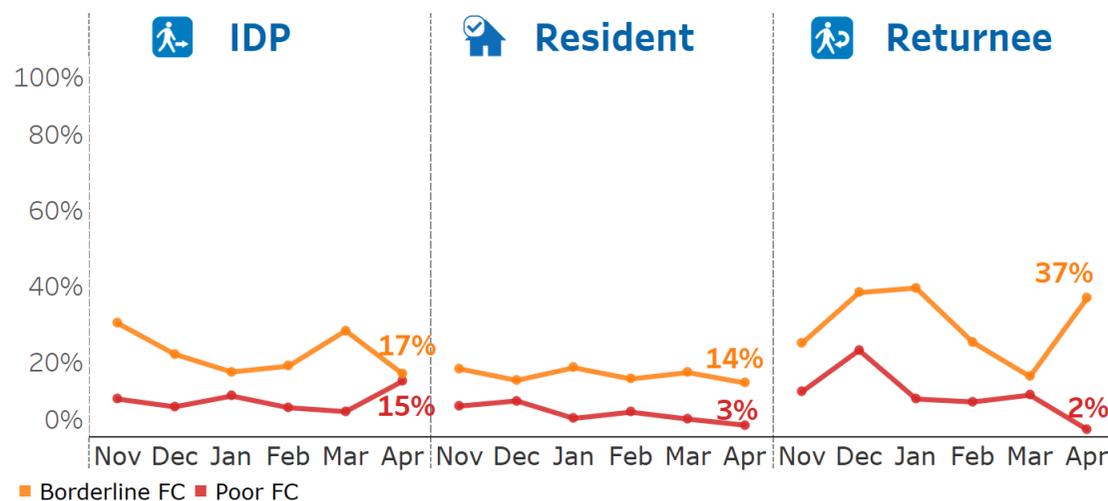


Figure 3: Percentage of households with inadequate food consumption by residency status, November 2017 to April 2018



Around ten percent of the surveyed households in April were headed by women. Female-headed households reported slightly worse food consumption (28 percent vs. 24 percent) compared to male-headed households. However, the use of coping strategies was similar for households headed by females and males.

In terms of household size, larger households were more likely to be food insecure than smaller ones. Households with more than eight members reported a higher percent of inadequate food consumption (15 percent poor and 26 percent borderline) and higher levels of consumption coping strategies in order to deal with food shortages. The mean reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI)¹ of households with more than 8 members (21.6) is considerably higher than the mean rCSI of smaller households (13.7), indicating that larger member households find it more difficult to meet their food needs than smaller member households and therefore more frequently engage in negative food consumption coping strategies.

There was positive correlation between the type of housing — a reflection of economic well-being — and households' food security status. Households with own accommodation reported lower levels of poor and borderline mean FCS and lower levels of mean rCSI. While households living with other families as guest or in rental accommodation were more likely to have higher poor food consumption rates than those residing in their own home. Similarly, households who were renting or were guests, were more likely to adopt consumption coping strategies. Six percent of all the surveyed households also recorded rent as a primary concern (Figure 10).

A household's food consumption category also has significant connotations with the household's dietary diversity and micronutrient intake. The average diet consumed by households who reported inadequate food consumption is considered low or medium diversified.

Figure 6 shows the average number of days that different food groups are consumed by households with poor and borderline food consumption; their diet primarily encompasses staples, sugars and fats (which are consumed almost daily). Deficiencies can be observed in the consumption of animal proteins and fruits, while among households with poor food consumption, deficiencies also exist in dairy and pulses which are essential sources of micronutrients and protein. Iron-consumption patterns show an alarming situation for households with inadequate consumption. Most households never consume iron-rich foods on a weekly basis, thus risking becoming more prone to iron-deficiencies that were already common in Syria even before the crisis (Figure 7).

Figure 4: Percent of households with inadequate food consumption by gender of head of household, household size and type of accommodation, April 2018

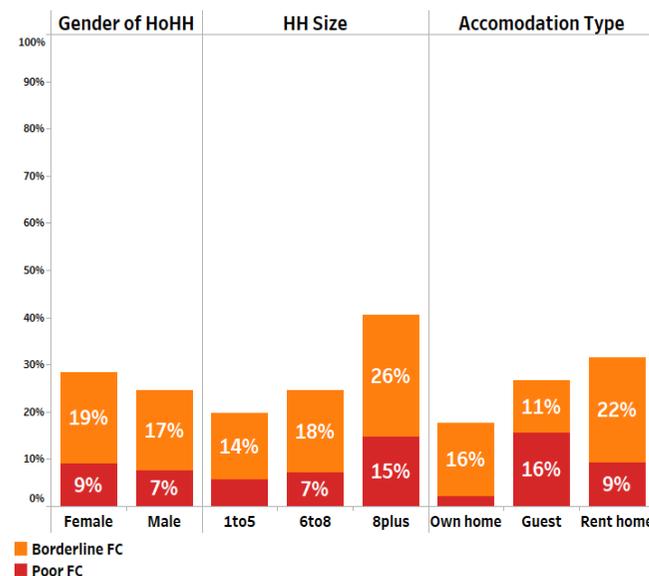


Figure 6: Dietary diversity by food consumption group (# of days food groups consumed), April 2018



Figure 5: Mean rCSI by gender of head of household, household size and type of accommodation, April 2018

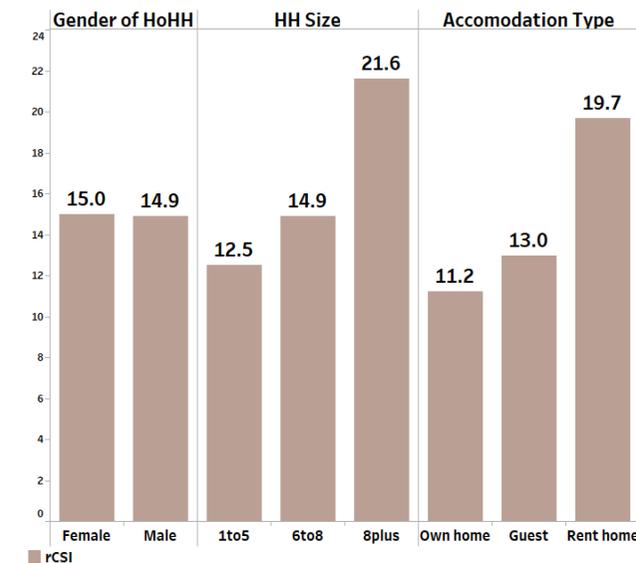
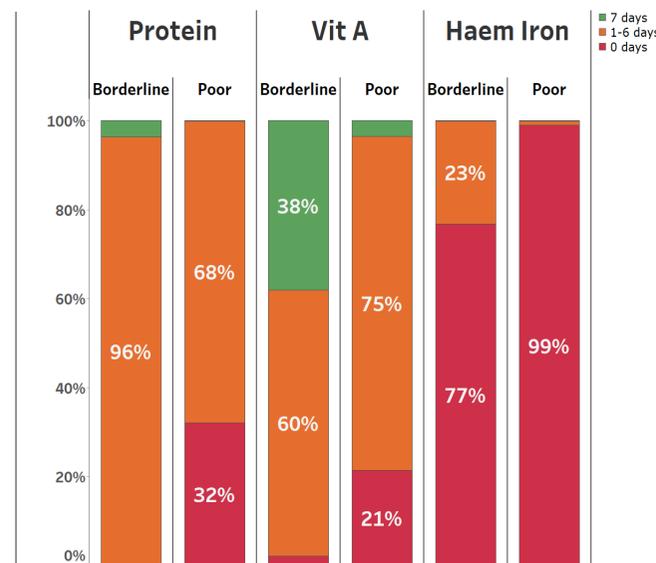


Figure 7: Frequency of consumption of nutrient-rich foods by food consumption group, April 2018



1. rCSI refers to a simple and easy-to-use indicator of household food security. It is based on a series of responses (strategies) to a single question: "What do you do when you don't have adequate food, and don't have the money to buy food?" rCSI is measured over time and an increase in rCSI refers to a worsening of the food security situation while a reduction in rCSI refers to an improvement in the food security situation



More households rely on food-based coping strategies in Hama

In April, almost 80 percent of households reported using some form of food-based coping strategy, with peaks in Al-Hasakeh (83%) and hard-to-reach areas of Dar'a (92%). Mean rCSI increased significantly in Hama, reaching 25.7, the highest score among surveyed governorates. In Hama, according to key informants, despite the fact that the agriculture harvest season is fast approaching, households and farmers are increasingly relying on coping strategies, especially borrowing and buying food on credit that they are committed to repaying after the harvest in cash or as a share of their crop. On the contrary, in hard-to-reach areas of Rural Damascus and Dar'a, households resorted less to food based negative coping strategies in April.

In all surveyed governorates, mean rCSI increased significantly for returnees (from 13.6 in March to 17.5 in April) while remaining at the same level as reported in March for displaced and non-displaced households. A higher proportion of returnee households reported limiting the size of food portions, reducing the number of meals eaten in a day, selling assets and using savings in order to buy food (Figure 9).

Map 1: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, April 2018

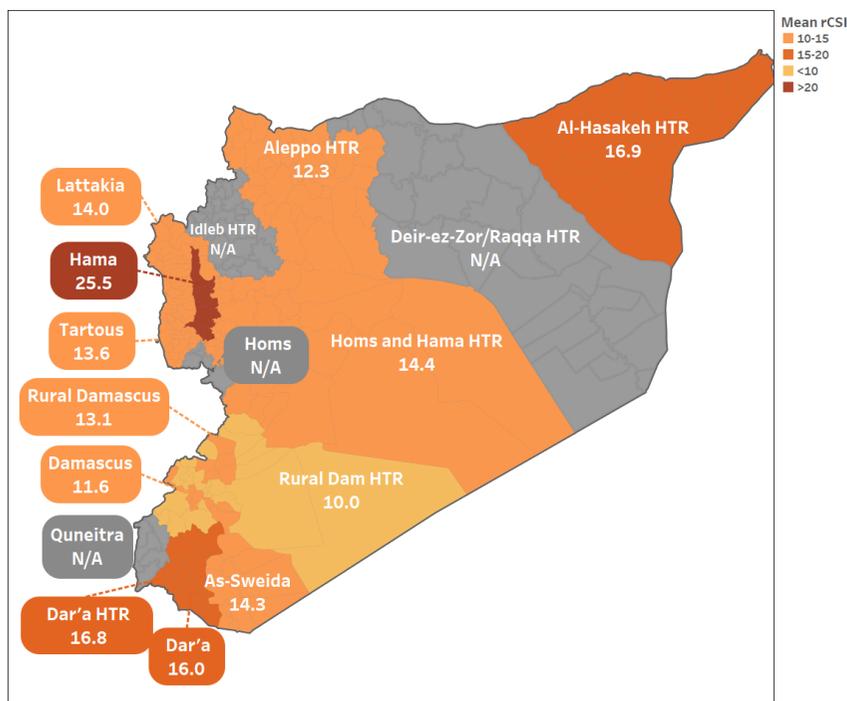


Figure 8: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, November 2017 to April 2018

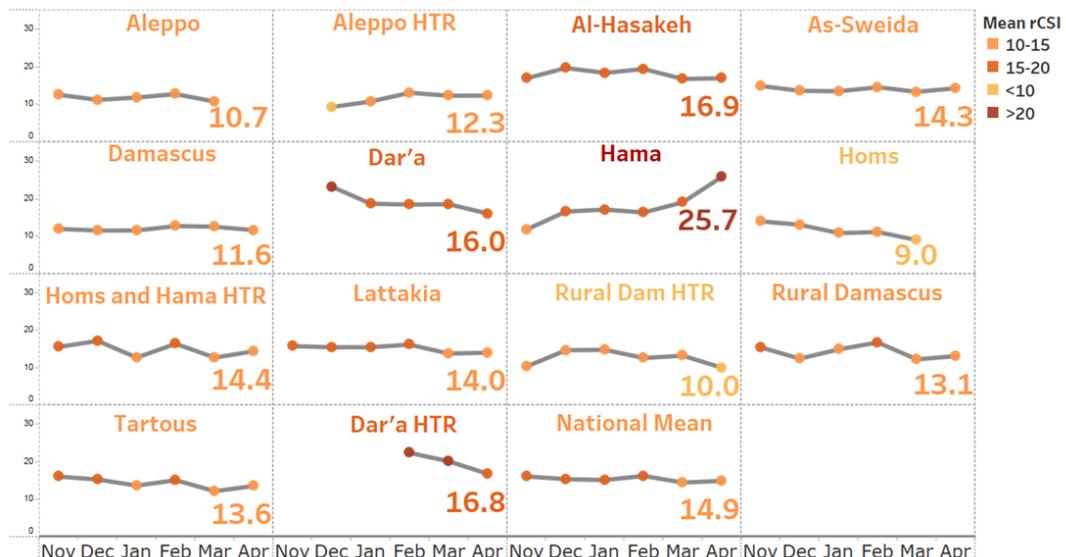
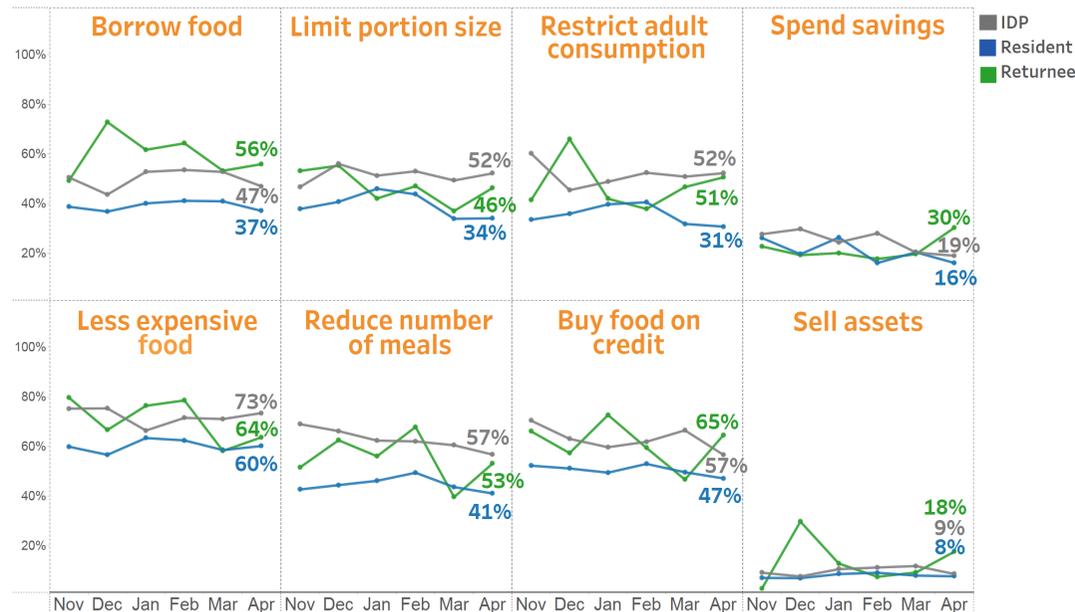


Figure 9: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, November 2017 to April 2018

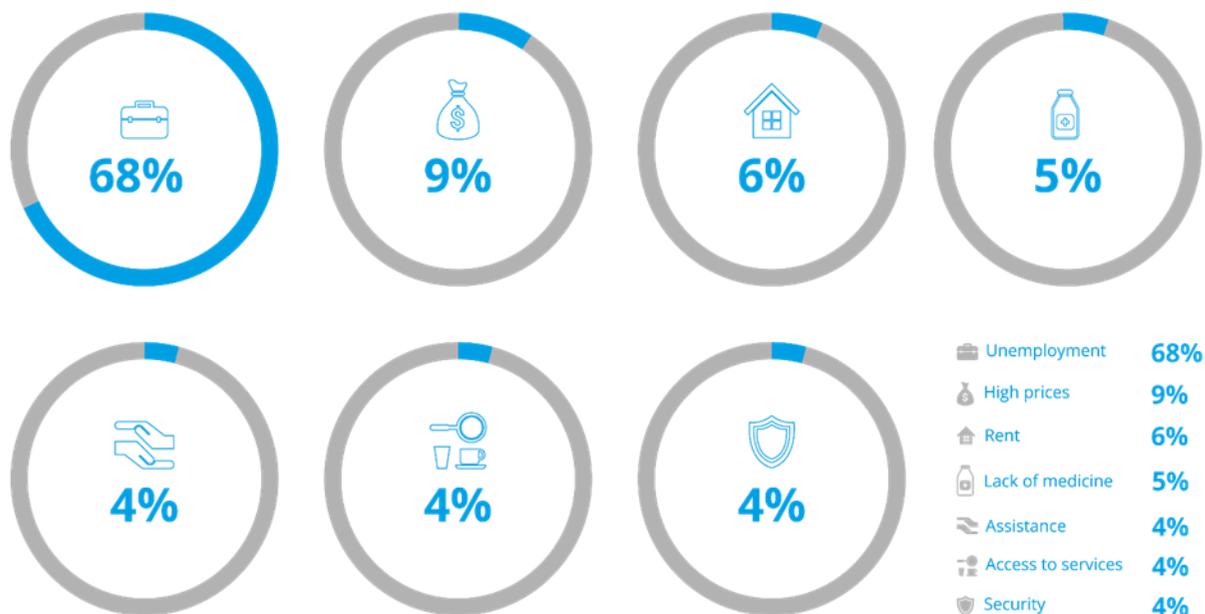




In the words of respondents

In April, 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, April 2018



Methodology

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via live telephone interviews in April from key informants and households in locations across Syria. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1,479 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 composition of the 18 strata changes following the evolution of the situation in Syria in terms of accessibility. In April 2018, the accessible areas were Aleppo, As-Sweida, Al-Hasakeh, Damascus, Dar'a, Hama, Homs, Rural Damascus, Quneitra, Lattakia and Tartous. Hard-to-reach (HTR) areas were Aleppo HTR, Idleb HTR, Deir-ez-Zor/AR-Raqqa, Homs and Hama HTR, Rural Damascus HTR and Dar'a HTR. The sampling frame groups together areas with similar geography and accessibility, 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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