

## Food security deteriorates in Dar'a and hard-to-reach areas of Rural Damascus

### Key points



In May, one in five of surveyed Syrian households reported poor or borderline food consumption and a diet mainly consisting of staples, sugar and oil.



The share of households reporting poor food consumption increased in the hard-to-reach areas of Rural Damascus, Dar'a and Hama recently affected by the conflict.



In Dar'a almost 90 percent of households reported resorting to food-related coping strategies in May, a 10 percent increase compared to April, highlighting the likely worsening of the food security situation in this governorate.



### Situation Update

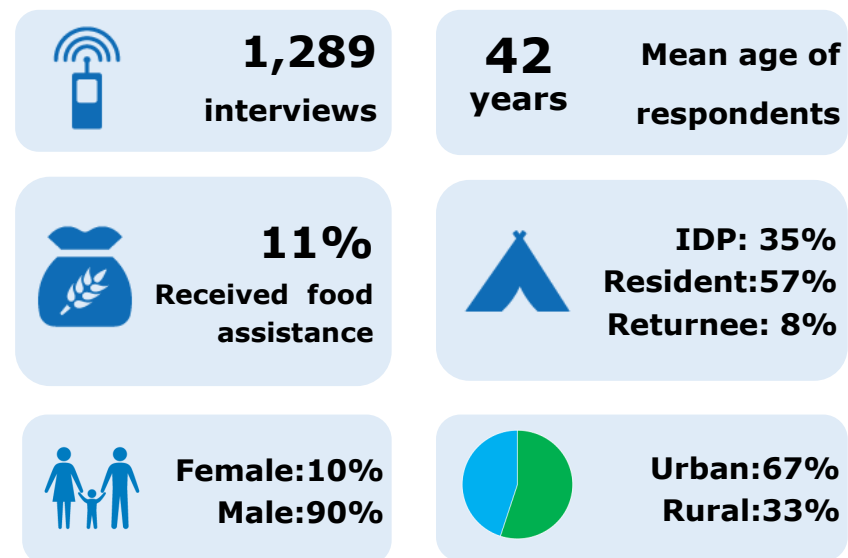
In May, military operations continued in several areas of northern Rural Homs governorate resulting in numerous deaths and injuries, as well as attacks on civilian infrastructure and medical facilities.

Although conditions for returns remain unsafe, an estimated **132,000 individuals** have returned to Ar-Raqqa city since October 2017 and **175,000** to Deir-ez Zor governorate since November 2017. Explosive hazard contamination remains a major protection concern and continues to hamper humanitarian access, assessments and the principle of safe returns in both governorates. The number of people in IDP sites has relatively stabilized but new IDP arrivals were reported from Deir-ez-Zor governorate in May as a result of the ongoing military operations against ISIL pockets.

On 21 May, the Syrian government announced that it had taken full control of all areas around Damascus. The announcement came after Syrian government forces took the last pockets in the Yarmouk Palestine refugee camp and the Hajar al-Aswad district, southern Damascus. Following an agreement reached between parties, around 11,190 opposition forces and their families in Yarmouk were allowed to move to the northern governorates of Idleb and Aleppo.

Around **39,500 individuals** that were displaced from Eastern Ghouta remain in eight IDP sites in Rural Damascus. However, IDPs have started to leave the sites and return to their areas of origin in Eastern Ghouta: over 7,000 IDPs left during the last week of May. Eastern Ghouta is no longer considered besieged and is instead considered hard-to-reach.

Figure 1: Sample Household characteristics





The share of households reporting poor food consumption increased in hard-to-reach areas of Rural Damascus, Dar'a and Hama

At the governorate level, the average FCS increased in hard-to-reach areas of Aleppo from 56.5 in April to 63.1 in May. Households in hard-to-reach areas with borderline food consumption dropped from 18.5 percent in April to 11.5 percent in May. On the other hand, Lattakia, Rural Damascus, Dar'a and hard-to-reach areas of Hama and Homs saw a deterioration in mean FCS levels.

In Lattakia the percent of households with borderline food consumption increased significantly from 7.8 percent in April to 16.6 percent in May. In Hama and hard-to-reach areas of Rural Damascus, the percent of households with poor food consumption rose from 0.5 percent in April to 10.4 percent in May and from 0.6 percent to 5.1 percent respectively. The highest percent of households reporting inadequate food consumption was in hard-to-reach areas of Hama and Homs (34 percent).

Mean FCS increased slightly for displaced (56.8), returnee (53.1) and resident households (65.1). However, a significant increase in the share of returnee households with poor food consumption was recorded while the share of households with borderline food consumption decreased among the same households. Instead, among displaced households, less households reported having poor food consumption in May than in April.

Figure 2: Percent of households with inadequate food consumption in aggregated governorates, December 2017 to May 2018

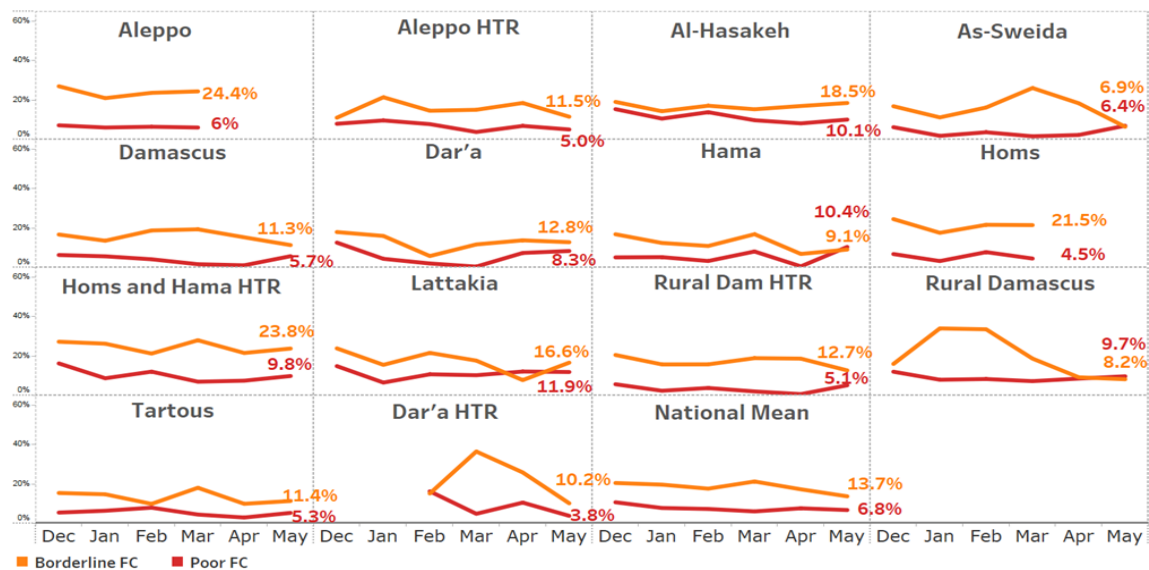
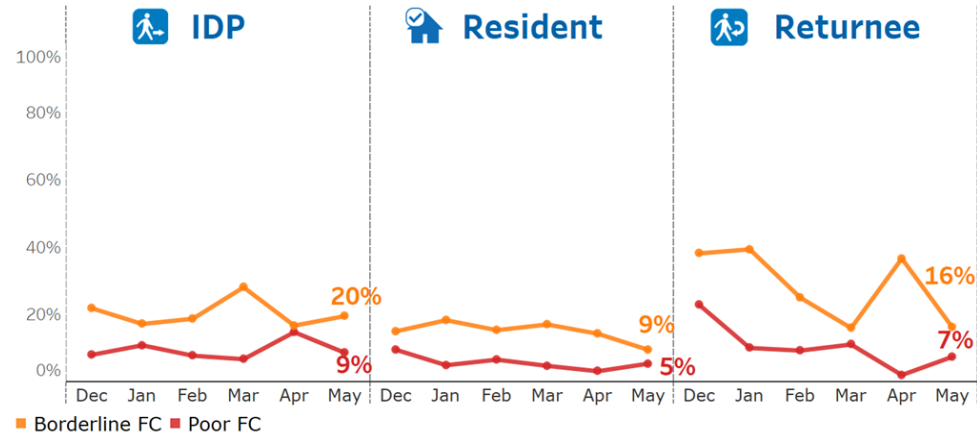
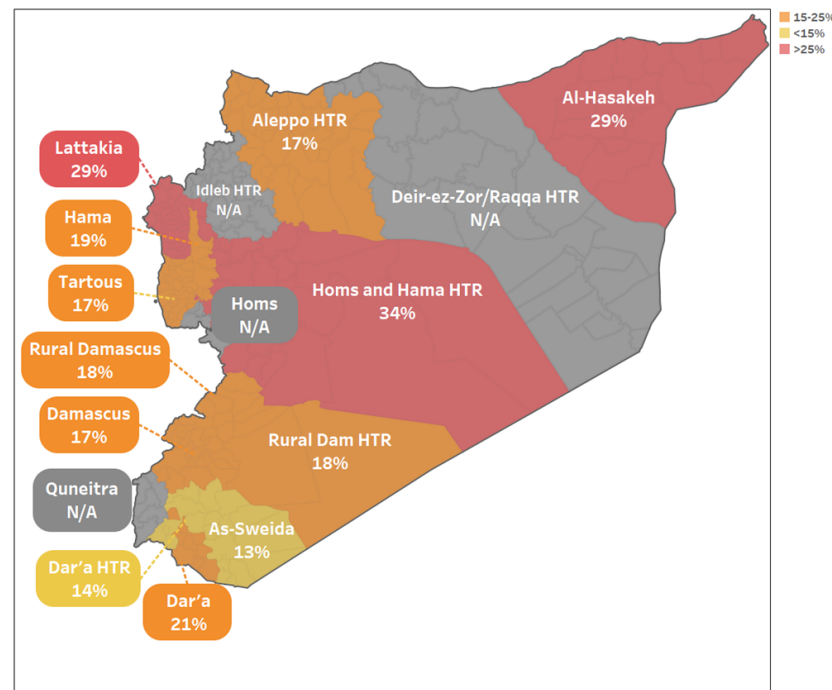


Figure 3: Percent of households with inadequate food consumption by residency status, December 2017 to May 2018



Map 1: Percent of households with inadequate food consumption by aggregated governorates, May 2018



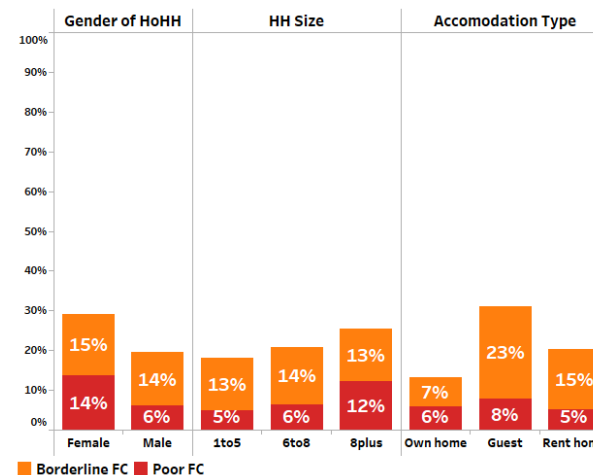
In May, around ten percent of the surveyed households were found to be headed by women. May saw a higher percent of female-headed households reporting inadequate food consumption levels compared to male-headed households (29 percent vs. 20 percent). In addition, female-headed households were found to be more likely to rely on food-based coping strategies than male-headed households, highlighting their increased vulnerability. In particular, limiting portion sizes (53 percent vs. 40 percent) and restricting consumption of adults so that children can eat (61 percent vs. 40 percent) were significant distinctions between the two groups.

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 (12 percent poor and 13 percent borderline) and high levels of coping strategy use in order to deal with food shortages. The mean reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI) of households with more than 8 members (21.1) was found to be considerably higher than the mean rCSI of smaller households (14). In particular, larger households are more likely to buy less expensive and less preferred foods and reduce the number of meals eaten per day.

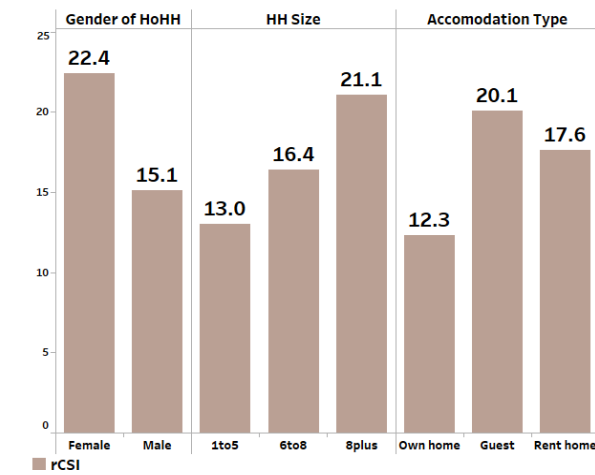
The survey found significant differences in dietary diversity and micro-nutrient intake depending on households' food consumption levels. Figure 6 shows the average number of days that different food groups are consumed by households with acceptable, poor and borderline food consumption. Households with borderline food consumption eat staples, sugar and fats as frequently as households with acceptable food consumption. While, households with borderline food consumption eat vegetables every other day, pulses and dairy products two days per week and proteins and fruits less than once a week. Households with poor food consumption, have a poor quality diet dominated by staples, sugar and fats between five to six days per week and vegetables slightly more often than two days per week. Pulses, dairy products, proteins and fruits are on average eaten less than one day per week by this group. Most households with poor food consumption rarely eat protein and vitamin A-rich foods.

Iron consumption patterns show an alarming situation for households with inadequate food consumption: the large majority never consume iron-rich foods on a weekly basis. They are therefore at risk of becoming more prone to iron-deficiencies or developing anemia (Figure 7).

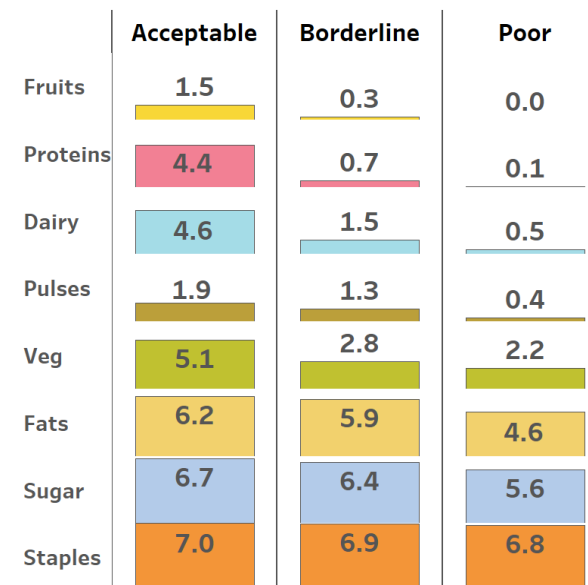
**Figure 4: Percent of households with inadequate food consumption by gender of head of household, household size and type of accommodation, May 2018**



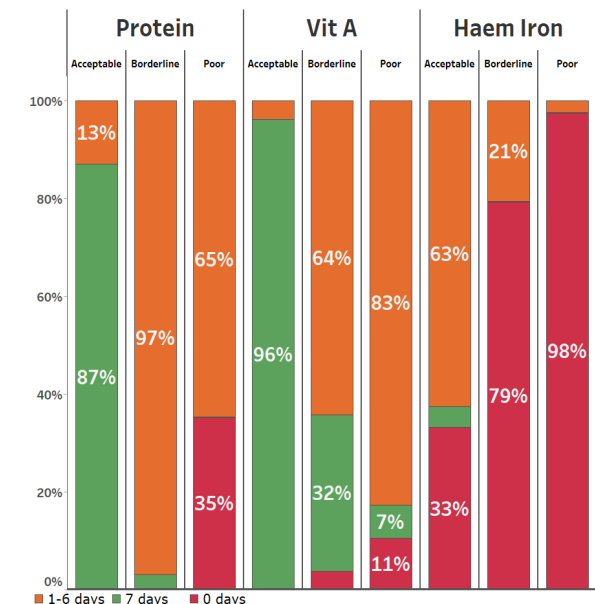
**Figure 5: Mean rCSI by gender of head of household, household size and type of accommodation, May 2018**



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



**Figure 7: Frequency of consumption of nutrient-rich food by food consumption group, May 2018**





More households rely on food-based coping strategies in Dar'a

In May, the national mean rCSI increased, reaching 15.8. Overall, more than 80 percent of households reported using some form of food-based coping strategy. The highest levels were reported in Dar'a governorate: 88 percent of households were using food-based coping strategies in accessible areas and 93 percent in hard-to-reach areas. The use of food-related coping strategies increased significantly in hard-to-reach areas of Rural Damascus and in both accessible and hard-to-reach areas of Dar'a. The trend in Dar'a is likely related to the national army having moved reinforcements into the governorate preparing for an imminent offensive. On the contrary, in Hama households resorted less to food-based negative coping strategies in May than in April.

In all surveyed governorates, the mean rCSI decreased significantly for returnees (from 17.5 in April to 14.2 in May) but increased for displaced and non-displaced households. In May a large proportion of surveyed displaced households (69 percent) were unable to buy their food with cash and instead had to purchase on credit, hereby increasing their vulnerability. Among residents, households were more likely to resort to borrowing food or relying on help from friends and relatives (50 percent), reducing the number of meals eaten in a day (48 percent) and selling savings (12 percent) (Figure 9).

Map 1: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, May 2018

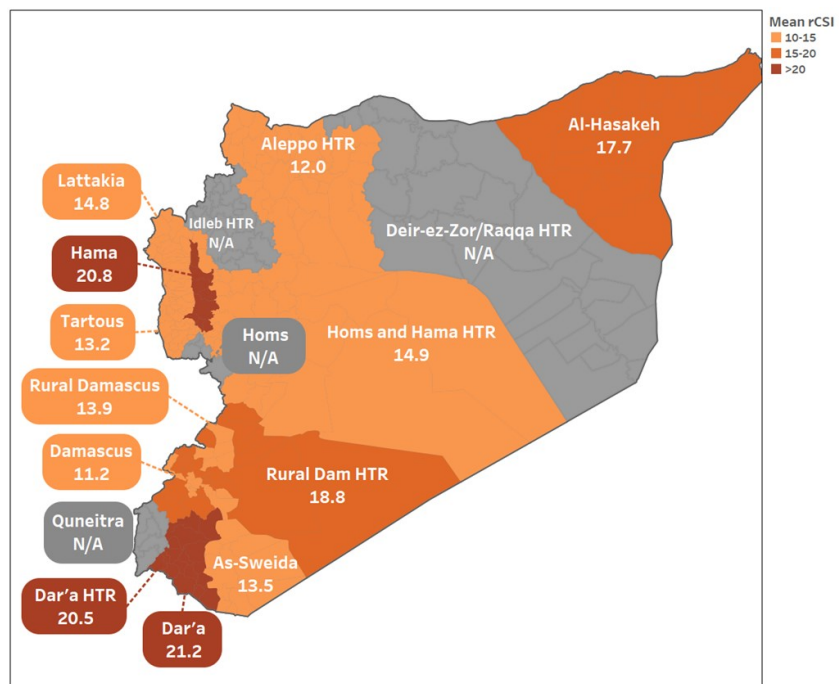


Figure 8: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, November 2017 to May 2018

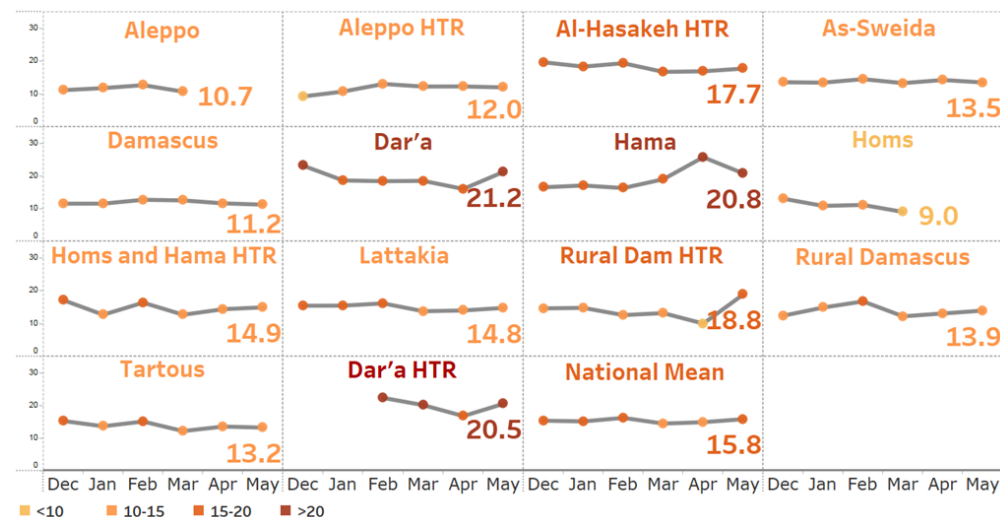
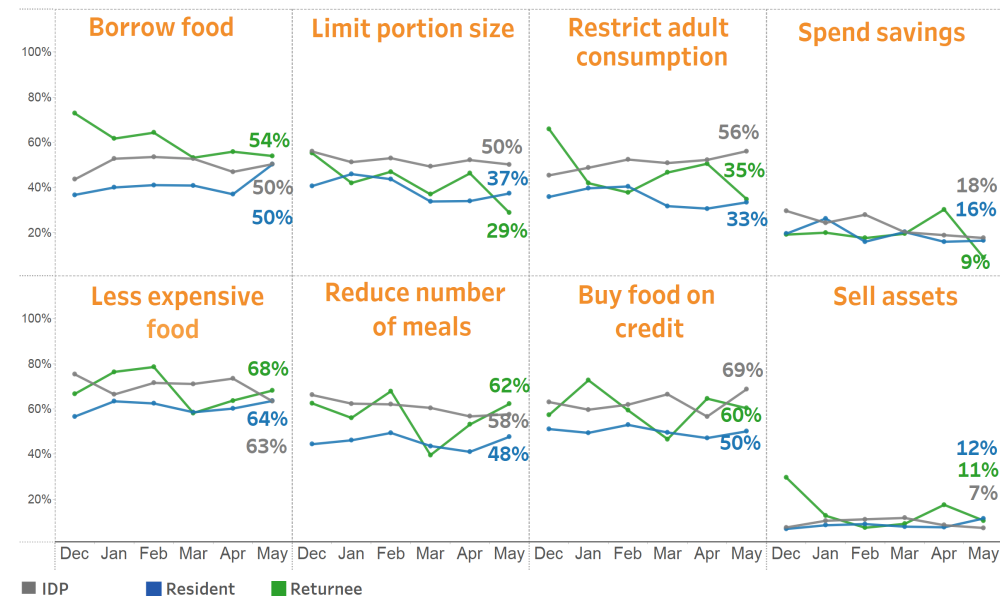


Figure 9: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, November 2017 to May 2018

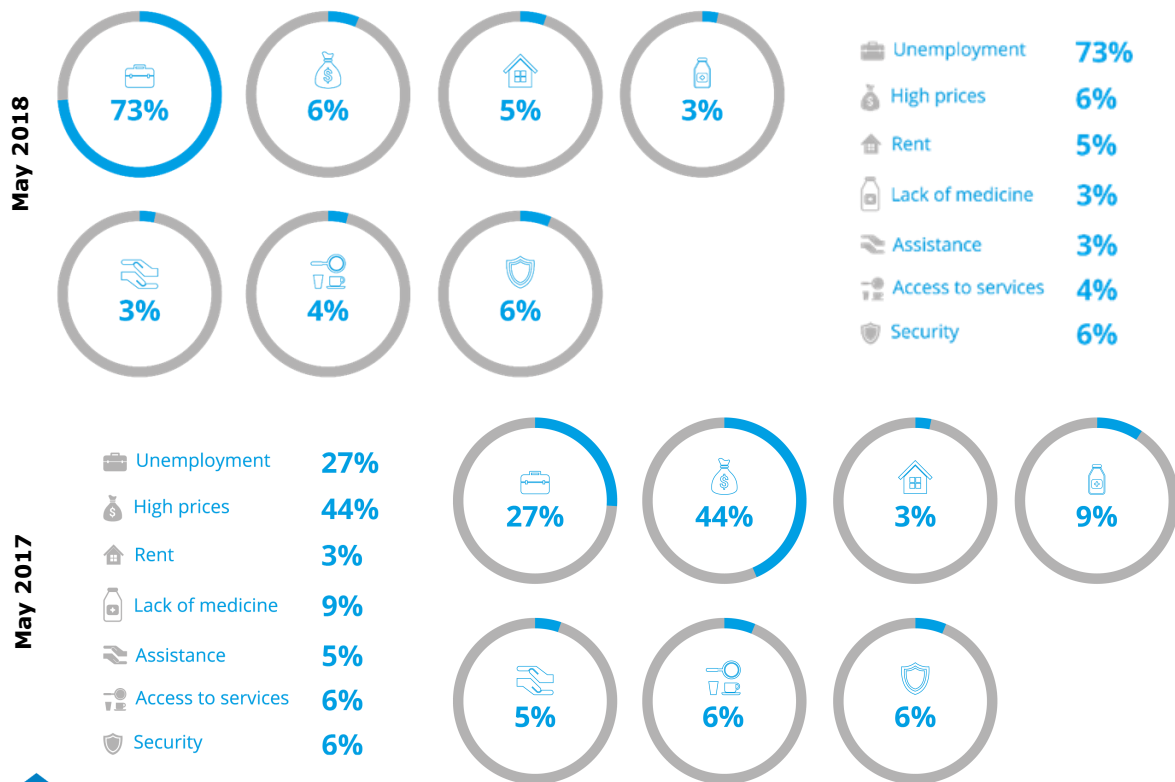




**In the words of respondents**

In May, respondents were asked to identify the main problems their families are facing. Figure 10 summarises their answers comparing May 2018 and May 2017. In May 2018, the majority (73 percent) of interviewed households perceived unemployment and lack of job opportunities as their main challenges, while in May 2017 high prices were perceived as the main issue by the greater number of surveyed households (44 percent).

**Figure 10: Main problems faced by surveyed households, May 2018 vs May 2017**



**Methodology**

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via live telephone interviews in May from key informants and households in locations across Syria. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1,289 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 May 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-Raqqqa, 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:**  
**Website:** [http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam\\_monitoring/](http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/)  
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