

Despite some improvement food insecurity remains high in Dar'a and Al-Hasakeh

Key points

 In August, an improvement was seen in the overall Syrian food consumption as the number of households with acceptable food consumption increased to 79 percent. This was mainly driven by improvements in hard-to-reach areas of Aleppo as well as Homs and Hama.

 Dar'a faced the highest proportion of households with poor food consumption (13.9 percent) followed by Al-Hasakeh (11.1 percent). The intake of haem iron is alarmingly low in Syria, especially for households with poor food consumption.

 While fewer households engaged in food-based coping strategies in August, the severity of the coping strategies increased. This led to an increase in the rCSI which is especially high in Dar'a and Al-Hasakeh governorates.



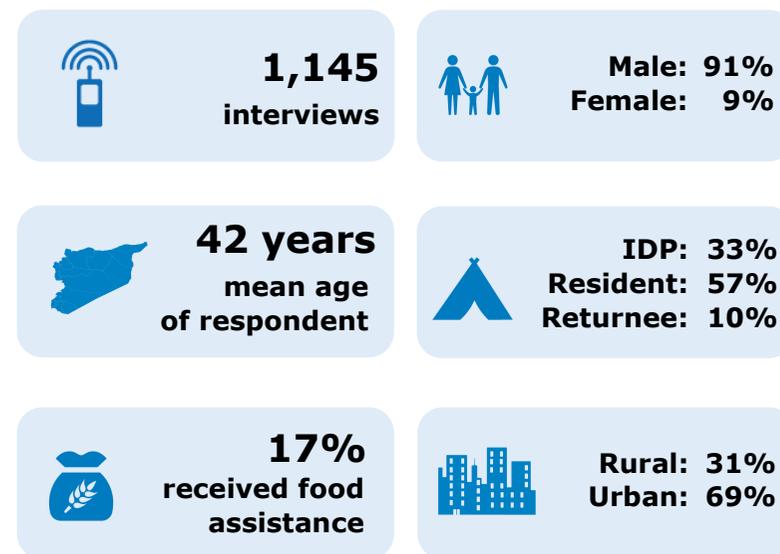
Situation update

During August, hundreds of displaced families were seen returning to their area of origin after the Government of Syria regained control over the majority of the South-Western areas including Dar'a and most of Quneitra governorates. On 11 August, a total of 452 people were evacuated from Dar'a to Idleb and Aleppo governorates, adding to the 10,516 individuals who have been evacuated from South-West Syria since 15 July.

A military intervention took place in Al Badia in As-Sweida governorate which led the Government of Syria to gain control of the majority of the areas as well as the entire administrative boundary of As-Sweida governorate. This contributed to the decrease in the number of displaced people from 184,000 to 57,000 individuals from 1 August vis-a-vis 16 August. However, the need for humanitarian assistance and protection remains high as both IDPs and returnees are in urgent need of assistance after returning to areas that have witnessed significant damage.

Though explosive hazard contamination continue to pose a security threat to civilians, more than 152,300 individuals are estimated to have returned to Ar-Raqqa city since October 2017. Since November 2017, Deir-ez-Zor governorate has seen a similar trend with 205,000 individuals estimated to have returned. However, 20,000 civilians are estimated to remain captured in the final ISIL-held enclave in southern Deir-ez-Zor where airstrikes as well as ground offensives are still ongoing and access to humanitarian assistance and basic services is limited. Hence, significant safety concerns persist around both returnees, humanitarian organisations and basic service providers.

Figure 1: Sample household characteristics





Fewer households in hard-to-reach areas of Aleppo as well as Homs and Hama report inadequate food consumption

Across Syria food consumption improved in August as the proportion of households with inadequate food consumption decreased by 6.8 percentage points to 21 percent, broken down to 5.2 percent poor and 15.8 percent borderline food consumption. The main driver of the positive change was a significant improvement of hard-to-reach areas of Aleppo (by 5.6 percentage points) as well as Homs and Hama (by 14.8 percentage points).

Areas of special concern in August are Dar'a, Al-Hasakeh and Rural Damascus where 38 percent, 36 percent and 29 percent of households respectively have inadequate food consumption. Households in Hama and As-Sweida reported the best overall food consumption.

According to residency status, a significant improvement in the food consumption levels for returnees was the main driver of the overall improvement. The proportion of returnee households with poor food consumption has halved since July (4.5 percent vs. 9.5 percent) while the number of households with borderline food consumption decreased from 30.3 percent to 12.5 percent. Another significant change was found for resident households with poor food consumption which dropped by 3.2 percentage points to 4.4 percent.

No data was available for Aleppo, Homs, Quneitra and hard-to-reach areas in Idleb and Deir-ez-Zor in August 2018.

Figure 2: Percent of households with inadequate food consumption in aggregated governorates, March to August 2018

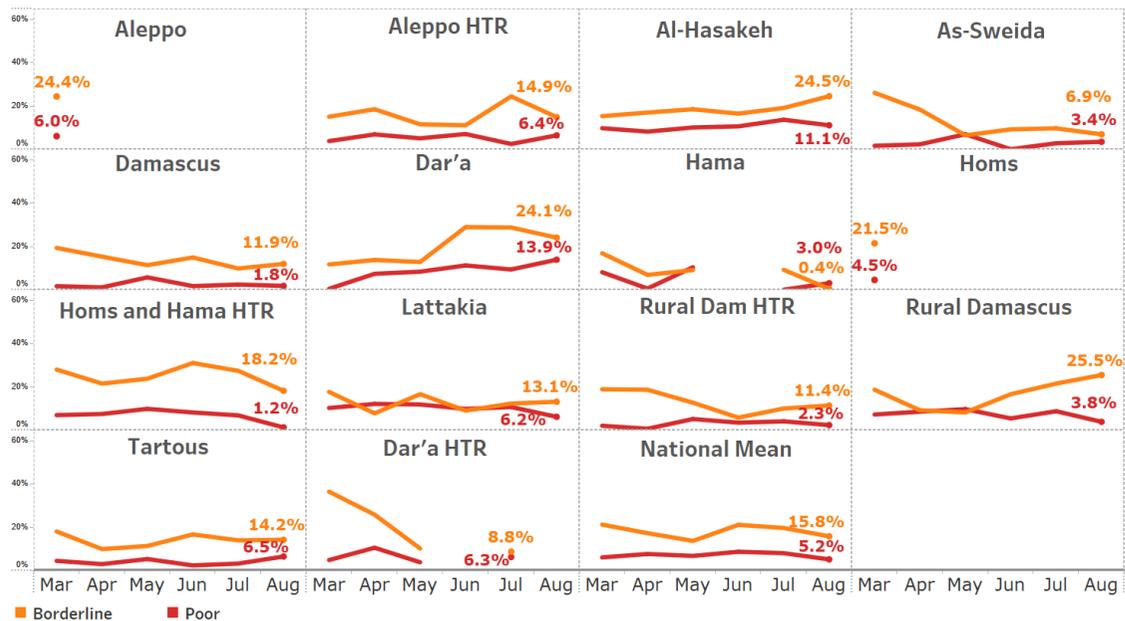
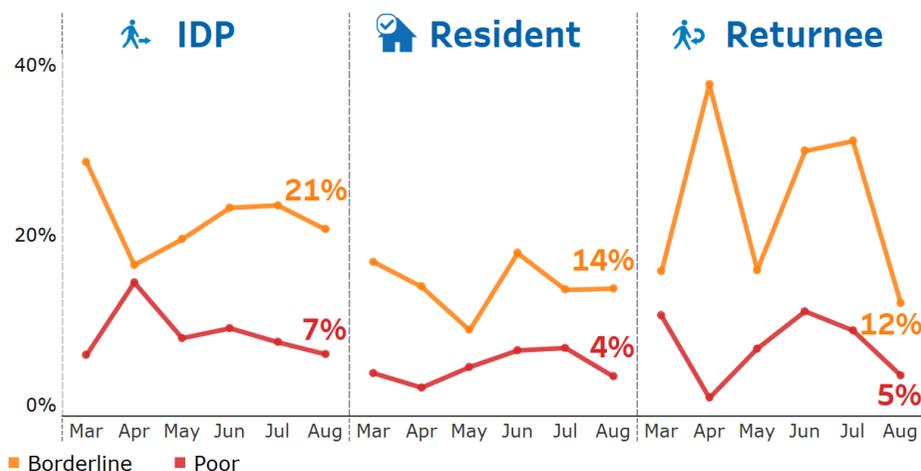
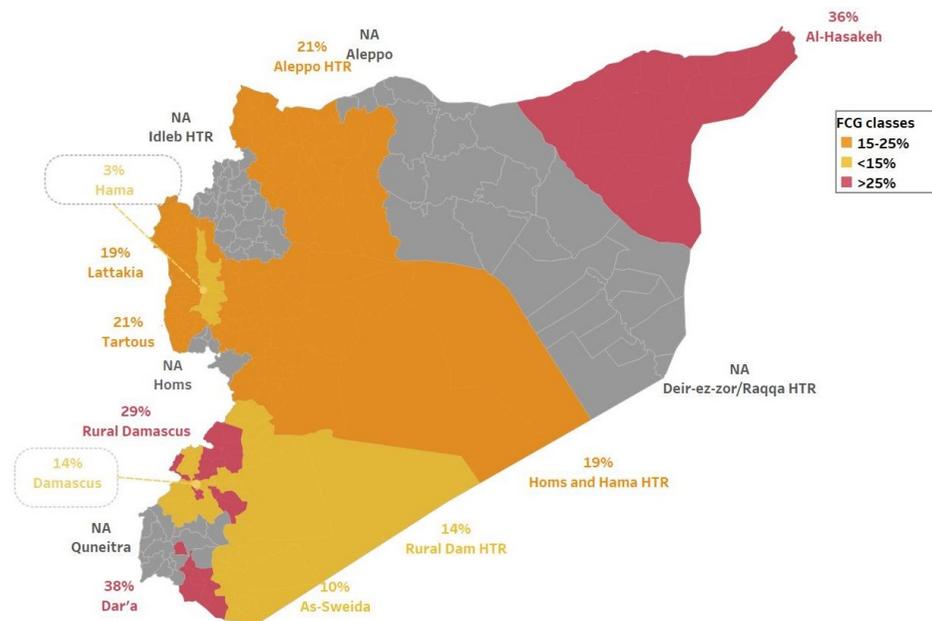


Figure 3: Percent of households with inadequate food consumption by residency status, February to August 2018



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



In August, improved diets of women-headed households contributed to the overall improved food consumption levels in Syria. In particular borderline food consumption saw a large and significant drop from 32.8 percent in July to 5.6 percent in August. Also male-headed households (91 percent of the survey sample) experienced significant decreases in the number of households with poor and borderline food consumption of 2.9 and 1.3 percentage points respectively.

Across Syria, the mean rCSI¹ showed an overall increase. Though this increase was mainly driven by male rather than female-headed households, the proportion of male-headed households applying at least one food-based coping strategy the week prior to being surveyed did actually decrease from July to August (from 74 percent to 71.3 percent), however the increased rCSI is due to more severe coping mechanisms being applied by the households in August.

According to household size, medium-sized households (six to eight members) saw the highest improvement in food consumption (nine percentage points) followed by small households with less than five members (7.9 percentage points). For large households, an increase in inadequate food consumption was reported (24.6 percent vs. 27.6 percent). Small households were the main driver of the increase in rCSI with 73 percent of the households having applied food-based coping strategies at least once during the week prior to the survey. A significant increase of 10.6 percentage points was seen in the number of households reducing the number of meals due to lack of food or money to buy food.

Overall food consumption significantly improved for households owning their own house following a decrease in the number of households with inadequate food consumption from 21.9 percent to 14.1 percent. At the same time, more house owners than other accommodation types were limiting portion sizes and restricting adult consumption in order for children to eat.

As illustrated in Figure 6, the main difference in the diets of households with acceptable and poor food consumption is the intake of protein, dairy and fresh foods (vegetables and fruits). On average, households with acceptable food consumption reported consuming vegetables almost six days a week, dairy and protein more than four days a week while fruits were eaten two days a week. For households with poor food consumption, vegetables were eaten more than two days a week while the intake of dairy, proteins and fruits was negligible.

The largest differences found in the intake of protein-rich food was an improvement for the households reporting poor food consumption where seven percent more were eating protein-rich foods between one and six days in August compared to July. However, eight percent fewer households with poor food consumption were eating vitamin A rich food every day (Figure 7).

Figure 4: Inadequate food consumption by gender of head of household, household size and type of accommodation, August 2018

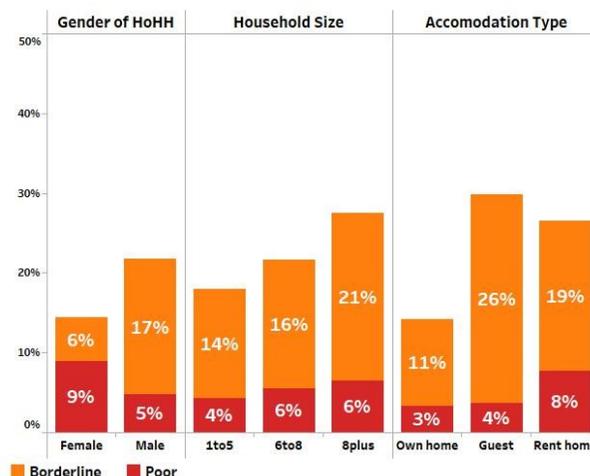


Figure 5: Mean rCSI by gender of head of household, household size and type of accommodation, August 2018

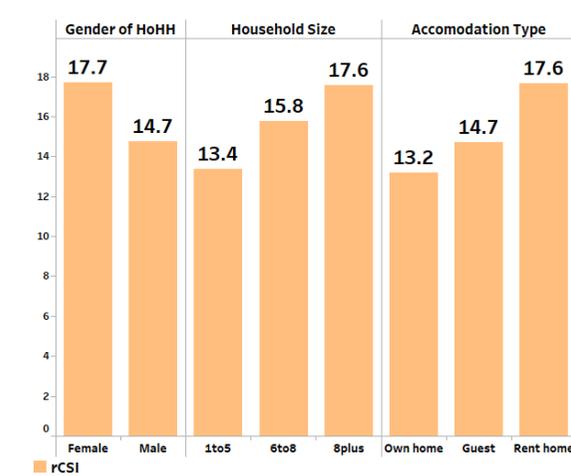


Figure 6: Number of days food groups consumed by food consumption group, August 2018

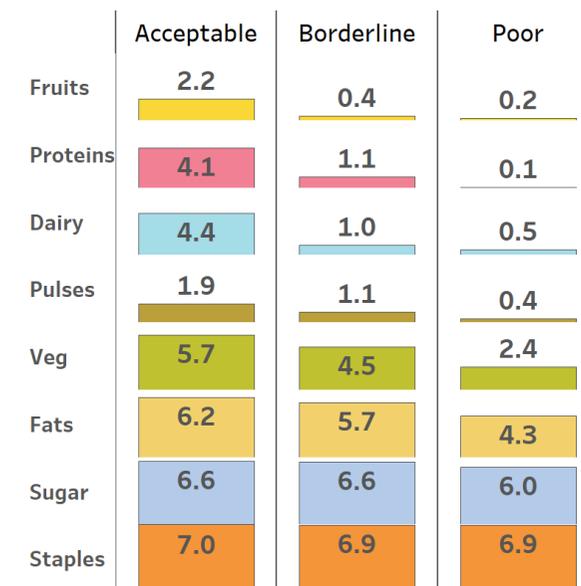
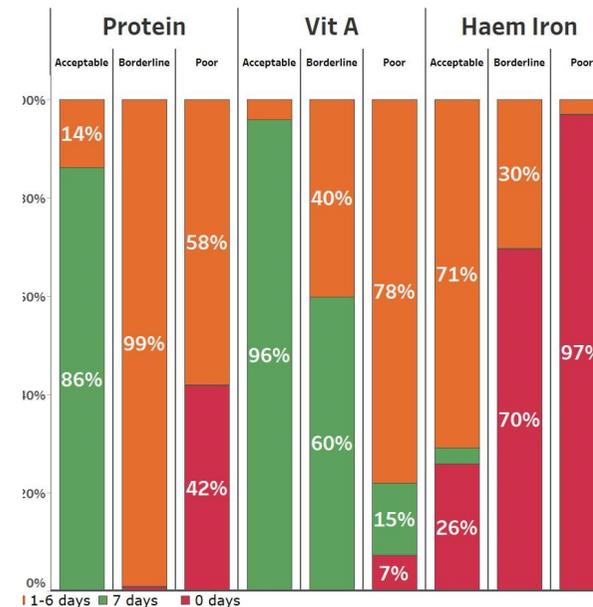


Figure 7: Consumption of nutrient-rich food by food consumption group, August 2018



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



Across Syria, the rCSI is increasing due to households applying more severe coping mechanisms

In August, the national mean rCSI increased from 13.8 to 15.1 due to an increase in the severity of the adopted coping mechanisms while the proportion of households applying food-based coping strategies at least once in the previous month dropped slightly (74.4 percent vs. 73.1 percent). At governorate level, Dar'a continues to face the highest level of coping despite a large improvement in the situation reflected by a drop in rCSI from 27.1 in July to 20.3 in August. Also the number of households in Dar'a applying food-based coping strategies fell between July and August 2018 from 93.6 percent of surveyed households to 83.9 percent.

Analysis for individual coping mechanisms shows that overall relying on less expensive food and buying food on credit are the most used coping strategies across Syria while selling assets and spending savings are the least used. Significantly more female-headed households had to buy food on credit in August compared to July (76 percent vs. 63 percent) as well as spending savings which increased from five percent in July to 17 percent in August. For male-headed households, significantly more households reported limiting portion sizes (five percentage points) and restricting consumption of adults for children to eat (six percentage points).

Compared to July, in August the proportion of large households having to spend savings to cover basic food needs increased significantly from 11 percent to 31 percent while the percent having to borrow food from family and friends fell by 31 percent. For accommodation type, significant increases were found for home owners limiting portion sizes and restricting adult consumption by eight and nine percentage points respectively, while renters having to spend savings increased to 21 percent from 14 percent in July.

Map 2: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, August 2018

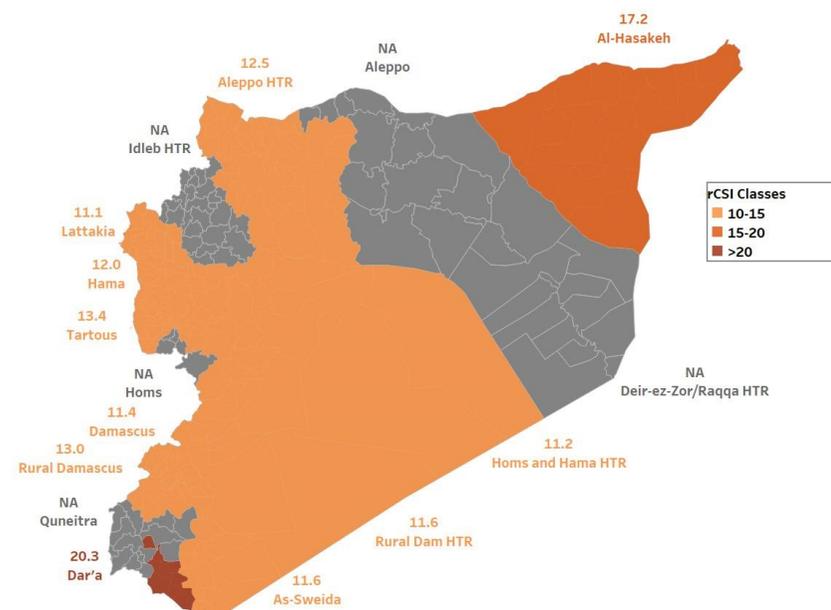
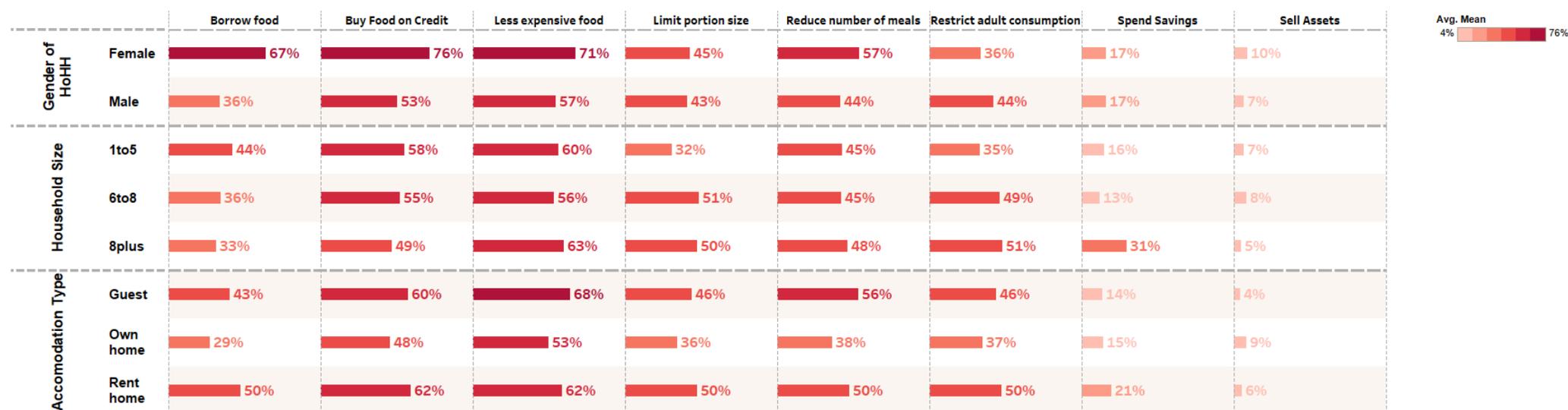


Figure 8: Coping strategies by gender of head of household, household size and type of accommodation, August 2018





In the words of respondents

Each month, respondents are asked to identify the main problems their families are facing. Figure 10 shows that during 2018, unemployment including lack of income opportunities has accounted for an average of 65 percent of the overall main reported concern by the respondents, increasing from 39 percent in January to 71 percent in August. Furthermore, unemployment was the only reported issue of concern that has shown an overall increase in 2018 whereas all other concerns have either decreased or been relatively stable since January.

The second most reported issue is food prices, which has however decreased from 13 percent in January to six percent in August while rent prices have decreased from nine to seven percent. Also medicine shortage has decreased from 11 percent to four percent, and security and safety concerns were reported by four percent of surveyed households both in January and August after a two percentage point increase in February 2018.

Figure 10: Main problems faced by surveyed households, 2018 overview

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Average	
Unemployment	39%	50%	66%	69%	74%	77%	72%	71%	65%	↑
Food prices	13%	12%	10%	8%	6%	6%	6%	6%	8%	↓
Rent	9%	10%	8%	6%	5%	4%	6%	7%	7%	↓
Medicine shortage	11%	7%	2%	2%	3%	3%	3%	2%	4%	↓
Security and safety	4%	6%	4%	4%	3%	2%	2%	3%	4%	↓
Electricity cuts	6%	4%	3%	2%	2%	2%	4%	4%	4%	↓
Lack of assistance	4%	3%	3%	4%	2%	2%	2%	1%	3%	↓
Transport	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	↓
Education	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	↓
Fuel shortage	5%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	↓
Drinking water	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	→
Food unavailability	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	→

Methodology

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via live telephone interviews in August 2018 from households in locations across Syria. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1,145 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.

Since May 2018, the accessible areas are Aleppo, As-Sweida, Al-Hasakeh, Damascus, Dar'a, Hama, Homs, Rural Damascus, Quneitra, Lattakia and Tartous. Hard-to-reach (HTR) areas are Aleppo HTR, Dar'a HTR, Idleb HTR, Deir-ez-Zor, Homs and Hama HTR, Ar-Raqqa and Rural Damascus 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](#).



For further information:

Arif Husain arif.husain@wfp.org
Jonathan Rivers jonathan.rivers@wfp.org

mVAM Resources:

Website: http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/
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