

Households across hard-to-reach areas of Syria report a deterioration of food consumption

Key points



In September 2018, food consumption across Syria deteriorated due to an increase in households across hard-to-reach areas of Homs and Hama, Rural Damascus and Aleppo reporting inadequate food consumption.



More than one in four Syrians reported inadequate food consumption in September and an average of seven percent of households had poor food consumption with a diet lacking important micro and macro nutrients.



While the number of households applying at least one coping mechanism increased slightly in September, the rCSI dropped due to lower reported severity of the adopted coping mechanisms.



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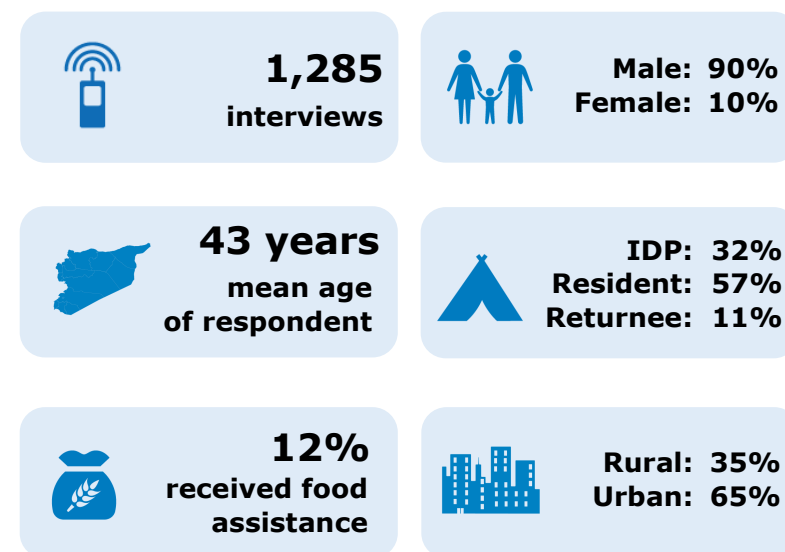
Situation update

On 4 September, intensified military operations in Idlib affected Jisr ash-Shugur and Mhambel in the western countryside while shelling was reported in the northern countryside of Hama. The following week airstrikes intensified in southern Idlib and northern Hama governorates, leading to significant displacements within Idlib.

Since the Government of Syria regained control of the south-western areas of Syria in late-July 2018, Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas of western Aleppo and north western Hama remain some of the last opposition-held areas in Syria. Around **three million** people are estimated to live in this area, **98 percent** of which are civilians while **10,000** individuals are classified as terrorists by the UN. Half (**1.4 million**) are IDPs with nowhere else to flee, having already fled from conflict and violence in other governorates of Syria or already being displaced within Idlib governorate. Hence, **2.1 million** individuals are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance. After rumours of intended use of chemical weapons and a fear of a potential humanitarian catastrophe, the UN appealed to the Government of Syria and all parties to avoid a full-military scale operation.

On 17 September, Russia and Turkey agreed to create a 15-20 km demilitarized buffer zone in Idlib to separate rebel forces from government troops. The agreement included heavy weapons to be withdrawn and rebel forces including members of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham to leave the zone by 10 October. The Syrian government and its allies announced that there would be no military operation against Idlib. Since the agreement, there has been a cautious calm in northern Hama and southern Idlib, areas previously targeted with air strikes while Idlib has witnessed a period of calm since 11 September.

Figure 1: Sample household characteristics





Food consumption deteriorates across hard-to-reach areas in Syria

In September 2018, the share of households with inadequate food consumption significantly increased by 5.3 percentage points to 26.3 percent. This is divided into seven percent poor and 19.4 percent borderline food consumption. The negative change in food consumption was mainly due to a deterioration across the following hard-to-reach areas: Homs and Hama (increased by 18.9 percentage points since August); Rural Damascus (10.6 percentage points) and Aleppo (seven percentage points). Opposite, the situation in accessible areas of Dar'a significantly improved from 37.9 percent households reporting inadequate food consumption in August to 27.2 percent in September.

In relation to residency status, the main deterioration of food consumption was reported from returnee households. Poor and borderline food consumption increased by 5.7 and 7.9 percentage points respectively. Hence, in September 2018 the total share of returnee households with inadequate food consumption added up to almost one-third (30.6 percent). However, despite the decrease in poor food consumption, the situation faced by IDPs was still worse as 31.5 percent of this group reported inadequate food consumption in September.

No data was available for Aleppo, Homs, Quneitra and hard-to-reach areas in Idlib in September 2018.

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

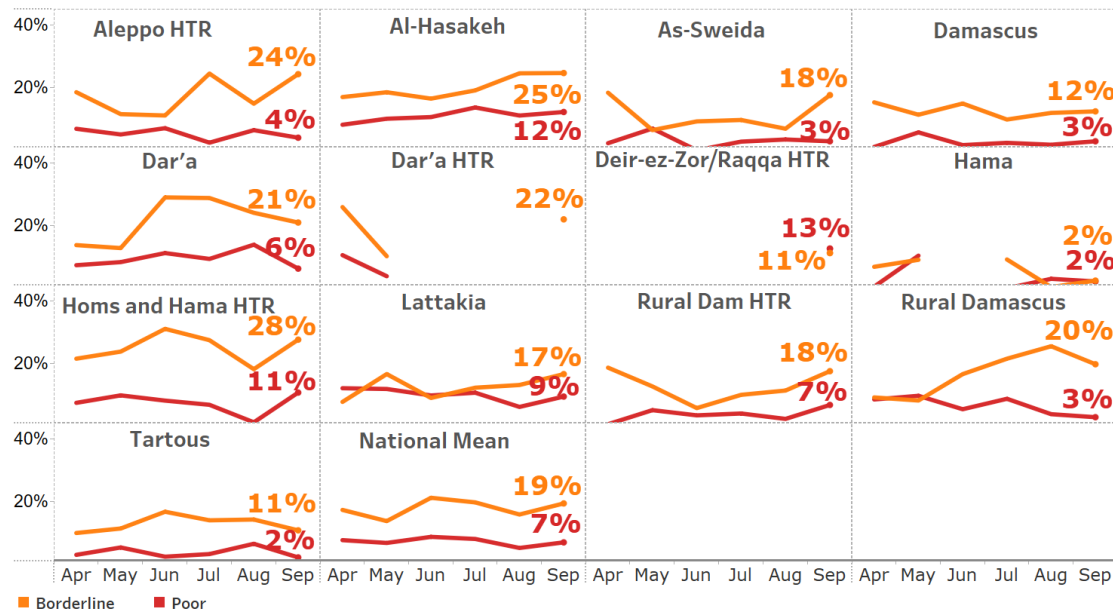
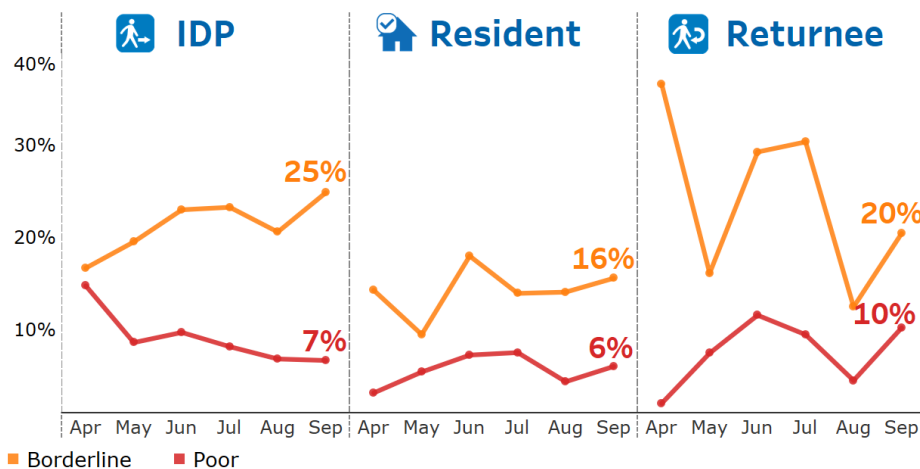
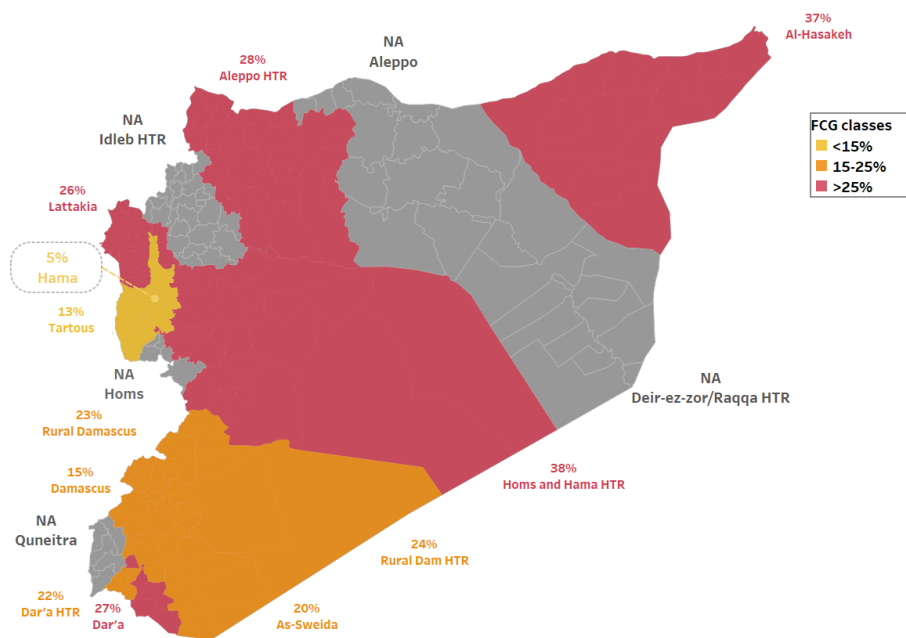


Figure 3: Percent of households with inadequate food consumption by displacement status, April to September 2018



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



In relation to the gender of the head of household, women-headed households (10 percent of the total sample) reported significantly worse diets. From August to September, the share of women-headed households with poor food consumption increased by 9.3 percentage points to 18 percent. Furthermore, the share of borderline food consumption reached 21.7 percent after increasing by 16.1 percentage points. Hence, the share of women-headed households with inadequate food consumption almost tripled from August to September (14.4 percent vs. 39.9 percent).

Despite this development, the rCSI decreased slightly for women-headed household from 17.7 in August to 17.5 in September. Male-headed-households continue to report a lower level of adopted coping mechanisms.

According to household size, small households of up to five members reported the worst development in food consumption in September. In total, the share of households with inadequate food consumption significantly increased by 9.3 percentage points. Due to this development, the share of small households and large households reporting either poor or borderline food consumption reached similar high levels in September (27.3 percent in August vs. 27.9 percent in September). Meanwhile, significantly more medium-sized households (six to eight household members) applied at least one food based coping strategy compared to August (70.6 percent in August vs. 77.1 percent in September).

In September, more than one-third of households staying as guests reported inadequate food consumption (34.4 percent), which is an increase of 4.6 percentage points since August. Also rCSI increased from 14.7 to 15.9 for this group due to more severe coping mechanisms applied by the households. Households who own their home faced an increase in inadequate food consumption of 8.5 percentage points to 22.7 percent.

Overall, 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). Significant differences were found for households with borderline food consumption's intake of vegetables (4.5 day in August vs. 3.5 day in September) and dairy products (1.0 day vs. 1.3 day).

The largest change in the intake of protein-rich food in September was that 23.9 percent fewer households with borderline food consumption were eating vitamin A-rich foods every day of the week prior to the survey (Figure 7). Instead the share of households with poor and borderline food consumption eating vitamin A-rich food one to six days a week has increased by 10.3 and 13.7 percentage points since August 2018. The share of households with poor food consumption that did not eat vitamin A-rich food decreased from 7.3 percent in August to 2.7 percent in September.

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

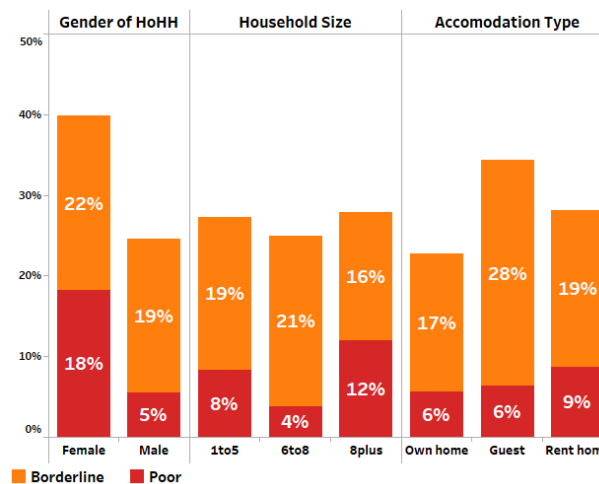


Figure 6: Number of days food groups consumed by food consumption group, September 2018

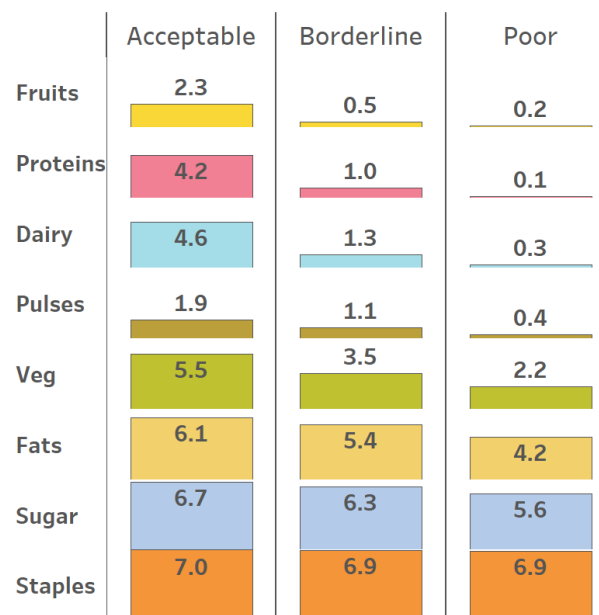


Figure 5: Mean rCSI¹ by gender of head of household, household size and type of accommodation, September 2018

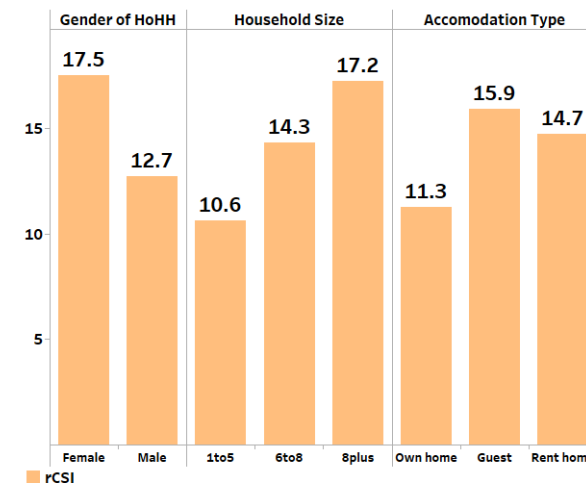
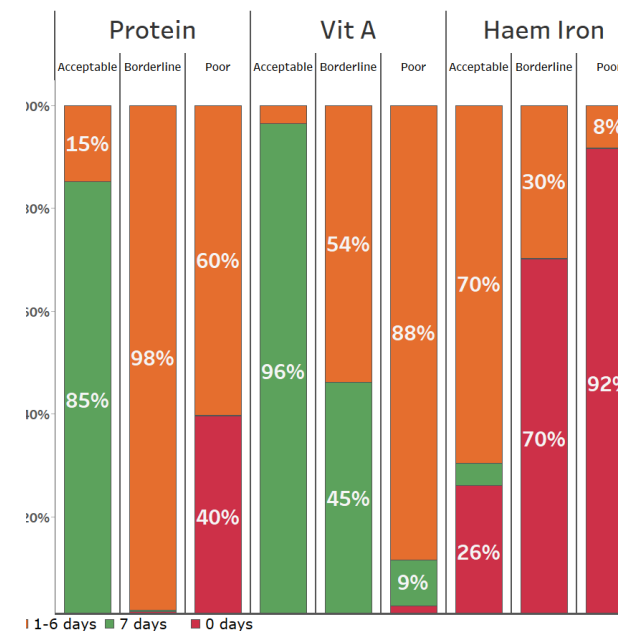


Figure 7: Consumption of nutrient-rich food by food consumption group, September 2018



1. The reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI) is an indicator used to inform household food security. It is based on a series of responses to the question: "What do you do when you do not have adequate food or money to buy food?" and is captured monthly. An increase in rCSI refers to a worsening in the household's coping capacity, negatively affecting the food security situation, while a reduction in rCSI refers to an improvement.



rCSI drops as households apply less severe coping mechanisms

In September, the national mean rCSI decreased from 15.1 to 13.3 as the reported severity of the adopted coping mechanisms by households across Syria dropped. At governorate level, the main driver of the positive change is reported from hard-to-reach areas of Dar'a, where the rCSI dropped from 15.6 in August to 7.9 in September. Dar'a (accessible areas) and Al-Hasakeh continue to report the highest rCSI at 20.2 and 16.0 respectively despite small improvements.

In hard-to-reach areas of Rural Damascus, the share of households that applied at least one consumption-based coping mechanism in August vis-à-vis September increased from 58.5 percent to 75.9 percent. Hama saw a similar increase from 58.6 percent to 74.3 percent. Hence, three out of four people in Rural Damascus and Hama were applying food-based coping mechanisms in the week prior to the survey.

According to displacement status, IDPs have experienced the most positive change since August as the rCSI has decreased from 18.2 to 15. This is mainly due to a significant decrease in the share of IDP households having to restrict adult consumption for children to eat, reduce the number of meals and limit portion sizes, which were down 11.4, 11.1 and 7.5 percentage points respectively since August.

Returnees have reported applying less severe consumption-based coping strategies which has led to a fall in rCSI from 15.7 in August to 13.7 in September. Hence, fewer returnee households had to sell assets in order to buy food or get money to buy food (10.3 percent vs. 5.5 percent).

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

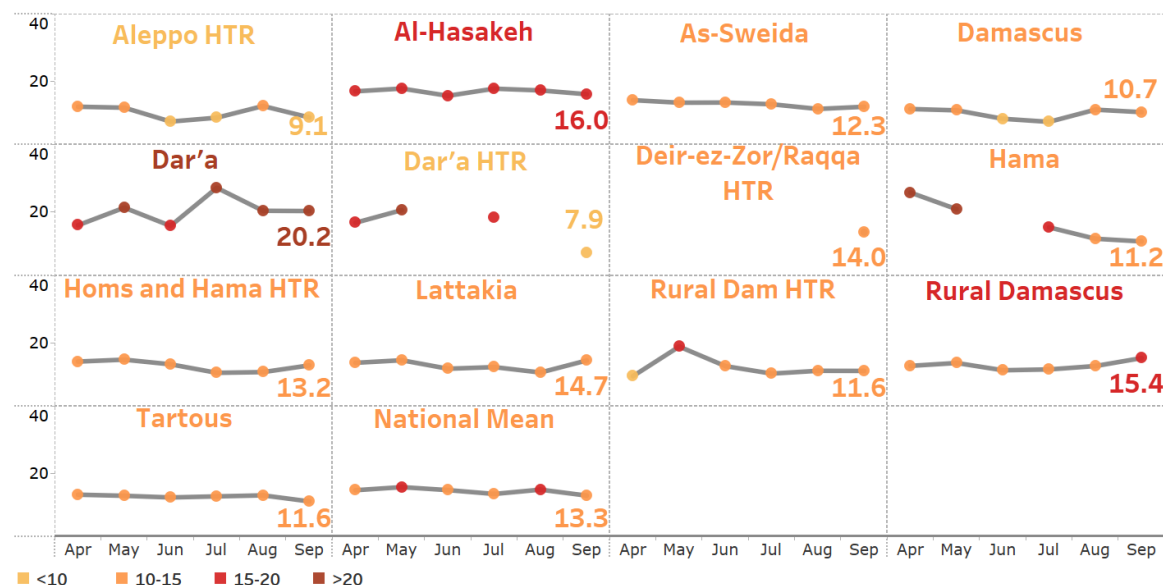
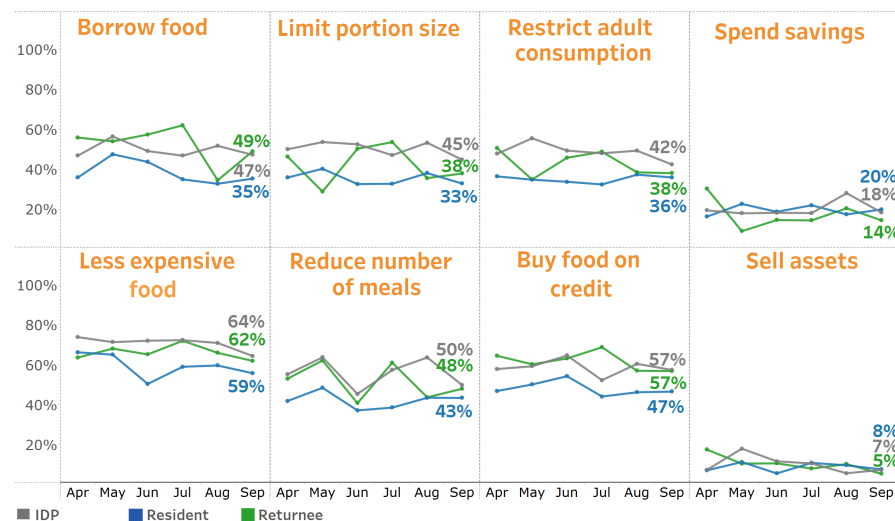
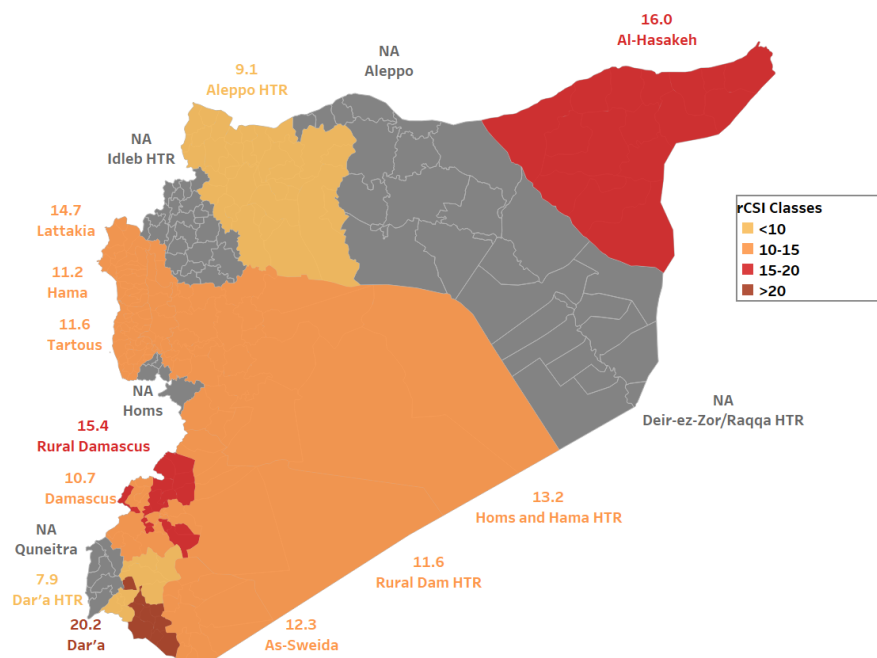


Figure 9: Coping by displacement status, April to September 2018



Map 2: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, September 2018



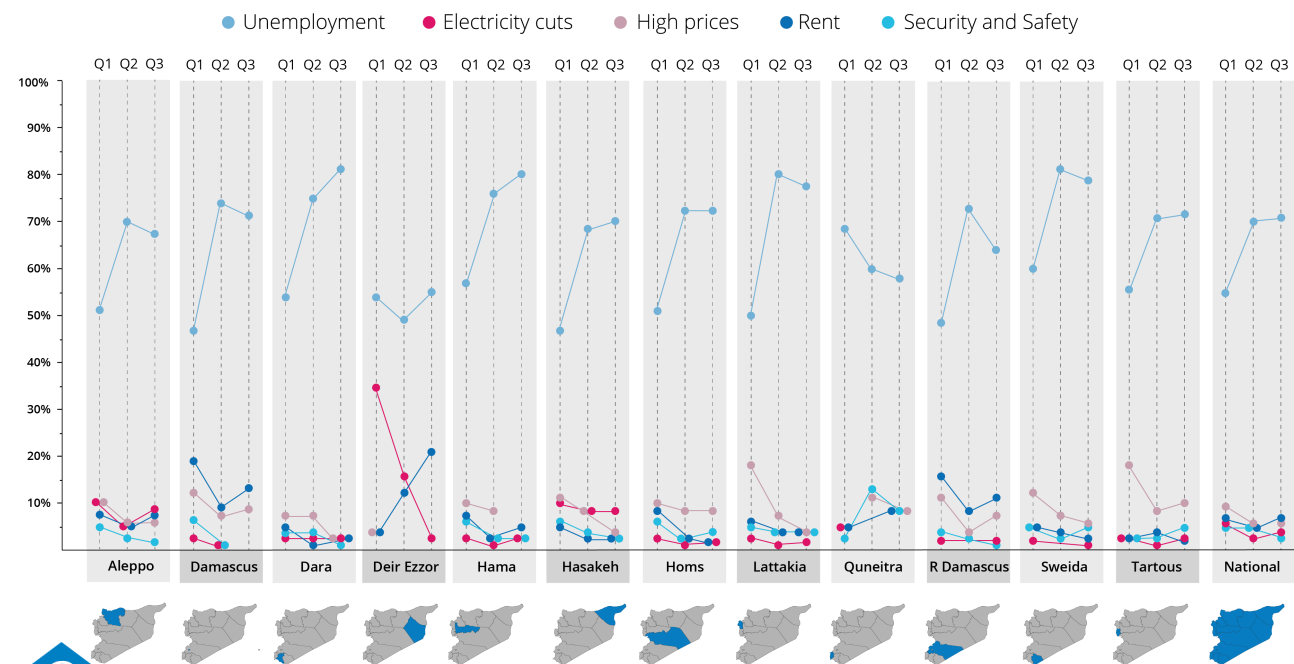


In the words of respondents

Figure 10 reflects the five main issues reported by Syrian households during the first three quarters of 2018. The main issue reported was unemployment including lack of income opportunities which increased from being reported by 55 percent of households in Q1 to 71 percent in Q3. Especially households in Dar'a and Hama have increasingly been reporting this issue.

The second most reported issue by households across Syria was related to rent at seven percent in both Q1 and Q3, mainly driven by Damascus and Rural Damascus, while high prices were reported especially in As-Sweida and Tartous. The share of households reporting high prices as their main issue fell from nine percent in Q1 to six percent in Q3. Similar falls were seen for issues related to electricity cuts (six percent vs. four percent) as well as safety and security (five percent vs. three percent).

Figure 10: Five main problems faced by surveyed households, quarterly overview for 2018



Methodology

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via live telephone interviews in September 2018 from households in locations across Syria. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1,285 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](#).



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