

Inadequate food consumption in the North, East and Central Syria

Key points



Inadequate food consumption continued to increase especially among displaced households



Households in conflict hotspots reported the highest level of coping strategies



Women-headed households are facing a significant worse food security situation compared to male-headed households.



Situation update

The security situation in many parts of the country remains volatile and unstable, especially in the governorates of Deir-ez-Zor, Hama, Aleppo and Idleb.

During the reporting period there have been increased reports of civilian casualties due to air-strikes and ground based fighting in south-east Deir-ez-Zor governorate. There are concerns for the estimated [6,000 people](#) who remain in ISIL-controlled areas in the vicinity of Hajin, where hostilities have reportedly been concentrated. IDPs displaced from Hajin over previous months continue to be dispersed across the surrounding areas, generally living in informal settlements and makeshift camps, more formal IDP sites in Gharanij and amongst the host community.

Since the end of November 2018, conflict in Idleb governorate and the surrounding areas of western Aleppo and north-western Hama intensified, with areas in northern Hama and southern Idleb governorates being affected by an increase in airstrikes and shelling. In particular, the community of Jarjanaz in Idleb was heavily impacted and experienced large displacements.

There continues to be an urgent and immediate need to scale up winter aid distribution (including sleeping bags, thermal blankets, winter clothes, plastic sheeting, winter NFI kits, heaters, stoves and fuel), particularly given the large number of IDPs living in inadequate shelters in IDP sites (including informal settlements and unfinished buildings) which are unable to withstand the harsh winter conditions.

Figure 1: Sample household characteristics



1,426
interviews



Male: 90%
Female: 10%



42 years
mean age
of respondent



IDP: 32%
Resident: 56%
Returnee: 12%



14%
received food
assistance



Rural: 39%
Urban: 61%



Inadequate food consumption continue to increase among displaced and returnee households

In December 2018, the overall share of households with poor and borderline food consumption remained stable for the third consecutive month: around 32 percent of the surveyed households reported having inadequate food consumption of which 11 percent poor and 21 percent borderline (Figure 2). The percent of households with poor food consumption has significantly decreased in Dar'a: in the hard-to-reach areas of the governorate the share of households with poor food consumption fell from 20 percent in November to 8 percent in December and in the accessible areas it decreased from 9 percent in November to 3 percent in December. On the other hand the share of households with borderline food consumption in Dar'a increased reaching 24 percent in hard-to-reach areas and 22 percent in accessible areas. Similarly in Tartous the percent of households with borderline food consumption continues to decreased since October reaching the lowest level in the past six months (3 percent) while in Hama a third of the surveyed households reported having borderline food consumption, rising 19 percentage points and reaching the highest levels among the surveyed governorates.

In relation to residency status, the share of households with inadequate food consumption continued to increase among displaced and returnees households. Borderline food consumption increased significantly for returnees households compared to November while

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

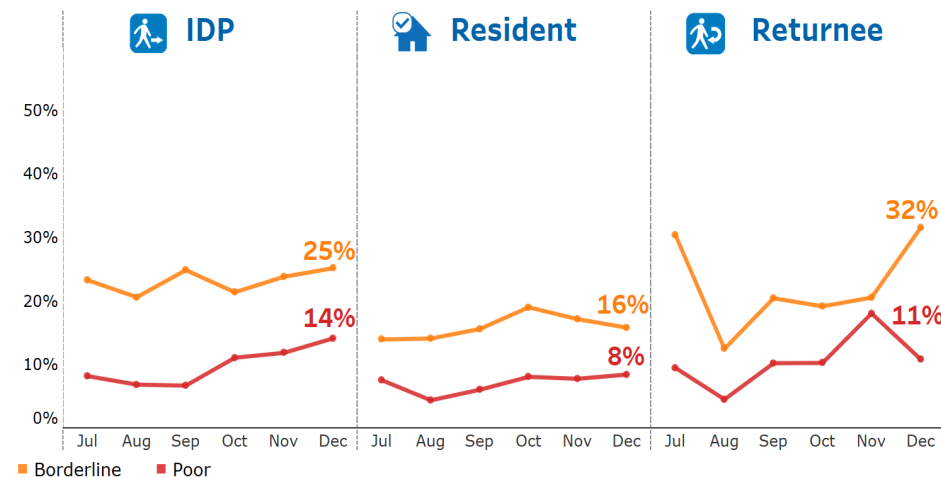
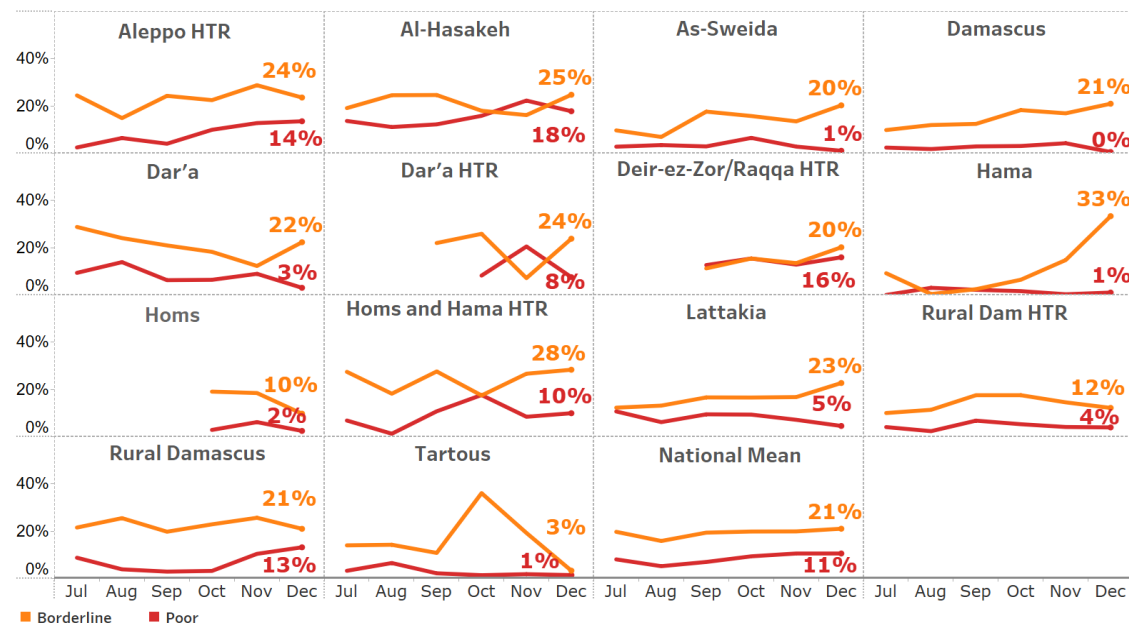
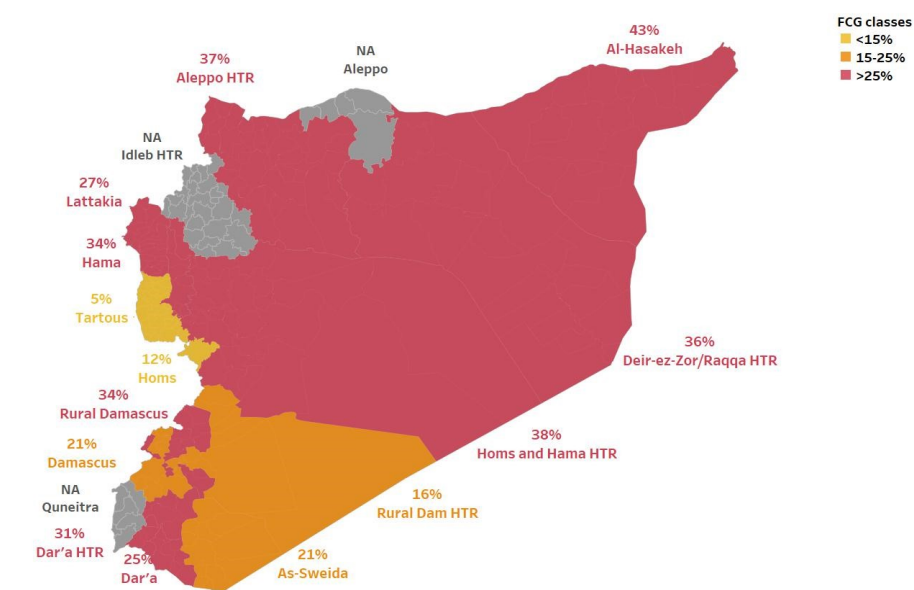


Figure 2: Percent of households with inadequate food consumption in aggregated governorates, July to December 2018



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



Reviewing the overall annual trend, the percent of households with inadequate food consumption fell in 2018 compared to 2017. However starting from September 2018 the percent of households with poor and borderline food consumption started to increase with December reporting the highest percent for the entire year and matched the 2017 December levels (Figure 4). In 2017 and 2018, the largest improvement in terms of food consumption was recorded in May. This recent increase is likely related to the lean season which has arrived early in 2018 due to the erratic rains which heavily reduced food production levels across Syria.

The overall average rCSI trend in 2018 also remained very similar to the previous year, suggesting that households are resorting to the same levels of coping strategies as in 2017. The slight improvement in 2018 might be due to a combination of continued humanitarian assistance and lower food prices. However, in 2018 the average rCSI exceeded the 2017 levels in February and October when it reached the year's highest recorded point before decreasing in November and December.

Regarding household diet by gender of the head of household, women-headed households reported a significant worse diet than male-headed households. In total, 47 percent of women-headed households reported inadequate food consumption (18 percent poor and 29 percent borderline), compared to 30 percent of male headed households reported inadequate food consumption (10 percent poor and 20 percent borderline). The main difference in the diets of households headed by females and males is the intake of protein, dairy and fresh foods (vegetables and fruits) as well as fats and sugar which are consumed less frequently by female-headed households.

Analysing the average rCSI, female-headed household are relying more on food-based coping strategies than male-headed households with a mean rCSI of 18.4 versus 13.8. A higher percent of female-headed-households are engaging in food consumption related coping strategies such as: limiting or reducing portion size at meals (54 percent), relying on less preferred or less expensive food (74 percent), reducing the number of meals eaten in a day (64 percent), borrowing food or relying on help from friends/relatives (63 percent), restrict consumption of adults so that children can eat (49 percent), and buying food on credit (72 percent).

Figure 4: Inadequate food consumption and rCSI average, 2017 vs. 2018

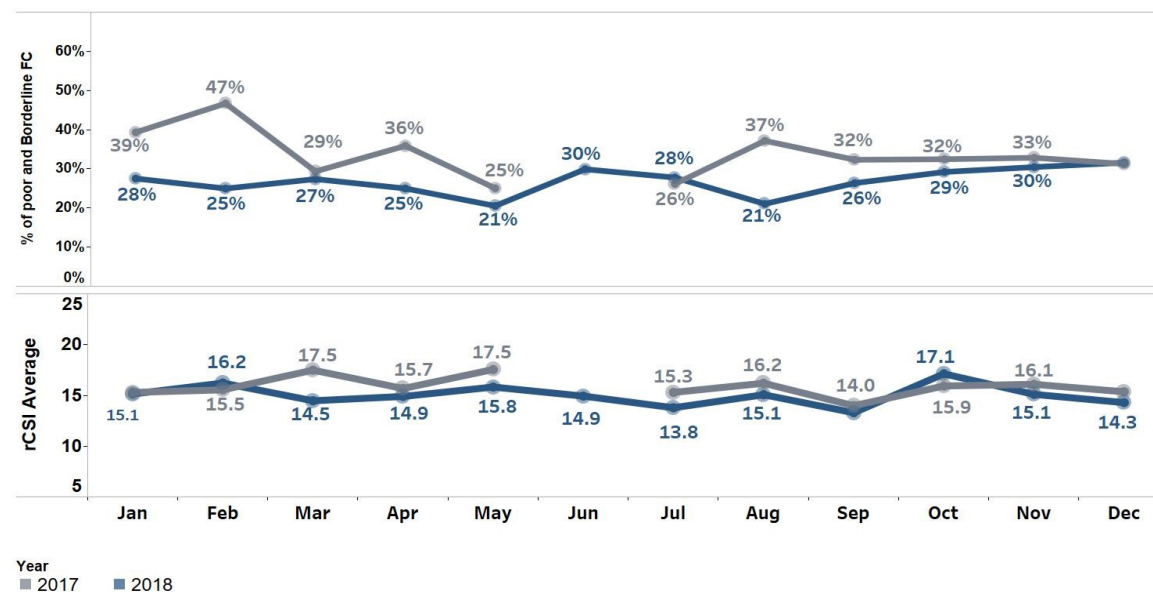
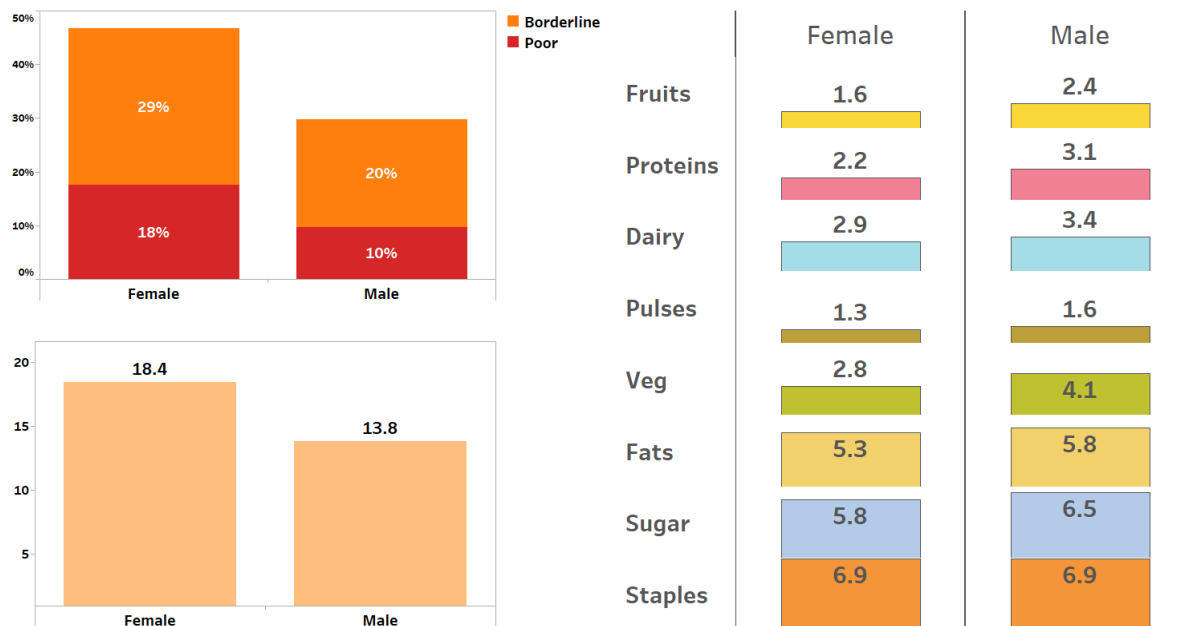


Figure 5: Inadequate food consumption, mean rCSI¹ and number of days food groups consumed by gender of head of household, December 2018



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.



Highest levels of coping registered in Hama and Deir-ez-Zor

In December, the national mean rCSI slightly decreased from 15.1 in November to 14.3 in December. This trend was recorded in most of the surveyed governorates and it was specifically significant in hard-to-reach areas of Dar'a, Rural Damascus and Tartous. On the other hand, the mean rCSI increased significantly in hard-to-reach areas of Homs and Hama and Lattakia (Figure 8). The highest rCSI continue to be reported in accessible areas of Hama at 20.5 followed by Deir-az-Zor and Raqqa at 17.2 and Lattakia at 17.1 (Figure 8). An overall four percent increase has been observed in the share of households that reported spending their savings (17 percent) in order to cope with lack of food or lack of money to buy food.

While the overall percent of displaced households relying on coping strategies decreased, in December an increase was observed in the percent of IDPs spending savings. Overall coping levels among non-displaced households remained at the same levels as November however returnee households resorted more to selling assets and reducing the number of meals eaten per day (Figure 9). The most widely applied food consumption strategy was buying less expensive and preferred food among displaced households (67 percent) and buying food on credit among returnees (65 percent) and among non-displaced households (54 percent).

Figure 8: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, July to December 2018

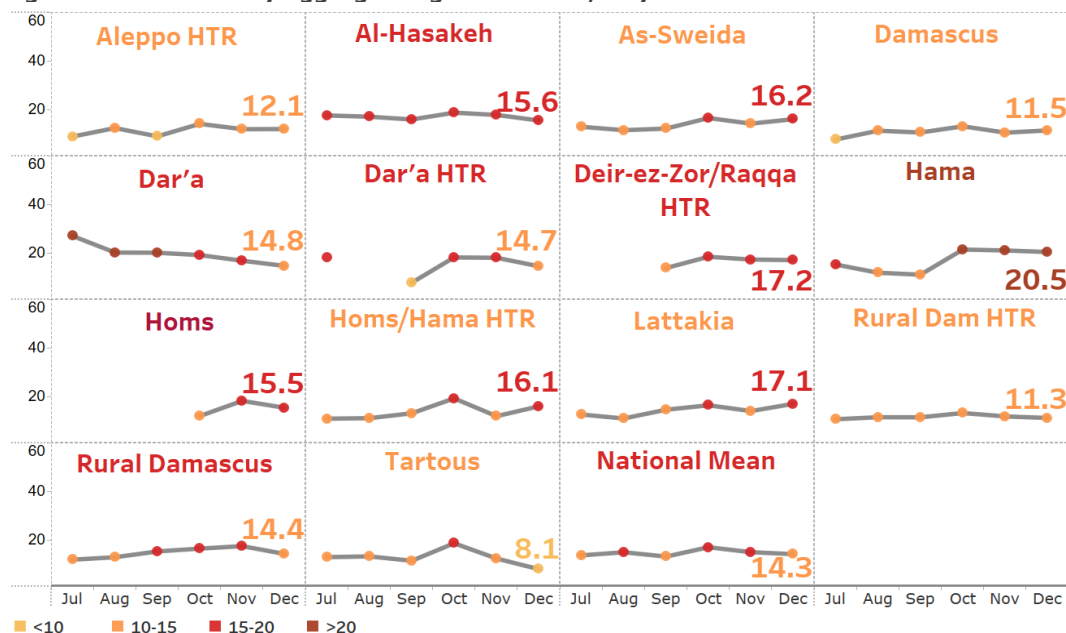
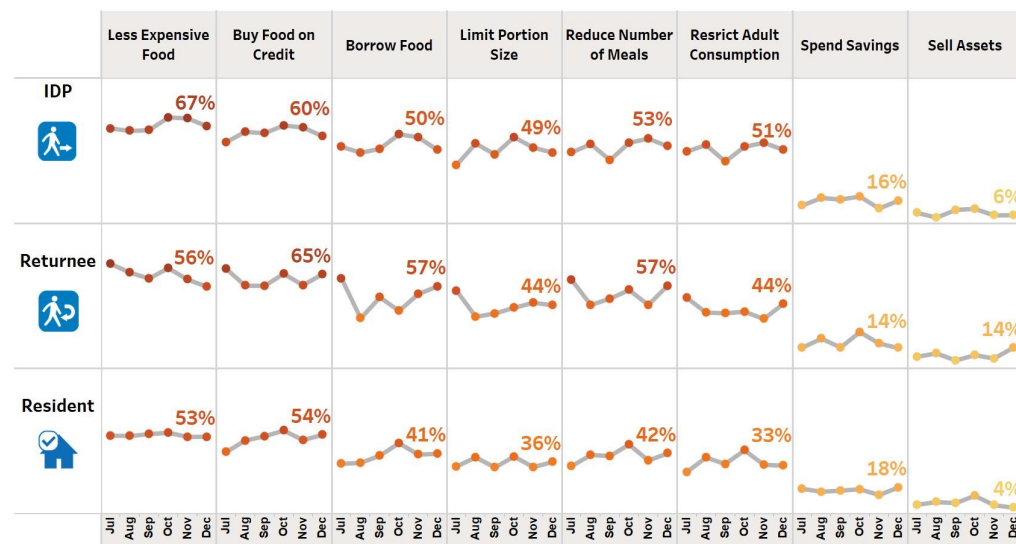
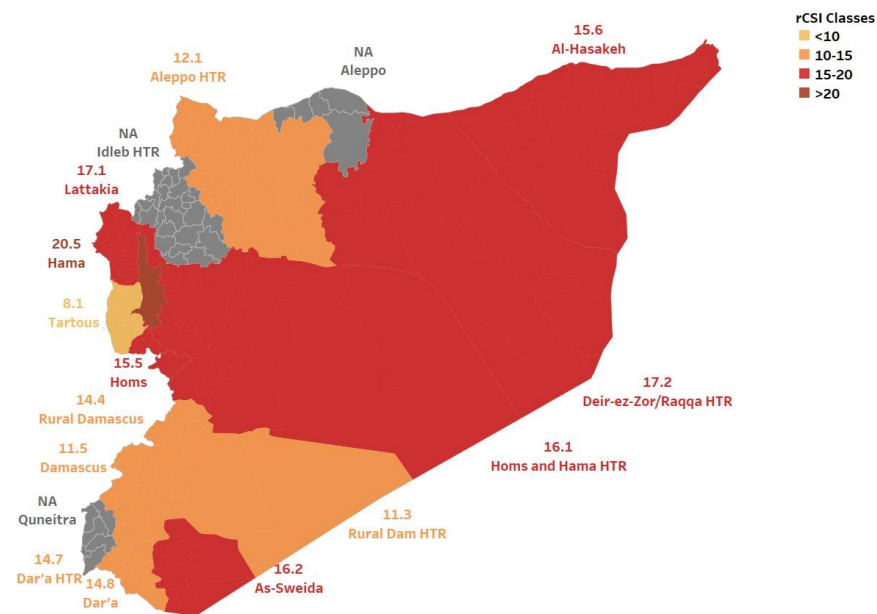


Figure 9: Coping by displacement status, July to December 2018



Map 2: Mean rCSI by aggregated governorates, December 2018

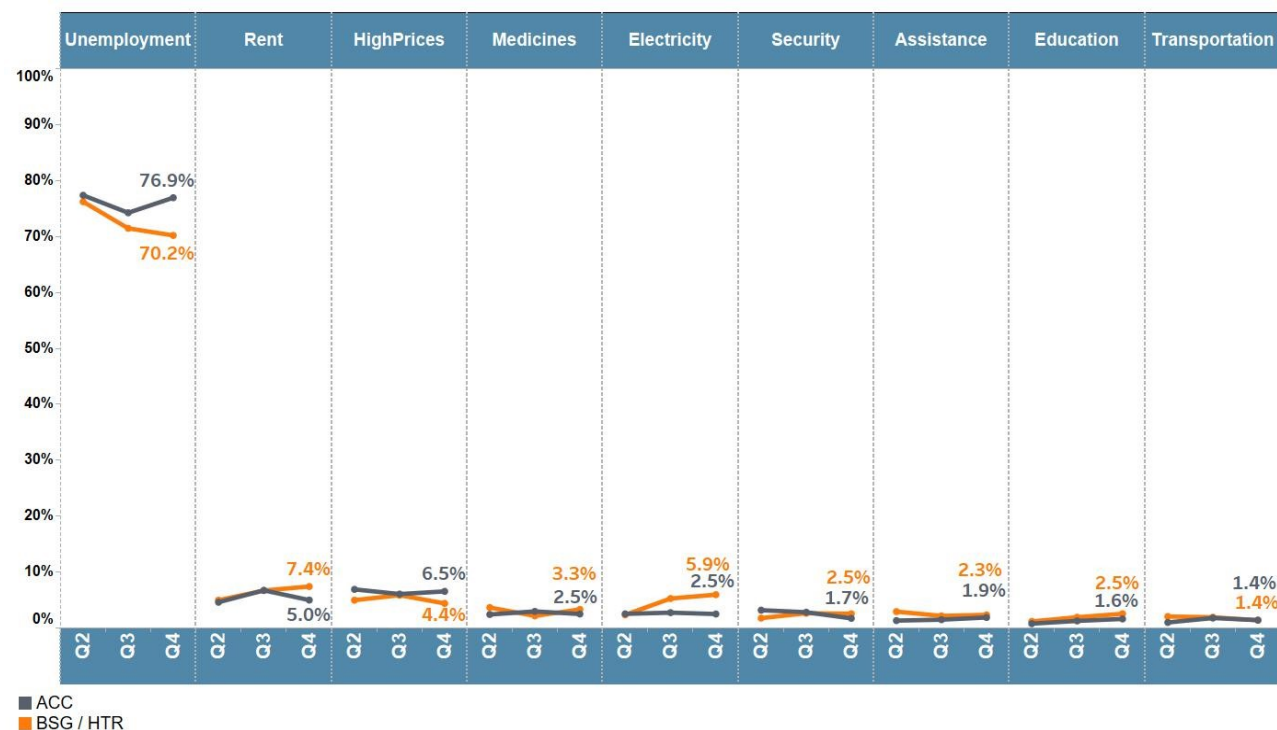




In the words of respondents

Each month, respondents are asked to identify the main problems their families are facing. The below graph shows how their main challenges changed in each quarter according to household area accessibility. mVAM data shows that unemployment and lack of job opportunities has been the top reported challenge since the second quarter and the percent of households reporting this issue has increased in the last quarter indicating that it remains a deep concern. Rent and high prices are reported as the second and third main issue by households living in both accessible and hard-to-reach areas.

Figure 10: Quarterly overview for households main challenges according to their areas accessibility



Methodology

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via live telephone interviews in December 2018 from households in locations across Syria. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1,394 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 July 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 June 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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mVAM Resources:

Website: http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/
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Toolkit: <http://resources.vam.wfp.org/mVAM>

