

SYRIA - Dar'a and Quneitra Rapid Assessment

Food Security Update: June 11, 2019

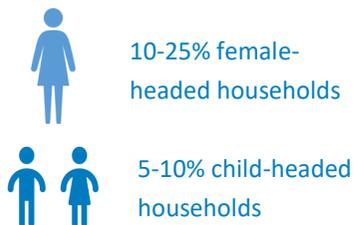


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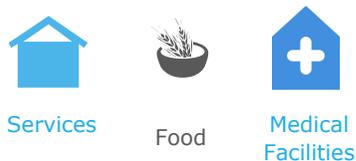


WFP and SARC meeting with community leaders in Nawa, Dar'a

AREA PROFILES



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES



FOOD SOURCES



RESIDENCY STATUS



KEY POINTS

- Following two rounds of blanket emergency food assistance, a rapid assessment was conducted jointly by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) from 26 – 30 May and then again from 10-11 June. In locations where this assessment took place during food distribution, monitoring observations will feed into strengthening future distributions. The joint exercise took place through key informant interviews, focus group discussions and food price monitoring. Over 400 people representing residents, IDPs and returnees were consulted on their humanitarian needs and priorities.
- This rapid assessment was conducted in 13 locations in Dara and Quneitra (south Syria), 12 of which are newly-accessible. This is the first time WFP conducts a rapid assessment directly with its staff in these locations. This is also the first time that WFP and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent conduct a joint assessment.
- In both Dar'a and Quneitra, high levels of infrastructure destruction were seen, causing a lack of critical services such as sanitation, health, and drinking water. Many families returned to partially or fully destroyed homes, and those homes that remained had been fully looted. Rebuilding efforts are hampered by a lack of resources and materials, as well as high prices. Unexploded ordnances (UXOs) were reported across the Yarmouk Basin in Dar'a, specifically in Ein Thakar.
- Both governorates are largely rural and, in some areas, up to 90% of the population engages in various kinds of agriculture-related activities. Food availability does not seem to be a concern as markets are well supplied. However, economic access to food remains a challenge as income is limited. Employee and daily worker salaries are too low and are barely enough to meet households' basic food and drinking water needs, leaving very little for health, education and other needs.
- Most families are reducing the number of meals consumed daily, relying on less preferred and cheaper foods and limiting portion of meals consumed. Households are also engaging in livelihood coping strategies to meet their food needs; resident and returnee groups reported selling household assets/goods, and selling non-productive animals, while IDP groups reported reducing non-food expenses and searching for alternative jobs.
- Markets are functional with sufficient quantities of food commodities. However, there is lack of capital and low cash liquidity. Interviewed groups reported that most households buy food on credit, in varying degrees.

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Talking to assisted people in Nawa, Dar'a



Food Basket Distribution in Nawa, Dar'a

RECOMMENDATIONS

- As the situation was not found conducive to implementing a regular programme, provide General Food Assistance (GFA) for returnees, IDPs and highly vulnerable residents through a three-month (July-September 2019) transitional emergency food assistance programme, which will entail an area-based intervention.
- During the transitional period of emergency food assistance, improve the capacity required to implement regular GFA, and explore programming for CMAM, School Feeding and Livelihoods.
- Conduct an in-depth assessment to explore ways for supporting livelihood-based programs in the area.
- Advocate with other agencies regarding mine risk awareness, WASH, Education, Shelter, Protection and Health services due to the high level of infrastructural damages and very limited services.

Situation Update

Between January 2015 and June 2018, WFP delivered food assistance to areas of Dar'a and Quneitra both from within Syria as well as through its cross-border operations from Jordan. The cross-border assistance was under the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2165 (UNSCR 2165). Following the "reconciliation process" in June 2018, all humanitarian deliveries to both governorates are directed from within Syria as the cross-border deliveries ceased for this region of the country.

Since July 2018, WFP, in collaboration with its partner Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), was able to assist 98 locations that came under reconciliation in Dara'a and Quneitra with up to two rounds of blanket emergency food assistance for over one million people. As per WFP's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), following two rounds of blanket emergency food assistance, an assessment is needed to determine the way forward with regular programme. In May, WFP dispatched the last round of emergency food assistance upon SARC's request to address the gaps in locations blanketed only once. In conjunction, WFP and SARC conducted a joint rapid assessment in Sahm al Jolan, Ein Thakar, Jillein in the Yarmouk Basin and Nawa in Dar'a, and Khan Arnabeh, Sweiseh, Rafid, Bir Ajam, Ghadir Elbostan and Hamiddiyeh in Quneitra. Additionally, Ghabagheb in Dar'a; Um Batna and Mashara in Quneitra were also assessed.

As per the interviewed community representatives in Dar'a, there are around 1,200 households in Sahm al Jolan (30% female-headed), 350 households in Ein Thakar (10-15% female-headed) and 375 households in Jillein (15% female-headed). Almost the entire current population of these three locations is comprised of returnees who returned between June and December 2018, after several displacements since the beginning of the crisis, particularly Ein Thakar. The community in Jillein also included Palestinian refugees. Nawa and Ghabagheb have a mix of residents, IDPs and returnees. There are around 12,000 households in Nawa, 25% of which is female-headed. According to information provided by interviewed community leaders and groups, 15% of households in Sahm al Jolan are child-headed, the highest rate amongst the five visited locations in Dar'a.

Situation update

As per the interviewed communities in Quneitra, Khan Arnabeh is home to 2,300 households, while Sweiseh and Rafid are home to 1,200 households each. Bir Ajam and Um Batna have smaller populations, with 550 and 150 households, respectively. For all locations, community representatives estimate that 10-20% of households are female-headed, except for Um Batna which is estimated at 30%. Most interviewed groups indicated that less than 10% of households are child-headed, with the average reported percentage being 7%. Most interviewed groups indicated that less than 10% of households are child-headed, with the average reported percentage being 7%. Khan Arnabeh has a mix of resident and IDP households, Sweiseh mostly returnee households, while Rafid has mostly resident households. Khan Arnabeh has a mix of resident and IDP households, Rafid has mostly resident households, Ghadir Elbostan mostly residents, while all other locations have mostly returnee households. Some residents in Khan Arnabeh reported that the presence of IDPs from other locations has put pressure on services and the market, and that residents are worse off than IDPs.

In Dar'a, locations visited have high levels of infrastructure destruction, causing a lack of critical services such as sanitation, health, and drinking water. Many families returned to partially or fully destroyed homes, and those homes that remained had been fully looted. Rebuilding efforts are hampered by lack of resources and materials, as well as high prices. In Nawa, only a small percentage of homes were rehabilitated. Presence of UXOs were reported across the Yarmouk Basin, specifically in Ein Thakar where some farmers and shepherds were injured or killed by mines. Several women complained that there are no clinics or hospitals that can support pregnant women in giving birth. Community leaders in Jillein noted that Anaemia is widespread. There are severe shortages of drinking water across eastern Dar'a; reportedly in Ghabagheb where drinking water was supplied for four hours per month, while in Ein Thakar and Jillen families are spending up to 70% of their income to purchase drinking water. Water shortages have had negative effects on agricultural production as well.

In Quneitra, interviewed groups in Sweiseh, Hamedidyeh, Beer Ajam, Um Batna, Mashara, where most families are returnees, reported that they returned to partially-destroyed and looted homes and that almost all homes need rehabilitation. In Hamideyyih, Mashara, Um Batna and Bir Ajam, there were no shops or bakeries. Bir Ajam and Um Batna did not have functioning schools. Overall, work opportunities are scarce and almost all interviewed groups spoke of how their areas, and Quneitra in general, used to be agricultural production hubs, and how the type of assistance that would best support them is livelihoods assistance. There was also an overwhelming number of people who noted that while water is abundant, many families are not able to access or gather it, as many wells are no longer functional.

Lack of identification documents was raised by community leaders and interviewed groups as a major issue in Dar'a, particularly in Nawa where two thirds of the population was reported to lack identification documents. This is hampering their freedom of movement and their ability to register to receive humanitarian assistance, creating frustration and tensions within the communities.

In Quneitra, lack of fuel is the most reported shock faced by the three visited locations, followed by increased prices and reported failed crops (mostly due to bad weather conditions). Food assistance and improved medical services were most frequently reported as community/area priorities. Interviewed groups in all locations reported a lack of proper medical facilities and that most facilities are for emergency medical cases only.



Destroyed homes on the way to Izra', Dar'a

Objectives of the assessment

- Assess the overall food security situation and market functionality.
- Assess how people's livelihoods have been affected by the crisis and how households are recovering.
- Identify the scale of and the food security priority needs.
- Identify possible areas for humanitarian intervention.

Food consumption and accessibility

Both Dar'a and Quneitra are highly agricultural governorates and in some areas, up to 90% of the population engages in agriculture-related activities and food is available in sufficient quantities in the market. As a result, food availability does not seem to be a concern. However, economic access to food remains a challenge as income is limited.

In Dar'a, households in all five locations reported consuming an average of three meals per day. A similar trend was found in Quneitra, except Ghadir Elbostan and Mashara where people reported consuming an average of two meals per day. Interviewed female groups, especially in Dar'a, reported that more than half of the families have had to reduce the number of meals consumed per day because they do not have enough money to buy food. Male groups reported a lower number, around half of the families. Bread, oil, rice and sugar are the main staple food commodities consumed in all locations. Families are spending most of their income to buy these nutrient-poor foods, leaving little money for other, healthier foods. Almost all groups reported that meat is consumed only a few times a month. The three main sources of food across all locations are shops, roadside vendors, and casual labour. According to information collected through focus group discussions, Khan Arnabeh in Quneitra has the highest dependence on food assistance out of all visited locations. Livelihoods (kitchen garden) beneficiaries in Um Batna mentioned that their monthly food ration is their main source of food.

In Dar'a, the price of a bundle of subsidized bread as reported by interviewed groups and retailers is SYP 100 in Sahn al Jolan and around SYP 65 for the other locations. All locations had functioning subsidized public bakeries except for Ein Thakar. In Quneitra, on the other hand, the price of a bundle of subsidized bread ranges from SYP 50 (when bought directly from a bakery) to SYP 75 (when bought through a middle man). Khan Arnabeh and Sweiseh have functioning subsidized public bakeries, while Rafid, Hamideyyih, Mashara, Um Batna and Bir Ajam in Quneitra have no functioning bakeries



On the way to Nawa, Dar'a



Distribution of food baskets in Nawa, Dar'a



Livelihood profile

Livelihoods in the visited locations centre around agriculture, with the majority of inhabitants engaging in agriculture. The three most important economic activities reported by interviewed groups are food crop production, livestock products and livestock trading. In Yarmuk basin in Dar'a, mines are widespread, and farmers are therefore unable to reach or cultivate their land. Remittance was reported in Quneitra, where, around 25% of families in Rafid receive monthly remittances, while the portion is less than 10% in all other visited locations.

Based on information received through conducted interviews, employees in the public sector are receiving their salaries but they are very low. It is reported to be around USD 85/month in Quneitra and USD 100/month in Da'ra. This is not sufficient to meet their monthly needs. For example, a food basket costs around half of that. Furthermore, drinking water reportedly costs around USD 40 per month in Dar'a. Between food and water, public sector employees, who are considered relatively "well off" compared to the rest of the affected population, can barely cover their food and drinking water needs. This leaves very little income for other household needs, forcing almost all households to resort to borrowing money or purchasing on credit.

The national average non-skilled labour wage in Syria was SYP 2,258 in April 2019. According to interviewed groups, the daily wage for unskilled labour in the assessed locations in Dar'a is SYP 1,500 and in Quneitra it is SYP 1,600. Many of the interviewed groups highlighted that this is very low and not enough to cover even minimum daily needs. Due to the very low rate of regular employment (reaching below 10% in Sahm Al Jolan, Ein Thakar and Jillein), there is high dependency on daily work, although not many opportunities are available. Some people are even seeking daily work in nearby villages and cities but are not always successful in finding work. As a result, most households are forced to borrow money or buy on credit.



Food and livelihood based coping strategies

Interviewed groups reported that households in all locations normally consume an average of three meals per day, except in Ghadir Elobstan and Mashara in Quneitra where two meals are consumed. However, most families are reducing the number of meals consumed daily, relying on less preferred and cheaper foods and limiting portion of meals consumed. Many families are purchasing food on credit and limiting adult intake for small children to eat.

Households are also engaging in livelihood coping strategies to meet their food needs. The most common strategies reported by IDP and returnee groups are selling household assets/goods (radio, furniture, refrigerator, television, etc.) and selling more non-bearing/male animals than usual. Interviewed IDP groups (which were all in Khan Arnabeh) reported reducing non-food expenses (health and education) and searching for alternative jobs as the two most common livelihood coping strategies. All interviewed groups across all locations reported that most families have no savings at all, which they spent to rebuild their homes, or to meet their food needs. Even though schools are free, there are a number of families who take their children out of school to work in agriculture to bring in additional income.

Early marriage (as young as 13 years of age) to cut down on expenses was reported. It was highlighted by female groups that many of these young women have become single mothers and/or heads of household as their husbands have either died or are unable to access or support their young wives.



Kitchen Gardens in Mashara, Quneitra



Talking to community leaders in Sahem Al Jolan, Dar'a

Markets and food prices

Market accessibility for consumers and suppliers alike was restored in the second half of 2018 across Dar'a and Quneitra following the change of control. While food is available in sufficient quantities in the local markets, it is not accessible for many due to the high prices and low income levels as very few families have an employed member. There is high dependency on irregular daily-wage (SYP1,500 -1,600 per day) work, mostly in agriculture.

In Quneitra, there are only two big markets in the governorate, which for some of the visited villages are difficult to reach in terms of distance and prices. Most villages mostly rely on weekly markets, which are more affordable than small fixed shops. Quneitra is also dependant on the markets in Dar'a for supplies (for instance the shops in Rafid receive their supplies from Nawa in Dar'a).

Food prices in both governorates remain high compared to before June 2018, although not significantly higher than national level. The significant level of infrastructural damage meant that many families spent their last savings on rebuilding their homes, leaving these families very vulnerable to shocks. Interviewed groups across the five visited locations indicate that there is an average of 50-75% increase in the number of families that buy on credit compared to before June 2018.

Retailers mentioned that supply routes are functional and that food prices, particularly meat, increased since the opening of the Syrian-Jordanian border (end 2018) due to the increased demand from the Jordanian side. In Mashara, interviewed groups reported that meat is expensive and unaffordable to most households. It was mentioned in several of the interviews conducted that the distribution of food assistance normally brings food prices down, which retailers also confirmed. This adds another layer to the benefits of food assistance in these vulnerable communities.

According to WFP's April Market Price Watch Bulletin, the cost of the standard food basket in Dar'a in April 2019 was SYP 25,297 and in Quneitra was SYP 23,42. The cost of the food basket in Dar'a is the second highest in Syria and about 1,000 SYP higher compared to the national average. This is an increase by 1% compared to March 2019, 7% compared to October 2018 and 6% compared to April 2018. The food basket in Quneitra did not change from March 2019 nor April 2018. However, it is 6% higher than the price of the standard food basket in October 2018.

Information provided by retailers and families interviewed during the rapid assessment is in line with these increases. Based on the collected prices during this rapid assessment, the average cost of the standard food basket for the five visited locations in Dar'a is SYP 24,567, however, it was SYP 23,615 in Ghabagheb and SYP 26,110 in Sahm al Jolan. All locations reported shortages of fuel. Based on the collected prices during this rapid assessment in Quneitra, the average cost of the standard food basket for the visited locations is SYP 25,586. In both governorates, the lack of fuel and its increase in price was reported by many interviewed groups and retailers as one of the main shocks faced by these communities and a key cause for increased food prices. All locations reported shortages of fuel.



Collecting market prices in Nawa, Dar'a



Market commodities in Khan Arnabeh, Quneitra

Methodology

The assessment was conducted along with food distribution which was monitored by WFP/SARC jointly. The distribution monitoring report will feed into improving future distribution mechanism. The assessment employed qualitative data collection instruments and secondary data analysis. Data collection took place in two phases: first from 26-30 May and then again from on 10-11 June.

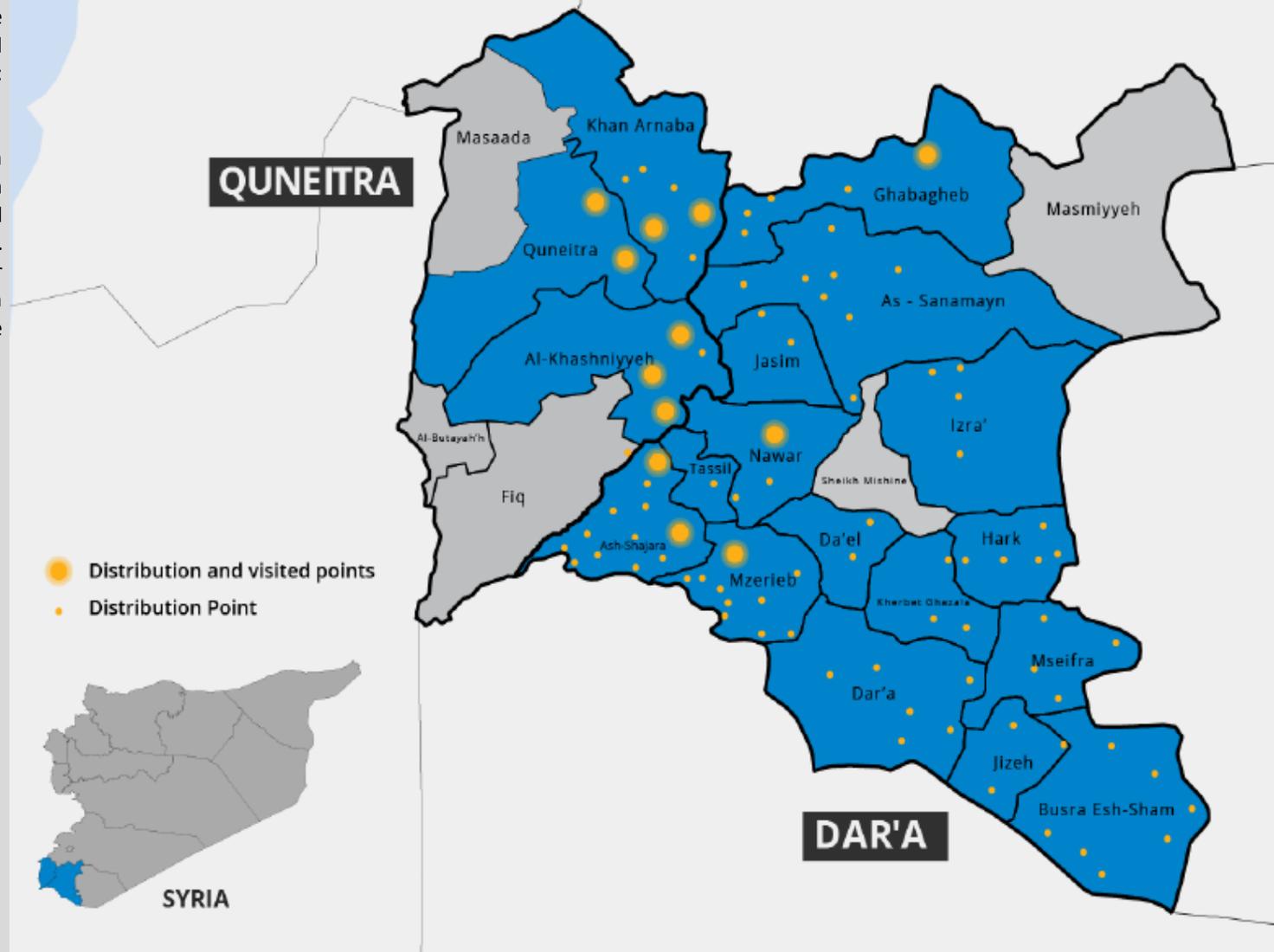
In total 42 focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with community leaders/key informants and general affected population groups (separate male and female groups) in the visited communities. 16 FGDs were conducted in Dar'a and 26 in Quneitra. In total, over 400 community members were consulted on their humanitarian needs and priorities. Shop keepers were interviewed in each location. The following topics/indicators were included in the survey:

- Food sources, consumption patterns, coping strategies, community-level priorities, shocks and livelihood/ income activities.
- Market volumes, flows, constraints and capacity, supply routes beside food stocks and prices.
- The impact the end of hostilities had on market functionality, food availability and prices of main staple commodities through secondary information and FGD.

Limitations

Due to limited available time and movement restrictions, FGD and market interviews with a sufficient sample size to be representative of the total population were not possible. The findings are therefore only indicative of the food security situation in the assessed area.

RAPID ASSESSMENT IN DARA AND QUNEITRA



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