



THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

CROP AND FOOD SECURITY ASSESSMENT MISSION

Highlights

18 July 2017



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

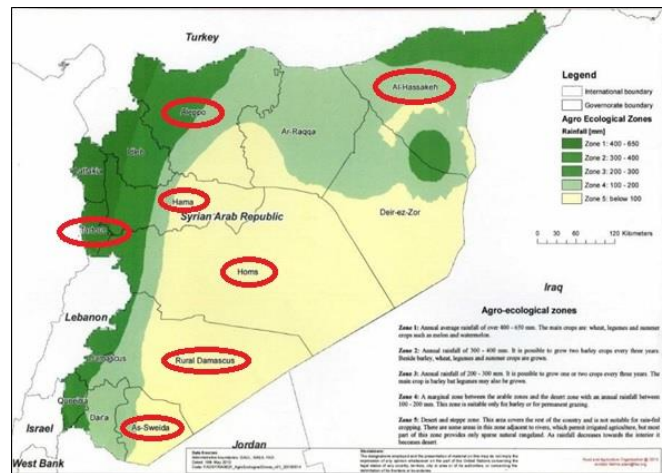


World Food
Programme



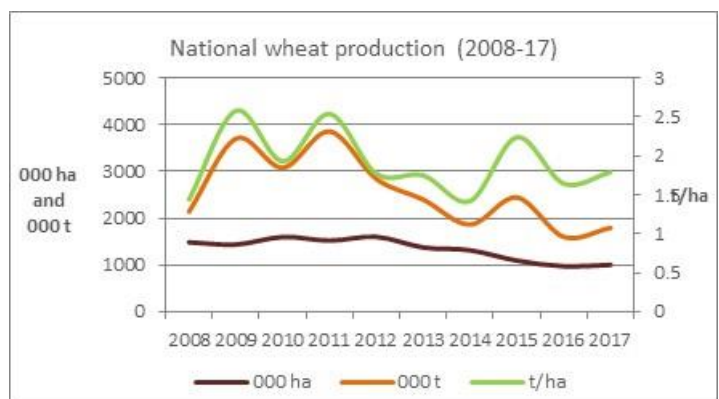
Scope and coverage

A team of 12 agriculture, livestock and food security international and national experts from FAO and WFP visited the Syrian Arab Republic in May 2017 to conduct an independent Crop and Food Security Assessment. This was the fourth assessment since the beginning of the crisis in 2011, however, for the first time, the team was able to visit 7 governorates, including Aleppo, Homs and Al-Hasakeh, the former bread-basket in North Eastern Syrian Arab Republic at the border with Turkey. The team conducted visits to farms and markets, and interviewed farmers, traders, displaced and resident households across the country to cross-check secondary information provided by the Government and International Organizations.



Crop production

Production of wheat and barley slightly improved in 2017 compared to the previous year due to better rainfall and improved access to agricultural land in some areas. The total wheat production has been estimated at 1.8 million tonnes, 12 percent more than last year's record low harvest but still much less than half of the pre-conflict average of 4.1 million tonnes (2002-2011). Main agricultural constraints continue to be high production costs and a lack of inputs as well as the impact of the crisis on infrastructure including irrigation.



Source: FAOSTAT, CFSAM

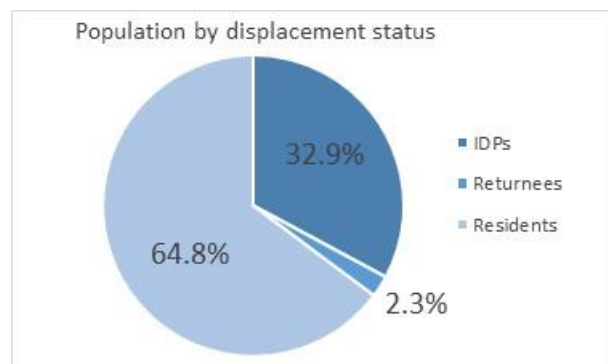


Livestock

Over the past two years, the herd sizes have stabilized albeit at very low levels. Main constraints continue to be high fodder prices, insufficient coverage of veterinary services and access to grazing areas in some parts of the country. Improved pasture conditions, benefitting from higher rainfall, will ease supply constraints and keep a lid on fodder prices.

Displacement

In addition to the millions who have fled the Syrian Arab Republic due to the war, about two in five people are on the move inside the country. By May 2017, 6.3 million were internally displaced – most of them multiple times - and 440 000 people have returned to their home areas benefiting from the improved security situation in parts of the country. At the same time, the fluidity of the conflict has resulted in new displacements, with seven out of 14 governorates experiencing an increased number of IDPs compared with the beginning of the year.



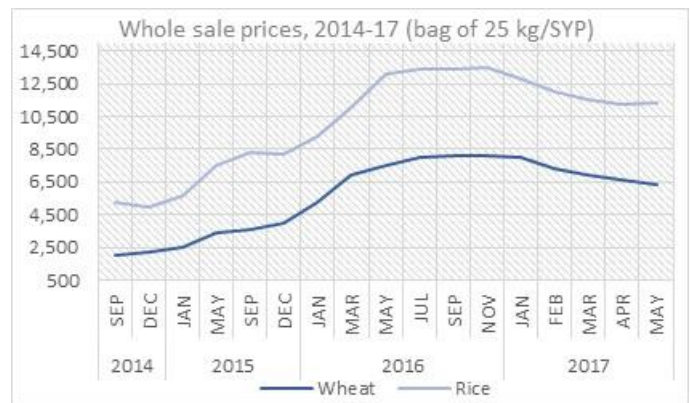
Source: Syria Needs and Population Monitoring (NPM)

Humanitarian access

Access continues to be heavily constrained across the Syrian Arab Republic, especially in Deir-ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa. While the humanitarian situation in Deir-ez-Zor city has slightly improved due to air drops, the situation in Ar-Raqqa remains critical. Shops are destroyed and the costs of the standard food basket has sharply increased by 42 percent between May and June 2017. Some of the previous "besieged areas" are now considered "hard-to-reach".

Markets

Due to the overall improved security situation and opening of supply routes, trade is slowly recovering throughout the country and urban markets appear to function well. Markets in parts of Eastern Aleppo city are slowly recovering from a status of full destruction. Food prices continue to be very high compared to two and three years ago, but have slightly decreased in parts of the country compared to the previous year.



Source: WFP

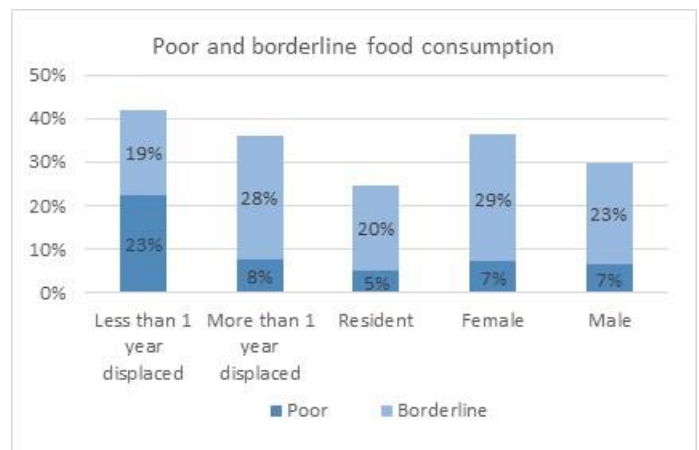


Livelihood trends

With slightly improved market access and market functionality, livelihood opportunities in the formal and informal sector have improved compared to the previous year. The purchasing power of casual labourers and pastoralists has slightly improved since December last year, but continues to be lower compared to 2014 and 2015. IDP households are often receiving lower wages or have less capacity to work. They resort to working longer hours and using child labour as a coping strategy. As many men have left or been drafted, women have a larger burden to bear to sustain their families.

Food consumption and dietary diversity

Over 30 percent of households have a diet characterized by poor quality and quantity. The situation is more severe among resident households in hard-to-reach and besieged areas as well as for internally displaced households. Most vulnerable are people who have been displaced for less than one year. Female-headed households and large households with many children are more likely to have low consumption levels. Overall, the situation has slightly improved compared to the previous year.



Source: WFP, mVAM (January to May 2017)

Coping strategies

Syrians resort to numerous food coping strategies, which is a signal of the stress they are confronted with in the face of food shortages. Some 50 percent of households have reduced the number of meals and more than 30 percent restrict the consumption of adults to prioritize children. In the seventh year of the crisis, a large majority of the households have depleted their assets and are no longer able to cope. A major coping strategy is to rely on child labour and withdraw children from school.

Food assistance needs

Based on the available data, the mission estimates that 6.9 million Syrians are food insecure. In addition, the situation of 5.6 million Syrians would likely be worse off without the food assistance provided. An additional 3.1 million are at risk of food insecurity as they are using asset depletion strategies in order to meet their consumption needs, and only 3.5 million can currently be considered food secure. Given the complex environment, there is no clear trend of improvement compared to the situation in mid-2016. On the one hand, there are fewer people with poor or borderline consumption compared to 2016. This reflects, inter alia, improved access to humanitarian assistance. On the other hand, the proportion of households with acceptable consumption levels who are not relying on assistance or depleting assets has declined.

Agricultural livelihoods needs

Over the last seven years, the agricultural sector has been devastated (loss of farm land, movement of farmers away from insecure areas, destruction of farm machinery, storage facilities and irrigation infrastructure) leading to deteriorating agricultural livelihoods. Despite the devastation, agriculture remains a key part of the economy and provides a lifeline for millions of Syrians. The majority of farmers, especially crop farmers have remained on their land. Agricultural livelihoods support is even more critical in order to strengthen the resilience of the affected population and mitigate negative coping mechanisms. Focus will be placed on interventions aimed at the immediate to medium term food and nutrition security needs as well as diversifying income and agricultural livelihoods opportunities of the most vulnerable households.

Key recommendations

To enhance the overall food security situation and rebuild resilience in the Syrian Arab Republic, the mission recommends to focus on two priority areas:

1. Address the immediate needs to support food security and strengthen absorptive capacity of vulnerable populations, in particular displaced households and returnees during their initial period back home.
2. Provide basis for sustainable longer term solutions to facilitate and strengthen the viability of rural and urban livelihoods and rebuild resilience of the population, particularly returnees by providing an enabling environment for agricultural production and facilitating supply of necessary inputs for crop and livestock production.

Priority actions

- The immediate needs include **support for the upcoming 2017-2018** cereal campaign by provision of good quality seeds to the most vulnerable farmers to increase agriculture production and enhance food security in the country.
- In the short and medium term, continue to provide support that will **protect, improve and restore agricultural livelihoods** of vulnerable households in the country through provision of agricultural inputs and services (household vegetable production and poultry/small ruminants rearing, production of staple crops, i.e. wheat and barley, vaccination and treatment of livestock, provision of supplementary animal feed, implementation of cash-based programmes, among others).
- Whenever possible security permitting, rehabilitate and improve the **seed production and distribution system** for selected crops; rehabilitate damaged irrigation infrastructure and storage facilities.
- Continue to strengthen **information management, early warning and coordination** of food security and agriculture sector in the country and build capacity of national partners.
- Continue **life-saving assistance**, in particular to vulnerable IDPs and returnees and in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, while gradually increasing the focus on **livelihood activities** to rebuild resilience – especially in areas that are stabilizing and with high return rates of IDPs.
- Monitor areas with **new influxes of IDPs**, such as As-Sweida, Hama, Aleppo and Lattakia and adjust assistance levels if required.
- Expand the existing **school meals and back-to school** initiatives and provide incentives for vulnerable displaced households to send their children to school.
- Expand the nutrition programme for pregnant and lactating women to increase their **access to a healthy and balanced diet**.
- With the improving market situation, there is an increasing scope to expand programmes using **cash-based transfers**; especially, in urban and peri-urban settings with functional markets.
- Enhance **partner capacities** to implement needs-based targeting and monitor assistance programmes.



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