



World Food Programme

Bulletin 1 — January 2016

Syria



January 2016 — Worsening food security conditions in besieged areas

Highlights

- According to the Food Security Assessment, 6.3 million people are food insecure nationwide, with another 2.4 million facing a high risk of food insecurity.
- IDPs, returnees and households in hard to reach and besieged areas are the most vulnerable and food insecure— particularly in Deir ez-Zor City (100%), Madaya (84%), Harasta (78%), Ar Raqqa (69%) and Daryya (63%).
- In most besieged areas, access to food is increasingly problematic due to limited food availability, exceedingly high food price and diminishing employment opportunities, resulting in dwindling purchasing power, deteriorating consumption, and increasing use of negative coping.
- The cost of a standard food basket in besieged areas is significantly higher than pre-siege prices. In Deir ez-Zor, the cost is 12 times higher than in central Damascus; in East Ghouta and Qudsayya, the cost is at least 2 to 3 times above Damascus.

Context

Inside Syria, 4.5 million people are living in hard to reach and besieged areas. 2.5 million people living in these areas are severely food insecure. 400,000 severely food insecure people live in besieged areas (Deir EzZor city, Daraya, Madaya, Foah and Kafraya, East Ghouta, ArRastan, etc.) while 2.1 million live in hard to reach areas in Ar-Raqqa, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Dara'a, Idlib governorates and Deir-ez-Zor rural.

According to the WFP Market Monitor, the impact of staple food price changes on the cost of the basic food basket from October to December 2015 was severe. Ongoing conflict continued to disrupt trade and access to food: seasonally adjusted prices surged for sugar (+23%) and oil (+21%). The besieged governorate of Deir Ezzor recorded the highest quarterly price increase (+27% sugar and +62% oil); sugar and oil were respectively 17 and 10 times more expensive than last year.

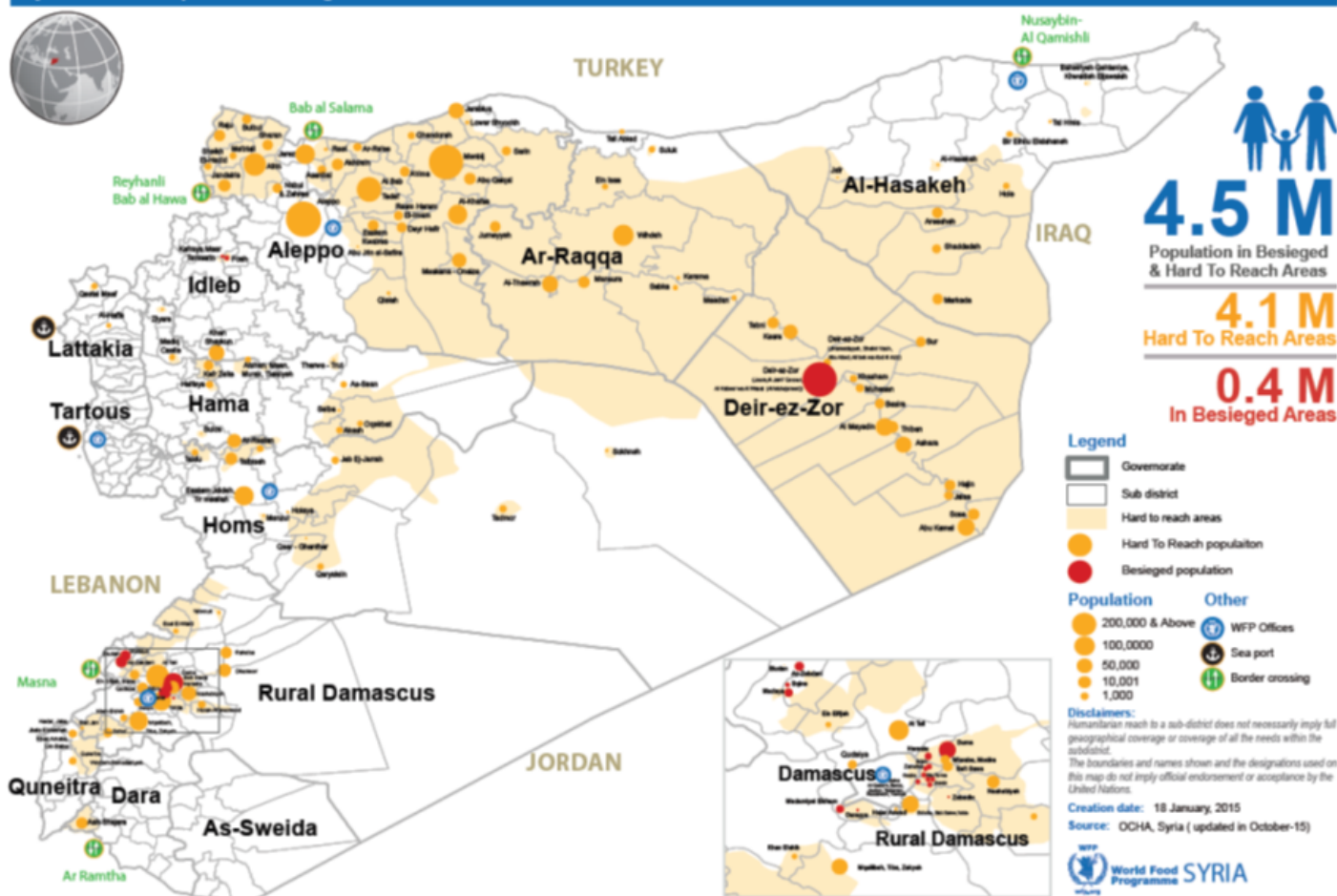
Food Security:

Based on data from WFP's Food Security Assessment, it is estimated that nationwide 6.3 million people are food insecure with another 2.4 million facing a high risk of food insecurity. IDPs, returnee and households in hard to reach and besieged areas gave rise to the greatest concern, as they are the most vulnerable and food insecure.

An estimated 4.5 million people are located in besieged and hard to reach areas in Syria. It is estimated that 2.5 million of them are severely food insecure. In besieged areas, almost all inhabitants are food insecure and do not have access to life-saving aid they urgently need. Based on FSA data it is estimated that 100 percent in Deir ez-Zor City, 84 percent in Madaya, 78 percent in Harasta, 69 percent in Ar Raqqa and 63 percent in Daryya are food insecure (Figure 1).

Map 1: Syria Besieged and hard to reach area

Syrian Arab Republic: Besieged and Hard To Reach Areas

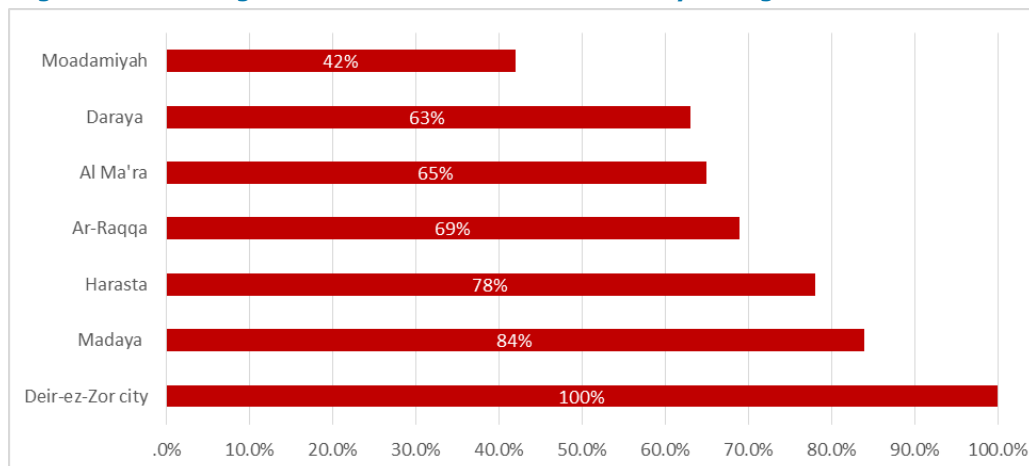


Food Access and Availability:

In most of the besieged areas, availability of- and access to food has become increasingly problematic as a result of long sieges. Factors that underpin the prevailing food insecurity are limited access to infrastructure, high food prices and reduced livelihood activities.

In rural areas under siege, people have been able to produce limited agricultural products that help them cope to a limited extent, but in urban besieged areas like Deir ez-Zor City residents lack access to arable land and they are mostly dependent on purchasing food from market and through credit and assistance if available. However, it is reported that even in some areas of Madaya and Zabadani where agriculture was previously the main livelihood and source of food for households, land is no longer accessible due to land mines.

Figure 1. Percentage of food insecure households in key besieged areas



Food Consumption:

In many besieged areas it is reported that most of people are eating only cheap cereals such as barley, bulgur and dried beans. Local agricultural production has been the primary mode of survival for many living under siege, particularly in rural areas such as Eastern Ghouta and the villages of northern Homs governorate. Whilst in urban areas such as Deir ez-Zor, households are consuming one meal per day on average with priority given to the children. Bread and water are the main food consumed by almost all households on daily basis. Other food categories such as vegetables, fruits and milk are not accessible for poor households. Some families drink large quantities of water to quell their feeling of hunger. Most of the households derive over 80 percent of their caloric intake from staples (cereals), reflecting poor access to a nutritious and balanced diet. After staples, the main sources of energy are oil, followed by dried beans. Dietary diversity is particularly low for the poorest people who have no access to regular income and remittances.

No fruits or vegetables are available in Madaya, where residents have been reduced to subsist on soup made of boiled grass and at most a fraction of a cup of rice daily. Bread was also not available during the last seven months.

Coping strategies:

Due to the lengthy sieges, almost every household has experienced difficulties in accessing food. Information from focus group discussions and key informants interviews showed that desperate and irreversible coping strategies have been adapted. Food related coping strategies including reliance on cheaper and least preferred foods, borrowing food and depending on help from friends and relatives, reducing the size and number of meals, reducing adult consumption in favour of more food for children.

Other reported coping strategies includes early marriage of pre-pubescent daughters and the indenture of young boys for labour by families that cannot afford to support them at home. The selling of household assets has occurred through most of besieged areas. All this has, and continues to, lead to a compromised future in terms of food security and livelihoods.

Markets:

Currently, the majority of the besieged communities are completely surrounded by armed groups that intentionally block access for the civilian population over an extended period of time and also inhibit the movement of goods; resulting in extreme shortages of food. Markets have been severely disrupted and only a few food commodities are available in some local markets, for example bread, rice, sugar, tea and vegetable oil in limited quantities with very high prices. In other markets such as East Ghouta and Eastern Aleppo, what little food enters these areas does so through smuggling or bribery.



Prices of basic goods are extremely high in besieged areas. In Deir ez-Zor, for example, the cost of the standard food basket was SYP 240,000 which is 16 times higher compared to their pre-siege prices of SYP 15,000 and 12 times higher than the cost of the same food basket in central Damascus. In East Ghouta and Qudsayya, the food basket costs at least 2 to 3 times more than Damascus central market. With the breakdown of the economy and very few paying jobs available in the besieged areas, many people are unable to purchase smuggled goods even when they are available in the markets. Prices are equally high in other besieged areas. Firewood prices in besieged locations are reportedly more than three times higher than their normal cost. In most markets in besieged areas there is limited or no diesel supply. During the current winter, families rely on cutting wood and burning their clothes to keep warm. Currently a litre of diesel in Deir ez-Zor is being sold at 1,435 SYP, which is 10 times higher than last year and more than seven times compared to the price in Damascus. While in Darayya City, a litre of diesel is sold at 2,500 SYP, gas cylinder 30,000 SYP, high prices that are not affordable for most households.

Trend of bread and cereal prices over past year in besieged areas

The analyses have shown that prices for bread and rice were much higher in besieged areas than prices in Damascus. This is depicted in (figure 2, 3) charts with the first chart illustrating the price of unsubsidized bread across markets in besieged areas during the last three years. The besieged market of Eastern Ghouta registered the highest price with SYP 1,200/bundle (80 times higher than Damascus) during May 2014, reflecting the scarcity of wheat flour and the breakdown of government bakeries in the area. Consequently, bread production in the area relied on irregular supplies of smuggled wheat flour. Supply has since improved, and a bundle was sold last month for SYP 350.

Despite the complex of the conflict and shortage of fuel, in Deir ez-Zor the government bakeries are still functioning. However, the production is insufficient and the bundle of bread has been shrunk to four pieces instead of the usual eight. The price is SYP 150/bundle (three times more than Damascus) but people have to wait in long queues for hours every day.

In Qudsayya, which has been besieged about six months, bread has remained available though at a high price (SYP 360/bundle, eight-folds more than Damascus) and only in limited quantities in a buffer zone that requires walking one hour and passing through several checkpoints.

A close monitoring of the national rice prices during 2015 shows that prices in Eastern Ghouta have dropped recently reaching almost one third of last year's level. The last price recorded during reporting time was SYP 650/kg. The falling prices reflect recent food availability in the market due to smuggling and some local production of vegetables and animal products.

One of the highest prices for rice was observed in Deir ez-Zor two months ago (SYP 1900/kg); however, the price has dropped slightly to SYP 1700/kg during last month. The protracted siege combined with the depreciation of the Syrian Pound explain high prices there.

Figure 2. Trend of rice prices over past year in besieged areas

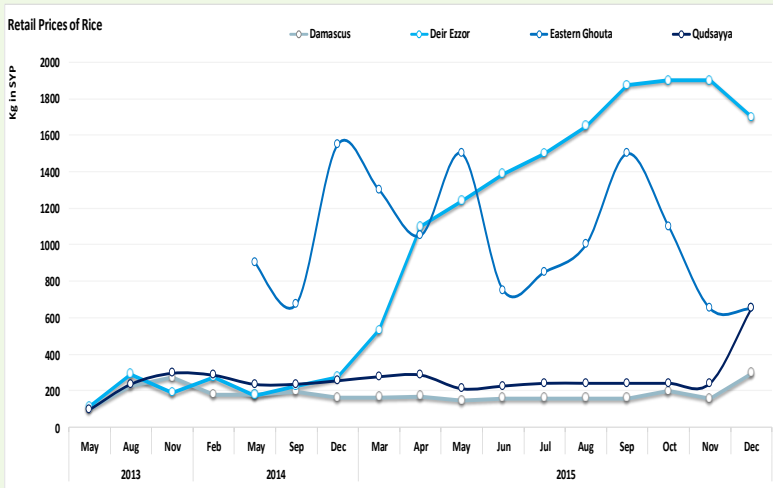
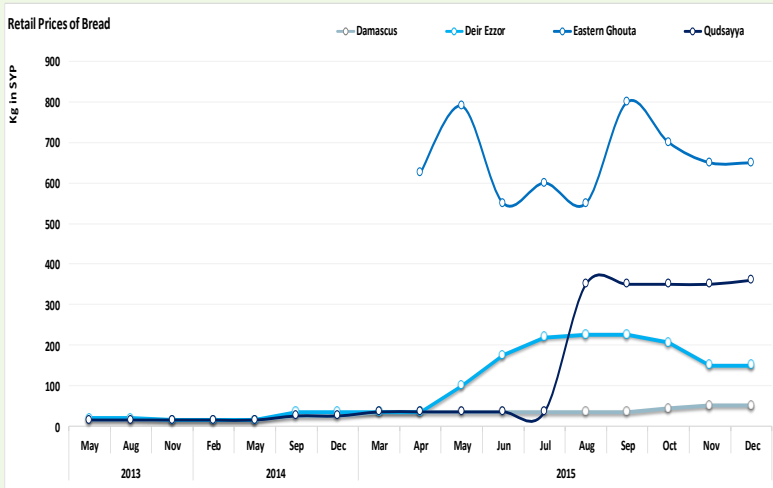


Figure 3. Trend of bread prices over past year in besieged areas



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