

SYRIA

Food insecurity and negative coping reach alarming levels



vam
food security analysis

KEY MESSAGES:

Food insecurity has reached alarming levels among households in besieged areas and internally displaced people (IDPs) – particularly those displaced within the past year.

The use of negative food-related coping is rampant in Syria – 79 percent of all surveyed households are struggling to cope with a lack of food or money to buy food.

In Darayya, Madaya and Az-Zabadani bakeries are not functioning because of extreme fuel and wheat flour shortages.

Households are contending with high food prices, a lack of income-generating opportunities and continual power cuts.

Food shortages and currency depreciation have sent food prices soaring, making food unaffordable for households with low stable incomes: some vulnerable households in besieged areas are facing possible starvation.



SITUATION UPDATE

The Cessation of Hostilities that came into effect on 27 February has resulted in a de-escalation of fighting in most parts of the country. There were fewer displacements in March thanks to the reduced violence.

However, there continue to be intense clashes and displacement in western rural Dar'a (Sheikh Miskine) - where 12,500 people were displaced from the worst affected areas, including Sehm Al-Golan, Hit, Tassil and Jlein by the second half of March, and in northern rural Aleppo - where at least 40,000 people has been displaced from the affected areas and sought refuge in rural areas between A'zaz and Al-Raee. During the last week of April, the security situation has also quickly deteriorated in Aleppo city, where violence had gradually escalated causing significant number of casualties and widespread material damage.

In Al-Hasakeh, continued closure and interrupted access through borders are affecting the delivery of humanitarian and commercial supplies, leading to food shortages and price rises.

The food security of households in areas where there is active conflict and massive displacement is deteriorating rapidly. IDPs who have fled the fighting are struggling in the context of the over-stretched capacities of host communities. Households in besieged areas are depleting their limited food stocks and are increasingly unable to cope amid active conflict and restricted humanitarian access.

In April, WFP was able to successfully provide food assistance for 3.9 million people. Of these, food assistance for over 1.1 million people was delivered through cross-line, cross-border and airdrop operations, such as in the case of the besieged city of Deir-ez-Zor, where WFP successfully completed sixteen airdrop rotations delivering partial food rations for 100,000 people.

Source: WFP



FOOD CONSUMPTION AND DIETARY DIVERSITY REMAIN POOR

Data collected in March through the mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (mVAM) survey shows that overall, people’s diets consist mainly of starches (wheat flour and rice), oil and sugar. On average, pulses, fruit and animal protein are consumed just 2 to 3 days a week.

Key sources report that the food consumption of households in besieged areas is extremely poor: many are eating just one meal a day. In besieged Deir-ez-Zor, Darayya, Madaya, Saqba, Arbin and Harasta, poor households also have to contend with poor access to safe drinking water and the breakdown of bakeries.

At the governorate level, households from Aleppo, rural Damascus and Hama had by far the highest incidence of ‘inadequate’ consumption in March.

Households in Aleppo have the lowest consumption of protein, dairy, fruit and vegetables. Consumption appears to be relatively better in Lattakia and Tartous, where a higher proportion of respondents noted ‘own production’ as one of their main three sources of food.



Table 1. Household characteristics

N° of Respondents		Head of Household		Respondent Status			Beneficiary vs Non-Beneficiary	
Female	Male	Female	Male	IDP	Resident	Returnee	Non-Beneficiary	Beneficiary
322	683	99	986	356	630	19	760	245
32.00%	68.00%	100.00%	9.90%	35.40%	62.70%	1.90%	75.60%	24.40%

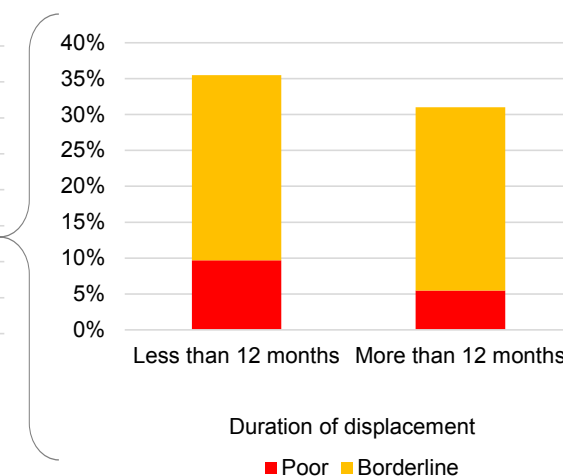
Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 1a. Households with ‘inadequate’ consumption, by respondent status



Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 1b. Displaced households with ‘inadequate’ consumption, by length of displacement

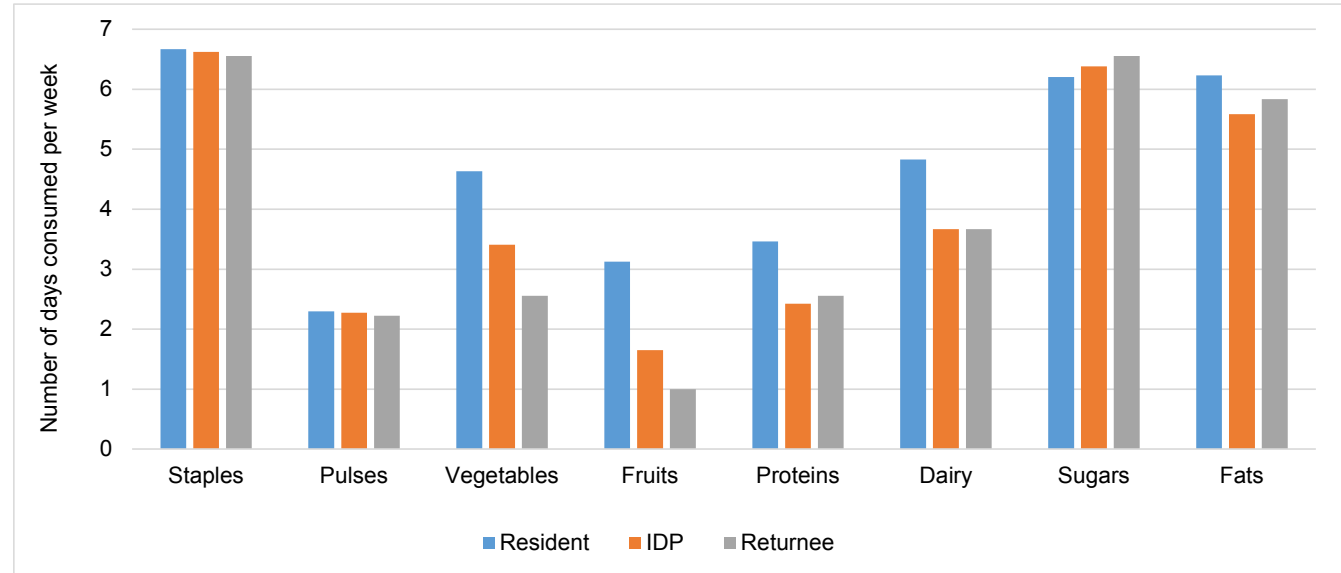


IDPs and returnees are especially vulnerable – 32 percent of IDPs (n=341) and 22 percent of returnees (n=18) said that their household is eating an “inadequate” amount of food (Figure 1a). On average, they are consuming vegetables, fruit, protein and dairy one day a week less frequently than non-displaced respondents (see Figure 2a).

Moreover, consumption frequency and dietary diversity appear to be worse among households who have been displaced more recently. As shown in Figure 1b, a higher proportion of respondent households who have been displaced within the last 12 months reported having ‘poor’ consumption than those who have been displaced for over a year. Except for staple foods and proteins, the more recently displaced households are consuming all food groups less frequently (Figure 2b).

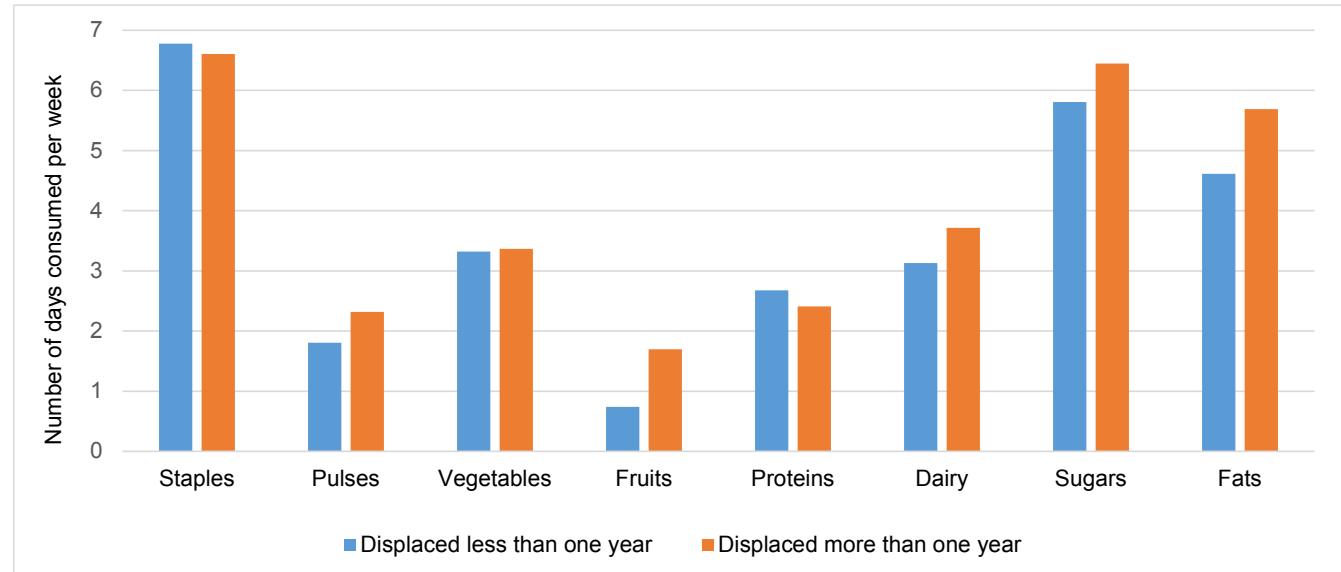


Figure 2a. Dietary diversity by respondent status



Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 2b. Dietary diversity by length of displacement



Source: WFP mVAM



NEGATIVE FOOD-BASED COPING IS WIDESPREAD

The reduced coping strategies index (rCSI) expresses the frequency and severity of the mechanisms that households use to access food. The more negative coping strategies households implement, the higher the rCSI.

The use of negative food-related coping is rampant throughout the country – 79 percent of all respondents reported resorting to negative coping strategies due to a significant lack of food, or money to buy food; national average rCSI is 15.2. The most commonly cited coping strategies are relying on less preferred and cheaper foods (66%), limiting portion size (45%) and reducing the number of meals per day (46%).

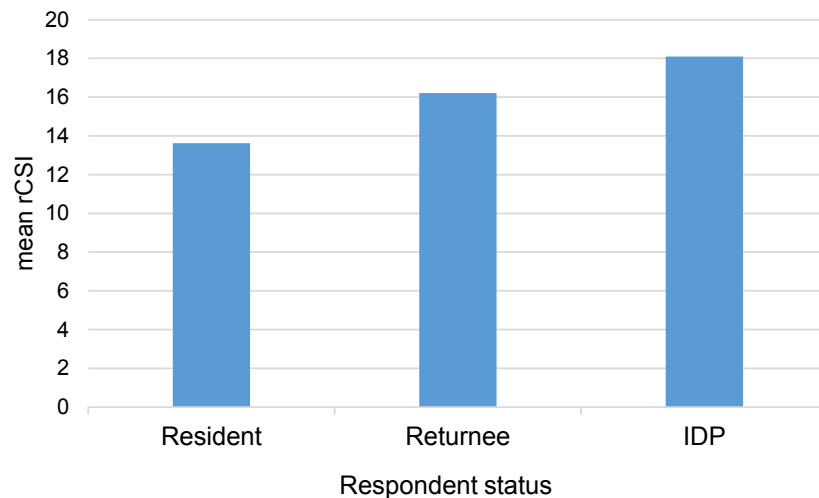
Households in rural areas, particularly in Homs, reported a much higher incidence and rate of negative coping than households in urban settings.

Negative coping is most prevalent among IDP and returnee households: approximately 85 percent of IDP and returnee respondents reported using one or more coping strategies, with an average mean rCSI of 18.1 and 16.2, respectively (Figure 3a). Households displaced within the last 12 months resort to coping strategies more than those who have been displaced for over a year (Figure 3b).

According to key sources in besieged areas, households are using severe food and livelihood-related coping mechanisms including limiting food intake, eating cheaper and less nutritious food, borrowing food, and relying on debt. In the most severe cases, they are going entire days without eating and they are sending children to beg. Some households reported resorting to the early marriage of daughters, joining armed groups and child labour to support themselves. There are very limited income-earning possibilities, and currency depreciation has further reduced households' already limited purchasing power. In Madaya, Madamiyet Elsham, Kafr Batna, Az-Zabdani and Foah, around half of the households with no income activities are borrowing food, relying on help from friends and purchasing food on credit.

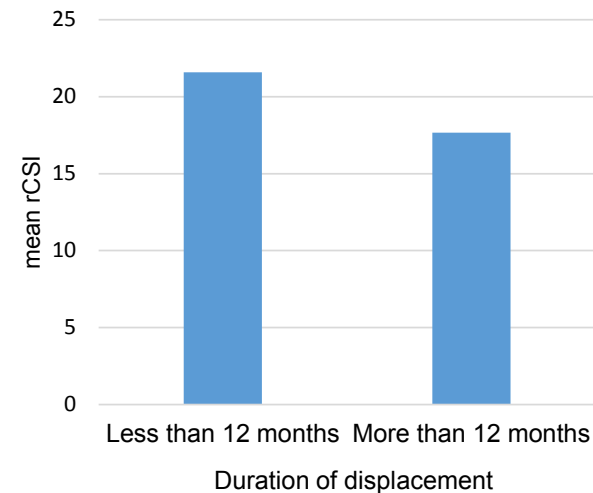
Negative coping is most acute in Darayya and Deir-ez-Zor city, where households are gathering wild food, restricting adult consumption to minimum low quality food in order to feed the children, skipping meals for many days during the month, and selling household and productive assets.

Figure 3a. Negative coping by respondent status



Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 3b. Negative coping by length of displacement



Source: WFP mVAM



CASUAL LABOUR IS AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF FOOD

As detailed in Table 2, the majority of respondents said that casual labour in exchange for food was one of their three main sources of food, followed by purchase and food assistance. As noted in the [latest Syria market price watch bulletin](#), persistently increasing food prices and decreasing terms of trade are continuing to erode the purchasing power of poor and vulnerable households who are mainly dependent on markets.

Food assistance is a much more important source of food for IDPs and returnees than for residents. Food purchase is less common among returnees and IDPs, indicating a disparity between the purchasing ability of those who have been displaced and those who have not.

Key sources indicated that food assistance was the main source of food in many besieged locations in Rural Damascus (Madamiyet Elsham, Kafr Batna, Madaya, Az-Zabdani and Foah) in March. In Madaya, Az-Zabdani, Foah and Kafraya, the majority of households were also dependent on harvesting wild vegetables — their second most common source of food.

In besieged locations still inaccessible to inter-agency convoys in March and April, such as Darayya, people are reportedly living underground with their livestock due to fighting: their sparse dairy products have become the main food that keeps their children and infants alive. The population has also been growing small-scale, limited crops (spinach, fava beans, parsley, etc.) using small parcels of land. However, recent attacks have rendered this land inaccessible. Some households reported they have not had access to fruits for a very long time.

In Deir-ez-Zor city, households with working members who are dependent on purchasing food cannot afford to feed the whole household. Those without working members are reliant on gathering wild food and purchasing on credit whenever possible.

Table 2. Cumulative summary of main food sources, by respondent status

Location	Work (casual labour)	Purchase	Food	Own production	Gift
Syria	84%	54%	24%	10%	7%
Resident	86%	59%	14%	15%	7%
Returnee	72%	22%	33%	17%	6%
IDP	81%	47%	43%	3%	8%

Source: WFP mVAM



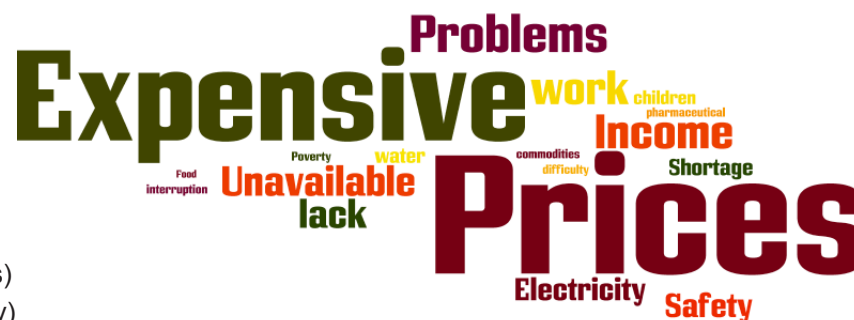
HOUSEHOLDS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIGH PRICES

When asked about the main challenges they faced, respondents cited the high cost of living, rising prices, the lack of income-generating opportunities and the continual interruption of electricity (Figure 4). In Aleppo and Rural Damascus, many reported a constant lack of electricity and water. Medicine, and basic food and non-food items were also reported to be unavailable in Aleppo.

IN THE WORDS OF THE RESPONDENTS

- “Electricity is cut off more than six months and there is no water” (Male respondent from Aleppo)
- “Our worries are lack of security, expensive prices and blackouts” (Male respondent from Damascus)
- “There is a lack of food commodities, clothes and infant milk” (Male respondent from Deir-ez-Zor city)
- “We have reduced our purchases due to the high prices” (Female respondent from Damascus)
- “Prices are high and there is a lack income and salaries” (Male respondent from Al-Hasakeh)

Figure 4. Word cloud for Syria



Source: WFP mVAM



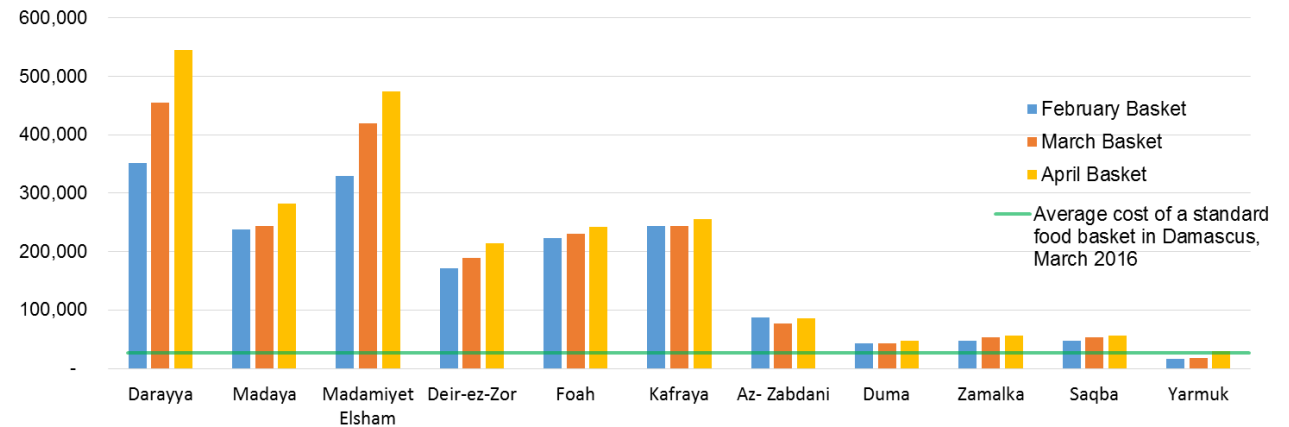
BESIEGED AREAS CONTINUE TO ENDURE RESTRICTED MARKET FUNCTIONING AND FOOD AVAILABILITY

In most besieged locations, markets are generally not functioning because of active conflict and road closures restricting supply access. In Deir-ez-Zor city and Darayya, food availability was still limited in March and April, as poor road conditions and the sieges continued to hamper market functionality and push up food prices, especially in Darayya. In Madaya, Foah, Duma, Zamalka and Arbin, markets are also functioning poorly with limited capacity, and few food items are available at very high prices. In Al-Hasakeh governorate, continued closure and interrupted access through surrounding borders are affecting the delivery of humanitarian supplies with a significant impact on food security. Many food items are scarce or even completely unavailable.

In Madamiyet Elsham, Madaya and Foah, bread has only been sporadically available: bakeries have been unable to function because of shortages of wheat flour, fuel and yeast. In Deir-ez-Zor city and Al-Hasakeh, bread is periodically available, but people have to queue for long hours to get a small bundle with no more than five pieces for each family.

As shown in Figure 5, the most expensive standard food basket recorded in March was in Darayya (SYP 454,500) — a 29 percent increase from February and over fifteen times the cost in Damascus. This is mainly due to the extremely high price of two main foods: bread, which has been mostly unavailable for over 6 months and rice (Figures 6a and 6b).

Figure 5. Cost of a standard food basket in monitored locations



Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 6a. Retail price of bread in monitored locations

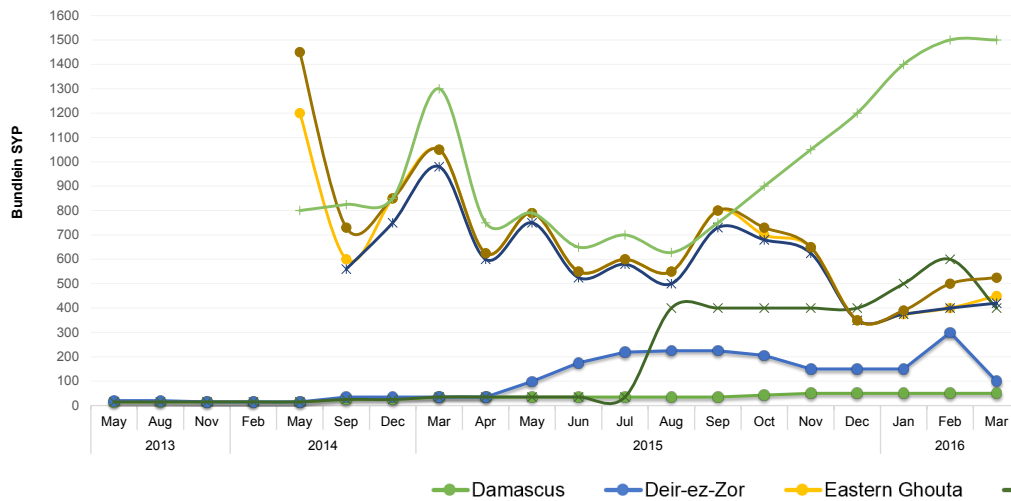
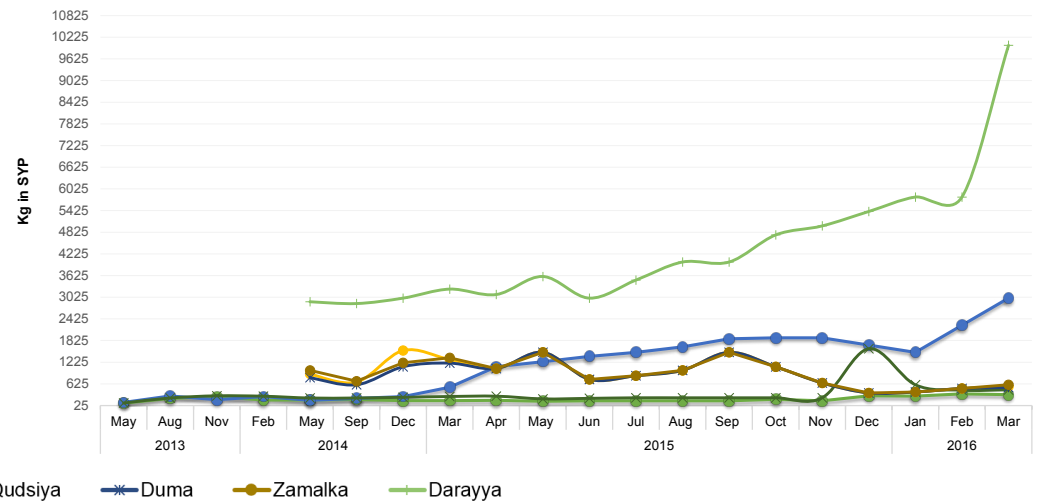


Figure 6b. Retail price of rice in monitored locations

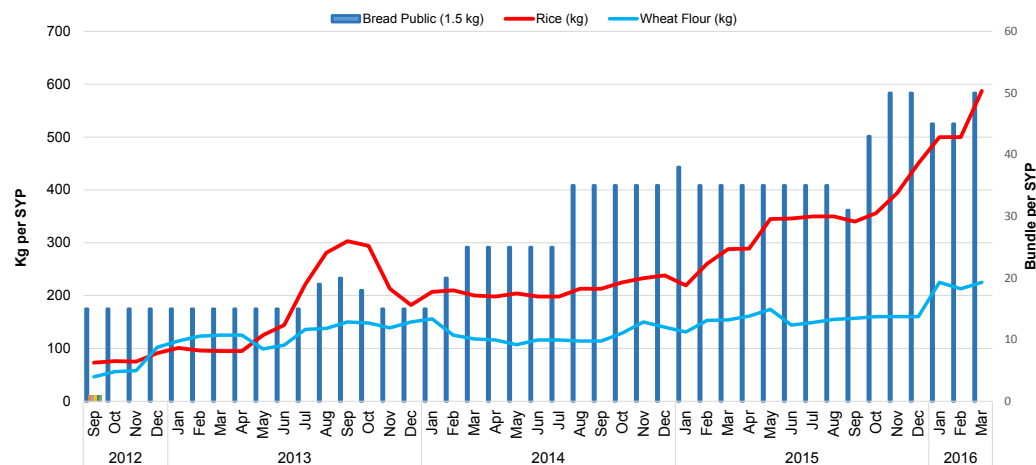


Source: WFP mVAM

The unofficial exchange rate for Syrian Pound against USD during March/April 2016 stood at 500 SYP/1 USD

In Qamishly, where the food supply situation remains critical due to limited access, the cost of a basic food basket continued to rise — in March it was SYP 29,438, which is 46 percent higher than in December 2015, 80 percent higher than six months ago and 108 percent higher than a year ago. As shown in Figure 7, the prices of wheat flour, rice and subsidized bread have risen dramatically over the past year.

Figure 7. Price trends in Qamishly



Source: WFP mVAM

METHODOLOGY

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected in March 2016 through key sources and telephone interviews. The telephone numbers were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1005 respondents. The questionnaire contained questions on demographics, household food consumption, coping strategies and primary food sources. A final open-ended question gave respondents the chance to share additional information on the food situation in their communities. Information collected through mobile 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.

Map 1. Syria mVAM data collection – March-April 2016

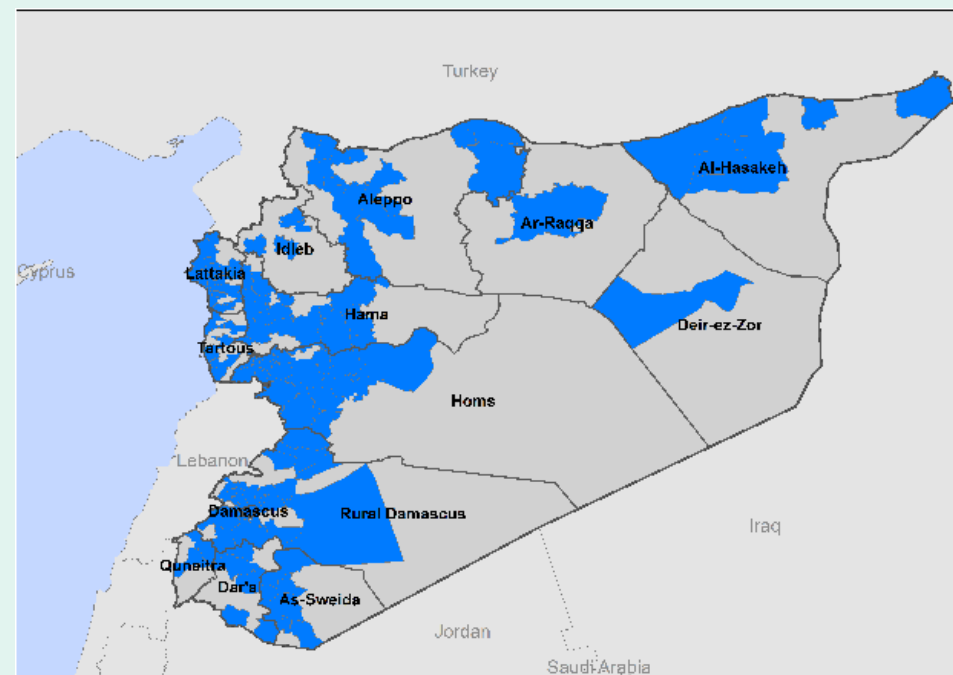


Table 3. Number of households interviewed by governorate

Governorate	Al-Hasakeh	Aleppo	Ar-Raqqa	As-Sweida	Damascus	Dar'a	Deir-uz-Zor	Hama	Homs	Idlib	Latakia	Quneitra	Rural Damascus	Tartous	Total
No of Interviews	22	150	1	40	188	13	4	75	90	4	138	9	189	82	1005



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mVAM resources:

Website http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/
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