

Eastern Aleppo city in distress; humanitarian assistance vital for food security in besieged areas

Key points:



Household food security continues to be under severe stress in eastern Aleppo city.



Market functionality in besieged areas is extremely poor, although staple food prices are levelling off with humanitarian assistance.



High levels of negative coping persist in all surveyed areas, but dietary diversity has improved in besieged locations.



WFP/Hussam Al Saleh

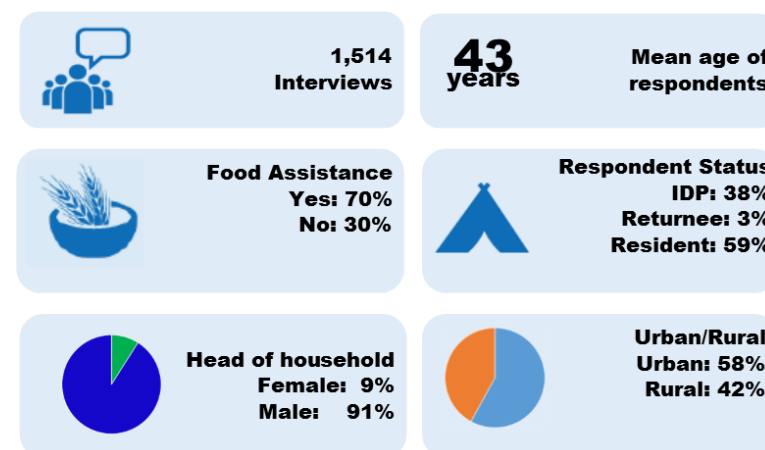
Situation Update

A US-Russian brokered nationwide cessation of hostilities came into effect on 12 September to allow humanitarian aid into eastern Aleppo city as well as to other hard-to-reach and besieged areas across Syria. However, this arrangement quickly collapsed and unprecedented levels of violence have struck Aleppo governorate since, leading to thousands of newly displaced civilians. Intensified shelling and airstrikes have severely disrupted markets and the main two supply routes to eastern Aleppo city (Castello and Ramouseh).

Meanwhile, airdrops to Deir-ez-Zor city are ongoing and WFP has dispatched sufficient quantities to provide two full monthly food rations to 110,000 people (as on 18 October). Initial key informant data suggest that food assistance has had a positive effect on food security in the city. Airlifts to Al-Hasakeh governorate are also ongoing, with 127 airlifts conducted so far (up to 18 October).

Source: UNHCR, OCHA and WFP

Fig. 1. Sample Household characteristics



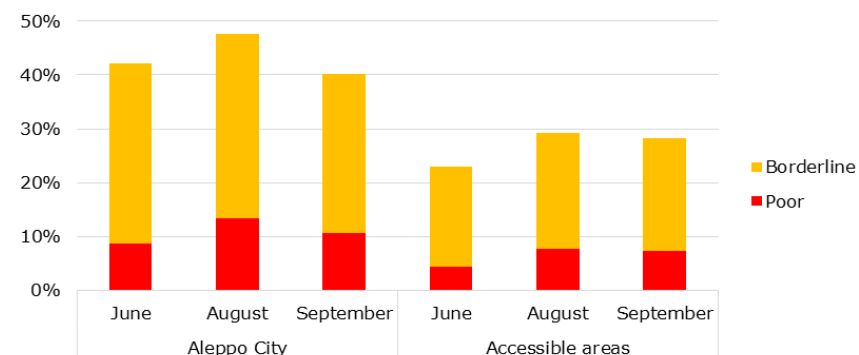
Source: mVAM September 2016



Continuing stress on household food security in Aleppo city

The proportion of households in Aleppo city with inadequate food consumption remained above 40 percent in September. This is far above the rate in accessible areas (28 percent) and has been for three consecutive months since June. Particularly in the east of the city, which has suffered from a complete severance of all humanitarian access routes since 7 July 2016, household access to food as well as to water, medicine and other basic supplies has been extremely limited. As reflected in the steep rise in food prices (see below), the disruption caused to the supply chain by the ongoing siege is putting added pressure on households in eastern Aleppo, most of whom depend on market purchases. Getting enough food has become a daily challenge for the majority of population, and many households have to walk at least 2 km to reach a functioning market.

Fig. 2: Food consumption groups in Aleppo city and accessible areas



Source: mVAM September 2016

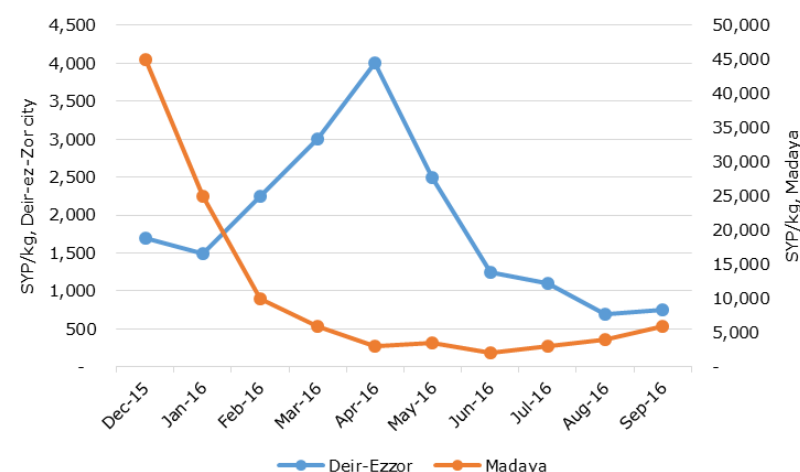


Markets struggle in besieged areas but food prices level off with humanitarian assistance

The protracted siege continues to exert upward pressure on food prices, restricting the supply chain in eastern Aleppo city and all other monitored locations. WFP market price monitoring data for September and early October indicate that most foods are either unavailable or are only available in limited quantities at inflated prices on the black market, rendering them unaffordable for poor and vulnerable households. In early October, a standard food basket inside eastern Aleppo city cost an average SYP50,925 (equivalent to US\$99 using the UN exchange rate for October 2016). This is almost 55 percent higher than in western Aleppo city and 71 percent higher than in Damascus.

At the same time, the positive effect of food assistance on staple food prices is evident in certain besieged areas. In Deir-ez-Zor city, rice prices – which reached SYP4,000 per kg in April 2016 – fell by 60 percent after the first airdrop. Prices have progressively decreased with successive airdrops, levelling out at SYP750 per kg in September 2016, less than one fifth of the pre-airdrop price. Similarly in Madaya, rice cost SYP6,000 per kg in September 2016, which is a 650 percent decrease compared with the price in December 2015 (SYP45,000) before the first humanitarian assistance arrived in January 2016. As extreme as this effect seems, it is necessarily short-term and volatile, contingent on humanitarian access.

Fig. 3: Retail price of rice (1 kg) in Deir-ez-Zor and Madaya



Source: mVAM September 2016



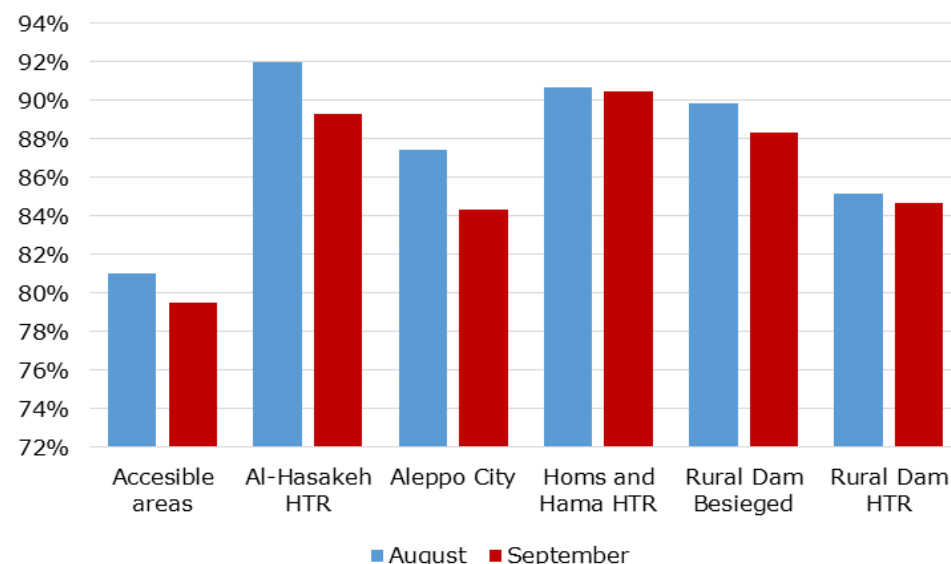
High levels of negative coping but better dietary diversity in besieged locations

In all surveyed locations except accessible areas, more than 80 percent of respondents reported engaging in at least one negative coping strategy in September (Figure 4). Buying food on credit continues to be a prevalent practice among all respondent households, especially in Homs and Hama hard-to-reach (HTR) areas, where 74 percent of households reported engaging in it. Since late August, thousands of displaced people have sought refuge particularly in Hama City and surrounding rural areas following heavy clashes between government forces and armed opposition groups.

On average, households are consuming one to two meals a day in most besieged areas; priority is given to the children. However, compared with December 2015, dietary diversity has gradually improved for most households despite the limited number of meals a day. In Madaya, Darayya (before the evacuation) and Madamiyet Elsham, households were able to shift to a more nutritious and balanced diet after humanitarian assistance arrived. Note that back in December 2015, some households even reported consuming grass and wild vegetables because of the lack of food. Key informants also reported that households are feeling better thanks to WFP food assistance, as they no longer have to drink a lot of water to fill their stomachs to mask their hunger. Even so, dietary diversity remains low for the poorest people who have no access to remittances.



Fig. 4: Households engaging in at least one negative coping mechanism, August – September 2016

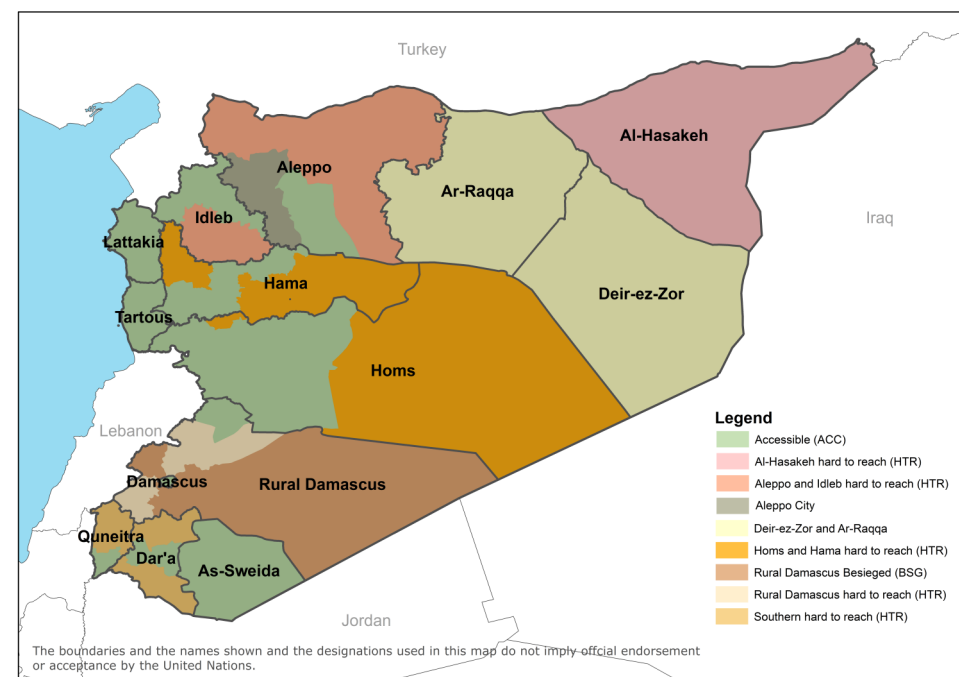


Results from Aleppo and Idleb hard to reach areas and Southern hard to reach areas are not reported because of small sample size

Methodology

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected in September through key sources and telephone interviews. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1514 respondents. The questionnaire contained questions on demographics, income sources, food assistance, household food consumption, 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 was 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. To obtain a more granular analysis of food security, districts have been combined into nine strata: accessible areas, hard-to-reach Al-Hasakeh, hard-to-reach Aleppo and Idleb, Aleppo city, Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor, hard-to-reach Homs and Hama, besieged Rural Damascus, hard-to-reach Southern Rural Damascus, and hard-to-reach Southern (Map 1). This sampling frame groups together areas with similar geography and access status, allowing for a large enough sample size to make statistically significant comparisons.

Map 1: Syria aggregated districts – September 2016



Source: mVAM September 2016



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mVAM Resources:

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