

Food access improves in Homs, Hama and Madaya but is severely limited in eastern Ghouta

Key points:



Although a large share of households in Aleppo city received assistance in April, the city continues to report the worst food consumption.



Food consumption has improved in hard-to-reach areas of Homs and Hama, but negative coping levels have risen in Al-Hasakeh.



Basic food prices have fallen in Madaya following the four-town agreement and delivery of humanitarian assistance. Food prices have soared in besieged east Ghouta.



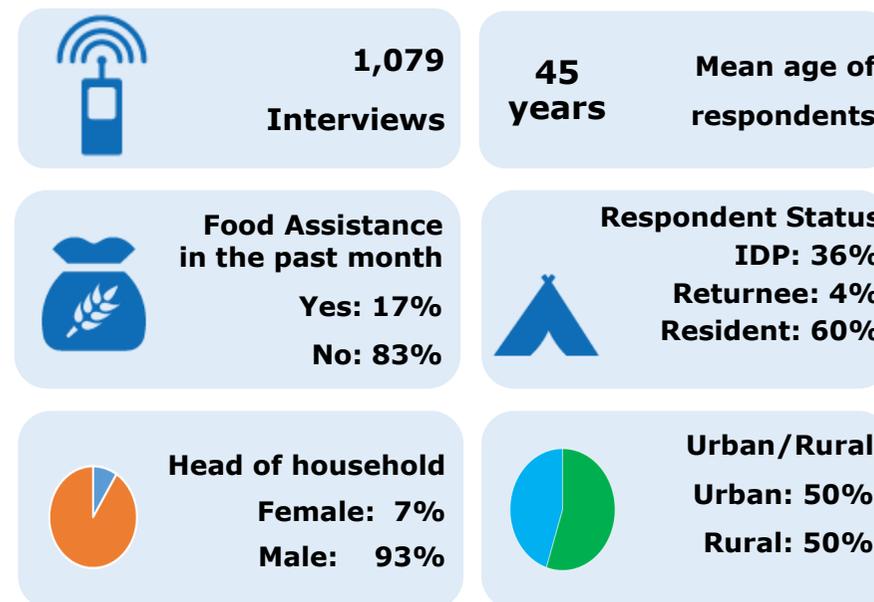
Situation Update

The evacuation of civilians and families from the “four towns” (Foah and Kefraya in Idleb governorate besieged since March 2015, and Madaya and Zabadani in rural Damascus) started on 12 April supervised by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. The evacuation was part of efforts to relocate more than 30,000 people in two stages. By 20 April, 8,000 people from Foah and Kefraya had arrived in Jibreen IDP shelter in Aleppo city. Another 3,000 people from Madaya and Zabadani arrived in Aleppo city; of these, an estimated 2,500 people have been transferred to Idleb. Following this operation, Zabadani is now completely empty of people. The evacuation process faced several delays and challenges due to reported disagreements among the parties, as well as the high levels of insecurity. This resulted in the evacuees sitting on buses for many hours waiting for agreements to be reached.

On 11 April, the UN expressed concern for the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation of the people trapped in eastern Ghouta, a major city of 394,796 residents in rural Damascus where ongoing conflict has reportedly resulted in civilian deaths and injuries. The city’s supply lines have been under increasing pressure since 2012, and Ghouta was officially declared besieged by OCHA in November 2016. The last UN humanitarian distribution was in October 2016.

Source: UNHCR, OCHA and WFP

Fig. 1. Sample Household characteristics





Food consumption score improves in hard-to-reach areas of Homs and Hama

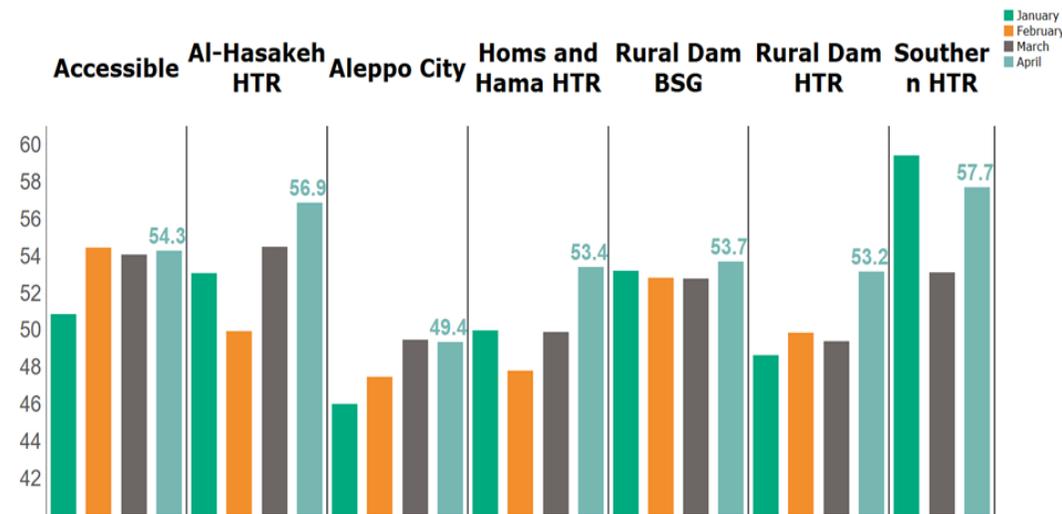
The mean food consumption score (FCS) for households in most of surveyed areas rose in April compared with March, especially in Homs and Hama hard-to-reach areas where mean FCS increased from 49.9 in March to 53.4 in April. Aleppo city continues to report the lowest food consumption score.

The overall proportion of households with inadequate (poor or borderline) food consumption fell in all surveyed locations except in Aleppo city and in southern hard-to-reach areas. The highest prevalence of inadequate food consumption was recorded in Aleppo city, where 4 percent of households reported poor food consumption and 37 percent reported borderline consumption. The share of households with inadequate food consumption fell in Homs and Hama hard-to-reach areas from 11 percent in March to 7 percent in April (Figure 3), most likely thanks to improved humanitarian assistance and relatively stable security situation.

Key informants from Madaya said that food accessibility improved slightly in April. Some households were able to consume fruit, vegetables and fresh food for the first time since the beginning of the siege, mainly thanks to the four-town agreement and the latest inter-agency convoy to the besieged

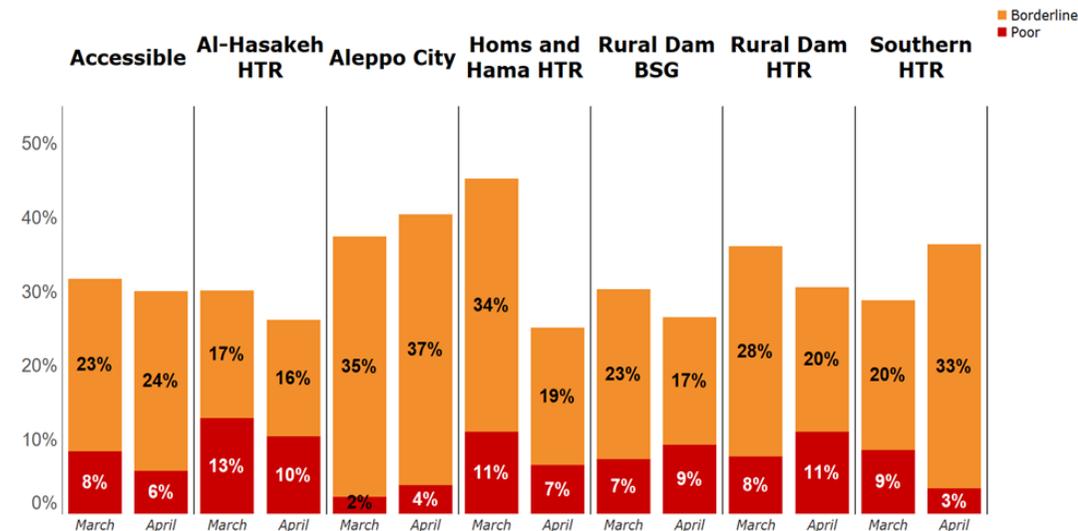


Figure 2: Mean FCS by aggregated district, December 2016 to April 2017



*February data is missing for Southern hard-to-reach areas

Figure 3: Inadequate food consumption by aggregated districts, March and April 2017



*February data is missing for Southern hard-to-reach areas

Source: mVAM April 2017

The prevalence of borderline food consumption among residents increased from 20 percent in March to 29 percent in April (Figure 4). It remained very much unchanged among IDP households.

In April, the prevalence of borderline food consumption in urban areas rose again, almost reaching the levels of February and exceeding the levels among rural households (Figure 5). The high concentration of IDPs in cities is contributing to worsening food security in urban areas – indeed, the majority of surveyed IDPs are residing in urban areas.

Households with limited or unstable incomes are especially vulnerable – 39 percent of those dependent on casual labour and 41 percent of those in full time employment said that their household is eating an “inadequate” amount of food. This could reflect the weak purchasing power caused by low wage rates in the face of high and increasing food prices.

Figure 4: Inadequate food consumption among IDP and resident households, March and April 2017



Figure 5: Inadequate food consumption among urban and rural households, February to April 2017

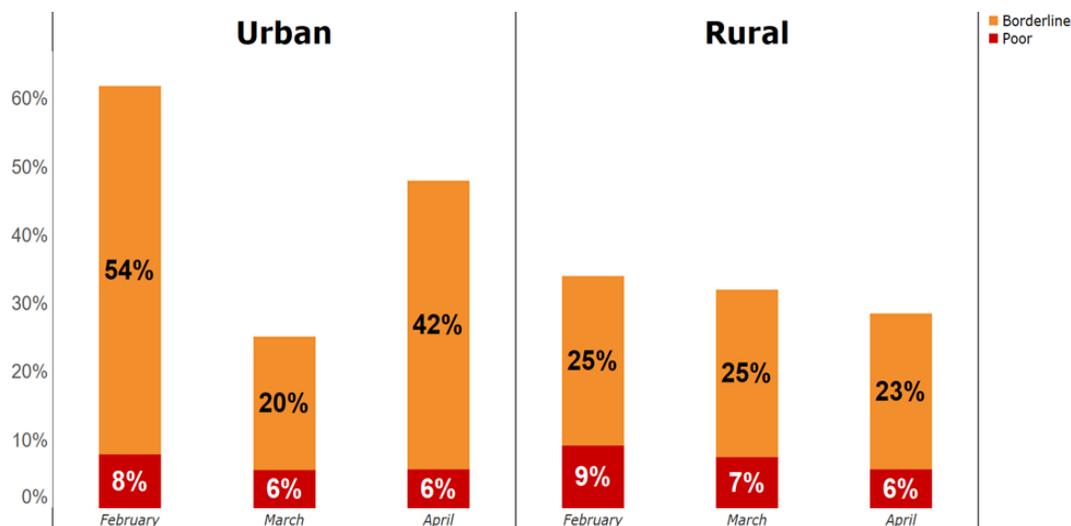
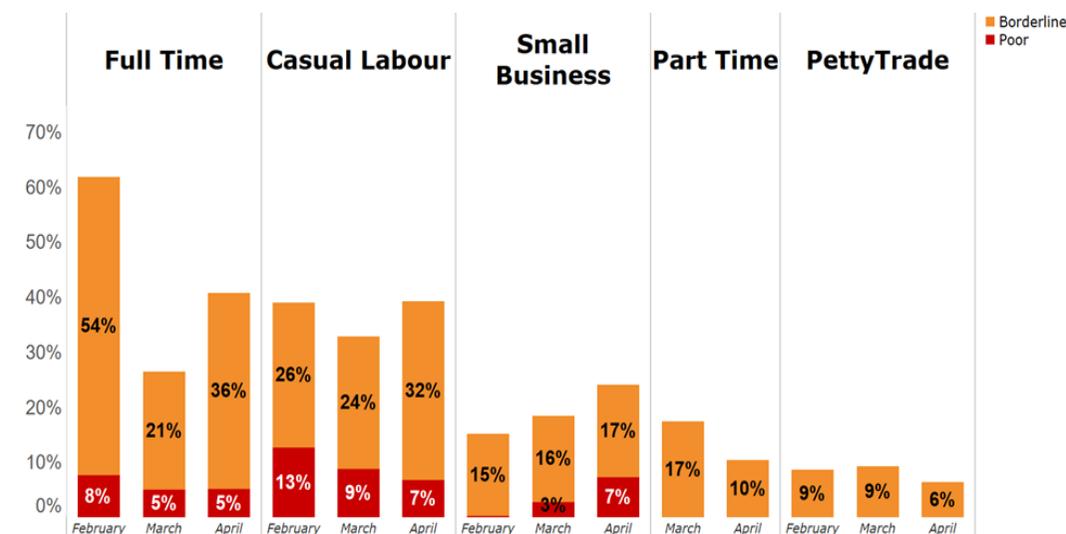


Figure 6: Inadequate food consumption by income sources, February to April 2017



Source: mVAM April 2017



High levels of negative coping in Al-Hasakeh and southern hard-to-reach areas

In April, households in Al-Hasakeh hard-to-reach areas had the highest mean reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) (18.5), followed by those in southern hard-to-reach areas (18) (Figure 7). Thanks to a relative improvement in the security situation in the governorate, WFP airlift operations and supply routes improved; consequently, almost all foods are available in the markets. However, prices remain unaffordable so poor households are eating just two meals a day and are eating smaller portions. Many are selling household assets to cope, and some are relying on remittances.

Surveyed households in southern hard-to-reach areas are relying frequently on negative coping strategies and have higher levels of inadequate food consumption than in March. The security situation has deteriorated in the western communities of Dar'a and in rural Damascus, and there are restrictions on access and movement for people in need.

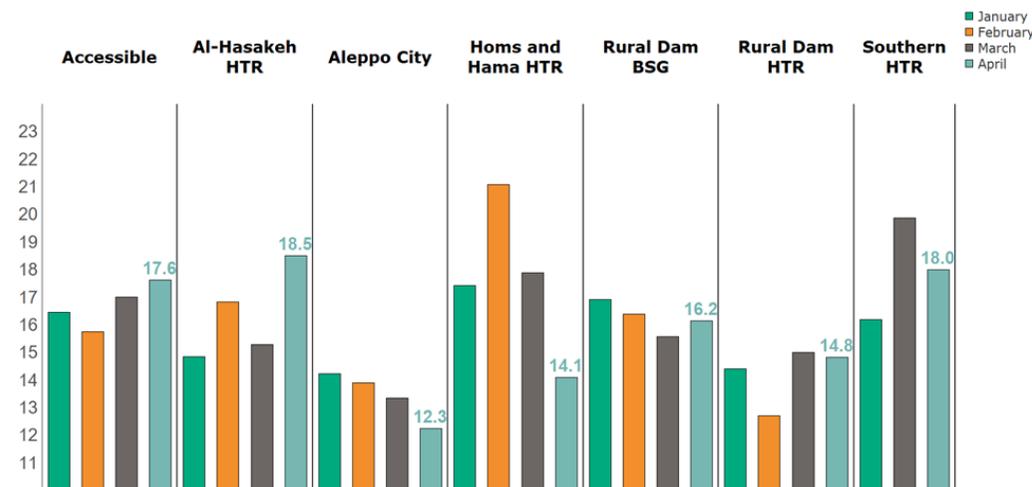
In east Ghouta, the prevalence of severe coping strategies is increasing. According to local sources, more households are engaging in severe food and livelihood-related coping mechanisms including skipping meals and purchasing food on credit. Some bakeries have stopped functioning because of the lack of diesel; people are turning to homemade saj bread baked by burning wood, which has pushed up the price of a single bundle of wood by 63 percent compared to March.

According to key informants, people in Deir ez-Zor have been affected by the long siege, and most households are still eating just one meal a day because of a lack of income, the lack of food in the market and high prices. Vegetables and meat are not available, so people are consuming cereal and beans mainly from WFP assistance. The situation is slightly better in Al Mayadin, where all foods are reported available in the market; supply routes are still functional but they have been affected recently by military operations in Ar-Raqa and in Iraq that have pushed up food prices.

As Figure 8 shows, the use of food-based negative coping strategies remains the highest among displaced households. In April, a smaller proportion of resident households were buying less expensive food and reducing the number of meals eaten a day. The use of livelihood coping strategies remained unchanged from March for both resident and displaced households.

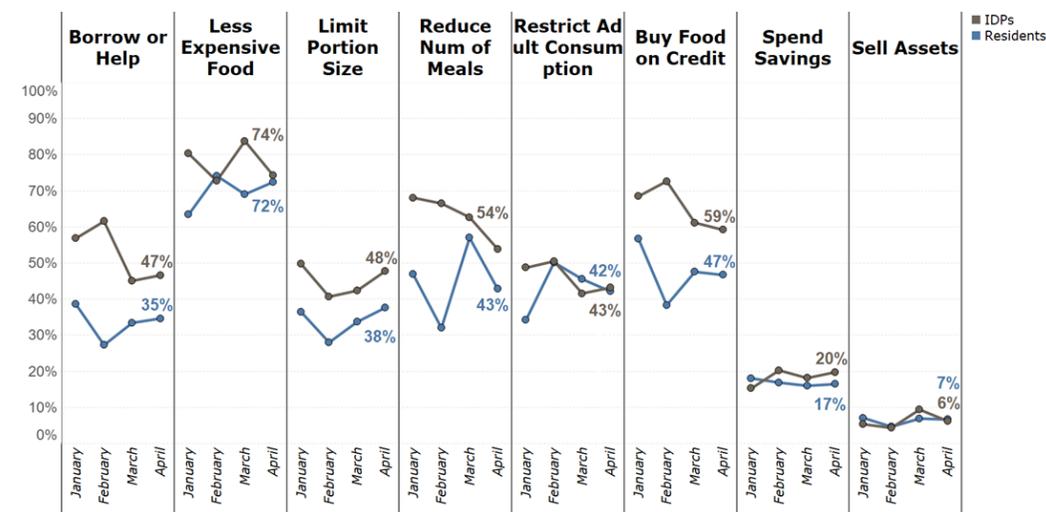
Households in urban areas reported a higher mean rCSI (17.1) than those in rural areas (14.8). Urban households are relying more on cheaper food and restricting consumption by adults so children can eat. However, rural households are using livelihood coping strategies more than urban households (Figure 9).

Figure 7: Mean rCSI, January – April 2017



*February data is missing for Southern hard-to-reach areas

Figure 8: Use of coping strategies by IDP and resident households, January – April 2017



Source: mVAM April 2017

Households led by women are more likely to report a higher use of extreme negative coping strategies than those led by men: in April, 57 percent of households headed by women reported borrowing food compared to 38 percent those led by men. Moreover, 72 percent of households led by women said they were buying food on credit during this round compared to 49 percent of households led by men.

mVAM data also shows a high dependence on food-related and livelihood coping strategies for households with more than eight members. Around half of these households reported borrowing food and limiting portion sizes, and a higher proportion of them reported prioritizing children, reducing the number of meals and buying food on credit.

Buying food continues to be the most common source of food for surveyed households (72 percent). However, 23 percent of households reported gifts and assistance as their primary source of food in April: a significant increase from March when only 12 percent reported assistance as their primary food source.

Around 30 percent of surveyed households in Aleppo city and 26 percent in southern hard-to-reach areas reported gifts and assistance as their primary source of food; 60 percent of those in Aleppo city and 52 percent of those in southern hard-to-reach areas had received food assistance.

Figure 9: Use of coping strategies among urban and rural households, February – April 2017

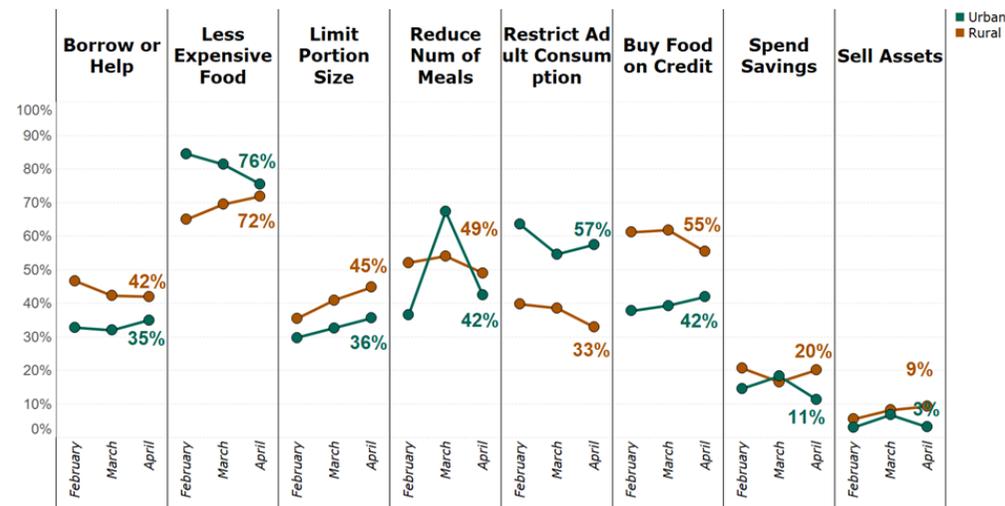


Figure 10: Use of coping strategies by sex of household head, February – April 2017

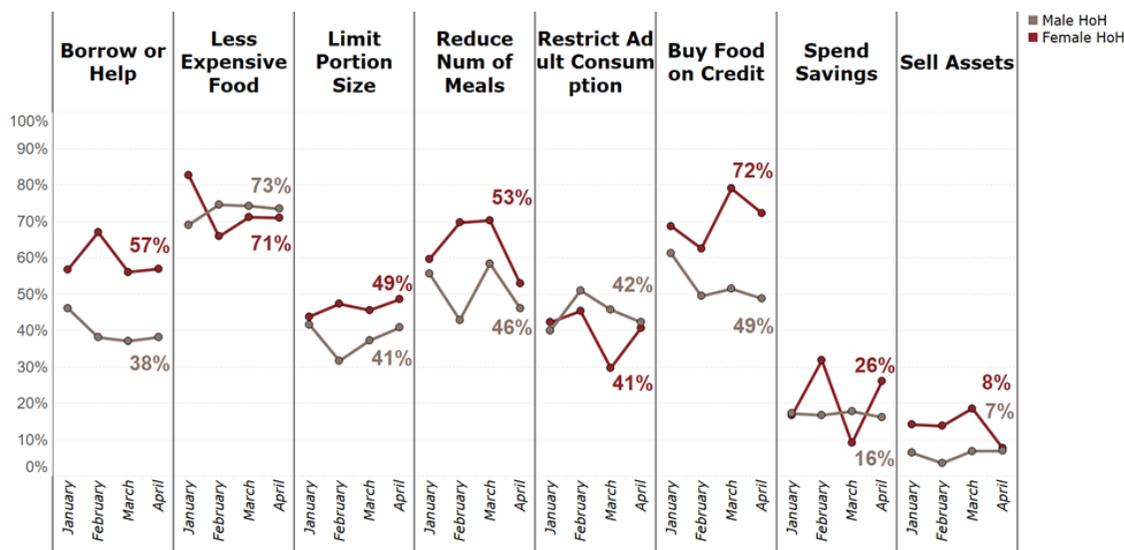
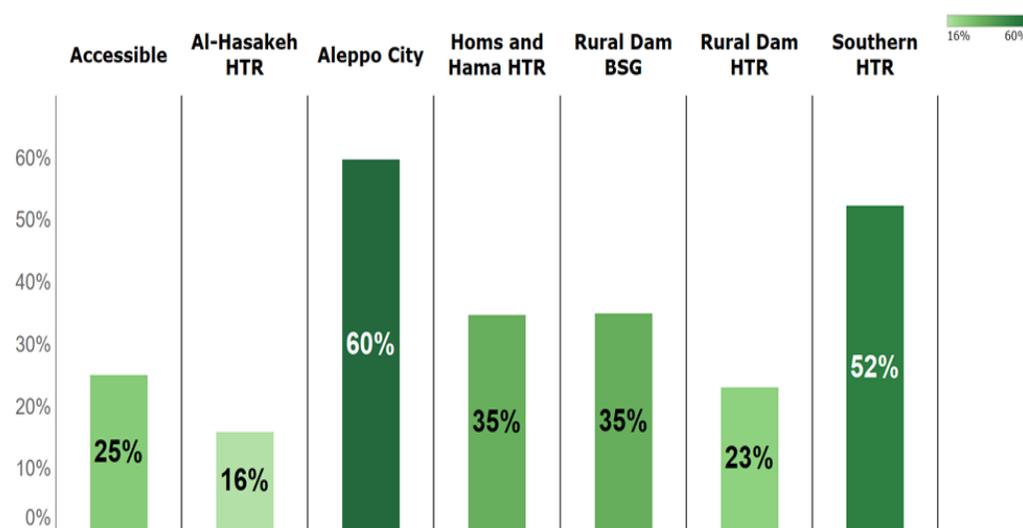


Figure 11: Percentage of households who received food assistance, April 2017



Source: mVAM April 2017



Blocked supply routes limit food availability in eastern Ghouta

Since the closure of the Barza and al-Wafideen crossings on 21 March and the seizure of most of the tunnels that served to bring in essential supplies, the eastern neighbourhoods of Damascus and Ghouta have become increasingly under siege and residents are reporting severely limited access to food and basic necessities. In recent weeks, foods such as rice, sugar and potatoes have been unavailable in the market and fuel is scarce. The prices of all basic foods have soared.

Markets in Madaya and Az-Zabadani have relatively improved in terms of commercial flow thanks to the four-town agreement and humanitarian access. Prices have dropped and fresh food and vegetables are available for the first time since the blockade. However, this is expected to be short-lived as the arrangement did not include lifting the siege on Madaya and the supply routes have closed again, leaving the thousands of households still trapped in the city struggling. Key informants from Al-Wa’er in Homs reported better movement/availability of food supply to the besieged community after the evacuation.

Higher prices in east Ghouta

The price of a standard food basket rose sharply in most locations in east Ghouta. A food basket costing SYP30,600 in Damascus was four times higher in Duma, Zamalka, Arbin and other besieged markets of east Ghouta, at over SYP 124,600. This is a 123 percent more than in March.

The cost of a standard food basket in Madaya was SYP57,050, which is 70 percent less than in March but still almost 66 percent more than the national average.

The current price of rice in east Ghouta is SYP1,500/kg, which is 105 percent more than in March, 146 percent more than in October 2016 and 253 percent more than in Damascus.

In Madaya, rice cost SYP300/kg in April, down 65 percent from March, and down 80 percent compared to six months ago.

Figure 12: Retail price of rice (SYP/kg) in east Ghouta city and Madaya, February – April 2017

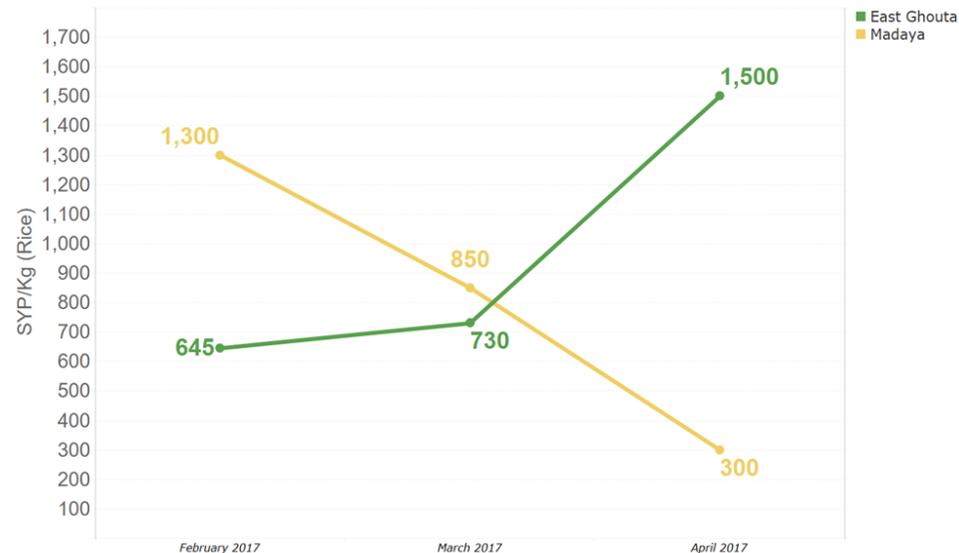
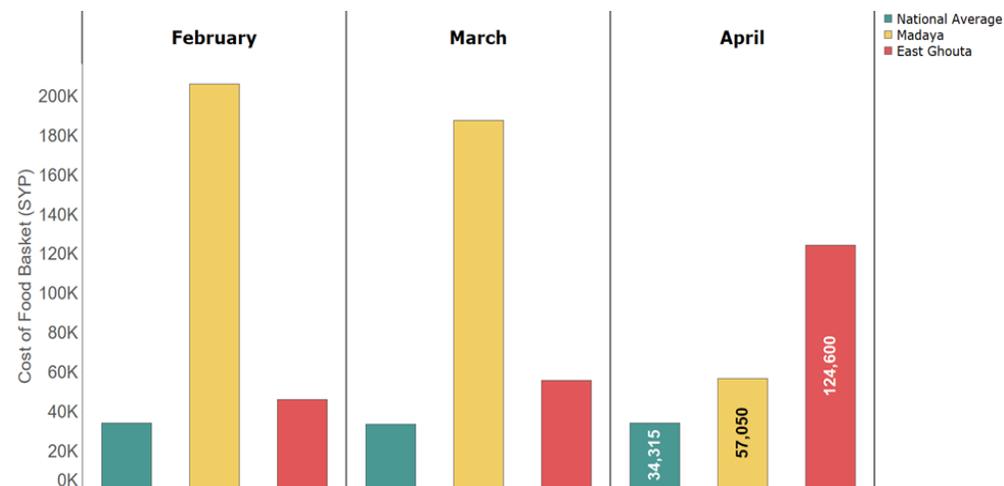


Figure 13: Cost of standard food basket in east Ghouta city and Madaya vs. national average (February – April 2017)



Source: mVAM April 2017

