

SYRIA

Food insecurity remains high as prices increase

KEY MESSAGES:

 **In Rural Damascus, households in hard-to-reach and besieged areas were 3 times more likely to report poor food consumption than those in accessible areas.**

 **90% of households that last received food assistance over 3 months ago are using negative food coping strategies.**

 **Poor food consumption was reported in more than 3 times as many households led by women.**

 **Buying food on credit is the most commonly used livelihoods coping strategy across the country.**

 **Prices for bread and rice are rising continuously in besieged areas; the standard food basket in Darayya costs SYP 575,700.**

 **The standard food basket in Deir-ez-Zor is 8.3 percent cheaper than in April, likely due to food assistance.**



WFP/Abeer Etefa

SITUATION UPDATE

Conflict: Heavy fighting and intensified airstrikes continued in Ar-Raqqa and Aleppo governorates in May. An estimated 216,000 people are at risk of displacement in north-eastern Aleppo (Menbij city) as new offensives have been launched. Up to 20,000 people have already been displaced from the Abu Qalqal and Menbij sub districts, up to 8,000 of whom have fled towards western Aleppo. Intense clashes have taken place since 27 May in the area of Mare'a town and near A'zaz, just south of the Turkish border, where more than 163,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) are confined.

Climate: Seasonal rainfall has been lower than average in Damascus, Deir-ez-Zor, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Quneitra, Tartous, Lattakia and Ar-Raqqa in 2016. This has negatively affected the planting season in some areas.

Humanitarian assistance: WFP started distributing food rations sufficient for almost 30,000 people in A'zaz in Aleppo governorate in May. The access route to eastern Aleppo city was closed yet again on 17 May, preventing delivery of humanitarian assistance from Turkey. However, deliveries have recently resumed, albeit on a small scale.

Source: WFP, OCHA

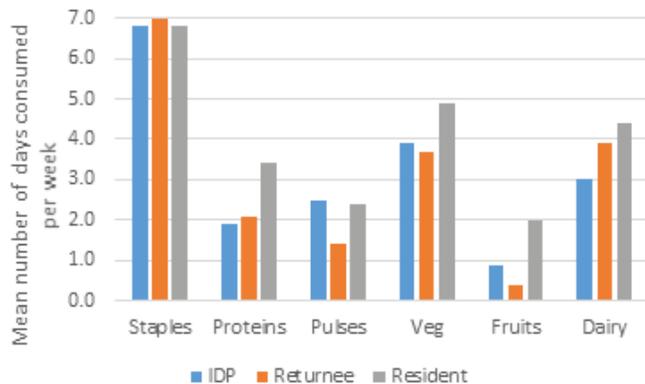


HIGH PREVALENCE OF INADEQUATE FOOD CONSUMPTION IN HARD-TO-REACH AREAS

Data collected in May indicates that IDP and returnee households continue to have inadequate (poor or borderline) food consumption and poor dietary diversity. On average, IDP households consume proteins on a little under 2 days per week and vegetables on less than 4 days per week (Figure 2).

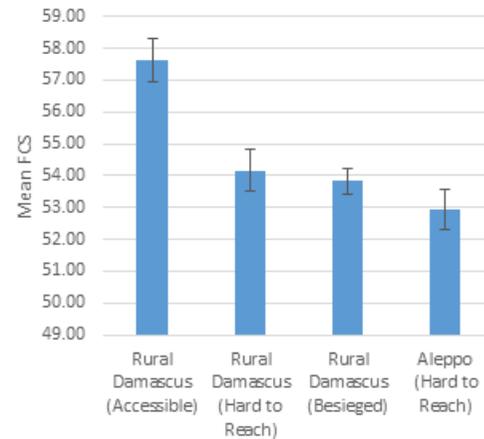
As shown in Figure 3a, households in hard-to-reach and besieged areas (n=25) in Rural Damascus had worse food consumption than those in accessible areas. Across Syria, just 6 percent of respondent households in accessible areas reported poor food consumption (Figure 3b).

Figure 2. Mean number of days food groups are consumed by respondent status



Source: WFP mVAM, May 2016

Figure 3a. Food consumption score (with confidence intervals)



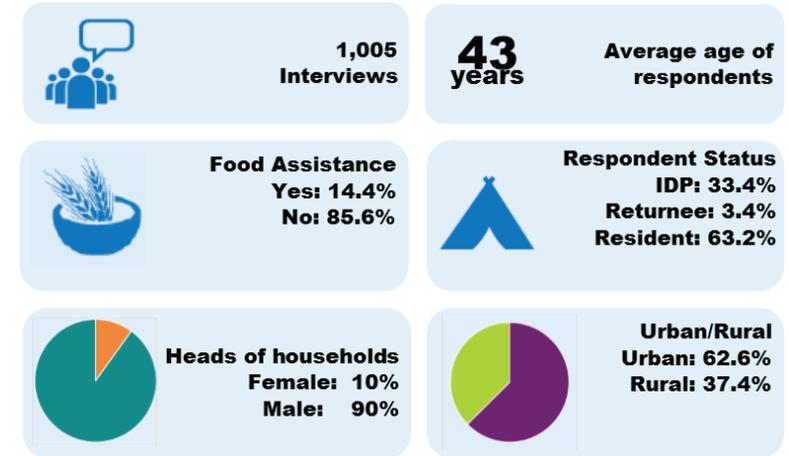
Source: WFP mVAM, May 2016

Key sources in besieged Madamiyet Elsham, Madaya, Kafr Batna, Darayya and east Harasta report that households do not have access to safe drinking water, and humanitarian assistance has become the main source of food. In eastern Ghouta, Harasta, Zamalka, Kafr Batna and Duma, households are consuming seed stock, harvesting immature crops, gathering wild food and hunting – all in a bid to supplement their limited food stocks.

In Deir-ez-Zor city, the food security situation has now improved slightly following WFP airdrops. The prevalence of severe coping strategies is still high but it is lower than it was two months ago.

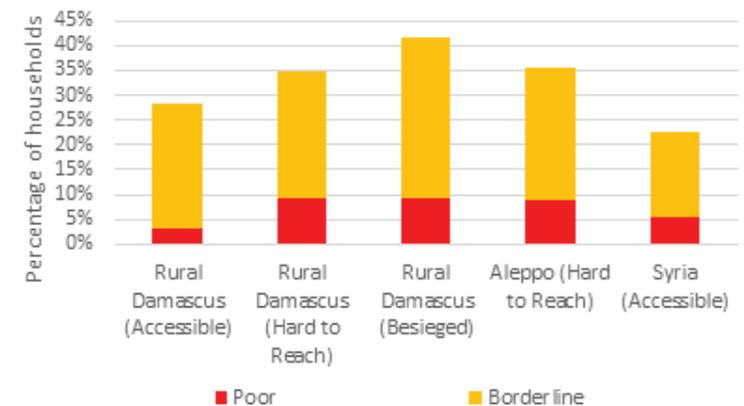
More than 90 percent of respondent households who last received food assistance three or more months ago reported using negative food-related coping strategies compared to 83 percent of those who received food assistance last month.

Figure 1. Sample Household characteristics



Source: WFP mVAM, May 2016

Figure 3b. Households with inadequate food consumption



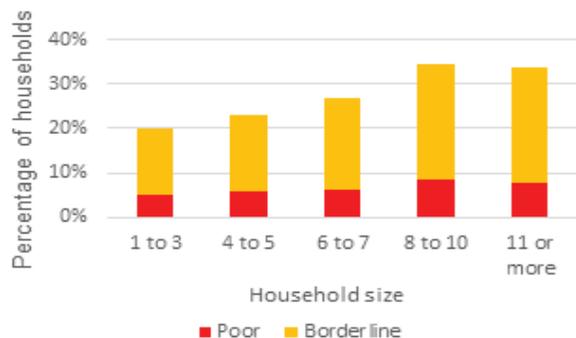
Source: WFP mVAM, May 2016



HOUSEHOLDS LED BY WOMEN AND LARGER HOUSEHOLDS ARE MORE FOOD INSECURE

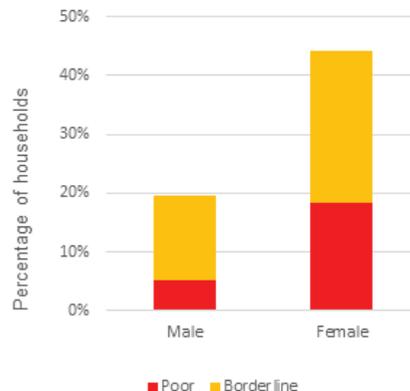
Households led by women and larger households are more likely to report inadequate food consumption (see Figures 4a and 4b). A larger proportion of households led by women (mean rCSI=19.1) adopted at least one severe food-related coping strategy and one livelihood coping strategy compared to those led by men (mean rCSI=14.9). Similarly, a higher percentage had sold productive assets to buy food or had exhausted their assets (Figure 5).

Figure 4a: Inadequate consumption by household size



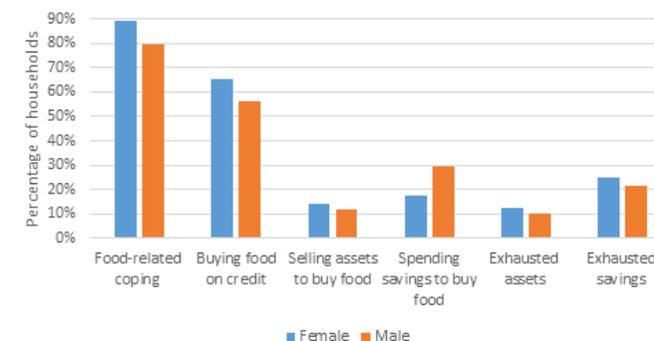
Source: WFP mVAM, May 2016

Figure 4b. Inadequate consumption by head of household sex



Source: WFP mVAM, May 2016

Figure 5. Prevalence of coping by head of household sex



Source: WFP mVAM, May 2016

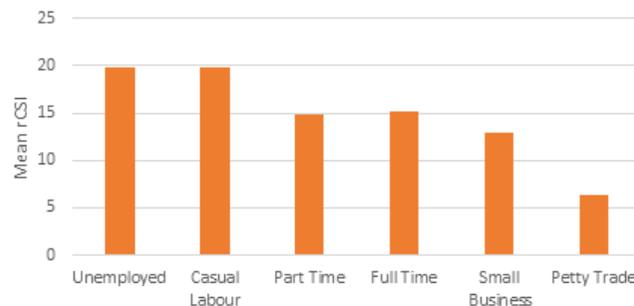


HIGH NEGATIVE COPING AMONG HOUSEHOLDS WHO ARE UNEMPLOYED OR HAVE UNSTABLE INCOME SOURCES

mVAM data also indicated a high dependence on food-related and livelihood coping strategies among unemployed households and those whose main source of income is unstable such as casual labour or part-time work. As shown in Figures 6a and 6b, the unemployed reported the highest levels of food-related coping (rCSI=19.8) and inadequate food consumption.

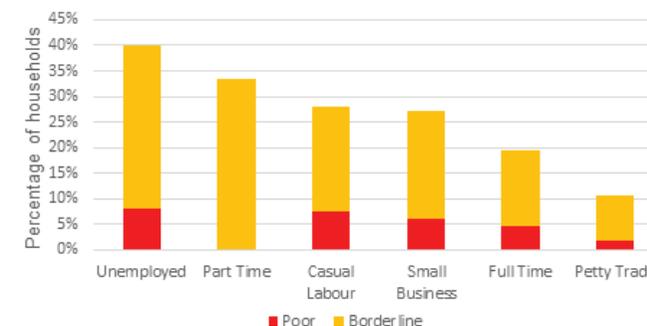
The most commonly reported coping strategies were reducing the number of meals eaten per day (39 percent) and eating less expensive food on at least four days a week (38 percent). Around 53 percent of IDPs and 44 percent of returnee households reduced the number of meals eaten per day—a reflection of their vulnerability.

Figure 6a. Food-related coping by main income source



Source: WFP mVAM, May 2016

Figure 6b. Households with inadequate consumption by main income source



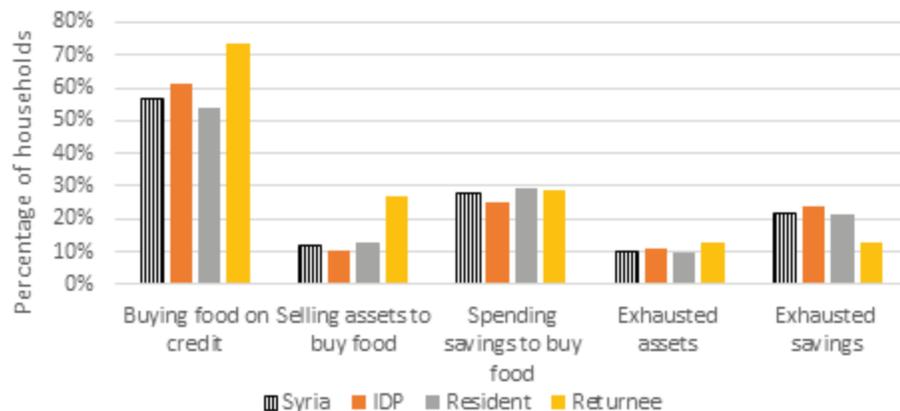
Source: WFP mVAM, May 2016



BUYING FOOD ON CREDIT IS THE MOST COMMON LIVELIHOODS COPING STRATEGY

More than 50 percent of all households are buying food on credit, with an even larger proportion of IDP and returnee households using this coping strategy (Figure 7a). The incidence of livelihood coping has been higher in hard-to-reach Rural Damascus compared to accessible areas in the governorate. As shown in Figure 7b, besieged areas have the highest proportion of households using at least one of the three monitored coping strategies except for spending savings to buy food. This is likely due to the fact that a very high proportion have already exhausted their savings.

Figure 7a. Prevalence of negative coping by respondent status



Source: WFP mVAM, May 2016

Figure 7b. Prevalence of negative coping by governorate accessibility



Source: WFP mVAM, May 2016



RISING PRICE OF BASIC COMMODITIES ARE A CONCERN

Overall, respondents continue to worry about price increases, particularly for food, electricity, water, clothes and medicine. The words most frequently mentioned were 'expensive', 'prices' and 'income'. Other concerns were raised over a lack of medication, infant milk and security. Some IDPs reported concerns about paying their rental housing expenses. Road destruction was reported in Homs, unavailability of vegetables in Al Hasakeh and lack of housing in Hama.

Figure 8. Word cloud for Syria



Source: WFP mVAM, May 2016



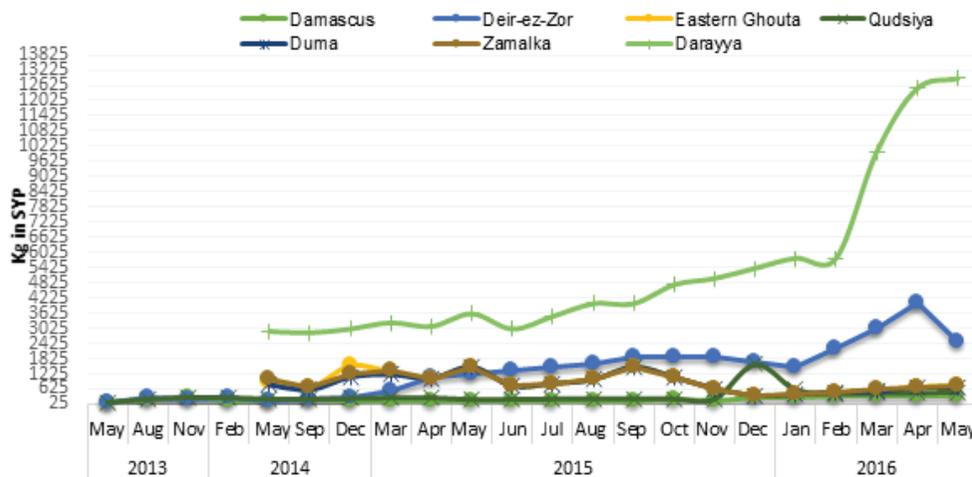
POOR MARKET FUNCTIONING AND FOOD AVAILABILITY IN BESIEGED AREAS

There continue to be low food supplies in markets within besieged areas due to blockades and destroyed supply routes. In Deir-ez-Zor city, bakeries are functioning with limited capacity, while in Darayya, Madamiyet Elsham, Madaya and Az-Zabadani fresh bread has been unavailable for more than seven months – the result of extreme shortages of fuel and wheat flour supplies.

The cost of the standard food basket¹ continued to rise in all besieged and conflict-affected areas apart from Deir-ez-Zor (Figure 9a) where in May it was 8.3 percent lower than in April – likely linked to WFP airdrops in the city. Nevertheless, the basket is still 171 percent more expensive than it was 12 months ago ([WFP VAM](#)). In May, Darayya continued to record the highest cost for a standard food basket: SYP 575,700 – 5.6 percent higher than in April and over twenty times the cost in Damascus. However, this is expected to decrease as WFP started to distribute food assistance in June, the first humanitarian access since November 2012.

In Deir-ez-Zor city, the recent WFP assistance released an upward pressure on rice prices, which fell by 38% from April (Figure 10a). Despite this, rice remains 32 percent more expensive than six months ago, and 102 percent more expensive than in May 2015. In Darayya, the price of rice reached extremely high levels at SYP 12,900/kg (36 times the price in Damascus) and in Madamiyet Elsham, it was SYP 11,900/kg (34 times the price in Damascus). The prices of other staple commodities such as pulses, sugar and vegetable oil are still rising in Deir-ez-Zor.

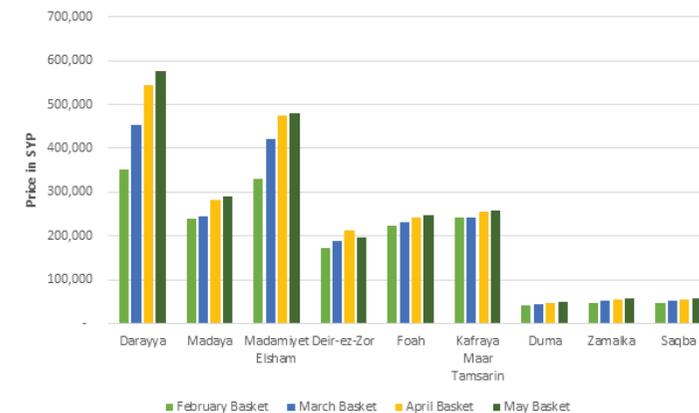
Figure 10a. Retail price of rice in besieged locations



Source: WFP mVAM May 2016

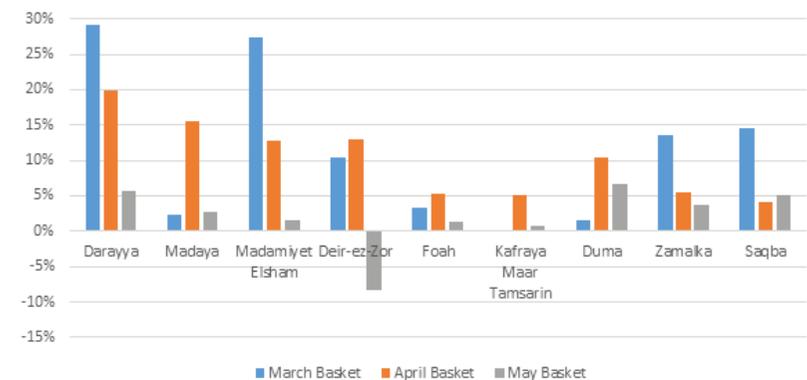
¹ The standard basket used in the analysis provides 1,930 kcal a day for a family of five during a month. It includes 37 kg of bread, 19 kg of rice, 19 kg of lentils, 5 kg of sugar, and 7 kg of vegetable oil.

Figure 9a. Cost of standard food basket in besieged locations



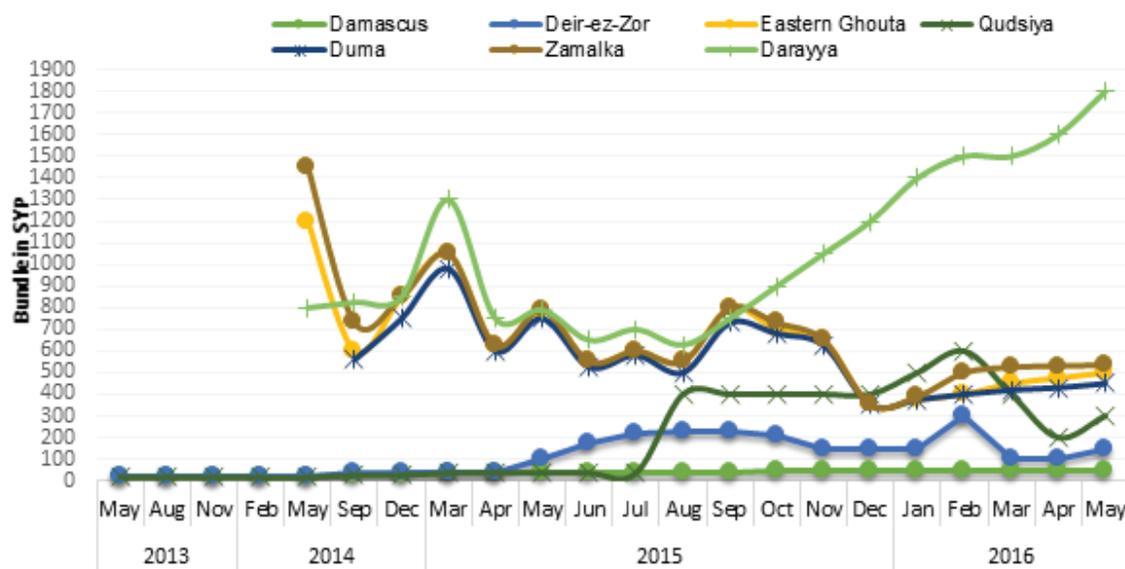
Source: WFP mVAM May 2016

Figure 9b. Monthly percentage change in cost of standard food basket in besieged locations



Source: WFP mVAM May 2016

Figure 10b. Retail price of bread in besieged locations



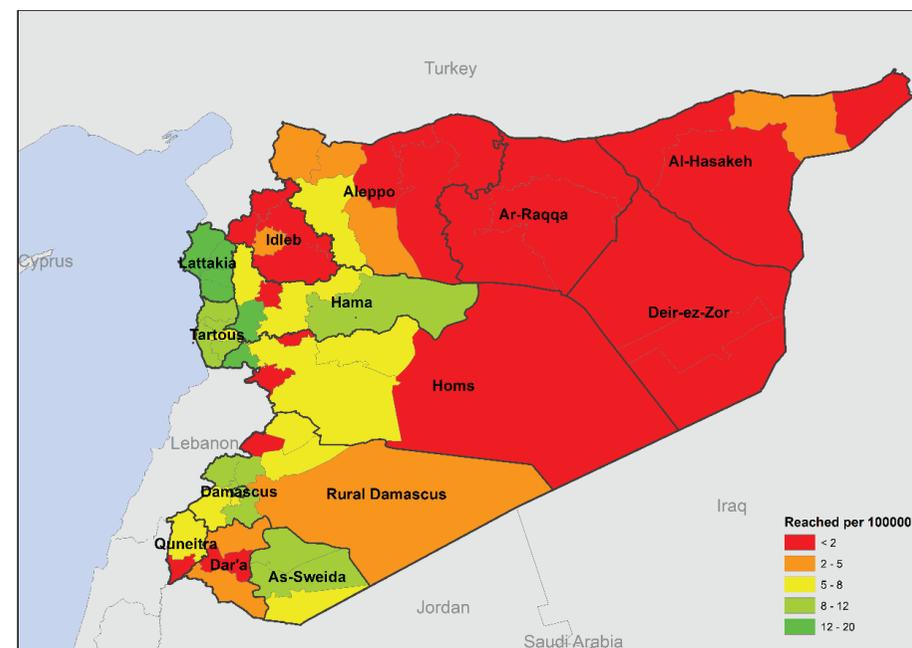
Source: WFP mVAM

METHODOLOGY

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected in May 2016 through key sources and telephone interviews. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1005 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 on 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.

In Madamiyet Elsham, fresh bread is only available when it could be smuggled in, costing more than SYP 1600/bundle (32 times higher than in Damascus). This price has increased by 13 percent since April and by 71 percent compared with six months ago. As almost no bakeries are functioning in Madaya, Kafr Batna, Zamalka and Duma, households are relying on homemade bread with restricted access to fuel and yeast. In Deir-ez-Zor city, the price of a bread bundle has increased by 50 percent since April (Figure 10b).

Map 1. Syria mVAM data collection – May 2016



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mVAM resources:

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