

## FOOD ACCESS IS SEVERELY LIMITED IN DEIR-EZ-ZOR CITY AND MADAYA AS THE CONFLICT INTENSIFIES

### KEY MESSAGES:



Food security deteriorated in Deir-ez-Zor and Madaya following an escalation of the conflict and restricted market accessibility.



Poor food consumption increased among IDPs in January.



Households in Aleppo city and in hard-to-reach parts of rural Damascus and southern areas are relying more heavily on food assistance.



WFP/Fatima Mohammad

### SITUATION UPDATE

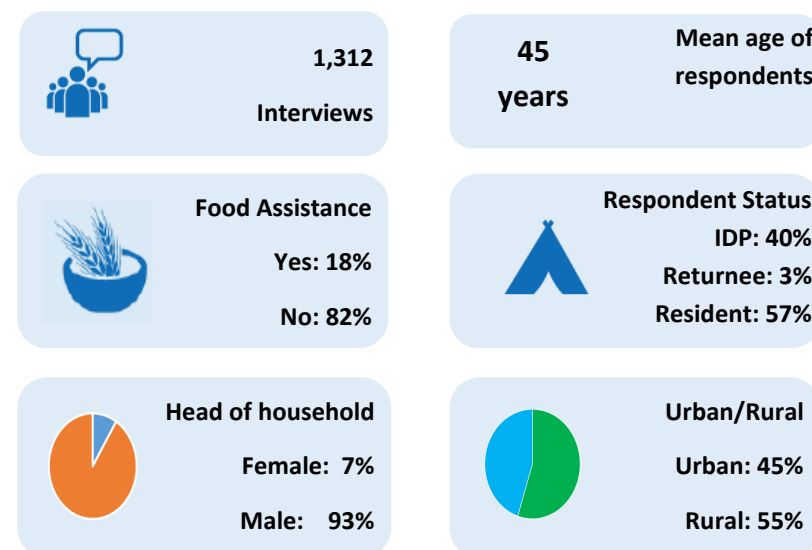
A major assault was launched on Deir-ez-Zor on 14 January, with attacks on several fronts and intense fighting. The offensive has separated the two eastern neighbourhoods from the western neighbourhoods, where the bulk of the population lives. As a result, markets are not easily accessible. This escalation, together with the already dire economic situation, has further reduced food security for the majority of the trapped population. Deir-ez-Zor has been under siege since 2014. WFP-led air drops over Deir-ez-Zor city have been temporarily suspended due to intense fighting in and around the landing zone and in parts of the city where aid distributions take place.

The month-long offensive in Wadi Barada valley (Rif Dimashq governorate) ended when a ceasefire was reached on 28 January. Work has begun to repair the water supply to 5.5 million people in Damascus, which has been disrupted since 22 December. According to the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, up to 17,500 people have been displaced from Wadi Barada to neighbouring villages since the beginning of the fighting.

The humanitarian situation is deteriorating in Ash Shajara (in Dar'a) and in many locations in rural Damascus that saw a significant escalation of conflict during January. In Madaya and Az-Zabadani, intense fighting brought the complete closure of markets and schools. Key informants reported that the small remaining quantities of food assistance were the only source of food for most of the population for many days.

Source: UNHCR, OCHA and WFP

Figure 1: Sample Household characteristics





## FOOD SECURITY IS DETERIORATING IN DEIR-EZ-ZOR CITY AND MADAYA

According to key informants, the intensification of the conflict in Deir-ez-Zor city has caused household food access and food consumption to deteriorate compared to December. Many households are reportedly consuming nothing but white beans, bulgur and bread each day. The scarcity of oil, sugar and rice has led to prices that are unaffordable for most families.

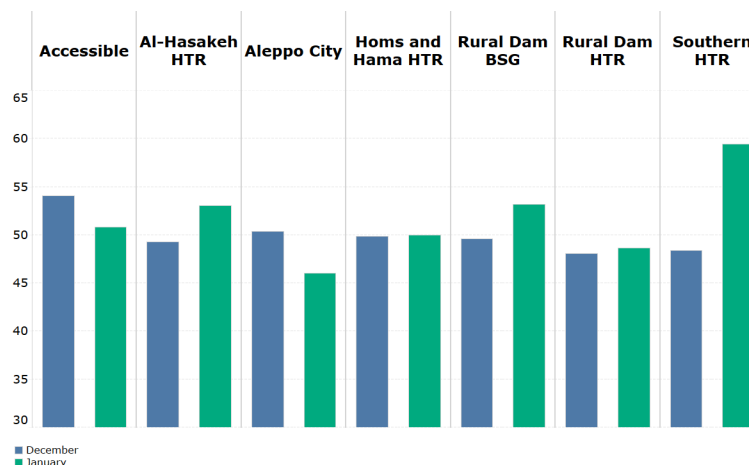
Likewise, in Madaya and Az-Zabadani, many households have been surviving on the little remaining food assistance. Physical access to markets was reported as an increasing challenge in January because of fighting.

mVAM January respondents reported better food consumption scores (FCS) in southern hard-to-reach areas (including parts of Dar'a subject to active conflict). By contrast, FCS fell from 50.3 to 46 in Aleppo city and from 54 to 50.8 in accessible areas compared with December (Figure 2).

The deterioration in accessible areas could be attributed to the lean season and increased lengthy power outages that harm the economy. In addition, the increased influx of IDPs who are seeking refuge in relatively stable areas is believed to be putting more pressure on the poor host communities in accessible areas, whose resources are already stretched.

January mVAM data identifies an overall decrease in the proportion of IDPs with inadequate food consumption: 50 percent of displaced households reported poor or borderline food consumption compared with 57 percent in December 2016. However, the prevalence of poor food consumption among IDPs rose from 8 percent in December to 13 percent in January (Figure 3).

**Figure 2: Mean FCS by aggregated district, December 2016 - January 2017**



**Figure 3: Inadequate food consumption among IDP and resident households, December 2016 - January 2017**





## NEGATIVE COPING STRATEGIES MOST PREVALENT IN ACTIVE-CONFLICT AREAS AND AMONG IDPS

The proportion of households resorting to irreversible or extreme negative coping strategies remains high in all areas under siege or affected by active conflict. Key informants reported an increased use of severe coping strategies such as skipping meals and limiting portion sizes, particularly in Deir-ez-Zor city and Madaya. In Al-Wa'er, there are increasing reports of households selling assets, spending savings and in some severe cases engaging in illegal activities to get food. When combined with poor incomes, limited economic activities and a lack of fuel and electricity, this will exert additional pressure on food-insecure and vulnerable households.

By contrast, in southern hard-to-reach areas the mean reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) fell considerably from 21.5 in December to 16.2 in January (Figure 4), in line with the FCS trend for these areas.

As Figure 5 shows, the use of negative coping strategies remained the highest among displaced households during January. Even so, the mean rCSI for IDPs has fallen, from 24.7 in December to 18.8 in January. A smaller proportion of households were restricting adult consumption so that children could eat (from 62 percent to 49 percent), borrowing food (from 66 percent to 57 percent) and reducing the number of meals (from 73 percent to 68 percent).

Figure 4: Mean rCSI, December 2016 - January 2017

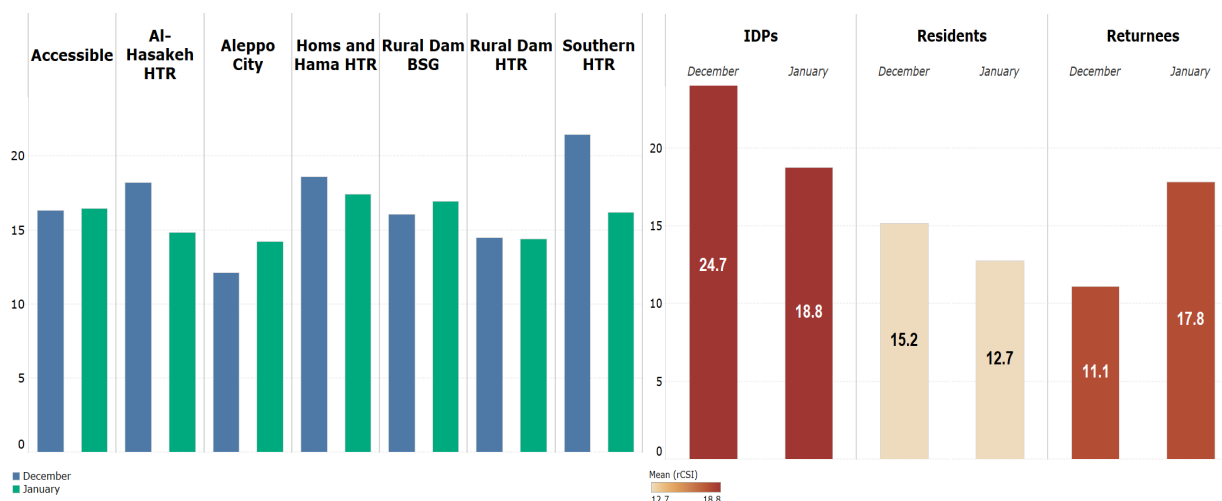


Figure 5: Mean rCSI – for resident, IDP and returnee households, December 2016—January 2017



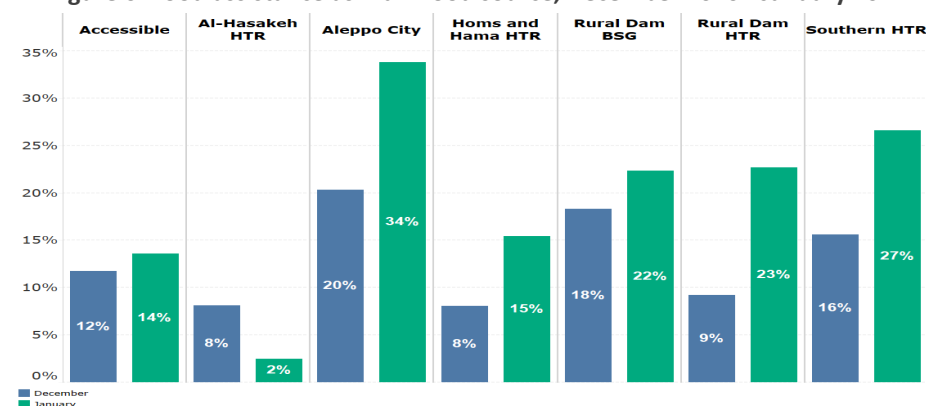
## INCREASED DEPENDENCE ON FOOD ASSISTANCE

Overall, the main source of food for the surveyed households continued to be purchasing (78 percent), followed by labour (16 percent), own production (4 percent) and gift/assistance (2 percent). As the conflict has escalated, disrupting market functionality and limiting economic access in active-conflict locations in Dar'a, rural Damascus and Aleppo city, more households reported relying on food assistance in January (Figure 6).

The highest percentage of households who reported food assistance as their main source of food was in Aleppo city (34 percent) and in southern hard-to-reach areas (27 percent).

A similar situation was recorded by key informants from Az-Zabadani, Madaya and Al-Wa'er. They reported that dwindling stocks of food assistance were the main – if not the only – source of food for many trapped households in January.

Figure 6: Food assistance as main food source, December 2016 - January 2017





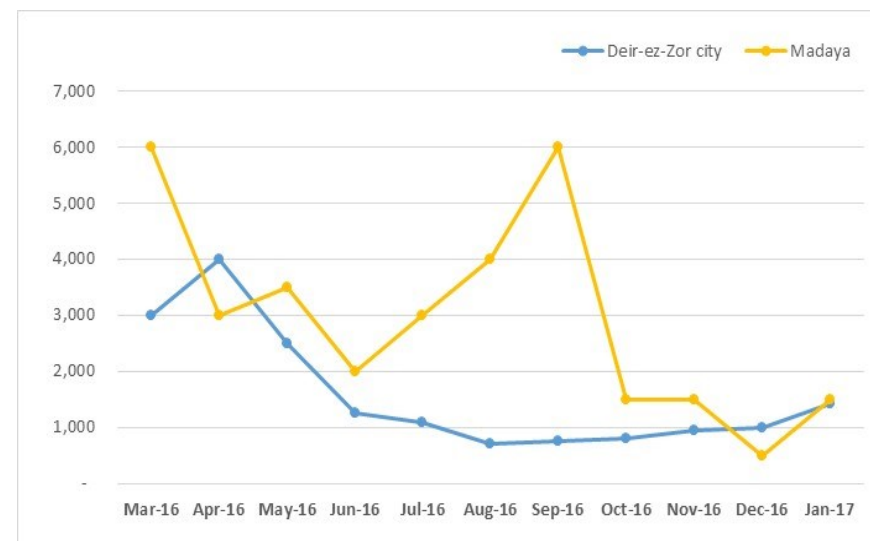
## MARKET ACCESS SEVERELY RESTRICTED IN BESIEGED DEIR-EZ-ZOR, MADAYA AND AZ-ZABADANI

Following increased attacks on markets in besieged Deir-ez-Zor, Madaya and Az-Zabadani, January market data indicates very poor market accessibility for households living in these locations. As shown in Figure 7, the current price of rice in Deir-ez-Zor city is SYP 1,425/kg, which is 50 percent higher than in November 2016 but still 64.3 percent less than in April 2016, before the airdrops. In Madaya, rice was sold at SYP 1,500/kg in January – a three-fold increase compared to December.

In besieged areas of Deir-ez-Zor, Madaya and Az-Zabadani, the severe lack of diesel has limited households' ability to cook. The shortage has added more pressure, especially on poor households led by women who have no other means of keeping their children warm than burning rubbish and dried animal dung.

Similarly, the closure of access points in Ash Shajara (in Dar'a) and the tightening of constraints on the only supply route to Al-Wa'er have adversely impacted market functionality; many food items were reported to be scarce and expensive. Al-Wa'er is also facing severe shortages of wheat flour and bread: in January the price of a bread bundle reached SYP 1,000, twenty times more than the official price. In contrast, market data from east Aleppo city indicates relatively better market functionality, reflecting improved food accessibility and lower demand on markets.

**Figure 7: Retail price of rice (SYP/kg) in Deir-ez-Zor and Madaya, March**

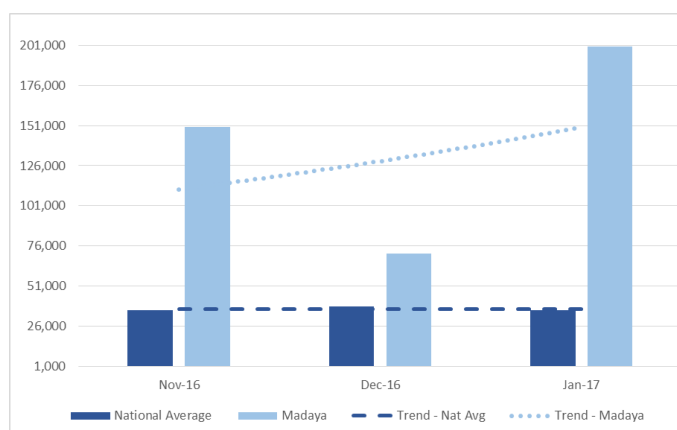


## COST OF THE FOOD BASKET RISES IN BESIEGED LOCATIONS

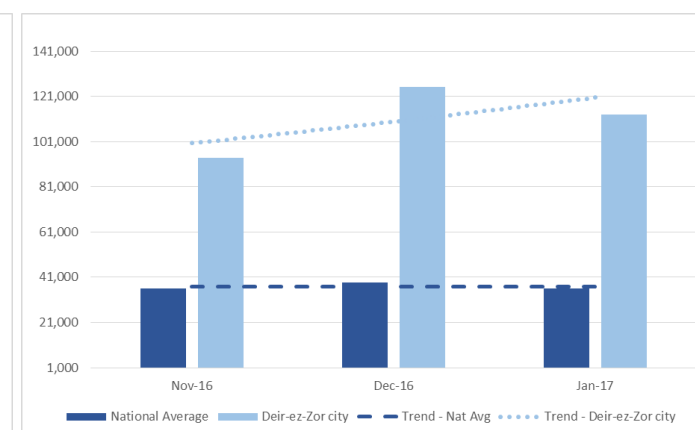
In January, the cost of a standard food basket (a group of essential commodities) in Madaya was SYP 200,000. This is an increase of 180 percent compared to December 2016 and of 33 percent compared to November – the last time a convoy reached Madaya.

In Deir-ez-Zor city, the January food basket cost SYP 113,025, down 9.7 percent compared to one month previously but 20.4 percent higher than in November 2016 (before airdrops became less frequent). The basket is 47 percent cheaper than before airdrops began in April 2016. By contrast, the basket cost SYP 104,100 in Al-Wa'er, over three times more than in Homs city and Damascus markets.

**Figure 8: Trends in the cost of the standard food basket in Madaya vs. national average (Nov 2016 - Jan 2017)**



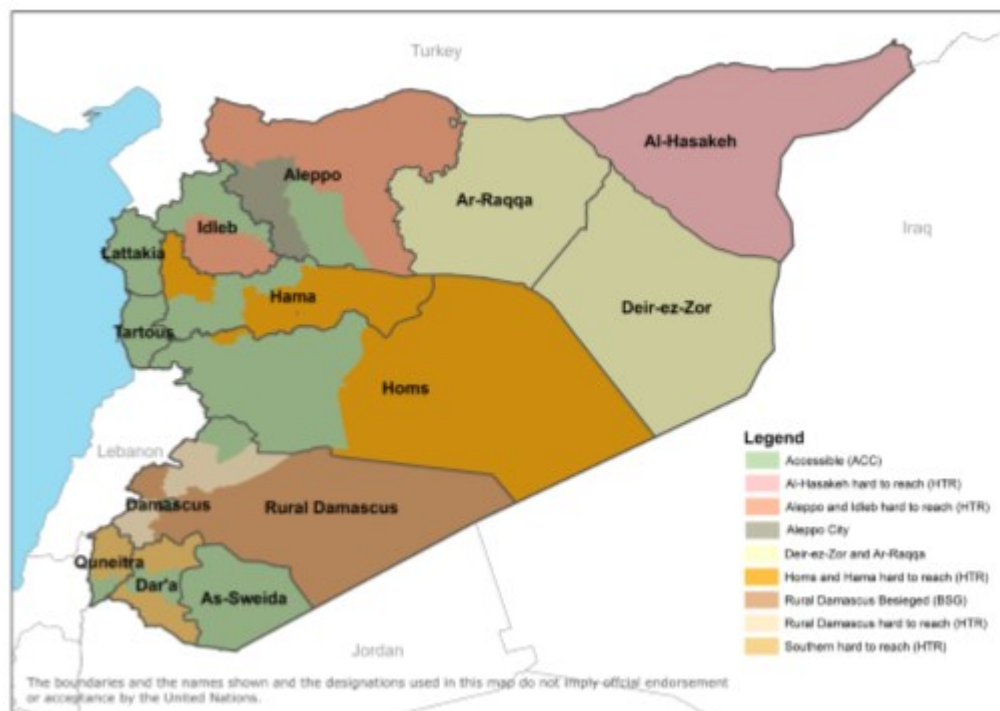
**Figure 9: Trends in the cost of the standard food basket in Deir-ez-Zor city vs. national average (Nov 2016 - Jan 2017)**





Households reported rising rents and food prices as their main concern in January. The lack of regular income is making it difficult for families to meet their basic needs. Several respondents mentioned the need for winter blankets to protect them from the harsh weather. Shortages of water, electricity, cooking gas, medicines and job opportunities were commonly reported. The food supply in the markets has been affected by the ongoing conflict, which is restricting the movement of goods and causing road closures and fuel shortages. The lack of security and safe movement was also among the main concerns of surveyed households.

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via telephone interviews in January from both key informants and households. The telephone numbers 2017 called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1,312 completed surveys. 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 Rural Damascus, and hard-to-reach Southern. This sampling frame groups together areas with similar geography and access status, allowing for a large enough sample size to make statistically significant comparisons.



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