

Access to food assistance improves in Deir-ez-Zor city

Key points:



Inadequate level of food consumption is more prevalent in urban areas.



More IDP households are buying food on credit and spending savings in order to obtain food.



Basic food commodity prices decreased in Deir-ez-Zor city. Elsewhere, in Madaya and Az-Zabadani, prices continue to increase as conflict intensifies.



WFP/Syria

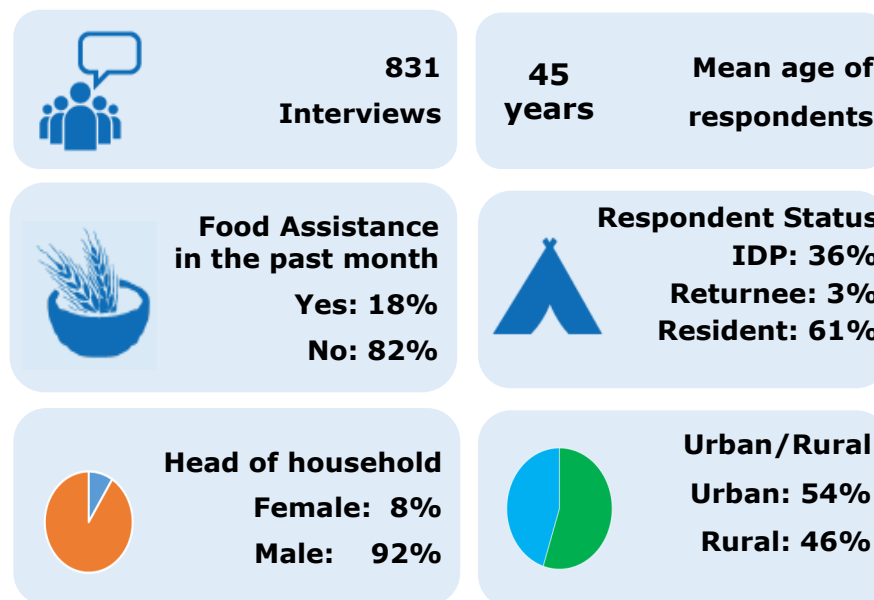
Situation Update

Conflict is ongoing in the city of Al Bab, 30 km south of the Turkish border, disrupting the main supply route linking the city to eastern Aleppo and Ar Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor governorates. As of 06 February, an estimated 10,000 civilians in the area remain besieged. Both Al Bab and Ar Raqqa have been under opposition groups control since 2014, with limited humanitarian access ever since.

In addition, an estimated 40,000 people are reportedly in desperate need of humanitarian assistance in the besieged town of Madaya 40 km northwest of Damascus. The last UN inter-agency convoy to the besieged “Four Towns” (Madaya and Zabadani in Rural Damascus Governorate and Foah and Kafraya in Idlib Governorate) took place on 28 November 2016. Despite the nationwide ceasefire declared on 30 December 2016, humanitarian access for the UN and its partners to besieged and hard-to-reach areas remains severely restricted due to the volatile security situation. As of February, the number of people living in hard-to-reach and besieged areas stands at an estimated 4.7 million. Of these, about 644,000 people live in 13 besieged locations.

On 12 February, conflict around Dar'a City, in southern Syria has escalated, affecting also Ramtha border crossing with Jordan that has led to the displacement of around 9,000 people. The Ramtha border crossing remains open.

Fig. 1. Sample Household characteristics





Household food security improved in accessible areas

Data collected in February shows that the mean food consumption score (FCS) for households in accessible areas has increased from 50.8 point in January to 54.4 point in February. The worst mean FCS was observed for households from Aleppo city and hard to reach areas of Homs and Hama (Figure 2).

Looking at the food consumption groups, the highest prevalence of inadequate food consumption (poor or borderline) was again reported from Aleppo city (48 percent) followed by hard-to-reach areas of Al-Hasakeh (42 percent) and hard-to-reach areas of rural Damascus (40 percent). However the highest percentage of poor food consumption was recorded in hard to reach areas of Homs and Hama (17 percent) (Figure 3).

Key informants from besieged areas reported that households' dietary diversity continue to be very poor as households mainly depend on external food assistance as main source of food. As airdrops resume in Deir-ez-Zor city, a better access to food assistance was registered by key informants.

In Madaya and Az-Zabadani, widespread violence and fighting keeps limiting humanitarian access. This alongside with scarce food supply and severely disrupted markets functionality exacerbate the vulnerability to food insecurity for the majority of poor besieged population.

Key informants also reported that the food security situation in Al-Wa'er and active-conflict areas of Dar'a didn't improve compared to last month. Major drivers of food insecurity are the instability of the security situation and the disruption of the supply routes.

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

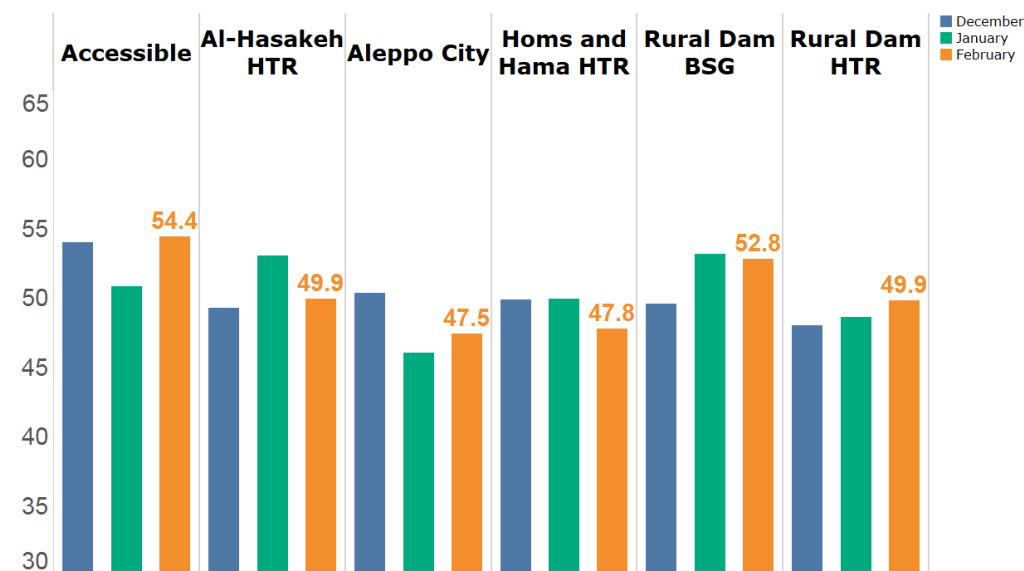
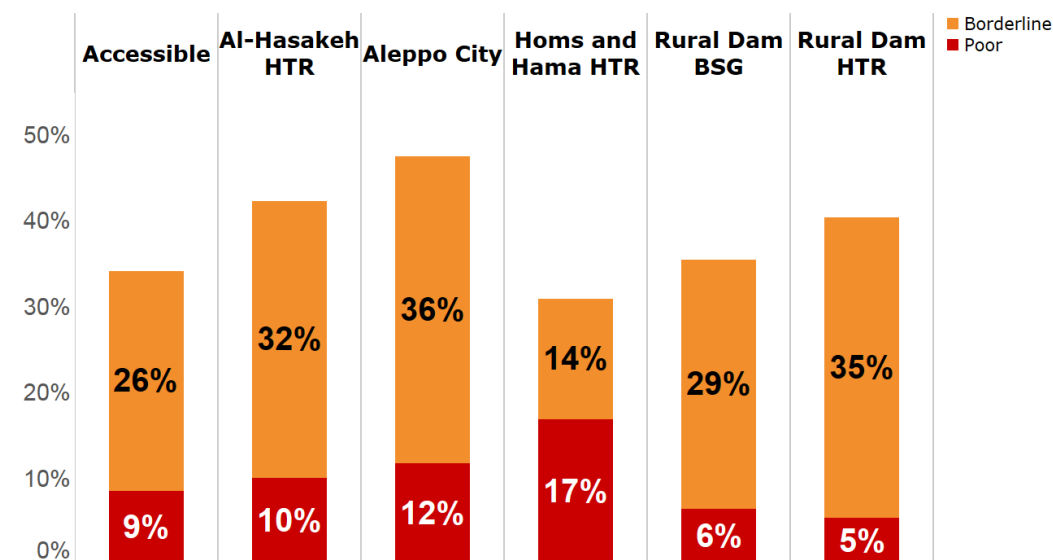


Figure 3: Inadequate food consumption by aggregated districts, February 2017





IDP households consume less proteins and fruits

There was no remarkable change in the prevalence of inadequate consumption among IDP households compared to the previous month. On the other hand, the prevalence of borderline food consumption among residents rose from 26 percent in January to 39 percent in February (Figure 4). Nonetheless, IDP households are worse off than residents in terms of overall consumption and dietary diversity. On average, IDP households consume proteins and fruits less than two days a week while dairy products, vegetables and pulses are consumed less than three days a week (Figure 5).

As shown in Figure 6, differently from previous rounds, in February the prevalence of borderline food consumption is higher in urban than in rural areas. Normally the prevalence of food insecurity is slightly higher in rural than in urban areas in part because people in urban areas typically have more markets and potential income opportunities than in rural areas. However, IDPs are mostly concentrated in urban areas, and these results further demonstrate the adverse impact of displacement on food security.

Figure 6: Inadequate food consumption among urban and rural households, January – February 2017

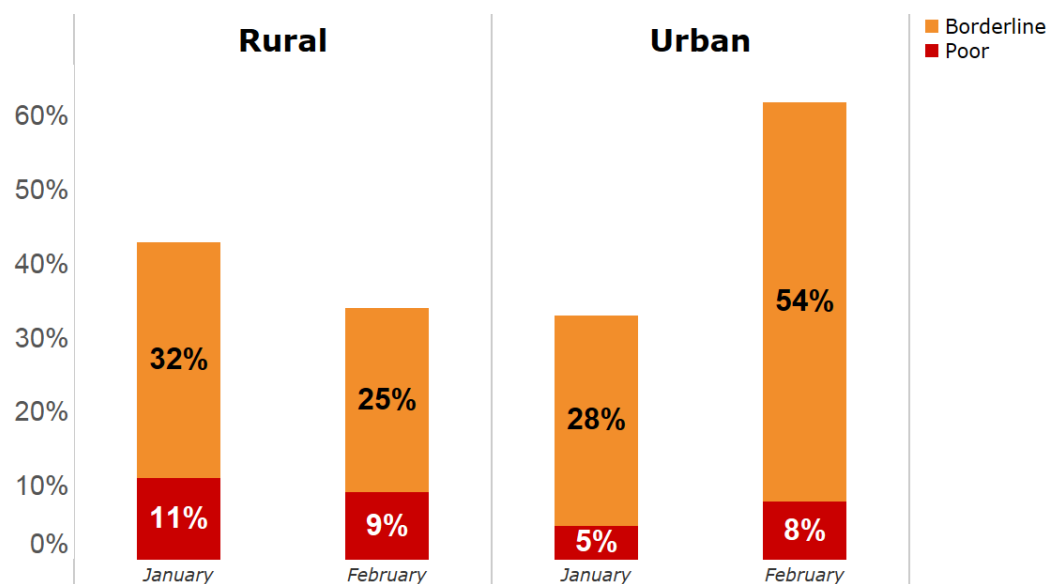


Figure 4: Inadequate food consumption among IDP and resident households, January– February 2017

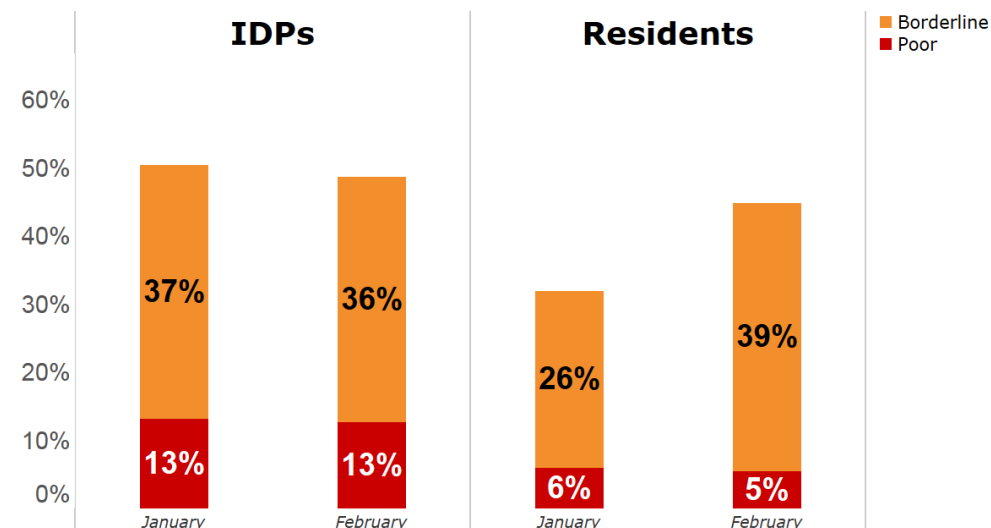
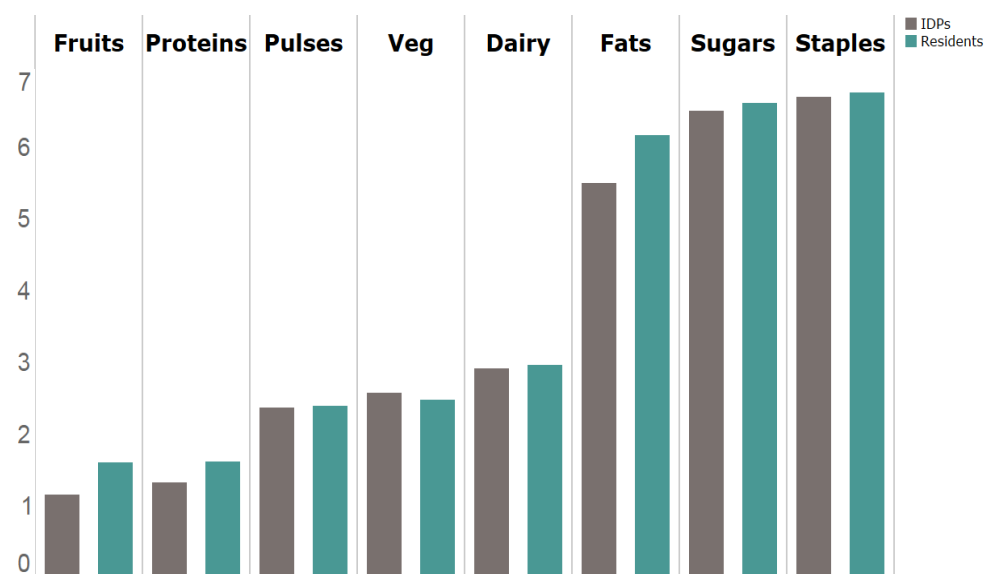


Figure 5: Dietary diversity among IDP and resident households, February 2017





Use of livelihood coping strategies increases among IDP households

In February, in hard-to-reach areas of Homs and Hama the mean reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) increased considerably from 17.4 in January to 21.1 in February (Figure 7), in line with the FCS trend for these areas. mVAM data for households surveyed from hard to reach areas of Homs, Hama and Al-Hasakeh identified higher prevalence of spending savings, restricting adults consumption, reducing number of meals and borrowing food compared to January round.

Widespread practicing of irreversible/extreme coping strategies continues to be reported from key informant sources in all besieged locations. This includes Deir-ez-Zor city, Madaya, Al-Wa'er, Az-Zabadani, Duma and other besieged locations in east Ghouta. Particularly, reducing portion size, limiting the number of meals per day and prioritizing children's consumption. Moreover, key informants indicated that many besieged households exhausted their savings and sold their assets during the years of crisis in order to buy food for their children.

However, in Deir-ez-Zor city the situation has slightly improved compared to January and December. Household have access to different food commodities like cereals, sugar and oil that were inaccessible in the previous months.

As Figure 8 shows, the use of negative coping strategies remained the highest among displaced households during February. Even so, the mean rCSI for IDPs has continued falling since December 2016. In February, a smaller proportion of IDP households were limiting the portion sizes at meal times (from 50 percent to 41 percent) and buying less expensive food (from 80 percent to 73 percent). However when looking at the livelihood coping strategies, more than 70 percent of the IDP households are buying food on credit and 20 percent are spending their savings in order to obtain food. This is particularly worrisome as the debt of these households increase, so they become more vulnerable to food insecurity (Figure 9).

Figure 7: Mean rCSI, December 2016 to February 2017

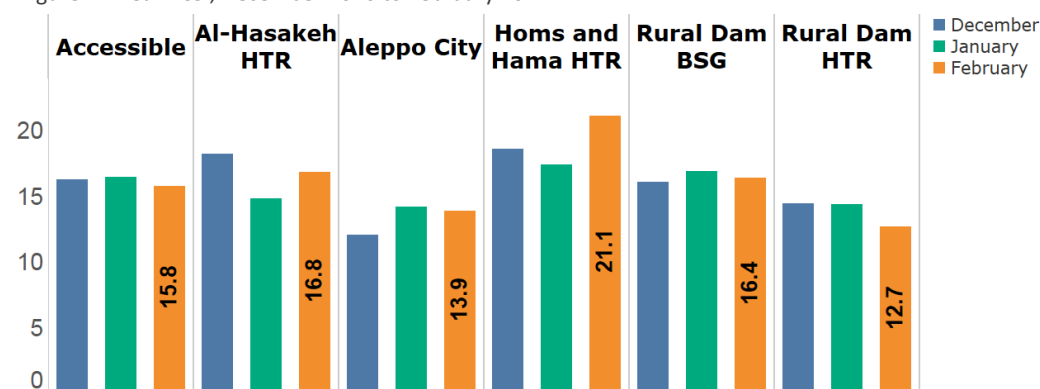


Figure 8: Mean rCSI – for resident and IDP households, December 2016 to February 2017

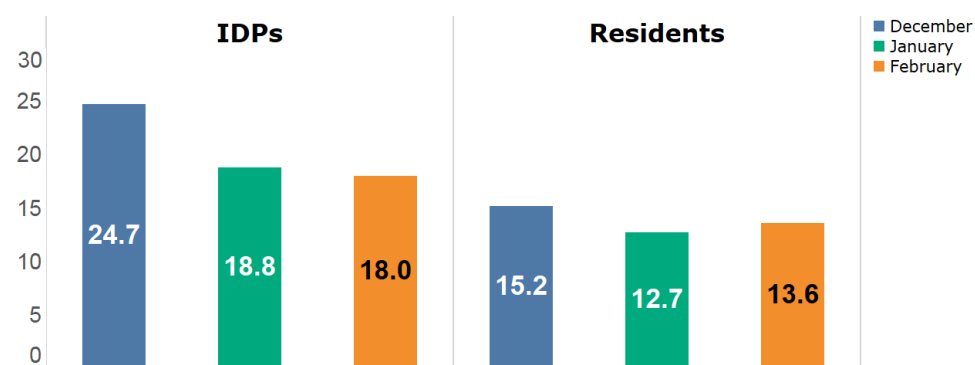
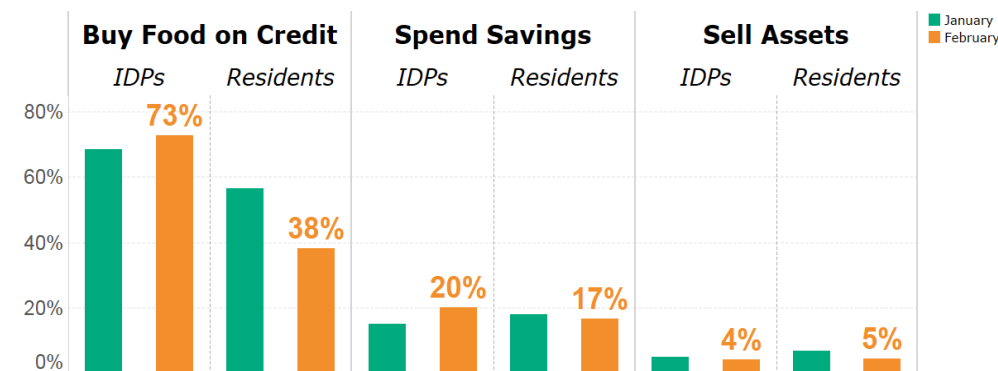


Figure 9: Use of livelihood coping strategies by IDP and resident households, January - February 2017





Decreased access to food assistance

Buying food continues to be the most common source of food for the surveyed households (80 percent). Overall the percentage of households who reported gift and assistance as their primary source of food decreased from 16 percent in January to 13 percent in February while the percentage of households reporting labour as their primary source of food increased from 2 percent in January to 5 percent in February.

Looking at the displacement status of the respondents, as expected IDPs (27 percent) are relying more on gifts and food assistance than residents (7 percent). At the same time, the percentage of households reporting having received food assistance in February decreased significantly for both IDP and resident households (Figure 10). In February no convoys were able to reach the besieged locations in rural Damascus due to the deterioration of the security situation which restricted the accessibility to food assistance for the households in these areas.



Limited food availability and accessibility in most of besieged and active-conflict locations

As shown in Figure 11, the current price of rice in Deir-ez-Zor city is SYP 1,200/kg, which is 16 percent less than last month, 71.4 percent lower than August level but still less than pre-airdrop level (April 2016) by 70 percent. In Deir-ez-Zor airbase surrounding besieged locations bread availability was limited as road linking it to the besieged city was cut by conflict parties. Bread airdrops from one side to the other was the only way to deliver bread to the population in the besieged location.

In Madaya, rice was sold at SYP 1,300/kg recording 13 percent decline compared to January level but still 160 percent higher than December 2016 level. Conversely, the prices of most food supplies have increased during February when compared to last month including oil, sugar and pluses. Fresh bread is not/limitedly available in Madaya and Az-Zabadani.

Similarly, severe shortage of wheat flour was reported from besieged Al-Wa'er in Homs and consequently bread wasn't easily accessible.

Figure 10: Food assistance as main food source by IDP and resident households, December 2016 to February 2017

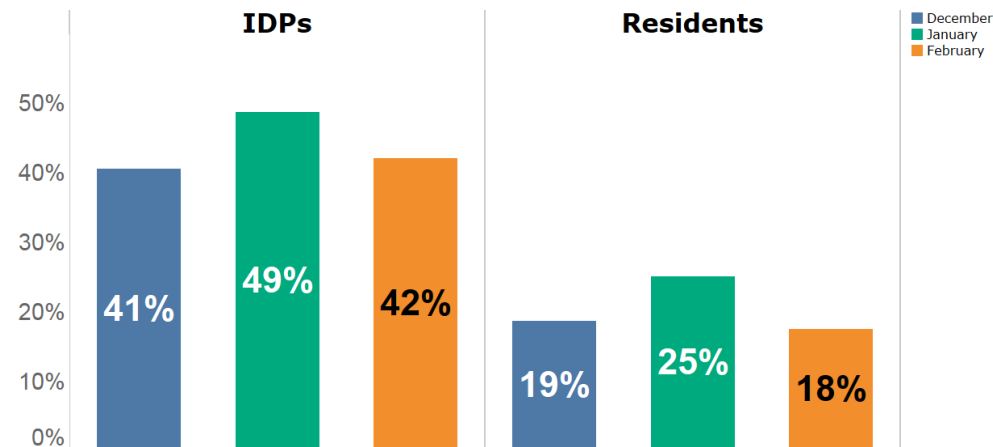
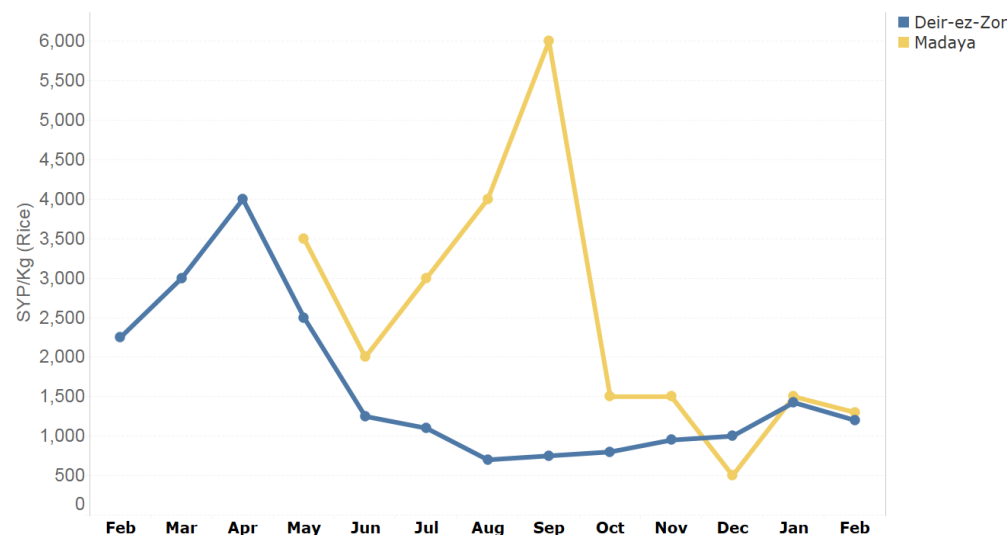


Figure 11: Retail price of rice (SYP/1 kg) in Deir-ez-Zor city and Madaya, February 2016 to February 2017





Lower prices and better availability for food supplies in Deir-ez-Zor city

As per WFP market data (February 2017), better availability and lower prices were recorded for stable food commodities in Deir-ez-Zor. This can be attributed to back-to-normal frequency of food assistance airdrops that has released pressure on markets. It is worth to mention that lower prices were recorded particularly for food commodities that are included in the food assistance due to less demand on it.

Nevertheless, the cost of reference food basket remained stable compared to last month with a slight increase of less than two percent recording SYP 115,100. This cost is also higher than six months ago by 109 percent but still 46 percent lower when compared to pre-airdrop level.

This was not the case in Madaya and Az-Zabadani where intensified conflict severely disrupted the supply routes to the besieged communities. Many food items prices are soaring and some are not even available or affordable. Food basket cost during this month was SYP 206,200, an increase of three percent compared to last month and 37.5 percent compared to November 2016 when the last humanitarian convoy reached these communities.

Market network continued to be disrupted in Al-Wa'er due to intensification of assaults. This alongside the disrupted humanitarian accessibility had negatively impacted food security situation for many besieged vulnerable households with limited/no income sources and heavy dependence on food assistance.

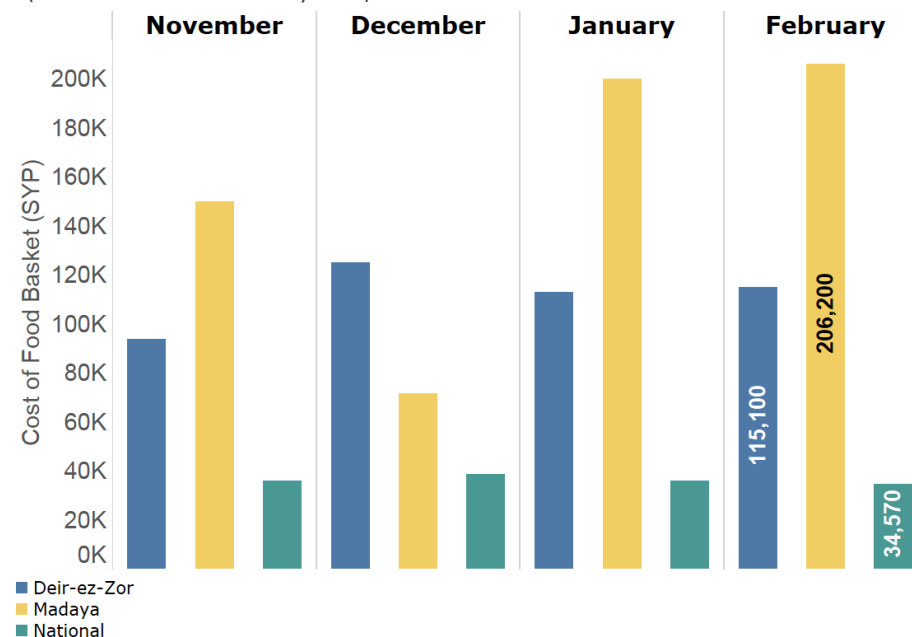


In the words of the respondents

Overall, respondents continue to worry about price increases, particularly for food, electricity, water, and clothes. Other concerns were raised over a lack of medical care, fuel and cooking gas.

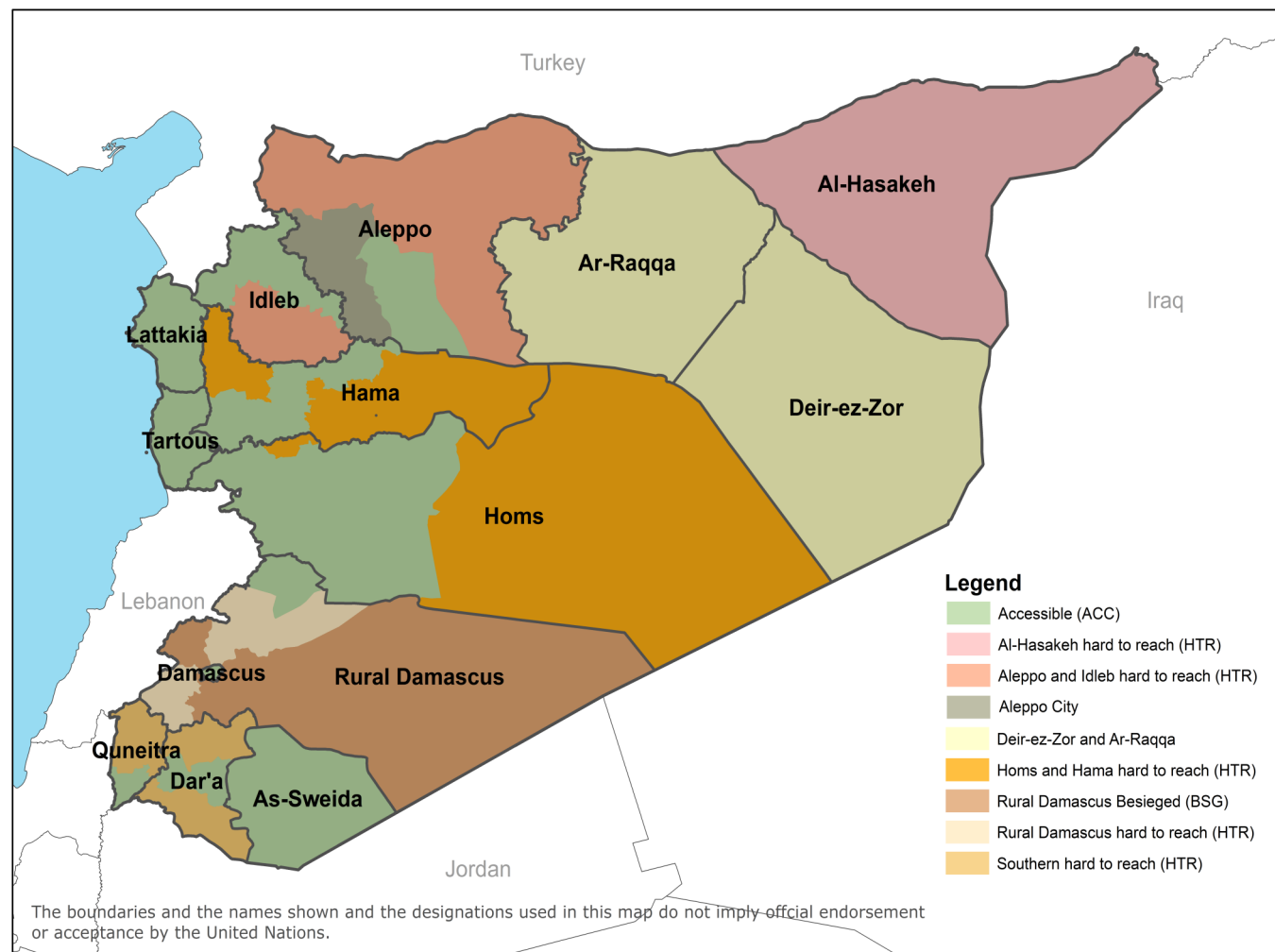
Some IDPs reported concerns about paying their rental housing expenses and the need to continuously move from a house to another. Low income also was one of the main challenges facing most of the respondents, as they reported high prices and expenditures at the same time as limited income opportunities. Food assistance, gifts and support from the relatives and neighbours is mentioned by many respondents as one of their main source of food. Finally insecurity and a lack a safety or protection continue to be mentioned by most respondents when asked about the food security situation in their community.

Figure 12: Cost of standard food basket in Deir-ez-Zor city and Madaya vs. national average (November 2016 to February 2017)



Methodology

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via telephone interviews in February from both key informants and households. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 831 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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mVAM Resources:

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