

Food prices fall as food accessibility improves in eastern Ghouta, Madaya and Deir-ez-Zor

Key points:



Lower food prices decrease the prevalence of inadequate food consumption for residents. Aleppo and rural Damascus report the poorest food consumption scores.



More IDPs and households led by women are resorting to negative coping strategies.



In eastern Ghouta, humanitarian access and better food supplies to markets have relatively improved food accessibility and prices.



Households are mostly concerned about unaffordable prices, particularly for clothes, food and electricity.



WFP Syria

Situation Update

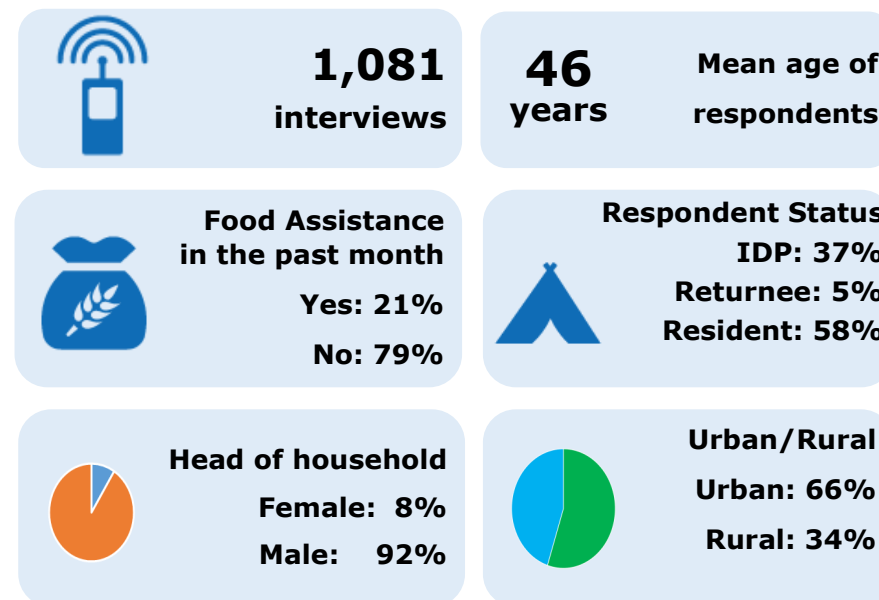
On 4 May, a "Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic" was signed in Astana, Kazakhstan. The Memorandum agrees to the establishment of four separate de-escalation areas for a period of at least six months. The largest de-escalation area includes Idleb governorate and certain parts of the neighbouring Hama, Aleppo and Latakia governorates. The other three areas are in northern Homs governorate, eastern Ghouta near Damascus city and along the Jordanian border in southern Syria (areas of Dar'a and Quneitra governorates).

Meanwhile, people are returning to newly accessible parts of Aleppo. The UN has officially registered 153,000 individuals, mainly in eastern parts of Aleppo, where many are living in partially damaged houses and congested collective shelters. Most of the newly accessible neighbourhoods are heavily damaged and lack infrastructure and basic services. More than 48,000 people from eastern Aleppo still reside with families in western parts of the city.

In Ar-Raqqa city, the security situation deteriorated in May and the conflict blocked most supply routes to the city. The situation is extremely fluid and further deterioration is expected in the next few weeks. WFP has responded with ready-to-eat rations for many households who have been displaced from the city to safe areas.

On 16 May, 2,400 people were reportedly evacuated from the Al-Waer neighbourhood in Homs city to Idleb governorate. This brings the total number of evacuees from Al-Waer to over 17,000 people since the four-town agreement was reached in mid-March 2017. An estimated 35,000 people remain in Al-Waer and further evacuations are expected.

Figure 1: Sample Household characteristics





Inadequate food consumption most prevalent in accessible areas of rural Damascus and Aleppo

Data show that the mean household food consumption score (FCS) rose from 52.8 in April to 57.6 in May. Several factors underpin this increase, including better access to own production, increased demand from agriculture for unskilled labour during the summer season, as well as lower staple food prices. This was particularly the case in Al-Hasakeh (the main cereal-producing area in Syria) and in Hama (where mean FCS increased from 53.5 in April to 64.5 in May).

As shown in Figure 2, the worst FCS was seen among households in accessible parts of rural Damascus and Aleppo, where there are high proportions of IDPs and returnees. With the approach of the summer season and the end of the school year, IDPs who are currently displaced in Homs, Tartous, Hama and Lattakia are returning to Aleppo to their original dwellings. However, many of them are considered to be very vulnerable due to their multiple displacements.

Households from rural Damascus had the highest prevalence of inadequate food consumption: 12 percent had poor food consumption and 15 percent had borderline consumption in May (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Mean FCS by aggregated district, May 2017

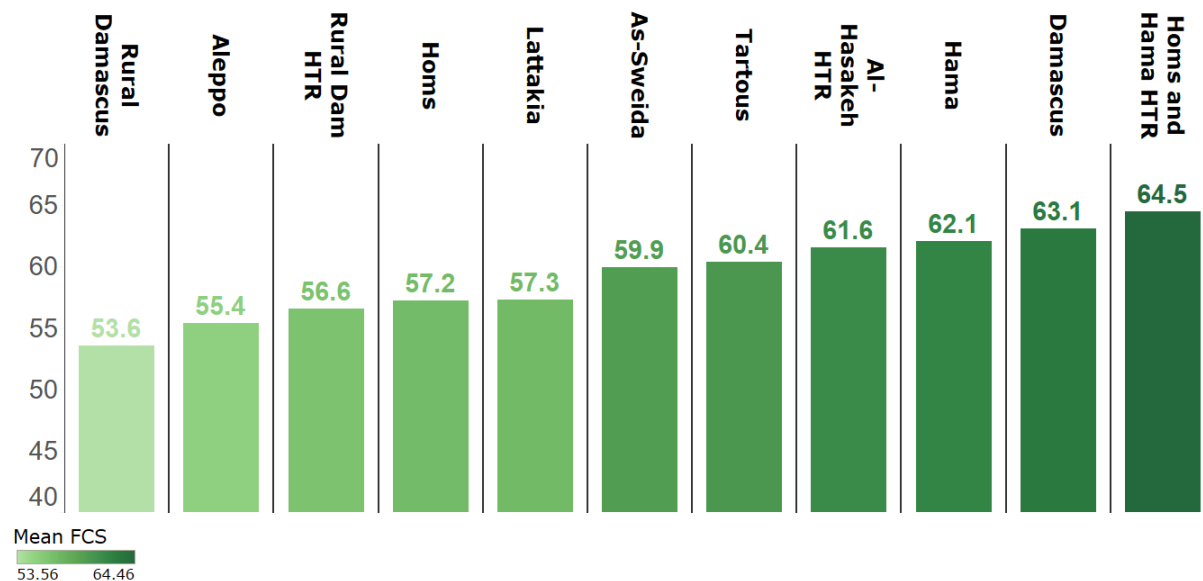
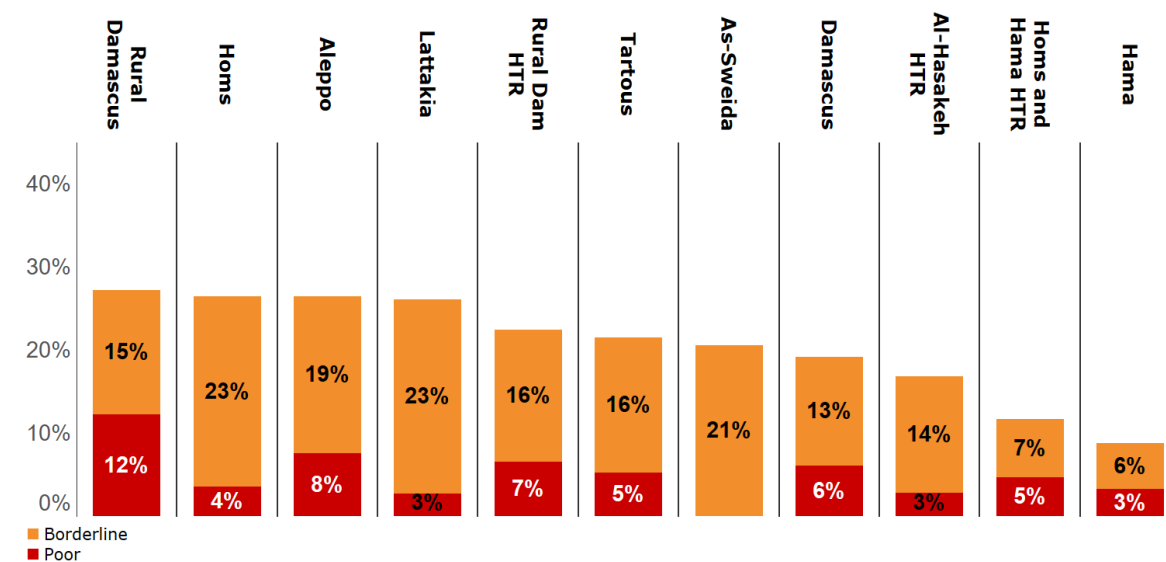


Figure 3: Inadequate food consumption by aggregated districts, May 2017



Households who rely on food assistance as one of their three main food sources are more likely to report inadequate food consumption than those who do not (Figure 4). However, the percentage of resident households with poor and borderline food consumption improved by 20 percent in May compared to the previous round; the proportion remained almost the same for IDPs (Figure 5).

In May, data were collected on nutrition rich-food groups. Almost all households were deficient in hem iron-rich foods. Residents reported better intake of protein and vitamin A-rich foods than IDPs (Figure 6).

In besieged eastern Ghouta¹ the main smuggling tunnels that bring food to the area have been closed since April, and households are mainly depending on remaining food stocks in markets. However, key informants said that food accessibility for many poor and vulnerable households improved with the last humanitarian access to Duma in May, alongside recent commercial flows. Dietary diversity is also better thanks to seasonal access to homegrown vegetables (beans, peas and early summer vegetables such as cucumber and eggplant) and crops (wheat and barley).

In May, the roads that link Madaya and Az-Zabadani to Damascus were opened, following the four-town agreement and the ceasefire in April. This has improved the movement of civilians through access points and allowed regular commercial flows to the area. It has also allowed technical workers to enter Madaya and begin rehabilitating public services. Since then, food security in the besieged area has gradually improved.

Food accessibility also improved in May in besieged Deir-ez-Zor city, in line with food distributions and lower food prices. However, dietary diversity remains poor for the majority, particularly for households led by women and poor households who have no access to income or remittances and who are mainly depending on starches and pulses from food assistance.

Figure 4: Inadequate food consumption by assistance as food source, May 2017

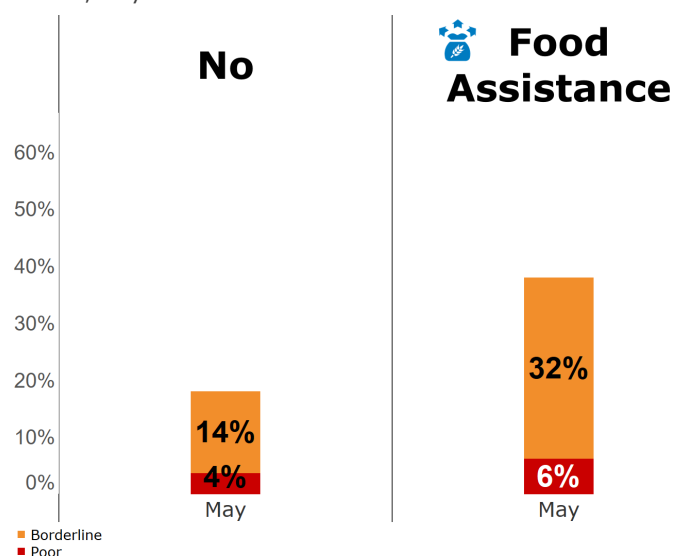


Figure 5: Inadequate food consumption among IDP and resident households, April –May 2017

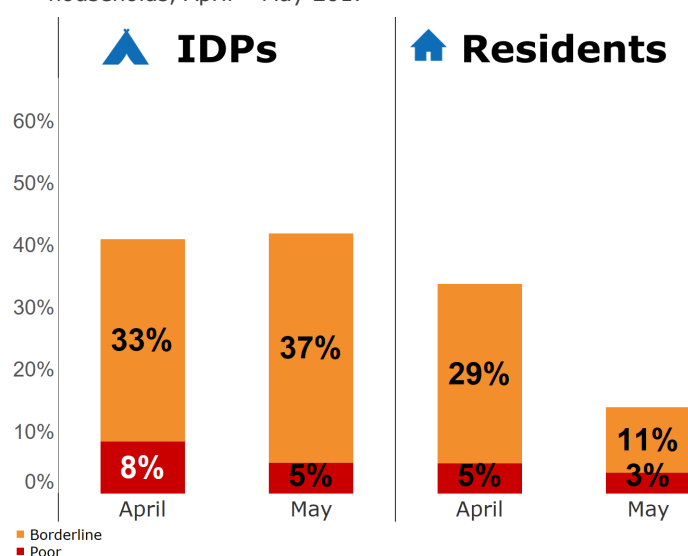
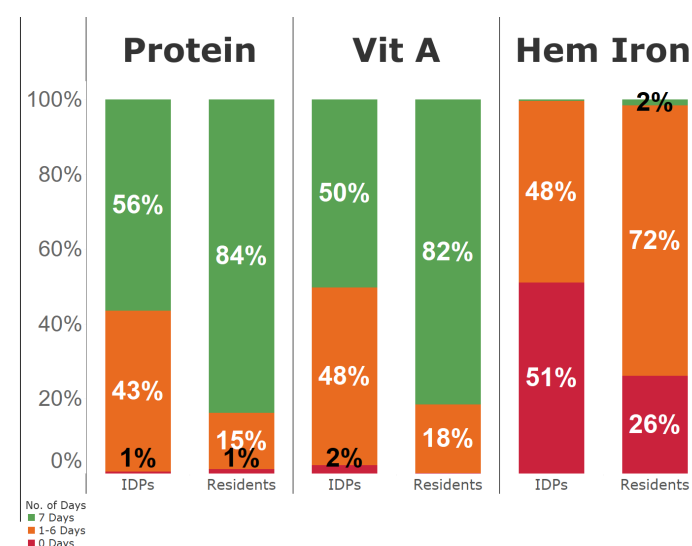


Figure 6: Frequency consumption of rich food groups by resident status, May 2017



¹ East Ghouta consists of five sub-districts: Arbin, Harasta, Duma, Kafrobatna and Nashabieh. Approximately 394,600 people are living under the siege according to OCHA April estimates.



Higher use of negative food-related coping among households led by women and IDPs

In May, the highest mean reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) was reported by households in accessible parts of Hama (22.5), followed by those in Lattakia and As-Sweida (Figure 7). Households led by women reported a higher mean rCSI (22.3) than those led by men (17.3). This was particularly evident for borrowing food, buying food on credit and reducing the number of meals per day – which more than 70 percent of households led by women reported engaging in (Figure 8). By contrast, households led by men are relying more on negative livelihood-based coping strategies such as spending savings and selling assets than households led by women.

Key informants from Al-Hasakeh reported that many poor and vulnerable rural households are spending many days with nothing more to eat than yoghurt and bread. Moreover, the rate of teenage girls engaging in agriculture labouring has significantly increased. In Tartous and As-Sweida, the average wage for displaced labour in some locations is lower than that of resident labour. Consequently, displaced households are working longer hours and many are forced to withdraw their children from school and send them to work. In Homs and Aleppo, there were many cases of returnees living in their destroyed houses to avoid paying rent, as their limited income is barely enough to feed their children.

The use of negative coping strategies remains high in Madaya despite a relative improvement in May. Because of lack of money, most households are eating fewer meals per day, borrowing food from relatives/friends and limiting meal sizes. Similarly, in eastern Ghouta, most of the population is consuming less preferred food, eating fewer meals per day and limiting meal sizes. Key sources reported that around half of the households are borrowing food on credit and sending their children to eat elsewhere.

mVAM data for May show that more displaced households are resorting to food-based negative coping strategies than resident households: the mean rCSI for IDP households in May (21.8) was far higher than that for residents (14.9). A smaller proportion of resident households were buying less expensive food and restricting adult consumption in May compared to April (Figure 9).

Figure 7: Mean rCSI, May 2017

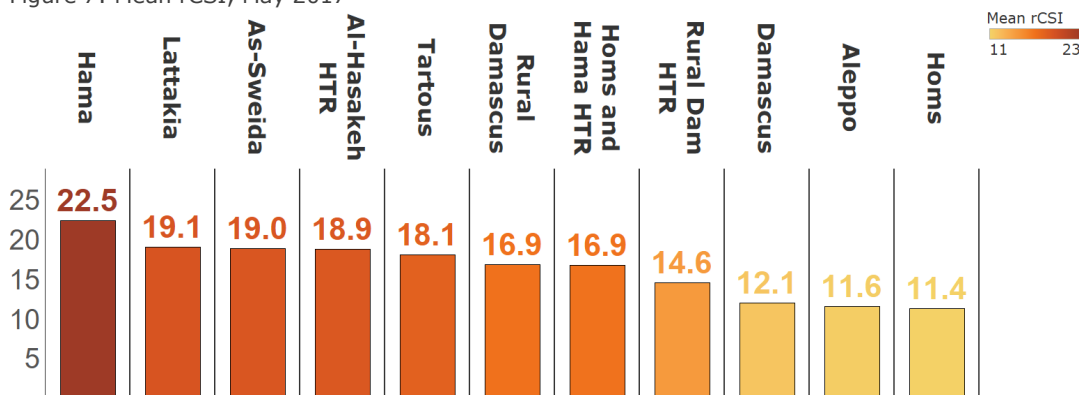


Figure 8: Use of coping strategies by sex of household head, February – May 2017

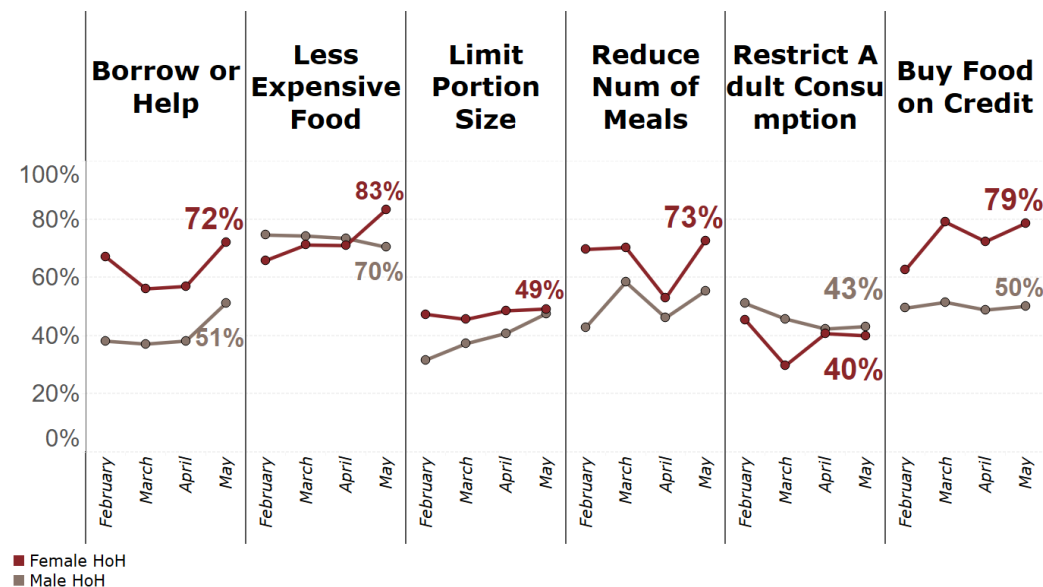
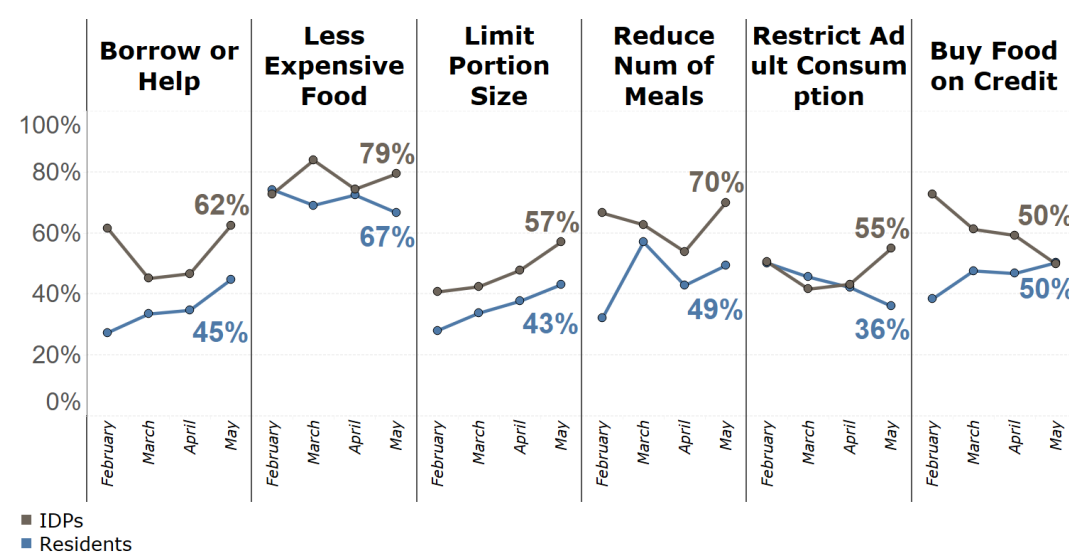


Figure 9: Use of coping strategies by resident status, February – May 2017





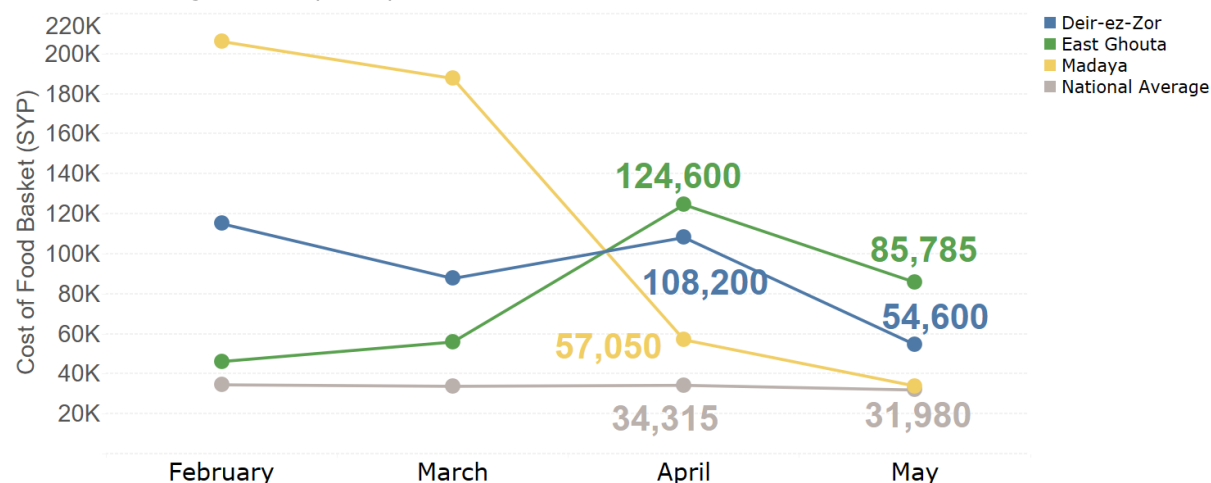
Cost of food basket falls in eastern Ghouta, Madaya and Deir-ez-Zor

On 9 May, traders in eastern Ghouta were able to facilitate the arrival of six trucks carrying rice, wheat flour, sugar, oil, pasta and dried milk. This improved food availability and prices. The average price of a standard food basket fell in eastern Ghouta to SYP85,785, a decrease of 31 percent compared to last month but still 168 percent higher than the national average.

In Madaya, commercial vehicles were allowed regular access to the area carrying fresh food and other items in May. This has significantly improved food availability and released pressure on markets, leading to lower and relatively stable prices. The cost of the food basket was SYP33,950 in May – 40 percent less than in April and only 6 percent higher than the national average.

The cost of a standard food basket in besieged Deir-ez-Zor was SYP54,600 during May. This is 50 percent less than in April but still 71 percent above the national average (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Cost of the standard food basket in eastern Ghouta city, Madaya and Deir-ez-Zor vs. national average, February – May 2017



Bread is five times more expensive in Madaya than in Damascus

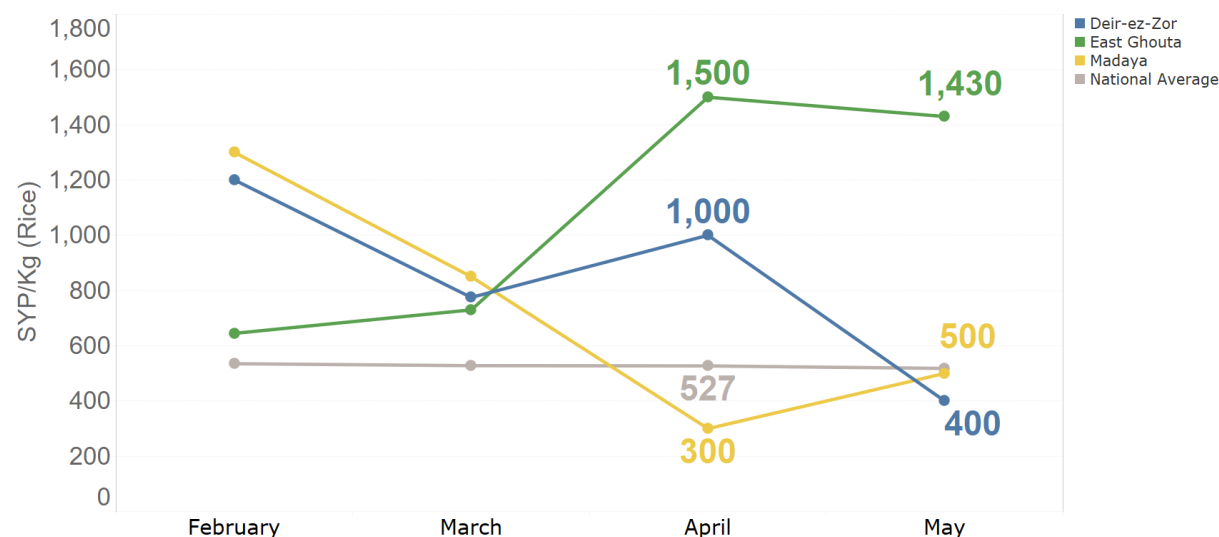
In eastern Ghouta, rice is currently retailing at SYP1,430/kg, which is 5 percent less than in April. However, prices are still 120 percent higher than six months ago and almost three times the national average.

In Madaya, rice cost SYP500/kg in May, an increase of 67 percent compared to April but 67 percent lower than six months ago. However, the price of a bread bundle is still five times higher than in Damascus because there are no functioning bakeries inside Madaya and bread is brought from outside.

In besieged Deir-ez-Zor city, rice prices fell by 60 percent compared to April, reaching SYP400/kg. This is 58 percent less than six months ago (Figure 11).

By contrast, in Ar-Raqqa city, the escalation of fighting has severely disrupted market functionality and many shops have been destroyed or are completely closed. As a result, food prices have soared, adding more pressure on physical and economic food access for the many households trapped inside the city. Compared to April, rice prices rose by 45 percent to SYP800/kg, while wheat flour prices doubled.

Figure 11: Retail price of rice (SYP/kg) in eastern Ghouta, Madaya and Deir-ez-Zor vs. national average, February – May 2017





In the words of respondents

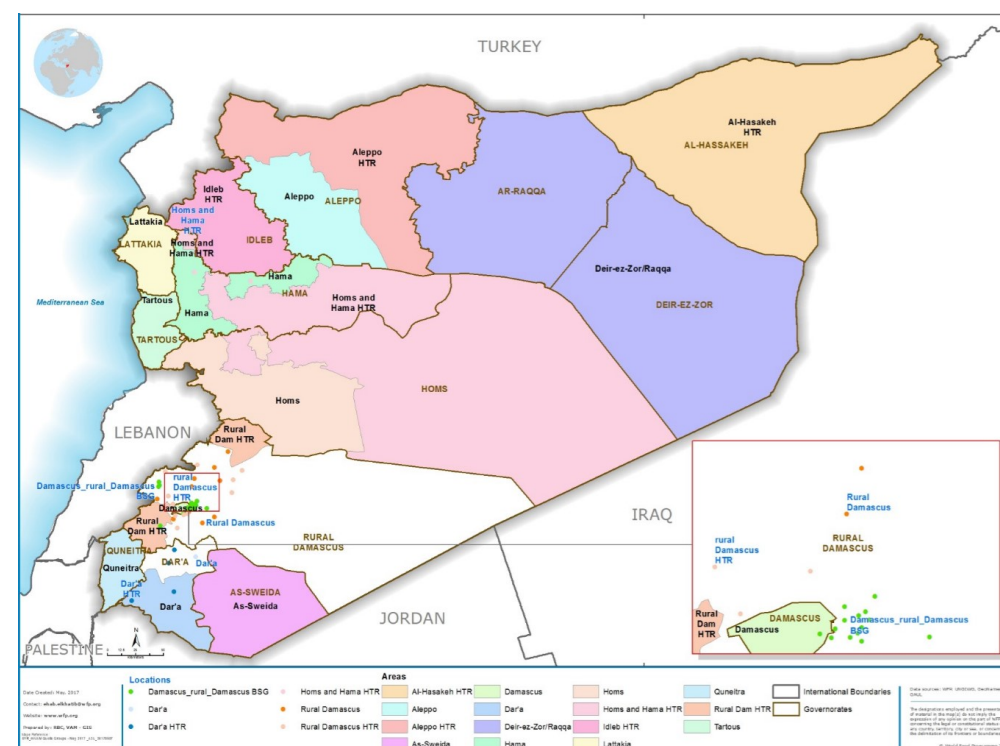
At the end of the survey, all households were asked to describe the food security situation in their communities. Almost a third said that prices were still unaffordable in May, particularly for clothes and electricity. Households also mentioned the spread of diseases, adding that it was difficult for their families to afford medical treatment. The second biggest concern was unemployment and low salaries, followed by security and safety, which worried 11 percent of respondents.

Methodology

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via telephone interviews in May from key informants and households. The telephone numbers called were generated using random-digit dialling, yielding 1,018 completed surveys. The questionnaire contained questions on demographics, food assistance, household food consumption and nutrition, 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.

In May 2017, districts were combined into 18 strata reflecting on their accessibility in order to obtain a more granular analysis of food security. The accessible areas were Aleppo, As-Sweida, Damascus, Dar'a, Hama, Homs, Rural Damascus, Lattakia and Tartous. Besieged areas were Rural Damascus BSG. Hard-to-reach (HTR) areas were Al-Hasakeh HTR, Aleppo HTR, Idleb HTR, Deir-ez-Zor/Raqqah HTR, Homs and Hama HTR, Rural Damascus HTR, Dar'a HTR and Quneitra HTR. This sampling frame groups together areas with similar geography and access status, allowing for a large enough sample size to make statistically significant comparisons. More details on the methodology can be found [here](#).

Figure 12: The main three concerns and the proportion of respondents reporting on them, May 2017



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mVAM Resources:

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

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