

Situation Overview

- The water level of the Euphrates River in Syria has declined since January 2021, reaching a critically low level in May 2021. The low water levels are believed to be a result of above average dry spells as well as a reduction of water flowing from Turkey to Syria. The Syrian Government reported that the Tishreen dam in Aleppo governorate received around 180 cubic meters of water per second during most of May. This represents less than half of the minimum amount of water outlined by the 1987 Syria-Turkey water sharing agreement, where at least 500 cubic meters of water per second are to be released from Turkey to Syria. Additionally, the water levels of Tabqa dam in Ar-Raqqa governorate, which is used as an emergency backup, were depleted by up to 80 percent. The water shortage crisis is concerning, given that nearly 5.5 million people in Syria rely on the Euphrates and its subsidiaries for drinking water and agriculture irrigation. Furthermore, the continued low water flow could result in loss of electricity for more than three million people as the Tishreen dam water-powered generators are shut, negatively impacting health care and sanitation, livelihoods, agricultural production and food security across the north and north-east regions of the country.
- On 9 May 2021, the Syrian Minister of Agriculture announced that harsh weather conditions and low rainfall levels have significantly reduced the amount of wheat across government-controlled areas this year. In northeast Syria, which is the country's wheat basket where typically 70 percent of Syrian wheat is produced, the Kurdish authorities announced that wheat production is expected to amount to around 500,000 tons this year, down from 850,000 tons last year. The reduction in wheat production is believed to be due to years of neglect and deforestation (throughout the prolonged conflict between 2012 and 2019, Syria lost around 20 percent of its tree cover), with now over 85 percent of Syrian agricultural land exposed to soil erosion. Additionally, shortages of foreign exchange reserves and unilateral coercive measures on the country complicated Syria's efforts to procure the required agricultural inputs on the open market. Moreover, on 12 May 2021, dozens of hectares of wheat and barley fields were reportedly burned by artillery bombardment in northwestern Aleppo. In response to the announcement of expected lower than average wheat yields, Russia's ambassador to Syria announced Russia's commitment to supply one million metric tons of wheat to the Government of Syria by the end of the year, having already supplied Syria with 350,000 metric tons since January 2021.
- COVID-19 continued to spread across Syria. As of 31 May 2021, a total of 24,495 COVID-19 cases, including 1,770 fatalities, were confirmed by the Minister of Health in government-controlled areas. The monthly increase in COVID-19 cases in May (1,762 cases) signals a downward trend compared to April 2021 (3,824 cases). In Northeast Syria, the situation has deteriorated during the COVID-19 second wave as many hospitals continued to lack essential health supplies and most people experienced limited access to water and sanitation services to control the spread of the virus. In May 2021, around 17,819 COVID-19 cases were reported across northeast Syria, an increase of 1,891 new cases compared to the previous month, representing the second highest monthly caseload since December 2020. In response, Kurdish authorities extended the imposed partial lockdown in Kurdish-controlled areas across northeast Syria throughout most of May.
- The security situation remained volatile across Syria. In May 2021, intensified hostilities were reported in northwest Syria, with shelling largely concentrated in southern Idlib and northern Aleppo. On 3 May 2021, an explosion was reported near Nadi Alfurusiah IDP camp in northern Idlib, resulting in civilian deaths and damaging approximately 50 tents. Moreover, the Islamic State continued its attacks across Deir-ez-zor, southern Al-Hasakeh, and the desert areas of Homs and Hama.
- In order to address the immense humanitarian needs in Syria, WFP delivered general food assistance to approximately 4.7 million people countrywide during May 2021. Ahead of the 10 July 2021 expiration of the Security Council resolution authorizing the cross-border operation in northwest Syria, WFP completed pre-positioning of food supplies sufficient for July and most of August 2021.

Sources: [OCHA Statement | Syria May 2021](#), [COAR | Syria Update May 2021](#)



Key Points

- Nearly two out of five interviewed households (37 percent) reported poor or borderline food consumption in May 2021, marking a 61 percent increase compared to levels recorded in May 2020.
- In May 2021, overall 73 percent of surveyed households indicated that they bought food on credit, an increase of 11 percent year-on-year, with a higher share recorded among female-headed households (80 percent).
- A third of interviewed households (33 percent) reported facing difficulties in reaching markets, an increase of three percentage points from April 2021 and representing the highest level recorded since April 2020.
- From interviews conducted in May, 71 percent of surveyed households in Syria reported their intent to have all household members vaccinated should the COVID-19 vaccine be made available to them free of charge.

For Further Information

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Key Characteristics



1,307
Households Surveyed



12%
Female Headed Households



19%
Stay as Guests



28%
Displaced Households

Methodology

This mVAM bulletin is based on data collected via live telephone interviews in May 2021 from households in locations across Syria. The phone numbers were generated using random-digit dialing. Data was collected from a sample of 1,307 respondents across 13 governorates (Idlib is not covered) during May 2021 and included parts of the holy month of Ramadan. As per standard survey procedures, respondents' consent was obtained prior to the interviews. For security and safety measures, all respondents were identified with an anonymous ID.

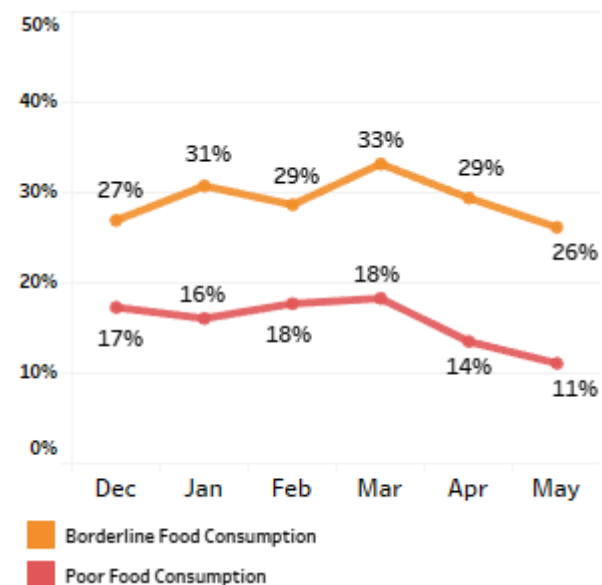




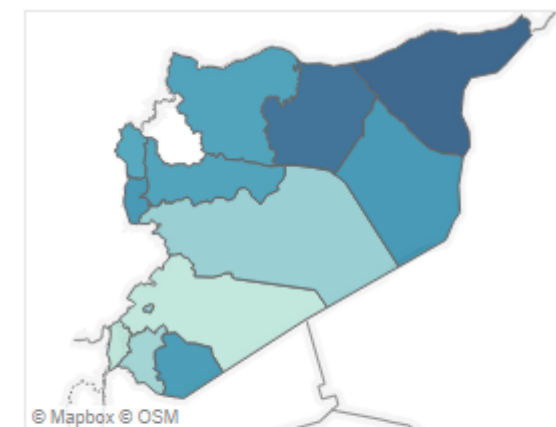
Food Consumption

- In May 2021, nearly two out of five interviewed households (37 percent) reported poor or borderline food consumption in Syria, with the highest levels recorded among female-headed households (44 percent). The national average rate of inadequate food consumption (poor and borderline combined) decreased by six percentage points month-on-month. The monthly decrease in inadequate food consumption levels in May is believed to be associated with the holy month of Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr festivities, when households tend to eat more complete and better quality meals and vulnerable families have access to more assistance from charity organizations and zakat (a form of alms giving) provided as food or livestock. Despite the slight improvement in households' food consumption during May 2021, overall food insecurity persisted across Syria, and the national average rate of inadequate food consumption witnessed a nearly two-thirds increase (61 percent) compared to levels in May 2020, which also corresponded to Ramadan 2020.
- Broken down by governorate, in May 2021, the highest proportion of households with poor or borderline food consumption was recorded in Ar-Raqqa (60 percent), an increase of 20 percentage points year-on-year, followed by Aleppo (48 percent). On the other hand, Damascus (24 percent) recorded the lowest level of inadequate food consumption in May 2021, which however witnessed a nearly three-quarter percent increase from the level recorded in May 2020.
- During the reporting period, more than one out of ten interviewed households (11 percent) reported poor food consumption in Syria, a decrease of three percentage points from a month earlier and the lowest national average level recorded since July 2020. Despite the slight monthly improvement, which is believed to be largely induced by the observance of the holy month of Ramadan, the level of poor food consumption remained at worrisome levels throughout Syria, marking a two-fold increase compared to May 2020. This highlights a sustained deterioration of the food security situation countrywide. At governorate level, in May 2021, Al-Hasakeh (22 percent) recorded the highest proportion of households with poor food consumption, a nine percentage points increase month-on-month and a three-fold rise from May 2020, followed by Ar-Raqqa (20 percent) and Tartous (15 percent).
- According to residency status, in May 2021, around 40 percent of returnees reported inadequate food consumption, a three-quarter increase year-on-year. Moreover, the total share of IDPs and resident households with poor or borderline food consumption reached 36 and 37 percent, respectively.
- Furthermore, insufficient consumption of protein-rich food items is still reported across Syria. In May 2021, the national average consumption rate of animal-source protein was two times a week. While this trend remains generally low, it represents the highest national level recorded over the past six months. Additionally, an observed increase in the consumption of vegetables was recorded among surveyed households in May 2021 (average of 4.6 times a week at the national level), marking the highest national level since November 2020. The slight monthly rise in consumption of protein and vegetables during May 2021 is largely linked to Ramadan festivities and the beginning of the harvest season in Syria.

Fig1: The national average level of poor and borderline food consumption in the last six months



Map1: Percent of households by governorate reporting poor food consumption in May 2021



Data from Idleb is not available

Fig2: Percent of households with inadequate food consumption in the last six months by governorate

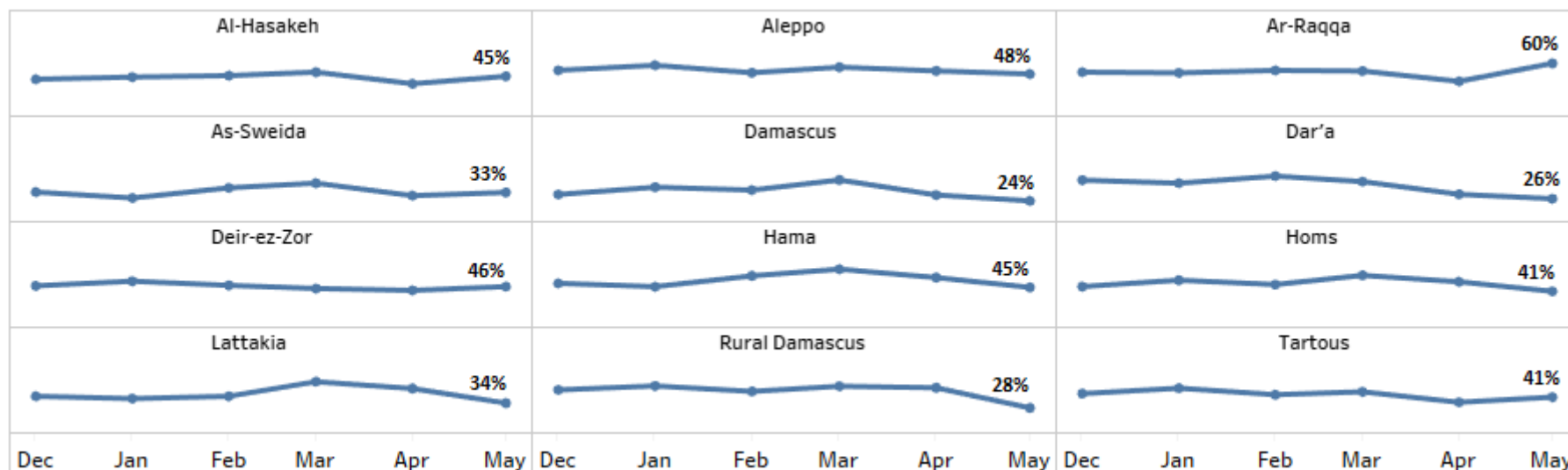
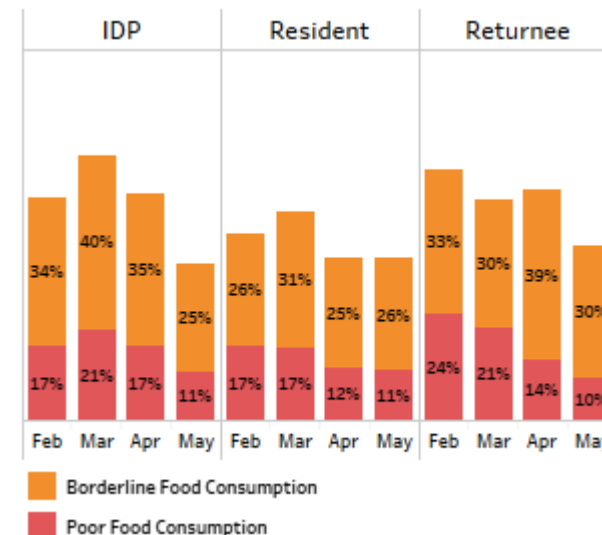


Fig3: Percent of households reporting poor and borderline food consumption according to displacement status





Coping Strategies

- Between April and May 2021, the national average reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI) slightly decreased from 20.5 to 19.1. In May 2021, nearly nine out of ten interviewed households (89 percent) reported applying at least one food-based coping mechanism to meet their food consumption needs, an increase of nine percent since May 2020, with a higher proportion recorded among female-headed households (93 percent). As a result of the continued degradation of the coping capacity and purchasing power of Syrian households, more than seven out of ten interviewed households across Syria (73 percent) indicated that they bought food on credit (a three percentage points increase from a month earlier and up by 11 percent year-on-year), with a higher share recorded among female-headed households (80 percent). This trend was more pronounced in Homs (82 percent), with an increase of 15 percent since May 2020, followed by Al-Hasakeh (80 percent). Also, the reported adoption of this strategy was most common among returnees (79 percent) and IDPs (76 percent), while it remained very high among residents (70 percent), signaling a general upward trend in households' indebtedness for all population groups.
- According to displacement status, the average rCSI was highest among IDPs and returnees. In May 2021, approximately 91 percent of the surveyed households for each group (IDPs and returnees) reported relying on at least one food-based coping mechanism to cover their essential food needs amid the worsening economic conditions, compared to 87 percent for resident households.
- The deteriorating economic situation and the widespread loss of livelihoods have led the Syrian families to further adopt food-based coping strategies. In May 2021, 71 percent of interviewed households reported relying on less preferred or less expensive food, up by 14 percentage points from May 2020, with peaks recorded in Al-Hasakeh (80 percent) and Hama (80 percent). Approximately half of the surveyed households in Syria indicated a reduction in the number of meals consumed per day, an increase of 18 percentage points year-on-year, with a wide share recorded among female-headed households (59 percent) compared to male-headed households (48 percent). Also, to cope with food shortages, 45 percent of interviewed households reported reducing food consumption by adult members to prioritize their children's food consumption needs, representing a one-quarter percent increase above the level of May 2020, with a higher proportion among IDPs (51 percent) and returnees (51 percent) compared to residents (41 percent). These findings highlight worrying signs of food-related stress, which further curbs access to adequate diets. Moreover, 14 percent of surveyed households across Syria reported taking children of the mandatory education age out of school to have them contribute to household tasks and income generating activities. This trend was much higher in Al-Hasakeh (38 percent) and Ar-Raqqa (27 percent).

Fig5: rCSI average by governorate over the last six months

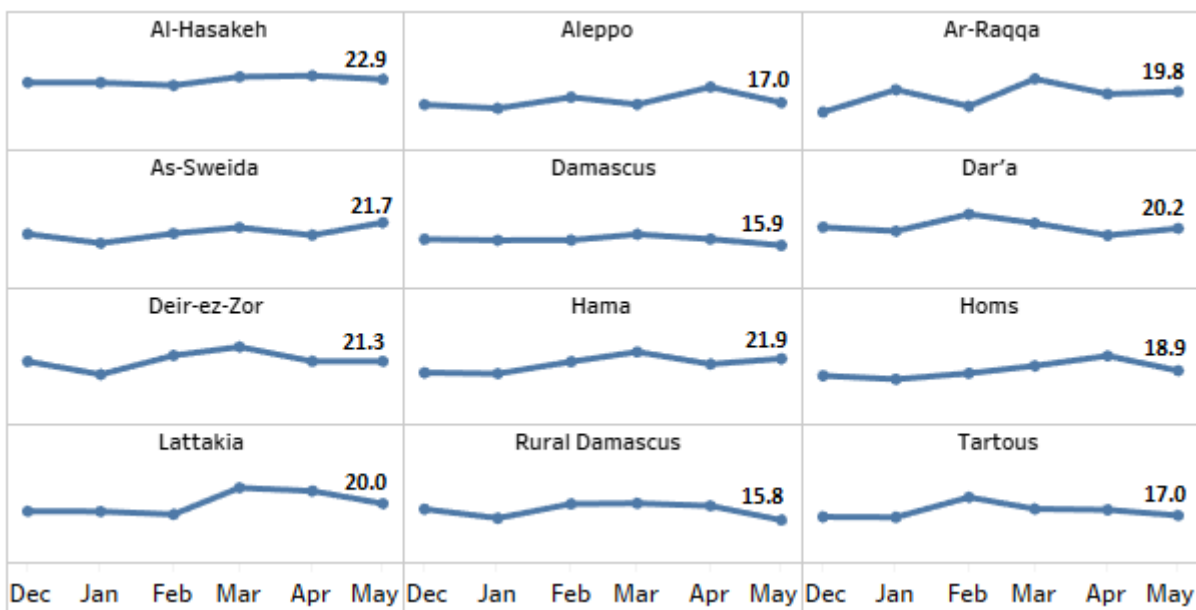
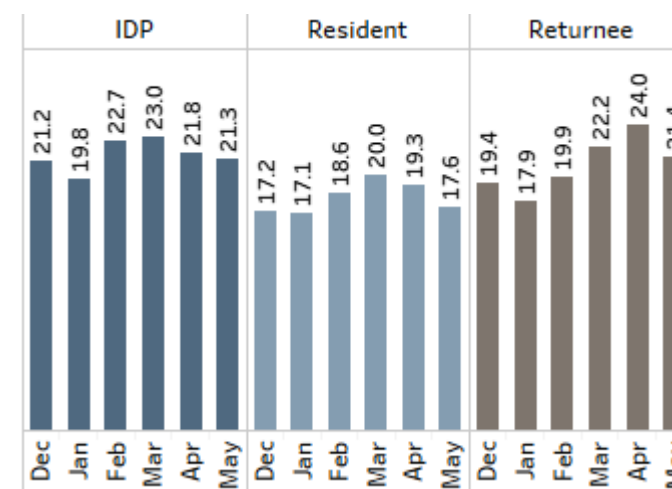


Fig4: rCSI average over the last six months according to displacement status



Map2: Percent of households buying food on credit in May 2021

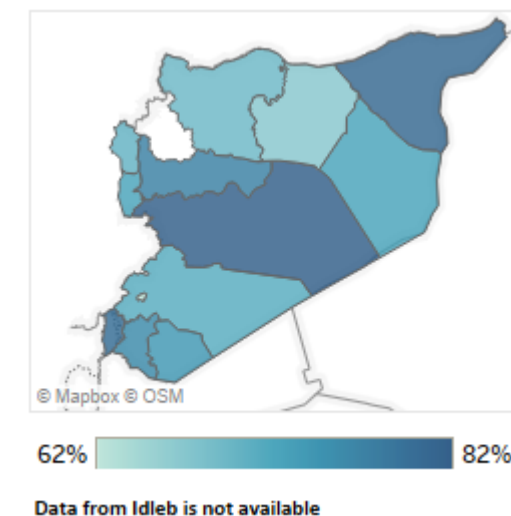


Fig6: Overall percent of households by adopted coping strategy over the past six months

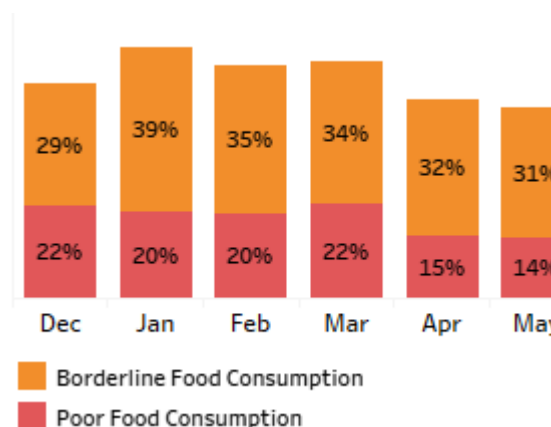
		Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Male	Less Expensive Food	65%	63%	67%	72%	72%	71%
	Limit Portion Size	44%	42%	45%	52%	51%	50%
	Reduce Number of Meals	52%	50%	53%	59%	54%	48%
	Borrow Food	43%	45%	46%	49%	48%	48%
	Restrict Consumption	44%	43%	47%	49%	49%	45%
Female	Less Expensive Food	70%	67%	76%	72%	74%	76%
	Limit Portion Size	48%	47%	48%	54%	54%	55%
	Reduce Number of Meals	61%	59%	65%	68%	57%	59%
	Borrow Food	51%	50%	49%	57%	49%	59%
	Restrict Consumption	46%	40%	48%	44%	42%	48%



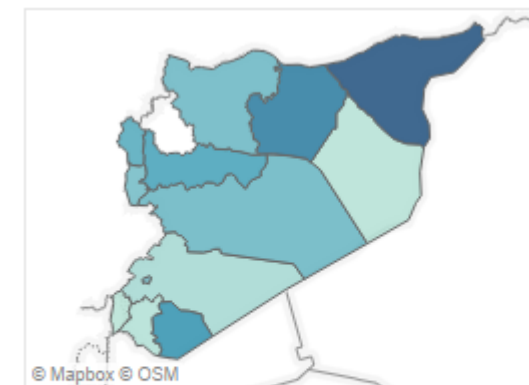
COVID-19 Situation Overview I

- The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant expansion in multi-sector needs, spurring further deterioration of the general food security situation nationwide.
- COVID-19 continued to negatively impact Syrian households by disrupting access to markets. A problem that has been exacerbated by the ongoing fuel crisis countrywide. In May 2021, a third of interviewed households (33 percent) indicated facing difficulties in reaching markets, an increase of three percentage points from April 2021, with a higher proportion recorded among female-headed households (39 percent). This represents the highest national average level recorded since April 2020. At the governorate level, more than half of the surveyed households (51 percent) in Al-Hasakeh and 43 percent of respondents in Ar-Raqqa reported not having access to markets during May 2021, an increase of 12 and 10 percentage points, respectively, from a month earlier. The reduced access to markets in both governorates happened concurrently with the surge of COVID-19 cases across northeast Syria and was heavily impacted by the imposed curfew in this region during most of May. In Al-Hasakeh, around five percent of interviewed households indicated that markets were closed in May. From interviews conducted in May 2021, close to half of the surveyed households with no regular access to markets nationwide (45 percent) had poor or borderline food consumption, up by 16 percentage points year-on-year. Furthermore, in May 2021, overall five percent of interviewed households reported difficulties in obtaining remittances and/or food assistance due to movement restrictions or security issues over the past month, with a higher proportion observed in Deir-ez-Zor (15 percent).
- During the reporting period, 19 percent of surveyed households reported facing challenges in accessing medical care services, an increase by eight percentage points since May 2020, with peaks recorded in Ar-Raqqa (30 percent) and Al-Hasakeh (27 percent). This trend was more pronounced among returnees (24 percent) and IDPs (20 percent) compared to residents (17 percent). Additionally, 37 percent of interviewed households reported not being able to purchase the necessary medicines in May 2021, mainly due to a lack of financial resources (82 percent) and a shortage of medicines in pharmacies (14 percent). Furthermore, as the pandemic outbreak continued to surge throughout the country and Syria started to receive supplies of COVID-19 vaccine, around 71 percent of surveyed households nationwide reported their intent to have all household members vaccinated were the COVID-19 vaccine made available to them free of charge. However, nine percent of interviewed households preferred to wait until the effectiveness of the vaccine has been confirmed, while around 16 percent of surveyed households reported unwillingness to get vaccinated even if the vaccine is available and free of charge.

Fig7: Share of households with inadequate food consumption who reported facing difficulties in accessing markets



Map3: Percent of households facing challenges to access markets by governorate in May 2021



24% 51%

Data from Idleb is not available

Fig8: Percent of households facing challenges to access markets in the last six months by governorate

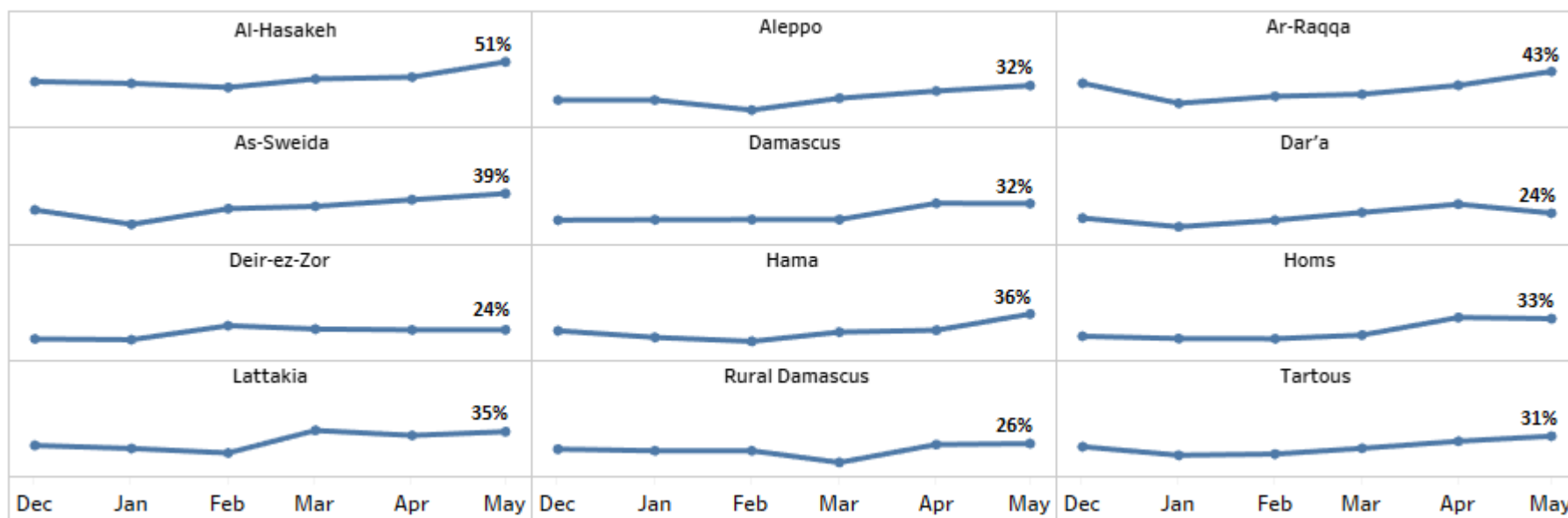
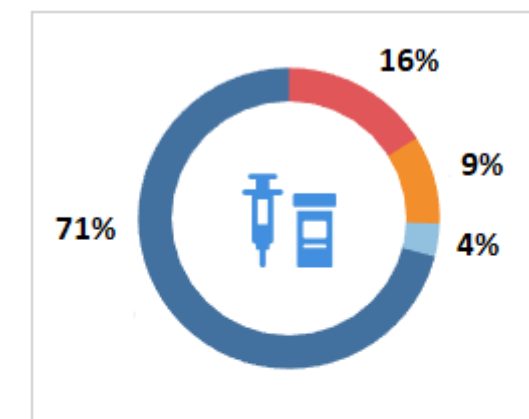


Fig9: Percent of households reported an intent to get the COVID-19 vaccine were it made available and free of charge



■ No Intention to Get Vaccinated
■ Wait to know the Effectiveness of Vaccine
■ Yes, But Elder Members Only
■ Yes, All Household Members



COVID-19 Situation Overview II

- In light of the deteriorating economic situation, Syrian households continued to grapple with sustainable income generating activities. In May 2021, approximately two out of five interviewed households in Syria (37 percent) indicated that they had lost one or more sources of income over the past month, with a higher proportion recorded among male-headed households (39 percent) compared to female-headed households (27 percent). This trend was more pronounced among IDPs (41 percent) and returnees (41 percent) compared to residents (35 percent). In addition, close to a third of interviewed households countrywide (29 percent) reported having lost more than half of their monthly income in May 2021, with a peak recorded in Al-Hasakeh (45 percent).
- Moreover, Syrian households' income was reportedly disrupted due to a number of issues. In May 2021, close to half of the surveyed households (48 percent) reported having been impacted by a reduction in working hours and thus receiving a partial salary, with peaks recorded in Aleppo (63 percent) and Quneitra (55 percent). During the reporting period, 28 percent of surveyed households indicated job lay-offs. This was the case even among breadwinners having university degrees (35 percent). Also, nearly one out of five interviewed households in Syria (18 percent) reported reduction of revenues from business activities or agricultural sales.
- At the governorate level, in May 2021, Al-Hasakeh (52 percent) and As-Sweida (46 percent) recorded the highest proportion of surveyed households having lost one or more sources of income. Nearly 18 percent of surveyed households in Al-Hasakeh and 11 percent in As-Sweida lost almost all their May income.
- Loss of income and employment opportunities had a negative impact on households' food consumption. In May 2021, around 39 percent of surveyed households across Syria who reported losses of income also reported inadequate food consumption and 93 percent of respondents indicated having relied on at least one food-based coping strategy. Moreover, around 21 percent of interviewed households in Syria who had mentioned receiving the same or more income sources in previous rounds of the survey since December 2020, reported having lost one or more sources of income in May 2021. This figure was highest in Al-Hasakeh (34 percent), Dar'a (30 percent), and Deir-ez-Zor (30 percent).

Fig11: Percent of households losing one or more sources of income in the last six months by governorate

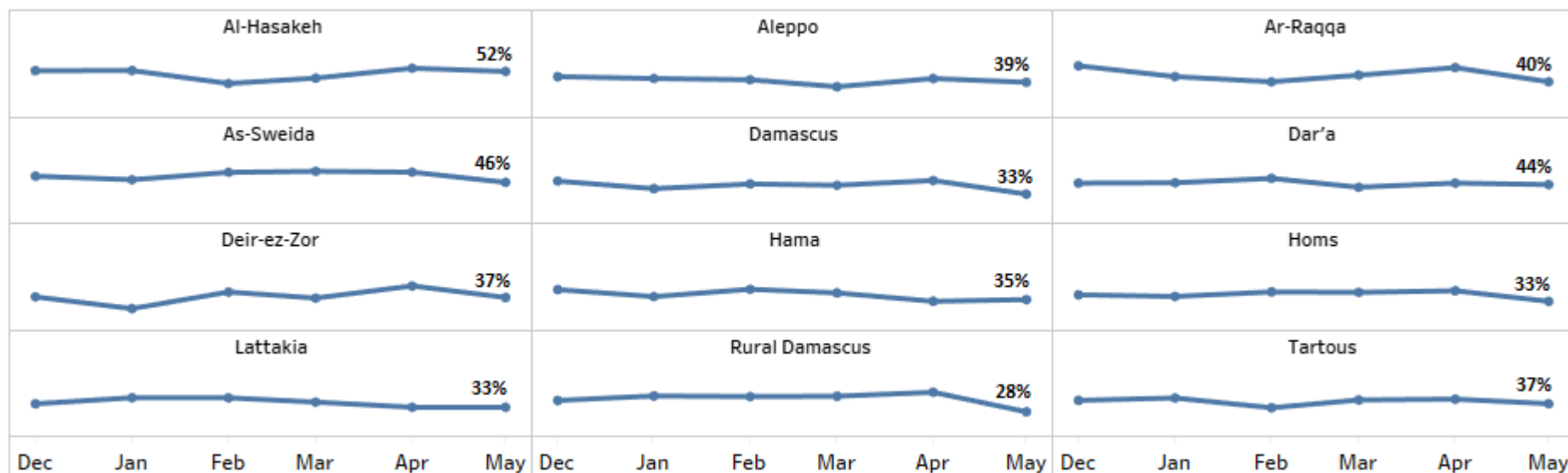
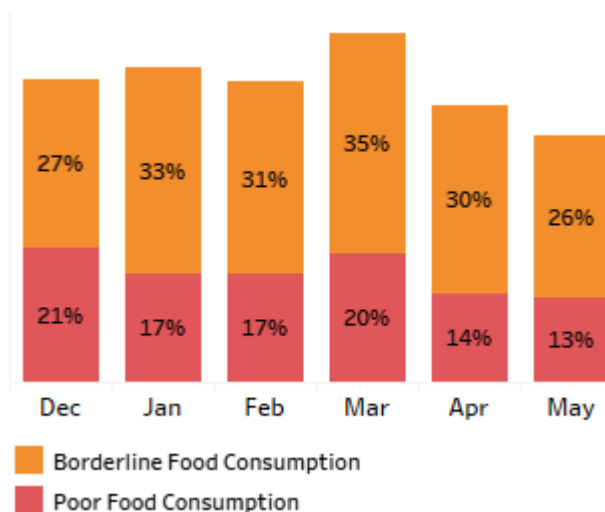
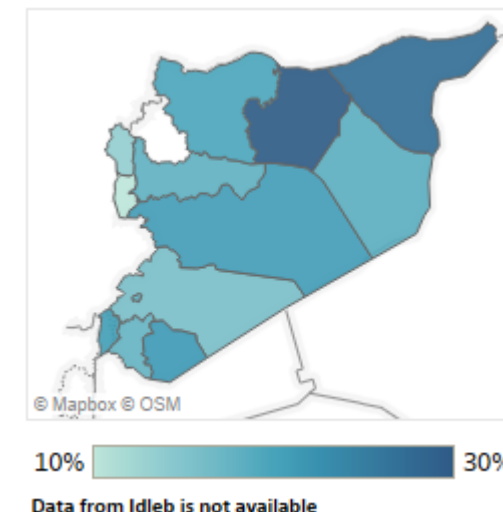


Fig10: Percent of households with inadequate food consumption who reported having lost their main income source



Map4: Percent of households facing challenges to access medical services by governorate in May 2021



Map5: Percent of households reporting losing more than half of their income sources in May 2021

