

# Northern Syria Market Monitoring Exercise

March 2016

Cash-Based Responses  
Technical Working Group

**REACH** Informing  
more effective  
humanitarian action

## INTRODUCTION

To understand market functionality in northern Syria and how markets cope with challenges created by the conflict, the Cash-Based Responses Technical Working Group (CBR-TWG) and REACH conduct monthly monitoring of key markets. In each assessed market, field teams record the prices and stock levels of selected food and non-food items (NFIs) sold by local traders and retailers. Commodities have been identified based on what is typically available, sold and used by an average Syrian household. Many are components of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB), detailed in the table to the right, which outlines the minimum culturally adjusted group of items required to support a six-person household over a one-month period.

This report provides an overview of price ranges and medians for key foods, NFIs and types of fuel across the areas assessed, as well as of water trucking expenses and currency exchange rates. In order to illustrate variation in prices and availability, REACH has used the collected data to map the price of an SMEB in each subdistrict. The cleaned data sets are available on the REACH Resource Centre and are distributed to CBR-TWG partners, as well as to the clusters

### WHAT IS THE CASH-BASED RESPONSES TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP?

The Cash-Based Responses Technical Working Group (CBR-TWG) was established in March 2014 to analyse the impact of the ongoing conflict on markets in Syria and guide the implementation of humanitarian cash and voucher programmes within those markets.

## METHODOLOGY

Between 14 and 20 March 2016, a network of enumerators affiliated with CBR-TWG members collected detailed information about the availability and prices of key food items, non-food items and fuel in northern Syria. Eight partners (CARE/Shafak, Concern, Global Communities, GOAL, Mercy Corps, People in Need, REACH and Solidarités International) contributed data from 25 subdistricts across Idleb, Hama, Lattakia, Aleppo, ar-Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor and al-Hasakeh governorates.

Ten survey forms were deployed on KoBo to capture price and stock information from different types of establishments, including grocery stores, fuel traders, currency exchange shops and water trucking services, among others. In most cases, enumerators used the KoBoCollect Android app to upload data.

In order to be included in the Market Monitoring Exercise, markets had to be permanent in nature, large enough to support at least two wholesalers, and diverse enough to provide a sufficient variety of goods and commodities. The shops surveyed within each market had to be housed in permanent

## CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

CBR-TWG partners closely monitor the security context in the subdistricts where they have committed to collect data and are encouraged not to expose their enumerators to undue risk. In some subdistricts, this means that enumerators cannot collect data from areas such as the divided cities of al-Hasakeh, Qamishli and Deir ez-Zor, where some neighbourhoods could not be surveyed.

In this round, restrictions on the use of mobile devices for data collection imposed by authorities in some subdistricts in northwestern Idleb meant that markets could not be directly assessed using the KoBoCollect app; instead, data was collected using paper forms and then entered into KoBo afterwards. In addition, several partners scaled

structures and had to sell certain items to be eligible for inclusion.

Enumerators were trained on methodology and tools by REACH and CBR-TWG members. Each enumerator assessed three to five shops of each type in the main market in their assigned subdistrict, using surveys to collect information about prices, current product inventory and the time needed to replace current stocks. In subdistricts where direct surveying by enumerators was not possible, such as Lattakia, ar-Raqqa, and Deir ez-Zor, data collection was conducted directly through key informants such as shop owners, suppliers, and consumers.

Following data collection, REACH compiled and cleaned all partners' data, normalising prices and cross-checking outliers. The cleaned data was then analysed by commodity and by subdistrict. Prices were divided into quartiles and boxplots were created to help CBR-TWG members understand the distribution of prices. In addition, REACH calculated and mapped the average cost of an SMEB in each subdistrict.

back coverage due to operational considerations. For methodological reasons, restocking data from al-Hasakeh governorate could not be analysed alongside data from other governorates and had to be excluded.

Coordinating a cross-border price monitoring exercise via remote management is inherently challenging, as issues of enumerator training, consistent communication and verification of results are harder to resolve from afar. CBR-TWG members have sought to overcome these issues by aligning their efforts, using a single set of online survey forms, uploading all data to a central server, and harmonising procedures to ensure that the data uploaded are as accurate as possible.

## ASSESSED GOVERNORATES



## SURVIVAL MINIMUM EXPENDITURE BASKET (SMEB) CONTENTS

	Item	Quantity
<b>Food Items</b>	Bread	37 kg
	Bulgur	15 kg
	Chicken	4 kg
	Dried pulses	19 kg
	Eggs	6 kg
	Fresh vegetables	6 kg
	Ghee	7 kg
	Rice	19 kg
	Salt	1 kg
	Sugar	5 kg
Tomato paste	6 kg	
<b>Non-Food Items</b>	Individual soap	12 pcs
	Laundry/dish soap	2 kg
	Sanitary pads	4 packs of 10
	Toothpaste	2 pcs
<b>Fuel</b>	Kerosene (manually refined)	25 L
<b>Water</b>	Water	2790 L
<b>Other</b>	6% float*	6% total value

\* 6% float was excluded from SMEB calculations due to the commonality of incomplete baskets.

## MARCH 2016: NORTHERN SYRIA CONTEXT

After an intensification of conflict throughout February, a partial ceasefire that began on February 27 led to a more stable security situation in many areas of northern Syria. However, a large number of households that fled northern Aleppo in the wake of conflict remain displaced throughout northern Aleppo and northern Idlib. These major population shifts have left many communities nearly empty. As a result, several previously monitored markets north of Aleppo are no longer accessible or functioning, notably those in Haritan, Tall Refaat and Mare' subdistricts.

Increasing stability in southern Idlib and in northern Hama allowed for Madiq Castle and Khan Shaykun subdistricts to be assessed, areas that had been inaccessible to CBR-TWG partners since early 2016. Kafr Takharim, in northwestern Idlib, was also covered in March following several months of absence from the exercise due to security concerns. Despite these positive developments, the security situation in Tall Refaat and Kansaba subdistricts has not improved; these areas are expected to remain inaccessible to the Market Monitoring Exercise for the foreseeable future.

Operational concerns unrelated to security resulted in a loss of coverage for three subdistricts in northern Idlib (Saraqab, Sarmin, Darkosh) and five in al-Hasakeh (Derbasyah, Amuda, Qahtaniyah, al-Malikeyyeh and Jawadieh).

## COMMODITY PRICE CHANGES

There was little variation found between exchange rates across governorates and areas of control.

### MEDIAN EXCHANGE RATES

**466 SYP/USD**  
**159 SYP/TRY**

## MAIN PRICE CHANGES

**FRESH VEGETABLES,  
TEA, CHICKEN, FUEL**

The median informal US dollar sell rate in the subdistricts assessed in March was 465 SYP/USD, up from 436 SYP/USD from February representing a rise of approximately 6.7% since February and of 16.8% since January. Local rates ranged from 442 SYP/USD to 488 SYP/USD, which may be attributed to data being collected over the span of a week, with higher prices observed towards the end. As for the Turkish lira, the median sell rate was 159 SYP/TRY, as opposed to 148 in February, with a range from 153 to 164 SYP/TRY.

Median prices of most food items rose by between 25 and 55 SYP since February, representing a greater month-to-month rise than usual. However, due to the decreasing value of the SYP compared to the USD, the price of many commodities has actually fallen in USD terms. The median prices of several food items fell in both SYP and USD during March. The median price of chicken, which rose steadily in January and February to reach 812 SYP/kg (1.86 USD), fell in March to 700 SYP/kg (1.51 USD), median prices of eggs and red lentils both fell by 25 SYP (0.05 USD).

Significant disparities in the prices of several food commodities were observed amongst individual subdistricts. The median price of vegetable oil throughout northern Syria was 500 SYP (1.08 USD), the same commodity cost over 1000 SYP at minimum in four al-Hasakeh markets. Similarly, the least expensive prices for ghee and tomato paste in Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa were consistently far higher than the northern Syria median prices for these commodities. Ghee was also unusually expensive in Qamishli. The overall picture is one of greater volatility than normal, perhaps due to the uneven effects of the ceasefire: while conflict continues in some regions of northern Syria, other

## MAIN SHORTAGES

**KEROSENE, WATER,  
BREAD**

areas are reportedly quieter than they have been at any time in the previous year.

By contrast, the prices of NFIs largely remained stable. Median prices for dish soap, sanitary pads and toothpaste were the same as last month, while the median price of laundry soap increased only modestly (30 SYP) and individual soap fell slightly.

For most fuels, there were no notable changes in price from the previous month. The median price of government petrol as well as natural gas rose by only 5 SYP while the price of kerosene did not change. The median price of government diesel increased dramatically by 215 SYP. This price spike can be attributed to idiosyncrasies in data collection this month, rather than to market disruptions. Five subdistricts in al-Hasakeh that are normally assessed each month were not covered in March. Because the price of government diesel is fixed at 35 SYP/litre in these subdistricts, their exclusion pushed the median price up. Similar effects were not seen with government petrol, which is more widely available across northern Syria and thus not as strongly affected by the exclusion of small numbers of subdistricts. The median prices of manually refined petrol and manually refined diesel increased by 75 SYP and 20 SYP respectively.

The median price to deliver 1 litre of water via private water trucking services was 0.38 SYP, the same price as in February and one that has been largely stable since the beginning of the year. As in the past, prices in Deir ez-Zor city were the highest, with one litre of water costing approximately 1 SYP.

In March 2016, the median price of a 150 x 200cm winter blanket with a minimum thickness of 5mm was 4000 SYP, up from 3000 SYP in February. Prices ranged widely from 2700 to 8000 SYP

depending on the subdistrict and the types of blankets available in the market.

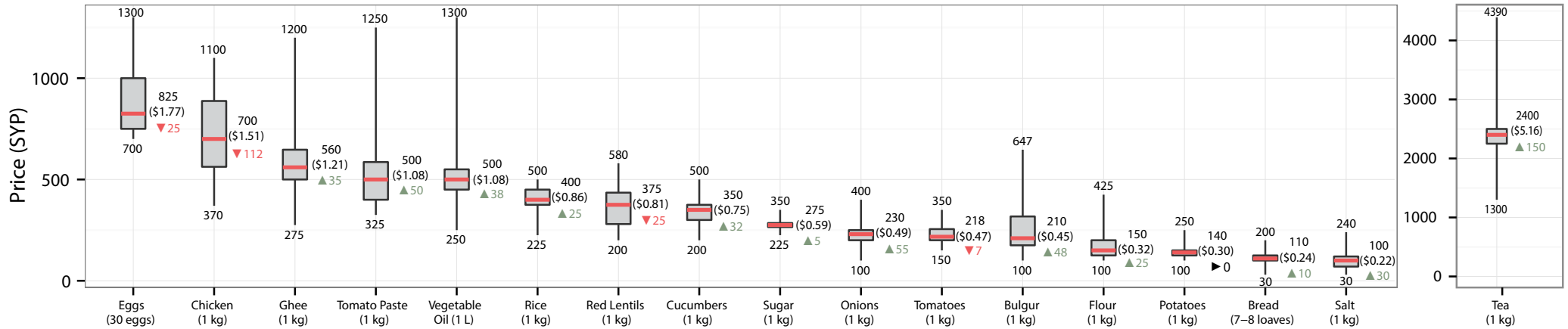
## ISSUES OF AVAILABILITY

Although localised shortages of specific SMEB commodities were present, they were less widespread than February. Private water trucking services were unavailable in five subdistricts (Kafr Takharim, Teftnaz, Afrin, Atareb and A'zaz); kerosene was unavailable in three subdistricts (Atareb, A'zaz and Ain al-Arab); and bread was also unavailable in three subdistricts (Harim, Qourqeena and Suluk). An additional 10 SMEB commodities exhibited shortages in certain subdistricts, but these were only sporadic and local. In contrast to February, there were no sugar shortages, and chicken could be easily obtained in all but two subdistricts (al-Hasakeh and Ras al-Ain).

## SMEBs

The value of a Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) is calculated for each assessed subdistrict by calculating the median prices of all SMEB commodities in that subdistrict and multiplying these medians by the number of units that an average northern Syrian household must purchase in a month. Due to the high number of subdistricts with localised shortages of just one or two commodities, complete SMEBs could be assembled for only nine assessed subdistricts. As in previous months, the most expensive SMEB was in Deir ez-Zor (64,194 SYP, 138.05 USD), where the cost of an SMEB rose by nearly 4,000 SYP since February but stayed static in USD terms. The least expensive complete baskets were in Qamishli, Yarobiyeh and Lattakia and cost between 45,514 and 48,030 SYP (97.88 and 103.29 USD); these low prices can be attributed partly to the heavy subsidies on water and fuel in these areas. Values of incomplete baskets can be compared using the SMEB map, caution should be taken to compare only baskets that are missing the same commodities.

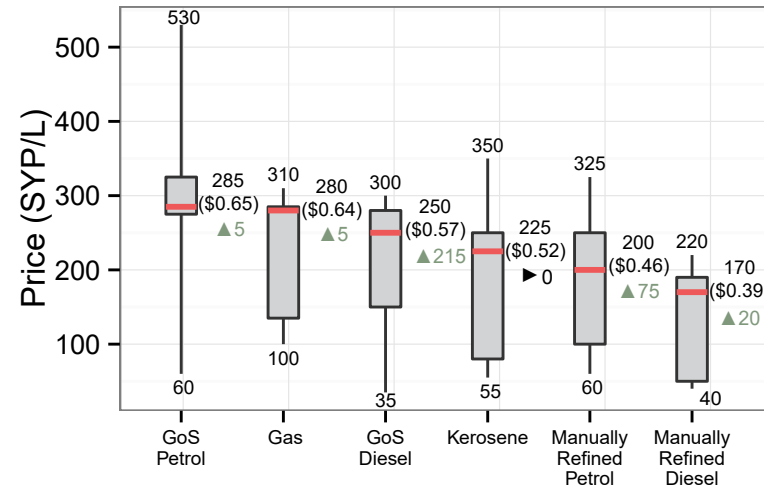
## FOOD ITEMS



## NON-FOOD ITEMS

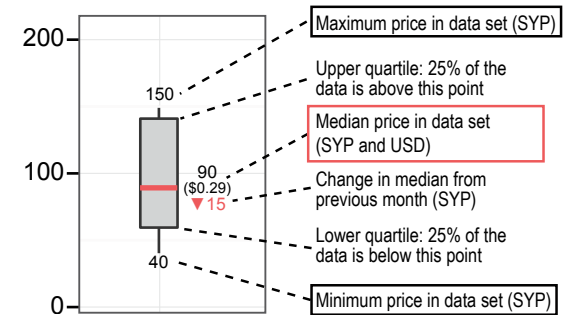


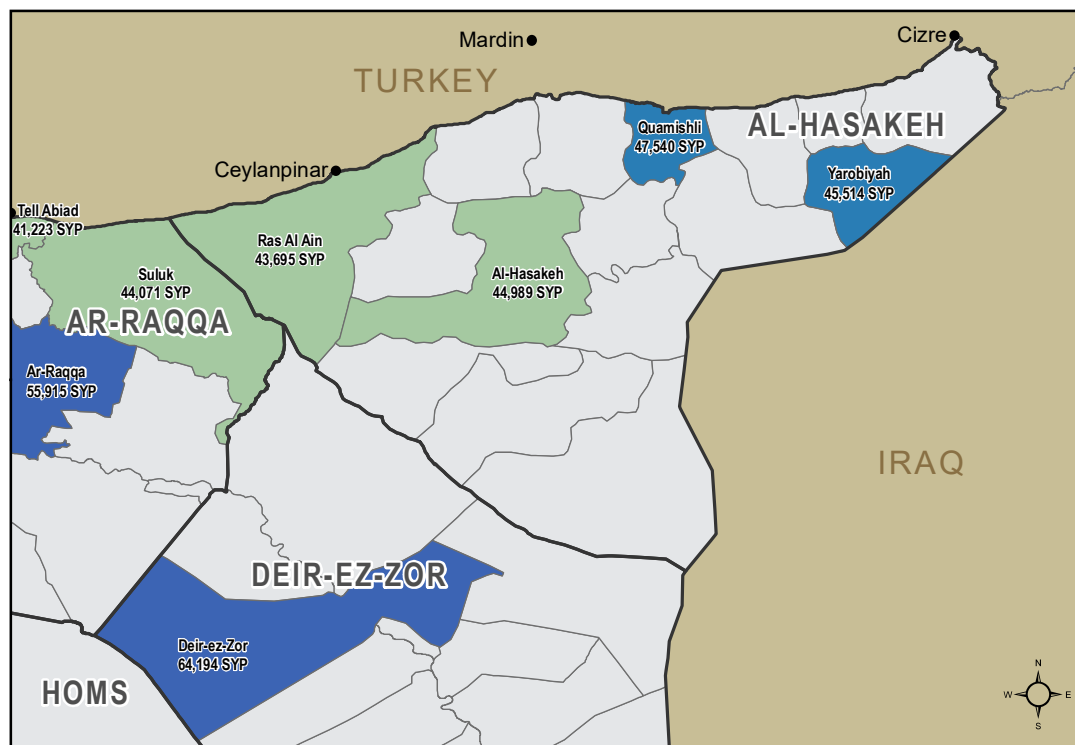
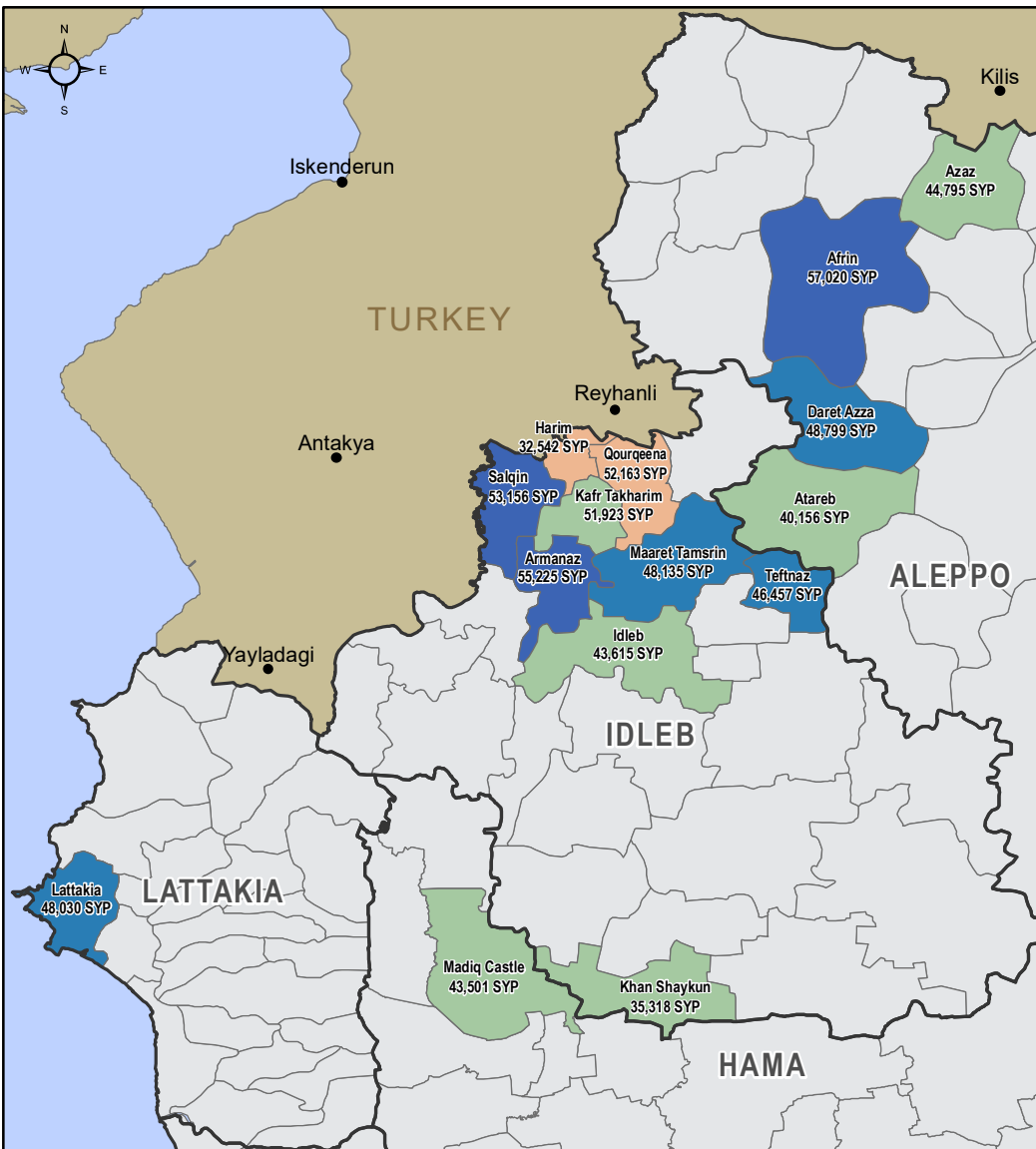
## FUEL



## How to read a box plot

Box plots provide a variety of data to aid in understanding the distribution of the data set. Prices are in SYP unless otherwise marked.





SURVIVAL MINIMUM EXPENDITURE BASKET			
ITEM	QUANTITY	ITEM	QUANTITY
Bread	37 Kg	Laundry/dish soap	2 Kg
Rice	19 Kg	Individual soap	12 Pcs
Bulgur	15 Kg	Toothpaste	2 Pcs
Ghee	7 Kg	Sanitary pads	4 packs of 10
Sugar	5 Kg	Dried Pulses	19 Kg
Tomato paste	6 Kg	Fresh vegetables	6 Kg
Chicken	4 Kg	Kerosene (manually refined)	25 L
Eggs	6 Kg	Water	2790 L
Salt	1 Kg	6% float*	6% total value

- SMEB Complete Low Cost
- SMEB Excluding Bread
- SMEB Complete High Cost
- SMEB Incomplete
- Subdistricts Not Surveyed

Data sources:  
Boundaries - OCHA COD, USDS HIU  
Market monitoring data - REACH, CBR-TWG  
Coordinate System: GCS WGS 1984  
File: 20160327\_REACH\_SYR\_SMEB\_A4  
Contact: reach.mapping@impact-initiatives.org

Note: Data, designations and boundaries contained on this map are not warranted to be error-free and do not imply acceptance by the REACH partners, associates or donors mentioned on this map.