

Syria Community Profile Update: Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu

Homs - October 2017



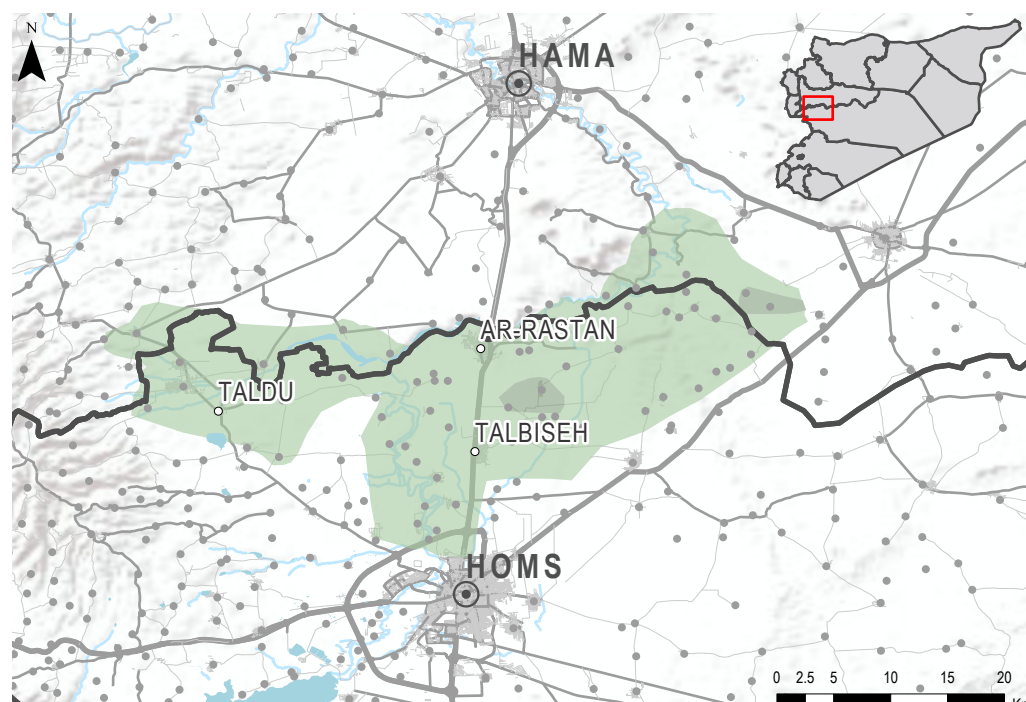
REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

CONTEXT

Situated in the Ar Rastan area between the cities of Homs and Hama, the communities of Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu have faced access restrictions since 2012. In early 2016, an escalation of conflict led to a deterioration in the humanitarian situation. The situation further worsened in October 2016, when conflict escalated again before stabilising in November. Since April 2017, humanitarian aid has been delivered every few months, and access restrictions have varied.



Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, and Taldu*



- Community Covered in Profile
- Community Not Covered in Profile
- ⊙ Governorate Capital
- ▭ Governorate Boundary
- Opposition Area of Influence
- Opposition Area of Influence (Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham)

*Sourced from Live UA Map: 31 October, 2017



DEMOGRAPHICS

	AR RASTAN	TALBISEH	TALDU
UN classification:	Besieged	Besieged	Hard-to-reach
Estimated Population ¹	47029	42520	7332
Of which estimated IDPs ¹	8575	1476	596
% of pre-conflict population	26-50%	26-50%	26-50%
% of female-headed households	1-25%	1-25%	1-25%

SUMMARY

In October, there was an increase in the amount of goods that entered each community. Taldu received humanitarian deliveries of food, non-food and medical items. In Ar Rastan and Talbiseh, improved access to informal routes increased the entry of medicine and medical items. In all three communities, these developments led to improvements in access to medical care.

Nonetheless, commercial vehicles continued to be prohibited from entering the three communities in October, and civilian movement in and out of the Ar Rastan area via formal routes remained restricted. Moreover, although medical care improved in October, residents continued to have access to only rudimentary facilities in their communities.

Access to basic services remained limited across all three communities in October, although the availability of water in Talbiseh improved as local charities resumed deliveries of fuel for the water pumps.

A flour shortage in Taldu resulted in an increase in the price of bread from private bakeries, which in turn contributed to a 10% increase in the price of a standard food basket in this community. However, residents reportedly compensated for this increase in price by baking more bread at home. The price of a standard food basket did not change significantly in the other two communities. Meanwhile, a number of items that are not included in the standard food basket changed in price: all three communities saw a decrease in the price of chicken, mutton and tomatoes, as well as an increase in the price of milk.

Hygiene item prices did not change significantly in any of the assessed communities, and fuel prices decreased in all three communities because of improved availability. Nonetheless, residents reportedly continued to burn plastics in order to cope with a lack of fuel.

1. Population estimates are from the HNO 2018 population data (September 2017). Population estimates provided by Community Representatives were reportedly 77,000-80,000 including 7,000-8,000 IDPs (Ar Rastan); 50,000-52,000 including 3,000-4,000 IDPs (Talbiseh); and 13,000-14,000 including 500-700 IDPs (Taldu).

1. ACCESS & MOVEMENT

Communities that are classified as besieged or hard-to-reach are characterised by unique access restrictions that impact civilian movement in and out of the community, commercial and humanitarian vehicle access, entry of goods, supply chains, power and control dynamics, and protection issues. The economy is unable to function normally due to the inability to use usual trade routes or foster competition. Prices soar and supplies dwindle, leading to an unsustainable and ultimately precarious situation that hits the most vulnerable the hardest. Furthermore, in areas of conflict or contested control, the average resident faces increased protection concerns. These can include risks such as conflict-related violence, physical, psychological, or gender-based violence, increased surveillance, harassment, detention, and conscription. Risks associated with crossing checkpoints can also limit or decrease mobility and create constraints for certain residents to access services in other areas. For this reason, this profile first considers access restrictions and their impact on other sectors.



MOVEMENT OF CIVILIANS

Civilian movement into and out of the Ar Rastan area continued to be restricted to only 11-25% of residents in October. As was the case in previous months, this group consisted of people with severe injuries as well as students and employees with identification papers. The formal access point was open between 8am and 4pm every day. The use of informal access routes² was not reported in October, as has been the case since September 2016.

Conversely, civilian movement between the three communities remained unrestricted in October, as has been the case since assessments began in June 2016.

Although there were no reported risks specific to accessing the formal route, shelling continued to be reported as a general risk associated with movement in the Ar Rastan area.



MOVEMENT OF GOODS AND ASSISTANCE

Commercial vehicle entry from outside the Ar Rastan area to any of the three communities was not permitted in October, as has been the case since assessments began.

Humanitarian vehicles reached only Taldu in October, where humanitarian deliveries of most items had last been reported in July 2017. All three communities received child immunisation supplies in September, but Ar Rastan and Talbiseh have reportedly not received any other humanitarian deliveries since August 2017.

The entry of food, non-food and medical items into Taldu increased as a result of the humanitarian deliveries, but the amount of fuel that entered the community was unaffected. Because of an

increase in the accessibility of informal routes leading into the Ar Rastan area, Ar Rastan and Talbiseh communities also saw an increase in the amount of medicine and medical equipment that entered. However, this increase did not apply to any other type of item; the amounts of food, non-food items and fuel that entered these two communities did not change compared to September.

2. FOOD & MARKETS



ACCESS TO FOOD

Food availability did not change significantly in October. Since April 2017, all foods except bread from public bakeries have been generally available³ in all three communities.

In all three communities, purchasing food from shops, markets and farmers continued to be the most commonly reported methods of obtaining food, as has been the case since assessments started. Movement of civilians between communities continued to be an important method for food to enter each community in October. In Taldu, humanitarian distributions were also reported as a main source of food.

Although bread continued to be available in private bakeries, these bakeries suffered from a lack of flour in October, which led to an increase in the price of bread. However, residents were able to mitigate the effects of this increase by baking more bread at home.

As has been the case since assessments began, residents of all three communities reportedly had to reduce the sizes of their meals and/or skip meals in order to cope with a lack of access to food. However, no deaths due to a lack of food have been reported since September 2016.




COMMONLY REPORTED STRATEGIES

TO COPE WITH A LACK OF FOOD

	AR RASTAN	TALBISEH	TALDU
Reducing meal size	✓	✓	✓
Skipping meals	✓	✓	✓
Days without eating	✗	✗	✗
Eating non-edible plants	✗	✗	✗
Eating food waste	✗	✗	✗
CHANGE SINCE SEPTEMBER	◆	◆	◆

2. The fact that some informal points exist does not mean that they are safe or free to use.
3. Generally available in markets (21+ days per month).

CORE FOOD ITEM/NFI PRICE AND AVAILABILITY INDEX⁴

	Item	Ar Rastan	Price change since September ⁵	Talbiseh	Price change since September ⁵	Taldu	Price change since September ⁵
 Food Items	Bread private bakery (pack)	300 ³	↑ +20%	300 ³	↑ +9%	200 ³	◇
	Bread public bakery (pack)	Not available	◇ No info	Not available	◇ No info	Not available	◇ No info
	Rice (1kg)	200 ³	◇	200 ³	◇	200 ³	◇
	Bulgur (1kg)	200 ³	◇	200 ³	◇	200 ³	◇
	Lentils (1kg)	250 ³	↑ +17%	350 ³	◇	300 ³	↑ +20%
	Chicken (1kg)	750 ³	↓ -12%	800 ³	↓ -6%	500 ³	↓ -31%
	Mutton (1kg)	2800 ³	↓ -16%	2800 ³	↓ -15%	3000 ³	◇
	Tomatoes (1kg)	250 ³	↓ -23%	225 ³	↓ -25%	250 ³	↓ -23%
	Cucumbers (1kg)	300 ³	↓ -8%	300 ³	◇	325 ³	↓ -7%
	Milk (1L)	200 ³	↑ +14%	225 ³	↑ +2%	200 ³	↑ +33%
	Flour (1kg)	275 ³	↑ +10%	275 ³	◇	250 ³	◇
	Eggs (1 unit)	50 ³	◇	50 ³	◇	50 ³	◇
	Iodised salt (500g)	75 ³	◇	75 ³	◇	50 ³	◇
	Sugar (1kg)	350 ³	↓ -7%	350 ³	↓ -8%	350 ³	↓ -2%
Cooking oil (1L)	650 ³	↓ -10%	700 ³	◇	700 ³	↓ -18%	
 WASH Items	Soap (1 bar)	105 ³	◇	100 ³	◇	100 ³	◇
	Laundry powder (1kg)	750 ³	◇	700 ³	◇	700 ³	◇
	Sanitary pads (9 pack)	700 ³	◇	650 ³	◇	650 ³	◇
	Toothpaste (125ml)	250 ³	◇	300 ³	◇	250 ³	◇
	Disposable diapers (24 pack)	1100 ³	◇	1100 ³	◇	1150 ³	◇
 Fuel Items	Butane (cannister)	7500 ³	↓ -12%	7200 ³	↓ -15%	7500 ³	↓ -12%
	Diesel (1L)	450 ³	↓ -10%	450 ³	↓ -10%	425 ³	↓ -15%
	Propane (cannister)	Not available	◇ No info	Not available	◇ No info	Not available	◇ No info
	Kerosene (1L)	Not available	◇ No info	Not available	◇ No info	Not available	◇ No info
	Coal (1kg)	800 ³	↓ -6%	800 ³	◇	800 ³	◇
	Firewood (1T)	90000 ³	↓ -28%	95000 ³	↓ -24%	100000 ³	↓ -23%



ACCESS TO MARKETS

The average price of a standard food basket increased by 10% in Ar Rastan community, while it remained relatively stable in Taldu and Talbiseh. The price increase in Ar Rastan was, in part, attributable to the flour shortage in this community, which caused a 20% increase in the price of bread from private bakeries.

AVERAGE PRICE OF A STANDARD FOOD BASKET FOOD BASKET⁶

	AR RASTAN	TALBISEH	TALDU
Average price (SYP) ⁵	30307	30632	25057

CHANGE SINCE SEPTEMBER



FOOD ITEM AVAILABILITY & PRICES

Food availability did not change significantly in October. Since April 2017, all foods except bread from public bakeries have been generally available in all three communities.

A number of food prices reportedly changed in October. The availability of chicken improved, which caused the price to decrease across the communities – by as much as 31% in Taldu and 12% in Ar Rastan. As a result, the demand for other types of meat decreased in Ar Rastan and Talbiseh, which caused the price of mutton to decrease by 16% and 15%, respectively.

Across all three communities, the price of tomatoes decreased by 23-25% as those produced in greenhouses due to the colder weather were less desirable to residents. Meanwhile, the price of milk increased by 13-33% in all three communities, following a rise in demand.

In Ar Rastan, the price of flour increased by 10% in October, while cooking oil became 10% less expensive. In Taldu, cooking oil and sugar decreased in price by 18% and 13%, respectively.



WASH ITEM AVAILABILITY & PRICES

All assessed hygiene items remained generally available in October, and no price changes occurred.



FUEL ITEM AVAILABILITY & PRICES

Access to fuel is critical for the transport of goods via commercial vehicles, the provision of medical services such as ambulances, the functionality of bakeries, and to power well pumps and electric generators in the absence of functioning water and electricity networks.

The prices of butane, diesel and firewood decreased in all three communities, by 12-15%, 10-15% and 23-28% respectively, as a result of increased availability on the market.

Coal and firewood remained generally available in October, after they had been reintroduced to the market in September in response to colder temperatures. Butane and diesel also remained generally available, while propane and kerosene continued to be unavailable.

Burning plastics has been reported as a strategy used to cope with a lack of fuel in all three communities since November 2016 when the indicator was first assessed.

3. LIVELIHOODS



ACCESS TO LIVELIHOODS

In Ar-Rastan and Talbiseh, farming and crop production, stable employment/salaried work, and remittances from outside Syria were the most common resources used to cover basic needs. For Taldu, farming and crop production, stable employment/salaried work and humanitarian assistance were reported.

4. ACCESS TO SERVICES

Access to healthcare, education, electricity, and water is critical for residents of besieged and hard-to-reach areas. These services are often affected by access restrictions on civilian movement, limitations on the entry of goods and vehicles, as well as rationing of the main water and electricity networks.

Two significant changes in access to services took place in the three communities in October: access to medical care improved slightly in all three communities, and access to water improved in Talbiseh.

AVAILABLE MEDICAL SERVICES	AR RASTAN	TALBISEH	TALDU
Child immunisation ⁷	✗	✗	✗
Diarrhoea management	✓	✓	✓
Emergency care	✓	✓	✓
Skilled childbirth care	✓	✓	✓
Surgery ⁸	✓	✓	✓
Diabetes care	✗	✗	✗
CHANGE SINCE SEPTEMBER	◆	◆	◆

HEALTHCARE

In all three communities, the healthcare situation improved slightly in October. The amount of medicine and medical items that entered each of the communities increased; in Ar Rastan and Talbiseh because of improvements in the accessibility of informal access routes, and in Taldu because of humanitarian deliveries. As a result, heart, diabetes and blood pressure medicine became generally available, having been only sometimes available in previous months.

No new cases of typhoid fever were reported in October, after an outbreak of the disease occurred in September.

The availability of medical services and facilities did not change significantly. Mobile clinics and field hospitals continued to be the only facilities present inside each of the communities, and diabetes treatment remained unavailable.

All assessed medical items remained available in October. Assistive devices, surgical equipment and artificial limbs continued to be reported as the most needed⁹ medical items.

AVAILABLE MEDICAL FACILITIES	AR RASTAN	TALBISEH	TALDU
Mobile clinics/field hospitals	✓	✓	✓
Informal emergency care points	✗	✗	✗
Pre-conflict hospitals	✗	✗	✗
Primary healthcare facilities	✗	✗	✗
CHANGE SINCE SEPTEMBER	◆	◆	◆



AVAILABILITY OF MEDICAL PERSONNEL

In all three communities, professionally trained surgeons, doctors, nurses and midwives continued to be present in October. Others providing medical services included dentists, pharmacists and volunteers with informal or no medical training.



EDUCATION

ACCESS TO EDUCATION	AR RASTAN	TALBISEH	TALDU
Available education facilities	✓	✓	✓
Barriers to education	✓	✓	✓
CHANGE SINCE SEPTEMBER	◆	◆	◆

Educational facilities continued to be present in all three communities, yet barriers to accessing education remained unchanged. In all three communities, facilities were destroyed, there was a lack of teaching staff, and travel routes to access educational services were unsafe.

7. The absence of child immunisations in a given month does not necessarily indicate a decline in access to medical services, as vaccinations in Syria are commonly administered in rounds and therefore may not be available on a monthly basis.

8. The availability of surgery does not mean that procedures were carried out by formally trained medical personnel or that anaesthetics and appropriate surgical equipment were used.

9. An item being listed as among the 'most needed' does not necessarily indicate that it is unavailable in the community.

ELECTRICITY

No change in access to electricity was reported in October. The electricity network remained unavailable in Talbiseh, while it was available for 8-12 hours per day in Ar Rastan and 4-8 hours in Taldu.

ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY	AR RASTAN	TALBISEH	TALDU
Access to electricity network	✓	✗	✓
Main source of electricity	Network	Generator	Network
Access to main source/day	8-12 hours	8-12 hours	4-8 hours
CHANGE SINCE SEPTEMBER	◆	◆	◆

WATER

Access to water reportedly improved in Talbiseh in October, as local charities resumed deliveries of fuel to power the water pumps, which caused water availability to increase back to 3-4 days per week after fuel supplies had run out in September.

However, access to water reportedly remained insufficient in all three communities, as has been the case since March 2017. Residents reportedly continued to purchase water with money usually spent on other things in order to cope with the high price. In Taldu, residents also reportedly continued to buy water with borrowed money and receive water on credit.

ACCESS TO WATER	AR RASTAN	TALBISEH	TALDU
Access to water network	✓	✓	✓
Main source of water	Network	Network	Network
Water safe to drink ¹⁰	✓	✓	✓
Access to water network/week	3-4 days	3-4 days	1-2 days
Sufficiency of water for HH needs	Insufficient	Insufficient	Insufficient
Coping strategies used	✓	✓	✓
CHANGE SINCE SEPTEMBER	◆	↑	◆

5. SUMMARY OF CHANGES SINCE PREVIOUS MONTH

	AR RASTAN	TALBISEH	TALDU		AR RASTAN	TALBISEH	TALDU
Movement of Civilians	◆	◆	◆	Core Food Item Prices	↑	◆	◆
Commercial Vehicle Access	◆	◆	◆	Access to Healthcare	↑	↑	↑
Humanitarian Vehicle Access	◆	◆	↑	Access to Education	◆	◆	◆
Core Food Item Availability	◆	◆	◆	Access to Electricity	◆	◆	◆
Access to Water	◆	↑	◆	Overall Humanitarian Situation	↑	↑	↑

BACKGROUND

In order to inform a more evidence-based response to address the needs of vulnerable communities across Syria, REACH, in partnership with the Syria INGO Regional Forum (SIRF) and other humanitarian actors, regularly monitors the humanitarian situation within communities facing restrictions on civilian movement and humanitarian access. The Syria Community Profiles, which commenced in June 2016, intend to provide aid actors with an understanding of the humanitarian situation within these communities by assessing availability of and access to food, non-food items, healthcare, water, education and humanitarian assistance, as well as the specific conditions associated with limited freedom of movement. The list of assessed communities is not intended to be exhaustive of all the areas in Syria facing limited freedom of movement and access. With greater partner input and collaboration, the number of assessed communities will be expanded when feasible.

METHODOLOGY

Data presented in the Community Profiles is collected through contact with community representatives (CRs) residing within assessed communities, who are responsible for gathering sector-specific data on their areas of expertise (e.g. health, education and so forth). Data for this round was gathered during the end of October and early November 2017 and refers to the situation in October 2017. Each community has a minimum of three and up to six CRs. The network continues to expand with ongoing collaboration with SIRF and other partners.

During analysis, data is triangulated through secondary information, including humanitarian reports, news and social media monitoring, and partner verification. Comparisons are made to findings from previous assessments (where possible) and follow up is conducted with CRs to build a thorough understanding of situational developments within communities. In the case of some profiles, multiple communities are presented together; decisions to do so are based on geographical proximity, or on similarities in the access restrictions faced by populations.

Due to the inherent challenges of data collection inside Syria, representative sampling, entailing larger-scale data collection, remains difficult. Consequently, information is to be considered indicative rather than generalisable across the population of each assessed community. Furthermore, an improvement or deterioration in the situation between months may not necessarily indicate a trend, but rather a distinct development specific to the month assessed. The exclusion or inclusion of assessed communities is influenced by the availability of CRs within communities and, therefore, the list of assessed communities should not be considered representative of all areas within Syria facing acute vulnerability. Finally, the level of information presented in each profile varies due to difficulties in obtaining data from certain communities.

About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organisations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives - and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH's mission is to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid actors through efficient data collection, management and analysis before, during and after an emergency. By doing so, REACH contributes to ensuring that communities affected by emergencies receive the support they need. All REACH activities are conducted in support to, and within the framework of, inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information, please visit our website: www.reach-initiative.org. You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on Twitter: [@REACH_info](https://twitter.com/REACH_info).