



COMMUNITY PROFILES: TREND ANALYSIS OF BESIEGED AND HARD-TO-REACH AREAS

SYRIA

REPORT

JANUARY 2017

Green evacuation buses and ambulances moving residents from Eastern Aleppo, December 2016 (GETTY IMAGES)

About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organizations - 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.

SUMMARY

With an estimated 13.5 million people in need of assistance as of December 2016, the conflict in Syria continues to present significant humanitarian challenges. Since March 2011, 4.8 million Syrians have sought refuge abroad, while 6.1 million have been internally displaced.¹ Among those remaining inside Syria, an estimated 624,500 live in besieged areas² and another 4.53 million in hard-to-reach areas.³ As of January 2017, 33 communities across Syria were considered besieged, and 2,556 were officially classified as hard-to-reach. Populations living in such communities face particular vulnerabilities related to access and movement restrictions, and high intensity of conflict.

A lack of regular monitoring of developments within besieged and hard-to-reach communities undermines the ability to track the specific needs and vulnerabilities of populations living in such areas. Challenges for humanitarian actors to identify needs of people remaining inside Syria are exacerbated in hard-to-reach and besieged communities due to rapidly shifting conflict dynamics. To fill this information gap, REACH, in co-ordination with the Syria INGO Regional Forum (SIRF), regularly monitors the humanitarian situation within besieged and hard-to-reach communities since 2016. By providing timely updates on individual communities, with particular focus on the impact of access restrictions on the humanitarian situation, this Community Profiles project aims to inform a more effective and evidence-based operational and strategic response in these areas.

Data is collected monthly through both remote and direct data collection through enumerators based inside Syria. Communities are selected in part drawing from OCHA list of classified besieged and hard-to-reach areas, in addition to other selected communities facing restricted access. Coverage is not exhaustive or static; the selection of communities is adapted, expanded and informed by partner recommendations and feedback, shifts in conflict dynamics, access restrictions and continuous monitoring. Based on data collected between June and December 2016 within the Community Profiles framework, the current report provides in-depth analysis of trends observed over time and across the assessed communities. In particular, it presents findings regarding the impact of restrictions on movement and access on the humanitarian situation across a selection of besieged and hard-to-reach communities inside Syria.

During the observed time period, the situation of communities experiencing the highest degrees of vulnerability in terms of access to food, health and basic services, as well as limitations on civilian movement, saw no improvement. These included the communities of Az Zabdani, Bqine and Madaya, and Deir ez Zor city. Conversely, the biggest changes in the overall humanitarian situation occurred in communities which signed local truce agreements during the reporting period. Overall, humanitarian aid delivery significantly shrank over the time span covered, decreasing from 16 communities supported in June to only 2 in December. Although the communities assessed were very diverse in terms of conflict dynamics and socio-economic settings, civilians' ability to leave and re-enter their communities appeared to be a critical mean for populations to meet their basic needs. More specifically, the following findings were observed:

Freedom of movement

Communities experiencing the highest degree of limitations on civilian movement (Az Zabdani, Bqine and Madaya, Deir ez Zor) reported the highest degrees of vulnerability (access to food, health and basic services), indicating the importance of civilian movement for populations to meet their basic needs. Their situation saw no improvement in this regard over the reporting period. Across other assessed communities, restrictions on civilian movement varied, with some reporting no or little changes, while others experienced improvements or deterioration in line with developments in conflict dynamics. Overall, significant changes in access

¹ OCHA 2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview (December 2016).

² In the context of the Syrian crisis, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) defines a besieged location as "an area surrounded by armed actors with the sustained effect that humanitarian assistance cannot regularly enter, and civilians, the sick and wounded cannot regularly exit".

³ A hard-to-reach location is "an area not regularly accessible to humanitarian actors for the purpose of sustained humanitarian programming due to the denial of access, the continual need to secure access, or due to restrictions such as active conflict, multiple security checkpoints or failure of the authorities to provide timely approval".

restrictions faced by particular communities were only reported in locations which signed local truce agreements between June and December 2016.

Restrictions on movement of goods and assistance

Commercial vehicles were unable to regularly enter a majority⁴ of the assessed communities during the reporting period. The lack of commercial access was mitigated in some of the communities by civilians' ability to bring goods from nearby areas (Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu, Burza, Jobar and Tadamon, Hajar Aswad, Yarmuk); such areas were overall more resilient. Conversely, extreme access restrictions precluding civilian movement in Az Zabdani, Madaya and Bqine, and Deir ez Zor exacerbated the negative effects of no commercial vehicles entering these communities. The overall trend for commercial access was closely linked to restrictions on civilian movement; between June and December 2016, significant changes in this regard were only reported in communities which implemented truce agreements.

Throughout the reporting period, no humanitarian deliveries reached 7 of the 28 locations assessed in this report (At Tall, Hajar Aswad, Jobar, Khan Elshih, Nashabiyeh, Tadamon, Yarmouk), including some of the communities where commercial vehicles were also unable to enter. In most communities which signed truce agreements during the reporting period, humanitarian deliveries occurred once or more following the implementation of such an agreement. **Overall, the number of communities reporting humanitarian deliveries declined during the reporting period; 16 communities reported receiving some type of aid in June, while only 2 did in December.⁵**

Health services

Although health situations very much varied from one community to the other over time, communities facing the tightest restrictions on freedom of movement also reported the poorest health situations during the reporting period (Az Zabdani, Madaya, Joura and Qosour). **Due to the limited number of humanitarian deliveries being able to access besieged and hard-to-reach communities, combined with restrictions on commercial access, civilians' ability to leave and re-enter their communities was a critical way to ensure the availability of medicine and medical items across assessed locations.** Developments in local conflict dynamics also significantly affected the health situation in assessed locations, which was particularly notable in the communities which implemented truce agreements during the reporting period.

Basic services

While a majority of assessed locations indicated sufficient access to drinking water to meet household needs during the reporting period, at least eight communities reported resorting to negative coping strategies.⁶ However, it was not possible to generalize findings regarding the impact of the type of main source of drinking water (network or other) on sufficiency, nor establish a pattern for besieged as compared to hard-to-reach communities, which indicates that other factors (such as population size) might be more decisive. Similarly, while communities which relied on generators for access to electricity were more sensitive to fluctuations in limitations affecting access to fuel, there was no generalizable pattern to discern between besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

Food security

Despite the large variations in food situations across assessed communities over time, **the highest levels of food insecurity were experienced in communities which reported the tightest restrictions on movement of civilians and commercial vehicles during the reporting period.** These included Al Waer, Az Zabdani, Bqine and Madaya, and Deir ez Zor (Joura and Qosour). Notably, all of these communities received food via humanitarian deliveries on at least two occasions during the reporting period. All assessed communities reported some type of negative coping strategies⁷ related to a lack of food at some point between June and December.

⁴ The exact number of communities varied from month to month; therefore, these are outlined in the relevant communities' overview subsequently.

⁵ While the overall decrease in humanitarian deliveries could be partially attributed to increased pressure strategically targeting besieged and hard-to-reach locations during the reporting period, specific reasons and circumstances varied across the assessed communities.

⁶ Assessed strategies related to a lack of drinking water include reducing drinking water consumption, spending money usually spent on other things to buy water, modifying hygiene practices (e.g. bathing less), receiving water on credit or borrowing water or money for water, drinking water usually used for cleaning or other purposes than drinking.

⁷ Assessed strategies related to a lack of food include reducing size of meals, skipping meals, spending days without eating, eating non-food plants, and eating food waste.

Prices

The highest prices of core food items and cooking fuel were reported in those communities which experienced the tightest restrictions on civilian and commercial movement. Further, the largest fluctuations in prices were observed in communities which implemented truce agreements during the reporting period, further highlighting the significance of access restrictions and conflict on price levels. Across assessed locations, the price of a standard food basket was on average 34% higher than the corresponding nationwide average. Data regarding prices of core food items and fuels was unavailable in several of the assessed besieged and hard-to-reach communities, due to the persistent unavailability of such items in markets in those locations.

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|-------------|--|
| CR | Community Representative |
| HSOS | Humanitarian Situation Overview of Syria |
| IDP | Internally Displaced Persons |
| INGO | International non-governmental organisation |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| NFIs | Non-Food Items |
| UN | United Nations |
| OCHA | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| SYP | Syrian Pound |

Geographical Classifications

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Governorate | Highest form of governance below the national level |
| District | Administrative unit below the governorate level |
| Sub-district | Administrative unit below the district level |
| Community | Lowest administrative boundary |

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INTRODUCTION

Having entered its seventh year, the conflict in Syria has caused over 5 million people to flee the country, while 6.5 million have been internally displaced. The situation presents significant humanitarian challenges, with an estimated 13.5 million people in need of assistance.⁸ Of these, 624,500 live in besieged areas⁹ and a further 4.53 million are located in hard-to-reach areas.¹⁰ Populations living in such communities face distinct vulnerabilities, including heavy conflict, restrictions on movement and entry of commercial and humanitarian vehicles, as well as significant challenges in accessing basic goods and services. As of January 2017, 33 communities across Syria were classified as besieged, and 2,556 were classified as hard-to-reach.¹¹

A lack of regular monitoring of developments within besieged and hard-to-reach communities undermined the ability to track the needs and vulnerabilities specific to such areas. Challenges for humanitarian actors to identify needs of people remaining inside Syria are exacerbated in hard-to-reach and besieged communities due to the effect of rapidly shifting conflict dynamics. Given the current difficulties in obtaining approval to deliver humanitarian assistance to such populations, understanding the severity of the situation is essential to enable the prioritisation of communities for humanitarian assistance and ensuring that the aid matches the priority needs of each particular area, as well as a basis for advocacy efforts related to such areas. To fill this information gap, REACH, in co-ordination with the Syria INGO Regional Forum (SIRF), launched the Community Profiles project. By providing timely updates on individual communities, with particular focus on the impact of access restrictions on the humanitarian situation, it intends to inform a more effective and evidence based operational and strategic response in these areas.

Using the established REACH Humanitarian Situation Overview of Syria (HSOS¹²) infrastructure, the Community Profiles project aims to identify the humanitarian needs of besieged and hard-to-reach communities, as well as to serve as a mechanism for providing updates on a monthly basis. Between January and April 2016, REACH conducted a pilot assessment and an interim update assessment utilising existing networks of community representatives (CRs) inside Syria to determine the specific vulnerabilities of affected communities. Since June 2016, SIRF and REACH regularly monitor the humanitarian situation within besieged and hard-to-reach communities. The data is currently used by both operational and strategic actors, including the Humanitarian Task Force, to identify priority communities, review the definition and criteria for besieged and hard to reach areas, and to advocate for access and assistance.

Based on data collected between June and December 2016 within the Community Profiles framework, the current report provides in-depth analysis of trends observed over time and across the assessed communities, focusing on the impact of restrictions on movement and access on vulnerability and resilience. It purports to show the nexus between conflict, access restrictions and changing needs, and to determine gaps and vulnerabilities to be considered for future humanitarian interventions. In particular, it highlights the impact of access restrictions faced by such communities on access to basic goods and services.

Data in this report was collected through CRs identified in Damascus, Deir ez Zor, Homs and Rural Damascus governorates. It is based on a qualitative survey, containing both closed and open-ended questions, with an emphasis on CRs making comparisons to the previous month across assessed indicators. Communities are selected in part drawing from the UN OCHA list of classified besieged and hard-to-reach areas, in addition to other communities facing restricted access. The exclusion or inclusion of assessed communities is influenced by conflict dynamics and the availability of CRs within locations, and therefore findings are indicative of the areas assessed only.

The communities assessed include Eastern Ghouta (Arbin, Duma, Ein Terma, Hammura, Harasta, Jisrein, Kafr Batna, Nashabiyeh, Saqba and Zamalka), certain other communities in Rural Damascus governorate (Az Zabdani,

⁸ OCHA 2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview (December 2016).

⁹ In the context of the Syrian crisis, OCHA defines a besieged area as “an area surrounded by armed actors with the sustained effect that humanitarian assistance cannot regularly enter, and civilians, the sick and wounded cannot regularly exit”, OCHA 2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview (December 2016)

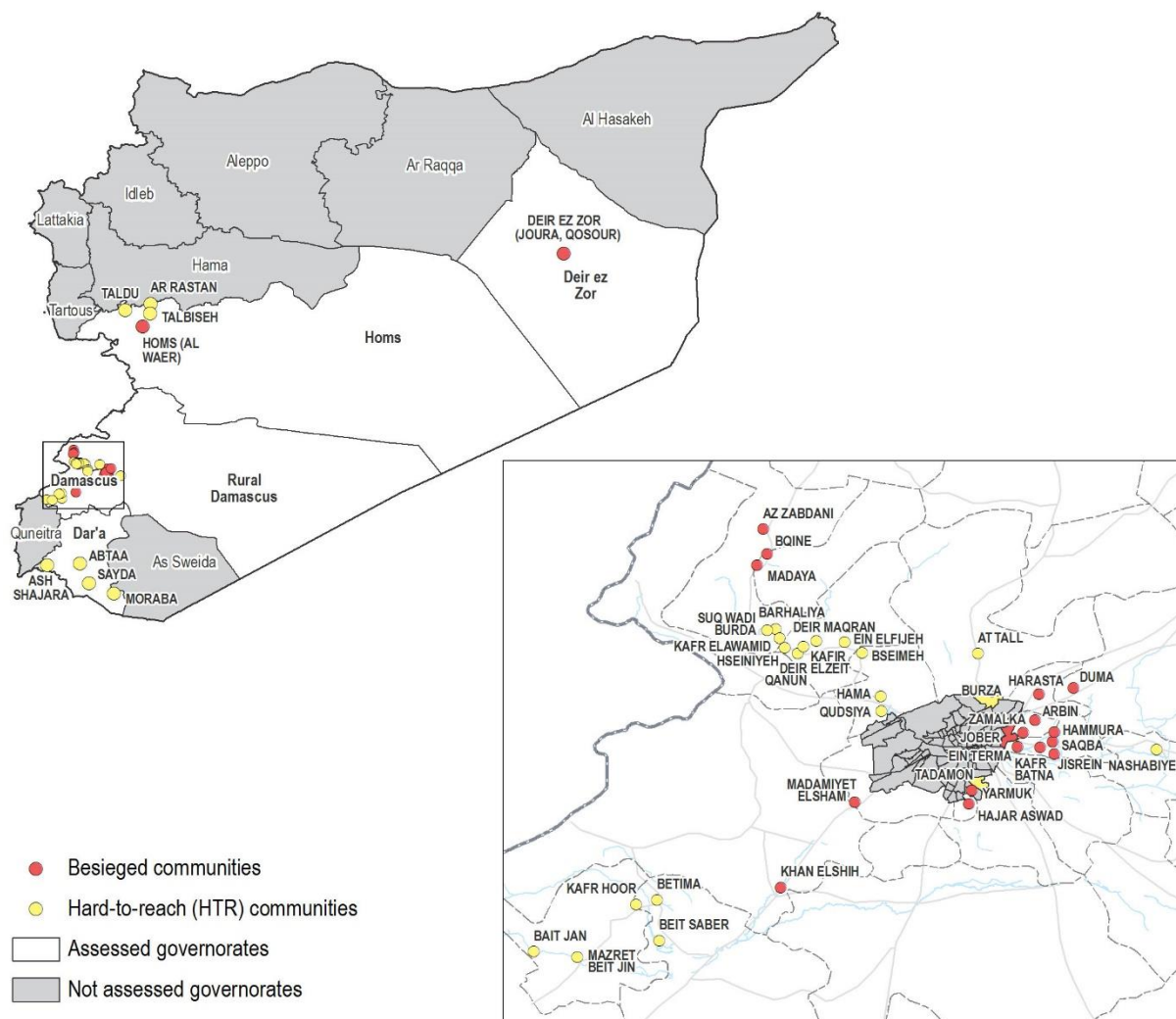
¹⁰ In the context of the Syrian crisis, OCHA defines a hard-to-reach area as “an area not regularly accessible to humanitarian actors for the purpose of sustained humanitarian programming due to the denial of access, the continual need to secure access, or due to restrictions such as active conflict, multiple security checkpoints or failure of the authorities to provide timely approval”, OCHA 2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview (December 2016)

¹¹ UN OCHA Syria, 26 January 2017 classification.

¹² Formerly known as [Area of Origin project \(link\)](#).

Madaya, Bqine and the Wadi Burda area¹³, certain communities in Homs governorate (Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu) and Damascus City (Burza, Jobe and Tadamon). For more information on each community and how these were grouped for analysis, please refer to Annex I and the Methodology section, respectively.

Map 1: All communities assessed between June and December 2016 for Community Profiles project



The following chapters of the report firstly outline a description of the methodology and related limitations, and then presents the key assessment findings, organised into the following sections:¹⁴

- 1) Freedom of movement;
- 2) Restrictions on movement of goods and assistance;
- 3) Health services;
- 4) Basic services;
- 5) Food security;
- 6) Prices.

¹³ Assessments of the Wadi Burda communities – including Bseimeh, Deir Maqran, Deir Qanun, Ein Elfijeh, Hseiniyeh, Kafr Elawamid, Kafr Elzeit and Suq Wadi Burda – started in August 2016. No assessment could be performed in October 2016 due to limitations in coverage because of access restrictions. At the time of writing, Wadi Burda had therefore only been assessed a total of four times, and was accordingly not examined in this report.

¹⁴ While REACH also collects certain data pertaining to access to education in besieged and hard-to-reach communities, assessed indicators tend to be more limited in scope. Additionally, due to the diverse situations experienced by the communities assessed for the purpose of this report, no clear trends could be distinguished during the reporting period; accordingly, access to education is not explicitly addressed in the report.

METHODOLOGY

Using the established REACH HSOS infrastructure, the Community Profiles project aims to identify the humanitarian needs of besieged and hard-to-reach communities, as well as to serve as a mechanism for providing updates on a monthly basis. This report purports to address information gaps related to long-term trends and developments across areas facing restrictions on movement and access.

For the Community Profiles project and associated monthly updates, some communities located in geographical proximity to each other and facing similar conditions are grouped into clusters for the purpose of analysis. Factors influencing such categorisation include geographical proximity, the nature of restrictions faced and movement between the assessed communities in question. This cluster approach is also employed for the purposes of the current report. These include:

- Eastern Ghouta (Arbin, Duma, Ein Terma, Hammura, Harasta, Jisrein, Kafr Batna, Nashabiyeh, Saqba and Zamalka)
- Wadi Burda (Barhaliya, Bseimeh, Deir Maqran, Deir Qanun, Ein Elfijeh, Hseiniyeh, Kafr Elawamid, Kafir Elzeit and Suq Wadi Burda)
- Bait Jan (Bait Jan, Beit Saber, Betima, Kafr Hoor and Mazraet Beit Jin)
- certain other communities in Rural Damascus governorate (Az Zabdani, Madaya and Bqine)
- certain communities in Homs governorate (Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu)
- Damascus City (Burza, Jobar and Tadamon)

Whereas the official UN classification of hard-to-reach and besieged communities in Syria provides guidance regarding which communities ought to be assessed, coverage is ultimately determined by factual findings regarding the humanitarian situation in a community, as well as access limitations inherent in assessing such areas. Accordingly, for the purpose of this report, the communities highlighted in the Findings section are those communities for which data could be consistently collected for a minimum of five out of six rounds of data collection over the six months period from June 2016 to December 2016. Out of a total of 45 communities assessed at least once between June and December 2016, 27 were analysed for the purpose of this report.

Table 1. Communities examined for trends analysis, June-December 2016

| Governorate | Community | Status according to UN classification as of December 2016 |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Damascus | Burza | Hard-to-reach |
| | Jobar | Besieged |
| | Tadamon | Hard-to-reach |
| | Yarmuk | Besieged |
| Deir ez Zor | Deir ez Zor city (Joura, Qosour) | Besieged |
| Homs | Al Waer | Besieged |
| | Ar Rastan | Hard-to-reach |
| | Talbiseh | Hard-to-reach |
| | Taldu | Hard-to-reach |
| Rural Damascus | Arbin | Besieged |
| | At Tall | Hard-to-reach |
| | Az Zabdani | Besieged |
| | Duma | Besieged |
| | Ein Terma | Besieged |

| | | |
|--|------------------|------------------------|
| | Madaya | Besieged |
| | Hajar Aswad | Besieged ¹⁵ |
| | Hama | Hard-to-reach |
| | Hammura | Besieged |
| | Harasta | Besieged |
| | Jisrein | Besieged |
| | Kafr Batna | Besieged |
| | Khan Elshih | Besieged |
| | Madamiyet Elsham | Besieged ¹⁶ |
| | Nashabiyeh | Besieged |
| | Qudsiya | Hard-to-reach |
| | Saqba | Besieged |
| | Zamalka | Besieged |

Data collection

Data in this report was collected through community representatives (CRs) identified in Damascus, Deir ez Zor, Homs and Rural Damascus governorates. CRs are contacted by REACH staff (enumerators) located inside Syria, who have prior undergone extensive training with regard to the tool contents and CR selection.

CRs include local council members, Syrian NGO workers, nurses, teachers, shop owners and farmers, among others, and are chosen based on their community-level or sector specific knowledge. Between June and December 2016, REACH contacted an average of 160 community representatives per each round of monthly data collection. With the exception of the communities in Eastern Ghouta and Yarmuk, who are interviewed in-person by REACH staff inside Syria, community representatives are contacted remotely. While most enumerators enter data collected from CRs into the KoBo online platform, a minority rely on hard copy paper forms of the questionnaire.

Data collection takes place during the last week of the month assessed and the first days of the following month, to ensure up-to-date information regarding the situation in the assessed location. Data is collected at the lowest possible administrative unit, the village or neighbourhood level, to further ensure that the area for which CRs are providing information corresponds directly to their actual area of knowledge. Additionally, to ensure accuracy of data collected, coverage for this project depends on whether a minimum of three CRs can be accessed for any given community.

Tool

The data collection tool is based on a qualitative survey, containing both closed and open-ended questions, with an emphasis on CRs making comparisons to the previous month across assessed indicators. With a view to explore the impact of access restrictions and limitations on movement on the humanitarian situation in assessed locations, indicators have been defined as a combination of the monthly Humanitarian Situation Overview in Syria needs assessment and an expanded qualitative component exploring access restrictions and specific issues faced by besieged and hard-to-reach communities. Indicators cover freedom of movement and restrictions on civilians, freedom of movement of commercial goods and humanitarian assistance, health services, health caseload and reported casualties, food security, access to goods, and access to services. Additionally, indicators have been established based on lessons learned from the pilot and interim assessments, including removal of indicators that were deemed too sensitive to ask, adjustment of indicators that asked for information that CRs were generally unable to provide, and adjustment of question wording to facilitate CR understanding.

¹⁵ Hajar Aswad was re-classified as hard-to-reach in the subsequent OCHA classification, made public on 26 January 2016.

¹⁶ Madamiyet Elsham was re-classified as hard-to-reach in the subsequent OCHA classification, made public on 26 January 2016.

Analysis

Subsequent to data collection, information on all communities assessed is compiled into a dataset which is checked for inconsistencies and compared to previous datasets by the assessment team. Points of follow-up are discussed and clarified with CRs, and the dataset adjusted accordingly. Verification of data with CRs is followed by triangulation with other assessments conducted by REACH, official agency reports, additional INGO and NGO primary data, and secondary data from various sources, including government and news reports.

Challenges and Limitations

Access restrictions, the dynamic nature of the conflict, and on-going tool improvements have affected indicator selection and geographical coverage as outlined below:

- Due to various factors, including access restrictions and changing circumstances in the communities considered for assessment, coverage varied across the six-month period. A cumulative total of 47 communities were assessed at least once between June 2016 and December 2016; out of these, 25 communities were assessed each round during the six-month period.
- To ensure consistency and for the purpose of detecting trends and patterns, only communities for which data could be collected for a minimum of five rounds of data collection between June and December 2016 are examined in this report. Accordingly, the following communities which are or have been assessed during the Community Profile project are not examined in the report: Abtaa, Ash-Shajara, Moraba and Sayda in Da'ra governorate; Bait Jan, Beit Saber, Betima, Kafr Hoor, Mazraet Beit Jin, Darayya and Wadi Burda (Bseimeh, Barhaliya, Deir Maqran, Deir Qanun, Ein Elfijeh, Hseiniyeh, Kafr Elawamid, Kafir Elzeit and Suq Wadi Burda) in Rural Damascus governorate.
- The exclusion or inclusion of assessed communities is influenced by conflict dynamics and the availability of CRs within locations, and therefore findings are indicative of the areas assessed only and cannot be assumed to reflect the humanitarian situation in other besieged/hard-to-reach areas not covered in this assessment.
- Due to periodical changes to the assessment tool and the lack of consistent information for some indicators across certain communities, the full list of questions included in the tool was not used in this report. The list of selected indicators used for the purpose of this report is provided in Annex 1.
- As a consequence of access restrictions, only communities located within areas controlled by non-state actors and surrounded by government forces were consistently assessed during the entire six-month period. As such, results might not accurately reflect the needs and vulnerabilities experienced in areas where the opposite conditions apply (controlled by government forces, surrounded by non-state actors).
- Due to the challenges of data collection inside Syria, representative sampling, entailing larger-scale data collection, remains a barrier. Consequently, information is to be considered indicative rather than generalizable across the population of each assessed community.

FINDINGS

This section of the report presents the main findings from Community Profile assessments conducted between June-December 2016, articulated around:

- a series of specific findings in relation to freedom of movement, restrictions on movement of goods and assistance, health services, basic services (water and electricity), food security and prices; and
- the way challenges experienced by besieged and hard-to-reach communities impacted populations' vulnerability and resilience, and cut across various sectors.

Freedom of Movement

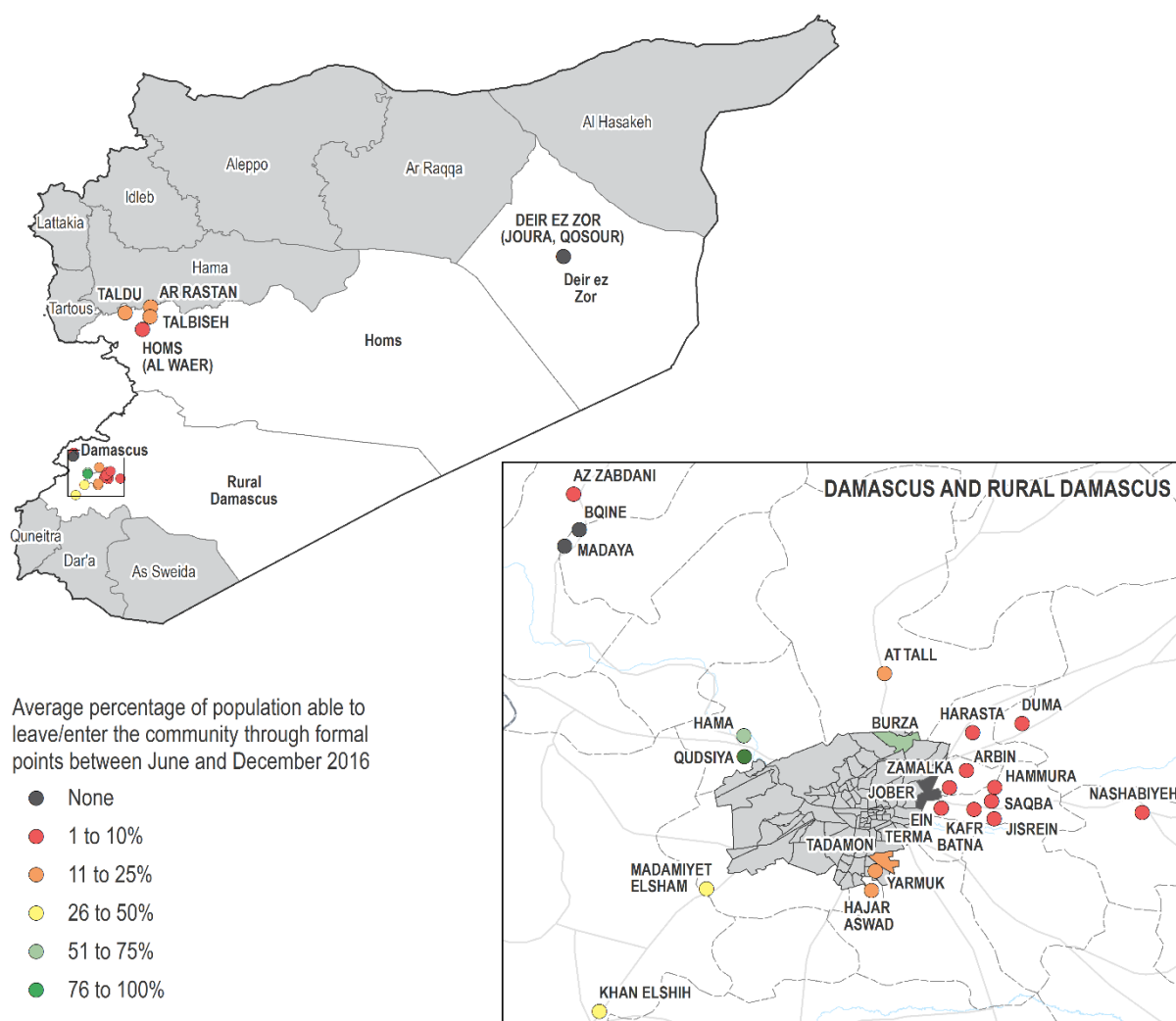
While limitations on civilian movement varied in intensity across besieged and hard-to-reach areas, they remained largely unchanged within all assessed locations during the reporting period. Notable changes were only reported in communities which implemented local truce agreements.

This sub-section outlines assessment findings related to the impact of conflict dynamics and access restrictions on populations' ability to leave and enter assessed communities, including the availability of formal and informal access points and risks associated with their use.

- Over the reporting period, the communities of Az Zabdani¹⁷, Madaya and Bqine faced comparatively the harshest restrictions on movement, with no formal or informal access points available. The deteriorating security situation in these locations also impacted movement within and across the communities in December. Similarly, no movement whatsoever was consistently reported to or from assessed neighbourhoods in Deir ez Zor city. In Jobar, while informal routes allowed for some movement, no formal access points were available during the reporting period.
- The communities of At Tall, Al Waer and Khan Elshih experienced fluctuations with regard to access restrictions, reflecting local conflict dynamics and the implementation of truce agreements. Generally, freedom of movement was curtailed preceding the signature of a truce agreement, and tended to increase subsequently; this was the case in At Tall, Hama and Qudsiya, Khan Elshih, Madamiyet Elsham Al Waer, which saw the collapse of an agreement during the reporting period, exhibited the reverse trend. On the other hand, Hama, Qudsiya, and Madamiyet Elsham, which signed agreements early on in the reporting period (early October in Hama and Qudsiya, mid-October in Madamiyet Elsham), saw the biggest improvements with regard to freedom of movement, although notably not all access restrictions had been removed by December.
- All remaining assessed communities reported no substantive change in the limitations on movement; however, the number of people able to move, as well as the associated risks, varied significantly among those communities, as outlined in Map 2.

¹⁷ While overall no formal access points were available in Az Zabdani during the reporting period, some civilian movement was reported in June 2016, as parts of the population were displaced due to local conflict dynamics.

Map 2: Freedom of movement – availability of populations to enter/leave through formal access points



Al Waer

When assessments of Al Waer began in June 2016, the community had undergone a range of agreements which broke down in the spring. An escalation in conflict followed, which prompted a number of people to leave the community in May. Consequently, a relative decrease in the number of people able to enter or leave the community was reported in June, with an estimated 1-10% of the population able to do so through the use of formal access points. Those who were allowed to use such access points included public and private sector employees and students, carrying identification documents. Additionally, some families who were able to pay informal fees also managed to leave permanently. In June, the use of formal access point entailed a number of risks, including detention and the inability to return to the community. After that - throughout August and September, the number of people allowed to use the formal access point remained stable. It subsequently increased to 11-25% in October, after a local truce agreement was reached in September, and one additional access point was temporarily opened. Some families were able to utilise the temporary access point subject to identification requirements and security clearance. However, in November, clashes intensified again in Al Waer, and the number of people able to enter or exit the community decreased to 1-10%, and remained as such in December. Throughout the reporting period, no informal access routes were reported in Al Waer.

Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Taldu

Residents in the towns of Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu reported that they could move freely between the three communities throughout the reporting period. However, only a small segment of the populations, employees and students carrying identification, could use one formal access point to access the wider contiguous area. The

average percentage of the population able to enter/leave the community through formal access points ranged from 1-10% in Ar Rastan, which has experienced comparatively tighter access restrictions due to local conflict dynamics, to 11-25% in Talbiseh and Taldu. In June, August and November, using the formal access point involved risks of detention, harassment, shelling and gunfire, whereas no such risks were reported in September, October and December. The use of informal routes was reported across all three communities in June and August only, with an estimated 1-10% of the population being able to use them.

At Tall

In At Tall, women, public sector employees and students could make use of the formal access point during weekdays from June to December 2016. In June, an estimated 11-25% of the population were reportedly able to do so, but this number decreased to 1-10% during the rest of the reporting period. Risks associated with the use of the formal point also increased between June and December, and included violence against women, sexual harassment, other types of harassment, detention and conscription. The number of people able to leave and enter At Tall decreased further in November, as hostilities intensified prior to the signing of a local truce agreement in early December. The effects of the truce agreement were not visible in data collected from December. Throughout the reporting period, use of informal routes was not reported.

Az Zabdani, Madaya, Bqine

Extremely tight access restrictions and continuous hostilities have effectively prevented civilian movement from the three communities since assessments began in June 2016. Following developments in conflict dynamics, all civilian population was displaced from Az Zabdani during the spring, with departures still reported in June.¹⁸ In September, following a local agreement, a limited number of medical cases were permitted evacuation from Madaya. Apart from these exceptions, no use of formal access points was reported during the reporting period. In June and August, a small portion of residents in Madaya (1-10%) were able to use informal routes, but associated risks included gunfire and landmines. Whereas populations were free to move between the three communities, such travel became increasingly dangerous from December onwards as hostilities increased further, with shelling occurring inside the communities. In October 2016, an estimated 300-500 residents from Bqine were forced to move to Madaya.

Damascus (Burza, Jobar, Tadamon)

Despite their geographical proximity on the eastern flank of Damascus city, the neighbourhoods of Burza, Jobar and Tadamon reported different restrictions on movement throughout the reporting period. Across all assessed communities, Burza (first assessed in August 2016), was the community consistently reporting the highest percentage of populations able to enter and exit through formal access points, at an estimated 51-75%. Employees, students and other civilians were able to leave and enter the community without any particular restrictions. No risks associated with the use of formal access points were overall reported - with the exception of December, when issues of harassment and detention were indicated. Due to the relative freedom of movement, populations did not resort to using informal routes in Burza. Conversely, no formal access points were available in Jobar between June and December 2016. Segments of the population (26-50%) consistently resorted to using informal routes, but this involved life-threatening risks, including gunfire and shelling. In Tadamon, an estimated 11-25% of residents – women, children and elders – could use the formal access point subject to documentation requirements. Using this formal channel involved a number of risks, such as harassment, detention and confiscation of documents. Additionally, since August, an estimated 26-50% of Tadamon residents had resorted to using informal routes to leave and enter the community, with underlying risks of harassment, detention and gunfire.

Deir ez Zor city (Joura, Qosour)

The assessed neighbourhoods in Deir ez Zor city, Joura and Qosour, reported extremely tight limitations on movement throughout the entire reporting period. There were no formal or informal access points allowing populations to leave or enter the areas between June and December 2016.

¹⁸ Between March and June 2016, the population of Az Zabdani decreased from around 700 individuals to 130-165 individuals, according to estimates by local actors.

Eastern Ghouta

In assessed communities across Eastern Ghouta - Arbin, Duma, Ein Terma, Hammura, Harasta, Jisrein, Kafr Batna, Nashabiyeh, Saqba and Zamalka – all populations consistently reported being free to move across the ten communities between June and December.¹⁹ However, internal clashes among armed groups within Eastern Ghouta had a nominal impact on populations' movement; during August and September residents were required to show identification documentation at checkpoints when travelling within the enclave. During these months, residents also reported increased risks, including shelling and gunfire, associated with movement across the assessed communities. However, these risks ceased to exist and no identification requirements were reported throughout the remaining months. Despite the freedom to move across the contiguous area of Eastern Ghouta, residents were not allowed to leave to the wider area through the formal access point in Duma. In Arbin and Harasta, informal access points allowed for the evacuation of severe medical cases and movement of a limited number of students and employees (1-10%). These routes were in use throughout the reporting period with the exception of August, when a local escalation in conflict occurred.

Hajar Aswad

Throughout the reporting period, limitations on movement prevented the majority of residents in Hajar Aswad from leaving the community. Between 1-10% and 11-25% of the population, only women, were allowed to occasionally use the one formal point available, but consistently reported risks including detention, sexual harassment and violence. In addition, informal access routes were reported from August onwards, but the use of these was associated with life-threatening risks, such as shelling and gunfire.

Hama and Qudsiya

At the time when assessments of Hama and Qudsiya began in June 2016, public servants, students and the majority of the civilian population could leave the locations through three formal access points. Movement was more burdensome for residents from Hama, as all access points were located in Qudsiya, but the overall access situation between the two communities was similar. Despite the ability of many residents to enter and leave the communities between June and August, the use of formal access points entailed risks of confiscation of documents, detention, conscription and various types of harassment, including sexual harassment of women. In September, an increase in hostilities prompted many residents to leave from both Hama and Qudsiya. In addition to previously outlined risks, gunfire was also reported as a potential threat at the formal access points during that time. The ongoing hostilities terminated with the implementation of truce agreements in both communities at the beginning of October. As part of the agreements, an estimated number of 1,300 fighters were relocated from both communities to Idlib governorate. Some people who left Hama and Qudsiya during the period of hostilities also returned in October. Subsequently, all populations could leave and enter the two locations upon presenting identification, with no risks reported. Throughout the reporting period, the use of informal access routes was only reported in Hama during one round of assessments, in September.

Khan Elshih

During the reporting period, the community of Khan Elshih underwent a period of intense hostilities, followed by a local truce agreement, which positively affected civilian mobility and lowered access restrictions. Until September 2016, women, elders and some students and employees carrying identification could use formal access points to enter and leave the community. However, such use entailed risks of gunfire, shelling, detention and various types of harassment. Populations also used informal routes during this period, but this also carried life-threatening risks such as shelling, landmines and gunfire. The security situation in Khan Elshih deteriorated significantly in the fall, preventing people to enter or leave the community through formal and informal access points alike in October and November. Following a truce agreement in late November, the formal access point in Khan Elshih re-opened in December. An estimated 1-10% of the population, mainly medical evacuees and students, were able to use it, with no particular access risks reported. The use of informal routes did not resume following the truce. As part of the agreement, about 3,000 fighters and their family members were relocated to Idlib governorate.

¹⁹ The community of Nashabiyeh was first assessed in August 2016.

Madamiyet Elsham

The community of Madamiyet Elsham signed a local truce agreement in June 2016, following which some access restrictions were lifted. As a result, between 1-10% and 11-25% of residents - employees and students carrying identification - could use the formal access point to leave and enter the community on weekdays. However, using formal access point involved potential risks of gunfire, detention and harassment. In August and September, an estimated 300 and 470 residents, respectively, originally from the nearby community of Darayya, were relocated from Madamiyet Elsham.²⁰ Another truce agreement was signed by the local council in October, following which all residents could leave and enter the community in October and November, without reportedly facing any risks. However, some restrictions were once again imposed in December, with the number of people allowed to use the formal access point decreasing to an average of 26-50% of the population, with detention and conscription reported as associated access risks. No informal routes were available in Madamiyet Elsham during the reporting period.

Yarmuk

The Palestinian camp of Yarmuk has faced tight limitations on movement throughout the reporting period, with only between 1-10% and 11-25% of residents able to leave and enter through the formal access point. Only women, children and elders were able to do so. Various types of harassment, including sexual harassment, were reported as risks tied to using this formal point. Additionally, hostilities inside the community as well as in nearby areas did occasionally negatively affect movement and travel inside Yarmuk. An estimated average of 26-50% of residents were reportedly using informal routes from August onwards, despite risks of detention, harassment and gunfire.

Restrictions on Movement of Goods and Assistance

Commercial vehicles were prevented from accessing the majority of assessed communities. Additionally, the number of successful humanitarian deliveries decreased substantively between June – December 2016, making civilian movement from and to besieged and hard-to-reach communities a crucial lifeline for such areas.

This sub-section presents findings regarding restrictions faced by the assessed communities related to the movement of goods and humanitarian assistance. The entry of goods via commercial vehicles and through aid deliveries is an essential lifeline which has a substantive impact on the overall humanitarian situation in besieged and hard-to-reach communities. This is particularly significant in light of the freedom of movement challenges analysed previously, which prevent populations to bring supplies from neighbouring areas.

Commercial vehicle access

- Commercial vehicles were unable to regularly enter a majority of the assessed communities during the reporting period. Among these, none did enter Az Zabdani, Madaya and Bqine, Deir ez Zor, Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Taldu, Burza, Jobar, Tadamon, Hajar Aswad or Yarmuk between June and December. In Khan Elshih, commercial access was allowed for the first time in December, following a truce agreement in November. Across these locations, the lack of commercial access was mitigated in some of the communities by civilians' ability to bring goods from nearby areas; this was the case in Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu, Hajar Aswad, Burza, Jobar and Tadamon, and Yarmuk. Conversely, extreme access restrictions precluding any civilian movement in Az Zabdani, Madaya and Bqine, and Deir ez Zor, exacerbated the negative effects of no commercial vehicles entering these communities.
- In communities which signed truce agreements during the reporting period, including Al Waer, At Tall, Hama and Qudsiya, and Madamiyet Elsham, commercial vehicle access generally reflected local conflict dynamics; a volatile situation had a negative impact on access, and was usually followed by an improvement related to the implementation of the agreement. However, all post-truce communities reported that restrictions related to

²⁰ The community of Darayya, assessed by REACH in June 2016, was emptied of all population in late August 2016, following three years of intensive siege. Some residents who were first relocated to Madamiyet Elsham were later again relocated to areas within Idlib governorates, or to an IDP shelter in Kisweh, Rural Damascus.

commercial vehicle entry were restored shortly after the agreement was reached, or had remained in place throughout.

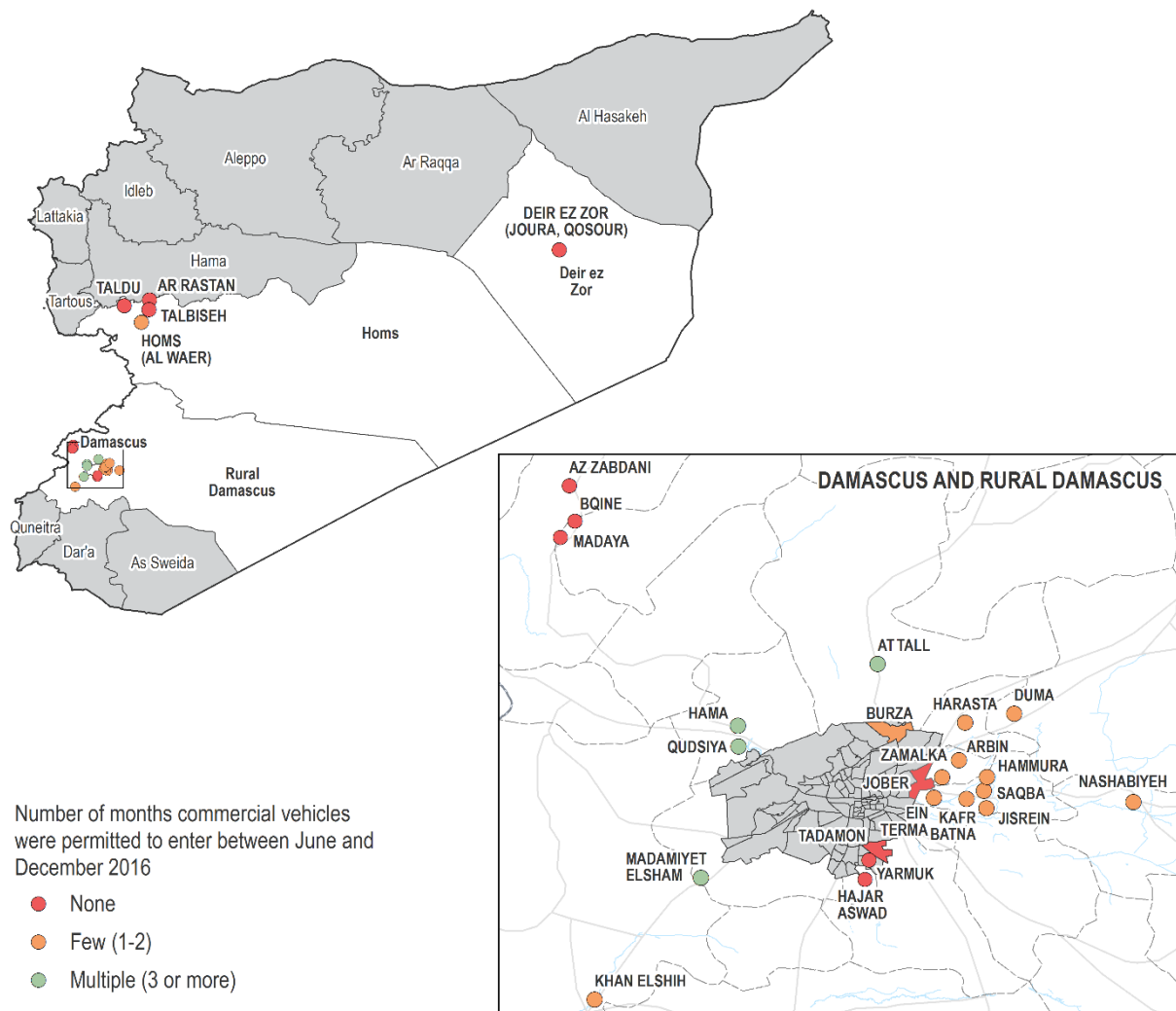
- Across the Eastern Ghouta area, commercial vehicle access remained relatively constant between June and December, with a limited number being allowed to enter through the formal access point in Duma (commercial vehicle movement between communities within Eastern Ghouta was unrestricted).

Humanitarian deliveries

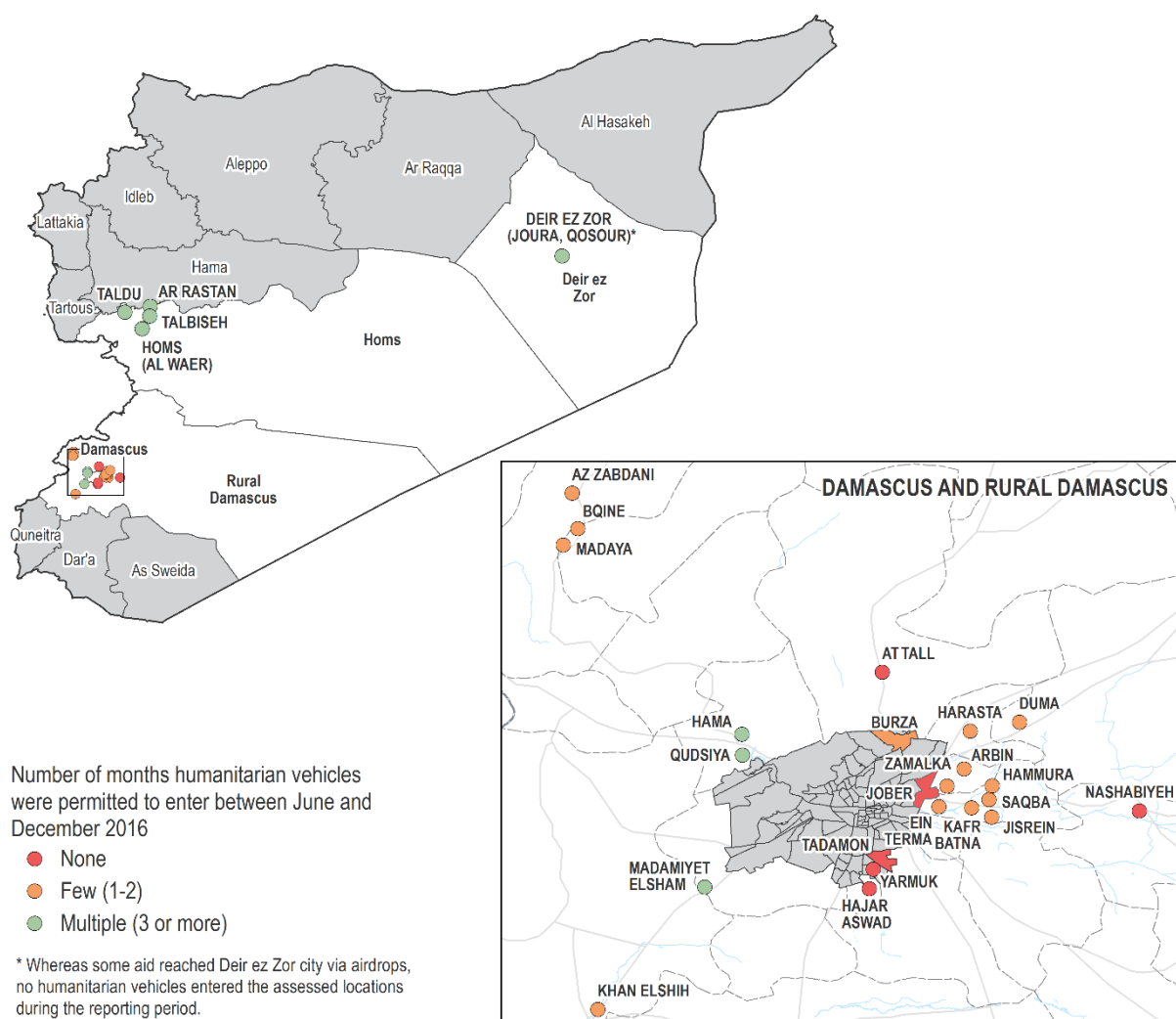
- Overall, the number of communities reporting humanitarian deliveries declined during the reporting period; in June, 16 communities reported receiving some type of aid, in November this number declined to four, and in December only Khan Elshih reported humanitarian vehicle entry (air drops also continued in Deir ez Zor).
- Throughout the reporting period, no humanitarian deliveries reached the communities of At Tall, Hajar Aswad, Jobe, Tadamon, Yarmuk and Nashabiyeh (Eastern Ghouta). These include some of the communities where commercial vehicles were unable to enter (Hajar Aswad, Jobe, Tadamon and Yarmuk). However, as noted above, in most of these communities a certain level of freedom of movement permitted civilians to procure supplies from nearby areas.
- Across locations facing the most extreme restrictions on access, including Az Zabdani, Madaya and Bqine, Deir ez Zor and Al Waer, aid was delivered at least twice between June and December.²¹ On the other hand, in communities which signed truce agreements during the reporting period (At Tall, Hama and Qudsiya, Khan Elshih, Madamiyet Elsham), humanitarian deliveries occurred once or more following the implementation of such an agreement.

²¹ In Deir ez Zor aid was delivered via airdrops rather than humanitarian vehicles.

Map 3: Movement of goods – commercial vehicle access between June-December 2016



Map 4: Access restrictions – humanitarian vehicle access between June-December 2016



Al Waer

No commercial access was allowed into Al Waer in June and August, reflecting a volatile security situation. Hostilities affecting Al Waer following truce agreement in mid-September, following which some commercial vehicles were able to enter the community throughout October, but were subject to restrictions (including fees, searches and restrictions regarding time of entry). As hostilities subsequently flared up again, commercial vehicles were no longer able to enter in November and December. Al Waer received humanitarian assistance during June, August, September and October. Prior to the implementation of the truce in September restrictions were placed on humanitarian vehicles entering the community; subsequently, vehicles could enter unrestricted following the agreement. However, as the agreement collapsed in November, humanitarian access was no longer permitted.

Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Taldu

No commercial vehicles were allowed to access either Ar Rastan, Talbiseh or Taldu throughout the reporting period. However, some goods entered the three communities via civilians leaving and bringing back items from nearby areas. Between June and December, all three communities also periodically received humanitarian aid, but independently of each other. In June and August, aid entered all three communities, but tighter restrictions on humanitarian assistance access were imposed in Ar Rastan, which has experienced comparatively more hostilities. In September and October, humanitarian vehicles could enter unhindered into Talbiseh and Taldu, but none reached Ar Rastan. Conversely, aid was delivered to Ar Rastan in November but not to the other two communities. No humanitarian deliveries were reported in either community in December.

At Tall

A limited number of commercial vehicles were able to enter the community throughout the reporting period, with the exception of June, when no commercial access was allowed into At Tall. However, commercial vehicles were subjected to various restrictions, including the payment of fees, confiscation of parts of shipments, documentation requirements and restrictions on the time of entry. In August and September for instance, traders were required to pay 100SYP²² for every kilogram of shipment brought in. As hostilities in At Tall increased in November, fewer goods – and no fuel or medicine – entered the community during that month. Following a truce agreement in early December, the number of commercial vehicles entering the location increased, and fuel and medicine were made available again. The only humanitarian delivery to reach At Tall occurred in June, when aid was delivered to the nearby community of Harna, and could be accessed by some At Tall residents, but in limited amounts.

Az Zabdani, Madaya, Bqine

Since assessments of the communities began in June 2016, and throughout the reporting period, no commercial vehicles were able to enter either Az Zabdani, Madaya or Bqine. This was due to the tight siege imposed on these communities and the lack of any formal access points. The communities did receive aid in September and November, as part of the Four Towns Agreement.²³ Aid deliveries included food, NFIs and medical items, and were distributed across the communities. However, on both occasions, assistance received was reportedly insufficient to meet population needs, and overcrowding at distribution points was reported.

Damascus (Burza, Jobber, Tadamon)

No commercial vehicle entered Burza, Jobber or Tadamon between June and December. Similarly, during the reporting period, only Burza received humanitarian aid once (in October), which included food and NFIs. Populations in all three locations relied on procuring food, fuel, NFIs and medical items from nearby communities. Availability of those items in the assessed communities was thus tied to residents' ability to leave and enter the locations, whether formally or informally, and as such depended heavily on restrictions on movement and developments in conflict dynamics.

Deir ez Zor

Due to the security situation in Deir ez Zor city and the strict access restrictions imposed on the assessed neighbourhoods of Joura and Qosour, neither commercial nor humanitarian vehicles were able to enter these communities during the reporting period. However, populations in Joura and Qosour have regularly been able to obtain limited amounts of aid delivered via airdrops. An estimated 100 UN inter-agency airdrops reached Deir ez Zor city during the reporting period.²⁴ Such deliveries reportedly contained food but no NFIs, fuel or medicines, with the exception of September, when NFIs and medicine were also delivered to the assessed communities. The amount of food reaching Joura and Qosour via airdrops varied but was frequently reported as insufficient to meet population needs.

Eastern Ghouta

Whereas commercial vehicles were free to move between all Eastern Ghouta communities during the reporting period (but sometimes experiencing conflict-related security risks), commercial vehicles from outside the enclave could only enter through the formal point in Duma, and were subject to restrictions including payment of fees, documentation requirements and confiscation of parts of shipment. Humanitarian deliveries reached Eastern Ghouta primarily at the beginning of the reporting period, reflecting the overall decrease in aid deliveries to besieged and hard-to-reach communities between June and December 2016. In June, all communities except Jisrein and

²² In both August and September 2016, the UN operational rate of exchange was \$1 = 515 SYP.

²³ Az Zabdani and Madaya, controlled by non-state armed groups, entered an agreement in September 2015 whereby aid deliveries and medical evacuations were permitted in exchange for reciprocal measures in the government-controlled towns of Foah and Kafraya (Idlib governorate); Siege Watch, Third Quarterly Report on Besieged Areas in Syria May - July 2016 (August 2016), p. 32; see also Waleed Khaled a-Noufal and Maria Nelson, "Bombings, recriminations in a series of towns tied by one ceasefire: 'People are afraid the agreement will break down'," SYRIA:Direct, 11 May 2016, <http://syriadirect.org/>.

²⁴ UN OCHA Syrian Arab Republic: 2016 UN Inter-Agency Humanitarian Operations (as of 14 December 2016)

Saqba received aid.²⁵ However, the deliveries were reportedly insufficient and their distributions caused tensions in the communities. In August, humanitarian aid reached the locations of Ein Terma, Hammura, Jisrein and Saqba. Subsequently, no humanitarian vehicles entered any of the communities in September, whereas in October limited amounts of aid were delivered to Duma and Harasta. No further aid was then reportedly delivered in November and December. Notably, the community of Nashabiyeh, which due to its strategic location has experienced comparatively more hostilities, was the only community which did not receive any aid during the assessed period.

Hajar Aswad

No commercial or humanitarian vehicles were allowed to access Hajar Aswad between June and December 2016. The community relied on civilians leaving and bringing back food, NFIs, fuel and medical items from nearby communities. Some of the goods that residents of Hajar Aswad regularly managed to access were part of humanitarian deliveries distributed in the communities of Yalda and Babella.

Hama and Qudsiya

Commercial vehicles were able to enter both Hama and Qudsiya throughout the reporting period, although the number of vehicles allowed to enter as well as the intensity of restrictions imposed on them varied depending on the developments in conflict dynamics. Throughout the summer (August, September), access restrictions tightened and fewer vehicles and items were permitted to enter the communities. Increased hostilities ended in a truce agreement in mid-October, following which restrictions on commercial vehicles were eased. However, document requirements and vehicle searches were imposed again in December. Humanitarian deliveries reached both Hama and Qudsiya in June, but not during the period of increased hostilities in August and September. Access was restored in October, following the implementation of the truce agreements, and continued through November. No humanitarian deliveries were reported in December; however, as commercial vehicles were entering the locations and civilians were able to bring goods from nearby communities, this did not have a significant impact on the overall humanitarian situations in Hama and Qudsiya.

Khan Elshih

Prior to the truce agreement signed on 27 November, strict access restrictions and a volatile situation had prevented any commercial vehicle to enter Khan Elshih between June and November. In December, some commercial vehicles were finally granted access to the community, but were subject to restrictions regarding the time of entry, and parts of their shipments were also occasionally confiscated. Following the implementation of the truce agreement, the first humanitarian vehicles entered Khan Elshih in December, carrying food, NFIs and medical items. However, aid was reportedly distributed unevenly among the population.

Madamiyet Elsham

Whereas commercial vehicles were able to enter Madamiyet Elsham on a relatively regular basis between June and December, their numbers and the type of restrictions they faced varied due to conflict dynamics affecting the community. In August and September, overall fewer goods, and in particular no NFIs or medicine, reached the community. Entry of goods via commercial vehicles increased significantly in October, after a local truce agreement was achieved. However, some restrictions including the payment of fees, were imposed again in December, resulting in the entry of fewer commercial vehicles. Humanitarian aid reached Madamiyet Elsham in June, September and October, but not in November or December, despite the truce agreement remaining in force.

Yarmuk

Throughout the reporting period, neither commercial nor humanitarian vehicles entered the community of Yarmuk. The population relied on civilians leaving and bringing food, NFIs, fuel and medical items from nearby communities. Accordingly, occasional intensification of local hostilities, which affected civilian movement, also directly impacted the availability of goods. As in Hajar Aswad, residents from Yarmuk were sometimes able to collect goods from humanitarian distributions in Yalda and Babella.

²⁵ The community of Nashabiyeh was not assessed until August 2016.

Table 2: Humanitarian access – humanitarian deliveries between June-December 2016

| | June | August | September | October | November | December |
|-----------------------------|---------|--------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|
| Deir ez Zor* | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Ar Rastan | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ |
| Talbiseh | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Taldu | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Homs (Al Waer) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Bqine | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ |
| Madaya | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ |
| At Tall | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Hama | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| Qudsiya | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| Madamiyet Elsham | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Khan Elshih | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| Hajar Aswad | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Damascus (Burza) | No info | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Damascus (Jobar) | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Damascus (Tadamon) | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Yarmouk | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Arbin (Eastern Ghouta) | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Duma (Eastern Ghouta) | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Ein Terma (Eastern Ghouta) | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Hammura (Eastern Ghouta) | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Harasta (Eastern Ghouta) | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Jisrein (Eastern Ghouta) | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Kafr Batna (Eastern Ghouta) | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Nashabiyeh (Eastern Ghouta) | No info | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Saqba (Eastern Ghouta) | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Zamalka (Eastern Ghouta) | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |

* Whereas some aid reached Deir ez Zor city via airdrops, no humanitarian vehicles entered the assessed locations during the reporting period.

Health Services

The ability of medical items to enter besieged and hard-to-reach communities directly affected populations' access to medical services and the ability to address health care needs in such areas. Communities facing the tightest restrictions on civilian movement reported comparatively worse overall health situations, and experienced relative deterioration over time.

This sub-section outlines findings with regard to the medical situation in the communities assessed during the reporting period. By surveying the ability of medicine and medical items to enter besieged and hard-to-reach communities, and the availability of medical services²⁶ provided in the communities assessed, it purports to examine the link between restrictions on movement and commercial and humanitarian access, and the health situation in such communities.

- Due to the limited number of humanitarian deliveries being able to access besieged and hard-to-reach communities, combined with restrictions on commercial access, civilians' ability to leave and re-enter their communities was a critical way to ensure the availability of medicine and medical items in a community. Consequently, communities facing the tightest restrictions on freedom of movement also reported the poorest health situations during the reporting period. This was the case of Az Zabdani, Madaya and Bqine, and Joura and Qosour in Deir ez Zor city. Although humanitarian deliveries occasionally alleviated the pressing needs in these locations, the overall health situation deteriorated steadily between June and December, a development which was largely attributable to insufficient and depleting stocks of medical items.
- Developments in local conflict dynamics was another factor significantly affecting the health situation in assessed locations. This was particularly visible in the context of those communities which signed truce agreements during the reporting period, including Al Waer, At Tall, Hama and Qudsiya, Khan Elshih and Madamiyet Elsham. Across these communities, an intensification in hostilities prior to the implementation of an agreement generally led to a tightening of restrictions on civilian movement, and commercial and humanitarian access. Additionally, increased casualties related to ongoing violence in some of the communities (Khan Elshih) placed additional strain on health systems, while in others (Al Waer, Hama, Qudsiya) the health infrastructure sustained direct damage. Following the implementation of a truce, however, these communities generally experienced an improvement in their medical situation, as lifted access restrictions allowed for the re-entry of needed medical supplies as well as for populations to access services in nearby communities if needed.
- The remaining assessed communities, including Eastern Ghouta, As Rastan, Tabiseh and Taldu, Hajar Aswad, Yarmuk, and Burza, Jobar and Tadamon all reported overall poor health situations but did not experience a significant deterioration during the reporting period. In most of these communities, the availability of medical items (and corresponding medical services) depended on populations' ability to bring items from nearby communities (or in the case of Tadamon, to seek medical assistance outside the neighbourhood), and was as such sensitive to changes with regard to the restrictions imposed on movement.
- Across assessed locations, a majority reported the existence of at least one type of medical facility in the community between June and December. The most common type of facilities were mobile clinics or field hospitals, followed by informal emergency points. This suggests a lack of permanent medical infrastructure in these besieged and hard-to-reach areas, likely attributable to past or ongoing hostilities' damages, as well as limited resources necessary for their functioning (medical, but also e.g. access to electricity). Across communities which implemented truce agreements, private facilities (clinics) frequently opened shortly after, in addition to populations being able access facilities outside the communities.

²⁶ As part of Community Profile data collection, REACH collects information on the availability of the following medical services in the assessed communities: child immunization, diarrhoea management, emergency care, skilled childbirth care, surgery and diabetes care.

Table 3: Health – Methods through which medical items entered the community

| COMMUNITY | Number of months in which medical items entered the community via: | | | | |
|------------------|--|---|-------------------------|---|-------------|
| | Commercial vehicles using formal entry points | Commercial vehicles using informal entry points | Humanitarian deliveries | Civilians bringing goods through formal/informal entry points | Other means |
| Al Waer | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Ar Rastan | 0 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 0 |
| Arbin | 6 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 1 |
| At Tall | 4 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Az Zabdani | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Bqine | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Burza | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Deir ez Zor | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Duma | 1 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 0 |
| Ein Terma | 1 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 |
| Hajar Aswad | 0 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 1 |
| Hama | 4 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Hammura | 4 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 0 |
| Harasta | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 |
| Jisrein | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| Jobar | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| Kafr Batna | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| Khan Elshih | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Madamiyet Elsham | 1 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| Madaya | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Nashabiyeh | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| Qudsiya | 3 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Saqba | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| Tadamon | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| Talbiseh | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| Taldu | 0 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 0 |
| Yarmouk | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 |
| Zamalka | 4 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 0 |

Table 4: Health – Available medical facilities between June and December 2016

| COMMUNITY | Number of months in which the following medical facilities were available: | | | | |
|------------------|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Pre-conflict hospitals | Pre-conflict surgeries/clinics | Mobile clinics/ field hospitals | Informal emergency care points | Other permanent medical facilities |
| Al Waer | 6 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Ar Rastan | 0 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 0 |
| Arbin | 0 | 0 | 5 | 6 | 0 |
| At Tall | 6 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Az Zabdani | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Bqine | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Burza | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Deir ez Zor | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Duma | 0 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Ein Terma | 0 | 0 | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Hajar Aswad | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| Hama | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Hammura | 0 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Harasta | 0 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Jisrein | 0 | 0 | 6 | 5 | 0 |
| Jober | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 0 |
| Kafr Batna | 5 | 0 | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Khan Elshih | 0 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| Madamiyet Elsham | 0 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Madaya | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Nashabiyeh | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| Qudsiya | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Saqba | 1 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Tadamon | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Talbiseh | 0 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 0 |
| Taldu | 0 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 0 |
| Yarmouk | 5 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Zamalka | 0 | 0 | 6 | 6 | 0 |

Al Waer

The health situation in Al Waer fluctuated considerably between June and December, reflecting the changing situation in the community during the reporting period. When assessments began in June, no medical items were able to enter the community due to tight access restrictions, significantly limiting the ability of existing medical facilities to operate. This continued throughout August, and until the truce agreement was implemented in mid-September. Following the agreement, medicine entered Al Waer via humanitarian deliveries in September and October. Consequently, access to medical services improved significantly, with populations receiving emergency services, skilled childbirth care, surgery, as well as diabetes and diarrhoea assistance at the facilities in the community (pre-conflict clinics, pre-conflict hospitals, mobile clinics and emergency care points). However, as the

agreement broke down in November and hostilities resumed, restrictions on humanitarian access were imposed again, and no medicine or medical items reached the community for the remainder of the reporting period. In December, the only medical services which remained available in the community were emergency care and childbirth care, with surgery only available sometimes.

Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Taldu

The health situation in Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu was relatively similar throughout the reporting period, and closely reflected the degree of restrictions on movement and access in each community over the assessed months. In June, medicine and medical items were part of the humanitarian assistance provided to all three communities. However, the aid delivery which reached these same communities in August reportedly mainly contained food items. Medical items entered again Talbiseh and Taldu via humanitarian deliveries in September and October, and Ar Rastan in November. During the months when no medical items were provided via humanitarian deliveries, limited quantities of such goods were brought back from nearby areas by civilians. Accordingly, changes in the security situation which affected the number of residents able to travel had a direct impact on the availability of medicine in the communities. Most assessed medical services were available in all three communities between June and December, with the availability of diabetes care seemingly most susceptible to fluctuations.

At Tall

The health situation in At Tall was reported as relatively stable between June and December, despite shifting conflict dynamics during that period. Populations had access to pre-conflict hospitals and clinics inside the community, and most assessed medical services were consistently reported as available, with the exception of child immunizations. Despite this overall trend, in June, fees on medicine brought back via civilians and commercial vehicles resulted in a decline in the availability of medical items in At Tall – a trend which persisted over the summer. Another relative decline in the availability of medical items occurred in November, as hostilities flared up in At Tall, increasing access restrictions. Following the implementation of the truce agreement in early December, medical items were able to enter the community through commercial vehicles again. However, due to the relocation of some of the medical personnel from the community within the framework of the truce agreement, surgery services became unavailable in the community.

Az Zabdani, Madaya, Bqine

When assessments of the communities began in June 2016, tight access restrictions prevented medicine and medical items from entering through formal access points, but small quantities were brought in informally. One mobile clinic provided services to residents from all three communities, in addition to one pre-conflict clinic located in Madaya. Available medical services in June included emergency care, diabetes care and diarrhoea management, in addition to surgery and immunizations which were sometimes available. Throughout the remainder of the reporting period, however, the availability of medical services steadily deteriorated, as access restrictions increased and no informal means of bringing medical items were reported. While some medicine reached the communities in September, as part of the humanitarian delivery which reached Madaya that month, none reportedly entered in August, October and December. The availability of existing medical services decreased in conjunction with the lack of medical items available. This was particularly evident in Madaya, which has a comparatively larger population than Az Zabdani, and as such faced greater needs. The situation became critical in the former in October, when local authorities decided to close the only available clinic in the community due to the lack of adequate medical supplies, with medical services no longer provided to the community. The clinic re-opened in November, but despite an aid delivery that month, the overall health situation did not improve due to the high needs and extensive casualties caused by ongoing hostilities which started in November. At the end of the reporting period, in December, there was one mobile clinic in Az Zabdani, and an emergency care point in Madaya (as the clinic was ultimately forced to shut down due to structural damage). While emergency assistance, diarrhoea management and diabetes care were available in Az Zabdani, residents of Madaya (and Bqine) only had access to limited emergency care.

Damascus (Burza, Jober, Tadamon)

Despite their geographical proximity, the neighbourhoods of Burza, Jober and Tadamon experienced considerably different medical situations and restrictions. The medical situation in Tadamon remained relatively unchanged throughout the reporting period. No permanent medical facilities were reported in the community from June to

December; as such, populations' ability to seek out medical treatment depended entirely on the ability to travel to nearby communities. In the absence of commercial and humanitarian access throughout the same period, the provision of medical items was also closely related to civilian movement across formal and informal points. Conversely, in Burza, residents had constant access to mobile clinics and primary healthcare facilities between August and December,²⁷ with the only medical service occasionally unavailable being diabetes care. Medical items were brought into Burza from neighbouring areas by its residents, which experienced relatively lighter restrictions on movement than in Jobber and Tadamon. Additionally, Burza was the only of the three neighbourhoods which received humanitarian aid – including medical items – during the reporting period. While the overall health situation in Burza was relatively good between August and November, it reportedly started deteriorating in December, as tensions increased and civilians were prohibited from bringing medical items into the neighbourhood. In Jobber, despite the lack of formal access points available to the population, the medical situation remained relatively stable until October, with residents being able to access emergency care within the neighbourhood. Medical items entered the community through informal routes. In October, although intensifying hostilities resulted in casualties, it also prompted the entry of medical professionals from nearby communities, overall increasing the availability of medical items and services in Jobber. As hostilities ceased in November, the medical situation returned to the June – October levels for both medical items and services.

Deir ez Zor

Collection of data pertaining to the health situation in Deir ez Zor city has presented challenges throughout the reporting period. Due to the volatile situation in the assessed communities, community representatives regularly reported being unable to collect accurate or complete information regarding the availability of medical facilities, services or items. Nonetheless, between June and December, they consistently indicated that only limited numbers of medicine and medical items could reach Joura and Qosour, and exclusively via air drops. The delivery of medical items faced the challenges associated with the air drops process more generally, namely the uneven distribution of delivered items across the population, and/or re-selling of aid items in shops and markets. In November, it was additionally reported that medicine was not included in the aid airdropped that month. With regards to facilities, it has been challenging to establish the exact number and type of medical facilities accessible to the populations in assessed Deir ez Zor areas. Overall, one pre-conflict hospital controlled by the armed forces has been reported, occasionally supplemented by medical professionals providing (limited) services informally. Access to the existent military hospital has reportedly been limited to those with affiliations to the local authorities, or those able to pay for the extensive fees associated with treatment.

Eastern Ghouta

Across the assessed communities in Eastern Ghouta, the health situation reflected the volatile nature of the conflict experienced across the region, but overall remained relatively stable between June and December. Throughout the reporting period, populations in all of the communities had access to at least informal emergency care points and mobile clinics, with comparatively more health facilities available in Duma, Harasta, Hammura and Saqba. In general, subject to security concerns, populations could move between the Eastern Ghouta communities and seek assistance as needed. In all communities, medical items entered primarily through informal routes, the use of which was highly contingent on the security situation at the time. Smaller quantities were also able to occasionally enter via commercial vehicles that reached Eastern Ghouta via the checkpoint in Duma, while those communities which received humanitarian aid reported increased medical items' availability and medical services' capacity in the corresponding months (see Table 2 for overview of humanitarian deliveries to the Eastern Ghouta communities). As comparatively fewer humanitarian deliveries were able to enter Eastern Ghouta from August onwards, the communities reported decreased medical capacities due to depleting stocks of medical items.

Hajar Aswad

The health situation in Hajar Aswad, while overall poor, remained stable throughout the reporting period, and reflected the general trend that the community experienced with regard to the overall humanitarian situation. The only way for medicine to enter the community, as was indeed the case with all other types of goods, was through civilians bringing back such items from the nearby communities of Yalda and Babella. As such, the availability of medical items was directly dependent on restrictions imposed on civilian movement. Between June and December,

²⁷ The community of Burza was first assessed in August 2016.

residents of Hajar Aswad had access to a mobile clinic, while medical services varied, depending on the type and presence of medical personnel who entered the community from Yalda and Babella.

Hama and Qudsiya

The medical situation in both Hama and Qudsiya, which was relatively stable in June, declined throughout the summer (August, September) as the security situation in the communities deteriorated. Medical items were able to enter the communities through commercial vehicles and humanitarian deliveries which reached Hama and Qudsiya in June. Residents had access to pre-conflict clinics and hospitals, as well as mobile clinics. All assessed medical services were available, with the exception of child immunizations in Qudsiya. As hostilities in and around the towns intensified over the summer, no humanitarian vehicles were allowed to enter in August and September, while the provision of medical items was no longer allowed via commercial vehicles. Conflict culminated in early October, when all permanent medical facilities were destroyed. Following the signing of the truce agreements in both communities mid-October, access restrictions were lifted and commercial vehicles were once again permitted to supply Hama and Qudsiya with medical items, in addition to such items being brought into the communities by residents from nearby communities. Some primary healthcare facilities were able to re-open in November, in addition to the opening of several private clinics. All assessed medical services were available in both communities by the end of October.

Khan Elshih

When assessments of the community began in June, only small amounts of medical items were able to enter Khan Elshih via civilians leaving and bringing back such items from nearby communities. As access restrictions continued to tighten in the subsequent months (June through November), the amount of medical items available in the community decreased, negatively affecting the overall health situation in Khan Elshih. All assessed medical services were reportedly available until October, however intense hostilities, which had commenced in August, effectively prevented large portions of the population from accessing the existing medical facilities. As conflict intensified, the health situation deteriorated significantly in November; all medical facilities closed, some due to a shortage of medical supplies while others sustained structural damage. Accordingly, no medical services were available in the community that month. The health situation improved only following the implementation of the truce agreement, as access restrictions were lifted in mid-December. Medicine entered the community via commercial vehicles and a humanitarian delivery, and through civilians bringing medical items from nearby communities. Primary healthcare facilities and private clinics re-opened, while UNRWA established a mobile clinic. Most medical services, with the exception of surgery and childbirth care, were also restored in December.

Madamiyet Elsham

Throughout the reporting period, the health situation in Madamiyet Elsham remained comparatively good, but did reflect the changes in the conflict dynamics affecting the community. When assessments began in June, community representatives reported that a limited amount of medicine and medical items were able to enter the community, as part of humanitarian deliveries. No such deliveries were permitted in August, and as such the amount of available items in the community decreased. Aid entered again in September and October, and following the truce agreement in October, medical items were additionally permitted via commercial vehicles and were also brought by residents from nearby communities. Although no humanitarian deliveries were recorded for the remainder of the reporting period, medicine continued to enter the community through civilian movement. A majority of the assessed medical services were available in Madamiyet Elsham during the reporting period. All existing medical facilities in the community were reportedly shut down in October, following the implementation of the truce agreement, as they were reportedly affiliated with the former local authorities. However, this was compensated for by increased civilian movement, which allowed populations to access services in nearby communities. A primary healthcare facility subsequently opened in Madamiyet Elsham in November.

Yarmuk

At the time when assessments of Yarmuk began in June, community representatives reported a deteriorating health situation in the location due to ongoing hostilities, indicating also a significant number of casualties. Additionally, as the only way for medical items (and some medical personnel) to enter Yarmuk was from the nearby communities of Yalda and Babella, the volatile security situation inside the assessed location directly affected availability of

medical services inside Yarmuk. There was a relative decline in clashes inside and around Yarmuk from September onwards, which also resulted in the health situation stabilizing. Throughout the remainder of the reporting period, medicine continued to enter via civilians leaving and re-entering the community. Residents could access emergency care, childbirth care and diarrhoea management, at one pre-conflict hospital and a mobile clinic.

Basic Services

Access to sufficient drinking water and electricity across assessed communities varied substantively, and was determined by various factors, including intensity of conflict, population size and location (urban vs rural). Overall, positive developments were only reported in communities which implemented a truce agreement between June and December 2016.

This sub-section presents findings related to access to water and electricity in hard-to-reach and besieged communities. It looks at sources of drinking water and electricity in the assessed locations, sufficiency of access, and related coping strategies. While all assessed communities reported irregularities in relation to access to basic services, these varied depending on various factors, including severity of access restrictions, intensity of conflict experienced, and population size.

Access to drinking water

- A lack of sufficient drinking water and negative coping strategies²⁸ were consistently reported in almost half of the communities assessed (At Tall, Bqine, Burza, Deir ez Zor, Hajar Aswad, Khan Elshih, Madaya and Madamiyet Elsham) during the reporting period. Across these locations, some were able to connect to the main water network (At Tall, Burza, Madamiyet Elsham), while others had to resort to alternative water sources, such as closed wells or water trucking Bqine, Deir ez Zor, Hajar Aswad, Khan Elshih, Madaya). These communities faced different intensities of conflict and distinct restrictions on movement and access during the reporting period which affected access to water in some of these locations. Additionally, other factors, including population size, were also potential factors in determining sufficiency of drinking water.
- Across communities which generally reported sufficient access to drinking water between June and December (Al Waer, Ar Rastan, Eastern Ghouta, Hama, Jobar, Qudsiya, Tadamon, Talbiseh, Taldu, Yarmuk), the reported main source of water varied, as did the degree of conflict and access restrictions experienced by those communities.
- Overall, all assessed communities located in Damascus city or Rural Damascus city experienced a decrease in water in December, following damage to the Ein Elfijeh water facility in Wadi Burda.
- Notably, across the communities which reported sufficient access to drinking water, a majority (12) was considered besieged as of December 2016. Only two hard-to-reach locations (Hama and Qudsiya) reported sufficient access to water. Conversely, out of the six communities which reported insufficient access to water for every month during the reporting period, two were hard-to-reach whereas four were besieged.

Access to electricity

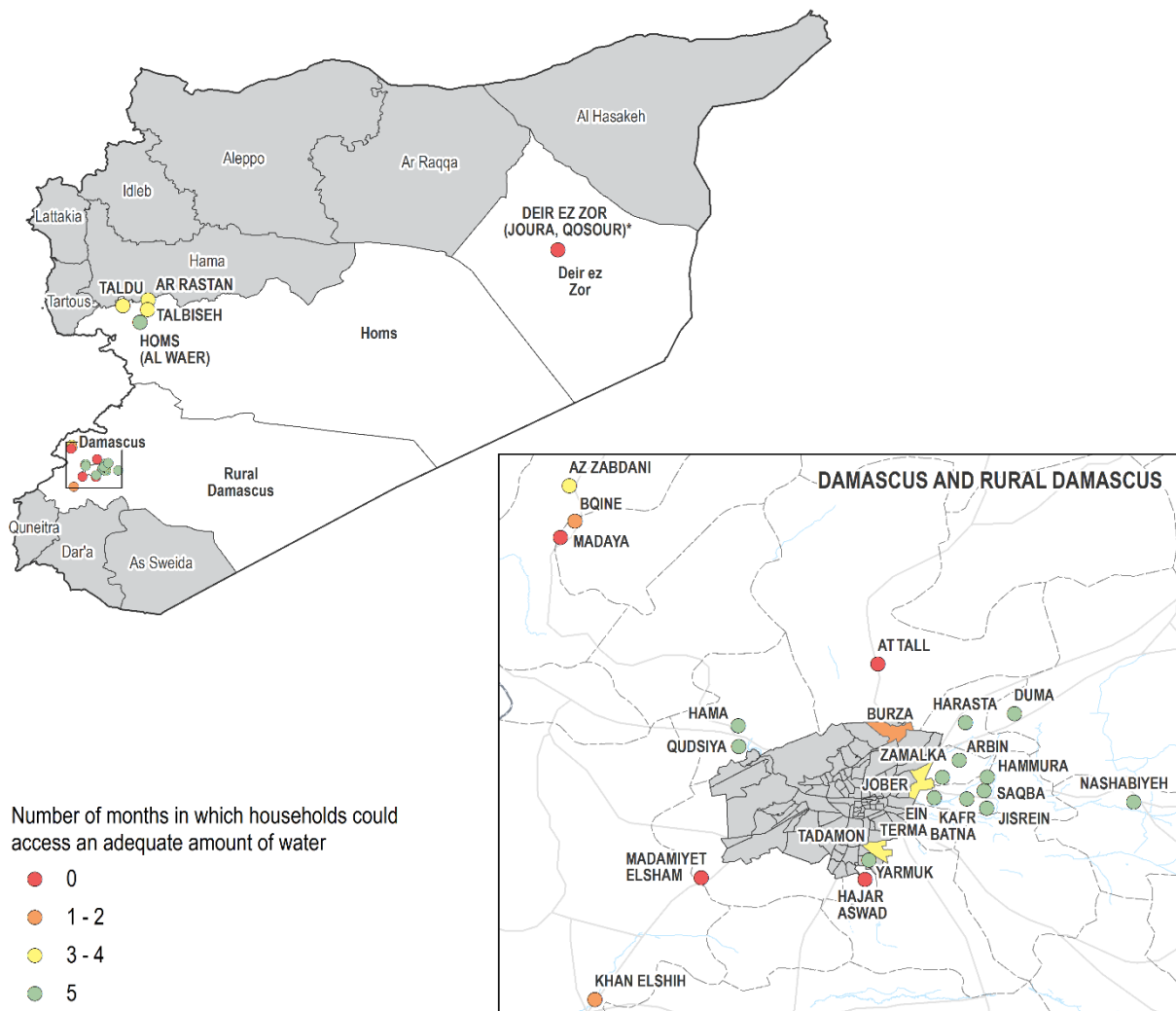
- Across assessed communities, minimal access to electricity (2 hours per day or less) was consistently reported in Az Zabdani, Bqine, Deir ez Zor and Madaya between June and December. While residents in Deir ez Zor were able to connect to the main network, in Az Zabdani, Bqine and Madaya populations relied on generators, and as such access was highly determined by the availability (and price) of fuel in the communities.
- Conversely, Burza, Hama, Qudsiya and some of the communities in Eastern Ghouta (Arbin, Kafr Batna, Zamalka) reported most extensive access to electricity during the reporting period (8 hours or more per day). In Burza, Hama and Qudsiya electricity was delivered via the main network, while in Arbin, Kafr Batna and Zamalka populations relied on generators. The proximity of these three communities to the informal access

²⁸ See n. 6 *supra*

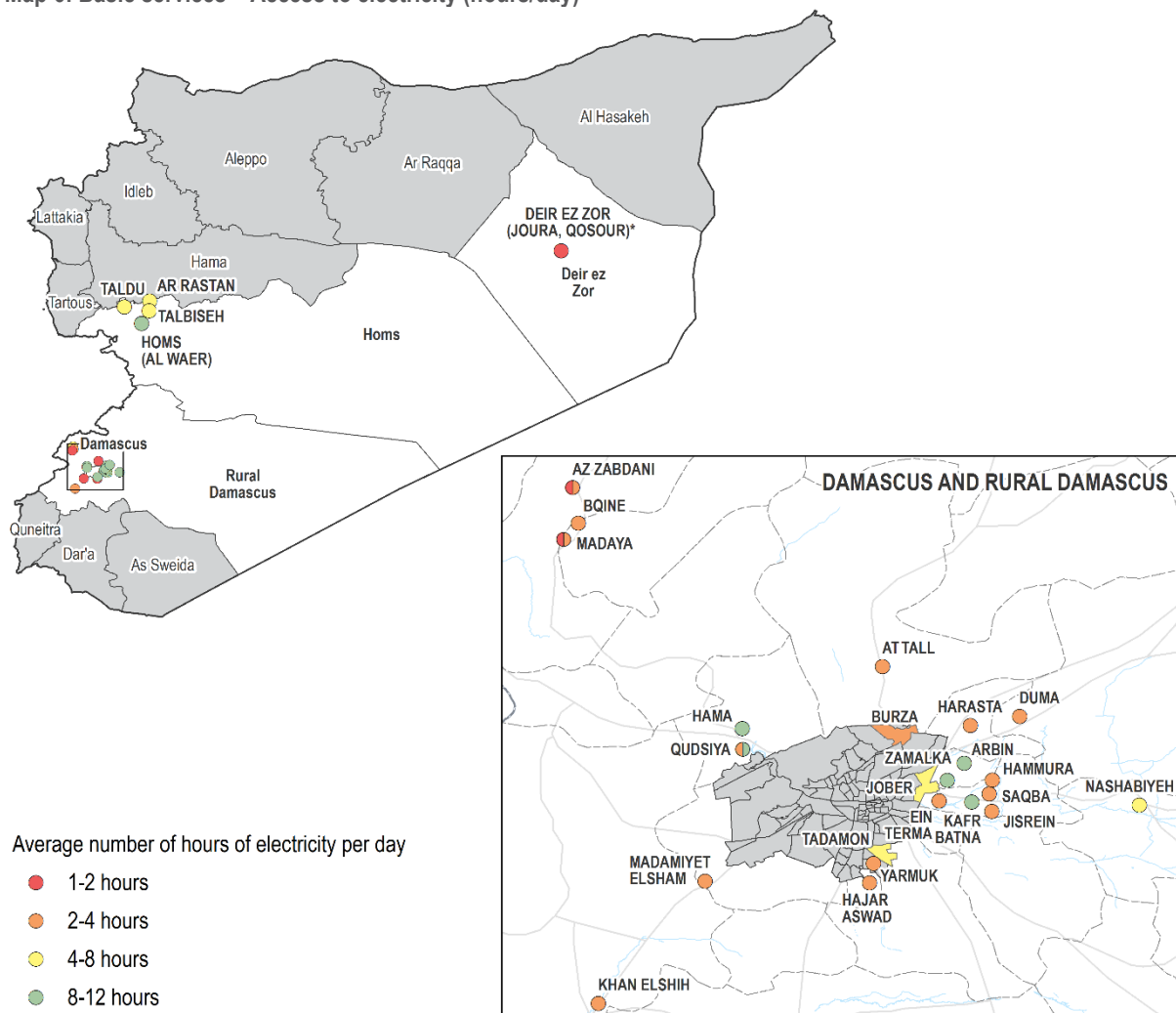
points through which fuel entered the Eastern Ghouta appears to have influenced the communities' better situation relative to the other communities assessed in the region.

- In other communities, access to electricity varied throughout the reporting period. In Madamiyet Elsham, more fuel entered the community directly after the truce agreement was reached in mid-October. In November and December, the community was able to connect to the main network again and was no longer reliant on generators as the main source of electricity. Khan Elshih relied on the main network as the main source of electricity when assessments began in June and throughout September, but had to change to generators following a military offensive in the fall which damaged infrastructure. Despite a truce agreement in November, access to the main network had not yet been restored in December. In At Tall, Hajar Aswad, Jober, Tadamon and Yarmuk, electricity levels remained stable between June and December.

Map 5: Basic services – Access to sufficient drinking water



Map 6: Basic services – Access to electricity (hours/day)



Al Waer

In Al Waer, populations had access to both the water and electricity network throughout the reporting period. The water network was consistently available seven days per week, and water access was sufficient to meet population needs. Conversely, access to the electrical network fluctuated between June and December, seemingly in tandem with periods of increased hostilities affecting the community. In June, the community reported 4-8 hours of electricity per day. This subsequently decreased over summer as conflict escalated, to 1-2 hours in August. Following the signing of a truce agreement in September, access increased again to 4-8 hours. The agreement broke down in November, and following the escalation of the conflict, access to electricity decreased to 2-4 hours in December.

Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Taldu

Between June and September, all three of the communities relied on water from private water trucks. Water delivered in this manner was safe to drink, but the amounts available were reported as insufficient until September, when additional water wells were built in the area. Throughout the reporting period, residents in Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu could also access the main water network during an estimated 1-2 days per week. However, access to water decreased in November and December, following breakdowns in some of the water pumps, as well as shortages in fuels necessary to operate them. While in Ar Rastan and Talbiseh generators were reported as the main source of electricity between June and December, residents in both communities were also able to intermittently connect to the main network; as such, access remained relatively stable throughout the reporting period (with an average 4-8 hours of electricity per day reported in Ar Rastan, and 2-4 hours in Talbiseh). In Taldu, the population relied on the main network as their main source of electricity. While access remained relatively stable, following power cuts and some reported breakdowns to the network in October, it decreased to 2-4 hours

per day (from 4-8 hours reported in previous months). This also negatively affected the availability of drinking water in Taldu in November and December.

At Tall

In At Tall, although the community was able to connect to the main water network between June and November, populations reported insufficient access to water throughout the reporting period. During these months, the water network was available 1-2 days per week, and residents resorted to coping strategies including modifying hygiene practices and spending money usually spent on other things to procure water. Additionally, when access to the water network was cut off in December following damage to the Ein Elfijeh water spring, private water trucking became the main source of water in the community instead, and overall access decreased. Throughout the entire reporting period, the community had unchanged access to the main electrical network, being able to access electricity 2-4 hours per day.

Az Zabdani, Madaya, Bqine

In all three communities, closed wells were the main source of drinking water during the reporting period. In Bqine and Madaya, access to water was reportedly insufficient every month between June and December, and populations consistently had to resort to coping strategies, such as reducing drinking water consumption and modifying hygiene practices. Conversely, in Az Zabdani, where residents could additionally access the water network, access was reported as sufficient until November. Around this time, tensions in conflict dynamics intensified and the intermittent access to the water network in Az Zabdani was subsequently cut off. Further, the three communities relied on generators for electricity, with only Az Zabdani being able to occasionally connect to the main electrical network (until October). As availability of fuels in the communities remained minimal throughout the reporting period, the amounts of electricity residents could access were correspondingly low. This did not improve in the months the communities received humanitarian aid (September, November), as such deliveries did not carry fuels. Depleting stocks of fuel, and greater demand related to colder winter months, led to electricity access decreasing to minimal levels (1-2 hours per day) in Madaya from November onwards, and in Az Zabdani in December. Additionally, water access also decreased in December following reduced ability to run generators.

Damascus (Burza, Jobar, Tadamon)

Despite their geographical proximity, access to water and electricity varied across the three Damascus neighbourhoods. Overall, Burza reported relatively better access to both drinking water and electricity, compared to the other two communities. Between August²⁹ and November, residents could connect to the main electrical network for an average 8-12 hours per day. This amount decreased in December, when more power cuts were recorded, reportedly due to increasing tensions between parties to the conflict. Further, residents in Burza also had access to the water network seven days per week between August and November. Yet, certain coping strategies were reported during this period; this could partly be ascribed to the comparatively larger number of residents living in the neighbourhood. In December, following damage to the Ein Elfijeh water source which affected many communities in Damascus and Rural Damascus, residents were forced to rely on water trucking (public), and water quality deteriorated. The population in Jobar also had relatively stable access to the water network until December, when access decreased and coping strategies were reported for the first time. Conversely, the electrical network was unavailable in Jobar, and residents relied on the use of generators for electricity. In Tadamon, neither the electrical or water networks were available during the reporting period. Instead, residents relied on closed wells and generators, respectively. Overall, access to water was reported as sufficient until December, while the amount of electricity available remained unchanged (2-4 hours per day).

Deir ez Zor

The assessed neighbourhoods of Joura and Qosour experienced extremely poor access to basic services during the reporting period. Between June and December, residents relied on surface water from the Euphrates river to meet needs. The water has been transported via the existing water network (except in September, when water bottles were used) without prior treatment, which caused illnesses among the residents. The water was also insufficient to meet population needs, and various coping strategies, including reducing drinking water consumption,

²⁹ The neighbourhood of Burza was first assessed by REACH in August 2016.

modifying hygiene practices and drinking water usually used for cleaning or other purposes, were consistently reported between June and December. When assessments began in June, the main source of electricity was generators, but the limited amounts of fuel available in the communities only allowed for 2-4 hours of electricity, per day. The communities reported being able to connect to the electricity network in the following months, but such access was limited to less than one hour per day, and was supplemented by the use of generators. However, the tight access restrictions imposed on Joura and Qosour prevented any substantive amounts of fuel entering the neighbourhoods, which in turn affected the amount of electricity which could be produced via generators. This also had an impact on water availability, as the shortages in electricity affected the availability to operate water pumps.

Eastern Ghouta

Despite an overall poor humanitarian situation and incidents of conflict-related violence during the reporting period in Eastern Ghouta, all assessed communities reported sufficient access to drinking water between June and December, although the quality differed across the communities. According to data collected, this was due to the relatively high number of closed wells in the area, along with water desalination plants, which were utilized by residents to ensure sufficient water access. Additionally, residents in Jisrein had intermittent access to the main water network until October, when it sustained damage following shelling related to increased hostilities. Further, all assessed communities within Eastern Ghouta relied on generators during the reporting period, but access to electricity varied across communities and from month to month. Overall, communities in close proximity to the informal access points through which fuel entered the Eastern Ghouta region (Arbin, Ein Terma, Zamalka) had relatively more access to electricity than other communities, especially those which were particularly vulnerable to hostilities during the reporting period (Duma). Additionally, variations were reportedly related to differences in prices across communities, as well as different pricing systems implemented for access to shared generators, which in turn determined usage. Overall, higher electricity access was reported in the summer, when generators were supplemented by solar panels, while a decrease was observed from August onwards due to tighter restrictions on fuel entry.

Hama and Qudsiya

Residents in both Hama and Qudsiya had access to the water and electricity networks during the entirety of the reporting period. Although between June and September the water network was only available 1-2 days per week, this was reportedly sufficient to meet populations' needs. Following repairs to the network after the implementation of the truce agreement in early October, access increased for the remainder of the reporting period, to 5-6 days in Hama and 3-4 days in Qudsiya, which has a relatively larger population, and correspondingly higher needs. Similarly, access to electricity fluctuated between 2-4 hours and 4-8 hours per day between June and September, but following repairs to the infrastructure, this increased to 8-12 hours from October onwards.

Hajar Aswad

In Hajar Aswad, populations were unable to access either the water or electricity networks throughout the entire reporting period. Instead, closed wells were the main source of water in the community. However, access was insufficient, and residents reported modifying hygiene practices to address water shortages. Further, in the absence of access to the electrical network, generators were relied on as the main source of electricity, with an average 2-4 hours of access, per day. There was no significant change in populations' access to either water or electricity between June and December, reflecting the relatively stable overall situation in Hajar Aswad during the reporting period.

Khan Elshih

Khan Elshih relied on closed wells throughout the reporting period, and while water quality was safe, access was reportedly insufficient between June and November. Shortages in water during this period were largely attributed to insufficient electricity to operate the water pumps. Populations reported modifying hygiene practices and spending money usually spent on other things to buy water during this period. Khan Elshih relied on the main network as the main source of electricity when assessments began in June and throughout September. However, residents had to change to generators following a military offensive in the fall which damaged infrastructure. Despite a truce agreement in November, access to the main network had not yet been restored in December. Yet, lighter restrictions on the entry of fuel had a positive impact on both access to electricity and water in December.

Madamiyet Elsham

In Madamiyet Elsham, the population relied on the water network between June and December, but access fluctuated between 1-2 and 3-4 days per week and was insufficient to meet needs. Coping strategies such as reducing drinking water consumption and modifying hygiene practices were reported throughout the reporting period. When assessments began in June, generators were the main source of electricity, and as such access to electricity was highly dependent on the availability of fuel in the community. In June, residents reportedly had less than one hour of electricity per day, as no fuels except for firewood were available in the community. Following local agreements involving the nearby community of Darayya, access restrictions were loosened, diesel became available in Madamiyet Elsham, and electricity usage increased to 2-4 hours per day in August. However access restrictions were once again tightened towards the end of the summer, once again affecting residents' access to electricity. The tensions culminated in a truce agreement in Madamiyet Elsham in October, following which more fuel was able to enter the community improving access to generators. In November and December, the community was able to connect to the main network again and was no longer reliant on generators as the main source of electricity.

Yarmuk

In the absence of access to the water and electricity networks, residents in Yarmuk relied on alternative sources (water trucking and generators) for basic services between June and December. Although access to water was sufficient to meet population needs throughout the reporting period, the water quality was reportedly negatively affected in December, due to the damage sustained by the Ein Elfijeh water source. While access to electricity remained at a stable level between June and December, it only allowed residents 2-4 hours of electricity per day, as fuel availability in the community was consistently limited and reflected in high prices.

Food Security

Extreme coping strategies related to the lack of food were seen across communities which reported the tightest restrictions on civilian and commercial access. Populations in such locations frequently resorted to skipping meals, spending days without eating, or eating non-food plants. Conversely, communities which could resort to more than one strategy for obtaining food (e.g. purchasing from shops, markets or local farmers; civilians bringing goods from nearby communities; home production; aid deliveries) were comparatively more food secure.

This sub-section aims to depict food security in the assessed hard-to-reach and besieged communities, and the nexus between limitations on freedom of movement and access restrictions. For this purpose, it looks at indicators related to sources of obtaining food at the household level in the assessed communities, as well as the incidence of reported food-related coping strategies.

- The communities which reported the tightest restrictions on movement of civilians and commercial vehicles during the reporting period experienced the highest levels of food insecurity. These represented a handful of all communities assessed, and included Al Waer, Az Zabdani, Bqine and Madaya, and Deir ez Zor (Joura and Qosour). In all of these communities residents reported extreme coping strategies such as spending days without eating or eating non-food plants. While in Az Zabdani, Bqine and Madaya populations relied almost exclusively on food distributions, conversely, in Deir ez Zor, humanitarian aid (airstrops) was not reported among the primary methods of obtaining food at the household level. Bearing in mind the poor overall humanitarian situation in Deir ez Zor during the reporting period, this could be indicative of the aid being insufficient or not reaching the civilian populations as intended.
- At Tall, Hama and Qudsiya, Khan Elshih and Madamiyet Elsham were the only communities where no negative coping strategies related to food shortages were reported at least during one month between June and December. In Khan Elshih, no coping strategies were reported for three consecutive months, between June and September. This was despite access restrictions which prevented both commercial and humanitarian vehicles from entering formally. However goods were being brought into the community through civilians via formal and informal routes, and food security only deteriorated in October when conflict increased sharply. In

At Tall, no coping strategies were reported in September and October following the entry of an increased amount of food in September via commercial vehicles.

- All other assessed communities reported either reducing meal size or skipping meals, or a combination of the two, during the reporting period. While restrictions facing these locations varied, in all of these communities some civilian movement was reported during the assessments, whether through formal or informal routes, or both. Across all of the communities which reported such less extreme coping strategies, purchasing food from shops and markets was among the main methods for obtaining food at the household level. Further, a majority reported additional means, such as purchasing from local farmers or home production.
- Notably, all of the communities which reported critical levels of food insecurity during the reporting period (Al Waer, Az Zabdani, Bqine and Madaya, Deir ez Zor) received humanitarian deliveries on two or more occasions during this time. Conversely, no or minimal civilian and commercial movement was permitted in these locations during the same period. This further suggests that civilian and commercial movement was crucial in influencing food security than humanitarian distributions.

Table 5: Food security – Prevalence of food-related coping strategies, June – December 2016³⁰

| COMMUNITY | Severity scale for use of food-related coping strategies in: | | | | | |
|-------------|--|---------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|
| | June | August | September | October | November | December |
| Al Waer | 4 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Ar Rastan | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Arbin | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| At Tall | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Az Zabdani | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Bqine | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Burza | No data | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Deir ez Zor | 4 | No data | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Duma | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Ein Terma | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Hajar Aswad | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Hama | 1 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Hammura | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Harasta | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Jisrein | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Jobar | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

³⁰ To better compare the use of food-related coping strategies in different besieged and hard-to-reach communities, each community has been given a score from 0 to 4 based on a severity matrix developed by REACH for use in hard-to-reach areas. The severity matrix includes the following categories for this indicator:

- **Fine (0):** No coping strategies are used to deal with a lack of food
- **Minor severity (1):** Some minor coping strategies may be used to deal with a lack of food, but these do not affect people's ability to face future shocks (e.g. reducing meal size)
- **Moderate severity (2):** Coping strategies are used to deal with a lack of food; these reduce people's ability to face future shocks through depleting savings or taking on debt (e.g. spending savings, borrowing money)
- **Major severity (3):** Negative coping strategies are used to deal with a lack of food; these affect future productivity and the development of human capital (e.g. reducing the number of meals a day, or selling productive assets)
- **Critical severity (4):** Crisis coping strategies are used to deal with a lack of food; these are very difficult to reverse (e.g. selling property) and represent limited available options (e.g. eating weeds, going long periods without food)

For each month, all food-related coping strategies in use were matched to these severity categories, and the community was assigned the severity ranking of the most extreme coping strategy in use. See also REACH 'Overview of five hard-to-reach areas in Iraq' December 2016.

| | | | | | | |
|------------------|---------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kafr Batna | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Khan Elshih | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Madamiyet Elsham | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Madaya | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Nashabiyeh | No data | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Qudsiya | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Saqba | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Tadamon | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| Talbiseh | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Taldu | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Yarmouk | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| Zamalka | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

A score of 0 = fine, 1 = minor severity, 2 = moderate severity, 3 = major severity, 4 = critical severity.

Al Waer

When assessments of Al Waer began, prohibitively high prices of food items in shops and markets forced populations to rely on other methods of obtaining food in June through August (purchasing from local farmers, home production, receiving through food distributions, receiving from family or friends). The various extreme coping strategies reported at during these months – reducing size of meals, skipping meals, eating non-food plants – further indicated critical levels of food insecurity, related to a military offensive which tightened access restrictions on the community. In September, following the truce agreement and the entry of humanitarian aid, purchasing from shops was reported as method of procuring food, and eating non-food plants was no longer reported as a coping strategy. The number of coping strategies reported decreased further in October, but increased again in November as the truce agreement broke down.

Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Taldu

Populations across Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu could procure food from shops and markets between June and December, in addition to home production and/or purchasing from local farmers. In September and October, when food prices reportedly increased, bartering was also observed in all three communities. In the months that humanitarian aid entered the locations, receiving food from distributions was reported among the methods of obtaining food at the household level. Despite the various means of procuring food in Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu, coping strategies were reported in all three between June and December (reducing meal size, skipping meals), with slightly fewer reported in Talbiseh and Taldu immediately following the humanitarian delivery in October.

At Tall

In At Tall, where populations were able to leave and re-enter the community and bring goods inside, purchasing from shops and markets as a method of obtaining food was reported throughout the reporting period. Additionally, in June and August humanitarian aid was delivered to neighbouring communities, and At Tall residents were able to receive some food items in this manner. In June and August, populations reportedly resorted to reducing meal size to address food shortages. In September, more food items were able to enter the community via commercial vehicles and civilians bringing goods from nearby areas, increasing availability and lowering prices in At Tall; as such, no coping strategies were reported that month or in October. However, conflict intensified in November and additional access restrictions were imposed, decreasing food availability. Negative coping strategies, including reducing meal size and skipping meals, were once again reported in At Tall. Although a truce agreement was signed in early December, and the overall situation in the community subsequently improved, these two coping strategies were still reported in December.

Az Zabdani, Madaya, Bqine

In Az Zabdani, Bqine and Madaya, receiving food from distributions was the sole main source of food at the household level throughout the entire reporting period. In between, the inter-agency deliveries that occurred in September and November, food was rationed and distributed by the local councils in Az Zabdani and Madaya. Reliance on food from distributions was indicative of the poor functioning of markets in these communities, due to the limited availability of food items. Throughout the reporting period, residents in all three communities reported skipping meals due to food shortages. Additionally, in August, reducing size of meals and spending days without eating was reported in Bqine and Madaya, as no food had entered the communities since April 2016. Food security was marginally better in Az Zabdani, which had a comparatively smaller population. Following the aid distribution in September, all three communities, continued to report reducing portion size and skipping meals for the remainder of the reporting period.

Damascus (Burza, Jober, Tadamon)

While food security across Burza, Jober and Tadamon remained overall relatively stable between June and December, there were certain differences across the three neighbourhoods. Tadamon appeared to have been the most food insecure of the three, relying on receiving food from family or friends and distributions of local NGOs at the beginning of assessments in June (in addition to purchasing food from shops and markets). It was also the only community where populations reportedly resorted to skipping meals, following a depletion in food stocks in September. However, by December, food availability appeared to have normalized. In Jober, which experienced comparatively tighter restrictions on access than Burza and Tadamon, populations were able to procure food items from local farmers and through home production during the summer months (June, July), in addition to buying from shops and markets. Item availability and prices fluctuated according to flare-ups in hostilities, and reducing meal size was continuously reported during the reporting period in Jober. Populations in Burza were able to procure food items from shops and markets during each of the assessed months. While populations reported reducing meal size, and price hikes were observed between June and December, food security in Burza was relatively more stable than in the other two communities. This was attributable to the comparatively lighter limitations on movement, and the humanitarian delivery which reached the community in October.

Deir ez Zor

Populations in the neighbourhoods of Joura and Qosour reported critical levels of food insecurity, which deteriorated further during the reporting period. The main methods of obtaining food was purchasing from shops, markets and local farmers, and bartering. During the summer (August), home production was also reported. Populations reported extreme coping strategies related to the lack of food during all months between June and December, including reducing size of meals, skipping meals, spending days without eating and eating non-food plants. Although airdrops reached Deir ez Zor city every month during the reporting period, related food distributions were seemingly insufficient to meet needs; indeed, airdrops were only reported as a method of obtaining food in November.

Eastern Ghouta

Eastern Ghouta is a fertile rural region, and across all communities assessed, home production and/or purchasing from local farmers was reported as a method of obtaining food during at least one of the months between June and December. Additionally, populations reported purchasing food from shops and markets throughout the reporting period. In communities where aid was delivered, receiving food from said distributions was reported (all assessed communities except Nashabiyeh). While overall food security remained relatively stable across Eastern Ghouta during the reporting period, populations in all communities reported reducing size of meals as a coping strategy. Additionally, in Duma, Ein Terma, Hammura, Harasta, Jisrein and Saqba, skipping meals was also reported each month. According to CRs in these locations, such differences could be partially explained by the relatively larger populations in most of these communities (and the corresponding higher needs), combined with local conflict dynamics which allowed larger quantities of food into some Eastern Ghouta communities compared to others.

Hajar Aswad

In Hajar Aswad, the population reported purchasing from shops and markets as a method of obtaining food at the household-level each month between June and December. These goods entered the community via civilians

travelling to Yalda and Babella, and were often cheaper than in those nearby communities (as some of the items were from aid distributions distributed in those locations, while others were of inferior quality). Additionally, although no humanitarian aid entered directly into Hajar Aswad during the reporting period, populations reported being able obtaining some of the aid which had entered those nearby communities from September through December. Despite the relatively stable situation in Hajar Aswad, reducing size of meals was continuously reported as a coping strategy between June and December, in addition to skipping meals in August, when food prices increased due to the US dollar exchange rate fluctuations.

Hama and Qudsiya

When assessments of the two communities began, residents in both Hama and Qudsiya reported reducing meal size and skipping meals altogether due to lack of sufficient food. This followed increased access restrictions over the summer, which in turn pressed prices to prohibitive levels between June and September. Both locations signed agreements in early October, following which humanitarian convoys entered the communities and restrictions on civilian and commercial movement were mostly lifted, improving food security. No coping strategies related to a lack of food were reported in October and November. However, in December, no humanitarian deliveries reached either Hama or Qudsiya, and fewer commercial vehicles were allowed to enter. Reducing meal size and skipping meals was once again reported, although according to community representatives this was mainly among poorer segments of the population.

Khan Elshih

No coping strategies related to a lack of food were reported in Khan Elshih between June and September. When assessments began, food security in the community was relatively stable, with populations able to obtain food through various methods – purchasing from shops and markets, as well as from local farmers, and through home production. Access restrictions tightened in June as conflict-related tensions increased, and remained as such through November. Consequently, this had a negative effect on food availability in Khan Elshih, and most items were brought by civilians from nearby communities. In October, populations started to reduce size of meals to address food shortages, with some reporting skipping meals altogether, as conflict increased. Following the truce agreement that was reached at the end of November, both commercial and humanitarian vehicles entered Khan Elshih in December, and skipping meals was no longer reported.

Madamiyet Elsham

Food security remained relatively stable in Madamiyet Elsham throughout the reporting period. Residents relied on purchasing food from shops and markets between June and August, and October and December. In September, before an agreement was reached, an escalation in conflict prevented sufficient quantities of food entering the community and most food items became unavailable in shops. However, a humanitarian delivery containing food reached Madamiyet Elsham that month. Until the implementation of the truce agreement, residents had relied on reducing meal size to address food shortages. No coping strategies were reported in October, when access restrictions were mostly lifted on civilian and commercial movement, in addition to another humanitarian convoy entering the community. However, no humanitarian deliveries entered in November and December, and despite the truce agreement remaining in place, some restrictions on commercial movement were re-introduced, causing populations to once again start reducing size of meals.

Yarmuk

Throughout the reporting period, populations were able to purchase food items from shops and markets, either directly in neighbouring communities or from residents who were re-selling items procured in this manner in Yarmuk. Home production was also reported in June, and bartering in August and December. While no humanitarian deliveries reached Yarmuk between June and December, residents were sometimes able to procure food items delivered to Yalda and Babella. As such, while food security remained relatively stable in Yarmuk throughout the reporting period, reducing size of meals or skipping meals were interchangeably reported each month in the community between June and December.

Prices

Besieged and hard-to-reach communities reported significantly higher prices of core food items than other locations, with the price of a standard food basket on average 34% higher than the national average.³¹ Many core food items were completely unavailable throughout the reporting period in communities experiencing the tightest restrictions on movement and access, precluding data collection.

This sub-section presents findings regarding the prices of assessed core food items³² and cooking fuel (butane) across the assessed communities during the reporting period. Where data was available, the price of a standard food basket³³ was calculated for each community, and compared to the respective governorate average.³⁴

Price of core food items

- The highest food item prices were reported in the besieged communities of Al Waer, Az Zabdani, Bqine and Madaya, and Deir ez Zor city. Additionally, the unavailability of core food items in these locations precluded the calculation of a standard food basket price during any given month of the reporting period in Az Zabdani, Bqine and Madaya, and Deir ez Zor city.
- In all communities where a truce agreement was signed between June and December 2016 (Al Waer, At Tall, Hama and Qudsiya, Khan Elshih, Madamiyet Elsham) there was an initial increase in prices which corresponded to the tightening of access restrictions and intensification of hostilities, followed by rapid decreases once such an agreement was implemented. Across the remaining assessed communities, prices remained relatively stable during the reporting period. In particular, in Hajar Aswad, Tadamon and Yarmuk prices were similar to, or lower than, those reported in nearby communities not considered besieged or hard-to-reach. This was reportedly due to the residents' ability to procure cheap goods from nearby locations.

Price of cooking fuel (butane)

- Butane was unavailable in Az Zabdani, Bqine and Madaya throughout the entire reporting period.³⁵ Availability also fluctuated in Khan Elshih and Madamiyet Elsham in the months preceding the respective truce agreements.
- Across communities where the fuel was reported as available, the highest prices were consistently reported in Al Waer and in all Eastern Ghouta communities. Hajar Aswad, Tadamon and Yarmuk reported relatively low prices.
- As was the case with food items, ongoing hostilities culminating in truce agreements visibly affected the price of butane in At Tall, Hama and Qudsiya, Khan Elshih and Madamiyet Elsham during the reporting period.
- Across all assessed communities where the fuel was available, an increase in price was reported in December and attributed to higher demand due to colder temperatures.

³¹ Monthly national average prices based on data collected by the United Nations World Food Programme: [Syria – Market Price Watch, 2016](#)

³² REACH collects price data regarding the following core food items as part of monthly Community Profiles assessments: bread (private bakery, 1 pack), bread (public bakery, 1 pack), rice (1kg), bulgur (1kg), lentils (1 kg), chicken (1kg), mutton (1kg), tomato (1kg), cucumber (1kg), milk (1 litre), flour (1kg), eggs (1), iodised salt (500g), sugar (1kg), cooking oil (1 litre).

³³ Calculation of average cost of food basket based on WFP's standard food basket of essential commodities. The basket includes 37 kg of bread, 19 kg rice, 19 kg lentils, 5 kg of sugar and 7 kg of vegetable oil, providing 1,930 kcal a day for a family of five during a month. Available at: WFP, VAM Food Security Analysis, 'Syria Market Price Watch Bulletin: December 2016'.

³⁴ Monthly governorate average prices based on data collected by the United Nations World Food Programme: [Syria – Market Price Watch, 2016](#)

³⁵ It was also unavailable in Deir ez Zor in September and October, while no data regarding availability could be collected during the remaining months.

Map 7: Prices – Food basket prices compared to governorate average food basket price

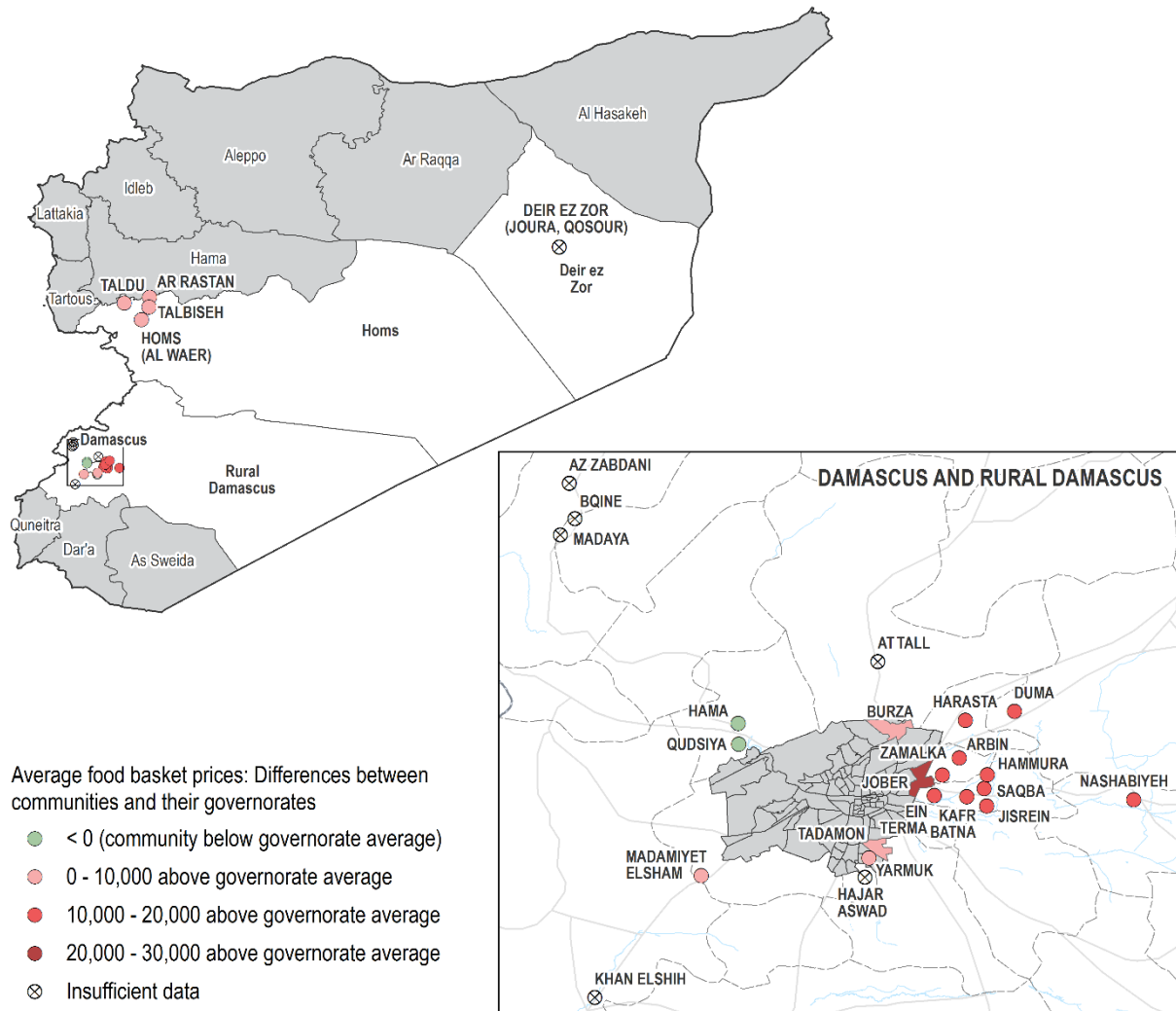


Table 6: Prices – Food basket prices, June – December 2016

| COMMUNITY | Price of a complete food basket in: | | | | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|
| | June | August | September | October | November | December |
| Al Waer | - | - | 36784 | - | - | - |
| Ar Rastan | 38422 | 37906 | 38123 | 37423 | 35496 | 36223 |
| Arbin | 53933 | 53259 | 53221 | 52265 | 52390 | 51034 |
| At Tall | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Az Zabdani | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Bqine | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Burza | - | 31301 | 36534 | 35334 | 35334 | 37809 |
| Deir ez Zor | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Duma | 53933 | 54127 | 53442 | 52466 | 51565 | 49584 |
| Ein Terma | 53933 | 53802 | 53442 | 52466 | 52466 | 49584 |
| Hajar Aswad | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Hama | 32771 | - | - | - | 22794 | 27219 |
| Hammura | 53933 | 52646 | 52791 | 52466 | 52466 | 49584 |
| Harasta | 53933 | 52971 | 53442 | 52466 | 52466 | 49584 |
| Jisrein | 53933 | 51815 | 52791 | 52466 | 52466 | 49584 |
| Jobar | 57165 | 48221 | 46915 | - | 50148 | 47496 |
| Kafr Batna | 53933 | 54540 | 52184 | 52265 | 52265 | 51034 |
| Khan Elshih | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Madamiyet Elsham | - | - | - | - | - | 37466 |
| Madaya | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Nashabiyeh | - | 54540 | 55447 | 52340 | 52340 | 52190 |
| Qudsiya | - | - | - | - | 22794 | 27219 |
| Saqba | 53933 | 54127 | 53254 | 52466 | 52466 | 49584 |
| Tadamon | - | 32370 | - | - | - | 29683 |
| Talbiseh | 38422 | 36722 | 37173 | 34741 | 36327 | 37504 |
| Taldu | 38248 | 37048 | 37173 | 36823 | 34896 | 37298 |
| Yarmouk | - | 33051 | - | - | - | - |
| Zamalka | 57165 | 53384 | 52065 | 52265 | 52265 | 52190 |

Blank cells indicate months when a complete food basket could not be assembled due to shortages in local markets.
Colours indicate price changes relative to the first month in which a complete food basket could be assembled.

Figure 1: Distribution of food basket prices/month

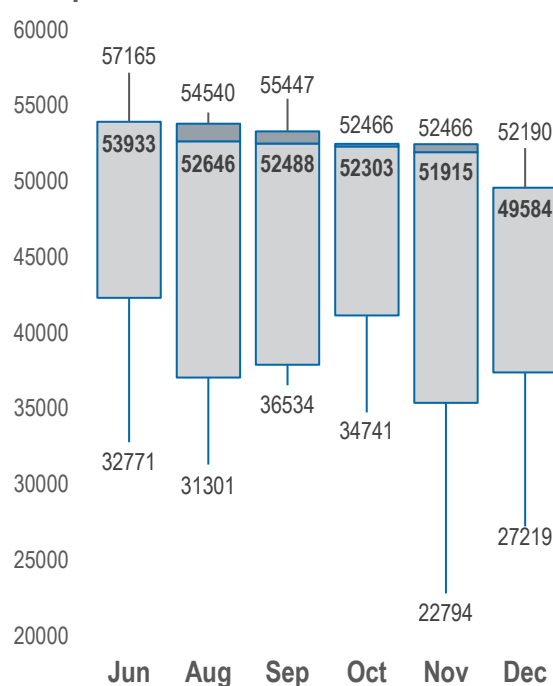
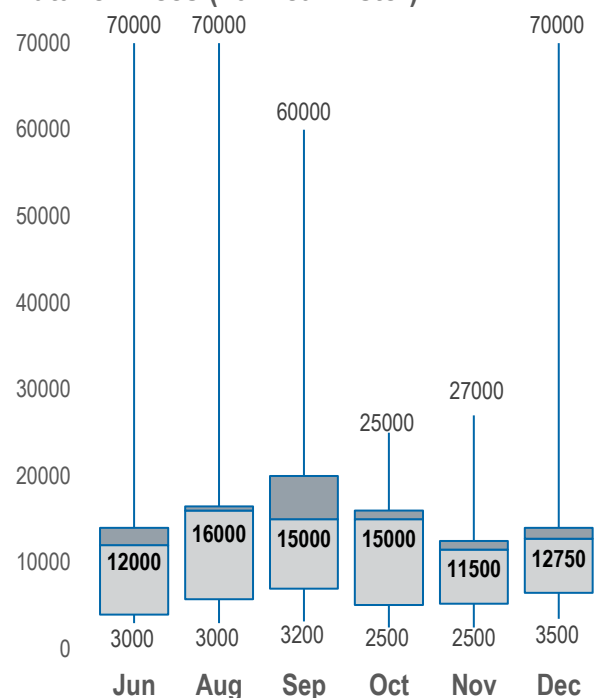
Complete Food Basket Prices

Figure 2: Distribution of butane prices/month

Butane Prices (20-L cannister)**Al Waer**

In June and August, a standard food basket price could not be calculated in the community due to the unavailability of bread. Core food items which were available in the community were astronomically priced, averaging 1,123% more in June 2016 than in nearby communities not considered besieged or hard-to-reach. Prices dropped following the implementation of the truce agreement in September (an average price decrease of 58% was observed between the August and September assessments), and the availability of bread allowed for the calculation of a standard food basket. However, prices started to rise again in November as tensions increased and access restrictions tightened in Al Waer. In December, the core food items that were still available in the community were on average 291% more expensive than in nearby communities. Similar to food, the price of butane reflected developments in Al Waer during the reporting period: in June and August, a canister cost 70,000 SYP. Following the implementation of the truce agreement and the related lifting of access restrictions, a price of 25,000 SYP was reported in October. By December, the price was once again 70,000 SYP.

Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Taldu

All assessed core food items, with the exception of cucumber, were available across Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu between June and December. Prices remained stable during the reporting period, with minor fluctuations seemingly corresponding to months when humanitarian aid was delivered to the communities. Further, even though Ar Rastan experienced relatively stricter restrictions on movement to the wider area than Talbiseh and Taldu, prices across the three communities remained similar, most likely due to the freedom of movement between the three localities. The average price of a standard food basket from the three communities was 31% higher than the Homs governorate average in June; by December, this number had decreased to a 27% difference in prices. Butane was available in markets in all three communities throughout the reporting period. Prices fluctuated from month to month and across communities, with the average price of a canister being 7,717 SYP. An increase in butane prices was noted in December, corresponding to higher demand associated with colder temperatures.

At Tall

When assessments of At Tall began, all assessed core food item prices were reported as rising, and were on average 49% higher than in nearby communities not considered hard-to-reach. This trend continued over the summer – by August prices were 119% higher than in nearby communities. Prices peaked in November, when the community experienced increased hostilities and tighter restrictions on civilian movement and commercial access. Following the implementation of the truce agreement in early December, food prices decreased by an average 17%, but remained 66% higher than in nearby communities. Throughout the reporting period, bread from bakeries remained unavailable in At Tall, precluding the calculation of a standard food basket price. As was the case with food items, the price of butane in the community steadily increased between June and November, and was 13,000 SYP in November 2016 (341% higher than in nearby communities). By December, it had decreased to 5,000 SYP.

Az Zabdani, Madaya, Bqine

Availability of assessed core food items was critically low in all three communities between June and November, with remaining items prohibitively expensive. In September, when the lowest prices during the reporting period were observed (due to humanitarian aid being delivered to the communities that month), available core food items in Madaya were nonetheless on average 1,546% more expensive than in nearby communities not considered besieged. All assessed core food items became unavailable in Az Zabdani in October, with residents forced to rely on food distributions by local councils instead. Further, in December, all remaining markets in Madaya and Bqine closed due to intense hostilities and related security concerns, and no prices could be collected for that month. As no bread was available in the communities during the reporting period, a standard food basket price could not be calculated for any of the months. Similarly, due to extreme access restrictions, no butane was available between June and December in either community.

Damascus (Burza, Jober, Tadamon)

While overall prices of assessed core food items across Burza, Jober and Tadamon remained relatively stable between June and December, they varied across the three neighbourhoods, with Jober experiencing the highest prices, while Tadamon reported the lowest. This was partly attributed to the relatively higher degree of movement restrictions imposed on residents in Jober. Further, civilians from Tadamon could easily access the communities of Yalda and Babella, where food deliveries were distributed on a regular basis. As such, during the months where bread was available in the community (August, December), Tadamon reported one of the lowest standard food basket prices across all communities assessed in this report; the food basket in Tadamon was on average only 4% more expensive than the Damascus average. In Burza, which was first assessed in August, there was a small but progressive increase in prices during the reporting period, with the price of a standard food basket increasing by 21% between August and December. Although Burza experienced comparatively lighter access restrictions than Jober and Tadamon, these increased gradually during the reporting period. Further, butane was available in all three communities during all months, but prices differed significantly. In Tadamon, the price of a canister varied between 3,600-7,500 SYP, in Burza between 12,000-15,000 SYP, and in Jober between 14,000-16,000 SYP.

Deir ez Zor

The persistent unavailability of a majority of assessed core food items in markets in Joura and Qosour precluded the calculation of a standard food basket price for those communities for any of the months during the reporting period. The price of remaining food items increased steadily during the reporting period; in June, core food items in Joura and Qosour were on average 79% more expensive than in nearby communities not considered besieged, while in October this number amounted to 551%.³⁶ Butane was not available in the communities at any point during the reporting period.

Eastern Ghouta

Reported prices of core food items were similar across all assessed Eastern Ghouta communities. Further, prices remained stable during the reporting period. This was attributed to relatively constant restrictions on movement and access, but also the region's capacity for local agricultural production. Nonetheless, assessed food items were on

³⁶ It was not possible to obtain prices from nearby communities not considered besieged or hard-to-reach from November and onwards due to limited coverage in Deir ez Zor governorate because of access restrictions.

average 81% more expensive than in nearby communities not considered besieged (June - December 2016). Similarly, the average price of a standard food basket in Eastern Ghouta did not fluctuate much between June and December, and was between 27% and 32% more expensive than the average standard food basket price for Rural Damascus governorate. The price of butane across assessed Eastern Ghouta communities was prohibitively high throughout the reporting period. In September, when prices peaked due to limited availability in nearby communities from which the fuel was obtained, a canister was reportedly priced at 25,000 SYP in some Eastern Ghouta communities, representing a 762% price difference from nearby communities.

Hajar Aswad

While a standard food basket price could not be calculated for Hajar Aswad due to the unavailability of bread (from bakeries) throughout the reporting period, most other assessed core food items were available every month, and prices remained stable between June and December. Additionally, food item prices collected in Hajar Aswad were overall similar to, or lower than, in nearby communities not considered besieged. This was explained by residents' ability to leave the community and bring items from the nearby communities of Yalda and Babella, which regularly received humanitarian deliveries during the reporting period. Items obtained from such distributions were re-sold in Hajar Aswad at comparatively low prices (but were also reportedly of low quality). The price of butane did not change between June and November, and was reported at 4,000 SYP (on average 36% more expensive than in nearby communities). It rose to 4,500 SYP in December, an increase associated with higher demand related to the onset of winter.

Hama and Qudsiya

While most assessed core food items were available in Hama and Qudsiya during the reporting period, their prices fluctuated considerably in response to developments in the communities. As the security situation deteriorated, prices increased between June and August. By September, chicken, mutton and flour were unavailable in markets, while prices of remaining food items were on average 59% more expensive than in nearby communities not considered hard-to-reach. Following the implementation of the truce in early October and the partial lifting of movement and access restrictions, all assessed food items became available in markets and prices decreased considerably. By December, a standard food basket in Hama and Qudsiya was 21% cheaper than the Rural Damascus governorate average. While butane was available in the communities throughout the reporting period, its price increased to prohibitive levels during the peak of hostilities (12,000 SYP in September). Following the truce agreement, the price fell to 2,500 SYP in October.

Khan Elshih

In June, assessed core food items were on average similarly priced to those in nearby communities in Rural Damascus not considered hard-to-reach. As tensions increased and the security situation became more volatile, prices increased: in October, prices of core food items in Khan Elshih were on average 79% higher than those in nearby communities. By November, at the peak of hostilities, most core food items were no longer available in markets. After the implementation of the truce agreement at the end of November, restrictions on access were partially lifted and core food items became available in Khan Elshih again. These were similar in price to those in nearby communities. No food basket price could be calculated in Khan Elshih, due to the unavailability of bread during the reporting period. Conversely, the price of butane remained relatively stable between June and December, and was on average 33% more expensive than in nearby communities (butane was not available in markets in October and November).

Madamiyet Elsham

In June and August, about half of assessed core food items were unavailable in Madamiyet Elsham, while those remaining were substantively more expensive than in nearby communities not considered besieged (in June and August, food items were on average 177% more expensive inside Madamiyet Elsham). This corresponded to tight restrictions on both civilian and commercial access, as tensions in the community grew over summer (June through September). Prices peaked in September, shortly before the signing of the truce agreement in Madamiyet Elsham. Following the truce, most core food items became available in the community, and prices decreased by 52% in October as compared to the previous month. Price levels also became comparable to those in nearby communities. A standard food basket price could not be calculated until December, when bread first became available in bakeries;

a food basket in Madamiyet Elsham was 8% more expensive than the governorate average. Butane was not available in the community until after the implementation of the truce, at which point it was similarly priced to nearby communities.

Yarmuk

Core food item prices remained relatively stable in Yarmuk throughout the reporting period, and were similar to or lower than those in nearby communities not considered besieged. The comparatively low price of food items in Yarmuk was partially attributed to populations' ability to leave and bring items from the nearby communities of Yalda and Babella, at least some of which were from aid distributions. However, food items obtained this way were reportedly of lower quality). Due to the persisting unavailability of bread from bakeries in Yarmuk, it was not possible to calculate the price of a standard food basket in the community, except during the month of August. Conversely, the price of butane was consistently higher than in nearby communities: it fluctuated between 3,600-4,000 SYP between June and November, before it increased to 7,000 SYP in December, following higher demand associated with colder temperatures.

CONCLUSION

This report was based on a multi-sector trends analysis of selected besieged and hard-to-reach communities across Damascus, Deir ez Zor, Homs and Rural Damascus governorates. Using data collected between June and December 2016 within the Community Profiles framework, it provides in-depth analysis of trends observed over time and across the assessed locations, focusing on the impact of restrictions on movement and access on vulnerability and resilience. It shows the nexus between conflict, access restrictions and changing needs, and purports to determine gaps and vulnerabilities to be considered for future humanitarian interventions and related advocacy efforts.

Data collected suggests that **communities experiencing the highest degree of limitations on civilian movement (Az Zabdani, Bqine, Madaya, Deir ez Zor city) reported the highest degrees of vulnerability**, indicating the importance of civilian movement for populations to meet their basic needs. Additionally, these communities saw a constant deterioration in living conditions throughout the reporting period. Conversely, the **biggest changes in the overall humanitarian situation occurred in communities which signed local truce agreements (Al Waer, At Tall, Hama, Khan Elshih, Madamiyet Elsham, Qudsiya)** between June and December. In all assessed locations, the implementation of such agreements was preceded by a tightening of restrictions on movement and access, and an escalation in conflict, reflected in a deterioration across assessed indicators (health, basic services, food security and price levels). There was a relative improvement in the humanitarian situation immediately after the signing of an agreement in all communities assessed, but a degree of access restrictions persisted nonetheless. Notably, the implementation of a truce agreement did not guarantee a permanent improvement, as exemplified by the breakdown of such an agreement in Al Waer.

The frequency of **humanitarian aid deliveries** decreased significantly, from 16 communities supported in June to only 2 in December. The lack of commercial access to most besieged and hard-to-reach communities further reinforced the importance of civilian's ability to leave and enter their communities. Overall, communities where segments of the populations could utilize formal or informal access routes were more resilient, reporting better health situations, food security and greater market functionality.

While **health situations** varied widely across assessed locations and over time, communities facing the tightest restrictions on freedom of movement also indicated the poorest health situations during the reporting period. Due to the limited number of humanitarian deliveries, combined with restrictions on commercial access, civilians' ability to leave and re-enter their communities was a critical way to ensure the availability of medicine and medical items inside such locations. Developments in conflict dynamics, such as implementations of local truce agreements, also significantly affected the health situation in assessed locations.

At least eight of the communities assessed reported resorting to negative coping strategies to deal with a lack of **sufficient drinking water** between June and December. However, it was not possible to generalize findings regarding the impact of the type of main source of drinking water on sufficiency, nor establish a pattern for besieged as compared to hard-to-reach communities, suggesting that other factors (such as population size) might be more decisive. Similarly, while communities which relied on generators for access to electricity were more sensitive to fluctuations in limitations affecting access to fuel, there was no generalizable patterns across all communities.

Food security varied extensively across communities, with the highest levels of food insecurity reported in communities indicating the tightest restrictions on movement of civilians and commercial vehicles during the reporting period. However, all of them reported some type of negative coping strategies related to a lack of food at some point between June and December 2016.

The highest **prices of core food items and cooking fuel** were reported in those communities which experienced the tightest restrictions on civilian and commercial movement. Additionally, the largest fluctuations in prices were observed in communities which implemented truce agreements during the reporting period, further highlighting the significance of access restrictions and conflict on price levels.

Due to unstable circumstances in besieged and hard-to-reach communities, REACH will continue to provide monthly assessments and analysis to monitor the dynamics of ongoing conflict (including restrictions on movement and access) and its impact on the ability of resident populations to meet their basic needs. Where feasible, REACH will expand its coverage to collect data in additional locations which are hard-to-reach or besieged.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Background information on assessed communities

Table 7: Population numbers in assessed communities (December 2016)

| Governorate | Community | Population (December 2016) ³⁷ | IDPs (December 2016) |
|----------------|----------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| Damascus | Burza | 30,000-35,000 ³⁸ | 12,000-14,000 |
| | Jobar | 500-600 ⁷ | None |
| | Tadamon | 1,800-2,000 ⁷ | 250-300 |
| | Yarmuk | 9,800 | 6,000 |
| Deir ez Zor | Deir ez Zor City (Joura, Qosour) | 100,000-120,000 ³⁹ | None |
| Homs | Al Waer | 50,000-55,000 ⁴⁰ | 40,000-45,000 |
| | As Rastan | 47,000 | 9,000 |
| | Talbiseh | 41,000 | 11,000 |
| | Taldu | 18,400 | 600 |
| Rural Damascus | Arbin (Eastern Ghouta) | 39,000 | 1,930 |
| | Duma (Eastern Ghouta) | 143,000 | 19,000 |
| | Ein Terma (Eastern Ghouta) | 23,300 | 14,300 |
| | Hammura (Eastern Ghouta) | 18,000 | 5,850 |
| | Harasta (Eastern Ghouta) | 20,000 | 5,270 |
| | Jisrein (Eastern Ghouta) | 14,000 | 6,300 |
| | Kafr Batna (Eastern Ghouta) | 19,500 | 5,770 |
| | Nashabiyeh (Eastern Ghouta) | 4,000 | 1,300 |
| | Saqba (Eastern Ghouta) | 24,000 | 8,500 |
| | Zamalka (Eastern Ghouta) | 12,000 | 2,640 |
| | At Tall | 194,850 | 174,260 |
| | Az Zabdani | 750 | None |
| | Bqine | 7,700 | 900 |
| | Madaya | 38,000 | 900 |
| | Hajar Aswad | 5,499 | 1,895 |
| | Hama | 21,000 | 9,460 |
| | Qudsiya | 647,940 | 130,515 |

³⁷ Unless otherwise stated, all population figures are based on HNO 2017 population data (December 2016).

³⁸ Figures based on population estimates by local actors within the community in December 2016. The OCHA HNO census does not provide population numbers at the neighbourhood level; the estimated total population for Damascus city was reportedly 1,750,000 individuals, including 645,000 IDPs; HNO 2017 population data (December 2016).

³⁹ Figures based on population estimates by local actors within the community. The OCHA HNO census does not provide population numbers at the neighbourhood level; the estimated total population for Deir ez Zor City was reportedly 110,000 individuals, including 52,200 IDPs; HNO 2017 population data (December 2016).

⁴⁰ Figures based on population estimates by local actors within the community in December 2016. The community reported a population of 70,000-80,000, including 60,000-65,000 IDPs, when assessments began in June 2016. The OCHA HNO census does not provide population numbers at the neighbourhood level; the estimated total population for Homs city was reportedly 600,000 individuals, including 300,000 IDPs; HNO 2017 population data (December 2016).

| | | | |
|--|------------------|--------|-------|
| | Khan Elshih | 12,000 | 3,000 |
| | Madamiyet Elsham | 43,000 | 2,520 |

Al Waer (Homs): Al Waer is a neighbourhood in western Homs city. Prior to the conflict, Al Waer was a modern, wealthy area, hosting some government offices. When the conflict reached Homs city, a large number of residents from central Homs fled to the neighbourhood in the hope to escape hostilities. In November 2013, the remaining route between Al Waer and Homs city was cut off, effectively trapping the population of the neighbourhood.⁴¹ Al Waer was recognized as besieged by the UN in May 2016. The community signed a local agreement in September 2016, but implementation broke down in the following months. The humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities of the population in Al Waer were largely determined by the dynamic changes in conflict in the area observed during the reporting period. When Al Waer was first assessed in June 2016, extreme access restrictions had forced food insecurity to nearly critical levels. The situation in the community improved following the agreement in September, but deteriorated again from October onwards as tensions increased.

Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu (Homs): The towns of Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu are all situated in the Al Houleh region between the cities of Homs and Hama in Homs governorate. Al Houleh is a broad plain with agricultural areas, allowing residents of the many small villages some degree of home production of food items. The towns of Ar Rastan, Talbiseh and Taldu have faced access restrictions since 2012, and by December 2016 were – together with Al Waer – the only remaining opposition-controlled areas in the region. While the humanitarian situation in the three communities remained relatively stable throughout the reporting period, Ar Rastan faced comparatively tighter access restrictions and more hostilities. Talbiseh and Taldu have been classified as hard-to-reach since 2015; Ar Rastan was classified as such in June 2016. All three communities have been assessed since June 2016.

At Tall (Rural Damascus): At Tall is a city in the Qalamoun mountains in Rural Damascus governorate, 11km north of Damascus city. The city has taken in large numbers of IDPs since the conflict began, predominantly from other communities in Rural Damascus. At Tall itself has faced access restrictions since the end of 2013 and was classified as hard-to-reach in 2015. While tight access restrictions negatively affected food prices and availability when At Tall was first assessed in June 2016, the overall humanitarian situation was relatively stable. Conditions started to deteriorate in October when access restrictions tightened further and hostilities flared up in November. A local truce agreement was reached in December 2016 between local authorities and belligerent forces.

Az Zabdani, Madaya and Bqine (Rural Damascus): Az Zabdani, Madaya and Bqine are three communities located in a contiguous, mountainous area in Rural Damascus, 40km from Damascus city. All civilian population was evacuated from Az Zabdani – most to Madaya – in early 2016. While residents can move freely between the towns, the communities have faced extreme access restrictions since July 2015. A limited number of medical evacuations was allowed from Madaya in September, but no other civilian (or commercial) movement has been reported in the towns since they were first assessed in June 2016. Az Zabdani was classified as besieged by the UN in November 2015, Madaya and Bqine in January 2016. The humanitarian situation in all three communities is critical, with extreme levels of food insecurity and poor access to basic services and medical assistance, and steadily deteriorated during the reporting period.

Damascus (Burza, Jober and Tadamon): The neighbourhoods of Burza, Tadamon and Jober are located on the eastern flank of Damascus city (Damascus governorate). The neighbourhoods, in particular Burza and Jober, are of strategic importance due to their proximity to the Eastern Ghouta region. The communities have faced access restrictions since mid-2013. Jober and Tadamon were first assessed in June 2016, while Burza was first assessed in August 2016. All three communities were classified as hard-to-reach in 2015; Jober was subsequently re-classified as besieged in November 2016. Despite their geographical proximity, the neighbourhoods experienced different degrees of access restriction and hostilities during the reporting period; overall, populations in Burza faced lighter restrictions on civilian movement, while restrictions on Jober were the harshest.

Deir ez Zor city (Joura, Qosour) Joura and Qosour are two neighbourhoods forming a contiguous area in Deir ez Zor City (Deir ez Zor governorate). Deir ez Zor City has experienced heavy conflict since 2012, and the neighbourhoods of Joura and Qosour have faced severe access restrictions since 2015. Deir ez Zor City is facing

⁴¹ PAX and The Syria Institute, "No Return to Homs: A case study on demographic engineering in Syria" (21 February 2017), p. 30-31.

both military encirclement and besiegement by armed groups; it was recognized as besieged by the UN in 2015. Throughout the entire reporting period, the tight access restrictions imposed on Joura and Qosour, coupled with ongoing hostilities in the area, have critically affected food security in the neighbourhoods, and also resulted in minimal access to medical assistance and basic services. While the neighbourhoods of Joura and Qosour were first assessed in June 2016, the communities could not be assessed in August, due to increased security risks which limited coverage that month.

Eastern Ghouta (Rural Damascus): Eastern Ghouta is a fertile region in Rural Damascus governorate, just east of Damascus city. The region is home to over 50 villages and towns, many of which are under the control of government forces, while others are opposition controlled. Nine Eastern Ghouta communities have been assessed since June 2016: Arbin, Duma, Ein Terma, Hammura, Harasta, Jisrein, Kafr Batna, Saqba and Zamalka. Additionally, assessments of Nashabiyeh started in August 2016. The 10 communities assessed have an estimated total population of 316,000, including 70,860 IDPs.⁴² Military control of Eastern Ghouta has been contested since mid-2012, with restrictions on access and movement tightened since mid-2013. In addition to vulnerabilities caused by access restrictions on the assessed Eastern Ghouta area, internal power struggles have negatively affected the security and humanitarian situations in the communities. All of the Eastern Ghouta communities assessed are under besiegement by government forces and are currently classified as besieged by the UN.

Hama and Qudsiya (Rural Damascus): Hama and Qudsiya are two suburban towns located in close proximity to each other in Rural Damascus, just west of Damascus city. The two communities have faced access restrictions since mid-2015 and Qudsiya was classified as hard-to-reach by OCHA in October 2015.⁴³ While the humanitarian situation in both locations was relatively stable when assessments began in June 2016, it deteriorated over summer as access restrictions tightened, and both Hama and Qudsiya experienced violent hostilities. The hostilities culminated in the signing of truce agreements in both towns in early October 2016. Despite an overall improvement in the security and humanitarian situations following the implementation of the local agreements, REACH has continued monitoring of the locations (which have experienced several temporary ceasefires in the past).

Hajar Aswad (Rural Damascus): Hajar Aswad is a town in Rural Damascus, located just south of Damascus city. The community has experienced conflict and access restrictions since 2012. It was first assessed in June 2016, and there were no significant changes to the humanitarian and security situations in the location during the reporting period. Hajar Aswad was classified as hard-to-reach when the OCHA classification was first made public in 2014; in November 2016, the community was re-classified as besieged.

Khan Elshih (Rural Damascus): Khan Elshih is a mostly Palestinian community, located in southwest Rural Damascus governorate. The town and adjacent rural areas have been surrounded by the military for over two years, and the community was designated by OCHA as a hard-to-reach location in 2014. When assessments of Khan Elshih began in June 2016, the community reported a poor humanitarian situation resulting from tight access restrictions on civilian and commercial movement. The situation in Khan Elshih deteriorated significantly during the reporting period, when hostilities increased in October 2016 through airstrikes, barrel bombs, shelling and snipers.⁴⁴ Khan Elshih was re-classified as besieged by the UN on 1 November 2016. Shortly thereafter, hostilities culminated in a truce agreement on 27 November 2016.

Madamiyet Elsham (Rural Damascus): Madamiyet Elsham is located 4km southwest of Damascus city, in the Western Ghouta region. The town has faced access restrictions since 2012. Madamiyet Elsham was classified as besieged when OCHA first made the classification public in May 2014. It was subsequently re-classified as hard-to-reach, until January 2016, when it was once again recognized as besieged. When assessments of the community began in June 2016, the community had just entered a local agreement which allowed for the delivery of multi-sectoral assistance and the partial lifting of access restrictions. However, the situation deteriorated over the summer as tensions increased and access restrictions were re-instated. An intensification of conflict culminated in a truce agreement being signed in mid-October in the community.

Yarmuk (Damascus): Yarmuk is a district of Damascus city, located 5km south of the city centre. It is an unofficial refugee camp and home to the largest group of Palestinians inside Syria. Yarmuk has faced hostilities since 2012

⁴² Figures based on HNO 2017 population data (December 2016).

⁴³ Hama did not appear on the OCHA status classification list until January 2017. However, local actors within the community reported conditions very similar to those in Qudsiya during the reporting period. Additionally, at the time when access restrictions were imposed on Qudsiya by government forces, populations were able to move freely between the two communities (but not to the wider outside area); residents of Hama could only leave the communities through the checkpoints in Qudsiya.

⁴⁴ Siege Watch, Fourth Quarterly Report on Besieged Areas in Syria August - October 2016 (November 2016), p. 31

access restrictions since early 2013 and was classified as besieged in 2014. In April 2016, direct fighting between parties to the conflict intensified significantly within the community, leading to increased access restrictions in June and August. The conflict further intensified in October and in December, leading to an additional deterioration of the humanitarian situation during the reporting period.

Annex 2: Questionnaire (selected indicators)

| Sector | Indicator | Question | Instructions | Choices | Conditions |
|----------------------------------|--|--|---|---|--|
| Community details | Estimated total population | Estimated population (total number of individuals pre-conflict plus IDPs): | Enter min. and max. estimated number of individuals | | |
| | Estimated IDPs | Of which estimated to be IDPs: | Enter min. and max. estimated number of IDPs | | |
| Movement of civilians | Existence of formal access points | Were there any formal entry and exit points which members of the community could leave / enter during October? | Select one | Yes, No; Not sure | If "No" selected Q1.2, 1.3., 1.4 and 1.5 and 1.5a should not appear |
| | Proportion of population allowed to leave through formal points | Overall, what proportion of the total population were allowed to leave the community through formal entry / exit points (given official permission) if they wished during [month]? | Please tick one | None; 1-10%; 11-25; 26-50%, 51-75%; 76-100% | Q1.3 only appears if 1.1 "Yes" |
| | Risks faced when attempting to enter/exit through formal exit points | What types of risks did people face when entering or exiting the location through formal entry and exit points during [month]? | Select all that apply | No risks faced (cannot select with any other option); No one tried to leave or enter the community through formal entry and exit points; Snipers / gunfire; Landmines; Shelling; Sexual harassment; Violence towards women; Verbal harassment; Physical harassment; Detention; Confiscation of documents; Conscripting; Other (specify); Not sure | Select all that apply; "No risks faced" cannot be selected with any other option |
| Movement of Goods and Assistance | Commercial vehicles able to enter | Were vehicles carrying commercial goods (food, fuel, NFIs etc) able to enter / exit the community through formal entry / exit points during [month]? | Tick one | Yes, all could enter without restrictions (no fees, searching trucks etc); Some vehicles allowed but with restrictions; No vehicles allowed to enter; Not sure | If "No vehicles allowed to enter" selected skip Q2.1b |
| | Humanitarian vehicles able to enter | Were humanitarian vehicles able to enter / exit the community through formal entry / exit points during [month]? | Tick one | Yes, all could enter without restrictions (no fees, searching trucks etc); Some vehicles allowed but with restrictions; No vehicles allowed to enter; Not sure | If "No vehicles allowed to enter" selected, skip Q2.4b and 2.4c |
| Access to services | Water | What was the main source of drinking water in the community? | Tick one | Water network; Water trucking (public); Water trucking (private); Closed wells; Open wells; Protected spring; Surface water / unprotected spring; Rainwater; Bottled water; Other; Not sure | Tick one |
| | Water | Did the community have enough water to meet its household needs? | Tick one | Yes, No; Not sure | If "yes", skip Q5.3a |
| | Electricity | What was the main source of electricity in the community? | Tick one | Main network; Generator; Solar / alternative sources; No electricity source at all; Other (specify); Not sure | Tick one |
| | Electricity | On average, how many hours per day could people access electricity, through the main source used? | Tick one | No electricity available; More than 12 hours; 12 – 8 hours; 8 > 4 hours; 4 > 2 hours; 2 > 1 hour; Less than 1 hour | Tick one |
| Food security | Food availability and prices | What was the availability and average price of the following items in the | Tick generally available / sometimes | "Table columns: Generally available in markets (21+ days per month); | Tick generally available / sometimes available / not available; enter price if known or "Not sure" |

| | | | | | |
|------------------|---|---|--|---|--|
| | | community during [month]? | available / not available; enter price (SYP) if known or "Not sure" | Sometimes available in markets (7-20 days per month); Generally not available in markets (fewer than 6 days per month); Not sure about availability; Price (SYP) / not sure; Items: Bread (private bakery, 1 pack); Bread (public bakery, 1 pack); Bread (shops, 1 pack); Rice (1KG); Bulgur (1KG); Lentils (1 KG); Chicken (1KG); Mutton (1KG); Tomato (1KG); Cucumber (1KG); Milk (litre); Flour (1KG); Eggs (1); Iodised salt (500g); Sugar (1KG), Cooking oil (litre) | |
| | Coping strategies related to a lack of food | Were any of the following coping strategies commonly used in the community to deal with a lack of food? | Tick all that apply | Reducing size of meals; Skipping meals; Spending days without eating; Eating non-food plants; Eating food waste; None (cannot be selected with other options); Other (specify); Not sure | Tick all that apply |
| NFIs | Availability and price of fuel | What was the availability and average price of the following fuels in the community during [month]r? | Tick generally available / sometimes available / not available; enter price (SYP) if known or "Not sure" | Table columns: Generally available in markets (21+ days per month) / Sometimes available in markets (7-20 days per month) / Generally not available in markets (fewer than 6 days per month) / Not sure about availability; Price (SYP) / not sure; Items: Butane (canister); Diesel (litre); Propane (canister); Kerosene (litre); Coal (kg); Firewood (tonne) | Tick generally available / sometimes available / not available; enter price if known or "Not sure" |
| Truce agreements | Implementation of truce agreement | Has there been a truce agreement in the assessed community since the beginning of September 2016? | Please select one | Yes; No | Tick one; if 'No' skip the rest of section 8 and proceed directly to section 9) |
| | Operation of NGOs/INGOs | Following the truce agreement, have there been changes in the ability of NGOs/INGOs to operate and provide services in the community? | Please select one | Increased availability to operate; Decreased availability to operate; No change; Not sure | Tick one; if 'No change' proceed to Q8.1.2 |
| | Additional risks faced by populations | Following the truce agreement, have people in the community faced new or additional risks? | Please select one | Yes; No; Not sure | Tick one; if 'No' proceed to Q8.1.6 |
| | Additional risks faced by populations | If yes, please explain | Enter text | <i>E.g. harassment, torture, increased insecurity, fear of surveillance and detention, interrogation etc.</i> | Enter text |
| | Operation of government-provided services | Following the truce agreement, what type of government services have resumed in the area? | Enter text | <i>E.g. public bakeries, schools, electricity, water</i> | Enter text |

Annex 3: List of all communities assessed for the Community Profiles project

| Community name | June | August | September | October | November | December | Total number of months assessed |
|-----------------------|------|--------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|---------------------------------|
| Dar'a | | | | | | | |
| Ash-Shajara | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Moraba | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| Sayda | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| Abtaa | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| Damascus | | | | | | | |
| Damascus (Burza) | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Damascus (Jober) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Damascus (Tadamon) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Yarmouk | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Homs | | | | | | | |
| Ar-Rastan | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Talbiseh | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Taldu | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Homs (Al Waer) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Rural Damascus | | | | | | | |
| Az-Zabdani | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Madaya | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Bqine | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Darayya | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| Madamiyet Elsham | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Duma | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Harasta | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Arbin | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Zamalka | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Kafr Batna | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Ein Terma | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Hammura | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Jisrein | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Saqba | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Nashabiyeh | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| At Tall | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Hajar Aswad | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Khan Elshih | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Hama | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Qudsiya | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Bseimeh | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Deir Maqran | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Kafir Elzeit | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Deir Qanun | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Suq Wadi Burda | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Kafr Elawamid | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Barhaliya | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Hseiniyeh | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Ein Elfijeh | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Bait Jan | | | | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Mazraet Bait Jan | | | | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Kafr Hoor | | | | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Beit Saber | | | | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Betima | | | | | 1 | 1 | 2 |