



# ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS AND HUMANITARIAN SITUATION INSIDE SYRIA: LIVELIHOODS

**SYRIA**

**THEMATIC REPORT**

**SEPTEMBER 2015**

### 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 of and within the framework of inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information please visit our website: [www.reach-initiative.org](http://www.reach-initiative.org).

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## SUMMARY

### Background and objectives

The onset of the Syrian conflict and the resulting collapse of the heavily subsidised national economy has severely affected access to livelihoods and general resilience of the population remaining in the country.<sup>1</sup> This report presents findings on the current status of livelihoods in Syria, based on data collected during a village-level humanitarian needs assessment in Syria. It seeks to identify the changes and challenges relating to livelihood sources, along with coping strategies adopted by the population to adapt to on-going shifts in the conflict. The report specifically highlights the limited opportunities that are available to the Syrian population when sustaining their livelihoods.

### Key findings

- **Remittances sent from outside Syria was the main reported source of income** across the communities assessed in April 2015; a source that had seen a dramatic increase in reliance since before the crisis. While only 15 per cent of assessed communities were said to have relied on remittances from outside Syria before the crisis, this proportion had increased six-fold by April 2015, when it was reported to have reached 75 per cent.
- **Reliance on stable employment, business and trade was said to have decreased considerably** since the start of the conflict. This gap in income source opportunities had reportedly not been filled by an increase in unstable employment opportunities, which on the contrary had remained the same since before the conflict.
- **The number of public sector employees was said to have halved** since before the crisis across all assessed governorates, with the exception of As Sweida and Damascus where the number was reported to have increased between the beginning of the crisis and April 2015.
- **Unemployment was the most reported challenge to maintaining livelihoods in April 2015**, highlighted in 58 per cent of communities. **High cost of inputs and damage to infrastructure** were the second and third most commonly stated challenges, reported in 42 and 30 per cent of communities respectively.
- **Borrowing money from family and friends** was the most reported means by which to cope with lack of income or resources in April 2015, highlighted by 74 per cent of communities assessed. **Reduction in meal sizes** was the second most reported coping strategy, said to be resorted to in 55 per cent of communities assessed.

<sup>1</sup> Chatham House, David Butter: Syria's economy: Picking up the pieces, June 2015

## Methodology

Data presented in this report reflect the situation in Syria in April 2015 and was gathered during one round of a monthly data collection exercise that uses the 'Area of Origin' methodology. Data was collected from 103 refugees in Jordan, 99 in Lebanon, 70 from the KRI and 53 participants in Syria, amounting to 325 participants in total, each with three or more sources within their community of origin in 121 sub-districts across 14 governorates in Syria. Following this methodology, Syrian refugee participants in Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon collect data through key pre-identified informants who still live in their sub-district of origin, in Syria. Key informants inside Syria are also contacted directly from Turkey.

The Area of Origin (AoO) methodology has been implemented in Jordan since August 2013, in Lebanon since June 2014, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) since July 2014 and in Turkey since March 2015. Participants were identified amongst recent arrivals in formal camps in Jordan and KRI; and in host community settings in Lebanon, through consultation with leaders in their communities. New arrivals were selected for participation where they could confirm that they had left Syria within one month of the first interview date; were in daily contact with relatives that remained in their area of origin; and demonstrated a community level understanding, such as that found amongst teachers and doctors. Implementing the methodology in several countries helped ensure coverage of larger areas of Syria and crucially, enabled better triangulation through several participants in different neighboring countries covering the same area of origin – a factor that helped mitigate diminishing access to recent arrivals in Jordan in particular, due to border closures.

Governorate	Communities Assessed
Al-Hasakeh	67
Aleppo	26
Ar-Raqqa	6
As-Sweida	7
Damascus	6
Dar'a	57
Deir-ez-Zor	7
Hama	19
Homs	11
Idleb	44
Lattakia	10
Quneitra	9
Rural Damascus	34
Tartous	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>304</b>

Data collection and analysis takes place on a monthly basis, with questionnaires distributed to all participants once a month, which they complete over the course of three weeks, by contacting their contacts via telephone to gather information about their sub-district of origin. Once data collection is completed, the regional data analysis team aggregates sub-district level questionnaires from Jordan, Lebanon and the KRI, identifying averages for continuous variables and modes for categorical variables. Before preparing a narrative outlining the findings, primary data is triangulated with secondary data from multiple sources, including UN, (I)NGO and national and international media, to verify accuracy of information provided.

Gender balance has overall proved challenging to maintain, with women representing on average 26% of participants, a factor that must be considered when interpreting findings, as male participants may not have access to female participants, hence issues affecting men are more likely to be reported. Finally, it should be noted that data collected through this remote methodology relies heavily on the perception of participants regarding the sector-specific situation in their area of origin.



## FINDINGS

### Livelihood sources

#### Income sources

**Reliance on social networks featured strongly as a resource across assessed communities** in April 2015, with remittances from outside Syria and/or support from families and friends inside the country cited as a main income source in 88 per cent of communities. Remittances received from abroad was the most commonly reported source overall, relied on in 67 per cent of assessed communities. In addition, support from family and friends still residing in Syria was reported as a main income source in 20 per cent of communities assessed.

**Farm owning was the second most common source** of primary income in April 2015, reported in 44 per cent of communities assessed. The prominence of this income source when compared to others in the fifth year of the conflict, may be related to a higher likelihood of households to remain in their area of origin when they have immobile assets to protect; such as farms. Protection of assets was said to be a primary reason behind the pre-conflict population stayed in their area of origin in 78 per cent of communities.

**Business and trade was the third most reported main source of income** in 37 per cent of the communities assessed in April 2015. Followed by unstable daily employment, including casual farm labour, which was reported as a main income source in 31 per cent of communities

**Geographical variation** was seen in the differences in reliance on income sources. Farm owning was found to be most common in the rural Southern governorates of Dar'a, Quneitra and Rural Damascus, in addition to northwestern governorates Aleppo, Latakia, Idlib and Hama, where it was reported as a main income source in 44-46 per cent of communities assessed. Conversely, in the Damascus Governorate, stable, salaried employment and business or trade were the most reported sources of income in April 2015. In the northeastern governorates of Ar Raqqa, Al Hasakeh and Deir Ez Zor, remittances received from outside Syria was overwhelmingly the most common income source, reported as a primary source in 95 per cent of the communities assessed.

**Farm ownership was also said to have been a main income source before the conflict**, whilst the other most commonly reported pre-conflict sources – stable, salaried employment, business and trade – were relied on to a much lesser extent by April 2015 (see Figure 1 below). Stable employment had been a main source of income before the conflict in 67 per cent of communities assessed, which had dropped to only 17 per cent by April 2015. Similarly, **the proportion where business and trade constituted a main source of income almost halved since before the crisis**, dropping from 66 per cent to 37 per cent in April 2015. Even farm ownership, which remained one of the most commonly reported income sources in April 2015, overall had dropped from being a main source relied upon in 71 per cent of communities pre-conflict, to 44 per cent in April 2015.

In contrast, a rise was seen in the proportion of communities in which **reliance on support from social networks was reported as the main source of income, increasing from 20 per cent before the crisis to 88 per cent of communities** in April 2015. The most dramatic increase was seen in the reliance on remittances from outside of Syria, which was reported as a main income source before the conflict in just 15 per cent of communities. This proportion had increased more than four-fold to 67 per cent of communities in April 2015. According to the World Bank data, before the conflict remittances had already doubled from \$800 million in 2006 to \$1.6 billion (2.4% of GDP) in 2010<sup>2</sup>. In the recently published study by the Norwegian Refugee Council, analysing bilateral remittances sent to Syria, it was reported that in 2014 93 per cent of these remittances came from the Middle East and North African (MENA) region.<sup>3</sup>

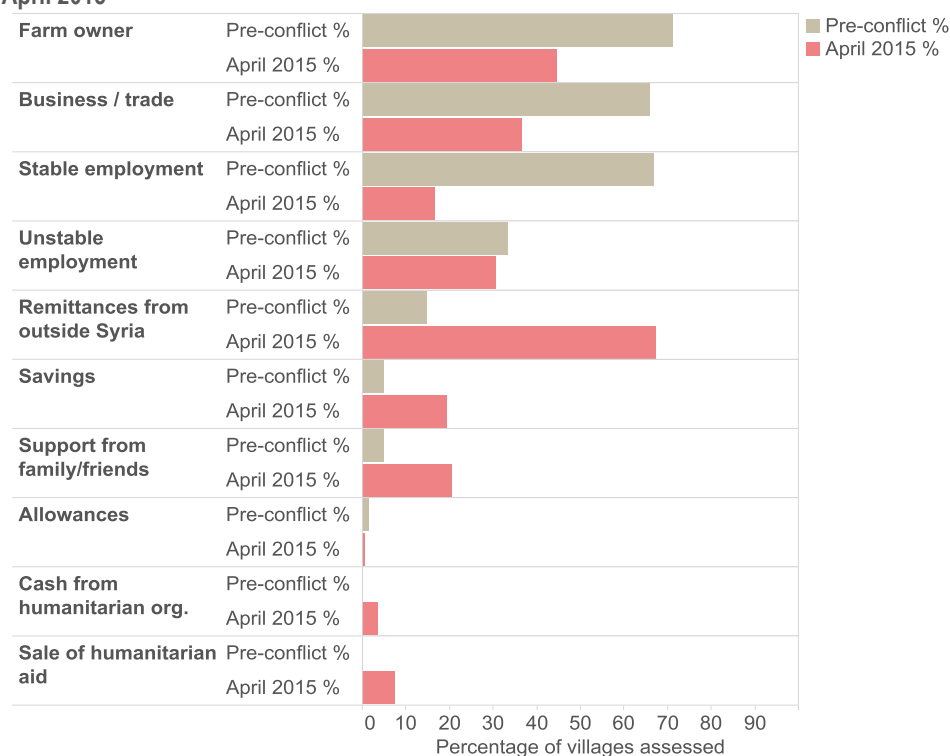
Similarly, the proportion reporting reliance on support from family and friends inside Syria rose from just 6 per cent, before the conflict, to 20 per cent in April 2015 in the communities assessed. These findings indicate a high and potentially rising level of dependency on the support of family and friends located outside and to a lesser extent inside Syria, in order to sustain households remaining inside the country.

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank, Personal remittances, received (current US\$), Retrieved from Data, August 2015

<sup>3</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council, Remittances to Syria: What Works, Where and How, July 2015

The level of reliance on unstable employment as a main source of income was said to have remained relatively unchanged, reported in 33 per cent of the communities assessed before the crisis and 31 per cent in April 2015. This lack of increase in casual labour opportunities, while stable labour opportunities had decreased considerably, indicate an **overall reduction in income generating opportunities**.

**Figure 1: Percentage of assessed communities where income source was reported as one of the main sources in April 2015**



In line with the reported reduction in livelihood opportunities, **reliance on savings was said to have increased** from being ranked as a main resource in just 5 per cent of communities before the crisis, to 19 per cent in April 2015. The most significant increase in the proportion of communities where savings was reported to be a primary resource was found in Dar'a and Al Hasakeh Governorates, rising from 5 and 13 per cent before the crisis to 18 and 27 per cent by April 2015, respectively.

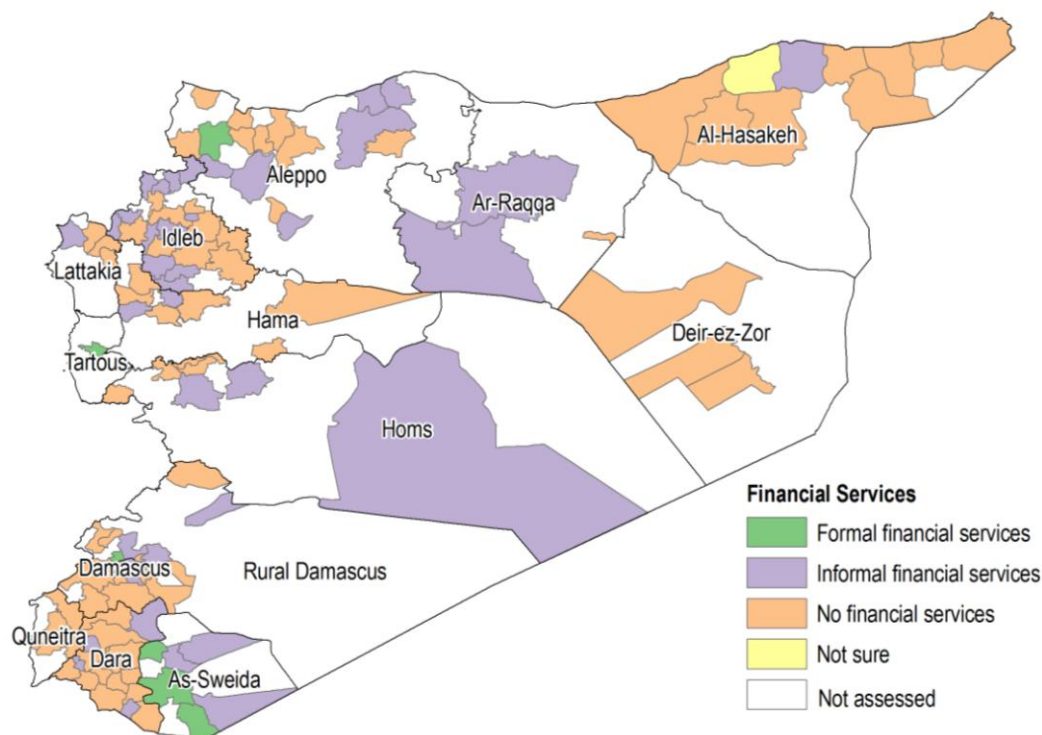
However, a large majority of the Dar'a and Al Hasakeh communities assessed were reported to lack both formal and informal financial services<sup>4</sup>. In Dar'a Governorate, no financial services were reported to be available in 74 per cent of the communities assessed, and similarly in 69 per cent of communities assessed in Al Hasakeh Governorate. Informal financial services which facilitate money transfers with no physical movement of cash per transaction, were reported to still exist in 21 per cent of the communities assessed in Dar'a Governorate<sup>5</sup>. The high rates of reliance on savings coupled with the limited availability of formal and informal financial services in the communities assessed, implies that travel inside or outside the governorate is necessary to access financial services. Any limitation of movement would hamper access to this income source.

Overall, **61 per cent of assessed communities reported having no formal or informal financial services** in April 2015. Formal services were only reported to be available in 4 per cent of the communities – of which the majority were located in Rural Damascus and As Sweida Governorates – whilst 28 per cent of the assessed communities reported having informal services. Both formal and informal services were reported to be available in only 3 per cent of the communities assessed. The lack of access to financial services could hinder receipt of remittances – thus potentially restricting access to the most prominently reported primary source of income.

<sup>4</sup> Formal services were defined as accessible through official banks and included access to bank accounts and bank transfers. Informal financial services were defined as Informal Value Transfer Systems and included unregistered *hawalas*.

<sup>5</sup> Focus group discussions were conducted in Zaatari camp in May 2015 and included in the assessment led by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), [Remittances To Syria - What Works, Where and How](#), July 2015

Map 1: Most reported access to formal and informal financial services per sub-district in April 2015



## Public Sector

A sharp decrease in the number of public sector employees was reported in April 2015 across assessed communities, with exception of the governorates of As Sweida and Damascus where the number of public sector employees had increased since the beginning of the crisis.

On average, across all communities assessed, it was estimated that between 1,628 and 2,757 public sectors employees were present before the crisis. In April 2015, this estimation had halved, dropping to between 774 and 1396 public sector employees.

Homs, Ar Raqqa and Aleppo Governorates had seen the sharpest decrease in the number of public sector employees<sup>6</sup>. This finding was in line with a recent household assessment in Eastern Aleppo, which found that the number of public sector employees had dropped by 97 per cent.<sup>7</sup> None of the assessed communities in Homs and Ar-Raqqa reported the presence of public sector employees in the community.

The reported number of public sector employees may serve as an indicator of local authorities' capacity to provide services such as general administration, civil registry, justice, civil protection and security. This extensive decrease also indicates an **overall shift in income source sectors**, as illustrated by the Rural Damascus Governorate where stable, salaried employment was reported as a main source of income before the crisis in 71 per cent of communities, compared to only 18 per cent of communities in April 2015.

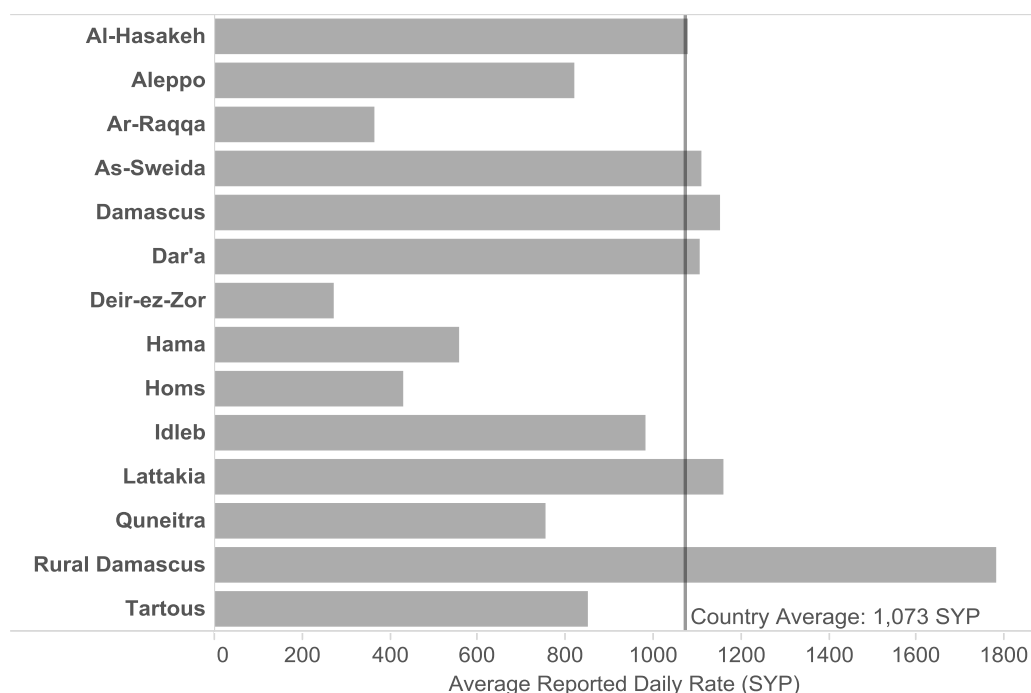
<sup>6</sup> Public employees were defined as employees working in general administration, civil registry, justice, civil protection and security and receiving salaries by the Government of Syria.

<sup>7</sup> REACH, Eastern Aleppo food security and Livelihoods household assessments, June 2015

## Casual Labour

The **average reported daily pay rate for casual labour across Syria in April 2015 amounted to 1,073 SYP** (US\$ 5). The lowest average daily pay rates were reported in Deir Ez Zor, Ar Raqqa and Homs Governorates at 339 SYP (US\$ 1.6), 363 SYP (US\$ 1.7) and 430 SYP (US\$ 2) respectively. The average daily pay rate for casual labour was reportedly highest in Lattakia and Damascus Governorates at 1,150 SYP (US\$ 5.4)<sup>8</sup>.

Figure 2: Average reported daily rate of casual labour per governorate in SYP in April 2015



Along with low average daily pay rates for casual labour, daily labour opportunities overall have also been decreasing, as portrayed above. In April 2015, no casual labour opportunities were reported to be available in 32 per cent of the communities assessed, and up to 50-54 per cent in Deir-Ez-Zor, Aleppo and Ar-Raqqa Governorates. It is notable that Aleppo and Ar-Raqqa were the governorates with the greatest cereal production before the beginning of the crisis<sup>9</sup>, indicating that a considerable drop in casual farm labour opportunities is likely to have occurred in these governorates. These findings are corroborated by two assessments<sup>10</sup> conducted in Syria in 2015, which similarly found that daily labour opportunities had decreased since the onset of the crisis.

The lack of casual labour opportunities in these governorates may be related to high levels of conflict-limiting **seasonal migration of casual labourers**, as well as **displacement of populations** from these governorates to relatively calmer areas in Syria. The closure of factories and businesses<sup>11</sup>; a massive drop in food production following a prolonged drought since 2008<sup>12</sup> and high costs of inputs including seeds, fertilizers and fuel<sup>13</sup>; are also likely to have contributed to the relatively limited number of casual labour employment opportunities reported across Syria.

The drop in access to direct livelihood sources – albeit partially counteracted by the rise in social networks support from inside and particularly outside of Syria – is likely to have **decreased households' capacity to cope with the economic, conflict and environmental shocks** that are currently impacting Syria.

<sup>8</sup> Currency converted using April 2015 average rate and using [InforEuro](#).

<sup>9</sup> FAO/WFP Crop And Food Security Assessment Mission To The Syrian Arab Republic, July 2015.

<sup>10</sup> FAO/WFP Crop And Food Security Assessment Mission To The Syrian Arab Republic, July 2015 and Save The Children Understanding livelihoods in northern Syria, January 2015

<sup>11</sup> Save The Children Understanding livelihoods in northern Syria, January 2015

<sup>12</sup> FAO/WFP Crop And Food Security Assessment Mission To The Syrian Arab Republic, July 2015

<sup>13</sup> Whole Of Syria (WOS) Food Security Sector Bulletin #1, January 2015 - June 2015



## Livelihoods challenges

The three most commonly reported challenges to maintain livelihoods across Syria were **unemployment**, reported in 58 per cent of communities; **high cost of inputs**, highlighted in 42 per cent of the communities; and **damage to infrastructure**, raised as a challenge in 30 per cent of the communities.

### Unemployment

**Unemployment was the most reported livelihoods challenge faced across the communities assessed in Syria** and was reported in a majority of assessed communities in Ar Raqqa, Deir Ez Zor, Hama, Homs and Latakia Governorates. Farm owning was said to have been the main source of income before the crisis in these governorates, with the exception of Deir Ez Zor where the most reported source of income had been stable employment. These sources had by April 2015 been overtaken by remittances from outside Syria, indicating a simultaneous decrease in stable deployment and lack of access to casual farm labour, thus contributing to rising unemployment.

High cost of labour was the most reported challenge to maintain livelihoods in Dar'a and Al Hasakeh Governorates. This was in line with average casual labour daily rate findings, which as noted above, were reported at 1,103 SYP (US\$ 5.1) and 1,076 SYP (US\$ 5) for Dar'a and Al Hasakeh respectively, considerably higher than the country average at 790 SYP (US\$ 3.7).

The high cost of labour and high levels of unemployment indicate a **lack of fully functioning job markets and consequently a lack of opportunities to maintain livelihoods**; both for potential employers such as farm owners and the potential labour force.

### High cost of inputs

**High cost of inputs was the second most reported challenge, faced in 42 per cent of the communities assessed.** Moreover, it was reported that no inputs were available for 17 per cent of the communities assessed. The most affected governorate was Rural Damascus where no availability of inputs was reported in 29 per cent of the communities assessed.

**Agricultural activities were reported to have been hampered by both high cost and lack of inputs.** Accounting for a fifth of Syria's gross domestic product (GDP) before the conflict, agricultural production has been affected by a combination of external shocks such as reduced labour force, limited seasonal migration of casual labourers and damage to infrastructure such as mills and silos<sup>14</sup>. Additionally, agricultural producers have been affected by a lack of available inputs of the likes of fuel to operate water pumps, fodder, fertilizers, seeds, and pesticides. This combination of factors may be related to reports of crop and livestock diseases, which were said to have occurred in 21 and 13 per cent respectively of assessed communities. These findings were corroborated by a FAO/WFP report which found outbreaks of wheat pests specifically in the Al Hasakeh Governorate, which were suspected to be related to a lack of available pesticides.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, the **high cost of inputs was reported as a critical issue for both public and private bakeries**. The high cost of flour was reported to be the main reason for which bread could not be accessed everyday across the assessed communities. Bread was said to have been unavailable to purchase from public bakeries for at least one day during the month of April 2015 in 41 per cent of communities and from private bakeries in 37 per cent of communities. Lack of available inputs, both flour and fuel, were the second and third most reported reasons for bread not being accessed across the communities assessed. Similar findings were presented in a report published by the Assistance Coordination Unit in December 2014, which stated that the main reported reason behind bakeries' inability to function, was a shortage of inputs. The first being a lack of flour (44 per cent), followed by a lack of fuel (34 per cent) and yeast (22 per cent)<sup>16</sup>. Overall, given that in 56 per cent of the communities assessed, the main sources of bread were private and public bakeries, and that distributions of bread were only reported in 6 per cent of communities, it is likely **that a high costs or lack of inputs resulting in a reduction in bread production affected the majority of the population**.

<sup>14</sup> FAO/WFP Crop And Food Security Assessment Mission To The Syrian Arab Republic, July 2015

<sup>15</sup> Pest outbreaks of wheat reported in Al Hasakeh due to a shortage of pesticide according to the FAO/WFP Crop And Food Security Assessment Mission To The Syrian Arab Republic in July 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Assessment Coordination Unit, Bakeries in Syria - Assessment Report, December 2014.

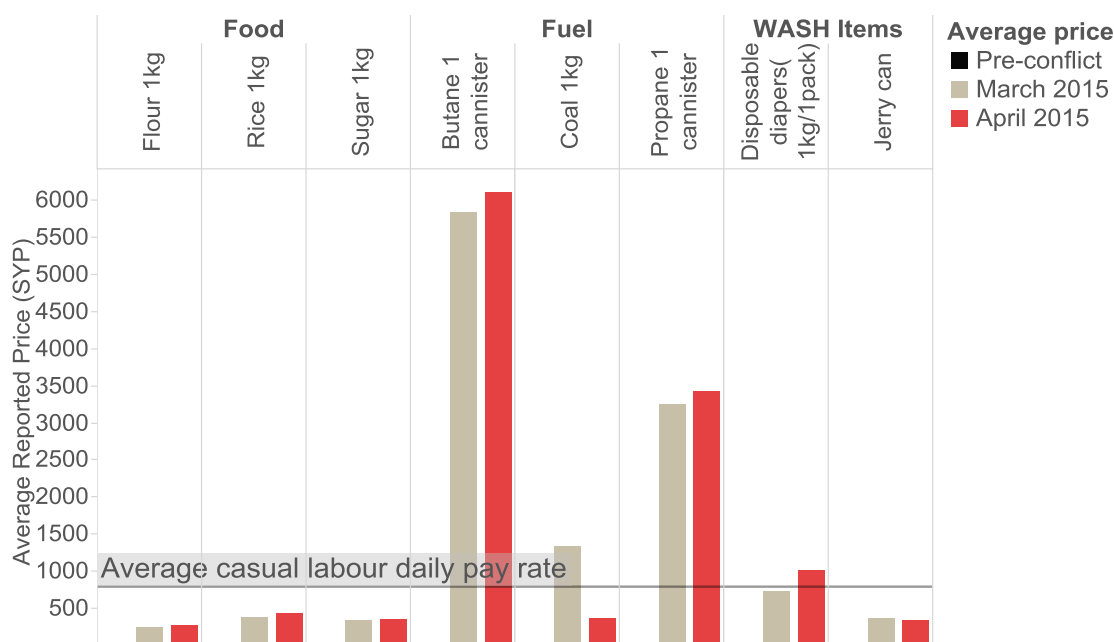
## Prices section

High inflation was reported across all assessed governorates. The most reported food access issue in April 2015 was that some types of food were too expensive for people to purchase, highlighted in 72 per cent of the communities assessed. Lack of resources to purchase food available in the market was the second most reported food access problem – raised in 59 per cent of the communities assessed.

A **kilogram of flour** was reported to cost 271 SYP (US\$ 1.3), on average, across the communities assessed in April 2015, while **one pack of bread** from private and public bakeries was said to cost 158 SYP (US\$ 0.7) and 116 SYP (US\$ 0.5) respectively. **One cubic meter of water** delivered by private trucking was reported to cost on average 1,238 SYP (US\$ 5.8); **one kilogram of disposable diapers** on average 1,018 SYP (US\$ 4.7); and **one canister Butane gas** was said to cost 6,104 SYP (US\$ 28.4). These selected prices, in comparison with the average reported daily pay rate for casual labour across communities, at 790 SYP (US\$ 3.7), indicate a severely limited purchase capacity of households (see Figure 3 below)<sup>17</sup>.

In some cases, essential items were reported not to be available at all on the market, further indicating limited functionality of markets across Syria. The most frequently reported unavailable fuel sources were Butane and coal, both said not to be available at all, reported in 29 per cent and 49 per cent respectively of the communities assessed. Key food items were said to almost always be available in assessed communities, with the exception of infant formula which was reported not to be available in 22 per cent of communities.

**Figure 3: Average price of selected fuel, food and WASH items in the communities assessed in SYP across assessed communities**



Overall, **prices were reported to be controlled in less than 20 per cent of communities assessed** and not at all in the communities in Lattakia and Homs governorates. In Ar-Raqqa Governorate, price control was reported in 33 per cent of communities assessed, where flour price had not risen above 234 SYP (US\$ 1.1) in April 2015, compared to in Dar'a Governorate, where on average the price of one kilogram of flour was 459 SYP (US\$ 2.1). The highest proportion of communities with price controls were found in As Sweida and Damascus Governorates, where controls were reported in 57 and 67 per cent respectively of communities assessed.

The Syrian Pound remained the most commonly used currency across the communities assessed in April 2015, reported in 97 per cent of the communities assessed. Exceptions were seen in Idleb Governorate, where the US Dollar was reported to be the most used currency in 41 per cent of communities.

<sup>17</sup> Prices varied greatly in different communities based on the availability of commodities. These prices are monitored at community level on monthly basis through the Area of Origin project

## Damage to infrastructure

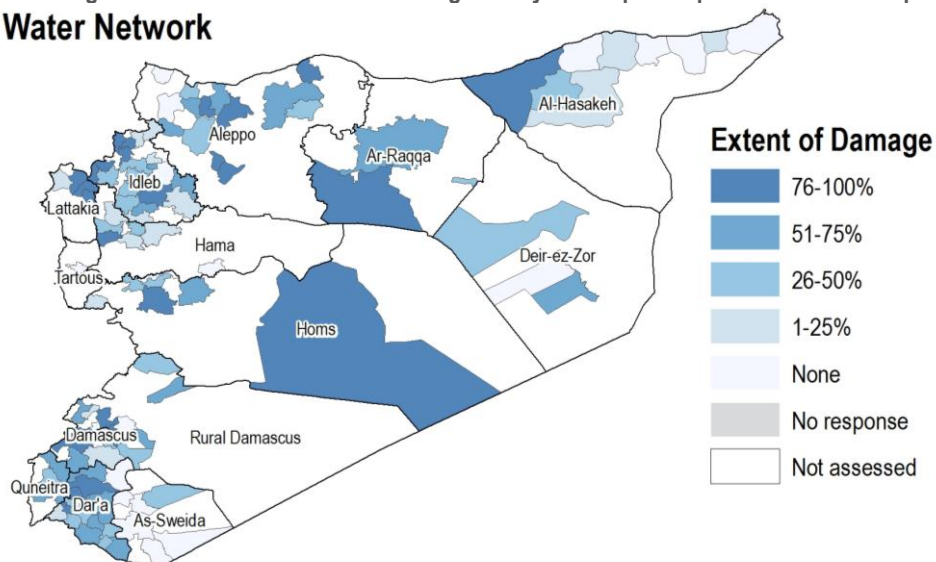
Damage to infrastructure<sup>18</sup> and irrigation schemes were amongst the top three most reported livelihoods challenges across the communities assessed in Dar'a, Rural Damascus and Idleb Governorates, posing considerable difficulties for a population that relies heavily on agricultural production which is dependent on functioning irrigation systems and energy sources (see Map 1 below).

**Between 76-100% of water networks, in the 23 per cent of the assessed communities which reported water networks to be a main source of water, had been destroyed.** The largest proportions of communities where both water networks and irrigation schemes were said to be affected were found in Aleppo, Ar Raqqa, Dar'a and Lattakia Governorates (see Map 1 below). Conversely, very few communities reported damage sustained by both the water network and irrigation schemes in As Sweida, Damascus and Al Hasakeh Governorates.

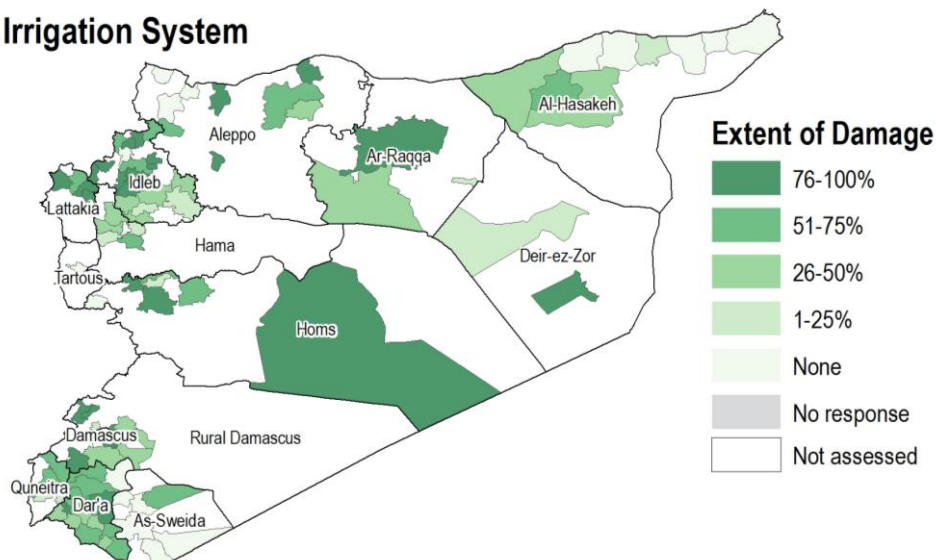
In 45 per cent of the communities assessed, damage to water infrastructure was reported to be **a main reason for a reduction in available safe drinking water** since the beginning of the conflict. Specifically, the public water network was said to have been damaged in 32 per cent of communities assessed and the public network was reported to remain a primary source of drinking water in only 23 per cent of communities.

Map 2: Level of damage to the water network and the irrigation system reported per sub-district in April 2015

### Water Network



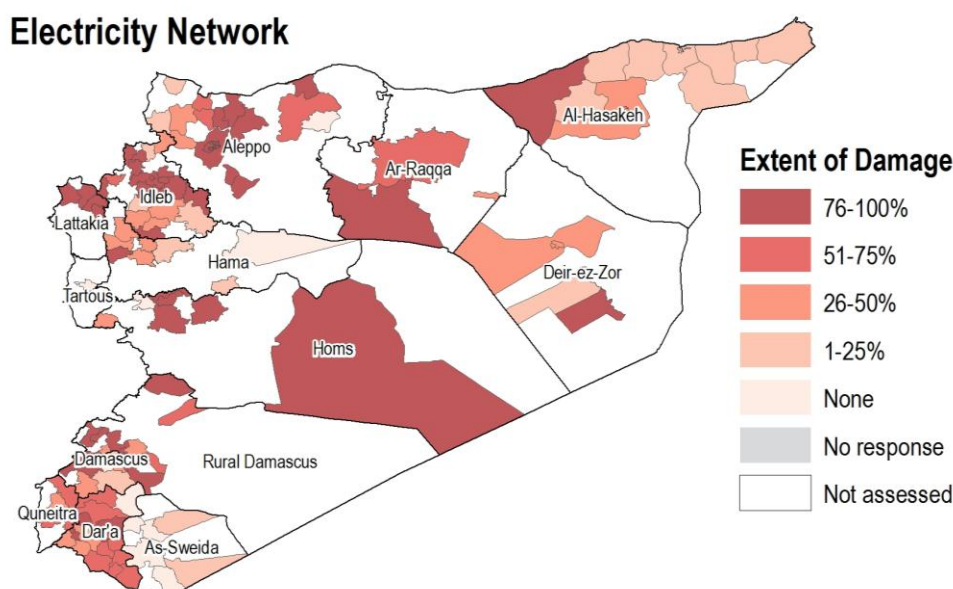
### Irrigation System



<sup>18</sup> These infrastructure include roads, electricity network, main phone lines, power stations, water network and water treatment stations.

Similarly to the water network, the **electricity network was said to have been heavily affected** since the beginning of the conflict, with damage reported in 80 per cent of the communities assessed. The main network had been the main source of electricity in 93 per cent of communities before the conflict; a proportion that had dropped to 21 per cent by April 2015. In 15 per cent of the communities, both generators and the main network were reported not to be available.

Map 3: Level of damage to the electricity network reported per sub-district in April 2015



In turn, the lack of electricity was said to have led to **reductions in the volume of available safe water**. 42 per cent of communities reported this as a primary reason behind reduced availability in water by April 2015, since the beginning of the conflict by. Given the continued reliance on farming, which as noted above was said to be the second most common source of income in Syria, lack of functioning electricity sources may thus have a detrimental impact on one of the few key livelihoods sources that remain in the country.

The lack of electricity has also affected bread production, reported as a **key reason, along with the lack of fuel, for which bread was not available every day in 23 per cent of the communities assessed**. When health facilities were reported to exist in 78 per cent of the assessed communities, lack of electricity was reported to be the main reason why these facilities did not have the capacity to receive any patients every day of the month in 15 per cent of the villages assessed.

Out of all infrastructure assessed in April 2015, those most affected since the beginning of the crisis were the main phone lines, with 36 per cent of communities reporting that between 76 and 100% of phone lines were destroyed. Between 26-100% of roads have been reported to be destroyed in a majority of the communities assessed with the highest rates of destruction said to have occurred in Aleppo, Homs and Rural Damascus Governorates.

## Coping strategies

In light of the reported challenges faced by the remaining population to maintain livelihoods, a wide range of coping strategies were reportedly adopted in the communities assessed across Syria. The **most reported strategy used to cope with a lack of income and/or resources in April 2015 was borrowing money from family** and friends, cited in 74 per cent of the communities assessed. This is consistent with the reported lack of both formal and informal financial services across the communities –only 10 per cent of communities were reportedly taking formal or informal loans as a coping strategy. This reinforces the conclusion, drawn from the assessment of income sources above, that the remaining population is highly reliant on support from social networks inside and particularly outside Syria.

## Food security

The reliance of food consumption related strategies in order to cope with a lack of resources was also reported, with a **reduction of meal sizes being the second most commonly reported coping strategy** across the governorates; cited in 55 per cent of communities assessed. Skipping meals was also reported as a coping strategy used in 23 per cent of communities; eating weeds/grass in 13 per cent; and spending whole days without eating in 9 per cent of the communities assessed.

Communities in the northeastern governorates of Al Hasakeh and Deir-Ez-Zor were particularly likely to report food consumption strategy use. Reducing the size of meals was the most reported coping strategy overall in Al Hasakeh, where it was said to be used in 40 per cent of communities assessed, while in Deir-Ez-Zor Governorate, skipping meals was the strategy was frequently stated, reported in 88 per cent of the communities assessed.

Overall food was most commonly reported to be purchased on the market, reported in 93 per cent of communities assessed. However, **more than half of the communities reported reliance on own production (58 per cent) and on food distributions (53 per cent)**. Finally, bartering to obtain food was reported in 15 per cent of the communities assessed especially in Rural Damascus Governorate, where it was said to be used to access food in 35 per cent of assessed communities.

The relatively high reliance on own production highlights the continued key role of agriculture in Syria and the importance of maintaining access to agricultural inputs to sustain the remaining population. Moreover, the reliance seen on food distributions may indicate a widespread dependency that may be related to a decreasing resilience of the population to withstand economic, conflict and environmental shocks.

## Displacement

The livelihoods challenges discussed above were reported to have affected intentions of movement across the communities assessed. In 38 per cent of the assessed communities hosting IDPs, access to income, employment and shelter, were reported as reasons behind IDPs choice to stay. Similarly, the loss of income, following the escalation of conflict and protection concerns, was the third most commonly reported potential reason why IDPs would choose to leave their host communities; cited in 28 per cent of the assessed communities hosting IDPs and ranking as a top reason in Latakia, Idleb and Damascus Governorates.

Similar displacement triggers were reported for the host population. The loss of income was the third most commonly reported reason for which people would leave their village of origin, highlighted in 39 per cent of the communities assessed and ranking as the top reason in Al Hasakeh, Dar'a and Idleb Governorates. Loss of assets was the second most common reasons why residents would leave and the most common reason was the escalation of conflict.



## CONCLUSION

This assessment sought to identify some of the changes that occurred in livelihood sources in Syria since the beginning of the conflict until April 2015, along with the challenges faced and coping strategies resorted to by the remaining population.

The high cost of labour and high levels of unemployment reported in April 2015, indicates a lack of fully functioning job markets and consequently a lack of opportunities to maintain livelihoods, both for potential employers such as farm owners and the potential labour force.

A critical shift in livelihoods sources is reported in assessed communities, with remittances received from outside Syria becoming the most common primary source of income across the country. This indicates a reliance on social networks to sustain households and livelihoods and reflects the reduction in livelihoods opportunities available inside the country. The high reliance on social networks to cope with lack of resources further highlights the crucial contribution made by families and friends both inside and outside the country, in sustaining vulnerable households.

Coping strategies such as a reliance on remittances from friends and family, a reduction in meal sizes, and displacement, underline the increasing vulnerabilities of many of those living in Syria where income opportunities have significantly reduced whilst input costs and inflation have increased. Due to the nature of the long-term destruction to infrastructure, business opportunities and agriculture families are likely to become increasingly more vulnerable resulting in continued reliance on external coping mechanisms. Were remittances from family and friends to reduce or stop, such as due to the lack of financial services or restriction of travel to collect remittances, 75% of those communities assessed would find themselves without adequate livelihood means.