

## Situation Update on Eastern Ghouta October 2017

### Needs

#### **Significant increase in food and fuel prices and lack of availability of food in markets reported.**

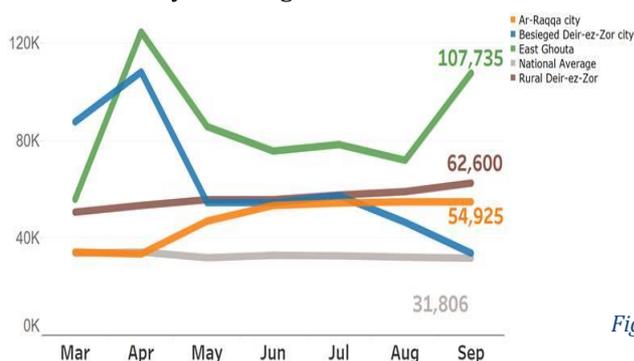
Eastern Ghouta enclave has entered one of the most difficult periods in terms of access and availability of food since its besiegement in 2013. The full closure of Al-Wafideen checkpoint on October 3<sup>rd</sup> and the massive tax imposed on traders of around SYP 2,000 per KG of items (approximately USD 4 to 4,5) have directly impacted the food security status of the besieged population.

The closure of the checkpoint and the tax imposed, paired with trader monopolies and accompanying market dynamics in Eastern Ghouta, have reportedly led to a significant increase in prices and reduced food availability and fuel in the markets. As a result, it has been reported that almost no supplies entered the area since the beginning of October and the only food sold in the markets is from pre-October stocks.

As of mid-October, WFP price monitoring indicates that the standard food basket cost had increased by 50 percent compared to last month reaching SYP 107,735 (USD 209) and was 239 percent above September's national average of SYP 31,805 (USD 62).

As of 28 September 2017, OCHA reported that an overall 393,300 people were living within the Eastern Ghouta besieged enclave, including 49,300 people in Arbin area; 59,000 people in Harasta area; 150,100 people in Duma area; 125,600 people in Kafr Batna area; and 9,300 people in Nashabiyeh area<sup>1</sup>. Although the situation overall had slightly improved after the De-escalation Agreement concluded in Astana last May and the recent Cairo Agreement late July. Over the past months, it was reported that most of the trading activities providing food items to the besieged locations have stopped operating since the time Barzen and Qaboun were retaken by GoS. Consequently, there was a significant increase in food prices inside these areas, which severely impacted the poorest and most vulnerable people who are unable to satisfy their basic food needs from the items available in the market. However, some traders were reportedly still managing to send a few trucks of food to the area which seems to have declined drastically in the last few weeks. The situation has however further worsened since September, mostly due to the increase in transaction costs<sup>1</sup> to get food and other essential items inside Eastern Ghouta through the tax imposed at Al Wafideen checkpoint that started with SYP 350 per KG (approximately USD 0,7) a few months ago and then increased gradually over the past months and now is reportedly at SYP 2000 per KG (USD 4 – 4.5).

Thus, Eastern Ghouta enclave has entered one of the most difficult periods in terms of access and availability of food since its besiegement in 2013 due to a further tightening of the siege through the closure of the Al-Wafideen Checkpoint as a result of the substantial increase of the “custom tax” imposed on traders, paired with the resumption of heavy airstrikes and indirect fire onto the vicinity of Al-Wafideen in October. Consequently, there has been further spike in food prices and availability of food in the markets. As mentioned earlier, in October, this reached SYP 2,000 per KG (approximately USD 4 to 4,5) that vendors and residents are unable to afford anymore. Factors such as lack of commodities entering the area, monopolism of prices and the limited income sources are contributing primarily to substantial rise in prices recently exacerbated, and therefore directly, negatively and largely impacting of food security situation of the besieged population within the Eastern Ghouta enclave. Although efforts reportedly have been made by the Rural Damascus Provincial Council to maximize the utility of local resources, mainly on bread production in a bid to reduce bread pack prices, the situation continues to be extremely alarming.



The common sources of income including selling of agriculture and livestock products are also severely affected due to restricted movement (to both land for cultivation and pastures), shortage and increase in prices of essential inputs including fuel and fertilizers.

As per WFP, the average monthly income of households in Eastern Ghouta is SYP 25,000

Figure 1: Cost of standard food basket (Source- WFP-VAM)

<sup>1</sup> As per OCHA Grouping:

Arbin area includes: Zamalka, Arbin, Jouba.

Harasta area includes: Harasta, Modira, Misraba.

Duma area includes: Duma, Shafuniyeh, Hosh Eldawahreh.

Kafr Batna area includes: Kafr Batna, Eftreis, Hezzeh, Saqba, Ein Terma, Hammura, Jisrein, Hosh Al-Ashary, Beit Sawa, Mahmadiyeh.

Nashabiyeh area includes: Nashabiyeh, Beit Nayem, Salhiyeh, Otaia, Hzrma.

(Approximately USD 48.5) and the sources of income are mostly unsustainable including petty trading. The common sources of income including selling of agriculture and livestock produce are also severely affected due to restricted movement (to both land for cultivation and pastures), shortage and increase in prices of essential inputs including fuel and fertilizers. WFP price monitoring indicates that as of mid October 2017, the cost of a standard food basket increased by 50 percent compared to last month reaching SYP 107,735 (USD 209) and was 239 percent above September's national average of SYP 31,806 (USD 62). This demonstrates that a standard food basket costs way over the average income, thus draining residents' purchasing power. Reportedly, most of the commodities currently in markets are from food stocks from pre-October.

As per sector partners' reports, individual food commodities such as bread and wheat flour prices have increased by 174 and 390 percent compared to January 2017. Both sugar and diesel prices recorded the highest increase of more than 1,000 percent increase when compared to January 2017. Other essential food and non-food items were reported to be unavailable in the market including cheese, pulses, meat, eggs, other dairy products, vegetable oil and blankets.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, **changes in prices of monitored commodities (flour, bread, rice, tomato paste, and diesel)** since the beginning of the year showed an initial increase in prices from the end of March to end of May. This period coincided with the conflict between the parties to the conflict that restricted movements of commodities within the Eastern Ghouta areas and also trade access with markets that are outside the besieged area. Since then, monitoring indicates that prices of commodities have remained high compared to the beginning of the year.

An assessment conducted by one sector partner in June, 2017 reported that the percentage of families with children under the age of five who eat less than three meals a day was 65%, the least is in Kafr Batna and the highest is in Douma. It has been found that 8% of households consume only one meal a day, while 41% of the families keep what can be enough for ten days, using it cautiously for fear of sudden blockade and prolonged food shortages. With the developments in the past couple of months the food security and nutrition status of households are expected to have worsened by several folds.

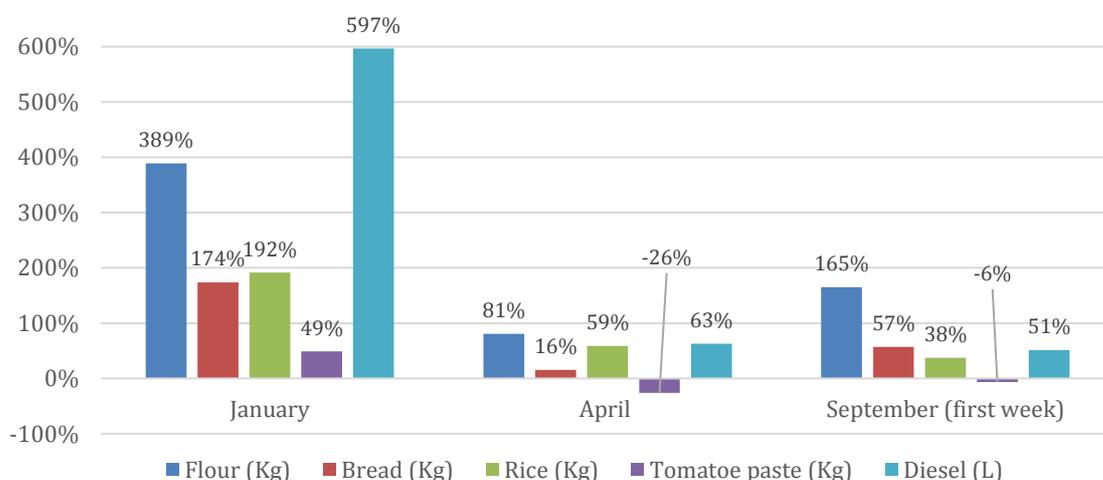


Figure 2: Percentage change in prices of commodities in comparison to previous months.

## Response

Over the past three months, humanitarian assistance was limitedly provided to the besieged population of Eastern Ghouta through either Cross Border Partners or through Inter-Agency Convoys from the Syria hub, as follows:

### Food Assistance

The last three months' response as recorded by the sector partners shows that it has been sporadic and inconsistent. In July a total of 63,648 people received monthly food assistance from 7 Cross Border Partners through food baskets, bread/flour distribution and emergency food rations, including 1,840 people from Syria hub reached by WFP through Inter-Agency Convoys in form of food basket assistance. In August, the response was much higher than in July as 7 Cross Border Partners reported to have reached 155,249 people with monthly food assistance in form of food baskets, emergency food rations and mixed food item while Syria hub reached 64,696 people from ICRC, UNRWA and WFP with food baskets and wheat flour/bread distribution.

The details of reached locations and people, and types of activity are further provided in the below table.

			Besieged Locations - Food Assistance Support (people)										
Governorate	Sub district	Village	July				August						
			Syria		XB Partners		Syria Partners		XB Partners				
			Food Baskets	Food Baskets	Bread/flour Distribution	Emergency Food Rations	Food Baskets	Bread/Flour distribution	Food Baskets	Bread/flour Distribution	Emergency Food Rations	Mixed Food items	
Rural Damascus	Duma	Duma	-	15,390	-	-	42,500	1,446	5,390	90,000	5,224	-	2,500
Rural Damascus	Duma	Shafuniyeh	-	200	-	-	-	-	200	-	-	-	-
Rural Damascus	Harasta	Harasta	1,840	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rural Damascus	Harasta	Misraba	-	4,000	45	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rural Damascus	Harasta	Modira	-	1,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rural Damascus	Nashabiyeh	Nashabiyeh	-	-	-	-	20,750	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rural Damascus	Arbin	Arbin	-	5,000	40	31,920	-	-	-	-	47,585	-	-
Rural Damascus	Arbin	Zamalka	-	50	-	-	-	-	50	-	-	-	-
Rural Damascus	Kafr Batna	Ein Terma	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,500	-	-	-	-
Rural Damascus	Kafr Batna	Hammura	-	20	1,404	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rural Damascus	Kafr Batna	Hezzeh	-	2,512	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rural Damascus	Kafr Batna	Jisrein	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rural Damascus	Kafr Batna	Kafr Batna	-	524	-	2,000	-	-	1,800	-	-	-	-
Rural Damascus	Kafr Batna	Saqba	-	38	495	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
			<b>1,840</b>	<b>28,744</b>	<b>1,984</b>	<b>33,920</b>	<b>63,250</b>	<b>1,446</b>	<b>9,940</b>	<b>90,000</b>	<b>52,809</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,500</b>

Additionally, as per the August and September Inter Agency Convoy plan, three convoys reached Eastern Ghouta in September with reportedly 5,000 food baskets and 5,000 bags of flour that were in the towns of Misraba and Modira and East Harasta. No response has yet been reported from Cross Border Partners during this month.

### Livelihood Assistance

Response for the months of July and August as recorded by sector partners indicated that a total of 16,613 people benefitted from agricultural support through provision of agricultural inputs and income generation activities through support from 8 Cross Border partners.

			Besieged locations - Agri/Livelihood Support	
			July - Aug Response	
Governorate	Sub district	Village	XB Partners	
			Agriculture inputs	Income Generating activities
Rural Damascus	Duma	Duma	779	-
Rural Damascus	Duma	Shafuniyeh	329	-
Rural Damascus	Harasta	Misraba	139	54
Rural Damascus	Harasta	Modira	524	-
Rural Damascus	Nashabiyeh	Salhiyeh	21	-
Rural Damascus	Arbin	Arbin	814	48
Rural Damascus	Arbin	Zamalka	1,059	-
Rural Damascus	Kafr Batna	Beit Sawa	529	-
Rural Damascus	Kafr Batna	Eftreis	160	-
Rural Damascus	Kafr Batna	Ein Terma	139	-
Rural Damascus	Kafr Batna	Hammura	2,894	48
Rural Damascus	Kafr Batna	Hezzeh	496	-
Rural Damascus	Kafr Batna	Jisrein	686	-
Rural Damascus	Kafr Batna	Kafr Batna	3,546	78
Rural Damascus	Kafr Batna	Saqba	4,270	-
Total			<b>16,385</b>	<b>228</b>

### Gaps

In spite of the last three months food assistance provided inside Eastern Ghouta, gaps in terms of food needs remain extremely high due to limited quantity of overall humanitarian assistance distributed – both in terms of food and livelihoods.

Additionally, the recent closure of the only entry point that represents Al-Wafideen Checkpoint<sup>3</sup> from where both humanitarian and commercial commodities are passing through, will only exacerbate the already limited food availability within the enclave, and therefore severely impact on the highly dire situation of the besieged population.

Furthermore, the current situation will also strongly impact food utilization of Eastern Ghouta population where fuel has become scarcer or at absolutely unaffordable prices. With the upcoming winter, this situation will become further dire as availability and utilization of fuel in winter becomes even more critical. This will heavily affect the functionality of bakeries where wood has reportedly being used as an alternative to lack of fuel.

The Food Security Sector therefore urges all humanitarian actors present in the Eastern Ghouta area to provide assistance with any remaining stocks available within the enclave. Simultaneously, large efforts from the humanitarian community need to be made to send Inter-Agency Convoys to the area as soon as possible, and at the bare minimum, as per the IAC October/November plan that is aiming – after GoS approval – at reaching 224,700 people out of the 272,500 people initially requested. Furthermore, to bolster own production as a source of food and livelihoods, inputs for agriculture and backyard farming are also encouraged as lifesaving needs.

<sup>3</sup> Harasta Access Point is sometimes used, but very rarely and only for IACs.