



Main Implementing Partner

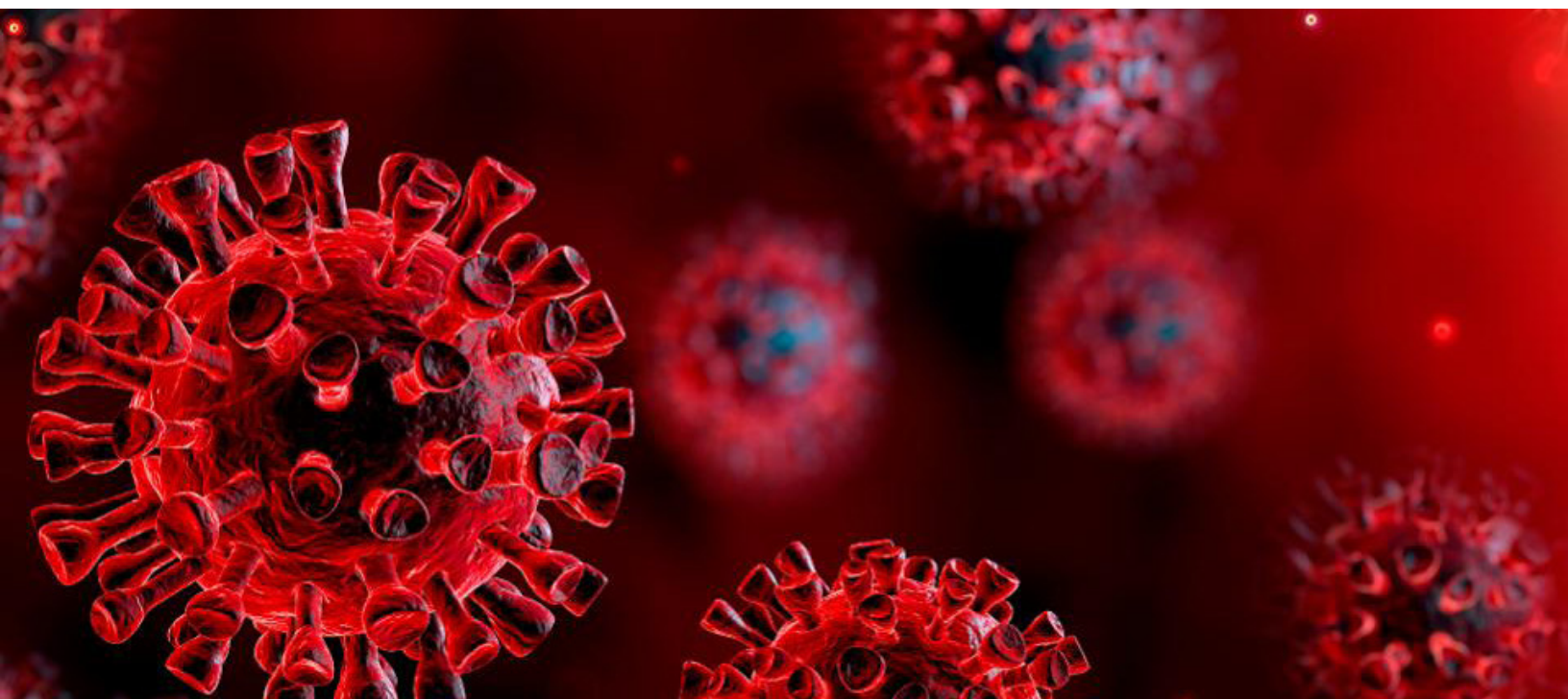


# COVID-19 SITUATION ANALYSIS

FIRST ANNUAL REVIEW - LIVELIHOODS,  
FOOD SECURITY, AGRICULTURE AND  
PROTECTION SECTORS.



July 2020 - July 2021



**Better Data | Better Decisions | Better Outcomes**

The outbreak of disease caused by the virus known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV-2) or COVID-19 started in China in December 2019. The virus quickly spread across the world, with the WHO Director-General declaring it as a pandemic on March 11th, 2020.

The virus's impact has been felt most acutely by countries facing humanitarian crises due to conflict and natural disasters. As humanitarian access to vulnerable communities has been restricted to basic movements only, monitoring and assessments have been interrupted.

To overcome these constraints and provide the wider humanitarian community with timely and comprehensive information on the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, iMMAP initiated the *[COVID-19 Situational Analysis project](#)* with the support of the USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (USAID BHA), aiming to provide timely solutions to the growing global needs for assessment and analysis among humanitarian stakeholders.

# CONTENTS

## 1. Introduction

Page4

A. About this report..... 4

## 2. COVID-19 Overview

Page5

## 3. Containment measures

Page22

## 4. Displacement

Page28

## 5. Economic overview

Page29

 Livelihood.....	34
 Food security.....	48
Agriculture.....	65
 Protection.....	68

## 6. Methodology and review of data

Page75

# INTRODUCTION

## About this report

Food, livelihoods, WASH, education and protection needs were significantly exacerbated in Syria by the economic consequences of COVID-19 related restrictions. While the COVID-19 outbreak might be perceived as a public health emergency, with a response oriented towards the containment of the epidemic and treatment of patients, the range of interventions and policies implemented also led to significant additional secondary impacts. A decade of conflict, multiple displacements, economic shocks in the country and neighboring countries, military operations, and violence had already severely affected the population and infrastructure, with high levels of cross-sectoral needs, leading to weak capacities to face this new shock. These additional disruptions of public and private services complexified even further the humanitarian landscape in Syria.

The BHA COVID-19 support project, implemented by IMMAP and DFS in six countries (DRC, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Syria, and Colombia), has been analyzing the main concerns and unmet needs that have emerged across humanitarian sectors due to the COVID-19 pandemic since the summer of 2020. After almost a decade of conflict, economic challenges over the past years, and high levels of vulnerabilities, untangling the specific effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on humanitarian needs from other factors at play in the country has been challenging.

However, across all sectors, three main drivers were identified:

- Containment measures such as lockdowns and curfews exacerbated existing conditions and significantly impacted sources of livelihood, an impact lasting even beyond the end of such measures, and hampered access to services (health, protection, education).
- Rising prices, coupled with lower income and devaluation of the currency, resulted in unaffordability being the main challenge reported across sectors, especially food.
- Fear of COVID-19 among the population and stigmatization had harmful effects on service usage, notably health and, to a lower extent, education.

This report reviews the data collected between July 2020 and July 2021 and highlights the main issues and evolution of humanitarian needs in Syria. This review is divided in two parts: the first one being published in July and the second one in September 2021. This first report presents an overview of the epidemiological situation in the three areas of control over the past year, as well as the containment measures implemented by authorities in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. It also highlights the macro and micro-economic developments that have emerged over the year and the impact of these developments on Displacement trends and the Livelihood, Food Security, Agriculture and Protection sectors. The next report will focus on the evolution of knowledge, attitude and practices of the population towards COVID-19 and the impact of the crisis on the Health, Nutrition, WASH, Education, Logistics and Shelter sectors.



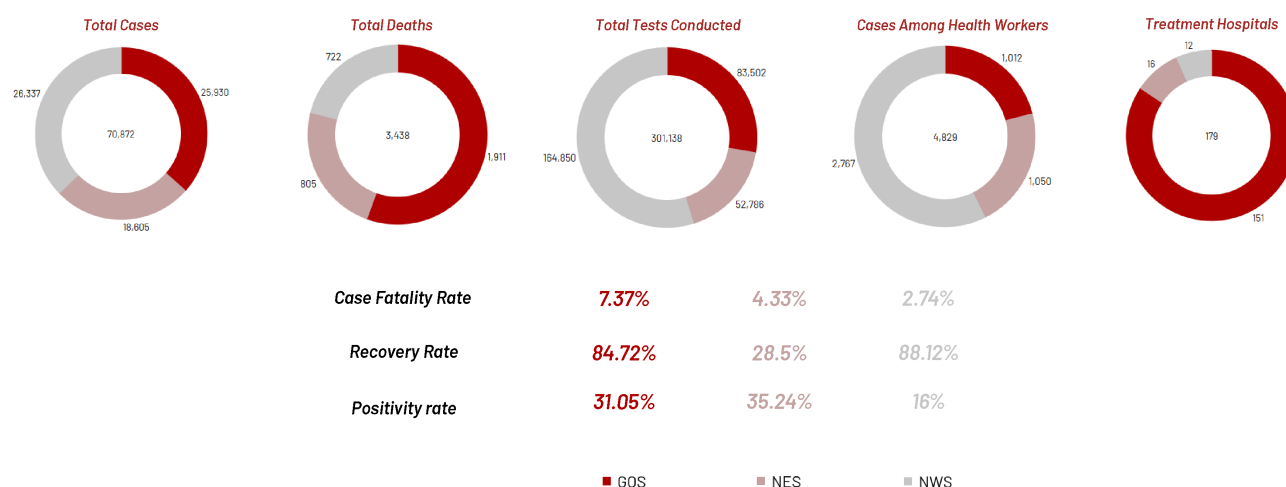
# COVID-19 OVERVIEW

Accurate figures of COVID-19 cases and fatalities have not been available throughout the epidemic, with the reported number of confirmed COVID-19 cases likely to be an underestimation of the real scale of the pandemic. Given the limited testing across Syria, reluctance to get tested among the population and tight control of the authorities over publicly released information, the actual number of cases is likely to far exceed official figures. Further, most cases have not been linked to a suspected source, demonstrating widespread community transmission. The

criteria for testing, number of tests available and used, as well as their accessibility, availability, and awareness of testing for the population is variable in different parts of Syria. These limitations in data consistency should be taken into consideration when comparing cases and number of tests between areas. For instance, only patients with severe conditions in hospitals and clinics were being tested in Government of Syria (GoS)-held areas since September 2020, artificially downplaying the likely real trend (SANA 16/12/2020).

## Epidemiological Overview country-wide March 2020–July 2021

**Figure 1.** Country COVID-19 overview ([WHO dashboard](#), [NES dashboard](#), [NWS dashboard](#) 29/07/2021)



## **RISING CONCERNS FROM JULY-SEPTEMBER 2020, FURTHER EXACERBATED BY SCHOOLS REOPENING IN OCTOBER 2020**

While the first official COVID-19 case in Syria was reported by the Health Minister on 22 March 2020 ([SANA 22/03/2020](#)), the number of cases remained quite low until July, due to tight containment measures in place across all areas, notably nationwide school closures and curfew (see [Containment section](#) below). A rise in the number of cases accelerated over the summer through March 2021 in GoS-held areas, peaking in August 2020 and January 2021. The situation started to be concerning for northern Syria from September 2020, where the rising number of cases led authorities in the northeast to implement tight mitigation measures, imposing a lockdown from 30 October 2020 to 4 February 2021.

Despite the high number of cases, schools reopened between late September and mid-October 2020 across all areas, leading to a spike in the number of cases reported among students and education staff. Cases reported in schools increased by four-fold in December 2020 compared to November and doubled again between mid-December and mid-January 2021 ([WHO & OCHA 01/02/2021](#), [OCHA & WHO 23/12/2020](#)), reaching more than 2,500 cases as of April 2021 ([OCHA & WHO 05/04/2021](#)).

## **SECOND WAVE FROM MARCH 2021 IN NORTHERN SYRIA AND THIRD WAVE IN GOS-CONTROLLED AREA, AFTER A DECLINE IN CASES EARLY 2021**

While across areas a decline in confirmed cases was reported in February 2021, the trend reversed again in March through May 2021. During this timeframe, the average number of daily confirmed cases was higher in GoS-held areas and the northeast than in all the previous waves. In June 2021, while official numbers remain low, widespread community transmission continued to be suspected in GoS-held areas, especially following the elections held earlier in the month, which led to more public gatherings. The northwest witnessed a late second wave, which recorded a rising number of cases since May 2021. However, thus far the scale of contamination remains at a lower level than during the first wave (September 2020-January 2021).

## ACCESS ISSUES AND LACK OF RESPONSE CAPACITIES HAMPERED CONTAINMENT

Throughout the pandemic, health authorities across the areas of control struggled to significantly scale up their testing operations. Since July 2020, to the date of this report, contact tracing has been reported as a challenge, notably in remote governorates and camps. ([OCHA & WHO 10/06/2021](#), [NES NGO Forum 16/04/2021](#), [OCHA & WHO 09/12/2020](#)). In addition to the lack of public funding, shortages of personnel, Protective Personal Equipment (PPE) and tests, fear and distrust of state institutions, as well as social stigma, have been driving people away from reporting symptoms or seeking care, hampering the COVID-19 response ([Enab Baladi 13/11/2020](#), [OCHA & WHO 29/10/2020](#)). During the first half of 2020, quarantine regulations were leniently applied, with COVID-19 suspected patients sent back home to await test results, rather than being immediately isolated, which reportedly further contributed to community transmission (SOHR 20/09/2020, Syria direct 31/08/2020).

Continued security and political constraints also limited COVID-19 response in reconciled areas (areas the GoS took over from the opposition), with some observers estimating the amount of support provided in such areas to be three times less than the support provided to more loyalist areas. According to at least one report, the GoS restricted the response in the northeast, by refusing to test the region's samples and thus hindering data-sharing with regional authorities, resulting in an overreliance on support from health INGOs in the northeast. Yet, even international actors have been facing barriers to respond by the GoS, which for example prevented WHO from supplying testing kits to private and non-governmental actors ([COAR 19/03/2021](#)).

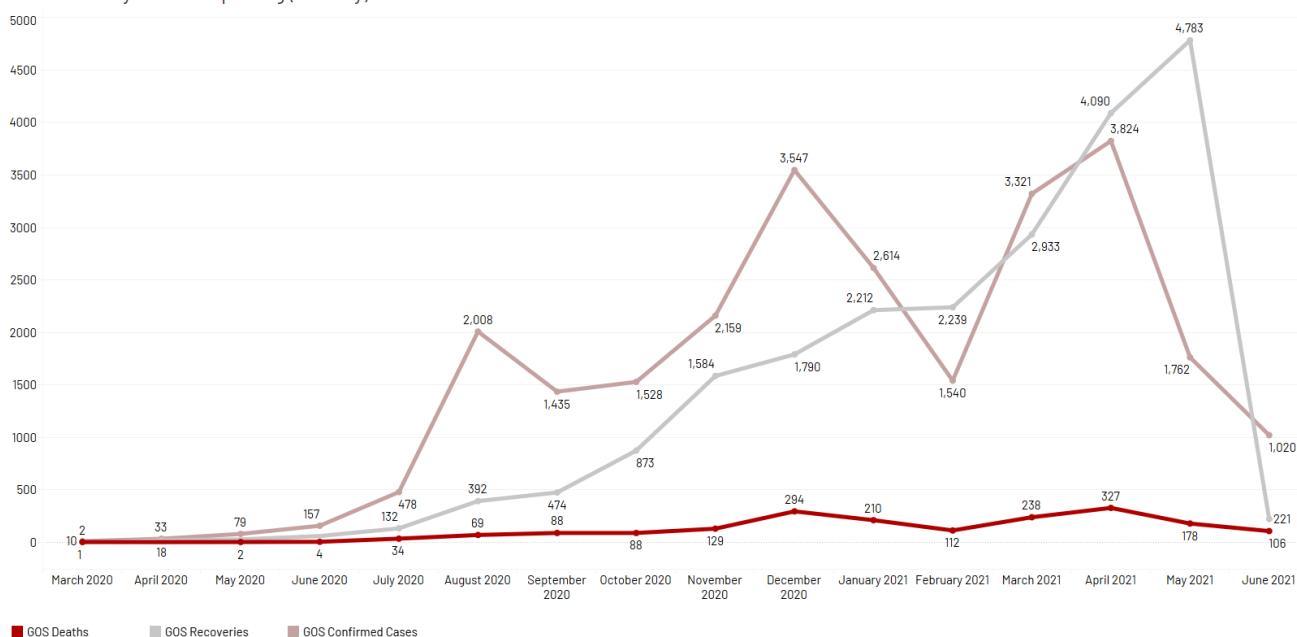
## HIGH CASELOAD AMONG HEALTHCARE WORKERS, FURTHER FRAGILIZING AN ALREADY WEAKENED HEALTH SYSTEM

Of particular concern is the number of health workers affected by the disease, which further exhausts an already overwhelmed and understaffed healthcare system. At least 3,800 healthcare workers have tested positive to the disease across all areas of control. This has been likely due to shortages and inadequate use of PPE when available, lack of distancing among staff, inadequacies in screening and triage protocols, in-person reporting of suspected COVID-19 symptoms rather than the utilization of remote communications, and the movement of health workers between multiple health facilities. While this high ratio can also be explained by the focus of the tests, which mostly targeted health workers, the effect on the healthcare system remains devastating ([WHO dashboard 06/07/2021](#), [NES dashboard](#) Kurdish Red Crescent 06/07/2021, [NWS dashboard](#) Health Cluster 07/07/2021).

# Government of Syria-held areas - Epidemiological Overview

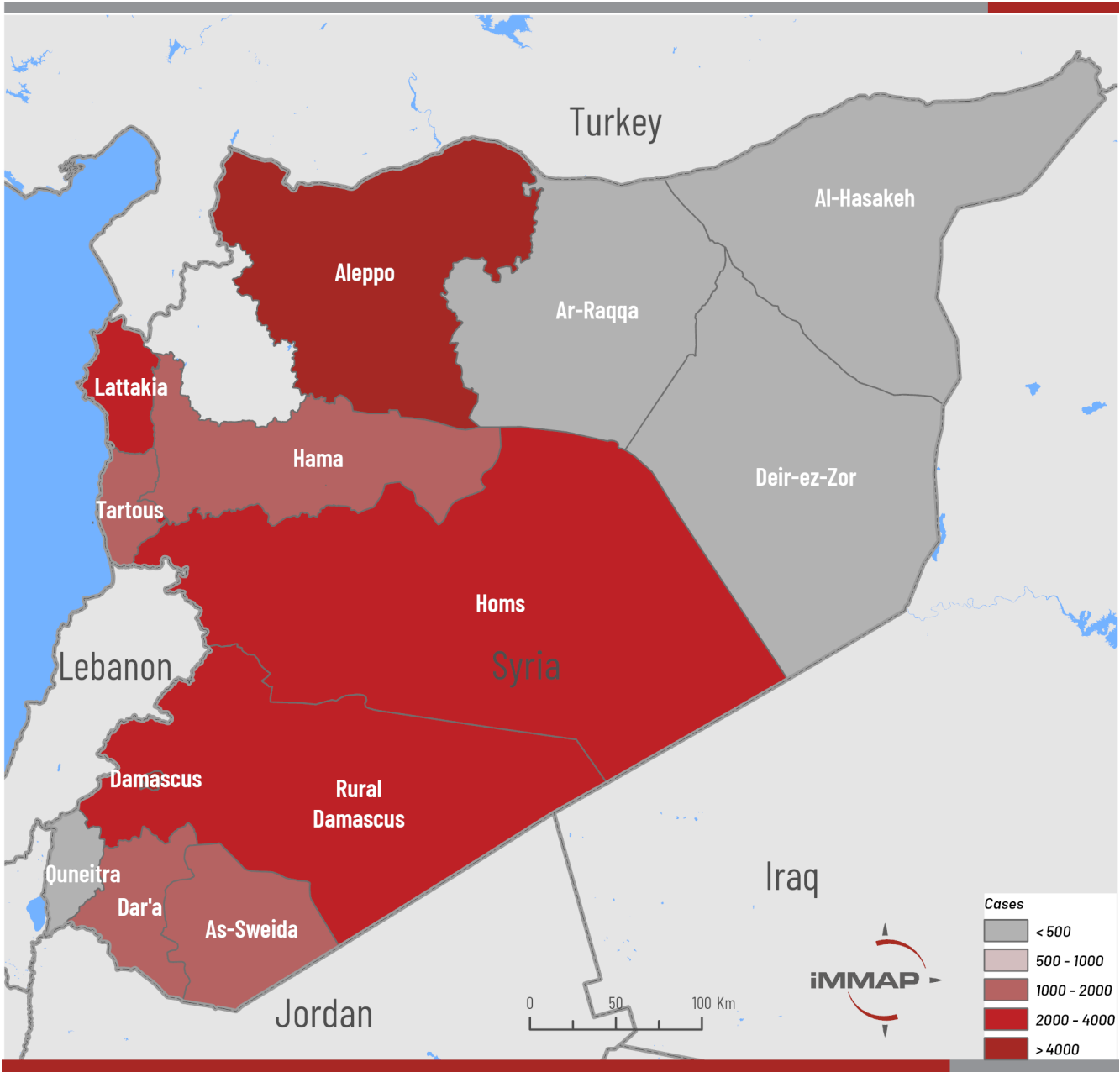
**Figure 2.** Cases deaths and recoveries by date of reporting in GoS areas ([WHO dashboard](#) 26/07/2021)

GOS Cases By Date of reporting (Monthly)



Even as the first official COVID-19 case in Syria was reported by the Health Minister on 22 March 2020 ([SANA](#) 22/03/2020), the number of cases remained quite low until July, due to tight containment measures in place across the areas, notably nationwide school closures and curfew (see [Containment section](#)). As of 29 June, less than 270 cases were officially confirmed in GoS-held areas. The situation accelerated over the summer, with a rising number of cases from July to September 2020, averaging 50 new daily confirmed cases, with some peaks at 100, reaching more than 2,800 cases confirmed as of September. However, these figures were likely far underestimated. The Assistant Director of Health in Damascus estimated that there could have been as many as 112,500 COVID-19 cases, only in the capital city and its surrounding, as of early August 2020, based on daily death reports, showing about 800 deaths over the three months prior (Middle East Institute 06/08/2020). The rapidly increasing number of patients arriving in healthcare facilities and the increasing number of death notices and burials further indicated that actual cases well exceed official figures at that time (UN Security Council 16/09/2020).

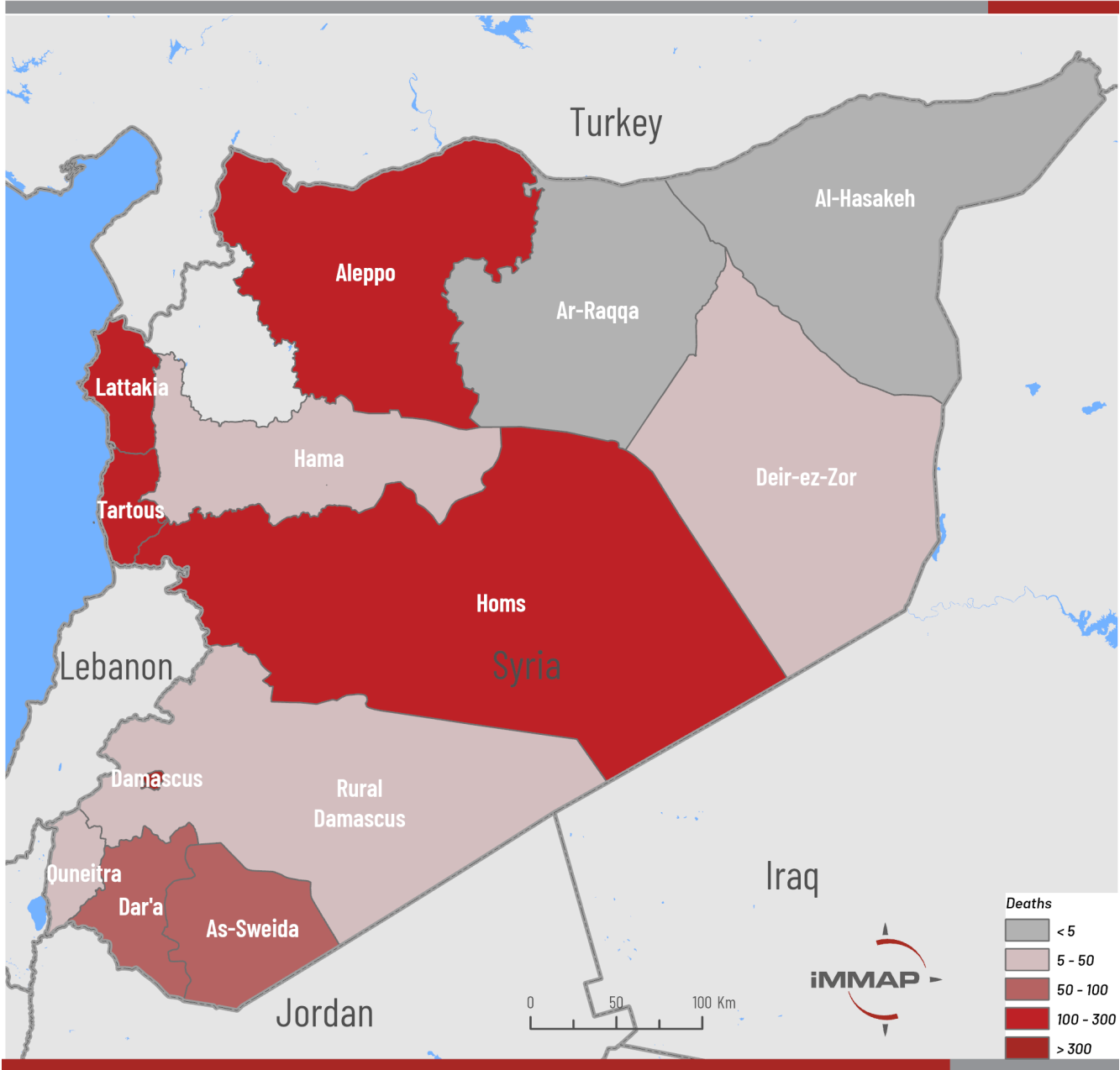
**Map 1.** Geographic Distribution of Cases by District ([WHO dashboard](#) 26/07/2021)



Contact: wasarhan@immap.org  
Map Name: 20210601cas

The boundaries, names and designations used in this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by iMMAP.

**Map 2.** Geographic distribution of deaths reported by district ([WHO dashboard](#) 26/07/2021)



Contact: wasarhan@immap.org  
Map Name: 20210602cas

The boundaries, names and designations used in this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by iMMAP.

While the trend slightly declined at the end of the summer, it quickly increased again in September 2020, with more than 90% of cases being recorded between mid-September and mid-October. This second wave was even more concerning, with an average of 75 new daily confirmed cases, peaking at more than 150 per day. By early December, a 50% increase in official death mortality was recorded compared to a month earlier. Reports of 100% bed occupancy rates in hospitals in December were also reported across government-controlled areas, notably in As-Sweida and Homs governorates ([OCHA](#) 16/12/2020). As of mid-December, the caseload was the highest being reported in a single month thus far, reaching almost 3,550. By 31 January 2021, more than 14,000 confirmed cases had been recorded, almost double the caseload reported at the end of November 2020. While daily reported cases started to decrease in January ([WHO & OCHA](#) 01/02/2021), more than 50% of tests were still coming back positive in As-Sweida and Tartous governorates and 60% in Homs governorate ([OCHA](#) 20/01/2021).

The situation then stabilized, until the start of the third wave in March 2021. Alarming, more new cases were reported in March than any previous month to that date ([Albaath Media](#) 11/03/2021). According to medical sources, greater numbers of children and adolescents were reported in hospitals in the capital, unlike the previous waves, pointing to the potential spread of the new UK virus strain ([The Syrian Observer](#) 23/03/2021). Alongside this rise in reported cases, hospitalizations and home oxygen users became more frequent, with more than 100 reported in As-Sweida governorate. In As-Sweida governorate, the number of patients in specialized isolation departments doubled each week in March ([Al Watan](#) 28/03/2021). This resurgence of cases continued throughout April, with declining rates from early May 2021. Between March and May 2021, there were 100 new daily cases on average, with peaks to more than 150 in April and May.

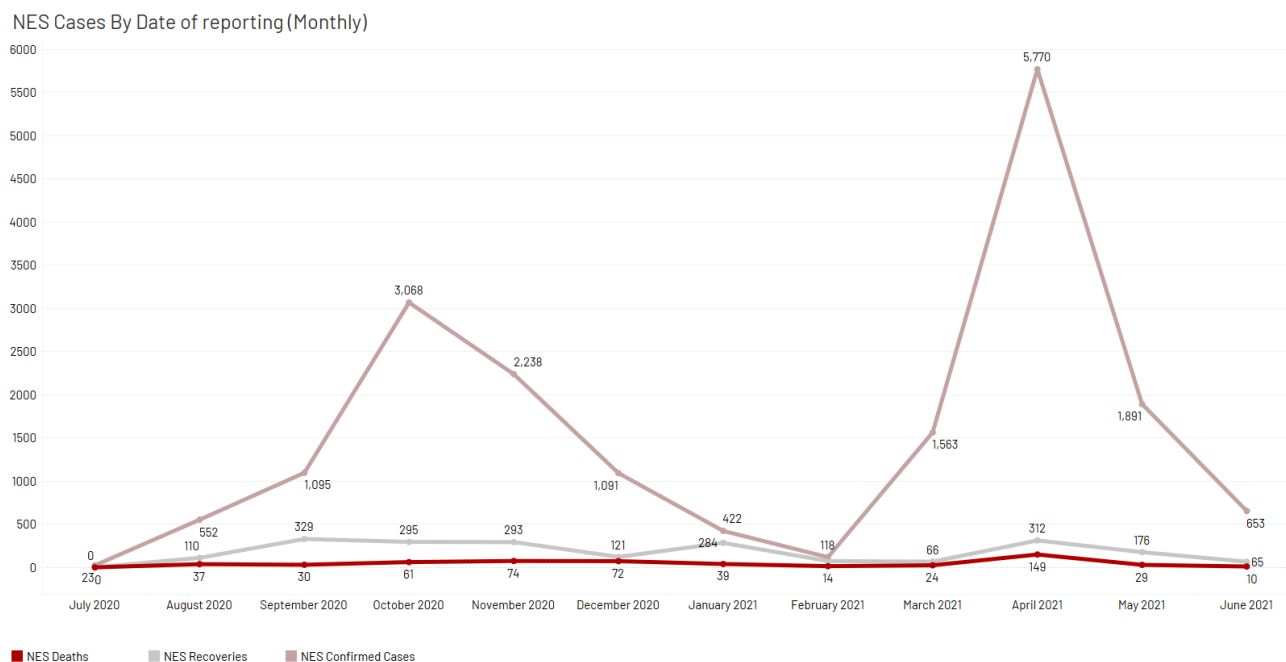
In June 2021, while official numbers remain low, widespread community transmission continues to be suspected. In Homs, As-Sweida and Tartous governorates, positivity rates still exceeded 50% by mid-June ([OCHA & WHO](#) 10/06/2021). Even though official statistics show an improvement since then, with a declining number of confirmed cases, according to medical sources interviewed by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, following the elections in GoS-held areas in June, more than 96,000 cases might have been recorded ([SOHR](#) 08/06/2021).

As of 06 July 2021, more than 80,700 tests have been conducted across the six labs conducting COVID-19 testing in GoS-held areas, with peaks of 570 tests per day, half of the number reported in the northwest, for a territory more than three times bigger. Officially, cumulative number of confirmed COVID-19 cases stand at more than 25,710 as of 06 July 2021, of which more than 1,890 deaths, representing a Case Fatality Rate (CFR) of 7.37%. Most of the cases have been recorded in Damascus (22%), Aleppo (16%), Latakia (15%), Homs (12%) and Rural Damascus (10%) governorates ([WHO dashboard](#) 06/07/2021). However, according to medical sources interviewed by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the real figure could be close to 1.3 million cases ([SOHR](#) 08/06/2021). More than 1,000 cases among healthcare workers were officially reported in GoS-held areas as of 6 July, of which 388 were in Damascus ([WHO dashboard](#) 06/07/2021). As of 16 May 2021, 211 doctors have reportedly died due to COVID-19 infections in GoS-held areas, 172 of whom in 2020 ([SOHR](#) 16/05/2021).



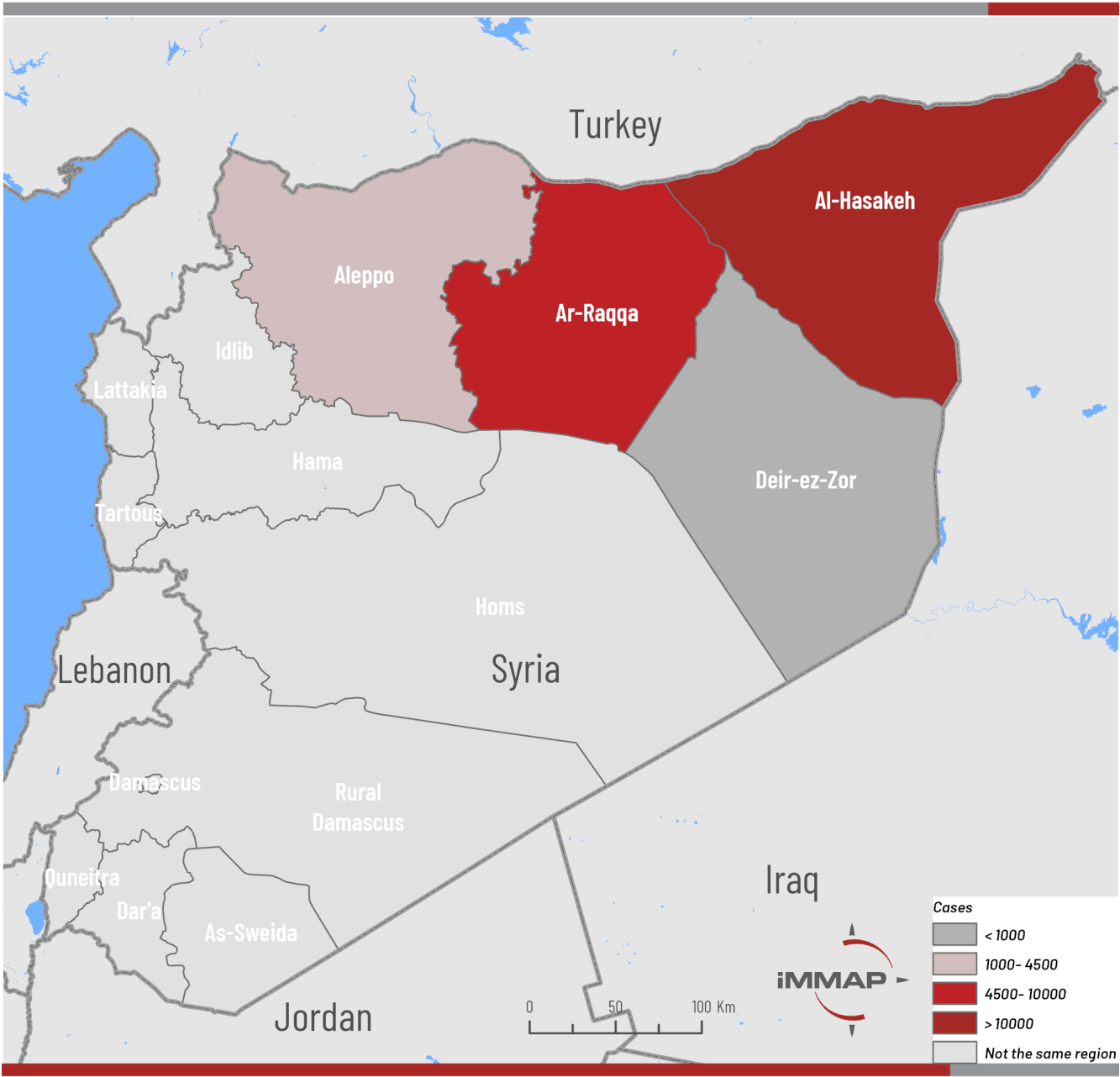
# Northeast Syria - Epidemiological Overview

**Figure 3.** Cases deaths and recoveries by date of reporting in NES areas ([NES Dashboard](#) 26/07/2021)



While the first case was reported on 27 March 2020, the epidemiologic situation started to reach concerning levels by September 2020, with an alarming peak in November. More than 100 new daily confirmed cases were reported on average, peaking at 260. By 30 September, more than 1,600 cases were confirmed, with a 180% increase in the number of cases recorded between mid-September and mid-October 2020. The true scale is likely far higher, as northeast authorities decided to ration the number of tests in September, to keep some capacity in the event of a further surge in cases during the winter([OCHA & WHO](#) 24/09/2020).

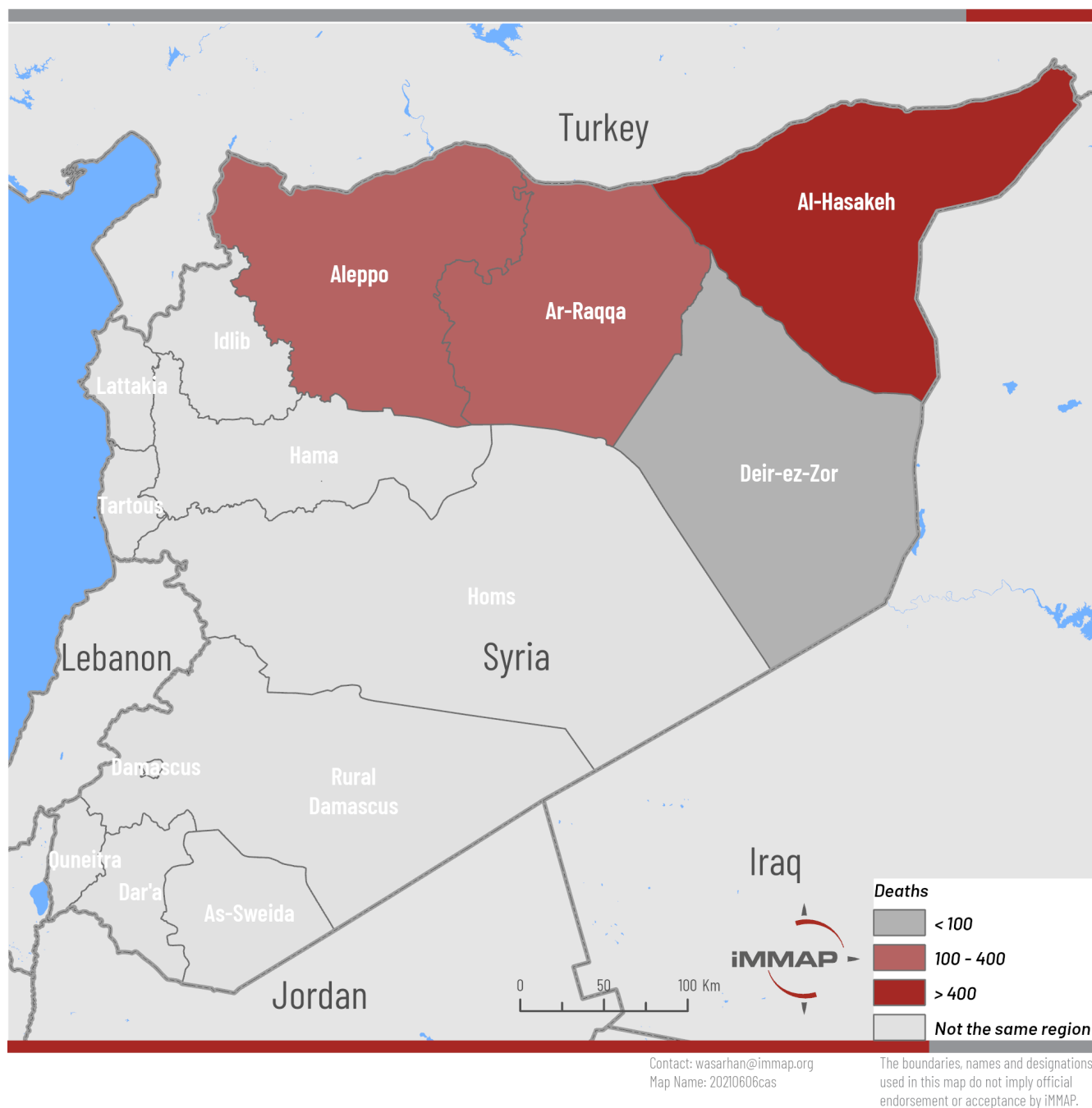
**Map 3.** Geographic distribution of cases reported by district ([NES Dashboard](#) 15/07/2021)



Contact: wasarhan@immap.org  
Map Name: 20210605cas

The boundaries, names and designations used in this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by iMMAP.

**Map 4.** Geographic distribution of deaths reported by district ([NES Dashboard](#) 15/07/2021)



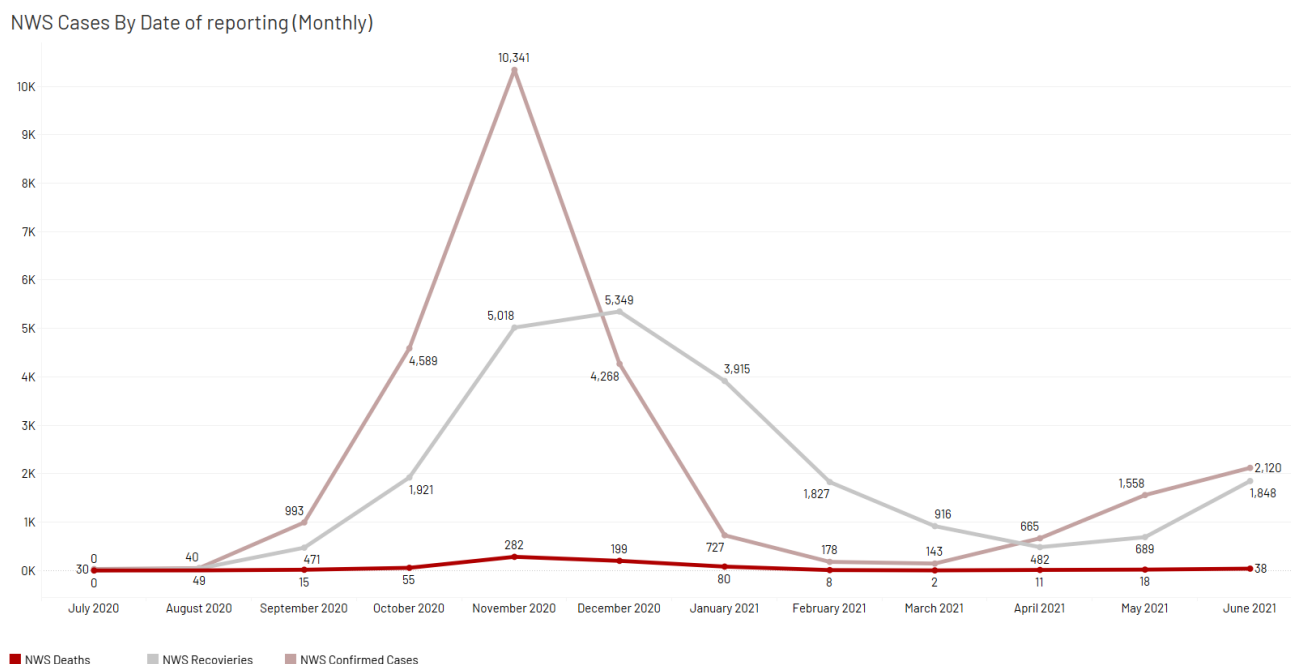
Following these rising rates of transmission, authorities in the northeast implemented tighter restrictions (see [Containment section](#)), with a lockdown lasting from 30 October 2020 to 04 February 2021. As a result, declining figures were reported throughout this period. The positivity rate of samples declined from 42% in November to 31% in December ([NES dashboard](#) Kurdish Red Crescent 03/01/2021, [OCHA & WHO](#) 09/12/2020), with weekly average number of cases continuing to decrease from November 2020 throughout January 2021. While these restrictive measures influenced the reduction of transmission, the decrease in newly reported cases was also linked to a reduction in testing capacity, due to supply shortages at the end of 2020, low surveillance capacity, as well as continued challenges related to case diagnosis and detection ([OCHA & WHO](#) 09/12/2020). Most of the tests focused on healthcare workers and Al-Hassakeh district, leaving significant information gaps on the status of the epidemic in the rest of the region and among other groups ([NES NGO Forum](#) 01/10/2020). More concerning was the high death rate reported despite a declining number of cases. Among reported deaths at nine COVID-19 facilities in November 2020, about 40% died within 24 hours of admission and many others died within 48 hours, highlighting patients' reluctance to seek treatment until severe symptoms have appeared, as well as inadequate referral procedures ([OCHA & WHO](#) 09/12/2020). This trend continued throughout the epidemic, with a striking death rate of 83% among patients who received invasive ventilation ([NES dashboard](#) Kurdish Red Crescent 06/07/2021).

With the lockdown being lifted in early February 2021, rising levels of contamination appeared between March and May 2021. While more new cases were reported in March (1,563) compared to January and February, there were fewer cases than in the months of October (3,060) and November (2,238). However, during April, higher peaks were reported reaching more than 320 new daily confirmed cases. Close to a 60% increase in confirmed cases was recorded between March and April, with registered deaths increasing by nearly 50% in May ([OCHA](#) 26/05/2021). Similar to the previous wave, the true scale of the epidemic was shadowed by shortages of testing supplies, with the only COVID-19 laboratory in the northeast running out of testing equipment in early May ([Middle East Eye](#) 29/04/2021, [IRC](#) 29/04/2021).

As of 06 July, almost 52,000 samples were tested in the northeast, with more than 18,400 positive cases reported, of which 804 deaths (CFR: 4.35%). Most of the cases have been reported in Al-Hassakeh (61%) and Ar-Raqqa (24%) governorates. 1,045 cases among healthcare workers have been confirmed and more than 415 cases in camp-setting as of July 2021 ([NES dashboard](#) Kurdish Red Crescent 06/07/2021). As of early March, the overall positivity rate in camps and settlements was 30%, with the largest number of confirmed cases in Mahmudli camp, Ar-Raqqa Governorate ([NES NGO Forum](#) 07/03/2021).

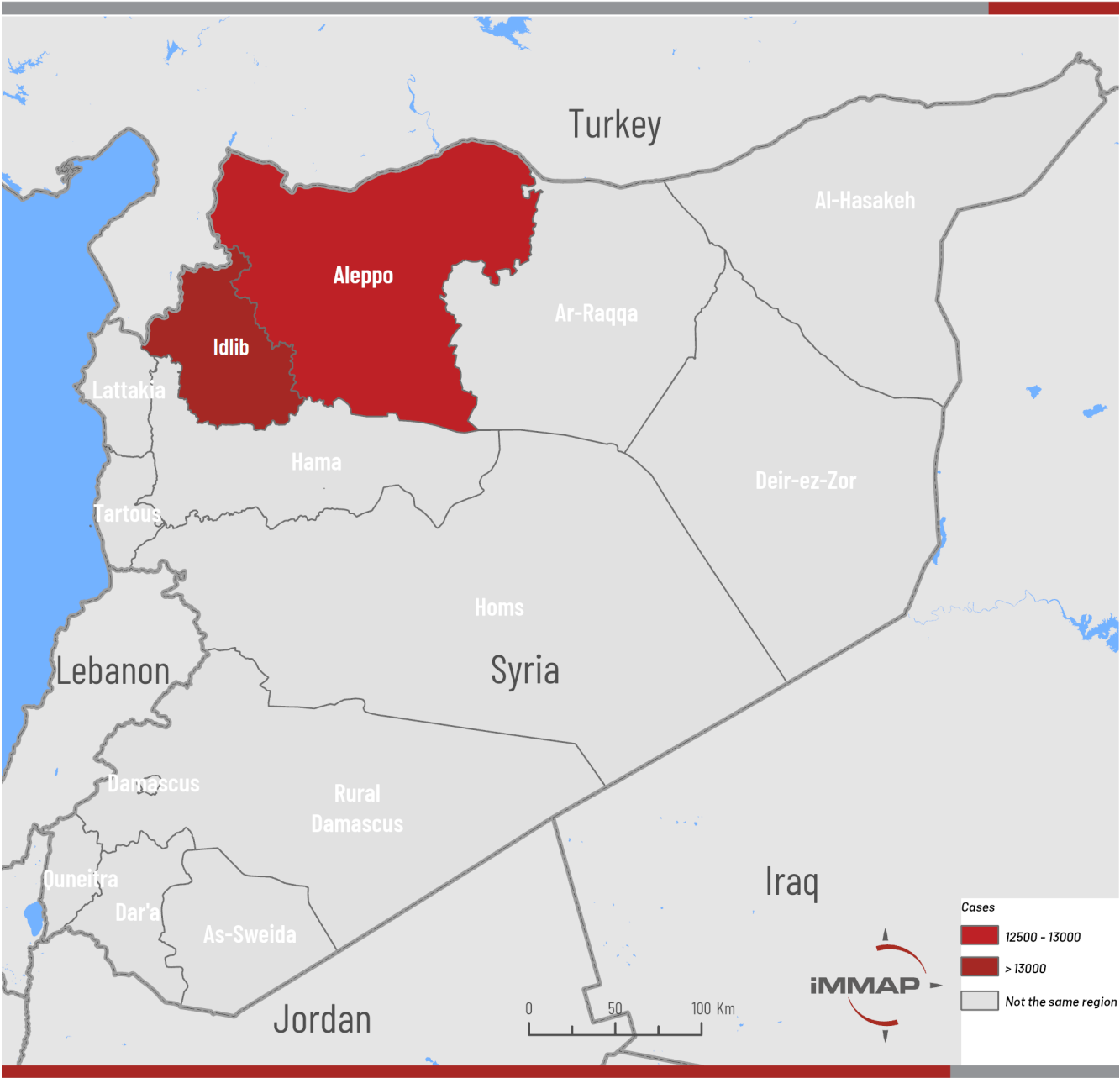
# Northwest Syria – Epidemiological Overview

**Figure 4.** Cases deaths and recoveries by date of reporting in NWS areas ([NWS Dashboard](#) Health Cluster 30/06/2021)



Since the first official confirmed case in the northwest, reported on 9 July 2020 among health professionals in Idlib, COVID-19 quickly spread, reaching high levels of contamination in September 2020. A ten-fold increase in the number of cases was recorded between August and September. The situation accelerated from September until January 2021, averaging more than 300 new daily confirmed cases and peaking at more than 520, higher levels than official figures reported in both the northeast and Government-controlled areas. Close to a 440% increase in the number of cases was reported between mid-September and mid-October. In Idlib, 50% of ICU beds and 80% of ventilators were occupied continuously throughout these months, with a peak of 80% ICU beds occupied in November, highlighting the drastic increase in cases ([Enab Baladi](#) 02/12/2020). Cases also appeared to be rising in camps, with more than 1,800 cases reported as of early December, of which half were recorded in the three weeks prior ([Humanitarian Response Coordinators](#) 08/12/2020). As of mid-September, almost 30% of all confirmed cases reported were among health workers ([MSF](#) 22/09/2020).

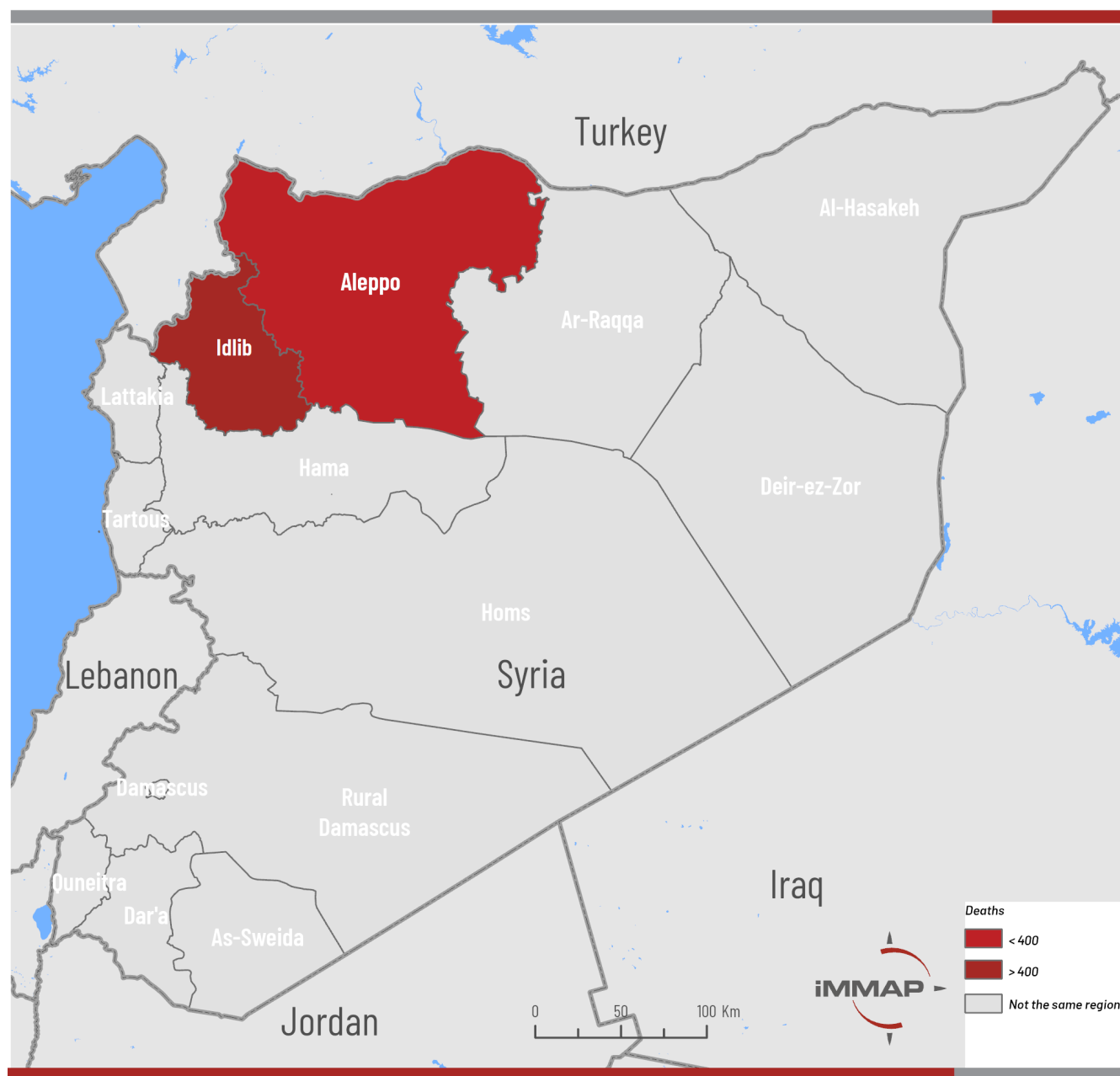
**Map 5.** Geographic distribution of cases reported by district ([NWS Dashboard](#) Health Cluster 27/07/2021)



Contact: wasarhan@immap.org  
Map Name: 20210603cas

The boundaries, names and designations used in this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by iMMAP.

**Map 6.** Geographic distribution of deaths reported by district ([NWS Dashboard](#) Health Cluster 27/07/2021)



Contact: wasarhan@immap.org  
Map Name: 20210604cas

The boundaries, names and designations used in this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by iMMAP.



Following the implementation of new preventative measures, the rate of new cases declined sharply between December 2020 and January 2021, compared to November and December (+7% compared to +47%). However, the number of COVID-19 deaths recorded an increase of 46%, reaching a total of 380 COVID-19 associated deaths, half of which were in only two districts, Harim and Idlib ([ACU 31/01/2021](#), [WHO & OCHA 26/01/2021](#)). While there were concerns that the alarming epidemiological situation in Turkey in 2021, which reported more than 3.3 million confirmed cases as of 31 March, would lead to higher levels of cross-border contamination, levels of infection in northwest Syria remained at low until May 2021. Since then, rising levels of COVID-19 transmission were recorded, however this increase occurred at a slower pace compared

to the previous wave. In May, close to 1,600 cases were recorded, averaging 100 daily confirmed cases rising as high as 180 at the highest peak.

As of 7 July, more than 165,300 COVID-19 tests were conducted, at the region's three operational laboratories, after two new ones were opened in October 2020 ([NWS dashboard](#) Health Cluster 07/07/2021, [OCHA 21/10/2020](#)). The total number of confirmed cases in the northwest stood close to 25,900, with 714 registered deaths (CFR: 2.76%). The vast majority of cases were reported in camp-setting (88%), with most occurring in Idlib (17%), Dana (14%) and Afrin (11%) sub-districts ([NWS dashboard](#) Health Cluster 07/07/2021). As of May, 6.8% of cases were reported among healthcare workers ([OCHA 18/06/2021](#)).

## Vaccination campaigns

Vaccination plans started early 2021, with the first doses reaching Government-controlled areas in April. However, the campaigns have been and will likely continue facing significant challenges. Doubts remain about Syria's preparedness levels to receive, store, distribute, and vaccinate, considering the country's current logistic, economic, and social conditions. Storage is the main challenge to vaccination efforts, given persistent power cuts in Syria and the lack of fuel, cold chain challenges and limited open border crossings (Enab Baladi 09/01/2021). Access challenges are also expected among the population. Due to insecurity and hostilities, people may not be able to access vaccination centers and could face additional security risks reaching these centers. Opposition members and others targeted by the regime will likely not feel safe enough to access vaccines, potentially resulting in large gaps in immunization coverage ([Syria Direct 14/01/2021](#)).

In addition, considering the already high levels of stigmatization and reluctance to get tested or treated, there are concerns that vaccines would not be accepted widely. According to community focal points interviewed by REACH Initiative and HNAP in May, in the northeast, between 35% and 30% of them reported that the majority of members of their community would not be willing to get the COVID-19 vaccine if it was made available to them. The main barrier among those not willing to get the vaccine was the lack of trust in the vaccine and concern over its presumed side effects ([REACH Initiative & HNAP 03/06/2021](#)).

## GOVERNMENT OF SYRIA-HELD AREAS - VACCINATION

The GoS received vaccine donations from Russia and China in February and April 2021, in addition to being allocated more than 1 million AstraZeneca vaccines through the COVAX initiative.

About 1.02 million AstraZeneca vaccine doses were allocated to Syria through the COVAX initiative ([Enab Baladi](#) 17/02/2021), with the first delivery of 203,000 doses arriving in Damascus in May 2021 ([OCHA & WHO](#) 10/06/2021). The vaccination plan is currently divided into three phases. Under Phase One, all 190,000 health workers will be vaccinated, as well as 485,000 people above 55 years, representing overall about 20% of the population. Under Phase 2, an additional 17% of the population would be vaccinated: the rest of the 1.5 million people above 55 years old, as well as 1.1 million people with comorbidities, 300,000 schoolteachers and close to 860,000 other essential workers. Coverage during the third phase is yet to be determined ([WHO](#) 16/02/2021). As of June, more than 46,000 COVAX doses have been administered ([UNICEF](#) 28/06/2021).

While in April 2021, according to the Minister of Health (MoH), 71 hospitals, 96 vaccination clinics and 416 mobile teams in remote areas were set to be used to support the vaccination campaign ([Tishreen news](#) 05/05/2021), according to the MoH vaccination portal, only 82 vaccination centers were available for registration to the public as of early June ([Syrian MOH](#) 06/06/2021). The mechanisms for registration, specific local allocations, mobility and access conditions remain unclear, raising security concerns for the population, especially those perceived as opponents to the regime. An electronic platform was launched by the MoH in May for the population to register. While WHO is expected to oversee this process, this will likely not be enough for many Syrians, especially those whose affiliation, perceived or real, to opposition civilian or military groups or individuals wanted for conscription, who will likely refuse to disclose their personal data ([COAR](#) 22/02/2021), resulting in potential large gaps in immunization coverage ([Syria Direct](#) 14/01/202).

Reports of the vaccination campaign not being fairly conducted have already emerged. Vaccination approvals have reportedly been granted to individuals with connections to influential people ([SOHR](#) 09/06/2021). While the GoS received 100,000 doses of Sputnik vaccines in February 2021, according to the Syrian Observer, only half of the doses were administered to health professionals in GoS hospitals and military health facilities, with the rest unaccounted for ([The Syrian Observer](#) 12/02/2021). Similarly, while the GoS also received more than 150,000 doses of Chinese vaccines in April ([Enab Baladi](#) 17/02/2021, [The Syrian Observer](#) 12/02/2021), their distribution remains unclear. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, bribes of USD 50 to obtain the vaccine without being registered or being part of the target groups were reported ([SOHR](#) 09/06/2021).

## NORTHERN SYRIA - VACCINATION

Due to limited access in northern Syria and the reliance on the GoS's authorization to access the northeast, delivery and vaccination services across areas of control have been, and will likely continue, to be difficult ([HRW](#) 02/02/2021).

### Northwest Syria - Vaccination

In the northwest, initiatives were taking place since February 2021 to facilitate the acquisition of 1.7 million vaccine doses by local authorities and international partners ([The Syrian Observer](#) 22/02/2021). Additionally, a request for 855,000 AstraZeneca doses was also granted via the COVAX initiative, to cover approximately 20% of the population in the northwest in a separate cross-border plan. Priority recipients include healthcare workers, high-risk groups, and other cluster front-line groups depending on availability ([OCHA](#) 18/06/2021). As of mid-April, an estimated 55,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines had arrived in Idlib through Turkey ([Middle East Monitor](#) 21/04/2021). The vaccination campaign was officially launched on 01 May ([Enab Baladi](#) 06/05/2021), with the aim of reaching all 53,000 health and relief workers across 82 facilities during the same month ([Qatar Red Crescent Society](#) 09/05/2021). But, by 07 July, about 38,700 people had been vaccinated ([NWS dashboard](#) Health Cluster 07/07/2021). Two more vaccine batches are expected to arrive in Idlib by the end of 2021 ([Reuters](#) 11/05/2021).

### Northeast Syria - Vaccination

According to the COVAX Interim Distribution Forecast of 03 February, 100,000 doses were preliminarily allocated to the northeast ([WHO & OCHA](#) 16/02/2021) with 17,500 doses of COVAX vaccines airlifted to Qamishli in May according to the MoH, out of which 13,320 doses were allocated to Al-Hassakeh governorate and 4,180 doses to Deir-ez-Zor governorate. An additional 6,000 doses were scheduled to be sent by road to Ar-Raqqa governorate, with only 1,000 delivered as of 10 June. The doses are expected to cover all the healthcare workers in the area (about 8,900). However, anecdotal evidence points to a significant reluctance among healthcare personnel to get vaccinated ([OCHA & WHO](#) 10/06/2021). When more doses would be available, broader population vaccination roll-out will rely on the Expanded Programme on Immunization, with its fixed health facilities and more than 100 mobile teams ([WHO](#) 16/02/2021).

# CONTAINMENT MEASURES

## March–May 2020: Start of the restrictions

Precautionary measures to prevent and contain the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic were first implemented in March 2020, three weeks before the first case was officially announced, and further tightened following the official start of the outbreak on 22 March. In GoS-held areas, these measures included the partial closure of borders, the suspension of the majority of unessential economic activities, the closure of schools and universities, and a 40% reduction in public sector capacity through the introduction of a two-shift part-time system. Movement restrictions between governorates, as well

as a countrywide curfew from 6pm until 6am, were put in place at the end of March and lasted until May 2020. In the northeast, schools, universities, shops and all non-essential services were ordered to close. Gatherings and events were all cancelled and a curfew was also implemented ([OCHA & WHO 25/03/2020](#)). Similarly, schools were shut down around mid-March. While they temporarily reopened in May, following the identification of new cases, education facilities closed again and switched to distant learning modality ([Mercy Corps 31/07/2020](#)).

## June–August 2020: Relaxation of containment measures in GoS, while northern Syria started to implement more restrictive rules

While authorities initially reacted to COVID-19 by closing most public services and heavily restricting movement, progressive relaxation of these containment measures took place during the summer.

In GoS-held areas, the strict overall lockdown and internal movement restrictions were lifted in May 2020. Economic activities, markets, gyms, religious places, cafes, parks, cinema were allowed to re-open in the summer as long as physical distancing was adhered to ([OCHA & WHO 02/09/2020](#), [OCHA & WHO 05/07/2020](#)). However, following new flare-ups in COVID-19 cases, localized lockdowns were reestablished in at least one town north of Damascus ([The Syria Report 18/06/2020](#)), and in several other locations in Rural Damascus and Quneitra governorates ([OCHA & WHO 05/07/2020](#)). Border closures, limited closure of public services, limitations on the size of gatherings and physical distancing regulations were still in place over the course of the summer in 2020 ([OCHA & WHO 02/09/2020](#), [OCHA & WHO 05/07/2020](#)). With regards to travel restrictions, International flights were still restricted in September, except for repatriation flights for Syrian nationals. Domestic and cargo flights were operating under some restrictions at Damascus, Aleppo, and Qamishli airports ([OCHA & WHO 05/07/2020](#), [OCHA & WHO 21/08/2020](#)).

On 16 August, new entry requirements for individuals arriving from official border crossing points with Lebanon were implemented, and evidencing a mandatory negative PCR certificate was a prerequisite to gaining entry ([OCHA & WHO 21/08/2020](#)).

In the northeast, following the announcement of four new cases in July, after two months without any case, a partial curfew was reinstated by local authorities between 23 July and 28 August while mass gatherings remained prohibited until the end of September ([NES NGO Forum 27/08/2020](#), [14/10/2020](#)). Partial lockdowns, curfews and limited closure of services, were also introduced in Ar-Raqqa and Kobane ([OCHA & WHO 21/08/2020](#)). Authorities formally announced the closure of all land border-crossings with both Iraqi Kurdistan and GoS-held areas, with the exception of emergency cases ([NES NGO Forum 27/08/2020](#)). As of 23 July, only one crossing point was considered 'open' into Turkish-controlled areas, with eight crossings considered 'partially opened' ([OCHA & WHO 05/07/2020](#)).

Similarly, in the northwest, local authorities tightened preventive measures early July, with the closure of wedding halls, public spaces, markets, gyms and restaurants until 30 October ([SOHR 15/09/2020](#), [SOHR 20/10/2020](#)). Crossing to and from Turkey was restricted since July, except for humanitarian and commercial deliveries ([OCHA & WHO 05/07/2020](#)).

## September–October 2020: Reopening of schools

In September 2020, most activities returned to pre-COVID levels as authorities reduced and retracted public health measures, as communities seemed less willing or unable to comply with them.

In GoS-held areas, educational institutions restarted mid-September ([OCHA & WHO](#) 02/09/2020). Syrian Airlines resumed flights to regional destinations, including Cairo and Beirut, with a weekly flight to Khartoum and ad-hoc flights to Kuwait ([Reuters](#) 01/10/2020). The Jordanian authorities reopened their land border with Syria on Sunday 27 September, after one month of closure ([The Syria Report](#) 30/09/2020).

In the northeast, despite the continuing spike in the number of infections, Self-Administration authorities decided to reopen wedding and funeral venues, as well as mosques and churches and allow other gatherings in mid-September ([Syria in Context](#) 16/09/2020). However, face-mask covering in public spaces became mandatory

across all areas in, with those in violation facing a SYP 1,000 fine ([OCHA & WHO](#) 02/09/2020). Adherence to this directive was reportedly extremely limited, even among Syrian authority officials ([NES NGO Forum](#) 13/09/2020). The 2020–2021 school year, initially postponed from late August to early October, started mid-October ([NES NGO Forum](#) 01/10/2020).

In the northwest, schools reopened mid-September, after only a temporary reopening in June ([SOHR](#) 24/09/2020). However, in September, the Syrian Interim Government in Aleppo announced the closure of public utilities, cafés, and restaurants in the town of Jarablus ([The Syria Report](#) 16/09/2020). Authorities in Idlib also decided to close restaurants, wedding halls, gyms and public swimming pools, in addition to preventing access to some non-food markets, due to the large increase in the number of COVID-19 infections, from 20 to 30 October ([SOHR](#) 20/10/2020).

## November 2020–January 2021: Spike in cases led to further restrictions, with a 3-month partial lockdown in the northeast

Following an acceleration of reported cases and low community compliance, tighter containment and public health restrictions were imposed in December 2020 in both GoS-controlled areas and the northeast, with mandatory face-mask wearing in public ([OCHA & WHO](#) 23/12/2020) and higher fines for non-abiders to the policy ([Sham FM](#) 15/12/2020, [AANES](#) 05/12/2020, [Al-Khabar](#) 02/12/2020).

In GoS-held areas, rising cases in schools led local authorities to shut down education facilities. Three schools were closed on 08 November in Aleppo city and all schools were closed mid-December for two weeks in Dar'a governorate as well ([Enab Baladi](#) 10/12/2020). Overall containment measures were also tightened in December in most governorates for a month, with new limitations imposed on gatherings, such as weddings and funerals ([Al Watan](#) 17/12/2020, [Sham FM](#) 14/12/2020, [Al-Khabar](#) 02/12/2020). Public health measures were more strongly enforced, with the penalty of arrest for anyone not complying in As-Sweida governorate ([Al Watan](#) 28/11/2020). While new restrictive measures were put in place, travel remained relatively unimpeded. Domestic airports in Aleppo, Latakia and Qamishli reopened at a rate of four flights per day on 21 December, with no PCR test required for domestic travel ([SANA](#) 01/10/2020, [Syria TV](#) 21/12/2020, [Syria TV](#) 16/12/2020). Aleppo international airport resumed its services, with a flight from Aleppo to Lebanon on 15 January 2021 ([Enab Baladi](#) 27/01/2021).

In the northeast, a partial lockdown was reinstated by the Autonomous Administration following a rise in cases on 30 October 2020, the lockdown was extended for 3 more months until 04 February 2021. Public health measures, such as mandatory facemasks in public spaces were re-imposed ([AANES](#) 09/11/2020, [OCHA & WHO](#) 09/11/2020). All major markets and public facilities were ordered to close, except shops selling food and restaurants (for takeaway orders only). Places of worship were closed as well, except for Friday prayers and Sunday mass, and public gatherings were also prohibited ([OCHA & WHO](#) 09/11/2020). Education facilities were allowed to open as long as strict health procedures were implemented ([AANES](#) 05/12/2020, [AANES](#) 21/11/2020). A complete lockdown was also imposed in Al-Hassakeh, Ar-Raqqa, Tabqa, and Qamishli cities for 10 days on 26 November ([AANES](#) 05/12/2020, [AANES](#) 21/11/2020). Authorities continued to require all citizens to wear masks in public transports and weekly prayers and use personal protection measures ([AANES](#) 20/01/2021).

In the northwest, as nearly 60% of all cases were reported in Idlib governorate and over a third of all cases in Idlib sub-district, local health authorities extended the temporary precautionary measures, such as the closure of markets, and suspended in-person schooling early November ([OCHA](#) 18/11/2020). While briefly reopening, education facilities were closed again mid-December for a month and transitioned to online distance learning. ([OCHA](#) 18/11/2020). Local authorities in the northwest put in place sporadic restrictions in November, at international and internal crossing points through short-term closures or limitations on the number of people allowed to cross ([OCHA & WHO](#) 07/10/2020). In January 2021, the Government of Turkey required a negative COVID-19 test for crossing from Syria into the country ([OCHA](#) 12/01/2021).

## April 2021: New restrictions during the month of Ramadan after a few months of easing of measures

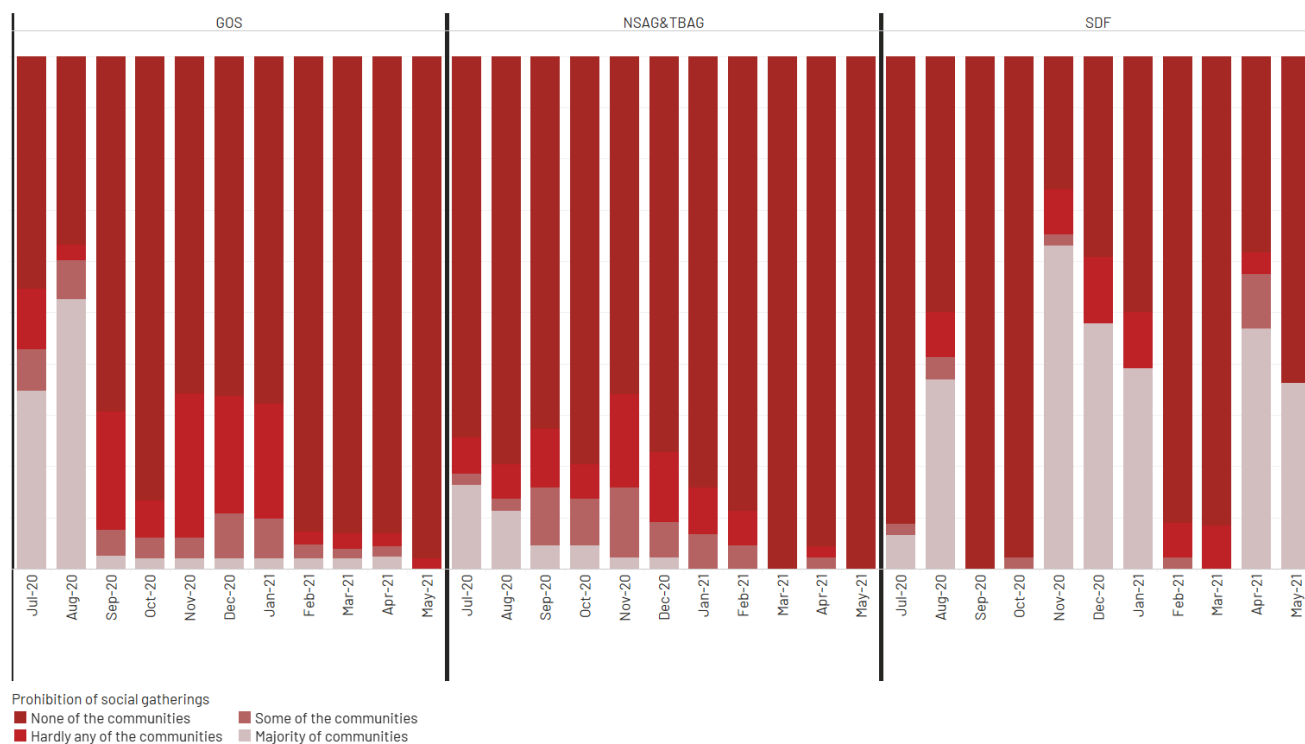
In GoS-held areas, preventive measures were mostly lifted, although some localized restrictions were temporarily reported in April 2021. Most public facilities, including shops and religious places are open, with mandatory precautionary measures ([OCHA & WHO](#) 05/04/2021). In a few sub-districts such as in Tartous governorate, gatherings were prohibited in March ([HNAP](#) 31/03/2021), including the closure of funeral and wedding halls for 15 days at the end of March ([Al Watan](#) 28/03/2021). Several schools had to shut down due to a large surge of cases among children in Damascus ([Reuters](#) 04/03/2021). Public and education offices extended their restrictions on the number of staff present on site until mid-April and continued implementing reduced working hours ([The Syria report](#) 07/04/2021). The tourism and hospitality sectors remained suspended until 24 April ([Ministry of tourism](#) 15/04/2021).

In the northeast, following a surge in cases in April and ahead of the month of Ramadan, new restrictions were implemented in the region, including a combination of full and partial lockdowns ([WFP](#) 17/05/2021). Curfews and lockdowns were imposed between 06 April and 16 May, resulting in the closure of all schools, universities, markets, and non-essential services. Gatherings were also prohibited ([UNICEF](#) 26/05/2021, [ANF News](#) 05/05/2021, [AANES](#) 03/04/2021). Mandatory wearing of face masks was reintroduced, after having been lifted two months prior, under the same SYP 1,000 penalty ([AANES](#) 03/04/2021). However, this sudden change in containment policy resulted in lower compliance rates compared to the previous lockdown ([NES NGO Forum](#) 07/04/2021). Since mid-May, shops, schools and religious places have reopened and mass gatherings are no longer prohibited.

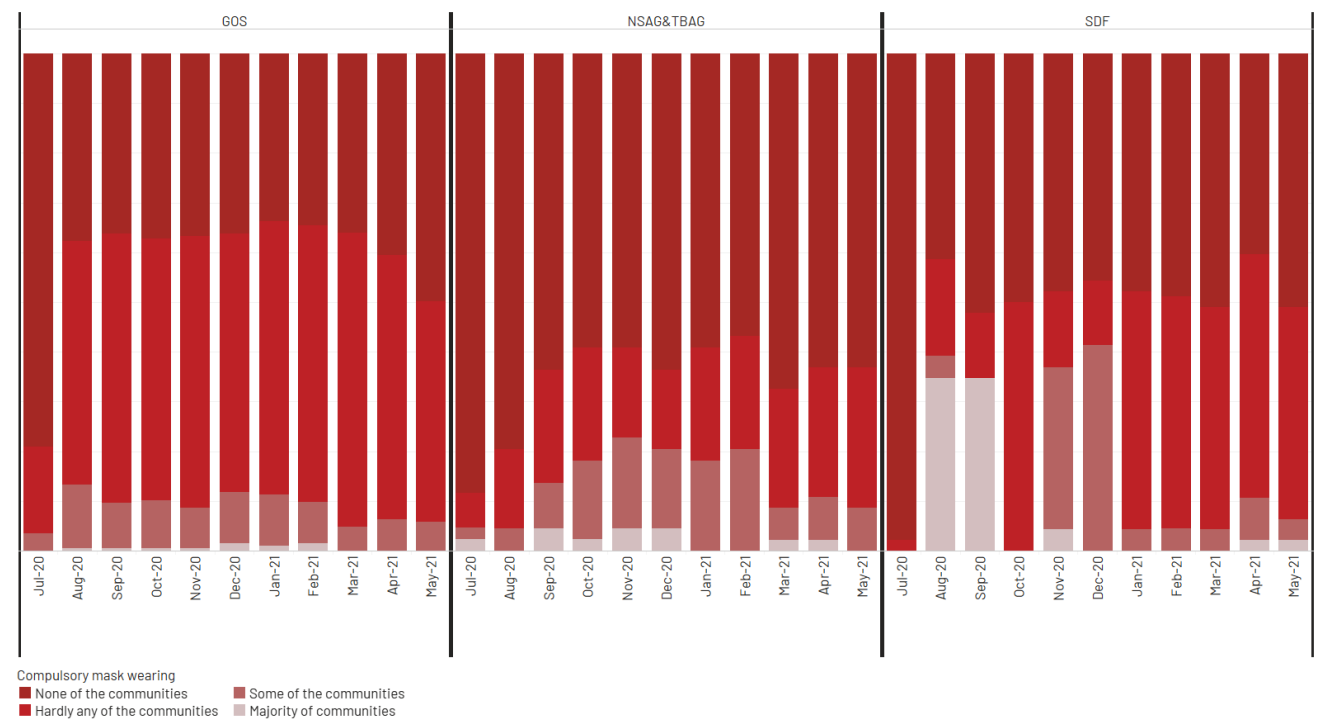
In the northwest, following the implementation of a lockdown during the month of Ramadan in Turkey mid-April to mid-May, Bab al Hawa crossing point was closed from 30 April to 16 May 2021 ([Bab Al Hawa Border Crossing Administration](#) 26/04/2021), however the movement of commercial and humanitarian trucks continued during this lockdown period ([UNICEF](#) 26/05/2021).



**Figure 5.** Proportion of sub-districts with prohibition of social gathering reported by community focal points ([HNAP](#) COVID-19 Rapid Assessment 27/07/2020 to 24/05/2021)



**Figure 6.** Proportion of sub-districts enforcing mask-wearing as reported by community focal points ([HNAP](#) COVID-19 Rapid Assessment 27/07/2020 to 24/05/2021).



# DISPLACEMENT

## Decreased IDPs flows, with access to resources becoming the main pull factor among newly displaced people in 2021

Due to a combination of less severe conflict dynamics and a wider ability to return following the end of the major offensives in early 2020, and COVID-19 restrictions increasing the barriers for international movements, displacement flows significantly decreased from March 2020 onward. Between March 2020 and March 2021, there were less IDPs reported cumulatively than in the entire month of February 2020. From December 2020 until June 2021, more than 90% of estimated displacement was reported to be within Aleppo and Idlib governorates, in the northwest.

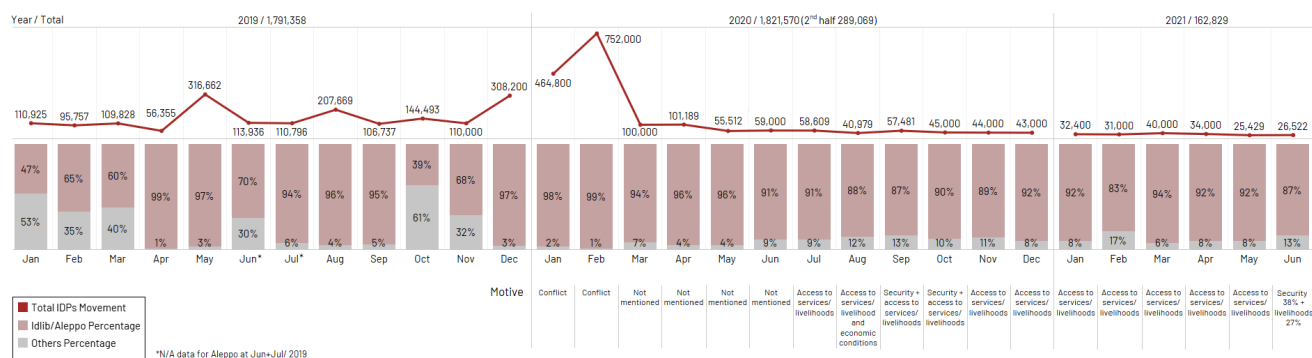
As 13 of the 29 land border crossings have been fully closed since July 2020, cross-border movements have also seen a sharp drop. Only about 900 people left Syria between March and August 2020, compared to almost 6,800 during the same period in 2019 ([WFP & IOM](#) 09/11/2020).

2019 and early 2020, while access to services and livelihood opportunities became the main incentive in the second half of 2020. The security situation was by far the main push factor for the population displaced for the first time in 2020 (about half of all IDPs), for those displaced four or more times, the main reason (34%) for the latest displacement was related to the economic deterioration. This finding was also confirmed in April and June 2021, with more than 90% of the newly displaced having been displaced three or more times ([HNAP](#) 05/07/2021, [Shelter & NFI](#) 09/06/2021). The deterioration of the economy was also the dominant push factor for the latest displacement for IDPs households in GoS-held areas, such as Tartous (96%) and Latakia (77%) governorates, whereas it was less commonly quoted amongst displaced persons in the northeast ([HNAP](#) 16/12/2020).

Conflict and insecurity drove most of the displacement in

**Figure 7.** IDPs movements and motivations ([HNAP](#) 2019–2021)

IDPs movements

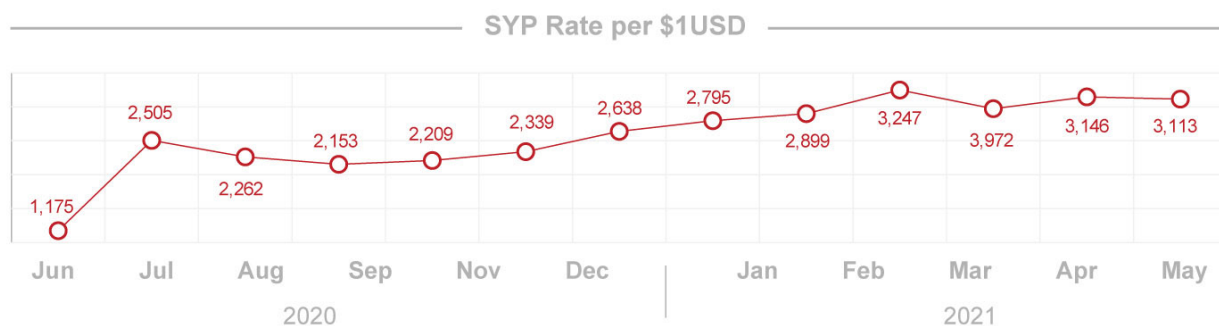


# ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

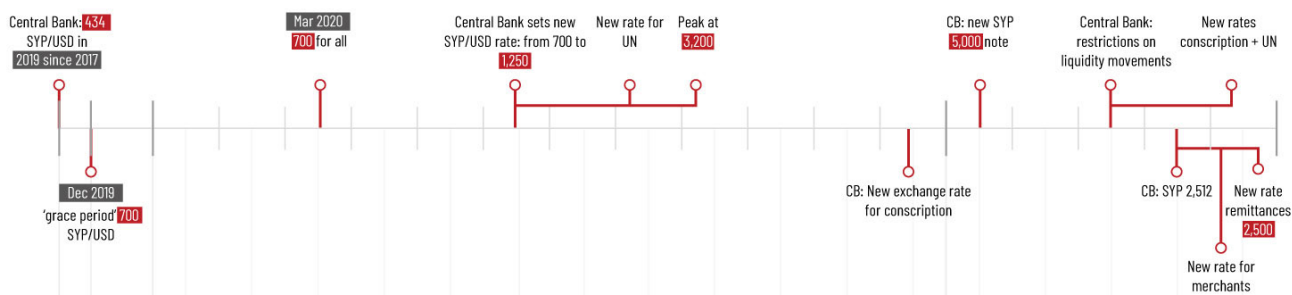
Pre-existing and underlying economic fragility in Syria along with the multiple shocks that occurred since 2019, notably driven by the economic crisis in Lebanon, had already greatly weakened the Syrian economy. However, this degradation accelerated in 2020 with COVID-19 related restrictions, which further eroded the livelihood situation of most Syrians, heavily impacting employment opportunities across the country, driving up inflation and constraining imports. The US sanctions, which came into effect in June 2020, significantly contributed to the devaluation of the Syrian Pound and the spiraling economic crisis. Rising prices and decreasing purchasing power, coupled with job losses, compounded by the dire impacts resulting from a decade of conflict, such as mass displacements and the erosion of essential infrastructure, deeply undermined the humanitarian situation ([HNAP](#) 08/2020, [WFP](#) 22/10/2020).

# Significant devaluation and volatility of the informal Syrian Pound

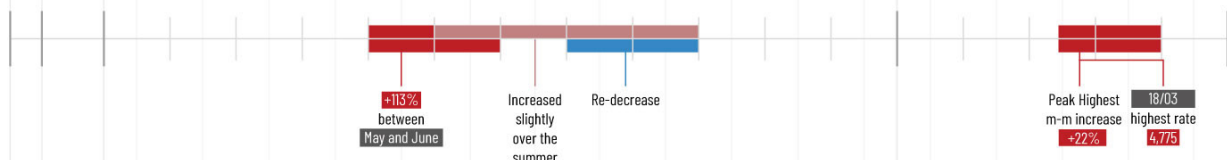
**Figure 8.** Monthly average currency exchange rates ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-05/2021)



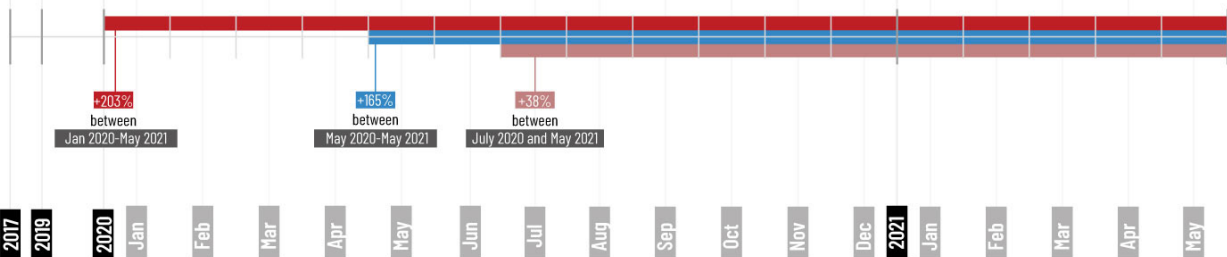
## Significant Events



## Trends



## Annual Change



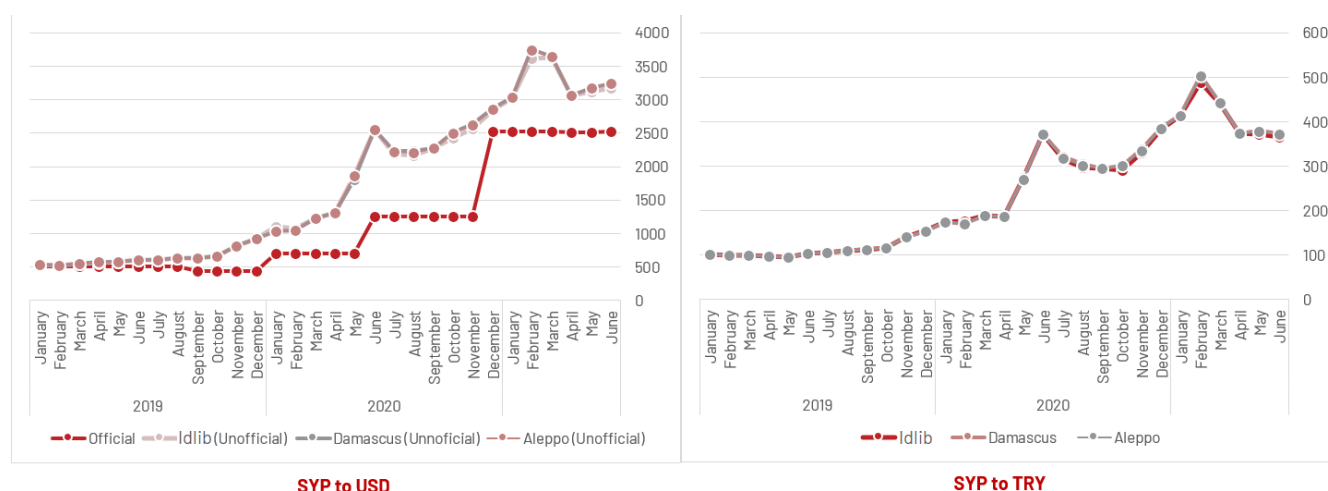
One of the biggest shocks for the Syrian economy has been the sharp devaluation and volatility of the informal value of Syrian Pound relative to the US Dollar exchange rate. For most of 2019, the informal exchange rate was slightly above the official rate – at SYP 535 per USD 1 in January and SYP 668 in November 2019. With the start of the Lebanon economic crisis at the end of 2019, the value of the Syrian Pound started to decrease, reaching SYP 1,028 per USD 1 in January 2020 ([WFP mVAM 01/2019-12/2019](#)).

The combined effects of COVID-19 related restrictions imposed from March to May 2020 and in June, along with the US Caesar sanctions led the exchange rate to devalue even more. As a result, the Central Bank of Syria was forced to devalue the official exchange rate from SYP 700 per USD 1 to SYP 1,250 – the second devaluation since November 2019 ([WFP 15/09/2020](#)). Consequently, between May and June 2020, its value decreased by more than 110% in the span of one month, reaching SYP 2,505 per USD 1. Infact,

the Syrian Pound devalued faster in the first six months of 2020 than it had at any point in the previous nine years ([Reuters 04/06/2020](#)). While it increased slightly over the summer, it started to decrease again in September and kept dropping over the following months. Although the official exchange rate remained the same, the Central Bank issued a new exchange rate in December for conscription exemption payments, at SYP 2,550 per USD 1 ([Enab Baldi 14/12/2020](#)).

In January 2021, the US administration announced the continuation of sanctions against Syria to reduce flows of funding to the government ([Enab Baladi 04/01/2021](#)), which led to even further devaluation. In an effort to counter the negative effects, the Central Bank introduced a new banknote of SYP 5,000. Although this only resulted in further collapse of the exchange rate ([The Syrian Observer 25/02/2021](#)).

**Figure 9.** SYP/USD vs. SYP/TRY exchange rate on the first of each month in Damascus, Aleppo and Idlib ([sp-today 26/07/2021](#); [Central Bank of Syria 26/07/2021](#))



The Syrian Pound exceeded its June 2020 benchmark in November 2020 and reached its lowest value in mid-March 2021 with SYP 4,775 per USD 1. As a result, the Central Bank restricted liquidity movements among governorates to SYP 1 million and bank withdrawals to SYP 2 million in March ([Zaman Al Wasl 22/03/2021](#), [Reuters 28/03/2021](#)). It also launched two new exchange rates: the first one for INGO and UN agencies, placed at SYP 2,500 per USD 1, and the second applying to the conscription fees, at SYP 2,250 per USD 1 ([The Syria Report 23/03/2021](#)). Despite these measures, the value of the SYP continued to decrease, forcing the Central Bank to raise the official exchange rate yet again, to SYP 2,512 per USD 1 in April ([The Syria Report 23/03/2021](#)) and launched a new exchange rate for importers, merchants and manufacturers at SYP 3,375 per

USD 1 ([The Syria Report 14/04/2021](#)). As a result, the value of the SYP strengthened slightly from April and increased by 20% compared to March 2021, reaching SYP 3,113 per USD 1 in May, almost at similar levels than a year prior, in June 2020 ([WFP mVAM 06/2020-05/2021](#)).

Due to the high volatility of the SYP and its higher dependency on cross-border trade with Turkey, the Turkish Lira was quickly adopted in the northwest as an official currency in August 2020 ([WFP 08/2020](#)). Since December 2020, more than 90% of vendors report the use of different currencies to avoid losses ([REACH Initiative Market Monitoring NES/NWS 08/2020-06/2021](#)).

## Significant contraction of GoS 2020 revenues and 2021 budget

The lockdown measures imposed in early 2020 resulted in significant economic losses, estimated to be 1 trillion Syrian Pound per month in GoS-held areas (based on April-May SYP value), representing almost half of the 2021 Syrian Government budget ([Al Watan](#) 11/04/2020, [Atlantic Council](#) 01/12/2020). Consequently, the total 2020 revenue was 83% lower than the pre-war budget of 2010 and the budget for 2021 was the smallest since 2010, due to the depreciation of the currency ([Atlantic Council](#) 01/12/2020). However, as there is no tax revenue, no inflow of foreign currency through tourists and expatriates, and no foreign currency channels left, it is unlikely that it will be able to repay them, resulting in higher interest payment rates in the future ([Mercy Corps](#) 25/01/2021, [The Syria Report](#) 25/11/2020). Despite USD 30 to 105 billion in lending from Iran since the beginning of the war ([Atlantic Council](#) 01/12/2020), the 2021 budget will have to result in additional austerity measures in GoS-controlled areas, with a planned reduction in the allocation of salaries, wages, social support nets and subsidies ([Enab Baladi](#) 07/01/2021). Already in 2020-21, the GoS had to significantly cut its bread and fuel subsidies, driving up food prices and insecurity ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-06/2021). Despite this concerning economic situation, the GoS increased the minimum salary for state and private workers in 2020-21, which will likely further indebt the budget, with no additional revenue streams in sight. Further, in February 2021, the GoS allocated a financial grant of SYP 50,000 to its employees and SYP 40,000 to elderly citizens with lower access to health services, namely those affected by COVID-19 ([Al Jazeera](#) 16/03/2021, [Protection Cluster](#) 11/02/2021). Similarly, following the rise in subsidized bread and fuel prices in July 2021, the GoS increased the salaries of state, civil and military workers, as well as the minimum wage of private workers, while also increasing pensions by 40% ([Roya News](#) 11/07/2021). However, these measures are far below the inflation rate and did not provide substantial relief for the affected populations (see [Livelihood section](#)).



## Rising levels of poverty following the economic recession

Due to harsher economic conditions, the number of people in need increased by 20% in 2020, with 13.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance out of 18 million ([HNO](#) 2021). Poverty levels also rose significantly during the same period. While different estimates and figures have been reported, they all point to a serious deterioration in living conditions. According to the UN, while between 80 to 85% of the population was estimated to be living below the poverty line in 2019, this figure climbed to 90% in 2020, with extreme poverty ranging between 55% and 65% ([HNO](#) 2021, [OCHA & WHO](#) 02/09/2020). According to HNAP, by January 2021, 98% of individuals in Syria were found to be living in extreme poverty (with USD 1.90 or less per day), an increase from the 93% recorded one year prior ([HNAP](#) 03/2021). Owing to weak purchasing power and the spiraling devaluation of currency devaluation, a “working poor” category appeared for the first time in 2020, with employed households also mentioning insufficient income to meet their basic needs ([HNO](#) 2021).

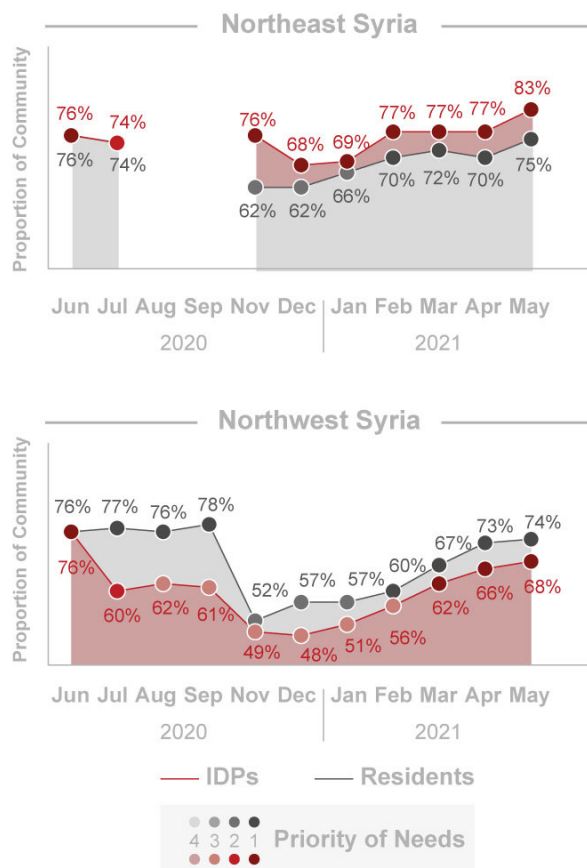
## Worsening living conditions since the start of the pandemic

COVID-19 related movement restrictions and external economic shocks (see the [Economic section](#)) led to direct loss of employment, as well as decreased income and purchasing power. The combination of multiple crises contributed to lowering households' and communities' capacity to cope, keeping the population's resilience to shocks under constant pressure. From March to July 2020, COVID-19 restrictions significantly impacted employment opportunities and pushed up prices, aggravating the humanitarian needs of 11.7 million people, including 6.2 million IDPs.

Most communities reported that living conditions worsened since the beginning of the pandemic, even more so in low-density areas, 96% compared to 82%, in August 2020 ([HNAP 24/08/2020](#)). According to a study conducted at the end of 2020 in three neighborhoods of Damascus, GoS-held area, despite the high average number of weekly working hours for about two-thirds of respondents (52.5 hours), about 45% considered their standards of living to be "low" ([OPC 22/06/2021](#)).

A year after the peak of the restrictions, the lingering effects of COVID-19 restrictions and subsequent economic recession are still palpable, with many households still reporting an impact on their livelihood and living conditions. Inflation and price fluctuations have been a major barrier for accessing key items, with the cost of living in Syria dramatically increasing over the course of 2020-21. Even households with regular income have been adversely affected, as the cost of living has been rocketing. Consequently, many households have been forced to prioritize their spending and choose between food, water, health or abiding by COVID-19 mitigation measures, further exacerbating the humanitarian conditions of the Syrian population. As a result, livelihood has been the first or second priority need in northern Syria among both residents and IDPs, throughout June 2020 to May 2021. Since February 2021 for the northeast and March for the northwest, livelihood ranked as the first top priority need for both population groups ([REACH Initiative NES/NWS HSOS 06/2020-05/2021](#)).

**Figure 10.** Communities reporting livelihood as priority need in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative NES/NWS HSOS 06/2020-05/2021](#))



# Significant decrease of purchasing power throughout 2020-21

## LOSS OF INCOME

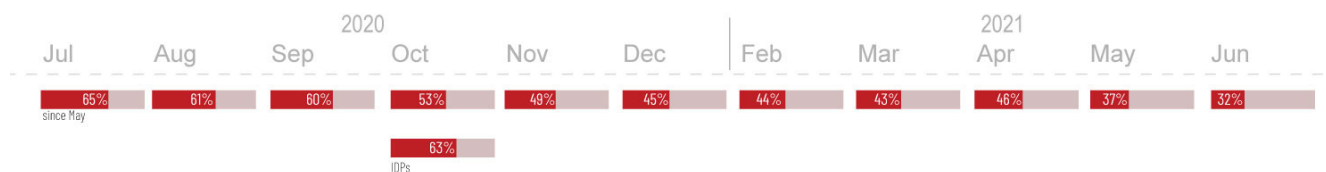
COVID-19 resulted in significant losses of income. According to WFP data, more than half of surveyed households reported the loss of at least one source of income every month due to COVID-19 from May to November 2020. While the rates have decreased since then, more than a third reported similar issues as of May 2021. The highest impact was felt during the summer of 2020 (July-August) where out of the more than 60% of households reporting losing income due to COVID-19, more than 25% reported losing more than 75% of their income ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-06/2021](#)). Further, 35% of assessed households, who had previously reported no change in their income sources over the past six months, reported losing one or more sources of income for the first time in April 2021, highlighting continued economic deterioration due to COVID-19 ([WFP mVAM 04/2021](#)). About 20% of households also mentioned a reduction of revenues from business activities or agricultural sales in May 2021 and more than 40% reported the same in June, reaching more than 50% in Homs and Tartous governorates, both of which are GoS-held areas ([WFP mVAM 05/2021](#), [WFP mVAM 06/2021](#)).

Regionally, the effects were even more significant in As-Sweida governorate, another GoS-held area, which recorded a 75% share of surveyed households who reported loss of income in July 2020, of which a third lost almost all, and still almost 50% in May 2021, of which 10% lost almost all income. The northeast was particularly affected as well, with Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hassakeh governorates recording similar striking rates. Close to 70% of surveyed households in Ar-Raqqa governorate in September 2020 reported loss of income and more than 55% reported the same in April 2021. Similarly, in Al-Hassakeh governorate, 55% of surveyed households reported such challenge in November 2020, a rate that remained approximately the same (52%) in May 2021, of which close to 20% lost almost all their income ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-06/2021](#)).

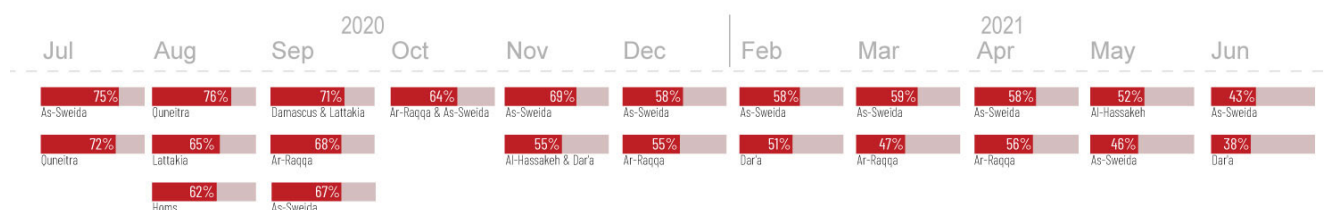
Displaced populations were also significantly impacted, due to their higher economic vulnerability, with more than 60% of surveyed IDPs reporting the loss of at least one source of income in October 2020 and still more than 50% of them reporting the loss of almost all of their income as of April 2021. While poorer households felt such impact more significantly, all social classes have been affected. Close to 50% of surveyed households whose breadwinner has a university degree reported losses of income in October 2020 and close to 40% reported the same in March 2021 ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-06/2021](#)).

**Figure 11.** Households reporting loss of sources of income due to COVID-19 across Syria ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-06/2021)

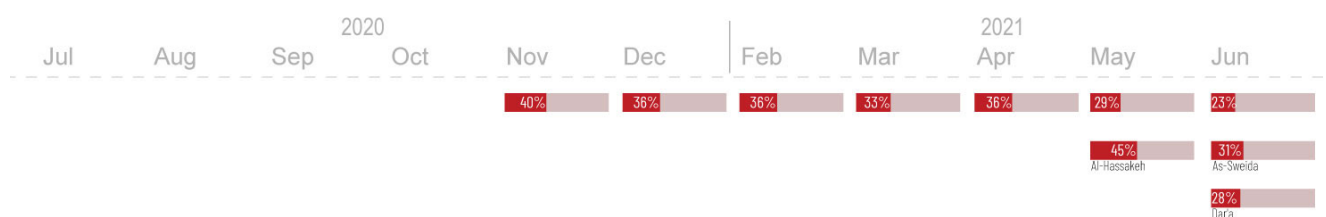
### HH reporting loss of one or more sources of income due to COVID



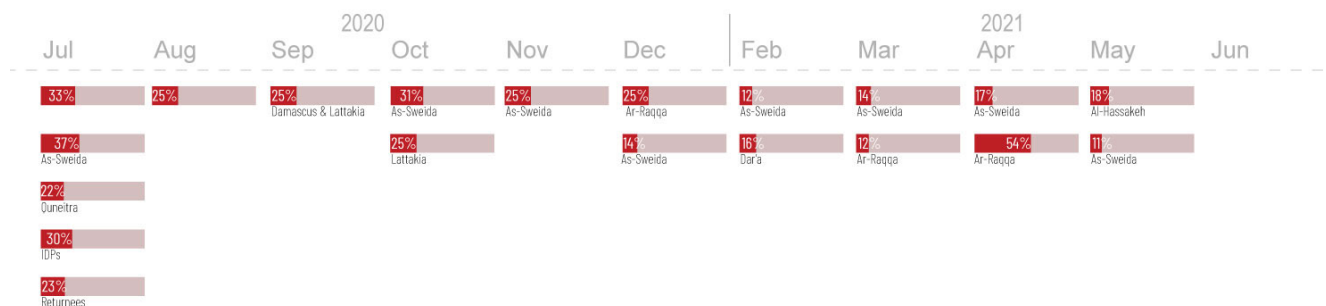
### Highest rates governorates



### of which lost more than half



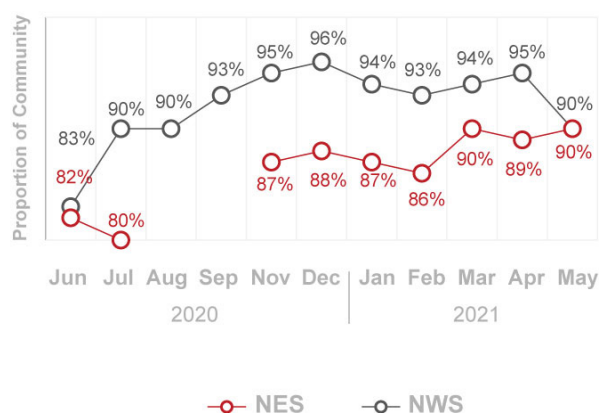
### of which lost almost all (more than 75%) - Highest rates governorates



## INCOME IS INSUFFICIENT FOR MOST HOUSEHOLDS

In 2020, the proportion of households reporting their income was not enough to cover their basic needs increased significantly, by more than 35% ([HNAP 24/08/2020](#)). According to REACH Initiative, about 90% of communities across northern Syria reported insufficient income or low wages as barriers to meet basic needs between June 2020 and May 2021. Both regions witnessed an increasing trend starting from the summer 2020 until April 2021, with the highest share of households reporting such challenges in the northwest in December 2020 and April 2021 in the northeast respectively, highlighting the continuous effects of COVID-19 restrictions and economic recession ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020-04/2021](#)).

**Figure 12.** Communities reporting insufficient income or low wages as barriers to meet basic needs in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020-04/2021](#))



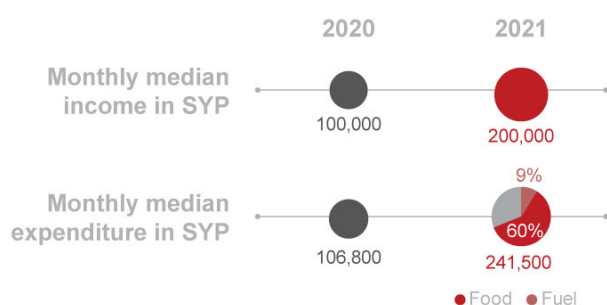
According to HNAP, between January and June 2020, income insufficiency recorded significant increases in Damascus (+79%) and Homs (+75%) governorates, and Al-Hassakeh (+74%) governorate. Northeast Syria was the region most significantly impacted, with a 50% increase in the number of income insufficient households, reaching a total of 78% households reporting such challenges in this area of control, compared to 71% country-wide ([HNAP 24/08/2020](#)). Over the course of 2020, the situation further deteriorated, with 83% of households reporting that their monthly income was insufficient to meet their needs as of January 2021 ([HNAP 12/04/2021](#)). Among households reporting insufficient income, about 60% mentioned their income was significantly or moderately constrained by COVID-19 as of January 2021 ([HNAP 23/03/2020](#)). This trend was also confirmed by the 2020 Multi-Sector National Assessment (MSNA) which found that more than 80% of Syrians reported a significant deterioration in their ability to meet basic needs since August 2019, with close to two-thirds of Syrians being unable to meet the basic household needs by October 2020 ([OCHA 22/02/2021](#)). The situation further deteriorated in 2021, with 95% of households in Al-Hassakeh governorate, in the northeast, reporting a similar issue as of May 2021 ([HNAP 05/2021](#)).

## HIGH INCOME TO EXPENDITURE RATIO

While at the end of 2019 the situation was already difficult, with the average income already being less than the average cost of expenditures, trends exacerbated during 2020. Between January 2020 to January 2021, a 50% decrease in median income was reported, while the expenditure to income ratio increased from 107% to 121% during the same period, highlighting income insufficiency for most households. As of January 2021, a striking 60% of expenditures was for food only and close to 10% was for fuel ([HNAP 12/04/2021](#)).

The situation was even more dire in the northeast, with a close to a 140% increase of the ratio of income vs expenditure during this period, of which a 40% increase occurred in 2021. In the northwest, the SMEB value took an 83% rise, with about a third of this increase taking place in 2021. The ratio of income insufficiency for unskilled labor peaked in June for the northwest and remained at striking levels until November 2020. While the situation slightly improved thereonout, it remained at more than 210%. In the northeast, the situation worsened in February and March 2021, when the ration stood at 200% ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020-04/2021](#)).

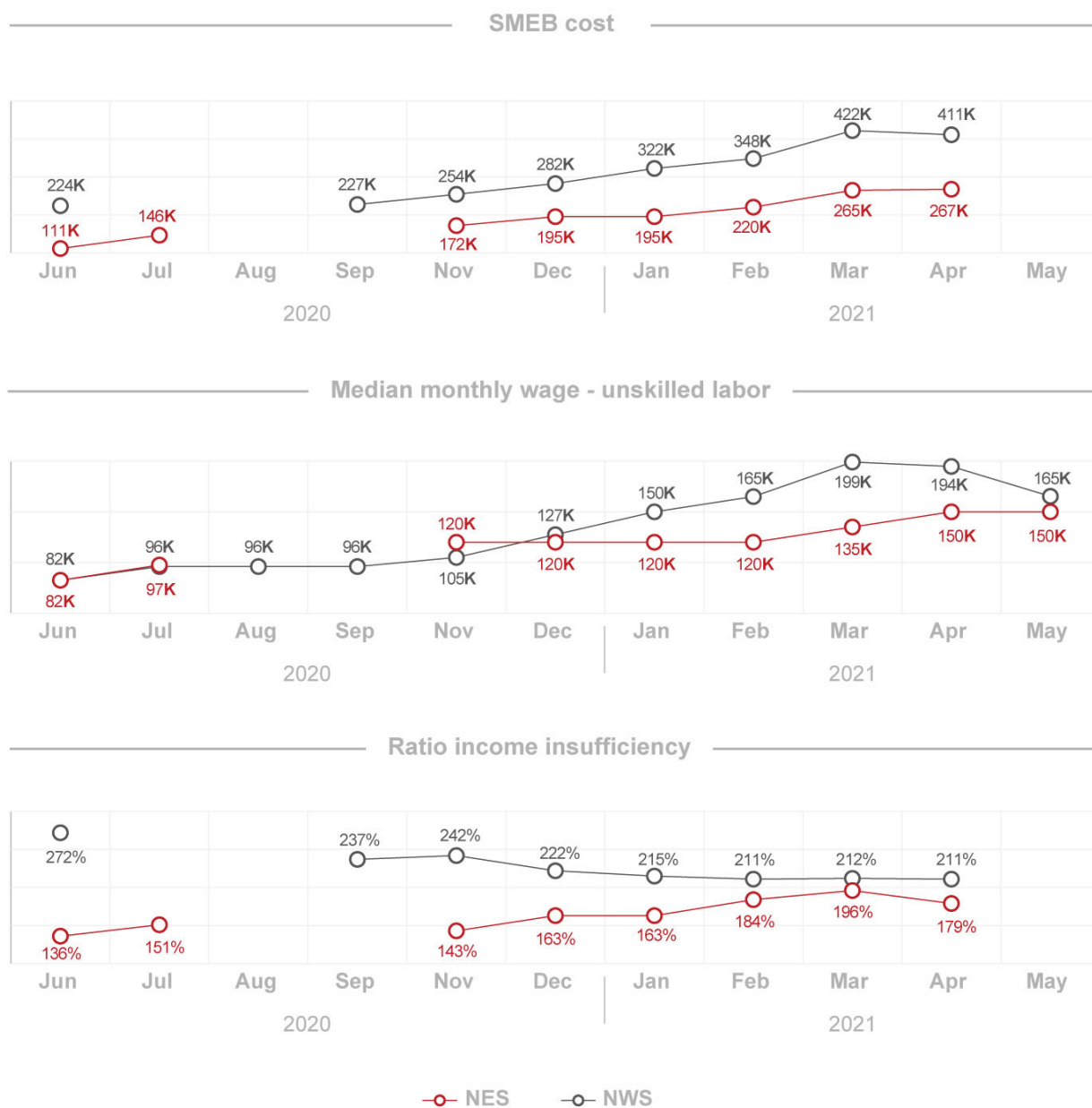
**Figure 13.** Monthly median income and expenditure ([HNAP 12/04/2021](#))



The value of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB)<sup>1</sup>, increased significantly between June 2020 and April 2021. During this period, there was not a month where the average income was enough to cover minimum expenses. In April 2021, the average day laborer would have had to work 70 days in the northeast and 63 days in the northwest to afford the SMEB. While the number of days needed for both regions was higher than 30 at the beginning of 2020, the figures kept increasing throughout 2020-21 ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020-04/2021](#)). Similarly, according to WFP data, the national average Terms of Trade (ToT) between wheat flour and wage labor, a proxy indicator for purchasing power, shows that a non-skilled labor waged worker could only buy 3.3kg of wheat flour in May 2021, compare to close to 5kg in May 2020 and 8kg in May 2019. For livestock owners, the situation also worsened in 2020-21, with a decrease of 65% in ToT between wheat flour and sheep ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-05/2021](#)).

<sup>1</sup> The Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) is the minimum items required to support a 6-person household for a month. It is mainly composed of food stuff, as well as hygiene items, cooking fuel, water and telecom services.

**Figure 14.** SMEB cost in SYP vs median monthly wage for unskilled labor in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020-04/2021](#))

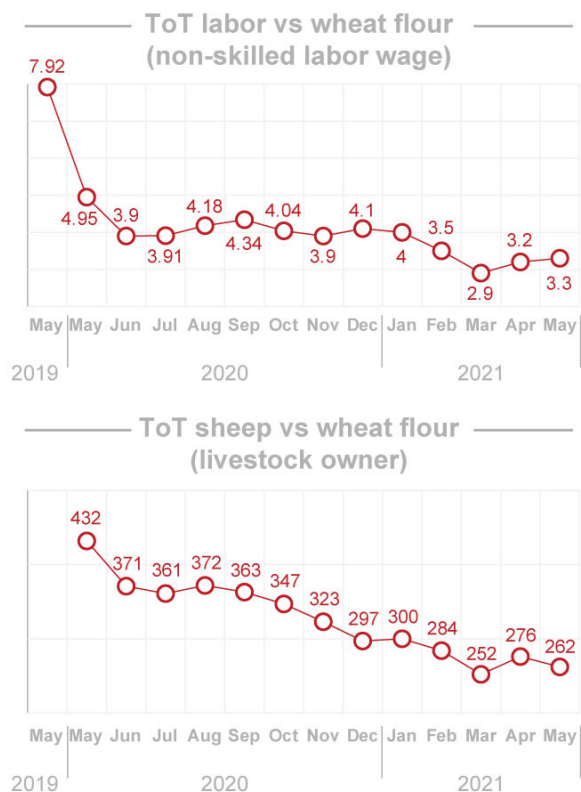




**Figure 15.** Number of days the average day laborer would need to work to earn the SMEB in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020-04/2021](#))



**Figure 16.** Terms of Trade for non-skilled labor wage worker and livestock owner ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-05/2021](#))



## DISPLACED POPULATIONS EVEN MORE VULNERABLE TO LOW INCOME LEVELS

The economic effects of COVID-19 precautionary measures have been felt even more significantly among the informal sector workers, relying on daily income for essential goods and services, notably in the agricultural sector and among IDPs. Displaced populations widely suffer from income insufficiency, particularly those displaced in the past six to twelve months, who reported the lowest national average household income at the end of 2020 ([HNAP 16/12/2020](#)). More than 80% of displaced families across the country reported that they were unable to secure a sufficient income at the end of 2020 ([OCHA & WHO 16/12/2020](#)). Findings from UNRWA socio-economic assessment in June 2020 also highlighted the high impact of COVID-19 and its economic-related consequences on Palestinian refugees, who were already among the most vulnerable groups in the country ([Needs and Response Summary 22/02/2021](#)). More than a third of displaced households are headed by a member with disabilities, significantly affecting these household's ability to secure sufficient economic resources ([HNAP 16/12/2020](#)). Female-headed households were also reported to be especially vulnerable, on average earning 35% less than their male counterparts. In northern Syria, the gap was even wider, with female-headed households' income reported to be close to 60% less than the one of male-headed households in the region ([HNAP 16/12/2020](#)).

## INCREASED RELIANCE ON MULTIPLE SOURCES OF INCOME

Low wages undermined household income and jeopardized their ability to mitigate future economic shocks. This resulted in a trend of increasing reliance on multiple sources of income to be able to meet basic needs. According to a study conducted at the end of 2020 in three neighborhoods of Damascus, GoS-held area, more than 70% of respondents reported that their households depended on two or three sources of income ([OPC 22/06/2021](#)). While daily labor was the main source of livelihood as of end 2020 for more than half of displaced households in northern Syria ([HNAP 16/12/2020](#)), between 90% and 95% of IDPs and between 80% and 85% among residents in the northeast and the northwest were relying on daily labor to complement their income between June 2020 and May 2021 ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020-05/2021](#)).



## SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION IN REMITTANCES FLOWS, FURTHER ERODING HOUSEHOLDS' COPING CAPACITIES

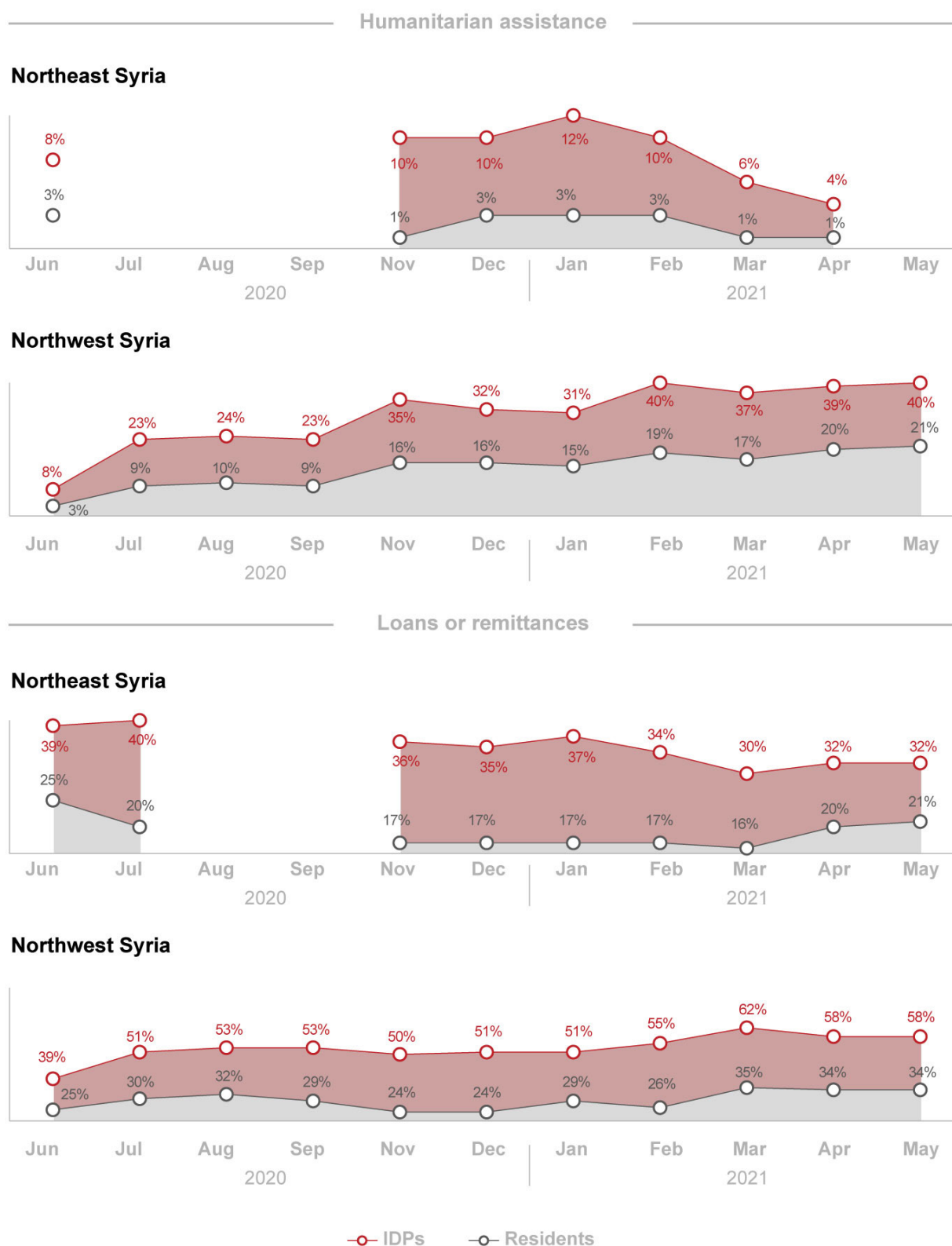
In March 2018, it was estimated that remittances inflows were 36% higher than total wages and salaries in Syria. However, due to the pandemic, labor sectors were heavily affected in the main countries of origin (Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey), resulting in a 50% decrease in the yearly USD 1.6 billion of remittance in 2019/2020 compared to 2017 ([Mercy Corps](#) 25/01/2021, [OCHA & WHO](#) 29/10/2020, [Syria Direct](#) 12/04/2020). COVID-19 related movement restrictions further compounded access to remittances. Throughout May 2020 to May 2021, about 5% of assessed households reported difficulties in obtaining remittances due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions, especially between May and August 2020. Higher rates, up to 14%, were reported in Dar'a, Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor governorates until August 2020 ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-06/2021).

In April 2021, remittances declined even further due to higher fees being charged in GoS-held areas to unregistered hawala offices (an informal international remittances network) ([iMMAP](#) 06/04/2021) and a higher exchange rate imposed by the Central Bank for converting personal remittances received from abroad – SYP 2,500 per 1 USD ([The Syrian Observer](#) 29/04/2021).

While remittance flows decreased in 2020-21, households' reliance on loans, remittances and humanitarian assistance increased, as a result of such losses of income and dire economic conditions throughout 2021-21. Between January 2020 and January 2021, the percentage of households receiving remittances increased from 33% to 45%, highlighting households' lower resilience and livelihood depletion ([HNAP](#) 12/04/2021). In northwest Syria, reliance on loans and remittances increased by 50% among IDPs between June 2020 and May 2021, reaching close to 60% in May. Even among residents, reliance rates increased in the northwest, with a third reporting such sources of livelihood in May 2021. Lower rates were reported in the northeast, even decreasing during the year, reaching about a third of IDPs and 20% of residents ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS](#) 06/2020-05/2021).

Reliance on humanitarian assistance significantly increased in the northwest, with rates climbing sevenfold for IDPs and fivefold for residents, reaching 40% and 21% residents respectively between June 2020 and May 2021 ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS](#) 06/2020-05/2021). Notably, 60% of IDPs in the northwest are completely dependent on humanitarian assistance to cover their food needs ([FSC](#) 10/04/2021). A slight increase was reported in the northeast among IDPs during the lockdown period (November 2020-January 2021), although remaining much lower than the northwest, with only about 10% reporting such sources of income ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS](#) 06/2020-05/2021). With more people unable to meet basic needs, a surge in demand for voluntary spots in camps has been reported in the northeast since January 2021. According to officials at Washokani camp, Al-Hassakeh governorate, interviewed by The New Humanitarian, daily requests to get accepted into the camp have spiked by tenfold in the last six months – from 30 to 300. Overall in the northeast, 15,000 people are on the waitlists to enter camps or receive assistance inside ([The New Humanitarian](#) 28/06/2021). In GoS-held areas, according to one study conducted at the end of 2020 in three neighborhoods of Damascus, close to 26% of respondents said that remittances from friends and relatives abroad were their main source of income and 42% in-kind and cash assistance ([OPC](#) 22/06/2021).

**Figure 17.** Communities reporting reliance on loans/remittances and humanitarian assistance in northern Syria  
([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS](#) 06/2020-05/2021)



## DEPLETION OF RESOURCES

More than 80% of surveyed households reported having depleted their savings throughout the year, with a peak of 88% emerging in September 2020. In Ar-Raqqa and Dar'a governorates, 96% and 90% of households reported the depletion of their resources in July and 90% and 93% in September 2020 respectively. Hama governorate reached an alarming proportion of 91% in June 2021 ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-06/2021](#)). According to the October 2020 MSNA, more than 70% of Syrians took on new debts since August 2019 ([Needs and Response Summary 25/02/2021](#)). Among newly displaced people in the northwest, this share reached more than half of households as of October 2020 ([HNAP 10/2020](#)).

With the increase in credit requests increased, due to high volatility of the exchange rate, traders reported they could not afford to extend credits as much as they had done before COVID-19. Fearing higher repayment default, they reportedly reduced by half the number of people to which they extended credit to in October 2020 ([WFP 22/10/2020](#)).

By January 2021, more than 65% of households were living below or critically below the SMEB, compared to 20% a year prior. Almost half (45%) of households were living below the SMEB, of which 22% living critically below<sup>2</sup>, an increase of more than 150% compared to January 2020. In GoS-held areas, an even more significant spike of 225% increase. Overall, an additional 20% were at risk of falling below the SMEB ([HNAP 12/04/2021](#)) and, considering the deterioration of the economic situation in 2021, are likely to now be even more compromised.

---

2 Living critically below the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) is defined as living 25% below the SMEB ([HNAP](#))

## COVID-19 related restrictions led to significant disruptions on the livelihood sectors

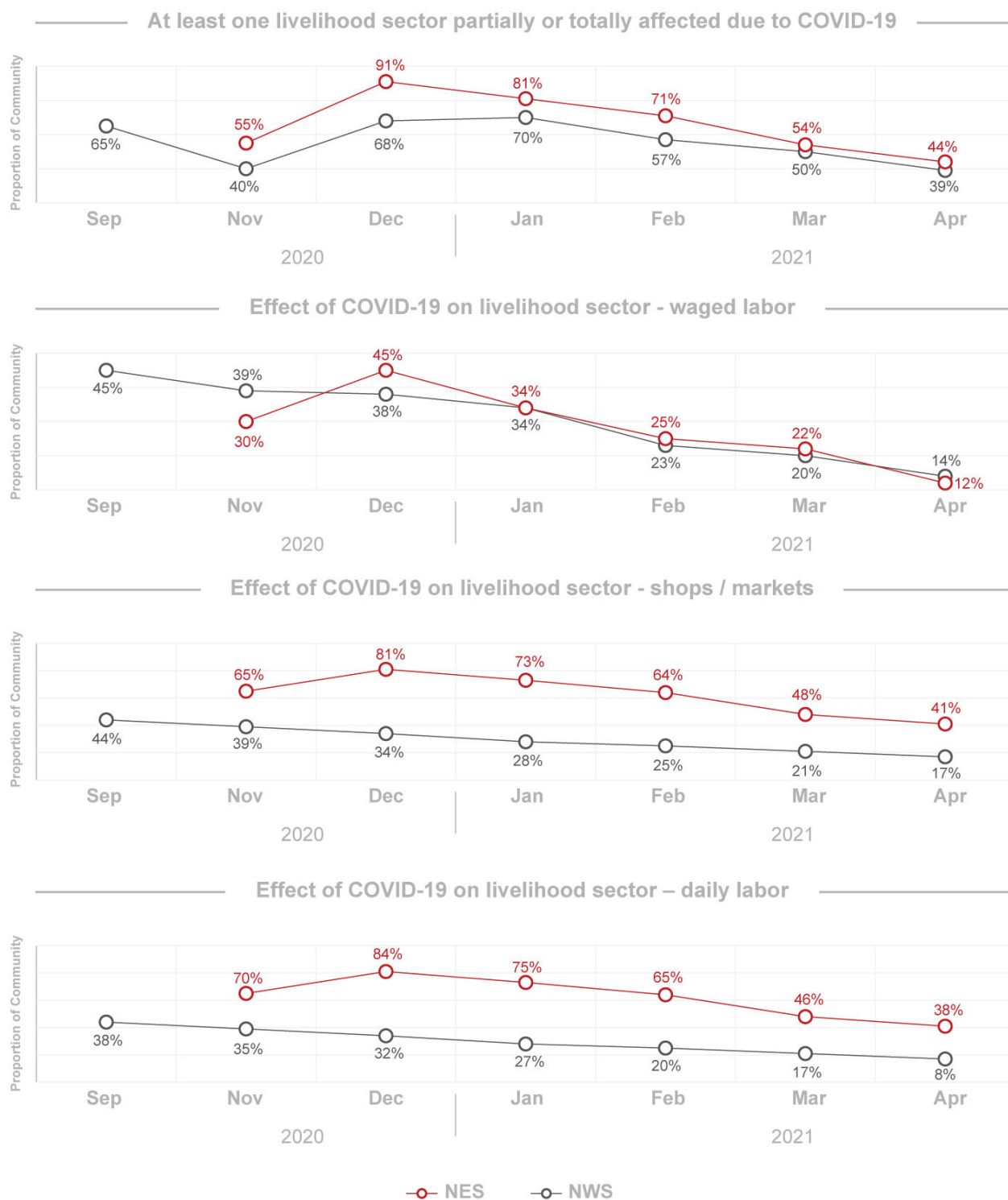
### HIGH RATES OF BUSINESS CLOSURES

As of September 2020, 45% of businesses mentioned having to be closed, 25% operated at reduced levels and 15% were permanently closed ([UN 16/09/2020](#)). Between September 2020 and March 2021, more than half of key informants reported that at least one livelihood sector was partially or totally affected due to COVID-19 in northern Syria. This rate peaked at more than 90% in the northeast in December, halfway through the first lockdown period (November 2020–January 2021), and 70% in January in the northwest. More recently, rates decreased, with about 40% of key informants still reporting a COVID-19 related impact on the livelihood sector as of April 2021 ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 09/2020–04/2021](#)).

With its informal nature inherently vulnerable to disruptions, such as COVID-19 mitigation measures, daily labor was even more affected, especially in the northeast. The lockdown periods resulted in high disruption rates, with 40% of key informants reporting such negative effects as of April 2021 in the region. Daily labor was also affected in the northwest, but to a lower extent, peaking at about 40% in September 2020 and declining thereon to reach less than 10% reporting an effect of COVID-19 on daily labor in the northwest as of April 2021 ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 09/2020–04/2021](#)).

These declining rates do not necessarily reflect an absence of impact but rather a normalization of COVID-19 impacts on the economy. Between January 2020 and January 2021, about a third of households reported COVID-19 as a barrier to employment and the proportion of households reporting ‘no barrier’ to employment decreased by more than 40% in a year, highlighting the economic recession ([HNAP 12/04/2021](#)).

**Figure 18.** COVID-19 impact on livelihood sector in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 09/2020-04/2021](#))



While the proportion of households reporting relying on small business as a primary source of livelihood increased significantly in 2020, this form of income was the most impacted, exhibiting a 37% drop between January 2020 and January 2021. Additionally, revenues from the private sector, the second most reported livelihood activity, shrunk by 26% over the same time period ([HNAP](#) 12/04/2021). The tourism sector also suffered as a result of the pandemic, with the number of tourists decreasing by 80% in 2020 and hotel occupancy dropped, along with revenues, resulting in the closure of more than 2,000 facilities ([Syria Times](#) 10/03/2021). Similarly, the meat industry was also heavily impacted, with butchers reporting an 80% decrease in the sales of lamb meat in September 2020 compared to the year before, due to high prices of meat and low purchasing power ([WFP](#) 22/10/2020).

While overall a negative impact of COVID-19 on employment and livelihood opportunities was reported, its effects varied regionally, depending on the extent and length of the restrictions and lockdown measures. According to a survey by CARE focusing on women, in the northeast, during the first lockdown (November 2020–January 2021), women reported work interruptions and barriers to accessing markets and selling their products. However, women in the northwest reported not seeing a significant impact of COVID-19 on their livelihood as their work was already unstable before the pandemic. A limited number of women reported new job opportunities emerging parallel to the pandemic, such as the production of facemasks ([CARE International](#) 25/02/2021).

## RIISING LEVELS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

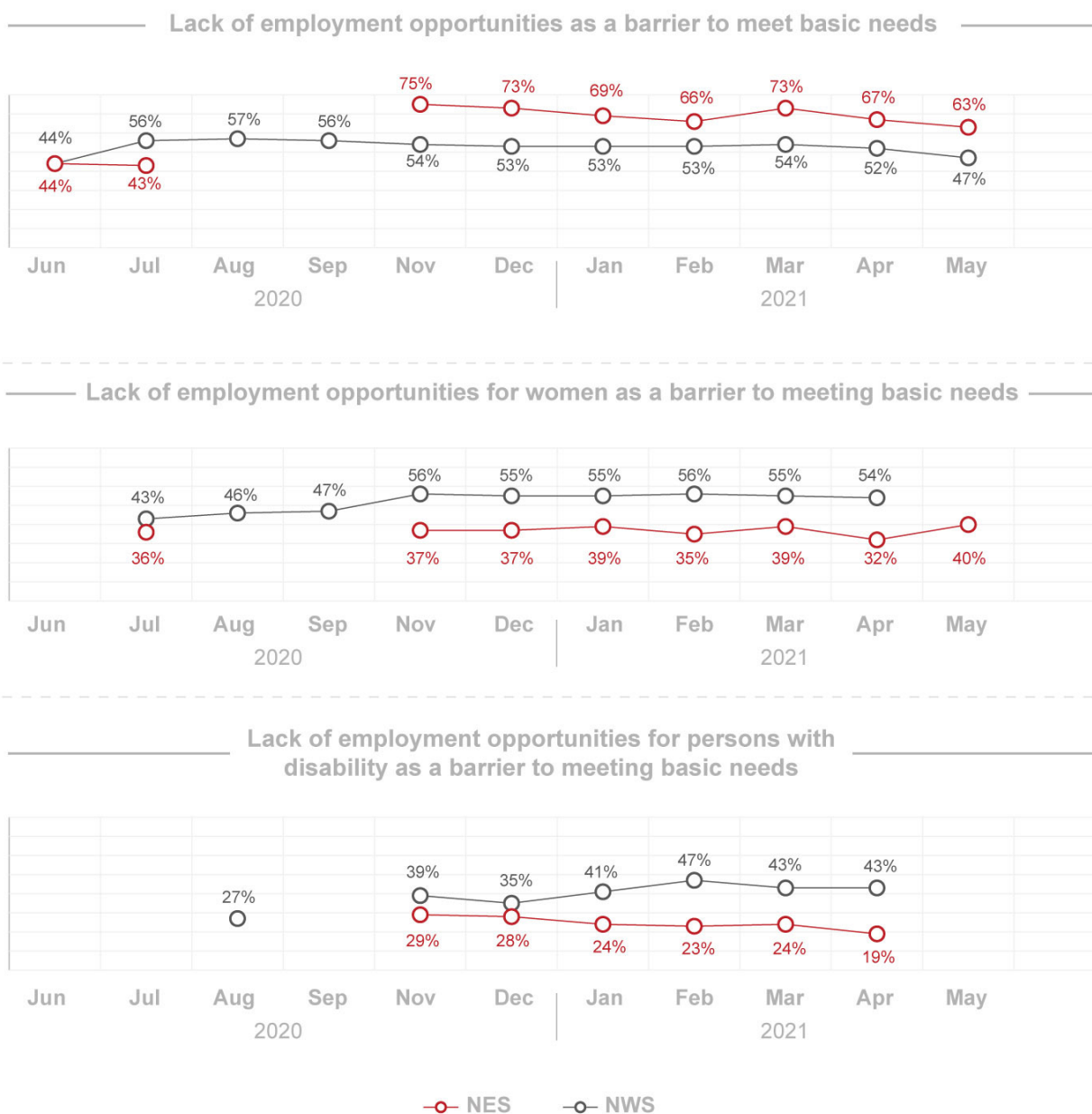
As a result of business closures and job losses, unemployment rates increased from 42% in mid-2019 to close to 50% in August 2020 ([UN Security Council](#) 16/09/2020), of which 60% were among youth as of December 2020 ([OCHA](#) 22/02/2021). An increase of 67% of Syrian households reported no livelihood activities compared to January 2020 ([HNAP](#) 12/04/2021). Rates of unemployment were particularly high among young women, reaching 50% nationwide and 83% in northern Syria ([HNAP](#) 23/03/2021). According to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, more than 320,000 people in GoS-held areas registered for the National Campaign for Emergency Social Response for assistance, primarily due to loss of work, as a result of COVID-19 preventive measures. Of these, 91% were daily laborers, 11% elderly, and 8% people with disabilities ([OCHA & WHO](#) 02/09/2020). Palestinian refugees have also been heavily impacted, with a third mentioning the head of households had lost their job (UNRWA 08/2020 quoted in [Needs and Response](#)

[Summary](#) 22/02/2020).

According to WFP, unemployment was increasingly mentioned as the main problem in 2020–21 by surveyed households across Syria. More than 35% of surveyed households reported this issue in July 2020 and close to 50% in November. Close to 50% of surveyed households reported being impacted by a reduction in the number of working hours, resulting in only partial salary being received in May 2021, with peaks of more than 60% in Aleppo and 55% in Quneitra governorates, and around 30% reported being impacted in June 2021. Displaced populations seem to be even more affected, with more than 40% of IDPs and returnees reporting unemployment as the main problem faced in July 2020 and close to 50% of returnees in December. As with the loss of income, even households whose breadwinner has a university degree have been affected. Close to 60% of this group reported job layoffs in September 2020 and 35% reported the same in May 2021 ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020–06/2021).

In northern Syria, lack of employment was also one of the main barriers to meeting basic needs throughout the year. In the northeast, this issue became even more acute during the lockdown period (November 2020–January 2021) and in March 2021, with more than 60% of key informants reporting lack of employment in communities as a barrier to meet basic needs. This barrier was even more prevalent for women (about a third in 2021), female IDPs (40% in May 2021) and people with disability (more than 20% in 2021). In the northwest, this issue was most reported during the summer (July–September 2020). Since then, the proportion decreased, reaching less than 50% in May 2021, almost similar to the level reported in June 2020. Similar to the northeast, this issue is more prevalent among women, with more than half of key informants reporting it as such group, while among people with disability it averaged higher than 40% in 2021 ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS](#) 06/2020–05/2021).

**Figure 19.** Lack of employment opportunities as a barrier to meet basic needs in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020-05/2021](#))





## FOOD SECURITY

High volatility of the exchange rate, the impacts of the economic crisis in Lebanon, as well as COVID-19-related containment measures led to supply chain and regular-employment pattern disruptions, forced service closures, localized food scarcity, significant increase in food prices and reduced household purchasing power, combined these factors negatively impacted food security ([WFP 07/07/2020](#)). This pressure on vulnerable communities, particularly those who have been displaced multiple times, came at a time when most were already struggling with depleted resources and the cumulative and devastating effects of a decade of conflict and a prolonged economic crisis.

According to WFP, 12.4 million people were food insecure in 2021, representing about 60% of the population, the highest number recorded so far in Syria, a significant increase from the previous 9.3 million food insecure estimated in May 2020. Among these, the number of severely food insecure people more than doubled in 2021 compared to the last year, standing at 1.3 million people ([WFP 22/02/2021](#)). An additional 1.8 million people were estimated to be at risk of falling into severe food insecurity as of January 2021 ([WFP 17/02/2021](#)), and considering the worsening trend since then, the food security situation is likely to have further deteriorated for these households.



## Spike in inadequate food consumption levels in 2020-21

Inadequate food consumption rates<sup>3</sup>, combining borderline and poor food consumption rates, sharply increased in 2020, especially in the second half of the year, and have been continuing on a worsening trend in 2021. While in 2019 the average yearly inadequate food consumption levels was 26.5%, in 2020, the yearly average reached 39%, with a peak at 54% in September. In 2021, over the first six months, the average was even higher, registering 45% while highlighting a serious deteriorating trend in food security across Syria since July 2020 ([WFP mVAM 01/2019-06/2021](#))

Inadequate food consumption levels started increasing in the last 2019 trimester, peaking at 37% in January 2020. Following that spike, rates stabilized around 30% until June 2020. Since then, coinciding with the implementation of the US economic sanctions and the end of a two-month lockdown, inadequate food consumption rates kept increasing sharply. In September 2020, over half the population (54%) reported borderline or poor food consumption, double the rate than a year prior. From October 2020 to March 2021, 60% of households only ate protein fewer than two times a week, half the level than in 2019. Among households with inadequate food consumption, 60% only ate protein once a week in November 2020 ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-06/2021](#)).

While the rates decreased in the last trimester of 2020 and in early 2021, overall the rates remained high (47% on average), climbing to 51% in March 2021. As with every year, the months of Ramadan, April and May in 2021, saw a slight improvement in the food security situation. Households reported an increase in the consumption of animal-source protein in April, on average two times a week. While this was the highest average consumption rate of protein over the past six months, this trend however remained below the levels reported during the month of Ramadan in 2020, when on average households consumed animal-source protein three times a week. While the national average rate of inadequate food consumption decreased by 16% in April 2021 compared to March, the proportion remained around 50% higher than in April 2020 ([WFP mVAM 04/2021](#)). This temporary improvement was already fading away by June 2021, with rates returning to 43% ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-06/2021](#)).

In the northwest, Aleppo governorate recorded the highest rates during the first half of the year. On average,

inadequate food consumption levels are always above 50%. In GoS-held areas, Hama governorate recorded a striking 60% increase between May and July 2020, reaching 60% in January and even 66% in March 2021. The situation is similar in Homs governorate with an average of 50%, peaking at close to 60% in March 2021. In the northeast, Ar-Raqqa governorate recorded a 45% increase between May and July 2020, averaging around 50% since then, peaking at 60% in November 2020 and May 2021. Female-headed households reported more serious issues than their male counterparts, with 54% of such households recording inadequate food consumption in December 2020 and June 2021, about a 10% difference relative to the overall rate ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-06/2021](#)).

In GoS-held areas, according to a study conducted at the end of 2020 in three neighborhoods of Damascus, a decrease in protein intake was reported in 2020 compared to previous years, highlighting unaffordability issues. Egg consumption dropped by almost 50% among respondents, of which a third mentioned it dropped to less than half of what it used to be in 2018. Chicken consumption decreased by close to 70% over the past two years, of which again a third reported their consumption level dropped to less than half of what it was in 2018. Simultaneously, overall rice and bulgur consumption increased slightly to compensate for the lack of protein ([QPC 22/06/2021](#)).

---

3 The food consumption rate is a proxy indicator of household caloric availability, assessing the frequency of household's consumption of eight different food groups over the previous seven days. A household's food consumption can be further classified into one of three categories: poor, borderline, or acceptable ([WFP](#)).

## SHARE OF POOR FOOD CONSUMPTION ALARMINGLY HIGH

In addition to an overall increase in the percentage of borderline food consumption in 2020, the significant deterioration of food security conditions is further highlighted by the increase in the proportion of households with poor food consumption: around one out of four households who had reported borderline food consumption between July and November 2020 were categorized, in December, as having poor food consumption. Similarly, 16% of households who had been reporting borderline food consumption between January and May 2021 reported poor food consumption in June. The overall share of households reporting poor food consumption rates in June 2021 was almost three times higher than in May 2020, reaching 14%, with a peak at 18% in September 2020 and again in February and March 2021 ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-06/2021](#)).

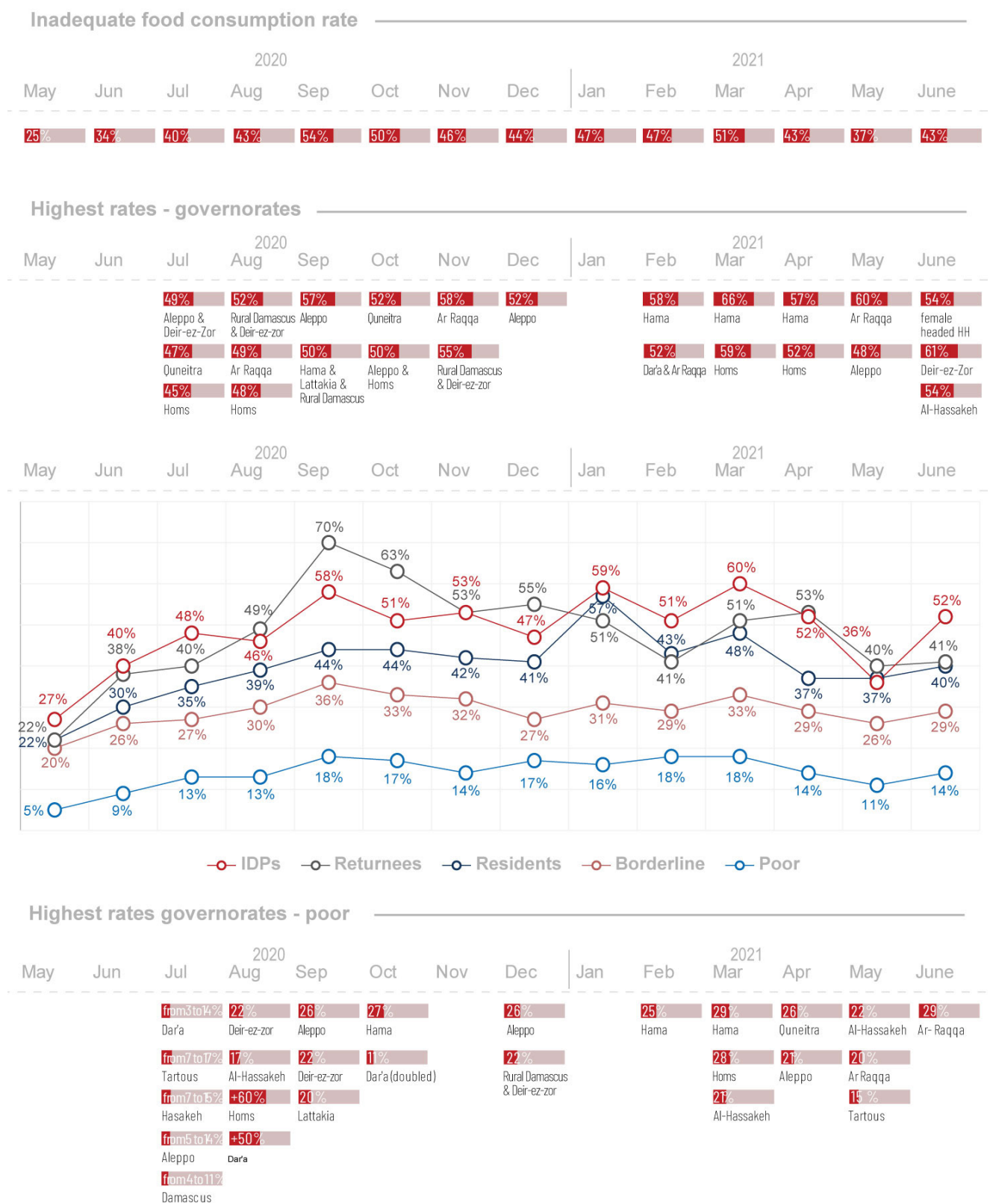
Regionally, similar governorates reporting records high of inadequate food levels reported higher prevalence of poor food consumption rates. The northeast was particularly affected and recorded serious rates of poor food consumption rates. Levels in Al-Hassakeh governorate doubled between May and July 2020 to reach an alarming rate of 22% in May 2021. Similarly, Ar-Raqqa governorate had a striking 26% of households reporting poor food consumption levels in December 2020 and 29% in June 2021. In the northwest, a three-fold increase was reported in Aleppo governorate between May and July 2020, peaking at 26% in September and 21% in April 2021. Households in GoS-held areas are also experiencing precarious conditions, with 30% of households reporting poor food consumption rate in Hama governorate in March 2021 ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-06/2021](#)).

## DISPLACED POPULATIONS FACING HIGHER FOOD NEEDS

Residents recorded an 80% increase in inadequate food consumption rates between June 2021 and May 2020. The rate climbed over 50% for the first time in January 2021 (57%) and recorded a 30% increase in the share of households reporting poor consumption rate in October 2020, reaching 20% in total ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-06/2021](#)).

Rates among IDPs kept increasing between May 2020 and April 2021, with a peak in March reaching 60%. Rates among returnee households almost doubled in a year, peaking in September 2020 to reach an alarming 70%, recording a 42% increase compared to the month prior. In December 2020, a two-fold rise in the share of returnees reporting poor food consumption was registered. Since September 2020, inadequate food consumption levels among IDPs and returnee households have been above 50% for the most part ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-06/2021](#)).

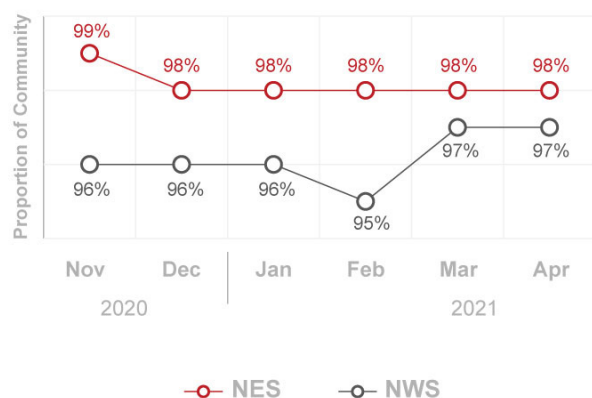
**Figure 20.** Inadequate food consumption rates ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-06/2021)



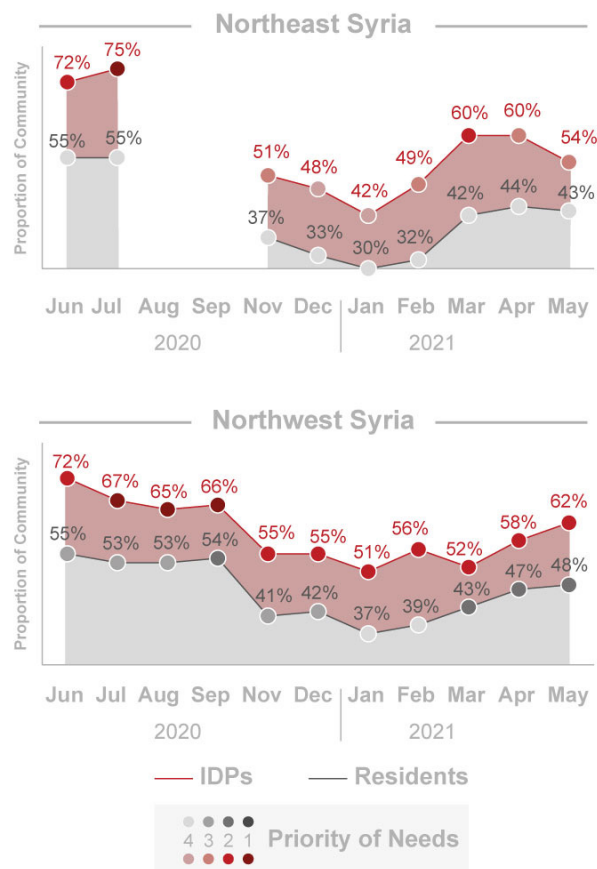
## FOOD AMONG THE MAIN PRIORITY NEEDS

Almost all communities in northern Syria reported barriers to accessing sufficient food throughout the year, resulting in most communities listing food in their top priority needs. More than 50% of KIs reported that food was one of the main needs for IDPs in both northwest and northeast from June 2020 to May 2021. In the northwest, food was among the top 3 priorities for both residents and IDPs during the same period ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 11/2020-04/2021](#)). In GoS-held areas, the share of households reporting food as a priority need climbed from 30% in January 2020 to close to 70% in January 2021 ([HNAP 12/04/2021](#)).

**Figure 21.** Communities reporting barriers to access sufficient food in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 011/2020-04/2021](#))



**Figure 22.** Communities reporting food as priority need in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020-05/2021](#))

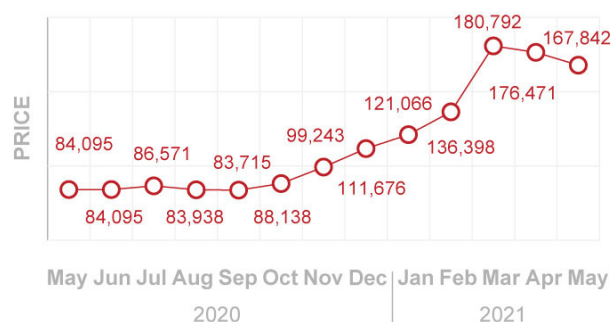


## Increase in food prices leading to unaffordability being the main barrier to access food

Spurred by heavy devaluation and the decision of the Syrian Central Bank to no longer provide USD to food traders for importing commodities from July 2020 onwards, trade from Lebanon and Jordan was reduced. As a result, food prices rose, especially for imported commodities. As of February 2020, the deteriorating SYP/USD informal exchange rate had already led to widespread inflation across all sectors of the Syrian economy, food included. The COVID-19 outbreak and its related government preventive measures added to the already worsening economic situation leading prices to increase even further in March 2020. But even with the lifting of most of these measures, prices continued to rise. Essential food items became increasingly out of reach in 2020, with the cost of basic foods, like bread, rice, lentils and oil and sugar, far exceeding average salaries. The shortage of fuel and bread in bakeries due to wheat flour scarcity, as well as the rationing of subsidized and unsubsidized fuel in GoS-held areas in September 2020, compounded the situation. The Syrian Central Bank announced an average inflation rate of 200% in 2020 compared to 2019, with goods inflation reaching 300% ([WFP mVAM 01/2021](#)).

The national average WFP reference food basket<sup>4</sup> recorded close to a 600% increase between May 2019 and May 2021, with an approximate 100% increase between May 2020 and May 2021. Food basket prices kept increasing from June 2020, exceeding the highest-paid official government monthly salary of about SYP 80,000 ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-05/2021](#)). In December 2020, its cost went above SYP 100,000 for the first time in all governorates ([WFP 12/2020](#)). In March 2021, its value underwent one of its highest monthly increases at 33% ([WFP 03/2021](#)). Due to the strengthening of the SYP, its value slightly decreased in May 2021 but considering the volatility of the currency and expected economic recession, this trend is unlikely to last.

**Figure 23.** Evolution of WFP food basket price ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-05/2021](#))



Similar data was found by REACH Initiative in northern Syria. The cost of the SMEB food component<sup>5</sup> in northern Syria increased significantly between June 2020 and April 2021. Between the two northern regions, the northeast recorded an even higher rise in prices, with the food component rising by close to 140% during the time period, reaching its highest level in April. While in the northwest, a lower change was recorded, where it increased by 81% ([REACH Initiative Market Monitoring NES/NWS 06/2020-04/2021](#)).

<sup>4</sup> WFP standard food basket is a group of essential food commodities set at a group of dry goods providing 1,930 kcal a day for a family of 5 during a month. For Syria, the basket includes 37 kg bread, 19 kg rice, 19 kg lentils, 5 kg of sugar, and 7 litres of vegetable oil.

<sup>5</sup> REACH Initiative Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) food component represents the minimum, culturally adjusted items required to support a 6-person household for a month. This represent 37kg of bread, 15kg of bulgur, 6kg of chicken, 6kg of eggs, 12 kg of fresh vegetables, 7 litres of vegetable oil, 15kg of red lentils, 19kg of rice, 1kg of salt, 5kg of sugar and 6kg of tomato paste.

**Figure 24.** Cost of the SMEB food component in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative Market Monitoring NES/NWS 06/2020-04/2021](#))



All food items in northern Syria recorded significant price hikes, especially eggs (+208% in the northwest and +186% in the northeast) and chicken (+131% in the northwest and +189% in the northeast). Overall, food items recorded price hikes from June 2020 until March 2021, before decreasing slightly in April. In the northwest, potatoes also recorded a significant price increase, +171%, while in the northeast, sugar was among the food items with the highest price rise, +128% ([REACH Initiative Market Monitoring NES/NWS 06/2020-04/2021](#)).

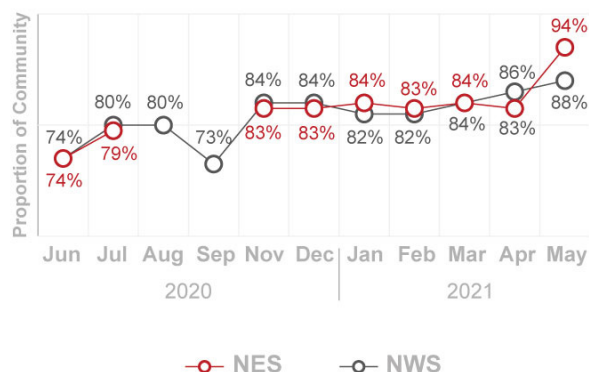
**Figure 25.** Evolution of key food prices in northern Syria (\_06/2020-04/2021)



As the cost of living spiraled, food became too expensive for most households, including households with regular income. Between June 2020 and May 2021, more than 80% of communities on average in the northeast and northwest faced barriers to accessing food while they also reported high cost of food as a challenge. For both regions, the rates peaked in May 2021, reaching almost all communities in the northeast (94%) and in the northwest (88%) ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020-05/2021](#)).



**Figure 26.** Communities which reported high cost of food as a challenge among communities reporting barriers to access sufficient food in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020-05/2021](#))



## Constraints on imports and trade leading to food shortages and unavailability issues

COVID-19 preventive restrictions also influenced cross-border and cross-line commercial activity. Ultimately, international and domestic supply chains were negatively affected ([REACH Initiative 07/09/2020](#)), resulting in availability issues. Road closure reportedly affected food or input supply in 38% of the 35 sites monitored by FAO across the country, mainly in Dar'a and Rural Damascus governorates, GoS-held areas, and Deir-ez-Zor governorate, in the northeast ([FAO 24/09/2020](#)). In the northeast, the import of fresh food products was restricted in 2020, resulting in limited food availability ([Enab Baladi 19/12/2020](#)). In addition, spurred by the heavy devaluation and the decision of the Syrian Central Bank to no longer provide USD to food traders for importing commodities from July 2020 onwards, trade from Lebanon and Jordan significantly diminished ([WFP mVAM 08/2020](#)). Due to high volatility of the informal exchange rate in May/June 2020, wholesalers also reduced their food supply in Syrian markets, causing retailers to temporarily shut-down shops to avoid losing profits, leading to lower capacity to secure basic food items at the household level ([FSC 15/06/2020](#)). The situation was further aggravated in the northwest by the lockdown in Turkey, implemented mid-April 2021, affecting price and availability of basic food items ([WFP 26/04/2021](#)).

In an indicative survey of community focal points, 46% of respondents in low density areas reported that products were less available in August 2020, marking price hikes a primary concern ([GTS & H NAP 24/08/2020](#)). In the northeast, unavailability was reported as a challenge in about a third of communities reporting barriers to

accessing sufficient food between June and November 2020, since then the rate decreased to an average of 20% throughout 2021. In the northwest, a similar trend was observed, with nearly a third of communities mentioning the same challenge in June 2020, before decreasing to an average of 25% by January 2021, then decreasing again to 20% ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020-05/2021](#)).

**Figure 27.** Communities which reported unavailability as a challenge among communities reporting barriers to access sufficient food in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020-05/2021](#))



## SHORTAGES OF WHEAT FLOUR, LEADING TO SHORTAGES IN BREAD AND RISING PRICES

Delays and reduction in cereal imports due to the COVID-19 context led to critical shortages of bread in September 2020, particularly affecting government-controlled areas, especially in Dar'a, Rural Damascus and Damascus governorates ([WFP](#) 29/09/2020). In September 2020, it was estimated that only 58% of the population's minimum bread needs were being met ([FSC](#) 23/09/2020). In Dar'a city, most bakeries shut down or operated at 50% capacity in September (WFP 25/09/2020). In the northwest as well, up to 30% of bakeries were no longer operational ([FSC](#) 23/09/2020). As a result, the GoS reduced bread subsidies, limiting bread packages per household, further exacerbating the dire food needs in the region ([The Guardian](#) 05/10/2020). In September 2020, people reportedly queued for up to four hours to receive their entitlement from public bakeries in rural Damascus governorate (WFP 29/09/2020). The September/October 2020 increases in the food basket price were largely driven by the doubling in subsidized bread prices in GoS-controlled areas ([WFP](#) 28/12/2020).

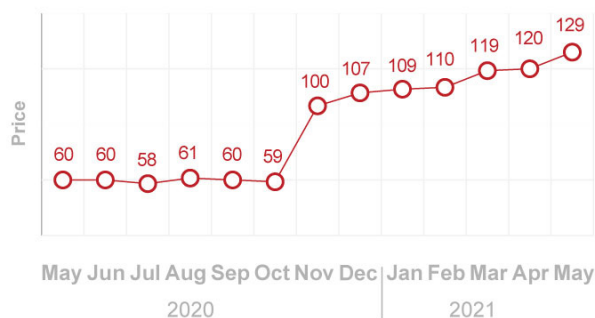
Shortages resulted from the delay in the arrival of 200,000 tons of wheat from Russia and a tender from European countries of the same quantity. Syria imports more than one million tons of wheat annually to meet the estimated need of 2.5 million tons for domestic consumption. However, due to the devaluation of the currency, imports were limited in 2020. Trade was also further limited by US sanctions, resulting in an increase in criminal activity and unofficial trade in the black market instead. The decline in internal wheat production in Syria, from about 4 million tons in 2019 to less than 1.5 million tons in 2020, drove wheat shortages and the increase in prices ([Al Araby](#) 14/09/2020).

Throughout 2020 and 2021, bread shortages continued to be reported across all areas in Syria ([Al Watan](#) 30/01/2021). In January 2021, in Al-Hassakeh governorate, severe flour shortages and subsequent unavailability of bread was reported, due to closure of public mills and most private bakeries ([Syria Times](#) 08/03/2021). Low access to bakeries was also reported in central and south Syria, with a third of households facing access issues, and more than half prioritizing this need for infrastructure ([HNAP](#) 25/03/2021). In Rubkan camp, at the border with Jordan, significant bread shortages were reported at the end of January ([Syria Direct](#) 04/02/2021). Likewise, increase in price of flour led to the closure of 40 bakeries in early March in Al-Hassakeh governorate, namely in the cities of Qamishli, al-Jawadiyah and al-Qahtaniyah, in the northeast ([Syria](#) 07/03/2021). Long queues at bakeries, up to 3 hours, were again reported in June 2021, in Aleppo governorate, in the northwest ([SOHR](#) 17/06/2021).

Following rising prices and shortages of wheat flour, the GoS doubled the price of a bundle of bread in mid-July ([Roya news](#) 11/07/2021), further restricting access to this key staple food. Between May 2020 and May 2021, the price of subsidized bread increased by 115% according to WFP data ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-05/2021).

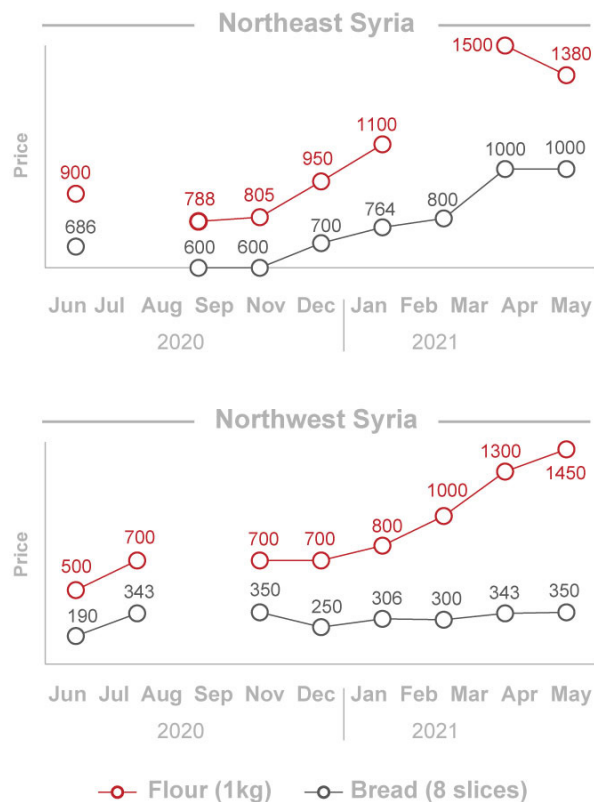


**Figure 28.** Evolution of subsidized bread prices in SYP (per bundle) ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-05/2021](#))



In northern Syria, according to REACH Initiative data, flour and bread prices recorded significant price hikes, especially in the northeast. Overall, between June 2020 and April 2021, flour cost increased by 190% in the northeast, half of which was in 2021, and by more than 50% in the northwest, half of which took place between February and March 2021. As a result, bread prices increased by close to 85% in the northeast, most of which (81%) occurred between June and July 2020, and by more than 45% in the northwest, most of which occurred between February and March 2021 ([REACH Initiative Market Monitoring NES/ NWS 06/2020-04/2021](#)).

**Figure 29.** Evolution of flour and bread prices in SYP in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative Market Monitoring NES/ NWS 06/2020-04/2021](#))



High levels of diversion of subsidized bread and flour were reported across all areas, driving more price increases. Since bread could be sold for 5 to 10 times the subsidized rate on unofficial markets, this reportedly led some state employees to steal and resell bread on the black market, in an effort to compensate for the diminishing value of their salaries ([New Lines Institute 09/02/2021](#)).

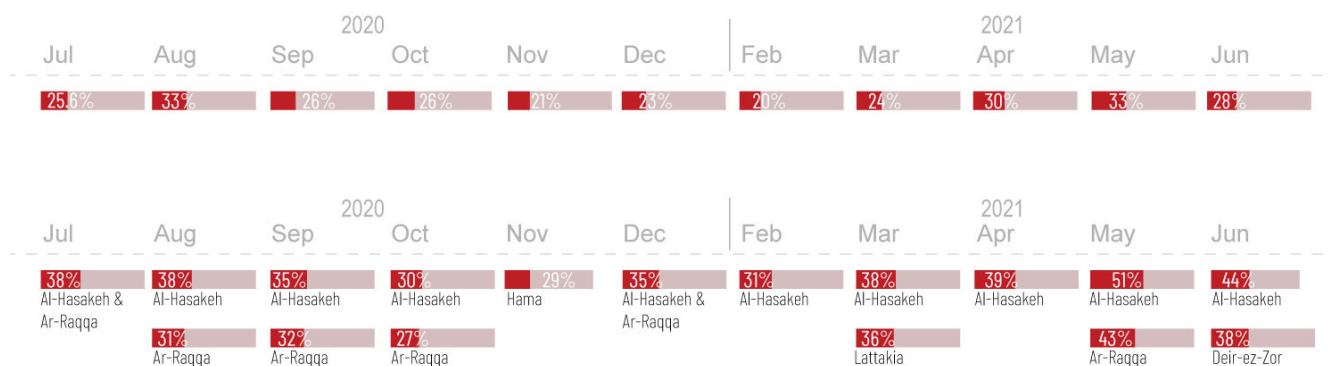
## Reduced access to markets further compounding food security issues

Syria heavily depends on markets for its food security. Already in 2010, over 50% of Syrians lived in urban areas, relying on markets to meet their food needs. This proportion almost doubled in 2019, with almost 90% of Syrians reporting markets as their main source of food ([WFP 22/10/2020](#)). Throughout the year, COVID-19 containment measures impacted the functionality of markets in all areas, decreasing livelihood opportunities as well as reducing the availability and quantity of basic goods, compounding the effects of high inflation.

Compounded by COVID-19 containment measures, more than 20% of surveyed households across Syria reported facing difficulties in reaching markets between July 2020 and June 2021, with higher rates reported from April 2021 onwards. As of May 2021, the highest level was recorded, with a third of households reporting this as an issue, compared to 21% six months prior in November 2020. The northeast was the region where a higher number of respondents reported this as an issue. In Al-Hassakeh and Ar-Raqqa governorates, about 35% of households mentioned facing barriers to access markets between July 2020 and March 2021, even peaking at 51% and 43% respectively in May. In June 2021, 44% of households in Al-Hassakeh and 36% in Deir-ez-Zor governorates reported facing such issues. As a result, inadequate food consumption rates among households having reduced access to markets increased significantly between July 2020 and June 2021, peaking in October reaching 75% compared to the overall rate of 50%. Since then, rates stabilized at around 50% of such households ([WFP mVAM 05/2020-06/2021](#)).

In northern Syria, communities reported a hindered access to markets due to reduced opening hours or days of market closures due to COVID-19, especially at the end of 2020. Close to 70% of communities in the northeast and more than 80% in the northwest reported such a barrier in December 2020. While lower effects had been reported in 2021 and none since February/March, 50% of communities reported such a barrier again in May 2021 in the northeast, at a time when a new lockdown was in place ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 11/2020-05/2021](#)).

**Figure 30.** Households reporting barriers to accessing markets ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-06/2021)



**Figure 31.** Communities reported access to markets hindered due to reduced opening hours or days of markets due to COVID-19 in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS](#) 11/2020-05/2021)



**Figure 32.** Inadequate food consumption rate among households with no regular access to markets ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-06/2021)



## Increasingly high reliance on negative food-based coping mechanisms

After months of increased food prices and income losses, most people have exhausted their capacities to cope. While most of the coping strategies were used before the COVID-19 crisis, the rates, frequency, severity and increased combination of multiple coping mechanisms increased significantly in 2020-21, especially for food-based mechanisms. One humanitarian worker highlighted: "I don't know how people are surviving, it seems mathematically impossible" ([TCF](#) 07/06/2021). On average, close to 90% of households relied on at least one coping strategy throughout June 2020 to July 2021, with the highest rates recorded in March 2021 ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-06/2021).

WFP reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI)<sup>6</sup>, an indicator of the extent and severity of the use of coping strategies among households, kept increasing since July 2020, and reaching unprecedentedly high levels from February to May 2021, with a score above 20 in March and April 2021, compared to 15 in May 2020. As with the inadequate food consumption rates, serious issues were reported in the northeast, with Al-Hassakeh governorate recording the highest rates every month between May 2020 and June 2020, with the exception of October, while peaking at 23.9 in April 2021. Similarly, Deir-ez-Zor governorate rCSI scores were among the top three for half of the year, peaking at 25 in March 2021, the highest level reached across the governorates throughout June 2020 to July 2021 ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-06/2021).

According to households surveyed by WFP, **buying food on credit** was the most used coping mechanism, used by 70% of households on average, with increasing rates reported since January 2021. Dar'a and Quneitra governorates in GoS-held areas and Al-Hassakeh governorate, in the northeast, reported the highest rates of households relying on such a mechanism (about 80%). IDPs and female-headed households also recorded similarly high rates ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-06/2021). Data from REACH Initiative also show high rates of reliance on credit to buy food in the northeast, reported as the most used strategy, by 75% of communities on average between June 2020 and May 2021, with higher rates in June-July 2020 (85%). In the northwest, food on credit was the second most used strategy, slightly less reported than in the northeast, with an average of 65% of communities, with the exception of an 85% peak in June 2020 ([REACH Initiative HSQS NES/NWS](#) 06/2020-05/2021).

**Consuming less preferred or less expensive food** was the second most used strategy, used by 68% of surveyed households on average between June 2020 and July 2021. Quneitra and As-Sweida governorates in GoS-held areas and Al-Hassakeh in the northeast reported even higher rates, from 74% to 88% respectively between November 2020 and February 2021 ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-06/2021). According to REACH Initiative data, between June 2020 and May 2021, the northwest recorded higher rates of reliance on this strategy, reported by 69% of communities on average, especially from January 2021, compared to 61% on average in the northeast, with increasing rates reported from November 2020 ([REACH Initiative HSQS NES/NWS](#) 06/2020-05/2021).

---

<sup>6</sup> The reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI) is an experience-based indicator measuring the behaviour of households over the past seven days when they did not have enough food or money to purchase food. The reduced CSI uses a standard set of five individual coping behaviors that can be employed by any household, anywhere. The maximal rCSI is 56 ([WFP](#)).

**Reducing the number of meals per day** was the strategy being used by slightly more than half of surveyed households (53%) in the same time period ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-06/2021). Skipping meals was quite highly recorded in the northwest between June 2020 and February 2021, mentioned by more than half (55%) of communities according to data from REACH Initiative ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS](#) 06/2020-05/2021).

Slightly less than half (46%) **restricted adult consumption to prioritize their children's**, with a significant increase of the use of this negative coping strategy between August and September 2020. As with the other strategies, Al-Hassakeh governorate, in the northeast, recorded the highest rate, reaching 60% in March and April 2021. This mechanism was also more frequent among IDPs (53%) ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-06/2021).

In northern Syria, according to REACH Initiative data, between June 2020 and May 2021, **buying food with money usually dedicated for other things** was also a frequently used negative strategy, used by more than 60% of communities on average in both the northeast and the northwest, even peaking to 70% in March 2021 in the northeast ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS](#) 06/2020-05/2021).

Anecdotal evidence in the GoS-held areas also showed an increase in the number of people offering to **sell their kidney** in the black market, for prices as high as USD 8,000–12,000, due to poor living conditions ([The Syrian Observer](#) 07/04/2021).

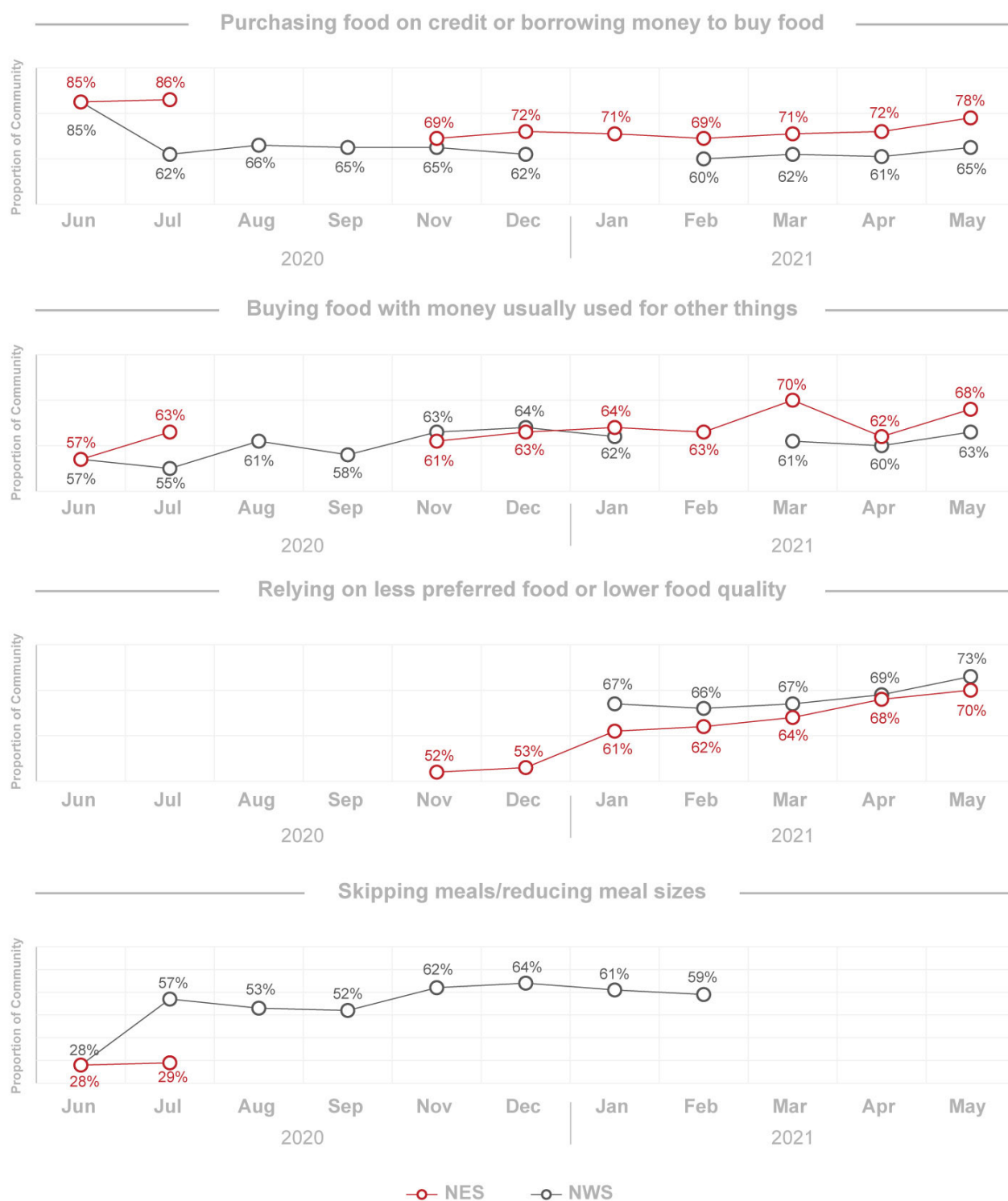
**Figure 33.** Reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI) ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-06/2021)

May	Jul	Aug	Sep 2020	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar 2021	Apr	May	Jun
<b>rCSI</b>												
15.1	17.8	16.8	17.7	18.4	17.9	18.5	17.9	19.8	21	20.5	19.1	18.5
<b>Highest rates - governorates</b>												
21.6 As-Sweida	22 Al-Hassakeh	22.2 Deir-ez-Zor	21.4 Al-Hassakeh	21.6 Lattakia	22.1 Hama	22.1 Al-Hassakeh	22.1 Al-Hassakeh	23.8 Dar'a	25 Deir ez Zor	23.9 Al-Hassakeh	22.9 Al-Hassakeh	23.4 Al-Hassakeh
20.7 Al-Hassakeh	20 Dar'a	20.5 Al-Hassakeh	20.7 Lattakia	21 Quneitra	19.7 Tartous	21.2 Deir-ez-Zor	20.3 Ar-Raqqa	22.8 Deir-ez-Zor	24 Lattakia	23.2 Lattakia	21.9 Hama	20.6 Deir-ez-Zor
20.5 Lattakia	19.8 Deir-ez-Zor	18.1 Quneitra	20 Quneitra	20.2 Ar-Raqqa	19.6 Al-Hassakeh	20.5 Dar'a	19.5 Dar'a	22.4 Al-Hassakeh	23.6 Al-Hassakeh	22.7 Homs	21.7 As-Sweida	20.5 Ar-Raqqa
				20.4 Hama				21.6 Tartous	23.1 Ar-Raqqa	21.3 Deir-ez-Zor	21.3 Deir-ez-Zor	

**Figure 34.** Coping strategies ([WFP mVAM](#) 05/2020-06/2021)



**Figure 35.** Food-based coping strategies in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020-05/2021](#))





# AGRICULTURE

In 2020, limited impact on planting activities was reported due to COVID-19 and related public health measures. Farmers were able to plant 70% of the land allocated for cereal production despite the pandemic ([FAO](#) 10/04/2020). While curfew and travel between towns and cities were banned in May 2020, exemptions were made for farmers and vehicles transporting key food supplies, limiting the

impact on farming activities ([The Syria Report](#) 06/05/2020). However, the 2021 agricultural season was more severely affected as COVID-19-related economic restrictions and subsequent border closures limited seeds imports, on which Syria heavily relies to meet half of its national grain requirements ([OCHA](#) 26/03/2021, [Food Security Cluster](#) 10/03/2021).

## Shortages and high cost of inputs constrained production in 2021

The main effect of the pandemic on agriculture activity has been on the prices of inputs, seed and fertilizers. COVID-19 precautionary measures and fuel shortages, currency depreciation and economic sanctions, importation constraints, and high transportation costs, all contributed to a general rise in the prices of key agriculture inputs and products from March 2020 ([FSC](#) 24/09/2020, [FSC](#) 28/12/2020, [FAO](#) 22/12/2020). Most fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides, livestock fodder and feed prices increased significantly since March 2020 and throughout 2021 ([FSC](#) 08/05/2021). While in April 2021, the prices of most inputs slightly decreased following a stabilization of the currency, they still remained out of reach for most farmers ([FSC](#) 01/06/2021).

Across the 35 sites monitored by FAO across the country, the prices of most agricultural inputs, especially fodder, poultry and cattle feed and fertilizers increased by close to 50% in October compared to July 2020 ([FAO](#) 22/12/2020). Prices of poultry feed items, such as soybean and maize, doubled by the end of March 2020 ([FAO](#) 03/12/2020), resulting in more than 70% of chicken farmers halting production at the end of June 2020, due to too high production costs, according to the Ministry of Agriculture ([WFP](#) 22/10/2020, [FAO](#) 02/11/2020). Most livestock breeders lost their productive assets due to the high costs of feed, vaccines, and veterinary treatment, as well as constraints in accessing grazing lands due to movement restrictions ([OCHA](#) 26/03/2021, [FSC](#) 10/03/2021, [FAO](#) 30/03/2020).

Pesticides prices also rose since March 2020, with a 100% increase in Hama governorate, a GoS-held area, reported early April 2020 ([FAO](#) 10/04/2020). Prices continued to spike in 2021, with a 50% increase recorded overall in January 2021 compared to September 2020 ([FSC](#) 08/02/2021). Similarly, fertilizers also recorded several increases in selling prices throughout the pandemic, with a 20% overall increase in March 2021 compared to a month prior. Rising prices are of significant concern in the northeast where a 50% increase was recorded in the same time period in Deir-ez-Zor and 40% in Al-Hassakeh governorate. Shortages were also reported throughout the country in March, notably in Homs, Hama and Tartous governorates, GoS-held areas and Al-Hassakeh governorate, in the northeast. As a result of being unaffordable, their use decreased significantly among farmers throughout the crop cycle, increasing the risk of pest and crop-disease, risking to further limit the production, productivity and quality of the 2021 harvest ([FSC](#) 08/05/2021).

Lack of access to resources, such as water, seeds and fertilizers was the main barrier reported by farmers in terms of accessing income from the agriculture sector since the start of the pandemic, reported by about 30% of residents in assessed communities in both northwest and northeast and between 20 to 25% of IDPs in the northwest throughout the year ([REACH Initiative HSOS NWS/NES](#) 06/2020 to 06/2021). A lack of access to fertilizers due to limited cash availability was the most commonly reported challenge for farmers in the northeast in June 2021, mentioned by 70% of assessed communities ([REACH Initiative](#) 23/06/2021).

## Fuel shortages and high prices further impacted agricultural activities

Shortages and unaffordability of diesel fuel prices in both local and black markets, notably due to COVID-19-related importation constraints and currency devaluation, heavily impacted mechanized agricultural activities in 2021, reducing production, while at the same time raising operational costs ([FAO 22/12/2020](#), [FSC 10/03/2021](#)). Compared to 2019, in GoS-held areas, farmers' shares of fuel subsidies were cut by a third in early 2021 ([Enab Baladi 06/01/2021](#)). Consequently, wheat and barley production are expected to decrease compared to previous years, due to a lack of crucial mechanized irrigation capabilities in March and April 2021 ([FSC 11/04/2021](#)). The harvest would also likely be limited, as the use of machinery would be constrained by the high cost of fuel. For some farmers, high production costs might also result in limiting their harvested area ([FSC 08/05/2021](#), [FAO 04/05/2021](#)). High operational costs (fertilizers, fuel) was the second challenge most reported by farmers in June 2021 in the northeast, mentioned in 50% of assessed communities ([REACH Initiative 23/06/2021](#)).

## High costs of production threatened households' income

Due to high costs of production and limited inputs, many households depending on agriculture reported insufficient income throughout the pandemic. While 70% of residents in assessed communities in the northeast rely on income from crop production or livestock products, agriculture as a source of income was reportedly affected in about 35% of communities throughout November 2020 until April 2021. Similarly, in the northwest, while 60% of residents depend on such income, agriculture activities were reportedly affected in around 25% of communities throughout September 2020 until April 2021 ([REACH Initiative HSQS](#)

[NES/NWS](#) 09/2020-04/2021). According to HNAP, 77% of households whose livelihoods depend on agriculture did not make enough money to meet basic needs in January 2021, about a 40% increase compared to January 2020. Similarly, 83% of households depending on livestock activities reported insufficient income in January 2021, compared to 58% in January 2020 ([HNAP](#) 01/2021). In the northeast, throughout the agricultural season, households in 58% of assessed communities reportedly ran into debt while running agricultural operations ([REACH Initiative](#) 23/06/2021).

## Recent drought further fragilizing the agricultural situation

The main new agricultural challenge is weather-related: with the worst drought since 1953 affecting the country, water levels in dams reach about only half capacity. Close to 90% of rain-fed wheat fields, representing about half of the entire crop, are expected to not result in any yield in 2021 ([Zamal News](#) 22/05/2021). Delayed rainfall at the start of the planting season and throughout the months critical for crop development (January-April 2021), as well as reduced water levels of the Euphrates river in 2021, have negatively affected crops, particularly in Al-Hassakeh governorate, northeast ([REACH Initiative](#) 23/06/2021). Forecast for 2021 barley production is for 1.2 million tones, the lowest amount since 2018 ([OCHA](#) 17/06/2021), likely resulting in further food insecurity in the coming months.

## Increase in psychological distress recorded during the COVID-19 period

Higher levels of psychological distress and anxiety were reported during the COVID-19 period, especially in 2020, according to anecdotal reports and ad-hoc assessments. COVID-19 protective measures and restrictions and subsequent economic pressure on livelihoods have been worsening the population's anxiety ([Groupe URD 01/04/2021](#)). According to a study by NRC conducted in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Jordan among displaced children in July 2020, close to 90% of children said they were stressed because of COVID-19, of which 75% feared catching the disease and slightly less than 50% feared their loved one could get the virus. On average, children in Syria reported feeling about 40% more stressed than before the pandemic ([NRC 01/09/2020](#)). This trend continued in 2020, with slightly more than a 25% increase in stress and anxiety reported among children in the last trimester, likely a result of the COVID-19 pandemic ([Needs and Response Summary 22/02/2021](#)). In December 2020, psychological trauma due to COVID-19 was reported as one of the main protection issues by about 75% of surveyed protection partners in GoS-held areas, especially among women and girls, elderly and people with disabilities ([Protection and Community Services Sector 01/02/2021](#)).

In the northwest, suicide levels among 15-20 years old reportedly increased by more than 85% in a year, following high levels of depression, due to worsened economic vulnerability and poor living conditions and reached an alarming rate particularly among children. More than 1,700 attempts and 232 deaths were officially recorded during the last 2020 trimester, compared to 132 in the first trimester ([Save the Children 29/04/2021](#), [OCHA 26/03/2021](#)).

## Increase in gender-based violence recorded during the COVID-19 period

Extended quarantines, curfews and other movement restriction measures led to increased reports of gender-based violence (GBV), due to forced coexistence in confined living spaces, exacerbated by the additional economic and health anxieties arising from the pandemic ([UNFPA](#) 01/05/2020). Significant increases in different types of GBV were reported, particularly incidences of domestic violence such as marital rape, physical and emotional violence and denial of resources, with girls and women with disabilities and pregnant women especially vulnerable ([OCHA](#) 13/07/2020). According to interviews conducted by Women Now in Idlib and Aleppo governorates in May 2020, 17% of women participants had reported being victims of

gender-based violence, of which few attributed it to the pandemic and subsequent preventive measures ([Friedrich Ebert Stiftung](#) 01/07/2020).

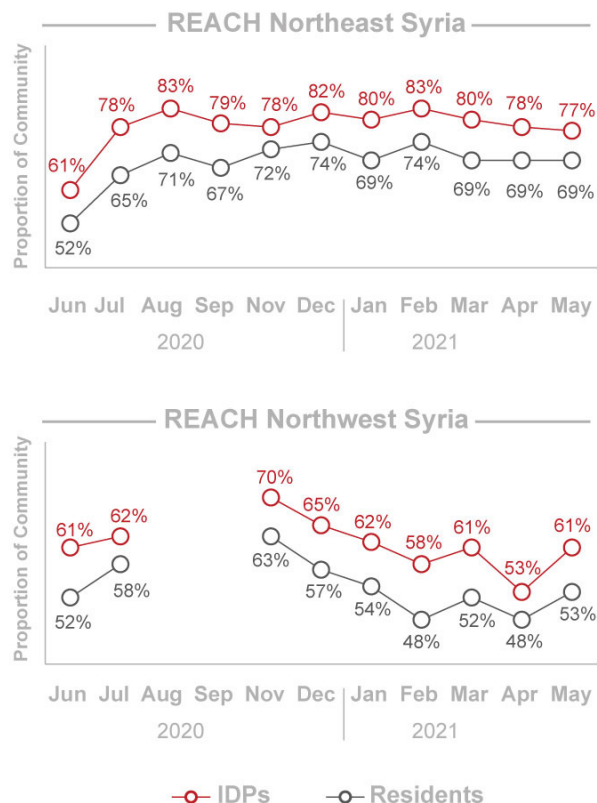
These issues were mostly reported during the first half of 2020, although few reports mention this trend continued throughout 2020, especially in the northwest ([OCHA](#) 21/12/2020). In December 2020, more than half (56%) of surveyed protection partners reported an increase in GBV due to COVID-19 ([Protection and Community Services Sector Inside Syria](#) 01/02/2021). Economic pressure continued to be a driver behind the high level of GBV reported in 2021 ([CARE International](#) 25/02/2021).

## Increase in child protection issues

The pandemic reportedly forced most children to take on additional responsibilities within the household. According to a study conducted by NRC in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Jordan, children have had to increasingly look after their younger siblings. When asked how they were spending their time, the highest number of children (42%) reported to be looking after their brothers and sisters, leading to even further stress among many children ([NRC 01/09/2020](#)). The pandemic also reinforced gender roles and inequalities. According to interviews conducted by Women Now in Idlib and Aleppo governorates in May, 40% of women reported giving more chores to girls ([Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 01/07/2020](#)).

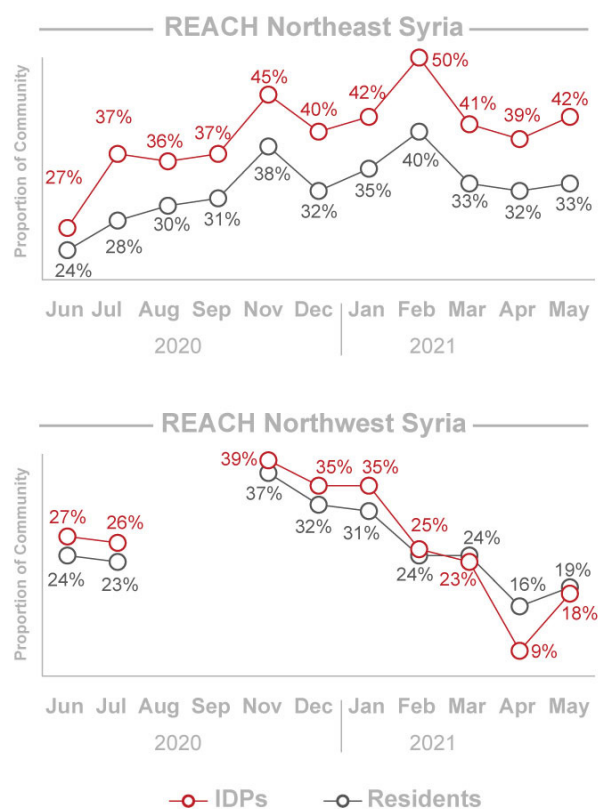
As the economic downturn increasingly impeded the ability of households to meet their basic needs, negative coping mechanisms were more widely adopted, and children have been particularly exposed to protection risks, especially as schools were closed during most of 2020 ([OCHA 26/06/2020](#)). Almost a third of the surveyed protection partners mentioned children faced increasing protection issues in December 2020 compared to earlier in the year ([Protection and Community Services Sector 01/02/2021](#)).

**Figure 36.** Communities reporting child labor to meet basic needs in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative HSQS NES/NWS 06/2020-05/2021](#))



Child labor as a way to meet basic needs was mentioned by between 50–80% of assessed communities across northern Syria from June 2020 to May 2021. This coping mechanism was more widely reported in the northwest, and particularly among IDPs. During this time period, a rise of 17 percentage points was recorded for both groups, with close to 70% of residents and 80% of IDPs mentioning relying on sending their children to work to cover their basic needs. In the northeast, while the levels remain high, with about 50% of residents and 60% of IDPs reporting the same, the trend remained stable across the time period ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020–05/2021](#)). However, according to WFP assessment, the proportions of households taking their children out of school due to lack of financial resources to have them work instead was the highest in Al-Hassakeh and Deir-ez-Zor governorates, northeast, close to double the national average rate throughout the year ([WFP mVAM 05/2020–06/2021](#)). The situation is even more dire in camps. In March 2021, in two camps, Twahina and Tel Samen, in Ar-Raqqa governorate, in the northeast, up to 60% of assessed households reported relying on child labor to meet basic needs ([REACH Initiative 20/05/2021](#), [REACH Initiative 20/05/2021](#)).

**Figure 37.** Communities reporting early marriage to meet basic needs in northern Syria ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020–05/2021](#))



Early marriage as a way to meet basic needs was mentioned by between 25–40% of assessed communities across northern Syria from June 2020 to May 2021. This coping mechanism was more widely reported in the northwest, and particularly among IDPs. However, for both regions and groups, November 2020 was the month with the highest levels of early marriage recorded ([REACH Initiative HSOS NES/NWS 06/2020–05/2021](#)), likely due to the combined effects of the accelerating Syrian Pound devaluation, fuel shortages and cuts in bread and fuel subsidies which led many households to require additional income to cover their food expenses.

Early marriages and child labor have both significantly affected school attendance of those children, likely resulting in serious psychological consequences as they are cut off from their standard socialization patterns and from available psychosocial support in schools.



## High levels of stigmatization against COVID-19 patients and healthcare workers in 2020 and 2021 in the northeast

COVID-19 reportedly caused such social pressure and widespread fear of infection that it led to a new type of discrimination, against COVID-19 potential or confirmed infected people, healthcare workers as well as people perceived as more at risk to this disease, especially in 2020. In October, in the northwest, close to 70% of respondents believe that COVID-19 was generating discrimination and close to 90% in Al-Hassakeh governorate, northeast; proportions that kept increasing from September 2020. This discrimination was more widely believed to be against COVID-19 positive people (more than 90% in both regions) and against health workers (about 30% in both regions) ([REACH Initiative](#) 22/10/2020, [REACH Initiative](#) 22/10/2020). Findings from 28 focus group discussions among 140 participants in Aleppo and Idlib, northwest Syria, in November 2020 revealed that, while IDPs living in sites were supportive of the idea of quarantine centers given the challenges of self-isolation in camps, participants living in non-camp locations all preferred home-isolation to minimize exposure to community's stigmatization and blame, highlighting how rampant stigmatization and fear of discrimination has been. Findings from this same assessment also highlighted that healthcare staff were also the target of stigma and bullying, as they were being perceived and referred to as "spreaders" of the virus ([Protection Cluster](#) 27/11/2020). As a result of stigmatization, bullying, social exclusion, prevention from entering shops or even leading to women being rejected by their spouse in extreme cases have been reported ([Protection Cluster](#) 27/11/2020, [The Independent](#) 26/08/2020).

Social stigma associated with COVID-19 continued to be reported in the northeast in 2021. According to community focal points interviewed by REACH Initiative and HNAP in May, almost half of community focal points reported instances of discrimination/stigmatization against current or former COVID-19 patients, driving people's reluctance to seek healthcare. While most instances of discrimination were of low severity, 70% reported the community would avoid these individuals, almost 40% of community focal points mentioned that stigmatization could prevent access to employment ([REACH Initiative & HNAP](#) 03/06/2021). The reporting of such an issue in 2021 only in the northeast is likely due to the prolonged restrictions the population in this region has been facing, with a partial lockdown imposed between November 2020 and January 2021, as well as new restrictions between April and May 2021.

Social stigma associated with COVID-19, alongside pressure to maintain income and livelihood, reportedly led people to hide symptoms and avoid seeking treatment or self-isolating ([Protection Cluster](#) 27/11/2020, [OCHA](#) 21/10/2020). The COVID-19 hotline in northeast Syria was not being used by many reportedly being reluctant to let their neighbours see the ambulance and spread rumours ([Medglobal](#) 14/10/2020).

### WOMEN AT HIGHER RISK OF DISCRIMINATION DUE TO THEIR CAREGIVER ROLE WITHIN THE HOUSEHOLD AND COMMUNITY

Social pressure and stigma has been even heightened for women, as they are considered by their community to be primarily responsible for the health and well-being of their families and the main duty-bearer of all house chores ([OCHA](#) 21/10/2020). Women participants in a protection focus group discussions in the northwest in November 2020 reported being under great pressure to keep their family members, including children and elderly, safe from infections, due to community expectations. Both male and female participants reported a fear of disgrace if women in the household were to be infected, as it would be interpreted as the women or girl in question had been in unsafe environments, resulting in the women and her family being socially excluded or bullied, and could even lead to the women being rejected by the spouse in extreme cases. Findings also showed that their absence for a prolonged period of time was such a serious domestic issue that women would hide their health symptoms (common cold, flu, COVID-19...) from their family members to mitigate tension within the households and avoid stigmatization and exclusion from their communities ([Protection Cluster](#) 27/11/2020). Similar perceptions are likely to be applicable to other areas in Syria.

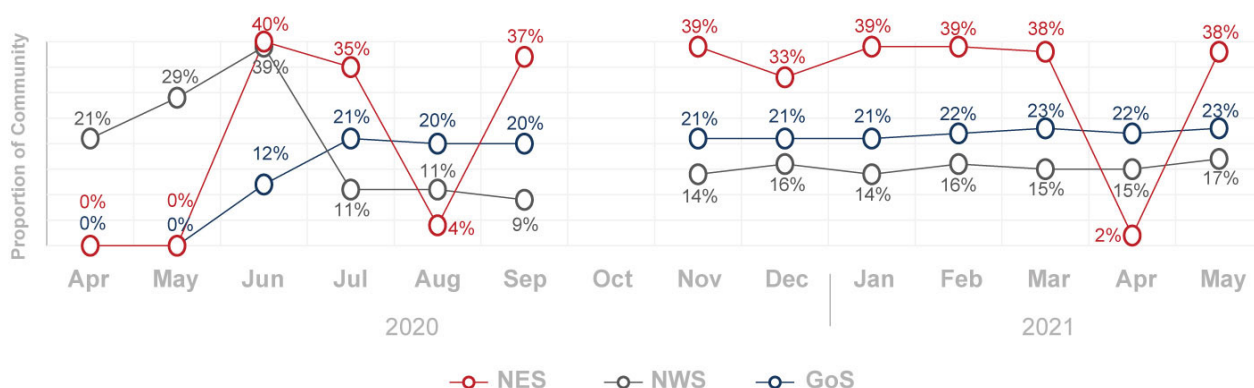
Findings from the same protection focus groups discussions in November 2020 also showed that negative perceptions towards people seen at a higher risk of infections, such as elderly or people with disabilities, had been growing in 2020. Male participants indicated hesitations to engage or assist these populations ([Protection Cluster](#) 27/11/2020).



## Lack of access to psychosocial services due to COVID-19 movement restrictions

While availability of mental health infrastructure (psychological service & psychiatric units) was already insufficient pre-COVID-19 throughout Syria, access issues due to movement restrictions led to an even higher rate of accessibility issues, notably in 2020 ([HNAP](#) 04/2020-05/2021).

**Figure 38.** Proportion of sub-districts where the majority of communities have access to psychosocial support ([HNAP](#) 04/2020-05/2021)



Restrictions of movements and forced quarantine measures have been impeding access to protection services, especially at the height of COVID-19 related restrictions, notably in March–October 2020, while access was also impeded in northeast Syria, specifically in August 2020 and April 2021, when total curfews were enforced. Schools, community centers, child friendly spaces and women and girl safe spaces were significantly scaled down due to COVID-19 precaution measures in the first half of 2020, making it more difficult for victims to disclose incidents and seek psychosocial support ([OCHA](#) 21/10/2020, [OCHA](#) 10/09/2020). This trend continued in 2021 and was still reported throughout April ([UNHCR](#) 28/04/2021, [Health Cluster](#) 31/03/2021, [UNHCR](#) 07/02/2021).

Although some GBV prevention and protection response activities continued to be provided throughout the pandemic, safety measures related to COVID-19, such as the use of online sessions, the reduction of the number of beneficiaries per session, led services to be accessible for a smaller number of beneficiaries ([OCHA](#) 26/06/2020). According to 73% of protection partners who responded to an online survey in December 2020, restrictions on face-to-face meetings / public gatherings, followed by closure of community centers (43%) were the common measures applied. The suspension of services, combined with these new ways of service delivery, led to a drop in beneficiaries, sometimes by as much as 70%, and on average between 30 and 50%, according to surveyed protection partners ([Protection and Community Services Sector](#) 01/02/2021).

### Arrest of healthcare workers in GoS-held areas

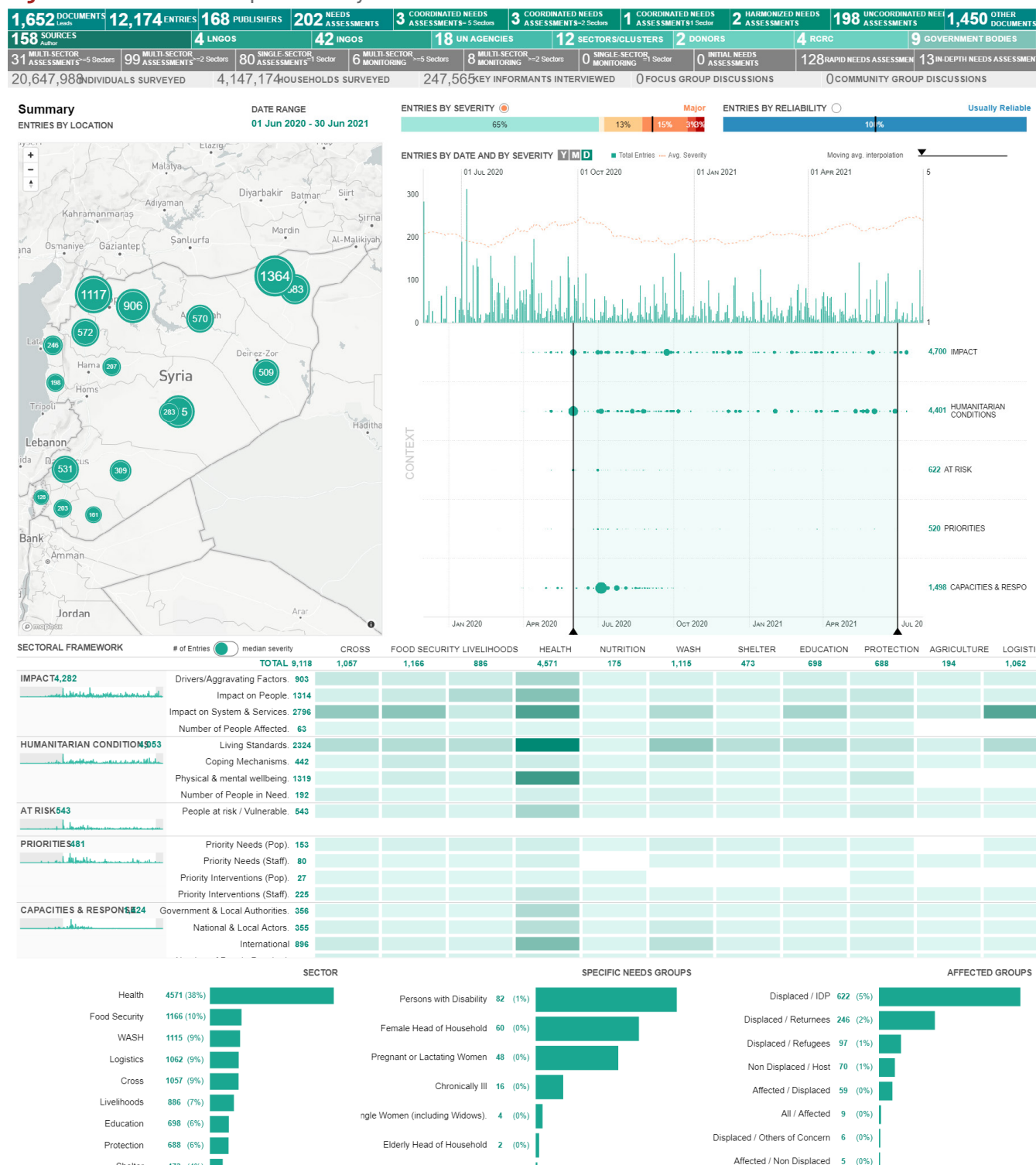
Health personnel in GoS-held areas faced additional protection issues in 2020, as authorities imposed a strict control over COVID-19 information and official cases count. While healthcare workers and structures have been targeted throughout the war, GoS authorities reportedly arrested medical workers not following Ministry of Health recommendations to limit testing to only severe cases in a way to artificially reduce the number of confirmed cases. More than 3,300 health workers were detained or forcibly disappeared since 2011, most of which by the Government of Syria forces. In 2020, 56 were arrested by Syrian regime forces and 28 in the first two months of 2021 ([Syrian Network for Human Rights](#) 27/02/2021). Healthcare workers were also the target of violence, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 52 incidents of violence or threat of violence against healthcare reported in Syria between March 2020 and March 2021 ([Insecurity Insights](#) 01/03/2021). In Dara'a governorate, doctors have been displaced or dismissed by the local authorities as they had been accused of working with the opposition ([Middle East Eye](#) 10/12/2020) and there are reports of detention of health care workers by the Government of Syria who accuse them of diagnosing patients with COVID-19 without liaising first with the Ministry of Health ([The Syrian Observer](#) 18/12/2020).

# METHODOLOGY AND REVIEW OF DATA

The DEEP structured and searchable information repository forms the basis of the analysis. Details of the

information captured for this report are available below.

**Figure 39.** Information captured for Syria in DEEP between 01/06/2020 and 30/06/2021



## Review of COVID-19 humanitarian assessments conducted in 2021

Between June 2020 and June 2021, more than 12,000 COVID-19 relevant pieces of information have been identified overall and at least 225 humanitarian needs assessments related to COVID-19 were conducted in Syria. About half were rapid assessments, with most using key informant interviews, highlighting the limitations posed by the COVID-19 context. Very few of these assessments were at household level. However, the unit of analysis and reporting in almost half of the assessments was the sub-district, providing a good level of data disaggregation. Unsurprisingly, health was the sector most covered, followed by Education since the reopening of schools in September, then the WASH sector, followed by containment measures & communications up to the summer 2020. Most of the assessments looked at all population groups, but IDPs were the top-ranking group being surveyed when needs assessments had a specific vulnerable group focus.

Overall, Syria's COVID-19 information landscape remains rich, and sector-specific information is being collected and shared regularly. Health remains the sector with the most related information, followed by food security and livelihoods and WASH, without surprise as these are the most disrupted sectors, significantly impacted by COVID-19 related restrictions. A low number of COVID-19 related needs assessments in the protection sector makes quantifying identified impacts and trends difficult. Although it is to be expected that such sensitive assessments would be less frequent, a rise in protection issues was reported among protection actors and reported in our monthly reports. Information is often available for different vulnerable groups – displaced populations, female-headed households, children, etc. It is also possible to disaggregate information by geographical areas, although central and southern Syria are the areas where needs are least reported. However, data is only available in areas with regular access. When assessments have not been conducted, there is a general tendency to center the analysis and draw conclusions from information or data from main cities and extrapolate these findings to generalize it to the entire governorate, erasing some of the disparities that may exist between urban and rural areas.

## Lack of information on GoS-controlled areas

Less information has been available for GoS-controlled areas overall, compared to northern Syria. While for the northwest and northeast, regular monthly assessments and updates were released, the GoS-held areas were more scarcely covered, likely resulting from more constraining access issues. Between January and June 2021, about 1,745 COVID-19 relevant pieces of information have been identified for the northeast and 1,250 for the northwest. For

GoS-held areas, 1,385 entries have been identified, about the same amount as the northwest, however for a territory at least three times larger, highlighting an information disparity. In addition, most of the information for GoS-controlled areas are coming from media sources, with various levels of reliability, compared to northern Syria, where the majority of the information comes from more reliable national or international humanitarian actors.

## Methodology

A comprehensive Secondary Data Analytical Framework has been designed to address specific strategic information needs of UN agencies, INGOs, NGOs, clusters, and HCTs at the country level. It is essentially a methodological toolbox used by Analysts and Information Management Officers during the monthly analysis cycle. The Analytical Framework:

- Provides the entire suite of tools required to develop and derive quality and credible situation analysis;
- Integrates the best practices and analytical standards developed in recent years for humanitarian analysis;
- Offers end users with an audit trail on the amount of evidence available, how data was processed, and conclusions reached;
- Aligns with global efforts and frameworks.

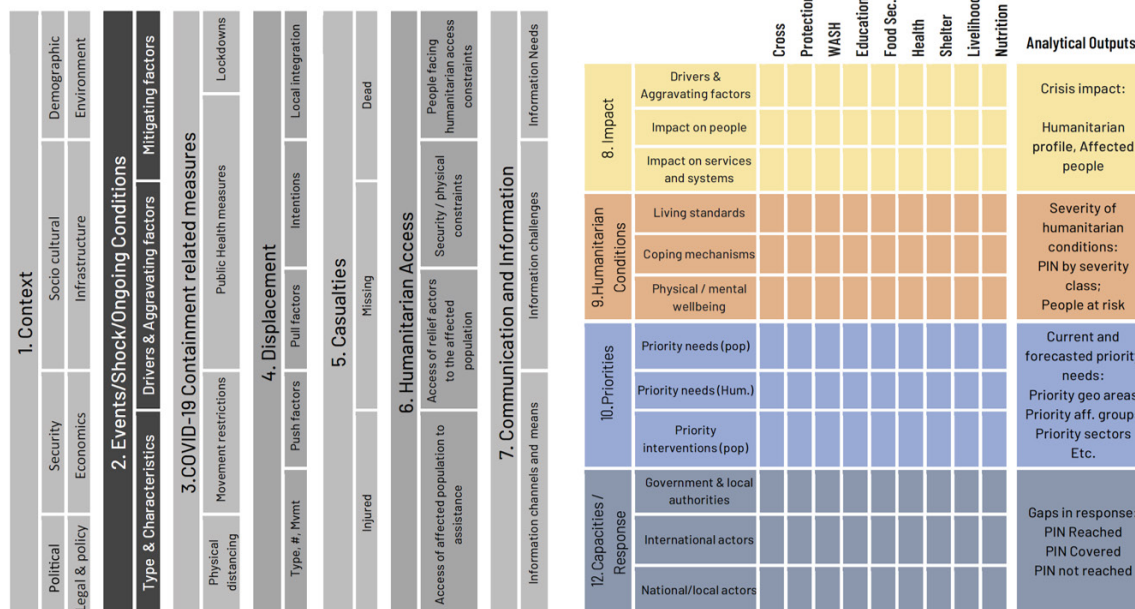
The two most important tools used throughout the process are the Secondary Data Analysis Framework (SDAF) and the Analysis Workflow.

# Secondary Data Analysis Framework

The Secondary Data Analysis Framework focuses on assessing critical dimensions of a humanitarian crisis and facilitates an understanding of both unmet needs,

their consequences and the overall context within which humanitarian needs have developed and humanitarian actors are intervening.

**Figure 40.** Secondary Data Analysis Framework





Thank you.



---

## Contact

### Global project manager

Benjamin Gaudin

email: [bgaudin@immap.org](mailto:bgaudin@immap.org)

### Syria focal point

Ali Al-Bayaa

email: [aalbayaa@immap.org](mailto:aalbayaa@immap.org)

---

## Website

Direct Link : <https://immap.org/>



Scan to access  
the website