Arab food security monitoring framework

Country reviews

Lebanon
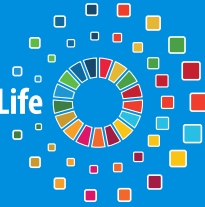
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Arab food security monitoring framework
Country reviews
Lebanon

UNITED NATIONS
Beirut

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Key Messages

AVAILABILITY

ACCESS

UTILIZATION

STABILITY

A monitoring framework to track food security in the Arab region was developed by ESCWA in collaboration with member States and other partners. It assesses the food security status through **3** outcome and **21** causal indicators distributed across the main food security dimensions, i.e.

The monitoring framework highlights that Lebanon has elevated rates of obesity and anaemia among women but is performing well in terms of food security. It has a high import dependency which can prove a drawback in time of crisis. The country profile reviews the impact of COVID-19, early measures against it and their effect on the food situation.

OBESITY

ANAEMIA

Introduction

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and its partners developed the Arab Food Security Monitoring Framework that helps countries assess their food security situation despite its complex and multidimensional nature.[1] The Monitoring Framework is an outcome of the project entitled "Promoting Food and Water Security through Cooperation and Capacity Development in the Arab Region", implemented in collaboration and partnership with Arab countries, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), academia and other experts, and with the support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

The framework builds on the globally agreed upon definition of food security as existing "when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life",[2] which, as defined, comprises four dimensions, namely availability, access, utilization, and stability, can be evaluated at individual, household, national, regional, or global levels and can be seasonal, transitory or chronic. The framework was developed over a period of three years and involved consultations with more than 200 Arab and international experts. It involved a wide-ranging literature review to account for the latest thinking and experiences in assessing and monitoring food security at national, regional and global levels as well as a mapping of past and present policies, strategies and action plans.

The encompassing review led to the development of a comprehensive monitoring framework that tracks food security at different spatial levels, considers its four dimensions and accounts for both individual and household food security while facilitating a follow-up of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The end result was the Monitoring Framework that expresses food security and nutrition as a function of a multitude of indicators spread in its four dimensions, though approximately five to six indicators under each dimension account for most of the variations and thus are more consequential than the rest. Most of the selected indicators are already widely used globally to monitor aspects of the food system, and the SDGs and other plans of actions are used by major global institutions as development, economic, social, health, or environmental indicators. It was also ensured that the indicators are measurable, relevant to the Arab context and available for at least 50 per cent of Arab countries or the regional population, or both.

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1 Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), 2019. Tracking Food Security in the Arab Region (E/ESCWA/SDPD/2019/4). Beirut. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/publications/tracking-food-security-arab-region.

2 Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), 2009. Report of the Committee on World Food Security: Final version. Agenda item III, Thirty-fifth Session of the Committee on World Food Security, 14, 15 and 17 October 2009, CFS:2009/2 Rev.2. Rome.

The 24 indicators that were selected are split into a core pillar with three ex post or outcome indicators — prevalence of undernourishment, moderate or severe food insecurity and obesity, while the remaining 21 ex ante or causal indicators were further split into the four food security dimensions as shown below. All the indicators are global in nature while catering to regional specificities and are grouped as follows:

- **The Core Pillar** comprises three outcome indicators that provide a picture of the prevailing food security and nutrition situation resulting from policies and programmes being implemented as reflected in the form of malnutrition – undernutrition (low caloric intake), overnutrition (excess caloric intake) or nutrient deficiency (low nutrient intake);

1 Core Indicators (CO)			
Code	**Indicator description**	**Short name**	**SDG linkage**
CO1	Prevalence of undernourishment Ⓡ %	Undernourishment	2.1.1
CO2	Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity measured using FIES Ⓡ %	Food insecurity	2.1.2
CO3	Prevalence of obesity in the adult population (18 years and older) Ⓡ %	Obesity	

Ⓡ : Reversed During Normalization

- **The Availability** dimension comprises six indicators reflecting the supply side of food, namely, physical food inflow and outflow at macro and micro levels through production, trade, distribution, and others;

2 Food Availability Indicators (AV)			
Code	**Indicator description**	**Short name**	**SDG linkage**
AV1	Primary wheat yield as a percentage of potential achievable yield - %	Yields	2.3.1
AV2	Agriculture Orientation index for government expenditures - Index	Agriculture expenditure	2.a.1
AV3	Food losses (% total food available) Ⓡ %	Food loss	12.3
AV4	Average dietary energy supply adequacy - %	Dietary energy supply	
AV5	Wheat import dependency ratio Ⓡ %	Import dependency	
AV6	Share of water resources used in agriculture out of total renewable water resources Ⓡ %	Agriculture water	6.4.2

- **The Access** dimension comprises five indicators reflecting the ability of the population to acquire needed food through financial means and/or socioeconomic strengths with determinants including income/revenues, prices and supply-chain infrastructure;

3	Food Access Indicators (AC)		
Code	**Indicator description**	**Short name**	**SDG linkage**
AC1	Poverty headcount ratio ®️ %	Poverty	1.1.1/1.2.1/1.2.2
AC2	Share of food consumption expenditure in total household consumption expenditure ®️ %	Food consumption	
AC3	Unemployment rate ®️ %	Unemployment	8.5.2
AC4	Logistics performance - index	Logistics	
AC5	Inflation, consumer prices ®️ %	Inflation	

- **The Utilization** dimension comprises five indicators touching on nutrition impact or factors affecting it such as availability of basic water and sanitation infrastructure and critical health parameters showing the impact of food unavailability or nutrient deficiency, namely, stunting, wasting and anaemia;

4	Food Utilization Indicators (UT)		
Code	**Indicator description**	**Short name**	**SDG linkage**
UT1	The population using at least basic drinking water services - %	Drinking water access	1.4.1/6.1.1
UT2	The population using at least basic sanitation services - %	Sanitation access	1.4.1/6.2.1
UT3	Children under 5 years of age affected by stunting ®️ %	Child stunting	2.2.1
UT4	Children under 5 years of age affected by wasting ®️ %	Child wasting	2.2.2
UT5	Anaemia among women of reproductive age (15-49 years) ®️ %	Women anaemia	

- **The Stability** dimension comprises five indicators highlighting the variability in food production or supply factors that might affect these such as climate change, weather events, price shocks and sociopolitical conditions, all of which might impact the other food security dimensions and the core pillar as well;

5	Stability Indicators (ST)		
Code	**Indicator description**	**Short name**	**SDG linkage**
ST1	Climate change vulnerability index ®️	Climate change	
ST2	Food price anomalies standard deviation ®️	Price anomalies	2.c.1
ST3	Political stability and absence of violence - ranking	Political stability	
ST4	Per capita food production variability - $1,000/capita ®️	Production variability	
ST5	Per capita food supply variability - kcal/capita/day ®️	Supply variability	

Data are collected and computed using a dedicated Excel template. The results are presented in the form of a dashboard with two overlapping doughnut charts whose ten rings represent the data normalized to score between 0 (worst performance) and 10 (best performance), as depicted in the graph below. The inner doughnut displays the results of the core indicators while the outer doughnut shows those of the four food security dimension indicators. During the normalization process, indicators with a low value indicating good performance were reversed and are represented with an (R). The doughnut chart is always accompanied by a table presenting the raw indicator data together with the year of data collection and the overall trend between two time periods.

By design, the framework is mechanistic for two reasons: (i) indicators are set and distributed across the food security core pillar and four dimensions; and (ii) the interpretation of results follows a determined path consisting, first, in evaluating results of the three core indicators to identify food security and/or nutritional outcome, and second, in examining the 21 dimension indicators to identify hotspot areas that need immediate action. Stakeholders only need to enter data into the provided Excel template to generate the doughnut graph and related table containing raw data and trends. The data can be sourced at the regional, national and, if available, sub-national levels and disaggregated along gender lines or others noting, however, that a great majority of indicators cannot be disaggregated below the national level.

A complete description of the framework, which was endorsed by the Executive Council of AOAD in March 2019, was published and is available at ESCWA official publication website[3] under the title "Tracking Food Security in the Arab Region".[4] In addition to providing a full background on the framework, the publication presents the key results of tracking food security at the Arab regional level and the trend over the considered years and reviews selected policies and actions that might be considered under each of the indicators to remedy arising concerns. The publication is accompanied by a technical document entitled "Manual for Monitoring Food Security in the Arab Region", which provides a more detailed description for each of the 24 indicators comprising the monitoring framework including, when applicable, computation methodology, justification for selection, linkage to SDGs, potential data sources, and normalization process. It also overviews the use of the accompanying Excel template. Since the completion of the Food Security Monitoring Framework, numerous national agricultural and statistics experts from Arab countries have received in-depth training that took place in Tunis[5] and Beirut[6] and which focused on how to utilize the framework and interpret results for maximum impact for policy and programme design and development.

This report provides a series of food security overviews for the 22 Arab countries, which build on the above-described Arab Food Security Monitoring Framework. Its aim is to further highlight how to use the framework as well as to build capacity on its use with a focus on the national level. As such, it supports Arab countries in their endeavours to utilize the framework in the implementation of food security programmes, to assess the prevailing situation and

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3 See https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/tracking-food-security-arab-region-english_1.pdf.

4 See https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/manual-monitoring-food-security-arab-region-english_1.pdf.

5 See https://www.unescwa.org/events/training1-food-security-monitoring-framework-arab.

6 See https://www.unescwa.org/events/training2-food-security-monitoring-framework-arab.

to follow up on progress achieved towards the implementation of selected SDGs. It should further enhance capacity at country level and support efforts of national experts to collect focused data, analyse them using a dedicated framework and interpret meaningfully the results to provide policymakers with an overall view of their respective country's food security situation while also outlining alternative paths to address the situation.

The country overviews were produced by ESCWA with data delivered by national experts who provided or reviewed the underlying data (see attached list) and from global databases, as appropriate. For some countries, critical data are still missing, which should serve as a call to action to collect and provide the necessary data as the basis of more accurate and focused advice. The data were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; thus, some results might not reflect the current situation. It is hoped that the report will raise the necessary awareness so that countries can make additional efforts to remediate the lack of data.

Food security dashboard

Arab region
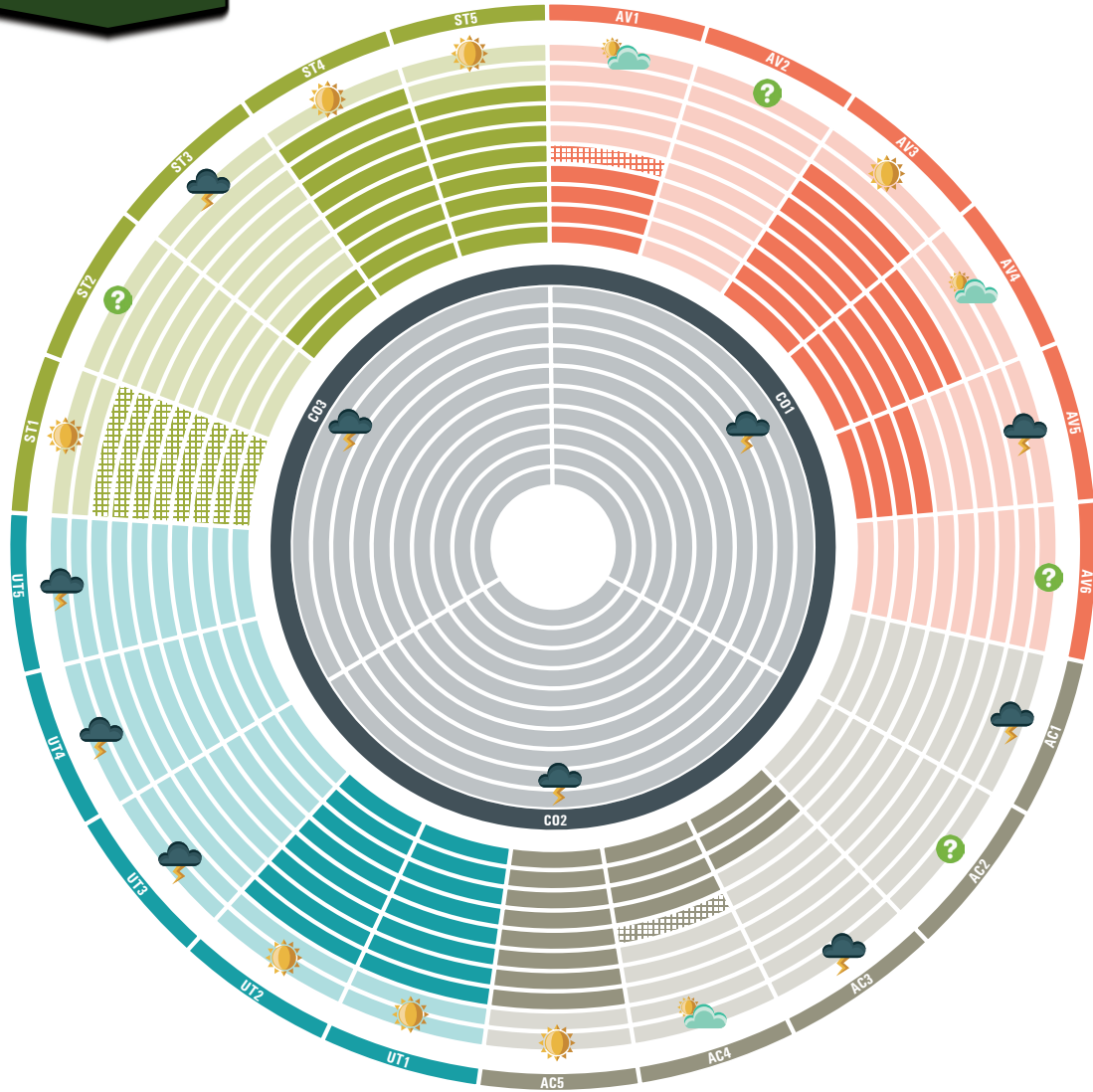
2010 Data:

Latest Data:

Performance:
- High: Proceed Action
- Average: More Action
- Low: Urgent Action
- No Data

Food security indicators, world vs. Arab region

Indicators		World		Arab region			Trend
		Latest		2010	Latest		
Code	Description	Value	Year	Value	Value	Year	
CORE INDICATORS							
CO1	Undernourishment (R) %	10.8	2016	11.5	12.1	2016	🟡
CO2	Food insecurity (R) %	9.2	2018	n.a.	12.2	2016	
CO3	Obesity (R) %	13.0	2016	24.6	28.4	2016	🔴
AVAILABILITY INDICATORS							
AV1	Wheat yields - %	n.a.		76.5	82.2	2017	🟢
AV2	Agriculture expenditure - index	n.a.		n.a.	n.a.		
AV3	Food loss (R) %	n.a.		7.3	6.8	2013	🟢
AV4	Dietary energy supply - %	n.a.		131	131	2017	🟡
AV5	Wheat Import dependency (R) %	n.a.		62.5	65.0	2012	🟡
AV6	Agriculture water (R) %	n.a.		n.a.	n.a.		
ACCESS INDICATORS							
AC1	Poverty (R) %	26.2	2015	n.a.	16.6	mult.	
AC2	Food consumption (R) %	n.a.		n.a.	n.a.		
AC3	Unemployment (R) %	5.0	2018	9.6	10.4	mult.	🔴
AC4	Logistics - index	2.8	2016	2.6	2.7	2016	🟢
AC5	Inflation (R) %	2.5	2018	5.7	12.8	mult.	🔴
UTILIZATION INDICATORS							
UT1	Drinking water access - %	88.5	2015	84.3	86.9	2015	🟡
UT2	Sanitation access - %	68.0	2015	78.9	80.8	2015	🟡
UT3	Child stunting (R) %	22.2	2017	n.a.	22.9	mult.	
UT4	Child wasting (R) %	7.5	2017	n.a.	8.7	mult.	
UT5	Women anaemia (R) %	32.8	2016	34.2	35.5	2016	🟡
STABILITY INDICATORS							
ST1	Climate change (R) - index	n.a.		n.a.	0.1	2019	
ST2	Price Anomalies (R) - index	n.a.		n.a.	n.a.		
ST3	Political stability - ranking	n.a.		20	14	2017	🔴
ST4	Production variability (R) - $1,000/capita	n.a.		10.3	10.1	2016	🟡
ST5	Supply variability (R) - kcal/cap/day	n.a.		32.8	29.8	2013	🟢

(R) : Reversed During Normalization   n.a.= Not Available   mult.= Multiple years
🔴 Red: Negative Trend   🟡 Yellow: Neutral Trend   🟢 Green: Positive Trend

Source: Computed by ESCWA.

Country background

A. Natural resources

Located on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, Lebanon has an area of 10,452 km^2. The coastal plain, the Lebanon mountain and the Beqaa valley offer arable land. Lebanon's total agricultural area covers 332,000 hectares, of which 230,000 are cultivated with about half being irrigated.

Lebanon is a relatively water-rich country with three main rivers, the Litani, the Orontes and the Nahr al-Kalb. Yet, with 743 m^3 per capita per year in 2016, Lebanon is below the water scarcity level of 1,000 m^3. About 60 per cent of the water is used in agriculture.[1]

Box 1. Impact of the Syrian crisis on food security

The Syrian crisis has had a tremendous effect on the food security situation of many groups in Lebanon. Displaced Syrians as well as Palestinian refugees and Lebanese who used to live in the Syrian Arab Republic form a vulnerable population that has experienced a worsening level of food security. Despite the food assistance delivered to these displaced groups, their overall food security status remains critical.

The Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees reveals that the number of food insecure households increased from 89 per cent in 2015 to 93 per cent in 2016. About 96 per cent of female-headed households are suffering from food insecurity as well as 92 per cent of male-headed households.

The percentage of households with moderate and severe food insecurity increased to 36 per cent in 2016, while that of food secure households decreased from 11 per cent in 2015 to 7 per cent in 2016. The percentage of households with poor and borderline food consumption reached 32 per cent of the refugee population as they had access to less diversified diets and experienced a decreased number of meals consumed.

With decreased consumption of nutrient-rich and healthy food, concerns are rising over the long-term impact on the health and nutritional status of those refugees as these deprivations might lead to large-scale micronutrient deficiencies.

Source: Ministry of Agriculture of Lebanon, WFP and FAO (2017).

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1 Maksoud, C.F. and others, 2020.

B. Socioeconomy

Lebanon hosts a large refugee population, representing approximately 25 per cent of the current 6 million populating Lebanon. The influx of an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees since 2011 skewed the country's demographics as some 80 per cent of the refugees are women and youth.[2]

Lebanon is highly urbanized, with 87 per cent of its inhabitants residing in urban areas. A middle-income country, in 2018, Lebanon's gross domestic product (GDP) was about $56.6 billion for a per capita GDP of about $8,300 in 2018 and a share of agriculture to GDP of about 3 per cent.[3]

C. Agriculture and food security

Even though the agriculture sector employs only 8 per cent of the labour force, it constitutes a primary source of income and employment for people living in rural areas, accounting for up to 25 per cent of the rural labour force and 80 per cent of the local GDP.[4]

Part of the population suffers from severe domestic water shortages, affecting up to 1.6 million people in Mount Lebanon and Beirut. The poorest neighbourhoods of the city, where dwellers live on less than $4 per day, are the most affected, as they have access to piped water for only a few hours per day.[5]

Food security concerns have heightened since the recent economic crisis which occurred along the influx of refugees due to the Syrian conflict (box 1).

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2 Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), 2016.
3 World Bank, n. d.
4 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), n. d.a.
5 Jha, S. K., 2018.

Data and trends

A. Core indicators

- **Prevalence of undernourishment (CO1)** has increased from 4.5 per cent in 2010 to 11 per cent in 2016 due to the influx of Syrian refugees putting Lebanon in the range of the Arab region average of 12.1 per cent;

- **Prevalence of severe food insecurity (CO2)** data are not available;

- **Prevalence of adult obesity (CO3)** increased from 27.9 per cent in 2010 to 31.3 per cent in 2016. Obesity prevalence is above the average for the Arab region (28.4 per cent). Obesity is much more prevalent among Lebanese women with 37 per cent than Lebanese men with 27.4 per cent.[6]

B. Availability

- **Wheat yield to potential (AV1)** increased from 2.9 tons/ha in 2010 to 3.4 tons/ha in 2017 though it is below the full potential of 4.71 tons/ha estimated by Mueller and others.[7] In 2017, total wheat production was estimated at 130,000 tons, which is around 7 per cent lower than the five-year average, during 2013-2017, of 140,000 tons;[8]

- **Agriculture orientation index (AV2)** was 0.12 in 2017, indicating that the agriculture sector did not receive a budget allocation commensurate to its size in the economy;

- **Food losses to food available (AV3)** accounted for 2.5 per cent in both 2010 and 2013. The regional average was 6.8 per cent though data might not be complete. It should be noted as well that food waste is not taken into account;

- **Average dietary energy supply adequacy (AV4)** decreased from 128 per cent to 114 per cent between 2010 and 2017, an indication of lower food supply which correlates with the increase in prevalence of undernourishment. The latest value is below the Arab regional average of 131 per cent;

- **Wheat import dependency (AV5)** stood at 86.5 per cent in 2012 well above the Arab regional average of 65 per cent. The country's cereal production covers only about 17 per cent of requirements;[9]

6 World Bank, n. d.
7 Mueller, N. D. and others, 2012.
8 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), n. d.a.
9 FAO, n. d.a.

- **Water resources used in agriculture (AV6)** was reported at 15.6 per cent in 2018, which might not be fully accurate as FAO

AQUASTAT pointed to a value of around 60 per cent in 2005.[10]

C. Access

- **Poverty ratio at $3.2/day (AC1)** data show a figure of 0.1 per cent in 2011, which might not be accurate. Before the Syrian war and the ensuing influx of refugees, 27 per cent of the Lebanese population lived below US$ 3.15/day, and 7 per cent were below the extreme poverty line of $2.4/day;[11]

- **Food consumption share of expenditures (AC2)** was reported at 20.7 per cent in 2018. For Syrian refugees, the ratio is estimated at 74 per cent despite the aid offered by international organizations;[12]

- **Unemployment rate (AC3)** climbed from 6.5 per cent for 2010 to 9.7 per cent in 2012.

Secondary sources indicate that female unemployment was at 12 per cent in 2011-2015 and unemployment of youth (15-24) was at 21 per cent during the same period;[13]

- **Logistics performance (AC4)** decreased from 3.3 to 2.7, indicating potential issues in the food supply chain due to hindrances in transport related infrastructure;

- **Inflation, consumer prices (AC5)** was relatively limited even though there was a slight increase from 4 per cent in 2010 to 6.1 per cent in 2018. It is less than the average inflation rate for the Arab region (12.8 per cent).

D. Utilization

- **Population using basic drinking water services (UT1)** was accessed by 90 per cent of the population in 2010, which increased to 92.6 per cent in 2017. However, piped water is not always available as mentioned above;[14]

- **Population using basic sanitation services (UT2),** according to the most recent data, were available for 98.5 per cent of the population in 2017, as compared to 87.6 per cent in 2010;

- **Stunting among children under five years (UT3)** data are not available;

- **Wasting among children under five years (UT4)** data are not available;

- **Prevalence of anaemia among women (UT5)** increased from 27.3 per cent in 2010 to 31.2 per cent in 2016, indicating rising nutrient intake deficiency. However, the value is still below the Arab regional average of 35.5 per cent though well above the World Health Assembly (WHA) 2030 target of 15.2 per cent.[15]

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10 FAO, n. d.b.
11 ESCWA, 2016.
12 Ibid.
13 FAO, 2019.
14 Jha, 2018.
15 FAO and others, 2019.

E. **Stability**

- **Climate change vulnerability (ST1)** is low at 0.06 indicating a low susceptibility to weather-related disasters, sea-level rise and loss of agriculture productivity;

- **Food price anomalies (ST2)** data are not available;

- **Political stability (ST3)** ranking was 7 in 2018, which is concerning given the ongoing regional instability and the economic crisis. The food security situation could be negatively impacted;

- **Food production variability (ST4)** decreased from $20,600 to $5,800 between 2010 and 2016, respectively, indicating improving production stability;

- **Food supply variability (ST5)** decreased from 85 to 63 kcal/capita/day but was still high, notably compared to the Arab regional average of about 30 kcal/capita/day. Food supply might be constrained, which is a concern given the economic crisis noted above.

Food security dashboard

Lebanon
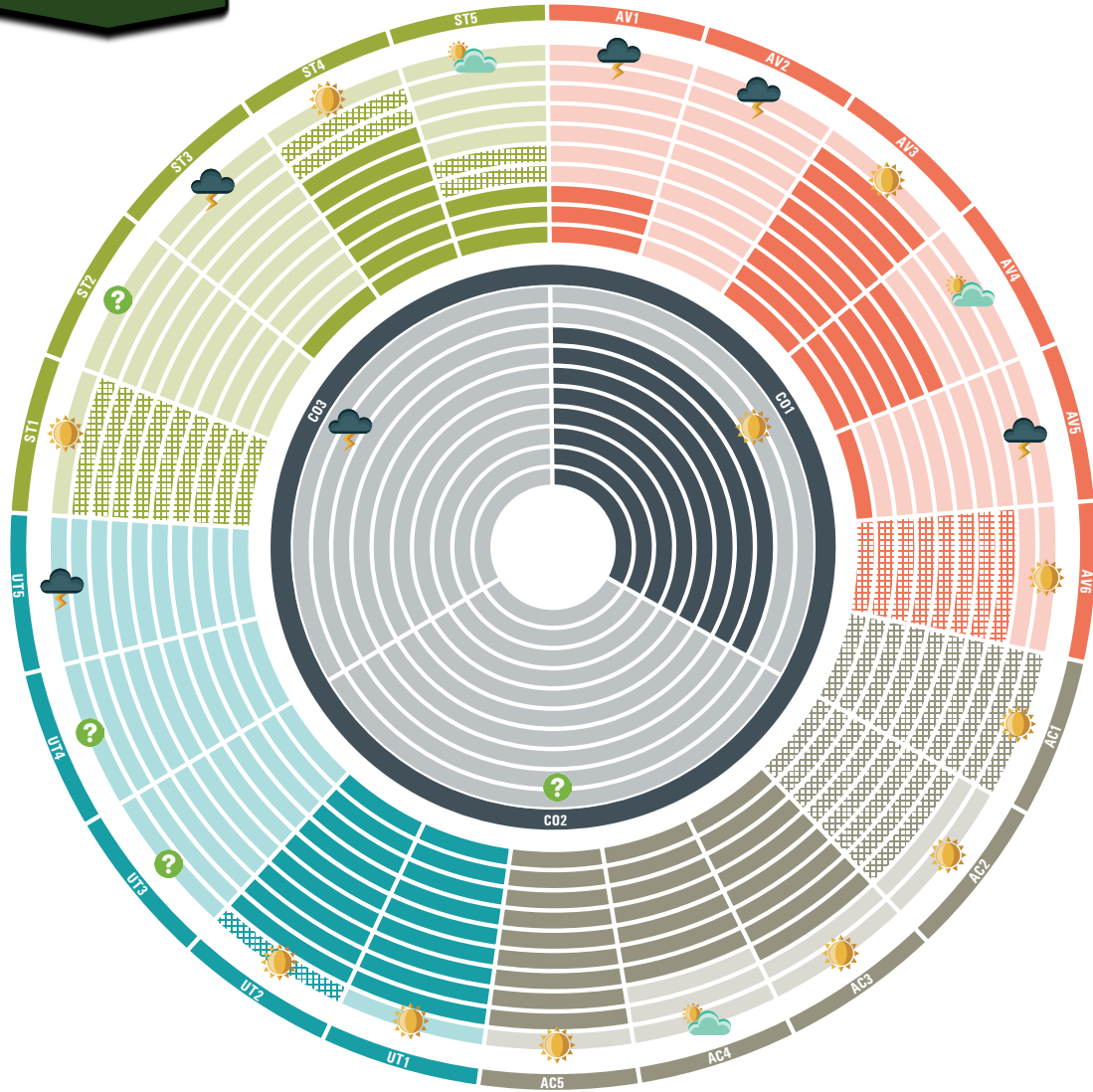
2010 Data:

Latest Data:

Performance: ☀ High: Proceed Action | ⛅ Average: More Action | ⛈ Low: Urgent Action | ❓ No Data

Food security indicators, Lebanon

Indicators		Arab		Lebanon			Trend
		Latest		2010	Latest		
Code	Description	Value	Year	Value	Value	Year	
CORE INDICATORS							
CO1	Undernourishment ® %	12.1	2016	4.5	11.0	2016	🔴
CO2	Food insecurity ® %	12.2	2016	n.a.	n.a.		
CO3	Obesity ® %	28.4	2016	27.9	31.3	2016	🔴
AVAILABILITY INDICATORS							
AV1	Wheat yields - %	82.2	2017	61.6	66.9	2016	🟢
AV2	Agriculture expenditure - index	n.a.		n.a.	0.12	2016	
AV3	Food loss ® %	6.8	2013	2.5	2.5	2013	🟡
AV4	Dietary energy supply - %	131	2017	128	114	2017	🔴
AV5	Wheat Import dependency ® %	65.0	2012	90.9	86.5	2012	🟢
AV6	Agriculture water ® %	n.a.		n.a.	15.6	2018	
ACCESS INDICATORS							
AC1	Poverty ® %	16.6	mult.	n.a.	0.1	2011	
AC2	Food consumption ® %	n.a.		n.a.	20.7	2018	
AC3	Unemployment ® %	10.4	mult.	6.5	9.7	2012	🔴
AC4	Logistics - index	2.7	2016	3.3	2.7	2018	🔴
AC5	Inflation ® %	12.8	mult.	4.0	6.1	2018	🔴
UTILIZATION INDICATORS							
UT1	Drinking water access - %	86.9	2015	90.0	92.6	2017	🟡
UT2	Sanitation access - %	80.8	2015	87.6	98.5	2017	🟢
UT3	Child stunting ® %	22.9	mult.	n.a.	n.a.		
UT4	Child wasting ® %	8.7	mult.	n.a.	n.a.		
UT5	Women anaemia ® %	35.5	2016	27.3	31.2	2016	🔴
STABILITY INDICATORS							
ST1	Climate change ® - index	0.1	2019	n.a.	0.06	2019	
ST2	Price Anomalies ® - index	n.a.		n.a.	n.a.		
ST3	Political stability - ranking	14	2017	7	7	2018	🟡
ST4	Production variability ® - $1,000/capita	10.1	2016	20.6	5.8	2016	🟢
ST5	Supply variability ® - kcal/cap/day	29.8	2013	85.0	63.0	2013	🟢

® : Reversed During Normalization   n.a.= Not Available   mult.= Multiple years

🔴 Red: Negative Trend   🟡 Yellow: Neutral Trend   🟢 Green: Positive Trend

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all data in this table and framework are from national sources.

Food security snapshot

A. Drivers and determinants

The framework shows that the food security situation in Lebanon is mixed. The outcome core indicators indicate that undernourishment (CO1) is not a major issue while food insecurity experience (CO2) lacked data and obesity (CO3) levels are alarming.

Hotspot areas include the following:

- **Availability:** wheat yields (AV1), agriculture orientation (AV2) and wheat import dependency (AV5);

- **Utilization:** anaemia among women (UT5);

- **Stability:** political stability (ST3).

Undernourishment is generally low though the sudden and massive influx of refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic has caused a systemic shock to a country that was already facing a substantial structural debt and experiencing low political stability.

This has negatively affected most of the determinants of food security, resulting in a 100 per cent worsening of the percentage in malnourishment, notably among children. This is accompanied by a nutritional transition as people, notably the youth, shy away from traditional diets, which is further exacerbated by the predominantly urban nature of the country. This is ushering increased rates of obesity, which are more pronounced among women.

The country relies heavily on imports to meet its needs of wheat, and this trend appears set to remain unchanged, especially considering the low governmental investment in agriculture. Food consumption expenditures have increased and are especially high among refugees. Sanitation and clean water are accessible to all while anaemia among women is a worsening problem.

B. Action areas

Lebanon suffers from significant data gaps that need to be addressed in order to properly monitor food security. Missing or obsolete data include, but are not limited to, the use of renewable water in agriculture, children's stunting and wasting and the prevalence of severe food insecurity.

A detailed, data-driven analysis of Lebanon's status and constraints regarding food

security, agrees fully with findings from this monitoring framework.[16] The review also puts forth a series of recommendations building on the strengths of the country in order to seize the opportunity of a sustainable transformation in food security. These recommendations can form a solid basis for a sustainable and durable enhancement of national food security.

16 ESCWA, 2016.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic reached Lebanon in late February 2020 and, by September, had affected more than 45,000 people with around 400 deaths recorded.[17] Although Lebanon had managed to control the spread of the coronavirus, it has witnessed, since the beginning of July, another substantial outbreak, which is proving harder to control.

Weekly cases

45,657
confirmed cases
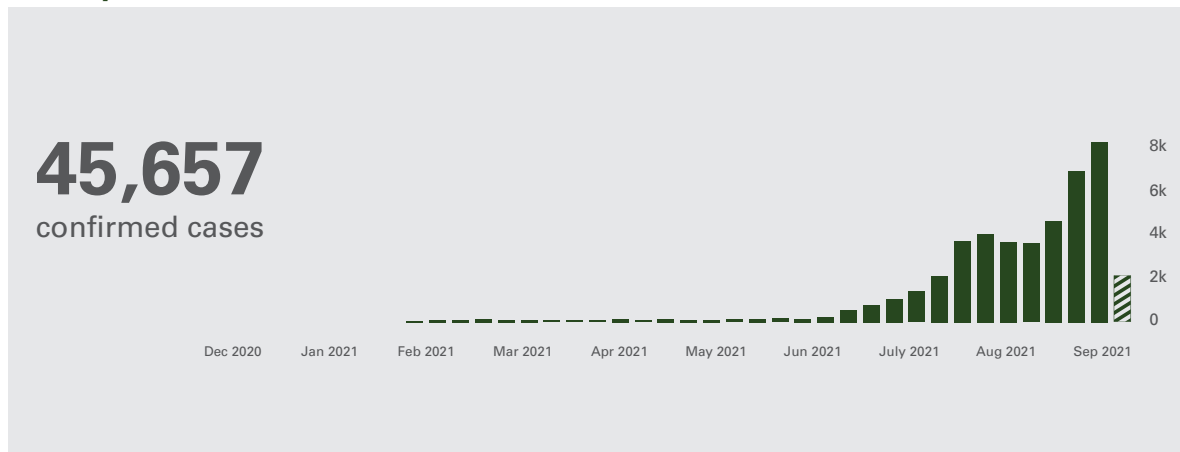
Source: World Health Organization (WHO), n. d.

The pandemic hit Lebanon while in the middle of a financial and political crisis. On August 4th, an explosion hit the port of Beirut at the time when COVID-19-confirmed cases surged to more than 600 per day.[18]

Lockdown measures[19] lead to trade and supply-chain disruptions, which, combined with panic buying, led to a reduced availability of some essential products. The port explosion damaged 150,000 tons of staple food stored at port silos; they included wheat, soy, corn and barley,[20] further threatening the supply chain and food availability. The situation was made worse by an 80 per cent decrease in the value of the Lebanese pound against the

17 World Health Organization (WHO), n. d.
18 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2020.
19 Suspension of schools and universities; and closure of all malls, cinemas, theaters, airport and restaurants.
20 World Food Programme (WFP), 2020a.

US dollar, shortage in foreign currency availability, causing cash-withdrawal restrictions from banks and high exchange rates in the black market, and the subsequent closure of some businesses.[21] Their combined effect led to a detrimental impact on livelihoods and food security of many Lebanese and refugees.

The living conditions of daily earners in the informal sector,[22] such as taxi drivers and street vendors, worsened.[23] The destruction caused by the explosion is expected to increase food insecurity and further exacerbate the economic crisis.[24] The unemployment rate, which was 9.7 per cent in 2012, is expected to increase as the latest assessment by the World Food Programme (WFP) indicates that the pandemic and financial crises have pushed nearly one out of every three Lebanese out of work so far, and reduced the salary of one in every five.[25] On August 19, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) stated that more than 55 per cent of the population is living under poverty with less than $14 per day, and 23 per cent in extreme poverty.[26] This percentage is expected to rise due to explosion-induced job and income losses, as is its impact on food availability and prices.[27] The middle class represents less

than 40 per cent of the population while the high-class population shrank by 10 per cent, to drop to 5 per cent within the next year.[28] When it comes to refugees, 75 per cent are living in extreme poverty.[29] The crises have led to a delay in food import, such as wheat and rice, with vendors either rejecting orders or postponing shipments; cooking oil and lentils shipments from Ukraine and Australia, respectively, were postponed for one month.[30] In addition, farmers and food industries were unable to buy or import agricultural inputs and other raw materials.[31]

In April 2020, Lebanese millers alerted the Government and citizens of a supply crisis if foreign currencies are not available for grain import.[32] At the same time, COVID-19 was inducing panic buying and stockpiling, which further accelerated the depletion, for instance, of locally produced potatoes in the market.[33]

Food prices increased dramatically.[34] An assessment by WFP[35] on June 17, 2020 showed that the price of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB)[36] has been steadily increasing over time with cumulative inflation of 109 per cent when compared to the prices in September 2019.[37] Food inflation rate, upon comparing

21 Al Jazeera, 2020.
22 According to a study by ILO 2019, 55 per cent of 39,000 respondents worked in the informal sector.
23 Al Arabiya English, 2020a.
24 The Lancet, 2020.
25 World Food Programme (WFP), 2020b.
26 ESCWA, 2020; and International Medical Corps, 2020.
27 International Medical Corps, 2020.
28 ESCWA, 2020.
29 UNICEF, 2020.
30 Al Arabiya English, 2020b; and Reuters, 2020a.
31 Al Arabiya English, 2020c.
32 Reuters, 2020b.
33 Al Akhbar, 2020a.
34 Al Arabiya English, 2020c; and MTV Lebanon, 2020.
35 Online survey capturing 3,470 randomly completed responses: 2,418 Lebanese, 887 Syrian refugees and 165 Palestinian refugees over 8 Lebanese governorates.
36 The SMEB food basket is based on a monthly ration per person of 6 kg of rice, 3.9 kg of bulgur, 1.5 kg of pasta, 1.5 kg of white beans, 1.5 kg of sugar, 0.9 liters of sunflower oil, 0.3 kg of salt and 1.2 kg of canned meat.
37 World Food Programme (WFP), 2020c.

that of June 2020 to October 2019, rose by 245 per cent.[38]

To aid in food access, the Government rushed to distribute food parcels and financial aid to vulnerable people. The Ministry of Social Affairs allotted about $12 million in March 2020 to provide food and medicine for 100,000 vulnerable families. The Lebanese army distributed aid packages in various locations. And Lebanon's Cabinet agreed to provided 400,000 Lebanese pounds (LL) as financial assistance to those who lost their jobs and are in need. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Lebanese Foodbank and Beit al-Baraka, among many others, distributed food boxes to needy people all over Lebanon.[39]

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38 Ibid.
39 The Daily Star, 2020; and Beirut Today, 2020.

Box 2. Examples of initiatives

Government-led

In March, the Government authorized the import of 10,000 tons of potatoes from Egypt for industrial purposes,[a] while in April, it requested 400,000 tons of wheat supplies from India.[b]

To protect consumer's purchasing power and ensure price stability, the Government subsidized food and announced a maximum price for a list of food items. This decision is to be implemented for three months by all actors across the supply chain.[c]

The Central Bank is suggesting to lift subsidies and issue ration cards to vulnerable people who meet certain criteria.[d]
The Ministry of Agriculture, in April 2020, prepared an emergency plan aiming at the following:

- Increasing the production of soft wheat, durum wheat and barley by cultivating additional areas;
- Cultivating about 80 hectares of land owned by religious entities;
- Supporting small and medium livestock breeders by providing fodder, strengthening extension support and providing beehives and tools to beekeepers.[e]

Other initiatives

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), together with other agencies, distributed cash aid to affected families to buy daily essentials, including food.[f]

WFP extended its cash assistance programme to support one million people, helping also those impacted by the explosion. It is working to expand its National Poverty Targeting Programme[g] and provided in-kind food assistance to 5,416 people affected by the explosion. Partners distributed food boxes containing 60 kg staple food each, enough for a family of five for one month.[h]

World Central Kitchen paid two restaurants to prepare and deliver 70,000 hot mails to 50 locations. WFP and SHIELD distributed 400 food boxes to families in affected neighbourhoods.[i] They also distributed food boxes to Caritas and Lebanese Food Bank to cook and serve 3,000 meals on a daily basis.[j] Caritas, by August 13, distributed cooked food and food boxes to 30,000 people and 700 people, respectively.[k]

To stabilize bread prices and prevent any shortages, WFP imported 12,500 tons of wheat flour on August 18 and stored them at temporary storage tanks at the port.[l]

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a Al Akhbar, 2020a.
b Al Arabiya English, 2020b.
c Annahar, 2020.
d Business Echoes, 2020.
e Al Akhbar, 2020b.
f United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2020.
g OCHA, 2020a.
h WFP, 2020c.
i OCHA, 2020a.
j WFP, 2020c.
k OCHA, 2020b.
l WFP, 2020c.

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