



Arab food security monitoring framework

Country reviews

Saudi Arabia

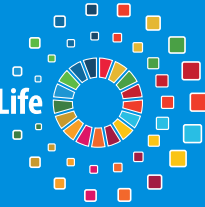


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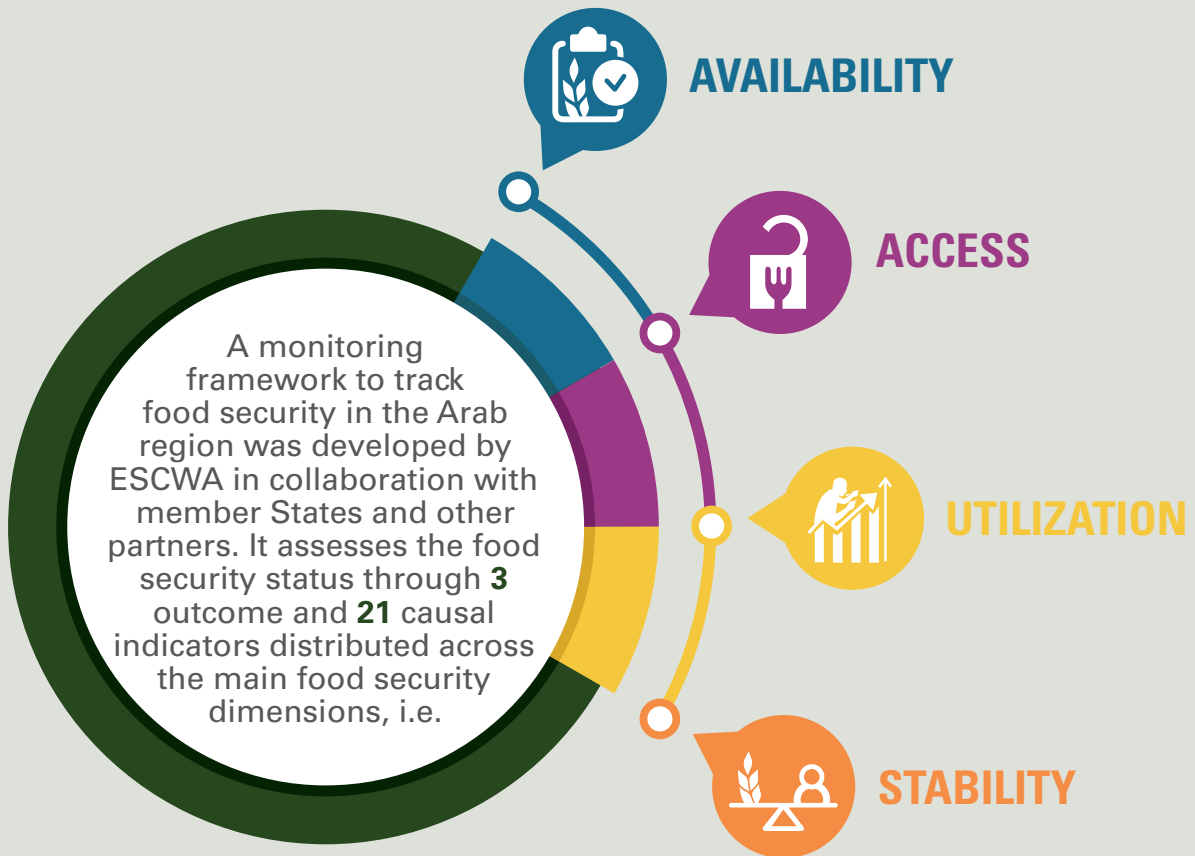


Contents

 Introduction	5
 Food security dashboard - Arab region	10
 Food security indicators, world vs. Arab region	11
 Country background	12
A. Natural resources	12
B. Socioeconomy	13
C. Agriculture and food security	13
 Data and trends	14
A. Core indicators	14
B. Availability	14
C. Access	15
D. Utilization	15
E. Stability	16
 Food security dashboard	17
 Food security indicators, Saudi Arabia	18
 Food security snapshot	19
A. Drivers and determinants	19
B. Action areas	19
 Impact of COVID-19	20
 References	22



Key Messages



The monitoring framework highlights that Saudi Arabia faces elevated and rising rates of obesity, with other areas of concerns including the high dependency on food imports and elevated rates of anaemia among women. 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.

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
C01	Prevalence of undernourishment ^R %	Undernourishment	2.1.1
C02	Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity measured using FIES ^R %	Food insecurity	2.1.2
C03	Prevalence of obesity in the adult population (18 years and older) ^R %	Obesity	

^R : 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) ^R %	Food loss	12.3
AV4	Average dietary energy supply adequacy - %	Dietary energy supply	
AV5	Wheat import dependency ratio ^R %	Import dependency	
AV6	Share of water resources used in agriculture out of total renewable water resources ^R %	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 ^R %	Poverty	1.1.1/1.2.1/1.2.2
AC2	Share of food consumption expenditure in total household consumption expenditure ^R %	Food consumption	
AC3	Unemployment rate ^R %	Unemployment	8.5.2
AC4	Logistics performance - index	Logistics	
AC5	Inflation, consumer prices ^R %	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 ^R %	Child stunting	2.2.1
UT4	Children under 5 years of age affected by wasting ^R %	Child wasting	2.2.2
UT5	Anaemia among women of reproductive age (15-49 years) ^R %	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 ^R	Climate change	
ST2	Food price anomalies standard deviation ^R	Price anomalies	2.c.1
ST3	Political stability and absence of violence - ranking	Political stability	
ST4	Per capita food production variability - \$1,000/capita ^R	Production variability	
ST5	Per capita food supply variability - kcal/capita/day ^R	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 website³ 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 Tunis⁵ and Beirut⁶ 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

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>.



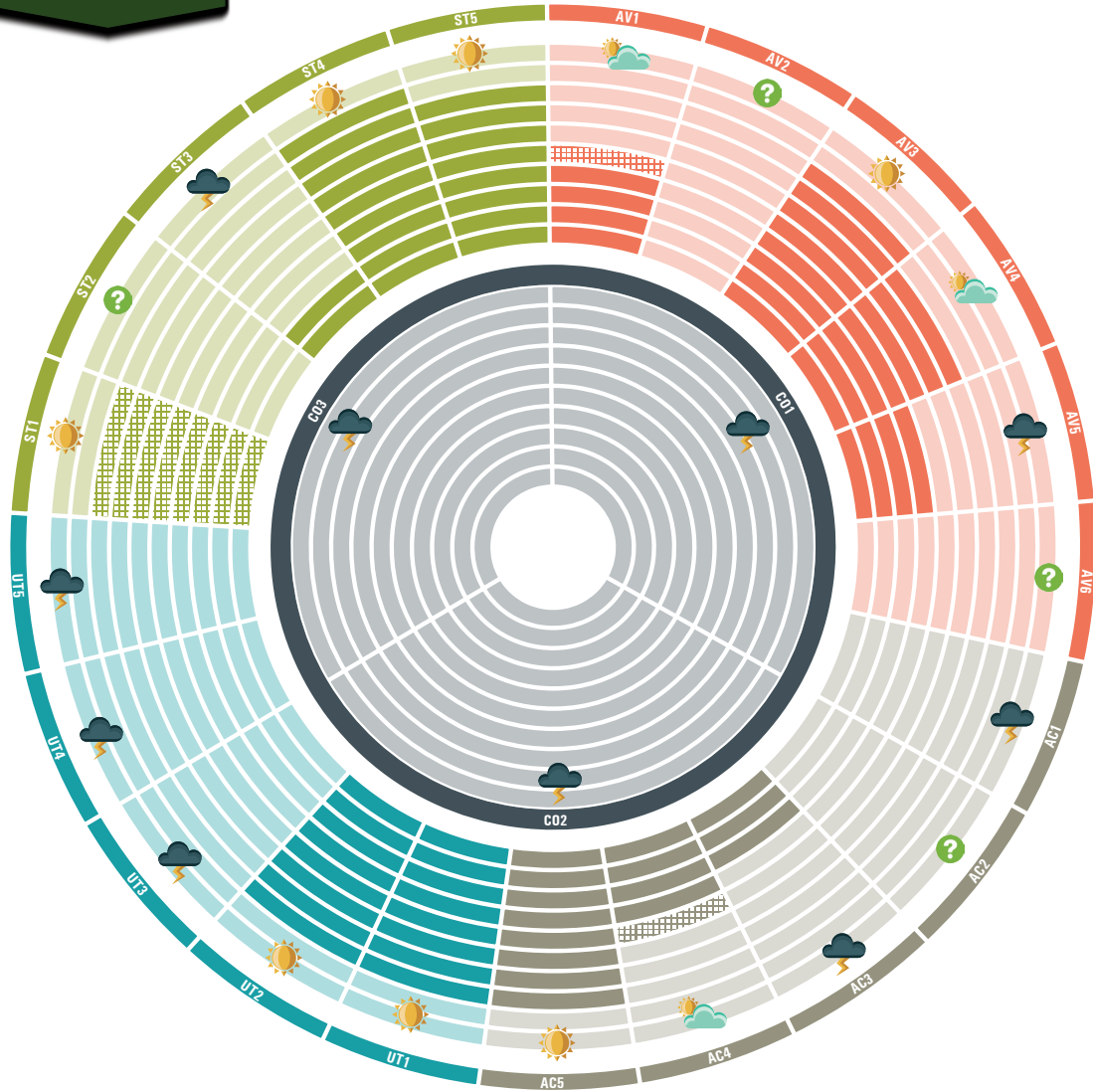
to follow up on progress achieved towards the implementation of selected SDGs. It should further enhance capacity at country level and support efforts of national experts to collect focused data, analyse them using a dedicated framework and interpret meaningfully the results to provide policymakers with 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

Saudi Arabia is a country of over 2 million km² that covers 80 per cent of the Arabian Peninsula with coastlines on both the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea. The central part of the country is mostly sand desert,

and the country has no permanent surface streams but numerous wadis and substantial underground water reserves that fueled agricultural development.¹

Box 1. Saudi Arabia and wheat: from exporter to importer to conserve water

Driven by concerns over the security of its food supply and the potential use of food as a geopolitical weapon, the country initiated its wheat production programme in the early 1980s to achieve at least self-sufficiency; however, the programme became so successful that it turned Saudi Arabia into a net wheat exporter. At its apex, the country had become the sixth world wheat exporter due to its generous support programme. Wheat was produced on vast desert lands overlying deep fossil water aquifers.

The programme led to a rapid decline in the levels of water in the aquifers and, by 2008, the country had to drastically change its wheat policy choosing to roll back its entire wheat programme by 2016. Though wheat was replaced by alfalfa destined for its dairy industry, the Government also decided to discontinue its production and to ease the import of both wheat and alfalfa instead.

Saudi Arabia consumes about 3.35 million tons of wheat per year and has built a network of silo complexes in major cities that allow the storing of up to 3.1 million tons. Efforts are underway to further increase this capacity to about 3.7 million tons.

Source: WORLD-GRAIN.com (2016); and Lippman, T. W. (2010).

1 Ochsenwald, W. L., H.S.J.B. Philby and J. Teitelbaum, 2020.



B. Socioeconomy

Saudi Arabia is home to more than 33 million people, 38 per cent of whom are non-nationals.² The country is heavily urbanized, with more than 83 per cent living in urban areas in 2018 compared to an Arab average of slightly less

than 60 per cent.³ The per capita gross domestic product (GDP) revolved around \$21,000 in 2018, which was about 165 per cent of the world per capita GDP average, putting Saudi Arabia among developed Countries.

C. Agriculture and food security

Only 2 per cent of the country is considered to be adequate for farming.⁴ The country is self-sufficient for eggs and milk and its fisheries sector is developing rapidly.⁵ The sector today accounts for 5 per cent of the non-oil economy and engages about 7 per cent of the labour force.⁶ Despite its limited role, Saudi Arabia continues to invest in the agriculture sector as a means to improve livelihoods in rural areas and to enhance economic diversification.

The Government changed tack with its strategy for food production and embarked on an agricultural modernization programme that saw the emergence of a strong animal production sector (especially dairy) coupled with an increase in cereal imports as the

national cereal production programme was wrapped up due to its impacts on the groundwater resources.

Concurrently, Saudi Arabia sought to enhance its overseas agricultural investments and constructed large silos for grains, the storage capacity of which increased from 40,000 tons in 1978 to 3.5 million tons in 2016. One of the outcomes of urbanization is the shift in diets towards a more Western diet rich in animal fats, sugars and red meat. The growth in meat consumption has been rapid and will place further stress on national water resources if it is to be produced locally, due to the large water footprint of meat.

2 UN-DESA Population Division, 2019; and Gulf Research Center (GRC), 2020.

3 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) Population Division, 2018.

4 Ochsenwald, W. L., H.S.J.B. Philby and J. Teitelbaum, 2020.

5 Mordor Intelligence, 2020.

6 Trading Economics, n. d.





Data and trends

A. Core indicators

- **Prevalence of undernourishment (CO1)** dropped from 7 per cent in 2010 to 5.5 per cent in 2016, well below the Arab average (12.1 per cent), indicating good progress. Being a high-income country, Saudi Arabia has no high concerns with undernourishment though additional efforts are being exerted through the Vision 2030 reform programme;
 - **Prevalence of severe food insecurity (CO2)** stood at 8.1 per cent in 2016, lower than that of the Arab region average (12.2 per cent) for the period 2015-2017.
- The high prevalence of food insecurity could be attributed to a prevalence of relative poverty;⁷
- **Prevalence of adult obesity (CO3)** recorded an increase from 31.5 per cent in 2010 to 35.4 per cent in 2016, which is well above the Arab average of 28.4 per cent. Adult obesity is more prevalent among women (42.3 per cent) than among men (30.8 per cent). The rise in affluence has led to a substantial change in diets, which is a major driving force of the high prevalence of obesity.

B. Availability

- **Wheat yield to potential (AV1)** was recorded at 6.14 tons/ha in 2010, and then at 5 tons/ha in 2017, above the country's estimated maximum potential for wheat yield which stands at 4.66 tons/ha. However, the country is phasing out wheat and forage production due to their negative impact on non-rechargeable aquifers;
- **Agriculture orientation index (AV2)** data are not available;
- **Food losses to food available (AV3)** were relatively low at around 3 per cent between 2010 and 2013. Food waste is not taken into account, but the available data might not represent the reality on the ground as data are missing for a large number of crops and produces;
- **Average dietary energy supply adequacy (AV4)** stands at 130 per cent; the higher the better as food is usually not uniformly distributed among the entire

⁷ Alsayyad, A. S. and A. H. Nawar, 2017.



population. The Arab average stands at 131 per cent;

- **Wheat import dependency (AV5)** is high as the country's low agricultural natural resource endowment makes it almost impossible to sustainably produce its own food, which makes it an almost net importer of food, with a 96 per cent compared to the already high Arab average of 65 per cent;
- **Water resources used in agriculture (AV6)** indicate that water withdrawals are 800 per cent of the renewable water compared to an Arab average of about 40 per cent. Saudi Arabia has practically no permanently running surface water streams, making it reliant on non-renewable underground water resources and desalinated water.

C. Access

- **Poverty ratio at \$3.2/day (AC1)** data are not available. As a high-income country with relatively good social programmes, poverty is not major issue;
- **Food consumption share of expenditures (AC2)** stands at almost 21 per cent of total expenditure. This is on the high range for a rich country as for example the average for the European Union stands at about 12 per cent;⁸
- **Unemployment rate (AC3)** was relatively stable at around 6 per cent between 2010 and 2018, which was well below the Arab average of about 10.4 per cent. Female unemployment is reaching up to 20 per cent, whereas male unemployment stands at only 3 per cent as a result of prevailing sociocultural characteristics. This is among the largest gender gaps within the region;
- **Logistics performance (AC4)** stood at 3.2 in 2010 and remained relatively stable throughout 2016 and above the Arab average of 2.7. Saudi Arabia has relatively good infrastructure and good trading procedures as it relies heavily on trade to import the food it needs;
- **Inflation, consumer prices (AC5)** was 5.34 per cent in 2010 and dropped to 2.5 per cent in 2018, compared to an Arab average of 12.8 per cent. Inflation is among the few indicators subject to substantial changes on a short-term basis, for instance, from one quarter or year to the next depending on the prevailing situation. It was relatively high in 2010 as it followed the food price crisis that prevailed in the late 2000s and early 2010s.

D. Utilization

- **Population using basic drinking water services (UT1)** stood at 100 per cent as the country's infrastructure is well developed and stable;
- **Population using basic sanitation services (UT2)** reached the entire population as well, which is usually a given for a high-income country;

⁸ Eurostat, 2018.



- **Stunting in children under five years (UT3)** data are not available though it is assumed to be well below the Arab average of 22.9 per cent due to its relatively good social programmes;
- **Wasting in children under five years (UT4)** data are not available but is assumed to

be well below the Arab average of 8.7 per cent;

- **Prevalence of anaemia among women (UT5)** is very high in Saudi Arabia standing at 41.5 per cent in 2010 and 42.9 per cent in 2016 compared to an Arab average of about 35.5 per cent.

E. Stability

- **Climate change vulnerability (ST1)** does not indicate that the country is highly vulnerable to climate change as it scores 0.02. The subcomponents of this indicator, namely, weather-related disasters, sea-level rise and agricultural productivity loss, might not be readily applicable to Saudi Arabia;
- **Food price anomalies (ST2)** was 0.6 in 2017, which is moderately high, indicating a probability that Saudi Arabia could be affected by price shocks. This might be attributed to its quasi-complete dependency on food imports;
- **Political stability (ST3)** ranking was at about 37 in 2010 and dropped to about 29 in 2018, which is above the Arab average of 14. This ranking indicates that Saudi Arabia could be impacted by instability,

most probably due to the ongoing conflict in Yemen and in the Arabian Gulf;

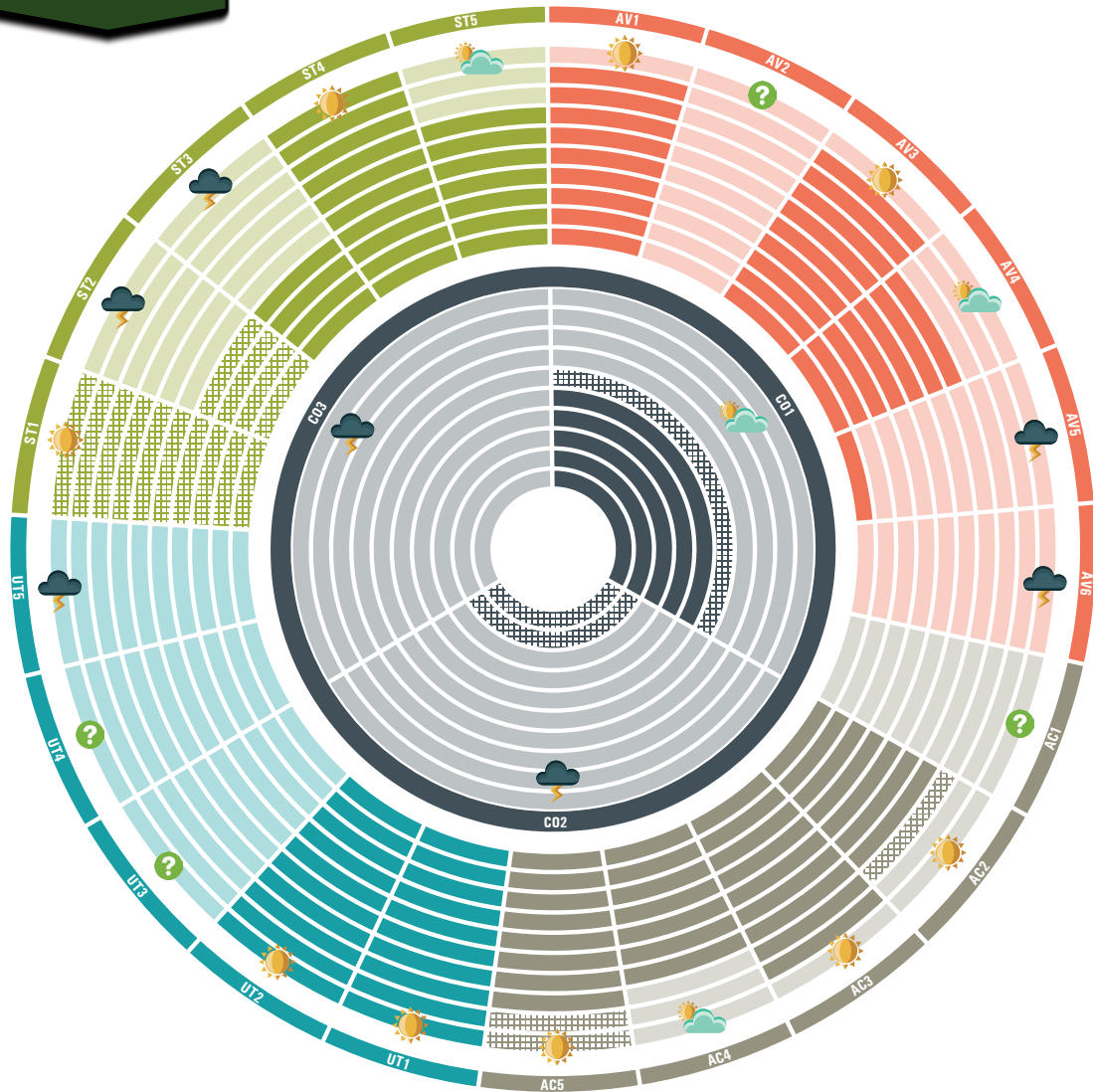
- **Food production variability (ST4)** slightly increased from \$3,300 to \$4,100⁹ per capita between 2010 and 2016. Although this is an unfavourable change depicting an increase in variability, the value is still among the lowest in the region as the Arab average is at about \$10,000 per capita;
- **Food supply variability (ST5)** recorded very high values between 2010 and 2013 with 37 and 75 kcal/capita/day, respectively, which were well above the Arab average of about 30 kcal/capita/day. The high variability might be the result of the trade restrictions that prevailed following the food price crises of the late 2000s and early 2010s.

⁹ Constant 2004-2006 International USD.



Food security dashboard

Saudi Arabia



2010 Data: ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Latest Data: ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Performance: ☀ High: Proceed Action | ☁ Average: More Action | ⚡ Low: Urgent Action | ? No Data



Food security indicators, Saudi Arabia

Indicators		Arab		Saudi Arabia			Trend
		Latest		2010	Latest		
Code	Description	Value	Year	Value	Value	Year	
CORE INDICATORS							
CO1	Undernourishment ^R %	12.1	2016	7.0	5.5	2016	●
CO2	Food insecurity ^R %	12.2	2016	n.a.	8.1	2016	
CO3	Obesity ^R %	28.4	2016	31.5	35.4	2016	●
AVAILABILITY INDICATORS							
AV1	Wheat yields - %	82.2	2017	131.9	107.3	2017	●
AV2	Agriculture expenditure - index	n.a.		n.a.	n.a.		
AV3	Food loss ^R %	6.8	2013	2.5	2.6	2013	●
AV4	Dietary energy supply - %	131	2017	130	130	2017	●
AV5	Wheat Import dependency ^R %	65.0	2012	91.6	96.0	2012	●
AV6	Agriculture water ^R %	n.a.		n.a.	800.0	2018	
ACCESS INDICATORS							
AC1	Poverty ^R %	16.6	mult.	n.a.	n.a.		
AC2	Food consumption ^R %	n.a.		26.3	20.6	2018	●
AC3	Unemployment ^R %	10.4	mult.	5.6	5.9	2018	●
AC4	Logistics - index	2.7	2016	3.2	3.0	2018	●
AC5	Inflation ^R %	12.8	mult.	5.3	2.5	2018	●
UTILIZATION INDICATORS							
UT1	Drinking water access - %	86.9	2015	98.8	100.0	2017	●
UT2	Sanitation access - %	80.8	2015	99.3	100.0	2017	●
UT3	Child stunting ^R %	22.9	mult.	n.a.	n.a.		
UT4	Child wasting ^R %	8.7	mult.	n.a.	n.a.		
UT5	Women anaemia ^R %	35.5	2016	41.5	42.9	2016	●
STABILITY INDICATORS							
ST1	Climate change ^R - index	0.1	2019	n.a.	0.02	2019	
ST2	Price Anomalies ^R - index	n.a.		n.a.	0.6	2017	
ST3	Political stability - ranking	14	2017	37	29	2018	●
ST4	Production variability ^R - \$1,000/capita	10.1	2016	3.3	4.1	2016	●
ST5	Supply variability ^R - kcal/cap/day	29.8	2013	37.0	75.0	2013	●

^R : 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 figuring in this table and framework have been sourced from international databases or national sources.





Food security snapshot

A. Drivers and determinants

In relation to the core indicators, Saudi Arabia has a slightly elevated prevalence of undernourishment (CO1) while the other two core indicators, namely, prevalence of food insecurity (CO2) and obesity (CO3) show alarming levels.

Hotspots among causal indicators include the following:

- **Availability dimension:** food import (AV5) and water use in agriculture (AV6);
- **Utilization dimension:** anaemia among women (UT5);
- **Stability dimension:** food price anomalies (ST2) and political stability (ST3).

Saudi Arabia is a high-income country with an affluent population. There are rural pockets

with poorer people, but the lack of data does not allow a clear assessment of the situation.

Following largely unsuccessful attempts at self-sufficiency, which exacted a heavy toll on the water resources, Saudi Arabia is now looking beyond its borders to satisfy its food needs. As a country that can afford a large food bill, this is a better policy option than local production. However, fair and equitable trade and investment deals must be sought in order to avoid undesirable political repercussions. Food access does not appear to be an issue, although data must be segregated and then analysed to identify potential pockets of poverty that can explain the poor performance in severe food insecurity.

B. Action areas

By far the largest problem remains the nutritional status of the population, especially of women, whose obesity and anaemia scores are concerning. Whether this is associated with the low inclusion of women in the labour force remains to be determined. This shortcoming needs to be addressed through focused nutrition and specially designed programmes including appropriate social safety nets for the

most vulnerable. Saudi Arabia has developed dietary guidelines, but additional efforts should go towards their implementation through focused national programmes.

As is the case with many countries of the region, unavailability of data is a limitation for the efficient monitoring and reporting of food security in all its dimensions and challenges.

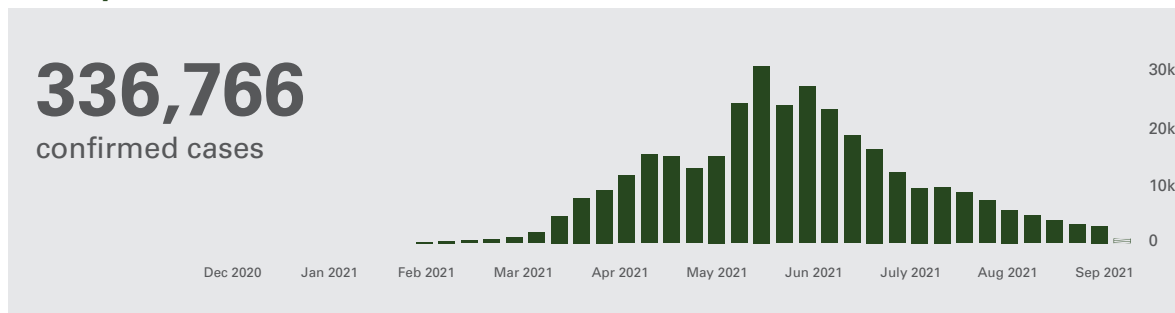


Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic reached Saudi Arabia in early March 2020 and, by October, had affected about 336,000 people with close to 5,000 deaths recorded. The country recorded a

succession of peaks with the highest of close to 5,000 confirmed daily cases towards mid-June. However, reported cases are following a decreasing trend now.¹⁰

Weekly cases



Source: World Health Organization (WHO), n. d.

Beside lockdown measures,¹¹ Saudi Arabia is facing an economic slowdown as oil revenues fell by 24 per cent in the first quarter of 2020 compared to the previous year.¹² The anticipated reduced touristic and religious events (hajj and omra) in the Gulf region are also expected to lead to a loss of 400,000 jobs related to tourism in all countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council

(GCC). It is expected to lead to the departure of 1.2 million foreign workers (9 per cent of total employment) from the labour market in Saudi Arabia.¹³ However, this is anticipated to open vacancies to Saudis, which might decrease the unemployment rate. The Government implemented the following policies that supported 80,000 firms and provided employment to 400,000 Saudis:¹⁴

¹⁰ World Health Organization (WHO), n. d.

¹¹ Suspension of international and domestic flights; closure of all educational and vocational training institutions, malls and amusement parks; banning of public and social events; nation-wide curfews from 7 p.m. till 6 a.m. in all cities except Makkah and Madina, where the curfew is 24 hours.

¹² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2020.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Bloomberg, 2020a.

- A \$13 billion stimulus package announced by the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority to support businesses and extend finance to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) for six months;¹⁵
- An economic package of \$18.7 billion aimed at preserving liquidity in the private sector by exempting or deferring payments of taxes;¹⁶
- The disbursement of \$2.4 billion aimed at paying 60 per cent of around 1.2 million salaries of private sector employees for three months as part of an unemployment insurance scheme;¹⁷
- An economic package of \$13.3 billion aimed at paying Government dues to the private sector at a faster pace and paying 30 per cent of electricity bills for three months for the agriculture, industrial and commercial sectors.¹⁸

Box 2. Examples of Government-led initiatives

The Saudi Agriculture Fund announced an action plan to support local food security and agricultural production.^a It allocated \$665 million^b to support farmers and ease imports by:

- Encouraging domestic production of fruits and vegetables including boosting the output of tomatoes and cucumbers by 50 per cent;
- Encouraging growers to adopt hydroponics in their farming systems through loans worth \$80 million;^c
- Boosting farming abroad in 10 countries in Africa, the Black Sea area and Latin America by offering low-interest loans for a total of \$533.33 million to companies that send at least half of their overseas harvest to Saudi Arabia;^d covered crops include alfalfa, wheat, barley, sugar, rice and corn;
- Allocating \$40 million to support small-scale livestock owners, fish farming projects and poultry producers;^e

In April, the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture lifted the ban on livestock imports from Somalia in an attempt to boost and ensure sufficient local supply.^f

Under the leadership of Saudi Arabia, the G20 ministers of agriculture agreed not to impose export restrictions or extraordinary taxes on food and agricultural products purchased for non-commercial humanitarian purposes.^g

a Arab News, 2020.

b Bloomberg, 2020b.

c SUSGT, 2020.

d Arab News, 6] 2020]; and SUSGT, 2020.

e Arab News, 2020.

f Horndiplomat, 2020.

g G20 Saudi Arabia, 2020.

15 Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), 2020.

16 Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG), 2020.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.





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