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# Policy Brief

## Towards the Implementation of Jordan's Food Security Strategy

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## Acknowledgments

"Towards the Implementation of Jordan's Food Security Strategy", is the second in a series of policy briefs developed under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator's Office, to formulate recommendations for policy-makers and feed into ongoing national initiatives and reform processes, and to empower different stakeholders and offer them tools for advocacy. In addition, the series aims to familiarize a wider audience with international norms and standards and the work of the United Nations in Jordan.

The brief was developed by the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), with contributions from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the World Health Organization (WHO) with substantive inputs and support from the UN Resident Coordinator's office.

# Background and Objective

Food security is defined as “the state when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”.

The high prevalence of undernourishment and malnutrition in Jordan are the greatest indicators for the need to transform its food systems. The Food Security Strategy (FSS) identified Jordan’s 2030 vision for the food security: **“Safeguard Jordan’s population against food insecurity and ensuring access to safe, stable, affordable and nutritious supply of food at all times”**. Jordan participated actively in all the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) preparatory activities and in [the Summit](#), which was held in September 2021.

Jordan faces significant challenges including a fragmented legislative framework, inefficient and insufficient efforts towards improving water use, dependence on imported foods and the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19. The adoption of the National Food Security Strategy 2021-2030 and Action Plan 2022-2024 in addition to the implementation of the Pathway and Jordan’s commitments announced during the UNFSS Summit are welcome steps to address these challenges.

Following a UN policy brief on [“Healthy Diets for All in Jordan”](#), this policy brief provides a synthesis and sheds light on the importance and priority Jordan places to its Food Security Strategy and transformation of food systems.



The brief aims to inform decision making and ensure harmonization, complementarity and coherence with other national and international frameworks and interventions.

Water harvesting structure at Al-Mashare’ Jordan. ©FAO Jordan



# Jordan's National Context

Food security is becoming a major national issue in Jordan, as it is a pre-requirement to achieving human and national security. The food systems in Jordan are fragile and vulnerable due to multiple factors. Jordan is located in an arid and semiarid climatic zone.

It is resource-poor in water and energy; the annual water share per capita is less than 100 m<sup>3</sup> yet local agriculture uses more than 50% of all available water resources to produce some 45% of the countries requirements. 55% of the food consumed in Jordan, mainly basic foods such as wheat and pulses, is imported.

The ongoing Syrian crisis has also directly impacted Jordan's food economy given Syria was Jordan's primary agricultural export market and some 70% of Jordan's imported foods used to pass through the country before border closures. This has affected Jordan's balance of payment, and consequently, Jordan's economic growth and foreign investment.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has aggravated the growing economic challenges faced by Jordan, exacerbated by a critical decline in foreign assistance to refugees, including reductions in food assistance by the United Nations. Food security for refugee households remains worryingly poor despite ongoing assistance; in August 2021, 84% of households in camps and 89% of households in communities remain either food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity. Female headed households and households with disabled members were particularly food insecure. Disaggregation by camp showed that the number of households that are food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity is 85% of households in Azraq Camp and 80% in Zaatari Camp.

A 2019 [Study](#) revealed that food insecurity in both Jerash and Souf Palestinian camps was 72.7%, with moderate-to-high prevalence of stunting and overweight levels among Palestine refugee children living in these camps. Since then, the COVID related movement restrictions and prolonged lockdown have had [a negative impact](#) on food security for most vulnerable Palestine refugees.

Among Jordanians, 3% of households are food insecure, and another 53% are [vulnerable to food insecurity](#). This constitutes a challenge as well as an opportunity, not only for the Government but also for other national and international partners in supporting Jordan build resilience and respond to immediate needs and priorities for both food security and food systems.

WFP provides monthly food assistance to approximately 465,000 refugees in camps and communities to help meet their food needs. © WFP/Mohammad Batah





# Legal, Policy and Institutional Framework



Bee keeping is one of many livelihood activities implemented in collaboration between WFP and the Ministry of Agriculture in Jordan to support vulnerable Jordanian and Syrian refugees. ©WFP/Mohammad Batah

Jordan has ratified the [United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), which includes the [right to adequate food \(article 11\)](#); food security is a pre-condition for the full enjoyment of the right to food.

The right to food places legal obligations on States to eliminate hunger and combat malnutrition, ensuring food security for all. The right to food is not a right to be fed, but primarily the right to feed oneself in dignity. States are therefore expected to put in place conditions that facilitate access to decent work opportunities or access to land for food production so that individuals can meet their own needs through their own efforts and using their own resources. The right to food is intrinsically linked and interdependent with other human rights, including the right to decent work and the right to participate in public affairs.

The national food security legislative framework is scattered and divided between the legislative and regulatory frameworks of several institutions such as the Ministries of Agriculture; Social Development; Industry, Trade and Supply; Health; and Water and Irrigation as well as the Jordan Food and Drug Administration among others.

Several laws, by-laws and instructions govern food security related issues in Jordan, but they lack coherence and harmony.

At the same time their implementation and enforcement are relatively weak. It is worth noting that so far, there is no entity in the country that is entrusted with the overall management and oversight of food security, so there are several overlaps, duplications and even contradictions in the functions and tasks of different institutions.

# The Strategy

The National Food Security Strategy 2021-2030 was endorsed by the Cabinet on 5 September 2021 and is accompanied by the first Action Plan covering 2022-2024. However this plan does not include all projects and interventions required to achieve the objectives of the strategy, as most of them are under the responsibility of other institutions. The Strategy itself covers four mutually inclusive Strategic Objectives and their respective Sub-objectives and programmes:

## 1 Ensure Availability of Food at National, Household and Individual Levels

Availability requires on the one hand that food should be available from natural resources either through the production of food, by cultivating land or animal husbandry, or enhance food processing especially for local food products. On the other hand, it means that food should be available for sale in markets and shops. The utilization and stability of food should be optimized.

Providing adequate, healthy, nutritious, and safe food at all times is one of the most important pillars of food security. Although significant self-sufficiency ratios have been achieved in vegetables, fresh milk, poultry, eggs and olive oil, Jordan relies heavily on imports of strategic food commodities, such as wheat, barley, rice and most legumes, which comprise the majority of the local food basket.

Jordan imports nearly \$4 billion worth of food and agricultural products annually, including more than 95% of the country's needs of wheat and barley as well as 100% of its rice and sugar needs. This emphasizes the role of trade and supply as key elements to securing sufficient strategic food commodities for Jordan considering the limited resources for expansion of domestic production. Food availability is also very much affected by food loss and waste at different stages of the supply chain; this loss of financial and natural resources offers an opportunity for improvement.

While Jordan has not till now experienced serious food availability issues, global crises could jeopardize food pipelines and the ability of major producers of strategic food commodities to maintain stable food exports, distorting the global food supply of strategic commodities.

<b>Strategic Objective One: Ensure Availability of Food at National, Household and Individual Levels</b>
<b>Sub-Objective 1.1: Achievement of the Maximum Potential of Local Food Production</b>
Program 1.1.1: Improving Production, Productivity and Enhancing Incomes of Farmers and Producers
<b>Program 1.1.2: Conservation and Sustainable use of Agrobiodiversity</b>
Program 1.1.3: Food Industry Development
<b>Sub-objective 1.2: Provision of Sufficient and Stable Supply of Imported Food Items</b>
Program 1.2.1: Ensuring the Availability of Sufficient Strategic Food Stock
<b>Sub-objective 1.3: Improvement of Regional Collaboration and Integration in the Different Aspects of Food Security</b>
Program 1.3.1: Establishing the Regional Food Security Hub
<b>Sub-objective 1.4: Reduction of Food Loss and Waste and Enhance Food Safety</b>
Program 1.4.1: Food Loss and Waste Reduction
<b>Program 1.4.2: Optimal Use of the Lost and Wasted Food</b>
Program 1.4.3: Food Safety Compliance



A group of Jordanian women who participated in a training on food processing organized by FAO in Mafraq, North of Jordan. © FAO Jordan

## 2 Enhance Access to Food

Accessibility requires economic and physical access to food. Economic accessibility means that food must be affordable; individuals should be able to afford an adequate diet without compromising on other basic needs such as school fees, medicines or rent.

Ensuring economic access to food for all people in Jordan is one of the main priorities; it is a religious requirement and a human right guaranteed in international human rights law. Poverty and unemployment are the top challenges to accessing food and require proactive measures to address the food insecurity of the most vulnerable people, building the resilience of poor families while enhancing the enabling environment and governance to ensure sustainable solutions. Despite the continued decline in household spending on food, which reached about 26.52% during the first nine months of 2020, food remains the highest expenditure, followed by housing at 23.78%. More than 40% of the families in Jordan spend more than 40% of their income on food.

### Strategic Objective Two: Enhance Access to Food

Sub-Objective 2.1: Reduction of the Food Insecure Households

Program 2.1.1: Supporting the Social Protection Networks

Sub-objective 2.2: Creation of Sustainable Economic Opportunities

Program 2.2.1: Improving Rural Livelihood Opportunities, Especially for Women and Youth

Program 2.2.2: Providing the Enabling Environment and Services for New Investments and Economic Opportunities

Sub-objective 2.3: Provision of Decent Living for Refugees

Program 2.3.1: Sustaining Decent Livelihoods to Refugees



### 3 Optimize the Utilization and Stability of Food

Adequacy means that food must satisfy dietary needs, taking into account the individual’s age, living conditions, health, occupation, sex, etc...

Providing healthy and balanced food to meet the requirements of healthy nutrition will reduce the prevalence of malnutrition, especially among children under five and women of childbearing age. Ensuring the stability of the adequate supply of fresh and processed food, whether locally produced or imported, is a major requirement and a prerequisite for food security. See also the UN in Jordan policy brief on [“Healthy diets for all in Jordan”](#).

<b>Strategic Objective Three: Optimize the Utilization and Stability of Food</b>
Sub-objective 3.1: Improvement of Food Quality for all People in Jordan
Program 3.1.1: Improving Food Quality
Sub-objective 3.2: Adoption of Effective Measures to Reduction of Malnutrition and its Potential Effects
Program 3.2.1: Enhancing Food Fortification by Elements and Minerals
Program 3.2.2: School Feeding
Program 3.2.3: Family Care

### 4 Strengthen the Governance of Food Security

Jordan does not have a specific institution dealing with food security in its broad sense, nor a unified and comprehensive regulatory framework to guide this vital and strategic issue. Food security responsibilities are shared by several institutions and are regulated by several legislations, policies and national strategies, experiences of other countries that have significantly advanced in achieving food security suggest having strong political support at the highest level is pivotal for success.

<b>Strategic Objective Four: Strengthen the Governance of Food Security</b>
Sub-objective 4.1: Enhancement of Food Security Governance Structure.
Program 4.1.1: Creating the Institutional and Legal Framework for Food Security in Jordan
Program 4.1.2: Establishment of a Database and Monitoring System for Food Security in Jordan
Sub-objective 4.2: Strengthening of the Food Systems Research, Innovation, Technology Dissemination and Services
Program 4.2.1: Supporting Research, Knowledge Development and Transfer

# The Change We Want to See

Even though food security in Jordan depends to a great extent on agriculture production, the concept of food security is a multi-dimensional and multi-institutional issue, much broader than food production and food availability.

When addressing food security in Jordan, the local context inside Jordan and the external global context that affect Jordan need to be considered.

The strengths of the Jordanian local agricultural sector include relatively cheap production costs, abundance of skilled farmers and their readiness for skills upgrading and capacity and capability development, diverse cultivation culture and active civil society organizations. The weaknesses that need to be addressed include contradicting policies and poor coordination among relevant institutions, dependency on foreign labour, lack of financial resources allocated to agricultural development from the government budget, lack of medium to long-term funding from both public or private sector banks and financial institutions as investments in the agricultural sector are seen as a very high risk, climate change and need to mitigate the impact on production, skyrocketing unemployment to 24.7% post-COVID and increased competition over resources. These weaknesses are compounded by increasing unemployment, worsening hunger and the inability of social protection programs to meet the needs of the most marginalized. In addition, food waste in Jordan reached 930 thousand tons in 2020 compared to the global figure of 931 million tons, making it a major cause of concern for food security.

Additionally, the increasing gender and socio-economic inequalities, patterns of discrimination like the unequal access to land and insufficient labor wage for the rural poor, and complications in both the local and international supply and value chains associated with this sector, constitute root causes for food insecurity and need to be reversed.

Moving to the global context, the high dependency of Jordan on imports to meet its needs of major food commodities as wheat and rice have caused its food balance deficit in 2018 to reach USD 2.501 billion, which makes Jordan vulnerable to global market changes. The core point that should be addressed here regards regional and global cooperation and harmonization of food quality and standards, which, if strengthened, are an opportunity to enhance food supply stability in the region. Also, given the initiative for Jordan to become a regional hub for food security, there is a need to build new partnerships and new cooperation modalities with the countries in the region to further Jordan's role as a center for peace and stability in the region. Additionally, improving food safety and security emphasizes the need to maximize the use of existing trade agreements and active international partners.

The National Food Security Strategy acts as a compass that will guide Jordan's development and implementation of regulatory and policy frameworks that will contribute to enhancing Jordan's competitive and comparative advantages in the agricultural sector, and achieving growth and prosperity

Cauliflowers harvest in a farm in Amman, Jordan. ©UN Jordan/ Mohammad Abu Ghoush



## Towards the implementation of the food security strategy and associated action plan in Jordan

Even though the Food Security Action Plan includes high priority interventions, some interventions should be prioritized as they constitute a prerequisite or requirement for proper implementation, for initiation of certain activities, or to accelerate and improve the efficiency and performance of food security relevant projects implemented through other sectoral plans.

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### The recommended priority actions:

1. Strengthen coordination between the various responsible entities including potentially establishing an executive inter-agency task force/committee at the Prime Ministry that reports to the Prime Minister and is empowered to deliver impactful change with a specific mandate and budget. This Task Force will oversee the management and implementation of the food security strategy and other relevant issues.
2. Support legal and regulatory reform.
3. Establish a food security Management Information System to facilitate data collection, analysis and reporting on food security indicators at the national and sub-national levels.
4. Conduct and prepare requirements necessary for the implementation of certain interventions such as:
  - A study on the feasibility of developing Jordan as a regional hub for food security,
  - Mapping of food loss and waste with analysis of reasons and potential solutions,
  - Road map/strategy for the transformation of food systems,
  - Analysis of the impact of climate change on food security,
  - Establish the food security acceleration trust fund,
  - Enhance institutional coordination and policy coherence tools.
5. Establish the regional hub for food security.
6. Support small farmers and food producers to adopt water-saving techniques, group marketing and contribute to school feeding.
7. Minimize food loss and waste and maximize the use of unused food.
8. Benefit from the experiences, practices and innovative approaches of other countries.
9. Promote social responsibility and private sector engagement in tackling food insecurity and hunger.
10. Promote access to information and meaningful participation by different stakeholders in the implementation of the food security strategy and action plan.
11. Extend further support from UN agencies and donors to vulnerable populations, including refugees to ensure that their food security is not compromised.
12. Place food security-related issues higher on the developmental agenda of the Government and international community.



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