

FOOD SECURITY

By June 2021, the Lebanese pound had lost 90% of its value since the onset of the economic crisis.¹ Inflation impacted food prices significantly. Between October 2019 and June 2021, the cost of food increased by 404%, resulting in worrisome food insecurity levels among Syrian refugee families.

Food security implies that individuals have physical and economic access to enough quantities of safe and nutritious food at all times.² This chapter assesses the food security and the extent of food insecurity of Syrian refugee households, disaggregating the results by governorate and district.

Key findings

- Food insecurity for Syrian refugees was still at worrisome levels (49%) in 2021, similar to 2020. The share of households who were moderately food insecure was 46% and those who were severely food insecure was 3%. The highest level of food insecurity was reported in the North at 56%.
- Food insecurity increased by 16 percentage points in Akkar, by 10 percentage points in both El Nabatieh and Mount Lebanon, and by 8 percentage points in Baalbek-El Hermel.
- More than 90% of the food insecure (moderate and severe) households were living below the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB).
- Fifty-one percent of households had medium to very high food expenditure share (more than 50% of their expenditures were on food), up from 45% in 2020.
- Female-headed households were slightly more food insecure (53%) than male-headed ones (49%), similar to 2020. Households in non-permanent shelters were more food insecure (53%) than those in non-residential (51%) and residential (48%) shelters.

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanon-currency-drops-new-low-financial-meltdown-deepens-2021-06-13/>

² World Food Summit 1996

Food security methodology

The food security status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is measured using a composite indicator that combines three dimensions of food security:

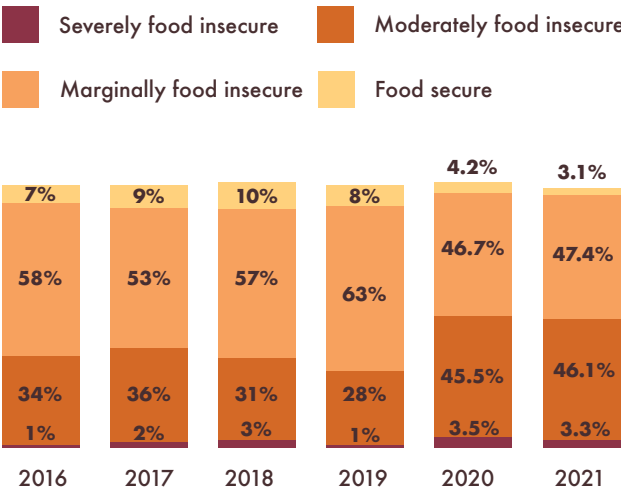
- current consumption as determined by the food consumption score
- food as a share of total expenditure reflecting economic vulnerability
- asset depletion strategies (livelihood coping strategies) which indicate the long-term coping capacity of livelihoods to shocks

In order to compare the 2021 data with trends of previous years, the methodology used to classify households was replicated as in previous VASyR assessments and detailed in Annex 18. Based on this methodology, households were classified into four categories: food secure, marginally food insecure, moderately food insecure, and severely food insecure. Second table in Annex 18 describes the characteristics of the four categories.

Overall, food insecurity among Syrian refugee households was maintained at the level of 2020, which was a significant increase by 1.7 times compared to 2019. An increase of 18 percentage points in moderately food insecure households was recorded and a 2 percentage points increase in severely food insecure ones when compared to 2019. These reported levels were the highest in comparison to previous years. Only 3% of households were food secure, the lowest level of food security reported over the past six years. The share of marginally food insecure households remained similar to 2020 levels (47%).

Food insecurity increased in all governorates except for the South, the North, and Bekaa. The highest increases in food insecurity (16 percentage points) were witnessed in Akkar from 33% in 2020 to 49% in 2021, El Nabatieh from 40% in 2020 to 50% in 2021, and Mount Lebanon from 40% in 2020 to 49% in 2021. On the other hand, food insecurity levels declined in the South by 26 percentage points (from 67% in 2020 to 41% in 2021), the North from 70% in 2020 to 56% in 2021, and Bekaa from 62% in 2020 to 53% in 2021. Similar to 2018, 2019, and 2020, female-headed households were more food insecure than male-

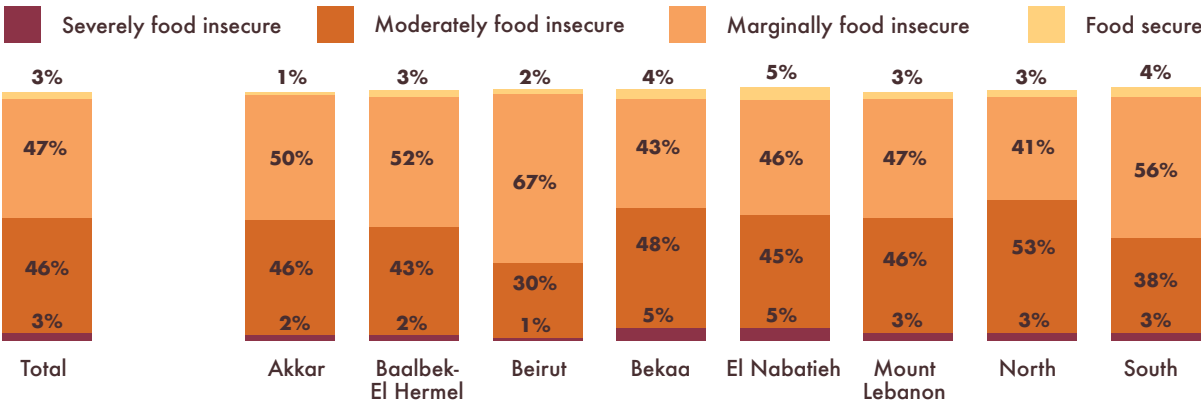
Figure 1: Food insecurity trends 2016-2021



headed ones (53% vs. 49%). Households in non-permanent shelters were more food insecure (54%) than those in non-residential (51%) and residential (48%) shelters. Households living below the SMEB were the most food insecure (52%) compared to other S/MEB categories.³ Households in the bottom expenditure quintile were twice as food insecure as those in the top expenditure quintile (69% vs. 33%).

Forty-nine percent of households with at least one member with a disability were moderately food insecure, compared to 45% for households with no members with a disability.

Figure 2: Food insecurity, by governorate



³ S/MEB categories are the following:
1. >=125% MEB (>=LBP 692,191)
2. MEB -125% MEB (LBP 553,753 – LBP 692,191)
3. SMEB-MEB (LBP 490,028 – LBP 553,753)
4. < SMEB (LBP 490,028)

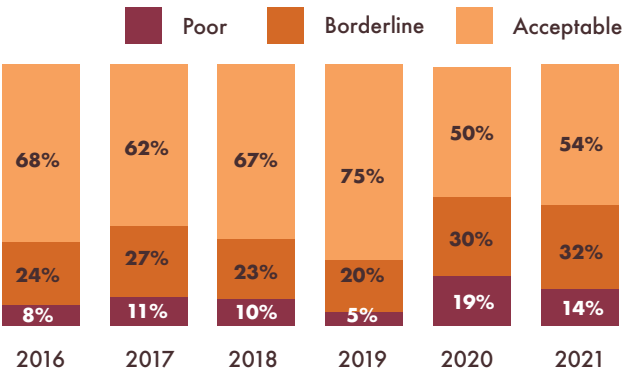
Components of food security

The three determinants of food security include: food consumption score, livelihood coping strategies, and food expenditure share.

Food consumption

As shown in the below figure, the level of poor and borderline food consumption declined slightly from 49% in 2020 to 46% in 2021, a level that is still considerably higher than the one before 2020. This implies that the multi-pronged crisis that Lebanon has witnessed in the last couple of years has continued to impact the food consumption levels of Syrian refugees.

Figure 3: Food consumption trends 2016-2021



Livelihood-based coping strategies trends

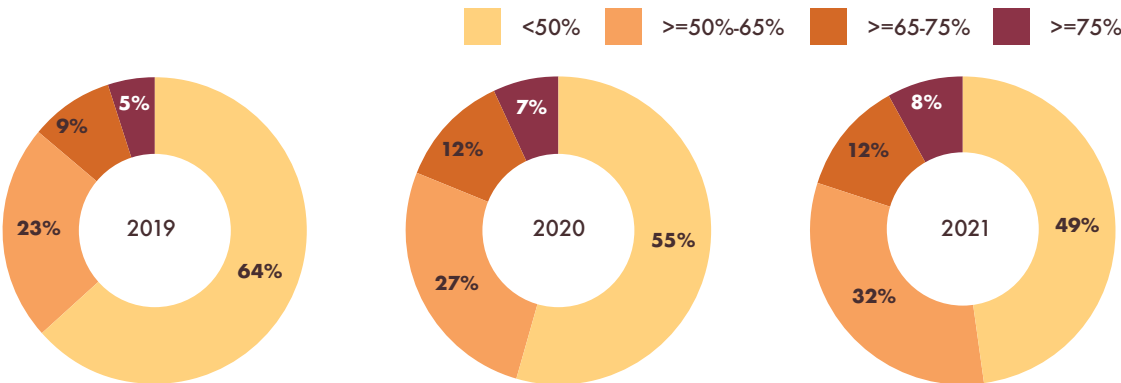
The share of households applying emergency and crisis coping strategies increased by seven percentage points between 2020 and 2021. Emergency coping strategies include begging, selling of house or land in Syria, accepting high-risk, illegal, and socially degrading jobs, as well as involving school children in income generation. Crisis coping strategies include withdrawing children from school, selling productive assets, marriage of children under 18, and reducing non-food (education and health) essential expenses.

The share of households only applying stress coping strategies slightly declined from 38% in 2020 to 32% in 2021. This implies that Syrian refugee households are shifting from stress coping strategies to crisis and emergency coping strategies, indicating an increase in vulnerability. Syrian refugee households might exhaust all coping strategies in the near future leaving them with no options or capacities left when faced with any upcoming crisis, suggesting a possible increase in food insecurity in the future. Stress coping strategies include selling household goods, spending savings, buying food on credit, and borrowing money.

Food as a share of household expenditures

Fifty-one percent of Syrian refugee households were allocating more than half of their expenditure to food, up by 6 percentage points compared to 2020, and by 15 percentage points compared to 2019, indicating that households' food security levels are deteriorating over time, leaving them increasingly vulnerable.

Figure 4: Percentage of household expenditure on food



Characteristics of food insecurity

The following section presents the characteristics of the food insecure households, especially in terms of sector indicators.

S/MEB: Ninety-three percent of severely food insecure households were below the SMEB level, down by 6 percentage points compared to 2020. Moreover, 91% of moderately food insecure households were below the SMEB level, similar to 2020.

Debt: Seventy percent of severely food insecure households had debt greater than LBP 900,000⁴, while 76% of moderately food insecure households were borrowing more than LBP 900,000. The majority of severely and moderately food insecure households were borrowing money to buy food, at 89% and 92% respectively. The second most reported reason for borrowing money was to pay rent.

Expenditure level: The level of expenditure per capita among severely food insecure households was one of the lowest in comparison to the other groups, at LBP 229,742. The expenditure levels for all food security groups were overall higher than in 2020, reflecting the high inflation in

2021. Moreover, severely food insecure households were the most economically vulnerable households among all groups.

Income sources: Severely food insecure households were relying the most on informal credit/debt (17%) in comparison to other food security groups and was also the group to rely the most on WFP food e-cards (35%).

Working members: Food secure households had the highest level of working members at 79%, while severely and moderately food insecure households had the lowest levels of working members (56% and 63% respectively).

Demographics: Twenty-two percent of severely food insecure households were female-headed, up by 7 percentage points compared to 2020 (15%). Eighteen percent of moderately food insecure households were female-headed, down by 4 percentage points from 2020. Twenty-five percent and 31% of severely and moderately food insecure households respectively had at least one member with a disability, higher than those who were food secure (17%).

Table 1: Food security by sectors indicators

| | Food secure | Marginally food insecure | Moderately food insecure | Severely food insecure |
|---|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| (S)MEB categories | | | | |
| >=125% MEB (>= LBP 692,191) | 12% | 6% | 4% | 2% |
| MEB - 125 % MEB (LBP 553,753- 692,191) | 4% | 4% | 3% | 0.3% |
| SMEB - MEB (LBP 490,028- 553,753) | 9% | 5 % | 2% | 5% |
| < SMEB (LBP 490,028) | 75% | 84% | 91% | 93% |
| Debt and borrowing | | | | |
| Debt group: > LBP 900,000 | 56% | 76% | 76% | 70% |
| Reason for borrowing: | | | | |
| Buy food | 92% | 95% | 92% | 89% |
| Pay rent | 56% | 49% | 49% | 55% |
| Buy medicine | 34% | 33% | 31% | 22% |
| Cover health expenses | 16% | 19% | 24% | 21% |
| Repay debt | 9% | 4% | 8% | 8% |
| Total expenditure per capita (LBP) | 482,862 | 349,779 | 292,631 | 229,742 |
| Main income source | | | | |
| Credit/debt | 6% | 11% | 14% | 17% |
| WFP food e-cards | 18% | 20% | 22% | 35% |
| Construction work | 13% | 9% | 7% | 9% |
| ATM cards from UN or humanitarian organizations | 16% | 22% | 23% | 11% |
| Other service work: hotel, restaurant, transport, personal services | 7% | 6% | 8% | 9% |
| Agriculture work | 6% | 9% | 8% | 8% |
| Working members | | | | |
| Households with working members | 79% | 71% | 63% | 56% |
| Demographics | | | | |
| Sex of the head of household | | | | |
| Women | 21% | 16% | 18% | 22% |
| Men | 79% | 84% | 82% | 78% |
| Households with members with a disability | | | | |
| Households with at least one member with a disability | 17% | 30% | 31% | 25% |

⁴ The average market rate during the time of data collection (June 7 – July 7) registered at LBP LBP 16,060 to the USD. source: www.lirarate.org

Annex 18: Food security classification

The food security classification is based on the combination of three main indicators: food consumption score, livelihood coping strategies, and expenditure share:

- The food consumption score measures the current food consumption. Households are grouped based on the variety and frequency of foods consumed as indicated in the Food Consumption Score (FCS) Annex. The FCS is grouped into three categories: acceptable, borderline, and poor. Another group is created for the classification of food security

combining those who have an acceptable food consumption and who apply any food-based coping strategies.

- The livelihood coping strategies measure the sustainability of livelihoods. Households are categorized based on severity of livelihood coping strategies. Households that do not apply any coping strategies fall under the category of food security. Food security classification include four categories: food secure, marginally food insecure, moderately food insecure, and severely food insecure.

| | Food secure | Marginally food insecure | Moderately food insecure | Severely food insecure |
|------------------------------------|---|--|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Food consumption | Acceptable | Acceptable with food-based coping strategies | Borderline | Poor |
| Food expenditure share | <50% | 50-65% | 65-75% | >=75% |
| Livelihood-based coping strategies | Household not adopting livelihood-based coping strategies | Stress coping strategies | Crisis coping strategies | Emergency coping strategies |

- Share of food expenditures measures the economic vulnerability. Households are categorized based on the share of total expenditures directed to food. Households that allocate more of their expenditures on food are more likely to be food insecure.

The table below describes the combination of components for the food security classification.

| Food security categories | Description |
|--------------------------|--|
| Food secure | Able to meet essential food and non-food needs without engaging in atypical coping strategies. |
| Marginally food insecure | Has minimally adequate food consumption without engaging in irreversible coping strategies; unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures. |
| Moderately food insecure | Has significant food consumption gaps OR marginally able to meet minimum food needs only with irreversible coping strategies. |
| Severely food insecure | Has extreme food consumption gaps OR has extreme loss of livelihood assets that will lead to food consumption gaps or worse. |

The steps to compute food security categories are the following:

1. Convert the three food security indicators into four-point scale indices:
- Coping strategy index

- Food expenditure share index

- Food consumption score index that was classified into four groups as follows:

| FCS Groups | Score |
|--|-------|
| Acceptable | 1 |
| Acceptable with food-related coping strategies | 2 |
| Borderline | 3 |
| Poor | 4 |

2. Calculate the coping capacity indicator by computing a rounded mean for the coping strategies index and the food expenditures share index.

3. Calculate the food security classification by computing a rounded mean of the household’s FCS score index and the coping capacities indicator. This variable will have a value from 1 to 4 and represents the household’s overall food security outcome.

The food security methodology used in the VASyR slightly differs from the WFP CARI⁵ methodology. This choice was necessary in order to maintain consistency and comparativeness across the VASyRs over the past 6 years while the CARI was developed and finalized only in 2015. The main difference in the two methods in 2021 consists in:

- The aggregation of food consumption and food related coping strategies in the second food consumption group as shown in the below table.

WFP advocates that the methodology should remain the same to ensure the comparability of results over the years.

As for the nomenclature for the food security categories as mentioned in previous VASyR reports, the VASyR 2021 is consistent with the WFP corporate definitions nomenclature by replacing mildly food insecure by marginally food insecure.

Please find below the link for more information about food security classification in CARI: <http://www.wfp.org/content/consolidated-approachreporting-indicators-food- security-cari-guidelines>

⁵ Consolidated Approach to Reporting Indicators of Food Security

| | | Food secure | Marginally food insecure | Moderately food insecure | Severely food insecure |
|-------|------------------|-------------|--|--------------------------|------------------------|
| CARI | Food consumption | Acceptable | | Borderline | Poor |
| VASyR | | Acceptable | Acceptable with food-related coping strategies | Borderline | Poor |

Annex 19: Food security classification table

| | Food secure | Marginally food insecure | Moderately food insecure | Severely food insecure |
|--|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| | ROW N % | ROW N % | ROW N % | ROW N % |
| Total | 3% | 47% | 46% | 3% |
| Governorate | | | | |
| Akkar | 1% | 50% | 46% | 2% |
| Baalbek-El Hermel | 3% | 52% | 43% | 2% |
| Beirut | 2% | 67% | 30% | 1% |
| Bekaa | 4% | 43% | 48% | 5% |
| El Nabatieh | 5% | 46% | 45% | 5% |
| Mount Lebanon | 3% | 47% | 46% | 3% |
| North | 3% | 41% | 53% | 3% |
| South | 4% | 56% | 38% | 3% |
| MEB/SMEB categories | | | | |
| >=125% MEB (>= LBP 692,191) | 7% | 57% | 35% | 1% |
| MEB - 125 % MEB (LBP 553,753- 692,191) | 3% | 61% | 35% | 0% |
| SMEB - MEB (LBP 490,028- 553,753) | 8% | 61% | 26% | 5% |
| < SMEB (LBP 490,028) | 3% | 46% | 48% | 4% |
| Expenditure quintiles | | | | |
| First quintile - Lowest expenditure (< LBP 800,000) | 2% | 29% | 60% | 9% |
| Second quintile (LBP 800,000 - LBP 1,174,137) | 2% | 41% | 53% | 3% |
| Third quintile (LBP 1,174,137 - LBP 1,500,000) | 4% | 47% | 47% | 3% |
| Fourth quintile (LBP 1,500,000 - LBP 1,900,000) | 3% | 55% | 40% | 2% |
| Fifth quintile - Highest expenditure (LBP 1,900,000 - LBP 4,425,000) | 4% | 62% | 32% | 1% |
| Gender of head of household | | | | |
| Female | 4% | 43% | 49% | 4% |
| Male | 3% | 48% | 45% | 3% |
| Shelter type | | | | |
| Residential | 4% | 48% | 46% | 2% |
| Non-residential | 4% | 46% | 44% | 6% |
| Non-permanent | 2% | 45% | 48% | 5% |