



Inter-Agency
Coordination
Lebanon



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



World Food
Programme



for every child

INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD FEEDING PRACTICES

Optimal infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices are pivotal to reducing malnutrition, morbidity and mortality. According to UNICEF and WHO, infants should be put to breast within one hour of birth and exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life, with breastfeeding continuing up to 2 years of age and beyond. When the infant is above six months, solid, semi-solid and soft foods are introduced along with breast milk. This transition, known as complementary feeding, is crucial for the child's development.

With the current situation in Lebanon, infants' and young children's survival, growth and development has been and remains at high risk, particularly among the Syrian refugee population. This assessment examined IYCF practices in Syrian refugee households. The information was collected on 343 infants under six months old, and 1,270 children aged 6–23 months.

KEY FINDINGS

- Breastfeeding practices remain largely similar to previous year, with 70 per cent of infants below 24 months having ever been breastfed, and 49 per cent still receiving breast milk.
- Complementary feeding also remained fairly similar to previous year, with key highlight showing that boys generally showed higher rates of complementary feeding across the age categories than girls.
- Similarly to last year, 19 per cent of children aged 6–23 months met the minimum diet diversity in 2022. However, the minimum acceptable meal frequency for children aged 6–23 months continued to decrease drastically this year, from 51 per cent in 2020, to 36 per cent in 2021, to 11 per cent in 2022.

BREASTFEEDING PRACTICES

The situation of breastfeeding practices remains largely similar to last year. Out of all infants below 24 months, around 70 per cent had ever been breastfed, and around 49 per cent were still receiving breast milk. Also, having ever been breastfed and still receiving breast milk were both found to be decreasing with age (see figure 1).

Out of all infants under 6 months of age, 84 per cent had ever been breastfed, and almost half of them (47 per cent) were receiving only breast milk.

Figure 1: Breastfeeding status of infants under 24 months

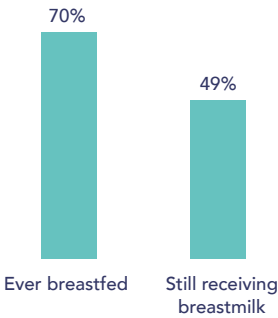
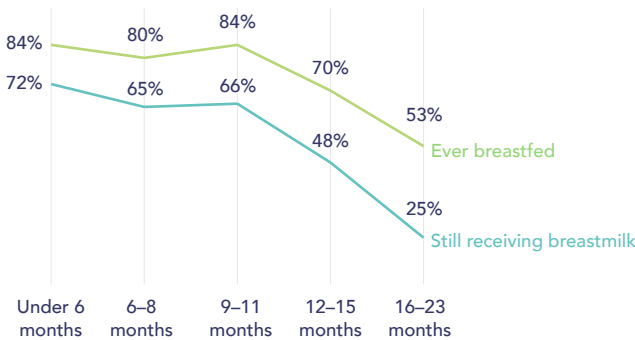


Figure 2: Breastfeeding practices for infants under 24 months

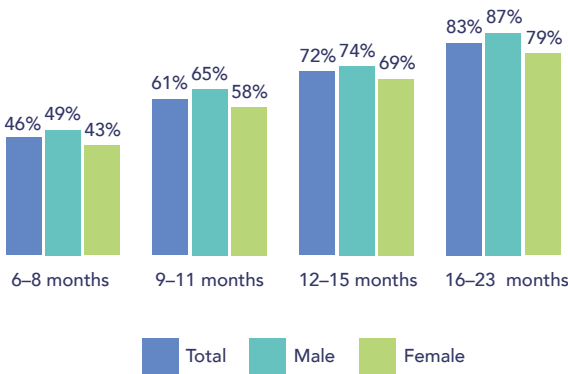


COMPLEMENTARY FEEDING

Complementary feeding is a critical period in growth where the child transitions from exclusive breastfeeding to partaking in food that includes solid, semi-solid and soft foods, and other liquids. The percentage of children aged 6–8 months who received complementary feeding the previous day was at a similar rate to the previous year (46 per cent in 2022, in comparison with 49 per cent in 2021).

Additionally, the rates of complementary feeding increased with age, reaching 83 per cent for children between aged 16–23 months. There was a notable difference between boys and girls according to age, with the rates of boys being higher than girls.

Figure 3: Percentage of infants who received solid, semi-solid or soft foods the previous day



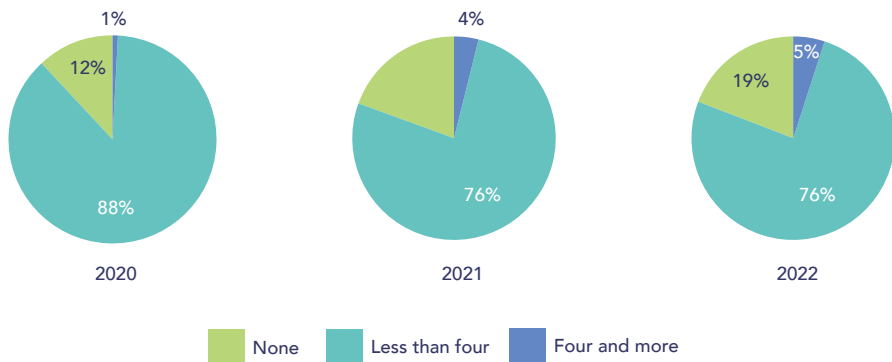
MINIMUM DIETARY DIVERSITY

According to 2008 WHO guidelines for assessing IYCF practices, children aged 6–23 months should consume a minimum of four out of seven food groups to meet the minimum dietary diversity target, independently of age and breastfeeding status. The food groups are:

- grains, roots and tubers
- pulses and nuts
- dairy products (e.g. milk, yogurt, cheese)
- meats (e.g. red meat, fish, poultry, liver/organ meats)
- eggs
- vitamin A-rich fruits and vegetables
- other fruits and vegetables

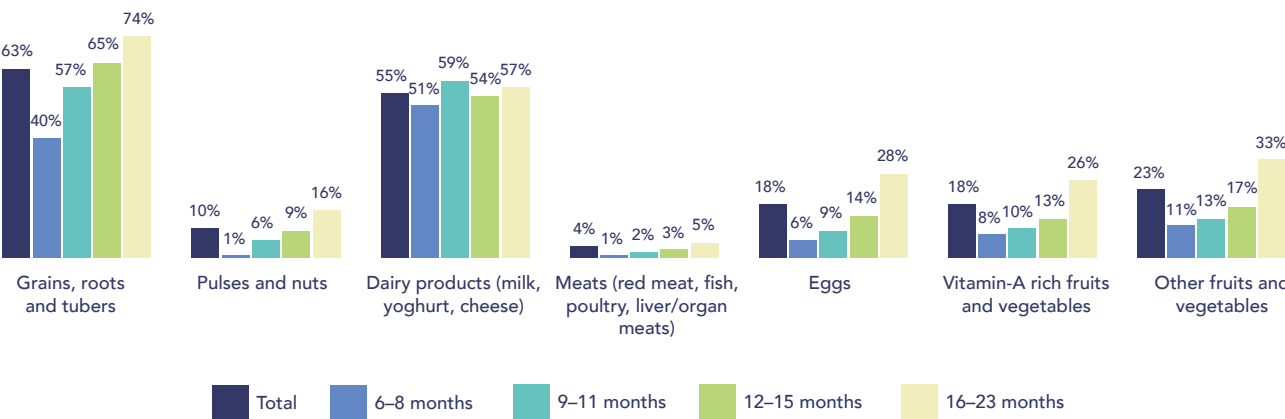
In 2022, and similarly to the previous year, only 19 per cent of children aged 6–23 months were fed a diverse diet on the previous day, consisting of four or more food groups. As for the remaining infants, 76 per cent received a diet consisting of three or fewer food groups, and 5 per cent did not receive any of the diverse food groups.

Figure 4: Proportion of children aged 6–23 months who receive food from four or more food groups/categories



Taking a closer look at the different food groups/categories, as in previous years, there was a very low proportion of children eating meats, pulses and nuts, and Vitamin A-rich fruits and vegetables. The highest proportions were for grains, roots and tubers, and dairy products.

Figure 5: Proportion of children 6–23 months old who receive foods from each food group/category



MINIMUM ACCEPTABLE MEAL FREQUENCY

WHO defines the minimum acceptable meal frequency for young children as follows:

- two meals/day for breastfed infants (6–8 months)
- three meals/day for breastfed children (9–23 months)
- four meals/day for non-breastfed children (6–23 months)

The share of children between 6 and 23 months who meet minimum acceptable number of meals every day continued to decrease from 51 per cent in 2020, to 36 per cent in 2021, and 11 per cent in 2022. Among children who were breastfed and who were non-breastfed, 10 per cent and 13 per cent met the meal frequency respectively.