

FOOD SECURITY



This chapter analyses the food security trends of the Syrian refugee households in Lebanon, including the characteristics of food insecure households and the differences in food security levels among districts and governorates.

- Food security witnessed slight changes in 2019, with a **large proportion of households being marginally food insecure in 2019 (63%), compared to 57% in 2018.**
- **Food insecurity is highest in the North (38%) and Mount Lebanon (33%).**
- **Women-headed households are more food insecure than men-headed households (35% vs 28% respectively).** This is a similar trend to 2018, where 40% of women-headed households were food insecure, compared to 32% of men-headed ones.
- **Households living in non-residential shelters (36%) are more food insecure than those living in non-permanent (26%) or residential shelters (29%).**
- Food security has increased in two of the three pillars of food security: **food consumption and livelihood based coping strategies.**
- The share of expenditure on food has increased in 2019, which indicates **increased economic vulnerability.**

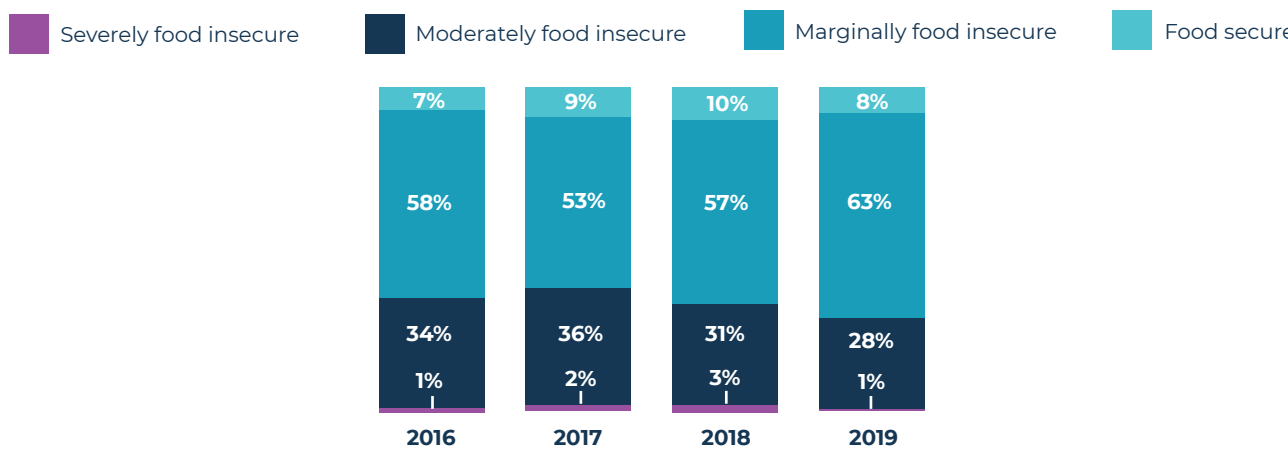
FOOD SECURITY METHODOLOGY

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**; and
- **asset depletion strategies (livelihood coping strategies)** which indicate the long-term coping capacity of livelihoods to shocks.

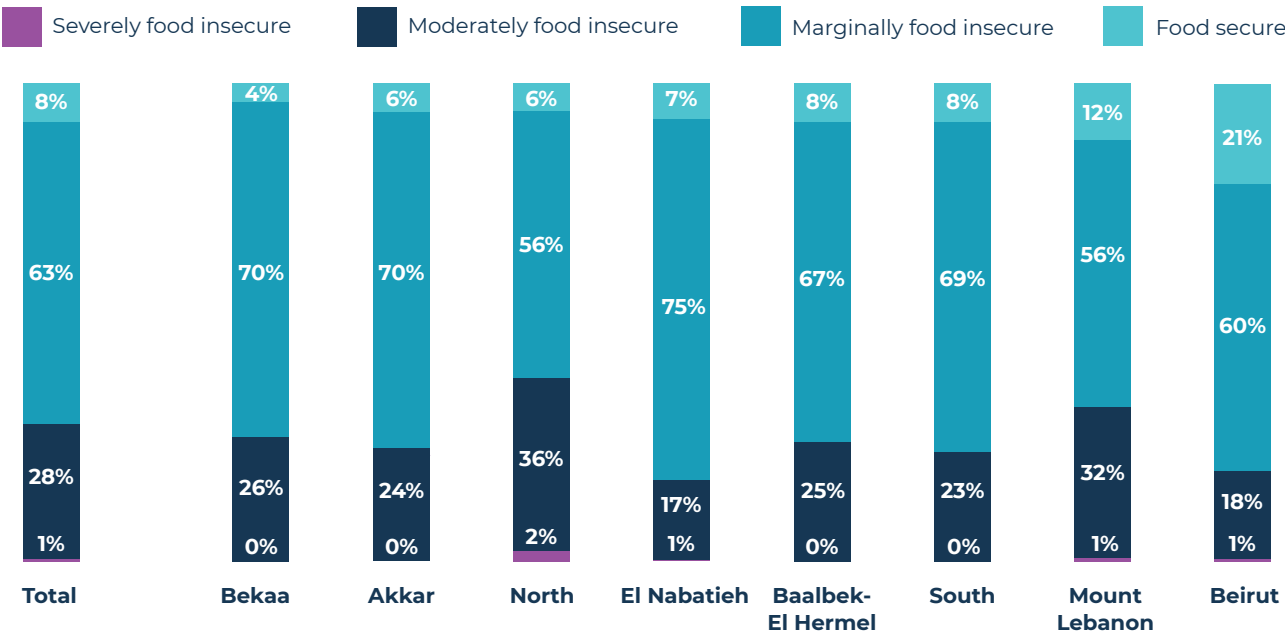
In order to compare this year's data with trends of the previous years, the methodology used to classify households was replicated as in previous VASyR assessments and is detailed in Annex 28. Based on this methodology, households are classified into four categories: food secure, marginally food insecure, moderately food insecure and severely food insecure. Table 5 describes the characteristics of the four categories.

Figure 1: Food insecurity trends 2016-2019



Food security of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has generally increased by 4% in 2019 compared to 2018. Additionally, only 1% of households are severely food insecure in 2019, compared to 3% in 2018. This decline is broadly a result of increased food consumption levels and adoption of less severe livelihood strategies to cope with lack of food or lack of money to buy food.

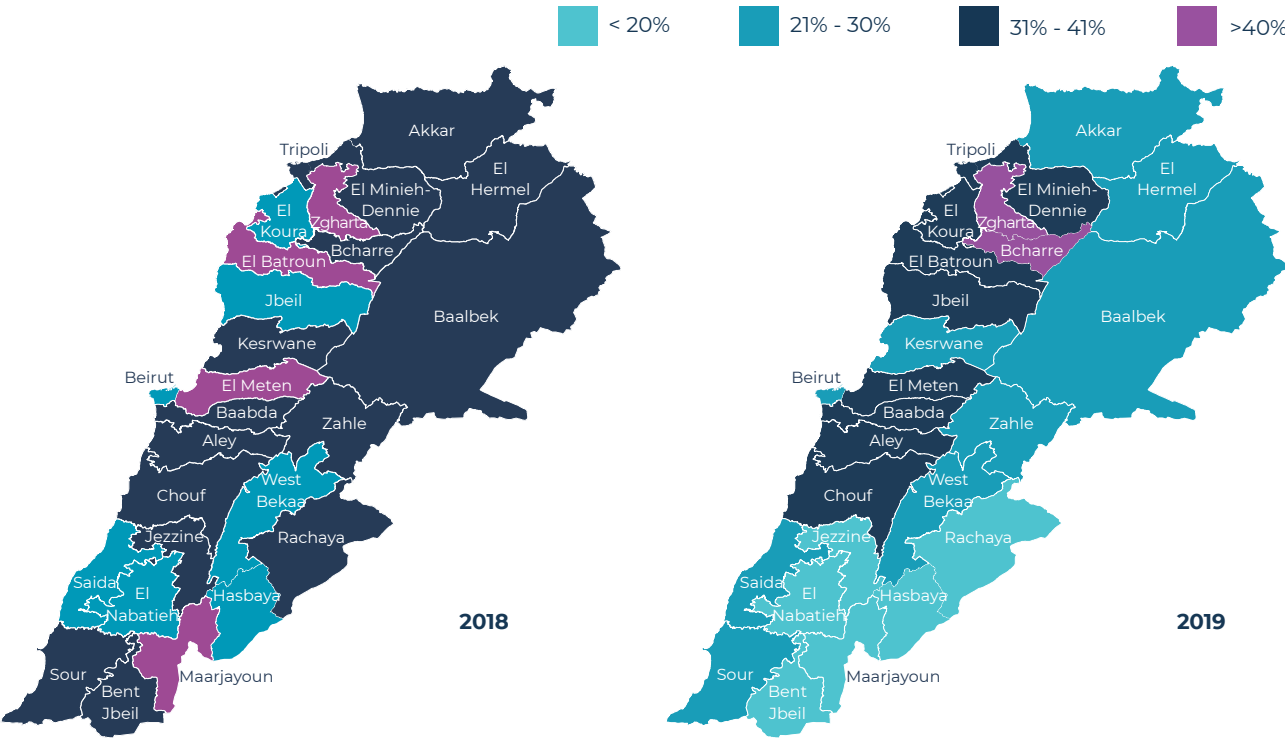
Figure 2: Food insecurity by governorate



By governorate, food insecurity is most prominent in the North (38%) and Mount Lebanon (33%). The lowest food insecurity levels are found in El Nabatieh (18%) and Beirut (19%) It is also worth noting that women-headed households are more food insecure than men-headed ones (35% vs 28% respectively). This is a similar trend to 2018, where a higher

share of women-headed households were food insecure (40% compared to 32% of their men-headed counterparts). Additionally, households living in non-residential shelters are significantly more food insecure (36%) than those living in non-permanent (26%) or residential shelters (29%).

Figure 3: Percentage of households with moderate and severe food insecurity



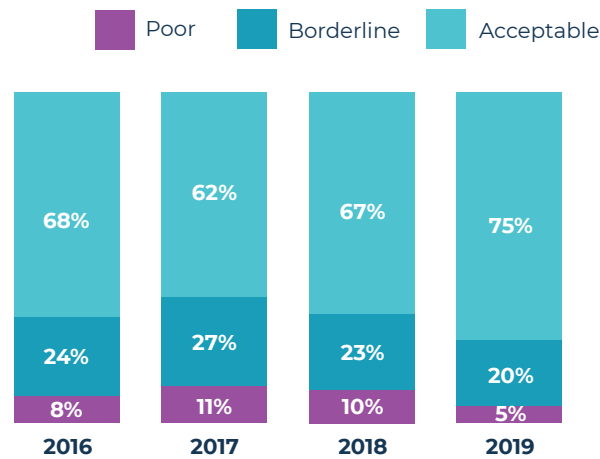
Food security has increased, particularly in the East and South of Lebanon. Districts in the North are mostly either stable or have less food security. For example, Zgharta is facing a chronic food insecurity level of over 40%. Food insecurity has increased in Bcharre from under 40% to over 40% of households and in El Koura and Jbeil from under 30% to above 30%.

COMPONENTS OF FOOD SECURITY

Food consumption

The first dimension of food security is food consumption. Over the last several years, food consumption of Syrian refugee households in Lebanon has increased considerably. Households with poor food consumption from 2018 fell by half in 2019. The level of acceptable food consumption has increased by 8 percent, from 67% in 2018 to 75% in 2019.

Figure 4: Food consumption trends 2016-2018

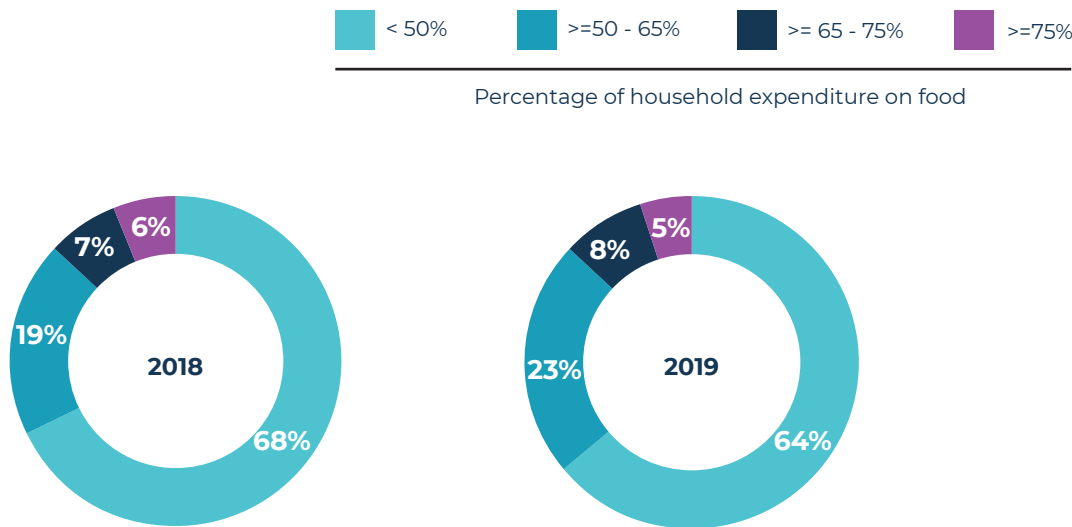


LIVELIHOOD COPING STRATEGIES TRENDS

Household coping capacity slightly improved in 2019 compared to 2018. Syrian refugee households are resorting less to emergency coping strategies¹ (10%) of begging or selling a house, However reliance on crisis strategies (57%), has increased, and includes reducing health and education expenditures, withdrawing children from school, or selling productive assets.

FOOD AS A SHARE OF HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURES

Figure 5: Food expenditure share trends 2018 - 2019



The final dimension of food security is food expenditure share. The more the household spent on food , the higher their economic vulnerability. In 2019, an additional 5% of households are spending over 50% of their expenditures on food only (36.2% in 2019 vs 31.9% in 2018). The food expenditure indicator showed a deterioration in the economic situations of the households.

¹ Emergency coping strategies include begging, involving school children in income generation, accepting high risk jobs and selling one's house or land in Syria.

Voices from the field

This box summarises discussions about the results of VASyR 2019 held in all field offices. It is based on the contextual knowledge of key actors in the field, as opposed to quantitative data.

Discussion participants pointed out the surprising fact that improvements in food security did not correspond to trends experienced in economic vulnerability, which has grown more acute. In-kind payments for work, particularly consisting of agricultural produce, were suggested as a possible explanation in regions such as South and Akkar.

In the north of the country, participants noted that while severe food security has decreased (Akkar) or stayed approximately the same (North), the percentage of families dedicating a high share of their expenditure on food was one of the highest in the country. This was seen as an important pointer to economic vulnerability, despite the improvements in food security.

Greater flexibility in spending cash assistance was said to be beneficial in terms of allowing refugees to shop around and find cheaper produce. The closure of Syrian-run shops was deemed to have a potentially negative impact on food security, as food sold there was cheaper. Food assistance overall was noted to have a favourable impact on food security rates, in line with VASyR's data.

Table 5 : Food security by sectors indicators

	Food Secure	Marginally food secure	Moderately food insecure	Food insecure
(S)MEB categories				
>=125% MEB (>=143\$)	40.8%	14.8%	12.9%	7.5%
MEB-125% MEB (114-142\$)	15.1%	10.3%	6.3%	5.3%
SMEB-MEB (87-113\$)	18.6%	19.6%	12.3%	12.3%
<SMEB (87\$)	25.4%	55.4%	68.5%	74.9%
Debt group: US\$ 600	34.9%	53.3%	52.5%	50.6%
Reason for borrowing:				
to buy food	50%	78.1%	77.6%	71.7%
to pay rent	37.1%	51.2%	52.9%	57.7%
to pay health	20.7%	37.3%	33.7%	25.9%
to buy medicine	17.1%	36.4%	32.5%	13.5%
to repay debt	0.8%	6.2%	7.2%	1.8%
Total expenditure per capita	157	100	84	60
Main income source				
Credit/debt	37.3%	68.2%	68.4%	63.7%
E-cards WFP FOOD	21.9%	35.3%	25.3%	0%
Construction	20.6%	20.3%	14.2%	21.9%
Cash from humanitarian organizations	14.9%	19.3%	10.2%	0%
Services	21%	13%	13.5%	12.2%
Agriculture	11.5%	12.9%	12%	7.4%
Received assistance				
Households having a card from which they can retrieve cash from an ATM	24.3%	30.2%	19.4%	13.3%
Households currently receiving multi-purpose cash assistance (US\$ 173/month)	18.2%	20.9%	10.7%	3.8%
Households having a card from which they can buy food	24.9%	34.4%	25.9%	9%
Working members				
Households with working members	71%	51%	45%	41%
Demographics				
Household size (mean)	4.67	5.25	4.62	3.8
Percentage of households with members with disability	7.9%	12.4%	13.1%	26.9%
Percentage of households with members with chronic illness	36.1%	48.6%	48.9%	41.3%
>70% of household members are dependent	9.2%	14.2%	10.7%	7.3%
Gender of head of the household				
Women	11.6%	17.2%	22.4%	24.9%
Men	88.4%	82.8%	77.6%	75.1%

CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOD INSECURITY

Food security levels were analyzed in comparison with sector indicators to describe the characteristics of households defined as the most food insecure.

(S)MEB: Three out of four food insecure households have expenditures that are below the SMEB of US \$87. Additionally, the data indicates that households spending less than the SMEB are more prone to being food insecure.

Debt: Food insecure households are borrowing more than food secure ones, with amounts as large as US \$600. The percentage of households borrowing US \$600 or more is higher in 2019 among all food security groups compared to 2018. This indicates that households are becoming more indebted, regardless of how food insecure or economically vulnerable they are. The reasons why food insecure households are borrowing are similar to vulnerable households and include buying food (72%) and paying for rent (58%).

Expenditure level: Food insecure households have the lowest expenditure levels among the different food security groups. This indicates

that food insecure households are also economically vulnerable. Expenditure level among all food security categories is lower in 2019 than in 2018.

Income sources: Food insecure households rely heavily on credit/debt for income (64%).

Working members: The percentage of households with working members is the lowest among severely food insecure households (41%), and the lower the food insecurity level, the lower the percentage of households with working members. This means that food security is positively associated with employment. A lower percentage of households at all food security levels have a working member in 2019, compared to 2018.

Demographics: Food insecure households are smaller than food secure ones. Additionally, the highest percentage of households with a disabled member is among the severely food insecure households (27%). The highest percentage of women-headed households is among severely food insecure households, which indicates that the most food insecure households are those headed by women, smaller households, and those with a disabled member.

Annex 28: 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 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 applied any food related coping strategies.

- Share of food expenditures measures the economic vulnerability. Households are categorized based on the share of total expenditures directed to food. Households which allocate more of their expenditures on food are more likely to be food insecure.
- The livelihood coping strategies measures sustainability of livelihoods. Households are categorized based on severity of livelihood coping strategies. Households which didn't 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-related coping strategies	Borderline	Poor
Food expenditure share	<50%	50-65%	65-75%	>75%
Coping strategies	Household not adopting coping strategies	Stress coping strategies		Emergency coping strategies

The table below describes the combination of components for the FS 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 able to meet minimum food needs only with irreversible coping strategies.
Severely Food Insecure	Has extreme food consumption gaps OR has extreme loss of productive 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

- Calculate the coping capacity indicator by computing a rounded mean for the coping strategies index and the food expenditures share index;
- 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 FS methodology used in the VASyR slightly differs from the WFP CARI methodology. This choice was necessary in order to maintain consistency and comparativeness along the different VASyRs over the past six years while the CARI was developed and finalized only in 2015. The main difference in the two methods in 2019 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 the VASyR 2018 report; the VASyR 2019 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-approach-reporting-indicators-food-security-cari-guidelines>

		Food Secure	Marginally Food Secure	Moderately Food Insecure	Severely Food Insecure
CARI		Acceptable		Borderline	Poor
VASyR	Food consumption	Acceptable	Acceptable with food-related coping strategies	Borderline	Poor

Annex 28: Food security classification

	Food security classification			
	Food secure	Marginally food insecure	Moderately food insecure	Severely food insecure
Total	8%	63.2%	28.1%	.7%
Governorate				
Akkar	6.5%	69.7%	23.8%	0.0%
Baalbek-El Hermel	8.1%	66.7%	25.2%	0.0%
Beirut	20.9%	60.1%	18.3%	.7%
Bekaa	3.9%	69.9%	26.2%	.0%
El Nabatieh	7.4%	75.3%	16.8%	.4%
Mount Lebanon	11.8%	55.7%	31.7%	.8%
North	5.8%	55.8%	36.1%	2.3%
South	8.1%	68.8%	22.7%	.3%
Expenditure				
>=125% MEB (>=143US\$)	20.0%	57.4%	22.3%	.3%
MEB- 125% MEB (114 - 142US\$)	12.7%	68.3%	18.6%	.4%
SMEB-MEB (87-113US\$)	8.5%	71.1%	19.9%	.5%
< SMEB (87US\$)	3.6%	61.6%	34.0%	.9%
Gender of the head of household				
Female	4.8%	60.6%	33.8%	.8%
Male	8.7%	63.8%	26.9%	.6%
Shelter type				
Non-permanent shelter	4.7%	69.7%	25.2%	.3%
Non-residential	7.3%	56.8%	34.8%	1.0%
Residential	9.1%	62.3%	27.9%	.7%