

In line with ECA's mission to support member States' in designing public policies amid the impacts of multifaceted crises, the ECA Office for North Africa will be holding a webinar on

FOOD SECURITY IN NORTH AFRICA: DRIVERS, IMPACTS AND MITIGATING POLICIES

Background

For North Africa meeting the food security and nutrition targets of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 remains elusive. In fact, between 2015 and 2022, the number of undernourished people in the region markedly rose, from 12.3 to 19.5 million (from 5.4% to 7.5 % of total population). Due its ongoing conflict that amplified the preexisting high food insecurity, Sudan has been country suffering most from underperformance on SDG2 in the region.

Elevated food prices and their impact on food security have been among the key policy concerns over the past two years across the globe and in the North Africa region. The Covid-19 and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which have led to interruption of supply chains, have contributed to food price rises, with climate change aggravating the challenge. North African countries experienced high and volatile food prices, with Egypt posting food annual inflation in mid-double digits (48%) in January 2024. High food prices and their volatility have pushed vulnerable populations across North Africa into poverty, amplifying hunger and jeopardizing development gains. Poor households have been disproportionately impacted by elevated food prices given that food accounts for particularly high shares of their budgets. The easing in food prices notwithstanding, the region suffers from a weakened food security situation and vulnerability to food price and other shocks.

In September 2022, Sudan recorded the highest annual food inflation in Africa (112%). Since early 2023, conflict has amplified Sudan's food security challenges, and additional 20.3 million Sudanese became food insecure during July and September 2023 (ACSS, 2023). According to the WFP the number of people facing acute hunger has doubled over the past year, with more than five million experiencing emergency levels of hunger in areas worst affected by the conflict.

North Africa's food security is also jeopardized by its heavy dependence on international markets in a context where the elevated food prices and their volatility are exacerbating chronic social and political tensions driven from the 2011 uprisings. Given the history of unrests, food security is thus not only a major economic and social challenge for the region, but also a political one.

Although the region's current food crisis was precipitated by the global economic shocks, the structural fragility of the food systems in North Africa is responsible for the severity of the problem. The region is facing structural difficulties in terms of i) production capacity, with a weak productive agriculture sector, highly dependent on rainfall in a region characterized by water scarcity subject to the effects of the climate change, ii) access to food amplified by the current global trade disruptions and the cost-of-living crisis, and, iii) a double burden of malnutrition, namely stunting and obesity, due to an inadequate diet.

Objective

This webinar will discuss drivers, impacts and policy responses to the ongoing food crisis in the North Africa region. Special attention will be paid to Sudan, which had the continent's highest

food price inflation in 2022 and experienced major humanitarian crisis since the eruption of conflict in 2023. The aim is to share experiences on addressing (i) elevated and volatile food prices across the region and (ii) food emergency amid conflict experienced by Sudan and other countries. A key objective is also a cross-regional sharing of knowledge with countries in the rest of Africa.

The event is focused on the following SDGs: mostly SDG2, and also SDG1, SDG17.

Topics for discussion

The following questions will be discussed in the virtual policy dialogue for North Africa:

General segment:

- What have been the economic and distributional impacts of rising and volatile food prices over the past few years? Which population/household segments have been most affected?
- What were the policy responses to rising and volatile food prices (and food shortages) in different countries? Focusing on trade measures, what has worked and otherwise?
- To cushion vulnerable households from elevated and volatile food prices, and inflation more general, what measures, both immediate and over the longer term can governments adopt considering also their social and economic impact and environmental goals?
- How can countries build climate-proof regional value chains in agriculture? What regional mechanisms (e.g. regional grain reserves) have worked in mitigating food security shocks? What innovative instruments can be deployed?
- How can ECA help in this situation and what partnerships with other UN agencies and international organizations can it form for effective interventions? What data is missing for evidence-based policymaking and how can international partnerships work?

Sudan segment:

- What has been the experience with emergency measures in Sudan? How effective has been the support provided to farming, herding families so they can keep producing and feed themselves and their communities?
- What measures can be taken (on local, national, regional levels) so that Sudan's potential to become an important player in realizing Africa's aspiration to feed itself, by leveraging its endowments of natural resources, including arable land, and youthful population.

Speakers:

UNECA: SRO-North Africa, SRO-East Africa

Representative of the Sudanese Government

FAO Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa, Dr. AbdulHakim Elwaer

Languages

The meeting languages are Arabic, English, and French. Interpretation available in all 3 languages (Arabic, English, and French).

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