

Introduction



We are facing hunger on an unprecedented scale, food prices have never been higher, and millions of lives and livelihoods are hanging in the balance. The war in Ukraine is supercharging a three-dimensional crisis – food, energy and finance – with devastating impacts on the world’s most vulnerable people, countries and economies. All this comes at a time when developing countries are already struggling with cascading challenges not of their making – the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, and inadequate resources amidst persistent and growing inequalities.

 **Source:** United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, Global Report on Food Crises, 2022

Uncertainty once again dominates multiple economic and social realities globally, and the Arab region is no exception.¹ The world is facing several compounded crises which are contributing to food insecurity: increasing inequalities in access to resources and opportunities; rising inflation; increasing food and fuel prices; global supply chain challenges; the impact of climate change; and the lack of strong, resilient local and regional supply networks. The combination of these factors has led to the worst

conditions witnessed in recent times and could threaten the stability and prosperity of nations around the world.

The record levels of high food and fuel prices have triggered a global crisis that is driving millions more into extreme poverty, magnifying hunger and malnutrition while threatening to erase hard-won gains in development. The war in Ukraine, supply chain disruptions and the continued economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with

increased debt and high interest rates are reversing years of development gains and pushing inflation and notably food prices to all-time highs.

The complexity and force of these crises are evident in the Arab region and are shaping and driving inequalities given the already weak regional resilience regarding capacity to absorb shocks and the historically rooted inequalities.

This second edition of the Arab inequality report follows the same approach as the first edition, “Inequality in the Arab region – A ticking time bomb” (2022), which examined the challenge of youth unemployment in the region. The present report is also inspired by the Pathfinders Alliance for Action on Inequality and Division that seeks to identify practical and politically viable solutions to meet Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10 on reduced inequality. This report presents the latest findings on inequality in the Arab region so as to inform public policy design. It focuses on the combination of the perfect storm of the cost-of-living crisis, food insecurity and energy poverty as factors of inequality hitting the Arab region. It also examines the challenges facing food security in the region, taking into consideration the latest global and regional developments. It provides a practical set of actions that identify how opportunities can be shared more equally to reach the most vulnerable populations and reduce inequalities in food security.

The report has three main purposes. First, to provide an update on the multidimensional forms of inequality that were identified in the first edition of the inequality report, which are: wealth concentration and inequality; income poverty; income inequality; and gender inequality. Second, the report flags the issue of food security as a significant form of inequality that can threaten the region's security.

A vicious circle: food insecurity leads to inequality and inequality fuels food insecurity.

Third, the report discusses alternative policy solutions that could tangibly reduce inequality, particularly the pertinent challenge of food security in the region.

The report is based on a desktop review, in addition to a public online survey on food security in the Arab region. The survey was disseminated on social media platforms to solicit people's perceptions on food security in 2022. The purpose of the survey was to understand the perceptions and concerns of people in the Arab region in general and on food security in particular. The survey was not based on representative samples but on random responses from social media users, and as such results are indicative and cannot be generalized. Informative interviews were conducted with policymakers from the Arab region to complement the findings of the online survey. Case studies in four countries (Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania and the State of Palestine) were conducted using health and demographic surveys, as well as household expenditure and consumption surveys to analyse inequalities in food consumption patterns.