



Special Session 10

Addressing child food poverty in early childhood in the Arab region – by mobilizing the food, health, WASH, and social protection systems

Thursday, 16 March 2023, 3.45–5.15 p.m. Beirut time

Background

Most countries in the MENA region bear the triple burden of malnutrition, which means that they face childhood stunting, wasting and micronutrient deficiencies at the same time as growing rates of overweight and obesity. Some countries, especially those affected by conflict and humanitarian crises, continue to experience high levels of food insecurity and undernutrition. Overall, the region is not on track to reaching SDG target 2.1 of eliminating hunger by 2030.

Poor diets of children remain one of the most critical drivers of malnutrition in the region. One in five children – 10 million – in low- and middle-income countries in the Arab Region under the age of five live in and suffer from severe food poverty. This means these children are fed extremely poor diets that include at most two food groups, often a cereal and perhaps some milk. The prevalence of severe child food poverty is 1.5 times higher among children living in the poorest households than those in the wealthiest households.

To address the underlying driver and support countries to accelerate actions for improving children's diets, UNICEF, WHO, WFP and FAO have developed a regional action framework. The regional action framework aims at guiding the countries with high child food poverty to prioritize actions for improving the young children diet during the complementary feeding 6-23 months by mobilizing the food, health, WASH and social protection systems.

Session Objectives

1. Raise awareness about child food poverty and its underlying drivers in the Arab region.
2. Launch and mobilize interest for implementing the 'Regional Action Framework for improving young children's diets at the regional and country level.
3. Share examples of the regional and country-level actions to address child food poverty through the food, health, and social protection systems.

During this special session, the Regional Action Framework for improving young children's diets will be launched jointly by, UNICEF, WHO, WFP and FAO. The use of the action framework facilitates systematic analysis by the countries to help them prioritize and implement strategic actions at the policy, institutional and community levels through multiple systems (food, health, WASH, and social protection).

Questions to be addressed

- What are the key drivers of child food poverty in the Arab Region? Which of these drivers you think we can/should prioritize for action?
- What are the priority and feasible actions (based on best practices) - the government and partners need to take to improve children's diets by mobilizing: Food system, Health system, WASH system and social protection system?
- How can we strengthen nutrition governance in the Arab region - nationally and regionally – to eliminate child food poverty, including in fragile and humanitarian settings?

Moderator

- **Hicham Jadaoun**, Independent consultant

Opening Remarks

- **Ms: Ettie Higgins**, UNICEF Lebanon Deputy Representative
- **Mr. Serge Nakouzi**, FAO Deputy Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa
- **Dr. Christoph Hamelmann**, WHO Chef de Cabinet, Regional Director's Office for Eastern Mediterranean Region.
- **Kate Newton**, WFP Deputy Regional Director for Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa

Keynote speaker

- **Lara Nasreddine**, PhD, LD, Professor Human Nutrition, American University of Beirut

Panelists

- **Sudan:** **Dr. Nuha Salheen**, Director nutrition department, Federal Ministry of Health
- **Yemen:** **Karima Al-Hada'a**, Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Secretariate, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
- **Yemen:** **Dr. Nazia Habib**, Associate Professor and Head of Research Centre, Centre for Resilience and Sustainable Development (CRSD); University of Cambridge, UK
- **Egypt:** **Dr. Atef El-Shitany**, Advisor to the minister, Ministry of Social Solidarity

This Special Session will be organized as a hybrid event. To participate over Zoom, please [register here](#).

Those physically present at the UN House can attend the session in Committee Room I (B1 floor).