



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
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FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY IN THE REGION - COUNTRY AND REGIONAL UPDATES

(Prepared by FAO and WHO)

1 Introduction and background

1. Despite facing a complex web of challenges—including climate change, rapid urbanization, protracted crises, economic volatility, water scarcity, and environmental degradation—countries in the Near East (NE) region are steadfastly advancing their commitment to food safety and security. Amid political instability, conflicts, and limited resources, and even as humanitarian needs often take precedence, many countries are making determined efforts to adopt and implement Codex Alimentarius standards. These efforts reflect a growing recognition of the critical role of such standards in safeguarding public health and supporting trade opportunities. There is increasing awareness of the need to invest in robust food safety infrastructure as an essential driver for long-term resilience, regional cooperation, and sustainable development. FAO and WHO commend the region's unwavering dedication to forging a safer and more secure food future, even in the face of adversity^{1,2,3,4}.
2. This report presents FAO and WHO activities carried out in the region since CCNE11 in 2023.

2 Regional-level activities

2.1 Enhancing food trade in the region: food safety and trade facilitation

2.1.1 FAO support to COMESA trade facilitation programme

3. Under the framework of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) trade facilitation initiative (Project GCP/INT/387/COM), FAO provided targeted technical support to the competent authorities of Egypt, Sudan, and Tunisia to strengthen their capacities in imported food control. This support included national and sub-regional training sessions, the development and validation of country-specific situation analyses and action plans, and the drafting of standard operating procedures for border inspections and good importing practices for both formal and informal importers.
4. A technical document was developed to facilitate the exchange of information on food rejections and national food control systems among trading partners. Additionally, FAO designed and implemented a tailored training programme for inspectors, based on international best practices and national needs. A thematic synthesis report was produced to consolidate key activities and outputs, offering strategic direction for scaling up efforts at the regional level. Addressing both food safety and phytosanitary concerns, the project delivered notable outcomes, including risk categorization frameworks for border control in six pilot countries—among them Egypt, Sudan, and Tunisia—and a draft regional technical document, aligned with Codex guidance, to support harmonized information exchange and trade facilitation among COMESA member states.

¹ FAO. 2024. *Results for FAO in the Near East and North Africa region – 2022–23*. Thirty-seventh Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC/24/2), Amman, Jordan, 5–8 February and 4–5 March 2024. Rome.

² FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO and ESCWA. 2024. *Near East and North Africa – Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2024: Financing the Transformation of Agrifood Systems*. Cairo. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd3550en>

³ FAO. 2023. *Feasibility study for application of digital technologies for improved traceability and transparency along the agrifood value chains - Case studies in the Near East and North Africa Region*. Cairo. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc7582en>

⁴ UNESCWA. 2024. *Arab Sustainable Development Report 2024*. E/ESCWA/CL5.SDGS/2024/1. Beirut, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) - unesco.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/arab-sustainable-development-report-2024-english.pdf

2.1.2 Strengthening of capacities and governance in food and phytosanitary control

5. As part of a European Union-funded initiative supporting the African Union's SPS Policy, FAO—together with the IPPC Secretariat—implemented comprehensive assessments of national food control and phytosanitary systems in 12 African Union Member States, including Egypt. Using internationally recognized tools—the FAO/WHO Food Control System Assessment Tool and the Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE)—the project identified priority capacity development needs and supported the formulation of strategic action plans. These efforts aimed to strengthen governance, facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration, and enhance readiness for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).
6. The initiative delivered lasting results, including legal and institutional reforms, laboratory upgrades, and national surveillance programmes. A final mutualization workshop in Rome convened representatives from 12 participating countries to exchange progress, lessons learned, and strategies for sustaining improvements in food safety and plant health systems. The event highlighted the need to integrate these priorities into national development agendas, strengthen the roles of Codex and SPS committees, and foster structured public–private partnerships for long-term impact⁵.

2.2 Regional food safety research network and innovation hub (RFSRNIH)

7. Through South–South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), the FAO RNE is actively supporting the establishment of the Regional Food Safety Research and Innovation Network (RFSRIN). Since April 2024, this initiative has been implemented under the regional framework (TCP/RAB/3902 - 23/III/RAB/232) to enhance coordination and knowledge sharing across the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region. It aims to support the transformation of agrifood systems by fostering research and innovation, strengthening regional capacities, and harmonizing food safety practices. The Network is envisioned as a collaborative platform that brings together governments, private sector actors, academia, civil society, and international partners.
8. With the support of FAO Country Offices, National Focal Points were nominated to contribute to project activities and consultations. A wide range of stakeholders—including researchers, innovation actors, government officials, and private sector representatives—were engaged in the process, culminating in the first in-person co-creation workshop, held in Cairo, Egypt, on 19–20 February 2025^{6,7}. This milestone event followed several months of online consultations and participatory processes, including virtual meetings and stakeholder surveys, ensuring broad engagement in shaping the Network's vision, priorities, and operational framework.
9. Building on the momentum and shared vision established during the workshop, the next phase focuses on consolidating inputs and advancing the operationalization of the Network. A consultation process has been launched to refine the draft Network Guidelines, including its governance structure and operational principles, ensuring alignment with regional priorities and stakeholder input prior to formal adoption. In parallel, implementation of Year 1 activities, as proposed during the workshop, is underway. These include coordinating four thematic working groups (on research, innovation, policy support, and capacity development), launching targeted capacity-building programmes, preparing the first regional hackathon, initiating an online platform for the Network, and engaging strategic partners to secure technical and financial support. FAO will work closely with proposed leads, national focal points, and institutions to support early implementation and sustain collaborative momentum. Engagements have also taken place with UNIMED, CIHEAM, the League of Arab States, INFOSAN, and WHO regarding their potential roles as permanent members of the proposed Executive Board of the Network.

2.3 Food safety and quality in the Near East and North Africa: mapping drivers, challenges and strategic imperatives

10. The FAO RNE has developed a comprehensive report that maps the food safety and quality landscape across the NENA region. Utilizing the One Health Approach and the DPSIR (Driver-Pressure-State-Impact-Response) framework, the report explores the multifaceted drivers influencing food safety governance in the region, including demographic changes, political and economic status, water scarcity, climate change, urbanization, and global trade dynamics. The study outlines the presence of various food safety hazards such as microbial and chemical contaminants, antimicrobial residues, and mycotoxins. It also highlights the occurrence of non-compliant practices in food production and trade, including the circulation of unauthorized agrochemicals and mislabeling incidents. These factors have implications for international trade, with several countries encountering challenges in meeting global food safety standards.

⁵ <https://www.fao.org/food-safety/news/news-details/zh/c/1739842/>

⁶ <https://www.fao.org/neareast/events/details/co-creation-conference-for-establishing-the-regional-food-safety-research-network-and-innovation-hub/en>

⁷ <https://www.fao.org/neareast/news/details/pioneering-food-safety--building-resilient-agrifood-systems-for-tomorrow/en>

11. The report emphasizes the importance of enhancing surveillance systems, laboratory infrastructure, and data management to support risk-based decision-making. It advocates for the institutionalization of food safety governance, the adoption of HACCP and Good Practices (GxPs), and the development of traceability systems and cold chain logistics. Additionally, it identifies the need for improved coordination among stakeholders, alignment with Codex Alimentarius standards, and the establishment of science-policy platforms to support evidence-based interventions and regional harmonization efforts.

2.4 Hack4safeFood: tackling food safety challenges

12. The Hack4safeFood initiative, organized by FAO RNE through the Regional Food Safety Research Network and Innovation Hub (RFSRNIH), is a regional hackathon set for September 2025 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, aimed at addressing food safety challenges across the NENA region. By fostering collaboration among innovators, developers, scientists, policymakers, private sector leaders, and academia, the event seeks to generate and scale innovative, science-based solutions tailored to local and regional needs. With a focus on sustainable technology, artificial intelligence, and policy innovation, Hack4safeFood aspires to empower safe food systems for all through coordinated, cross-sectoral efforts⁸.

2.5 The First Joint Arab Forum between the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development on food safety and sanitary and phytosanitary measures within the framework of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area

13. The inaugural Joint Arab Forum on Food Safety and Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures was held in Cairo, Egypt, from 27 to 29 November 2024. Organized by the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States (LAS) in collaboration with the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the forum addressed pressing food safety challenges across the Arab region. Convened within the framework of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA), the event aimed to strengthen economic integration among Arab countries by harmonizing food safety standards and SPS protocols, thereby facilitating smoother regional and international trade. The participation of several Arab nations underscored their commitment to enhancing cooperation and aligning regulatory frameworks. The forum also served as a platform for knowledge exchange among agricultural producers, exporters, and policymakers.
14. Notably, the 17th meeting of the Arab Specialized Team for Food Safety was held in conjunction with a roundtable discussion featuring representatives from UN organizations, including FAO RNE, and WHO EMRO, as well as other Arab institutions, focusing on future collaboration in food safety and trade facilitation.

3 National level activities

3.1 The Arab Republic of Egypt

3.1.1 Expanding Egyptian horticultural exports to European markets: food safety challenges and investment priorities

15. A joint study by the EBRD and the FAO Investment Centre highlighted Egypt's strategic potential to expand horticultural exports to the EU. The agrifood sector is Egypt's second-largest industry in terms of manufacturing value added, with horticultural production increasing by 20 percent over the past decade. The EU, Egypt's second-largest horticultural export destination after the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), offers premium prices, with the top four European countries importing nearly 70 percent of Egypt's top 12 horticultural products.
16. Europe imports 55 million tonnes of fruit and vegetables annually—accounting for 40 percent of global trade—making it a high-value market. However, Egypt's access is constrained by non-tariff barriers, particularly EU food safety regulations on maximum residue levels (MRLs) for pesticides, traceability requirements, and evolving standards under the EU Green Deal. Frequent border rejections due to MRL violations pose a risk to both current and future market access. To unlock a projected 50–60 percent growth in exports, a FAO/EBRD study report identifies the following investment priorities:
 - Sustainable production and quality management, through climate-resilient practices and integrated pest management.
 - Capacity development, including upgraded laboratories, inspection services, and training to ensure compliance with EU standards.
 - Supply chain and logistics enhancement, such as cold-chain systems, aggregation centers, and digital traceability tools.
 - Strategic investments and regulatory alignment are essential to fully realize Egypt's horticultural export potential and to meet evolving EU food safety expectations.

⁸ <https://www.fao.org/neareast/events/details/hack4safefood--tackling-food-safety-challenges/en>

3.2 Syrian Arab Republic

17. A three-year FAO project TCP/SYR/4001, that launched in November 2024, aim at providing technical support to the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (MAAR) in Syria to strengthen its compliance and certification programme. The initiative focuses on enhancing citrus and apple exports by improving agrifood value chain practices and modernizing food standards, regulatory frameworks, and control systems. These efforts aim to reduce technical barriers and improve market access for Syrian agrifood products.

3.3 Palestine

18. A three-year EU-funded project aiming at “Promoting increased market access for Palestinian food products and safeguarding the health and well-being of consumers and producers facing a protracted crisis in Palestine through the development of a more resilient and inclusive Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) System” has been initiated in February 2024. During the first year, under the food safety component, key preparatory activities have taken place, including: (i) initiating the update of the national food safety strategy, and of the National Food Safety Control Plan (NFSCP), (ii) kickstarting the preparation of Standard Operating Procedures, and (iii) offering laboratory support. Activities aiming at strengthening the inclusion of the private sector in implementing good food safety practices and awareness raising of consumers were also commenced.

3.4 The Islamic Republic of Iran⁹

3.4.1 Improving Pistachio's production and export through establishment of integrated product management

19. The FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific has recently operationalized a Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP/IRA/3901) entitled “Improving Pistachio's production and export through establishment of integrated product management”. The project will run from 2023 to 2025. The project aims to enhance national capacity for integrated supply chain management in the pistachio sector, with a particular focus on improving productivity, harvesting, processing, and adherence to mycotoxin contaminant safety regulations. The overall objective of the project is to contribute to food and nutrition security and safety through sustainable pistachio production and consumption, by promoting efficient, inclusive, and compliant supply chain management practices.

Key areas of focus:

- **Enhancing Orchard Productivity and product quality:** Piloting three main pistachio producing provinces in the country Kerman, Yazd and Khorasan Razavi, and demonstrating improved orchard management practices through Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) to increase yield and resource-use efficiency.
- **Improving Post-Harvest Processes:** Advancing technologies, mechanization, and good practices in harvesting, post-harvest handling, storage, and processing.
- **Strengthening Regulatory and Institutional Capacity:** Supporting the development of institutional arrangements and regulatory frameworks to improve quality assurance, food safety, and contaminant monitoring systems.

Key deliverables to date include:

- A total of 182 hectares of pilot orchards are being implemented across three main pistachio producing provinces—Kerman (150 hectares), Yazd (12 hectares), and Khorasan Razavi (20 hectares)—to carry out a comprehensive assessment of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). This assessment focuses on key areas including irrigation, soil and nutrient management, Integrated Pest Management (IPM), and horticultural practices. Aflatoxin levels in processed pistachios are being analysed, and based on the findings, detailed procedures and guidelines for harvesting, post-harvest handling, processing, and storage are being developed and adopted. These efforts are aimed at reducing the risk of aflatoxin contamination and maintaining conditions that minimize its development. The result will be the standardization of 22 national guidelines for GAP and 5 guidelines covering harvest, post-harvest, processing, packaging, and mycotoxins quality control.
- Hands-on capacity building for more than 500 pistachio growers, processors, extension officers, traders, and researchers are planned based on these findings, and so far, 300 individuals have already received training.

⁹ Iran is a member of CCNE while FAO-led activities in the country are implemented by the Regional Office for Asia and Pacific in Bangkok, Thailand. This information is also reported in the corresponding CCASIA document.

- A comprehensive guide titled “Comprehensive Guide to Aflatoxin Management for Iran’s Pistachio Value Chain” developed that offers actionable tools such as predictive risk models, recommendations for developing local testing capacities, and stakeholder awareness initiatives. It also highlights the importance of institutional coordination and alignment with EU standards.
- National workshop on “Pistachio Safety and Trade: Navigating SPS and Codex Standards” held with national stakeholders, resulting in enhanced understanding of global food safety—particularly SPS and TBT measures—and increased awareness of mechanisms for addressing Specific Trade Concerns (STCs) and complying with Codex guidelines on contaminants. As part of the workshop outcomes, a draft procedure for a pistachio traceability mechanism was developed, outlining the framework and operational steps to strengthen compliance with EU food safety standards for pistachio exports.
- An Action Plan titled “Enhancing Mycotoxin Control in Pistachio Exports from Iran in Compliance with EU Regulation 2023/2782” was developed, recommending tailored sampling protocols, pilot testing of dynamic sampling systems, and the implementation of improved traceability tools to strengthen compliance and reduce border rejections.

3.4.2 Control of food authenticity and management of food supply chain for successful achievement of Sustainable Development Goals

Control of food authenticity and management of food supply chain for successful achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) TCP/IRA/3902 To enhance capacity for immediate response and effective enforcement mechanisms for food quality testing and traceability.

20. Among the most commonly adulterated food products, saffron stands out due to its high market value and limited production. Consequently, there has been growing interest in developing rigorous methods to verify the authenticity and geographical origin of saffron, based on its unique chemical composition. To address this, various analytical techniques have been proposed and are under development to authenticate saffron and ensure compliance with quality standards.

Key areas of focus:

- Strengthen the integrity and quality of Iranian saffron by developing a standardized method for the characterization and fingerprinting of its key components, crocin, picrocrocin and safranal using advanced analytical techniques.
 - Enhance post-harvest practices through Good Manufacture Practices (GMP) based guidelines for drying and storage.
 - Build national capacity among laboratory experts, farmers, and traders to implement and apply saffron characterization as well as advance GMP methods effectively.
21. This integrated approach will support the standardization of saffron production and authentication processes, ensuring product traceability, compliance with quality standards, and improved market competitiveness.

3.5 Antimicrobial Resistance and One Health¹⁰

22. Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) continues to pose a significant threat to public health, animal health, food safety, and the environment across the NE region. Several efforts have been invested in different countries to enhance the One Health approach and address AMR.

3.5.1 Regional collaboration for One Health operationalization

Regional initiatives

- At the 36th FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC 36) in January 2022, a side event on “One Health and Combating Transboundary Diseases and Pests” was held. Countries were urged to support a Regional One Health Platform. At NERC 37 in 2024, an Info Note was presented to update on progress and next steps for the platform’s establishment.
- An operational framework for One Health was introduced in 2022 during the 69th Regional Committee adopted a resolution EM/RC69/R.3 that introduced an operational framework for One Health, which the framework identifies elements for governance and leadership, multisectoral coordination, data and information sharing, and building the capacity of a multidisciplinary workforce for One Health that help member states to be prepared and better respond to health threats at the human-animal-environment

¹⁰ <https://www.fao.org/neareast/news/details/regional-leaders-unite-to-strengthen-one-health-approach-in-historic-agreement-one-health--one-region--one-strength/en>

interface including AMR and food safety. This framework was developed by WHO in close consultation with FAO, WHO, WOAHA and UNEP regional offices. The framework was introduced to countries during a Quadripartite regional meeting that was held in Muscat, Oman, in May 2023.

- The 17th WOAHA Regional Commission for the Middle East, held in October 2023 in Saudi Arabia, highlighted One Health as a key theme, emphasizing intersectoral coordination. The resulting recommendations were adopted for submission to the World Assembly.
- Collaboration between the Quadripartite organizations at global, regional, subregional and country levels was notably strengthened during 2024-2025. In this regard, a Quadripartite regional One Health Multisectoral coordination mechanism has been developed with specific TORs involving regional and subregional offices of FAO, WOAHA, and UNEP.
- A regional Quadripartite One Health action plan was developed in late 2024 and rolled out in June 2025 in a signing ceremony attended by the regional directors of the four organizations.
- Introduction to One Health online bilingual course has been delivered to professionals in the Near East and North Africa, in collaboration with the FAO Regional Office for the Near East.

Country-Level engagement and support

23. FAO RNE and WHO EMRO are supporting countries in developing and updating National Action Plans (NAPs) on AMR, ensuring alignment with One Health principles and to mobilize resources such as the following:
 - Supporting Egypt and Lebanon in developing full project proposals for the 2025 AMR Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) round, following the acceptance of their concept notes.
 - Supporting the application for Pandemic Fund proposals, which offer a key opportunity to promote sustainable capacities for epidemic preparedness and health security under the one health umbrella through strengthening multisectoral coordination, surveillance, workforce, and laboratory systems. For the 1st call for proposals, Palestine, and Yemen were selected, for 2nd call for proposals: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Tunisia, while 3rd round: 8 eligible Member States; Afghanistan, Djibouti, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.

3.5.2 AMR activities carried out by FAO

24. The FAO RNE applies a multi-sectoral One Health approach to address AMR, in alignment with global, regional, and national frameworks. AMR is a priority within FAO RNE's OH agenda, with key focus areas including surveillance, policy support, capacity development, and regional coordination. Despite limited dedicated funding, substantial progress is being made through synergies with regional initiatives, particularly the FAO-led TCP/RAB/3903 project.

One Health governance and technical support

25. FAO RNE co-leads the Regional One Health Coordination Group (ROH-CG), working closely with WHO, WOAHA, and UNEP to align regional strategies and actions. This group meets monthly to harmonize efforts on priority areas, including AMR, zoonoses, and food safety. FAO provides technical leadership in integrating food and agriculture components into the Quadripartite Regional One Health Action Plan, particularly focusing on AMR surveillance, responsible antimicrobial use (AMU), and capacity building in the veterinary and food production sectors.

Country-Level engagement and project support

26. FAO promotes the Progressive Management Pathway for AMR (PMP-AMR) to support countries in institutionalizing multisectoral AMR governance and NAP implementation. Through technical guidance, policy dialogue, and cross-sectoral coordination, FAO is helping Member Countries operationalize One Health systems that are responsive, evidence-based, and sustainable.
27. At the country level, FAO supports:
 - Technical assistance for NAP formulation and review, including multi-sectoral coordination, governance structures, and monitoring frameworks.
 - Integration of AMR and antimicrobial use (AMU) in national livestock, food safety, and public health policies.
 - Capacity development for veterinary services, laboratories, and regulatory authorities.

28. Current initiatives include:

- Egypt and Lebanon: Concept notes accepted under the 2025 AMR Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF); FAO is supporting both countries in preparing full project proposals, including technical design, stakeholder consultation, and alignment with national OH strategies.
- Yemen and West Bank and Gaza: Supported under the first round of the Pandemic Fund, with a focus on AMR and zoonotic disease prevention.
- Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia: Beneficiaries of the second round of the Pandemic Fund, with FAO coordinating inputs on climate change–AMR linkages, especially in the livestock sector, and providing technical support through in-country and regional expertise.
- In Tunisia and Morocco, FAO implements joint projects under the One Health AMR-NAP framework, strengthening national surveillance, data systems, and policy implementation.

Capacity development and surveillance tools

29. FAO RNE facilitates both virtual and in-person training on AMR and AMU monitoring:

- Virtual training on InFARM and AMR targeting veterinary and laboratory professionals, leveraging resources from other regional projects.
- Scaling up of FAO tools such as ATLASS (laboratory assessment) and InFARM (Integrated AMR Monitoring and Reporting) across priority countries.
- Laboratory support includes provision of diagnostic tools, upgrading biosafety systems, and enhancing lab data management for AMR diagnostics.

Awareness, advocacy, and good practices

30. FAO RNE promotes awareness among consumers and farmers on AMR risks and responsible antimicrobial use:

- Development and dissemination of risk communication materials for farmers and food chain actors.
- Advocacy for the RENOFARM initiative, linking AMR reduction to improved agricultural practices and sustainability.
- The region also prioritizes knowledge-sharing and peer exchange, connecting veterinary laboratories and policy focal points through joint learning sessions.

AMR strategic priorities for 2026–2027

31. Two key global initiatives led by the Quadripartite organizations (FAO, WHO, WOA, UNEP) are currently underway and will shape AMR efforts at global, regional, and national levels:

- The establishment of the Independent Panel on Evidence for Action against AMR (IPEA) aims to provide independent, scientific, and policy-relevant advice to drive effective, evidence-based action against AMR. IPEA will serve as a global knowledge hub, supporting countries in translating evidence into practice.
- The update of the Global Action Plan (GAP) on AMR is in progress, with a revised framework expected to better reflect One Health integration, climate-health linkages, and evolving challenges in AMR governance, surveillance, and antimicrobial stewardship.

32. Both processes are guided by roadmaps jointly developed by the Quadripartite, and FAO RNE is aligning its regional strategy to ensure countries in the NENA region are actively engaged and benefit from the updated global direction.

FAO RNE encourages Member Countries to:

- Participate in global consultations and contribute regional perspectives to the GAP revision process;
- Utilize IPEA's forthcoming recommendations to strengthen national AMR strategies and evidence-based policymaking;
- Align national planning and monitoring efforts with emerging global standards and tools, including InFARM, PMP-AMR, and updated surveillance frameworks.

33. These global developments present a timely opportunity for countries in the region to reinforce their AMR response, scale up impact, and ensure sustainability through coordinated action and knowledge-driven policies.

34. Additionally, FAO RNE will build on recent achievements to further support countries in institutionalizing sustainable AMR responses within the One Health framework. Strategic priorities for the biennium include:
- Accelerating the implementation of the Regional One Health Action Plan, with the development and rollout of an AMR-specific monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to measure progress and guide evidence-based action.
 - Encouraging countries to adopt and scale up the FAO InFARM platform (International FAO Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring), to improve national AMR/AMU surveillance. FAO will support countries to standardize data collection, enhance notification systems, and ensure timely analysis and reporting.
 - Establishment of regional AMR laboratory networks with specialized diagnostics and data-sharing systems.
 - Institutionalizing support for NAP development and implementation, using the FAO Progressive Management Pathway (PMP) approach.

Ongoing projects on AMR and zoonoses in the NENA region

35. The Global Health Security Program (GHSP) in Egypt (OSRO/EGY/100/USA) aims to enhance the country's capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to emerging, re-emerging, and endemic zoonoses, as well as antimicrobial resistance (AMR) threats. The project focuses on improving multisectoral collaboration, increasing knowledge and reducing the spread of neglected zoonotic diseases, and strengthening mitigation measures against AMR in the livestock sector.
36. The Global Health Security (GHS) Project in Egypt (OSRO/EGY/045/USA) is designed to reduce public health risks, animal suffering, and economic losses associated with zoonotic diseases and AMR. It supports effective prevention, detection, and response mechanisms to address these threats.
37. In Tunisia, the project titled "Support the Implementation of the AMR National Action Plan Using a One Health Approach", (UNJP/TUN/047/UNJ) seeks to integrate AMR-related risks and benefits into national budgets and development partner investments. It also aims to improve the evidence base and availability of representative data on antimicrobial resistance and use (AMR/AMU) to inform policy and implementation.
38. The Support to the Antimicrobial Resistance National Action Plan (AMR-NAP) in Morocco (UNJP/MOR/043/UNJ) focuses on advancing the implementation of the AMR-NAP through a One Health approach, under the framework of a Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF), promoting coordinated action across sectors.

3.5.3 AMR activities carried out by WHO

39. WHO continues to support Member States as part of WHO's broader mandate in addressing AMR through policy development, program management, and coordinated action. In 2024, Member States adopted a resolution 2024 Promoting collaborative action to accelerate the response to antimicrobial resistance in the Eastern Mediterranean Region¹¹ Recognizing the urgent need to accelerate national and global responses to AMR collaborative approach to addressing AMR through a One Health lens. Reflecting the resolution WHA77.6 of the World Health Assembly in May 2024 and the political declaration of the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on AMR in September 2024. Concerned that the latest available data show that the Region has the highest and most rapidly rising levels of antibiotic consumption of any WHO region¹²

Surveillance and monitoring

- Assist all Member States in compiling and submitting annual antimicrobial use (AMU) surveillance data, and infection prevention and control (IPC) indicators.
- Tracking the progress on national AMR actions through the annual TrACSS (Tripartite AMR Country Self-Assessment Survey) process.
- Coordinating Member State contributions to the proposed Independent Panel on Evidence for Action Against Antimicrobial Resistance, ensuring regional perspectives are well represented.
- A regional Member State consultation to gather input on the upcoming Global Action Plan on AMR is scheduled for 3 September 2025.

¹¹ <https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/RC71-R4-D-AMR-eng.pdf?ua=1>

¹² <https://www.tropicalmedicine.ox.ac.uk/gram/research/global-antibiotic-consumption>

Country support

- Promoting investment in regional workforce development aligned with the Regional Director's flagship initiative.
- Developing integrated programmes combining IPC, AMR, and AMS, aimed at building a cadre of competent, multi-skilled health professionals capable of implementing AMR/IPC/AMS programmes in healthcare facilities. These efforts are carried out in collaboration with academic institutions and regional partners.
- Developing and piloting of a One Health field epidemiology programme in Egypt. In addition to building national capacities on prioritizing health threats at the human-animal-environment interface through a TOT organized in May 2025 and facilitated by WHO, EMRO experts.
- Two Global Laboratory Leadership Programme (GLLP) webinars and a GLLP regional workshop were held in Muscat, to support the development of national capacity to respond to outbreaks and health emergencies and sustain national laboratory systems in line with the One Health approach.
- Support national professionals in Yemen through providing guidance and tools towards establishing a coherent One Health coordination mechanism involving all relevant national human-animal-environment health authorities.
- A standardized One Health structure with Terms of Reference and defined roles and responsibilities for each sector and modality of work was developed. This model structure includes multiple examples that provide comprehensive guidance for countries such as Yemen and Iraq to build their structure to serve OH relevant areas of work, including food safety and AMR.

Regional collaboration within EMRO

- One Health regional working group has been formed, comprising the relevant units and departments in EMRO responsible for coordinating all One Health-related activities including Food safety and AMR.

3.6 Codex Trust Fund 2

40. The Codex Trust Fund 2 (CTF2) is a joint FAO/WHO programme designed to provide support to developing and transition economy countries to build strong and sustainable capacity to engage in Codex work. Since the end of 2024 the CTF has been facing a disruption of its liquidity pipeline due to some of the donors not being able to extend their lifetime of their grants and a paucity of new funding agreements. As a result, all new activities under the CTF2, for which funds have not yet been disbursed to countries by FAO and WHO, have been put on hold until new funding becomes available.
41. In 2024, CTF2 launched its project output repository which provides access to resource material and products developed with CTF2 support. Documents included in the repository have been officially shared by beneficiary countries of the CTF2 to serve as examples and inspiration to countries aiming to develop similar products to strengthen the components of their national Codex systems. The repository can be accessed through the CTF website¹³.

3.7 FAO/WHO INFOSAN

42. In November 2024, WHO EMRO in collaboration with FAO RNE, the FAO/WHO INFOSAN Secretariat, the Codex Coordinating Committee for the Near East (CCNE), and the League of Arab States (LAS), hosted the "First INFOSAN regional meeting in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean and FAO Near East and North Africa regions: strengthening intraregional collaborative efforts for advanced preparedness and efficient management of food safety incidents"^{14,15}.
43. Over 90 participants, including INFOSAN Emergency Contact Points (ECPs), and Focal Points (FPs), International Health Regulation (IHR) national focal points and the Codex Contact Points (CCP) participated from Afghanistan, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

¹³ <https://www.who.int/initiatives/codex-trust-fund/repository-of-project-outputs>

¹⁴ <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/380509>

¹⁵ <https://www.emro.who.int/ceha/ceha-news/first-regional-infosan-meeting-in-the-eastern-mediterranean.html>

44. The meeting concluded with key recommendations to FAO and WHO:

- Develop a regional FAO/WHO INFOSAN strategy that outlines regional-specific priority actions for 2025–2030 to achieve the global targets set in the WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety 2022–2030 and supported by the FAO Food Safety Priorities 2022–2031.
- Convene INFOSAN regional virtual meetings annually.
- Strengthening country capacities in food safety incident reporting and management, and the utilization of new technologies such as AI to improve access to information and the timely management of foodborne risks.
- Establish formal links with the regional networks facilitating the dissemination of food safety incident information and reporting, such as the Arab Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed initiative.
- Organize tailored national workshops for priority countries with capacity scores 1 and 2 (as reported through the IHR-SPAR).
- Deliver regional workshops on multisectoral collaboration mechanisms and good practices to establish operational links between INFOSAN members and IHR focal points.
- Strive for a 100 percent active representation in INFOSAN by countries of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean and FAO Near East and North Africa regions.

4 Global initiatives and programmes of relevance to the region

4.1 World Food Safety Day

4.1.1 WFSD 2024: Food Safety: prepare for the unexpected

45. The FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (FAO RNE), in collaboration with the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (WHO EMRO), jointly organized a hybrid awareness campaign, held both in Cairo and online, to commemorate World Food Safety Day 2024, under the theme “Food safety: prepare for the unexpected”. The event highlighted the critical importance of preparedness in managing food safety risks, including those arising from unforeseen events. It featured panel discussions aimed at aligning priorities and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. FAO RNE reaffirmed its commitment to supporting governments in the region to strengthen food safety systems through a One Health approach, while WHO EMRO emphasized the public health burden of unsafe food, noting that foodborne diseases affect millions annually across the region.
46. The event brought together representatives from the Codex Alimentarius Commission, FAO/WHO INFOSAN, FAO’s Food Systems and Food Safety Division (ESF), and national food safety authorities—including the National Food Safety Authority (NFSA) of Egypt, the National Office of Food Safety (ONSSA) of Morocco, and the Abu Dhabi Agriculture and Food Safety Authority (ADAFSA)—to exchange perspectives and reinforce collective efforts toward safer food systems^{16,17,18}.

4.1.2 WFSD 2025: Food Safety: science in action

47. In commemoration of the World Food Safety Day 2025 under the theme “Food Safety: Science in Action”, WHO EMRO and FAO RNE jointly launched a series of webinars from 28 May to 11 August 2025 aimed at strengthening global food safety systems through science-based approaches. These sessions covered a wide range of topics, including risk assessment and risk-benefit analysis for informed decision-making, innovative strategies to combat antimicrobial resistance, and the role of food safety laboratories.
48. The series also explored tools like the JECFA toolbox for veterinary drug residues, the FAO/WHO Food Control System Assessment Tool, and practical applications of Good Hygiene Practices (GHP) and HACCP¹⁹. Additional focus areas included consumer behaviour, foodborne outbreak investigations, disease surveillance, and emerging issues such as novel foods and alternative proteins²⁰.

¹⁶ <https://www.emro.who.int/media/news/unsafe-food-makes-100-million-people-ill-each-year-in-the-region.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.emro.who.int/media/news/world-food-safety-day-2025-the-vital-role-of-science-in-ensuring-safe-food.html#:~:text=7%20June%202025%2C%20Cairo%2C%20Egypt,food%20contaminants%20in%20many%20ways>

¹⁸ <https://www.fao.org/neareast/news/details/fao-and-who-working-to-ensure-everyone-has-access-to-safe-and-healthy-food-in-the-near-east-region/en>

¹⁹ <https://www.fao.org/good-hygiene-practices-haccp-toolbox/en>

²⁰ <https://www.fao.org/neareast/events/details/the-seventh-world-food-safety-day-2025/en>

4.2 Food control system assessments in the NE

49. The FAO/WHO food control system assessment tool allows Member Countries to assess, in a structured and transparent way, the performance of their national food control systems (NFCS) throughout the entire food chain, identify priority areas for capacity development, and measure and evaluate progress over time.
50. This tool consists of five volumes has been published in English, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic language.
51. The tool is available at:

- FAO <https://www.fao.org/food-safety/food-control-systems/assessment-tool/en/>
- WHO <https://www.who.int/activities/strengthening-national-food-control-systems>

To facilitate widespread use of the FAO/WHO Assessment Tool, dissemination packages including global launch, and an introductory booklet (available at: <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb4964en/> and

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240028371>) have been developed jointly by FAO and WHO. A video has also been developed and is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_zdTup2yKY

52. FAO and WHO are continuing to assist Member countries in utilizing the tool to assess their national food control systems (NFCS) as a strong basis to encourage harmonization of regulatory frameworks, policies and practices with Codex Alimentarius guidance and drive consistent progress.
53. FAO successfully completed assessments in Sudan and Tunisia in 2019, in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (UAE) in 2021.
54. Under a European Union (EU) funded project, assessments were completed in ten African Member States including Egypt where the assessment was completed in 2024²¹. FAO currently facilitates assessments in the United Arab Emirates which will be completed in September 2025²². Regular updates are also posted on <https://www.fao.org/food-safety/news/en/>
55. Members are encouraged to contribute to the online platform for information sharing on food control systems and roles and responsibilities in food safety. This platform was developed by FAO and WHO with support of the Codex Secretariat in response to the request of CAC38²³. Certain members have contributed to this useful site²⁴.

4.3 The WHO Alliance for Food Safety²⁵

56. The WHO Alliance for Food Safety was launched in 2024 to support the implementation of the WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety 2022-2030. The Alliance is formed of a network of WHO Collaborating Centers (WHO CC) and other partners collaborating and sharing expertise to achieve the mission of guiding and supporting Member States in prioritizing, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating actions to reduce the burden of foodborne diseases. Lebanon, Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are members of the Alliance.

5 FAO and WHO global strategies implementation progress

57. The Framework for coordination of the FAO Strategic Priorities for Food Safety (2022–2031) and the WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety (2022–2030)²⁶ outlines a joint approach by FAO and WHO to strengthen global food safety. It promotes coordinated action through shared strategic priorities, a One Health approach, and mechanisms for collaboration, information exchange, and stakeholder engagement.
58. The framework outlines a collaborative approach to enhancing global food safety through four strategic areas: Codex Alimentarius, scientific advice, national food control systems, and communication. The framework supports innovation, sustainable agrifood systems, and global standard-setting, providing a roadmap for safer food and improved public health worldwide.

²¹ <https://www.fao.org/egypt/news/detail/In-Egypt-FAO-leads-an-evaluation-of-the-national-food-control-system/en>

²² <https://www.fao.org/food-safety/news/news-details/es/c/1734012/>

²³ https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/sh-proxy/en/?lnk=1&url=https%253A%252F%252Fworkspace.fao.org%252Fsites%252Fcodex%252FMeetings%252FCX-701-38%252FReport%252FREP15_CACe.pdf

²⁴ <https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/about-codex/members/detail/en/c/15611/>

²⁵ <https://www.who.int/initiatives/who-alliance-for-food-safety>

²⁶ <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/379872/9789240102583-eng.pdf>

5.1 FAO

59. FAO continues to deliver its food safety programme for its Members in accordance with the FAO Strategic Priorities for Food Safety within the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31²⁷. These Strategic Priorities are articulated around four interconnected Strategic Outcomes focused on governance, scientific advice, strengthening national food control systems and fostering public-private partnerships along the food chain.

5.1 WHO

5.1.1 Roadmap for implementing the WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety²⁸

60. In December 2023, WHO EMRO hosted a regional meeting in collaboration with the CCNE and WHO Collaborating Centers in the Region. Representatives from 15 EMR countries attended the meeting, including Afghanistan, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Libya, the occupied Palestinian territory, Sudan, and the Syrian Arab Republic joined virtually. The meeting aimed at:
- Updating on the national food control system capacities in the Region using the FAO/WHO food control assessment tool as a self-assessment.
 - Introducing the WHO global strategy for food safety 2022–2030 and the global targets.
 - Outlining the regional roadmap for 2023-2030.
 - Exchange country experiences and success stories in food safety.
 - Enhance intraregional collaboration and coordination on food safety.

5.1.2 Strengthening national foodborne diseases surveillance and response capacities

- Supporting countries in developing and maintaining core capacities to effectively manage food safety risks and protect public health in accordance with the IHR 2005. National trainings on foodborne disease outbreak investigations were delivered in Yemen and Kuwait during 2024 to build capacity of outbreak Rapid Response Teams (RRT) in investigating and responding to foodborne disease outbreaks in accordance with the CXG 96-2022²⁹, enhance coordination and improve the implementation of food and environmental assessments to enforce effective and timely control measures.
- Assessment of national foodborne disease surveillance system. WHO facilitated the assessment in Yemen and Iraq to identify priority actions for strengthening the detection and response of foodborne diseases.
- WHO and MOH in Iraq inaugurated a national project to develop national guidelines for foodborne disease surveillance and outbreak investigation. The project aims to ensure a coordinated and consistent approach to detecting, reporting, and investigating foodborne disease outbreaks³⁰.

5.1.3 Food safety roadmap development tool

61. In 2024, WHO in partnership with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) -World Bank, validated the “food safety roadmap development tool” in Egypt and Qatar. The tool was developed with the aim of supporting Member States in identifying and prioritizing actions for strengthening national food control systems mapped against the WHO Global strategy for food safety strategic priorities and objectives³¹.

6 Conclusion

62. The NE region exhibits significant disparities in food safety governance. While several countries have made notable progress through regulatory modernization, institutional coordination, and strengthened governance structures, many other NE countries continue to face persistent challenges due to protracted crises, institutional fragility, and limited regulatory capacity.

²⁷ <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/cc4040en>

²⁸ [WHOEMFCS033E-eng.pdf](https://www.who.int/emfcs033E-eng.pdf)

²⁹ fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/sh-proxy/en/?lnk=1&url=https%253A%252F%252Fworkspace.fao.org%252Fsites%252Fcodex%252FStandards%252FCXG%25B96-2022%252FCXG_096e.pdf

³⁰ <https://www.emro.who.int/iraq/news/iraq-strengthens-foodborne-disease-surveillance-and-response.html>

³¹ https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/sh-proxy/en/?lnk=1&url=https%253A%252F%252Fworkspace.fao.org%252Fsites%252Fcodex%252FMeetings%252FCX-716-34%252FWorking%252BDocuments%252Fqp34_03e.pdf

7 Recommendations

63. CCNE Members are invited to consider:

- Applying the FAO/WHO Food Control System Assessment Tool (FCSAT) to evaluate institutional mandates, legal frameworks, and technical capacities.
- Establishing regional databases, conduct dietary exposure assessments, and improve surveillance.
- Identifying and engage competent authorities, private sector actors, academia, and civil society to foster inclusive governance and coordinated food safety actions.
- Strengthening integrated foodborne disease surveillance systems, traceability mechanisms, and post-harvest handling.
- Promoting automation, AI, and biotechnology for food safety monitoring and compliance.
- Supporting Codex-aligned standards on microbial control, water safety, AMR, novel food, and remote inspections.
- Enhancing detection and prevention mechanisms to address smuggling and counterfeiting in food, under the overall umbrella of food fraud.
- Using network mapping and scenario-based simulations to identify coordination gaps and improve emergency response capacity.
- Promoting policy coherence across trade, agriculture, and health sectors.

Appendix I

Materials from FAO and WHO available in Arabic, English and French languages

Topic	Title	Language versions of use to the region	Link(s)
Engagement in Codex Alimentarius work	Regional guideline for engagement in Codex Alimentarius work (2020)	AR	https://www.fao.org/publications/card/en/c/ca7200ar https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/ca7200ar
Foodborne disease	Estimating the burden of foodborne diseases: a practical handbook for countries; Executive Summary and modules (2021)	AR, EN	https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240012264
Food control system assessment	FAO and WHO Food Control System Assessment Tool (2020)	AR, EN, FR	https://doi.org/10.4060/ca5334ar https://doi.org/10.4060/ca5334fr https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240028371
Food safety global strategy	The WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety 2023-2030 (2022)	AR, EN, FR	https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/9789292743680-ara.pdf
FAO food safety priorities	FAO Strategic Priorities for Food Safety within the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-2031 (2023)	AR, EN, FR	https://doi.org/10.4060/cc4040ar https://doi.org/10.4060/cc4040fr
INFOSAN	The INFOSAN members guide: template for INFOSAN/IHR communication (2021)	AR	http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/337469/9789240016590-ara.pdf?sequence=5
Management of foodborne outbreaks	FAO/WHO Guidelines on the Management of Biological Foodborne Outbreaks (2022)	AR, EN, FR	https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/sh-proxy/en/?lnk=1&url=https%253A%252F%252Fworkspace.fao.org%252Fsites%252Fcodex%252FStandards%252FCXG%2B96-2022%252FCXG_096a.pdf
Risk assessment	Brochures about Ad hoc Joint FAO/WHO expert consultation on risk assessment of food allergens (A4 and 3-fold formats) (2021-2024)	AR, EN, FR	https://www.fao.org/food-safety/scientific-advice/food-allergens/en/ https://www.who.int/groups/ad-hoc-joint-fao-who-expert-consultation-on-risk-assessment-of-food-allergens
E-learning course on agriculture in trade agreements	E-learning course on agriculture in trade agreements (FAO RNE, EST and UNITAR) (2025)	AR	https://www.fao.org/neareast/events/details/e-learning-course-on-agriculture-in-trade-agreements/en

			https://aita-arabic.unitar.org/
Human and food-producing animal exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs)	Exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals (2024)	EN	https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/ec927884-7e97-46f5-a5f6-b2c77b4ac378
Emerging trends and drivers affecting food safety	Thinking About the Future of Food Safety: A Foresight Report (2023)	EN	https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/0aa558d4-57c7-498d-87f7-b9e37577882f/content/cb8667en.html
Food safety risks in circular agrifood systems, including contamination risks from physical, microbiological, and chemical sources	Food Safety in a Circular Economy (2024)	EN	https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/a56651cc-2058-446f-8e68-ff92664891b6/content
Identifies and attempts to quantify current and anticipated food safety issues associated with climate change	Climate Change: Unpacking the Burden on Food Safety (2020)	EN	https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/6f00ca3a-90ae-432b-8124-d748533b277a/content
Food safety hazards in plant-derived proteins, seaweeds, jellyfish, insects, microbial proteins, cell-based foods, precision fermentation, vertical farming, and 3D food printing	Safety of New Food Sources and Production Systems (2024)	EN	https://www.fao.org/food-safety/news/news-details/en/c/1682565/

Safety of food supplements and functional foods	Food safety in personalized nutrition: A focus on food supplements and functional foods (2025)	<u>EN</u>	https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/cd4280en
Risk assessment	Food safety in the context of limited food availability: Risk assessment of 3-MCPD and fatty acid esters in nutrient supplements and therapeutic food (2025)	EN	https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/cd0761en