

Summary report on the

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# Expert consultation on the development of a plan of action for food safety in the Eastern Mediterranean Region 2017–2022

Amman, Jordan  
2–3 August 2016



**World Health  
Organization**

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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## **1. Introduction**

The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Centre for Environmental Health Action (CEHA) convened an expert consultation on the development of a plan of action for food safety in the Eastern Mediterranean Region 2017–2022 in Amman, Jordan, on 2–3 August 2016. The objective of the meeting was to discuss and revise the draft plan of action, incorporating the comments and viewpoints of Member States and invited experts.

The plan of action was requested by the 62nd session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean in 2015 for submission to the 63rd session of the Regional Committee in 2016. It is based on assessment of national food safety systems and the development of food safety profiles for 16 Member States. The plan of action was drafted by an international expert, reviewed by WHO and shared with Member States for their review and comments prior to the consultation. The feedback from Member States was considered during the consultation and duly incorporated, where appropriate.

## **2. Summary of discussions**

The draft plan of action, along with the comments received from Member States, was reviewed and discussed by 10 international experts, section by section. Recommendations were reviewed, reorganized and incorporated in the main text and in tabulated format for quick reference and inclusion in an executive summary.

The outcome of the consultation was a draft regional plan of action for food safety in the Eastern Mediterranean 2017–2022 (see section 3 below).

### **3. Regional plan of action for food safety in the Eastern Mediterranean (2017–2022)**

The draft regional plan of action includes separate recommended actions for Member States at each of the three levels of development of national food safety systems (limited, intermediate and advanced) and for WHO support for regional and subregional activities in response to common needs among Member States. The framework for the plan of action groups the recommended actions according to the seven essential components of a food safety system: intersectoral coordination; laws, regulations and policies; emergency preparedness and response; disease surveillance and exposure monitoring; food safety implementation, product monitoring and inspection; risk communication and information; and human and financial resources.

#### *Intersectoral coordination*

##### **Limited**

- Establish a national inter-ministerial food safety coordinating group, a national Codex Alimentarius committee and a national food safety focal point.

##### **Intermediate**

- Promote the “One Health” approach at national and local levels, and develop an inter-ministerial plan for food safety management.

##### **Advanced**

- Develop and refine intersectoral coordination mechanisms to cover food safety activities from farm to table, including regulatory frameworks and information sharing at all levels of government.

### **WHO support**

- Promote the “One Health” approach in coordination with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and other international and regional organizations.

### *Laws, regulations and policies*

#### **Limited**

- Review and update basic food safety legislation, using Codex Alimentarius standards, guidelines and other recommendations, and establish a national Codex committee.

#### **Intermediate**

- Identify gaps and overlaps in the current national framework for food laws and regulations, develop a plan for improving them, develop national policies for food safety and make food safety legislation easily accessible, preferably online.

#### **Advanced**

- Enact comprehensive food safety legislation with clear roles and responsibilities for all competent authorities and stakeholders, establish a continuous process for addressing emerging and re-emerging food risks and issues, and make food safety legislation easily accessible to international trade partners.

### **WHO support**

- Provide guidance on food safety legislation and assist countries in implementing Codex Alimentarius standards, guidelines and other recommendations at the national level.

### *Emergency preparedness and response*

#### **Limited**

- Appoint a focal point for the food component of International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005, who should be integrated into the national IHR team, coordinate closely with the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) emergency focal point, strengthen surveillance and investigation for foodborne disease emergencies, and establish/develop a database of food business operators, including importers and exporters.

#### **Intermediate**

- Convene a meeting with all relevant government agencies involved in the food supply chain and identify emergency contacts, establish standard operating procedures (SOPs) with relevant agencies, engage key private sector food supply chain stakeholders, establish SOPs for hazardous product notification, tracing and recall, develop capacity for risk communication, and implement the food safety component of the IHR.

#### **Advanced**

- Establish capacities for rapid, scientific risk-based advice on hazards in food, develop a protocol to permit rapid notification, tracing and recall of hazardous food products, validate through tests that the system works as intended, identify and address

inadequacies in laboratory services, and allocate resources and develop expertise as part of preparedness.

### **WHO support**

- Assist countries to establish and improve systems to monitor, assess and manage food safety emergencies, convene workshops on the obligations under the IHR regarding foodborne disease events, and include participation of IHR food safety and INFOSAN focal points, and contact points in relevant ministries and agencies, to define roles and responsibilities of government stakeholders.

### *Disease surveillance and exposure monitoring*

#### **Limited**

- Develop a short list of biological hazards and include these in the national disease surveillance system, and develop laboratory capacity to identify the listed organisms.

#### **Intermediate**

- Expand foodborne disease surveillance and outbreak investigation, develop laboratory capacities for both clinical and food analysis, require mandatory notification of a list of specific foodborne disease agents, train selected food inspectors to investigate outbreaks and participate in foodborne disease outbreak investigation teams, and conduct total diet studies to identify priority chemicals of concern.

#### **Advanced**

- Establish a comprehensive foodborne disease surveillance and outbreak investigation system with participation by all relevant agencies, periodically update national food consumption data, and

link national data on relevant noncommunicable diseases to exposure through food intake, where possible.

### **WHO support**

- Convene at the regional or subregional level training courses to build capacity in foodborne disease surveillance and outbreak investigation, convene workshops on total diet studies and biomonitoring to develop capacity for exposure assessment of chemical hazards in diet, and encourage participation in the Global Early Warning System for health threats and emerging risks at the human–animal–ecosystems interface (GLEWS), Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS/food), Global Foodborne Infections Network (GFN) and other relevant WHO-associated networks.

### *Food safety implementation, product monitoring and inspection*

#### **Limited**

- Consolidate basic food inspection services, review inspection services provided by different government agencies to identify and address gaps and overlaps, and develop basic food safety laboratory capacity for compliance monitoring with existing standards.

#### **Intermediate**

- Register and categorize all food premises according to risk profile, develop a food inspection manual and train inspectors to use it, establish adequate laboratory capabilities for monitoring compliance, and assure laboratory results with appropriate quality assurance and control.

**Advanced**

- Develop national inspection and product monitoring policies and plans, periodically review enforcement policies and procedures, establish modern information management systems, ensure support for inspectors in terms of equipment, transport and infrastructure, and establish a network of quality-assured laboratories for enforcement.

**WHO support**

- Assist countries to develop and strengthen enforcement structures, and provide guidance and training in inspection methods and laboratory analysis for compliance with standards, such as maximum residue levels.

*Risk communication and information*

**Limited**

- Identify a risk communication focal point to adapt and distribute food safety information, education and communication (IEC) materials.

**Intermediate**

- Develop country-specific food safety IEC materials for diverse stakeholders along the food supply chain, as well as for schoolchildren and consumers.

**Advanced**

- Develop community-specific food safety IEC materials, survey consumers to understand their knowledge, attitudes and practices, and develop risk communication plans for specific food safety topics, including emergencies.

### **WHO support**

- Provide WHO food safety materials for adaptation by national risk communication focal points and provide training in risk communication methodology, including risk communication during emergencies.

### *Human and financial resources*

#### **Limited**

- Establish and strengthen a food safety unit and identify internal or external funding to support basic food safety services.

#### **Intermediate**

- Secure continuous and adequate government support for food safety activities, develop proposals to ensure the required human and financial resources are available, and develop a plan for staff development, including career tracks.

#### **Advanced**

- Maintain adequate human and financial resources, periodically evaluate priority needs and re-allocate resources accordingly, collaborate with and provide support for regional and international activities, create specialized positions, and establish a framework for assessing the national burden of foodborne disease.

### **WHO support**

- Promote the importance of, and support for, food safety by policy-makers and decision-makers in countries and international organizations, including donors, and develop advocacy material to

emphasize national obligations under the IHR in the area of food safety.

#### **4. Next steps**

- Submit the draft plan of action to the 63rd session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean for endorsement.
- For future implementation of the plan of action, Member States should consult their national food safety profiles for country-specific recommendations.



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