

# THE RIGHT TO FOOD

*In its last Universal Periodic Review in 2010, Egypt accepted one recommendation on ensuring that all segments of society enjoyed their right to food. Nevertheless, food insecurity has become a major concern in Egypt, particularly in the context of a sharp rise in food prices in recent years.*

**INCREASING FOOD INSECURITY IS RESULTING IN HIGHER LEVELS OF MALNUTRITION.** The prevalence of food insecurity is on the rise in Egypt. In 2013, Egypt was ranked as one of FAO's "Low-Income Food-Deficit Countries." Food insecurity increased from 14% in 2009 to 17.2% in 2011 (WFP, 2013). From 2005 to 2011, the rate at which children under five years old suffer from stunting (an indicator of chronic malnutrition) increased from 8% to 31% (CAPMAS, 2012).

**Suggested Question: Please provide up-to date information on malnutrition in Egypt, disaggregated by age, region, socio-economic level and gender.**

**AGRICULTURAL POLICIES HAVE LEFT EGYPT HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON FOOD IMPORTS.** State policies pursued in recent decades, including removing subsidies on agricultural materials, increasing the cost of renting agricultural land, doubling land tax, increasingly using agricultural land for urban development and tourism, and the monopolization of farm products and methods of mass agriculture by foreign companies, has left Egypt increasingly reliant on importing food. Egypt remains the largest importer of wheat in the world (FAO, 2014). This has contributed to a food shortage (Shawkat, 2013).

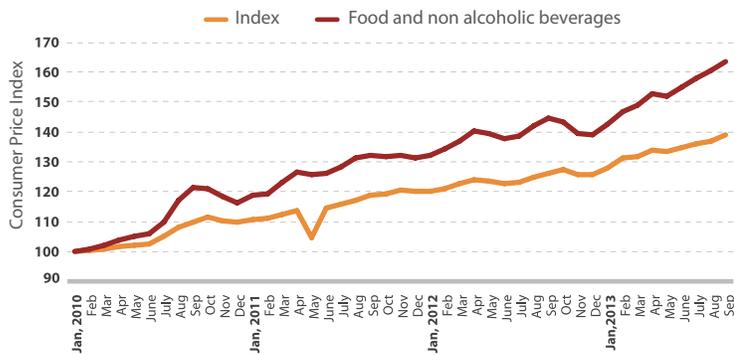
**FOOD INSECURITY IS BEING EXACERBATED BY THE SHARP RISE IN FOOD PRICES.** Consumer prices for food and beverages increased by 16.3% between January 2010 and September 2013, a steeper rate than the overall consumer price index. Prices for items such as vegetables and breads and cereals have also experienced particular spikes, 21.3% and 16.3% respectively (EFO, 2013b).

**Suggested Question: How can reforms to agricultural policy in Egypt help to safeguard the availability, accessibility and adequacy of food and meet the country's food needs in line with international standards?**

The decline in household purchasing power is having a serious impact on household consumption. The percentage of vulnerable households reporting that their income does not cover their monthly expenditures increased from 78.9% in September 2011, to 88.9% in March 2013 (EFO, 2013a). In Qalyubia, Matrouh and Cairo this figure is even higher: 100%, 98.7% and 98.1% respectively (EFO, 2013a). Similarly, in a 2012 poll conducted for the World Bank, 44% of respondents reported they could not buy the food they needed, almost double compared to 23% in 2010 (World Bank, 2012).

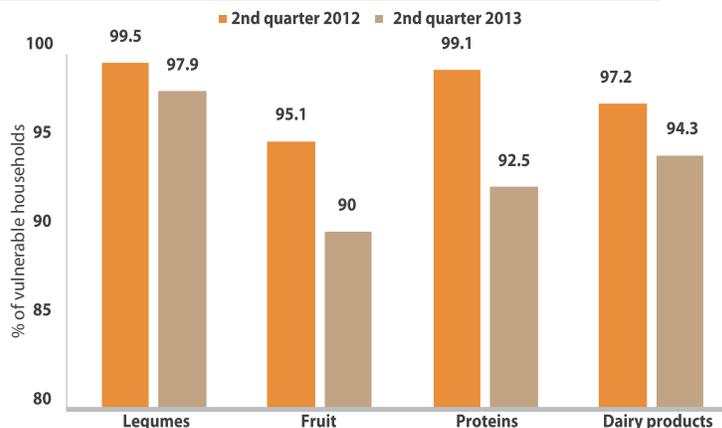
**CONSUMPTION OF CHEAPER FOOD ITEMS IS A COMMON COPING STRATEGY AMONG POORER HOUSEHOLDS.** This leads to an increasing overreliance on calorie-dense foods among poor households, to the detriment of nutritional content. The decreasing consumption of legumes, fruits, and dairy products as a result of Egypt's political and economic instability is likely to exacerbate malnutrition levels even further. The World Food Program (WFP) has estimated that roughly 25% of Egyptians are suffering from deficiencies in iron, zinc and Vitamin A (WFP, 2013). Further, increased consumption of refined carbohydrates, saturated fats and sugars has simultaneously increased risk for malnutrition and obesity (UNICEF, 2013).

Monthly consumer prices, January 2010 - September 2013



Source: CAPMAS, 2013

Vulnerable households consuming selected food items weekly 2012-2013



Source: Egyptian Food Observatory



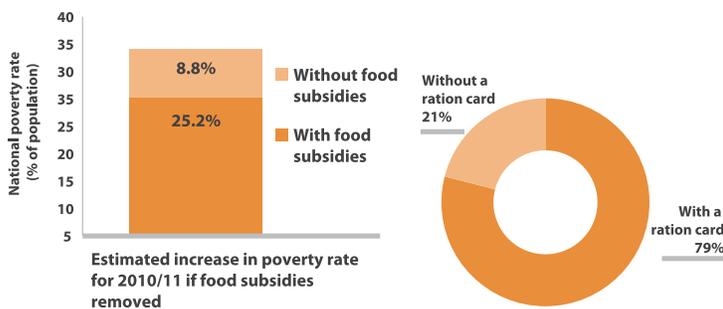
**THE GOVERNMENT HAS TRADITIONALLY KEPT FOOD PRICES DOWN THROUGH SUBSIDIES.** Food subsidies accounted for 1–2% of GDP over the past decade (by comparison, fuel subsidies accounted for 5–7%). Egypt has a system of ration cards that allows households to buy set quotas of commodities at subsidized prices from specific outlets. Approximately 80% of Egyptians benefit from these ration cards.

However, there are concerns the ration card system suffers from poor and limited targeting; 73% of the households it covers are considered non-poor, while a fifth of the most vulnerable households are excluded (IFPRI, 2013). Similarly, the Egyptian Food Observatory reported that 16.4% of vulnerable households did not hold a ration card for subsidized food in the last quarter of 2013. These numbers are even higher in the governorates of Alexandria (33.3%), followed by Sohag (25.0%) and Suez (23.8%). The Observatory also indicates that quantities of rationed foodstuffs are insufficient for a large number of households and need to be supplemented.

**Suggested Question: How is Egypt monitoring food security and tracking the effectiveness of its ration card system?**

**REFORMS TO FOOD SUBSIDIES MUST PROTECT THE RIGHT TO FOOD OF VULNERABLE GROUPS.** Despite concerns about its effectiveness, the food subsidy system in Egypt has a large impact on poverty. For example, it is estimated that in 2010/11, a further 9% of the population would have fallen below the poverty line had these subsidies not been in place (WFP, 2013). In July 2014, a decision was made to cut yearly food subsidies from 34.6 billion EGP to 31.6 billion EGP. To mitigate the impact of expected price hikes, the government established a new system of wheat distribution to reduce the leakages into the black market. Moreover, a wider variety of food items were added to the subsidized food distribution system and any citizen with a monthly income less than 1,500 EGP (about USD 209) can register (Gad, 2014). These measures are welcome. However, it is still not clear how they will be implemented in practice.

Ration card coverage and impact of food subsidy removal on the national poverty rate



Source: EFO, 2013b

**Suggested Question: Please provide information on how the reform of food subsidies will impact the right to food. Has a human rights impact assessment of proposed reforms been conducted? What steps have been taken to prevent and mitigate any potentially negative effects?**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Combat hunger and malnutrition by assessing the human rights impact of reducing food subsidies.

Adopt programs of social protection and assistance to address the apparent retrogression in the right to food, in line with the recommendation of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Increase food security, particularly for those in extreme poverty in rural areas, by allocating resources equitably.

Reevaluate agricultural policies against the provisions of international standards on the right to food; involve farmers of all organizational types in drawing up the plan for agricultural productions; and support small farmers to access farm lands and agricultural supplies.

### ABOUT THIS FACTSHEET SERIES

This Factsheet was prepared by the Urban Reform Coalition, with the support of the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECECSR) and the Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) in light of Egypt's appearance before the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review in 2014. The 11 factsheets in this series accompany the joint submission on economic, social, and cultural rights in Egypt endorsed by 130 non-governmental organizations and labor unions.

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