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UN report warns of accelerating food insecurity in the Arab region due to global crises

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Hunger and malnutrition have reached critical levels in the Arab region as access to basic foods has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, according to a United Nations report.

Produced by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Childrenâ??s Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the 2022 Near East and North Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition: Trade as an Enabler for Food Security and Nutrition, examines the state of regional food security, providing analysis and recommendations on how to mitigate the situation.

The report reveals that an estimated 53.9 million people suffered from severe food insecurity in the Arab region in 2021, accounting for a 55 per cent increase since 2010. This is also an increase of 5 million people from the previous year. Moderate or severe food insecurity has also continued its upward trend, affecting an estimated 154.3 million people in 2021, an increase of 11.6 million people over the previous year, the report also warned.

In addition, it stated that more than half the population in the Arab States, or 162.7 million people, could not afford a healthy diet in 2020. The cost of a healthy diet in the Arab region has been increasing each year since 2017, reaching $3.47 per person per day in 2020.

The Arab region continues to suffer from multiple forms of malnutrition. While the prevalence of stunting of 20.5 per cent and affecting one out of every five children under 5 years of age was lower than the global average, the report indicates that the regional indicators for wasting, 7.8 per cent, is higher than the global average of 6.7 per cent. The prevalence of overweight among children under 5 years of age has shown a steady increase since 2000 and has reached 10.7per cent in 2020.