

# Protecting Consumers in Lebanon: The Need for Effective Food Safety System

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**Background:** Food safety has a major impact on the health of the Lebanese population and economy. Pathogenic microorganisms are being detected in Lebanese foods, food poisoning outbreaks are being reported, and some Lebanese food product exports are being rejected while no changes have been made in the food safety practices. Little is known about what happened after the spoiled meat incident in March 2012 which provoked major public and political interest in the food safety practices. There is lack of clarity on who is responsible for food safety governance and control in Lebanon and how this system can be enhanced. This K2P Briefing Note aims to shed light on the current situation in terms of the food safety system and practices in Lebanon, clarify problems and offer a recommendation.

**Methods:** To effectively inform and advise decision makers about this pressing public health issue, the knowledge translation tool “K2P Briefing Note” was selected and prepared. The selection of this tool was based on predetermined criteria. The development of the K2P briefing note involved combining the explicit knowledge from the literature with the tacit knowledge of policymakers, content experts and relevant stakeholders through interviews. Available local, regional and global evidence on food safety governance mechanisms was collected through an assessment of the databases and identification of literature, screening, extraction and synthesis. This evidence was then contextualized through key stakeholder interviews and recommendations were developed.

**Findings:** To date, there is no food safety law in Lebanon, there are only decrees from the 1960s and 1970s which are outdated. There are nine agencies in Lebanon that govern food safety with overlapping functions, duplication of activities, gaps in the food control chain, and lack of accountability. Lebanese food safety practices do not conform to international standards and do not ensure the safety of Lebanese consumers. The current draft food safety law suggests a centralized approach to the food safety system coordinated by an independent food safety board and authority. There is a world-wide trend for governments to adopt stricter and more rigorous food safety control systems. The Briefing Note reports on food safety system models implemented in different countries, including their advantages and disadvantages and case studies of how some countries restructured their food safety systems.

**Recommendations:** The development of a national food safety law to uphold an effective food control system is essential for protecting consumers in Lebanon. Based on evidence synthesized in the K2P Briefing Note, the new food safety law should be context-specific, taking into consideration local applicability, implementation barriers, and political influences. This law should be accompanied by appropriate legislative decrees addressing implementation such as inspection, import/export, licensing etc. This law could be developed by conducting thorough assessment of the background of the food safety practices in Lebanon, analyses of the problem and underlying factors and identifying and appraising options for strengthening the food safety system. Such analysis should be the basis for holding deliberative policy dialogues.