

Country Profile: Lebanon

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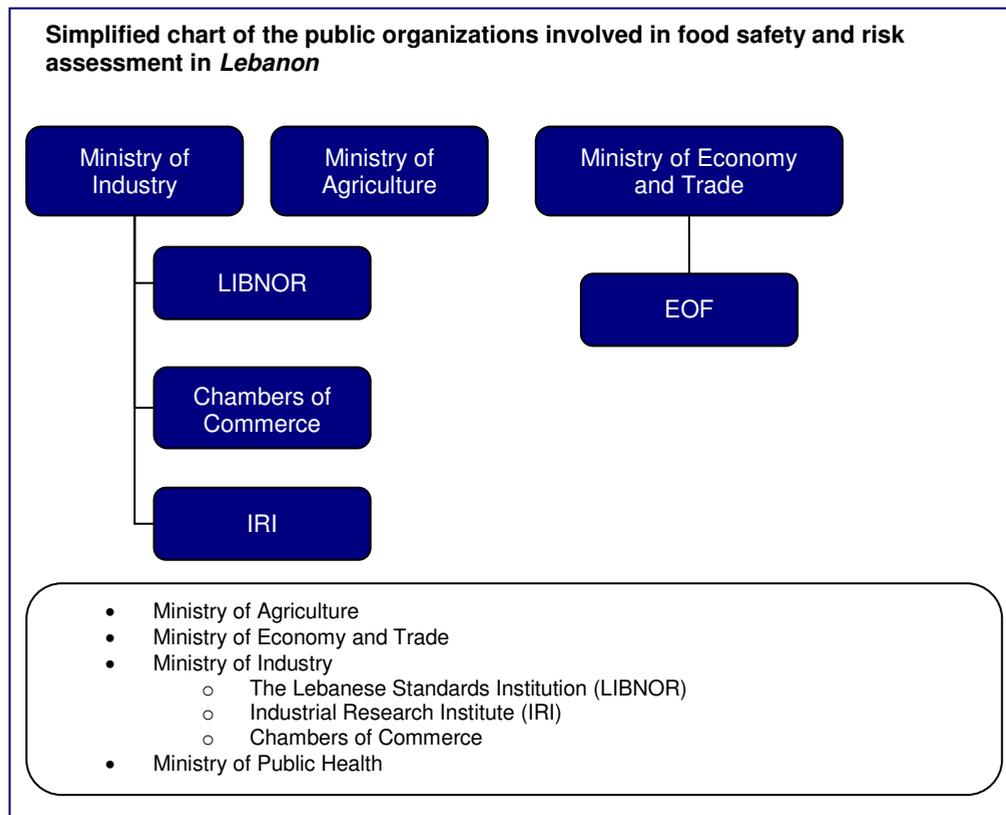
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Country Profile: Lebanonⁱ

I – Key priorities for risk assessment

- Tools and funding for risk assessment
- A strategy for risk management and communication
- Emerging risks

II – Major public actors involved in food safety (including risk assessment, management and communication)



Main public organisations involved in food safety and roles – Lebanon

Organisation	Main areas of remit (in term of risk assessment/ management/ communication)	Risk assessment	Risk management	Risk communication
Ministry of Agriculture	Plant health, animal health, Food safety in farms/bakeries/fisheries/customs	x		x
Ministry of Economy and Trade	Food safety in retail outlets for goods and services	x		x
Ministry of Industry	Food safety in factories/manufacturing businesses	x		x
Ministry of Public Health	Raising awareness of hazards in food products			x
LIBNOR – Lebanese Standards Institution	Issuing of standards, certifying products with NL conformity mark, awareness of standards among industrialists	x		x
IRI – Industrial Research Institute	Biological and chemical analysis of food samples	x		x
Chambers of Commerce	Biological and chemical analysis of food samples	x		x

The Lebanese Standards Institution is the sole authority capable of issuing food standards. These standards do not become law until they have been reviewed and adopted by the Council of Ministers. The standards must then be published in the official gazette. Three months after publication, the law is reviewed (as an assessment of feasibility and practicality) by the council and made mandatory. A Minister of a certain Ministry is entitled to pass a law if there is a critical situation that may need to be immediately addressed.

In Lebanon, there is no separation between risk assessment and management. Risk assessments are not made available to the public and the government offers advice that may be considered risk management, but the business owners are obliged to carry out the risk management at their own expense.

LIBNOR is a member of the ISO and adopts most of ISO standards for Lebanese products. Lebanon is also involved with CODEX (not in creating standards but using standards already present).

Whilst keeping in mind that Lebanon is a developing country, it is very important to note that the constant political and security instability directly affects the work of ministries and governmental organizations.

Ministry of Agriculture

Tasks of the Ministry of Agriculture:

- Risk Assessment of Food Safety in Farms/Factories/Fisheries/Customs
- Risk communication

Website: <http://www.agriculture.gov.lb/Arabic/Pages/Main.aspx>

The Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for Food safety in the agricultural and livestock sectors. It is responsible for formulating and implementing legislation regarding the safety of livestock and crops, the work ethics required in farms, wheat factories and fisheries. It is also responsible for the monitoring of plant and animal products imported through customs.

The Ministry has regional offices in the 7 regions of Lebanon, and the Head of each regional office is responsible for monitoring food safety in the Office's regional jurisdiction. The Head of the individual offices will often send trained inspectors to farms or factories with a risk assessment and set list of requirements applicable in these facilities. Reports are then given to the owners of the facilities being inspected if improvements need to be made. If the facility fails to comply with requirements and does not make improvements, warnings are given and the file (which includes the reports, warnings, checklists, risk assessments) may be given over to the Ministry of Justice and other Legal authorities for further action to be taken.

The work of the Ministry often overlaps with the work of other Ministries, such as that of the Ministry of Industry, when inspections of manufacturing factories, are undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture instead of the Ministry of Industry. This overlapping is not necessarily detrimental to the regulation of food safety, but may potentially lead to wasting of effort or time if more than one Ministry ends up performing the same work instead of organizing efficiently together, conflicts between ministries may occur.

For the processing of samples taken from inspection sites and other research generally related to the Ministry, the Ministry employs the IRI and the Chambers of Commerce and Trade. It also employs private laboratories such as those belonging to the American University of Science and Technology (AUST) and the American University of Beirut (AUB).

Ministry of Economy and Trade

Tasks of the Ministry of Economy and Trade:

- Risk assessment of retail outlets for goods and services
- Risk communication
- Raising public awareness

Website: <http://www.economy.gov.lb/index.php/home/2>

The Ministry of Economy and Trade in Lebanon is responsible for the national economy and its competitiveness on the global scale. One of the units or bodies within the Ministry is the Directorate for Consumer Protection. The Directorate is responsible for the rights of consumers and ensuring that consumers receive the highest quality of goods and services available.

The Directorate has several different functions, which include receiving complaints and inquiries from consumers, inspecting retail outlets for goods and services, and educating the public on the rights of the consumer.

The Directorate has a special hotline for the public to call 24 hours a day (after hours messages are taken) and receives complaints by email and occasionally, from the Ministry of Telecommunications.

Retail outlets are subjected to random inspections, where the conditions of the workplace and safety of the products are assessed and samples are taken for laboratory analysis. Trained professionals from different fields carry out inspections on retail outlets for goods and services ranging from corporate companies to franchises, to small shops and restaurants.

The Directorate educates the public through seminars and awareness campaigns it runs. However, one of the main achievements of the Directorate and the Ministry of Economy and Trade is the publishing of the Law of Consumer Protection, available in English on this site: <http://www.brandprotectiongroup.org/pdf/consumer.pdf>. The Law has been published in the Official Gazette and is available online in English and Arabic.

Ministry of Industry

Tasks of the ministry of Industry:

- Risk assessment in Factories
- Risk communication

Website: <http://www.industry.gov.lb/Arabic/Arabic/Pages/default.aspx>

The Lebanese Ministry of Industry is committed to the enhancement of the industrial sector and to the implementation of industry laws in all its domains. The Ministry implements food safety laws and decrees by carrying out regular inspections on all factories in the country, advising the requirements needed to meet standards, and issuing warnings in some cases. In extreme cases, the Ministry has the right to close industrial businesses if these businesses fail to comply with warnings. The Ministry may also carry out random inspections if a business owner wishes to receive a license for their business, or if complaints are made against a certain business company/factory/etc.

The Ministry has patronage over a number of public agencies that are involved in food safety. These include LIBNOR and the Chambers of Commerce, which will be discussed in this document. The Ministry is hence involved in acting as the link between these agencies and the Council of Ministers, and is involved in the election of members and the passing of legislation in these agencies.

Ministry of Public Health

Tasks of the Ministry of Public Health:

- Public awareness
- Health safety

Website: <http://www.moph.gov.lb/Pages/Home.aspx>

The Ministry of Public Health is concerned with raising public awareness against certain hazards in food samples.

The Lebanese Standards Institution (LIBNOR)

Tasks of LIBNOR:

- Issuing of standards
- Certifying products with NL conformity mark
- Contact point for ISO

Website: <http://www.libnor.org/>

LIBNOR was established in 1962, under the patronage of the Ministry of industry. It remains the sole institution with the right to issue and amend Lebanese standards. LIBNOR issues and

publishes vertical and horizontal standards pertaining to international and local products (food products that are only produced in Lebanon). LIBNOR is a member of the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) and often uses ISO to issue standards on food products unique to Lebanon. LIBNOR is also involved with CODEX.

In addition to issuing and publishing standards, LIBNOR gives products the NL conformity mark, which certifies that a product meets the required safety standards relating to it. LIBNOR has no responsibility to monitor products in the market, but may conduct assessments on products with the NL mark, to ensure the products still meets the required standards.

Industrial Research Institute (IRI)

Tasks of IRI:

- Research
- Analysis of samples

Website: <http://www.iri.org.lb/>

The IRI is a public research facility linked to the Ministry of Industry and is responsible for analysing the food samples to assess if standards and qualifications are met. General scientific research is also conducted in the IRI. However this function of the IRI is currently non-operational.

Chambers of Commerce

Tasks of Chambers of Commerce:

- Analysis of product samples

Websites: <http://www.ccib.org.lb/en/>

<http://www.cciias.org.lb/index.php?lang=en>

<http://www.cciiaz.org.lb/en/TrainingCenter.aspx>

The Lebanese Chambers of Commerce were enacted in 1967 by the decree 36/67, however chambers of commerce were established in Lebanon before the Lebanese Republic by the Ottoman Empire.

There are four chambers in Lebanon:

1. The Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Beirut and Mount-Lebanon.
2. The Chamber of Commerce; Industry and Agriculture of Tripoli and the North.
3. The Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Saida and the South.
4. The Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Zahle and the Bekaa.

These chambers are committed to the smooth running of the economy and businesses in the country. They are often employed by the government and the private sector to conduct analysis of food product samples. They assess whether the products meet standards set by LIBNOR.

III – Food safety alerts management in Lebanon

1. Does the competent authority (or authorities) for food safety have an established mechanism to evaluate and react to food safety crises (crises management mechanism)?	No
2. If the reply to Q1 is yes, does this mechanism include a committee or a body with pre-determined representatives?	No (no committees are formed specifically for crisis management)
3. If there is an established mechanism for crisis management (the reply to Q1 is Yes):	
3a. Do actors with risk assessment capacity participate directly in this mechanism?	-
3b. Do actors with risk management capacity participate directly in this mechanism?	-
3c. Do actors with risk communication capacity participate directly in this mechanism?	-

IV – Characteristics of the food sector in Lebanon (referred to as the Agro-food sector in Lebanon)

Number of enterprises¹: 736 companies

% of the industrial sector: 18.2%

% of the industrial workforce: 24.9%

% of industrial turnover:

Top subsectors (in terms of number of enterprises): Bakery, Milk and Dairy products, and preserved vegetables and Fruits.

Top subsectors (in terms of turnover):

V – Civil Society Organizations

There is a small number of NGOs in Lebanon that are involved in food safety. The main goals of these organizations are raising public awareness of the potential hazards that exist in food, the proper methods for food handling, and healthy diet alternatives. Some of these organizations often pressure the government to improve the regulation of food safety in the country and may adopt and bring to light cases of fatal or critical food poisoning.

Civil society members feel that the government falls short of regulating food safety because of the political instability in the country. They also feel that their requests for improvement are ignored and that they need to wait for the opportune moment when there is some stability and security to tackle the government with these issues.

ⁱ **Country profile elaborated by:**

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¹ AGROFOOD FACT BOOK, Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL), 2012.
<http://investinlebanon.gov.lb/Content/uploads/SideBlock/131216042540287~Agrofood%20fact%20book.pdf>