

Extended Abstract

Paper/Poster Title	Food security and the triple crises: Evidence from the Western Balkans
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Abstract prepared for presentation at the 98th Annual Conference of The Agricultural Economics Society will be held at The University of Edinburgh, UK, 18th - 20th March 2024.

Abstract	200 words max
<p>This paper aims to analyse the consequences of the triple crises on the food security situation of the Western Balkans. In doing so, it applies a dual approach. On the one hand, as a quantitative approach, it assesses the food security situation of the different countries based on descriptive statistics of the most relevant indicators on a time series basis as well as the most important determinants of food security. On the other hand, as a qualitative approach, it demonstrates the results of the semi-structured interviews made with local experts to understand the reasons behind changing food security patterns. Our results suggest stable food security and self-sufficiency patterns in most cases in general, while the large number of small farms, depopulation of the countryside, climate change and harmonisation of food systems were identified as the main challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic seems not to have resulted in serious food security consequences, though it definitely have speeded up restructuring inside the agri-food sectors. The war in Ukraine, however, had bigger impacts, especially in the fields of high price inflation and increasing agri-food input prices.</p>	
Keywords	food security, triple crises, Western Balkans
JEL Code	Q18
Introduction	100 – 250 words
<p>Lockdowns, food supply chain and trade disruptions, resilience, sharp increase in agricultural, food and input prices, food inflation, energy dependency – all countries seem to have experienced many of these global shocks during the recent years. We are currently experiencing times of triple crises, food, energy and finance, exacerbated by the intensification of natural disasters, the consequences of a global pandemic and the war in Ukraine. In this context, ensuring food security is increasingly important for many developing countries, including those located in the Western Balkans. The triple crises situation both created new challenges and intensified previous ones at the same time. Consequently, it is important to better understand these challenges and the reactions given by the different countries to create holistically-developed evidence-based policies for more affordable healthy diets in the future. This paper aims to analyse the consequences of the triple crises on the food security situation of the Western Balkans. In doing so, it assesses the food security situation of the different countries based on the most relevant indicators on a time series basis as well as analyses the most important determinants of the food security. Moreover, as a qualitative approach, it demonstrates the results of the semi-structured interviews made with local experts to understand the reasons behind changing food security patterns.</p>	

Methodology	<i>100 – 250 words</i>
<p>Consistent with our dual approach, the paper first demonstrates some descriptive statistics on the status of food security in the Western Balkans by analysing recent changes in the well-known food-security related indicators. Moreover, the paper also analyses the developments of food, energy and finance related determinants of food security. Our analyses cover the timeframe of 2000-2022 and includes all Western Balkans countries. Second, the paper shows the results of the semi-structured interviews conducted with local experts of the Western Balkans countries. Interviews were made in September to December 2023 through online channels (except for Albania where live interviews were made). Several interviewees highlighted the unreliability of datasets for ECA countries due to data problems and changed methodologies which was another reason for validating the results.</p>	
Results	<i>100 – 250 words</i>
<p>Our analyses have ended up in several different results. As to the status of food security, it seems that undernourishment, at least as it is measured by the prevalence of undernourishment indicator, is becoming less important for Western Balkans countries, though over-nourishment in terms of obesity seems to have emerged as a new challenge to deal with. The food, energy and finance crises have affected Albania as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina the most, making them highly vulnerable to external shocks. The countries analysed have shown high diversity in food self-sufficiency: one group of countries were highly self-sufficient and less dependent on food imports, while others were proved to be less self-sufficient and more dependent. The large number of small farms, the massive outmigration from rural areas, increased climate pressures as well as the lack of harmonisation to EU food safety standards, however, was found to be common in all countries. Most countries in the Western Balkans were mainly exempted from restrictive policies during pandemic, while the war in Ukraine has hit the region with skyrocketing food, feed, seed and fertiliser/pesticide prices.</p>	
Discussion and Conclusion	<i>100 – 250 words</i>
<p>Our combined methodology applied in this paper has helped us to reach several conclusions. Most of the countries as well as households experienced increased vulnerabilities during the recent years due to decreased incomes and increased price levels. Most countries in the region is capable of reaching their own self-sufficiency levels, though this highly changes by country and by product. One of the most important challenges given by most countries is their continuous and even increased dependence on cereal imports. The large number of small farms prevails in land use in all the countries analysed, though fragmented land and farm structures hinder agricultural development in the long run. Smallholders were among the most vulnerable groups to external shocks identified in our report. Moreover, it seems that the pandemic and the war situation have speeded up the processes of economic transformation, including the depopulation of the countryside. Recent weather extremes have raised more attention on the importance of climate change and its possible effects on agriculture. Last but not least, our paper also showed the limited role of (sometimes not even existing) food security policies to convert local food systems to a modern age. The lack of consistency and long-term vision combined with limited budget and corruption are the key bottlenecks in this regard.</p>	