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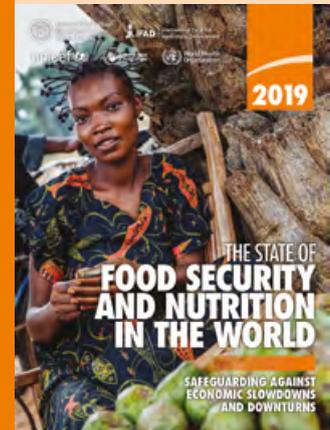
World Food Programme



World Health Organization

2019

# THE STATE OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN THE WORLD



## Safeguarding against economic slowdowns and downturns

The two most recent editions of *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* already offered evidence that the decades-long decline in the prevalence of undernourishment in the world had ended and that hunger was slowly on the rise. Additional evidence available this year confirms that the global level of the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU), has remained virtually unchanged at a level slightly below 11 percent, while the total number of undernourished (NoU) has been slowly increasing for several years in a row. This means that today a little over 820 million people suffer from hunger, corresponding to about one in every nine people in the world. This underscores the immense challenge posed by achieving the Zero Hunger target by 2030.

Hunger is on the rise in almost all subregions of Africa, the region with the highest prevalence of undernourishment, at almost 20 percent. It is also rising slowly in Latin America and the Caribbean, although the prevalence there is still below 7 percent. In Asia, where undernourishment affects 11 percent of the population, Southern Asia saw great progress in the last five years but is still the subregion with the highest

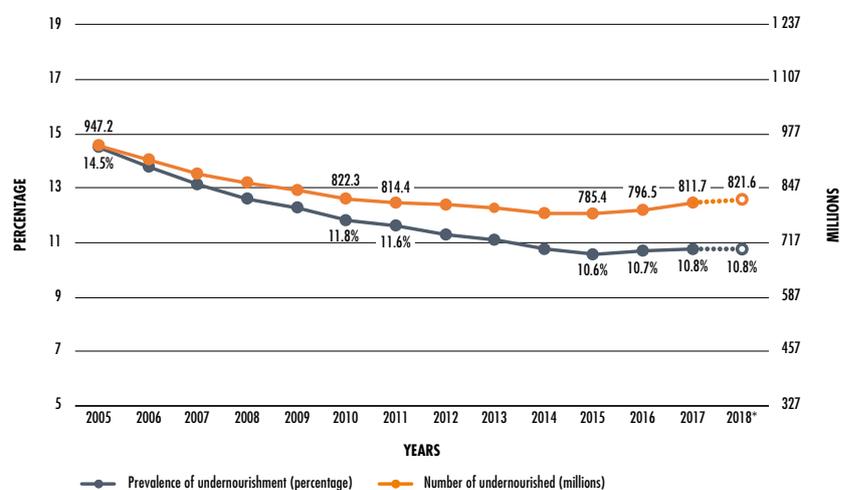
prevalence of undernourishment, at almost 15 percent.

This report has traditionally tracked world hunger using the PoU, one of the indicators used to monitor global progress towards SDG Target 2.1. This year the report takes another step forward by reporting, for the first time, another indicator of the global

SDG monitoring framework: the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES).

A broader look at the extent of food insecurity, beyond hunger, shows that 17.2 percent of the world population, or 1.3 billion people, have experienced food insecurity at moderate levels. »

THE NUMBER OF UNDERNOURISHED PEOPLE IN THE WORLD HAS BEEN ON THE RISE SINCE 2015, AND IS BACK TO LEVELS SEEN IN 2010–2011



NOTES: \* Values for 2018 are projections as illustrated by dotted lines and empty circles. The entire series was carefully revised to reflect new information made available since the publication of the last edition of the report; it replaces all series published previously.

SOURCE: FAO.

# KEY MESSAGES

- In the past three years, the number of people who suffer from hunger has slowly increased, with more than 820 million people in the world hungry today.
  - This year's report introduces a second indicator for monitoring SDG Target 2.1: the Prevalence of Moderate or Severe Food Insecurity based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES).
  - It is estimated that over 2 billion people do not have regular access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food.
  - No progress has been made in reducing low birthweight since 2012.
  - The number of children under five years in the world affected by stunting has decreased by 10 percent in the past six years, but the pace of progress is too slow to meet the 2030 target of halving the number of stunted children.
  - Overweight and obesity continue to increase in all regions, particularly among school-age children and adults.
- The uneven pace of economic recovery is undermining efforts to end hunger and malnutrition, with hunger increasing in many countries where the economy has slowed down or contracted, mostly in middle-income countries.
  - Economic slowdowns or downturns disproportionately undermine food security and nutrition where inequalities are greater. Income inequality increases the likelihood of severe food insecurity, and this effect is 20 percent higher for low-income countries compared with middle-income countries.
  - To safeguard food security and nutrition, it is critical to have in place economic and social policies to counteract the effects of adverse economic cycles when they arrive, while avoiding cuts in essential services.
  - To ensure that structural transformation is pro-poor and inclusive requires integrating food security and nutrition concerns into poverty reduction efforts.

» This means that they did not have regular access to nutritious and sufficient food – even if they were not necessarily suffering from hunger, they are at greater risk of various forms of malnutrition and poor health. The combination of moderate and severe levels of food insecurity brings the estimate to 26.4 percent of the world population, amounting to a total of about 2 billion people. In every continent, the prevalence of food insecurity is slightly higher among women than men.

New evidence confirms hunger has been on the rise for many of the countries where the economy slowed down or contracted. Most countries (65 out of 77) that experienced a rise in undernourishment between 2011 and 2017 simultaneously suffered an economic slowdown or downturn. Strikingly, the majority of these cases involved not low-income countries, but middle-income countries.

Economic shocks have also prolonged and worsened the impact of conflict and climate events on acute food insecurity requiring urgent humanitarian assistance in food crisis countries. In more than half of the countries affected by food crises in 2018, the compounding impact of multiple economic shocks worsened the severity of acute food insecurity, affecting 96 million people. Where inequality is greater, economic slowdowns and downturns have a disproportionate effect on food security and nutrition for lower-income populations.

This report calls for action on two fronts: the first, safeguarding food security and nutrition through economic and social policies that help counteract the effects of economic slowdowns or downturns, including guaranteeing funding of social safety nets and ensuring universal access to health and education; and, the second, tackling existing inequalities at all

levels through multisectoral policies that make it possible to more sustainably escape from food insecurity and malnutrition.

Part 1 presents the most recent trends in hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms with a focus on monitoring progress on SDG Targets 2.1 and 2.2. It introduces for the first time one of the indicators of the SDG monitoring framework for SDG Target 2.1: the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES). This year's report also presents for the first time low birthweight estimates.

Part 2 looks closely at the role that economic slowdowns and downturns have played in recent food security and nutrition trends. The analysis ultimately points to guidance on what short- and long-term policies are necessary to safeguard food security and nutrition, either during episodes of economic turmoil or in preparation for them. ■



*The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* is an annual flagship report jointly prepared by FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO to inform on progress towards ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition and to provide in-depth analysis on key challenges for achieving this goal in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The report targets a wide audience, including policymakers, international organizations, academic institutions and the general public.

*Subject categories:*  
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Nutrition  
Resilience building  
Conflict  
Climate change

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