

## State of Food Insecurity in the World *IN BRIEF*

### 72 developing countries have reached the 2015 MDG 1 target of halving the proportion of hungry people



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*"Hunger remains an everyday challenge for almost 795 million people worldwide, including 780 million in developing regions. Thus hunger eradication should remain a key commitment of decision-makers at all levels."*

José Graziano da Silva, FAO Director-General

### Key messages

Global hunger has continued to decline, albeit gradually, to an estimated 795 million undernourished people, or a reduction of 167 million hungry people over the last ten years. This decline has been most pronounced in developing countries, despite significant population growth.

The year 2015 is a milestone, marking the end of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) monitoring period. For the developing regions as a whole, the target to reduce the proportion of the world's hungry by 50 percent by 2015 was missed by a small margin. Some regions, such as Latin America, the eastern and south-eastern regions of Asia, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and the northern and western regions of Africa have reached the target, as they made fast progress in reducing undernourishment.

As many as 72 developing countries out of 129 have reached the MDG hunger target. Most of these enjoyed stable political conditions and economic growth, along with sound social protection policies aimed at assisting the most vulnerable.

Generally for the developing regions, the two official indicators for the hunger target – the prevalence of undernourishment and the proportion of underweight children under 5 years of age – have declined in parallel, providing a consistent message on its achievement. In many countries, however, where the reduction of child malnutrition has been slow, there is still room for improving the quality of diets, hygiene conditions and access to clean water, particularly for poorer population groups.

A key factor of success in reducing undernourishment is economic growth, but only when it is inclusive – providing opportunities for the poor, who have meagre assets and skills, to improve their livelihoods. Enhancing the productivity of family farmers and strengthening social protection mechanisms are key factors for promoting inclusive growth, along with well-functioning markets and governance in which all voices may be heard.

Conflict, political instability or natural disasters have resulted in protracted crises, adding to vulnerability and food insecurity. Strong political commitment, respect for basic human rights and the integration of humanitarian and development assistance are necessary to address protracted crises.

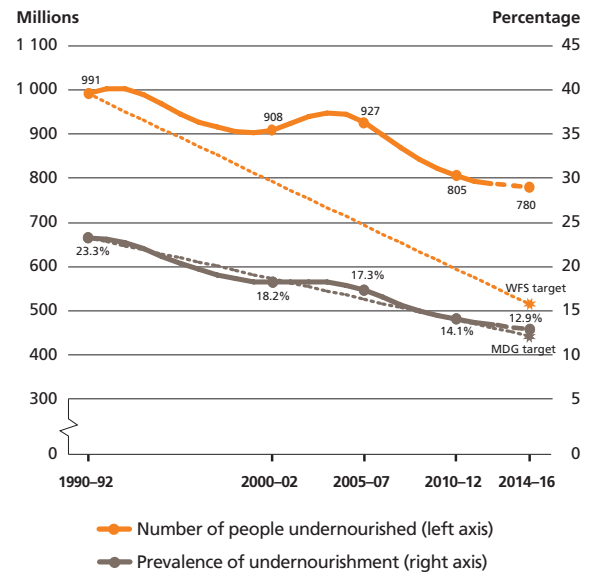
# About SOFI 2015

This year's annual *State of Food Insecurity in the World* (SOFI) reviews progress made towards achieving the internationally established Millennium Development Goal (MDG 1) and the 1996 World Food Summit hunger targets and reflects on what needs to be done, as we transition to the new post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Progress towards the MDG 1 target measures both undernourishment, or hunger, and also the prevalence of underweight in children under five years of age. Progress for the two indicators across regions and over time, is compared, providing insights into the complexity of food security.

Despite overall progress, much remains to be done to eradicate hunger and achieve food security. *SOFI 2015* not only estimates the progress already achieved, but also identifies remaining problems, and provides guidance on which policies should be emphasized in the future.

The trajectory of undernourishment in developing regions: actual and projected progress towards the MDG and WFS targets



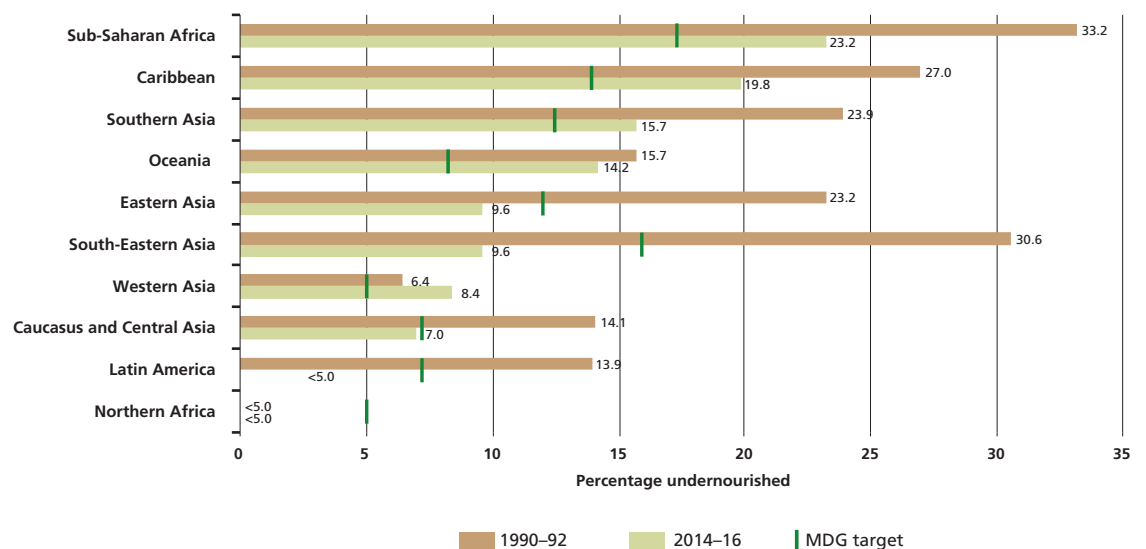
Note: Data for 2014–16 refer to provisional estimates.  
Source: FAO.

## Global trends

Just over one in nine people in the world were still suffering from hunger in the period 2014–16. The total number of undernourished people has fallen in the past two years. Their share in the global population, or the prevalence of undernourishment, has decreased from 18.6 percent in 1990–92 to 10.9 percent in 2014–16, reflecting fewer undernourished people in a growing global population.

Since the early 1990s, the number of hungry people has declined by 216 million globally, a reduction of 21.4 percent, notwithstanding a 1.9 billion increase in the world's population. This is mainly due to changes in highly populated countries like China and India, where rapid progress was achieved during the 1990s.

Undernourishment trends: progress made in almost all regions, but at very different rates



Note: Data for 2014–16 refer to provisional estimates.  
Source: FAO.

# Wide differences between regions

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Marked differences in progress occur not only among individual countries, but also across regions and subregions.

For example, the prevalence of hunger has been reduced rapidly in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia as well as in Latin America; in most countries of Northern Africa undernourishment has remained a small share of the population, below 5 percent. Other regions, including the Caribbean, Oceania and Western Asia, saw some overall progress, but at a slower pace.

South America has been able to reduce the prevalence of undernourishment by more than 50 percent and has brought it below 5 percent. Progress in Central America was considerably slower at 38.2 percent.

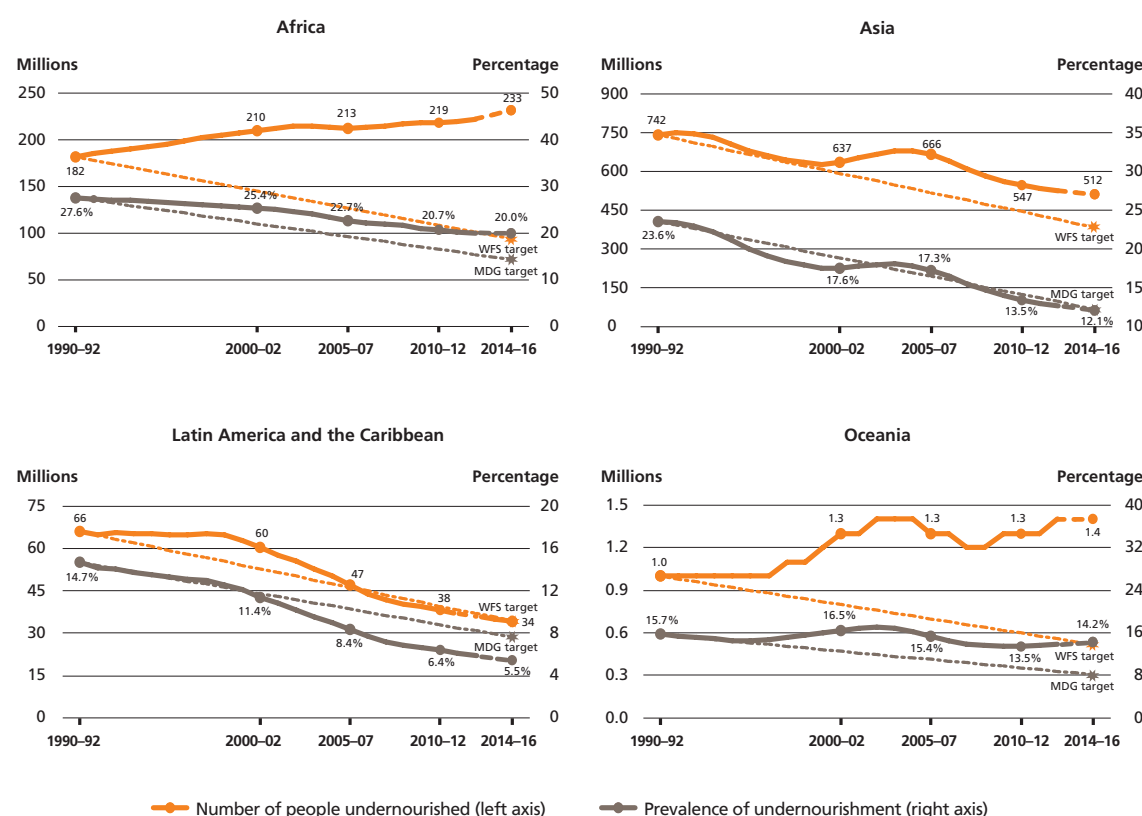
Many countries that have made progress in fighting hunger have enjoyed stable political conditions and overall economic growth, as well as expanding primary sectors, mainly agriculture, fisheries and forestry. Many had policies in place aimed at promoting and protecting access to food.

In two regions, Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, progress has been slow, despite many success stories at country and subregional levels. The highest burden of hunger occurs in Southern Asia, where as many as 281 million people are undernourished in the region. In sub-Saharan Africa, one in every four people, or 23.2 percent of the population, are hungry.

The most successful region in Africa for reducing hunger was Western Africa, where the number of undernourished people has fallen by 24.5 percent since 1990–92. This success happened despite limiting factors such as rapid population growth, drought in the Sahel and high food prices experienced in recent years. A total of 18 countries in sub-Saharan Africa have reached the MDG 1c hunger target, and another four are close to reaching it, that is, they are expected to achieve it before the year 2020 if current trends persist.

In many countries that have achieved modest progress, factors such as war, civil unrest and the displacement of refugees have often frustrated efforts to reduce hunger, sometimes even increasing the ranks of the hungry.

Regions differ markedly in progress towards achieving the MDG and WFS hunger targets



Note: Data for 2014–16 refer to provisional estimates.  
Source: FAO.

## Target 2015 – meeting the Millennium Development Goals

In 1990, world leaders met and adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration. They set out eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including the first one to halve the proportion of hungry people and the rate of poverty, reflecting the world's commitment to improve the lives of billions of people.

Half a year remains before the end of 2015, the deadline for achieving most of the MDG targets, including the hunger target.

As *SOFI 2015* shows, over 216 million people have been rescued from a life of hunger – to date, 72 countries have already reached the MDG

hunger target and another nine are just short by a small margin.

Progress towards meeting the MDG food security and nutrition targets requires that food is available, accessible and of proper quantity and quality to ensure good nutrition. Proper nutrition contributes to human development and helps people realize their full potential and take advantage of opportunities offered by the development process.

Good governance, political stability, the rule of law and absence of conflict and civil strife, climate shocks or excessive food price volatility – are conducive to all dimensions of food security.

## Inclusive economic growth

Economic growth is also central to the fight against hunger – countries that become richer are less likely to become food-insecure. However, while, governments in rapidly growing economies have more resources to dedicate to the improvement of food security and nutrition, this may not necessarily translate into food for all.

The key factor is “inclusive growth”, that is, growth that promotes access for everyone to food, assets and resources, particularly for poor people and women so they can develop their potential. Therefore, economic growth, while a necessary condition for progress in poverty and hunger reduction especially in the face of an expanding population, is not sufficient.



Afghanistan - A woman farmer manually winnowing wheat grains in a wheat field near Mazar-e Sharif.



Across the developing world, the majority of the poor and most of the hungry live in rural areas, where family farming and smallholder agriculture is the main farming system. Family farming and

smallholder agriculture's growth, through labour and land productivity increases, has significant positive effects on the livelihoods of the poor through increases in food availability and incomes.

## Social protection is key

Social protection systems have become an important tool in the fight against hunger. More than 100 countries have some form of cash transfer programme that focuses on promoting food security and nutrition, health, and education, particularly of children. Food distribution schemes and employment guarantee programmes are also important.

The expansion of social protection across the developing world has been critical for progress towards the MDG hunger target. Providing regular and predictable cash transfers to poor households often plays a critical role in terms of filling immediate food gaps, but can also help improve the lives and livelihoods of the poor by alleviating constraints to their productive capacity.

Combining social protection with complementary agricultural development

measures, such as the Purchase from Africans for Africa (PAA) programme, which links family farmers and smallholders to school-feeding programmes, can maximize the poverty-reducing impact of these programmes.

Today, every country in the world has at least one social safety net programme in place. School-feeding programmes – the most widespread type of social protection programme – have been implemented in 130 countries.

Over the past 20 years, it has emerged that such programmes play a significant role in achieving food security and improving nutrition. Yet despite the rapid growth of social protection programmes, about 70 percent of the world's population lack access to some form of social security, meaning that considerably expanded coverage of such programmes is needed to eradicate hunger.



Ethiopia - School children eating lunch prepared by a group of women participating in a school feeding project.

# 6 Protracted crises and hunger

Countries and areas where protracted crises exist mean that much of the population is acutely vulnerable to death, disease and disruption to their means of living over a prolonged period of time. Governance in such circumstances is usually very weak, with the state having limited capacity to respond to, and mitigate, threats to the population, or to provide adequate levels of protection.

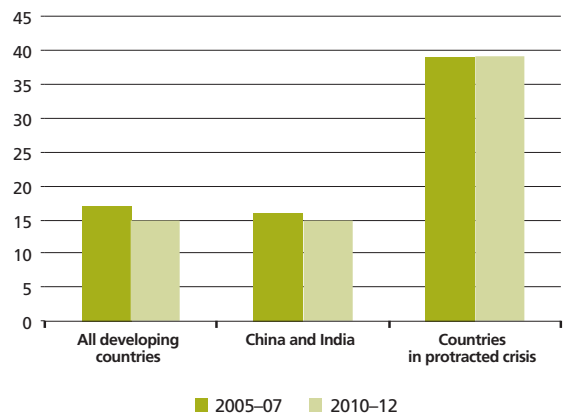
In 1990, 12 countries in Africa were facing food crises, of which only four were in protracted crises. Just 20 years later, a total of 24 countries in Africa were in food crises, with 19 of these in crisis for eight or more of the previous ten years.

Conflict is increasingly at the root of protracted crises, often in conjunction with natural disasters. Food insecurity is among a number of exacerbating factors that can trigger or deepen conflict.

Although protracted crises are diverse in both their causes and effects, food insecurity and undernutrition are common manifestations, being particularly severe, persistent and on a large scale. The approximate combined population in protracted crises in 2012 was 366 million people, of whom approximately 129 million were undernourished – some 19 percent of the global total of food-insecure people.

## Food insecurity: are protracted crises different?

Prevalence of undernourishment (%)



Source: FAO.



Haiti. A woman watering chard plants inside tires distributed by the Urban Agriculture Center for people affected by the 2010 earthquake and who are living in tents.

Trade is neither a threat nor a panacea when it comes to food security, but it can pose challenges and even risks that need to be considered by governments. To ensure that their food security and development needs are

addressed in a consistent and systematic manner, countries need to have a better overview of all policy instruments available to them and the flexibility to apply the most effective policy mix for achieving their goals.

## The possible effects of trade liberalization on dimensions of food security

	Possible positive effects	Possible negative effects
AVAILABILITY	<p>Trade boosts imports and increases both the quantity and variety of food available.</p> <p>Dynamic effects on domestic production: Greater competition from abroad may trigger improvements in productivity through greater investment, R&amp;D, technology spillover.</p>	<p>For net food-exporting countries, higher prices in international markets can divert part of production previously available for domestic consumption to exports, potentially reducing domestic availability of staple foods.</p> <p>For net food-importing countries, domestic producers unable to compete with imports are likely to curtail production, reducing domestic supplies and foregoing important multiplier effects of agricultural activities in rural economies.</p>
ACCESS	<p>For net food-importing countries, food prices typically decrease when border protection is reduced.</p> <p>In the competitive sectors, incomes are likely to increase as the result of greater market access for exports.</p> <p>Input prices are likely to decrease.</p> <p>The macroeconomic benefits of trade openness, such as export growth and the inflow of foreign direct investment, support growth and employment, which in turn boosts incomes.</p>	<p>For net food-exporting countries, the domestic prices of exportable products may increase.</p> <p>Employment and incomes in sensitive, import-competing sectors may decline.</p>
UTILIZATION	<p>A greater variety of available foods may promote more balanced diets and accommodate different preferences and tastes.</p> <p>Food safety and quality may improve if exporters have more advanced national control systems in place or if international standards are applied more rigorously.</p>	<p>Greater reliance on imported foods has been associated with increased consumption of cheaper and more readily available high-calorie/low-nutritional-value foods.</p> <p>Prioritization of commodity exports can divert land and resources from traditional indigenous foods that are often superior from a nutrition point of view.</p>
STABILITY	<p>Imports reduce the seasonal effect on food availability and consumer prices.</p> <p>Imports mitigate local production risks.</p> <p>Global markets are less prone to policy- or weather-related shocks.</p>	<p>For net food-importing countries, relying primarily on global markets for food supplies and open trade policies reduces the policy space to deal with shocks.</p> <p>Net food-importing countries may be vulnerable to changes in trade policy by exporters, such as export bans.</p> <p>Sectors at earlier stages of development may become more susceptible to price shocks and/or import surges.</p>



# New commitments to reduce hunger

Major new commitments to reduce hunger have recently been taken at the regional level – the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative, Africa's Renewed Partnership to End Hunger by 2025, the Zero Hunger Initiative for West Africa, Asia-Pacific Zero Hunger Challenge, and pilot initiatives in a number of individual countries.

FAO and its Rome-based partners, as dynamic members of the United Nations system, support national and other efforts to make hunger and malnutrition history through the Zero Hunger Challenge, the 2014 Rome Declaration on Nutrition and the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda.

## Drivers of progress

- Economic growth is necessary to sustain progress in poverty alleviation and to reduce hunger and malnutrition. But it is not sufficient.
- Inclusive growth – growth that provides opportunities for those with few assets, skills and opportunities – improves the incomes and livelihoods of the poor, and is effective in the fight against hunger and malnutrition. Rural people make up a high percentage of the hungry and malnourished in developing countries, and growth in agriculture and the rural sector can be an important component of a strategy for promoting inclusive growth and improving food security and nutrition.
- Improving the productivity of resources held by family farmers and smallholders is, in most cases, an essential element of inclusive growth and has wide implications for the livelihoods of the rural poor and for the rural economy in general. Well-functioning markets for food, inputs and labour can help to integrate family farmers and smallholders in the rural economy and enable the rural poor to diversify their livelihoods which is critical for managing risk, and reducing hunger and malnutrition.
- In many situations, international trade openness has an important potential for improving food security and nutrition by increasing food availability and for promoting investment and growth. International trade agreements should provide for effective safeguards and greater policy space for developing countries to avoid detrimental effects on food security and nutrition.
- Social protection directly contributes to the reduction of hunger and malnutrition by promoting income security and access to better nutrition, healthcare and education. By increasing human capacities and mitigating the impact of shocks, social protection fosters the ability of the very poor to participate in the growth process through better access to decent employment.
- The prevalence of food insecurity and malnutrition is significantly higher in protracted crises resulting from conflict and natural disasters. Strong political commitment is necessary to address the roots of protracted crises. Action should focus on addressing vulnerability, respecting basic human rights and integrating humanitarian and development assistance.



**Citation:** FAO, IFAD and WFP. 2015. *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015. Meeting the 2015 international hunger targets: taking stock of uneven progress*. Rome, FAO.

This is an outline in brief of the *State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015 (SOFI 2015)* publication. The full edition of the SOFI 2015 report presents new estimates of undernourishment and updates progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and World Food Summit hunger targets.

To see the full report go to: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4646e.pdf>