



Undernourishment around the world in 2010

The number of undernourished people has declined but remains unacceptably high

Key message

The number and proportion of hungry people in the world are declining as the global economy recovers and food prices remain below their peak levels, but hunger remains higher than before the food price and economic crises, making it more difficult to meet the internationally agreed hunger-reduction targets.

After increasing sharply from 2006 to 2009, owing to high food prices and the global economic crisis, the number of undernourished people in the world is estimated to have declined in 2010 as the global economy recovers (Figure 1). But the number of undernourished people remains unacceptably high – higher than it was before the recent crises, higher than it was 40 years ago, and higher than the level that existed when the hunger-reduction target was agreed at the World Food Summit in 1996 (see Box 1).

Based on the latest available data, the total number of undernourished people in the world is estimated to have reached 1 023 million in 2009 and is expected to decline by 9.6 percent to 925 million in 2010. Developing countries account for 98 percent of the world's undernourished people and have a prevalence of undernourishment of 16 percent (Figure 2) – down from 18 percent in 2009 but still well above the target set by the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1.

Global cereal harvests have been strong for the past several years – even as the number of undernourished people was rising – but the overall improvement in food security in 2010 reflects improved access to food through the expected resumption of economic growth, particularly in developing countries, combined with food prices that remain below the peaks of 2008. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that world economic output will increase by 4.2 percent in 2010, faster than previously expected, following a contraction of 0.6 percent in 2009.¹ In general, gross domestic product (GDP) is growing faster in emerging economies and developing

BOX 1

What is food security and what are the hunger reduction targets?

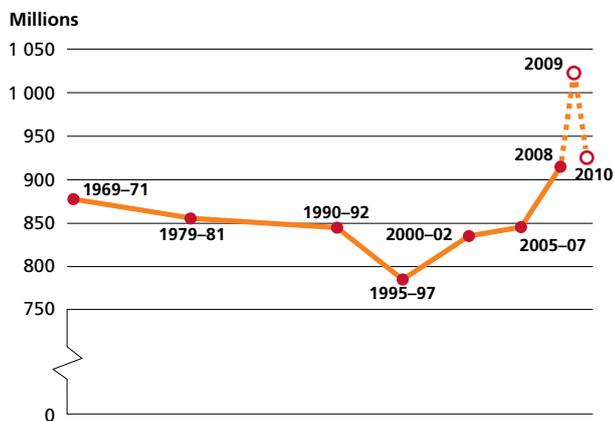
- **Food security** exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Household food security is the application of this concept to the family level, with individuals within households as the focus of concern.
- **Food insecurity** exists when people do not have adequate physical, social or economic access to food as defined above.
- **Undernourishment** exists when caloric intake is below the minimum dietary energy requirement (MDER).

The MDER is the amount of energy needed for light activity and to maintain a minimum acceptable weight for attained height. It varies by country and from year to year depending on the gender and age structure of the population. Throughout this report, the words “hunger” and “undernourishment” are used interchangeably.

- The **World Food Summit goal** is to reduce, between 1990–92 and 2015, the number of undernourished people by half. **Millennium Development Goal 1**, target 1C, is to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

FIGURE 1

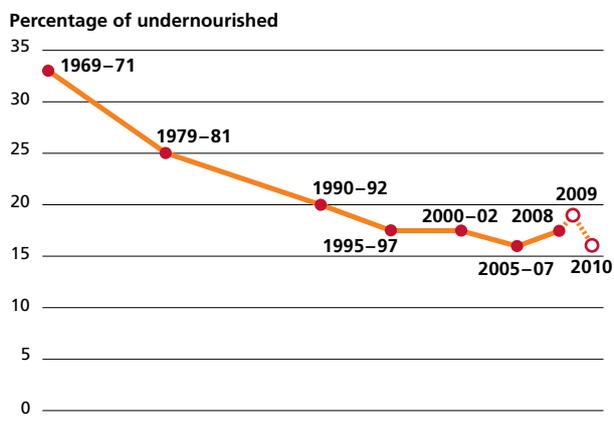
Number of undernourished people in the world, 1969–71 to 2010



Note: Figures for 2009 and 2010 are estimated by FAO with input from the United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Full details of the methodology are provided in the technical background notes (available at www.fao.org/publication/sofi/en/). Source: FAO.

FIGURE 2

Proportion of undernourished people in developing countries, 1969–71 to 2010

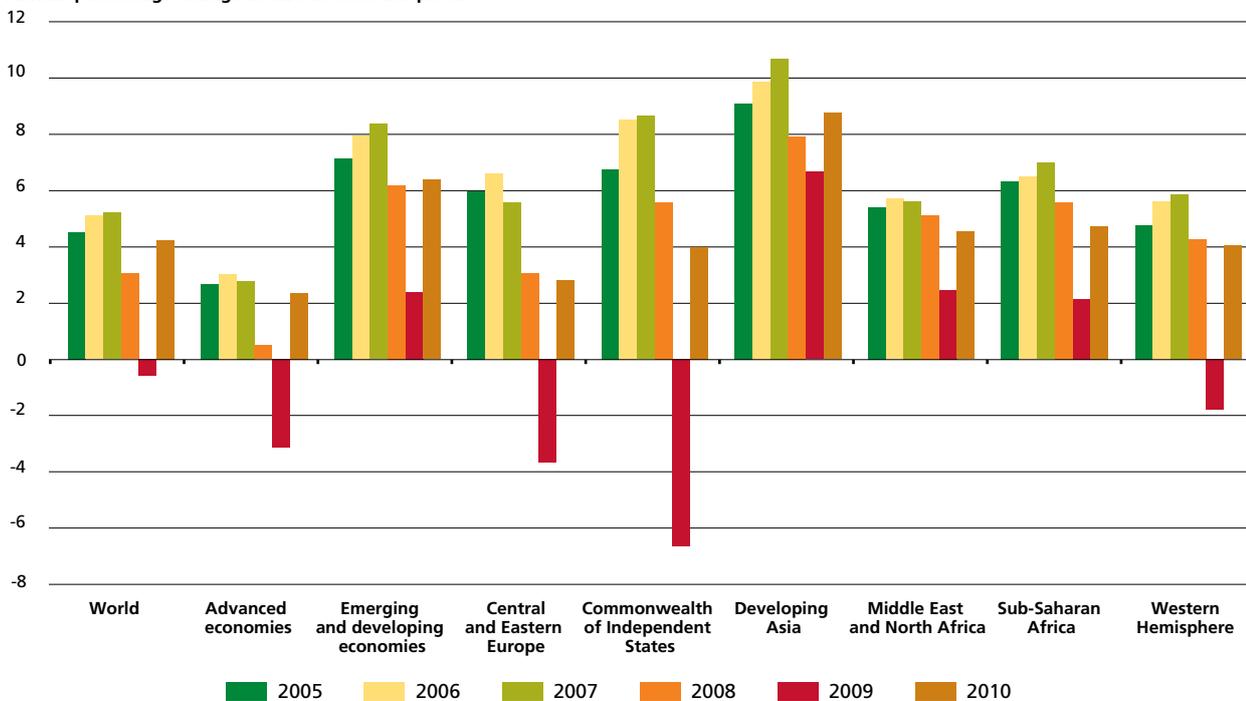


Source: FAO.

FIGURE 3

Economic growth is projected to resume in 2010, particularly in developing countries

Annual percentage change in GDP at constant prices



Source: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook database, April 2010.

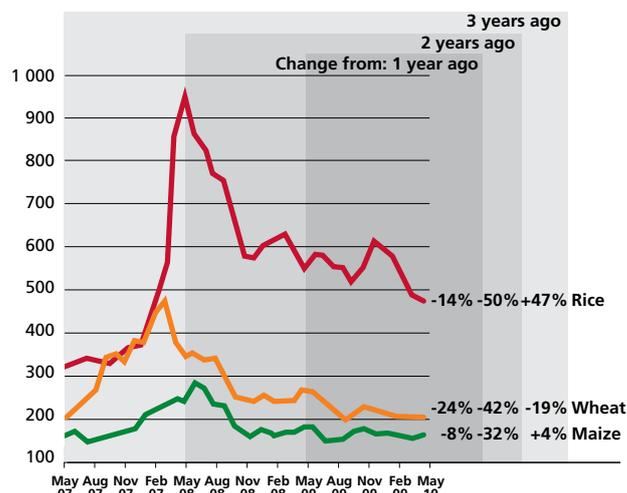
countries than it is in developed countries (Figure 3). The World Bank estimates that private capital inflows to developing countries are also increasing faster than originally expected.² In parallel, international cereal prices have declined in recent months and are below their recent peaks, reflecting ample global cereal supplies in 2009/10 and prospects for large crops in 2010 (Figure 4), but food prices in most low-income food-deficit countries remain above the pre-crisis level of early 2008, negatively affecting access to food by vulnerable populations.³

The analysis of hunger during crisis and recovery brings to the fore the vulnerability to economic shocks of many poor countries. Lack of appropriate mechanisms to deal with the shocks or to protect the most vulnerable populations from their effects result in large swings in hunger following crises. Moreover, it should not be assumed that all the effects of crises on hunger disappear when the crisis is over. Vulnerable households deal with shocks by selling assets, which are very difficult to rebuild, by reducing food consumption in terms of quantity and variety and by cutting down on health and education expenditures – coping mechanisms that all have long-term negative effects on quality of life and livelihoods.

FIGURE 4

Food prices remain below their peak in 2008, but are still higher than pre-crisis levels in many developing countries

International cereal prices (benchmark monthly averages; US\$/tonne)



Source: FAO. 2010. *Crop prospects and food situation*. No. 2 (May). Rome.

Undernourishment by region

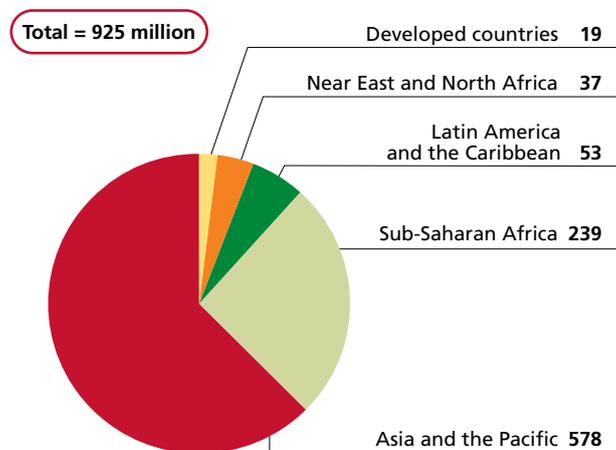
The majority of the world's undernourished people live in developing countries. Two-thirds live in just seven countries (Bangladesh, China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia and Pakistan) and over 40 percent live in China and India alone.

Projections for 2010 indicate that the number of undernourished people will decline in all developing regions, although with a different pace. The region with most undernourished people continues to be Asia and the Pacific (Figure 5), but with a 12 percent decline from 658 million in 2009 to 578 million in 2010, this region also accounts for most of the global improvement expected in 2010 (Figure 6).⁴

While the World Food Summit goal is to reduce by half the number of people who are undernourished, MDG 1 seeks to reduce by half the proportion of these people. Because the world's population is still increasing (albeit more slowly than in recent decades), a given number of hungry people represents a declining proportion of people who are hungry. In fact, developing countries as a group have seen an overall setback in terms of the World Food Summit goal (from 827 million in 1990–92 to 906 million in 2010), while some progress has been made towards MDG 1 (with the prevalence of hunger declining from 20 percent undernourished in 1990–92 to 16 percent in 2010).

FIGURE 5

Undernourishment in 2010, by region (millions)



Note: All figures are rounded.

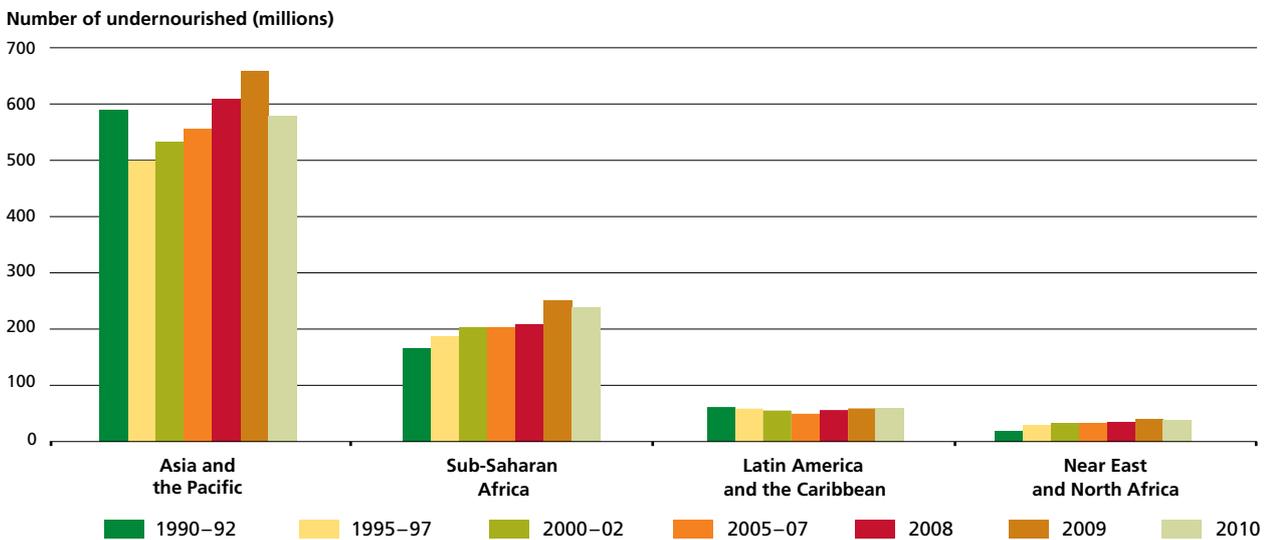
Source: FAO.

The proportion of undernourished people remains highest in sub-Saharan Africa, at 30 percent in 2010 (Figure 7), but progress varies widely at the country level. As of 2005–07 (the most recent period for which complete data are available), the Congo, Ghana, Mali and Nigeria had already achieved MDG 1 and Ethiopia and others were close to achieving it; in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, however, the proportion of

undernourishment had risen to 69 percent (from 26 percent in 1990–92). In Asia, Armenia, Myanmar and Viet Nam had achieved MDG 1 and China and others were close to doing so, while in Latin America and the Caribbean, Guyana, Jamaica and Nicaragua had achieved MDG 1 and Brazil and others were approaching the target reduction. (Table 1 in the Technical annex provides more details on country-level statistics.)

FIGURE 6

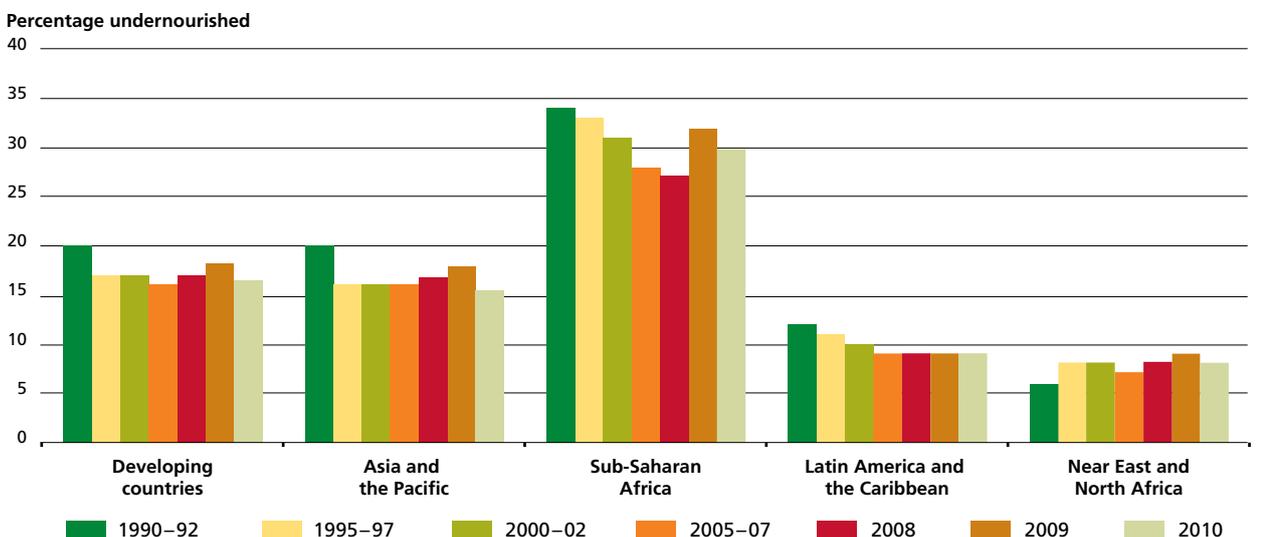
Regional trends in the number of undernourished, from 1990-92 to 2010



Source: FAO.

FIGURE 7

Regional trends in the proportion of undernourished, from 1990-92 to 2010



Source: FAO.