



**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations**



Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Monitoring Framework

July 2018 version

Indicator 19: Percentage of people supported by food and/or social assistance programmes

MUFPP framework of actions' category: Social and economic equity

The indicator measures the take-up (or usage) of food and/or social assistance support through programmes that target vulnerable groups that are struggling to feed themselves. Over time, this indicator should show how take-up is increasing or decreasing, or speeding up/slowing down.

Overview table

MUFPP Work stream	Social and economic equity
MUFPP action	Use cash and food transfers, and other forms of social protection systems to provide vulnerable populations with access to healthy food. This is as a means of increasing the level of food security for specific vulnerable groups.
What the indicator measures	The indicator measures the take-up (or usage) of food and/or social assistance support through programmes that target vulnerable groups that are struggling to feed themselves. Over time, this indicator should show how take-up is increasing or decreasing, or speeding up/slowing down.
Which variables need to be measured / what data are needed	Total city population; figures for different 'vulnerable' groups; audit/numbers of food assistance programmes; types and numbers of social assistance programmes that relate to food security; numbers of people using the assistance programmes (or registered to use them); data in relation to a timeframe - specific length of time that users are encouraged to participate or eligible for assistance (e.g. number of weeks or months).
Unit of measurement (i.e. Percentages, averages, number, etc.)	Percentage of the total city population in receipt of food or social assistance support because they are struggling to feed themselves.
Unit(s) of Analysis (i.e. people under 5 years old, etc.)	Data can be disaggregated by category of vulnerable groups e.g. children, families, young people, indigenous, elderly, disabled, unemployed, etc. Data could also be disaggregated by type of food or social assistance programme and by numbers of people benefiting from the different types. For example, it may be very helpful to have clear and separate data for school feeding programmes

	in order to support specific actions and monitoring ¹ . Social assistance programmes could also include unconditional cash-transfers or cash-transfers conditional to food acquisition/production.
Possible sources of information of such data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -National and local government statistics departments and social assistance/benefits departments -Food Security and Public Health Agencies or departments -NGO's and community sector organisations -City partnerships addressing food insecurity/poverty; -Family and Children centres; -Homeless centres; Rough sleeper initiatives -Doctor surgeries and clinics.
Possible methods/tools for data-collection	Use national food insecurity data to estimate city level data if none exists. Audit of all food/social assistance programmes. Existing report and data analysis from above sources. Interviews with key stakeholders to identify existing data or sources of data. Surveys with the above types of organisations to collect data on number of users if no overview of food and social assistance programmes exist or if there are significant gaps.
Expertise required	Data analysis and statistical expertise; interview and survey research design and analysis
Resources required/estimated costs	
Specific observations	This indicator could become less useful if for example national or local budget cuts reduce government services and thus reduce assistance programmes and services. This could result in lower indicator figures and an incorrect assumption that this means food insecurity is reduced. In an alternative scenario, the indicator could also become less useful if for example high cost of living forces low income families and vulnerable individuals out of the city and thus reduces the demands on food or social assistance programmes.
Examples of application	Many cities collect data in relation to food insecurity: New York City, US; Brighton and Hove, UK; see notes below under References.

Rationale/evidence

Scope: While this indicator is limited in scope both in relation to the complex causes of food insecurity, and in relation to quantifying the degree to which food insecurity is prevalent within a city, it quantifies the uptake of food and or social assistance programmes which are provided to support vulnerable groups, which is probably one of the easiest indicators to measure. The resulting figure should be seen in the context of total population as well as figures for vulnerable groups. The focus should be on assistance programmes that target those most in need of help (i.e. emergency food provision), even though most likely this will represent only the people who are using it as a last resort (rather than the many more living with long-term food insecurity and missed meals).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's): The SDG's focus on ending poverty, fighting inequality and tackling climate change. This indicator relates to SDG goals 1 and 2, and specifically to target 1.3. Goal 1 is to 'End poverty in all its forms everywhere'. Goal 2 is to 'End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture'. Why does this matter? 'Extreme hunger and malnutrition remains a barrier to sustainable development and creates a trap from which people cannot easily escape. Hunger and malnutrition mean less productive individuals, who are more prone to disease and thus often unable to earn more and improve their livelihoods.'² SDG Target 1.3 is to 'Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable'. The SGD indicator for this target is 1.3.1: 'Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing

¹ Note that a separate indicator 20 on school feeding programmes is also proposed.

² UN Sustainable Development Goals <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, new-borns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable’.

Food and cities: In the case of food, the critical challenge is to increase the level of food security for specific vulnerable groups within local communities through the provision of food assistance programmes or social assistance programmes, thus ensuring that the most vulnerable groups always have access to food. Cities need to understand the extent of food insecurity within their populations and to have appropriate assistance systems in place. They also need to know the number of people in receipt of such assistance, ideally at any given time. This may be easier to do for nationally administered cash transfers (which are more likely to have built in monitoring systems) than for other food assistance programmes.

Glossary/concepts/definitions used

Definition of ‘vulnerable populations’: In general, ‘vulnerability’ is accepted to mean susceptibility to harm or suffering. ‘Vulnerability’ is a regularly used word that means different things in different contexts.

In the context of public health, the World Health Organisation (WHO) states: ‘Vulnerability is the degree to which a population, individual or organization is unable to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impacts of disasters. Children, pregnant women, elderly people, malnourished people, and people who are ill or immune-compromised, are particularly vulnerable when a disaster strikes, and take a relatively high share of the disease burden associated with emergencies. Poverty – and its common consequences such as malnutrition, homelessness, poor housing and destitution – is a major contributor to vulnerability.’³

Each nation (or city) will have its own criteria to define vulnerability and identify specific vulnerable groups of people; e.g. income, educational opportunities, health status, etc. People are by definition vulnerable if they depend on food programs or social assistance or both for their wellbeing or even their survival.

Brazil, for example, defines ‘*vulnerability*’ as follows: ‘to be susceptible, to be propitious to a particular problem, due to individual, social and institutional conditions, which may or may not lead to a situation of risk, but not necessarily one is the consequence of the other. As a result of poverty, deprivation (lack of income, precarious or nil access to public services, among others) and, or, weakening of affective relationships - relational and social belonging (age, ethnic, gender or disability discrimination, among others)’. There is also a definition of ‘*risk*’: individuals and families in situations of personal or social risk and violation of rights (victims of physical, psychic and sexual violence, neglect, abandonment, threats, abuse, use of psychoactive substances, compliance with socio-educational measures, street situation, situation child labour, among others).

Clarity about types of assistance: It may be important to separate out ‘food assistance programmes’ and ‘social assistance programmes’, depending on the type of programmes available. Some cities will have clear food assistance programmes. Others will have social assistance programmes that amongst other issues also assist, directly or indirectly, with poverty and food insecurity. However it may be the case that the working or non-working poor who are eligible for some additional income through social assistance still depend on other food programs because social assistance rates are too low to support dietary diversity given the high costs of fixed expenses like rent.

The municipality of Quito, Ecuador, for example does not have a specific program of food assistance (e.g. soup kitchens or specific points of provision of food for those who receive a bonus). They only have their urban agriculture and bio-fairs programmes (distribution of surplus organic produce), and support through childcare centres for young children of 3 years, where a balanced and nutritious diet is guaranteed.

Definition of ‘food assistance programmes’: Not surprisingly definitions are complex. Over the last two decades, terms that relate to the emergency provision of food in humanitarian crisis situations at a global level have evolved. Whereas the term ‘food aid’ was commonly used (giving food directly to the hungry), there has been a shift to ‘food assistance’ in order to include cash, value vouchers or electronic funds to buy nutritious ingredients as well as direct in-kind food distribution. The World Food Programme defines food assistance as involving ‘a more complex understanding of people’s long-term nutritional needs and of the diverse approaches required to meet them [...] recognising that hunger does not occur in a vacuum. It means we must concentrate time, resources and efforts on the most vulnerable in society. It implies not just emergency interventions, but tailored, multi-year support programmes designed to lift a whole nation’s nutritional indicators.’

³ Environmental health in emergencies and disasters: a practical guide,’ WHO, 2002

However, at a global level the definitions remain unclear; for example some food assistance programmes only focus on direct food aid and cash payments while others include wider food system interventions like production or market support. 'Food assistance instruments might include direct food-based transfers (such as general rations, food-for-work, supplementary feeding or vulnerable group feeding and school feeding), food subsidies, cash transfers and vouchers (including school or user fee waivers) and agricultural and livestock support.'⁴

This is useful context for defining 'food assistance' at a city level. A city may define its food assistance programmes as purely emergency food provision for people in crisis (e.g. food banks, soup kitchens, child feeding centres, supplementary feeding programmes for mothers and babies) over a specific length of time (e.g. up to 12 months) or it could include other wider intervention programmes that aim to move people away from food insecurity in the longer term.

The Community Food Centres network in Canada provides an example of wider intervention programmes based in local communities. From the simple beginnings of one food bank in Toronto set up over 30 years ago during the recession, a national network of community food centres now exists. In addition to emergency food provision, the centres offer community kitchens and gardens, healthy drop-in meals, peri-natal support, outdoor bake ovens, affordable food markets, and community action and civic engagement programmes.⁵

In the US, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service's 'Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program' (SNAP) offers nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families and provides economic benefits to communities. SNAP is the largest programme in the domestic hunger safety net. The Food and Nutrition Service works with State agencies, nutrition educators, and neighbourhood and faith-based organisations to ensure that those eligible for nutrition assistance can make informed decisions about applying for the programme and can access benefits. FNS also works with State partners and the retail community to improve programme administration and ensure program integrity.⁶

Definition of 'social assistance programmes': Social assistance programmes, usually means tested, may not specifically focus on food provision, but may indirectly contribute. The World Bank defines social assistance as follows: 'Social assistance programs are non-contributory transfers in cash or in-kind and are usually targeted at the poor and vulnerable. Some programs are focused on improving chronic poverty or providing equality of opportunity; others more on protecting families from shocks and longstanding losses they can inflict for the unprotected poor. These programmes also known as social safety net programs or social welfare, include cash transfers (conditional and unconditional), in-kind transfers, such as school feeding and targeted food assistance, and near cash benefits such as fee waivers and food vouchers.'⁷

⁴ 'Food aid and food assistance in emergency and transitional contexts: a review of current thinking'; Paul Harvey, Karen Proudlock, Edward Clay, Barry Riley and Susanne Jaspars; June 2010; Humanitarian Policy Group Overseas Development Institute, UK <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/6038.pdf>

⁵ Community Food Centres, Canada https://cfccanada.ca/mission_vision

⁶ USDA's SNAP programme <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>

⁷ ASPIRE: The Atlas of Social Protection - Indicators of Resilience and Equity | Social Assistance | The World Bank <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/aspire/indicator/social-assistance>

Other examples of social assistance programmes include cash for work, cash for education, unconditional social pension, fee waiver for school fees, etc. For reference, see the Social Assistance in Developing Countries database.⁸

Many countries have nationally designed and administered social assistance programmes. Each city will have an understanding of its own relevant social assistance programmes, whether local or national. For example, the SUAS system is a public system that organises Social Assistance services in Brazil in a decentralized way. Established to guarantee protection to the family, maternity, childhood, adolescence and old age, in order to reduce damage and prevent vulnerability and social risk, it organises its actions through 'Basic Social Protection' and 'Special Social Protection'.⁹

Preparations

The team responsible for monitoring this indicator should agree on:

1. Type of data disaggregation and categories that will be used (see further notes below).
2. Data collection method (analysis and projection of existing data or further gathering of new data from stakeholder organisations).
3. If interviews or surveys with stakeholder organisations are to be used to help identify other sources of data, the right questions to ask have to be clarified. Training/briefing of interviewers may be needed.
4. If there are significant data gaps, then further research and investment may be required to help the organisers of community based food and/or social assistance programmes to gather and present appropriate data.

Sampling

In the case that new primary data has to be collected by means of survey of food and/or social assistance programmes, a 25% sample of programmes is minimally needed to be able to present useful figures and extrapolation estimates. In this case, the programmes surveyed could be sampled according to category of vulnerability or geographic area - in relation to clearly defined groups of users and/or in neighbourhoods where food assistance is critical.

Data collection and data disaggregation

An initial audit of existing food assistance and relevant social assistance programmes will be needed from the outset in order to set the context for any further work. The resulting list could also be turned into a directory and used for future monitoring purposes.

If basic programme information is not available, then this should be the starting point. An audit survey with food and relevant social assistance programmes could include questions on types of programme assistance; categories of beneficiaries; length of time during which beneficiaries receive supported; regularity of support provided.

The second step will be to identify all possible existing and relevant data sets that either are part of setting the context or direct numbers of programme users. National data on food insecurity may be available.

⁸ Social Assistance in Developing Countries Database; March 2006; Armando Barrientos and Rebecca Holmes IDS, University of Sussex for the UK Department for International Development (DFID) http://www.chronicpoverty.org/uploads/publication_files/Social_Assistance_Database_Version2_March_2006.pdf

⁹ Brazilian Social Assistance Policy (SUAS) http://www.ipc-undp.org/doc_africa_brazil/5.SNAS.pdf

Data could be disaggregated by category of vulnerable groups, according to the city's own definitions; for example, children, families, young people, elderly, disabled, unemployed, etc. Data could also be disaggregated by type of food or social assistance programme and by numbers of people benefiting from the different types; for example food banks, soup kitchens, community feeding centres, food vouchers, etc.

Data analysis/calculation of the indicator

The indicator is computed by calculating the total number of people receiving food and/or relevant social assistance as a percentage of the total city population. Further useful figures could include more detailed breakdown by neighbourhood to show more nuanced patterns for the city. Similarly there could be more detailed breakdown figures relating to different types of programmes or different categories of vulnerable groups. If possible such data should be made available too as a set of additional indicators.

References and links to reports/tools

Overview report on approaches to the design of emergency food assistance programmes in urban and peri-urban settings

Emergencies in urban settings: a technical review of food-based program options, USDA, August 2008, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadm940.pdf

Brighton and Hove Food Partnership, UK

The Brighton and Hove Food Poverty Action Plan 2015-18 is a coordinated approach of a city in the South of England to address food insecurity. Food poverty is categorized in two ways: i) crisis level and ii) ongoing food poverty. The overall outcome they want to see in relation to 'crisis level' is a reduction (or slower growth) in the number of people experiencing hunger or seeking emergency assistance.

Their chosen indicators for food poverty at crisis level are:

- Number of food banks in the city; weekly food parcel distribution; yearly change in demand
- Annual number of Local Discretionary Social Fund (LDSF) payments for food and cooking equipment.

For more information see pages 4 & 6

http://bhfood.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2017/09/FINAL_Food_Poverty_Action_Plan_2015.pdf

New York City and work on addressing food insecurity

New York City defines food insecurity as 'the lack of access, at times, to enough nutritionally adequate food for an active, healthy life for all members of a household. Food insecure families may worry that food will run out before they have enough money to buy more, eat less than they should, or be unable to afford to eat balanced meals.' Work to address food insecurity in New York is focused around reducing the 'Meal Gap' alongside the food insecurity rate in all boroughs, in addition to prioritizing funding for emergency food that is made available to those who may need it.

The metrics used for this work include: Food insecurity rates for different areas of the city; the 'meal gap' – missing meals per person by neighbourhood; Emergency Food Assistance Program investment; Numbers of supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program recipients i) by neighbourhood and ii) by specific vulnerable groups; and neighbourhood based practical food distribution achievements.

The Meal Gap, New York City's official measure of food insecurity, represents the meals missing from the homes of families and individuals struggling with (longer-term) food insecurity - that is, when household food budgets fall too short to secure adequate, nutritious food year-round.

For NYC food metrics reports 2012-2017, see <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/foodpolicy/about/food-metrics-report.page>

A new tool to measure food insecurity: The Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) is a new and innovative approach to measuring the prevalence of food insecurity. It is based on direct responses of individuals about their access to food. This promising new tool permits a more disaggregated analysis of food insecurity by place of residence, gender and other factors.¹⁰ (See separate Indicator 18 for how to use FIES.)

¹⁰ Asia and the Pacific: Regional overview of food insecurity, FAO, 2016 <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6481e.pdf>