



Q&A: The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019

Q. How many hungry people are there in the world?

A. After decades of steady decline, the trend in world hunger – as measured by the prevalence of undernourishment – reverted in 2015, remaining virtually unchanged in the past three years at a level slightly below 11 percent. Meanwhile, the number of people who suffer from hunger has slowly increased. As a result, more than 820 million people (821.6 million) in the world were still hungry.

Q. Which regions of the world are most affected by hunger?

A. Hunger is on the rise in almost all African sub-regions, making Africa the region with the highest prevalence of undernourishment, at almost 20 percent. In Eastern Africa in particular, close to a third of the population (30.8 percent) is undernourished. Hunger is also slowly rising in Latin America and the Caribbean, although its prevalence is still below 7 percent. The largest number of undernourished people (more than 500 million) live in Asia. Western Asia, which includes Syria and Yemen, shows a continuous increase since 2010, with more than 12 percent of its population undernourished today.

Q. What are the main reasons for hunger not improving?

A. Conflict, climate variability and extremes, and economic slowdowns and downturns are the main reasons for the recent rise in global hunger. This year's report takes an in-depth look at economic slowdowns and downturns.

Q. Where are economic slowdowns and downturns contributing to the rise in hunger?

A. Hunger is increasing in many countries where economic growth is lagging, particularly in middle-income countries. During the period 2011–2017, 77 countries experienced increases in hunger (out of a sample of 134 low- and middle-income countries), and for 84 percent of these countries (65 out of 77), the increases in hunger corresponded with the occurrence of economic slowdowns or downturns. The majority of these countries (44 out of 65) are middle-income countries. Evidence also shows that 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.

Q. How are hunger and food insecurity measured?

A. For decades, hunger has been measured using the Prevalence of Undernourishment, which is an assessment of how many people in the population are regularly consuming amounts of food that do not provide enough dietary energy to allow them to conduct an active, healthy life. The estimate is derived



from official country-level data on food supply, food consumption and dietary energy needs in the population. The PoU data are complemented by indicators based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), which is a survey-based metric of the severity of food insecurity. The FIES assesses the constraints people experience in obtaining nutritious and sufficient food, and relies on direct yes/no responses to eight questions regarding food access, such as: Was there a time when you went without eating for a whole day because of a lack of money or other resources? Was there a time when you were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food because of a lack of money or other resources?

The PoU and the FIES-based indicators offer two different but valuable lenses to understand food insecurity. Both approaches are used to measure progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2, or Zero Hunger Goal, which aims to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. The PoU helps to measure progress towards the target of ending hunger, while the FIES-based indicators help to measure progress towards the target of ensuring access to food for all.

Q. Is the world on track to achieve Zero Hunger by the 2030 deadline?

A. Ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030 is an immense challenge and progress has been too slow. We are not on track to meet the goals of ending hunger and ensuring access to food for all. The number of people affected by hunger and food insecurity has been slowly increasing for three years in row. Regarding malnutrition, no progress has been made in reducing low birthweight between 2012 and 2015 which is the last year for which data are available. In 2015, one in seven newborns suffered from low birthweight which can have life-long complications. 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 SGD 2 target is to halve the number of stunted children.

Q. What needs to change to reach Zero Hunger?

A. Ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition is a goal that we strongly believe can be reached if we strengthen our common efforts and work to tackle the underlying causes. Strong political commitment to eradicate hunger is fundamental, but it is not enough. Our actions must be bolder. There must be broader efforts to combat not just hunger but the multiple forms of malnutrition. Solutions require structural transformation that are pro-poor and inclusive and that integrate food security and nutrition concerns into efforts to reduce poverty and gender inequalities. Countries need to protect the poorest people's incomes and purchasing power through social protection programmes. In the longer term, countries need to invest wisely during periods of economic booms to reduce economic vulnerabilities and inequalities, build capacity to withstand future shocks, and use policy tools to create healthier food environments.