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# Global Hunger in the Time of COVID-19

The World Food Program projects that, without urgent action, 265 million people will face a food crisis by the end of 2020.

## COVID-19 will increase hunger and food insecurity

- COVID-19 is expected to drive up hunger, especially in countries already suffering from food crises – meaning they don't have enough food and there are higher levels of acute malnutrition. For example, people in Angola, South Sudan, Yemen, and the drought-affected parts of Pakistan, as well as Venezuelan migrants in Colombia and Ecuador, are [already acutely food insecure](#) and at higher risk of starvation from COVID-19.
- [The World Food Program projects](#) that, without urgent action, the number of people facing food crises could double by the end of 2020.
- COVID-19 also particularly threatens nations with [high burdens of poverty](#) and weak public health systems. Most of the world's hungry people live in these countries, and **hunger is expected to increase** in countries that already have high hunger rates.
- As in the United States, the people who will be most affected come from the poorest and most vulnerable populations. In developing countries, these include **displaced people, migrants, people who live in fragile states, and populations affected by conflict**.
- Estimates suggest that for every 1 percent of slowdown in the global economy, the number of people living in poverty—and most likely food insecurity— [will increase by 14 million \(2 percent\)](#).
- **Loss of employment and income** will be the main reason for the expected rise in hunger.
- Closed borders and national lockdowns will [disrupt food supply chains](#) and therefore food access and availability.
  - Just as the main agricultural season is beginning, restrictions may prevent [seasonal laborers](#) from migration to work on farms. This could cause **crop shortages and rising food prices**.
  - Pastoralists may not be able to move about freely to find pasture or water, which **could threaten their livestock** and cause conflict with farming communities.<sup>1</sup>



WFP/Rafael Campos

**Food assistance recipients in Mozambique are divided into smaller groups and asked to stay 1.5 metres or almost 5 feet apart while in line.**

## Hunger is already a major global problem

- Despite progress against global hunger since 1990, [the number of people living with hunger has increased](#) since 2015 because of conflict, climate change, and economic downturns. Approximately **2 billion people are food insecure**.
- In low- and middle-income countries, many households spend [half of their income](#) on food.
- In 2020, East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and portions of western and Southwest Asia have already suffered the
- [worst locust infestation in 70 years](#), which destroyed crops and dramatically increased food insecurity. The United

Nations estimates that this swarm is capable of **consuming enough food to feed 34 million people**. A [second wave of locusts](#) is expected to further increase hunger in East Africa, Yemen, and Iran.

### Current COVID-19 impacts on food security

- Key **food security programs have been disrupted** by quarantine measures, including restrictions on movement and gatherings.
  - Nearly 1.6 billion children are out of school. Children who had relied on [school meals](#) **can no longer count on that food**.
  - [Community nutrition and food assistance](#) programs cannot continue as usual.
- Delivery of agricultural inputs and nutrition commodities [faces delays and is more expensive](#) due to **less availability of air, sea, and ground transportation**.
- Farmers do not have access to the accurate and timely information they need to plant and harvest their crops. Crops and fresh produce are [being left in fields](#), causing both **loss of income for farmers and food waste**.
- [Closure of markets](#) means **farmers have nowhere to sell** their produce, and consumers have **limited places to purchase** their food.
- The **poorest households are most vulnerable** to increases in hunger. In rural China, COVID-19 [reduced the purchasing power](#) of these households, including their ability to buy food.
- **Food prices are showing signs of increasing**, although higher prices are not yet widespread. Based on reports from Sudan, Rwanda, China, and Vietnam,<sup>ii</sup> fresh produce prices have been most significantly affected.

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### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Action Against Hunger (2020). Risk of rising death toll in West Africa: COVID-19 meets hunger.

<sup>ii</sup> Presentation by Chase Sova, WFP USA, April 2020.