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.

**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, fresh produce prices have been most significantly affected.

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**Endnotes**

2. Presentation by Chase Sova, WFP USA, April 2020.