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Global Hunger in the Time of COVID-19

The World Food Program projects that, without urgent action, the number of people facing food crises could double by the end of the year due to COVID-19.

COVID-19 will increase hunger and food insecurity

- The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization has said that [food insecurity will rise](#) as a result of the global economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, **even in places that were food secure before the pandemic**. The number of people facing hunger could increase by **up to 132 million**.
- COVID-19 disproportionately affects nations with [high burdens of poverty](#) and weak public health systems. According to the United Nations, people in [25 countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia](#) are at high risk of acute hunger and malnutrition in the next six months.
- COVID-19 will have the most severe impacts in countries that already suffer from food crises – meaning that people don't have enough food and the levels of acute malnutrition are higher. **People in Angola, South Sudan, Yemen, and the drought-affected parts of Pakistan, as well as Venezuelan migrants in Colombia and Ecuador, were [already acutely food insecure](#) and are now at higher risk of starvation because of COVID-19.**
- Child [malnutrition rates will spike](#) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Without action, the number of children [suffering from wasting](#) (becoming dangerously thin) will **increase by 6.7 million** this year, leading to an additional 10,000 deaths of young children each month. That means, if this malnutrition is not prevented, one child will die every 4.5 minutes.
- As in the United States, the people most affected by the crisis come from the poorest and most vulnerable global populations. They include **people who live in fragile states, people affected by conflict, displaced people, and migrants**.
- Closed borders and nationwide lockdowns [disrupt food supply chains](#) and therefore food access and availability.
 - Restrictions may prevent [seasonal laborers](#) from traveling to farms. This could cause **low crop yields 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.¹
 - **Reduced availability of air, sea, and ground transportation causes delays** in the delivery of agricultural inputs and nutrition commodities and makes them [more expensive](#).
 - [The closure of markets](#) means many **farmers have nowhere to sell** their produce, and consumers have **limited places to purchase** their food.



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.

WFP/Rafael Campos

- Key **food security programs have been disrupted** by quarantine measures such as 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.
- 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**.
- The **lowest-income households are most likely** to face increased 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,ⁱⁱ fresh produce prices have been most significantly affected thus far.

Hunger was a major global problem before the pandemic

- 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. Around the world, **3 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet**.
- In 2020, East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and portions of western and Southwest Asia have 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.

Recommendations for urgent action

- Provide an additional **\$20 billion toward global COVID-19 relief** to ensure funding for global food and nutrition programs, emergency global health, flexible humanitarian assistance, urgent economic relief, and efforts to develop and ensure access to new vaccines, diagnostics, and treatments. This should include no less than \$500 million to meet the urgent nutrition needs of vulnerable mothers and children.
- **Support multilateral efforts to improve food security, including the multi-donor COVID-19 Rural Poor Stimulus Facility** launched by the International Fund for Agricultural Development. Its purpose is to provide smallholder farmers with urgently needed inputs, information, markets, and liquidity.
- **Fully fund the UN humanitarian appeal** and the \$2.4 billion call to prevent a spike in wasting, a life-threatening form of malnutrition.
- **Support debt relief** for countries in crisis and approve a **new issuance of Special Drawing Rights** to boost countries' access to finance to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.
- Support the United Nations' **call for a global ceasefire**.
- **Expand support for homestead food production** to improve access to nutrient-rich foods, including fruit, vegetables, and eggs.
- **Invest in national social protection systems** to safeguard nutrition, food security, and livelihoods, including through cash and/or voucher transfers.
- **Keep vital trade routes open** to ensure the uninterrupted flow of food supplies.

Endnotes

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

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