

FAO

Food and Agriculture Organization

Food Security and Nutrition

Overview/What is FAO?

Around the world, an estimated 9.2% (equivalent to nearly 1 billion) of people are considered “food insecure” or “malnourished”. The United Nations defines food insecurity as “a lack of regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life”¹. Food Insecurity is marked by hunger, which is defined as an uncomfortable or painful physical sensation caused by insufficient consumption of dietary energy”. Factors such as war, famine, poverty, unemployment and lack of access to nutrition sources combine to create a situation which affects the daily lives of millions. In addition to these factors, there exists an urban-rural as well as a gender divide relation to access to food and nutrition. To counter Food Insecurity and hunger, United Nations agencies, notably the World Food Programme, World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and the International Fund for Access to Agriculture have been established in order to address large-scale as well as local issues in order to reduce and eliminate Food Insecurity and Hunger.

Facts About Food Insecurity

According to Action Against Hunger, a leading organization devoted to ending food insecurity world-wide, enough food is produced to feed everyone on earth. However², 4 in 10 cannot access a healthy diet, 1 in 11 people go to bed hungry every night, and current crop yields are projected to drop by 50%. Geographically, lack of access to nutrition is generally most prevalent in Africa, where 342 million people are considered food insecure; and Asia, where 425 million people are considered food insecure³. Across the world, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Haiti, and South Sudan are considered the countries with the least access to food in the world. In these countries, access to healthy food and water is severely limited by war (where

¹ “Food.” *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/en/global-issues/food. Accessed 23 Sep. 2024.

² “7 facts About World Hunger.” *Action Against Hunger*, <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/app/uploads/2024/07/Action-Against-Hunger-7-Facts-About-Hunger.pdf>. Accessed 23 Sep. 2024.

³ “Hunger in Asia.” *Compassion International*, www.compassion.com/poverty/hunger-in-asia.htm. Accessed 8 Nov. 2024.

60% of the world's food insecure people live), famine, disease, and natural disasters (extreme weather events have doubled in the last 30 years). For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 23.4 million people are considered to be food insecure. The United Nations reports that this situation is the result of a combination of factors such as political conflicts the country has endured for over 30 years, resulting in deteriorating economic factors. Additionally, natural phenomena have made food production increasingly difficult, meaning that reliance on aid has increased. The lack of sufficient aid has allowed the famine to continue and prolonged it.⁴

Causes of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity has many causes. However, most experts and organizations agree that the main causes of food insecurity are⁵:

- a. Conflict: violent conflicts (wars, civil conflicts, social unrest, etc) often drive people away from their homes, cut supply lines, cause the destruction of infrastructure such as markets and stores. (Haiti is a notable example.)
- b. Climate Emergencies: various climate emergencies such as hurricanes, floods, typhoons, droughts, and earthquakes contribute to the destruction of infrastructure, crops, and supply lines. They also cause the mass displacement of millions of people, causing the loss of agricultural assets. (South Sudan is a notable example)⁶
- c. Economic inequalities: the results of economic depressions, stock market crashes, and inflation disproportionately affect the poorest members of society, resulting in the inability to purchase or produce food and exacerbates reliance on foreign economic aid. (The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a notable example.)

Laws, Regulations, and Conventions Relating to Food Security

⁴ “Hunger Hotspots FAO–WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity November 2023 to April 2024 outlook.” *World Food Programme*, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000153539/download/?_ga=2.201867153.1638852298.1727113009-326911987.1727113009. Accessed 23 Sep. 2024.

⁵ “Ending Hunger: World Food Programme.” *UN World Food Programme*, www.wfp.org/ending-hunger. Accessed 27 Sep. 2024.

⁶ “Global Food Crisis: 10 Countries Suffering the Most from Hunger.” *World Food Program USA*, 25 June 2024, www.wfpusa.org/articles/global-food-crisis-10-countries-suffering-the-most-from-hunger/.

In reaction to public awareness about the lack of access to food across the world, many countries have enshrined the *right to food* in law⁷. These acknowledgements of rights have been taken in a variety of ways. The United Nations also recognized the right to food in its 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Additionally, many Western governments have created programs to ensure that the least fortunate citizens have access to basic necessities such as food. However, third-world countries who are still unable to create programs such as these are forced to leave poor citizens (who often for huge, or majoritary segments of their respective societies) to their own devices.⁸

Effects of Food Insecurity and Hunger

Lack of access to food leads to various personal and economic consequences⁹. In developed Western countries, the less fortunate are forced to purchase and consume low-quality fast and processed foods, regardless of the detrimental effects to their health. Additionally, those who are forced to choose between feeding themselves and acquiring other commodities and services are forced to forgo essential services such as healthcare, housing, and education. In less developed countries, such as the DRC and Haiti, those lacking access to food often see a decrease in life expectancy, rises in hunger related diseases¹⁰ such as diabetes (type 2 specifically), high blood pressure, and certain cancers. These negative health effects are often left untreated, as access to health quality care in these countries is not possible. In addition to this, hunger creates a toll on mental health, often resulting in certain nervous disorders and complexes.

Public Awareness and Opinion

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2019, food insecurity has risen by up to 132 million people. However, this rise in hunger has not necessarily resulted in a rise in awareness in food-secure countries such as Canada, the United States, or the United Kingdom.

⁷ “About the Right to Food and Human Rights.” *OHCHR*, www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-food/about-right-food-and-human-rights. Accessed 27 Sep. 2024.

⁸ “The Right to Adequate Food.” *OHCHR*, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FactSheet34en.pdf. Accessed 27 Sep. 2024.

⁹ “Tough Choices. Devastating Consequences.” *Feeding America*, www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger. Accessed 27 Sep. 2024.

¹⁰ Insights, GGI. “Effects of Hunger: Public Health Implications and Solutions.” *Gray Group International*, 1 Oct. 2024, www.graygroupintl.com/blog/effects-of-hunger. Accessed 6 Jan. 2025.

This lack of awareness about food insecurity by the general public is of great concern to organizations responsible for orchestrating aid programs destined to help food-insecure countries and people, as a lack of public awareness often results with less support for funding a lack of grassroots activism on the ground in these countries.

However, multiple organizations such as [Feeding America](#) and [Feed the Children](#) have made it their mission to raise awareness of global food insecurity, especially in western countries that are already food-secure. These organizations play an important role in affecting public opinion and perception of the issue at hand and are considered key assets in the fight against food insecurity.

Questions to Consider

1. What are the causes of food insecurity around the world?
2. How does food insecurity affect people around the world today?
3. Where is food insecurity highest, and why?
4. How has your country been affected by food insecurity?
5. How can technology be used to solve food insecurity in a sustainable way?
6. What can be done to combat food insecurity?
7. Which countries and/or organizations should be at the forefront of solving the food insecurity issue?

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