

2021
THE STATE OF
FOOD SECURITY
AND NUTRITION
IN THE WORLD



**TRANSFORMING FOOD SYSTEMS FOR FOOD
SECURITY, IMPROVED NUTRITION AND
AFFORDABLE HEALTHY DIETS FOR ALL**

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
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CONTENTS

FOREWORD	vi	ANNEXES	129
METHODOLOGY	viii	ANNEX 1A	
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ix	Statistical tables to Chapter 2	130
ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	xi	ANNEX 1B	
KEY MESSAGES	xii	Methodological notes for the food security and nutrition indicators	156
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	xv	ANNEX 2	
CHAPTER 1		Methodologies Chapter 2	170
INTRODUCTION	1	ANNEX 3	
CHAPTER 2		Country exposure to the drivers and PoU change point analysis in Chapter 3	179
FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION AROUND THE WORLD	7	ANNEX 4	
2.1 Food security indicators – latest updates and progress towards ending hunger and ensuring food security	8	Country group definitions and lists of countries affected by drivers in Chapter 3	181
2.2 Nutrition indicators – latest updates and progress towards global nutrition targets	29	ANNEX 5	
2.3 Ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030	38	Country group definitions for the analysis of food insecurity and drivers in 2020	186
CHAPTER 3		ANNEX 6	
MAJOR DRIVERS OF RECENT FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION TRENDS	51	Glossary	188
3.1 A food systems lens is critical to address the major drivers of recent food security and nutrition trends	52	NOTES	194
3.2 Impact of major drivers on food security and nutrition	60		
CHAPTER 4			
WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO TRANSFORM FOOD SYSTEMS FOR FOOD SECURITY, IMPROVED NUTRITION AND AFFORDABLE HEALTHY DIETS?	85		
4.1 Six pathways to address major drivers behind recent food security and nutrition trends	87		
4.2 Building coherent portfolios of policies and investments	109		
CHAPTER 5			
CONCLUSION	125		

TABLES

1	Prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) in the world, 2005–2020	11
2	Number of undernourished people in the world, 2005–2020	12
3	Prevalence of food insecurity at severe level only, and at moderate or severe level, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale, 2014–2020	17
4	Number of people experiencing food insecurity at severe level only, and at moderate or severe level, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale, 2014–2020	18
5	Healthy diets were still unaffordable for around 3 billion people in the world in 2019. The number of people unable to afford healthy diets increased in Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean between 2017 and 2019	27
6	The global nutrition targets endorsed by the World Health Assembly and their extension to 2030	31
7	Most regions have made some progress, but not enough to achieve global targets if trends (before COVID-19) continue; no subregion is on track for the low birthweight target, and adult obesity has been worsening in all subregions	42
8	Key policy areas and goals for integrating humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts in conflict-affected areas	92
9	Key policy areas and goals for scaling up climate resilience across food systems	95
10	Key policy areas and goals for strengthening resilience of the most vulnerable to economic adversity	98
11	Key policy areas and goals for intervening along food supply chains to lower the cost of nutritious foods	101
12	Key policy areas and goals for tackling structural inequalities, ensuring interventions are pro-poor and inclusive	105

13	Key policy areas and goals for strengthening food environments and changing consumer behaviour to promote dietary patterns with positive impacts on human health and the environment	108
A1.1	Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and global nutrition targets: Prevalence of undernourishment, moderate or severe food insecurity, selected forms of malnutrition, exclusive breastfeeding and low birthweight	130
A1.2	Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and global nutrition targets: Number of people who are affected by undernourishment, moderate or severe food insecurity and selected forms of malnutrition; number of infants exclusively breastfed and number of babies born with low birthweight	143
A2.1	Ranges of PoU and NoU nowcasted in 2020	171
A2.2	Regression coefficients from three models estimated on historic CVy values (2000–2019)	175
A2.3	Rules for progress assessment against the global nutrition targets	177
A4.1	List of countries by combination of drivers	184

FIGURES

1	The number of undernourished people in the world continued to rise in 2020. Between 720 and 811 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020. Considering the middle of the projected range (768 million), 118 million more people were facing hunger in 2020 than in 2019 – or as many as 161 million, considering the upper bound of the range	10
2	More than half (418 million) of the people in the world affected by hunger in 2020 were in Asia and more than one-third (282 million) in Africa	13
3	All subregions of Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, and most subregions of Asia, show increases in the prevalence of undernourishment from 2019 to 2020, with the sharpest increase in Western Africa	14

CONTENTS

4	Moderate or severe food insecurity has been climbing slowly for six years and now affects more than 30 percent of the world population	19	14	Impacts of various drivers are transmitted throughout food systems, undermining food security and nutrition	53
5	The concentration and distribution of food insecurity by severity differs greatly across the regions of the world	20	15	Low- and middle-income countries face increasing frequency and intensity of drivers	61
6	Globally and in every region, the prevalence of food insecurity is higher among women than men	22	16	While poverty declines around the world, income inequality remains high, with an increase in 2020 in low- and middle-income countries	64
7	Reaching the 2025 and 2030 global nutrition targets remains a challenge. In 2020, an estimated 22 percent of children under 5 years of age were affected by stunting, 6.7 percent by wasting and 5.7 percent by overweight. Nearly 30 percent of women aged 15 to 49 years were affected by anaemia in 2019	32	17	More than half of low- and middle-income countries experienced increasing PoU change points in correspondence with one or more drivers (conflict, climate extremes, and economic slowdowns and downturns) between 2010 and 2018	66
8	Stunting is the only indicator showing substantial improvements in multiple regions since 2000. Two indicators – child overweight and anaemia among women of reproductive age – have seen no progress in two decades. Adult obesity is rising sharply in all regions	34	18	The 2020 increase in the number of undernourished was more than five times greater, than the highest increase in undernourishment in the last two decades, and the economic downturn was twice as severe, than previously recorded in low- and middle-income countries	68
9	Around 90 percent of countries surveyed reported changes in coverage of key nutrition services due to COVID-19 in August 2020. While 80 percent reported disruptions in coverage, a small proportion witnessed improved coverage	36	19	In 2020, most low- and middle-income countries hit by economic downturns exhibit an increase in the PoU, but oftentimes economic downturns occur simultaneously with climate-related disasters and climate extremes	69
10	The COVID-19 scenario projects a small decrease in global hunger between 2021 and 2030, with wide variation in evolution across regions	40	20	The majority of undernourished people and stunted children live in countries affected by multiple drivers (2019)	73
11	Some progress has been made on malnutrition, but the pace must be accelerated, and trends in some forms of malnutrition must be reversed to achieve the 2025 and 2030 global nutrition targets	44	21	Hunger is higher and has increased more in countries affected by conflict, climate extremes or economic downturns, or with high inequality	74
12	Around half of children live in countries that are not on track to reach one of the 2030 SDG targets for child stunting, wasting and overweight	46	22	Low-income countries affected by conflict and climate extremes show the largest increase in the PoU, while for middle-income countries, the largest increase occurs during economic downturns	76
13	Conservative estimates of the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that an additional 5 to 7 million children may be stunted, and 570 thousand to 2.8 million more wasted, in low- and middle-income countries in the year 2030. However, the estimate of accumulated additional cases of wasting from 2020 to 2030 is 16 to 40 million	48	23	Latin America and the Caribbean feature the highest increase in the PoU from multiple drivers, while Africa is the only region where the PoU increased under the influence of all three drivers from 2017 to 2019	78

24 In 2020, Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean witnessed significant increases in the PoU while being hit by economic downturns combined with climate-related disasters, conflict, or a combination of both	79
25 The unaffordability of healthy diets in 2019 is strongly associated with higher levels of both severe and moderate or severe food insecurity	81
26 In 2019, countries affected by multiple drivers and countries affected by conflict (alone or combined with other drivers) exhibited among the highest percentage of the population who cannot afford a healthy diet and are moderately or severely food insecure	82
27 Possible pathways towards food systems transformation to address major drivers of food insecurity, malnutrition and unaffordability of healthy diets	88
28 Steps towards food systems transformation for more affordable healthy diets	89
29 Key elements of a portfolio of policies and investments	110
30 Ensuring coherence and complementarity among agri-food*, environmental, health, social protection and other** systems for food systems transformation for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all	111
A4.1 Countries by combination of drivers	183

BOXES

1 Major drivers and underlying factors challenging food security and nutrition in the world: a synthesis from the previous four editions of this report	3
2 Updates to the prevalence of undernourishment and methodology for the 2020 nowcast	9
3 Adapting FIES data collection in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020	16
4 Using the FIES to guide and target responses to the COVID-19 pandemic at subnational level	23
5 Assessment of progress towards 2030 targets for nutrition indicators	43

6 Methodology: estimates of potential additional cases of stunting and wasting due to the COVID-19 pandemic based on a scenario	47
7 Impact channels of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security and nutrition	56
8 Definition of countries affected by conflict, climate extremes, economic downturns and with high income inequality	71
9 Home-grown school feeding as a lever for food systems transformation	97
10 The Quito Agri-Food Pact: facilitating the transformation of the city's food systems	100
11 Accelerating food systems transformation by empowering women and youth	104
12 Protecting children from the harmful impacts of food marketing	106
13 Nutrition policy measures to enhance benefits and minimize risks of trade	107
14 Indigenous Peoples' systemic approaches provide extensive knowledge for the sustainable and inclusive transformation of food systems	122

FOREWORD

The world is at a critical juncture: it is very different to where it was six years ago when it committed to the goal of ending hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition by 2030. At the time, while we understood that the challenges were significant, we were also optimistic that with the right transformative approaches, past progress could be accelerated, at scale, to put us on track to achieve that goal. Nonetheless, the past four editions of this report revealed a humbling reality. The world has not been generally progressing either towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 2.1, of ensuring access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food for all people all year round, or towards SDG Target 2.2, of eradicating all forms of malnutrition.

Last year's report stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic was having a devastating impact on the world's economy, triggering an unprecedented recession not seen since the Second World War, and that the food security and nutrition status of millions of people, including children, would deteriorate if we did not take swift action. Unfortunately, the pandemic continues to expose weaknesses in our food systems, which threaten the lives and livelihoods of people around the world, particularly the most vulnerable and those living in fragile contexts.

This year, this report estimates that between 720 and 811 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020 – as many as 161 million more than in 2019. Nearly 2.37 billion people did not have access to adequate food in 2020 – an increase of 320 million people in just one year. No region of the world has been spared. The high cost of healthy diets and persistently high levels of poverty and income inequality continue to keep healthy diets out of reach for around 3 billion people in every region of the world. Moreover, new analysis in this report shows that the increase in the unaffordability of healthy diets is associated with higher levels of moderate or severe food insecurity.

While it is not yet possible to fully quantify the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, we are concerned by the many millions of children

under 5 years of age who were affected by stunting (149.2 million), wasting (45.4 million) or overweight (38.9 million). Child malnutrition continues to be a challenge, particularly in Africa and Asia. Adult obesity also continues to increase, with no reversal in the trend in sight at global or regional levels. Efforts to eradicate malnutrition in all its forms have been challenged by disruptions in essential nutrition interventions and negative impacts on dietary patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the health front, the interaction between the pandemic, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases has underlined the urgency of ensuring access to affordable healthy diets for all. Such myriad setbacks hide some important achievements – such as the increasing prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding of infants under 6 months.

The situation could have been worse without governments' responses and the impressive social protection measures they have put in place during the COVID-19 crisis. However, not only have measures to contain the spread of the pandemic resulted in an unprecedented economic recession, but also other important drivers are behind recent setbacks in food security and nutrition. These include conflict and violence in many parts of the world as well as climate-related disasters all over the world. Given the past and present interactions of these drivers with economic slowdowns and downturns, as well as high and persistent (and in some countries growing) levels of inequality, it is not surprising that governments could not keep the worst-case scenario for food security and nutrition from materializing and affecting millions of people all over the world.

Hence, the world is at a critical juncture, not only because we have to overcome more significant challenges to ending hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition, but also because, with the fragility of our food systems widely exposed, we have an opportunity to build forward better and get on track towards achieving SDG 2. The UN Food Systems Summit, to be held later this year, will bring forward a series of concrete actions that people, food system actors and governments from all over the world can take

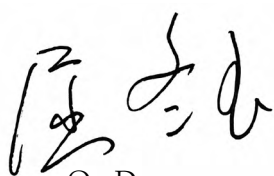
to support a transformation of the world's food systems. We must build on the momentum that the run-up to the Summit has already generated and continue to build the evidence base on interventions and engagement models that best support the transformation of food systems. This report aims to contribute to this global effort.

We are aware that transforming food systems so that they provide nutritious and affordable food for all and become more efficient, resilient, inclusive and sustainable has several entry points and can contribute to progress across the SDGs. Future food systems need to provide decent livelihoods for the people who work within them, in particular for small-scale producers in developing countries – the people who harvest, process, package, transport and market our food. Future food systems also need to be inclusive and encourage the full participation of Indigenous Peoples, women and youth, both individually and through their organizations. Future generations will only thrive as productive actors and leading forces in food systems if decisive action is taken to ensure that children are no longer deprived of their right to nutrition.

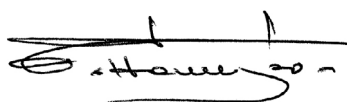
While this broader food systems transformation is currently at the centre of global attention, this report identifies the transformation

pathways needed to specifically address the key drivers behind the recent rise in hunger and slowing progress towards reducing all forms of malnutrition. The report recognizes that these transformation pathways are only feasible if they help meet certain conditions, including creating opportunities for traditionally marginalized people, nurturing human health and protecting the environment. Getting on track towards ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition will require a move away from silo solutions towards integrated food systems solutions, as well as policies and investments that address the global food security and nutrition challenges immediately.

This year offers a unique opportunity for advancing food security and nutrition through transforming food systems with the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit, the Nutrition for Growth Summit and the COP26 on climate change. The outcomes of these events will certainly shape the actions of the second half of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition. We stand firmly committed to take advantage of the unprecedented opportunity for these events to generate commitments towards transforming food systems to eradicate food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms and deliver affordable healthy diets for all, and to build forward better from the COVID-19 pandemic.



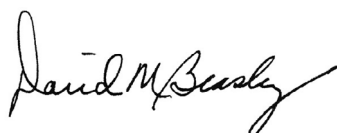
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METHODOLOGY

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021 has been prepared by the FAO Agrifood Economics Division in collaboration with the Statistics Division of the Economic and Social Development Stream and a team of technical experts from FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO.

A senior advisory team consisting of designated senior managers of the five UN publishing partners guided the production of the report. Led by FAO, this team decided on the outline of the report and defined its thematic focus. It further gave oversight to the technical writing team composed of experts from each of the five co-publishing agencies. Background technical papers were prepared to support the research and data analysis undertaken by the members of the writing team. This year's report also included a global call for *"best practices in transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets and addressing key drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition"*, which generated inputs from more than 80 development institutions and individuals worldwide. Further inputs were derived from an online webinar organized through the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum), which included an expert panel discussion and reflection on the report's theme.

The writing team produced a number of interim outputs, including an annotated outline, first draft and final draft of the report. These were reviewed, validated and cleared by the senior advisory team at each stage in the preparation process. The final report underwent a rigorous technical review by senior management and technical experts from different divisions and departments within each of the five UN agencies, both at headquarters and decentralized offices. Finally, the report underwent executive review and clearance by the heads of agency of the five co-publishing partners.

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