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# World Food Assistance 2018

## Preventing Food Crises

May 2018



Beneficiaries of the Resilience and Climate Change Programme in El Salvador purchase food at the local supermarket with e-vouchers.  
WFP/Rein Skullerud







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# Foreword

In just the past few years, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of people around the world who are trapped in food crises. Conflict, climate-related disasters and overall instability and insecurity are the main factors for why 124 million people in 51 countries were in food crisis in 2017, up from 108 million in 48 countries in 2016.

This report builds on datasets and analytical approaches that were first introduced in World Food Assistance 2017: Taking Stock and Looking Ahead. This year's report quantifies how short-term events and long-term factors influence the outbreak and intensity of food crises. Examining these phenomena through the lens of WFP's food assistance expenditures sheds unique insight into both drivers and deterrents of food crises.

We can and should do better in how we plan for the short-term natural disasters and other shocks that always happen. But that's just in the short term. In the long-term, we need to have a broader, deeper strategic plan that would help enhance the economies of communities, regions and countries that are susceptible to food crises. If we do this right, we might spend more money up front, but we'll be far more effective in the long run by making these areas more resilient. And if they are more resilient, they will be more stable and peaceful.

The message of World Food Assistance 2018 is clear: we can stem the tide of food crises – stopping them in many cases, and preventing them from expanding and persisting in others. The impact of effective prevention would be dramatic, not just in terms of the money we save, but the lives we change. We must remain committed to working with partners around the globe, from national authorities to the international community, to improve and enhance our work. If we do, then the dream of Zero Hunger can become a reality.

David Beasley  
Executive Director  
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Children enjoy high-energy biscuits distributed as part of the WFP school feeding programme in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

WFP/Shehzad Noorani

# Summary

Chronic hunger is increasing, and food crises are spreading and intensifying across the world. *World Food Assistance 2018: Preventing Food Crises (WoFA 2018)* focuses on these crises, and asks what causes them to break out, what determines their scale and how they might be prevented.

Existing knowledge suggests that food crises are driven by combinations of short-term events such as conflicts and natural disasters and long-term influencers of poverty and food insecurity. Hence the prevention of food crises entails short-term action and long-term investment. But precisely which actions and investments should be prioritized in different contexts, and why, are still not clear.

WoFA 2018 seeks to reduce this knowledge gap through ground-breaking analysis of linkages between food assistance expenditures by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and a range of other factors. Food assistance is uniquely positioned at the intersection of short-term humanitarian action and long-term hunger reduction. Food assistance expenditures thus constitute a powerful lens through which the drivers and deterrents of outbreak and intensity of food crises can be examined. The vision of the report is that increased understanding of the drivers of food assistance will lead to greater comprehension of the causes of food crises. This should in turn expand scope to prevent them.

A dataset covering 152 countries between 2009 and 2015 is analysed in two stages. In the first stage the probability of a food crisis in all 152 countries is examined; the presence of WFP food assistance is taken as an indicator of a food crisis. The aim is to identify factors influencing the probability that a country will need WFP food assistance, which in turn sheds light on causes of food crisis outbreaks. The second stage focuses on the scale of food crises. Only the 77 countries receiving food assistance from WFP are included, and the aim is to identify the factors that influence the level of food assistance expenditures and hence show what determines the scale of the underlying food crisis.

The results indicate that the likelihood of a food crisis outbreak increases in accordance with the share of a population affected by natural disasters, displacement and/or chronic hunger. The likelihood of outbreaks decreases with greater availability of food, better food absorption capacity and better access to markets and services.

The scale of a food crisis increases in line with the share of population affected by natural disasters and displacement and by lower food absorption capacity. The higher the income, the greater the level of education and the greater the political stability the smaller the scale of food crises. The size of a country does not affect the outbreak or scale of a food crisis.

Political instability, displacement, poor education and sparse infrastructure emerge as especially potent drivers of food assistance expenditures, and hence also of the food crises reflected in these expenditures. Exposure to natural disasters and food system congestion lead to greater than proportionate increases on food assistance expenditures. Lower income increases food assistance expenditures but less than proportionately.

The findings suggest that improved management of natural and man-made shocks in the short-term, and greater investments in political, social and economic underpinnings of societies in the longer term can reduce risks of food crises and lower food assistance expenditures significantly. For instance, such investments could have reduced WFP's global food assistance expenditures in 2016 by US\$ 5.1 billion. This would have been equivalent to almost 96 percent of the US\$ 5.3 billion WFP actually spent that year.

There are similarities and differences in priorities for preventing outbreaks of food crises and for containing them. Each component of the prevention agenda requires short-term and long-term action and investment to address the effects of identified risk factors. Priorities for preventing outbreaks of food crises and for containing them are inherently country-specific, but regional patterns are apparent. Priorities also vary across income groups.

A core argument in WoFA 2018 is that international food assistance signals the existence of food crises. The analysis shows that these crises are linked to myriad performance gaps in national food sectors, economies and political and social systems. The analysis also shows that international food assistance reveals challenges and opportunities at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. The greater the level of international food assistance, the greater the challenges and opportunities at the nexus. The identified priorities for action and investment to prevent food crises can therefore justifiably be interpreted as priorities to generate and seize major dividends at the nexus.





## Hunger, Food Crises and Food Assistance

Globally, 124 million people are caught up in food crises that condemn them to acute hunger and food insecurity (FSIN, 2018). Food crises are far more common among populations suffering from prolonged hunger and malnutrition (Timmer, 2010). About 11 percent of the world's population – 815 million people – are chronically hungry. In 2016 this number increased for the first time in a decade from 775 million in 2015 (FAO, IFAD and WFP, 2017). Risks of further food crises are therefore high and increasing.

World Food Assistance 2018: Preventing Food Crises (WoFA 2018) seeks to build an understanding of the factors that cause food crises to break out, persist and expand. Most important, WoFA 2018 seeks to identify how food crises can be prevented.

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