Acute food insecurity global estimates in 2018

More than 113 million people across 53 countries experienced acute hunger requiring urgent food, nutrition and livelihoods assistance (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above).

The worst food crises in 2018 were, in order of severity, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan, South Sudan and northern Nigeria. These eight countries accounted for two thirds of the total number of people facing acute food insecurity - amounting to nearly 72 million people.

Countries in Africa remained disproportionally affected by acute food insecurity

The figure of 113 million people represents a slight improvement over the number for 2017 presented in last year’s report, in which an estimated 124 million people in 51 countries faced acute hunger.

Despite the slight decrease, over the past three years, the report has consistently shown that, year on year, more than 100 million people (2016, 2017 and 2018) have faced periods of acute hunger.

The modest decrease between 2017 and 2018 is largely attributed to changes in climate shocks. A number of highly exposed countries did not experience the intensity of climate-related shocks and stressors that they had experienced in 2017 when they variously faced severe drought, flooding, rains, and temperature rises brought on by the El Niño of 2015-16. This includes countries in southern and eastern Africa, the Horn of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Asia-Pacific region.

An additional 143 million people in a subset of 42 countries were found to be living in Stressed conditions (IPC Phase 2). At the cusp of acute hunger, they risked slipping into Crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) if faced with a shock or stressor.

High levels of acute and chronic malnutrition in children living in emergency conditions remained of grave concern. The immediate drivers of undernutrition include poor dietary intake and disease. Mothers and caregivers often face challenges in providing children with the key micronutrients they need at critical growth periods in food crises. This is reflected in the dismally low number of children consuming a minimum acceptable diet in most of the countries profiled in this report.

Primary drivers

Conflict and insecurity, climate shocks and economic turbulence – the main drivers of food insecurity – continued to erode livelihoods and destroy lives.

Conflict and insecurity remained the key driver in 2018. Some 74 million people – two-thirds – of those facing acute hunger were located in 21 countries and territories affected by conflict or insecurity. Around 33 million of these people were in 10 countries in Africa; over 27 million in seven countries in Western Asia/Middle East; 13 million in three countries in South/South-east Asia and 1.1 million in Eastern Europe.

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1 This report complements the evidence reported by SOFI 2018 - The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, which identifies 821 million people undernourished. While the SOFI estimate provides the scale of chronic food insecurity worldwide, this Global Report on Food Crises focuses specifically on the most severe manifestations of acute food insecurity in the world’s most pressing food crises.
Climate and natural disasters pushed another 29 million people into situations of acute food insecurity in 2018. As in previous years, most of these individuals were in Africa, where nearly 23 million people in 20 countries were acutely food insecure due to climate shocks.

Economic shocks were the primary driver of acute food insecurity for 10.2 million people, mainly in Burundi, the Sudan and Zimbabwe.

Food insecurity: Short-term outlook for 2019

Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan, South Sudan and northern Nigeria are expected to remain among the world’s most severe food crises. Large segments of populations in most of these countries risk falling into Emergency (IPC/CH Phase 4) levels of acute food insecurity.

Climate shocks and conflict will continue driving food insecurity and are expected once again to severely affect several regions. Dry weather in parts of Southern Africa and drought in Central America’s Dry Corridor has dampened prospects for agricultural output. El Niño conditions are likely to have an impact on agricultural production and food prices in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The needs of refugees and migrants in host countries are expected to remain significant in Bangladesh and the Syria regional crisis. The number of people who are displaced, refugees and migrants are expected to increase if the political and economic crisis persists in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

The way forward

Ending conflicts, empowering women, nourishing and educating children, improving rural infrastructure and reinforcing social safety-nets are essential for a resilient, stable and hunger-free world.

Investments in conflict prevention and sustaining peace will save lives and livelihoods, reduce structural vulnerabilities and address the root causes of hunger.

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