

# Media Update

13 July 2021

## United Nations

PRESS RELEASE

### UN report: Pandemic year marked by spike in world hunger

*Africa posting biggest jump. World at critical juncture, must act now for 2030 turnaround.*

**12 July 2021, Rome** – There was a dramatic worsening of world hunger in 2020, the United Nations said today – much of it likely related to the fallout of COVID-19. While the pandemic’s impact has yet to be fully mapped<sup>1</sup>, a multi-agency report estimates that around a tenth of the global population – up to 811 million people – were undernourished last year. The number suggests it will take a tremendous effort for the world to honour its pledge to end hunger by 2030.

This year’s edition of [\*The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World\*](#) is the first global assessment of its kind in the pandemic era. The report is jointly published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Previous editions had already put the world on notice that the food security of millions – many children among them – was at stake. “Unfortunately, the pandemic continues to expose weaknesses in our food systems, which

<sup>1</sup> To reflect the added uncertainty induced by the pandemic, this year’s edition for the first time presents a range (720 million to 811 million) rather than a single headline number. For regional breakdowns, the number of 768 million – the mid-range estimate – is used. Whether the lower, middle or upper value of the range is considered, the annual increase over 2019’s mid-range number of 650 million is substantial. At the higher end, this increase is a massive 161 million. (The entire historical series is revised annually in line with new data.)

threaten the lives and livelihoods of people around the world,” the heads of the five UN agencies<sup>2</sup> write in this year’s Foreword.

They go on to warn of a “critical juncture,” even as they pin fresh hopes on increased diplomatic momentum. “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 outcome of these events,” the five add, “will go on to shape the [...] second half of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition” – a global policy commitment yet to hit its stride.

### ***The numbers in detail***

Already in the mid-2010s, hunger had started creeping upwards, dashing hopes of irreversible decline. Disturbingly, in 2020 hunger shot up in both absolute and proportional terms, outpacing population growth: some 9.9 percent of all people are estimated to have been undernourished last year, up from 8.4 percent in 2019.

More than half of all undernourished people (418 million) live in Asia; more than a third (282 million) in Africa; and a smaller proportion (60 million) in Latin America and the Caribbean. But the sharpest rise in hunger was in Africa, where the estimated prevalence of undernourishment – at 21 percent of the population – is more than double that of any other region.

On other measurements too, the year 2020 was sombre. Overall, more than 2.3 billion people (or 30 percent of the global population) lacked year-round access to adequate food: this indicator – known as the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity – leapt in one year as much in as the preceding five combined. Gender inequality deepened: for every 10 food-insecure men, there were 11 food-insecure women in 2020 (up from 10.6 in 2019).

Malnutrition persisted in all its forms, with children paying a high price: in 2020, over 149 million under-fives are estimated to have been stunted, or too short for their age; more than 45 million – wasted, or too thin for their height; and nearly 39 million – overweight.<sup>3</sup> A full three-billion adults and children

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<sup>2</sup> For FAO – Qu Dongyu, Director-General; for IFAD – Gilbert F. Houngbo, President; for UNICEF – Henrietta H. Fore, Executive Director; for WFP – David Beasley, Executive Director; for WHO – Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General.

<sup>3</sup> Social distancing rules made nutrition data exceptionally hard to collect in 2020. Some numbers – especially for wasting in under-fives – may be higher than these estimates.

remained locked out of healthy diets, largely due to excessive costs. Nearly a third of women of reproductive age suffer from anaemia. Globally, despite progress in some areas – more infants, for example, are being fed exclusively on breast milk – the world is not on track to achieve targets for any nutrition indicators by 2030.

### ***Other hunger and malnutrition drivers***

In many parts of the world, the pandemic has triggered brutal recessions and jeopardized access to food. Yet even before the pandemic, hunger was spreading; progress on malnutrition lagged. This was all the more so in nations affected by conflict, climate extremes or other economic downturns, or battling high inequality – all of which the report identifies as major drivers of food insecurity, which in turn interact.<sup>4</sup>

On current trends, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* estimates that Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger by 2030) will be missed by a margin of nearly 660 million people. Of these 660 million, some 30 million may be linked to the pandemic's lasting effects.

### ***What can (still) be done***

As outlined in last year's report, transforming food systems is essential to achieve food security, improve nutrition and put healthy diets within reach of all. This year's edition goes further to outline six "transformation pathways". These, the authors say, rely on a "coherent set of policy and investment portfolios" to counteract the hunger and malnutrition drivers. Depending on the particular driver (or combination of drivers) confronting each country, the report urges policymakers to:

- Integrate humanitarian, development and peacebuilding policies in conflict areas – for example, through social protection measures to prevent families from selling meagre assets in exchange for food;
- Scale up climate resilience across food systems – for example, by offering smallholder farmers wide access to climate risk insurance and forecast-based financing;

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<sup>4</sup> The more drivers a country has, the worse the undernourishment and malnutrition, the greater the food insecurity, and the more prohibitive the cost of healthy diets to its citizens.

- Strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable to economic adversity – for example, through in-kind or cash support programmes to lessen the impact of pandemic-style shocks or food price volatility;
- Intervene along supply chains to lower the cost of nutritious foods – for example, by encouraging the planting of biofortified crops or making it easier for fruit and vegetable growers to access markets;
- Tackle poverty and structural inequalities – for example, by boosting food value chains in poor communities through technology transfers and certification programmes;
- Strengthen food environments and changing consumer behaviour – for example, by eliminating industrial trans fats and reducing the salt and sugar content in the food supply, or protecting children from the negative impact of food marketing.

The report also calls for an “enabling environment of governance mechanisms and institutions” to make transformation possible. It enjoins policymakers to consult widely; to empower women and youth; and to expand the availability of data and new technologies. Above all, the authors urge, the world must act *now* – or watch the drivers of hunger and malnutrition recur with growing intensity in coming years, long after the shock of the pandemic has passed.

**Read the full report [here](#) and the In-Brief report [here](#)  
Download the full report [here](#)**

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## GLOSSARY

**Hunger:** an uncomfortable or painful sensation caused by insufficient energy from diet. Food deprivation; not eating enough calories. Used here interchangeably with (chronic) undernourishment. Measured by the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU).

**Moderate food insecurity:** a state of uncertainty about the ability to get food; a risk of skipping meals or seeing food run out; being forced to compromise on the nutritional quality and/or quantity of food consumed.

**Severe food insecurity:** running out of food; experienced hunger; at the most extreme, having to go without food for a day or more.

**Malnutrition:** the condition associated with deficiencies, excesses or imbalances in the consumption of macro- and/or micronutrients. For example, **undernutrition** and **obesity** are both forms of malnutrition. Child **stunting** or **wasting** are both indicators for undernutrition.

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## UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank-OECD JOINT PRESS RELEASE

### 1 in 3 countries are not taking action to help students catch up on their learning post-COVID-19 school closures

*A new UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and OECD report documents education responses to COVID-19 in 142 countries*

**Paris/New York/Washington D.C., 13 July 2021** – Around one in three countries where schools are or have been closed are not yet implementing remedial programmes post-COVID-19 school closures, according to a UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and OECD global "Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures". At the same time, only one-third of countries are taking steps to measure learning losses in primary and lower secondary levels – mostly among high-income countries.

*"Measuring learning loss is a critical first step towards mitigating its consequences. It is vital that countries invest in assessing the magnitude of such losses to implement the appropriate remedial measures,"* said Silvia Montoya, Director, UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

Fewer than a third of low- and middle-income countries reported that all students had returned to in-person schooling, heightening their risk of learning loss and drop-out. However, the majority of countries reported using at least one form of outreach to encourage students' return to school, including community engagement, school-based tracking, modification to water, sanitation and hygiene services, financial incentives and review of access policies.

*"Remedial instruction is vital to help those children who have missed out on school to get back on track and reduce long-term learning losses. This requires an urgent effort to measure students' learning levels today and collect good quality data to inform classroom practices, as envisioned under the UNICEF, UNESCO, and World Bank's Learning Data Compact,"* stressed Jaime Saavedra, Global Director for Education, World Bank.

The survey documents how countries are monitoring and mitigating learning losses, addressing the challenge of reopening schools and deploying distance learning strategies. In total, 142 countries responded to the survey that covers the period from February to May 2021 and spans pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary.

*"Remote learning has been a lifeline for many children around the world during school closures. But for the most vulnerable, even this was out of reach. It is urgent that we get every child back into the classroom now. But we cannot stop there; reopening better means implementing remedial programmes to help students get back on track, and ensuring that we prioritize girls and vulnerable children in all our efforts,"* said UNICEF Global Chief of Education Robert Jenkins.

Key findings from the survey include:

- Countries have responded with a variety of measures to mitigate potential learning losses from **school closures**: around 40 per cent of countries extended the academic year and a similar proportion of countries prioritized certain curriculum areas. However, more than half of the countries reported that no adjustments have been or will be made.
- Many countries improved health and safety standards at examination centres, still, 28 per cent of countries **cancelled examinations** in lower secondary and 18 per cent of countries did so in upper secondary education.

- Reviewing or **revising access policies** was uncommon, especially for girls – a cause for concern as adolescent girls are at the highest risk of not returning to school in low- and lower-middle-income countries.
- Low-income countries are lagging in the implementation of even the most basic measures to ensure a **return to school**. For instance, only less than 10 per cent reported having sufficient soap, clean water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and masks, compared to 96 per cent of high-income countries.

The survey also sheds light on the deployment and effectiveness of distance learning and related support more than one year into the pandemic. Results show that:

- Most countries took multiple actions to provide **remote learning**: Radio and TV broadcasts were more popular among low-income countries, while high-income countries provided online learning platforms. However, over a third of low- and lower-middle-income countries reported that less than half of primary school students were reached.
- Ensuring take-up and engagement requires **remote learning strategies** suited to the context, parental engagement, support from and to teachers, and ensuring girls and other marginalized children are not left behind. It also requires generating rigorous data on the effectiveness of remote learning. While 73 per cent of countries assessed the effectiveness of at least one distance learning strategy, there is still a need for better evidence on effectiveness in the most difficult contexts.

*"There is a critical need to produce more and better evidence on remote learning effectiveness, particularly in the most difficult contexts, and to support the development of digital learning policies,"* said Andreas Schleicher, Director, OECD Education and Skills.

In 2020, schools worldwide were fully closed across all four education levels for 79 teaching days on average, representing roughly 40 per cent of total instructional days averaged across OECD and G20 countries. The figures ranged from 53 days in high-income countries to 115 days in lower-middle-income countries.

Demand for funds is rising, in competition with other sectors, while governments' revenues are falling. Nevertheless, 49 per cent of countries

increased their education budget in 2020 relative to 2019, while 43 per cent maintained their budget constant. Funding is set to increase in 2021, as more than 60 per cent of countries plan to increase their education budget compared to 2020.

These findings reinforce the importance of reopening schools, remedial learning and more effective remote learning systems that can better withstand future crises and reach all students. Moreover, it shows that the measurement of learning losses due to COVID-19 related to school closures is a critical effort for most countries and development partners, highlighted by the recent partnership of UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank around the [Learning Data Compact](#).

The survey is in line with the [Mission: Recovering Education 2021](#) by which the World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF are partnering to support countries as they take all actions possible to plan, prioritize, and ensure that all learners are back in school; that schools take all measures to reopen safely; that students receive effective remedial learning and comprehensive services to help recover learning losses and improve overall welfare; and their teachers are prepared and supported to meet their learning needs.

The survey will be launched during the Ministerial segment of the Global Education Meeting on 13 July.

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*Notes to editors:*

This is the third Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures, in which the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and OECD sought information from Ministry of Education officials. The survey was conducted in collaboration with UNICEF, the World Bank and UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report, with financial support from the Global Partnership for Education.

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Link to report:

[http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/lessons\\_on\\_education\\_recovery.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/lessons_on_education_recovery.pdf)

Link to Ministerial Segment of Global Education Meeting:  
<https://webcast.unesco.org/events/2021-07-GEM-Ministerial/>

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## UNICEF PRESS RELEASE

### UNICEF signs supply agreement for Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine

**NEW YORK/COPENHAGEN, 13 July 2021** - UNICEF and Sinopharm have signed a long-term agreement for the supply of the BBIBP-CorV inactivated virus vaccine against COVID-19 on behalf of the COVAX Facility. Through the agreement, UNICEF will have access to up to 120 million doses of the vaccine by the end of 2021 to supply participating countries and territories in the COVAX Facility's Advance Market Commitment (AMC), as well as self-financing participants.

This is the 7th supply agreement UNICEF has signed for COVID-19 vaccines on behalf of COVAX. Previous agreements have been announced with the Serum Institute of India, Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Human Vaccine, Moderna and Janssen Pharmaceutica NV.

The Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine received a WHO Emergency Use Listing (EUL) in May. On 12 July, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance announced that it had signed an Advance Purchase Agreement with Sinopharm on behalf of the COVAX Facility for the purchase of up to 60 million doses to be made

available from July through October 2021. The agreement also includes an option to purchase a further 60 million doses in Q4 2021 and 50 million more doses in the first half of 2022, if necessary. This totals a potential 170 million doses of the Sinopharm vaccine available to COVAX participants.

Deliveries could start as early as August providing countries are ready to receive them. The COVAX Allocation Framework will determine the dose allocations to COVAX participants taking into consideration access, country readiness, vaccine supply through COVAX to date, operating and supply aspects, and other parameters.

The goal of the COVAX Facility is to help address the acute phase of the global pandemic by the end of 2021 by providing rapid, fair and equitable access to safe and effective vaccines for all participating countries and territories regardless of income level.

The COVAX Facility, co-led by Gavi, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and WHO, together with UNICEF, aims to provide access to quality-assured COVID-19 vaccines, enabling the protection of frontline health care and social workers, as well as other high-risk and vulnerable groups.

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*Notes for editors:*

Multimedia materials available [here](#).

## About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone. For more information about UNICEF and its work for children, visit [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org). For more information about COVID-19, visit [www.unicef.org/coronavirus](http://www.unicef.org/coronavirus). Find out more about UNICEF's work on the COVID-19 vaccines [here](#), or about UNICEF's work on immunization [here](#).

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## About the COVAX Facility

COVAX is the vaccines pillar of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, a ground-breaking global collaboration to accelerate the development, production, and equitable access to COVID-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines. COVAX is co-led by Gavi, the Coalition for

Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and WHO. Its aim is to accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines, and to guarantee fair and equitable access for every country in the world. [www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax](http://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax). UNICEF, in collaboration with the [PAHO Revolving Fund](#), is [leading efforts](#) to procure and supply doses of COVID-19 vaccines on behalf of the COVAX Facility

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