



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



International Fund for
Agricultural Development



World Food
Programme



World Health
Organization

2019

IN BRIEF

THE STATE OF
**FOOD SECURITY
AND NUTRITION
IN THE WORLD**

**SAFEGUARDING AGAINST
ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS
AND DOWNTURNS**

CONTENTS

This booklet contains the key messages and content from the publication

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019.

The numbering of the tables and figures corresponds to that publication.

KEY MESSAGES

FOREWORD

PART 1 FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION AROUND THE WORLD IN 2019

1.1 Recent trends in hunger and food insecurity

- ▶ **BOX 1** Two indicators for SDG Target 2.1 to monitor progress on ending hunger and ensuring access to food for all
- ▶ **FIGURE 1** The number of undernourished people in the world has been on the rise since 2015, and is back to levels seen in 2010–2011
- ▶ **TABLE 1** Prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) in the world, 2005–2018
- ▶ **FIGURE 10** Over the past five years (2014–2018), total levels of food insecurity have been on the rise at the global level, mainly due to increases in Africa and Latin America

1.2 Progress towards global nutrition targets

- ▶ **FIGURE 15** Progress on malnutrition is too slow to achieve the 2025 and 2030 global nutrition targets

1.3 Towards an integrated understanding of food security and nutrition for health and well-being

1.4 Conclusions

4	PART 2	
6	SUSTAINED ESCAPES FROM FOOD INSECURITY AND MALNUTRITION IN THE FACE OF ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS	18
9	2.1 Economic slowdowns and downturns and their impact on food security and nutrition	18
9	▶ BOX 9 What are economic slowdowns and downturns?	19
10	▶ FIGURE 22 Real GDP per capita growth has been uneven since the 2008–2009 sharp global downturn	20
10	▶ FIGURE 24 PoU increasing change points associated with the occurrence of economic slowdowns and downturns	21
12	▶ TABLE 8 Economic shocks were significant secondary and tertiary drivers of food crises in 2018	22
13	2.2 Commodity dependence and its relevance for food security and nutrition	23
14	▶ FIGURE 27 Many low- and middle-income countries are high commodity-dependent countries	24
15	▶ FIGURE 29 Potential negative impacts of international commodity price reductions on food security and nutrition in commodity-dependent economies: transmission channels	25
16	2.3 Nexus between economic growth, poverty, and food security and nutrition: the role of inequality	27
17	▶ FIGURE 37 Inequality in the distribution of agricultural land is high in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa	29
17	2.4 Policies for achieving sustainable escapes from food insecurity and malnutrition in the context of economic slowdowns and downturns	29
	2.5 Conclusions	30

KEY MESSAGES

→ After decades of steady decline, the trend in world hunger – as measured by the prevalence of undernourishment – reverted in 2015, remaining virtually unchanged in the past three years at a level slightly below 11 percent. Meanwhile, the number of people who suffer from hunger has slowly increased. As a result, more than 820 million people in the world were still hungry in 2018, underscoring the immense challenge of achieving the Zero Hunger target by 2030.

→ Hunger is on the rise in almost all African subregions, making Africa the region with the highest prevalence of undernourishment, at almost 20 percent. Hunger is also slowly rising in Latin America and the Caribbean, although its prevalence is still below 7 percent. In Asia, Western Asia shows a continuous increase since 2010, with more than 12 percent of its population undernourished today.

→ This year's report introduces a second indicator for monitoring SDG Target 2.1: the Prevalence of Moderate or Severe Food Insecurity based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES). While severe food insecurity is associated with the concept of hunger, people experiencing moderate food insecurity face uncertainties about their ability to obtain food, and have been forced to compromise on the quality and/or quantity of the food they consume.

→ Considering all people in the world affected by moderate levels of food insecurity together with those who suffer from hunger, it is estimated that over 2 billion people do not have regular access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food, including 8 percent of the population in Northern America and Europe.

→ One in seven newborns, or 20.5 million babies globally, suffered from low birthweight in 2015; no progress has been made in reducing low birthweight since 2012. The number of children under five years in the world affected by stunting, by contrast, has decreased by 10 percent in the past six years. However, with 149 million children still stunted, the pace of progress is too slow to meet the 2030 target of halving the number of stunted children.

→ Overweight and obesity continue to increase in all regions, particularly among school-age children and adults. In 2018, an estimated 40 million children under five were overweight. In 2016, 131 million children 5–9 years old, 207 million adolescents and 2 billion adults were overweight. About a third of overweight adolescents and adults, and 44 percent of overweight children aged 5–9 were obese. The economic costs of malnutrition are staggering.

→ Analysis of household and individual level data from selected countries across all regions shows that

food insecurity plays an important role as a determinant of many different forms of malnutrition. In upper-middle- and high-income countries in particular, living in a food-insecure household is a predictor of obesity in school-age children, adolescents, and adults.

→ Previous editions of this report show how conflict and climate variability and extremes are exacerbating the above trends. This year the report shows that the uneven pace of economic recovery and continuing poor economic performance in many countries after the 2008–2009 global economic downturn are also undermining efforts to end hunger and malnutrition. Episodes of financial stress, elevated trade tensions and tightening financial conditions are contributing to uncertain global economic prospects.

→ Hunger has increased in many countries where the economy has slowed down or contracted, mostly in middle-income countries. Furthermore, economic shocks are contributing to prolonging and worsening the severity of food crises caused primarily by conflict and climate shocks.

→ Out of 65 countries where recent adverse impacts of economic slowdowns and downturns on food security and nutrition have been strongest, 52 countries rely heavily on primary commodity exports and/or imports.

→ Economic slowdowns or downturns disproportionately undermine food security and nutrition where inequalities are greater. Income inequality increases the likelihood of severe food insecurity, and this effect is 20 percent higher for low-income countries compared with middle-income countries. Income and wealth inequalities are also closely associated with undernutrition, while more complex inequality patterns are associated with obesity.

→ To safeguard food security and nutrition, it is critical to already have in place economic and social policies to counteract the effects of adverse economic cycles when they arrive, while avoiding cuts in essential services, such as health care and education, at all costs. In the longer term, however, this will only be possible through fostering pro-poor and inclusive structural transformation, particularly in countries that rely heavily on trade in primary commodities.

→ To ensure that structural transformation is pro-poor and inclusive requires integrating food security and nutrition concerns into poverty reduction efforts, while ensuring that reducing gender inequalities and social exclusion of population groups is either the means to, or outcome of, improved food security and nutrition.

FOREWORD


The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development puts forward a transformational vision recognizing that our world is changing, bringing with it new challenges that must be overcome if we are to live in a world without hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in any of its forms.

The world population has grown steadily, with most people now living in urban areas. Technology has evolved at a dizzying pace, while the economy has become increasingly interconnected and globalized. Many countries, however, have not witnessed sustained growth as part of this new economy. The world economy as a whole is not growing as much as expected. Conflict and instability have increased and become more intractable, spurring greater population displacement. Climate change and increasing climate variability and extremes are affecting agricultural productivity, food production and natural resources, with impacts on food systems and rural livelihoods, including a decline in the number of farmers. All of this has led to major shifts in the way in which food is produced, distributed and consumed worldwide – and to new food security, nutrition and health challenges.

This is the third year that we have jointly produced *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*. It reaffirms our commitment to working together to overcome these emerging challenges and free the world from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.

Recent editions of the report showed that the decline in hunger the world had enjoyed for over a decade was at an end, and that hunger was again on the rise. This year, the report shows that the global level of the prevalence of undernourishment has stabilized; however, the absolute number of undernourished people continues to increase, albeit slowly.

More than 820 million people in the world are still hungry today, underscoring the immense challenge of achieving the Zero Hunger target by 2030. Hunger is rising in almost all subregions of Africa and, to a lesser extent, in Latin America and Western Asia. We welcome the great progress seen in Southern Asia in the last five years, but the prevalence of undernourishment in this subregion is still the highest in Asia.



Another disturbing fact is that about 2 billion people in the world experience moderate or severe food insecurity. The lack of regular access to nutritious and sufficient food that these people experience puts them at greater risk of malnutrition and poor health. Although primarily concentrated in low- and middle-income countries, moderate or severe food insecurity also affects 8 percent of the population in Northern America and Europe. In every continent, the prevalence rate is slightly higher among women than men.

With regard to nutrition indicators, we are faring no better. If current trends continue, we will meet neither the 2030 SDG target to halve the number of stunted children nor the 2025 World Health Assembly target to reduce the prevalence of low birthweight by 30 percent. This year's report warns that one in seven live births (20.5 million babies born globally) was characterized by low birthweight in 2015 – many of these low birthweight babies were born to adolescent mothers. The trends of overweight and obesity give us additional reason for concern, as they continue to rise in all regions, particularly among school-age children and adults. The most recent data show that obesity is contributing to 4 million deaths globally and is increasing the risk of morbidity for people in all age groups.

Our actions to tackle these troubling trends will have to be bolder, not only in scale but also in terms of multisectoral collaboration, involving the agriculture, food, health, water and sanitation, education, and other relevant sectors; and in different policy domains, including social protection, development planning and economic policy.

As we seek solutions, we must keep in mind the fragile state of the world economy. Since the sharp 2008–2009 global economic downturn, there has been an uneven pace of recovery in many countries, and the global economic outlook is darkening again.

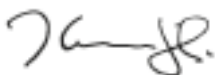
This year, importantly, the report notes that hunger has been increasing in many countries where economic growth is lagging. Strikingly, the majority of these countries are not low-income countries, but middle-income countries and countries that rely heavily on international trade of primary commodities. Economic shocks are also

prolonging and worsening the severity of acute food insecurity in food crisis contexts. Left unattended, these trends may have very unwelcome implications for malnutrition in all its forms. Moreover, we see that economic slowdowns and downturns disproportionately challenge food security and nutrition where inequalities in the distribution of income and other resources are profound.

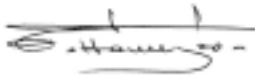
We must recognize the importance of safeguarding food security and nutrition in times of economic difficulty. We must invest wisely during periods of economic booms to reduce economic vulnerability and build capacity to withstand and quickly recover when economic turmoil erupts. We must foster pro-poor and inclusive structural transformation focusing on people and placing communities at the centre to reduce economic vulnerabilities and set ourselves on track to ending hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition while “leaving no one behind”.

To make our transformational vision pro-poor and inclusive, we must integrate food security and nutrition concerns into poverty reduction efforts to make the most of the synergies between eradicating poverty, hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. We must also ensure that reducing gender inequalities and social exclusion of population groups is either the means to, or the outcome of, improved food security and nutrition.

This will require accelerated and aligned actions from all stakeholders and countries, including tireless and more integrated support from the United Nations and the international community to countries in support of their development priorities, through multilateral agreements and means of implementation, so that countries can embark on a pro-poor and inclusive path to transformation in a people-centred way to free the world from poverty, inequalities, hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms.



José Graziano da Silva
FAO Director-General



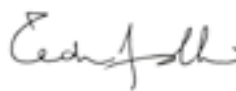
Gilbert F. Houngbo
IFAD President



Henrietta H. Fore
UNICEF Executive Director



David Beasley
WFP Executive Director



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
WHO Director-General

PART 1

FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION AROUND THE WORLD IN 2019

Part 1 of this year's report aims to bring new ways of thinking to bear on the latest trends in hunger, food insecurity, and various forms of malnutrition.

1.1 RECENT TRENDS IN HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY

KEY MESSAGES

→ In the past three years, the number of people who suffer from hunger has slowly increased, with more than 820 million people in the world still hungry today.

→ This recent trend is confirmed by estimates of severe food insecurity in the world based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), which is another way to monitor hunger.

→ Hunger is on the rise in almost all subregions of Africa, the region with the highest prevalence of undernourishment, at almost 20 percent. It is also rising slowly in Latin America and the Caribbean, although the prevalence there is still below 7 percent.

→ In Asia, where undernourishment affects 11 percent of the population, Southern Asia saw great progress in the last five years but is still the subregion with the highest prevalence of undernourishment, at almost 15 percent.

→ Estimates of SDG Indicator 2.1.2, which monitors progress towards the target of ensuring access to food for all, reveal that a total of about 2 billion people in the world experience some level of food insecurity, including

moderate. People who are moderately food insecure lack regular access to nutritious and sufficient food, putting them at greater risk of various forms of malnutrition and poor health.

Food insecurity is more than just hunger

The main indicator for monitoring progress on the eradication of hunger in the world reported in this report is the prevalence of undernourishment, or PoU (SDG Indicator 2.1.1). Beginning in 2017, the prevalence of severe food insecurity based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) was also included in the report as another, complementary indicator of hunger using a different approach.

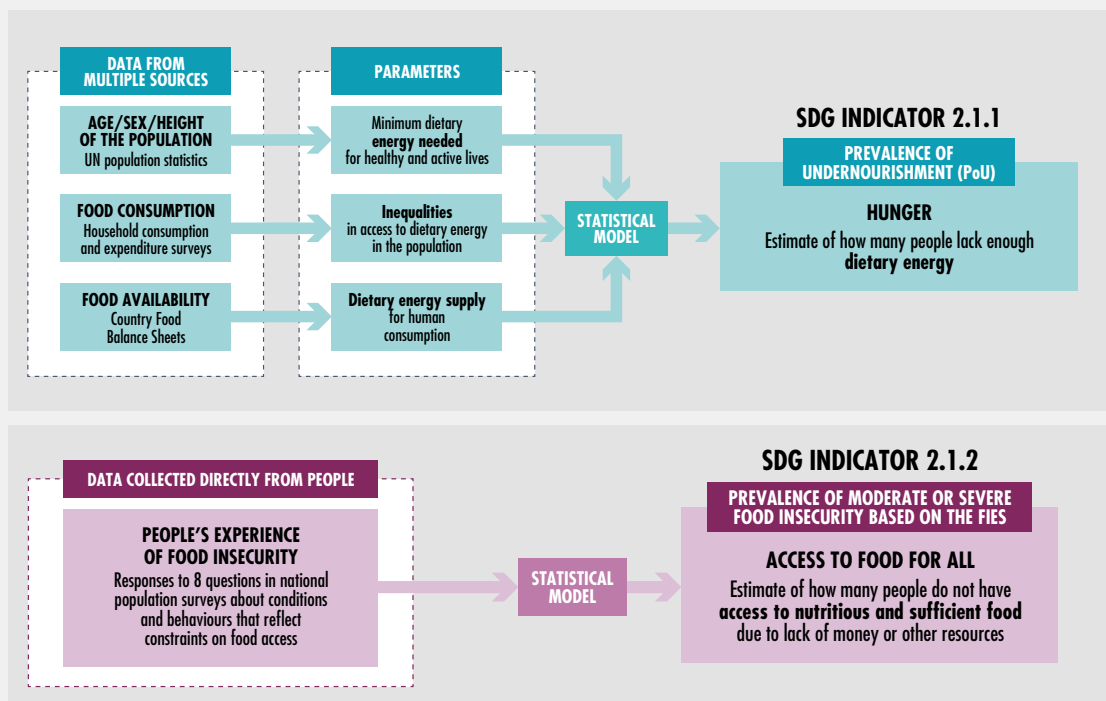
This year's report now takes a step forward by also reporting, for the first time, estimates of the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity based on the FIES (SDG Indicator 2.1.2). This indicator provides a perspective on global food insecurity relevant for all countries of the world: one that looks beyond hunger towards the goal of ensuring access to nutritious and sufficient food for all (Box 1). As estimates of SDG Indicator 2.1.2 refer to the total number of people suffering from food insecurity, including at moderate levels, it should come as no surprise that they correspond to a much higher number of people than those who suffer from hunger.

BOX 1
TWO INDICATORS FOR SDG TARGET 2.1 TO MONITOR PROGRESS ON ENDING HUNGER AND ENSURING ACCESS TO FOOD FOR ALL

The SDG framework endorsed by member countries of the UN Statistical Commission in March 2017 and adopted by the UN General Assembly on 6 July 2017¹ includes two indicators for monitoring SDG Target 2.1: the **prevalence of undernourishment – PoU** (SDG Indicator 2.1.1) and **prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale – FIES** (SDG Indicator 2.1.2). The PoU is FAO’s traditional indicator used to monitor hunger at the global and regional levels. The FIES was developed by FAO to complement the

information provided by the PoU and to provide a broader perspective on the food access dimension of food security. People experiencing moderate food insecurity face uncertainties about their ability to obtain food and have been forced to reduce, at times during the year, the quality and/or quantity of food they consume due to lack of money or other resources. It thus refers to a lack of consistent access to food, which diminishes dietary quality, disrupts normal eating patterns, and can have negative consequences for nutrition, health

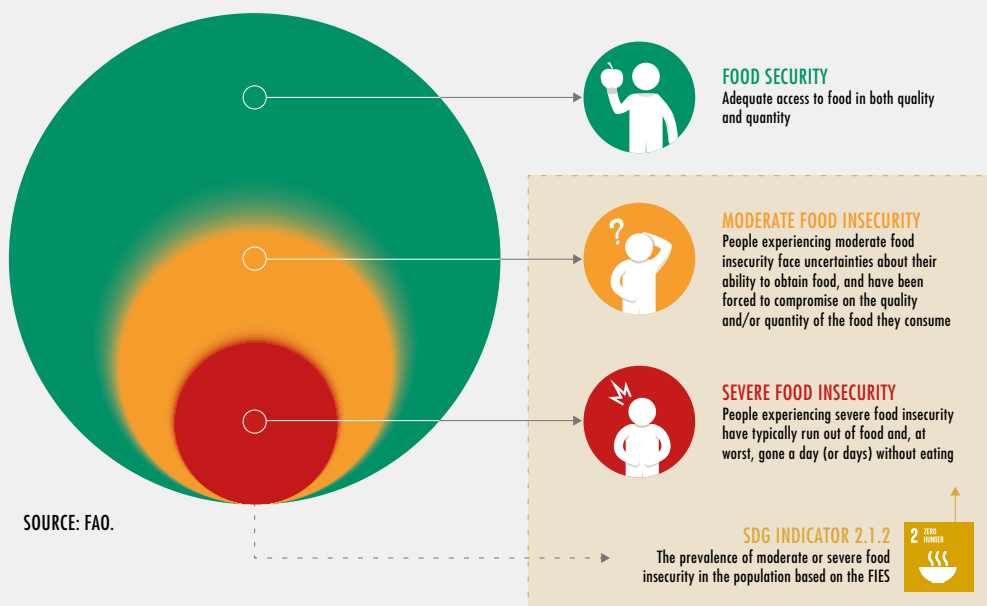
TWO INDICATORS FOR SDG TARGET 2.1 TO MONITOR PROGRESS ON ENDING HUNGER AND ENSURING ACCESS TO FOOD FOR ALL



and well-being. People facing severe food insecurity, on the other hand, have likely run out of food, experienced hunger and, at the most extreme, gone for days without eating, putting their health and well-being at grave risk. The figure below illustrates the meaning of food security, moderate food insecurity and severe food insecurity, with each category shown as a proportion of the total population. FI_{sev} can be considered a complementary indicator to the PoU in measuring the extent

of hunger. SDG Indicator 2.1.2 ($FI_{mod+sev}$) is the proportion of the total population represented by those who experience food insecurity at moderate or severe levels combined. This indicator is particularly relevant for countries where severe food deprivation may no longer be of concern, but where sizeable pockets of food insecurity still remain. In this sense, it is an indicator that is fully aligned with the universality principles of the 2030 Agenda.

EXPLANATION OF FOOD-INSECURITY SEVERITY LEVELS MEASURED BY THE FIES IN SDG INDICATOR 2.1.2



¹ UN. 2017. United Nations Statistical Commission – 48th Session (2017). In: UNSD - *United Nations Statistical Commission* [online]. New York, USA. [Cited 4 April 2019]. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/48th-session/>; and UN. 2017. *Indicator 2.1.2: Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)*. [Cited 4 April 2019] <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-02-01-02.pdf>

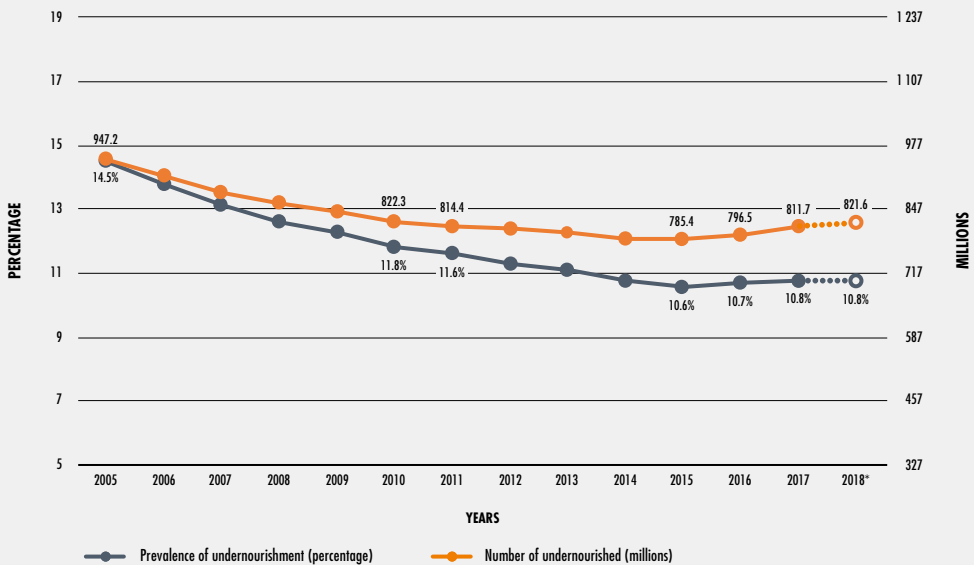
SDG Indicator 2.1.1 Prevalence of undernourishment (PoU)

The two most recent editions of *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* already offered evidence that the decades-long decline in the prevalence of undernourishment in the world had ended and that hunger was slowly on the rise. Additional evidence available this year confirms that the global level of the PoU has remained virtually unchanged at a level slightly below 11 percent, while the total number of undernourished (NoU) has

been slowly increasing for several years in a row. This means that today a little over 820 million people suffer from hunger, corresponding to about one in every nine people in the world (Figure 1, Table 1).

The situation is most alarming in Africa, where since 2015 the PoU shows slight but steady increases in almost all subregions. In Asia, the PoU has been steadily decreasing in most regions, reaching 11.4 percent in 2017. In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), rates

FIGURE 1
THE NUMBER OF UNDERNOURISHED PEOPLE IN THE WORLD HAS BEEN ON THE RISE SINCE 2015, AND IS BACK TO LEVELS SEEN IN 2010–2011



NOTES: * Values for 2018 are projections as illustrated by dotted lines and empty circles. The entire series was carefully revised to reflect new information made available since the publication of the last edition of the report; it replaces all series published previously.

SOURCE: FAO.

of undernourishment have increased in recent years, largely as a consequence of the situation in South America.

SDG Indicator 2.1.2 Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the FIES

The 2019 edition introduces estimates of the prevalence of food insecurity

combining moderate and severe levels to report on SDG Indicator 2.1.2 (Box 1). This second indicator thus refers to an expanded range of food-insecurity severity that encompasses moderate levels. This was in response to the need for indicators to monitor progress towards the very ambitious target of ensuring access to safe,

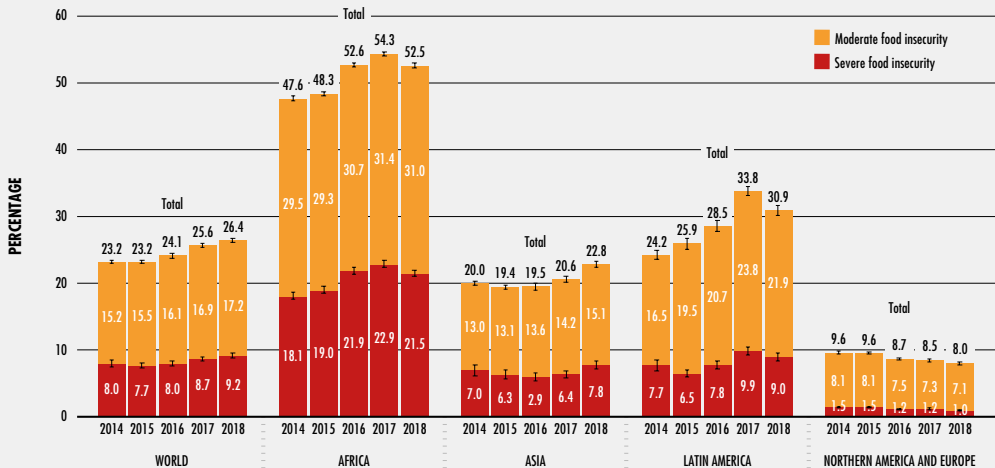
TABLE 1
PREVALENCE OF UNDERNOURISHMENT (PoU) IN THE WORLD, 2005–2018

	Prevalence of undernourishment (%)					
	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018*
WORLD	14.5	11.8	10.6	10.7	10.8	10.8
AFRICA	21.2	19.1	18.3	19.2	19.8	19.9
Northern Africa	6.2	5.0	6.9	7.0	7.0	7.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	24.3	21.7	20.9	22.0	22.7	22.8
Eastern Africa	34.3	31.2	29.9	31.0	30.8	30.8
Middle Africa	32.4	27.8	24.7	25.9	26.4	26.5
Southern Africa	6.5	7.1	7.8	8.5	8.3	8.0
Western Africa	12.3	10.4	11.4	12.4	14.4	14.7
ASIA	17.4	13.6	11.7	11.5	11.4	11.3
Central Asia	11.1	7.3	5.5	5.5	5.7	5.7
Eastern Asia	14.1	11.2	8.4	8.4	8.4	8.3
South-eastern Asia	18.5	12.7	9.8	9.6	9.4	9.2
Southern Asia	21.5	17.2	15.7	15.1	14.8	14.7
Western Asia	9.4	8.6	11.2	11.6	12.2	12.4
<i>Western Asia and Northern Africa</i>	<i>8.0</i>	<i>7.1</i>	<i>9.2</i>	<i>9.5</i>	<i>9.8</i>	<i>9.9</i>
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	9.1	6.8	6.2	6.3	6.5	6.5
Caribbean	23.3	19.8	18.3	18.0	18.0	18.4
Latin America	8.1	5.9	5.3	5.5	5.7	5.7
Central America	8.4	7.2	6.3	6.1	6.1	6.1
South America	7.9	5.3	4.9	5.3	5.5	5.5
OCEANIA	5.5	5.2	5.9	6.0	6.1	6.2
NORTHERN AMERICA AND EUROPE	< 2.5	< 2.5	< 2.5	< 2.5	< 2.5	< 2.5

NOTES: * Projected values.

SOURCE: FAO.

FIGURE 10
OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS (2014–2018), TOTAL LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY HAVE BEEN ON THE RISE AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL, MAINLY DUE TO INCREASES IN AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA



NOTES: Differences in total are due to rounding of figures to the nearest decimal point.
SOURCE: FAO.

nutritious and sufficient food by all people (SDG Target 2.1).

According to the latest estimates, 9.2 percent of the world population (or slightly more than 700 million people) were exposed to severe levels of food insecurity in 2018, implying reductions in the quantity of food consumed to the extent that they have possibly experienced hunger.

A broader look at the extent of food insecurity beyond severe levels and

hunger reveals that an additional 17.2 percent of the world population, or 1.3 billion people, have experienced food insecurity at moderate levels, meaning they did not have regular access to nutritious and sufficient food.

The combination of moderate and severe levels of food insecurity brings the estimated $FI_{mod+sev}$ (SDG Indicator 2.1.2) to 26.4 percent of the world population, amounting to a total of about 2 billion people.

1.2 PROGRESS TOWARDS GLOBAL NUTRITION TARGETS

KEY MESSAGES

→ Low birthweight estimates, included for the first time in this year's edition of the report following the release of new global estimates, indicate that one in seven live births was characterized by low birthweight in 2015.

→ Globally, the prevalence of stunting among children under five years is decreasing and the number of stunted children has also declined, but 149 million children are still stunted.

→ Globally, the prevalence of overweight and obesity is increasing in all regions, particularly among school-age children and adults. The increase of obesity between 2000 and 2016 has been even faster than that of overweight.

→ Malnutrition is linked across the life cycle, with undernutrition in foetal and early life contributing to both immediate and long-term health problems such as stunted physical growth, heart disease, diabetes and obesity.

Malnutrition exists in multiple forms. Maternal and child undernutrition contributes to 45 percent of deaths in children under five. Overweight and obesity are on the rise in almost all countries, contributing to 4 million deaths globally. The various forms of malnutrition are intertwined throughout the life cycle, with maternal undernutrition, low birthweight and child stunting giving rise to increased risk of overweight later in life.

This section assesses global and regional trends and patterns to track progress towards seven nutrition indicators used to monitor global World Health Assembly targets for nutrition (Figure 15).

Global and regional trends

Low birthweight estimates indicate that one in seven live births, or 20.5 million babies globally, suffered from low birthweight in 2015. If current trends continue, the 2025 World Health Assembly target of a 30 percent reduction in the prevalence of low birthweight will not be met.

Estimates of exclusive breastfeeding reveal 41.6 percent of infants under six months being exclusively breastfed in 2018 compared with 37 percent in 2012. In 2018, Africa and Asia had the highest prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding. Conversely, however, these two regions have the highest prevalence of anaemia among women of reproductive age.

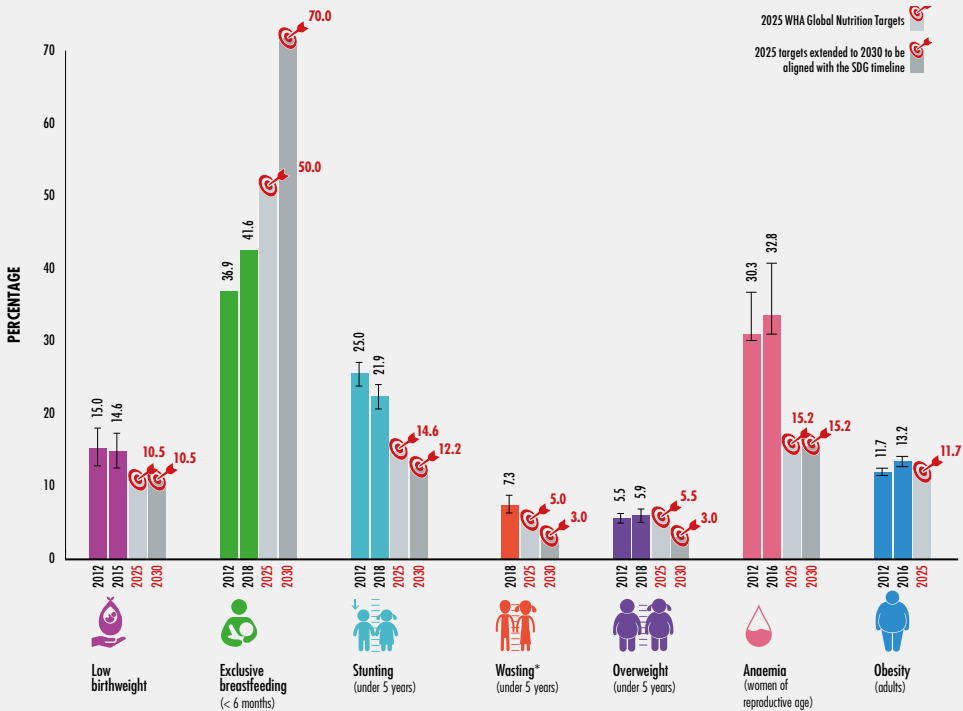
Globally, the prevalence of stunting among children under five years is decreasing, while the number of stunted children has also decreased from 165.8 million in 2012 to 148.9 million in 2018.

Globally, 7.3 percent (49.5 million) children under five years of age are wasted, two-thirds of whom live in Asia.

In 2018, childhood overweight affected 40.1 million children under five worldwide; while in 2016, nearly two in five adults (38.9 percent) were overweight, representing 2 billion adults worldwide. The prevalence of overweight is increasing in all age groups and in all regions.

A closer look at the SDG indicators of wasting, stunting, and childhood overweight reveal striking regional

FIGURE 15
PROGRESS ON MALNUTRITION IS TOO SLOW TO ACHIEVE THE 2025 AND 2030
GLOBAL NUTRITION TARGETS



NOTES: * Wasting is an acute condition that can change frequently and rapidly over the course of a calendar year. This makes it difficult to generate reliable trends over time with the input data available and, as such, this report provides only the most recent global and regional estimates.

SOURCES: Data for stunting, wasting and overweight are based on UNICEF, WHO and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank. 2019. *UNICEF-WHO-The World Bank: Joint child malnutrition estimates – Levels and trends* (March 2019 edition) [online]. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/nutrition>, www.who.int/nutgrowthdb/estimates, <https://data.worldbank.org>; data for exclusive breastfeeding are based on UNICEF. 2019. *Infant and Young Child Feeding: Exclusive breastfeeding, Predominant breastfeeding*. In: *UNICEF Data: Monitoring the Situation of Children and Women* [online]. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/nutrition/infant-and-young-child-feeding>; data for anaemia are based on WHO. 2017. *Global Health Observatory (GHO)*. In: *World Health Organization* [online]. Geneva, Switzerland. [Cited 2 May 2019]. <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.imr.PREVAEMIA?lang=en>; data for adult obesity are based on WHO. 2017. *Global Health Observatory (GHO)*. In: *World Health Organization* [online]. Geneva, Switzerland. [Cited 2 May 2019]. <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.A900A?lang=en>; and data for low birthweight are based on UNICEF and WHO. 2019. *UNICEF-WHO Low Birthweight Estimates: levels and trends 2000–2015, May 2019*. In: *UNICEF data* [online]. New York, USA, UNICEF [Cited 16 May 2019]. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/unicef-who-low-birthweight-estimates-levels-and-trends-2000-2015>

differences. In 2018, Africa and Asia bear the greatest share of all forms of malnutrition, accounting for more than nine out of ten of all stunted children,

over nine out of ten of all wasted children, and nearly three-quarters of all overweight children worldwide.

1.3 TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED UNDERSTANDING OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION FOR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

KEY MESSAGES

- Countries with higher prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity based on the FIES tend to have higher rates of adult obesity.
- Household and individual level data from selected countries across all regions reveal that food insecurity plays an important role as a determinant of different forms of malnutrition.
- In upper-middle- and high-income countries, living in a food-insecure household is a predictor of obesity in school-age children, adolescents and adults.
- In lower- and lower-middle-income countries, household food insecurity tends to be negatively associated with overweight and obesity, or is not associated at all.

To accelerate progress towards ending hunger and achieving food security and improved nutrition, as required by SDG 2, it is important to fully grasp the connections between food insecurity and malnutrition, and the drivers underlying both.

This section presents new evidence from two analyses of the links between moderate or severe food insecurity and various forms of malnutrition.

Results of the first analysis of country-level indicators show that, if one focuses attention on countries of similar levels of undernourishment and poverty, obesity rates are higher in those countries where moderate food insecurity is also higher.

As national economies grow, people facing difficulties in accessing food, as captured by an experience-based indicator of food insecurity, have a higher risk of obesity.

Results of an analysis of micro-level data obtained from nationally representative surveys reveal that living in a household classified as food insecure helps explain the status of being affected by one or another form of malnutrition in seven of the eight countries studied. Household food insecurity is associated with indicators of child undernutrition in most of the countries.

The association of food insecurity with overweight and obesity (across different age groups) varies depending on the income level of the country. In the low- and lower-middle-income countries considered, living in a food-insecure household either decreases the likelihood of being overweight or obese or has a very weak or no association. In upper-middle- and high-income countries, food insecurity increases the likelihood of being overweight or obese in some age groups.

1.4 CONCLUSIONS

The trends in food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms described in Part 1 pose a significant challenge to achieving SDG 2. It is imperative to continue addressing the urgent needs of those who are hungry, while at the same time going beyond hunger and ensuring access not only to sufficient food, but also to nutritious foods that constitute a healthy diet.

PART 2

SUSTAINED ESCAPES FROM FOOD INSECURITY AND MALNUTRITION IN THE FACE OF ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS

Part 2 of this year's report looks closely at the role that economic slowdowns and downturns have played in recent food security and nutrition trends. This is critical to understanding future trends in hunger and malnutrition, especially given the dark predictions of the latest global economic prospects, with slowing and stalled economic growth in many countries, including emerging and developing economies. Indeed, episodes of financial stress, elevated trade tensions and tightening financial conditions are all contributing to these bleaker global economic prospects. Importantly, the impact of economic slowdowns and downturns on food security and nutrition cannot be separated from the root causes of hunger and malnutrition: poverty, inequality and marginalization. Ultimately the analysis points to policies and programmes that can protect the most vulnerable from the impact of economic slowdowns and downturns, while fostering food security and nutrition from a perspective of more inclusive economic growth. Ending hunger and malnutrition by 2030 (SDG Targets 2.1 and 2.2) will require greater efforts and integrated approaches to eradicate extreme poverty (SDG 1), ensure decent work and inclusive economic growth (SDG 8), and reduce inequalities (SDG 10).

2.1 ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS AND THEIR IMPACT ON FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

KEY MESSAGES

- The outlook for the global economy has darkened, reflecting risks of increasing trade tensions and rising global borrowing costs.
- Hunger has been on the rise in countries where the economy has slowed down or contracted. The uneven pace of global economic recovery raises concerns regarding prospects for ending hunger and malnutrition in all its forms.
- Most countries (84 percent) that experienced a rise in undernourishment between 2011 and 2017 simultaneously suffered an economic slowdown or downturn – and the majority of these are middle-income countries.

How are economic slowdowns and downturns relevant to the quest to eradicate hunger and malnutrition?

Hunger has been on the rise in many countries where the economy has slowed down or contracted. Between 2011 and 2017, this increase coincided with an economic slowdown or downturn in 65 out of 77 countries. Furthermore, economic shocks tend to be significant secondary and tertiary drivers that prolong and worsen the severity of food crises,

BOX 9**WHAT ARE ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS?**

- ▶ An **economic slowdown** is when economic activity is growing at a slower pace. An economic slowdown occurs when real GDP growth declines from one period of time to another but is still positive.
- ▶ An **economic downturn** is when there is no growth, but rather a period of decline in economic activity. It refers to a period of economic contraction or negative economic growth as measured by the growth rate in real GDP.
- ▶ An **economic shock** is an unexpected event that is external to the specific economy and can either harm or boost it. A global financial crisis causing bank lending or credit to fall, a steep rise in oil and gas prices, or natural disasters that result in sharp falls in production, are examples of economic shocks.

especially in countries experiencing acute food insecurity requiring urgent humanitarian assistance.

Economic slowdowns and downturns (Box 9) often lead to a rise in unemployment and decline in wages and incomes, challenging access to food and essential social services for the poor. People's access to high-quality, nutritious food can be affected, as can access to basic services such as health care.

Recent world economic reports highlight that slowdowns, stagnation and outright recessions are evident in several economies and already leading to increased unemployment and declines in income. There may soon be yet another global economic downturn.

Trends in economic slowdowns and downturns

In most regions, the economy rebounded after the sharp 2008–2009 global economic downturn. But the recovery

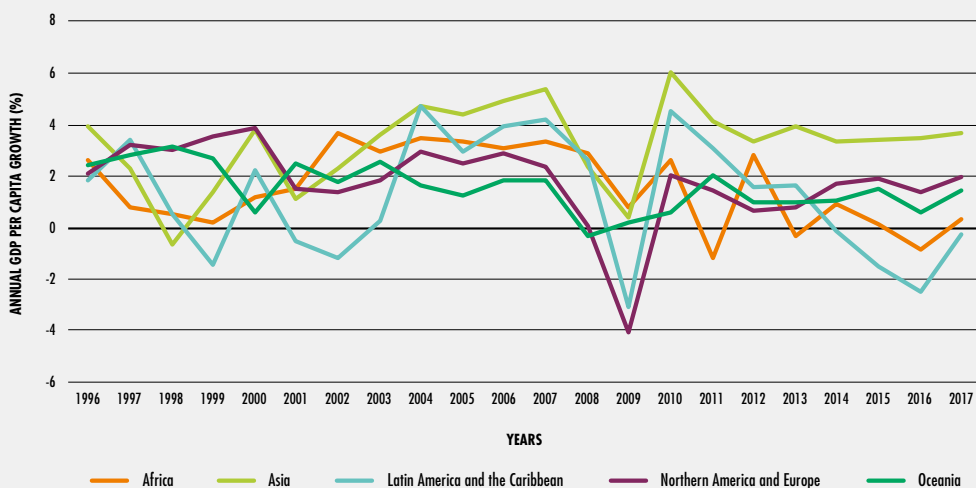
was uneven and short lived (Figure 22) – real GDP per capita growth is being challenged particularly in regions with some of the highest levels of food insecurity and malnutrition.

Within subregions, the situation is worse. In the last few years, real GDP per capita growth on average declined in seven subregions, five of which experienced negative growth in different years. In 2018, these five subregions combined were home to almost 263 million undernourished people.

Rises in undernourishment in places where the economy slowed down or contracted

Hunger, as measured by the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU), has been on the rise in many countries where the economy has slowed down or contracted (Figure 24). Strikingly, the majority of the countries (44 out of 65) are middle-income countries. Only 19 (out of 65) are low-income countries, of which 17 are located in Africa.

FIGURE 22
REAL GDP PER CAPITA GROWTH HAS BEEN UNEVEN SINCE THE 2008–2009 SHARP GLOBAL DOWNTURN



NOTES: Annual rate of per capita GDP growth at constant 2010 prices that occurred in the five regions during the period 1996–2017.

SOURCES: UN. 2019. National Accounts – Analysis of Main Aggregates. In: *UNSTATS* [online]. New York, USA. [Cited 6 May 2019]

<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama>; and for North America and Europe UNCTAD. 2019. Gross domestic product: Total and per capita, growth rates, annual. In: *UNCTADSTAT* [online]. New York, USA. [Cited 14 May 2019]. <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/wds/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=109>

Economic slowdowns and downturns worsen global food crises

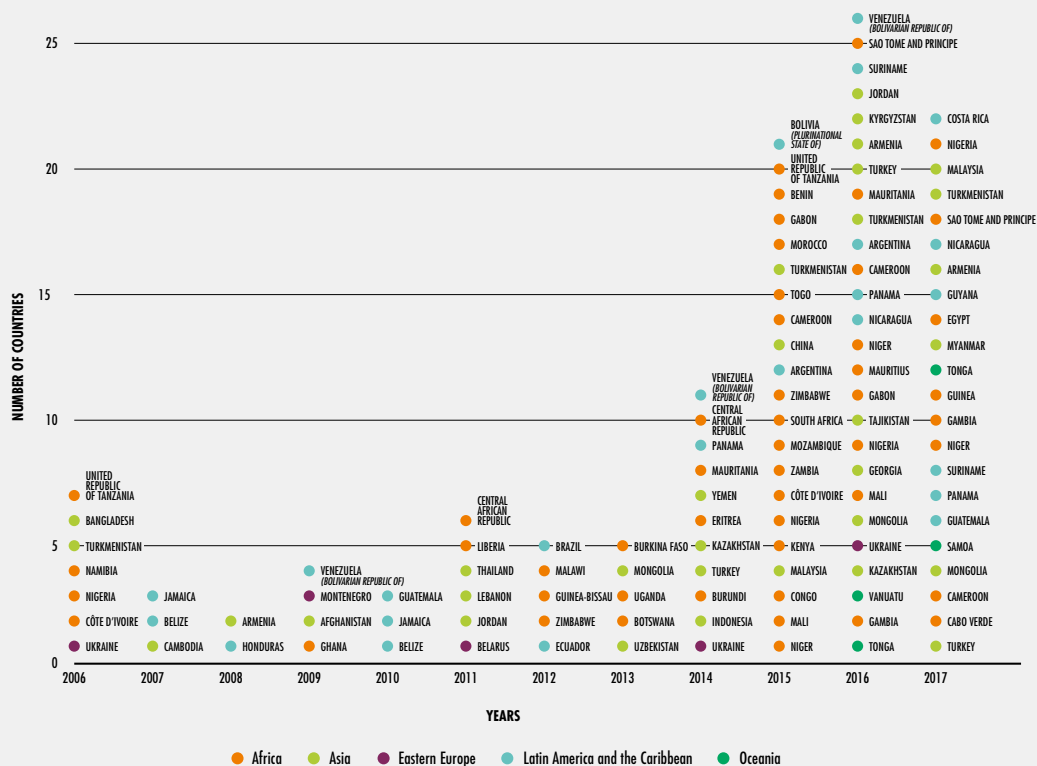
While economic shocks are rarely the primary drivers of food crises, in many instances, they worsen the severity of acute food insecurity, as well as prolonging the duration of the crisis.

In fact, more than 96 million people in 33 countries who suffered from acute food insecurity in 2018 lived in places where the economy was undergoing economic shocks of rising

unemployment, lack of regular work, currency depreciation and high food prices (Table 8). The economy of most of these countries (27 out of 33) was contracting, according to their real GDP per capita growth for 2015–2017.

In food crisis contexts, the interaction between conflict and economic slowdowns and downturns is particularly important. In 2018, conflict and civil insecurity were the major driver of food crises in 21 countries – 14 of them

FIGURE 24
PoU INCREASING CHANGE POINTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE OCCURRENCE OF ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS









NOTES: The number of countries with an increasing change point in the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) which occurs in correspondence with an economic slowdown or downturn by year, between 2006 and 2017, where each year is the middle year for the PoU three-year average; that is, for example, 2017 for 2016–2018. See Annex 3 for the methodology and list of countries with PoU increasing change points related to economic slowdowns or downturns. **SOURCES:** FAO for PoU; for economic slowdowns and downturns, UN. 2019. National Accounts – Analysis of Main Aggregates. In: *UNSTATS* [online]. New York, USA. [Cited 6 May 2019]. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama>

experienced deep economic recessions with an average negative difference of 2.4 percentage points in economic growth between years 2014 and 2017.

Economic slowdowns and downturns also lower the resilience capacity of households to respond to other shocks – including climate shocks.

TABLE 8
ECONOMIC SHOCKS WERE SIGNIFICANT SECONDARY AND TERTIARY DRIVERS OF FOOD CRISES IN 2018

DRIVERS OF FOOD CRISES					NUMBER (millions) people in IPC/CH Phase 3 and 4	
Economic shocks	Economic slowdown or downturn	Conflict	Climate	Conflict and climate	IPC/CH Phase 3 (Crisis)	IPC/CH Phase 4 (Emergency)
	Slowdown	Central African Republic, Jordan,* Lebanon*	Madagascar, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras	Cameroon, Djibouti, Kenya, Myanmar	8.3	1.2
	Downturn		Mozambique	Nigeria, Uganda	7.6	0.6
 + 	Slowdown	Ukraine*	Eswatini,* Pakistan*	Niger, Syrian Arab Republic*	10.5	0.1
	Downturn		Malawi	Chad, Afghanistan	11.6	3.3
 +  and/or 	Slowdown	Palestine	Zambia	Sudan	8.2	0.9
	Downturn	Iraq, Turkey	Zimbabwe	Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Yemen, Haiti	33.2	10.5
					79.4	16.6
					96.0	



High food price



Currency depreciation and worse terms of trade



Unemployment, loss of income

NOTES: Countries affected by food crises in 2018 where economic shocks are a driver of acute food insecurity as identified by the *Global Report on Food Crises 2019* (GRFC). Information on economic shocks as drivers of food crises was not available in the GRFC 2019 for Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar and Turkey. For these countries the information is obtained from the FAO Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) Country briefs referring to the year 2018. When the main driver of a food crisis is conflict, countries are highlighted in red; when the main driver is climate shocks, countries are highlighted in blue; when the main driver is economic shocks, countries are highlighted in green. Countries denoted by the asterisk (*) do not experience economic slowdowns or downturns. Economic slowdowns and downturns are identified when they either occur in years 2015–2016 or 2016–2017 and are computed using the annual rate of per capita growth at constant prices. See Annex 5 for the list of food crisis countries with a full description of economic shocks.

SOURCES: FAO elaboration based on FSIN. 2019. *Global Report on Food Crises 2019* [online]. [Cited 24 April 2019]. http://www.fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC_2019-Full_Report.pdf and for economic slowdowns and downturns, UN. 2019. National Accounts – Analysis of Main Aggregates. In: *UNSTATS* [online]. New York, USA. [Cited 6 May 2019]. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama>

2.2 COMMODITY DEPENDENCE AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

KEY MESSAGES

→ Eighty percent of the countries with a rise in hunger during recent economic slowdowns and downturns are highly dependent on primary commodities for export and/or import.

→ In 2018, 807 million undernourished people and 154 million stunted children under the age of five lived in low- and middle-income countries: of these, respectively, around 381 million and 73 million lived in high commodity-dependent countries. The latter also were home to almost 109 million out of the 113 million people facing crisis levels of acute food insecurity requiring urgent humanitarian actions.

→ Changes in commodity prices affect the relative value of exports and imports in these countries.

→ Many vulnerable households see their purchasing power reduced by aggregate macroeconomic shocks, while coping strategies they use during idiosyncratic once-off shocks are not effective.

→ The need to change consumption patterns can lead vulnerable households to cut spending on a range of basic services for health and disease prevention or shift away from nutrient-rich foods towards more energy-dense but nutrient-poor foods.

Commodity price trends and booms

Low- and middle-income countries are exposed to external vulnerabilities. A key vulnerability arises relating to what these countries produce and what

they trade with the rest of the world: essentially, primary commodities.

International commodity price shocks and volatility can create harmful impacts for food security and nutrition in all combinations of high commodity dependence. The trend in rising commodity prices that started in 2003 and the period of extreme price volatility in 2008 have been followed by largely declining global commodity prices for five consecutive years from 2011 to 2016.

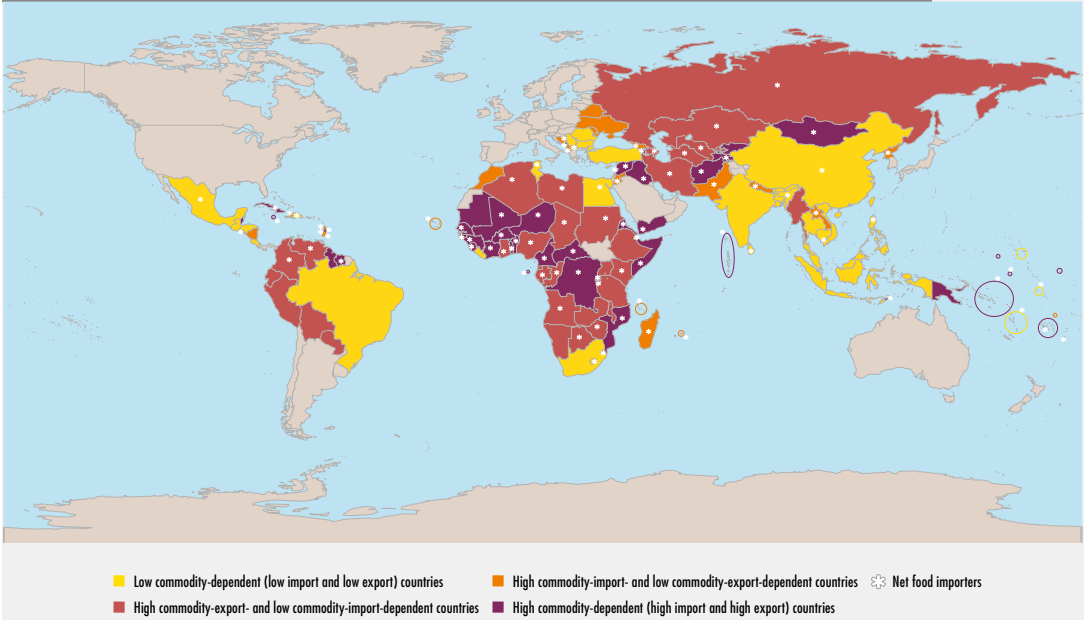
Why does commodity dependence matter?

Commodity dependence matters because it increases the vulnerability of countries to world price swings. Recent slowdowns and downturns in economic growth in many regions are largely explained by marked declines in commodity prices. This is mainly affecting countries dependent on primary commodity exports, particularly in South America, but also other regions including Asia and some countries in Africa.

Countries from these regions are commodity-export-dependent as they derive the bulk of their export earnings from primary commodities. Many of these countries also show commodity-import dependence, having a high ratio of commodity imports to total import merchandise traded. This includes essential goods, such as food items and fuel.

Out of a total of 134 low- and middle-income countries studied for the period 1995–2017, 102 countries are

FIGURE 27
MANY LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES ARE HIGH COMMODITY-DEPENDENT COUNTRIES



NOTES: The map shows low- and middle-income countries by the four categories of export (CXD) and import (CMD) commodity dependence: i) low commodity-import- and low commodity-export-dependent; ii) low commodity-export- and high commodity-import-dependent; iii) high commodity-export- and low commodity-import-dependent; iv) high commodity-export- and high commodity-import-dependent. High commodity-export (-import) dependence is identified when $CXD > 0.6$ ($CMD > 0.3$). Net food importers are those countries with a negative average food trade balance during the years 2013–2015. For further information see Annex 6. Areas with insufficient data coverage are denoted in grey. The final boundary between the Republic of the Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined. Final status of the Abyei area has not yet been determined. SOURCES: Typology of commodity dependence is an FAO elaboration based on UNCTAD. 2019. UNCTADStat. In: UNCTAD [online]. New York, USA. [Cited 13 May 2019] <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/wds/ReportFolders/reportFolders.aspx>; UNCTAD. 2019. *Economic groups and composition* [online]. New York, USA. [Cited 29 May 2019]. https://unctadstat.unctad.org/EN/Classifications/DimCountries_EconomicsGroupings_Hierarchy.pdf

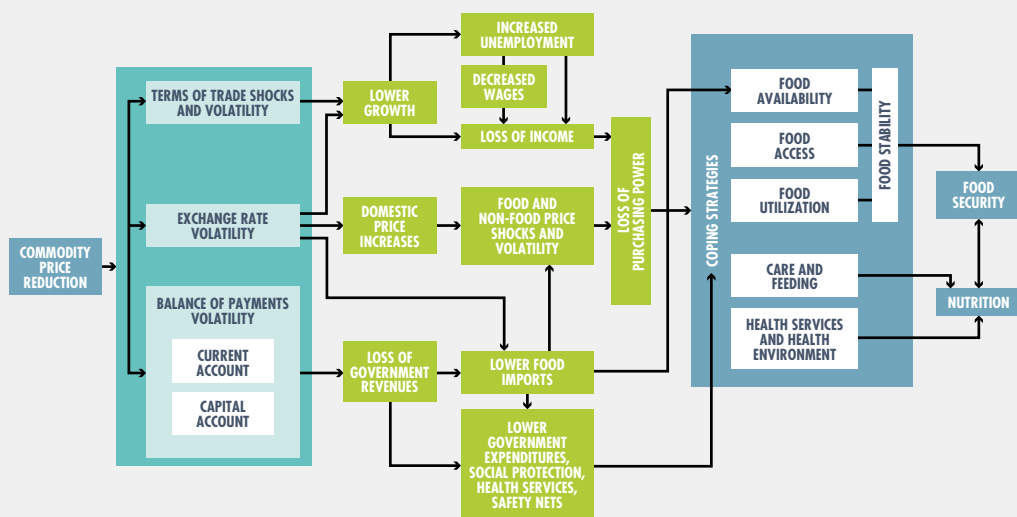
classified according to three types of high commodity dependence, whereas the remaining 32 are low commodity dependent (Figure 27).

Most of the countries (52 out of 65) that experienced rising undernourishment

in correspondence with economic deceleration during 2011–2017 are highly dependent on primary commodity exports and/or imports.

In 2018, most (27 out of 33) of the food crisis countries where economic shocks

FIGURE 29
POTENTIAL NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF INTERNATIONAL COMMODITY PRICE REDUCTIONS ON FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN COMMODITY-DEPENDENT ECONOMIES: TRANSMISSION CHANNELS



SOURCE: Based on diagram from UNCTAD and FAO. 2017. *Commodities and Development Report 2017. Commodity markets, economic growth and development*. New York, USA, UNCTAD, but modified for this report to focus on the specific transmission channels that affect food security and nutrition.

worsened the severity of acute food insecurity are high primary commodity-dependent countries. Most are also net food-import dependent (25 out of 33), where inflationary pressure stemming from the depreciation of national currencies against the US dollar was a key factor that contributed to an escalation in domestic food prices.

Many high commodity-dependent countries (67 out of 102) witnessed a rise in hunger or a worsening food crisis situation during 2011–2017. Twenty-three

high commodity-dependent countries underwent two or more consecutive years of negative growth and most of these (15 countries) also saw rises in undernourishment or a worsening food crisis situation in 2018.

Commodity dependence and food security and nutrition: transmission channels

Designing policies to help offset the vulnerability that arises with high commodity dependence requires direct and indirect channels that link global commodity markets with domestic

economic, social and human development outcomes, including food security and nutrition.

The transmission channels are complex, and a given commodity price change does not affect all commodity-dependent countries in a uniform manner (Figure 29).

There are direct impacts emanating as the change in commodity prices affects terms of trade, exchange rate adjustments and the balance of payments; and secondary indirect effects of these macroeconomic impacts on domestic prices, including food; unemployment, declining wages and loss of income; and health and social services.

Terms of trade, exchange rate and balance of payments

Sharp and continuous declines in international commodity prices from 2011 to 2016 led to substantial shifts in the terms of trade (ToT) and a sharp deterioration of GDP growth in commodity-dependent countries.

Declines in commodity prices since 2011 led to a deterioration in public finances for many commodity-export-dependent countries (oil and non-oil exporters) in Asia, Africa, North Africa and the Middle East, and in Latin America and the Caribbean.

For many commodity-dependent countries that experienced an increase in undernourishment or worsening food crises, the decline in commodity prices from 2011 to 2016 is associated with significant currency depreciations.

Rising domestic prices, including food

The pass-through of international commodity price developments to local domestic prices can be particularly challenging for food security and nutrition, as it can affect people's access to food, care and feeding, as well as access to health services.

Declining commodity prices may result in depreciation and devaluation of currencies that may pass through the system resulting in domestic price increases, including food prices.

In these situations, households that need to buy food are immediately affected by higher domestic retail prices as the cost of food relative to their incomes increases.

Unemployment and loss of income and wages

Sluggish economic activity as a result of falling commodity prices can lead to unemployment, loss of wages and, consequently, loss of incomes.

The impacts can be felt particularly hard in agriculture, both because of what happens within the sector and because of urban–rural linkages.

Where export crops are grown by smallholder producers, the impacts can be more widely spread.

Health and social intersectoral effects

For high commodity-dependent countries reductions in fiscal revenues in the wake of low or declining commodity prices can threaten the continuity of social programmes, safety nets, and other

components of economic and social development plans. Cuts to health and social sector spending can have negative impacts on food security and nutrition, with potentially lifelong and intergenerational implications for health and development.

Health expenditure as a percentage of total government expenditure in high commodity-dependent countries during the 2008–2015 period contracted by 1.3 percent for low-income countries (compared with an increase for this specific period in other low-income countries), by 0.6 percentage points for lower-middle-income countries, and by 0.3 percent percentage points for upper-middle-income countries.

Similarly, reduced education expenditure means less investment in school infrastructure relevant to health, such as for safe water and sanitation, which affects the risk of infectious disease, such as diarrhoea, that can exacerbate or be exacerbated by undernutrition.

How households cope and when they fail

Households facing a reduction in purchasing power as a result of economic events have to look for ways to cope with these shocks to maintain food security and consumption, but many coping strategies that are used during single shocks are ineffective.

Households might have to take up lower paying jobs, often in the informal sector, or try to make use of any savings or insurance mechanism at their disposal.

However, with increased prices, savings will buy less food than before and households might find it more difficult to borrow from family members or access informal insurance groups such as village funds. Also, public spending on safety nets might decrease during economic slowdowns, thereby leaving behind many households in need.

2.3 NEXUS BETWEEN ECONOMIC GROWTH, POVERTY, AND FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION: THE ROLE OF INEQUALITY

KEY MESSAGES

- Economic events will ultimately affect food security and nutrition, depending on extreme poverty levels and the extent to which the poor face exclusion due to different inequalities.
- While extreme poverty is one of the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition, food-insecure and malnourished people are not always members of the poorest households.
- Inequalities are one of the myriad reasons why extreme poverty reduction does not necessarily translate into improved food security and nutrition.
- Income inequality is rising in several low- and middle-income countries, making it more difficult for poor and marginalized groups to benefit from economic growth and making these people more vulnerable in the face of economic slowdowns and downturns.

Poverty and socio-economic inequalities also matter

Economic slowdowns and downturns generate a number of direct and indirect impacts that flow through different transmission channels and challenge food security and nutrition. The final impact on food security and nutrition, however, depends on how many poor people live in the country and the extent to which they face exclusion due to inequalities.

On the one hand, economic slowdowns and downturns tend to be correlated with increases in poverty and inequality. On the other hand, poverty, inequalities and marginalization are some of the underlying causes of hunger and malnutrition in all its forms. But the relationships between these factors are not so simple, for a number of reasons.

First, it is not always true that robust economic growth helps to reduce poverty and improve food security and nutrition. Economic growth, although necessary, may not be sufficient to ensure poverty reduction, food security and nutrition. Second, poverty, food security and nutrition do not always move in unison. Countries can achieve robust economic growth and poverty reduction, but this does not always translate into improved food security and nutrition. Third, when poverty reduction does result in increased food security, this does not necessarily mean nutritional status will be improved as well.

The role of inequalities and marginalization in shaping food-security and nutrition outcomes

Economic growth alone is not sufficient to reduce extreme poverty or improve food security and nutrition. Inequality, not only in the distribution of income, but also in access to nutrition-relevant services and social and health infrastructure, is critical in understanding why this is so. In fact, evidence indicates that in countries that have greater levels of inequality, economic slowdowns and downturns have a disproportionately negative effect on food and nutrition security.

Inequality in income distribution

Income inequality is a defining issue of our time. It is rising in nearly half of the countries in the world, including many low- and middle-income countries. Notably, several countries in Africa and Asia have seen large increases in income inequality over the last 15 years.

In countries where inequality is greater, economic slowdowns and downturns have a disproportionate effect on low-income populations in terms of food and nutrition security, since they use large portions of their income to buy food.

Inequality increases the likelihood of severe food insecurity, and this effect is 20 percent higher for low-income countries compared with middle-income countries. The prevalence of severe food insecurity is almost three times higher in countries with high income inequality (21 percent) compared with countries with low income inequality (7 percent).

Beyond income inequality, other forms of inequality

Around 40 percent of the inequality in low- and lower-middle-income countries is due to the gap in living standards between rural and urban populations, with the standards being lower for people living in rural areas.

Inequality in the distribution of productive assets, is also prevalent in many countries. The greater the inequality in asset distribution such as

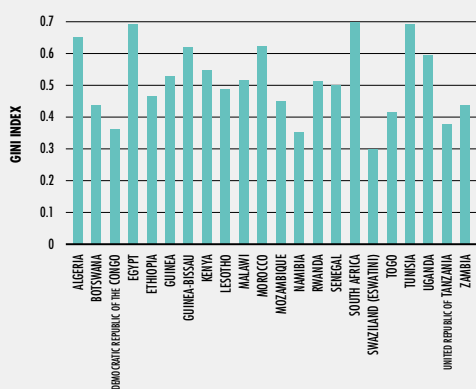
land (Figure 37), water, capital, finance, education and health, the more difficult it is for the poor to participate in economic growth processes. This then slows the progress in reducing food insecurity and malnutrition. Socially excluded and marginalized groups are likely to be hit particularly hard by economic downturns.

2.4 POLICIES FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE ESCAPES FROM FOOD INSECURITY AND MALNUTRITION IN THE CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS

KEY MESSAGES

- Responding to economic events that constrain households' purchasing power requires short- and long-term policy responses to safeguard food security and nutrition.
- Countries need to protect incomes and avoid cuts in essential social services and invest wisely during periods of economic boom on economic diversification, human capital accumulation and universal access to health care and other social services.
- Trade policy also needs to feature prominently in the minds of policymakers when promoting economic transformation that helps achieve food security and nutrition objectives.
- Integrating food security and nutrition concerns into poverty reduction efforts, while increasing synergies between poverty reduction and hunger eradication, helps accelerate both goals.

FIGURE 37
INEQUALITY IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND IS HIGH IN MANY COUNTRIES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



NOTES: The figure reports the Gini index for land distribution, mostly referring to year 2000 or around.

SOURCE: N. Cuffaro and G. D'Agostino. 2017. *Land inequality and growth: meta-analysis and relevance for contemporary development in Africa*. Working Paper n° 222 [online]. Rome, Università di Roma Tre. [Cited 5 May 2019]. <http://dipeco.uniroma3.it/db/docs/WP%20222.pdf>.

→ When implementing these policies, reducing gender inequalities and social exclusion of population groups needs to be either the means to, or outcome of, improved food security and nutrition.

The imperative of safeguarding food security and nutrition

Economic slowdowns and downturns pose challenges for food security and nutrition; creating sustained escapes requires safeguarding against these and tackling increasing inequalities.

This report calls for action on two fronts: the first, safeguarding food security and nutrition through economic and social policies that help counteract the effects of economic slowdowns or downturns, including guaranteeing funding of social safety nets and ensuring universal access to health and education; and, the second, tackling existing inequalities at all levels through multisectoral policies that make it possible to more sustainably escape from food insecurity and malnutrition.

Acting on these two fronts requires short- and long-term policy responses that will depend on institutional capacity and availability of contingency mechanisms and funds to support them.

In the short term, countries need to protect incomes so as to counteract economic adversity. It is critical to strengthen savings capacity when the economy is growing, using available instruments (automatic fiscal stabilizers, stabilization funds, sovereign wealth funds, macro-prudential norms, and the like), so as to make countercyclical policies feasible.

In the longer term, countries need to invest wisely during periods of economic booms to reduce economic vulnerabilities and inequalities; build capacity to withstand shocks; maintain health and other social expenditures; use policy tools to create healthier food environments; and quickly recover when economic turmoil erupts. This requires balancing a set of policies and investments to achieve an inclusive structural transformation that diversifies the economy away from commodity dependence, while also fostering poverty reduction and more egalitarian societies.

2.5 CONCLUSIONS

This year's report continues to signal the significant challenges that remain in the fight against hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms.

Part 2 of the report calls for action to safeguard food security and nutrition from economic slowdowns and downturns.

Short- and medium-term policies should aim at achieving a pro-poor and inclusive transformation, but this will not be possible by focusing on economic growth alone. It will require tackling existing inequalities at all levels, through multisectoral policies that keep these inequalities as the central focus. Ultimately, this kind of transformation will only materialize if policies effectively strengthen the economic resilience of countries to safeguard food security and nutrition at those times when the economy slows or contracts.

2019

THE STATE OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN THE WORLD

SAFEGUARDING AGAINST ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS

This year's report presents evidence that the absolute number of people who suffer from hunger continues to slowly increase. The report also highlights that food insecurity is more than just hunger. For the first time, the report provides evidence that many people in the world, even if not hungry, experience moderate food insecurity as they face uncertainties about their ability to obtain food and are forced to compromise on the quality and/or quantity of the food they consume. This phenomenon is observed globally, not only in low- and middle-income countries but also in high-income countries.

The report also shows that the world is not on track to meet global nutrition targets, including those on low birthweight and on reducing stunting among children under five years. Moreover, overweight and obesity continue to increase in all regions, particularly among school-age children and adults. The report stresses that no region is exempt from the epidemic of overweight and obesity, underscoring the necessity of multifaceted, multisectoral approaches to halt and reverse these worrying trends.

In light of the fragile state of the world economy, the report presents new evidence confirming that hunger has been on the rise for many countries where the economy has slowed down or contracted. Unpacking the links between economic slowdowns and downturns and food insecurity and malnutrition, the report contends that the effects of the former on the latter can only be offset by addressing the root causes of hunger and malnutrition: poverty, inequality and marginalization. The report concludes by recommending short- to long-term policies that address these underlying causes and safeguard food security and nutrition against economic slowdowns and downturns.

