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CALL FOR ACTION TO AVERT FAMINE IN 2021

Overview

The number of people experiencing acute food insecurity has remained persistently above 100 million over the last four years. In 2019, the figure rose sharply to 135 million across 58 countries, driven by more conflict, climate extremes and economic turbulence. This number has since dramatically increased including due to the compounding effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Across 79 countries with World Food Programme (WFP) operational presence and data available, WFP estimates that up to **270 million** people are acutely food insecure or at high risk at the outset of 2021. While the next Global Report on Food Crises will be launched in April 2021 by the Global Network Against Food Crises, a dramatic increase in the numbers of people in acute food insecurity is evident through new Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analyses or similar analytical processes in countries where the IPC/Cadre Harmonisé (CH) analyses have not been undertaken, with **174 million people in IPC Phase 3 or worse in the 58 countries covered**. Equally concerning is the rise in the number of persons displaced within and across international borders while fleeing conflict, persecution, violence or human rights violations, rising to **over 80 million in 2020**.

Of absolute urgent and imminent concern today are more than **34 million people in IPC Phase 4 across the world** who already face emergency levels of acute food insecurity and are highly vulnerable to face famine or famine-like conditions without urgent immediate life-saving action. In nine of these countries (**Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**) there are more than 1 million people already at this level. Other countries of concern include the **Central African Republic, Honduras and Zimbabwe with more than 500,000 people in IPC Phase 4**. Already in 2020, there were **132,900 people in IPC Phase 5 (“catastrophe”)** living in famine or famine-likely conditions in **Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Yemen**, compared to 84,500 in 2019. In 2021, this number is further increasing and currently stands at **155,000 people**. In addition, preliminary estimates indicate that millions currently in IPC Phase 3 are at extremely high risk of a rapid deterioration into Phase 4 or even Phase 5 in the event of a further stress or shock.

The magnitude of the suffering in these countries is alarming, and millions are in conflict-stricken places where their survival is almost entirely reliant on timely access to humanitarian assistance. A sudden or sustained deterioration in their situation and their ability to produce or access food, access nutrition or health services, and/or access humanitarian assistance (due to insufficient funding, access or an impeding political environment), could tip them further. In 2020, **Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Yemen** already had areas with people in Catastrophe (IPC/CH Phase 5 – famine or famine-like conditions) situations where populations suffer extreme deprivation in access to food, critical rates of acute malnutrition, and mortality. In these areas, decades of underdevelopment, sustained conflict, as well as climate, economic and political shocks have resulted in extreme disruption to basic services, food systems and the means of local food production, and impeded access to humanitarian assistance.

The situation requires urgent action at scale. By the time famine is declared many lives will already be lost; the wider impact on child development, poverty and people's lives will endure for years to come; and the stripping of productive livelihood assets will increase dependence on external assistance. What is especially concerning is that 2 of the 3 countries with pockets of people in IPC Phase 5 in 2020 (**South Sudan and Yemen**) were also on the brink of famine in 2017. And that a number of countries hosting large populations in IPC Phase 4 — **Somalia, Ethiopia**, and areas of West Africa and the Sahel — have experienced famine or famine-like conditions in recent decades. WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimate that in 2021 at **least US\$ 5.5 billion** is needed for **famine relief and/or averting an imminent risk of famine**. This amount will cover the **food assistance needs through 2021 for some 34 million people in IPC Phases 4 and 5** who are at highest risk of, or already in, famine or famine like conditions; and support 20 million of the most vulnerable people with **agricultural support to mitigate the food security deterioration**.

Where access to humanitarian assistance remains limited, emergency livelihoods assistance can safeguard the lives of people who cannot flee and must survive on locally produced food. This will allow continued household food production and ensure food availability for several months.¹

¹ Going into 2021, **WFP's programme of work amounts to US\$ 13.5 billion**. However, the figure is **expected to go up to US\$ 15 billion** based on assessments and ongoing revisions of response plans. This includes food assistance to refugees, livelihoods and lean season support to build resilience of food insecure populations with particular attention to populations in IPC Phase 3 and above to safeguard their coping capacity, school feeding and nutrition programmes, and national capacity building support.

FAO's planned humanitarian assistance programmes in 2021 amounts to US\$ 1.1 billion as requested under the Humanitarian Response Plans to support acutely food insecure people in IPC Phase 3 and above and safeguard their means of survival. The FAO humanitarian activities will be linked to the resilience and development programmes. The community participatory approaches will promote social cohesion among communities affected by conflicts and tensions over the access to natural resources, especially in displacement contexts.

Risk drivers

Conflict



Nearly all countries reporting a significant number of people in IPC Phase 4, and all countries with pockets in IPC Phase 5, are affected by conflict. Conflict or other forms of violence are likely to further shift and escalate in several countries and regions, notably **Afghanistan**, the **Central African Republic, Central Sahel**, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen**. The deterioration of **humanitarian access** is further aggravating the food security outlook. Protracted conflict, generalized violence, political instability and further displacement continue to be the main drivers of increasing humanitarian needs across all of these crises.

Economic



The growing public debt burden and COVID-19 induced decline in export commodity prices — negatively impacting governments' capacity to provide social protection to the most vulnerable — as well as rising prices of essential goods will likely be the main economic risks affecting many low- and medium-income countries. High inflation, currency depreciation and exhausted reserves, the result of years of economic slowdown created by blockades and disruptions, are further exacerbating economic hardship in countries such as **Haiti**, the **Syrian Arab Republic** and **Yemen**. The result is many more families pushed into severe poverty.

Natural hazards



La Niña will continue to cause extreme weather patterns through early 2021 across different regions, with below-average rainfall experienced in countries such as **Afghanistan**.

Eastern Africa has experienced below-average rainfall, likely leading to below-average harvests in some areas, with early signals of potential consecutive below-average rainfall for the upcoming April to June rainy season.

Madagascar is currently facing severe drought in southern and central regions, with rainfall deficits of about 60 percent of the average and forecasts for continued below-average rainfall until the end of the season.

The **southwestern Indian Ocean** is currently entering the peak of its **cyclone activity** (January–March), threatening northeast and eastern regions of **Madagascar** as well as central and southern **Mozambique**.

Desert locust swarms continue to threaten large swathes of the **Horn of Africa** and **Yemen** and could severely affect food production and availability with sustained control operations.

Urgent Actions

Appeal for the mobilization of extraordinary resources that are flexible, unearmarked and front-loaded to facilitate immediate action and avert catastrophic consequences. An urgent appeal must **include at minimum:**

US\$ 5 billion for emergency food assistance for famine relief and mitigation targeted to 34 million people at the highest risk of famine and in famine or famine-like conditions; and

US\$ 500 million for targeted livelihood inputs to protect the food security situation of people in IPC Phases 3 and 4 who are on the edge of falling into more desperate conditions.

In order to meet the most urgent needs on a no-regrets basis, funds need to be readily available, flexible and unearmarked. Timeliness is also crucial: funds need to be available well in advance of the main planting season for agricultural interventions to succeed, and both food assistance and livelihood operations require sufficient lead time to compensate for complex supply corridors. It is of extreme concern that in areas with IPC Phase 4 and IPC Phase 5 conditions, WFP has already been forced by resource constraints to implement ration reductions, while only a fraction of critical livelihoods needs are being met – multiplying the risk that countries with precarious food security situations will be pushed further into catastrophic conditions.

Appeal to ensure that civilian populations can safely access life-saving assistance, particularly in situations of widescale insecurity and armed conflict. Nearly all countries reporting a significant number of people in

IPC Phase 4, and all countries with pockets in IPC Phase 5, are affected by protracted conflict. And the overwhelming majority of these report high to extreme humanitarian access constraints. Unrestrained conflict, restricted access, destruction of fields and other means of food production and support can quickly undermine the coping mechanisms of communities and lead to the creation of famine conditions. Ensuring humanitarian access and the application of protection measures that are timely and responsive are critical to the survival of affected communities. This also includes adherence to United Nations Security Council resolution 2417 (2018), which reaffirms the prohibition on the deliberate starvation of civilians in times of war, destruction of infrastructure necessary for their survival and unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance.

Appeal for an urgent comprehensive package of live-saving assistance at scale. Food distributions to populations at risk of famine in the form of in-kind distributions and/or the provision of cash and vouchers is needed to pull populations back from the brink of famine and starvation. This must be accompanied by immediate targeted **livelihood-saving interventions** ahead of the planting season to support household food production. When a situation is deteriorating, **preventing and treating acute malnutrition** is one of the areas where humanitarian response has consistently saved lives. During situations of crisis, these and related services must be safeguarded – as must the supply chain of specialized nutritious foods. The provision of health and water services are also critical as starvation-related diseases and untreated illnesses put populations at further risk of death.

Appeal to ensure the commitment of all food security actors to support and strengthen scenario planning, independent analysis, real-time monitoring and the use of early warning mechanisms to track changes and anticipate crisis, which may be sudden or gradual, to ensure the scaled-up action and the advocacy required to prevent a deteriorating situation.

OFFICE OF EMERGENCIES AND RESILIENCE

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00153 Rome, Italy - T +39 06 57051

fao.org

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS DIVISION

World Food Programme

Via Cesare Giulio Viola 68/70,
00148 Rome, Italy - T +39 06 65131

wfp.org

