

The Global Hunger Crisis Explained



There's always been famine somewhere in the world. What's different about this crisis?

What's happening right now is unprecedented. World hunger was declining in the early 2000s, but in 2014, levels slowly began to rise. The situation became a crisis in 2020, when the pandemic propelled hunger to crisis levels. The war in Ukraine then accelerated this trend even further.

Experts now estimate that between **702 and 828 million people** faced hunger in 2021. The World Food Programme's [Global Report on Food Crises](#) says the number of people facing hunger has now surpassed all records.

Who are among the most hungry?

Around 70 per cent of people who need urgent food intervention come from 10 countries: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Yemen, northern Nigeria, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan, South Sudan, Pakistan, and Haiti. Around 60 per cent of chronically hungry people are women and girls*.

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IN 2021.



How do experts measure hunger?

Chronic hunger is when a person doesn't consume enough calories on a regular basis to lead an active and healthy life. It often occurs because a person is **food insecure**: they don't have access to enough nutritious food for normal growth and development.

To measure food security around the world, experts use a scale called the [IPC Acute Food Insecurity Classification](#). This measures how severe a situation is, based on malnutrition levels and what families must do to survive. In some countries, people have some access to food, but need to reduce the quantity or quality in order to afford to feed their whole family. This moderate level of food insecurity affects a person's health and wellbeing.

In other places, the need is more urgent. Households have exhausted all efforts to provide food and are experiencing starvation, destitution, and death. This is classified as a famine. Today, around 50 million people around the world are on the edge of famine.

How does food affect a child's health and wellbeing?

In 2021, 26 million children under the age of five experienced 'wasting', which is when their body is too thin for their height. Children who are wasting have 11 times the risk of dying compared to healthy children. They are at risk of life-long consequences such as stunting (impaired growth and development), serious illness due to a weakened immune system, and a lower IQ.

Children who are malnourished may be too unwell for school and unable to complete their education. Families struggling to afford food might sell girls into an early marriage because it is one less mouth to feed. Children may be forced into labour, leading to a life of exploitation and risk of harm.

Some say we have enough food to feed twice the earth's population for a year. If that's true, why are people going hungry?

The United Nation's [State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report](#) says hunger is prevalent in countries facing conflict, climate extremes, and economic downturn.

Conflict disrupts every aspect of a food system, from harvesting and processing to transport and distribution. It destroys land where food is grown, blocks trade, and restricts supply. Conflict also uproots people from their homes, making them vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition.

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Climate variability—including disasters like drought and floods—is detrimental to a country's agriculture. It can deplete pastures, destroy livestock, and force people to import food. Drought, for example, has caused high levels of food insecurity for 16.7 million people in the Horn of Africa

Economic downturn affects people's ability to afford food. In 2020, almost all low and middle-income countries experienced COVID-induced downturns. The number of undernourished people in these countries increased more in that year compared to increases in the last two decades.

What does COVID and the war in Ukraine have to do with my supermarket bill?

Food prices around the world rose during the pandemic, as closures disrupted supply chains and created shortages around the world. In 2022, the conflict in Ukraine drove food prices higher still—even in Australia.

Ukraine and Russia are major producers of the world's staple crops, producing a third of the world's wheat and barley. Russia is also a major fuel producer, contributing 14 per cent of the world's crude oil supplies. But the conflict has changed this. Widespread infrastructure damage in Ukraine and blocked Black Sea ports has stopped grain and fertiliser from being produced and exported, while Russian fuel sanctions has limited global supply. This has placed pressure on food prices, which are now at their highest level.

How does COVID and the war in Ukraine affect people around the world who are already struggling to eat?

People with low incomes are the most vulnerable to rising food prices. They spend a larger share of their incomes on food, and many of them still experience economic hardship from the pandemic.

Countries with high food insecurity also depend on food, fuel and fertiliser imports from the Ukraine and Russia. Up to 25 African countries, including many of the least developed, import more than one third of their wheat from Ukraine and Russia, and 15 of them import over half[^]. Less supply will drive prices higher in these countries, while fertiliser shortages will most likely impact farmers' crop production, leaving them with less food and income.

**UP TO 25
AFRICAN
COUNTRIES**

**IMPORT MORE
THAN ONE THIRD
OF THEIR WHEAT
FROM UKRAINE
AND RUSSIA**



What are some solutions to the global hunger crisis?

There are ways to address food insecurity, so that everyone in the world has enough to eat. Experts recommend measures like:

- Scaling up climate resilience in agriculture through practices like soil management and growing drought-tolerant crops;
- Empowering those who are vulnerable—such as women—to access natural resources, financial resources and education, so they can provide food for their families;
- Helping small-scale farmers improve production, which increases incomes and lowers food prices, You can read about how Baptist World Aid's Christian Partners in [Kenya](#) are providing support.
- Creating a long-term food security strategy to address our fractured food system. You can write to your Member of Parliament, asking our government to commit to this. Find out more by visiting the [Help Fight Famine website](#).
- Reduce food waste by being more thoughtful about the way we shop. Each year, one third of all food produced in the world goes to waste. If we stopped wasting food globally, we'd save enough to feed two billion people.

What is Baptist World Aid Australia doing about the hunger crisis?

Baptist World Aid is working with Christian Partners around the world to help those who are hungry. We tackle the issue in two ways: providing emergency food assistance where it's needed most, and addressing the drivers of food insecurity with long-term solutions.

Here are some ways we are helping people eat, through the work of our Partners:

- In Ukraine, we are distributing emergency food packages to displaced people still in the country
- In Tonga, we are helping farming communities increase the productivity of their land after the eruption of Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai in January made growing food difficult.
- In Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, we are providing nutrition care, food assistance, and cash assistance for vulnerable families
- In Kenya and Uganda, we are helping farmers find solutions to drought. People are learning how to grow drought-resistant crops and keep bees, which require less water to thrive.
- In Lebanon, we are helping people access education and earn a living, so they can feed their families
- In Indonesia, we are providing food assistance for COVID-impacted communities

*World Food Programme Gender Policy and Strategy

**The Food Security and Nutrition Working Group

^[The Impact of Trade and Development of the War in Ukraine](#), 2022

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