



Fighting Famine

SPECIAL UPDATE

Issue #3 – November 2023

A Special Update from the UN's Famine Prevention and Response Coordinator

The past few weeks have seen an acceleration in crises across the world, putting further strain on an already stretched humanitarian system. In this increasingly fragmented and polarised world, civilians pay the highest price. It is imperative to protect civilians at all times and ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches all people in need in a timely, safe and effective manner.

Acute hunger remains high

Too many countries in the world are still grappling with high levels of acute food insecurity.

The [Mid-Year Update for the 2023 Global Report against Food Crises](#) released in September highlighted that acute hunger remained stubbornly high despite improvements in some areas. The prevalence of people facing crisis levels of acute food insecurity (IPC/CH Phase 3 and above) stayed largely unchanged at about 21%, while the number of people in catastrophic conditions (IPC5) dropped significantly from 376,000 in 7 countries at the end of 2022 to 128,600 in 4 countries in August 2023. This decrease is the result of improved rainfall, the scale up of emergency assistance and critical access to populations, and will be temporary if not coupled with investments in resilience and social protection programming through sustained access.

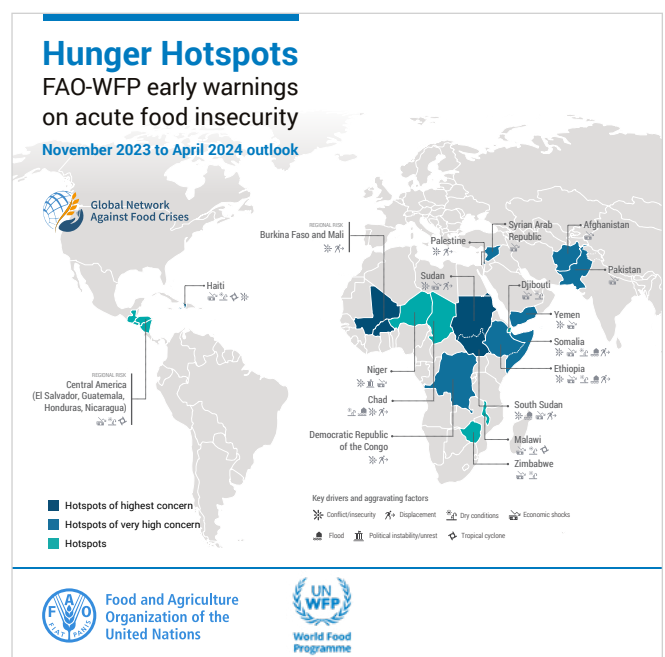
The [FAO-WFP early warning analysis](#) issued at the end of October warns of a possible deterioration in 18 hunger hotspots. In these areas, millions of people are expected to face worsening acute food insecurity from November 2023 to April 2024 unless immediate assistance is provided.

The hotspots of highest concern remain Burkina Faso, Mali, South Sudan and Sudan. Palestine has been added to the list due to the escalation of conflict.

Other countries of very high concern include Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Pakistan, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

Chad, Djibouti, Niger and Zimbabwe have been added to the list of hunger hotspots at risk. Countries affected by drought linked to El Niño – El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua as well as Malawi – remain of concern due to likely weather impacts on agriculture.

The key drivers of food insecurity in those areas remain conflict and insecurity, economic shocks, and weather extremes. In this context, it is crucial to invest more in early warning and preparedness, including anticipatory action, to mitigate the impact on vulnerable populations. Suggested action include cash assistance, strategic livestock destocking, vaccinations or seeds distribution.





SPOTLIGHT ON HUNGER HOTSPOTS OF HIGHEST CONCERN

In **Burkina Faso, Mali, Palestine, South Sudan** and **Sudan**, people are facing rapidly deteriorating conditions. **Burkina Faso** experienced a significant increase in Catastrophe (CH Phase 5) from 1,800 in October–December 2022 to 42,700 in June–August 2023, the highest figure ever projected for the country. **Mali** recorded 2,500 people in Catastrophe (CH Phase 5) for the first time in 2023.

The severe escalation of the conflict in Palestine and Israel since early October 2023 is likely to lead to a staggering increase in the magnitude and severity of acute food insecurity in **Gaza**, where 1.2 million people were already facing acute hunger in 2022.

In **South Sudan**, critical levels of acute food insecurity are expected to persist across the country, even after the start of harvests in October, due to insufficient crop production, high staple food prices and a lack of resources to support the rising numbers of returnees from Sudan.

The crisis in **Sudan** and its spill-over into neighbouring countries have driven massive population displacement and hunger. In the country itself, the devastating impacts of the conflict on livelihoods, amid the internal displacement of 4.4 million people between April and October 2023, will lead to a dramatic increase in the already high levels of acute food insecurity.

The fight against hunger on the global agenda

The global food crisis was one of the key issues on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly high-level week in New York, in September.

The UN Secretary-General placed the fight against hunger as a top priority, [saying](#): “In our world of plenty, hunger is a shocking stain on humanity, and an epic human rights violation. It is an indictment of every one of us that millions of people are starving in this day and age.” In [his message for World Food Day](#), he called on Governments, the private sector, civil society and academia to work together to bring this issue to the top of the global agenda. He urged Governments and donors to invest in durably transforming food systems.

UN Member States also reiterated their commitment to end poverty and hunger in the [SDG Summit declaration](#) adopted on 18 September. On the issue of the global food crisis, they highlighted five main priorities: transforming agri-food systems, promoting healthy diets, ensuring free movement of food and fertilisers, developing shorter supply chains and addressing food price volatility.

While hunger was present in many political declarations of the General Debate, numerous concrete announcements were also made. World Vision, for example, [pledged US\\$3.4 billion](#) to eradicate child hunger and malnutrition globally.

During this high-level week, the Governments of Zambia and Sweden, in partnership with the UN and the Global Network Against Food Crises convened a high-level roundtable on the alarming food insecurity situation. Participants agreed that while imminent humanitarian needs must be addressed, responding to the global food security crisis requires combined and broad efforts that target agricultural development, energy systems, climate change, biodiversity, trade, and gender equality.

“Hunger and malnutrition are a human rights violation on an epic scale.”

UN Secretary-General António Guterres
at the 51st session of the Committee
on World Food Security
(23 October 2023)

Climate change and hunger

Many of the countries affected by food crises are among the worst impacted by the climate emergency. In fact, last year, weather extremes were the primary driver of acute food insecurity for 56.8 million people, twice the number compared to 2021.

Despite an increasing acknowledgement of the link between food insecurity and climate change, efforts to support those worst affected are still insufficient.

At the [Africa Climate Summit](#) in Nairobi in September, the conversation focused on the disproportionate burden carried by African countries. While Africa has not contributed much to climate change, it alone costs the continent an estimated \$7-15 billion in losses every year, in some countries as much as 2-3% of GDP. The discussions also highlighted the immense potential of the continent, which – with the right investment - could become a food exporter and a driving force for global growth.

Representatives from grassroot organisations shared their experience of climate adaptation, at [an event organized by the HDP Coalition](#). From the Yaaku Indigenous People to the Samburu pastoralists, their unique voices were brought to the table. They urged the international community to unlock climate finance especially in contexts facing the interlinked challenges of climate change, food security, malnutrition, and conflict.

These conversations are paving the way for a meaningful engagement at COP28, where the food crisis should be on the menu. The Secretary-General has urged Member States to “arrive at COP28 next month with concrete plans and proposals to avoid the worst effects of climate change.” All hopes will be on the operationalization of the loss and damage fund, making sure money committed is new and additional.

“I realised many of us are affected by climate change. But I’d like people to care more about pastoralists and women. We shouldn’t be the ones left behind, we have so much to bring to the table.” Samwel Lentoror is an agropastoralist from Marsabit County in Northern Kenya. His Samburu community is on the frontline of climate change. Last year, the historic drought that hit the Horn of Africa decimated their livestock. Food insecurity and malnutrition rates went up and remain high up to now. However, pastoralist communities are already taking the lead in adapting to a new reality. [PACIDA](#), the organization Samwel works with, supported by WeltHungerHilfe, is advocating for alternative livelihoods and climate adaptation investments that combine indigenous traditional pastoralism and income-generating activities, which also contribute to offering job opportunities and empowering women.



Kisiria Forest, Kenya – Maasai women belonging to a women’s traditional group work on the community tree nursery.
© FAO/Luis Tato



After the drought, floods. Over 100,000 people have been affected by flash floods and heavy rains in Somalia. The UN has released emergency funding to support communities at greater risk of the projected impact of El-Niño. © OCHA/Ayub Ahmed

Must-read recommendations

The climate crisis is making extreme weather events more severe and frequent in East Africa,

costing the region 2 to 4% of its annual GDP between 2020 and 2022, found a [new report from Oxfam](#). At the same time, climate-related development finance for the region remains insufficient at only \$2.4 billion in 2021.

Equality is key. In fact, when economies grow

without progress in equality, hunger increases, according to [new research by CARE](#). Most importantly, investing in gender equality appears foundational to improving global food security.

The world is building back weaker, with the most vulnerable being hit hardest by the global food crisis. The [latest data unveiled by UNCTAD](#) points to

economic slowdown and rising inequalities. Policy changes are needed to make sure no one is left behind.

A recent study from CARE analysing IPC through sex-disaggregated data in Somalia, showed how inequalities both shaped the food crisis and the differential experiences of men and women, but also demonstrated shifting gender dynamics, with the

crisis expanding women's economic role in the household.

We are off-track on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, but more worryingly, we are seeing stagnation or even reversal of progress on hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity, showed [the FAO progress report](#) on food and agriculture-related SDGs.

For more information:

<https://www.fao.org/home/en/>
<https://www.fightfoodcrises.net/>
<https://www.un.org/en/famine-prevention-and-response>
<https://www.wfp.org/fight-famine>

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Fighting Famine is a special update highlighting critical aspects of global food crises, including response efforts and urgent priorities. It is produced with the support of the Global Network Against Food Crises.