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NEWS RELEASE

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In one year, 4 million people were thrust into hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean

New UN report says that 56.5 million people suffered hunger in 2021, while 268 million faced food insecurity.



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6 July – Santiago, Chile – According to The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022 (SOFI), an additional 4 million were thrust into hunger between 2020 and 2021 in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This downturn comes after an already disheartening increase of 9 million people between 2019 and 2020, with the number of undernourished people reaching a total of 56,5 million in 2021, 8.6 percent of the population.

“The situation is extremely dire. In just two years, thirteen million people have fallen into hunger. And four out of ten people live with food insecurity, while we have yet to brace for the impacts of the current food crisis, including the war in Ukraine”, said FAO’s Regional Representative, Julio Berdegué.

The new UN report states that, of the total number of undernourished people in 2021 (823 million), more than half live in Asia, more than one-third in Africa, while Latin America and the Caribbean accounts for 7.4 percent of global undernourishment.

The SOFI is a joint publication of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Hunger has nearly doubled in South America since 2015

According to the SOFI, the Caribbean presents the highest proportion of the population affected by hunger in the region (slightly over 16 percent), compared with about 8 percent in Central America and in South America.

However, after a general upward trend in hunger in the Caribbean since 2015, and a notable increase from 2019 to 2020, hunger remained unchanged from 2020 to 2021, albeit still above pre-pandemic levels.

In contrast, hunger has nearly doubled in South America since 2015. While in the Caribbean it has increased by 2.2 percentage points and in Central America by 0.9 percentage points.

“We are facing a major and complex crisis that requires unprecedented actions, not only by governments but all players in the regional agri-food system”, said Berdegúé.

Food insecurity continues to worsen

Food insecurity also continued to worsen in Latin America and the Caribbean, driven in large part by South America, although the deterioration has slowed following a relatively sharp rise in food insecurity in 2020.

In 2021, 40.6 percent of the population – 268 million people - was facing moderate or severe food insecurity – an increase of 1.1 percentage points since 2020.

Severe food insecurity affected 93.5 million people in 2021, after rising 1.4 percentage points, to 14.2 percent – an increase of nearly 10 million more people in one year, and almost 30 million more when compared with 2019.

“The number of people in food insecurity in the region suggests that the problem is no longer limited to social groups that have lived in poverty for a long time; food insecurity has now reached the cities and tens of thousands of households that had not experienced it before,” said Berdegué.

Widening gender gap in food security

The global gender gap in food insecurity – which had grown in 2020 under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic – widened even further from 2020 to 2021, driven largely by the widening differences in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in Asia.

In 2021, 31.9 percent of women in the world were moderately or severely food insecure compared to 27.6 percent of men. The growing gap is most evident in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the difference between men and women was 11.3 percentage points in 2021 compared to 9.4 percentage points in 2020.

Impact of the war in Ukraine

Regarding the impacts of the war in Ukraine, the simulations contained in the SOFI suggest that under the moderate shock scenario, the global number of undernourished people in 2022 would increase by 7.6 million people, while this rise would amount to 13.1 million people above baseline estimates under the more severe shock setting.

For Latin America and the Caribbean, by 2022, this would mean an increase of 0.62 percent in the number of undernourished people in the region – 350 thousand people – under the moderate shock scenario, and 1.13 percent – 640 thousand people – in the more severe shock setting.



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OP-ED - Hunger

Julio Berdegue, FAO Regional Representative for Latin America and the Caribbean

Hunger

By Julio Berdegue

Nearly one in ten people on this planet live with hunger. In just two years - from 2019 to 2021 - an additional 150 million people were thrust into hunger. The total number of undernourished people has reached the staggering figure of more than 828 million, while 22% of girls and boys suffer from chronic malnutrition.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, 56.5 million people are regularly deprived of the necessary food to have even the minimum energy that a human being needs to maintain a normal life; they live undernourished, or, in plain words, they suffer from hunger.

93.5 million People suffer severe food insecurity, and 267.7 in moderate or severe food insecurity. In total, almost four out of every 10 inhabitants of Latin America and the Caribbean do not have enough to eat.

At the same time, 106 million adults are living with obesity, largely because this is the region where a healthy diet is most expensive: it costs 22% more than what it does in Europe or the United States and Canada, for example. And this happens in a region that is the main net exporter of food on the planet, and that produces enough food to satisfy the basic energy requirements of 1,300 million people, twice its population.

These are some of the figures included in the new edition of *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022*, a report published by five United Nations agencies, under the coordination of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO.

We have already seen seven years of setbacks in the fight against hunger in the world and in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is due to climate change, to conflicts and wars, to the COVID-19 pandemic, to weak economic growth, and above all to inequalities, but (and this must be said forcefully) also to indifference.

A contributing factor that aggravates food and nutritional insecurity is the misguided support that the agri-food sector receives in large parts of the world, especially in high and medium-high income countries; every year, some US \$630 billion are allocated to support the agri-food sector, mainly through direct transfers that tend to disproportionately benefit large companies and higher-income farmers.

This would be a different world, and we would not have to lament the horrific hunger figures if that same financing were reoriented to promote the population's access to sufficient, safe and healthy food, and to facilitate and encourage innovations so that agri-food systems are more efficient, inclusive, sustainable and resilient.

The new United Nations report shows how the reorientation of current support for agriculture towards other objectives and uses would be enough to improve economic access to healthy diets, increase the income of farmers, and reduce hunger, extreme poverty and greenhouse gas emissions. Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the regions that would benefit the most from such a change in agri-food policies.

The tragedy, then, is not only the growing number of children and adults who experience the drama of hunger and malnutrition. It is also that the solution is there, within reach of our hands, but we do not see it, or we do not want to see it.