



New UN Report: 74 percent of Latin American and Caribbean countries are highly exposed to extreme weather events, affecting food security

Climate variability and extreme weather events (such as droughts, floods, and storms) are reducing agricultural productivity, disrupting food supply chains, increasing prices, impacting food environments, and threatening progress in reducing hunger and malnutrition in the region.

Santiago, Chile, 27 January 2028 (PAHO) – Changing patterns of climate variability and extreme weather events are negatively affecting all dimensions of food security and exacerbating other underlying causes of malnutrition in all its forms in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to the [2024 Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition](#). The report, published today, states that Latin America and the Caribbean is the second-most exposed region in the world to extreme weather events, following Asia.

In this region, at least 20 countries (74 percent of analyzed countries) face a high frequency of such events, indicating significant exposure, and 14 (52 percent) are considered vulnerable, as they are more likely to experience increased undernourishment due to these phenomena. The impact of extreme weather events is further worsened by persistent structural challenges, including conflicts, economic slowdowns, crises, and underlying factors such as high levels of inequality, lack of access to affordable healthy diets, and unhealthy food environments.

According to the report, between 2019 and 2023, the prevalence of undernourishment increased by 1.5 percentage points in countries affected by climate variability and extremes. The situation is worse in countries experiencing economic recessions. The most vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected, as they have fewer resources to adapt.

The report underscores the urgent need to accelerate action to build resilience within agrifood systems, which are critical for the region's progress toward eradicating hunger and malnutrition in all its forms. The

report emphasizes that ensuring the long-term sustainability of agrifood systems is essential.

Hunger and Food Insecurity Declined for the Second Consecutive Year

According to the report, hunger affected 41 million people in the region in 2023. This represents a decrease of 2.9 million people compared to 2022 and 4.3 million compared to 2021. However, despite regional progress, disparities persist among subregions. Hunger prevalence has increased over the last two years in the Caribbean, reaching 17.2 percent, while it has remained relatively stable in Mesoamerica, at 5.8 percent.

Regarding moderate or severe food insecurity, the region also showed progress for the second consecutive year, falling below the world average for the first time in 10 years. A total of 187.6 million people in the region experienced food insecurity, 19.7 million fewer than in 2022 and 37.3 million fewer than in 2021.

This reduction is attributed to the economic recovery of several South American countries, driven by social protection programs, post-pandemic economic efforts, and targeted policies to improve food access.

The report also highlights that food insecurity disproportionately affects certain population groups, such as rural communities and women. The gender gap in Latin America and the Caribbean remains higher than the global average.

The Challenge of Malnutrition Amid Climate Variability

FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Latin America and the Caribbean, Mario Lubetkin highlighted the relevance of the Regional Overview 2024 considering that: "Climate variability and extremes are a threat for the stability of food security and nutrition. He added: "the importance of implementing a comprehensive response, based on policies and actions designed to strengthen the capacity of agri-food systems. This resilience allows us to anticipate, prevent, absorb, adapt, and transform in a positive, efficient and effective way against various risks, including the challenges associated with climate change and extreme events."

Regarding malnutrition, the report states that in 2022, stunting affected

22.3 percent of children under five globally. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the prevalence was estimated at 11.5 percent, significantly below the global average. While the region has made notable progress since the turn of the millennium, progress has slowed in recent years.

"In Latin America and the Caribbean, one in ten children under five lives with stunting. Undernourishment and overweight coexist in the region, exacerbated by high exposure and vulnerability to climate events in the most affected communities. This double burden of malnutrition daily threatens the full development of children," said Karin Hulshof, UNICEF Regional Director a.i. for Latin America and the Caribbean. "Any decision on climate action must prioritize the right to food and nutrition for children, women, and families."

In 2022, 5.6 percent of children under five globally were overweight, compared to 8.6 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean—3.0 percentage points above the global estimate. The regional prevalence has also grown faster than the global rate, increasing by 1.2 percentage points between 2012 and 2022, compared to only 0.1 percentage points globally. The region's trends vary significantly, with South America mainly driving the increase, while Mesoamerica and the Caribbean have shown greater stability in recent years.

The report also identifies economic barriers to accessing healthy diets as a critical issue. In 2022, 182.9 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean could not afford a healthy diet. This marks an improvement of 2.4 percentage points compared to 2021, meaning 14.3 million more people can now afford a healthy diet.

"Overweight and obesity are growing challenges in the region and key risk factors for non-communicable diseases. A healthy diet is the foundation for health, well-being, and optimal growth and development. PAHO positions health as a cornerstone for transforming food systems, promoting fiscal policies such as taxes, public food procurement policies, regulations on advertising (including breast milk substitutes), food safety, product reformulation, and front-of-pack labeling," said Jarbas Barbosa, Director of the Pan American Health Organization.

Disparities also persist among subregions in access to healthy diets. In the Caribbean, 50 percent of the population (22.2 million people) could not afford a healthy diet, followed by Mesoamerica at 26.3 percent (47.1 million people) and South America at 26 percent (113.6 million people).

This highlights the need to focus on vulnerable populations exposed to extreme climate events.

"Climate shocks are making it increasingly difficult for families across Latin America and the Caribbean to produce, transport, and access food. Frequent storms and floods are destroying homes and farmland, while drought and erratic rainfall are wiping out crops before they can grow," said Lola Castro, WFP's Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean. "As extreme weather events intensify, WFP is working with communities and governments to strengthen food security, protect the most vulnerable and build resilient food systems that can withstand the climate crisis", she added.

The agencies emphasized the need to further accelerate investments and actions to create long-term capacities to address climate variability and extreme weather events.

Rossana Polastri, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean at IFAD, stated: "We are making progress in the fight against hunger, but the numbers still exceed pre-pandemic levels, showing there is much work to be done. We must redouble efforts to adapt food systems to the effects of climate change, whose negative impacts exacerbate food insecurity. To achieve this, we need to invest more in rural areas, ensuring that small-scale producers have access to basic infrastructure, climate information systems, sustainable agricultural practices, and financial products to cope with extreme events and climate variability. Additionally, we must invest in women and the most vulnerable groups to ensure that progress in reducing hunger leaves no one behind."

The 2024 Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition is a joint publication by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

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The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of its population. Founded in 1902, it is the world's oldest international public health agency. It serves as the Regional Office of WHO for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system (OAS).