

# PRICE SHOCKS

How COVID-19 is triggering a pandemic of child malnutrition and what is needed to prevent this from happening

# **IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO PREVENT THE WORST OF THIS CRISIS**

- Food prices reach the highest levels in a decade as COVID-19 causes income collapse.
- Healthy food now out-of-reach for billions worldwide; children bear the brunt.
- Hunger killing more people per day than COVID-19.
- Pandemic-related malnutrition could kill 250 children per day by the end of 2022.

The world is on the brink of a child-malnutrition pandemic. This is due to a perfect storm of sky-rocketing food prices, lower incomes, reduced nutritional services and disrupted food-supply chains as a result of COVID-19.

But it is not too late to prevent the worst of this nutritional crisis. Together, governments and others can strengthen food-supply chains, and empower parents and caregivers with the economic tools they need to provide nutritious food for their households.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## COVID-19 is fuelling food price rises for the world's poorest.

In May 2020, global food prices reached the highest levels in a decade. Retail food prices have risen in almost every country, but the impact of this has been greatest in poor countries where food costs account for a larger share of household budgets. Since the pandemic was declared, between February 2020 and July 2021 food prices rose by an average of 2.9% in the U.K., 3.6% in the U.S.A., and 4.8% in Japan and Canada. These rises were dwarfed by country-level food-price increases in Lebanon (48%), Syria (29.2%), Venezuela (29%), Uganda (21%), Yemen (18.5%), Sudan (17%), Guatemala (16.8%), Afghanistan (10.7 %), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (10.9%) and Chad (10.3)—countries with large numbers of people who can least afford it.

While food prices are increasing, so too is unemployment, putting the cost of nutritious food further out of reach for millions of families worldwide. Pandemic-related job losses and lower incomes are forcing millions of families to skip meals, opt for cheaper and less nutritious food, or go without food altogether. Developing countries are expected to lose more than US\$220 billion in income because of COVID-19,<sup>2</sup> which means there is less money to buy food at the same time that food (especially nutrient-rich food) is becoming more expensive and less available due to supply-chain disruptions.

This perfect storm of rising food prices and reduced incomes is already contributing to growing global hunger. As many as 161 million more people faced hunger in 2020 compared to the previous year—a 25% increase from 2019.<sup>3</sup> Most worryingly, more

than 41 million people are currently suffering emergency levels of food insecurity and/or famine-like conditions due to a deadly mix of conflict, climate change and the economic impacts of COVID-19.<sup>4</sup>

## ALREADY, HUNGER IS KILLING MORE PEOPLE PER DAY THAN COVID-19,

with acute hunger estimated to kill 11 people every minute,<sup>5</sup> compared to seven people per minute from the coronavirus.<sup>6</sup>

Children are the most vulnerable in this ballooning hunger crisis. They have much greater needs for nutrients and become undernourished much faster than adults. Children are also at a much higher risk of dying from diseases and undernutrition associated with hunger crises. World Vision warns that the reduced access to nutritious food associated with COVID-19 could lead to a pandemic of child malnutrition, sharply reversing the development of a generation of children.

By 2022, the nutritional crisis from COVID-19 could result in 13.6 million more children suffering from acute malnutrition or wasting (a severe form of acute malnutrition).<sup>7</sup> This is in addition to the 47 million children under age 5 who suffered from wasting in 2019 before the onset of COVID-19.<sup>8</sup>

Now is the time to act. Together, private, public and NGO sectors can strengthen food-supply chains, and empower parents and caregivers with the economic tools they need to provide nutritious food for their families. A pandemic of child malnutrition cannot occur on our watch.

# PRICE SHOCKS: THE HUMAN COST



Annet Rojo and her family wonder where their next meal will come from because they have not been able to afford food since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Photo: Brian Jakisa Mungu/World Vision

## Food out-of-reach for pandemic-hit families in Uganda

Annet Rojo's family hasn't eaten in nearly 24 hours. Hunger has stripped the energy and smiles from Annet's seven-year-old daughter, Evelyn, and her little brothers. There is no playing in this house.

Annet is on the veranda of their home, trying to breastfeed her baby. She and her husband, James, are wondering where their next meal will come from—and when it will be. Evelyn's grandmother, Magdalena, arrives at the door, a bundle of firewood balanced on her head. She had been gone for more than six hours.

"I went early [to collect firewood]. Sometimes I just want to be away from here because if I stay, the children will keep asking for what to eat," she says.

Magdalena might have found the firewood, but there is nothing at home to cook.

The family of ten ate a small amount the day before.

"We now mostly depend on the neighbours to survive. We borrow and beg for food sometimes. Sometimes they give it to us but sometimes they don't," she says.

"You cannot depend on neighbours the whole time. About a week ago, we spent four days without eating," says Magdalena. Evelyn's father, James, used to do manual labour to earn an income, but he says job opportunities are now hard to find. Before the COVID-19 pandemic began, there was demand for farm and off-farm labour, which would pay up to 10,000 Ugandan shillings a day (US\$3.80), enough to buy food for a few days.

"It is sad to see that, as a man, I cannot provide for my family. The situation wasn't this bad before. The food was enough and people would sell part of it to get money to pay us for the work we would do, but now everyone is poor and hungry," says James.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, food prices have risen by an average of 21%, while at the same time, the pandemic has caused the loss of livelihoods and incomes.

# PRICE SHOCKS: THE NUMBERS

**Global food prices are now at the highest levels in a decade**

**12 months**

Global food prices rose monthly from May 2020 to May 2021.<sup>9</sup>

**↑43%**

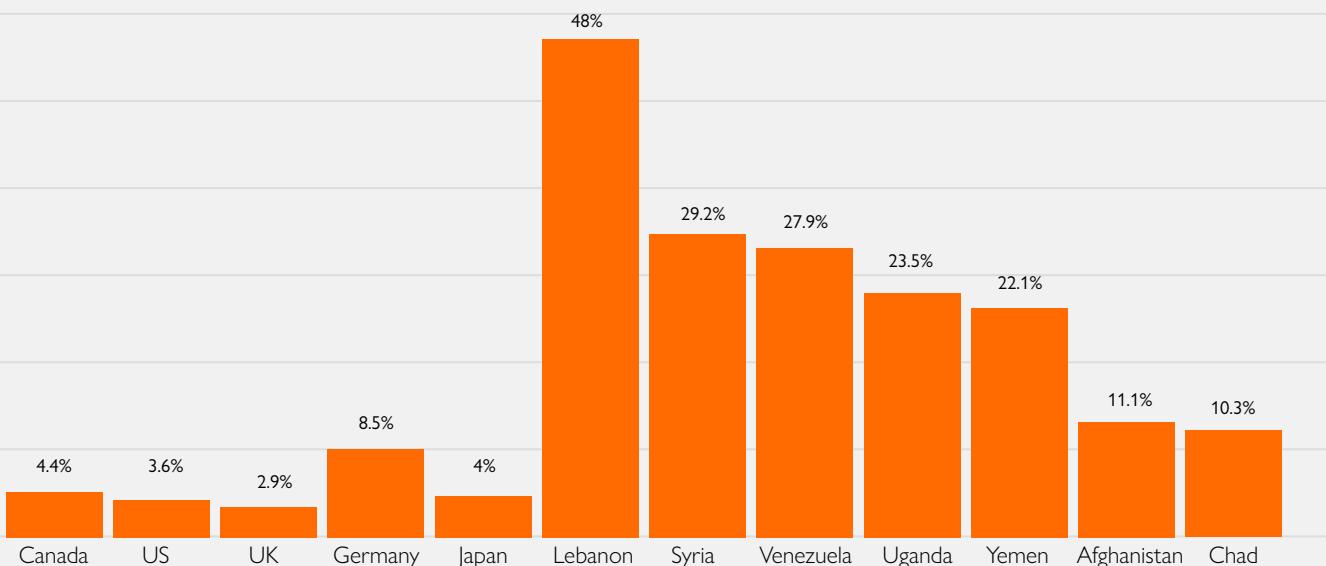
Maize prices are 66% higher than in January 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic began.<sup>10</sup>

**↑20%**

Low-income countries reliant on food imports will see food import costs jump 20% in 2021.<sup>11</sup>

**Food costs have surged in many countries since COVID-19, but the poorest are hardest hit**

Food Price Increases (February 2020 – August 2021)<sup>12</sup>



**According to World Vision research, a food basket of 10 common items costs:<sup>i</sup>**

**1 hour** of work in Canada compared to **5.6 days** in the Democratic Republic of Congo

**1.1 hours** of work in the U.K. compared to **1.25 days** of work in Afghanistan

**1 hour** of work in Germany compared to **5.5 days** in Chad

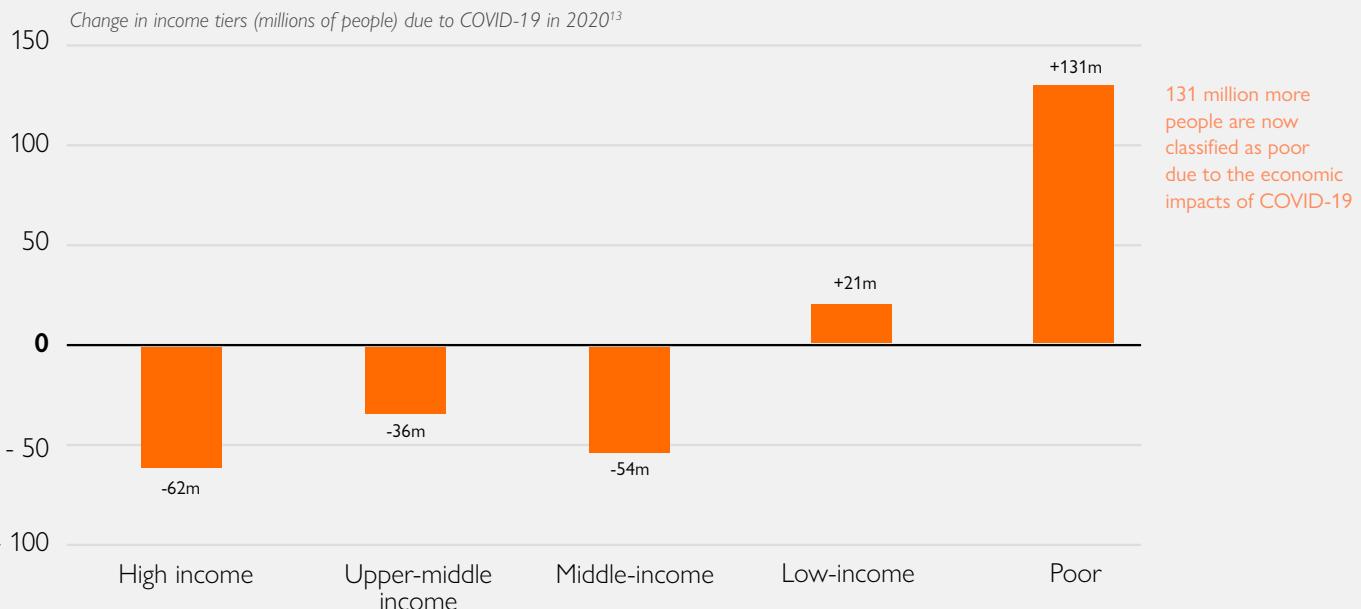
**2 hours** of work in Japan compared to **3 days of work** in Ethiopia

**1 hour** of work in the U.S.A. compared to **2 days** of work in Lebanon

<sup>i</sup> Food basket figures are based on a comparison of prices of ten common food items (World Vision, 2021) with Gross National Income per capita (World Bank, 2019). The ten common food items included a raw chicken, cooking oil, corn cobs, eggs, milk, raw sugar, rice, sweet bananas, tomatoes and wheat flour. Prices were collected from supermarkets in capital cities and converted into Australian dollars (AUD). Total food prices were then compared to Gross National Income per capita data from the World Bank (2019), which were also converted into AUD and divided by working days to calculate daily income.

# PRICE SHOCKS: THE NUMBERS

**Sharp rises in food prices come as the COVID-19 pandemic pushes millions into poverty**



**HUNGER IS  
NOW KILLING  
MORE PEOPLE  
THAN COVID-19**



**11 people** are dying every minute from lack of food (estimate)<sup>14</sup>



**7 people** are dying every minute from COVID-19 (actual)<sup>15</sup>

**Combined, COVID-19 disruptions, rising prices and falling incomes are creating a children's crisis**



**370 million children** missed out on school meals in 2020 due to COVID-19-induced school closures.<sup>16</sup>



**40% drop in coverage** of essential nutritional services occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>17</sup>



**An estimated 250 children** per day may die from pandemic-related malnutrition by the end of 2022.<sup>18</sup>

**WITHOUT URGENT ACTION, COVID-19 AND ITS SECONDARY IMPACTS COULD CLAIM MILLIONS MORE LIVES AND SCAR A GENERATION OF THE WORLD'S MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN.**

# COVID-19 AND FOOD SYSTEMS

## COVID-19, FOOD SYSTEMS AND SUPPLY CHAINS

Food systems produce, process and deliver the food that all of us eat. They also provide the main source of livelihoods for the majority of poor rural people in the world. The pandemic came at a time when food systems were already strained due to conflict, natural disasters, climate change and the mega-spread of agricultural pests in many parts of the world. Before COVID-19 hit, 650 million people were already chronically food insecure. The pandemic worsened this situation as response measures, including physical distancing, school closures, country lockdowns and border restrictions, significantly disrupted the production, processing, transport and sale of food.

The COVID-19 pandemic created supply-and-demand shocks across food systems worldwide. Most people source their food from local markets, which are highly susceptible to disruption.

COVID-19 contributed to disruptions throughout the entire supply chain, from affecting inputs (such as the availability of seeds for planting and labour for harvesting) to the processing, transport and sale of food. Perishable foods (such as fresh milk, fruits, vegetables, meat and fish) are much richer in nutrients than non-perishable foods, but they are also more susceptible to disruption than other foods with a longer shelf life. Figure 1 below summarises how food systems have been significantly affected by COVID-19 and associated measures to limit the spread of the virus.

**Figure 1: COVID-19 impacts on food systems**



### LABOUR SHORTAGES

Movement restrictions and the health impacts of the virus led to widespread labour shortages across the food industry. Labour-intensive activities, such as livestock production, planting, harvesting and crop processing have been most affected.<sup>19</sup>



### DISRUPTED HARVESTING AND PLANTING

Planting seasons were delayed and, in some cases, missed altogether due to COVID-19 limiting or disrupting the supply of agricultural inputs, such as seeds, fertiliser and animal feed.<sup>20</sup> This could lead to production shortfalls in the future.



### INCREASED FOOD WASTE

Closed markets, lack of labour for harvesting and processing and a lack of cold storage capacity has forced farmers to dump milk and throw away fresh produce, such as fruits and vegetables.<sup>21</sup>



### MISSED SCHOOL MEALS

School closures meant that 370 million of the most vulnerable children did not receive school meals in 150 countries during the pandemic. As a result, these children missed out on an estimated 39 billion in-school meals in 2020.<sup>22</sup> For many children, school meals are their most reliable source of nutritious food.

### KEY POINTS:

- COVID-19 has disrupted almost every aspect of the food system—hindering food transportation, slowing harvests, reducing food affordability and causing more than 370 million children worldwide to miss out on vital school meals in 2020.
- Global food prices reached the highest levels in a decade during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Food import costs are at very high levels. Poor countries dependent on food imports are likely to see food import costs jump by 20% in 2021 alone.



### REDUCED DEMAND

Widespread loss of income since the COVID-19 pandemic began means many families are not able to spend as much on food. In turn, less consumer spending on food means less income for farmers and workers across the food value-chain. This triggers a downward reinforcing spiral.<sup>23</sup>



### REDUCED ACCESS TO MARKETS

Both producers and consumers suffered from reduced access to markets during lockdowns.<sup>24</sup> Individuals and households living in low-income areas often had a disproportionate lack of access to places to buy food, including food delivery services.



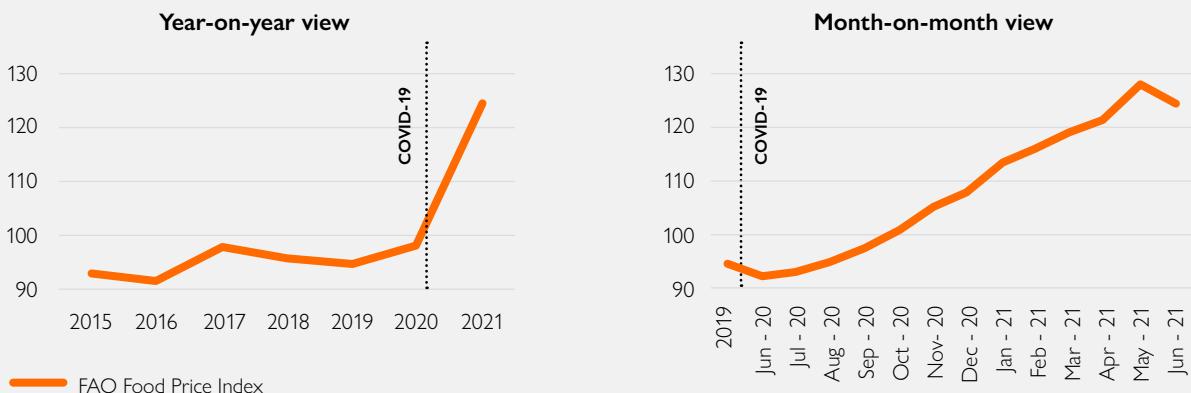
### INCREASED FOOD PRICES

Low-income countries reliant on food imports are particularly vulnerable to rising food prices since the COVID-19 pandemic began. These countries are forecast to see food import costs jump 20% in 2021.<sup>25</sup>

## COVID-19 AND FOOD AFFORDABILITY

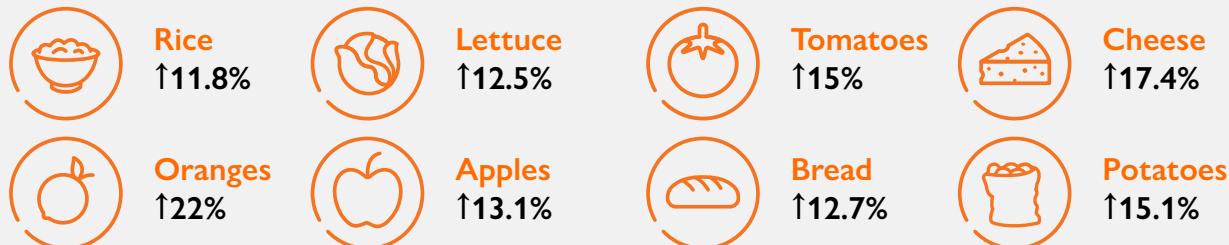
Sharp increases in global food prices mean healthy diets are even more unaffordable for millions of people. According to the FAO's Food Price Index,<sup>26</sup> global food prices were 40% higher in June 2021 than in June 2020. Between May 2020 and May 2021, food prices increased every month. In May 2021, prices hit the highest levels in a decade, soaring 40% above costs a year earlier. While food prices fell slightly (1.3%) in July 2021, they remain exceptionally high.<sup>27</sup>

**Figure 2: Global food prices jump since COVID-19 (2016-2021)<sup>28</sup>**



Some commodities have been affected more than others. For example, the price of maize has skyrocketed 43% since January 2020, according to the World Bank.<sup>29</sup> Figure 3 below provides a snapshot of other food price changes between February 2020 (before the pandemic was declared) and July 2021, showing price increases across the board.

**Figure 3: Global food price increases since COVID-19<sup>30</sup>**



While increased global food prices are of concern, the primary risk to food security related to price inflation is at the country level, with the most vulnerable countries at highest risk. The steep rise in food prices has hit low-income food-deficit countries (LIFDCs)<sup>31</sup> particularly hard. LIFDCs, such as Afghanistan, the DRC, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, could see their food import costs jump 20% this year alone.<sup>32</sup> In addition to directly impacting consumers through increased prices at the retail level, evidence from the 2007-2008 global food price crisis showed that higher food import costs negatively affected national governments' balance of payments. This often puts a downward pressure on public spending on essential services, such as health, education and social protection.<sup>33</sup> Retail food prices have risen in almost every country in the world, but their impact is greatest for low-income groups in the poorest countries, such as the urban and rural poor who depend on the market to access food products and who spend a much larger proportion of their household budgets on food than do non-poor families. For example, a 2020 sample of 300,000 households in developing countries by Laborde et al. found that poor people spend over a quarter of

their total income on staple foods compared to 14% for non-poor households.<sup>34</sup>

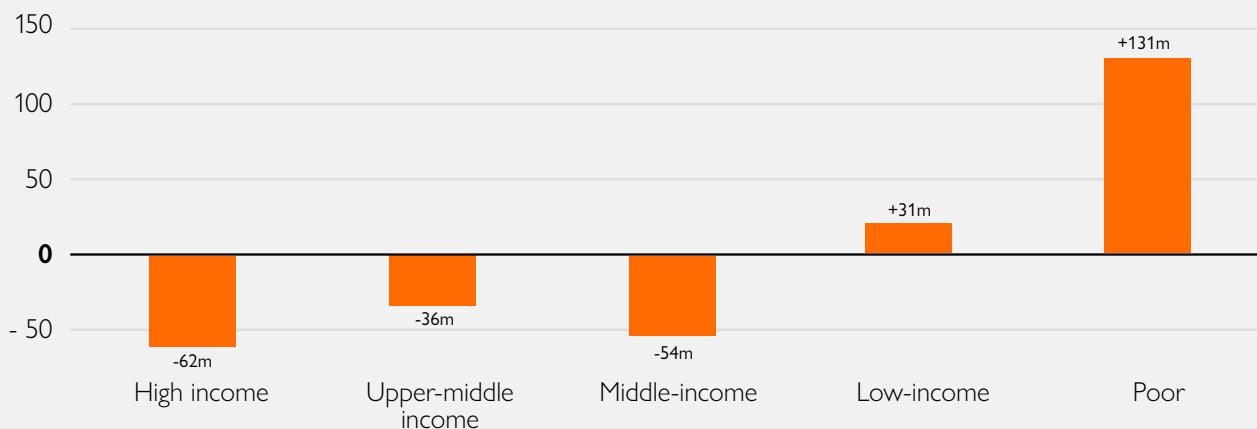
To what extent are these price shocks related to COVID-19? The emerging understanding of the relationship between COVID-19 and food prices is complex and quite context specific. The COVID-19 pandemic has put both downward and upward pressure on food prices. On the one hand, the loss of income, falling remittances and rising unemployment from COVID-19 policy responses, such as lockdowns and movement restrictions, can dampen demand as households reduce their food intake, contributing to reduced food prices. At the same time, however, COVID-19 has disrupted food supply chains, reduced labour availability and the availability of key inputs, such as seeds and fertilisers. This has increased the costs of agricultural production, processing and transport, which in turn drives food prices upwards. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to both higher consumer prices and lower returns for producers (due to increased input and transport costs), increasing food insecurity for both the urban and rural poor.

## COVID-19 AND FOOD ACCESS

The sharp rise in food prices comes at a time when COVID-19 has triggered job losses and, in turn, the ability of millions to afford sufficient nutritious food. Developing countries alone are expected to lose more than US\$220 billion in income because of COVID-19.<sup>35</sup> Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, 3 billion people (40% of the world's population) could not afford even the most basic healthy diet.<sup>36</sup> This situation has been exacerbated by the economic shocks of COVID-19.

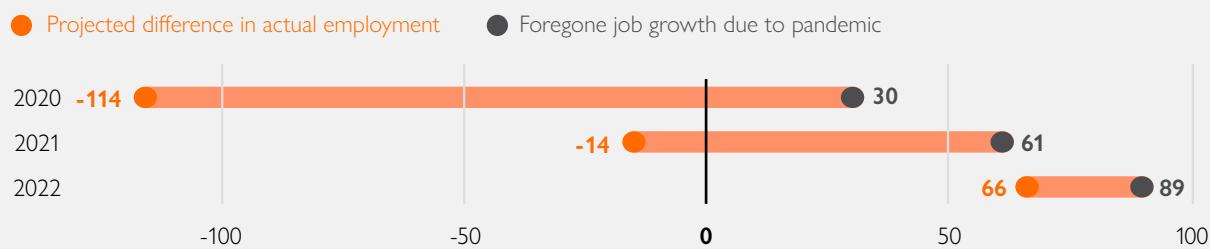
The Pew Research Center estimates that an additional 131 million people are now categorised as "poor" due to the COVID-induced economic recession in 2020.<sup>37</sup> Millions of workers have fallen out of the global middle class (defined as those who live on US\$10-\$20 a day), and are now classified as "low income" (earning US\$2-\$10 per day) or "poor" (earning US\$2 or less per day). (See Figure 4.) Seven former high and upper middle-income countries (including Indonesia and Samoa) have fallen entire income groups since the pandemic, according to the latest World Bank classifications. The World Bank projects that the knock-on effects of COVID-19 could plunge an additional 150 million people into extreme poverty by the end of 2021.<sup>38</sup>

**Figure 4: Change in income tiers (millions of people) due to COVID-19 impacts in 2020<sup>39</sup>**



COVID-related job losses have significantly affected people's ability to afford food. The International Labour Organization forecasts global unemployment will reach 220 million people in 2021, up from 187 million in 2019.<sup>40</sup> Had the pandemic not occurred, the world would have created an estimated 30 million new jobs in 2020. Instead, as Figure 5 below shows, 114 million jobs were lost in 2020 and a further 14 million jobs are expected to be lost in 2021. This includes both actual job losses from the knock-on effects of COVID-19, as well lost job growth due to COVID-19's economic impact.

**Figure 5: COVID-induced global shortfall in jobs, relative to 2019 (millions)<sup>40</sup>**



Note: The orange dots denote the projected difference in actual employment relative to 2019. The grey dots denote the development that would have been expected had there been no pandemic, hence showing foregone employment growth. The numbers inside the bar refer to the total pandemic-induced shortfall in jobs in a given year (that is, the shortfall due to the combination of the actual employment losses and foregone employment growth).  
Source: ILO estimates

Reduced incomes are forcing millions of families worldwide to skip meals, opt for cheaper and less nutritious food or go without food altogether. This is especially concerning for women and girls, who often eat last and less. Other families have resorted to child labour or child marriage to make up for lost income. Reduced expenditure on food leads to reductions in calorie intake and increased micronutrient deficiencies.<sup>42</sup> When compounded by conflict and climate shocks, this can lead to the most extreme form of food deprivation—famine.

# COVID-19 AND GLOBAL HUNGER

It is clear that COVID-19 is causing a global health and economic crisis; what is less well-known is that it is also triggering a global hunger and nutritional crisis. According to the 2021 State of Food Security and Nutrition report,<sup>43</sup> in 2020:

- up to 811 million people went hungry, a 25% increase from 2019.
- more than half of the people affected by hunger in 2020 lived in Asia and more than one-third in sub-Saharan Africa.
- 3 billion people (40% of the world's population) could not afford healthy diets in 2020.
- After remaining virtually unchanged for five years, the prevalence of undernourishment (an estimate of the proportion of the population facing serious and chronic food deprivation) increased 1.5 percentage points in just one year, reaching around 9.9%.

## KEY POINTS:

- **Global hunger dramatically increased in 2020. As many as 811 million people suffered from hunger, a 25% increase from 2019.**
- **Almost 40% of all people globally did not have access to adequate healthy diets in 2020.**
- **More than 41 million people are currently experiencing emergency levels of food insecurity due to a deadly mix of conflict, climate change and the economic impacts of COVID-19.**

## THE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF HUNGRY PEOPLE IN 2020 WAS GREATER THAN THE TOTAL INCREASE OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS.

As outlined above, high food prices combined with reduced incomes due to the COVID-19 pandemic mean that nutritious food has become even more unaffordable for millions of households, who are forced to reduce the quantity and quality of their food intake.

This food-and -nutritional crisis affects more women than men. At the global level, the gender gap in the prevalence of hunger among women was 10% higher than among men in 2020, compared to 6% in 2019.<sup>45</sup>

The ripple effects of COVID-19 on global hunger and food security will be felt for years to come, especially on children. By 2030, projections are that 656.8 million people<sup>46</sup> will suffer from hunger, which is 6% higher than the number of hungry people in 2015, the year 193 governments committed to Zero Hunger in the context of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

## SPIRALLING FOOD INSECURITY AMONG REFUGEES SINCE COVID-19

World Vision recently surveyed 339 refugee and displaced households (representing 1,914 people) in eight countries (Brazil, Colombia, the DRC, Jordan, Peru, Turkey, Uganda and Venezuela). More than three-quarters (77%) of the refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) surveyed could not meet their basic household food needs.<sup>47</sup> More than 70% of respondents reported an income drop and 40% said they lost a job due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked about their top concerns for children, 37% of refugee and displaced households reported concerns about their ability to feed their children. Children's lack of access to food or a good diet was reported by respondents as the top concern for most refugees and IDPs in Colombia (67%), Venezuela (56%) and Peru (50%). In the DRC, which currently has the world's largest population of people living with Emergency (IPC 4) levels of hunger, nine out of ten people surveyed were unable to fully meet their food needs.

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), more than 3 million refugees across East Africa (72% of the total regional refugee caseload) face ration cuts of between 10%-60%.<sup>48</sup> Less than a third continue to receive full food rations (2,100 calories per person per day).

### What is a food ration?

The Sphere standards require that a minimum food ration for an adult who is completely dependent on food assistance (such as refugees or internally displaced people) provides 2,100 kilocalories per adult per day, and contain a mix of protein (e.g. lentils, chickpeas), fats (vegetable oil), carbohydrates (e.g. wheat, maize flour, rice) and micronutrients, such as vitamin A, iron, iodine and zinc. When food rations are reduced by half, this translates into an active adult male consuming fewer calories than recommended for a moderately active five-year-old child in Canada, the UK or the US.

## COVID-19, FRAGILITY AND FOOD SYSTEMS

The WFP first warned in April 2020 that the economic impacts of COVID-19 could trigger a “famine of biblical proportions,” estimating that 270 million people were already—or are at risk of becoming—acutely food insecure due to the aggravating effects of COVID-19.<sup>49</sup> Of urgent concern are the 41 million people who are currently living in Emergency (IPC 4<sup>i</sup>) levels of acute hunger (who are just one small shock away from starvation)—a 50% increase since the pandemic was declared in March 2020.<sup>50</sup> Even more concerning are the 584,000 people currently living in situations with Catastrophe/Famine (IPC 5) levels of hunger.

**The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)** system is 1) a standardized scale of food insecurity; and 2) a process for building interagency technical consensus on the state of food insecurity and malnutrition in a specific country at a given moment and aims to inform evidence-based decision making.

<http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/resources/resources-details/en/c/1152188/>

These sharp increases in emergency levels of hunger are driven by a deadly mix of conflict, climate change and the economic shocks brought on by COVID-19. Food systems in fragile contexts are already deeply impacted by conflict and insecurity. Conflict damages markets and roads, destroys stored food and contributes to volatile food prices. Insecurity makes it difficult for people to reach food markets or plant their crops. The economic impacts of COVID-19 have amplified these systemic weaknesses, exacerbating already high levels of acute food insecurity, extreme poverty and limited household coping capacities.<sup>51</sup>

## WORLD VISION’S RESPONSE TO THE GLOBAL HUNGER CRISIS

World Vision’s response to the hunger crises aims to reach at least 15 million people, more than half of whom are children, in 19 countries of urgent concern through programmes valued at US\$300 million. Our work includes cash and vouchers assistance, food distribution, prevention and treatment of child malnutrition, school meals, livelihoods support and psychosocial support.

High global food prices are also putting pressure on the budgets of agencies that provide emergency food assistance. For example, in the first four months of 2021, the WFP had to pay 13% more for wheat than it did in the previous year.<sup>52</sup>

## COVID-19, PRICE SHOCKS AND CONFLICT

Food unaffordability can be a risk multiplier for instability, especially when it intersects with pre-existing community tensions. Multiple studies have shown that food insecurity, especially when caused by increasing food prices, is associated with a higher risk of civil unrest and communal conflict.<sup>53</sup> Essentially, hunger feeds unrest. For example, the price of food was a significant, if not principal, factor in triggering the unrest initially in Tunisia, and then in Algeria, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan and Egypt in 2010-11 (known as the Arab Spring).<sup>54</sup>

One recent study recently projected that the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic could ignite conflict in 13 more countries by 2022.<sup>55</sup> This reflects an increase of 56% compared to the pre-pandemic forecast, which is due to

the pandemic, and its economic impacts and government responses, such as national lockdowns. Although each case has its own unique drivers, political grievances and violence have already started to spread across Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Myanmar and South Africa since COVID-19 took hold.

Hunger can be both a cause and consequence of displacement. Mass movements of people, whether within their own countries or across borders, can distort already fragile food systems due to the sudden increase in food demand as populations swell. This can put pressure on food availability, and increase prices for both forcibly displaced people and host communities.

<sup>i</sup>Households in IPC 4 have large food consumption gaps, which lead to very high acute malnutrition rates and unusually high levels of death. In IPC 5, starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident.

# COVID-19 AND CHILD MALNUTRITION

Young children are the most vulnerable to even short periods of malnutrition. They need more nutrients to support their rapidly growing bodies and brains. Children become undernourished faster than adults, and they are at a much higher risk of dying from diseases associated with even short periods of hunger. For example, during the 2011 Somalia famine, 260,000 people died, half of whom were children under age 5.<sup>56</sup>

**Malnutrition** refers to deficiencies or excesses in a person's intake of energy and/or nutrients, but for the purpose of this report, it focuses on undernutrition. This includes children who are underweight, too short for their age (stunted), dangerously thin for their height (wasted) and those who suffer from micronutrient deficiencies.<sup>57</sup>

## KEY POINTS:

- Even before COVID-19 hit, 1 million children under age 5 died every year as a direct result of wasting.
- In 2019, 144 million children under age 5 were stunted and 47 million children suffered from wasting.
- COVID-19 is likely driving a malnutrition crisis. Estimates are that an additional 13.6 million more children under age 5 are suffering from wasting or acute malnutrition, 3.6 million more from stunting and that an additional 283,000 more will die.

## THE MAGNITUDE OF CHILD MALNUTRITION



**45% of deaths**  
among children under age 5 are  
linked to undernutrition.



**47 million children**  
under age 5 suffered from  
wasting before the COVID-19  
pandemic began.



**144 million children**  
under age 5 were stunted  
before the COVID-19  
pandemic began.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic took hold, 1 million children died each year due to wasting. About 45% of deaths of children under age 5 are linked to undernutrition.<sup>58</sup>

In 2019<sup>ii</sup>, an estimated 47 million children under age 5 suffered from wasting (low weight-for-height). Severe wasting is responsible for one in ten deaths among children under age 5 in low- and middle-income countries. For those children who survive, malnutrition can damage their physical growth, cognitive development and school performance.<sup>59</sup>

Stunting is even more pervasive. In 2019, 144 million children under age 5 were stunted.<sup>60</sup> This means more than one in five children worldwide are not able to grow properly physically and cognitively due to chronic malnutrition. Globally, children living in the poorest households are more than twice as likely to be stunted. Children in rural areas are 40% more likely to be stunted than those in urban settings.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>ii</sup> Updated, comprehensive data on wasting and stunting rates in 2020 is not available due to data availability challenges associated with COVID-19 movement restrictions.

## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILD NUTRITION



### 13.6 million

more children will suffer from wasting or acute malnutrition by 2022 due to the impacts of COVID-19.



### 40% less coverage

of essential nutritional services during COVID-19 in low- and middle-income countries.



### 250 children

estimated to die per day from pandemic-related malnutrition between 2020 and 2022.

The COVID-19 pandemic is increasing the risk of all forms of malnutrition. It is estimated that an additional 267.6 million people will be unable to afford a healthy diet by 2022,<sup>62</sup> and an additional 13.6 million children will suffer from wasting due to the nutritional crisis caused by COVID-19.<sup>63</sup> Child stunting rates are expected to increase for the first time in two decades due to the aftershocks of COVID-19, with predictions that an additional 3.6 million children will be stunted by 2022.<sup>64</sup> Each percentage point drop in global GDP is expected to result in an additional 700,000 stunted children.<sup>65</sup>

While child malnutrition cases are rising, access to essential nutritional services is declining. There has been a 40% reduction in the coverage of essential nutritional services in low- and middle-income countries since the COVID-19 pandemic began, reaching 75% to 100% in lockdown contexts.<sup>66</sup> This means millions of children are missing out on vital iron and folic acid supplements, deworming and family nutrition education in the places where families need them most.<sup>67</sup>

## THE COST OF CHILD MALNUTRITION



### US\$3.5 trillion

is lost from the global economy each year due to all forms of malnutrition.



### US\$29.7 billion

in productivity losses due to COVID-related stunting and mortality by 2022.



### US\$1400

is lost in average lifetime earnings for every person who is stunted in childhood.

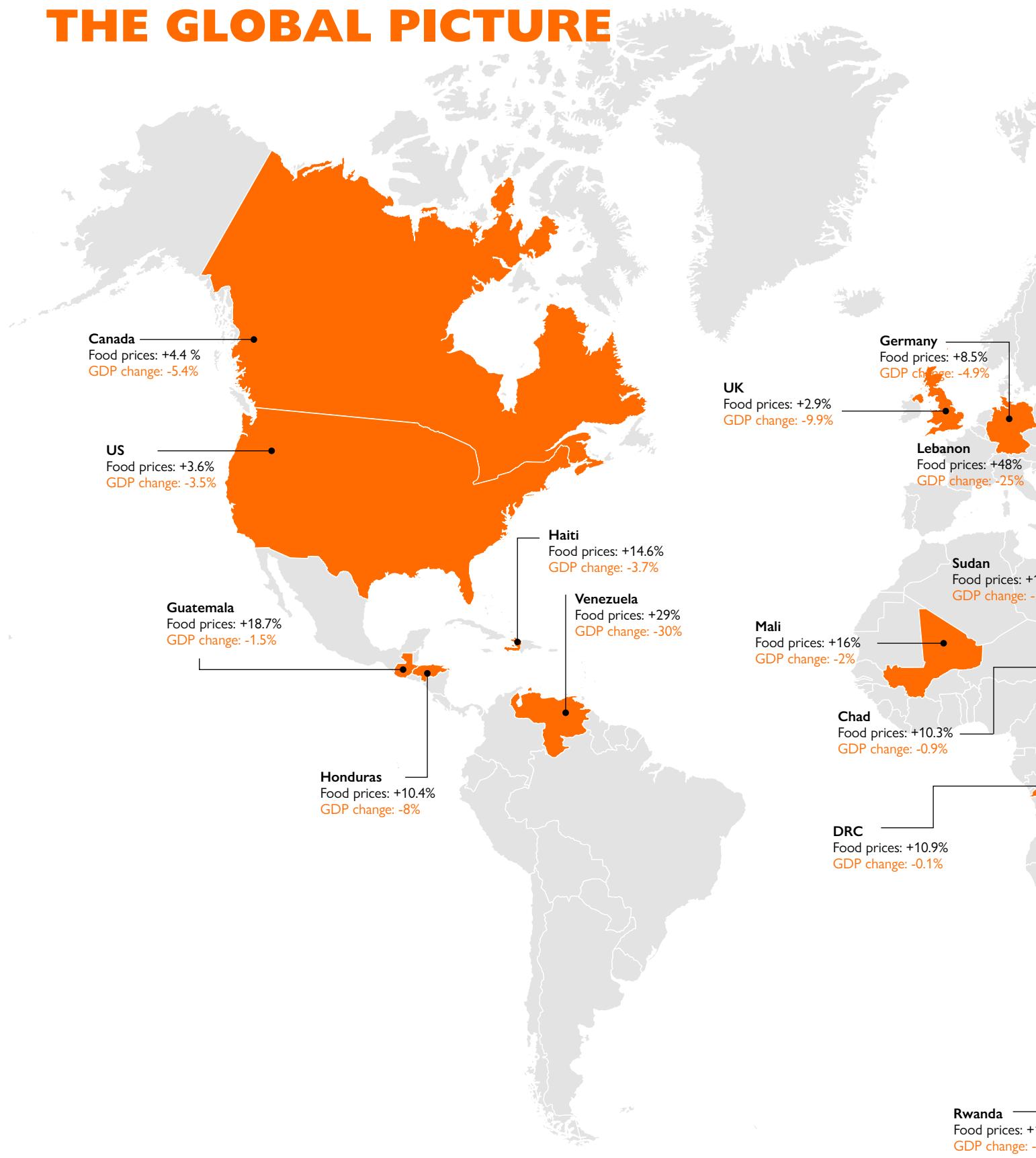
Child malnutrition takes a deep toll on individuals, families, communities and nations. Children suffering from wasting are 11 times more likely to die from preventable diseases than those who are well-nourished.<sup>68</sup> Globally, malnutrition is associated with about 45% of all deaths among children under age 5.<sup>69</sup>

The impacts of childhood malnutrition can last a lifetime, harming a child's ability to learn, earn and reach their full potential as adults. On average, adults who were stunted as children earn at least 20% less than those adults who were not.<sup>70</sup> The average lifetime lost earnings associated with stunting is US\$1,400 per child.<sup>71</sup> This lost earning potential also has significant economic implications for nations. Stunting can lower a country's average GDP per capita by 7%.<sup>72</sup> Globally, it

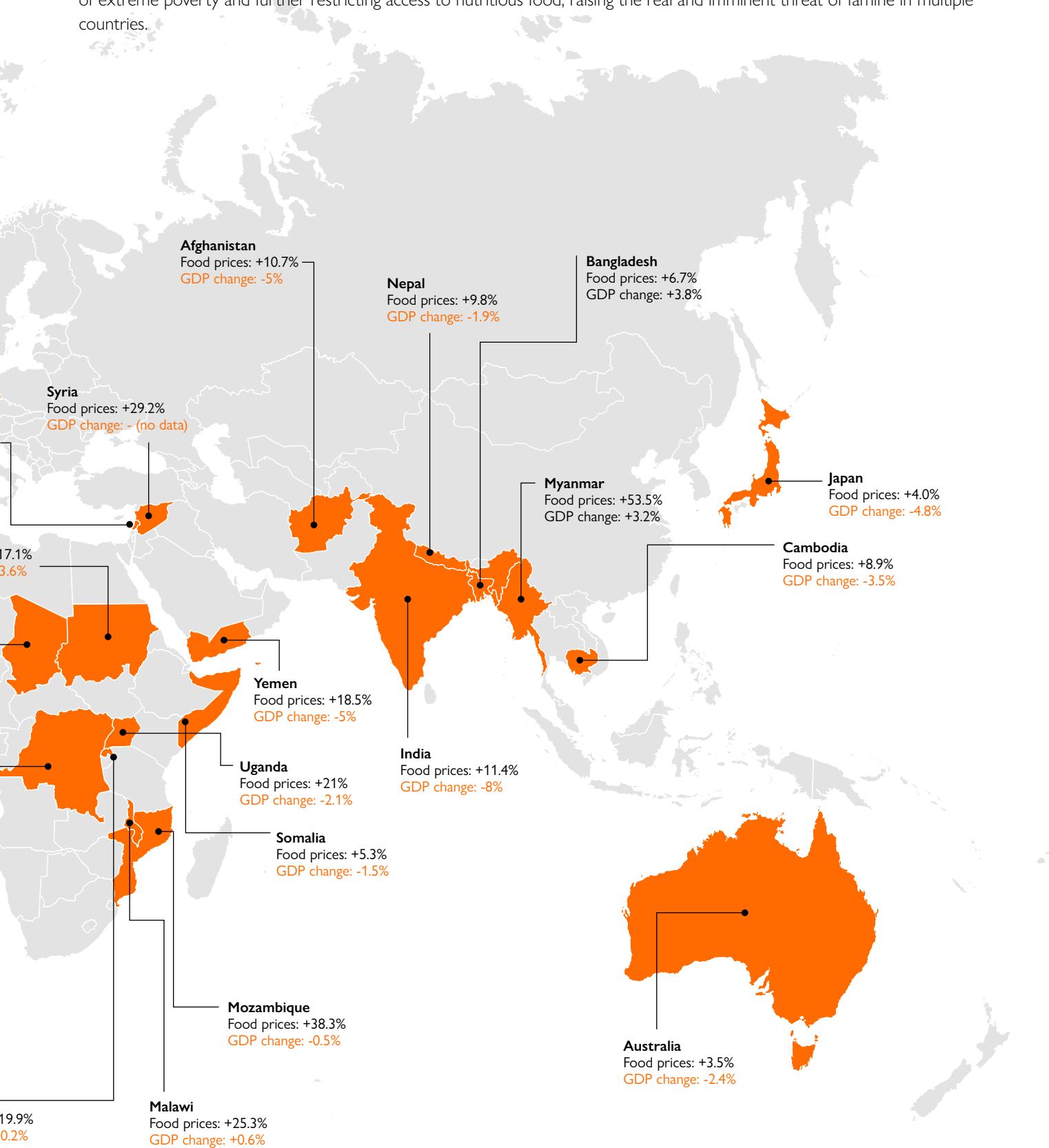
is estimated that malnutrition in all its forms costs the global economy as much as US\$3.5 trillion every year.<sup>73</sup> Mounting evidence indicates that a COVID-19-induced pandemic of malnutrition may lead to productivity losses due to stunting and mortality that may reach US\$29.7 billion by 2022.<sup>74</sup>

The United Nations warned that without large-scale coordinated action, COVID 19 combined with the emerging global recession could create a global hunger emergency, with consequences for health and nutrition "of a severity and scale unseen for more than half a century."<sup>75</sup> Without adequate action, the nutritional crisis stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic could permanently scar a generation of the world's most vulnerable children.

# PRICE SHOCKS: THE GLOBAL PICTURE



Across the globe, skyrocketing food prices combined with large-scale job losses are making nutritious food even more unaffordable for millions more families, creating the conditions for a malnutrition crisis. The most vulnerable people in the poorest countries are the worst affected. In countries affected by conflict, high food prices and reduced incomes are amplifying already high levels of extreme poverty and further restricting access to nutritious food, raising the real and imminent threat of famine in multiple countries.



Source of food price data: Food and Agriculture Organization (2021)<sup>76</sup> Price changes (%) from February 2020 to August 2021, by country.

Source of GDP data: International Monetary Fund<sup>77</sup> Real GDP growth (annual % change) in 2020, [https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDP\\_RPCH@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD](https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDP_RPCH@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD)

# PRICE SHOCKS: IMPACTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Conflict, climate change, high food prices, flooding and the desert locust outbreak, together with the socioeconomic impacts of COVID 19, gravely threaten the food security of millions of people in Africa south of the Sahara. Tens of thousands of hectares of farmland and pasture were damaged by locusts in 2020, a situation exacerbated by the devastating impacts of the pandemic on lives and livelihoods.

## CHILD HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION

Approximately one in five people in sub-Saharan Africa (21% of the population) faced hunger in 2020—more than double the proportion of any other region. Compared with 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic), about 46 million more people in sub-Saharan Africa were affected by hunger in 2020.<sup>78</sup> According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 34 of the 45 countries requiring external food assistance are in sub-Saharan Africa, making the continent by far the most food insecure region in the world.<sup>79</sup>

The situation is particularly dire in the DRC. In 2020, World Vision surveyed 46 households in the DRC.<sup>80</sup> More than half (61%) of the survey respondents said they had to reduce the quantity and quality of meals since the pandemic took hold, with only 4% saying they were able to fully meet their food needs. More than one in ten households (13%) said they could not meet their food needs at all.

A decade after the devastating famine in Somalia, multiple countries in sub-Saharan Africa have large populations on the brink of starvation. In 2021, almost 23 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are facing emergency (IPC 4 Emergency) levels of hunger, and over 535,000 people are already suffering from

### KEY POINTS:

- **Currently, over 28 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are living in Emergency (IPC 4) or Catastrophe/Famine (IPC 5) levels of food insecurity.**
- **About one in five people in Africa (21% of the population) faced chronic hunger in 2020—more than double the proportion of any other region.**
- **Millions of refugees across East Africa have had food rations cut due to funding shortages.**

famine-like conditions (IPC 5 Catastrophe). Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 92% of all people currently in IPC 5.

Child malnutrition in the region remains a major source of concern. According to UNICEF and the WFP, the number of acutely malnourished children across six Sahelian countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal) has increased sharply since the pandemic, from an estimated 4.5 million in January 2020 to almost 5.4 million by July 2020.<sup>81</sup> Another study of the combined impact of food insecurity and COVID-19 on acute malnutrition in 19 countries in West and Central Africa estimated that 15.4 million children under age 5 would be affected by wasting in 2020, a 20% increase from pre-COVID estimates.<sup>82</sup> One-third of these children were expected to become severely wasted. Another study warned that acute child malnutrition across Central and Southern Africa could increase by 25% or more during 2020 and 2021.<sup>83</sup>

## FOOD SYSTEMS

With at least 60% of the sub-Saharan African population dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods and household food consumption, disruptions to cropping or pastoral systems can threaten the food security of the continent's poor. Measures to contain COVID-19, including movement restrictions and border closures, limited farmers' access to pasture, fields and markets, affecting food supply chains, livelihoods and jobs.

Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa are also vulnerable to international food price fluctuations. From 2016 to 2018, sub-Saharan Africa imported about 85% of its food from outside the continent, leading to an annual food import bill of US\$35 billion. This is forecast to reach US\$110 billion by 2025.<sup>84</sup> This heavy reliance on world food markets is problematic for food security given that food import costs are expected to jump 20% in 2021 for LIFDCs.<sup>85</sup>

## FOOD AFFORDABILITY

Countries in sub-Saharan Africa have faced some of the sharpest food price increases in the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Between February 2020 and July 2021, food prices increased by 38.3% in Mozambique, 21% in Uganda, 17.1% in Sudan and 10.9% in the DRC.<sup>86</sup> Food-price increases were highest for fresh products, such as vegetables, meat and fish, mainly driven by shortages related to disruptions in the supply chain for fresh foods following movement restrictions.

COVID-19 impacts have already reduced the availability of food in markets in refugee camps.<sup>87</sup> Funding shortfalls continue to drive food-ration cuts for more than 3 million refugees in East Africa, affecting 72% of refugees in the region.<sup>88</sup> Food rations have been cut by 60% in Rwanda, 50% in South Sudan, 40% in Uganda and Kenya, and 16% in Ethiopia.

**“We don’t have enough to eat. We share food enough for one person amongst the three of us, leaving us hungry. Finding money has become very difficult.”**

Sourcevie, 11, DRC, 2021

# PRICE SHOCKS: IMPACTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In the Middle East,<sup>iv</sup> food crises triggered by protracted conflict and/or worsening economic crises have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. There are currently over 12 million people facing emergency levels (IPC 4) of food insecurity with 57,000 people in Yemen estimated to be living in famine-like conditions (IPC 5). Of the ten countries that have more than one million people in IPC 4, three are in the Middle East: Afghanistan (5.5 million), Yemen (5 million) and Syria (1.3 million). The number of young children suffering from severe wasting in Yemen increased by 15.5% in 2021, with 98,000 now in need of urgent treatment.

An assessment carried out by World Vision across countries in the Middle East between June and September 2020 found that 74% of respondents in Syria and 65% of respondents in Lebanon worried that they would not have enough to eat in the coming months.<sup>89</sup> This was echoed in a UN report in 2021, which reported that half a million children in Syria were chronically malnourished. In some areas of north-west Syria, acute malnutrition was approaching the emergency threshold of 15% among displaced children living in camps and hard-to-reach areas.<sup>90</sup>

Nutrition services in the region are needed more than ever, but they are hampered by movement restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Coverage of vital services to detect child wasting have reduced by 10%-24% in Syria and Yemen due to COVID-19, meaning countless children are missing out on potentially lifesaving early detection and treatment.<sup>91</sup>

## FOOD SYSTEMS

The pandemic and its secondary impacts are disrupting food systems in all countries in the Middle East through COVID-19-related trade restrictions, supply chain shocks, stockpiling and increased food prices. This is particularly concerning for food import-dependant countries such as Lebanon, Iraq,

### KEY POINTS:

- In 2021, almost 12 million people in three conflict-affected countries in the Middle East faced emergency levels of food insecurity or worse (IPC Phase 4 or above).**
- Half a million children in Syria alone are chronically malnourished and, in some areas of north-west Syria, almost 15% of displaced children are suffering from acute malnutrition.**
- Coverage of services to detect wasting, the most severe form of child malnutrition, have dropped by 10%-24% in Syria and Yemen due to the COVID-19 crisis.**

Syria and Yemen.<sup>v</sup> They are vulnerable to food price hikes and collectively host large populations of refugees and IDPs. Food prices were already rising in many countries in the region before COVID-19 due to the long-term impacts of conflict in the region and depreciating currencies, particularly in Lebanon and Syria.<sup>92</sup> Since the onset of COVID-19, food prices have jumped by 48% in Lebanon, 29.2% in Syria<sup>vi</sup> and 18.5% in Yemen.<sup>93</sup> To make matters worse, the region's economy is expected to contract by 5.7% as a result of the pandemic, with the economies of some conflict-affected countries projected to shrink by as much as 13%.<sup>94</sup> The situation in north-east Syria is particularly dire, with estimates from January 2021 that a family with a median income of 250,000 Syrian pounds would have to spend 84% of that income just on the bare minimum food basket.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>iv</sup> World Vision's Middle East operations include Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.

<sup>v</sup> Syria and Yemen are LIFDCs.

<sup>vi</sup> Price surge percentages for certain countries including Syria and Lebanon vary depending on the items evaluated and currency strength.



Some children in the Bekaa Informal Tented Settlements have only two meals a day because food prices have doubled due to COVID-19.  
Photo: Maria Bou Chaaya/World Vision

## The human cost: Families skip meals in Lebanon as local food prices double

Food prices have doubled in the Bekaa Informal Tented Settlement where Ziad, Fatima and their five children have lived since they sought refuge from the war in their home country of Syria.

Due to COVID-19 lockdowns, Ziad lost his job as a tailor. With food prices spiralling upwards, the family had to cut back on even the essentials. Their bills—from tent rental costs to electricity—continued to mount, but they had no way to pay their debts. They used to be able to buy groceries in the local market on credit. However, given the

new circumstances brought on by COVID-19, this is no longer possible. As a result, Ziad and Fatima's children now eat two meals a day instead of three.

Dalia, another mother in the settlement, said she stopped giving her one-year-old girl milk because it has become so expensive. "I had to start feeding her solid food," Dalia said. Her husband, Ahmad, used to paint houses, but now he can't find work. Although they receive food assistance, it is barely enough because food prices have doubled since an economic crisis hit Lebanon.

# PRICE SHOCKS: IMPACTS IN ASIA-PACIFIC

More than half of the world's hungry people (418 million) live in Asia. Approximately one in ten (9%) of the region's population experienced hunger in 2020—an additional 57 million people than in 2019, largely due to the disruptions caused by COVID-19.<sup>96</sup> It is also the region with the largest burden of child undernutrition—an estimated 74.5 million children under age 5 are stunted and 31.5 million suffer from wasting. These numbers are expected to increase due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, access to quality nutrition services is decreasing. In Bangladesh and Nepal, for example, the number of young children reached by treatment for wasting fell by more than 80% compared to levels in 2019.<sup>97</sup>

## FOOD SYSTEMS

Food systems in Asia have proved relatively resilient when compared with other regions.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, COVID-19 has stretched food systems, causing widespread disruptions to transportation, labour-intensive food production and food affordability. For example, in India, the national lockdown coincided with the country's peak time for harvesting key crops (including wheat, barley and high-value crops, such as fruits and vegetables).<sup>99</sup> The lack of harvesting labour led to huge levels of food waste and economic losses for farmers. Food-price increases have varied across the region, ranging from 53.5% in Myanmar and 11.4% in India to 8.9% in Cambodia and 5.5% in Indonesia.<sup>100</sup>

COVID-19 and its associated containment measures have drastically reduced employment opportunities and incomes across the region, making it even more difficult for families to afford a healthy diet. A nationwide survey in Bangladesh found

### KEY POINTS:

- Around 1.85 billion people in Asia were unable to afford a healthy diet in 2019. The real numbers are expected to be much higher now because of the economic impacts of COVID-19.
- Up to 85 million households in Asia have had limited or no food stocks since the pandemic, according to World Vision research.
- In Southern Asia alone, there are nearly 56 million stunted children and more than 25 million children suffering from wasting.

that 93% of respondents had suffered a loss of earnings, with 54% reporting no income in March 2020.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, a World Vision survey of more than 14,000 households across nine countries in Asia reported that one third of households had lost their income since March 2020.<sup>102</sup> As a result, only 30% of households said they could fully cover basic food expenses for a month. The main household coping strategies included relying on cheaper, less nutritious food (50% of families), eating smaller meals (36% of families) and skipping meals (28% of families). Most worryingly, one quarter of all families surveyed did not have any food stocks on hand and one-third had only a one-week supply left.

**“Every day for the past 22 days, we've eaten one meal per day. Sometimes for my husband and me, there is no food for us. We do not know how long we can survive. There is no food anywhere. I cannot tolerate this situation anymore.”**

Shilpi, 35, Bangladesh, 2020

**“The people in my community are following the rules of the lockdown, however, certain things are challenging. For example, shops and vegetable vendors are hiking the prices and taking advantage of the situation. It is tougher for daily wage earners and construction workers, as well. How will they afford to buy these expensive things?”**

Durgesh, 13, India, 2020

### The human cost: Amid economic devastation, a story of resilience in Bangladesh

Khadija Begum was one of many Bangladeshis who were forced to stop working after COVID-19 triggered lockdowns in 2020. The situation could have been far more dire for her, her husband, Ohab, and their two children, but the family could continue to buy food with the support of a World Vision livelihoods programme that helped them generate alternative sources of income.

“Every day since the lockdown over 50 days ago, my husband and two children have divided our chores around our livestock. While my first-born, Abu, 19, and I milk the cows and check on the sheep, my husband and Hassan, 13, pick up eggs from the chickens and ducks,” Khadija said. They had some hungry days in the earlier stages of lockdown, but eventually the family had enough food, such as milk and eggs, from their livestock and vegetable garden to make it through.

In 2018, Khadija and Ohab were among many other ultra-poor families who received training from World Vision on agricultural production and livestock rearing. World Vision supplied them with a heifer and a variety of vegetable seeds to help them create alternative incomes. The family embraced the opportunity. During COVID, Khadija and Ohab had enough food not only to feed themselves, but also to sell to others and to give surplus food to families in need in their village.



Khadija's family have shown resilience through the COVID-19 pandemic because of previous agriculture and livestock training from a World Vision program. Photo: Masud Rana/World Vision

**“I cannot not sleep because in the next few days our rice supply will finish, and I have no money left. We eat less and save up for the next days.”**

Sum, 43, Cambodia, 2020

# PRICE SHOCKS: IMPACTS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region was hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, experiencing its worst economic contraction in a century. The gross domestic product per capita declined by 9.6 percent, translating into 9.6 years of development losses.<sup>103</sup> This sharp decline has taken a deep social and economic toll on millions of people in the region, which was already experiencing years of stagnating economic growth and limited progress on social indicators.<sup>104</sup> The economic impacts of COVID-19 had a much greater effect on the labour market than previous crises, with larger job losses, sharp declines in labour participation and increased unemployment.<sup>105</sup> Unemployment increased by 25 million people, 52% of whom were women. Between January and March 2021, the region had only recovered 58% of the jobs lost during the crisis. Regional recovery is expected to be below average in the coming months and years compared to the rest of the developing world.<sup>106</sup> It is estimated that LAC's income per capita will remain below pre-COVID-19 levels until 2025, returning to its long-term trend levels through 2031.<sup>107</sup>

## CHILD HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION

On average, 13% of children under age 5 in LAC are stunted. However, this regional figure masks large variations between countries, with stunting rates in Guatemala estimated at 47% and at over 20% in Haiti, Ecuador and Honduras.<sup>108</sup> The prevalence of wasting in LAC (1.3%) is low compared to other developing regions, but there are also significant differences between sub-regions: South America (1.4%), Central America (0.9%) and the Caribbean (2.8%). LAC accounted for 60 million (8%) of the global population of hungry people in 2020, which was a 30% increase compared to 2019, the second largest percentage increase in the world.<sup>109</sup> LAC also

### KEY POINTS:

- The region's economy contracted by 9.6% (GDP/capita) due to the economic impacts of COVID-19, the worst of any world region.
- The number of hungry people in the region increased by 30%, the second largest percentage increase in the world.
- Guatemala has the sixth largest percentage of stunted children in the world, tied with Yemen.

experienced the sharpest increase (9%) globally in moderate or severe food insecurity between 2019 to 2020.

## FOOD SYSTEMS

Food systems are diverse in LAC, with large variations among the region's countries in terms of their scale, sophistication and economic importance. LAC is the world's largest net-exporter of agricultural products and fish, and accounts for a larger share of global agricultural production than the European Union, or the United States and Canada combined.<sup>110</sup> The LAC food system accounts for between 10%-15% of all jobs in the region—work that is particularly important for poor households.<sup>111</sup>

COVID-19 and its associated containment measures have drastically reduced employment opportunities and incomes across the region making it even more difficult for millions more families to afford a healthy diet.



Photo: World Vision

## The human cost: COVID-19 brings hunger to urban households in Brazil

Brazil was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides the toll of infections and deaths, the economic impacts of COVID-19 destroyed the jobs and livelihoods of millions of families, particularly poor families in urban areas and the north-east region, exacerbating prevailing inequalities and causing hunger to return.

When Maria da Guia wakes up every morning, the only certainty she has is the need to feed the 11 people in her household. Until March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, she worked as a janitor, helping to provide for the residents of her one-bedroom home where she lives with her husband, children and grandchildren.

COVID-19 took away Maria's job, schooling for her grandchildren and her sense of certainty about the future. Maria, 56, resorted to collecting and recycling reusable waste from morning to night in the streets of João Pessoa, a

coastal town in north-eastern Brazil. It was the only option she had to feed her family. With luck, she finds food that is still consumable. "I've already found a complete food basket in the trash. I don't understand why people throw food away," she says.

Maria does not know how to write her name, but she can read in her granddaughter's eyes a small hope for a better future. Maria Eduarda, age 8, is the closest of all the grandchildren to her grandmother. "She's like a mother to me," says the girl, who dreams of becoming a doctor.

In July 2021, these two Marias and World Vision crossed paths. Working with its local partner, World Vision provided food supplies for their household to ensure that everyone in the family had enough nutritious food during this difficult time.

# SCOPING SOLUTIONS: FOOD FOR THOUGHT

World Vision addresses both the short- and long-term causes of hunger through a range of initiatives. We help provide emergency food security support while ensuring that markets work for the poor. We teach farmers how to nurture their land, and to improve the quantity, diversity and safety of the food they grow. World Vision also supports community-and -health centres, distributing micronutrient supplements, and providing mothers and caregivers with the information they need to improve nutrition for their families and newborn children. We take action to address both the immediate risks from malnutrition and its root causes.

## PROVIDE LIFESAVING SAFETY NETS (FOOD, CASH AND VOUCHER ASSISTANCE) IN EMERGENCIES

Over 41 million people are one step away from starvation, and in some countries, there are populations already living in famine-like conditions, the most life-threatening and catastrophic form of food insecurity. The most urgent priority must be to meet urgent hunger needs to prevent large-scale human suffering and destitution. Engaging markets is key to this, as is cash and voucher assistance. We know that collective political will and immediate assistance works to beat back famine in the short-term. In 2017 when the world last faced the risk of large-scale famine in multiple countries, the international community came together to fight famine and saved millions of lives.

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### Solution in action: Responding to the hunger emergency in East Africa

In East Africa, around 7.8 million people are being pushed to the edge of starvation due to a deadly mix of conflict, climate change and COVID-19. In April 2021, World Vision declared a regional hunger crisis response in six countries (Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda and Kenya). World Vision has already reached 1.4 million highly vulnerable people with food and market-sensitive cash, voucher and nutrition support in these countries. As of May 2021, more than 19,000 children have received malnutrition treatments, 35,000 people were reached with cash and voucher assistance, and 311,000 people received much-needed food assistance.<sup>112</sup>

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### World Vision's mission to end global hunger

Every 60 seconds, a hungry child is fed through the generous support of World Vision's donors. Every year for the past five years (2015-2020), we and our partners have provided lifesaving food assistance to 7 million children annually.

With the support of our donors, World Vision has further stepped up to combat COVID-19 and its aftershocks of hunger and child malnutrition. In 2020, World Vision:

- reached 12 million of the most vulnerable people (including 7.2 million girls and boys) in 29 countries with lifesaving, resilience-building food security and nutrition programmes, in partnership with the WFP. Almost 50% of these programmes were delivered through cash and vouchers.
- provided supplementary feeding to over 684,000 children under age 5 across 14 countries to protect their nutritional status.
- treated more than 96,000 children suffering from wasting in 13 countries, with 89% of these children making a full recovery.

For the past 16 years, World Vision has been the largest non-governmental partner of the World Food Programme, winner of the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize.

## STRENGTHEN FOOD SYSTEMS TO BE MORE INCLUSIVE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE

In addition to responding to immediate food crises, we need to make smart investments over the longer term to end food crises once and for all. This requires working across the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus in a climate-smart way to reduce humanitarian need, and to promote sustainable livelihoods for the most vulnerable people. It also requires improving the resilience of food systems to respond to and recover from economic, climatic and conflict-induced shocks.

World Vision's work in food systems addresses both the supply and demand side of food systems. Our programmes focus on increasing the availability of nutritious food through improving agricultural techniques and strengthening local markets, as well as supporting behaviour change to improve household diets. We work alongside communities to diversify food sources, plant more drought-resistant and nutritious crops, access seed banks, restore degraded landscapes, improve food storage capacity and reduce food loss.

Crucially, our approach engages the market system to distribute agricultural inputs and facilitate buying, processing and retailing, as well as supporting microfinance programmes to strengthen small and medium-sized enterprises. For example, World Vision's rural development programme in the drylands of Ethiopia helped more than 60,000 smallholder farmers better capture and use rainwater to increase crop yields. This helped build their confidence to engage with input suppliers, credit providers and markets to improve incomes. As a result, local dietary diversity more than doubled, and the food gap (the difference between what the wealthy and the poor eat) reduced by 34%. World Vision has also worked with communities in South Sudan to establish community-managed seed banks to ensure that farmers have enough locally adapted seed to increase their yields and incomes.

### **Solution in action: Reducing child stunting in Burundi through nutrition-sensitive agriculture**

Burundi's Muyinga Province has one of the highest rates of child stunting in the world. At the start of World Vision's nutrition-sensitive economic-development project, six out of ten children suffered stunting due to undernutrition.

With funding from the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, World Vision implemented a nutrition-sensitive value-chain project in Muyinga Province to reduce chronic malnutrition, especially for children under age 5. This involved:

- improving the agricultural productivity of biofortified crops, such as high-iron beans, by providing technical training and market information for farmers, and improving commercial access to inputs, such as seeds.
- linking producers to markets through farmer cooperatives.
- providing vitamin A supplements to children under age 5 to reduce rates of malnutrition.
- setting up kitchen gardens in more than 40% of households to reduce food costs and increase dietary diversity.

This nutrition-sensitive approach to agriculture, combined with direct support for vulnerable children, boosted food security and nutrition. Chronic malnutrition, stunting and underweight prevalence among children under age 5 reduced by 3%, 6% and 27% respectively, while the prevalence of all three increased in areas outside of the project by 21%, 5% and 1% respectively.

### **Solution in action: Supporting superfoods in Timor-Leste**

World Vision's Better Food, Better Health project is a nutrition-sensitive agricultural project that aims to improve nutrition for more than 31,000 people in Timor-Leste. The project promotes the production and utilisation of six superfoods: eggs, moringa, mung beans, orange sweet potato, red kidney beans and soybeans.

Alda, 35, from Aileu, used to have difficulties developing her farm and her business before her involvement with World Vision's project. "Before World Vision came to my village, I only planted mustard green and cabbage on my farm," says Alda. "However, World Vision's presence in my village motivated me to plant various crops. I attended the superfood training on how to produce local foods and received seeds for planting."

Alda won World Vision's superfood cooking competition and now grows a variety of crops, but she says COVID-19 has presented challenges for her work and family. "It's been two or three months, and I can't sell my food collection at the market due to the lockdown," she says. Nevertheless, Alda's crops have provided nutritious food for her and her family during this difficult time. Since COVID-19 began, there was a local rice shortage, but Alda could exchange her crops for rice.

## TARGET THE ‘WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY’, THE FIRST 1,000 DAYS OF A CHILD’S LIFE

Meeting a child’s nutritional requirements is most crucial in the first 1,000 days of life—the period between pregnancy and a child’s second birthday. Through its evidence-based 7-11 Strategy for Maternal and Child Health, World Vision focuses on this age cohort in order to improve life-long health, education and other child-development outcomes.

**Figure 6: World Vision’s ‘7-11’ approach**



### 7 INTERVENTIONS FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

1. Adequate diet
2. Iron/folate supplements
3. Tetanus Toxoid immunisation
4. Malaria prevention and intermittent preventive treatment
5. Birth preparedness, healthy timing and spacing of pregnancy
6. Deworming
7. Access to maternal health services



### 11 INTERVENTIONS FOR CHILDREN UNDER AGE 2

1. Appropriate breastfeeding
2. Essential newborn care
3. Handwashing with soap
4. Appropriate complementary feeding
5. Adequate iron
6. Vitamin A supplementation
7. Oral rehydration therapy/zinc
8. Prevention and care for malaria
9. Full immunisation
10. Prevention and care-seeking for acute respiratory infections
11. Deworming

In World Vision’s experience, child-health outcomes are best achieved when integrated with women’s empowerment initiatives, including women’s right to healthy, spaced and planned pregnancies. We also promote nutrition interventions that include food security and diet diversity, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene programmes and activities that increase household incomes.

### Solution in action: Using the ‘7-11’ strategy to improve child health and nutrition in Myanmar

World Vision’s maternal, newborn and child health project in Myanmar trained nearly 80,000 people in 115 villages in nutrition, childcare and ante-natal care, while also improving family planning and sanitation. This project was funded by the Australian Government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

In line with the ‘7-11’ approach, growth monitoring also took place, with thousands of children referred to specialist care for under-nutrition. The project encouraged local farmers to be part of the project by donating eggs to families with malnourished children. Over four years, the project treated 3,794 malnourished children.

## REDUCE POVERTY, AND INCREASE AND DIVERSIFY INCOMES SO FAMILIES CAN AFFORD NUTRITIOUS FOOD

Poverty is a leading cause of food insecurity. The widespread collapse of incomes and livelihoods that were driven by some COVID-19 containment measures dramatically increased poverty rates. Interventions are required to ensure that households have the income they need to purchase food. When combined with nutrition, behaviour-change activities can have a significant impact. Economic development that provides opportunities for jobs and decent work for the poor, combined with inclusive social protection systems, is one of the most sustainable and powerful ways to improve food security in the long-term.

World Vision promotes changes in food systems to make markets more inclusive of women, the poor and other marginalised groups. This work includes working with private sector actors to ensure that their business models are fit for purpose to work with groups that are often excluded from market systems. We also build the capacity of marginalised groups (such as women, youth and the ultra-poor) to engage in markets and generate incomes, drawing on over a decade of World Vision’s experience with value-chain programming across 38 countries. We provide supports, such as coaching, business-management and financial-literacy training, and establish savings groups, depending on a household’s level of market readiness.

## **Solution in action: More Income Generated for Poor Families in Indonesia (MORINGA)**

World Vision's MORINGA project embraces systems thinking and market forces to increase the income of 4,000 farming households in central and eastern Indonesia. It does this through commercial partnerships with private market actors, while simultaneously building household productive capacity through training and coaching.

Through this project, World Vision is seeking to change the way market actors operate to benefit the poor. This has involved improving the supply of hybrid seed through two partnerships with large agri-input supply companies, training small-holder farmers in good agricultural practice and establishing production centres to fast-track processing. This project focused on three sub-sectors: pili nut, moringa leaf and seed and maize.

At the end of the first growing season, farmers were already experiencing positive results. Within just two years of the project, annual incomes of participating households increased 265%. In turn, higher incomes enable households to invest more in health, including nutritious food.

## **SUPPORT WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

Women's empowerment is a power driver of individual, household and national economic empowerment. It can also contribute to better nutritional outcomes for children. In India, children of mothers who participated in more household decisions were less likely to be wasted and stunted.<sup>113</sup> In other studies, women having a more equal say in crop decision-making has been linked with improved farming productivity in Bangladesh,<sup>114</sup> and better household food security in South Africa<sup>115</sup> and Ghana.<sup>116</sup> Another study revealed that when women have the means to regularly contribute financially to household budgets, spending on health and education for children increases, and household poverty decreases.<sup>117</sup>

World Vision is committed to advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment. We do this through responding to the different barriers and opportunities faced by women, promoting gender-equitable relations between women and men within households, as well as engaging men and boys as allies and partners in women's empowerment. Our work involves conducting gender-sensitive market and value-chain analysis, which help to identify economic barriers facing women and ways to address them.

## **Solution in action: Empowering Bangladeshi women through nutrition-sensitive agriculture )**

In Bangladesh, 36% of children under age 5 are stunted. Poor nutrition outcomes are closely linked to gender inequality. Due to harmful social-and -gender norms, women and girls often eat last and less, with 46% of women of reproductive age being anaemic.

With the support of the Australian Government's Australian NGO Cooperation Program, World Vision is implementing the Nutrition-Sensitive Value Chains for Smallholder Farmers Project in Jamalpur, one of Bangladesh's least-developed regions. Adopting an integrated approach, the project seeks to improve economic empowerment, nutrition and gender-equality outcomes for 20,000 women and men farmers, and their households.

The project works to improve incomes from value chains where there are opportunities and to lower entry barriers for women. For example, we are working in leafy greens and chili value chains, where women can more easily participate given the lower input costs and the opportunity to work close to home. Given the prevailing challenges linked to nutrition, the project is increasing the demand for and supply of diverse nutritious food through nutrient-rich food systems, home gardens, infant and young child feeding practice groups, as well as gender-sensitive nutrition behaviour change.

By integrating women's empowerment and child nutrition with work on agricultural markets, the project is improving incomes, and health and social outcomes at the same time. The project's mid-term evaluation in 2021 found that average incomes have already increased from 10,500 Bangladeshi taka (US\$170) before the project to 17,500 taka (\$284) at midline. Children are reaping the benefits. Meal frequency has significantly improved for children between the ages of 6 months to 23 months, increasing from 23% of children receiving minimum meal frequency to 93% of children now enjoying adequate meals.



Photo: Klezer Gaspar/World Vision

## RECOMMENDATIONS

World Vision has long prioritised ending global hunger, poverty and all forms of malnutrition, especially for the world's most vulnerable children. The deep economic impacts of COVID-19 have made this mission even more critical. The needs, rights and perspectives of most vulnerable children, families and communities must be at the centre of a just and equitable global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Doing so will require the following.

### NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS



Strengthen and/or establish national child-sensitive social protection systems, ensure adequate budgetary allocations and put in place accountability mechanisms to ensure that the most vulnerable children and their families receive transfers of sufficient size and duration to meet lifesaving food-and -nutrition needs.



Prioritise an inclusive, green economic recovery to improve household purchasing power and affordability of safe, nutritious food. By rebuilding livelihoods for the most vulnerable, governments can increase food security, broaden the consumer base, build resilience across market system and contribute to reducing food price volatility at the country and local levels.



Strengthen national health systems and integrate specific investments in human capital in overall COVID-19 economic responses and recovery plans. These investments should focus on the prevention and treatment of malnutrition through prioritising proven and cost-effective nutrition interventions, such as micronutrient supplementation, breastfeeding promotion, vitamin A supplementation, treatment of severe acute malnutrition and support for improved infant and young child feeding practices.

## DONORS AND INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS



Work with other G20 members to deliver on the G20 leaders' commitment to rapidly mobilise comprehensive and coordinated policy responses to COVID-19's direct and indirect impacts.



This must include support for national governments to adapt, strengthen and scale up inclusive, child-sensitive social protection and gender-responsive measures that meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and families. Where national systems do not exist, rapidly scale up funding to humanitarian programmes to meet lifesaving needs for the most vulnerable, including urgently disbursing US\$6.6 billion in additional funding to prevent, mitigate and respond to large-scale famine risks in multiple countries.



Provide multi-year, flexible funding and support implementing agencies to adapt programming to accommodate needs in rapidly changing local contexts. In addition, coordinate humanitarian and development financing to support an inclusive and coherent response that supports social assistance transfers to meet the immediate needs of the most vulnerable girls, boys, their families and communities, while also assisting them to achieve sustainable development outcomes and resilience in the longer-term.



Marshall urgent global and national political leadership to increase financial-and -policy commitments for nutrition in this critical Year of Action at the UN Food Systems Summit (September 2021) and Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit (December 2021).



Support an inclusive, green economic recovery focused on the poorest countries, with a focus on rebuilding global, regional and national food systems to be fairer, greener in the wake of COVID-19, making nutritious food more accessible and affordable for the most vulnerable. Building back better food systems means creating food systems that are more resilient against shocks and stressors. It also means delivering greater value to growers and workers and providing consumers with an affordable range of healthy food. Nutrition-sensitive and climate-smart agriculture can do just this, as a source of both income and food. To promote gender equality, priority should be placed on targeted women's economic empowerment programmes that respond to the different barriers and opportunities faced by women compared to men.

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