



## WORLD VISION POLICY BRIEF

# There is no place for famine in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Escalating and protracted conflicts, climate change, and the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 are driving the shocking rise in global food insecurity and malnutrition seen in many parts of the world today. Exacerbating this already dire situation, global food prices hit record levels in February 2022, rising 21.7% over the same period last year.<sup>1</sup> The conflict in Ukraine, one of the world's largest grain exporters, is already having significant impacts on global food supplies and the prices for food, fuel, key agricultural inputs and the costs of providing humanitarian assistance. This is having a devastating effect on the most vulnerable people, particularly in low-income, food-deficit countries, threatening to push millions more people into hunger and poverty.<sup>2</sup> Currently, there are 45 million people – almost half of whom are children – suffering from Emergency (IPC 4) levels of food insecurity or worse, according to the IPC (Box 1). Of most urgent concern are the 552,000 people – over 260,000 of whom are children – currently living in Catastrophe/Famine (IPC 5) levels of hunger in Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen.<sup>3</sup>

### Box 1: The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) system

is (1) a standardised scale of food insecurity, and (2) a process for building interagency technical consensus on the state of food insecurity in a specific country at a given moment and aims to inform evidence-based decision making. The 5 phases of the IPC scale are: Phase 1 (None/Minimal), Phase 2 (Stressed), Phase 3 (Crisis), Phase 4 (Emergency) and Phase 5 (Catastrophe/Famine).

Prior to COVID-19, the vast majority of people facing these life-threatening crises lived in humanitarian and/or fragile contexts where humanitarian access is constrained and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL) are rife. Food crises and state fragility are closely linked – of the 10 countries facing the highest burden of emergency and catastrophe/famine levels of food insecurity, all

<sup>1</sup> 'FAO Food Price Index Rises to a New All-Time High in February' (March 4, 2022). <https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/>

<sup>2</sup> 'FAO Information Note: The Importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for Global Agricultural Markets and the Risks Associated with the Current Conflict' (March 25, 2022 Update). <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9236en/cb9236en.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> 'Hunger Hotspots, FAO-WFP Early Warnings on Acute Food Insecurity: February to May 2022 Outlook' (Rome: FAO, 2022). <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb8376en>

have longstanding humanitarian response plans, and seven are categorised as ‘extremely fragile’ by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).<sup>4</sup>

Two years into the pandemic World Vision is witnessing how the deadly interplay between conflict, climate change and COVID-19 has continued to devastate the food security of the most vulnerable people by destroying livelihoods and incomes, driving up food prices, increasing child malnutrition and limiting access to even the most basic of social services. Food insecurity is a leading cause of wasting in children,<sup>5</sup> with malnutrition as the underlying cause of 45% of all preventable deaths of children under five. Young children with wasting are 11 times more likely to die from preventable diseases than well-nourished children.<sup>6</sup> A July 2021 study estimated that COVID-19-related disruptions could result in an additional 9.3 million wasted and 2.6 million stunted children, 168,000 child deaths, and US\$29.7 billion losses in future productivity due to excess stunting and child mortality.<sup>7</sup> Poor nutrition in the first thousand days (from pregnancy to two years of age) can have lifelong negative physical and cognitive consequences for children, and it undermines the long-term development and resilience of individuals, households and nations.

**World Vision believes that famine is preventable and has no place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.** This is not the first time the world has faced this situation in recent years. The last large-scale famine occurred in Somalia in 2011, where failure to act quickly on early warnings of famine and restricted humanitarian access left 260,000 people dead, half of whom were children.<sup>8</sup> As famine was declared and the UN Secretary-General made his plea to the international community to save ‘children from a truly terrible nightmare’,<sup>9</sup> it was already too late. Half of all people that perished did so before famine was officially declared. The collective failure to act on early warnings led to thousands of preventable deaths. We cannot let this happen again. Our experience in 2017, the last time we faced famine risks at scale, demonstrated the power of collective action, when famine was largely held at bay due to a massive, sustained and collective humanitarian response and improved access.



<sup>4</sup> OECD, *States of Fragility 2020* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 17 September 2020). <https://doi.org/10.1787/ba7c22e7-en>

<sup>5</sup> Other causes include poor access to health and nutrition services, water and sanitation and poor infant-feeding practices.

<sup>6</sup> Bhutta, Z A, et al., ‘Severe Childhood Malnutrition’, *Nat. Rev. Dis. Primers* 3, 17067 (2017). [Article Number 17067 | Volume 3.](https://doi.org/10.1038/nrdp.2017.3)

<sup>7</sup> Osendarp, S, et al., ‘The COVID-19 Crisis Will Exacerbate Maternal and Child Undernutrition and Child Mortality in Low- and Middle-Income Countries’, *Nat Food* 2, 476–84 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00319-4>

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Maxwell, et al., ‘Facing Famine: Somali Experiences in the Famine of 2011’, *Food Policy* 65 (2016): 63–73.

<sup>9</sup> Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General, ‘Famine in Somalia’ (2011). <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/articles/2011-07-21/famine-somalia>.

social protection systems, nature-based solutions to address climate change and gender-transformative policy changes. Social protection is among the best documented and most cost-effective ways to promote equity, reduce vulnerability, invest in human capital development and protect people’s food security and nutrition status when disaster hits, particularly for the extreme poor. Multipurpose cash transfers are particularly effective and efficient in supporting vulnerable families to meet immediate needs in contexts where multiple, overlapping shocks are the norm.<sup>10</sup> Both short-term and long-term measures must prioritise the realisation of human rights; support peaceful resolution to conflict; address the impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable people and countries; and transform food systems to be more inclusive, sustainable and resilient.

World Vision welcomes high-level initiatives to address famine risks in multiple countries, including the UN Secretary-General’s Famine Prevention Task Force, the UN’s [Call for Action to avert famine in 2021](#) and the G7’s Compact on Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Crises. However, much more must be done to get lifesaving resources into the hands of the vulnerable children and their families who need them now. Bold, decisive leadership and urgent action by national governments, civil society, faith actors and the international community are needed to prevent this terrible situation from slipping into an unimaginable catastrophe, pushing the food security and nutrition-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) even further out of reach for the most vulnerable children and their families.

## World Vision’s response to food security and nutrition crises

World Vision has been addressing urgent and long-term food security in humanitarian and fragile contexts for many years. In response to the current global hunger and nutrition crisis, World Vision launched the **Global Hunger Initiative (GHI)** in April 2021. The GHI seeks to reach 15 million of the most food-insecure people in 19 of the most affected countries where World Vision is operational.<sup>11</sup> As of January 2022, World Vision’s GHI has **reached over 8.7 million people – more than 4.9 million of whom are children** – with integrated programming that improves access to nutritious food; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); health and nutrition support; child-protection services; and livelihoods assets to support early recovery and build resilience (for more details, see Table 1 and World Vision’s most recent [GHI Situation Report, February 2022](#)). World Vision is on the ground, responding, and ready to do more. We are an experienced global leader in food security and nutrition in the most fragile contexts, able to meet emergency hunger and nutrition needs and support longer-term food security at scale.

**TABLE 1: Number of people assisted by World Vision’s Global Hunger Initiative: April 2021– February 2022**

Total number of people reached	Improved access to WASH	Improved access to food: in-kind, cash and voucher, school meals	Improved access to health and nutrition services	Improved livelihoods assets	Child protection and psycho-social services
9,920,140 • Children: 5,567,132 • Adults: 4,353,132	1,339,921	7,208,987	942,608	230,233	102,645

As a part of the GHI, World Vision has been actively involved in interagency advocacy efforts to draw greater attention to and action on the global hunger crisis. These collective efforts include engagement in high-level events convened by the Interagency Standing Committee, WFP, OHCA, FAO, and the EU,

<sup>10</sup> International Labor Organization (ILO), ‘World Social Protection Report’, Flagship Report (2020–22). [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_817572.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_817572.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> GHI priority countries are Afghanistan, Angola, Burkina Faso, CAR, Chad, DRC, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Somalia, Syria, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Venezuela, Yemen.



and large-scale public mobilisation efforts to encourage grassroots action and advocacy such as the 2021 [Weekend of Prayer Against Hunger](#) with faith partners. World Vision has prioritised participation by children and women with lived experience of hunger crises and senior leaders. We also draw from our extensive operational experience to inform our policy and advocacy efforts.

## Recommendations

The sheer scale of food and nutrition crises around the world requires a joint effort by humanitarian, development and peace actors to rapidly scale up lifesaving support and protect the rights of the more than 45 million people facing starvation and malnutrition. Preventing food and nutrition crises requires concomitant efforts and political will to address the underlying causes of food insecurity, poverty and vulnerability at the global, national, community and household levels. To realise the vision of a hunger-free world today and tomorrow, World Vision makes the following recommendations:



### **National governments should:**

- Strengthen access to and delivery of equitable quality essential food, nutrition, health and improved water and sanitation services.
- Establish accountability mechanisms to ensure the most vulnerable children and families are able safely and equitably to access those services.
- Establish and/or strengthen national, child-sensitive, equitable protection systems and safety nets, and ensure adequate budgetary allocations and accountability mechanisms are in place to ensure the most vulnerable children receive transfers of sufficient size and duration to meet lifesaving food and nutrition needs.

- Strengthen the functioning of local and national food and agriculture market systems, with particular attention to local food systems and markets where the majority of poor people buy and trade food. This requires greater investments in infrastructure, access to quality agricultural inputs and post-harvest storage, training and market information, savings and credit services and off-farm employment opportunities. It also requires increased access to financial services and business-training opportunities for small and medium enterprises. In addition, it requires governments to avoid instituting trade-distorting measures such as export bans.
- Reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission for women and men engaged across the food system by ensuring equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, in line with the World Health Organization's SAGE Values Framework for the Allocation and Prioritisation of COVID-19 Vaccination<sup>12</sup> and following the WHO's Fair Allocation guidance.<sup>13</sup>
- Ensure policy measures implemented to stem rising food prices minimise negative impacts on global and regional agricultural trade and food security, especially for the most vulnerable people.
- Support the most vulnerable households and communities to adapt to and build their resilience to climate change and weather-related hazards, which are key drivers of food and nutrition crises and disproportionately impact children. Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans must explicitly recognise children as rights holders, integrate their needs and perspectives, and ensure monitoring and evaluation frameworks include data disaggregated by age and gender and by child-specific indicators.



#### **Parties to Conflict should:**

- Take immediate measures to end conflicts and sustain peace through diplomatic and political solutions.
- Adhere to IHL and human rights law, cease attacks on civilians, especially children, on aid workers and on civilian infrastructure.
- Stop the use of starvation as a method of war in alignment with UN Security Council Resolution 2417.
- Facilitate the safe and timely provision of principled humanitarian assistance to affected populations.



#### **Implementing agencies should:**

- Urgently scale up humanitarian food, cash and/or vouchers, and other multi-sectoral responses to protect the nutrition, health and food security status of the more than 45 million girls, boys, and adults experiencing emergency and catastrophe/famine levels of food insecurity.
- Support national social protection system strengthening by
  - committing to developing and implementing a time-bound plan to deliver on the Grand Bargain's new model for cash coordination recently endorsed by the Emergency Relief Coordinator. This should include promoting common targeting and monitoring criteria and interoperability of systems, tools and approaches, particularly at the country/response level

12 WHO 'WHO SAGE Values Framework for the Allocation and Prioritization of COVID-19 Vaccination (13 September 2020). <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/who-sage-values-framework-for-the-allocation-and-prioritization-of-covid-19-vaccination>

13 WHO, 'Fair Allocation Mechanism for COVID-19 Vaccines through the COVAX Facility (9 September 2020). <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/fair-allocation-mechanism-for-covid-19-vaccines-through-the-covax-facility>

- prioritising the use of multipurpose cash transfers through digital systems, which will support better integration with existing social protection mechanisms, or which serve as building blocks to support transitions to national social protection systems.
- Design and implement health and multi-sectoral approaches to prevent and treat malnutrition to address the needs of children and other vulnerable groups. These approaches should include
  - scaling up and expanding coverage of screening to detect wasting, including mid upper-arm circumference screenings for families
  - expanding coverage of wasting treatment services (for example, Community Management of Acute Malnutrition) and implementing simplified approaches for wasting treatment as appropriate to the context (such as combined protocols for moderate and severe wasting, and treatment by community health workers)
  - ensuring continuity of essential health and nutrition services in order to prevent malnutrition, such as increasing investment in and scaling of nutrition-education programmes that promote exclusive breastfeeding, Emergency Infant and Young Child Feeding and dietary diversity
  - improving the integration of nutrition services into health in-patient and out-patient services, school meals programmes and other multi-sectoral programming.
- Support interagency efforts to work across the HDP nexus and apply lessons learned from previous famines, including the devastating 2011 Somalia famine, by
  - building NGO consortia, inclusive of local actors, focused on strengthening the resilience of children, families and communities to multiple shocks and stresses through livelihoods diversification, strengthening social connectedness, and other responsive, flexible programming.



- providing greater support for productive, resilient livelihood opportunities for smallholder farmers and pastoralists to improve their skills; access appropriate tools, technologies and financial services; produce more nutritious foods; and increase market opportunities and off-farm employment opportunities throughout the food system
- integrating famine early action 'trigger' indicators into planning, emphasising prevention and disaster risk reduction and 'no regrets' programmes, and increasing the use of crisis modifiers in development programming. Early warning must be linked to global accountability mechanisms for action in order to ensure a rapid response and consensual buy in of member states.<sup>14</sup>



### **G7 governments should:**

- Urgently disburse the funding commitments outlined in the G7 Compact on Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Crises, targeting the 45 million people in emergency and Catastrophe/Famine levels of hunger; and also report on progress on all the G7 Compact's commitments at the G7 Leaders' Summit in June 2022.
- Urgently deliver on promises to protect global food security and address steep food price increases as outlined in the 24 March 2022 G7 Leaders' statement. This includes increased funding for emergency food security programmes and ensuring that policy measures implemented by G7 countries minimise the negative impacts on global agricultural trade and food security, especially for the most vulnerable people and countries. The critical window to prevent famine is rapidly closing, and funding to save lives must
  - translate into getting lifesaving assistance urgently into the hands of those that need it most
  - be in addition to existing humanitarian funding commitments to ensure resources are not diverted from the existing 28 humanitarian response plans, three flash appeals, and eight regional response plans – which have only received 4.9% of total funding requirements to date.<sup>15</sup>
  - be multi-year, flexible and frontloaded.
- Ensure the G7 Compact implementation plans emphasise needs-based funding allocations based on independent, consensus-based analysis; acknowledge the importance of adherence to IHL and humanitarian principles; reinforce a system-wide shift to greater investment in prevention, preparedness and anticipatory action; and outline commitments to political action to promote peace, protect civilians and safeguard humanitarian access.



### **All donors should:**

- Mobilise additional, comprehensive humanitarian funding to complement G7 commitments and address urgent and growing humanitarian needs.
- Increase support for strengthening or establishing equitable, inclusive and child-sensitive national social protection systems, including through the provision of stepped-up funding for multipurpose cash transfers accessible to all.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Maxwell, Jeeyon Janet Kim, and Nisar Majid, 'Planning from the Future: Component 2. The Contemporary Humanitarian Landscape: Malaise, Blockages and Game Changers'. Research project by Kings College (London), Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute (HPG/ODI) and the Feinstein International Center (FIC). August 2015.

<sup>15</sup> OCHA Financial Tracking Service. Appeals and response plans 2022. Data extracted 28 March 2022.



- Commit to taking diplomatic action whenever necessary to prevent famine, protect civilians and ensure humanitarian access in conflict situations. Actions should comply with IHL, respect humanitarian principles and be aligned to UN Security Council Resolution 2417, which prohibits the deliberate starvation of civilians as a weapon of war, promotes early warnings and seeks to protect agriculture and related infrastructure from attack.
- Support interagency HDP nexus efforts to reduce humanitarian need, build resilience and promote sustainable livelihoods for the most vulnerable. This requires multi-year, flexible support for community-based programmes that assist poor female and male smallholder farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk and the urban poor to improve their livelihoods and increase investments in inclusive, sustainable and resilient food systems.
- Build 'crisis modifiers' into development programmes to increase flexibility to respond to and mitigate hunger crises through early action and 'no regrets' programming.
- Prioritise efforts to prevent and treat wasting in children, with a focus on the first 1,000 days, through multi-sectoral action across food security, health, nutrition, WASH and child protection.
- Support programming that is needs driven, context specific, flexible and accountable to affected populations.