



Facts and figures on world food insecurity and malnutrition

Despite progress in Asia, food insecurity remains widespread and does not diminish according to global targets

‘Despite adequate global food production, millions of people go hungry or are malnourished because safe and nutritious food is not available, not accessible or, more often, not affordable’ says the 2025 report on [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World](#) published by a group of United Nations agencies (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO).¹

This illustrates, once more, that food security is not a simple matter of producing more, but that capacity to access food in adequate quantity and quality is key, while the way in which food is produced - sustainably and according to the preferences of the population - cannot be neglected [[read](#)].

The 2025 report confirms again that the objective set by the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) of ending hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms by 2030 is out of reach.

Yet, what should be done to achieve this goal is widely known and has been explored at length on hungerexplained since 2012 [[read here](#) and [here](#), for example]. Unfortunately, resistance by powerful vested interests has perpetuated the many obstacles that stand in the way of a transition towards sustainable - from an economic, social and environmental point of view - food systems [[read](#)], including the prevailing balance of power [[read](#)] and the mode of governance [[read](#)] that prevent proper policy and investment decisions from being made.

Although the food price rise observed after 2020 has somewhat slowed down in 2023, many population groups do not have the revenue required for purchasing adequate food for a healthy and balanced diet, particularly but not exclusively in low-income countries, adds the UN report.

Estimates show that the food security situation improved slightly between 2023 and 2024, ‘driven by notable improvement in South-eastern Asia, Southern Asia and South America in contrast to the continuing rise in hunger in most sub-regions of Africa and in Western Asia’.

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, United Nations Children’s Fund, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization.

In addition to being off track in the combat against hunger and malnutrition, the world is also failing to combat effectively multiple intertwined global crises (climate, biodiversity, land and water, inflation, etc.) and their impacts.

Food insecurity: the figures

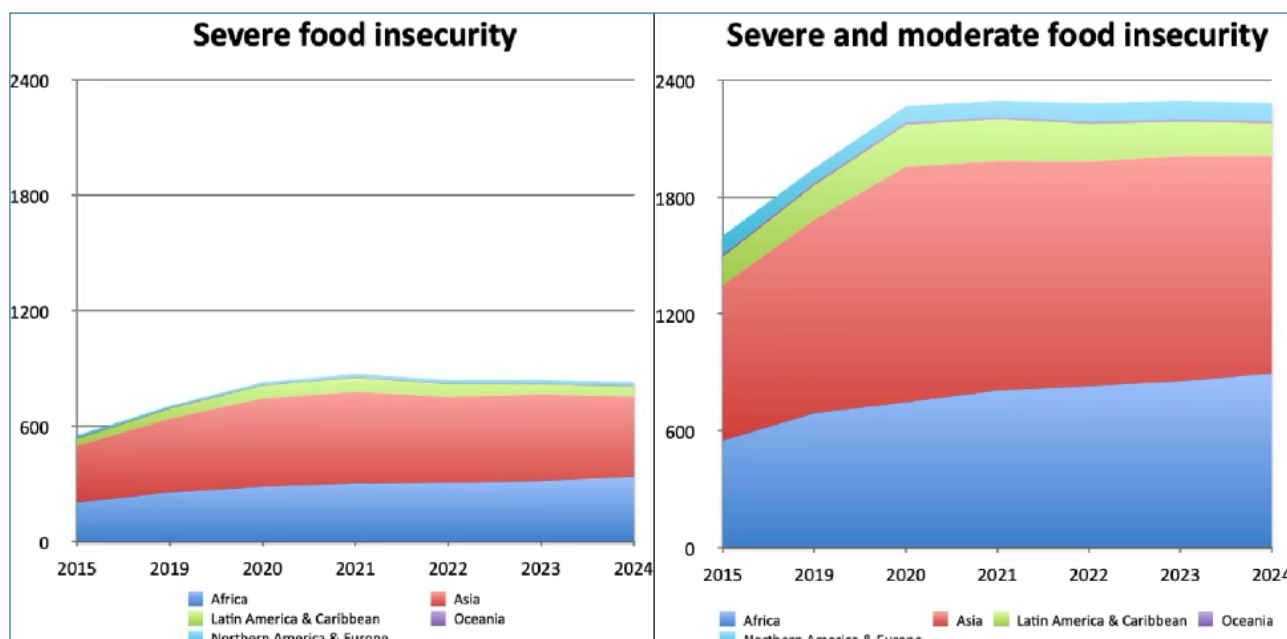
In earlier articles on the global food situation, we had drawn the attention of readers on the three main ways to measure the extent of world malnutrition and we discussed the difficulties of making estimates, as well as issues around the stability and consistency of the numbers produced. This year we will limit this article to the result, inviting those readers interested by these questions to refer to what we had written in 2020 [\[read\]](#) and in 2024 [\[read\]](#).

Moderate and severe food insecurity, as captured by surveys

The prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity is measured on the basis of large national surveys using the [Food Insecurity Experience Scale](#) (FIES) introduced by FAO in 2014 and adopted by 59 countries covering more than a quarter of the world population, complemented by the results of the [Gallup© World Poll](#) (GWP). The principle here is to ask people about their experience.

The estimates over the years during which the surveys were conducted show that, after a period of serious deterioration, especially between 2019 and 2021, the food security situation has been relatively stable globally since, with a slight improvement in 2024, but that a growing number of people have yet been experiencing moderate and acute food insecurity particularly in Africa (**figure 1 and table 1**).

Figure 1: Evolution of severe and moderate food insecurity in the regions (in millions) (2015-2024)



Source: [FAO](#) data

Table 1 below shows that nearly one person out of 10 in the world - **828 million** - declared having suffered from **severe** food insecurity in 2024 (compared to 842 million in 2023). This proportion was **more than 4 persons out of 10 in Africa** (337 million people,

compared to 316 million in 2023) and around **one out of 12 in Asia** (418 million people, compared to 449 in 2023). Women were slightly more affected than men.

In Africa, the number of people experiencing severe food insecurity increased by more than 21 million between 2023 and 2024. The share of people concerned grew in all sub-regions of the continent, but in Southern Africa. In Asia, Southern and to a lesser extent Western Asia are the sub-regions where the prevalence of severe food insecurity was highest. In Latin America, prevalence continued to decrease, although less than during the previous year, while in the Caribbean, it stabilised at a high level (24.8% of the total population).

Despite the improvement in 2024, the number of people having experienced severe food insecurity in the world that year was higher than in 2015 by 275 million, mostly in Africa and Asia.

Table 1: Evolution of the number of people having experienced severe food insecurity (in millions) (2015-2024)

Region	2015	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Variation (2024-2023)
Africa	202	256	285	302	306	316	337	21
Asia	295	383	458	476	446	449	418	-32
Latin America & Caribbean	37	52	68	75	67	53	52	-1
Oceania	3	4	4	5	4	5	4	-0
Northern America & Europe	15	10	13	15	17	19	17	-1
World	553	705	828	872	840	842	828	-14

Source: [FAO](#)

Table 2 shows an incredible figure of nearly **2.3 billion people** who experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in the world in 2024 (only 11 million less than in 2023), representing almost 1 person out of 3. This proportion was of **more than half of the population in Africa** (893 million people) and close to **a quarter of the population of Asia** (1.12 billion people).

Table 2: Evolution of the number of people having experienced severe and moderate food insecurity (in millions) (2015-2024)

Region	2015	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Variation (2024-2023)
Africa	549	689	745	806	828	853	893	40
Asia	799	993	1211	1180	1153	1159	1121	-38
Latin America & Caribbean	147	180	218	217	197	176	167	-9
Oceania	9	11	10	11	11	12	12	-0
Northern America & Europe	99	77	85	84	95	96	92	-4
World	1602	1949	2269	2297	2284	2296	2285	-11

Source: [FAO](#)

The very high jump in the number of food insecure after 2019 can clearly be linked to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic that have been highlighted on [hungerexplained.org](#) since early 2020 [read [here](#) and [here](#)], even though the pandemic is not the only explanation but rather an accelerator of past trends resulting from weaknesses of food systems, as illustrated by the fact that the prevalence of food insecurity experience has been growing throughout the period 2015-2023. The food price

rise observed from 2020 onwards can be considered as one of the causes of prevalent food insecurity. While the war in Ukraine played its part after April 2022, the earlier price hike can be put on the account of the leap of fossil energies (oil and gas) prices when China's economy recovered after the COVID-19 pandemic. This hike was a consequence of the period of low investments in the oil sector that followed the oil price drop seen after 2014.

Higher energy prices caused higher production costs in agriculture (more expensive fertiliser and fuel) and they boosted the use of food commodities for manufacturing agrofuels, particularly in the US and the EU. In the EU, for instance, around 11 million tonnes of vegetable oil (equivalent to 45% of the total use of vegetable oil in the Union) were being used as fuel in one year [[read pp. 8-9](#)].

As shown in **figure 1**, above, 275 million additional people experienced severe food insecurity in 2024 compared to 2015, while another 407 million more people were exposed to moderate food security.

Estimates of the number of people suffering from chronic undernourishment

Statistics on chronic undernourishment² have been produced for several decades by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) through the publication, since 1999 of its flagship report, SOFI (see the [first SOFI of 1999](#)).

In July 2025 the latest of this series of SOFI reports displays data estimates that suggest that there were between **639 and 720 million chronically undernourished people in the world in 2024**, equivalent to 8-9% of total world population³ (**Figure 2**). This means that after a long period of almost 10 years, during which from decreasing the number of chronically undernourished was stable or even increased (since 2017), this **number is now again decreasing** (e.g. by 15 million between 2023 and 2024 - see **table 3**).

The change in the trend can probably be put on the account of economic improvements and some specific policies, including social. It is particularly visible in Asia (- 24 million) and Latin America and the Caribbean (-2 million), while in Africa the direction is still of an increase of the food insecure (+10 million).

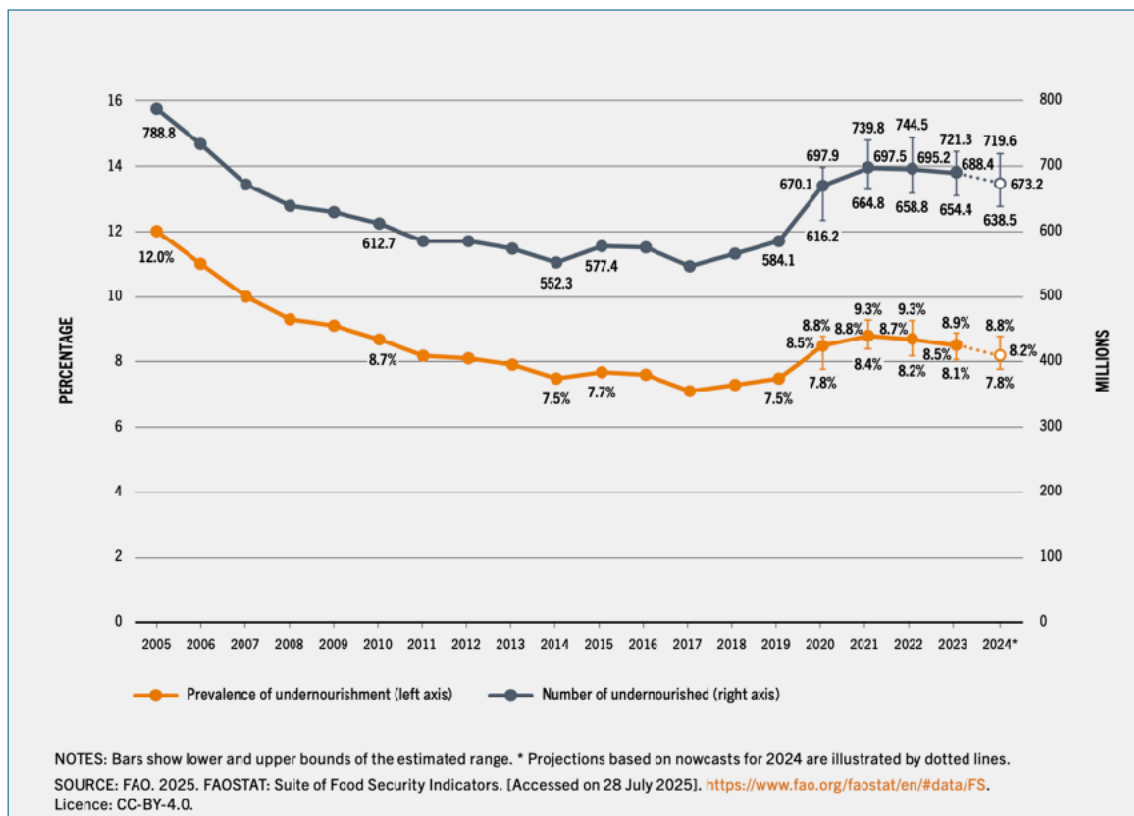
Yet, the majority of the food insecure people are still found in Asia (323 million - 48% of the total), followed by Africa (298 million - 46%).

Compared with 2015, about 129 million more people were affected by hunger in 2024 in Africa, while their number was less in Asia by 229 million. These estimates are roughly consistent with movement observed in recent years in the data drawn from the FIES survey that are presented above in this document.

² Chronically undernourished people are unable to meet their minimum food requirements over a sustained period of time. This is fundamentally different from those people who suffer from a transitory undernourishment that may occur as a short term or temporary situation. [[FAO](#)]

³ These figures are estimated for individual countries on the basis of a computation that uses as inputs (i) dietary energy consumption per person that is derived from production, trade and population statistics; (ii) the coefficient of variation of this consumption based on results of past household surveys or derived from a statistical model, and; (iii) the average minimum individual dietary energy requirement at a certain level of activity, based on the age and sex structure of the population. The methodological details are provided in Annex 1B of the [report SOFI 2021](#), and in box 2.2 on pp. 6-7 of the [2025 report](#).

Figure 2: Evolution of the number and percentage of chronically undernourished people in the world (2005-2024)



Source: [FAO](#)

The total estimated number of undernourished in 2024 is roughly equivalent to the number in 2006/2007 (see **Figure 2** above), illustrating a lost decade-and-a-half in the combat against food insecurity and undernourishment, despite a general commitment (in words) to the UN's [Sustainable Development Goals](#), and the launching of several initiatives aiming to eradicate hunger.

The type of food and agricultural policies and strategies that are being implemented, particularly in Africa [[read](#)], and the frequent - if not general - inconsistency observed between government policy commitments and statements, on the one hand, and their actual action, on the other [[read pp. 4 to 6](#)], largely explains the difference of performance between countries and regions.

Considering the availability of sufficient food worldwide and the volume of global financial resources, this situation is intolerable. Let's recall here that agricultural production has never been so high over the period for which statistics are available and that its gross value (in constant US dollars) increased by 31% between 2006 and 2023 ([FAOSTAT](#)). Let's also recall that the total amount of money owned worldwide in 2017 was estimated at USD 215,000 billion [[read](#)] representing around 2.5 times the annual global GDP and that past recent estimates of the financial resources required for eradicating hunger worldwide were less than USD 5,000 billion to be mobilised over a period of several years [[read p. 95](#)]. Let's equally be aware that military expenditure has seen a record growth in 2023 (+6.8%) to reach almost USD 2,500 billion [[read](#)], to be compared to 1,650 billion in 2015.

Table 3: Estimates of the number of undernourished people in the world (in millions) (2005-2024)

Region	2005	2010	2015	2020	2023	2024	Variation (from 2023 to 2024)
Africa	178	170	194	255	296	307	10
Asia	552	398	343	366	347	323	-24
Latin America and the Caribbean	47	35	31	40	35	34	-2
Oceania	2	3	3	3	4	4	0
Northern America and Europe	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.
World	789	613	577	670	688	673	-15

Note: Figures do not add up. 2020, 2023 and 2024 figures are based on point estimates.
Source: [FAO](#)

To the explanatory factors usually given by the UN (war, climate change and economic downturn), one should therefore add the economic policy measures, particularly in the area of food and agriculture, adopted by countries mostly under the influence of international organisations, especially financial organisations, large multinational companies and other [powerful lobbies](#) (see **box** below) [\[read\]](#).

The causes of hunger and malnutrition

As has been usual in the SOFI series presented by the UN, the list of [causes hunger](#) and malnutrition resulting from the “weaknesses” of food systems - conflicts, climate variability and extremes, economic slowdowns and downturns, high income inequality, low productivity and inefficient food supply chains, unaffordability of healthy diets - is suggested without pointing at the fact that these are the consequences of underlying **human decisions**, resulting from a specific balance of power and which are the real root causes of the persistence of these “weaknesses” over decades.

Conflicts are human-made, climate change is due to the extraordinary boom of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions resulting from the massive use of fossil fuels by humans [\[read\]](#), and economic slowdowns and downturns are an effect of the rules and policy decisions that governments have made to manage the economy. The same applies regarding income inequality and poverty [\[read\]](#). As for low productivity and inefficient food supply chains, they too are the consequence of technological and organisational choices made by humanity over the last century, and they are everything but “natural” or “inescapable” [\[read\]](#).

It is essential to point at this here from the start, to avoid proposing solutions to hunger and malnutrition that will only scratch the surface of the problems to be solved and merely alleviate in part the negative effect of fundamental choices made.

Unfortunately, this is largely what the SOFI reports do by advocating mitigating measures such as social protection to help families during conflicts, insurance and finance against extreme climatic events, cash support to vulnerable groups in case of crisis that either seem unfeasible because unrealistic (can social protection really be implemented when a conflict situation weakens the state apparatus?) or a relief that is evidently useful but does not address the true causes of the problem. Moreover, they are based on the dangerous belief that everything can be fixed with money, without modifying the real economy and its processes. We, on [hungerexplained.org](#), have on several occasions provided a critical view of these recommendations.

It is true that, some problems can be mitigated immediately through financial means without having to wait for the root causes to be resolved and for profound changes to be enacted [\[read\]](#). This should then, of course, be done without delay. But it does not exempt the world from simultaneously designing deep reforms [\[read\]](#) and implement them to avoid having to mobilise emergency relief again and again, while the economy continues to generate suffering for hundreds of millions of people.

Indeed, it is unrealistic to believe that it is possible to eradicate hunger and food inequalities without addressing other fundamental inequalities in our societies [\[read\]](#).

In Africa, government policies and programmes, as well as private sector- and donor-led initiatives such as [AGRA](#) have contributed to further marginalise poor farmers by supporting large private investments frequently under the control of powerful financial operators, the penetration of multinationals in input markets (seeds, fertiliser and pesticides) and an unregulated digitalisation of agriculture [\[read\]](#). As a consequence small peasants are being deprived of their land to the benefit of private investors or excluded from agricultural development programmes [\[read\]](#), and multinationals and financial investors are collecting huge profits, including by siphoning off government subsidies [\[read\]](#).

Regrettably, there is as yet no serious discussion among national or regional decision makers on the validity of these policies with respect to the attainment of the hunger eradication goal. The main concern, for them, remains to produce more, whatever the resulting social or environmental impact may be. The way production is taking place does not matter, provided the output increases quickly, even if growth is not sustainable in the longer term! This idea is still well rooted in the mind of policy-makers, although consequences of this stance means more hunger, more rural urban migration and greater exclusion of large parts of the rural population.

Some more data on undernourishment

- An estimated **150 million children** under five years of age across the world suffered from **stunted growth** (low value of height for age) in 2024 (23% of the total). This compares to the 180 million of 2012 (26% of the total). Progress has been made since 2000 when prevalence was 30%, but the world is not on track to bring it down to the target of 14% by 2030;
- Around **7% of the children under five** in the world were affected by **wasting** (weight too low for height) in 2024. That is twice the target fixed for 2030! Roughly half lived in Southern Asia and one quarter in Sub-Saharan Africa. Not surprisingly, they are mostly found in poor households.
- Around **15% of the newborn babies** are born every year with low birthweight. This is quite above the 10.5% target fixed for 2030.
- The rate of global **exclusive breastfeeding** has been improving from 37% in 2012 to 48% in 2023, but remains below the 70% global target for 2030.
- **Anaemia** in women aged 15 to 49 years has been increasing to reach 31% in 2023 and it is projected at around 32% in 2030, more than double of the global target of 14%.
- **5 to 6% of children of less than 5 years are overweight**, considerably more than the 3% targetted for 2030, and this share is growing.
- In the meantime, **adult obesity** jumped from 12% of the population in 2012 to **16% in 2022**, above the 2030 target of 12%.

Conclusion

The latest UN data on food security and malnutrition leave little hope of achieving SDGs by 2030. A real “miracle” would be required to bring down poverty, the main fundamental cause of food insecurity [\[read\]](#). The data clearly show that food insecurity and hunger are not decreasing worldwide, as a result of the combined effect of the mismanagement of the global food system, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Some progress is observed in Asia, but the food security situation is further degrading in Africa.

The world is off track in the combat against malnutrition, as it is off track in making our food systems more sustainable and combatting climate change and its impact. In the likely absence of a “miracle”, genuine commitment of governments could possibly turn around this worrying trend. But that, in itself, would be a kind of “miracle”.

At hungerexplained, we think that unless policies followed by countries are fundamentally modified in a way that we have suggested on several occasions on this site⁴, one can only expect that malnutrition will persist if not increase in the future, along with its huge attached human cost in terms of lost lives and suffering.

Some believe that the solution can be found in the combination of pro-growth policies - even if they bringing about exclusion and develop inequality - and social protection and education measures. In fact, when this approach is implemented, social protection is often used as a cover-up for the most violent anti-social economic policies. This, in our view, is not acceptable: root causes of poverty and inequality must be tackled, within food systems as well in society more broadly.

Social protection and education measures are indispensable and, if well designed, it is true that they can contribute to creating more capacity for the poor to graduate out of poverty and food insecurity. However, they can only be effective if overall and sectoral economic policies (particularly but not exclusively in the food and agricultural sector) are conducive and offer opportunities for the poor to improve their living by a fairly remunerated work so as to have access to healthy diets. Social protection alone does, however, not constitute a sustainable way for eradicating malnutrition, and a solution has to be found in a manner that the environment is preserved (biodiversity, water and land resources, climate) by developing and promoting food production technologies that are sustainable and accessible to the poorest.

[Materne Maetz](#)
(August 2025)

For more information:

- FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025 – Addressing high food price inflation for food security and nutrition](#), Rome, 2025.
- FAO, [Voices of the Hungry - The Food Insecurity Experience Scale](#). Website.

Earlier articles on hungerexplained.org related to the topic:

- [The food weapon: a never-ending and horrendous story...](#) 2025.

⁴ See in particular: [Policies for a transition towards more sustainable and climate friendly food systems](#) 2018, [Climate is changing - Food and Agriculture must too - Towards a “new food and agricultural revolution”](#) 2016, and [Seven principles for ending hunger sustainably](#), 2013.

- [Twelve years after approving the largest ever food security programme, India's food security challenge remains](#), 2025.
- [Food security - First part 1 - Second part - Third part](#), 2024.
- [Measuring reality is quite complex: Two illustrations](#), 2024.
- [Our view of hunger is changing, ... so should the way we combat it \(urbanisation of hunger\)](#), 2024.
- [Inequality in food systems - Is it realistic to believe that food systems could become more equal in an unequal society?](#) 2023.
- [The "food and agricultural transition" is ongoing Nine changes tell us to what kind of world it is leading us](#), 2023.
- [Ukraine war and food crisis: facts and debates](#), 2022.
- [COVID-19 and food crisis: the main operating mechanisms](#), 2020.
- [Why famines in a world of plenty?](#) 2017.

and all our articles under our "[World Hunger](#)" thematic page.

Archives on the world food situation:

- [Facts and figures on world food insecurity and malnutrition - World food insecurity back to what it was 15 years ago - Lack of food and money not a valid reason](#), 2024.
- [Facts and figures on world food insecurity and malnutrition](#) - Food insecurity stable globally, but still on the rise in Africa - SDGs out of reach, 2023.
- [Facts and figures on world food insecurity and malnutrition](#) - Food insecurity is on the rise, a consequence of the current food crisis, 2022.
- [Facts and figures on world food insecurity and malnutrition](#) -The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic 2021.
- [Facts and figures on world food insecurity](#) - An alarming deterioration, 2020.
- [Facts and figures on world malnutrition](#), 2019.
- [Facts and figures on world malnutrition](#), 2018.
- [Facts and figures on world hunger 2017](#).
- [Facts and figures on world hunger 2015](#).
- [Facts and figures on world hunger 2014](#).
- [Our comments on SOFI 2013](#), 2013.
- [Facts and figures on world hunger 2013](#).
- [What is the real number of hungry people in the world?](#), 2013.