



# Ending the hunger crisis:

Response, recovery and resilience

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**Front cover:** Family eating a meal, Yemen. *Saleh Ba Hayan/IRC*



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# Executive summary

## Millions on the brink of famine

**A global hunger crisis – fuelled by conflict, economic turbulence and climate-related shocks – has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of people experiencing food insecurity and hunger has risen since the onset of the pandemic. The IRC estimates that the economic downturn alone will drive the number of hungry people up by an additional 35 million in 2021. Without drastic action, the economic downturn caused by COVID-19 will suspend global progress towards ending hunger by at least five years.**

Of further concern are the 34 million people currently experiencing emergency levels of acute food insecurity who according to WFP and FAO warnings are on the brink of famine. People living in warzones and displaced from their homes are at greatest risk. Within these fragile contexts, women and girls continue to bear the greatest brunt of food shortages and are experiencing increased risks of violence and exploitation.

## Action in 2021 to reverse the spike in hunger

2021 represents a chance for change. Preventing famine is on the G7's agenda following the launch of the Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Crises Compact.<sup>1</sup> The UN Food Systems Summit, Nutrition for Growth Summit and COP26 Climate Change Conference also mark opportunities to halt the rise in hunger. The IRC is calling on the international community to seize these moments to stop and reverse the global hunger crisis.

As the world's largest economies, members of the G7 must work with the international community to urgently deliver more aid to countries at risk of acute food insecurity. By supporting frontline responders to implement proven solutions – such as humanitarian cash and malnutrition treatment – they can break the cycle of hardship and hunger before it takes hold and unleashes ever greater levels of need. The hunger crisis is a critical chance to deploy a combined approach of development and diplomacy, removing barriers to sustained humanitarian access and holding those who use hunger as a weapon of war to account. A secure aid budget – fulfilled in line with the internationally endorsed target of 0.7 percent of Gross National Income (GNI) – and risk-informed financing that can be quickly deployed, is critical to mitigating the impact of future shocks. Investing now to tackle hunger and food insecurity will save time, money and lives in the long run.



Over half the population of Yemen are expected to face crisis or worse levels of food insecurity. Holding a bowl of lentils in Yemen. *Salah Ba Hayan/IRC*

## Recommendations for the G7 and wider international community

### 1 - Increase the food security, resilience, choice and dignity of the most vulnerable people through the distribution of humanitarian cash transfers

Life-saving humanitarian services must be urgently delivered to communities to prevent famine. Humanitarian cash transfers are a proven, effective means of increasing food security and supporting basic needs. In addition to saving lives, humanitarian cash helps get people back on their feet and boosts local economies.

A humanitarian cash stimulus is urgently required to meet immediate needs and prevent rapidly increasing hunger and hardship caused by the economic downturn. The IRC estimates that the cost of providing humanitarian cash assistance to the additional people at risk of hunger in countries affected by conflict, fragility and displacement will be US\$2.3 billion in 2021.

### 2 - Scale up proven interventions to prevent and respond to acute malnutrition

High levels of acute malnutrition among children are an early indicator of famine. The IRC's own nutrition programmes have recorded a 55 percent year on year increase in the number of children requiring treatment for acute malnutrition across 11 countries due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Preventing and treating acute malnutrition is an essential component of the famine response and necessary to prevent decades of progress in reducing child mortality from being reversed. More efficient malnutrition prevention and response programmes offer huge potential for rapidly expanding nutrition services in hard-hit countries. IRC modelling shows that shifting to a simplified protocol for community-based testing and treatment of acute malnutrition could double malnutrition coverage from 25 percent of children in need to 50 percent, and sustain gains in treating acute malnutrition.

### 3 - Remove barriers to humanitarian access so frontline humanitarian responders can safely reach food insecure communities and provide emergency support

Reaching communities with life-saving cash transfers and nutrition services depends on safe humanitarian access to populations in need. Yet humanitarian organisations including the IRC are facing persistent access constraints in some of the regions at highest risk of famine, preventing those in urgent need from accessing life-saving assistance.

Strategic diplomatic action by G7 member states is required to ensure international law is upheld and barriers to humanitarian access in regions at high risk of famine are overcome.

### 4 - Build inclusive food systems that empower women and girls and are climate resilient

The climate crisis continues to drive food insecurity and displacement in fragile states. Gender inequality increases women and girls' vulnerability to hunger and food insecurity. Despite their key roles within the community and local food systems, women are rarely included in the design of solutions to climate change and food insecurity.

Long-term investments in local approaches to food security and climate resilience that include women and girls are critical to protect future generations from shocks. Barriers to women's control over resources vital to food security reflect inequalities of power and opportunity. IRC's feminist approach to food security promotes women's agency, leadership and control over land and agricultural inputs.

### 5 - Fully resource famine prevention and response, ensure humanitarian assistance reaches frontline responders, and better prepare for future risks through anticipatory and risk-informed financing

Humanitarian funding to support people caught in crisis is not keeping pace with growing needs. Countries on the brink of widespread famine, such as Yemen and South Sudan, are experiencing devastating aid cuts and a significant funding gap.

Donors should prioritise responding to and preventing food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition in 2021 and beyond. To have maximum impact, reach and scale in fragile and conflict settings, multi-year humanitarian aid should be delivered directly to frontline responders alert to the needs of crisis-affected communities. Donors, including the G7, should ensure that this funding enables the inclusion of crisis-affected populations into national systems and services that can help address food insecurity needs, such as national health systems and social protection schemes. To avoid famine in the future, governments, multilateral institutions and NGOs should work together to better predict and prepare for future risks through analytical tools and anticipatory and risk-informed financing as proposed by the Crisis Lookout Coalition.

#### No time to lose

In this report, the IRC outlines the priority actions that the G7 and wider international community must take to prevent famine and build countries' preparedness and resilience against future food security crises.

By investing now in the proven approaches outlined in this report, and ensuring assistance is swiftly and safely made available to those who need it most, the G7 and other actors can avert famines, save lives and build countries' long-term resilience to prevent further humanitarian catastrophes.

## Acronyms

ACAPS	Assessment Capacities Project
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
COP26	26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties
EA\$E	Economic and social empowerment model
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
G7	Group of Seven
GBV	Gender-based violence
GHRP	Global Humanitarian Response Plan
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGOs	International non-governmental organisations
IPC	Integrated food security phase classification
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ODA	Overseas development assistance
MEB	Minimum Expenditure Basket
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSC	UN Security Council
WFP	World Food Programme

## Fast facts

### Hunger

- Nearly **690 million people** on the planet – approximately one in eleven – are hungry.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2020, **155 million people** across 55 countries were acutely hungry, an increase of 20 million since 2019.
- The IRC estimates an additional **35 million people** will be hungry in 2021 as a result of the COVID-19 economic downturn.
- Without drastic action, economic shocks arising from COVID-19 will suspend any progress towards ending hunger by at least **five years**.

### Food insecurity

- **34 million people** globally are in emergency levels of acute food insecurity and are highly vulnerable to famine.
- Food insecurity is projected to worsen in at least 20 countries in 2021.
- **Eight of the ten** worst food-crisis countries are also hosting internally displaced people, refugees and asylum seekers fleeing conflict.
- Prevalence of severe food insecurity is **higher among women**.

### Acute malnutrition

- The IRC has recorded a **55 percent increase** in the number of children requiring treatment for acute malnutrition.
- New research estimates that **110 million children** have severe acute malnutrition, more than double current estimates.
- At best, only **25 percent of children** in need of treatment for acute malnutrition can access treatment.
- IRC modelling has shown that shifting to a simplified protocol for the testing and treatment of acute malnutrition could **double malnutrition coverage** and sustain gains in treating acute malnutrition.

### Humanitarian cash stimulus needed

- **US\$2.3 billion** is the amount required in 2021 to provide people at risk of hunger in fragile contexts with life-saving cash transfers.

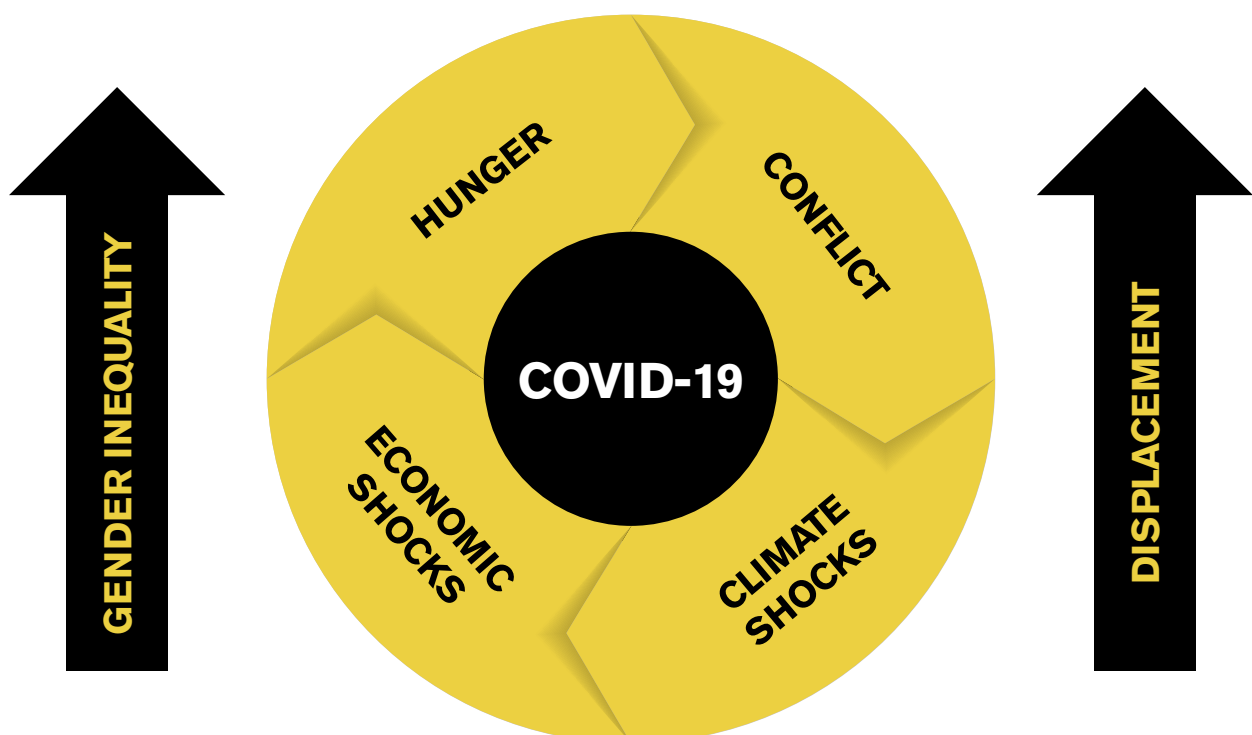
# Introduction

**Conflict, climate change and COVID-19 have conspired to drive a surge in hunger, putting millions of people at risk of famine. People living in warzones and displaced from their homes are the hardest hit. Conflict, often compounded by climate change impacts, is the number one driver of food insecurity and food crises. In turn, food insecurity is a significant impetus for forced migration and refugee flows.<sup>3</sup> Competition for resources, depleted by climate change and displacement, can further fuel conflict, thereby tightening the grip of hunger and exacerbating underlying tensions. This is illustrated by the IRC 2021 Watchlist of humanitarian crises of deepest concern that identifies conflict as the primary driver of need.<sup>4</sup> Now also faced with unprecedented health and economic shocks related to COVID-19, the world's poorest people – and particularly women, girls and marginalised groups – are caught in a vicious cycle of hunger, deprivation and violence (See Figure 1).**

2020 saw a dramatic increase in the number of people experiencing a food crisis compared to 2019. The fall-out from COVID-19, climate change and protracted conflicts triggered an increase in the number of people experiencing acute food insecurity from 135 million to 155 million across 55 countries.<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that the situation will further deteriorate in 2021 with acute food insecurity worsening in 20 countries. Of most concern are the 34 million people globally experiencing emergency levels of acute food insecurity and who are highly vulnerable to famine or famine-like conditions without immediate life-saving action.<sup>6</sup>

Four contexts in particular are at highest risk of famine or are already experiencing famine-like conditions in 2021: Yemen, South Sudan, Burkina Faso, and Northeast Nigeria. According to the Acute Food Insecurity Index, which measures, analyses and classifies food insecurity and acute malnutrition situations by severity and magnitude, each of these territories currently have significant portions of their populations in IPC Phase 3 or higher.<sup>7</sup> In Yemen, an astonishing 54 percent of the population – over 16 million people – are in crisis-level acute food insecurity or higher, with nearly 50,000 already in famine (see Chapter 3).

**Figure 1: COVID-19 feeds a cycle of hunger, conflict, deprivation and climate shocks, driving increased displacement and gender inequality**





Destroyed buildings next to a mosque in the city of Aleppo in Syria. ©Ali Albahri / Adobe Stock

### Food insecurity exacerbated by COVID-19

A hunger crisis – already fuelled by conflict risks, economic turbulence and climate-related shocks such as flooding, droughts, megafires and locust swarms – has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Household incomes have fallen or stalled altogether due to lockdowns, retail prices have increased, remittances have declined and families have had to cut down on the quantity and quality of their food consumption. Meanwhile, many countries continue to endure high food prices with devastating effects on people in the poorest countries who spend a larger share of their income on food compared to people in wealthier countries.<sup>8</sup> Women, and displaced women in particular, reliant on the jobs hardest hit by lockdown or working outside the safety net in the informal economy<sup>9</sup> have faced increased risks of isolation, violence and exploitation<sup>10</sup> and continue to bear the brunt of food shortages and climate shocks. COVID-19 has further exacerbated the disproportionate impacts on women and girls caused by gender inequality.<sup>11</sup>

A 'divergent recovery' from COVID-19 is forecast by the IMF's *World Economic Outlook*.<sup>12</sup> Many of the world's poorest countries are burdened with pre-existing debts and have limited fiscal space to boost their economies and invest in universal vaccine rollouts.<sup>13</sup> Whilst an economic recovery for wealthier countries is on the horizon, the outlook remains bleak for people living in crisis and on the brink of famine.

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### The COVID-19 response: Too little, too late

The global response to the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced long-standing challenges of humanitarian assistance, with consequences felt especially in fragile and conflict affected contexts. State-led systems have failed to reach these populations, especially refugees who often do not have access to national services. Aid for the response was too slow, too rigid, too short-term and failed to get sufficient funding to organisations at the frontlines of the response, including international, national and community-based NGOs. It took over two months for the UN to raise the first US\$1 billion for the Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) for COVID-19, and another two months for the second US\$1 billion. As of May 2021, the GHRP remains at just 40 percent funded, even while immediate and secondary impacts lead to continued increases in needs.

Of the funding raised for the GHRP, more than 75 percent of funding went to UN agencies and just 20 percent went directly to NGO frontline implementers like the IRC and its partners, including local actors and women-led organisations. Although the International Organization for Migration's disbursement of Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) funding to NGOs in response to COVID-19 in West Africa only took a few weeks, proving that faster distribution of aid resources is possible, in many cases funding through UN agencies to implementing partners took months. This issue is particularly problematic in places where NGOs deliver upwards of 80 percent of health services, such as in the Central African Republic and South Sudan. It is also problematic for smaller and community-based organisations, which do not have funding reserves and require funding in-hand to start programming. In addition, few donors provided sufficient flexibility in their grants, even though it is central to effectiveness when working in contexts where COVID-19 restrictions, trajectories and impacts can quickly evolve.





30 year old mother Asrar lives in Al-Sawda camp in Yemen. Her youngest daughter, Tahani, developed acute malnutrition and anaemia after price increases affected the family. *IRC*

## Opportunities for action in 2021

2021 offers multiple opportunities for the G7 and other governments to respond to the immediate threats of food insecurity and famine and to rebuild a greener, more inclusive and resilient future. This year, the UK has prioritised efforts to address food insecurity through its leadership of the G7 with the launch of the G7 Famine Prevention Crisis Panel and Compact. In addition, the UN Secretary General has established a new High Level Task Force on Preventing Famine. Also in 2021, the UN Food Systems Summit will convene to agree actions for a resilient, sustainable and inclusive food system. The Nutrition for Growth summit will mobilise donors to make new and renewed commitments to nutrition, and support for the most vulnerable societies and economies to adapt to climate change will be discussed at COP26. The Grand Bargain – an international agreement between the world's largest aid donors, UN agencies and humanitarian organisations to drive efficiencies in humanitarian assistance – is expected to continue after its original five-year mandate ends in June 2021 and member states will review implementation of the Global Refugee Compact. These moments must all be seized to prevent a food crisis that will be felt by generations to come.

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## Charting the way forward

This report uncovers factors that are compromising the vital humanitarian relief urgently required to tackle food insecurity and prevent famine. Major barriers include reduced or slashed aid budgets by some major donors, politically motivated barriers to humanitarian assistance and inadequate prioritisation of effective interventions to prevent and respond to malnutrition and food insecurity.

Through urgent and decisive global leadership and action, the G7 and other actors can leverage the opportunities presented in 2021 to mitigate the current food insecurity crisis and avert famines. This report outlines how the international community can support the immediate response by prioritising humanitarian cash transfers and guaranteeing safe access for life-saving assistance to communities facing acute malnutrition and food insecurity.

To build long-term resilience and prevent more people falling into acute food insecurity, donors including the G7 must also invest in inclusive local food systems that empower women and girls and are climate-resilient. This means supporting multi-sector and multi-year interventions that combine support for diverse, nutritious food production that sustains or regenerates biodiversity, while promoting linkages to local value chains, with activities to improve women's agency and control over resources such as land. Financing solutions are required to ensure humanitarian assistance is swiftly received by those who need it most and contributes towards countries' preparedness and resilience against future food security risks.

# 1. Humanitarian cash to prevent hunger

**The damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic impacts will have lasting effects on developing countries. Those with conflict or socio-economic crises predating or arising during the onset of the pandemic have been unable to increase public spending to defend people from these shocks.**

Many countries have suffered decreased revenues from remittances, commodity exports, tourism and industrial production. In the Middle East and North Africa, countries already impacted by conflict and economic crisis at the end of 2019, such as Yemen, Syria and Lebanon, are expected to see further economic deterioration, with rapid currency depreciation and skyrocketing inflation. In addition, several African countries are experiencing rising food prices which, coupled with a shortfall in food production due to conflict and climatic shocks, could worsen domestic food supply and continue to drive up food prices in the coming months.<sup>14</sup> For example, in the Central African Republic, the emergency and armed conflict that erupted in December 2020 pushed average food prices up by 410 percent in the Bangui area,<sup>15</sup> in Juba, South Sudan, the price of maize flour increased by 33 percent between March 2019 and 2020 and by 75 percent compared to the three-year average.<sup>16</sup>

A deadly combination of decimated livelihoods, food access challenges, price spikes and restricted humanitarian access (see Chapter 3) is forcing crisis-affected populations to make impossible choices and compromise on basic necessities. The most marginalised communities surviving outside formal economies, including displaced populations and disproportionately more women, have not benefited from the expanded social safety nets some countries have offered. The IRC's experiences have shown that refugees and asylum seekers are often excluded from social protection measures due to their displacement status, and the advent of COVID-19 has yet to significantly change this.<sup>17</sup>

## Humanitarian cash transfers are a swift, effective means of preventing hunger

Humanitarian cash transfers are a proven effective means of increasing food security and supporting basic needs (See Box 1). Overwhelming evidence from multiple regions of the world shows that people who receive humanitarian cash spend a large proportion on food, and that cash can increase the diversity of foods consumed as compared to in kind food assistance.<sup>18</sup> For example, in Lebanon, 91 percent of families receiving multipurpose cash in 2018 prioritised food in their household expenditure, followed by rent and medical fees.<sup>19</sup>

### Box 1: Humanitarian cash transfers: an essential and cost-efficient tool in the COVID-19 response

- Cash can be **more efficient** in terms of reduced administration costs, meaning **more aid goes directly to the people who need it** – particularly vital now that need is expanding and budgets are stretched.
- Cash is spent in local markets, in turn **supporting those markets and the people who benefit from them** and multiplying the impact when markets need support.
- Cash transfers can reduce poverty and vulnerability by giving people the choice over **how they rebuild their lives**, offering them dignity in the face of this crisis.
- People often prefer to receive cash rather than goods. **They can spend it on what they and their families need most such as food, clothing and transport.**<sup>20</sup> **This is a more efficient allocation of resources.**
- Designed well, cash has the potential to **improve women's use and control of resources and assets** helping to reduce the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women informal workers' incomes.
- Findings show that when coupled with complementary activities such as gender discussion groups and psychosocial support humanitarian cash can **prevent and mitigate the risk of gender-based violence (GBV).**<sup>21</sup>

Humanitarian cash transfers can help reduce food insecurity and mean that people affected by the COVID-19 crisis are less likely to have to sell their few assets or fall further into debt. Designed well, cash transfer programmes not only help people survive and get back on their feet, but can also help mitigate the exclusion of women and marginalised populations by giving them more control over resources. Cash transfers can also support the broader economic recovery thanks to their multiplier effects on the local economy. By enabling people to purchase food and other items locally, cash can help strengthen local markets, encourage smallholders to be more productive and build national capacities. In Bangladesh, a survey showed that all the people who receive multi-purpose cash grants spend a part of the grant on livelihood activities (e.g. poultry, seeds and tools, rental of a rickshaw) which boosted the local economy.<sup>22</sup>

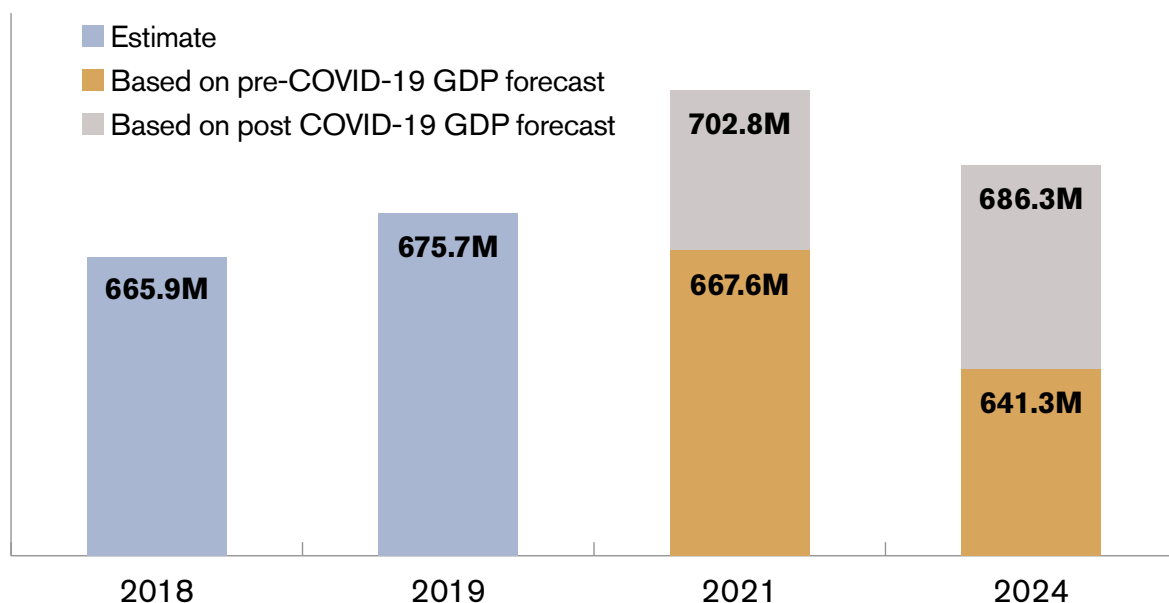
**Humanitarian cash transfers can help reduce food insecurity and mean that people affected by the COVID-19 crisis are less likely to have to sell their few assets or fall further into debt. Designed well, cash transfer programmes not only help people survive and get back on their feet, but can also help mitigate the exclusion of women and marginalised populations by giving them more control over resources.**

## Zero hunger: Progress suspended by at least five years

As discussed in the introduction, the drivers of food insecurity are complex. Factors, including climate shocks, conflict, food price rises and natural disasters, intersect with economic shocks to increase and prolong high levels of hunger. However, it is possible to isolate the economic effects and forecast the impact of the COVID-19 triggered economic shock on numbers of hungry people to calculate the total cost of cash transfers required to help prevent a hunger crisis.<sup>23</sup>

As shown in Figure 2, by drawing on the correlation between changes in GDP and numbers of hungry people over time (see Annex 1 for methodology), it is possible to calculate that the COVID-19 economic downturn will be associated with an **additional 35 million hungry people in 2021**. Our estimates show that, without drastic action, the COVID-19 economic shock will mean over 680 million people will be at risk of hunger in 2024; higher than the 2019 level. **In other words, the economic shocks arising from COVID-19 will suspend any progress towards ending hunger by at least five years.** This will significantly undermine the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the target of achieving Zero Hunger by 2030. For millions of children affected by hunger, these represent critical early years, particularly for child development, when a shortage of food can have devastating lifelong effects on their future potential. Immediate action is therefore required to stimulate fragile economies and protect households from the devastating impacts of food insecurity.

**Figure 2: Estimated additional hungry people in developing countries associated with economic shock**





While taking precautionary measures to protect both themselves and others from Covid-19, the IRC has been distributing emergency cash assistance to vulnerable refugees and people in need across the north Bekaa in Lebanon. *IRC*

## Global cost of responding with humanitarian cash transfers

The IRC has estimated the global cost of distributing humanitarian cash to mitigate the economic drivers of hunger in 2021. We collected current data on the local cost of basic needs required to survive (known as the Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB)) from developing countries where the IRC works, factoring in currency depreciation and rising food prices and estimated the MEB in countries where data is not available (see Annex 1). We used that data to calculate the total cost of providing 12 months of cash assistance to the estimated number of additional people at risk of hunger in countries affected by fragility, conflict and displacement. **This cost comes to a total of US\$2.3 billion in 2021.**

This figure represents the 'humanitarian cash stimulus' required to meet additional immediate needs and prevent rapidly increasing hunger and hardship. It is based on 2021 economic forecasts and the relationship between hunger and economic growth. It does not factor in assistance that is already being provided or quantify the costs of distributing the cash.

An increase in cash transfers on this scale could mitigate the devastation being felt by people already suffering the effects of conflict, displacement and food insecurity. It is particularly vital for those who are outside the capacity and reach of social protection systems, in contexts where humanitarian responders are attempting to plug the gaps.<sup>24</sup> To this end, UN, donors and NGOs have united as part of the Grand Bargain process<sup>25</sup> and NGOs have convened via the Collaborative Cash Delivery Network<sup>26</sup> to identify opportunities for complementary humanitarian cash transfer

programming. They are defining a clear role for humanitarian actors delivering cash to ensure that the most marginalised are heard and included; to understand and utilise local formal and informal social protection systems; guarantee that humanitarian interventions do not disrupt these systems further; and embed consideration for longer term social protection linkages.

## Recommendations for G7 members and the international community:

- The G7 must urgently mobilise US\$2.3 billion for humanitarian cash transfers in 2021 to protect people from the worst economic impacts of conflicts and crises and enable them to meet their basic needs including food.
- The international community must concurrently invest in long-term and inclusive social protection programmes in countries affected by fragility, conflict and displacement.
- Humanitarian organisations must design and implement humanitarian cash programmes that are informed by recipients' preferences and feedback on the appropriate modality, delivery mechanism, timing, and location of cash transfers. They must ensure any potential risks associated with the distribution of cash to women and girls and other marginalised populations are assessed and mitigated.
- The humanitarian sector must increase efficiency in the delivery of humanitarian cash by improving global coordination of cash transfer programmes, defining common approaches to measuring implementation and strengthening coordination between humanitarian action and social protection programming via appropriate platforms including the next iteration of the Grand Bargain (or Grand Bargain 2.0).

## 2. Malnutrition prevention and response

Rates of malnutrition have grown considerably as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic's economic shocks and impacts on food and health systems. Acute malnutrition (also known as wasting) is the most severe and life-threatening form of malnutrition. Globally, 45.4 million children were affected by acute malnutrition in 2020 and it has been shown to increase a child's likelihood of death 11-fold compared to a child without malnutrition.<sup>27,28</sup> An article published in *The Lancet* in July 2020 estimated that an additional 6.7 million children under the age of five would become acutely malnourished because of the pandemic.<sup>29</sup> Today, at best only 25 percent of children in need of treatment for acute malnutrition can access treatment.<sup>30</sup> Levels of malnutrition projected for 2021 threaten the considerable progress that has been made over the past three decades to reduce global child mortality.

### Acute malnutrition during famine

Meeting children's need for acute malnutrition treatment in hard-hit countries is an essential component of famine response; long-term, sustainable efforts to prevent and treat acute malnutrition must similarly be included as a cornerstone of any effort to prevent famine. The rate of acute malnutrition in children is one of only three indicators used to predict and declare famine (IPC Phase 5). High rates of acute malnutrition are among the earliest indicators –the canary in the coal mine – of famine risk. Famine is declared if the following conditions are met:<sup>31</sup>

- 20 percent of the population face extreme food shortages with limited ability to cope
- Acute malnutrition rates exceed 30 percent for children under five
- Two deaths per 10,000 people, or four deaths per 10,000 children per day

Chronically high rates of acute malnutrition are a bellwether indicating not only risk for child mortality, but for future risk of famine. South Sudan, which today has 46 percent of its population in IPC Phase 3 or higher, including 20 counties which are in Phase 4, is a clear example of this. The situation is expected to get worse in the coming months of lean season with 60 percent of the population soon to be in IPC Phase 3 or higher. Since January 2017, South Sudan has had no less than 30 percent of its population in IPC Phase 3 or higher.<sup>32</sup> Acute malnutrition rates in Yemen are similarly high, with 2.25 million children under age five expected to suffer from acute malnutrition in 2021, as well as a million pregnant or nursing mothers.<sup>33</sup>

### The number of acutely malnourished children is being underestimated

Rates of acute malnutrition are undeniably on the rise. The IRC's own nutrition programmes have recorded a 55 percent year on year increase in the number of children treated for acute malnutrition across 11 countries.<sup>34</sup> Even more worrying, however, are several recent studies suggesting current methods for determining acute malnutrition rates actually under-estimate the number of children with acute malnutrition. Estimates typically use prevalence data from coverage surveys and are multiplied by an incidence factor. This is designed to take into account the fact that severe acute malnutrition is an acute condition, with children becoming healthier, or dying, sometimes within only a few weeks. The current incidence factor in use is 1.6, but a recent review of data from 352 malnutrition treatment sites found that a more accurate incidence factor would be 3.6.<sup>35</sup> If this factor were used, the estimated number of children with acute malnutrition globally would more than double to an estimated 105 million, requiring the global response to increase accordingly. Another recent study found that the number of children with the most severe acute malnutrition globally may actually be 110 million – more than double the number of children estimated today to have severe and moderate acute malnutrition combined.<sup>36</sup>

**Chronically high rates of acute malnutrition are a bellwether indicating not only risk for child mortality, but for future risk of famine. South Sudan, which today has 46 percent of its population in IPC Phase 3 or higher, including 20 counties which are in Phase 4, is a clear example of this.**

## Donor funding for acute malnutrition is inadequate – and declining

Preventing and responding to acute malnutrition is an urgent global need, but funding and prioritisation of acute malnutrition have long been lacking. Whilst the G7 this year will focus on the looming risk of famine with the creation of a Famine Compact, nutrition is only briefly mentioned in the Compact and key questions around how it will be implemented – including funding for nutrition interventions such as treatment for acute malnutrition – go unanswered.<sup>37</sup>

Against a backdrop of rising malnutrition, hunger and mortality, levels of donor funding for nutrition is uncertain (see Chapter 5). The Nutrition for Growth funding cycle, in which donors make multi-year commitments to nutrition funding, closed at the end of 2020, with a delayed Nutrition for Growth Pledging Summit now planned for December 2021. The UK, who holds the Presidency of this year's G7 and historically one of the world's largest nutrition donors, has made devastating cuts to its nutrition budget. The UK's nutrition funding for 2021 is estimated to be down nearly 80 percent compared to its 2019 budget (£26 million compared to £122 million).<sup>39</sup> These are cuts to a small budget globally; overseas development assistance (ODA) for basic nutrition services, from 2007 to 2017, has never exceeded 0.6 percent of all ODA despite the fact that malnutrition is an underlying cause of 45 percent of global child deaths.<sup>40</sup>

## Preventing and treating acute malnutrition must be made an urgent priority

Global donors must urgently respond to the grave crisis of acute malnutrition. Prevention efforts, like supporting breastfeeding, Vitamin A supplementation, prenatal vitamins for pregnant women and ensuring widespread screening and diagnosis of malnutrition are essential actions that must be scaled up across high-burden countries. Effective treatment for acute malnutrition – such as high calorie, nutrient-dense pastes – must also be expanded to restore children's weight and prevent unnecessary deaths. Access to quality foods that provide dietary and nutrient density and diversity must also be increased. As well as tackling malnutrition, these same measures will help prevent famine, and the near-famine conditions currently observed in countries like Yemen and South Sudan.

The G7's Famine Compact offers the potential to shape famine prevention and response for years to come. It is essential that nutrition interventions, including effective approaches to prevent and treat acute malnutrition (see Box 2), are prioritised within the funding committed and within any plans developed to implement the Compact. Food and agricultural responses are of course necessary, but to avert mortality and humanitarian catastrophe, a health systems response that delivers care for nutrition is also essential.

### Box 2: Scaling up acute malnutrition services – Improved protocol for testing and treatment

The IRC, working closely with Action Against Hunger and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, has tested a simplified protocol for diagnosis and treatment of acute malnutrition among children, with the same success as treating children as the current cumbersome approach.<sup>41</sup> The IRC has also piloted delivery of care for acute malnutrition through community health workers, a promising approach that has been recommended by UNICEF during COVID-19. These advancements should be scaled up, especially in emergency contexts, to ensure that all children can access the treatment needed for acute malnutrition. IRC modelling has shown that shifting to a simplified protocol for the testing and treatment of acute malnutrition and the scale-up of services with the help of community health workers could double malnutrition coverage from 25 percent of children in need to 50 percent and sustain gains in treating acute malnutrition. To achieve this, more agencies implementing nutrition programmes would need to adopt these simplified treatment approaches.

## Recommendations for G7 members and the international community:

- The G7 must rapidly scale-up approaches to prevent and treat acute malnutrition in contexts experiencing famine or famine-like conditions as part of implementing the G7 Famine Compact.
- Donors must commit ambitious, long-term and flexible funding for nutrition at this year's Nutrition for Growth Summit, including funding to prevent and treat acute malnutrition.
- The humanitarian sector should expand the use of simplified approaches for treatment of acute malnutrition in humanitarian and emergency contexts and encourage agencies implementing nutrition programmes to uptake these approaches.
- The international community must hold the multilateral system – especially key actors like UNICEF, World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization – accountable for commitments made to support national governments in tackling wasting including changing policies to allow for the uptake of more effective approaches.

# 3. Removing barriers to humanitarian access

**In recent years there has been a growing international awareness of the need to address the connection between conflict, constrained humanitarian access, and food insecurity. In a recent address, the UN Secretary General noted that “Conflict drives hunger and famine; and hunger and famine drive conflict.”<sup>42</sup> Nowhere is this more evident than the contexts currently at greatest risk of famine.**

In 2018, acknowledging that global levels of undernourishment were on the rise for the first time in decades, the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2417 recognising “the need to break the vicious cycle between armed conflict and food insecurity”. The resolution further condemns the starving of civilians as a method of warfare as well as the unlawful denial of humanitarian access to civilian populations. The recognition of access constraints as an aggravating factor in food crises has implications for the role of international diplomacy in improving access and therefore, humanitarian response.

## The role of humanitarian response and access in food insecurity

Humanitarian responses in the form of food aid, nutrition programming, agricultural and market support, and humanitarian cash transfers all play an important role in mitigating the impacts of food crises. However, none of these interventions are possible without sustained access to populations in need. In many of the settings where the IRC works, restrictions on humanitarian access are aggravating pre-existing food insecurity crises by undermining people’s access to food and services, and the reach of humanitarian programming.

**Humanitarian access** is the ability of crisis-affected populations to reach the services they need to survive. It therefore includes both the ability of humanitarian organisations to reach people in need (whether across borders or within a country) and people’s ability to access critical services, like cash and nutrition support.

Access constraints can take several forms. They may arise because of **conflict-driven insecurity**, such as the movement of frontlines that stop humanitarians delivering services or civilians reaching them, or direct attacks on aid workers; **bureaucratic barriers**, including delays in providing operational permits, travel authorisations or visas; or **political barriers**, such as counter-terrorism legislation that inadvertently impacts the ability of humanitarians to negotiate their access with armed groups. As illustrated in the case studies below, in the contexts at greatest risk of famine many of these forms of access barriers are present and combine to significantly impact the ability of humanitarians to reach those in need.

The outbreak of COVID-19 compounded these existing access challenges, bringing new bureaucratic hurdles for humanitarian work, and increased restrictions on the movement of staff, as well as vital food imports. In five contexts examined by one UN study, humanitarian actors had dealt with cancelled or significantly reduced flights, sustained land border closures, and increased restrictions or delays in the issuance of visas, resulting in “increasing needs with diminished access.”<sup>43</sup>

While many access constraints can be overcome by improved logistics for humanitarian aid delivery or locally-led negotiations with authorities or armed actors, others require high-level political dialogue with governing actors, for example to agree temporary or localised ceasefires, or to apply political pressure to ease restrictions on visas and permits.

## Hunger as a weapon of war

Intentional access constraints, including political acts designed to cause hunger and starvation, are violations of international humanitarian law. Such acts are divided into three categories: **acts of commission** (attacks on food production, markets and the restriction of people’s movement); **omission** (failure to act, such as when food relief is blocked); and **provision** (the selective provision of aid to one side of a conflict).<sup>44</sup> All these acts are associated with constrained humanitarian access and have serious consequences for marginalised people in food insecure contexts.

WFP’s efforts to prevent the use of hunger as a weapon of war was among the reasons given for their award of the Nobel Peace Prize,<sup>45</sup> and reflects growing international concern with the trend of mass starvation in conflict.

The case studies below provide examples of the ways in which access constraints play a role in contributing to food insecurity in some of the highest risk contexts in the world.

## Yemen

Today, after six years of war, Yemen is the world's largest humanitarian crisis and stands on the brink of what the UN has described as "the worst famine in decades."<sup>46</sup> This year more than 16 million people, over half the population, are expected to face crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) while approximately 50,000 people are expected to be living under famine-like conditions.<sup>47</sup> Half of all children under the age of five are projected to suffer from acute malnutrition in 2021. For these people, humanitarian food assistance has been a lifeline: an average of eight million people per month were reached with food assistance at the beginning of 2021.<sup>48</sup>

While funding remains the greatest impediment to the delivery of assistance in Yemen, access constraints continue to undermine Yemen's food security. ACAPS rates access in Yemen as "extremely constrained" due to broad and rapidly changing insecurity, shortages of essential supplies, attacks on aid workers and the manipulation of aid deliveries. Already in 2021, IRC staff in southern Yemen have faced threats to their safety and armed robbery, curtailment of staff movement and limits to operations. The vast majority of access challenges in 2020 were bureaucratic, accounting for over 93 percent of all constraints on aid delivery, an increase from 90 percent in 2019 and a trend which persists today.<sup>49,50</sup>

## South Sudan

South Sudan is facing the worst food security crisis since independence ten years ago, with famine conditions most likely already occurring in some areas and likely to continue in the next six months – an assessment that is disputed by the central government.<sup>51</sup> A myriad of access constraints aggravate the food crisis by undermining the delivery of assistance, including high levels of violence against aid workers, ongoing hostilities and restrictions on movement, and efforts by parties to the conflict to interfere with humanitarian assistance.<sup>52</sup> Although the 2018 revitalised peace agreement has allowed an expansion in humanitarian coverage, about 1.6 million people remain internally displaced, making them harder to reach with assistance.<sup>53</sup> In 2019, South Sudan was the second most dangerous place for aid workers in the world, having previously been the most dangerous for five years running.<sup>54</sup>

Political tensions and increased intercommunal violence have led to temporary suspensions of IRC programming across multiple regions. In January 2021, attacks by armed youth in Majak resulted in the injury of IRC staff and the suspension of all IRC activities including cash for work, savings and loans groups, and farming support in Majak and neighbouring Nyal Payams. Bureaucratic impediments, access denials and operational interference also continue. IRC staff have faced intimidation by local authorities seeking to influence the IRC's recruitment process, resulting in threats to both specific staff members, and IRC's presence in regions of South Sudan.



Increasing prices meant that our financial situation became very bad," Taqwa and Mohammed live in Al-Sahdah camp in Yemen with their children. "We were not even able to visit the hospital or buy medicine for our children." Taqwa and her husband Mohammed had to sell personal belongings to visit the hospital when their children fell sick. *Saleh Ba Hayan/IRC*

## The international response to access barriers

These case studies clearly illustrate the daily challenges faced by operational NGOs in securing and maintaining humanitarian access to deliver life saving and life sustaining assistance. The trend of increasingly complex access barriers has implications for the international response that is required to address them. Steps taken by member states, including the UK, to integrate development and diplomatic efforts have been proposed, in part, on the value they add to overcoming access impediments. The degree to which they can deliver on these objectives is a key test for such an integrated approach.

## Recommendations for G7 members and the international community:

- The G7 and the international community should commit to uphold international humanitarian and human rights law, and invest in conflict prevention as key pillars of Famine Prevention Compact implementation plans. This includes maintaining political support for the implementation of relevant UNSC resolutions including resolutions 2417 and 2286 to improve reporting on violations of international humanitarian law and constraints on access that exacerbate food crises, and seek to hold those responsible for breaches to account.
- The G7 and the international community should maintain high-level bilateral diplomatic engagement with state and non-state actors to address political and bureaucratic barriers to humanitarian access in cases of food crises, or in contexts where early signs suggest a deterioration in food security is being aggravated by constrained access. Investment in embassy and capital-level capacity and expertise to understand and address humanitarian access constraints will be critical.
- Donors must ensure that financial support to operational NGOs allows investment in national level capacity to engage in access negotiations with state and non-state actors.



## 4. Climate-resilient food systems that empower women and girls

**The climate crisis continues to drive food insecurity and displacement due to slow onset events such as higher temperatures, irregular rainfall, land degradation and desertification; and the increased frequency and severity of sudden natural shocks such as flooding, droughts, megafires and desert locust swarms. These events destroy agriculture<sup>55</sup> and rural livelihoods, displacing people from their homes, resulting in vast regions of our planet facing famine, which at times spark conflict over resources.<sup>56</sup> Climate risks are higher in fragile states.<sup>57</sup>**

Deeply entrenched gender roles and structural inequalities put women and girls at a disadvantage in crisis situations. Prevalence of severe food insecurity is higher among women.<sup>58</sup> Gender inequality creates additional burdens and barriers for women and girls during times of conflict and climate-related crisis, which increases their vulnerability to hunger and food insecurity. Women play key roles in local food systems and are carers and activists, which make them uniquely placed to prevent famine and drive longer-term climate resilience and food security.<sup>59</sup> Yet they are rarely included in the design of local solutions for climate adaptation. Women hold multiple roles in crisis situations that often span the artificial divisions between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding interventions, but without dedicated resources and accountable inclusion of displaced women in crisis management they will continue to be left behind.

### The gendered nature of crises

Gender inequality limits women's ability to access rights and freedoms that can support their resilience in protracted crises, which means they are disproportionately affected by conflict, climate change impacts and food insecurity. Discriminatory social norms and GBV are among key factors limiting women's agency and ability to choose how they control their time and resources, particularly during times of conflict.<sup>60,61</sup> This results in risks of hunger as women frequently eat least, last and least well within their households, and suffer the most from nutrient deficiencies.<sup>62</sup>

As women tend to be the main caregivers and have multiple dependents, their inability to access food and other lifesaving services has a multiplying effect on families and communities. This is worse for women displaced by climate change-related impacts who often have less access to relief resources.<sup>63</sup>

Women farmers are also at particular risk of hunger, and face steeper and more barriers to accessing land, agricultural inputs and credit.<sup>64,65</sup> Women also experience additional

barriers to accessing information and technologies to adapt and mitigate climate-related loss and damage.<sup>66</sup>

### Barriers to women's leadership in crisis

The same structural factors and inequalities that make women and girls disproportionately vulnerable to food insecurity, can also exclude them from processes and platforms where decisions are made about local food systems, environmental governance and crisis management.<sup>67,68</sup> Women and girls' unpaid care work expands in disasters, hindering formal participation in disaster response and rebuilding. This results in climate interventions and crisis response strategies missing their needs and failing to account for their realities, such as risks of violence, healthcare needs, economic exclusion and unpaid care work.<sup>69</sup> Displaced women and girls have even fewer opportunities to participate and make decisions concerning investments in their own resilience and climate change adaptation as they are often absent from local governance systems.<sup>70</sup>

### Building food security and climate resilience

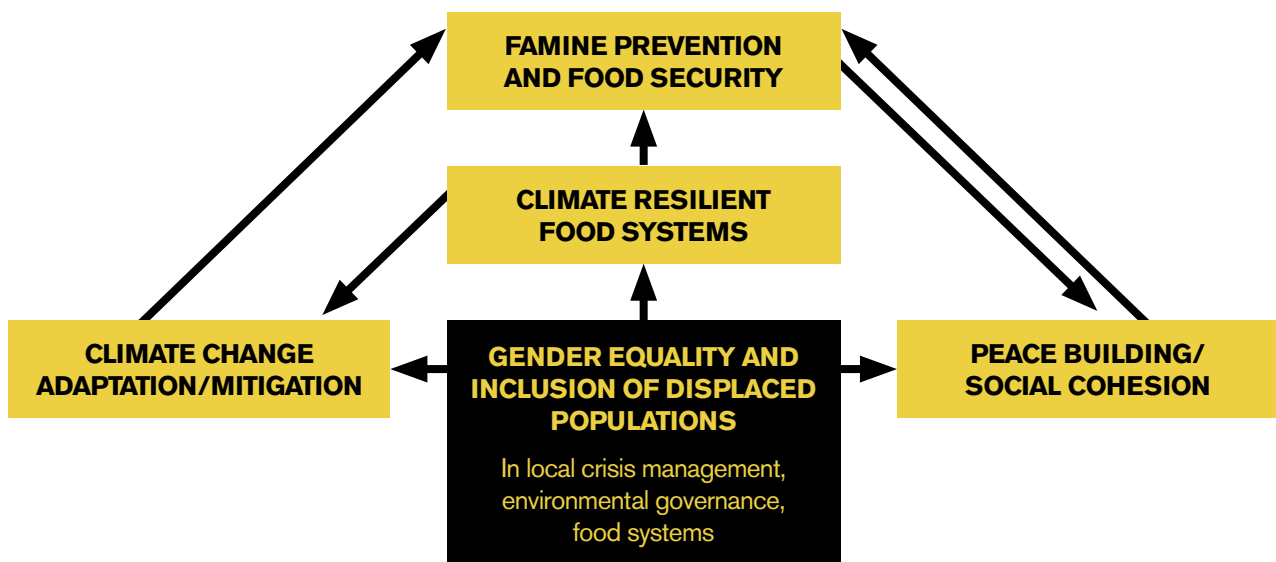
Famine prevention and response requires an integrated response to protracted crises, both responding urgently to acute hunger while simultaneously building resilience to climate change and conflict, combining humanitarian and development approaches. This means supporting locally-led food security and adaptation strategies, which include climate-smart, diverse and nutritious food production that conserves and regenerates biodiversity, and investing in local markets and value chains. The resilience of local food systems was illustrated by an FAO survey which found that facilitating the availability and access to locally produced food were key measures to ensure continued food supply and protect the most vulnerable from COVID-19 impacts.<sup>71</sup> Holistic responses that recognise local priorities and local knowledge, are critical.<sup>72</sup> Displaced and conflict-affected communities should be included in local environmental and food systems governance.

Despite the barriers to leadership they face, conflict-affected and refugee women are uniquely placed to drive climate resilience and food security. In their capacity as producers, processors, sellers, consumers and preparers of food, they generally farm for household consumption and manage resources like water, firewood and fodder.<sup>73,74</sup> Where women are able to control resources they and their families are generally found to have better-quality diets.<sup>75</sup> Leveraging women's roles in food systems can more effectively build resilience from shocks and food insecurity risks.<sup>76</sup> Women's knowledge and experiences of leading community-based and grassroots responses to food insecurity and climate change must be integrated into formal policy making processes.<sup>77</sup> Women often drive movements for women's rights and climate justice which improve resilience and peacebuilding in their communities and this commitment can and should be harnessed and supported.<sup>78</sup>

### Taking a feminist approach to food security

Strategies to prevent famine and build long-term food security in fragile and conflict-affected states must be guided by a feminist approach that centres on the resilience and leadership of women and girls (see Figure 3). This requires transformations to take place at individual, household, community and society levels that improve crisis-affected women's agency and access to key resources and opportunities – in line with IRC's model for women's economic empowerment in crisis contexts.<sup>79</sup> Transformative interventions should be multi-sector and multi-year, combining food security support with a response to GBV while challenging discriminatory social norms and policies that prohibit women to control resources such as land, and to lead decision making.

**Figure 3: A feminist approach to food security**



This also requires increased financial support for women leaders and grassroots initiatives with local knowledge and expertise, who often cannot access climate financing. Of climate adaptation finance provided by most G7 countries, less than ten percent considers gender equality as a key objective<sup>80</sup> and only a tiny proportion of gender-responsive climate bilateral ODA goes to Southern civil society organisations.<sup>81</sup>

The IRC implements a feminist approach by working towards enhancing women's control over and equal access to resources, assets, jobs and markets in our livelihoods and food security programmes. In South Sudan, for example (see Box 3), programmes aimed at building resilience to climate-induced shocks, enhancing food security and income generation are increasingly integrating gender-transformative activities that aim to change gender unequal social norms.

The IRC also works with host and refugee communities to advance integrated food systems and build resilience and cohesion.



Members of the IRC-supported community-based organization Tupendane (which translated to "Let's Love Ourselves") cultivate the land, Democratic Republic of Congo. *Kellie Ryan/IRC*

### Box 3: Integrating refugee and host food systems in South Sudan

Integrating refugees into food systems in their new homes can help them rebuild their lives and reduce aid dependency. Being part of the host food system allows refugees to move beyond subsistence agriculture, rejoin exchange markets and adopt climate change adaptation measures, contributing to improved food security in resilience in the wider community<sup>82</sup>. In South Sudan, the IRC strengthened the local seed system to also extend to two refugee camps (Ajuong Thok and Pamir) and better serve the needs of the host community of Jamjang with funding from UNHCR.

Improving the independent functioning of local, diverse seed and food systems is increasing the ability of the community and refugees to adapt to COVID-19, conflict and climate change shocks. With seed stocks depleted or lost during displacement and cyclical climate shocks, and low availability and yield quality of externally produced seeds, the IRC supported farmers to become local seed producers. Host and refugee farmers were provided with seeds of local high yielding varieties, supported in seed multiplication and improved storage as well as seed trading skills and market linkages. This contributed to improved availability to local farming communities at large.

As refugees had limited access to land, 'peaceful coexistence committees' made up of refugees and hosts were set up in the refugee camps to facilitate dialogue and refugee access to farming land. Women leaders make up 33 percent of these committees, which enabled them to advocate for issues that affect women farmers such as safety and security around farmlands, and access to more land and inputs. The programme prioritised support for female farmers (over 70 percent). Integrated economic support to women-led businesses included activities to sensitise women and spouses on inclusive household financial decision making and leadership through the IRC's impactful EA\$E Gender Discussion Groups series.<sup>83</sup>

Overall, the project has resulted in positive impacts on family welfare, nutrition and resilience and social cohesion between refugees and host communities. Eighty percent of the farmers involved saw their incomes increase and about 75 percent of female farmers increased their own and their family's food consumption.

The international community must take a feminist approach to famine prevention to urgently and effectively respond to and anticipate acute hunger and malnutrition, while simultaneously working to build long-term food security by resourcing local, climate resilient food systems. The UK in particular should capitalise on the opportunities of its G7 presidency and COP26, to champion and invest in gender-transformative and climate-resilient responses to hunger and malnutrition that are informed and driven by women and girls disproportionately affected by food insecurity.

### Recommendations for G7 members and the international community:

- Global initiatives to address famine, such as the G7 Famine Prevention Compact, must recognise the disproportionate risks of hunger for women and girls in fragile and conflict-affected states. As part of the Compact's implementation, the G7 should fund feminist approaches to climate resilience and integrate humanitarian famine response with development and peacebuilding approaches.
- Donors should prioritise women's and girls' leadership in crises in line with the G7 Whistler Declaration, the Grand Bargain and the Generation Equality Forum, by committing to measurable targets to increase the amount and quality of funding going to feminist approaches and women led organisations.
- Leading up to the UN Food Systems Summit, the international community must enable civil society in the global South, including women's rights organisations in fragile and conflict affected contexts to lead the development of solutions and commit to new funding for solutions that strengthen local, biodiverse and climate resilient food systems and include feminist approaches.
- The international community must ensure all climate finance is gender-just, takes an intersectional approach and is accessible to national women's rights organisations and local communities, with 50 percent of climate finance going to adaptation.
- All governments must ensure adaptation strategies within local, national and global climate response plans incorporate conflict-displacement-gender considerations and include actions to address the unique needs and circumstances of women, refugees, asylum-seekers, and conflict-affected communities.

# 5. Resourcing famine prevention and response

## The aid environment

**Due to increased needs stemming from the pandemic, humanitarian funding rose to US\$18 billion in 2020 – a six percent increase over 2019. A number of key donors contributed to this increase. The European Commission committed an additional US\$1.86 billion, representing a 53 percent increase compared to 2019.<sup>84</sup> Germany made an additional US\$1.89 billion in aid available, allowing it to meet the 0.7 percent target for the first time in many years. The United States’ contributions saw a marginal increase and in March 2021 passed a bill with roughly US\$10 billion for the global response to COVID-19, including US\$800 million for food assistance. The United States is also expected to increase its foreign aid budget for its fiscal year 2022.**

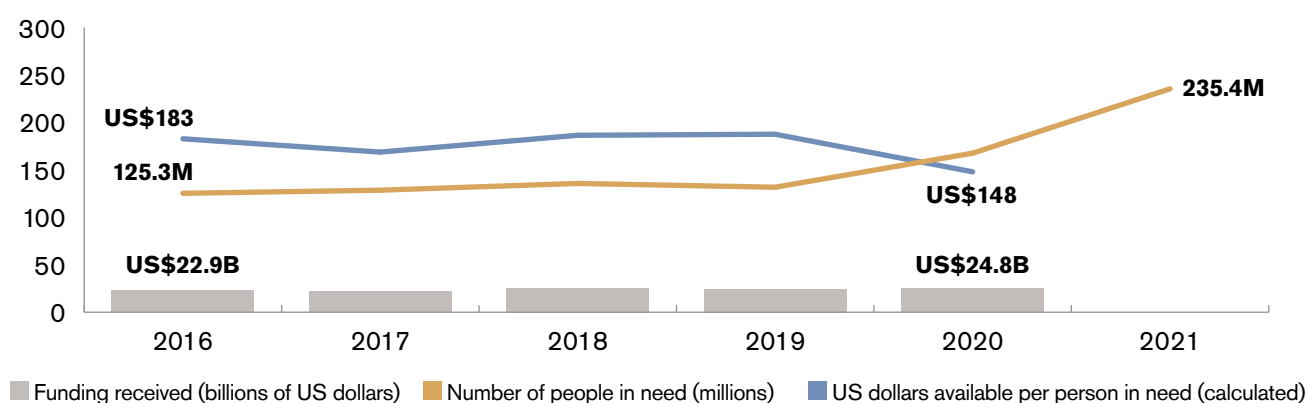
However, not all donors are on-trend towards an increase in humanitarian assistance. The UK, which holds the Presidency for this year’s G7, oversaw an absolute fall in aid commitments of 48 percent between January and July in 2019 and the same time period in 2020.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile the UK government will oversee a drastic reduction in aid spending in 2021, and a cut in its aid spending commitment of 0.7 percent of GNI to 0.5 percent. On top of the reductions in 2020, this represents a cumulative cut of around £5 billion or one-third of the UK aid budget over two years compared to 2019.<sup>86</sup> The UK Overseas Development Assistance allocated to humanitarian assistance in 2021/22 is 40 percent less than the amount spent before the pandemic in 2019.<sup>87</sup>

Beyond bilateral donors, multilateral financial institutions such as the World Bank have stepped-up with increased commitments for food security focused both on immediate and longer-term needs. In fiscal year 2021, the World Bank is dedicating approximately more than US\$3 billion in new commitments and adjusted projects across social protection and agriculture and food-related programs in low-income countries, including fragile states such as Yemen, South

Sudan, Nigeria and Burkina Faso. This is double the total amount of financing that the World Bank’s Global Food Crisis Response Program dedicated between 2008 and 2011. Importantly, the World Bank’s strategy recognises the linkages between food security, COVID-19, conflict and climate change, and takes a gendered approach.<sup>88</sup> Given ongoing and rising needs, this financing will need to be sustained in the upcoming 20th replenishment of the International Development Association (IDA).

Despite the overall increases in 2020, humanitarian funding is still not meeting needs. Since 2016, the number of people in need has increased from 125.3 million to 235.4 million – an 88 percent increase.<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile, humanitarian assistance has risen from US\$22.9 billion in 2016 to US\$24.8 billion in 2020 – an 8.3 percent increase (see Figure 4).<sup>90</sup> Humanitarian response plans are, on average, only 40 percent funded.<sup>91</sup> Places on the brink of widespread famine, like Yemen, are among those where there is a massive and growing gap between requirements and available funding. To date, the humanitarian response plan has received just US\$1.3 billion of the US\$3.85 billion required and the food security sector

**Figure 4: Rising needs are outpacing available humanitarian funding**



is just 20 percent funded.<sup>92</sup> During a visit to Yemen in March 2021, WFP Executive Director David Beasley noted that the programme needed at least US\$815 million in aid over the following six months, but had only received US\$300 million from donors.<sup>93</sup>

### **Driving aid to immediately respond to hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity in crisis contexts**

Donors should prioritise responding to food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition as they look to spend their humanitarian aid through 2021 and develop budgets for 2022. To have the greatest impact, this aid should be delivered using models that respond to the trends of crisis and that can have maximum reach and scale in fragile and conflict settings. This means more aid should go directly to frontline humanitarian responders, including international and local NGOs and women-led organisations, who have access to and are trusted by crisis-affected communities. More aid needs to be multi-year and flexible; rather than short-term and earmarked grants. Bilateral donors should move towards grants that are at least two years in length and allow for adaptability in contexts where crises are evolving. Evidence has shown that multi-year, flexible humanitarian financing is both effective and cost-efficient.<sup>94</sup>

In addition to funding to humanitarian actors, financing to low- and middle-income countries from institutions like the World Bank should prioritise the inclusion of crisis-affected and displaced populations into national systems that can help prevent hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. These populations are often left out by accident or by design. In some places, intentional constraints on humanitarian access prevent aid from reaching those most in need (see Chapter 3). In other contexts, displaced populations may not be able to benefit from development assistance to governments because national laws prevent them from accessing national services, such as social protection schemes (see Chapter 1). Instead, these populations rely on more limited and unpredictable resources flowing through the humanitarian system. As witnessed in Uganda in late 2020, when WFP had to cut monthly cash relief and food rations for 1.26 million refugees in Uganda due to a shortfall in international aid, reliance purely on the humanitarian system is not sustainable.<sup>95</sup>

### **Preventing the next famine: a longer-term view**

COVID-19 has demonstrated the immeasurable costs associated with underinvestment in crisis preparedness in terms of dollars, lives and livelihoods. Just US\$374 million in ODA was invested specifically in pandemic preparedness in 2019; the IMF now estimates that COVID-19 will cost the global economy tens of trillions of dollars.<sup>96</sup>

Preparing finance for response *before* people are affected by famine and food insecurity can improve the speed and effectiveness of humanitarian action. For example, a study commissioned by USAID found that investing in a proactive response to avert drought could reduce the cost to international donors by 30 percent – a US\$2.8 in savings for every US\$1 invested.<sup>97</sup> A combination of early warning analytics and anticipatory or early financing – such as through the World Bank-led Famine Action Mechanism<sup>98</sup> and UN OCHA's anticipatory action pilots for drought<sup>99</sup> – is one potential model for bolstering preparedness and averting food security crises. The Crisis Lookout Coalition has developed a broader set of solutions that G7 countries should consider if they are serious about predicting crises better, preparing responses better, and ultimately protecting people better.<sup>100</sup> For example, the Coalition – which the IRC supports – has identified the need for: a Crisis Lookout to assess the likelihood and potential cost of crisis risks over a 12-month period; a fundamental shift to pre-arranged crisis financing; and a greater focus on and investment in locally-led solutions. With G7 country investment, these new tools, financing strategy and approach could help prevent and prepare for the next major food security crisis.

It is critical that there is sufficient funding for preparedness and response to famine and food crises and that funding is spent effectively and efficiently, with appropriate accountability and financial transparency. To achieve this, a number of challenges within the aid system will need to be overcome through reforms across bilateral donors such as the G7, multilateral donors like UN agencies, and international financial institutions such as the World Bank.

### **Recommendations for G7 members and the international community:**

- Donors should increase, or at least maintain, aid budgets, including funding for preparedness and response to food insecurity and malnutrition, and set a timetable for meeting, or returning to, the target of investing 0.7 percent of GNI in international aid.
- G7 members should adapt financing models to provide more multi-year, flexible humanitarian grants for cash, nutrition and gender-transformative climate-resilient food security programmes that quickly reach frontline implementers, including women's rights organisations; and advocate at the Financing and Development Summit and at the Grand Bargain for system-wide reform to encourage other government donors and UN agencies to also shift their financing models.
- G7 members should, through the G7 Famine and Humanitarian Crisis Panel, invest in better risk information and monitoring, and more predictable risk financing, and in the Crisis Lookout Coalition's roadmap.

# Conclusion and recommendations

**Conflict, climate shocks and COVID-19 are pushing already vulnerable and food insecure communities to the brink of famine. Decades of progress in reducing global hunger and acute malnutrition is under threat. Without immediate action and injections of funding from the world's largest economies to tackle hunger and malnutrition, millions of lives will be lost and more will be devastated. Economies of fragile and conflict-affected countries, already weakened by a deadly combination of crises, will face even more uncertain paths to recovery.**

The IRC welcomes the G7's focus on preventing famine this year and urges G7 members to urgently implement the Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Crises Compact by defining an ambitious and fully resourced famine response that incorporates the recommendations outlined in this report. We know what needs to be done: invest in humanitarian cash, scale up proven intervention to tackle acute malnutrition, advocate for safe humanitarian access and build countries' resilience through climate-resilient inclusive food systems that empower women and girls. Levels of action and investment must be sufficient to stop and reverse the hunger crisis.

When the G7 meets in the UK later this year, its decisions will have life-or-death consequences for people already suffering from hunger and food insecurity. All opportunities to stop and reverse the global hunger crisis must be seized.

## Recommendations for G7 and the international community:

- 1** Increase the food security, resilience, choice and dignity of the most vulnerable people through the distribution of humanitarian cash transfers
- 2** Scale up proven interventions to prevent and respond to acute malnutrition
- 3** Remove barriers to humanitarian access so frontline humanitarian responders can safely reach food insecure communities and provide emergency support
- 4** Build inclusive food systems that empower women and girls and are climate-resilient
- 5** Fully resource famine prevention and response, ensure humanitarian assistance reaches frontline responders, and better prepare for future risks through anticipatory and risk-informed financing



Fatima Khalek sits outside with her grandchildren in Badghis province. Stefanie Glinski/IRC

# Annex 1

## Methodology

### Estimates of additional number of hungry people in developing countries and the cost of responding using humanitarian cash transfers

This analysis draws on the methodology used in **The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019** (Annex 4) to assess the relationship between changes in prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) and economic growth between 2011 and 2017 and explore whether increases in PoU are statistically associated with economic slowdowns and downturns.

No attempt was made in that or this analysis to model the complex mechanism and the diverse pathways by which economic growth and hunger are linked. Instead, the analysis focuses on a reduced form of this complex system and attempts to assess the correlation between hunger and economic performance – i.e. fast rates of growth, slowdowns and downturns.

The change in the PoU in percentage points between 2012 and 2018 (using the 3-year averages data) was regressed on the change in log real GDP per capita (measured in 2011 international USD, taken from the IMF WEO database) between 2012 and 2018. A sample of 110 developing countries which had data for both variables was used for the calculations. This regression yielded a constant (alpha) term of 0.8 and a slope (beta) term of -8.8; the beta coefficient is statistically significant. The regression coefficients were then applied to WEO estimates and forecasts of GDP growth up to 2024 in order to estimate the change in the PoU attributable to economic growth over various time periods (for periods of less than six years the constant term from the regression was reduced proportionately).

Estimates of the increase in the number of hungry people were arrived at by combining the estimated PoUs with population forecasts, also taken from the WEO database, and then summing the increase across all developing countries. Comparing resultant estimates for the IMF's October 2019 and April 2021 forecasts allows for an estimate of the impact of COVID-19 on hunger via the economic growth channel, assuming that for most countries by far the biggest driver of the economic growth downgrade over the intervening period was the COVID-19 crisis.

### Minimum expenditure basket estimates

The most recently reported Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) figure has been used to define a monthly cash transfer for the developing countries where the IRC works. The transfer value for each country was calculated based on the percentage of the MEB that the local Cash Working Group or other relevant actors recommends to cover, which is typically based on a gap analysis of which items within an MEB a household can meet through their own income and savings.

For the remaining countries in the sample an estimate was used, derived by regressing the MEB on 2019 real GDP per capita in international USD terms for 21 countries where a MEB is available and using the fitted relationship (since MEB is positively correlated with per-capita GDP).

This is converted into US dollars using exchange rates from the IMF's International Financial Statistics and multiplied by 6 months to reflect the duration of the cash transfer programme. Depending on the impact of the economic shock in each context, shorter or longer programmes may be required, but for this exercise we used a reasonable but conservative estimate of the duration of the transfer. This figure was multiplied by the number of additional people hungry in each country to calculate the total amount required to meet the additional need using humanitarian cash transfers.

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