

300 million people need humanitarian assistance, with one in five children living in or fleeing conflict zones

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22 February 2024

The latest report from the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) states that around 300 million of the world's eight billion population need humanitarian assistance and protection due to conflicts, climate emergencies and economic factors.

This has forced the agency to appeal for a record \$56.7 billion to help 245 million people. It warns that funding for humanitarian relief has declined, resulting in the largest funding gap on record, leaving millions at risk of starvation. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), every one percent cut in food assistance, risks pushing 400,000 more people to the brink of starvation.

OCHA says the world is seeing a growing number of more deeply entrenched conflicts, disrupting food systems and agricultural production, hampering aid delivery, and creating a burgeoning population of displaced people. The consequences for civilians, particularly children, are devastating. Almost one child in every five around the world is living in or fleeing from conflict zones, many barely mentioned in the international corporate media.

One in every 73 people have been forced to flee their homes, a ratio that has almost doubled in the last decade, with 71.1 million people internally displaced at the end of 2022, a 20 percent increase in just a year and the largest year-on-year increase since 2013. The number of refugees is at a record high of 36.4 million, with over half coming from Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine, the product of imperialist-fuelled wars.

Most devastating is the situation in Gaza. In the first five weeks of 2024, the number of civilians killed there was equivalent to almost 60 percent of the total number of global civilians killed in 2022, itself the deadliest year since the Rwandan genocide in 1994.

Already last December, a UN report warned that 93 percent of people in Gaza face "crisis levels of hunger"

and that a quarter of the besieged enclave's population faces "catastrophic hunger and starvation." The UN special rapporteur on the right to food said that all children under five in Gaza, 335,000, are at high risk of starvation, while WFP spokesperson Steve Taravella said, "The scale and swiftness of this crisis is unprecedented in modern times," adding "If current predictions continue, we will reach famine by February."

Israel rejected this out of hand, saying "There is no starvation in Gaza, period." The catastrophe has worsened since.

But the Palestinians are a fraction of the 53.8 million requiring assistance in the Middle East, with 32.5 million in need in Syria and neighbouring countries, along with 21.6 million people in Yemen as 80 percent of its population struggles to put food on the table and access basic services. This humanitarian crisis is set to worsen following repeated missile strikes by the US and Britain on the Houthis who control much of the war-torn country.

By far the largest number of people in need of assistance are in Africa. The eruption of civil war in Sudan in April last year between two rival factions of the military has left 30 million of the country's 49 million population in desperate need of assistance. The crisis in Sudan accounts for almost 40 percent of the 74.1 million in need in East and Southern Africa. In West and Central Africa, centred on Burkina Faso and Niger, 65.1 million people require humanitarian assistance.

There are 50.8 million people in Asia and the Pacific in need, predominantly in Afghanistan (30.6 million of its 43 million population) and Myanmar (18.6 million of its 55 million population).

The Latin America and Caribbean region are now home to 38.9 million people in need, with 15.9 million impacted by the Venezuela crisis.

In Eastern Europe, 16.8 million people are in desperate need of assistance because of the war in Ukraine.

As well as conflicts and wars, the global climate crisis is wreaking destruction with tropical cyclones in southern Africa, wildfires in Europe and Storm Daniel in Libya. Some 8.7 million people were internally displaced due to more frequent and extreme weather events by the end of 2023. But pre-existing poverty, social inequality, official discrimination, and economic policies were also significant drivers of humanitarian need in several countries, including Afghanistan, Syria and Venezuela.

Acute food insecurity is the reality for 258 million people in 58 countries because of armed conflict, economic shocks, climate extremes, poverty and inequality. Of particular note is that “wasting” threatens the lives of 45 million children under 5 (a shocking 7 percent of all children), with nearly one third or 13.6 million suffering from severe wasting, meaning that they are at imminent risk of death.

Disease is also causing significant suffering and loss of life. Twenty-nine countries reported outbreaks of cholera, a water-borne disease easily preventable and treatable. Outbreaks have grown deadlier due to overstretched health systems, vaccine shortages, lack of access to clean water and sanitation, and the presence of multiple, parallel disease outbreaks, while most communities remain under-vaccinated for COVID-19.

Crucially, as OCHA points out, in the absence of concerted international efforts, food security will deteriorate further in 2024 with Burkina Faso, Mali, Gaza and the West Bank, South Sudan and Sudan of particular concern.

Hunger hotspots include the Middle East where Israel’s genocide in Gaza is spiralling into a wider regional war, and in the Sahel where instability and violence continued to surge, according to the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). It warned that food insecurity would deteriorate further amid reduced “donor support,” lower economic growth and sharp rises in domestic food prices. Food prices rose following the start of the US/NATO proxy war in Ukraine, and, as at the end of last month, 15 countries had implemented 21 food export bans, while 11 had introduced export restrictions that, along with the re-routing of shipping around southern Africa, are pushing up transportation costs, exacerbating the global food crisis.

A separate report, *The Funding Gap*, by Action against Hunger, revealed that 17 countries with a hunger burden at “crisis” levels or above in 2022-23, had just 35 percent

of their urgent requests for hunger relief funding met.

It would have taken just \$8.86 billion to fully fund the hunger-related appeals of all 17 of these countries, loose change for the world’s 2,600 billionaires.

The funding gap was about 23 percent larger at the start of 2024 than it was a year earlier. Approximately 88 percent of hunger appeals received less than half the funding requested in last year. Only 12 percent of hunger programs in countries with crisis levels of hunger received half of what they needed. None were fully funded, compared with just 3 percent in 2022.

This year, the UN and its partner organisations are appealing for \$46.4 billion to assist 180.5 million of the 300 million people who it says need humanitarian assistance.

The world produces enough food for everyone, and the resources exist to end global hunger and poverty. Humanitarian appeals to the oligarchs, corporations and banks that control the planet’s wealth and to the capitalist governments that defend their massive profits, will never secure the necessary funds. Without a frontal assault on the wealth and power of the corporate and financial oligarchy, there can be no solution to the crises confronting mankind. Only a massive social movement of the working class, which has as its aim the conquest of state power and the reorganization of social and economic life based on human need, equality and socialism, can end the scourge of global poverty and hunger for good.



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