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Latin America and the Caribbean suffer more hunger than before Covid-19 Empty plates in a rich continent

This unprecedented food crisis, according to La Via Campesina, is interwoven with the climate crisis, wars, corruption, media control, institutional racism and neo-fascism while the peasantry continues to be criminalized and their livelihoods monopolized.

The peasant mobilization in defense of women's rights as well. Women are the main victims of food insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean. Photo: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation

Things are not going well in the world, and Latin America and the Caribbean are no exception: hunger is hitting even harder than before the pandemic. Persistent inequalities in the region have a significant impact on food insecurity among the most vulnerable.

More than 42 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean suffer from hunger. This is 6.5% of its total population of 662 million. There, optimism does not overflow since hunger today is greater than during the pre-Covid 19 stage. With the aggravating factor that 248 million suffer from food insecurity and one in five people fail to consume a truly balanced and healthy diet. Today, globally, nearly one person in ten suffers from hunger.



Women and rural populations are the sectors most affected by food insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean. Photo: FAO

This finding is worrying: while some progress was made between 2021 and 2022 on the continent in reducing hunger and food insecurity, that progress is far from the targets of Sustainable Development Goal number 2 for 2030: to eliminate it definitively.

[This is the conclusion of the Report Latin America and the Caribbean – Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition-2023](#) prepared by several United Nations agencies: FAO (food and agriculture), UNICEF (children), IFAD (agricultural development), PAHO/WHO (health) and the World Food Programme, and published in the first week of November



The FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) played a central role in the preparation of this report and its so-called "indicator of prevalence of undernourishment" (i.e. hunger thermometer) is derived from national data on food supply and consumption, as well as the energy needs of the population, taking into account age, sex and physical activity levels. This indicator was designed to identify a chronic state of energy deprivation, i.e. without consideration of the ephemeral effects of temporary crises. Between 2021 and 2022 in South America, the number of hungry people decreased by 3.5 million. However, the number of undernourished people increased by 6 million compared to the pre-pandemic figure. In 2022, more than 9 million people went hungry in Central America. Meanwhile, in the Caribbean, 7.2 million suffered this extreme reality. This was 700,000 more than in 2021 and Haiti recorded the highest incidence. Almost one Haitian person in two today suffers from this scourge.

Food insecurity

The UN report notes that food insecurity – both moderate and severe – in the region was much higher than the global average estimate, which covers 29.6% of its total population. In fact, in 2022, 37.5% of the inhabitants of Latin America and the Caribbean were affected by this condition. In absolute numbers, 248 million people were forced to reduce the quality or quantity of their food (moderate food insecurity) and, in the most extreme

case, went several days without eating, putting their health and well-being at serious risk (severe food insecurity). In 2022 in South America, 36.4% of its population suffered from this condition. In Mesoamerica, 34.5 per cent, and in the Caribbean, 60.6 per cent.



35 percent of the continent's population is a victim of the scourge of food insecurity.
Photo: FAO

On the other hand, food insecurity in either of its two expressions continues to affect women more than men and affects 8% more in rural areas than in urban areas.

The World's Most Expensive Healthy Diet

Latin America and the Caribbean are the region of the world where eating healthily costs more than any other on the planet.

Between 2020 and 2021, the cost of a healthy diet in that region increased by 5.3% due to food inflation driven by pandemic lockdowns, global supply chain disruptions, and human resource shortages. There were more than 133 million people who could not afford a healthy diet – an increase of more than 11 million compared to 2020.

The indicator of a healthy diet basically consists of the purchase price of the least expensive and locally available foods needed to cover 2,330 calories per day.



Millions of Latin-Americans and Caribbeans today do not have access to a healthy diet.

Photo: FAO

Currently, the same diet costs an average of \$4.08 per person per day in the region. Technically identified as Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), the cost of the diet in Latin America and the Caribbean is well above the global PPP of \$3.66. It is followed by Asia (\$3.90 PPP); Africa \$3.57 PPP); North America and Europe (\$3.22 PPP) and finally Oceania (\$3.20 PPP).

Uncertain outlook

The Report notes that the region is facing a complex scenario due to a series of successive crises: the Covid-19 pandemic, persistent inequalities, poverty levels, the climate crisis, and the effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Factors that have contributed to rising food prices and food inflation and consequently threatened the functioning, efficiency and resilience of agrifood systems. In this context, the report concludes, hunger and malnutrition continue to be among the main challenges for the region, and neither Latin America nor the Caribbean is on track to achieve the goals proposed by the World Health Assembly with respect to hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.



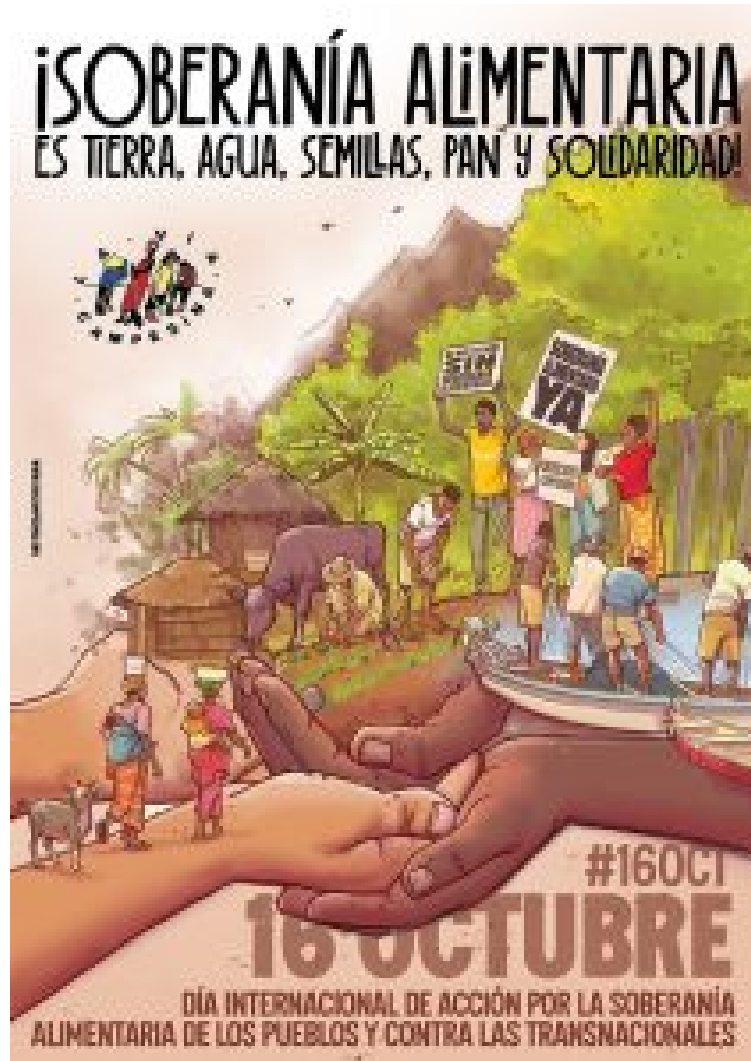
Child malnutrition is one of the direct consequences of malnutrition. Photo: UNICEF

"Latin America and the Caribbean," the report states, "face a complex problem of malnutrition that encompasses both malnutrition (stunting, child wasting, and vitamin and mineral deficiencies) and overweight and obesity." Proof of this is the increase in overweight that the region experienced between 2000 and 2022 in children under 5 years of age, as well as obesity among adults from 2000 to 2016. Both trends exceed global average rates, and a number of countries still have a very high level of stunting in children under 5 years of age.

According to the United Nations, the region's capacity as a food producer is and will continue to be an essential pillar, including to contribute to global food security. For that reason, it is necessary to improve access to nutritious food and close the gap between countries, with a special focus on the most vulnerable groups. It concludes that, in the current context, it is imperative to move towards the transformation of agrifood systems in coordination with the strengthening of health and social protection systems, and with comprehensive actions and systemic and multisectoral approaches. Specifically, "it is crucial to prioritize the development of sustainable value chains that promote nutrition, energize markets and agri-food trade, regulate food promotion and advertising, and foster the development of healthy food environments."

Numerous regional institutions and agencies have joined forces to achieve food security and better nutrition. The Report highlights the joint work of several specialized agencies that are following up on what was proposed by [the United Nations Food Systems Summit](#);

the process of updating the [Plan for Food Security and Nutrition and the Eradication of Hunger 2024-2030 of the Community of Latin American](#) and Caribbean States, and the work of [the Parliamentary Front against Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean](#), among others.



Despite the worrisome figures, the suggestions of the report of these United Nations agencies float in superficiality, remain in generalities and do not risk incorporating the reflection and alternative proposals of the main peasant movements of the continent. On the occasion of last October's International Day of Affairs, [La Via Campesina](#) – the world's largest rural organization with a strong presence in Latin America and the Caribbean – presented its own diagnosis of the world food situation.

"We are experiencing a scenario of generalized monopolization of all links in food systems," says the organization. And he explains: "They monopolize our agricultural production, seeds, lands, territories; They violate our peasant rights to rent and a dignified

life, to protest and to the autonomy of our peoples." This unprecedented food crisis, according to La Via Campesina, is interwoven with the climate crisis, wars, corruption, media control, institutional racism and neo-fascism while the peasantry continues to be criminalized and their livelihoods monopolized. Finally, La Via Campesina reiterates and vindicates its historic essential commitments as the only food alternative to hunger in the world: the fight against the agribusiness model (large-scale monopolistic production of agriculture) and the promotion of real food sovereignty.

Sergio Ferrari from Bern for La Pluma

Edited by [Maria Piedad Ossaba](#)

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