

UN: 258mn People Faced Acute Food Insecurity in 2022



Internally displaced people collect food aid distributed by a charity in Taiz, Yemen April 8, 2022.

ROME (AP) — More than a quarter-billion people in 58 countries faced acute food insecurity last year because of conflicts, climate change, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war, according to a report published Wednesday.

The Global Report on Food Crises, an alliance of humanitarian organizations founded by the UN and European Union, said people faced starvation and death in seven of those countries: Somalia, Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Haiti, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen.

The report found that the number of people facing acute food insecurity and requiring urgent food aid — 258 million — had increased for the fourth consecutive year, a “stinging indictment of

humanity’s failure” to implement UN goals to end world hunger, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said.

While the increase last year was due in part to more populations being analyzed, the report also found that the severity of the problem increased as well, “highlighting a concerning trend of a deterioration.”

Rein Paulsen, director of emergencies and resilience for the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, said an interplay of causes was driving hunger. They include conflicts, climate shocks, the impact of the pandemic and consequences of Russia-Ukraine war that has had an impact on the global trade in fertilizers, wheat, maize and sunflower oil.

The impact has been most acute on the poorest countries that are dependent on food imports. “Prices have increased (and) those countries have been adversely affected,” Paulsen said.

He called for a “paradigm shift” so that more funding is spent investing in agricultural interventions that anticipate food crises and aim to prevent them.

“The challenge that we have is the disequilibrium, the mismatch that exists between the amount of funding money that’s given, what that funding is spent on, and the types of interventions that are required to make a change,” he said.

The UN World Food Program’s new chief issued a warning that the Rome-based agency’s resources to provide food aid amid the surging needs are “running dangerously low.” Executive Director Cindy McCain told panelists at an event to prevent the report that the agency could be forced to make “heart-breaking decisions to slash” assistance if substantial new funding doesn’t materialize quickly.

Acute food insecurity is when a person’s inability to consume adequate food puts their lives or livelihoods in immediate danger.

The European Union’s commissioner for international partnership, Jutta Urpilainen, said that the bloc’s strategy to fight hunger includes supporting initiatives aimed to “boost local production and reduce dependence on unsustainable imports.”

South Korea Community Doctors Launch Strike in Protest Over Nursing Law



SEOUL (Reuters) - More than 10,000 South Korean community doctors and certified nursing assistants went on strike on Wednesday, protesting a nursing bill they fear would hurt their jobs even as it improves nurses’ pay and working conditions.

The bill, passed in parliament last week, was primarily designed to help nurses, who have been suffering from burn-out and a shrinking talent pool while fighting on the frontlines against COVID-19.

But doctors see the bill as opening the door for nurses to provide treatment without a medical license, while nursing assistants say it would expand jobs for regis-

tered nurses at the expense of theirs. They urged President Yoon Suk Yeol to veto the bill and lawmakers to rewrite it.

An official at Yoon’s office said it would decide after discussions with medical groups and the ruling party.

More than a dozen groups staged the strike, including the Korean Medical Association, which represents all doctors in South Korea but did not specify the number of participants. The Korean Licensed Practical Nurses Association, the largest grouping of nursing assistants, said about 10,000 members joined.

The impact of the strike was seen as limited, as most protesters used their holidays or shortened business

hours in the afternoon, and major hospitals were operating normally.

But the groups said they would go on a general strike nationwide on May 17 if their demands were not met, which would most likely cause disruptions in a medical system already hit hard by the protracted battle against COVID.

“The law should be fair and sensible,” Lee Pil-soo, president of the Korean Medical Association, told a news conference on Tuesday, asking the government to make a “fair, reasonable” decision.

The Korean Nurses Association, which has pushed for the legislation, says nurses had long been exposed to hostile work environments and abuses, and the bill would help provide better health care without damaging the interests of doctors and assistants.

The health ministry, which had played a mediating role between doctors and nursing groups, blamed the main opposition Democratic Party for using its majority in parliament to pass the bill.

Officials expressed concerns that the divide among medical workers could derail their cooperation and undercut the health system.

The ministry said on Wednesday it has asked larger hospitals and clinics to extend business hours and maintain 24-hour emergency care services.

Torrential Rain Lashes Northern Italy, Killing At Least Two People

ROME (Reuters) - Torrential rain lashed Italy’s northern Emilia Romagna region over the last 24 hours, causing extensive flooding and killing at least two people, rescuers and media said on Wednesday.

An elderly cyclist drowned when he was swept away by flood waters in the town of Castel Bolognese, Ansa news agency reported.

The body of a man aged around 70 was found in a house that collapsed in the nearby village of Fontanelice, a spokesman for the fire service told Reuters.

The rain follows months of drought which raised concerns about the low water level in the Po, Italy’s largest river, which runs West to East through the northern part of Emilia Romagna.

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said in a statement she was in “constant contact” with the authorities involved and expressed “solidarity and closeness” to those affect-

ed by the flooding.

Footage released by the fire brigade showed extensive flooding in an area between Bologna, Emilia Romagna’s capital, and the city of Ravenna on the Adriatic coast.

The fire brigade said it had carried out around 400 rescue operations, evacuating dozens of people.

Rail operator Trenitalia said several services were suspended while a number of streets were closed.

The head of Italy’s civil protection agency said he was travelling to the flood-hit area and Environment Minister Gilberto Pichetto Fratin promised help for those affected.

“The government stands by the people in difficulty: today for the emergency, which must be backed by adequate economic resources, but from now on to accelerate (infrastructure) measures that are needed for safety,” he wrote on Facebook.

At Least Nine Killed in Belgrade School Shooting



Ambulances and police officers arrive following a shooting at a school in the capital Belgrade on May 3, 2023.

BELGRADE, Serbia (AFP) - A teenage boy opened fire at a school in Serbia’s capital Wednesday, killing eight children and a school guard, police said. Six more children and a teacher were injured and hospitalized.

Police identified the shooter by his initials, K.K., and said he had opened fire with his father’s gun. He was arrested in the school yard, police said. A statement identified him as a student at the school in central Belgrade who was born in 2009.

Police said they received a call about the shooting at the Vladislav Ribnikar primary school around 8:40 a.m. Primary schools in Serbia have eight grades, starting with first grade.

“I was able to hear the shooting. It was non-stop,” a student who was in a sports class downstairs when the gunfire

erupted. “I didn’t know what was happening. We were receiving some messages on the phone.”

Unlike in the United States, mass shootings in Serbia and in the wider Balkan region are extremely rare; none were reported at schools in recent years. In the last mass shooting, a Balkan war veteran in 2013 killed 13 people in a central Serbian village.

Experts, however, have repeatedly warned of the number of weapons left over in the country after the wars of the 1990s. They also note that decades-long instability stemming from the conflicts as well as the ongoing economic hardship could trigger such outbursts.

Police sealed off the blocks around the school in the center of Belgrade.

Kenyan Police Clash With Anti-Government Protesters



Kenyan riot police react as a tear gas grenade they threw explodes next to them, during clashes with rock-throwing opposition protesters in the Kibera slum of the capital Nairobi, Kenya Tuesday, May 2, 2023.

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Police in Kenya clashed with anti-government protesters in the capital, Nairobi, during a fresh round of demonstrations called by the opposition leader.

Opposition lawmakers marched to the president’s office, in the central business district, to present a petition. Police dispersed them with tear gas.

Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua “told us we know where to find them. We do. We went there and instead met police. Cowards!” Sen. Edwin Sifuna, who represents Nairobi County, said.

Protesters who turned up in the morning to erect barricades on major roads around the city threw stones at police, who responded with tear gas. A bus and a cargo truck were torched.

Business was paralyzed in Kisumu County, an opposition stronghold, as police clashed with protesters.

The opposition is calling for action to tackle the cost of living and reforms to the electoral com-

mission that oversaw the election won by President William Ruto last year.

Karua said Odinga and former Deputy President Kalonzo Musyoka both had their security withdrawn.

The police chief had banned the protests, citing previous protest violence that led to businesses being looted and Kenyans being robbed.

Odinga said the protests would be peaceful.

Ruto on Monday warned opposition supporters against destroying private property. He urged Odinga to reconsider returning to talks.

Odinga had called off protests during Ramadan to pave the way for the talks proposed by Ruto. Both the opposition and the ruling party nominated politicians to take part in the discussions, but the opposition rejected some of those nominated by the ruling party.

The talks have since halted, and the opposition announced that it would resume street protests.

News in Brief

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP) — Brazil’s Federal Police searched former President Jair Bolsonaro’s home and seized his phone Wednesday in what they said was an investigation into alleged falsification of COVID-19 vaccine cards. Several other locations also were searched and a half-dozen people faced arrest, police said. The president confirmed the search on his residence while speaking with reporters, as did his wife Michelle on her Instagram account. She said her phone wasn’t seized, contrary to media reports. A federal police official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the person wasn’t authorized to speak publicly, said that Bolsonaro will be deposed at Federal Police headquarters and confirmed that one of his closest allies, Mauro Cid, was arrested.

WARSAW (Reuters) - Russia said it had summoned Poland’s chargé d’affaires to protest against what it called the “seizure” of its embassy school building in Warsaw last week. Poland took over the building on Saturday, arguing that Russia was illegally occupying Polish state property. Russia called the move an “illegal seizure”. “These steps by Warsaw will certainly not go without a proper response from us, which will not take long,” Moscow’s Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Already hostile relations between Russia and Poland have worsened since the start of the war in Ukraine; Warsaw has positioned itself as one of Kyiv’s staunchest allies. Russia’s ambassador to Poland said last week that Polish prosecutors had seized significant amounts of money from the frozen bank accounts of the Russian embassy and trade mission.

FRANKFURT (Reuters) — German and Italian police arrested more than 100 people on Wednesday in a crackdown on the Italian ‘Ndrangheta organized crime group, German public prosecutors and police in the two countries said. The suspects are accused of money laundering, criminal tax evasion, fraud and the smuggling of drugs, mafia-type criminal association, and the possession and trafficking of weapons. The arrests were part of a coordinated investigation by Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain, German authorities said. The ‘Ndrangheta, which has its roots in the southern region of Calabria, the toe of Italy’s boot, has surpassed Cosa Nostra as the most powerful mafia group in the country, and one of the largest criminal networks in the world.

ANKARA (AFP) — The deputy defense ministers of Russia, Ukraine and Türkiye will meet in Istanbul on Friday to discuss a deal that allows the exports of Ukrainian grains on the Black Sea, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar was quoted as saying on Wednesday. “During the meeting, some issues starting with the grain initiative will be discussed,” state-owned Anadolu Agency quoted him as saying about the meeting scheduled to take place in Istanbul. “In this regard, we can say that the sides are looking warmly at the extension of the duration. Our wish is that this initiative is extended without any trouble,” he said.

NAIROBI (Reuters) - Heavy rain that triggered flooding and landslides in western and northern Rwanda has killed at least 109 people, the state-run broadcaster said on Wednesday, as authorities searched for survivors trapped in their homes. Muddy water flowed swiftly down an inundated road and destroyed houses in a video clip posted by the Rwanda Broadcasting Agency. “Our main priority now is to reach every house that has been damaged to ensure we can rescue any person who may be trapped,” Francois Habitegeko, governor of Rwanda’s Western Province, told Reuters. The death toll stood at 95 in the province, he said. The state broadcaster’s toll of 109 included deaths from a second region, the Northern Province.