

Nearly 20 million more people hit by food crises last year

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LONDON, UK - Nearly 20 million more people faced food crises last year amid armed conflict, the Covid-19 pandemic and weather extremes, and the outlook for this year is again grim, according to a report by the Global Network Against Food Crises.



A woman who fled from attacks of armed militants the in Sahel region holds her child as she stands besides her tent at a camp for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Kaya, Burkina Faso, 23 November 2020. Reuters/Zohra Benserra

The humanitarian agency, set up in 2016 by the European Union and United Nations, also warned that acute food insecurity has continued to worsen since 2017, the first year of its annual report into food crises.

"We must do everything we can to end this vicious cycle. There is no place for famine and starvation in the 21st century," said UN secretary general Antonio Guterres.

He added that conflict and hunger need to be tackled jointly, as they reinforce one another.

Defined as any lack of food that threatens lives, livelihoods or both, acute food insecurity at crisis levels or worse impacted at least 155 million people last year, the highest number in the report's five-year existence.



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No improvement expected this year

It warned the situation is not expected to improve this year, driven first and foremost by conflict, but with containment measures related to the Covid-19 pandemic an exacerbating factor.

Two out of three people affected by food crises last year were in Africa, though other parts of the world were not spared, with Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria and Haiti among the 10 worst hit locations.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the fragility of the global food system and the need for more equitable, sustainable and resilient systems," said the EU, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, the UN World Food Programme and Usaid in a joint statement.

"A radical transformation of our agri-food systems is needed," it added. "If current trends are not reversed, food crises will increase in frequency and severity."

In Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Yemen, 133,000 people were in the most severe or "catastrophe" phase of food insecurity last year, requiring urgent action to avert widespread death and a total collapse of livelihoods, the report showed.

At least another 28 million people were in an "emergency" phase of food crisis, meaning they were one step away from starvation and required urgent action to save lives and livelihoods, and prevented famine.

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