

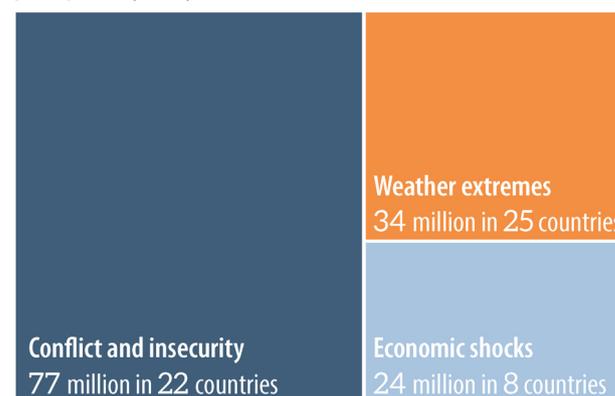
World Food Programme: Food for peace

On 9 October 2020, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) 'for its efforts to combat hunger, for its contribution to bettering conditions for peace in conflict-affected areas and for acting as a driving force in efforts to prevent the use of hunger as a weapon of war and conflict'. Adding to a worrying rise in food insecurity, the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic have pushed millions more people to the brink of famine. The WFP's expertise on emergencies, often in conflict areas, has provided relief to the most fragile populations. The EU supports the WFP through funding, knowledge-sharing, and protecting its vessels from piracy in certain waters.

Food security during the coronavirus pandemic

The [Global Report on Food Crises 2020](#) (GRFC 2020) counted 135 million acutely food-insecure people in 2019 in its analysis of 55 countries and territories – the highest figure since the first report in 2017. A [September 2020 update](#) of the report estimates that between 83 and 132 million more people might be under-nourished in 2020 due to the pandemic. This update – covering 26 of the 55 GRFC 2020 countries and territories, plus Togo – confirms that measures to combat the pandemic have compromised access to food for millions. Lockdown and quarantine measures have reduced [economic activity and revenue](#) for both households and governments, while infected people have had to face increased health expenditure. The measures also disrupted the [food supply chain](#). Despite the fact that most countries endeavoured to keep essential food and agricultural activities running, lockdown and border closures have hindered food transport and trade, leading also to higher levels of food loss. Food shortages caused by this disruption, combined with revenue losses, have increased nutritional deficiencies for the already most fragile populations, including those with higher nutritional needs such as aged and sick persons, pregnant and lactating women. The first year of the pandemic may have caused more than 120 000 additional [nutrition-related child deaths](#) in low- and middle-income countries. Moreover, Covid-19 restrictions have complicated [humanitarian access](#) and therefore [obstructed food supply](#) for refugees, internally displaced persons, and other victims of man-made and natural disasters (such as internally displaced persons in central Africa, Venezuelan migrants or Syrian refugees). Coronavirus concerns have also distracted global attention from other crises. Most development aid providers – including [the EU](#) and its Member States – have [reoriented their funds](#) towards coronavirus-related programmes and projects. [Vaccination campaigns](#) against other diseases have slowed. [Peace-keeping missions](#) have been scaled back, while at the same time coronavirus-related measures [have exacerbated tensions](#) and triggered unrest due to their economic consequences or their impact on freedom of assembly, leaving room for jihadist and other armed groups in fragile countries to operate. This will have a direct impact on food security, as conflict and insecurity are one of the main drivers of food crises (and the primary driver in 22 countries, see Figure 1). The Chair of the Norwegian Nobel Committee [underlines](#) that not only does conflict create hunger, and hunger trigger conflicts, but hunger can also 'be used as a weapon', despite its [prohibition](#) under international humanitarian law.

Figure 1 – Numbers of acutely food-insecure people by key driver (2019)



Source: [Peace and Security in 2020](#), EPRS, September 2020
Data source: GRFC 2020, April 2020.

WFP action for food security

Against this backdrop, the [Nobel Peace Prize 2020](#) award acknowledges the WFP is an essential driver for peace. The Norwegian Nobel Committee hopes that this prize will highlight the importance of [multilateralism](#), although [other voices](#) consider this choice to be mistaken, since the WFP is not directly involved in any peace process. Established in 1961, as a means for the United Nations to coordinate and improve the provision of food aid for countries in crisis, it launched its first humanitarian operation in 1962, in Iran and its first development programme in 1963, in Sudan. Since then, the WFP still combines longer-term development projects and a humanitarian emergency response, at the request of the governments concerned. The WFP is part of the UN System and based in Rome, like its '[sister organisations](#)', the [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO, mainly dealing with data gathering and policy advice), and the [International Fund for Agricultural Development](#) (IFAD, a financial institution for sustainable agriculture). The UN Secretary-General and the Director-General of the FAO jointly appoint the WFP's executive director – currently [David Beasley](#). However, the WFP is [funded](#) on a voluntary basis, with financing ([US\\$6 356 million](#) as of 3 October 2020) mainly provided by countries and multilateral partners. Private companies provide financial and technical support, and individual donors can also contribute directly.

The WFP is active in more than [80 countries](#), tackling the most pressing food emergencies, mostly in [conflict areas](#), and helping states to devise policies and strategic plans boosting their food security. The logistics of the [food supply chain](#) lie at the core of the WFP. Headquarters and regional bureaux contribute to buy the food needed at local or international level. They manage land, sea or air transport, and maintain a storage network, so that food is delivered to the right place in the right time. WFP food assistance includes not only food delivery, but also [cash transfer and vouchers](#) that allow beneficiaries to make their own choices and fulfil their nutritional needs in the longer-term. Cash transfers make up one third of WFP assistance (US\$2.1 billion transferred in 2019, compared to US\$10 million in 2009). The WFP strategic plan is aligned with the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) – SDG2 ('[Zero Hunger](#)') and SDG17 ('[Partnership for the Goals](#)') – so that the [SDG targets](#) can help measure progress towards WFP strategic objectives. The WFP has adapted its programming to meet [coronavirus-related medium-term needs](#), by strengthening governments' responses in three areas: increasing coverage of social protection safety nets; finding alternative ways to deliver food to children and people with special needs when schools and health services are closed; and improving food value chains.

Thanks to its expertise, the WFP has developed its logistical support helping other international agencies and [local responders](#) face crises. The WFP operates the UN humanitarian air service (UNHAS), which facilitates humanitarian access to the most remote crisis areas. As the lead agency of the '[logistics cluster](#)' and the co-lead agency of the '[food security cluster](#)', the WFP plays a coordination role in these areas, when [requested](#) by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, in the actions of the humanitarian actors on the field, including those from the European Union (EU).

EU and WFP cooperation

Both important actors in [food and nutrition security](#), the [WFP and the EU cooperate](#) in a variety of ways. The European Commission contributed US\$422 million to the WFP in 2020. Among the individual Member States, the main donors are Germany (US\$964 million, the second largest donor after the United States of America), Sweden (US\$155 million) and Denmark (US\$55 million). The EU funds WFP through various channels: the EU budget, the European Development Fund, the EU emergency trust fund for Africa ([EUTF](#)) and the [EU facility for refugees in Turkey](#). Beyond financial contribution, and highlighting the close relationship between conflict and food insecurity, the [EU Naval Force](#) (EUNAVFOR) Operation Atalanta is tasked with [protecting WFP vessels](#) operating in the territorial waters of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden from piracy. The WFP and the EU also collaborate with other organisations and research centres within the [Food Security Information Network](#) (FSIN). FSIN stakeholders gather data and share expertise to promote evidence-based food and nutrition security decision-making. FSIN provides technical support for the [Global Network against Food Crises](#), a network of development and humanitarian practitioners launched in 2016 by the WFP, the EU and the FAO (FSIN and the Global Network publish the GRFC, mentioned above). The EU has long called for the [coordination of actors](#) dealing with food and nutrition security, and this has [improved](#) in recent years, in particular thanks to [UN Development System reform](#).

This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy. © European Union, 2020.

