

UN, partners warn 108 million people face severe food insecurity worldwide

31 March 2017 – Despite international efforts to address food insecurity, around 108 million people worldwide were severely food insecure in 2016, a dramatic increase compared with 80 million in 2015, according to a United Nations-backed report on food crises that offers benchmark for action needed to avoid catastrophe.

“The cost in human and resource terms only increases if we let situations deteriorate,” said UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) Director-General José Graziano da Silva, in a news release on the [Global Report on Food Crises 2017](#).

“We can prevent people [dying from famine](#) but if we do not scale up our efforts to save, protect and invest in rural livelihoods, tens of millions will remain severely food insecure,” he added.

Civil conflict is the driving factor in nine of the 10 worst humanitarian crises, underscoring the strong linkage between peace and food security, says the report.

The report represents a new and politically innovative collaboration between the European Union and USAID/FEWSNET, regional food security institutions together with UN agencies including the FAO, the World Food Programme and the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)).

“Hunger exacerbates crisis, creating ever greater instability and insecurity. What is a food security challenge today becomes tomorrow’s security challenge,” said WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin. “It is a race against time – the world must act now to save the lives and livelihoods of the millions at the brink of starvation.”

“This report highlights the critical need for prompt and targeted action to effectively respond to the food crises and to address their root causes,” said Neven Mimica, Commissioner for EU’s International Cooperation and Development, noting that in 2016, the EU allocated €550 million already, followed by another €165 million that we have just mobilized to assist the people affected by famine and drought in the Horn of Africa.

This year, the demand for humanitarian and resilience building assistance will further escalate as four countries are at risk of famine: South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and north-east Nigeria.

Other countries that require massive levels of assistance because of widespread food insecurity are Iraq, Syria (including refugees in neighbouring countries) Malawi and Zimbabwe. In the absence of immediate and substantive action, the food security situation in these countries will continue to worsen in coming months, according to the new report.

AUDIO: There has been a “dramatic increase” in food insecurity around the world the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has said, launching a joint agency report showing that some 108 million people were categorized as “severely food insecure” during 2016.

[Some 300 million people suffer from depression, UN warns ahead of World Health Day](#)

31 March 2017 – More than 300 million people are now living with depression, which is the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide, according to the latest estimates from the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) released ahead of World Health Day.

“These new figures are a [wake-up call](#) for all countries to re-think their approaches to mental health and to treat it with the urgency that it deserves,” WHO Director-General Margaret Chan said in a news release.

With the number of people with depression increasing more than 18 per cent from 2005 to 2015, WHO is carrying out a year-long campaign, [Depression: let’s talk](#), with the aim of encouraging more people with depression to get help. This is also the theme of the 2017 edition of World Health Day, marked on 7 April.

Lack of support for people with mental disorders, coupled with a fear of stigma, prevent many from accessing the treatment they need to live healthy, productive lives. Depression is an important risk factor for suicide, which claims hundreds of thousands of lives each year.

One of the first steps is to address issues around prejudice and discrimination. “The continuing stigma associated with mental illness was the reason why we decided to name our campaign Depression: let’s talk,” said Shekhar Saxena, Director of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse at WHO. “For someone living with depression, talking to a person they trust is often the first step towards treatment and recovery.”

Increased investment is also needed. In many countries, there is no, or very little, support available for people with mental health disorders. Even in high-income countries, nearly 50 per cent of people with depression do not get treatment. On average, just three per cent of government health budgets is invested in mental health, varying from less than one per cent in low-income countries to five per cent in high-income countries.

Every \$1 invested in scaling up treatment for depression and anxiety leads to a return of \$4 in better health and ability to work.

Failure to act is costly. According to a WHO-led study, which calculated treatment costs and health outcomes in 36 low-, middle- and high-income countries for the 15 years from 2016-2030, low levels of recognition and access to care for depression and another common mental disorder, anxiety, result in a global economic loss of \$1 trillion every year.

Households lose out financially when people cannot work. Employers suffer when employees become less productive and are unable to work. Governments have to pay higher health and welfare expenditures.

[Guterres voices 'disappointment and alarm' after latest Israeli settlement announcement](#)

31 March 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today reiterated his support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, voicing concern about the latest decision to build a new settlement in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

“The Secretary-General took notice with disappointment and alarm of the decision by Israel to build a new [settlement](#),” according to a statement from his spokesman.

“He condemns all unilateral actions that, like the present one, threaten peace and undermine the two-state solution,” the spokesman added.

The UN and the international community have for years urged the establishment of a Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security.

Mr. Guterres today reiterated the call adding that “that there is no Plan B.”

The settlement noted also that settlement activities are illegal under international law and present an obstacle to peace.

[News story: South West Water fail to report dead fish after polluting Devon](#)

stream

South West Water has been ordered to pay £89,000 in fines and costs for polluting a stream in Woodbury near Exeter. The case was brought by the Environment Agency.

A court heard how large numbers of fish died following the incident at Ham Lane Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) in September 2014 following an illegal discharge. CSOs are allowed to discharge during storm conditions to prevent the internal flooding of properties. They are not permitted to operate during periods of dry weather.

The spill was caused by a blockage that resulted in effluent being discharged into a nearby stream over one to two days. The pollution adversely affected water quality in the stream and killed more than 150 fish.

The water company must report any fish kills that occur following a pollution incident. It failed to report this important information to the Environment Agency.

Instead, a witness alerted the Environment Agency to the seriousness of the incident after seeing South West Water staff collect and remove dead fish from below the CSO discharge pipe over several days as part of its remediation work on the stream.

The discharge occurred during a period of dry weather. The dead fish included minnows, stone loach, bullhead and eels.

Pete Ball of the Environment Agency said:

It is important water companies regularly inspect and maintain their structures and assets such as CSOs to ensure they are operating in accordance with their permit and do not cause pollution.

While South West Water responded quickly to this incident, it failed to report the extent of the environmental impact of this spill, especially the fish deaths.

Appearing before Exeter Crown Court, South West Water Ltd was fined £70,000 and ordered to pay £19,023 costs after pleading guilty to breaching its environmental permit at Ham Lane Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO), Woodbury on or around 27 September 2014.

Today's near-miss with a drone at Heathrow underlines why Government must step up measures – Richard Burden

Richard

Burden MP, Labour's Shadow Aviation Minister, commenting on the recent near-miss between a passenger plane and a drone as it approached Heathrow Airport, said:

"Today's incident underlines why Ministers must get a move on. There were 70 reported near-misses last year and the British Airline Pilots Association believe that the real number is likely to be even higher.

"Last year Labour urged the Government to take action this time last year but Ministers have been far too slow to act. By now they should be further towards making decisions on whether the UK should follow other countries by establishing a compulsory registration scheme and getting systematic geo-fencing in place to physically stop drones getting near airports and other places where they are a danger.

"Labour's approach – highlighted by our amendment to the Government's Vehicle Technology and Aviation Bill this month – is to get a strategy in place to both ensure safety, and protect innovation and the responsible use of drones, linking in with initiatives expected to come out of the European Aviation and Safety Agency shortly."