



INTRODUCTION

FROM THE HEALTH TO THE FOOD CRISIS

When the first cases of COVID-19 made headlines a year and a half ago, few would have imagined the magnitude the pandemic would reach and the disastrous outcomes that would follow. What started as a health crisis, quickly turned into a livelihood and food crisis for many. The devastating impact of the virus was swiftly met with containment measures that were just as, if not more, devastating. Governments across the globe adopted drastic measures, which were often applied in an indiscriminate way, leading millions of people to lose their jobs and income – especially those in the informal sector and day laborers. With no, or inadequate, social protection schemes in place, these measures pushed a large section of society to the brink of survival. In the wake of the resulting food crisis, the number of those suffering from hunger has increased by up to 161 million – amounting to 811 million people – in just over a year. While nearly one in three people lacked access to adequate food.

While the ‘proportionality’ of measures is a complex question that needs to be assessed from case to case, it is true to say that in many instances, if not most, governments failed to adequately consider and act upon the differential impacts that measures would have on certain population groups, especially marginalized and disadvantaged groups. A case in point is small-scale fishing communities, who were hit hard by curfew during the hours and months that coincided with their prime fishing time. Another example is women farmers, who were unable to access their fields due to requirements to show land titles, which often only men hold. In many instances, no precautions were taken or relevant exceptions made to protect the rights of these groups, and to shield them against the effects of restrictive measures. In most countries, social protection schemes have proved incapable of protecting those most in need, and of supporting them to get back on their feet.

While patterns are strikingly similar across regions, the impacts are far from the same for everyone. Across societies, the pandemic and the measures to contain it, hit marginalized and disadvantaged groups struggling to meet their daily needs the hardest. The pandemic has laid bare the structural discrimination, inequalities and exclusions that pervade our societies. It has pushed certain population groups to extremes, making them immensely vulnerable to crises of all sorts.

The lack of access to basic social services and common goods such as health-care, water and sanitation, coupled with the precarious working conditions that many workers find themselves in – especially in the food and agricultural sector – have rendered them highly vulnerable to infection. At the same time, colonial and neo-liberal structures have deprived Indigenous Peoples and other rural communities of their territories and access to natural resources, leaving them with no option but to seek jobs as daily laborers and migrant workers, with little resilience to economic and food crises.

Under the prevailing patriarchal structures, the colossal increase in care work largely landed on the shoulders of women, who in turn have been more likely to lose their jobs. Women have equally had to endure higher levels of stress, as they are often responsible for putting food on the table. On top of everything, they

have faced an escalation in domestic violence. Children living in poverty have suffered from missing out on school meals, or a reduction in the quality of meals. In some instances, children have been pressed into hazardous jobs to help their families make ends meet.

Many countries across several regions face a rise in authoritarianism. Here, governments have used the pandemic to (further) militarize societies, and forcefully push through harmful laws, policies, and projects. In this sense, the pandemic has served as a perfect pretext to silence social protests, violently target communities, and criminalize human rights defenders.

WHAT IS NEXT?

The health and subsequent food crises have placed a spotlight on food systems. The crises reveal, on the one hand, the multi-layered vulnerability that results from an increasing reliance on the global industrial food system and, on the other, the resilience of local food systems and small-scale food producers. In some countries, the pandemic has provided an incentive for home gardening, shifts to ecological farming, and community supported agriculture (CSA). But it has equally accelerated the ongoing digitalization of food systems, especially with regards to e-commerce, thereby alienating people even further from where their food comes from.

Moving forward, it will be critical to learn from the lessons of the pandemic and work towards a different tomorrow. As quoted in the [Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism \(CSM\) Women's Group publication](#): "We won't go back to normality, because normality was the problem". Already prior to the crisis, the number of hungry, malnourished, and food insecure people was rising. Climate change, eco-destruction, and natural resource grabbing were already rampant, undermining the rights of small-scale food producers and rural communities across the globe. [Biodiversity](#) has been in rapid decline as of late, diets have become progressively homogenized, and consumption is gradually shifting to ultra-processed food products. A radical shift in direction is more critical than ever: we need to move [away from 'agri-business-as-usual'](#) and further digitalization of our food systems, and towards the creation and strengthening of healthy, sustainable and just food systems.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

The State of the Right to Food and Nutrition report is a joint endeavor of the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition (hereinafter Global Network or GNRtFN), supported by its secretariat, FIAN International. First published in 2019, it attempts to provide a yearly snapshot of developments at country and international level concerning the right to food and nutrition. It thereby complements the United Nations (UN) Food and Agricultural Organization's (FAO)



State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report from a human rights perspective that looks beyond the numbers and sheds light on the structural causes of hunger and malnutrition (see SOFI 2021 critique). This year's report, which covers the period from July 2020 to June 2021, places the spotlight on the right to food and nutrition in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The publication is part of the GNRtFN's broader monitoring initiative: The Peoples' Monitoring Tool for the Right to Food and Nutrition. The tool serves as a guide for peoples, communities, movements, civil society, academics, and even civil servants to monitor the human right to adequate food and nutrition (RtFN), based on a holistic understanding of the right to food, and underpinned by a counter-hegemonic food systems perspective. It mainly aims at supporting national level monitoring efforts by providing a framework, and relevant tools, to carefully analyze whether and how states are complying with their obligations relative to the RtFN. The tool is the result of a collective exercise by members of the Global Network, and should be considered a living document that 'grows' with the evolving understanding of the RtFN, as well as with lessons learned from using it on the ground.

The content of this publication is based on inputs from members of the GNRtFN, complemented with information provided by other networks, as well as relevant surveys and reports, including those of the CSM. The publication does not pretend to cover all countries nor situations, but is focused on the countries and issues that Global Network members work on.