

## World's hungry population on the rise again, says UN report

The number of hungry people in the world has risen for the first time in more than a decade, according to a United Nations report released on Wednesday.

There are now approximately 38 million more undernourished people in the world, rising from 777 million in 2015 to 815 million in 2016, the year for which the latest statistics are available.

According to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals 2018 report, conflict is now one of the main drivers of food insecurity in 18 countries. "After a prolonged decline, world hunger appears to be on the rise again. Conflict, drought and disasters linked to climate change are among the key factors causing this reversal in progress," said the report. Violent conflicts also led to the forced displacement of a record high 68.5 million in 2017.

### Economic losses

Noting the increasing impact of extreme events related to a changing climate, the report said economic losses attributed to disasters were estimated at over \$300 billion in 2017. This is among the highest losses in recent years, owing to three major hurricanes affecting the United States of America and several countries across the Caribbean.

While there is little country-specific data in the report, it does examine the performance of various regions in meeting the 17 SDGs, which were adopted by UN member nations in 2015. The deadline to meet them is 2030.

South Asia, which includes India, has seen child marriage rates plunge, with a girl's risk of getting married in childhood dropping by 40% from 2000 to 2017. On the other hand, water stress levels for many countries in the region are above 70%, indicating fast-approaching water scarcity. More than nine out of 10 people living in urban areas around the world are breathing polluted air, with southern Asia scoring the worst in this area. While electricity and sanitation deficits in south Asia are still poor, the report noted efforts are being made to close the gap.

### Sense of urgency

"With just 12 years left to the 2030 deadline, we must inject a sense of urgency," said UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres in the foreword to the report. "Achieving the 2030 Agenda requires immediate and accelerated actions by countries along with collaborative partnerships among governments and stakeholders at all levels. This ambitious agenda necessitates profound change that goes beyond business as usual."

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