

## THE GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX 2022: PAKISTAN'S PERSISTENT HUNGER CRISIS

By  
**Mir Sher Baz Khetran**  
Research Fellow

*Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP), ISSI*

Edited by  
**Dr Neelum Nigar**

September 1, 2023

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



**Pakistan has been ranked 99<sup>th</sup> out of 126 countries in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) report released in July 2023.<sup>1</sup> The report reveals that Pakistan's score has dropped from 38.1 in 2006 to 26.1 in 2022, yet the level of hunger is described as "serious".**

At the global level, the intertwining of armed conflicts, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a situation where millions are at risk of experiencing food shortages. The report further predicts that by 2030, as many as 46 countries will fall short of attaining a state of "minimal hunger," let alone achieving complete eradication of hunger. The regions that remain vulnerable to the highest hunger level are Africa and South Asia; with South Asia having the highest child stunting rate, and by far the highest child stunting and wasting rate of any world region.

*Global Hunger Progress is at a Near Standstill: Eradicating Hunger: Goal 2 of the SDGs*

As the combination of malnutrition challenges—undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and obesity—puts the health, advancement, and development of young individuals at risk, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Goal 2 spires to eradicate hunger, ensure food security, enhance nutrition, and advance sustainable agriculture by the year 2030.

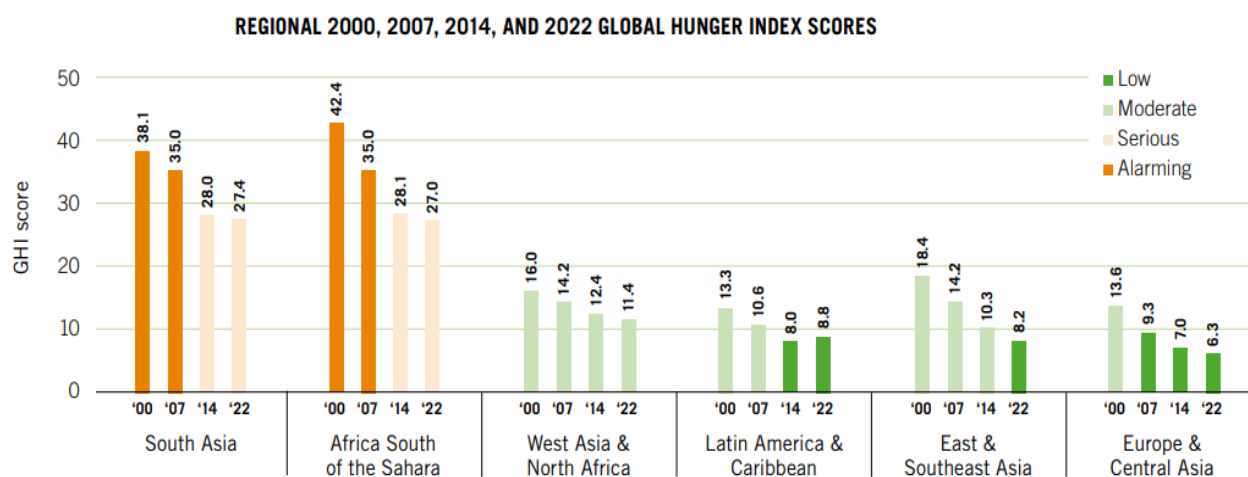
---

<sup>1</sup> 2022 Global Hunger Index: Food Systems Transformation and Local Governance, <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/pdf/en/2022.pdf>

However, recent statistics from the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023<sup>2</sup> report also reveal that the world is moving backward in eliminating hunger and malnutrition. As stated in the report:

- Hunger and food insecurity have surged since 2015, worsened by factors like the pandemic, conflict, climate change, and inequality.
- In 2022, around 9.2% (735 million) experienced chronic hunger, up by 122 million from 2019. Moreover, 2.4 billion people (29.6%) lacked sufficient food, an increase of 391 million from 2019.
- Despite global efforts, in 2022, 45 million children under 5 faced wasting, 148 million had stunted growth, and 37 million were overweight.

Similarly, the 2022 GHI report also identifies violent conflicts, climate change, and economic downturn due to COVID-19 as the key drivers that have brought global progress on ending hunger to a standstill. The countries and regions, which are already weak and rampant with poverty and inequality along with weak institutional and governance mechanisms, are bearing the heavy burden of this crisis. The progress in the “Zero Hunger” target articulated in the SDGs 2030 has been lost and is getting worse in many low-income countries and regions.



Source: Global Hunger Index

### *The State of Persistent Hunger and Key Contributing Factors in Pakistan*

Hunger has remained a persistent issue and a challenge in Pakistan, which has adversely affected the well-being, development, and quality of life of its population. Despite many efforts to address this

<sup>2</sup> The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special edition, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf>

issue, the country continues to grapple with matters related to food insecurity and malnutrition. The GHI report mentions that within the South Asian region, Pakistan, along with India and Afghanistan, has the highest child wasting and stunting, ranging between 35 to 40 percent. Pakistan has experienced one of the most severe impacts, with a significant rise in chronically food-insecure areas. The situation has been further exacerbated by a recent crisis in food prices, which has particularly affected those already living below the poverty threshold of \$2 per day. According to the International Food Security Assessment by the US Department of Agriculture, projections for the decade spanning from 2021 to 2031 indicate that an alarming 38 percent of Pakistan's population will grapple with food insecurity.<sup>3</sup>

This assessment also highlights a distressing fact: Pakistan possesses the most substantial food gap in its region, surpassing even Bangladesh in terms of heightened food insecurity levels. Its food insecurity index is a staggering 389, compared to Nepal's 255. Additionally, a recent survey conducted by the World Food Programme underscores the dire situation, revealing that approximately 82 percent of children in Pakistan do not have access to timely meals when they require them. This survey also exposes the country as having the second-highest rate of malnutrition within the region. Shockingly, around 18 percent of children under the age of five suffer from severe malnutrition, while 40 percent experience stunted growth in the same age group.

Similarly, the UN report on Global Food Outlook also paints a grim look for Pakistan, saying that more than 8 million people are expected to face “high levels of acute food insecurity”.<sup>4</sup> Among many factors, the key contributing factors are:

- Poverty and income inequality are the primary factors that contribute to the level of hunger in Pakistan. As per reports, more than one-third of Pakistan's population lives below the poverty line, lacking access to adequate resources for sufficient food intake. Income inequality further exacerbates the problem, limiting the purchasing power of marginalized communities.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> USDA Agricultural Projections to 2030: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/outlooks/100526/oce-2021-1.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2022: repurposing food and agricultural policies to make healthy diets more affordable, FAO; International Fund for Agricultural Development; UNICEF; World Food Programme; WHO. file:///C:/Users/Director%20CSP/Downloads/9789251364994.pdf

<sup>5</sup> Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023, Unstacking global poverty: data for high impact action <https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/MPI/PAK.pdf#:~:text=Based%20on%20these%20estimates%2C%2038.3%20percent%20of%20the,to%20multidimensional%20poverty%20%2829%2C896%20thousand%20people%20in%202021%29.>

- Despite being an agrarian economy, Pakistan faces challenges in achieving optimal agricultural productivity due to issues such as water scarcity, outdated farming techniques, and lack of access to modern agricultural technologies. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics report, 16 percent of the population is experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity. The incidence is twice as high among the rural population, 20 percent, and among the urban, 9.2 percent. Moreover, three out of five households, are experiencing food insecurity.
- Fluctuations in food prices, driven by factors like inflation, supply chain disruptions, and market speculation have significantly affected the affordability of food for vulnerable populations.
- Pakistan is prone to natural disasters, including floods and droughts, which disrupt agricultural production and lead to food scarcity. Climate change further exacerbates these challenges, causing irregular weather patterns and affecting crop yields leading to acute food insecurity in the country.
- Poor access to healthcare and inadequate sanitation facilities contribute to malnutrition by increasing the vulnerability of individuals, particularly children, to diseases that hinder nutrient absorption and utilization.

### *Eliminating Hunger and Addressing Food Security Challenges is a Race against Time*

The world is facing a series of overlapping chronic and acute crises that are exposing the vulnerabilities in the global food system and the progress in ending hunger. Moreover, in the face of surging inflation and escalating poverty rates, addressing hunger has become an immense challenge for numerous countries worldwide. More than half a decade has passed after the world committed to ending hunger, food insecurity, and all forms of malnutrition, and the world is still off-track in achieving the targets by 2030. The 2022 GHI report reflects on the alarming hunger level across the globe, where decades of progress have been halted due to a series of crises reinforcing each other. The longstanding structural deficiencies in the global food system are inadequate for sustainably ending poverty and hunger as envisaged by the United Nations' 2030 Agenda.

Towards the end, the 2022 GHI report emphasizes the central role of inclusive governance and accountability in transforming food systems. Governments are urged to uphold the right to food, involving mechanisms for addressing grievances. Inclusive coordination of food policies, prioritizing

vulnerable voices, and supporting multi-actor platforms are crucial. Governments must also review and implement food systems commitments with a focus on accountability.

At the global level, strengthening the Committee on World Food Security is essential. International commitments are needed through forums like COP28. Proactive responses to crises, such as early warnings and flexible funds, are crucial. Export restrictions should be avoided, and conflict situations demand collaboration between humanitarian, development, and peace-building efforts for addressing the immediate and long-term needs of vulnerable people.