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# Hunger by the Numbers

## Food Insecurity Rates Continue Downward Trend, but Remain Higher than Pre-Recession Levels

### Food insecurity in the U.S. remains too high

In 2017, 11.8 percent of households in the U.S.—40 million people—were food-insecure, meaning that they were unsure at some point during the year about how they would provide for their next meal. While the number of food insecure households is still too high, it has been declining since the post-recession high of 14.9 percent in 2011. Unfortunately, the overall food insecurity rate has not recovered to pre-recession levels. In 2007, 11.1 percent of U.S. households experienced food insecurity, compared to 11.8 percent in 2017. At the rate of decrease we saw this year, the United States would not end hunger until 2040.

### 12.5 million children live at risk of hunger

The 2017 food insecurity rate for households with children was essentially unchanged from 2016 and continued to be significantly higher at 15.7 percent than for households without children (10.1 percent). Overall, 12.5 million children lived in food-insecure households in 2017.

Food insecurity rates remained high for single-mother households at 30.3 percent—notably higher than for single-father households at 19.7 percent and married-couple families at 9.5 percent.

Parents and other caregivers often shield children from the most severe forms of food insecurity, but children who are hungry and at risk of hunger are more likely to struggle in school and have an increased vulnerability to illnesses and weakened immune systems.



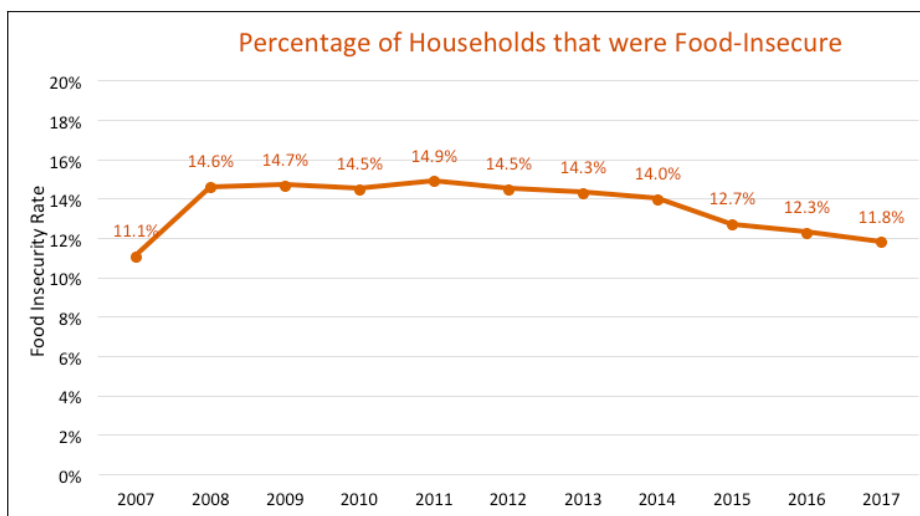
Joseph Molieri / Bread for the World

### Food insecurity remains higher among African American and Latino households

The food insecurity rates also remain disturbingly higher for African American and Latino households, nearly double that of the national rate and even higher when compared to white households. In 2017, approximately 1 in 5 African-American households (21.8 percent) and 1 in 6 Latino households (18.0 percent), was food insecure, compared to fewer than 1 in 11 white households (8.8 percent). While we anticipate that food insecurity levels are equally as high among Native Americans and Alaskan Natives, food insecurity data has not been released on these groups.

### Food insecurity varies geographically

Calculated over a three-year average (2015-2017), food-insecurity rates varied considerably from state to state, from 7.4 percent in Hawaii to 17.9 percent in New Mexico. Overall, the prevalence of food insecurity was higher than the national average in 11 states, lower in 15 states, and the same in 24 states. Regionally, the highest rates of food insecurity remained in the South (13.4 percent), followed by the Midwest (11.7 percent), the West (10.7 percent), and the Northeast (9.9 percent). Food insecurity was



highest in cities (13.8 percent), followed by rural areas (13.3 percent). It was lowest in the suburbs (9.4 percent).



### The role of federal public support programs

For most people, the best solution to hunger is a good job. But the wages of low-income workers have not increased in decades. Bread for the World and its members advocate for policies that would improve job opportunities for low-income workers. Giving undocumented immigrants legal protection, for example, would allow them to get better jobs and contribute more to the U.S. economy. Similarly, providing targeted supports to people returning from jail or prison and addressing employment discrimination would give formerly incarcerated individuals a chance to earn enough to provide for themselves and their families.

Federal support programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); school meals; and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program help millions of families put food on the table every day. In 2017, 58 percent of food-inse-

cure households reported that they had participated in one or more federal food assistance programs in the previous month, and 26 percent had used a local food pantry in the previous year. These programs are critical in reducing the levels of food insecurity and hunger but are often insufficient to meet a family's nutritional needs.

These and other support programs are designed to meet immediate needs on a temporary basis. They are not designed to replace longer-term solutions such as living-wage jobs; supportive family policies; affordable housing; or other systemic factors affecting hunger, such as racial discrimination and gender bias.

### A plan to end hunger

Bread for the World and its members advocate for strong and effective assistance programs and for changes that would improve the job market for low-income workers.

The extent to which the United States has reduced hunger—and more dramatic progress in many other countries—suggest that virtually ending hunger is feasible. All the nations of the world have agreed on development goals for 2030, including the goal of ending hunger. However, the current rate of progress is not sufficient to meet this goal. At the rate of decrease we saw this year, the United States would not get to zero until 2040. To end hunger by 2030, our country needs to see the same decreases it saw from 2014 to 2015, when the rate of food insecurity declined at a statistically significant rate of 1.3 percent.

Ending hunger by 2030 will require strong political commitment and a comprehensive approach to address hunger's root causes and accelerate progress. Learn more at [www.hungerreport.org](http://www.hungerreport.org).

### A NOTE ABOUT HOW WE MEASURE HUNGER...

Bread for the World uses statistics provided by the U.S. government for domestic hunger figures. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) measures food security on the household level and releases data annually in a report titled, "Household Food Security in the United States." This year's report—written by Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory, and Anita Singh—was released September 5, 2018, and is available at [ers.usda.gov](http://ers.usda.gov).

Food-insecure households are those in which the eating patterns of at least one member are disrupted. Food-insecure households are divided into two subcategories:

- **Low food security** is defined as the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods or not knowing the source of the next meal.
- **Very low food security** is defined as disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake through such actions as cutting portion sizes or skipping meals entirely.