

# *United Nations Economic and Social Council Study Guide*

*Council Topic: Advancing regional cooperation in the maintenance of food security in developing countries*



## **FOREWORD**

Hello delegates,

Welcome to the ECOSOC Council of IPYLC 2019!

As one of the UN's 6 main organs, as established in 1946, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations unites countries and organisations to advance development for a sustainable world. Its primary functions include policy dialogue, policy review and recommendation in the economic, social and environmental fields.

During IPYLC 2019, you will be embarking on the main issue of food security. Food security is an extremely crucial aspect of ECOSOC because its critical nature means that it is a large concern for every single countries. Without basic food security, a country cannot hope to progress economically, socially, or culturally.

Delegates will have to represent their countries and their respective stances to their best of their abilities while understanding the motives of other countries and learning to negotiate with them to produce the most ideal and comprehensive solution that they can. This can be done in a few ways, but one that would ensure delegates coming up with the most extensive and thorough resolution is understanding the main causes of climate change and finding ways to deal with it from there.

Throughout the course of IPYLC 2019, we hope that delegates will be pushed to their limits of thinking innovatively and cognizantly, while considering global issues and current affairs in order to best cater to the needs of each country. Delegates would do well to also diplomatically network with one another in order to better understand each countries' delegates specific requirements and opinions in the writing of the final resolution. We hope that all delegates will be able to think out of the box and question the status-quo so as to explore new frontiers in diplomacy.

We look forward to meeting you and are very honoured to be your chairs at IPYLC 2018 ECOSOC. We wish you an enriching experience and the best of luck!

Sincerely,

Head Chair Gabrielle, Vice Head Chairs Malhar and Nicholas

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

Most of us will spend our lifetimes acquainted only with what it is like to live with an abundance of food. However, not all countries can say the same. In 2017, the number of people facing chronic food deprivation increased to nearly 821 million.

The lack of consistency in our ability to obtain sufficient, nutritious food across countries is the reason why we cannot say we have achieved food security. Despite the apparent abundance of food accessible by first-world citizens, food security can only be only obtained when we come to an international standard in which “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy lifestyle.” (FAO, 1996)

There are four main pillars of food security—availability, access, utilization and stability. All four pillars must be successfully maintained in balance with one another in order for food security to be achieved as a whole.

Availability refers to the supply levels of food within the country, which is impacted by national and local production, import capabilities as well as food aid. Access refers to whether or not people have the capability to obtain this food, through factors such as purchasing power, price levels, infrastructures and political stability. Utilisation is dependent on food safety, quality, nutritional knowledge, and proper preparation of food. Lastly, stability ensures the maintenance of the aforementioned three pillars over time, without risk of loss of supply.

At its core, food security is heavily influenced by climate change. Extreme variations in climatic conditions can and have affected the production of some staple crops, and future climate change threatens to exacerbate these risks of hunger and undernutrition. Furthermore, climate-related natural disasters have the potential of destroying crops, essential infrastructure and key community assets. Combined with an increasingly stressed earth, as well as a drainage of the capability of natural resources to provide a sufficient amount of food for a rapidly growing population, we find that what results is food insecurity.

## **DEFINITIONS**

### Food security

Food security is when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy lifestyle.

### Developing countries

A nation or a sovereign state with a less developed industrial base and a low Human Development Index relative to other countries. Examples of developing countries include Pakistan, Iraq and Argentina.

### Regional cooperation

Regional cooperation refers to the political and institutional mechanisms that countries in a general geographical region devise to find and strengthen common interests as well as promoting their national interests, through mutual cooperation and dialogue.

### ECOSOC

An acronym for the Economic and Social Council, ECOSOC is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations (UN), which is an international organization formed in 1945 to increase political and economic cooperation among its member countries. As the UN's largest and most complex subsidiary body, ECOSOC is responsible for the direction and coordination of the economic, social humanitarian and cultural activities.

## CURRENT SITUATION

There has been a rise in world hunger for the third year in a row. An estimated 124 million people in 51 countries are currently facing crisis-level food insecurity or worse, a significant increase from the amount recorded last year. The number of those facing chronic food deprivation, has from around 804 million in 2016, increased to nearly 821 million in 2017. Instability in conflict-ridden regions, adverse climate events in many parts of the world and economic slowdowns have affected more peaceful regions, worsening the food security, as can be seen in Fig. 1.

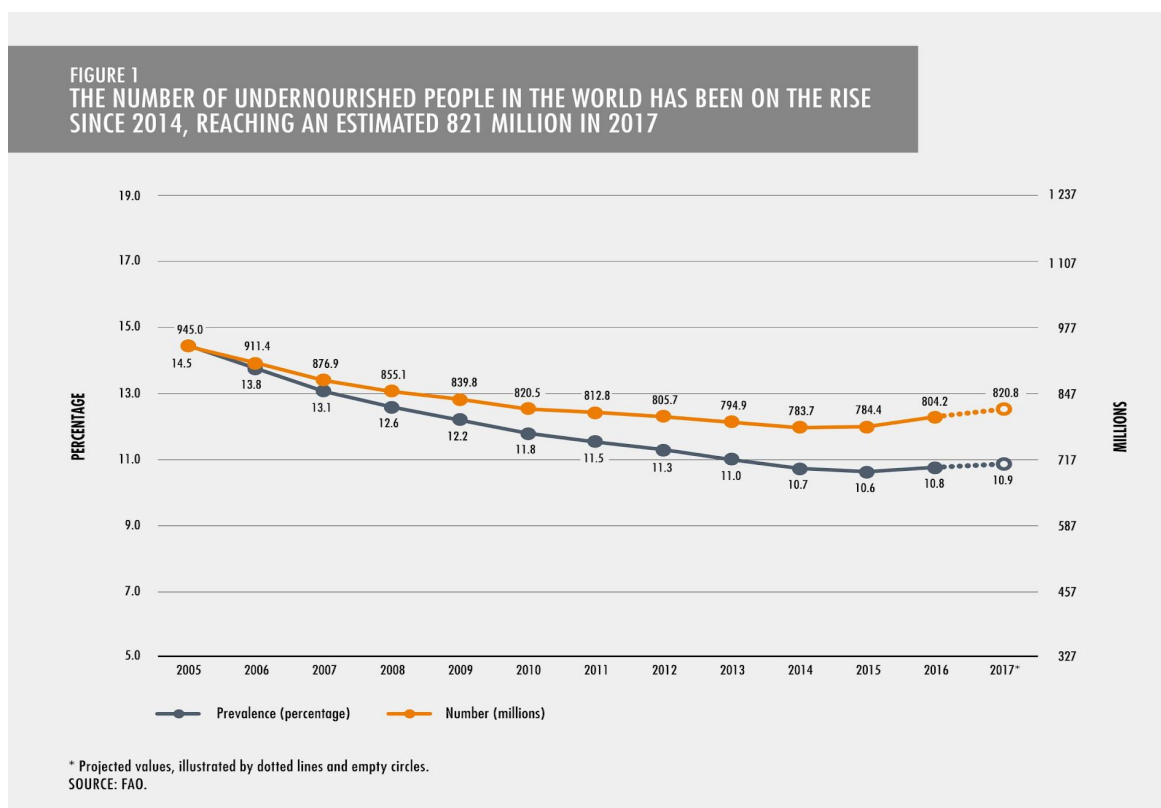


Fig. 1

One of the most prominent examples of food insecurity would be India. Agriculture accounts for 18% of the economy's output and 47% of India's workforce. India is the second biggest producer of fruits and vegetables in the world. Yet according to the FAO, some 194 million Indians are undernourished, the largest number of hungry people in any single country. An estimated 15.2% of the population of India are too malnourished to lead a normal life and a third of the world's malnourished children live in India.

Addressing the problem of hunger and malnourishment in an economy such as India's requires improvements in the productivity of the agriculture sector, particularly smallholder farms. Rural and farming communities typically experience a higher rate of poverty and hunger. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) funds and conducts food security operations throughout the world to deal with these kind of situations, reducing the number of undernourished people. They provide crops and assistance, working towards giving people access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food. The FAO also works with

governments to improve capacities, mobilize resources in any way to eradicate hunger and all forms of malnutrition.

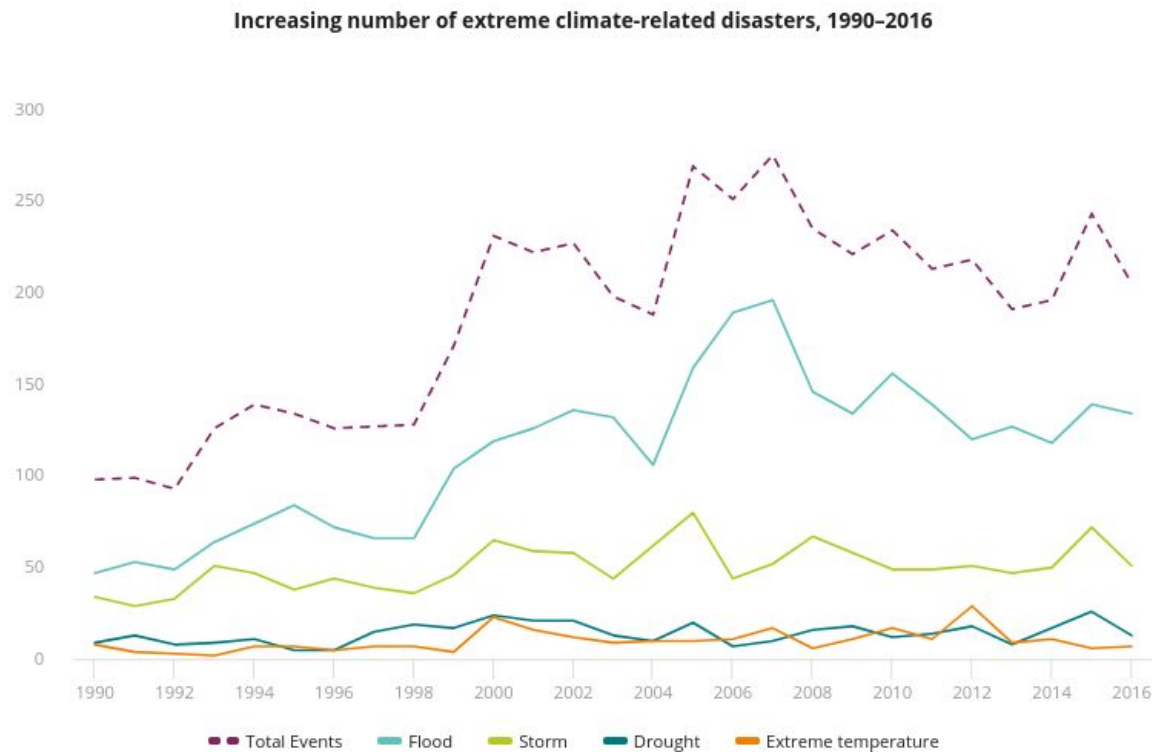


Fig. 2

Currently, one of the biggest causes of food insecurity is climate change. As global temperatures continue to rise exponentially, food security grows to be decreasingly in reach. The number of extreme climate-related disasters have doubled since the early 1990s. Disasters such as droughts, floods, and storms harm agricultural productivity. These disasters severely damage structures and possibly office buildings, which worsens the economy. This eventually leads to food price spikes and income losses as a result, reducing people's access to food. Climate extremes are already negatively impacting production of crops in tropical regions. This situation is expected to deteriorate without adaptation, with the extreme temperature rising. Extreme heat is associated with increased mortality, lower labour capacity, lower crop yields and more, undermining food security and nutrition.

## NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF FOOD INSECURITY

### Health Issues - Malnutrition

At its core, food insecurity centres the lack of food in areas that face systematic and economic challenges that prevent access to food. As seen in Fig. 3, global malnourishment has been steadily rising from 783.7 million in 2014 to an estimated 820.8 million in 2017. If the graph is traced further, the projected number of malnourished people in the world may hit over 850 million by 2020. Furthermore, malnourished populations are more susceptible to diseases such as diarrhoea and pneumonia. As such, delegates are advised to come up with creative solutions to maintain a stable food supply at affordable rates. Delegates are also advised to look into solutions to solve these health issues.

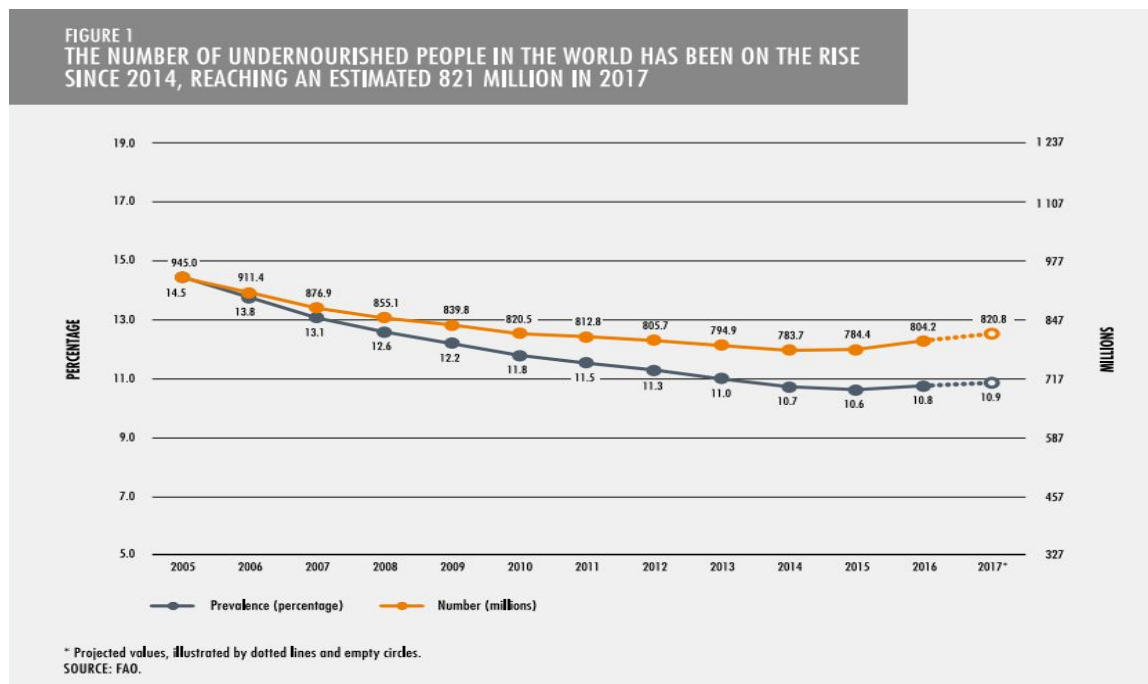


Fig. 3

### Social Tensions

Despite there being an available supply of food, food may not always be accessible. Households with low income usually have insufficient resources to obtain sufficient food. This results in stress and anxiety in households struggling to cope with increased food prices and lower availability of food.

Furthermore, lack of proper nourishment has been seen to result in psychological and physical disabilities in people, especially children. The number of stunted children worldwide remains a shocking 150.8 million in 2017. In addition, anaemia among women of reproductive age is not improving. The prevalence of anaemia among women of reproductive age has risen incrementally from 30.3 percent in 2012 to 32.8 percent in 2016 with no region showing a decline.



### Poverty Cycle

Poor nutrition, combined with the stress of handling health issues and disease management leads to the need for more time and money to manage chronic diseases. This results in less money available for essential nutrition and healthcare in the household, hence creating a cycle of poverty. An oft-cited solution would be the dedication of unused land to farming areas so as to create more affordable food options for the population. The population who need subsidies on food options or access to these farming areas' with cheaper options can contribute in manning certain factions of the farm. Basic education on the operation of farms can be supplied by the government, leaving the basic manual labour to the population. This has been tried out by many countries regarding many different problems, and these solutions are referred to as "self-help schemes". As victims of the poverty cycle continue along the path of finding their way out of this cycle, they also begin to get cheaper access to food, proving it to be a progressive cycle.

### **A Conceptual Framework: Cycle of Food Insecurity & Chronic Disease**



Adapted: Seligman HK, Schillinger D. N Engl J Med. 2010;363:6-9.

Fig. 4



## **MAJOR BLOC POSITIONS**

### United States of America

In the recent decades, the number of Americans facing food insecurity had been declining each year. This helped mainstream politics ignore the problem of hunger in the United States for a long time. After the post-World War II economic expansion, many interpreted that the matter of food security was not a problem. That lasted until May 1969, where a change in attitude saw President Richard Nixon address the ongoing problem of food insecurity. Despite the material abundance and agricultural wealth of America, many were still suffering from malnutrition. As such President Nixon promised to revamp the Food Stamp program to ensure adequate nutrition for people, as well as calling on the private sector for assistance. However, despite his promises things took a turn for the worse. Shortly before he resigned in 1974, America were faced with a major food crisis. American citizens have since realised the problem of food insecurity and how far it is from being solved. The United States are now one of the largest contributors to FAO budget and a key resource partner across food and agriculture, also cooperating with FAO to ensure emergency assistance, food safety, sustainable agricultural production measures have been put in place.

### Russia

One of the main reasons that cause food insecurity in Russia is the low level of per capita income. In other countries, economic growth has shown to benefit both the rich and the poor. Overall helping to reduce poverty, which is tantamount to dealing with food insecurity. The Russian economy has been stagnant due to slow structural reforms and is the single impediment to food insecurity in the Russian Federation. However the main problem of food security in Russia is not undernutrition, but rather overnutrition and malnutrition, both results of unhealthy diets. The food aid that was constantly supplied to people was found to be no longer needed by the time they received it. It harmed domestic producers by forcing them to sell resources below market prices, also causing harmful incentives of implementing economic reforms in Russia. Designed to address inadequate food consumption, food aid may not have had the most impact on helping with food insecurity in Russia as it has proven to be far from the main problem. However despite their own problems, the Russian Federation has been in close cooperation with the FAO, supporting a wide array of development initiatives.

### China

China is the world's largest producer and consumer of agricultural products and also has a major global impact on food security. It is the largest importer of certain agricultural crops and actually accounts for around 60% of soybeans in the global market. It is certain that no matter what, changes in the situation of food security in China would have a great impact on global food security given how big a role China plays in agricultural production and imports. China is a highly committed supporter of FAO programs in combating hunger and food security well beyond borders.

### UK

Food security has been on a long-term decline in the UK. In fact, Britain produces only 60% of what it needs to feed itself compared to the 74% from 30 years ago, according to the

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Put into perspective alongside the looming threat of Brexit, it is likely that post-Brexit, the UK will be unable to obtain food imports as easily from the rest of the EU as well as internationally. The estimated date for Britain to run out of food should they continue along this pattern is August 2019. The scarcity of food in the UK is further exacerbated by the climbing weather patterns globally, which will affect the already insufficient amount of food that the UK's agricultural sector is able to provide for the rest of the countries within the UK. Hence, it is critical that the UK finds ways to deal with the issue at hand with haste.

### France

As a nation that struggled heavily with food shortage during the French revolution, France is and has been aware of the dangers of food insecurity for a long time. However, as our global population expands and bad climate renders more land unusable or increasingly ineffective for reliable agriculture, food security has once again climbed to be a priority of the French government. According to a 2013 poll from the Pew Research Center, 20 percent of French citizens reported that they struggled to afford enough food. This may be attributed to the fact that approximately 6.1 percent of the French population lives under the poverty line.

### Developing Nations

Around 795 million lack sufficient food to lead a healthy life. Many of these nations are already facing a slew of other issues which will continue to remain unsolvable unless the citizens' most basic physiological needs are first met. Developing nations most fundamentally rely on agricultural production and management. With the rise of climate change and increasingly unstable management of food shortages, governments of these nations require effective action and international cooperation urgently in order to mitigate the adverse of food insecurity. Prominent examples of developing nations that bear the heaviest brunt of food insecurity include India, Timor-Leste, Yemen and Zambia.

## **KEY PARTIES**

### **United Nations**

From the establishment of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations in 1945, to the adoption of the international treaty The Food Assistance Convention in 2012, the UN has taken many steps in combating food insecurity. They have published numerous resolutions, such as E/RES/2018/25 and E/CN.4/Sub.2/RES/2003/9.

### **State Governments**

Depending on the stance of the individual nation, different state governments will have different regulations and protocols when tackling the issue of food security. This is due to the fact that different kinds of food security are often attributed to different causes, depending on the varied situations. These regulations have varied impacts on the different stakeholders in the issue, and delegates have to be well versed with the stances that their state governments take on the issue.

### **Developing Countries**

Developing countries are known to be particularly susceptible to food insecurity. Citizens of developing nations often depend heavily on the natural environment and have the least resources to cope with adverse changes. Developing countries mostly rely on primary sectors for jobs, which means they produce their own food and exchange with one another as necessary on a very basic level. When climate change reduces food production or eliminates sources of nutrition, people in developing countries often have no way to cope with such loss, and hence will fall to the risk of food insecurity.

### **Citizens**

Citizens and communities suffer the consequences of food insecurity, such as rising social tensions, lack of economic productivity, chronic diseases and starvation.

## SCOPE OF DEBATE

As both our Earth's climate and population continues to incline at a rapid rate, food security is only becoming an increasingly prevalent issue. Though less visible in developed countries such as Singapore, beyond the insular sphere of what we know lies a much greater urgency to change the lives of those who experience hunger as a norm.

The relevance of food security makes itself evident by the presence of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). CFS is an intergovernmental body that functions as a platform within the United Nations System for member nations to review and re-evaluate policies concerning world food security including production and physical and economic access to food. CFS Plenary has approved the Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition (GSF), which is meant to improve cooperation and propel synchronized action by a wide range of stakeholders. So why does food security continue to be a problem?

The answer is change. As members of the ECOSOC council, delegates are meant to identify the constantly evolving effects of food insecurity in order to create layers of defence for those who cannot fend for themselves. These measures of protection are meant to be adjustable as priorities change, adaptable such that policies are able to shelter those who require it even as populations grow and new problems present themselves. At the end of the debate, delegates are meant to be able to come up with a thorough, all-rounded solution that deals with food security as extensively as possible.

Delegates are encouraged to think through as well as structure their policies and eventual resolution around a few guiding questions. The questions are as follows:

1. Consider your country's food security on a global context. What does your country hope to get out of an international agreement to better the standard of food security?
2. What are the specific and unique characteristics of developing countries, taking note that they do not have as efficient of a food distribution network as developed countries?
3. By doing research on the adverse effects of food insecurity, what are some short-term policies to aid those who currently suffer from the results extreme food shortages, such as starvation, chronic illnesses, or economic failure?
4. Consider climate change, a rapidly growing population and food wastage. Taking into account the main factors that influence food security and then coming up with policies to mitigate those, what are some long-term solutions that can be created?
5. Funding also presents itself a big issue—whose onus is it to pay for these protective policies? Is it possible and/or necessary for nations to work in tandem to achieve an international standard of success for food security? In this debate, delegates must also discuss the causes of food security in order to decide who to place the burden upon to take responsibility for this issue.

Delegates should remember to keep each of their countries' unique needs and characteristics in mind as the debate progresses, working cooperatively to achieve each of their goals. As the United Nations, we hope that delegates will be able to unite in walking toward food security and ensuring the safety of 821 million people.

## **PROPOSED SOLUTIONS**

### Charitable Food Organisations

By encouraging the setting up of more charitable food organisations, governments may tackle social issues and lack of food more directly. These organisations include institutions like food banks and feeding programs. Through these organisations, families in poverty may slowly recover from debts, and health issues may be reduced. However, this is only a short term solution to mitigate the negative effects of food insecurity, and must be supplemented by long term solutions.

### Yield Gap

According to estimates from the World Wildlife Fund, over 100 million hectares of natural habitats will be used as farm area by 2050, in developing countries. However, throughout the world, it has been observed that the current agricultural areas yield approximately only half of its potential. The difference in what could be produced and what is actually produced is referred to as the yield gap. Closing this gap would greatly reduce the need to clear land for agriculture, thus improving global food security.

### Economic Incentives & Taxes

A possible solution for the council to look into could be the implementation of economic incentives with two main aims; to reduce food wastage, and to ensure optimal food production. By raising taxes on fertilisers and water used for farming, food production could be made more efficient, and less wastage of resources would occur. Funds and resources saved could then be used on more important aspects of developing the country.

## RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

- <https://www.essay.uk.com/free-essays/marketing/food-security.php>
- <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/food-security-and-why-it-matters/>
- <http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/>
- <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w1358e/w1358e.pdf>
- <https://www.foodinsight.org/preventing-food-insecurity-agriculture-technology-fao>
- <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/exploring-landscapes-in-regional-convergence/55672>
- <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/understand-food-insecurity/hunger-health-101/>
- [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/cfs/Docs0910/ReformDoc/CFS\\_2009\\_2\\_Rev\\_2\\_E\\_K7197.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/cfs/Docs0910/ReformDoc/CFS_2009_2_Rev_2_E_K7197.pdf)
- <http://www.fao.org/cfs/home/products/onlinegsf/1/en/>
- <https://www.treehugger.com/sustainable-agriculture/5-ways-improve-global-food-security.html>
- <http://time.com/4477157/hunger-america-history/>
- <http://www.fao.org/docrep/007/y5069e/y5069e07.htm#TopOfPage>
- <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index/en/?iso3=USA>
- <http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/aug/07/uk-run-out-of-food-no-deal-brexit-national-farmers-union>
- <https://borgenproject.org/ending-hunger-in-france/>