

# ANNUAL REVIEW 2020

Food is the  
pathway to  
peace



# 2020 IN NUMBERS

Provided lifesaving and life-changing support to **115.5M** people in 84 countries

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**53%** of beneficiaries were women

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**US\$8.4BN** in contributions

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**US\$2.1BN** in cash-based transfers

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Strengthened national social protection systems in **78** countries

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**19,903** WFP employees worldwide

# W FORE R D

In 2020 our lives were utterly transformed as the COVID-19 pandemic swept around the globe, leaving hunger and poverty in its wake. Fortunately, governments everywhere mobilized their financial firepower to avert famine, destabilization and mass migration — and we must continue this critical work in 2021.

I am proud of how the World Food Programme has also stepped up and stood right alongside the people we serve to confront a looming hunger pandemic. We were truly honoured when these efforts were recognized with the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize.

Across the world, our country teams stayed and delivered to get life-saving help to those in greatest need. Thanks to their dedication, WFP reached 115.5 million people last year — an all-time annual record.

And when borders closed and commercial aircraft were grounded, WFP was the backbone of the international humanitarian response, transporting essential supplies and workers for nearly 400 UN bodies and NGOs to keep critical global supply chains moving.

The challenges of COVID-19 have been immense, but WFP's determination to save lives and change lives remains just as strong as ever.



As schools everywhere closed their doors, WFP raced to replace precious school meals with take-home rations for children and their families.

We also collaborated with 78 governments as they ramped up their social safety nets — often to reach people who had never required food assistance before. Our expertise in cash programs, built on tech know-how, allowed us to quickly pay out US\$2.1 billion in money and vouchers to vulnerable families.

None of these achievements would have been possible without the support of WFP's incredible donors, who gave us a record US\$8.4 billion in contributions in 2020. The trust that they and so many others have shown in WFP is truly humbling.

The award is a testament to our core values of integrity, collaboration, commitment, humanity and inclusion, which WFP's dedicated women and men strive to live up to every single day. They will guide us as we face the future with hope and resolve.

After the turmoil of the past year, we must now redouble our efforts to end global hunger and seize the opportunity to start building the better world we all want to see. It is time to work together, in partnership, to achieve it.

**David M. Beasley**  
WFP Executive Director

# CRISIS

Looking back on the past year, the coronavirus pandemic looms large. The worst global health crisis for more than a century, COVID-19 has claimed more than 3 million lives to date and caused the deepest global recession in generations. In 12 months, the pandemic pushed 124 million people into extreme poverty — the first increase in global poverty in two decades — and could double the number of people facing acute food insecurity to 270 million.

# UPON

For the World Food Programme (WFP) and the people we work with and for, the pandemic was another crisis in what would have already been a difficult year. Conflict didn't stop for COVID-19; in more than half the world's countries, violence intensified. Communities endured more frequent, extreme and deadly weather events, which have more than doubled since the 1990s due to our rapidly changing climate. The number of forcibly displaced people reached 1 percent of the global population. Positive global trends had already slowed or been put into reverse, with inequality at an all-time high and 690 million people going to bed hungry every night.

# CRISIS



COVID-19 exacerbated these crises and laid bare the broken systems that sustain them. The challenge is monumental for poorer countries, who have multiple complex needs, weak infrastructure and limited financial room for manoeuvre due in part to heavy debt burdens.

Lockdowns, border closures and social distancing, which aimed to curb the virus's spread, caused supply chains to break down, businesses to shut and markets for goods and services to evaporate. Over the year, the world lost the equivalent of 255 million full-time jobs, four times the number lost during the 2008 global financial crisis.

Women and young people have been especially hard-hit (making up 5 percent and 8 percent of these employment losses respectively), as have the world's 2 billion informal workers, most of whom had no social safety net.

For the people already experiencing poverty, conflict or instability, stay-at-home orders meant a stark choice — to go out in search of work and risk arrest and illness or to go without food. The escalation in need was rapid and urgent; in Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of people facing acute food insecurity quadrupled.



Movement restrictions and economic slowdown also presented challenges for the humanitarian and development sectors, as commercial airlines stopped flights and many international actors retreated to their headquarters. Used to rolling with the punches, WFP stayed and delivered — and helped other organizations to do the same, transporting tens of thousands of the world's key workers and 135,000 m<sup>3</sup> of critical supplies, including personal protective equipment.

In 2020, WFP provided lifesaving and life-changing support to 115.5 million people. We maintained existing operations — like our food and cash assistance to 860,000 Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar — and we responded to emergencies as they happened, such as hurricanes Eta and Iota that devastated Central America. In West Africa, we scaled up to reach 70 percent more people as COVID-19 collided with lean season. Across East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, we supported households as they battled the worst locust plague in decades and widespread flooding that affected 6 million people and drove 1.5 million from their homes.

Minimizing risk to WFP staff and beneficiaries was paramount. We negotiated safe, continued access to communities in need, introduced social distancing at distribution points and switched from biometric registration to no-contact QR codes to prevent the spread of infection. By taking care of our people, we made sure that WFP could continue delivering

support to those people who needed it — and do so without overburdening local and national services (see box).

The pandemic meant rethinking how WFP delivers programmes and adapting quickly. But it also demonstrated many of WFP's incredible strengths — our global footprint and prepositioning, unparalleled physical and digital infrastructure, and dedicated partners and staff.

Donors recognized these capabilities and increased their contributions, trusting WFP to deliver. With this support, we reached more people than ever before in 2020. Over the year we built on and refined our systems and approaches, including rolling out two years' worth of digital transformation activities in just two months.

Through 2020, WFP made medical evacuations available to staff and dependants, provided protective equipment at duty stations and increased the number of on-site medical doctors across emergency operations.

The pandemic has taken a huge psychological toll and kept many staff away from their families. We made more counsellors available to staff and introduced flexible working arrangements to support them.

WFP continued to be a trusted presence in communities affected by conflict, providing critical access for other humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors, even in hard-to-reach places. We accelerated remote





needs assessments, monitoring in near-real time threats to food insecurity in 38 countries. We also expanded our use of web surveys, allowing us to quickly and cost-effectively understand the needs of often hidden groups, including young people and mobile and displaced people.





In 2020, there was a new face of food insecurity. People who had never needed WFP's support suddenly did, as whole sectors — from retail to tourism — shut down and food prices soared (in 20 countries, the cost of a food basket rose by 10 percent in just three months). For the first time in years, middle-income countries like Peru asked WFP to procure food to support people made newly vulnerable due to COVID-19.

In some cases, new needs emerged almost overnight. In Lao PDR, when Thailand shut its border, tens of thousands of migrant workers were unable to earn money to send back to their families, going from breadwinners to WFP beneficiaries in a matter of weeks. We provided more than 20,000 of these people with meals and basic hygiene items, in partnership with the Swiss Red Cross and World Vision International.

## A NEW URBAN FACE OF FOOD INSECURITY

Across the world, food insecurity spiked among urban populations. In countries like Jordan, where beneficiaries in cities were mostly refugees or migrants, they were now also hairdressers or taxi drivers, who had no work and no social safety net. Most of the 3 million people that we added to our programmes in Afghanistan were based in urban areas.





Urban communities already face a triple burden of malnutrition. Overweight and obesity, once considered problems among the world's wealthiest, are on the rise in cities in low- and middle-income countries due to limited access to affordable, fresh and nutritious food. At the same time, one-third of the world's stunted children live in urban areas.

Here, there is an imperative — and an opportunity — to address immediate needs while also tackling longer-term health and nutrition challenges. For example, in cities like Dhaka, Bangladesh, we provided cash and voucher assistance to people in slums on the condition that they buy fresh food from smallholders, providing a boost to nutrition and to incomes.

Food and cash assistance is fundamental to development progress and to a peaceful and

prosperous world. With basic needs taken care of, families can afford to send their children to school and invest in assets; they can buy goods locally, strengthening country systems and markets; and are less likely to have to migrate. By helping people to live healthy, productive and more resilient lives, we are breaking destructive and deadly cycles of poverty, conflict, crisis and hunger.







Social protection, especially where shock responsive, offers a means to deliver on this development potential at scale. National social protection systems already reach billions of people — many more times the number that any humanitarian organizations can reach. These programmes are a powerful tool for achieving zero hunger and supporting a sustainable future for all. They also offer a way to rapidly identify and even anticipate needs. The challenge, as COVID-19 has shown, is that many national

programmes have limited coverage and lack robust, flexible processes that can respond quickly. In 2020, more than half of the world's population had no access to any form of social protection.

In response to increasing demand, WFP supported governments in 65 countries to introduce new measures or to scale up or adapt their existing social protection schemes to mitigate the pandemic's impact. In total, WFP worked to strengthen national social protection systems in 78 countries in 2020.



# FROM MILLIONS TO BILLIONS

WFP's experience in delivering food and cash transfers, digital capabilities and partnerships with finance institutions and the private sector were pivotal. In the Philippines, for example, we trained Government officials to register 356,000 households using a biometrics-enabled digital platform, helping them to distribute cash assistance quickly and flexibly.

In Mauritania, WFP, UNICEF and others have for years worked with the Government to strengthen its social protection policies and systems. When COVID-19 hit, the Government was able to rapidly scale up its existing assistance programme and increase its shock-responsive transfers during the lean season to limit food insecurity and malnutrition. WFP also worked through the national system to reach four times the number of beneficiaries.

Social protection can boost economies by linking to local markets or innovative procurement schemes — like the 2020 Sudanese 'wheat swap' agreement. Here the United States provided wheat in exchange for local

currency that is being reinvested, through WFP, in a national social assistance programme to meet citizens' needs. In India, we helped connect the world's largest national food-based programme to rural women growing nutritious food. This small investment is improving the diets of the 800 million people reached by the programme each month and is supporting the incomes of women farmers.





**T**he biggest and most widespread social safety net in the world is school feeding. Over the past 60 years, WFP has worked with more than 100 countries to set up sustainable national school feeding programmes. At the start of 2020, half of the world's 776 million primary schoolchildren were receiving a school meal.

But even after decades of progress, we began the year with a gap: 73 million children weren't being reached by any form of school-based nutrition programme. Then, in April 2020 as the pandemic took hold, almost all of the world's schools shut their doors, affecting 1.6 billion children and causing the greatest ever

educational crisis. Suddenly 370 million children were going without what for many was their main meal of the day.

As classroom-based teaching moved to remote learning around the world, WFP shifted quickly from school feeding to take-home rations and cash transfers — and helped 50 governments to do the same. Yet these measures, while necessary, were no substitute. In 2020, our school-based programmes reached 13 percent fewer children than in the previous year. And UN estimates suggest that digital or broadcast learning will fail to reach at least a third of children worldwide.



The pandemic showed just how important schools are in sustaining communities and connecting children and families to a range of services that allow them to thrive. For WFP, getting children safely back to school is a priority — including those who were already being left behind before the pandemic. School-based meals are pivotal to achieving this goal.

Feeding programmes bring children to school and give them the energy to learn, grow and flourish, supporting longer-term health and productivity. School feeding creates jobs — 2,000 for every 100,000 children fed — and, when meals are sourced locally, it also boosts local markets and economies. For girls, in particular, the importance of school feeding can't be overstated: they go to school and stay there longer, and child marriage rates and teen pregnancies decrease. WFP is working with governments worldwide to make sure that, as schools reopen, we don't miss this opportunity to invest in children and a better future.

# WHEN SCHOOLS SHUT THEIR DOORS



We live in a complex, volatile and uncertain world. Biodiversity loss and human disturbance of ecosystems has increased the risk of zoonotic disease, as the COVID-19 pandemic has underlined. Technological advancement and changes in global power continue apace. And sudden climate shocks and rapidly changing weather patterns threaten lives and livelihoods.

But this uncertainty doesn't mean that crisis is inevitable. According to UNDP, we are now in the Anthropocene, where humans are the determining factor in our planet's future. This presents challenges but also means that managing risk is in our hands, perhaps now more than ever before.

Food and cash assistance in itself helps people to withstand climate shocks and stresses by taking care of immediate needs and giving people the means to invest in adaptive, climate-smart

solutions. But WFP also works directly with governments and communities to help them build their resilience and take early action before disaster strikes. In Bangladesh, for example, WFP supported 145,000 people in 2020 with anticipatory cash transfers four days before flooding affected their livelihoods. By doing so, WFP and partners can help prevent human suffering, limit capital losses and reduce the average cost of an emergency response by over two-thirds.

Using drones, satellite technology, land observation and indigenous knowledge, for example, we are helping countries to better understand weather patterns and develop forecast-based and early warning systems so that communities can protect assets or livestock. And in 2020, WFP created the first weather index risk insurance product for farmers and vulnerable groups, building on our experience in Africa. This will trigger financing in advance







# MANAGING RISK IS IN OUR HANDS

of climate shock and could prevent hundreds of thousands of people from migrating, especially in the Central America Dry Corridor where drought, socioeconomic pressure and violent gangs are wreaking havoc.

Community-led nature-based solutions that create and restore local assets in harmony with ecosystems help to build resilience and protect biodiversity. WFP links these efforts with conditional food and cash transfers, which in 2020 saw communities build and repair water catchments, irrigation canals and 11,000 kilometres of road, plant thousands of trees and rehabilitate 159,000 hectares of degraded land to production. And by bringing people together to restore connected lands and shared infrastructure, WFP and its partners are also helping to reduce tensions between communities.



For WFP, food is the pathway to peace. It is an investment in people and planet that supports reconstruction, promotes development and helps to tackle the root causes of conflict (and therefore hunger) — from economic exclusion to climate change. Food is an entry point for dialogue and a catalyst for change.

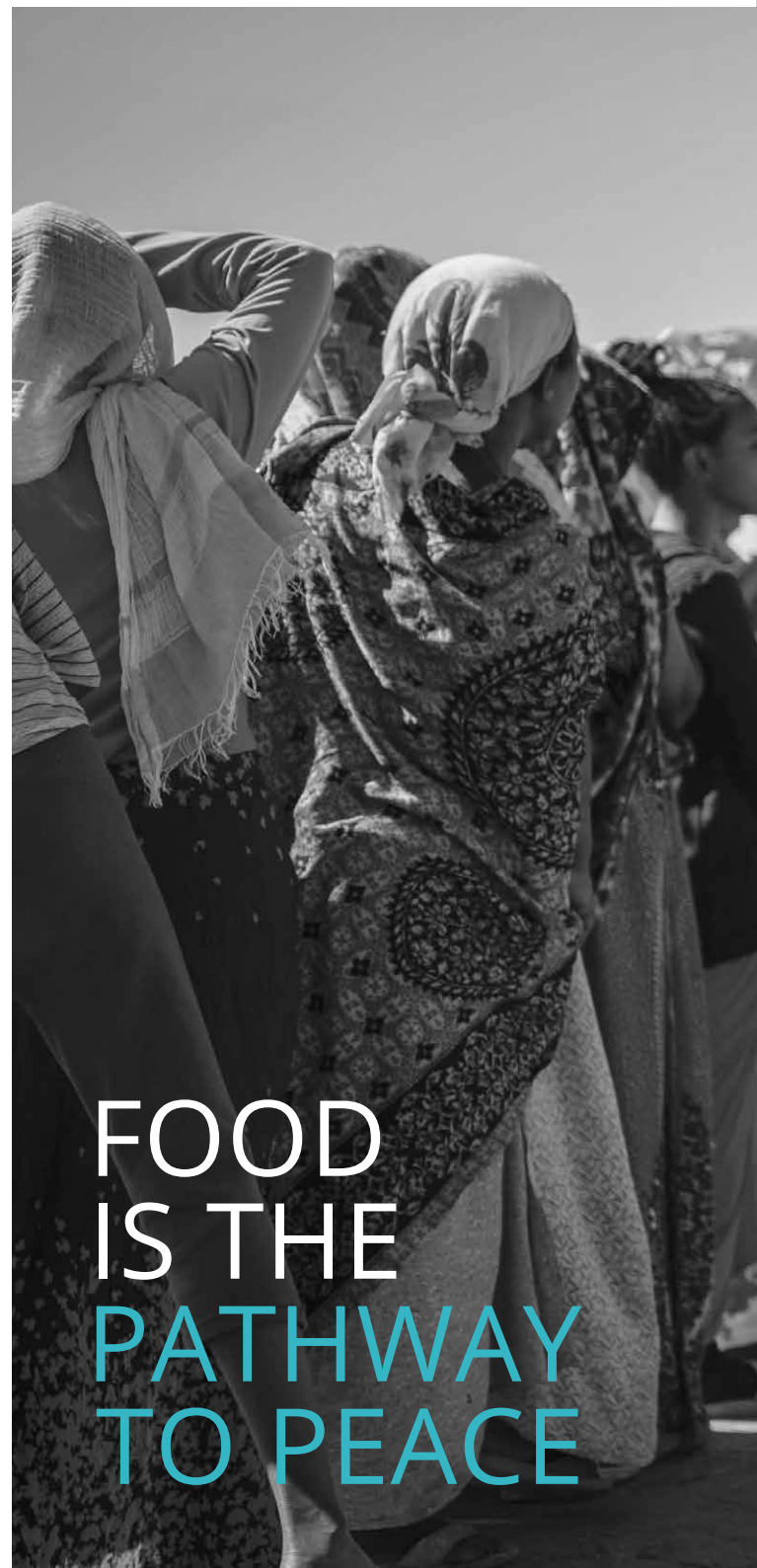
Conflict is the single biggest driver of food insecurity, destroying food systems and infrastructure and forcing people from their homes. But the dual crises of climate and conflict exacerbate one another.

Violence prevents communities from adapting to new climate conditions and displaces people from their livelihoods and land. Meanwhile chronic poverty and hunger, driven by extreme weather, can further trigger violence. Food shortages fuel social tensions and injustices, pushing many people to join armed groups.

Understanding and addressing people's needs is core to sustaining peace, promoting development and to 'leaving no one behind', and it is what WFP does every day.

As a trusted UN agency committed to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable people, WFP is positioned to speak directly and honestly to peace and political actors. We work at all levels, from local to global, as a protective presence in communities and an influential voice in international forums.

Preventing conflict and sustaining peace flow through everything that WFP does. Because without peace we cannot end hunger — and where this is hunger, we will never have a peaceful world.



FOOD  
IS THE  
PATHWAY  
TO PEACE





Countries now have just 10 years to deliver on their commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals — to secure a peaceful and prosperous world. Progress was already too slow in some areas and COVID-19 has further eroded many hard-won gains. But we can get back on track if we act decisively and act together. We can't afford not to: the lost potential is vast, the human loss reprehensible.

The pandemic, though far from over (and responses still hampered by inequity), has offered glimpses of what is possible when we work beyond our silos, putting people front and centre.

# POWER FOR CHANGE

The scale of the challenges in 2020 prompted new partnerships and strengthened existing ones. WFP continued to work closely with the wider UN family, partnered more with the private sector and finance institutions than ever before, and engaged in regions, countries and topics we hadn't previously. Civil society, even in countries where we didn't have a presence, looked to us for guidance. And despite mounting domestic pressure, donors and government partners stepped up their contributions to our work.

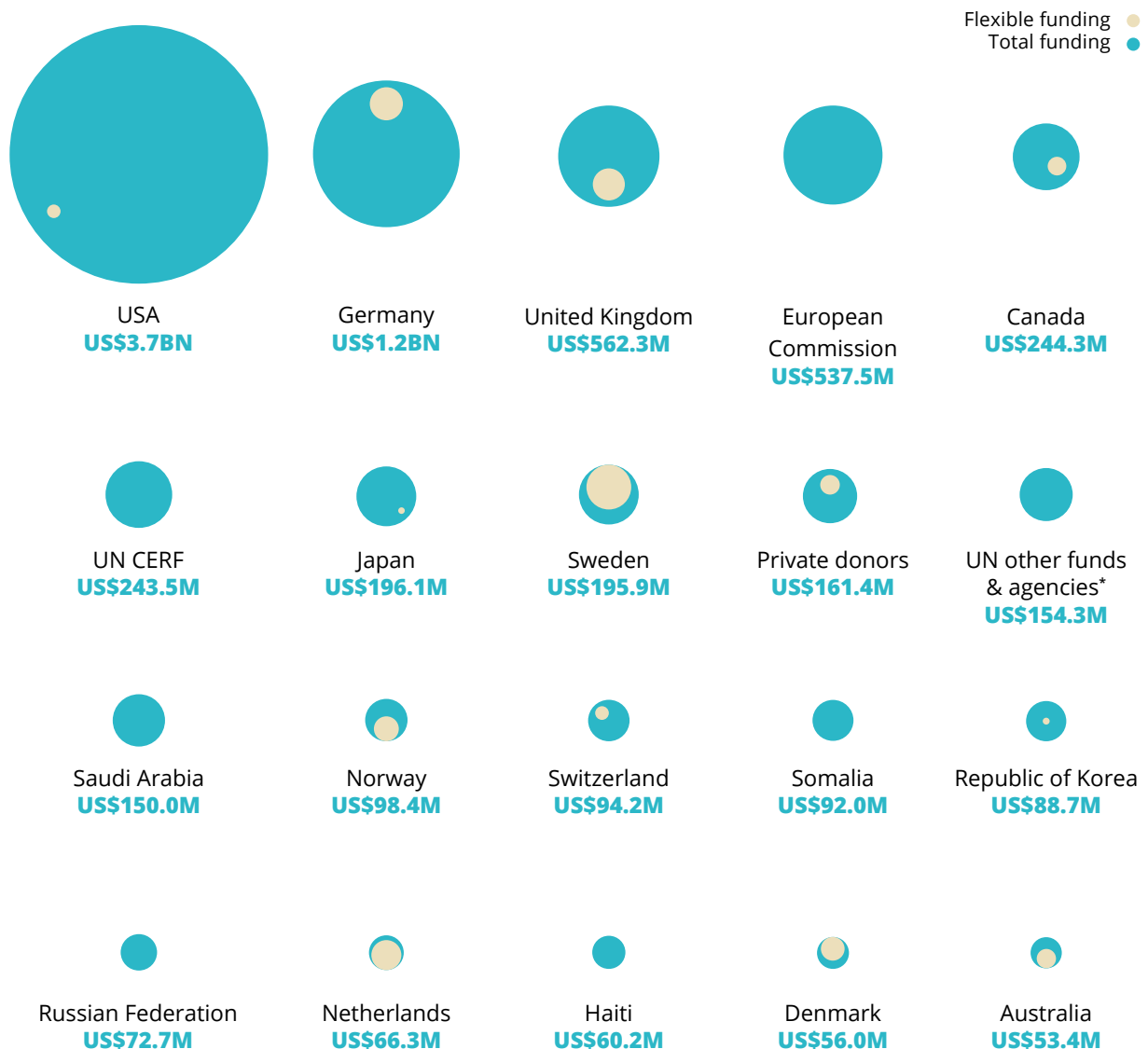




With this continued trust and cooperation, WFP is confident that we can avert catastrophic famine and contribute in a much broader way, as we did in 2020, to a sustainable future for all. But we cannot do this alone. The challenges we face are not separate, nor are they confined within borders; we must build on the commitment and collaboration of 2020, working together as a global system to engineer joined-up approaches to interlinked problems. This is the power for change — and if 2020 has shown us anything, it's that change is possible.

# OUR DONORS

We are hugely grateful to all of the donors and partners who put their confidence in us and supported our work in what was an extraordinary year. **Thank you.**





USA	Liberia	Monaco	Thailand
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UN country-based pooled funds	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Malawi	Slovakia
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France	Cameroon	South Africa	
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		Israel	

*Order of donors by total contribution*

*\* Excluding CERF*

## Photo credits

**Page 1:** Executive Director David Beasley. WFP/Arete/Lisa Murray

**Page 3:** Momotaz walks through flooded farmlands near her home in Bangladesh. WFP/Sayed Asif Mahmud

**Page 5, top:** With a spike in COVID-19 cases, WFP pivots to door-to-door food distributions in Palestine.

WFP/Ali Jadallah

**bottom:** A WFP beneficiary in Guatemala receives cash assistance and supplies of hand gel after taking part in talks on health, nutrition and COVID-19. WFP/Carlos Alonzo

**Page 6, left:** A Peruvian woman waits for lunch at a community kitchen. WFP/Guillermo Galdos

**right:** Luis, a Venezuelan migrant, lost his job due to COVID-19. Without support from a national social protection programme, migrants are particularly vulnerable to hunger. WFP/Guillermo Galdos

**Page 7, top:** WFP kekes (rickshaws) loaded with food items head to one of the communities in Kano, Nigeria, to begin a distribution.

WFP/Damilola Onafuwa

**bottom:** Ponteciana buys groceries and food in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, thanks to WFP cash transfers.

WFP/Alice Rahmoun

**Page 8:** WFP staff travel to the homes of beneficiaries of the National Home Grown School Feeding programme in Lagos, Nigeria. WFP/Damilola Onafuwa

**Page 10:** 16-year-old Anna completes school work at her home in Uganda after schools were closed due to the pandemic. WFP/Hugh Rutherford

**Page 11, top:** Fatema, 13, one of 40,000 students in Cox's Bazar who received reading curriculum, storybooks and nutritious biscuits during the pandemic. WFP/Nalifa Mehelin

**bottom:** In Colombia, WFP and the Ministry of Education provided take-home rations to some 110,000 children missing out on school meals.

WFP/Miller Choles

**Page 12:** Abdus and his grandson stand on a raft in front of his flooded house in Bangladesh. WFP/Sayed Asif Mahmud

**Page 13, top:** A girl cycles away from a brewing storm, days after Super Typhoon Goni hit the Philippines.

WFP/Arete/Angelo Mendoza

**bottom:** Antonio Belez, National Institute for Disaster Management and Risk Reduction and Domingos Reane, WFP, conduct a drone assessment in the wake of tropical storm Eloise.

© Mercy Air/Matthias Reuter.

**Page 14:** Refugees from Tigray, Ethiopia, queue for WFP food distributions in Um Rakuba refugee camp in eastern Sudan. WFP/Arete/Ed Ram

**Page 17:** A woman in Chad carries water through a community garden. WFP/Evelyn Fey

## Notes

*Number of global coronavirus deaths:* Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center (data as at 14 May 2021)

*Impact of coronavirus on poverty rates:* World Bank (2021) 'Updated estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: Looking back at 2020 and the outlook for 2021', 11 January

*2020 conflict data:* ACLED (2020) ACLED 2020: The Year in Review

*2020 refugee data:* UNHCR (2020) Mid-year trends

*2020 locust plagues:* Njagi, D. (2020) 'The Biblical locust plagues of 2020', BBC, 7 August; FAO (2020) 'Ethiopia: Desert Locusts drive one million to food insecurity,' 13 April

*Atlantic Hurricane Season:* Milman, O. (2020) 'Devastating 2020 Atlantic hurricane season breaks all records' The Guardian, 10 November

*Flooding in East Africa:* BBC News (2020) 'Flooding hits six million people in East Africa', 6 October

*COVID-19 employment and productivity losses:* ILO (2021) ILO Monitor 7th edition: COVID-19 and the world of work

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