



© Emily Janoch/CARE 2023

Gender Food Gap

Women play a crucial role in producing food and feeding their families and the world. Despite this fact, women are often last to eat and still face huge barriers to equal food, equal access, and equal opportunities to contribute to food systems. The [more gender inequality there is in the world, the more hunger there is](#). The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent food crisis—exacerbated by the conflict in Ukraine—has drastically worsened the gender food gap. Women have been hit first and hardest by the impacts of crisis on overall increases in hunger. While 2022 saw improvements in global averages, inequality continues to grow in many parts of the world.



The gap today

84.2 million more women and girls are food insecure than men and boys.ⁱ The most conservative estimateⁱⁱ for the gender gap is that 79.7 million more adult women are food insecure than adult men.ⁱⁱⁱ That is more than the entire population of Germany, or nearly twice the population of Ukraine.

COVID-19 is still impacting the gender food gap. Using the most conservative estimate (only adult women), 52.7 million more women than men are food insecure than were before the pandemic. Progress toward gender equality has rolled back since COVID-19, delaying equality by an entire generation ([31 years](#)).

There is some progress. The global gender gap in food insecurity narrowed in the last year, with 39.4 million women moving out of the gap. The difference between adult men and women was 3.8 percentage points in 2021 and 2.4 percentage points in 2022. This is largely driven by progress that Southern Asia made out of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Southern Asia the gender food gap narrowed by 40.7 million in 2022. This accounts for the vast majority of progress from 2021-2022.

Inequality is growing

Gender inequality in food insecurity is still growing. Despite some progress in the global averages, in some regions, the gap continues to grow. Africa, MENA, the Caribbean, South East Asia, Europe, and North America have all seen the gender food gap increase since 2021. In Africa alone, 10.4 million more women are food insecure than men—2.8 million more women than in 2021. In the Middle East, the gender food gap grew from 700,000 women in 2019 to 3.1 million women in 2021. By 2022, it was up to 4.3 million more women than men who are food insecure.

This is not just a problem of wealth. Despite consistently high GDP, and food insecurity that is less than one quarter of the global average, North America and Europe have some of the highest growth in the food gender gap. In North America and Europe, 6.6 million more adult women than men who were food insecure in 2019. By 2021, the number had risen to 12.3 million women. In 2022, the gap is 15 million.

Frequent and prolonged crises are hitting women hardest

Women are consistently hit hardest by crises, and bear much of the brunt of shocks to food systems. To take just one example, in the first year of COVID-19, [22% of women lost their jobs in agrifood systems](#), compared to only 2% of men. This makes the current crisis even more extreme for women than the [2008 crisis was](#) for women. In 2008, women [lost their jobs](#) at the same rate as men; in COVID, it was 10 times worse for women.

Women also spend [4.2 hours a day on unpaid care work](#), compared to only 1.9 hours for men. The ratio got even more unequal during covid, rising to women working [2.4 times more than men on unpaid care work](#)—including cooking and buying food—by September of 2021.

As climate change makes water scarcer, women are forced to spend more time and [take more risks to get the water](#) they and their families need—for drinking, for cooking, and for agriculture. Water insecurity raises the risk of Gender Based Violence—both while travelling to access water and because of having insufficient water at home.

Economic shocks—including COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine—are the main driver of food crisis for [89.3 million people](#), pushing 53.7 million more people into food crisis since 2021. The 27 countries covered in the [Global Report on Food Crisis](#) are almost all in regions where the gender food gap is growing.

Inequality is multi-dimensional

Inequality extends beyond the division between men and women. Indigenous people—especially women, are much more likely to be [facing low pay and discrimination](#) than non-Indigenous peoples, which contributes to inequality in food security.

[33% of the rural population faces food insecurity](#), compared to 26% of the urban population, even though rural populations are more likely to be involved in agriculture.

ⁱ CARE calculates this number using the methodology laid out here: <https://www.care.org/news-and-stories/resources/150-million-more-women-hungry/>

ⁱⁱ FAO officially only looks at sex-dissaggregated data in food security for men and women over the age of 15.

ⁱⁱⁱ FAO revised all of the 2021 numbers downward, including the data on food insecure adults, which accounts for some of the reduction here.