

LatinMUN 2025

# **The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

**Addressing Basic Need Shortages and  
Nutrition Inequality in Central and South  
America**

## **Committee Background**

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly. Established in the aftermath of the Second World War, UNHCR has been working for over 70 years protecting people forced directly or indirectly out of their country to another for persecution or other forms of violence. This agency was created for the purpose of mandating the lead and co-ordinate international actions to protect and resolve refugee problems worldwide. The committee works governments has successfully helped more than 50 million refugees to successfully restart their lives, and continue provide help protect and provide support for themselves 122.6 million people who are currently displaced. UNHCR, in the present, has 20,305 personnel working worldwide in 136 countries.

UNHCR stands for United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. It works to protect refugees, displaced and stateless people by advocating for their rights. The committee works with governments and other types of partners to ensure, advice and enforce laws and national systems and help provide services. Through this changes the committee can ensure that the refugees are welcomes with access to documentation, education, work and health care.

They can also help stateless people achieve their right to a nationality. UNHCR helps refugees achieve employment in the foreign countries, they can support themselves and their families with their basic needs. In other cases, they work with making children and young people access education, giving them a sense of normalcy and safeguarding their future.

UNHCR plays a critical role in responding to humanitarian crises worldwide, including those caused by conflicts, natural disasters, and persecution. When conflicts happen, such as in Syria, Sudan, or Ukraine, millions of people are forced to flee their homes, often with little to no belongings. UNHCR provides immediate assistance by setting up refugee camps, distributing food and clean water, and offering medical care and psychological support to those affected. In cases of natural disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes, or floods, the agency works alongside governments and humanitarian partners to ensure displaced individuals receive emergency shelter, sanitation, and protection from further harm. Additionally, UNHCR is deeply involved in assisting people facing persecution due to their race, religion, political beliefs, or social identity.

## **Topic Background**

In Central and South America, many people struggle to get enough food and basic necessities due to poverty, high food prices, and other challenges. Some families cannot afford healthy meals because food costs are rising, making it harder to get fruits, vegetables, and proteins. This problem is even worse in rural areas where there are

fewer jobs and less access to stores with fresh food. Many children and adults do not get enough nutrients, which can lead to health problems like malnutrition and disease.

Organizations and governments are working to help by providing food aid, improving farming techniques, and creating programs that make healthy food more available for all. Schools play an important role by offering free or low-cost meals to children, ensuring they get the nutrition they need to grow and learn. While progress is being made, more efforts are needed to make sure everyone in Central and South America has access to enough healthy food and basic resources for a good quality of life.

The regional overview of food security and nutrition in Latin America stated that over 131.3 million people can't afford a healthy diet in 2022, this shows an increase of over 8 million compared to 2019. This is due to the higher cost in healthy diets in Latin American and the Caribbean. Other world's regions cost an average of \$3.89 per person per day compared to the global average of \$3.54. In the Caribbean this reaches a value of \$4.23, followed by South America and Mesoamerica with \$3.61 and \$3.47. It has also been reported that the rise in prices of food started due to the Ukraine war back in 2020, this war had made difficulties in the access of healthy diets.

"The hunger figures in our region continue to be worrying. We see how we are moving further and further away from meeting the 2030 agenda, and we have not yet managed to improve the figures before the crisis unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our region has persistent challenges such as inequality, poverty, and climate change, which have reversed progress in the fight against hunger for at least 13 years. This scenario obliges us to work together and act as soon as possible," said Mario Lubetkin, Regional Representative for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Another cause of this problem also is climate change, climate change has led to extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, and hurricanes that destroy crops and make it harder for farmers to grow food. Small farmers, who produce much of the region's food, often struggle with low incomes and lack of tools and resources needed to improve their harvests. Without government support, they cannot compete with large food industries, and this leads to even higher food prices in local markets.

Other studies mention that this problem is also due because of socioeconomic and nutritional indicators. This shows the inability to afford a healthy diet and such variables as a country's income level, the rise of poverty rates, and the level of inequality. Another major factor is the rise in poverty rates. Economic crises, inflation, and lack of job opportunities have pushed more people into poverty, making it harder for them to buy food. When wages stay low, but food prices keep rising, families are forced to reduce the quantity and quality of the food they eat.

### **Current Situation**

In 2025, food security in Latin America and the Caribbean has seen some improvements, but challenges remain. In 2023, about 187.6 million people in the region

faced moderate or severe food insecurity, which means they didn't have access to enough nutritious food. This is a decrease of 19.7 million people compared to 2022, marking progress for the second year in a row. Central America's "Dry Corridor," talks about parts of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, which remains highly vulnerable to prolonged droughts and other climate-related challenges. These conditions have led to crop failures, heightened food insecurity, and increased malnutrition rates among rural and indigenous communities. For instance, in Guatemala, droughts have severely affected small farmers.

In 2022, 247.8 million people in the region experienced severe food insecurity. People were forced to reduce the quality or quantity of the food they consumed, went hungry, and in the most extreme case, went days without eating, putting their health and well-being at serious risk, due to the shortage of food they could get. Latin America and the Caribbean have the highest healthy diet costs in the world. In between 2020 and 2021, the cost of a healthy diet increased by 5.3% due to government issues. This crisis is set to get worst. between March and June 2025, about 2 million people are in risk to reach an emergency level of food insecurity.

The countries with the highest percentage of severe food insecurity are Haiti, Mali, South Sudan, Sudan and Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Since conflict in Sudan began in April 2023, over 11.3 million people have been displaced. Families do not have access to the food they need to survive.

In South America, while food insecurity rates have decreased, certain areas continue to face difficulties. Suriname has been grappling with a huge drought since early 2023, leading to severe food and water shortages in affected communities. The drought has disrupted transportation, access to clean water, and health issues, mostly in remote villages that rely on river systems.

In Mali, the conflict is pushing more people towards critical levels of hunger. In Mopti, Gao, Tombouctou and Kidal, 120,000 people were projected to reach an emergency level of food insecurity between June and August 2024, due to problems in the country.

War has continued to go since late 2023, with violent groups blocking peoples paths, without letting people reach food and aid needed. Hunger is reaching catastrophic levels.

In 2023, Santiago, Chile, The United Nations report, Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023, states that 6.5% of the population of Latin American and the Caribbean suffers from hunger, or 43.2 million people. This figure is a slight improvement of the previous year measurements of 0.5%, but it's still is less than the 0.9% prior to COVID-19.

## **Conclusion**

Our conclusion as the chair is that food insecurity in Central and South America remains a serious issue, despite some recent improvements. Millions of people still struggle to afford a healthy diet due to poverty, inequality, and rising food prices. Climate change, including droughts and extreme weather, continues to worsen the situation by disrupting food production.

Millions of people cannot afford a healthy diet due to high food prices, income inequality, and limited access to essential resources. The situation is worse in rural areas, where agricultural challenges and lack of infrastructure make food even harder to obtain. These challenges have led to widespread malnutrition, hunger, and declining public health, putting millions of lives at risk and threatening long-term stability in the region.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. What are the main factors contributing to the rise in food insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean?
2. How has the cost of a healthy diet changed in different regions, and what impact does this have on food accessibility?
3. How do socioeconomic factors like poverty, inequality, and national income levels affect a population's ability to afford a healthy diet?
4. What are potential long-term consequences of rising food insecurity in Latin America and other affected regions?
5. How have government policies and international responses influenced the food security crisis in recent years?
6. What strategies can be implemented to reduce food insecurity and ensure access to affordable, nutritious diets for vulnerable populations?

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