



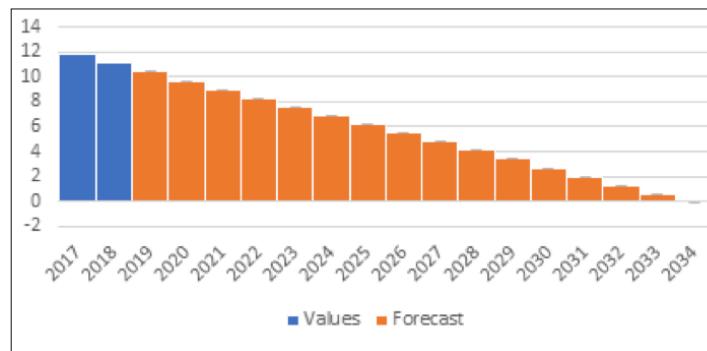
# Hunger by the Numbers

## Food Insecurity Finally Recovers from the Great Recession, but Progress Remains Too Slow

### U.S. food insecurity rates are too high

Federal food insecurity data for 2018,<sup>i</sup> released September 4, 2019, indicates that 11.1 percent of U.S. households—37.2 million people—were food insecure (at some point during the year, they did not know where their next meals were coming from). In 2018, food insecurity finally fell to its pre-Great Recession levels, and it is now significantly lower than its recession peak of 14.9 percent in 2011. But at this rate, the United States will not end hunger until 2034 (see graphic below).<sup>ii</sup>

**Graphic 1. The United States Is Not on Track to End Hunger by 2030**



Joseph Molieri /Bread for the World

### The list of hungriest states has remained the same for a decade or more

The hungriest states include Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, and West Virginia.

They have several factors in common:<sup>v</sup>

- Region—concentrated in the South and Appalachia.
- Generational poverty—low rates of economic mobility (the likelihood of a child born into poverty not being poor as an adult).
- A significant share of female-headed households live in poverty—30 percent to 40 percent.
- A significant share of children live in poverty—20 percent to 30 percent.
- High levels of concentrated poverty. In the five hungriest states, from 45 percent to 70 percent of all counties have poverty rates of 20 percent or more.
- Significant liquid asset poverty, meaning that many households live paycheck to paycheck.

### 11.2 million children live at risk of hunger

Food insecurity among households with children declined significantly last year, from 15.7 percent in 2017 to 13.9 percent in 2018. The number of children affected, 11.2 million, is still far too high but it has fallen well below the 12 million children facing hunger in 2007, the last pre-Great Recession year. This is an improvement from last year, when food insecurity remained unchanged, and is well below pre-Great Recession levels of

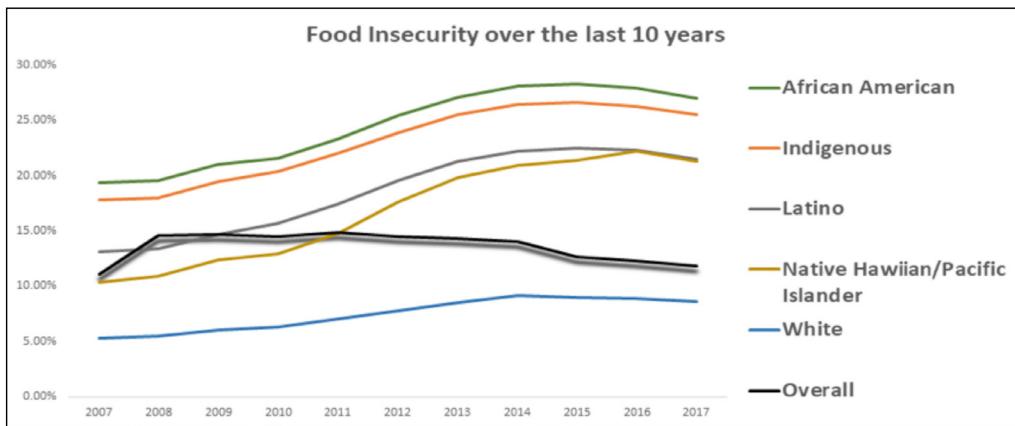
### Every state has food insecurity

Even though some are doing better than others, all are affected by one or more of seven measures of health, income, and opportunity that are highly correlated with food insecurity.<sup>iii</sup> These are:

- Incidence of concentrated poverty (areas with poverty rates of 20 percent or higher).
- Rate of child poverty.
- Poverty rate among households headed by women.
- Infant mortality rate.
- Prevalence of diabetes among adults.
- The net worth (savings and equity) of the median household.
- An indicator of opportunity in a state that considers measures in areas such as employment, income equality, access to banking, affordable housing, quality education, and access to health care.<sup>iv</sup>

2007 when 12 million children faced hunger. In 2018, 1 in 7 children lived in food-insecure households.

Food insecurity rates remain very high for female-headed households (27.8 percent). Learn more at: [bread.org/library/hunger-and-poverty-female-headed-households](https://bread.org/library/hunger-and-poverty-female-headed-households).



Source: American Community Survey, 2017 (the most recent data available that calculates rates for communities of color that are not considered separately in the USDA data).

## Households of color are more likely to experience food insecurity

The new USDA report indicates that African Americans have not made progress on food insecurity for the past two years, and food insecurity has not fallen below pre-Great Recession levels. Food insecurity among African American households is still nearly double the national rate and triple the rate of white households. In addition, food insecurity among Latino households is double the rate of white households.

In 2018, approximately 1 in 5 African American households (21.2 percent) and 1 in 6 Latino households (16.2 percent), were food insecure, compared to 1 in 12 white households (8.1 percent). Data on 2018 food insecurity has not yet been released for other groups, such as Indigenous communities. See the graph above.

For more on racial disparities in food insecurity, see Bread's new report at [bread.org/racialequity](https://bread.org/racialequity).

## The extent of food insecurity varies by geography, so there are no one-size-fits-all solutions

Food insecurity rates vary considerably by state, from 7.8 percent in New Hampshire to 16.8 percent in New Mexico. Regionally, the prevalence of food insecurity was significantly higher in the South (12 percent), compared to the other three regions: the Midwest (10.8 percent), the West (10.4 percent), and the Northeast (10.2 percent). Food insecurity was highest in cities (13.2 percent), followed by rural areas (12.7 percent), and was lower in the suburbs (8.9 percent).

## A plan to end hunger

Bread for the World and its members advocate for strong and effective federal nutrition programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and school meals. Bread advocates also work to address the root causes of hunger, and they support improved policies that end the long-term vulnerability to hunger. Taking the longer-term sustainable approach means advocating, for example, for an end to racial and gender discrimination, for jobs with a living wage, and affordable and accessible health care.

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The U.S. track record, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s but also in recoveries from recent economic setbacks, suggests that our country could virtually end hunger. The current rate of progress is not enough to accomplish it. The goal of ending hunger by 2030 is one of several adopted by the nations of the world in 2015. To reach it, the United States must reduce food insecurity by almost 1 percentage point every year for the next twelve years. This will require strong political commitment and a comprehensive approach to address hunger's root causes and accelerate progress. Learn more at [hungerreport.org](https://hungerreport.org).

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory, and Anita Singh, Household Security in the United States in 2018, ERR 270, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, September 2019, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/94849/err-270.pdf?v=963.1>

<sup>ii</sup> Bread for the World analysis based on the rate of decline from [2018], to get to zero hunger.

<sup>iii</sup> Highly correlated means correlations greater than 70 percent. Based on internal analysis from Bread for the World Institute, "State Trends on Food Insecurity," July 2019.

<sup>iv</sup> "Opportunity Index: Summary of findings for states & counties." Opportunity Nation and Measure of America. 2015. [http://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/06173658/2015\\_Opportunity\\_Index\\_Report.pdf](http://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/06173658/2015_Opportunity_Index_Report.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> Bread for the World Institute Analysis. "State Trends Internal Project". June 2019.

<sup>vi</sup> Hunger and Poverty in Female-Headed Households. Fact Sheet. Bread for the World. May 2019. <https://www.bread.org/library/hunger-and-poverty-female-headed-households>