



# India: On The Brink Of Hunger Crisis During COVID-19

The Indian government has fallen short of its obligations to guarantee right to food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

*The Global Hunger Index 2019 ranks India as suffering from a “level of hunger that is serious”.*

- There have been at least 300 deaths, where the major causes are lack of food, financial distress, and exhaustion.
- An estimated 400 million informal sector workers are at risk of “falling deeper into poverty”.
- COVID-19 has resulted in loss of livelihood for millions, particularly informal sector workers, many of whom are internal migrant workers.
- Hunger is compounded by existing social and structural discrimination based on caste, religion and gender.
- Several million people lack access to food and information about ways to access food such as community kitchens.

## **What Measures has India taken?**

The Indian Government’s “relief package” for people living in poverty included provision of food and direct cash transfers for about 800 million ration card holders. But:

- Reputed economists say over 100 million persons who should qualify for this support have been unable to access food through the food public distribution system; &
- Many that did not qualify previously are now likely to require food subsidies, as food insecurity has increased since the lockdown.
- Evidence suggests that India holds at least three times the normal buffer stock of food and can afford to provide foodgrain to its population.

## **What are India’s legal obligations to guarantee the right to food?**

- To use a maximum of available resources to ensure everyone “has access to the minimum essential food” which is “sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe” to ensure “freedom from hunger”.
- To ensure that there is no discrimination of any kind in access to food.
- To ensure that “specially disadvantaged groups” are given priority consideration with respect to access to food.

Domestic law in India acknowledges the right to food as part of the right to life with dignity. The Indian Supreme Court has confirmed that India must ensure that all people are free from hunger and starvation. Buffer stock must be used to ensure this.

## **The ICJ calls on the responsible Indian authorities to:**

### **Direct Provision of Food**

- ensure accounting of the food needs of those living in poverty, as well as other vulnerable groups;
- address minimum essential needs of food to the maximum of its available resources, including through use of buffer food stock;
- prevent and act swiftly to remedy supply chain disruptions in provision of foodstuff;

### **Legal Enforcement**

- prompt access to justice for acts of discrimination and criminal violence against food vendors;
- hold police accountable for acts of violence or mistreatment in enforcing lockdowns;

### **Information Circulation**

- provide regular, accurate, evidence-based information on spread of COVID-19;
- publicly contradict false information to prevent discrimination and crimes committed against Muslim persons and other marginalized persons.

Read the full briefing paper here: <https://bit.ly/3ftcfRQ>