



SHARE OF UNDERNOURISHED POPULATION IN THE WORLD - DYNAMICS AND ANALYSIS

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Abstract: Food insecurity represents a pressing social and economic challenge in Romania and its neighbouring countries, affecting vulnerable populations such as low-income families, children, and the elderly. This paper aims to analyze the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to food insecurity in the region. Using recent statistical data, literature review, and case studies, the study highlights the impact of poverty, unemployment, social inequalities, and environmental factors on access to adequate nutrition. The findings reveal significant disparities between urban and rural areas and underline the urgent need for targeted policies, social programs, and community-based interventions. The paper concludes with recommendations to improve food security, emphasizing the importance of coordinated efforts at local, national, and regional levels.

• Introduction

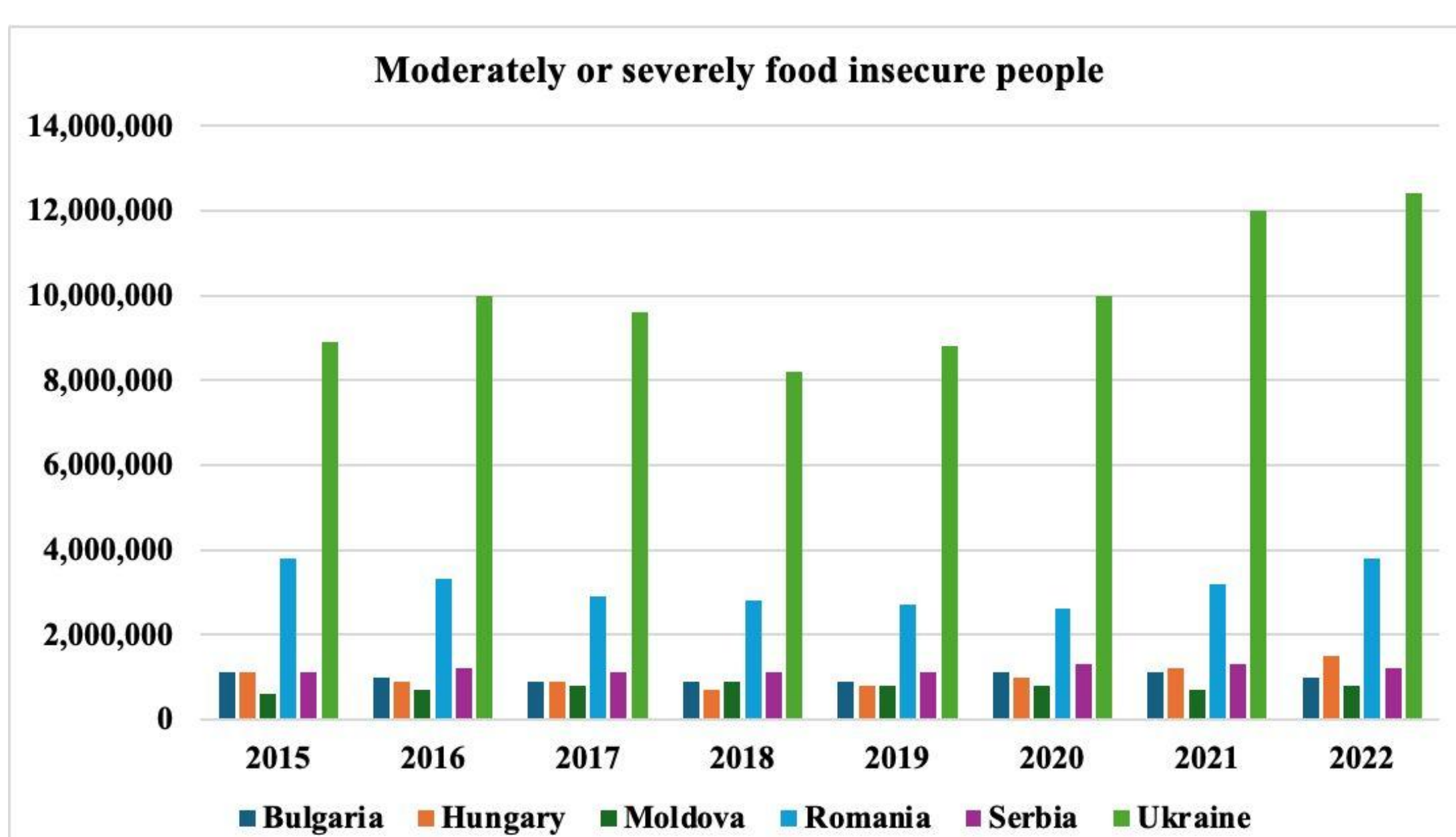
Food insecurity occurs when people lack reliable and consistent access to sufficient, nutritious food necessary for a healthy and active life. Although global food production is adequate, millions continue to struggle with maintaining a balanced diet due to poverty, social inequalities, limited access to quality products, and climate change. In Romania and neighboring countries, the issue primarily affects vulnerable rural households with low incomes and high food-related expenses. Addressing food insecurity requires effective public policies, well-targeted social programs, and support for sustainable local production, in order to improve access to nutritious food and strengthen community resilience.

• Material and method

This study is based on the analysis of external data from secondary and tertiary sources. The primary dataset used was Our World in Data, complemented by reports from FAO and relevant academic literature on food security. Key indicators related to food access, affordability, and socio-economic vulnerability were selected and compared across Romania and neighboring countries. Trends were examined over a multi-year timeframe to identify structural differences and factors influencing food insecurity. The analytical approach focused on interpreting these patterns in relation to regional economic conditions and rural-urban disparities, allowing the formulation of evidence-based insights and potential policy directions.

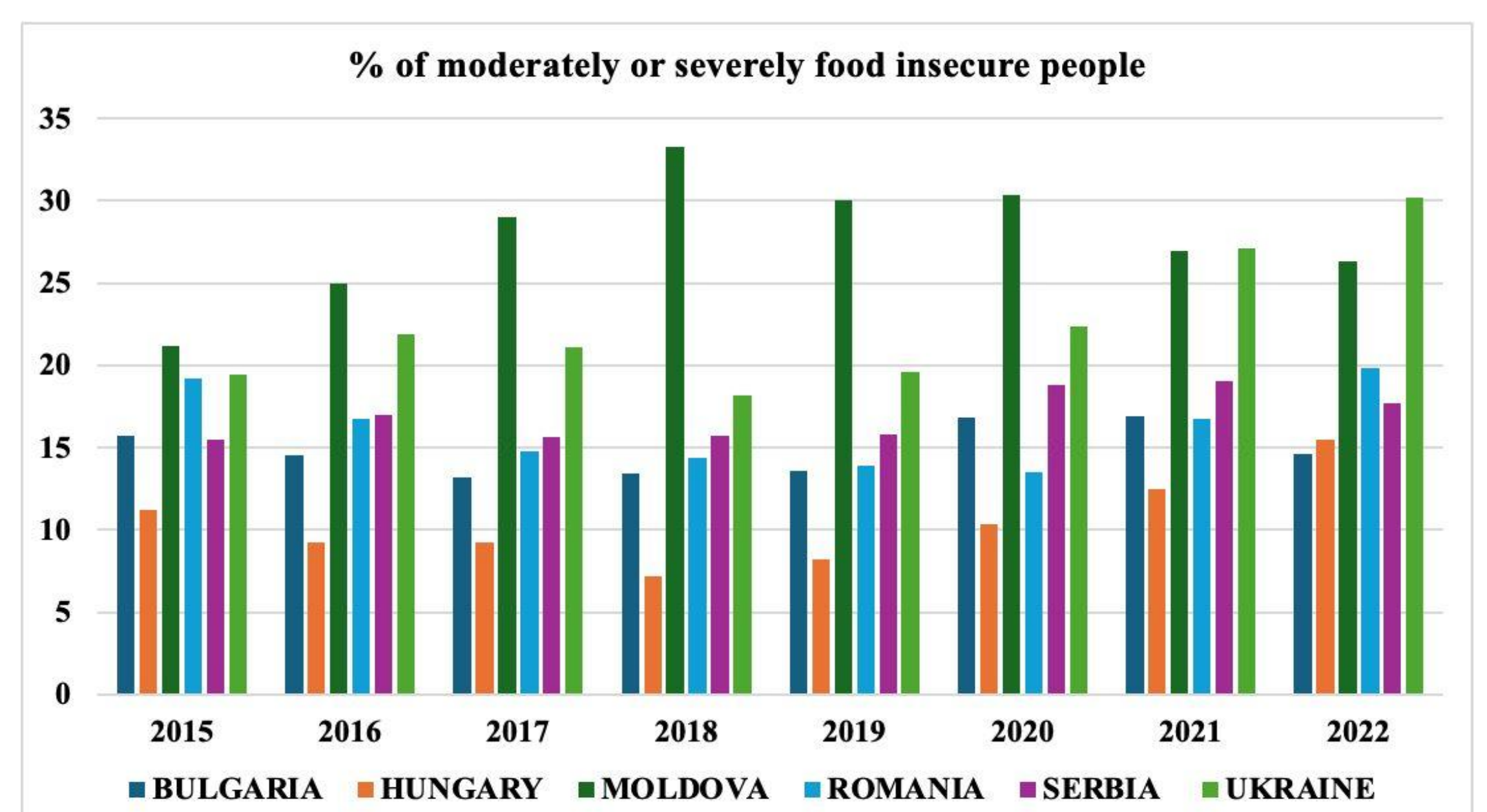
• Results and discussions

The results show that the number of people experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity varies significantly across the region, reaching millions of individuals in every country. Ukraine and Moldova register the highest values, between 8 and 12 million people, highlighting long-term structural vulnerability and, in Ukraine's case, the profound effects of conflict on food systems.



Romania decreased from 3.8 million (2015) to 2.6 million (2020), but the situation worsened again by 2022, returning to 3.8 million, mainly due to inflation and rising living costs. Bulgaria and Serbia remain relatively stable around 1–1.3 million, while Hungary shows an upward trend, reaching 1.5 million in 2022.

Also, the results show clear differences in the share of the population experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity. Moldova and Ukraine consistently record the highest percentages, often exceeding 25–30%, which indicates persistent structural vulnerability and, in Ukraine's case, severe disruption caused by conflict. Romania shows a gradual improvement from 19% (2015) to around 13% (2019–2020), followed by an increase to nearly 20% in 2022, reflecting rising food prices and declining purchasing power. Bulgaria and Serbia remain relatively stable around 14–18%, while Hungary decreases initially but rises sharply after 2020, reaching 15.5% in 2022, largely due to inflationary pressures.



• Conclusions

The comparative analysis highlights that food insecurity remains a persistent challenge across the region, though its intensity varies significantly between countries. Moldova and Ukraine are the most affected, both in absolute numbers and as a share of the population, pointing to deep structural vulnerabilities and, in Ukraine's case, the disruptive impact of conflict. Romania has shown periods of improvement, yet recent increases indicate that many households remain highly sensitive to economic shocks. Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary display moderate but stable levels, though rising inflation has intensified pressure in recent years. Strengthening social support, improving income stability, and promoting sustainable local food systems are essential steps to reduce vulnerability.