



## **Food Insecurity in Cuba: Vulnerating of the Right to Food for the Elderly**

The quality of life for elderly people who are (barely) surviving in the circumstances of the current structural crisis in Cuba has become an increasingly worrying reality. From Cuido60 and Food Monitor Program, we want to draw attention to the food insecurity situation in Cuba, particularly affecting the elderly, whose right to food is being violated. Food security refers to the sufficient and stable availability of food, timely access, and biological utilization, which must constantly occur over time. Food is a fundamental human right that seeks to guarantee all people access to sufficient food for a healthy and active life.

Two stories that have had a high impact on social media during April highlight the difficult reality of those who have worked for years and are now, in their old age, having difficulty acquiring basic food. We want to document through them the impact of the progressive deterioration of the purchasing power of pensions and the social protection network, which, together with the food crisis and the increase in the cost of living after the "Tarea Ordenamiento," place many elderly people in a situation of greater social vulnerability.

The first testimony corresponds to Jorge de Mello, a 69-year-old retiree who warns about the problems of access and cost to one of the most basic foods in anyone's diet: milk. He calculates how he would have to dedicate practically his entire monthly pension of 1986 Cuban pesos, equivalent to about 11 dollars at the current cost of living on the island, to afford half a cup of milk daily if he can find the vital food. In Jorge's words, "after striving to work all my life to cover my family's needs, in the end, I am receiving a reward that barely reaches us to guarantee half a cup of milk every day." This situation threatens human dignity and endangers the health and well-being of the population, particularly certain groups that may require it more, such as the elderly, children, and those suffering from certain chronic diseases. De Mello criticizes the government's management for being unable to find a sustainable solution to the basic food problem of the more than 2 million elderly people who "barely live" in Cuba.

The second known case is that of artist Luis Felipe Franco Laffitte, who, after 50 years of dedication to culture and teaching, claims that with his pension of 1328 pesos, he can only afford to buy 26 eggs or a bottle of oil for himself and his wife. Despite having worked hard all his life, Luis Felipe finds himself in a situation of economic vulnerability that forces him to seek alternatives to survive, working informally. "Thanks to the kindness of 'poor man' I become a 'vulnerable person'", concludes Felipe in his post.

According to the most recent data from ONEI, it is possible to evidence steep increases in most basic foods. The price of a bottle of cooking oil has multiplied four times, and powdered milk, which was only sold to children and the elderly, 120 times. A significant drop in agricultural, livestock, and fishing production is confirmed, combined with reduced food imports due to the lack of foreign currency, which has caused acute food shortages.

Regarding social policies, food subsidies and services have been reduced. Many of the products offered at subsidized prices through the ration book, which previously ensured a basic food quota, are sold at prices that have multiplied between five and twenty times, either in the informal market or in stores in freely convertible currency (MLC). Meanwhile, through its dining rooms, the Family Care System (SAF), which offers food services, has become more expensive and is only subsidized for 15.9% through Social Assistance. As a result, many elderly people have stopped using the service due to its high costs. The official press acknowledged a decrease in people attending the dining rooms (Granma, 2021).

The above results in a low food consumption index (8.5-12.8), on the one hand, and food stability, on the other (8.2-11.4), as evidenced by the Hunger Map developed by FMP. Both indices translate into a low food security index (38-53) in most of the country's provinces.

In summary, we amplify with these voices what we have been warning from Cuido60 and Food Monitor Program about the problems of accessibility, quality, and management of food on the island, which has become one of the main social problems, particularly affecting the elderly. The primary responsibility for protecting these people lies with the Cuban state, which constantly violates the population's right to food and disregards, under political arguments, the international commitments arising from various protection instruments, such as the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights of Older Persons, which the Cuban state has not signed.

Additionally, we want to emphasize the responsibility that corresponds to international organizations, which, at times, need to adequately document in their reports on Cuba the severe food crisis being experienced, and they need to make the corresponding demands on the Cuban state. This responsibility cannot be ignored and must be addressed urgently and effectively. The right to food is a fundamental human right that must be guaranteed to all people without exception.