

2
ZERO
HUNGER

KEY ASKS

2023 • SDG National Reviews

SDG 2: ZERO HUNGER

SDG 2 aims to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030. Since 2000, the world has reduced the proportion of children under 5 suffering from stunting by one third and the number of children who are stunted by 55 million. This remarkable achievement proves that positive change for nutrition is possible and is happening at scale – but there is more work to be done.

Today, many of the world's children are threatened by the triple burden of malnutrition. The first burden is the continuing scourge of undernutrition, in the form of stunting and wasting, which threatens the survival, growth and development of millions of children and hampers the development of economies and nations. The second burden is micronutrient deficiencies, a hidden form of malnutrition in which children lack the vitamins and minerals that are essential for optimal immune response, skeletal growth, and brain development. The third burden is the growing prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity, once regarded as a condition of the rich and now increasingly affecting children from poorer households in low-, middle- and high-income countries.

Child malnutrition rates remain unacceptably high. Trends indicate that current progress is insufficient to achieve SDG 2 and its targets for the reduction of child stunting, wasting and overweight. The backdrop of nutrition has changed, and new forces drive – in positive and negative ways – the nutrition situation of children around the world. Globalization and urbanization have changed food availability, food environments and food practices. Millions of families have left the countryside and moved to cities, leaving behind traditional diets for processed foods that are frequently high in salt, sugar and fat, and low in essential nutrients and fibre. Women are increasingly joining the formal workforce and many of them receive little or no support from families, employers, or society to help balance work responsibilities with their persistent role as primary caregivers. Socio-economic inequities are increasing in most parts of the world and many families are changing the way they eat or feed their children because of poverty and the rising cost of well-balanced, nutritious diets. Finally, the climate crisis, the loss of biodiversity, the damage done to water, air and soil, and the increasing number, duration and complexity of health epidemics and humanitarian crises pose critical challenges to feeding every child sustainably today and for generations to come.



KEY ASKS

There are five key responses essential to improve children's nutrition that should be included in development plans and budgets, to put children's nutrition rights first.

- 1. An explicit focus on addressing child malnutrition in all its forms.** Malnutrition, in all its forms, is a violation of children's right to nutrition. Addressing the triple burden of child malnutrition – undernutrition, both stunting and wasting; deficiencies in vitamins and other micronutrients; and overweight and obesity – is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls for an end to malnutrition in all its forms.
- 2. A comprehensive life cycle approach to nutrition programming.** Maternal and child nutrition during the first 1,000 days – from conception to age 2 years – must remain core in nutrition programmes in both development and humanitarian contexts. In addition, we call for an increased focus on nutrition in middle childhood and adolescence – an underutilized window of nutrition opportunity for girls and boys and a chance to break the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition.
- 3. A deliberate emphasis on improving diets, services, and practices.** Protecting and promoting diets, services and practices that support optimal nutrition, growth and development is essential. While acknowledging the triple burden of malnutrition, it is important to highlight the centrality of nutritious, safe, affordable, and sustainable diets with adequate nutrition services and practices as the foundation of good nutrition for children, adolescents, and women.

4. **A systems approach to maternal and child nutrition.** We call for national governments to strengthen the capacity and accountability of five key systems – food, health, water and sanitation, education, and social protection – to deliver nutritious diets, essential nutrition services and positive nutrition practices for children, adolescents, and women. As a multisectoral agency for children, UNICEF supports a systems approach to nutrition that drives sustainable results.
5. **A greater attention to private sector engagement.** National governments have primary accountability for upholding children’s right to nutrition; we never lose sight of this foundational principle. Nevertheless, the private sector also has a key role to play and countries should engage strategically with private sector actors to advocate for diets, services and practices that support good nutrition for all children.
6. **A universal vision and agenda relevant to all countries.** Children’s right to nutrition is universal. While it is particularly relevant to focus on low- and middle-income countries, where the triple burden of child malnutrition is greatest, there is an increasing burden of child overweight globally, and high-income countries should be more involved in policies and programmes that protect every child’s right to nutrition.



MONITOR -- THE IMPORTANCE OF DISAGGREGATED DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE

Using data and evidence to shape decision-making for policies and programming is crucial to understand dietary decisions that improve children’s lives. There is a strong need for new tools to better understand children’s diets. Methods to measure food availability, access, affordability, demand and use and the relationship between all these aspects is needed, along with tracking and understanding the nutrition transition as unhealthy diets become more prevalent worldwide. The potential impact and effectiveness of data do not lie only in tracking more indicators or producing more surveys: the analysis and use of existing data to drive policy advocacy and programme design and implementation is vital. This effort must also be linked to the development of global and national targets for improving children’s diets and feeding practices.



INVEST -- SOCIAL SPENDING AND PROGRESS ON RESULTS FOR CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

To address the multifaceted challenge of malnutrition, a systems approach should be adopted to provide the multiple responses needed. Social protection programmes are a powerful instrument to not only lift families and children out of poverty, but also to promote maternal and child nutrition through nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive programmes. A range of interventions, such as conditional and unconditional cash transfers, food subsidies, food rations and school feeding, can provide communities with the means to access and afford nutritious food and limit the long-term effects of deprivation. There is growing evidence that cash-transfer programmes targeted to households with young children improves their growth and nutritional status.

Additional Information is available on: <https://www.unicef.org/nutrition>