



NUTRITION, FOR EVERY CHILD

UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030

In Brief



Who are the main audiences of the UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030?

The primary audience of the Strategy is UNICEF staff, particularly programme teams working on maternal and child nutrition in development and humanitarian contexts. The Strategy is also destined for UNICEF staff working on nutrition relevant programmes, such as health, water and sanitation, education, protection and social policy, as well as UNICEF leaders who champion our advocacy at the national, regional and global levels to make the right to nutrition a reality, for every child.

Every child has the right to nutrition. And today, the need for diets, services and practices that protect, promote and support good nutrition has never been greater.

Since 2000, the world has reduced the proportion of children under 5 suffering from stunted growth 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.

This document lays out UNICEF’s strategic intent to support national governments and partners over the 2020–2030 decade in upholding children’s right to nutrition and ending child malnutrition in all its forms. It calls for a global response to the evolving nature of child malnutrition: one that delivers diets, services and practices that support optimal nutrition at every stage of life, while sustaining nutrition-responsive development for all children, adolescents and women.

A TRIPLE BURDEN

In 2020, the burden of malnutrition remains unsolved, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where about 200 million children are

affected by stunting or wasting and almost twice as many suffer from deficiencies in vitamins and other essential micronutrients. At the same time, the number of children with overweight and obesity continues to rise, increasingly affecting poorer children, households and countries. Together, these problems can be characterized as a triple burden of malnutrition facing the world’s children: undernutrition, in the form of stunting and wasting; widespread micronutrient deficiencies; and a growing prevalence of overweight and obesity.

New forces drive the nutrition situation of children – globalization, urbanization, inequities, environmental crises, health epidemics and humanitarian emergencies – posing critical challenges to feeding children sustainably today and for generations to come. The added strain of the COVID-19 pandemic could throw an additional 140 million children into poverty in 2020 and increase the number of undernourished children by 7 million.

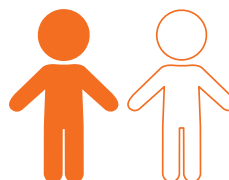
As we embark on the final decade towards 2030, our data indicate that at least one in three children is not growing well because of malnutrition and at least two in three are not fed the minimum diet they need to grow, develop and learn to their full potential.

That hurts not just children – it hurts us all.

**At least
1 in 3 children
is not growing well
because of malnutrition**



**At least
1 in 2 children
suffers from deficiencies
in essential micronutrients**



**At least
2 in 3 children
are not fed the minimum diet
they need to grow healthy.**



VISION AND GOAL

The **vision** of the UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030 is “**a world where all children, adolescents and women realize their right to nutrition**”. This vision is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognizes the right of every child to adequate nutrition.

The **goal** of the Strategy is “**to protect and promote diets, services and practices that support optimal nutrition, growth and development for all children, adolescents and women**”. This goal aims to contribute to the goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to ensure children’s access to nutritious diets and to end child malnutrition in all its forms.



The Strategy supports four nutrition **objectives** for children, adolescents and women in both development and humanitarian contexts:

- **Objective 1:** To prevent undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight in early childhood (i.e., the first five years of life).
- **Objective 2:** To prevent undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight in middle childhood and adolescence (i.e., 5–19 years of age).
- **Objective 3:** To prevent undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight in women – particularly during pregnancy and breastfeeding – and to prevent low birthweight in newborns.
- **Objective 4:** To ensure the early detection and treatment of wasting and other forms of life-threatening acute malnutrition in early childhood.

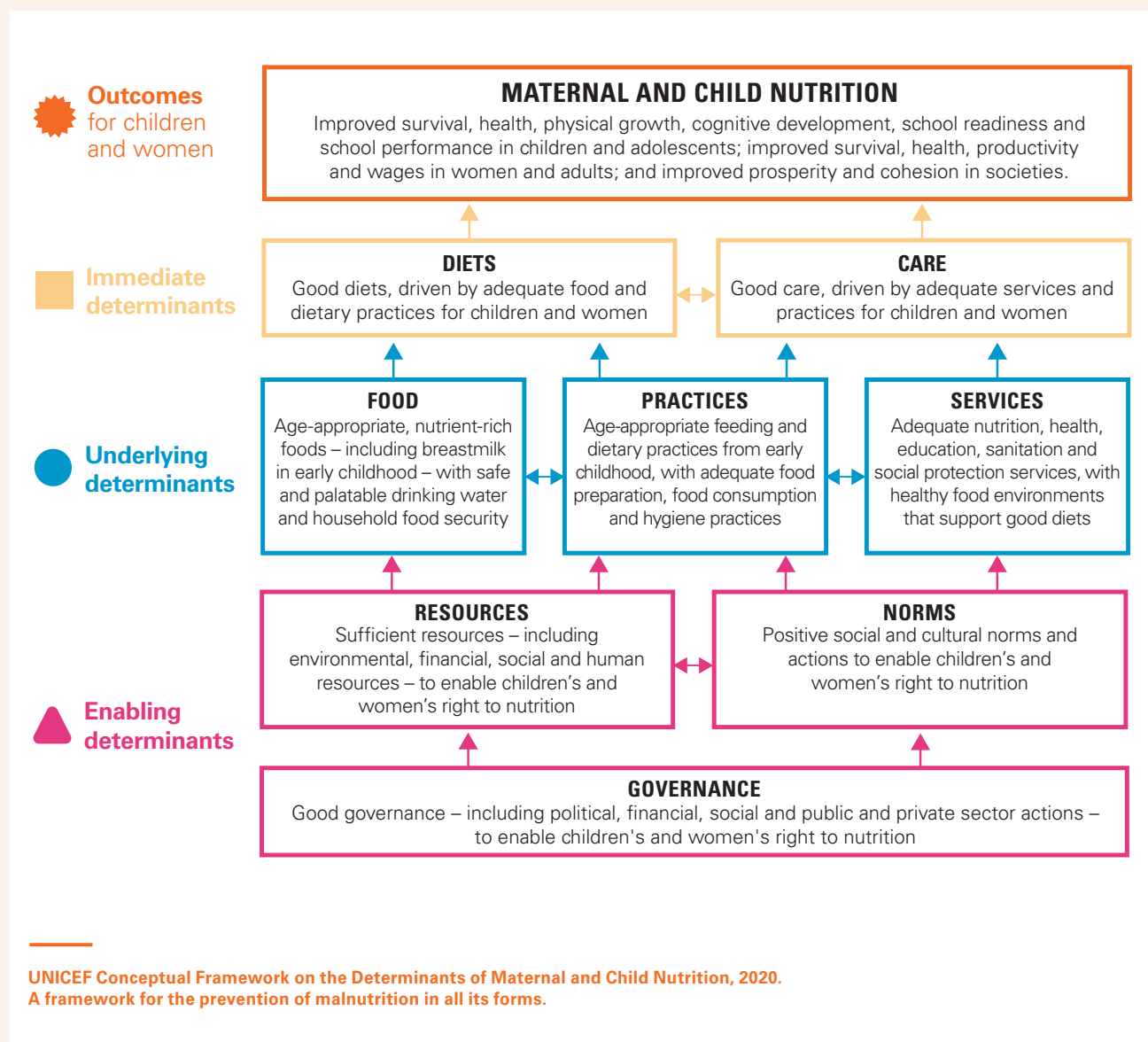
The vision of the UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030 is universal applying equally to children, adolescents and women everywhere. The Strategy builds on past guidance, strategic plans, and programme experience and outlines UNICEF’s intention to support a global response to the challenge of child malnutrition over the next decade, with national governments and partners.

Our vision, goal and objectives are realized through programming at the global, regional, national and subnational levels. Six universal principles guide UNICEF’s programming for maternal and child nutrition. These principles guide the design and implementation of programmes that are rights-based, equity-focused, gender-responsive, context-specific, evidence-informed and systems-centred.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030 introduces UNICEF’s Conceptual Framework on the Determinants of Maternal and Child Nutrition, 2020. The Framework, which builds on previous conceptual work by UNICEF, acknowledges the triple burden of malnutrition and highlights the role of diets and care as immediate determinants of maternal and child nutrition.

Using a positive narrative about what contributes to good nutrition in children and women, the Framework provides conceptual clarity on the enabling, underlying and immediate determinants of adequate nutrition, their vertical and horizontal interconnectedness, and the positive outcomes resulting from improved maternal and child nutrition.



RESULTS AREAS

The vision and goals of the Strategy are realized through programmes that share a universal premise: **prevention comes first, in all contexts; if prevention fails, treatment is a must.** UNICEF nutrition programmes aim to prevent child malnutrition in all its forms across the life cycle. When efforts to prevent malnutrition fall short, our programmes aim to ensure the early detection and treatment of children suffering from life-threatening malnutrition, both in development and humanitarian contexts. UNICEF organizes its programming for maternal and child nutrition into six results areas:

Results Area 1: Early childhood nutrition encompasses UNICEF's programming for the prevention of all forms of malnutrition in the first five years of life, including undernutrition – both stunting and wasting – micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight and obesity. Our work in this results area intends to ensure that young children under 5 years of age benefit from diets, services and practices that support optimal nutrition, growth and development in early childhood.

We advocate for and support policies, strategies and programmes that aim to protect and promote recommended breastfeeding practices for infants and young children from birth; promote and support age-appropriate complementary foods and feeding practices in the first two years of life; promote the use of adequate foods and feeding practices for children aged 3–5 years; support the use of micronutrient supplements where nutrient-poor diets and micronutrient deficiencies are common; and improve children's food environments to prevent all forms of malnutrition in early childhood.

Results Area 2: Nutrition in middle childhood and adolescence encompasses UNICEF's programming for the prevention of all forms of malnutrition in middle childhood (ages 5–9 years) and adolescence (ages 10–19 years), including through school-based programmes. Our work in this results area intends to ensure that school-age children and adolescents benefit from diets, services and practices that support optimal nutrition, growth and development in middle childhood and adolescence.

We advocate for and support policies, strategies and programmes that aim to promote nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable diets, including fortified foods, for school-age children and adolescents; improve children's food environments in schools and beyond; promote the use of micronutrient supplementation and deworming prophylaxis where nutrient-poor diets and micronutrient deficiencies are common; improve nutritional knowledge and skills in school curricula; and promote good diets and active lifestyles through large-scale communication programmes.

Results Area 3: Maternal nutrition encompasses UNICEF's programming for the prevention of malnutrition in women during pregnancy and breastfeeding – two stages of nutritional vulnerability for women – and the prevention of low birthweight in newborns. Our work in this results area intends to ensure that women benefit from diets, services and practices that support optimal nutrition during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

We advocate for and support gender-responsive policies and programmes that aim to improve women's nutritional status before and during pregnancy and while breastfeeding; promote nutrition care and support for adolescent mothers and other nutritionally at-risk women; and foster innovations to improve the coverage and quality of maternal nutrition programmes. This results area aims to accelerate progress towards the global targets of reducing anaemia among women and low birthweight among newborns, while contributing to the other global nutrition targets for children.



Results Area 4: Nutrition and care for children with wasting

encompasses UNICEF's programming for the early detection and treatment of children with wasting through facility- and community-based approaches, in all contexts. Our work in this results area intends to ensure that children benefit from services for the early detection and treatment of wasting in early childhood, including in non-humanitarian contexts, where most children with wasting live.

We support the development of evidence-informed protocols and strategies for the early detection, treatment and care of children with wasting; strengthen the capacities of facility- and community-based workers to provide care for children with wasting; support the scale-up and quality of facility- and community-based routine services for children with wasting; integrate nutrition supply chains into national supply systems to improve care for children with wasting; and promote and support cost-effective and sustainable production of ready-to-use therapeutic foods.

Results Area 5: Maternal and child nutrition in humanitarian action

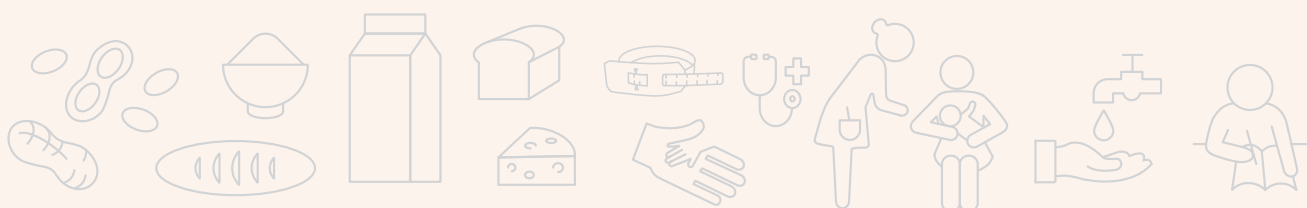
encompasses UNICEF's nutrition programming in emergencies and is guided by UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action and our commitments as Cluster Lead Agency for Nutrition. Our work in this results area intends to ensure that children, adolescents and women affected by humanitarian crises benefit from diets, services and practices that protect, promote and support good nutrition.

We advocate for and support policies, strategies and programmes to protect and fulfil the nutrition rights of children and women affected by humanitarian crises. Specifically, we aim to ensure effective coordination and technical support for nutrition in emergency preparedness, response and recovery; strengthen systems and capacities to prepare for and respond to nutrition in humanitarian crises; strengthen nutrition information systems and manage nutrition data in humanitarian contexts; and support the delivery of essential nutrition interventions in humanitarian response.

Results Area 6: Partnerships and governance for nutrition

encompasses UNICEF's programming to strengthen the enabling environment for maternal and child nutrition through improved partnerships, data, knowledge, advocacy and financing, which are the five pillars of UNICEF's governance work for nutrition. Our work in this results area intends to improve governance for maternal and child nutrition at national, regional and global levels.

We aim to convene, support and coordinate strategic partnerships for maternal and child nutrition; strengthen data and information systems; generate, share and use evidence and knowledge; lead strategic advocacy and communication efforts; and mobilize resources and domestic financing for maternal and child nutrition in both development and humanitarian contexts.



Are UNICEF country programmes expected to implement all components of the Nutrition Strategy?

No. A guiding principle of the Strategy is *context-specific programming*, which is informed by an analysis of the nutrition situation of children and women in a given context (determinants, drivers and potential impact pathways) and the human and financial resources and partnerships available. The triangulation of needs, resources, and partnerships allows UNICEF to identify the *results areas* and *programmatic priorities* of the Strategy that are relevant to a given context. The Strategy keeps UNICEF nutrition programmes coherent across regions, countries and programming contexts.



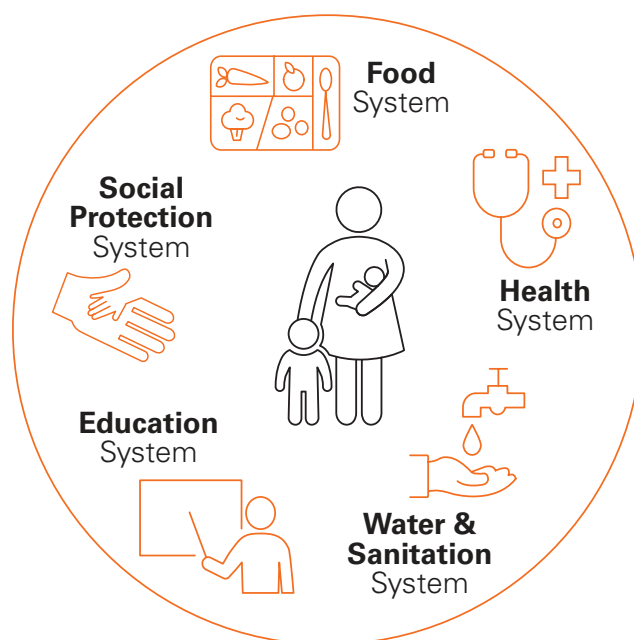
A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO NUTRITION

To support our goal and objectives, the Strategy calls for a systems approach to nutrition. This approach aims to activate the five systems – **food, health, water and sanitation, education, and social protection** – with the greatest potential to deliver nutritious diets, essential nutrition services and positive nutrition practices for children, adolescents and women. We aim to make these five systems better equipped and more accountable for maternal and child nutrition. For each system, our Strategy identifies the result that we intend to achieve and our priority areas of engagement.

Working with the food system: UNICEF works with food systems to protect, promote and support diets, services and practices that prevent child malnutrition in all its forms. We prioritize five areas of engagement, advocacy and support: (1) adequate foods and diets for children in national guidelines and standards; (2) better foods and diets for children through actions in food supply chains; (3) healthy food environments for children through public sector policies; (4) healthy food environments where children live, learn, eat, play and meet; and (5) improved food and feeding practices for children.

Working with the health system: UNICEF works with health systems to protect, promote and support diets, services and practices that prevent and treat child malnutrition through primary health care. We prioritize five areas of engagement, advocacy and support: (1) essential services to prevent and treat malnutrition; (2) health workforce capacity to deliver essential nutrition services; (3) nutrition supplies for essential nutrition services; (4) information systems for maternal and child nutrition; and (5) financial resources for maternal and child nutrition in the health system.

Working with the water and sanitation system: UNICEF works with water and sanitation systems to protect, promote and support diets, services and practices that prevent child malnutrition in all its forms. We prioritize five areas of engagement, advocacy and support: (1) free, safe and palatable drinking water for healthy diets; (2) safe sanitation services and practices for good nutrition; (3) safe hygiene practices for good nutrition; (4) capacity of the water and sanitation workforce for nutrition; and (5) synergistic community-based programmes for nutrition, water and sanitation.



Improving maternal and child nutrition requires a systems approach

Working with the education system: UNICEF works with education systems to protect, promote and support diets, services and practices that prevent malnutrition in school-age children. We prioritize five areas of engagement, advocacy and support: (1) policies and programmes to improve nutrition through schools; (2) school curricula to improve nutrition literacy and promote physical activity; (3) provision of essential nutrition services through the school system; (4) healthy food environments in and around schools; and (5) financial resources for nutrition in the education system.

Working with the social protection system: UNICEF works with social protection systems to protect, promote and support diets, services and practices that prevent malnutrition among vulnerable children. We prioritize five areas of engagement, advocacy and support: (1) evidence on poverty, malnutrition and social protection; (2) public financing for maternal and child nutrition; (3) social policies for maternal and child nutrition; (4) nutrition-responsive social protection systems for children and women; and (5) shock-responsive social protection systems for maternal and child nutrition.

PARTNERSHIPS, PROGRAMMING AND PEOPLE

Strategic partnerships are core to UNICEF’s mandate and a critical lever for implementing the Strategy. They allow UNICEF to share responsibilities, optimize resources and maximize results. In countries, national and subnational governments are UNICEF’s main partners for implementing the Strategy as they have primary responsibility for the protection, promotion and fulfilment of children’s right to nutrition.

Besides governments, UNICEF convenes and supports multi-stakeholder partnerships – at national, regional and global levels – with civil society and non-governmental organizations, bilateral and multilateral partners, philanthropic foundations and donors, academic and research institutions, private sector and media to accelerate progress towards the nutrition targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

UNICEF is a key partner in the *Scaling Up Nutrition Movement (SUN)* – a global effort uniting governments, civil society partners, United Nations agencies, development partners and donors, private sector and businesses to support country-led efforts to end malnutrition. Sixty-one countries and four Indian states have joined the *SUN Movement* as of 2020. The *SUN Movement* is guided by its 2021–2025 Strategy and UNICEF’s Executive Director chairs the SUN Lead Group.

In humanitarian settings, UNICEF is designated as lead agency of the *Global Nutrition Cluster (GNC)*, which comprises more than 45 partners and 10 observers. The GNC aims to safeguard and improve the nutritional status of emergency-affected populations by ensuring a coordinated response that is predictable, timely, effective and at scale.



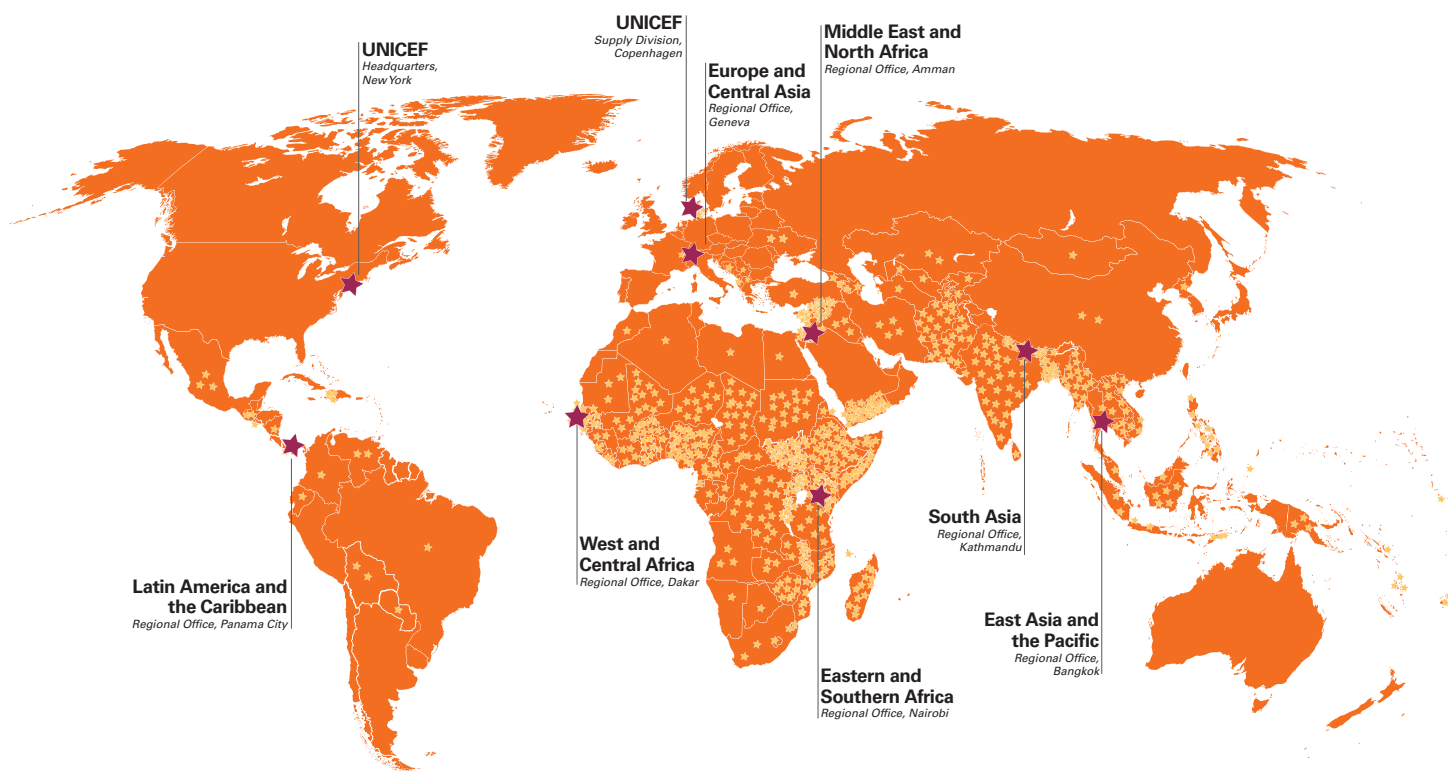
Programming approaches to improve maternal and child nutrition

Working with partners UNICEF uses a strategic mix of 10 inter-related programming approaches. We prioritize and tailor these approaches as appropriate to the programming context, in consultation with governments and partners, and considering the needs, resources and partnerships available.

To deliver on the Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030, UNICEF counts the largest nutrition workforce globally. In 2019, our workforce for nutrition included 640 staff members and more than 1,500 consultants leading and supporting the design and implementation of advocacy, policies, and programmes for maternal and child nutrition in development and humanitarian settings, in 130 countries across 7 regions worldwide.

Further, more than 3,600 UNICEF staff lead and support the design and implementation of policies and programmes for health, education, water and sanitation, child protection and social policy. UNICEF’s multisectoral mandate for children, wide on-the-ground presence, and role as a trusted adviser to national governments position UNICEF to mobilize national, regional and global partners to tackle the challenge of child malnutrition.

UNICEF will continue to increase its institutional commitment to maternal and child nutrition guided by our Strategy 2020–2030. Together with our partners, we will contribute to increasing financing for nutrition, including by working closely with national governments to secure the domestic resources needed to fulfill children’s right to nutrition.



UNICEF’s global nutrition workforce, 2020

STRATEGIC SHIFTS

The Strategy builds on UNICEF's past strategic guidance and programme experience while embracing six strategic shifts to respond to the evolving face of child malnutrition and support national governments and partners in upholding children's right to nutrition:

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. The Strategy aims to contribute to addressing the triple burden of child malnutrition – undernutrition, both stunting and wasting; deficiencies in vitamins and other micronutrients; and overweight and obesity – and is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls for an end to malnutrition in all its forms.

A comprehensive life cycle approach to nutrition programming. Maternal and child nutrition during the first 1,000 days – from conception to age 2 years – remains core to UNICEF programmes in both development and humanitarian contexts. In addition, the Strategy calls for an increased focus on nutrition in middle childhood and adolescence – a window of nutrition opportunity for girls and boys and a chance to break the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition.

A deliberate emphasis on improving diets, services and practices. The goal of the Strategy is to protect and promote diets, services and practices that support optimal nutrition, growth and development. Acknowledging the triple burden of malnutrition, it highlights 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.

A systems approach to maternal and child nutrition. The Strategy calls for UNICEF programmes 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 is positioned to support a systems approach to nutrition that drives sustainable results.

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. However, the private sector has a key role to play. The Strategy calls for UNICEF programmes to engage strategically with public and private sector actors to advocate for diets, services and practices that support good nutrition for all children.

A universal vision and agenda relevant to all countries. Children's right to nutrition is universal and so is the UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030. Operationally, the Strategy is particularly relevant to low- and middle-income countries, where UNICEF programmes are larger and the triple burden of child malnutrition is greatest. However, with the increasing burden of child overweight globally, UNICEF is strengthening its work in high-income countries through its country offices and national committees to advocate for policies and programmes that protect every child's right to nutrition.





WAY FORWARD

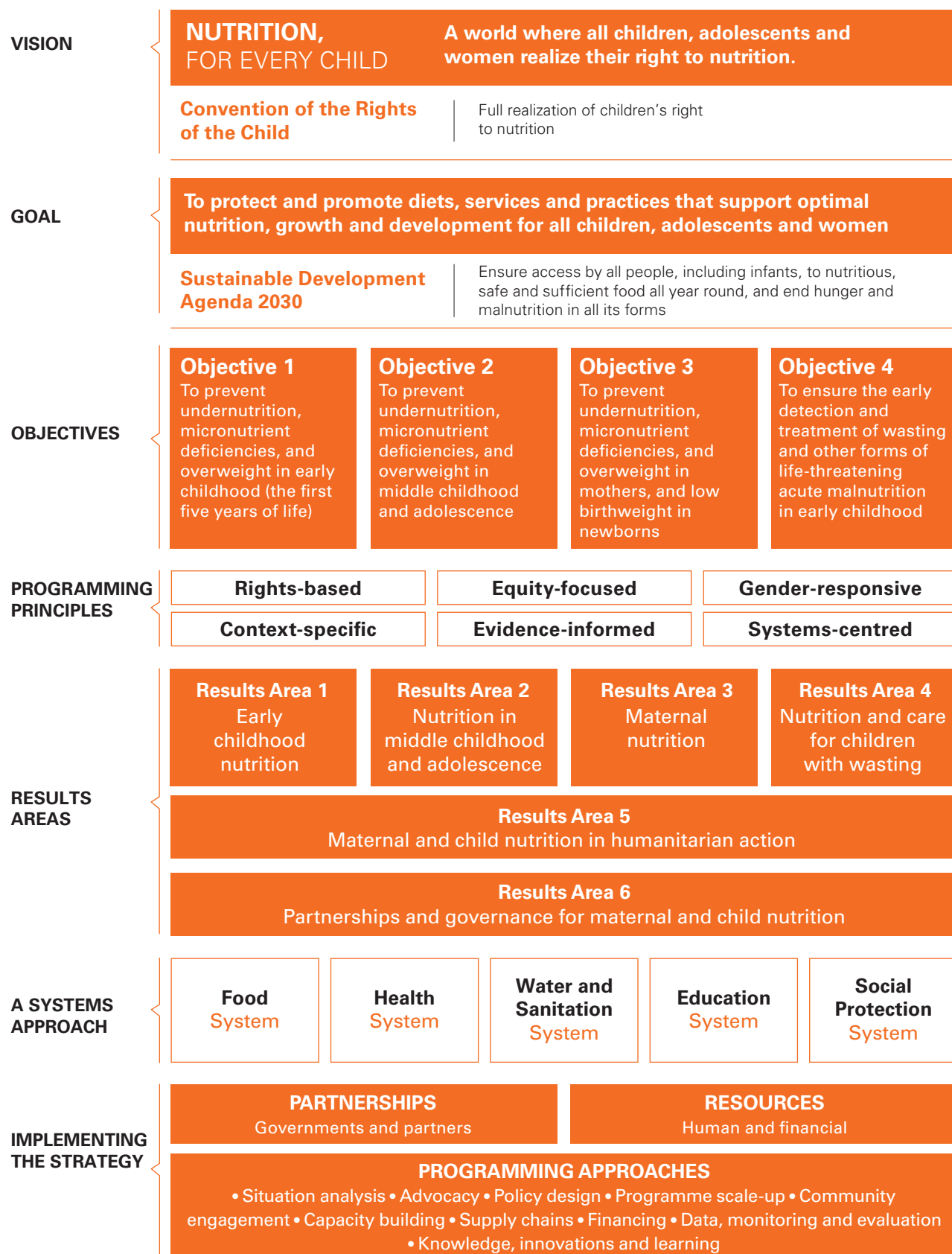
In 2020, the nutrition situation of the world's children is characterized by a significant decline in the number of children who are undernourished, indicating that positive change for child nutrition is happening at scale. Yet, this decline remains insufficient to achieve the global targets to address the triple burden of child malnutrition: undernutrition, both stunting and wasting; micronutrient deficiencies; and overweight and obesity.

National governments have primary responsibility for upholding children's right to nutrition. We never lose sight of this foundational principle. Yet, the path to nutritious diets, essential nutrition services and positive nutrition practices for all

children, adolescents and women demands a shared purpose, with commitments and investments required from a range of government, societal, public and private partners.

Guided by the goal and programmatic priorities outlined in the UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030, we have an important opportunity to contribute to ending child malnutrition across countries and regions over the final decade towards 2030. UNICEF stands ready to support national governments and their partners in upholding the right to nutrition for every child and securing a more just and equitable future for children and their families – today, and on the path to 2030.

UNICEF Nutrition Strategy Framework 2020–2030



© United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

December 2020

Permission is required to reproduce any part of this publication. Permissions will be freely granted to educational or non-profit organizations.

Published by:
UNICEF
Nutrition Section, Programme Division
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA

Email: nutrition@unicef.org
Website: www.unicef.org

Photography credits: Cover: © UNICEF/Eric Pasqualli; page 2: © UNICEF/
Giacomo Pirozzi; page 8: © UNICEF/UN0343201/Pazos; page 13: © UNICEF/
Giacomo Pirozzi; page 14: © UNICEF/Giacomo Pirozzi

unicef  | for every child