



Undernutrition is preventable, unacceptable, and ending it is our responsibility

Nutrition is central to the 2030 Agenda. While target 2.2 calls for an end to all forms of undernutrition, good nutrition lays the foundation for achieving the SDGs. Improvements in nutrition directly support the achievement of ensuring healthy lives (SDG3), while also playing a role in ending poverty (SDG1), ensuring quality education (SDG4), achieving gender equality (SDG5), promoting economic growth (SDG8), and reducing inequalities (SDG10). This is because good nutrition allows children to survive, grow, develop, learn, play, participate and contribute. Yet, undernutrition explains around 45% of deaths among children under five, mainly in low and middle-income countries. In addition to the human tragedy, this costs the global economy billions of dollars in lost productivity and health care costs. These losses are almost entirely preventable.

CHALLENGES

- **Undernutrition** manifests itself through wasting, stunting, and micronutrient deficiencies. **STUNTING** is the devastating result of poor nutrition in-utero and early childhood. Children suffering from stunting may never attain their full possible height and their brains may never develop to their full cognitive potential. These children face learning difficulties in school, earn less as adults, and face barriers to participation in their communities. **WASTING** in children is the life-threatening result of poor nutrient intake and/or disease. It is a condition where a child's weight is too low for his/her height, and his/her body wastes away. This leads to weakened immunity, and susceptibility to long-term developmental effects, and increased risk of death.
- Poor nutrition weakens children's immune systems and renders them more vulnerable to common diseases. Hence children get stuck in a cycle of undernutrition and infection. **Preventing undernutrition involves:** adequate maternal nutrition before and during pregnancy and lactation; optimal breastfeeding in the first two years of a child's life (the first 1,000 days); nutritious, diverse and safe foods through childhood and adolescence; a healthy environment, including access to basic health, water, hygiene and sanitation services, opportunities for safe physical activity, and gender equality.
- Currently, investments in nutrition are minimal compared to the scale of the problem. **Governments currently spend \$2.9 billion (just 1% of their health budgets)** and donors provide just under \$1 billion annually to address stunting reduction, wasting, anemia, and exclusive breastfeeding. **Nutrition-specific spending accounts for less than 0.5% of Official Development Assistance (ODA)**

Each year around **45%** of deaths among **children under 5 years** of age are linked to undernutrition.



In 2017, **stunting affected 150.8 million (22.2%) children under 5**, globally and continues into adolescence. **Wasting** continued to threaten the lives of an estimated **50.5 million (7.5 %) children under 5**. This is costing the global economy an average **GDP loss of 10% every year**.

FACTS

Investing in nutrition interventions is highly cost-effective and impactful:

every \$1 invested in nutrition generates a return of at least \$16, and up to \$35 for breastfeeding interventions.



CASE STUDY

World Vision Ireland supports a health programme aiming to reduce under-5 mortality. The programme is implemented in **Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Mauritania, countries where the effects of climate change are impacting the communities** with prolonged droughts and unpredictable rainfall. Families are less able to feed their children. Striving to support families to produce a wider variety of foods and provide their children with proper nutrition, the organisation trains Community Health Workers to provide nutrition counselling to pregnant women and families to improve their dietary intake; supports community groups, such as Mother Support Groups, with skills and knowledge to develop backyard gardens and grow a variety of drought-resistant fruits and vegetables; encourages breastfeeding; organises cooking demonstrations. Globally, over the last five years, 89% of the more than 250,000 severely malnourished children treated through World Vision's nutrition programmes made a full recovery.

Yet, undernutrition is a reality even in Europe. A comprehensive study run by World Vision Romania on the well-being of children in Romanian rural areas showed that in 2018, in this EU Member State, 1 out of 11 children goes hungry to bed at night. Over 95% of the respondents declared that their money is not enough to buy the bare necessities, forcing parents to buy cheaper (71%) or less (61%) food.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Accelerating progress against undernutrition will require **financial investment and political commitment** towards ending it for good. The EU and its Member States should:

- 1) continue to **play a strong leadership role at the global level** and act as a champion among donors, including by seizing the opportunity of the next **Nutrition4Growth Summit in Tokyo in 2020** to scale up commitments to ending all forms of undernutrition. According to the World Bank, reaching the targets to reduce stunting among children and anemia in women, increase exclusive breastfeeding rates, and mitigate the impact of wasting will require an **average annual investment of \$7 billion over the next 10 years**. This is in addition to the \$3.9 billion the world currently spends on nutrition annually;
- 2) **implement the humanitarian/development nexus** to close the humanitarian and development gap by investing in nutrition and enabling children with severe acute undernutrition to access treatment in all contexts, emergency and development alike. Funding cross-sectoral programmes and working with stakeholders from other sectors will be crucial to end all forms of undernutrition;
- 3) **expand gender-sensitive nutrition investments** that target a child's first 1,000 days into adolescence through a life-cycle perspective;
- 4) **invest in increasingly responsible food system** development for nutrition, livelihood and environmental outcomes, also holding European food companies accountable for this progression.

WHO WE ARE

We are 25 NGOs from across Europe working on social issues, supporting farmers, stopping climate change, protecting the environment, defending women's rights, young people, & gender equality, supporting fair trade, development, global justice, & workers' rights.
makeeuropesustainableforall.org



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