LEVELS AND TRENDS IN CHILD MALNUTRITION

UNICEF / WHO / World Bank Group
Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates

Key findings of the 2016 edition

156 MILLION
Stunting rates are dropping but 156 million children under 5 around the world were still affected in 2015.

42 MILLION
There were 42 million overweight children in the world in 2015 – an increase of about 11 million over the past 15 years.

50 MILLION
In 2015, wasting continued to threaten the lives of 50 million children under 5 globally.

In September 2016, UNICEF, WHO and World Bank Group released joint child malnutrition estimates for the 1990–2015 period, representing the most recent global and regional figures. This key findings report summarizes the new numbers and main messages. Additional materials, including (i) the latest country-level joint malnutrition dataset; and (ii) interactive dashboards, which allow users to visualize and export the global and regional estimates, are available at the following websites:

**UNICEF**
<uni.cf/jmedashboard>

**WHO**
<www.who.int/nutgrowthdb/estimates>

**World Bank Group**
<data.worldbank.org/child-malnutrition>

### Forms of malnutrition* highlighted in this key findings report

- **Stunting** refers to a child who is too short for his or her age. Stunting is the failure to grow both physically and cognitively and is the result of chronic or recurrent malnutrition. The devastating effects of stunting can last a lifetime.

- **Overweight** refers to a child who is too heavy for his or her height. This form of malnutrition results from expending too few calories for the amount of food consumed and increases the risk of noncommunicable diseases later in life.

- **Wasting** refers to a child who is too thin for his or her height. Wasting, or acute malnutrition, is the result of recent rapid weight loss or the failure to gain weight. A child who is moderately or severely wasted has an increased risk of death, but treatment is possible.

*Some children suffer from more than one form of malnutrition – such as stunting and overweight or stunting and wasting. There are currently no joint estimates for these combined conditions.*

### Strengths and weaknesses of malnutrition data

- **Prevalence estimates for stunting and overweight are relatively robust.** It is therefore possible to track global and regional changes in these two conditions over time.

- **Wasting and severe wasting are acute conditions that can change frequently and rapidly.** This makes it difficult to generate reliable trends over time, and as such, this report provides only most recent (2015) global and regional estimates.

- The global and regional estimates presented here are based on data from national household surveys. These data are collected infrequently and measure malnutrition at one point in time (e.g. during several months of field work), making it difficult to capture the rapid fluctuations in wasting that can occur over the course of a given year. Incidence data (i.e. the number of new cases that occur during the calendar year) would allow for better tracking of changes over time; however, these data currently do not exist.
Global overview

Malnutrition rates remain alarming: stunting is declining too slowly while overweight continues to rise


Africa and Asia bear the greatest share of all forms of malnutrition

In 2015, more than half of all stunted children under 5 lived in Asia and more than one third lived in Africa.

In 2015, almost half of all overweight children under 5 lived in Asia and one quarter lived in Africa.

In 2015, more than two thirds of all wasted children under 5 lived in Asia and more than one quarter lived in Africa.
Regional overview: prevalence

Two out of four regions have experienced slow progress for stunting reductions

Percentage of stunted, overweight and wasted children under 5, by United Nations region, 2000 – 2015

Africa has made only limited progress on stunting since 2000 compared with other regions

Progress for stunting within Asia have been uneven since 2000

More data are needed to generate reliable estimates for Oceania

Progress in Latin America and Caribbean is aligned with global goals

Africa has made only limited progress on stunting since 2000 compared with other regions.

- Africa: -17%
- Asia: -36%
- LAC: -39%

Both Asia and Latin America and Caribbean have cut stunting rates by over one third since 2000 while Africa saw a reduction of only one sixth during the same period.

Progress for stunting within Asia have been uneven since 2000.

- Southern Asia: -30%
- Eastern Asia: -69%

Stunting rates in Eastern Asia have dropped by more than two thirds since 2000, compared with Southern Asia, where stunting declined by less than one third during the same period.

More data are needed to generate reliable estimates for Oceania.

Based on available data, stunting rates in Oceania have been stagnant for the past 15 years, while rates of overweight have nearly doubled. However, confidence intervals are very large.

Progress in Latin America and Caribbean is aligned with global goals.

Improvements in malnutrition in the region are encouraging. Continued vigilance will be needed to maintain success and avoid an increase in child overweight.
Five sub-regions have stunting rates that exceed 30 per cent

In three sub-regions more than 10 per cent of children under 5 are overweight

The wasting rate in Southern Asia is approaching a critical public health emergency

Note: *Eastern Asia excluding Japan; **Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand, *** Australia and New Zealand, regional average based on Australian data, ****Northern America regional average based on United States data. These maps are stylized and not to scale and do not reflect a position by UNICEF, WHO or World Bank Group on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.
Regional overview: numbers affected

In Africa, the number of stunted children is rising
Number of stunted children under 5, by United Nations region, 2000 and 2015

Western Africa accounts for half of the stunting increase in Africa; there were 4 million more stunted children in Western Africa in 2015 than in 2000

The number of overweight children is on the rise in Africa and Asia
Number of overweight children under 5, by United Nations region, 2000 and 2015

The number of overweight children under 5 in Africa has increased by more than 50 per cent since 2000

The majority of children under 5 suffering from wasting and severe wasting live in Asia
Number of wasted and severely wasted children under 5, by United Nations region, 2015

33.9 million children under 5 in Asia are wasted, of which 11.9 million are severely wasted
In Africa, 14.1 million children under 5 are wasted, of which 4.3 million are severely wasted

Country income groupings overview

Upper-middle-income countries have more than halved their stunting rates since 2000

Percentage of stunted, overweight and wasted children under 5, by country income classification, 2000 – 2015

Low-income countries are the only group with more stunted children today than 15 years ago

Number of stunted children under 5, by country income classification, 2000 and 2015

The number of overweight children has increased most rapidly in lower-middle-income countries

Number of overweight children under 5, by country income classification, 2000 and 2015

While less than half of all children under 5 live in lower-middle-income countries, two thirds of all stunted children live there

Share of under-5 population, by country income grouping, 2015

Share of stunted children under 5 in 2015

66% of all stunted children live in upper-middle-income countries

24% of all stunted children live in lower-middle-income countries

9% of all stunted children live in upper-middle-income countries

1% of all stunted children live in high-income countries


* High-income countries: low (<50 per cent) population coverage in all time periods. Note: At the time of printing Argentina was not classified by the World Bank’s income classification and was therefore not included in the estimates for any income group.