Levels and trends in child malnutrition
UNICEF – WHO – World Bank Group joint child malnutrition estimates
Key findings of the 2015 edition

The ultimate goal: for all children to be free of malnutrition in all its forms.

- Stunting rates are dropping but 159 million children around the world are still affected.
- There are 41 million overweight children in the world; about 10 million more than there were 2 decades ago.
- Wasting still threatens the lives of 50 million children across the globe.

Global overview

Stunting

The global trend in stunting prevalence and numbers of children affected is decreasing...

...but not fast enough.

Overweight

The global trend in overweight prevalence and numbers of children affected is rising.

Overweight prevalence has gone up slightly between 1990 and 2014, from 4.8 per cent to 6.1 per cent...

Wasting

In 2014, the global wasting rate was 7.5 per cent.

Approximately 1 out of every 13 children in the world was wasted in 2014.

Nearly a third of all wasted children were severely wasted, with a global prevalence in 2014 of 2.4 per cent.

In 2014, there were 667 million children under 5 in the world. An estimated:

- 159 million were stunted
- 41 million were overweight
- 50 million were wasted

Globally, 50 million children under 5 were wasted, of which 16 million were severely wasted in 2014.

Notes on the updated joint malnutrition estimates

In September 2015, UNICEF, WHO and World Bank Group released updated joint child malnutrition estimates for the 1990 to 2014 period, which represent the most recent global and regional figures after adding 62 new surveys from 57 countries to the joint dataset. This key findings report summarizes the new numbers, main messages and identifies some minor changes in methodology.

Additional materials include:
(i) the latest country-level joint malnutrition dataset; and, (ii) interactive dashboards, which allow users to visualize and export the global and regional estimates.

UNICEF
<uni.cf/jmedashboard2015>

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

World Bank Group
<data.worldbank.org/child-malnutrition>
Regional overview – prevalence

**Africa has seen slow progress in reducing stunting**

Percentage of children under 5 stunted and percentage of children under 5 overweight, by United Nations region, 1990 – 2014

---

Unequal progress in stunting reduction since 1990

While Asia as a whole has cut stunting by almost half...

---

In 2014, one subregion was above the public health emergency line for wasting

Percentage of children under 5 wasted, by United Nations subregion, 2014

---

Forms of malnutrition* highlighted in this key findings report

*Stunting* refers to a child who is too short for his/her age. Stunting is the failure to grow both physically and cognitively and is the result of chronic or recurrent malnutrition. Its effects often last a lifetime.

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

*Wasting* refers to a child who is too thin for his/her height. Wasting is the result of sudden or acute malnutrition, where the child is not getting enough calories from food and faces an immediate risk of death.

---

*Note it is possible for a child to show combinations of malnutrition, such as be stunted and overweight or stunted and wasted.*
Regional overview – numbers affected

**In Africa, the number of stunted children is rising**

Number of children under 5 stunted, by United Nations region, 1990 and 2014

- **Asia**: 190 M in 1990, 201 M in 2014 (12% increase)
- **Africa**: 47 M in 1990, 58 M in 2014 (23% increase)
- **Latin America and Caribbean**: 14 M in 1990, 6 M in 2014 (-57% decrease)
- **Oceania**: 0.3 M in 1990, 0.5 M in 2014 (57% increase)

In 2014, more than half of all stunted children under 5 lived in Asia and more than one third lived in Africa.

**The number of overweight children is on the rise in all regions**

Number of children under 5 overweight, by United Nations region, 1990 and 2014

- **Asia**: 16.0 M in 1990, 16.6 M in 2014 (4% increase)
- **Africa**: 5.4 M in 1990, 10.3 M in 2014 (91% increase)
- **Latin America and Caribbean**: 3.7 M in 1990, 3.9 M in 2014 (5% increase)
- **Oceania**: 0.03 M in 1990, 0.12 M in 2014 (near 3x increase)

In 2014, almost half of all overweight children under 5 lived in Asia and one quarter lived in Africa.

The majority of children under 5 suffering from wasting live in Asia

(each child silhouette represents 1 million children)

- **Asia**: 34.3 M
- **Africa**: 13.9 M
- **Latin America and Caribbean**: 0.7 M
- **Oceania**: 0.1 M

**Southern Asia** is home to more than half of all wasted children under 5 globally.

In 2014, more than half of all stunted children under 5 lived in Asia and more than one third lived in Africa.

Three out of five sub-regions in Africa, Eastern Africa, Middle Africa and Western Africa, have rising numbers of stunted children under 5.

**The number of overweight children under 5 in Africa has nearly doubled since 1990.**

Strengths and weaknesses of malnutrition data

- **Prevalence estimates for stunting and overweight are relatively robust.** Hence it is possible to generate reliable time trends.
- **Trends are not informative for wasting and severe wasting given that these are acute conditions, which can change rapidly.** Thus only 2014 global and regional estimates are presented.
- **The underlying data for global and regional estimates are from country-level household surveys.** Such country data are collected infrequently and measure malnutrition at one point in time. This makes it difficult to capture the rapid fluctuations of wasting and severe wasting over time. For programme purposes, incidence data (i.e., the number of new cases that occur during an entire calendar year) would be ideal, however, these currently do not exist.
Country income groupings overview

Low-income countries have made the least progress towards stunting reductions since 1990

Percentage of children under 5 stunted and percentage of children under 5 overweight, by country income classification, 1990 – 2014

Low-income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Stunted</th>
<th>Overweight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lower-middle-income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Stunted</th>
<th>Overweight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>54.6%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upper-middle-income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Stunted</th>
<th>Overweight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unequal progress in stunting reduction since 1990

Only a 32% decrease in low-income countries...

...and a 77% decrease in upper-middle-income countries.

Overweight numbers have doubled in lower-middle-income countries since 1990

The number of overweight children in lower-middle-income countries has more than doubled since 1990, from 7.5 million to 15.5 million.

Low-income and lower-middle-income countries now account for almost all stunted children worldwide

The share of all stunted children that live in low-income and lower-middle-income countries has shifted from 7 in 10 to 9 in 10 between 1990 and 2014.

Lower-income countries bear a disproportionate share of stunted children relative to the total population distribution

Less than half of all children under 5 lived in lower-middle-income countries in 2014, yet these countries accounted for two thirds of all stunted children globally.

Low-income countries only accounted for 15 per cent of the global under-5 population in 2014, but nearly one quarter of all stunted children live in these countries.

In 2014, one quarter of all children under 5 lived in upper-middle-income countries, yet these countries only accounted for 8 per cent of all stunted children globally.

Share of under-5 population in 2014

47% 26% 15%

Share of stunted children under 5 in 2014

66% 24% 8%

Note: the numbers do not add up to 100 per cent; the residual is for high-income countries.
Notes on methodology

The analysis methods have remained unchanged from the 2012 report, except for some minor refinements detailed below:

1. **Year assigned to each survey**
   When data collection begins in one calendar year and continues into the next, the survey year assigned is the one in which most of the fieldwork took place. For example, if a survey was conducted between 1 September 2009 and 28 February 2010, the year 2009 would be assigned, since the majority of data collection took place in that year (i.e., four months in 2009 versus two months in 2010). This method has been used since the 2013 edition (prior to that, the latter year was used by default – e.g., 2010 in the example above).

2. **Final reports only**
   As of the 2014 edition, the dataset used to generate the global and regional estimates is based only on final survey results. Preliminary survey results are no longer included in the dataset due to situations where they had been cancelled or significantly changed before release.

3. **Updated data sources**
   i. The updated joint dataset which includes:
      - 778 national surveys (62 new)
      - data from 150 countries and territories (representing more than 90 per cent of all children under 5 globally (population coverage varies by regions and periods)).
   
   ii. The under 5 population estimates
      The United Nations World Population Prospects, 2015 Revision, were used as weighting factors for each country survey to derive the regional and global prevalence estimates and calculate the numbers affected.

iii. Regional and country income classifications as per July 2015
   - countries with data
   - countries without data

4. **Footnotes on population coverage**
   As in the 2014 edition, a separate exercise was conducted to assess population coverage. This was important in order to alert the reader, via footnotes, to instances where the data should be interpreted with caution due to low population coverage (defined as less than 50 per cent). A conservative method was applied looking at available data within mutually exclusive five-year periods around the projected years. Population coverage was calculated as:
   
   \[
   \text{Population Coverage} = \frac{\text{the sum of country five-year average populations (for which surveys are available in the dataset)}}{\text{the total of country five-year average population for all countries in the region}}
   \]