

## The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2023

This is a summary of the following report: *FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2023) The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023. Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural–urban continuum. Rome, FAO.*

<https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3017en>



This densely packed, 316-page report provides a comprehensive breakdown of the food security landscape and subsequent nutrition indicators both globally and by region. We encourage readers to download and view elements of the report that are specific to their own work. A detailed summary of the findings is beyond the scope of this article; instead, the key messages are outlined (Box 1).

A central theme of the 2023 report is urbanisation. The report highlights the urban–rural divide that exists across stunting, wasting, and overweight globally<sup>1</sup> – with stunting and wasting disproportionately affecting rural populations and overweight impacting urban communities. This is true for all regions, although the effect is less pronounced for wasting in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the urban–rural divide is present but not significant.

By 2050, 70% of the global population are projected to reside in cities. Food systems require reorientation to cater to these new challenges and leverage opportunities to eradicate hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition.

*“As urbanisation increases, rural and urban areas are becoming more intertwined, and the spatial distinction between them is becoming more fluid.”*

Another key theme is the context in which this report arrives – with global food security facing the stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic, including its subsequent economic fallout, and the war in Ukraine, with its trickle-down effects

<sup>1</sup> Global data are only provided for Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean for these high-level indicators, with Europe, Oceania, and Northern America omitted. A more detailed breakdown of these trends can be found in the article below.

on food and energy affordability. These stressors exacerbate existing conflict, climate extremes, economic slowdowns and downturns, and growing inequality. These factors have all been highlighted in previous reports but are set to continue and, in some cases, intensify.

Estimates indicate that hunger is no longer on the rise but is still far above pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels and far off track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger).

### Box 1 Key findings

**Global hunger levels** stalled between 2021 and 2022, yet many places in the world face deepening food crises.

**Access to nutritious, safe, and sufficient food** remains an issue for roughly 2.4 billion individuals, particularly women and rural residents.

**Child malnutrition** remains high around the world – 22.3% of children are stunted, 6.8% are wasted, and 5.6% are overweight.

**Urbanisation** is accelerating and driving increased consumption of processed and convenience foods, leading to a spike in overweight and obesity rates.

**Rural dependence on global markets** is another concern, as previously self-sustaining rural regions are now increasingly reliant on broader markets for access to nutrients.



## 2023 Joint Malnutrition Estimates

This is a summary of the following report: *UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank (2023) Levels and trends in child malnutrition.*

[https://data.unicef.org/resources/jme-report-2023/?utm\\_id=JME-2023](https://data.unicef.org/resources/jme-report-2023/?utm_id=JME-2023)

Every two years, joint estimates for child malnutrition (aged under five years) are updated to provide a more accurate picture of the magnitude of child malnutrition globally. The headline figures for 2023 – 148 million stunted, 45 million wasted, and 37 million overweight – indicate that not enough progress has been made on the global level.

Just one-third of countries are projected to halve the number of stunted children – as per the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals – and only one in every six countries is on track to meet the 3% prevalence of overweight targets. Globally, wasting prevalence is at 6.8%, which has changed little since 2000 (8.7%). Stunting progress has been more promising, with a 10.7% reduction in the same timeframe (down from 33.0% to 22.3%). However, stunting progress is tailing off, so efforts are needed to accelerate progress. Since 2000, overweight prevalence has steadily increased year on year.

Almost all stunted children reside in Asia (52%) and Africa (43%), although some countries in South and Central America and Oceania have

‘high’ or ‘very high’ prevalence. Although many regions are off track based on 2012–2022 trends, most are still making progress. Nonetheless, stunting prevalence is worsening in Melanesia (+3.1%) and has largely stalled in Middle Africa (-0.5%) and Southern Africa (-0.6%). Significant progress has been made in Southern Asia (-9.8%) and Eastern Africa (-8%) in particular, but stunting prevalence remains unacceptably

high (30.5% and 30.6%, respectively). This highlights that stunting rates can improve given the right policies, but that more effort is required.

Wasting prevalence varies widely within regions, but Asia and Africa are the continents with the most numerous ‘high’ prevalence countries (>10%). Around 32 million and 12 million wasted children reside in Asia and Africa, respectively, with Latin America and the Caribbean and Oceania (around 1 million) making up most of the rest. A total of 25.1 million wasted children live in Southern Asia – far exceeding any other region.

*“Only 25% of children under five live in Southern Asia, but this sub-region is home to more than half of all children with wasting.”*

By contrast, the prevalence of overweight children has declined in low-income countries (-1.7%), remained stable in lower-middle-income countries (+0.3%), and increased in upper-middle- (+1.6%) and high-income countries (+1.6%) since 2000. Australia and New Zealand (+6.9%) and Melanesia (+4.8%) showed the greatest increases in childhood overweight between 2012 and 2022.

There are data gaps in some regions that make it difficult to accurately assess progress toward global targets – particularly for wasting (Box 1). Yet current trends indicate that stunting reduction targets will be missed by some 39.6 million children. Over 80% of these ‘missed’ children are living in Africa.

### Box 1 Methodology

The key dissemination materials for the 2023 edition include global, regional, and country trends from 2000–2022 for stunting and overweight. For wasting and severe wasting, country estimates are based on available primary data sources (e.g., household surveys), while global trends are presented for 2000–2022 and the regional estimates show the latest estimates (2022). Country progress assessments toward the 20230 targets are aggregated into regional summaries and included.