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for every child

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2019

Children, food and nutrition

Growing well in a changing world

EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY



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GROWING WELL IN A CHANGING WORLD

At a time when one in three children under 5 is not getting the nutrition they need to grow well, *The State of the World's Children 2019* examines children's malnutrition today. Communities increasingly face a triple burden of malnutrition: despite declines, 149 million children aged under 5 still suffer from stunting and almost 50 million from wasting; 340 million children suffer from the hidden hunger of deficiencies of vitamins and minerals; and rates of overweight are rising rapidly.

In the 21st century, children's malnutrition must be understood against a backdrop of rapid change, including the growth of urban populations and the globalization of food systems, which is leading to increased availability of food high in calories but low in nutrients.

Malnutrition profoundly harms children's growth and development. Unless it is addressed, children and societies will struggle to reach their full potential. This challenge can be met only by addressing malnutrition at every stage of the child's life and by putting children's unique nutritional needs at the heart of food systems and the supporting systems of health, water and sanitation, education and social protection.



A child sells snacks to other children outside a clinic in Gaza City, State of Palestine. © UNICEF/UN068011/EI Baba

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Key Messages

At least 1 in 3 children under 5 is undernourished or overweight and 1 in 2 suffers from hidden hunger, undermining the capacity of millions of children to grow and develop to their full potential.

- Globally, at least 1 in 3 children under 5 is not growing well due to malnutrition in its more visible forms: stunting, wasting and overweight.
- Globally, at least 1 in 2 children under 5 suffers from hidden hunger due to deficiencies in vitamins and other essential nutrients.
- Undernutrition continues to exert a heavy toll. In 2018, almost 200 million children under 5 suffered from stunting or wasting while at least 340 million suffered from hidden hunger.
- Overweight and obesity continue to rise. From 2000–2016, the proportion of overweight children (5 to 19 years old) rose from 1 in 10 to almost 1 in 5.
- The number of stunted children has declined in all continents, except in Africa while the number of overweight children has increased in all continents, including in Africa.

The triple burden of malnutrition – undernutrition, hidden hunger and overweight – threatens the survival, growth and development of children, young people, economies and nations.

- Stunting – a clear sign that children in a country are not developing well – is both a symptom of past deprivation and a predictor of future poverty.
- Wasting can be lethal for children, particularly in its most severe forms. Contrary to common belief, most wasted children around the world live in Asia and not in emergency settings.
- Hidden hunger harms children and women. Iron deficiency reduces children's ability to learn and iron deficiency anaemia increases women's risk of death during or shortly after childbirth.
- Child overweight can lead to early onset of type-2 diabetes, stigmatization and depression, and is a strong predictor of adult obesity, with serious health and economic consequences.
- The greatest burden of all forms of malnutrition is shouldered by children and young people from the poorest and most marginalized communities, perpetuating poverty across generations.