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# AFRICA REGIONAL OVERVIEW OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

STATISTICS AND TRENDS

## SUMMARY

Africa is facing a food crisis of unprecedented proportions. Millions are expected to be at risk of worsening hunger in the near future due to the rippling effects of the war in Ukraine which are compounding the devastating impacts that conflicts, climate variability and extremes, economic slowdowns and downturns, and the COVID-19 pandemic are having on the most vulnerable. In this context, social and gender inequalities are also on the rise, with women and girls being among the most affected by these shocks.

Despite efforts made in several countries, the African continent is not on track to meet the food security and nutrition targets of Sustainable Development Goal 2 on Zero Hunger for 2030, and certainly the Malabo targets of ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2025. The most recent estimates show that nearly 282 million people in Africa (about 20 percent of the population) were undernourished in 2022, an increase of 57 million people since the COVID-19 pandemic

began. About 868 million people were moderately or severely food-insecure and more than one-third of them – 342 million people – were severely food-insecure.

Progress towards achieving the global nutrition targets by 2030 remains slow. In addition to hunger, millions of Africans suffer from widespread micronutrient deficiencies. Overweight and obesity are already significant public health concerns in many countries. Moreover, estimates show that in 2021 the majority of Africa's population – about 78 percent – were unable to afford a healthy diet, compared with 42 percent at the global level. The average cost of a healthy diet has been increasing over time, and was at 3.57 purchasing power parity (PPP) dollars per person per day in 2021 on the continent, which is much higher than the extreme poverty threshold of USD 2.15 per person per day. This means that not only the poor but also a large proportion of people defined as non-poor cannot afford a healthy diet. ■

# KEY MESSAGES

## 1 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 2.1: UNDERNOURISHMENT AND FOOD INSECURITY

- Africa is not on track to meet the food security and nutrition targets of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 – and the Malabo targets of ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2025. After a long period of improvement between 2000 and 2010, hunger has worsened substantially and most of this deterioration occurred between 2019 and 2022.
- In 2022, nearly 282 million people in Africa were undernourished, an increase of 57 million people since the COVID-19 pandemic.
- An estimated 868 million people were moderately or severely food-insecure in Africa in 2022 and more than one-third of them – 342 million people – were severely food-insecure. More than two-thirds of the population in Central Africa, Eastern Africa and Western Africa faced moderate or severe food insecurity, meaning they did not have access to adequate food.

## 2 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 2.2: MALNUTRITION

- In Africa, the prevalence of stunting among children under five years of age was 30 percent in 2022, which is high despite the substantial improvement achieved during the past two decades.
- The prevalence of wasting in children in the region remained just below the global estimate of 6.8 percent in 2022 and was relatively high in all subregions except Southern Africa.
- The overall prevalence of overweight in children under five years of age in Africa was below the global estimate in 2022, although higher levels were observed in Northern Africa and Southern Africa. Since 2020, overweight levels have remained the same in most subregions.
- The prevalence of anaemia among adult women remains high in Africa, above the global estimate, and especially so in Western Africa and Central Africa.

## 3 ADDITIONAL WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY NUTRITION INDICATORS

- The prevalence of adult obesity in Africa in 2016 was very similar to the global estimate, relatively low in all subregions except for Northern Africa and Southern Africa, where the prevalence was about twice the global estimate.
- The prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding in Africa was very similar to the global estimate in 2021, and it is specifically high in Eastern Africa with considerable progress made in Central Africa and Western Africa since 2012.
- Despite modest progress in Africa in the reduction of the prevalence of low birthweight during the last two decades, the prevalence was still high on the continent in 2020 compared to the global estimate.

## 4 UPDATES TO THE COST AND AFFORDABILITY OF A HEALTHY DIET

- Diet quality is a critical link between food security and nutrition. Poor diet quality can lead to different forms of undernutrition, including micronutrient deficiencies, but also to overweight and obesity.
- In 2021, the average cost of a healthy diet in Africa was 3.57 purchasing power parity (PPP) dollars per person per day, an increase of 5.6 percent from its 2020 level.
- The cost of a healthy diet was much higher than the extreme poverty threshold of 2.15 PPP dollars per person per day, meaning that not only the poor but also a large proportion of people defined as non-poor could not afford a healthy diet.
- More than three-quarters of the population in Africa, approximately one billion people, were unable to afford a healthy diet in 2021, about 51 million more people since the COVID-19 pandemic. Western Africa and Eastern Africa had the largest cumulative increases between 2019 and 2021.
- The steady increase in the cost of a healthy diet in Africa and in all the subregions except Northern Africa is compromising food security and nutrition. The number of people unable to afford a healthy diet is on the rise.