

Child under-nutrition in developing countries

With 3.1 million child deaths each year in developing countries, under-nutrition is the single biggest contributor to mortality in under-fives. NGOs have pushed for the fight against child under-nutrition, and provision of universal access to adequate nutritious food, to remain one of the major targets of the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals' agenda for both the EU and the broader international community.

Under-nutrition is defined by the [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) of the United Nations (FAO) as 'the outcome of under-nourishment, and/or poor absorption and/or poor biological use of nutrients consumed as a result of repeated infectious disease'. It includes being underweight for one's age, too short for one's age (stunted), dangerously thin for one's height (wasted) and deficient in vitamins and minerals (micronutrient malnutrition). Under-nutrition is just one of the [global hunger problems](#) addressed by the World Food Programme (WFP); they also include under-nourishment or chronic hunger, malnutrition and [food insecurity](#). The European Commission considers child under-nutrition is often linked to household food insecurity and poverty, inadequate care and feeding practices, unhealthy household environments and inadequate health services.

Current situation

According to 2014 [WFP statistics](#), 805 million people in the world do not have enough food to lead a healthy active life; that is about one in nine people on earth. The vast majority of the world's starving people live in developing countries, where 13.5% of the population is under-nourished. Asia is the continent with most suffering from hunger: two-thirds of its total inhabitants. The percentage in southern Asia has fallen in recent years but in western Asia it has increased slightly. Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the highest prevalence of hunger (as a proportion of population). One person in four there is under-nourished. Poor nutrition causes nearly half (45%) of deaths in children under five, or 3.1 million children each year. One out of six children (roughly 100 million) in developing countries is underweight. One in four of the world's children are stunted, and in developing countries that proportion can rise to one in three. Across the developing world, 66 million primary school-age children attend classes hungry, with 23 million of them in Africa alone. [Unicef](#) underlines that the scope of **under-nutrition** goes beyond the crises we see in the headlines; stunting affects 165 million children under five years old, and traps people in a lifelong cycle of poor nutrition, illness, poverty and inequality. A [recent report by the World Bank](#) states that one reason for the slow gains in some of the UN [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs) was the chronic lack of investment in nutrition, which should therefore be addressed in the [Post-2015 Agenda](#). The [Generation Nutrition](#) global campaign believes that governments and international actors are increasingly recognising that good nutrition is a precursor to the achievement of a wide range of targets on development issues.

Possible solutions

The WFP calculates that €2.5 billion is needed per year to reach all 66 million school-age children in developing countries suffering from hunger. The WFP emphasises also that, if women farmers had the same access to resources as men, the number suffering from hunger in the world could be reduced by up to 150 million. A recent [policy brief](#) from the [International Food Policy Research Institute](#) highlights the need for a comprehensive strategy for resolving the problem, which must include concrete actions, improvements in national incomes and democracy, increased resources and political will to invest in health environments, women's education and status, and food availability. The [European Commission](#) believes that support to smallholder agriculture has the capacity to increase the access of both rural and urban poor to nutritious food and to impact positively on livelihoods. A motion for resolution, tabled for the November II plenary session, by Linda McAvan (S&D, United Kingdom) on behalf of the Committee on Development calls on all EU and international actors to mobilise long-term financial investments and innovative financing for nutrition, which should be one of the main challenges of the post-2015 MDG agenda.