

2023

Global Annual Results Report

NUTRITION, FOR EVERY CHILD



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for every child

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Cover image: © UNICEF/UNI610268/Dejongh. Laveille Kone, cuddling her 6-month-old baby Korotoum, in Tomba, Côte d'Ivoire.

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Parvati prepares and feeds complementary food for her daughter Vani in Dodka Village, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.

Overview: Global nutrition results in 2023

Malnutrition is a violation of children's rights and a roadblock to a future where every child survives and thrives. Increasing inequities, rising food prices, conflict and climate crises, and the overabundance of low-cost nutrient-poor foods, harmful food marketing and sub-optimal feeding practices are constraining children's access to the nutritious foods, essential nutrition services and nurturing care practices they need to grow, develop, learn and reach their full potential.

Despite the immense challenges, there has also been important progress to realize the right to nutrition for every child. Since 2000, the proportion of children under 5 years of age affected by stunting has fallen by one third and the number of children with stunted growth and development has declined by 55 million. This remarkable achievement proves that positive change for nutrition is possible and happening at scale across countries and regions – but more work needs to be done. About 200 million children under the age of 5 years still suffer from undernutrition (stunting or wasting), while 136 million children aged 5–10 years suffer from overweight and obesity. Child food poverty – the inability to access and consume a nutritious, diverse diet in early childhood – affects 181 million children under the age of 5 years in its most severe form, and remains the main driver of child malnutrition, increasing risks of mortality, poor growth and suboptimal development.

Notwithstanding these challenges, UNICEF – through its global thought leadership, strategic direction and technical support – has continued to lead global action to prevent child food poverty and reduce the triple burden of malnutrition in children and women, while protecting the significant nutrition gains achieved in the last three decades. UNICEF is also leading global efforts to ensure that all children receive early stimulation and nurturing care in early childhood, the life stage during which positive influences on children's physical, cognitive, emotional and social development have the greatest impact.

In 2023, guided by its Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030, UNICEF implemented nutrition programmes in 140 countries, including in development and humanitarian settings and in fragile contexts, across three results areas: (1) nutrition in early childhood, including early stimulation and care; (2) nutrition of school-age children, adolescents and women; and (3) early detection and treatment of malnutrition. These country-driven programmes reached hundreds of millions of children, adolescents and women with policies, programmes and services to prevent malnutrition and ensure early detection and treatment when prevention efforts fell short.

In the second year of its Strategic Plan, UNICEF achieved the following headline results:

- Nearly **434 million children** and caregivers were reached with policies, programmes, and services for the **prevention of malnutrition in early childhood**, exceeding the 2023 milestone of ≥ 300 million.
- Nearly **123 million school-age children and adolescents** were reached with gender-responsive policies, programmes, and services for the **prevention of all forms of malnutrition in schools and communities**, exceeding the Strategic Plan target of ≥ 85 million.
- More than **210 million children** under 5 were **screened for wasting** and more than **9.3 million children** globally were **admitted for treatment of wasting**, far exceeding the target of 6.5 million. This included treating 6 million children with severe wasting in the 15 countries hardest hit by the global food crisis.

Results: Nutrition in early childhood

Children are protected from malnutrition in early childhood – stunting and wasting, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight and obesity – in development and humanitarian contexts

UNICEF Child Nutrition and Development programmes prioritize the prevention of malnutrition in all its forms throughout the life cycle.

To prevent malnutrition in early childhood, UNICEF works with governments to protect, promote and support recommended breastfeeding practices from birth through the first two years of life; promote and support age-appropriate complementary foods and feeding practices in the first two years of life; promote and support the use of adequate foods and feeding practices for children aged 3–5 years; support the use of nutrient supplements where nutrient-poor diets and micronutrient deficiencies are common; and improve children’s food environments through evidence-based policy and legislation.

Figure 1. Strategic Plan Outcome Indicator 1.17

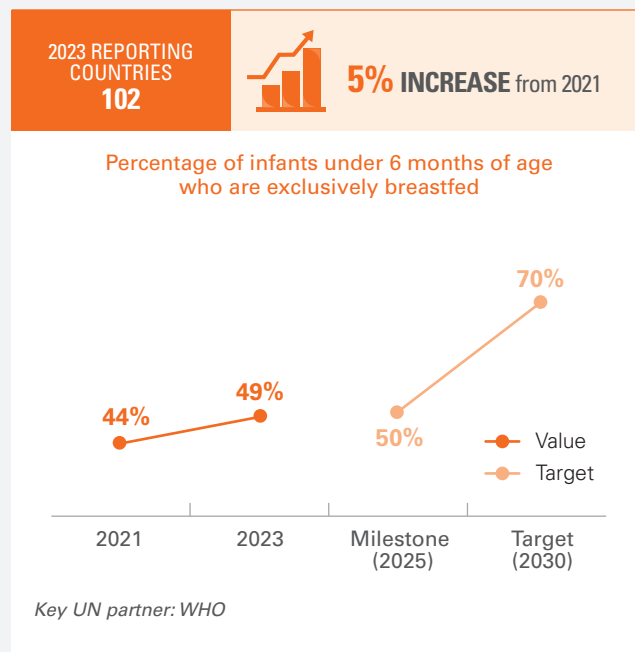


Figure 2. Strategic Plan Outcome Indicator 1.18

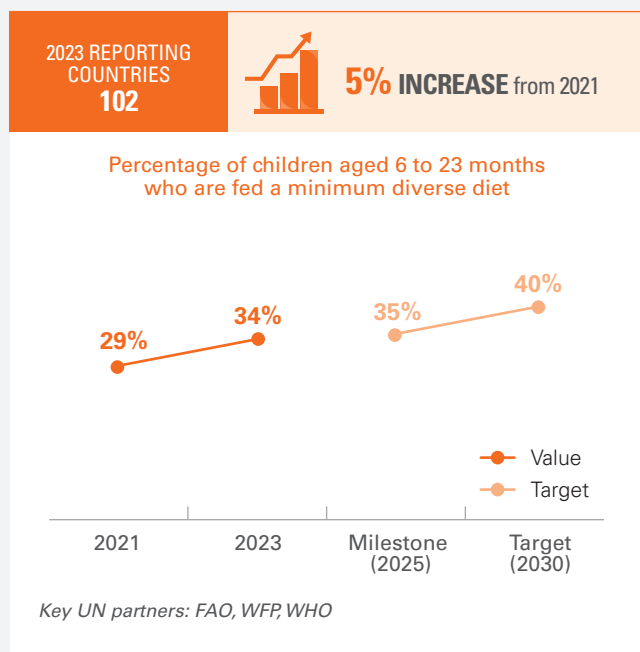
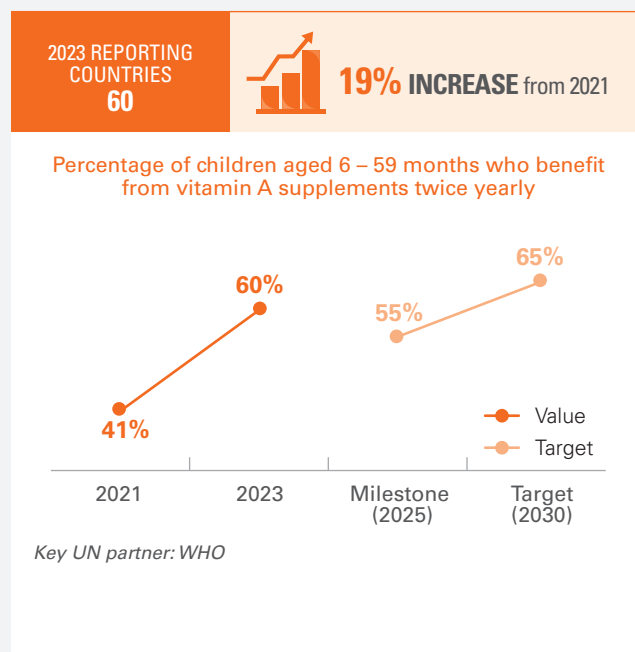


Figure 3. Strategic Plan Outcome Indicator 1.19





In the village of Pinalito, Chiquimula, Guatemala, Kimberly breastfeeds her two-month-old son, Mateo, accompanied by her three-year-old daughter, Emely, outside the Community Centre for Integrated Child Development (CECODII), where they explore, play and develop key skills that lay the foundation for healthy growth and development.

In the area of early child development, UNICEF works to support policies, programmes and practices that support parents and families in caring for their young children and themselves. These approaches are outlined in UNICEF's 'Vision 2030 for Early Childhood Development', which was released in 2023.

UNICEF's achievements in early childhood nutrition and development are supported by contributions from the Governments of Canada, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom, the United States, and other partners, including Nutrition International and the Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations unit (ECHO) of the European Commission.

Scaling up services for the prevention of all forms of malnutrition in early childhood

UNICEF tracks the number of children reached with essential services to prevent malnutrition in early childhood, including the protection and promotion of recommended breastfeeding practices; promotion and support of improved complementary foods and feeding practices; promotion and support of nutrient supplements, including vitamin A supplementation combined with deworming prophylaxis and home-based fortification with multiple nutrients; and programmes for the early prevention of overweight and obesity. In 2023, a record of nearly 434 million children and caregivers were reached with such services – a 30 per cent increase from 2021 and far surpassing the milestone of 300 million.¹

Counselling on infant and young child feeding, provided through health-care facilities and community platforms, equips mothers and other caregivers with the knowledge and skills to improve child feeding practices. In 2023, UNICEF supported infant feeding counselling for more caregivers than ever before, reaching 93.5 million globally, a 62 per cent increase from the 57.5 million reached in 2021. UNICEF efforts to protect, promote and support early childhood nutrition contributed to an increase in global rates of exclusive breastfeeding from 44.1 per cent at the start of the Strategic Plan to 48.8 per cent in 2023. This result indicates that the World Health Assembly target of 50 per cent by 2025 is within reach (see Figure 1).

With UNICEF support, for example, the Government of Kenya has invested in the scale-up of services and support to improve breastfeeding rates. In 2023, nearly 2.2 million caregivers received infant feeding counselling, well above the target of 1.8 million, with UNICEF playing a key role by supporting the training of nearly 600 health workers in IYCF counselling. UNICEF also supported another nine counties to develop and implement programmes and plans to improve the diversity of young children's diets. This progress was bolstered by UNICEF advocacy and policy support to develop Kenya's multisectoral, national, early childhood social and behaviour change strategy as well as the maternal, infant, and young child nutrition strategy for 2023–2030 and operational guideline. Together, these policy frameworks provide strategic direction and strengthen the enabling environment for early childhood nutrition in Kenya.



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In Tin Htet village, Myanmar, Daw Buu Shane feeds her daughter a nutritious meal cooked with ingredients grown in her backyard.

UNICEF is the main provider of vitamin A supplementation (VAS) globally and has supported governments worldwide to implement VAS programmes for nearly three decades. UNICEF ensured delivery of nearly 480 million vitamin A capsules to 71 countries, which helped to reach more than 320 million children with two doses of VAS in 2023, a 26 per cent increase from about 252 million children in 2021. In Sierra Leone, for example, UNICEF facilitated VAS for more than 1 million children aged 6–59 months and supported the training of more than 8,000 community workers to reach vulnerable children with life-saving VAS protection.

To increase VAS coverage and foster women's empowerment, UNICEF initiated the gender-transformative Vitamin A in a New Age (VINA) project in 15 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This project aims to overcome gender-related barriers to service delivery for VAS. It promotes coordination and integration with various sectors, including social protection and WASH, and parenting initiatives. The approach aims to improve access and use of services by women caregivers of children under age 5.

VINA also encourages the active participation of fathers in shared caregiving responsibilities and enhances the proficiency of health workers to address gender-related barriers and inequity in VAS delivery. As part of the project, countries developed novel indicators to track gender-transformative actions in child nutrition programmes.

Once learning has been generated, these indicators can be applied in other settings.

Improving the quality of children's foods and feeding practices

Young children need to eat a diverse range of nutritious foods to ensure healthy growth and development and prevent all forms of malnutrition. Yet, progress in improving the quality of children's first foods has remained stubbornly slow for more than a decade. Dietary deprivations, also known as child food poverty in early childhood, are a major factor jeopardizing progress towards SDG 2.

UNICEF is tackling this slow progress by supporting the scale-up of programmes to improve children's access to nutritious and diverse complementary foods. Seventy-four countries in 2023 implemented programmes to improve the quality of children's diets in early childhood, an increase from 63 countries at baseline.² Many of these programmes leveraged the food system to improve access to and availability of the nutrient-dense foods that children need to grow up healthy. These efforts have contributed to an increase in the proportion of children fed a quality, nutritious diet in early childhood, from 28.9 per cent at baseline in 2021 to 34.3 per cent in 2023 (see Figure 2).

In 2023, UNICEF continued to provide leadership to the global agenda for improving the quality of complementary foods and feeding practices. This included providing technical guidance for the roll-out of the newly updated [WHO guidelines on complementary feeding](#) at regional and country level.

Home-based fortification with multiple micronutrient powders (MNPs) is a core strategy for improving the nutrient quality of children's diets in settings where diets are poor and micronutrient deficiencies and anaemia are common. In 2023, UNICEF developed technical briefs on home fortification using small-quantity lipid nutrient supplements (SQLNS)³ and MNPs.⁴ An estimated 18 million children aged 6–59 months in 48 countries received MNPs to improve the quality of home-prepared foods, compared with 13.6 million children from 34 countries in 2021.

In 2023, UNICEF continued to roll out the [complementary feeding 'bowl and spoon' initiative](#), an innovation aimed at supporting caregivers in their feeding practices and improving the quality of young children's diets. Fifteen countries are implementing the bowl and spoon initiative as part of programmes to reduce stunting, with some countries also leveraging domestic resources from governments to improve the sustainability of the initiative. UNICEF is documenting the learnings and effect of this innovation on infant and young child feeding practices and child development outcomes.

Building an enabling policy and legislative environment for the prevention of malnutrition in early childhood

UNICEF supports countries to develop strong national strategies and plans for the prevention of malnutrition. The adoption of a national strategy signals government commitment and a strategy's effectiveness is measured by having key elements in place, such as a focus on evidence-based nutrition interventions, dedicated budgets, and an emphasis on coverage and service delivery provided at scale. Seventy-five countries in 2023 had a nutrition policy or strategy to prevent stunting, wasting and/or micronutrient deficiencies in children under age 5, up from 66 countries in 2021.⁵

In Nigeria, UNICEF supported the government to develop a gender- and disability-responsive Social Behaviour Change (SBC) Strategy for Nutrition (2023–2028), shaped by formative research. UNICEF led the development of two high-quality SBC products aiming to shift norms, bust myths, and promote recommended breastfeeding practices, reaching more than 6.3 million caregivers through a national social media campaign. This included a [breastfeeding video](#) with national influencers – which amassed more than 53 million views and 48 million engagements – to discourage the practice of giving water to babies during the first 6 months of life. The video was also translated into Sign Language.

In line with the [UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030](#) and as a key change strategy, UNICEF continued efforts to strengthen the systems responsible for ensuring children's access to nutritious diets, essential services and positive nutrition practices. This included prioritizing actions such as supporting national regulations to protect and promote children's access to improved foods, food environments and food practices in 70 countries.

UNICEF also provided strategic leadership and advocacy as part of efforts to transform food systems and advance the United Nations Secretary-General's food systems agenda. Such efforts included the convening of a leadership dialogue at the UN Food Systems Summit + 2 Stocktaking [Moment](#) to position children's right to nutrition at the centre of food systems transformation. In related efforts, UNICEF released an evidence-based [advocacy report](#), calling for action to transform food systems for all children, everywhere. UNICEF also leveraged education systems to support policies and programmes to improve the quality of children's foods, food environments and food practices in schools in 59 countries.

As part of efforts to further improve breastfeeding rates and strengthen health systems in 111 countries, UNICEF helped build the capacities of health providers, including community health and nutrition workers, to counsel mothers and caregivers on infant feeding.

Integrated social protection and nutrition policies can help to ensure that systems and services are resilient and able to adapt, expand and respond in times of crisis to support children's nutrition needs. In 35 countries, UNICEF leveraged the social protection system to deliver cash transfer programmes with explicit nutrition objectives targeting nutritionally vulnerable children and women. To support these efforts, UNICEF issued [Programme Guidance on Child Nutrition and Social Protection](#) to strengthen synergies between child nutrition and social protection policies and programmes and make them more impactful.

Protecting children's right to nutrition through stronger legislation

UNICEF supports governments in adopting and strengthening legal measures to protect children's right to nutrition. This includes legislation to: restrict the marketing of breastmilk substitutes; adopt maternity leave and other family-friendly policies; mandate food fortification; establish taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages and other unhealthy foods; and enforce front-of-package food labelling measures and comprehensive restrictions on the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children.

By the end of 2023, a total of 70 countries had a policy/strategy to promote breastfeeding, with monitoring to protect children from harmful promotion and marketing of breastmilk substitutes and/or foods and beverages, in comparison to 66 countries in 2021.⁶ These efforts to support policy and programme actions in the food system are giving rise to stronger regulations to protect

and promote children's access to nutritious foods in over 50 countries. Over the course of the year, 27 countries implemented front-of-package warning labels to identify foods high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars and/or salt; while 26 countries reported applying taxes to unhealthy foods or beverages (e.g., 'soda taxes'). In Argentina, implementation of the front-of-pack labelling of ultra-processed foods and beverages began in 2023, which was supported by UNICEF. In Colombia, UNICEF support contributed to a law establishing taxes on high-sugar, ultra-processed products, which came into effect in 2023, as well as approval the previous year of a law on front-of-package labelling of ultra-processed foods and beverages.

In 2023, UNICEF issued a number of guidance documents to support countries in strengthening the regulatory environment to protect children's right to nutritious foods. Some of these offer tools to improve national capacities to support this agenda, including the [UNICEF-WHO toolkit Taking Action to Protect Children from the Harmful Impact of Food Marketing: A child rights-based approach](#) and the [UNICEF Guidance Framework to Support Healthier Food Retail Environments for Children](#). UNICEF also issued [Engaging with the Food and Beverage Industry: UNICEF Programme Guidance](#), with the goal of maximizing its impact, credibility and leadership as a trusted government adviser advocating for the best interests of the child.

UNICEF continued to lend its strategic leadership and technical experience to develop global standards for children's foods, which form the basis of key national legislation to protect child nutrition. In 2023, as part of efforts to protect breastfeeding, UNICEF and partners successfully advocated to include a reference to the [International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes \('the Code'\)](#) in the [Codex Alimentarius Standard for Follow-up Formula](#). This breakthrough was achieved despite strong, decade-long opposition from the commercial formula milk industry to the standard. The new global standard enables low- and middle-income countries to include WHO guidance in national breastfeeding laws without fear of international trade challenges.

UNICEF also continued to provide technical support to governments to adopt, monitor and enforce national legislation reflecting the Code. In 2023, UNICEF provided legal technical assistance to more than 15 national governments on implementing the Code and enhancing existing legislation to align more fully with it and all subsequent resolutions. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, UNICEF strengthened the monitoring of the Breastmilk Substitutes Code by training more than 400 government staff on monitoring and data collection at retail sales points, resulting in nearly 7,300 violations being reported across 121 districts.

Global advocacy, thought leadership and partnerships for nutrition

In 2023, strategic partnerships with United Nations agencies, donors, civil society, the private sector, and academia continued to play a pivotal role in achieving nutrition results for children in early childhood in both development and humanitarian contexts.

The partnership between UNICEF and WHO provides a key foundation for progress to achieve the global nutrition targets in early childhood nutrition. This partnership cuts across many elements of nutrition programming, specifically on breastfeeding through the co-chairing of the [Global Breastfeeding Collective \(GBC\)](#), which is a partnership of prominent international agencies committed to increasing investment in breastfeeding worldwide. The 2023 annual meeting fostered partner commitments to the GBC and set strategic advocacy priorities with a renewed focus on monitoring.

In 2023, the [Global Complementary Feeding Collective](#) was launched. It is a partnership of agencies co-led by UNICEF and WHO comprising global agencies dedicated to improving complementary feeding, diets and practices through improved programming, policies, and advocacy.

In collaboration with WHO, the World Bank, the Early Childhood Development Action Network, and the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health, UNICEF continued to lead the global implementation of the [Nurturing Care Framework \(NCF\)](#) for ECD. The NCF has been instrumental for enhancing the positioning of ECD as an outcome and for informing the development of child development policies and strategies. The NCF handbook and practice guide were also launched to enhance the provision of nurturing care.

In 2023, UNICEF and other partners under the [Global Alliance for Vitamin A](#) developed and agreed on a new strategic plan that sets the direction for this partnership over the next five years. UNICEF continued to co-chair the [Home Fortification Technical Advisory Group](#) with Nutrition International, which is a global network comprising stakeholders engaged in home fortification, including members from governments, United Nations, NGOs, and the private and academic sectors.

Results: Nutrition of school-age children, adolescents and women

Adolescent girls and women benefit from gender-responsive diets, services and practices for the prevention of anaemia and poor nutrition, in development and humanitarian contexts

Good nutrition for adolescents is critical to fuel growth and development, improve learning, establish life-long positive dietary practices and break the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition. For women, good nutrition protects their own health and well-being and is strongly linked to the survival, growth and development of their children.

Globally, millions of adolescents and women are deprived of the nutritious diets, essential services and positive nutrition practices they need to prevent malnutrition in all its forms. Nutritious foods remain out of reach for many adolescents and women, while the widespread availability of cheap, nutrition-poor, ultra-processed foods is increasingly undermining their right to good nutrition.

Adolescent girls and women are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition during the nutritionally demanding periods of pregnancy and breastfeeding and because of gender-based discrimination and harmful gender norms, which can exclude them from receiving the diets, services and care they need.

These results are a testament to investments made by thematic and non-thematic donors such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department (ECHO), Novo Nordisk, Global Health Advocacy Incubator and the governments of Canada, Germany, Norway and the United States.

Preventing all forms of malnutrition in school-age children and adolescents

UNICEF's gender-responsive programmes for the prevention of all forms of malnutrition in middle childhood and adolescence aim to improve the availability of and access to nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable diets, including fortified foods; improve children's food environments in and around schools; promote the use of micronutrient supplementation and deworming prophylaxis in settings where nutrient-poor diets are common; enhance children's knowledge about good nutrition and physical activity; and promote good diets and active living through large-scale communication programmes.

Figure 4. Strategic Plan Outcome Indicator 1.20

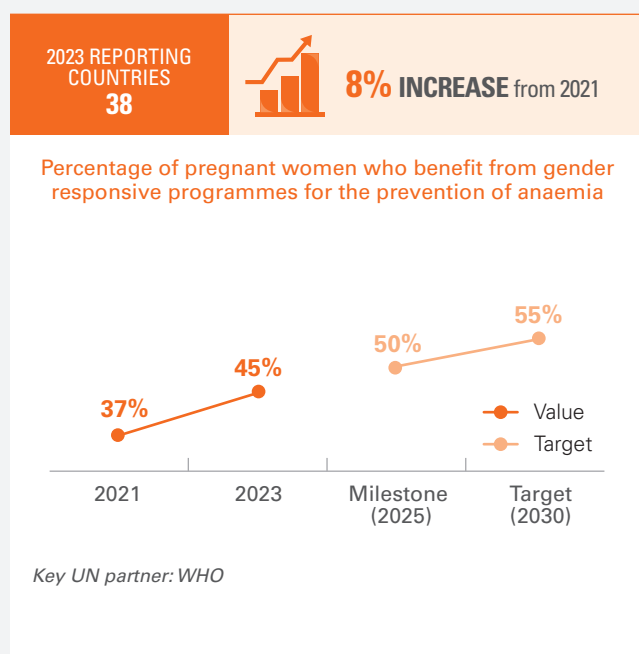
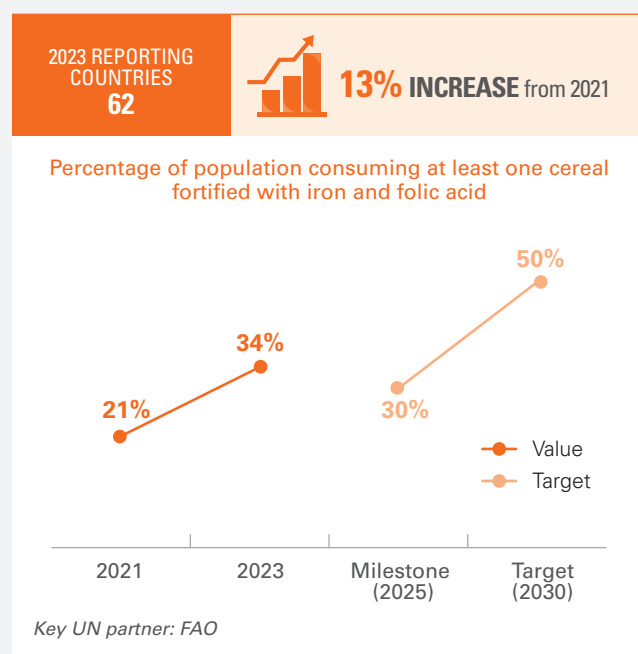


Figure 5. Strategic Plan Outcome Indicator 1.21





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Children having a nutritious meal at the Pietro Bonili Health Centre of Odienné, in the northwest of Côte d'Ivoire.

The scale-up of programmes to improve the nutrition of school-age children and adolescents globally has resulted in dramatic increases in the number of children benefiting from key preventive interventions to improve their diets, access to services, and feeding practices.

In 2023, UNICEF supported 75 countries with policies, programmes and services for the prevention of anaemia and overweight. Nearly 123 million school-age children and adolescents were reached with services to prevent all forms of malnutrition in schools and communities, an increase from about 64.7 million in 2021 and exceeding the 2025 Strategic Plan target of at least 100 million.⁷

This result reflects the resilience of UNICEF programming, which was able to recover from the pandemic-related dips in service delivery due to school closures, and efforts to leverage community platforms to reach out-of-school adolescents. This is a testament to years of investments in partnerships and strengthening and leveraging multiple systems to reach the most vulnerable children, with the aim of leaving no child behind.

Weekly iron and folic acid (IFA) supplementation is a key intervention for tackling anaemia in school-age children and adolescents. Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to iron deficiency anaemia, a form of malnutrition that is

exacerbated by gender inequality and remains stubbornly high globally. Gender-sensitive anaemia prevention programmes were implemented for adolescent girls and boys using school- and community-based approaches in 45 countries in 2023, compared with 28 countries in 2021⁸ (See box on weekly IFA supplementation programme from Afghanistan: Supplementing vital micronutrients for adolescent girls in Afghanistan).

UNICEF supports policies and programmes to prevent overweight and obesity in school-aged children and promote nutritious, safe and affordable diets and healthy practices in schools and communities. In 2023, UNICEF supported 51 countries to design and implement such programmes – a substantial increase from 31 countries in 2021.⁹

Children are increasingly exposed to the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages across multiple channels, including online. These marketing practices impact children's food choices and dietary intake and are linked to childhood overweight and obesity. In addition to being a public health concern, there is growing consensus that food marketing undermines children's rights. UNICEF's advocacy and technical support to governments to strengthen legal measures that protect children from the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages are described on pages 5 and 6.

Preventing malnutrition in women during pregnancy and breastfeeding

UNICEF advocates for and supports gender-responsive policies, strategies and programmes to prevent malnutrition in women during pregnancy and breastfeeding. This includes supporting countries to deliver a package of interventions to support women's right to nutrition,



Odile Konkobo, age 25, resident of Ziniaré in Burkina Faso, proudly shows her box of multiple micronutrient supplements (MMS).

including IFA supplementation or multiple micronutrient supplementation (MMS); deworming; counselling on nutritious and safe diets, physical activity and rest; and weight-gain monitoring, with specific support for adolescent mothers and other nutritionally at-risk women.

IFA supplementation is a key intervention for preventing both anaemia among women during pregnancy and low birthweight in infants. The number of countries that included preventive IFA supplementation as part of antenatal care increased to 94 in 2023 from 85 in 2021.

Supplementing vital micronutrients for adolescent girls in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, in 2023, UNICEF and partners intensified efforts to rapidly scale up the community-based weekly IFA supplementation programme for girls aged 10–19 years of age.

After the Taliban transition to power in August 2021, all secondary schools for girls were closed. IFA supplements were previously being delivered through schools, but this ground to a halt, making it crucial to find an alternative delivery platform to reach girls. UNICEF mobilized a network of more than 30,000 skilled community workers, half of them women, to distribute IFA supplements and provide information to girls on the benefits of IFA supplements and nutritious foods for mental and physical well-being and anaemia prevention.

With the support of this network, the community-based WIFS programme was scaled to 23 out of 34 provinces by the end of 2023, ensuring that more than 1.45 million adolescent girls benefitted from the WIFS programme.

The shift to a community-based platform also cut the cost of the programme by more than 50 per cent, improving its financial sustainability.

The percentage of pregnant women benefiting from anaemia prevention programmes has increased over the course of the current Strategic Plan, from 37.4 per cent at baseline (in 2021) to 45.4 per cent in 2023 (see Figure 4).

UNICEF continued to support governments in scaling up access to MMS for pregnant women to improve the quality of women's diets, prevent anaemia, micronutrient deficiencies, and low birthweight. MMS, which contains 15 essential vitamins and minerals, is superior to IFA and also cost-effective, which makes it an increasingly preferred intervention to improve pregnancy and birth outcomes, as well as catalyst to increase access to and uptake of quality antenatal care services. In 2023, 33 countries included MMS as part of antenatal care package.

In 2023, UNICEF continued country support for implementation research on the use of MMS to demonstrate how this product can improve access to and uptake of quality antenatal care services. In the Philippines, a significant policy shift was adopted to replace IFA supplementation with MMS for pregnant women, as a result of UNICEF-supported implementation research and advocacy.

Pakistan was among the first countries to mobilize domestic resources for the procurement of MMS through the Nutrition Match Window of the Child Nutrition Fund in 2023. This mechanism is incentivizing provincial governments to increase domestic investments in MMS (see page 14 for more information on the Nutrition Match Window).

Alongside preventive iron supplementation, UNICEF supports countries to strengthen the routine provision of nutrition counselling within pregnancy care programmes. The integration of nutrition counselling and other nutrition services in antenatal care is an important step towards strengthening health systems, improving the quality of nutrition care and fostering sustainable access to care for pregnant women. Anaemia prevention and nutrition counselling were integrated into pregnancy care programmes in 46 countries in 2023, compared with 30 countries in 2021.¹⁰

Global advocacy, thought leadership and partnerships to improve the nutrition of adolescents and women

UNICEF generated data and evidence and strengthened its thought leadership in 2023, including through collaboration with a range of agencies, academic institutions and other partners. These efforts have helped to mobilize global and national investments in, and commitments to, adolescent and maternal nutrition, areas which tend to be under-prioritized and under-resourced.

On International Women's Day 2023, UNICEF released the flagship report *Undernourished and Overlooked: A Global Nutrition Crisis in Adolescent Girls and Women*. Among the findings highlighted in the report were that more

than 1 billion girls and women suffer from undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and anaemia and that in crisis-hit countries, the number of acutely malnourished pregnant women has risen by 25 per cent since 2020. In the report, UNICEF called on governments and their partners to prioritize access to: nutritious and affordable diets for adolescent girls and women, including fortified foods; essential nutrition services before and during pregnancy and while breastfeeding; and free-of-charge prenatal micronutrient supplements. UNICEF also called for the elimination of discriminatory gender and social norms that undermine women and girls' access to nutritious diets, nutrition services and nutrition care.

Mandatory, large-scale food fortification is a proven and cost-effective strategy for preventing anaemia and micronutrient deficiencies, especially for adolescent girls and women before pregnancy, and is central to the transformation of food systems. UNICEF works with governments to strengthen national fortification policies and legislation, develop technical standards, and monitor quality and compliance. Through these efforts, 51 countries now have adopted large-scale fortification of staple foods with iron. And in 2023, more than one third (34.3 per cent) of the world's population was consuming at least one cereal fortified with iron and folic acid, compared with 21 per cent in 2021 (see Figure 5).

At the global level, UNICEF leadership contributed to strengthening policies to support large-scale food fortification. In 2023, UNICEF- and partner-led advocacy culminated in the adoption of a [World Health Assembly resolution](#) that calls for accelerated efforts to prevent micronutrient deficiencies through food fortification and to strengthen financing and monitoring mechanisms. UNICEF also convened a third technical consultation to determine a 'new way forward for universal salt iodization' to prevent iodine deficiency, an initiative that aims to support countries to implement mandatory salt fortification more effectively and sustainably, including by changing the way fortification is implemented.

As the key implementing partner of the [WHO Acceleration Plan to STOP Obesity](#), UNICEF has been providing technical support to accelerate country-level action against the obesity epidemic in 19 countries, including co-organizing regional Inter-Country Dialogues in Eastern and Southern Africa, South Asia, and East Asia Pacific in 2023. This has involved convening hundreds of UNICEF and WHO staff with government counterparts to harmonize national food environment policy priorities.

As part of its global thought leadership on prevention of child and adolescent overweight, UNICEF co-hosted the [Lancet Summit on Childhood Obesity in 2023](#), bringing together nearly 3,000 experts from United Nations agencies, academia, and civil society from more than 45 countries. In addition, UNICEF co-authored two key publications: 'A plan for accelerated action on obesity' in *The Lancet* and 'Healthy weight in childhood' in the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*.

Results: Early detection and treatment of malnutrition

Children benefit from timely and quality services and supplies for the early detection and treatment of wasting in development and humanitarian contexts

The primary objective of UNICEF nutrition programmes is to prevent malnutrition in all its forms. But when efforts to protect children from undernutrition fall short, the early detection and treatment of child wasting – provided in health-care facilities and communities – are essential services for saving lives and returning children to healthy growth and development.

To detect and treat wasting in children under 5 years of age, UNICEF supports the development of evidence-based programmes and protocols; strengthens the capacities of caregivers and facility- and community-based workers to identify and provide care for children with life-threatening wasting; supports the scale-up of routine services for children affected by wasting; integrates nutrition supply chains into national supply systems to improve care for children with wasting; and promotes the cost-effective and sustainable production and delivery of ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF).

In response to the ongoing global food and nutrition crisis and the ensuing deterioration in the nutrition situation of children, UNICEF launched the No Time to Waste Acceleration Plan for the early prevention, detection and treatment of child wasting, 2022–2023. Costed at \$1.2 billion, the plan aimed to reach more than 26 million children and women with a package of essential maternal and child nutrition interventions, as well as social protection actions, to prevent, detect and treat child wasting. In the second year of its implementation, the plan mobilized attention and much-needed resources for children's nutrition needs in crises. This resulted in an unprecedented increase in children reached with services for the early prevention, detection and treatment of child wasting.

UNICEF's achievements in meeting its milestones and the sharp increase in the number of children reached with services to prevent and treat malnutrition are the result of significant commitments made by national governments to increase domestic financing and partners including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Governments of Belgium, Canada, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States.



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In Somalia, 2-year-old Luul Hassan sits on the lap of her mother, 30-year-old Salaado Kerow, and eats from a sachet of RUTF after being assessed for malnutrition at the outpatient therapeutic centre in the Alla Futo camp for internally displaced people on the outskirts of Mogadishu.

Scaling up early detection and life-saving treatment and care to children with wasting

UNICEF empowers community and health workers and caregivers to screen and treat children with wasting in the communities where they live. These efforts are resulting in more children being detected early and reached with the life-saving treatment and care they need than ever before.

Globally in 2023, more than 210 million children were screened for wasting, nearly 55 million more than in 2021.¹¹ Of those screened, a record 9.3 million children with severe wasting were admitted for life-saving treatment; this marked a 72 per cent increase from 2021 and is the highest number ever reported in UNICEF programming. What's more, three quarters of the children reached with treatment and care in 2023 were living in high-mortality countries.¹²

UNICEF programmes for child wasting have maintained a high quality of treatment and care in all contexts. In 2023, more than four fifths (83 per cent) of children fully recovered from wasting; this result exceeds global

performance markers and the quality targets set in the Strategic Plan.

These results were made possible through an expansion in service reach, which was driven by an increase in the number of implementing partners and scaling up of screening and referral. UNICEF also helped increase the number of service delivery points and community workers, strengthened supply chains, improved coordination with government and partners and United Nations agencies, and provided strategic leadership and technical assistance. In 2023, the number of UNICEF implementing partners delivering services for the detection and treatment of wasting at national level increased by 62 per cent, from 106 to 170. The use of mobile teams and community-led services in Mali, the Niger, Somalia, the Sudan (see case study on 'Prevention, early detection and treatment of child wasting in the Sudan', page 15) and Yemen led to improved coverage of services for child wasting in remote areas.

The Government of Germany and UNICEF partnering to end child food poverty and malnutrition by 2030

At the start of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025, the world faced immense challenges – the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, climatic shocks, the impacts of the war in Ukraine and other conflicts and the ensuing global food and nutrition crisis – which has left millions of children at risk of child food poverty and malnutrition, threatening hard-won progress in securing the right to nutrition for every child.

Germany has been the largest contributor to global thematic funding for nutrition within the current UNICEF Strategic Plan. This support enabled UNICEF to mount a global response to these threats by scaling up programmes that address child food poverty and malnutrition, building the resilience of the food, health and social protection systems, and engaging communities to move closer to a future where children everywhere have the same opportunity to grow, develop and thrive. It also allowed UNICEF to respond flexibly, where needs were greatest, including in countries experiencing social, economic and environmental fragility, in contexts plagued by socioeconomic inequities where the poorest and most disadvantaged children were being left behind, and in settings where recent gains in reducing child food poverty and malnutrition were at risk of backsliding.

Guided by its Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030, UNICEF prioritized programmes in 2023 to prevent malnutrition across the life cycle and strengthened the capacities and resilience of the food, health and social protection systems, strengthening their capacity to protect the nutrition rights of children and their families.

The support of Germany has contributed to the following results within the current UNICEF Strategic Plan:

- 37.5 million children, adolescents and women were reached with nutritious diets, essential nutrition services and positive nutrition practices.
- 9.2 million children under 5 years of age were reached with services for the early detection and treatment of child wasting.

UNICEF would like to thank the Government of Germany for its allyship in protecting children's food security and nutrition rights and looks forward to strengthening this partnership, working together to drive faster progress towards a malnutrition-free future by 2030.

Nutrition-responsive social protection and life-saving treatment for children in Nigeria

In Nigeria, with UNICEF support, nearly 1 million children with severe wasting received life-saving treatment and care in 2023 across 13 states, exceeding the target of about 842,000 children. This figure includes children in the conflict- and violence-affected north-east and north-west states, and is 50 per cent higher than the number of children admitted for treatment of wasting in 2022. In addition to treatment, UNICEF also stepped up efforts to ensure that children who received life-saving treatment were protected against future risks.

UNICEF introduced two different models of humanitarian cash transfers (HCTs) in Nigeria with the government and partners. The HCTs aimed to build nutrition resilience, help families respond to nutrition shocks, and prevent relapse into malnutrition. In Sokoto and Katsina states, monthly cash assistance was provided to households of children with wasting who had been successfully discharged from treatment, with the objective of preventing relapse. A total of NGN 32,000 (\$43) per household per month was provided for three months to 5,379 households. Additionally, in partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF introduced a cash assistance programme in Yobe state for families with pregnant women and children under 2 years of age, where three months of cash assistance of NGN 15,000 (\$20) was provided to more than 4,100 households to prevent malnutrition.

UNICEF continued to seek opportunities for innovation in the prevention, detection and treatment of child wasting. In 2023, this included developing a multi-mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) tape to screen infants from 6 weeks to 6 months of age at risk of poor growth and development and their mothers. Given the significance of low birthweight and underweight in infants under 6 months of age in contributing to the burden of wasting, increased focus on this age group is key to achieving the global target on child wasting by 2030. UNICEF also initiated a multi-regional landscape analysis to understand the primary drivers, barriers, and strategies for integrating programmes for infants under the age of 6 months at risk of poor growth and development, and their mothers.

Strengthening systems and integrating treatment within routine primary care

Early detection and treatment services for children with wasting should be universally available and accessible to every child in need. The most effective and sustainable path for achieving this is by integrating the prevention, early detection and treatment of wasting within routine primary health care services for children. UNICEF supports governments to foster the integration of services across the six building blocks of the primary health care system: service delivery, workforce, information systems, access to essential medicines (including ready-to-use therapeutic foods and other essential nutrition commodities), financing, and leadership/ governance.

Countries are at various stages of integrating services for the early detection and treatment of wasting within their health systems. Seventy-three countries integrated care

for children with severe wasting as part of an essential package of regular health and nutrition services in 2023,¹³ while 77 countries included the early detection and treatment of severe wasting as part of a training package for community workers. Also, 54 countries in 2023 included care for children with severe wasting within national health and nutrition budgets, up from 36 in 2021, and 74 countries tracked wasting within the national nutrition information system, compared with 52 in 2021.

The integration of early detection and treatment into community structures, implemented by community workers, is a highly effective strategy for strengthening the primary health care system and extending services to the most vulnerable and at-risk children. In Mali, for example, the integration of screening and treatment for child wasting at community level was instrumental in improving access to care for children in remote localities. Through this approach, more than 4.9 million children under 5 years of age were screened for wasting by community workers. Seventy-five per cent of community worker sites supported by UNICEF provided treatment for children with severe wasting in 2023, against 70 per cent targeted.

In Ethiopia, UNICEF efforts to build the capacity of health workers contributed to impressive results in 2023. For example, investments in systems strengthening led to nearly 670,000 children receiving life-saving treatment for wasting, more than 80 per cent of them from conflict- or drought-affected areas. UNICEF's efficient and strategic provision of 12,500 metric tons of RUTF greatly contributed to these results. Over half were purchased locally, ensuring timely availability and lead time for delivery, and creating local employment and economic development opportunities.

Improving access to ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF)

Major efforts were made in 2023 to improve access to sustainable supplies of therapeutic foods, such as RUTF, as part of UNICEF's food-systems approach. As of 2023, UNICEF was procuring about 80 per cent of the global RUTF supply to provide life-saving treatment to children suffering from the more severe forms of wasting. As part of its efforts to support localization, UNICEF has diversified the supplier base for RUTF from a single global manufacturer in 2000 to 21 global and local manufacturers in 2023. Eighteen of these 21 manufacturers are in countries with a high wasting prevalence, and 7 out of 10 children with severe wasting are now treated with RUTF produced in a country in the global South. These efforts have been essential to increasing the reach of treatment for child wasting in 2023. Procurement of RUTF increased 200 per cent in 2023 compared with 2022, with a significant proportion produced by local manufacturers.

Following years of advocacy by UNICEF and partners, RUTF was approved for inclusion in the WHO Essential Medicines List (EML) in 2023. This approval is a major development, as it will trigger governments to include RUTF in their national EML and allocate domestic resources for this life-saving product for children with wasting.

In Timor-Leste, UNICEF's advocacy resulted in a significant increase in government budget allocations for nutrition, including RUTF, which nearly quadrupled from \$2.4 million in 2022 to \$8.4 million in 2023. In addition, UNICEF supported the government to leverage the Nutrition Match Window of the Child Nutrition Fund by mobilizing \$300,000 in domestic resources for 3,000 cartons of RUTF, which were matched with an additional 3,000 cartons of RUTF at no additional cost to the government.

The Child Nutrition Fund, launched by UNICEF in 2023 with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, and the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), is an innovative financing mechanism to strengthen global and national governance for the early prevention, detection and treatment of child undernutrition. Its Nutrition Match Window mechanism allows national governments to double their investment in essential services and supplies to counter malnutrition in children. Through this mechanism in 2023, the Child Nutrition Fund matched \$15.1 million towards the procurement of over 600,000 RUTF cartons and 460,000 units of MMS in 14 countries across Asia and Africa. The Child Nutrition Fund also brokered a \$30 million co-funded programme with GAVI to increase access to essential immunization and nutrition services in Ethiopia.

Mobilizing partnerships to drive global action on child wasting

In the face of the worst food and nutrition crisis in recent history and the rising number of conflicts, UNICEF, governments and partners were able to rapidly scale up services, resources and funding to quickly reach the most vulnerable children and their families. In collaboration with donors, United Nations agencies and NGO partners, UNICEF quickly mobilized key stakeholders and resources to respond to the increased number of children affected by wasting, to avert deaths and continue progress towards the SDG targets for 2030. This impressive scale-up demonstrated that with adequate financial resources, increased levels of child wasting can be rapidly addressed.

UNICEF continued to support the implementation of the United Nations Global Action Plan (GAP) on Child Wasting in 24 countries, with Somalia joining the GAP in 2023. A joint Call to Action was released in January 2023 by the GAP for immediate multisectoral actions in light of the global food and nutrition crisis.

Through concerted advocacy and strengthened partnerships, new WHO guidelines for the prevention and management of child wasting were finalized and released. Following this achievement, UNICEF and WHO established the UNICEF-WHO Technical Advisory Group for Child Wasting to guide the roll out of the new guidelines, including developing implementation guidance for countries.

Prevention, early detection and treatment of child wasting in the Sudan

In 2023, the Humanitarian Response Plan in the Sudan projected a 30 per cent increase in the number of children suffering from wasting, driven in part by the escalation of conflict. UNICEF responded by scaling up early detection and treatment for children with wasting, while investing in preventive actions that could mitigate the risk of children becoming malnourished.

As part of efforts to prevent malnutrition, more than 850,000 children and caregivers were reached with support for infant and young child feeding care and practices, and provision of vitamin A supplementation and deworming tablets. To identify children with wasting early and ensure their timely access to care, UNICEF worked to integrate MUAC screening into routine health campaigns and expand programme reach by engaging community workers and caregivers to find and screen children at risk. UNICEF supported the training of some 3,400 community nutrition workers, who in turn supported more than 14,400 caregivers or community members to screen children for wasting. As a result, more than 4.68 million children under age 5 were screened for malnutrition, ensuring that many of the country's children with wasting were identified early and referred for treatment.

UNICEF also expanded the coverage of services for treatment of child wasting in the Sudan, increasing the number of service points providing treatment to almost 2,000, even in areas of conflict where health systems were non-functional or destroyed. To overcome the challenges, 47 mobile nutrition and health teams were deployed. As a result of these efforts, more than 313,000 children received life-saving treatment for severe wasting in 2023.

Results: Maternal and child nutrition in humanitarian action

UNICEF's nutrition programming in emergencies aims to protect, promote and support optimal nutrition for children, adolescents and women affected by humanitarian crises. Its work in these areas is guided by UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) and the organization's mandate as United Nations Cluster Lead Agency for Nutrition. UNICEF acknowledges the support of key donors to its work on nutrition in humanitarian emergencies, such as the Governments of Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States (the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance and the Office of Food for Peace), and the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO).

In 2023, efforts to advance nutrition programming continued to be threatened by the increasing number, scale and intensity of emergencies, particularly in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel region. Moreover, global shifts in funding for humanitarian aid and a focus on food aid, which typically is not designed to meet children's unique nutritional needs, continued to pose challenges to children's nutrition. In this context, UNICEF's advocacy as sector and cluster lead to protect the nutrition rights of children – especially the youngest, poorest and most marginalized in humanitarian contexts – at global and national levels has been crucial.

The complex challenges of global food and nutrition crises were exacerbated in 2023 by conflicts in the Gaza Strip, Myanmar, and the Sudan, along with the impacts of climate crises, including those due to the El Niño phenomenon. In response, UNICEF built on the No Time to Waste Acceleration Plan to support the nutrition needs of the most vulnerable and at-risk children. As a result of these efforts, 6 million children with severe wasting were reached in the 15 countries most affected by food and nutrition crises, exceeding the target of 4.5 million. These results were possible thanks to the committed efforts of governments and partners that were able to rapidly scale up services, resources and funding to reach vulnerable children and their families quickly in humanitarian settings.

The same 15 countries were the focus of a joint strategic approach developed with WFP to optimize actions for the early prevention, detection and treatment of wasting in children and women in humanitarian contexts. This strengthened partnership supports an ambitious objective to provide a blueprint for higher-impact programming to invest in actions that can prevent wasting in children, while also ensuring treatment to all children who need it. The objective is to stabilize wasting rates across the targeted countries at greatest humanitarian risk. This is an example of UNICEF's continued investment and new strategic approach in 2023 to build effective partnerships for nutrition in humanitarian contexts, strengthen coordination and efficiencies among UN agencies, and deliver context-appropriate nutrition responses to children and families in need.

As United Nations Cluster Lead Agency for Nutrition, UNICEF led the development with WFP and other partners of innovative methods and tools to gather information on changes to child malnutrition in areas where humanitarian access is limited. In Gaza, data from such assessments are helping to guide programming and advocacy in this complex emergency. Other important partnerships that were strengthened in 2023 include those with the [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification](#) and the [Global Network Against Food Crises](#), to prioritize nutrition and elevate its importance, especially in contexts where famine or the risk of famine is a concern.

Climate shocks (extreme heat, droughts and floods), loss of biodiversity, and damage to water, air and soil have substantially lowered the quantity and quality of food available to children and families. UNICEF advocated for understanding the nutrition implications of the climate crisis in a new report, [The Global Climate Crisis is a Child Nutrition Crisis](#), released for COP28, outlining a five-point agenda for action. The agenda advocates leveraging policies, actors and resources to build nutrition resilience in the context of climate change and to protect children's access to nutritious diets, essential nutrition services, and positive nutrition practices, while supporting children to become nutrition and climate champions.

As part of its ongoing commitment to support infant and young child feeding in emergencies, UNICEF commissioned guidance on wet nursing in emergency settings, to respond to a critical knowledge gap in promoting and supporting this practice in settings where it could be acceptable and practised by communities. UNICEF also developed a roadmap outlining priorities for complementary feeding in emergencies to guide country actions in fragile contexts.

To address the neglect of women's nutrition in humanitarian crises, UNICEF led work on developing comprehensive implementation guidance for women's nutrition in humanitarian contexts, including agreement on appropriate methods of assessment and interim guidance for MUAC measurement cut-offs. UNICEF also documented the [implementation of MMS in humanitarian contexts](#) in 2023, summarizing evidence and including a mapping exercise and two case studies from Pakistan and Somalia, which will serve to inform further MMS scale-up in humanitarian contexts.

In humanitarian settings, UNICEF continued to elevate multisectoral ECD programmes as part of the CCCs and in line with UNICEF's Vision for ECD 2030. UNICEF's ECD interventions in emergencies aim to support young children's access to programmes, frontline workers' capacity to deliver quality services, and caregivers' ability to provide nurturing care. In 2023, through UNICEF-supported advocacy and technical collaborations, ECD integration was strengthened in child nutrition, protection, and health response in emergencies. UNICEF also began collaborating with partners to enhance climate-smart ECD programmes.



In Nigeria, mother Maryam Musa sits with her playful 14-month-old twin daughters, Halima (left) and Asma'u Kasimu. Two months earlier, Asma'u was treated for severe wasting at the Rumbukawa Primary Health Centre. After successful treatment, her mid-upper arm circumference measurement improved from 11.2 cm to 12.8 cm, and she was discharged from care.

More than 20 countries in need of humanitarian assistance were supported to integrate ECD into their emergency response through technical assistance, capacity building and training; and support to test, roll out and evaluate tools. In 2023, UNICEF delivered nearly 43,000 ECD kits in emergencies, benefiting 2 million children aged 0–6 years across 62 countries. In parallel, progress was made in developing new ECD kits that emphasize caregiver engagement in play and inclusivity for children with disabilities. [Project Play](#), which repurposes RUTF packaging to make play materials, provided nearly 50,000 new toys for children in malnutrition treatment facilities in Pakistan, Sierra Leone and Uganda.



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Judite is a young mother in Mozambique whose 9-month-old baby, Anastacia Paulo, was diagnosed with malnutrition. It all started when Judite noticed that Anastacia had persistent fevers. After consultation with the community health worker, Judite sought help at the nearest health facility, in Palma District, in Cabo Delgado province.

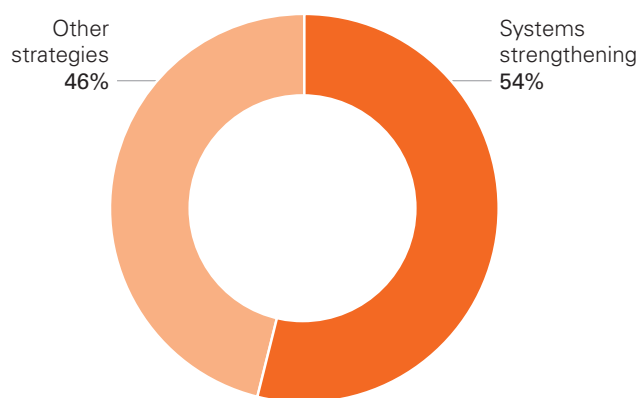
Spotlight on the Global Thematic Fund for Nutrition

Results achieved in 2023 to ensure good nutrition for every child

Financial results

UNICEF's Global Thematic Fund for Nutrition is a flexible funding pool that enables the organization to strengthen systems to ensure good nutrition for every child, everywhere.

Thanks to its generous donors, in 2023, UNICEF's Global Nutrition Thematic Fund received US\$5.8 million. UNICEF is grateful for this support.



* Other strategies include advocacy and communications; social and behaviour change; data and research; innovation; partnerships and engagement; humanitarian and development nexus; and support to programme delivery.

The chart above illustrates how global thematic expenses are distributed across eight of UNICEF's nine implementing strategies for nutrition-related programming, noting that multiple strategies can be used to achieve results. In 2023, systems strengthening continued to be a core focus of child nutrition and development work, accounting for 54 per cent of all expenses.

Through its work on systems strengthening, UNICEF responds to the immediate, underlying and enabling determinants of malnutrition, with the aim of protecting every child's right to nutritious food, essential nutrition services and positive care practices, the three pillars of good nutrition outcomes for all children. Working in this 'big picture' way is cost effective, sustainable and scalable, and it works.

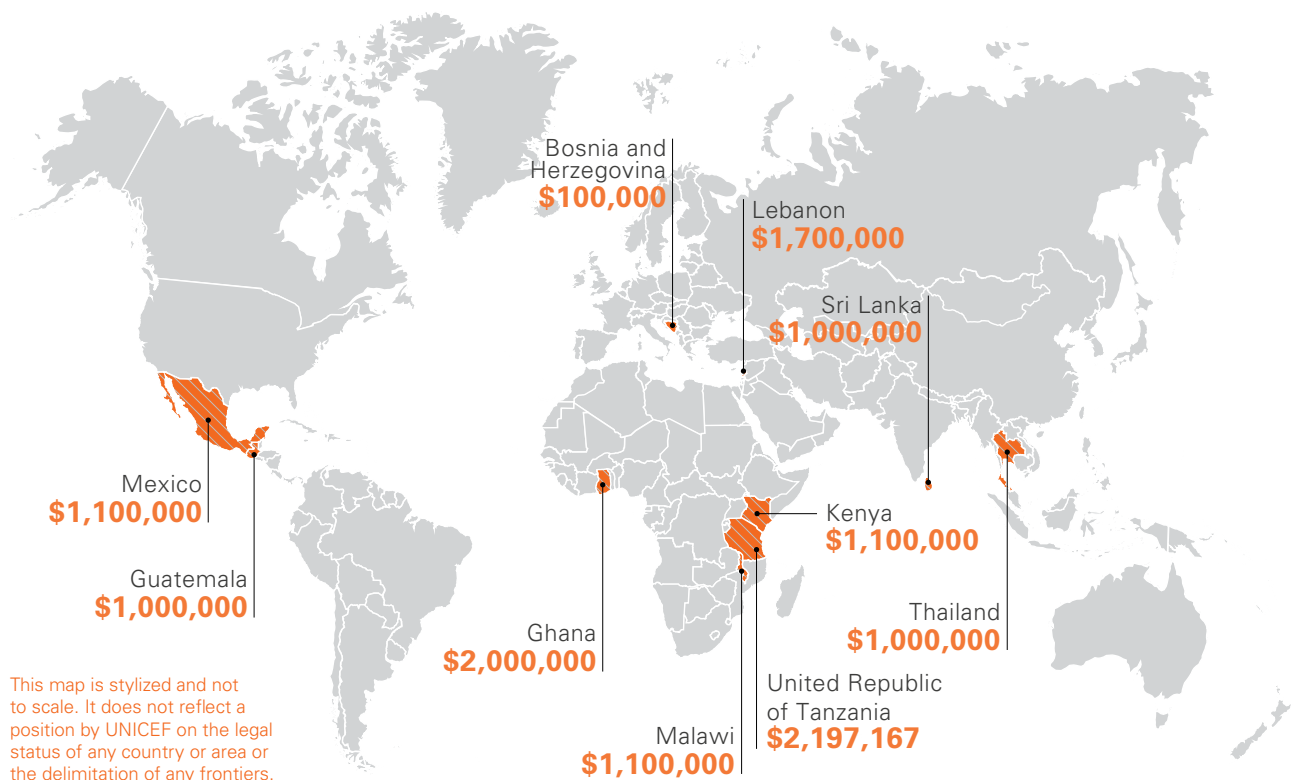
Partner Type	Partner	Total (US\$)
Public sector	Norway	2,791,996
	Luxembourg	1,081,413
	Balance from previous year	10,244
Private sector	United States Fund for UNICEF	878,324
	German Committee for UNICEF	460,571
	Portuguese Committee for UNICEF	121,780
	Dutch Committee for UNICEF	113,018
	Norwegian Committee for UNICEF	98,236
	Austrian Committee for UNICEF	88,407
	Korean Committee for UNICEF	81,473
	The New Zealand National Committee for UNICEF	18,218
	Slovenia Foundation for UNICEF	13,164
Grand Total		5,756,844

Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

Allocations

In 2023, supporters of the Global Thematic Fund for Nutrition enabled UNICEF to allocate \$60.7 million in resources to child nutrition and development programmes in 47 countries and regional offices. These allocations were made based on a cumulative contribution of \$77.7 million received over the course of 2022–2023 from the following donors: Germany, Norway, Luxembourg, and UNICEF’s National Committees in the United Kingdom and United States. The map shows the 10 countries that received the highest allocations.

Global thematic funds for nutrition were allocated to UNICEF countries to accelerate programming excellence and progress for results for children at-scale. In particular, efforts focused on preventing all forms of malnutrition in early childhood, the nutrition of school-age children and adolescents, maternal nutrition, and early detection and treatment of child wasting, aligned with UNICEF’s Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030 and the Strategic Plan 2022–2025. These funds have been crucial for catalysing important policy changes and driving momentum on many of UNICEF’s key progress indicators, as outlined in the targets table on page 23.



Ghana

The Girls’ Iron-Folic Tablet Supplementation (GIFTS) Programme in Ghana is supported with an allocation of \$2 million from the Global Thematic Fund. GIFTS provides adolescent girls both in and out of school with weekly IFA tablets to prevent anaemia, as well as nutrition education. While GIFTS was initially delivered through schools, UNICEF worked with the government to transition programme delivery to the health system during the COVID-19 pandemic when schools were closed. Following the pandemic, with UNICEF support, GIFTS continued through both health facilities and schools, and now reaches all eligible girls nationwide. In 2023, close to 2.5 million girls aged 10 to 19 years received IFA supplements.

Lebanon

With \$1.7 million of support from the Global Thematic Fund for Nutrition, UNICEF leveraged multiple platforms including primary health care centres, ECD corners, community centres, day care facilities, and home visits to deliver essential nutrition and child development interventions to prevent malnutrition and developmental deprivations. This included counselling on child feeding and nurturing care and maternal nutrition, provision of nutritional supplements, and early detection and treatment of malnutrition and developmental deprivations. In 2023, more than 390,000 caregivers received integrated nutrition and ECD counselling; 94,600 children received nutritional supplements; 124,900 children received vitamin A supplementation; and 19,700 women received micronutrient supplements. About 7,000 children were enrolled in services to treat wasting, coupled with

supplementary cash support to access the services. UNICEF also worked to target the national Child Grant to families with young children and link it with interventions to promote responsive child development and feeding practices.

Mexico

A \$1.1 million allocation from the Global Thematic Fund for Nutrition played a catalytic role in enabling UNICEF to support government efforts to transform the food system for children. UNICEF supported government and stakeholders to strengthen the food policy environment and move towards a harmonized regulatory policy framework. In 2023, the government amended the General Education Law to enforce front-of-pack nutritional warning labels in and outside schools; ban the distribution, sale and marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages in schools; and provide nutrition education to school-age children and adolescents.

Pakistan

With \$1 million of support from the Global Thematic Fund for Nutrition, UNICEF trained health care and frontline workers, empowering them with SBC strategies to promote maternal and child nutrition. These frontline workers reached 710,000 caregivers in 122 districts with interpersonal social and behaviour change interventions, employing one-on-one counselling and community engagement to improve early childhood nutrition and stimulation. In addition, more than 4.4 million mothers and caregivers were reached with messages on parenting and optimal child feeding practices.

The Philippines

UNICEF-generated evidence was supported through an allocation of \$1 million, which contributed to stronger policies and legislation to protect children's food environments and prevent childhood overweight. UNICEF's collaboration with the Nutrition Center of the Philippines generated evidence which was instrumental in shaping landmark legislation on the marketing of unhealthy foods to children, which is now being proposed in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. UNICEF advocacy also led to nutrition becoming a key focus in the Philippines Development Plan for 2023–2028, which prioritizes the creation of the 'Anti-Unhealthy Foods in Schools Act' as a major legislative goal for the nineteenth Congress.

Regional and global programming

Thematic funds not only support UNICEF's work in countries; they are also used to guide thought leadership, drive strategic direction, deliver technical assistance and improve programme quality across wider regions and globally. These vital allocations of flexible funding enable the Global Thematic Fund for Nutrition to have an impact far beyond the countries that receive direct allocations.

The largest portion of Global Thematic Funds for Nutrition were allocated directly to countries to drive progress towards Strategic Plan results and SDG2. In 2023, UNICEF also allocated funds to seven regional offices, covering East Asia and the Pacific, Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and West and Central Africa and headquarters. At regional level, these funds aimed to provide strategic guidance and technical support to accelerate country progress towards Strategic Plan results, including progress on newer areas of work, such as food systems for children and the nutrition of school-age children, and to leverage additional funding from domestic resources. At headquarters, these funds enabled UNICEF's global team to drive global thought leadership, strategic direction and technical support to guide the scaling up of policy and programmatic action to accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

Achieving results for systems strengthening

Thematic funds are a vital cornerstone of UNICEF's systems-strengthening work to unlock lasting impact for children. But this takes strategic vision and time. This is why resources from the Global Nutrition Thematic Fund are spent over a four-year period, aligning with UNICEF's Strategic Plan (2022– 2025).

UNICEF works to strengthen and leverage the capacities of key systems – the food, health, water and sanitation, education and social protection systems – responsible for ensuring children's access to nutritious and safe diets, essential nutrition services, and positive nutrition and care practices.

In 2023, UNICEF worked to strengthen the capacity of national food systems in 70 countries to protect and promote children's access to improved foods and protect their food environments. In 59 countries, UNICEF leveraged education systems to support policies and programmes to make nutritious foods and essential nutrition services and practices available in and beyond schools. In 66 countries, UNICEF strengthened social protection programmes to make nutrition foods more affordable and accessible to the poorest children, women and families.

Below are some headline sector-level results, for which thematic funding – as part of an overall portfolio of funding – was a key contributor.

Policies and strategies

UNICEF works directly with governments to support them to make the best evidence-based policies suited to their contexts to support children's access to nutritious diets, essential nutrition services and positive nutrition and care practices. For instance, this includes legislation to protect children from the harmful marketing of ultra-processed food and beverages, as well as creating financial incentives to produce and market nutritious foods for children.

- In 2023, 70 countries had adopted legislation to protect children from harmful promotion and marketing of breastmilk substitutes and/or foods and beverages. Twenty-seven countries introduced front-of-package warning labels to identify foods high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars and/or salt; while 26 countries reported applying taxes to unhealthy foods or beverages (such as 'soda taxes').

Workforce

UNICEF strengthens breastfeeding promotion, as well as counselling for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers on their own nutrition and that of their children, with specific support to small and vulnerable newborns. UNICEF does this by training workers who deliver services through primary health-care facilities and community-based

programmes, with the knowledge and skills to support mothers and caregivers to improve child-feeding practices. For instance, UNICEF provides training on how to use mid-upper arm circumference tape, a colour-coded measuring tape used to identify and treat children with severe wasting, the most life-threatening form of malnutrition.

- UNICEF strengthened the capacities of health providers to counsel mothers and caregivers on infant feeding in 111 countries; this resulted in significant increases in breastfeeding rates. With this strengthened nutrition workforce, more than 93 million caregivers were reached globally with counselling on infant and young child feeding - a 62 per cent increase from 2021. UNICEF's efforts to protect, promote and support early childhood nutrition in 66 countries led to an increase in global rates of exclusive breastfeeding, from 44.1 per cent at the start of the Strategic Plan to 48.8 per cent in 2023. Such progress indicates that the global target of 50 per cent by 2025 is within reach.

Supply chains

The prevention and treatment of malnutrition in children and women requires access to quality, affordable nutrition supplies. This includes vitamin A supplements and deworming tablets; multiple micronutrient powders to fortify children's first foods; multiple micronutrient supplements for pregnant women; therapeutic supplies, therapeutic milks and ready-to-use therapeutic foods; tools for measuring children's height and weight; and MUAC colour-coded tapes for the early detection of children with severe wasting in the communities where they live. Making supplies available entails strengthening supply chains from end to end.

This includes establishing local factories to manufacture supplies closer to the point of use, reducing costs and delivery times, and supporting local economies.

- UNICEF procures about 80 per cent of the global supply of RUTF to treat children with severe wasting. UNICEF has diversified the supplier base for RUTF, from a single global manufacturer in 2000 to 21 global and local manufacturers in 2023. Eighteen of these suppliers are in countries with high prevalence of wasting in the global south. These efforts were essential to support the expansion of programmes for child wasting in 2023: procurement of RUTF tripled in 2023 compared with 2022, with a significant proportion produced by local manufacturers.

Service integration

UNICEF works with governments to integrate essential nutrition interventions as part of a regular package of health and nutrition services delivered by primary health-care providers through facility- and community-based programmes. This is a crucial step towards strengthening

health systems, improving the quality of nutrition services and fostering sustainable access to nutrition care and support for children and women, including the most vulnerable.

- UNICEF is supporting countries to strengthen the routine provision of nutrition counselling within pregnancy care programmes. The integration of nutrition counselling and other nutrition services within antenatal care is a critical step towards strengthening maternal services, improving the quality of nutrition care and support for women, fostering sustainable access to care for pregnant women, including women from poor and excluded households and communities. In 2023, anaemia prevention and nutrition counselling were integrated into pregnancy care programmes in 46 countries, compared to 30 countries in 2021.

Social and behaviour change

SBC is key to enabling the positive changes in nutritious diets, essential nutrition services and positive nutrition and care practices needed for optimal nutrition. UNICEF is working to improve child feeding practices through SBC interventions with caregivers of young children. As part of its work to transform food systems, UNICEF also uses SBC to promote nutritious diets and active living among school-age children, adolescents and their families.

- In 2023, UNICEF supported 73 countries to use SBC within their nutrition programmes. Nearly all these programmes included SBC for promoting optimal

infant and young child feeding practices, such as breastfeeding counselling and support to caregivers, complementary feeding demonstrations or large-scale campaigns to promote breastfeeding.

Data

UNICEF is the custodian of global data on the nutrition situation of children, hosting databases tracking malnutrition status, infant and young child feeding practices, micronutrient deficiencies and maternal nutrition, in addition to data on the status of nutrition programmes and interventions via UNICEF's global online platform, NutriDash. UNICEF data guide policies and programmes that are grounded in the latest evidence, enabling better targeting of responses for the most vulnerable children.

- Drawing on its global data, and its flagship report, Undernourished and Overlooked: A Global Nutrition Crisis in Adolescent Girls and Women, UNICEF mobilized action on the crisis of undernutrition in women in 2023. This advocacy culminated in the release of the UNICEF Improving Maternal Nutrition Acceleration Plan, which sets out a vision for UNICEF and partners to fast-track delivery of a package of essential services to 16 million women across 16 priority countries by the end of 2025 and intends to raise 320 million USD to support the scale up of sustainable maternal nutrition programmes that include the provision of MMS to all pregnant women.



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Mary Diston, aged 30, is a care group member in Mukwala village, Malawi, where she has learned to prepare well-balanced meals for her family comprised of six food groups.

Targets

To measure the long-term impact of strengthening inclusive and effective systems for nutrition, UNICEF monitors several key indicators, as seen in the table below.

In the second year of its Strategic Plan, UNICEF has already met or exceeded many of its nutrition targets. These achievements are testament to years of investment in

strengthening systems, which allowed UNICEF-supported programmes to withstand and bounce back from the COVID-19 pandemic, the global food and nutrition crisis and other shocks, to deliver key nutrition services and to continue expanding programming to reach more children.

Indicator	Baseline (2021)	Progress (2023)	Target (2025)
Policies and strategies Number of countries with a nutrition policy or strategy to prevent undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies in children under 5 years of age	66	75	At least 80
Nutrition workforce Number of countries implementing integrated anaemia prevention and nutrition counselling in their pregnancy care programmes for women	30	46	At least 45
Social and behaviour change Number of countries with gender-responsive programmes to prevent anaemia in adolescent girls and boys through school- and community-based approaches	28	45	45
Data Number of countries with wasting programme indicators included in the national nutrition information system	52	74	80

Impact story

In Pakistan, multiple micronutrient supplements are transforming the nutrition and well-being of mothers – and their babies.

Rozan remembers how she used to feel when she was pregnant. After long days working in the fields, she would come home to look after her family and take care of the house. But she felt weak, low on energy, and unable to do even simple household tasks. Rozan's first four children had all been born with low birthweight and she was fearful the same fate awaited her unborn baby.

"I used to feel dizzy and have full body aches," Rozan says. "I didn't feel like doing household chores."

However, a routine visit from a Lady Health Worker during Rozan's third trimester transformed the future of both mother and child.

Roshan serves the Thatta community in Sindh Province as a Lady Health Worker – a female health and nutrition worker who has received training in basic first aid and health and nutrition care guidance and who conducts community-based health and nutrition interventions, particularly in remote areas. Last year, Roshan started distributing multiple micronutrient supplements (MMS) as part of a package of essential nutrition services for pregnant women in the community.

UNICEF MMS contain 15 vitamins and minerals proven to boost the nutrition and wellbeing of pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and their babies, while also helping to reduce low birthweight, stillbirth, and pre-term birth. They are most effective when taken as part of an adequately nutritious diet and as part of a range of services, including nutrition education, adequate weight gain monitoring, nutrition screenings and regular antenatal checkups.

"I discussed [how I was feeling] with the Lady Health Worker, and she advised me to take MMS," Rozan says. "I have two bites of my food, then I take the tablet with water, and then I finish my meal."

Now, clutching her one-week-old baby boy, Rozan beams proudly as she announces that Zameer was her first child to weigh more than 3 kg at birth, compared to less than 2 kg for her other children.

Rozan, who was born deaf and communicates with her family using sign language, adds that she also gained 7 kg in the last three months of her pregnancy, improving her own nutrition and wellbeing and making her more likely to deliver a healthy baby.



Roshan, right, speaks with Rozan about the benefits of MMS in Thatta, Sindh Province.

"MMS have had a huge impact," explains Roshan, who has distributed the tablets to more than 300 women in the city of Thatta over the last few months.

"Before they had access to these tablets, a lot of women were losing their babies, or the babies would die after birth. Many would have low birthweight," Roshan says. *"Now that's not happening. I've seen a positive impact in at least 35 women in this village alone."*

Rozan's home, in the rural village of Ramzan Mallah, Thatta, was badly damaged by the catastrophic floods that affected much of Pakistan in 2022 and which exacerbated the poverty, poor access to services and food insecurity that so many in the province already faced. But even before the recent climate-related and economic hardships that have affected many communities, Pakistan had one of the highest burdens of low birthweight. Children experiencing low birthweight are more likely to die during their first month of life, while those who survive face lifelong consequences including a higher risk of stunted growth.

As part of a campaign led by UNICEF and the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination to reach 2 million women with MMS in Pakistan, many of Pakistan's network of Lady Health Workers were trained on the benefits of taking the supplements. Roshan now routinely administers MMS to pregnant and breastfeeding women while also providing advice on the benefits of breastfeeding and infant feeding practices, as well as supporting screenings for malnutrition.

"If they were skeptical, I counselled them. I know many of the women from previous polio and family planning campaigns, so they trust me," Roshan says. *"I told them MMS have more vitamins and other nutrients than just iron and folic acid, that they are more beneficial. Now the women are less weak, have less back and knee pain, and they're stronger!"*

"Seeing healthy babies being born and not dying – that's the most rewarding part for me."

Hearing from our donors and partners

The Government of Norway and UNICEF working together to end child food poverty and malnutrition by 2030

In 2023, the Government of Norway was the largest contributor to the Global Nutrition Thematic Fund, which supports programmatic excellence on child nutrition and development in 47 countries aligned with the UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030 and the Strategic Plan 2022–2025. Norway is one of UNICEF’s most flexible supporters and the organization is especially grateful for their thematic and core contributions, which comprise the majority of this support.

While significant progress has been made to address child malnutrition globally – including a one-third reduction in stunting in children since 2000 – acceleration is needed to end child food poverty and malnutrition by 2030.

The flexible resources provided by Norway contributed to accelerating progress towards two of the three nutrition-related Strategic Plan targets:

- By 2025, at least 300 million children under 5 benefit from programmes for the prevention of stunting, wasting, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight in early childhood, annually.
- By 2025, at least 100 million school-age children and adolescents benefit from programmes for the prevention of anaemia, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight and obesity, annually.

Norway and UNICEF share a common vision of a world every child has access to nutritious, safe, affordable, and sustainable diets. Well-nourished children are also better able to learn, play and participate in their communities.

With the support of flexible partners like Norway, and through child nutrition and development programmes in 140 countries and 7 regions, UNICEF seeks to reach children, adolescents and women everywhere – at key moments in life, when good nutrition matters most.



Bakhta, Sajna and Sajjad live in Ismail Bhelai village, Sajawal, Thatta district, in the Sindh province of Pakistan. UNICEF is actively supporting the prevention of malnutrition in Sindh, Balochistan, and other areas of Pakistan. Serving as the nutrition sector lead, UNICEF collaborates with humanitarian and development partners for information sharing, advocacy, and coordinated preparedness and response.

Endnotes

- 1 Output indicator 1.6.1: Number of children under five years benefitting from programmes for the prevention of stunting, wasting, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight and obesity.
- 2 Output indicator 1.6.3: Number of countries with strategies and programmes to improve diet diversity among children aged 6 to 23 months.
- 3 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Small Supplements for the Prevention of Malnutrition in Early Childhood (SQLNS)', Brief guidance note, UNICEF, New York, February 2023, <www.unicef.org/documents/nutrition/SQLNS-Guidance>.
- 4 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Home Fortification with Multiple Micronutrient Powders for the Prevention of Iron Deficiency Anaemia in Early Childhood', Brief guidance note, UNICEF, New York, July 2023, <www.unicef.org/documents/nutrition/MNPS-Guidance-Note>.
- 5 Output indicator 1.6.2: Number of countries with a nutrition policy or strategy to prevent undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies in children under 5 years of age.
- 6 Output indicator 1.6.4: Number of countries with a national policy for the protection, promotion and support of optimal child nutrition, including legislation to protect children from harmful promotion/marketing of breastmilk substitutes and/or foods and beverages.
- 7 Output indicator 1.7.1: Number of children 5 to 19 years who benefit from gender responsive programmes for the prevention of anaemia and all forms of malnutrition.
- 8 Output indicator 1.7.3: Number of countries with gender-responsive programmes to prevent anaemia in adolescent girls and boys through school- and community-based approaches.
- 9 Output indicator 1.7.2: Number of countries with programmes to prevent overweight and obesity in school-age children and adolescents.
- 10 Output indicator 1.7.4: Number of countries implementing integrated anaemia prevention and nutrition counselling in their pregnancy care programmes for women.
- 11 Output indicator 1.8.1: Number of children under 5 years of age who benefit from services for the early detection and treatment of severe wasting and other forms of severe acute malnutrition.
- 12 United Nations Children's Fund, No Time to Waste: 2024 update and call to urgent action, New York: UNICEF, 2024.
- 13 Output indicator 1.8.2: Number of countries that provide services for the early detection and treatment of children with severe wasting as a regular service for children.



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