

Undernourishment around the world in 2015

The global trends

Progress continues in the fight against hunger, yet an unacceptably large number of people still lack the food they need for an active and healthy life. The latest available estimates indicate that about 795 million people in the world – just over one in nine – were undernourished in 2014–16 (Table 1). The share of undernourished people in the

population, or the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU),¹ has decreased from 18.6 percent in 1990–92 to 10.9 percent in 2014–16, reflecting fewer undernourished people in a growing global population. Since 1990–92, the number of undernourished people has declined by 216 million globally, a reduction of 21.4 percent, notwithstanding a 1.9 billion

TABLE 1

Undernourishment around the world, 1990–92 to 2014–16

| | Number of undernourished (millions) and prevalence (%) of undernourishment | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| | 1990–92 | | 2000–02 | | 2005–07 | | 2010–12 | | 2014–16* | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| WORLD | 1 010.6 | 18.6 | 929.6 | 14.9 | 942.3 | 14.3 | 820.7 | 11.8 | 794.6 | 10.9 |
| DEVELOPED REGIONS | 20.0 | <5.0 | 21.2 | <5.0 | 15.4 | <5.0 | 15.7 | <5.0 | 14.7 | <5.0 |
| DEVELOPING REGIONS | 990.7 | 23.3 | 908.4 | 18.2 | 926.9 | 17.3 | 805.0 | 14.1 | 779.9 | 12.9 |
| Africa | 181.7 | 27.6 | 210.2 | 25.4 | 213.0 | 22.7 | 218.5 | 20.7 | 232.5 | 20.0 |
| Northern Africa | 6.0 | <5.0 | 6.6 | <5.0 | 7.0 | <5.0 | 5.1 | <5.0 | 4.3 | <5.0 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 175.7 | 33.2 | 203.6 | 30.0 | 206.0 | 26.5 | 205.7 | 24.1 | 220.0 | 23.2 |
| Eastern Africa | 103.9 | 47.2 | 121.6 | 43.1 | 122.5 | 37.8 | 118.7 | 33.7 | 124.2 | 31.5 |
| Middle Africa | 24.2 | 33.5 | 42.4 | 44.2 | 47.7 | 43.0 | 53.0 | 41.5 | 58.9 | 41.3 |
| Southern Africa | 3.1 | 7.2 | 3.7 | 7.1 | 3.5 | 6.2 | 3.6 | 6.1 | 3.2 | 5.2 |
| Western Africa | 44.6 | 24.2 | 35.9 | 15.0 | 32.3 | 11.8 | 30.4 | 9.7 | 33.7 | 9.6 |
| Asia | 741.9 | 23.6 | 636.5 | 17.6 | 665.5 | 17.3 | 546.9 | 13.5 | 511.7 | 12.1 |
| Caucasus and Central Asia | 9.6 | 14.1 | 10.9 | 15.3 | 8.4 | 11.3 | 7.1 | 8.9 | 5.8 | 7.0 |
| Eastern Asia | 295.4 | 23.2 | 221.7 | 16.0 | 217.6 | 15.2 | 174.7 | 11.8 | 145.1 | 9.6 |
| South-Eastern Asia | 137.5 | 30.6 | 117.6 | 22.3 | 103.2 | 18.3 | 72.5 | 12.1 | 60.5 | 9.6 |
| Southern Asia | 291.2 | 23.9 | 272.3 | 18.5 | 319.1 | 20.1 | 274.2 | 16.1 | 281.4 | 15.7 |
| Western Asia | 8.2 | 6.4 | 14.0 | 8.6 | 17.2 | 9.3 | 18.4 | 8.8 | 18.9 | 8.4 |
| Latin America and the Caribbean | 66.1 | 14.7 | 60.4 | 11.4 | 47.1 | 8.4 | 38.3 | 6.4 | 34.3 | 5.5 |
| Caribbean | 8.1 | 27.0 | 8.2 | 24.4 | 8.3 | 23.5 | 7.3 | 19.8 | 7.5 | 19.8 |
| Latin America | 58.0 | 13.9 | 52.1 | 10.5 | 38.8 | 7.3 | 31.0 | 5.5 | 26.8 | <5.0 |
| Central America | 12.6 | 10.7 | 11.8 | 8.3 | 11.6 | 7.6 | 11.3 | 6.9 | 11.4 | 6.6 |
| South America | 45.4 | 15.1 | 40.3 | 11.4 | 27.2 | 7.2 | ns | <5.0 | ns | <5.0 |
| Oceania | 1.0 | 15.7 | 1.3 | 16.5 | 1.3 | 15.4 | 1.3 | 13.5 | 1.4 | 14.2 |

*Data for 2014–16 refer to provisional estimates.
Source: FAO.



increase in total population over the same period. The vast majority of the hungry live in the developing regions,² where an estimated 780 million people were undernourished in 2014–16 (Table 1). The PoU, standing at 12.9 percent in 2014–16, has fallen by 44.5 percent since 1990–92.

Changes in large populous countries, notably China and India, play a large part in explaining the overall hunger reduction trends in the developing regions.³ Rapid progress was achieved during the 1990s, when the developing regions as a whole experienced a steady decline in both the number of undernourished and the PoU (Figure 1). This was followed by a slowdown in the PoU in the early 2000s before a renewed acceleration in the latter part of the decade, with the PoU falling from 17.3 percent in 2005–07 to 14.1 percent in 2010–12. Estimates for the most recent period, partly based on projections, have again seen a phase of slower progress, with the PoU declining to 12.9 percent by 2014–16.

■ Measuring global progress against targets

The year 2015 marks the end of the monitoring period for the two internationally agreed targets for hunger reduction. The first is the World Food Summit (WFS) goal. At the WFS, held in Rome in 1996, representatives of 182 governments pledged “... to eradicate hunger in all countries, with an immediate view to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015”.⁴ The second is the Millennium Development Goal 1 (MDG 1) hunger target. In 2000, 189 nations pledged to free people from multiple deprivations, recognizing that every individual has the right to dignity, freedom, equality and a basic standard of living that includes freedom from hunger and violence. This pledge led to the formulation of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2001. The MDGs were then made operational by the establishment of targets and indicators to track progress, at national and global levels, over a reference period of 25 years, from 1990 to 2015. The first MDG, or MDG 1, includes three distinct targets: halving global poverty, achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all, and cutting by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger⁵ by 2015. FAO has monitored progress towards the WFS and the MDG 1c hunger targets, using the three-year period 1990–92 as the starting point.

The latest PoU estimates suggest that the developing regions as a whole have almost reached the MDG 1c hunger target. The estimated reduction in 2014–16 is less than one percentage point away from that required to reach the target by 2015 (Figure 1).⁶ Given this small difference, and allowing for a margin of reliability of the background data used to estimate undernourishment, the target can be considered as having been achieved. However, as indicated in the 2013 and 2014 editions of this report, meeting the target exactly would have required accelerated progress in recent years. Despite significant progress in many countries,

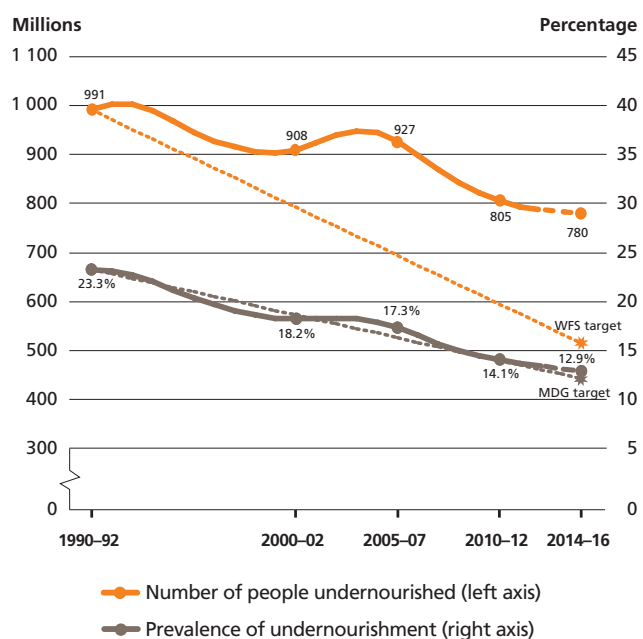
the needed acceleration does not seem to have materialized in the developing regions as a whole.

The other target, set by the WFS in 1996, has been missed by a large margin. Current estimates peg the number of undernourished people in 1990–92 at a little less than a billion in the developing regions. Meeting the WFS goal would have required bringing this number down to about 515 million, that is, some 265 million fewer than the current estimate for 2014–16 (Table 1). However, considering that the population has grown by 1.9 billion since 1990–92, about two billion people have been freed from a likely state of hunger over the past 25 years.

Significant progress in fighting hunger over the past decade should be viewed against the backdrop of a challenging global environment: volatile commodity prices, overall higher food and energy prices, rising unemployment and underemployment rates and, above all, the global economic recessions that occurred in the late 1990s and again after 2008. Increasingly frequent extreme weather events and natural disasters have taken a huge toll in terms of human lives and economic damage, hampering efforts to enhance food security. Political instability and civil strife have added to this picture, bringing the number of displaced persons globally to the highest level since the Second World War. These developments have taken their toll on food security in some of the most vulnerable countries, particularly

FIGURE 1

The trajectory of undernourishment in developing regions: actual and projected progress towards the MDG and WFS targets



Note: Data for 2014–16 refer to provisional estimates.
Source: FAO.



in sub-Saharan Africa, while other regions such as Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, have remained unaffected or have been able to minimize the adverse impacts.

The changing global economic environment has challenged traditional approaches to addressing hunger. Social safety nets and other measures that provide targeted assistance to the most vulnerable population groups have received growing attention. The importance of such targeted measures, when combined with long-term and structural interventions, lies in their ability to lead to a virtuous circle of better nutrition and higher labour productivity. Direct interventions are most effective when they target the most vulnerable populations and address their specific needs,

improving the quality of their diet. Even where policies have been successful in addressing large food-energy deficits, dietary quality remains a concern. Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa remain particularly exposed to what has become known as “hidden hunger” – the lack of, or inadequate, intake of micronutrients, resulting in different types of malnutrition, such as iron-deficiency anaemia and vitamin A deficiency.

How the challenges posed by the global economic environment affect individual regions, and the policies adopted to counteract them, are discussed in greater detail in the third section of this report, “Food security and nutrition: the drivers of change (see pp. 26–42)”.

Wide differences persist among regions

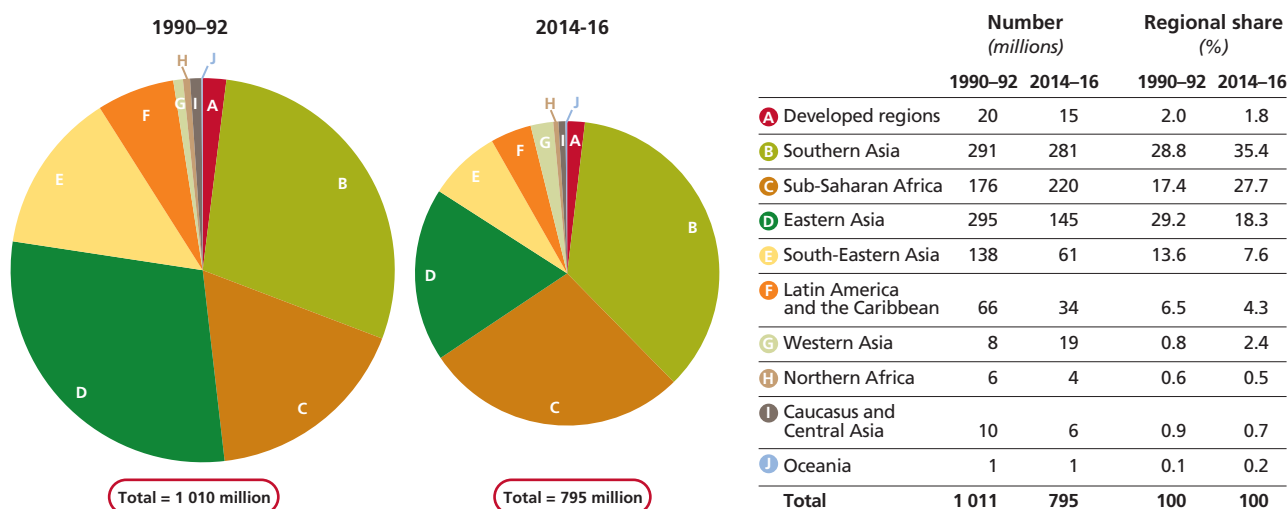
Progress towards improved food security continues to be uneven across regions. Some regions have made remarkably rapid progress in reducing hunger, notably the Caucasus and Central Asia, Eastern Asia, Latin America and Northern Africa. Others, including the Caribbean, Oceania and Western Asia, have also reduced their PoU, but at a slower pace. Progress has also been uneven within these regions, leaving significant pockets of food insecurity in a number of

countries. In two regions, Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, progress has been slow overall. While some countries report successes in reducing hunger, undernourishment and other forms of malnutrition remain at overall high levels in these regions.

The different rates of progress across regions have brought about changes in the regional distribution of hunger since the early 1990s (Figure 2). Southern Asia and

FIGURE 2

The changing distribution of hunger in the world: numbers and shares of undernourished people by region, 1990–92 and 2014–16



Note: The areas of the pie charts are proportional to the total number of undernourished in each period. Data for 2014–16 refer to provisional estimates. All figures are rounded. Source: FAO.



sub-Saharan Africa now account for substantially larger shares of global undernourishment.⁷ The shares for Oceania and Western Asia also rose, albeit by much smaller margins and from relatively low levels. In tandem, faster-than-average progress in Eastern Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean means that these regions now account for much smaller shares of global undernourishment.

Progress towards the international hunger targets

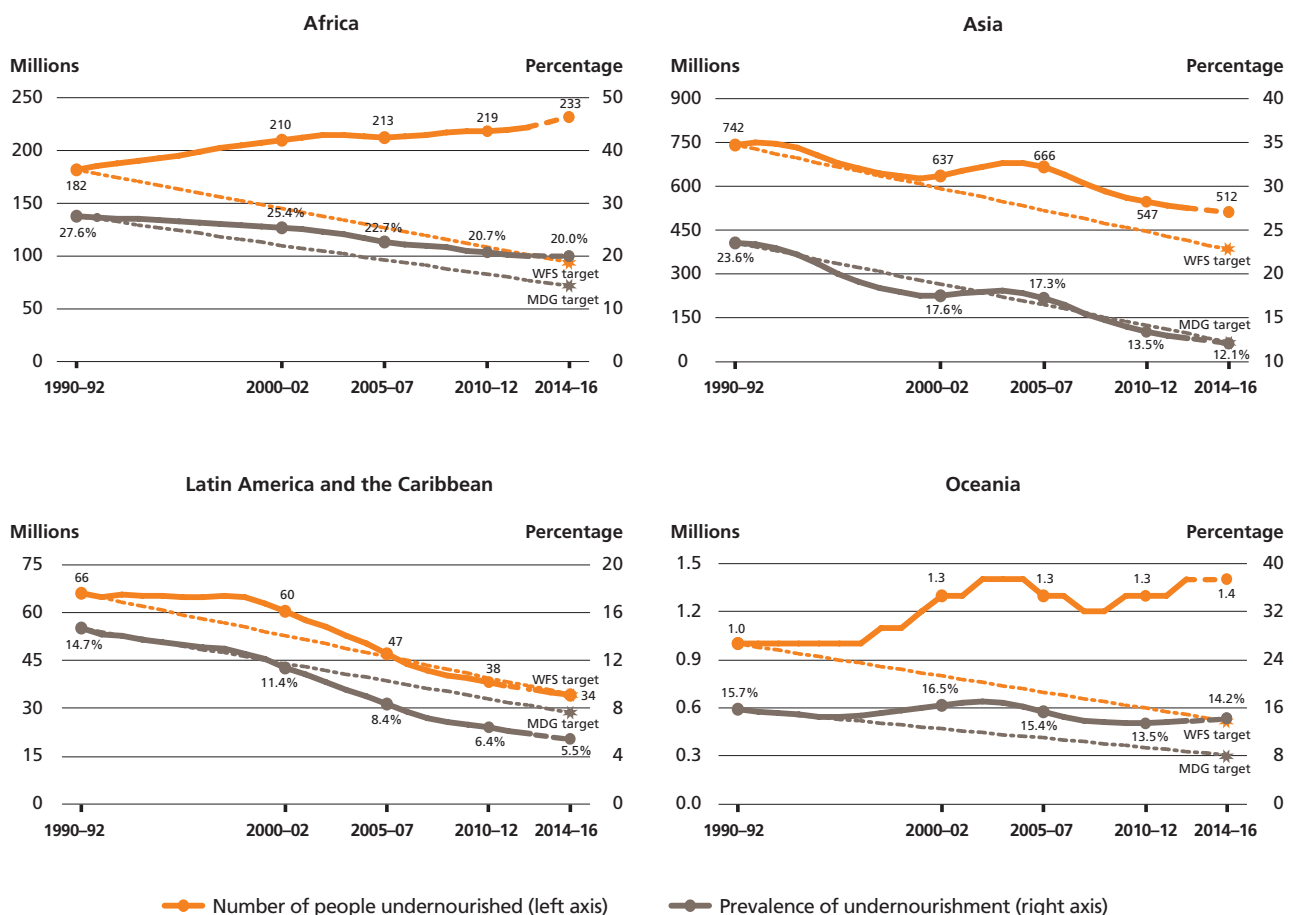
Figure 3 shows how the various developing regions fare with respect to these targets. The estimates suggest that Africa as a whole, and sub-Saharan Africa in particular, will not achieve the MDG 1c target. Northern Africa, by contrast, has reached the target.⁸ The more ambitious WFS goal, however, appears to be out of reach for Africa as a whole, as well as for all its subregions. Asia as a region has already achieved

the MDG 1c hunger target, but would need a further reduction of about 140 million undernourished people to reach the WFS goal – an achievement that is unlikely to materialize in the near future. Latin America and the Caribbean, considered together, have achieved both the MDG 1c hunger target and the WFS goal in 2014–16. Finally, Oceania has reached neither the MDG 1c hunger target nor the WFS goal.

Some countries have met both international targets. Based on the latest estimates, a total of 72 developing countries have achieved the MDG 1c hunger target by 2014–16 (Tables 2 and 3).⁹ Of these, 29 countries have also reached the WFS goal. Another 31 developing countries have reached only the MDG 1c hunger target, either by reducing the PoU by 50 percent or more, or by bringing it below 5 percent. Finally, a third group of 12 countries is also categorized alongside those that have reached the MDG 1c hunger target, as they have maintained their PoU close to or below 5 percent since 1990–92.

FIGURE 3

Regions differ markedly in progress towards achieving the MDG and WFS hunger targets



Note: Data for 2014–16 refer to provisional estimates.
Source: FAO.

TABLE 2
Countries that have achieved, or are close to reaching, the international hunger targets

| WFS goal and MDG 1c target achieved | Close to reaching WFS goal* | MDG 1c target achieved | Close to reaching MDG 1c target * | Prevalence of undernourishment below (or close to) 5 percent since 1990 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1 Angola | 1 Algeria | 1 Algeria | 1 Cabo Verde | 1 Argentina |
| 2 Armenia | 2 Indonesia | 2 Bangladesh | 2 Chad | 2 Barbados |
| 3 Azerbaijan | 3 Maldives | 3 Benin | 3 Colombia | 3 Brunei Darussalam |
| 4 Brazil | 4 Panama | 4 Bolivia (Plurinational State of) | 4 Ecuador | 4 Egypt |
| 5 Cameroon | 5 South Africa | 5 Cambodia | 5 Jamaica | 5 Kazakhstan |
| 6 Chile | 6 Togo | 6 Costa Rica | 6 Honduras | 6 Lebanon |
| 7 China | 7 Trinidad and Tobago | 7 Ethiopia | 7 Paraguay | 7 Republic of Korea |
| 8 Cuba | 8 Tunisia | 8 Fiji | 8 Rwanda | 8 Saudi Arabia |
| 9 Djibouti | | 9 Gambia | 9 Sierra Leone | 9 South Africa |
| 10 Dominican Republic | | 10 Indonesia | | 10 Tunisia |
| 11 Gabon | | 11 Iran | | 11 Turkey |
| 12 Georgia | | 12 Jordan | | 12 United Arab Emirates |
| 13 Ghana | | 13 Kiribati | | |
| 14 Guyana | | 14 Lao People's Democratic Republic | | |
| 15 Kuwait | | 15 Malawi | | |
| 16 Kyrgyzstan | | 16 Malaysia | | |
| 17 Mali | | 17 Maldives | | |
| 18 Myanmar | | 18 Mauritania | | |
| 19 Nicaragua | | 19 Mauritius | | |
| 20 Oman | | 20 Mexico | | |
| 21 Peru | | 21 Morocco | | |
| 22 Saint Vincent and the Grenadines | | 22 Mozambique | | |
| 23 Samoa | | 23 Nepal | | |
| 24 Sao Tome and Principe | | 24 Niger | | |
| 25 Thailand | | 25 Nigeria | | |
| 26 Turkmenistan | | 26 Panama | | |
| 27 Uruguay | | 27 Philippines | | |
| 28 Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) | | 28 Solomon Islands | | |
| 29 Viet Nam | | 29 Suriname | | |
| | | 30 Togo | | |
| | | 31 Uzbekistan | | |

*These countries are expected to reach the target before the year 2020.
Source: FAO calculations.

Sub-Saharan Africa: some success stories, but the international hunger targets are far from being met

In sub-Saharan Africa, just under one in every four people, or 23.2 percent of the population, is estimated to be undernourished in 2014–16 (Figure 4, p. 14). This is the highest prevalence of undernourishment for any region and, with about 220 million hungry people in 2014–16, the second highest burden in absolute terms. In fact, the

number of undernourished people even increased by 44 million between 1990–92 and 2014–16. Taking into account the region's declining PoU (Table 1, p. 8), this reflects the region's remarkably high population growth rate of 2.7 percent per year. The slow pace of progress in fighting hunger over the years is particularly worrisome. While the PoU fell relatively rapidly between 2000–02 and 2005–07, this pace slowed in subsequent years, reflecting factors such as rising food prices, droughts and political instability in several countries.



TABLE 3

Countries that have achieved the international hunger targets, by region

| Sub-Saharan Africa | Eastern, Southern and South-Eastern Asia, and Oceania | Latin America and the Caribbean | Caucasus and Central Asia | Northern Africa and Western Asia |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Countries that met the MDG 1c target by halving the proportion of hungry people or bringing it under 5 percent by 2015 | | | | |
| 1 Benin | 11 Bangladesh | 22 Bolivia | 27 Uzbekistan | 28 Algeria |
| 2 Ethiopia | 12 Cambodia | 23 Costa Rica | | 29 Iran |
| 3 Gambia | 13 Fiji | 24 Mexico | | 30 Jordan |
| 4 Malawi | 14 Indonesia | 25 Panama | | 31 Morocco |
| 5 Mauritania | 15 Kiribati | 26 Suriname | | |
| 6 Mauritius | 16 Lao People's Democratic Republic | | | |
| 7 Mozambique | 17 Malaysia | | | |
| 8 Niger | 18 Maldives | | | |
| 9 Nigeria | 19 Nepal | | | |
| 10 Togo | 20 Philippines | | | |
| | 21 Solomon Islands | | | |
| Countries that reached both the MDG 1c target and the WFS goal of halving the number of hungry people by 2015 | | | | |
| 1 Angola | 8 China | 13 Brazil | 23 Armenia | 28 Kuwait |
| 2 Cameroon | 9 Myanmar | 14 Chile | 24 Azerbaijan | 29 Oman |
| 3 Djibouti | 10 Samoa | 15 Cuba | 25 Georgia | |
| 4 Gabon | 11 Thailand | 16 Dominican Republic | 26 Kyrgyzstan | |
| 5 Ghana | 12 Viet Nam | 17 Guyana | 27 Turkmenistan | |
| 6 Mali | | 18 Nicaragua | | |
| 7 Sao Tome and Principe | | 19 Peru | | |
| | | 20 Saint Vincent and the Grenadines | | |
| | | 21 Uruguay | | |
| | | 22 Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) | | |
| Countries that maintained undernourishment below or close to 5 percent since 1990–92 | | | | |
| 1 South Africa | 2 Brunei Darussalam | 4 Argentina | 6 Kazakhstan | 7 Egypt |
| | 3 Republic of Korea | 5 Barbados | | 8 Turkey |
| | | | | 9 Lebanon |
| | | | | 10 Saudi Arabia |
| | | | | 11 Tunisia |
| | | | | 12 United Arab Emirates |

Source: FAO.

In the Central African subregion,¹⁰ the number of undernourished people more than doubled between 1990–92 and 2014–16, while the PoU declined by 23.4 percent. The divergence between the increase in absolute numbers and the decline in the PoU is explained by the Central Africa's rapid population growth. The lack of progress in absolute terms reflects prevailing problems in the subregion, notably political instability, civil strife and outright war, as is the case in the Central African Republic.

Eastern Africa remains the subregion with the biggest hunger problem in absolute terms, being home to 124 million undernourished people. As in Central Africa, the region continues to experience rapid population growth. While the share of undernourished has fallen by 33.2 percent, the number of hungry people has risen by nearly 20 percent over the MDG monitoring period. A more favourable picture emerges in Southern Africa, where the PoU has fallen by 28 percent since 1990–92 and a little more than 3 million people remain undernourished. The most successful subregion in reducing hunger is Western Africa, where the number of undernourished people has decreased by 24.5 percent since

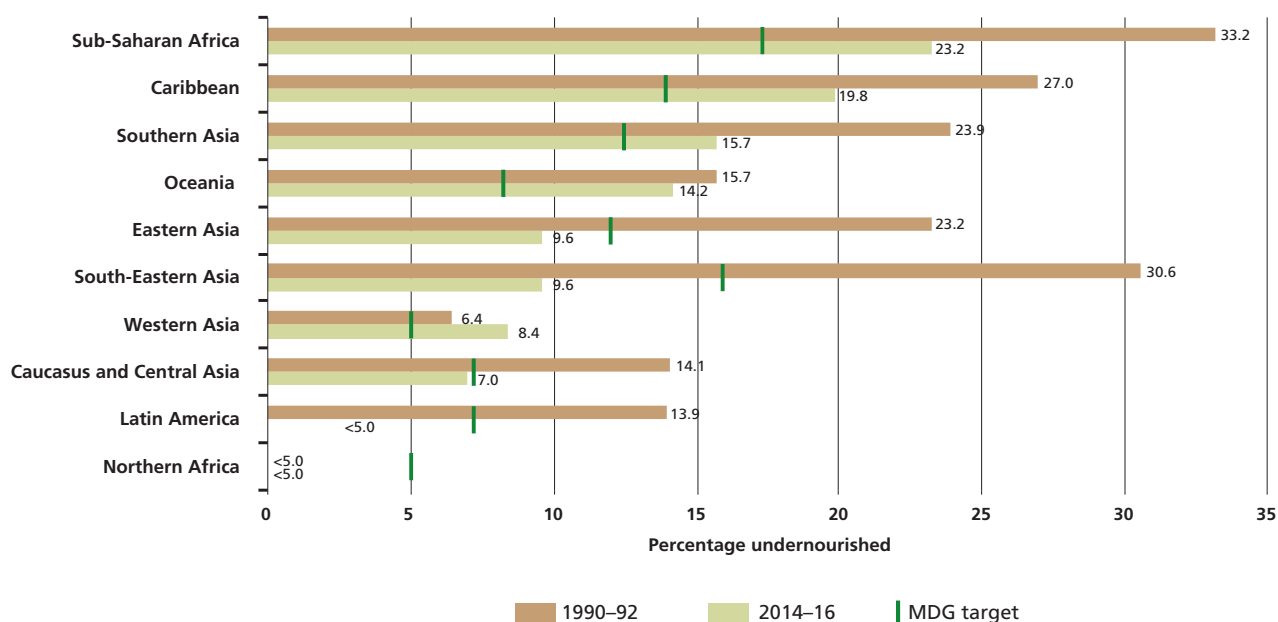
1990–92, while the PoU is projected to be less than 10 percent in 2014–16. This success has been achieved despite a combination of limiting factors, such as rapid population growth – Nigeria is the most populated country in the region – drought in the Sahel and the high food prices experienced in recent years.

A total of 18 countries in sub-Saharan Africa have achieved the MDG 1c hunger target, and four more are close to reaching it (i.e. they are expected to do so before 2020 if current trends persist). Of these, seven countries have also achieved the more ambitious WFS goal (Angola, Cameroon, Djibouti, Gabon, Ghana, Mali and Sao Tome and Principe), and two more (South Africa and Togo) are close to doing so. While these are welcome developments, progress mostly started from high levels of undernourishment, and many of these countries are still burdened with high hunger levels. The more populous countries that have reached the MDG 1c hunger target include Angola, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria and Togo. In addition, many smaller countries, including Benin, the Gambia, Mauritius and the Niger have reached MDG 1c. Others, including Chad,



FIGURE 4

Undernourishment trends: progress made in almost all regions, but at very different rates



Note: Data for 2014-16 refer to provisional estimates.
Source: FAO.

Rwanda and Sierra Leone, are close to reaching the MDG 1c hunger target, even if the hunger burden in these countries remains high, both in relative and absolute terms. However, most countries in sub-Saharan Africa show lack of progress towards the international targets, and many countries, including the Central African Republic and Zambia, still face high PoU levels.

As discussed in more detail in the third section of this report, “Food security and nutrition: the drivers of change” (see pp. 26-42), many of the countries that have made good progress in fighting hunger have enjoyed stable political conditions, overall economic growth and expanding primary sectors, mainly agriculture, fisheries and forestry. Many had policies in place aimed at promoting and protecting access to food. Moreover, many of these countries have experienced high population growth rates, yet have still achieved the MDG 1c target and even the WFS goal.¹¹ This shows that hunger reduction can be achieved even where populations are increasing rapidly, if adequate policy and institutional conditions are put in place. By contrast, countries where progress has been insufficient or where hunger rates have deteriorated are often characterized by weak agricultural growth and inadequate social protection measures. Many are in a state of protracted crisis. The number of such countries extends beyond those for which data are provided in Table A1. The lack of reliable information on food availability and access prevents a sound analysis of the PoU for countries such as Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea and

Somalia, hence their exclusion, but food security indicators for which data are available suggest that their levels of undernourishment remain very high.

■ Northern Africa: international hunger targets are met, despite potential instability

Trends and levels of undernourishment in Northern Africa are very different from those in the rest of the continent. The region has attained PoU levels below 5 percent according to the projections for 2014-16 (Figure 4).¹² The positions of individual countries *vis-à-vis* the international hunger targets are more or less consistent. While 5 percent of the population can still amount to a considerable number of people in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, the generally low PoU indicates that, based on current trends, the region is close to eradicating severe food insecurity.

Subsidized access to food is a central policy element in the region, with prices for basic foods remaining low in many countries, even when world prices spiked. While the sustainability of these measures can be questioned, they have helped keep levels of undernourishment low, by supplying large amount of calories affordably. The focus on calories, however, has left dietary quality concerns largely unaddressed, giving rise to other forms of malnutrition, including a rising prevalence of overweight and obesity. Moreover, the region remains exposed to potential and actual economic and political instability. Some countries are heavily dependent on



food imports, and their limited resource base, coupled with rapid population growth, suggests that import dependence will remain a feature of the region in the future, notwithstanding efforts to increase agricultural productivity.

■ Southern Asia: some progress, but too slow to meet the international hunger targets

The highest burden of hunger in absolute terms is to be found in Southern Asia. Estimates for 2014–16 suggest that about 281 million people are undernourished in the region, marking only a slight reduction from the number in 1990–92 (Table 1, p. 8). But there has been noticeable progress in relative terms: the PoU has declined from 23.9 percent in 1990–92 to 15.7 percent in 2014–16 (Figure 4). The region is on a trajectory towards a more manageable hunger burden. Most importantly, progress has accelerated over the last decade, notwithstanding higher prices on international commodity markets. The evolution of hunger trends in India, in particular, has a significant influence on results for the region. Higher world food prices, observed since the late 2000s, have not been entirely transmitted into domestic prices, especially in large countries such as India. In this country, the extended food distribution programme also contributed to this positive outcome. Higher economic growth has not been fully translated into higher food consumption, let alone better diets overall, suggesting that the poor and hungry may have failed to benefit much from overall growth.

Most countries in Southern Asia have made progress towards the international hunger targets, even if the pace has been too slow for them to reach either the WFS or the MDG targets, including, for example, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. As these countries constitute a large share of the region’s population, they account for the low overall performance – India still has the second-highest estimated number of undernourished people in the world. A notable exception in terms of performance is Bangladesh, which has made faster progress and has already reached the MDG 1c hunger target, thanks also to the comprehensive National Food Policy framework adopted in the mid-2000s. Nepal, also, has not only reached the MDG 1c hunger target, but has almost reached the 5 percent threshold. One more country in the region, the Islamic Republic of Iran, has already brought the PoU below 5 percent, and has thus reached the MDG 1c target.

■ Eastern and South-Eastern Asia: rapid and generalized progress towards the international hunger targets

The most successful subregions in fighting hunger have been Eastern and South-Eastern Asia. The number of undernourished people in Eastern Asia has fallen from 295 million in 1990–92 to 145 million in 2014–16, a 50.9 percent reduction (Table 1, p. 8). Over the same period,

the PoU dropped from 23.2 percent at the beginning of the monitoring period, to 9.6 percent in 2014–16, a reduction of more than 60 percent (Figure 4).

In South-Eastern Asia, the number of undernourished people has continued its steady decline, from 137.5 million in 1990–92 to 60.5 million by 2014–16, a 56 percent reduction overall. The PoU has shrunk by a remarkable 68.5 percent, falling from 30.6 percent in 1990–92 to less than 10 percent in 2014–16. Most countries in South-Eastern Asia are making rapid progress towards international targets. Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam all account for this positive performance. No country in the region shows lack of progress with respect to the international targets. Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia have reduced their PoU to below the 5 percent threshold, which means they are close to having eradicated hunger.

As discussed in more detail in the section “Food security and nutrition: the drivers of change” (pp. 26–42), much of the success of Eastern and South-Eastern Asia was possible due to high overall economic growth. Unlike Southern Asia, these subregions experienced more inclusive growth, with more of the poor and vulnerable sharing the benefits. Rapid productivity growth in agriculture, since the Green Revolution, has boosted food availability and significantly improved access to food for the rural poor.

China’s achievements in reducing hunger dominate the overall performance of Eastern Asia. The country accounts for almost two-thirds of the reduction in the number of undernourished people in the developing regions between 1990–92 and 2014–16. China and the Republic of Korea have achieved both the MDG 1c hunger target and the WFS goal. Nevertheless, given the sheer size of its population, China is still home to an estimated 134 million people facing hunger, and the country with the highest number of undernourished people. The prospects of continued growth, the increasing orientation of the economy towards the domestic market, the expansion of economic opportunities in internal areas of the country and the growing ability of the poor to benefit from these developments, have been and will continue to be key factors in hunger reduction. Again, given its size, this also holds at the regional level and has a marked influence on global results. The only major exception to overall favourable progress in the region is the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, which is burdened by continuously high levels of undernourishment and shows little prospect of addressing its problems any time soon.

■ Caucasus and Central Asia: rapid recovery from the transition to the market economy enabled the international hunger targets to be met

A combination of factors accounts for progress in the Caucasus and Central Asia, including rapid economic growth, a resource-rich environment and remittances. After

a difficult transition in the early 1990s, often characterized by political instability and economic austerity, economic conditions have improved significantly and the political situation has stabilized. This progress has translated into lower hunger burdens throughout the region. Latest estimates point to a steady decline in the PoU, which has contracted from 14.1 percent in 1990–92 to 7.0 percent for 2014–16 (Figure 4, p. 14). The number of undernourished people is much lower than in other Asian subregions – 5.8 million in 2014–16, down from 9.6 million in 1990–92 (Table 1, p. 8).

Progress has been sufficiently rapid to enable both the region as a whole and most countries to achieve the MDG 1c hunger target. Indeed, most countries have attained PoU levels close to, or below, the 5 percent threshold. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan have achieved the WFS goal, while Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have achieved the MDG 1c hunger target. The only country still lagging behind is Tajikistan,¹³ which is making insufficient progress to reach the international targets, and is burdened by a relatively high PoU (33.2 percent in 2014–16).

■ **Western Asia: no progress towards the international hunger targets, despite low undernourishment levels in several countries**

A less encouraging picture emerges from Western Asia, where very different patterns can be observed. Some countries, including Iraq and Yemen, show high levels of food insecurity and have made slow progress towards improving this situation. Most other countries, on the contrary, have long since attained solid levels of food security, after having brought undernourishment levels below 5 percent. These include politically stable, resource-rich economies, such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, together with Jordan, Lebanon and Oman – all of which have achieved the MDG 1c hunger target; Kuwait and Oman have also achieved the WFS goal. The group also includes rapidly growing and politically stable countries, such as Turkey. In Iraq and Yemen, as well as other countries in the region for which no reliable information is available, political instability, war and civil strife, as well as fragile institutions, are the main factors underlying the lack of progress.¹⁴

Despite a relatively low number of undernourished people, Western Asia saw an increase in undernourishment throughout the monitoring period: the PoU rose by 32.2 percent between 1990–92 and 2014–16, from 6.4 to 8.4 percent (Figure 4, p. 14). In parallel, rapid population growth has brought about a dramatic increase in the number of undernourished people, from 8 million to nearly 19 million. The region in its entirety, therefore, has not made progress towards reaching either of the international hunger targets, as a result of the polarized situation across countries.

■ **Latin America and the Caribbean: international hunger targets have been met, due to rapid progress in South America**

In Latin America, the PoU has declined from 13.9 percent in 1990–92 to less than 5 percent in 2014–16 (Figure 4, p. 14). In parallel, the number of undernourished people fell from 58 million to fewer than 27 million (Table 1, p. 8). As in most regions, stark differences can be found across countries and subregions. The Central American subregion, for instance, saw much less progress compared with that of South America and even Latin America overall. While South America has been able to bring undernourishment down by more than 75 percent and eventually to below the 5 percent mark, the PoU for Central America has declined by only 38.2 percent over the MDG monitoring period.

Despite divergent developments within the region, Latin America has achieved both the MDG 1c and WFS targets by large margins. The overall achievements are to a large extent also a reflection of robust progress in its most populous countries. Good overall economic performance, steady output growth in agriculture and successful social protection policies are among the main correlates of progress in the region. The combination of safety nets with special programmes for family farmers and smallholders and targeted support to vulnerable groups, together with broad-based food security interventions such as school-feeding programmes, have contributed significantly to improving food security in the region. At the continental level, important commitments started in 2005 with the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative and, through various other initiatives, eventually led to the Plan for Food Security, Nutrition and Hunger Eradication 2025 of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC),¹⁵ adopted by all countries of the region in January 2015 during its third Presidential Summit.

Hunger rates are currently below the 5 percent threshold in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Uruguay and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and the WFS hunger goal has been achieved in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Guyana, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. In all, 13 countries in Latin America have achieved the MDG 1c hunger target. Beyond those listed above, these include the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Guyana, Panama, Peru and Suriname. Another four countries, including Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras and Paraguay, are on track to reach the MDG 1c target over the next few years, if current trends persist. Even if some countries, such as Guatemala or El Salvador, appear to be off-track for reaching the international targets, no country in the region has a PoU higher than 20 percent.

The Caribbean as a whole, like Central America, has failed to meet the MDG 1c target. Unlike Central America, however, the remaining hunger burden in almost all Caribbean countries is lower and thus more manageable. The PoU has dropped from 27.0 percent in 1990–92 to 19.8 percent in



2014–16, a 26.6 percent decrease in relative terms. Many individual Caribbean countries, however, have achieved the international targets or are at least close to reaching them. Barbados, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have all attained the MDG 1c hunger target. The latter three have also reached the more demanding WFS goal. Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago are also very close to reaching the MDG 1c target. The explanation for the region as a whole lagging behind lies in the severe and still largely unabated problems experienced by Haiti – a country hit by recurrent natural disasters, still facing slow growth in food availability *vis-à-vis* population growth and burdened by an increasingly degraded resource base as well as a fragile national economy.¹⁶

■ Oceania

The developing countries of Oceania have experienced slow progress towards improved food security. The overall PoU in the region fell by less than 10 percent between 1990–92 and 2014–16. This corresponds to an increase in the number of undernourished people of about 0.5 million, or 50 percent. Being largely small island developing states characterized by high dependency on food imports, food security in most

countries can be severely affected by external shocks, including international price volatility, adverse weather events and sudden changes in the availability of a few important staples, such as rice. The Pacific Islands face multiple burdens of malnutrition; while hunger has fallen slowly, overweight, obesity and, as a consequence, non-communicable diseases, such as type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease, are taking a growing toll on the region's health and economic status.

Several countries in the Oceania region covered by this report have achieved the MDG 1c hunger target, including Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa and the Solomon Islands, while Vanuatu has not. Samoa has also reached the more ambitious WFS goal. The situation in Vanuatu has deteriorated dramatically since Cyclone Pam hit the islands in March 2015.¹⁷ Before this catastrophic event, the country had been showing consistent progress in reducing hunger. In the case of Papua New Guinea, by far the most populous country in the region, a detailed assessment has not been possible due to the lack of reliable background data. Overall progress notwithstanding, there is considerable uncertainty about the situation in the country, where the information needed to reliably estimate undernourishment is largely absent. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the country's food security situation is far from resolved.

Key findings

- **Based on the latest estimates, about 795 million people remain undernourished globally, down 167 million over the last decade, and 216 million lower than in 1990–92. This means that just over one in every nine people in the world are currently unable to consume enough food to conduct an active and healthy life.**
 - **About 780 million people, or the vast majority of the hungry, live in the developing regions. In these regions, the prevalence of undernourishment has dropped by 44.4 percent since 1990–92, and the overall share now stands at 12.9 percent of the total population.**
 - **The year 2015 marks the end of the monitoring period for the World Food Summit (WFS) and Millennium Development Goal (MDG) hunger targets. The latest projections suggest that, as a whole, the developing regions have almost reached the MDG 1c hunger target. From a statistical perspective, the target was missed by a small margin, but from a development perspective,**
- the essence of the MDG 1c commitment has been fulfilled, at least globally. The WFS target, by contrast, has been missed by a large margin. The estimated number of undernourished people is some 285 million above the envisaged target for 2015.**
- **Wide differences persist across regions. Some have made rapid progress in reducing hunger: Latin America as well as the Eastern and South-Eastern regions of Asia have all achieved both the MDG 1c hunger target and the more ambitious WFS goal. The MDG 1c target has been reached in the Caucasus and Central Asia and in the Northern and Western regions of Africa. Progress has also been recorded in the Caribbean, Oceania, Southern Asia, and Southern and Eastern Africa, but at too slow a pace to reach the MDG 1c target. Finally, Central Africa and Western Asia are moving away from the hunger targets, with a higher proportion of undernourished in the population now than in 1990–92.**



- A total of 72 developing countries of the 129 monitored have reached the MDG 1c hunger target. Of these, 29 countries have also achieved the more ambitious WFS goal. Another 12 countries, among the 72 countries considered to have achieved the MDG 1c target, have maintained the prevalence of undernourishment below, or very close to, 5 percent since 1990–92.
- Most countries that have achieved the international hunger targets enjoyed stable political conditions and economic growth, accompanied by sound social protection policies targeted towards vulnerable population groups. In these countries, the commitment to fight food insecurity proved successful in spite of the difficulties posed by rapid population growth, volatile commodity prices, high food and energy prices, rising unemployment and the economic recessions that occurred in the late 1990s and again after 2008.
- In several countries that have failed to reach the international hunger targets, natural and human-induced disasters or political instability have generated a status of protracted crisis, which has prevented the protection of vulnerable population groups and the promotion of income opportunities for all. In other countries, the benefits of economic growth have failed to reach the poor population, due to lack of effective social protection and income redistribution policies. In the short run, the only means to address food insecurity is humanitarian intervention. In the medium and the long term, hunger eradication can only be pursued if all stakeholders contribute to designing and enacting policies for improving economic opportunities, the protection of vulnerable groups and disaster preparedness. Action undertaken at the global and regional levels should take into account country specificities and exposure to natural and human-induced disasters, especially those of small island developing states.