

A key component of human capital is healthy and well-nourished people throughout their lives, but many children are not able to access sufficient, safe nutritious food and a balanced diet that meets their needs for optimal growth and development, to enable an active and healthy life. Globally, it is estimated that 150.8 million children are stunted, 50.5 million are wasted, and 38.3 million are overweight (Development Initiatives, 2018[11]). Hence, many countries are facing a double burden of malnutrition – characterised by the coexistence of undernutrition along with overweight, obesity or diet related NCDs – a health challenge on the rise in many LAC countries. Child malnutrition also contributes to poorer cognitive and educational outcomes in later childhood and adolescence, which in turn affect lifelong potential and heavily determines the socio-economic status of the individual.

The UN SDG target 2.2 sets that by 2030 end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under five years of age, and also includes an indicator on childhood overweight. Subsequently, in April 2016, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2016-2025 the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition to eradicate hunger, and malnutrition in all its forms (undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight or obesity) and reduce the burden of diet-related NCDs in all age groups (UN, 2019[12]).

Stunting rates in LAC are generally lower than in other world regions but it is still a significant problem in several countries. In average, 13% of children below five years of age are stunted in LAC27 (Figure 4.9). The rate is nearly 47% in Guatemala and over 20% in Haiti, Ecuador and Honduras, while is lowest in Chile and Saint Lucia below 3%. Wasting rates are also lower than in other regions with an average of 2.5% among children below five years of age, but Barbados, Guyana and Uruguay have significantly higher rates than average being over 6%. The lowest rates are observed in Chile, Peru, Guatemala and Colombia, all below 1%.

Countries with higher stunting prevalence tend to have higher than average under-5 mortality, reflecting the fact that about half of all deaths before the age of 5 can be attributed to malnutrition (Figure 4.10). Guatemala deviates significantly from the trend by having a stunting rate almost four times the LAC average and an under-5 mortality rate eight points over the LAC average. This is mainly due to the high poverty rate and large inequality in the country, which causes that half the population cannot afford the cost of the basic food basket. This adds to the effects of natural disasters and climate change that damages food production (WFP, 2019[13]).

Childhood overweight and obesity is shaping up to be one of the most significant challenges of the century. In LAC26, the average prevalence of overweight among children under age 5 is almost 8%

(Figure 4.11). The highest rates are observed in Paraguay and Barbados having over 12%, followed by Trinidad and Tobago, Bolivia, Panama and Argentina, where more than one child out of 10 is overweight. In turn, rates are lower than 5% in Haiti, Suriname and Guatemala.

The identification, promotion and implementation of actions that simultaneously and synergistically address undernutrition as well as overweight, obesity and diet related NCDs are important opportunities and immediate priorities. They include: food systems for healthy, sustainable diets, aligned health systems providing universal coverage of essential nutrition actions, social protection and nutrition related education, trade and investment for improved nutrition, safe and supportive environments for nutrition at all ages, and strengthening and promotion of nutrition governance and accountability (WHO, 2017[14]).

Definition and comparability

The WHO definition of children overweight is weight for height greater than 2 standard deviations above WHO child growth standard median. The WHO definition of children obesity is weight for height greater than 3 standard deviations above the WHO Child Growth Standard median.

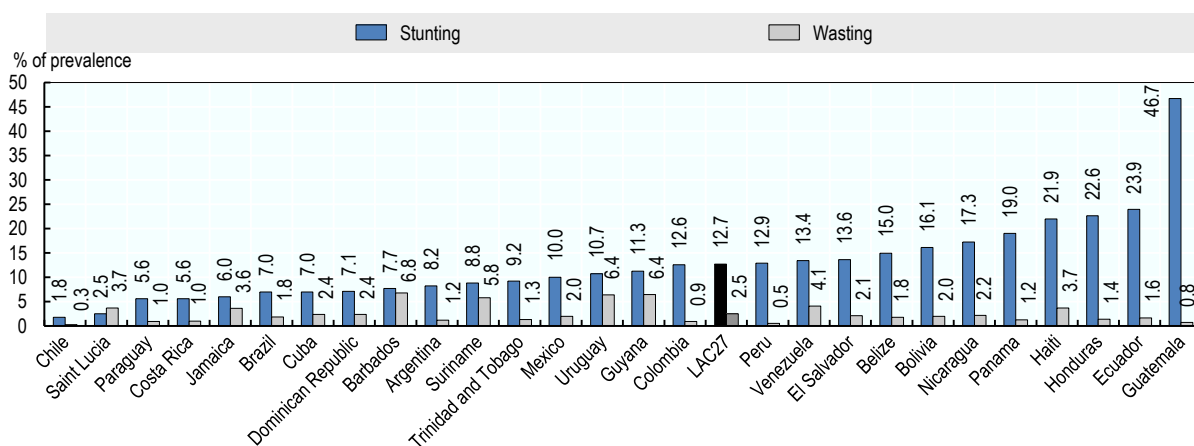
Stunted growth (low height for age) reflects failure to reach linear growth potential as a result of long-term suboptimal health and/or nutritional conditions.

Wasting usually indicates recent and severe weight loss, because a person has not had enough food to eat and/or they have had an infectious disease such as diarrhea which has caused them to lose weight.

References

- [11] Development Initiatives (2018), *Global Nutrition Report: shining a light to spur action on nutrition*, Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd, Bristol, https://globalnutritionreport.org/documents/344/2018_Global_Nutrition_Report_Executive_Summary.pdf.
- [12] UN (2019), *United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025*, <https://www.un.org/nutrition/home>.
- [13] WFP (2019), *Guatemala | World Food Programme*, <https://www.wfp.org/countries/guatemala>.
- [14] WHO (2017), *The double burden of malnutrition*, World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/doubleburdenmalnutrition-policybrief/en/>.

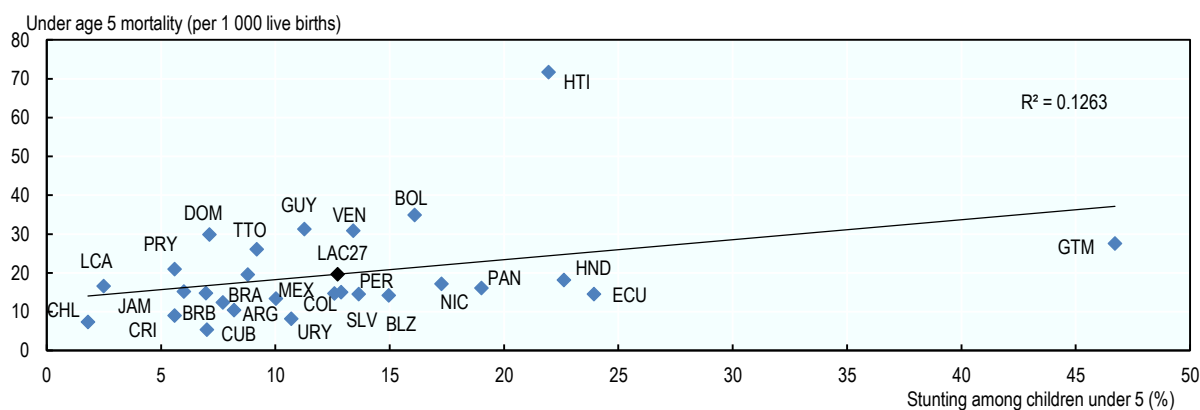
Figure 4.9. Prevalence of stunting and wasting among children under age 5, latest year available



Source: WHO GHO 2018.

StatLink <https://stat.link/m9u12g>

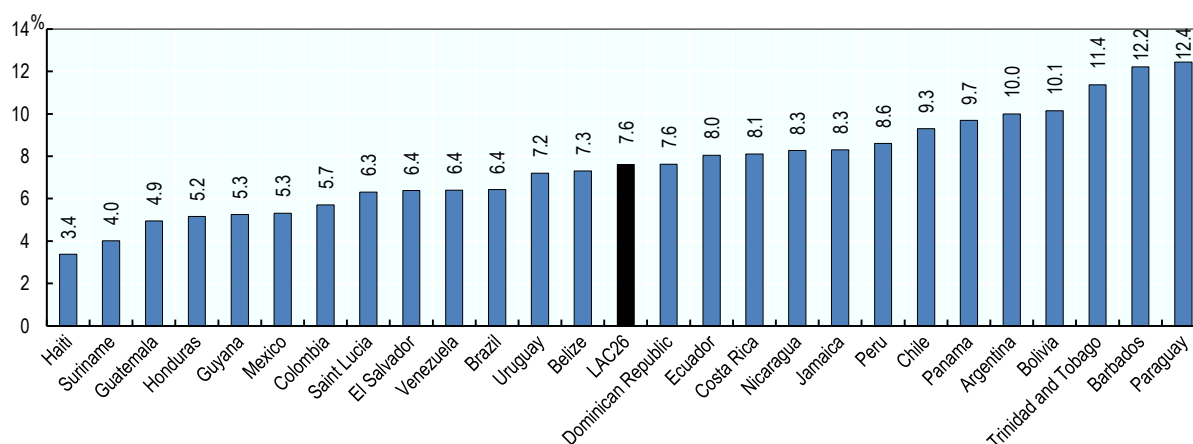
Figure 4.10. Under age 5 mortality and stunting prevalence, latest year available



Source: WHO GHO 2018.

StatLink <https://stat.link/y6mxlk>

Figure 4.11. Prevalence of overweight among children under age 5, latest year available



Source: WHO GHO 2018.

StatLink <https://stat.link/irfc27>



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