Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

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STUDY GUIDE

COMMITTEE OEWG 1

Safe Food and Healthy Diets

I

Introduction

At the 2020 World Food Safety Day, FAO Director-General QU Dongyu stated that "food security and food safety are basic rights of human beings" (FAO, 2020a). The United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seek to further the global goals of ending hunger, achieving food security and providing healthy food to all by addressing the need to significantly transform agrifood systems[1] towards greater sustainability and resilience (UN, 2015).

Food safety is defined as "the assurance that food will not cause harm to the consumer when it is prepared and/or eaten according to its intended use" (CAC, 1969). Unsafe food impinges on the progressive realization to the right to adequate food in the context of national food security and undercuts efforts to guarantee health and wellbeing. Safe food is also a prerequisite for achieving healthy diets, increasing market access and economic development, as well as overall food security, defined as "access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life" for all.

When and where food is not safe, transformation of agrifood systems to meet the SDGs will not be feasible, and many SDGs will remain out of reach, including eliminating hunger (SDG2) and achieving health and wellbeing (SDG3). Unsafe food causes an estimated 600 million cases of food-borne diseases (FBDs) every year, as well as 420 000 annual deaths. Children under the age of five account for 143 000 of those fatalities (WHO, 2015). Human illnesses due to unsafe food are estimated to cause yearly productivity losses equating to USD 95 billion for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (Jaffee et al., 2019).

[1] Agrifood system: "The agrifood system covers the journey of food from farm to table: when it is grown, fished, harvested, processed, packaged, transported, distributed, traded, bought, prepared, eaten, and disposed of. The agrifood system also includes the livelihoods of the people who work in the system as well as the activities, investments and choices that play a part in producing food and agricultural products. In the FAO Constitution, the term "agriculture" and its derivatives include fisheries, marine products, forestry and primary forestry products". From: 166th FAO Council Report (CL 166/REP, http://www.fao.org/3/nf693en/nf693en.pdf)

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Something to Think About 1

Food safety and nutrition are both necessary for a healthy diet, but they address different problems. Vegetables may provide essential nutrients yet cause illness if contaminated by unsafe irrigation water; conversely, food can be free of dangerous contaminants without providing the variety of nutrients people need. This matters when governments purchase food for schools or other public programmes: checking that suppliers meet hygiene requirements does not establish that meals are nutritionally balanced, and reviewing menus does not establish that meals are safe. Investigate how existing public food programmes assess both food safety and nutritional quality, and whether gaps in those systems warrant provisions in the resolution.

Connection to Study Guide B: See pp. 1–3 for what makes a diet healthy, including whether diets provide the nutrients people need, and why affordability matters.

Interesting Facts 1

WHO's updated estimates, published in 2026, indicate that contaminated food caused approximately 866 million illnesses and 1.52 million deaths worldwide in 2021, including 143,000 deaths among children under five. WHO also estimates that foodborne illness causes US$310 billion annually in lost productivity and medical expenses worldwide. Families lose income when people are unable to work, while healthcare systems bear the costs of treatment. Food safety failures can also damage agricultural markets. A 2026 study of two Salmonella outbreaks linked to onions in the United States estimated approximately US$2.5 billion in combined market losses, demonstrating how contamination can reduce demand and harm producers beyond the immediate costs of treating illness. These consequences show why preventing foodborne illness is not only a public health priority but also an important economic and development concern.

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STRATEGIC OUTCOME 1: Intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder engagement in intersectoral coordination of food safety governance is reinforced at all levels

As FAO Members work to transform agrifood systems, it is important that food safety remains a priority and its principles and objectives are integrated across the whole food chain. Food safety principles and standards should be respected when making operational, governance, and financial decisions at national, regional and international levels.

FAO plays a crucial role in this endeavour by providing tailored support to Members and other stakeholders related to guidance and technical support on various aspects of food safety, including normative, governance, science, and policy matters.

A prominent element is the FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, which, through the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC, 2022a), develops evidence-, science- and risk-based food standards. These standards and texts provide guidance to stakeholders and Members meant to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in food trade. FAO and WHO provide the scientific basis for the deliberation of the Commission through the joint FAO/WHO Scientific Advice Programme, typically in the form of expert meeting reports, guidance documents and tools.

As one of the three international standard-setting organizations in the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS), along with the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) governing body, the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM), the Codex Alimentarius Commission plays an important role in the context of international food trade. Its guidance is used as a reference to establish national standards, to minimize the regulatory burdens in cross-border trade, and to promote global harmonization.

FAO will continue providing support and actively contributing to intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder engagement in intersectoral coordination of food safety governance. It will enhance its work with the SPS standard-setting organizations, as well as the One Health High Level Expert Panel (OHHLEP) and other organizations advocating for One Health approaches.

The goal of fostering food safety governance and applying food safety norms globally and at all subsidiary levels can only be achieved with FAO Members' support and engagement in the process. This is especially true when the overall goal is improving public health and

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Something to Think About **1**

Strengthening food safety governance requires cooperation between international organizations, national authorities and food businesses. Generally, this cooperation works well to protect consumers from foodborne illnesses, but sometimes the system fails to prevent food contamination. When this happens, measures taken to protect consumers can have unintended consequences for the availability and affordability of food commodities. A good example occurred in 2021, when Kenya restricted maize imports from Uganda and Tanzania because of concerns about aflatoxin, a toxic substance produced by certain molds. According to a 2023 Food Trade Coalition for Africa report, maize diverted from export markets increased domestic supplies and contributed to falling prices in Uganda. Meanwhile, reduced imports caused shortages in Kenya, increasing costs for maize millers and contributing to higher maize prices. Exporters also faced financial losses and additional testing and certification requirements. Although the restrictions were intended to protect consumers, the report found that informal cross-border trade increased, potentially undermining food safety controls. This example illustrates how food safety governance and affordability can be closely connected. Investigate the challenges importing and exporting countries face when food safety incidents disrupt trade. How could existing international and regional food safety mechanisms help countries manage the consequences of these incidents while continuing to protect consumers?

Connection to Study Guide B: See pp. 6–7 for how food prices, transportation and distribution costs affect access to nutritious foods.

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STRATEGIC OUTCOME 1

trade and in the context of an evolving agrifood system. FAO will continue to encourage and support Members and stakeholders to actively participate in the global food safety governance discussions and activities.

The Strategic Actions (A1) to achieve **Strategic Outcome 1** are:

A1.1 **To continue supporting collaboration between the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its Secretariat to advance the food safety standards-setting process.**

Encouraging greater participation of FAO Members, especially developing countries and those in economic transition, and stakeholders in the Codex work will be key in achieving this goal. FAO will continue to reach out to diverse stakeholders and broaden the support towards international standards development. It will consider new ways of working, including virtual tools for communication, information sharing, collaborations and meetings. It will continue advocating for support to the Codex Trust Fund and for the use of Codex standards as the basis for harmonizing and developing national regulatory frameworks.

A1.2 **To promote greater coordination and dialogue in line with the One Health approach and One Health Action Plan.**

FAO will facilitate dialogues and activities taking into account the mandates, responsibilities and accountabilities of each stakeholder, including regional and international organizations. It will promote cooperation across multiple sectors, including food safety, public health, agriculture, animal and plant health, economy, education, trade, environment, and general food law at all relevant national and international levels and in synergy with the One Health Action Plan (FAO et al., 2022). Specific initiatives will include coordinating activities and establishing technical multistakeholder networks around current and emerging food safety issues. FAO will encourage Members to continue to establish food safety standards, taking into close consideration the uptake capacities of all stakeholders (including for example, smallholders, women and men, and MSMEs), thus enhancing food safety governance. The Organization will further provide integrated and coherent assistance to countries in regulating and monitoring the use of antimicrobials and in preventing and minimizing the development and further spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) within the agrifood system, to humans and in the environment, and limit its effect on the safety and integrity of the food chain. These actions will be carried out according to the FAO Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2021-2025 (FAO, 2021a), which was developed further to Conference Resolution 4/2015 on AMR (FAO, 2015), to combat antimicrobial resistance globally.

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Did You Know That... 1

The Codex Alimentarius Commission, supported by FAO and WHO, develops international food standards, guidelines and codes of practice based on scientific evidence. For example, Codex establishes maximum residue limits (MRLs) that specify how much of a particular pesticide residue may remain in a food product when the pesticide has been used according to approved agricultural practices. This helps countries decide what levels of residues are acceptable. But a country cannot apply those limits effectively simply by copying them into national law: laboratories must be able to measure residues, inspectors must check compliance, and farmers and food processors must understand the rules that apply to them. Investigate where countries have struggled to implement existing Codex standards and whether FAO's current technical assistance could be strengthened to address those difficulties.

Something to Think About 1

Countries help shape Codex food safety standards by contributing scientific evidence and explaining conditions in their food systems. For example, a proposed standard for a widely traded crop may require data on how it is grown and treated in different countries. A government with few food safety specialists may struggle to gather those data, review technical documents or send experts to meetings, leaving its circumstances less fully represented. FAO's strategy already calls for broader participation by developing countries and economies in transition. Investigate barriers to meaningful participation, the assistance already offered, and what gaps remain that you might address in your resolution.

Definition 3

One Health recognizes that the health of people, animals, plants and the environment is connected. For example, bacteria carried by poultry can contaminate meat during slaughter if equipment is not cleaned properly. Veterinary services monitor animal health, food safety authorities oversee slaughter and processing, and public health officials investigate illnesses in people. If these services do not share information, they may miss a common source of contamination. FAO already promotes coordination through the One Health approach. Investigate where countries have had difficulty coordinating these services and how existing cooperation and technical assistance could be strengthened.

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STRATEGIC OUTCOME 2:
Sound scientific advice and evidence are provided as the foundation for food safety decision-making

Over the last several decades, the FAO/WHO Scientific Advice programme for food safety has been the authoritative global point of reference for evidence-based scientific information on food safety. By gathering a wide range of expert advice, resources and tools, it has established principles and methods to assess various types of hazards. This programme has supported Codex and FAO Members in informing their food safety related decisions.

To enable the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, it is essential that the programme continues to provide timely and sound advice through its standing expert panels which include the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA), the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA), and the Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues (JMPR), as well as ad hoc expert meetings.

Food safety science and food-related technologies are constantly evolving and new food safety issues continue to emerge. FAO takes into account the potential impacts of ongoing changes and trends in agrifood systems with implications for food safety. It also uses forward-looking approaches such as foresight and horizon scanning to proactively identify emerging issues and to assess their food safety implications. These approaches can help to evaluate trends and drivers, as well as issues of regulatory significance, and quickly alert decision-makers and policymakers so they can make informed and appropriate decisions. In this regard, for FAO to continue to provide cutting-edge and useful information in support of Members' and Codex's time-sensitive decisions, it must continue to update and revise the methods and approaches underpinning risk assessment and risk-based advice.

Across various science areas, the ability and practice of assessing both risks as well as benefits continues to deserve attention. For this to happen, good data on food safety need to be in place. This is especially true as managing and making decisions on food safety issues increasingly involve ensuring due consideration of food safety within specific food security contexts and factors related to the sustainability and resilience of agrifood systems. This raises the importance of producing sexdisaggregated data when pertinent for understanding and addressing gender and social inequalities as underlying causes of value chain inefficiencies and that may constrain the uptake of food safety measures.

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Definition **3**

Food safety regulations should be guided by scientific evidence about which substances or microorganisms can cause harm, how people are exposed to them, and how serious the consequences may be. For example, scientists may discover pesticide residues on vegetables. However, determining whether those vegetables pose a health risk requires examining which pesticide is present, the amount of residue, how much of the vegetable people typically consume, and the health effects associated with that level of exposure. This process, known as risk assessment, helps governments determine whether action is necessary and what measures would adequately protect consumers. FAO and WHO already provide scientific assessments that inform international food safety standards developed by the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Investigate how countries use this scientific advice when establishing national food safety regulations and what challenges they face in applying it.

Food safety hazards can be biological (such as Salmonella bacteria), chemical (such as pesticide or veterinary medicine residues), or physical (such as glass fragments). Different hazards require different ways of identifying and controlling them; finding a chemical residue does not by itself establish that the amount present poses a health risk.

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STRATEGIC OUTCOME 2

FAO must continue to support Members in generating, interpreting and maintaining their own good quality data according to a set of standard approaches and processes. It can also provide relevant alternative data where country data may be missing. Attaining good data must also result from coordinated activity between FAO Members, stakeholders and partners. Furthermore, making the results of the analysis of data accessible within a secure and protected framework is important as it benefits both Members and the international food safety community, and allows for more efficient decision-making processes, both regionally and internationally.

Gathering trustworthy and solid information on food safety risks and communicating that information in a timely manner to the relevant authorities is key for advancing food safety goals. However, so is clear messaging that avoids ambiguity and potential misinterpretation. It is important to continue to harness capacities and tools to achieve effective risk communication on food safety matters and to readily counteract miscommunication.

The Strategic (A2) Actions to achieve **Strategic Outcome 2** are:

A2.1 **To maintain and improve the leading-edge scientific advice provided by the joint FAO/WHO food safety expert panels, mainly JECFA, JEMRA, and JMPR.**

This will ensure that the FAO/WHO Food Safety Scientific Advice programme will continue to be a key global point of reference for the development of national and international standards, as well as for risk management and other decision-making processes on current and emerging food safety issues.

A2.2 **To continuously improve, tailor, and update the science-, evidence- and risk-based approaches, as well as the methodologies and skills to provide authoritative scientific advice to Codex, FAO Members and other UN agencies.**

This concerns various types of food safety hazards, including chemical, microbiological, and physical hazards, as well as associated risk assessment capacities. There are a number of examples of approaches that are becoming increasingly relevant in these areas. For example, in chemical risk assessments, non-animal testing-based approaches and combined exposure to multiple chemicals are some of the areas that are being increasingly explored. A further example, regarding microbiological risk assessments, is the modelling of data generated by gene-based technologies and big-data approaches that are under rapid development.

A2.3 **To foster an understanding and appreciation of the importance of scientific advice and guidance on food safety matters among FAO Members and food safety stakeholders.**

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Something to Think About **1**

A country needs reliable information about the causes of foodborne illness to determine where inspections and preventive measures are most needed. For example, if repeated outbreaks of illness are linked to vegetables contaminated by irrigation water, authorities may need to strengthen water testing and controls on farms. But if they cannot identify the source of the outbreaks, they may continue concentrating inspections on restaurants and food markets without addressing the contamination occurring earlier in production. FAO already supports countries in collecting, analyzing and sharing food safety data. Investigate examples where inadequate information has prevented authorities from identifying or addressing food safety problems, and consider whether lessons from these cases could inform provisions in your resolution.

Something to Think About **1**

When authorities discover that food may be contaminated, they must quickly identify which products are affected, where they have been distributed and what consumers should do. For example, suppose a country discovers Salmonella in a shipment of tomatoes that has already been exported to several neighboring countries. Its food safety authorities need to notify their counterparts so they can identify the affected shipments, remove contaminated tomatoes from sale and warn consumers. If the information is delayed or does not clearly identify the affected products, contaminated food may remain on the market, while businesses may unnecessarily discard safe tomatoes. FAO's strategy recognizes the importance of timely communication about food safety risks. Investigate how countries currently share information during cross-border food safety incidents, what problems have occurred and how existing international arrangements could be strengthened.

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STRATEGIC OUTCOME 3

The Strategic Actions (A3) to achieve **Strategic Outcome 3** are:

A3.1 **To provide technical support to FAO Members to evaluate their national food control systems, identify needs and design integrated capacity development programmes.**

Members can benefit from using the FAO/WHO food control system assessment tool (FAO and WHO, 2019b) to conduct the evaluation. This will help them monitor improvements over time and ultimately increase accountability.

A3.2 **To support FAO Members and relevant stakeholders, particularly in developing and transition economy countries, where requested, to participate more actively in Codex Alimentarius work.**

This will bring in a diversity of perspectives, making the Codex Alimentarius Commission's work more inclusive, and the resulting standards and guidance more globally applicable. FAO Members need to develop capacities at local and national level to adopt Codex standards, codes of practice, guidance and recommendations, and to harmonize national or regional regulations using the relevant Codex texts. This also involves developing national capacities to engage effectively with the Commission, by establishing the proper working processes and communication mechanisms at national level (and regional, where appropriate), and by strengthening technical expertise.

A3.3 **To support FAO Members in developing and updating their food safety standards, legal frameworks and government policies, as well as operational level procedures and guidelines.**

This will provide the necessary basis to strengthen their science, evidence and risk-based food controls including inspection and monitoring programmes, analytical services, early warning mechanisms and emergency responses. Efforts must be made to raise awareness among policymakers to encourage greater coordination between competent authorities across different sectors on food safety matters. With the support of its partners, FAO will also assist Members and relevant stakeholders to strengthen capacities with regard to food control infrastructure and services.

A3.4 **To help FAO Members generate relevant food safety data that reflects their national context/situation.**

Good national data is a critical element of effective national food control systems. Such data should reflect the food safety status in terms of the hazards and risks at national or other relevant level. This would help FAO Members make decisions on governance, specifically on the levels of acceptable risks and the necessary steps to mitigate risks. It would also help in tracking regulatory implementation or operational food safety performance, surveillance approaches and help to identify research and innovation needs related to food safety. It would also support

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Did You Know That... **1**

A food safety law is only as effective as the institutions that implement it. For example, inspectors may find unsafe practices at food markets but lack laboratory support to confirm contamination; alternatively, health officials may record foodborne illnesses without sharing findings with food inspectors. FAO and WHO already provide a food control system assessment tool that helps countries examine their laws, inspections, laboratories, surveillance and coordination. Investigate how countries have used this tool to identify concrete weaknesses, what changes followed, and whether further technical or financial assistance could help put assessment findings into practice.

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STRATEGIC OUTCOME 4

The Strategic Actions (A4) to achieve **Strategic Outcome 4** are:

A4.1 **To support both governments and food chain actors starting from primary production and including associated industries, academia, consumers and other stakeholders, in adopting gender responsive and inclusive programmes of preventative food safety control and management.**

This will enable the development of inclusive and integrated approaches to prevent and tackle complex food safety challenges affecting trade and public health, and the development of food safety interventions both for routine circumstances and for food chains affected by emergencies and crises.

A4.2 **To provide the tools and resources for stakeholders to make informed choices and adopt food safety interventions that are specific to their countries' priorities, safety risks and their constituents' differentiated needs.**

This will be done by striking the right balance between existing ways of operating and the adoption of new technologies, while ensuring that agrifood system transformations do not compromise food safety.

A4.3 **To ensure that lessons learned from national- and regional-level food safety control programmes and initiatives can inform global level normative work and strengthen dialogues on food safety.**

A4.4 **To support initiatives aiming to create training programmes and curricula that better reflect the complexity of food safety and the need for collaborations across disciplines.**

FAO will continue to engage with academia to adapt food safety curricula, ensuring that disciplines such as data and knowledge management, risk assessment and risk communication are included.



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Something to Think About 1

Government inspectors cannot examine every food item, so businesses must prevent contamination during their daily operations. For example, a milk processor needs to check cleaning procedures and storage temperatures routinely; an occasional government inspection cannot replace those checks. Public authorities remain responsible for setting rules, checking compliance and responding when businesses fail to meet them. Small processors may need training or affordable equipment to carry out appropriate controls. Investigate how countries monitor compliance of these procedures, what assistance governments are getting to properly monitor compliance and where there may be room for improvement. Is there a need for more support, if so, what recommendations do think would be helpful to include in your resolution.

Something to Think About 1

A gender-responsive programme recognizes that women and men may have different responsibilities, resources and opportunities, and takes these differences into account when designing policies. For example, in some countries, women make up a large share of informal food vendors but may have less access to training, credit or equipment needed to meet food safety requirements. A food safety programme that offers training only during hours when women are responsible for childcare, or requires equipment they cannot afford, may exclude many of the people it is intended to help. A gender-responsive programme would identify these barriers and adjust training schedules, provide accessible instruction or help vendors obtain appropriate equipment. An inclusive programme would also consider barriers faced by other groups, such as small farmers, people with disabilities and businesses operating in remote areas. Investigate how FAO and Member States already incorporate gender-responsive and inclusive approaches into food safety programmes, what barriers remain, and how international cooperation could help address them.

Interesting Facts 1

Food can be contaminated during production, processing, transport, sale or preparation. For example, contaminated irrigation water can expose produce to microorganisms before it reaches a market; later washing may not reliably eliminate every hazard. FAO already supports preventive food safety controls across agrifood systems. Food can also become contaminated through unwashed hands, dirty utensils or unsafe water in markets, restaurants and homes. Investigate examples where preventive food safety controls have been implemented unevenly, have proven inadequate, or have failed. Identify what went wrong, why existing measures were insufficient, and what could have been done differently. Then consider whether the lessons learned could inform recommendations in your resolution to strengthen food safety and prevent similar failures in the future.

Consider how existing FAO food hygiene guidance can be applied where informal vendors and households have limited access to clean water or suitable equipment.

Investments for delivering the Strategic Priorities

Ensuring that safe food is "available for everyone all the time", as stated in the Vision, requires efforts and investments of public and private entities. Greater investments need to be dedicated to further strengthening national food control systems. These cover many areas of responsibility of governments, including food safety governance and standard setting, policy, law and regulations, monitoring and surveillance, inspection and enforcement, crisis preparedness and management, risk management, risk assessment and risk communication.

Further investments are required in FAO's attempts to engage stakeholders involved in food safety at global and local level. These include policymakers, regulatory authorities, food industry and associated businesses, consumer organizations and individual consumers that may benefit from receiving more timely information on food safety matters, especially to make better, more balanced decisions.

In addition, investments are needed to make sure that food chain operations integrate food safety principles, especially as agrifood systems become MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable, while maintaining supply chain integrity. Innovative tools and technologies, for example related to the development of new foods and nutrient sources, will require investments to ensure food safety management and controls. Finally, training and educating future food safety professionals is also key in advancing food safety and deserves greater investments. Training efforts must be funded so the workforce can acquire adequate knowledge and skills to be able to respond to the challenges and opportunities that food safety and the transformation of agrifood systems pose.

In the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031, the Organization identified the themes of gender, youth, and inclusion as cross-cutting and important issues, which need to be taken into account across all of FAO's programmatic work, so as to promote a more systematic mainstreaming and operationalization of these issues across all of FAO's work, and thus will be considered while implementing the Strategic Actions.

Achieving safe food for everyone requires a gender sensitive approach, addressing restrictive cultural norms that prevent rural women to access capacity building and extension services; as well as finance, technologies, and markets, when they need to respond to food safety requirements and operationalize food safety measures. Often women operate in informal value chains, thus special measures are needed to ensure that informal retailers, food vendors and caterers have access to adequate infrastructure, such as potable water and waste disposal facilities, safe storage as well as safe and hygienic accommodations, so that they can ensure food safety and dispose of food waste with minimal environmental damage.

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Something to Think About **1**

Food safety improvements require continuing investment, not just new laws or one-time purchases. For example, a laboratory may receive new testing equipment through an aid project but later be unable to afford replacement supplies or retain trained technicians. Without the necessary supplies or staff, the laboratory may be unable to conduct enough tests to support food safety inspections. If experienced technicians are replaced by inadequately trained staff, testing errors may also produce unreliable results. This illustrates why investments in laboratory equipment must be accompanied by sustained funding for supplies, equipment maintenance and staff training.
FAO's strategy recognizes the need for investment and monitoring of national food control systems. Investigate cases where shortages of operating funds, staff or maintenance have undermined food safety programmes, how governments and partners have responded, and whether these lessons could inform more sustainable assistance.

Something to Think About **1**

Responding to a foodborne illness outbreak requires several connected steps. Health authorities first identify unusual patterns of illness; investigators look for a common food source; businesses and regulators trace affected products back to suppliers and finally remove those products from sale. If a processor (individuals or businesses who transform raw agricultural products into food products for consumption or further processing) cannot identify which batches were sent to particular retailers, authorities may have to recall far more food than necessary. FAO's strategy addresses surveillance and crisis management. Investigate documented outbreaks to see where reporting, traceability or coordination succeeded or failed, and whether the lessons point to gaps that countries could address together.

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CORE MESSAGES

➔ **New global estimates of hunger confirm sustained, gradual improvement.** An estimated 7.8 percent of the global population faced hunger in 2025, down from 8.1 percent in 2024 and 8.6 percent in 2022. Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean have shown steady progress in recent years, and the prolonged upward trend in hunger in Africa has come to a halt.

➔ **Between 608 and 696 million people in the world, corresponding to 7.4 and 8.5 percent of the global population, respectively, faced hunger in 2025.** Considering the point estimate of 645 million in 2025, this indicates a decrease of about 14 million people compared to 2024 and 43 million compared to 2022. While the number is projected to continue to decrease, between 510 and 520 million people may still be facing hunger in 2030, of whom 56 percent will be in Africa.

➔ **For the first time, Africa hosts the largest number of people facing hunger.** In 2025, hunger affected 309 million people in Africa, 292 million in Asia and 32 million in Latin America and the Caribbean – 20.0, 6.0 and 4.8 percent of the population, respectively.

➔ **In 2025, an estimated 2.1 billion people – 25.8 percent of the global population – were moderately or severely food insecure, down from 28.7 percent in 2020.** Nearly 86 million fewer people experienced food insecurity in 2025 compared to 2024, and 135 million fewer compared to 2020. Steady progress has been seen in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean since 2020, and there was improvement in Africa in 2025 for the first time since the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was launched in 2015. The global prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity was consistently higher in rural areas than in peri-urban areas, and lowest in urban areas; it was higher among women than among men, although the difference was smaller in 2025 compared to 2024.

➔ **Dietary diversity – one of the four core principles of healthy diets – remains inadequate globally for both children and women.** Only 30.8 percent of children aged 6 to 23 months, and 62.7 percent of women aged 15 to 49 years, consume a minimally diverse diet.

➔ **Global progress on maternal and child nutrition is far too slow – and in several areas it is reversing – leaving the world off track for all 2030 targets.** Stunting, wasting and overweight among children under five years of age, low birthweight, and exclusive breastfeeding are improving only marginally and not at the pace required, while anaemia in women aged 15 to 49 years is worsening.

➔ **New estimates of the prevalence of obesity in adults in the world show a steady increase from 12.1 percent in 2012 to 16.2 percent in 2024,** contrary to the target of halting the rise in obesity by 2025.

➔ **Progress towards the 2030 global nutrition targets is highly uneven across regions.** The prevalence of child stunting is decreasing markedly in Africa and is on track to reach the 2030 target in Asia, while exclusive breastfeeding is improving in all regions for which data are available. On the other hand, nearly all regions are seeing widening gaps between the projected and target prevalence for anaemia in women aged 15 to 49 years, and child overweight is rising sharply in Oceania. Without stronger multisectoral policies and sustained investment, there is a risk of missing key nutrition targets in every region.

➔ **Healthy diets are essential to achieving SDG 2, but remain economically out of reach for large segments of the global population.** In the context of persistent cost-of-living pressures, reducing the cost of a healthy diet (CoHD) is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to enhance diet quality, and thus improve nutrition, health and development outcomes.

➔ The CoHD rose globally to 4.28 PPP dollars in 2025 from 3.44 PPP dollars in 2021 and 2.94 PPP dollars in 2017, with the highest cost in Latin America and the Caribbean (4.91 PPP dollars).

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Interesting Facts **1**

WHO's updated estimates, published in 2026, indicate that contaminated food caused approximately 866 million illnesses and 1.52 million deaths worldwide in 2021, including 143,000 deaths among children under five. WHO also estimates that foodborne illness causes US$310 billion annually in lost productivity and medical expenses worldwide. Families lose income when people are unable to work, while healthcare systems bear the costs of treatment. Food safety failures can also damage agricultural markets. A 2026 study of two Salmonella outbreaks linked to onions in the United States estimated approximately US$2.5 billion in combined market losses, demonstrating how contamination can reduce demand and harm producers beyond the immediate costs of treating illness. These consequences show why preventing foodborne illness is not only a public health priority but also an important economic and development concern.

Definition **3**

Food insecurity is broader than hunger. Moderate food insecurity can mean that people worry about obtaining food, reduce food quality or skip meals because they lack money or other resources. Severe food insecurity involves more serious restrictions, potentially including going without food for an entire day. This helps explain why the number experiencing food insecurity is much larger than the number classified as facing hunger. Delegates should examine how national policies respond to both the amount of food people can obtain and the reliability of their access to it.

Interesting Facts **1**

Young children need a variety of foods as they grow because no single food provides every nutrient in the required amounts. The minimum dietary diversity indicator checks whether a child ate foods from a sufficient number of defined food groups during the previous day. It is a useful warning sign about diet quality, but it does not by itself establish that every nutrient requirement was met. As you research national policies, examine how infant and young-child feeding programmes address the availability and affordability of diverse foods.

Definition **3**

Obesity can increase even where hunger and nutrient deficiencies remain serious problems. This is sometimes called the "double burden of malnutrition": undernutrition and obesity can exist in the same country, community or even household. Food policies therefore need to address both inadequate access to nutritious foods and diets containing unhealthy amounts of salt, sugar and saturated fats when consumed excessively. A resolution that focused only on producing more calories to combat hunger would be overlooking other important parts of what makes a healthy diet.

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CORE MESSAGES

→ **New global estimates of hunger confirm sustained, gradual improvement.** An estimated 7.8 percent of the global population faced hunger in 2025, down from 8.1 percent in 2024 and 8.6 percent in 2022. Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean have shown steady progress in recent years, and the prolonged upward trend in hunger in Africa has come to a halt.

→ **Between 608 and 696 million people in the world, corresponding to 7.4 and 8.5 percent of the global population, respectively, faced hunger in 2025.** Considering the point estimate of 645 million in 2025, this indicates a decrease of about 14 million people compared to 2024 and 43 million compared to 2022. While the number is projected to continue to decrease, between 510 and 520 million people may still be facing hunger in 2030, of whom 56 percent will be in Africa.

→ **For the first time, Africa hosts the largest number of people facing hunger.** In 2025, hunger affected 309 million people in Africa, 292 million in Asia and 32 million in Latin America and the Caribbean – 20.0, 6.0 and 4.8 percent of the population, respectively.

→ In 2025, an estimated 2.1 billion people – 25.8 percent of the global population – were moderately or severely food insecure, **down from 28.7 percent in 2020.** Nearly 86 million fewer people experienced food insecurity in 2025 compared to 2024, and 135 million fewer compared to 2020. Steady progress has been seen in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean since 2020, and there was improvement in Africa in 2025 for the first time since the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was launched in 2015. The global prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity was consistently higher in rural areas than in peri-urban areas, and lowest in urban areas; it was higher among women than among men, although the difference was smaller in 2025 compared to 2024.

→ **Dietary diversity – one of the four core principles of healthy diets – remains inadequate globally for both children and women.** Only 30.8 percent of children aged 6 to 23 months, and 62.7 percent of women aged 15 to 49 years, consume a minimally diverse diet.

→ **Global progress on maternal and child nutrition is far too slow – and in several areas it is reversing – leaving the world off track for all 2030 targets.** Stunting, wasting and overweight among children under five years of age, low birthweight, and exclusive breastfeeding are improving only marginally and not at the pace required, while anaemia in women aged 15 to 49 years is worsening.

→ New estimates of the prevalence of obesity in adults in the world show a steady increase from 12.1 percent in 2012 to 16.2 percent in 2024, contrary to the target of halting the rise in obesity by 2025.

→ **Progress towards the 2030 global nutrition targets is highly uneven across regions.** The prevalence of child stunting is decreasing markedly in Africa and is on track to reach the 2030 target in Asia, while exclusive breastfeeding is improving in all regions for which data are available. On the other hand, nearly all regions are seeing widening gaps between the projected and target prevalence for anaemia in women aged 15 to 49 years, and child overweight is rising sharply in Oceania. Without stronger multisectoral policies and sustained investment, there is a risk of missing key nutrition targets in every region.

→ **Healthy diets are essential to achieving SDG 2, but remain economically out of reach for large segments of the global population.** In the context of persistent cost-of-living pressures, reducing the cost of a healthy diet (CoHD) is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to enhance diet quality, and thus improve nutrition, health and development outcomes.

→ **The CoHD rose globally to 4.28 PPP dollars in 2025 from 3.44 PPP dollars in 2021 and 2.94 PPP dollars in 2017,** with the highest cost in Latin America and the Caribbean (4.91 PPP dollars).

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Definition **3**

Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) is an economic concept that measures what money can actually buy in different countries.

Imagine a worker in Country A who earns $15,000 a year, while a worker in Country B earns $45,000. At first glance, the worker in Country B appears to be three times wealthier. However, this comparison can be misleading. If rent, food, clothing and other everyday expenses in Country A cost only one-third as much as in Country B, both workers could afford roughly the same quantity of goods and services. To compare their purchasing power, we need to consider not only how much they earn but also what their money can buy.

Let's look at another example. Imagine that a fast-food burger costs $5 in Country A but the equivalent of $2.50 in Country B. With $5, you can buy one burger in Country A but two burgers in Country B. The same amount of money goes twice as far in Country B when purchasing burgers.

PPP applies this principle to a much broader range of goods and services, rather than just one product. Economists compare prices across countries to calculate how much money is needed to purchase comparable goods and services. For example, FAO uses PPP to compare the cost of a healthy diet, calculated using its Healthy Diet Basket (see comment on Healthy Diet Basket on pg. xvii). FAO estimates that the global average cost is 4.28 PPP dollars per person per day. This helps economists compare people's purchasing power and living standards more meaningfully than simply converting incomes using currency exchange rates. This helps them compare people's purchasing power and living standards more meaningfully than simply converting incomes using currency exchange rates.

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➔ **The global number of people unable to afford a healthy diet decreased from 2.97 billion (37.4 percent of the world population) in 2021 to 2.69 billion (32.7 percent) in 2025.** The improvement in affordability suggests that, on average, incomes available for food increased more relative to food prices. However, unaffordability of a healthy diet is increasing in Africa, where a healthy diet was out of reach for 66.6 percent of the population in 2025, more than double the levels estimated for Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.

➔ **The CoHD indicator uses price data from the International Comparison Program, a worldwide statistical initiative, which imposes limitations in terms of item coverage and update frequency.** As a complement to global monitoring, United Nations agencies are supporting national governments in producing their own CoHD estimates using national retail food price data.

➔ **Animal source foods, fruits and vegetables account for a large share of the total cost, while starchy staples contribute relatively little.** The relative cost of food groups varies across regions. Animal source foods are the highest-cost food group in Africa, while vegetables account for the largest share of diet costs in Latin America and the Caribbean.

➔ **Differences in both food basket composition and overall food prices explain cross-country variation in diet costs.** Flexibility in selecting locally available, low-cost foods substantially reduces the CoHD, particularly in regions with greater product diversity. At the same time, the CoHD is positively associated with overall food prices (relative to household expenditures). However, at any given level of relative food prices, substantial variation in the CoHD between countries remains. This underscores the distinct feature of the CoHD indicator, which establishes a cost floor for a healthy diet by focusing on the least-cost available items rather than on general food prices.

➔ **Within countries, the CoHD varies considerably across locations and seasons.** National annual averages can mask important temporal and geographical variation, underscoring the need for frequent, granular price data to support timely and well-targeted policies.

➔ **Structural characteristics of agrifood systems are associated with the CoHD.** Higher agricultural productivity and crop yields, sustained public investment in research and development, efficient logistics and transport (including better road quality), mobile connectivity, effective trade integration, and lower electricity and labour costs are all associated with a lower CoHD, pointing to key entry points.

➔ **Reducing the CoHD requires context-specific interventions rather than uniform approaches.** Policy options fall along two complementary axes: expanding the supply of nutritious foods through domestic production and trade, and lowering structural per unit costs across the agrifood value chain.

➔ **The most effective strategies combine investments along both axes,** including research and development, irrigation, infrastructure, cold chains and food loss reduction, alongside structural and policy reforms in subsidy design, trade facilitation and regulatory frameworks.

➔ **Long-term productivity gains are greatest when agricultural research and development is oriented towards fruits, vegetables and legumes.** Translating these gains into lower diet costs requires enabling systems, including seed delivery, water management, land tenure, finance and extension, that support technology adoption.

➔ **Post-farmgate activities account for 70 to 75 percent of what consumers pay, with up to 40 percent of value chain costs accumulating in midstream processing, logistics and wholesale.** Improving efficiency at these stages is essential for lowering the prices of perishable foods that compose healthy diets.

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Definition 3

"Unable to afford a healthy diet" means that people do not have enough money to purchase even the least expensive combination of locally available foods that provides the variety and amounts of food needed for a healthy diet, based on dietary guidelines. Even when people can afford enough inexpensive staples, such as rice or bread, to avoid hunger, they may not be able to afford sufficient fruits, vegetables and other nutritious foods needed to maintain a healthy diet.

To estimate affordability, FAO calculates the cost of the least expensive foods that meet dietary guidelines in a country and compares that cost with people's estimated resources after allowing for essential non-food expenses. For example, if a healthy diet costs $3 per person per day but someone is estimated to have only $2 available for food, that person cannot afford it. However, someone with $4 available for food may be able to afford a healthy diet without necessarily choosing to eat one. The measure therefore estimates whether a healthy diet is financially within reach, not what people actually consume.

Interesting Facts 1

The report estimates that nearly two-thirds of people in Africa could not afford a healthy diet in 2025. This figure shows how widespread the problem is, but does not tell us whether affordability in Africa has improved or worsened compared with previous years. Affordability depends on more than how much food a country produces. Low household incomes can prevent people from buying nutritious foods even when they are available. Poor roads and high transportation costs can increase food prices, while inadequate storage and refrigeration can cause fresh foods to spoil before reaching consumers, reducing supplies and increasing costs.

These challenges differ across countries and regions. What are FAO and Member States already doing to make healthy diets more affordable and accessible? Where do significant gaps remain, and how could international cooperation help countries address them in the resolution being negotiated?

Something to Think About 1

Fresh produce is often more costly to deliver to consumers than dry staples because it can spoil quickly and may require careful handling, refrigerated storage and rapid transport. Animal-source foods can also have high production and distribution costs. The report finds that the most expensive food group differs by region, so reducing the price of one product will not necessarily solve the affordability problem everywhere. Investigate which nutritious food groups are particularly costly in different regions of the world and why and how that impacts the affordability and access to a healthy diet.

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The global number of people unable to afford a healthy diet decreased from 2.97 billion (37.4 percent of the world population) in 2021 to 2.69 billion (32.7 percent) in 2025. The improvement in affordability suggests that, on average, incomes available for food increased more relative to food prices. However, unaffordability of a healthy diet is increasing in Africa, where a healthy diet was out of reach for 66.6 percent of the population in 2025, more than double the levels estimated for Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The CoHD indicator uses price data from the International Comparison Program, a worldwide statistical initiative, which imposes limitations in terms of item coverage and update frequency. As a complement to global monitoring, United Nations agencies are supporting national governments in producing their own CoHD estimates using national retail food price data.

Animal source foods, fruits and vegetables account for a large share of the total cost, while starchy staples contribute relatively little. The relative cost of food groups varies across regions. Animal source foods are the highest-cost food group in Africa, while vegetables account for the largest share of diet costs in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Differences in both food basket composition and overall food prices explain cross-country variation in diet costs. Flexibility in selecting locally available, low-cost foods substantially reduces the CoHD, particularly in regions with greater product diversity. At the same time, the CoHD is positively associated with overall food prices (relative to household expenditures). However, at any given level of relative food prices, substantial variation in the CoHD between countries remains. This underscores the distinct feature of the CoHD indicator, which establishes a cost floor for a healthy diet by focusing on the least-cost available items rather than on general food prices.

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Long-term productivity gains are greatest when agricultural research and development is oriented towards fruits, vegetables and legumes. Translating these gains into lower diet costs requires enabling systems, including seed delivery, water management, land tenure, finance and extension, that support technology adoption.

Post-farmgate activities account for 70 to 75 percent of what consumers pay, **with up to 40 percent of value chain costs accumulating in midstream processing, logistics and wholesale.** Improving efficiency at these stages is essential for lowering the prices of perishable foods that compose healthy diets.

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Something to Think About 1

National averages may conceal large differences between rural and urban markets, or between harvest and lean seasons. For example, vegetables may be affordable near farms after harvest but much more expensive in remote communities several months later. Monitoring prices in different locations and seasons can help governments identify where transport, storage or targeted support is most needed. Research whether your country already collects this information and how it uses the findings in nutrition or agricultural policy.

Something to Think About 1

A farmer may produce nutritious food but still struggle to sell it at an affordable price if roads are poor, transport is expensive or deliveries are unreliable. Delays along a delivery route carry risks if a farmer is transporting perishable produce. Improving roads, collection points and transport services can reduce spoilage and the cost of moving food to markets.

Something to Think About 1

The same policy may not be equally effective in every country. In a country where vegetables are expensive because farmers cannot produce enough, improving irrigation or access to seeds may help lower prices. In another country where farmers produce plenty of vegetables but transportation costs are high, improving roads and distribution networks may be more effective. This is why the report recommends policies that address the specific reasons healthy diets are unaffordable in each country. Delegates should investigate these barriers in their own countries before proposing solution.

Something to Think About 1

A "cold chain" is the network of refrigerated storage and transport used to keep perishable foods, such as milk, fish, fruit and vegetables, at safe temperatures between production and sale, which is important in reducing spoilage and microbial hazards. Although cold chains can play an important role in improving access to nutritious foods, if electricity costs are high this can increase food prices, and if electricity is unreliable it can lead to spoilage and food safety risks.

Connection to Study Guide A: See p. 10 for safe storage temperatures and how refrigeration helps prevent harmful microorganisms from multiplying in perishable foods.

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Something to Think About 1

Agricultural research can help farmers produce more nutritious food using improved seeds, pest management and farming techniques suited to local conditions. The report highlights potential benefits from investing in fruits, vegetables and legumes rather than concentrating support only on staple grains. Research alone is insufficient: farmers may also need access to seeds, water, credit and advice to use new techniques. Compare your country's existing agricultural research priorities and investigate if they are oriented to meeting what farmers feel are their most important needs. If not, how can famers be more involved in determining the research agenda to better meet their needs?

Something to Think About 1

The "farmgate" is the point at which a product leaves the farm. The price paid by a consumer also includes costs for collecting, sorting, processing, storing, transporting, wholesaling and retailing food. The report estimates that these post-farm activities make up most of the consumer price. Increasing food production alone may not be enough to make healthy diets affordable. While private businesses manage most of these activities, governments can help reduce costs by improving infrastructure and encouraging competition. What opportunities exist for governments and the private sector to work together to reduce these costs and make nutritious foods more affordable?

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CORE MESSAGES

➔ **Integrated interventions across the value chain yield significantly larger cost reductions than do isolated measures.** Targeted technological and structural upgrades in perishable foods, especially fruits and vegetables, emerge as key levers for narrowing the affordability gap – for example, addressing cold chain deficits and high animal source food costs in Africa, improving transport and reducing vegetable costs in Latin America and the Caribbean, and strengthening post-harvest handling of fruits in Asia.

➔ **Public spending is most effective when directed towards the higher-cost food groups.** Broad fiscal support to already low-cost staples generates limited improvements in overall dietary affordability.

➔ **Implementing cost-reducing reforms presents governance challenges.** Efforts must ensure that cost reductions do not come at the expense of environmental sustainability, public health or decent rural livelihoods. Demand-side interventions should be carefully sequenced with supply expansion to avoid unintended price increases.

➔ **Because reforms are redistributive, they require transition support and inclusive public–private collaboration** to protect vulnerable consumers and enable smallholders, women and youth to benefit.

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Something to Think About 1

Investments in different parts of the food system may achieve more when they are coordinated. For example, building refrigerated warehouses may accomplish little if farmers lack reliable transportation to reach them. The report suggests that combining investments can reduce the cost of healthy diets more effectively than addressing individual problems separately. How can governments encourage businesses and public agencies to coordinate their investments so that improvements in one part of the food system are supported by improvements elsewhere?

Connection to Study Guide A: See pp. 9–10 for school meal programmes, safe food handling, refrigeration and procurement.

Something to Think About 1

Reducing the cost of producing food can sometimes create other problems. For example, farmers may save money by paying very low wages, using untreated wastewater for irrigation or applying pesticides without adequate safety precautions. These practices can harm workers, contaminate food or water, and threaten the long-term sustainability of agriculture. How can countries encourage more affordable food production without compromising food safety, environmental protection or rural livelihoods?

Something to Think About 1

"Redistributive" means that a policy creates different gains and costs for different groups. For example, cheaper food imports may benefit consumers while reducing income for farmers who compete with imports. Investments in modern storage may improve efficiency but be difficult for small businesses to finance. The report recommends support for people who may lose out during the transition. Delegates should investigate which groups would benefit or face new costs under proposed reforms and what existing programmes could help them adapt. Small producers may also need support to meet food safety requirements while remaining viable suppliers of nutritious foods; see the companion guide.

Connection to Study Guide A: See p. 9 for the difficulties small producers face in meeting food safety requirements while maintaining access to markets.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING THE COST OF A HEALTHY DIET WORLDWIDE

Despite signs of post-COVID-19 pandemic improvement in recent years, global levels of hunger and food insecurity remain far above those recorded when the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in 2015. Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) – ending hunger (SDG 2.1) and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2.2) – requires not only that populations have access to sufficient food, but that the food consumed is nutritious. This imperative places diet quality, and the systemic barriers preventing access to it, at the centre of global policy.

A healthy diet is:

- **adequate** – supplying enough essential nutrients to meet requirements and prevent deficiencies;
- **balanced** – in energy and its three main sources (carbohydrates, proteins and fats) to support healthy weight and growth;
- **diverse** – comprising a variety of foods within and across distinct food groups; and
- **moderate** – with limited consumption of dietary components detrimental to health if consumed in excess.

While healthy diets are essential for population health, child development, and sustainable livelihoods, unhealthy dietary patterns persist globally. These patterns contribute massively to the global disease burden, imposing immense health, economic and social costs. Access to a healthy diet is influenced by household incomes, consumer preferences, food environments and, critically, the cost of foods. Amid recent high food price inflation, the cost barrier has intensified.

The cost of a healthy diet (CoHD), introduced as a benchmark indicator in 2020, allows for consistent and comparable monitoring of the minimum daily cost of purchasing locally available foods that constitute a healthy diet.

The 2026 edition of this report investigates the global patterns of the CoHD, its structural drivers, and the targeted policies and investments required to reduce these costs.

FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION AROUND THE WORLD

Food security indicators: latest updates and progress towards ending hunger and ensuring food security

The assessment of global hunger in 2025, based on the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) (SDG Indicator 2.1.1), shows continued gradual progress for the third consecutive year. The proportion of the world population facing hunger decreased from 8.6 percent in 2022 to 8.1 percent in 2024 and 7.8 percent in 2025. It is estimated that hunger affected between 608 and 696 million people in the world in 2025. Considering the point estimate of 645 million, that is nearly 14 million fewer people in 2025 compared to 2024 and 43 million fewer than in 2022. However, the estimated number of people facing hunger is still above levels recorded in 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to 2015, when the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was launched, the prevalence is lower (7.8 percent in 2025 compared to 8.0 percent in 2015), but the estimated number of people facing hunger has increased by about 50 million.

Stark regional differences persist. It is estimated that one out of five people in Africa, 20.0 percent, faced hunger in 2025, compared to 6.0 percent of the population in Asia, 4.8 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 8.0 percent in Oceania and less than 2.5 percent in Northern America and Europe. Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean have been showing steady recovery over several consecutive years. In contrast, the PoU in Africa had been on the rise since 2017 – until the most recent estimates, which point to signs of a turnaround in 2025.

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Definition 3

Hunger is the physical feeling of discomfort or pain caused by an insufficient consumption of calories. A person can have plenty of food to satisfy their hunger but still suffer from malnutrition if that food lacks essential vitamins, minerals, and protein. It includes both undernutrition (not enough nutrients) and overnutrition (too many calories, leading to obesity or metabolic issues), as well as specific nutrient imbalances. Policies that increase access to calories may reduce hunger without resolving these other problems. When researching national positions, distinguish measures designed to improve food availability from those designed to improve the nutritional quality of diets, and examine where the two objectives can be advanced together.

Definition 3

A healthy diet is not simply a diet that supplies enough calories. "Adequate" means providing enough essential nutrients, such as iron and vitamin A; "balanced" means obtaining appropriate amounts of energy from carbohydrates, fats and proteins; "diverse" means eating foods from different food groups; and "moderate" means limiting components that can harm health when consumed in excess, such as salt and added sugars. A person may consume enough calories from inexpensive staples and still lack essential nutrients. For FAO negotiations, this distinction matters because increasing the quantity of food available does not automatically improve diet quality.

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Women (MDD-W) as new indicators for SDG 2 monitoring (SDG 2.2.4). These indicators provide a simple assessment of dietary diversity by counting the number of predefined food groups consumed during the previous 24 hours, at the population level. Minimum dietary diversity captures diversity and adequacy, which are two of the four principles of a healthy diet, together with balance and moderation.

Globally, less than one-third of children aged 6 to 23 months (30.8 percent) achieved minimum dietary diversity, based on pooled data from 2018 to 2024, a prevalence level that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade (prevalence was 29.4 percent between 2011 and 2017). This means that more than two-thirds of young children worldwide did not consume sufficiently diverse diets, potentially limiting their intake of essential vitamins, minerals and other nutrients critical for healthy growth and development.

In Africa, only one out of five children aged 6 to 23 months (20.5 percent) achieved minimum dietary diversity, compared to 34.9 percent of children in Asia in the same reporting period. Data scarcity, however, prevents the generation of reliable aggregated estimates for the other regions.

A large proportion of women, as well, lack minimally diverse diets, placing them at higher risk of not consuming sufficient essential micronutrients. Globally, only 62.7 percent of women aged 15 to 49 years achieved minimum dietary diversity between 2021 and 2025, meaning that about one in three did not. The lowest MDD-W prevalence was observed in Africa (43.0 percent), followed by Asia (65.0 percent) and Latin America and the Caribbean (77.5 percent), while the highest was recorded in Northern America and Europe (79.8 percent).

The state of nutrition: progress towards the global nutrition targets

WHO Member States at the Seventy-eighth World Health Assembly in May 2025 endorsed a resolution extending the six maternal, infant and young child nutrition targets – first adopted in 2012 for achievement in 2025 – by five years to align with the 2030 SDGs. The extended targets maintain existing goals for indicators still off track, but set more ambitious objectives for those nearing achievement.

Globally, the prevalence of **low birthweight** has shown limited improvement, with a relatively small decline from 15.0 percent in 2012 to 14.7 percent in 2020. Without significant acceleration, the 2030 target of 10.5 percent will not be achieved. **Exclusive breastfeeding** rose from 37.0 to 47.4 percent between 2012 and 2024; however, progress is not yet sufficient to meet the updated global ambition of 60 percent.

Stunting among children under five years of age fell from 26.4 percent (180.4 million) in 2012 to 23.2 percent (150.2 million) in 2024, but progress is insufficient to reach 16.8 percent (108.3 million) by 2030. Childhood **overweight** increased slightly from 5.3 to 5.5 percent over the same period, with projections indicating that the 2030 target of remaining below 5 percent will not be met. The prevalence of **wasting** among children under five years of age declined from 7.4 percent in 2012 to 6.6 percent in 2024, yet not at the pace required to reach 5 percent by 2030.

Anaemia among women aged 15 to 49 years rose from 27.6 percent in 2012 to 30.7 percent in 2023 and is projected to reach 32.6 percent by 2030, departing significantly from the trajectory required to meet the 2030 target of a 50 percent reduction.

Adult obesity (≥18 years) continues to rise, increasing from 12.1 percent in 2012 to 16.2 percent in 2024, with projections of 18.6 percent by 2030 – far from the target of halting its increase.

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Interesting Facts **1**

This indicator examines how many food groups women consumed during the previous 24 hours. Eating from too few groups can signal a greater risk of inadequate intake of important nutrients, including iron and other vitamins and minerals. However, it is a population-level screening measure, not a medical diagnosis for an individual woman. Delegates can investigate whether national nutrition programmes combine dietary guidance with practical measures that make diverse foods more affordable.

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An assessment of progress towards the 2030 global maternal, infant and young child nutrition targets by region shows that Africa is on track to achieve the child overweight and wasting targets and Asia is on track to achieve the targets for child stunting and overweight. Latin America and the Caribbean is on track to meet the wasting target by 2030 and has made meaningful progress towards the exclusive breastfeeding target.

UNDERSTANDING THE DRIVERS OF THE COST OF A HEALTHY DIET AROUND THE WORLD

Healthy diets are central to achieving SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), which comprises two targets: ensuring access to safe and nutritious food (SDG 2.1) and ending all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2.2). Unhealthy dietary patterns hinder the world's ability to meet these targets and impose significant health consequences and socioeconomic costs globally. The hidden costs pertaining to increased risk of diseases related to unhealthy dietary patterns around the world amount to USD 8.1 trillion annually.

Economic and non-economic drivers determine the consumption of healthy diets, including the cost of the items that shape such diets. Agrifood systems and food environments shape the availability of the food items that make up a healthy diet. This report focuses on the average CoHD and the food groups that compose it, exploring how they differ across the world.

Several dimensions of healthy diets fall outside the scope of this report. By focusing strictly on the national average cost of a Healthy Diet Basket (HDB), it excludes income distributions and demand-side factors influencing food choices, such as consumer preferences, education and food environment interventions. Additionally, the report relies on market valuations rather than a true-cost accounting framework that captures broader environmental and social externalities. FAO's forthcoming report on healthy diets will address these complementary areas.

Measuring the cost of a healthy diet

A healthy diet promotes optimal health, growth and development; supports active lifestyles; prevents nutrient deficiencies and excesses, non-communicable diseases and foodborne illness; and promotes a population's overall well-being. While the exact composition of a healthy diet varies across people, cultural contexts and communities, and depends on, *inter alia*, an individual's age and activity level, preferences and beliefs, traditions, religion and income, as well as on the availability and affordability of foods, FAO and the World Health Organization in 2024 identified four core principles that are universal in their application, based on human biology and underpinned by evidence. Healthy diets are thus: adequate, balanced, diverse and moderate.

Analysts have developed methods to estimate the average cost of specific diets at national and subnational levels for different intended uses. An established element of these efforts is food price monitoring, but the actual food consumption basket used for these purposes may not be appropriate to cost a normatively defined "healthy" diet. The HDB – the benchmark for calculating the CoHD indicator discussed in this report – is a combination of locally available foods that meet energy and most nutrient requirements. It is calibrated so that the food items from various food groups provide a dietary energy intake of 2 330 kilocalories (kcal). More specifically, the HDB comprises 11 food items spread across six food groups, each contributing a determined share. Starchy staples contribute the largest share (1 160 kcal), followed by animal source foods, legumes, nuts and seeds, and oils and fats at 300 kcal each. Fruits contribute 160 kcal and vegetables 110 kcal.

Definition 3

The Healthy Diet Basket is a calculation tool, not a prescribed menu that everyone should eat. It identifies a least-cost combination of foods from six groups: starchy staples; animal-source foods; legumes, nuts and seeds; oils and fats; fruits; and vegetables. The report uses a standardized energy level to make costs comparable. Individual needs and culturally appropriate food choices vary, so governments should not treat the basket as a universal daily meal plan.

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