



## Press Release

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### **Act now, or future generations will pay: Central Asia risks economic losses from malnutrition**

*Many countries off track for key indicators of nutritional well-being, report finds*

**February 10, 2016, Moscow**—Children whose growth is stunted, people who don't get enough vitamins, micronutrients or minerals for a healthy life, adults who are overweight and obese—malnutrition takes many forms and affects every country on earth. [The 2015 Global Nutrition Report](#) (GNR) makes it clear that global progress to reduce malnutrition has been slow and uneven, despite evidence that \$1 invested in nutrition can bring the equivalent of a \$16 economic return.

Country profiles from the GNR 2015 show that most of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are facing overlapping burdens of different forms of malnutrition: Armenia and Tajikistan are experiencing high rates of stunting for children under five in addition to adult overweight and anemia among women of reproductive age (WRA); Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are having overlapping burdens of WRA anemia and adult overweight; all CIS countries, including Russia and Belarus, are facing high and increasing adult overweight rates.

The impacts of malnutrition at an individual level are well-known: stunting affects children's cognitive development, resulting in less schooling and lower earnings in adult life. But the consequences of malnutrition go well beyond the individual level: stunting can cost economies the equivalent of 10 percent of GDP, according to the report. At the same time, obesity costs up to 4 percent of health budgets in Europe, and 20 percent of health budgets in the United States. The GNR shows that obesity is on the rise in every country in the world, with female obesity highest. The data for CIS countries mirrors this trend.

The region has made significant progress over the last 20 years in stunting rates: which significantly decreased in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan: in Uzbekistan, the reduction was dramatic, from 40 percent in 1996 to 20 percent in 2006. In Tajikistan, stunting rates declined from 39 percent in 2007 to 26.8 percent in 2012. However, this progress has slowed across the region in recent years, while Armenia saw an increase in stunting from 15 percent in 1998 to 21 percent in 2010.

CIS countries also have more progress to make on exclusive breastfeeding, which hovered at around one third of the population across the region. A recent [Lancet series](#) showed that breastmilk makes children healthier and smarter, and that the deaths of 823,000 children and 20,000 mothers each year could be averted globally through universal breastfeeding, along with economic savings of US\$300 billion.

The region has a key opportunity to make progress on these indicators. In many countries, spending on sectors which can improve nutrition—such as agriculture, education and social protection—is rising. Adjusting programs within these sectors to factor in nutrition could bring significant gains.

Lawrence Haddad, one of the report authors, called for action on nutrition:

“In order to make significant gains on malnutrition, governments and donors must double their spending on tackling nutrition, and put in place policies and practices which can do ‘double duty’ and address both over and under nutrition at the same time. Unless we act now, future generations will pay for our neglect.”

[The Global Nutrition Report 2015](#) is a report card on the world’s nutrition—globally, regionally, and country by country—and on efforts to improve it. It assesses countries’ progress in meeting global nutrition targets established by the World Health Assembly. It documents how well countries, aid donors, NGOs, businesses, and others are meeting their nutrition commitments. And it spells out the actions that proven effective in combating malnutrition in all its forms. This year’s report has a special focus on climate change, food systems and the role of business.

These and other research findings from various CIS countries will be the focus of a [one-day conference in Moscow on Feb. 11](#) organized by the Eurasian Center for Food Security (ECFS) at Lomonosov Moscow State University, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the World Bank, the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets, and the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health. The conference will highlight the linkages between climate change, agriculture, food systems, social safety nets, and nutrition outcomes.

“This event brings together professionals and researchers from CIS countries and international organizations to discuss important issues related to nutrition around the world and CIS countries,” said Sergey A. Shoba, Director of ECFS, Corresponding Member of Russian Academy of Sciences. “It will give us an opportunity to review what has been done so far and identify remaining problems and ways to ensure food and nutrition security for all in the region.”

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*The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) seeks sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty. IFPRI was established in 1975 to identify and analyze alternative national and international strategies and policies for meeting the food needs of the developing world, with particular emphasis on low-income countries and on the poorer groups in those countries. [www.ifpri.org](http://www.ifpri.org).*