

COUNTRY PROFILE ON NUTRITION 01/2021

THE GAMBIA

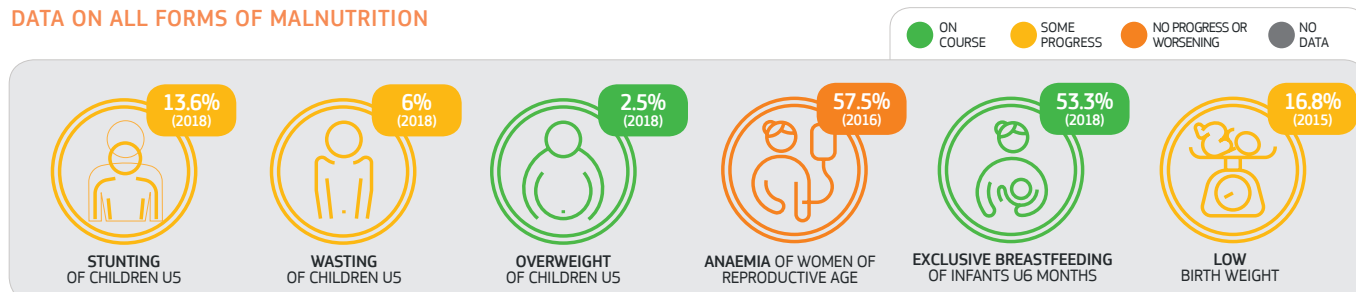
Nutrition situation in The Gambia

AT A GLANCE

The Gambia (population 2.4 million¹) is principally an agrarian economy (with tourism contributing 15% of GDP), but it still imports some 50% of its food requirements. It frequently suffers from poor and irregular rains. However, The Gambia has made considerable progress in reducing the prevalence of stunting and wasting among children under five over the past 10 years, despite poor basic services, inadequate sanitation, very fragile food and nutrition security and the current COVID-19 pandemic. There are significant disparities, nevertheless, between the west (capital Banjul) and the east of the country up-river,

where rural households are poorer and gender inequalities prevail. Of particular concern is that iron deficiency has increased in recent years among both children and women; over 50% of children and women suffer from anaemia². Survey findings show that rice and wheat flour constitute suitable iron fortification vehicles to address this deficiency³. Vitamin A deficiency affects almost 20% of children up-river, and many more in certain locations. The Gambia has a Gender Inequality Index value of 0.612 and is ranked at 148 of 162 countries in the 2019 index.

DATA ON ALL FORMS OF MALNUTRITION



NUTRITION GOVERNANCE

- The Gambia joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement in July 2011.
- A comprehensive national nutrition policy 2010-2020 outlining broad objectives, strategies and priority areas was recently reviewed, leading to the drafting of a new policy for 2018-2025, which has been endorsed by the National Nutrition Council.
- A multi-sectoral national nutrition strategic plan translates the policy into actions and is costed
- The National Nutrition Agency, established under the Office of the Vice President, draws on the coordination efforts of the National Nutrition Council (inter-ministerial) and the Nutrition Advisory Committee (acting as the SUN multi-stakeholder platform).
- The Food Safety and Quality Authority was established in 2017. The Gambia Standards Bureau published (with EU support) national standards on fortified wheat flour and oils/fats and updated the standards for iodised salt in 2019.

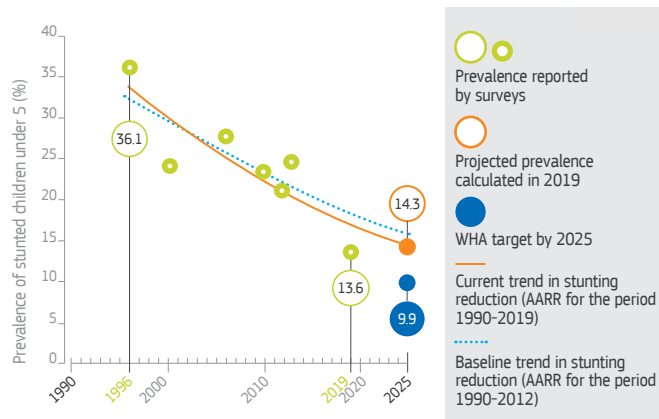
Example of EU support

The EU supported a 'Post-Crisis Response to Food and Nutrition Insecurity in The Gambia' (EUR 11.5 million) following poor rains in 2014 and the outbreak of the Ebola virus. The project (completed in January 2020) aimed to improve household food security by promoting agricultural sector employment through cash-for-work programmes, and increased food diversification through processing and fortification of locally available food crops, while improving nutrition and care practices by promoting better nutrition and health outcomes. Implemented by FAO, WFP and UNICEF, the project used the UNICEF conceptual framework to tackle nutrition, targeting near national coverage. The nutrition screening and treatment of moderate acute malnutrition and severe acute malnutrition scored highly on performance⁴. Social behaviour change and communication, training through farmer field schools, the provision of agricultural inputs and cash for work, all sensitive to gender, were critical contributions: during the project period the national prevalence of stunting dropped from almost 23% (2015) to below 14% (2018) and wasting from over 10% (2015) to 6% (2018), a remarkable achievement. The programme has contributed to averting stunting for 6 740 children under five⁵.

THE GAMBIA

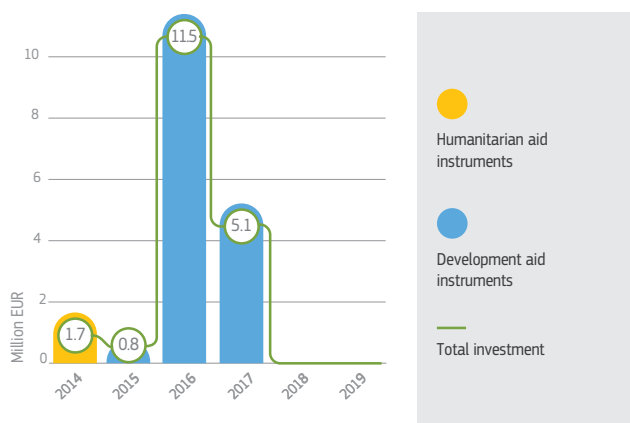
Progress on the two EU pledges for nutrition

TREND, PROJECTION AND TARGETS IN THE PREVALENCE AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN (U5) STUNTED



The Government of The Gambia has committed in the new national nutrition policy to reduce the prevalence of stunting to 13% by 2025. Indeed, the country has seen a strong decline (by over half) in the prevalence of stunting since the early 1990s. However, due to population growth, the number of children stunted has not shown a similar decline. The rate of decline in the number of children stunted accelerated from 2.45% in 2012 to 2.92% in 2019. If this is maintained, then approximately 63 800 children are expected to be stunted in 2025, higher than it has been recently, despite the decrease in prevalence of stunting.

EU FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS TO NUTRITION BETWEEN 2014 AND 2019 – A TOTAL OF EUR 19.1 MILLION



The two principal EU commitments to nutrition during this period were the 'Post-Crisis Response to Food and Nutrition Insecurity in The Gambia' (EUR 11.5 million) (described above) and EUR 20.6 million (of which 25% targeting nutrition) for 'Agriculture for Economic Growth and Food Security/Nutrition to Mitigate Migration'. The latter, implemented by FAO, contributes to sustainable growth in the agricultural sector, working with the National Agriculture Research Institute on establishing a seed secretariat - including the development of drought resistant climate smart seeds - and to reducing food insecurity and malnutrition. Furthermore, the project on Building Resilience through Social Transfers (BRsT, EUR 3 million of which 25% is for nutrition) implemented UNICEF, as well as two Food Fortification projects implemented by FAO and United Purpose were instrumental in reducing stunting in The Gambia over the recent period.

¹ UNDESA World Population Prospects 2019 population estimate 2020.

² In the last 20 years the prevalence of iron deficiency in children has almost tripled, and in women doubled.

³ The Gambia Micronutrient and Nutrition Survey 2018.

⁴ Debriefing presentation by independent project evaluation team CAPA, Banjul, 29 November 2019.

⁵ Final evaluation report of Post-Crisis Response to Food and Nutrition Insecurity in The Gambia project, 20 March 2020.

⁶ Summative evaluation of Building Resilience for Nutritional Security in The Gambia through Social Transfers 2016-2019 project (January 2020).