

## COUNTRY PROFILE ON NUTRITION 01/2021

# LAO PDR



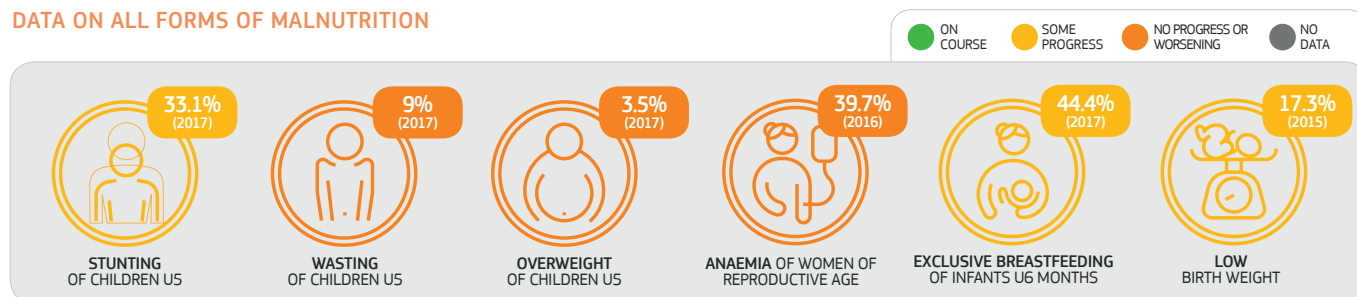
### Lao PDR

#### AT A GLANCE

Lao PDR has a small population of 7.3 million, but a relatively high population growth of 1.25%<sup>1</sup>. Despite significant progress in reducing child stunting over recent years, the prevalence of stunting remains considerably higher than the regional average for both South-East Asia (25%) and Africa (30%). The prevalence of both child wasting and overweight is rising, two in five children are anaemic, and three quarters of young children do not get even a minimally adequate diet. At the same time adolescent and adult obesity continues to rise and noncommunicable diseases are estimated to account for 60% of all deaths. There are also significant inequalities in malnutrition both

across provinces and between different wealth groups and ethnicities. The situation is exacerbated by rice shortages in Northern provinces as a result of two years of drought. Gender inequality and early marriage is also a challenge. Restrictions due to COVID-19 have had a greater impact on women, as their already high workload at home has increased more than that of men and movement restrictions significantly affected many sectors with a large female workforce. Laos has a Gender Inequality Index value of 0.459 and is ranked at 113 of 162 countries in the 2019 index.

#### DATA ON ALL FORMS OF MALNUTRITION



#### NUTRITION GOVERNANCE

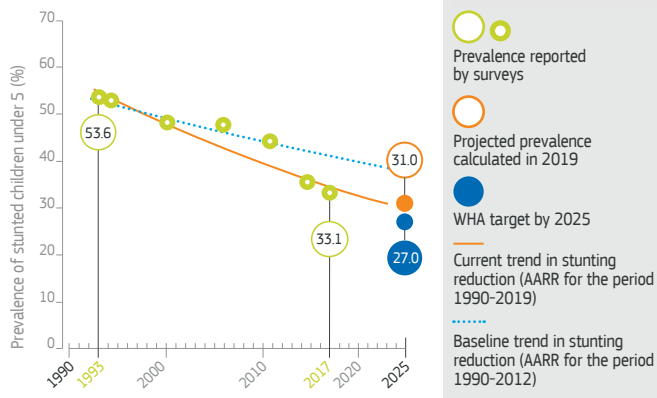
- Lao PDR joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement in 2011.
- The EU is the SUN donor convenor in Lao PDR.
- Building on the first national nutrition policy from 2008, the Government of Lao PDR made a firm commitment to focus on progress towards the World Health Assembly (WHA) international targets for nutrition. Supported by the donor community and especially the EU, in 2015 the Government approved a national nutrition strategy (NNS) 2016-25 and plan of action (NPAN) 2016-2020.
- The NNS and NPAN contain 11 strategic objectives and 29 priority interventions to be implemented through the joint collaboration of the ministries for health, agriculture, education and planning, which come together and are represented by the national nutrition committee.
- Provincial and district governors play key roles in the sub-national nutrition coordination mechanisms that are being established and supported. Following a mid-term national review of the NPAN 2016-2020, supported by EU/UNICEF, a new NPAN (2021-2025) is currently in development.

#### Example of EU support

The strategic evolution of EU programming for nutrition in Laos is confirmed by the 2019 EUR 50.8 million Budget Support for Nutrition programme, 'Support to the Lao PDR National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action'. A further EUR 7.85 million is allocated to support the capacity development of the national nutrition committee secretariat, provincial nutrition committees and district nutrition committees. Promoting greater alignment of domestic public financing with priority interventions for nutrition is a key focus for policy dialogue, while the Budget Support programme is linked to a seven-year blended investment, 'Sustainable Rural Infrastructure and Watershed Management Sector Project', in partnership with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (EUR 51.2 million of which EUR 4 million from the EU) to strengthen nutrition-sensitive agricultural investments for improved food security and increased climate resilience in four provinces. Discussions with the Government resulted in agreement on several ambitious performance indicators including a national decree on 'infant and young child product control'; the application of nutrition-sensitive planning guidelines; and a commitment to address the absence of basic water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in primary schools.

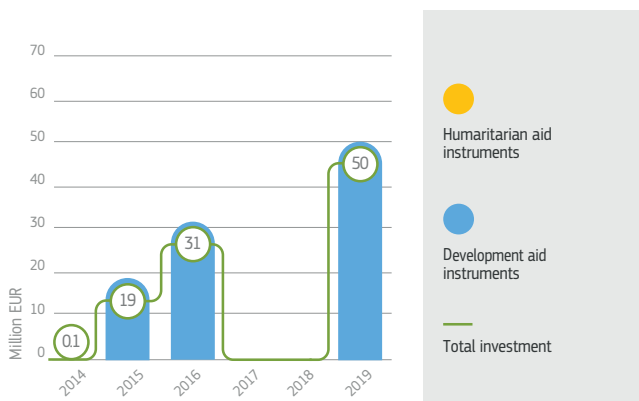
## Progress on the two EU pledges for nutrition

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



The Government of Lao PDR has committed to reduce child stunting to 25% prevalence by 2025. The prevalence of stunting and the number of stunted children has continuously declined. The rate of decline in the number of children stunted has accelerated from 1.00% in 2012 to 1.78% in 2019. If this rate is maintained, then just over 240 000 children are expected to be stunted in 2025. Recent projections anticipate that Lao PDR is close to meeting both the Government and the WHA targets by 2025, and that of the principal indicator for SDG2, as long as recent droughts and the COVID-19 pandemic do not set back this progress.

### EU FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS TO NUTRITION BETWEEN 2014 AND 2019 – A TOTAL OF EUR 100 MILLION



Lao PDR is prioritising nutrition in its 2014-2020 multi-annual indicative programme, which evolved into an EU joint programming strategy for 2016-2020. Investments in the EUR 50 million Partnership for Nutrition Programme in 2015 and 2016 comprise several projects including Partnership for Improved Nutrition – a UNICEF project to strengthen nutrition governance and enhance service delivery. Five additional NGO-implemented projects ensure engagement with most vulnerable communities. The new EUR 50.8 million Budget Support Programme for nutrition includes a package of complementary measures to develop national capacities. The National Information Platforms for Nutrition (NIPN) initiative focuses specifically on strengthening national stakeholders' analysis of nutrition data to better inform policies and programmes. An EU investment blending contribution of EUR 4 million (from the regional indicative programme) has been made towards an ADB project for nutrition sensitive agriculture.

<sup>1</sup> UNDESA World Population Prospects 2019 population estimate 2020.