

## LAO PDR

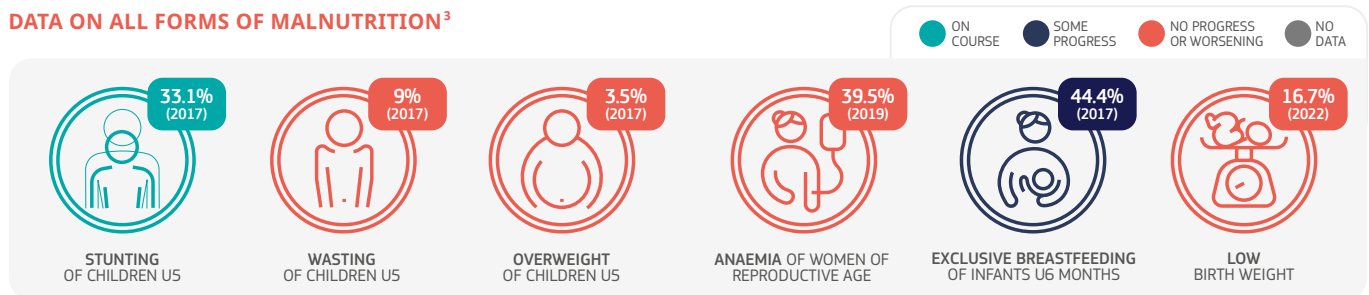
### Nutrition situation in LAO PDR

#### AT A GLANCE

Lao PDR has a small population of 7.6 million people, but a relatively high population growth of 1.4%<sup>1</sup>. Despite significant progress in reducing child stunting over recent years, the prevalence of stunting (33.1%) 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 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. Climate change is a key challenge facing the rural population. The country is vulnerable to climate change due to its low adaptability and high dependence on climate-sensitive natural resources. Changing climate patterns, combined with poor access to both markets and diverse livelihoods, further worsen the situation in remote upland areas, where over 20% of households are food insecure<sup>2</sup>. Gender inequality and early marriage is also a challenge. Laos has a Gender Inequality Index value of 0.468 and is ranked at 118 of 166 countries in 2022.

#### DATA ON ALL FORMS OF MALNUTRITION<sup>3</sup>



The data reported in the 2023 EU Nutrition Country Profiles is drawn from the UNICEF/WHO/World Bank Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates and the Global Nutrition Report (GNR).

#### NUTRITION GOVERNANCE

- Lao PDR joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement in 2011.
- The EU and World Bank are the SUN donor convenor in Lao PDR.
- The Government has endorsed the Ninth National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2021–2025, which refers to 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 next NPAN (2021–2025), also supported by the EU, is now active.
- The NPAN (2021–2025) has 8 indicators: (1) stunting in children under 5 years of age, (2) wasting in children under 5 years of age, (3) underweight in children under 5 years of age, (4) anaemia in children aged 6–59 months, (5) anaemia in women of reproductive age (15–49 years), (6) infants born with low birth weight, (7) overweight in children under 5 years of age, and (8) infants under 6 months of age who are exclusively breastfed.
- The 13 strategic objectives and 22 priority interventions are 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 sub-national nutrition coordination mechanisms.

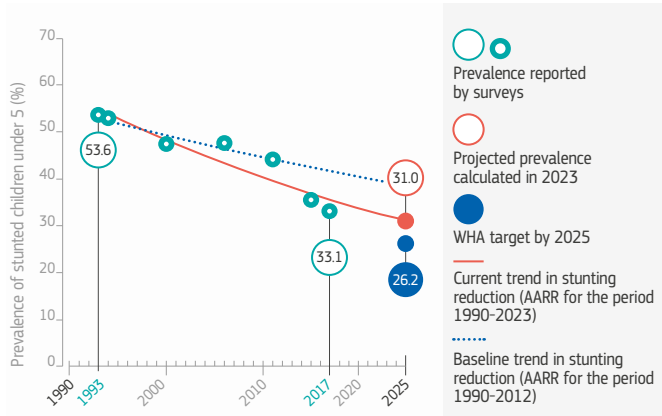
#### Example of EU support

A nutrition portfolio critical review (2019) highlighted the evolution towards a more strategic focus on scaling-up of national and sub-national efforts to reduce malnutrition. This is exemplified by the 2019 EUR 50 million commitment which includes:

- EUR 38 million Budget Support programme for nutrition 'Support to the Lao PDR National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action',
- EUR 7.85 million for capacity development of the National Nutrition Committee Secretariat, provincial and district nutrition committees. Promoting greater alignment of domestic public financing with priority interventions for nutrition is a key policy dialogue focus.
- 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 (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. Indicators agreed included a national decree on 'infant and young child product control'; application of nutrition-sensitive planning guidelines; and a commitment to address basic water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in primary schools, among others.

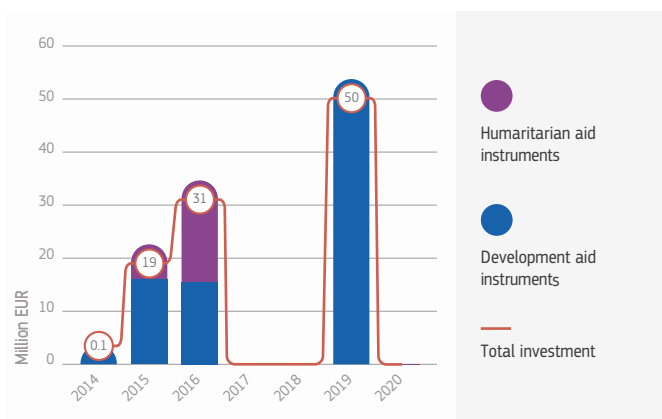


## Progress on the two EU pledges for nutrition



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

The Government of Lao PDR has committed to reduce child stunting prevalence to 25% 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% in 2012 to 1.78% in 2022. If this rate is maintained, then just over 240 000 children are expected to be stunted in 2025.



## EU FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS TO NUTRITION BETWEEN 2014 AND 2020 – A TOTAL OF EUR 0.7 MILLION

Investments in the EUR 50 million Partnership for Nutrition Programme in 2015 and 2016 included Partnership for Improved Nutrition – a UNICEF-implemented project to strengthen nutrition governance and enhance service delivery. Five additional NGO-implemented projects ensured engagement with most vulnerable communities. Included in the 2019 EUR 50 million commitment, the Budget Support Programme for nutrition supports a package of complementary measures to develop national capacities. Also included is the EU investment blending contribution of EUR 4 million (from the regional indicative programme) towards an Asian Development Bank project for nutrition sensitive agriculture<sup>4</sup>. There have not been any commitments to nutrition since 2019.

## Planning for nutrition 2021-2027

At the 2021 Tokyo Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit, the Government of Lao PDR committed to accelerate the National Nutrition Strategy 2025 and Plan of Action 2021-2025 and highlighted:

- the importance of creating an enabling environment in which communities of the multi-ethnic people of Laos can access and appropriately use nutritious foods and access quality services and support for maintaining good health and nutrition;
- the urgent need to get the most needed nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive priority interventions “on” the government budget to ensure the continued delivery of basic nutrition services even within the limited fiscal space available;
- actions that must be informed by evidence;
- the need to support social and behaviour change that protects, promotes and supports reduced women’s workload, breastfeeding, complementary feeding, improved dietary diversity, early childhood stimulation, and health and hygiene practices and hence improvements in nutritional status of vulnerable populations.

All registered and verified N4G commitments can be found in the [N4G Compact](#) and [Annex](#).

At the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit the Government of Lao PDR pledged to move towards a more sustainable food system, that ensures no one is left behind, is integral to achieving a more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable growth model, and to accelerate progress in the achievement of the SDGs. The Government’s Pathway to Sustainable Food Systems can be found here: [version 16.09.2021](#).

Nutrition forms part of the 360-degree approach of the EU’s Global Gateway. The Team Europe Initiative (TEI) for ‘digital education’ offers opportunities to support nutrition impacts beyond school feeding through three relevant areas: (i) early childhood education; (ii) innovative approaches to strengthening a nutrition-sensitive curriculum (pre-service and in-service teacher training and other initiatives); and (iii) ensuring and maintaining minimum WASH standards in all education settings. The other TEI, ‘Green Deal’ and its priority areas ‘Farm to Fork’ and ‘Green and Integrated Landscapes’ has the potential to positively impact land-use management while reducing malnutrition and fostering inclusive growth through climate-adapted, resilient and well-managed food systems, notably in agriculture, nutrition, integrated landscape management, forest and biodiversity conservation. With the National Plan of Action for Nutrition 2021-2025, there is an opportunity to further strengthen multisector coordination and collaboration. Closer integration with current programmes, such as [National Information Platform for Nutrition \(NIPN\) in Lao PDR](#) with the NPAN implementation and alignment with the new Nutrition Information Systems (NIS) project as well as the aforementioned TEIs, enables investments in different sectors to substantially improve nutrition in Lao PDR. Through its Nutrition Research Facility, the EU Commission is supporting a research study in Lao PDR to examine the impact on diets through agroecological approaches, particularly using underutilised species (Future Smart Foods).

1 - UNDESA [World Population Prospects 2022](#), estimated population as of January 2023.

2 - [WFP website Lao People's Democratic Republic](#).

3 - The data reported in the 2023 EU Nutrition Country Profiles is drawn from the UNICEF/WHO/World Bank Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates and the Global Nutrition Report. To note, the 2023 Lao Social Indicator Survey III (LSIS III) Key Indicators Report notes the following: Stunting U5 – 32.8% (2023); wasting U5 – 10.7% (2023); overweight U5 – 2.8% (2023); anaemia women of reproductive age – 39.5% (2019); exclusive breastfeeding children under 6 months – 50.6% (2023); low birth weight – 16.7% (2022).

4 - Data in this section excludes some regional, global and policy/research/information commitments that could not be disaggregated by beneficiary country. Data for 2022 are preliminary. The European Commission applied the methodology of the SUN Donor Network for nutrition resource tracking 2014-2020 and the OECD DAC’s nutrition policy marker from 2021 onwards.