

Generation Nutrition Policy Brief: Reaffirming EU Leadership in Global Food Security and Nutrition

GENERATION NUTRITION

Generation Nutrition EU is a network of civil society organisations advocating for stronger action to tackle malnutrition at EU level. Its goal is to galvanise political will and ensure that we can be the generation that ends undernutrition for good. The network brings together organisations working together to engage with the EU calling to scale up efforts and increase political and financial commitments to prioritise the fight against malnutrition, ensuring adequate and effective nutrition interventions and nutrition accountability mechanisms are in place. Generation Nutrition believes that, with strong political will and sustained action, a world free from child deaths caused by undernutrition can be achieved within a generation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global food security and nutrition landscape is facing a profound structural shift, shaped by the convergence of conflict, climate extremes, economic shocks, shifting geopolitical priorities and declining Official Development Assistance (ODA).¹ While overall hunger statistics suggest a marginal improvement, acute malnutrition, unaffordable diets, and climate- and conflict-driven food insecurity continue to escalate and are felt most severely across fragile, conflict-affected, and dryland regions in sub-Saharan Africa.^{2,3}

The compounding nature of today's polycrisis—most recently marked by escalating conflicts, severe climate shocks, and supply chain disruptions—demands a fundamental realignment of EU external action toward integrated, multi-annual funding models that link

immediate nutrition interventions with long-term health and food system resilience.

Yet, at a time when the latest El Niño phenomenon is forecasted to threaten the food security of an additional 40 million people and heighten famine risks across key hotspots into 2027, global humanitarian food and nutrition funding plummeted by 59% between 2022 and 2025.⁴ This fiscal contraction has forced stringent hyper-prioritisation that narrows humanitarian action solely to immediate life-saving relief. Ultimately, connecting emergency aid and anticipatory action with multi-year development finance is essential to breaking the cycle of recurring crises and unlocking sustainable human and economic development.

The EU is at a pivotal moment as it reshapes its external action priorities and financing in response to growing geopolitical, economic and security pressures. The negotiations on the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the proposed Global Europe Instrument extend beyond any single Council presidency. Nevertheless, by placing food security and nutrition firmly on the political agenda, Ireland's Presidency can create momentum for this priority to be carried forward by subsequent presidencies and throughout the wider EU negotiating process. The choices made will determine whether food security and nutrition are diluted by competing economic and geopolitical

priorities or embedded as essential foundations of human development, resilience and stability.

Access to adequate food and nutrition is a fundamental human right and an essential foundation of equitable and sustainable development. By supporting this, EU external action can contribute to more resilient societies, economies and partnerships. Delivering on this ambition requires a renewed EU political framework for nutrition, backed by adequate, predictable and long-term financing



STATE OF GLOBAL NUTRITION

Decades of gains achieved through global efforts to eradicate hunger and malnutrition are at risk. Global progress on maternal and child nutrition is far too slow – and in several areas reversing – leaving the world off-track for all 2030 targets.

Recent global estimates² indicate **a slight decrease in global hunger**, falling to **7.8% in 2025** (affecting approximately **645 million people**)—down from 8.1% in 2024 and 8.6% in 2022. While this reflects a reduction of 14 million people compared to 2024 and 43 million since 2022, these statistics mask deep structural fragilities, stark regional disparities, and a widening divergence from Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets. The modest progress remains highly fragile and vulnerable to rapid climatic, macroeconomic, and geopolitical shocks. Africa has now surpassed Asia as the region with the highest absolute number of hungry people, with **56.6% of Africa's population** experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity.

Undernutrition remains the leading underlying cause of death for children under five, increasingly concentrated in fragile, climate-vulnerable, and conflict affected regions. Beyond its devastating human cost and systemic

gender impacts, undernutrition carries a staggering economic price, eroding national GDP by up to 16.5% in Africa and 11% in Asia.⁵

- **Unaffordable Diets:** Nearly **one in three people worldwide (2.69 billion)** could not afford a healthy diet in 2025. In sub-Saharan Africa, healthy diets remain out of reach for **two-thirds (66.7%)** of the population.⁶
- **Acute Child Malnutrition:** Data across 23 crisis-affected contexts reveals **35.5 million acutely malnourished children**, including **9.7 million** suffering from life-threatening **severe acute malnutrition (SAM)**.³
- **Chronic Malnutrition & Diet Gaps:** Globally, **150 million children under five** suffer from **chronic malnutrition**, and only **30.8% of children aged six to 23 months** consume a minimally diverse diet.²
- **Women continue to face disproportionate nutrition risks:** globally, approximately **one in three women aged 15 to 49** do not achieve minimum dietary diversity and **anaemia among women increased to 30.7% in 2023**.⁷

ESCALATING POLYCRISIS AND THE NARROWING WINDOW FOR ACTION

The global food system is experiencing simultaneous disruptions across primary production and input supply chains. Escalating conflict across the Middle East and the Horn of Africa continues to restrict fertiliser and fuel flows, driving up logistics costs and threatening regional stability.^{8,9} Sustained high energy and fertiliser prices threaten to lock **over 510 million people into chronic hunger by 2030⁷** – a situation further exacerbated by extreme climate events like El Niño, which the World Food Programme (WFP) warns could drive **nearly 50 million additional people into acute food insecurity by the end of 2027.¹⁰** Baseline projections fail to account for severe weather extremes associated with the ongoing **El Niño cycle across 2026 and 2027.** It is expected that rain-fed smallholder farmers and pastoralists will be disproportionately impacted. Beyond crop yields, El Niño alters disease vector dynamics, disrupts Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) infrastructure, primary healthcare

and forces displacement. It was reported that **June to September 2026 was the vital window for anticipatory action ahead of compounding climate and market shocks.¹¹** In response, FAO and WFP activated a joint El Niño Anticipatory Action Appeal targeting 8.8 million people across 22 high-risk countries. **However, despite this coordinated push, total funding and delivery have only materialised to cover roughly 40% of the target population to date — leaving over five million vulnerable individuals without critical anticipatory support** (FAO–WFP Joint Progress & Funding Update, 2026; UN OCHA, 2026). UN OCHA released targeted CERF anticipatory funding allocations, UNICEF pre-positioned life-saving health and nutrition supplies for children across vulnerable dryland zones, while the World Bank expanded climate-contingent emergency financing through its Crisis Response Window to buffer national social safety nets¹².



THE CASE FOR GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY & NUTRITION: BUILDING ON TWO DECADES OF PROGRESS

In the wake of the 2007–08 global food price crisis, the **EU established itself as a world leader in global food and nutrition security by translating political intent into multi-year financial commitments.** Through its landmark 2010 Food Security Policy Framework, 2013 Maternal and Child Nutrition Communication, and the 2014–2025 Action Plan on Nutrition (APN), the EU set a gold standard for multi-sectoral accountability.

The APN provided a clear, binding roadmap that linked EU commitments to national programming, and exceeded its €3.5 billion target by delivering €4.3 billion between 2014 and 2020. Further reinforced by the support for the UN Food Systems Summit (UN FSS) National Pathways and the Global Alliance Against

Hunger and Poverty, and €2.5 billion commitment at the Tokyo N4G Summit and subsequent €3.4 billion pledge at the Paris N4G Summit in 2025, as well as 2024 Council Conclusions, **Team Europe signalled that predictable, grant-based development aid directly drives systemic health and human development outcomes.**

Today, that hard-won consensus faces a critical turning point. Following the conclusion of the EU APN, the EU is operating in a strategic policy limbo without a dedicated roadmap to guide programming under the post-2027 MFF. This vacuum coincides with a ~23% contraction in global ODA and a paradigm shift within EU external action.



REAFFIRMING TEAM EUROPE LEADERSHIP ON FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

In December 2024, at a time of escalating geopolitical crises- marked by the conflict in Ukraine, economic shocks, climate extremes - the Council of the EU adopted conclusions on ***'Stepping up Team Europe's support to global food security and nutrition'*** (16901/24). These conclusions reflected a crucial EU consensus on the strategic necessity of advancing global food systems that are sustainable, inclusive and resilient, and ending hunger.

Since 2024, this global polycrisis has intensified. Compounding funding shortfalls, climate change, conflict and economic volatility are severely impacting health and food systems, pushing more people into severe vulnerability, and making the strategic necessity of these conclusions more urgent than ever. Along with these Council Conclusions, the **commitments made**

at the 2025 Nutrition for Growth Summit must now be translated into sustained EU political commitment and investment in nutrition as negotiations on the 2028 to 2034 MFF advance, particularly for countries affected by fragility. While the EU and some of its Member States have built a long-standing legacy of leadership on global food security and nutrition within international development and humanitarian cooperation, the paradigm governing EU external action is rapidly shifting.

To remain effective in this new landscape, food security and nutrition must be repositioned not just as a sectoral goal, but as both a critical enabler and a direct outcome of global stability, gender equality, resilience, economic development and peace.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO EU AND MEMBER STATES

Governance & Strategic Continuity

- **Adopt a Successor EU Nutrition Strategy:** Following the conclusion of the EU Action Plan on Nutrition (APN) legacy cycle, the EU currently faces a policy limbo. This action plan has provided vital guidance since 2013, and a success for the framework is critical to safeguard nutrition gains and reaffirm EU leadership in global food and nutrition security.
- **Leverage the Council Conclusions on the Global Health Resilience Initiative to Support Measurable Nutrition Outcomes:** EU external action—including Global Gateway health investments— should show a credible route from infrastructure, products and finance to services, workforce capability, continuity, equitable access and outcomes.
- **Establish Tracking Metrics:** Incorporate disaggregated nutrition indicators alongside transparent financial tracking tags to guarantee accountability across geographic envelopes.

Safeguarding External Action and Intent

- **Ringfence the Humanitarian Aid Budget:** Maintain the €25 billion for humanitarian assistance in final MFF negotiations, given the scale of needs and the urgency of ongoing nutritional crises.
- **Protect External Action:** Reject the proposed spending cuts to GEI, ensuring the EU maintains its ambition and capacity as a principled global actor.
- **Protect Human Development Benchmarks:** Re-anchor poverty reduction and human development by establishing a spending benchmark of at least 50% of ODA within external financing instruments, ensuring nutrition-related programmes remain fully funded.

Fragility & Resilience Building

- **Bridge Crisis Response and Systems Resilience:** In fragile settings, support joint-programming modalities that link emergency response with shock-responsive local food, health, and social protection systems.
- **Invest in Anticipatory Action:** In regions facing El Niño climate impacts and supply chain disruptions, invest more in early warning systems, anticipatory action and resilient, locally anchored food systems, while strengthening integrated programming to meet urgent needs and build self-reliance
- **Operationalise the HDP Nexus via Multi-Year Country-Level Strategies:** In line with the ECA Special Report 20/2025¹³ recommendations, replace fragmented, short-term project cycles with unified, multi-annual Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus strategies.

Meaningful Civil Society Organisation Participation

- **Recognise and resource CSOs as strategic partners:** Recognise the role of CSO as implementers, innovators and trusted actors with deep knowledge of local contexts and communities. Provide accessible, transparent and traceable funding to local, national and international CSOs, including SUN Civil Society Alliances, and ensure their timely and meaningful participation in the design, implementation of EU and Team Europe food security and nutrition initiatives.
- **Strengthen civil society oversight and accountability:** Enable CSOs to monitor commitments, advocate for robust regulatory frameworks, and safeguard nutrition policies and programmes from conflicts of interest.



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