

A stylized world map composed of various shades of blue polygons, serving as a background for the top section of the document.

DISCUSSION PAPER No. 347

Upgrading the EU's policy toolbox for nutrition leadership

By Koen Dekeyser and Francesco Rampa

June 2023

The European Union (EU) is a leader in supporting nutrition worldwide. Its current nutrition framework and Action Plan on Nutrition are generally seen as well-built but outdated and not well-linked with new sectors and priorities.

This paper summarises recent developments in the EU's nutrition policy landscape and provides recommendations on upcoming opportunities to ensure nutrition is optimally built into the EU's approach to food systems transformation and food security in its external action.

Three strategies are proposed for a revision of the framework: emphasising the importance of nutrition for long-term development; linking it more strongly with other EU priorities; and building coalitions of nutrition champions. Better nutrition outcomes are necessary for long-term development but are vulnerable to short-term setbacks. Hence, a strong and updated policy framework can help to integrate nutrition better with crisis response while providing backing to continue the EU's leadership on nutrition support.

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	i
List of Tables.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Acronyms.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
1. Recent changes in the EU nutrition policy landscape.....	1
1.1. Main events.....	1
1.2. Financing.....	3
1.3. Crisis responses.....	3
2. Stalled revision of nutrition policy framework.....	4
3. Strategies for revising the framework.....	5
3.1. Emphasise the importance of nutrition for long-term development.....	6
3.2. Link more strongly with other EU priorities.....	6
3.3. Build wider, deeper coalitions of nutrition champions.....	6
4. Recommendations.....	7
4.1. Who can do what?.....	7
4.2. When are the opportunities?.....	9
5. Conclusion.....	10
Appendix.....	11
References.....	13

List of Figures

Figure 1: Who can do what? Connecting nutrition strategies with actors.....	8
Figure 2: When are the opportunities? Timeline of selected upcoming nutrition relevant events for 2023.....	10

List of Tables

Table 1: Key events, agreements and reference frameworks for external EU food and nutrition security policy, 2010-2022.....	12
---	----

Acknowledgements

Generation Nutrition commissioned this discussion paper from ECDPM as a contribution to understanding, underscoring and advancing the EU's leadership on nutrition in the face of the current major crises, including those on food and nutrition. The analysis and recommendations were also enriched through a High-Level Round Table discussion, "A Crisis within a Crisis: the Silent Nutrition Crisis at the Heart of the Global Food Crisis", held on 28th February 2023 at the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU with Generation Nutrition. The authors warmly thank the interviewees for their time, Generation Nutrition for the valuable knowledge, feedback and comments, and Joyce Olders and Catarina Farinha for the layout. The views and opinions expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of ECDPM or Generation Nutrition. For more information about ECDPM's Sustainable Food Systems programme, please visit ecdpm.org. Please contact Koen Dekeyser (kde@ecdpm.org) or Generation Nutrition (via Alliance2015 member from People in Need: deirdre.mcmahon@peopleinneed.net) for comments and feedback.

Generation Nutrition is a network of civil organisations, collaborating to end malnutrition in all its forms by 2030. Members of Generation Nutrition include Action Against Hunger, Alliance2015, Care International, Global Health Advocates, Save the Children, WaterAid and World Vision.



Acronyms

AU	African Union
C4N	Capacity for Nutrition
CSO	Civil society organisation
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
F2F	Farm to Fork Strategy
FARM	International Food and Agriculture Resilience Mission
GAFS	Global Alliance for Food Security
I-CAN	Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition
MIP	Multiannual Indicative Programme
MS	Member state
N4G	Nutrition for Growth
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SUN	Scaling up Nutrition
TEI	Team Europe Initiatives
UN FSS	United Nations Food Systems Summit

Introduction

With the UN Food Systems Summit (UN FSS), the UN Climate Change Summit (COP 26), and the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit all in one year, 2021 was seen as the ‘year of action on nutrition’. This led many to hope that 2021 would have created sorely needed political momentum for a redoubling of efforts towards the end of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2. Instead of progress, however, 2021-2022 saw a deterioration in global food security and a dramatically increased need for more humanitarian aid, with undernourishment being the highest since 2010 (FAO et al. 2022); a global food crisis emerged.

Even a brief crisis can have long-term effects: the current food crisis can lead to child wasting in the short run and stunting in the long run (Heady and Ruel 2022). The EU continued to take a leadership role in nutrition, supporting initiatives such as the UN FSS, investing in the Committee on World Food Security¹ and its pledge at the N4G Summit, but its ability to respond to rapidly rising needs was constrained by a multitude of other crises hitting the European continent - a security crisis due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, increased climate impacts, an energy crisis due to rising prices, and an economic crisis including due to inflation and the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the resulting rise in food prices, the EU made food security a geopolitical priority (Medinilla et al. 2022); however, this response focused much more on food security and less on nutrition objectives.²

One reason could be that the EU’s nutrition framework is outdated and not well-linked with new sectors and priorities. For example, its Action Plan on Nutrition hails from 2014 and its Guidelines on Addressing Undernutrition in Emergencies from 2013. While EU development cooperation is working in a multisectoral approach, there are missed opportunities for synergies between crisis responses and nutrition objectives. Revising the nutrition frameworks is caught in somewhat of a catch-22: more political support is needed to revise the frameworks, but an updated framework is wanted to connect strongly with the current priorities and garner more political support for nutrition. It is advisable to consider revising the Action Plan on Nutrition (2015-2025) to ensure a smooth transition beyond 2025.

1. Recent changes in the EU nutrition policy landscape

1.1. Main events

The EU supported the UN FSS, which provided an opportunity to implement its leadership role in sustainable food policy and green partnerships promoted by the EU’s flagship Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F; launched in 2020). A Council Conclusion before the Summit set out the EU’s principles for transforming food systems, which includes change based on a holistic and systemic approach, promoting healthy diets, and strong and integrated multi-stakeholder dialogues and partnerships. Moreover, the EU, the world’s third largest food importer in 2019 (Matthews 2022), intends to include a specific chapter on the sustainability of food systems in EU trade agreements currently under negotiation (CoEU 2021). The importance of nutrition in food systems was clear at the Summit: its first Action Track theme was to ‘*Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all*’. Some of the most important outcomes of the Summit were the National Pathways and the Coalitions. The Pathways spelt out, often for the first time, countries’ visions for their food systems. After the Summit, the EU joined eight Global Food Systems Summit Coalitions, with the

¹ Support to the Committee is at the core of the EU’s efforts to strengthen global food governance (EC et al. 2022f).

² Food security refers to the availability, access, and utilisation of food to meet dietary needs and preferences of individuals. Nutrition goes beyond food security and emphasises quality, adequacy, and balanced intake of nutrients necessary for good health and well-being.

“Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems for Children & All”, *“School Meals Coalition”*, and *“Fighting food crises along the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus”* of particular relevance for nutrition (EC 2022b). However, a large portion of civil society deemed the Summit’s organisation too involved with large private companies and condemned its lack of inclusivity (Chandrasekaran et al. 2021). Before the Summit, the EU supported the Committee on World Food Security in developing the *Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition*, which provides guidance to governments and relevant stakeholders on designing context-specific food policies and aligning policies, laws, programmes and investment plans to address malnutrition using a holistic food systems lens. The guidelines are a contribution to the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition and intend to help countries to operationalise nutrition recommendations.

Nutrition for Growth (N4G) is a global effort to bring together country governments, donors and other stakeholders to commit to nutrition. While the EU did not promise new financial commitments for nutrition at the UN FSS, it pledged EUR 2.5 billion for nutrition objectives in international assistance over four years at the N4G Summit. Of this total, EUR 1.4 billion is designated for development aid and EUR 1.1 billion for humanitarian assistance (EC 2021). There is a slight shift towards funding more humanitarian assistance: over the last seven years, 35% of financial commitments were committed to humanitarian assistance, which goes up to 44% in the new N4G Summit pledges (EC 2022d).³ Team Europe-related commitments at the N4G Summit were at least EUR 4.3 billion (EC 2022d). This third N4G Summit saw a combined USD 27 billion in commitments pledged, and while these were seen as a significant step forward, much more is needed to end malnutrition (UNICEF 2021). Notably, while most countries did not reach their financial commitments for the 2013 N4G Summit, the EU achieved its financial commitments from 2013 (GNR 2021).⁴ In a reaction to the N4G Summit, a group of EU Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) called on the EU to ensure the multisectoral approach to nutrition in the NDICI-Global Europe instrument and asked to revise the EU Action Plan on Nutrition as it will expire in 2025 (Alliance2015 2021). France committed to hosting the fourth N4G Summit in 2024 or 2025 and will appoint a Special Envoy for the N4G Summit.

After almost a two-year delay, the EU and African Union organised an EU-African Union (AU) summit at the beginning of 2022 to strengthen their partnership. Out of the Summit came the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package, worth EUR 150 billion over seven years, which includes support for more sustainable African food systems by 2030. The political background of the Summit and the investment package is the prioritisation of Africa in Von der Leyen’s so-called ‘Geopolitical Commission’. Even though the Summit did not result in an EU-AU alliance, it did underscore the importance of Africa in the European Commission (EC) and EU leaders’ strategies.

³ During the 2023 European Humanitarian Forum, hosted by the Swedish rotating Presidency and DG ECHO, the EU and its MS announced planned humanitarian funding of €8.4 billion for 2023 (EC 2023).

⁴ The EU’s Action Plan on Nutrition (2015-2025) commits to support efforts to reduce stunting among children under five years by 7 million by 2025. While the EU’s 7th Progress Report discloses that stunting in supported countries has fallen by 6% on average between 2012-2021, data for the EU’s progress toward the stunting reduction commitment is not yet available (EC 2022d).

1.2. Financing

NDICI-Global Europe has become the main instrument for EU cooperation and development with partner countries since June 2021. The instrument aims to distribute at least 20% of its funding towards human development and social inclusion, where nutrition and food support are part (Generation Nutrition 2021). Besides nutrition and food, the theme of *Human Development including Gender* covers health, education, water, hygiene and sanitation, and social protection. A multisectoral approach to nutrition would link with all these themes: strengthening social protection systems, including nutrition services in building robust and resilient health systems, and ensuring equitable access to quality water, hygiene and sanitation services. Through NDICI-Global Europe, the EU will prioritise support to food systems in about 70 partner countries. While the instrument provides the EU with significant financial means and flexible resources to respond quickly to crises and unforeseen events, the multiple crises of 2022 exhausted the instruments' flexibility mechanisms rapidly (Di Ciommo et al. 2022).

1.3. Crisis responses

COVID-19 was still in full swing in 2021 and threatened to derail progress on the World Health Assembly nutrition targets, especially for women and the poor (OWID 2022; Picchioni et al. 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic greatly increased EU funding to health systems abroad, but mostly towards vaccine production. Recognising the need for a more coherent and effective response to the crisis, the Team Europe approach⁵ was launched to strengthen the impact and increase the visibility of the EU and Member States (MS) abroad by pooling resources and expertise. At the end of 2021, more than EUR 53 billion to support partner countries in response to COVID-19 was mobilised, much reassigned from existing funds (Bilal and Di Ciommo 2020; EC 2022a). Geopolitical motives drive the Team Europe approach: the EU and MS seek to leverage more effectively that, collectively, they are the largest development cooperation donor and trade and investor partners with most African countries. Team Europe's global response focused on three priority areas: responding to the immediate health crisis and humanitarian needs, strengthening health, water and sanitation systems, and mitigating the immediate socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. Team Europe is not the only joint effort towards more coherence. While Team Europe is more based on informal processes, joint programming uses a more formal and bureaucratic process to plan the EU and MS development cooperation (Jones and Teevan 2021). Team Europe Initiatives (TEI) are the flagship of the Team Europe approach. TEI will be the main channel for delivering on the promises of the Global Gateway and will be embedded in the Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs; Jones and Sergejeff 2022). Zambia and Liberia are two examples where a TEI includes a nutrition component (EU 2022).

In February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. The invasion worsened already high global food insecurity as it pushed up the prices of food, fertilisers and fuel, and as such, the costs of humanitarian aid. A global food crisis emerged, the worst one since 2007-08. While the 2007-08 and current food crises are marked by rapidly increasing global food prices, there are important differences in causes and impact. The 2022 food crisis is primarily caused by a more complex confluence of key factors, like conflict, climate and economic shocks, than the drought, biofuel policies and speculation of 2007-08. Excessive speculation might have amplified price spikes in 2022 (Kornher et al. 2022). The impact on undernourishment is larger as well: while undernourishment continued to decline between 2007-08, the COVID-19 pandemic and the current food crisis caused more people to be hungry, to a level not seen since 2005 (FAO et al. 2022). The strain on government budgets will likely shift spending away from social programmes, limiting the provision and expansion of social protection measures needed to reach women and children (Bryan and Ringler 2022; Di Ciommo et al. 2022). Low food access for women and girls makes them more vulnerable to gender-based

⁵ The Team Europe approach brings the EU, its member states, the European financial institutions (e.g., the European Investment Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) and the private sector together (Di Ciommo et al. 2022).

violence and the adoption of coping mechanisms (CARE International 2022). Higher food prices also have an outsized impact on poor children’s stunting (Headey and Ruel 2022). In low- and middle-income countries, a staggering 478 million or two-thirds of children under five suffer from food poverty today. They do not receive the varied diet essential for optimal growth and development (UNICEF 2022). The consequences are dire: more people worldwide might lose their lives in this food crisis than on the Ukrainian battlefields.

In general, while the European Parliament in a resolution stressed the importance of nutrition support (EP 2022), the EU crisis response appears to focus more on food security through cereal availability and affordability and the smooth functioning of markets. *“Nutrition took centre stage in the 2007-08 crisis, but not now”*.⁶ The EU’s response risks to be seen more as an attempt to contain the sociopolitical instability that can derive from the crisis rather than a full-fledged emergency and development-focused response (Medinilla et al. 2022). At home, the EU is motivated to reduce its dependence on imports of gas and fertilisers from Russia. With Africa particularly hard hit, food security became a geopolitical priority for the EU, as well as to counteract the Russian narrative that blames the food crisis on European sanctions (EC 2022c). The EU and its member states have tried to articulate a rapid and comprehensive response to address food insecurity, especially in Africa (Jones and Sergejeff 2022). Its response included both short and long-term interventions, while comprehensive in scope, it appeared somewhat limited compared to needs (Di Ciommo et al. 2022).

2. Stalled revision of nutrition policy framework

The EU’s current nutrition framework and its Action Plan on Nutrition are generally seen as well-built but outdated, lacking particular linkages to the SDGs, which started in 2015, nexus approaches, resilience and climate change. Besides the lack of these linkages, the Action Plan foresees few activities with partner countries post-2020: only information sharing and reporting activities are planned between 2020-2025. Between 2018 and 2020, there were efforts to update the EU’s nutrition framework: in 2018, the Council invited the Commission to revise their policy frameworks on food security and nutrition (CoEU 2018) and the Commission services initiated the development of a revised policy framework in 2019. However, given the imminent launch of the F2F in 2020 the Commission decided not to proceed with a new nutrition policy framework. This was to prevent the development of parallel frameworks and to promote policy coherence with the external dimension of the F2F. The F2F, however, is mainly domestically oriented and is occupied, as it is part of the EU’s Green Deal, more with climate goals than nutrition (EC 2020). More importantly, while food systems are crucial for nutrition, support for nutrition benefits from a multi-sectoral approach that includes health, sanitation, education, social protection, gender, trade and climate adaptation sectors, among others. The F2F’s external dimension does not link nutrition to these sectors.⁷ Neither does it refer to nutrition in emergencies. After the F2F was launched, the German Presidency of the Council in 2020, with backing from France and the European Parliament, tried to push for a revision of the EU’s nutrition framework. Part of the reasoning for a revision was that even though the Action Plan was valid until 2025, its financial targets were already achieved. This pressure did not result in a revision.

Nutrition support has not fallen off the table. However, other priorities and crisis responses came on top: first, the COVID-19 pandemic shifted development investments to health systems, focused on vaccines, and then the Russian invasion of Ukraine caused a security, energy and food crisis. Then, domestically, the EU prioritises its green

⁶ Tom Arnold, Generation Nutrition High-level Roundtable Event, 28 February 2023.

⁷ The F2F came under fire in 2022 as some EU member states see it as an obstacle to greater food security following the 2022 food crisis. While the Commission reconfirmed the F2F as its long-term ambition, it has pressed a short-term ‘pause button’ and approved some environmental rules exceptions to help ramp up food production. The agricultural sector has previously lobbied against the strategy, but in 2022, member states, including the French and Czech governments, are openly questioning the long-term viability of the strategy in light of the present crisis (Medinilla et al. 2022).

transition, while abroad pursues its revamped geopolitical ambition. Because of these other priorities and crises, the EU did not sufficiently expand resources and capacity to meet the growing nutrition needs. In an environment with multiple high-stakes competing priorities, it does not help that the effects of nutrition support are not as visible as, say, conflict or migration. While strong nutrition support was provided in the previous budget period, malnutrition seems so persistent that political fatigue has crept in. Lastly, EU country programming through MIPs is developed in dialogue with partner governments and is the result of negotiating between the EU, partner countries, and other actors' priorities. While it depends on a country-by-country basis, there is the impression that, overall, there is less demand from partner governments to prioritise nutrition strongly. More MIPs feature nutrition priorities than in the previous programming period, which should lead to more nutrition prioritisation and implementation in the Annual Action Plans. However, being more present in MIPs does not mean more resources going towards nutrition.

An outdated nutrition framework did not stop the EU from enacting leadership on global nutrition support, including considerable pledges at the 2021 N4G Summit and its engagement with the UN FSS. The EU's development cooperation regarding nutrition is, in practice, working in a multisectoral approach with these sectors. With the Capacity for Nutrition (C4N) facility, support is given to programming partners to integrate nutrition and make the linkages with other sectors.⁸ The Commission's Directorate-General (DG) INTPA Sector Nutrition unit is regarded as very competent and engaging with partners such as nutrition-focused CSOs. The Commission's nutrition unit helped EU Delegations to identify entry points for nutrition support in-country programming and steered the prioritisation of nutrition in 55 MIPs (2021-2027), up from 44 between 2014-2020. This should be reflected in more Annual Action Plans, which set out the implementation of the MIPs, with nutrition initiatives. In practice at least, the integration of nutrition with other sectors is underway. The institutional location of the nutrition sector within the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) "*Sustainable Agri-Food systems and Fisheries*" unit might, however, steer the agriculture-nutrition connection more than other sectors, such as health-nutrition.

A strategic evaluation of the EU's support to food systems abroad (for 2014-20; EC et al. 2022f) found that EU assistance to food systems abroad lacked strong integration of nutrition until recent years. The evaluation revealed that without a robust and current framework, integrating nutrition with other sectors can still happen but it is a slow process and may lead to missed opportunities for synergies. EU integration of nutrition support was particularly weakly linked to international trade, infrastructure, energy, and climate support.

3. Strategies for revising the framework

The case for a timely revision of the nutrition policy frameworks is clear: the Action Plan for Nutrition runs out in 2025. There is a risk of a vacuum without a new policy, only a few years from 2030 and the intended achievement of SDG 2. But there is also a more immediate relevance: In the current crisis environment, synergies between the food crisis response and nutrition objectives can be missed as the current framework does not strongly integrate other sectors. At the moment, revising the nutrition frameworks is caught in somewhat of a catch-22, as more political support is needed to revise the frameworks, while an updated framework is wanted to connect more strongly with the current priorities. Here are three strategies to revise the framework: reiterate the importance of nutrition for sustainable development, link with priorities, and build coalitions. Each requires an adaptation of the message to different audiences.

⁸ For example, the 'Nutrition Quick Tips Series' helps EU Delegations to link nutrition with other themes, such as social protection, and thus facilitates multi-sectoral integration.

3.1. Emphasise the importance of nutrition for long-term development

Supporting nutrition interventions remains a compelling strategy due to their cost-effectiveness and contribution to sustainable development. Depending on the intervention, each Euro invested in nutrition could yield between EUR 4-35 in economic returns (Mehta and Shekar 2017). A pivotal World Bank report, "Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development" and The Lancet's Maternal and Child Undernutrition series (The Lancet 2008; WB 2006) presented a convincing argument for investing in nutrition and contributing to the creation of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement and an increase in global nutrition support. The report's conclusions and case for nutrition support have since been confirmed. For example, targeted nutrition interventions in low and middle-income countries are necessary to prevent stunted economies and societies (Vollmer et al. 2014). India exemplifies the need for sustained nutrition support to achieve long-term sustainable development. Reduced schooling and cognitive impairments significantly impact the country's economic growth and hinder its transition to a more productive, knowledge-based economy. While short-term stability may dominate in crisis environments, the case of India highlights the need for ongoing nutrition support to achieve sustainable development, as short-term crises can have lasting effects (Heady and Ruel 2022).

3.2. Link more strongly with other EU priorities

Given the current political agenda, reiterating nutrition's fundamental role in achieving other EU priorities can help gather more political support. Nutrition is critical for achieving a host of outcomes, including development, building resilience, achieving educational goals, attaining gender equality, and especially improving health outcomes. It is underlying and driving the achievement of at least 12 SDGs (Alliance2015 2021). Already, the importance of nutrition to achieve health objectives is firmly acknowledged in the 2022 EU's Global Health Strategy, which guides EU action in health systems worldwide (EC 2022e). In all, nutrition interventions can provide value for money, although implementing multisectoral approaches may require more time to see their effectiveness. Take climate: the EU presents itself as a champion for climate action. While diets can be both unhealthy and have a high carbon footprint, dietary change can lead to more healthy diets that are low-carbon too, at the same time as building more resilience to climate change (Willett et al. 2019). The same is true for linkages to crisis responses. Amidst the food crisis, there is an opportunity to enhance nutrition, promote dietary diversity, and strengthen resilience by prioritising support for locally sourced foods rather than expensive imported grains. In the COVID-19 pandemic, although the EU's health response abroad focused strongly on vaccines, the combination of COVID-19 infection and malnutrition was especially deadly. Linking the COVID-19 response with addressing malnutrition lowers COVID-19 mortality, health system costs, and general mortality. Strengthening the importance of nutrition in accomplishing these goals can be a strategy to sustain nutrition support even during periods when competing crises demand attention or when nutrition loses its priority under a new government.

3.3. Build wider, deeper coalitions of nutrition champions

A third opportunity is to build coalitions of nutrition champions. Several EU Member States were identified as champions of nutrition leadership: Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and France, and to a lesser degree, Spain, Italy and Belgium. Through their prioritisation and funding allocation with partner countries, these Member States can provide opportunities for Team Europe Initiatives in nutrition. This can create a bottom-up process to involve other Member States and request the EU for further upscaling. Coalitions of nutrition champions could also emerge from international initiatives formed beyond Europe to respond to the global food crisis, such as the G7 Global Alliance for Food Security (GAFS) and the International Food and Agriculture Resilience Mission (FARM), though

these so far seems not to have embraced a specific nutrition lens.⁹ With a nutritional transition that causes a shift in the burden of malnutrition underway in many partner countries, highlighting its rapidly rising health costs may prompt more demand for nutrition programmes stemming that tide. Another option is launching a sort of alliance for food systems and nutrition between the EU and the African Union (AU) as part of strengthening relations after the 2022 EU-AU Summit. Building on the AU's 'Year of Nutrition' (2022), African governments that prioritise nutrition can strengthen their demands for nutrition-related support, which could justify a new increase in policy and finance focus from the EU on nutrition. This can be linked to the 2022 Abidjan Declaration, where AU calls on all Member States to "*act to end malnutrition in all its forms and identify actions and strategies to address them*". A common African position to fight against all forms of malnutrition might be underway, together with three continental strategies to address malnutrition (AU 2022). Lastly, the Sector Nutrition unit at DG INTPA F3 is the most obvious contact point for nutrition-focused CSO in the EU. But recognising the multi-sectoral nature of nutrition, other units and DGs - related to digitalisation, climate, investments, infrastructure and others - may be useful to structurally and strategically engage with.

4. Recommendations

This section provides recommendations targeting specific audiences (Figure 1) to advance a revision of the EU's nutrition framework and includes a timeline of selected upcoming nutrition-relevant events (Figure 2).

4.1. Who can do what?

The **European Parliament** has legislative, budgetary and supervisory powers, while Members have broad leeway in advocating for their priorities within the EU. Through public hearings and amendments, the parliament can reiterate the importance of nutrition in reference to other priorities and push for a revision of the EU's frameworks. An opportunity is provided by the - according to the EC 'ambitious' - mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework. Nutrition needs have grown since the budget's start; likewise, the case for more investments can be made. Already, the Plenary of the European Parliament voted to adopt a resolution calling for a revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework to cope with current crises (EP 2022b). A key platform for policy dialogue and awareness-raising on nutrition is *The European Parliamentary Alliance against Hunger and Malnutrition*, which supports EU leadership on food and nutrition security

The **Presidencies of the Council** can chair Council meetings, and facilitate dialogue between EU institutions. To a large extent, Presidencies still shape the Council's agenda (Vaznonytè 2020). The Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered a food crisis, which has become a pressing issue for the French, Czech, and Swedish presidencies. Despite not prioritising food security initially, these presidencies were compelled to include it in their agendas due to the escalating crisis. Given the flexible agenda-setting and coordinating function, the presidencies can facilitate linking nutrition with ongoing policy processes and play a key facilitator role in bringing nutrition coalitions together. As the food crisis and its reverberations will be with us in the short term, food and nutrition security can be a transversal theme for the presidency trios Spain-Belgium-Hungary. Looking ahead, malnutrition and food security is expected to be a priority in the upcoming Spanish presidency starting in July 2023.¹⁰ The EU Foreign Policy Chief, Josep Borell, has emphasised that 2023 should be the year of Latin America in Europe and Europe in Latin America (Nolte 2023). This presents an opportunity to draw attention to the gendered increase in food insecurity in the region and to take

⁹ In 2022, several EU Member States joined the FARM and GAFS initiatives, which currently do not prioritise nutrition. While there is potential to emphasise this aspect, available concept notes and commitments within these initiatives primarily address food security measures rather than nutrition-specific interventions, lacking details on the latter.

¹⁰ Amaya Fuentes Milani, Generation Nutrition High-level Roundtable Event, 28 February 2023.

stock of the impact of recent trade agreements on all forms of malnutrition.¹¹ This is particularly relevant in light of the upcoming EU-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States Summit, in which Spain is expected to play a key role.

Belgium scaled back its support to food and nutrition security in 2017 when it ended its Fund for Food Security and almost all bilateral cooperation in agriculture. Instead, it focused more on private sector involvement (EC et al. 2022f). The food crisis renewed Belgium’s interest in food and nutrition security, but Belgium can be encouraged more into the nutrition champions coalition by highlighting the importance of nutrition and its linkages with other goals like gender equality and climate action, which are Belgian development priorities. In July 2024, Hungary will take up the Presidency, followed by Poland. Both have traditionally less interest in global development issues but strongly focus on curbing migration. It is important to note that according to the World Food Programme, the countries with the highest level of food insecurity are also those experiencing the largest refugee outflows, not just those affected by armed conflict (WFP 2018). By reiterating the connections between food and nutrition security, migration, and long-term stability through sustainable development abroad, nutrition can continue to be prioritised. The next time a ‘nutrition champion’ chairs the Presidency is the second half of 2026, when it is Ireland’s turn.

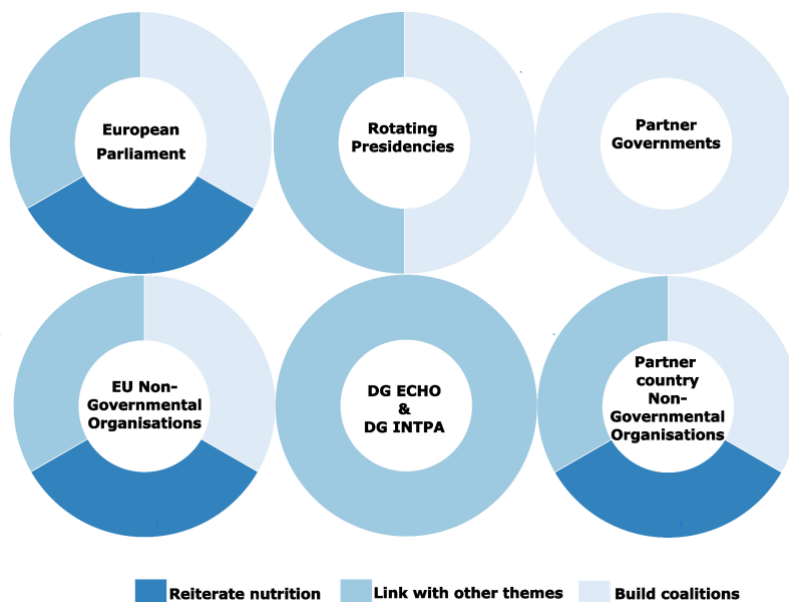


Figure 1: Who can do what?
Connecting nutrition strategies with actors

The potential of **Partner country governments** to influence EU nutrition frameworks seems underserved. Partner countries’ priorities inform the EU’s country programming. One way partner countries could signal their commitment to nutrition would be to increase domestic resource mobilisation in line with the goals of the Malabo Declaration, which few African countries have achieved (ReSAKKS 2023). The emergence of the food crisis after the launch of the MIPs (2021-2027) underscores a case for adjustments. As the Commission prepares to conduct its mid-term review of country programming in 2024, greater priority setting by partner governments could lead to adjustments such as changes in funding allocation, new initiatives, or strengthened partnerships. At the continental level, the AU has designated 2023 as the Year of the African Continental Free Trade Area, which could provide an opportunity to highlight the importance of increased African regional trade in improving nutrition. Already, nutrition

¹¹ Before the EU-Chile and MERCOSUR-EU agreements were signed, the European Public Health Alliance analysed that these agreements can carry a very high risk that investment measures will be used to prevent or weaken public health promoting regulations and actions, and may facilitate increased availability and relative affordability of unhealthy food (EPHA 2018).

is featured more in the AU-EU partnership since the Russian invasion.¹² **EU and partner country non-governmental organisations** can advocate for nutrition support by linking nutrition messaging with other priorities, facilitating networking for EU's nutrition support, and engaging in advocacy efforts. Collaborations between EU-based and recipient-country Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) can apply pressure both internally, through European civil society networks, and externally, through southern NGOs advocating with or without their respective governments. Southern NGOs can hold their governments accountable for their commitments: The challenge with nutrition support often lies not in the initial summit declarations or policy formulation, but in the execution and sustained monitoring of such policies over the long term. The accountability framework developed by the SUN Civil Society Network could be helpful to uphold accountability at the local and national levels of pledges made at the 2021 UN FSS and N4G Summits until the 2023 Stocktake and 2024 or 2025 N4G Summit (SUN CSN 2022). More emphasis on EU nutrition support on local food systems and governance can foster homegrown ownership and improve accountability, which is beneficial for the potency of nutrition programmes.

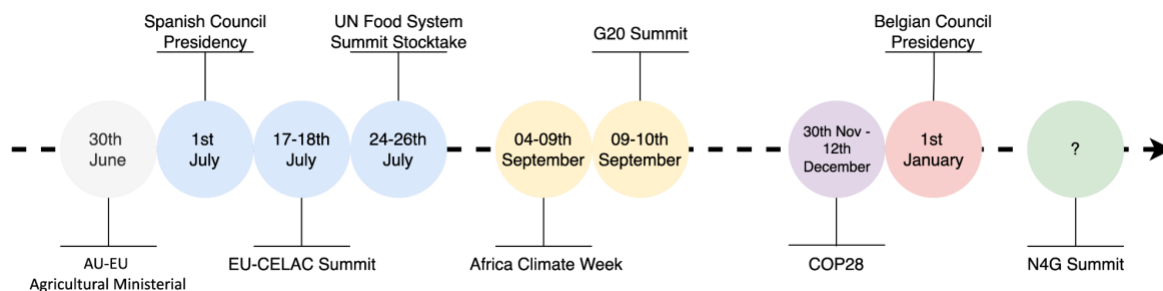
The roles of the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (**DG ECHO**) and **DG INTPA** are wide-ranging: from co-designing and implementing nutrition policies and programmes, advising and supporting MIPs and TEI, monitoring and reporting, and managing EU funds and programmes, to analysis and engaging with stakeholders. They are key in implementing the external dimension of the F2F and strengthening its value to nutrition action. In addition, DG INTPA provides support to global initiatives such as the SUN movement. The most recent strategy of the SUN movement emphasises country-led nutrition leadership and multisectoral action. Their roles in the revision strategies can be to highlight the importance of nutrition and to support the integration of nutrition with other priorities, something that is already being done, or by strengthening nutrition monitoring by linking with accountability initiatives, such as the Access to Nutrition Initiative, which tracks the private sector's progress in delivering healthy and affordable diets. If the political mandate is granted, an essential responsibility would be for the DGs to provide support for the revision of the EU's nutrition frameworks, leveraging their expertise in the matter.

4.2. When are the opportunities?

There are several opportunities in the short-to-medium term to advocate for revising the EU's nutrition frameworks. Financial investment often follows from political commitments made at multilateral events. In 2023 (Figure 2), there are fewer opportunities to advocate for nutrition in itself, but several opportunities to link nutrition with other themes such as trade, food systems and climate and to build networks. The **AU-EU Agricultural Ministerial in Rome**, which is a meeting of all EU MS and African ministers of agriculture, focuses on sustainable investments, research and innovation, climate resilience and regional trade integration, all of which could benefit from nutrition linkages. **The Spanish and Belgian Council Presidencies** are opportunities to keep nutrition on the EU agenda and are key to garnering sufficient political momentum to revise policy frameworks. Given the particular food security dynamics in the South American region, the **EU-CELAC Summit** could be useful in highlighting nutrition's importance in achieving gender goals and the impacts trade agreements can have on the availability and accessibility of unhealthy foods. The **UN Food Systems Stocktake** reviews the progress of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit every two years. The Summit's national pathways are key documents outlining the national transformation of food systems. Given the polycrisis environment, the Stocktake might show that many countries have little to show for progress on their national plans. It is likely that the Stocktake, much like the 2021 UN FSS, will encounter resistance from organisations and networks that question the extent of corporate participation. But several of the operative UN FSS Coalitions of Action - like the School Meals Coalition where France is active - are strong on the nutrition component and provide opportunities to discuss nutrition in food system transformation strategies.

¹² Tom Hanney, Generation Nutrition High-level Roundtable Event, 28 February 2023.

Figure 2: When are the opportunities? Timeline of selected upcoming nutrition relevant events for 2023



Slowly, food systems are becoming more important in the UNFCCC process. **COP28** will feature food systems more heavily than COP27, particularly the need for adaptation in food systems. Climate change is at the top of many agendas, and making compelling linkages between nutrition and climate action can help to future-proof the nutrition agenda. At COP27, the Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN) was launched to address the intersection of climate change and nutrition within the UNFCCC process. I-CAN aims to assist countries in integrating nutrition with adaptation and mitigation policy measures. A crucial measure of progress would be including climate action and nutrition in the Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans. When nutrition is brought up in the context of the climate agenda, the focus is typically on how to reduce resource-intensive diets, which is a concern of affluent nations, rather than on adapting food systems and diets in climate-vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change, a concern of vulnerable countries. The tension between climate mitigation and adaptation is not unique to food systems and nutrition but is a broader issue within the climate agenda. Lastly, EU citizens will head to the polls in June 2024 to elect a **new European Parliament**, which then elects the Commission’s President and vets Commissioners. It is unlikely that any work on the nutrition framework will be undertaken prior to the establishment of the new Commission. However, creating a new Commission presents a new and strong opportunity to shift priorities and overcome obstacles to reform.

5. Conclusion

The EU maintains its leadership role in nutrition, for example, through its support of the UN FSS and its pledge at the N4G Summit. But many crises have strained the ability of the EU to respond to the rising needs sufficiently. The EU’s current nutrition framework and its Action Plan on Nutrition are generally seen as well-built but outdated. This paper puts forward three strategies that can contribute to an impactful revision of the EU’s nutrition frameworks: Emphasis on the importance of nutrition for long-term development, Linking more strongly with other EU priorities, and Building coalitions of nutrition champions. Specific recommendations are given for stakeholders: the European Parliament, partner governments, EU and recipient-country NGOs, Presidencies of the Council, and DG ECHO and DG INTPA. Lastly, we present some opportunities for nutrition advocacy in 2023 and beyond. Better nutrition outcomes are necessary for long-term development but are vulnerable to short-term setbacks. Hence, a strong and updated policy framework can help to integrate nutrition better with crisis response while providing backing to continue the EU’s nutrition leadership.

Appendix

This section is based on EC, 2022. The EU strongly commits to nutrition and has adopted several policies and programmes to improve nutrition worldwide. The EU is also a major donor of development assistance in general and supports many countries through food aid and other programmes. The EU's development assistance programmes support several initiatives to improve nutrition in low and middle-income countries, including programmes to improve maternal and child health and to address the underlying causes of malnutrition. The EU also provides humanitarian support to the World Food Programme and other UN agencies working on nutrition.

The EU's policy landscape of supporting Food and Nutrition Security abroad is both complex and scattered, being shaped by various instruments, organisations, bylaws, and funding modalities. Table 1 presents the key events, agreements and frameworks. This policy landscape is in part complex as nutrition is a multisectoral issue, thus necessitating action across a range of sectors and actors. Nutrition policy is regarded as at the forefront of integrated and multisectoral development policy approaches. The EU has been pursuing a coherent framework for global FNS for more than a decade, with the EU-wide Food Security Policy Framework adopted in 2010, reinforced by Council Conclusions in 2016, as a milestone for this endeavour. The main policy framework for nutrition is the 2013 Communication *Enhancing Maternal and Child Nutrition*, detailed by the 2014 *EU Action Plan on Nutrition (2015-2025)*. The Action Plan focuses on reducing the number of stunted children and is implemented through EU support to the UN Decade on Nutrition (2016-2025), the SUN Movement Strategy, and the National Information Platforms for Nutrition. Its main objectives are to support partner countries in reducing the number of stunted children under five by 7 million by 2025, and to allocate €3.5 billion to improve nutrition between 2014-20. The Action Plan seeks to tackle the underlying and basic causes of undernutrition while acknowledging the multisectoral nature of nutrition action. The EU's nutrition ambition is well monitored: its seventh and latest progress report (2021-2022) notes that the EU committed €4.3 billion for nutrition between 2014-2020, or €835 million more than planned. Nutrition-sensitive development disbursements were especially high following COVID-19 (EC 2022d). The EU's support in partner countries is implemented through the MIPs.

In 2018, the Council recognised the Commission's efforts on food and nutrition security in Council Conclusions, encouraged the Commission and Member States to support food systems that ensure sustainable food and nutrition security for all, and keep food and nutrition security all the while at the forefront of the EU's development. The Council also invited the Commission to revise their policy frameworks on food security and nutrition (CoEU 2018).

Table 1: Key events, agreements and reference frameworks for external EU food and nutrition security policy, 2010-2022

Year	Major events and global agreements	EU policies
2010		EU Food Security Policy Framework.
2011		Agenda for Change.
2012	SUN Movement.	
2013	London Nutrition for Growth Summit.	Maternal & Child Nutrition Policy.
2014	International Conference on Nutrition II.	
2015	2030 Agenda; FSN in Protracted Crises (FFA).	Gender Action Plan II.
2016	UN Decade of Action on Nutrition; Global Network Against Food Crises; World Humanitarian Summit.	Global Strategy.
2017	Milan Nutrition for Growth Summit.	New Consensus.
2018		Strengthening global Food and Nutrition Security.
2019	COVID-19 pandemic.	European Green Deal.
2020		Farm to Fork Strategy; Team Europe Initiatives; Gender Action Plan III.
2021	UN Food Systems Summit; Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition; Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit.	NDICI-Global Europe; EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.
2022	Russian invasion of Ukraine; African Union's Year of Nutrition; EU-AU Summit.	Global Health Strategy.

Source: Adapted from EC et al. 2022f.

In 2019, the EU launched its green growth strategy, the European Green Deal. At the heart of the Green Deal lies the Farm to Fork Strategy, launched in 2020, which is the EU's ambitious policy framework to promote a more sustainable and resilient European food system and support a global transition to sustainable food systems. While its external dimension is brief, it mentions that nutrition and healthy diets are part of its ambition in international cooperation. The Commission aims to promote the global transition to sustainable food systems by using trade policy to enhance cooperation and obtain commitments from partner countries and by focusing its international cooperation on food research and innovation. In recognition that food systems straddle many policy sectors, the Strategy mentions the need for policy coherence for sustainable development in all of the EU's policies (EC 2020; Dekeyser and Woolfrey 2021).

In 2020, the EC launched its new *Gender Action Plan* (GAP III), which details the EU's policy ambitions for the inclusion of gender in its external action. Integration of gender in projects and programming and mainstreaming gender throughout other actions - such as wider foreign policy and trade - is a key part (Teevan et al. 2021). Specific to nutrition, the new Plan calls on EU action to support women's entrepreneurship and employment by promoting a gender-transformative approach to agriculture and by creating synergies with various sectors, such as education and health (EC 2020).

References

- AU. 2022. [High-level meeting on the theme of the African Union year 2022 on nutrition and food security](#). Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- Alliance2015. 2021. [Money for Malnutrition: EU leads on finance, must match with delivery](#). Alliance2015. Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- Bilal, S., and Di Ciommo, M. 2020. [Following the money: Why a COVID-19 marker might not help](#). ECDPM Commentary. Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- Bryan, E. and Ringler, C. 2022. [The response to the global food crisis must address the needs of women and girls](#). Washington D.C.: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).
- CARE International. 2022. [Gender-based violence & food insecurity: What we know and why gender equality is the answer](#). Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- Chandrasekaran, K., Guttal, S., Kumar, M., Langner, L. and Manahan, M.A. 2021. [Exposing corporate capture of the UNFSS through multistakeholderism](#). Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- CoEU. 2018. [Strengthening global food and nutrition security - Council Conclusions](#). Brussels: Council of the European Union.
- CoEU. 2021. [Council Conclusions on the EU's priorities for the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit](#). Brussels: Council of the European Union.
- Dekeyser, K. and Woolfrey, S. 2021. [A greener Europe at the expense of Africa? Why the EU must address the external implications of the Farm to Fork Strategy](#). Briefing note 137. Maastricht: ECDPM
- Di Ciommo, M., Rampa, F., and Dekeyser, K. 2022. [The EU's capacity for crisis response: A look at the 2022 food crisis](#). Discussion Paper No. 330. Maastricht: ECDPM
- EC. 2020. [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system](#). COM/2020/381 final. Brussels: European Commission
- EC. 2020b. [Gender Action Plan – putting women and girls' rights at the heart of the global recovery for a gender-equal world](#). Brussels: European Commission.
- EC. 2021. [EU pledges €2.5 billion to combat malnutrition with partner countries](#). Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- EC. 2022a. [COVID-19: Team Europe has delivered €47.7 billion to help its partners address the pandemic and its consequences](#). Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- EC. 2022b. [Food security: Commission steps up support for global action to transform food systems via eight Global Coalitions](#). Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- EC. 2022c. [Safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems](#). Brussels: European Commission.
- EC. 2022d. [Action plan on nutrition: seventh progress report April 2021 – March 2022](#). Brussels: European Commission.
- EC. 2022e. [EU Global Health Strategy to improve global health security and deliver better health for all](#). Brussels: European Commission.
- EC, Directorate-General for International Partnerships, Engel, P., Slob, A., Laanouni, F., et al. 2022f. [EU support to sustainable agri-food systems in partner countries 2014-2020](#). Brussels: European Commission.
- EC. 2023. [European Humanitarian Forum: Commission and Swedish Presidency set the goals for EU's humanitarian action](#). Retrieved 21 March 2023.
- EP. 2022. [Addressing food security in developing countries](#). Brussels: European Parliament.

-
- EP. 2022b. [EU long-term budget needs urgent revision to cope with current crises](#). Brussels: European Parliament. Retrieved 15 December 2022.
- EPHA. 2018. [Unhealthy trades – The side-effects of the European Union’s Latin American trade agreements](#). Brussels: European Public Health Alliance
- EU. 2022. [Team Europe Initiative and Joint Programming tracker](#). Capacity4dev. Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2022. [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022](#). Rome: FAO.
- Generation Nutrition. 2021. [EU Nutrition investment: No time to waste](#). Brussels: Generation Nutrition.
- GNR. 2021. [Global Nutrition Report: the state of global nutrition](#). Bristol: Development Initiatives.
- Headey, D.D. and Ruel, M.T. 2022. [Food inflation and child undernutrition in low and middle income countries](#). IFPRI Discussion Paper 2146. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)
- Jones, A and Sergejeff, K. 2022. [Half-time analysis: How is Team Europe doing?](#) Briefing note 149. Maastricht: ECDPM.
- Jones, A. and Teevan, C. 2021. [Team Europe: Up to the challenge?](#) Briefing note 128. Maastricht: ECDPM.
- Kornher, L., Von Braun, J. and Algieri, B. 2022. [Speculation risks in food commodity markets in the context of the 2022 price spikes – Implications for policy](#). Policy brief no. 40. Bonn: ZEF.
- Matthews, A. 2022. [EU throws hand grenade into global agri-food trade](#). CAP reform. Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- Medinilla, A., Dekeyser, K., and Karaki, K. 2022. [Promoting a global green transition following the Russian invasion of Ukraine – The external dimensions of the European Green Deal](#). Discussion Paper 325. Maastricht: ECDPM.
- Mehta, M. and Shekar, M. 2017. [Why nutrition is a smart development investment](#). Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- Nolte, D. 2023. [The European Union and Latin America: Renewing the Partnership after Drifting Apart](#). Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- OWID. 2022. [COVID-19 Data Explorer](#). Retrieved 11 November 2022.
- Picchioni, F., Goulao, L. F., & Roberfroid, D. 2022. [The impact of COVID-19 on diet quality, food security and nutrition in low and middle income countries: A systematic review of the evidence](#). *Clinical Nutrition*, 41(12), 2955–2964.
- ReSAKKS. [Tracking indicators – Monitoring Progress – Mutual Accountability – eAtlas](#). Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- SUN CSN. 2022. [From nutrition commitments to nutrition results](#). Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- Teevan, C., Tadesse Shiferaw, L. and Di Ciommo, M. 2021. [Taking the gender agenda forward in EU programming](#). Discussion paper 297. Maastricht: ECDPM.
- The Lancet. 2008. [Maternal and Child Undernutrition](#). Series from the Lancet journals. Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- UNICEF. 2021. [More than US\\$27 billion committed to tackle global malnutrition and hunger crisis at the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit](#). Retrieved 15 June 2023.
- UNICEF. 2022. [Child food poverty – A nutrition crisis in early childhood](#). Retrieved October 2022.
- Vaznonyté, A. 2020. [The rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU – Still an agenda-setter?](#) *European Union Politics*, 21(3), 497–518.
- Vollmer, S., Harttgen, K., Subramanyam, M. A., Finlay, J., Klasen, S., & Subramanian, S. v. 2014. [Association between economic growth and early childhood undernutrition: evidence from 121 Demographic and Health Surveys from 36 low-income and middle-income countries](#). *The Lancet Global Health*, 2(4), e225–e234.
- Willett, W., Rockström, J., Loken, B., Springmann, M., Lang, T., Vermeulen, S., Garnett, T., Tilman, D., DeClerck, F., Wood, A., Jonell, M., Clark, M., Gordon, L. J., Fanzo, J., Hawkes, C., Zurayk, R., Rivera, J. A., de Vries, W., Majele Sibanda, L., ... and Murray, C. J. L. 2019. [Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems](#). *The Lancet*, 393(10170), 447–492.

WB. 2006. [Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development : A Strategy for Large Scale Action](#). Washington, DC: the World Bank.

WFP. 2018. [Fact sheet Hunger & conflict](#). Rome: World Food Programme.

About ECDPM

ECDPM is an independent 'think and do tank' working on international cooperation and development policy in Europe and Africa.

Since 1986 our staff members provide research and analysis, advice and practical support to policymakers and practitioners across Europe and Africa – to make policies work for sustainable and inclusive global development.

Our main areas of work include:

- EU foreign and development policy
- Migration and mobility
- Digital economy and governance
- AU-EU relations
- Peace, security and resilience
- Democratic governance
- Economic recovery and transformation
- Climate change and green transition
- African economic integration
- Sustainable food systems

For more information please visit www.ecdpm.org

This publication was commissioned and funded by Generation Nutrition. It has also benefited from the structural support by ECDPM's institutional partners: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands and Sweden.

ISSN1571-7577