

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

**End hunger,  
achieve food security  
and improved nutrition  
and promote  
sustainable agriculture**

**2** ZERO  
HUNGER



## > Regional overview

- The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the climate crisis, the war in Ukraine and its impact on supply chains, along with the economic slowdown and rising food prices in a context of income inequality, have accelerated the increase in hunger since 2019, not only in the region but also globally. In this context, to meet the demand of a growing world population, it is estimated that food production will have to increase by almost 50% by 2050, relative to 2015 levels. This is also expected to be the case in Latin America and the Caribbean, as the region is forecast to continue growing until 2056. The expected expansion of food production will, in turn, lead to increased pressure on natural resources such as soil, water and biodiversity, as well as a rising trend in greenhouse gas emissions.
- In Latin America and the Caribbean, although the latest estimates show that the prevalence of hunger and food insecurity showed no increase in 2022 compared to 2021, the figures remain above pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels. Progress in the region, on average, appears sufficient to achieve the global target of reducing the number of stunted children under 5 years of age by 40% by 2025,<sup>1</sup> which is the most common manifestation of chronic undernutrition; however, the prevalence of overweight in this population has followed a marked upward trend over the past two decades. In addition, the region has made significant progress in food production in recent decades, thanks to technological change and investments in infrastructure, especially in recent years.

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), *Comprehensive implementation plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition*, Geneva, 2014.



## Key facts on the region

- Between 2000 and 2014, the prevalence of undernourishment in Latin America and the Caribbean fell from 10.8% to 5.1% of the population.<sup>2</sup> However, since 2014, low economic growth and, more recently, the combination of various crises have resulted in a trend reversal, with the level of undernourishment rising to 6.5% in 2022.
- The prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the region increased from 21.7% in 2015 to 29.6% in 2022, with women and people living in rural areas the worst affected.<sup>3</sup>
- Information by subregion indicates that in 2022, undernourishment affected 5.1% of the population of Central America and Mexico (9.1 million people), 6.1% of the population of South America (26.8 million people) and 16.3% of the population of the Caribbean (7.2 million people). The prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity was 34.5% of the population in Central America and Mexico, 36.4% in South America and 60.6% in the Caribbean.
- Given that global food supply is currently sufficient to meet demand, the increase in hunger and food insecurity is mainly due to problems of access.<sup>4</sup> Rapidly rising food prices associated with an incomplete post-pandemic economic recovery based on low-productivity, low-income jobs, are a barrier to access to a healthy diet for the population of Latin America and the Caribbean.
- The Caribbean has the highest cost of a healthy diet in the region: US\$ 4.41 at purchasing power parity per person per day, according to 2021 data. It is followed by South America, with US\$ 3.82, and Central America and Mexico, with US\$ 3.63. This translates into 57% of the Caribbean population being unable to access a healthy diet owing to its high cost; in Central America and Mexico, the percentage

<sup>2</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and others, *Latin America and the Caribbean -Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023: Statistics and trends*, Santiago, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/Food and Agriculture Organisation/World Food Programme (ECLAC/FAO/WFP), *Towards sustainable food and nutrition security in Latin America and the Caribbean in response to the global food crisis*, Santiago, 2022.



## GOAL 2

is 22.2% and in South America 20.6%.<sup>5</sup> Wasting, or low weight for height, in children under 5 years of age showed a prevalence of 1.4% in 2022, with an estimated range from 1.0% in South America to 2.9% in the Caribbean.

- The prevalence of overweight among children under 5 years of age in the region rose from 6.8% in 2002 to 8.6% in 2022, a relative increase of 26.5%. This trend is more marked in South American countries, where the relative increase was 40.6%, while the Caribbean saw a rise of 8.2%; in Central America, on the other hand, there was a decline of 2.9%.
- All countries in the region show a downward trend in anaemia among women aged 14–49. Caribbean countries record the highest prevalences and at the same time the lowest reductions. Between 2000 and 2019, prevalence in the region showed a decrease from 25.6% to 17.2%, which, while significant, is still insufficient to reach the global target of halving anaemia rates in women of reproductive age by 2025.<sup>6</sup>
- In agriculture, the value added per worker in the regional agricultural sector was approximately US\$ 7,400 in 2020, less than one tenth of the figure in the United States (US\$ 76,700). Regional agricultural productivity increased by 2.0% per year in real terms between 2000 and 2020, but with significant differences between subregions. While growth in South America was 2.3% per year in that period, it was 1.5% in Central America and Mexico, and 0.8% in the Caribbean. In the period 2015–2020, regional agricultural productivity remained stagnant, increasing only in the subregion of Central America and Mexico, but not enough to reach the target.
- According to estimates by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in South America an increase in investment of US\$ 35.295 billion per year (1.08% of the subregion's GDP) is needed to reach the agricultural investment intensity of the United States; in the subregion comprising Central America and Mexico,

<sup>5</sup> FAO and others, *Latin America and the Caribbean - Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023: Statistics and trends*, Santiago, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> WHO, *Comprehensive implementation plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition*, Geneva, 2014.



the required increase is US\$ 12.536 billion per year (0.73% of GDP), and in the Caribbean, US\$ 2.594 billion per year (3.34% of GDP).<sup>7</sup>

- Latin America and the Caribbean imports 78% of the fertilizers it uses. No other region in the world is so dependent on fertilizer imports and, above all, no other region produces and exports so much food. The intensity of nitrogen fertilizer use in the region is lower than the world average, especially in the Caribbean, but is growing at higher rates than in the rest of the world, especially in South America.
- Between 2000 and 2020, pesticide use in agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean grew by more than 180%, much higher than the global average of 56%.
- Latin America and the Caribbean accounts for 40% of the capacity of the planet's ecosystems to provide benefits to humans and contribute dozens of cultivated and domesticated species that are part of the world's staple foods. However, biodiversity loss in the region is much higher than the global average. The region is home to 10 of 36 areas identified as the planet's biodiversity hotspots owing to their high biodiversity, high endemism and a decrease of 70% or more of their original natural vegetation. The major cause of biodiversity decline in the region is habitat loss and degradation, mainly as a result of land-use change.
- In Latin America and the Caribbean, about one fifth of all jobs depend heavily on biodiversity, and regional economic growth has historically been linked to trade in its natural assets. However, much of this growth has not been environmentally sustainable; costs have not been internalized and boom periods have failed to translate into innovation, productive diversification and long-term economic growth processes.<sup>8</sup>
- Between 2001 and 2021, public spending on agriculture, forestry and fisheries, environmental protection, and agricultural, forestry and fisheries research and development in the region averaged

### Natural fertilization



### Food labelling



### Food security



### More sustainable agriculture



<sup>7</sup> ECLAC, *Investment and cooperation opportunities for Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union* (LC/TS.2023/78), Santiago, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> ECLAC, *The Inefficiency of Inequality* (LC/SES.37/3-P), Santiago, 2018.

## GOAL 2

---

around US\$ 23.4 billion per year (at 2015 prices), representing about 0.67% of Latin America and the Caribbean GDP, just shy of the global average of 0.75%.

- The proportion of countries in the region with unusually high food prices has declined in recent years, as food inflation has tended to moderate latterly. Despite that, international prices remain high compared to 2015–2019, and food inflation also remains high.

### ➤ Good practices in the region

- There is extensive experience in agriculture in the region in the exercise of traditional natural fertilization practices, ranging from crop rotation with legumes and the use of guano to the latest generation of biofertilizers, such as enhancing the absorption of nutrients from the soil through the use of microorganisms. In a context of rising agrochemical prices, this represents an opportunity for the transition of food systems towards more sustainable forms of production.
- In response to malnutrition due to overweight, several countries in the region, such as Chile, Ecuador and Mexico, have implemented regulations on the labelling of foods that are high in sugar, salt and fat.



## > ECLAC recommendations

- Various public policy efforts must be redoubled in the fight against hunger, taking into account the entire life cycle, through measures such as monitoring of maternal or foetal health during pregnancy and prevention of low birth weight, breastfeeding advocacy, micronutrient fortification, nutritional supplements and food labelling.
- It will be important to consider the public policy proposals developed by ECLAC, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) to address access problems arising from food price rises,<sup>9</sup> facilitating trade in products and strengthening social protection systems, with an active role for school feeding programmes and linkages with productive development, within the framework of a regional food security plan.
- It is essential that governments invest in expanding traditional natural fertilization practices and in supporting the most vulnerable producers, so that the transition to more sustainable agriculture does not have a negative impact on productivity and food production.
- It is important to implement macroeconomic, trade, regulatory and other similar policies that provide the incentive framework to guide producers' behaviour and consumers' dietary patterns.
- Eliminating export subsidies is key to correcting distortions in international markets and addressing global inequality by discouraging surplus production in exporting countries and incentivizing increased production in importing countries.
- It is necessary to strengthen the implementation of policies that favour the proper functioning of commodity markets in the region, particularly through measures to limit price volatility.



<sup>9</sup> ECLAC/FAO/WFP, *Towards sustainable food and nutrition security in Latin America and the Caribbean in response to the global food crisis*, Santiago, 2022.

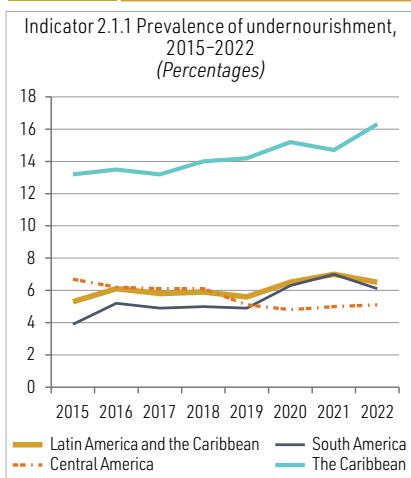
# Key regional statistics

## Sustainable Development Goal 2

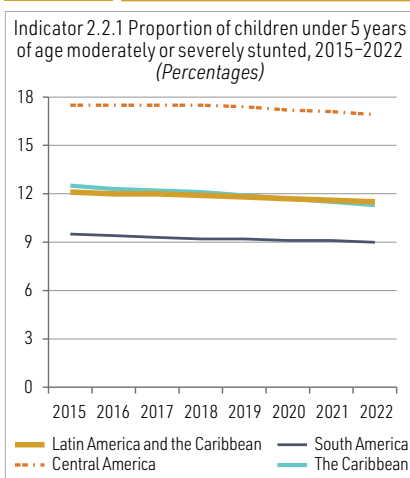
End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Progress in Latin America and the Caribbean

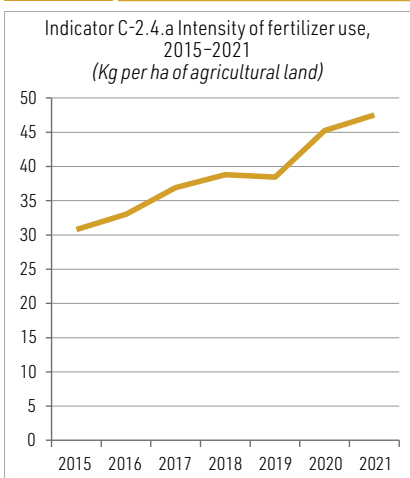
**Target 2.1 Universal access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food** 2.1



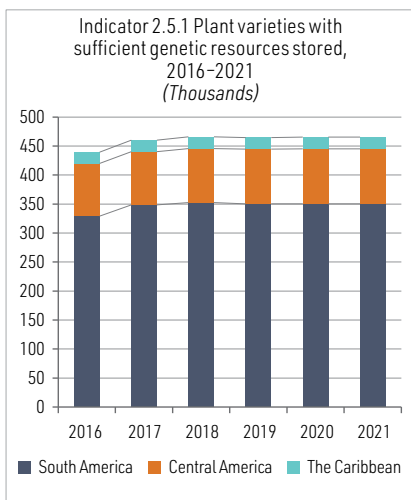
**Target 2.2 End all forms of malnutrition** 2.2



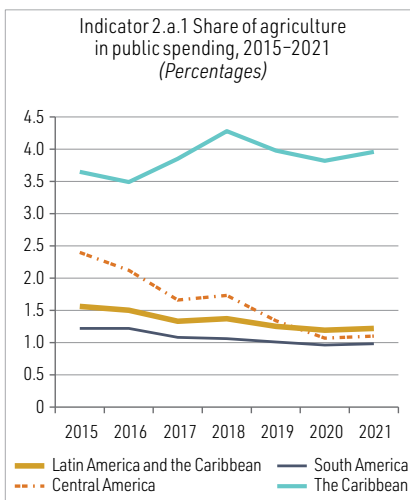
**Target 2.4 Sustainable food production and resilient agricultural practices** 2.4



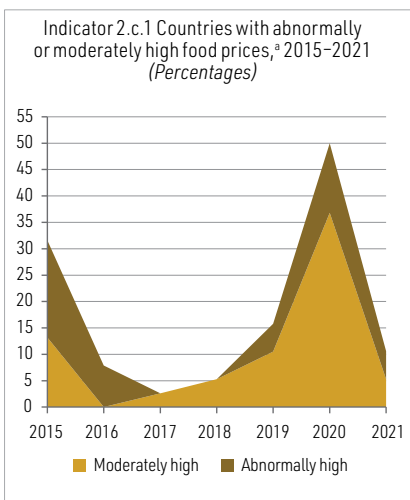
**Target 2.5 Maintain genetic diversity in food production** 2.5



**Target 2.a Increase investment in rural infrastructure and agricultural research** 2.a



**Target 2.c Ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets** 2.c



■ The trend is moving away from the target  
 ■ The trend is in the right direction, but progress is too slow for the target to be met  
■ Target already reached or likely to be reached on the current trend

**Goal 2** 2.1 2.4 2.a 2.2 2.5 2.c 2.b 2.3

■ The trend is moving away from the target  
 ■ The trend is in the right direction, but progress is too slow for the target to be met  
 ■ Target already reached or likely to be reached on the current trend  
 ■ Insufficient data

**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

**Note:** Each indicator comprises one or more statistical series, which partially or fully cover the corresponding indicator. In the figures presented here, one or more statistical series were used for the respective indicator.

<sup>a</sup> As measured by the indicator of food price anomalies.