

UNSCN Statement at the SEVENTY-THIRD WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

The United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition, to be renamed as UN Nutrition, notes with deep appreciation the huge efforts being carried out by Member States towards tackling and containing the COVID-19 pandemic. For more than two months now, the world has been living in semi-confinement, and the world's economy moving in slow motion to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and save lives. UN Nutrition commends the fundamental support provided by the WHO Secretariat to Member States in such challenging times.

The UNSCN would like to highlight however, the need for a more prominent mention of the fundamental importance of the interaction between the health, social protection and food systems in order to protect and promote good nutrition.

Malnutrition is a core driver of complicating factors, specifically [obesity and type 2 diabetes](#), leading to higher mortality from COVID-19. At the same time, maintaining good nutrition is an even greater challenge due to disturbances and disruptions in day-to-day food supply and demand mechanisms at all levels. As the pandemic spreads, the points of interaction between people and the food system – their food environments - are changing rapidly. All over the world both external and personal food environment domains, such as availability, prices, accessibility, and affordability of food are potentially severely impacted by COVID-19.

Consequences include an estimated increase of at least [150 000 child deaths](#) due to the indirect impacts of COVID-19 on childhood undernutrition and health service delivery. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, [135 million people experienced crisis level of acute food insecurity](#). COVID-19 and related restrictions risk pushing many more into acute hunger. Equally important, consequences also include overweight and obesity as people face financial hardships and altered purchasing patterns where cheaper products, with poorer nutrition profiles are favored. Unhealthy diets are a leading cause of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). [People living with NCDs](#) are more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus and to die from COVID-19.

Social protection systems need to be expanded to protect the many additional people that rely on them. Making them more nutrition sensitive can support and build a heightened awareness on the importance of sustainable healthy diets for protecting against disease. If designed well, these schemes can also support food systems that deliver healthy sustainable diets to promote people's, and the planet's health.