

A Resilient Future: Investing today to safeguard tomorrow

COVID's Impact on Malnutrition

The Standing Together for Nutrition (**ST4N**) Consortium of leading experts in the areas of nutrition, economics, health, and food systems modelled the impact on nutrition due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent impacts on economic losses and productivity.¹ Given the trajectory of the pandemic, the impact could be the “worst case” scenario modelled:

- Globally **over 250 children may die each day** in the absence of immediate action, an additional 283,000 malnutrition-related deaths in children under five and 13.6 million more children under five wasted, over 3 years. As a result, we stand to lose a decade or more of progress on nutrition.
- The **loss in economic productivity could be as high as \$44 billion dollars globally** due to the additional burden of childhood stunting and child mortality. An additional 3.6 million children may suffer life-long physical and cognitive impairments that impede their full potential.
- **Urgent investments of \$1.7 billion in additional COVID-19 response investments and actions are needed** by leaders and decision makers to protect mothers and an entire generation of children – **on top of the \$7 billion needed before the pandemic to reach SDG 2 by 2030.**

Nutrition must be at the heart of all COVID-19 pandemic immediate and long-term recovery plans by all development stakeholders.

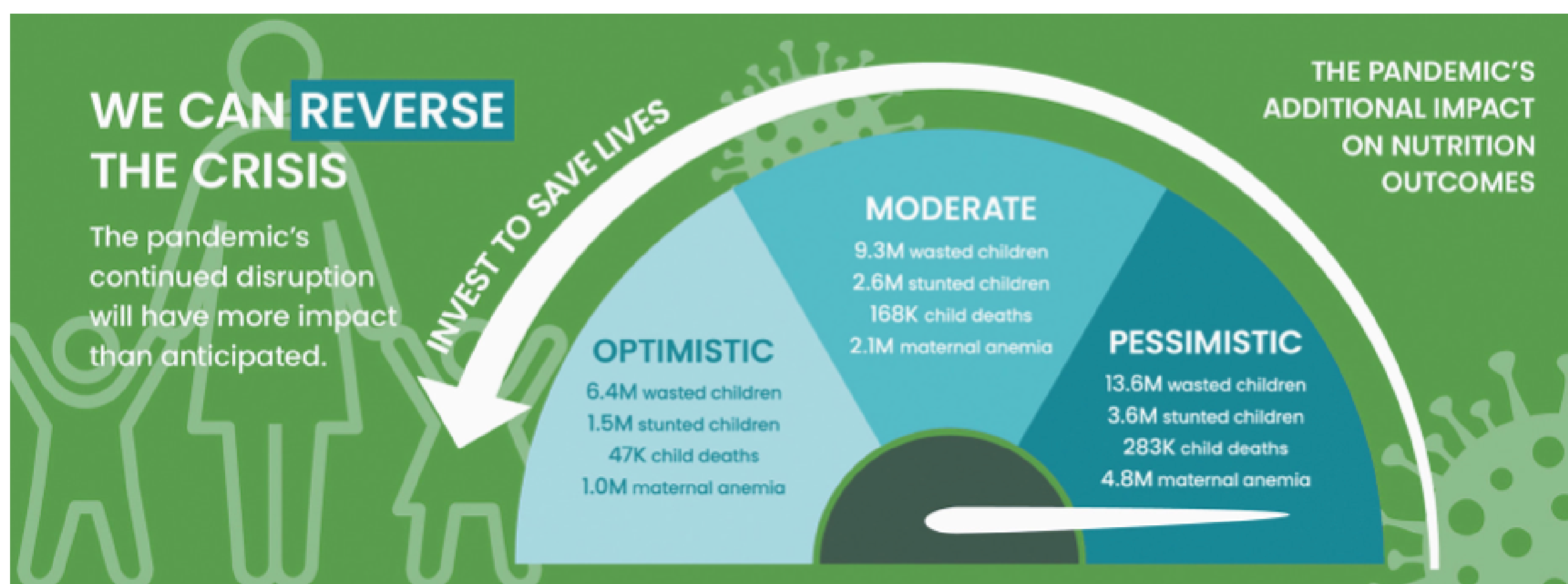
- ❑ **Increase investments and actions on nutrition in global and national COVID-19 response and recovery plans** that can be delivered through national health, food and social protection systems and platforms.
- ❑ **Integrate the continuity of nutrition services in the WHO COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan Monitoring Framework.**
- ❑ **Ensure health, food and social protection systems are strengthened to address the key drivers of malnutrition and underlying structural inequalities** as part of medium- and long-term strategies to strengthen human capital with better nutrition integration.

The situation is worse than anticipated

The shocking rise of COVID-19 in recent months in many LMIC countries, particularly populous countries in South Asia with pre-existing high levels of malnutrition, is now projected to lead to a far greater rise in child deaths and malnutrition in mothers and young children than previously predicted.

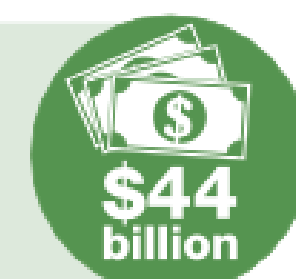
The unfathomable impacts of the COVID-19 global crisis have already been particularly severe for the world's most vulnerable poor. Given the trajectory of the pandemic, leading international experts from the **ST4N Consortium** now project that **child malnutrition may reach the most 'pessimistic' estimated levels.** This includes an **additional 283,000 malnutrition-related deaths in children under five years over the next 3 years** or **over 250 additional child deaths per day** in the absence of immediate action.¹ Moreover, they estimate an additional 13.6 million wasted children with high risks of death, 3.6 million children with life-long physical and cognitive impairments due to stunting, and 4.8 million more women afflicted with anemia.¹

¹ Osendarp, S., Akuoku, J.K., Black, R.E. *et al.* The COVID-19 crisis will exacerbate maternal and child undernutrition and child mortality in low- and middle-income countries. *Nat Food* **2**, 476–484 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00319-4>



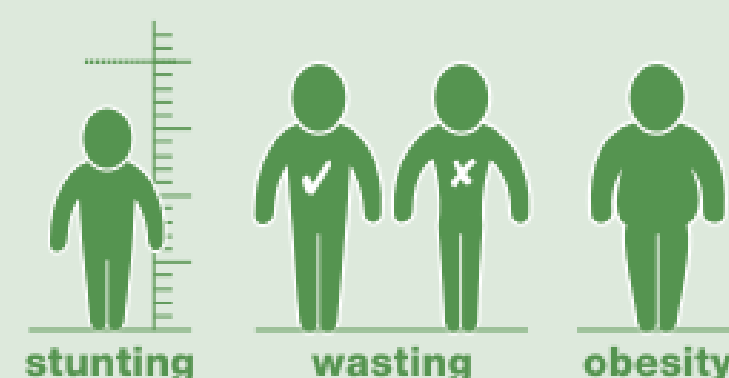
ST4N projections on the long-term productivity losses resulting from the anticipated rise in child stunting and mortality are further cause for concern for nations already reeling from the pandemic's harsh blow to national health systems and setbacks to domestic budgets.

The additional burden of childhood stunting and child mortality translates to **future productivity losses among working-age adults of close to \$44 billion under the most pessimistic scenario.**¹



Additional cases of anemia during pregnancy would result in **\$177 million in lost productivity** between 2020–2022.¹

Costs associated with the immediate impact of COVID-19 on children, as outlined by the above projections, are only one part of a much larger, complex picture. Taking into account all the other forms of malnutrition in adults and children that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, **costs from lost productivity will be far higher.**



The true long-term productivity losses are likely to be higher in light of increasing levels of overweight and obesity resulting from COVID-19's disruptions to food, economic and social systems.

Dire financial landscape for low- and middle-income countries

Nations are struggling to fund mitigation measures at the same time as needs continue to grow. Domestic financing for health in LMICs, including nutrition-specific financing, is projected to fall by 4.2% in 2021 and 2.2% in 2022, not recovering to pre-crisis levels until the end of the decade, absent V-shaped economic recoveries in LMICs.

Unfortunately, **ST4N estimates a 19% reduction in ODA to nutrition-relevant sectors through 2030** (compared to pre-COVID-19 levels) accompanied by a similar decrease in domestic health budgets.

A resilient future: invest today for a stronger tomorrow

The 2017 Global Nutrition Investment Framework estimated that approximately \$7 billion per annum is needed to reach the World Health Assembly targets for stunting, wasting, maternal anemia, and breastfeeding by 2025.² **ST4N projects additional needs of \$1.7 billion per annum to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19.**¹

As economies falter, the short- and long-term consequences of early childhood malnutrition demand that actors opt for more efficient use of existing resources, follow through on existing investment commitments, and advocate for additional resources to respond to this unprecedented crisis.

Call to action

Urgent actions and investments are needed by leaders and decision makers to protect mothers and an entire generation of children. Nutrition must be at the heart of all COVID-19 pandemic immediate and long-term recovery plans for all development stakeholders.



The Standing Together for Nutrition Consortium (**ST4N**), formed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, is a unique collaboration of over 50 leading experts in the areas of nutrition, economics, health, and food systems, representing more than 35 organizations from across the globe.

² Shekar Meera, Jakub Kakietek, Julia Dayton Eberwein and Dylan Walters. 2017. *An Investment Framework for Nutrition: Reaching the Global Targets for Stunting, Anemia, Breastfeeding, and Wasting*. Directions in Development. Washington, DC: World Bank. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-1010-7