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Subject: Fourth Progress Report on the Action Plan on Nutrition
- Council conclusions (25 November 2019)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the Fourth Progress Report on the Action Plan on Nutrition, as adopted by the Council at its 3732nd meeting held on 25 November 2019.

Council conclusions**on the fourth Progress Report on the Action Plan on Nutrition**

1. The Council recognises that hunger and malnutrition in all its forms constitute one of the greatest global obstacles to achieving most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to equitable economic and social development¹ as poor nutrition is a driver of inequality in its own right. The Council notes with alarm the negative trends in food insecurity and malnutrition² and underlines the need to speed up action to achieve SDG 2 to end hunger and malnutrition in all its forms. The upward trend of world hunger, after decades of steady decline, underscores the immense challenge of achieving the Zero Hunger target by 2030. Currently, 820 million people are chronically undernourished.
2. At present, 149 million children under the age of five are stunted, while the lives of 49 million children in the same age group remain threatened by acute malnutrition. The Council notes with serious concern the decreasing pace of stunting reduction and the differences in progress between partner countries and across regions, in particular Africa and South Asia. The Council is also deeply concerned by the development of a 'triple burden of malnutrition' – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency and overweight and obesity – across the globe, with at least one third of the global population experiencing one or more forms of malnutrition. Concurrently, the further intensification of the impact of climate change and ecological crises will exacerbate existing challenges to food security and adequate nutrition for all.

¹ With economic losses attributable to undernutrition equivalent to 11% of GDP in Africa and Asia (or approximately \$3.5 trillion annually) and 2.8% of global GDP (or about \$2 trillion annually) to obesity.

² Global report on Food Crisis 2019 <https://www1.wfp.org/publications/2019-global-report-food-crises>. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, July 2019. Joint report by FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. The State of the World's Children 2019: Children, food and nutrition. UNICEF.

3. The Council recalls its previous relevant conclusions and the firm commitment of the EU and its Member States to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition in line with the 2030 Agenda, the European Consensus on Development and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, as well as towards the fulfilment of the right to adequate food. In this context, the Council welcomes the Fourth Progress Report on the Commission's Action Plan on Nutrition³ and the analyses presented on the effectiveness of nutrition-related interventions.
4. Together, the EU and its Member States continue to support partner countries, as well as local, national and regional stakeholders to build resilient livelihoods, strengthen local food systems in food-insecure areas, enhance nutritional outcomes as well as improve social security systems. As a priority for international cooperation, investments to improve nutrition strengthen the physical, cognitive and productive capability as well as the wellbeing of individuals. The Council welcomes the Commission's achievement of 87% of its financial commitment to allocate EUR 3.5 billion to nutrition between 2014 and 2020, and urges enduring efforts to secure the target in full. The Council also acknowledges that 4.9 million children will have been averted from stunting by 2025 in the countries prioritising nutrition, representing commendable progress towards the objective of reducing cases of stunting by at least 7 million by 2025.
5. The Council acknowledges that stunting is the result of complex interactions between several underlying factors and welcomes the Commission's collaboration with research bodies to better assess how EU assistance is contributing towards changes in stunting. The Council, therefore, underlines the importance of addressing the multiplicity of factors that drive stunting reduction, in particular the interaction of income and gender equality, including with regard to women's rights, decision-making power and access to work opportunities, health, water and sanitation. Monitoring these underlying factors through appropriate indicators is of key importance.

³ 11850/19 - SWD (2019) 321 final.

6. The Council also recognises the paramount importance of protecting, promoting and supporting exclusive breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding, to ensure that efforts to tackle food insecurity and malnutrition target infants and young children, in order to save an estimated 820 000 young lives annually. Nutrition during a child's first 1 000 days from pregnancy until the second birthday is of key importance for the development of a child's brain, lifelong health, wellbeing and ability to build skills and to earn a living. In this context, the Council also notes with concern that there has been no progress globally in tackling the high rate of anaemia among women of reproductive age⁴.
7. As part of a holistic approach on health, social security and education and recognising interlinkages between SDGs, the Council underlines the importance of social safety nets such as nutritious school meals, in specific contexts, to promote healthy eating habits and so assist in ending malnutrition in all its forms.
8. The Council supports the conclusions and key recommendations of the report, in particular:
 - a) **To strengthen programme design across multiple sectors.** The Council underscores the urgent need to accelerate stunting reduction by scaling up multi-sectoral, including health sector, and food system-focused interventions that are nutrition-sensitive, rights-based and gender-responsive. An evidence-based theory of change must be considered as a precondition for effective programme design as well as the use of appropriate indicators.
 - b) **To strengthen links between nutrition and gender pathways.** The Council highlights the importance of mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment in the design and implementation of nutrition-related programmes, so that women's engagement in food systems results in mutually reinforcing benefits and progress with respect to all forms of malnutrition.

⁴ Global Nutrition Report (2019), <https://globalnutritionreport.org/nutrition-profiles/>

- c) **To develop the nutrition capacity of domestic institutions and implementing partners.** The Council stresses the need for a more strategic approach to nutrition-related capacity development and system strengthening for the effective implementation of national nutrition strategies, policies and plans.
- d) **To intensify partnerships with the Member States, multilateral organisations, civil society organisations and the private sector in the implementation of nutrition actions based on the health needs of the population.** In addition to leveraging financing, partnerships will enhance the coordination, complementarity and coherence of partners' actions and strengthen engagement in national nutrition policy dialogues, including supporting sub-national level processes.
- e) **To build up resilience by strengthening the humanitarian, development and peace nexus for improved nutrition.** The Council recalls the high levels of acute and chronic malnutrition in children living in fragile and conflict environments. Humanitarian, development and peace-building efforts are complementary and should reinforce each other in order to respond to volatile situations. The Council urges the Commission to seize opportunities to further enhance links between development and humanitarian plans on nutrition to promote resilient communities and address the main drivers of malnutrition. Disaster risk reduction and building resilience to climate change impact should be applied as a cross-cutting issue. Moreover, the Council reaffirms the need to acknowledge the links between armed conflict, food insecurity and the threat of famine, and for the EU and its Member States to commit to enhance the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2417.

9. On the basis of growing evidence on the interrelationship between all forms of malnutrition, the Council recalls the November 2018 Council conclusions that invited the Commission to "propose a revision of the 2010 policy framework on food security and the 2013 policy framework on nutrition". This would sustain and reinforce achievements in advancing healthy diets and sustainable food systems in a fast-changing world by scaling up transformative nutrition-sensitive investments, while reducing negative impact on the climate and environment as well as reducing and mitigating the impact of climate change. This shall be done according to the approach and spirit of the 2030 Agenda. In this regard, the Council takes note that building sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition patterns is one of the entry points identified in the Global Sustainable Development Report 2019 according to which focused and collaborative action by various stakeholders can accelerate progress towards the SDGs.
10. The Council encourages the Commission to maintain and intensify its engagement at the global level, including at the Nutrition For Growth Summit in 2020 and by promoting the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition as well as an ambitious outcome of the Voluntary Guidelines for Food Systems and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security. The Council further encourages the Commission to engage in the UN Food Systems Summit to be held in 2021 in view of speeding up efforts to achieve SDG 2.
11. The Council also recalls its commitment to enhanced joint programming to secure greater coherence and alignment amongst the EU and its Member States so as to ensure that nutrition remains at the core of the EU's development cooperation agenda. These coordinated efforts should be targeted towards those regions and countries where the needs are the greatest.