

The cost of inaction:

The price of stalled progress on nutrition

UNDERNUTRITION IS COSTING HONDURAS \$938 MILLION EACH YEAR

BACKGROUND

In 2012, the World Health Assembly (WHA) set global nutrition targets to spur action and investment for addressing malnutrition. These targets, which are to be achieved by 2025, aimed to achieve a 40% reduction in the number of children under five who are stunted, a 50% reduction of anaemia in women of reproductive age, a 30% reduction in low birthweight, and an increase in the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months to 50%. At present, Honduras is off course to meet all of the global nutrition targets. Significant progress has been made on stunting, but 17.5% of children are still affected.¹

Every year, more than 185,000 children under five in Honduras are stunted, close to 250,000 are anaemic, 28,000 are born with low birthweight, and more than 145,000 are being sub-optimally breastfed. Additionally, more than 515,000 older adolescent girls and women (15–49y) are suffering from anaemia.²

The interrelated crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and cost of living have put unprecedented pressure on social sector accounts and caused governments to consider diverting investments from public health and prevention programs to bolster short-term responses to urgent needs.

Through the development of an online, user-friendly Cost of Inaction Tool, Nutrition International has sought to support policy makers as they weigh their options. The tool provides an analysis of the costs of “inaction” – of allowing limited to no progress

on key indicators of undernutrition to be made – and how doing so affects countries’ income in both the immediate and long term. The new tool demonstrates that inaction on malnutrition comes at a significant price – one that can be averted through investments in proven, low-cost and high-impact nutrition interventions.

THE FINDINGS

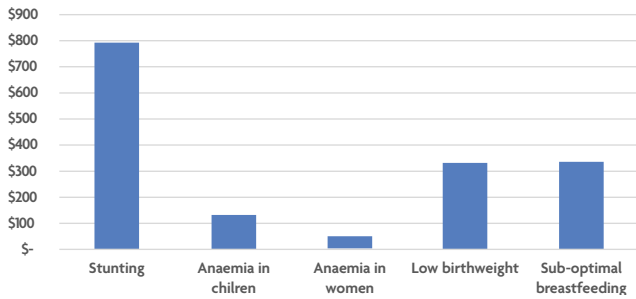
Findings from the Cost of Inaction Tool estimate that the total global economic cost of undernutrition is more than USD \$761 billion per year. In Honduras, undernutrition costs at least USD \$938 million per year in economic losses associated with: stunting; anaemia in children; anaemia in adolescent girls and women of reproductive age; low birthweight; and a lack of protection, promotion and support for breastfeeding.³ The impacts of poor nutrition are wide-ranging and serious.

When a population is undernourished, they are more vulnerable to preventable infections and diseases, leading to increased spending on healthcare and treatment. Persistent malnutrition in groups living in vulnerable situations – including infants, young children and pregnant women – can also be life-threatening. Malnutrition impacts school performance and educational attainment, which in turn affects workforce capabilities and performance. Nutrition is foundational for human capital and economic development.





ECONOMIC COST OF INACTION IN HONDURAS, US\$ MILLION PER YEAR



* The total economic cost is lower than the sum of each individual cost. This estimate avoids double counting of costs associated with co-occurrence of stunting, anaemia, low birthweight and suboptimal breastfeeding.

Honduras has the fourth highest prevalence of stunting in Latin America and the Caribbean (out of 27 countries), and the 75th highest in the world (out of 175 countries). With a current prevalence of 17.5%, Honduras has made progress against the 2012 prevalence of 22%, but it has not yet met the 2025 global nutrition target for stunting of 13%.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF ACHIEVING GLOBAL NUTRITION TARGETS

Here are some of the benefits that Honduras stands to realize if the extended 2030 global nutrition targets were to be met.

If Honduras were to meet the WHA global nutrition target on stunting, an estimated 14,000 cases of stunting will be averted annually, preventing 225 deaths, the loss of 149,000 IQ points and 24,000 school years. Overall, this will prevent USD \$299 million in economic losses.

If Honduras were to meet the WHA global nutrition target on anaemia, an estimated 277,000 cases of anaemia will be averted annually, preventing USD \$27 million in economic losses.

If Honduras were to meet the WHA global nutrition target on low birthweight, 9,000 cases of low birthweight will be averted annually, preventing 131 deaths, the loss of 93,000 IQ points and USD \$109M in economic losses.

If Honduras were to meet the WHA global nutrition target on exclusive breastfeeding, 41,000 cases of diarrhea will be averted annually, preventing 111 deaths, the loss of 215,000 IQ points and 75,000 school years. This will avert USD \$180M in economic losses.

NUTRITION FOR GROWTH

The next edition of the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit will take place on March 27–28, 2025, in Paris. N4G Paris will be a multi-stakeholder summit that provides an opportunity for ambitious policy and financial pledges from different actors from all continents to move the nutrition agenda forward: governments, international organizations, research institutions, civil society organizations, philanthropies, private sector organizations and many more.

As the 2025 N4G Summit approaches, Nutrition International and the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE) are partnering to highlight the price of not investing in nutrition and to encourage ambitious commitment-making on nutrition at N4G Paris.

ABOUT NUTRITION INTERNATIONAL TOOLS

Nutrition International’s Cost of Inaction Tool was developed in 2023 by Nutrition International in partnership with Limestone Analytics and with funding from the Government of Canada. The Cost of Not Breastfeeding Tool was created in 2017 by Alive and Thrive, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and updated by Nutrition International and Alive & Thrive in partnership with Limestone Analytics in 2022, with funding from Government of Canada. Both tools present results for over 140 countries to see the potential benefits if action is taken now. All estimates included in this brief are as of September 2023. Visit both tools on Nutrition International’s website to read about the methodology and data sources, and to learn more about Nutrition International.

[Cost of Inaction Tool](#)

[Cost of Not Breastfeeding Tool](#)

REFERENCES

- 1 World Health Organization WHO Global Nutrition Targets Tracking Tool. Stunting (who.int).
- 2 Country-wise data is not available on anaemia rates in younger adolescent girls (10–14y).
- 3 Jain S, Ahsan S, Robb Z, Crowley B, Walters D. (2024.) The cost of inaction: A global tool to inform nutrition policy and investment decisions on global nutrition targets. Health Policy and Planning, Jul 17:czae056. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czae056>.

