The Costs of Malnutrition

- Over one-third of child deaths are due to undernutrition, mostly from increased severity of disease.²
- Children who are undernourished between conception and age two are at high risk for impaired cognitive development, which adversely affects the country’s productivity and growth.
- The Europe and Central Asia region is anticipated to lose a cumulative US$7 billion to chronic disease by 2015.³
- The economic costs of undernutrition and overweight include direct costs such as the increased burden on the health care system, and indirect costs of lost productivity.
- Childhood anemia alone is associated with a 2.5% drop in adult wages.⁴

Where Does Albania Stand?

- 19% of children under the age of five are stunted, 5% are underweight, and 9% are wasted.⁵
- 55% of those aged 15 and above are overweight or obese.⁶
- 7% of infants are born with a low birth weight.²

As seen in Figure 1, stunting rates in Albania are the second highest in the region, and much higher than neighboring countries of similar income levels such as Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Double Burden of Undernutrition and Overweight

Though Albania is currently on track to meet MDG 1c (halving 1990 rates of child underweight by 2015), it has seen a recent increase in adult obesity. Low-birth weight infants and stunted children may be at greater risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease than children who start out well-nourished.⁸ The prevalence of overweight and obesity is particularly high among adults in the capital Tirana where type 2 diabetes has also been on the rise.⁹

This “double burden” is the result of various factors. Progress in improving community infrastructure and development of sound public health systems has been slow, thwarting efforts to reduce undernutrition; while rapid urbanization and the adoption of diets high in refined carbohydrates, saturated fats and sugars, combined with a more sedentary lifestyle are commonly cited as the major contributors to the increase in overweight and chronic diseases.⁹,¹⁰

The methodology for calculating nationwide costs of vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and interventions included in the cost of scaling up, can be found at: www.worldbank.org/nutrition/profiles

**Country Context**

**HDI ranking:** 70th out of 182 countries¹

**Life expectancy:** 77 years²

**Lifetime risk of maternal death:** 1 in 490²

**Under-five mortality rate:** 14 per 1,000 live births²

**Global ranking of stunting prevalence:** 70th highest out of 136 countries²

**Technical Notes**

**Stunting** is low height for age (too short).

**Underweight** is low weight for age (too small).

**Wasting** is low weight for height (too thin).

Current stunting, underweight, and wasting estimates are based on comparison of the most recent survey data with the WHO Child Growth Standards, released in 2006.

**Low birth weight** is a birth weight less than 2500g.

**Overweight** is a body mass index (kg/m²) of ≥ 25; obesity is a BMI of ≥ 30.

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**Scaling up core micronutrient nutrition interventions in Albania would cost US$1.2 million per year.**

*(See Technical Notes for more information.)*
Solutions to Primary Causes of Undernutrition

Albania

**Poor Infant Feeding Practices**
- 62% of all newborns do not receive breast milk within one hour of birth.2
- 60% of infants under six months are not exclusively breastfed.2
- During the important transition period to a mix of breast milk and solid foods between six and nine months of age, 31% of infants are not fed appropriately with both breast milk and other foods.2

**Solution:** Support women and their families to practice optimal breastfeeding and ensure timely and adequate complementary feeding. Breast milk fulfills all nutritional needs of infants up to six months of age, boosts their immunity, and reduces exposure to infections.

**High Disease Burden**
- Undernourished children have an increased likelihood of falling sick and severity of disease.
- Undernourished children who fall sick are much more likely to die from illness than well-nourished children.
- Parasitic infestation diverts nutrients from the body and can cause blood loss and anemia.

**Solution:** Prevent and treat childhood infection and other disease. Hand-washing, deworming, zinc supplements during and after diarrhea, and continued feeding during illness are important.

**Limited Access to Nutritious Food**
- Achieving food security means ensuring quality and continuity of food access, in addition to quantity, for all household members.

**Solution:** Involve multiple sectors including agriculture, education, transport, gender, the food industry, health and other sectors, to ensure that diverse, nutritious diets are available and accessible to all household members.

**References**