



## BETWEEN LACK AND EXCESS – TRAJECTORIES OF CHILD MALNUTRITION IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** Child malnutrition remains a persistent public health and food security concern in Romania, reflecting persistent social and economic inequalities. This paper analyses malnutrition evolution among children under 5 years of age, over the period 2000–2022, based on modeled estimates published by FAOSTAT. The study focuses on three key indicators: stunting, wasting, and overnutrition.

### • Introduction

Malnutrition in childhood remains one of the most pressing indicators of social injustice and unequal access to essential resources. In Romania, a country shaped by rapid political, economic, and social transformations in the last three decades, child malnutrition has taken on complex and evolving forms. While overt hunger and acute food deprivation have declined, subtler and often overlooked forms of nutritional imbalance continue to affect large segments of the population - especially children under five.

Understanding malnutrition in Romania today requires moving beyond simplistic notions of scarcity and recognizing the interplay of multiple, often contradictory trends. Children may be stunted not only by insufficient food but also by poor-quality diets, limited healthcare, and unequal opportunities for development. At the same time, the rise in childhood overweight, even as undernutrition persists, points to a “double burden” of malnutrition - where both deprivation and excess exist within the same households, communities, or even individuals.

### • Material and method

This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining a structured literature review with a longitudinal analysis of modeled estimates on child malnutrition in Romania, covering the period from 2000 to 2022. The research focuses on two key nutritional indicators: stunting (low height-for-age) and overweight, with particular attention to the rising prevalence of childhood overweight.

### • Results and discussions

#### 1. Opposite initial directions

At the beginning of the observed period (2000–2006), the two indicators move in opposite directions: while stunting declines slowly from 13.5% to around 11.9%, overweight increases slightly, from 8.8% to 10%.

#### 2. Simultaneous decline, different timing

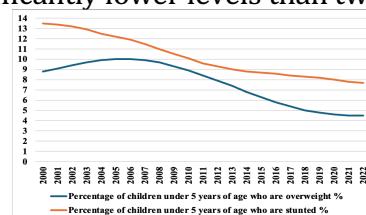
After 2007, both indicators began to decline, but not at the same pace:

- **Stunting** shows a consistent and gradual decrease throughout the period

- **Overweight** follows a more abrupt and rapid decline

#### 3. Convergence and stabilization

From 2015 onwards, the two indicators began to converge, narrowing the gap between them. By 2022, stunting (7.7%) and overweight (4.5%) still coexist, but at significantly lower levels than two decades earlier.



This convergence may indicate progress toward reducing the double burden of malnutrition, but also signals the emergence of new nutritional vulnerabilities, for example, micronutrient deficiencies or hidden hunger that are not captured in either indicator.

### • Conclusions

The prevalence of both stunting and overweight among children under five has declined considerably over the past two decades. However, the persistence of these two conditions—though at lower levels—suggests that Romania continues to face a double burden of malnutrition, shaped by structural inequalities and uneven access to essential services.