Obesity and Overweight: Population trends & consequences

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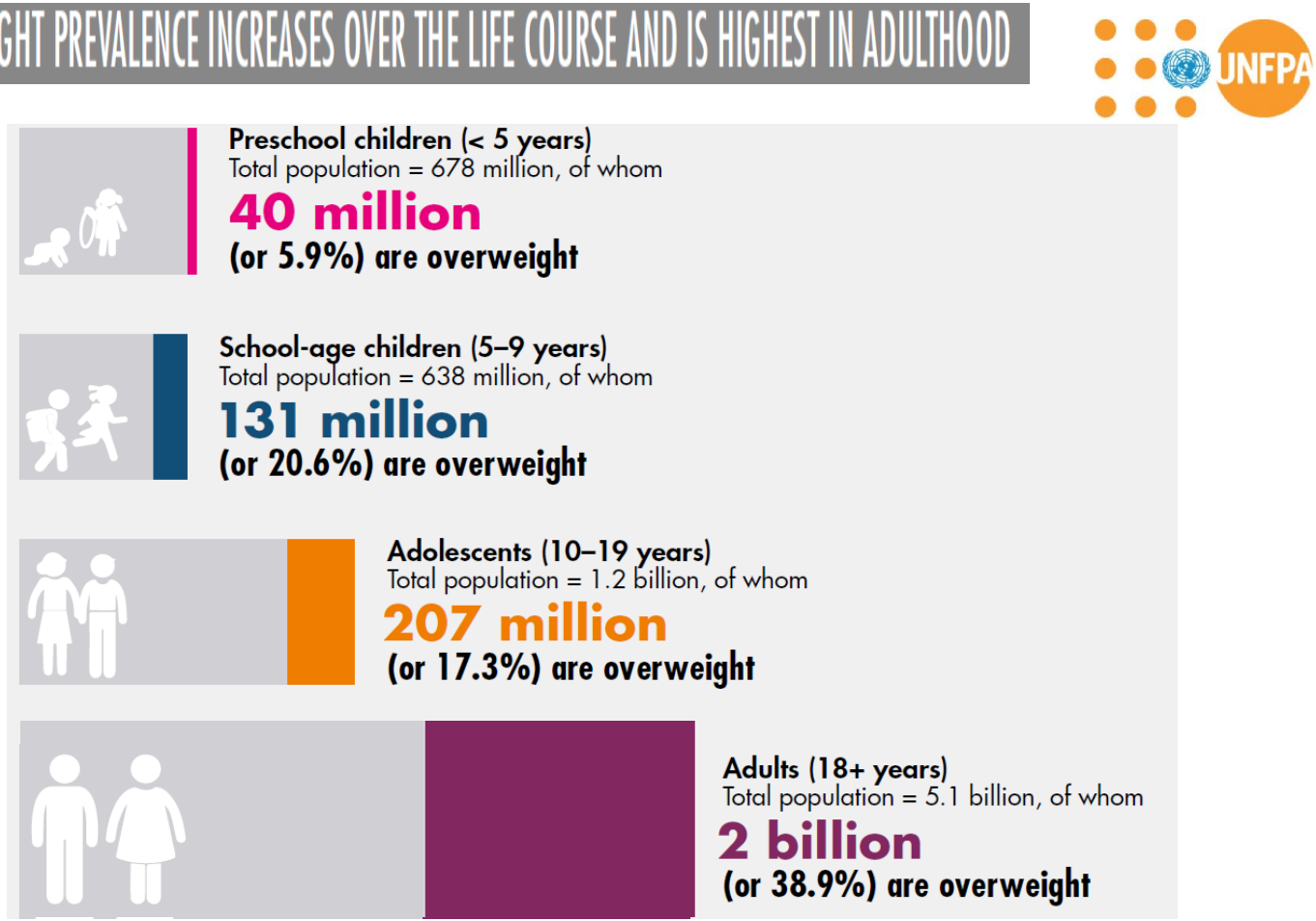
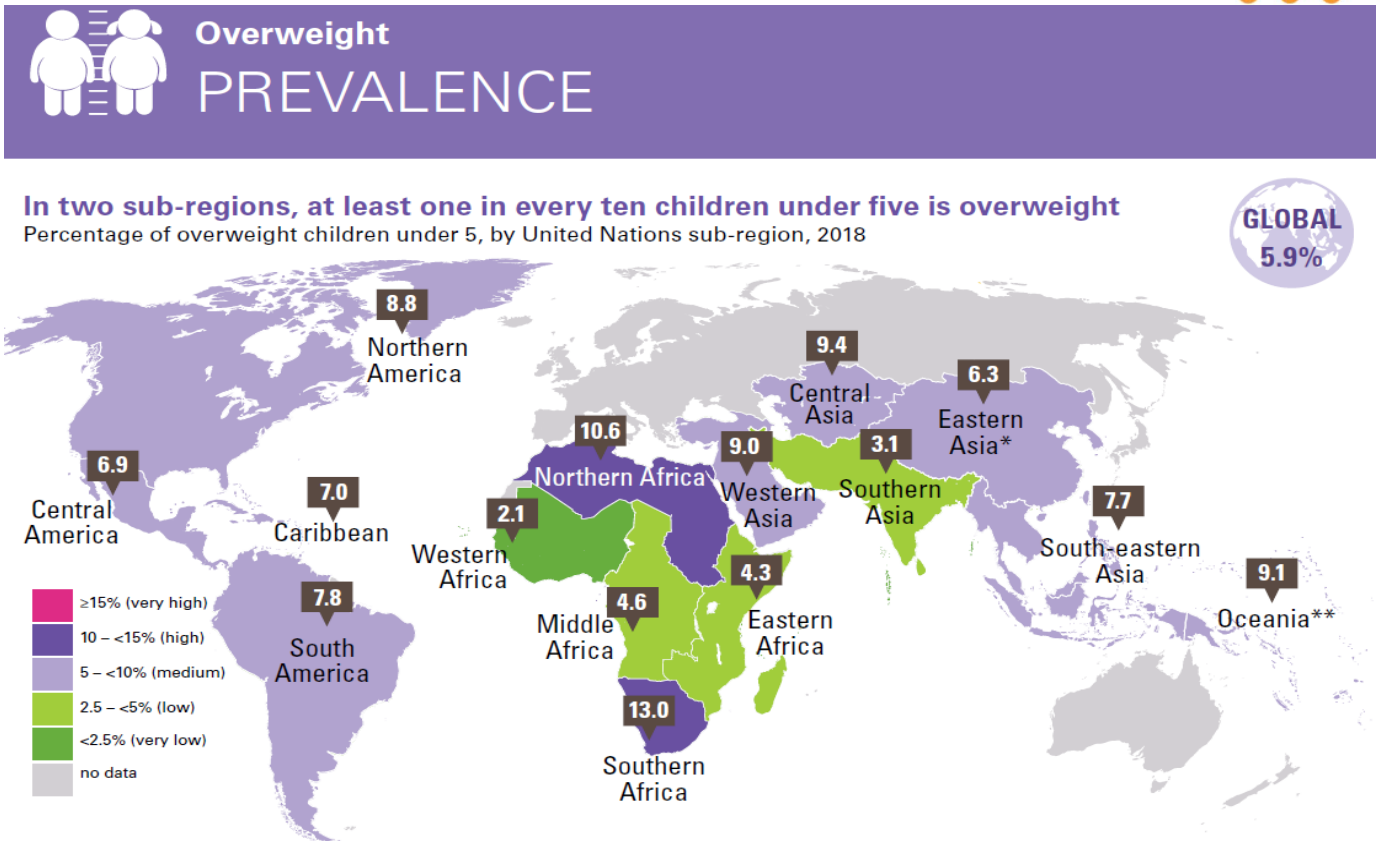
Key facts



Source: FAO and others, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World,* (Rome, FAO, 2019), fig. 17.

Key facts



Source: UNICEF, WHO, World Bank group Joint malnutrition estimates, 2019.

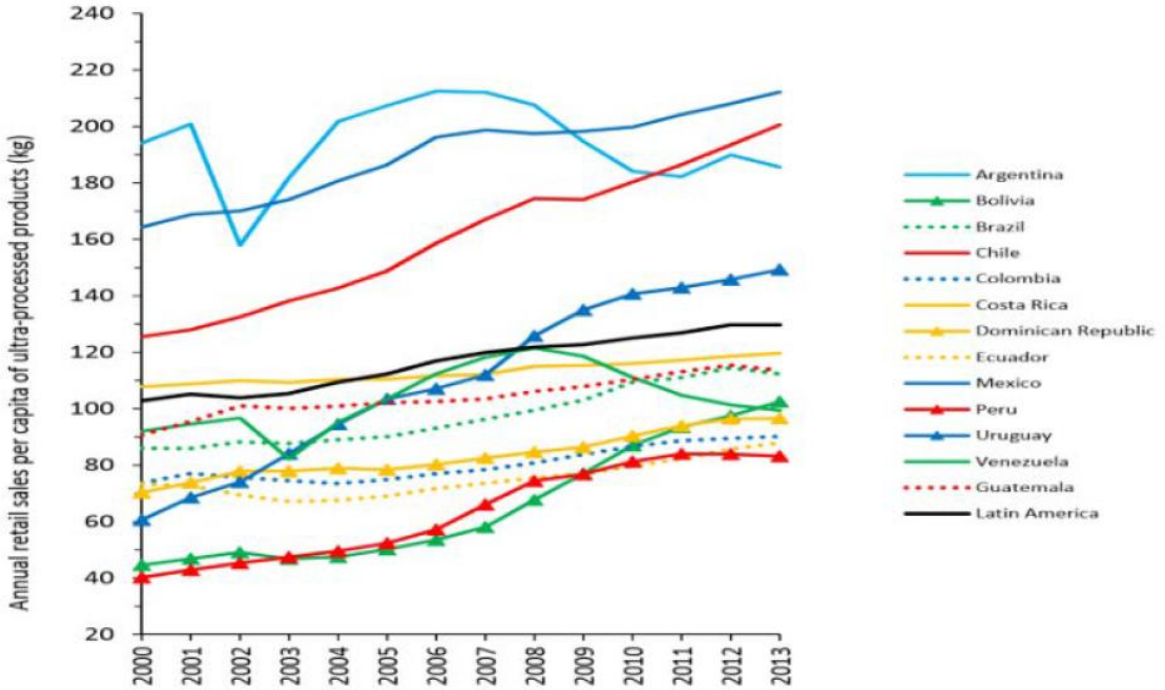
Contributing Factors

- Rising incomes in LMIC
  - greater demand for nutrient-rich foods
  - With a parallel – and more rapid – increase in consumption of processed food & beverages
- *Greater affordability,* marketing and availability of high processed, energy-dense, low-nutrient foods

Contributing Factors

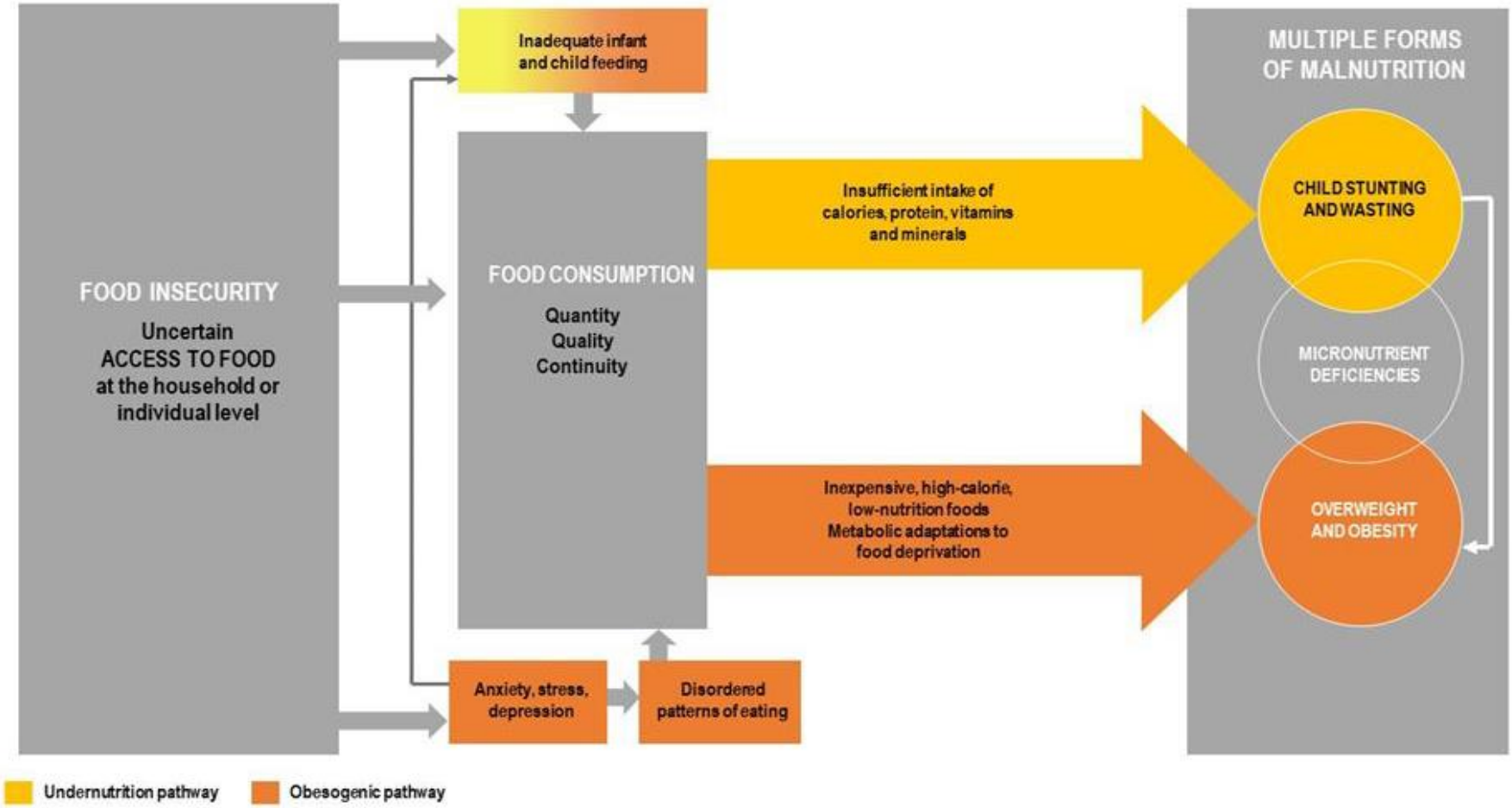
Figure 4

Annual retail sales per capita of ultra-processed food and drink products in 13 Latin American countries, 2000–2013



Ultra-processed products here include carbonated soft drinks, sweet and savory snacks, breakfast cereals, confectionery (candy), ice cream, biscuits (cookies), fruit and vegetable juices, sports and energy drinks, ready-to-drink tea or coffee, spreads, sauces, and ready-meals. Quantity in liters is converted into kilograms. Sales data are from the Euromonitor Passport Database (2014) *(38)*.

Pathways from inadequate food access to multiple forms of malnutrition



Health impact of obesity and overweight

- ~8% of global deaths globally attributable to overweight/obesity (2017)

- Unhealthy diets are now responsible for more adult deaths and disability worldwide than tobacco use

Health impact

- Obese women who become pregnant have elevated risks to their own health, worse pregnancy outcomes, and offspring have higher risks of adult obesity

- Breastfeeding reduces risk of overweight/ obesity, breast & ovarian cancers, type 2 diabetes, hypertension – only 2 in 5 infants exclusively BF for 6 months

What works?

- WHO "**best buys**" for cost-effective interventions to improve unhealthy diets:
  - behaviour change communication and front-of-pack labelling;
  - eliminate industrial trans-fats;
  - tax on sugar-sweetened beverages;
  - reduce salt intake through reformulation;
  - provide lower salt options in public institutions

What works?

- Taxation on sugar-sweetened beverages – enacted in 73 countries – emerging evidence
- In developed countries, vouchers for fruit and vegetable purchases have increased consumption
- Food-based dietary guidelines, in 91 of 193 UM Member States

COVID-19 and Obesity

- Malnourished individuals (undernutrition or obesity) more likely to have severe COVID-19 symptoms, requiring hospitalization
- Obesity is linked to co-morbidities, but newest data suggests obesity has an independent effect -
- In March, obesity was the most prevalent condition among 180 patients age 18-49 hospitalized for COVID-19 in USA
- Obesity appears to be a risk factor among young people with no co-morbid conditions