NUTRITION OVERVIEW

Child malnutrition has improved since DHS 2014/15. In 2018, acute malnutrition was down by two percentage points to 4.2 percent of children aged 6–59 months, considered a ‘low’ prevalence, with 1.5 percent severely wasted. Muchinga province recorded the highest rate (8.2 percent, ‘medium’), followed by Luapula (6.2 percent), Lusaka (5.5 percent) and Copperbelt (5.4 percent).

However, at 34.6 percent, the national prevalence of stunting was considered ‘very high’ - though down from 40 percent in 2014/15 (DHS, 2018). Rates ranged from 46 percent in the northern province to 29 percent in western and southern provinces (DHS, 2018).

High levels of chronic malnutrition can be at least partly attributed to inadequate infant and young child-feeding practices. Only 42.1 percent of infants below 6 months were exclusively breastfed and 12 percent of children aged 6–23 months received a minimum acceptable diet. These factors also likely contribute to the ‘very high’ (58.1 percent) anaemia levels among 6–59 month-old children. Anaemia among women was a ‘moderate’ public health concern at 31.1 percent, reaching 41.1 percent (‘severe’) among pregnant women (DHS, 2018).

A cholera outbreak was declared on 17 October 2019 (ZNPHI, October 2019) with over 1,500 cases reported during 2019 across the country (WHO, December 2019). An estimated 1.2 million Zambians are living with HIV even though the prevalence has declined since 2001–2002 (UNAIDS, 2018).

The failure of two rainy seasons resulted in more than 20,000 drought-affected people lacking access to clean and safe water in November (OCHA, December 2019).

Nutrition status of refugees

The nutrition and health status of the refugees in the three settlements has been stable over the past few years. The 2017 SENS nutrition survey found ‘medium’ acute malnutrition prevalence in Mayukwayukwa (6.2 percent) and Meheba (5.7 percent) (SENS, 2017). The 2019 nutrition survey in Mantapala settlement found ‘low’ levels of acute malnutrition (2.9 percent) (UNICEF 2019). The prevalence of stunting was ‘very high’ in all three camps, at 34.6 percent in Mayukwayukwa and Meheba, rising to 66.2 percent in Mantapala (SENS, 2017 and UNICEF 2019).

Child-feeding practices in Meheba and Mayukwayukwa showed a diverse result. While 61.8 percent of children were exclusively breastfed for 6 months in Mayukwayukwa, the prevalence fell to 28.9 percent in Meheba (SENS, 2017). Both camps failed to meet the 95 percent UNHCR target for measles vaccination. As for the WASH situation, only 25.3 percent of households in Mayukwayukwa and 12.4 percent in Meheba reported using an improved toilet, which indicates an urgent need for better hygiene (SENS, 2017).