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End hunger and eradicate all forms of malnutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean

Summary

Hunger and food insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) increased in 2016 for the first time in the last two decades. Conversely, excess weight and obesity have become an issue of public concern due to their serious impact on the health and wellbeing of millions of people.

If this trend continues, it will not be possible to achieve the targets set in the Hunger Free Latin America and the Caribbean 2025 Initiative (IALCSH) nor the Zero Hunger goal set in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In order to reverse this situation, a renewed political commitment from the whole region that includes governments, parliaments, civil society organizations, the private sector and academia is required, with particular emphasis on the most vulnerable groups, such as women, children, the elderly and indigenous people.

A new range of public policies is needed urgently in the region to meet the needs of families that live in the most disadvantaged territories in terms of hunger: an agenda based on well-established institutional and regulatory frameworks that must include a combination of productive and social programmes and must also be accompanied by greater investment and skills that are consistent with the scale of the challenge, and measures to mitigate vulnerability to climate change.

The high levels of people who are overweight or obese are due largely to drastic changes in eating habits in the region over recent decades. In order to respond to this challenge, it is necessary to implement measures that transform the current food system to ensure a nutritional approach that helps to feed the whole region in a healthy manner, especially the most poor and vulnerable.

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Recommendations for the Regional Conference:

- Acknowledge that LAC is suffering from both a setback in terms of the fight against hunger and an alarming increase in excess weight and obesity. Highlight the role played by states and society as a whole to address this dual challenge, and recognize the opportunity presented by the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025) to implement the commitments agreed by states at the second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2).
- Recommend that FAO support Member States in developing a programme that serves those territories that have the greatest concentrations of hunger, extreme poverty and vulnerability to climate change in conjunction with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and implementation of the CELAC Plan for Food and Nutrition Security, and Hunger Eradication 2025 (FNS-CELAC Plan).
- Call on FAO, in cooperation with other agencies of the United Nations system, to help countries streamline their policy instruments to achieve substantial changes in the conditions of food and nutrition security of disadvantaged communities, including rural women, indigenous people and other vulnerable groups.
- Give instruction to FAO, in alliance with other institutions and actors, to include the following as part of their support to countries: identify, develop and implement public policies that have an impact on transforming food systems with the aim of tackling the issue of overweight people and obesity in the region.
- Request that FAO prioritize capacity building for the mobilization and use of resources, and the implementation and effective management of programmes, in addition to the support it provides in strengthening institutional and regulatory frameworks and information systems related to food and nutrition security.

I. Introduction

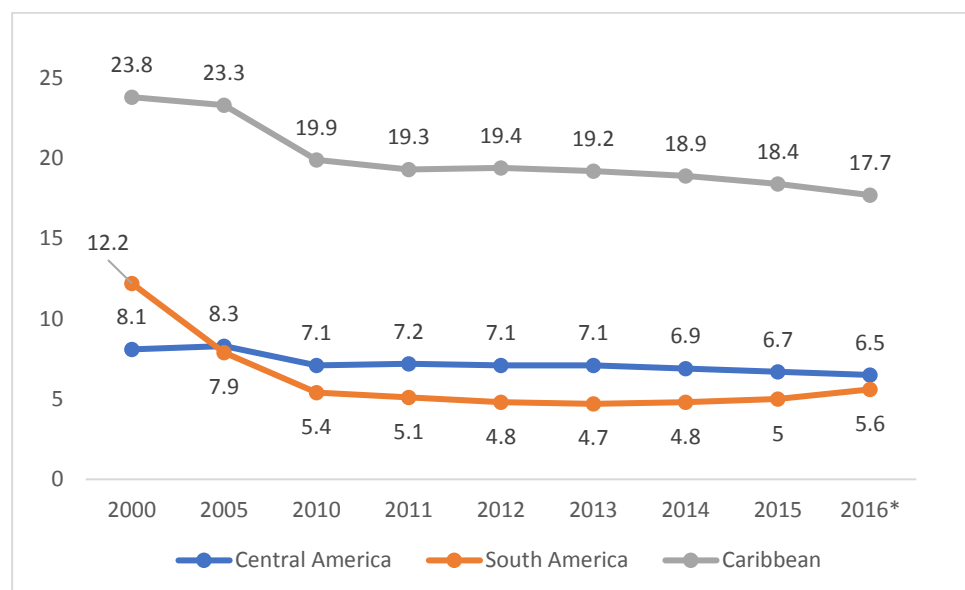
1. The increase in hunger in LAC is an unacceptable change in trend compared to the advances made over recent decades. The number of people who are undernourished in the region increased by 2.4 million between 2015 and 2016, totalling 42.5 million people, the equivalent to 6.6 percent of the population. At the same time, estimates based on data collected on adults from all over the world reveal that 38 million people suffered from severe food insecurity in the region in 2016¹.

2. The figures that monitor the state of malnutrition for SDG 2 (Sustainable Development Goal) show a decline in chronic and severe child malnutrition affecting respectively 11 and 1.3 percent of children under five years old in 2016. By contrast, the prevalence of overweight children, which is at 7 percent, one point above the world average is of particular concern.

3. At a subregional level, the trend of undernourishment between 2000 and 2016 (see Figure 1) shows that from 2013, in both Mesoamerica and the Caribbean, hunger maintains a downward trend, while in South America, there is a significant upturn. The main reasons for this increase are the economic downturn that has affected the region since 2015, as well as a drop in the price of raw materials, which are the region's main export products, in addition to instability and political uncertainty.

Figure 1

Prevalence of undernourishment in LAC subregions, annual values, 2000-2016



Source: FAO, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO) 2017. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017*. Rome.

4. In terms of chronic malnutrition, which is measured by the prevalence of children under five years of age with stunting, LAC subregions have an indicator that demonstrates a downward trend

¹ Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES). FAO and PAHO. 2017a. *Panorama of food and nutrition security in Latin America and the Caribbean 2017*. Santiago, FAO.

over the last 26 years. In 2016, Mesoamerica has a prevalence of 15.4 percent, South America 9.5 percent and the Caribbean 5.3 percent².

5. It is pertinent to note that the trend of excess weight and obesity can be seen increasingly in all of the region's countries and in all age groups regardless of levels of wealth or geographical location³. In fact, in 24 countries the prevalence of obesity in the adult population is close to or over 20 percent of the population.⁴

6. Another malnutrition indicator that has not been taken into account by the SDG 2 indicators but that is still important for health and nutrition is the lack of micronutrients. For example, 22 percent of women of childbearing age in 2016 were affected by a lack of iron or anaemia, which can have negative implications for the mother's and the newborn's health, as well as for the future development of children⁵.

7. If no significant changes are made to the trend or the speed of growth, the region will be unable to eradicate hunger by 2025, which was part of its commitment to the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative (IALCSH) and the CELAC Plan for Food and Nutrition Security, and Hunger Eradication 2025 (FNS-CELAC Plan), nor will it be able to achieve this by 2030, which puts the fulfilment of SDG 2 at risk. This scenario is a threat to the progressive realization of the human right to adequate food in the region, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable.

II. Zero Hunger: eliminating hunger in the most disadvantaged territories

8. The target of eradicating hunger will require a redoubling of effort aimed at the least-developed and backward population centres. Available data on poverty and malnutrition divided by area and income reveal that these problems are concentrated mainly in rural territories with a lack of public services, that are difficult to access and are extremely vulnerable to climate events, which are increasingly recurrent and severe. This fact is especially noticeable in the poorest families who earn their livelihoods from farming or other activities related to the management of natural resources, and affects women, children and indigenous people with the greatest severity⁶.

9. In the context of different international and regional commitments whose deadlines and targets are about to be fulfilled, it is essential to regain the momentum and the experience of LAC to ensure that zero hunger becomes a reality.

10. Therefore, it is necessary to implement and evaluate new policies and instruments designed to take action in the most vulnerable territories and communities to make efforts more effective and efficient. FAO, working in partnership with other agencies such as WFP, IFAD and other cooperation agencies, proposes four areas of cooperation in particular to meet this ambitious target:

² FAO and PAHO. 2017b. *Panorama of Food and Nutritional Security in Latin America and the Caribbean 2016*. Santiago, FAO.

³ For example, the countries which have the three highest incidences of excess weight in children under five are Barbados (12.2 percent), Paraguay (11.7 percent) and Chile (9.3 percent). FAO and PAHO. 2017a. *Op. cit.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ For example, in Belize, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Suriname, the prevalence of chronic malnutrition in children in rural areas exceeds that of urban areas by 50 percent. In the same countries, the average prevalence of chronic malnutrition in children of the poorest 40 percent is double or triple that of the richest 40 percent. FAO and PAHO. 2017b. *Op. cit.*

A. Renewed political commitment

11. The eradication of hunger and malnutrition in the territories that pose the greatest challenges can only be achieved with a comprehensive commitment by different society sectors and actors capable of providing sustainability and political and social legitimacy to the changes needed to achieve this target. LAC has the advantage of having been a pioneer in the establishment of agreements and mechanisms to help fulfil food and nutrition security. The United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025 can become a useful framework to convert existing political commitments into efficient actions.

12. The FNS-CELAC plan also demonstrates the commitment of 33 countries from LAC and helps to facilitate policy dialogue to link food and nutrition security with issues such as climate change, a gender-sensitive approach and food systems and nutrition⁷. Supporting the implementation of the plan could lead to the construction of an effective framework to promote renewed political commitment on the eradication of hunger, and to strengthen action in territories that still have high levels of food and nutrition insecurity.

13. By the same token, the parliamentary world has become a key player in the realization of the human right to adequate food. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that there are currently 19 national Parliamentary Fronts against Hunger⁸, which have supported 16 laws or policy adjustments at national level in favour of food and nutrition security and recently four Model Laws at the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament (PARLATINO)⁹.

14. To achieve zero hunger the region needs to speed up the prevention and reduction of food losses and waste by fostering social and technological innovation that requires a clear commitment and contribution from the private sector and consumers. As an example, data suggest that for the retail trade this reduction would be sufficient to cover the calorific requirements of 36 million people.¹⁰

15. FAO can continue to highlight the challenges of hunger and malnutrition for the region by building and publicising bodies of evidence as well as creating fora for awareness-raising discussions for different society actors. This is in addition to continued support of countries in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies, legal frameworks and institutional strengthening for food and nutrition security.

⁷ Examples include the work session on “Food security and climate change: Challenges and opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean”, held in Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic (August 2016), approval by CELAC countries on the Gender Strategy of the FNS-CELAC Plan (January 2017), and the implementation of the “Regional symposium on sustainable food systems for healthy eating” in El Salvador (September 2017). FAO supported these CELAC fora for discussion.

⁸ There are national fronts in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Uruguay.

⁹ Model Law on “Regulation of food and soft drink advertisements and sales promotions to children and adolescents” (http://www.parlatino.org/pdf/leyes_marcos/leyes/proyecto-regulacion-publicidad-regulacion-pma-30-nov-2012.pdf), Model Law on family farming (http://parlatino.org/pdf/leyes_marcos/leyes/ley-agricultura-familiar-esp.pdf), Framework Law on school feeding (http://www.parlatino.org/pdf/leyes_marcos/leyes/ley-alimentacion-escolar-pma-19-oct-2013.pdf).

¹⁰ FAO. 2016. *Food losses and waste in Latin America and the Caribbean*. FAO, Santiago. In order to address this issue, the Regional Alliance for the Prevention and Reduction of Food Losses and Waste has promoted the establishment of specific policies. For example, Argentina has set up the National Programme for the Reduction of Food Losses and Waste. FAO. 2016. *Op. cit.*

B. Policies, programmes and strategies aimed at disadvantaged territories and communities

16. The combination of large-scale productive and social policies has been fundamental in guaranteeing food and nutrition security for a significant number of people in the region¹¹. As part of the commitment framework set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims to leave nobody behind¹², and within a regional context that is experiencing reduced economic growth and greater unemployment, these types of "twin-track" interventions become even more important.

17. Extending coverage of food and nutrition security programmes is essential as well as improving policy instruments to increase the impact on living conditions of families living in the most disadvantaged territories. Initiatives that have traditionally been effective in reducing the high rates of hunger over the last decade must be adapted to deal with rural areas that are very disadvantaged, more vulnerable to climate events and subject to migration, and must also include goals focused on improving nutrition. Work with these communities, many of whom are indigenous groups, needs a public policy that is innovative in its approach and puts these territories and their needs at the heart of the policy cycle. To this end, FAO is initiating a partnership with IFAD and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) to improve the territorial approach of programmes in rural areas.

18. FAO can support the design and implementation of new programmes in these territories that are more coordinated and aligned and that improve the availability of and sustainable access to high-value nutritional products, as well as improving supply and better use of local produce, and strengthening capacities to diversify income from agricultural and non-agricultural activities, with a particular focus on boosting employment for young people. It is essential that these initiatives are efficiently linked to comprehensive social protection systems and to an extension in the coverage and quality of health and education services.

19. For example, in order to improve food for future generations and help dynamize local economies, FAO, in partnership with the WFP, can help support the extension of national coverage of feeding programmes that can be found in almost all the countries in the region, with menus that are aligned with the country's food guides, including education on nutrition, school gardens to educate children, and the direct purchase of family farming products.

C. Investment and skills to improve policy implementation

20. Despite current policy, institutional and legal frameworks, one of the main impediments to improving the impact of initiatives on territories with the highest indices of hunger is the kerbing of financial resources and skills required for more efficient management and use.

21. Although there are difficulties in trying to estimate regional investment in food and nutrition security, public spending on agriculture as a percentage of GDP¹³ declined between 2013 and 2015. Equally, fiscal efforts in the social sector have declined: for example, investment in conditional transfer programmes dropped from 0.38 percent to 0.33 percent of GDP, due to spending cuts in some countries¹⁴. Lastly, in the last few years several traditional donors in the region have reduced their contributions.

¹¹ Examples are available in the following editions: 2013, 2014 and 2017 of the *Panorama of food and nutritional security in Latin America and the Caribbean*, FAO.

¹² FAO and PAHO. 2017a. *Op. cit.*

¹³ <http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/investment/expenditure/en/>.

¹⁴ Cecchini, S., and Atuesta, B. 2017. *Op. cit.*

22. Given this situation, FAO can support countries and regional agencies in designing initiatives that help to mobilize national resources and international cooperation to combat food insecurity in territories with the greatest problems.

23. In partnership with other agencies, it is possible to identify elements of the public budget cycle, during approval and implementation stages, to improve its efficiency in terms of the targeting and use of funds for food and nutrition security. FAO can also promote capacity building and South-South Cooperation so that public officials at both a national and local level have a greater understanding of food and nutrition security and their own programmes, including management, follow-up and evaluation instruments and mechanisms.

D. Monitoring, follow-up and evaluation systems: more targeted and transparent policies

24. Improving investment and management and extending coverage of programmes to tackle hunger and malnutrition also needs consolidated production and data analysis to make informed decisions and evaluate results. Policy decisions based on evidence and data broken down by gender, ethnicity and territory, will improve efficiency as well as ensuring sustainability in the long term.

25. At the same time, follow-up of SDG 2 requires strengthening of national statistics and information systems, given that it is the countries that are responsible for reporting on their targets.

26. FAO technical support to train public actors who are responsible for generating and interpreting information is especially relevant, not only for the 21 indicators of SDG 2, for which they have a special responsibility, but also in the development of national population surveys, censuses and farming surveys that provide essential information for indicators in the 2030 Agenda. This provides a unique opportunity to support countries in generating indicators for food and nutrition security that are set in the global monitoring framework of the 2030 Agenda (undernourishment and the prevalence of moderate and severe levels of food insecurity, via the food insecurity experience scale) in SDG 2, and food losses and waste in SDG 12.

27. FAO can also support its Member States in reinforcing the role of follow-up and evaluation systems that are already being carried out in some areas of institutional governance on food and nutrition security, helping to identify areas for improvement in the institutional design of hunger eradication and malnutrition policies.

III. Improve nutrition: addressing the challenge of excess weight and obesity

28. Excess weight and obesity have become an issue of public concern in the region due to their serious impact on the wellbeing of millions of people. Equally, the rapid increase in treatment costs for chronic non-communicable diseases resulting from a poor diet means an ever-greater financial burden for countries¹⁵.

29. Although the prevalence of excess weight in children in most countries is still concentrated in the quintiles with higher incomes, evidence suggests that this relationship is not as direct as it seems. Thus, while in low-income countries obesity is more frequent in the group of the highest quintiles¹⁶, in middle-income countries, among which the majority of LAC is concentrated, this situation tends to

¹⁵ FAO and PAHO. 2017b. *Op. cit.*

¹⁶ Dinsa, G.D., Goryakin, Y., Fumagalli, E. and Suhrcke, M. 2012. *Obesity and socioeconomic status in developing countries: a systematic review*. In *Obesity Reviews*, 13(11), 1067-79.

move towards lower-income groups as national income increases¹⁷. Alternatively, higher-income countries that have populations with higher socio-economic levels have a lower increase in child obesity¹⁸.

30. Excess weight and obesity are also differentiated in terms of population groups. For example, the proportion of obese adult women exceeds that of men, and in over 20 countries this difference is greater than ten percentage points.

31. There are several reasons for this trend, but it is due mainly to the drastic changes in the region's eating habits over the last three decades, which is characterized by the consumption of products with high levels of edible oils, saturated fats, salt, sugar and sweeteners, as well as in the increase in consumption of calories and nutrients originating from animal sources coupled with the reduction in consumption of pulses, grains, fruits and vegetables¹⁹.

32. Another striking aspect of these changes is the widespread increase in the supply and consumption of processed products with high levels of salt, fat and sugar. The sales of these products in the region have increased by 48 percent in the first decade of the century, which is equivalent to approximately 16 percent of total food sales, equal to an annual increase of 3.1 percent above the world average²⁰.

33. It is also worth highlighting the change in recent decades to the way in which people have access to food. Local food markets, which were predominant in the middle of the twentieth century, have given way to large supermarket chains, multinational food companies and international brands of fast food. The share of supermarket sales as a total of food sales in the region went from 15 percent in 1990 to 60 percent in 2000²¹.

34. This rapid transformation also affects new means of production, processing, transport, marketing and ways in which food is sold, changes in consumption and cultural practices, as well as so-called food environments. Therefore, to combat the increase in excess weight and obesity in LAC, it is necessary to implement strategies to regain control of the whole food system, with an emphasis on promoting healthy and nutritious diets. For this, FAO proposes two main areas of cooperation:

A. Availability of healthy and varied food

35. Food systems provide food that is increasingly homogenous²² as current food habits are characterized by the consumption of products that have a high energy density, are generally low in cost and have poor nutritional value. This situation is worsening in families with the lowest incomes who are often putting aside a greater percentage of their income for food. This is why it is very important to put in place measures to guarantee a good diet based on food that is safe, nutritional, varied and accessible to all.

¹⁷ Monteiro, C. A., Moura, E.C., Conde, W.L., and Popkin B. M. 2004. *Socioeconomic status and obesity in adult populations of developing countries: a review*. In *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 82(12), 940-6.

¹⁸ WHO. 2014b. *Comprehensive implementation plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition*. WHO. Geneva.

¹⁹ Although a few decades ago these food habits were characteristic of high-income countries, now they can be seen increasingly in developing countries. Popkin, B., Adair, L. and Ng, S.W. 2012. *Now and then: the global nutrition transition: the pandemic of obesity in developing countries*. In *Nutrition reviews*, 70 (1), 3-21.

²⁰ PAHO. 2015. *Ultra-processed food and drink products in Latin America and the Caribbean: Trends, impact on obesity, policy implications*. PAHO, Washington D.C.

²¹ Popkin, B., Adair, L. and Ng, S.W. *Op. cit.*

²² Khoury, C.K., Bjorkman, A.D., Dempewolf, H., Ramirez Villegas, J., Guarino, L., Jarvis, A., Rieseberg, L.H., and Struik, P.C. 2014. *Increasing homogeneity in global food supplies and the implications for food security*. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 111, 4001–4006 (2014).

36. For this reason, food systems need to be repositioned from feeding people to nourishing people²³, which means taking into account the nutritional effects of diet together with the social and environmental effects, to increase the availability of adequate nutritional food²⁴.
37. In order to ensure the availability of more varied and healthy food, FAO can help strengthen actions in areas where countries from the region are currently working, such as:
- a) Incentivize the production of healthy food (pulses, fruit, vegetables, leafy vegetables, etc.) from family farming if possible;
 - b) Create short food supply chains for closer integration between producers and consumers, reducing intermediation²⁵ by setting up areas such as outdoor markets²⁶, traditional markets or local food shops or by fostering agreements between producers and value chains²⁷, as well as strengthening rural-urban links in small and medium-sized urban areas.
 - c) Improve and modernize access to food markets as well as the way in which they work, helping to facilitate access to fresh and healthy food for the population in urban and rural centres²⁸.
 - d) Strengthen public purchase programmes and consolidate food supply systems, understood as the state addressing the asymmetries in access to markets to partly regulate the stock and the price of some staple foods, guaranteeing the supply should there be any economic or nature-based shocks²⁹.
 - e) Strengthen trade that enables an increase in the supply of safe and more nutritious food for the whole population, including the promotion of food products with lower levels of sugar, fat and salt and promoting a trade that takes into account cultural characteristics and values healthy cooking practices.
 - f) Establish partnerships with the private sector to promote the availability of healthier and more diverse food in supermarkets and in other commercial chains, in particular in the most vulnerable urban and rural areas.

B. Access and consumption of varied and healthy food

38. In order for production support policies and the facilitation of food access to result in improvements in nutrition, it is necessary to recognize the importance of optimizing food

²³ *Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition*. 2016. *Food systems and diets: Facing the challenges of the 21st century*. London.

²⁴ FAO and PAHO. 2017b. *Op. cit.*

²⁵ ECLAC, FAO and IICA. 2015. Short food supply chain as an alternative for promoting family agriculture. ECLAC, Santiago, Chile.

²⁶ In Chile, for example, outdoor markets supply 70 percent of the domestic market with fruit and vegetables and 30 percent of the fish market. ECLAC, FAO and IICA. 2015. *Op. cit.*

²⁷ In Ecuador, the Handbook of Good Marketing Practices for Supermarkets and Suppliers states that supermarkets must buy 15 percent of their products from local suppliers. This represents an opportunity for family farming to be included in the large food retailers chain (Available at: <https://rimisp.org/noticia/pequenos-agricultores-y-supermercados-buscan-alianzas-para-mejorar-venta-de-productos-nacionales-en-ecuador/>, el 12-06-2017).

²⁸ It is estimated that there are approximately 291 wholesale and food markets in the region. FAO and PAHO. 2017b. *Op. cit.*

²⁹ To this effect, ten countries in the region form part of the LAC Public Systems Network for Food Supply and Marketing in LAC.

environments and consumer access to dietary information and education. These are some of the initiatives that have positive effects in this area, and in which FAO can offer its support to countries:

- a) Promoting social protection programmes to close the urban-rural gap, especially in terms of the income of the most vulnerable communities, so that they are able to cover the cost of a more varied and healthy diet.
- b) Integrating initiatives on food and nutrition education to encourage changes to the population's eating habits, which have led to positive results in the reduction of the body mass index and in the consumption of unhealthy food, especially in schools³⁰.
- c) Implementing nutrition guides that are validated and widespread instruments to promote healthier eating habits, to increase and improve their use in dietary and nutritional education as well as to advise on policies and programmes³¹.
- d) Regulating the sale, packaging and advertising of food that has high levels of sugar, fat and salt, to reduce their consumption. There are at present six countries³² in the region that have established legislation or regulations of these products aimed at children; nine countries have regulations in place for front labelling of food³³, while five countries in the region³⁴ have either regulated and/or banned the cited products in schools³⁵.

³⁰ Mancipe Navarrete, J., García Villamil, S., Correa Bautista, J., Meneses-Echávez, J., González-Jiménez, E., and Schmidt-Riovalle, J. 2015. *Efectividad de las intervenciones educativas realizadas en América Latina para la prevención del sobrepeso y obesidad infantil en niños escolares de 6 a 17 años: una revisión sistemática*. En *Nutrición Hospitalaria*, 31 (1), 102-114. [The effectiveness of educational interventions in Latin America for the prevention of excess weight and obesity in school children from 6 to 17 years of age: a systematic review. In the magazine *Nutrición Hospitalaria*]

³¹ FAO and PAHO. 2017b. *Op. cit.*

³² Brasil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay.

³³ Argentina, Brasil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay.

³⁴ Chile, Costa Rica, Panama, Peru and Uruguay.

³⁵ FAO and PAHO. 2017b. *Op. cit.*