

National development is largely dependent on healthy and well-nourished people. Food security means being able at all times to access sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life. Yet this basic need is not met for many people in the Asia/Pacific region. Chronic hunger has devastating effects on health and well-being, both now and among future generations.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimated that more than half a billion people in the Asia/Pacific region (550 million, or 15% of the population) were undernourished in 2006-08 (FAO, 2011a and 2011b). One quarter or more of the total population in Pakistan, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Mongolia and DPR Korea were affected, and the prevalence was greater than 10% in two-thirds of the countries examined here (Figure 2.4.2). In China and India alone, more than 350 million people were undernourished in 2006-08, and the region is home to two-out-of-three of the world's hungry. Poverty remains the major determinant of undernourishment.

Daily dietary energy consumption among 19 Asian countries averages around 2 600 kcal per person, compared to 3 400 in OECD countries (Figure 2.4.1). Australia, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand have high-energy diets. Food available for consumption provides less energy for persons living in DPR Korea, Lao PDR, India, Mongolia and Cambodia. Compared to diets in OECD countries, food in Asian countries provides two-third the amount of protein, and less than half the amount of fat (Figure 2.4.4).

Food available for consumption has risen across the region as a whole over the past two decades, from around 2 300 kcal in 1990 to the current value of 2 600 (Figure 2.4.3). China's sustained economic expansion has led to many gains for its population, including in food intake, which rose to over 3 000 kcal in 2009. During the world food crisis of 2006-08, domestic prices of rice and wheat were stable in China, India and Indonesia because of government controls on exports of these crops. Viet Nam, with relatively

equitable land distribution, has many households that produce a surplus of rice, and so the country is a substantial rice exporter (FAO, 2011a). The situation in DPR Korea is more precarious. Sustained famine ravaged the population in the 1990s, and the economic crisis, along with drought, threatens to extend its reliance on food aid.

The economic and food crises may force the poor in the Asia/Pacific region to further reduce their dietary intake, as well as their spending on essential items such as education and health care. Rising and volatile food prices, climate change impacts, frequent natural disasters, trade policies, soaring crude oil prices and the growing use of food crops for biofuels complicate the fight against hunger. Investments in the agriculture sector, and social protection for people without access to food will assist in providing an economic, employment and health buffer, especially for poorer countries in the region (FAO, 2011a; OECD, 2012b).

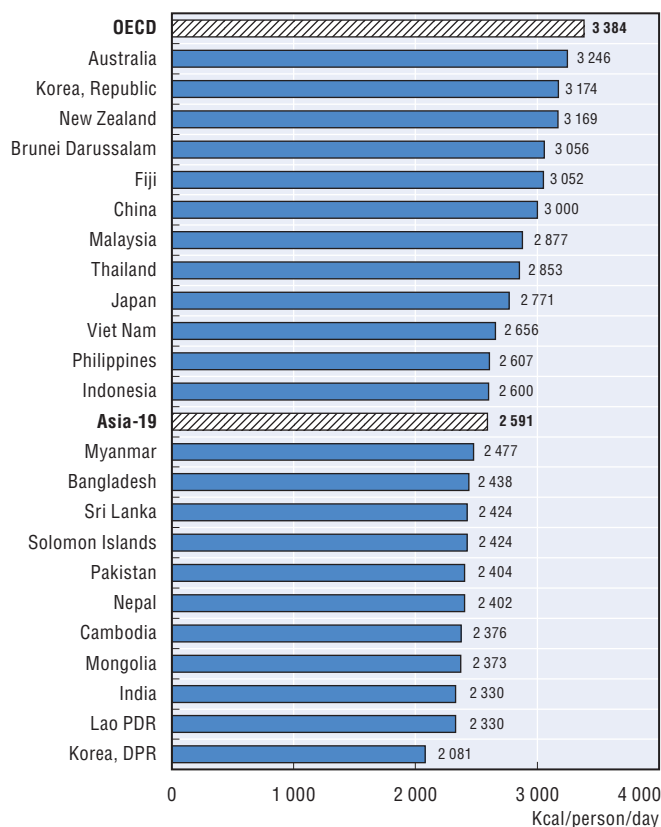
Definition and comparability

FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) consumption estimates are based on annual estimates of the production and trade of food commodities as supplied by national Ministries of Agriculture and Trade.

Dietary consumption of energy measures the amount of food available for human consumption, and is expressed in kilocalories (kcal). Measures of protein and fat are expressed in grams. The content of each is derived by applying appropriate food composition factors to commodities.

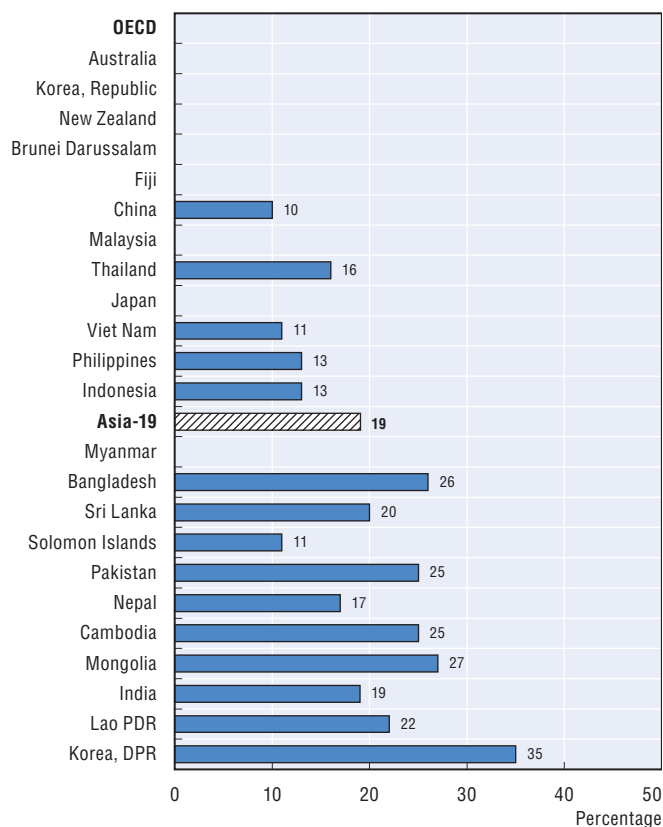
Undernourishment refers to the condition of people whose intake of calories is continuously below a minimum dietary energy requirement needed for light activity and acceptable weight-for-attained height.

2.4.1. Dietary energy consumption, 2007-09



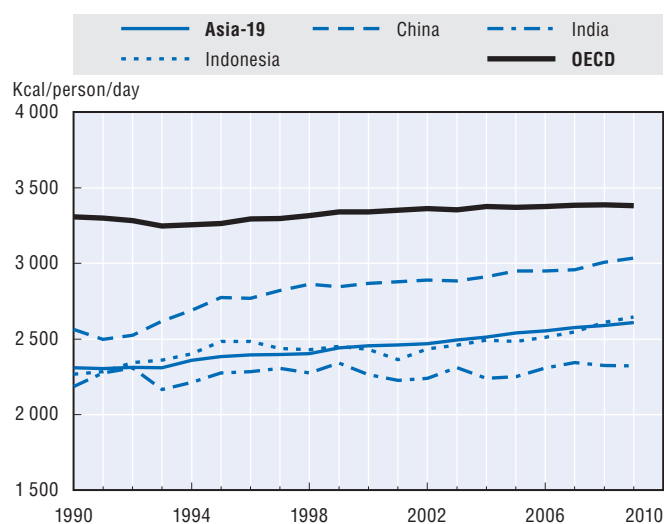
Source: FAOSTAT Database, <http://faostat.fao.org/>.

2.4.2. Prevalence of undernourishment in total population, 2006-08



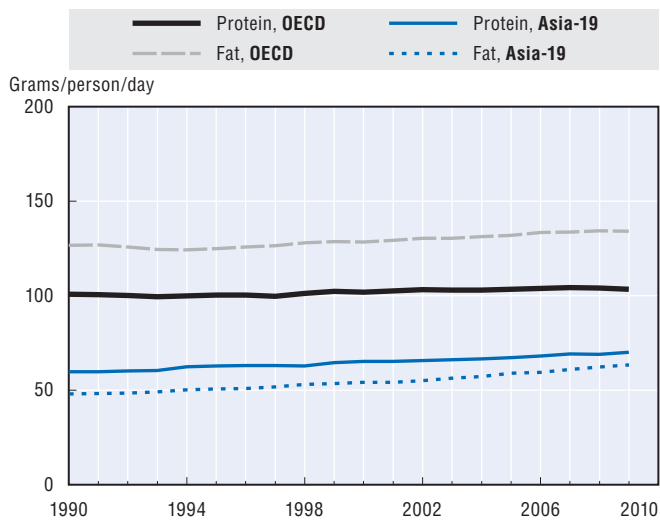
Source: FAOSTAT Database, <http://faostat.fao.org/>.

2.4.3. Dietary energy consumption, selected countries, 1990-2009



Source: FAOSTAT Database, <http://faostat.fao.org/g>.

2.4.4. Dietary protein and fat consumption, OECD and Asian countries, 1990-2009



Source: FAOSTAT Database, <http://faostat.fao.org/>.

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