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STUNTING PREVALENCE AMONG CHILDREN FROM ROMANIA AND NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES IN THE CONTEXT OF FOOD SECURITY

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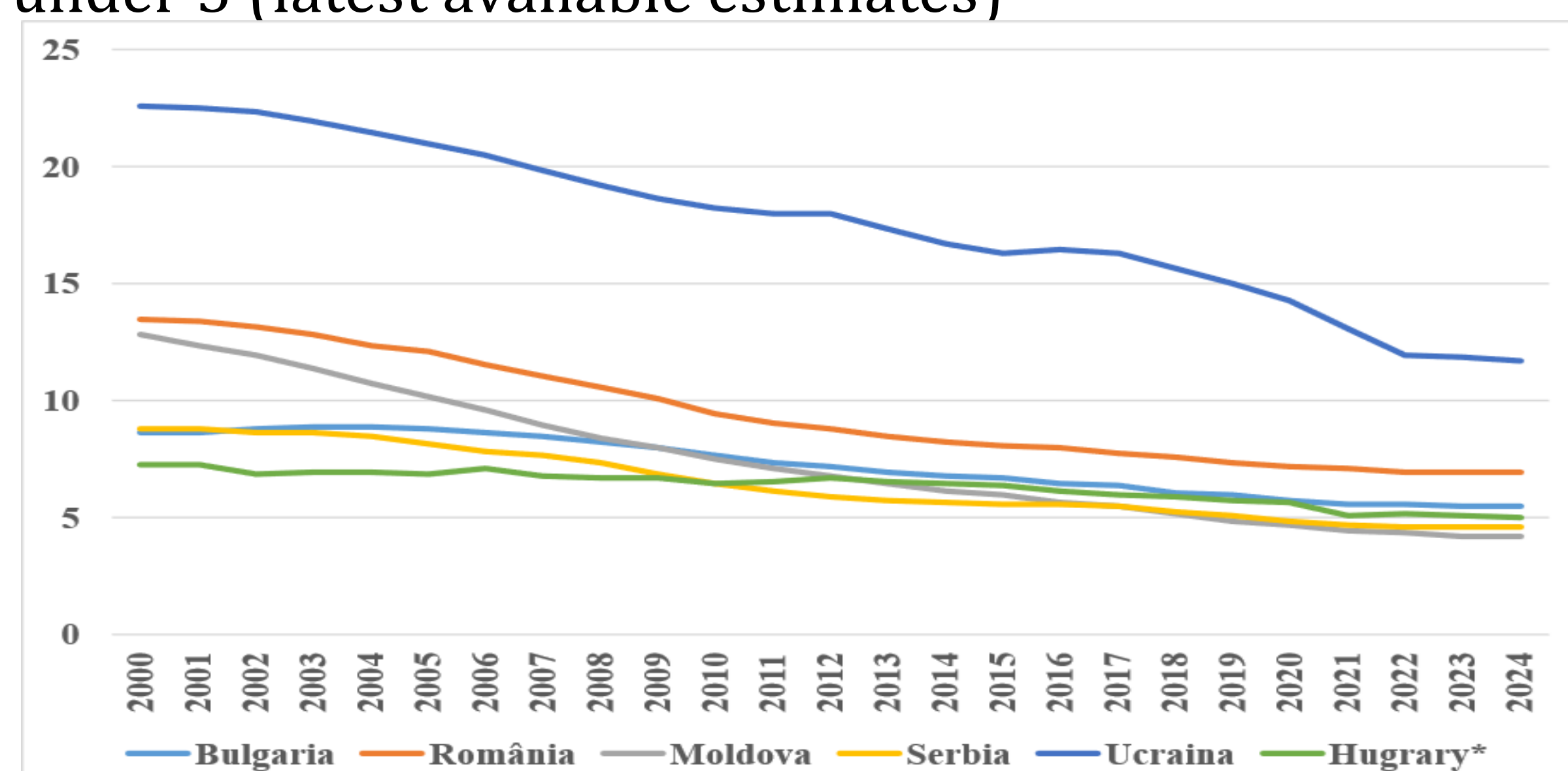
Abstract: *This study analyzes the prevalence of stunting among children in Romania and neighboring countries in the context of food security challenges. Stunting is a key indicator of nutritional status and socio-economic development, reflecting long-term effects of limited access to nutritious food and inadequate living conditions. The research compares recent data from Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine, Serbia, and Hungary, highlighting regional disparities and key drivers such as poverty, food insecurity, and parental education.*

• Introduction

Stunting – the impaired growth and development of children under five years due to chronic malnutrition in early life – remains a key indicator of food security and socio-economic inequality. In Romania and its neighbouring states (Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia, Ukraine and Moldova), children's nutritional status reflects both progress in food availability and persistent vulnerabilities in access, stability and utilisation of nutritious diets. In a recent comparative study, Romania was found to have a modelled estimate of 7.7 % of children under five years stunted, exceeding the regional average of 6.6 % for its neighbours. While Romania benefits from relatively high agricultural capacity and per-capita food energy supply, segments of the population still face severe food insecurity, which may help explain residual stunting among vulnerable groups.

• Material and method

This study adopts a mixed-method quantitative design, combining secondary national and regional survey data with modelled estimates to assess the prevalence of stunting (height-for-age < -2 SD) among children under five years, and relate this to dimensions of food security (availability, access, stability, utilisation). Prevalence data are drawn primarily from the World Health Organization (WHO) / United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) / World Bank Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates (JME) database, which defines stunting as the proportion of children under five whose height-for-age is more than two standard deviations below the WHO Child Growth Standards median. Table 1 – Stunting prevalence among children under 5 (latest available estimates)



• Results and discussions

Comparative stunting prevalence: Romania and neighbouring countries
(latest available estimates; years vary by country)

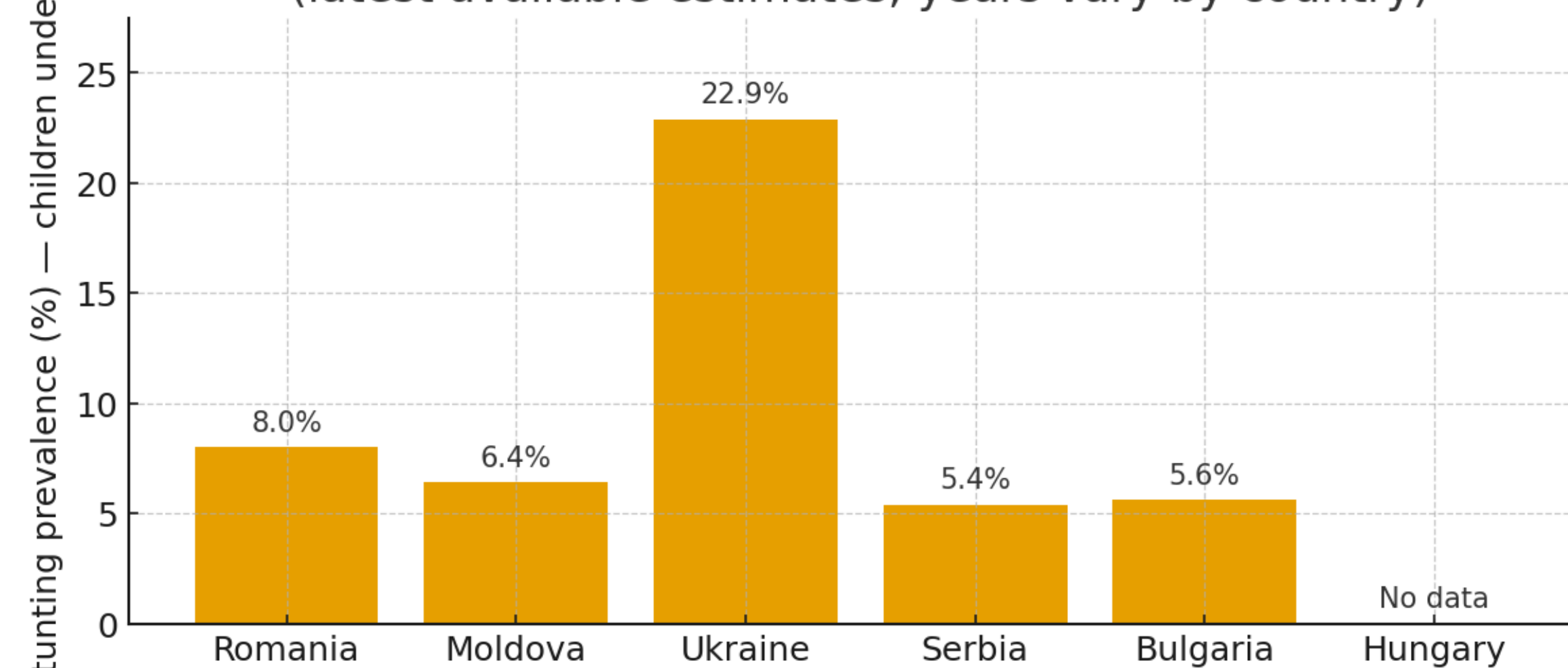


Figure 1 – Comparative stunting prevalence (children under 5)

The comparative patterns suggest that food security and socio-economic stability are key protective factors against chronic child undernutrition. Countries with stronger economic and food-security indicators exhibit lower stunting prevalence, whereas those facing structural vulnerabilities or conflict experience higher rates. Continuous monitoring, targeted nutrition programs, and strengthened social protection policies are necessary to sustain progress and address inequalities, particularly in vulnerable rural and low-income communities.

Conclusion

Overall, countries with stronger economic indicators and higher food-security scores demonstrate lower levels of chronic undernutrition. Sustained investment in social protection, equitable access to nutritious food, and early-childhood health interventions remain essential to further reduce stunting and prevent nutritional inequalities from widening across Eastern Europe. Strengthening regional cooperation on food systems and nutrition policy could further support resilience and improve outcomes for children throughout the region.

Figure 2. Evolution