

# Initiative for School Meals and Social Protection in the Middle East and North Africa

Presentation at the First Regular Session of WFP Executive Board

Tuesday, 21 February 2017

Rome



**A shared vision for enhanced nutrition, education, resilience and social protection through partnerships and coordinated policy response.**

*The Initiative for School Meals and Social Protection in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)* is a new partnership engagement bringing together and leveraging the complementary capacities of leading governments and national institutions, regional organizations, United Nations agencies and other international organizations, donors, and the private sector, to achieve greater impact and more sustainable outcomes. By supporting governments and institutions to enhance the coverage, quality and sustainability of national programmes, by linking such programmes to local economies, and by ensuring stronger strategic and programmatic coherence, the initiative contributes to accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and Zero Hunger.

The central vision is to contribute to transforming the lives of the next generation in the MENA region by ensuring that the most vulnerable girls and boys are reached with integrated and high-impact school meals programmes. The Initiative for School Meals and Social Protection promotes programmes that are responsive to local needs and contexts, which boost nutrition, education and social protection, recognizing their roles as drivers of development.

The initiative champions leveraging school meals programmes and services regionally as key social protection and social inclusion instruments and platforms in support of most deprived children and communities, both in crisis situations as well as in more stable but fragile contexts. School meals programmes and services can help strengthen community resilience and provide opportunities for more inclusive development pathways and social stability, leaving no one behind, in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda.

Several leading institutions involved in school health and nutrition, social protection, education, and food security have engaged in this initiative, providing an extraordinary opportunity to expand collaboration, synergies, and impact through complementary interventions on a regional scale. Key partners include FAO, ILO, the League of Arab States, the Partnership for Child Development, UNESCO, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, WFP, and the World Bank, as well as the private sector. Collaboration opportunities are being explored with other partners, including the Global Education Cluster, IFPRI, UNHCR, UNICEF, the Education Commission, and national and international non-governmental organizations.

## **Presenting the *MENA Regional Initiative for School Meals and Social Protection***

The initiative will be presented during a side event at the First Regular Session of the WFP Executive Board on Tuesday 21 February 2017, providing an opportunity to further build commitment around a shared vision and agenda for enhanced social protection and inclusive development in the region.

During this 90-minute event hosted by WFP at its Headquarters in Rome, the Ministries of Education and Social Affairs of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia, will share their national experiences, providing evidence of how integrated and converging approaches can multiply benefits for the most vulnerable, both in crisis situations as well as in relatively stable, yet vulnerable contexts.

**Attendees:** Distinguished representatives from the Governments of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia, the WFP Executive Board membership, WFP and senior representatives from partner United Nations agencies, World Bank and other partner institutions, as well as regional institutions (League of Arab States).

**Event objective:** To build commitments around the *Initiative for School Meals and Social Protection in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)* by:

- ✓ Illustrating national reform pathways, and sharing visions from states in the region;
- ✓ Discussing the collaboration under way and the future of the initiative, including ways to scale up programmes and enhance South-South cooperation;
- ✓ Exchanging views on the role that a committed international community can play to achieve optimal impact and lasting outcomes;
- ✓ Offering an advocacy opportunity with donors potentially interested in supporting the initiative.

### **Achieving more together**

The MENA region presents some of the most challenging development and humanitarian settings in the world. It is the only region where rates of malnutrition have been on the rise over the past decade, mainly due to the impact of ongoing conflicts and instability. Furthermore, an estimated 15 million children find themselves out of school today. This is due to poverty and social marginality, as well as to migration, displacement and disruption of infrastructure caused by conflict and affecting millions.

Against this backdrop, in June 2016, WFP hosted a consultation on the development of the *MENA Regional Initiative for School Meals and Social Protection*, as a coordinated response to the pressing needs for enhanced social protection and more effective interventions in support of children's nutrition and education in vulnerable situations in the MENA region.

Strengthened school meals programmes and services, embedded in national education and social protection systems, are a critical pathway to bring forward more inclusive social policies. Several governments are already leading the way in consolidating the link between school meal programmes, health and education, local production, and social protection. Through the MENA Regional Initiative, international partners, among these WFP, are aligning themselves strategically and programmatically to improve the effectiveness of their interventions and achieve together greater impacts.