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School meals policy update

Draft decision*

The Board approves the school meals policy update (WFP/EB.2/2024/4-B).

1. Introduction

1. National school meal programmes can help address some of the greatest development challenges facing the world in the 21st century. They enable children to secure the education that offers a passport out of poverty into a life of expanded opportunities and support governments to reform the wider food system. Increased access to school meals has the potential to accelerate human development, fostering more dynamic, sustainable and inclusive growth for countries.
2. Governments are stepping up support for this agenda, including through increased domestic contributions. The growth of the School Meals Coalition illustrates the unprecedented momentum and political will surrounding this powerful driver of development. WFP will support this government-led movement by providing global thought leadership, technical assistance, and operational support with partners. The organization will harness its 60 years of experience in supporting governments, during which time 50 countries¹ have transitioned to self-reliant programmes, making school meals one of WFP's most important tools for changing lives in a sustainable way.

* This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Board, please refer to the decisions and recommendations document issued at the end of the session.

¹ WFP internal analysis and data (unpublished).

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3. WFP's policy on school meals has evolved and matured over 20 years, making this one of its best documented and evidence-based programme areas (see figure 1). This policy update, which supersedes the 2013 policy,² aims to institutionalize WFP's global leadership role, introducing the School Meals Coalition as the driving force behind global efforts. It also seeks to sharpen WFP's approach to school meals based on the latest evidence and good practice and responds to the findings and recommendations of a strategic evaluation carried out by WFP in 2021.³
4. As this policy update is implemented, three strategic shifts are expected:
 - i) WFP will reinforce its ways of working and acting in partnership; sharpen its advocacy and convening capacities; and act as a catalyst of global, regional and country efforts.
 - ii) WFP will strengthen its work with governments, increasing the sustainability of its efforts through a better understanding of national priorities and challenges and a systemic and evidence-based approach to strengthening national systems and financing mechanisms.
 - iii) WFP will improve the way it delivers school meal programmes, ensuring better integration, coherence and quality of programme delivery, a stronger focus on the impact of diet and lifestyle on well-being and nutrition outcomes, increased capacity to act in humanitarian and fragile settings, and a stronger approach to food system transformation and climate action.

2. From crises to coalition: the evolution of a policy priority

5. In 2009, the World Bank and WFP published *Rethinking School Feeding*⁴ in response to governments' increased interest in school meals after the 2008 global financial crisis. This landmark report confirmed that school meal programmes were both powerful safety nets that supported people and communities during crises and a long-term investment in human capital, with positive implications for education and nutrition outcomes and for local economic development.
6. The findings of the report informed WFP's school feeding policy in 2009,⁵ which was updated in 2013⁶ following a policy evaluation.⁷ The 2030 Agenda, adopted in 2015, connected school meals to at least eight Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁸
7. In 2017, the World Bank's *Disease Control Priorities*⁹ introduced a paradigm shift: while confirming that the first 1,000 days of a child's life were critical, the report concluded that greater investment was also needed in the following 7,000 days, leading to calls for an "8,000 days approach" to child development. The report concluded that a health and

² WFP. 2013. *Revised School Feeding Policy: Promoting innovation to achieve national ownership*.

³ WFP. 2020. *Strategic Evaluation of the Contribution of School Feeding Activities to the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals*.

⁴ D.A.P. Bundy and others. 2009. *Rethinking School Feeding: Social Safety Nets, Child Development, and the Education Sector*.

⁵ "WFP School Feeding Policy" (WFP/EB.2/2009/4-A).

⁶ WFP. 2013. *Revised School Feeding Policy: Promoting innovation to achieve national ownership*.

⁷ WFP. 2011. *WFP's School Feeding Policy: A Policy Evaluation Vol. I Full Report*.

⁸ Related to SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).

⁹ D.A.P. Bundy and others. 2017. *Child and Adolescent Health and Development. Disease Control Priorities (third edition), Volume 8*.

nutrition package delivered through schools, including school meals, is essential in helping children and adolescents to achieve their full potential.

8. WFP's *State of School Feeding Worldwide* report estimated that national school meal programmes reached a record 388 million children in 2020.¹⁰ This achievement was the result of a decade of action by governments and development partners, including efforts led by the WFP Centre of Excellence against Hunger in Brazil,¹¹ momentum created by South-South and triangular cooperation and regional mobilization by the African Union and regional networks such as the Latin America Regional School Meals Network developed by the Government of Brazil in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the annual school meals forum of the Global Child Nutrition Foundation.
9. Just as WFP launched its ten-year school feeding strategy in early 2020, based on a growing body of evidence on school meals,¹² the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic called everything into question.
10. The closure of schools in 2020 exacerbated the pre-existing global learning crisis¹³ and deprived 1.6 billion children of access to education. It also deprived 370 million children of school meals,¹⁴ jeopardizing the learning, health and nutrition of future generations.
11. In 2021, supported by WFP, a group of countries came together to re-establish and scale up school meal programmes worldwide. Their efforts culminated in the launch of the School Meals Coalition during the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit.
12. The coalition has achieved notable gains. Co-chaired by France, Finland and Brazil, as of September 2024 it comprises 102 Member States and 124 development partners, working together to ensure that every child receives a healthy and nutritious daily meal in school by 2030. Functioning as an innovative "network of networks" and a highly effective vehicle for multilateral action,¹⁵ the coalition supports Member States in meeting their commitments and addressing design and implementation bottlenecks through partner-led initiatives.
13. Between 2020 and 2022, countries expanded their programmes to feed an additional 30 million children, providing meals for 418 million schoolchildren every day and surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Global annual investment in school meals increased by USD 5 billion to USD 48 billion over the same period.¹⁶ School meals are expanding in all the regions in which WFP operates, with 98 percent of their costs being covered by domestic budgets.¹⁷

¹⁰ WFP. 2020. *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020*.

¹¹ The WFP Centre of Excellence against Hunger in Brazil was established in 2011 in partnership with the Government of Brazil.

¹² WFP. 2020. *WFP School Feeding Strategy 2020–2030. A Chance for every Schoolchild: Partnering to scale up School Health and Nutrition for Human Capital*.

¹³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Children's Fund and WFP. 2023. *Ready to learn and thrive: School health and nutrition around the world*.

¹⁴ WFP. 2020. *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020*.

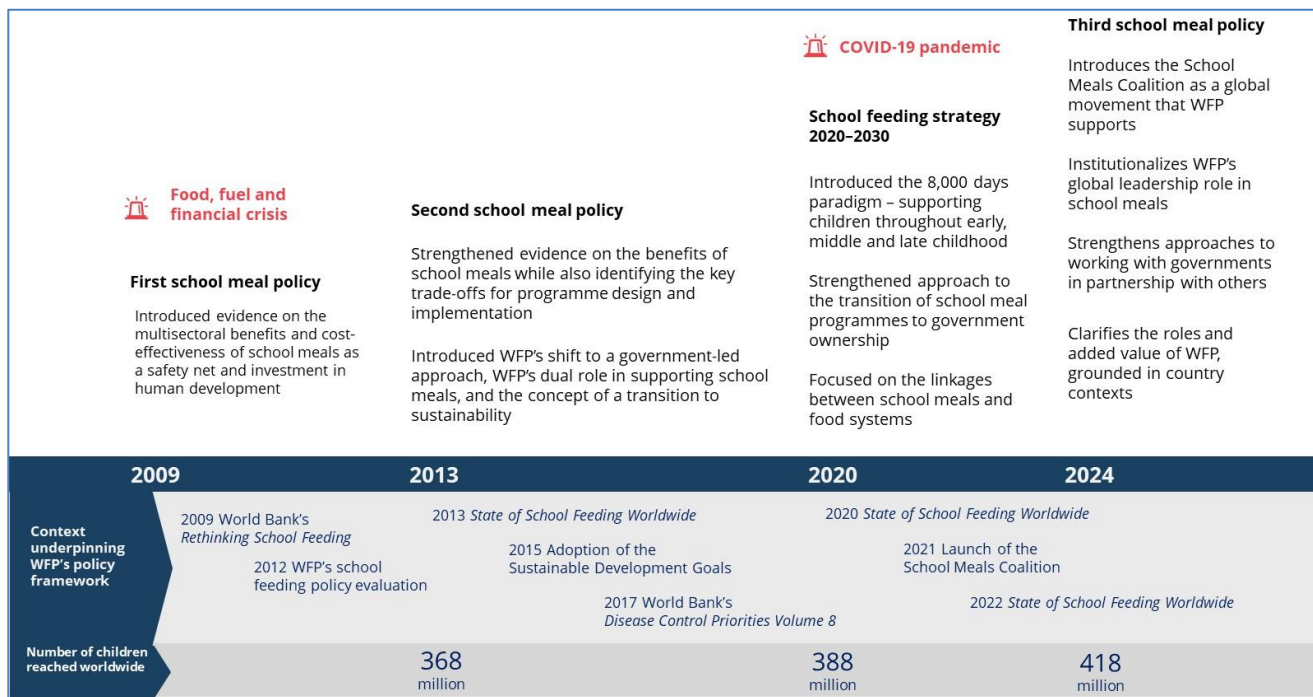
¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. 2023. *Review of the process leading to the formation of the School Meals Coalition (SMC)*.

¹⁶ WFP. 2022. *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

14. While progress has been extensive, it has also been uneven. Approximately 18 percent of schoolchildren in low-income countries receive school meals, compared with 39 percent in lower-middle-income countries and 48 percent in upper-middle-income countries.¹⁸ Coverage is often lowest where the need is the greatest. A more ambitious global effort is needed to expand the fiscal space of low-income countries, leverage innovative financing mechanisms and increase their capacity to design, implement and expand national school meal programmes.

Figure 1: Evolution of WFP’s school meals policy



3. WFP’s policy position: school meals as a multisectoral platform for sustainable development

15. Based on current evidence, WFP believes that school meal programmes are interventions that generate results in at least five interconnected sectors: health, nutrition and education, which can promote gender equality and increase returns on human capital development; and social protection and local agriculture, which can increase returns on community investment. School meals are also an effective instrument during and after shocks and emergencies.¹⁹
16. Other positive impacts – such as those related to post-conflict reconstruction, community building, social cohesion, contributions to peace²⁰ and the potential for advancing environmental protection and climate action²¹ – are still being quantified and are likely to significantly increase the overall rate of return. Below is WFP’s policy position by sector.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ WFP. 2022. *Peace, Conflict and School Feeding: Technical Briefing Note* (unpublished).

²¹ S. Pastorino and others. 2023. [School meals and food systems: Rethinking the consequences for climate, environment, biodiversity, and food sovereignty](#).

3.1 Social protection

17. At the global level, school meals are among the most widespread and significant social protection interventions, considered by the International Labour Organization as one of the strategies for providing income security for children.²² School meals can:
- increase the resilience of children and families facing poverty, food insecurity, social exclusion and provide nutrition, while protecting children's access to education and increasing the disposable income available to families;
 - ease the pressure on household budgets – school meals represent between 8 and 16 percent of the average income of the poorest households;²³ and
 - support gender equality by creating opportunities for women – globally, women provide more than three quarters of unpaid care work, which has implications for human capital development and economic growth potential.²⁴ When children are in school, women can pursue income-generating opportunities that contribute to long-term household income and food security.

3.2 Education and gender equality

18. Analysis indicates that the return on school meal programmes ranks alongside interventions such as early childhood development, better-qualified teachers and better teaching.²⁵ School meals can:
- increase school enrolment and attendance, especially among girls,²⁶ and boost children's ability to concentrate, participate and learn; and
 - support girls and children who are vulnerable to multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination²⁷ – they improve girls' level of education, reducing the risk of early and forced marriage and early pregnancy. A 2019 review found that school meal programming was one of the two interventions with the greatest impact on equity and inclusion in education, the other being conditional cash transfers.²⁸

²² International Labour Organization. 2012. [Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 \(No. 202\)](#), para. 5(b).

²³ Education Commission, School Meals Coalition and Sustainable Financing Initiative. 2022. [School Meals Programmes and the Education Crisis: A Financial Landscape Analysis](#).

²⁴ International Labour Organization. 2018. [Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work](#).

²⁵ N. Angrist and others. 2020. [How to Improve Education Outcomes Most Efficiently? A Comparison of 150 Interventions Using the New Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling Metric](#). Policy Research Working Paper 9450.

²⁶ A.U. Ahmed and C. del Ninno. 2002. [The Food for Education Program in Bangladesh: An Evaluation of Its Impact on Educational Attainment and Food Security](#). Discussion Paper no. 138. International Food Policy Research Institute.

²⁷ Education Commission, School Meals Coalition and Sustainable Financing Initiative. 2022. [School Meals Programmes and the Education Crisis: A Financial Landscape Analysis](#).

²⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2019. [Making evaluation work for the achievement of SDG 4 Target 5: Equality and inclusion in education](#).

3.3 Health and nutrition

19. The school health and nutrition package, of which school meals are a key pillar, can build on the substantial investments that governments already make in the first 1,000 days of a child's life by consolidating early gains and providing an opportunity for catch-up growth from early childhood into the next 7,000 days.²⁹ School meals can:
- support weight and height gain, as evidenced by a Cochrane systematic review that analysed three randomized control trials in Jamaica, Kenya and China;³⁰
 - improve the macro and micronutrient adequacy of a child's diet through safe, nutritious and diverse school menus that can reduce iron-deficiency anaemia in girls by as much as 20 percent;³¹ and
 - accelerate progress in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, if paired with complementary programming for both girls and boys on healthy diets and food habits, and on health and hygiene practices, including sexual and reproductive health.

3.4 Local agriculture and food systems

20. When school meals are sourced from local production, they can be a powerful engine for food system transformation. Since school meals account for 70 percent of publicly managed food systems, they offer a unique opportunity to leverage food procurement to enhance and shorten local value chains and influence the ways in which food is produced, processed, stored and consumed on a large scale.³² Effective food systems are also essential for the successful rollout of home-grown school meal programmes,³³ which source food locally from smallholder farmers. These approaches can:
- provide a stable market for smallholder farmers, which can strengthen local value chains, increase incomes and support local employment by creating jobs in the production, processing, distribution and preparation of food – school meals have directly created 4 million jobs in 85 countries,³⁴ with 32 percent of programmes reporting a focus on creating jobs for women and 20 percent a focus on youth employment;³⁵
 - make children agents of change by fostering healthier dietary preferences through nutritious and diverse menus, physical activity, clean cooking solutions and energy efficiency, minimal food and packaging waste, gender equality throughout the food chain value, and holistic education on food; and

²⁹ D.A.P. Bundy and others. 2018. *Re-Imagining School Feeding: A High-Return Investment in Human Capital and Local Economies*.

³⁰ B. Kristjansson and others. 2007. *School feeding for improving the physical and psychosocial health of disadvantaged students (Review)*. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, article number CD004676.

³¹ S. Adelman and others. 2019. *School Feeding Reduces Anaemia Prevalence in Adolescent Girls and Other Vulnerable Household Members in a Cluster Randomized Controlled Trial in Uganda*. *Journal of Nutrition*, 149(4): 659–666.

³² S. Pastorino and others. 2023. *School meals and food systems: Rethinking the consequences for climate, environment, biodiversity, and food sovereignty*.

³³ For this policy, WFP follows the definition provided in the home-grown school feeding framework published by FAO and WFP in 2018: "HGSF constitutes a school feeding model that is designed to provide children in schools with safe, diverse and nutritious food, sourced locally from smallholders". However, WFP acknowledges that the interpretation of this definition may vary depending on local context. At the country level, WFP aligns itself with the definition used by the national government.

³⁴ WFP. 2022. *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022*.

³⁵ Global Child Nutrition Foundation. 2022. *School Meal Programs Around the World: Results from the 2021 Global Survey of School Meal Programs*.

- offer an opportunity to focus on young people, women and Indigenous People who otherwise face barriers to economic empowerment. The food security of schoolchildren and their communities is enhanced by access to safe, diverse and nutritious food – including traditional and Indigenous foods sourced locally and produced using regenerative agricultural practices through efficient value chains that are resilient to climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourage equitable farming practices for men, women and young people.

3.5 Responding to shocks and emergencies

21. In times of shock and crisis, when food insecurity tends to be higher, governments and other actors including WFP can use school meal programmes to respond, while integrating them into broader national social safety net programmes.³⁶ School meals can:

- be used to meet basic food needs, reduce short-term hunger, support continuity of education, provide an income transfer to parents and caregivers and act as an important incentive for sending children – especially girls – to school, while helping to strengthen the humanitarian–development–peace nexus; and
- support the reopening of schools in the aftermath of conflict. When accompanied by measures to mitigate the protection and conflict sensitivity risks associated with the reopening of schools in post-conflict settings – such as family separation, early, child and forced marriage, child labour and gender-based or sexual exploitation and abuse – school meals can provide children with a sense of normality and create more conducive conditions for learning, thereby improving educational outcomes.³⁷ Although partnering with governments to deliver school meals in conflict settings brings particular risks, these are mitigated by ensuring strict adherence to humanitarian principles in the implementation of school feeding, for instance in the selection and coverage of schools. It may also include deliberate efforts to reach out-of-school children when implementing emergency school meal programmes.

3.6 Quantifying and recognizing these multiple returns

22. The numerous and potentially multiplying benefits of school meals make them a particularly worthwhile investment, with an estimated economic return of between USD 7 and USD 35 for every dollar invested.³⁸ The multisectoral aspect of school meal programmes means that investments need to be examined on the basis of their aggregate benefits (considering the returns on nutrition *and* learning *and* social protection simultaneously, for example) rather than on their short-term cost-effectiveness in any one sector alone. Unfortunately, this holistic, systemic view is not yet the norm, which leads to sectoral approaches that affect the design, implementation and funding of these programmes. WFP is well placed to help bridge this gap and will keep working with governments and donors to operationalize multisectoral approaches. Through academic partnerships, WFP will help to refine ways of quantifying the cumulative returns.

³⁶ D.A.P. Bundy and others. 2018. *Re-Imagining School Feeding: A High-Return Investment in Human Capital and Local Economies*.

³⁷ WFP. 2022. *Peace, Conflict and School Feeding: Technical Briefing Note* (unpublished).

³⁸ S. Verguet and others. 2020. *The Broader Economic Value of School Feeding Programs in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Estimating the Multi-Sectoral Returns to Public Health, Human Capital, Social Protection, and the Local Economy in Frontiers in Public Health*.

4. Towards a more sustainable future: WFP's ambition and enhanced role

4.1 WFP's vision and ambition

23. WFP aligns itself with the vision of the Member States that have joined the School Meals Coalition: ensuring that all children have access to healthy and nutritious meals in school. WFP believes that the universal scale-up of school meals that promote healthy and sustainable diets can contribute to inclusive and resilient food systems that are aligned with human well-being, support the local economy and respect planetary boundaries.
24. WFP will continue to shift to nationally owned and sustainable programmes that are home-grown and integrated into a broader package of health and nutrition services. Specifically, WFP will work with governments and partners to support an estimated 100 million children living in extreme poverty and hunger in obtaining access to safe, diverse and nutritious meals at school.³⁹
25. WFP will work to ensure that schools catering to children vulnerable to food insecurity and other intersecting dimensions of poverty and exclusion are prioritized in WFP-managed programmes. In the event of resource constraints, vulnerability assessment tools will be used to identify schools with the support of the community. WFP will provide technical assistance to governments on navigating the trade-offs among different approaches to school meal programming, including in relation to targeting and eligibility that ensure equitable access to school meals for girls, boys, children with disabilities, children from Indigenous communities and other children facing disadvantages, inequality and barriers in education.
26. WFP's support for school meal programming contributes to strategic outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the WFP strategic plan for 2022–2025.⁴⁰ WFP's approach is aligned with current strategies and policies.⁴¹

4.2 WFP's policy objectives

27. The following four corporate objectives will be attained through investments and action at the global, regional and country levels.
28. At the country level, in some cases WFP's pathway to achieving the objectives will be through policy engagement and technical support only. In other cases, WFP will be more involved in school meal operations, purchasing and delivering food and reaching children directly. This is because, while promoting national ownership is the overarching goal of WFP assistance, some countries will want support to get there.
29. WFP will continue to focus on primary school-aged children as the main target group for its operations. However, in certain cases (for example, where governments ask for support with a specific age group), with the right partners, WFP will support pre-primary and secondary schoolchildren – including by addressing the barriers faced by adolescent girls and boys in obtaining access to education – and children who are out of school or in schools that operate without government oversight (for example, community-based education).

³⁹ D.A.P. Bundy. and others. *Re-estimating global school feeding program targets: How has the size of the global population of vulnerable school-age children changed post-COVID pandemic* (pending publication).

⁴⁰ WFP. 2022. [WFP strategic plan \(2022–2025\)](#).

⁴¹ The forthcoming nutrition strategy to improve diets and address malnutrition for 2024–2030, as well as the gender policy (2022), the disability and inclusion road map (2020), the climate change policy (2017), the local and regional food procurement policy (2023), the cash policy (2023), the social protection and safety nets policy (2022), the country capacity strengthening policy (2022), the South–South and triangular cooperation policy (2023), the protection and accountability policy (2020) and WFP's role in peacebuilding in transition settings (2014).

Objective 1: Support governments in expanding the scale and quality of nationally owned school meal programmes as platforms for human capital development and inclusion

30. WFP will continue its shift from being an implementer of programmes to becoming an enabler of country efforts, with a growing part of its portfolio dedicated to supporting governments in scaling up inclusive, nationally owned school meal programmes that meet national development goals.
31. By supporting governments in designing school meal programmes that are often considered part of social protection, WFP can help to promote outcomes that protect children and families and help to combat poverty, food insecurity, social exclusion and other forms of discrimination. School meals can be linked to other social assistance programmes, such as scholarships, unconditional transfers and public works, which help to expand their impact.⁴²
32. To enhance children's ability to learn and increase their chances of thriving, WFP will work across sectors with partners – including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) – to support a comprehensive school health and nutrition package, advocating for its inclusion in sectoral plans.
33. WFP will continue to promote equitable access to diverse and nutritious meals for girls and boys by identifying their specific needs and barriers to education. WFP will consider the intersectional dimensions of poverty and exclusion – sex, gender, disability, indigeneity, ethnicity, migration and displacement – by assessing and addressing protection risks such as early, child and forced marriage, gender-based violence, early pregnancy, sexual exploitation and abuse, child labour and recruitment into armed groups.

Objective 2: Enhance children's nutrition, health and well-being

34. By focusing on the food supply, the food environment and consumer behaviour, school meals are a platform for promoting healthier diets and addressing issues related to food access, affordability and diversity.⁴³
35. WFP-supported tools, such as the Fill the Nutrient Gap analysis and tools developed with FAO,⁴⁴ will be used to help governments to identify the barriers to healthier diets and the interventions that will increase access to nutritious and diverse foods.
36. WFP will work with partners, such as by building on established collaboration with FAO on nutrition guidelines and standards for school meals to support the rollout of low-cost solutions that enhance the nutritional value of school meals, with a focus on food fortification⁴⁵ and the introduction of practical tools to measure the nutritional quality of school meals. WFP will also measure the impact that these programmes have on improving equitable access to and control over safe, diverse and nutritious foods by individuals in communities, especially those who face intersecting forms of discrimination.

Objective 3: Support food system transformation and climate action

37. WFP will work with partners to support the design of home-grown school meal programmes and policies that help transform local food systems. By leveraging local procurement in combination with supply-side interventions, WFP will promote the development of shorter,

⁴² "Update of WFP's Safety Nets Policy: The Role of Food Assistance in Social Protection" (WFP/EB.A/2012/5-A).

⁴³ WFP. *Nutrition strategy* (forthcoming).

⁴⁴ For more information, see [School nutrition standards for safeguarding children's right to food](#) (FAO).

⁴⁵ While improving diets is the ideal solution for addressing micronutrient gaps, fortification and micronutrient supplements are widely recognized as effective and affordable alternatives where diet improvements are not feasible.

more sustainable and inclusive value chains that supply diverse, safe, culturally appropriate and nutritious food to schools throughout the year. WFP will promote the design of planet-friendly⁴⁶ school meal programmes that promote home-grown approaches, adopt sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices, promote biodiversity, contribute to climate change mitigation and make use of energy sustainably in schools and throughout the value chain.

38. The Rome-based agencies have a special role in this area. By working together, FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and WFP can support home-grown approaches and promote food system transformation through increased coordination across value chain actors and the provision of technical assistance to smallholder farmers and other local actors, particularly women, young people and Indigenous People. Capacity strengthening activities will focus on innovative productive practices, inputs, post-harvest management techniques, financial inclusion, enhancing access to markets and access to credits, insurance and information.
39. Recognizing the integral role that women play in the food value chain and, in particular, in food production and preparation, primarily as unpaid family labour, WFP can work to dismantle gender-based stereotypes affecting food-related livelihoods and responsibilities in schools, households and communities, including by formally recognizing, fairly compensating and equitably distributing work in school meal programmes. To ensure local ownership and sustainability, WFP will support and empower local communities to actively engage in all phases of the design and implementation of school meal programmes.
40. With partners, WFP will promote sustainable infrastructure and access to energy in schools, including for clean cooking, food preservation and irrigation for school gardens. Services will be adapted to the needs of local communities. Efficient cooking solutions and the use of renewable energy not only reduce fuel costs but also contribute to climate change mitigation and present opportunities to generate additional funding through carbon revenues.

Objective 4: Support responses to shocks and emergencies

41. Considering the increase in the scale, duration and intensity of shocks and emergencies, WFP will continue to use its well-established operational capacities to help governments use school meal programmes as a tool to prepare for and respond to stressors. Lessons from WFP's successful experiences in countries like Haiti, the Niger and Somalia will inform future approaches. WFP will ensure that activities are based on local contexts and incorporate gender, protection and conflict analyses. The organization will also strengthen partnerships with education and child protection actors, such as UNICEF and UNFPA, on the design and implementation of risk prevention and mitigation measures.
42. When working in fragile or conflict-affected settings, WFP will deploy a conflict-sensitive approach to school meals, going beyond the "do no harm" principle and capitalizing on opportunities to mitigate protection risks, such as gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, displacement and separation from families, exploitation, abuse, recruitment into armed forces and groups, and trafficking, while contributing to peace and social cohesion.
43. Through school meals, WFP will contribute to the operationalization of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus by working with partners to implement an integrated and inclusive package of support. This includes considering approaches that

⁴⁶ Planet-friendly school meals is a new evolving concept currently defined as: "*Programmes delivering equitable and healthy foods for children, produced in ways that do not pollute or overexploit natural resources and protect biodiversity*" (S. Pastorino. Planet-friendly school meals: an opportunity to improve children's health and leverage food systems transformation in *The Lancet Planetary Health*, pending publication).

ensure that priority is given to children facing intersecting forms of discrimination, including children with disabilities and those whose education has been disrupted, such as crisis-affected children, migrants and refugee children.

4.3 WFP's strategic partnership approach to the school meals agenda

44. This policy renews WFP's commitment to providing global leadership on the school meals agenda, drawing on 60 years of experience supporting more than 100 governments and building on the recent momentum in this field. WFP is the point of reference for school meals globally, regionally, nationally and sub-nationally, where it is – in most cases – the trusted source of information and expertise for governments and partners.
45. While WFP will continue to champion this agenda, it will not and cannot do everything on its own. Governments and communities require a range of partners – including civil society, private sector, United Nations entities and academic institutions – that can provide multisectoral and integrated support in various technical areas. WFP will actively work to engage others in school meals, drawing on the strengths and expertise of partners, identifying gaps, convening different actors and calling for collective solutions and multisectoral planning processes to address the challenges identified.
46. In a resource-constrained environment, WFP will prioritize actions according to the framework outlined in the following section, which introduces three strategic roles. Following a corporate approach, WFP will leverage capacity and assets at the global, regional and country levels according to the setting, taking into account its comparative advantages and the availability and capacity of partners. WFP will invest in strengthening the strategic capabilities of its workforce and will continue to utilize partnerships with all stakeholders in the coalition to address the needs of national programmes. WFP will continue to collaborate with governments and partners to enhance country-to-country dialogues, including through South–South and triangular cooperation. This involves sharing best practices and experiences at the global, regional, and local levels. WFP will strive to achieve coordinated and efficient regional cooperation by harnessing the power of regional networks.

Strategic role 1: Hosting the School Meals Coalition and nurturing a global movement of support

47. WFP will continue to support the growth of the School Meals Coalition. Under the guidance of the coalition co-chairs and member countries, WFP will continue to host the Secretariat of the School Meals Coalition primarily through a dedicated team in headquarters, with support from regional and country offices. The Secretariat is responsible for the overall coordination and management of the coalition, ensuring that it is accessible for countries at all income levels and that its membership and initiatives are informed, connected and equipped to make progress on agreed goals. The Secretariat will act as the primary vehicle providing school meal-specific support to countries joining the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty and will continue to ensure coordination with other initiatives such as the Coalition of Action on Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems for Children and All, and the Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems Coalition. The coalition will benefit from WFP's political commitment at the highest levels, its global infrastructure and its role as a recognized, credible and agile facilitator of the work of partners.
 - Success in this role means:
 - an increased number of countries at all income levels committing to the school meals agenda, increased collaboration among them and an enabling environment that supports greater fiscal space, including through innovative sources of funding;

- an increased number of partners supporting governments with better technical assistance and policy support, following a multisectoral approach; and
 - strengthened regional partners that lead in setting policies and priorities, including the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Southern African Development Community, the African Union Development Agency, the Eastern African Community and others.
- This entails the following major strategic shifts and learning:
- *Connecting across silos and positioning school meals as a multisectoral platform*: it takes collaboration among several sectors to make school meal programmes work and the school meals agenda does not belong to a single sector. This is a strength because it encourages sectors to work together towards mutually beneficial outcomes, but it is also a challenge due to the inherent difficulties of multisectoral coordination. WFP will support multisector action through a large network of governments and partners, demonstrating that joint progress is possible.
 - *Supporting partners, including by channelling resources to them, so that they can lead in critical areas*: where WFP does not have expertise, or in countries where it is not present, it will work to enable others to provide support. This includes supporting the four coalition initiatives that focus on research, financing, data and localization with funding, technical support and coordination.⁴⁷ The expertise and technical assistance of these initiatives – which are themselves networks of partners – are pooled and made available to governments at all income levels, thereby increasing the breadth of support for countries that are committed to implementing school meal programmes.

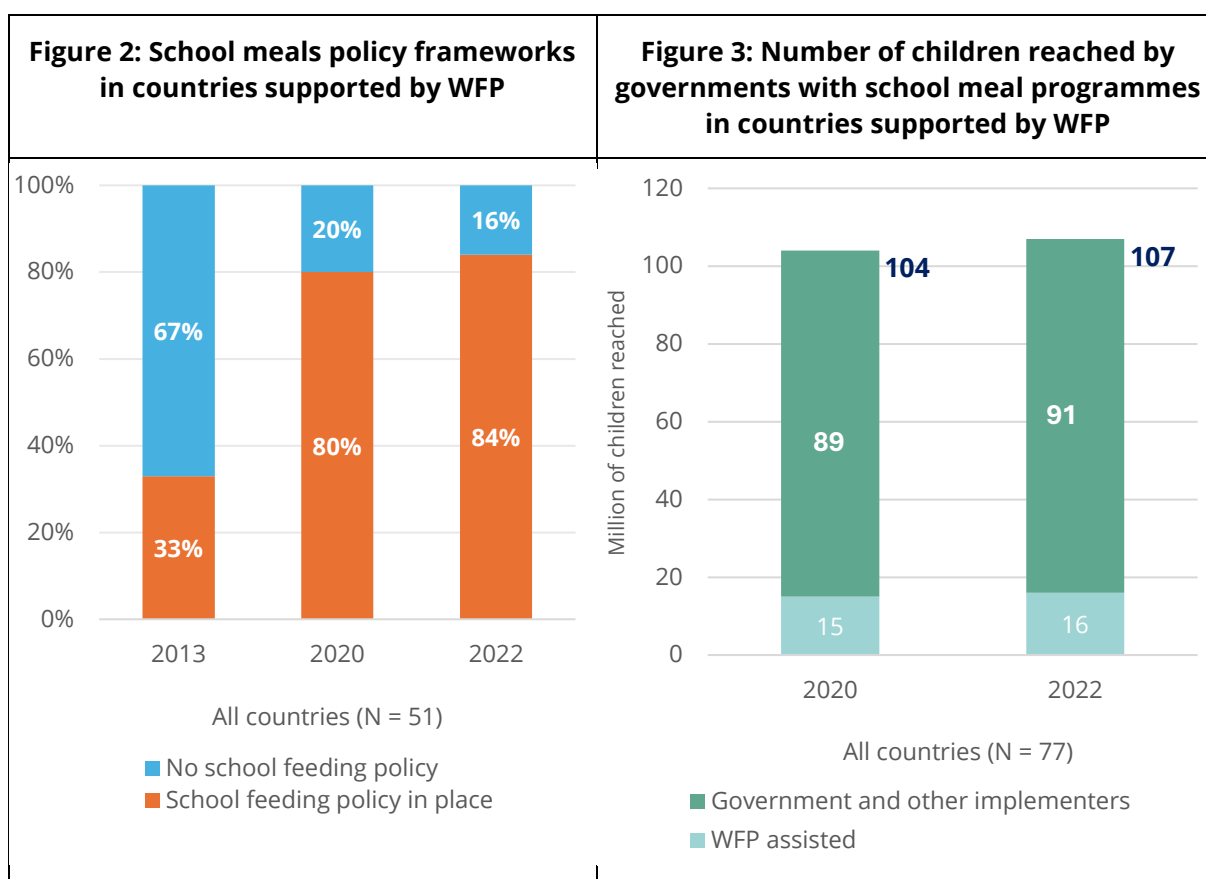
Strategic role 2: Providing technical assistance and policy support to governments so they can run sustainable, nationally owned programmes

48. In stable low- and lower-middle-income countries, WFP will shift to an enabling role responding to increasing government demand for nationally owned and operated school meal programmes. In these countries, WFP will engage with national and subnational governments to develop time-bound national targets and sustainable transition strategies, leading to a gradual decrease in WFP operational caseloads and an increase in government-supported caseloads.
49. WFP's efforts to position school meals globally, including through the School Meals Coalition, have mobilized political will, which in turn has led to an increase in domestic resource allocations for school meals in all continents and to more countries having national school meal policies (see figure 2). WFP will work with partners, harness its extensive country network and leverage assets such as the WFP Centre of Excellence against Hunger in Brazil to provide technical assistance. WFP's technical and policy support has already improved the quality of life of 107 million schoolchildren in 77 countries (see figure 3).⁴⁸
- Success in this role means:
- decreased direct WFP assistance for children in stable low- and lower-middle-income countries, leading to lower WFP caseloads;

⁴⁷ The four initiatives are the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, the Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition, the Data and Monitoring Initiative, and the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative.

⁴⁸ WFP. 2022. *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022*.

- increased numbers of children reached by nationally owned, funded and operated programmes, and increased domestic funding for those programmes; and
 - increased resources and numbers of partners providing high-quality and integrated technical assistance to governments.
- This entails the following major strategic shifts and learning:
- *Improving WFP's capacities for systems strengthening and upstream policy work:* WFP will work with partners to strengthen its engagement in sectoral planning, leveraging its increased investments in research and academic partnerships to provide evidenced-based advice on impact, efficiency and effectiveness and contribute to policy planning.⁴⁹
 - *Supporting countries in expanding the fiscal space and innovative sources of funding:* WFP will enable partners to support countries in developing long-term, sustainable financing plans and tools for costing, accounting and budgeting that improve cost-effectiveness and sustainability, including supply chain optimization. It will help countries explore options for mobilizing domestic and external finance and support mechanisms such as debt swaps, blended financing and co-financing to fill funding gaps.



Source: WFP. 2022. *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022*.

⁴⁹ "Synthesis of evidence and lessons on country capacity strengthening from decentralized evaluations" (WFP/EB.A/2021/7-C); WFP. 2020. *Strategic Evaluation of the Contribution of School Feeding Activities to the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals*.

Strategic role 3: Providing direct operational support in low-capacity settings or countries affected by shocks and crises

50. In countries that require operational support, including those affected by or vulnerable to fragility, low capacity, conflict, climate extremes or other shocks, WFP will implement high-quality school meal programmes in accordance with humanitarian principles and based on context-specific needs assessments and response analysis. WFP will aim to increase the coverage and quality of cost-effective programmes in these settings to reach as many children facing intersecting forms of discrimination as possible, while laying the foundations for transition to national ownership. WFP will ensure that relevant safeguarding measures are put in place to fulfil its obligations as a humanitarian actor and to make sure that staff, operations and programmes do not expose children, especially girls, to risks of harm, gender-based violence or sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Success in this role means:
 - an increased number of children reached by WFP in these settings; and
 - increased quality, efficiency and integration of WFP programmes.
 - This entails the following major strategic shift and learning:
 - *Working at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus and progressively increasing national capacities to support the transition of school meal operations to national ownership:* while responding to shocks, WFP can scale up innovative approaches that promote recovery and lay the groundwork for future nationally owned, shock-responsive school meal programmes. WFP can introduce innovative climate action that enables countries that are susceptible to climate disasters to mitigate climate-related risks and adapt to the effects of extreme weather. Depending on the situation, WFP can work with partners to provide an integrated and multisectoral package of interventions. Home-grown school meal approaches that contribute to emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction can be piloted and expanded to act as an incentive for local smallholder farmers, particularly women and young people, to re-engage in farming aftershocks and thus contribute to faster recovery. Based on recent evaluations, WFP recognizes that emergency settings may require a special approach, which can affect programme objectives and design (see box).

Box: School meals in emergency settings – lessons from evaluations

Recent evaluations highlight that emergency settings require a special approach to ensure that school meal programmes can produce their intended results. The following points will guide WFP's policy and programming in emergency settings:

- Damaged infrastructure and limited access to water may mean that food choices are restricted to snacks or pre-packaged food as opposed to fresh meals. It can also influence who is able to resume schooling and when, as girls may be absent from school because of unpaid care roles or early, child and forced marriage, and boys because of labour or forced recruitment into armed groups. WFP will assess the trade-offs between the quality, quantity and nutritional benefits of meals, the value of income transfers and the type of assistance that is economically and logistically feasible.
- Compromised food production capacities and a lack of functioning markets can make it difficult to source food locally. WFP will decide the delivery model depending on feasibility, choice of modalities, targeting, investment requirements and the potential disruption of food provision.

- While school meal programmes can offer children a safe environment (which can reduce the risk of child labour, sexual exploitation and abuse, recruitment into armed groups and forced marriage), these protection benefits need to be weighed against other risks. For instance, when children travel long distances to reach schools, they face risks of insecurity and violence, which may discourage parents from sending them to school. In addition, keeping food stocks in schools may increase the risk of schools becoming targets, exposing both students and school staff to risk. WFP will conduct robust protection, conflict and gender analyses.
- Tensions within forcibly displaced populations, and with host communities, will be analysed to ensure that school meal programmes are designed with social cohesion in mind.

Sources: WFP. 2022. *School Feeding in Emergencies: a synthesis evaluation*; WFP. n.d. *The impact of school feeding in emergencies on nutrition, education, child protection, and social cohesion and peacebuilding: A global literature review. For the Evaluation Series on Emergency School Feeding in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Niger and Syria (2015–2019)* (not publicly available); WFP. 2021. *Strategic evaluation of the Contribution of School Feeding Activities to the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals*; WFP. 2022. *Peace, Conflict and School Feeding: Technical Briefing Note* (unpublished); WFP. 2020. *The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on school feeding around the world. A Special Report from the State of School Feeding Worldwide*.

5. Implementing the policy: institutional arrangements

51. The 2021 strategic evaluation of WFP's school feeding activities confirmed that the school feeding strategy, which will be updated as needed to guide the implementation of this policy, was widely consulted (internally and externally), robust and action oriented. Regional implementation strategies are in place and will be also revised as needed to support the rollout of this policy update.

5.1 Innovative partnership approaches

52. Building on the success of the School Meals Coalition, WFP will set up and maintain strategic relationships with stakeholders that add value in different sectors and that support governments enhancing school health and nutrition, including but not limited to FAO, IFAD, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA, and WHO; international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, the African Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank; sectoral partners such as Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership for Education; the private sector and philanthropies such as Dubai Cares, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Novo Nordisk Foundation; and academic institutions, civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations such as World Vision, Save the Children and the Global Child Nutrition Foundation.
53. Adopting a demand-led approach, WFP will work with partners on a new technical assistance platform to provide governments with support for designing and implementing stronger policies and legal frameworks; strengthening multilevel and cross-sectoral coordination; designing, implementing and monitoring evidence-based, home-grown and planet-friendly programmes that empower and support girls and boys and are equitable, inclusive, culturally adapted and sustainable; ensuring an integrated school health and nutrition package of support; and anticipating and adapting to shocks while providing timely and effective response during and in the aftermath of shocks. WFP will also continue to support country-to-country sharing of expertise and South–South and triangular cooperation.

5.2 Data, digital innovation, research and thought leadership

54. WFP's flagship *State of School Feeding Worldwide* report provides quantitative and qualitative information and monitoring of progress of the School Meals Coalition. WFP will continue to issue the report every two years. WFP will also host the coalition's data and monitoring initiative, which includes the global school meals database containing indicators for tracking progress, including the new SDG 4 indicator on coverage of school meals. WFP will partner with the coalition and other organizations to develop innovative solutions and expand the

knowledge and monitoring of interventions addressing the needs of children in a holistic way.

55. WFP will collaborate with the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition to promote independent, rigorous research on the effectiveness of school meals in order to improve multi-sectoral outcomes and will participate in the communities of practice of the consortium. This work is expected to contribute to an expanded evidence base on the benefits of school meals for cognitive development and education, schoolchildren's health and nutrition status, social protection, and local agriculture and food systems. The evidence generated and good practices documented will help inform policy decisions and support knowledge sharing between and among governments and institutions.
56. In line with the 2013 policy and in collaboration with the World Bank, a newly revised assessment tool, "Healthy SABER", will continue to be a mandatory requirement for all WFP school meal programmes that focus on technical assistance and the handover of activities to governments. The results of the "Healthy SABER" will inform transition strategies and government technical assistance plans. In fragile or crisis settings, the use of "Healthy SABER" will depend on the presence of a recognized government partner with whom to jointly conduct the assessment. WFP will ensure transition strategies are planned and include learning from evaluations and previous experiences to ensure that school meal programmes are sustainably transferred to national ownership.
57. In alignment with the global assurance project and WFP's commitment to innovation,⁵⁰ WFP will improve the way that it tracks attendance and monitors the meals served, with data disaggregated by sex, age and disability, while managing the stock held in schools for various assistance modalities. WFP will also continue to roll out School Connect, a tool that tracks programme data, allows for the near real-time availability of data from operations for better and quicker decision making, and enhances countries' oversight capabilities. It will support the rollout of the School Menu Planner PLUS,⁵¹ a digital solution created to help governments design and manage nutritious, locally sourced and cost-efficient school menus by automatically correlating price, nutrition values and national nutrition standards based on locally available commodities. This includes promoting local production and the procurement of fresh produce for school meals.

5.3 Theory of change, monitoring and evaluation

58. The theory of change for this revised policy is provided in the annex. While the 2013 policy recognized results for children and institutions, this policy includes five actors: children, families, communities, actors in the school feeding value chain, and governments.
59. To track and measure the results of school meals for school-aged children and the broader ecosystem, WFP is committed to quality monitoring of its programmes and to supporting the strengthening of government systems. WFP will adhere to the corporate results framework for 2022–2025, disaggregating data by sex, age and disability, and ensure that the minimum monitoring requirements are met at all times. WFP will also support the development of government monitoring systems through tools for national programmes.

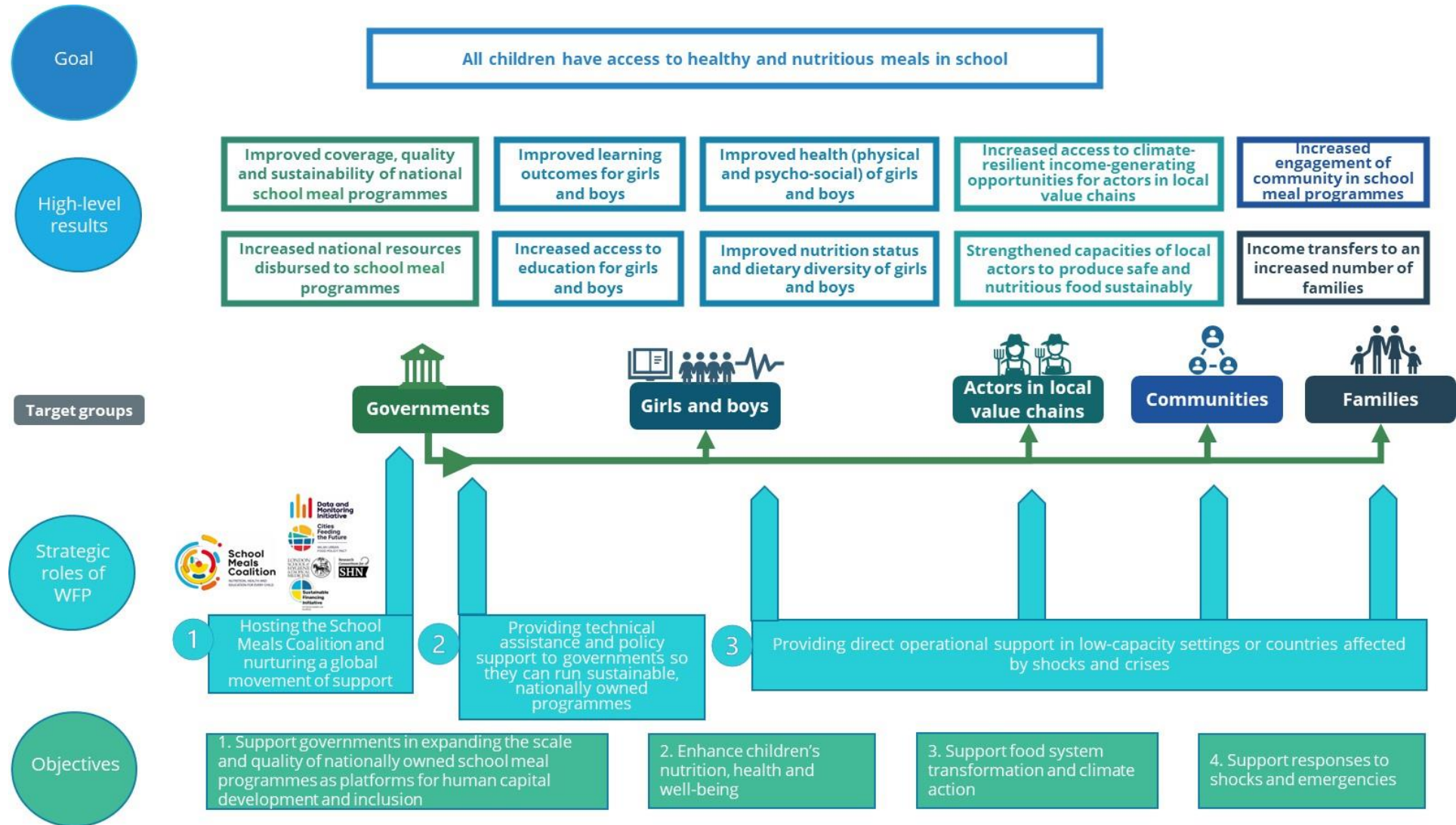
⁵⁰ WFP. 2024. [Update on the Global Assurance Project](#).

⁵¹ See WFP webpage on [School Menu Planner Plus](#).

60. For each strategic outcome, the corporate results framework establishes both mandatory and optional indicators, which serve as benchmarks for monitoring the effectiveness and impact of school meal activities. WFP will encourage the use of qualitative and quantitative assessment tools to track the link between school meals and attendance rates, particularly for girls.
61. Beyond monitoring, the impact evaluation unit of the Office of Evaluation gathers data on the impact of school meals. An impact evaluation window on school-based programmes was opened in 2021 and allows country offices to receive support for conducting rigorous, randomized control trials to determine the impact of school meal programmes on students – with data disaggregated by sex and age – families and value chain actors, including women and young people.
62. An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the policy will be commissioned within four to six years of its approval. The evaluation results will inform further implementation of, and possible updates to, the school meals policy.

ANNEX

Theory of change



Acronyms

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization