



Executive Director's Circular (Resource Management Department, Programme & Policy Development Department)

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ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WFP ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK

Introduction

1. As stated in the *2017 Environmental Policy* ([WFP/EB.1/2017/4-B/Rev.1*](#)), WFP embraces the vision of the *2030 Agenda* of a world free from hunger within a context of socially equitable and environmentally responsible sustainable development. The WFP Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework (hereafter referred to as ESSF) has been developed to fulfil the concrete commitment made in the *2017 Environmental Policy* to establish and maintain: a set of core environmental standards; a process for screening and categorizing environmental risk; and an environmental management system (EMS).
2. In line with UN-wide practice, the scope of the standards and tools envisaged by the 2017 Environmental Policy has been expanded to cover also social sustainability.¹
3. The ESSF has been developed in line with the [Model Approach to Environmental and Social Standards for UN Programming](#)² and with the commitments made in the [Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System, 2020–2030, Phase I](#).³
4. This Circular establishes the ESSF as WFP's principal framework to increase the environmental and social sustainability of its programme activities, support operations,⁴ and interactions with partners as an integral part of WFP's normative framework.

¹ WFP's understanding of what constitutes 'environmental sustainability' and 'social sustainability' is described in the WFP Environmental and Social Standards (Module 2 of the ESSF).

² See <https://unemg.org/modelapproach/>

³ See <https://unsceb.org/strategy-sustainability-management-united-nations-system-2020-2030>

⁴ Programme activities are the activities described in Country Strategic Plans that contribute to the achievement of WFP's strategic goal(s); they include the delivery of food, goods, cash, services, or capacity building to beneficiaries, partners or governments. Support operations are all in-house functions that support the delivery of the programme activities; they include procurement, logistics, emergency preparedness, information technology, administration services, business travel, and facilities management.



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Purpose of the ESSF

5. In line with the mandate given by the WFP Environmental Policy, the ESSF is designed to:
 - limit the potentially negative impacts WFP may have on the environment, people, or communities, stemming from its programme activities, support operations, or any other action carried out or funded by WFP; and
 - progressively increase the environmental and social sustainability of WFP programme activities, support operations, and any other action carried out or funded by WFP.

Description of the ESSF

Principles and Standards

6. The ESSF incorporates the underlying principles of the 2030 Agenda, in particular: *Leave no one behind*, *Sustainability*, and *Accountability and transparency*. They are described in full in [Module 1 of the ESSF](#).
7. The ESSF is built around the WFP Environmental and Social Standards, which summarize the commitments and minimum standards enshrined in existing WFP policies, directives, and guidelines, as well as in relevant international law vis-à-vis environmental and social sustainability. The WFP Environmental and Social Standards form the benchmark for what constitutes environmental and social sustainability in WFP. They are described in full in [Module 2 of the ESSF](#).

Environmental and Social Safeguards for Programme Activities

8. The WFP Environmental and Social Standards should be mainstreamed in programme activities through the application of Environmental and Social Safeguards. The Environmental and Social Safeguards are a set of tools to help identify the environmental and social risks in the programmatic activities and avoid (through redesign) or otherwise manage negative environmental or social impacts.
9. The Environmental and Social Safeguards should be applied to all programmatic activities in Country Strategic Plans and at different stages of the programme cycle:
 - Strategic planning: Country offices are expected to assess, at a strategic level, the environmental and social risks of WFP's programmatic activities in the country and describe them in their Country Strategic Plan.
 - Design and implementation of programme activities: All programme activities described in a Country Strategic Plan should be screened for environmental and social risks when the activity, or part thereof, is formulated for implementation through a Field Level Agreement (FLA) with a cooperating partner; a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with a government entity or partner; or a construction contract with a contractor. The environmental and social risks associated with the FLA, MoU or construction contract should be categorized as low, medium or high:
 - Low risk: No further risk management measures are required.



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- Medium risk: Risk management measures need to be described in a Social and Environmental and Social Risk Management Plan (ESMP), which will be part of the implementation plan.
 - High risk: The activity requires an independent Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) as well as an ESMP. The ESMP will be part of the implementation plan.
 - Complaints: The country office's Community Feedback Mechanism (CFM) is expected to be equipped to handle complaints, including anonymous complaints, about environmental or social harm caused by WFP, its partners, or its vendors. As per WFP's CFM guidance, complaints on environmental or social harm should be handled as sensitive, high-priority cases by CFM operators.
10. [Module 3 of the ESSF](#) provides procedural guidance and templates for the application of the safeguards at each stage of the programme cycle.

Environmental Management System (EMS) for Support Operations

11. The WFP Environmental Standards are mainstreamed in support operations through the application of an Environmental Management System based on the international standard [ISO 14001:2015](#). The EMS provides an approach to identify, manage, monitor and control environmental issues in support operations through a continuous cycle of improvement.
12. Physical boundary of the EMS⁵: WFP's EMS covers all leased, owned and donated facilities that it operates globally, as detailed in the ARCHIBUS facilities management database. WFP can control its own actions at these properties and, through choice of service providers and in contract provisions, can influence to varying degrees the infrastructure and services (including those provided by third parties) that may lead to negative environmental impacts. Examples may include changing light fittings or installing shading to reduce energy demand and CO2 emissions, or through engaging certified environmentally responsible waste contractors).
13. Functional boundary: WFP's EMS covers all support operations – also referred to in the Environmental Policy (2017) as “in-house operations and ongoing activities” – that WFP can control or influence. Specifically this includes: all aspects of facilities management, including construction, refurbishment, operation and decommissioning; goods & services and food procurement; logistics (air, maritime and ground transport; warehouse management – food and non-food); emergency preparedness; information technology (IT); and administration services including business travel.
14. [Module 4 of the ESSF](#) describes WFP's approach to implementing EMS and includes both procedural guidance (for example on energy/waste/water management on WFP premises), and templates (for various steps in the EMS process: initial environmental reviews, environmental site assessments, action plans etc.).⁶

⁵ The ISO standard 14001 requires both the physical and functional boundary to be defined by an entity/organization implementing an EMS.

⁶ Templates can be accessed through the Environmental Sustainability topic pages of [WFPgo](#).



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Implications for Partnerships

15. As a basic principle, WFP operates according to its own ESSF. WFP may consider applying additional sustainability measures on a voluntary and case-by-case basis.
16. When developing a proposal for, or agreement with a donor, WFP should assure the donor that it will apply the WFP Sustainability Framework, as described in [Module 1 of the ESSF – Section V.4](#).
17. Any FLA, MoU, or construction contract signed for the implementation of a WFP programme activity (or part thereof) shall include a commitment to respect the WFP Environmental and Social Standards ([Module 2 of the ESSF](#)) and to apply the relevant tools of the WFP Sustainability Framework during the implementation of the programme activity (or part thereof).

Alignment with Enterprise Risk Management

18. The ESSF is aligned with and strengthens the three lines model of WFP's Enterprise Risk Management:
 - first line: the ESSF provides risk control measures that are put to work by country offices in the programme cycle and support operations;
 - second line: the ESSF is maintained by the responsible HQ technical units; the HQ technical units ensure that the corporate monitoring and reporting systems are equipped to monitor and report on the application of the ESSF and to review compliance; the regional safeguards advisors and the regional EMS advisors provide technical assistance and maintain regular monitoring and regular oversight; decentralized evaluations may assess environmental and social sustainability, as appropriate;
 - third line: the Office of Internal Audit can check compliance with the standards and the tools described in the ESSF and the Office of Evaluation may reflect consideration of environmental and social sustainability in its evaluations, as appropriate.
19. A non-exhaustive list of risks that can be controlled through the application of the ESSF is provided in [Module 1 of the ESSF – Annex 2](#).

Monitoring and Reporting

20. All Country Offices report on the application of the ESSF in Annual Country Reports (ACRs).
21. As per the Corporate Results Framework, WFP monitors:
 - (a) the extent to which programmatic activities have been screened for environmental and social risks;
 - (b) the percentage of countries implementing Environmental Management Systems and the percentage of countries reporting their environmental footprint (greenhouse gas emissions, and waste and water management).
22. As per inter-agency commitments, WFP reports externally its progress in implementing Environmental Management Systems and its environmental footprint.



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Roles and Responsibilities

23. The roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders in operationalising the ESSF, including for securing/allocating resources for implementation, are described in [Module 1 of the ESSF – Annex 1](#).
24. The ESSF itself shall be maintained and updated by the Environmental Unit (in MSDI) and the Climate & Disaster Risk Reduction Programmes Unit (PROC), with inputs from other units as needed, on the basis of feedback from the field, and in line with new or updated WFP policies, guidelines, and relevant international law.
25. If required, new modules of the ESSF or major updates to the WFP Environmental and Social Standards shall be jointly approved by the Director of the Management Services Division (MSD) and the Director of the Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division (PRO) through joint Directives. Any new or updated guidance will be communicated to all staff and made available on WFPGo.

Effective Date

26. This Circular shall take immediate effect.

David M. Beasley
Executive Director