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## Summary report on the evaluation of the interim country strategic plans for the Syrian Arab Republic (2018–2025)

### Executive summary

The evaluation of the Syrian Arab Republic interim country strategic plans for 2018–2025, including the transitional plan for 2018, was conducted between October 2022 and January 2024 with the main purpose of providing evaluation evidence and learning with regard to the performance of WFP in the Syrian Arab Republic from 2018 to June 2023.

The evaluation assessed WFP's relevance, strategic positioning and coherence; its contribution to outcomes; its efficiency in implementation; and the factors explaining its performance. It used a theory-based and mixed-methods approach to serve accountability and learning purposes.

Under the evaluated interim country strategic plans, WFP has effectively laid the foundation for a “dual track” approach to its work in the Syrian Arab Republic, providing large-scale humanitarian assistance combined with support for early recovery and creating conditions for self-reliance. However, the situation of the crisis-affected population has deteriorated, and vulnerability has increased due to the protracted nature of the crisis, which has spanned more than a decade.

The widespread destruction of productive assets has made the population more vulnerable and unable to withstand shocks, including the economic crisis and the effects of climate change. In addition, the number of people in need of assistance has been growing exponentially over the last five years at a time when donor aid budgets have decreased.

The evaluation concludes that WFP has made important contributions to addressing food insecurity through large-scale food assistance; a strategy of distributing assistance more thinly before reducing the number of beneficiaries was found to be the right approach. WFP's efforts in

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*In line with WFP evaluation policy (2022) (WFP/EB.1/2022/4-C), to respect the integrity and independence of evaluation findings the editing of this report has been limited and as a result some of the language in it may not be fully consistent with the World Food Programme's standard terminology or editorial practices. Please direct any requests for clarification to the Director of Evaluation.*

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the country have been seriously hindered by a range of external factors including decreasing financial resources, which has posed challenges in the complex and high needs environment. At the same time, WFP has successfully navigated a challenging environment, adhering to humanitarian principles, incorporating a conflict-sensitive perspective into its activities and increasingly paying attention to cross-cutting issues. Finally, although WFP has made considerable efforts to assess vulnerability, it has not yet fully demonstrated the effective prioritization of the most vulnerable populations, including women and girls.

The evaluation provides five recommendations to support WFP in the design and implementation of its forthcoming activities in the Syrian Arab Republic: i) better reflect WFP's full mandate in the next interim country strategic plan by consolidating the transition to a "dual track" approach that addresses the double burden of humanitarian and development needs in the country; ii) achieve a stronger strategic focus by fine-tuning the design of activities and seeking synergies across activities to better align them with available financial resources and with WFP's full mandate; iii) enhance targeting to reach the most vulnerable; iv) further tailor and strengthen WFP's contribution to cross-cutting aims to support principled aid delivery and accountability to crisis-affected populations; and v) maximize internal and external resources in support of the "dual track" approach and a focus on transition.

### **Draft decision\***

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the interim country strategic plans for the Syrian Arab Republic (2018–2025) (WFP/EB.2/2024/6-C/5) and the management response (WFP/EB.2/2024/6-C/5/Add.1) and encourages further action on the recommendations set out in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

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\* 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.

## Introduction

### Evaluation features

1. The evaluation of the Syrian Arab Republic interim country strategic plans (ICSPs) for 2018–2025, including the transitional plan for 2018, was conducted between October 2022 and January 2024 with the main purpose of providing evaluation evidence and learning with regard to the performance of WFP in the Syrian Arab Republic from 2018 to June 2023 as well as accountability for results.
2. The evaluation covered the implementation of three programmatic cycles (2018, 2019–2021 and 2022–2025), and its timeframe enabled the assessment of changes across the three cycles, with particular attention to the various modalities used by WFP for food assistance.
3. The evaluation adopted a theory-based and mixed-methods approach, drawing on monitoring data, a literature review, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions with beneficiaries and site visits. Consideration of gender issues was integrated throughout the evaluation process. Data collection took place in the country in May and June 2023, followed by hybrid debriefing sessions. Several stakeholder workshops were held in Damascus in November 2023 to discuss the conclusions and draft recommendations, including a workshop with the country office, a workshop with government partners and a workshop with cooperating partners and other United Nations entities. A briefing for donors on the key insights from the evaluation was organized. Ethical standards were applied to ensure the dignity and confidentiality of those involved in the evaluation.
4. The primary users of the evaluation include WFP's country office and field offices; the Regional Bureau for the Middle East, Northern Africa and Eastern Europe; WFP headquarters; and the United Nations country team. Other relevant stakeholders include the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, donors, local authorities and cooperating partners.

### Context

5. The Syrian Arab Republic was recognized as a middle-income country in early 2011, with moderate economic growth and positive development indicators.<sup>1</sup> The crisis in the country began in 2011 and continues to take a heavy toll on the lives of Syrian people, drastically affecting the socioeconomic situation. The country was reclassified as a low-income country in 2018. As of June 2023, 5.3 million Syrians were registered as refugees living outside the country.<sup>2</sup> Economic deterioration, accelerated by the financial crises in Lebanon and Türkiye, as well as the impact of the war in Ukraine, climate-related shocks, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the 2023 earthquake have increased vulnerability further.<sup>3</sup>
6. An estimated 97 percent of Syrians live below the poverty line,<sup>4</sup> with 1.2 percent of the population in extreme multidimensional poverty.<sup>5</sup> More than 12 million people are deemed food insecure.<sup>6</sup> According to United Nations estimates, some 15.3 million people needed

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<sup>1</sup> H. Slim and L. Trombetta. 2014. *Syria Crisis Common Context Analysis*.

<sup>2</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2022. [Operational Data Portal: Situation: Syria Regional Refugee Response](#).

<sup>3</sup> World Bank. 2024. *Syria – Economic Monitor: Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare*.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). 2022. [Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic](#).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Development Programme. 2022. *Human Development Report 2021/2022. Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World*.

<sup>6</sup> OCHA. 2022. [Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic](#).

some form of humanitarian assistance in 2023.<sup>7</sup> On 6 February 2023, multiple earthquakes, including one that measured 7.7 on the Richter scale, struck southern Türkiye and the northern part of the Syrian Arab Republic. By March 2023 at least 53,000 deaths and 132,000 injuries were reported in the two countries, with an estimated 8.8 million people affected by the earthquake.<sup>8</sup>

7. An estimated 12 million people in the Syrian Arab Republic are food insecure, including all 2 million people living in camps, and a further 2.9 million people are estimated to be at risk of food insecurity; households led by women are particularly at risk.<sup>9</sup> Approximately 5.9 million people, including 3.75 million children aged 6–59 months and 2.1 million women, are in need of nutritional assistance, an increase from 5.5 million in 2022.

### **WFP interim country strategic plans**

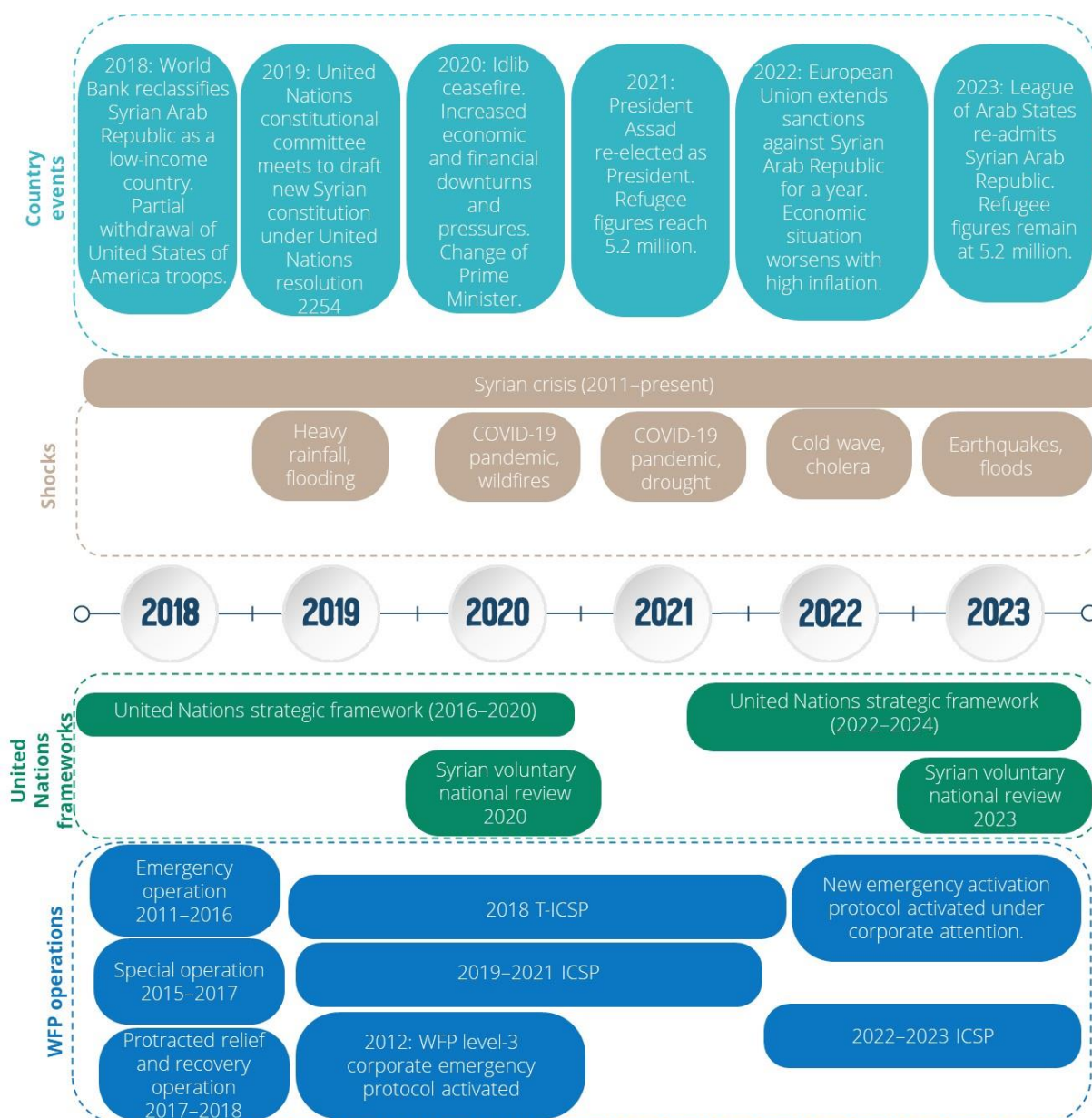
8. WFP has been present in the Syrian Arab Republic since 1964. Over the years, its assistance shifted towards development-oriented projects until the start of the crisis in 2011. A WFP level-3 corporate emergency protocol has been in place in the Syrian Arab Republic since December 2012. Following the introduction of a new WFP emergency activation protocol in January 2022 the level 3 designation was recategorized as a “corporate attention” situation.
9. A one-year transitional ICSP (T-ICSP) for 2018 superseded the regional protracted relief and recovery operation for 2017 and 2018. The T-ICSP included four strategic outcomes to address the high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition among food-insecure populations affected by the crisis. Under the T-ICSP, WFP sought to gradually transition to providing livelihood-focused activities for men and women while maintaining food assistance for the most vulnerable.
10. WFP began implementation of its ICSP for 2019–2021 in January 2019. The plan had the same four strategic outcomes as the T-ICSP but added more support services for humanitarian partners across the Syrian Arab Republic. The ICSP provided life-saving assistance and increased the resilience of affected communities. The main strategic shift was in strengthening operational processes. In response to the deterioration of the humanitarian and food security situation from late 2019 onwards, the ICSP and its budget were revised four times between 2019 and 2021 to increase general food assistance.
11. An ICSP for 2022–2023 was begun in January 2022, with the aim of responding to growing food and nutrition needs; the plan was subsequently extended to December 2025. Like the previous T-ICSP and ICSP it had four strategic outcomes, although there were some small differences.
12. Figure 1 depicts key events in the country and gives an overview of WFP operations for the period 2018–2023.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> OCHA. 2023. *Flash appeal: Syrian Arab Republic. Earthquake – Humanitarian Programme Cycle February–May 2023.*

<sup>9</sup> OCHA. 2022. *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic.*

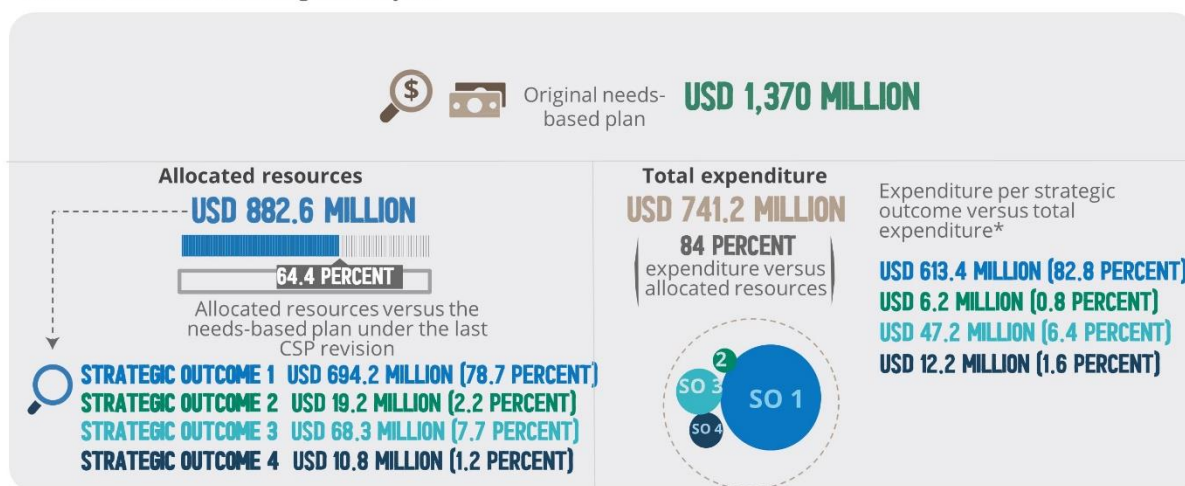
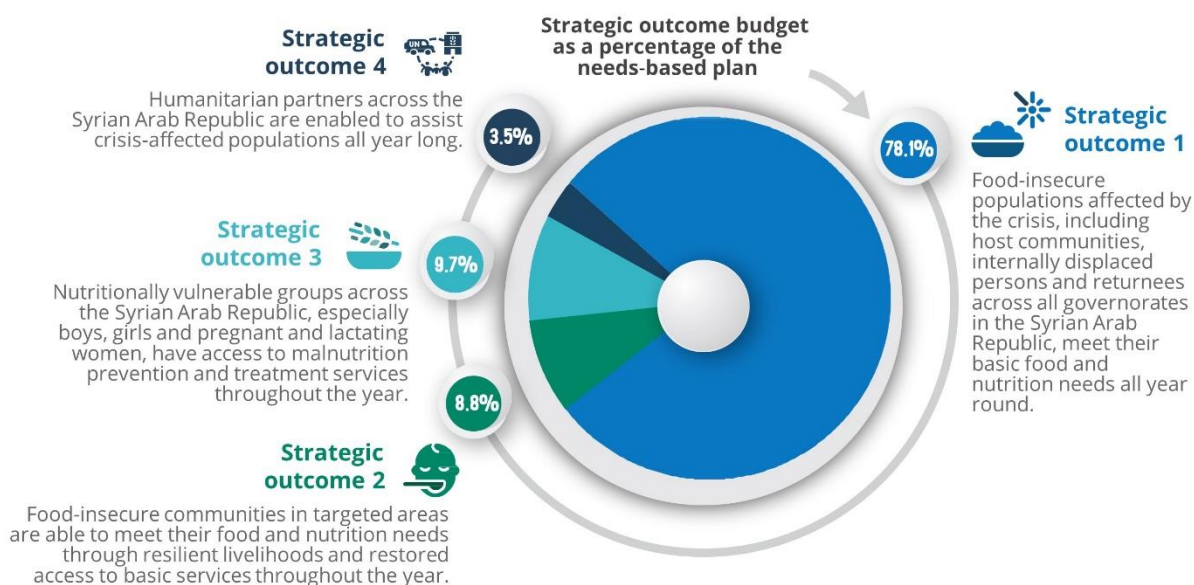
**Figure 1: Country context and WFP operational overview, 2018–2023**

Source: Office of Evaluation, based on the full report on the evaluation of ICSPs for the Syrian Arab Republic for 2018–2023.

- Following its second revision, the T-ICSP had a total budget of USD 790 million. The original needs-based programme budget for the 2019–2021 ICSP amounted to USD 1,386.31 million but more than doubled to USD 3,079.47 million following the fourth revision of the ICSP. For the ICSP for 2022–2025, which is still under way, the needs-based plan budget is USD 1,370.02 million.<sup>10</sup> Allocated resources as a percentage of the needs-based plans were 67 percent for the T-ICSP, 55 percent for the first ICSP and 64 percent for the second ICSP (see figure 2). The four strategic outcomes remained throughout 2018–2023, save for minor adjustments.

<sup>10</sup> This does not reflect the first revision of the ICSP for 2022–2025, which had a needs-based plan budget of USD 4,873 million, because it was approved in November 2023 and therefore falls outside the timeframe of this evaluation.

**Figure 2: Strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures (2018–2022)**



\* Percentages of allocated resources and expenditures by strategic outcome do not add up to 100 percent because resources were also allocated to and spent on direct and indirect support costs.

Source: Annual country reports for the Syrian Arab Republic.

## Evaluation findings

### To what extent are the interim country strategic plans evidence-based and strategically focused to address the needs of the most vulnerable?

#### Relevance and alignment

- WFP’s assistance and intervention areas directly respond to the priority needs of the crisis-affected population. WFP has strengthened its evidence base across its main focus areas. Assessments and surveys have informed the development of the ICSPs, underpinning the continued efforts of WFP to strengthen its vulnerability-based targeting and its life-saving and life-sustaining interventions.

15. The design of the T-ICSP for 2018, the ICSP for 2019–2021 and the ICSP for 2022–2025 supports both crisis response and resilience. This operational strategy aligns with the 2016 WFP Syria+5 Vision 2020, which focused on maintaining life-saving food and nutrition interventions for the most vulnerable people, combined with activities designed to restore livelihoods and create economic opportunities.<sup>11</sup>
16. The ICSPs have been aligned with the priorities of the humanitarian response plans for the Syrian Arab Republic, advocating both humanitarian response and increased focus on recovery and resilience to support a move away from food assistance where feasible. This move towards a “dual track” approach is also consistent with the priorities outlined in the United Nations strategic framework for 2022–2025 and the Government’s aim of supporting agricultural production.

### ***Coherence and comparative advantage***

17. There is a high degree of coherence between the ICSPs and the United Nations strategic framework for the Syrian Arab Republic. WFP does not undertake its work in isolation from others and indeed is considered a constructive and active partner within the United Nations system in the country. Its engagement has contributed to a more coherent and effective response by the United Nations system. Its comparative advantage lies in its logistical strength, nationwide reach and expertise in general food assistance, nutrition and livelihoods, all of which enable it to tailor its operations to the situation on the ground.
18. The intervention logic of the ICSPs strongly emphasizes food and nutrition assistance, leveraging WFP’s operational and logistical capabilities effectively. However, it does not adequately reflect WFP’s vision of complementing humanitarian assistance with long-term programming in support of early recovery, resilience and disaster risk reduction. There is not yet sufficient clarity on how WFP can best use its comparative advantage and strengths to support a resilience agenda in the country.

### ***Strategic positioning***

19. The ICSPs have remained relevant and enabled WFP to adapt to changes in circumstance, including geopolitical changes. For example, the organization increased assistance following the sharp rise in food insecurity in 2019. Decreased funding for general food assistance, however, has cast doubt on the effectiveness of this assistance in addressing the food insecurity of beneficiaries.

### **What are the extent and quality of WFP’s specific contribution to interim country strategic plan strategic outcomes in the Syrian Arab Republic?**

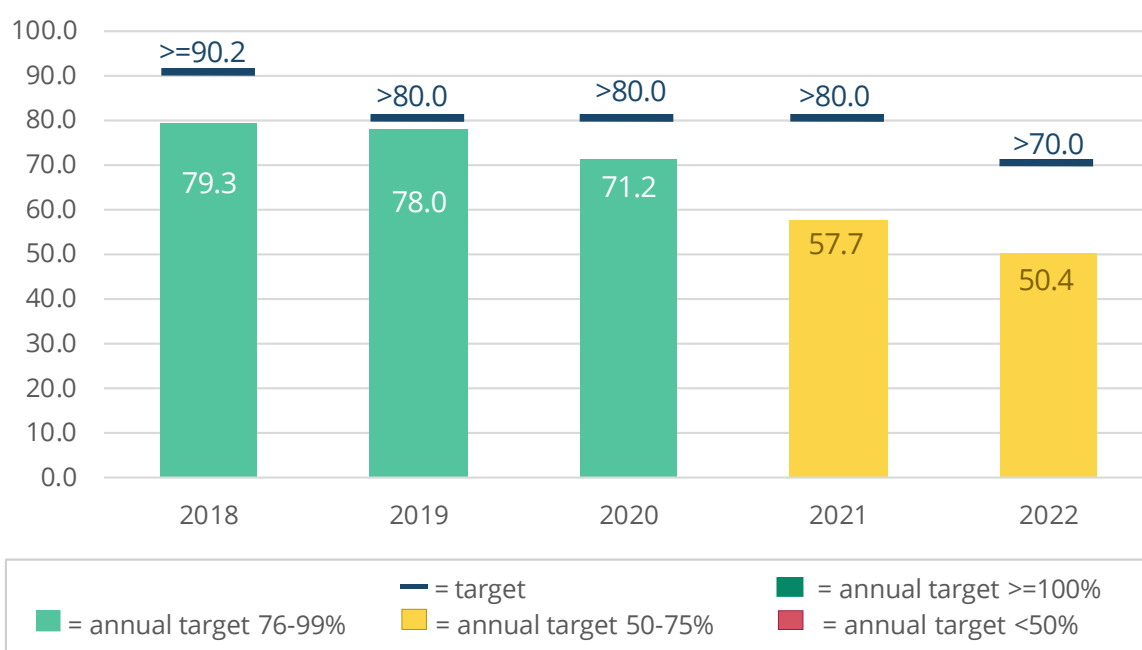
20. **Strategic outcome 1 – unconditional resource transfers and school feeding.** WFP was able to respond to food security needs across the Syrian Arab Republic through large-scale general food assistance operations that slowed the deterioration of food security. As of 2020, however, WFP was no longer able to meet the increased demand for food assistance because of the increase in humanitarian need and a drop in available financial resources. WFP has worked to improve targeting to ensure that the most vulnerable are being assisted. However, the reduced caloric value of the food basket and the rotation of beneficiaries receiving food assistance has meant that WFP’s impact on household food insecurity has been significantly reduced.
21. A cash-based transfer pilot in 2020 showed that households receiving both in-kind and cash vouchers were more likely to improve or maintain their food consumption, but this hybrid modality remains more expensive because of the increase in the cost of basic food items.

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<sup>11</sup> WFP. 2016. *Syria+5 Vision 2020. Laying the Foundation for Syria’s Future* (internal document).

22. School feeding led to increased attendance and retention; it did not lead to increased enrolment, however, due mainly to economic factors that led to children being out of school. The number of children reached by school meals also decreased after 2020 due to financial shortfalls. In addition, from 2018 WFP has partnered with the United Nations Children's Fund to provide date bars for children in non-formal education, initially in camps in the northeast of the country. WFP furthermore worked to enhance the capacity of Ministry of Education staff to implement various forms of school feeding.
23. **Strategic outcome 2 – livelihoods and resilience, and national safety nets.** Increased focus on restoring communal assets and the introduction of a wheat value chain approach enabled WFP to reach more beneficiaries, support the recovery of farming communities and improve food availability, reducing dependence on food assistance. It also facilitated collaboration with other United Nations entities, extending geographic coverage and increasing complementarity. Lack of funding, however, hampered WFP support for early recovery, livelihoods, resilience and social safety nets.
24. Restoration of communal assets increased community self-reliance, improved food availability and affordability, created jobs and reduced negative coping strategies. Interventions in this area yielded strong returns on investment, with the potential of reducing the reliance on food assistance. Livelihood interventions did not always consider sufficiently the societal barriers hampering women's access to markets. Moreover, at the household level the positive effects of food assistance for assets and food assistance for training support on food consumption scores was offset by rising inflation and food insecurity, especially in the case of cash assistance.
25. **Strategic outcome 3 – nutrition.** WFP increased the number of people that it planned to reach with malnutrition prevention and treatment activities to respond to increased need. It faced challenges, however, related to funding shortages, the COVID-19 pandemic and rising transport costs. Aggravated by increasing food prices, minimum dietary diversity for women, a key indicator of malnutrition prevention, remained very low (see figure 3).

**Figure 3: Minimum dietary diversity – women**



Source: WFP annual country reports for the Syrian Arab Republic for 2018–2022. Colours of the vertical bars indicate percentages of targets reached. The colour coding and percentage values are based on the evaluation team's own classification.



26. For malnutrition treatment, the outcomes for pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls and children in the treatment programme were positive across almost all indicators; they dipped during the COVID-19 pandemic because of restrictions on the movement of mobile clinics but improved thereafter.
27. **Strategic outcome 4 – common services.** WFP enabled humanitarian partners to assist crisis-affected populations and supported more efficient aid delivery, drawing on its comparative advantages in logistical and technical capacity. Due in large part to its field presence and logistical capacity WFP was able to support the humanitarian system in reaching those in need, even in hard-to-access areas, through cross-line and cross-border operations.
28. WFP's provision of logistics, coordination and technical services contributed to harmonized and efficient collective approaches to food and nutrition assistance. Cross-border deliveries accounted for more than one third of all WFP assistance delivered in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2022.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Cross-cutting areas***

29. The operationalization of humanitarian principles in the complex context of the Syrian crisis proved challenging for all humanitarian actors. WFP pursued a principled approach to reaching those in need. Using a conflict-sensitive approach, WFP maintained its engagement with all relevant actors to ensure humanitarian access to vulnerable communities while upholding the neutrality and impartiality of its operations.
30. WFP promoted sustainable environmental management and climate adaptation, particularly through its resilience work, which is aligned directly with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Steps taken by WFP in its programming have contributed to reduced tensions in previously conflict-affected areas. WFP considers social cohesion and conflict sensitivity in its areas of operations and develops related policies and guidelines to underpin its operations.
31. WFP has strengthened its processes in order to support accountability and communication with beneficiaries, developing a mechanism that allows beneficiaries to appeal the discontinuation of their food assistance.
32. WFP has emphasized strengthening the economic empowerment of women, especially in rural areas, but efforts to adopt gender-transformative approaches are constrained by financial and societal factors. WFP has senior staff dedicated to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse; follows strict guidelines, protocols and confidential reporting; and provides regular training and awareness raising regarding gender, inclusion and protection for its cooperating partners. WFP has also taken steps to strengthen disability inclusion in its operations through measures such as improved infrastructure for accessibility and disability inclusion capacity strengthening for its cooperating partners.

### ***Sustainability of results***

33. It is unlikely that results will be fully sustainable in the complex protracted humanitarian crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic. WFP has sought to mitigate challenges by planning for the transition from relief to early recovery in its livelihoods, resilience, social safety nets and nutrition activities and by fostering collaboration with other actors. To address sustainable water use WFP set up community-level water user associations, but these are new in the

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<sup>12</sup> WFP. 2023. *Annual Country Report 2022: Syrian Arab Republic*.

Syrian Arab Republic and the evaluation found variation in the capacity of the associations and uncertainty regarding their maintenance.<sup>13</sup>

### **To what extent has WFP used its resources efficiently in contributing to interim country strategic plan outputs and strategic outcomes?**

#### ***Timeliness***

34. Major changes in the humanitarian context challenged the timely delivery of outputs by increasing pressure on WFP funding, disrupting supply chains and hampering access to beneficiaries. The increase in humanitarian needs outpaced donor funding and was only marginally cushioned by WFP's accelerated expenditure of available funding. Supply chains were affected by various external factors,<sup>14</sup> but WFP adopted effective mitigation measures. WFP responded in a timely manner to the earthquake in the northwest of the country in February 2023.

### **To what extent do the depth and breadth of coverage ensure that those most vulnerable to food insecurity benefit from WFP activities?**

#### ***Appropriateness of coverage and targeting***

35. The proportion of people in need covered by WFP declined between 2018 and 2022 as humanitarian needs outpaced donor funding. In response to funding shortfalls WFP opted to maintain broad coverage while reducing the caloric value of its food basket and the frequency of distributions, but this risked pushing people deeper into food insecurity.
36. Geographic targeting was based on food insecurity, nutrition and education indicators. WFP used the Vulnerability Needs Review tool for household level targeting in Government-controlled areas and took necessary action to compile beneficiary lists that were as accurate as possible; however, access to beneficiary data, lengthy approval processes and the enormous scale of assessments all proved challenging.
37. Due to reduced funding, WFP had to shift from providing blanket assistance to implementing a targeting and prioritizing approach. The evaluation found that while people understood that cuts needed to be made because of reduced funding, the updated targeting criteria were not well understood.

### **To what extent was WFP cost-efficient in the delivery of its assistance?**

#### ***Economy in the acquisition and management of inputs/commodities***

38. To maximize economy in the acquisition of inputs, WFP used multiple procurement channels, tools and facilities, such as the Global Commodity Management Facility, which reduced lead times, and local procurement. Post-delivery losses were generally modest, although slightly above the regional average, and were mainly due to warehouse management activities such as repacking and rebagging, as well as looting.

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<sup>13</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2021. *Special Report: 2021 FAO Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to the Syrian Arab Republic*.

<sup>14</sup> These factors included the number of people covered by the needs-based plan – which doubled from 4.88 million in 2018 to 9.96 million in 2023, disruption to WFP supply chains caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, a ban on the import of Turkish goods and delays in the receipt of donor contributions.

***Cost efficiency in the delivery of activities and outputs***

39. Country office overheads were lower than the WFP global average, helped by portfolio-level economies of scale. Cost efficiency considerations were evident in (but not limited to) the selection of cooperating partners, activities with other United Nations entities and, especially, the choice of transfer modalities. Cash-based transfers were generally more cost efficient than in-kind transfers; this was not true in all contexts, however, such as in areas lacking retailers, and also varied depending on exchange rates.

**What are the factors that explain WFP's performance and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected by the interim country strategic plans?*****Adequate, predictable and flexible resources***

40. Overall, funding shortfalls have impeded WFP's capacity to operate at full potential. Although most funding remains heavily earmarked, the 15 percent that was unearmarked in 2022 enabled WFP to respond to the most urgent needs. WFP allocates funding based on need, consistent with the core humanitarian principles in a crisis setting. Multi-year funding for long-term resilience engagement remains extremely limited.

***Monitoring and reporting***

41. WFP has strengthened its monitoring capacity, but there is room for further improvement at the field office level. Direct monitoring visits by WFP monitors, sometimes jointly with third-party monitors, increased during the period under evaluation, increasing significantly across all governorates, although the evaluation found that the quality of third-party monitors varied. WFP also carried out specific assessments of pilot projects. Indicators on gender equality and women's empowerment are focused on the disaggregation of data rather than capturing empowerment-related dimensions.

***Partnerships***

42. WFP is recognized by stakeholders as the leading entity in providing food assistance to those in need owing to its expertise in addressing food insecurity; it has established strategic partnerships with other relevant United Nations entities in support of humanitarian action and resilience, which was shown to contribute to increased geographic coverage and complementarity of action. The quality of the food distribution centres was varied, for example in terms of the confidentiality of community feedback mechanisms, the conditions in waiting areas for beneficiaries and the availability of help desks. Service provision was stronger where WFP had direct access or through third-party monitors. WFP's logistical capacity is critical for multiple humanitarian actors, ensuring that aid reaches its intended recipients. WFP's strong network of cooperating partners, and in particular the extensive network of Syrian Arab Red Crescent local branches, enabled WFP to deliver its assistance in a timely and effective manner.

***Human resources***

43. Stability among national staff has improved but the two-year rotation cycles for international staff have affected stability and institutional memory. The short duration of assignments sometimes impedes the continuity of strategic action. The country office addresses staffing needs through various strategies, including an ongoing workforce analysis, fast-track recruitment for emergencies and initiatives to develop staff skills. Insufficient resources have been allocated to gender and protection initiatives at the field office level.

## Conclusions

*Conclusion 1. The WFP portfolio in the Syrian Arab Republic has made important contributions to addressing food insecurity through large-scale food assistance covering all governorates; the strategy of spreading assistance more thinly before reducing the number of beneficiaries was found to be the right approach.*

44. WFP conducted a large-scale assessment of its caseload to ensure improved prioritization among those in need. To avoid inclusion and exclusion errors WFP engaged with relevant government institutions to obtain additional data on the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of affected people to determine their eligibility for WFP assistance.
45. This evaluation highlights that general food assistance is a lifesaver for many families and makes a critical difference to the availability of food for food-insecure people. Reducing the composition of the food basket and cash-based transfers and supporting the rotation of assistance were considered the right approaches to avoid sudden shocks to beneficiaries. General food assistance alleviated hardship in crisis-affected communities and contributed to social cohesion.

*Conclusion 2. WFP's efforts in the Syrian Arab Republic have been seriously hindered by a range of factors, including political considerations; this has been particularly noticeable in terms of the restricted financial resources available to facilitate the crucial programmatic decisions demanded by the increased and evolving needs of the affected population.*

46. Funding has not kept pace with the recent surge in needs. WFP's reliance on a few large donors and various smaller donors has made it vulnerable to shifts in domestic agendas. Donors' reluctance to fund early recovery interventions has limited WFP's ability to shift to supporting livelihoods and early recovery and adopt a more sustainable approach to food insecurity.
47. WFP's operations have provided a buffer against deteriorating food insecurity, but the scale of deterioration and lack of funds have meant that its support has been insufficient to halt the decline of key indicators at the food security outcome level.

### Designing and implementing the strategic framework for WFP assistance

*Conclusion 3. The ICSPs, including the T-ICSP, have laid the foundation for a "dual track" approach, but the underlying strategic vision and approach, including the growing attention to supporting recovery in crisis-affected farming communities, is not yet fully developed in a coherent overarching framework.*

48. The ICSPs have a well-developed line of sight but a coherent strategic framework reflecting the "dual track" approach that WFP intends to follow has not yet been fully developed. The interlinkages between crisis response, early recovery and resilience are not sufficiently clear.
49. There are challenges to developing a dual track approach to the Syrian crisis. While WFP has shifted quickly towards early recovery and resilience, donors have been hesitant to support this dual pathway (see conclusion 2). WFP's strong monitoring and vulnerability assessment and mapping capacity in the Syrian Arab Republic has provided solid evidence to support strategic decisions and adaptive programming.

*Conclusion 4. Most intended outcomes identified in the ICSPs were achieved, reflecting the good overall performance of WFP operations and significant achievements. However, indicators only capture part of the limitations faced during implementation; obstacles persist in many areas.*

50. Large-scale food assistance has prevented a decline in food insecurity for many people of concern. Increasingly, however, WFP has not been able to provide full entitlements for all beneficiaries and has been forced to reduce food assistance to many due to unprecedented funding shortfalls. This has constrained food security and nutrition results.

51. Through its resilience and livelihoods support WFP has focused on addressing the obstacles preventing communities from restarting food production. It has achieved strong results in malnutrition treatment but has struggled to reach its targets in malnutrition prevention. WFP's school feeding programme led to increased attendance and retention, but the number of children reached decreased after 2020 due to financial limitations.
52. WFP has recently started to provide technical assistance to support social safety nets and the groundwork for further engagement has been laid, with a promising outlook regarding the effectiveness of future assistance. WFP's core comparative advantage of logistical and response capacity has enabled it to make critical contributions to the operations of the wider humanitarian community in the country.

*Conclusion 5. While there is certainly potential for enhancement, WFP has successfully navigated a challenging environment, adhering to humanitarian principles, incorporating a conflict-sensitive perspective into its portfolio, building effective partnerships and increasingly paying attention to cross-cutting issues.*

53. WFP has adhered to the humanitarian principles by maintaining engagement with all relevant actors to safeguard neutrality and independence; adopting a consistently principled approach; and negotiating access based on need. Its ability to reach those in need, even in hard-to-reach areas, through cross-line and cross-border operations is to its credit. WFP has a strong commitment to implementing conflict-sensitive programming in its operations within a very complex environment.
54. Mixed progress has been made on various cross-cutting issues. While efforts to mainstream gender considerations are progressing, the use of gender-transformative approaches for livelihoods activities is limited. WFP has incorporated environmental and climate change considerations into its operations, particularly in its resilience programmes. However, the sustainability of these initiatives is still being determined.
55. Feedback mechanisms are very important when assistance is being reduced so that beneficiaries have the opportunity to raise complaints if they feel they are being incorrectly excluded from assistance. Accordingly, WFP has increased its efforts and support in order to strengthen protection, accountability to affected populations and community feedback mechanisms.

*Conclusion 6. Challenges around transparency and accountability remain given WFP's limited access to personal identifiable data on beneficiaries, leading to exclusion errors. Despite persistent challenges, WFP has taken steps to ensure that its resources reach the most vulnerable.*

56. Although the Vulnerability Needs Review has been a massive undertaking, with over 1 million households across the country being assessed, its effectiveness in prioritizing the most vulnerable populations has not yet been fully demonstrated. WFP does not have full access to personal identifiable information, which influences exclusion and inclusion errors.

## Recommendations

57. The evaluation makes two operational and three strategic recommendations to address key issues under the next CSP for the Syrian Arab Republic.

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
<b>1</b>	<p><b>Better reflect WFP's full mandate – saving and changing lives – in the next CSP by consolidating the transition to a “dual track” approach adopted to address the double burden of needs in the Syrian Arab Republic.</b></p> <p>The “dual track” approach – combining humanitarian emergency assistance, recovery, safety nets and resilience interventions – should allow for a greater focus on the sustainability of support and the transition from food assistance to resilience and recovery.</p> <p>For this, actions to be implemented include those below.</p>	Strategic				
1.1	Continue to advocate – jointly with other actors – an early recovery and safety net approach, emphasizing that it is not sustainable to keep people on general food assistance, and continue to make the case that, in a protracted humanitarian crisis, saving lives is about sustaining lives.		Country office	Regional Bureau for the Middle East, Northern Africa and Eastern Europe Headquarters (Partnerships and Innovation Department)	Medium	Second quarter 2025
1.2	Clarify the comparative strength of WFP in terms of mandate, expertise and reach in addressing the double burden of needs.		Country office	Regional bureau Headquarters	Medium	Second quarter 2025

<sup>15</sup> The dates are part of the new CSP design phase and continue into the implementation of the next CSP.

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
1.3	Develop a theory of change for the next CSP that reflects the transition to the dual track approach.		Country office	Regional bureau (vulnerability analysis and mapping, and monitoring and evaluation units)	High	Second quarter 2025
1.4	Accompany the theory of change with a results framework and monitoring mechanisms that allow WFP to track medium- to long-term changes; further enhance the country office's learning approach, allowing for stronger attention to long-term issues.		Country office	Regional bureau (research, assessment and monitoring unit)	High	Second quarter 2025
1.5	Increase WFP's direct monitoring of programmes.		Country office		Medium	Fourth quarter 2024
1.6	Identify strategies for addressing harmful gender-related norms under each CSP outcome, including for general food assistance, nutrition and livelihoods interventions.		Country office	Regional bureau (gender unit)	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024
2	<p><b>Achieve a stronger strategic focus by fine-tuning the design of the portfolio and seeking synergies across interventions to better align action with available financial resources and with the mandate of saving and changing lives.</b> Current circumstances will require challenging strategic decision-making to ensure an effective transition from humanitarian assistance to recovery and resilience.</p> <p>Areas of improvement in each programmatic area are listed below.</p>	Strategic				

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
2.1	<p><b>Unconditional resource transfers.</b> In the absence of increased funding to cover all food-insecure people, reduce and phase out general food assistance where possible, retaining it in areas of severe vulnerability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Reduce the number of beneficiaries in order to reach the most vulnerable people with rations that meet their food and nutrition needs;</li> <li>➤ Review the composition of the food basket to improve nutritional variety and reduce the emphasis on calories.</li> <li>➤ Continue rolling out cash-based transfers where feasible, in coordination with relevant actors.</li> <li>➤ Expand cash-based transfers, considering retail capacity and market functionality.</li> <li>➤ Regularly review cash and voucher values to take into account general inflation, market prices and other factors.</li> <li>➤ Keep contingency planning and stocks in case of lack of access to hard-to-reach areas and maximize direct on-the-ground monitoring by WFP.</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau Headquarters (programme and cash-based transfer units)	High	First quarter 2025
2.2	<p><b>School feeding.</b> Maintain an area-based approach to school feeding, prioritizing areas with high prevalence of food insecurity and education needs in coordination with education sector partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continue e-voucher support and strengthen coordination with the United Nations Children's Fund to reach more out-of-school children.</li> <li>➤ Explore the potential of home-grown school feeding initiatives for further diet diversification.</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	First quarter 2025



#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
2.3	<p><b>Nutrition.</b> Maintain a strong connection between malnutrition treatment and prevention interventions to address all forms of malnutrition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continue to target those most in need of assistance under the blanket supplementary feeding programme.</li> <li>➤ Maintain current targets for the e-voucher programme for pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls; consider increasing the duration of assistance and expanding eligibility to second pregnancies.</li> <li>➤ Improve the quality of social and behaviour change communication through increased investment and more training of partners, local authorities and key informants and make engagement more interactive so that it not only informs but also inspires and empowers women and girls.</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	High	Fourth quarter 2024
2.4	<p><b>Early recovery/resilience.</b> Strengthen the adoption of a food systems approach for food security and nutrition in coordination with relevant actors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Discuss with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the United Nations Development Programme the opportunity to develop a theory of change for the food systems approach.</li> <li>➤ Within an overall food systems strategic framework, identify short-term (restoring community-level agricultural productive assets) and long-term (supporting better food supply) activities.</li> <li>➤ Focus on areas and communities where revival of agricultural production will have an influence on food security, reliance on general food assistance and shock responsiveness.</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	High	Fourth quarter 2025

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
2.5	<p><b>Social safety nets.</b> Continue to focus on interventions that support inclusive social safety nets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Support the rehabilitation of public bakeries to provide subsidized bread.</li> <li>➤ Support national efforts to pilot the fortification of bread through a wheat flour fortification programme.</li> <li>➤ Provide technical assistance and share WFP learning with Syrian institutions in relation to the implementation of sustainable safety nets that support the poorest and most vulnerable in society.</li> <li>➤ Facilitate understanding of cash programming for social protection among key stakeholders.</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	First quarter 2025
3	<p><b>Achieve a stronger strategic focus by enhancing targeting to reach the most vulnerable households with general food assistance.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continue engagement with relevant stakeholders to gain access to beneficiary and non-beneficiary data to allow for fair and transparent targeting.</li> <li>➤ Establish an annual process that supports the grievance redress mechanism for beneficiaries appealing exclusion decisions.</li> <li>➤ Build further evidence on the effectiveness of various cash-based transfer modalities in improving the food security of beneficiaries in various locations; consider cash vs. vouchers, cash-based transfers vs. in-kind transfers and full cash-based transfers vs hybrid transfers.</li> </ul>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	Second quarter 2025

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Produce a verified beneficiary list for general food assistance that is as accurate as possible.</li> <li>➤ Strengthen direct communication with general food assistance beneficiaries and cooperating partners on WFP's targeting methodology.</li> </ul>					
<b>4</b>	<b>Further adapt to context and strengthen WFP's contribution to achieving cross-cutting aims, supporting principled aid delivery and accountability to crisis-affected populations.</b>	Operational				
4.1	<b>Humanitarian principles</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Based on need.</i> Continue advocating for the right to adequate food and demonstrate a transparent approach in the delivery of assistance according to identified need.</li> <li>➤ <i>Conflict sensitivity.</i> Maintain a strong understanding of the operating environment and conflict dynamics through community presence and engagement with all actors on the ground. Prioritize the safety and well-being of staff and cooperating partners by adopting conflict-sensitive measures to avoid causing harm.</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Second quarter 2025
4.2	<b>Protection, accountability to affected populations, community feedback mechanisms.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Accountability to affected populations.</i> Expand helpline centres and use direct community-level engagement to communicate information regarding the reduction of assistance. Clarify targeting processes in a transparent manner.</li> <li>➤ <i>Community feedback mechanisms.</i> Maintain a WFP mechanism directly accessible by beneficiaries; and enhance the quality of the mechanism across all areas and all cooperating partners.</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Capacity of cooperating partners.</i> Further strengthen WFP efforts to support the capacity of cooperating partners to develop their own policies and tools for community feedback mechanisms and accountability to affected populations and support them in communicating decisions to communities.</li> </ul>					
4.3	<p><b>Gender and inclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Nutrition.</i> Further integrate corporate nutrition and gender policies by considering household gender dynamics when designing and implementing nutrition programmes.</li> <li>➤ <i>Gender-transformative actions.</i> As part of early recovery and resilience activities, undertake gender-transformative actions and monitor their progress using participatory approaches involving community members.</li> <li>➤ <i>Inclusion.</i> Strengthen the inclusion of people with disabilities across all activities and monitor it more closely.</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
<b>5</b>	<b>Maximize internal and external resources in support of a “dual track” approach and a focus on transition.</b>	Operational				
5.1	<p>In the context of reduced financial resources, ensure the strategic use of internal resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Align activities with available resources, optimizing planned results (see recommendation 2).</li> <li>➤ Advocate unearmarked funding for early recovery.</li> <li>➤ Support and empower staff seeking to implement changes in operational direction, ensuring that they have the right skills and competencies.</li> <li>➤ Streamline, optimize, consolidate and simplify processes in order to enhance internal cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness.</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024
5.2	<p>Leverage headquarters resources in support of country office efforts to increase and diversify funding sources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increase headquarters and regional bureau support to the country office in advocating unearmarked and multi-year funding in support of early recovery.</li> <li>➤ Seek to identify new donors for early recovery activities and expand partnerships with current donors to scale up current successful resilience activities.</li> </ul>		Headquarters (Partnerships and Innovation Department)	Regional bureau	High	Fourth quarter 2024
5.3	<p>Support capacity development for cooperating partners in the area of early recovery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Provide adequate support to cooperating partners to ensure staff capacity and growth.</li> <li>➤ Select partners for capacity-building training and support on early recovery.</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024