



POLICY CYCLE FRAMEWORK (at 13 December 2024)

Background and purpose of the framework

1. At the 2020 annual session of the Executive Board, WFP committed to reviewing its 2011 policy formulation paper,¹ prompted by a synthesis of evidence and lessons from WFP's policy evaluations issued by the Office of Evaluation.² Initial work on updating the policy formulation paper was put on hold, pending the completion of an external review of WFP's governance framework and processes, commissioned by WFP's Executive Board.
2. In November 2024, the Executive Board approved a set of recommendations from the Governance Review Working Group, established pursuant to the report on the external review. These included recommendations aimed at producing a more streamlined, efficient and predictable policy process, with more effective strategic guidance by the membership.³
3. Reaffirming the role and functions of the Board in providing strategic oversight of WFP's policy development,⁴ this policy cycle framework builds on these recommendations. It defines WFP's normative instruments, clarifies how WFP identifies policy gaps and priorities within its mandate and outlines the process for developing and implementing policies, in conjunction with the Board and key internal and external stakeholders.
4. In addition to the recommendations of the Governance Review Working Group, this document builds on evaluation findings and lessons on policy formulation and implementation gathered from internal and external sources.⁵

¹ Following a request for information on the policy development process by the Executive Board in 2009, WFP prepared a document on WFP policy formulation, which was approved in 2011. See "[WFP Policy Formulation](#)" (WFP/EB.A/2011/5-B).

² "[Synthesis of evidence and lessons from WFP's policy evaluations \(2011–2019\)](#)" (WFP/EB.A/2020/7-D).

³ "[Second interim report of the Executive Board working group on the governance review: Remaining recommendations from the independent consultant's report, recommendations from other governance initiatives and next steps](#)" (WFP/EB.2/2024/11-A).

⁴ Originally defined in WFP's General Regulations, General Rules and Financial Regulations. See "[Guidelines for the meetings of the Executive Board of the World Food Programme](#)" (WFP/EB.1/2001/4-B).

⁵ For example, see WFP Office of Evaluation. 2018. [Top 10 Lessons for Policy Quality in WFP](#). WFP also conducted a series of interviews with other United Nations agencies and programmes and Member States to better understand opportunities and challenges in the policy formulation process.

WFP's normative instruments and components

5. WFP's normative instruments define the organization's roles and responsibilities within the evolving global environment and outline its core contributions to meeting the food needs of people in emergencies and protracted crises, promoting food security and supporting economic and social development.⁶ They enable WFP to translate the priorities of its governance bodies into policies, strategies and guidance, and to set and manage accountability and expectations across the organization. WFP also uses its normative instruments to harness global expertise and evidence generated by the United Nations system, research institutions, governments and civil society and to feed external and internal learning and trends into its strategy and policy planning processes.
6. The following constitute WFP's main normative instruments, which together shape how WFP carries out its country strategic plans (CSPs) and other operations and aim to ensure that the organization has the capabilities, tools and systems in place to deliver on its mandate.
7. A **policy** is a course or principle of action adopted by WFP and used to guide decision making and operations. The development of a policy aims to codify a new way of thinking or a body of evidence that is not captured in WFP's current set of policies, addressing a clear and specific gap. Policies are part of a set of normative instruments that WFP can deploy to achieve the objectives of its strategic plan and guide the development and implementation of CSPs. A policy is presented to the Board for decision and remains valid until decommissioned.
8. **Enablers** facilitate the implementation of a policy to achieve its intended results. The strategic plan for 2022–2025 defined key enablers as people, partnerships, funding, evidence, technology and innovation.
9. A policy **implementation plan** is a document that outlines the investments and activities needed to implement a policy and includes top-level activities with an indicative budget, timeframe and monitoring and evaluation plan. Implementation plans are endorsed by WFP management and submitted to the Executive Board as supplementary documents for information when policies are sent to the Board for decision.⁷
10. A **thematic or programme-based strategy** is a contextualized⁸ and time-bound action plan developed by WFP and endorsed by WFP management to support the implementation of a specific area of programming, mode of delivery or enabler. Strategies have explicit programmatic targets and focus on guidance, capacities and resourcing. While a policy establishes what WFP will focus on, a strategy is the plan of action that explains how WFP will deliver.⁹ WFP will give the Executive Board visibility on strategies through an online platform.
11. **Guidance** refers to an internal document, or set of documents, aimed at assisting WFP personnel in translating policies into action, based on the most relevant and up-to-date evidence and learning. For country offices, guidance provides direction on how to design and implement activities on the ground. Developed by WFP divisions or services, guidance

⁶ Article II: The purposes and functions of WFP, [“General Regulations, General Rules, Financial Regulations, Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board”](#)

⁷ This budget does not include the resources required for operations, which are reflected in CSPs.

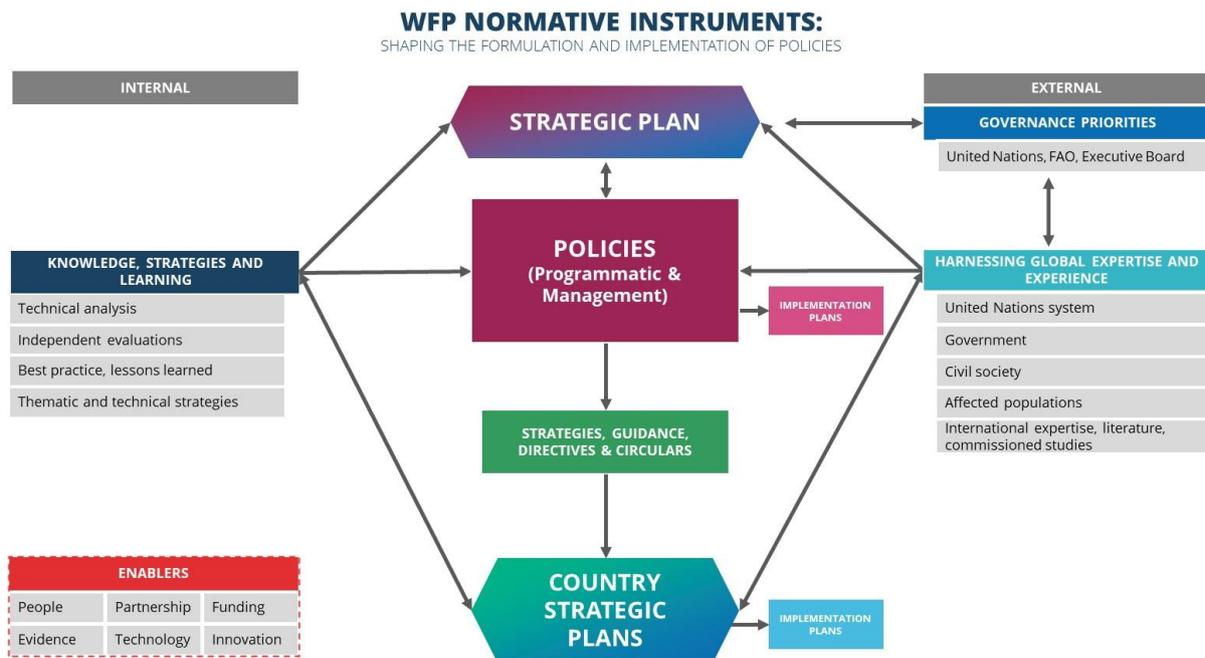
⁸ They can be contextualized by subject area applicability or region.

⁹ A strategy may also be considered where an approach or activity is considered exploratory or situated across multiple thematic areas. Smaller scale thematic areas may also be addressed more effectively through internal WFP strategies, which is both more time and cost efficient.

documents are approved by the managers of those divisions or services within their reporting lines.

12. **Executive Director's circulars** cover procedures that are binding and apply across WFP, organizational changes affecting the structure of WFP, and other matters such as delegations of authority. **Directives** are regulatory instruments used by heads of divisions to set out procedures and other instructions that concern matters that fall in their respective areas of responsibility.

Figure 1: WFP's normative instruments



Abbreviation: FAO = Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Policy categories

13. WFP categorizes its policies in the annual policy compendium¹⁰ as either programmatic policies or management policies.¹¹
 - **Programmatic policies** establish WFP's level of ambition and objectives in its work to meet emergency needs and promote food security. Such policies seek to adapt or transform WFP's programmes, setting priorities and direction for CSPs on what to do to achieve the aims of the strategic plan and explaining the rationale for action. They also inform strategies and guidance for the field on how to achieve those aims.
 - **Management policies** aim to ensure that WFP's workforce and corporate systems are fit for purpose; examples include the people policy and the risk enterprise management policy. This set of policies helps WFP to organize its systems and actions in a way that maximizes the results of its operations and programmes and supports accountability. Each management policy is followed by an Executive Director's circular,

¹⁰ "Compendium of policies relating to the strategic plan" (WFP/EB.2/2024/4-F).

¹¹ The current policy compendium includes drivers of food and nutrition insecurity; principles; strategic outcomes and cross-cutting priorities; and enablers and corporate policies. These categories are based on the structure of the strategic plan for 2022–2025. From the introduction of this new policy framework, the annual compendium will have two categories: programmatic policies and management policies.

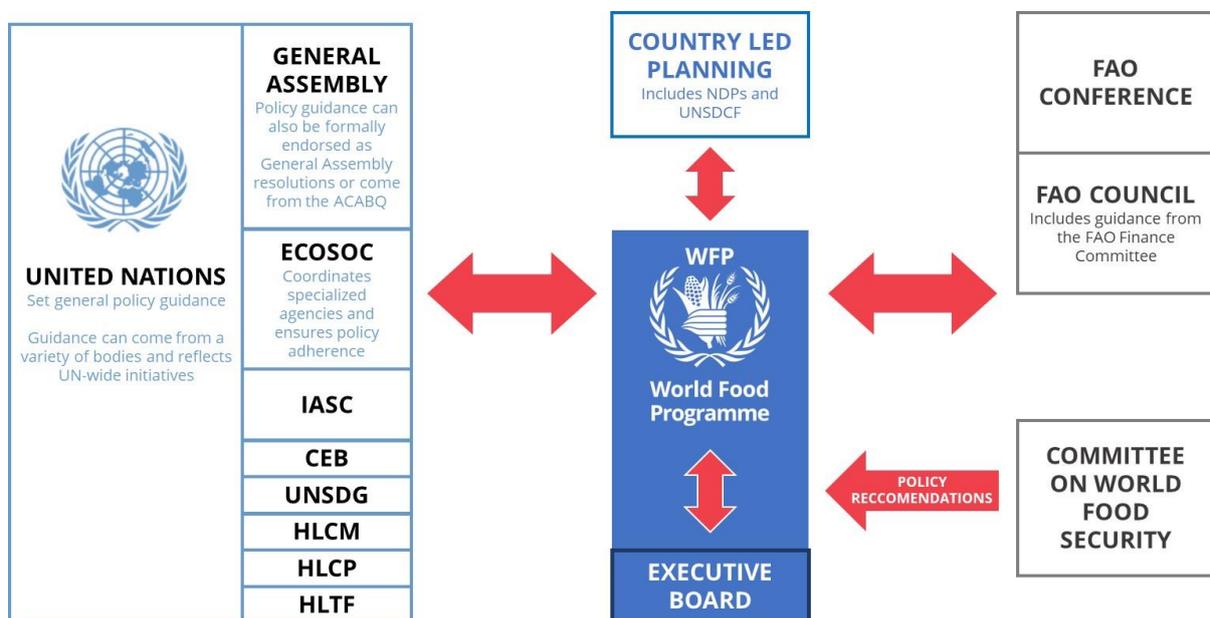
which promulgates the policy and delegates authority to enable the administrative action and organizational change needed to implement it.

WFP policy process

Governance regime for WFP policies

14. WFP’s General Regulations, General Rules and Financial Regulations assign the Executive Board the responsibility for providing WFP with intergovernmental support and specific policy direction that are consistent with the overall policy guidance provided by the United Nations General Assembly, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Conference, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and the FAO Council. The Board provides an annual report to ECOSOC and the FAO Council, detailing progress on the implementation of the policies formulated by the General Assembly and the FAO Conference and the coordination measures and guidance received from ECOSOC and the FAO Council.
15. Figure 2 illustrates how the United Nations General Assembly, the FAO Conference, ECOSOC and the FAO Council provide policy guidance to WFP. The General Assembly and ECOSOC can also provide policy guidance to the FAO Conference and Council. WFP actively participates in the reform of the United Nations development system at the global level and in the development of United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks and common country analyses at the country level, which constitute a coherent and effective channel through which national priorities feed into WFP’s normative instruments.¹²

Figure 2: Policy governance



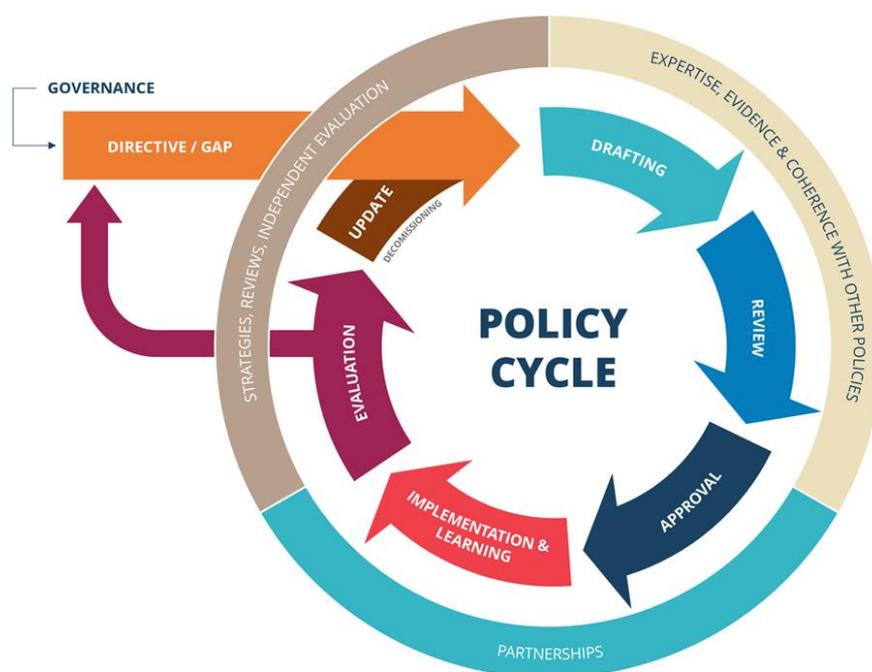
Abbreviations: CEB = United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination; HLCM = High-Level Committee on Management; HLCP = High-Level Committee on Programmes; HLTF = High-Level Task Force; IASC = Inter-Agency Standing Committee; UNSDCF = United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks; UNSDG = United Nations Sustainable Development Group.

¹² For instance, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the “Pact for the Future”, which lays out dozens of actions for the United Nations system, including a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations, ([A/RES/79/1](#)). Some of those will be captured in additional forthcoming General Assembly resolutions and will help to guide WFP’s policy formulation.

16. Within WFP, the portfolio of policies is facilitated through the Policy Committee and (for programmatic policies) the Policy Cycle Steering Group. The Policy Committee is an internal advisory body, chaired by the Assistant Executive Director, Partnerships and Innovation Department. Comprised of the senior management team and selected directors, it is dedicated to the review and internal endorsement of policies and strategies. The Policy Cycle Steering Group is chaired by the Director, Programme Policy and Guidance Division, with the participation of key WFP services. The Policy Cycle Steering Group aims to strengthen programme policy coherence and provides advice to the Assistant Executive Director, Programme Operations Department, on policy-related matters.

WFP policy cycle

Figure 3: The policy cycle



Policy gap identification

17. A new policy implies a change in how WFP operates, rather than an adjustment or refinement of existing practices. Policy gaps can be identified by the United Nations system, various WFP divisions (including the Office of Evaluation), WFP management or the Executive Board.
18. Following the launch of a new strategic plan, WFP undertakes a gap analysis to ensure that its set of policies enable the achievement of the plan's objectives. Drawing on WFP evaluations, policy guidance, learning, external evidence and expertise, the gap analysis is shared with the Executive Board as a basis for a strategic exchange on policy gaps. The analysis includes how identified gaps can best be addressed and indicates the most relevant and effective normative instrument to do so.
19. Once there is agreement on the need for a new policy, it is tabled at the Executive Board Bureau for inclusion in the biennial programme of work.
20. An update on the gap analysis is provided in the annual policy compendium, ensuring that the Executive Board is informed about how identified gaps are being addressed. If, during the implementation of the strategic plan, WFP management or members of the

Executive Board identify a policy gap that was not detected by the initial gap analysis, this can also be flagged in the annual policy compendium and tabled for discussion at the Executive Board Bureau for potential inclusion in the biennial programme of work.

Policy development

21. A policy is developed by a lead WFP division or service, drawing on research and analysis from a desk review, consultations and peer feedback. The process is guided by an internal reference group and external consultations, which ensure that the policy is developed with inputs from stakeholders both within and outside the organization.
22. The Executive Board is involved in policy formulation from the outset, with a focus on transparent strategic engagement across the membership. This includes a strategic informal discussion between WFP management and the Board during the policy conception phase (potentially in the form of a workshop or other meeting format), informed by a policy brief.¹³
23. The policy brief will cover the following aspects:
 - the importance of the policy issue;
 - its relevance to WFP's mandate;
 - key objectives of the proposed policy;
 - associated evidence and data; and
 - risks and opportunities.
24. Such engagement at the outset of the policy drafting process facilitates strategic feedback by focusing on high-level contributions from the Executive Board before attention is turned to addressing technical observations once a policy has been drafted.
25. While the policy is being developed, WFP holds consultations with a broad range of internal and external actors, ensuring that operational evidence and views from across the organization consistently inform the development of policies. In line with the people-centred approach prioritized in the strategic plan for 2022–2025¹⁴ and detailed in the protection and accountability policy (2020),¹⁵ WFP is also committed to reflecting the experience and perspectives of affected populations and the people it serves, especially in the formulation of programmatic policies. This consultative and participatory approach helps to ensure that policies and their implementation plans are realistic and pragmatic.
26. Once the lead division or service has an advanced policy draft, it is shared with the Executive Board for consultation. This takes the form of an online virtual consultation platform, with Board members invited to provide written suggestions and technical contributions, and an in-person informal consultation, both held prior to the submission of the policy for decision by the Board. WFP indicates how strategic feedback and comments raised by Board members have been incorporated into the policy document. Additional informal consultations may be called by the Executive Board as necessary.

¹³ Not all aspects of the policy brief necessarily apply to management policies.

¹⁴ “WFP strategic plan (2022–2025)” (WFP/EB.2/2021/4-A/1/Rev.2).

¹⁵ “WFP protection and accountability policy” (WFP/EB.2/2020/4-A/1/Rev.2).

Elements of high-quality policies

27. The lead WFP division or service drafting the policy prepares a consolidated document, incorporating feedback from the consultative process alongside evidence from the desk review and data analysis. WFP ensures that policies are integrated and aligned with other policies. While the purpose of each policy will vary,¹⁶ the following elements are required for programme policies to be effective, actionable and of high quality:
- context;
 - evidence base;
 - purpose and scope;¹⁷
 - principles, objectives and expected results;
 - policy coherence within the United Nations system and WFP's normative structure;
 - partnerships; and
 - monitoring, evaluation and reporting.
28. WFP is committed to providing concise, strategic policy documents, within a maximum of 6,000 words.

Policy approval

29. The final draft of the policy is shared with the WFP Policy Committee for endorsement. It is then presented to the Executive Board for decision at a regular or annual session. When a policy is submitted for decision, WFP provides an implementation plan and indicative budget as a supplementary note.

Policy implementation and learning

30. The implementation plan for policies highlights priority actions for the policy rollout and outlines the workstreams for implementing a policy, as well as key roles and responsibilities at WFP headquarters and in country offices. The policy owner in WFP headquarters is accountable for rolling out the policy and providing guidance to support the uptake of the policy across WFP. Meanwhile, country offices are accountable for implementing activities in line with policies, within their CSPs and during the internal management of their operations.
31. With the approval of management policies, an Executive Director's circular is issued to ensure that the organization is aware of the policy, to enable necessary organizational changes and to clarify delegation of authority and accountability. The approval of a management policy may also be followed by new or updated guidance to divisions and country offices or developing new tools.
32. WFP is committed to ensuring that new programmatic policies are followed by the necessary guidance and outreach to support their implementation and that policies are integrated into the design and operationalization of CSPs¹⁸ and country operations. Prior to the

¹⁶ "Policy-making is now such a broad term that it cannot be examined using a single model" in Jones, H. and others. 2013. *Knowledge, policy and power in international development: a practical framework for improving policy*. Overseas Development Institute Background Note.

¹⁷ A policy will include a definition of terms and international standards.

¹⁸ CSPs are one of the main channels through which WFP policies are expressed and implemented. They benefit from close consultations with governments, partners, WFP management and technical units and are presented for decision by the Executive Board.

presentation at the Executive Board for decision, the design of each CSP requires extensive internal and external review. Country directors are accountable for implementing relevant WFP policies, taking into account the context, priorities and needs in their respective countries as well as the partners, capacities and funding available to implement WFP programmes. Country offices also provide feedback on challenges encountered during implementation and lessons learned.

33. The annual policy compendium provides an overview of the status of all policies, reflecting recent progress and challenges in their implementation and related evaluation findings. Further updates on the implementation of a policy can be provided to Executive Board members upon request.
34. Policy reviews and evaluations provide essential independent feedback that guides the implementation of policies.

Policy evaluation

35. All policies are evaluated by the Office of Evaluation between four and six years after the start of implementation. Evaluations are an important source of accountability and learning; efforts have been made to ensure that sufficient time and capacity is dedicated to using evaluation results to improve policies and programme excellence.¹⁹ Findings from an evaluation can confirm the continued validity of a policy and its implementation, identifying whether there is a need for an update to the policy, a new policy or the decommissioning of a policy.

Policy update

36. WFP has decades of experience working in the humanitarian and development space and has established a broad range of policies since the early 2000s. New evidence or a new global priority often requires a revision of an existing policy or normative guidance rather than a substantive shift in how WFP operates such as would require a new policy. Policy updates may be recommended in several ways: in an evaluation led by WFP's Office of Evaluation; during a review of WFP's portfolio of policies following the rollout of a new strategic plan; or following analysis of new trends and evidence that shape the direction of WFP programmes and operations. A policy update does not change the principles and broad objectives of a policy.
37. Agreement to update a policy is reached following the same process with the Executive Board Bureau as for a new policy, noting that where an update of a policy is recommended following an evaluation, this can be agreed with the Executive Board during the discussion on the management response to an evaluation during an Executive Board session. The development, approval and implementation of a policy update also follow the same process within the policy cycle.

Policy decommissioning

38. Policies may be decommissioned for several reasons, including when a policy is deemed no longer relevant due to a significant change in the international context; an evaluation recommends that the current policy is no longer required or suitable; or a policy has been replaced by a new policy.²⁰

¹⁹ "WFP Evaluation Policy" (WFP/EB.1/2022/4-C). See also, WFP Office of Evaluation. 2018. *Top 10 Lessons for Policy Quality in WFP*.

²⁰ Old policies may be combined into one new policy, with the old policies decommissioned.

39. Under the policy cycle framework, the lead service or division will propose decommissioning a policy through the Policy Committee; following the Policy Committee's endorsement, this will be reflected in the annual policy compendium.²¹ WFP will seek to ensure that references to decommissioned policies are removed from internal and external documentation.

Timeframe for policy formulation

40. Policy formulation requires significant staff time, careful planning and prioritization. Once agreement is reached on developing a new policy, the average timeline from conception to endorsement is between 16 and 24 months, depending on the level of consultation required.

²¹ The Board is informed of the recommendation to decommission a policy through evaluations and notified of decommissioning in the annual policy compendium.