

Implementation of the 2017 environmental policy

Background paper



Informal consultation

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**World Food Programme
Rome, Italy**

1. Introduction

1. WFP embraces the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which envisages a world freed from hunger through the successful attainment of socially equitable and environmentally responsible sustainable development. WFP is therefore committed to mainstreaming environmental sustainability into all its functions, operations and programmes, as stated in the [2017 Environmental Policy](#) (hereafter referred to as “the policy”).
2. This paper summarizes WFP’s advances in mainstreaming environmental sustainability over the period from 2017 to 2022, in accordance with the 2017 policy and through inter-agency partnerships.¹

2. Key commitments of the 2017 environmental policy

3. The policy has five **objectives** (see paragraph 37 of the policy). It aims to support WFP and its partners in:
 - i) progressively enhancing the environmental sustainability of activities and operations, improving efficiency and outcomes over time;
 - ii) protecting the environment and preventing pollution by managing risks and maximizing the environmental opportunities of all activities and operations;
 - iii) minimizing the carbon footprint and increasing the resource-efficiency of operations and facilities management, particularly the management of materials, water, energy and waste;
 - iv) aligning WFP’s approach to environmental sustainability with global standards and good international practice, including in donors’ policies and expectations; and
 - v) strengthening the understanding and capacities of national governments, cooperating partners, suppliers and, particularly, beneficiary communities in planning and implementing sound activities for food security and nutrition.
4. The policy includes the concrete commitment that WFP would establish and maintain three **tools** (see paragraph 40, with further elucidation in paragraphs 41 to 43):
 - a) a set of core **environmental standards**;
 - b) a process for **screening and categorizing environmental risks**; and
 - c) an **environmental management system** (EMS).
5. The policy indicates that these tools should be aligned with common practices in the United Nations system and with internationally recognized standards (paragraph 40); that they should allow WFP to systematically consider the environment from the earliest stages in the design of country strategic plans (CSPs), operations and other activities (paragraphs 39, 42 and 51); that environmental risk screening should be consistent with the enterprise risk management policy (paragraph 42); and that the tools should apply in both development and emergency settings (paragraph 38) and be developed and rolled out in a phased approach (paragraph 50).

¹ Some of those inter-agency partnerships are listed in section 5, on “Key partnerships”, in this paper.

3. Overview of activities, 2017–2022

3.1 Development and rollout of the tools envisaged in the 2017 policy

This contributes to objectives i), ii), iii), iv) and v) and the commitments outlined in paragraphs 38–43 and 49–56 of the policy.

6. The following four-phased plan was agreed for the development and rollout of the three tools described in paragraphs 40–43 of the policy.



7. In phase I, the standards and tools were developed through internal consultation and in collaboration with external experts. Early in this phase, WFP management decided to develop and adopt environmental and social standards (rather than environmental standards only) and a package of environmental and social safeguard procedures that would be applied at different stages of the programme cycle (rather than applying risk screening during the design stage only). This aligned WFP with common practices in other United Nations entities agencies and with the requirements of WFP’s multilateral donors.
8. Phase II focused on field testing and fine-tuning the tools. Throughout phases I and II, the EMS was piloted in six country offices and the safeguard procedures tested in 11. The fine-tuning led to the development of the [WFP environmental and social sustainability framework \(ESSF\)](#). The ESSF is aligned with the [model approach to environmental and social standards in UN programming](#) and comprises the following:
- a) [Environmental and social standards](#): a set of minimum requirements and expectations that need to be respected in all operations and programme activities.
 - b) [Environmental and social safeguards for programme activities](#): a set of tools for managing environmental and social risks in the programme cycle.
 - c) [Environmental management system](#): a system based on standard ISO 14001 of the International Organization for Standardization for guiding day-to-day decision-making on the environmental sustainability of support functions.

The ESSF was formally established by means of an Executive Director’s circular in September 2021 ([OED2021/018](#)), in compliance with WFP’s commitments mentioned in paragraphs 40–43 of the policy.

9. Phase III focused on the organization-wide rollout of the tools, which started in January 2020. Regional advisors were recruited to build the capacity of country offices in environmental and social safeguards and the EMS. However, further recruitment of advisors and deployment to regional bureaux was hampered in 2020–2021 owing to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (see section 6.1 of this paper). The rollout of the tools and training is still ongoing (see table 1).

TABLE 1: STATUS OF THE ROLLOUT OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN COUNTRY OFFICES AND SAFEGUARDS IN PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of country offices implementing the EMS (as % of total country offices)	6 (7%)	7 (8%)	15 (14%)	30*
Number of country offices reporting on the screening of programme activities annually**	32	30	44	<i>not yet available</i>

* As of 31 October 2022.

** The indicator methodology was updated in 2020. As a result, the values for 2019 are not fully comparable with those for 2020 and 2021.

10. Phase IV is the steady-state phase in which the standards and tools will be applied in all country offices, with technical support from regional bureaux and oversight from headquarters.

3.2 Mainstreaming into programme activities by means of safeguards

This contributes mainly to objectives i), ii), iv) and v) and the commitments outlined in paragraphs 39, 42 and 51 of the policy.

11. WFP's environmental and social standards are mainstreamed into the programme **activities** in each CSP through the application of environmental and social safeguards. The safeguards consist of the following tools, which are applied at various stages of the programme cycle to identify and manage the environmental and social risks and impacts:
- A strategic assessment of the environmental and social risks of the activities and operations described in a CSP is carried out during the formulation of the CSP.
 - Environmental and social risk screening of specific interventions under a CSP activity is carried out during the definition of the implementation details of those interventions.
 - An environmental and social impact assessment is undertaken for each high-risk intervention under the CSP activity.
 - An environmental and social management plan is developed for each medium- or high-risk intervention under the CSP activity.
 - A community feedback mechanism, to which all stakeholders have access, is established at the country or programme level.

Box 1: Example of the application of safeguards in a country office

In Mozambique, the WFP country office started to apply environmental and social safeguards in 2019 under a project funded by the Green Climate Fund in Tete province. After receiving training on the application of safeguards, the cooperating partners, in collaboration with WFP's project implementation unit, were able to identify environmental and social risks, categorize each project intervention according to its level of risk and define relevant mitigation measures. For instance, the screening identified the risk of water and air pollution resulting from the use of pesticides. Hence, the design of some project interventions was adjusted to promote integrated pest management methods, which is expected to minimize the negative impacts of the interventions and ensure more sustainable food production.

The country office has also been testing the use of the risk screening tool in other programme areas, such as school-based programmes. In school feeding programmes, for instance, there is a risk that an increased use of firewood for the cooking of meals can cause indiscriminate tree cutting and indoor air pollution. This risk can be avoided by equipping the cooking spaces with cleaner and more fuel-efficient stoves. Such measures have the potential to reduce wood consumption by at least 30 percent and reduce negative health effects from indoor air pollution.

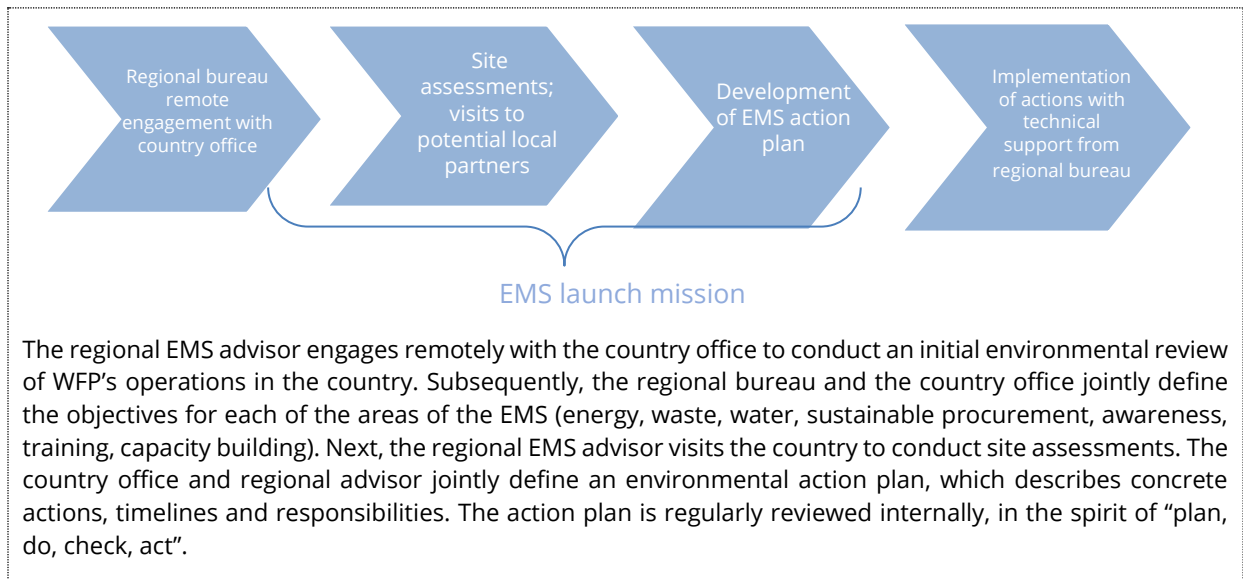
3.3 Mainstreaming into in-house operations by means of an environmental management system

This contributes mainly to objectives i), ii), iii) and iv) and the commitments outlined in paragraphs 38, 43 and 53–56 of the policy.

12. WFP's environmental standards are applied to **in-house operations** through an EMS based on the principles of international standard ISO 14001. The EMS covers the in-house operations that fall under the control of WFP's management in the following functional areas: facilities management; procurement of goods, services and food; logistics; emergency preparedness; travel; information technology (IT); and human resources management.
13. The ISO standard provides a framework for the continuous improvement of WFP's environmental performance (through a process of "plan, do, check, act") through the incorporation of environmental considerations into standard procedures, guidelines, manuals and partnership agreements; awareness raising among WFP employees² and partners; and the direct implementation of environmental improvement actions.
14. The following paragraphs provide an overview of key actions taken to mainstream environmental sustainability into the functional areas covered by the EMS. Box 2 describes the rollout of the EMS in a country office.

² "WFP employees" refers to employees of any contract type, including professional staff, general service staff, junior professional officers and consultants.

Box 2: Rollout of the environmental management system in a country office



Facilities management

- Environmental sustainability is integrated into WFP's [management services manual](#) and the training of facilities managers, with specific attention to reducing energy and water consumption and managing waste.
- Energy consumption in WFP facilities accounts for approximately 30 percent of WFP's reported greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Two-thirds of those emissions are caused by diesel-powered generators in field locations.³ WFP created an energy efficiency programme that provides WFP country offices with grants to cover the costs of increasing the energy efficiency of facilities and replacing diesel-powered generators with on-site solar installations. Between 2012 and 2018, the programme supported 19 projects in 12 country offices, which led to a reduction of 2,009 mt of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) in GHG emissions and savings of USD 4.7 million. In October 2022, ten new projects were selected. The energy efficiency programme is funded by a small CO₂ emissions tax that is levied on the petrol and diesel vehicles used under WFP's Global Vehicle Leasing Programme.⁴
- WFP is making great efforts to improve the management of waste from its facilities, particularly hazardous waste. Hazardous waste assessments have been completed at vehicle workshops in 11 countries. Several country offices have set up long-term agreements with local recycling companies to enable the systematic recycling of various types of waste. For instance, the Kenya country office recycles used polypropylene food bags via a local company. A first batch of 60 tons was turned into 600,000 new bags.
- Since 2019, all single-use plastics have been banned from WFP headquarters, avoiding 650,000 items of disposable plastic per year. The ban is set to be extended to other offices. WFP's Executive Board Secretariat saves more than a million sheets of paper every year under its "Paperless Executive Board" initiative.

³ For details on WFP's GHG tracking and reporting, see section 4, on "Quantification of WFP's footprint 2017–2022", in this paper.

⁴ The tax is currently set at USD 5 per month for each vehicle. In 2023, it will be increased to up to USD 27 per month, depending on the model and fuel type of the vehicle.

Procurement of goods, services and food

19. WFP's [goods and services procurement manual](#) includes guidance on sustainable procurement. WFP is increasingly incorporating environmental performance criteria and whole-of-life costing into the specifications of products and services and into tender evaluations (with criteria including the use of certified renewable electricity purchases, optimized food packaging and energy-efficient IT and air-conditioning equipment). WFP maintains a repository of sustainability criteria for commonly purchased items.
20. WFP has made significant progress in avoiding the use of unsustainable palm oil, with 100 percent of the palm oil procured by headquarters being certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, and 87 percent certified as fully sustainable. Headquarters purchases more than 70 percent of all palm oil used in WFP's operations globally.
21. WFP builds the capacities of local suppliers to improve the quality of the food products offered to WFP (in particular through the [smallholder access to markets](#) programme) and works with cooperating partners and suppliers to reduce the environmental footprint of the supply chain.
22. WFP is constantly searching for more sustainable packaging solutions. In 2022 it partnered with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on identifying alternatives to polypropylene bags; various options for field trial and scale up are under consideration. In addition, in 2021 WFP signed a three-year partnership agreement with a global packaging supplier on jointly enhancing the packaging used for food assistance around the world.

Emergency preparedness

23. The [emergency field operations pocketbook](#), which is the most important reference book for WFP emergency operators, includes guidance on increasing the environmental sustainability of emergency operations.
24. All of the environmental actions implemented in a country office using the EMS are also implemented in the emergency operations managed by that country office.

Fleet operations

25. WFP's global fleet of trucks accounts for approximately 18 percent of WFP's reported GHG emissions. To reduce those emissions, WFP trains employees on eco-driving and the proper maintenance of vehicles. WFP's fleet management system helps fleet managers to monitor vehicle usage and implement cost-efficiency measures. While the total distance travelled by WFP trucks rose from 8 million km in 2019 to more than 12 million km in 2021, the fuel efficiency increased by 18 percent.
26. WFP's global fleet of passenger vehicles also accounts for approximately 18 percent of the reported emissions. WFP is electrifying that fleet, and electric and hybrid vehicles have been introduced at ten country offices so far. The total distance travelled by WFP vehicles dropped from 42.5 million km in 2019 to 40 million km in 2021 while the fuel efficiency increased by 3 percent.

Logistics

27. The WFP Aviation Branch has adopted an environmental and sustainability programme that operationalizes the organization's commitment to the continuous improvement of the service in terms of environmental impact. As part of that programme, environmental clauses have been integrated into all fuel and aircraft charter agreements between the WFP Aviation Branch and air operators, ground handlers and fuel providers; environmental parameters have been included in procurement processes; and compliance with standard ISO 14001 is enforced as a minimum requirement.

28. The WFP Shipping Branch has a rigorous vetting process in place for confirming the compliance of all chartered ships with international standards in relation to marine pollution, performance, fuel consumption and efficiency. In 2020, when the International Maritime Organization set a new limit for the sulphur content of ship fuel, WFP immediately switched to low-sulphur fuel throughout its fleet and complied with the new limit.

Travel

29. Thanks to the travel restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP's emissions from business travel via commercial airline dropped by 60 percent between 2019 and 2020, and stayed low in 2021. WFP seeks to maintain the reduction in business travel through the enforcement of new travel guidelines, the strengthening of remote working and meeting modalities, and awareness raising.

Information technology

30. WFP has moved most of its IT services to the Cloud. This has reduced electricity use and GHG emissions. Most IT equipment is purchased from ISO 14001-compliant companies.
31. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that WFP has adequate IT infrastructure to allow employees to work remotely and participate in meetings online. This is key to the reduction of emissions from travel.

Human resources management

32. The WFP Code of Conduct has been updated and includes a statement that employees will work in ways that take into account "social and environmental considerations of the present and future generations".
33. The generic staff profiles of country directors and professional administration staff are being updated to include environmental protection as one of their responsibilities.
34. As well as the in-country training on the EMS and safeguards (described in section 3.1 of this paper), generic training modules for all employees have been developed and made available on WFP's intranet. These include a training module offered by the Sustainable United Nations team of the United Nations Environment Programme.

3.4 Mainstreaming into enterprise risk management

This contributes mainly to objective ii) and the commitments outlined in paragraph 42 of the policy.

35. By design, the ESSF is aligned with the "three lines model" used by WFP in its enterprise risk management:
- *First line:* the ESSF standards and tools are applied by employees in country offices.
 - *Second line:* regional advisors provide technical assistance; headquarters maintains oversight.
 - *Third line:* the Office of Evaluation and the Office of Internal Audit can provide independent and objective assurance and advice on the adequacy and effectiveness of the ESSF.

3.5 Mainstreaming into agreements with partners

This contributes to objectives i), ii), iii), and iv) and the commitments outlined in paragraphs 38 and 43 of the policy.

36. Any partner that implements programme activities, or parts thereof, on behalf of WFP needs to respect WFP's environmental and social standards and to apply the safeguards, as defined in the ESSF. The standard field-level agreement that WFP signs with cooperating partners has been updated in 2022 to reflect those requirements.
37. Since the establishment of the ESSF in 2021, WFP positions it in agreements with donors as the reference framework for ensuring the environmental and social sustainability of programme activities. If a donor has more stringent requirements, WFP may consider applying additional sustainability measures on a case-by-case basis, to the extent that those measures are consistent with WFP's policies.

3.6 Mainstreaming into corporate planning, monitoring, and reporting

This contributes mainly to objective ii) and the commitments outlined in paragraph 56 of the policy.

38. Since 2017, the WFP corporate results framework has included a management key performance indicator that tracks the rollout of the EMS in WFP offices, and a cross-cutting programme indicator that tracks the application of risk screening in programme activities.
39. As of 2019, second-generation CSPs have included a strategic assessment of the potential environmental and social risks associated with WFP's operations and activities in the country concerned.
40. Since 2020, annual country reports include a standard section on the environmental sustainability of operations and programme activities.
41. The new WFP strategic plan for 2022–2025 positions environmental sustainability as one of four cross-cutting issues and refers to the ESSF for its mainstreaming.

4. Quantification of WFP's footprint, 2017–2022

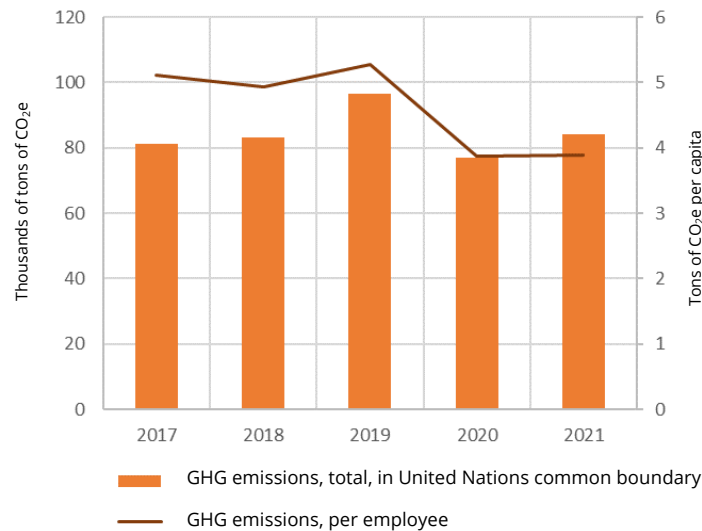
This contributes mainly to objective iii) and the commitments outlined in paragraph 56 of the policy.

42. In 2009, WFP became one of the first agencies in the United Nations system to track and report on the GHG emissions generated by the various business areas covered by the "United Nations common boundary".⁵ The United Nations common boundary comprises the emissions from facilities (stemming from the purchase or generation of electricity or heat and the use of refrigerants for air-conditioning and refrigeration) and transportation (air, sea and ground). In 2021, WFP reported total emissions of 84,191 mt of CO₂e. Figure 1 shows the evolution of those emissions in the period from 2017 to 2021. WFP also tracks emissions from WFP aviation services and reports on them voluntarily. In 2017, WFP started to collect and report information on waste generation and water usage in its facilities.

⁵ Established by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination in 2007.

43. Since 2015, and in line with the 2007 United Nations Climate Neutral Strategy, WFP has purchased certified emission reduction units through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to offset its annual unavoidable GHG emissions and achieve climate-neutral status with respect to emissions from the United Nations common boundary.

Figure 1: WFP's reported greenhouse gas emissions, 2017-2021



5. Key partnerships in environmental sustainability

44. WFP is an active member of the United Nations Environment Management Group, an inter-agency platform where United Nations entities agree on common strategies in relation to environmental issues. The following strategies of the group have influenced WFP's work on environmental sustainability:
- The Model Approach to Environmental and Social Standards for United Nations Programming laid the basis for WFP's safeguards.
 - The Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System 2020-2030 Phase I: Environmental Sustainability in the Area of Management laid the basis for WFP's environmental plan of action (EPACT) (see section 7.2 below).
45. WFP reports annually on its GHG emissions, waste production and water consumption through the Greening the Blue reporting initiative led by the United Nations Environment Programme.
46. WFP is a founding member of the Waste Management and Measuring, Reverse Logistics, Environmentally Sustainable Procurement and Transport, and Circular Economy Project on sustainable logistics, and the Joint Initiative on Sustainable Humanitarian Packaging Waste Management.
47. WFP contributes to ICRC's humanitarian carbon calculator project – an open-source protocol and tool that humanitarian organizations can use to track GHG emissions from all three emission scopes as defined by the global Greenhouse Gas Protocol.

6. Reflections on the implementation of the policy

6.1 Funding for implementation

48. The policy was presented to the Executive Board without a costed implementation plan. As a result, the cost of policy implementation was borne mainly by extrabudgetary (non-programme support and administrative – PSA) funding sources. The short-term nature of that funding, in combination with the logistics complications posed by COVID-19, caused a high turnover of employees hired in 2020–2021 to support the rollout of the EMS and safeguards in the field.
49. The total number of employees working full time in headquarters and the regional bureaux on the implementation of the policy rose from 6 in 2017 to 12 in 2022.⁶ The increase was made possible with the allocation of PSA funding in 2022. One additional expert has been provided by a stand-by partner. For 2023 and beyond, requests will be made for predictable annual PSA funding to cover a global headquarters support structure.
50. In 2023, the critical corporate initiative, as a one-off investment, will support the embedding of ESSF as a cross-cutting priority, aligned to WFP's strategic plan for 2022–2025.
51. In 2024, to sustain that profile and the application of the ESSF, key positions in the six regional bureaux and at headquarters need to be mainstreamed and be funded from the PSA budget.

6.2 Need for clear targets and an update of the scope of the policy

52. The policy did not set targets for WFP's environmental footprint (in terms of emissions, waste generation, water consumption or biodiversity degradation). In 2019, the United Nations system set a target for the reduction of GHG emissions by 45 percent from the 2010 baseline by 2030. WFP has adopted this target in its EPACT for 2030, which is under development (see section 7.2). No United Nations system-level targets exist for other areas, such as waste generation, water consumption or biodiversity degradation. WFP's EPACT will set its own targets where relevant.
53. The United Nations' reporting on GHG (and that of WFP) is limited to emissions from the United Nations common boundary (see paragraph 42 above), which was agreed in 2007 and now requires updating in line with international best practice. In collaboration with ICRC and other partners, WFP is exploring ways of tracking emissions from outside the United Nations common boundary.

7. Next steps

7.1 Evaluation of the policy

54. The Office of Evaluation has indicated that it plans to evaluate the policy in 2023–2024. The evaluation will provide an opportunity to assess the issues described in section 6.

7.2 Environmental plan of action 2030

55. WFP is finalizing its EPACT for 2030, which describes its commitments to environmental sustainability management and sets out targets for the reduction of its environmental footprint by 2030. The development of the EPACT was prompted by the adoption of the Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System 2020–2030 Phase I: Environmental Sustainability in the Area of Management at the United Nations system-level in 2019. The commitments and targets of the EPACT are aligned with those of the United Nations system strategy.

⁶ Only employees working in the areas of management services and programmes are included in these figures.

56. Key commitments of the EPACT include, but are not limited to, the following:
- the reduction of WFP's overall GHG emissions (from the United Nations common boundary) by 45 percent from the 2010 baseline by 2030;
 - the reduction of GHG emissions from diesel generators by 90 percent from the 2010 baseline by 2030;
 - the creation of a corporate waste tracking system for food packaging, e-waste and other major waste streams by 2025; and
 - the elimination of the open burning of waste in all locations where WFP works by 2030.

Acronyms

CO ₂ e	carbon dioxide equivalent
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
EMS	environmental management system
EPACT	environmental plan of action
ESSF	environmental and social sustainability framework
GHG	greenhouse gas
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IT	information technology
PSA	programme support and administrative