



POLICY FORMULATION FRAMEWORK

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 with the aim of helping to achieve the objectives of the strategic plan and guide the formulation of country strategic plans (CSPs). The review was prompted in part by a synthesis of evidence and lessons from WFP's policy evaluations issued by the Office of Evaluation in 2020.²
2. In 2023, an external review of WFP's governance frameworks and processes called for clarity on the role and responsibilities of the Board in relation to WFP policies. The Executive Board subsequently established a working group on governance, providing further 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 formulation framework outlines the definitions of WFP's normative instruments and clarifies the policy cycle process with the associated governance mechanisms. It elaborates on how WFP identifies policy gaps and priorities within its mandate and subsequently develops and implements policies that are built on the principles of evidence, partnership and programmatic coherence.
4. This document is informed by the recommendations of the Governance Review Working Group, evaluation findings and best practice 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).

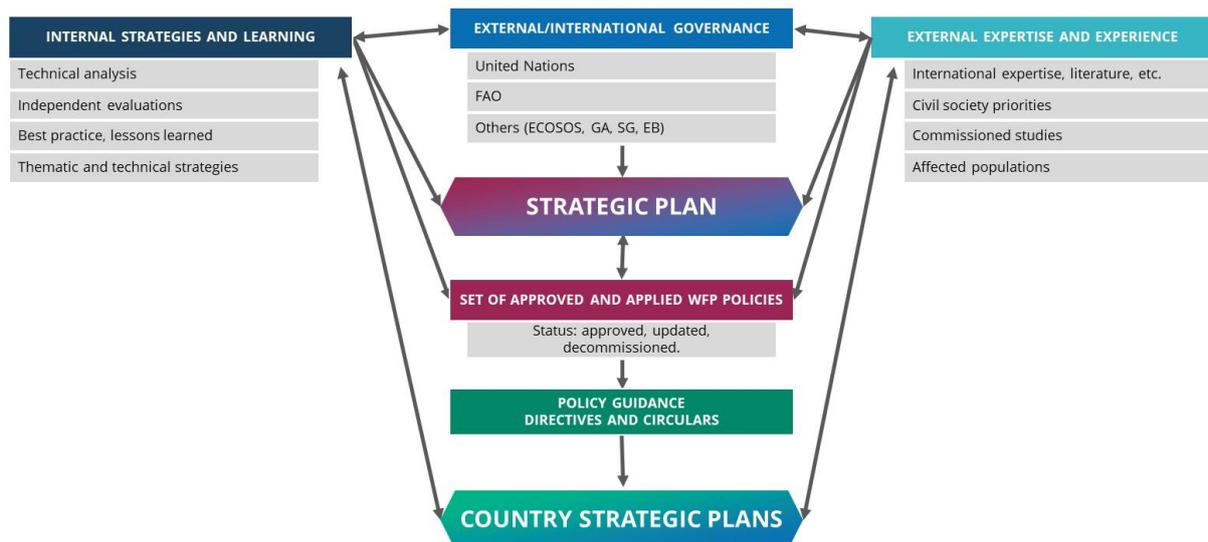
⁵ For example, see WFP Office of Evaluation. 2018. [Top 10 Lessons for Policy Quality in WFP](#). WFP also conducted a series of interviews with other United Nations agencies and programmes and Member States to better understand opportunities and challenges in the policy formulation process.

WFP's normative structure

- WFP's normative structure is an iterative mechanism that defines the organization's position within the evolving global policy environment and outlines how it strives to contribute – through action-oriented policies – to lasting solutions to hunger and malnutrition. The normative structure enables WFP to ensure that the priorities of its governance bodies are translated into policies. It also ensures that WFP captures global expertise and evidence generated by the United Nations system, research institutions, governments and civil society and feeds external and internal learning and trends into its strategic and policy planning processes.
- The normative structure provides the organizing principles for WFP's policy cycle, helping to define how policies are developed, implemented, evaluated and adopted, also at the field level. It reflects WFP's values of integrity, collaboration, commitment, humanity and inclusion and the moral imperatives embedded in its mandate of saving and changing the lives of the people it serves. All WFP policies are developed through its normative structure, from policies that shape how WFP carries out its operations to those that ensure that the organization has the tools and systems in place to deliver on its mandate.

Figure 1: WFP's normative structure

FORCES SHAPING THE DEVELOPMENT AND ADAPTATION OF APPLIED POLICIES



Abbreviations: EB = Executive Board; ECOSOC = Economic and Social Council of the United Nations; FAO = Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; GA = General Assembly; SG = United Nations Secretary-General.

Definitions of normative instruments and components

- 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 instruments that WFP can deploy to achieve the objectives of the strategic plan and guide the development and implementation of CSPs. A policy is presented to the Board for decision and remains valid until decommissioned.
- 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 ensure that a policy is implemented across WFP. The implementation plan outlines the enablers required to deliver on a policy's objectives and includes top-level activities with an indicative budget and timeframe. 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.⁶
10. A **thematic or programme-based strategy** is a contextualized⁷ and time-bound action plan developed by WFP and endorsed by its senior leadership to support the implementation of a specific area of programming, mode of delivery or enabler. Under the purview of WFP management, strategies have explicit programmatic targets and focus on guidance, capacities and resourcing.⁸
11. **Guidance** refers to an internal document, or set of documents, that ensures that WFP country offices are able to translate policies into action, based on the most relevant and up-to-date evidence and learning. They provide instruction on how to design and implement activities on the ground. Developed by WFP divisions or services, guidance documents are approved by the managers of those divisions or services within their reporting lines.
12. **Executive Director's circulars** cover procedures that 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.

Categories of policy at WFP: shaping operational activities and corporate culture and practices

13. WFP categorizes its policies in the annual policy compendium⁹ as either programmatic policies or management policies.¹⁰
 - **Programmatic policies** establish WFP's level of ambition and objectives in important areas of work to address food insecurity and malnutrition. Such policies seek to change the way in which WFP programmes work in key areas and they set a priority direction for CSPs. Programmatic policies direct country offices on what to do to achieve the aims of the strategic plan and explain 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 adapted to its mandate; examples of these policies 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.

⁶ This budget does not include the resources required for operations, which are reflected in CSPs.

⁷ They can be contextualized by subject area applicability or region.

⁸ Key strategies will be shared with the Executive Board for information, via an online platform.

⁹ "Compendium of policies relating to the strategic plan" (WFP/EB.2/2024/4-F).

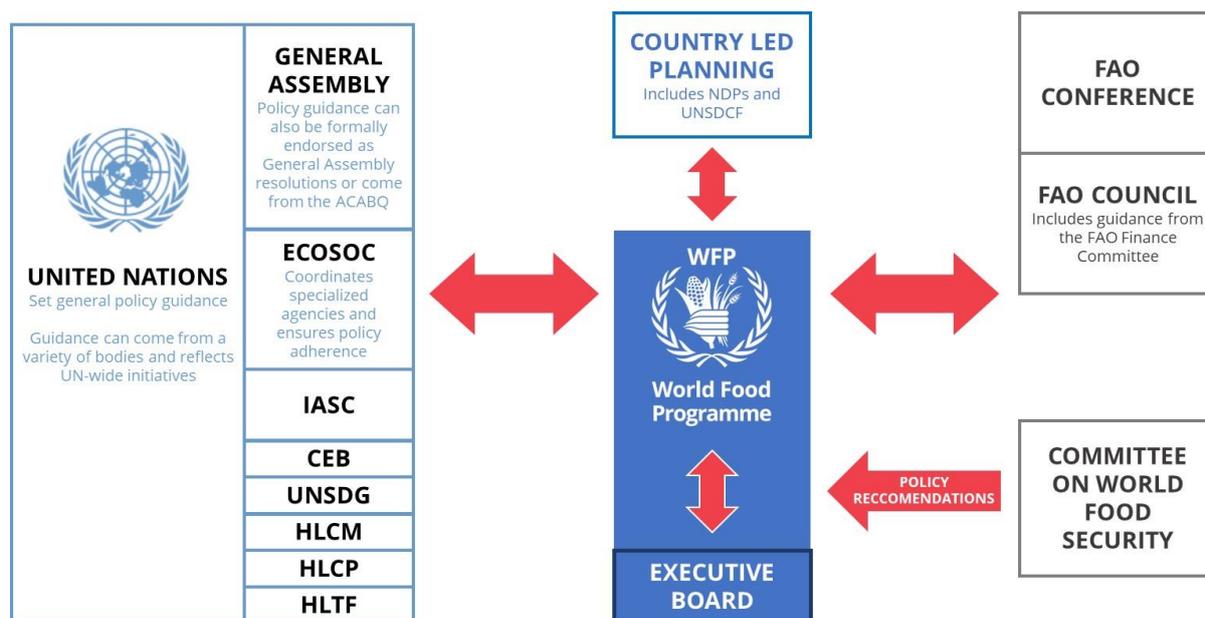
¹⁰ The current policy compendium includes drivers of food and nutrition insecurity; principles; strategic outcomes and cross-cutting priorities; and enablers and corporate policies. These categories are based on the structure of the strategic plan for 2022–2025. From the introduction of this new policy framework, the annual compendium will have two categories: programmatic policies and management policies.

WFP policy process

The governance regime for WFP policies

14. The 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 structure.¹¹

Figure 2: Policy governance



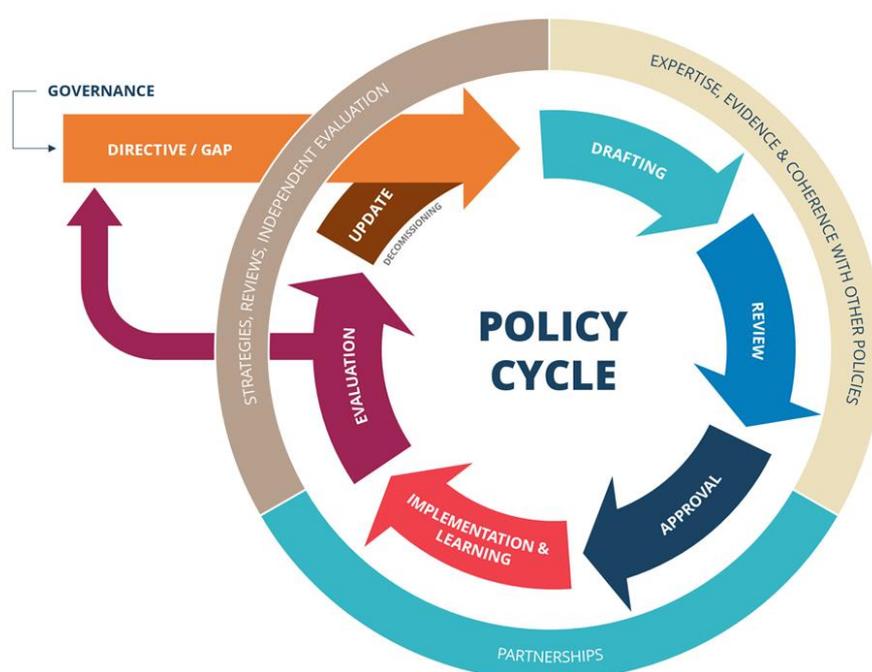
Abbreviations: CEB = United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination; HLCM = High-Level Committee on Management; HLCP = High-Level Committee on Programmes; HLTF = High-Level Task Force; IASC = Inter-Agency Standing Committee; UNSDCFs = United Nations sustainable development cooperation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

¹¹ 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 the Policy Cycle Steering Group, which are mechanisms that set the policy agenda and priorities, oversee policy formulation and ensure policy coherence. 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 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. Focusing on programmatic policies, the Policy Cycle Steering Group aims to strengthen 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 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 objectives of the plan. 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.¹²

¹² An update on the gap analysis is provided in the annual policy compendium, ensuring that the Executive Board is informed about how the identified gaps are being addressed.

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. 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, it can be tabled for discussion at the Executive Board Bureau and included in the biennial programme of work if agreed.

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 drafting a policy from the outset, with a focus on transparent strategic engagement across the membership. An initial discussion with the Executive Board may take the form of a workshop, providing the opportunity for a strategic discussion on the direction and scope of the policy. A policy brief is prepared and shared before the workshop, covering 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.

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.

23. While the policy is being developed, WFP holds consultations with a broad range of internal and external actors. WFP ensures that views from the field, particularly operational evidence, consistently inform the development of policies. In line with the people-centred approach prioritized in the strategic plan for 2022–2025¹³ and detailed in the protection and accountability policy (2020),¹⁴ WFP is also committed to reflecting the experience and perspectives of affected populations and the people it serves in the formulation of policies. This consultative and participatory approach helps to ensure that policies and their implementation plans are realistic and pragmatic.
24. 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 the membership 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.

¹³ “WFP strategic plan (2022–2025)” (WFP/EB.2/2021/4-A/1/Rev.2).

¹⁴ “WFP protection and accountability policy” (WFP/EB.2/2020/4-A/1/Rev.2).

Elements of high-quality policies

25. 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 in alignment with other policies within the normative structure. While the purpose of each policy will vary,¹⁵ the following elements are required for a policy to be effective, actionable and of high quality:
- context;
 - evidence base;
 - purpose and scope;¹⁶
 - principles, objectives and expected results;
 - policy coherence within the United Nations system and WFP's normative structure;
 - partnerships; and
 - monitoring, evaluation and reporting.
26. WFP is committed to providing concise, strategic policy documents, within a maximum of 6,000 words.

Policy approval

27. The final draft of the policy is shared within WFP with the Policy Committee for endorsement. It is then presented to the Executive Board for decision and approval 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

28. WFP is committed to ensuring that new policies are followed by the formulation of guidance on their implementation and that policies are integrated into the design and operationalization of CSPs¹⁷ and country operations. Country offices are expected to implement relevant WFP policies, taking into account the priorities and needs in their respective countries and the partners, capacities and funding available to implement WFP programmes. Country offices provide feedback on challenges encountered in implementation and lessons learned.
29. 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. Updates on the implementation of a policy can be provided to Executive Board members, as and when requested.
30. Policy reviews and evaluations provide critical independent feedback that guides the implementation of policies.

¹⁵ "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.

¹⁶ A policy will include a definition of terms and international standards.

¹⁷ 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.

Policy evaluation

31. All policies are formally 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.¹⁸ 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

32. 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; during a review of WFP's portfolio of policies following the roll-out 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.
33. Agreement to update a policy is reached following the same process with the Executive Board Bureau as for a new policy. The development, approval and implementation of a policy update also follow the same process within the policy cycle.

Policy decommissioning

34. 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.¹⁹
35. Under this new policy formulation framework, internal endorsement of the decommissioning of a policy will be obtained through the Policy Committee and reflected in the annual policy compendium. WFP will seek to ensure that references to decommissioned policies are removed from internal and external documentation.

Timeframe for policy formulation

36. 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.

¹⁸ "WFP Evaluation Policy" (WFP/EB.1/2022/4-C). See also, WFP Office of Evaluation. 2018. *Top 10 Lessons for Policy Quality in WFP*.

¹⁹ Old policies may be combined into one new policy, with the old policies decommissioned.