

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

PROGRAMMING FOR ADOLESCENTS

Why should WFP do more?



AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

Adolescents in the World Today



Adolescents, aged 10 to 19¹, represent about **1.2 billion people** - or 1 in 6 of the world's population. About 90% of them live in low- and middle-income countries².



More than 1.1 million adolescents die every year - over 3,000 every day - mostly **from preventable or treatable causes**. Most recent data show that major causes of death among adolescents include: road traffic injuries (135,000)³, self-harm or suicide (67,000)², diarrhoeal diseases (64,000)², interpersonal violence (42,000)², and HIV/AIDS (33,000)⁴. In 2015, over two thirds of adolescents' deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries, in the African (45%) and South-East Asia (26%) regions².



Many boys and girls, especially in developing countries, enter adolescence undernourished, making them more vulnerable to diseases later in life. It is estimated that in some countries, as many as half of all adolescents are stunted⁵. In 2016, iron deficiency anaemia was the second leading cause of years lost by adolescents due to ill-health or early death. At the same time, overweight is affecting 1 in 6 adolescents worldwide, and the numbers are increasing⁴.



Child marriage is a fundamental violation of human rights. Yet, 21% of young women were married, or in a union, before their 18th birthday; this figure goes up to 36% in low- and middle-income countries⁶.



Worldwide, approximately **21 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 become pregnant every year** in developing regions, and 12 million of them give birth. Complications from pregnancy and childbirth constitute the leading cause of death for 15-19 years old girls globally⁷.



Adolescents **are particularly vulnerable in humanitarian and fragile settings**, facing increased risk of exploitation, forced labour, sexual abuse, and exposure to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. In 2016, an estimated 408 million youth - 1 in 4 young people - resided in settings affected by conflict or organized violence, while at least 2.5 million adolescents (aged 12-17) were displaced in 2014⁸.



WHY INVEST IN ADOLESCENTS TODAY?

Adolescence – defined by the World Health Organization as the period between the ages of 10 and 19¹ – represents the bridge between childhood and adulthood⁹. As a period of life characterized by important physical, psychological, and social changes - with specific health and developmental needs - adolescence carries new risks, but also provides unique opportunities.

Investments in adolescents today will have broad implications not only for their own lives but also for family members and broader communities alike. The adolescents of today will be the parents, the teachers and the policy makers of tomorrow.

With over 1.2 billion adolescents in the world, representing about 16% of the global population⁹, the opportunities for impacting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have never been greater. Adolescents represent, in fact, a powerhouse of human potential that, if leveraged, could drive sustainable changes across all SDGs. As the world enters the final decade of the Agenda 2030, more actions are needed to accelerate progress on adolescents' health and wellbeing.



INVESTING IN ADOLESCENT WELL-BEING IS FUNDAMENTAL FOR ACHIEVING THE AGENDA 2030

Achieving the 2030 Agenda requires **accelerating actions to ensure adolescents survive and thrive** now and into adulthood. Progress on adolescent mortality has stalled and has not replicated the gains made for younger children¹⁰. Each year over 1.1 million adolescents die, with major contributors including: road traffic injuries, self-harm or suicide, diarrhoeal diseases, interpersonal violence, and HIV/AIDS^{2,3}. In addition, adolescents - particularly adolescent girls - remain nutritionally vulnerable. While in some areas of the world high rates of undernutrition persist, in others, adolescents are affected by an increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity. We will not be able to achieve Zero Hunger without investing in adolescent nutrition and well-being.



INVESTING IN ADOLESCENCE LAYS THE FOUNDATION FOR LASTING PROSPERITY

There are currently **more adolescents in the world than any previous time in history**⁹, providing an ideal opportunity to build the foundations for lasting prosperity. Almost 1 in 6 humans are adolescents and 90% of them live in low and middle-income countries¹¹, many of which are fragile due to conflict or climate change, and/or are experiencing rapid urbanisation. As adolescents make up such a significant part of the world's population, it will be increasingly difficult to reach the SDGs by 2030 without **meaningful investments to address their needs and priorities**, right across the humanitarian and development nexus.



INVESTING IN ADOLESCENT WELL-BEING: A SECOND WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR HUMAN CAPITAL AND DEVELOPMENT

While interventions in the first 1,000 days are critical for a child development, new evidence indicates that these investments may be insufficient. The first 8,000 days of an individual's life – or 21 years - constitute a **second window of opportunity**, including critical developmental phases that require **specific and tailored attention for each individual to realize his or her full potential**¹². This period has historically been overlooked in international and national development priorities, even though it is a time of significant growth and consolidation. Adequate nutrition during adolescence is critical for both current and future health. This critical period provides **one of the few opportunities for catch-up growth needed to prevent the vicious intergenerational cycle of malnutrition** whereby malnourished girls are more likely to deliver small, nutritionally impaired babies. These babies, will be more likely to become malnourished children, and more at risk of cognitive delays, poor school performance and worse health and education outcomes in the future. In addition, adolescence is the time to develop knowledge and skills, learn how to manage emotions and relationships, and acquire new abilities - all of which is key for assuming adult roles⁹.

➔ INVESTING IN ADOLESCENT WELL-BEING IS **LOW-RISK, HIGH-REWARD** AND YIELDS MULTIPLE DIVIDENDS

Investment in adolescents delivers a **triple dividend**: improving health and well-being now, enhancing them throughout the life-course and contributing to the health and well-being of future generations. Research has also shown that for every dollar invested in selected adolescents' health interventions, there is an estimated **ten-fold health, social and economic return**. This reveals how investing in adolescent's health carries long-term benefits for society at large since healthy adolescents have the potential to perform better in school and improve their career prospects¹³. In addition, investing in best-practice programmes to end child marriage, at approximately \$3.80 per person, could bring an almost six-fold return on investment, while reducing child marriage by around a third¹⁴.

➔ INVESTING IN ADOLESCENCE **FUELS ECONOMIC GROWTH**

Engagement of adolescents for social and economic development is vital as **adolescents are the human capital of the future, the parents of the next generation and the drivers of economic growth**. A thriving adolescent population fuels economic growth by contributing to increased productivity and reduced health expenditure, and by ensuring reduced inequities across generations. Moreover, adolescence provides a window of opportunity for establishing healthy behaviours and for increasing positive development trajectories, contributing to economic well-being and labour market successes later in life³.



WHY IS WFP WELL PLACED TO DO MORE?

With an operational footprint expanding to more than 80 countries, and deep field presence in some of the most fragile environments of the world, WFP contributes to promoting food security and resilience, as well as improving nutrition for more than 90 million people annually. Across both humanitarian and development spheres, WFP supports national governments and other key stakeholders to achieve SDG 2, through national policy formulation and programme design and implementation. Across the realms of WFP's work, there are **multiple entry points** for advocating, influencing and supporting the delivery and uptake of programmes and services for adolescents.

Thus far WFP has made considerable progress on addressing adolescents by putting in place **policy and strategy frameworks** necessary for addressing their nutritional needs. This has included the establishment of global commitments to address adolescents' unmet needs and the creation of an Adolescent Working Group - at HQ level - to drive the agenda forward, contributing to bridge the knowledge gap through research and reviews.

In addition, WFP has furthered its **research efforts** on adolescents, including the influential work of the WFP 'Fill the Nutrient Gap'. This work has revealed that, in more than 15 low and middle-income countries, a nutritious diet for an adolescent girl is often the most expensive diet within the household (based on Cost of the Diet analysis)¹⁵; this result has been associated with the increased nutritional needs characterizing this lifecycle period. The nutritional needs of an adolescent girl are in fact similar to those of a lactating woman but higher than those of an adolescent boy or an adult man. Moreover, the WFP 'Bridging the Gap'¹⁶ study, conducted in partnership with UNILEVER and Anthrologica, delivered valuable qualitative insights on adolescent's access to and uptake of existing interventions. The study captured adolescent voices and outlined ways to actively engage adolescents as agents of change to improve the health and nutrition of their families, peers and communities.

Finally, a recent internal **mixed-methods review** – conducted through a proxy population method – estimated that, across 63 countries and all WFP's activity portfolios, adolescents represent an average of 27% of all WFP's beneficiaries, ranging from 3% to 60% depending on the country¹⁷. This proportion represents approximately **15 million adolescents reached in 2018**. In the vast majority of cases, WFP reached them via school feeding and general food assistance, suggesting that the organization has **enormous potential for leveraging its platforms to more appropriately and comprehensively address adolescents' needs**. In order to do so, the study offers a number of recommended actions, including the need to improve WFP's systems to better capture and report activities and services targeting this age group.



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR WFP MOVING FORWARD?

In order to advance the adolescent's agenda, WFP needs to:

CAPACITY BUILDING

- ▶ Lead change by strengthening both internal and external capacities. Many of the Governments WFP engages with are prioritizing programming for adolescents and asking WFP to 'scale up' its efforts in providing technical support.
- ▶ Develop clearly articulated policies, strategies and guidance across all its activity portfolios.

POLICY

- ▶ Develop a comprehensive strategy for adolescents, cutting across all operations - from nutrition to school feeding, from social protection to food assistance.
- ▶ Translate comprehensive strategies into operational guidance for Regional Bureaus and Country Offices.
- ▶ Highlight - within the strategy - a comprehensive suite of multisectoral and context-specific interventions, grounded in concrete examples, lessons learned and best practices.

DATA

- ▶ Review the data disaggregation in WFP HQ's current reporting system, ensuring it can adequately capture information for the 10-19 age group. This will ensure adolescent beneficiaries are tracked and monitored, and will help tailor interventions and identify gaps in countries' programming.
- ▶ Document 'best practices' and lessons learned from countries and organizations that are already implementing adolescent programmes - across a spectrum of sectors. This would help to ascertain how demand, coverage, and quality of services for adolescents could be improved.

PROGRAMMES

- ▶ Leverage different platforms and synergies across the organization to deliver integrated services and programmes that are centred on adolescent needs, rights, and circumstances.
- ▶ Engage adolescents as active participants in the design, implementation and monitoring of the interventions. WFP should create solutions for adolescents, with the adolescents.
- ▶ Ensure adolescents programming is adapted to the context. Effective programming should engage adolescent groups as defined and understood at the community level.

IN SUMMARY, TO SUPPORT ADOLESCENTS AND ACHIEVE THE AGENDA 2030, WFP WILL NEED TO:



Develop in-house technical capacity to provide Governments and other national partners and stakeholders with adequate technical assistance.



Address the data gaps for adolescents by strengthening mechanisms and capacities for data collection, reporting and monitoring.



Foster multi-sectoral programming that is responsive to the needs of adolescents and address them effectively and efficiently, using the most appropriate delivery platforms.



Enhance adolescents' participation and **allow for greater adolescents' engagement** in the design, implementation, monitoring and review of results.



Strengthen existing and develop future **partnerships for adolescents** in order to augment synergies and maximize learning and impact.



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