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Decentralized Evaluation

Evaluation Series on Emergency School Feeding in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Niger and Syria

2015-2019

Syria Evaluation Report

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

ACR	Annual Country Report
AVSI	Association of Volunteers in International Service
BFM	Beneficiary Feedback Mechanism
CARI	Consolidated Approach to Reporting Indicators of Food Security
CBT	Cash-Based Transfers
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CFSAM	Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission
CO	Country Office
CP	Cooperating Partner
CSP	Country Strategic Plan
DoE	Directorate of Education
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECHO	European Community Humanitarian Aid Office
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EMOP	Emergency Operation
EQ	Evaluation Question
ESF	Emergency School Feeding
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FQS	Food Quality and Safety
FSA	Food Security Assessment
FSLA	Food Security/Livelihoods Assessment
GFA	General Food Assistance
HQ	Headquarters
ICSP	Interim Country Strategic Plan
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
Kcal	kilocalorie
KG	Kindergarten
KII	Key Informant Interview
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLAE	Ministry of Local Administration and Environment
MT	Metric ton
mVAM	mobile VAM
N/A	Not Available
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OOSC	Out-of-School Children

PDM	Post Distribution Monitoring
PLW	Pregnant and Lactating Woman
PRRO	Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation
SADD	Sex, age-disaggregated data
SBP	School Based Programmes Office
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SF	School Feeding
SIMIS	School Integrated Management Information System
SIRS	Syria Internal Situation Report
SLP	Self-Learning Programme
SPR	Standard Project Report
TEP	Transitional Education Plan
T-ICSP	Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan
TPM	Third-Party Monitoring
UHT	Ultra-Heat Treatment
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States Dollar
VAM	Vulnerability Assessment and Measurement
WaSH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

This Evaluation of Emergency School Feeding in Syria from 2014 until 2019 is part of a four-country¹ Evaluation Series on Emergency School Feeding (ESF) commissioned by the WFP School Based Programmes Unit (SBP) and made possible by a multi-year Canadian contribution to WFP.

The series provides accountability to Canada and other donors contributing to WFP ESF in the four countries, as well as to the wider humanitarian community. It also promotes learning at the strategic and operational levels, both globally and in country. Findings from the individual country evaluation feed into a synthesis of lessons learned on school feeding in emergencies that is presented in a separate synthesis report. A global literature review, interviews with key global stakeholders on school feeding, and a survey conducted among a wider selection of WFP country offices on school feeding have complemented the evidence from the four countries.

The expected users of this evaluation report are WFP management and technical staff involved in ESF / School Feeding (SF) programming in Syria, the Regional Bureau in Cairo, and at headquarters. The report is also likely of interest to other partners and donors that provide support to SF. In Syria, this includes partners that work closely with WFP on school feeding and related fields, including the Ministry of Education (MoE) who may draw on and use the evaluation to inform the policy framework on school feeding. Other interested parties may include the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and other organizations working in education, food security or school feeding.

Context

The crisis in Syria started in 2011 and has had a disastrous effect on the Syrian population. In January 2019, a total of 11.7 million people was estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance, including 6.2 million people that had been internally displaced.² Over eight in ten people in the country now live below the poverty line. Food insecurity increased significantly and

girls' and boys' school enrolment, attendance and retention decreased considerably.³

Overview of the evaluation subject

In order to address this double challenge, WFP, since 2014, started implementing the ESF portfolio through three modalities – in-kind date bar distribution, cash-based transfers for Curriculum B students and distribution of fresh meals. By 2019, the ESF portfolio had been implemented in 13 out of the 14 governorates in Syria and had reached a total of 782,000 primary school children (girls and boys) in 2,800 schools. These modalities were implemented not as a stand-alone project but were part of WFP's successive programmes: the Emergency Operation (EMOP) 200339 (2011-2016), the Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) 200998 (2017), the Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan (T-ICSP) 2018 and Country Strategic Plan (CSP) 2019-2020. The period covered by the evaluation is from 2015 to 2019. This evaluation covers all the ESF modalities implemented from 2014 to 2019.

Methodology

The development of the thematic scope for this evaluation was coordinated with the three other evaluation teams for the evaluations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lebanon and Niger. Scoping was guided by a global evaluation matrix that represented the common framework for data collection and analysis for all evaluations in this series. The global matrix was then adapted to the specific characteristics of the ESF portfolio in Syria. This global evaluation matrix and the theory of change that were also developed were both validated during an Inception workshop attended by WFP Country Office (CO) School Feeding and Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) teams.

A gender-responsive, mixed-method, theory-based approach was adopted and the team carried out a desk review of all ESF related documents, in-depth qualitative interviews with key stakeholders, focus group discussions (FGD) with beneficiaries, site observation of the Cash-Based Transfer (CBT) modality in Homs, and Skype interviews.

¹ DRC, Lebanon, Niger, Syria.

² <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/unhcr-syria-factsheet-january-2019> [accessed 25.04.2019]

³ MoE, Statistical Book on Education, Statistical Report for 2011-2017

Furthermore, the evaluation adhered to the International Humanitarian Principles and followed the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) ethical standards and norms.

The evaluation faced severe limitations, including logistical challenges which led to the postponement of the field mission; cancellation of the Aleppo field mission due to security reasons; inability to observe the in-kind distribution of date bars and insufficient documentation and data specific to the ESF modalities. The team used geographical, source and method triangulation to validate the findings.

Key findings

EQ1 – Appropriateness of School Feeding in Emergencies

The three ESF modalities in Syria were appropriately designed to address the double challenge of low education indicators and food insecurity. The ESF portfolio complemented other UN programmes (e.g., UNICEF and UNESCO) however synergies in the field could be improved. Furthermore, no specific gender analyses were undertaken to inform the design of the programme.

EQ2 – Coherence of ESF with humanitarian response

To a large extent, WFP adhered to the principles of humanitarian assistance in conflict settings in School feeding in Emergencies in Syria. Through its targeting of schools in food insecurity areas and with a large number of vulnerable people, it ensured humanity, neutrality and impartiality. By attempting to address child labour and child early and forced marriage through incentivizing children to attend school, it addressed child protection. Finally, in terms of accountability, WFP responded in an *ad hoc* manner to issues raised by different stakeholders. The beneficiary feedback mechanism (BFM) has not been finalized as it is awaiting government approval.

EQ3 – ESF results on food security and nutrition and on education indicators

The ESF portfolio was able to continuously expand both in terms of number of beneficiaries reached as well as geographical coverage. As such, it contributed to improving food security and nutrition among primary school children through the three modalities. However, lack of data did not allow to gauge the extent of this improvement. The ESF portfolio achieved different levels of results in terms of reaching targets per year and modality - the fresh meals

modality having reached the highest percentage of targeted beneficiaries. Data available suggested that girls' and boys' attendance, enrolment and retention increased. However, even though ESF targets in terms of these education outcome indicators were reached for each modality, there was no evidence that it was a direct result of the ESF portfolio.

Effectiveness of the fortified date bar distribution was challenged by a number of factors: (1) lengthy procedures to obtain the necessary clearances; (2) interruption in the delivery; (3) logistical challenges; (4) lack of storage facilities; and (5) leakages in the consumption of date bars.

Effectiveness of the CBT modality was reduced by: (1) delays in receiving the list of registered students from the MoE/Directorate of Education (DoE); (2) abuse by school principals in a few cases; (3) technical difficulties with registration through SCOPE and the SCOPECARD; (4) misconduct by participating retailers; and (5) insufficient understanding of the CBT modality by the beneficiaries.

EQ4 – ESF results on households' capacity to cope with crises and on the local economy.

The ESF portfolio contributed to stabilizing communities through targeting vulnerable and food insecure people, including host community, IDP and returnee children, as well as by expanding coverage to newly accessible areas. The ESF portfolio had a positive effect on the economy, creating jobs in the production of date bar, increasing sales for the retailers under the CBT modality and employing around 100 women in Aleppo for the fresh meals modality. In addition, by shifting to local production of date bars, WFP was able to respond to sudden increase in demand.

EQ5 – Additional effects of ESF

There was an anecdotal evidence that ESF reduced child labour though no evidence was found on early child and forced marriage reduction. In addition, interviews revealed that in some instances, the e-voucher modality created tensions between the beneficiaries and uncompliant retailers as well as minor tensions between siblings attending different Curricula.

EQ6 – Sustainability and connectedness of school feeding

WFP initiated advocacy activities targeting high-level MoE staff and has delivered workshops to all its partners for increasing local ownership and understanding of the school feeding programme. It has included training on

gender and child protection. High turnover of MoE's School Feeding focal point was a constraint for the ESF portfolio's continuity and coordination. However, WFP was not consulted by the MoE for the design of the national strategy on school feeding that the MoE is currently developing.

Main Conclusions

The conclusions confirm the validity of the ESF's Theory of Change and reveal that additional assumptions should be considered in order to take into account the specific context and ensure the fulfilment of the ESF's objectives in an emergency setting.

C1 (appropriateness): ESF in Syria was appropriate to address the needs of girls, boys and adolescents in the evolving crisis. It was aligned to both the government's and humanitarian community's priorities. Each modality as well as the choice of implementing partner were appropriately designed and selected to respond to a specific objective.

C2 (gender): Though certain steps were undertaken to mainstream gender; they could be further improved to ensure that gender considerations were integrated into all aspects of the ESF portfolio.

C3 (internal coherence): In general, WFP adhered to the principles of humanitarian assistance in conflict settings through its targeting of ESF beneficiaries in Syria though it lacked an institutionalized accountability system towards its beneficiaries.

C4 (external coherence): Complementarity and coordination with other UN agencies - while taking place - was insufficient to ensure the delivery of an integrated and comprehensive package to schools that includes food security, nutrition, health and sanitation activities.

C5 (coverage): As the security situation improved and new areas became accessible, the ESF portfolio was able to expand its coverage significantly, by increasing the number of beneficiaries it reached, expanding geographically in terms of governorates targeted, and widening delivery to cover rural areas.

C6 (effects on food security, nutrition and education results): The ESF portfolio contributed to equitably improving food security and nutrition among primary school children (girls and boys) through the three modalities; however, lack of data did not allow to gauge the extent of this improvement.

C7 (effects on education): Several factors contributed to improving education indicators (enrolment, attendance, retention) In Syria – ESF being one of them.

C8 (effects on the local economy): ESF had a positive impact on the local economy by increasing food production and creating market and employment opportunities for different stakeholders.

C9 (effects on community stabilization): ESF likely contributed to stabilizing communities by targeting both host communities, IDPs and returnees in newly accessible areas and increasing their resilience.

C10: (effects on negative coping mechanisms): Positive/negative effects of ESF on the reduction of child, early and forced marriage could not be observed; however, the ESF portfolio did most likely contribute to decreasing child labour.

C11 (unintended results): ESF led to two unintended consequences: in some cases, the offloading of date bars from the trucks by children and, in other instances, the shift of children from Curriculum A to Curriculum B in order to obtain the food voucher.

C12 (sustainability and connectivity): WFP - by carrying out advocacy, awareness raising, technical assistance and training – has put in place the building blocks for a sustainable and nationally-owned school feeding programme in Syria in the future.

Recommendations

R1: Develop a plan to motivate school principals through non-financial incentives in order to increase their buy-in and ensure success of the ESF.

R2: Mainstream gender and social inclusion into all aspects of the ESF portfolio, including assessments, activities, policies and M&E.

R3: Improve reporting and monitoring in order to assess the cost-efficiency/ effectiveness of each modality, placing a greater emphasis on gender.

R4: Organize quarterly coordination meetings on school feeding with UN agencies, the Syrian MoE/DoE and the Cooperating Partners (CPs).

R5: Improve communication and accountability with all stakeholders (schools, beneficiaries, Third-Party Monitors and CPs) and operationalize the BFM.

R6: Continue and expand timely training and technical assistance to all stakeholders, including WFP staff, on all aspects related to

ESF implementation, including child labour, protection, and gender.

R7: Operationally, further improve the implementation of the three ESF modalities by: (1) smoothing the distribution of date bars and monitoring that the delivery is done as stipulated in the contracts with the trucking companies; (2) expanding the network of retailers under the CBT modality; and (3) ensuring that all children receive the fresh meals where it is being implemented.

R8: Decentralize decision-making and increase delegation of authority to field offices while putting in place due diligence and *post hoc* verification procedures.

R9: At the strategic level with MoE, design a clear road map for transitioning from an emergency to a development perspective with short-, medium- and long-term objectives and milestones.

R10: For WFP Headquarters, consider providing greater flexibility and allowing the CO to relax certain corporate requirements in order to adapt to the emergency context in Syria.

1 Introduction

1. **This Evaluation of the Emergency School Feeding in Syria is part of the four-country Evaluation Series on Emergency School Feeding (ESF) that was commissioned by the WFP School Based Programmes Unit (SBP).** The evaluation series was made possible by a multi-year Canadian financial contribution to WFP to support Emergency School Feeding and corresponding evaluation work in Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), as well as in Lebanon and Niger. The multi-year contribution provides a unique opportunity for WFP to invest in the quality of ESF programming while at the same time generating evidence that has a significance for WFP beyond these four countries. The series provides accountability to Canada and other donors contributing to WFP ESF in the four countries, as well as to the wider humanitarian community. It also promotes learning at the strategic and operational levels, both globally and in country. Findings from the individual country evaluation feed into a synthesis of lessons learned on school feeding in emergencies that is presented in a separate synthesis report. A global literature review, interviews with key global stakeholders on school feeding, and a survey conducted among a wider selection of WFP country offices on school feeding have complemented the evidence from the four countries.

2. The emphasis of these series of evaluations is on **learning for WFP at the strategic and operational levels.** Findings from the four country evaluations – DRC, Niger, Lebanon and Syria - are expected to inform the implementation of WFP’s new 10-year School Feeding Strategy. This new strategy covers both school-feeding in development contexts as well as in emergency and fragile contexts. With its development, WFP is considering new areas of focus for its school feeding portfolio; namely “girls’ education, including adolescent girls, and school feeding (SF)” and the “humanitarian-development-peace nexus”⁴, two thematic areas that are also covered by the scope of this evaluation series.

3. As stipulated in the **Terms of References for the ESF Evaluation Series** (see Annex 17), the final reports of the country evaluations should:

- Establish a multi-faceted baseline for future evaluations;
- Document best practices and generate evidence about ESF programming; and
- Generate context-specific recommendations for ESF/SF programming.

4. Among the users of this evaluation report will be WFP management and technical staff involved in ESF / SF programming in Syria, the Regional Bureau in Cairo, and at headquarters. It is expected that the evaluation will also be of interest to other partners and donors that provide support to ESF. In Syria, this includes partners that work closely with WFP on school feeding and related fields, particularly the Government of Canada, UNESCO, UNICEF and ILO as well as national level partners - including the Ministry of Education (MoE) - who may draw on and use the evaluation to inform the policy framework on school feeding.

2 Context

5. **The crisis in Syria started in March 2011, and, since then, has had disastrous effects on the population.** In January 2019, a total of 11.7 million people was estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance, including 6.2 million people that had been internally displaced⁵. The resources of the affected population are continuously and increasingly being depleted. Over eight in ten people in the country now live below the poverty line.⁶

6. Notwithstanding the stabilization of the situation in some areas, the crisis does not yet seem to be at its end. A surge in violence from February 2019 in northwest Syria posed a significant threat to the civilian population in that area.⁷

7. **Food insecurity has remained persistently high, caused by loss of livelihoods, extremely high unemployment rates, and households’ reduced purchasing power, aggravated by an**

⁴ Also referred to as the “triple nexus”.

⁵ <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/unhcr-syria-factsheet-january-2019> [accessed 25.04.2019]

⁶ OCHA. Humanitarian Update. Syrian Arab Republic. Issue 02 | 4 April 2019

⁷ *Ibid*

eightfold increase in food prices since the beginning of the crisis⁸. According to the Consolidated Approach to Reporting Indicators of Food Security (2019), 50.8 percent of the population⁹ was marginally food insecure, 30.0 percent moderately and 2.9 percent severely food insecure; meaning that almost 7.1 million people were classified as people in need. Moreover, around 9.6 percent – of those classified as marginally food secure - were at risk of becoming food insecure. Annex 1 provides an insight into the food security status of people at the governorate as well as at the national level. According to WFP (2017), of the food insecure population, 52 percent were women, while children accounted for around 43 percent.¹⁰ Furthermore, WFP's 2015 Food Security Assessment (FSA) found that households headed by women and/or the elderly tend to be far more food insecure and vulnerable than households headed by men (up to 60 percent). Lastly, there were wide regional variations, ranging from Tartous which had only 10 percent of its population classified as food insecure to Deir-ez-Zor with the highest percentage of food insecure people at 46 percent.

8. **Before the crisis, Syria was a middle-income country and on track to achieving many of the 2015 Millennium Development Goals.** Over the years of the crisis, however, this situation dramatically deteriorated. Public services, including education, suffered severely over the years. Since the crisis began in 2011, 309 education facilities have come under attack and by the time of the evaluation, one in three schools was either damaged, utilized as collective shelter, or used by fighters. What remained of the education system was overstretched, also due to the departure of many of the teachers.

Prior to the crisis, Syria had achieved gender parity in terms of primary school enrolment with the net enrolment at 99.6 percent (99.5 percent for boys and 99.7 percent for girls). According to UNESCO, in 2013, net enrolment had decreased to 67.96 percent (68.85 percent for boys and 67.04 percent for girls).¹¹

9. As a result, each year on average, an estimated 2.1 million children are not attending school.¹² In 2018, UNICEF estimated that the number of children who had missed out on their education had reached a total of 2.8 million.¹³ These could be children, who had never been to school during the seven years of crisis, or those who had missed a part of their school education, making it extremely difficult for them to catch up.

10. Access to education was constrained by many factors, in particular the **lack of safety and security**, but also **child labour and child, early and forced marriage**. Households increasingly resorted to harmful coping strategies to overcome increasing poverty, such as involving their children in child labour. Many children who are out of school were between 15 and 17 years old and are vulnerable to engage in child labour.¹⁴ Some of the school children could also be suffering from psychosocial effects due to the crisis, which might be an additional risk for dropping out of school. Box 1 provides key statistical figures which demonstrate the **significant decrease in enrolment, and retention rates and the major increase in dropout rates in primary schools between 2010 and 2017**.

Box 1 Key Primary Education Statistics in Syria

- Enrolment dropped from 4.7 million in 2010 to around 3.4 million in 2017 (a decrease by 28 percent, the lowest was in 2013 when it fell to less than 3.0 million).
- Retention rates until 5th grade fell from 95 percent in 2010 to 81 percent in 2017; whereas dropout rates increased from 4 percent in 2010 to 29 percent in 2017.
- The number of primary schools fell from 17,120 in 2010 to 10,279 in 2017 (a decrease by 40 percent).
- The number of classrooms fell from 172,250 in 2010 to 107,128 in 2017 (a decrease by 38 percent).

Source: MoE, *Statistical Book on Education, Statistical Report for 2011-2017*

⁸ OCHA. 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview

⁹ These figures are for the population outside the camps. If we add the population inside the camps, the number of food insecure people increases to 7.9 million (representing 38.8 percent of the total population)

¹⁰ WFP. 2017. Syria - Secondary Gender Analysis & Programme Review to Support Implementation of the Transitional Interim Country Strategy Paper, November 2017

¹¹ <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/sy>

¹² OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2019

¹³ <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/syrian-crisis> [accessed 25.04.2019]

¹⁴ UNICEF, 2016. Syria Crisis Education. Strategic Paper. London Progress Report. September 2016

11. As for **gender**, the Government of Syria had affirmed its commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action already in 1995 and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in April 2003. It had established a National Committee on Women during that year, followed by various sub-committees, and a National Strategy on Women in the Syrian Arab Republic was developed. Subsequently, women's empowerment became part of the Five-Year Plans (which formed the Country Strategic Framework from 2000 to 2005 and from 2005 until 2010). Pre-crisis and according to the 2008 labour force survey, two-thirds of men above the age of 15 were employed, whereas three-quarters of women above the age of 15 were neither in employment nor in education.¹⁵ In terms of primary education, Syria in 2010 had achieved gender parity in primary enrolment. **Nonetheless, gender inequalities - including child, early and forced marriage - were already prevalent in Syria before the crisis.**

12. The crisis in Syria has impacted on women, men, boys and girls in different ways due to their different social roles and responsibilities and the diverse gender equity issues that result mainly in greater discrimination against women. As a result, Syria's gender ranking deteriorated and, in 2018, was placed 136 out of 162 countries in the Gender Inequality Index¹⁶ and 146 out of 149 in the 2018 Global Gender Gap Index¹⁷. As a consequence of violent conflict in Syria, women-headed households and separated families increased (UNOCHA, 2018). Migration of men and adolescent boys to other countries was a common coping mechanism as they attempted to avoid conscription by the government or recruitment by armed groups. Alternatively, men, and also some women, joined armed groups and were absent from home or were killed in the fighting¹⁸. In terms of **child, early and forced marriage**, there are no national statistics prior or post the start of the crisis. However, according to one study, in camp settings, 13 percent of girls were married before their 18th birthday and 3 percent before their 15th¹⁹. Furthermore, several reports and analyses revealed specific vulnerabilities faced by women and girls as a result of forced displacement, including risk of gender-based violence and lack of gender-sensitive services²⁰. In addition, women were at a higher risk of violence in the home, given the psychosocial toll of conflict/displacement and were more likely to engage in survival sex. They also faced challenges accessing basic services due to unavailability of clear information and lack of time and privacy²¹.

13. As for **social security and protection**, Syria has availed only of a very limited system. The National Social Aid Fund, created in 2011 as a semi-autonomous entity under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, was far too limited in size and effectiveness to respond to the current needs²². Social protection programmes have significantly diminished over the course of the crisis, and subsidized bread and medicines are now the Government's primary social safety net contribution. Syria did not have a national school feeding policy or strategy prior to the crisis.

14. **Regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, many humanitarian actors have worked together to achieve **SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)**, but as a result of the difficult circumstances, progress was limited. Nonetheless, the proportion of the population severely or moderately food insecure has continued to slowly decrease from 35.8 percent in 2015 to 33.3 percent in 2017 and to 31.0 percent in 2018²³. WFP has also worked in support of **SDG 17 (Partnerships)** on several fronts in Syria. Among other things, it leads the Logistics and Emergency Telecommunications Clusters, co-leads the Food Security and Agriculture Sector, and participates as a member in the Nutrition, Education and Early Recovery and Livelihoods sectors. Finally, WFP co-chairs the Interagency Gender Working Group under the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria.

¹⁵ ILO. 2018. Gender, Employment and the Informal Economy in Syria, Policy Brief

¹⁶ UNDP. 2018. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/SYR.pdf

¹⁷ World Economic Forum. 2018. <https://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2018/results-and-analysis/>

¹⁸ WFP. 2017. Syria - Secondary Gender Analysis & Programme Review to Support Implementation of the Transitional Interim Country Strategy Paper, November 2017

¹⁹ <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/syrian-arab-republic/> [accessed 25.04.2019]

²⁰ WFP, 2018. Corporate Emergency Evaluation of the WFP Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis (January 2015-March 2018), October 2018

²¹ Inter-Agency Task Force Basic Needs Sector (2017); Gender Analysis Report (May 2017); Global Protection Cluster, Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (2017); and Corporate Emergency Evaluation of the WFP Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis (January 2015-March 2018)

²² UNDP, 2012. Final Report: Establishing the National Social Aid Fund "NSAF" Syria

²³ Whole of Syria Food Security and Livelihood Assessment, 2018

3 Evaluation

3.1 Overview of the evaluation subject

15. WFP started implementing Emergency School Feeding in Syria in 2014. The ESF portfolio, led in cooperation with UNICEF and the Syrian MoE, consisted in three modalities: (i) distribution of fortified snacks (date bars²⁴); (ii) provision of fresh meals – both targeting schoolchildren in primary (6-12 years old) and pre-primary school (under 5 years old); and (iii) provision of food vouchers through a Cash-Based Transfer (CBT) modality which was developed, specifically to fit with the Curriculum B programme of UNICEF. Through the different Emergency School Feeding modalities, WFP aimed to increase access to education as well as to improve the nutritional status of children in an emergency context.

3.1.1 Evolution of the ESF portfolio in Syria

16. In 2013, the education sector reported that many children in education facilities had **insufficient access to food and had difficulties in concentrating on lessons**. Local authorities requested WFP to provide support through ESF, and it was proposed to the EMOP to include 350,000 pre-primary and primary school children to be assisted through school feeding. The EMOP continued to be renewed and enlarged over the years until it was replaced by PRRO 20098 in January 2017.

17. **From February 2014, implementation of school feeding through fortified date bars was foreseen in three food insecure governorates. The primary target were pre-primary and primary school children in locations with high concentration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) with poor food security indicators.** The implementation of the ESF was postponed in order to coincide with the start of the academic year in September 2014 and in order to resolve several constraints, such as insufficient funding, transportation bottlenecks, including fuel shortages, and initial unavailability of small-sized trucks. The ESF portfolio then expanded swiftly; the number of children almost doubled between September and November 2014 and would more than triple in the next year.

18. In 2016, the ESF faced **logistical challenges in the form of access restrictions, in Al-Hasakeh city** which was only accessible through costly airlifts for high priority relief items, and in supply chain issues that also hindered expansion in Rural Damascus, Aleppo and Tartous. Also, in the first half of 2016, WFP suffered from **funding shortfalls**, which **constrained it from reaching the planned number of children under school feeding**. In the second half of the year, this was solved as more funding became available. In November 2016, the ESF portfolio was expanded with a second modality, monthly paper food vouchers for out-of-school children.

19. The PRRO 200998 was implemented from 1 January 2017 until 31 December 2018, in continued collaboration with UNICEF and the MoE and other education-sector partners in areas with both high food insecurity and low education indicators. WFP continued providing the same package as in previous years. In 2017, WFP reached 660,661 schoolchildren in 10 governorates against a target of 750,000. The number of reached governorates remained the same, but **WFP managed to reach additional areas within the governorates through cross-border delivery from Jordan**. The challenges included security-related access restrictions.

20. Under PRRO in 2017, **WFP continued voucher provision to out-of-school children (OOSC)**. It planned to reach 50,000 children and their households. Finally, only 1,534 were reached, due to a late and only partial roll-out of the remedial classes.

21. Furthermore, in mid-2017, WFP **provided date bars to more than 10,000 children attending the UNESCO programme in Aleppo City**, which only ran during summer vacations and offered remedial classes to children who did not pass core subjects.

22. In 2018, a Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan (T-ICSP) was developed and approved, which included the last year of the PRRO 200998. Under the T-ICSP, further expansion of the ESF portfolio was foreseen. The objectives, outcomes and outputs relevant to school feeding were developed over the years of implementation, culminating in the latest set under the T-ICSP, which also reflected the latest achievements.

²⁴ Milk was distributed with date bars only once when WFP received a one-off in-kind donation from the European Union

23. Lastly, an Interim Country Strategic Plan (ICSP) was developed for 2019-2020, under which the ESF portfolio continued with an expansion of date bars provision and CBTs. A scaling up of the fresh school meals modality was also considered, pending the outcome of a planned modality review, including a cost–benefit analysis.

3.1.2 Modalities

24. WFP started school feeding in 2014, as a pilot in a summer school in Tartous, with the **first modality – the in-kind distribution of fortified date bars**. Fortified date bars are snacks that are provided every school day to pre-primary and primary school children (girls and boys) in targeted schools or other established learning spaces. Each child received a fortified date bar (80 grams or 344 Kcal/pp/day). As the bars were enriched, they were foreseen to not only contribute to the necessary energy dietary requirements, but also increase the micronutrient intake. At the onset, date bars were imported. In order to address logistical challenges and contribute to the local economy, WFP started local procurement of date bars by the second half of 2015 and scaled it up in 2016, with the objective of fully transitioning to local procurement.²⁵

25. In November 2016, the ESF portfolio was expanded with a **second modality – Cash-Based Transfers (CBT) - to encourage OOSC return to education**. Under this modality, monthly paper food vouchers worth USD 20 per child were distributed to parents or legal guardians of households, who had enrolled their children into the accelerated Curriculum B supported by UNICEF. This amount would cover nine months per year. The school principals had to certify at least 80 percent attendance to be eligible for support. The paper food vouchers were later replaced by e-vouchers.

26. **A third modality – preparation of fresh school meals - was started in 2016 in Aleppo City**, exploring the transition from a school snack to a school meal. Schoolchildren received fresh meals consisting of one sandwich and a piece of fruit or vegetable, providing over 600 kcal per child. For the fresh school meals, WFP provided fortified flour for the sandwiches which were prepared by women - most of whom internally displaced - using products that were locally produced.²⁶

27. **The date bars were distributed in different schools than those that were implementing the fresh meals modality**. However, there was an overlap in some selected schools between the CBT and the other two modalities since there was a small number of Curriculum B students on those schools and WFP could not exclude them from receiving the date bars or the fresh meals.

3.1.3 Geographical coverage and beneficiaries

28. **By 2019, WFP delivered the fortified date bars in 13 out of 14 governorates in Syria** (see Table 1 in Annex 1). The fresh meals have been provided only in Aleppo. Vouchers have been distributed in the governorates of Aleppo, Damascus, Rural Damascus, Hama, Homs, Hasakeh, Lattakia and Tartous.²⁷ Table 1 provides an **overview of the beneficiaries** reached through the fortified date bar modality in terms of schools, governorates and children targeted.

²⁵ Because there was no capacity in Syria initially to produce date bars that met WFP standards, WFP started by importing the date bars and once sufficient capacity had been built in-country, WFP shifted to local procurement.

²⁶ PRRO-SYCO-Assistance to the Population Affected by Unrest in Syria Standard Project Report 2017

²⁷ Vouchers were also planned to be distributed in Deir Ezzor and Raqqa but for security reasons this could not be implemented

Table 1 Beneficiaries and schools planned & reached through the date bar modality (2014-19)

Year	Program	# schools		Governorates	# of children	
		Planned	Reached		Planned	Reached
2014	EMOP 200339		285	3	350,000	90,054
2015			483	6	500,000	315,651
2016		910	883	10	500,000	485,540
2017	PRRO 200998	1,629	1,591	10	750,000	660,661
2018	PRRO 200998 & T-ICSP	2,244	2,034	12	650,000 (reduced from 1 million)	970,000 (partial delivery)
2019	ICSP	4,020	2,083	12	1,000,000	740,623

3.1.4 Planned results and limitations

29. In 2018, under the prioritization plan resulting from severe underfunding, **WFP was forced to reduce the number of children targeted to 500,000 (50 percent of the needs-based plan)**. By implementing partial delivery, WFP was able to reach 970,000 children across 12 out of 14 governorates.²⁸ Through the CBT modality, WFP worked with a total of 52 retailers against an initial planned number of 27 and food vouchers continued to be distributed under the T-ICSP.²⁹

30. **The fortified date bar modality was planned to target up to one million students in 2019, increasing to 1.1 million in 2020.**³⁰ The provision of fresh meals was projected to be scaled up to reach 30,000 students in 2019, and 50,000 in 2020. CBT distributions for vulnerable households were meant to target 75,000 students in 2019 and 100,000 in 2020. The number of feeding days was foreseen to be nine months for school meals and 12 months for the out-of-school programme for 2019 and 2020.

3.1.5 Technical support

31. **Apart from the food distribution component, WFP collaborated with UNICEF and other education sector partners on protection-related initiatives.** To enhance the protection of children targeted through school feeding and given the Syrian context, WFP partnered with the ILO to train school staff on child labour awareness. Furthermore, in 2018, WFP partnered with UNESCO in the development of a National Education Management Information System to include **school feeding indicators**. In addition, UNICEF and UNESCO and under leadership of the MoE, are currently developing a national Transitional Education Plan (TEP) and WFP will be consulted once the draft TEP is finalized.

32. Moreover, officials from the Directorate of Education (DoE) in target governorates, as well as head teachers and school administrators, were trained on management of the different school feeding modalities (implementation, logistics and monitoring) and sensitized on their objectives. Furthermore, workshops on mainstreaming gender, protection and nutrition were offered to staff members from participating schools across all governorates covered.

33. Lastly, WFP provided technical assistance to the local suppliers of date bars to enhance their production capacities and improve the quality of the date bars.

3.1.6 Funding

34. The following Table 2 provides the budget of each programme type (EMOP, PRRO, T-ICSP, ICSP) as well as the funds received to implement each of these programmes between 2014 and 2019.

²⁸ This included a one-off donation of milk and date bars by the European Union. Due to several supply chain challenges, combined with a short shelf-life, the milk was distributed to a larger number of schools to ensure it was consumed before expiration. These additional schools received only milk and were not provided with date bars, hence the partial delivery and the almost doubling of the number of beneficiaries with respect to what was originally planned

²⁹ WFP Syria, 2018. Annual Country Report

³⁰ WFP Syria, 2018. Syrian Arab Republic interim country strategic plan (2019–2020)

Table 2 WFP Budget and funding per year and programme

Programme	Budget (USD million)	Budget revisions	Funding received (USD million)	Approval date	Duration
EMOP 200339	2014: 1,507.3 2015: 2,189.3 2016: 2,844.3	2013: Increase by USD 0.92 million extension one year 2014	1,726.8	13/10/2011	Nov 2011-2016, ESF since 2014
PRRO 200998	854.2	1: increase by USD 123 million (for 2 years) 3: Decrease by USD 41.3 million (for 2 years)	467.6	17/11/2016	2017
T-ICSP	795.9 (82.2 for ESF)	-	455.4		2018
ICSP	1,386.3	-	347.9	29/11/2018	2019-2020

Source: WFP country office

35. Various donors have funded school feeding in Syria and, over the years, **almost USD 74 million** has been allocated to supporting the ESF portfolio. The details per donor and per year are reflected in the Table 3 in Annex 2. Most of the funds have been provided in 2016 and 2019 (38 million and 23 million respectively).

3.2 Theory of Change

36. WFP had not elaborated a specific Theory of Change (ToC) for the ESF portfolio in Syria. Following is the ToC that the evaluation team jointly developed with the CO. Over the long-term, the ESF portfolio was meant to contribute to **improved health and nutrition among recipients and their communities, improved education outcomes, and was supposed to help improve household resilience and food security**. These were impacts already mentioned in WFP's current corporate ToC (2013) for school feeding. In addition, the ESF in Syria was intended to make contributions to child protection and psychological well-being, community social cohesion, gender equality and was also meant to revitalize the economy, specifically through the local procurement of ESF inputs and employment generation.

37. The **ESF** activities and associated outcome pathways towards contributing to these longer-term objectives in Syria fell broadly under **1) service delivery**; that is, the support to targeted primary and pre-primary schoolchildren through three different modalities (in-kind distribution of date bars, food vouchers, and fresh meals) and **2) provision of training and technical support**.

38. WFP delivered school feeding to help improve the school achievement of girls and boys; and to improve health behaviours, including better dietary choices; both of which were *outcomes* commonly pursued through school feeding.³¹ As a *food transfer*, school feeding would increase the amount of food available to children, and, by implication, to their households overall. As a consequence, care-givers would be incentivized to enroll their children in school – including those that had been out-of-school - and to keep them enrolled throughout the school year (see *intermediate outcomes* in Theory of Change Annex 3), thereby increasing enrolment, attendance and retention for both boys and girls. The additional *food energy* and high *quality of the food* would help to alleviate hunger among students and improve their nutritional status, thus increasing their ability to learn. In the particular context of Syria, incentivizing care-givers to keep their children in school was also meant to help protect their children from harmful coping mechanisms, such as child, early and forced marriage and child labour.

39. Alongside the direct support of school children, WFP foresaw technical assistance and training to a wide range of stakeholders (government, private sector and CPs). In addition, WFP committed itself to the **local procurement of food for the school feeding services**. Working with the local supplier of date bars, retailers and CPs was meant to provide employment opportunities, especially for vulnerable women, and to **help create market opportunities for local smallholders** as a contribution to the **recovery of the local agricultural sector**.³² The aim was not only to help to **increase the number of beneficiaries and targeted schools**, but also to help increase **social stability and resilience as well as social cohesion** among the different members of the community (IDPs, returnees, and host communities).

³¹ These outcomes correspond to Objective 2 and Objective 1 respectively of the WFP school-feeding policy (WFP, 2013)

³² Corresponding to Objective 5 of WFP's school feeding policy (WFP, 2013).

40. **The feasibility of WFP's ESF in Syria hinged on a number of factors that were - for the most part - external to WFP's own operations.** In the ToC (see Annex 3), these were captured in the list of *assumptions*.

3.3 Evaluation Methodology and Limitations

41. The evaluation adopted a **gender-responsive, mixed-method, theory-based approach** (see Annex 4 for additional information on methodology). The team did a desk review of all ESF-related documents (see Annex 6), in-depth qualitative interviews (see Annex 7 for a list of stakeholders interviewed), focus group discussions (FGDs) with beneficiaries – ensuring that both women and men, girls and boys were equally represented - site observation of the CBT modality in Homs, and Skype interviews. The global evaluation matrix (see Annex 8) with six main evaluation questions (see Table 3), corresponding to five evaluation criteria – appropriateness, coherence, effective coverage effectiveness and sustainability/connectedness - was adapted for the Syrian context. Furthermore, a ToC (see Annex 3) was developed and adapted jointly with WFP's CO. Both the Evaluation Matrix and ToC were validated during an Inception workshop attended by both the WFP CO School Feeding and M&E teams. In Annex 4, table 4 gives also an overview of how the evaluation team has used evaluation questions and sub-questions to adapt the scope of each of the evaluation criteria covered by this evaluation.

Table 3 Evaluation Questions (EQs)

EQ1 - Appropriateness	To what extent is school feeding appropriate to address the needs of boys, girls and adolescents in the evolving crisis settings and contexts in the four programme countries?
EQ2 - Coherence	To what extent has school feeding been coherent with the overall humanitarian response of WFP and other actors?
EQ3 - Effective Coverage	To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response supported the education of girls and boys, and has contributed to their food and nutrition security in crises and emergency situations?
EQ4 - Effectiveness	To what extent has school feeding in emergencies strengthened the ability of households to cope with crises and (if applicable) helped to revitalize local economies and stabilize communities?
EQ5 - Effectiveness	To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response had effects not yet foreseen in WFP's school feeding policy but important in crisis and emergency settings?
EQ6 - Sustainability & Connectedness	To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response been coupled with creating a sustainable system for school feeding, in line with priorities and capacities of the line ministries?

42. For the **data collection**, the team proposed the following locations: (1) Damascus: to interview key informants that have been engaged at the strategic level as partners of WFP in school feeding, including the MoE, as well as to interview WFP staff. (2) Aleppo: to gather information on all three ESF modalities (in-kind date bars, in-kind fresh meals, cash-based food vouchers). (3) Homs: to gather information on the two modalities used in this governorate (in-kind date bars and cash-based food vouchers). The WFP CO was consulted to confirm the feasibility of this proposal. The choice of the sites to be visited took into account security constraints, which also imposed certain restrictions on the sample size. The team communicated the requirements for data collection with WFP CO, the MoE, the DoE, school administrators and CPs who, acted as gate keepers for the engagement with students, parents and staff.

43. The evaluation was designed and implemented in keeping with the core **International Humanitarian Principles** of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence and with the additional principles of protection and accountability. All data collection and reporting protected the anonymity and safety of respondents. The inclusion of different groups of stakeholders in data collection (WFP, national Government, local authorities, partners, and beneficiaries) ensured a balanced representation of view. Finally, the members of the evaluation team presented and introduced themselves consistently as independent from WFP's own operations and structures.

44. The evaluation followed WFP and UNEG **ethical standards and norms**. In addition to the usual confidentiality arrangements for evaluations, the evaluation team ensured that no context-specific information drawn from interviews was included in the report so as to mitigate risks to participants and thus gain access to relevant sensitive information. Furthermore, interviews with children were conducted in keeping with the applicable UNICEF ethical standards.

45. **The evaluation faced severe limitations, including the following:**

- *Logistical limitations:* the evaluation was postponed from October 2019 to January 2020 due to delays in obtaining visas and clearances to carry the field missions. Furthermore, since the Lebanese-Syrian border was closed in October 2019 due to security reasons, and in order to mitigate the risk of this happening in January, entry into Syria was re-routed via Jordan and visa issuance could not be done at the border – as originally planned – which shortened the mission by two days.
- *Change in Team Leader:* the original team (Team Leader and Team Member) were replaced after the draft Inception Report had been presented to WFP which introduced some discontinuity in the evaluation. However, the change in team composition also brought an advantage since the new team consisted of two senior evaluation experts who were native Arabic speakers and who were very familiar with the Syrian context which facilitated greatly the interaction with the different stakeholders.
- *Increased security risks:* the field mission to Aleppo was cancelled one day before the team was supposed to leave from Damascus to go north to Aleppo due to heavy shelling. As a result, the evaluation team was unable to observe the fresh meals modality, conduct some of the planned visits to schools, or to meet with stakeholders in Aleppo. The team, with the help of WFP CO, tried to identify locations which it could visit (e.g., Rural Damascus and Damascus) and obtain the necessary clearances. However, the MoE did not provide the authorization to visit these new areas. The mitigation strategy followed by the team was to meet the Third-Party Monitor in Homs who provided information on the ESF modalities in Aleppo. The team also conducted Skype interviews with selected stakeholders.
- *Technical issues:* Though the evaluation mission was rescheduled to coincide with the distribution of the date bars, fresh meals and e-vouchers, the evaluation team was unable to carry out direct observation of the date bars' distribution. The schools selected for site visits had indeed received the date bars in the previous year and were not included in the list of schools which were to be targeted during the current school year. WFP was informed of the new list of targeted schools for 2019/2020 in December 2019 - only after the evaluation mission had submitted the request for Government approval to visit specific schools.
- *Methodological issues:* The evaluation of the ESF portfolio in Syria had originally envisaged to include a quantitative survey which would have provided in-depth insights into how the modalities were being implemented. However, the WFP CO advised against such a survey since it would not have been feasible to do it logistically. In addition, the selection of schools visited had to be agreed and approved by the MoE which limited the choice of schools the team could visit. Furthermore, as a result of the cancellation of part of the field mission to Aleppo, the number of schools which the team had planned to visit was halved. Finally, the team and WFP CO had requested the assistance of the DoE/schools to organize FGDs with parents at the school premises. This turned out not to be feasible so – as a mitigating measure - the team met with the parents in the offices of the CPs implementing the CBT modality, many of whom were also parents of children who had benefitted from the date bar distribution. All these methodological constraints did not allow the evaluation team to carry out a more in-depth and evidence-based assessment of the ESF portfolio in Syria.
- *Insufficient documentation and M&E data specific to the ESF portfolio:* The ESF portfolio was not a stand-alone project but was a component of various sequential programmes (EMOP, PRRO, T-ICSP and ICSP), which also focused on other activities. This meant that there were no documents specifically for the ESF portfolio and that the annual reports did not provide specific information regarding the budget allocated to the ESF portfolio nor did they always provide the M&E data required for the three modalities (outputs and outcomes, planned versus reached), including data related to gender and protection. Little information was available on outcomes/achievements (the outcome indicators were calculated based on an estimation of the planned percentages, in most of the cases, hence their inaccuracy). Therefore, the available data on gender (and protection) did not allow for a comprehensive analysis.

46. Notwithstanding the above-mentioned limitations, the evaluation team is confident about the findings and conclusions presented in this report because it was able to **triangulate most of the information** through the following methods:

- *Source triangulation*: comparing information from different sources, e.g. government, UN, private sector, NGOs, CPs, school staff, parents and children.
- *Method triangulation*: comparing information collected by different methods, e.g. interviews, document reviews, prior evaluations, on-site visits, and FGDs.
- *Geographic triangulation*: comparing information collected from different areas, such as Damascus, Rural Damascus, Homs and Aleppo, to ensure that emerging findings could be generalized and were not limited to a particular area or context.

47. In addition to systematic data triangulation, the **validation of data** was sought through **regular exchanges with the ESF team** and during the **debriefing workshop** held in Damascus at the end of the mission with several WFP CO staff representing senior management and different technical teams.

4 Evaluation findings

48. This section presents the main evaluation findings and responds to the six evaluation questions on appropriateness, coherence, results – at the child/household level, at the community/local economy level, and unintended effects - and the ESF's sustainability.

4.1 Area 1: Design of the ESF portfolio in Syria

4.1.1 EQ1: Appropriateness

EQ1 To what extent is school feeding appropriate to address the needs of boys, girls and adolescents in the evolving crisis settings and contexts in Syria?

Key findings

- The ESF portfolio was aligned with the priorities of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the humanitarian community.
- The three modalities – in-kind date bar distribution, cash-based transfers for Curriculum B students and fresh meals – were designed to address the overall double challenge of low education enrolment/retention and food security indicators. Each modality was appropriately designed to respond to a specific objective.
- Targeting of schools was done correctly taking into consideration three factors: food insecurity, population vulnerability (i.e., presence of IDPs and returnees) and the security context.
- Although no specific ESF gender analyses were undertaken, WFP started mainstreaming gender in 2018 in all its programmes, including the ESF portfolio.

4.1.1.1 Alignment with primary needs of target group

49. **The ESF portfolio was aligned with the priorities of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the humanitarian community.** The ESF portfolio contributed to the achievement of all the national priorities outlined in the Strategic Framework for Cooperation between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Nations 2016–2019 (see Box 2).³³ ESF responded to the first priority (response to people's basic needs) by distributing food assistance; to the second priority (community needs) by creating employment opportunities, especially for women; and to the third priority (institutional needs) through delivering training and technical assistance.

³³ Strategic Framework for Cooperation between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Nations 2016-2017

Box 2 *Government's National Priorities Regarding Strengthening Resilience*

- *Responses to people's basic needs:* deliver basic services - water, sanitation, health, housing, energy, and sustainable livelihoods and education.
- *Community needs:* rebuild infrastructure; re-energize productive sectors including women's participation in local economic development; and promote return of IDPs and socio-economic integration in rural areas.
- *Institutional needs:* enhance institutional performance in analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting.

Source: *Strategic Framework for cooperation between the government of Syria and the United-Nations.*

50. **ESF in Syria was fully aligned with the country's needs in terms of both food security and education.** As mentioned in Table 1 Annex 1, around 30 percent of the Syrian population was classified as either moderately or severely food insecure. In addition, approximately 12 percent were at risk of becoming food insecure. The ESF portfolio, by providing in-kind and/or CBT assistance, has contributed to improving the food security status of schoolchildren and their families. Similarly, as indicated in Box 1, enrolment and retention rates of primary school children decreased considerably due to the crisis and dropout rates rose significantly. According to UNESCO (2016), 91 percent of primary school-aged children were in school in 2011, but by 2015 the rate had plummeted to 37 percent.³⁴ The ESF, by distributing date bars, fresh meals and e-vouchers, was meant to incentivize school children to return to school.

51. **The three modalities – in-kind date bar distribution, cash-based transfers for Curriculum B students and fresh meals – were designed to address the overall double challenge of low education enrolment/retention and food security indicators.** Each modality was appropriately designed to respond to a specific objective. Furthermore, modalities were gradually diversified as both the security situation improved and as it became more feasible operationally to implement them. ESF implementation started with the distribution of fortified date bars in 2014, expanded to paper vouchers in 2016, introduced the e-vouchers in 2017 and started implementing the fresh meals as a pilot modality in Aleppo in 2017.

- **The fortified date bars modality was operationally and logistically easier to implement at a large scale and relatively quickly, especially in newly accessible areas.** It was planned to reach a large number of schoolchildren by providing them with a nutritious meal on a daily basis during school hours to enhance their education outcomes.
- **The CBT modality was specifically designed to complement UNICEF's Curriculum B programme** by incentivizing caregivers to enroll their out-of-school children and to ensure their attendance at least 80 percent of the time.
- **The fresh meals modality provided a sandwich and a fruit every day for primary school students in Aleppo.** It was designed as a pilot modality to gain experience and lessons on how to better attract students to schools in an urban setting and to generate employment for disadvantaged women, such as widows, women head of households, IDPs, and returnees.

52. **Furthermore, WFP's choice of implementing partner for each modality was also appropriate** since it implemented the date bar distribution directly through the schools and the CBT modality and fresh meals through CPs. On one hand, by implementing the date bar modality directly with the schools, WFP both **increased the ownership and sense of responsibility of school staff.** It also created the opportunity to train the MoE/DoE as well as school staff on issues related to school feeding – something which could turn out to be useful in the future, should school feeding become a national programme. Furthermore, in order to reach such a large number of schools, it would not have been feasible to deliver the date bars through CPs. On the other hand, implementing the other two modalities through CPs was more appropriate since schools did not have the necessary capacity to produce, on a daily basis, fresh meal which met WFP's standards in terms of food safety and quality. Equally, school staff would also not have been able to implement the CBT modality which would have included not only the e-voucher element but also the supervision of the retailers.

53. **All stakeholders met (government, partners, school staff and beneficiaries) indicated the usefulness and appropriateness of the ESF for school children,** especially in newly accessible

³⁴ Bridging Learning Gaps for Youth: UNESCO Regional Education Response Strategy for the Syria Crisis (2016-2017). Paris: UNESCO. pp. 13–14

areas. They also highlighted that the three modalities responded to the needs of primary school children in Syria.

54. **Given the Syrian context, targeting of schools was done correctly taking into consideration three factors: food insecurity, population vulnerability (i.e., presence of IDPs and returnees) and the security context.**³⁵ Targeting of schools was based on a food and vulnerability assessment (see Box 3), the presence of a large number of IDPs and returnees as well as on accessibility. As areas became newly accessible and secure, WFP gradually expanded its geographical coverage with the number of targeted schools and planned beneficiaries increasing each year. And, more recently in 2019, WFP widened its reach by targeting newly-secured rural areas.

Box 3 *Vulnerability Assessment and Mapping (VAM) in the Syrian Arab Republic*

Inside the Syrian Arab Republic, despite access challenges, WFP has made considerable effort to shed light on the food security landscape. It has collected data on a frequent basis to map food security and nutrition patterns and deficits across the country, applying a wide range of tools including food security assessments (FSAs), crop and food security assessment missions (CFSAMs), rapid food security data and market assessments, cash-based transfer market assessments, plus monthly VAM food price monitoring. The mobile VAM (mVAM) system, implemented from Amman, collected household food security data by phone, including from hard-to-reach and besieged areas.³⁶ The consensus from external actors, was that WFP VAM analysis was a “well-oiled machine”, and a major contributor to creating the clearest picture of food insecurity and nutrition to date in the country - while recognizing that significant information gaps remained.

Source: WFP Syria. 2018. *Evaluation of the WFP regional response to the Syrian crisis (2015- 2018)*

4.1.1.2 Gender and equity

55. **Although no gender analysis specifically focussing on SF had been undertaken for the period under evaluation, the three ESF modalities, in general, were meant to enhance equal access to education.**³⁷ The ESF’s number of planned beneficiaries was sex-disaggregated, and thus, demonstrated the intention - even at the design stage - to reach equally girls and boys (51 percent girls and 49 percent boys). Moreover, though the immediate objective of the ESF portfolio was to address food insecurity and low education indicators, it also had an indirect objective which was to reduce child protection risks in general (such as, decreasing child labour, especially among boys, and early child marriage among girls).

56. **In addition, WFP started to mainstream gender in all its programme in Syria in 2018, including the ESF portfolio.** A participatory gender analysis was undertaken in 2017 and a Syria Gender Strategy was developed in 2018. However, an ESF-specific gender and protection assessment was not undertaken which would have allowed better targeting and would have provided gender and age appropriate nutritional information. Since 2018, WFP Syria has had a dedicated Gender and Protection Specialist to ensure that relevant analysis was systematically incorporated in programme design and implementation.³⁸ The ESF Team was gender-balanced (two women - international and national, and two men - international and national). The ESF programme also planned four gender awareness workshops for the MoE/DoE/school staff aiming for an equal participation of women and men (see Annex 16 Table 13).³⁹ Furthermore, WFP stipulated in the contracts of the local suppliers of date bars that at least 80 percent of their employees should be women. However, no analysis was undertaken to assess whether these gender mainstreaming efforts contributed to more gender-transformative programmatic results or impact.

4.1.2 EQ2: Coherence

EQ2: To what extent has school feeding been coherent with the overall humanitarian response of WFP and other actors?

³⁵ Given that there are no gender-related issues regarding primary school enrollment – gender parity had been achieved in Syria (see paragraph 8), targeting on the basis of gender was not relevant

³⁶ However, it is important to note that data collection at the household does not capture gender differences and obscures inequalities that undermine food security

³⁷ Gender inequalities in terms of girls/boys enrolment in primary school is not an issue in Syria. Targeting as mentioned above was done adequately based on other criteria

³⁸ However, at the time of the evaluation, this position was vacant.

³⁹ The evaluation was unable to assess the outcome of these workshops since no workshop report had been elaborated.

Key findings

- WFP adhered to the principles of humanitarian assistance in conflict settings through its targeting of ESF beneficiaries; though adhering to the principal of operation independence faced some challenges.
- In 2019, WFP undertook steps to increase accountability towards its beneficiaries. However, neither the Beneficiary Feedback Mechanism (BFM) - awaiting government approval - nor the issues tracking initiative had been formally institutionalized and, therefore, they were still not operational.
- The ESF programme benefitted from working closely together with different WFP units, such as Nutrition, Food Safety and Quality, CBT and Supply Chain.
- WFP collaborated with other UN agencies to implement ESF in Syria. However, effective coordination among the different development actors was limited since all information was centralized and had to pass through the MoE before being shared with the separate organizations. As a consequence, this made it more difficult to create synergies between the different programmes, since different schools were targeted by the UN agencies to deliver services.

4.1.2.1 Principles of humanitarian assistance

57. **WFP adhered to the principles of humanitarian assistance in conflict settings through ESF in Syria.**⁴⁰ The principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality were ensured through targeting of schools which was based on several criteria: food insecurity indicators, education indicators, security/accessibility of schools and area targeting (covering the whole and not a selection of schools in order to avoid creating social tensions and to minimize the risk of beneficiary schools becoming a magnet and incentivizing students to change schools in the same area). Adhering to the principal of operation independence was more challenging. Nevertheless, WFP was able to provide food assistance to children in the Kurdish area even though it did not have the permission to implement the ESF portfolio in the schools following a non-accredited curriculum by the Government. Children - who were in camps in those areas - were assisted through two other different WFP programmes: The General Food Assistance and the date bar distributions at UNICEF's SLP centres.⁴¹

58. **With the exception of the date bar distribution, which was implemented directly with the MoE, MoE's involvement in the initial design of the interventions was limited.** This changed over time and, by the time of the evaluation, the MoE was engaged closely in the selection of the flavours of the new fortified bars and carried out inspections in the school kitchen which provided fresh meals in Aleppo. Furthermore, WFP involved the DoE staff by including them in the monitoring of the distribution of date bars. Finally, and in order to ensure efficient coordination at field level, the MoE nominated dedicated staff as focal points in each governorate to guarantee that school staff were available on-site to receive the deliveries at the designated time of the delivery.

59. **In 2019, WFP undertook two steps to increase accountability towards its beneficiaries.** At the time of the evaluation, WFP was in the process of setting up a BFM for all its programme in Syria, including the ESF. The BFM has a specific section to capture feedback regarding the implementation of the ESF modalities. Furthermore, as a result of the various *ad hoc* complaints it had received, the ESF unit designed a form which it had shared with the MoE (see Annex 9) to record all the issues as they arose and to track them. However, at the time of the evaluation, the BFM has not been finalized as it was awaiting government approval and the tracking initiative had not been mainstreamed. They were therefore not operational.

60. **Finally, protection was envisaged in the ESF portfolio design.** The crisis has been characterized as a "protection crisis"⁴² and child protection was one of the ESF programme's objectives. Since by incentivizing parents to send and keep their children in school through either in-kind food assistance or cash-based food transfers, the likelihood of girls and boys engaging in child labour and/or being married at an early stage would probably decrease. However, these aspects were not adequately

⁴⁰ The core humanitarian principles are the following: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, operational independence, and the ability to gain access to those in need of assistance

⁴¹ The Self-Learning Programme (SLP) enables children with limited or no access to school to continue their learning at home, in NGOs centres or in community learning centres. It helps them prepare for the national exam, ultimately offering a pathway for reintegration to formal education

⁴² European Union/United Nations (2018) Brussels II Conference - Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region (24-25 April 2018) - Document Annex - Situation inside Syria

monitored and, as such, insufficient data/information was available to assess the extent to which the ESF was able to address protection-related issues.

4.1.2.2 Complementarity with other WFP interventions

61. **Although there was no specific reference regarding coordination and complementarity between the ESF portfolio and other WFP interventions in the programme documents (EMOP, PRRO, T-ICSP), the ESF benefitted from working closely together with different WFP units, including Nutrition, Food Quality and Safety (FQS), CBT and Supply Chain units.** In 2016, the School Feeding unit and the Nutrition unit were merged into a single “School Feeding and Nutrition Unit”. This contributed to de-siloing the activities and to achieving greater synergies by **guaranteeing the nutritious content of the date bars and fresh meals.**⁴³ Similarly, there was a close collaboration with the FQS unit which ensured that the production of in-kind meals **adhered to WFP’s food quality and safety standards.** The FQS team also assisted ESF by carrying out the technical assessments of local suppliers of date bars, inspecting the packaging, supervising the recipes for the fresh meals’ modality, and providing training for partners on issues related to food quality and safety.⁴⁴ The CBT and ESF teams coordinated their activities since they shared the same retailers and CPs⁴⁵. The ESF unit worked closely with the Supply Chain unit, especially through procurement, transport, and logistics.⁴⁶ These internal complementarities among the different WFP units in Syria created synergies and allowed continuous improvements of the ESF programme. However, the evaluation team noted that the figures and data of the different teams did not always match (e.g., number of CBT beneficiaries differed between the CBT and ESF teams; number of governorates varied between the ESF and Supply Chain teams).

4.1.2.3 Complementarity with other humanitarian and development actors and government partners

62. **Overall, the ESF portfolio’s design and implementation in Syria has taken into consideration other interventions by UN agencies.** The ESF complemented UNICEF’s Curriculum B programme which supported MoE’s efforts to reach out-of-school children and provided date bars to those children attending UNICEF’s SLP centres in Al-Hasaka.⁴⁷ ESF also distributed date bars to school children attending the summer schools which UNESCO organized. At the time of the evaluation, WFP was collaborating with UNESCO on building the School Integrated Management Information System (SIMIS).^{48,49} Furthermore, in 2018, WFP collaborated with UNESCO to include school feeding indicators in the National Education Management Information System (EMIS).⁵⁰ Finally, WFP co-organized with ILO a training for school staff on child labour awareness.⁵¹ While WHO was implementing “the healthy schools programme” and UNICEF some WaSH activities in selected schools, WFP did not use these complementary activities as criteria for selecting the schools. It therefore missed an opportunity to leverage both water and sanitation solutions and health and nutrition education for its own ESF. The evaluation team was unable to determine the reason why WFP did not consider these complementary activities as one of the selection criteria in targeting schools.

63. **Effective coordination with these partners was limited since all information had to pass through the MoE before being shared with the other partners.** The Education Cluster was led by UNICEF and coordinated all education-related interventions, including the ESF. WFP participated in these meetings and reported on the 4 “Ws” (Who, What, When, Where). However, there were limitations on information-sharing per the Communication Protocol, since the “Who” could not be disclosed to all the development actors. As such, neither UNICEF nor UNESCO were aware in which specific locations the ESF was being implemented. Similarly, the CPs could interact only with WFP and the beneficiaries, but they were not allowed to communicate directly with the schools nor to visit them. The result was that the school officials did not know which CP was providing the e-vouchers to the care-givers of

⁴³ Interview WFP-04

⁴⁴ Interview WFP-02

⁴⁵ Interview WFP 06

⁴⁶ Interview WFP-05

⁴⁷ Interview Partners-03 and WFP-03

⁴⁸ WFP Syria, 2018. T-ICSP Annual Country Report

⁴⁹ Interviews Partners-01 and Partners-02

⁵⁰ Interview Partners-05 and WFP 03

⁵¹ Interview Partners-04 and WFP 03

children enrolled in their school. In addition, WFP and WHO worked separately on nutrition in schools. There was a plan to form a working group in 2020 to bring together the MoH, MoE, World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and WFP to better coordinate nutrition and health in schools. As a previous evaluation had concluded, operational partnerships for implementing School Feeding in Syria had scope for expansion, especially at the provincial level.⁵²

4.2 Area 2 – Results of the ESF

4.2.1 EQ3: Education, food security and nutrition

EQ3: To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response supported the education of girls and boys, and has contributed to their food and nutrition security in crises and emergency situations?

Key findings

- The ESF portfolio yielded different levels of results in terms of reaching the targeted beneficiaries per modality and year - with the fresh meals modality reaching the highest percentage of targeted beneficiaries, followed by the date bar distribution and the CBT having the lowest number of reached beneficiaries *versus* planned.
- WFP increased the number of schools targeted through ESF and expanded geographically its reach from three governorates in 2014 to 13 governorates in 2019.
- The ESF programme contributed to improving food security and nutrition among primary school children through the in-kind distribution of date bars, fresh meals and through the provision of vouchers which could only be utilized for purchasing food products.
- Data available suggested that the ESF contributed to increased attendance, enrolment and retention for girls and boys, which had declined dramatically during the crisis.
- Effectiveness of the fortified date bar distribution was challenged by a number of factors: (1) lengthy procedures to obtain the necessary clearances; (2) interruption in the delivery; (3) logistical challenges; (4) lack of storage facilities; and (5) leakages in the consumption of date bars.
- Effectiveness of the CBT modality was reduced by: (1) delays in receiving the list of registered students from the MoE/DoE; (2) abuse by school principals in a few cases; (3) technical difficulties with registration through SCOPE⁵³ and the SCOPECARD; (4) misconduct by participating retailers; and (5) insufficient understanding of the CBT modality.

4.2.1.1 Reaching beneficiaries

64. **ESF showed diverse results according to the modality and the year** (see Table 4 providing number of planned beneficiaries per modality and per year as well as the actual number of reached beneficiaries).

Table 4 *Beneficiaries per modality and per year*⁵⁴

Year	Modality	Beneficiaries planned			Beneficiaries actual			% Reached vs planned
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
2014	Date bar	178,500	171,500	350,000	44,126	45,928	90,054	26
2015	Date bar	255,000	245,000	500,000	160,982	154,669	315,651	63
2016	Date bar	255,000	245,000	500,000	247,570	237,871	485,450	97
	CBT ⁵⁵	4,900	5,100	10,000	n/a	n/a	376	0

⁵² WFP. 2018. Corporate Emergency Evaluation of the WFP Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis (January 2015-March 2018)

⁵³ SCOPE is WFP's beneficiary and transfer management platform that supports the WFP transfer modalities: in kind, voucher and cash for a variety of project activities.

⁵⁴ The figures reported are an estimate based on the number of date bars that were distributed to the schools; the actual number of beneficiaries receiving the date bars/milk is unavailable (from WFP CO).

⁵⁵ The data for actual beneficiaries is not available in the annual report

Year	Modality	Beneficiaries planned			Beneficiaries actual			% Reached vs planned
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
2017 ⁵⁶	Date bar	367,500	382,500	750,000	323,699	336,911	660,611	88
	CBT	24,500	25,500	50,000	759	775	1,534	3
	Milk*						660,611 ⁵⁷	88
	Fresh meal ⁵⁸	4,900	5,100	10,000	5,008	5,202	10,210	102
2018 ⁵⁹	Date bar	318,500	331,500	650,000	474,242	483,598	967,841	149
	Milk*						970,000 ⁶⁰	-
	CBT	24,500	25,500	50,000	1,458	1,518	2,977	6
	Fresh meal	14,700	15,300	15,000 ⁶¹	4,785	4,980	9,766	65
2019	Date bar	525,300	504,700	1,000,000	377,718	362,905	740,623	74
	CBT	38,250	36,750	75,000	20,229	21,021	41,250	55
	Fresh meal	14,700	15,300	30,000	14,897	14,313	29,209	97

Source: SPR (2014-2016), ACR 2016-2019 and data shared by the SF team, Syria CO.

* No breakdown of planned, actual or sex-disaggregated figures available for the milk distribution.

65. **Regarding the fortified date bar distribution, both the number of planned and reached beneficiaries continued to increase from year to year.** The percentage reached versus planned increased from a low 26 percent in 2014, reaching a peak of 149 percent in 2018 to falling to 71 percent in 2019. The gradual improvement from 2014 to 2017 was possible due to improvements in the supply chain and the security situation. The peak in 2018 - when the number reached outstripped the number planned - was due to the one-off distribution of date bars and milk when the number of beneficiaries was increased in order to distribute the milk before it expired (see Box 4). Finally, the decrease in 2019 was explained by a request from the MoE to temporarily put on hold the distribution for the first couple of months of the school year (distribution started only in December 2019).

Box 4 The Milk Story

The UHT milk was provided as a one-off, in-kind donation by the European Union and shipped to Syria. Due to the transport and national testing requirements, there was extensive lead time. Under the prioritization plan, WFP was forced to reduce the number of children targeted to 500,000 in 2018 (50 percent of the needs-based plan). However, over the course of the year, WFP reached a cumulative total of 970,000 children across 12 out of 14 governorates — the widest geographical coverage and the highest number of unique beneficiaries reached since the start of the ESF programme. It is worth noting that the high number of children reached can partly be attributed to distributions of milk in the first half of the year. Due to significant delays in in-country arrival and other supply chain challenges, combined with a short shelf-life, the milk was distributed to a large number of schools to ensure it was consumed before expiration.

Source: WFP Syria. 2018. T-ICSP Annual Country Report

66. **In the first years of implementation, the ESF's CBT modality did not meet the planned number of beneficiaries which were ambitious given the context.** The CBT modality started in 2016 but data was available only from 2017 when WFP shifted from paper vouchers to e-vouchers. The plans were ambitious given all the challenges associated with introducing the e-vouchers. As such, the rate achieved versus planned was low - 3 percent (in 2017) and 6 percent (in 2018). It was only in 2019, that this modality was able to reach 55 percent of the beneficiaries that were originally planned.

67. **The fresh meals modality** – given its relatively small scope and since it was implemented by two CPs – **had the highest number of beneficiaries reached versus planned.** The fresh meals modality started in Aleppo in 2017 as a pilot activity. Since it was implemented fully by two CPs, the numbers reached were high. The CPs were able to obtain relatively accurate numbers of students

⁵⁶ From 2017 and onward, the sex-disaggregated data for actual outputs is calculated based on an estimation (51% female-49% male) except for the CBT (2017). According to the ESF team, in 2017 WFP was unable to cope with the large number of beneficiaries for the milk distribution and monitor it closely. 2018-2019 witnessed a high turnover of focal points in the MoE in addition to an increase in the beneficiaries' number making it difficult to report on sex-disaggregated data

⁵⁷ WFP Syria, 2017. PRRO Standard Project Report, p.29

⁵⁸ The data for fresh meal was provided by the ESF team in the CO while the other modalities were included in the SPR 2017

⁵⁹ The data for 2018 was provided by the school feeding team (CO)

⁶⁰ WFP Syria. 2018. T-ICSP Annual Country Report, p.9

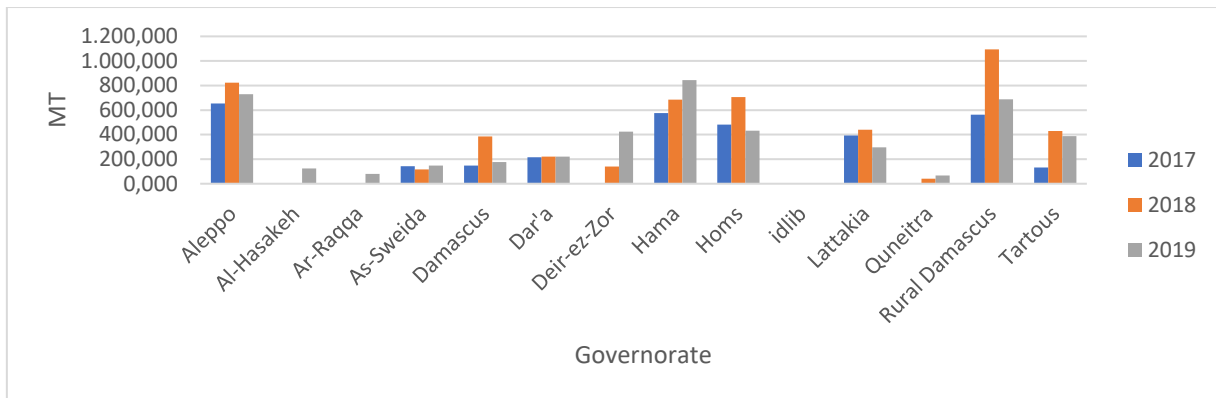
⁶¹ This figure was provided by ESF team in the CO since there was no information in the ACR

registered in the primary schools that were targeted and planned accordingly. When, on a given day, a higher number of sandwiches was prepared, the excess sandwiches were distributed to a nearby orphanage.⁶²

68. **In addition to an increase in planned and reached number of beneficiaries, WFP increased the number of schools targeted through the ESF and expanded geographically.** The number of schools reached grew from 285, in 2014, to 1,414, in 2019, an almost five-fold increase. Similarly, the number of targeted governorates rose from three in 2014 to 13 governorates in 2019 (see Annex 5 Table 5).

69. The following Figure 1 shows the date bar distribution in the different governorates in 2017-2019 and illustrates how the in-kind distribution shifted as the security situation changed.

Figure 1 Date bar distribution in the different governorates for the years 2017-2019



Source: Evaluation Team, based on data provided by WFP CO Supply Chain Unit, January 2020

70. **The different modalities faced diverse challenges to reach the beneficiaries**, several of which were addressed (see Table 6). For the fortified date bar distribution, these included (1) lengthy procedures to obtain the necessary clearances; (2) interruption in the delivery; (3) logistical challenges; (4) lack of storage facilities; and (5) leakages in the consumption of date bars:

- *Lengthy procedures to obtain necessary clearances*: dispatches of commodities from WFP's warehouses to CPs could only be undertaken following the receipt of clearance of WFP's monthly dispatch plans by the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment (MoLAE), and the receipt of facilitation letters from the local governors (see Annex 10 for flowchart of approval processes).⁶³
- *Interruption in delivery of date bars due to security and logistical reasons*: the security situation at times impacted dispatches to schools, particularly when they were near to conflict areas.⁶⁴
- *Logistical challenges related to downstream delivery to the school level*: delivery to more than 1,000 locations (schools) had to be done within a short delivery time window. This caused some deliveries to be made after school hours or even in the evenings. In some instances, the lack of availability of off-loaders – due to contract violations by transport contractors - resulted in schoolchildren carrying the date bar boxes from the delivery trucks into the storage room.⁶⁵
- *Lack of adequate storage facilities*: as mentioned earlier, several schools were destroyed during the conflict. Furthermore, many of those that were still functioning did not have adequate storage facilities. WFP provided some schools with wooden pellets and prefabricated containers to improve the storage conditions. However, there were cases where the date bars were stored in the school principals' house as mentioned in the Third-Party Monitors' (TPM) reports.⁶⁶
- *Leakages (fortified date bars used for non-intended purposes)*: several stakeholders reported that some of the date bars were being sold in the markets and being consumed by non-intended beneficiaries (e.g., caretakers and school officials who indicated they liked the taste of the date bars).⁶⁷ A school principal even shared the market price (the shopkeeper purchases three bars for

⁶² Interview WFP-09

⁶³ Interviews WFP-03 and WFP-05

⁶⁴ Interviews WFP-03 and WFP-05

⁶⁵ Interviews GoS-01, GoS-03, WFP-03, WFP-05, and SP-03

⁶⁶ Interview TPM-01

⁶⁷ Interview GoS 03, SP-03 and SP-05

100 Syrian pounds and sells each one for 50 Syrian pounds, making a 50 percent profit).⁶⁸ However, the extent and prevalence of such leakages were not possible to determine.

71. Similarly, **the specific factors that reduced the effectiveness of the CBT modality included the following:** (1) delays in receiving the list of registered students from the MoE/DoE; (2) abuse by school principals in a few cases; (3) technical difficulties with registration through SCOPE and the SCOPECARD; (4) misconduct by participating retailers; and (5) insufficient understanding of the CBT modality by the beneficiaries.

- *Delays in receiving the list of registered students from the MoE/DoE:* for this modality, the MoE requested the school principals to prepare a list of all the students enrolled in the Curriculum B programme. The school principals sent this list to the DoE which forwarded them to the MoE. In turn, the MoE provided this list to the WFP CO in Damascus which finally shared the information with WFP's field offices in the governorates who forwarded the lists to the CPs. The same procedure was repeated every month to ensure that newly-enrolled students were included in the updated lists as well as to certify that the previously enrolled students had fulfilled the condition (80 percent attendance rate during the previous month) in order for them to receive the CBT amount. Furthermore, all CPs interviewed in Homs, Damascus and Rural Damascus mentioned that the lists they received had incomplete/incorrect information which made it difficult for them to identify the students and contact them, further delaying the process.⁶⁹
- *Difficulties with registration through SCOPE⁷⁰ and the SCOPECARD:* beneficiaries and staff of all CPs met shared their frustration regarding the registration process on SCOPE.⁷¹ Issues raised included (1) the difficulty of capturing the beneficiaries' fingerprints; (2) unavailability of children's birth certificates; (3) sudden blocking of the system which meant that the whole registration process had to be done a second time; resulting in long waiting times for the beneficiaries; (4) poor internet connection; and (5) technical problems associated with SCOPE in Nairobi⁷². All these issues caused some beneficiaries to lose one month's worth (sometimes more) of the amount they were supposed to receive per child. The longer the delay in reactivating the card, the greater the impact of losing a month's worth of assistance, especially since the system did not allow retroactive payment.
- *Abuse by school principals:* interviews with different stakeholders as well as FGDs revealed that there were a few cases of abuse by school principals who felt that - as the Curriculum B students were an additional burden on them and the schoolteachers - they were not getting compensated for the extra work they had to do. This led some school principals to abuse their power by asking parents to pay an amount for including the name of their child on the list of Curriculum B students or for certifying every month that the child had fulfilled the conditionality requirement (80 percent attendance).⁷³
- *Misconduct by participating retailers:* beneficiaries as well as CP staff reported that certain retailers were carrying out several practices that had a detrimental effect on the effectiveness of the CBT modality (see Box 5). For example, by imposing higher prices on beneficiaries, the purchasing value of the voucher diminished. The lengthy process of approving a new retailer (which could take up to one year) and the unavailability of retailers in rural areas, made it difficult for WFP to increase sufficiently the number of participating retailers. As a consequence, the relatively low number of accredited retailers had the upper hand, knowing that it would be difficult to replace them for their misconduct. Nevertheless, WFP had blacklisted at least one retailer.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Interviews GoS-03, WFP-05 and SP-03

⁶⁹ Interviews CP-01, CP-02 and CP-03

⁷⁰ SCOPE is WFP's beneficiary and transfer management platform that supports the WFP programme intervention cycle from beginning to end. The SCOPE platform is a web-based application used for beneficiary and household registrations. Once a beneficiary is registered s/he receives a SCOPECARD which can be used to make food purchases at approved local retailers.

⁷¹ Interviews CP-01, CP-02 and CP-03

⁷² One CP staff reported that she had to manually correct errors that were introduced by the centralised system in Nairobi and verify all the information for each beneficiary (Interview CP-03). Furthermore, the SCOPECARD was deactivated when placed near a mobile phone or was washed.

⁷³ Interview CP-01. The extent and prevalence of abuse by school principals was not possible to determine since no quantitative survey was undertaken as part of the evaluation

⁷⁴ Interview WFP-05

Box 5 *Issues related to retailers⁷⁵*

- In all the FGDs held with beneficiaries, several issues related to the retailers accredited through the CBT modality were raised. They included the following:
- Some retailers were pricing their food items higher if purchased with the e-vouchers than if purchased with cash.
 - Some retailers were refusing to sell specific items to the beneficiaries even though the ESF programme allowed it.
 - In some cases, retailers were forcing the beneficiaries to buy products that they did not need or had expired dates.
 - In rural areas, there were only few WFP- approved retailers. Some of the interviewed beneficiaries reported traveling long distances to find retailers.
- *Beneficiaries had difficulties understanding how the CBT modality operated (see Box 6). This was because of the poor communication mechanisms put in place among the different stakeholders (WFP, DoE, CPs, schools and beneficiaries) and/or the beneficiaries, or the misleading information given by the staff of the CP or the school management. As a consequence, beneficiaries were unable to benefit fully from the CBT. For example, in FGDs held in Homs only 8 out of 22 parents of children attending the Curriculum B first level and 10 out of 20 parents of those enrolled in the second level reported benefiting from the CBT modality.*

Box 6 *Misinformation/miscommunication regarding the e-voucher modality⁷⁶*

- During FGDs and interviews with CPs, it was repeatedly noted that stakeholders were not well-informed about the modality's implementation details. For example:
- Some beneficiaries did not know which retailers were accredited by WFP.
 - In several cases, beneficiaries were under the impression that only one child per household was entitled to be registered for receiving the e-voucher.
 - Some parents were under the impression that if the child skipped only one day of school per month, s/he would lose the e-voucher amount.
 - Beneficiaries indicated that there was a lack of clarity regarding the rules related to sick leave.
 - Several beneficiaries did not understand how the conditionality functions – that the child had to attend 80 percent of the days of the previous month in order to be eligible for receiving the e-voucher of the current month.
 - School principals/teachers did not know which CP was responsible for distributing the e-vouchers for its Curriculum B students.

4.2.1.2 Food security

72. **In Syria, ESF contributed to improving food security among primary school children to varying degrees through the three modalities.** Through the in-kind modality (date bars), children received around 344 kilocalories which is equivalent to one-quarter of their daily calorie intake. Similarly, the fresh meal component provided around 800 kilocalories per day including the milk and around 660 kilocalories per day excluding the milk (see Annex 11 for details). The in-kind distribution was carried out during the school days, therefore contributing to improving food security for around 140 days/year. FGDs with school children in Homs found that, for some schoolchildren, the date bars were the only breakfast they were consuming. Children also revealed that sometimes they took the date bars home to share them with their siblings. In addition, through the date bar distributions during the summer camps organized by UNESCO, some children received food during the summer months as well. Monitoring visits of UNESCO's programme showed that many students – since they tended to skip breakfast due to the limited amount of food at home - relied on the school feeding, and in some instances, they even shared the date bars with their siblings. In addition, an internal evaluation carried out by UNESCO recognized the value of ESF in the summer camps and recommended its expansion.⁷⁷

73. **The CBT modality most likely did not achieve its full potential to improve the food security of the beneficiaries and their households.** Though the primary objective of the CBT modality was to improve school children's enrollment, attendance and retention, through this modality, households had

⁷⁵ FGDs, FM-01 and Interview CP-01

⁷⁶ Interviews CP-01, CP-02, GoS-03

⁷⁷ UNESCO, 2017. Evaluation Report for the Secondary Education Opportunity Programme 2016

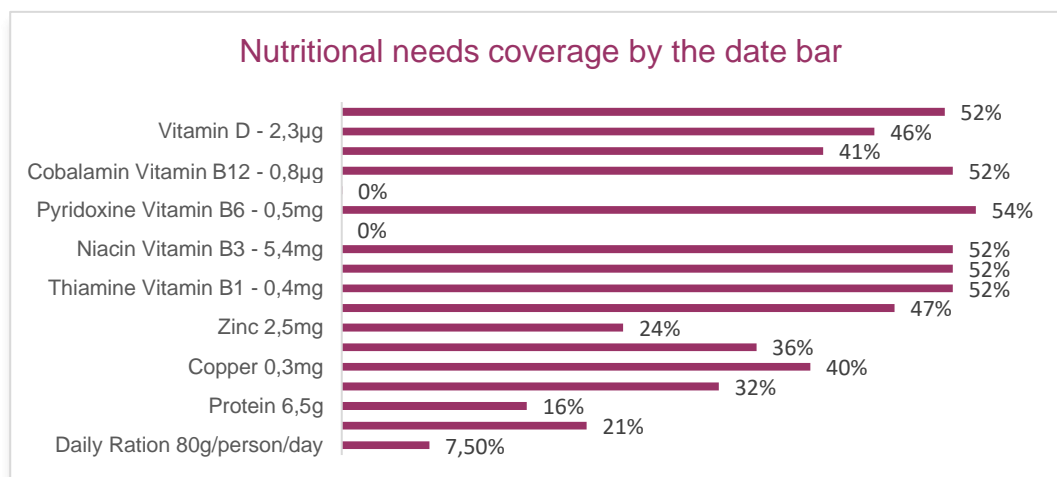
the potential to improve their food security status thanks to the e-voucher (USD 20/month) they received for each child who had attended 80 percent of the schooldays of the previous month. Since only food products were allowed to be purchased, this modality contributed to the food security of children enrolled in Curriculum B as well as their families. Programme documents assumed that, through the CBT modality, children were assisted for 270 day/year. However, the real number of days that children and their families were reached through this modality was most likely less, since as mentioned above, there were several issues with the e-vouchers which led to the money not being added/redeemed by the beneficiaries. Furthermore, since there was no analysis regarding which member(s) of the household benefitted from the food purchases. Additional data (e.g., number of e-vouchers redeemed per month; type of food items purchased per month) was unavailable to estimate the extent to which the CBT modality had achieved its objective.

4.2.1.3 Nutritional status⁷⁸

74. **Low levels of global acute malnutrition but high rates of chronic malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies justified the nutrition focus of the three ESF modalities.**⁷⁹ The in-kind modalities (date bars and fresh meals) contributed to improving the nutritional status of primary school children while the CBT modality provided cash assistance to families of Curriculum B students to purchase exclusively nutritious products. Since no nutritional survey had been carried out and since there was no baseline information available, the evaluation was not able to assess the degree to which ESF improved the nutritional status of its targeted beneficiaries. The only conclusion the evaluation team could reach was that - most likely - the nutritional status of primary school children would have been worse in the absence of ESF.

75. **Both the date bars and the fresh meals had high nutritional content.** The fortified date bars were enriched with vitamins and minerals and were supposed to be distributed on a daily basis to school children during the first recess to enhance their learning abilities (see Figure 2). The objective of fresh meals was to provide 30 percent of micronutrients through a balanced meal (carbohydrates, protein, calcium, vegetable, and fruit) and which is locally acceptable (see Annex 11).

Figure 2 Nutritional information of the date bars (2020)



Source: based on data provided by WFP CO Syria, 2020

76. **In the case of date bars, parents, children and school officials confirmed during interviews that, for the most part, children were consuming the date bars and liked them.** The MoE reported that schoolchildren were complaining about the monotony of the date bars and had requested from WFP to change their flavour.⁸⁰ However, during interviews with different stakeholders – teachers, parents and children – most reported their satisfaction with the taste of the date bars. In fact, schools in Homs who were no longer receiving the date bars requested a resumption of the in-kind

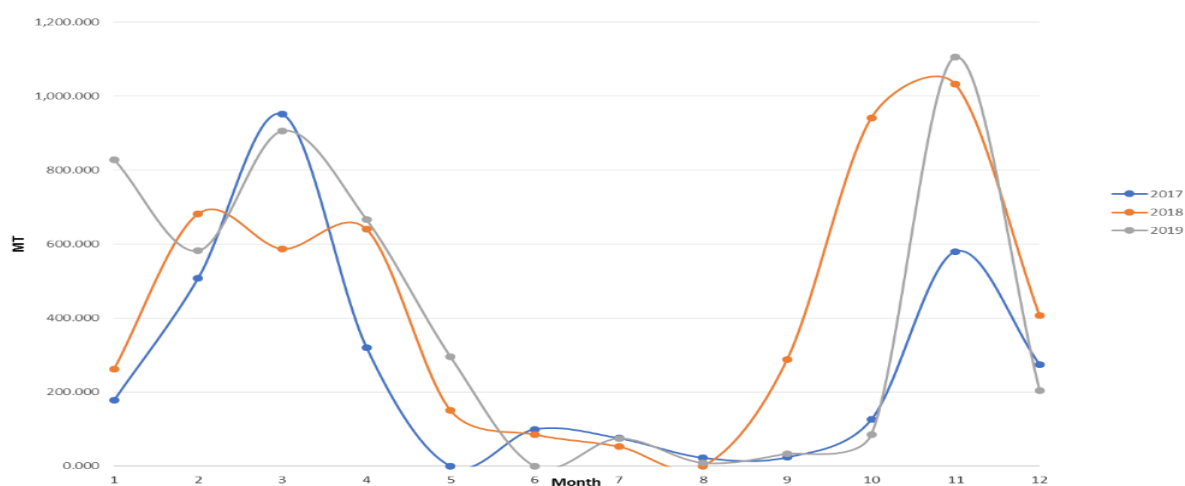
⁷⁸ Nutritional security is determined by three factors (1) access to adequate food, (2) care and feeding practices, and (3) sanitation and health

⁷⁹ This was also the conclusion of a previous WFP evaluation. WFP. 2018. Corporate Emergency Evaluation of the WFP Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis (January 2015-March 2018)

⁸⁰ Interview GoS-01

distribution. However, it is important to note that the date bars had a dual objective: (1) to improve the nutritional status; and (2) to enhance the learning abilities of children. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution to schools per month in metric tons. The graph is M-shaped with two peaks and a flat period in between. The low amount distributed during the summer months illustrates the quantities sent to the UNESCO summer school programme. The two peaks (March and November) were the months when the largest amount of date bars was delivered to schools. According to school principals, this led in some cases to an interruption in the supply (e.g., in September/October or January) and to an over-supply in March and November. Sometimes, due to a large amount delivered, the school principal decided to distribute once per week the date bars to children. The reasons were manifold: (i) insufficient storage space, (2) lack of awareness regarding the importance of consuming the bars on a daily basis, and/or (3) to decrease the workload of the school officials by distributing once per week instead of on a daily basis. In such cases, although the children were eating the date bars and were benefitting from the nutritional value, it cannot be concluded that the ESF portfolio fully achieved its objective of improving the learning abilities of primary school children.

Figure 3 Date Bar Distribution per Month (MT) between 2017-2019



Source: Evaluation team, based on data provided by WFP CO Supply Chain Unit, January 2020

77. **For the fresh meals, the recipe was refined to respond to children’s preferences** (e.g., the za’atar⁸¹ sandwich was replaced since children eat za’atar at home). WFP and TPM staff indicated that the children appreciated the fresh meal option, though some took the sandwiches home and shared them with their siblings.⁸²

78. **For the CBT modality, initially the ESF portfolio allowed only the same food items that Pregnant and Lactating Women (PLW) beneficiaries were permitted to purchase.**⁸³ Subsequently, the ESF team working, closely with the Nutrition team, modified the list of allowed items and expanded it to cover all nutritious items. However, during FGDs, beneficiaries noted that certain retailers were obliging the beneficiaries to purchase expired items and/or restrict their choices⁸⁴. In such cases, the nutritional value of the food items purchased would be decreased. In contrast, during one FGD, some of the participants reported an improvement in the household’s nutritional status because the household was able to purchase nutritious products – such as chicken – which it could not have afforded otherwise. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, the amount of the voucher redeemed and what purchases were made were unavailable making it difficult to assess the livelihood and nutritional outcomes of this modality.

79. **Finally, despite the challenges of an emergency context, WFP succeeded in introducing innovative initiatives that addressed nutritional awareness.** For example, WFP designed a “snakes and ladders” game which could be used to teach children the importance of healthy nutritional behaviour. However, the evaluation did not find any evidence of the game being used for nutritional education since none of the six schools visited in Homs were aware of the game or had received it. Similarly, the sandwiches offered under the fresh meals’ modality were wrapped in paper that had

⁸¹ Thyme mixed with sumac and sesame seeds

⁸² Interviews WFP-09 and TPM-01

⁸³ Interview WFP-04

⁸⁴ This information came from Interview WFP-04 but the magnitude of this problem remains unclear.

nutritional messages and drawings which could also be colored by children. However, depending on the contents of the sandwiches, the paper bag could become too soggy to be colored.⁸⁵

4.2.1.4 Enrolment, attendance, retention

80. **According to the data available, ESF contributed to increased attendance, enrolment and retention for girls and boys** (see Table 7 in Annex 12). However, it is important to note that the ESF portfolio was only one of the many factors that contributed to these high education outcomes. Three other significant reasons were (1) the importance that education plays in Syria – as mentioned earlier, primary education enrolment rates prior to the crisis were above 90 percent; (2) the improving security context and increasing accessibility to schools; and (3) the availability of functioning schools. Table 7 in annex 12 gives the outcome indicators planned and actual by modality, in terms of enrolment, attendance and retention.

81. **The planned target for enrolment (6 percent), attendance (70 percent for CBT and 80 percent for in-kind) and retention (70 percent) have been exceeded every year where data was available.** There were only two exceptions. One in 2017, where enrolment for the CBT modality fell short of the planned target (2.89 percent instead of 6 percent), due to two reasons: (1) implementation started late in the year; and (2) partly, as the security situation improved in parts of the country, some displaced households returned to their original place of residence and changed the schools where they enrolled their children.⁸⁶ Another exception occurred in 2019 when attendance rates did not reach the planned 90 percent, possibly because – as the ESF team explained - the new corporate planned rate was not realistic in the Syrian context.⁸⁷ Additional outcome level information was unavailable such as the number of children that moved from Curriculum B to Curriculum A. Finally, given that the reports from the MoE were not always available and that UNICEF encountered difficulties in establishing a proper methodology to collect accurate data, WFP used its own on-site monitoring to assess the achievements of the ESF portfolio. However, the evaluation team was unable to ascertain the extent to which these indicators were reliable and accurately reflect the outcome indicators at the school level.⁸⁸

82. **Change in targeted schools from one year to another limited the ability to assess accurately enrolment, attendance and retention.** Since these indicators measure the change from one year to another, the greater the difference between targeted schools from one year to another, the less accurate they are. For example, a comparison between the 2017 and 2018 school years revealed that 94 percent of the targeted schools were the same as the previous year. In contrast, for the 2019 school year, only 59 percent of the schools from the previous academic year continued to be targeted.⁸⁹ This meant that assessing these indicators for 2019 would have been much more challenging.

83. **FGDs with parents, children and school management in Homs provided further evidence that ESF was contributing to improving educational outcomes.** For example, most parents reported that the different modalities motivated their children to attend school. This was also confirmed with school principals who noted that both the date bar and the CBT modalities had encouraged parents to send their children to school. Though some also mentioned that they would send their children to school “even if no food vouchers were distributed. We send our children to schools because they need to learn, regardless of our bad economic situation”.⁹⁰

4.2.2 EQ4: Households and local economies

EQ4: To what extent has school feeding in emergencies strengthened the ability of households to cope with crises and (if applicable) helped to revitalize local economies and stabilize communities?

Key findings

⁸⁵ Interview TPM-01

⁸⁶ As explained by the ESF team and in the SPR 2017 p. 18

⁸⁷ WFP at the corporate level has increased the targets in 2019 to 9 percent for enrolment, 90 percent for attendance, and 97 percent for retention. According to the ESF team, these may not be realistic for a context such as the one in Syria (Interviews WFP-03 and WFP-09)

⁸⁸ Based on interviews with DoE staff, school principals and WFP CO staff

⁸⁹ Interview WFP-06

⁹⁰ FGDs Parents-01, Parents 02

- The ESF portfolio contributed to stabilizing communities by: (1) assisting all children (host communities, IDPs and refugees) in the targeted vulnerable and food insecure geographical areas that have become newly accessible; (2) assisting IDP and returnee children attending the Curriculum B programme; and (3) increasing monthly incomes of households through e-vouchers.
- ESF had a positive impact on the local economy by (1) supporting local suppliers of date bars which succeeded in increasing production capacity; increasing the number of employees to 650; expanding their exports overseas; and diversifying their products; (2) supporting around 90 retailers through the CBT modality; and (3) employing around 100 women in the kitchen for the fresh meals modality.
- By shifting from importing to locally producing the date bars, WFP not only contributed to improving the local economy, but it also put in place a production system that could cope with sudden increases in demand.

4.2.2.1 Reaching the most vulnerable households

84. **In Syria, the ESF portfolio reached vulnerable households using food insecurity as the primary targeting criterion.** The in-kind school feeding modality targeted newly accessible areas based on the food insecurity mapping that was carried out by WFP. By providing e-vouchers to households which have children enrolled in the Curriculum B programme, WFP benefitted mostly the IDPs and returnees. **In both cases, once a geographical area had been selected, all the schools within that area were targeted.**

85. **Furthermore, ESF supported alternative learning programmes for vulnerable out-of-school children implemented by UNESCO and UNICEF.** For example, the date bars were distributed to children attending UNESCO's summer school programme (see Box 7) which reached more than 110,000 students in 14 governorates. In-kind distribution also targeted those enrolled in UNICEF's Self-Learning Programme (SLP) in the Kurdish areas.

Box 7 UNESCO's Second-Chance Programme

The Second-Chance Programme was launched in 2017 in Syria and catered to primary level students who failed their final year exams. The Second-Chance Programme aimed to fill a gap in the education system. It provided the necessary assistance to households who could not afford additional tuition for their children who had failed exams, supporting them to better understand the curriculum. Over a six-week summer period, the programme gave them the opportunity to re-sit these exams and progress to the next grade. The programme also offered psychosocial support activities, taught by trained counsellors, helping children to overcome conflict-related stress and trauma. The sessions included classroom and extra-curricular activities, music, games and sports. By 2019, 14 governorates had taken part in the programme and more than 110,000 students had participated in the summer schools.

Source : <https://en.unesco.org/news/second-chance-education-children-syria>

4.2.2.2 Ability to cope with crises and emergencies

86. **By supporting local suppliers of date bars, accrediting local retailers to participate in the e-voucher modality and employing vulnerable women for producing date bars and fresh meals, the ESF programme contributed to improving the local economy, improving women's income, and enhancing communities' ability to cope with the aftermaths of the Syrian crisis, including the ongoing economic crisis.** In 2016, WFP started the shift towards the local production of fortified date bars - initially imported from Egypt and Jordan - with a view to supporting local manufacturers. WFP bought almost half of its fortified date bars through two local suppliers, reducing the lead time and ensuring consistency with local taste preference.⁹¹ This enabled WFP to establish a more reliable supply chain and contributed to the livelihoods of 241 people employed by the two suppliers, about 70 percent of whom were women.⁹² By 2019, WFP was procuring locally all its needs in terms of date bars from one supplier; the second one was not selected since it had presented higher prices when responding the tender. As of December 2019, the local supplier had recruited around 650 employees to work exclusively on producing the date bars for WFP's ESF in Syria. Women who came from vulnerable households (IDPs, women-headed households, widows) constituted around 90 percent of

⁹¹ Most participants in FGDs in Homs indicated that the date bars produced in Syria were tastier than those imported from Egypt

⁹² WFP Syria, 2017. PRRO Standard Project Report

its employees.⁹³ The supplier had plans to increase its staff working on the production of date bars by an additional 150 persons. It estimated that 85 percent of its total production was to supply the ESF date bar modality.⁹⁴ Furthermore, thanks to the financial support and technical assistance that WFP provided to the supplier, the latter succeeded in diversifying its production from only date bars to around 12 different products which it sold in Syrian markets and exported overseas (e.g., to Iraq, UAE, Spain, Germany). Finally, due to the technical assistance that WFP provided on food quality and safety, the supplier was able to obtain ISO certification as well as United States Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) approval which will allow it to export to the American market in the near future.⁹⁵

87. By shifting from importing to locally producing the date bars, WFP not only contributed to improving the local economy, but it also put in place a production system that could cope with sudden increases in demand. This was particularly the case when areas became newly accessible or when there was movement of people from one area to another (see Box 8). However, by relying exclusively on only one local supplier, WFP could also become vulnerable should the local supplier experience any difficulties.

Box 8 *Advantages of shifting to local production*

- Shorter delivery time and contribution to local economy
- Easier quality assurance of food safety processes
- Ability to change specifications (e.g., change in thickness of boxes for better storage)
- Greater flexibility in responding to shifting needs (e.g., when additional beneficiaries were added in the middle of the year, such as what happened when people started leaving the Rukban camp and WFP was requested to provide them with date bars)
- In-kind production of date bars better suited to local taste
- Improved cost-efficiency: local procurement and Food Supply Agreements (FSAs) allowed for a 15 percent drop in the price of locally procured date bars⁹⁶
- Greater sustainability through training and technical assistance provided to local suppliers

88. In Aleppo, the kitchen providing the fresh meals to school children employed around 100 women. Since they were only employed during the school year, WFP was exploring ways to linking up with other livelihood opportunities (e.g., providing food to hospitals) in order to have continuous income-generating opportunities. Furthermore, the fresh meals modality was linked to the local bakery which WFP had supplied with wheat and yeast (through the livelihoods programme). The CP implementing the fresh meals modality purchased from the bakery the bread it needed to prepare the sandwiches and paid only overhead cost.

89. The CBT modality worked with around 90 retailers⁹⁷ and contributed to the economy by increasing local food purchases through the use of e-vouchers. In addition to fulfilling WFP criteria (e.g., food safety and security, diversity of products, hygiene, etc.), the retailers had to be at a certain distance from each other to facilitate a greater geographical coverage and also not to compete with each other. However, MoE reported that some parents had complained that the retailers were not close to their place of residence. Furthermore, during the FGDs in Homs, beneficiaries noted that they had to travel for more than 50 km to the closest accredited retailer. They expressed their preference to have the retailers closer to the schools where their children were enrolled. The long distances to reach retailers was more of a challenge in the rural areas into which the ESF had recently expanded.

⁹³ Interview PS-01

⁹⁴ *Ibid*

⁹⁵ *Ibid*

⁹⁶ WFP Syria. 2018. Evaluation of the WFP Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis (2015- 2018)

⁹⁷ Information provided by WFP CO CBT team.

4.2.3 EQ5: Additional effects

EQ5: To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response had effects not yet foreseen in WFP's school feeding?

Key findings

- Only anecdotal evidence was found that the ESF programme had a positive effect on social cohesion or the psychosocial well-being of beneficiaries.
- ESF sometimes created tensions between siblings enrolled in different curricula as well as between WFP beneficiaries and retailers engaged in misconduct. However, the date bar modality did not lead to any friction among the different groups of beneficiaries, since it targeted all schools within the same area.
- Two main unintended consequences were reported by the various stakeholders met: (1) the use of schoolchildren to offload the delivery of date bars; and (2) shifting schoolchildren from Curriculum A to Curriculum B in order to benefit from the e-vouchers.
- CPs in the CBT modality reported that the e-vouchers were contributing to making children cease work and resume educational activities.
- There is no evidence that ESF had any positive/negative impact on child, early and forced marriage.
- There were several internal as well as external factors that influenced the ESF results, including WFP's adaptive capacity, insecurity, lengthy processes, inadequate M&E, centralized decision-making, and logistical challenges.

4.2.3.1 Social cohesion

90. **The date bar modality, by targeting all the schools in a given geographical area, did not create tensions among the different groups: IDPs, returnees and host communities.** Nevertheless, there was no direct evidence that ESF had any effect on improving social cohesion.

91. **The e-voucher modality, by targeting specifically children enrolled in the Curriculum B programme, assisted IDP and returnee households mostly.** In interviews with school principals and with DoE officials as well as during FGDs, stakeholders noted that there were no tensions between households whose children were in Curriculum A (mostly host communities) and those whose children were in Curriculum B (mostly IDPs and returnees). In one FGD, though, it was reported that - in some instances - there were tensions between siblings from the same household enrolled in different curricula (one A and another B) since the one in Curriculum A was upset that it was only his sibling (enrolled in Curriculum B) who was receiving the e-voucher. Finally, some retailers were engaging in misconduct (see Box 5) which may have caused some tensions between the retailers and the WFP beneficiaries.

92. **The fresh meals were distributed to all primary school children in the targeted schools.** However, in some cases reported by the TPMs, the primary schools had to absorb kindergarten (KG) children because there were an insufficient number of kindergartens in Aleppo, and KG children in those schools did not receive the sandwiches simply because they were not officially registered in the primary schools.⁹⁸ This caused distress among the KG children – an issue that can easily be remedied by ensuring that all children regardless of age receive the fresh meals.

4.2.3.2 Psychosocial well-being

93. **There was anecdotal evidence that in-kind distribution (date bars and fresh meals) had improved the well-being of children.** In FGDs held in Homs, some teachers and caregivers reported that children were happier and more attentive in school. One interviewed school principal indicated that the students were happy with the date bars, which were a substitute for the sweets that they could not afford to buy. Furthermore, by being able to purchase additional food items (such as chicken) and by diversifying their meals, FGD participants noted that this had a positive impact on the psychosocial well-being of households.⁹⁹ However, the evaluation was unable to determine the gender and age differences in improved well-being within the households.

94. **ESF placed an additional burden on school principals and teachers.** School staff had to distribute daily the date bars and to supervise the offloading of trucks. These activities were an

⁹⁸ Interview TPM-01

⁹⁹ Interview Parents-01

additional workload on the school staff, who, might be already challenged by their regular duties. For instance, teachers of Curriculum B students were particularly solicited since they had to manage children who had been out-of-school for some time and who, most likely, had been exposed to traumatic events.

4.2.3.3 Exposure to negative coping mechanisms

95. There was no evidence that the ESF had any positive/negative impact on child, early and forced marriage; but did likely contribute to decreasing child labour¹⁰⁰, notwithstanding the lack of data. In discussions with stakeholders, it was noted that most early child marriages in Syria took place when the girls were between 15 and 17 years old. Since the in-kind date bar distribution targeted children under 14 years, one could conclude that it did not necessarily have an impact on decreasing/preventing early child marriage. Through the CBT modality, the ESF reached older children who were at a higher risk of both forced early child marriage and/or child labour. However, one school principal in Homs noted that the number of girls in schools was lower than in the past, possibly because parents were pulling them out of school to marry them and/or help in household chores¹⁰¹. The picture was different when it came to child labour. According to UNICEF (2018), the most recent official figures estimated that there were 2.1 million children in Syria who were out-of-school and, though there were no official figures as to how many were engaged in child labour or were at risk of early child marriage, it was estimated that there were significant numbers of children who were working to support their families financially. According to some school principals, the CBT modality had encouraged some households to enroll their children in the Curriculum B programme and pulled them out of the jobs they had¹⁰².

96. **CPs in the CBT modality reported that the e-vouchers contributed to making children cease work and resume educational activities.** They mentioned that children were “proud” because - through their school attendance/retention – they could contribute financially to the household’s income¹⁰³. Similarly, some of the interviewed school principals and beneficiaries also confirmed that the CBT encouraged parents to stop their children from working and enroll them back in school. However, in one instance, one parent mentioned that he had to ask his child to drop out and work because of the difficult economic situation the household was facing. Although, WFP included questions regarding negative coping mechanisms in its Education Programme School Monitoring Checklist (see Annex 13), there was no available analysis of the results of these reports, and the Evaluation Team did not see any documentary evidence on how the ESF had contributed to reducing negative coping mechanisms.

4.2.3.4 Unintended consequences¹⁰⁴

97. **The first unintended consequence was the use – in some instances - of schoolchildren to offload the delivery of date bars¹⁰⁵.** This was due to one of two reasons: (1) the trucking company either had not sent workers to offload the trucks; and/or (2) the workers offloaded the trucks, however they transported the boxes only to the entrance of the school and not to the designated area for storage which required the teachers and children to carry the boxes to the storage room. WFP attempted to mitigate for this by several ways: (1) WFP changed the contractual terms of the transport companies and increased the amount allocated in order to cover for the cost of hiring workers; and (2) WFP raised the awareness of the MoE/DoE staff and school principals regarding the use of child labour to offload the trucks. Furthermore, WFP advised the school principals that they should not sign off on the waybill unless the trucking company had delivered all the boxes to the designated storage area. Notwithstanding these measures, there were still some reports that this practice was still ongoing in some schools – though it is not possible to determine its prevalence.

¹⁰⁰ This is based on FGDs with parents and school staff

¹⁰¹ Interview SM-01

¹⁰² Interview SP-02

¹⁰³ Interview CP-03

¹⁰⁴ The unintended consequences listed in this section were triangulated with WFP CO staff, DoE staff, school principals and CPs. However, the evaluation was unable to determine the magnitude and frequency of these consequences since no monitoring data was available and a quantitative survey – though initially foreseen - was not carried out as part of the evaluation due to lack of necessary approvals

¹⁰⁵ Interviews GoS-01, WFP-03, WFP-05; SP-01

98. **The second unintended consequence – the magnitude of which was difficult to assess – was that of shifting schoolchildren from Curriculum A¹⁰⁶ to Curriculum B in order to benefit from the e-vouchers.** For example, in one interview, it was reported that even one school principal shifted his four children from Curriculum A to Curriculum B which would have provided him with the equivalent of around USD 85/month additional income – a substantial addition to the low salaries that school principals received. In order to overcome this practice, greater monitoring by the DoE and WFP staff, TPMs, and CPs would be required.

4.3 Area 3 – Creation of a sustainable system for school feeding

4.3.1 EQ6: Sustainability and connectedness

EQ6: To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response been coupled with creating a sustainable system for school feeding, in line with priorities and capacities of the line ministries?

Key findings

- WFP, in coordination with UNICEF, initiated advocacy activities targeting high-level MoE staff to integrate school feeding into a nationally-owned programme in Syria which is yet to be developed. One challenge faced was the high turnover of the SF focal point within the MoE.
- MoE did not have a policy on SF but was in the process of developing a school feeding strategy. However, there was no evidence of the involvement of WFP - or other partners implementing school-level activities - in the elaboration of such strategy.
- There was ownership at the MoE, DoE, and community level of the three modalities. All stakeholders were fully supportive of ESF.
- Through ESF, WFP provided training and technical assistance to all its partners implementing school feeding including MoE/DoE staff, CPs, local producers of date bars and fresh meals, and school officials.
- In conclusion, WFP took several measures to ensure the long-term sustainability of school feeding in Syria – though the steps undertaken were still at the embryonic stage.

4.3.1.1 Action plan for transitioning to nationally-owned programme

99. **WFP has initiated advocacy activities to integrate SF into a nationally-owned programme in Syria which is yet to be developed.** WFP coordinated closely with UNICEF such advocacy activities to ensure that the UN agencies were conveying the same message. In 2019, WFP, with the aim to raise awareness and engagement in developing a national SF Programme, invited four staff from MoE and MoH (two from each ministry) to the Global Child Nutrition Forum in Cambodia. In addition, WFP ESF staff continuously held meetings to raise awareness of senior MoE staff regarding SF. The challenge encountered was the high staff turnover at the MoE, since in the last 18 months, WFP's counterpart changed four times.

100. **Starting in 2016, WFP organized training workshops for MoE staff to present the objectives of the ESF portfolio** (see Annex 16). Officials from the Departments of Education in target governorates, in addition to school principals, administrative staff and teachers were trained on the management and implementation of the SF modalities (e.g., nutritional value of date bars, logistics and monitoring) and sensitized on their objectives.¹⁰⁷ The purpose of these workshops was to ensure efficient implementation and build long-term programmatic sustainability. In total, around 6,000 Ministry of Education staff attended these half-day workshops on ESF implementation which were held in various governorates.¹⁰⁸ No sex-disaggregated information regarding the participants was available, however WFP and DoE staff noted that the majority were female since most primary school principals were women.¹⁰⁹

101. **In addition, gender-awareness training workshops were held in four governorates - Damascus, Hama, Hassakeh and Lattakia.** The objective was to deliver a Training of Trainers to

¹⁰⁶ Curriculum A students are those enrolled in the regular education programme

¹⁰⁷ Interviews WFP-03, GoS-01, GoS-03

¹⁰⁸ Information provided by ESF team

¹⁰⁹ Interviews WFP-03 and GoS-03

around 100 school principals and DoE staff on nutrition, gender and protection related issues who would in their turn provide training to school teachers. There was no report on the outcome of these trainings nor any information regarding whether the school principals, in their turn, delivered the training to the school teachers. Similarly, one training on child labour and protection was co-organized with ILO in April 2019 for government officials. For both types of training, though the total and sex-disaggregated number of participants was not available, WFP staff who attended the training reported that the vast majority of participants were men.¹¹⁰ They attributed the low number of women participants to several factors, including the following: (i) gender concepts and gender equality are not clear in Syrian society; (ii) as a result of the crisis, society has become more conservative and it is not acceptable/advisable for women to travel; (iii) if the training requires an overnight stay, it is less likely for women to participate; and (iv) given that the participants receive per diems, it is more likely that the person selected to attend is a man so that he receives the per diem¹¹¹.

102. **In 2016, WFP, through a grant, provided technical assistance to two local suppliers to produce date bars that responded to WFP's standards of food quality and safety.**¹¹² On-site training was delivered on topics that included (i) improving production practices; (ii) refining the date bar recipes and improving food quality; (iii) testing date bars in laboratories to ensure food safety; (iv) improving packaging; and (v) carrying out internal quality assurance and monitoring. This technical assistance has continued to date and, as a result, the local supplier reported that only 5 percent of its production of date bars did not meet WFP standards and was rejected and sold in bulk at only cost-of-production price. WFP's food technologists formulated a plan to procure and install advanced machinery and equipment that allowed both suppliers to increase their production capacity. Furthermore, as a result of the technical assistance provided and, as mentioned in the previous section, the local supplier succeeded in expanding its production significantly and in exporting a diversity of products overseas¹¹³.

103. **Finally, WFP provided training to the CPs implementing the CBT modality as well as to the retailers** in order to ensure that the formers were able to implement the modality and monitor the retailers in addition to the regular monitoring done by WFP. It also enabled the latter to maintain the required standards of hygiene in their stores.

4.3.1.2 Integration of SF in policies and legislative frameworks

104. **Syria does not have a national SF policy and/or legislation.** The MoE indicated that a national SF policy was being developed and that it was expected that it would start to be implemented during the school year 2020/2021¹¹⁴. There was no evidence that WFP – or any other UN agency – was involved and/or consulted in drafting this strategy. Nevertheless, WFP's continuous discussions on SF with MoE officials has most likely contributed to raising the awareness of MoE regarding the importance of SF for ensuring educational outcomes.

105. **Similarly, there was no budget allocated by MoE for SF.** Given the emergency context and the current economic crisis, it was unlikely that any significant funding would be earmarked for SF in the near future. Nevertheless, MoE indicated that it would endeavour to mobilize government resources to partially cover the short-term activities planned under the strategy it was currently drafting¹¹⁵.

106. **Institutionally and within the MoE, there were several Directorates who were following the different SF modalities.** Though the focal point for WFP's ESF portfolio was the Director of Planning and International Cooperation, there were other directorates that were also involved in the different modalities (see Table 5) and coordination among the different directorates was weak. In addition, and as mentioned earlier, WFP's main focal point changed four times in the last two years. In mid-2019, the SF focal point started reporting directly to the Minister of Education, thus elevating the importance of school feeding at the strategic level. Furthermore, though government institutions continued to function in the capital and in expanding swathes of the country, the institutional capacity within Syria was challenged following several years of crisis. Finally, geographical fragmentation meant that governance structures were not unified.

¹¹⁰ Interview WFP-07

¹¹¹ Interviews WFP-08 and Partners-04

¹¹² Interviews WFP-02, WFP-03, PS-01

¹¹³ Interview PS-01

¹¹⁴ Interview GoS-02

¹¹⁵ Interview GoS-02

Table 5 MoE Focal Point per modality

Date bars	CBT	Fresh meals
Directorate of Planning	Directorate of Planning (focal point for WFP's CBT modality) and Directorate of Compulsory Education (focal point for UNICEF's Curriculum B). Coordination between the two Directorates is weak.	Directorate of Planning (recently became formal focal point for WFP) and Directorate of School Health (informal focal point for WFP)

4.3.1.3 Community participation and ownership

107. A previous evaluation found that ESF was “highly valued by the Ministry”.¹¹⁶ **There was full ownership of the date bars by the MoE which approved the list of targeted schools and has gradually become more involved in the modality’s design** (e.g., MoE was discussing with WFP the possibility of diversifying the bars to include other types of fruits). Similarly, the CBT modality benefitted from the MoE’s full approval. MoE officials indicated that they would even like to expand it further and increase the amount that each child would receive monthly. Furthermore, for both modalities, it was the MoE that prepared the monitoring reports – albeit not always in a timely and regular manner. The picture was different for the fresh meals modality which was not “institutionalized” within the MoE, since the selection of schools was done by the Department of Education in Aleppo. Though there was no full ownership by the MoE, it expressed its full satisfaction with this modality and was impressed with how the kitchen was managed in Aleppo. The responsibility and accountability were shared between WFP and its CPs. There was a need to develop internal procedures for the MoE to follow up on this modality. In order to increase ownership, WFP involved the School Health Unit in the Aleppo Governorate to carry out random checks, take samples and check on the quality and safety of the fresh meals that were prepared and distributed.¹¹⁷ Ownership by school management and staff was mixed. Though school employees admitted that ESF responded to a food security/nutrition need and was welcome, it also created a heavier workload for which the employees were not compensated.

108. **At the community level, parents who participated in the FGDs were fully in favour of the three modalities.**¹¹⁸ By employing vulnerable women in the fresh meals modality and by linking it to the local bakery which provided the bread for making the sandwiches, the fresh meals modality ensured high community participation. Similarly, with the CBT modality, by involving local retailers and through its implementation by national CPs, this modality connected different stakeholders in the communities where it took place. Finally, the local production and distribution of date bars generated the private sector’s support to ESF in Syria.

4.3.1.4 Communication and coordination with stakeholders

109. **WFP collaborated with UNESCO on building a National Education Management Information System to include school feeding indicators.** Together with UNICEF and UNESCO and under leadership of the MoE, WFP would support the implementation of national Transitional Education Plan (TEP) once it is finalized.¹¹⁹ However, there were no indications as to whether SF figures were included in this transitional plan nor whether the TEP would address gender equality and equity issues. WFP was also in discussions with UNICEF regarding improving nutritional status of school children through a “comprehensive school model” which was under review.

110. **Finally, at the time of the evaluation, WFP was negotiating with the private sector to pilot the fresh meal modality in Rural Damascus.**¹²⁰ WFP reported that - by partnering with the private sector - it could address long-term sustainability of SF in Syria. By teaming up with an existing company that produced fresh meals, it expected to lower the overhead costs, decrease the unit cost per meal and increase the potential of expanding the fresh meals modality to reach a greater number of students, therefore leading to longer-term sustainability.

¹¹⁶ WFP. 2018. Corporate Emergency Evaluation of the WFP Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis (January 2015-March 2018)

¹¹⁷ Interviews with WFP-03, GoS-01 and GoS-02

¹¹⁸ FGDs Parents-01 and Parents-02

¹¹⁹ Interview WFP-03

¹²⁰ Interview WFP-03

5 Main factors influencing ESF results

111. There were several factors – internal and external to WFP - that influenced ESF results. Some of issues were already considered under the “Assumptions” of the Theory of Change (e.g., the security context), while others were not (e.g., the essential role that school managers play).

112. **Internally, WFP’s capacity to continuously adapt the design and implementation of ESF as the context changed and as challenges arose was key.** Table 6 below provides concrete examples of solutions used by WFP to address issues. In addition, WFP addressed problems of a more complicated nature (e.g., blacklisting a retailer because of misconduct; firing a truck driver who was not respecting the terms of the contract; reporting to the DoE a school principal for abuse of power).

Table 6 Examples of WFP’s continuous adaptation of ESF in Syria¹²¹

Challenge	Solution
Difficulty in accessing certain areas	Used a combination of regular deliveries, cross-line deliveries to hard-to-reach and besieged areas, cross-border deliveries carried out from Jordan and Turkey to areas in the southern and northern governorates respectively as well as one air operation (Al Hasaka) to deliver date bars (in 2016) ¹²²
Difficulty of truck drivers to access/deliver in certain areas	Placed a focal point in each governorate for the truck driver to call in case of difficulties
Claims that children found date bars monotonous	WFP and MoE are exploring diversifying the bars to include other flavours (such as raisins, apples, and strawberries)
Quality of date bars	Shifted to local production which improved quality ¹²³
Moulding of date bars	Provided wooden pellets and pre-fabs for improving storage in schools
Inadequate boxes for storing and piling date bars	Changed the thickness of the boxes to make them sturdier
Logistical issues with trucking companies (late arrival to school, requesting schoolchildren to offload trucks)	Changed contractual terms with trucking company to stipulate arrival of trucks to schools before 4:00 pm and included funds for off-loading of trucks in contract
Lengthy import time	Shifted to local procurement
Difficulty in accessing rural retailers	Expanded number of approved retailers (however it takes several months to approve a new retailer)
Lengthy process of accrediting retailers	Faster retailer onboarding process; regular steering group meetings to track retailer performance; submission of warning letters to non-compliant retailers
Ad hoc requests to add schools and/or increase number of beneficiaries	Introduced two months stocking of date bars in WFP warehouses which allowed greater flexibility to increase quickly number of beneficiaries

113. The following **internal factors** also influenced WFP results:

- *There was effective technical collaboration among WFP’s various departments.* As mentioned previously technical collaboration among WFP’s internal units (ESF, Nutrition, CBT, FQS, Supply Chain) contributed positively to the delivery of the ESF modalities¹²⁴.
- *WFP CO has highly motivated and qualified staff working on the ESF programme.* Staff worked overtime and during the weekends to ensure timely delivery.¹²⁵ Furthermore, as the security situation continued to improve, WFP opened field offices in Lattakia, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Deir ez Zor which allowed it to better implement and monitor the programme. In addition, WFP recruited a Food Quality and Safety Specialist in 2016, and a Gender Specialist in 2018 which helped ensure that the date bars and the fresh meals adhered to food quality and safety standards and introduced gender mainstreaming (e.g., delivery of four gender workshops).
- *The internal processes to validate new partners/products were lengthy.* WFP’s review processes to accredit retailers in Syria took up to one year¹²⁶. This limited the expansion of the number of retailers, especially in rural areas which decreased the effectiveness of the ESF programme. Similarly, the

¹²¹ Interview WFP-06

¹²² Interview WFP-03

¹²³ Interviews GoS-01, WFP-02, WFP-03, WFP-04; and FGDs Parents-01, Parents-02

¹²⁴ Interviews WFP-02, WFP-03, WFP-04, WFP-05

¹²⁵ Field observations

¹²⁶ Interview WFP-06

approval of new varieties of fortified bars, discussed when the evaluation was taking place, was also a lengthy process¹²⁷.

- *Decision-making was centralized in Damascus.* Several decisions could only be taken by the CO in Damascus. As a consequence, implementation was delayed (e.g., it took approximately one year for a retailer to be approved). This was further compounded by the fact that CO staff in Damascus needed MoFA approval to travel within Syria.
- *Monitoring and reporting were weak and did not provide analytical information to guide decision-making.* There were severe limitations to what M&E data were available for the first couple of years of the ESF portfolio (2014-2016), due to the emergency nature of the programme and to the security context. Since 2018, on-site monitoring for the three modalities has been done by WFP staff who tried to cover every school at least once a year. In addition, post-distribution monitoring (PDM) was also carried out with parents of out-of-school children. For the fresh meals' modality, the Aleppo field office collected the data and tracked issues that were raised. TPM for ESF was only done in Aleppo. Notwithstanding the different types of questionnaires and methodologies used for monitoring (see Table 9 in Annex 12), all these reports – which provided a wealth of information – were analysed insofar to fulfill key corporate indicators. Dedicated ESF reports – based on the analysis of checklists - were not produced. A more structured and strategic analysis could have been used to improve the design and implementation of the ESF even further.
- *Reporting and ESF implementation were misaligned.* Reporting was done on the basis of a calendar year, which made it difficult to obtain accurate figures for the ESF modalities which were implemented on the basis of the school year. Furthermore, reporting was done to address donor requirements. However, it did not provide the necessary data to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of ESF and thus limited the potential to fine-tune interventions and improve them. More recently, reporting improved and more information regarding the ESF modalities was available. Lastly, the number of beneficiaries reported was the highest number of unique beneficiaries reached in any given month of the year. Given the uncertainty in the budget figures allocated to ESF and the inability to collect data regarding the number of children receiving the date bars, neither the cost-efficiency nor the cost-effectiveness could be calculated. The ESF team was able to provide only the cost of production for the two in-kind modalities (see Table 7). Furthermore, the CPs had to be reaccredited at the end of the calendar year which delayed implementation in January.

Table 7 Cost of producing bars and fresh meals per child

Commodity	Daily ration (g)	Cost for 141 feeding days	USD/child/day	USD/child /day/100 g served	USD per child per 100 kcal served			
					Kcal average	USD/100 kcal	Kcal max	USD/100 kcal
Date bars	80	\$23	\$0.17	\$0.21	387	\$0.04	387	\$0.04
Fresh meal	300	\$76	\$0.54	\$0.18	458	\$0.12	600	\$0.09

Source: WFP CO ESF Team

- *SCOPE registration and use of SCOPECARD suffer from technical difficulties.* As mentioned above there were several technical issues related to the use of SCOPE (registration and utilization) which were beyond WFP CO's control.
- *Some WFP HQ requirements/decisions were disconnected from WFP CO realities.* Some implementation/programmatic decisions were taken by WFP at the corporate level. For example, requirements for registering on SCOPE,¹²⁸ criteria for approving retailers, outcome indicators (increasing enrolment, attendance and retention rates), that did not correspond to the Syrian context and slowed down implementation.

114. In addition to the internal factors mentioned above, the following **external factors** also needed to be considered when assessing the results:

- *The country context was fluid and insecure.* The crisis in Syria started in 2011 and is still ongoing. At the start of the ESF, many areas were insecure and inaccessible with control shifting continuously among different armed groups (see Annex 14 for maps showing shift in control).

¹²⁷ Interview WFP-02

¹²⁸ The children had to have a birth certificate which was not always feasible to produce in Syria

- *ESF faced several logistical challenges.* Related to the security context, it had to address several logistical challenges, including the unavailability of truck drivers to go into certain areas, lack of workers to off-load the date bars, lack of adequate storage space, etc. which impacted the delivery of the date bar modality.
- *There was a high turnover of MoE focal points.* In the last 18 months, the Director of Planning and international cooperation- the focal point for school feeding and WFP's main counterpart in the MoE - was substituted four times. As a consequence, WFP had to re-initiate advocacy and awareness-raising efforts with every change.
- *Some school staff lacked the necessary motivation.* School principals and teachers felt that the ESF was an additional burden (preparing of lists, reporting, distribution of in-kind food, responding to issues, etc.) with no compensation in exchange.
- *The targeted schools changed from one year to another.* As a consequence, training delivered was not fully effective. School officials that were trained were no longer receiving the fortified date bars, and *vice versa*, staff of schools recently added had not been trained. For example, a comparison between the 2017 and 2018 school years revealed that 94 percent of the targeted schools were the same as the previous years; whereas only 6 percent were new schools which were added in 2018. In contrast, for the 2019 school year, only 59 percent of the schools from the previous academic year continued to be targeted, while 41 percent were newly-added schools since ESF expanded further in rural areas and decreased its targeting in urban areas¹²⁹ (see Annex 14).
- *Information-sharing processes were highly centralized.* All information regarding schools had to go through the DoE and then the MoE which slowed down coordination among different agencies.
- *The process for approving the lists of targeted schools was long*¹³⁰. The school lists were prepared by the school principals who sent them to the DoE, which forwarded them to the MoE, which formally shared them with WFP CO in Damascus, and only then did they finally reach the field office at the operational level.
- *The process for approving the monthly distribution plan was lengthy*¹³¹. Annex 10 describes the process of obtaining government approval for the distribution of the date bars and the number of days required for each step. The process required the approval of two ministries (Education and Local Administration and Environment) as well as that of the Governor.
- *The process of accrediting/renewing contracts of CPs was not smooth.* CPs needed to be approved by both the Ministry of Social Affairs as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Their accreditation usually expired at the end of the calendar year and it took several weeks before they could be operational again. This caused a disruption in the implementation of the ESF programme at the beginning of the calendar year.
- *Field missions were not always approved in a timely manner.* All field missions of international and national staff had to be approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which often took a long time to obtain. Furthermore, if for any reason (e.g., change in security situation as happened when the evaluation was taking place), the mission needed to be postponed, the whole approval process needed to be reinitiated.

6 Conclusions

115. The evaluation commends WFP for the implementation of ESF under a challenging and complex context. WFP has proven its ability to be flexible and resourceful and has continuously addressed issues as they arose and solved them as best as possible.

116. Based on both the evidence collected throughout the evaluation and on the findings presented in the previous section, a series of conclusions on the ESF portfolio in Syria is provided below. Notwithstanding the reporting and monitoring data limitations, the conclusions confirm the validity of the ESF's Theory of Change (see Annex 3) and reveal that additional assumptions should be considered in order to take into account the emergency context and ensure the fulfilment of the ESF's objectives in Syria. The conclusions are organized around the six evaluation questions as follows:

¹²⁹ Per information provided by the ESF team

¹³⁰ Interview WFP-03

¹³¹ Interview WFP-03

EQ1 To what extent is school feeding appropriate to address the needs of boys, girls and adolescents in the evolving crisis setting and context in Syria? (appropriateness)

Conclusion 1: ESF in Syria was appropriate to address all the stakeholders' needs and priorities.

C1: The ESF portfolio in Syria (i) responded to beneficiaries' needs; (ii) was aligned to the government's and humanitarian community's priorities; and (iii) was appropriately designed to respond to specific objectives.

The different ESF modalities in Syria were appropriate to address the needs of boys, girls and adolescents in the evolving crisis. They were aligned with the priorities of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the humanitarian community. In particular, the ESF programme contributed to the achievement of all the national priorities outlined in the Strategic Framework for Cooperation between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Nations 2016–2019. Targeting of schools was correctly done since it was based on three factors: food insecurity, population vulnerability, and the security context. Finally, each modality as well as the choice of implementing partner were appropriately designed and selected to respond to a specific objective. Furthermore, WFP operated in a complex context and proved its ability to be flexible and resourceful. WFP diversified its ability to respond to the fluid situation which ensured the continued relevance of ESF in Syria. However, ESF followed a school calendar and the Government and WFP a calendar year, which led to several issues in the ESF's operational continuity and reporting between one calendar year and the following one.

Relevance for ToC:

In order to ensure that ESF is designed in an appropriate manner and is relevant to the needs of primary schoolchildren, several surveys need to be undertaken. As such, an assumption needs to be added to the ToC - that *"Securing timely prior approvals for implementing surveys (food security, nutrition, vulnerability, etc.) is feasible"*. A second assumption is also required: *"Measures need to be put in place to ensure that ESF programming (which follows a school year) is not affected by WFP/Government planning (which follows a calendar year)"*.

Conclusion 2: Gender mainstreaming in the ESF programme could be further improved.

C2: Though certain steps were undertaken to mainstream gender; they were insufficient to ensure that gender considerations were integrated into all aspects of the ESF portfolio.

Since 2018, with the recruitment of the Gender Specialist, WFP initiated some gender mainstreaming activities. In terms of ESF, these consisted of four gender awareness workshops. However, no gender analysis specific to ESF was done. An ESF-specific gender and protection analysis could provide guidance in terms of better targeting, as well as information on sex and age differentiated nutrition needs. There was no outcome report of the gender awareness training and the actual number of beneficiaries reached through the in-kind date bar distribution was not gender disaggregated. Furthermore, there was insufficient monitoring on how ESF had contributed to decreasing child, early and forced marriage for girls and child labour for boy. Finally, staff of WFP and its partners would benefit from training on gender mainstreaming.

Relevance for ToC:

This conclusion highlights the importance of gender analysis and monitoring in order to achieve specific outcomes (e.g., reduction in harmful coping mechanisms). It is associated with the assumption that *"WFP CO has the technical capacity to design, develop, implement and MEL which is gender-transformative"*. (Assumption #3)

EQ2 To what extent has school feeding been coherent with the overall humanitarian response of WFP and other actors? (coherence)

Conclusion 3: ESF in Syria was internally coherent since it adhered to the principles of humanitarian assistance and built on synergies between different WFP units.

C3: In general, WFP adhered to the principles of humanitarian assistance in conflict settings through its targeting of ESF beneficiaries in Syria though it lacked an institutionalized accountability system towards its beneficiaries.

The principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality were ensured through targeting which was based on several criteria (food insecurity indicators, education indicators, security/accessibility of schools) and area targeting (covering the whole and not a selection of schools in order to avoid creating social tensions). Though WFP had created the necessary forms to establish an accountability system, the BFM was neither institutionalized nor operational. In addition, the ESF's design and implementation benefitted from working closely together with different WFP units, such as Nutrition, Food Safety and Quality, CBT and Supply Chain.

Relevance for ToC:

This conclusion demonstrates that synergies and interlinkages among different WFP units is necessary to deliver food assistance that is of high quality and safety and of nutritional value and such an assumption should be added to the ToC. In addition, to ensure the adherence to the humanitarian principles, an assumption "*Targeting is made on the basis of clear and transparent criteria*" needs to be added.

Conclusion 4: While synergies exist, the coordination with other UN agencies could be strengthened to ensure the external coherence of ESF in Syria.

C4: Complementarity and coordination with other UN agencies - while taking place – could be strengthened to ensure the delivery of an integrated and comprehensive package to schools that included food security, nutrition, health and sanitation activities.

Externally, WFP collaborated with several UN agencies and complemented UNICEF and UNECSO's educational interventions. However, effective coordination among the different development actors was limited since all information was centralized within the MoE. As a consequence, this prevented the creation of synergies between the different programmes, since different schools were targeted by the UN agencies to deliver services, such as WaSH and nutrition.

Relevance for ToC:

This conclusion shows that there are several factors that affect external coherence and that limit the possibility to achieve complementarity between different UN agencies' interventions to deliver a complete health package at the school level which includes food security, nutrition, health and sanitation. This means that in addition to *Assumption #10 "Other agencies, partners, stakeholders complement ESF activities"*, another assumption "*Communication mechanisms for better coordination are in place*" needs to be added to the ToC.

EQ3 *To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response supported the education of girls and boys, and has contributed to their food and nutrition security in crises and emergency situations? (coverage and effects on food security, nutrition and education)*

Conclusion 5: ESF was able to expand its coverage in terms of number of beneficiaries reached and geographical areas targeted. (coverage)

C5: As the security situation improved and new areas became accessible, the ESF programme was able to expand its coverage significantly, by increasing the number of beneficiaries it reached, expanding geographically in terms of governorates targeted, and widening delivery to cover rural areas.

ESF was able to gradually increase the number of girls and boys reached across the three modalities. This was made possible due to new areas becoming accessible and secure which allowed schools to reopen and children to go back to school. Furthermore, as more funding became available and the capacity of the local producer of date bars improved, WFP was able to procure greater and better quantities of date bars. However, ESF yielded different levels of results in terms of reaching the targeted beneficiaries per modality and year - with the fresh meals modality reaching the highest number of targeted beneficiaries. In addition, WFP grew by a factor of five the number of schools targeted through ESF and expanded geographically, reaching 13 out of 14 governorates in 2019.

Relevance for ToC:

In order to increase coverage (geographical and number of beneficiaries), the following assumptions needed to be fulfilled: *Assumption #1 "Sufficient funds are available to sustain inputs and interventions in selected schools"*; *Assumption #2 "Implementing agencies who can implement procurement and distribution of snacks are present"*; *Assumption # 4 "Required food available locally of required quality and quantities"*; *Assumption #8 "Schools are functioning and able to provide space for schooling"*;

Assumption #9 “Children are able to access schools (distance, safety on the road...); and Assumption #13 “Sufficient access in terms of security, delivery potential and approvals”.

Conclusion 6: ESF contributed to equitably improving food security and nutrition among primary school children (girls and boys). (effects on food security and nutrition)

C6: The ESF programme contributed to improving food security and nutrition among primary school children through the three modalities; however, lack of data did not allow to gauge the extent of this improvement.

Through scaling-up the ESF portfolio, WFP contributed to reducing short-term hunger of both girls and boys by providing micronutrients through the fortified date bars and the fresh meals. In addition, the CBT modality enabled households to purchase more diverse nutritious products. However, several factors - including interruptions in delivery, lack of adequate storage facilities, shortages, and misconduct of retailers and school principals – resulted in a discontinuity in the delivery of meals and in the ESF programme not achieving its full potential to improve food security and nutrition. However, in the absence of baseline information and a nutritional survey, it was not possible to ascertain to what extent ESF had actually improved the food security and nutrition of children. Finally, the M&E system did not track adequately input, output, and outcome level indicators. As mentioned above, the M&E system tracked corporate indicators as required, but due to changing requirements and approaches over the years, these indicators are not sufficient to properly assess the ESF's efficiency/effectiveness.

Relevance for ToC:

This conclusion rests on one major *Assumption #11 that “Children [actually] eat the snacks and meals and food vouchers are used, snacks and food have required nutrition value”*. Though reporting data provided only amount of date bars delivered to schools and not number of children receiving them, through FGDs and KIIs, the evaluation was able to reach this conclusion. *Another major assumption that is missing from the ToC is the “Full buy-in and ownership of school staff (management and teachers) is necessary to ensure the delivery of the ESF modalities”*.

Conclusion 7: ESF modalities were one of several factors that contributed to improving education indicators in Syria. (effects on education)

C7: Several factors contributed to improving education indicators (enrolment, attendance, retention) in Syria –ESF being one of them.

With the exception of two instances, WFP met the targets set in terms of enrolment, attendance and retention. Nonetheless, these results could not be attributed solely to the ESF programme, since other factors – including the importance of education in Syria and the availability and accessibility of functioning schools – also played an important role.¹³² Furthermore, the evaluation was unable to confirm the reliability and accuracy of the education indicators (enrolment, attendance and retention). Lastly, different stakeholders lacked sufficient information regarding the different modalities. In particular, the lack of understanding of the CBT modality by all stakeholders involved hindered its effectiveness.

Relevance for ToC:

This conclusion suggests that two assumptions are missing in the ToC: the first is that *“Caregivers are sufficiently informed about ESF and incentivized to send, enroll and retain the children in school”* and the second is that the *“Full buy-in and ownership of school staff (management and teachers) is necessary to ensure the delivery of the ESF modalities”*. Finally, it also rests on *Assumption #8 “Schools are functioning and able to provide space for schooling” and Assumption #9 “Children are able to access schools (distance, safety on the road...)”*.

EQ4 To what extent has school feeding in emergencies strengthened the ability of households to cope with crises and (if applicable) helped to revitalize local economies and stabilize communities? (effects on the local economy and communities)

Conclusion 8: The ESF programme had a positive impact on the local economy.

C8: ESF had a positive impact on the local economy by increasing food production and creating market and employment opportunities for different stakeholders.

¹³² Most likely, the enrolment would have increased regardless of the ESF because security improved and more schools were accessible. Furthermore, parents/students did not know prior to enrolling that the school would receive date bars. Finally, the number of students did not drop down when the date bar distribution stopped in their schools

Through its three different modalities, the ESF portfolio was able to (1) support local suppliers of date bars who, as a result, succeeded in increasing production capacity; increasing the number of employees; expanding their exports overseas; and diversifying their products; (2) create new market opportunities for the retailers through the CBT modality; and (3) improve the livelihoods of around 100 women employed in the kitchen for the fresh meals modality and approximately 600 women involved in the production of date bars.

Relevance for ToC:

Through the different types of technical assistance and training it provided, ESF was able to achieve this outcome. This conclusion rests on the following: *Assumption #4 “Required food available locally of required quality and quantities”*; *Assumption #6 “Agricultural producers growing needed produce available locally and interested to engage with ESF”* and *Assumption # 12 “Sufficient demand for local agricultural produced generated through ESF”*.

Conclusion 9: ESF contributed to stabilizing communities and increasing their resilience.

C9: ESF contributed to stabilizing communities and increasing their resilience by: (1) assisting all children (host communities, IDPs and returnees) in the targeted vulnerable and food insecure geographical areas that have become newly accessible; (2) assisting IDP and returnee children attending the Curriculum B programme; (3) increasing monthly incomes of households through e-vouchers; and (4) improving the livelihoods/resilience of vulnerable women by providing employment opportunities through the date bar and fresh meals modalities.

Relevance for ToC:

Through different activities the ESF programme was able to achieve this outcome. These included targeting all beneficiaries in one geographical area to ensure that social cohesion was maintained; assisting IDPs and returnees to stabilize newly-accessible areas; providing food vouchers which supplemented household’s incomes; and improving the livelihoods of women-headed households.

EQ5 To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response had effects not yet foreseen in WFP’s school feeding policy but important in crisis and emergency settings? (effects on early child marriage and child labour; unintended consequences)

Conclusion 10: The evaluation was unable to determine whether ESF had any impact on reducing child, early and forced marriage; but anecdotal evidence pointed out that it did most likely contribute to decreasing child labour.

C10: Though one of the objectives of ESF in Syria was to reduce harmful coping mechanisms (child labour and child, early and forced marriage), this was not monitored in a way to provide sufficient evidence on whether ESF contributed to the reduction of these negative coping mechanisms.

Relevance for ToC:

This conclusion rests on the *Assumption #3 “WFP CO has the technical capacity to design, develop, implement and MEL gender-responsive, gender-transformative and rights-based responses”*. Two additional assumptions need to be added to the ToC: *“Caregivers aware of school feeding”* and *“Caregivers / children choose school over harmful coping mechanisms (avoid school enrolment and attendance of children, child, early and forced marriage)”*.

Conclusion 11: The ESF implementation led to two unintended and harmful consequences the magnitude of which could not be verified by the evaluation.

C11: The ESF programme led to two unintended consequences: in some instances, the offloading of date bars from the trucks by children and, in some cases, the shift of children from Curriculum A to Curriculum B in order to obtain the food voucher.

This outcome demonstrates that it is important to provide timely training on the ESF’s objectives and principles to the different stakeholders prior to the start of implementation. Equally, it is also crucial to closely monitor the ESF’s implementation in order to avoid causing (unintended) harm to children.

Relevance for ToC:

Predictably, this outcome is not foreseen in the ToC. However, the Assumption that *“School staff and caregivers are sufficiently informed about the ESF’s objectives and principles”* is needed in order to ensure the “do no harm principle”.

EQ6 To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response been coupled with creating a sustainable system for school feeding, in line with priorities and capacities of the line ministries? (sustainability)

Conclusion 12: WFP - by carrying out advocacy, awareness raising, technical assistance and training – has put in place the building blocks for a sustainable and nationally-owned school feeding programme in Syria in the future.

C12: The long-term sustainability of school feeding in Syria depends on policy and institutional factors, as well as on human and financial resources. Given the context, it is too early to assess its sustainability, nevertheless, WFP has initiated several activities that could contribute in the future to a nationally-owned school feeding programme.

In the absence of a national school feeding strategy, implementation plan and associated government funding, WFP has taken steps to ensure that when such a strategy is elaborated, the basic building blocks are there. As such, it has raised the awareness of MoE staff at the central as well as governorate level on different issues related to school feeding. It also provided limited technical assistance regarding the implementation of activities. In addition, WFP significantly built the capacities of its partners (local suppliers of date bars and CPs). It is expected that all these activities will contribute positively to the potential establishment of a nationally-owned programme in the future. However, there is one factor that has been overlooked and that is the role of the school management which is key for ensuring the sustainability of any future school feeding programme in Syria. The school principals are the persons who control the final distribution of the food items, certify school enrolment and attendance, and prepare the monthly reports. Ensuring their buy-in and increasing their motivation is necessary for the ESF programme's success.

Relevance for ToC:

The improved awareness, capacities, and coordination of ESF as envisaged in the ToC would lead to long-term sustainability. However, an additional assumption is needed and that is that “Government adopts and implements gender-equitable safety nets policy / social protection policies that include SF”.

7 Recommendations

117. Based on the findings and conclusions of this evaluation, the recommendations of the evaluation team are outlined below. The target group for each recommendation is clearly identified as is the timeframe for implementing it.

Recommendation 1: WFP Syria CO should develop a plan to motivate school principals through non-financial incentives.

R 1. Develop a plan to motivate school principals through non-financial incentives.

<u>Recommendation is based on:</u> C.1 and C.13	<u>Priority:</u> High	<u>Time horizon:</u> Short to medium	<u>Directed at:</u> WFP CO
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- In collaboration with the MoE, WFP should explore different non-financial incentives (e.g., workshops, certificates, competitions, awards) to motivate the school principals and increase their buy-in and ownership of ESF in order to ensure its success.

Recommendation 2: WFP should mainstream gender and social inclusion into all aspects of the ESF.

R 2. Integrating gender throughout the policy and programme cycle - from initial analysis, to implementation of the ESF's three modalities as well as in the training/technical assistance that is provided, through to gender-responsive monitoring (and then programme revision).

<u>Recommendation is based on:</u> C.2, C.5, C.6, C.7, C.8, C.9 and C.10	<u>Priority:</u> High	<u>Time horizon:</u> Short to medium	<u>Directed at:</u> WFP CO
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Echoing a previous corporate evaluation's recommendation for WFP to “centralise equality in the response”,¹³³ the ESF portfolio should:

¹³³ WFP. 2018. Corporate Emergency Evaluation of the WFP Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis (January 2015-March 2018), October 2018

- Ensure that project and area specific participatory gender and protection analyses are carried out for all the activities implemented under ESF (assessments, design, targeting, food assistance, e-vouchers, partners, retailers, training, policies, M&E), in particular the CBT modality which targets older students who are at a higher risk of being forced into early marriage and/or child labour.
- Provide advanced technical trainings on gender mainstreaming to WFP CO staff, CPs, and government representatives.
- Expand further the gender-awareness raising workshops for the MoE/DoE/school staff and follow-up to ensure that they have passed on the gender training to their colleagues.
- Provide training and on-going support to all CPs regarding gender, disability and protection mainstreaming. Ensure that they engage with women as well as men and adhere to a 'do no harm' approach.
- Ensure that equity is mainstreamed, in particular regarding disabled children given that a high number of Syrian children were disabled due to the conflict-related wounds.

Recommendation 3: WFP should improve all aspects of M&E.

R 3. Improve reporting and monitoring in order to assess the cost-efficiency/ effectiveness of each modality and implement gender-responsive monitoring.

<i>Recommendation is based on:</i> C.2, C.5, C.6, C.7, C.8, C.9 and C.10	<i>Priority:</i> High	<i>Time horizon:</i> Short to medium	<i>Directed at:</i> WFP CO
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- Analyse the data generated by the series of monitoring reports that WFP produces on a regular basis.
- Track the funds that are allocated for implementing ESF - even though the ESF portfolio is not a stand-alone project.
- Establish a common understanding of who is the "beneficiary" for the CBT modality, in order to ensure that there is standardization in reporting.
- Explore with the MoE the possibility of the CPs visiting the schools which would ease the burden on both the school officials as well as DoE staff.
- Develop a robust methodology to monitor the education outcome indicators (enrolment, attendance and retention).
- Report on the sex-disaggregated number of actual beneficiaries reached and people trained.
- Practice gender responsive monitoring systematically, and assess areas that are relevant to gender, disability and protection.
- Assess the cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the three modalities.

Recommendation 4: WFP should improve coordination with other UN agencies implementing school-level activities and expand partnerships.

R 4. Improve coordination with other UN agencies implementing school-level activities and expand partnerships to ensure complementarity and increase coherence and effectiveness.

<i>Recommendation is based on:</i> C. 4, C.7, C.10 and C.12	<i>Priority:</i> Medium	<i>Time horizon:</i> Short to medium	<i>Directed at:</i> WFP CO
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- Organize quarterly coordination meetings specifically on school feeding with UN agencies, the MoE/DoE and CPs in order to better leverage the ESF programme and to increase synergies among the different UN agencies implementing school-level activities (e.g., UNICEF's school canteens and WaSH programs, WHO's "healthy schools" programme).
- Include other partners implementing activities at the school level in such coordination meetings (e.g., AVSI, an Italian NGO that has agreement with the MoE to rehabilitate schools in Rural Damascus and DORCAS that implements school feeding activities).

Recommendation 5: WFP should improve communication and accountability with all stakeholders (schools, beneficiaries, TPMs, CPs).

R 5. Improve two-way communication with all stakeholders (schools, beneficiaries, TPMs, CPs) to ensure transparency and accountability.

<u>Recommendation is based on:</u> C.1, C.3, C.4, C.5, C.6, C.10, C.11, and C.12	<u>Priority:</u> High	<u>Time horizon:</u> Short to medium	<u>Directed at:</u> WFP CO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide to all stakeholders detailed information concerned regarding each modality in order to improve the ESF programme's effectiveness. • Develop an audio-visual message for the CBT modality and propagating in order to better inform the beneficiaries and dispel any misunderstandings. • Share with school officials the list of CPs (and their address and contact information) which are responsible for registering the caretakers of the Curriculum B students in order for them to be able to better advise the beneficiaries. • Inform school officials and students if/when the date bar distribution will be interrupted/be resumed/ceased. • Provide regular feedback to Field Teams, especially WFP and TPM Field Monitors, regarding programme solutions and improvements introduced at the CO level. This would serve a dual purpose: motivating them to report issues knowing that they will be addressed by WFP and knowing what to monitor if action has been taken. • Track, analyse and respond in a systematic manner to the issues that are being raised and are currently being addressed in an <i>ad hoc</i> manner. • Operationalize the BFM and open up to school principals and parents to enhance communication on issues related to school feeding. 			

Recommendation 6: WFP should continue and expand timely training and technical assistance to all stakeholders, including WFP staff.

R 6. Continue and expand timely training and technical assistance to all stakeholders (MoE/DoE/school staff, private sector, CPs, and WFP staff) to ensure that principles, objectives and operational requirements are fully adhered to.			
<u>Recommendation is based on:</u> C.2, C.6, C.10, C.11 and C12	<u>Priority:</u> High	<u>Time horizon:</u> Short to medium	<u>Directed at:</u> WFP CO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize workshops with the aim of initiating a change in the mindset of WFP and government staff from operating in an emergency context to implementing recovery and development activities. • Build the capacities of TPMs, CPs, school officials, DoE and WFP staff in order to improve implementation, monitoring and reporting of ESF. • Continue and expand collaboration with ILO to deliver child labour and protection awareness raising workshops. • Expand gender awareness raising training, while ensuring that women and men are equally participating in training workshops. • Deliver these trainings in a timely manner and sequence them prior to starting implementing ESF in a specific geographic area. 			

Recommendation 7: At the operational level, WFP should further improve the implementation of the three modalities.

R 7. At the operational level, WFP should further improve the implementation of the three modalities to increase their effectiveness and improve both nutrition and education indicators.			
<u>Recommendation is based on:</u> C.5, C.6, C.7, C.8 and C.9	<u>Priority:</u> High	<u>Time horizon:</u> Short to medium	<u>Directed at:</u> WFP CO and CPs
<p>For the <u>fortified date bars</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smooth the distribution of date bars in order to decrease the possibility of shortages in supplies and/or over-supply of date bars. • Raise awareness regarding the importance of daily distribution/timely consumption of the date bars. • Continue monitoring the delivery of the date bars, ensuring that delivery is done within the hours stipulated in the contract and that children are not involved in offloading the trucks. <p>For the <u>CBT modality</u>:</p>			

- Expand the network of retailers and consider mobile registration centres to facilitate outreach and minimize the distances beneficiaries have to travel.

For the fresh meals' modality:

- Ensure that all children (even the Kindergarten classes) are receiving the sandwiches.
- Consider modifying the paper bags so that the children can use them for coloring.

Recommendation 8: WFP should decentralize decision-making and increase delegation of authority to field offices.

R 8. Decentralize decision-making and increase delegation of authority to field offices in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness of ESF.

Recommendation is based on: C.5, C.6, C.7, and C.8

Priority: High

Time horizon: Short to medium

Directed at: WFP CO

- Decentralize certain decisions while putting in place due diligence and *post hoc* verification procedures. This would allow to address the difficulties in obtaining mission approvals. It would also shorten the time it takes to approve new retailers as well as other operational procedures.

Recommendation 9: WFP should design a clear road map for transitioning from an emergency to a development perspective.

R 9. At the strategic level, with MoE and other UN partners, WFP should design a clear road map for transitioning from an emergency to a development perspective with short-, medium- and long-term objectives and milestones.

Recommendation is based on: C.1, C.4 and C.12

Priority: Medium

Time horizon: Medium

Directed at: WFP CO

- Increase and broaden advocacy efforts in partnership and collaboration with other UN agencies (e.g., UNICEF, ILO, WHO).
- Further increase awareness of key MoE staff regarding ESF by organizing their participation in study tours and conferences on ESF relevant to the Syrian context.
- Discuss with the MoE a vision for going forward which could be informed by the nutritional needs assessment which WFP is planning on doing in order to better target and design any future school feeding activity.
- Advocate for the issues of gender, equity, inclusion and protection to be included in a nationally-owned school programme once it is developed, of which school feeding may be a part of.

Recommendation 10: WFP HQ should consider introducing greater flexibility in certain WFP corporate requirements.

R 10. Consider introducing greater flexibility in certain WFP corporate requirements in order to take into consideration emergency contexts.

Recommendation is based on: C.5, C.6, C.7, C.8 and C.9

Priority: Medium

Time horizon: Medium

Directed at: WFP HQ

Reinforcing a previous evaluation which found that “corporate resources were available to support the response. However, several of these were either too broad to be useful, or lacked relevance to middle-income contexts with highly engaged government institutions”,¹³⁴ WFP should:

- Allow the CO to relax certain requirements in order to adapt to the emergency context. Several challenges related to ESF implementation and monitoring are due to WFP corporate requirements. For example, documents required for registering on SCOPE, standards to partner with retailers, outcome indicators are all determined at the HQ level. These may not be realistic in complex emergency contexts such as the one in Syria.
- In collaboration with WFP COs, revise the corporate indicators and expand them with indicators that are "fit-for-purpose" to the specific country contexts.

¹³⁴ Ibid