



**WFP EVALUATION**



**World Food Programme**

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# **Evaluation of Syrian Arab Republic WFP Transitional and Interim Country Strategic Plans 2018-2025**

Evaluation Report – Volume I  
OEV/2022/019

**June 2024**

# Acknowledgements

The evaluation team is very grateful for the support and guidance provided throughout the evaluation process by Alexandra Chambel (Senior Evaluation Officer, Evaluation Manager), Aboh Anyangwe (Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Research Analyst) and Anne-Claire Luzot (Director of Evaluation) at the Office of Evaluation.

The team would like to thank the regional bureau in Cairo, the country office in Damascus and the various field offices for their support. Additionally, the team would like to express gratitude to all the key informants from World Food Programme (WFP) staff and from WFP partners and beneficiaries who have made themselves available to provide information and insights.

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

### Evaluation features

1. The evaluation of the Syrian Arab Republic interim country strategic plans (ICSPs) for 2018–2025, including the transitional plan for 2018, was conducted between October 2022 and January 2024 with the main purpose of providing evaluation evidence and learning with regard to the performance of WFP in the Syrian Arab Republic from 2018 to June 2023 as well as accountability for results.
2. The evaluation covered the implementation of three programmatic cycles (2018, 2019–2021 and 2022–2025), and its timeframe enabled the assessment of changes across the three cycles, with particular attention to the various modalities used by WFP for food assistance.
3. The evaluation adopted a theory-based and mixed-methods approach, drawing on monitoring data, a literature review, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions with beneficiaries and site visits. Consideration of gender issues was integrated throughout the evaluation process. Data collection took place in the country in May and June 2023, followed by hybrid debriefing sessions. Several stakeholder workshops were held in Damascus in November 2023 to discuss the conclusions and draft recommendations, including a workshop with the country office, a workshop with government partners and a workshop with cooperating partners and other United Nations entities. A briefing for donors on the key insights from the evaluation was organized. Ethical standards were applied to ensure the dignity and confidentiality of those involved in the evaluation.
4. The primary users of the evaluation include WFP's country office and field offices; the Regional Bureau for the Middle East, Northern Africa and Eastern Europe; WFP headquarters; and the United Nations country team. Other relevant stakeholders include the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, donors, local authorities and cooperating partners.

### Context

5. The Syrian Arab Republic was recognized as a middle-income country in early 2011, with moderate economic growth and positive development indicators.<sup>1</sup> The crisis in the country began in 2011 and continues to take a heavy toll on the lives of Syrian people, drastically affecting the socioeconomic situation. The country was reclassified as a low-income country in 2018. As of June 2023, 5.3 million Syrians were registered as refugees living outside the country.<sup>2</sup> Economic deterioration, accelerated by the financial crises in Lebanon and Türkiye, as well as the impact of the war in Ukraine, climate-related shocks, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the 2023 earthquake have increased vulnerability further.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H. Slim and L. Trombetta. 2014. [Syria Crisis Common Context Analysis](#).

<sup>2</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2022. [Operational Data Portal: Situation: Syria Regional Refugee Response](#).

<sup>3</sup> World Bank. 2024. [Syria – Economic Monitor: Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare](#).

6. An estimated 97 percent of Syrians live below the poverty line,<sup>4</sup> with 1.2 percent of the population in extreme multidimensional poverty.<sup>5</sup> More than 12 million people are deemed food insecure.<sup>6</sup> According to United Nations estimates, some 15.3 million people needed some form of humanitarian assistance in 2023.<sup>7</sup> On 6 February 2023, multiple earthquakes, including one that measured 7.7 on the Richter scale, struck southern Türkiye and the northern part of the Syrian Arab Republic. By March 2023 at least 53,000 deaths and 132,000 injuries were reported in the two countries, with an estimated 8.8 million people affected by the earthquake.<sup>8</sup>
7. An estimated 12 million people in the Syrian Arab Republic are food insecure, including all 2 million people living in camps, and a further 2.9 million people are estimated to be at risk of food insecurity; households led by women are particularly at risk.<sup>9</sup> Approximately 5.9 million people, including 3.75 million children aged 6–59 months and 2.1 million women, are in need of nutritional assistance, an increase from 5.5 million in 2022.

### **WFP interim country strategic plans**

8. WFP has been present in the Syrian Arab Republic since 1964. Over the years, its assistance shifted towards development-oriented projects until the start of the crisis in 2011. A WFP level-3 corporate emergency protocol has been in place in the Syrian Arab Republic since December 2012. Following the introduction of a new WFP emergency activation protocol in January 2022 the level 3 designation was recategorized as a “corporate attention” situation.
9. A one-year transitional ICSP (T-ICSP) for 2018 superseded the regional protracted relief and recovery operation for 2017 and 2018. The T-ICSP included four strategic outcomes to address the high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition among food-insecure populations affected by the crisis. Under the T-ICSP, WFP sought to gradually transition to providing livelihood-focused activities for men and women while maintaining food assistance for the most vulnerable.
10. WFP began implementation of its ICSP for 2019–2021 in January 2019. The plan had the same four strategic outcomes as the T-ICSP but added more support services for humanitarian partners across the Syrian Arab Republic. The ICSP provided life-saving assistance and increased the resilience of affected communities. The main strategic shift was in strengthening operational processes. In response to the deterioration of the humanitarian and food security situation from late 2019 onwards, the ICSP and its budget were revised four times between 2019 and 2021 to increase general food assistance.
11. An ICSP for 2022–2023 was begun in January 2022, with the aim of responding to growing food and nutrition needs; the plan was subsequently extended to December 2025. Like the previous T-ICSP and ICSP it had four strategic outcomes, although there were some small differences.

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). 2022. [Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic](#).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Development Programme. 2022. [Human Development Report 2021/2022. Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World](#).

<sup>6</sup> OCHA. 2022. [Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic](#).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

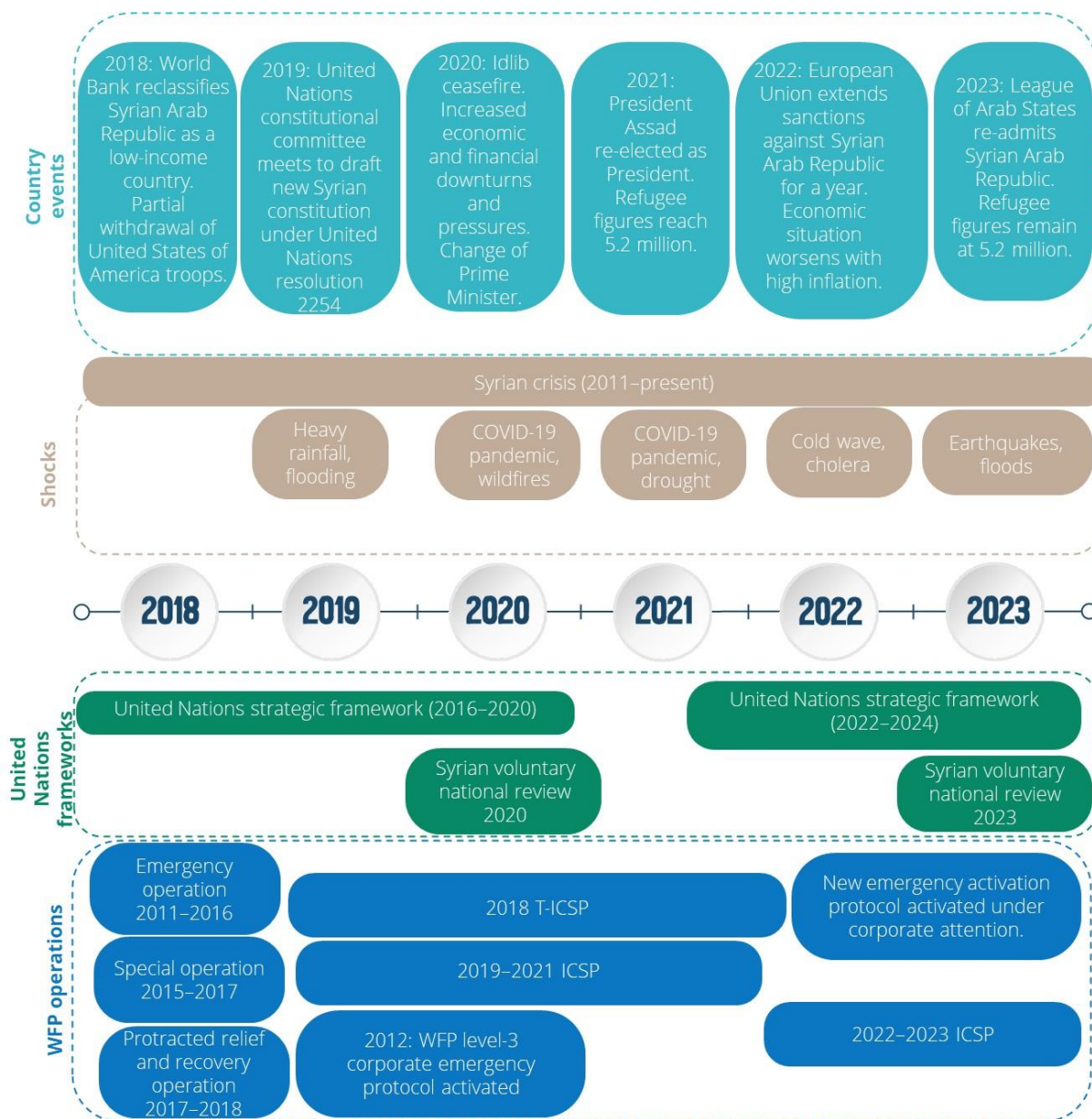
<sup>8</sup> OCHA. 2023. [Flash appeal: Syrian Arab Republic. Earthquake – Humanitarian Programme Cycle February–May 2023](#).

<sup>9</sup> OCHA. 2022. [Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic](#).



12. Figure 1 depicts key events in the country and gives an overview of WFP operations for the period 2018–2023.

**Figure 1: Country context and WFP operational overview, 2018–2023**

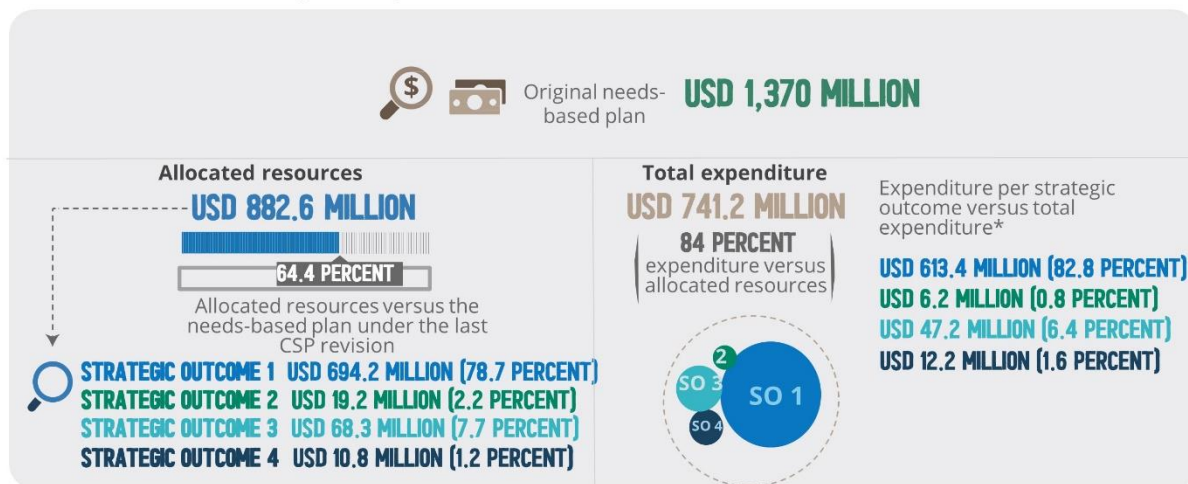
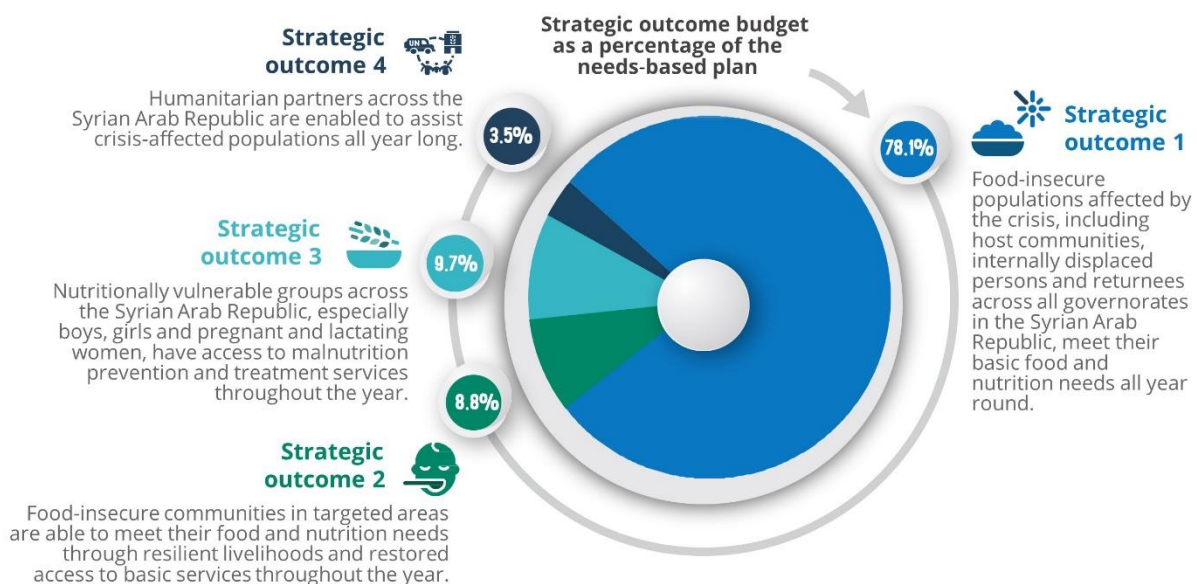


Source: Office of Evaluation, based on the full report on the evaluation of ICSPs for the Syrian Arab Republic for 2018–2023.

13. Following its second revision, the T-ICSP had a total budget of USD 790 million. The original needs-based programme budget for the 2019–2021 ICSP amounted to USD 1,386.31 million but more than doubled to USD 3,079.47 million following the fourth revision of the ICSP. For the ICSP for 2022–2025, which is still under way, the needs-based plan budget is

USD 1,370.02 million.<sup>10</sup> Allocated resources as a percentage of the needs-based plans were 67 percent for the T-ICSP, 55 percent for the first ICSP and 64 percent for the second ICSP (see figure 2). The four strategic outcomes remained throughout 2018–2023, save for minor adjustments.

**Figure 2: Strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures (2018–2022)**



\* Percentages of allocated resources and expenditures by strategic outcome do not add up to 100 percent because resources were also allocated to and spent on direct and indirect support costs.

Source: Annual country reports for the Syrian Arab Republic.

## Evaluation findings

**To what extent are the interim country strategic plans evidence-based and strategically focused to address the needs of the most vulnerable?**

<sup>10</sup> This does not reflect the first revision of the ICSP for 2022–2025, which had a needs-based plan budget of USD 4,873 million, because it was approved in November 2023 and therefore falls outside the timeframe of this evaluation.

### **Relevance and alignment**

14. WFP's assistance and intervention areas directly respond to the priority needs of the crisis-affected population. WFP has strengthened its evidence base across its main focus areas. Assessments and surveys have informed the development of the ICSPs, underpinning the continued efforts of WFP to strengthen its vulnerability-based targeting and its life-saving and life-sustaining interventions.
15. The design of the T-ICSP for 2018, the ICSP for 2019–2021 and the ICSP for 2022–2025 supports both crisis response and resilience. This operational strategy aligns with the 2016 WFP Syria+5 Vision 2020, which focused on maintaining life-saving food and nutrition interventions for the most vulnerable people, combined with activities designed to restore livelihoods and create economic opportunities.<sup>11</sup>
16. The ICSPs have been aligned with the priorities of the humanitarian response plans for the Syrian Arab Republic, advocating both humanitarian response and increased focus on recovery and resilience to support a move away from food assistance where feasible. This move towards a “dual track” approach is also consistent with the priorities outlined in the United Nations strategic framework for 2022–2025 and the Government's aim of supporting agricultural production.

### **Coherence and comparative advantage**

17. There is a high degree of coherence between the ICSPs and the United Nations strategic framework for the Syrian Arab Republic. WFP does not undertake its work in isolation from others and indeed is considered a constructive and active partner within the United Nations system in the country. Its engagement has contributed to a more coherent and effective response by the United Nations system. Its comparative advantage lies in its logistical strength, nationwide reach and expertise in general food assistance, nutrition and livelihoods, all of which enable it to tailor its operations to the situation on the ground.
18. The intervention logic of the ICSPs strongly emphasizes food and nutrition assistance, leveraging WFP's operational and logistical capabilities effectively. However, it does not adequately reflect WFP's vision of complementing humanitarian assistance with long-term programming in support of early recovery, resilience and disaster risk reduction. There is not yet sufficient clarity on how WFP can best use its comparative advantage and strengths to support a resilience agenda in the country.

### **Strategic positioning**

19. The ICSPs have remained relevant and enabled WFP to adapt to changes in circumstance, including geopolitical changes. For example, the organization increased assistance following the sharp rise in food insecurity in 2019. Decreased funding for general food assistance, however, has cast doubt on the effectiveness of this assistance in addressing the food insecurity of beneficiaries.

### **What are the extent and quality of WFP's specific contribution to interim country strategic plan strategic outcomes in the Syrian Arab Republic?**

20. **Strategic outcome 1 – unconditional resource transfers and school feeding.** WFP was able to respond to food security needs across the Syrian Arab Republic through large-scale general food assistance operations that slowed the deterioration of food security. As of 2020, however, WFP was no longer able to meet the increased demand for food assistance

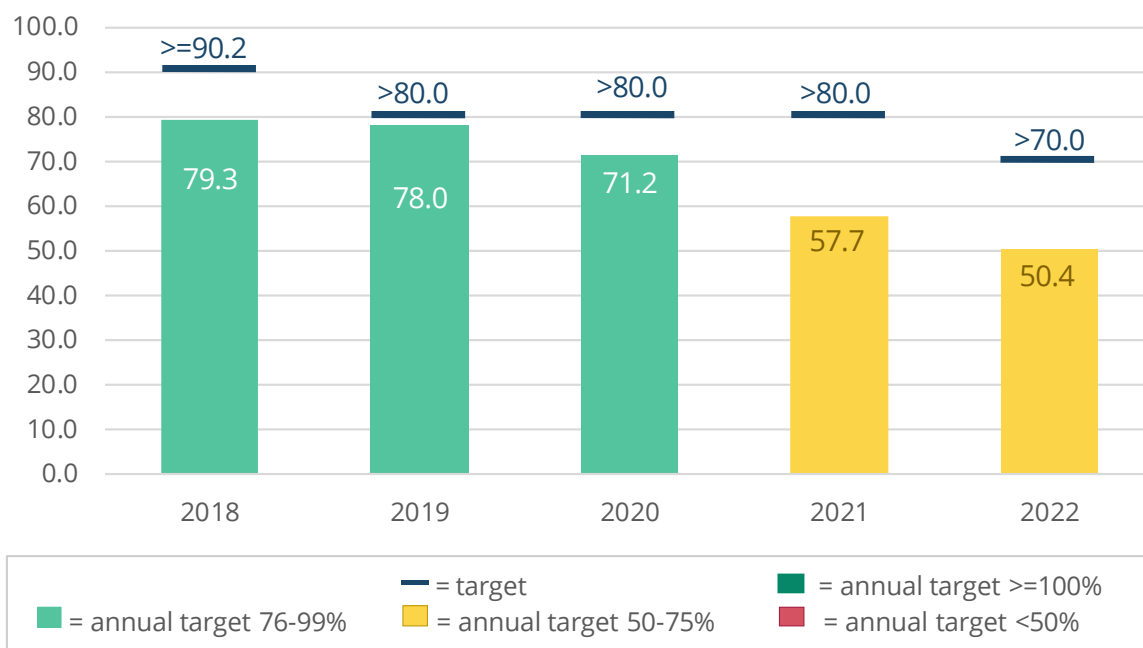
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<sup>11</sup> WFP. 2016. *Syria+5 Vision 2020. Laying the Foundation for Syria's Future* (internal document).

because of the increase in humanitarian need and a drop in available financial resources. WFP has worked to improve targeting to ensure that the most vulnerable are being assisted. However, the reduced caloric value of the food basket and the rotation of beneficiaries receiving food assistance has meant that WFP's impact on household food insecurity has been significantly reduced.

21. A cash-based transfer pilot in 2020 showed that households receiving both in-kind and cash vouchers were more likely to improve or maintain their food consumption, but this hybrid modality remains more expensive because of the increase in the cost of basic food items.
22. School feeding led to increased attendance and retention; it did not lead to increased enrolment, however, due mainly to economic factors that led to children being out of school. The number of children reached by school meals also decreased after 2020 due to financial shortfalls. In addition, from 2018 WFP has partnered with the United Nations Children's Fund to provide date bars for children in non-formal education, initially in camps in the northeast of the country. WFP furthermore worked to enhance the capacity of Ministry of Education staff to implement various forms of school feeding.
23. **Strategic outcome 2 – livelihoods and resilience, and national safety nets.** Increased focus on restoring communal assets and the introduction of a wheat value chain approach enabled WFP to reach more beneficiaries, support the recovery of farming communities and improve food availability, reducing dependence on food assistance. It also facilitated collaboration with other United Nations entities, extending geographic coverage and increasing complementarity. Lack of funding, however, hampered WFP support for early recovery, livelihoods, resilience and social safety nets.
24. Restoration of communal assets increased community self-reliance, improved food availability and affordability, created jobs and reduced negative coping strategies. Interventions in this area yielded strong returns on investment, with the potential of reducing the reliance on food assistance. Livelihood interventions did not always consider sufficiently the societal barriers hampering women's access to markets. Moreover, at the household level the positive effects of food assistance for assets and food assistance for training support on food consumption scores was offset by rising inflation and food insecurity, especially in the case of cash assistance.
25. **Strategic outcome 3 – nutrition.** WFP increased the number of people that it planned to reach with malnutrition prevention and treatment activities to respond to increased need. It faced challenges, however, related to funding shortages, the COVID-19 pandemic and rising transport costs. Aggravated by increasing food prices, minimum dietary diversity for women, a key indicator of malnutrition prevention, remained very low (see figure 3).

**Figure 3: Minimum dietary diversity - women**



Source: WFP annual country reports for the Syrian Arab Republic for 2018–2022. Colours of the vertical bars indicate percentages of targets reached. The colour coding and percentage values are based on the evaluation team’s own classification.

26. For malnutrition treatment, the outcomes for pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls and children in the treatment programme were positive across almost all indicators; they dipped during the COVID-19 pandemic because of restrictions on the movement of mobile clinics but improved thereafter.
27. **Strategic outcome 4 – common services.** WFP enabled humanitarian partners to assist crisis-affected populations and supported more efficient aid delivery, drawing on its comparative advantages in logistical and technical capacity. Due in large part to its field presence and logistical capacity WFP was able to support the humanitarian system in reaching those in need, even in hard-to-access areas, through cross-line and cross-border operations.
28. WFP’s provision of logistics, coordination and technical services contributed to harmonized and efficient collective approaches to food and nutrition assistance. Cross-border deliveries accounted for more than one third of all WFP assistance delivered in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2022.<sup>12</sup>

**Cross-cutting areas**

29. The operationalization of humanitarian principles in the complex context of the Syrian crisis proved challenging for all humanitarian actors. WFP pursued a principled approach to reaching those in need. Using a conflict-sensitive approach, WFP maintained its engagement with all relevant actors to ensure humanitarian access to vulnerable communities while upholding the neutrality and impartiality of its operations.
30. WFP promoted sustainable environmental management and climate adaptation, particularly through its resilience work, which is aligned directly with the

<sup>12</sup> WFP. 2023. [Annual Country Report 2022: Syrian Arab Republic](#).



humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Steps taken by WFP in its programming have contributed to reduced tensions in previously conflict-affected areas. WFP considers social cohesion and conflict sensitivity in its areas of operations and develops related policies and guidelines to underpin its operations.

31. WFP has strengthened its processes in order to support accountability and communication with beneficiaries, developing a mechanism that allows beneficiaries to appeal the discontinuation of their food assistance.
32. WFP has emphasized strengthening the economic empowerment of women, especially in rural areas, but efforts to adopt gender-transformative approaches are constrained by financial and societal factors. WFP has senior staff dedicated to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse; follows strict guidelines, protocols and confidential reporting; and provides regular training and awareness raising regarding gender, inclusion and protection for its cooperating partners. WFP has also taken steps to strengthen disability inclusion in its operations through measures such as improved infrastructure for accessibility and disability inclusion capacity strengthening for its cooperating partners.

### ***Sustainability of results***

33. It is unlikely that results will be fully sustainable in the complex protracted humanitarian crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic. WFP has sought to mitigate challenges by planning for the transition from relief to early recovery in its livelihoods, resilience, social safety nets and nutrition activities and by fostering collaboration with other actors. To address sustainable water use WFP set up community-level water user associations, but these are new in the Syrian Arab Republic and the evaluation found variation in the capacity of the associations and uncertainty regarding their maintenance.<sup>13</sup>

### **To what extent has WFP used its resources efficiently in contributing to interim country strategic plan outputs and strategic outcomes?**

#### ***Timeliness***

34. Major changes in the humanitarian context challenged the timely delivery of outputs by increasing pressure on WFP funding, disrupting supply chains and hampering access to beneficiaries. The increase in humanitarian needs outpaced donor funding and was only marginally cushioned by WFP's accelerated expenditure of available funding. Supply chains were affected by various external factors,<sup>14</sup> but WFP adopted effective mitigation measures. WFP responded in a timely manner to the earthquake in the northwest of the country in February 2023.

### **To what extent do the depth and breadth of coverage ensure that those most vulnerable to food insecurity benefit from WFP activities?**

#### ***Appropriateness of coverage and targeting***

35. The proportion of people in need covered by WFP declined between 2018 and 2022 as humanitarian needs outpaced donor funding. In response to funding shortfalls WFP opted

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<sup>13</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2021. [Special Report: 2021 FAO Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to the Syrian Arab Republic](#).

<sup>14</sup> These factors included the number of people covered by the needs-based plan – which doubled from 4.88 million in 2018 to 9.96 million in 2023, disruption to WFP supply chains caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, a ban on the import of Turkish goods and delays in the receipt of donor contributions.

to maintain broad coverage while reducing the caloric value of its food basket and the frequency of distributions, but this risked pushing people deeper into food insecurity.

36. Geographic targeting was based on food insecurity, nutrition and education indicators. WFP used the Vulnerability Needs Review tool for household level targeting in Government-controlled areas and took necessary action to compile beneficiary lists that were as accurate as possible; however, access to beneficiary data, lengthy approval processes and the enormous scale of assessments all proved challenging.
37. Due to reduced funding, WFP had to shift from providing blanket assistance to implementing a targeting and prioritizing approach. The evaluation found that while people understood that cuts needed to be made because of reduced funding, the updated targeting criteria were not well understood.

### **To what extent was WFP cost-efficient in the delivery of its assistance?**

#### ***Economy in the acquisition and management of inputs/commodities***

38. To maximize economy in the acquisition of inputs, WFP used multiple procurement channels, tools and facilities, such as the Global Commodity Management Facility, which reduced lead times, and local procurement. Post-delivery losses were generally modest, although slightly above the regional average, and were mainly due to warehouse management activities such as repacking and rebagging, as well as looting.

#### ***Cost efficiency in the delivery of activities and outputs***

39. Country office overheads were lower than the WFP global average, helped by portfolio-level economies of scale. Cost efficiency considerations were evident in (but not limited to) the selection of cooperating partners, activities with other United Nations entities and, especially, the choice of transfer modalities. Cash-based transfers were generally more cost efficient than in-kind transfers; this was not true in all contexts, however, such as in areas lacking retailers, and also varied depending on exchange rates.

### **What are the factors that explain WFP's performance and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected by the interim country strategic plans?**

#### ***Adequate, predictable and flexible resources***

40. Overall, funding shortfalls have impeded WFP's capacity to operate at full potential. Although most funding remains heavily earmarked, the 15 percent that was unearmarked in 2022 enabled WFP to respond to the most urgent needs. WFP allocates funding based on need, consistent with the core humanitarian principles in a crisis setting. Multi-year funding for long-term resilience engagement remains extremely limited.

#### ***Monitoring and reporting***

41. WFP has strengthened its monitoring capacity, but there is room for further improvement at the field office level. Direct monitoring visits by WFP monitors, sometimes jointly with third-party monitors, increased during the period under evaluation, increasing significantly across all governorates, although the evaluation found that the quality of third-party monitors varied. WFP also carried out specific assessments of pilot projects. Indicators on gender equality and women's empowerment are focused on the disaggregation of data rather than capturing empowerment-related dimensions.

## **Partnerships**

42. WFP is recognized by stakeholders as the leading entity in providing food assistance to those in need owing to its expertise in addressing food insecurity; it has established strategic partnerships with other relevant United Nations entities in support of humanitarian action and resilience, which was shown to contribute to increased geographic coverage and complementarity of action. The quality of the food distribution centres was varied, for example in terms of the confidentiality of community feedback mechanisms, the conditions in waiting areas for beneficiaries and the availability of help desks. Service provision was stronger where WFP had direct access or through third-party monitors. WFP's logistical capacity is critical for multiple humanitarian actors, ensuring that aid reaches its intended recipients. WFP's strong network of cooperating partners, and in particular the extensive network of Syrian Arab Red Crescent local branches, enabled WFP to deliver its assistance in a timely and effective manner.

## **Human resources**

43. Stability among national staff has improved but the two-year rotation cycles for international staff have affected stability and institutional memory. The short duration of assignments sometimes impedes the continuity of strategic action. The country office addresses staffing needs through various strategies, including an ongoing workforce analysis, fast-track recruitment for emergencies and initiatives to develop staff skills. Insufficient resources have been allocated to gender and protection initiatives at the field office level.

## **Conclusions**

*Conclusion 1. The WFP portfolio in the Syrian Arab Republic has made important contributions to addressing food insecurity through large-scale food assistance covering all governorates; the strategy of spreading assistance more thinly before reducing the number of beneficiaries was found to be the right approach.*

44. WFP conducted a large-scale assessment of its caseload to ensure improved prioritization among those in need. To avoid inclusion and exclusion errors WFP engaged with relevant government institutions to obtain additional data on the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of affected people to determine their eligibility for WFP assistance.
45. This evaluation highlights that general food assistance is a lifesaver for many families and makes a critical difference to the availability of food for food-insecure people. Reducing the composition of the food basket and cash-based transfers and supporting the rotation of assistance were considered the right approaches to avoid sudden shocks to beneficiaries. General food assistance alleviated hardship in crisis-affected communities and contributed to social cohesion.

*Conclusion 2. WFP's efforts in the Syrian Arab Republic have been seriously hindered by a range of factors, including political considerations; this has been particularly noticeable in terms of the restricted financial resources available to facilitate the crucial programmatic decisions demanded by the increased and evolving needs of the affected population.*

46. Funding has not kept pace with the recent surge in needs. WFP's reliance on a few large donors and various smaller donors has made it vulnerable to shifts in domestic agendas. Donors' reluctance to fund early recovery interventions has limited WFP's ability to shift to

supporting livelihoods and early recovery and adopt a more sustainable approach to food insecurity.

47. WFP's operations have provided a buffer against deteriorating food insecurity, but the scale of deterioration and lack of funds have meant that its support has been insufficient to halt the decline of key indicators at the food security outcome level.

### **Designing and implementing the strategic framework for WFP assistance**

*Conclusion 3. The ICSPs, including the T-ICSP, have laid the foundation for a "dual track" approach, but the underlying strategic vision and approach, including the growing attention to supporting recovery in crisis-affected farming communities, is not yet fully developed in a coherent overarching framework.*

48. The ICSPs have a well-developed line of sight but a coherent strategic framework reflecting the "dual track" approach that WFP intends to follow has not yet been fully developed. The interlinkages between crisis response, early recovery and resilience are not sufficiently clear.
49. There are challenges to developing a dual track approach to the Syrian crisis. While WFP has shifted quickly towards early recovery and resilience, donors have been hesitant to support this dual pathway (see conclusion 2). WFP's strong monitoring and vulnerability assessment and mapping capacity in the Syrian Arab Republic has provided solid evidence to support strategic decisions and adaptive programming.

*Conclusion 4. Most intended outcomes identified in the ICSPs were achieved, reflecting the good overall performance of WFP operations and significant achievements. However, indicators only capture part of the limitations faced during implementation; obstacles persist in many areas.*

50. Large-scale food assistance has prevented a decline in food insecurity for many people of concern. Increasingly, however, WFP has not been able to provide full entitlements for all beneficiaries and has been forced to reduce food assistance to many due to unprecedented funding shortfalls. This has constrained food security and nutrition results.
51. Through its resilience and livelihoods support WFP has focused on addressing the obstacles preventing communities from restarting food production. It has achieved strong results in malnutrition treatment but has struggled to reach its targets in malnutrition prevention. WFP's school feeding programme led to increased attendance and retention, but the number of children reached decreased after 2020 due to financial limitations.
52. WFP has recently started to provide technical assistance to support social safety nets and the groundwork for further engagement has been laid, with a promising outlook regarding the effectiveness of future assistance. WFP's core comparative advantage of logistical and response capacity has enabled it to make critical contributions to the operations of the wider humanitarian community in the country.

*Conclusion 5. While there is certainly potential for enhancement, WFP has successfully navigated a challenging environment, adhering to humanitarian principles, incorporating a conflict-sensitive perspective into its portfolio, building effective partnerships and increasingly paying attention to cross-cutting issues.*

53. WFP has adhered to the humanitarian principles by maintaining engagement with all relevant actors to safeguard neutrality and independence; adopting a consistently principled approach; and negotiating access based on need. Its ability to reach those in need, even in hard-to-reach areas, through cross-line and cross-border operations is to its

credit. WFP has a strong commitment to implementing conflict-sensitive programming in its operations within a very complex environment.

54. Mixed progress has been made on various cross-cutting issues. While efforts to mainstream gender considerations are progressing, the use of gender-transformative approaches for livelihoods activities is limited. WFP has incorporated environmental and climate change considerations into its operations, particularly in its resilience programmes. However, the sustainability of these initiatives is still being determined.
55. Feedback mechanisms are very important when assistance is being reduced so that beneficiaries have the opportunity to raise complaints if they feel they are being incorrectly excluded from assistance. Accordingly, WFP has increased its efforts and support in order to strengthen protection, accountability to affected populations and community feedback mechanisms.

*Conclusion 6. Challenges around transparency and accountability remain given WFP's limited access to personal identifiable data on beneficiaries, leading to exclusion errors. Despite persistent challenges, WFP has taken steps to ensure that its resources reach the most vulnerable.*

56. Although the Vulnerability Needs Review has been a massive undertaking, with over 1 million households across the country being assessed, its effectiveness in prioritizing the most vulnerable populations has not yet been fully demonstrated. WFP does not have full access to personal identifiable information, which influences exclusion and inclusion errors.



## Recommendations

57. The evaluation makes two operational and three strategic recommendations to address key issues under the next CSP for the Syrian Arab Republic.

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
<b>1</b>	<p><b>Better reflect WFP's full mandate – saving and changing lives – in the next CSP by consolidating the transition to a “dual track” approach adopted to address the double burden of needs in the Syrian Arab Republic.</b></p> <p>The “dual track” approach – combining humanitarian emergency assistance, recovery, safety nets and resilience interventions – should allow for a greater focus on the sustainability of support and the transition from food assistance to resilience and recovery. For this, actions to be implemented include those below:</p>	Strategic				
1.1	Continue to advocate – jointly with other actors – an early recovery and safety net approach, emphasizing that it is not sustainable to keep people on general food assistance, and continue to make the case that, in a protracted humanitarian crisis, saving lives is about sustaining lives.		Country office	Regional Bureau for the Middle East, Northern Africa and Eastern Europe Headquarters (Partnerships and Innovation Department)	Medium	Second quarter 2025
1.2	Clarify the comparative strength of WFP in terms of mandate, expertise and reach in addressing the double burden of needs.		Country office	Regional bureau Headquarters	Medium	Second quarter 2025

<sup>15</sup> The dates are part of the new CSP design phase and continue into the implementation of the next CSP.

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
1.3	Develop a theory of change for the next CSP that reflects the transition to the dual track approach.		Country office	Regional bureau (vulnerability analysis and mapping, and monitoring and evaluation units)	High	Second quarter 2025
1.4	Accompany the theory of change with a results framework and monitoring mechanisms that allow WFP to track medium- to long-term changes; further enhance the country office's learning approach, allowing for stronger attention to long-term issues.		Country office	Regional bureau (research, assessment and monitoring unit)	High	Second quarter 2025
1.5	Increase WFP's direct monitoring of programmes.		Country office		Medium	Fourth quarter 2024
1.6	Identify strategies for addressing harmful gender-related norms under each CSP outcome, including for general food assistance, nutrition and livelihoods interventions.		Country office	Regional bureau (gender unit)	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024
<b>2</b>	<b>Achieve a stronger strategic focus by fine-tuning the design of the portfolio and seeking synergies across interventions to better align action with available financial resources and with the mandate of saving and changing lives.</b> Current circumstances will require challenging strategic decision-making to ensure an effective transition from humanitarian assistance to recovery and resilience. Areas of improvement in each programmatic area are listed below.	Strategic				
2.1	<b>Unconditional resource transfers.</b> In the absence of increased funding to cover all food-insecure people, reduce and phase out general food assistance where possible, retaining it in areas of severe vulnerability.		Country office	Regional bureau Headquarters (programme and	High	First quarter 2025

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Reduce the number of beneficiaries in order to reach the most vulnerable people with rations that meet their food and nutrition needs;</li> <li>➤ Review the composition of the food basket to improve nutritional variety and reduce the emphasis on calories.</li> <li>➤ Continue rolling out cash-based transfers where feasible, in coordination with relevant actors.</li> <li>➤ Expand cash-based transfers, considering retail capacity and market functionality.</li> <li>➤ Regularly review cash and voucher values to take into account general inflation, market prices and other factors.</li> </ul> <p>Keep contingency planning and stocks in case of lack of access to hard-to-reach areas and maximize direct on-the-ground monitoring by WFP.</p>			cash-based transfer units)		
2.2	<p><b>School feeding.</b> Maintain an area-based approach to school feeding, prioritizing areas with high prevalence of food insecurity and education needs in coordination with education sector partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continue e-voucher support and strengthen coordination with the United Nations Children's Fund to reach more out-of-school children.</li> </ul> <p>Explore the potential of home-grown school feeding initiatives for further diet diversification.</p>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	First quarter 2025
2.3	<p><b>Nutrition.</b> Maintain a strong connection between malnutrition treatment and prevention interventions to address all forms of malnutrition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continue to target those most in need of assistance under the blanket supplementary feeding programme.</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	High	Fourth quarter 2024

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Maintain current targets for the e-voucher programme for pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls; consider increasing the duration of assistance and expanding eligibility to second pregnancies.</li> </ul> <p>Improve the quality of social and behaviour change communication through increased investment and more training of partners, local authorities and key informants and make engagement more interactive so that it not only informs but also inspires and empowers women and girls.</p>					
2.4	<p><b>Early recovery/resilience.</b> Strengthen the adoption of a food systems approach for food security and nutrition in coordination with relevant actors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Discuss with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the United Nations Development Programme the opportunity to develop a theory of change for the food systems approach.</li> <li>➤ Within an overall food systems strategic framework, identify short-term (restoring community-level agricultural productive assets) and long-term (supporting better food supply) activities.</li> </ul> <p>Focus on areas and communities where revival of agricultural production will have an influence on food security, reliance on general food assistance and shock responsiveness.</p>		Country office	Regional bureau	High	Fourth quarter 2025
2.5	<p><b>Social safety nets.</b> Continue to focus on interventions that support inclusive social safety nets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Support the rehabilitation of public bakeries to provide subsidized bread.</li> <li>➤ Support national efforts to pilot the fortification of bread through a wheat flour fortification programme.</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	First quarter 2025

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Provide technical assistance and share WFP learning with Syrian institutions in relation to the implementation of sustainable safety nets that support the poorest and most vulnerable in society.</li> </ul> <p>Facilitate understanding of cash programming for social protection among key stakeholders.</p>					
3	<p><b>Achieve a stronger strategic focus by enhancing targeting to reach the most vulnerable households with general food assistance.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continue engagement with relevant stakeholders to gain access to beneficiary and non-beneficiary data to allow for fair and transparent targeting.</li> <li>➤ Establish an annual process that supports the grievance redress mechanism for beneficiaries appealing exclusion decisions.</li> <li>➤ Build further evidence on the effectiveness of various cash-based transfer modalities in improving the food security of beneficiaries in various locations; consider cash vs. vouchers, cash-based transfers vs. in-kind transfers and full cash-based transfers vs hybrid transfers.</li> <li>➤ Produce a verified beneficiary list for general food assistance that is as accurate as possible.</li> </ul> <p>Strengthen direct communication with general food assistance beneficiaries and cooperating partners on WFP's targeting methodology.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	Second quarter 2025
4	<p><b>Further adapt to context and strengthen WFP's contribution to achieving cross-cutting aims, supporting principled aid delivery and accountability to crisis-affected populations. For this, actions to be implemented include those below:</b></p>	Operational				



#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
4.1	<p><b>Humanitarian principles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Based on need.</i> Continue advocating for the right to adequate food and demonstrate a transparent approach in the delivery of assistance according to identified need.</li> </ul> <p><i>Conflict sensitivity.</i> Maintain a strong understanding of the operating environment and conflict dynamics through community presence and engagement with all actors on the ground. Prioritize the safety and well-being of staff and cooperating partners by adopting conflict-sensitive measures to avoid causing harm.</p>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Second quarter 2025
4.2	<p><b>Protection, accountability to affected populations, community feedback mechanisms.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Accountability to affected populations.</i> Expand helpline centres and use direct community-level engagement to communicate information regarding the reduction of assistance. Clarify targeting processes in a transparent manner.</li> <li>➤ <i>Community feedback mechanisms.</i> Maintain a WFP mechanism directly accessible by beneficiaries; and enhance the quality of the mechanism across all areas and all cooperating partners.</li> </ul> <p><i>Capacity of cooperating partners.</i> Further strengthen WFP efforts to support the capacity of cooperating partners to develop their own policies and tools for community feedback mechanisms and accountability to affected populations and support them in communicating decisions to communities.</p>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024
4.3	<p><b>Gender and inclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Nutrition.</i> Further integrate corporate nutrition and gender policies by considering household gender</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
	<p>dynamics when designing and implementing nutrition programmes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Gender-transformative actions.</i> As part of early recovery and resilience activities, undertake gender-transformative actions and monitor their progress using participatory approaches involving community members.</li> </ul> <p><i>Inclusion.</i> Strengthen the inclusion of people with disabilities across all activities and monitor it more closely.</p>					
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Maximize internal and external resources in support of a “dual track” approach and a focus on transition.</b></p> <p><b>For this, actions to be implemented include those below:</b></p>	Operational				
5.1	<p>In the context of reduced financial resources, ensure the strategic use of internal resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Align activities with available resources, optimizing planned results (see recommendation 2).</li> <li>➤ Advocate unearmarked funding for early recovery.</li> <li>➤ Support and empower staff seeking to implement changes in operational direction, ensuring that they have the right skills and competencies.</li> </ul> <p>Streamline, optimize, consolidate and simplify processes in order to enhance internal cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness.</p>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024
5.2	<p>Leverage headquarters resources in support of country office efforts to increase and diversify funding sources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increase headquarters and regional bureau support to the country office in advocating unearmarked and multi-year funding in support of early recovery.</li> </ul>		Headquarters (Partnerships and Innovation Department)	Regional bureau	High	Fourth quarter 2024

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>15</sup>
	Seek to identify new donors for early recovery activities and expand partnerships with current donors to scale up current successful resilience activities.					
5.3	<p>Support capacity development for cooperating partners in the area of early recovery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Provide adequate support to cooperating partners to ensure staff capacity and growth.</li> </ul> <p>Select partners for capacity-building training and support on early recovery.</p>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. EVALUATION FEATURES

1. The Evaluation of the Syrian Arab Republic World Food Programme (WFP) Transitional and Interim Country Strategic Plans (T-ICSP) (2018-2025) was conducted between October 2022 and January 2024. The purpose was to provide evaluation evidence and learning on the performance of WFP in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) from 2018 to June 2023,<sup>16</sup> as well as accountability for results to stakeholders (see [summary terms of reference](#) (ToR) in Annex I). The evaluation covered the implementation of three programmatic cycles (2018; 2019-2021; and 2022-2025).
2. The timeframe for the evaluation started in 2018 when the T-ICSP was introduced, enabling the evaluation team to assess changes in the approach across the three consecutive interim country strategic plans (ICSPs). This evaluation covered WFP-supported interventions and considered any recent relevant major developments.
3. The evaluation drew lessons from current practices and had a forward-looking lens. This included paying particular attention to assessing the different modalities used by WFP for food assistance to inform future opportunities and the way forward.
4. The evaluation addressed four standard evaluation questions (EQs) (see Annex I) and assessed cross-cutting issues including gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) and accountability to affected populations (AAP). Other cross-cutting issues that were considered include: the centrality of protection; humanitarian principles and access; inclusion of people with disabilities (PWD); social cohesion; and capacity strengthening. The evaluation used a mix of methods, including documentary review, remote and in-person key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) and site visits (see Annex II: Key informants' overview and Annex III: Data collection schedule).
5. The evaluation is scheduled to be presented to the WFP Executive Board (EB) in November 2024 (see the evaluation timeline in Annex IV).
6. The evaluation sought the views of a broad range of internal and external WFP stakeholders. The primary users of the evaluation included WFP country office (CO), WFP field offices (FOs), WFP regional bureau in Cairo (RBC), WFP headquarters, and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT). Other users and relevant stakeholders included the Government of Syria, donors, local authorities, cooperating partners (CPs) and the private sector. A matrix of stakeholders is attached in Annex V.

## 1.2. CONTEXT

### General overview

7. The conflict started in 2011 (herein referred to as "the crisis") and continues to take a heavy toll on the life of Syrian people, drastically changing the socioeconomic situation in Syria. Approximately 24 percent of Syrians have a disability, reaching almost 40 percent in northeast Syria.<sup>17</sup> As of June 2023, 5.3 million Syrians are registered as refugees living outside of Syria.<sup>18</sup> In early 2011, Syria was recognized as a middle income country with moderate economic growth and positive development indicators.<sup>19</sup> The crisis halved gross domestic product (GDP) between 2010 and 2020.<sup>20</sup> Since 2018, the country has been reclassified as a low income country.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cutting date for data collection.

<sup>17</sup> Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (OCHA). December 2022. *Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) 2023*.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *Situation Syria Regional Refugee Response*. Accessed 14/07/2023. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>

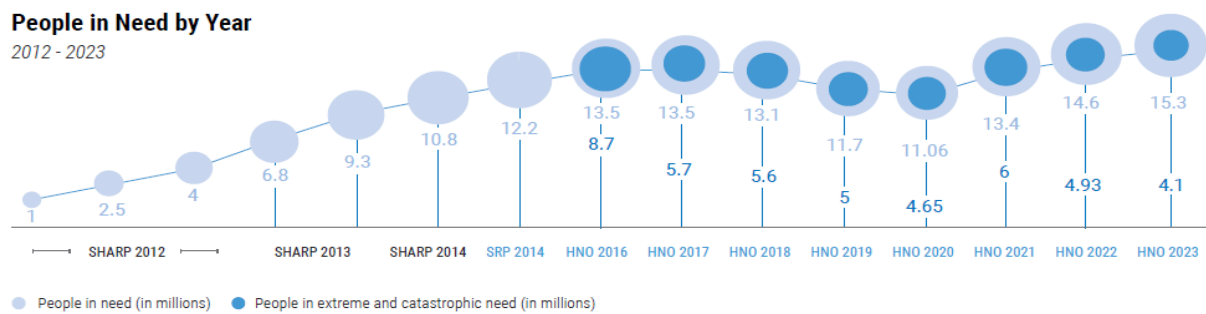
<sup>19</sup> H.Slim and L.Trombetta. 2014. *Syria Crisis Common Context Analysis*.

<sup>20</sup> World Bank. 2023. *Syria Economic Monitor – Syria's Economy in Ruins after a Decade-long War*.

<sup>21</sup> World Bank. April 2022. *Syria's Economic Update*.

8. The consequences of the crisis have taken a devastating toll on the Syrian population, and this situation is compounded by the impact of sanctions. Economic deterioration, accelerated by the financial crises in Lebanon and Türkiye, as well as the impacts of the war in Ukraine, climate-related shocks, COVID-19 and the 2023 earthquake have increased vulnerabilities further.<sup>22</sup> An estimated 97 percent of Syrians live below the poverty line,<sup>23</sup> with 1.2 percent of the population in extreme multidimensional poverty.<sup>24</sup> More than 12 million people in Syria are deemed food insecure.<sup>25</sup> The worsening economic situation has resulted in a steadily increasing number of people in need of humanitarian assistance (Figure 1).

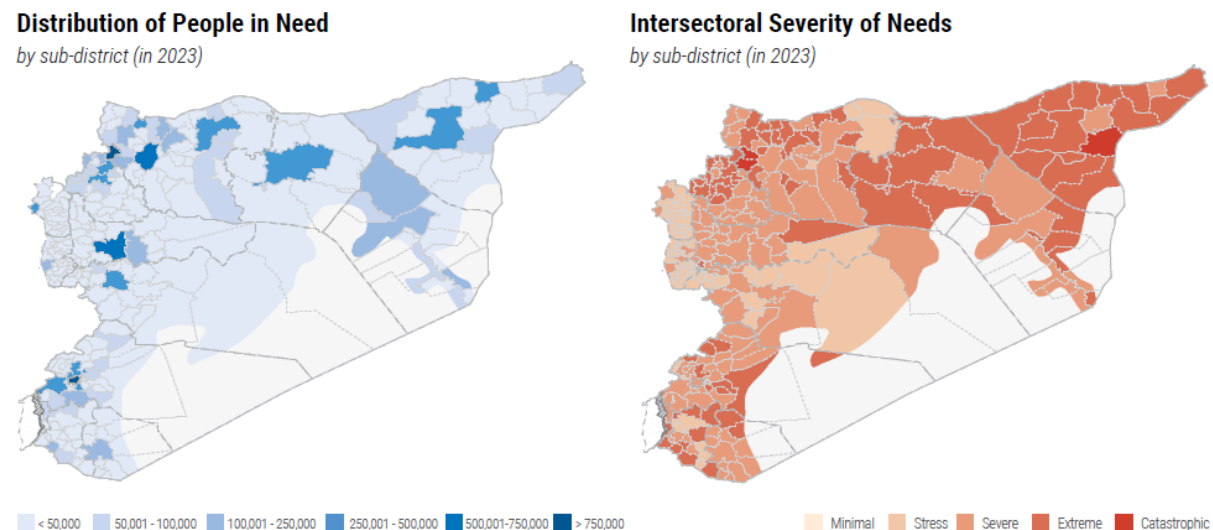
**Figure 1: People in need by year, 2012-2023**



Source: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). December 2022. Syria HNO 2023.

9. While the situation continues to evolve, the overall scale and severity of humanitarian needs in Syria remain extensive. According to United Nations estimates, 15.3 million people needed some form of humanitarian assistance in 2023.<sup>26</sup> The number of sub-districts in the severe categorization are 117, those in the extreme category are 83 and those categorized as catastrophic are 3. The five governorates with the most people in need are Aleppo, Al-Hasakah, Ar-Raqqa, Idlib and Rural Damascus (Figure 2).<sup>27</sup>

**Figure 2: Distribution of people in need and severity, 2023**



Source: OCHA. December 2022. Syria HNO 2023.

10. The crisis and economic decline contributed to the deterioration of basic services, a damaged infrastructure, a lack of critical supplies and decreased purchasing power. As of June 2023, across all 14

<sup>22</sup> OCHA. February 2022. Syria HNO 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2022. Human Development Report 2021/2022.

<sup>25</sup> OCHA. December 2022. Syria HNO 2023.

<sup>26</sup> OCHA. December 2022. Syria HNO 2023.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



governorates 132,782 suspected cases of cholera have been reported, including 104 associated deaths.<sup>28</sup> The earthquake had a significant impact on the cholera response, with thousands of people living in overcrowded emergency shelters with limited access to safe water, sanitary facilities or hygiene practices.<sup>29</sup>

11. Regional disparities, as well as control and access issues, complicate the provision of humanitarian assistance. Essential United Nations cross-border humanitarian operations are disrupted, with the United Nations forced to stop cross-border operations through Al-Yarubiyah between Iraq and Syria in January 2020.<sup>30</sup> The crossing at Bab al-Salam between Türkiye and Syria is no longer authorized under United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2533.<sup>31</sup> Bab al-Hawa, which is the only remaining cross-border<sup>32</sup> aid corridor from Türkiye to northwest Syria, was closed for one month in July 2023 and reopened for six months on 7 August 2023.<sup>33</sup>

12. On 6 February 2023, multiple earthquakes, the strongest of 7.7 magnitude on the Richter scale, struck southern Türkiye and northern Syria.<sup>34</sup> Gaziantep near the Türkiye-Syria border was identified as the epicentre. By March 2023, at least 53,000 deaths and 132,000 injuries were reported in Türkiye and Syria, with an estimated 8.8 million quake-affected population reported.<sup>35</sup> Though the earthquake affected the north, central, south, and coastal parts of Syria, severe human and material damages were mainly reported in Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, and Latakia governorates and as impacting almost every person living in northwest Syria.<sup>36</sup> The earthquake had a large impact on further displacement.<sup>37</sup> By February 2023, 200,000 families were reported as newly displaced.<sup>38</sup> Syria already hosts the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), estimated at 6.8 million.<sup>39</sup> Local authorities declared a state of emergency in northwest Syria following the earthquake.

13. For a detailed contextual background, including sectoral overview (except food security and nutrition given the WFP core mandate), please see Annex VII.

## Food security

14. While the overall food security situation had improved in many parts of Syria between 2016 and 2019,<sup>40</sup> indicators severely deteriorated as of late 2019.<sup>41</sup> Key drivers were currency depreciation, hikes in food prices, population displacements, the effects of the Lebanese crisis, lack of livelihood options and losses in agricultural production and assets compounded by ongoing conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic.

15. In September 2022, the national average price of the WFP standard reference food basket had increased by 52 percent since the start of the Ukrainian crisis, and was up to 91 percent compared to September 2021. This drastic increase affected people's livelihoods and pushed them further into negative coping mechanisms. As a net food importer, Syria is more susceptible to changes in global dynamics, including the Ukrainian war, which created uncertainty in the global supply of grain and vegetable oil.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> World Health Organization (WHO). June 2023. *Whole of Syria Cholera Outbreak Situation Report No.17*.

<sup>29</sup> WHO. May 2023. *Whole of Syria Cholera Outbreak Situation Report No.16*.

<sup>30</sup> Human Rights Watch. 2022. *Syria Events Report 2021*.

<sup>31</sup> OCHA. February 2022. *Syria HNO 2022*.

<sup>32</sup> *Cross-border providing aid to northwest Syria from across its border with Türkiye. Cross-line aid, assistance that moves across front lines from government areas to non-government-controlled areas.*

<sup>33</sup> United Nations. 8 August 2023. *Secretary-General Welcomes United Nations Understanding With Syrian Government to Continue Using Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing for Delivering Life-Saving Aid*. Accessed 11/08/2023. <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21900.doc.htm>

<sup>34</sup> OCHA. 2023. *Flash appeal: Syrian Arab Republic Earthquake February–May 2023*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> WFP. 2023. *Food Security Sector Whole of Syria EQ Response. Situation Report no.4 (13 & 14 February 2023)*.

<sup>37</sup> OCHA. 2023. *Flash appeal: Syrian Arab Republic Earthquake February–May 2023*.

<sup>38</sup> WFP. 2023. *Situation Report no. 1. 8 February 2023*.

<sup>39</sup> OCHA. 2023. *Flash appeal: Syrian Arab Republic Earthquake February–May 2023*.

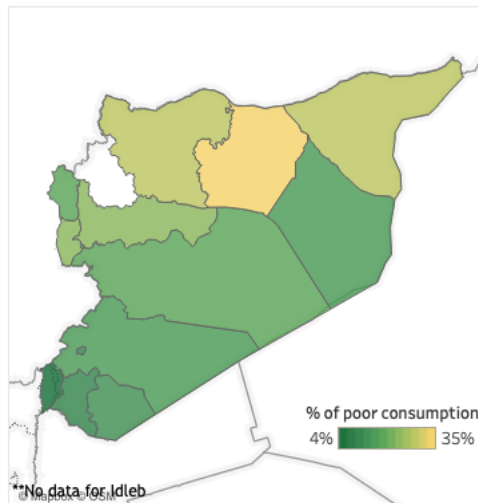
<sup>40</sup> FAO. WFP. 2019. *FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM)*.

<sup>41</sup> WFP. October 2020. *The Socioeconomic Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Syrian Arab Republic*.

<sup>42</sup> OCHA. December 2022. *Syria HNO 2023*.

16. An estimated 12 million people in Syria are food insecure, including all 2 million people living in camps, and a further 2.9 million people are estimated to be at risk of food insecurity. Households, particularly households headed by women, face food shortages and engage in food coping mechanisms to maximize the use of limited available resources. In particular, 93 percent of households headed by women purchased less expensive food at least once a week and 63 percent reduced the meal size at least once a week.<sup>43</sup> Figure 3 shows levels of poor food consumption by governorate, with the highest levels in northern Syria.

**Figure 3: Percent of households by governorate reporting poor food consumption in February 2022**



Source: Mobile vulnerability assessment and mapping (mVAM) bulletin Issue no. 64: February 2022 conducted by RBC.  
 Note: WFP Syria country office confirmed on 03.08.2023 that February 2022 is the latest available mVAM publication.

## Nutrition

17. Approximately 5.9 million people, including 3.75 million children aged 6-59 months and 2.1 million women, are in need of nutritional assistance in Syria, an increase from 5.5 million in 2022. The country is affected by various dimensions of malnutrition, including rising levels of both chronic malnutrition, as shown by the high prevalence of stunting and acute malnutrition. Emergency levels of anaemia among children and women also remain an issue.<sup>44</sup>

18. Stunting prevalence varies from 25-28 percent across Syria, with an estimated 609,979 children below five years of age who are stunted.<sup>45</sup> Approximately 363,556 children below 5 years of age suffer from acute malnutrition.<sup>46</sup> An estimated 544,752 pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls (PBWG) suffer from acute malnutrition, including 460,124 who suffer from anaemia. Recent community nutrition assessments confirm a deteriorating nutrition situation, showing a double-fold increase in severe and moderate wasting among children.<sup>47</sup>

## International assistance

19. From 2019 to 2021, Syria received a yearly average of United States dollars (USD) 9.96 billion in gross official development assistance (ODA). In 2020-2021, 72.4 percent of official development assistance to Syria went to the humanitarian sector. The 2021 gross official development assistance to Syria is USD 9.69 billion, nearly double that in 2015 of USD 4.9 billion. The top five official development assistance funding

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> OCHA. December 2022. Syria HNO 2023.

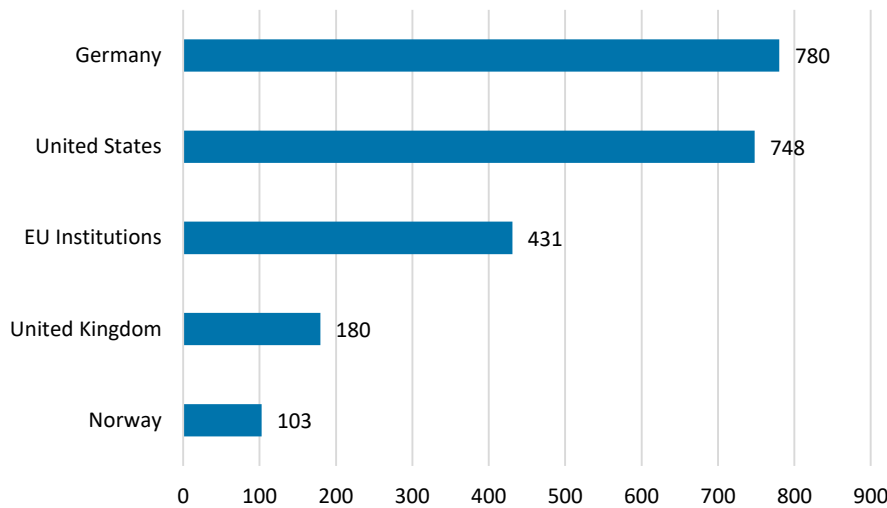
<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

sources are Germany, the United States of America (USA), European Union (EU) institutions, the United Kingdom (UK) and Norway (**Error! Reference source not found.**).<sup>48</sup>

20. Syria humanitarian response plans (HRP) have appealed for an average USD 4.1 billion annually between 2018 and 2023, with a yearly average USD 1.9 billion in humanitarian funding funded between 2018 and 2023 (

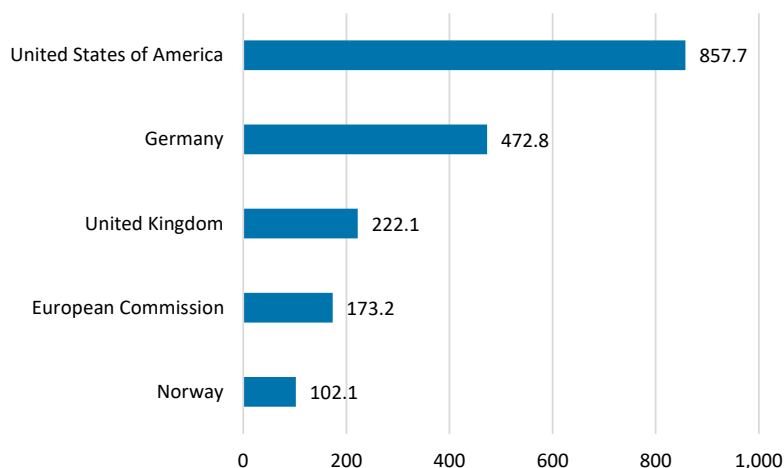
21. Figure 7).<sup>49</sup>

**Figure 4: Top five donors of gross official development assistance for Syria, 2020-2021 average, USD million**



Source: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) website, accessed 14.07.2023

**Figure 5: Top five donors of humanitarian assistance for Syria, 2018-2023 annual average, USD million**

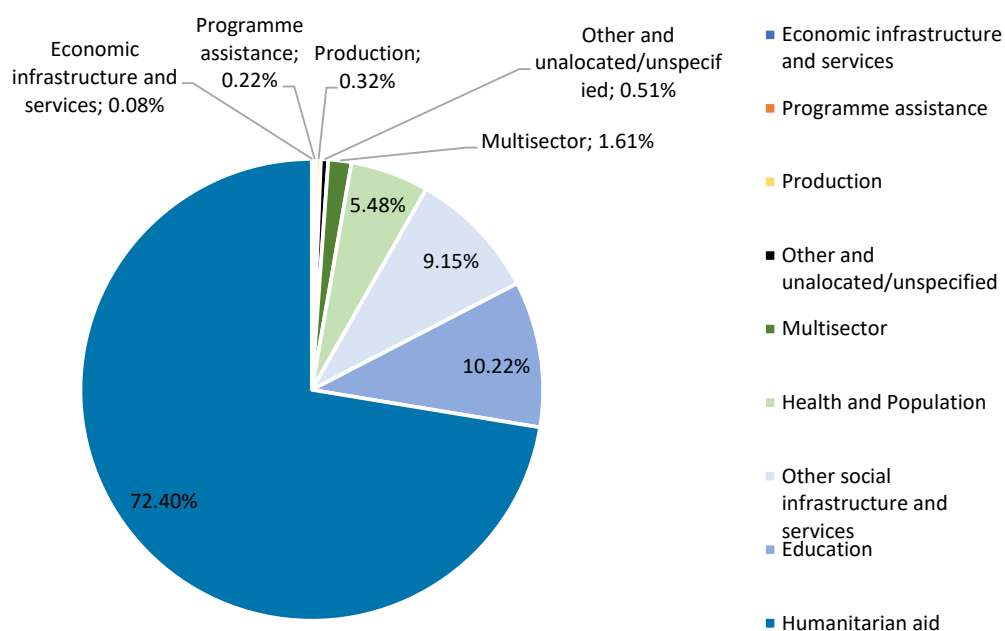


Source: UN OCHA – Financial tracking system (FTS). Accessed 02.08.2023.

<sup>48</sup> OECD. 2023. *Aid at a glance: Syria*. Accessed 14/07/2023. Note: the OECD ranks Türkiye as the largest donor of gross ODA for Syria. However, given that a significant portion of its assistance goes to Syrian refugees in Türkiye, it is not included in Figure 4 to avoid presenting an inaccurate picture of assistance inside Syria.

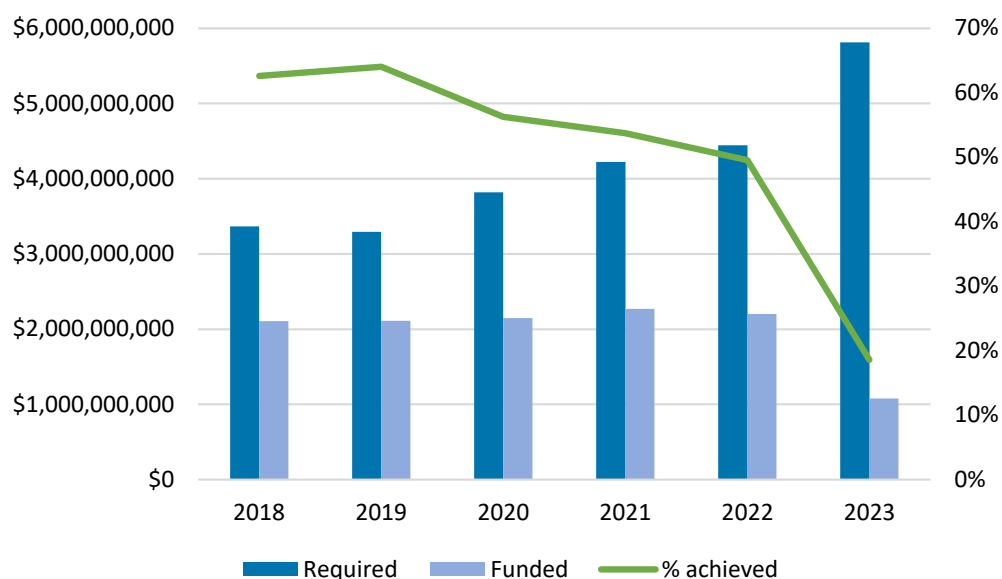
<sup>49</sup> OCHA. Financial tracking system (FTS). Accessed 02/08/2023.

**Figure 6: Syria bilateral official development assistance by sector, 2020-2021 average**



Source: OECD website, accessed 14.07.2023

**Figure 7: Funding of humanitarian assistance response plans against appeals for Syria, 2018-2023**



Source: OCHA FTS website, accessed 14.07.2023

22. The United Nations system in Syria is composed of the United Nations common system, with 16 resident organizations and seven non-resident organizations, representing the United Nations Humanitarian Country Team (UNHCT) in the country.

23. United Nations humanitarian programming in Syria is guided by the humanitarian needs overview (HNO) and the humanitarian response plans, which remain the main frameworks for responding to humanitarian needs. In recognition of the need for a longer-term plan, a two-year United Nations Strategic Framework (UNSF) for Cooperation between the Government and the United Nations (2016–2017) was signed and extended to 2020. The current UNSF 2022-2025 focuses on multi-year resilience and recovery programming complementary to the large humanitarian assistance efforts.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> UN Syria. 2022. UNSF 2022-2024.

## 1.3. SUBJECT BEING EVALUATED

### Evolution of strategic focus

24. WFP has been present in Syria since 1964 and its assistance approach had shifted towards development-oriented projects until the start of the crisis in 2011. The WFP Level-3 corporate emergency protocol has been activated for the Syria operation since December 2012. Following the introduction of a new WFP emergency activation protocol in January 2022, it has been recategorized under corporate attention.

25. Following the start of the crisis, WFP rapidly scaled up its emergency assistance through emergency operation (EMOP) 200339 "Emergency Food Assistance to People Affected by Unrest in Syria" (2011-2016). It had a strong emergency food assistance component, targeting 4.5 million people in 2016 through 16 budget revisions (BRs). The multiple budget revisions are explained by the continuous adjustment by WFP to the humanitarian response.

26. In 2017, the protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO) 200988 (2017-2018) "Food, Nutrition and Livelihood Assistance to the People Affected by the Crisis in Syria" was launched. It introduced a shift from emergencies to livelihood programmes in more stable areas. These interventions remained small in scale compared to the continuous needs of general food assistance (GFA) for an estimated 5.5 million beneficiaries.

27. In line with the **Whole of Syria approach**, WFP provided transport, storage and telecommunications support for the humanitarian community through special operation 200950 (2012-2014) "WFP Aid Deliveries to Provide Humanitarian Support to Besieged and Hard-to-Reach Areas in Syria" and special operation 200788 (2015-2017) "Logistics and Telecommunications Augmentation and Coordination to Support Humanitarian Operations in Syria". Support was provided to the wider humanitarian community operating in Syria, both from within the country and from the existing corridors in Türkiye and Jordan to partners operating cross-border. The logistics cluster on behalf of the United Nations, managed the cross-border activity through the facilitation of the trans-shipment hub in Reyhanli to enable United Nations supplies coming from Türkiye to reach beneficiaries in northwest Syria, under UNSCR 2672. The logistics cluster has continued to play a key role in facilitating joint humanitarian convoys to besieged and hard-to-reach locations and airlifts to governorates inaccessible by land.

28. Two corporate evaluations of the WFP regional response informed the development of the ICSPs (see Annex VIII for the main recommendations). In 2015, WFP Office of Evaluation (OEV) commissioned the first Corporate Emergency Evaluation (CEE) of the WFP Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis 2011-2014.<sup>51</sup> In 2018, the Office of Evaluation commissioned a second corporate emergency evaluation covering the response to the Syrian regional crisis between January 2015 and March 2018.<sup>52</sup> These evaluations guided the country office towards a stronger focus on humanitarian principles and protection, an improved targeting approach, placing gender more central to operations and a better defining of resilience in the Syrian context.

29. In 2018, **a one-year Syria T-ICSP [SY01] superseded the regional PRRO 200987**. The T-ICSP included four strategic outcomes (SOs) to address the high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition among food insecure populations affected by the crisis. Under the T-ICSP, WFP sought to gradually transition into providing livelihood-focused activities for men and women while maintaining food assistance to the most vulnerable. This shift from purely humanitarian emergency response operations to incorporating recovery interventions is a key strategic change that WFP has included in the development of the ICSPs since 2018.

30. **The Syria ICSP [SY02] 2019-2021**, which started in January 2019, was initially planned for two years and then extended for a third year to December 2021. While the T-ICSP and ICSP shared the same four strategic outcomes (Figure 8), WFP added more support services to humanitarian partners across Syria under SO4.

31. The ICSP also aligned with the strategic objectives of the 2019 humanitarian response plan to provide life-saving assistance and increase resilience of affected communities. The ICSP supported the food security

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<sup>51</sup> WFP. 2015. *An Evaluation of WFP's Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis, 2011-2014*.

<sup>52</sup> WFP. 2018. *Corporate Emergency Evaluation of the WFP Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis, 2015-2018*.

sector's objectives of: i) improving food security through food assistance; ii) supporting livelihoods by increasing agricultural production and income-generating opportunities; and iii) rehabilitating productive infrastructure.

32. The main strategic shift was in strengthening operational processes, such as targeting, beneficiary management, data collection and analysis to improve evidence-based programming and knowledge management systems. Continuous efforts to increase the use of cash-based transfers (CBT), scale up livelihood activities and reinforce age- and gender-sensitive approaches were woven into its design. In response to the deterioration of Syria's humanitarian and food security situation since late 2019, the ICSP increased general food assistance, leading to four budget revisions between 2019 and 2021.

33. The **Syria ICSP [SY03] 2022–2023** started in January 2022 (and was extended to December 2025), with the aim of responding to growing food and nutrition needs because of the growing economic and financial crises, high unemployment, the drought in eastern Syria, crop failure and the collapse of food systems. While the strategic outcomes largely remain the same as those of the previous T-ICSP and ICSP, there are some differences, as detailed in Figure 8.

34. An overview of the three (T-)ICSPs under the scope of this evaluation is presented below. Annex IX provides an overview of the current ICSP and a description of its activities.

Figure 8: Overview of (T-)ICSP strategic outcomes and related activities

	Syria T-ICSP (SY01) 2018	Syria ICSP (SY02) 2019-2021	Syria ICSP (SY03) 2022-2023	Changes from SY01 and SY02 to SY03
<b>Crisis response</b>	<p><b>SO1:</b> Food insecure populations affected by the crisis, including host communities, IDPs and returnees, in all governorates, have access to life-saving food to meet their basic food needs all year long.</p> <p><b>Activity 1:</b> Provision of general food assistance in the form of regular in-kind monthly food rations and ready-to-eat rations in the initial phase of displacement.</p> <p><b>Activity 2:</b> Provision of school meals for pre- and primary school children in regular schools and CBT to out-of-school children enrolled in informal education or alternate learning opportunities.</p>	<p><b>SO1:</b> Food-insecure populations affected by the crisis, including host communities, internally displaced persons and returnees, in all governorates, have access to life-saving food to meet their basic food needs all year round</p> <p><b>Activity 1:</b> Provision of general food assistance in the form of regular in-kind or CBT monthly food assistance, with ready-to-eat rations in the initial phase of displacement.</p> <p><b>Activity 2:</b> Provision of school meals for pre- and primary school children in regular schools and CBT to out-of-school children enrolled in informal education or alternate learning opportunities.</p>	<p><b>SO1:</b> Food-insecure populations affected by the crisis, including host communities, internally displaced persons and returnees across all governorates in the Syrian Arab Republic, meet their basic food and nutrition needs all year round</p> <p><b>Activity 1:</b> Unconditional resource transfers to food-insecure households</p> <p><b>Activity 2:</b> Provide meals and cash-based transfers to school-age boys and girls attending formal and non-formal education centres</p>	<p><b>SO1:</b> Under SY03, SO1 includes a stronger emphasis on unconditional resource transfers to food insecure families (Act1). Under the school feeding e-voucher, support is provided to children in formal (accelerated curriculum B) and in United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) supported non-formal education targeting OOSC.</p>
<b>Resilience</b>	<p><b>SO2:</b> Food insecure families in urban and rural areas affected by the crisis are enabled to meet their basic food and nutrition needs and increase their self-reliance, throughout the year.</p> <p><b>Activity 3:</b> Creation and rehabilitation of communal assets through Food Assistance for Assets (FFA); and household-level productive assets and enhanced human capital through Food Assistance for Training (FFT).</p>	<p><b>SO2:</b> Food-insecure families in urban and rural areas affected by the crisis are enabled to meet their basic food and nutrition needs and increase their self-reliance throughout the year</p> <p><b>Activity 3:</b> Provision of livelihood support through household- and communal-level asset creation through food-for-assets (FFA) activities and enhanced human capital through food-for-training (FFT).</p>	<p><b>SO2:</b> Food-insecure communities in targeted areas are able to meet their food and nutrition needs throughout the year thanks to resilient livelihoods and restored access to basic services</p> <p><b>Activity 3:</b> Support diversified and sustainable livelihoods and food systems at the household, community and national levels</p> <p><b>Activity 4:</b> Provide technical assistance to strengthen national social safety nets</p>	<p><b>SO2:</b> Under SY03, SO2 focuses on working at the national level when supporting livelihoods and food systems (Act3). It also includes a new activity focusing on providing technical assistance to strengthen national social safety nets.</p>
<b>Resilience</b>	<p><b>SO3:</b> Vulnerable groups, especially children, pregnant and lactating women and girls, across Syria have reduced levels of malnutrition, achieved through high quality, nutrient dense diets, throughout the year.</p> <p><b>Activity 4:</b> Prevention of acute malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies in children 6-23 months of age.</p> <p><b>Activity 5:</b> CBT to targeted PLWG to improve their dietary diversity and intake of fresh food items such as dairy, meat and vegetables.</p> <p><b>Activity 6:</b> Treatment of moderate acute malnutrition in children aged 6-59 months and PLWG.</p>	<p><b>SO3:</b> Nutritionally vulnerable groups, especially children and pregnant and lactating women and girls, across the Syrian Arab Republic have reduced levels of malnutrition throughout the year</p> <p><b>Activity 4:</b> Prevention of acute malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies in children aged 6-23 months and pregnant and lactating women and girls.</p> <p><b>Activity 5:</b> Treatment of moderate acute malnutrition in children aged 6-59 months and pregnant and lactating women and girls.</p>	<p><b>SO3:</b> Nutritionally vulnerable groups across the Syrian Arab Republic, especially boys, girls and pregnant and lactating women, have access to malnutrition prevention and treatment services throughout the year</p> <p><b>Activity 5:</b> Provide nutrition assistance to prevent chronic and acute malnutrition</p> <p><b>Activity 6:</b> Provide nutrition assistance to treat moderate acute malnutrition.</p>	<p><b>SO3:</b> Under SY03, SO3 includes no changes from the previous ICSP beyond a change in SO formulation, with SY02 focusing on nutritionally vulnerable groups having reduced level of malnutrition, and SY03 focusing on groups having access to prevention and treatment services throughout the year</p>
<b>Crisis response</b>	<p><b>SO4:</b> Humanitarian partners across Syria benefit from augmented logistics and emergency telecommunications capacity, enabling them to provide their technical assistance, throughout the crisis.</p> <p><b>Activity 7:</b> Provide Whole of Syria coordination, information management, capacity development and shared logistics services to sector partners that face logistical gaps.</p> <p><b>Activity 8:</b> Provide shared ICT services, Emergency Telecommunications coordination and Information Technology (IT) Emergency Preparedness training to humanitarian organizations in common operational areas.</p>	<p><b>SO4:</b> Humanitarian partners across the Syrian Arab Republic benefit from augmented logistics and emergency telecommunications capacity and services, enabling them to provide humanitarian assistance throughout the crisis</p> <p><b>Activity 6:</b> Provide coordination, information management, capacity development and shared logistics services to sector partners that face logistical gaps.</p> <p><b>Activity 7:</b> Provide shared ICT services, emergency telecommunications coordination and IT emergency preparedness training to humanitarian organizations in common operational areas.</p> <p><b>Activity 8:</b> Provide technical assistance and support services to humanitarian partners.</p> <p><b>Activity 9:</b> Provide passenger and light cargo services UNHAS to the humanitarian community.</p> <p><b>Activity 10:</b> Provide on-demand CBT services to humanitarian partners.</p>	<p><b>SO4:</b> Humanitarian partners across the Syrian Arab Republic are enabled to assist crisis-affected populations all year long</p> <p><b>Activity 7:</b> Provide common logistics services to humanitarian partners.</p> <p><b>Activity 8:</b> Provide common emergency telecommunications services to humanitarian partners</p> <p><b>Activity 9:</b> Provide humanitarian air services to humanitarian partners</p> <p><b>Activity 10:</b> Provide on-demand technical assistance and support services to humanitarian partners</p> <p><b>Activity 11:</b> Provide on-demand cash-based transfer services to humanitarian partners</p>	<p><b>SO4:</b> Under SY03, SO4 includes no changes from the previous ICSP.</p>

Source: T-CSP 2018, ICSP 2019-2021, and ICSP 2022-2025. Developed by the evaluation 2022.



35. The T-ICSP received a Gender and Age Marker (GAM)<sup>53</sup> of 2A, indicating that gender equality was mainstreamed into all activities, while the ICSPs received a GAM of 4. Table 1 below shows the GAM by activity category over the 2018-2022 period. It shows overall improvement for unconditional resource transfers and the school meals programme (SMP), reflecting an evolution to more gender- and age-specific assessments and criteria, but a slight deterioration for nutrition prevention activities in 2022.

**Table 1: Gender and Age Marker by (T-)ICSP activity category, 2018-2022**

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	SY01	SY02			SY03
URT					
SMP					
ACL					
NPA					
NTA					

	No data
	GAM 1
	GAM 2
	GAM 3
	GAM 4

conditional resource transfers  
SMP: School meals programme activities  
ACL: Asset creation and livelihood support activities  
NPA: Malnutrition prevention activities  
NTA: Nutrition treatment activities

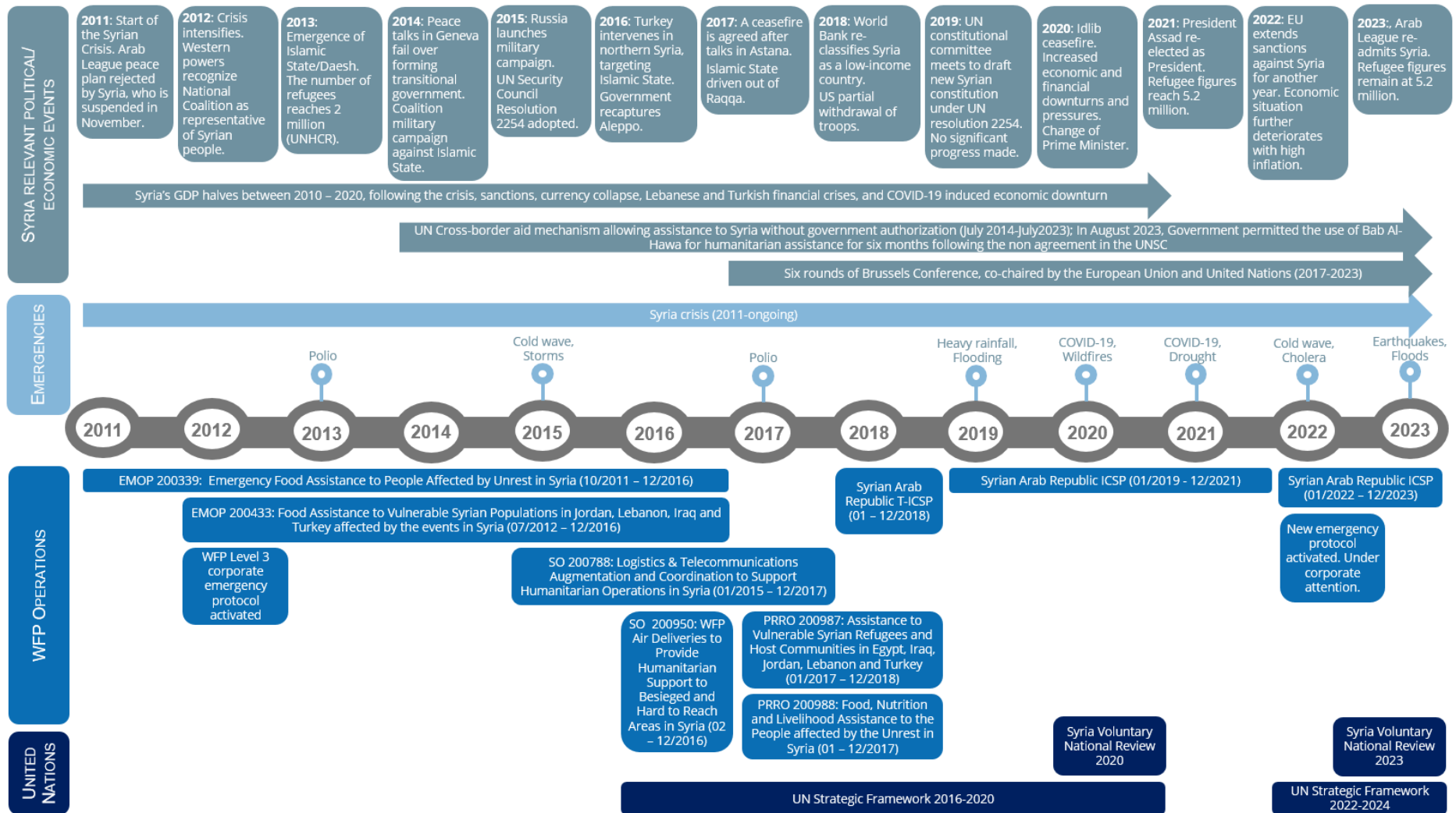
Source: WFP Syria 2018-2022 annual country reports (ACRs).

36. Figure 9 presents a general overview of WFP operations in Syria and key events that occurred in the country prior to and during the evaluation period.

37. The reconstructed theory of change (ToC) for the evaluation is presented in Figure 10, along with key assumptions in Figure 11. The ICSP 2022-2025 includes a briefly explained theory of change, which the evaluation team considered in developing the reconstructed intervention logic. The theory of change covers the three programming cycles with emphasis placed on the current results framework. Annex X - Revised reconstructed theory of change - includes a further developed (ex-post) theory of change based on the analysis of the main evaluation findings.

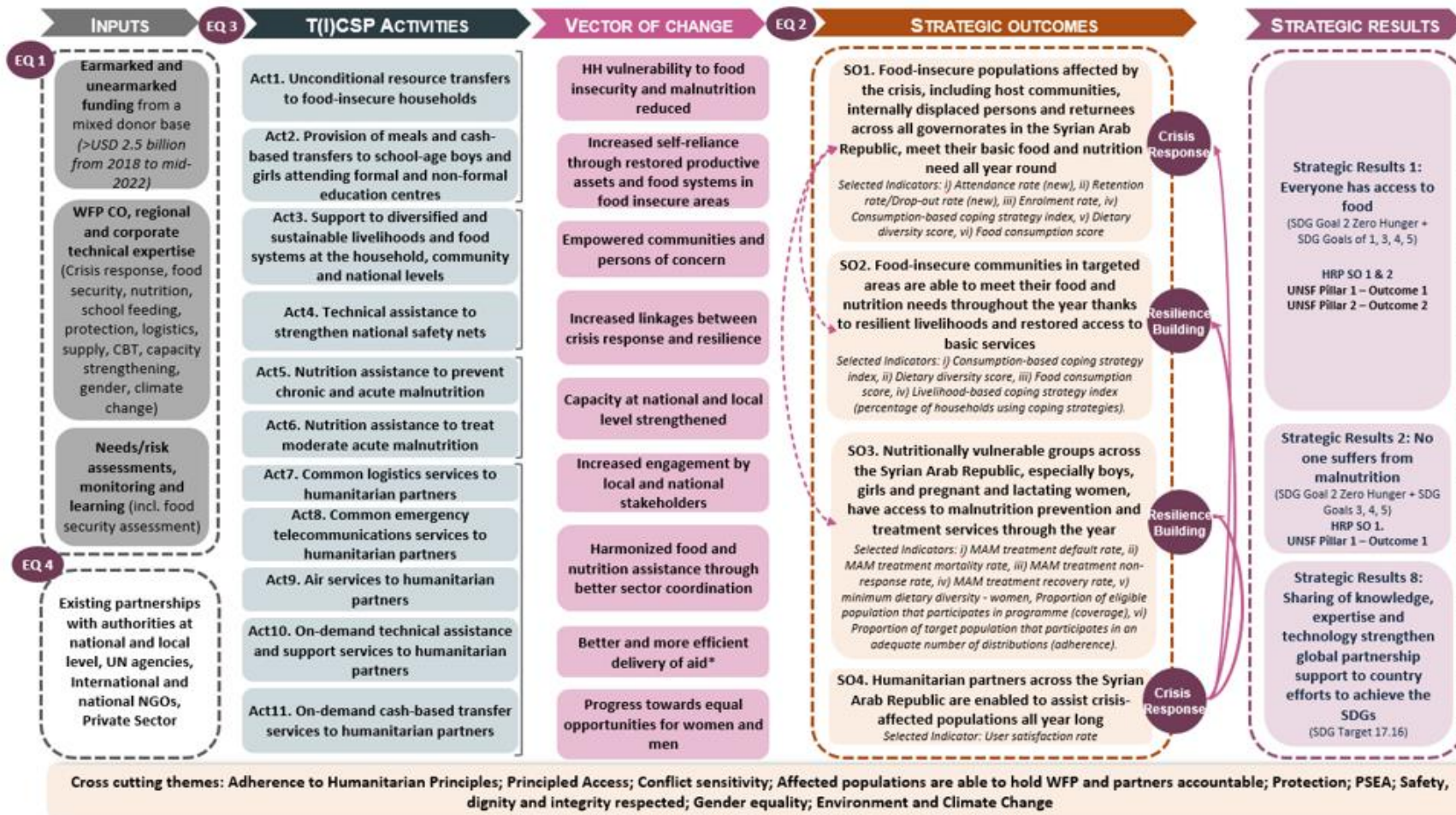
<sup>53</sup> The WFP GAM is a corporate tool that codes – on a 0-4 scale – the extent to which gender and age are integrated into the design and implementation of a CSP. A GAM score of 3 represents fully integrated gender; a GAM score of 4 represents fully integrated gender and age. Source: WFP Executive Board. 2021. Annual Performance Report 2021 – Annex VI.

Figure 9: Overview of major events in Syria and WFP operations, 2011-2023



Source: WFP. Operations database – Syria. Accessed 14/07/2023; OCHA. Syria Disasters. Accessed 29/07/2023. Developed by the evaluation 2023.

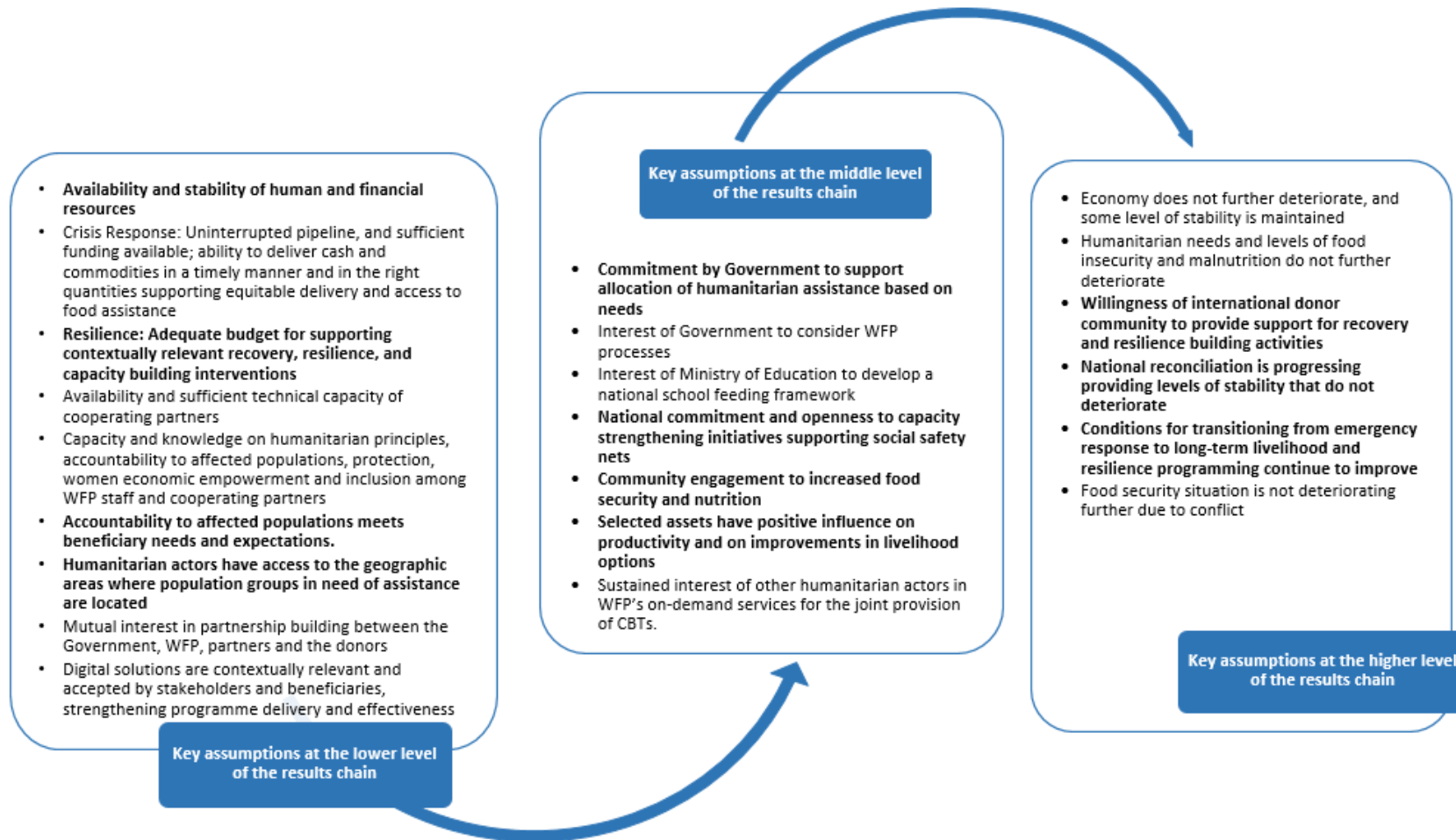
Figure 10: Reconstructed theory of change



HRP Strategic Objective 1. Provide life-saving and life-sustaining humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable people with an emphasis on those in areas with high severity of needs.  
 HRP Strategic Objective 2. Increase the resilience of affected communities by improving access to livelihood opportunities and basic services, especially among the most vulnerable households and communities.  
 UNSF Pillar 1: Availability and Access to Basic and Social Services. Outcome 1: Improved, equitable, inclusive and safe access to quality basic services.  
 UNSF Pillar 2: Sustainable Socio-Economic Recovery. Outcome 2: Better access for people, especially the most vulnerable, to social protection services, sustainable livelihoods, and inclusive and equitable socio-economic recovery.  
 \*Through better targeting systems, shared platforms with other actors, strengthened community feedback mechanisms, results-focused monitoring and evaluation.

Source: Evaluation team.

Figure 11: Key assumptions of the reconstructed theory of change



Source: Evaluation team.



## Resource mobilization

38. Table 2 below provides an overview of the WFP Syria portfolio under the T-ICSP 2018, ICSP 2019-2021 and ICSP 2022-2025. Under the T-ICSP, the original needs-based plan (NBP) amounted to USD 795.88 million but decreased slightly to USD 790.15 million following the second budget revision. Allocated resources were above half (67 percent) of the current needs-based plan and expenditures were 76 percent of allocated resources. For the ICSP 2019-2021, the original needs-based plan amounted to USD 1,386.31 million, but following the fourth budget revision, the needs-based plan more than doubled to USD 3,079.47 million. Allocated resources remained low at 55 percent of the needs-based plan, while expenditures reached 94 percent of allocated resources. For the ICSP 2022-2025 that is still underway, the needs-based plan amounted to USD 1,370.02 million. As of 31 December 2022, it is funded at 64 percent, with expenditures amounting to 84 percent of allocated resources.

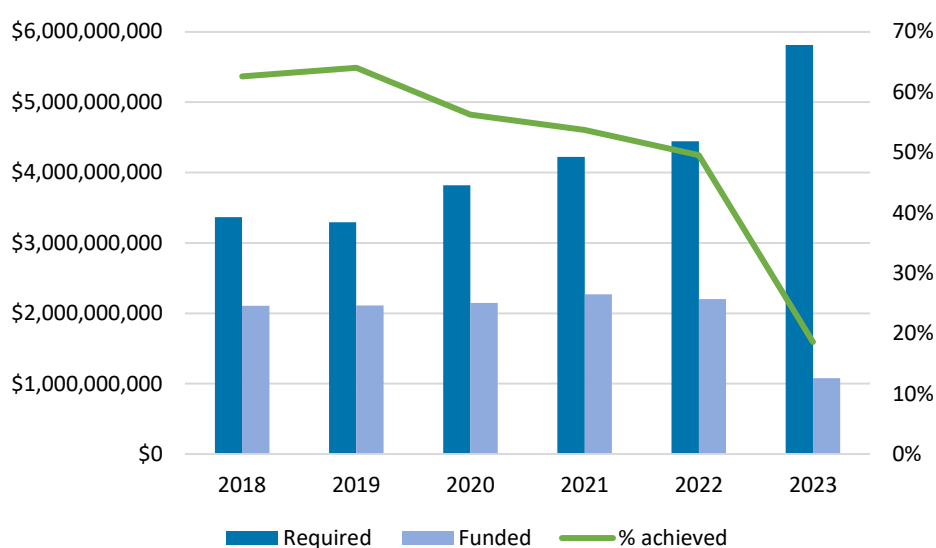
39. Annex XI provides detailed cumulative financial overviews of the T-ICSP, ICSP 2019-2021 and ICSP 2022-2025. These show that over the years, crisis response (SO1, SO4) has consistently utilized the majority of the budget (around 95 percent), while resilience (SO2, SO3) remained at a smaller proportion. While funding levels remained low across the years (as mentioned above), they were highest for SO1 and SO4, and lowest for SO2. Expenditures by strategic outcomes under the ICSP 2019-2021 neared 100 percent of allocated resources, while it varied for the T-ICSP and for the ICSP 2022-2025.

**Table 2: Summary cumulative financial overview by operation type (USD)<sup>54</sup>**

*NOTE: CURRENT NBP REFLECTS NBP AS PER LATEST BK.*

40. Figure 12 illustrates the top funding sources for WFP during the period 2018-2023 and covers three needs-based plans. USA and Germany were the two main donors for the three needs-based plans (T-)ICSPs (SY01, SY02 and SY03).

**Figure 12: Top ten funding sources for WFP Syria, 2018-2023**



Source: Syria SY01 Resource Situation Report 21/1/2019; Syria SY02 Resource Situation Report 1/20/2022; Syria SY03 Resource Situation Report 5/4/2023.

41. Table 3 shows that flexibility of funding has varied over the three plans. Under the T-ICSP, 94.2 percent of directed multilateral contributions were earmarked at the activity level, while under the ICSP 2019-2021 it decreased to 52.7 percent, and under the ICSP 2022-2025 further decreased to 40.2 percent. This highlights that activity-level earmarking decreased over the years in favour of country-level and strategic outcome-level earmarking. Flexible funds allowed the country office to make funds available where there were gaps.

<sup>54</sup> Allocated resources include multilateral and directed multilateral contributions (both programmed and unprogrammed portion), locally generated funds, other miscellaneous income, outstanding advances and resource transfer.

**Table 3: Directed multilateral contributions by earmarking levels<sup>55</sup>**

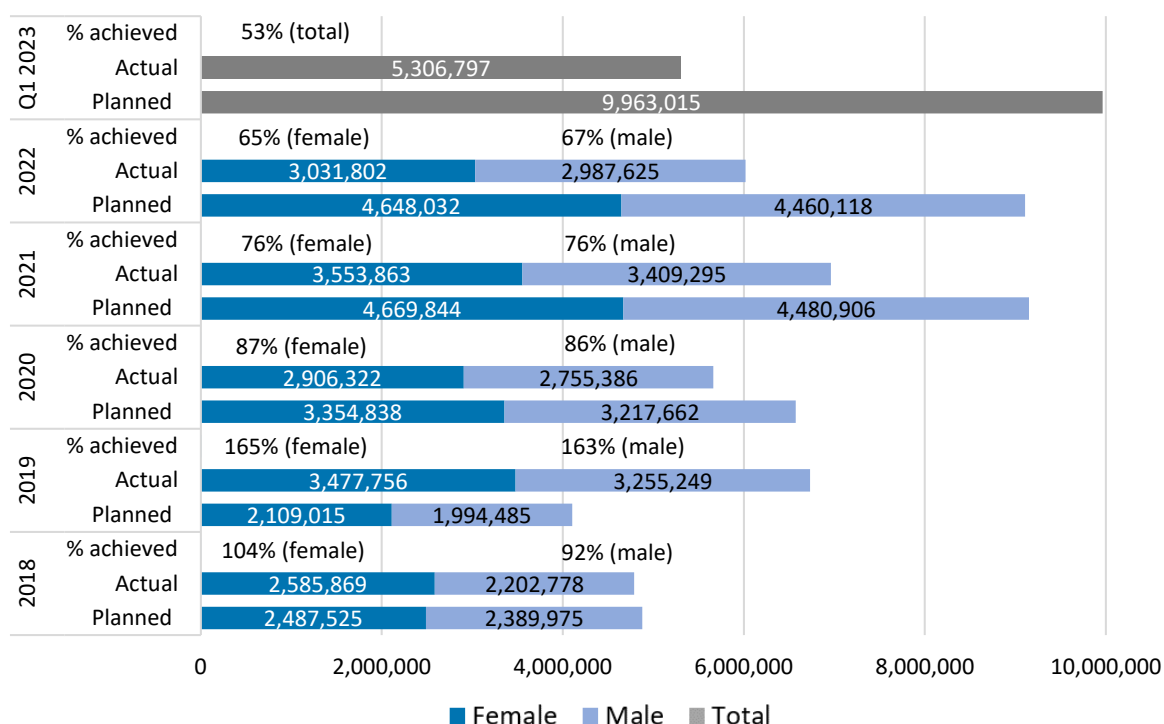
	T-ICSP (SY01)		ICSP (SY02)		ICSP (SY03)	
	Contributions (USD)	% of total contributions	Contributions (USD)	% of total contributions	Contributions (USD)	% of total contributions
Activity Level	393,313,963	94.2%	800,609,078	52.7%	238,752,195	40.2%
Country Level	23,701,833	5.7%	69,224,760	4.6%	92,490,282	15.6%
Strategic Outcome Level	20,467	0.0%	647,845,977	42.7%	261,815,690	44.1%
Strategic Result Level	693,334	0.2%	69,550	0.0%	-	-
Flexible Funding	-	-	-	-	973,710	0.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>417,729,597</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1,517,749,365</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>594,031,877</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: For SY01-02: WFP Syria Directed multilateral contributions by earmarking level as of 2.10.2022; For SY03: WFP SY03 update CSP contribution earmarking level as of 5.04.2023

## Beneficiaries

42. As shown in Figure 13, the actual number of beneficiaries assisted across the years increased from 4,788,647 beneficiaries reached in 2018 to 6,963,158 beneficiaries in 2021. Thereafter, the actual number of beneficiaries assisted decreased, reaching 5,306,797 in the first quarter (Q1) of 2023. There is overachievement in terms of beneficiaries reached for women and girls in 2018 and for both genders in 2019. For other years, there is an underachievement. Women and girls represented roughly half of planned and actual beneficiaries, ranging from 50 to 54 percent across the 2018-2022 period.

**Figure 13: Planned versus actual beneficiaries by gender, 2018-Q1 2023**



Source: WFP Syria 2018-2022 ACRs. 2023 data (Jan – April 2023) shared by Syria CO on 17.07.2023.

<sup>55</sup> Directed multilateral contributions (i.e. earmarked) are funds that a donor requests WFP to direct to a specific country, SO or activity.

Note: For 2023, gender disaggregated data is only available at activity level for the period covered.

43. As shown in



44. Table 4, unconditional resource transfers represent the activity category with the largest proportion of beneficiaries over the years. However, achievement rates progressively decreased from 2020 onwards. The school meals programme category represents the second largest proportion of beneficiaries and maintained an overall steady achievement rate. Meanwhile, asset creation and livelihood (ACL) activities showed significant underachievement and progressively decreased over the years. Nutrition prevention activities maintained high achievement rates during the 2018-2020 period but decreased thereafter, while nutrition treatment activities (NTA) showed improving achievement rates. These trends are further explored under EQ2 of the report (see Section 2.2).

**Table 4: Planned versus actual beneficiaries by activity category, 2018-Q1 2023**

		Unconditional resource transfers	School meals programme	Asset creation and livelihoods	Malnutrition prevention 1	Malnutrition prevention 2	Nutrition treatment
2018	Planned	4,000,000	1,050,000	800,000	200,000	60,000	45,000
	Actual	4,288,127	970,818	193,866	181,535	40,380	17,388
	% achieved	107%	92%	24%	91%	67%	39%
2019	Planned	3,500,002	1,105,000	900,000	364,800		45,000
	Actual	6,292,108	781,873	212,134	399,349		27,191
	% achieved	180%	71%	24%	109%		60%
2020	Planned	5,900,000	1,250,000	1,000,000	430,051		45,000
	Actual	5,318,637	1,102,436	109,675	417,796		37,824
	% achieved	90%	88%	11%	97%		84%
2021	Planned	8,250,000	795,000	600,000	598,800		45,000
	Actual	6,738,096	693,091	65,437	438,499		42,018
	% achieved	82%	87%	11%	73%		93%
2022	Planned	8,300,000	809,000	500,002	598,800		50,000
	Actual	5,751,206	616,149	19,677	434,425		65,789
	% achieved	69%	76%	4%	73%		132%
Q1 2023	Planned	9,325,012	680,000	375,003	598,800		50,000
	Actual	5,057,451	664,929	6,861	340,925		33,242

Source: WFP Syria CM-R020 2018-22; 2023 data (Jan–April 2023) shared by Syria country office on 17.07.2023.

Notes: i) In 2018 the T-ICSP contained the activity category malnutrition prevention 2, which under the ICSPs was merged into malnutrition prevention 1. Malnutrition prevention 2 focused on cash-based transfers to pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls for improved dietary diversity, while malnutrition prevention 1 focused on prevention of acute malnutrition in children 6-23 months; ii) Planned figures reflect the needs-based plan. Given the early stage (Q1) figures for 2023, the percentage achieved is not calculated for 2023.

45. Annex XI presents a more detailed overview of beneficiaries, transfers, other outputs and outcomes. It highlights actual cash-based transfer values as underperforming compared to planned values across the 2018-2023 period, particularly under SO1/Act1 (ranging from 0 to 16 percent achievement). Food transfers show an overall more positive picture for the 2018-2023 period but still show underperformance, particularly for SO2/Act3 livelihoods (ranging from 0 to 18 percent achievement).

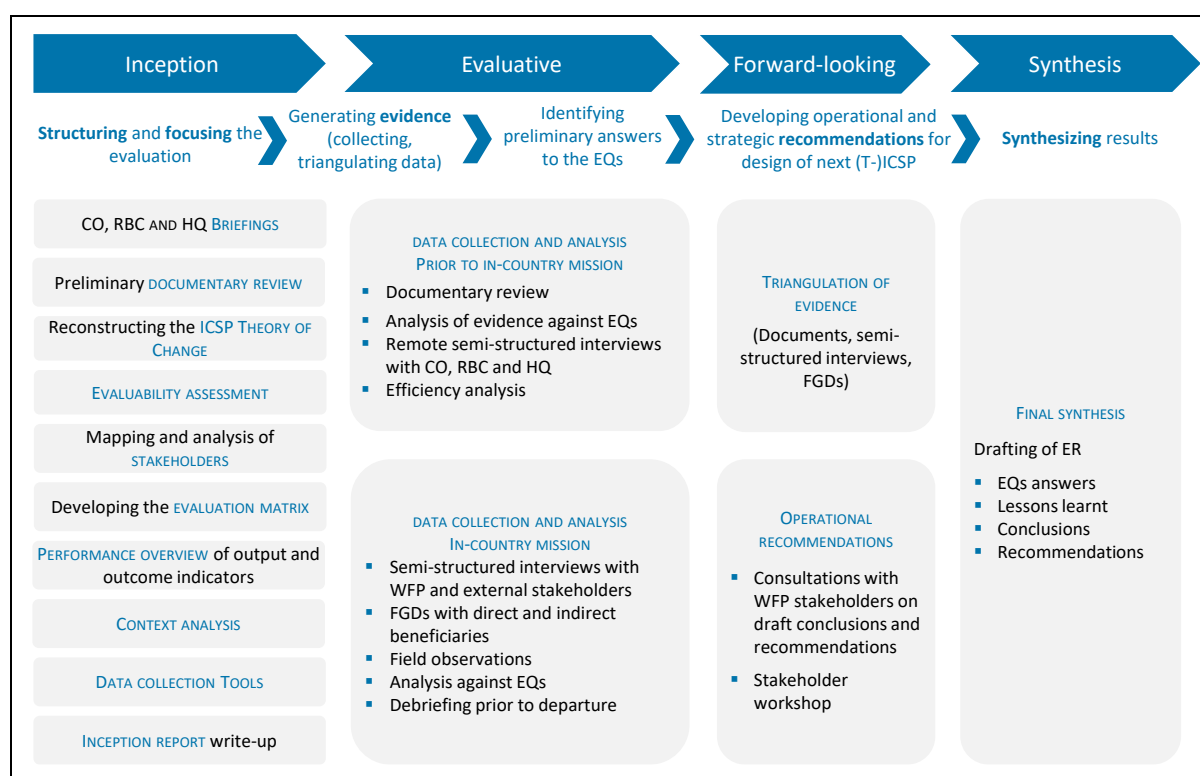
## 1.4. Evaluation methodology, limitations and ethical considerations

### Methodological approach

46. For this evaluation, data until end of Q2 2023 were used for analysis when available, though outcome data were only available until end of 2022. The evaluation analysis also considered any significant developments that occurred by the end of 2023.

47. A theory-based approach relying on contribution analysis was applied. The theory of change developed by the evaluation team enabled the team to place the logic of the CSP objectives and activities within a broader context. The methodological approach was also gender-sensitive, ensuring equal representation of women and men during the stakeholders' consultations and providing women the space to speak. Figure 14 provides a summary of the country strategic plan evaluation (CSPE) key methodological elements. The evaluation's full methodology is described in Annex XII and the accompanying evaluation matrix in Annex XIII.

Figure 14: Overview of key methodological elements



Source: Evaluation team.

48. The evaluation used a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches for data collection. The team analysed secondary data through a comprehensive desk review of existing documents and quantitative datasets (see Annex XI: Detailed performance overview and Annex XIX: Bibliography). The desk review was complemented by primary data collection, which included semi-structured key informant interviews during the inception and field visit phases.

49. The evaluation had a strong emphasis on community consultations to gain the perspective of communities on changing priorities and needs and whether responses had been adapted over time. Overall, 24 focus group discussions were conducted, including 21 focus group discussions with WFP beneficiaries supported by general food assistance, nutrition and livelihoods interventions; and 3 focus group discussions with non-beneficiaries. Table 5 shows a detailed breakdown of interviewees and beneficiaries consulted (for further details see Annex II: Key informants' overview and Annex XIV: Data collection tools).

Table 5: Stakeholders consulted during the inception and field missions, by gender

Stakeholder category	Women	Men	Total
WFP HQ, RBC, country office and field office staff	75	89	164
UN agencies and INGOs	5	5	10
Donors	7	2	9
CPs	11	22	33
Government	7	11	18
Private sector (third party monitors, warehouse companies)	1	6	7
FGD beneficiaries	113	81	194
FGD non-beneficiaries	4	18	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>457</b>

Source: Evaluation team.

50. The site visit locations in five governorates were purposively selected. The evaluation team selected the geographic areas where 80 percent of WFP operations are implemented in government-controlled areas.

51. During community consultations the evaluation team applied an inclusive approach and was gender-responsive. Mixed group settings were avoided when not appropriate and power dynamics at the community level were considered. The evaluation team, in close collaboration with WFP staff, ensured confidentiality and that the “do no harm” principles were guaranteed during community consultations.

52. An internal database of interview notes and documentary evidence was set up using the evaluation matrix as the guiding framework. Quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated to validate findings by identifying recurring themes, narratives and patterns of responses across data sources and data collection methods. During the data analysis the team tested the theory of change by examining whether the observed data and findings aligned with the logic of the theory of change with an emphasis on the identified vectors of change. The team substantiated the findings based on the evaluation matrix (Annex XIII).

53. The evaluation team paid particular attention to the areas of humanitarian assistance, transitioning to early recovery, effective targeting, accountability to affected populations, community feedback mechanisms (CFM) and operationalization of humanitarian principles across WFP operations with a focus on learning lessons from WFP experiences and supporting a forward-looking lens.

54. Four stakeholder workshops were organized with: the country office; the Government of Syria; cooperating partners and United Nations agencies; and donors in November 2023 to discuss and validate the draft recommendations.

## Limitations

55. Table 6 summarizes the limitations and mitigation measures undertaken during the evaluation process.

**Table 6: Limitations and mitigation measures during the CSPE**

Limitation	Mitigation measure
General validity of evaluations findings potentially affected by remote participation of some team members.	The evaluation team was able to validate the findings by triangulating the information provided by WFP through interviews with donors, other United Nations agencies, service providers, cooperating partners and community consultations.  During the in-country data collection phase, remote links were set up with the international team members to allow full participation in interviews.
Lack of access to some areas of the country and coverage of only WFP-assisted areas in Syria.	The evaluation team selected the geographic areas for the in-country field mission where the vast majority of WFP operations are implemented.
The reassignment of WFP international staff based on two-year cycles, which has an impact on institutional memory.	Strong consultation with national staff and with the regional bureau in Cairo and WFP headquarters staff.

Source: Evaluation team.

## Ethical considerations

The evaluation conformed to the 2020 United Nations Evaluation Group ethical guidelines. The evaluation team: obtained informed consent of interviewees; protected the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of interviewees; ensured compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation; considered cultural sensitivity; ensured equity in the selection of participants (including women and socially excluded groups); and ensured the evaluation resulted in no harm to participants or their communities. All interviews were confidential and used for the sole purpose of this evaluation.

## 2. Evaluation findings

56. The findings section is organized around the evaluation matrix and presents the responses to each sub-evaluation question. Summaries of evidence are presented by sub-evaluation question with the exception of sub-EQ 2.1.

### 2.1 EQ1: TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE TRANSITIONAL AND INTERIM COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLANS EVIDENCE-BASED AND STRATEGICALLY FOCUSED TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF THE MOST VULNERABLE?

#### EQ 1.1 To what extent are the transitional and interim country strategic plans informed by existing evidence on the hunger challenges, food security and nutrition issues prevailing in the country to ensure their relevance at the design stage?

**Summary Finding 1.** WFP assistance and intervention areas are a direct response to the priority needs of the crisis-affected population. WFP has strengthened its evidence base across its main focus areas, including food security, nutrition and resilience building. Assessments and surveys have informed the development of the (T-)ICSPs, underpinned the continued efforts of WFP to strengthen vulnerability-based targeting and strengthened the life-saving and life-sustaining interventions of WFP. Under the ICSPs, WFP adapted to changes in the context to support the early recovery and self-reliance of vulnerable communities.

57. **The attention given to both life-saving and life-sustaining interventions allowed WFP to respond to a double burden of needs.** Since the introduction of the 2018 T-ICSP, WFP has initiated an approach to maintain large-scale humanitarian assistance, gradually shifting from solely providing general food assistance to interventions that increase resilience and recovery of community-level assets and social safety nets (see also EQ1.4).<sup>56</sup>

58. **WFP has achieved a strong evidence base on food security and nutrition underpinning its operations.** WFP partners, including United Nations agencies, government, cooperating partners and donors, commented positively on the contribution of WFP towards a better understanding of the food security situation in the country (see

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<sup>56</sup> T-ICSP 2018; ICSP 2019-2021; ICSP 2022-2023.

59. Box 1). Research and monitoring data are considered one of the key comparative strengths of WFP. These assessments informed the design of the consecutive (T-)ICSPs and strengthened the knowledge of the wider humanitarian community operating in Syria. The 2015 evaluation of the regional response to the Syrian crisis recommended an enhanced evidence base (see Annex VIII), which WFP committed to address in its management response.<sup>57</sup>

60. The design of the (T-)ICSPs duly considered relevant recommendations and lessons learned identified in research and evaluation reports, including but not limited to: the Decentralized Evaluation on Emergency School Feeding (2015-2019) – Syria Evaluation Report; the 2018 Evaluation of the WFP Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis (2015-2018); findings from WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)-conducted crop and food security assessment missions (CFSAM); and the food security and livelihoods assessments (FSLA).

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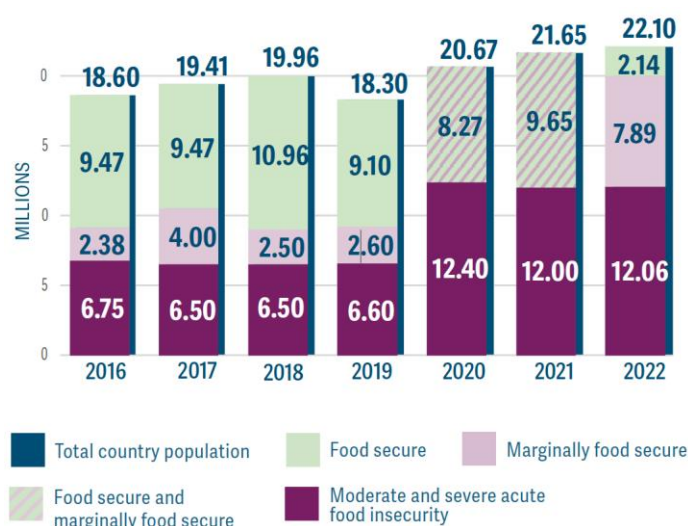
<sup>57</sup> WFP. 2018. *Evaluation of the WFP Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis (2015-2018)*.

## Box 1: Food security and vulnerability analysis

WFP knowledge products provided a regular picture on the food security situation and key vulnerability dimensions in the country, informed the (T-)ICSP designs and supported adjustments in targeting and activities. The tools developed and the systematic data collection and analysis have continued to provide a strong evidence base for the operations, including through the: i) mobile vulnerability and assessment mapping (mVAM) system; ii) market assessment and monthly food price monitoring of the WFP reference food basket in different governorates and the minimum expenditure basket; iii) annual crop and food security assessment missions; food security assessments in government-controlled areas (including northeast Syria); food security and livelihoods assessments in northwest Syria; and iv) socioeconomic impact assessments. WFP has been able to collect food security data from hard-to-reach areas through a network of cooperating partners and third-party monitors (TPMs) conducting remote data collection (see also EQ4).

61. The design of the T-ICSP 2018, ICSP 2019-2021, and the ICSP 2022-2025 **support both crisis response and resilience**. This operational strategy is in line with the 2016 WFP Syria+5 Vision 2020 that focused on maintaining life-saving food and nutrition interventions for the most vulnerable people, combined with restoring livelihoods and creating economic opportunities.<sup>58</sup>

**Figure 15: Acutely food-insecure and food-secure populations in Syria, 2016-2022**



Food Security Information Network (FSIN) and Global Network Against Food Crises. 2023. Global Report on Food Crises 2023.

62. WFP aimed to address the high and growing food assistance needs in Syria through general food assistance and school feeding. **General food assistance remained the largest WFP activity implemented in Syria**. As shown in Figure 15, the scale of assistance needed has increased considerably since 2018, with a notable upsurge in 2020 when 12.4 million people (60 percent of the population) were food insecure.

63. **This massive increase in need prompted a redesign of targeting in 2021**, leading WFP to set up a household-level vulnerability needs review (VNR) targeting exercise for government-controlled areas and the beneficiary enhanced selection tool in northwest Syria (see EQ2.1).

64. **WFP recognized early on that large-scale direct food assistance is not sustainable** and aimed to strike a balance between life-saving and life-sustaining interventions, taking advantage of the changes in the crisis context.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> WFP. Syria+5 Vision 2020. Laying the Foundation for Syria's Future. 2016.

<sup>59</sup> United Nations Syria. 2022. UNSF 2022-2025.



65. WFP responded through a **strong focus on malnutrition prevention and support for treatment where needed**. To understand better the nutrition situation in the country, WFP in collaboration with other United Nations agencies focused on implementing nutrition assessments in 2022.<sup>60</sup> These assessments informed the WFP response in addressing malnutrition (see EQ2.1 SO3).

## **EQ 1.2 To what extent are the transitional and interim country strategic plans aligned with national priorities and plans, humanitarian response plans (HRP), United Nations strategic frameworks and the sustainable development goals (SDGs)?**

**Summary Finding 2.** Through their crisis response and resilience operations, the (T-)ICSPs have been aligned with the humanitarian response plans priorities, advocating for both humanitarian response and increased focus on recovery and resilience. The move towards a dual-track approach is also aligned with the priorities outlined in the UNSF 2022-2025 and the Government's objective to support agricultural production.

66. **The (T-)ICSPs were aligned with the focus of the Government, United Nations agencies and beneficiaries on the shift from life-saving assistance to restoring livelihoods and resilience.** There is vast destruction of productive assets across the country and stakeholders interviewed – from the Government, United Nations agencies and beneficiaries – highlighted the importance of repairing those assets to be able to move away gradually and responsibly from humanitarian assistance. The humanitarian response plans have highlighted the importance of working on three strategic objectives, including life-saving assistance, protection and restoring livelihoods.<sup>61</sup> WFP operations of general food assistance, nutrition and resilience combined with the logistical support and coordination efforts have directly supported these objectives.

67. **The ICSPs align with the Government's commitments to support the recovery of agricultural production.** Government stakeholders welcomed the dual-track approach and indicated that more resources should be allocated to early recovery interventions to support a move away from food assistance where feasible.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, it was stressed that humanitarian assistance should be maintained in the transition period, recognizing that it is the only lifeline for a high number of people.<sup>63</sup> Relevant for WFP is that the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform has prepared its 2030 Plan for Agriculture, which includes the restoration of irrigation networks to support the growing of agricultural crops as a priority.

68. **The ICSPs align with the commitments to contribute to SDG 2 (zero hunger) and SDG 17 (partnerships).** In 2020, Syria presented its voluntary national review of progress against the sustainable development goals, emphasizing the importance of "leaving no one behind", ending extreme poverty and hunger, implementing nationally appropriate social protection systems, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture.<sup>64</sup> WFP has contributed to the achievement of the Strategic Framework for Cooperation between the Government and the United Nations (2016-2020; 2022-2025). The (T-)ICSPs support the United Nations strategic framework collective outcomes agreed in 2018 to gradually complement the short-term humanitarian response with a mid-term resilience approach, sustainable community recovery and resilience building that can mitigate the risks of further deterioration of the humanitarian situation.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2021. In 2022, WFP through its food security assessment (FSA)/FSLA commissioned a Joint Assessment for Nutrition and Food Security serving as sources of nutrition indicators in the last standardized monitoring and assessment of relief and transitions (SMART) of that year.

<sup>61</sup> OCHA. HRP 2019-2023.

<sup>62</sup> Interviews with government stakeholders.

<sup>63</sup> Interviews with CPs.

<sup>64</sup> Syrian Arab Republic. 2020. *The First National Report on Sustainable Development SDGs. Executive Summary.*

<sup>65</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework 2022-2025.

69. **WFP laid the groundwork to better understand existing social safety nets.**<sup>66</sup> Syria has a long history of social safety net systems and public subsidies. However, the 2014 Social Safety Net Strategy is considered insufficient in terms of quality.<sup>67</sup> The WFP strategy is to move towards cash assistance for its own operations and provide technical assistance to relevant technical ministries to support the targeting of the most vulnerable. This is aligned with the UNSF 2022-2025, highlighting the need for social protection.

70. **Bringing children back to school is “priority number 1” for the Ministry of Education.**<sup>68</sup> **School feeding to food insecure children, including e-vouchers, to support out-of-school children (OOSC) are considered relevant to support this goal.**

WFP is planning to progressively scale up the provision of cash-based transfers for 200,000 out-of-school children in alignment with the education sector’s enrolment targets.<sup>69</sup> This is aligned with the humanitarian response plan 2023 education sector objectives to provide children with cash-based transfer or vouchers for education to support enrolment (Activity 16).<sup>70</sup>

"Need to revive the Social Aid Fund to provide assistance targeting the most vulnerable with cash assistance. The food basket phase should be over. We need to support farmers to produce food. Ninety percent of people are not reaching food security." - Government stakeholder

### EQ 1.3 To what extent are the transitional and interim country strategic plans coherent and aligned with the wider United Nations and to what extent do they include appropriate strategic partnerships based on the comparative advantage of WFP in the country?

**Summary Finding 3.** There is a high degree of coherence with the United Nations strategic framework in Syria. WFP is considered a constructive partner within the United Nations system in Syria, it does not work in isolation from others and is seen as an active partner in the UNHCT and UNCT. WFP engagement has contributed to a more coherent and effective response.

71. **WFP worked towards complementing its large-scale humanitarian assistance with early recovery and resilience activities.** This approach is in line with the UNCT approach of combining equitable access to critical basic services with enhancing livelihoods. The comparative advantage of WFP in aligning its operations with the context lies in its logistical strength and nationwide reach, its knowledge and expertise in general food assistance, nutrition and livelihoods.<sup>71</sup>

72. WFP co-leads the food security cluster (FSC) and coordinates extensively with partners in the food security sector to avoid duplication of assistance. WFP leads the emergency telecommunications cluster (ETC) and the logistics cluster. WFP coordinates cross-border movement, inter-agency convoys and common storage (see EQ 2.1. SO4). The gender working group is co-chaired by WFP with the aim of contributing to gender equality outcomes. WFP leads the accountability to affected populations task force mandated by the UNCT, co-leads under the UNSF the social protection pillar with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and co-leads the external cash working group.

73. The design of the successive (T-)ICSPs identified partnerships with other United Nations agencies in support of early recovery in the agricultural sector and livelihoods. **WFP combined efforts with agencies such as FAO and UNDP to support larger-scale agricultural early recovery** interventions for food security in rural areas. Under its early agricultural recovery approach WFP focused on the repair of communal productive assets to restart the production of crops to support food security, often in collaboration with United Nations agencies such as FAO and UNDP.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>66</sup> WFP. ACR. 2022.

<sup>67</sup> Government interviews.

<sup>68</sup> Interviews with MoE.

<sup>69</sup> WFP Syria ICSP 2022-2023.

<sup>70</sup> OCHA. Syria HRP 2023. Accessed 18/08/2023. <https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1114/ge/6961>.

<sup>71</sup> Interviews with external stakeholders.

<sup>72</sup> WFP. 2023. Situation Report 5.

74. **WFP also contributed to the nutrition priority under the last UNSF.**<sup>73</sup> WFP partnered with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in nutrition support for pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls (PBWG).<sup>74</sup> WFP cooperates with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in line with the corporate agreement on community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM) and provides occasional logistics support for UNICEF programmes.

#### **EQ 1.4 To what extent are the transitional and interim country strategic plan designs internally coherent and based on a clear theory of change articulating the WFP role and contributions in a realistic manner and based on its comparative advantages as defined in the WFP strategic plan?**

**Summary Finding 4.** The intervention logic of the (T-)ICSPs places a strong emphasis on food and nutrition assistance, leveraging WFP operational and logistical capabilities effectively. However, it does not reflect adequately the WFP vision of complementing humanitarian assistance with longer-term programming in support of early recovery, resilience and disaster risk reduction (DRR).

75. The (T-)ICSPs articulate the WFP role in Syria focusing on addressing the increasing basic food and nutrition needs of food insecure Syrians across all governorates. They also involve supporting food systems and livelihood opportunities at the household and community levels, as well as providing support services to humanitarian partners. Since the 2018 T-ICSP, WFP has gradually introduced a dual-track approach to simultaneously address emergency response and the underlying causes of food insecurity. Across the three (T-)ICSPs, there are no significant changes, with life-saving food assistance remaining at the core, but with an expanded use of cash-based transfers. Notable developments include a stronger focus on enhancing operational procedures and the introduction of technical assistance to strengthen national social safety nets. The (T-)ICSPs were developed to leverage the comparative advantages of WFP, which include its operational and logistical capacity to provide large-scale food assistance, strong partnerships and effective assessment and monitoring systems.

76. The reconstructed theory of change, includes four strategic outcomes with two, SO1 and SO4, under crisis response and two, SO2 and SO3, under resilience building. While all strategic outcomes are contextually relevant, it was found that **SO2 does not elaborate sufficiently on the resilience and recovery objectives**. The target group in the description of both SO1 and SO2 is the same, supporting a dual-track approach. However, SO2-selected indicators do not support adequately the measurement of resilience results due to their predominantly quantitative nature. The intervention logic, and therefore the reconstructed theory of change, does not mention early recovery or disaster risk reduction. The country office was working to collect additional data through case studies or intervention-based assessments, such as the Sector 5 irrigation project impact report.<sup>75</sup>

77. **There is not yet strong conceptual clarity on how WFP can best use its comparative advantage and strengths in support of a resilience agenda in the country.**<sup>76</sup> At a corporate level, WFP policy and guidance on resilience also requires updating.<sup>77</sup> Stakeholders indicated that, in the context of Syria, the lack of funding for resilience and early recovery for political reasons is an important additional factor preventing WFP from elaborating a longer-term strategy in support of these interventions. Another factor is unclear strategies and an as-yet-undefined vision for resilience with which WFP can align its response plans. Furthermore, the UNSF, which aligns the United Nations agenda with government priorities, is the first in years, emphasizing protracted recovery and services restoration.

78. **Vectors of change identified in the reconstructed theory of change** remain overall relevant but may require some amendments in order to take external factors into consideration. An example is the

<sup>73</sup> “Strengthening and scaling up crucial nutrition services across the primary health care services to prevent malnutrition in early childhood and pregnancy and to promote growth and development of children and the nation.” (UN Syria. 2022. UNSF 2022-2025).

<sup>74</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2020-2021.

<sup>75</sup> WFP. 2022. Sector 5 Irrigation System Rehabilitation: End of Activity Review.

<sup>76</sup> Interviews with WFP staff.

<sup>77</sup> WFP. 2023. Evaluation of WFP’s Policy on Building Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition.

strengthened national capacity to support social safety nets. If restrictions remain in place prohibiting humanitarian and development actors to support the technical capacity of government agencies, then unsustainable parallel systems will remain in place.

79. The theory of change identified the underlying assumption that increased focus on resilience building will reduce the need for crisis response such as general food assistance. The worsening of the context – outside the control of humanitarian agencies such as WFP – did not realize this change.

### **EQ 1.5 To what extent has WFP strategic positioning remained relevant throughout the implementation of the transitional and interim country strategic plans considering changing national context, national capacities and needs? – for example, the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic crisis,<sup>78</sup> the Ukraine crisis (impacting food availability), climate shocks?**

**Summary Finding 5.** The (T-)ICSPs have remained relevant and enabled adaptation to contextual changes. The (T-)ICSPs have also allowed adaptation to the different geopolitical contexts in Syria.

80. An important adjustment to the context was the increase of assistance following the sharp rise in food insecurity in 2019. The WFP caseload increased rapidly up until mid-2021. However, because of reductions in funding, WFP was unable to maintain the level of its assistance and was forced – as a first step – to reduce the contents of the food basket.

81. WFP has also planned for a contingency buffer of 550,000 additional general food assistance beneficiaries for three months each year in the event of sudden-onset emergencies (floods, fires, earthquakes) or unforeseen needs, such as refugee returns or conflict-related population displacement.<sup>79</sup>  
**This pre-positioning of food allowed WFP to respond quickly following the 2023 earthquake.**

82. With increased funding reductions impacting general food assistance, interlocutors during the in-country evaluation mission stressed that while any assistance is better than nothing, **the relevance and effectiveness of this reduced assistance on addressing food insecurity is becoming increasingly questionable** (see EQ2.1).<sup>80</sup>

83. WFP has continued to advocate for support to early recovery, but results are limited because of the restrictions under the sanctions regime imposed on Syria.

## **2.2 EQ 2: What is the extent and quality of WFP's specific contribution to transitional and interim country strategic plan strategic outcomes in Syria?**

### **EQ 2.1 To what extent did WFP activities and outputs contribute to the expected outcomes of the transitional and interim country strategic plans and to the UNSF and other United Nations humanitarian frameworks? Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative?**

SO1: Food-insecure populations affected by the crisis, including host communities, internally displaced persons and returnees across all governorates in the Syrian Arab Republic, meet their food and nutrition needs all year round.

SO1: Overall achievement

**Summary Finding 6.** WFP was able to respond to food security needs across Syria through large-scale general food assistance operations. As of 2020, WFP was no longer able to meet the increased demands for food assistance because of the increase in humanitarian needs and the reduced availability of financial resources. WFP has worked towards a better targeting approach to ensure that the most vulnerable are being assisted. However, the reduced food basket caloric value and the rotation of beneficiaries receiving

<sup>78</sup> World Bank. 2020. *The World Bank in the Syrian Arab Republic*. Accessed on 21/11/2022.

<sup>79</sup> WFP Syria APP 2022.

<sup>80</sup> Interviews with WFP and CP staff.

food assistance meant that the impact on household food insecurity has been significantly reduced. School feeding led to increased attendance and retention but not enrolment rates, and the number of children reached decreased after 2020 due to financial limitations.

84. **Under SO1, Act1** covers unconditional resource transfers to food-insecure households while **Act2** covers school feeding in formal and non-formal education centres.

85. **Overall, general food assistance had a stabilizing effect on the food security of the crisis-affected population.** However, reduced financial resources combined with a deterioration in the context (caused by both the crisis and economic decline) have negatively impacted the ability of WFP to respond. This is reflected in a deterioration of the situation in households with a poor food consumption score (FCS) and an increase in the number of households using negative coping strategies.

86. **WFP school-based assistance (snacks, school meals, cash-based transfers) had a positive effect on school attendance and retention rates.** However, the value of the WFP food voucher was perceived as too low by various stakeholders to have had a major effect on re-enrolment numbers.

87. SO1 contributes to strategic objective 1 of the humanitarian response plan (providing life-saving humanitarian assistance) and pillar I of the UNSF 2022–2025 (availability and access to basic and social services).

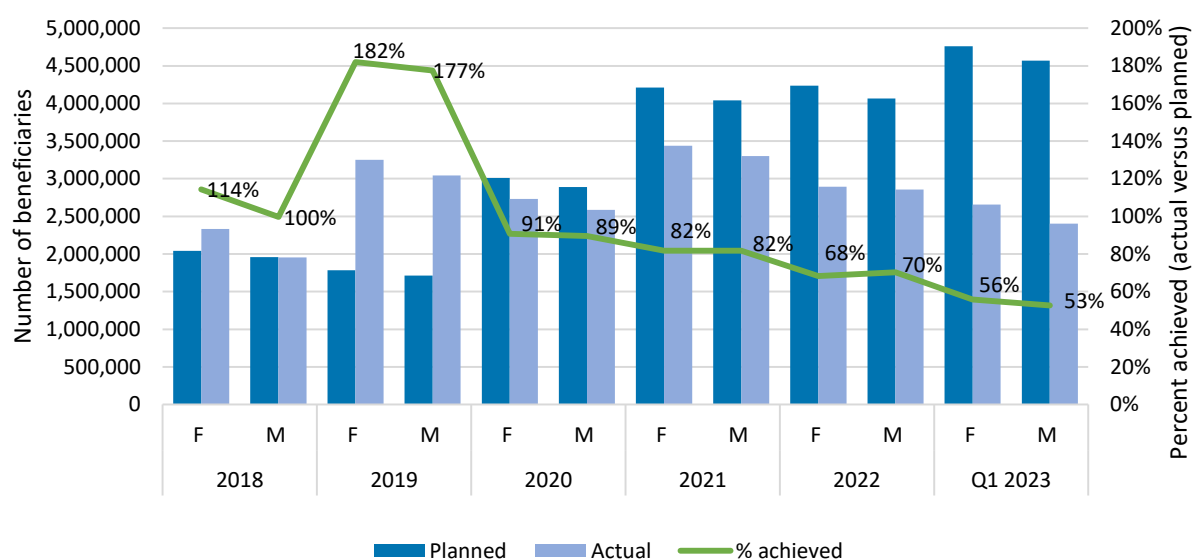
SO1: Achievement of outputs

### SO1/Act1 General food assistance

**Summary Finding 7.** The strength of WFP and its ability to respond rapidly in a deteriorating country context was clearly shown from 2020 onwards. As part of its humanitarian mandate, WFP increased efforts to rapidly respond to rising needs by increasing the number of beneficiaries while resources were sufficient, followed by the reduction of the food basket caloric value to allow a maximum reach of beneficiaries. In parallel, WFP worked on strengthening its targeting and prioritization of beneficiaries based on vulnerability.

88. In 2019, WFP, in response to a rapid increase in food insecurity, increased its coverage and reached 50 percent more beneficiaries than initially planned (see Figure 16).

**Figure 16: SO1/Act1 planned versus actual beneficiaries by gender, 2018 – Q1 2023**



Source: COMET Report 2018-2022 CM-R020; 2023 data shared by Syria country office on 17.07.2023.

89. Exceptionally strong donor support meant the needs-based plan for 2019 was fully funded and that WFP was able to meet the demands of the needed scale-up to reach on average 96 percent of the targeted

beneficiaries each month (Table 7).<sup>81</sup> Expenditures were low in 2019 because funding was received late in the year and was migrated towards 2020.<sup>82</sup> Level of expenditures compared with available resources is determined by date of receipt of funding, supply chain disruptions, security and access to the different geographic locations for food distributions.<sup>83</sup>

**Table 7: SO1/Act1 financial overview, 2018-2022<sup>84</sup>**

Year	Needs Based Plan (NBP)	Implementation plan (IP)	Available resources	% on NBP	% on IP	Expenditures	% on Available resources
2018	503,479,798	-	405,357,096	81%	-	306,382,575	76%
2019	455,041,117	307,731,240	549,814,780	121%	179%	396,043,198	72%
2020	697,084,826	569,505,596	561,997,329	81%	99%	437,362,487	78%
2021	842,522,678	419,357,173	470,002,489	56%	112%	427,610,474	91%
2022	918,508,612	500,808,221	649,553,369	71%	130%	578,947,976	89%

Source: WFP Syria ACRs 2018 – 2022.

90. The vulnerability and needs of the population for general food assistance continued to increase after 2019, which is reflected in Table 8 and Table 9. However, funding resources received were insufficient to meet the growing food insecurity and provide general food assistance to all those in need (Table 7). Progress on the roll-out of cash-based transfers was hampered by funding limitations with the majority of funding earmarked for in-kind.<sup>85</sup> As of mid-2022, increased funding became available; however, delays occurred due to hold-ups in the vulnerability needs review<sup>86</sup> results and challenges in access to personal identifiable information data. In northwest Syria, a high number of general food assistance beneficiaries switched to value vouchers in 2022.<sup>87</sup>

**Table 8: SO1/Act1 planned versus actual beneficiaries by modality, 2018-Q1 2023**

Year	Planned			Actual			% achieved		
	Food	CBT	CV	Food	CBT	CV	Food	CBT	CV
2018	4,000,000	-	-	4,288,127	-	-	107%	-	-
2019	2,900,000	600,000	-	6,292,108	0	-	217%	0%	-
2020	5,900,000	500,002	-	5,318,637	35,291	-	90%	7%	-
2021	8,250,000	500,002	0	6,729,514	36,945	8,582	82%	7%	-
2022	7,250,000	1,050,000	-	5,608,711	395,167	-	77%	38%	-
Q1 2023	5,340,675	300,000	-	4,862,476	339,045	-			

Source: COMET Report 2018-2022 CM-R020; 2023 data (Jan–April 2023) shared by Syria country office on 17.07.2023.

Note: CV = commodity voucher; Planned figures reflect the needs-based plan, except for 2023 planned figures, which reflect the operational plan. Given the latter as well as the early stage (Q1) figures for 2023, the percentage achieved is not calculated for 2023.

<sup>81</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2019.

<sup>82</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2019-2020.

<sup>83</sup> Consultations with WFP stakeholders; WFP Syria ACR 2022.

<sup>84</sup> Table 7 – **Needs-based plan**: reflects requirements based on needs assessments undertaken in collaboration with government counterparts and partners. NBPs are developed for the full duration of the CSP. **Implementation plan**: is an annual prioritized plan of work, derived from the NBP, prioritized, and adjusted based on the funding forecasts, available resources, and potential/actual operational challenges. **Available resources**: are annualized value of allocated contributions plus unspent balances carried forward from previous years. Includes multilateral and directed multilateral contributions, locally generated funds, other miscellaneous income, outstanding advances and resource transfer.

<sup>85</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2019. WFP KIIs.

<sup>86</sup> The vulnerability needs review (VNR) is a household-level data collection and analysis conducted by WFP and partners to direct food assistance to the most vulnerable families in Syria.

<sup>87</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2022.



91. **WFP took several steps to minimize the effects on beneficiaries of insufficient funding for general food assistance.** This approach initially included a reduction of caloric value, followed by a rotation in distributions until WFP was finally forced to reduce the number of general food assistance beneficiaries in 2023 because of a combination of reduced donor support and higher costs of food items.<sup>88</sup> In 2020, WFP used 588,667 metric tons (mt) of actual food to reach 5.3 million beneficiaries. In 2021, WFP used a reduced 532,467 mt of actual food to reach a higher number of 6.7 million beneficiaries (Table 9).

**Table 9: SO1/Act1 planned versus actual food (mt), cash-based transfers and commodity vouchers (CV) (USD) transfers, 2018-2023**

Year	Planned			Actual			% achieved		
	Food	CBT	CV	Food	CBT	CV	Food	CBT	CV
2018	596,361	-	-	362,161	-	-	61%	-	-
2019	446,999	86,400,000	-	480,854	0	-	108%	0%	-
2020	817,320	36,000,000	-	588,667	1,718,072	-	72%	5%	-
2021	938,044	68,400,000	0	532,467	1,408,750	120,748	57%	2%	-
2022	900,168	94,860,000	0	466,352	15,376,744	69,234	52%	16%	-
2023	1,696,545	172,280,000	-	88,206	4,105,728	-	5%	2%	-

Source: COMET Report 2018 CM-R014; ACR 2019-2022; COMET Report 2023 CM C002, as at 19.5.23; COMET Report 2023 CM-P006 and CM-A004, as at 6.7.23.

92. **The reduction in caloric value was not well received by beneficiaries.**<sup>89</sup> Before the reduction in government areas, 59 percent of beneficiaries were satisfied with the overall quantity of the monthly ration. This decreased to 41 percent after the reduction.

93. This was also the opinion shared by the beneficiaries whom the evaluation team met in the different governorates. Beneficiaries mentioned that the quantities of oil, sugar, rice and wheat flour were not sufficient to meet monthly needs. They also highlighted that the food basket no longer contained a good variety of food items. **Based on the feedback received, the evaluation team found that the composition of the food basket items is mainly driven by caloric count and price.** However, while beneficiaries expressed their dissatisfaction with the reduced food basket contents and with the rotation schedule, all beneficiaries mentioned that the general food distribution was a lifeline for those who received it. This finding was also made in the 2018 WFP regional response evaluation.

94. Based on interviews with WFP staff, it is evident that **the strategy of first reducing the caloric value of the food basket was motivated by the desire to avoid putting people under shock to minimize harm** and to allow for a transition period. The reduction in support by WFP came at the same time as the Government was forced to reduce several subsidies, such as for bread and fuel. Reducing beneficiaries too quickly would have likely resulted in tensions and put cooperating partners at risk. During the data collection mission, the evaluation team was informed about numerous incidents where beneficiaries came to the food distribution centres to express their despair and anger.

95. Following government approval, WFP conducted a cash-based transfer trial in 2020. **The pilot showed that households receiving hybrid food assistance (both in-kind food and cash vouchers) were more likely to improve or maintain their food consumption.**<sup>90</sup> It shielded some vulnerable households from falling further into food insecurity as the economic situation deteriorated. Most households receiving hybrid assistance maintained acceptable food consumption levels and the adoption of negative livelihoods-based coping strategies decreased significantly. Nearly all (98 percent) household heads confirmed a preference for hybrid assistance by the end of the pilot.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2020.

<sup>89</sup> WFP. 2022. *GFA Beneficiary Food Basket Analysis. Review of 2021 data.*

<sup>90</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2021.

<sup>91</sup> WFP. 2021. *Benefits of mixed modality assistance for food security in Syria. Evidence from a pilot project in Damascus and Rural Damascus (2020).*



96. However, WFP reports indicated that the sharp increase in the cost of basic food items, as well as the unfavourable official exchange rate, means that **the hybrid modality remains much more expensive than pure in-kind assistance, hampering any large-scale expansion of the use of this modality.**<sup>92</sup>

97. WFP progressively scaled up the use of the hybrid modality to reach 37,000 people in 2021 and aimed to further expand the scale-up to cover around 200,000 beneficiaries.<sup>93</sup> The planned scaling-up of the hybrid modality was decided based on the results of the pilot project and after the necessary government approvals were obtained. By 2022, WFP was able to scale up the hybrid modality by reaching 115,000 general food assistance beneficiaries targeting the most vulnerable households.<sup>94</sup> Cash-based transfer beneficiaries are registered through SCOPE, the WFP beneficiary management platform.<sup>95</sup> Based on feedback from WFP and cooperating partners it was found that SCOPE is considered as a not-very-flexible system, with general food assistance beneficiaries included on another platform. Working with two systems – for in-kind and cash – was considered inefficient.<sup>96</sup>

98. **Beneficiaries consulted during the evaluation mission stressed their preference for the hybrid modality to mitigate food cost increases due to inflation and said that they were unfamiliar with cash assistance.** In northwest Syria, WFP started a full cash-based transfer project under its general food assistance activity in early 2022 and some 142,500 general food assistance beneficiaries had switched to value vouchers by the end of 2022. WFP was planning to scale up to reach 500,000 beneficiaries by the end of 2023 but it was found during the data collection phase that this target would not be reached, mainly because of financial constraints.<sup>97</sup>

99. **WFP developed programmatic mitigation guidelines – based on the WFP Global COVID-19 Response Plan<sup>98</sup> – which allowed most activities to continue uninterrupted** (except for school-based interventions). During the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP provided food assistance in quarantine centres and areas under localized lockdowns in coordination with the World Health Organization (WHO). WFP also changed its distribution modalities in certain areas and increased the number of general food assistance distribution days and distribution shifts to avoid crowding at food distribution points (FDPs). For example, in the camps, food was distributed from trucks to avoid beneficiaries having to line up in distribution centres. During the COVID-19 school closures WFP provided take-home rations for schoolchildren.<sup>99</sup>

## SO1/Act2 School feeding

**Summary Finding 8.** Due to budget constraints, the target numbers were significantly reduced in both 2021 and 2022. Despite this, the achievement rate remained consistently below 85 percent on average compared to the planned targets. Together with UNICEF, a steady number of “Curriculum B”<sup>100</sup> students were successfully reached, and non-food items distributed.

100. WFP provides three components: i) fortified date bars; ii) fresh meals for children in selected schools;<sup>101</sup> and iii) value vouchers for students of the “Curriculum B” programme. Whereas the first two components target children in primary schools, the last one is part of a retention programme for children 8-14 years of age.

101. **The largest number of beneficiaries is reached with school-based in-kind distribution** (Figure 17) with most of the children receiving date bars. Fresh meal provision, which started in 2017, was provided

<sup>92</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2022.

<sup>93</sup> WFP Syria APP 2022.

<sup>94</sup> WFP. Syria. ACR 2022.

<sup>95</sup> WFP. 2016. SCOPE. Know them better, to serve them better.

<sup>96</sup> Interviews with WFP and CP staff.

<sup>97</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2022.

<sup>98</sup> WFP Global Response to COVID-19. 2020. Updated in September and November 2020.

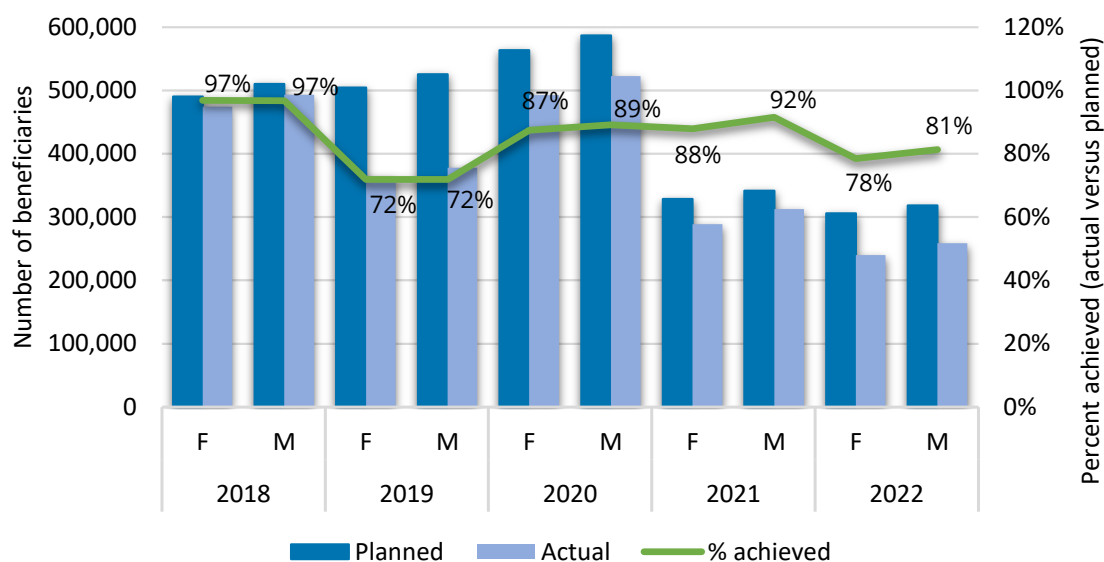
<sup>99</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2020.

<sup>100</sup> A programme designed to enable out-of-school children, who have missed years of school due to the crisis, to re-integrate into the formal education system.

<sup>101</sup> Starting in 2017 in East-Aleppo and from 2021/2022 also in Damascus and rural Damascus.

initially to 15,000 children and increased to 55,500 children in 2022; including 532 children with disabilities.<sup>102</sup> Targets declined after 2020, influenced partly by budget constraints and partly by a strategic shift prioritizing cash-based transfers and fresh meals. Consequently, overall achievement decreased, particularly for the distribution of date bars.

**Figure 17: Planned versus actual number of primary school children receiving school-based in-kind distribution (date bars and fresh meals)**



Source: WFP Syria ACRs 2019-2022; WFP 2018 CM-R020.

102. WFP also provided cash-based transfers in the Curriculum B programme, and during school closures in 2020 and 2021. Moreover, in 2020, 45,800 school children received a cash-based transfer to purchase hygiene items through UNICEF-provided top-ups.<sup>103</sup> The target numbers kept increasing related to rising needs as reported by the Ministry of Education, but actual numbers decreased, leading to a decreasing proportion of actual against planned.

103. WFP, with UNICEF, provided limited support to self-learning centres for children and adolescents with disabilities upon request from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. The planned assistance consisted of food assistance to households of 694 pupils (399 boys, 295 girls) in these centres.<sup>104</sup> As per March 2022, the first 127 households were reached with e-vouchers,<sup>105</sup> in April 2022, another 240, and in May 2022, an additional 195.<sup>106</sup>

104. Additionally, from 2018 WFP has partnered with UNICEF to provide date bars and e-vouchers to children in non-formal education, initially in camps in northeast Syria (with date bars), expanding to Raqqa (with date bars) and Dara'a (with e-vouchers) in 2022.<sup>107</sup> WFP support to children coming from out of the government areas to sit for national exams was implemented in between 2020 and 2023. WFP supported

<sup>102</sup> As part of a pilot, and at the request of MoSAL, WFP provided school meals to 532 students with disabilities, beneficiaries of MoSAL's centres (five out of 32 centres located in Damascus and Rural Damascus). The students received sandwiches in the first half of the year and date bars in the second half.

<sup>103</sup> The value of UNICEF top up was USD 10 added to the WFP voucher value of USD 20 for 2 months. After that, WFP continued during COVID-19 to allow the purchase of food and hygiene items with the e-voucher.

<sup>104</sup> WFP. 2022. Concept Note for SSN Pilot Intervention Disability Support Centres.

<sup>105</sup> WFP Syria, 2022. Internal Situation Report #3.

<sup>106</sup> WFP Syria, 2022. Internal Situation Report #4.

<sup>107</sup> In Ar-Raqqa and Dar'a governorates, from 2022, 240 children in camps were supported. The pilot in Ar-Raqqa was discontinued but Dar'a is ongoing and may be scaled up. The support included children with disability, adolescent 5-18 years of age, and young women >18 preparing for national exams.

essential food needs of hosted students through provision of “ready-to-eat” baskets, fortified date bars, bread and hot meals.<sup>108</sup>

105. The fresh meal component also provided income to vulnerable women from local communities who made up the workforce, although the result was not measured. The products were sourced locally to benefit the local economy.

106. WFP furthermore worked to enhance the capacity to implement various forms of school feeding of Ministry of Education staff and staff from on average 3,500 participating schools<sup>109</sup> through workshops and training. WFP also supported UNICEF and UNESCO in their efforts to develop a National Education Management Information System and a national Transitional Education Plan.<sup>110</sup>

SO1: Achievement of outcomes

### SO1/Act1 General food assistance

**Summary Finding 9.** From 2020, the food security situation deteriorated against most general food assistance outcome indicators showing the imbalance between the needs of the vulnerable population and the resources available to WFP to respond.

107. **General food assistance, mainly through in-kind food distribution, represents the largest WFP activity in Syria**, accounting for two thirds of its needs-based plan in 2020 and 2022, and is **directly aligned with the WFP core mandate of achieving SDG 2 zero hunger**. Focus group discussions with beneficiaries and cooperating partners all highlighted that the in-kind food basket is a lifesaver for many families and is making a critical difference in food availability for food-insecure and highly vulnerable families. Monitoring data collected by WFP in 2019 showed that most households receiving general food assistance had acceptable levels of food consumption, illustrating the contribution made by WFP assistance on their food security with a notable increase in the rate of acceptable food consumption among households headed by women. From 2020 onwards, there was a deterioration in the food security situation, which is reflected in the general food assistance food consumption score (FCS) (Figure 18).

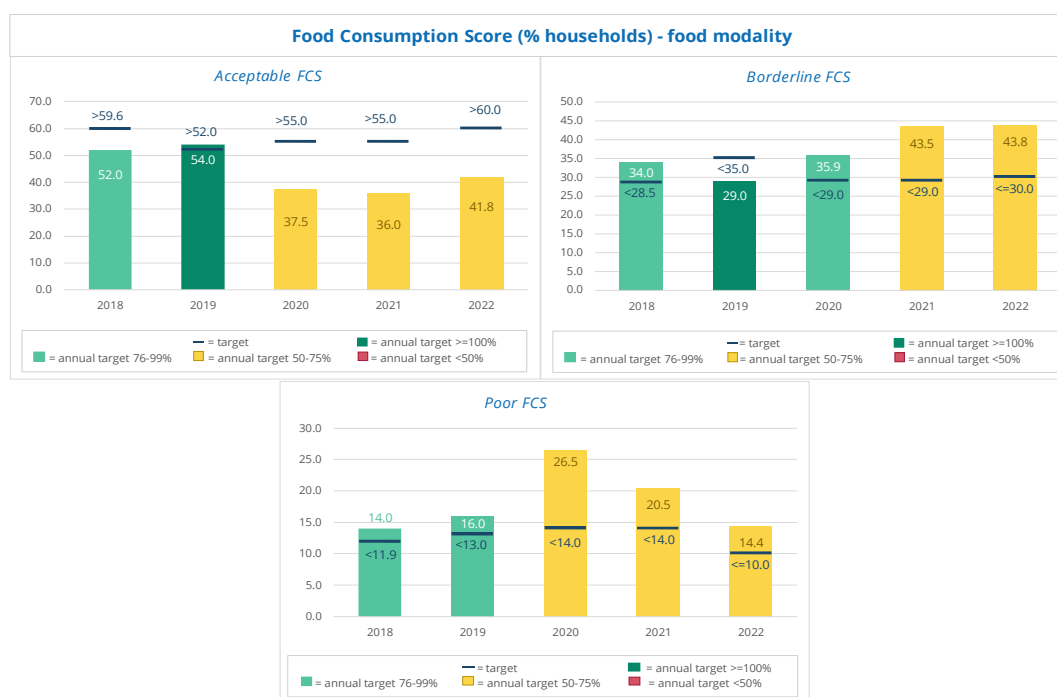
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<sup>108</sup> In 2021, cost of hot meals was covered by WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF; and in 2022 by WFP and UNICEF. In 2023 hot meals were discontinued.

<sup>109</sup> In, 2018, WFP supported 2,244 schools, in 2019 2,800, in 2020 5,200, in 2021 3,500 and in 200 3,486 (ACR 2081-2021).

<sup>110</sup> WFP. 2019. *Evaluation Series on Emergency School Feeding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, Niger and Syria 2015-2019. Syria Evaluation Report*; and ACR 2018.

Figure 18: SO1/Act1 Food consumption score (food modality), 2018-2022



Source: WFP Syria ACR 2018-2022. Colours of the vertical bars indicate percentage of target reached. The colour coding and percentage values are based on the evaluation team’s own classification.

108. **Only 38 percent of households had acceptable levels of food consumption in 2020, a 31 percent decline from 2019.** In parallel, the percentage of households with borderline and poor food consumption increased by 24 and 66 percent respectively. In 2021 and 2022 there was little improvement in food consumption scores, with many households experiencing poor or borderline food consumption. This pushed people to resort to negative coping strategies. As shown in Table 10, households increasingly relied on emergency and severe coping mechanisms, including reducing both the size and number of meals, borrowing food or cash to access food, sending children to work and forcing them into marriage.<sup>111</sup>

109. Indicators showed that households headed by women benefiting from WFP assistance were more food-insecure than households headed by men and a widening gap was evident (Table 10).<sup>112</sup> This trend continued during the period under review and is caused in part by systemic gender inequalities that impede women’s ability to produce, access, afford and consume food, as well as their reduced earning potential.<sup>113</sup> However, it is also a result of the ineffective response of actors, including WFP, in addressing these diverse gender needs adequately. On the Consumption-based Coping Strategy Index, the households headed by women score higher than those headed by men except for 2019 (Table 10).

Table 10: SO1/Act1 selected outcome indicators, 2018-2022

Indicator	Sex	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
		Target	Follow up	Target	Follow up	Target	Follow up	Target	Follow up	Target	Follow up
Target Group: all - Location: Syria - Modality: Food - Subactivity: General distribution											
% households with Poor Food Consumption Score	Female	<17.30	19.00	<15	23.0	<19	28.7	<19	28.50	≤10	19.00
	Male	<10.00	13.00	<10	13.0	<13	25.8	<13	17.80	≤10	12.50
	Overall	<11.90	14.00	<13	16.0	<14	26.5	<14	20.50	≤10	14.40
Consumption-based Coping Strategy Index (Average)	Female	≤11.96	9.86	≤10	13.0	≤10	11.08	≤10	13.89	≤10	13.76
	Male	≤11.67	9.75	≤10	15.0	≤10	10.47	≤10	11.55	≤10	12.24
	Overall	≤11.74	9.77	≤10	15.0	≤10	10.63	≤10	12.14	≤10	12.68

Source: WFP Syria ACRs 2018-2022.

<sup>111</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2022.

<sup>112</sup> WFP. 2018. Regional Evaluation – Syria response.

<sup>113</sup> CARE. 2021. ‘If we don’t work, we don’t eat’. Syrian Women Face Mounting Food Insecurity a Decade into the Conflict.

110. Under the vulnerability needs review implemented in the government-controlled areas, WFP introduced a classification of four tiers in vulnerability, including: (T1) severe food insecurity (receiving monthly hybrid assistance – food baskets plus cash-based assistance or monthly food basket); (T2) high food insecure (receiving monthly food baskets); (T3) medium-high; and (T4) medium food insecure (receiving a food basket every two or three months, respectively). All internally displaced persons living in camps receive monthly food baskets.<sup>114</sup>

111. The majority of the stakeholders interviewed indicated that the vulnerability needs review process of assessing beneficiaries on their vulnerability in order to determine their food assistance entitlements had been faced with a number of difficulties. The main concerns were that the process was too long, which meant that the data became outdated. While WFP engaged throughout the vulnerability needs review process with government and Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) officials, requesting access to the personal data of beneficiaries to verify and assess eligibility for food assistance, data have so far not been forthcoming. This means that the only way of ensuring that the beneficiary lists are up-to-date and reflect an accurate family situation is to keep assessing families and to have a strong community feedback mechanism in place. WFP staff indicated that there are concerns around protection issues linked to possible inclusion and exclusion errors. Therefore, WFP stepped up its efforts to have its community feedback mechanism further strengthened and increased the number of helpline staff.<sup>115</sup>

112. It was evident from multiple interviews with internal and external stakeholders that there is widespread concern about the effects of the reduction in general food assistance beneficiaries. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the targeting is as accurate as possible. However, WFP needs to have access to personal identifiable information to be able to carry out verification and reassessments.

### SO1/Act2 School feeding

**Summary Finding 10.** School feeding contributed to achieving attendance and retention rates (apart from during COVID-19)<sup>116</sup> for both regular primary school students and Curriculum B students. However, while enrolment increased somewhat in absolute terms, school feeding fell short of meeting the planned enrolment targets due to various factors, leading to children being out of school. The contribution of school feeding to an improved nutrition status is perceived as limited.

113. WFP school meals, including the vouchers to out-of-school children, have most probably increased the dietary diversity available to students from poor households receiving fresh meals, but hard data are not available.<sup>117</sup> Date bars are fortified and may help decrease micronutrient deficiencies, but it is not measured.

114. Though date bars are relevant to many children who leave home without breakfast, these are not the best option to attract children to school. WFP would prefer to provide fresh meals, but covering such a large group is logistically and financially impossible, without a large amount of funding available.

115. Attendance and retention rates had been achieved, outside of COVID-19, close to plan (

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<sup>114</sup> WFP Syria APP 2022.

<sup>115</sup> Interviews with WFP staff.

<sup>116</sup> Since schools were closed and WFP could not collect indicator data.

<sup>117</sup> These children usually receive less varied meals at home. WFP. 2020. Evaluation Series on Emergency School Feeding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, Niger, and Syria 2015-2019 – Synthesis Report.

116. Figure 19). The enrolment rate reached its target in 2019 but was well below the target in 2021 and did not recover in 2022. The reason may be that the contribution of school feeding to enrolment is more limited than to attendance and retention.

Figure 19: School feeding related outcome indicators, 2018-2022<sup>118</sup>



Source: WFP Syria ACR 2018-2022. Colours of the vertical bars indicate percentage of target reached. The colour coding and percentage values are based on the evaluation team's own classification.

117. Since curriculum B support is provided to children who are already in school, the voucher will at best keep children in school, but does not act as an incentive for them to not go out to work. Moreover, the amount of 77,000 Syrian pounds (SYP) (USD 17 as per September 2023) per child was considered by respondents as very low in terms of purchasing power, especially when considering transport fees and the potential income earned by the child.

SO2: Food-insecure communities in targeted areas are able to meet their food and nutrition needs throughout the year thanks to resilient livelihoods and restored access to basic services.

SO2: Overall achievement

**Summary Finding 11.** A shift in focus emphasizing restoration of communal assets and a wheat value chain approach enabled WFP to increase its beneficiary reach and to support the recovery of farming communities and food availability, reducing the dependence on food assistance. It enabled collaboration with other United Nations agencies allowing geographic scale and complementarity. Lack of funding hampered WFP support to early recovery, livelihoods, resilience and social safety nets. Where possible, WFP has provided technical assistance on reform of the system of public subsidies including technical assistance for flour fortification for subsidized bread.

118. Under SO2, Act3 covers livelihoods and resilience assistance and Act4 covers technical assistance to strengthen national safety nets.

119. The decline in agricultural production is a main driver of the rise in food insecurity in Syria. WFP contributed to reversing this trend through emphasizing the "farm-to-bread" wheat value chain with

<sup>118</sup> COVID-19 not only affected indicators, but also allowed fewer monitoring visits. Therefore, indicators for 2020 and 2021 may not be fully reliable or comparable to 2019. WFP. 2020. Evaluation Series on Emergency School Feeding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, Niger, and Syria. 2015-2019. Syria Evaluation Report.



projects implemented under four complementary pillars: 1) food assistance for assets (FFA) to support vulnerable farmers; 2) rehabilitation of communal agrarian assets; 3) restoration of the wheat value chain; and 4) expansion and improvement of social safety nets.<sup>119</sup> The focus of SO2 is therefore on supporting people to transition from needing humanitarian assistance to being able to support themselves through a change in focus from a household level to a system level and area-based approach.<sup>120</sup>

120. The WFP decision to shift focus from household-level support to repairing of community-level productive assets was found to be the right move in the context of decreasing funding and rising needs.<sup>121</sup> This shift fostered joint approaches with other United Nations agencies and attracted limited multi-year funding dedicated to early recovery.<sup>122</sup> An illustrative result is that WFP reached 335,000 people in 2022<sup>123</sup> by restoring their access to irrigation water, improving their agricultural production and strengthening their access to bread.

121. Under social safety nets, WFP had no budget available. Nonetheless, WFP supported wheat flour fortification and started a mapping exercise of existing social protection programmes.

122. SO2 contributes to strategic objective 3 of the Humanitarian Response Plan 2022-2023 (increase the resilience of affected communities by improving access to livelihood opportunities and basic services) and pillar II of the UNSF (sustainable socioeconomic recovery).

SO2: Achievement of outputs

### SO2/Act3 livelihoods assistance

**Summary Finding 12.** The WFP transition from household-level support to restoring of community-level assets and bakeries supported food and bread availability at the community level. Restoration of irrigation networks and public bakeries allowed WFP to have an outsized reach in restoring community-level assets although, due to funding limitations, WFP was forced to scale back both its community asset restoration and its beneficiary reach from 2019 onwards.

123. The ability of WFP to reach beneficiaries through food assistance for assets and food assistance for training (FFT) fell steadily throughout the evaluation period, peaking at 212,134 beneficiaries in 2019 and dropping to 19,677 in 2022 (Figure 20). WFP was able to maintain gender parity in beneficiaries.

124. Livelihood activities were delivered through three modalities: conditional food assistance and value vouchers (cash-based transfers) were used for food assistance for assets programmes; conditional cash-based transfer was used to deliver food assistance for training; and a capacity strengthening component was added to the food assistance for assets programmes.<sup>124</sup>

**125. The ability of WFP to reach its targets under all three modalities fell throughout the evaluation period.** WFP achieved only 42 percent of its food and 24 percent of its cash-based transfer beneficiaries in 2018, falling to only 9 percent and 1 percent of food and cash-based transfer beneficiaries in 2022.<sup>125</sup> WFP achieved only 16 percent and 4 percent of its planned capacity strengthening beneficiaries in 2021 and 2022.

**126. The drop in beneficiaries reached is due to lack of funding.** Funding against the needs-based plan was on average 15 percent over 2018-2022 (Table 11). Although there was a spike of 17 percent against the needs-based plan in 2022, the percentage increase solely reflected the adjustment of the needs-based plan value being lowered. WFP allocated unearmarked funding to livelihoods activities in 2018 and 2019.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> WFP. ACR. 2022.

<sup>120</sup> WFP. *Building Resilience in Syria*.

<sup>121</sup> Interviews.

<sup>122</sup> WFP. *Syria ACR 2022*.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

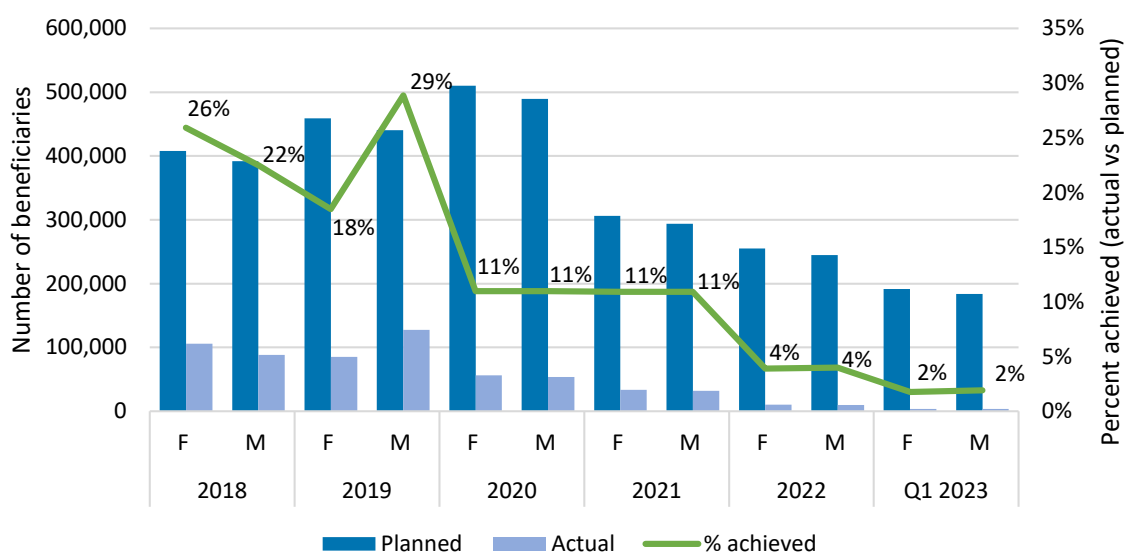
<sup>124</sup> WFP Syria APP 2021; WFP Syria ACR 2019 – 2022.

<sup>125</sup> COMET Report 2018-2022 CM-R020. 2023 data shared by Syria CO on 17.07.2023.

<sup>126</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2019.

However, from 2020 onwards, WFP had to prioritize general food assistance in the face of rapidly rising needs.<sup>127</sup>

**Figure 20: SO2/Act 3 Planned versus actual beneficiaries by gender, 2018-Q1 2023**



Source: COMET Report 2018-2022 CM-R020; 2023 (Jan–April) data shared by Syria country office on 17.07.2023.

**Table 11: SO2/Act 3 financial overview, 2018-2022**

Year	Original NBP	NBP as per last BR	Allocated resources	% on latest NBP	Expenditures	% allocated resources
T-ICSP (2018)	99,759,313	98,768,624	11,515,398	12%	9,024,508	78%
ICSP (2019-2021)	232,294,708	342,105,022	49,619,821	15%	40,711,910	82%
ICSP (2022-2023)	110,792,024		19,174,998	17%	6,200,012	32%

Source: WFP Syria ACRs 2018, 2021, 2022.

127. WFP resilience and livelihoods activities are delivered through a mix of partnerships with cooperating partners, the International Centre for Agriculture in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), private sector and strategic partnerships with United Nations agencies, including FAO and UNDP.<sup>128</sup> However, **poor capacity among cooperating partners remained a constraint to delivering effective livelihoods programmes.**

128. WFP achieved its target for communal asset repair, though lack of funding saw it scale down its targets from 42,644 assets in 2019 to 3,055 assets in 2022 (Table 12).<sup>129</sup>

**Table 12: Number of assets built, restored or maintained by targeted communities, 2018-2022**

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Planned	36,327	42,644	32,109	11,764	3,055
Actual	36,327	42,377	29,104	13,484	3,055
% achieved	100%	99%	91%	115%	100%

Source: WFP Syria ACRs 2018-2022.

<sup>127</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2020.

<sup>128</sup> Interview with WFP staff; WFP Livelihoods and resilience projects 2020-2023, data shared on 03/08/2023.

<sup>129</sup> WFP Livelihoods and resilience projects 2020-2023, data shared 03/08/2023; WFP. 2022. Resilience, livelihoods and social protection briefing.

129. Through interventions in East-Maskaneh in Aleppo governorate; in Qalamoun, Rural Damascus; in Al-Houle and Ain Al-Qosier in Homs governorate, WFP rehabilitated 632 km of irrigation systems providing irrigation water to 104,433 farmers daily, enabling them to resume the agricultural production of wheat particularly.<sup>130</sup> During focus group discussions, farmers stressed that water access for irrigation supported the return of farmers because they could start growing crops again.

130. An impact study in 2022 showed that the restoration of the Sector 5 irrigation system in Deir Ezzor governorate benefited directly 11,500 farmers, doubling the amount of land used for farming (from 1,642 ha in 2019 to 3,565 ha in 2021), and increased wheat production (from 2,801 tons in 2019 to 15,640 tons in 2021).<sup>131</sup>

131. **Under Output 3, WFP rehabilitated 14 bakeries between 2020-2022, supporting subsidized bread to 600,000 people.**<sup>132</sup> Focus group discussions at rehabilitated bakeries in Aleppo and Homs reported strong benefits, including an increase in returns to areas supported by bakeries and increased employment.<sup>133</sup> The upgrade of the Tawarij silo 25 km south of Qamishli city in 2022 provided storage capacity for 4,000 farmers, reducing losses by 10 percent and saving farmers on transportation costs.<sup>134</sup>

### SO2/Act4 Social safety nets

**Summary Finding 13.** Lack of donor interest led to very few activities implemented in the area of social safety nets beyond support for wheat flour fortification. Progress is not being measured.

132. WFP started Act4 (technical assistance to strengthen national social safety nets) only in 2022, but there are no indicators to measure progress and results, and no resources have been available or spent. Through wheat flour fortification for subsidized bread, which benefits poor households, WFP has provided some support to social safety nets.

133. WFP has taken steps to lay the foundation for future engagement in supporting social safety nets. The country office did a rapid mapping exercise of existing social protection programmes and prepared a social protection strategic note that has been reviewed by headquarters and the regional bureau in Cairo.<sup>135</sup> The new UNSF includes social protection as Pillar 2 and WFP, together with UNDP, is the co-convenor to support the UNCT on social protection.<sup>136</sup>

SO2: Achievement of outcomes

### SO2/Act3 Livelihoods assistance

**Summary Finding 14.** Restoration of communal assets increased community self-reliance, improved food availability and food affordability, created jobs and reduced negative coping strategies. These interventions had a strong return on investment with the potential of reducing the reliance on food assistance. Tailored strategies are needed to ensure livelihoods support addresses the differentiated needs of women. At the household level the food assistance for assets and food assistance for training support was no longer able to have an effect on food consumption scores because the assistance was insufficient to offset rising inflation and food insecurity, especially for cash assistance.

134. **Outcomes at the household level deteriorated from 2019 onwards** (Figure 21).<sup>137</sup> Outcome indicators show a deterioration for livelihood-based coping strategies and food consumption scores as of 2019. The situation deteriorated for both genders (see Annex XI for gender-disaggregated data). Cash-

<sup>130</sup> WFP. 2022. *Building Resilience in Syria*. ACR. 2022.

<sup>131</sup> WFP. 2022. *Sector 5 Irrigation System Rehabilitation: End of Activity Review*.

<sup>132</sup> WFP Syria. 2023. *Why invest in early recovery?*

<sup>133</sup> FGD, bakeries in Aleppo and Homs.

<sup>134</sup> Site visit to Tawarij silo, Qamishli, May 2023.

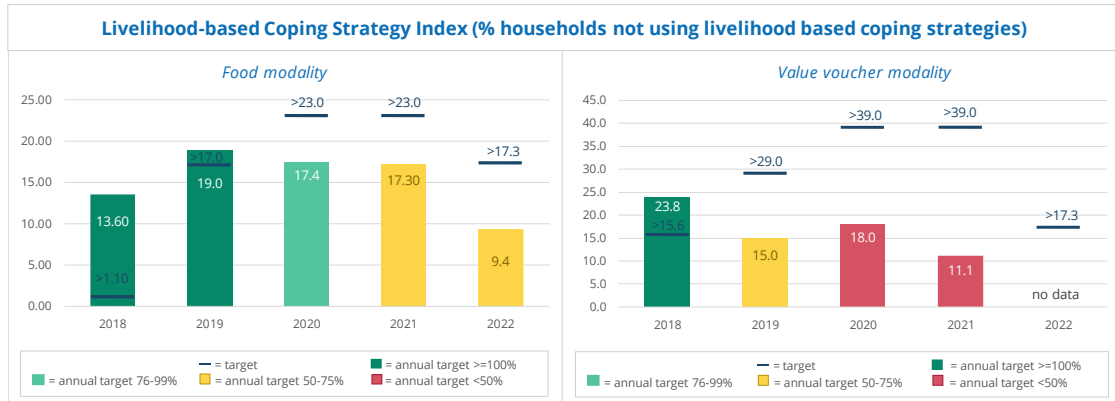
<sup>135</sup> WFP. 2022. *Resilience, Livelihoods and Social Protection Briefing Note lists opportunities in analysis (vulnerability analysis, knowledge exchange and evidence-based targeting), subsidies (bread and fortification) and social transfer*.

<sup>136</sup> WFP Syria, ACR 2022.

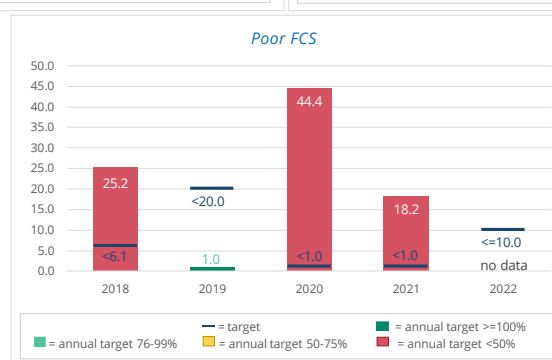
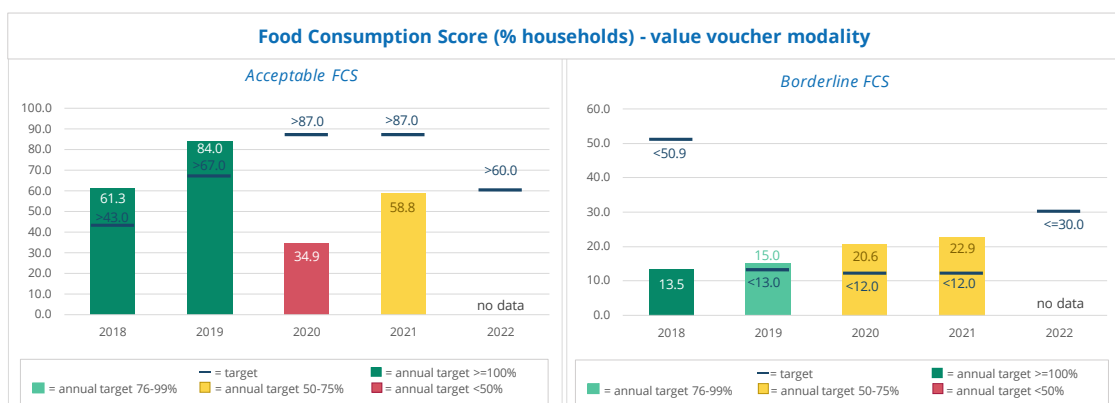
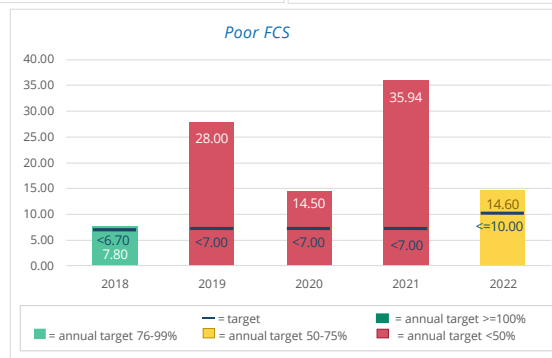
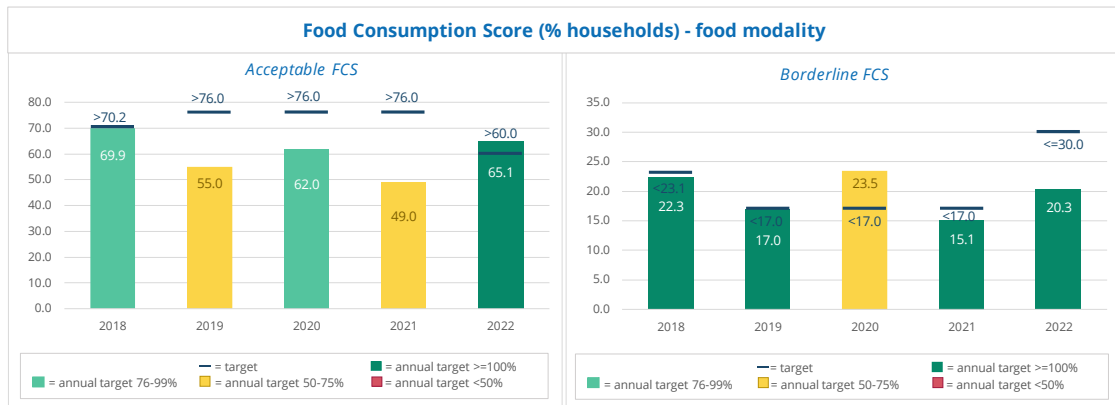
<sup>137</sup> WFP Syria ACRs 2018-2022.

based transfer beneficiaries generally reported poorer food consumption scores compared to in-kind assistance beneficiaries as WFP did not have the funding to adjust cash assistance levels quickly enough to keep pace with inflation.<sup>138</sup>

**Figure 21: SO2/Act3 Selected outcome indicators, 2018-2022**



<sup>138</sup> WFP Syria ACRs 2019-2022.



Source: WFP Syria ACR 2018-2022. Colours of the vertical bars indicate percentage of target reached. The colour coding and percentage values are based on the evaluation team's own classification.

135. Although WFP livelihoods interventions target women and men equally, achieving near equity in the beneficiary numbers of men and women throughout the period under review, **further research and actions are needed to ensure that support addresses the unique needs of women.** WFP conducted a review of gender risks for urban livelihoods in 2018, and supported the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform to launch a national strategy on the empowerment of rural women in 2019, but further work is

needed to integrate these approaches into project design.<sup>139</sup> During site visits to irrigation projects in Rural Damascus, Aleppo and Homs, the evaluation team found that livelihood interventions did not always consider sufficiently the societal limitations of women in accessing markets.<sup>140</sup>

136. **Under Act3, outcome indicators are not tracked at the community level**, however, there is strong evidence from the documents, site visits and focus group discussions with beneficiaries that community-level assets have a strong effect on resilience at the community level.

137. **Irrigation projects** contributed to the revival of agricultural lands and **improved food availability at the community level by increasing agricultural yields and job creation**.<sup>141</sup> Satellite analysis of the Maksaneh water restoration project in Aleppo showed a significant expansion of cultivation following the project (Annex XV). Site visits to Rural Damascus, Aleppo and Homs showed that, following WFP projects restoring water networks, farmers were able to double the number of planting seasons, thereby diversifying food crops and increasing livestock.<sup>142</sup> Beneficiaries in Homs described reclaiming land that had gone uncultivated for a decade and doubling their agricultural yields after WFP assisted with the restoration of the irrigation canals.<sup>143</sup> Agricultural experts consulted affirmed that community-level water infrastructure was the priority intervention to support early recovery in Syria.<sup>144</sup> WFP worked to build sustainable water management practices into its irrigation projects by establishing community-level water user associations.

#### Box 2: Effects of Sector 5 irrigation system rehabilitation project

Following the completion of the Sector 5 irrigation rehabilitation project in Deir Ezzor, only 14 percent of beneficiaries reported that they did not have enough food or money to buy food as compared with 100 percent before the restoration. As a result of the increased supply of wheat, local bread prices trended favourably lower in the area (al Quriyeh market) in 2021.

Source: WFP. 2022. Sector 5 Irrigation System Rehabilitation: End of Activity Review.

138. **WFP took initial steps moving towards a food systems approach**. The evaluation team saw some evidence of linkages between farm production supported through WFP irrigation restoration and the wheat value chain approach, with farmers in Aleppo telling the evaluation team that they sold their wheat to support subsidized bread.<sup>145</sup> WFP also reported a strong return on investment from investments in bakery rehabilitation. A one-off investment of USD 36 million could restore 80 damaged bakeries, supporting 3.2 million people with affordable daily bread.

139. Despite good outcomes at the community level, the current approach is missing a number of steps in the food systems or value chain approach. Activities are too dispersed geographically, are not always sufficiently connected, and do not consider value chains in their entirety mainly because of funding limitations.

#### SO2/Act4 Social safety nets

**Summary Finding 15.** Despite plans of the UNCT, due to a lack of funding, the WFP contribution to social safety nets remained limited. Cash and food transfers under other activities may be seen as a replacement for non-existing social protection in Syria.

140. The pre-crisis, well-working social protection system in Syria no longer exists, and social safety nets are badly needed. When COVID-19 hit, a WFP survey<sup>146</sup> found year-on-year price increases of between 183 and

<sup>139</sup> WFP. July 2019. Interim Country Strategic Plan; WFP Livelihoods Strategy; WFP. 2018. Gender, risks and urban livelihoods: Study in three cities in Syria: Aleppo, Homs and Lattakia.

<sup>140</sup> FGD with women farmers.

<sup>141</sup> WFP Syria. 2023. *Why invest in early recovery?*

<sup>142</sup> FGDs.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Interviews.

<sup>145</sup> FGD with farmers.

<sup>146</sup> WFP. 2020. *Monthly Food Price Survey June 2020.*

353 percent, varying per governorate. The UNCT then envisaged expanding national and international social cash transfers to help vulnerable people cope with the worsened situation.<sup>147</sup> WFP, through their general food assistance, cash transfers and even school feeding, provides de-facto replacement for the non-existing social protection, even if this is not reflected under Act4. Nonetheless, even if WFP has included such activities adequately into its ICSP under other activities, they remain United Nations-driven and externally funded, with little scope for transferring to national social protection, despite the aim of the UNCT to work with the Government towards a stronger, more inclusive and coherent social protection system.<sup>148</sup>

SO3: Nutritionally vulnerable groups across Syria, especially boys, girls and pregnant and breastfeeding women, have access to malnutrition prevention and treatment services throughout the year.

SO3: Overall achievement

**Summary Finding 16.** WFP expanded its planned number of malnutrition prevention and treatment beneficiaries to respond to increased needs. However, WFP faced challenges related to funding shortages, COVID-19 and rising transport costs. Aggravated by adverse price trends of food items, the achieved minimum dietary diversity (MDD) rate of women remained very low. The impact on household nutrition is not measured but is likely to be low as well with the limited outreach. As for malnutrition treatment, WFP from 2020 started to achieve against planning, and all outcomes were achieved, except the default rate in 2020 due to COVID-19.

141. Under SO3, Act5 covers malnutrition prevention while Act6 covers malnutrition treatment. While increased needs led to higher targets for malnutrition prevention, the proportion of beneficiaries reached versus plan decreased. Adherence was low during COVID-19 but increased later.

142. WFP aimed at covering more PBWG with vouchers, but instead reached fewer. The vulnerability needs review exercise was initiated in 2021 and 2022, leading to the reassessment of families registered in the WFP general food assistance programme. Consequently, new registrations were restricted during this period, impacting the number of children reached under the blanket supplementary feeding programme. Nevertheless, despite the challenges, the programme managed to achieve 85 percent of its target. The surge in food prices, coupled with the inadequacy of the food basket or voucher, has likely contributed to a minimum dietary diversity rate that falls significantly below the target.

143. Treatment was successful in terms of people reached and outcomes (recovery rate above target, mortality rate and non-response rate below maximum target), despite logistical challenges and COVID-19. This is part of one of the activities under outcome 2 of the UNSF "support malnutrition detection and management".

144. SO3 contributes to strategic objective 3 of the Humanitarian Response Plan 2022-2023 (increase the resilience of affected communities by improving access to basic services) and pillar I of the UNSF (availability and access to basic and social services).

SO3: Achievement of outputs

**Summary Finding 17.** For malnutrition prevention, WFP increased its targets to accommodate increased needs but numbers achieved stayed below target. This was due to the adjustment that targeted PBWG needing to be part of the most vulnerable families under general food assistance tiers 1 and 2, instead of tiers 1 to 4 as before.<sup>149</sup> For malnutrition treatment, WFP gradually increased its targets and the numbers reached, even overachieving in 2022. Nutrition social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) is reaching large groups of people under malnutrition prevention and treatment, but the effect is not clear and not measured, with some concerns about the quality and the tailoring of the communication.

145. WFP combats undernutrition through: i) specialized nutritious food or cash-based transfers for PBWGs already receiving general food assistance; ii) treatment of acute malnutrition in children and PBWGs

<sup>147</sup> UNCT. *Syria Vision for Social Protection, Final Draft.*

<sup>148</sup> UN Syria. 2022. *UNSF 2022-2024.*

<sup>149</sup> *Classifications of vulnerability of the VNR that WFP conducted to make its targeting more accurate.*



through the CMAM programme; iii) capacity building of national stakeholders for wheat flour fortification and salt iodization; and iv) SBCC. SO3 targets nutritionally vulnerable beneficiaries - children under 5 and PBWG certified by UNFPA. Malnutrition treatment involves collaboration with UNICEF and WHO.

146. Table 13 and Table 15 provide numbers of children and PBWG planned and reached under malnutrition treatment and prevention, showing that the proportion of beneficiaries reached was low against target in 2018, but stable at close to 100 percent of an increased target for 2019 and 2020. The achievement went down considerably for 2021 and 2022. This can be partly ascribed to the further increased targets, especially for women, while achievements remained stable.

### Malnutrition prevention

147. Malnutrition prevention consists of: the blanket supplementary feeding programme implemented under general food assistance; cash-based transfers to PBWG to improve their dietary diversity and micronutrient intake; SBCC; and capacity strengthening of national partners.

### Blanket supplementary feeding programme for children and women

148. Table 13 presents children reached under the blanket supplementary feeding programme and PBWG with cash-based transfers. From 2018, WFP had expanded its geographic reach to include all governorates in Syria. Despite the geographical expansion, beneficiary reach was curtailed by lack of funding.

**Table 13: Planned versus actual number of children and pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls reached with malnutrition prevention per month.**

		2018			2019			2020			2021			2022		
		M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Total	Planned	102,000	158,000	260,000	144,452	220,348	364,800	131,343	298,708	430,051	195,412	403,388	598,800	195,412	403,388	598,800
	Actual	96,940	124,975	221,915	150,348	258,539	408,887	126,686	291,110	417,796	135,619	302,880	438,499	147,765	286,661	434,426
Children	Planned	102,000	98,000	200,000	144,452	150,348	294,800	131,343	136,704	268,047	195,412	203,388	398,800	195,412	203,388	398,800
	Actual	96,940	84,595	181,535	150,348	146,860	297,208	126,686	145,865	272,551	135,619	152,933	288,552	147,765	155,206	302,971
PBWG	Planned		60,000	60,000		70,000	70,000		162,004	162,004		200,000	200,000		200,000	200,000
	Actual		40,380	40,380		111,679	111,679		145,245	145,245		149,947	149,947		131,455	131,455

Source: WFP 2018 CM-R020; WFP Syria 2019-2022 ACRs.

149. **Beneficiary reach has been around 300,000 children since 2019**, with a slight drop in 2020 due to COVID-19. Nonetheless, due to increased planning based on higher needs, the proportion of children supported as per plan decreased from 2021. To respond to the changing environment and growing humanitarian needs in northern and northeastern Syria, WFP expanded the number of partners to 24.<sup>150</sup>

150. **In 2020, COVID-19 had an operational impact on the provision of specialized nutritious food**, although the activity remained ongoing. Fewer beneficiaries were registering and visiting distribution centres for malnutrition prevention at the beginning of 2020. This is evidenced by the fact that, compared to 2019, coverage and adherence rates significantly decreased in 2020 (see Figure 21). Obstacles in 2021 included the aftermath of COVID-19, and higher transportation expenses restricting the number of PBWGs accessing voucher distribution centres.<sup>151</sup>

151. **In 2022, the gap between planned and actual numbers remained for children and further increased for PBWG.** The PBWG malnutrition prevention programme did not fully reach its target population. From 2023, beneficiaries need to be part of households with general food assistance support under tier 1 and 2 to be eligible for the value voucher. The blanket supplementary feeding programme for children 6-23 months old also reached fewer children than planned.<sup>152</sup>

“The voucher helps us to buy what we need. We are happy to buy things that our children want, because the food basket does not provide fish, eggs, chicken, yogurt, or cheese.” -FGD with women, Aleppo

### Voucher programme supporting nutrition of PBWG

<sup>150</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2018-2019.

<sup>151</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2021.

<sup>152</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2022.

152. PBWG are targeted through a voucher programme, launched in 2014, when it was realized that general food assistance would not help PBWG to access their diversified diet. The vouchers enable women to get diversified or fresh foods at WFP-contracted retailers.

153. **WFP expanded the geographical coverage** from 5 governorates in 2018 to 14 in 2021. The programme supported the local economy by contracting stores where vouchers could be used, and WFP monitored pricing.<sup>153</sup> Women are eligible when their pregnancy is confirmed until the child is 6 months old. Here as well, vouchers are now limited to tiers 1 and 2, which has led to a lower number of PBWG being included. The voucher programme expanded but the administrative delays in issuing cards meant that PBWG were only benefiting from the voucher later in their pregnancy (in some instances only from the fourth or the fifth month).<sup>154</sup>

154. **WFP covers only one pregnancy per woman under the programme.** Health facilities' senior staff brought up considerations that with a second baby, women may be in need of even more support.

155. The current value of the voucher has been increased over the years to accommodate for higher prices. Focus group discussion women were positive about the support. They preferred electronic vouchers to cash, since they felt free to spend it, avoiding the risk that the husband would spend it "on unnecessary items".<sup>155</sup>

#### 156. Social and behaviour change communication (SBCC)

157. SBCC aims at positively influencing beneficiaries' and stakeholders' nutrition knowledge and behaviour. Some United Nations agencies' key informants were unsure about the relevance of SBCC, since they perceived nutrition knowledge to be less problematic than in other humanitarian contexts. They felt that knowledge on diversified diets, breastfeeding and complementary feeding was relatively strong, and that challenging factors were negative coping strategies in reaction to hyperinflation and economic recession as well as health system deterioration.

158. **SBCC was mainstreamed, mostly geared towards beneficiaries, targeting nutritionally vulnerable people, specifically, caregivers of young children and PBWG.** It was meant to improve dietary diversity, nutrient intake and infant and young child feeding practices. Among recipients, 60-67 percent are women and girls. Table 14 provides an insight into the evolution of people reached, with a positive trend over the years, and achieving much more than the target in any given year. As for the quality and effectiveness of SBCC, there are a few observations. The messages are not yet sufficiently tailored to the needs and characteristics of the audience groups (apart from breastfeeding messages), and materials and skilled staff in the field are lacking. Though the number of people reached is reported upon, it is by no means clear whether there has been an effect and what that has been.

**Table 14: People reached through SBCC under malnutrition prevention, 2018-2022**

2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
245,000	221,783	334,651	353,924	302,777	417,796	377,041	438,499	341,000	417,800

Source: WFP Syria ACRs 2018-2022.

<sup>153</sup> WPF Syria ACR 2018-2019.

<sup>154</sup> FGDs with PBWG and KIIs with health care staff.

<sup>155</sup> Quote from a pregnant woman.

159. WFP also supported Syria's capacity building related to nutrition, but as this was counted by the number of workshops and only captured from 2019, the information value is low.

### Capacity strengthening for national wheat flour fortification

#### 160. WFP technically assists resuscitation of Syria's wheat flour fortification for publicly available, subsidized bread.

Wheat fortification helps address the high levels of micronutrient deficiencies, notably anemia, among the Syrian population. Fortified flour is used in general food assistance. By 2021, the full 100 percent target was achieved for both general food assistance and food assistance for assets activities.<sup>156</sup> Fortified bread produced through WFP-rehabilitated bakeries was initially utilized for school sandwiches in Aleppo when access to bread was limited. This practice was discontinued in 2021, since the use of fortified flour was expensive and regular bakeries started functioning again.<sup>157</sup>

"WFP has supported our bakery, and the new production lines are now safe for workers and capacity has gone up sharply. This enables us to accommodate more returnees with high quality fortified bread." -Bakery staff, Homs.

161. WFP advocates continuously for mass wheat fortification and takes an integral role in capacity strengthening of national stakeholders. Until 2021, WFP supported capacity building on salt iodization, which was adopted by UNICEF in 2022. Yet, in 2023, WFP again had to support the import of potassium iodate as sanctions hampered UNICEF in doing so. Only 36 percent of school children has access to iodized salt,<sup>158</sup> which indicates a remaining relevance of salt iodization.

### Malnutrition treatment

162. **The CMAM programme achieved substantial geographic growth in 2018**, extending to newly accessible governorates. However, the closure of numerous CMAM locations because of financial issues experienced by partners reduced the number of people reached. Additionally, pipeline breakdowns brought on by supplier delays led to a lower outreach than for other nutrition initiatives. In total, 10,000 children and 7,000 PBWG received moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) treatment from WFP in 2018, which is 40 percent of the target. Despite these coverage issues, outcomes as per indicators were positive in 2018. In 2019, a 40 percent rise in the beneficiary number was seen. In 2020, due to mobility restrictions, the use of mobile clinics was put on hold for almost half of the year. In 2022, the targets were revised slightly upward for children. Table 15 shows that the actual numbers of PBWG mostly remained behind planning. In 2022, this changed positively, according to WFP respondents, possibly caused by the approach of mid-upper arm circumference measuring (and referring) of all PBWG who came to distribution points.

**Table 15: Planned and actual number of children and PBWG reached with malnutrition treatment**

		2018	2019		2020			2021			2022			
		Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Total	Planned	42,500	12,000	33,000	45,000	9,600	35,400	45,000	9,600	35,400	45,000	12,000	38,000	50,000
	Actual	17,000	6,993	20,198	27,191	9,960	27,864	37,824	10,063	31,955	42,018	15,407	50,382	65,789
Children	Planned	25,000	12,000	13,000	25,000	9,600	10,400	20,000	9,600	10,400	20,000	12,000	13,000	25,000
	Actual	10,000	6,993	9,542	16,535	9,960	13,148	23,108	10,063	14,336	24,399	15,407	21,762	37,169
PBWG	Planned	17,500		20,000	20,000		25,000	25,000		25,000	25,000		25,000	25,000
	Actual	7,000		10,656	10,656		14,716	14,716		17,619	17,619		28,620	28,620

Source: ACR 2018 (only estimate of total numbers available), ACR 2019, ACR 2020, ACR 2021, and ACR 2022.

<sup>156</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2018-2022.

<sup>157</sup> According to WFP staff.

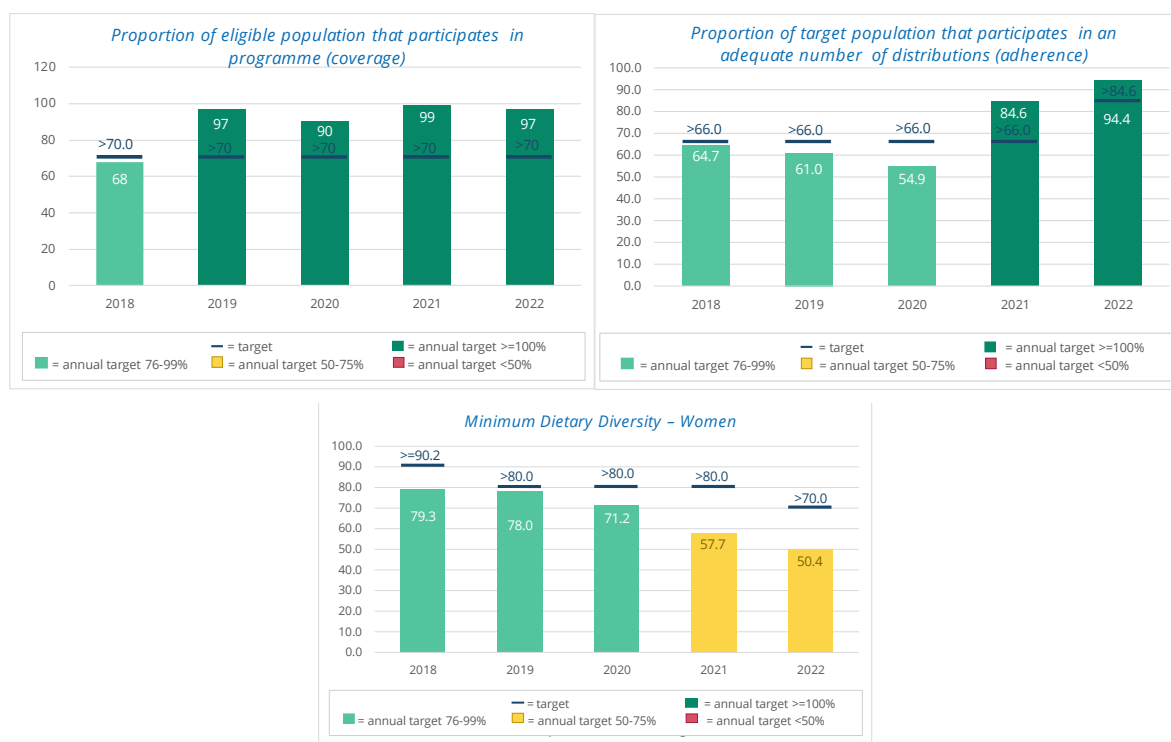
<sup>158</sup> SMART Survey 2022.

**Summary Finding 18.** Though malnutrition treatment outcomes were overall as planned or close to plan, minimum dietary diversity for pregnant women, a key outcome for malnutrition prevention, remained well below target. This can be partly ascribed to lower coverage in 2021, but potentially also the lowered food basket caloric value under general food assistance due to budget limitations, leading to the vouchers being insufficient or shared.

163. **Malnutrition prevention:** For PBWG, the outcome indicator minimum dietary diversity showed a worrisome picture. In 2018, it was 80 percent and in 2022 the rate went down to a bleak 50.4 percent (see Figure 22).<sup>159</sup> This may indicate that the cash-based transfer has been used partly to cover the gap left by decreasing food basket contents as well as increasing food prices, and thus has been insufficient to ensure the targeted 70 percent minimum dietary diversity.

164. As a proxy for outcome, coverage and adherence to the nutrition programme are measured. Figure 22 shows that adherence has seen a dip in COVID-19-ridden 2020 but has picked up after that; both coverage and adherence have been relatively high from 2021. The adherence targets have been adapted based on this performance. However, the feasibility remains unclear in view of the expected budget cut, coupled with a critical nutrition donor that wants to favour treatment.

**Figure 22: S03 prevention of acute malnutrition outcome indicators, 2018-2022**



Source: WFP Syria ACRs 2018-2022. Colours of the vertical bars indicate percentage of target reached. The colour coding and percentage values are based on the evaluation team’s own classification.

<sup>159</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2018-2022.

165. **Malnutrition treatment: The outcomes for the PBWG and children in the CMAM programme were positive across almost all indicators.** In 2020, as a result of COVID-19, a slight stalling was seen (Table 16). In 2020, 37,800 PBWG and children were supported, up 39 percent from 2019. The pandemic then led to mobility restriction for mobile clinics for almost half of 2021 and partners reported a reduction in PBWG and children reporting for follow-up consultations throughout the first half of 2020. This is evident in the outcome data, indicating a rise in the percentage of beneficiaries who stopped participating in the programme, as well as a decline in the recovery rates of PBWGs and children.

“If the child is breastfed, the mother is encouraged to first breastfeed, then give supplementary food provided by the clinic. 99 percent of children are recovering.” - Paediatrician,

166. Although WFP lacked valid national-level data to confirm that the nutrition situation deteriorated, more people sought treatment in 2021. Monitoring results in 2021 showed that 85.6 percent of children who received preventative therapy recovered in 2021, which is a 10 percent improvement from 2020. Nonetheless, reduced fuel supply in the first half of the year, combined with a rise in the gasoline cost, restricted beneficiaries' access to CMAM centres.

**Table 16: SO3 moderate acute malnutrition treatment outcome indicators, 2018-2022**

	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
Recovery rate	>75	81.4	>75	87	>75	76	>75	85.6	85.6	85
Mortality rate	<3	0.3	<3	0	<3	0	<3	0	0	0
Non-response rate	<15	4.1	<15	2	<15	1	<15	0.9	<0.9	1
Default rate	<15	14.3	<15	12	<15	23	<15	12.6	<12.6	11

Source: WFP Syria ACR 2018-2022.

167. **The indicators developed positively afterwards;** while recovery rate and non-response rate were only very mildly outside of target, it should also be noted that the 2022 target had been adapted upwards, based on the 2021 actuals.

SO4: Humanitarian partners across Syria are enabled to assist crisis-affected populations all year long.  
SO4: Overall achievement

**Summary Finding 19.** WFP enabled humanitarian partners to assist crisis-affected populations and supported more efficient aid delivery, drawing on its comparative advantages in logistical and technical capacity. The ability of WFP to support the humanitarian system in reaching those in need, even in hard-to-access areas through cross-line and cross-border operations, is to its credit.

168. WFP services are supporting humanitarian partners' capacity to deliver assistance. WFP achieved high satisfaction rates among users of WFP logistics and emergency telecommunication cluster services from 2018-2022, at or near programme targets. Humanitarian partners particularly valued WFP support to logistics for both cross-line and cross-border assistance. More than 55 partners benefited from WFP coordination, logistics and common and on-demand services in 2022.<sup>160</sup>

169. SO4 contributes to strategic objective 1 of the Humanitarian Response Plan 2022-2023 (provide humanitarian assistance) and pillar I of the UNSF (availability and access to basic and social services).

SO4: Achievement of outputs

**Summary Finding 20.** WFP delivered common services to the humanitarian response in Syria through its coordination of the logistics and emergency telecommunication clusters, the provision of common humanitarian air services, common cash services and technical support to United Nations partners to

<sup>160</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2022.

address fuel, transport and storage challenges. WFP consistently achieved or exceeded its targets for support services, helped in part by comparatively good levels of funding.

170. Activities under SO4 were comparatively well funded, receiving 85 percent and 75 percent of the needs-based plan in 2018 and 2019. Funding fell from 107 percent of the needs-based plan in 2020 to 43 percent in 2022<sup>161</sup> but activities were sufficiently covered with carried-over resources and both the logistics and emergency telecommunication clusters received additional funding for the earthquake response in early 2023.<sup>162</sup>

171. **WFP provided common logistics services** to humanitarian partners including logistics coordination, information management and warehousing services, providing and facilitating cross-line convoys free to users into northwest Syria from government-controlled areas.<sup>163</sup> WFP met or exceeded its annual output targets, except for 2018 where it fell short of its target for metric tons of cargo transported and 2020 where it fell slightly short of its target number of partners supported.

172. **Common emergency telecommunication cluster support** provided by WFP to humanitarian partners met or exceeded targets (Table 17).<sup>164</sup> Government and sanctions restrictions have delayed the roll-out of new technology such as satellite phones and internet.<sup>165</sup> Key informant interviews were positive about WFP support, noting that emergency telecommunications were “difficult because of the operating environment, but WFP has helped the aid community troubleshoot communications issues.”<sup>166</sup>

**Table 17: Emergency telecommunication cluster output indicator, 2018-2022**

		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of partners supported	Planned	6	15	15	15	-
	Actual	9	15	15	15	15
	% achieved	150%	100%	100%	100%	-

Source: WFP Syria ACR 2018-2022.

173. WFP launched the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) in Syria in 2020<sup>167</sup> carrying members of the humanitarians and development community in Syria as well as critical cargo.<sup>168</sup> WFP achieved most of its output indicators (Table 18).

**Table 18: UNHAS output indicators, 2020-2022**

		2020	2021	2022
Quantity of cargo delivered (mt)	Planned	1	24	30
	Actual	2.2	35.1	24
	% achieved	220%	146%	80%
Number of passengers transported	Planned	150	1,800	4,500
	Actual	115	4,492	4,963
	% achieved	77%	250%	110%

Source: WFP Syria ACR 2018-2022. Note: Act9 was introduced in March 2020 under BR1 of SY02.

<sup>161</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2018-2022.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. WFP Syria ACR 2022. KII with cluster coordinators.

<sup>163</sup> Logistics Cluster. 2022 to 2023. Logistics Cluster Sectoral Strategy (DRAFT); Sector SOPs shared by the country office August 2016-2022.

<sup>164</sup> Operational areas: Aleppo, Damascus, Deir Ezzor, Hama, Homs, Qamishli, Tartous, and Gaziantep in Türkiye. WFP Syria ACR 2022, KII with logistics cluster.

<sup>165</sup> KII with WFP staff.

<sup>166</sup> KII United Nations partner.

<sup>167</sup> WFP Syria APP 2020.

<sup>168</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2022.

174. **WFP provides technical assistance and on-demand support services** through service-level agreements with 22 United Nations agencies, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and cooperating partners, mostly supporting fuel, transport and storage.<sup>169</sup> Indicators are not tracked consistently across the different ICSPs so it is not possible to assess performance over time. However, partners valued the contribution of WFP in this area, noting that WFP played a crucial role in securing fuel imports in 2022 when shortage threatened the provision of humanitarian assistance.<sup>170</sup>

175. **WFP provided on-demand cash transfer services** to other United Nations agencies through the WFP SCOPE system, supporting efficient cash and voucher transfers to beneficiaries. Since 2020, the platform has been used by UNFPA to provide cash and vouchers for hygiene items to PBWG.<sup>171</sup> In 2022, 149,700 beneficiaries were reached with value vouchers by UNFPA with USD 5.8 million through the WFP cash-based transfer platform.<sup>172</sup>

SO4: Achievement of outcomes

**Summary Finding 21.** WFP provision of logistics, coordination and technical services contributed to harmonized approaches for efficient food and nutrition assistance. WFP field presence and logistical capacity were critical to cross-border and cross-line aid delivery.

176. SO4 outcome indicators achieved user satisfaction ratings of over 86 percent in annual surveys (Table 19). The emergency telecommunication cluster and UNHAS met or exceeded their user satisfaction targets each year. However, results were mixed for the logistics cluster, falling short of its targets across 2020-2022. This coincided with a change in the WFP operating model from direct provision of free storage and transport to a focus on coordination.

**Table 19: SO4 outcome indicators, 2018-2022**

Indicator	Sex	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
		Target	Follow up	Target	Follow up	Target	Follow up	Target	Follow up	Target	Follow up
User satisfaction rate - Logistics cluster	Overall	>90.00	90.33	>90	98	>99	93	>99	89	>90	89
User satisfaction rate - Emergency telecommunications cluster	Overall	>80.00	86	>81	86	>87	96	>87	87	>88	91
User satisfaction rate - Humanitarian air service	Overall	-	-	-	-	-	-	>90	90	≥90	98.7

Source: WFP Syria ACRs 2018-2022.

177. In key informant interviews, partners particularly appreciated the logistics cluster’s support to cross-border and cross-line shipments. For example, in 2022, 7,566 trucks used the logistics cluster-facilitated trans-shipment hub into Syria from Türkiye. Cross-border deliveries accounted for more than one third of all WFP assistance delivered in Syria in 2022.<sup>173</sup> Cross-line was more challenging, with partners reporting that trucks often had to wait two weeks for approval before being unloaded.<sup>174</sup> Cross-line deliveries accounted for only 3 percent aid crossing into northwest Syria, but partners reported they had a strategic value.<sup>175</sup> WFP also contributed to harmonized approaches for cash programming, including by negotiating preferential exchange rates with the Central Bank of Syria.<sup>176</sup>

<sup>169</sup> KII with WFP staff.

<sup>170</sup> WFP Syria. December 2022. Situation Report #12; KII with United Nations staff; WFP Syria ACR 2022.

<sup>171</sup> UNFPA. 2022. Regional Syria Crisis Response.

<sup>172</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2022.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> KIIs with WFP staff, United Nations partners.

<sup>175</sup> KII with United Nations partners.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*



## EQ 2.2 To what extent did WFP contribute to the achievement of cross-cutting aims?

**Summary Finding 22.** The operationalization of humanitarian principles in the complex context of the Syrian crisis proved challenging for all humanitarian actors. WFP sought a principled approach to reaching those in need. Using a conflict-sensitive approach, WFP maintained its engagement with all relevant actors to ensure humanitarian access to vulnerable communities and people based on needs while upholding neutrality and impartiality of its operations. WFP promoted sustainable environmental management and climate adaptation, particularly through its resilience activities.

178. **External stakeholders confirmed WFP adherence to humanitarian principles.** WFP maintained its collaboration with all stakeholders in the field to uphold the neutrality and impartiality of its operations. WFP operations are guided by assessments conducted internally or within the broader humanitarian network. The commitment of WFP to the principle of humanity is clear through its efforts to refine beneficiary lists for a more accurate reflection of vulnerability and need.

179. **WFP approaches Syria in its entirety, which allows it to provide assistance based on humanitarian needs through cross-border and cross-line operations.** Cross-line and cross-border operations have required WFP to adjust and consider often unpredictable security situations. WFP carried out cross-line deliveries of humanitarian assistance from government-held to non-government-held areas in Idlib governorate, crossing lines of control and conflict. To address some risks surrounding cross-line operations in northwest Syria, WFP rolled out cash-based transfers in Idlib governorate in 2022. The evaluation team joined WFP on a monitoring visit to Dara'a governorate in the south and observed the strength of the WFP security approach, prioritizing the safety of its staff. The evaluation team also witnessed how WFP in a difficult operating environment has been able to establish strong relations with community actors and organizations across the political divide.

180. **The evaluation found that WFP actively engaged with a range of stakeholders to secure access.** Where access to communities or areas has been a challenge, WFP has continued to engage with all actors to obtain access. Assessments of needs have been done in coordination with actors on the ground and other international humanitarian and development organizations. During the evaluation mission, the majority of stakeholders commented positively on the attitude and engagement of WFP with all actors concerned to obtain access to beneficiaries.

181. **WFP was found to have a strong institutional understanding of community dynamics and what drives needs and grievances.** Key informants and WFP documents highlighted that WFP closely monitors economic developments and their effects on local communities and understands that in the Syria context competition over land and resources and reduced aid requires strong conflict sensitivity in WFP operations.

182. Interviews with WFP staff at country office and field office levels indicated a strong contextual knowledge, including of the security situation and the socio-political context. It was also found that the field office set-up and community **presence in the different governorates supports an adaptive approach, especially in resilience building.**

183. **Steps taken by WFP in its programming approaches have contributed to reduced tensions in communities.** The evaluation team heard accounts of reduced tensions from local stakeholders as a result of WFP interventions and programming. Examples of this include adopting an area-based approach in the provision of school feeding<sup>177</sup> and moving from household- to community-level interventions, which has reduced tensions in communities. WFP is also aware of the effect its general food assistance has in different communities and has taken steps to minimize possible negative effects through:

- adopting a blanket approach in areas where there was a high risk that aid distribution could potentially contribute to the crisis (for instance in the camps);
- considering the effect of aid distribution on the stabilization of communities and on bringing people together around community-level assets (for example, bakeries, irrigation projects and water user associations). Community level assets support equal access to bread and water and reduce tensions; and

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<sup>177</sup> WFP. Syria ACR 2022.

- pre-positioning assistance in case of conflict or blocked access to ensure the continuation of support.

**184. WFP integrated climate and the environment across its portfolio and took initial steps to reduce its carbon footprint.** WFP integrated analysis of climate risks and vulnerability, including erratic rainfall, in early warning and context monitoring<sup>178</sup> and as a cross-cutting issue in project design.<sup>179</sup> Climate-sensitive approaches were included in programming, including water user associations to address over-extraction of aquifers, water saving measures such as rainfall harvesting and complementary irrigation systems, support for pastoral reserve areas for sustainable grazing,<sup>180</sup> solar panel pilots,<sup>181</sup> joint agency responses to environmental disasters (fires and droughts), and training for Ministry of Local Administration and Environment staff on natural resource mapping.<sup>182</sup> Partners were positive about the WFP approach, but ongoing work is needed to make water user associations sustainable (Section 2.3).<sup>183</sup> In 2023, WFP hired a consultant to study measures to reduce its carbon footprint.<sup>184</sup>

**185. WFP has strengthened its processes to support accountability and communication with beneficiaries.** An accountability to affected populations unit was established in 2020 and WFP has been co-chair of the accountability to affected populations task force advising the UNCT on technical issues pertaining to accountability, providing training and ensuring that solutions are mainstreamed across all United Nations operations in Syria.<sup>185</sup> This was in addition to a number of accountability to affected populations processes in place, especially the WFP central helpline as the main accountability mechanism.<sup>186</sup> In addition, help desks and suggestion boxes (in Latakia only) were installed at cooperating partner-managed distribution sites and cash-based transfer retailer shops. In view of the discontinuation of food assistance to a high number of general food assistance beneficiaries, the country office increased the helpline capacity to receive more calls for assistance from beneficiaries and ensured proper training for the cooperating partner staff managing the help desks at the distribution centres. WFP used vulnerability assessments to prioritize those most in need of assistance and developed an appeal mechanism that allows beneficiaries who have their food assistance discontinued to have their cases re-examined.<sup>187</sup> These steps are building on an already good community feedback mechanism approach in Syria, which was considered to be pro-active and providing accessible information to communities.<sup>188</sup>

**186. There is improved inclusion of GEWE in WFP operations but efforts towards gender-transformative approaches are constrained because of financial and societal factors.** So far, emphasis has been on capacity building of women, especially in rural areas, aiming to strengthen economic empowerment.<sup>189</sup> These initiatives on their own, while valuable, do not contribute to gender transformation if they are not designed to address specific challenges faced by women. All field-level agreements now include specific gender equality-related activities and costs within the project proposal and budget.

**187. WFP has staff members dedicated to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) at the senior management level. The organization follows strict guidelines and protocols and ensures confidential reporting. It also provides regular training and awareness raising around gender, inclusion, PSEA and protection for its cooperating partners.** Issues of concern are quickly escalated to the country office senior management for attention. WFP staff demonstrated understanding on the

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<sup>178</sup> WFP. 2022. Early warning watchlist: September 2022 to February 2023 outlook. VAM. 3 October 2022. Water Crisis Analysis.

<sup>179</sup> WFP. Syria ACR 2022.

<sup>180</sup> KII with WFP staff and partners; evaluation team review of resilience design documents for 2022.

<sup>181</sup> WFP/ Syria ACR 2022.

<sup>182</sup> WFP. 2022. Syria fire incidents: September to October 2022. United Nations. August 2022. Critical response and funding requirements: Response to the water crisis in Syria.

<sup>183</sup> KII with partners and government; FDG with farmers.

<sup>184</sup> KII with WFP staff.

<sup>185</sup> WFP. Syria ACR 2021.

<sup>186</sup> WFP. Syria ACR 2021-2022.

<sup>187</sup> WFP. 2023. Situation Report 4.

<sup>188</sup> WFP. 2022. Inclusive Accountability to Affected Populations: Lessons from CFM hotlines in Syria and Moldova.

<sup>189</sup> WFP. Syria ACR 2021.

concerns raised regarding sexual exploitation and abuse, gender-based violence (GBV), child protection and other protection concerns. All interviewees confirmed that there are no concerns on this.

188. WFP has taken steps to strengthen disability inclusion in its operations. In the first instance, WFP created better access in food distribution points for people with disabilities through improved infrastructure for accessibility, updated standards for food and voucher distributions and provided training to staff of WFP and cooperating partners on including people with disabilities in beneficiary consultations.<sup>190</sup> WFP is also providing additional capacity strengthening to the cooperating partners on what disability inclusion involves and service-level agreements include steps for the cooperating partners to follow on disability inclusion in their activities. Yet, stakeholders interviewed found that more progress could be made in this area.

### **EQ 2.3 To what extent are the achievements of the transitional and interim country strategic plans likely to be sustainable, in particular from financial, social, institutional and environmental perspectives?**

**Summary Finding 23.** Sustainability of results is deemed unrealistic in a protracted humanitarian crisis context when combined with reduced financial resources, challenges with government capacity, sanctions and reluctance to invest in long-term solutions including repair of productive assets. WFP included sustainability from a financial and social perspective in the design and implementation of resilience projects. WFP considered environmental and climate change risks, especially linked to water management.

189. Humanitarian assistance to households, without any positive change to the enabling environment, can only be expected to meet immediate needs rather than address medium-term food security issues, as seen in previous evaluations.<sup>191</sup> WFP has tried to mitigate this by planning for transitioning from relief to early recovery, and by fostering collaboration with other actors to complement efforts.

**190. Efforts to address sustainability in Syria fall mainly under SO2 livelihoods, resilience, social safety nets and SO3 nutrition.** Sanctions, donor reluctance to fund assistance that could be perceived as reconstruction, and the Government's limited capacity and resources to maintain infrastructure and support social protection systems are significant barriers to sustainability. WFP struggled to fundraise for the repair of bakeries or capacity building for school feeding as some donors considered it governmental support, which could fall under international sanctions and donor policies.<sup>192</sup>

191. Site visits to irrigation projects, and satellite analysis,<sup>193</sup> showed a visible impact on local production, doubling or tripling yields, with irrigated farms clearly distinguishable from the surrounding non-irrigated lands.<sup>194</sup> The evaluation team visited bakery projects in Aleppo and Homs, which were still operating, providing subsidized bread and jobs, three years after they had been completed and handed over to the community.

192. Poor water management is also an underlying threat to the sustainability of Syria's overall agricultural sector, especially in the face of more regular droughts exacerbated by climate change.<sup>195</sup> The responsible ministry currently lacks the resources or capacity to manage water distribution and illegal wells have proliferated.<sup>196</sup> Climate change is exacerbating the issue. **To address sustainable water use, WFP took steps to set up community-level water user associations to manage water distribution and ensure project maintenance.**<sup>197</sup> The approach is sound. However, water user associations are new to Syria and their capacity varies heavily.<sup>198</sup> In focus group discussions, the evaluation team found that there was an expectation among beneficiaries that maintenance of assets would continue to be managed by the United

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<sup>190</sup> WFP. ACR. 2022.

<sup>191</sup> WFP. 2018. *Corporate Emergency Evaluation of the WFP Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis (January 2015-March 2018)*

<sup>192</sup> Interview with a United Nations partner and WFP staff.

<sup>193</sup> Annex XV.

<sup>194</sup> FGDs.

<sup>195</sup> FAO. 2021. *Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to the Syrian Arab Republic*.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with agricultural experts.

<sup>197</sup> Project proposal. 2022. *Building and Strengthening Rural and Urban Resilience and the Conditions for Recovery in Deir- ez-Zor*. Project proposal. 2022. *Strengthening Food Security & Resilience for rural households in Maskaneh Sharq of eastern Aleppo governorate through communal assets rehabilitation, and support to farmers*.

<sup>198</sup> Interview with agricultural experts.

Nations or by the Government.<sup>199</sup> Changing of mindsets and expectations of people to take responsibility at the local level will require a continued engagement with communities through the cooperating partners.

193. Livelihoods cooperating partners recommended that WFP stay with communities for at least two to three planting seasons to ensure sustainability and strengthen partnerships with technical actors at the project planning and design stage in order to ensure a strategic approach to activity selection and provide technical guidance to communities during consultation processes. This is important to avoid generating a “wish list of projects”.<sup>200</sup>

## **EQ 2.4 To what extent did the transitional and interim country strategic plans facilitate more strategic linkages across humanitarian action, development cooperation and, where appropriate, contributions to social cohesion?**

**Summary Finding 24.** WFP resilience work aligns directly with the humanitarian-development-peace “triple nexus” and their inter-linkages by providing food assistance, restoring food systems and promoting social cohesion in previously conflict-affected areas.

194. **WFP has laid the groundwork for sustainable interventions that contribute to reducing food assistance dependence.**<sup>201</sup> The WFP approach to support early recovery with a focus on starting agricultural production will in time influence the availability of food in the country and consequently reduce the need for food assistance provided by WFP. The ICSPs have brought this vision together through activities supporting both humanitarian assistance and early recovery. There are opportunities in the country to support a transition from a short-term humanitarian response toward a more long-term response to food insecurity, but progress is hampered by many factors – mainly external and not under the control of humanitarian or development actors. These include sanctions and international restrictions preventing the import of relevant equipment, barriers to engaging in reconstruction activities, limited technical expertise and a deteriorating economy, with an increasing number of people falling into need and no capacity to invest.

195. **It was found that WFP considers social cohesion and conflict sensitivity in its areas of operations, and develops policies and guidelines to underpin its operations.** An example of this is the WFP approach in Dara’a, where its engagement is based on a solid understanding of the context by remaining focused on addressing the underlying causes of hunger, avoiding exacerbating the conflict, and ensuring inclusivity and equity. Of note is the focus of WFP on its mandate of addressing hunger and ensuring respect for the safety and dignity of all beneficiaries in need through collaboration and coordination with all actors on the ground.

196. **WFP operations reflect an understanding that a one-size-fits-all approach is unworkable in the context of Syria.** This approach promotes inclusivity by tailoring humanitarian assistance to meet the requirements of various populations. WFP has adjusted its approaches to support access in hard-to-reach areas (for instance the convoy modality in Dara’a) and has a strong cross-border operation supported through its Gaziantep’s field office. When aid reaches difficult areas, it helps to reduce tensions and competition for limited resources within and between communities.

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<sup>199</sup> FGD.

<sup>200</sup> Interview with agricultural experts.

<sup>201</sup> WFP. ICSP 2022-2023.

## 2.3. EQ3: To what extent has WFP used its resources efficiently in contributing to the transitional and interim country strategic plans' outputs and strategic outcomes?<sup>202</sup>

### EQ 3.1 To what extent were outputs delivered within the intended timeframe?

**Summary Finding 25.** Major shifts in the humanitarian context challenged the timely delivery of outputs by increasing pressure on WFP funding, disrupting supply chains, and hampering access to beneficiaries. The increase in humanitarian needs outpaced donor funding and was only marginally cushioned by the organization's accelerated expenditure of available funding. The supply chain was affected by various external factors, but WFP adopted effective mitigations measures. Access to beneficiaries was mainly delayed by cross-border hurdles, though its planning capacity and effective coordination with humanitarian partners minimized further delays.

#### Overall timeliness in relation to the needs-based plan, targets and the humanitarian context

197. WFP operations were put under pressure due to significant external factors. The number of people included in the needs-based plan doubled from 4.88 million people in 2018 to 9.96 million in 2023 due to a sharp deterioration in the food security situation (see Section 1.2 and Figure 9).<sup>203</sup> WFP supply chains faced disruption due to COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, a ban on the import of goods from Türkiye and late delivery of donor funding. WFP also faced reduced access to beneficiaries due to conflict in 2018 and 2019.<sup>204</sup> These factors made it more difficult for the country office to deliver timely outputs at the scale foreseen in the WFP needs-based plan.

#### 198. WFP adopted several effective mitigation measures to respond to these challenges.

**Nevertheless, the numbers of actual beneficiaries increasingly fell short of their targets.** While actual beneficiaries corresponded to almost 100 percent of the plan in 2018 (actual 4.79 million versus planned 4.88 million), they remained about one third below the plan in 2022 (actual 6.02 million versus planned 9.11 million).<sup>205</sup>

#### Effects of funding and expenditure patterns on timely response to needs

199. **A major factor explaining why output delivery increasingly lagged behind beneficiary targets is the fact that resources did not keep pace with rising needs.** Donor funding increased sharply in 2019 and led to a 72.5 percent funded needs-based plan. However, funding levels fell in the following years, ranging from 50.7 to 27.4 percent of the needs-based plan. EQ 4.1, and Table 35 in Annex XVI have more details. From 2022, higher global costs, driven by the impact of COVID-19 and the Ukraine crisis on global supply chains, further outpaced donor contributions, placing pressure on the ability of WFP to respond in a timely manner.<sup>206</sup>

#### 200. WFP responded in a timely manner to the earthquake in northwest Syria in February 2023.

Cross-border operations into the earthquake zone were initially delayed due to bureaucratic constraints, but quickly picked up pace with a total of 338 trucks crossing into northwest Syria between 13 February and 7 March 2023.<sup>207</sup> However, it should be noted that WFP was able to begin delivering assistance within 24 hours of the earthquake through its network of partners in northwest Syria, Aleppo, Homs and coastal areas relying on food supplies that had been pre-positioned in northwest Syria in anticipation of a possible non-renewal of the United Nations cross-border resolution.<sup>208</sup> The Syria country office and the regional bureau in Cairo provided support to the northwest field office, deploying additional programmes,

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<sup>202</sup> The cost efficiency analysis reflects the data in the WFP Integrated Road Map (IRM) Analytics platform and not the ACR because the ACR reports do not present the different cost categories (such as the transfer values and transfer costs and implementation costs), which were used in this analysis.

<sup>203</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2018; 2023 data shared by the country office on 17/07/2023.

<sup>204</sup> Data shared by the country office 06/08/2023.

<sup>205</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2018 and 2022.

<sup>206</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2022.

<sup>207</sup> KII with WFP staff; WFP. 2023. Türkiye and Syria earthquake response: Internal sitrep #13.

<sup>208</sup> KII with WFP staff.

operational and human resources staff, a staff counsellor and emergency telecommunication cluster experts, with additional staff arriving on the ground within a week of the earthquake.<sup>209</sup> Partners appreciated WFP communication during the earthquake crisis, noting they “received frequent and good information on needs”.<sup>210</sup>

### **Timeliness of procurement and delivery of goods**

**201. The second major bottleneck of timely output delivery was the supply chain.** A ban on the import of food originating from Türkiye, in place since 2017, impacted the timeliness of the procurement and importation of food in Syria throughout the evaluation period, leading to four to five months lead times on importation.<sup>211</sup> Once the suppliers were contracted, however, the percentage of tonnage uplifted as per the agreed date was at least 95 percent (and usually higher) in all years of the period 2018-2022. Likewise, the percentage of tonnage delivered on time, in the right quantity, of the right quality and on time exceeded 96 percent in all years with available data (2018-2020).<sup>212</sup>

**202. Procurement of food was also slowed because significant funding was received late in the different years of the evaluation period.** To address the challenge of late donor contributions, WFP utilized its Internal Project Lending Facility to advance 37 percent of the contributions received in 2022 ahead of confirmation.<sup>213</sup> This was a vital tool that helped WFP maintain the flow of commodity imports. It also relied on the assistance of the WFP Global Commodity Management Facility (GCMF),<sup>214</sup> which mitigated some of the challenges in timely procurement faced by WFP. In 2018, WFP also established long-term agreements with food suppliers for locally procured commodities, which can in principle accelerate procurement and delivery. However, the volume of food purchased locally remained fairly small (around 12 percent) due to higher costs and lower quality in the local market.<sup>215</sup>

### **Effects of access to beneficiaries on timely output delivery**

**203. The timing of output delivery also hinges upon WFP access to beneficiary communities, which was mainly driven by the humanitarian context in the evaluation period.** Under SO1/Act1, the delivery of food was hampered by bureaucratic hurdles, conflict and security-related access constraints in 2018 and 2019. In 2020, WFP saw a notable opening of the humanitarian space in Syria, with more access requests approved. However, delays in approvals and facilitation letters continued to constrain operations even thereafter, especially in northeast Syria and for cross-line deliveries. These were the main cause of delays in food distributions in 2022 and 2023.<sup>216</sup> WFP staff also described ongoing lengthy delays at the Tabqa border crossing between areas controlled by the Government and the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces. Furthermore, cross-line convoys were kept loaded waiting approvals for several weeks before having to be unloaded again at considerable cost to WFP and the organization was not then able to meet its planned schedule for cross-line deliveries due to delays in approvals beyond WFP control. WFP was able to achieve only two deliveries in 2021 and seven in 2022, against a planned output of 12 per year.<sup>217</sup> However, United Nations partners and donors were uniformly positive about WFP logistical and planning support to cross-line deliveries.<sup>218</sup>

**204. The good logistic and planning capacity of WFP was also reflected in its decision to pre-position food in northwest Syria in anticipation of non-renewal of the Security Council resolution,** which helped its partners to distribute within the first 24 hours of the earthquake. The response was further

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<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> *KII with partners.*

<sup>211</sup> *Türkiye is an especially important supplier given its proximity to Syria, good prices, high quality standards and cost-effective transport networks.*

<sup>212</sup> *WFP Syria APP 2018-2022.*

<sup>213</sup> *WFP Syria ACR 2022.*

<sup>214</sup> *WFP Syria ACR 2021-2022.*

<sup>215</sup> *WFP Syria ACR 2018.*

<sup>216</sup> *Data shared by the country office 06/08/2023.*

<sup>217</sup> *KII with WFP staff.*

<sup>218</sup> *KII with United Nations partners.*

accelerated by consideration by WFP of the earthquake as an additional crisis on top of many others and by the integration of the WFP response under its normal general food assistance (SO1/Act1).

205. **Beneficiaries outside of camps did not generally raise concerns about the timeliness of WFP assistance.** However, some beneficiaries based in camps noted that food distributions were consistently late.<sup>219</sup>

206. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic presented additional challenges to WFP in maintaining access to beneficiaries of different activities. WFP developed mitigation guidelines and adjusted implementation approaches that allowed most activities to continue uninterrupted, with the exception of in-school assistance, which was suspended by nationwide school closures from March to October 2022. However, WFP was able to provide some take-home rations and nutrition activities, which were interrupted by breaks in global supply chains in 2020 and 2021.<sup>220</sup>

207. WFP mitigated several of the previous challenges through its enhanced coordination with partners for timely humanitarian response. **The WFP network of 55 partners gave WFP strong reach into each area of Syria, allowing it to respond rapidly** to local issues like renewed conflict in northeast and northwest Syria in 2019.<sup>221</sup> WFP worked in partnership with OCHA to facilitate the more rapid transfer of supplies cross-line into northwest Syria and to advocate to address delays at Tabqa crossing point into northeast Syria.<sup>222</sup> The WFP-led logistics cluster facilitated the timely transfer of supplies within Syria, cross-border from Türkiye and cross-line into northwest Syria. The logistics cluster also facilitated fuel for United Nations partners to address shortages that were delaying the delivery of health and nutrition services.<sup>223</sup> The emergency telecommunication cluster helped to maintain a stable communications network in the face of constant electricity cuts across eight common United Nations operational areas, while UNHAS facilitated timely travel of key humanitarian personnel across Syria.<sup>224</sup>

### EQ 3.2 To what extent does the depth and breadth of coverage ensure that the most vulnerable to food insecurity benefit from WFP activities?

**Summary Finding 26.** The country-level proportion of people in need covered by WFP declined from 72 to 50 percent from 2018-2022 as humanitarian needs outpaced donor funding. In response to funding shortfalls, WFP opted to maintain broad coverage while reducing the frequency and caloric value of its food basket. WFP continued to make its targeting approach for general food assistance beneficiaries more accurate through the vulnerability needs review process in government-controlled areas and took necessary actions towards compiling beneficiary lists that were as accurate as possible, despite challenges accessing beneficiary data, lengthy approval processes and the huge scale of assessments.

#### Appropriateness of coverage

208. Between 2018 and 2022, countrywide coverage of people in need by WFP fell from 74 to 50 percent.<sup>225</sup> Figure 15 shows that the number of people with moderate and severe acute food insecurity nearly doubled from 6.5 million in 2018 to 12.06 million (55 percent of the population) in 2022. In contrast, the actual number of beneficiaries supported by WFP increased by only one quarter from 4.79 million in 2018 to 6.02 million in 2022.

209. **With beneficiary needs outpacing available funding, WFP faced a trade-off between the scale of geographic coverage and the number of persons of concern reached versus the 'depth' of coverage (transfer values).** WFP opted for expanding coverage in absolute terms while reducing the frequency and

<sup>219</sup> FGD with GFA beneficiaries, May 2023.

<sup>220</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2020.

<sup>221</sup> KII with donors.

<sup>222</sup> KII with United Nations partner.

<sup>223</sup> KII with WFP staff.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> WFP total annual beneficiary numbers (Source: WFP Syria ACR 2018 and 2022) divided by total annual number of people with moderate and severe acute food insecurity (Source: FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises. 2023. Global Report on Food Crises 2023).



caloric content of its food basket (the latter was reduced from 1,600 kcal to 1,250 kcal per person per day in 2021). Logistically, WFP achieved relatively broad coverage through a network of partners (between 55 to 65 organizations throughout the evaluation period) and a network of seven field offices in eight governorates.<sup>226</sup> WFP increased its presence in Syria from 2018 to 2022, re-establishing the Deir Ezzor field office in 2022<sup>227</sup> and opening new sub-offices in Hama and Lattakia.<sup>228</sup>

**210. Partners almost unanimously reported that the current WFP approach of providing a broad coverage of minimal support needed to change.** Within WFP, different views exist, with some staff supporting a more targeted approach and others arguing to maintain coverage in order to stop people falling into deeper food insecurity.<sup>229</sup>

### **Appropriateness of targeting**

**211. Geographic targeting.** General food assistance (SO1/Act1) has been delivered across all 14 governorates in Syria since 2011. This broad coverage is justified by the fact that food security and livelihoods assessments consistently show high levels of food insecurity across all Syria's governorates.<sup>230</sup> School feeding (SO1/Act2) has been targeted since 2020 (after a revision of the targeting strategy) to geographical areas of Syria where food security, nutrition and education indicators were the poorest. Livelihoods and resilience activities (SO2/Act 3) have focused on areas with: i) high prevalence of food insecurity; ii) high levels of displacement or returns; iii) high levels of damage to agricultural or economic assets; and iv) a degree of stability and security to allow community engagement.<sup>231</sup>

**212. Household-level targeting.** The in-country data collection coincided with the start of introducing the results of the countrywide household-level vulnerability needs review, an exercise to enhance WFP beneficiary targeting. The vulnerability needs review started in 2021 with the aim of better understanding the needs of beneficiaries and improving the organization's accountability to affected populations. The vulnerability needs review exercise was a massive undertaking with over 1,200 enumerators from WFP cooperating partners trained on its tool with the aim of interviewing more than 1 million households. The vulnerability needs review aim was to improve the beneficiary selection tool to enable WFP to update its beneficiary vulnerability database, which had been in use since 2016. For its beneficiary assessment, WFP used the vulnerability needs review tool in the government-controlled areas. In the northwest, WFP used the beneficiary enhanced selection tool.

213. The evaluation found that, overall, there was an understanding that WFP is faced with a reduction in funding at a time of increased vulnerability and that difficult choices had to be made, including the need for better targeting, moving away from provision of blanket assistance.

**214. At the same time, it was found that beneficiaries' concerns centred on not understanding the selection criteria and how decisions were being made.** The starting point had been the beneficiary selection tool case load, which in many people's views (the Government, cooperating partners, WFP and beneficiaries) had shortcomings in terms of inclusion and exclusion errors, which had been carried over to the vulnerability needs review process. Across those consulted – beneficiaries, cooperating partners – the majority expressed the view that the selection criteria are not reflective of the Syrian contextual reality, that there was no transparency on how the analysis of the vulnerability needs data was done and how the beneficiaries' list was created.

## **EQ 3.3 To what extent were WFP activities cost efficient in the delivery of its assistance?**

**Summary Finding 27.** WFP used multiple procurement channels, tools and facilities to maximize economy in the acquisition of inputs. Commodity losses after delivery were generally modest although slightly

<sup>226</sup> WFP. 2022. Syria: WFP Presence.

<sup>227</sup> The Deir Ezzor sub-office was relocated to Hassakeh in 2012 due to conflict.

<sup>228</sup> WFP. 2019 & 2022. Syria: WFP Presence.

<sup>229</sup> *KII with WFP staff.*

<sup>230</sup> WFP. 2023. Whole of Syria Food Security Sector HNO 2023 - FSLA 2022.

<sup>231</sup> WFP. 2019. ICSP: Livelihoods Strategy.

above the regional average. Compared to the global average, the country office reaped visible portfolio-level economies of scale from the large volumes of transfers. Cost efficiency considerations were evident in (but not limited to) the selection of cooperating partners, activities with other United Nations agencies, and especially in the choice of transfer modalities. Cash-based transfers were generally more cost efficient than in-kind transfers, but not in all contexts and depending on exchange rates.

## Economy in the acquisition and management of inputs/commodities

### Economy in procurement

215. **WFP adopted several strategies to minimize the procurement costs of commodities.** The Global Commodity Management Facility not only reduced lead times (see EQ 3.1) but helped WFP to purchase food when market conditions were favourable and enable economies of scale. Moreover, the import parity system allowed WFP to identify opportunities for cost savings through local procurement. Local procurement accounted for 10-18 percent of total procurement volumes per year across 2018-2022.<sup>232</sup> In terms of quality, internal audits conducted in 2021 observed that the country office did not distribute any quality-impacted commodities to beneficiaries. Regional procurement decisions by the regional bureau in Cairo, however, “were primarily driven by price; other factors such as those related to potential quality issues [...] were not embedded in decision making”.<sup>233</sup>

### Commodity losses

216. Annual post-delivery losses in 2018-2022 ranged from 0.13 to 0.33 percent of total USD handled, which situated Syria in every year of the period among the 50 percent of countries in the regional bureau in Cairo region that experienced the highest losses.<sup>234</sup> The annual WFP reports on global losses have mostly highlighted losses in rice since 2020, frequently due to warehouse activities such as repacking, re-bagging, reconstitution and weight variances. In 2018, large volumes of food rations were lost due to looting of a cooperating partner’s warehouse after new conflict had broken out in the area. In 2021, WFP recorded the highest level of losses, 985 metric tons of rice, chickpeas and lentils, due to post-delivery losses during warehouse activities, transport and sampling. Standard mitigation measures, including staff training, were adopted in all years.<sup>235</sup>

## Cost efficiency in the delivery of activities and outputs

### Overall economies of scale and expenditure rates

217. Table 38 in Annex XVI gives an idea of the overall economies of scale of the (T-)ICSPs. The table presents the ratio of direct operational costs to direct support costs (DSC). **Similar to other countries in the region, the country office managed the portfolio with relatively less country-level overhead (direct support costs represented 2.28 to 3.37 percent of total direct expenditure) than the WFP global average (3.53 to 4.37 percent).** This is plausible given that the large volumes of transfers to beneficiaries allowed the country office to substantially leverage on overhead costs (in contrast to country capacity strengthening, for example). However, overall economies of scale declined between 2018 and 2021 before recovering in 2022 due to higher levels of expenditure than previous years.

218. WFP acted efficiently in using donor contributions within the foreseen disbursement periods (see Table 36 in Annex XVI). A snapshot analysis in May 2023 (Table 37 in Annex XVI) showed that only 5.9 percent of the total volume of non-expired grants had not been spent yet at that time, and that the country office had on average still 17 months left to spend the remaining balance. This positive result can largely be credited to the fact that WFP finance, budget and programming officers actively advise activity managers on the availability and prioritization of grants (given grant expiration dates).<sup>236</sup> In 2021 and 2022, WFP used a part of the unspent resources from previous years to cushion the impact of funding shortfalls on the timing and

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<sup>232</sup> WFP Syria APP 2018-2022.

<sup>233</sup> WFP. 2022. *Internal Audit of WFP Operations in Syria. Office of the Inspector General Internal Audit Report AR/22/04, page 14.*

<sup>234</sup> WFP. *Reports on Global Losses, 2018-2022.*

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> *KIs with WFP staff; WFP APPs 2019-2022.*

scale of its operations (see Table 36 and the corresponding narrative in Annex XVI for details).<sup>237</sup> Moreover, Table 37 in the same annex shows that, across all activity-level grants received in the evaluation period, the country office took on average 5.2 months before it started spending a grant. In activities with on average shorter grant durations, the first expenditure of a grant was done faster. Further research is needed to understand why the country office took so long to begin disbursing grants.

Cost efficiency of/with partners

219. Interviews with WFP staff and reviews of the partnership selection processes provided evidence that the **selection approach for cooperating partners was as cost efficient as possible in a constrained environment**. The main challenge encountered was the limited availability of government registered co-operating partners with which to work, which constrained the potential to scale up, and accordingly limited efficiencies.

220. WFP encouraged initiatives with United Nations agencies to support cost sharing agreements between agencies, especially for common services.

Cost efficiency of transfers

221. **The country office has strongly embedded cost efficiency considerations in the choice of transfer modalities.** Standard calculations performed by the evaluation team for the period 2018-2022, based on actual cost data at official exchange rates and summarized further below, suggest that in-kind transfers were generally less expensive than cash-based transfers. However, a recent (2022) analysis of the country office shows that the relative costs of different modalities may considerably vary with exchange rates. The country office also performs periodic cost efficiency analyses using the WFP Optimus methodology to inform decisions on cash-based transfer scale-up.<sup>238</sup> Optimus uses advanced analytics that simultaneously considers multiple key factors in the supply chain (and beneficiary preferences) from different data sources.

222. The results of the evaluation team's cost efficiency analysis by year and activity category are presented in Annex XVI. The key indicator is the ratio of transfer and implementation costs to transfer values. There is no evidence of systematic economies of scale in transfers within activity categories: transfer and implementation costs did not change proportionally less when total transfer values varied across years. For example, the ratio of transfer and implementation costs remained steady at around 34 percent throughout the period under evaluation, despite a large increase in the total value of unrestricted resource transfers from USD 186.7 million in 2018 to USD 282.6 million in 2022.<sup>239</sup> Restrictions on partner selection and the full roll-out of cash programming limited economies of scale.<sup>240</sup>

223. **The implementation costs of transferring a value of one USD to beneficiaries approximately doubled when transfers were made in-kind rather than in cash for all activities, except for school meal activities.** This is plausible given the extra costs of handling food items, such as procurement, storage and transport; significant challenges with permits and delays further added to delivery costs of in-kind transfers.<sup>241</sup> These challenges have less of an impact on the date bar distribution, which require less frequent transportation. Despite the implementation costs associated with in-kind transfers, the country office managed to keep the cost ratio for in-kind transfers under general food assistance (activity category 'URT/Unconditional Resource Transfers' in the Annex XVI) relatively stable over time. The food basket was reduced from 12 to 8 items (lower transfer and implementation costs per beneficiary), which partially compensated the reduction in ration size (lower transfer value per beneficiary).

224. **The general result that cash-based transfer was more cost efficient in the period 2018-2022 does not extend to all contexts.** Some areas of the country (especially in the northwest) lack retailers, and the continuous change of partners and request for permits drives up costs.<sup>242</sup> In periods of hyperinflation,

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<sup>237</sup> Available resources in a given year = resources allocated to this year plus unspent balances from previous years.

<sup>238</sup> WFP. Country Operations Management Plan 2022.

<sup>239</sup> Evaluation team analysis of data for 2018-2021 from WFP. 2022. CPB Resources Overview EV (accessed on 7 October 2022), and data for 2022 from WFP. 2023. CPB Resources Overview EV (accessed on 5 April 2023).

<sup>240</sup> KIs with WFP staff.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

cash-based transfer costs may increase sharply compared to in-kind transfers of commodities that are procured with several months of lead time. In its own cost efficiency analysis, the country office also showed that the cost of cash-based transfer (and the cash-based transfer portion in the hybrid modality) depends on the gap between the official and the informal exchange rate. The latter is more closely correlated with market prices, associated with a weaker local currency, and thus lower USD costs for cash-based transfers.<sup>243, 244</sup> This is one of the reasons why WFP advocates, through the Resident Coordinator, for a United Nations preferential exchange rate with the Syrian Central Bank.

## 2.4. EQ4: What are the factors that explain WFP performance and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected by the transitional and interim country strategic plans?

### EQ 4.1 To what extent has WFP been able to mobilize adequate, timely, predictable and flexible resources to finance the transitional and interim country strategic plans?

**Summary Finding 28.** Heavy earmarking of funding remains but positive trends are observed, with 15 percent unearmarked funding in 2022 supporting the ability of WFP to respond to the most urgent needs and addressing gaps in assistance. Multi-year funding for longer-term resilience engagement remains extremely limited.

225. **A heavy reliance on two main donors, USA and Germany, has made WFP vulnerable to reduced aid budgets in both countries.** Most donor funding remains earmarked at the country strategic plan (CSP) activity level (under Act1<sup>245</sup>) but some reduced earmarking has allowed the country office to make funds available where there were gaps.

226. Flexible (unearmarked) funds made up just 1 percent of allocated resources in 2020; down 68 percent from the amount received in 2019. In 2021, this was 4 percent of the allocated resources.<sup>246</sup> In 2022, 15 percent of WFP funds were flexible.<sup>247</sup> Unearmarked funding was prioritized by WFP – based on needs, for use in underfunded activities to maximize their impact. **WFP allocates funding based on needs across the country**, which is at the core of humanitarian operations.

227. **WFP recognized the increasing risks associated with unstable funding, as funding shortfalls have impeded WFP capacity to operate at full potential.** WFP is implementing an active fundraising strategy, increasing its efforts to diversify its funding sources, but the forecast is not promising.

228. Only a limited number of smaller donors are based in-country and most of the donors have their offices in the region or follow the Syrian crisis from their headquarters. Stakeholders indicated that given this very diversified set up, additional support from the WFP regional bureau in Cairo or headquarters is required.

229. Donors highlighted the important role of WFP in cross-border and cross-line operations and acknowledged the strength and capacity of a large-scale and reliable humanitarian actor. WFP is seen as the “backbone in the cross-border operations”. Donors indicated as well that WFP negotiates with all parties on the ground and is ready to go when missions are allowed in hard-to-reach areas, including northwest. Based on the consultations, the majority of donors found that WFP was a reliable actor to support both humanitarian assistance and early recovery.

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<sup>243</sup> WFP. *Country Operations Management Plan 2022*.

<sup>244</sup> WFP. 2022. Syria country office cost efficiency analysis: Supply chain CBT.

<sup>245</sup> WFP. ACR. 2022. *44 percent of contributions were earmarked at the activity level with 81 percent going towards the GFA activity.*

<sup>246</sup> WFP. ACR. 2021.

<sup>247</sup> WFP. ACR. 2022.

230. Some donors expressed the view that the humanitarian needs remain too high and the context still too unpredictable, warranting short-term planning of a maximum of two years, while others advocated for a more linked-up strategy between emergency response and early recovery (Table 20).<sup>248</sup>

**Table 20: Single-year versus multi-year pledge values, SY01-SY03**

	T-ICSP (SY01)	ICSP (SY02)	ICSP (SY03)
Single-year versus multi-year pledge (% of total pledge value)			
Single-year pledge	85.6%	70.6%	70.2%
Multi-year pledge	14.4%	29.4%	29.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
% of multi-year total pledge value <sup>1</sup> by activity category			
Unconditional resource transfers	89.9%	82.8%	90.7%
School meals programme	7.8%	10.3%	4.7%
Asset creation and livelihood activities	0.0%	3.4%	1.4%
Nutrition prevention activities	2.0%	2.7%	2.3%
Nutrition treatment activities	0.2%	0.3%	0.5%
Service provision	-	0.5%	0.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: WFP Syria CPB\_Grant\_Balances\_Report\_19.5.23.

<sup>1</sup> Direct support costs are excluded.

231. **Based on interviews it is evident that the donor community does not have a collective understanding on what would classify as early recovery or reconstruction.** Donors were clear that under the present international position (the European Union conclusions), support for reconstruction in Syria cannot be made available (until political transition is underway). Some indicated that support for early recovery could be provided as complementary actions to humanitarian assistance. The Brussels VII 2023 Donor Conference “Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region” highlighted the importance of supporting early recovery and resilience.

#### **EQ 4.2 To what extent were the monitoring and reporting systems useful to track and demonstrate progress towards expected outcomes and to inform management decisions?**

**Summary Finding 29.** There is increased focus on linking monitoring with adaptive programming through specific monitoring initiatives. Direct monitoring visits by WFP have increased during the period under review.

232. **WFP Syria has strengthened its vulnerability assessment and monitoring (VAM) capacity and its monitoring capacity, with room for further strengthening at the field office level.** A comparison between 2019 and 2022 country briefs indicates that the number of direct monitoring visits across all governorates has increased significantly. In 2022, around 20 percent of on-site monitoring visits across all governorates were directly conducted by WFP monitors or jointly with third-party monitors (TPM). The remaining visits were conducted by third-party monitors in areas not accessible by WFP staff.<sup>249</sup> Despite the challenges to obtain authorizations to travel to different geographic areas in-country, WFP has increased field monitoring visits, enhancing the quality of the services delivery. The country office’s increased staffing capacity has allowed the accountability to affected populations unit to follow up beneficiaries’ concerns captured under the community feedback mechanism (helpline). An audit report in 2021 recommended that

<sup>248</sup> Donor and WFP interviews.

<sup>249</sup> WFP. February & July 2022. Country brief.

WFP Syria follow up and close outstanding issues and better track beneficiaries' complaints or concerns raised through monitoring.

233. The monitoring approach is based on capturing data against the outcome and output indicators based on corporate guidance. There has been an increased focus on carrying out specific assessments of pilot projects to inform management decisions. There is evidence that these pilot studies informed operations, including the expansion of the hybrid modality for general food assistance, the introduction of fresh meals in certain settings, and the Sector 5 study demonstrating the impact of limited investments on food availability.

234. Third-party monitors are considered by WFP staff as critical in ensuring that all food baskets are accounted for and that beneficiaries are treated with respect and dignity. **Based on six visits to general food assistance distribution sites, it was found that the third-party monitoring quality varies.** It was also clear that there was no unrestricted access for third-party monitors to all sites; for example, to general food assistance distribution sites managed by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

235. **The CSP monitoring system complies with WFP corporate requirements in relation to GEWE.** There has been progress in the disaggregation of data and their reporting. However, the reported indicators provide very limited tangible information on gender empowerment and keep a focus on gender parity. There is limited progress in monitoring progress on gender-transformative action.

### EQ 4.3 How did the partnerships and collaborations with other actors influence performance and results?

**Summary Finding 30.** WFP is recognized by stakeholders as the leading agency in providing food assistance to those in need; it has directed significant attention to partnerships and collaboration with other agencies in support of both humanitarian action and resilience, which contributed to increased geographic coverage and complementarity in actions. The quality of the food distribution centres was varied. Where WFP had direct access itself or through third-party monitors, the service provision was stronger.

236. WFP plays a critical role in the humanitarian country team (HCT) in Syria due to its essential expertise in addressing food security. WFP logistical capacity is critical for multiple humanitarian actors, ensuring that aid reaches its intended recipients. WFP works with multiple actors including United Nations agencies, international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and government entities. WFP established strategic partnerships with relevant United Nations agencies, including: UNICEF and WHO for nutrition-specific interventions and UNFPA for the nutrition-sensitive programme for PBWGs; UNICEF for education interventions; FAO, UNDP and the International Labour Organization (ILO) for livelihoods activities and to support the resilience of crisis-affected populations.

237. **WFP developed strong partnerships with FAO and UNDP in support of resilience and livelihoods and with WHO for the COVID-19 response.** In partnership with FAO, WFP works with the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics on the annual food security assessment.

238. WFP partnered with UNFPA in getting pregnancy certificates for nutrition support for PBWG.<sup>250</sup> WFP cooperates with UNICEF in line with the corporate agreement on CMAM and provides occasional logistics support for UNICEF programmes.

239. Since the onset of the crisis and with the consequent large-scale humanitarian needs in the country, a network of cooperating partners has enabled WFP to deliver its assistance in a timely and effective manner. For its general food assistance distribution, WFP has cooperated with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other international and Syrian humanitarian organizations to contribute to better access to food across the country. On average 60 percent of general food assistance is distributed in government-controlled areas through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent's extensive network of local branches across much of the country.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> WFP Syria ACR 2020-2021.

<sup>251</sup> WFP interviews.

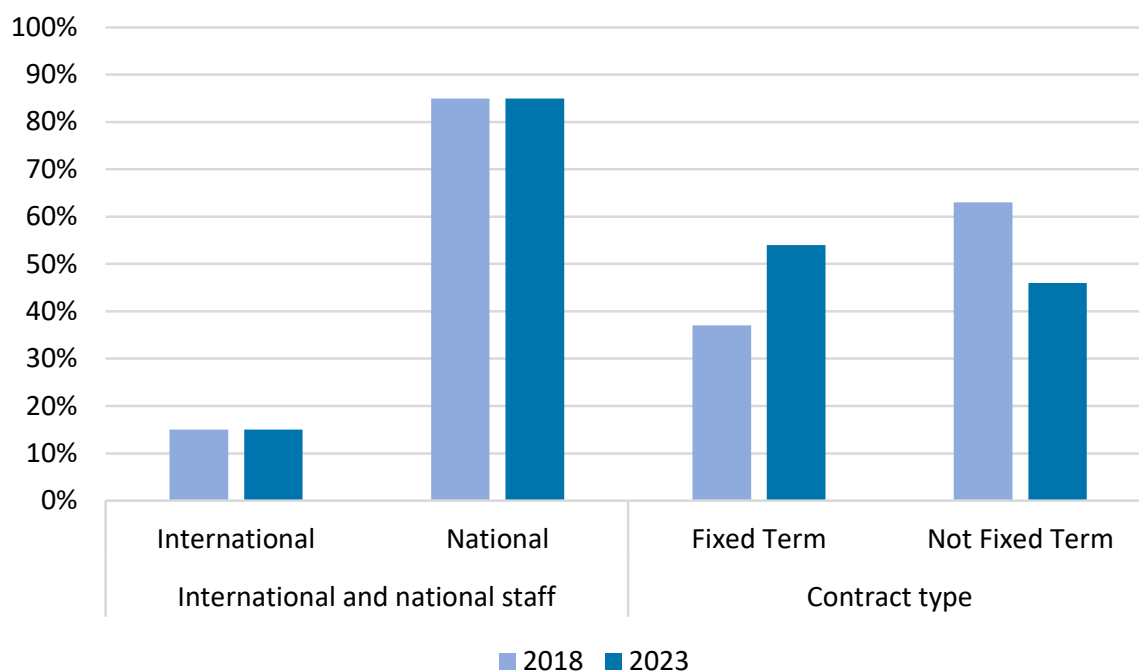
240. The evaluation team visited food and voucher distribution points managed by different cooperating partners and observed significant differences in quality-of-service provision. In areas where WFP staff and third-party monitoring staff have unrestricted access to carry out on-site monitoring, there was a noticeable difference in the organization of the distribution points in terms of confidentiality of the community feedback mechanism and the conditions of waiting areas for beneficiaries. Not all distribution points have a help desk for affected people to obtain information on eligibility or raise concerns.

#### EQ 4.4 To what extent did the country office have appropriate human resources capacity to deliver on the transitional and interim country strategic plans?

**Summary Finding 31.** There is greater stability among national staff, but the two-year rotation cycles for international staff have impacted stability and institutional memory. Short assignment duration does not always allow for sustaining certain strategic directions taken.

241. There have been some challenges with filling critical roles including protection, accountability to affected populations, vulnerability assessment and monitoring and for the geographic information system (GIS).<sup>252</sup> The country office is addressing staffing needs through various strategies, including a current workforce analysis, fast tracking recruitment for emergencies, and initiatives to develop staff skills. The country office made efforts to address staffing needs through the 2020 organizational alignment and conversion exercise.<sup>253</sup>

**Figure 23: WFP Syria staffing, 2018 and 2023**



Source: Data shared by WFP Syria human resources unit, 14/09/2023.

<sup>252</sup> Information provided by the country office.

<sup>253</sup> WFP. 2022-2023. APP.



242. **Through a new staffing framework, WFP is trying to address the practice of keeping staff members for too long on a consultant contract or special service agreement.** In 2023, 54 percent of the staff had a fixed term contract, which is an important improvement since 2018, when this was only 37 percent.

243. International fixed term staff are based in Syria for a period of two years on average; a short presence in the country does not always allow for sustaining certain strategic directions taken.

244. The evaluation found that insufficient resources have been allocated for gender and protection initiatives at the field office level. In the field offices there are only protection and gender focal points, which means these areas are added tasks in addition to the main job descriptions of staff members. This is also the case for monitoring.

245. WFP aims to provide stability and mental health support to its national staff. Support systems have been put in place to support national staff in dealing with stress and trauma.<sup>254</sup> "Safety and well-being" is integrated in the office planning and an increased number of staff are using the available counselling services.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> *Key Informant interviews.*

<sup>255</sup> *WFP. 2022. APP.*

# 3. Conclusions and recommendations

## 3.1. CONCLUSIONS

### Overarching strategic dimensions

**C1:** The WFP portfolio in Syria has made important contributions to addressing food insecurity through large-scale food assistance covering all governorates across all lines of controls; the strategy of spreading assistance more thinly before reducing the number of beneficiaries was found to be the right approach.

246. The consecutive (T-)ICSPs continued to refine the existing WFP operations, with an emphasis on strengthening: i) targeting and beneficiary management; ii) data collection and evidence-based programming; and iii) knowledge management. Growing humanitarian needs and dwindling resources have also required better focusing of assistance. **With the introduction of the (T-)ICSPs, WFP supported a large-scale assessment of its caseload to ensure improved prioritization among those in need.** While this process has faced several challenges, WFP has been moving in the right direction. To avoid inclusion and exclusion errors, WFP engaged with relevant government institutions to obtain additional data on the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of affected people in order to determine their eligibility for WFP assistance.

247. WFP has been the main provider of general food assistance in Syria since the start of the crisis. **This evaluation clearly highlights that general food assistance is a lifesaver for many families and is making a critical difference in food availability for food-insecure groups.** This effect on food security is now dwindling due to the reduced general food assistance, the rotation of beneficiaries and now the reduction in the number of beneficiaries. The approach of reducing the food basket composition and cash-based transfers and supporting the rotation of assistance were considered by the evaluation team to be the right approach in order to avoid sudden shock to beneficiaries. While still making a life-saving difference to families, the reduced assistance is starting to have a limited influence on the nutritional and food security of vulnerable families.

248. **General food assistance had a alleviating effect in crisis-affected communities and contributed to social cohesion.** Through area-based or community-level assistance, including school feeding and the restoring of bakeries and livelihoods activities, WFP food assistance also contributed to reducing tensions within communities. WFP successfully followed a tailored approach, recognizing the unique contexts and access issues across governorates.

**C2:** WFP efforts in Syria have been seriously hindered by a range of factors, including political considerations; this impact has been particularly noticeable in terms of the restricted financial resources available to facilitate the crucial programmatic decisions demanded by the increased and evolving needs of the affected population.

249. **Funding has not kept pace with the recent surge in needs.** The reliance of WFP on a few large donors and various smaller donors has made it vulnerable to shifts in domestic agendas. Reduced aid budgets in the main donor countries have resulted in decreased funding. While country office senior management is actively pursuing the diversification of the donor base, human resources available to fully explore the diversification options remain too limited. Moreover, most donor representatives are not based in Syria, with many absent from the region entirely. Consequently, the outlook for fundraising efforts remains unpromising.

250. In the Syrian context, further challenges hinder the funding of WFP operations. **Donors' reluctance to fund early recovery has constrained WFP from making the transition to support livelihoods and early recovery and taking a more sustainable approach to food insecurity.** Under the current sanctions, it is unfeasible to import a number of products needed to stimulate early recovery activities in agricultural communities. A food systems approach would be beneficial in bridging the gap between humanitarian support and early recovery and development efforts.

251. WFP faces a steady decline in humanitarian funding. This is partly attributed to reduced resources from traditional donor governments, in part due to the political complexities surrounding the regional Syrian crisis. These challenges force WFP to make tough decisions regarding its activities and approaches to

ensure adequate depth and coverage. WFP operations have provided a buffer against deteriorating food insecurity, but **the scale of deterioration and lack of funds mean that support is not sufficient to halt the deterioration of key indicators at food security outcome level.** The capacity to curb the negative trends is likely to diminish.

252. Deterioration of the humanitarian context in Syria has meant that WFP had to prioritize providing humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable, although there is a strong realization that growing food insecurity needs cannot be addressed through short-term humanitarian assistance. While humanitarian needs in Syria are expected to remain high in the foreseeable future and will continue to require a humanitarian response, support for early recovery may influence better outcomes towards resilience and stabilization in the future.

## Designing and implementing the strategic framework for WFP assistance

**C3:** The (T-)JCSPs laid the foundation for a dual-track approach; but the underlying strategic vision and approach, including the growing attention to supporting recovery in crisis-affected farming communities, is not yet fully developed into a coherent overarching framework.

253. **The (T-)JCSPs have a well-developed line of sight but a coherent strategic framework that would reflect the dual-track approach WFP intends to follow is not yet fully developed.** The (T-)JCSPs combined the direct provision of unconditional food and nutrition assistance with livelihood and resilience programming aimed at addressing the underlying causes of food insecurity. WFP has adapted its operations over the course of successive (T-)JCSPs and has incorporated both short-term and long-term dimensions in the different programmatic areas. However, the interlinkages between crisis response and early recovery and resilience are not sufficiently made clear.

254. **There are challenges and obstacles to moving further with a dual-track approach to the Syrian crisis.** While WFP has shifted quickly towards early recovery and resilience, there is hesitation among donors to support this dual pathway (see conclusion 2 above). WFP has used flexible funding to support agricultural recovery as far as feasible, but these resources are not sufficient for further progress. The absence of multi-year funding is a further limitation to supporting effective early recovery. Additional challenges are the weak capacity among cooperating partners to support resilience. With over a decade-long focus on humanitarian assistance, there is little capacity and expertise left in Syria to focus on resilience or recovery in the agricultural sector.

255. **WFP has a strong monitoring and vulnerability assessment and mapping capacity in Syria, providing solid evidence to support strategic decisions and adaptive programming by management and activity managers.** These assessments and monitoring efforts follow corporate guidelines and corporate outcome indicators. Complementing the internal WFP monitoring capacity with third-party monitors has been valuable, especially in hard-to-reach areas. WFP Syria has complemented this approach successfully with assessments of other resilience-oriented activities. These assessments were of good quality and provided evidence that, through targeted small investments, agricultural production can start again. While there are good examples, the assessment of long-term changes is not well defined in the country office's monitoring and evaluation strategy. Currently there is also no results-based monitoring within a theory of change framework, limiting learning and adaptation.

**C4.** Most intended outcomes identified in the (T-)JCSPs were reached, reflecting the good overall performance of WFP operations and their significant achievements. However, measured indicators only capture part of the limitations faced during implementation; obstacles persist in many areas.

256. **The large-scale food assistance has prevented a decline in food insecurity for many people of concern.** But increasingly WFP has not been able to provide full entitlements to all beneficiaries and has been forced to reduce food assistance to a high number of beneficiaries due to unprecedented funding shortfalls. WFP efforts in expanding cash-based assistance have been considerable but will need to keep pace with inflation in order to have a sustained effect on families' food security.

257. **Through its resilience and livelihoods support, WFP has focused on addressing the obstacles preventing communities from restarting food production.** Widespread destruction of community-level productive assets has prevented communities from restarting to grow crops. Repair of these assets will have an impact on the medium- and long-term availability and affordability of food in the local market and

will help support farming communities to become self-reliant as well as more resilient and resistant to future shocks.

**258. WFP achieved strong results in malnutrition treatment, but for malnutrition prevention WFP has struggled to reach its targets.** Based on available evidence showing the effectiveness of addressing the issue from both ends of the spectrum, combining malnutrition prevention and treatment among children and PBWG will remain crucial in the foreseeable future.

**259. The WFP school feeding programme has made a difference in supporting the retention and learning of children.** Supporting the return of out-of-school children is a priority for government and humanitarian actors. Nevertheless, there is insufficient evidence to indicate that the current approach of school feeding and vouchers has effectively facilitated a return to education, which is hindered by multiple factors.

**260. Technical assistance to support social safety nets has recently commenced and the groundwork for further engagement has been laid,** with a promising outlook regarding the effectiveness of future assistance if obstacles related to the limited financial capacity of the Government and hesitation on the part of the donor community to engage are overcome. National safety nets are virtually absent due to resources constraints, but involvement in community-level social safety-net initiatives has yielded positive outcomes. Support for fortification of flour and restoration of community bakeries is considered part of supporting social safety nets. Further clarity is needed around engagement with the Government on social safety nets and what technical capacity is needed.

**261. The WFP core comparative advantage of logistical and response capacity has enabled WFP to make critical contributions to the operations of the wider humanitarian community in Syria.** WFP has made available its well-recognized capacity in food security analysis and logistics, its solid experience in cash-based transfers, its active support to humanitarian sector coordination and its access to communities through an operational network of field offices and cooperating partners, including for cross-border and cross-line operations.

**C5: While there is certainly potential for enhancement, WFP has successfully navigated within a challenging environment, adhering to humanitarian principles, incorporating a conflict-sensitive perspective into its portfolio, building effective partnerships and increasingly paying attention to cross-cutting issues.**

**262. WFP has developed strong linkages with other United Nations agencies, including complementary partnerships with UNDP and FAO. WFP has maintained engagement with all relevant actors on the ground to safeguard the neutrality and impartiality of its operations.** To safeguard its independence, WFP coordinates its operations with the relevant authorities based on evidence gathered through its own assessments or those of the humanitarian community. While the principle of humanity is supported through the sustained efforts of WFP to work toward a beneficiary list that more accurately reflects vulnerability and need, improved communication with communities and beneficiaries on entitlements and criteria for inclusion is needed.

**263. The leadership and strength of WFP in the Syria humanitarian response has been highlighted by both internal and external stakeholders.** WFP can build on comparative advantages in terms of logistical and technical capacity. The ability of WFP to reach those in need, even in hard-to-reach areas, through cross-line and cross-border operations is to its credit. To achieve this, WFP has acted in a principled manner and negotiated access based on needs with all actors on the ground. While WFP is recognized as a 'powerhouse' in cross-border and cross-line operations, with many other United Nations agencies relying on WFP, access approvals are out of the control of WFP or any other humanitarian organization.

**264. WFP relies on an extensive network of cooperating partners, especially for general food assistance.** While WFP has processes in place to monitor the delivery of its assistance through cooperating partners, there are constraints on WFP and its partners' access to the food distribution sites of its largest cooperating partner. WFP has continued to provide capacity support to its partners but there is scope for working with partners to strengthen further the performance on accountability and transparency to communities.

**265. There is strong commitment from WFP country office and field office staff, including senior management, to implement conflict-sensitive programming in its operations within a very complex environment.** There is a strong understanding of the context and the interactions between WFP

interventions and the crisis and context dynamics. Using a conflict-sensitive approach, WFP assesses the potential effects of its interventions on the social cohesion in communities.

**266. Mixed progress is being made on various cross-cutting issues but dedicated efforts to increase the quality of mechanisms is recognized.** In particular, gender equality was integrated within the (T-)ICSPs and progress has been made to mainstream gender in WFP operations. Under general food assistance the vulnerability of women is considered, especially through the targeting of households headed by women. WFP assistance to supporting women with vouchers under its nutrition programming is considered empowering by women. While progress is being made on gender mainstreaming, progress on gender-transformative approaches under livelihoods activities is limited. WFP has incorporated environmental and climate change considerations into its operations, particularly in its resilience programmes. However, sustaining these initiatives will require ongoing attention and focus.

**267. WFP has increased its efforts and support to strengthen protection, accountability to affected populations and community feedback mechanisms.** Feedback mechanisms are of high importance within the context of a reduction in assistance so that beneficiaries are provided with the opportunity to raise complaints if they feel they are being incorrectly excluded from assistance. Such feedback mechanisms and follow-ups are critical for accountability. The lack of dedicated full-time field office staff for gender and protection has impacted these areas. At the country office level, there are full-time dedicated staff available to provide support in the areas of gender and protection.

**C6: Challenges around transparency and accountability remain, given limited access to personal identifiable information data leading to exclusion errors. Despite persisting challenges, WFP has taken steps to ensure its resources reach the most vulnerable. Over a million households across the country were assessed but prioritization of the most vulnerable is yet to be fully demonstrated.**

268. Although the vulnerability needs review has been a massive undertaking with over 1 million households across the country being assessed, its effectiveness in prioritizing the most vulnerable populations is yet to be fully demonstrated. The process has spanned over two years, marked by occasional delays stemming from approval bottlenecks for the review and challenges related to accessing geographical areas.

269. As mentioned in conclusion 5, a major persisting challenge in terms of accountability and transparency is the limited access for WFP to the food distribution sites of its largest cooperating partner. Moreover, **WFP does not have full access to personal identifiable information, which impacts on exclusion and inclusion errors and it is important to ensure that assistance is targeted to the most vulnerable.** The accuracy of the list is important to help the most vulnerable and support cohesion and stability in communities. Transparency and direct communication with beneficiaries as to why there are included or excluded beneficiaries will be critical when moving forward with reduced caseloads.

**270. WFP has adapted its approach and used different modalities to deliver its assistance depending on the needs of the targeted population.** Based on assessments and pilot interventions, WFP has successfully introduced – where feasible – cash assistance or opted for a hybrid approach to better meet the needs of the most vulnerable beneficiaries. School feeding was aligned with other United Nations food insecurity assessments.

### 3.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

271. The evaluation makes two operational and three strategic recommendations to address key issues for Syria in the next CSP. Annex XVIII links conclusions to recommendations.

**Table 21: Recommendations**

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>256</sup>
<b>1</b>	<p><b>Better reflect WFP's full mandate – saving and changing lives – in the next CSP by consolidating the transition to a “dual track” approach adopted to address the double burden of needs in the Syrian Arab Republic.</b></p> <p>The “dual track” approach – combining humanitarian emergency assistance, recovery, safety nets and resilience interventions – should allow for a greater focus on the sustainability of support and the transition from food assistance to resilience and recovery. For this, actions to be implemented include those below:</p>	Strategic				
1.1	Continue to advocate – jointly with other actors – an early recovery and safety net approach, emphasizing that it is not sustainable to keep people on general food assistance, and continue to make the case that, in a protracted humanitarian crisis, saving lives is about sustaining lives.		Country office	Regional Bureau for the Middle East, Northern Africa and Eastern Europe Headquarters (Partnerships and Innovation Department)	Medium	Second quarter 2025
1.2	Clarify the comparative strength of WFP in terms of mandate, expertise and reach in addressing the double burden of needs.		Country office	Regional bureau Headquarters	Medium	Second quarter 2025

<sup>256</sup> The dates are part of the new CSP design phase and continue into the implementation of the next CSP.

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>256</sup>
1.3	Develop a theory of change for the next CSP that reflects the transition to the dual track approach.		Country office	Regional bureau (vulnerability analysis and mapping, and monitoring and evaluation units)	High	Second quarter 2025
1.4	Accompany the theory of change with a results framework and monitoring mechanisms that allow WFP to track medium- to long-term changes; further enhance the country office's learning approach, allowing for stronger attention to long-term issues.		Country office	Regional bureau (research, assessment and monitoring unit)	High	Second quarter 2025
1.5	Increase WFP's direct monitoring of programmes.		Country office		Medium	Fourth quarter 2024
1.6	Identify strategies for addressing harmful gender-related norms under each CSP outcome, including for general food assistance, nutrition and livelihoods interventions.		Country office	Regional bureau (gender unit)	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024
<b>2</b>	<b>Achieve a stronger strategic focus by fine-tuning the design of the portfolio and seeking synergies across interventions to better align action with available financial resources and with the mandate of saving and changing lives.</b> Current circumstances will require challenging strategic decision-making to ensure an effective transition from humanitarian assistance to recovery and resilience.  Areas of improvement in each programmatic area are listed below.	Strategic				
2.1	<b>Unconditional resource transfers.</b> In the absence of increased funding to cover all food-insecure people, reduce and phase out general food assistance where possible, retaining it in areas of severe vulnerability.		Country office	Regional bureau Headquarters (programme and	High	First quarter 2025



#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>256</sup>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Reduce the number of beneficiaries in order to reach the most vulnerable people with rations that meet their food and nutrition needs;</li> <li>➤ Review the composition of the food basket to improve nutritional variety and reduce the emphasis on calories.</li> <li>➤ Continue rolling out cash-based transfers where feasible, in coordination with relevant actors.</li> <li>➤ Expand cash-based transfers, considering retail capacity and market functionality.</li> <li>➤ Regularly review cash and voucher values to take into account general inflation, market prices and other factors.</li> </ul> <p>Keep contingency planning and stocks in case of lack of access to hard-to-reach areas and maximize direct on-the-ground monitoring by WFP.</p>			cash-based transfer units)		
2.2	<p><b>School feeding.</b> Maintain an area-based approach to school feeding, prioritizing areas with high prevalence of food insecurity and education needs in coordination with education sector partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continue e-voucher support and strengthen coordination with the United Nations Children's Fund to reach more out-of-school children.</li> </ul> <p>Explore the potential of home-grown school feeding initiatives for further diet diversification.</p>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	First quarter 2025
2.3	<p><b>Nutrition.</b> Maintain a strong connection between malnutrition treatment and prevention interventions to address all forms of malnutrition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continue to target those most in need of assistance under the blanket supplementary feeding programme.</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	High	Fourth quarter 2024

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>256</sup>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Maintain current targets for the e-voucher programme for pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls; consider increasing the duration of assistance and expanding eligibility to second pregnancies.</li> </ul> <p>Improve the quality of social and behaviour change communication through increased investment and more training of partners, local authorities and key informants and make engagement more interactive so that it not only informs but also inspires and empowers women and girls.</p>					
2.4	<p><b>Early recovery/resilience.</b> Strengthen the adoption of a food systems approach for food security and nutrition in coordination with relevant actors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Discuss with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the United Nations Development Programme the opportunity to develop a theory of change for the food systems approach.</li> <li>➤ Within an overall food systems strategic framework, identify short-term (restoring community-level agricultural productive assets) and long-term (supporting better food supply) activities.</li> </ul> <p>Focus on areas and communities where revival of agricultural production will have an influence on food security, reliance on general food assistance and shock responsiveness.</p>		Country office	Regional bureau	High	Fourth quarter 2025
2.5	<p><b>Social safety nets.</b> Continue to focus on interventions that support inclusive social safety nets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Support the rehabilitation of public bakeries to provide subsidized bread.</li> <li>➤ Support national efforts to pilot the fortification of bread through a wheat flour fortification programme.</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	First quarter 2025

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>256</sup>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Provide technical assistance and share WFP learning with Syrian institutions in relation to the implementation of sustainable safety nets that support the poorest and most vulnerable in society.</li> </ul> <p>Facilitate understanding of cash programming for social protection among key stakeholders.</p>					
3	<p><b>Achieve a stronger strategic focus by enhancing targeting to reach the most vulnerable households with general food assistance.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continue engagement with relevant stakeholders to gain access to beneficiary and non-beneficiary data to allow for fair and transparent targeting.</li> <li>➤ Establish an annual process that supports the grievance redress mechanism for beneficiaries appealing exclusion decisions.</li> <li>➤ Build further evidence on the effectiveness of various cash-based transfer modalities in improving the food security of beneficiaries in various locations; consider cash vs. vouchers, cash-based transfers vs. in-kind transfers and full cash-based transfers vs hybrid transfers.</li> <li>➤ Produce a verified beneficiary list for general food assistance that is as accurate as possible.</li> </ul> <p>Strengthen direct communication with general food assistance beneficiaries and cooperating partners on WFP's targeting methodology.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	Second quarter 2025
4	<p><b>Further adapt to context and strengthen WFP's contribution to achieving cross-cutting aims, supporting principled aid delivery and accountability to crisis-affected populations.</b></p> <p><b>For this, actions to be implemented include those below:</b></p>	Operational				

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>256</sup>
4.1	<p><b>Humanitarian principles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Based on need.</i> Continue advocating for the right to adequate food and demonstrate a transparent approach in the delivery of assistance according to identified need.</li> </ul> <p><i>Conflict sensitivity.</i> Maintain a strong understanding of the operating environment and conflict dynamics through community presence and engagement with all actors on the ground. Prioritize the safety and well-being of staff and cooperating partners by adopting conflict-sensitive measures to avoid causing harm.</p>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Second quarter 2025
4.2	<p><b>Protection, accountability to affected populations, community feedback mechanisms.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Accountability to affected populations.</i> Expand helpline centres and use direct community-level engagement to communicate information regarding the reduction of assistance. Clarify targeting processes in a transparent manner.</li> <li>➤ <i>Community feedback mechanisms.</i> Maintain a WFP mechanism directly accessible by beneficiaries; and enhance the quality of the mechanism across all areas and all cooperating partners.</li> </ul> <p><i>Capacity of cooperating partners.</i> Further strengthen WFP efforts to support the capacity of cooperating partners to develop their own policies and tools for community feedback mechanisms and accountability to affected populations and support them in communicating decisions to communities.</p>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024
4.3	<p><b>Gender and inclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Nutrition.</i> Further integrate corporate nutrition and gender policies by considering household gender</li> </ul>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>256</sup>
	<p>dynamics when designing and implementing nutrition programmes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Gender-transformative actions.</i> As part of early recovery and resilience activities, undertake gender-transformative actions and monitor their progress using participatory approaches involving community members.</li> </ul> <p><i>Inclusion.</i> Strengthen the inclusion of people with disabilities across all activities and monitor it more closely.</p>					
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Maximize internal and external resources in support of a “dual track” approach and a focus on transition.</b></p> <p><b>For this, actions to be implemented include those below:</b></p>	Operational				
5.1	<p>In the context of reduced financial resources, ensure the strategic use of internal resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Align activities with available resources, optimizing planned results (see recommendation 2).</li> <li>➤ Advocate unearmarked funding for early recovery.</li> <li>➤ Support and empower staff seeking to implement changes in operational direction, ensuring that they have the right skills and competencies.</li> </ul> <p>Streamline, optimize, consolidate and simplify processes in order to enhance internal cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness.</p>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024
5.2	<p>Leverage headquarters resources in support of country office efforts to increase and diversify funding sources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increase headquarters and regional bureau support to the country office in advocating unearmarked and multi-year funding in support of early recovery.</li> </ul>		Headquarters (Partnerships and Innovation Department)	Regional bureau	High	Fourth quarter 2024

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when <sup>256</sup>
	Seek to identify new donors for early recovery activities and expand partnerships with current donors to scale up current successful resilience activities.					
5.3	<p>Support capacity development for cooperating partners in the area of early recovery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Provide adequate support to cooperating partners to ensure staff capacity and growth.</li> </ul> <p>Select partners for capacity-building training and support on early recovery.</p>		Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	Fourth quarter 2024

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