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WFP EVALUATION

EVALUATION OF SCHOOL FEEDING MODALITIES APPLIED IN ARMENIA (2018-2023)

Decentralised Evaluation Final Report
WFP Armenia

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Executive Summary

Evaluation features

1. The Decentralised “Evaluation of School Feeding Modalities Applied in Armenia” was commissioned by World Food Programme (WFP) Armenia and spans January 2018 to December 2023. The report focuses on the School Feeding Programme (SFP) activities implemented by WFP and its partners within the Country Strategic Plan (CSP) 2019-2025 under Strategic Outcome 1 (SO1): ‘*Vulnerable populations in Armenia, including schoolchildren, have access to adequate and nutritious food year-round*’, and Strategic Outcome 2 (SO2): ‘*National policies, programmes, and systems are strengthened to improve food security and nutrition among targeted groups by 2024*’.

2. The evaluation assesses the project’s performance (accountability) and provides valuable lessons for its future (learning). As such, it combines summative and formative elements. The evaluation should serve as a basis for advocacy and a showcase of the effectiveness of the pilot transformative approach. The timing of the evaluation coincides with the end of the implementation of the programme under the current CSP. The main users of the evaluation are internal (WFP) stakeholders; governmental partners at the national (the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports (MoESCS), the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Ministry of Economy (MoE), the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI), and the School Feeding and Child Welfare Agency (SFCWA)), regional (Yerevan Municipality and governors’ offices in ten provinces), and local (community administrations) levels; implementing partners (NGOs), multilateral and bilateral existing and potential donors, as well as United Nations Agencies.

Key methodological features

3. The evaluation covers all ten provinces that benefited from WFP SFP, focusing on four principal ones, namely Gegharkunik, Kotayk, Lori, and Armavir, which are covered by the current CSP, and Tavush, where WFP implemented pilot Food Value Chain (FVC) interventions. The evaluation uses a theory-based evaluation (TBE) approach, integrating utilisation-focused principles and applied mixed methods. The evaluation addresses six evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, impact, and sustainability. Data were collected across five provinces of Armenia through desk review and participatory methods, capturing the voices of different groups of stakeholders. Data collection methods included Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), observation walks and questionnaire surveys. A total of 68 KIIs, 25 FGDs, ten on-site visits, and 611 schoolchildren (307 boys, 304 girls) were involved.

4. Quantitative data was analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics, where relevant, to emphasise significant differences. Primary and secondary data sources and data collection methods were triangulated for a comprehensive understanding of phenomena, ensuring the findings were valid, impartial, independent, and credible. The evaluation abides by the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan (UNSWAP) criteria to integrate Gender Equality and Women’s empowerment (GEWE) issues and adheres to United Nations evaluation group (UNEG) guidelines. No major constraints were encountered. Limitations mostly related to the access to some documents. Gender and age-disaggregated data for schoolchildren are available, but information on children with special needs lacks sex-disaggregation. Additionally, data for other beneficiaries, such as teachers and school staff, are not sex-disaggregated, highlighting gaps in the program’s monitoring and reporting.

Context

5. Armenia is a landlocked country in the South Caucasus region that is prone to natural disasters, including droughts, hailstorms, floods, and landslides. Food insecurity is primarily created by lack of access to nutritious food, lack of financial means, the population’s non-agricultural incomes, inequality, limited opportunities in the labour market, limited economic access to healthy diets, and low awareness of and education about nutrition. Malnutrition is an issue in Armenia, manifested in the double burden of stunted and overweight children, particularly those under five years of age. Obesity and overweight are prevalent in all social strata of the population and is confirming an alarming trend towards increased malnutrition levels in adulthood.

School feeding programme

6. Since 2010, WFP Armenia's flagship initiative has been the School Feeding Programme (SFP). The WFP has worked with the Government and partners to develop a comprehensive model of SF; the handover of school feeding activities to the Government began in 2017. Under the current (revised) CSP for 2019 to 2025, WFP, with a budget of US\$ 18 million, not only continued to support the Government in finalising the smooth handover of school feeding but also worked to develop a more sustainable and school-based transformative model that is more nutritious than the traditional model and benefits vulnerable communities. It introduced wholegrain flour production and baking covering the entire value chain, with a farm to work approach, involving schoolchildren. As part of WFP's efforts to establish a more sustainable, gender-transformative, and nutrition-sensitive approach to school feeding, WFP has piloted the use of greenhouses and gardens, together with purchasing from local producers through cash-based transfers (CBTs). Gender and age were systematically integrated into the implementation of all activities linked to school feeding, as proved by WFP's gender and age marker (GaM)¹ score of 4.¹

Key evaluation findings

7. **Key Findings—Relevance:** The SFP has contributed to addressing issues of overweight, obese, and malnourished primary schoolchildren and has been transferred to the Government of Armenia (GoA) through the provision of school meals, infrastructure rehabilitation, capacity strengthening, and piloting of innovative models for school production capacities. The SFP has not only provided nutritious meals but also promoted a healthy lifestyle and financial savings for families. The SFP fits in the concept of "Leave no one behind", a commitment by United Nations (UN) Member States to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities, end discrimination, and prioritise the most vulnerable and marginalised members of society. The SFP has particularly benefited vulnerable households in remote provinces and rural areas. The programme has also integrated gender equality and women's empowerment, ensuring equal access to meals and promoting socio-economic empowerment for women.

8. **Key Findings—Coherence:** WFP's close collaboration with the GoA led to the development of new policies on food security and nutrition. The WFP's School Feeding Programme (SFP) complemented national policies on education and nutrition, aligning with the Sustainable School Feeding Strategy (2013) until its conclusion in 2022. WFP also supported the development of subsequent programmatic documents. This said, although school feeding is generally aligned with GoA strategies, it is not explicitly mentioned in national strategic documents outside of the specific strategies, nor does a dedicated school feeding legal text exist. However, its integration into key sectoral frameworks and its inclusion in the mid-term national budget, as outlined in the GoA Action Plan 2021– 2026, underscore its institutional importance. Various stakeholders have been actively involved in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the programme. The WFP's SFP has established synergies with other UN agencies, local NGOs, and academia, contributing to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 17. From an internal coherence perspective, the SFP has been fully integrated in the Country Strategic Plan, and is aligned with WFP's global approach on school feeding.

9. **Key Findings—Effectiveness:** WFP effectively delivered on its Country Strategic Plan Strategic Outcomes 1 and 2 in improving nutrition of children and contributing to improving educational attainment as well as building capacities for the Government of Armenia. It has also contributed to the establishment of an enabling environment in schools. The development and piloting of innovative models allowed school feeding to switch from a poverty reduction focus to a platform for learning opportunities on healthy nutrition and lifestyle, innovative agriculture, circular economy, local value chains, and green energy. It has also shown signs of delivering on the intermediate outcomes of increased resilience and economic sustainability, optimisation of resources and improvement of livelihood of communities involved with the schools. WFP's support also acted as a buffer to shocks, alleviating the impacts on food security and poverty of affected populations and of the effects of COVID-19. Availability of multiyear funding committed national stakeholders and WFP teams, and a gradual approach towards handover allowed full nationalisation of the traditional school feeding model to be ensured. In this regard, it has contributed to the expected intermediate outcomes of developing a policy framework, institutionalising school feeding and fostering

¹ The WFP Gender and age Marker (GaM) is a corporate tool that codes, on a scale from 0 to 4, the extent to which gender and age considerations are integrated into the implementation (GaM M) of a WFP Country Strategic Plan (CSP). Four is the highest score, meaning that the gender and age considerations are fully and systematically integrated in the implementation.

social and behavioural change toward healthier lifestyles. The main opportunities and commitments for future efforts are the introduction of school feeding in Yerevan, the expansion of school feeding to higher grades, and the scale-up of transformative school feeding across the country. With the assistance of the School Feeding and Child Welfare Agency (SFCWA), the schools are now able to engage in agricultural core activities. However, the agro-business component and revenue formulation are still areas that require further development.

10. **Key Findings—Efficiency:** The implementation of the SFP was cost-efficient overall, with cost-savings and budget adjustments made to accommodate price increases and rising needs. Despite the establishment of an institutional framework for the ongoing implementation of a National School Feeding Programme (NSFP), a lack of human resources at the SFCWA and in regional departments on education, science, culture, and sport is currently limiting the further institutionalisation of the SFP. The SFCWA has a trained monitoring team and tools for proper monitoring of NSFP. Meanwhile, a digitalisation process and integration into the Electronic Management and Information System of the MoESCS is still in progress. Overall, the traditional school feeding approach requires less investment in the short terms but is potentially less sustainable; while the transformative approach yields significant economic benefits and longer-term added value, despite its higher cost at first, in the order of tenfold the cost per pupil.

11. **Key Findings—Sustainability:** Government stakeholders are prioritising school feeding as an essential part of the education system. With the assistance of WFP, school feeding was gradually fully handed over to the GoA. In spite of the integration of school renovation into the GoA plans and budgets, some government informants' perception of sustainability is compromised by challenges with securing consistent funding and partial reliance on external support. The current Education Sector reform can be seen as a window of opportunity for school feeding and long-term sustainability and further improvement through specialisation of management functions at school. The SFP sustainability is vulnerable to internal risks (legal framework, financial resources, and capacities) and external risks (increased food costs, high inflation, political instability, and conflicts). It is possible to alleviate these by leveraging additional financial and technical support to the national institutions that are responsible for the SFP administration following the handover.

12. **Key Findings—Impact:** The SFP has positively contributed to long-term results in the areas of education and healthy and nutritious food in Armenia. School meals are equally accessible for girls and boys. The differential impacts of school meals are observed depending on the school feeding model and provinces. Refugee children have the same access to the SFP as resident primary schoolchildren showing good inclusiveness. The program also has positive impacts on children's growth, behaviour, and on agricultural skills in communities. The transformative component including green energy also reduces CO2 emissions and SFP costs while potentially generating revenues for schools and local SMEs. However, the SFP has faced challenges regarding the sales potential of transformative products. Meeting all the needs of children with special needs, especially in the area of accessibility still needs further attention.

Conclusions

13. The evaluation highlights that WFP's School Feeding Programme (SFP) in Armenia effectively addresses national needs and aligns with government priorities, particularly focusing on capacity building, programmatic continuity, and sustainability. While the programme covers two-thirds of schools and targets those most in need, some gaps in inclusion and planning responsibilities remain beyond WFP's scope. The transformative model introduced by the programme integrates schools with communities and local producers, offering potential for financial self-sustainability, though it requires substantial investments and continued donor support to achieve viability.

14. Effectiveness is underscored by WFP's ability to adapt during the COVID-19 pandemic, transitioning to Take-Home Rations and maintaining support for children. The SFP has strengthened institutional and individual capacities and fostered partnerships with government entities, SMEs, and international donors, notably the Russian Federation. However, challenges persist in monitoring and retaining developed capacities, requiring ongoing support. Budget adjustments during the pandemic were justified and aligned with evolving needs, and the transformative model demonstrates promise but necessitates significant initial funding.

15. Sustainability is bolstered by the government's mid-term funding and integration of initiatives like the Healthy Lifestyle Curriculum and agri-clubs, which promote long-term behavioural and educational improvements. The SFP's contributions to nutrition, education, and income generation for SMEs are

significant, with impacts extending beyond schools into communities. However, financial vulnerabilities and legal constraints threaten full implementation and scaling of transformative approaches. Overall, the programme has evolved into a platform for broader human capital investment, advancing public health and educational outcomes with potential for sustained positive impacts.

Lessons

16. The collaboration between WFP, the Government of Armenia, and external donors has facilitated a smooth transition of the School Feeding Programme (SFP) to government ownership, even during the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Strategic planning and unwavering focus on programmatic objectives were critical to maintaining continuity. Government stakeholders and WFP prioritise school feeding in education, with infrastructure development, needs analysis, and capacity building. Gradual handover and political will contribute to success, but financial constraints challenge sustainability.

17. A key lesson is the importance of viewing innovative approaches, like the transformative model, as investments requiring time and donor support to mature, acknowledging potential delays or partial success while fostering long-term impact. Transforming school feeding to a comprehensive learning platform beyond food provision for various beneficiaries has the potential for a spillover effect.

18. Capacity-building efforts need sustained support to institutionalize acquired skills and mitigate challenges like staff turnover, emphasizing the ongoing need for national capacity development in programme transitions.

Key evaluation recommendations

19. Six recommendations were derived from the evaluation results. Three recommendations are to be addressed at the strategic level: a further three at the operational level.

- a. Enhance resilience to external shocks through the advancement of adaptive management and flexibility in implementation frameworks to enable a more robust SFP during crises and scaling up the transformative SF model which promotes circular economy
- b. Ensure the institutionalization of monitoring and evaluation of SFP by developing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy and promoting an inclusive SFP that ensures equal access to school feeding for all children.
- c. Engage and empower local communities by establishing a community mechanism to promote ownership.
- d. Secure sustainable long-term funding to support the operational expenses of school feeding initiatives by revising the Sustainable School Feeding Strategy and developing legislation that incorporates school feeding within the government's budgetary framework. Enhance staff training and professional development in managing school feeding components.
- e. Secure funding for investments in both soft and hard components to enhance and expand the school feeding program and improve its resilience through fundraising from GOA, donors, the corporate sector, and the diaspora
- f. Continue enhancing interagency and multi-stakeholder collaboration to strengthen the involvement and coordination of all relevant parties into SFP.

1. Introduction

1. The evaluation consortium composed of the ICON Institute and 4G eval was commissioned by the World Food Programme (WFP) Armenia Country Office to conduct the decentralised “Evaluation of the school feeding modalities applied in Armenia”. The evaluation was conducted both remotely and in Armenia between January and July 2024. This draft report presents the rationale, objectives, methodology, findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the evaluation.

1.1. EVALUATION FEATURES

2. The evaluation was commissioned for the following reasons:

- To conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the school feeding programme (SFP), including its piloted components, such as the new transformative school agriculture component, food value chain (FVC) pilot interventions complementing the SFP, and green energy solutions and their contribution to the circular economy.
- To highlight key insights on performance, identify lessons learned, and contribute to informing future programming in Armenia and other WFP contexts, including the potential expansion of the programme into urban school feeding and the development of the next country strategic plan (CSP).
- To enable efforts aimed at strategically securing continuous sustainability for the handed-over programme.
- To comply with corporate requirements by conducting a decentralised evaluation.

3. **Objectives:** The evaluation has the dual objective of assessing the performance of the project (accountability) and learning valuable lessons for its future (learning). As such, it combines both summative and formative elements. The evaluation also pays specific attention to the SFP handover strategy, capacity building, integration of human rights and gender equality, and to the creation of an enabling environment. It also analyses the perspective of the scale-up of SFP in Yerevan including the Government's commitment and buy-in.

4. **Scope:** The evaluation focused on Activities 1 (School Feeding) and 2 (Technical Support to national Institutions) implemented under Strategic Outcome 1 (SO1) and Strategic Outcome 2 (SO2), as well as Transformative School Feeding (SF) and FVC pilot interventions. The WFP SFP has two specific outcomes: (i) Vulnerable populations in Armenia, including schoolchildren, have access to adequate and nutritious food year-round, and (ii) National policies, programmes and systems are strengthened to improve food security and nutrition among targeted groups by 2025. Within the reviewed aspects - the gender equality and women empowerment, including human rights approaches, accessibility to income generating opportunities for women, and environmental sustainability of smallholder farming activities was also analysed as in line with UNSWAP Criterion 1b. The period covered by this assignment was from January 2018 to December 2023. The evaluation covers all ten provinces which benefited from the WFP SFP, with a focus on four covered by the current CSP, i.e. Gegharkunik, Kotayk, Lori, and Armavir. The evaluation also covered Tavush, which serves both as an intervention and comparison province. WFP has implemented several important pilot Food Value Chains interventions there, including the Wholegrain Wheat Project and Legumes Value Chain (Berd) Project.

5. **Main stakeholders and intended users:** The evaluation engaged a broad range of internal and external stakeholders either directly participating in the programme or with the relative power to influence it, including WFP offices and divisions at different levels, beneficiaries, Government at the central and local levels, UN country team, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and donors.

6. The evaluation findings are expected to be useful for the following target audiences:

- Internal (WFP) stakeholders, including the WFP Armenia country office (CO), the WFP regional bureau in Cairo (RBC), the WFP HQ, including the school feeding division, the office of evaluation (OEV), and research, assessment, and monitoring departments,

among others, as well as the WFP executive board (EB) and WFP offices in other countries in the region that can learn from the Armenian model.

- Governmental partners at national (the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports (MoESCS), the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Ministry of Economy (MoE), the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI), and the School Feeding and Child Welfare Agency (SFCWA), regional (Yerevan Municipality and governors' offices in ten provinces), and local (community administrations) levels.
- Implementing partners, including NGOs (the Social and Industrial Foodservice Institute (SIFI) of the Russian Federation, AGIT, the New Society Institute, Green Lane, Work and Motherland, Green Age, and Shirak-Farmers) and academia (Armenian National Agrarian University).
- Donors, including the Russian Federation and other multilateral and bilateral existing and potential donors (European Union (EU), The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Asian Development Bank (ADB), France, Italy, Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC)).
- United Nations Agencies (UNICEF, UNDP, FAO, WHO, UNFPA, UNESCO, and IFAD).

7. **Evaluation team:** The assignment was conducted by two international and two national experts with complementary skills in the evaluation and thematic sectors, including agriculture, food security and nutrition, support of smallholder farmers, community and stakeholder engagement, formal and informal education in rural areas, gender mainstreaming, and gender and inclusion in education. The evaluation process was actively supported by the country office throughout the whole implementation by provision of programme documents, stakeholder and beneficiary contacts, and involvement in key stages of the evaluation.

8. **Timing and duration of fieldwork:** The data collection took place in April and May 2024 (see Annex 6, Field mission programme and summary of people interviewed) and was concluded by online debriefing presenting the preliminary findings to the WFP, regional, and country office representatives. The second meeting was held for the internal and external stakeholders and was used to collect additional feedback on key findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

1.2. CONTEXT

9. Between 2018 and 2023, international assistance for school feeding programs underwent significant transformations, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, international organizations among which WFP were instrumental in providing school meals to millions of children worldwide, emphasizing locally sourced and sustainable initiatives to enhance food security and educational outcomes. For instance, WFP's Home-Grown School Feeding programs aimed to link school feeding with local agricultural production, fostering community development and resilience.²

10. WFP's school feeding efforts aim to provide free, nutritious meals to children in schools, ensuring that students have the energy and focus needed to learn effectively. These programs are particularly impactful in low- and middle-income countries, where food insecurity and poverty often hinder educational access. School feeding programs initiatives supported by WFP are designed to address hunger, boost education, and support community development. WFP's school feeding efforts aim to provide free, nutritious meals to children in schools, ensuring that students have the energy and focus needed to learn effectively. These programs are particularly impactful in low- and middle-income countries, where food insecurity and poverty often hinder educational access.

11. WFP's approach includes Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programs, which source food locally to stimulate agricultural markets and benefit smallholder farmers. By connecting local agricultural production to school feeding, WFP fosters economic opportunities in rural areas, reduces supply chain vulnerabilities, and promotes sustainability. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP adapted its operations to include take-home rations, cash or food transfers, and other measures to continue supporting children's nutrition during school closures. The pandemic underscored the critical role of school feeding programs in social protection systems, prompting renewed global commitments to expand and

² WFP - summary of evidence – WFP Evaluation - Home-Grown School Feeding
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strengthen these initiatives. By 2023, efforts were underway to restore and enhance school feeding programs, integrating lessons learned during the pandemic to build more resilient and comprehensive support systems for children's nutrition and education worldwide.

12. Additionally, WFP collaborates with governments to build capacity and establish nationally owned school feeding programs, ensuring long-term sustainability. By 2023, WFP was a key driver in advancing global commitments to expand access to healthy school meals, contributing to achieving several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including those related to hunger (SDG 2), education (SDG 4), and health (SDG 3).

13. In response, international agencies adapted by implementing alternative solutions such as take-home rations and cash transfers to maintain food security for affected students. The pandemic underscored the critical role of school feeding programs in social protection systems, prompting renewed global commitments to expand and strengthen these initiatives. By 2023, efforts were underway to restore and enhance school feeding programs, integrating lessons learned during the pandemic to build more resilient and comprehensive support systems for children's nutrition and education worldwide.

14. The school feeding programme supported by WFP in Armenia is also fully in line with the general approach of WFP in SFP by supporting educational outcomes, improving nutrition, linking communities and working with the government for the transfer and upscaling of the SFP.

15. **General Overview:** Armenia is a landlocked, upper-middle-income country with a population of 2.9 million (WB, 2023)³. The country has been undergoing reform and development since snap parliamentary elections in 2021. The Government aims to enhance transparency and accountability, combat corruption, and improve human rights and the rule of law³⁴. These efforts support broader economic development goals, including modernisation and focusing on the information technology sector to transition to a service-based economy.

16. Armenia faces significant environmental and social hurdles, being one of the most shock-prone countries in the South Caucasus and Central Asia because of its seismic location. It faces challenges from various natural disasters, including earthquakes, floods, droughts, hailstorms, and landslides, which are worsened by climate change. These disasters along with conflict and wars, inter alia, threaten agricultural productivity. This leads to a dependency on imported vital food items, higher prices, and sensitivity to exchange rate changes. Additionally, Armenia grapples with socio-economic issues, including a 24.8 percent poverty rate in 2022 with 1.2 percent living in extreme poverty⁵. High emigration rates, driven by the search for better economic opportunities, particularly affect women, who tend to take on more responsibilities and social roles due to their spouse's absence while remaining dependent on their husband's income and living under pressure from family members to abide to cultural norms⁶. These result in a financial reliance on remittances. Remittances play a significant role in household economies and employment choices. After a peak in 2013, when money sent home from abroad amounted to 19.7 percent of GDP, the figures dropped to 11.2 percent in 2019, 10.4 percent in 2022⁷, and 4.6 percent in the first nine months of 2023⁸.

17. Armenia's human development index declined in 2021, ranking 85th on the Human Development Index⁹ (compared with 81st in 2020)¹⁰. Armenia also faces gender inequalities, as evidenced by the gender gap in labour force participation rates of women and men being 32.3 percent in 2022. It is particularly high for the 25-34 age group (41 percent) because of women's engagement in family responsibilities. The gender pay gap was 39.2 percent in 2022, which is 2.5 higher than the EU average. The horizontal and vertical gender segregation in labour markets favours men prevailing among production and operations managers and

³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/armenia/overview>

⁴ SDG Implementation Voluntary National Review (VNR) Armenia: Report for the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. 2018. Available at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19586Armenia_VNR_2018.pdf

⁵ Armenia Poverty Snapshot over 2019-2022. https://armstat.am/file/article/poverty_2023_en_2.pdf

⁶ OECD Development Pathways, Interrelations between Public Policies, Migration and Development in Armenia. Chapter 2 <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/9789264273603-6-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/9789264273603-6-en>

⁷ Migration Data Portal, https://www.migrationdataportal.org/international-data?t=2022&i=remit_inflows&cm49=51

⁸ <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d5f32ef28464d01f195827b7e020a3e8-0500022021/related/mpo-arm.pdf>

⁹ UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) in annual Human Development Report 2020.

¹⁰ [Armenia 2024 | countryeconomy.com](https://countryeconomy.com)

managers of SMEs.

18. Unemployment rates in Armenia dropped in 2022 but remained high at 13.5 percent, especially among women and girls (13.8 percent)¹¹. The country also has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, with 25.9 percent of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET) in 2022¹². This also disproportionately affected women (42 percent compared with 19 percent of men).

19. The conflict escalation in late 2023 led to over 101,848¹³ refugees arriving in Armenia from the Karabakh region, including men, women, people with disabilities, the elderly, and children. By October 20, 2023, 15,424 refugee children had been enrolled in schools in Armenia and Yerevan. The strain on the national school feeding programme (NSFP) highlights the challenges faced by displaced families, including housing, food shortages, medication, and the need for warm clothing.

20. **Education issues:** Based on WB data¹⁴, 100 percent of the adult population is literate in Armenia. School enrolment is monitored via the Education Management Information System (EMIS) platform. Since 2010, enrolment ratios have deteriorated at all levels of education¹⁵. Considering the years evaluated, the decline in gross enrolment ratios for primary schools from 100 percent in 2018 to 93 percent in 2022 is evident, with a slightly higher decline for girls (from 99 percent to 92 percent) than for boys (from 100 percent to 93 percent) (WB, 2020)¹⁶. The Gender Parity Index in primary and secondary school enrolment is very slightly advantageous for girls, at 1.01 (2019 – 2021) and 1.04 -1.03 (2018–2021) for primary and secondary schools, respectively¹⁷. The internal efficiency of the education system is measured through repetition and drop-out rates. Armenia had one of the lowest repetition rates worldwide at 0.14 percent for both sexes in primary education (2021)¹⁸. The dropout rate is also low at 0.65 percent for primary education (2019), caused mainly by poor socio-economic conditions, parents not allowing children to attend school, death, and a low percentage due to various types of disabilities. The share of out-of-school children in the school-age population showed an increasing trend in primary education, from 6.9 percent in 2018 to 10.5 percent in 2020, and slightly higher for boys than girls. Among common risk factors for out- of-school status are disabilities, extreme poverty, child labour, ethnicity, and refugee status^{19,20}.

21. **Displaced children:** At the end of 2023, over 80 percent of school-age refugee children were enrolled in schools²¹. There are concerns about barriers to access to preschool, especially linked to pre-existing infrastructure gaps. The risk of school dropout, especially among adolescents, is another concern due to several factors, including the difference in the mandatory schooling years²².

22. **Agriculture and food production:** Agriculture is vital to Armenia's economy, contributing 8.4 percent to GDP in 2023 and employing 48.3 percent of the workforce in 2022²³, with women forming a significant

¹¹ https://armstat.am/file/article/f_sec_1_2024_1.pdf

¹² <https://sdg.armstat.am/8-6-1/>

¹³ Armenia Emergency Refugee Response. Inter-Agency Update 31 October – 07 November 2023.

<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/104704>

¹⁴ Data World Bank for Armenia, latest from 2020. <https://data.worldbank.org>

¹⁵ UNICEF (2022): Education Sector Analysis for Armenia.

<https://www.unicef.org/armenia/media/15496/file/Education%20Sector%20Analysis%20for%20Armenia.pdf>

¹⁶ Data World Bank for Armenia. <https://data.worldbank.org>

The Adjusted Net Enrolment Rate without sex disaggregation based on data by Armstat (2022) shows lower ratios; however, with a slightly increasing trend, from 88.3% in 2018 to 90.2% in 2020. UNICEF (2022): Education Sector Analysis for Armenia. <https://www.unicef.org/armenia/media/15496/file/Education%20Sector%20Analysis%20for%20Armenia.pdf>

¹⁷ UNICEF (2022): Education Sector Analysis for Armenia.

<https://www.unicef.org/armenia/media/15496/file/Education%20Sector%20Analysis%20for%20Armenia.pdf>

¹⁸ UNESCO (2024). UNESCO Institute for Statistics. <http://data.uis.unesco.org>

¹⁹ UNICEF. (2018). UNICEF Armenia supports the Government in making all schools inclusive and child-focused. <https://www.unicef.org/armenia/en/what-wedo/education>

²⁰ UNICEF (2022): Education Sector Analysis for Armenia.

<https://www.unicef.org/armenia/media/15496/file/Education%20Sector%20Analysis%20for%20Armenia.pdf>

²¹ No data is publicly available on school attendance nor on access to early childhood education.

²² UNICEF (2023): Armenia Humanitarian Situation Report No 8-17. <https://reliefweb.int/report/armenia/unicef-armenia-humanitarian-situation-report-no-8-17-30-november-2023>

²³ [F_sec_1_2024_1 \(armstat.am\)](https://armstat.am)

portion, particularly in seasonal and informal roles. Their limited access to land and social protections renders them vulnerable²⁴. While around 40 percent of the population is covered by at least one social protection benefit, there are large discrepancies between age groups and variations between women and men.

23. Armenia's agricultural landscape comprises predominantly small-scale farms, with around 95 percent being smallholdings. Despite this, they produce most agricultural output. Nearly 60 percent of agricultural land is pastures and meadows. Approximately 30 percent of cultivable land remains unused.

24. **Food security and nutrition:** Recent assessments by WFP Armenia²⁵ show that food insecurity has risen, with 30 percent of households experiencing severe or moderate food insecurity compared to 23 percent in summer 2022. Approximately 40 percent of households fear running out of food, and half report limited food variety due to financial constraints. Crisis coping strategies are prevalent, especially among vulnerable groups such as households with children with special needs, those displaced from the Karabakh region, or those consisting of single pensioners. Life-saving assistance to displaced populations and communities affected by conflicts strengthen the shock responsiveness of national social safety nets enhancing food security and developing national emergency response capacities. These are the main defined coping strategy directions. The main causes of food insecurity include financial constraints, limited non-agricultural incomes, labour market challenges, and low awareness of nutrition²⁶. The GoA adopted the National Food Security Strategy (2023-2027) (NFSS) in June 2023. The strategy sets out key integrated pillars, including ensuring food security, enhancing food safety, promoting sustainable food systems, strengthening food value chains, and empowering communities²⁷.

25. According to the Ministry of Economy (MoE), Armenia maintained 67.9 percent (2022)²⁸ self-sufficiency in vital food products, such as potatoes, cucurbit crops, fruit, grapes, mutton, eggs, and fish. However, it relies heavily on imports for wheat, grass-and-legume crops, vegetable oil, and poultry²⁹. The country's Global Food Safety Index stands at 57.1, with varying scores in terms of availability, accessibility, and quality/ safety³⁰ of food.

26. Malnutrition is a concern in Armenia, with children under five³¹ suffering both stunting³² and being overweight. The prevalence of stunting among children under five in the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region was 7.3 percent in 2020, down by almost half from 14.2 percent in 2000 and reduced by 2.7 percent compared with 2015³³. The prevalence varies significantly by subregion. The stunting rate in Armenia is low in comparison with other Caucasus countries, i.e. 13.9 percent in 2012 vs 7.2 percent in 2022³⁴. Childhood obesity surveillance study (COSI) data indicates high rates of overweight and obese children aged 7-10. Armenia ranks lowest in COSI for breakfast consumption³⁵. Obesity and being overweight affect all social strata, leading to increased malnutrition in adulthood. Currently, 48 percent of adults are overweight, and 22 percent leave the labour market early due to non-communicable diseases. In WFP's fifth food security and vulnerability assessment (FSVA5), 6 percent of households had unacceptable food consumption, with 1

²⁴ Assessment of Social Protection Floor in Armenia, UN Women.

²⁵ Since late 2020 five nation-wide Food Security and Vulnerability Assessments (FSVA) were carried out.

²⁶ Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment in Armenia. January 2023, WFP Armenia.

<https://www.wfp.org/publications/food-security-and-vulnerability-assessment-armenia>

²⁷ https://www.wfp.org/operations/annual-country-report?operation_id=AM02&year=2023#/25755/25757

²⁸ https://armstat.am/file/article/f_sec_1_2024_3.pdf

²⁹ Ministry of Economy. RoA. <https://www.mineconomy.am/en/page/1333>

³⁰ Manucharyan (2021). Food security issues in the economic security system of the Republic of Armenia. BIO Web of Conferences 36, 08004 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1051/bioconf/20213608004>

³¹ National Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition in Armenia. January 2018.

³² While the prevalence has been especially low in the EU27 and the United Kingdom, the prevalence in the Caucasus remained relatively higher: <https://www.fao.org/3/cc2571en/online/sofi-statistics-reu-2022/stunting-among-children.html>. Stunting rate in Armenia is low in comparison with other Caucasus countries, i.e. 13.9% in 2012 vs 7.2% in 2022:

<https://data.unicef.org/resources/jme-report-2023/>

³³ <https://www.fao.org/3/cc2571en/online/sofi-statistics-reu-2022/stunting-among-children.html>.

³⁴ <https://data.unicef.org/resources/jme-report-2023/>

³⁵ WHO European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI), 2022; Report on the fifth round of data collection, 2018–2020: <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/WHO-EURO-2022-6594-46360-67071>

percent experiencing poor consumption and 5 percent borderline scores.

27. In June 2023, Armenia's Government adopted a strategy for the development of the food safety system and an action plan focusing on consumer health and food quality assurance and strengthening food safety regulations and controls from 2023-2026.

28. **National School Feeding Strategy:** The Government of Armenia (GoA), with support from the WFP, is developing a national school feeding strategy to make the program a permanent part of the education system. The strategy includes input from various stakeholders and aims for equal access to school meals, with special support for women in food production. It will be integrated into the broader national education strategy and has specific targets for expanding coverage to all primary schoolchildren by 2026-2030, including Yerevan city.

29. **International assistance and other WFP work:** The WFP in Armenia focuses on long-term solutions to improve food security, support local farmers, empower communities, and strengthen government capacities. Their approach includes a resilient 'farm to fork' strategy to ensure lasting food security. The WFP's flagship initiative in Armenia is the School Feeding Programme (SFP), which is linked to strategic outcomes 1 and 2 of the WFP's Country Strategic Plan (CSP) for 2019- 2024. The CSP also focuses on crisis response, providing technical support to address food insecurity and malnutrition, and supporting the Government and partners in providing food assistance to vulnerable populations. The WFP also facilitates social assistance programs, such as the Food Card, which provides access to essential food items at designated supermarkets. These initiatives align with multiple sustainable development goals (SDGs) beyond SDG2 and SDG17, including SDG4 on education. The WFP's efforts in Armenia are in line with the country's development strategy, which prioritises human capital development and social protection improvement.

30. **SDGs and Agenda 2030 in Armenia:** Armenia has integrated the SDGs into its national reform agenda and is implementing the "Armenia Transformation Strategy 2050". Despite challenges, such as regional instability and blockades, Armenia has pursued economic development, democratic institutions, and peace. The third VNR³⁶ highlights Armenia's resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic and aggressions from Azerbaijan, when it achieved economic growth, green energy investments, and governance reforms. Armenia is committed to gender equality and has improved women's participation in the workforce and government. The country emphasises the need for multilateralism and joint action to address humanitarian crises and promote sustainable development.

31. **Gender Profile:** The government, with WFP's assistance, is formulating a National School Feeding Strategy to institutionalise the programme, integrating gender and age considerations to ensure equal access to school meals for boys and girls and to support women in food production. Armenia possesses a robust legislative framework for GEWE, including constitutional provisions and laws prohibiting discrimination. However, challenges remain in enforcement due to limited budgetary allocations and implementation capacity. Various laws and action plans have been adopted to address issues such as domestic violence and women's rights. Armenia has ratified numerous international instruments on human rights and women's rights, including conventions against human trafficking and violence against women, demonstrating its commitment to these principles. However, certain conventions, like the Istanbul Convention, await ratification by Armenia's parliament.

32. In the Gender Equality Index 2021, Armenia ranked 89 out of 146 countries, with the highest improvement in the region. The gender gap in labour force participation (more than 30 percent) and high gender pay gap (39.2 percent, 2022), together with the horizontal and vertical gender segregation in labour markets, favour men among production and operations managers and managers of SMEs. Women have limited access to agricultural assets, credit, and income-generating opportunities, often connected to gendered social norms, which impede their economic and social empowerment.

33. Armenia scores 82 percent for its overall legislative frameworks on gender equality and women's empowerment and 42 percent for its legislative frameworks on gender-based violence, according to the Women's Global SDG Database. The Government has implemented changes in social protection mechanisms to improve women's access to the labour market and introduced proactive supportive care policies and social protection measures to assist mothers and families³⁷. The most important are supportive

³⁶ <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/armenia/voluntary-national-reviews-2024>

³⁷ EU. Country Gender Profile Armenia EU4 Gender Equality Reform Helpdesk (2021).

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Country%20Gender%20Profile_%20ARMENIA_ENG.pdf

care policies, including remuneration-related changes³⁸.

1.3. SUBJECT BEING EVALUATED

34. **Strategic focus of the CSP:** WFP Armenia's CSP for 2019-2025 that launched on 1 July 2019 is informed by the Government's development agenda and the country-led National Strategic Review exercise, which involved a wide range of government stakeholders, civil society, the private sector, donors, and international organisations. The SFP activities implemented by WFP and its partners are within CSP 2019 - 2025 under Strategic Outcome 1 (SO1) "Vulnerable populations in Armenia, including schoolchildren, have access to adequate and nutritious food year-round" and Strategic Outcome 2 (SO2) "National policies, programmes and systems are strengthened to improve food security and nutrition among targeted groups by 2024". The CSP prioritises school meals, access to food, food security, food value chains, nutrition, as well as the improvement of rural livelihoods and food productivity in the face of climate change. Initially approved by the Executive Board for a duration of five years (July 2019 – July 2024), the CSP was subsequently extended until November 2025 to align with Armenia's current UNSDCF 2021–2025 and WFP's new Corporate Strategy and the Results Framework for 2020-2025.

35. **Nature of evaluation:** The SFP has been a flagship activity of the WFP in Armenia since 2001. The SFP initially started as part of the WFP's relief component under the protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO). At the time, schools were selected in collaboration with provincial education departments and aimed at the needs of food-insecure rural communities in Gegharkunik, Shirak, Syunik, and Tavush provinces. By the end of 2008, the SFP had managed to reach some 30,000 primary school children; however, the SFP was halted due to the downsizing of the WFP operation in Armenia. In 2010, the WFP successfully relaunched and developed the SFP. The SFP covers all ten provinces of Armenia (except the capital city Yerevan) in primary school (grades 0/1 – 4).

36. The SFP in Armenia was implemented under traditional and transformative models. The WFP has worked with the Government and partners to develop a comprehensive model of school feeding, and the handover of school feeding activities to the Government began in 2017. Under the current (revised) country strategic plan for 2019 to 2025, WFP Armenia not only continued to support the Government to ensure a smooth handover of traditional school feeding model, but also worked to develop more sustainable and transformative school feeding models, including an innovative school-based agriculture model that creates an opportunity to cultivate and consume nutritious and home-grown food and contributes to the development of vulnerable communities. It also introduced wholegrain flour production and baking covering the entire value chain, from the farm to final consumers, including schoolchildren. The WFP SFP has two strategic outcomes: (i) Vulnerable populations in Armenia, including schoolchildren, have access to adequate and nutritious food year-round, and (ii) National policies, programmes and systems are strengthened to improve food security and nutrition among targeted groups by 2025.

37. The overview of the SFP structure is provided in Table 1 below presenting its two strategic outcomes, two activities, and seven outputs.

³⁸ EU. Country Gender Profile Armenia Eu4genderequality Reform Helpdesk (2021).

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Country%20Gender%20Profile_%20ARMENIA_ENG.pdf

Table 1 - SFP under the WFP Armenia's CSP (2019-2025)

CSP Strategic Outcomes	SFP Activities	SFP Outputs
Strategic outcome 1: Vulnerable populations in Armenia, including schoolchildren, have access to adequate and nutritious food year-round	Activity 1: Provision of school meals Activity 2: School infrastructure rehabilitation Activity 3: Innovative SFP and community engagement Activity 3.1: Local production and school meals Activity 3.2: Introducing school gardens and other form of school-based production facilities (bakeries, drying food, poultry, etc.) Activity 3.3: Green energy for school meals	1.1. Schoolchildren in the targeted areas receive a nutritious, hot, diverse meal every day they attend school to meet their basic food and nutrition needs 1.2. Communities benefit from an enhanced national SFP, including nutrition education, enabling them to meet their basic food and nutrition needs 1.3. Schoolchildren benefit from rehabilitated school facilities and equipment, including kitchens, which improve the delivery of school meals 1.4. Communities including smallholders benefit from joint efforts to link local production with procurement of school meals to improve their incomes
Strategic outcome 2: National policies, programmes and systems are strengthened to improve food security and nutrition among targeted groups by 2025	Activity 4: National capacity strengthening Activity 4.1: Strengthening national structures and systems on school feeding Activity 4.2: Improving School-Level infrastructure and school meals provision	2.2. National institutions have strengthened capacities to implement a comprehensive nutrition sensitive national SFP 2.3. Communities benefit from enhanced national frameworks and policies on food systems to improve the availability of nutritious food 2.4. Communities have enhanced awareness of access to and consumption of healthy, nutritious, and diverse diets

38. The SFP supported 474 schools out of 1,050 with the highest number of schoolchildren in 10 provinces (Kotayk, Ararat, Armavir, Shirak, Lori, Gegharkunik, Aragatsotn, Syunik, Tavush, Vayots Dzor) through traditional and transformative models. In 2018, SFP reached 61,088 schoolchildren (47 percent girls and 53 percent boys), which reduced to 5,490 (50 percent girls and 50 percent boys) in 2023 in line with the handover strategy. The total number of planned and actual beneficiaries under the SFP from 2018 to 2023 are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 - Children benefitting from intervention, disaggregated by sex and age group

Year	Category	5-11 years		
		Male	Female	Total
2018	Planned	33,250	28,365	61,615
	Achieved	32,672	28,416	61,088
	Achieved/ planned (%)	98.3%	100.2%	99.1%
2019	Planned	29,760	26,720	56,480
	Achieved	25,076	22,512	47,588
	Achieved/ planned (%)	84%	84%	84%
2020	Planned	28,210	25,290	53,500
	Achieved	44,968	36,194	81,162
	Achieved/ planned (%)	159%	143%	152%
2021	Planned	20,951	19,098	40,049
	Achieved	32,694	29,648	62,342
	Achieved/ planned (%)	155%	155%	156%
2022	Planned	20,765	18,671	39,436
	Achieved	13,168	11,810	24,978
	Achieved/ planned (%)	63%	63%	63%
2023	Planned	2,961	2,679	5,640
	Achieved	2,763	2,727	5,490
	Achieved/ planned (%)	93%	102%	97%

39. Activity 1: Provision of school meals. The traditional school feeding model includes provision of hot meals at schools through in-kind and cash assistance. Under the in-kind assistance, the WFP provided six commodities: buckwheat, pasta, rice, vegetable oil, wheat flour, and lentils. The food basket for cash-based transfer (CBT) modality included grains/ cereals, roots and tubers, dairy products, meat, and oil. Parents contributed to diversifying food baskets by providing additional home-grown seasonal fruits and vegetables. In-kind transfers were procured directly by the WFP from the Eurasian Economic Union region (EAEU)³⁹, fostering local procurement.

40. The WFP implemented a shift from in-kind to cash transfer modality in provincial schools before handing it over to the GoA. Under this approach, the WFP transferred \$0.25 per student per day to schools, allowing them to purchase 20 food commodities (12 of which are locally produced). The WFP worked closely with schools to monitor implementation, while SFCW Agency provided training on procurement and food safety. The cash was transferred to school bank accounts specifically opened for WFP cash transfers. The shift to cash transfers was supported by sectoral assessments and aimed to diversify school menus and simplify procurement.

41. Between 2018 and 2023⁴⁰, cash-based transfers totalled \$1,863,444 (78 percent of the planned amount), while WFP food transfers^{40,41} comprised 7,308 MT (74 percent of the planned amount).

42. The annual food transfers decreased progressively from 2,548 MT as of December 2018 to 0 MT as of July 2023 to ensure the full handover of the schools to the NSFP.

³⁹ Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is composed of Armenia, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation

⁴⁰ Not full data on CBT was available for 2019 and is requested by the evaluation team in Chapter 5.

⁴¹ Food transfers included buckwheat, lentils, rice, vegetable oil, wheat flour, split peas, pasta.

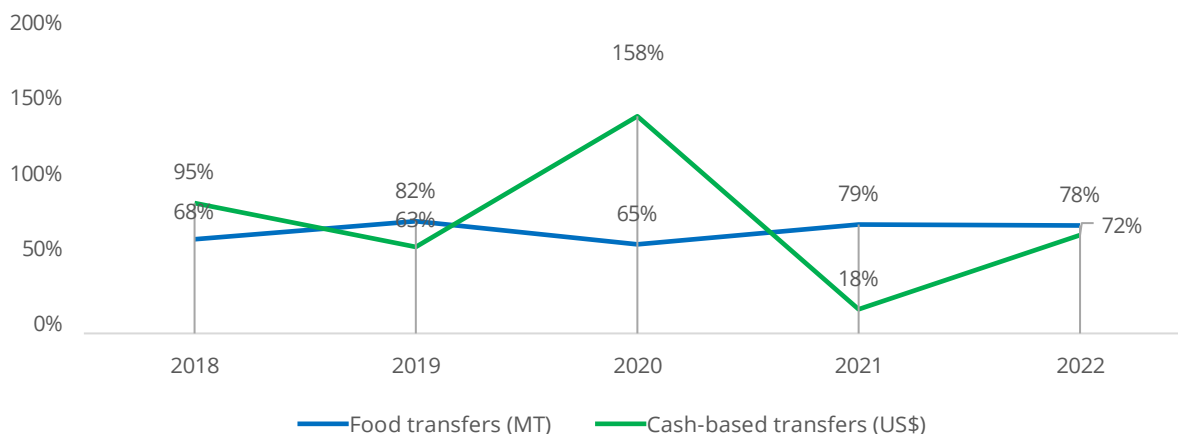
Table 3 - Actual vs. Planned of Food Transfers and Cash-Based Transfers (2018-2023)

Year	Food transfers (MT)		Cash-based transfers (US\$)	
	Planned	Achieved	Planned	Achieved
2018	2,548	1,745	350,526	332,265
2019	2,874	2,344	208,421	130,972
2020	2,310	1,496	391,579	618,335
2021	1,695	1,341	450,000	79,051
2022	487	382	982,080	702,243
2023	NA ⁴²	NA	0 ⁴³	578

43. Since 2017, the WFP has commenced nationalising the SFP, gradually handing over one province each year, with full nationalisation by 2023. Every year, the number of schoolchildren directly receiving support from WFP has decreased in line with the nationalisation of the SFP.

44. The food transfer process reached its maximum value of 2,344 MT in 2019 and its minimum value of 382 MT in 2022 because of the gradual handover of the schools into the NSFP. In turn, the planned annual cash-based transfers were progressively escalated from \$350,526 in 2018 to \$982,080 in 2022. The planned cash-based transfers were exceeded by 158 percent in 2020, whereas in 2021, they were significantly underachieved (by 82 percent).

Figure 1 - Actual vs. Planned Food Transfers and Cash-Based Transfers (in %) (2018-2022)



⁴² The food transfers happened only till 2022.

⁴³ This was a new initiative “Milk to School” project.

45. Activity 2: School infrastructure rehabilitation. The WFP and its partners helped schools renovate their kitchens and canteens, providing them with necessary materials and kitchen equipment. This allowed schools to prepare nutritious meals and ensured the sustainability of the programs. WFP also conducted assessments in partnership with the SIFI to identify needs for daily school meals and potential for school-based production and infrastructure to improve food availability and create job opportunities for the community. The budget for infrastructure rehabilitation at school level was increased from US\$ 4.7 million to US\$ 5.5 million because of an increase in price of construction materials and equipment as well as the provision of kitchen equipment to schools under the national SFP.

46. Activity 3: Innovative School Feeding Programme and community engagement. The transformative school feeding component was launched in 2020. This component aims to enhance the schools' self-reliance, to integrate circular economy models and to improve children's eating habits. School-based production, investments in food value chains (FVCs), and links to agribusinesses aimed to improve the availability and affordability of nutritious food at the school as well as in the community.

47. **School-agriculture projects (SAP):** The goal of the SAP is to provide primary school children with nutritious meals using on-site grown fruit and vegetables. According to the monitoring and evaluation report of the SAP project, 41 schools and 8 Marzes covering around 16,700 pupils. The programme also aims to generate investment through the sale of agricultural produce and increase awareness of the benefits of a diverse diet and agricultural practices. The SAP includes the installation of greenhouses, the establishment of school gardens, and the provision of assets to small and medium enterprises, farmers, schools, and communities.

Figure 2 - School-based Agriculture Projects



Source: WFP SFP Annual Reports

48. **Food value chain pilot interventions:** The WFP implemented pilot interventions in the FVCs to improve nutrition and reduce obesity among schoolchildren by supporting farmers to produce healthy crops thereby increasing availability and affordability for SFP. This included developing wholegrain value chains, establishing a farmers' cooperative, and investing in nutrition-sensitive practices and disaster risk reduction. The WFP also equipped farmers with agricultural resources and established a mill and training centre to promote wholegrain products in school meals.

49. **Green energy solutions:** The WFP supported the installation of solar panels at schools to promote the use of sustainable and green energy and to generate savings/income for the beneficiaries.
50. **Community based model:** To make school meal programmes as inclusive as possible, the WFP piloted the “Arpi” school meals model promoting community-generated investment in financing school meal activities. This unique model provides assets including solar panels and farming equipment to schools, small to medium enterprises, and smallholder farmers to generate additional revenue towards school meals and community development.
51. The transformative school feeding model was introduced in nine provinces of Armenia: Armavir, Kotayk, Tavush, Lori, Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, Shirak, Syunik, and Aragatsotn.
52. Activity 4: National capacity strengthening. The WFP has worked on strengthening the operational capacity of the SFCWA in areas of implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and identifying fundraising mechanisms to enhance the sustainability and ownership of the programme at national and community levels. The WFP and SFCWA are jointly working on the development of the National School Feeding strategy. They also supported legislation and policies related to school feeding and associated activities. In addition, the SFCWA was enhanced to work with MoH on the norms and regulations, as well as with infrastructure and cafeteria design estimates, kitchenware and equipment procurements for the newly built school buildings.
53. **Changes in planned implementation:** The WFP applied an adaptive management approach due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures between March 2020 and November 2021 and escalation of the conflict in and around the Karabakh region in 2020 and 2023. On-site school meals were repurposed to take-home rations (THR), which were provided to 53,874 primary schoolchildren and 6,575 kitchen helpers with their family members from vulnerable families⁴⁴. The WFP produced guidance and informational material on nutrition behaviours to be adopted during the pandemic. The WFP also raised funds to procure an estimated US\$7 million worth of personal protective equipment (PPE) for the MoESC to support the safe implementation of school feeding activities amid the COVID-19 pandemic. To mitigate the suffering of children from families displaced due to the 2020 Karabakh conflict, the WFP extended the operation to cover over 1,500 primary schoolchildren enrolled in Armenian schools.
54. **SFP reviews:** The midterm review of WFP Armenia's CSP45 shows that the SFP was well-resourced and implemented effectively, but the FVC faced challenges due to inadequate planning. Continuous CSP activities, such as school feeding, were more cost-effective than emergency response efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic caused temporary setbacks for school feeding initiatives. The 2019-2024 CSP aims to build on the achievements of school feeding and includes recommendations for strengthening the SFP, such as mainstreaming nutrition and engaging in partnerships. The CBT pilot in Tavush province in mid-2017 was successful in simplifying the handover process and generating revenue for schools through greenhouse farming.
55. **Results Framework and Theory of Change (ToC):** To support the design of the intervention's structure and results, the WFP prepared a results framework⁴⁶ for the CSP, within which the SFP falls under SO1 and SO2. This framework outlines the results chain of the intervention and its approaches. The results framework is clear, comprehensive, and logical. It was revised several times due to challenges within the country and changing contexts. The WFP does not have a designed ToC for the SFP. Therefore, the evaluation team reconstructed the ToC for SO1 and SO2 to reflect the elements of SFP⁴⁷, its logic, and interconnections between the specific objectives, activities, and expected/ achieved outcomes and outputs during the inception phase. The reconstructed ToC reflects all the components of SFP, including the pilot interventions. The long- term vision underlying the SFP is that Armenia positions schools at the centre of lifelong learning that benefits school children, their parents, and wider community members. Additionally, vulnerable populations in Armenia, including schoolchildren, will have access to sufficient and nutritious food all year. The following six pathways have been identified for the achievement of the high-level change:

⁴⁴ THRs were provided in all ten provinces. It was a shock-response measure and both WFP and the Government adopted the same model to reach the beneficiaries, ensuring that schoolchildren and their families have access to nutritious food.

⁴⁵ Source: Mid-term Review of the Country Strategic Plan 2019 – 2024, WFP Armenia, November 2022

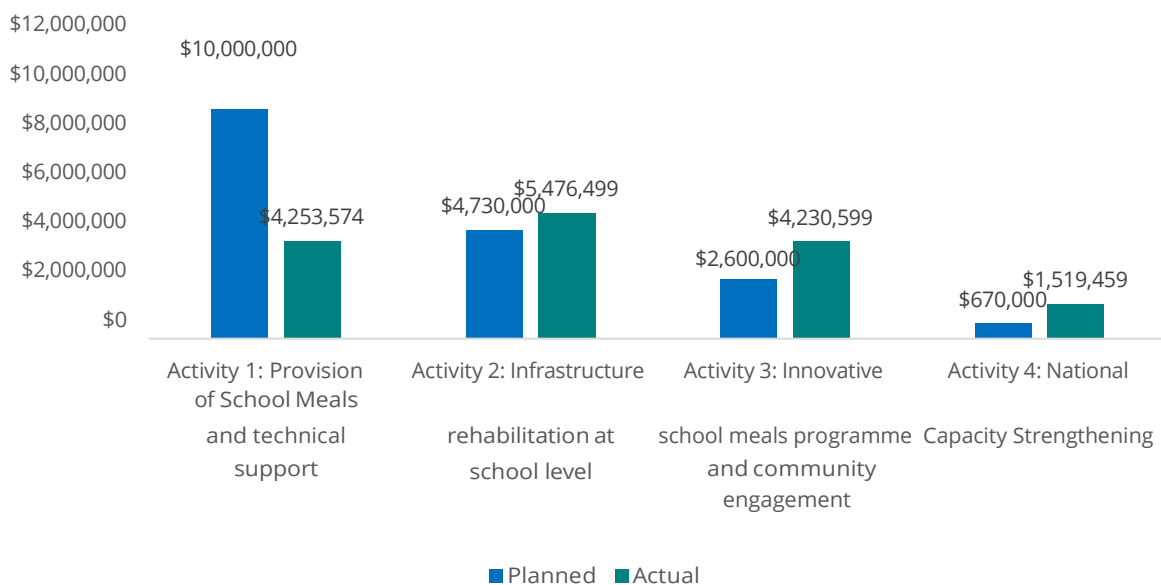
⁴⁶ Line of Sight, see Annex 11

⁴⁷ See Annex 10.

(i) The GoA shifts gradually from a traditional school feeding programme towards a comprehensive, sustainable, nutrition-sensitive, innovative, and transformative national model and manages it successfully with funding from own resources; (ii) The quality of children’s education is enhanced. The facilities created for school feeding now are also to be used as teaching and learning environments, such as kitchens for practical tasks included in the curriculum classes for nutrition and physical activities component.(iii) Schools have better resilience and economic sustainability to sustain the provision of nutritious daily hot meals and have additional funds to improve their learning environment; (iv) The use of resources is optimised, which contributes to saving water and energy and a reduction in the carbon footprint; (v) Job opportunities for the vulnerable population are created, and (vi) Farmers and local suppliers improve their livelihoods from regular and reliable food sales. Notably, each outcome aims to contribute towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2 (Zero Hunger) and 17 (Partnerships), in addition to having positive multiplier effects towards SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 3 (Health), 4 (Quality Education), and 5 (Gender Equality). The ToC effectively identifies the synergies to improve resilience and nutritional outcomes. The design of the results emphasises engagement and capacity building across various stakeholders, enabling compact development of the sector and achievement of the programme targets. Along with the findings, recommendations, and lessons learned from the current evaluation, the ToC is deemed a useful tool to pave the way for the upcoming CSP and to support its refinement and adjustment to keep targeting the selected SDGs and improve livelihoods in Armenia.

56. **Budget:** The total SFP budget for 2010 to 2023 constituted US\$43 million from the Russian Federation, while the total allocations for the period under evaluation (2019-2023) amounted to US\$18 million. The actual spending equals US\$15.48 million as of July 2023, i.e. the budget utilisation rate constituted 86 percent of the planned budget. To ensure full utilisation of funds, a no-cost extension of the Russian Federation’s contribution was granted in November 2023, extending SFP activities to October 2024. In addition, in November 2023, the WFP received a multiyear contribution of US\$0.5 million from France for school feeding and capacity strengthening activities in Syunik province under Activity 1.

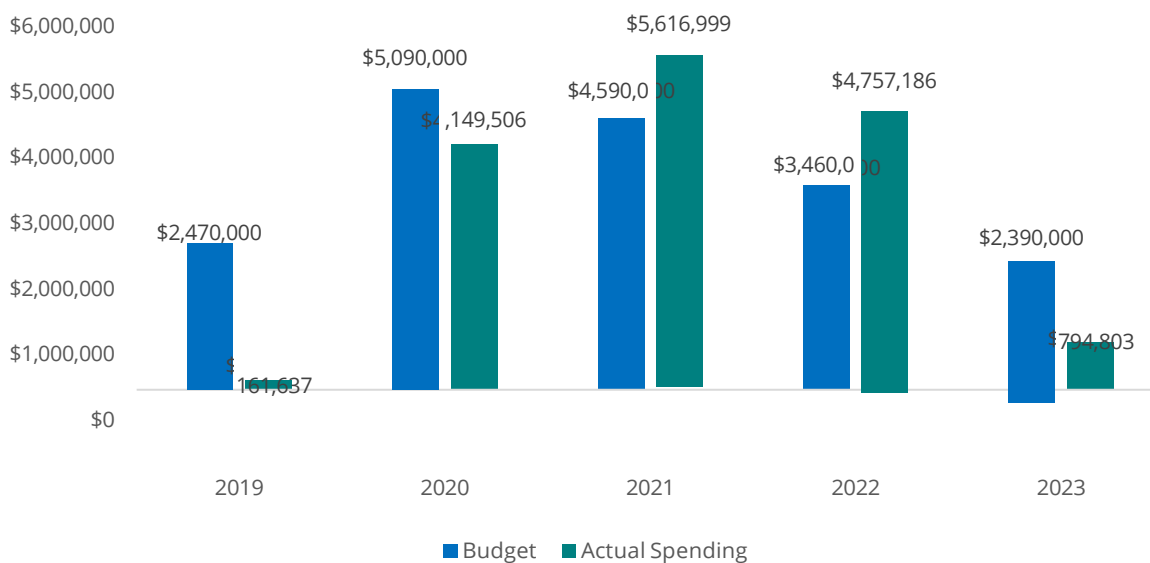
Figure 3 - Budget utilisation rate by activity (January 2019-July 2023), US\$



Source: WFP SFP Annual Reports The main reason for that was a gradual handover of the SFP to the GOA.

57. Figure 4 displays the programme’s slow start and how it caught up speed over the next years. The implementation rate in 2019 constituted 7 percent, 82 percent in 2020, 122 percent in 2021, 132 percent in 2022 and 33 percent in 2023. The main reason for that was a gradual handover of the SFP to the GoA.

Figure 4 - Evolution of the budget and its use over time



Source: WFP SFP Annual Reports

58. **GEWE dimensions:** The WFP has undertaken several complementary activities that focus on gender, and which have accompanied infrastructure investments from the WFP. This includes social behaviour change, trainings, and awareness-raising sessions. For example, a special module on gender equality and gender-based violence for school head teachers (at least 50 percent are women) and kitchen staff (all women) of schools engaged in the school feeding programme. In schools, the WFP also used nutrition education that considers gender and age, and an SBC campaign to challenge discriminatory social norms and gender roles. To encourage and enable women’s participation, the WFP emphasised a participatory and co-designing approach to its activities. This resulted in an adjustment to the type of activities being implemented. For example, the WFP ensured a focus on smaller garden plots and women-owned businesses, such as bakeries, to ensure the inclusion of women and to contribute to their economic empowerment and food security.

1.4. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY, LIMITATIONS, AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

59. The evaluation is theory-based (TBE), non-experimental, and utilisation-focused, and combines summative and formative elements. It assesses and reports on the performance of the WFP’s SFP and its handover to the government, serving accountability purposes towards WFP’s internal and external stakeholders, including current and future donors. The evaluation identifies and extracts learning elements to inform future decision-making.

60. Using TBE extends beyond the “results chain” of the intervention (i.e. inputs-outputs-outcomes-impact) and examines the programme’s ToC, i.e. by outlining the mechanisms of change including assumptions, risks, and context that support or hinder the achievement of results. The reconstructed ToC for the SFP is in Annex 10.

61. In conformity with the Terms of Reference (ToR), the evaluation covers six of the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, impact, and sustainability. The evaluation assesses the inclusion of GEWE objectives and principles in activity design and the alignment with WFP and system-wide objectives. The evaluation questions from the ToR were integrated with operational sub-questions for better data collection structure. An overview of the evaluation questions and sub-questions by evaluation criteria is presented in table 4 below. GEWE is targeted in sub-question 1.3, which focuses on integration in the evaluation subject.

Table 4 – Evaluation questions and sub-questions by evaluation criteria⁴⁸

Criteria	Evaluation questions and sub-questions
Relevance	<p>EQ1 To what extent was the SFP relevant to the needs of the schools, beneficiaries, the Government, and the communities served?</p> <p>1.1 As designed, how relevant was and is the programme in addressing the nutritional/ educational needs of children (girls, boys, and children with special needs) in the target communities?</p> <p>1.2 What are the key factors that have contributed to the programme's relevance or lack thereof?</p> <p>1.3 To what extent have GEWE issues been integrated into the programme design and implementation?</p>
Coherence	<p>EQ2 How coherent is the SFP to the Government strategy related to education and nutrition?</p> <p>2.1 Did the WFP's SFP complement or duplicate other interventions by Government or other development partners in the same geographic area or among the same target population (primary schoolchildren (girls, boys, and children with special needs), school cooks and smallholders), did it align or support policies, and what has WFP's added value been?</p> <p>2.2 How well does the school feeding handover strategy to the Government fit into the broader national plans and integrate into the country's education and nutrition strategies?</p>
Effectiveness	<p>EQ3 To what extent has the SFP achieved its objectives for the handover strategy? To what extent did the SFP achieve its objectives in terms of improving school attendance, nutrition, and learning outcomes?</p> <p>3.1 How effective was the WFP in terms of contributing to creating enabling environments in schools, including the infrastructure, capacity building, and innovative models for enhanced self-resilience?</p> <p>3.2 How effective were the different modalities used in the SFP (e.g. in-kind, cash transfers, take-home rations, transformative agriculture, community-based models) in achieving the programme's objectives?</p> <p>3.3 How effective has the programme been in supporting the development of new policies, systems, and procedures to enable full handover of the programme to the Government?</p> <p>3.4 To what extent have the national policies, programmes, and systems been strengthened to improve food security and nutrition among targeted groups (schools, parents, communities, and children) by 2025?</p> <p>3.5 What are the main challenges and opportunities for the SFP in Armenia?</p>
Efficiency	<p>EQ4 How efficient was the SFP in terms of the resources (e.g. time, money, personnel)?</p> <p>4.1 Was the programme cost-efficient?</p> <p>4.2 Was the programme implemented in a timely way?</p> <p>4.3 How well were human resources managed in the implementation of the SFPs? Did any capacity gaps or staffing issues affect efficiency?</p> <p>4.4 Were the modalities (in-kind, cash, self-financing, THR) used in the SFP cost-effective compared to other possible interventions?</p>
Sustainability	<p>EQ5 To what extent is the SFP sustainable in the long term?</p> <p>5.1 To which extent is the handover strategy sustainable for the continuous implementation of national school feeding by the Government? Why? What needs to be done within the Government and the programme to ensure the sustainability of the NSFP?</p> <p>5.2 Are there any risks/ factors to the program's sustainability, and how can they be mitigated?</p>

⁴⁸ A more detailed evaluation matrix is available in Annex 4.

Criteria	Evaluation questions and sub-questions
Impact	<p>EQ6 What has the impact of the SFP been to date? How well have the schools prepared for the transition and handover? What were the overall impacts of the SFP on the schools, communities, and beneficiaries?</p> <p>6.1 To what extent has the SFP contributed to long-term results in the areas of education and healthy and nutritious food?</p> <p>6.2 Were there any differential impacts on different subgroups (e.g. boys vs. girls, urban vs. rural)?</p> <p>6.3 Are there any other expected or unexpected impacts on systems, structures, or individuals?</p>

62. The methodology was adopted in the inception phase, specifically during an online validation meeting in March 2024. After the data collection in May 2024, initial findings were presented to the WFP country office and RBC as part of a debriefing meeting.

63. Regarding data collection, the evaluation followed participatory and mixed method approach and used a set of quantitative and qualitative methods. The principal data collection methods included desk reviews, key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and a survey, complemented with observation and guided walks. Data collection methods are presented in Table 10, Annex 3. The data collection also included an online quantitative questionnaire survey prior to conducting KIIs.

64. The various tools and streams of data collections were designed to cover the evaluation matrix to the greatest extent possible, while covering a wide array of stakeholders and informants. The data collected through all sources allowed us to formulate findings and triangulate across stakeholders and sources. In addition, a gender-sensitive and diverse approach was employed to ensure equal representation and opinions.

65. To ensure proper coverage of stakeholders, a sampling strategy for primary data collection methods including a purposive approach to select informants for KII was developed based on criteria such as information richness, accessibility, gender diversity, and stakeholder diversity. KIIs were conducted with various stakeholders at different levels, including international, national, regional, and local government, donors, NGOs, academia, private sector, SMEs, and school staff. For FGDs, participants were selected purposively from ten selected schools, including healthy lifestyle curriculum (HLC) teachers, parents, schoolchildren, and refugee children. On-site visits were conducted in ten schools, ensuring a mix of traditional and transformative schools with various features. The survey with schoolchildren used a sample size of 611 interviews, using a stratified sample and a random selection of schools using selection probability proportional to size and a systematic selection of pupils with stratification by sex and grades within each selected school.

66. The UNSWAP criteria⁴⁹ is adhered to while integrating GEWE and ensuring coherence with UNEG guidelines throughout evaluation process. Mixed-gender discussions were conducted with children and parents, considering cultural acceptance and time constraints. The evaluation also examines how gender equality and women's empowerment objectives were included in the activities design and guided by WFP and system-wide objectives. The gender dimension is integrated into every stage of the evaluation phase aligned with the UNSWAP criterion 2c. Additionally, to encompass the broader concept of human rights and GEWE, data were specifically collected from parents of children with special needs (KIIs), children with special needs (survey), refugee children (KIIs or FGDs), and kitchen staff, primarily vulnerable women from communities (KIIs). Results are interpreted through a gender-sensitive context, considering the differing impacts on various genders.

67. Details about methodology and data collection methods are provided in Annex 3, Annex 5, and in the Evaluation Matrix (Annex 4). During the implementation of this assignment, the evaluation team has been committed to United Nations guidelines on ethical research⁵⁰.

68. The evaluation design and methodology ensure ethics at all stages of the evaluation cycle. This includes but is not limited to ensuring informed consent, protecting privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of participants, ensuring cultural sensitivity, respecting the autonomy of participants, ensuring the fair recruitment of participants (including women and socially excluded groups), and ensuring that the evaluation results in no harm to participants or their communities. The survey among schoolchildren was carried out using a child-sensitive and protection-based approach. This approach reinforced the

⁴⁹ UNEG (2018): UN-SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator Technical Note. Guidance Document. <https://www.uneval.org/document/download/2148>

⁵⁰ <https://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2866>

commitment to doing no harm, ensuring that every child's engagement with the survey process was safe, respectful, and empowering.

69. All personnel interacting with children signed a declaration of clean legal backgrounds and conduct. They had all received training by a child protection expert from Prisma LLC (subcontractor entrusted with survey work) to ensure that interactions with children were culturally and legally sensitive. The training ensured that survey interviewers honoured the children's dignity, using language and behaviour that was respectful and appropriate within the targeted communities. Additionally, the trainer ensured that the interviewers were skilled in recognising and responding to children's emotional states and were ready to adjust the interview process to avoid causing stress or anxiety. The presence of a responsible adult during the survey process was ensured, providing an additional layer of comfort and protection for the child. Furthermore, adherence to data privacy regulations were maintained in protecting the personal information and responses of the children involved. A system for reporting any concerns or incidents regarding child safety was established, ensuring swift action to address potential harm.

70. During analysis, collected data were processed anonymously and safely archived in a central data management system. Audio recordings of KIIs and FGDs were transcribed and translated into English (when needed) and prepared for further analyses using Excel. Survey data were downloaded from the server, cleaned, checked for consistency, and analysed using Stata and Excel for visualisation. All transcriptions and records of communications with relevant stakeholders were compiled and anonymized, then analysed using coding of evidence aligned with the evaluation questions.

71. The reporting was structured per OECD Development Assistance Commission (DAC) criteria⁵¹ and evaluation questions. The narrative focused on tracing causal linkages using contribution analysis as well as assessing the contribution of the results and impacts of the SFP, including intended and unintended outcomes. Units of analysis were applied to compare across SFP interventions (thematic), by province (geographical), and comparisons among the modalities.

72. Regarding quality assurance, WFP has developed a decentralised evaluation quality assurance system (DEQAS) based on the UNEG norms and standards and good practice of the international evaluation community (the active learning network for accountability and performance (ALNAP) and the OECD-DAC. The quality assurance framework sets out process with in-built steps for quality assurance and templates for evaluation products. It also includes checklists for feedback on quality for each of the evaluation products. This framework has been applied throughout this evaluation to ensure usability of the evaluation.

73. The main limitations that the evaluation faces are due to issues in data availability, a relative lack of institutional memory, unavailability of beneficiaries, time constraints during the field mission, and potential security risks. A summary of limitations encountered, and mitigation strategies implemented is provided in Annex 13. A close cooperation with the WFP country office and thorough planning helped minimise the negative impact of these limitations. The evaluation team believes that sufficient and adequate information was provided, ensuring good evaluability of the subject.

74. Regarding the human resources and gender equality data availability, GaM monitoring has been available since 2019 in the annual country reports (ACRs) and scores from 3 to 4, with a full integration of gender into the CSP design and annual activity implementation. Sex and age disaggregated data are available for schoolchildren. The information about the inclusion of schoolchildren is only partially available; quantitative data on schoolchildren with special needs have been reported in the ACRs since 2020 but lack sex-disaggregation, while qualitative data providing insights are not available. Similarly, reported data about other supported beneficiaries (teachers/ educators and school administrative staff) lack sex-disaggregation. During the data collection phase, the evaluation team succeeded in collecting sufficient data for presenting sex- disaggregated data and views of girls/ women, boys/ men, and children with special needs.

⁵¹ The criteria embrace the following: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability.
<https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

2. Evaluation findings

2.1. RELEVANCE

75. **Evaluation Question 1: To what extent was the SFP relevant to the needs of the schools, beneficiaries, Government, and communities served?**

76. **1.1 As designed, how relevant was and is the programme to addressing the nutritional/ educational needs of children (girls, boys, and children with special needs) in the target communities?**

77. **Finding 1:** The provision of hot and diversified meals along with promotion of healthy lifestyle proved highly relevant towards addressing the double burden of malnutrition in targeted regions, thus contributing to improved literacy outcome of primary school children through improved attendance and attention. The SFP is also especially relevant for vulnerable households, but also promotes community engagement in the target communities through the transformative component. However, the SFP is limited to primary schools outside of the capital city. The SFP does not address similar needs at secondary schools and does not address vulnerable people within the capital city, thus not covering about one third of the students in the country.

78. One of the most prominent issues in Armenia, as outlined by the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) in 2016⁵² relates to overweight children. Whereas wasting and stunting are also still problematic. The interviews with stakeholders demonstrated that the SFP helps to systematically address the problems of high levels of overweight and obese children combined with a high level of malnutrition among primary schoolchildren in Armenia. Nutrition quality issues is impacting close to one in four children in Armenia, based on the DHS results. The provision of nutritious and balanced meals, along with the promotion of healthy lifestyle through the SFP, is highly relevant for addressing the double burden of malnutrition (co-existence of under nutrition and over nutrition) in Armenia.

'School meals play a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of education and fostering healthy lifestyles among schoolchildren',

Government informant.

79. Studies have shown that overweight and obesity rates have increased since 2000 among children aged 5-19.⁵³ Being overweight and obese are public health problems among Armenian children. Quoting from the COSI study in 2019, *'Obesity and overweight among children are specifically more of a problem in urban and semi-urban areas, while stunting, underweight, and wasting have a higher prevalence in rural areas⁵⁴'*. Moreover, school meals are provided in the most food-insecure areas of the country.

80. Based on the food security and vulnerability assessment from WFP⁵⁵, 30 percent of Armenian households are food insecure, and another 44 percent are marginally food secure. The food insecurity levels are significantly higher in rural (34 percent) and other urban areas (31 percent) compared to Yerevan (24 percent). In the regions, the highest rates of food insecurity were seen in Gegharkunik (39 percent), Lori (39 percent), Shirak (36 percent), and Tavush (36 percent).

81. Studies have shown⁵⁶ that nearly half of the children in Armenia do not have breakfast before going to school, despite the importance of breakfast in providing children with nourishment and energy to

⁵² The DHS in 2016 showed that between 8% and 10% of children from three to five years are overweight and it's higher among children from poorer households. The prevalence of being overweight among children u5 is 13.6%. Another 5% of children u5 are stunted (short for their age) and 4% are wasted (thin for their height). 8.8% of children from 36 to 59 months have a weight to height ratio over two standard deviations, what is the definition of overweight. For the children from poorest households, overweight prevalence raises to 12.2%

⁵³ The Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI) Report, 2019. 27.7 percent of surveyed children were found to be overweight, and 12.6 percent were obese. The gender disaggregation showed that 30 percent of boys and 25.4 percent of girls are overweight, and that boys are more obese than girls (15 percent and 10 percent, respectively)

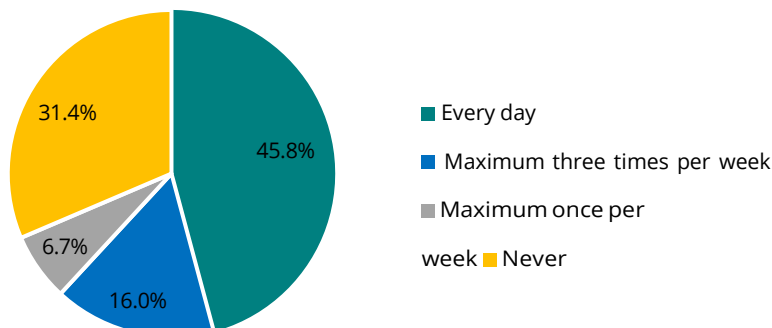
⁵⁴ See COSI study p.20 <https://www.arabkirmc.am/files/621df7dba0fbc.pdf>

⁵⁵(2023) The WFP Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment in Armenia

⁵⁶(2018) Impact evaluation of The Nutrition-sensitive Aspect of the "Development of Sustainable School Feeding" Project

function at their best⁵⁷. The SFP addresses an apparent need in school meals. Insights from focus groups with schoolchildren showed that some kids do not eat breakfast at home and instead, rely on school meals. Additionally, a survey among schoolchildren conducted during this evaluation demonstrated that only nearly half (45.8 percent) of children had breakfast at home before coming to school while one third (31.4 percent) of them did not eat anything at home before coming to school (Figure 5).

Figure 5 - Proportion of children consuming meals at home prior to attending school in the morning, (N=611)



82. About 96 percent of school administrators during the evaluation said that the SFP was needed in Armenia and 89.6 percent of school administrators completely agreed that the SFP should be continued in their school⁵⁴. School feeding is a highly relevant programme because it is crucial that children receive nutritious food daily, as the interviews with head teachers further demonstrated. This is especially critical in the remote provinces and rural areas where there are many vulnerable households. All interviewed regional authorities consider that the provision of school meals for socially disadvantaged children is the main factor contributing to the relevance of the program.

83. Prior to implementation of the SFP, numerous children attended school hungry as evident from the interviews with school administration and focus groups with parents. It was further demonstrated through focus groups with parents that the provision of hot school meals is important, as it promotes a healthy lifestyle and enables financial savings for their household budget. A single female parent with three children stated that she cannot afford to provide any pocket money to her kids. All children are of school age, and all are provided with school meals. She said, *'The SFP is a great help for me'*. In addition, the interviewed parents see the SFP as bringing equality, as some families are vulnerable, and their kids do not have access to the same food as others.

84. A systemic approach for better education conduction in collaboration with the World Bank in 2016 recommended to include school feeding in all relevant policies highlighting the expected positive outcomes of better nutrition to educational attainment. The study also recommended a national school feeding unit, inclusions of local agriculture and implementing home-grown school feeding model. In this regard, the overall approach taken by WFP is fully aligned with these recommendations.

85. Indeed, the approach envisaged by WFP to address these issues is through a four-pillar approach, which combined (1) the provision of nutritious hot meals to children in schools under (2) the traditional and transformative school feeding framework, (3) contribution to the community development, and (4) assistance to the national capacity strengthening. The Theory of Change for the SFP integrates these four pillars. The relevance of the overall model lies in the combination of direct and indirect interventions covering improvement of nutritional quality to improve educational attainment, as well as as increasing resilience, improving use of resources and building synergies with the community and local supplier. This is also combined with interventions seeking to increase the capacity of the government to take over the school feeding programme from WFP. This approach is relevant to the challenges and needs of Armenia and aligns with the global approach of WFP on school feeding. Both the parents and the head teachers who were interviewed believe the SFP promotes improved learning. The consensus is that school feeding programmes helps pupils to focus and be more involved in classroom and better nutrition also improves the cognitive capacity of pupils. This have been reported by several interviewees, ranging from parents to teachers as children eat more regularly and more diversely.

86. School feeding covers primary grades in all regions except Yerevan. The MoESCS is in the process of preparing an extension to middle and high schools. In the interviews, governmental stakeholders

⁵⁷Impact evaluation of The Nutrition-sensitive Aspect of the "Development of Sustainable School Feeding" Project, June 2018

recognised that although people in Yerevan have higher economic power compared to the regions, there are vulnerable families for which school feeding will be relevant. In addition, there is a need for healthy and nutritious school meals versus easy and accessible fast-food options in a big urban setting such as Yerevan.

87. 1.2 What are the key factors that have contributed to the programme's relevance or lack thereof?

88. **Finding 2:** The high-level commitment of the GoA, multiyear funding, the involvement of a dedicated technical partner (SIFI) and ongoing dialogue with WFP have contributed to the programme's relevance.

89. The interviews with the WFP, Government, NGOs, academia, donors, and UNCT members showed that several factors contributed to the programme's relevance.

90. First, the high-level continuous dialogue and collaboration between the WFP and the GoA through technical and financial assistance to the School Feeding Child Welfare Agency (SFCWA), a national entity established to assist the Government in managing, monitoring, and implementing the National School Feeding Programme. Armenia's Government designated school feeding as a national priority in 2013 and has provided financial support and encouragement for the programme's gradual nationalisation. Beginning in 2017, the transition started for three provinces with a view to completely transition one province every year. The SFP was progressively transitioned to the National SFP by 2023.

91. Second, the commitment of the key national counterparts to taking over. The SFP is owned by the MoESCS. In 2021, the Government went further in their commitment to school meals by joining the global School Meals Coalition⁵⁸.

92. All school feeding-related functions and coordination of the diverse scope of the SFP activities are the responsibility of a designated SFCWA a successor of the School Feeding Foundation established in 2016 under MoESCS' Charter of the National Center for Education Development and Innovation Foundation (NCEDIF). A sectorally-represented SFCWA steering committee, chaired by the MoESCS Deputy Minister, makes decisions for approval by the SFCWA.

93. Third, the multiyear funding from the main donor, the Russian Federation, and its openness to pilot innovative approaches for the enhancement and development of school production capacities. The Russian Federation's US\$25 million multi-year contributions from 2010 to 2019 enabled the WFP to make long-term strategic investments in school feeding in Armenia, with a renewed US\$18 million contribution from 2019-2023 strengthening technical partnerships and ensuring sustainability.

94. Last, involvement of a technical skilled partner (the Social and Industrial Foodservice Institute (SIFI) of the Russian Federation), which, together with the WFP, continued to improve and refine the school feeding models that led to enhanced community development and ownership.

95. As an example of the relevance of WFP intervention, in 2019, there was a near total absence of wholegrain baked products on the market despite them being one of the most consumed products in Armenia. A package of activities was designed by the WFP to support the introduction of wholegrain products to the schools using a FVC approach thus alleviating the lack of baked wholegrain products.

96. The interviews with various stakeholders (the WFP, Government, NGOs, schools, and parents) showed that both traditional and transformative SFP approaches are highly responsive to the local context. The WFP's outcome monitoring survey in 2018⁵⁹ reported that the main challenge in the provision of hot meals was the lack of appropriate kitchen conditions.

97. In some provinces, schools did not have designated kitchens/ cafeteria areas at first and had to improvise some space, e.g. classrooms, for that purpose. This gap was closed by the WFP through improvement in schools enabling environments (rehabilitation and re-equipment of school kitchen, cafeteria, and storage facilities). This fostered new partnerships with local communities, regions, and diaspora as the WFP provided a limited supply of construction materials, and community contributions were a vital precondition for rehabilitation work.

98. All schools visited confirmed that the infrastructure rehabilitation was tailored to their needs. This was achieved thanks to conducting technical assessments and creating renovation plans for the SIFI to

⁵⁸ Note: School Meals Coalition is a Member State effort that aims at ensuring that by 2030 every child worldwide receives a healthy meal in school

⁵⁹ Outcome Monitoring Survey of the School Meals Programme, June 2018

rehabilitate and equip school kitchens and cafeterias.

99. One of the key factors that has contributed to increase the relevance of the interventions was to work on raising awareness and introducing activities to change behaviour as they were seen as necessary at all levels of society in order to allow changes to happen and improve the dietary diversity and nutrition status of the children in the country⁶⁰.

100. Despite its high relevance, the programme did not reach full coverage. Overall, the programme extended to 75 percent (1,050 out of 1,400) of schools in ten provinces (Kotayk, Ararat, Armavir, Shirak, Lori, Gegharkunik, Aragatsotn, Syunik, Tavush, and Vayots Dzor), all provinces apart from Yerevan. According to monitoring of school feeding in 2019, it is highly likely, however, that these 25 percent of schools did not need direct support as close to all schools were able to serve hot meals and the non-covered schools did not need repairs to their kitchen. In this light, it is likely that no one has been left behind by the programme. The schools that have been reached were through so-called traditional and transformative models. The coverage of the transformative model is somewhat more limited with about 9 percent (99 out of 1,050) of schools supported by the SFP, what is expected as the transformative model is still considered a pilot. The extent to which the transformative model could be applied makes for an appropriate use case confirming a proof of concept that could be upscaled.

101. 1.3 To what extent have GEWE issues been integrated into the programme design and implementation?

102. **Finding 3:** GEWE issues were integrated into the programme design and implementation to a great extent. The inclusion of more tailored approaches for different age groups, genders, and children with special needs were beneficial.

103. During the planning and implementation of the SFP, the WFP ensured that boys and girls were provided with equal access to school meals. Gender-transformative programming was reflected in the twin-tracked strategy aiming to improve women's socio-economic position in communities through capacity-building in food and nutrition-related job and entrepreneurship opportunities, empowerment in decision-making, and sensitisation activities to improve awareness about gender stereotypes and GBV. Furthermore, smallholder farmers (SHFs) and their mostly female-headed households were included in the intervention.

104. The design was responsive to the conclusions and recommendations of the gender analysis⁶¹ done by the WFP in 2017 and the internal survey report with head teachers and cooks done after the first capacity-building training by the Armenia Young Women's Association⁶² in 2018. The original CSP design was assigned a GaM⁶³ score of 3, which changed in the reporting over time to GaM 4 (full integration of gender and age considerations).

105. Gender and age breakdown and other gender information are captured in all programme activities and reports, including PDM and training reports. Until the CSP mid-term review (2022), the gender budgeting per CSP activity and respective indicators were not part of the CSP⁶⁴. All key actions are expected to incorporate gender in food security/ nutrition policies and legislation supporting the inclusion of GEWE in the policy dialogue, considering gender analysis and gender indicators to be included in monitoring and learning tools, and building the capacity of the Government's partners. As a result, and in compliance with the WFP Gender Policy (2022-2026)⁶⁵, the country office developed a gender budget during the CSP revision in July 2022 and incorporated the gender equality activities and indicators into it (please see Annex 11).

106. Comprehensively elaborated gender equality budgeting and indicators, together with 0.5 full-time-equivalent allocation on the internal WFP Gender Focal Point and gender equality training for WFP country office staff, created essential enablers for implementing the effective GEWE twin-tracked gender transformative approach.

⁶⁰ Impact evaluation of The Nutrition-sensitive Aspect of the "Development of Sustainable School Feeding" Project, June 2018

⁶¹ Sargiyova J. (2017): Gender Analysis in Food Security Areas, Republic of Armenia. WFP Armenia. September 2017.

⁶² Armenia Young Women Association

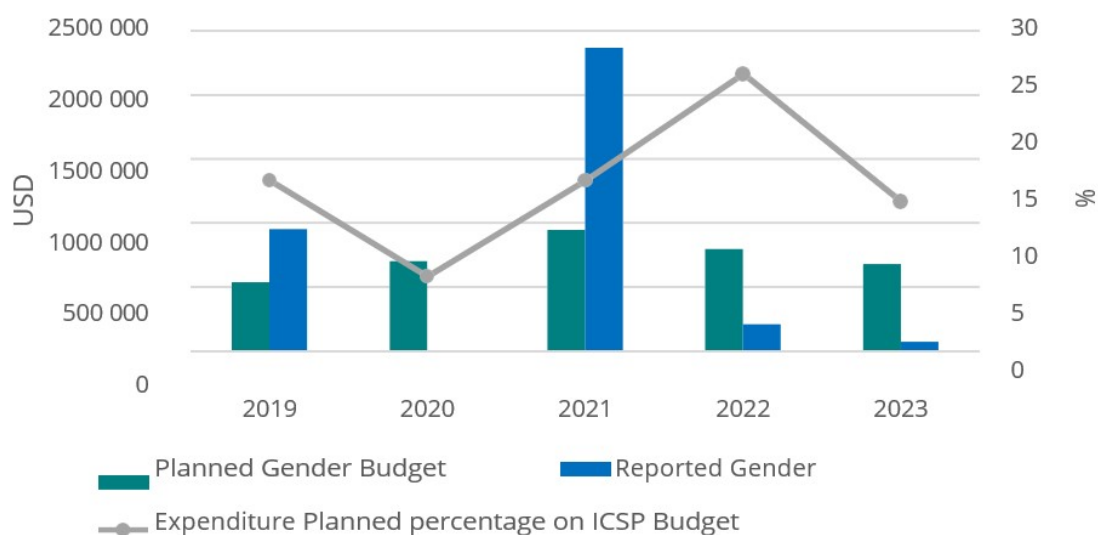
⁶³ The WFP gender and age marker (GaM) is a corporate tool that codes, on a scale from 0 to 4, the extent to which gender and age considerations are integrated into the design (giving the GaM D) and implementation (GaM M) of a WFP country strategic plan (CSP).

⁶⁴ CSP Budget Revision # 4, July 7, 2022

⁶⁵ https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document_download/WFP-0000132139

107. The gender budgeting planned and actual is shown in Figure 6. The average planned budget was, on average, 15.8 percent of the total CSP budget, considering the years where data are available (2019-2023) and CSP Budget Revision 4 (BR4). Gender expenditures are only available for some years, e.g. the reported percentage of gender expenditure. 2020 expenditures are not available to the evaluation team. The high expenditure in 2021 was mainly related to the employment and payment (cash and in-kind) of 2,225 vulnerable women from the community (kitchen staff), renovation of school canteens in four regions to make the work of the all-women kitchen staff easier, distribution of agriculture input and machinery, and training among female smallholder farmers.

Figure 6 - Gender specific budget plans and expenditure from 2019 to 2023



Source: WFP country office report for UNSDCF Reporting

108. Sex and age-disaggregated data were collected and reported in the ACRs, alongside the gender budget monitoring and detailed gender equality activities indicators, which the WFP country office only reported internally as a part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSCDF) reporting.

109. The ACRs reported sex- and age-disaggregated data showing almost equal distribution among girls and boys, with slight variations for some years (slightly more boys than girls benefitted in 2019 and 2020, while in other evaluated years it was the opposite). Primary data findings from the survey confirmed equality in school meal access among children.

110. The intervention targeted children attending schools, as indicated in the monitoring reports, disaggregated by age and sex (boys and girls, and children with special needs); however, with no specification of whether and how these were approached differently by the intervention. Children with special needs were included in the SFP but not specifically targeted by the intervention. Depending on the type of disability, children’s access to school meals requires further assistance provided by teachers or family members.

111. In line with the provisions of the Country Strategic Plan calling for the inclusion of children with special needs, interviewed head teachers were open to their inclusion in their schools, that were still to be part of the education policy (amendments to the law on general education to come into force by August 1, 2025); however, they admitted that sometimes it is challenging due to the levels of disability and lack of trained school staff working with such children. As for inclusion into school feeding, all head teachers at the schools with such children agreed on their equal access to school meals.

112. Interviewed parents of children with special needs showed high levels of satisfaction and are grateful for the inclusive approach in school feeding. The WFP gender transformative approach targeted vulnerable women from the communities by integrating them into the school feeding scheme, first, as kitchen helpers with in-kind support, and later, with paid job positions anchored in the school budget. Together with cooks, these women received capacity-building training in food and nutrition, which they evaluated positively during the interviews.

113. Interviewed children with special needs confirmed they have access to school meals in both the survey and interviews, even though the evaluation team observed physical challenges in some schools. For example, canteens and/or facilities for washing hands that were difficult to reach.

114. If refugee children are enrolled at school, the head teachers at the schools visited by the evaluation team ensure they have access to meals. These children confirmed having access to school meals during the FGD conducted by the evaluation team at one school. In some schools, children with refugee experience in the 5th grade and higher were offered to be part of school feeding if capacity allowed; some took the opportunity, and some refused.

115. A series of training on gender equality issues was provided by the SFCWA to head teachers, cooks, and parents. During interviews with head teachers and cooks and FGDs with parents, the head teachers and parents recalled that they participated in such training and could name some topics (e.g. gender stereotypes), then the discussion often turned to the HLC. These trainings would help consider specific needs and requirements associated with gender specific topics

116. Interviewed children provided positive feedback about the teaching methods for cooking. Despite being obligatory, they liked that the course has no grading system and specifically enjoyed the cooking classes, which motivated some of them to cook at home. Children did not mention that gender- mixed classes would be a negative factor in any of the ten FGDs conducted. This was contrary to the gender norms that some head teachers and cooks followed at the initial implementation stage of gender-mixed cooking classes, saying that cooking is not for boys or supporting gender- separated working spaces, while WFP field officers insisted on a gender-mixed approach.

2.2. COHERENCE

117. Evaluation Question 2: How coherent is the SFP to the Government strategy related to education and nutrition?

118. 2.1 Did the WFP's SPF complement or duplicate other interventions by Government or other development partners in the same geographic area or among the same target population (primary schoolchildren (girls, boys, and children with special needs), school cooks, and smallholders), did it align or support policies and what has been the WFP's added value?

119. **Finding 4:** The WFP's SFP complemented interventions of national policies on education and nutrition very well.

120. The WFP's SFP complemented efforts and activities defined by the government in several national policies on education and nutrition. The Armenian Development Strategy 2014-2025 identifies education as a fundamental driver for the country's sustainable development. Increasing the quality, effectiveness, relevance, and access to all levels of education is a major priority.

121. The new Education Strategy 2030, the State Programme for the Development of Education in the Republic of Armenia until 2030, was endorsed by the National Assembly in November 2022. Following wide stakeholder consultations, the Strategy Action Plan, running until 2026, was adopted in March 2023⁶⁶. The Action Plan stipulates the objective of provisioning school meals to pupils of primary classes of general education in all marzes, including required actions on expansion and respective budget allocation to Lori, Armavir, and Kotyak. The strategy covers the full spectrum of educational activities, including preschool education, primary and secondary schools, vocational education, higher education and, to some extent, informal and nonformal education, and focuses on education quality, accessibility, and efficiency. The WFP's SFP, particularly its transformative component, complemented the Strategy's approaches in the diversification of curricula through the HLC's component on food and nutrition developed by the WFP and taught with modern teaching methods, and then, in a social dialogue involving various stakeholders in designing, implementing, and monitoring school feeding. Finally, through the partnership cooperation with CSOs and the private sector, as materialised in School Assistance Programme (SAP) and Food Value Chain (FVC) pilot projects. In addition, the "Leave no one behind" principle applied to the WFP's SFP complemented the principles of inclusive education that is accessible to all, fostered in the strategy. Further, the WFP's intervention in kitchen rehabilitation and equipment was coherent with the Strategy's efforts, which look at building and upgrading school buildings and facilities, school feeding, and reviewing sanitary-hygienic requirements.

122. The new GoA programme on capital renovation in schools and kindergartens include renovating

⁶⁶ https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-01/Country%20Fiche_Armenia_2023_EN_web.pdf

the kitchens and canteens to enable school feeding for all, at the WFP initiative. The MoESCS is cooperating with the SFCWA over the renovation programme of 300 schools to create school feeding infrastructures (kitchen and canteen) and kindergartens until 2026⁶⁷. The MoESCS prepared the equipment list, while the SFCWA tailored the specific technical equipment needed to each school. Some school buildings may be closed and merged with others, requiring a clear plan for integrating and further using the kitchen equipment provided by WFP.

123. The coherence between the WFP's interventions and national policies on nutrition is evident in several key areas. The WFP's efforts complemented the five-year strategy for developing the health care system 2020-2025, emphasising maintaining and strengthening population health and disease prevention and promoting healthy lifestyles. The WFP's initiatives, including strengthening the capabilities of kitchen staff, upgrading kitchen equipment with easy-to-clean surfaces, and encouraging healthy living through accredited Healthy Lifestyle Curriculum (HLC) and FVC pilot projects, directly support these objectives.

124. Moreover, the National Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition in Armenia 2018⁶⁸, commissioned by the WFP and led by the Government, played a significant role in shaping new strategies. The strategy sets out five key integrated pillars, comprising: i) Ensuring access to safe nutritious food for all; (ii) Enhancing food safety; (iii) Promoting sustainable food systems; (iv) Strengthening food value chains; and (v) Empowering communities. This collaborative effort underscores the alignment between the WFP's activities and national policy. Additionally, the Concept of Improving Child Nutrition 2014⁶⁹ and the National Strategy for Improving Child Nutrition for 2015-2020⁷⁰ emphasized the importance of health and nutrition in children's growth and development. The WFP's SF interventions aligned with this vision by promoting healthy nutrition practices, contributing to children's overall health and development. Through these aligned efforts, the WFP demonstrates its commitment to supporting national strategies and enhancing the nutritional well-being of the population in Armenia.

125. **Finding 5:** The WFP's School Feeding Programme aligned with the Sustainable School Feeding Strategy (SSFS, 2013), which remained in effect until 2022. The WFP's close collaboration with the Government of Armenia (GoA) resulted in new food security policies and in the alignment and integration of the objectives in the Action Plan and into key sectoral frameworks and support through the national budget (outlined in the GoA Action Plan 2021–2026), demonstrate its institutional significance. WFP has largely supported the drafting and development of policies conducive to the institutionalisation of SFP in the Government plans and policies.

126. The WFP's SFP was aligned with the SFSS approved by the GoA on August 23, 2013, and was valid until January 1, 2022⁷¹. The main objective of the SFSS was to create a sustainable school-feeding system that would provide healthy food for elementary school students in all districts of Armenia to improve health and overcome poverty, contributing to increased school attendance and improved universal primary education. In this sense, the WFP SFP shared its objectives with the SSFS and contributed to its results, furthermore, the SFP has been integrated to the 2021-2026 Action Plan of the Government⁷² thus reinforcing the alignment of WFPs and the GoAs objectives.

127. The WFP played a crucial role in supporting the GoA in creating an enabling environment for nationalising the SFP, including new policies addressing food insecurity. In close collaboration with the MoE and as part of a commitment to advance national food security solutions, WFP supported drafting the National Food Security Strategy (2023-2027), which was approved in June 2023. The strategy sets out five key integrated pillars, comprising (i) Ensuring access to safe nutritious food for all; (ii) Enhancing food safety;

⁶⁷ Background information: The "300 Schools, 500 Kindergartens" programme focuses on creating a child-centred, safe environment at schools and kindergartens. In 2023, 29 schools and 167 kindergartens were fully renovated or built. In 2024, the plan is to expand to 264 schools, including 75 educational complexes that will provide both school and preschool educational services.

⁶⁸ https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000104914/download/?_ga=2.131021903.1154082026.1727642908-3547012.1710326357&_gac=1.155403081.1726094310.CjwKCAjw_4S3BhAAEiwA_64YhIKbpRi1CWqTAcqdbSLvHjvkdHSRra_QKw3AWMuCo5qYbP0T--1zPMRoCWi0QAvD_BwE

⁶⁹ http://www.moh.am/OrenqMshakum/Voroshum_nutrition.pdf

⁷⁰ http://www.moh.am/Qaqhaqakanutyun/40_1ardzvoroshum.pdf

⁷¹ arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=85348

⁷² THE 2021-2026 ACTION PLAN OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA. Annex No 1 to Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia No 2117-L of 22 December 2022. Annex No 1. to Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia No 1902-L of 18 November 2021.

(iii) Promoting sustainable food systems; (iv) Strengthening food value chains; and (v) Empowering communities. The WFP contributed to the draft of the national SSFS (2023-2030) and Action Plan (2022-2026) and provided technical assistance in decision-making through several analytical assessments and research. The studies conducted by the WFP and partners, the SIFI, are perceived by government stakeholders interviewed as highly important in informing policy creation.

128. The WFP produced Policy Analysis for School Health and Nutrition in March 2022 as a high-level snapshot of the policy environment with key points that have led to further strategic discussions within the WFP, the GoA, and other external partners and have been addressed in a draft SSFS (2023-2030) to some extent. The support of the WFP in this regard ensured that adequate evidence was available for further strategic planning. However, the GoA must take ownership of this new SSFS for a successful implementation of school feeding.

129. As a result of the work carried out in strategic planning and supported by WFP, the draft SSFS (2023-2030)⁷³ aligns with GoA priorities for ensuring healthy and educated schoolchildren by 2030. In addition, the SFSS is, expectedly, in line with numerous legal and strategic documents, such as the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Armenia Law on General Education, the Republic of Armenia Transformation Strategy 2050, the Armenia Development Strategy (2014-2025)⁷⁴, the Agriculture Development Strategy (2007), the Labour and Social Protection Strategy of the Republic of Armenia (2022-2026), the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) (2021-2030) by the Ministry of Environment, and the Food Security Strategy (2022). This highlights that the work done in preparing the draft SSFS ensured coherence with other national laws and strategies. There is no specific law to institutionalize the School Feeding Program (SFP); however, several legal documents guide school feeding, as detailed in Annex 12. The WFP's Policy Analysis suggests that some of these documents require revision to maximize the impact of national school feeding efforts. The WFP plays a key role in facilitating this process moving forward. These existing frameworks provide entry points to leverage for sustainable school feeding and prioritize measures to address children's poor nutrition, eating habits, and related health issues.

130. SF has driven significant reforms, including changes in the Ministry of Health's regulations for feeding programs in schools and kindergartens, with technical assistance provided by the SFCWA. Additionally, HLC is fully integrated into the national educational curriculum, and school feeding staff are now included on state payrolls. These elements demonstrate that, despite the absence of a specific law on school feeding, it is integrated into key sectoral frameworks and supported through the national budget stipulated in the Action Plan of GoA 2021-2026.

131. **Finding 6:** Synergies between the WFP programme and interventions of local CSOs, United Nations-wide programmes, and Public Private Partnership were established; however, more regular experience sharing would be beneficial.

132. The SFP aligns with and directly contributes to SDGs 2 and 17. Additionally, it has direct implications for SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 concerning school meals and nutrition, and SDGs 8 and 10 regarding improving access to food and strengthening government capacity to achieve the SDGs.

133. The WFP SFP aligns with the UNSDCF for Armenia (2021-2025)⁷⁵. Findings from the KIIs show significant synergies of the WFP SFP with other United Nations Agencies in the transformative element of school feeding, agricultural projects with the FAO, cooperation on healthy lifestyle curriculum with UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNFPA, and the renovation and equipping of kitchens and canteens with UNDP. Some United Nations Agencies are members of the Ministry of Education 's School Feeding Board, where the WFP's activities were discussed to find synergies with their programmes.

134. In parallel to the WFP SFP, the FAO implemented a project on greenhouses and orchards with technical consultation by the SIFI and funded by the Russian Federation. However, the FAO's approach differed in that it focused on less intensive and more sustainable technologies while not compromising efficiency. For example, by establishing only semi-intensive orchards, while not applying hydroponic cultivation if skilled personnel is not assured, and not installing drip irrigation in greenhouses of smaller size than 1,000 m². The experience sharing was done rather informally. Therefore, regular experience-sharing and co-creative meetings of representatives of engaged organisations (e.g. WFP, FAO, SIFI) can address identified issues and contribute to more successful results in implementation.

⁷³ Draft not for circulation, 14.09.2023

⁷⁴ Available on <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/arm151333.pdf>

⁷⁵ <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/UN-Armenia-Cooperation-Framework-2021-2025.pdf>

135. The WFP's cooperation with other United Nations Agencies and the GoA (MoESCS and SFCWA) on a healthy lifestyle curriculum resulted in comprehensive educational material for students and teachers, including interactive learning outcomes on healthy nutrition and physical activities.

136. The cooperation between the WFP and the Armenian National Agrarian University yielded strategic results in enhancing agricultural knowledge and services in rural communities. By expanding extension services and supporting the university's soil laboratory with advanced equipment, the WFP facilitated more accurate and high-quality agricultural analysis. This collaboration also strengthened FVCs and improved resource management and productivity in rural areas. Furthermore, the capacity-strengthening training provided to WFP staff elevated their technical expertise, enabling more informed decision-making and better support for local agricultural initiatives.

137. NGOs were directly engaged in the transformative component. The WFP worked with six local NGOs as implementing partners. WFP's school feeding transformative component aligned with the NGOs' missions and visions, even though some NGOs had to outsource agricultural specialists for school agricultural projects (SAP). The benefits from NGO participation are perceived in their context-specific knowledge, expertise and, to some extent, established rapport with local communities. The cooperation with the WFP was highly valued by interviewed representatives of NGOs. During KIIs, some NGOs expressed their concerns about the sustainability of SAPs due to the limited skills of school personnel. Similarly, visited schools still rely on consultations with the NGO that implemented the SAP. Similar results were found by the assessment conducted jointly by the WFP and the SIFI⁷⁶.

138. The WFP's transformative approach to school feeding allowed for the establishment of new public-private partnerships (PPP) aiming to invest in one activity (e.g. production of whole grain flour and bakery products), resulting in maximised effects, including the population's health, fostering human capital, and developing new drivers of equitable economic growth, including the circular economy. The WFP launched its PPPs via pilot projects focusing on supplying healthier and more nutritious food items to schools, such as wholegrain wheat bread in Tavush and the Milk in Schools⁷⁷ program in Vayots Dzor. In Tavush in 2020, the WFP supported a mill and bakeries with equipment for making wholegrain flour and bread, respectively. In Vayots Dzor in 2022, the WFP started cooperating with the dairy producers of Yeremyan projects that provide milk to schools. Both pilots followed the 'farm-to-fork' concept and are yet to be assessed regarding results.

139. **Finding 7:** The Russian Federation was a key multiyear strategic partner for the WFP country office. The high-level technical expertise of the Social and Industrial Foodservice Institute (SIFI) allowed resource mobilization from another school-feeding donor in the French government. The funding complied with their Strategy (2019-2024) on food and nutrition, including sustainable agriculture and improved school food systems. and further synergies under the SFP.

140. The Russian Federation has been a key multi-year strategic partner for the WFP SFP since 2010. 'Our support over the years extended beyond financial assistance and encompassed technical guidance methodological support, and personnel training', donor agency informant. The WFP's long-term cooperation with the SIFI ensured high-level technical expertise in transformative activities within the FVC projects, green energy, and School Assistance Programme implementation. The SIFI, commissioned by the WFP, produced numerous technical assessments and analytical reports informing strategic decision-making.

141. The WFP benefited from two key factors for implementing transformative school feeding: multiyear stable funding by the Russian Federation and high technical expertise by the SIFI.

142. 2.2 How well does the school feeding handover strategy to the Government fit into the broader national plans and how well is it integrated into the country's education and nutrition strategies?

143. **Finding 8:** The handover strategy fits well into the Government plans and has been taken up and ensured coherence as various stakeholders participated in the design and implementation of the handover strategy.

144. In 2022, the MoESCS and the WFP developed an SSFP Handover Roadmap embracing handover models, roles, and responsibilities, and a timeline to nationalise school feeding gradually. However, sections on contingency plans and risk analysis were lacking in the roadmap. This has been only partially addressed

⁷⁶ SIFI (2022): Assessment of the project School Agriculture Project in the Republic of Armenia synthesis report

⁷⁷ <https://www.yeremyanprojects.com/en/projects/milk-in-schools>
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in the drafted SFSS (2023-2030) involving a school feeding SWOT⁷⁸ analysis, which was jointly done by involved stakeholders based on 12-year experience. Identification of strengths and opportunities contributed to shaping the SFSS, while identification of weaknesses and threats^{76,79} for school feeding implementation makes the stakeholders aware of these. However, the mitigation strategy and contingency plan are missing. The principal threats identified include the lack of a mandatory implementation law, insufficient budget allocation, high food costs, global and local economic instability, political uncertainty, and the absence of prohibitions on selling unhealthy food near schools, resulting in a weak legal framework for processes, reforms, contingency planning, and norms regarding procurement, parental participation, and nutrition standards.

145. The institutionalisation of school feeding is through the SFCWA. WFP's approach to gradual handover strategy, with capacity strengthening at the government level and establishment of the SFCWA with the defined mandate and future budget allocation, contributed to the successful handover and is aligned with the State Programme for Development of Education of the Republic of Armenia until 2030. The GoA has committed to funding school feeding within the mid-term expenditure framework. However, the interview findings revealed, that the government informants perceive challenges with an insufficient school feeding and SFCWA budget, particularly with the envisaged school feeding upscaling to Yerevan. The KIIs results show that, to some extent, the GoA still relies on Russian Federation funding but simultaneously realises the need to take it over fully.

146. The GoA was involved in all steps of SFP, design and handover strategy; implementation and monitoring of SFP by SFCWA and WFP (on-site visits). In the interviews, government informants reported that cooperation with WFP has been high among government stakeholders and ministries following the prescribed protocol.

147. Schools were active actors in all steps. They were consulted on their needs during the initial on-site visits. Schools and their communities (teachers, parents, community members) participated in the implementation of SFP (in-kind labour for the renovation of kitchen and canteen, donation of kitchen utensils, parent financial or in-kind contribution to SF) and, to some extent, in monitoring by reporting to the SFCWA (e.g. providing sex and grade-disaggregated data on SF).

148. In addition, the transformative approach appealed to private partners who participated in FVC projects (wholegrain flour and bread, milk) via Private-Public-Partnerships. Under the WFP wholegrain project in Tavush, in total, 67 smallholder farmers were supported with agricultural inputs, a private mill was rehabilitated and equipped with a complete technological line as well as a solar station, and seven bakeries were supported with equipment and respective training to produce wholegrain bread while using green energy.

2.3. EFFECTIVENESS

149. Evaluation Question 3: To what extent has the SFP achieved its objectives for handover strategy and what extent did the SFP achieve its objectives in terms of improving school attendance, nutrition, and learning outcomes?

150. 3.1 How effective was the WFP in terms of contributing to creating enabling environment at schools, including the infrastructure, capacity building, and innovative models for enhanced self-resilience?

151. **Finding 9:** The WFP effectively contributed to the establishment of an enabling environment in schools. The school kitchen infrastructure was improved by rehabilitating and re-equipping kitchens, cafeteria and storage facilities enabling schools to prepare hot meals in a sanitary safe manner. The capacity of school personnel and community members for school meals organisation, agricultural practices and healthy lifestyle was built. Innovative modules were introduced to improve school production capacities, including school gardens, food processing, bakeries, renewable energy, and connecting farmers to schools and markets.

152. **Infrastructure:** As part of the nationalisation of the SFP, the WFP supported the GoA in improving school kitchen infrastructure for cooking and providing hot meals. The rehabilitation of school facilities not only provided potable water for school children and staff, but the renovations and rehabilitation of kitchens, cafeterias and storage facilities. In total, 816 schools were provided with kitchen equipment⁸⁰ and

⁷⁸ Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats Analysis

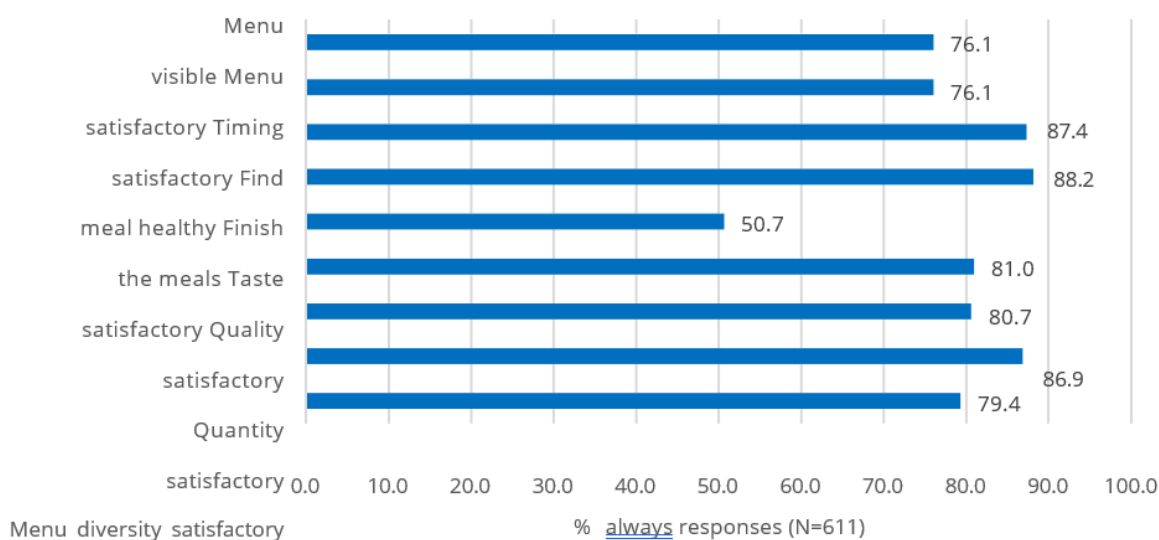
⁷⁹ Annex C - School Feeding SWOT analysis in Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Republic of Armenia: School Feeding Strategy of the Republic of Armenia (2023-2030). DRAFT NOT FOR CIRCULATION. Version 00. 14.09.2023

⁸⁰ Note: 25 types of kitchen equipment supplied (appliances and machinery)

512 schools received construction materials for renovation of canteens from 2018-2023. The program achieved 86 percent of the set target in terms of the number of schools with supporting renovation and equipped kitchen, canteens and storage facilities.

153. Ninety percent of interviewed head teachers consider that the enabling environment at schools and the quality of kitchen equipment improved thanks to participation in the SFP. All five transformative schools visited stated that further improvement of school enabling environment took place. Moreover, the site visits showed that provided equipment and infrastructure are in operation (i.e. kitchen, canteen, storage, SAP facilities). In two out of ten schools, the electric cookers were not used due to the problems with the power supply. Nearly all (609 out of 611) schoolchildren who took part in the survey answered that they receive school meals all school days. A very large share (more than 80 percent) of the school children survey respondents reported that school meals are always healthy, satisfying in quantity, taste and of quality. Close to 80 percent report that meals are always varied and two third of them reported that they always have fresh component. About half the children mention they always completely finish the meals, whereas it is not known whether they don't finish due to quality or quantity. Figure 7 shows the school meal satisfaction status of school children as measured through seven variables.

Figure 7 - Overall satisfaction of school children with various aspects of school feeding in their school



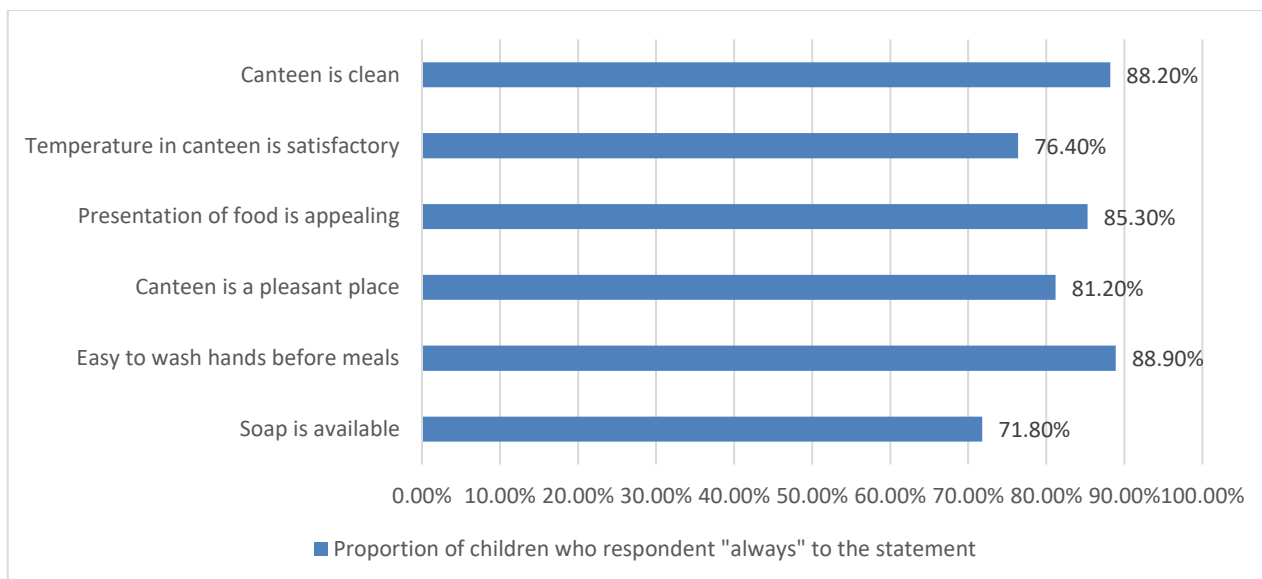
154. Fruit is the most frequently cited item children like to eat, followed by vegetable salads, buckwheat, pilaf and rice, bread, lentil soup, cheese, and bean soup. Eggs, yogurt-based soup, cooked vegetables, hajar, and pea soup are reported by less than half the children as being very much liked.

155. In qualitative research, the evaluation team found out that children in less favourable socio-economic areas were happier with school meals and often finished everything on the plate. In FGDs in poorer areas, children expressed that they like vegetable salads, and some also ask for them at home. Their pocket money was lower than that of children from visited schools closer to Yerevan, limiting them from buying snacks between meals. On the contrary, children receiving higher amounts of pocket money were less happy with school meals as they buy usually unhealthy options before lunch time and they remain not hungry, and in such schools, the evaluation team observed a larger volume of leftovers.

156. According to most children who were interviewed, the canteens are pleasant and tidy. They like sitting and spending lunch time together. Children say that the cook cooks healthier food than they eat at home. Parents see the cleanliness of the kitchen and canteen positively. Some parents during focus groups also say that children can receive additional portions if asked. Some of schoolchildren also mentioned that their schools are not big; therefore, canteens are small, and they experience some discomfort when consuming school meals.

157. About 80 percent of interviewed cooks stated that the WFP has provided sufficient resources (commodities, equipment) to provide school feeding for primary grade students. More than three of four schoolchildren mentioned that they can easily wash their hands (although soap is not always available), canteens are always clean, serving of food is appealing, the atmosphere is pleasant, and the temperature is enjoyable.

Figure 8 - Percentage of schoolchildren satisfied with canteen conditions (N=611)



158. **Capacity building:** As evident from document review, the target for the number of people engaged in capacity strengthening initiatives facilitated by WFP was surpassed. A total of 1,343 school staff (head teachers, chefs, accountants, teachers) and parents received training in food handling, food safety, hygiene, and procurement through the SFCW Agency; 1,490 children, their parents, teachers, and the school community increased their awareness of the benefits of a diverse diet and understand how to adapt their food consumption behaviour; and 3,818 children, and members of the school community increased their knowledge of agricultural practices and understand how to replicate these practices in other land.

159. All schoolchildren interviewed (n= 11 FGDs) stated that cooks are nice to them, they never push them to eat everything or meals they do not like. They rather explain to them why it is healthy, and they should try it. Kitchen staff members greet children with a smile, treat them as the parents and instruct them to refrain from speaking during meals. This was reconfirmed by parents who consider that children are treated at school like at home. The interviews with cooks revealed that all of them chose to become cooks because they have a passion for cooking. Additionally, half of them mentioned that their children or grandchildren attend this school, which further influenced their decision to become cooks.

160. The enabling environment for capacity building, using awareness raising and social and behavioural change, has also been achieved through the development and piloting of the HLC, which was introduced to 5-9 grades as a mandatory extracurricular class conducting healthy lifestyle awareness campaigns in collaboration with the MoH. It has also created a curriculum for Agri-clubs Transformative school feeding models piloted by the program also focused on improving nutrition and dietary habits. This has led to creating an education platform, job learning and career orientation towards “green profession”, alongside community-led climate action and resilience building. It is a critical component that only now emerges, but it has the potential to have a significant impact.

161. **Innovative models for enhanced self-resilience:** As planned, the WFP has established 54 agricultural projects in 51 schools to sustain school feeding for 20,548 students who attend schools with homegrown school feeding capacities in five provinces including Lori, Shirak, Tavush, Armavir, Aragatsotn, Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, and Syunik. 48,610 m2 of agricultural facilities were established in those schools, including 12,460 m2 of berry gardens with fruit freezing and orchards with drying capacities, and 7,880 m2 of greenhouses, of which 3,200 m2 are used for hydroponics. As a result, schoolchildren have access to fruit throughout the year based on the site visits and interviews with school administrators. Moreover, by SFCW Agency Agri-club programs were developed and introduced to schools for piloting. These opportunities reveal the potential of the infrastructures as learning platforms as well.

162. In addition, in the 97 schools⁸¹ that installed solar panels, there is a combined capacity of 2,371 kW, generating 3,437,950 kWh annually⁸². In view of the parents, SAP is highly effective as their children can learn about the agri-practices such as environmentally friendly farming methods, crop cultivation, food

⁸¹ Note: The programme is ongoing, and these targets might increase.

⁸² WFP Operational Updates on the SFP (2021-2023).

production and business planning based on circular and revolving models which will be useful in their adult life. Children like that SAP promotes unity among schoolchildren. At one school, children during the FGD referred to cooking classes, where they baked cakes and used the berries from the garden. They shared the products (cakes) with their peers. They enjoyed it and felt proud of themselves. This activity was also shared on the school's social media channel to attract the attention of a broader audience.

163. The combination of transformative agricultural projects in school plots and the installation of solar stations creates a synergistic effect. Not only do solar systems meet the energy needs of schools for project implementation, but they also enable the surplus electricity to be utilised for classroom heating, lighting, and it is even sold back to the grid. The savings generated from reduced electricity bills, which amount to 30 percent annually, are then redirected towards various school feeding purposes, such as kitchen and canteen repairs, meal diversification. Community-based models like the Arpi project invest in local businesses to fund the SFP. This makes the NSFP more sustainable, feeding young schoolchildren even in remote areas with difficult infrastructure and harsh climatic conditions.

164. 3.2 How effective were the different modalities used in the SFP (e.g. in-kind, cash transfers, take-home rations, transformative agriculture, and community-based models) in achieving the programme's objectives?

165. **Finding 10:** A combination of modalities (support through inputs, cash distributions, take-home rations, transformative agriculture, and community-based models) enabled the program to contribute to the strategic objectives of increasing access to adequate and nutritious food, and improving food security through strengthening of governance, despite the challenging context.

166. Through the "transitional model" (support through inputs⁸³), the WFP and cooperating partners delivered tailored training to local-level actors, improved school infrastructure, such as kitchen and cafeterias, and provided modern equipment.⁸⁴ The model also mobilised partners, including state agencies, to coordinate interventions for nutrition, gender, hygiene and sanitation, school rehabilitation, finance, and education. The introduction of cash-based transfers (CBT) for purchasing from local producers significantly improved the nutritional diversity of the school menu and fostered local food purchasing. The outcome monitoring survey showed a high engagement of parents in the decision-making at school level, particularly regarding the implementation and management of the school feeding programme on such decisions as which food items to procure, menu compositions, meal quality control, and promotion of healthy child behaviour habits. The developed alternative school feeding modality like take home rations ensured the programme beneficiaries have access to nutritious food during the pandemic crises. The Take-Home Rations (THR) post-distribution monitoring⁸⁰ that surveyed parents, kitchen helpers and focal points confirmed that the THR distribution process was implemented well, without any serious issues observed. It was implemented in a safe, accessible, and respectful way. The beneficiaries in general were satisfied with the quality of food received. Transformative agriculture empowered the schools and communities to adopt climate-friendly practices. The interviewed stakeholders emphasised that the integration of seasonal fruits and vegetables from school-based agricultural production facilities increased the availability and diversity of nutritious ingredients for school meals. This approach promotes healthier eating habits among students, leading to improved nutrition and overall well-being. Schoolchildren learned how to grow and harvest fruits and vegetables during their lessons. In addition, school agricultural facilities have generated resources that are reinvested in the SFP, promoting sustainability, and ensuring a continuous supply of nutritious meals for students.

167. 3.3 How effective has the programme been in supporting the development of new policies, systems, procedures to enable full handover of the programme to the government?

168. **Finding 11:** Overall, the programme has strengthened national structures and systems on school feeding. A Roadmap for a SFP handover was developed, making a complete transfer of the project to national institutions possible. This was facilitated by SFCWA capacity building alongside piloting a variety of school feeding models.

169. As evident from document review and interviews, the GoA and the WFP developed a strategic plan called the Roadmap to Handover/Takeover of the Sustainable School Feeding Programme 2019- 2023 in 2020 and which was approved in 2021. It focused on strengthening communities and the government's capacity to sustain the program after full transfer of responsibilities from the WFP. Later in 2020, the SFCWA

⁸³ See WFP's modalities of intervention in section 1.3

⁸⁴ School Feeding Programme Take Home Rations Post Distribution Monitoring Report, WFP, October 2021

was created under the National Centre for Education Development and Innovation Foundation which is part of the MoESCS with the mandate to support MoESCS in the implementation, management, and coordination of the SFP. The SFCWA established a collegial decision-making Steering Committee comprised of competent professionals from public, private sectors and donor organisations to mentor the Agency's overall operations, providing technical advice to the Board of Trustees and the Founder.

170. The WFP and the SIFI provided technical support to the SFCWA through peer-to-peer advisory sessions, bilateral meetings, and trainings to support the sustainability of the NSFP. As a result, monitoring and evaluation and information management systems have been developed for the SFCWA. The packages and cost-estimates for infrastructure renovations were designed and provided to the GoA to advise on future school improvements that enhance the readiness of schools to implement school feeding activities. Comprehensive research activities and feasibility studies were carried out to pilot innovative school feeding models (transformative agriculture, community, and commercial school feeding models). Additionally, WFP representatives participated in the recruitment procedures of the agency to ensure transparency and bring its best practices for the benefit of the SFCWA. Moreover, the SFCWA's support for the GoA encompassed developing and introducing internal policies and regulations related to the implementation of the Transformative School Feeding. Based on the Transformative School Feeding legislative gap analysis conducted by WFP, a package of amendments related to the regulations and normative documents guiding the entrepreneurial operations of schools was submitted to the MoESCS. It aimed at enhancing the operational sustainability of the SAPs. In addition, a standardised two-week menu was developed and put into operation. However, as most school head teachers reported during the interviews, the menu must be strictly followed. The adjustment option on the menu reflecting fluctuation of food price and available budget is envisaged in the MoH feeding norms and new SSFS.

171. 3.4 To what extent have the national policies, programmes, and systems been strengthened to improve food security and nutrition among targeted groups by 2025?

172. **Finding 12:** With the assistance of the WFP, the National Food Security Strategy and Action Plan for 2023-2027 were developed, which have an integrated food systems approach and are aligned with the NSFP.

173. The document review and interviews demonstrate, as discussed under the coherence section, that the WFP supported drafting of the National Food Security Strategy (2023-2027) and its Action Plan in close collaboration with the Ministry of Economy (MoE) as part of a commitment to advance national food security solutions and better alignment with the National School Feeding Programme. The Strategy and Action Plan were approved in July 2023. The WFP supported the MoE in implementing this strategy by conducting an inter-ministerial consultation and a costing exercise.

174. This shows that under the Specific Objective 2, WFP has been able to provide support in designing policies and plan while at the same time ensuring coherence across the various policies and align with existing policies.

175. **Finding 13:** The WFP's expertise in nutrition allowed to strengthen existing partnerships and closely engage with the MoH and MoESCS to streamline nutrition-sensitive approaches in national policies.

176. The WFP supported the amendment of a government decree for the organisation of school meals whereby the sale of sugary products in schools, including cookies, biscuits, sweets, waffles, and cakes has been banned, replacing them with fresh fruit and vegetables. Processed meat has also been removed from the list of items that can be consumed in schools and the amount of sugar contained in meals has been reduced. Moreover, in cooperation with the SFCWA, the WFP provided guidance to the GoA to join the School Meals International Coalition.

177. The Healthy Lifestyle Curriculum (HLC) taught in a modern didactical way has become a part of obligatory courses for 5th and 7th grades since January 2024, with a previous pilot period in Tavush province. In addition, the WFP expanded the HLC to include grades 6, 8, and 9 in partnership with the MoH and the MoESCS. The WFP worked with UNFPA, UNICEF, and UNESCO to assist the MoESCS in developing the HLC and developed the food and nutrition component, which is designed as a combination of theoretical parts, educational games and practical sessions aiming at enhancing knowledge and skills in food and nutrition while deconstructing gender stereotypes related to food through gender-mixed cooking classes using the kitchen equipment provided by the WFP. In FGDs, children showed knowledge and interest in HL thanks to the HLC food and nutrition component and their respective teachers. The innovative approach to HLC teaching, including games, is positively valued. Also, children showed awareness that physical activity is a part of a healthy lifestyle. Some children also admitted that their parents motivate them to engage in

physical activity. The survey (N=611) shows that most children who practice sports (92.5 percent) tend to practice only one type of sport. Boys are significantly more involved in sports than girls (50.8 percent and 36.8 percent, respectively). At the same time, the interviews with the stakeholders and parents showed that girls usually take part in dance circles and clubs.

178. The WFP and MoESCS developed nutritional educational materials, including a cookbook that was highly awarded at the International Book Fair in China in 2019 for the general public as a part of social behaviour changes on a healthier diet.

179. With the aim of strengthening national capacity and implementing evidence-based campaigns, the WFP has also supported the MoH in developing three campaigns on healthy lifestyle, including messaging, story boards, and behaviour change activities around three key health behaviours, comprising salt reduction, healthy snacking habits, and ageing well.

180. Furthermore, the GoA has approved a new education sector policy, the Education Development Strategy 2022-2030, and the Plan of Activities for 2022-2026. This policy recognises school feeding as a valuable tool for supporting human capital development and enhancing the quality of education.

181. 3.5 What are the main challenges and opportunities for the SFP in Armenia?

182. **Finding 14:** The main opportunities moving forward are introducing urban school feeding in Yerevan, expanding rural school feeding to higher grades, and scaling up transformative school feeding across the country. Schools' capacity to independently manage agricultural initiatives is the primary obstacle.

183. The main opportunity is introduction of Urban School Feeding in Yerevan. Currently more than 47,000 elementary school students of the country study in 153 schools in Yerevan, which is one third of the total number of schoolchildren in the country. As research conducted by the WFP and SIFI shows, 85 percent of Yerevan's school head teachers support the initiative to organise hot nutritious meals, with more than half of them being ready to organise hot meal preparation at school. Moreover, the GoA has taken on a long-term commitment to further expand its funding for school feeding and is ready to include schools in Yerevan into the National Programme as soon as school canteens are brought into proper condition. Another opportunity is to expand the Rural School Feeding to higher grades as children of 5th grade and higher often have limited or no access to healthy food during classes, then return to unhealthy but accessible food. Another opportunity is to expand the Transformative School Feeding and Wholegrain Project across the country. Currently Transformative School Feeding was introduced in 9 out of 10 provinces (Armavir, Kotayk, Tavush, Lori, Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, Shirak, Syunik, Aragatsotn); the Wholegrain Project in three provinces (Tavush, Lori, Gegharkunik). The main challenge is that schools have limited capacities in terms of running agricultural projects by themselves. The results from interviews with head teachers show that they prefer both scenarios: (i) to continue with the agri-project under the school administration, however, with access to professional consultations that might be partially charged; or (ii) contract external private entity to run it, though a clear vision about economy of this scenario is yet to be elaborated. The WFP and School Feeding and Child Welfare Agency of the National Center for Education Development and Innovation (SFCWA) are aware of these limits that schools face. Therefore, the WFP has recommended the Agency's Board to change the staff list. It suggests adding positions for two agronomists who provide continuous technical assistance to schools. In addition, the WFP currently develops a legal framework to support the MoESCS to regulate the economy of schools with school-based facilities by outsourcing either to a private company or delegating it to the Agency with a service fee.

184. The position of schools in commercial activities seems unclear. They are primarily regarded as state educational institutions not intended for commercial activities, although school charters grant some options for commercial activities and entrepreneurship. In consultation with the WFP, the SFCWA drafted a government decision on supporting schools. This included their entrepreneurship component. However, this decision was not approved and consequently led the SFCWA abandon this entrepreneurial direction and is looking, together with the WFP and MoESCS, for a strategy involving legal mechanisms allowing schools to outsource services managing the commercial aspects.

185. **Finding 15:** A specialization of managing staff at the head of school, through an ongoing educational reform could prove to become an enabling factor to further improve school feeding as the management of school feeding and procurement will be taken over by specifically trained managers.

186. The country will introduce a reform of school administrators, which envisages having the positions of two school principals with different roles and responsibilities, namely administrative and educational.

The educational director will cover the educational agenda only (e.g. curriculum), while the administrative director will take over all administrative and financial needs of schools, including school feeding and related procurement, and reduce the load of actual head teachers.

187. The administrative directors are professional in financial aspects and require training only in school feeding, nutrition, and sanitary and hygienic regulations. The SFCWA has trained 24 out of 27 administrative directors on school feeding, with a plan to gradually train for the next three years aligned with the termination of services of actual directors. These new directors will take the positions along with the new educational directors.

188. For some interviewed head teachers, the position remains unclear, while some welcome such an idea as they feel overloaded. Most head teachers spend more than 15 hours on school feeding management per month; some reported that they work on procurement on weekends.

2.4. EFFICIENCY

189. Evaluation Question 4: How efficient was the SFP in terms of the resources (e.g. time, money, and personnel)?

190. 4.1 Was the programme cost-efficient?

191. **Finding 16:** The implementation of the SFP was overall cost-efficient. The budget was fully utilized and adjusted during the implementation to respond better to evolving contexts and needs. The share of the direct and indirect support costs in the total expenditure was 10 percent. The biggest portion of the budget (90 percent) was allocated for Activity 1 and 10 percent for Activity 2. No significant delays in disbursements preventing the delivery of activities were reported.

192. The budget allocated originally to Activity 1 in the funding proposal amounted to US\$17,330,000 million for the period 2019 - 2023 and was reduced to US\$13,960,672, revisions to the Country Strategic Plan budgets, were made as part of a crisis's response in 2020. Table 5 below presents the expenditures by activity for each year. The budget included the activities for the provision of school meals and technical assistance, infrastructure rehabilitation at school level, an innovative school meals programme, and community engagement. As far as budget revisions were concerned, the major revision was observed for the provision of school meals and technical assistance that was revised the most due to cost-savings. In 2020, due to the partial implementation of support through input assistance, only 44 percent of the planned budget was disbursed covering the support through input assistance and the provision of the Take Home Ration boxes, introduced as a COVID-19 mitigation measure. In 2021, despite an increase in food prices, the management of the supply chain and existing stocks have enabled the expenditures to remain in line with the initial budget allocation, showing efficient management of resources. It should also be stressed that the number of the beneficiaries in the 2021/2022 academic year for WFP has decreased with the handover of the programme implementation in Gegharkunik province to the Armenian authorities. At the same time, the budget for infrastructure rehabilitation at school level (see table 5 below) was increased by about 700,000 USD due to an increase in the price of construction materials and equipment and the provision of kitchen equipment to additional schools which were under the National SFP. As part of a strategic reorientation in 2021 based on a high return for reasonable investments, the number of SAP have been increased. This, combined with the increase in prices of agricultural inputs, the budget for innovative school meals programme and community engagement was increased from US\$2.6 million to US\$4.2 million.

Table 5 - Allocated vs spent budget for Activity 1

Activities	Years	Planned Budget (in US\$)	Actual Expenditures (in US\$)
Provision of School Meals and Technical Support	2019	1,450,000	0
	2020	2,900,000	1,908,911
	2021	2,300,000	1,377,508
	2022	1,950,000	992,567
	2023	1,400,000	-25,412
Sub-total:		10,000,000	4,253,574
Infrastructure Rehabilitation at School Level	2019	220,000	161,637
	2020	1,320,000	611,484
	2021	1,430,000	1,497,528
	2022	990,000	2,763,081
	2023	770,000	442,769
Sub-total:		4,730,000	5,476,499
Innovative school meals programme and community engagement	2019	650,000	0
	2020	720,000	1,369,122
	2021	710,000	2,342,506
	2022	350,000	428,522
	2023	170,000	90,449
Sub-total:		2,600,000	4,230,599

193. The budget allocated to Activity 2 in the funding proposal in 2019 totalled US\$670,000. However, this amount has increased to US\$1,519,459 due to expansion of the coverage of the activities provided by the SIFI. In line with the institutionalisation of the SFCWA, the costs for the staff and the operation and maintenance increased, comprising 50 percent of the budget.

194. The share of the direct and indirect support costs in the total expenditure (US\$18 million) was 10 percent (4 percent direct support costs and 6 percent indirect support costs). The management cost and the cost of the Field Level Agreement (FLA) with the SIFI amounted to US\$1.7 million of the total allocations.

195. The program maintained thorough records of all transactions. In reviewing of the financial documents obtained from the desk review, all procurement is done within the rules and regulations of the WFP. This attentive maintenance of records and adherence to good administrative and financial practice also contribute to the active promotion of transparency and accountability. Furthermore, the WFP supply chain strategy has been designed to avoid any additional storage costs while maintaining stocks to last at least two to three months⁸¹⁸⁵, which also enhanced the SFP's cost-efficiency. In addition, no delays in disbursement halting the implementation of activities were reported, hence reinforcing the cost-effectiveness of the delivery of the school feeding programme.

196. 4.2 Was the programme implemented in a timely way?

197. **Finding 17:** Although the time for implementation was extended for one year, the program was flexible enough to adjust to changing context.

198. The CSP does not provide a timeline for SFP activities. The annual planning, including the workplan for the year, was not presented to the evaluation team. The ACRs report the set of interventions and

⁸⁵ Note: WFP purchased in-kind food from the Russian Federation or locally on a “delivered-at-place” basis, with suppliers delivering commodities directly to WFP warehouses in Armenia. WFP Armenia was responsible for the storage and regular (four to five cycles per year) delivery of food to WFP-supported schools following the in-kind school feeding model. Food was transported by commercial trucking companies, who were selected through a competitive and transparent tendering process. In-country transport, storage and handling costs were covered by the host government.

achievements for the respective year. The delays of some activities were reported within the ACRs.

199. As evident from the interviews with the WFP and the government, the SFP suffered delays in implementation due to complicated implementation environment (COVID-19 and NK conflict) and operational limitations (restructuring of the SFCWA). As a result, the handover process took one additional year, mainly because of lockdown. The two final provinces (Armavir and Kotayk) were handed over to the National SFP in July 2023 instead of 2022.

200. The GoA and the WFP demonstrated a high degree of adaptability to the challenging environment during the implementation of SFP.

201. First, as a primary response to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures between March 2020 and November 2021, the WFP, jointly with the MoESCS and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), introduced an alternative Shock Responsive School Feeding modality. Cash transfers (AMD 8,000 per child) were provided for two months in 2020 to more than 26,000 primary school children from the families enrolled in the “Family Benefit Programme” established by the GoA. The WFP allocated AMD 212,944,000 as one-time exceptional intervention. In the fall, the programme turned to alternative THR with food assistance boxes composed of six commodities (buckwheat, lentils, pasta, rice, vegetable oil, wheat flour) intended to last for 80 days. THR assistance was provided twice during the 2020-2021 academic year (once per semester⁸⁶) covering the needs of 53,874 primary schoolchildren from vulnerable families.

202. Second, as the children from the families affected by the Karabakh region conflict were getting enrolled in schools in Armenia, the WFP extended its assistance and allocated three percent THR boxes extra to reach additional 1,578 children in four WFP supported regions.

203. Third, a special take-home ration was designed for the kitchen helpers, who are from poor households and households headed by women. As a result, THR assistance was received by 6,575 kitchen helpers with their family members from vulnerable families for 80 feeding days each time.

204. Fourth, 40 people from the local community were employed in the repackaging process for THR boxes, earning US\$ 600 monthly, which is higher than the average salary in Armenia. These employment opportunities improved the livelihoods of households whose members had lost their seasonal jobs due to the border closure.

205. Fifth, to support the GoA in implementing school feeding in a safe manner amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the WFP facilitated a donation from Amazon of personal protective equipment (PPE) valued at US\$7 million for the MoESCS. This enabled the MoESCS, in cooperation with the SFCWA, to ensure that school meals could be distributed to 100,000 children (67 percent of all children engaged in primary grades) in a COVID-19-safe manner by distributing personal protective equipment items to more than 1,400 schools.

206. Sixth, the GoA allocated the US\$800,000 in cash-transfers for school feeding in academic year 2020/2021, which went unused due to irregular implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic, to rehabilitate kitchens, cafeterias, and other vital school infrastructure. To mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on the processes and quality of school feeding, the WFP and SIFI initiated widescale refresher trainings in all provinces, intensive monitoring visits, and oversight missions to schools. The WFP and SIFI worked with the directors and kitchen staff to reintroduce adequate infrastructure and food safety in school kitchens and canteens essentially re-establishing and recovering school feeding in the country.

207. Last, in 2020, the WFP expanded the SFP, supporting community-led food production and the sustainability of school feeding activities. This was achieved by providing schools with green technologies and training schools to produce food requirements for daily meals, create new job opportunities for community members and share knowledge on agricultural and climate sensitive practices

208. A governmental organisation informant expressed the following: *‘Before, the tendency was to bring training participants to Yerevan, but the efficiency was low’*. Hence, the decentralisation approach has been put in place in training and monitoring. The close distance of the training place was appreciated by some participants, *‘Training was here in the province; we did not have to travel far. It was convenient for me’*, a cook commented.

⁸⁶ The first stage of which was distributed in November-December 2020 (for the first school semester), and the second stage was distributed during April-May 2021 (for the second school semester).

209. 4.3 How well were human resources managed in the implementation of the school feeding programs? Were there any capacity gaps or staffing issues that affected efficiency?

210. **Finding 18:** Thanks to the support of WFP, the institutional structure for continuous implementation of school feeding was established. However, challenges with inadequate human resources are identified at the SFWCA and regional departments.

211. A multi-sectoral approach to SFP requires cooperation among GoA entities with clearly defined roles and responsibilities and adequate capacities. The roles and responsibilities are outlined in the draft of SFSS; however, the capacities for school feeding implementation are not mentioned.

212. Some government stakeholders perceive that the GoA has sufficient capacities to implement school feeding in terms of national staff's knowledge, and experience. Cooperation of several Ministries (MoESCS, MoH, MoF and Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI)) is in place.

213. The major step towards the institutionalisation of school feeding was the establishment of SFCWA in 2020 under the National Centre for Education Development and Innovation Foundation, which is a part of the MoESCS.

214. The SFCWA plays a crucial role in implementing the national SFP. The WFP has strengthened the capacity of the SFCWA in areas of technical assistance on implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and identifying fundraising mechanisms to enhance the sustainability and ownership of the programme at national and community levels.

215. The SFCWA's human resource's structure is well-developed, embracing professional positions like nutritionists, agronomists, coordinators (for SFP, education and training, PR and outreach) and a monitoring team with an evaluation-research specialist. The challenges identified lie in insufficient financial remuneration for the positions, high workload for current positions, and low staffing to cover the agenda of 1,052 schools. Despite the limited human resources capacities, their commitment to school feeding is perceived as high and considered one of the contributing factors for actual achievements. The SFCWA is aware of the need for monitoring to have first-hand evidence informing their decisions.

216. At the regional level, the Marzpetaran's Department on Education, Science, Culture and Sport is responsible for the feeding, information management monitoring, reporting, compliance to Norms and Regulations and partnerships with schools. However, the new SFSS states that their engagement is not regulated, and an accountability and responsibility system is not in place. In addition, responsible staff lacks engagement in school feeding in their job descriptions and clear guidelines to follow. Staff is needed to strengthen its capacities in public food organisation and monitoring topics.

217. Department staff are expected to monitor school feeding on-site; however, budgetary constraints prevent this from being carried out.

218. **Finding 19:** Despite the support of WFP in capacity building, the monitoring of the NSFP is only done partially and a relative lack of strategy and capacities in this area compromise its effective monitoring.

219. The SFCWA is currently responsible for monitoring and evaluating school feeding (SF), but the school feeding monitoring and evaluation strategy is not integrated into the national system, despite the capacity building provided by WFP. The ToR of integration of SF monitoring into EMIS (governmental platform for digital monitoring, reporting and information sharing) is ongoing. WFP has initiated this process with SFCWA. In the draft SSFS (2023-2030), monitoring and evaluation are mentioned solely as SFCWA's and regional administrations' responsibilities without a clear strategy.

220. The SFCWA recognises the importance of first-hand evidence in its decisions. The key informants from the GoA find it an important and necessary component for SF. However, some government informants view school feeding monitoring as a challenge, acknowledging the SFCWA's limited capacities, which cannot be expanded numerically.

221. The GoA prefers to continue monitoring by engaging regional administrations. The SFCWA coordinated the monitoring activities through the Marzes administration. However, the engagement of provincial administration offices has not yet been institutionalised.

222. 4.4 Were the modalities (in-kind, cash, self-financing, THRs) used in the SFP cost-effective compared to other possible interventions?

223. **Finding 20:** The traditional school feeding approach appears to be more cost-effective in the short-term, as it requires less initial investment and provides results specifically in the area of nutrition; however,

the transformative approach yields significant economic benefits and a longer-term income generation, despite its higher initial cost in amortization period. The traditional model could therefore be attractive when short-term results are necessary while the investment in the transformative approach is reasonable in the long-term. From an economic perspective, the traditional model can be approached as a net expenditure whereas there is an expected return on investments in the transformative model, potentially making it cost neutral, if not income generating.

224. **Traditional model:** The interviews with the government and the WFP showed that THR is reported to be a useful model in emergency situations when the children do not have access to school. Ration boxes comprised of nutritionally diversified dry commodities were provided as a one-time solution to cover their needs over one semester, ensuring that children had access to food at home while minimising the financial burden on families, particularly in poorer communities, and the number of those resorting to reduced coping strategies. A rapid estimation of the investment per beneficiary, based on expenditure and number of reached pupils puts the investment at about US\$ 20 per pupil, making the traditional model rather cost-effective.

225. **Transformative model:** Overall, the transformative school feeding approach supports small agricultural production. The installation of solar panels in schools provide opportunities to enhance skills of communities to become self-sustainable. The cost benefit analysis conducted by the SIFI⁸⁷ indicated that SAP is financially sound due to their high return on investment. For greenhouse the anticipation is that after 6.4 years, the investment would have paid for itself and within a ten-year period the net profit is anticipated to be US\$11,000, after this time increasing significantly and steeply. For intensive orchard, the estimation is that after 5.7 years, the investment would have paid for itself and within a ten-year period the net profit is anticipated to be US\$11,000. For intensive berry garden, the estimation is that after 5.1 years, the investment would have paid for itself, and within a ten-year period the net profit is anticipated to be over US\$40,000. The installation of solar panels in schools has a 2.4 investment return index, i.e. each invested dollar yields a US\$1.4 net profit after amortization. Also, the exploitation of a 20-kW solar power plant allows reducing up to 18 tons of CO2 emissions annually. However, the SAP's efficiency depends on three main factors: (i) amount of investments, (ii) yielding ability, and (iii) selling prices. The initial investment puts the cost-effectiveness at US\$ 160 per reached pupil at present. However, this does not account for future income generated.

2.5. SUSTAINABILITY

226. **Evaluation Question 5: To what extent is the SFP sustainable in the long-term?**

227. **5.1 To what extent is the handover strategy sustainable for the continuous implementation of national school feeding by the Government? Why? What needs to be done within the Government, and the programme to ensure the sustainability of the National SFP?**

228. **Finding 21:** Government stakeholders prioritise school feeding as an essential part of the education system. With the assistance of the WFP, school feeding was gradually fully nationalised, and mechanisms have been put in place. However, the prospect of sustainability is compromised by challenges with the financing of SFP.

229. The WFP assisted in the gradual nationalisation of the school feeding by creating an enabling environment. This included improved infrastructure such as kitchen, canteen and storage facilities based on in-depth needs analysis by the SIFI, complemented by capacity building at both national and school levels. The gradual approach is perceived as one of the key factors enabling successful handover together with the favourable political will of the GoA.

230. Government informants evaluated the handover process positively, as replicable in other countries, and reported positive feedback from external partners (e.g. Brazil). According to the informants, sustainability is assured by nationalising school feeding and integrating it into the state budget.

231. At the national level, sustainability of school feeding implementation is ensured via the establishment of an independent government SFCWA with financial and HR procedures and measures in operation. With the support of the WFP, this has strengthened its capacities for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, as well as for identifying fundraising mechanisms to enhance the sustainability and ownership of the programme at national and community levels. The SFCWA works in close cooperation with MoESCS. However, the SFCWA funding still needs to be secured in long-term perspective.

⁸⁷ (2022) Synthesis Report "Monitoring and Evaluation of the Project School Agriculture Project in the Republic of Armenia"
December 2024 | Report Number: DE/AMCO/2019/042

232. WFP funding of the SFCWA has been crucial for its successful operation, and it continues even after the nationalisation of school feeding in 2023. The WFP has allocated funding to the SFCWA until September 2024, and GoA will start financing the SFCWA from January 2025. The funding gap for Q4/2024 is yet to be secured.

233. The WFP has brought a broader concept of school feeding to Armenia, which exceeds school feeding as a social protection tool and involves its transformative approach contributing to social change behaviour among schoolchildren, parents, teachers and the wider community members. In addition, WFP SFP has created an enabling environment for the circular economy of schools (green energy and SAP projects) and communities (FVC projects). Such a concept has gradually been accepted by GoA and anchored in its educational strategy⁸⁸.

234. Results from interviews with GoA informants show a positive perception of the transformative school feeding model and an understanding of its benefits; *'it is a more effective school feeding model'*, female informant from government. With its transformative components, school feeding is seen as a learning platform embracing a healthy lifestyle, sustainable agricultural production, strengthened local food value chains, green energy and circular economy contributing to broader society. However, such an approach to school feeding requires a broader portfolio of the SFCWA specialists. This is associated with higher demand on the SFCWA funding, which still needs to be secured.

235. The SFCWA embraces innovative approaches to school feeding coordination, such as fundraising, to enhance its resilience. However, the fundraising efforts have not yet materialized but are encouraged by WFP.

236. Another innovation relates to the need for monitoring to have first-hand evidence informing the SFCWA's decisions. However, this requires strengthening regular monitoring and evaluation through advanced participatory data collection methods and triangulation and allocation of adequate financial and human resources.

237. The multiyear funding from the Russian Federation and other donors is perceived as essential for successful school feeding covering all provinces and gradual nationalisation.

238. The GoA is committed to the school feeding budget, even though it still relies on support from the Russian Federation: *'However, we realise that one day we need to take it over'*, female governmental organisation informant. *'This year, the budget will be decided when the government adopts a new format for funding schools'*, informant from a government organisation. Only medium-term budgets^{86,89} are allocated; long-term financial planning is to be developed with the SFCWA and the Education Development and Innovation National Centre Foundation (EDINCF). The discussions are in progress to allocate a separate budget covering SFCWA funding starting from January 2025. Midterm budget spending is planned and allocated accordingly without pending the National Assembly's decision (this is for SFP). Only new projects/ programmes requiring additional budget are subject to government approval. For instance, Yerevan SFP will go for the government's approval.

239. A new decree on health and nutrition norms requires compliance and modification of the actual content of the school menu, which had already been drafted by the SFCWA, but it *'will bring some increase in costs per meal'*, male informant from government. The changes increase per capita school meal allocation to 215 AMD/ child/ day planned since January 2025. However, with this, *'the budget will increase by 38 percent, which, together with high pressure on the budget caused by funding programmes for displaced people from Karabakh region can compromise the plan for 2025 and postpone it for 2026'*, male informant from a government. Additionally, primary data about school feeding implementation and possible challenges at school level collected from regions are needed to inform decision-making about the budget.

240. A limited budget will restrict the initiatives and campaigns promoting a healthy lifestyle, as perceived by some government informants. The targets are set quite high, despite limited capacities. A strategy to cover both the quality and quantity of school feeding needs to be found.

241. Insufficient financial resources for SAP at the school level compromise the sustainability of this transformative component. Several visited schools reported a lack of funds for the gardener position, even

⁸⁸ State Programme for Development of Education of the Republic of Armenia until 2030

⁸⁹ Background information: The system of Medium-Term Public Expenditure Framework (MTEF) was introduced in Armenia in 2003 and enshrined in law as an indivisible part of budgetary process. MTEF outlines the main expenditure directions and priorities of the Government during the next three years and lays a basis for drafting the next year's Annual Budget.

though it is included in the school budget. Additionally, interviews with head teachers and teachers of Agri-clubs revealed that schools struggle to cover agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilisers, tools) as these are not part of their budget. Schools typically resort to ad hoc strategies to find the necessary funds when needed. None of the visited schools had an economic or business plan for SAP.

242. **Finding 22:** The transformative component opened new opportunities for school feeding and schools, however, its long-term sustainability is compromised due to a lack of qualified personnel and an unclear common realistic vision of the use of school produce

243. The transformative component of SAP, despite the anticipated high return on investment, does not always reach its full economic potential within the lifetime of the SFP due to some misalignment with the current legal environment and initial strategy set by GoA. A female government informant highlighted the lack of a commercial relationship framework. This view is echoed by a male GoA informant who noted the reactive approach taken by the Ministry. These statements illustrate that the legal aspects of transformative school feeding, particularly the commercial components, have not been well planned and developed on an ad hoc basis, with no clear roles or responsibilities assigned to stakeholders. During interviews with GoA informants, two possible scenarios were presented. The first deals with schools becoming commercial entities, while the second considers outsourcing the commercial agricultural part of schools.

244. Further complicating the sustainability of SAPs is the lack of experienced personnel. Visited schools employed various strategies to cope with that, e.g. involving current school technical staff (maintenance workers, often males) without an agricultural background and slightly increasing their remuneration from school funds and hiring parents (a female parent in a full-time position in one case) with limited agricultural experience for the production season from March to October. However, the head teacher expressed challenges in finding qualified gardeners, as *'people from communities are not interested due to the seasonality of work and low salary'*. These examples highlight the difficulties in achieving sustainable SAPs without a robust legal framework and adequate resource allocation.

245. The ACRs include information about WFP assistance in establishing farmers' cooperatives, investments in nutrition-sensitive FVC and disaster risk reduction in a border community in Berd. Additionally, the WFP equipped the group with the best agricultural practices, access to seeds, and agricultural machinery to increase the amount of cultivated land. However, this was not verified in the field.

246. The Wholegrain Academy can serve as an agent of change for the Tavush province, promoting healthier food and lifestyle, providing training for bakers (previously funded by the WFP) and commercial masterclasses for children and parents. The baked products (wholegrain bread and pastry), however, are accessible *'for wealthier clientele only'*⁸⁷⁹⁰ as recognised by the owner. She also added that for the bakery, producing only wholegrain products is not economically viable without additional services she runs, such as organisation of events, catering, and accommodation.

247. **Finding 23:** Integration of the school feeding handover strategy into the government strategy has been done to some extent. The school feeding handover strategy has started as it was integrated into the SSFS (2013) through Annexes (2017) and continued with the Handover Roadmap 2019-2022 and the 2021-2026 Action Plan of the RA^{91,92}; supported by analysis done by WFP.

248. The strategies and planning documents developed and adopted created a solid framework for the successful institutionalisation of SFP. However, some sustainability challenges associated with dependency on external support for school feeding implementation arose from the detailed analyses done by the WFP in early 2022⁹³. These include various activities stated in the Annexes for which funding was unclear or relied on extra-budgetary sources, hinging on parental contribution, and lacking a contingency plan to respond to unexpected changes and turns. Some of these challenges have been addressed in the new SSFS; however, yet to be approved. The issue with long-term funding assurance remains, as it is secured by the

⁹⁰ The loaf of 600 g wholegrain bread costs 600 AMD in the bakery, while lavash made of white flour costs 400 AMD per 1 kg in other bakeries in town.

⁹¹ THE 2021-2026 Action Plan of The Government of The Republic of Armenia. Annex No 1 to Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia No 2117-L of 22 December 2022. Annex No 1. to Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia No 1902-L of 18 November 2021.

⁹² Rationale for Actions Ensuring Implementation of the 2021-2026 Action Plan of the Government of the Republic of Armenia. Annex No 2 to Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia No 2300-L of 25 December 2023 Annex No 2 to Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia No 1902-L of 18 November 2021.

⁹³ WFP. Armenia: Policy Analysis for School Health and Nutrition. March 2022

GoA Mid-Term Expenditure Framework, and partially relies on donor support as stated by some government informants.

249. The SSFS (2023-2030) recognises school feeding as a valuable tool for supporting human capital development and enhancing the quality of education, school feeding is no longer perceived as a social protection tool. The SFSS embraces various modalities of SF, including lessons learned from THR as a shock-responsive model, and the involvement of parents and local communities in SF.

250. **Finding 24:** Social behaviour changes among children and their parents associated with food habits and healthy lifestyle are likely to continue thanks to its integration into educational curricula. Similarly, agricultural education is likely to continue through Agri-clubs.

251. In education, the WFP's effort on social behaviour changes related to food habits and healthy lifestyles resulted in a collaboration between the WFP and other United Nations Agencies and MoESCS on developing a comprehensive healthy lifestyle curriculum to be accredited by MoESCS. The WFP developed a component on nutritious food and physical activities for 5th and 9th grades together with pedagogical-didactical materials. The HLC is aligned with competence 3 from the National Curriculum approved in 2021 (Amendment of the Law on General Education, 2021), *'the standard is aimed at ensuring an equally accessible, inclusive and quality education policy'*. Further, transformative SAP learning opportunities are formalised in the curriculum prepared by MoESCS with the WFP and aligned with the Economic Competence 8 from the National Curriculum approved in 2021 (Amendment of the Law on General Education (2021)).

252. Moreover, to enhance the quality of agricultural education and to ensure its sustainability, the WFP, in cooperation with the SFCWA and Armenian National Agrarian University, has been developing manuals for School-Based Agriculture. These manuals serve as resources for teachers, providing them with step-by-step instructions, best practices, and relevant information on agricultural techniques *suited* for school settings. The WFP has been creating a curriculum for Agri-clubs, which are extra classes focused on soil cultivation, agricultural practices, circular economy principles, and business models. The curriculum aims to supplement the existing educational framework by offering specialised knowledge and practical skills related to agriculture. Agri-clubs provide students with opportunities for hands-on learning and developing an understanding of climate-sensitive farming practices. However, their sustainability is closely associated with the sustainability of SAP.

253. **Finding 25:** The environment enabling school feeding is functional to some extent in the visited schools. Tailored-specific individual approach is needed to address the issues.

254. The extension of the SFP for 5th grade is considered; however, the emphasis is first given to ensure high quality and quantity of school feeding for primary and fourth grades, which is challenged by budget allocation. After ensuring the provision of school feeding in primary grades in Yerevan, the GoA can move forward with providing school feeding to higher grades.

255. School feeding seems to be compromised by the school break time allocated for the school meal, *'The longest break is 15 minutes, and children just swallow the food, so they are not late for the following class, which is an issue. Obviously, it contradicts with healthy lifestyle, consumption. Plus, it doesn't create a positive environment for children to have a rest. Now we are discussing with the MoH to extend the break duration to 30-40 minutes, during which children will have possibility to eat and take rest, to spend some time outside to do some physical activities, to recover'*, government informant.

256. **Parental contribution:** Despite the understanding of the ownership of school feeding, which has been built over time under WFP intervention, the MoESCS is *'inclined to decline parents' contribution where school feeding is financed by the government'*, government informant. The principal reason is to reduce social inequalities if some parents cannot contribute. This was also confirmed during FGDs with parents and in interviews with some head teachers. Another challenge perceived by the GoA was connected to the transparent management of collected financial sources, which was nevertheless denied by parents in the FGDs saying that parental association is responsible for the transparency. In the FGDs with parents, opinions differ. Parents in some schools were willing to pay as it could contribute to the diversification of the menu or support the cooks. In some schools, parents, particularly in socio-economic vulnerable areas, were happy that the GoA took over, and they saved on school meals. The GoA is in the process of discussing parent contribution of AMD 6,000 per month per child and an additional AMD 1,000 to cover school feeding for vulnerable children, which is considered for the school feeding model for middle schools. Still, the model must be piloted first as parent resistance is envisaged.

257. Renovation and equipment donated by the WFP, along with capacity building of school staff, highly contributed to an enabling environment for SF, including its transformative approach. However, under the

MoESC school renovation programme, some school buildings may be closed or merged. As of now, a clear strategy for the donated equipment and transformative infrastructure (solar stations, agriculture) is unknown, despite the MoESC's stated goal of preserving and continuing to use these resources. This uncertainty was observed at one of the transformative schools visited by the evaluation team.

258. Kitchen helpers used to be rewarded with an in-kind modality (provision of school meals). Since 2023, they have occupied regular positions with salary, though the salary is perceived by interviewed cooks and head teachers as low (AMD 40,000 per month for full time position). Some schools compensated the low salaries with additional payments from parents' contributions ranging from AMD 5,000 to AMD 10,000 per month. However, in some provinces, the parental contribution was cancelled as *'not needed if the government has taken over'* (parent, head of PA).

259. The kitchen staff was supported with training under WFP activity; however, the GoA recognises that cooks need further professionalisation, as stated by a government informant, *'We don't have that many people with a culinary certificate, like thousands of women. So, the idea is to prepare a short-term course... pilot it, and then introduce it to different colleges and institutions in different parts of Armenia'*.

260. Cooks often apply increased knowledge and skills not only at schools but also at home. Interviews revealed that cooks are often searched by parents and other members of communities for advice, which makes them feel acknowledged. *'The parents come to ask the cook on how she cooks the rice, as it is very delicious'*, HLC teacher.

261. The short-term vocational education and training curriculum for a three-day training programme pilots in summer 2025 in five institutions. It comprises theoretical and practical parts with a certificate awarded by completion. After piloting, the training will be kicked off to professionalise school cooks with limited or no professional background. If external funds, including the results of our fundraising activities, are available, the training will be free of charge for cooks. The coverage of fees is important when considering remarks of cooks who, in most cases, must cover the fee for health certificate validity every 6 months for approximately 15,000 AMD. The duration of the validity of the certificate is not precise yet.

262. The SFCWA maintains a database of kitchen staff it has trained, but the records on the concrete positions are incomplete. To gather this information, as well as assess a schools' needs for additional training – since each school should have at least one trained individual – the SFCWA relies on the feedback from the schools. Unfortunately, this feedback is often unreliable, as stated by the government informant. The lack of comprehensive, up-to-date national database of trained personnel placements limits monitoring and evaluation, and proper future planning.

263. The SFCWA prepared various models of school feeding outlined in the draft SFSS. A GoA male informant also mentioned that outsourcing school feeding from food preparation to delivery is one of the models and can be easily done in Yerevan but difficult in other regions; therefore, a customised approach should be applied.

264. 5.2 Are there any risks/ factors to the program's sustainability, and how can they be mitigated?

265. **Finding 26:** SFP sustainability is threatened by both internal risks (legal framework, financial resources, capacities for SFP implementation) and external risks (increased food costs, high inflation, political instability, conflicts). Further financial and technical support to the national institutions that are responsible for program administration following the nationalization will be necessary to increase the likelihood of sustainability.

266. External risks involve increased food costs, high inflation, political instability, and conflicts. The strong anchorage of SFP in the legal system in the form of Law on SFP can contribute to higher school feeding resilience in times of such shocks. The internal SFP risk factors are related to the legal framework, financial resources, and capacities for SFP implementation. The absence of a Law on school feeding weakens the legal framework for school feeding, particularly concerning processes, and reforms. This gap results in a lack of contingency plans, regulations, and guidance on critical aspects such as procurement, parental participation, use of SAP harvests, and adherence to nutrition and hygiene standards. Currently, school feeding is not mandatory for schools and depends on the school principal's decision.

267. Other risk factors are associated with allocating funding for school feeding implementation after the end of the current funding and in the case of expansion of SF to Yerevan and higher grades. The financial resources for SFCWA have not been clearly secured. In the KIIs, some stakeholders expressed their worries that the Government will take over only minimal funding to cover basic activities. The coping strategy for lacking funds, mainly for human resources remuneration, involves the creation of a savings fund for

SFCWA, which may be used to cover salaries if needed.

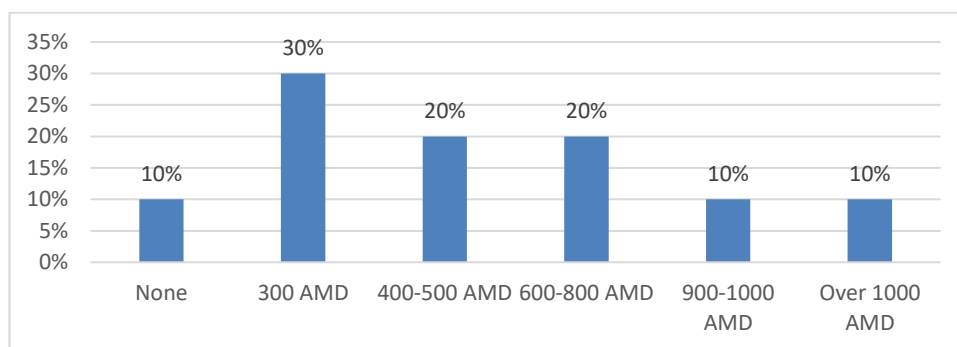
268. The SFCWA staffing is another challenge for school feeding smooth implementation. The SFCWA employs 17 people to cover the school feeding agenda in 1,072 schools. Several challenges with HR for professional positions, monitoring and public relations were identified in the interviews. The SFCWA struggles with low salaries allocated for their positions, which prevents them from hiring professionals, e.g. in nutrition and agriculture. The current coping strategy includes part-time employment for these positions so that highly qualified persons from academia can be hired while keeping their jobs elsewhere and merging two positions into one, such as evaluation and research positions.

269. Monitoring the SFP lacks a comprehensive strategy including roles and responsibilities and sufficient HR at all levels. Despite recognising the high importance of regular monitoring, only five monitoring positions are funded at the SFWCA. In the case of an SFCWA SFP coordinator, the overlaps of their planning agenda and monitoring responsibilities limit the planning performance. Although cars are available, the SFCWA has a challenge in funding technical staff. Respective departments at the regional level are involved in the monitoring, but they often lack HR and clear guidelines. There is an existing database of trained cooks, but it has not been updated and can compromise the relevance and efficiency of follow-up training planning by SFCWA.

270. Systematic communication about planned strategies or reforms brings positively envisaged changes, e.g. renovation and merging of the schools to improve the environment for better educational performance, as well as the new position of administrative school directors to reduce the burden on the educational director. The interviewed governmental officers understand that *'a lack of well-planned communication can bring panic to those involved [schools and their communities]'*.

271. The participation of parents in current school feeding is unclear and varies depending on the province. Figure 9. shows the variety of parents' contributions to SFP in the years subjected to evaluation. Currently, most schools do not receive parental contributions as some regional authorities do not allow it.

Figure 9 - Average monthly parental investment per parent (reported by parents at 6 schools visited by the ET)



272. Only one cook per school has been trained. If this person leaves, the school remains without first-hand trained personnel. Therefore, MoESCS, together with the SFCWA, developed a short-term vocational education and training with certification, which will be conducted in all regions. This will lead to better professionalism of cooks. However, the issue of cooks' low salaries remains.

273. As for SBC sustainability, once out of SFP, children in the 5th and higher grades face challenges to continue eating healthy. Besides the school feeding model implemented for higher grades, as envisaged in the drafted SFSS, accessibility of healthy food and meals in higher grades can be solved by supporting school buffets or stores around schools with healthier variants of snacks and small meals.

274. The interviews with representatives of the governmental organisations showed that the legal aspects of transformative school feeding, particularly agricultural components, are yet to be finalised. Without a clear vision, developed strategy and measures in place, the SAP performance and results (profit vs. investments) might be relatively poor. This can consequently result in a decrease in the motivation of school management to continue with SAP. Schools cannot use all their produce because of harvest timing: 'Tomatoes are ready by or after the school year ends' (governmental officer), nor can they sell it due to commercial activities limitations or process it in the school canteen. One of the discussed strategies is to engage the SFCWA to collect and generate profit from the school harvest. However, no strategic plan has been developed so far considering the overall feasibility, incl. the SFCWA capacities. The findings from interviews with GoA informants reveal that the role and responsibilities at the government level for SAP are unclear.

275. **Finding 27:** The SFP has not yet attained the anticipated impact in certain areas at school and individual levels. At schools, the changing context has compromised the sustainability of trained school feeding management. This is a continuous process due to the flow of staff. The commercialisation potential of products from the transformative component is challenged due to an unfavourable legal environment. At the individual level, some challenges were observed such as unfinished meals and a minority of pupils preferring processed food.

276. At the school level, changes in leadership at some schools have disrupted the continuity of trained head teachers, necessitating school feeding training for new administrative directors. However, this issue has been recognised by the respective ministries, and relevant plans have been developed. Additionally, the commercial potential of products from the transformative component at the school level remains underutilised due to an unfavourable legal environment, which prevents schools from selling agricultural produce. Consequently, the best option currently is to use the total green electricity production for the school and its facilities.

277. At the individual level, in schools near Yerevan, the evaluation team observed a high volume of leftovers. During FGDs, children from these schools mentioned that they did not appreciate healthy food as it is not tasty. These children have more pocket money, allowing them to purchase unhealthy snacks from nearby vendors. This tends to indicate that social and behavioural change in this context might take longer and might even not be successful.

2.6. IMPACT

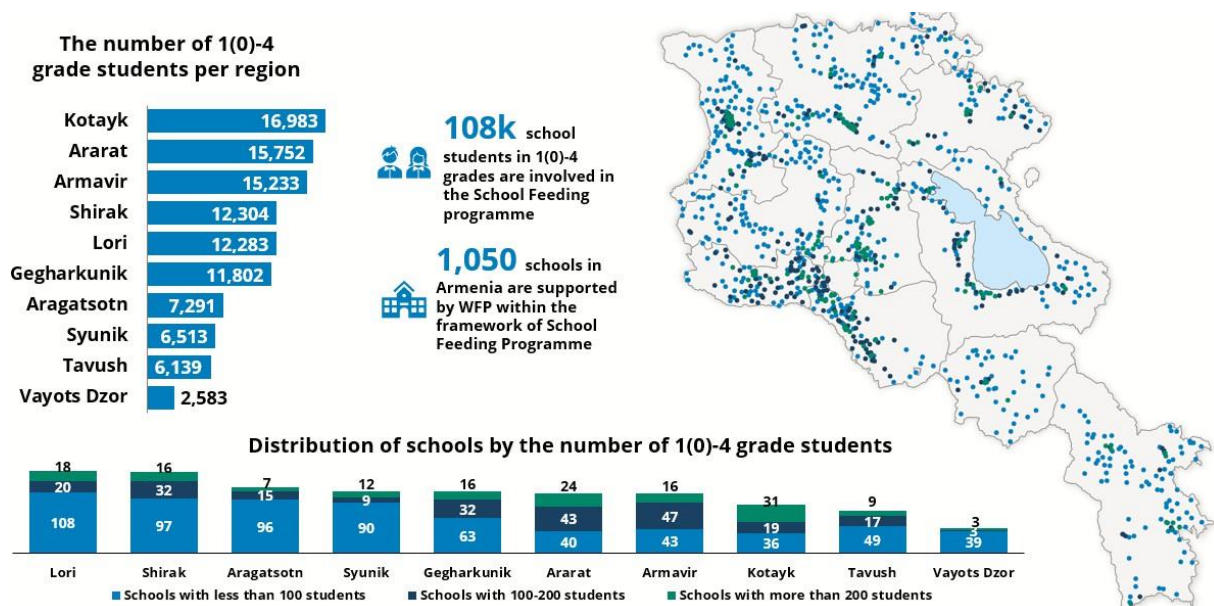
278. **Evaluation Question 6: What has been the impact of the SFP to date? How well have the schools prepared for the transition and handover? What were the overall impacts of the SFP on the schools, communities, and beneficiaries?**

279. **6.1 To what extent has the SFP contributed to the long-term results in the areas of education and healthy and nutritious food?**

280. **Finding 28:** The SFP made a positive contribution to the long-term results in the areas of education and healthy and nutritious food in Armenia.

281. Currently, the NSFP supports over 108,000 primary schoolchildren from 1,050 schools with healthy and nutritious school meals across all ten provinces of Armenia. *'I think it is important to emphasise that the school feeding programme provides a balanced diet'*, Government respondent.

Figure 10 - NSFP coverage in Armenia as of December 2023



282. The impact evaluation of school feeding on education conducted in Armenia showed that daily school meals improved the learning abilities of children⁹⁴. These data originate from 6 to 8 years ago and

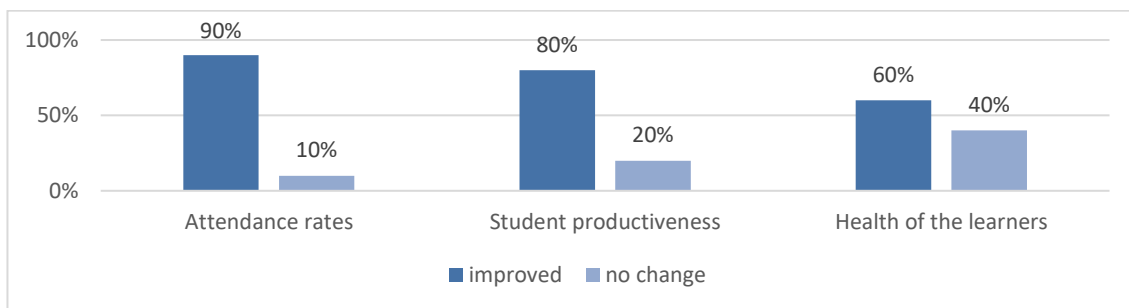
⁹⁴ (2018) Impact evaluation of The Nutrition-sensitive Aspect of the "Development of Sustainable School Feeding" Project
December 2024 | Report Number: DE/AMCO/2019/042

were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. They showed that school feeding positively reduced poverty rates by 0.4 percent. A cost-benefit study conducted in 2016 in Armenia reported that for every dollar invested in Armenia's School Feeding Programme, there is a US\$ 7.1 return of investment within five years in the form of improved health and education among schoolchildren and increased professional productivity for the benefit of themselves and the national economy⁹⁵.

283. The impact assessment conducted by the WFP further suggests that children who received the morning snack had higher processing speed and short-term memory^{93,96}.

284. Both parents and school administration highlight that children benefiting from school feeding become more active and attentive during the classes. *'I can see that children are more productive. They are not tired and learn with enthusiasm'*, head teacher. According to the school heads, the attendance of students from poor families increases if they have a chance to eat at school. *'School feeding motivates children to visit school, they are free from thoughts about food or being hungry'*, head teacher. There is a credible stream of observations pointing at a possible contribution to a decrease of absenteeism due to student sickness in most of schools visited.

Figure 11 - Impact of SFP on attendance, student productiveness and health, % (N=10 schools)



285. The focus groups with parents conducted during this evaluation showed positive contribution of the program in change of eating habits towards healthier diet. Parents see behavioural change, especially for the children, that they did not eat well at home, but at school, they started eating very well.

286. There was some resistance at the beginning, for example, to eat peas, beans, and rice soups, but gradually it is better. Now, children like the soups and eat more vegetables. *'We see changes also in the way that children did not eat healthy food before and now they eat it at the school as they see their friends do so'*, parent. Most parents admit that they try to cook healthy food at home. School children eat healthy food at school and demand it at home; therefore, some parents follow school menu recipes. Cooks are consulted about healthy meals by parents and some neighbours from communities.

287. Some parents observe the change in salt consumption. Children began to consume less salt at home and began to refrain from requesting salt during dinner. *'Before, my child used a lot of salt; now, it is less'*, parent. Parents highlight that children get routines by eating at the same time of the day. Then they learn about basic food safety practices, like washing hands before eating. Junk food consumption is also reduced due to the SFP. Now, when children go to school, they know that they will have a meal and will not be hungry. Parents refer to teachers or cooks when their children request unhealthy food (chips, snacks, etc), asking whether they are available at school. School has high reputation in that sense. Some parents also say that their children started to know how to prepare meals by themselves and they like cooking. *'Last year, I attended a cooking competition. Children used berries from the school garden and then baked some cookies. They did it within the cooking club. It was a nice event'*, mother. A father said, *'My son talked about it [the cooking event], and since then has liked cooking together with his siblings'*. Before the SFP, protein-rich food, fruit, and berries were absent in children's rations. *'Now, children enthusiastically eat their fruit and berries before the main meal'*, NGO source.

288. As a result of the implementation of wholegrain flour value chain project, 15,100 children (54 percent boys and 46 percent girls) in two of the ten provinces (Lori and Tavush) have seen more nutritious wholegrain wheat replace white wheat in their SFP. Children like wholegrain bread and did not report any issues during the FGDs. Similarly, parents are aware of its healthy aspects and would bake it at home;

⁹⁵ (2016) The World Food Programme, Armenia's National School Feeding Programme, Cost Benefit Analysis, The World Food Programme, Armenia

⁹⁶ (2018) Impact evaluation of The Nutrition-sensitive Aspect of the "Development of Sustainable School Feeding" Project
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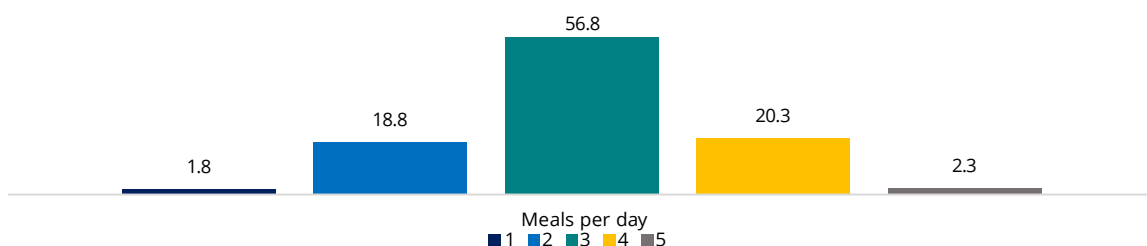
however, they have no access to wholegrain flour. The visited supported bakeries do not sell wholegrain flour to individual consumers, despite the WFP plan to do so. The GoA further reinforced the positive impact of the NSFP by adjusting procurement requirements to include wholegrain wheat products in the menus.

289. **6.2 Were there any differential impacts on different subgroups (e.g. boys vs. girls, urban vs. rural)?**

290. **Finding 29:** The differential impacts of school meals are observed depending on the school model and provinces.

291. On average, the interviewed schoolchildren during the survey replied having three meals per day. Distribution of responses by the number of meals per day is presented in Figure 13. Based on the analysis, there is significant difference on mean number of meals per day by school model, indicating that children in transformative schools have a significantly higher mean number of meals per day than the ones in traditional schools. On average, children from transformative schools eat 0.2 meals more outside of the school than those in traditional schools. From the observation of the on-site visits, the evaluation team could associate it with the better socio-economic environment of the respective communities. No significant differences were captured based on other respondent characteristics. This said, a non-parametric test on the median number of meals per region showed significance in the difference by region with the following mean numbers of meals per regions: 2.8 in Tavush, 2.9 in Armavir, 3.1 in Gegharkunik, 3.1 in Lori and 3.2 in Kotayk.

Figure 12 – Distribution of surveyed school children by number of meals per day (N=611)

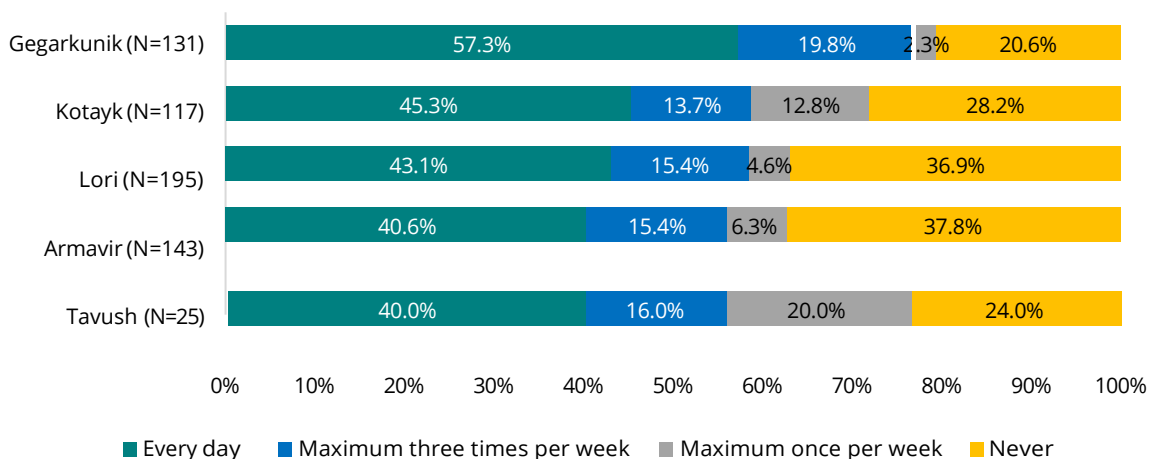


Source: Survey among schoolchildren, April 2024

292. Survey analysis further shows differences in the perception of quality of meals per region showing higher satisfaction of meals among schoolchildren in Armavir (92 percent) and Lori (90 percent), and lower in Kotayk (72 percent), Gegharkunik (68 percent), and Tavush (64 percent). Armavir and Lori are among the provinces with the lowest child poverty while Gegharkunik and Tavush are among the Provinces with the highest child poverty.

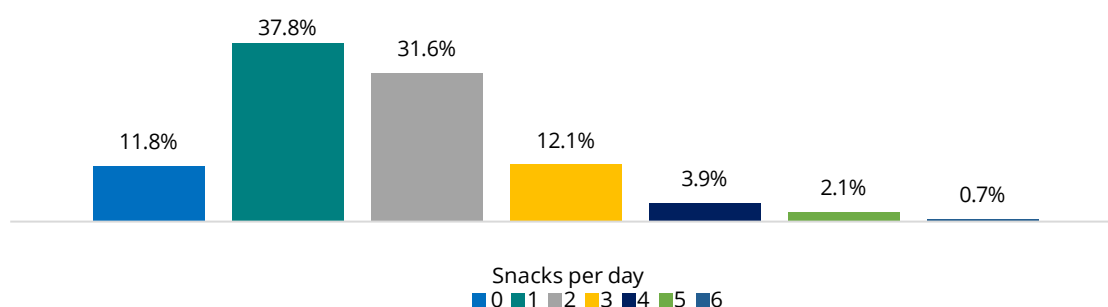
293. Moreover, statistical analysis indicates significant differences in breakfast habits by region (Figure 15). Namely, schoolchildren in Gegharkunik tended to eat breakfast more often than their peers in other regions (57 percent of respondents in Gegharkunik answered “always eat breakfast”). The opposite trend was visible in Lori and Armavir, where more than one third of schoolchildren (respectively 37 percent and 38 percent) answered “never eat breakfast”.

Figure 13 - Proportion of children consuming meals at home prior to attending school in the morning by region, % (N=611)



294. On average, children would eat 1.7 snacks per day. The distribution of answers on the number of snacks per day is presented in Figure 15. Statistical analysis shows significant differences in the number of snacks per day by school model. Schoolchildren attending transformative schools tend to eat significantly more snacks per day (on average 0.6 snacks more per day; with average numbers of snacks for traditional and transformative schools respectively 1.6 and 2.2), this could be associated with a generally higher standard of living in areas where transformative models are applied.

Figure 14 - Number of snacks schoolchildren eat every day, % (N=611)



295. The program also allowed 2,500 women to get employment in rural areas as school kitchen staff. *'For me, it is a great opportunity to work because in our community there is high unemployment. My husband has health problems, and I am the breadwinner in my household'*, cook. Women employed at these schools have been given the opportunity to complete vocational training, which will enhance their food production skills and knowledge and increase their incomes. The program also created employment opportunities for gardeners in 41 transformative school feeding schools. *'We did not have a gardener before, and he started from 2023, school head.*

296. **Finding 30:** School meals are equally accessible for girls and boys.

297. Both qualitative and quantitative research results with children show equal access to school meals by both girls and boys. Results from interviews with school staff and representatives of organisations were aligned with such results. Results from quantitative surveys, complemented by qualitative research, indicate that schoolchildren with special needs are involved in SF. However, observations during on-site visits reveal that these children often require assistance from the school or their family, depending on the level and type of disability and the location of the school canteen, with some being situated on the second floor.

298. 6.3 Are there any other expected or unexpected impacts on systems, structures, and individuals?

299. **Finding 31:** The SFP has positive impacts at system level, such as on economic growth, at a structural level such as reduced CO2 emissions and energy costs and at an individual level with changes in behaviour, and increased agriculture skills

300. **Systemic level:** According to WFP monitoring data, the SFP has demonstrated a significant contribution to the growth, where sales of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) cooperating with schools increased by US\$ 1.7 million and more than 3,000 parent associations were created⁹⁷.

Individual level: According to WFP, more than 4,500 people were trained in special skills as of 2023. In the view of government representatives interviewed, the school feeding program has a positive impact on the formation of children's behaviour. It fosters a sense of responsibility, teaches proper food usage etiquette, promotes friendship, and cultivates a sense of equality among children. The interviewed NGOs, head teachers and teachers believe that the SAP sparks children's interest in agriculture and contributes to the formation of professional skills in the agricultural business. *'In the greenhouse, we use hydroponic and aquaponic systems. Also, we produce our own seeds for peppers, and children participated in that, too'*, teacher. One of the NGO representatives stated, *'Some children want to become specialists in greenhouses or orchards or any other agricultural field, which is also good from my perspective, because if they want to return to their village, they see some perspective'*. According to the parents, the SAP does not have any adverse effects on the learning process or children. They are in favour of the utilisation of facilities for the purpose of engaging children in agricultural activities, as well as for education (e.g. biology courses).

Structural level: The installed solar panels as a part of SAP allowed to reduce CO₂ emissions by 1.237 million kg energy as well as the energy costs by 30 percent. The savings in the amount of AMD 154.7 million were reinvested in school feeding per year⁹⁸. The SAP also promotes a zero-kilometre approach to school feeding where local production is used in place of long and energy consuming supply chains, reducing the environmental impact of school feeding programmes.

⁹⁷ (2023) WFP Armenia, Annual Country Report 2022, p. 16

⁹⁸ (2022) Monitoring and Evaluation of the School Agriculture Project in the Republic of Armenia

3. Conclusions and recommendations

3.1. CONCLUSIONS

301. As part of the transition from a WFP-delivered to government-owned programme, WFP support ensured that the future programmatic documents aligned with and built from the existing strategies, ensuring continuity. The programme is relevant to the needs and efforts of the government; while its coverage only addresses two thirds of schools and might not capture every child in need, it is deemed fit for its purpose in targeting those schools most in need. The introduction of the so-called transformative model also answers further relevance and sustainability questions as it provides a model that integrates schools and communities and has the potential to be self-sustaining financially, thus allowing for further upscaling. The delivery of capacity building under the specific objective 2 is also particularly relevant with the view to transfer the SFP to the Government of Armenia.

Relevance and coherence

302. The programme was designed to address the needs of all children regardless of their specific needs. Some of these could have been better taken into account at school level but this was partially beyond the scope and responsibility of WFP as WFP finances rehabilitation of schools but is not in charge of the planning of these works.

303. In general, the SFP is well aligned with the national policies. This is somewhat expected as one of the main focuses of the 2019-2023 School Feeding Programme is the full transfer to the Government of Armenia. However, it must be stressed that great attention has been put to conduct adequate programmatic work for a successful transfer. As part of the transition, WFP support ensured that the future programmatic documents aligned with and built from the existing strategies, ensuring continuity. This said, some strategic orientation could have been reinforced in the management and monitoring function under the School Feeding and Child Welfare Agency of the National Center for Education Development and Innovation.

304. The evaluation also finds that aspects of inclusion, gender empowerment and women equality were taken into account satisfactorily. For example, the evaluation found no evidence of a lack of access to hygiene or food for young girls under the programme. Access to school lunch facilities proved difficult to access for some pupils but is mainly under the responsibility of the school or the Government of Armenia.

305. Synergies were found to have been established in the collaboration among the Government of Armenia, the Russian Federation and WFP. This allowed an expansion on the expected results. The handover to the GoA is seen as well designed and planned carefully with alignment and continuity at its core.

Effectiveness and efficiency

306. The SFP programme successfully contributed to WFP's Country Strategic Plan and specifically to the specific objective 1 and specific objective 2 in improving access to nutritious food and developing capacities at school and at the Government level. In its approach, WFP managed to build on improving the institutional capacities, individual capacities and facilities, thus creating a favourable environment for a continued implementation of the school feeding programme. In addition, WFP also allowed continued support to children even during the COVID-19 by quickly transitioning from school meals to Take Home Rations. By introducing a so-called transformative model, WFP also innovated in introducing a more holistic and sustainable approach linking up with communities and local producers. This said, this approach, even under the transition to the Government requires sustained investments to break even and it is unclear whether it can be applied without support from external donors once the transition to the Government will be final.

307. WFP has largely supported the capacity building of the School Feeding and Child Welfare Agency of the National Center for Education Development and Innovation which has allowed for a largely successful transition. However, there remain challenges regarding capacity building, especially when it comes to

monitoring of the school feeding programme. In addition, as in all capacity building endeavours, turnover of staff at all levels and retention capabilities of developed capacities is an on-going challenge that might require further support in the future.

308. From a more systemic perspective, the support delivered by WFP allowed to develop a new programmatic environment in the National Food Security Strategy and Action Plan for 2023 - 2027, ensuring continuity in the implementation the School Feeding Programme in Armenia. In addition, WFP support also ensured cooperation and partnerships with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education (MoESCS).

309. The resources allocated to the school feeding programme were initially thought as adequate, however with the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting school attendance in 2020 and 2021, the SFP has gone through operational adjustments with changes in budget allocation. This was also initiated by WFP's own crisis response plan and the adaptation to the Country Strategic Plan in 2020. Overall, the evaluation did not gather evidence that the SFP has faced delays in disbursement or shortages of resources to achieves its objectives. The changes in budget were justified and aligned with changes in needs. The introduction of the transformative model, linking local producers and generating solar power for school shows the potential, under the right circumstances, to become self-sufficient in terms of funding generating revenues level or superior to its costs. However, initial investments are estimated to be tenfold the costs per pupil of the traditional model and will require sustained funding from donors after this cycle of the School Feeding Programme.

310. The Russian Federation has also been a key multiyear strategic partner for the WFP's SFP since 2010, providing stable funding and expanding the program's expertise, which has attracted additional donors such as France. This long-term cooperation, coupled with high-level technical expertise from SIFI, has facilitated transformative activities within the FVC and green energy projects, ensuring effective implementation and strategic decision-making.

Sustainability and impact

311. The taking over of the School Feeding Programme by the Government of Armenia is one of the major achievements in terms of sustainability as it is likely to continue being implemented past the current period of funding from WFP. This said, the evaluation identified some financial vulnerabilities, should no external funding be secured. The current legal framework and capacities could limit the implementation in the long term, especially if the transformative approach is not generalised and does not prove to be self-financing.

312. The inclusion of long-term assistance and multiyear funding from the WFP and the Russian Federation, strong political commitment from the GoA, and mid-term budget allocations for school feeding, which demonstrate high governmental priority have proved to be key enablers for sustainability so far

313. Another positive outcome of the SFP under WFP's support is the institutionalisation and generalisation of the healthy lifestyle curriculum into the school curriculum complemented by training of parents and the creation of agri-clubs delivering agricultural education. A more bespoke approach to address the specific needs of some schools could be welcome and would benefit the effectiveness of the School Feeding Programme in the long term.

314. Overall, the evaluation finds that the SFP has made positive contributions to its expected outcomes and is likely to have an impact for a broader improvement of nutrition and educational attainment in the country in the long run. The transformative model is also expected to provide positive impact in terms of environmental friendliness of school kitchen, in terms of income generation for SMEs working with local schools and in terms of behavioural change.

315. Through the support of WFP, the Government of Armenia appears to be well positioned to succeed in the implementation of the School Feeding Programme, provided that the financial and capacities vulnerabilities identified are addressed. The necessary conditions appear to have been put in place in terms of capacity building, programmatic work and rehabilitation of schools. In addition, the development of social and behavioural change interventions for children, parents and communities should ensure that the Healthy Lifestyle Curriculum results are carried forward.

316. The SFP has contributed to outcomes in educational performance as well as improving healthy eating habits of the young students. Throughout its implementation, the programme has evolved from a narrow school-feeding approach towards a more comprehensive set of development interventions. The SFP has become a platform for investment in human capital and the promotion of healthy eating outside the

schools. Promoting healthy diets and lifestyles through schools, social and behavioural changes and public campaigns helped to reduce malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. SFP had also positive impact on the health of children in terms of mental and physical development. At the same time, the income generation potential of transformative products could be further enhanced should a more favourable legal framework be adopted.

3.2. LESSONS

317. The long-term cooperation between WFP; the Government of Armenia and other external donors appear to have created a favourable environment for a successful handover of the School Feeding Programme from a largely donor-driven to a fully government-owned programme. The absence of major disruption in the handover process due to the COVID-19 pandemic is remarkable as WFP and the Government of Armenia seemed not to have changed their strategic focus and only adapted their delivery modalities. It is possible that the specific programmatic work in strategic planning throughout proved to be essential in keeping the course steady toward the overall objective.

318. Another lesson that can be learned from this evaluation is the necessity to allow time for innovative approaches to bear fruit and potentially consider them investments, or pilot initiatives that may or may not succeed. In the case of the transformative approach, we can see the potential for significant benefits; yet various obstacles might delay or lower the financial expected returns.

319. Finally, capacity building interventions necessitate continued and sustained support as the institutionalization of the acquired individual capacities into changes in processes and operations takes time and some of the created capacities will be lost due to turnover. There is not much novelty in this lesson, but it is a recurring discussion when one objective is the development of national capacities to enable transfer of competencies.

3.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

320. The below table presents the main recommendations for strategic and operational actions to be put in place by the Armenia WFP country office and GoA managerial staff as a response to the evaluation findings, conclusions, and lessons learned.

321. Alignment of validated recommendations with the findings and conclusions of the evaluation process is presented in Annex 7.

Table 6 - Recommendations

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping	Responsibility (one lead office/ entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: High/ medium	By when
1	<p>Enhance resilience to external shocks through the advancement of adaptive management and flexibility in implementation frameworks to enable a more robust SFP during crises and scaling up the transformative SF model which promotes circular economy.</p> <p>1.1. WFP should strengthen the institutional capacity of the SFCWA through the implementation of a capacity building plan to ensure longer term staffing and sustainable funding. The implementation plan should include mentoring and technical assistance in place for at least two years to ensure the SFCWA can independently manage and execute the program effectively. This will help ensure a smooth transition and enable the SFCWA staffing, capacity building, and funding to operate sustainably without WFP support in the future.</p> <p>1.2. WFP to, jointly with the GoA, further develop strategic planning for the school commercial component of SAP, embracing identification of roles and responsibilities, planning and managing SAP.</p> <p>1.3. WFP to support with gender-transformative programming aiming to improve women's socio-economic position in communities through capacity-building in food and nutrition-related job and entrepreneurship opportunities (e.g. vocational training, certified short-term training), empowerment in decision-making, and sensitization activities to improve awareness about gender stereotypes, in particular, related to food and nutrition and deconstruct them among schoolchildren and school staff with an envisaged impact on parents and the broader community. Use</p>	Operational	WFP CO	GoA (MoESCS, MoF, MoE)	High	Throughout SFSS timeline (2024-2026)

	<p>synergies in activities on GBV (e.g. awareness-raising campaigns, capacity-building, training) with other stakeholders. Plan GEWE activities, including relevant indicators and gender budgeting, for the new SFP with annual monitoring and potential revisions. Collect gender and age- disaggregated data during regular SFP monitoring and utilise the results for planning GEWE initiatives.</p>					
2	<p>Ensure the institutionalization of monitoring and evaluation of SFP by developing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy and promoting an inclusive SFP that ensures equal access to school feeding for all children.</p> <p>2.1. Finalize the development and approval of the TOR for integration of school feeding monitoring into EMIS (governmental platform for digital monitoring, reporting and information sharing). Collect gender, age-and children with special needs disaggregated data for planning GEWE initiatives.</p> <p>2.2. Regularly update databases of trained personnel and create feedback loops to inform continuous improvement of the SFP, ensuring the program's effectiveness and adaptability.</p>	Operational	WFP	GoA (MoESCS, SFCWA, MOH, MLSA)	High	Throughout SFSS timeline (2024-2026)
3	<p>Engage and empower local communities by establishing community mechanisms to promote ownership.</p> <p>3.1. WFP assist GoA to further involve parents and community members, particularly from urban settlements and local NGOs, in the planning and implementing of school feeding programs to ensure they are context-specific and sustainable. Promote community ownership and participation to build a supportive environment for children's health and nutrition. This can improve coordination and resource-sharing, supporting comprehensive school feeding initiatives.</p>	Operational	GoA (SFCWA)	Parents, community members, and local NGOs	Medium	Throughout SFSS timeline (2024-2026)
4	<p>Secure sustainable long-term funding to support the operational expenses of school feeding initiatives by revising the Sustainable</p>	Strategic	WFP CO	GoA (MoESCS)	High	Throughout the current and upcoming

	<p>School Feeding Strategy and developing legislation that incorporates school feeding within the government's budgetary framework.</p> <p>4.1. WFP to ensure further provision of assistance in drafting the upcoming National Sustainable School Feeding Strategy (2023-2030), assistance in drafting and passing legislation specifically addressing school feeding and school health and nutrition to create a solid legal framework, ensuring sustained and systematic support for school feeding programs. This will align national legal and strategic documents with school feeding priorities, providing clear guidance and contingency plans.</p> <p>4.2. WFP jointly with GOA to seek sources of possible co-funding to supplement the operational costs of SFP.</p>					CSP implementation period
5	<p>Secure funding for investments in both 'soft' and 'hard' components to enhance and expand the school feeding program and improve its resilience through fundraising from GOA, donors, the corporate sector, and the diaspora.</p> <p>5.1. WFP to sustain multiyear strategic partnerships with existing donors like the Russian Federation and attracting additional funding sources to ensure effective implementation of school feeding programs. Highlight the program's successes to potential existing and new donors (e.g. Asian Development Bank, World Bank, French Embassy, Government of China) to expand the funding base to cover the existing school feeding activities and to expand the SFP in Yerevan, and to secondary schools in the regions.</p> <p>5.2. WFP to engage more private sector partners (private bakeries, mills, markets, cooperatives) in the food value chains (wholegrain products, dairy products) and green energy projects (solar stations) to inform, sustain and scale up transformative activities. Provide support to the GOA in developing a clear strategy for equipping new / rehabilitated schools and for transferring equipment provided by the WFP to existing schools, based on the existing Government Program "300 schools and 500 kindergartens" to be completed by 2026.</p>	Strategic	WFP CO	GoA (MoESCS, SFCWA), private sector partners	High	Throughout the current and upcoming CSP implementation period

	<p>5.3. WFP support institutionalization of learning programmes and platforms and to advocate further for vocational training and certification for the school staff. Implement comprehensive training programs for school personnel, particularly cooks, to enhance their skills in managing school feeding components. Provide vocational training and certification to ensure professionalization and address issues related to low salaries and staff turnover.</p>					
6	<p>Continue enhancing interagency and multi-stakeholder collaboration to strengthen the involvement and coordination of all relevant parties into SFP.</p> <p>6.1. Facilitate structured experience-sharing and co-creative meetings involving different Ministries, local CSOs, UN agencies, private sector partners (enterprises in food value chains of wholegrain bread, dairy products, and others), and academia to address emerging issues and enhance the program's impact. Regularly scheduled meetings can improve coordination and resource-sharing, ensuring comprehensive support for school feeding initiatives.</p>	Strategic	WFP	Ministries (MoESCS, SFCWA, MoH, MoF, MoE, MTAI), CSOs, UN agencies, private sector partners, and academia, WFP	High	Throughout SFSS timeline (2024-2026)

Annexes in Volume II

Due to the size of the annexes, they have been compiled in a second volume, for reference, the list of annexes has been reproduced here:

Annex 1. Summary Terms of Reference

Annex 2. Timeline

Annex 3. Methodology

Annex 4. Evaluation Matrix

Annex 5. Data collection Tools

Annex 6. Fieldwork Agenda

Annex 7. Findings Conclusions

Annex 8. Key informants overview

Annex 9. Bibliography

Annex 10. Reconstructed Theory of Change

Annex 11: GEWE Activities under SFP

Annex 12: Overview of national guidelines and legal documents framing SF

Annex 13. Methodological Limitations Matrix

Acronyms