



# REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

School Based  
Programmes  
July 2021



## Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region presents some of the most complex and diverse development and humanitarian challenges in the world, including inequitable development pathways, resource scarcity, limited production potential, dependence on food imports, increasing poverty, triple burden of malnutrition, and conflict-induced crises that have caused the largest displacement and refugee crisis since World War II.

The depreciation in human capital in MENA is compounded by continued and prolonged conflict, violence, and civil wars in the region. It is largely in view of these factors that millions of primary and secondary aged children are out of school.

There is clear evidence from the countries in which WFP operates that school feeding programmes provide a strategic, cost-effective and efficient way to support vulnerable children. For all of them, a daily school meal can mean not only better nutrition and health, but also increased access to education and better learning and cognitive capacity, especially for girls. Well-designed school feeding programmes contribute directly to SDG2, SDG4 and SDG5 and indirectly to SDG1, SDG3, SDG8, SDG10 and SDG16.

## Transforming the Lives of the Next Generation

School feeding programmes are the most common safety nets in the world, helping to ensure vulnerable children have access to education, health and nutrition. Children are often out of school, have limited or no access to quality education, have less or no access to nutritious food and healthcare, all of which can lead to serious, long-standing, and detrimental effects on human capital. A school meal can either be provided on-site, in form of a cooked meal or a snack, or a ration of food that children take home to their families.

Acknowledging that the first 8,000 days are the most important in a child's life, school feeding programmes play an important role in attracting and retaining children in school and addressing short-term hunger so that they can concentrate and learn.

Providing children with healthy, diversified meals can encourage them to stay in school, perform better and improve their human capital.

School feeding programmes promote gender equality by providing an incentive for families to send their daughters to school and can also be leveraged as a programmatic platform to deliver other cost-effective health and nutrition interventions, such as deworming, nutrition education, social and behavioral change communication, school gardens etc.

By transferring resources to households, school feeding programmes can help vulnerable households and communities survive difficult times and shocks ensuring their food security. This allows them to avert negative coping strategies and invest in productive assets.

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, 15 million children in the region between the ages of 5-14 were out of school, while 10 million were in school but at risk of dropping out. The negative COVID-19 effects will become more evident in years to come.

The best way MENA countries can reverse human capital depreciation, particularly among those forcibly displaced, is by investing more in the building blocks of human capital: nutrition, health care and quality education especially for children.

This is precisely where the WFP Changing Lives agenda is pertinent.

## School Feeding Programmes in the region

Acknowledging that the first 8,000 days are the most important in a child's life, school feeding programmes contribute to multiple objectives and can achieve various outcomes, combining short-, medium- and long-term benefits.

Schools are a key platform for the delivery of relief and development interventions, and school feeding is a critical enabler for schools to remain open with safety measures in place. Schools play a role in restoring normalcy and stabilizing local communities, both directly and complementing other interventions, and by investing in a new generation of human capital.

Leveraging the school feeding presence in the region offers many possibilities, including optimizing school feeding from a nutrition, gender, social protection and peace building perspective through social integration and cohesion. The persistence of conflicts in several countries in the region, such as Iraq, Yemen and Syria, brings even greater importance to the focus on child-sensitive social protection programmes.

In this region, school feeding is a flagship programme for WFP, with most MENA countries engaged in school feeding in various ways.

WFP is currently either supporting government led school feeding programmes or is itself the implementer of this type of programming, or doing both, in 12 countries across the region, namely: Armenia, Algeria, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Syria, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen.

In 2020, WFP Regional Bureau in Cairo (RBC) accounted for the largest caseload of School Feeding (SF) programmes for WFP globally, targeting around 3.8 million children across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

### School feeding programmes can either be provided:

**On-site**, in form of:



**Cooked hot meal**



**Snack in a form of a date bar, high-energy biscuit, nuts, pastry, fruits, sandwich**

**Take-Home Ration**, in form of:



**Wheat flour, oil, rice, beans, pasta, lentils, sugar, salt**





## Supporting National Programmes

WFP provides support to national institutions through capacity strengthening activities which include technical assistance in the design and/or implementation of school feeding programmes, policies and strategies.

21 million out of 44 million of children in the region are the beneficiaries of the national school feeding programmes, making it almost 1 in every 2 children.

WFP's overarching vision is advocating for the universal adoption of school feeding programmes that help increase children's access to education and learning opportunities and strengthen their health and nutrition status.

Where possible, programmes should be linked to local agricultural production and schools should be used as platforms for delivering complementary nutrition and health activities.

In 8 out of 12 countries WFP supports national capacity strengthening efforts along with directly implementing school feeding programmes:

Armenia, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.

In 2 countries, Tunisia and Morocco, WFP exclusively focuses on providing technical assistance to governments to ensure that their national school feeding programmes are embedded in the national policies and strategies, contributing to the realization of a national 2030 agenda.

Egypt is one of the biggest national programmes in the world, targeting 12 million of children daily.

In Iraq where WFP is currently implementing the programme, discussions with the Government are underway where WFP will start a smooth handover in the course of next couple of months making it the sixth country in the region that will have a national school feeding programme.

## School Feeding in Emergencies

*In emergencies, delivering potentially life-saving nutrients to children is the central goal, while also promoting critical protection of children and allowing to continue education.*

*The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on local economies, coupled with the tendency potential for preexisting health and educational inequalities to widen, has given rise to a renewed interest in school feeding programmes.*

The crisis in some countries of the region has put many children out of school, taking away their right to education and the critical psychosocial protection that schools provide, exposing children to negative coping strategies like child labour and early marriage. To bring them back to school and ensure that quality education is available while their stomachs are full, WFP is distributing school meals to 3 million of children in those countries.

Moreover, at the height of the COVID-19 crisis in April 2020, all 12 MENA countries had closed their schools and approximately 18 million children in countries where WFP operates were suddenly deprived of what for many was their main meal of the day. From providing mostly on-site meals, WFP programmes shifted to take home rations or cash-based transfers, making sure children still received the necessary nutrition, which allowed them to concentrate on a new way of learning and studying from home. These alternative mechanisms also contributed to alleviating some of the financial burden households face to feed their children in extremely trying times.

## Nutrition and Healthy lifestyle a core approach

*WFP's school feeding programmes can be used as a platform to address other underlying causes of malnutrition through complementary activities such as nutrition education, nutrition summer camps, healthy lifestyle trainings and social and behavioral change communication.*

In Lebanon, Tunisia and Libya, WFP has carried out a number of nutrition summer camps for children to improve their awareness and knowledge on nutrition by teaching them about different food groups, and the importance of eating fruits and vegetables, and drinking healthy beverages.

In Armenia, Jordan and Egypt, WFP supported the Government in developing nutrition education materials which are disseminated through a national curriculum for primary and secondary school age children.

To influence and support health and nutrition outcomes in Armenia, WFP implements cash-based transfer modality instead of food, linking school meals to local purchases and boosting local economy. The food basket is diversified, fresh and locally accepted.

## Healthy Kitchens as an innovation

*New model where part of the food is sourced locally and where communities, mostly women, are given greater control over the school feeding programme. Healthy kitchens strengthen local ownership, improve nutritional quality of the meal and boost local economies.*

Healthy Kitchens have already proven to be a successful model in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Yemen, bringing multiple benefits to both children and whole communities in terms of nutrition, employment, economic stimulation, women's empowerment, stronger programme ownership and locally made food adapted to local tastes.



**3.8 MILLION** 

CHILDREN REACHED THROUGH HOT MEALS, FRESH MEALS AND SNACKS AND/OR TAKE HOME RATIONS.

**1,684,328** 

FOOD METRIC TONS

**FOOD DELIVERY** 

TO 10 COUNTRIES

**MAIN DONORS** 

CANADA, FRANCE, GERMANY, RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND JAPAN.

**CASH TRANSFERS** 

DELIVERED IN ARMENIA, EGYPT, IRAN AND SYRIA.

**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE** 

AND SUPPORT TO 10 GOVERNMENTS

**KILOCALORIES PER SCHOOL MEAL** 

500–700



WFP/Mohammed Awadh