



COMMITTEE ON  
WORLD FOOD  
SECURITY

# CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition

## Introduction

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) adopted the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSyN) at its 47th Plenary session in February 2021. The VGFSyN are a concrete inter-governmental and multi-stakeholder negotiated policy tool for use by governments, specialized institutions and other stakeholders to develop appropriate policies, responsible investments and institutional arrangements to address the causes of hunger and malnutrition in all its forms, from a food systems perspective.

The Voluntary Guidelines present a wide range of recommendations to promote policy coherence and reduce policy fragmentation between relevant sectors - health, agriculture, education, environment, gender, social protection, trade and employment - all of which impact food systems and nutrition. They aim to support the development of coordinated, multi-sectoral national policies, laws, programmes and investment plans to enable safe and healthy diets through sustainable food systems.

## What makes these guidelines unique?

The Voluntary Guidelines are the only global policy instrument that have been negotiated at a multilateral level among governments and other stakeholders on the connections between food systems and nutrition. They:

- Present a systemic, multi-sectoral science and evidence-based approach that considers food systems in their totality and looks at the multi-dimensional causes of malnutrition in all its forms.
- Present agreed definitions of key concepts such as healthy and unhealthy diets, nutritious foods, food systems, and sustainable food systems.
- Contribute to the formulation of context-specific policies and related responsible investment through coordinated actions among different actors and across all relevant sectors at international, regional, national, subnational, and local levels.
- Support efforts to strengthen governance and accountability mechanisms and foster inclusive decision-making processes, which are based on transparent rules of engagement including safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interest.
- Promote policies and actions that:
  - › Enhance the livelihoods, health, and well-being of populations;
  - › Encourage sustainable food production and responsible consumption of safe, diverse and nutritious foods to enable healthy diets;
  - › Protect and promote sustainable use of natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystems;
  - › Support mitigation and adaptation to climate change.
- Based on the recognition of the strong interlinkages between sustainable food systems and healthy diets, the Guidelines recognize the importance of implementing interventions within and across food systems, and their constituent elements - food supply chains, food environments, consumer behaviour - to improve their ability to deliver healthy diets and to generate positive outcomes along the three dimensions of sustainable development.
- Are global in scope but take into consideration different national realities, capacities, and levels of development.
- Support the implementation of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025) and help countries operationalize the recommendations of the Framework for Action agreed at the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) held in 2014.

## How will the guidelines be implemented and by whom?

All CFS stakeholders are encouraged to promote the use and application of these Voluntary Guidelines in developing coordinated and multi-sectoral national policies, laws, programmes and investment plans to achieve sustainable food systems that deliver healthy diets and improve nutrition.

The VGFSyN contain advice on their implementation and monitoring which defines roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, outlines the plan for building and strengthening capacity for implementation and defines the monitoring and evaluation approach.

## Focus areas

The Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition are structured around seven focus areas encapsulating cross-cutting factors that are relevant for improving diets and nutrition.

### 1 Transparent, Democratic and Accountable Governance

The VGFSyN emphasize the importance of governance mechanisms, leadership and accountability across the range of actors, at global, regional, national and local levels, within food systems. They provide guidance to:

- Promote policy coordination;
- Integrate food systems and nutrition into development plans;
- Create accountability mechanisms and monitoring and evaluation tools;
- Strengthen the participation of indigenous peoples in food systems.

### 2 Sustainable Food Supply Chains to Achieve Healthy Diets in the Context of Economic, Social and Environmental Sustainability, and Climate Change

Food supply chains play a crucial role in human health, resilience, and economic, social and environmental sustainability of food systems. The VGFSyN present a range of actions to create sustainable and resilient food supply chains and sustainable consumption and production in the midst of climate change and natural resource degradation. The Guidelines seek to:

- Mainstream climate adaptation and mitigation;
- Promote sustainable use and management of natural resources;
- Protect the health of food systems workers;
- Improve food storage, processing, packaging and transformation;
- Empower women and youth across food systems

### 3 Equal and Equitable Access to Healthy Diets Through Sustainable Food Systems

The VGFSyN recommend potential policy entry points to improve physical and economic access, and availability of food that contributes to healthy diets through sustainable food systems in the places where people shop, choose, and eat food. In this respect, the Guidelines seek to promote food environments that ensure that people have equal access to sufficient, affordable, safe and nutritious foods that meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

### 4 Food Safety Across Sustainable Food Systems

The VGFSyN recognize the critical role of food safety to all parts of the food system and to prevent and control potential food safety hazards. They highlight the need for:

- International and national cooperation on food safety;
- Promotion of effective risk assessments, communication and management;
- Establishment of control systems that are appropriate for different scales, contexts and modes of production and marketing

### 5 People-Centered Nutrition Knowledge, Education and Information

The VGFSyN outline policy entry points to promote healthy diets by supporting people to improve their knowledge, awareness, skills, education, and the quality of information available. Proposed actions are based on the need to consider and protect the range and diversity of food cultures, social norms, relations and traditions that contribute to healthy diets through sustainable food systems

### 6 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Across Food Systems

The VGFSyN present a range of actions to improve women's wellbeing, ensuring direct access to financial, technical and biophysical resources, improving and enabling agency and participation in decision-making, and balancing power relationships and overcoming legal impediments that limit equality and healthy food choices. This is in acknowledgement that gender relations and cultural norms are among the most significant drivers of hunger, malnutrition and unhealthy diets, particularly for women and girls.

### 7 Resilient Food Systems in Humanitarian Contexts

The VGFSyN highlight the importance of linking food security and nutrition during humanitarian crises with long term strategies in accordance with international humanitarian law, universally agreed human rights instruments, and national legislation. The Guidelines recommend meeting immediate food security and nutrition needs in humanitarian crises while ensuring that these responses have no long-term impact on food systems. To achieve this, the Guidelines call for protection of the most vulnerable populations, building the resilience of food systems in humanitarian contexts, and improving the quality of food and nutrition assistance provided.