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Security report

Executive summary

In 2020, WFP expanded its operations in an increasingly volatile and complex security environment, as the COVID-19 pandemic compounded the global security threats already faced by the organization. The pandemic caused significant economic instability that resulted in the reprioritization of financial resources to domestic responses and reduced the ability of government security forces to address non-pandemic-related security threats.

WFP security services¹ scaled up operations, keeping pace with the increased and changing demands on WFP in responding to the global emergency. Despite the humanitarian coordination challenges, global supply chain disruptions and the faster pace of WFP operations, WFP security services implemented well-coordinated and effective risk mitigation and prevention measures. As a result, the impact of security incidents on WFP operations largely remained the same as in 2019.

Notwithstanding international and domestic travel restrictions, the Security Division continued to support WFP operations through surge capacity deployments (such as to country offices in Ethiopia and Ghana for the establishment of logistics hubs) and increased the provision of direct security support, in particular to countries of high strategic importance to WFP.

¹ In this report, "security services" or "WFP security services" refer to the security activities and personnel of WFP collectively. The term *Security Division* refers to the headquarters-based unit that provides guidance and support for field operations.

Focal point:

Ms M.V. Montalvo
Director
Security Division and WFP Security Focal Point
tel.: 06-6513-2665

While local security personnel continued to support teams on the ground and respond to the new challenges posed by the pandemic, the Security Division examined ways of increasing operational efficiency and adapting to WFP's emerging needs and new operational modalities. The division embraced the use of technology, data and improved processes while enhancing cooperation and collaboration beyond security services. For the first time, data was integrated at the corporate level in the analysis of the pandemic response through a collaborative cross-functional process, with security as a key component. Data integration also gave WFP decision makers a common overview through visualization dashboards.

Demands related to security personnel have changed in this new reality. The Security Division is working towards increasing workforce diversity in terms of gender, soft skills, digital literacy and professional background, in line with WFP workplace culture and values. Combined with the digital transformation of security services, the enhancement of the security workforce will make an important contribution to the success of WFP within the increasingly demanding humanitarian space.

The impact of the pandemic will continue to be felt in 2021, exacerbating underlying socioeconomic vulnerabilities and intensifying conflicts. Leveraging the momentum from the previous year, WFP security services are accelerating their modernization efforts in order to alleviate the pressure from growing demands. Continued investment and resourcing are key to enabling the Security Division to foster a culture of safety and security within WFP.

2020 security in numbers

Expenditure

WFP spent **USD 118.6 million** on security, representing **1.5 percent** of its budget (costs include staffing and equipment).

WFP spent **USD 494** per employee per month on security (calculated using the current WFP workforce of 20,000 staff).

Staffing and training

The global security workforce comprises **443** employees, an increase of nearly **6 percent** since 2019.

74 percent of the security workforce are national employees.

16 percent of the security workforce are women.

59 percent of the security workforce are located in areas designated as L2 or L3 emergencies.

Performance tracking

35 operational or analysis support field missions were dispatched in 2020.

The global security key performance indicator score was **92 percent**.

98 percent of security contributions to strategic and programme reviews and planning processes were validated.

Global security environment

1. In 2020, WFP operated in an increasingly volatile and complex security environment. Existing global security threats, ranging from armed conflict and violent extremism to civil unrest and crime, were compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed the underlying causes of insecurity and reduced the ability of government security forces to counteract them.
2. Following an initial decline in protests in response to lockdown measures, the economic and social fallout from the pandemic exacerbated social tensions and fuelled civil unrest in numerous countries. Movement restrictions, reductions in remittances and food stocks, increases in the prices of basic goods and spikes in unemployment fuelled socioeconomic grievances, particularly in vulnerable areas. On many occasions, protests were met with violent suppression, heightening popular anger and fracturing political and social cohesion. These conditions hindered WFP's movements in major cities and impeded cash-based transfers and school feeding programmes.
3. In conflict-affected areas, the pandemic drained resources from government and international security forces, affecting peace and security operations. Non-state armed groups, criminals and extremists took advantage of security gaps and operated more freely, which led to upticks in violence, displacements, market disruptions and access constraints and adversely affected WFP activities. In countries where economic recession caused significant job losses, there were signs of increased recruitment by non-state armed groups. The reprioritization of resources, opportunistic use of the pandemic by some local actors or stakeholders and reduced economic space hindered peace and political stabilization processes in some countries. The security of humanitarian aid workers also became a growing concern in 2020; the Islamic State condoned the targeting of humanitarians in late 2020, while other armed groups and criminals demonstrated their intent to attack personnel, who are viewed as lucrative targets. This has resulted in growing security threats to United Nations and WFP personnel.
4. While COVID-19 affected the operating environment in various ways, the pandemic was just one of multiple factors influencing the security threat environment of most WFP operations in 2020.

WFP global incident analysis and trends²

5. Because of the security challenges faced by WFP throughout 2020, robust operational security engagement and support was required to enable programme implementation while ensuring the safety and security of personnel, assets and operations.

²Based on incidents reported in the WFP Security Information Management and Security Analysis Support System.

6. After a record-breaking number of L2 and L3 emergencies in 2019, WFP maintained the same level of response in 2020, adding the global COVID-19 pandemic to its list of L3 emergencies.
7. Despite COVID-19-related movement limitations, the pace of response activities increased. The risk management measures put in place by WFP proved effective. There was no major spike in security and safety incidents affecting WFP personnel, partners or contractors compared with 2019, despite an 8.6 percent increase in the number of personnel. The share of security incidents involving partners, however, increased over the course of 2020.
8. Most major incidents were linked to accidents, although a significant portion stemmed from violent crime. Of all reported incidents in 2020, 27 percent involved acts of violence. Geographically, personnel located in countries covered by the Regional Bureau for Eastern Africa experienced significantly more incidents than those in other regions.
9. Four deaths of WFP personnel were recorded in 2020, compared with ten in 2019. No WFP personnel were killed in acts of violence; the four recorded deaths were attributed to accidents.
10. The number of abductions increased by 21 percent compared to 2019. There were 20 abduction incidents involving 48 personnel and dependents – 90 percent of whom were partner or contractor personnel.
11. Crime remained the most significant security threat to WFP personnel around the world, and road safety incidents were the most common incident type – up 10 percent compared to 2019. There has been a marked increase in the number of arrests of WFP personnel by local authorities and an alarming rise in the number of abductions in West Africa.
12. Further analysis and possible improvement of procedures and support mechanisms are required in several areas. Incidents affecting nationally recruited personnel and women are on the rise, as is the proportion of incidents affecting WFP cooperating partners.³

A United Nations document on lessons learned, *COVID-19 Response across the United Nations Security Management System (UNSMS)*, noted the increased security risks:

“while COVID-19 was a health issue, it would have a direct impact on security personnel and operations, and [...] cooperation in future pandemics should be informed by a review of the current response.”

“Personnel experienced heightened psychological stress, as well as increased exposure to both health and security risks.”

Resilience, flexibility and efficiency throughout the global pandemic

13. The sudden onset of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 made it a challenging year for everyone. WFP showed resilience, flexibility and efficiency throughout 2020 in the face of a global L3 emergency that added to the existing challenges faced by the organization.
14. WFP continues to maintain the highest volume of travel of all United Nations entities; the number of WFP security clearances dropped by just 21 percent from 2019 to 2020 despite extensive international and domestic travel restrictions. This reflected WFP’s push to continue its operations, especially in support of the COVID-19 response and emergencies in Lebanon, Mozambique and Ethiopia.

³ For more information on 2020 incident analysis, please refer to this [interactive report](#) or this [infographic](#).

15. In 2020, WFP scaled up operations to reach more than 100 million beneficiaries with critical food and nutrition assistance. COVID-19-related movement restrictions limited WFP access to beneficiaries in very high-risk operational areas; requests for such access fell from 44 in 2019 to only 8 in 2020, notably in central Yemen and north-western parts of the Syrian Arab Republic; programme delivery nevertheless continued through partners and third-party monitoring with the assistance of the Security Division.
16. WFP security services maintained business continuity with minimal impact on WFP operations during this period, anticipating the required operational capacity and reorienting security capabilities. The Security Division embraced the use of technology, data and optimized and automated processes to achieve greater efficiency while enhancing cooperation and collaboration beyond the division.

Field operations support

17. Since the end of 2019 the Security Division has been changing its working model to improve its agility and targeted support, in response to operational needs in the field; this work has been accelerated by the pandemic. The division continued to respond to ongoing and new emergencies while providing additional support to meet demands related to the pandemic response. Priority was given to fostering a culture of safety and security in order to facilitate programme delivery.
18. During the COVID-19 response, the role of WFP security services was enhanced and integrated into processes through greater involvement in the design, planning and implementation of United Nations and WFP COVID-19 prevention and mitigation protocols at the country level, including through the appointment of many security officers as COVID-19 focal points. While occupational safety and health are not considered to be core security functions, many security personnel were asked to align health response protocols with existing security plans and crisis management mechanisms. This lack of clarity in the delineation of responsibilities prompted some country offices to treat safety, security and medical functions in a single coordination and crisis management mechanism.
19. Security services teams adjusted protocols and operating guidance to reflect local COVID-19-related regulations such as those related to office access, field missions, food distribution procedures and in-person meetings. To address the increased number of incidents affecting partners, security teams in many countries helped reinforce security risk management protocols, especially through the establishment of security structures for partners, the development of security incident reporting and management mechanisms, the provision of security at food distribution areas, and COVID-19-related safety risk training in the latter half of the year.
20. Security services capitalized on community-based acceptance to enhance local security risk management strategies while improving access to beneficiaries. When access to communities was reduced, national security personnel played a key role in re-engaging with local authorities and communities, enabling the continuation of field operations.
21. As part of WFP's corporate COVID-19 response, the Security Division deployed personnel to Ethiopia and Ghana to support the establishment of logistics hubs for aviation and supply chain operations and the establishment of field hospitals specialized in the treatment of COVID-19 for United Nations personnel and dependents in East and West Africa.
22. The Security Division also provided extensive support to 8 out of the 13 countries designated by WFP to receive corporate strategic attention in 2020, including in the context of three L3 emergencies and one L2 emergency. Despite the movement restrictions, the division conducted 35 analytical and operational support missions compared with 28 in 2019, visiting countries including Burundi, Mozambique and the Niger.

23. To maintain a high level of compliance and due diligence in high-risk operational environments, the Security Division ensured the continued presence of security professionals in the Syrian Arab Republic, the central Sahel and Haiti while increasing their presence in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Afghanistan and Mozambique. Security professionals were deployed swiftly to Lebanon and Armenia in response to unfolding crises and critical security incidents to undertake rapid security risk management activities. The Security Division recruited two security analysts in Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic tasked with analysing security threats affecting local operations. Safeguarding support continued, despite movement restrictions, with the enhancement of fire safety management support in the Syrian Arab Republic and the Central African Republic and the strengthening of the security risk management capacity of WFP cooperating partners in the Syrian Arab Republic, Cameroon, Afghanistan and Burkina Faso.
24. The pandemic response required security officers with increasingly diverse profiles, including especially digital literacy and prior pandemic or medical response experience. Based on lessons learned from the Ebola response, many security professionals were trained to follow up on COVID-19 protocols and responses. Surge deployments of national security personnel were also vital in addressing global security needs while enhancing the profiles of those personnel and broadening their learning and development.

Analytical support

25. In the face of the growing number of challenges, all WFP entities have been engaging in monitoring and analysis using a global and structured approach. Security analysis has become a key component of the work of the cross-functional analytical team established to create a shared overview of WFP operations using integrated data sets to support informed decision making. This work has enhanced the regular interactions of security analysts across WFP.
26. The analytical team served as a primary support mechanism for the global operational task force established for the COVID-19 L3 emergency. Having proved its effectiveness in cross-functional analysis and coordination, the team has continued collaborating beyond the COVID-19 emergency also on non-COVID-19-related issues. Security analysis remains an integral part of the process, ensuring that WFP programme planning and delivery are based on a comprehensive security analysis and enabling the Security Division to better orient staffing and operations towards the safe implementation of programmes.
27. Based on the COVID-19 global WFP security assessment, the Security Division produced COVID-19 security reports, providing operational security and contextual updates on the challenges that needed to be addressed by the security services to enable programme delivery while ensuring the safety and security of WFP personnel, assets and operations. These reports used a new corporate tool (DOTS⁴), which integrated with and contributed to corporate data sets already used for the tool.

Resource support

28. The Security Division has reinforced its contribution to the in-country design, planning and implementation of WFP programmes by engaging with programme teams to align WFP strategies with likely security threat scenarios, enabling country teams to foresee mitigation measures and security costs associated with implementation.

⁴ DOTS is a WFP data hub that brings together information from across the organization.

29. Of the 2020 contributions, 98 percent were validated. As a result, the number of security emergency fund requests from country offices fell by 79 percent compared to 2019, totalling USD 410,000. This is a positive outcome of recent efforts to integrate security budgeting into country-level programme planning and review processes.
30. With a total expenditure of USD 118.6 million in 2020, security costs accounted for 1.5 percent of WFP expenditures under the country portfolio budget, as shown in table 1. Total expenditure remained the same as in 2019 despite increased activities and operations. Security costs represent 17 percent of direct support costs and 7.2 percent of programme support and administrative (PSA) costs. Tables 1 and 2 present a more detailed breakdown of security expenditure.

Type of cost	WFP Expenditure	Security cost	% of total
Transfer cost	6 655.5	19.2	0.3
Implementation cost	513.3	16.3	3.2
Direct support cost	309.7	52.7	17.0
Indirect support cost	423.6	30.5	7.2
Total	7 902.0	118.6	1.5

Description	Cost	% of total
Security staff in field offices and regional bureaux	38.8	Personnel: 37
Security Division personnel	5.6	
Local cost shared security budget	7.7	UNDSS: 17
UNDSS jointly financed activities	11.9	
Security guard services	36.0	Guard services: 30
Residential security	1.6	Other costs: 16
Safety and security equipment	7.0	
Security Division internal services	2.9	
Other indirect security services	7.0	
Total	118.6	100

Abbreviation: UNDSS = United Nations Department of Safety and Security

Challenges

31. Faced with movement restrictions and reprioritization, the Security Division discontinued most in-person activities planned for 2020. Security training and development were heavily affected, as nearly all training had been designed to be provided in person. The pandemic reinforced the importance of security training for WFP personnel, as could be seen in the numerous requests for this training from WFP offices all over the world. Women's security awareness training and first responder training were halted, as was the Safe and Secure Approaches to Field Environments (SSAFE) course, which staff are required to complete in order to work in high-risk environments. A limited number of countries were able to resume SSAFE training in the second half of 2020 in adherence with UNSMS training guidance related to COVID-19.

32. With UNSMS security certification programmes for United Nations security professionals also put on hold, there was a risk that newly recruited personnel or those deployed to emergencies would not have adequate preparation. To prevent this, the Security Division launched a headquarters-led pilot programme for onboarding security personnel deployed as surge capacity in order to equip them with the minimum WFP-specific security risk management knowledge. At an inter-agency level, the suspension of UNSMS certification programmes allowed time for a review of course content and delivery methods in order to adapt them to current needs.
33. The United Nations system response to COVID-19 also faced challenges, as highlighted by the Inter-Agency Security Management Network. A lack of clarity in key instructions related to the COVID-19 response was noted, in particular at the initial stages, in terms of the definition of required actions and roles and responsibilities. Coordinated information flows related to the pandemic required further streamlining across the United Nations system and partners.
34. Information overload has been an additional challenge, in particular at headquarters. This has motivated further changes in information management that will help transform the Security Division's approach to security risk management.

Modernizing security

35. As identified in the 2019 annual security report, innovative and novel approaches have helped to alleviate the pressure and demands on WFP security services stemming from the expansion of WFP operations amid increasing instability and insecurity. The volatile environment persisted in 2020 and due to COVID-19 became more complex. In response, the Security Division accelerated efforts to modernize the work of the security services.

Transforming the security "business"

36. Unpredictable travel and movement restrictions forced the global workforce into the digital sphere, highlighting the importance of data and clear processes in facilitating informed decision making in a constantly changing environment. Prompted by WFP's corporate digital journey, the Security Division pushed ahead with its digital agenda by establishing its first digital business road map in early 2020, fostering closer collaboration with the Technology Division.
37. The modernization initiative aims to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of WFP security services through the use of data and information, facilitating better decision making in the field and at headquarters while aligning with WFP's digital transformation objectives. The initiative comprises four pillars: governance; data management and integration; systems integration and interoperability; and automation and simplification.
38. One example of this work is a pilot DOTS project whereby the Security Division fed data into DOTS for the COVID-19 response, giving WFP a more robust understanding of the situation. Combined with other sources, the DOTS data sets were used to produce security-related visualizations and interactive dashboards that facilitated data-driven decisions.
39. Integrated data has become key to internal reporting needs, providing a clearer operating picture. For example, the Security Division uses data sets from WFP and the UNDSS together with leading open-source incident data to produce a comprehensive incident analysis interactive dashboard. The division has also leveraged data from an automated security compliance monitoring tool to enhance the reporting of security key performance indicators through interactive dashboards. By visualizing large amounts of data, the division has improved how it identifies suitable candidates for surge requests while keeping track of deployments, enabling it to respond rapidly to field personnel needs.

40. A greater understanding of the value of data has also given rise to pilot initiatives in the field. Field offices under the Regional Bureau for Eastern Africa and the Regional Bureau for Western Africa began exploring the use of data visualizations and dashboards for reporting in 2020. Security personnel in Afghanistan began to use advanced geospatial technology to enhance their data-driven planning, analysis and decision making, enabling them to anticipate needs and support programme delivery more safely and securely. In Somalia, security personnel implemented a pilot project on automating core tasks, thus saving staff time and reducing the possibility of human error while improving data quality and generating near-real-time field security operations management dashboards.
41. Externally, WFP has continued to facilitate and drive modernization efforts in UNSMS. The WFP-facilitated Telecommunications Security Standards (TESS+) service continues to support security communications for UNSMS and non-governmental organizations, following up with 90 countries regularly. In 2020, TESS+ began supporting countries in moving to remote security operations centres, which significantly reduce UNSMS operational costs. Even though missions were suspended from March to June due to COVID-19-related travel restrictions, the TESS+ service conducted seven full on-site assessments and two on-site technical support missions in 2020. Support missions are planned for 30 countries. TESS+ continues to produce technical guidance and training while mobilizing UNSMS to agree on standards for security communications guidance. A cost-cutting review of this inter-agency service has led to further savings, reducing annual costs by 16 percent, to USD 840,000, despite an increase in services provided.

Responding to evolving demands

42. The modernization of WFP security services goes beyond digital initiatives. The Security Division has taken steps to refine its practice, advancing diversity and inclusiveness while steering the direction of security in the United Nations system. Within WFP, improvements in human resources and recruitment have diversified the skillsets and backgrounds of security personnel so that they are aligned with the transformation of security. In addition to the typical military or police backgrounds, the Security Division is seeking new profiles of security risk managers from professional settings, while increasing the number of women.
43. The skills and competencies of security personnel are being selected to align more closely with operational needs. On-the-job training through informal experiential learning is another component of this new strategy, which will bring the Security Division in line with WFP core values related to innovation and change, performance mindset and professionalism. The transformation of the security workforce and the approach to working respond to WFP focus on diversity and inclusion.
44. Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of security services is a priority for the Security Division. Additional investment in people and technology will accelerate the transformation and modernization of security in 2021, leveraging the foundations set in 2020. These efforts will strengthen the digital landscape of security, align workforce needs and embed a culture of safety and security in WFP programmes and operations, allowing not only the Security Division, but WFP as a whole, to be more agile in preparing for and responding to current and future security-related operational challenges.