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Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Colombia (2021–2024)

Executive summary

The evaluation of the country strategic plan for Colombia for 2021–2024 was conducted between January and November 2023. It served both accountability and learning purposes and informed the design of a new country strategic plan for Colombia.

The evaluation concluded that the country strategic plan has been relevant to the needs and conditions in Colombia and was adapted to the characteristics of a high-middle-income country with strong institutions and the capacity to manage significant humanitarian crises. WFP has built on its comparative advantages to support and complement the Colombian Government's response to four types of crises with very different characteristics: the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, migratory flows, violence and natural disasters.

In response to an increase in humanitarian needs, WFP had to absorb unprecedented growth in the resources and operational capacity available to it. The country office successfully achieved the massive expansion required to grow from a small office into one of the largest WFP offices in the world, although this transformation posed challenges for the efficiency of internal processes and the systematization of lessons learned.

The country strategic plan contributed to results in sectors that can be considered non-traditional for WFP, such as social cohesion and socioeconomic integration within the framework of national efforts to foster integrated local development and contributions to peace. WFP has achieved relevant results in those areas and is gathering significant learning from its experience.

In line with WFP evaluation policy (2022) (WFP/EB.1/2022/4-C), to respect the integrity and independence of evaluation findings the editing of this report has been limited and as a result some of the language in it may not be fully consistent with the World Food Programme's standard terminology or editorial practices. Please direct any requests for clarification to the Director of Evaluation.

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WFP helped to strengthen the capacities of national institutions, but a more systematic approach to capacity strengthening, with clear transition strategies to national ownership of interventions, could have enhanced the effectiveness and sustainability of its results. Notably, when WFP is acting as a government contractor in the implementation of interventions there is a high risk that it ends up substituting government capacity, resulting in very limited prospects for the sustainability of results if no exit strategies are envisaged.

The country strategic plan allowed WFP to expand its range of partners and thematic focus and to attract resources. However, the relative fragmentation of the donor base for development programming, donors' preferences in terms of targeting and geographical prioritization and the prevalence of short-term funding windows led to a multiplicity of short-term projects with challenges for maintaining strategic and operational coherence, particularly in resilience building interventions.

Under the country strategic plan, gender considerations were systematically integrated into programming. While some positive contributions were identified in terms of women's empowerment, approaches aimed at promoting women's participation in WFP interventions have predominated, and more could be done to influence the transformation of the structural problems that affect the ability of women to realize their potential in society. Consideration of ethnicity was also an important element of programming and efforts were made to ensure the inclusion of different ethnic groups in the design of WFP interventions.

The country office's monitoring systems proved to be of limited utility for strategic programme management and for capturing results at the outcome level over the long term, particularly in areas such as social cohesion, socioeconomic integration and capacity strengthening.

The evaluation made six recommendations, the overarching thrust of which was to recommend a move towards consolidating interventions through the evidence-based prioritization of sectors and geographical areas; the strengthening of links between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding interventions; and a focus on increasing operational efficiency in the face of reduced funding.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Colombia (2021–2024) (WFP/EB.2/2024/6-C/1) and management response (WFP/EB.2/2024/6-C/1/Add.1) and encourages further action on the recommendations set out in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

* This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Board, please refer to the decisions and recommendations document issued at the end of the session.

Introduction

Evaluation features

1. The evaluation was conducted between January and November 2023. It served both accountability and learning purposes and informed the design of a new country strategic plan (CSP) and a new United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework (UNSDCF) for Colombia.
2. It focused on assessing the results of the CSP for 2021–2024 but also provided a strategic overview of work and results under the previous CSP for 2017–2021 so as to allow an analysis of the continuity and consistency of programming and WFP's responsiveness to evolving needs and priorities across a longer period.
3. The evaluation serves the interests of stakeholders, including beneficiaries of the CSP, the WFP country office in Colombia, the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, WFP headquarters, the Government of Colombia, cooperating partners, donors and other United Nations entities.
4. The evaluation was conducted by an independent evaluation team following a mixed-methods approach that combined a document review, quantitative data analysis, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Carefully selected in-depth case studies were a key feature of the approach, allowing the evaluation team to derive logical generalizations regarding the CSP's results and the factors explaining WFP's performance. The evaluation applied WFP's approach to gender equality and women's empowerment and the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group.

Context

5. Colombia has a population of 48.3 million people,¹ 84.2 percent of whom live in urban areas.² Afro-descendant people represent 9.3 percent of the population; Indigenous Peoples represent 4.4 percent³ and include members of at least 115 Indigenous communities.⁴ Peace accords between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia were signed in 2016, putting an end to six decades of armed conflict. In June 2022, Gustavo Petro was elected as President.
6. Despite economic growth, Colombia is one of the most unequal countries in the Latin American region and the world.⁵ Poverty rates are highest among Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant people, who are engaged predominately in agricultural activities such as smallholder farmers with precarious incomes, especially in a context of unequal access to land and the prevalence of land-related conflict.⁶
7. In 2022 an estimated 7.6 million people had needs related to food security,⁷ which are usually correlated with characteristics such as being a migrant, being a victim of violence, belonging to an Indigenous or Afro-Colombian community, being an informal labourer, having a low level of educational attainment or living in a household led by a woman.⁸

¹ National Administrative Department of Statistics of Colombia (*Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística*, or DANE). 2018. [Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2018](#).

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ DANE. 2019. [Población indígena de Colombia](#).












⁵ World Bank Group. 2021. [Hacia la construcción de una sociedad equitativa en Colombia](#).

⁶ Penagos, A.M. 2015. [El campo Colombiano: un camino hacia el bienestar y la paz](#).

⁷ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2022. [Colombia: Humanitarian Needs Overview](#).

⁸ Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela. 2022. [RMNA 2022: Refugee and Migrant Needs Analysis](#); WFP. 2023. [Food Security Assessment: Colombian Population. Executive Summary](#).

8. By October 2022, Colombia had received 2.9 million migrants, mainly from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Women account for 51 percent of migrants⁹ and are vulnerable to violence, discrimination and various forms of gender-based violence.¹⁰ Migration contributed to an increase in the need for humanitarian assistance in the period from 2017 to 2022.¹¹

SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Value	Year
	Life expectancy at birth (years) (1)	77	2021
	Human Development Index (score and rank) (2)	0.752 88 out of 191	2021
	Population, female (% of total population) (3)	50.7	2022
	Urban population (% of total population) (3)	84.2	2018
	Population by age (% of total population) (3)	0-14 years: 22.6 15-64 years: 68.2	2018
	Income inequality: Gini coefficient (4)	0.54	2020
	Employment in agriculture (% of total employment) (5)	16	2021
	Population living below the national poverty line (% of total population) (2)	36.6	2022
	Global Hunger Index (rank) (6)	38 out of 121	2022
	Prevalence of severe stunting (% of children under 5) (7)	10.8	2015
	Global Gender Gap Index (score and rank) (8)	0.710 75 out of 146	2022

1) DANE. 2021. [Projection of Demographic Change: Life expectancy](#); 2) United Nations Development Programme. 2022. [Human Development Index – Colombia](#); 3) DANE. 2018. [Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2018](#); 4) World Bank Group. 2021. [Hacia la construcción de una sociedad equitativa en Colombia](#); 5) OECD. 2020. [Seguimiento y Evaluación de las Políticas Agrícolas OCDE 2020: Apoyando a una agricultura productiva, sostenible y resiliente y respondiendo a la pandemia COVID-19](#); 6) Welthungerhilfe and Concern worldwide. 2022. [2022 Global Hunger Index: Food systems transformation and local governance](#); 7) Colombian Family Welfare Institute, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, National Institute of Health, Administrative Department for Social Prosperity and National University of Colombia. 2015. [Encuesta Nacional de Situación Nutricional](#); 8) World Economic Forum. 2022. [Global Gender Gap Report 2022](#).

⁹ Government of Colombia. 2022. [Informe Nacional de caracterización de población migrante de Venezuela](#).

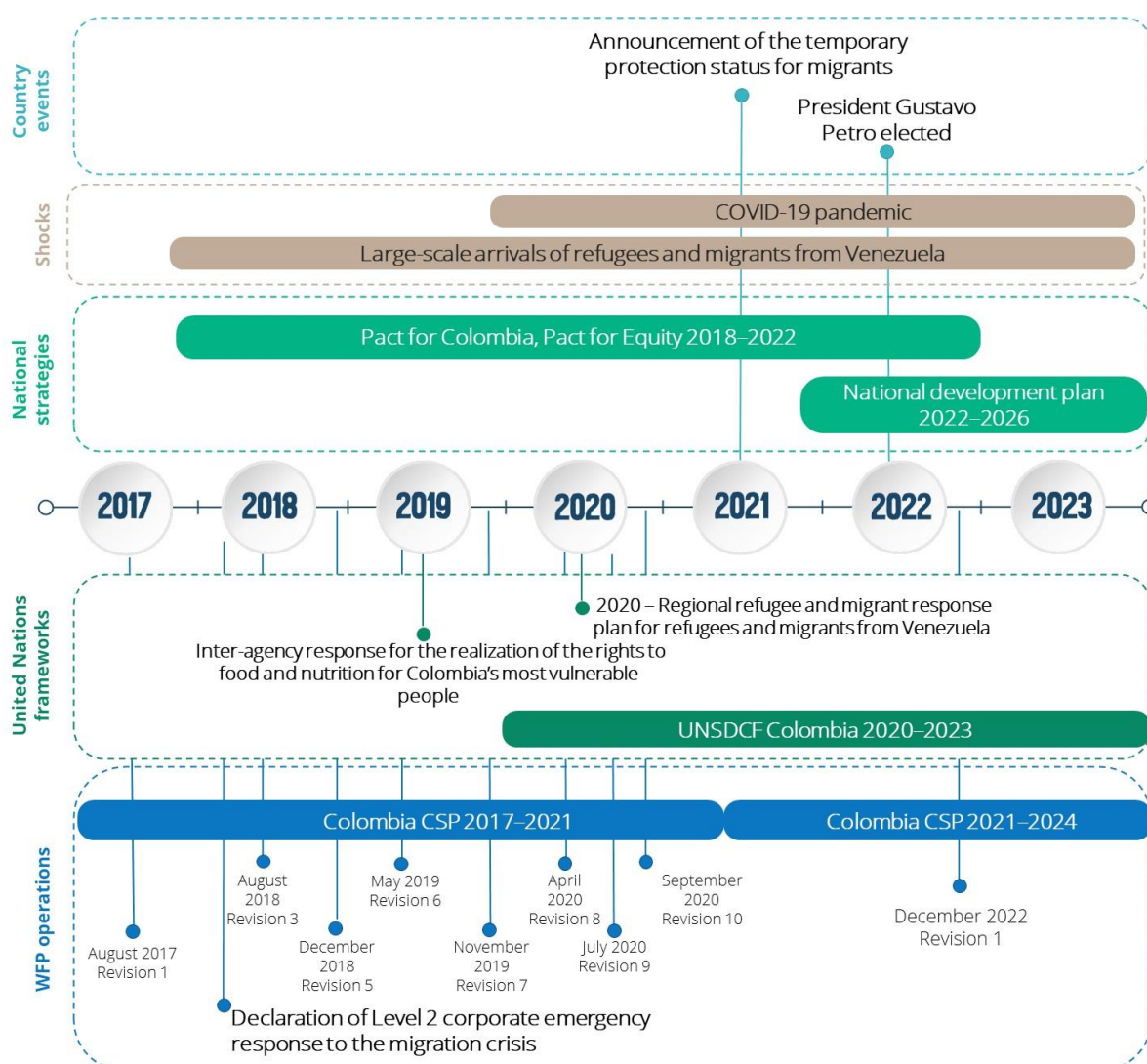
¹⁰ Profamilia and United States Agency for International Development. 2020. [Desigualdades en salud de la población migrante y refugiada venezolana en Colombia](#).

¹¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2022. [Colombia: 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan](#).

WFP interventions in Colombia, 2017–2023

9. There have been two CSPs in Colombia since 2017: the first from 2017 to 2021 and the second from 2021 to 2024. The latter is the main focus of the evaluation.
10. In March 2018, WFP declared a level 2 emergency in Colombia due to the large numbers of migrants arriving from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, a situation that was subsequently exacerbated by the impacts of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. To adapt to the evolving needs, the needs-based plans for the two CSPs underwent a total of 11 budget revisions, increasing from USD 84 million in 2017 to USD 856 million by June 2023. The CSP for 2017–2021 was shortened by ten months to allow the alignment of the next CSP with UNSDCF for 2020–2023.¹²

Figure 1: Country context and WFP operational overview in Colombia, 2017–2023



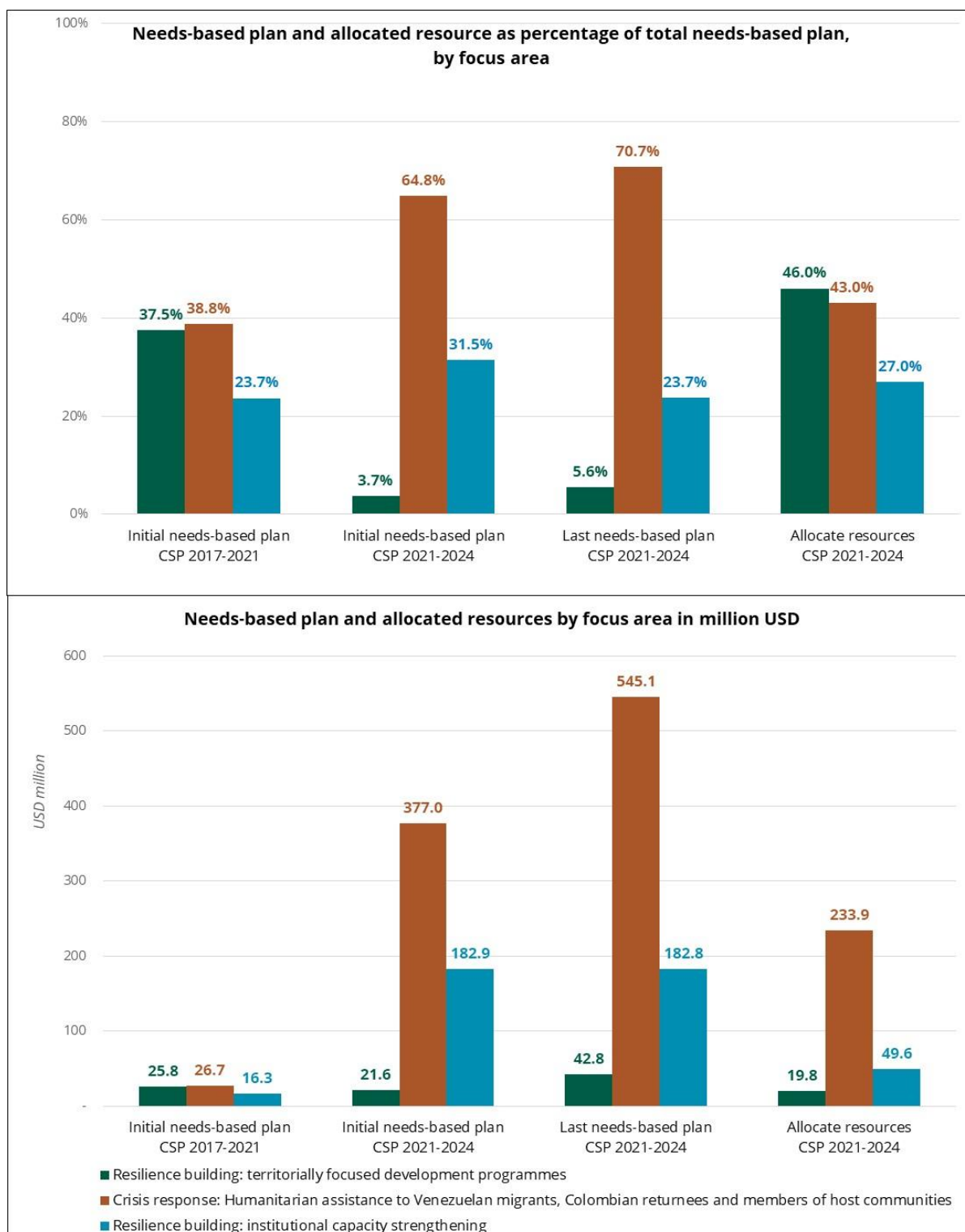
¹² WFP. 2020. *Colombia country strategic plan, revision 10*.

11. The CSP for 2021–2024 was approved by the Executive Board in February 2021. It gave continuity in the focus areas of resilience building and crisis response and was designed around three strategic outcomes and six activities, summarized in table 2.

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC OUTCOMES AND ACTIVITIES IN THE COLOMBIA CSP FOR 2021–2024		
Focus area	Strategic outcome	Activity
Resilience building	1. Improved quality of life in the municipalities with territorially focused development plans	1: Provide technical support for resilience strengthening efforts
Crisis response	2. Provision of humanitarian assistance and support for economic integration	2: Provide humanitarian assistance
		3: Strengthen institutional capacities and provide support that facilitates socioeconomic integration
Resilience building	3. Strengthened public policies and institutional capacities	4: Support the national Government and territorial entities with capacity strengthening in social protection
		5: Provide technical assistance and support for the implementation of the school meals programme
		6: Provide technical assistance in nutrition

12. The original needs-based plan for the CSP for 2021–2024 foresaw a budget of USD 654 million, to reach 3,875,566¹³ beneficiaries. A CSP revision in June 2021 increased that budget to USD 856 million.
13. Investments in resilience building were maintained or increased during the period evaluated, but the relative weight of those investments within the CSP budget declined owing to the exponential growth in humanitarian needs, with crisis response increasing its share of the needs-based plan from 38.8 to 70.5 percent.
14. As illustrated in figure 2, interventions in all the focus areas of the CSP for 2021–2024 were significantly underfunded.

¹³ WFP. 2022. *Revision of Colombia country strategic plan (2021–2024) and corresponding budget increase*. Beneficiary numbers for the revision come from the country office tool for managing effectively owing to the minor differences between those figures and the figures in the approved CSP.

Figure 2: Budget allocations and funding levels by focus area, 2017–2023

Note: The crisis response focus area includes activities related to service delivery under the latest revision of the CSP for 2021–2024.

Source: Country portfolio budget resources overview (data extracted in June 2023).

Evaluation findings

To what extent is the country strategic plan evidence-based and strategically oriented to meet the needs of the most vulnerable individuals?

Relevance to needs

15. The CSP was well informed by various evidence sources and reflected the comparative advantages of WFP in Colombia, including its logistics capacity, field presence, expertise in food and nutrition security and cash-based transfers, and operational coordination on the ground.
16. It was aligned with the UNSDCF for Colombia, the WFP strategic plan and national priorities, particularly in relation to crisis prevention and response, resilience building, socioeconomic integration and contributions to peace.
17. WFP interventions were relevant and responsive to evolving needs and focused on the most vulnerable people, including migrants and victims of violence and natural disasters, with special attention directed to women, Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant people.
18. While WFP should be commended for its ability to operate in different regions of Colombia, including remote areas facing challenging circumstances, there are opportunities for making greater use of the knowledge and experience of field sub-offices in informing managerial and programmatic decisions and further tailoring interventions to local conditions.
19. The evaluation also noted that while WFP's responsiveness to new funding opportunities and government requests allowed it to widen the range of its partners and interventions within the CSP framework, it also led to fragmentation in its geographical and thematic coverage, which in turn limited the opportunities for greater programme integration and internal synergies.
20. WFP's strong focus on capacity strengthening was highly relevant to the middle-income country, but insufficient attention was paid to the sustainability of results, such as through the development of strategies for the transition to full government ownership, in the design of the CSP.
21. Finally, the evaluation noted limitations in the corporate results framework and its indicators, which do not give full visibility of the intentions underlying the CSP regarding the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, particularly in areas such as socioeconomic integration, social cohesion and contributions to peace.

What are the extent and quality of WFP's specific contributions to the strategic outcomes of the country strategic plan in Colombia?

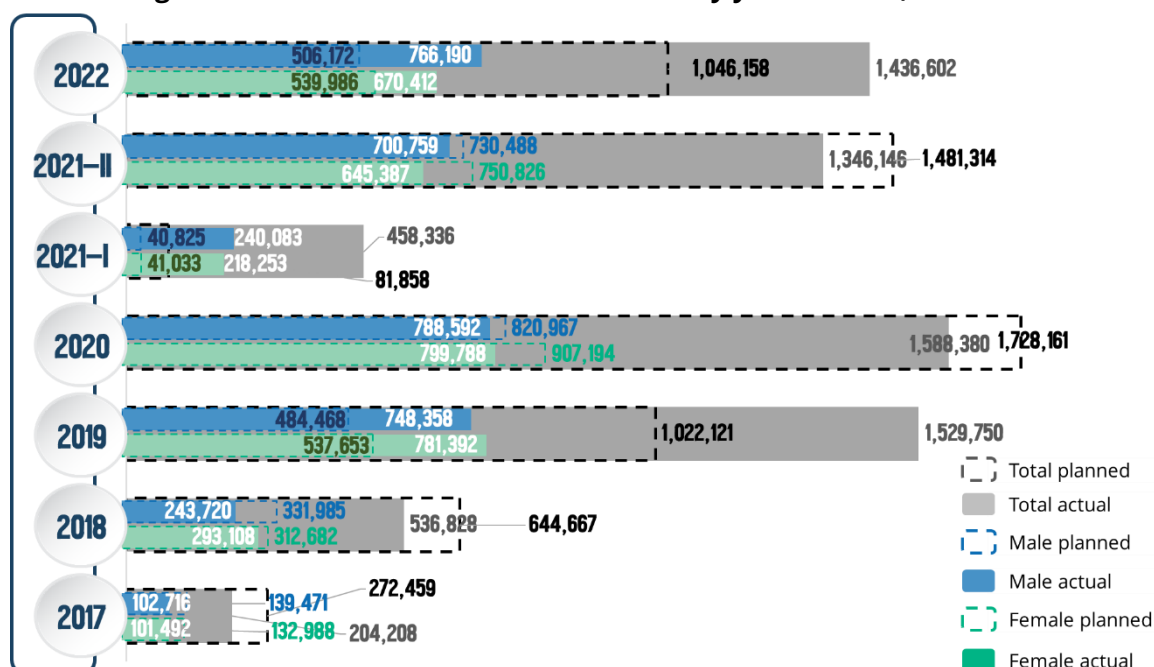
22. This section presents an analysis of the CSP results set out under the six dimensions of analysis that were defined – in dialogue with the country office – during the inception phase of the evaluation, with the aim of better articulating the intentions underlying the CSP and the interconnections between outcomes and activities, beyond the formal architecture of the CSP “line of sight”. Those dimensions are humanitarian assistance, the policy environment for food security and nutrition, resilience, support for national services, social cohesion and contributions to peace, and socioeconomic integration. Table 3 shows the linkages between the strategic outcomes and the related activities in each dimension.

TABLE 3: LINKAGES BETWEEN THE STRATEGIC OUTCOMES AND THE RELATED ACTIVITIES IN THE SIX DIMENSIONS OF ANALYSIS		
Dimension of analysis	Strategic outcome	Activity
Humanitarian assistance	2. Crisis response	2
Policy environment	3. Country capacity strengthening 1. Resilience building	1
		4
		5
		6
Support for national services	3. Country capacity strengthening	4
		5
		6
Resilience	1. Resilience building	1
Social cohesion	1. Resilience building 2. Crisis response	1
		2
		3
Socioeconomic integration	2. Crisis response	3

Humanitarian assistance

23. In Colombia, in the period evaluated, WFP responded effectively to various types of crises in various geographical areas and contributed to the food security of vulnerable people during emergencies. As illustrated in figure 3, from 2017 to 2022, WFP massively scaled up its interventions, reaching an average of 1.5 million people a year from 2019 to 2022 and achieving a relatively good gender balance among its beneficiaries.¹⁴

Figure 3: Planned and actual beneficiaries by year and sex, 2017–2022



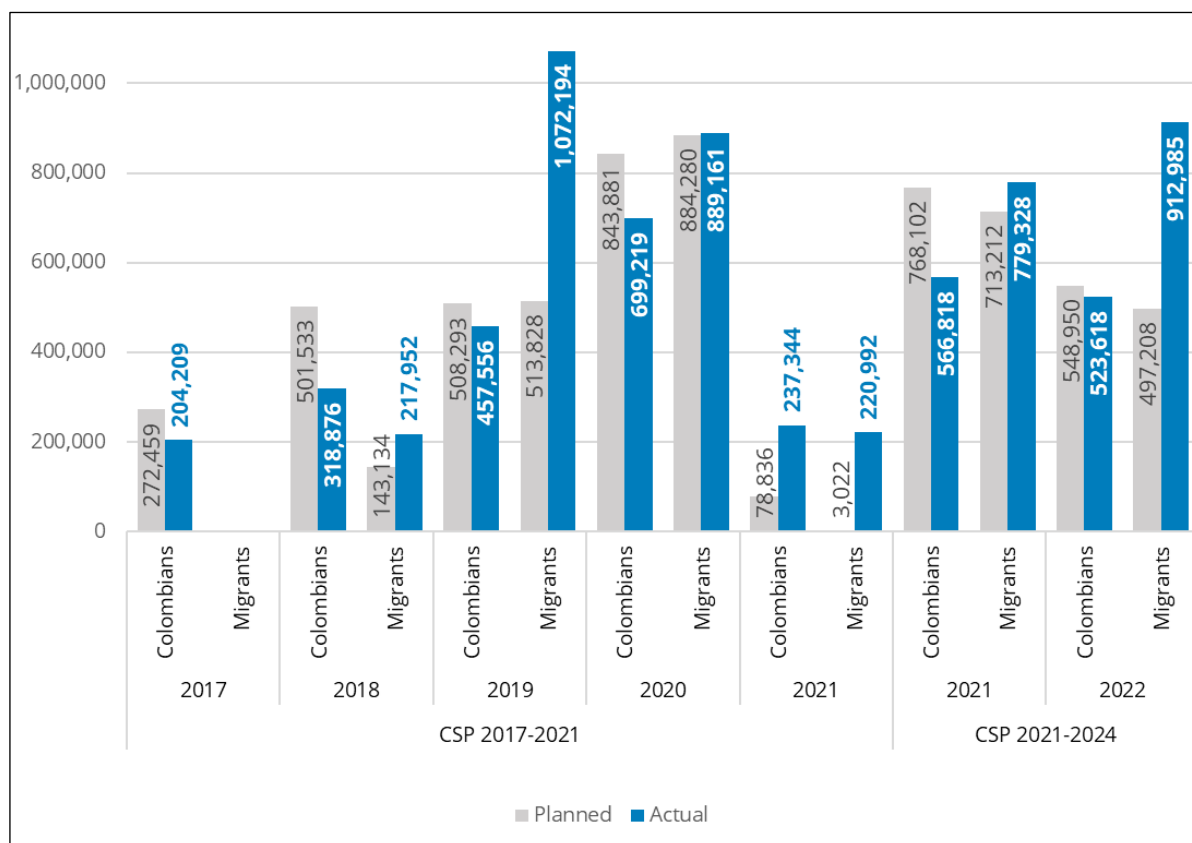
Note: 2021-I reports on the beneficiaries recorded under the CSP for 2017–2021, and 2021-II on those recorded under the CSP for 2021–2024.

Source: WFP. [Annual country reports – Colombia 2017–2022](#).

¹⁴ All the details on output and outcome indicators are presented in the main evaluation report.

24. The beneficiaries of WFP interventions included Colombian citizens affected by natural disasters and violence, migrants seeking permanent residency in Colombia, migrants in transit, and commuters crossing the border every day (see figure 4). WFP was able to adapt its interventions by distributing cash, vouchers or ready-to-eat food according to the specific needs of the different target groups.

Figure 4: Numbers of Colombians and migrants assisted, 2017–2022



Notes: Among both Colombians and migrants, 51 percent of beneficiaries are women.

Data for 2021 show beneficiary numbers under the CSP for 2017–2021, which covered the period from January to March 2021, and the CSP for 2021–2024, which covered the rest of the year.

Sources: WFP. [Annual country reports – Colombia 2017–2022](#).

25. To link short-term humanitarian assistance to longer-term social protection, WFP technical assistance supported the registration of migrants in the national registration system for people experiencing poverty and vulnerability in Colombia, which is essential in providing access to the labour market and connections to the Colombian social protection system. To ensure full coherence with national standards, transfer values were aligned with the Government's emergency cash-based transfer programmes, thereby contributing to the mainstreaming of cash-based transfers in national crisis response.
26. However, the transition of beneficiaries from humanitarian assistance to resilience building interventions within the CSP framework proved complex owing to the vast scale of humanitarian assistance and the small scale of development-oriented interventions: activity 2 (humanitarian assistance) reached more than 1 million people per year, while activity 1 (early recovery) reached 2,000, and activity 3 (socioeconomic integration) 25,000.

Policy environment for food security and nutrition

27. WFP contributed to the strengthening of the normative and programmatic frameworks for food and nutrition security, school meals and social protection by promoting adjustments to existing policies and programmes.

28. Through advocacy and technical assistance WFP has contributed in four key areas:
 - the increased visibility of food security and nutrition objectives in the new national development plan (2022) compared with the previous one;
 - enhanced capacity for the expansion of the national school meals programme;
 - the integration of the zero-hunger approach (and the human right to food) into the activities of the new ministry responsible for equity; and
 - greater government investments in support of rural women, particularly through the initiatives of the rural reform policy.
29. Many such gains took place at the territorial level, presenting an opportunity to strategically expand investments at that level. Examples include support for the generation of empirical data to inform planning on food and nutrition security and adaptation to climate change in Nariño province; and a study on the cost efficiency and supervision of the school meals programme, which was supported by WFP and made a particularly significant contribution to the development of the local capacity strengthening component of that programme.
30. The bi-national climate adaptation project with Ecuador informed the design of Colombia's ten-year plan for 2020–2029, which provides a strategic road map for ensuring the right to a balanced, nutritious and sufficient diet in a health-promoting environment for all residents, especially children and pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls. Similarly, in Norte de Santander province, WFP's technical assistance was instrumental in developing the local policy for gender-sensitive food security.
31. To mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in Arauca province WFP successfully promoted and supported the use of cash-based transfers in emergencies, including by supporting a study on crisis-responsive social protection which was used as the basis for a set of recommendations aimed at generating a normative framework for the distribution of cash assistance through the national social protection system during emergency responses.
32. The evaluation also noted room for further strengthening WFP's strategic engagement with territorial governments with a view to enhancing local institutional capacities in line with the existing capacities at the national government level.

Support for national services

33. Support for the national services dimension has two components: WFP's provision of technical assistance and support for improving government programmes for vulnerable people; and WFP's provision of specific services through the role of government contractor.
34. One of the most notable results of the first component has been the inclusion of migrants in the unified beneficiary registry for national social protection programmes (see paragraph 25), implemented by government institutions such as the Department of Social Prosperity, the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. This has improved the integration and coverage of migrant populations within social protection programmes and enhanced the complementarity of those programmes, facilitating the linking of crisis response to long-term social protection mechanisms.
35. Other examples include WFP's advocacy with local coordination teams in La Guajira, which led to adjustments in the school meals programme during emergencies; WFP's contributions to the improvement of systems for collecting data on food and nutrition security at the municipal level for use in decision-making processes in Norte de Santander, Chocó and Cauca; and WFP's support for the implementation of a home fortification strategy using

micronutrient powder, and the pilot implementation of the *Estrategia Unidades Integrales*¹⁵ in Nariño and Norte de Santander.

36. In its role of government contractor, WFP's main contributions relate to food procurement and logistics support for the implementation of the school meals programme in areas where large numbers of migrants are present. Despite occasional challenges affecting the timeliness of deliveries, counterparts and beneficiaries perceive WFP's procurement and distribution services as more efficient than those of national institutions, and they have been considered instrumental in ensuring the implementation of the school meals programme as planned.
37. Beyond the training of institutional personnel, however, there is no evidence of a formal handover plan with key performance indicators that determine when sufficient system capacity has been achieved.

Resilience building

38. WFP's resilience-related work has focused on strengthening livelihoods in the municipalities prioritized by the Government within the framework of the *Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial* ("territorially focused development programmes"), which involve two main types of activity: building assets through food assistance for assets or cash-based assistance for assets programmes; and improving market access for smallholder farmers through aggregation systems.
39. Evidence indicates that the most positive results have been achieved in the enhancement of food and nutrition security for beneficiaries, while less progress has been made in enhancing access to markets, as measured in terms of the value and volume of sales.¹⁶
40. Case studies revealed that projects promoting collective enterprises were more successful than those promoting single activities in the service sector, such as running a beauty salon. The available data do not explain this difference in results, but evidence from interviews and focus group discussions suggests that collective projects were more successful because they focused on the transformation, value addition and commercialization of goods, which – in the local setting – are considered to have greater profit margins than the provision of an individual service. Another factor highlighted by interviewees is that groups of participants had more resources and skills to deploy collectively when facing challenges, while individuals inevitably had only their own.
41. The case studies also revealed some unplanned positive benefits of the resilience projects. For example, participants in the projects for rural women in Chocó, Nariño and Cauca frequently cited positive changes in their self-esteem and increased self-confidence.
42. Despite several successful projects, however, resilience building interventions were very small in relation to needs. In addition, the effectiveness of their contributions on a large scale was hindered by fragmentation among the many small projects of short duration that arose largely from the financing structure and donors' preferences regarding the prioritization of geographical areas and the targeting of interventions.

Social cohesion and contributions to peace

43. Contributions to social cohesion and the consolidation of peace were observed as indirect consequences of the way in which activities were implemented rather than the results of the specific goods or services delivered by WFP. Consultations with beneficiaries indicate

¹⁵ Initiative aimed at promoting knowledge of nutrition and healthy lifestyles, implemented by the [Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar](#) in conjunction with WFP.

¹⁶ Details on the achievement of targets are provided in the main evaluation report.

that improvements were made in three dimensions: inter- and intracommunity relations, group solidarity and intrahousehold dynamics.

44. In the inter- and intracommunity relations dimension, the most cited examples were a project with ex-combatants in Norte de Santander, in which activities always involved mixed groups of ex-combatants and members of the host community and included exercises in social inclusion and the appreciation of differences; and school meals interventions in La Guajira, Barranquilla, Santa Marta, Cúcuta and Arauquita, in which a campaign aimed at preventing xenophobia was implemented in addition to the delivery of food and nutrition awareness campaigns.
45. In the group solidarity dimension, qualitative evidence from focus group discussions and interviews with beneficiaries suggests that collective action in resilience programming and livelihoods strengthened group solidarity. Contributions to intrahousehold dynamics were more subtle, with projects in this dimension having the potential to influence those dynamics in two ways: through the provision of training in soft skills such as conflict resolution, which – according to respondents – could also be applied to their own household interactions; and through activities that could create the space for healthy household interactions, such as the urban gardens project in Chocó.
46. On the other hand, the evaluation also found that the absence of an explicit strategy for promoting social cohesion and the consolidation of peace limited the adoption of a more systematic approach to social cohesion and peacebuilding as cross-cutting issues in Colombia, ultimately affecting large-scale effectiveness.

Socioeconomic integration

47. WFP has recently developed a series of small pilot projects that promote the socioeconomic integration of migrants, but work in this area started under the first CSP (2017–2021), with early recovery activities for migrants and people affected by internal displacement.
48. According to the available data, almost 70 percent of the people who participated in the pilot projects, including marginalized people, ex-combatants and migrants, declared that they were able to participate in some form of income generation activity after the pilot project. The most successful interventions were entrepreneurship activities, while finding employment proved to be far more challenging for migrants. According to interviews with participants, the barriers to getting a job were related to three factors: xenophobia and the rejection of migrants; beneficiaries' limited knowledge of the companies operating in the sector; and their lack of relevant experience or the necessary qualifications.

Cross-cutting issues

Gender and ethnicity

49. The country office has made progress in gender mainstreaming notably in:
 - the integration of gender and ethnicity considerations into the design and implementation of projects;
 - the presentation of data disaggregated by gender and age in follow-up reports;
 - the integration of gender issues into training exercises; and
 - the allocation of budgets for specific gender interventions.
50. There is also evidence of progress in the empowerment of women, for example through resilience building activities. However, multiple sources also cited new opportunities for gender mainstreaming. For example, in the rural women initiative, when selecting activities, women's domestic workload could have been taken more fully into consideration, teams trained in protection could have been selected, and talks on gender issues could have included both men and women.

51. Notably, the evaluation found that the approach to gender equality at the programme level continues to depend on ad hoc decisions that are based on the resources available for the individual project. Gender advisers are hired by field offices or linked to the budgets of specific projects, which results in high staff turnover and creates challenges for staff retention and the consistency of approaches and strategic coordination among staff members.

Humanitarian principles

52. The CSP systematically adhered to the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, particularly in relation to:
- the prioritization of the most vulnerable people based on context analysis and verification exercises;
 - the inclusion of marginalized groups, without discrimination based on ethnic origin, positioning in the conflict (for ex-combatant communities) or residence in the areas of influence of specific armed groups; and
 - the systematic verification and validation of government databases in order to prevent any bias in targeting.

Protection

53. The CSP has achieved good results in terms of protection. No evidence indicated that any protection challenges were encountered during the period evaluated, despite the massive expansion of the response for Venezuelan migrants and WFP's presence in remote and challenging areas.

Accountability to affected populations

54. Available data suggest that accountability to affected populations continues to evolve, although improvements were observed during the implementation of the current CSP, notably the strengthening of complaint and feedback mechanisms through the use of telephones, emails and internet-based chat boxes.
55. Ensuring that beneficiaries are well informed about the projects remains a challenge, especially in very isolated areas. Focus group discussions consistently indicated that beneficiaries were grateful for the help provided but could not coherently articulate the objectives and duration of projects. Community leaders, who participated in the beneficiary selection process, usually knew the scope of the project better than the participants themselves, suggesting that more efforts are needed in this area.

Environment

56. Environmental considerations occupy a prominent place in the CSP document and in programme guidance, but there is little evidence of the integration of environmental risk assessments into CSP activities.

Sustainability

57. From a political and institutional perspective, there are good prospects for the sustainability of results thanks to the CSP's strategic alignment with national priorities, and WFP's proven ability to adapt to and respond in a dynamic environment, including changes in government, without losing track of its mandate. The capacities installed in national institutions is another positive element that fosters sustainability.
58. However, the absence of a transition strategy for interventions in which WFP serves as a government contractor generates uncertainties regarding the sustainability of the approach followed, which seems geared towards the temporary filling of gaps. In addition, financial sustainability will depend on the availability of domestic resources, which will depend largely on national political decision making beyond WFP's control.

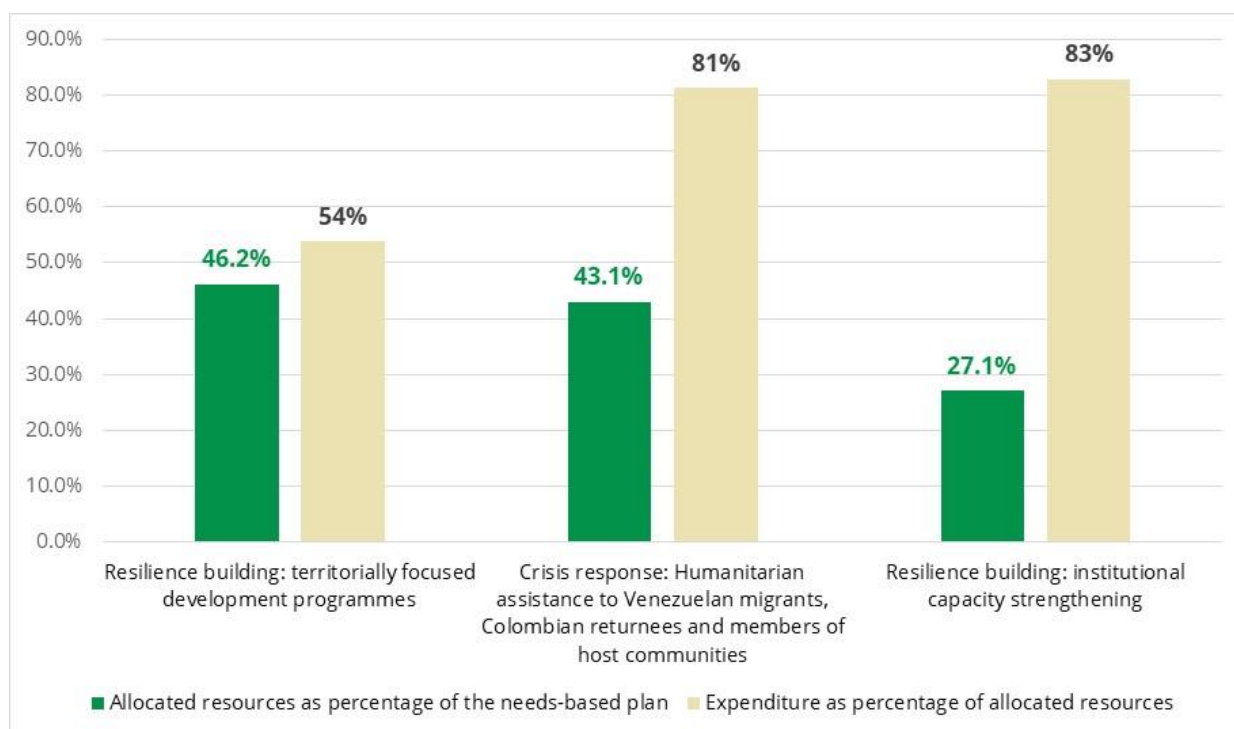
59. It is too early to assess the sustainability of the benefits generated at the community and individual levels, and insufficient data are available. However, the limited coverage and duration of resilience building interventions imply that there are challenges for the consolidation of results.

To what extent has WFP used its resources effectively to contribute to country strategic plan outputs and strategic outcomes?

Operational efficiency

60. WFP is widely perceived as being timely and agile in its delivery of support and more responsive to changing circumstances than are other organizations or municipal agencies. However, the organization has encountered challenges in delivering outputs within the planned timelines owing to internal administrative and bureaucratic hurdles. Regarding budget implementation, there are significant variations between years and activities, and data gaps make it difficult to draw conclusions. However, aggregated data (see figure 5) reveal a particularly low rate of budget implementation for resilience building activities at the community level.

Figure 5: Funding levels and budget implementation rates by focus area



Source: Country portfolio budget resources overview (data extracted in June 2023).

Depth and breadth of coverage

61. Decisions regarding geographical coverage and the targeting of beneficiaries were largely evidence-based, and WFP was able to assist the most vulnerable people and communities, including women, Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant people, in very isolated and hard-to-reach communities.
62. While covering a wide range of geographical areas, ecosystems and cultures, WFP interventions were of limited scale in relation to needs, particularly in resilience building.
63. Donor preferences in relation to targeting and geographical prioritization were not always in line with the available evidence regarding vulnerability, or with an integrated territorial approach, which intensified the geographical and thematic fragmentation, thereby limiting internal and external coherence.

Cost efficiency

64. Transfer costs by modality and per beneficiary have improved over the period evaluated despite fluctuations over the years and among activities. Other than in 2022, cash-based transfers proved the most cost-efficient modality for the provision of humanitarian assistance, with an average cost per beneficiary of USD 4.54 compared with USD 12.31 for food transfers.
65. However, it is concerning that the share of direct support costs as a percentage of total direct costs is increasing (see table 4). Notably, in 2022 the share of direct support costs was significantly higher than in 2020, although total direct costs were similar in both years. This is in part owing to the duplication of data resulting from the implementation of multiple projects under a single activity; it also reflects significant growth in staff numbers.

TABLE 4: DIRECT SUPPORT COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL DIRECT COSTS, 2017–2022					
	Country strategic plan for 2017–2021				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Direct support costs	1 549 587	4 387 687	3 469 565	4 462 702	2 173 117
Total direct costs	13 354 046	48 537 279	72 191 132	117 203 668	19 696 849
Direct support costs as % of total direct costs	11.6	9.0	4.8	3.8	11.0
	Country strategic plan for 2021–2024				
	2021	2022			
Direct support costs	4 708 935	6 795 238			
Total direct costs	102 491 545	116 723 136			
Direct support costs as % of total direct costs	4.6	5.8			

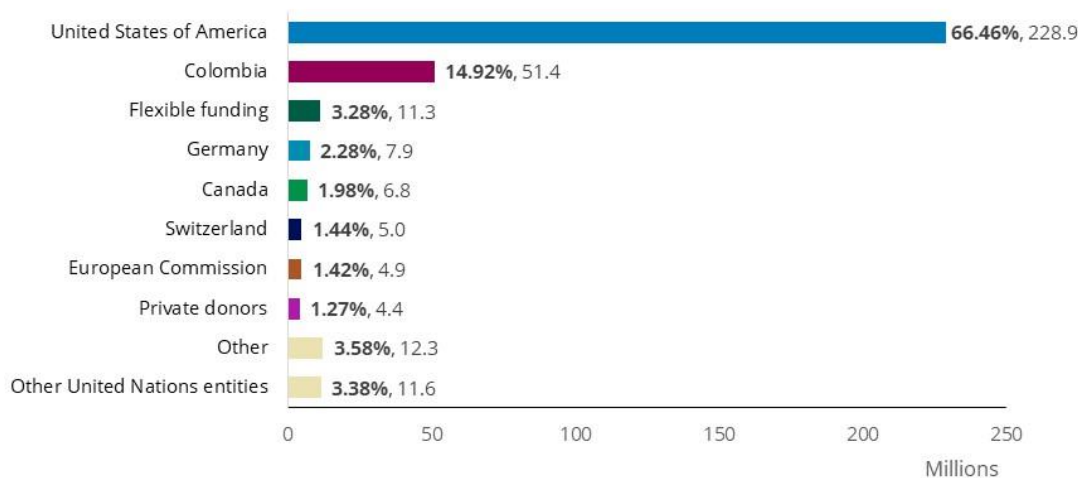
Sources: WFP. [Annual country reports – Colombia 2017–2022](#).

What are the factors that explain WFP's performance and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected under the country strategic plan?

Availability of adequate, flexible and predictable resources

66. Funding shortages were a key factor limiting the scale of WFP's interventions in relation to needs: the CSP was 40.2 percent funded in June 2023.
67. Most of the funding received came from the United States of America and the Colombian Government (figure 6), with the rest coming from a range of minor donors. High dependency on a single donor presents significant risks for the continuity of programmes should that donor reduce its contributions. That risk was materializing when the evaluation was being completed.

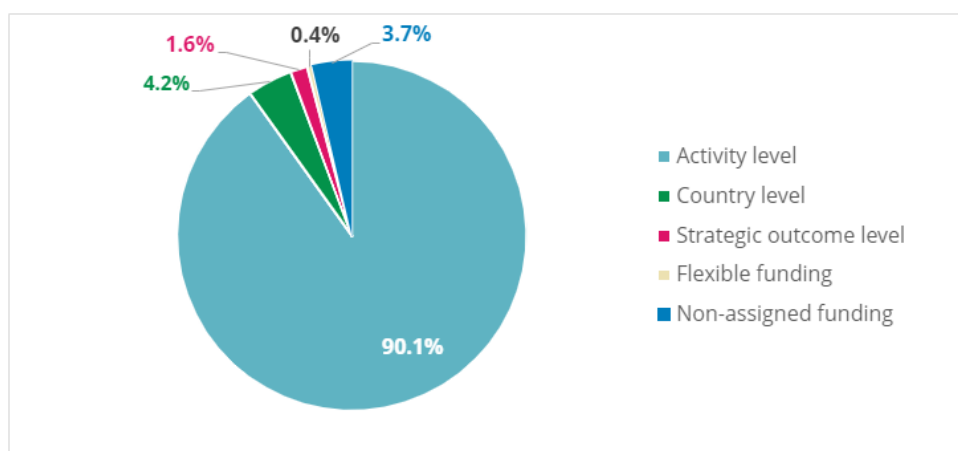
Figure 6: Funding sources as shares of total allocated resources, country strategic plan for 2021–2024



Source: Country portfolio budget resources overview (data extracted in June 2023).

68. The relative fragmentation of the smaller contributions, coupled with the dominance of earmarking at the activity level (figure 7) and the generally short duration of the grants received, posed challenges to the layering and integration of activities and to the consolidation of results, particularly at the community level.

Figure 7: Allocated resources by level of earmarking



Source: Distribution contribution and forecast statistics (data extracted in June 2023).

Internal processes

69. The significant expansion of the country office to address multiple crises came at the cost of an increasingly bureaucratic structure for programme management, which limited the flexibility, efficiency and internal coordination of WFP's response.

Programme design and the availability and use of monitoring data

70. The country office was guided by a strong conceptual framework and strategic vision, but that vision was not fully reflected in programme documents. For example, in the Colombian context, the corporate results framework with which the CSP was aligned was of limited utility in tracking and reporting on progress and in strategic decision making during programme implementation. In addition, the rigidity of the CSP's line of sight and the corresponding management structures limited internal coherence.

Partnerships

71. WFP's solid strategic, technical and operational partnerships with the Government at the national level were instrumental in ensuring the continuity of engagement throughout changes in government. At the territorial level, WFP maintains solid partnerships with other United Nations entities, but strategic engagement with local governments could be enhanced. Partnerships with the private sector have potential and are a priority in the CSP, but they are still incipient and there are challenges for their coherent and strategic coordination.

Staffing

72. Staff numbers in the country office grew from approximately 100 people in 2017 to 390 in May 2023; women make up 55 percent of the workforce. The expansion occurred mainly in response to the increasing demand for logistics support for the provision of humanitarian assistance but also because of the hiring of additional sectoral expertise, including for the establishment of a research, assessment and monitoring unit and an innovation hub; for advisers on Indigenous, gender or protection issues; and for the security unit.
73. While enabling the country office to respond to growing needs, the steep rise in staffing also generated challenges in ensuring adequate selection processes and induction into WFP systems, policies and procedures. In addition, the hiring of personnel linked to individual projects posed challenges for talent retention, with negative effects on institutional memory and the consistency of the approaches followed.

Conclusions

74. The CSP proved to be highly relevant to circumstances in Colombia and responsive to evolving needs and priorities. Despite challenges in meeting the scale of the needs, the CSP complemented the Government's response to multiple humanitarian crises and enabled WFP to reach the most vulnerable and isolated communities using its comparative advantages in logistics support and its field presence. Through its complementarity with the Government's response, the CSP also contributed to results in sectors that can be considered non-traditional for WFP, such as social cohesion and socioeconomic integration, within the framework of national efforts to promote integrated local development and peace. WFP has achieved relevant results in those areas and is gathering significant learning from its experience.
75. Moreover, building on its technical expertise in food and nutrition security and cash-based transfers, WFP helped to strengthen the enabling normative and programmatic framework for reducing hunger and malnutrition during emergencies and through local development initiatives. Notably, WFP's contribution was instrumental in the systematic adoption of cash-based transfers in national emergency responses, an important innovation in Colombia.

76. While acknowledging the CSP's positive contributions to the capacities of national and local institutions, however, the evaluation concluded that a more systematic approach to capacity strengthening, with clear strategies for the transition to full national ownership of interventions, could have enhanced the effectiveness and sustainability of results. In particular, when WFP acts as a government contractor for the implementation of national programmes there is a high risk that it ends up substituting government capacities, resulting in very limited prospects for the sustainability of results if no exit strategies are envisaged.
77. As a single programmatic framework at the country level, the CSP allowed WFP to expand its range of partners and its thematic focus and to attract resources, but the relative fragmentation of the donor base and donors' preferences in relation to targeting and geographical prioritization generated a multiplicity of short-term projects with challenges for the maintenance of strategic and operational coherence.
78. Under the CSP, gender considerations were systematically integrated into programming. While positive contributions were identified in terms of women's empowerment, approaches aimed at promoting women's participation in WFP interventions predominate, and more could be done to influence the transformation of the structural problems that affect the ability of women to realize their potential in society. Ethnicity considerations were also an important element of programming and efforts were made to ensure the inclusion of different ethnic groups in the design of WFP interventions.
79. In accordance with corporate standards, the country office's monitoring systems have evolved to track the outputs and beneficiaries of individual projects, mainly for reporting purposes, but proved to be of limited utility for the strategic management of programmes and the capture of results at the outcome level over the long term, particularly in areas such as social cohesion, socioeconomic integration and capacity strengthening.

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
<p>1. Strategic and conceptual framework: Develop a conceptual and strategic framework for each thematic area of intervention, based on WFP's comparative advantages and changes in the operational environment.</p> <p>1.1 Maintain flexibility in the thematic areas of intervention so that they respond to changing circumstances and incorporate the core areas of the country office's work, including the triple nexus, peacebuilding, the fight against hunger, adaptation to climate change, social inclusion and differential approaches.</p> <p>1.2 Consider exchanging experiences with other WFP country offices that are developing strategies in similar settings.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau, headquarters	High	July 2024
<p>2. Capacity strengthening strategy: Develop a strategy for strengthening national capacities that clearly defines the role of WFP in a middle-income country such as Colombia.</p> <p>The strategy should have a vision of sustainability, encompass all capacity strengthening interventions in all thematic areas, and be tailored to the country setting and based on the comparative advantages of WFP in each thematic area of intervention.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau, headquarters	High	October 2024
<p>3. Thematic and geographical focus: Define clear criteria for setting the thematic and geographical focus of interventions so as to avoid the dispersion of effort and optimize internal synergies. In defining the criteria, consider carrying out a systematization exercise on the lessons learned from the two country strategic plans.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau, headquarters	Medium	July 2024
<p>4. Evidence generation: Generate evidence from analysis and the systematization of lessons learned, focusing on the following:</p> <p>4.1 Articulate a more explicit model for work at the triple nexus based on an intervention approach that allows the capture of results in social cohesion and contributions to peace.</p>	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau, headquarters	High	September 2024

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
<p>4.2 Based on corporate updates, identify mechanisms for tracking long-term progress under the country strategic plan in terms of the non-traditional results that have little visibility in the corporate results framework (such as social cohesion).</p> <p>4.3 Develop monitoring mechanisms for verifying the transition of beneficiaries from crisis response to early recovery and development support.</p> <p>4.4 Identify mechanisms for reporting on the long-term effects on beneficiaries who participate in programmes and link those mechanisms to other types of medium- and long-term programmes for early recovery and development, including those that contribute to social cohesion, resilience building and economic integration.</p>					
<p>5. Review of internal processes: Conduct a review of internal processes with a view to improving internal coordination and expediting the implementation of programmes. As part of the consolidation and review exercises that are already under way, the country office may consider the following:</p> <p>5.1 Continue the ongoing review of the corporate framework for internal processes.</p> <p>5.2. Identify critical processes and ways of improving them.</p> <p>5.3 Seek to reduce the number of approval lines and points in internal processes.</p> <p>5.4 Develop process indicators, such as improvements in the achievement rates of output targets or the timeliness of those achievements, for measuring the effect of the internal adjustments.</p>	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau, headquarters	High	May 2024

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
<p>6. Systematization of resource mobilization processes for project management: Standardize design and management processes with a view to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the country office's mobilization efforts. For example, the country office could do the following:</p> <p>6.1 Standardize the process for writing proposals, clarifying who does what and when.</p> <p>6.2 Standardize the processes for reviewing and adjusting interventions, allowing sufficient flexibility to adapt them to the varying needs of different donors.</p> <p>6.3 Systematize the learning from projects so that it can be used to mobilize new resources.</p> <p>6.4 Exchange experiences with other WFP country offices in similar situations.</p>	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau, headquarters	Medium	July 2024