World Food Programme
Programme Alimentaire Mondial
Programa Mundial de Alimentos
برنامج الأغذية العالمي

Executive Board
Annual session
Rome, 23–26 June 2026

Distribution: General
Date: 23 April 2026
Original: English

Agenda item 7
WFP/EB.A/2026/7-G/2
Oversight functions
For decision

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Summary report on the strategic evaluation of WFP's support for social protection

Executive summary

This evaluation[1] was conducted to support institutional learning on WFP's efforts to strengthen national social protection systems and programmes, as well as its broader engagement in the social protection sector. It was conducted in 2025 in the context of the start of a new WFP strategic plan cycle (2026–2029) and the significant changes in the organization's operating and partnership landscape, which require WFP to identify and focus on areas with the greatest potential for results.

Overall, the evaluation found that the quality of WFP's strategy for support to social protection was high and in line with international thinking, as well as WFP normative frameworks. WFP made notable contributions to social protection, although the consolidation and sustainability of results are still a work in progress. WFP is now widely viewed as a key actor in the social protection sector and its support and partnership is increasingly sought, thanks to well-recognized comparative advantages in operational capacities and field presence, particularly in fragile and conflict settings, food security analysis, nutrition and disaster risk management expertise.

At the system level, WFP contributed to creating conducive policy environments for shock-responsive social protection and school meals, as well as for the incorporation of food fortification in national nutrition policies and programmes. However, it did not play a lead role in supporting the development of overarching social protection policies or strategies, as there are other partners better positioned to engage at that level, mostly international financial institutions. WFP's key contributions to institutional capacity include promoting and facilitating links between

[1] The full evaluation report and all related documents are available on WFP's website: https://www.wfp.org/publications/wfp-support-social-protection-strategic-evaluation.

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

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disaster risk prevention and social protection, and the development of social registries and other common digital platforms. Challenges related to transferability, sustainability and data sharing, however, still need to be addressed.

Coverage of national social protection programmes was expanded with WFP support in numerous instances, but trade-offs between coverage and adequacy remain, and the potential for striking the right balance is often challenged by limitations in government fiscal capacity. Similarly, effects on comprehensiveness of social protection programmes have been limited, often due to coordination-related challenges within WFP and among national institutions. Finally, WFP made significant contributions to the accountability, transparency and efficiency of national programmes, and to geographic and refugee inclusion, but approaches to promoting inclusion and empowering women can be more strategically addressed.

Analysing different modalities of engagement, the evaluation found that if technical assistance is provided without clear pathways towards achieving medium-term goals, the consolidation and sustainability of results can be compromised. Similarly, pilot projects have been effective when objectives have been clearly defined in advance, in agreement with governments. Engagement with international financial institutions is promising in relation to greater financial sustainability, but short-term results of the on-demand services that WFP provides to governments lack prospects for technical sustainability unless they are coupled with strategies and resources for national capacity strengthening, as well as clear transition and handover plans. In that regard, successful support for nationally led and sustainable systems requires adaptation and flexibility, which may sometimes include compromising on WFP's ways of working.

The evaluation made four recommendations in relation to clarifying the criteria used to prioritize areas and intervention modalities; further developing the skills of WFP's social protection workforce and facilitating greater sharing of knowledge, experience and lessons across offices; deepening strategic partnerships with international financial institutions and other United Nations entities; and strengthening the results-based management of WFP's support for social protection.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the strategic evaluation of WFP's support for social protection (WFP/EB.A/2026/7-G/2) and the management response (WFP/EB.A/2026/7-G/2/Add.1).

* 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.

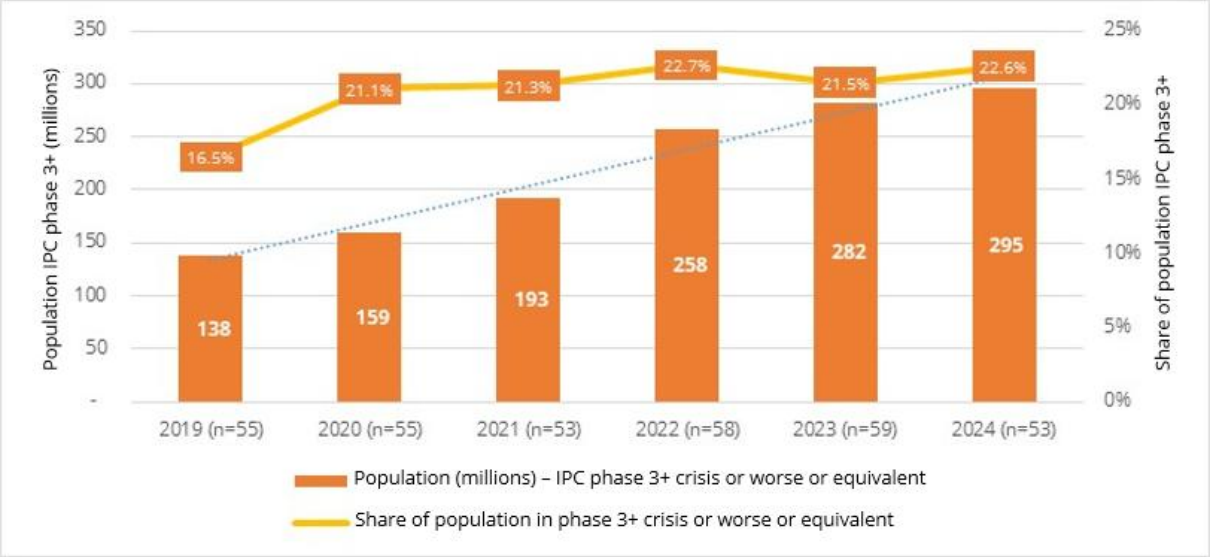
Introduction

Context

1. Global progress in expanding social protection systems has accelerated, with more than half of the world's population covered by at least one form of social protection in 2024.[2] Nonetheless, substantial gaps persist: 3.8 billion people remain entirely unprotected, and there are significant disparities in coverage and adequacy across regions, genders and age groups.[3]

2. At the same time, the frequency and duration of crises driven by conflict, climate and economic shocks, and pandemics have increased, reinforcing structural inequalities and contributing to rising food insecurity. The number of people facing crisis-level food insecurity more than doubled over the evaluation period, while those experiencing catastrophic hunger increased twenty-three-fold, largely due to crises in the State of Palestine and the Sudan.[4]

Figure 1: Acute food insecurity trends, 2019–2024



Source: Food Security Information Network. 2025. *Global Report on Food Crises 2025.*
Abbreviations: IPC = Integrated Food Security Phase Classification.

3. In this context, work on strengthening national systems and linking humanitarian assistance with social protection has become increasingly urgent. Evidence shows that strong social protection systems enhance crisis preparedness and support just transitions when paired with broader sectoral investments.[5] However, while global financing for social protection surged temporarily during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, it has since fluctuated, and recent major donor cuts reflect a growing long-term financing gap that threatens progress in expanding social protection in low-income and crisis-affected countries.

[2] International Labour Organization. 2024. *World Social Protection Report 2024–2026.*

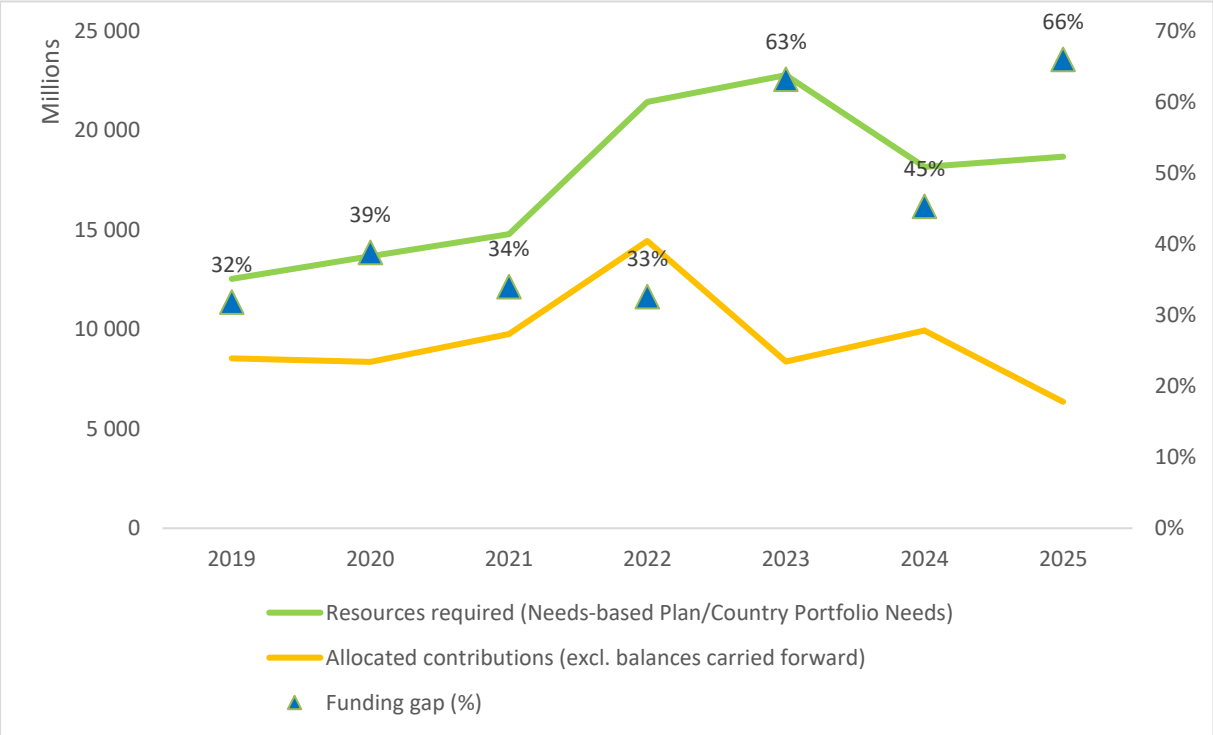
[3] *Ibid*.

[4] Food Security Information Network and Global Network Against Food Crises. 2025. *Global Report on Food Crises 2025*. The number of people classified as being in Integrated Food Security Phase Classification phase 5 almost tripled between 2023 and 2024.

[5] International Labour Organization. 2024. *World Social Protection Report 2024–2026*.

4. These global challenges have significantly affected WFP, which is now facing the most severe funding crisis in its history. After a period of increasing resources until 2022, the gap between allocated contributions and assessed needs widened sharply, reaching a record 63 percent in 2023. This trend has persisted, with funding gaps of 45 percent in 2024 and 66 percent in 2025, underscoring the growing mismatch between escalating humanitarian needs and available resources (figure 2).

Figure 2: WFP's resource requirements and allocated contributions, 2019–2025



Source: Internal reporting on the distribution of contribution and forecast statistics, as of 29 December 2025.

5. In 2024 and 2025, WFP initiated a major internal restructuring to improve organizational efficiency and address reduced funding. The reorganization included the adoption of the "one global headquarters" model, which consolidates headquarters and regional bureaux into a single global structure, as well as significant staff reductions. In parallel, technical portfolios were streamlined: the school meal and social protection teams were merged under one director in 2024, and in late 2025, the nutrition, school meal and social protection services were integrated under a single director to align oversight and service delivery.

Evaluation subject

6. The WFP strategy for support to social protection[6] focused on helping countries to strengthen and expand inclusive and risk-informed social protection systems, with the ultimate aim of strengthening food availability, access and utilization, thereby enabling households to meet other essential needs and reinforcing their overall resilience to shocks.

7. WFP pursued these intended results by defining priority areas of work and identifying two main modalities of support, as set out in box 1. Notably, the strategy emphasizes that, for WFP's work to be considered as contributing to social protection, it must be in support of a national social protection system.

[6] WFP. 2021. *Strategy for Support to Social Protection*.

Box 1: WFP strategy for support to social protection, 2021

Vision: "By 2030 people will have substantially increased access to national social protection systems that safeguard and foster their ability to meet their food security, nutrition and associated essential needs, and to manage the risks and shocks they face".

The strategy has two distinct but interconnected priorities: social protection that, first, helps people to meet their food security, nutrition and associated essential needs; and second, helps them to manage risks and shocks.

By implementing the strategy, WFP aims to promote the inclusion of people with diverse and often intersecting vulnerabilities and inequalities by recognizing and helping to address the significant barriers and challenges that they face in accessing and benefiting from social protection.

The strategy is organized around two modes of support and four areas of work contributing to 12 building blocks of a national social protection system.

Modes of support: The two main modes (which may also be combined) are as follows:

1. Supporting nationally led social protection systems and programmes (e.g. providing advice and guidance to national actors, and/or delivering **social protection** on behalf of national actors).
2. Implementing complementary actions in WFP's own programming that are made with the clear intent to strengthen national systems.

Areas of work:

- Contribute to strengthening the national social protection system architecture.
- Support enhancements to the quantity and quality of national social protection programming.
- Improve the effectiveness of social protection in the shared space between humanitarian, development and peace actors.
- Build social protection partnerships and evidence globally.[7]

The first two areas of work strengthen the 12 building blocks of a national social protection system.[8]

8. The strategy has a theory of change that sets out WFP's intended pathways towards achieving social protection impact, defining outputs and outcomes at different levels.

9. The evaluation assessed progress towards the intended results set out in the strategy, analysed positive and negative unintended outcomes, and identified the key internal and external factors that enabled or hampered the successful implementation of the strategy. In doing so, it took account of current challenges in the operating environment and identified lessons and priorities to guide WFP's future work in social protection.

Rationale

10. The evaluation was designed to consolidate lessons learned and assess progress made since the 2019 evaluation of WFP's safety nets policy, including the four years since the launch of the strategy. It was conducted in 2025 in the context of the start of a new WFP strategic plan cycle (2026–2029) and the significant changes in the organization's operating and partnership landscape, which have required WFP to identify and focus on areas that have the greatest potential for results.

11. The evaluation was primarily intended to support institutional learning. It reviewed and consolidated experience gained through WFP's efforts to strengthen national social protection systems and programmes, as well as its broader engagement in the social

[7] WFP notes that a vast amount of informal social protection also exists, but this falls outside the scope of the strategy.

[8] The 12 building blocks include issues related to systems architecture: 1) policy and legislation; 2) governance, capacity and coordination; 3) platforms and infrastructure; 4) planning and financing; as well as issues related to knowledge and learning: 5) assessments and analysis; 6) advocacy; 7) engagement and communications; and 8) monitoring, evaluation and learning. The remaining building blocks concern programme features: 9) design of programme parameters; 10) registration and enrolment; 11) benefit delivery; and 12) accountability, protection and assurance.

protection sector. The aim was to generate lessons that can inform and reinforce WFP's approach as it begins implementing the new strategic plan.

12. The evaluation was conducted between February 2025 to February 2026. It adopted a theory-based, mixed-methods approach, collecting data at global, regional and country levels from primary and secondary sources, through desk review, key informant interviews and direct observation. Case studies were conducted in five countries (Burundi, the Niger, Pakistan, Peru and Rwanda) and five additional country offices were engaged through case studies conducted remotely (the Caribbean multi-country office, and country offices in Iraq, Mauritania, the Philippines and Zambia).

Key evaluation messages

Quality and relevance of the strategy

The quality of the strategy was high and in line with international thinking, as well as WFP's normative framework. It was based on a clear theory of change that set out the logic of interventions from activities to results, although some important assumptions in relation to WFP's funding structure and internal capacity, as well as national political and economic variables, were missing. The broad menu of potential activities and modalities of engagement envisaged by the strategy is relevant to addressing evolving humanitarian needs and permits adaptation to different operational settings, but the complementary actions modality diluted focus and led to the mis-categorization of activities as social protection.

13. The evaluation found that WFP's strategy for support to social protection is aligned with international discourse on social protection and with social protection priorities set out in Agenda 2030. Its focus on strengthening national social protection systems anchored in national strategies and legislation, including in fragile and humanitarian settings, is valued by external stakeholders that play an important role in the social protection sector and is in line with the principles of other major international agreements promoting universal social protection systems, such as the Social Protection Floor Initiative, Universal Social Protection Initiative (USP2030) and the Grand Bargain.

14. The evidence found that WFP's country-level social protection activities are largely aligned with national priorities and context-specific needs. The strategy included an assumption that WFP would channel support through national systems that can absorb and account for assistance, but it could have more strongly advocated for working with national systems as a default, even in complex settings and sudden-onset crises. This reflects a broader lesson learned among international actors in relation to the response to COVID-19. The strategy is also in line with the WFP localization policy, even though the strategy predates that document.

15. The formulation of the strategy was broadly robust, strongly evidence-based and consistent with WFP strategic plan, policies and programmatic approaches. It was clear in its intent and included a solid theory of change that set out the expected results and the key assumptions underpinning the strategy. The wide range of activities illustrated in the strategy allows country offices to select those most relevant to their setting. It also opened for new pathways for social protection support by endorsing on-demand service provision.

16. The evaluation found that the extent to which the strategy is utilized by country office teams varies considerably. While the strategy provided useful framing for some to develop country strategic plan (CSP) activities linked to social protection, for others it was difficult to engage with because of its length and complexity. The inclusion of the modality of "complementary actions in WFP's own programming" left space for interpretation by country offices, diluting focus and leading to the mis-categorization of activities as social protection that do not actually support or align with national systems. This mis-categorization hampers WFP's ability to extract from its reporting systems information that accurately links expenditures to activities and results.

17. Similarly, the results chain did not include a clear pathway for instances where WFP fully manages or implements a social protection programme on behalf of a government – a situation that straddles the two modalities of the strategy. Finally, some important assumptions in relation to WFP's funding structure and internal capacity, as well as national political and economic variables, were missing.

18. The practical arrangements made to facilitate the implementation of the strategy were also robust. They included an implementation plan that defined baselines and progress indicators, identified financial and human resource requirements and was accompanied by guidance documents.

Effectiveness of WFP interventions and sustainability of results

Policy environments and institutional capacity

WFP is helping to foster conducive policy environments for social protection at the global and country levels. It has made substantial progress towards establishing itself as a credible and valued actor in the social protection sector since 2019 but rarely plays a lead role or makes significant contributions to the development of overarching national social protection policies and strategies, given that other partners are often better positioned to do so.

19. The evaluation found that WFP has contributed to the development of national social protection policies and strategies in different settings, ranging from fragile and crisis situations to more stable environments. Significant contributions were identified in the areas of shock-responsive social protection (SRSP) and school feeding, in fragile and conflict-affected countries, as well as in the incorporation of food fortification in national nutrition policies and programmes. WFP's evidence generation, advocacy at the national, regional and global levels and technical assistance have been instrumental, but national political commitment and fiscal space are also key variables explaining success.

20. WFP has been actively engaged at the global level in advancing key social protection initiatives, including the global forum on fragility and conflict, which led to the creation of a high-level panel and subsequent catalytic agenda seeking to expand social protection in those settings, and the Global Shield against Climate Risks,[9] which promotes links between disaster risk financing, anticipatory action and social protection.

[9] An initiative launched by the Vulnerable Twenty Group together with the Group of Seven, see: https://www.globalshield.org.

21. Alongside these important contributions to specific social protection schemes, however, the evaluation found that some CSPs state ambitions for WFP to play a lead role in supporting governments with the development of overarching social protection policies or strategies. There are other partners better positioned to engage in overarching social protection policies, including, for example, the World Bank and other international financial institutions (IFIs).

WFP contributes to strengthening institutional capacity for social protection mainly in relation to the development of social registries or other common digital platforms. While acknowledging important contributions by WFP, which are instrumental to the effective functioning of social protection systems, the evaluation found that challenges related to approaches around transferability, sustainability and data sharing still need to be addressed.

22. Some illustrative examples of positive contributions were found in countries such as Somalia, where WFP supported the development of the unified social registry, which serves as the backbone of the Government's social protection delivery system; Jordan, where WFP investments in digital payments filled critical gaps, establishing systems which enabled the national aid fund to scale up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and India, where WFP support for the targeted public distribution system in the form of digitization and data analytics resulted in improved socioeconomic targeting, fewer inclusion and exclusion errors and streamlined processes.

23. Besides these and other success stories, WFP's experience with digital advisory and solutions services for governments reveals critical lessons about the mismatch between growing demand for such services and organizational readiness. By November 2020, more than 20 governments had asked WFP to share its digital beneficiary information and transfer management platform (SCOPE) for use in social registries, cash transfer programmes and school feeding systems. However, internal audits and strategic reviews conducted between 2021 and 2023 found that SCOPE was not readily transferable to governments and identified fundamental gaps for digital advisory and solutions services in relation to WFP's strategy and value proposition; standardized service delivery models; project management practices; WFP's ability to share data with governments; partner infrastructure and digital literacy required to sustain technologies; planning and funding for the long-term WFP support that is required; and internal coordination of teams working on similar issues. WFP lacked guidance on when to use different approaches and on the use of replicable "digital public goods" and the organization faced significant technical capacity constraints.

24. Risk management concerns raised included missing critical data and privacy safeguards, inadequate "do no harm" frameworks for fragile settings, and significant reputational risks when WFP technologies prove difficult to transfer and sustain. This has led to calls for a fundamental shift in WFP's approach – moving from solution development to advisory services – and for corporate approval for any solution development, accompanied by costed business plans with use cases, capacity requirements and handover strategies.

25. The Technology Division issued interim guidance in October 2025 that emphasized an advisory-only role for WFP, although the guidance did not include input from the Programme and Operations Department, demonstrating continued internal coordination gaps. Stakeholders expressed concerns that overly restrictive guidance may limit WFP's ability to support social registries and digital cash transfers when governments or donors want WFP to play a more direct role, creating tension between risk management and operational relevance. While WFP has significant operational expertise and credibility, the full realization of its potential as a valuable digital transformation partner will require fundamental shifts in

approach, with the development of new mentalities, capabilities, processes and staff profiles suited to long-term capacity strengthening rather than direct implementation.

Quantity[10] of social protection programmes: coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy

WFP has helped to expand social protection coverage in numerous instances, albeit often on a temporary basis apart from school feeding activities and a few large-scale programmes implemented on behalf of governments. WFP's contributions to the comprehensiveness of social protection assistance are more limited and are hindered by internal factors that often prevent the layering of different types of assistance. There was little evidence of the influence of WFP on the adequacy of social protection programme benefits and transfer values, which is often not feasible given limitations in government fiscal capacity.

26. The evaluation found evidence that WFP has contributed to expanded social protection coverage in numerous instances through training and technical assistance, as well as through supply chain operations, vulnerability analysis and mapping, and particularly the direct delivery of assistance that complemented national programmes. Examples include work in Peru, where WFP technical assistance provided to the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion to establish the social protection and emergency response system led to the vertical and horizontal expansion of social protection programmes and allowed the Government to provide cash-based transfers to more than 5 million households. Meanwhile, in Lebanon the WFP-implemented national poverty targeting programme expanded coverage from 72,000 individuals in early 2019 to 91,200 individuals by the end of that year; the programme was then handed over to Government and by 2024 had been scaled up to reach 413,000 vulnerable Lebanese. In the Dominican Republic, the national social protection programme established to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic expanded from 800,000 to 1.5 million households with WFP technical assistance provided between 2020 and 2021, although it was scaled back in 2022. The evaluation noted, however, that across various settings, such expansions in coverage have often been temporary by design, aside from school feeding and a few large-scale government programmes, such as the national poverty targeting programme in Lebanon.

27. WFP is contributing to increased comprehensiveness of social protection programmes related to nutrition and school feeding. The design and implementation of the Benazir Nashonuma Programme in Pakistan represents a success story: WFP delivery of specialized nutritious foods for pregnant and breastfeeding women and children under 2 complements Government-led cash transfers, behavioural change communication and referrals to health and nutrition services.

28. Despite this and other success stories, programme integration within WFP programmes and activities remains limited, particularly across social protection and resilience, which is a missed opportunity to contribute to comprehensiveness. Social protection work was found to be often isolated structurally, financially and in results architecture, although the evaluation observed that this is a systemic issue going beyond social protection. As also noted in the mid-term evaluation of the WFP strategic plan for 2022–2025, internal competition and the fragmentation of country office work streams and teams, and gaps in

[10] The quantity of national social protection programming, as included in the strategy and Universal Social Protection 2030, is the combination of the coverage of national social protection programmes; comprehensiveness, intended as the range of needs being addressed by national social protection systems and programmes; and the adequacy of benefits, including transfer values.

overarching programme management can also hamper WFP's ability to implement integrated programmes effectively.

29. The adequacy of social protection programme benefits is an area in which the evaluation found WFP to have had limited effectiveness as the level of benefits is dependent on available social development financing and on domestic political considerations. A balance often has to be struck between the adequacy of transfers and the desired coverage level, and such decisions lie outside WFP's direct control.

30. Examples of advocacy aimed at increasing transfer values were found in the Caribbean, where WFP has worked with governments to conduct scenario planning related to potential SRSP transfers, although the effects of this work on adequacy are unclear from the available evidence; Burundi, where the same group of refugees received humanitarian cash transfers and were included in the national MERANKABANDI programme, which contributed to improved overall transfer adequacy; and Rwanda, where WFP engaged with the Government to improve the adequacy of school meals.

Quality of social protection programmes: efficiency, transparency, shock-responsiveness and inclusion

WFP has contributed to making social protection programmes more shock responsive in many places. It has also made significant contributions to the efficiency, transparency and accountability of national programmes. WFP has also had a strong effect on geographic and refugee inclusion, but WFP could be more strategic when promoting inclusion and empowering women, girls and other marginalized population groups within national programming.

31. WFP has made substantial contributions to the cost efficiency and transparency of national social protection programmes by leveraging its expertise in procurement and logistics. The evaluation found examples of WFP technical assistance resulting in savings in transport costs of national targeted distribution programmes, as well as in the costs per meal of school feeding programmes. Similarly, WFP technical assistance provided to establish community feedback mechanisms for national social protection programmes resulted in enhanced transparency and accountability to affected people.

32. On-demand procurement and logistic services provided by WFP have also resulted in efficiency and transparency gains for national social protection programmes in terms of cheaper food products, faster procurement processes and more systematic use of competitive bidding. However, while on-demand service provision can improve efficiency and transparency, the evaluation observed that such gains are unlikely to be sustainable unless service provision agreements include a capacity strengthening component and a transition plan. Moreover, when these agreements do not include a role for WFP in last-mile distribution and monitoring, the potential risk of WFP being associated with politicized use of food assistance could harm its reputation of impartiality and neutrality.

33. WFP has contributed to making social protection systems more shock responsive in several cases. Its technical capacities in this area and relationships with a range of social protection and disaster risk management actors are seen as important areas of comparative advantage. Examples of concrete contributions include successful advocacy in relation to cash transfers and indicate a shift towards pre-emptive rather than reactive disaster response strategies, as in the Philippines, where WFP supported the Government in developing a bill – which was signed into law as the "Declaration of State of Imminent Disaster Act" (Republic Act No. 12287) on 12 September 2025 – and is now supporting the drafting of accompanying implementation rules and regulations. Similarly, in Belize, WFP piloted mobile money

transfers in response to Hurricane Lisa, showcasing the potential for digital transfers in an environment in which social protection transfers are still largely provided in kind.

34. In some cases, WFP has been instrumental to the establishment of new government bodies for SRSP. For example, in Mauritania WFP and the World Bank supported the establishment of the *Dispositif National de Prévention et de Réponse aux Crises Alimentaires et Nutritionnelles*, which in 2021 took over from WFP in leading and coordinating lean season assistance.

35. Successful SRSP requires collaboration between government actors responsible for disaster management and social protection, which can be hindered by institutional silos. In that regard, WFP still has an important role to play bringing social protection and early warning systems to develop inter-institutional SRSP policy and programming.

36. WFP has designed approaches that include or prioritize women in the social protection programmes it implements, but there is room to improve the emphasis on the autonomy and empowerment of women and girls in nationally led programmes supported by WFP. In one country, the evaluation noted the exclusion of some women from a national social protection programme based on their marital status or age at the time of pregnancy, with no WFP strategy to advocate for changes. More broadly, the extent to which corporate commitments are implemented at the country level is highly variable, and this was found to be a relatively weak area in the strategy for support to social protection.

37. WFP has been active in the inclusion of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and migrants. To cite just two examples: in Colombia, WFP facilitated the registration of 900,000 irregular migrants in a single social registry (SISBen), granting them access to all national social protection programmes and the labour market; and in Uganda, the organization supported the digital financial inclusion of refugees and the integration of refugees into government systems.

38. Full integration of refugees, IDPs and migrants into national social protection systems, however, can be challenging, including for political reasons, and evidence suggests that more could be done by WFP to advocate for such integration.

39. WFP advocacy and technical assistance have contributed to making national social protection systems more nutrition-sensitive in several countries, mainly through the introduction of food fortification in school feeding and other social protection programmes, through analytical support and through nutrition-sensitive cash transfer programmes.

40. Despite several positive examples, the evaluation found that WFP is not systematically engaged on nutrition-related aspects of social protection except in school feeding, even though such engagement might be expected given that it is an intended outcome in the strategy.

Sustainability of results

WFP contributions are more likely to be institutionally sustainable when they help to address an issue of priority to national actors and enable those actors to implement a solution that is well-adapted to the context.

WFP effects on the allocation of domestic resources for long-term social protection programming are still rare outside of school feeding, but growing partnerships with IFIs are promising.

41. The sustainability of WFP contributions to national social protection systems and programmes depends mainly on three variables: the degree of political prioritization by national governments; available financing; and explicit transition arrangements.

42. School feeding is the area in which WFP advocacy has been the most effective in fostering conducive policy and financial environments. Notably, WFP contributed to an increase in the number of countries with domestic budget allocations for school feeding from 33 in 2023 to 45 countries in 2024.[11]

43. In the Caribbean, WFP commissioned research on linking disaster risk financing to SRSP and encouraged numerous governments in that region to expand their Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility Segregated Portfolio Company. Since 2025, WFP has been supporting governments in ten countries to create links between microinsurance payouts for climate shocks and social protection programmes.

44. In a more fragile setting such as Haiti, WFP played a key facilitation role bringing together donors including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to create a coalition that made implementation of the previously adopted national social protection and promotion policy a structural benchmark tied to receiving IMF support, thereby strengthening system sustainability.[12]

45. Institutional capacities are where WFP may have the greatest impact. In this regard, evidence suggests that close engagement with national and local counterparts to design and implement technical solutions that match the context and current potential of the institutions concerned, coupled with realistic transition plans, is key to fostering sustainability.

Factors explaining performance

Modalities of intervention

WFP's technical assistance for building social protection systems has generally been appreciated by governments and other partners. However, country offices are not consistently looking at this work holistically and ensuring that each year's efforts build on the achievements and lessons learned in previous years, with a view to achieving medium-term strategic goals.

46. The provision of technical assistance to governments was the primary focus of the strategy for support to social protection and has been the most frequent modality of intervention at the country level. This included analytical work, embedded consultants, coaching, facilitation of South–South exchange, and training. This support was highly appreciated by partners, and WFP is seen as responsive to a variety of requests for support. While responsiveness is key to ensuring continued relevance, the evaluation also found that technical assistance activities often lack clear pathways and milestones towards the medium-term goals envisioned in the strategy, which may hinder the effectiveness and sustainability of this work.

WFP's delivery of social protection programmes on behalf of governments has filled important gaps in national social protection systems. However, this role needs to be understood as inherently transitional in nature.

[11] "Annual performance report for 2024" (WFP/EB.A/2025/4-A/Rev.1

[12] "Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Haiti (2018–2022)" (WFP/EB.2/2023/6-A/6).

47. WFP's delivery of social protection programmes on behalf of, and contracted by, governments, including a few examples of on-demand services, has filled important gaps in national social protection systems and institutional capacities. The main reasons WFP was chosen to fill these gaps relate closely to its field presence, operational capacity and ability to connect social protection and humanitarian assistance. WFP's role in assuring the efficient and transparent administration of funds is also worth noting, particularly in the interplay between national governments and IFIs. This gap-filling role, however, needs to be understood as inherently transitional, and the evaluation noted that it should be accompanied by a strategy for capacity strengthening and by adequate plans for a sustainable transition of activities to full implementation by national actors.

There are positive examples of pilot projects related to social protection in countries where governments have directly commissioned WFP to undertake them, or where objectives have been clearly defined in advance. However, in other cases, pilot projects have been less effective than other ways of working on social protection.

48. WFP piloting of new social protection programmes and approaches has led to greater quantity and quality of programming when governments are closely engaged. By contrast, pilot projects designed without adequate consideration of government priorities, capacities and potential for uptake had limited effects. The evaluation also found cases of pilot projects that, while not completely disconnected from governments, lacked a clear definition of what was being piloted and why.

External coherence

The external coherence of WFP's support for social protection has improved in relation to support provided by international partners, and WFP has deepened its relationships with government social protection actors and other key ministries in many countries. WFP is increasingly seen as collaborative and engaged in global and country-level multi-stakeholder platforms.

49. The evaluation found that WFP support for social protection frequently demonstrates complementarity with the work of governments and other development actors, including other United Nations entities and IFIs. Relationships with government social protection actors deepened during the period evaluated, with WFP's alignment with national coordination systems and sectoral leadership arrangements, although the depth and effectiveness of this coherence vary depending on the setting.

50. Engagement with IFIs has also deepened and matured, most notably with the World Bank and regional development banks. The models of WFP collaboration with IFIs vary in different settings, ranging from purely technical collaboration and coordination in more stable contexts to WFP's direct implementation of large-scale transitional programming, with government financing leveraging IFI resources, in more fragile settings.

51. The evaluation also found evidence of structured arrangements within the United Nations system for preventing duplication and promoting synergies between different United Nations entities through clear division of labour, outcome-based responsibilities and joint governance structures, with WFP increasingly participating in joint social protection programmes, often alongside some combination of the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Labour Organization.

52. Some overarching challenges to effective collaboration and external coherence remain. These mainly relate to WFP establishing parallel delivery or data systems that limit alignment with national social protection structures. The rationale for continuing parallel humanitarian response varied in the countries visited for the evaluation and included donor concerns regarding the channelling resources through governments, WFP incentives to deliver quickly through its own delivery systems, concerns regarding the capacity or targeting prioritization of national governments, and lack of prior coordination between country office emergency and social protection functions.

53. Finally, the evaluation found some tensions between, on the one hand WFP's data protection and privacy concerns and adherence to humanitarian principles, and, on the other, the importance of interoperable and efficient data systems to support nationally led social protection systems.

Comparative advantage

Operational capacities, field presence, skills and relationships in disaster risk management and, more broadly, responsiveness and a problem-solving culture, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings, are well recognized comparative advantages of WFP, which is now widely viewed as a key actor in the social protection sector and its support and partnership is increasingly sought.

54. While confirming WFP's comparative advantages, the evaluation nonetheless noted that the organization's ability to provide relevant technical advice to governments on operational issues connected to social protection does not flow automatically from them. It requires WFP to adapt its own operational solutions to the realities faced by a government in a particular context. This is a challenging endeavour and requires WFP to maintain and combine a range of technical and soft skills. Commitments to working through national social protection systems whenever possible require WFP to accept that it needs to sometimes compromise on its ways of working and even the quality and speed of short-term results in order to support sustainable nationally led and sustainable systems.

Key internal factors

Key internal factors affecting the achievement of results included staffing, funding limitations and deficiencies in the WFP corporate approach to performance management, including gaps in knowledge management.

Human resources

55. The existence of high-quality, long-tenure staff with social protection experience and relationship skills represented the most frequent critical success factor for WFP support in the area of social protection. Conversely, staff turnover and rotation were the most important hindering factors. In some contexts, a lack of specialized social protection capacity among WFP staff continues to hinder success.

Funding

56. Despite some progress in securing more multi-year funding, short-term project-specific funding for WFP social protection activities is inherently at odds with commitments to long-term systems strengthening. However, the Changing Lives Transformation Fund represents a valuable approach for identifying good models for engaging in support for social protection.

57. During the period evaluated WFP has experienced a dramatic funding shortage leading to significant structural cuts, some of which risk undermining WFP's comparative advantages, particularly in relation to its field presence and technical expertise.

Performance and knowledge management

58. Frequently acknowledged deficiencies in the WFP corporate approach to performance management – particularly weaknesses in measures for capacity strengthening and lack of qualitative results monitoring – hinder learning and adaptive management of WFP support for social protection. Similarly, poor knowledge management across different settings reduces the value of evidence generated.

Recommendations

Recommendation	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 1: Redouble efforts to implement the strategy, developing and communicating clear criteria for prioritizing social protection engagement, including as follows:	Programme Division (PRG)	June 2027
1.1 Prioritize support for social protection in areas where WFP has demonstrated comparative advantages, using them as entry points for wider engagement at the systems level; deprioritize pilot projects that are not either jointly conceived with/requested by the Government and include a strategy for uptake, or where WFP has a clearly formulated advocacy strategy.		
1.2 Re-emphasize the importance of working with or through national social protection programmes as the default wherever feasible and appropriate. Where WFP is involved in implementation in an initial phase, explicitly stress the importance of maintaining a long-term perspective with adequate transition planning, including clear metrics and milestones to be agreed with government counterparts.		
1.3 Support country offices in analysing political economy, and structural and cultural patterns of inequality between men and women and the exclusion of people with disabilities in order to inform the selection of social protection support modalities, level of engagement and feasibility.		
Recommendation 2: Further develop the skills of WFP's social protection workforce and facilitate greater sharing of knowledge, experience and lessons between offices.	PRG in coordination with Human Resources Division (HRM)	June 2027
2.1 Conduct an updated census of the social protection workforce to assess the impact of recent budget reductions and contraction in staffing capacities to identify critical gaps that require attention based on programme portfolio significance and need for specialized skills.		
2.2 Develop adequate social protection knowledge and soft skills for WFP employees at all levels and, in particular, leverage the knowledge, expertise and political awareness of senior national staff in country offices. This may include requiring personnel to participate in social protection training and engage in regional and global social protection communities of practice.		

Recommendation	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 3: Deepen strategic partnerships for social protection with international financial institutions and other United Nations entities at the global and country levels.	PRG in coordination with HRM	
3.1 Building on lessons learned, develop context-specific strategies for building relationships and engaging with governments and international financial institutions to ensure complementarity and influence social protection sector reforms and financing in order to better address food security, nutrition and resilience to shocks.	Public Partnerships Division (PPD); PRG	
3.2. Prioritize global social protection partnerships with other United Nations entities to deepen mutual appreciation of organizational capacities and strengths and identify opportunities for collaboration and complementarity.	PPD; PRG	
Recommendation 4: Strengthen results-based management for support for social protection	PRG	June 2027
4.1 Consolidate learning gained from the implementation of support for social protection, identifying the most effective approaches and modalities and defining what WFP support for social protection should look like in different settings in order to better clarify priorities – including from WFP's implementation of social protection programming on behalf of governments, on-demand services, work in fragile settings, and programmes that have linked WFP resilience and social protection activities.	PRG	
4.2 Clarify criteria for what constitute WFP contributions to social protection as opposed to other programme activities, using a clear taxonomy to reduce inconsistent categorization across country offices.	PRG	
4.3 Develop or ensure adequate use of existing qualitative outcome monitoring and reporting tools (or adopt existing tools used in the sector) that meaningfully track progress towards the strengthening of social protection systems and ensure that WFP contributions to the quantity and quality of social protection programmes is systematically tracked.	PRG	

Acronyms

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
HRM	Human Resources Division
IDP	internally displaced person
IFI	international financial institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
PPD	Public Partnerships Division
PRG	Programme Division
SRSP	shock-responsive social protection