



World Food Programme
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Programa Mundial de Alimentos
برنامج الأغذية العالمي

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Security report

Introduction

1. In 2023, global conflicts continued to be one of the main drivers of humanitarian needs. As geopolitical competition intensified, intra-state conflicts became increasingly internationalized, adding complexity and layers of instability to WFP's operating environment. Concurrent factors such as the global climate crisis, economic hardship and the proliferation of unmanned armed technology also acted as conflict multipliers, driving insecurity and complicating the organization's ability to deliver its mandate safely.
2. Amid rising global demand for humanitarian and development assistance, WFP's funding returned to pre-pandemic levels. This resulted in the prioritization of assistance to the most vulnerable people, who are often located in areas where significant security threats and access limitations cause serious potential risks to personnel, assets and operations, such as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central Sahel, Haiti, the Sudan and wider region, the State of Palestine and Yemen.
3. Despite the challenges, WFP was able to reach an estimated 150 million people with food, cash and commodity vouchers throughout 2023. This figure marks an approximate reduction of 10 million beneficiaries compared to 2022 but no significant reduction in risk exposure. To sustain these levels of service delivery with a stretched capacity, the Security Division strove to optimize its available resources, leveraging innovation to augment efficiency and making tough choices to prioritize activities that deliver greater value for money.
4. While the number of security incidents affecting WFP operations in 2023 remained at levels comparable to those of 2021–2022, WFP personnel were more directly affected by such incidents. To prevent a further deterioration of that trend, in 2024 the Security Division plans to prioritize some of the strategic decisions that were put on hold in late 2023 in order to align the outcomes of these decisions with the broader organizational readjustment that was taking shape. These decisions relate to issues including workforce management, the use of new technologies and enhanced partnerships.

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Staffing highlights from 2023

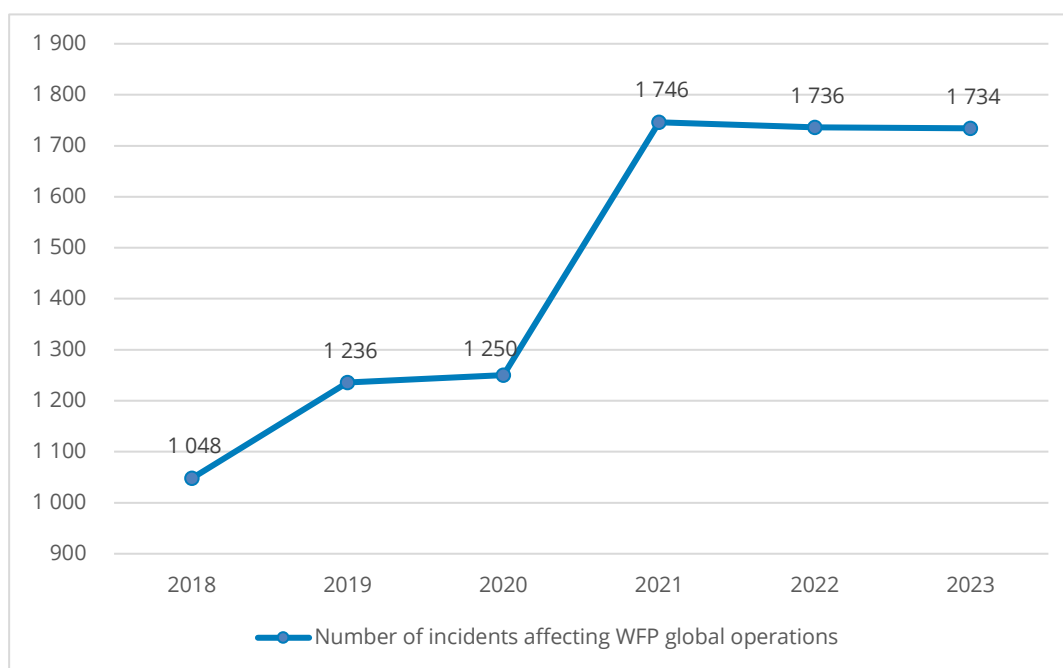
5. Key trends and figures:

- The global security workforce comprised 554 employees, an increase of 6.9 percent from 2022 (518 employees) driven by the global demand for additional security support in the field.
- 71 percent were national personnel.
- 59 percent of WFP personnel operated in countries classified as “non-family” duty stations.¹

Incident trends

6. In 2023, the number of safety and security incidents affecting WFP operations stood at 1,734, which is largely consistent with the data recorded in 2022 and confirms the negative trend that started in 2021 (figure 1).² Last year, however, there was a notable shift away from the typical pattern whereby risks predominantly affect cooperating partners and contractors.

Figure 1: Trend in safety and security incidents, 2018–2023



7. A total of 21 fatalities among WFP personnel, cooperating partners and contractors were recorded in 2023 (up from 18 in 2022). Violent acts were responsible for most of those deaths, while almost a quarter (24 percent) were caused by road traffic incidents.

Major incidents

8. Compared to 2022, the number of major incidents (i.e. those resulting in death, serious injury or abduction) decreased by 16 percent, totalling 51 events in 2023. Those incidents involved 72 WFP personnel, dependants, cooperating partners or contractors, which marked a 35 percent decrease in the number of people affected compared to 2022.

¹ Duty stations classified at the "D" or "E" hardship level that have been declared as non-family.

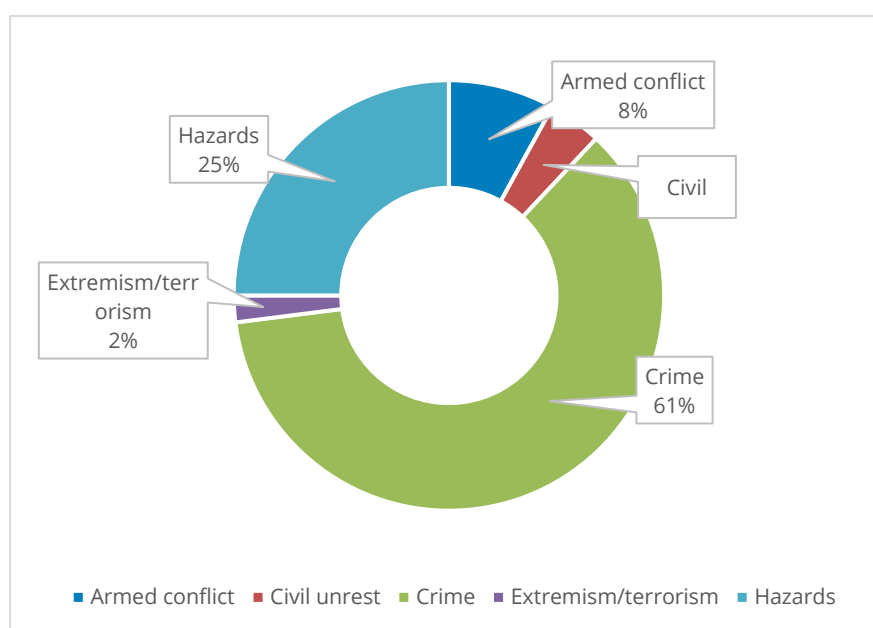
² The figure comprises incidents affecting WFP personnel, cooperating partners and contractors only when providing services directly related to WFP programmes.

9. Despite these reductions, a higher percentage of major incidents affected WFP personnel in 2023, in contrast to previous years. A total of 29 WFP employees and 10 dependants were affected by major incidents, compared to 20 contractors and 13 cooperating partners.
10. In 2023, WFP personnel suffered a notable rise in fatalities, largely because of incidents linked to the Sudan regional crisis. Ten employees lost their lives (up from two in 2022): five in armed incidents, four in road traffic accidents and one in the Türkiye earthquake.
11. Five WFP employees were abducted in 2023, up from two in 2022. Four were briefly held in Chad, while one abduction occurred in Myanmar. All were eventually released.
12. Major incidents mostly affected male personnel. All of the fatality and abduction cases involved male colleagues. Thirteen male employees were affected by serious injuries, and only one female employee sustained a major injury, while off-duty. It is assessed that these figures reflect the large number of male personnel deployed in field locations, where such incidents have predominantly occurred.

Incidents by threat type

13. **Crime** remained the most significant threat, contributing to 61 percent of all recorded incidents (figure 2). Crime-related incidents are predominantly associated with theft, burglary, robbery, harassment/intimidation and threats of violence. Most of the incidents (65 percent) were non-violent, which is consistent with data from previous years. The countries where personnel were most affected by criminal incidents were Afghanistan, Ethiopia, South Sudan, the Sudan and Uganda.

Figure 2: Percentage of incidents by threat type



14. **Hazards** ranked as the second most common threat, accounting for 25 percent of all incidents in 2023. In line with previous years, road traffic accidents were the most significant type of incident in this category, comprising 58 percent of all hazards. Notably, most incidents took place in Ethiopia and South Sudan (32 percent of the total), where road conditions are assessed as poor and WFP operations are sizeable. In response to this, the Security Division continues to cooperate with other United Nations entities and WFP units

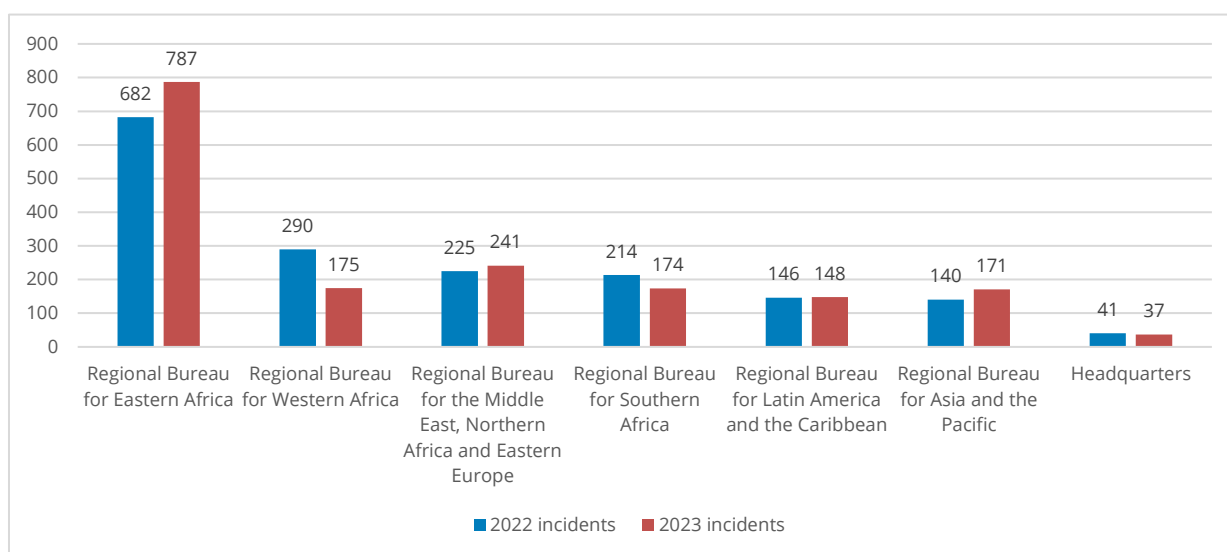
in the framework of the “One UN vision for road safety” to refine policies, increase overall workforce capacity and ultimately reduce the frequency of hazard-related incidents.³

15. **Armed conflict** accounted for 8 percent of total incidents. The two most common incident types in this category were related to armed incidents and movement restrictions. WFP operates in many areas where armed conflicts are still active. Despite this, security incidents involving WFP personnel, cooperating partners and contractors are not the result of direct targeting, but rather a consequence of collateral exposure. A prominent example of these dynamics is the Sudan, where collateral risks increased due to the outbreak of conflict in April 2023.
16. **Civil unrest** represented 4 percent of global incidents, primarily resulting in movement restrictions. Eleven instances of violent civil unrest were reported, with the majority (five) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where anti-United Nations protests were on the rise. Two instances of violent protests directed at WFP were recorded: one in relation to misunderstandings about aid allocation in the Syrian Arab Republic and the other linked to expectations of employment in Haiti.
17. **Terrorism/extremism** accounted for only 2 percent of incidents, with one third related to movement restrictions and incidental armed incidents.

By region

18. Almost half of all WFP-related incidents (47 percent) took place in the **Eastern Africa region** (figure 3). Apart from experiencing the largest number of incidents, the region saw a 15 percent year-on-year increase in the total number of occurrences. This pattern is notable, as only 26 percent of WFP personnel are based in this region. Most incidents were road traffic accidents, but inter- and intra-communal incidents were also prominent, especially in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan. South Sudan continued to record the highest number of incidents in the region, but the cumulative figure decreased by nearly 9 percent compared to 2022. Consistent with the trend observed during previous years, the main causes of fatalities and injuries were armed attacks on WFP convoys.

Figure 3: Regional comparison of incidents related to WFP operations, 2022–2023



³ Cooperation with the Occupational Safety and Health Unit focuses on continued upgrades to vehicle tracking systems and speed control tools. Awareness campaigns were conducted for WFP personnel to prevent occupational health and safety accidents, and training was provided to all staff to encourage the reporting of all work-related road safety incidents through the Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments system.

19. The **Middle East, Northern Africa and Eastern European region** recorded the second highest number of incidents, with a 7 percent increase (from 225 in 2022 to 241 in 2023). This surge was mainly triggered by an increased number of incidents in the Syrian Arab Republic and Gaza, underscoring the challenges of operating in protracted conflict environments.
20. The **Asia and the Pacific region** experienced a 22 percent increase in incidents (140 in 2022; 171 in 2023), mainly attributed to events in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Afghanistan, the increase was driven by harassment and intimidation incidents, involving a range of physical threats, restrictions, demands and attempts to disrupt WFP operations. In Pakistan, minor road traffic accidents were prevalent. Despite the large number of robberies and thefts, no significant impact on operations was recorded.
21. While the **Western Africa region** witnessed a significant downturn in security incidents (40 percent decrease from 2022), this trend is largely associated with operational disruption in the Central Sahel resulting in loss of access and/or movement restrictions. Notably, the broader regional dynamics, characterized by evolving threats from jihadist non-State armed groups and the withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, affected WFP's operational capacity, constraining the delivery of humanitarian aid and forcing a reassessment of the organizational footprint.
22. Similarly, the **Southern Africa region** saw a 19 percent decline in the total number of incidents (214 in 2022; 174 in 2023). This should not be interpreted as a sign of improved security, however, as the region continues to feature widespread jihadist threats (e.g. in Mozambique) and increased disruption by non-State armed groups such as the *Mouvement du 23 mars* in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, significantly affecting WFP operations by hampering access.
23. In the **Latin America and the Caribbean region**, incident trends remained largely consistent (146 in 2022; 148 in 2023), whereas incidents at headquarters declined slightly (from 41 in 2022 to 37 in 2023) and were all related to property thefts.
24. Further details on specific country operations can be found in the box below.

Country operational focus

Burkina Faso: Operating conditions in the country continued to be extremely challenging, as they have been since January 2022. WFP operations were repeatedly affected by security incidents and political volatility, resulting in a progressive loss of access in northern and eastern regions. In Djibo (Centre-Nord region), persistent militant activity paired with credible capability and reach remain a constant threat. Twelve distinct security incidents directly affected planned United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) flight rotations, all stemming from efforts by the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims to prevent humanitarian deliveries to besieged areas. The severity and nature of these incidents evidenced a progression from mere "warning" to "targeting" WFP assets. A similar trend was observed in the Sahel and Est regions, where WFP-contracted trucks were the target of security incidents caused by jihadist non-State armed group activity. These incidents included detonations of improvised explosive devices, ambushes, robberies and arson. In response to these developments, the Security Division has prioritized the enhancement of personnel security awareness through the Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments training programme. Additionally, regular Security Division-UNHAS joint risk assessments were conducted in support of UNHAS air operations.

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Increased conflict between armed groups in the eastern part of the country resulted in operational disruption for WFP and its cooperating partners. The expansion of the *Mouvement du 23 mars* rebellion continued towards Sake, North Kivu, cutting off main supply routes to Goma, which severely limited road movements for humanitarian operations. Ongoing fighting between the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the *Mouvement du 23 mars* also prompted a reorganization of armed groups in South Kivu, increasing the risk of armed conflict. Altogether, ongoing fighting in the east resulted in the delay or suspension of WFP operations and the relocation of distribution sites. Violence also continued in Ituri province, marked by clashes between Cooperative for the Development of the Congo and Zaire armed group fighters, as well as attacks on camps for internally displaced persons. On two occasions in 2023, armed groups in Ituri ambushed WFP-contracted vehicles, while armed criminals ambushed a WFP cooperating partner's vehicle in South Kivu. Opportunistic attacks against humanitarian vehicles and personnel were the result of both criminal motivations and conflict dynamics. Meanwhile, the spread of anti-MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and anti-United Nations sentiments resulted in demonstrations and instances of vandalism affecting United Nations premises and assets. The Security Division was instrumental in ensuring that programmatic activities continued to adjust to shifting security dynamics.

Haiti: The security situation continued to worsen in 2023, particularly in urban areas, amid a multifaceted crisis marked by escalating gang violence that resulted in recurrent kidnappings, deaths, mob killings and clashes involving organized crime groups and the national police. Exploiting the political vacuum and dire economic conditions, organized crime groups expanded their control in Haiti, leading to mass displacements and disrupting WFP operations. The hijacking of four WFP trucks by crime groups in May highlights the grave threats faced by humanitarian efforts. Further to the October approval of a Kenya-led Multinational Security Support mission by the Security Council, crime group activity heightened, exacerbating security risks and causing delays in and suspensions of WFP activities, including maritime operations. The seizure of the Mariani suburban area by crime groups in November 2023 severely hampered WFP's access to southern regions along the *Route Nationale 2* highway. Additionally, waves of protests have paralysed the country, further challenging WFP operations. WFP security support was critical to enabling programme delivery in the country's dynamic security context, with major efforts devoted to secure planning of evacuation options and assessments of field security risks based on the prevailing security context.

Myanmar: Conflict dynamics changed significantly in October 2023, when the Three Brotherhood Alliance intensified attacks against the de facto authority in northern Shan State, demonstrating improved coordination between various ethnic armed groups across the country. The most intense fighting affected northern Shan, Rakhine and Kachin states, but reports indicate related attacks by armed resistance groups across other regions, including near the borders with Bangladesh, China, India and Thailand. The ongoing armed conflict resulted in civilian casualties, displacements and disruptions in transportation and communication, worsening the overall humanitarian and security situation. The Security Division supported the relocation of WFP personnel from the affected areas, while access restrictions and bureaucratic obstacles continued to affect WFP's ability to deliver humanitarian aid.

The Sudan: Since the start of conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces in April 2023, complex and multifaceted security risks have had a significant impact on WFP operations and personnel. Attacks on WFP facilities in the Sudan ranged from attempted looting in Kabkabiya (North Darfur), where armed men targeted the WFP field office, to the storming and extensive looting of premises in Khartoum, Nyala (South Darfur), Ed Daein (East Darfur), Wad Medani (Gezira State), Kutum and El Fashir (North Darfur). The most extensive and coordinated attack occurred in Geneina (West Darfur), where a group of armed militias invaded numerous WFP facilities, including offices, warehouses and clinics. The looting and vandalism in Geneina were extensive, affecting vehicles, commodities, information

technology equipment and even safes containing emergency and petty cash. Additionally, the takeover of Zalingei (Central Darfur) by Rapid Support Forces in November saw looting of WFP warehouses, including stored food rations for internally displaced persons. The direct attacks on WFP personnel residences involved not only looting of personal valuables, but in some incidents the Rapid Support Forces engaged in aggressive tactics, including firing guns, intimidating people, occupying houses and placing snipers on roofs, contributing to a climate of fear and insecurity for WFP personnel. Indirect attacks with significant impacts have resulted in fatalities and severe injuries among WFP personnel and their dependants. Despite significant mobilization by the Security Division to coordinate the evacuation of international personnel and the relocation of nationally recruited personnel to safe areas, WFP suffered the loss of four employees and two dependants, with an additional four employees and two dependants sustaining major injuries. Two dependants were abducted (and eventually released). WFP-related incidents underscore the significant risks and hazards faced by humanitarian workers and their families in the country.

Yemen: The country's security conditions worsened over the course of 2023 in the context of increasingly tense regional dynamics and shrinking funding for WFP operations. Hostilities in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden are causing supply chain disruption, higher shipping costs and the prospect of further food and fuel price increases. The likelihood of security incidents, including attacks against humanitarian personnel and infrastructure, remains high, triggered by growing animosity towards international organizations. As WFP adjusted its operations, working to put in place a smaller and more focused food assistance programme, a significant increase in incidents involving harassment, intimidation and threats of violence was recorded. These types of incidents constituted nearly a quarter of all safety and security issues reported in the country. Unlike in other regions, where harassment incidents varied, in Yemen the majority occurred at food distribution points and primarily affected implementing partners conducting distributions on behalf of WFP. Perpetrated by individuals or groups not included in the distribution list, some of these incidents escalated into violence against partner staff, leading to the suspension of distributions. One WFP employee was killed in Turbah in July 2023, underscoring the risks of the operating environment. In response to these trends, the Security Division has prioritized a review of security risk management measures, aiming for improved situational awareness, improved acceptance of local communities, increased compliance and measures more tailored to the evolving threat environment, among other results.

Developing a collaborative security culture with cooperating partners

25. In 2023, the Security Division continued to implement its multi-pronged approach to partnership, with activities targeting stakeholders both internal and external to WFP in an effort to drive impact at the field level.
26. The Security Division continued to advocate for greater system-wide support for cooperating partners at various levels, including the United Nations security management system's Inter-Agency Security Management Network, the Global Interagency Security Forum and the Humanitarian Networks and Practice Week. WFP contributed to an event organized under the umbrella of the Saving Lives Together initiative, where multiple United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Department of Safety and Security gathered to improve global security coordination issues, address policy gaps and explore opportunities to mitigate cooperating partners' exposure to risks. For instance, since August 2023, the Security Division has provided dedicated support to local NGO partners in relation to the implementation of World Bank programmes in Afghanistan and Yemen. WFP notably assisted these NGOs in meeting the World Bank's requirements with regard to ad hoc security risk management plans, training and reporting.

27. During the reporting period, the Security Division also supported cooperating partners at multiple levels through internal mechanisms. Security personnel have been working closely with the Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division, aiming to mainstream the inclusion of clauses on security requirements for cooperating partners in field-level agreements. The Security Division also addressed a considerable number of requests outside the Saving Lives Together framework; for instance, Security Division personnel played a significant role in supporting WFP cooperating partners during the crisis that erupted in the Sudan by including international NGO personnel in evacuation concepts of operations and providing access to WFP facilities as temporary relocation points.

Operational security response

Operationalizing enhanced WFP regional and country access strategies

28. Throughout 2023, humanitarian access continued to be hindered by active conflicts, security risks, administrative barriers, political constraints and natural hazards. A notable example is the current ban on cash-based transfers in Burkina Faso, which increased security risks for WFP operations, whereas in the Niger, travel restrictions affected WFP's ability to rapidly respond to fluid security dynamics. More recently, WFP has been severely limited in its ability to respond to the crisis in Gaza owing to the lack of security guarantees and administrative barriers.
29. Over the reporting period, multiple regional tensions resulted in significant disruption to UNHAS flights, notably in Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Sahel, which added to the broader logistical disruption to maritime transport in the Red Sea. All of this underscores the need to reinforce operational preparedness and improve acceptance strategies and business continuity plans to account for evolving threat environments.
30. WFP maintained close coordination with its cooperating partners in the field, implementing multifaceted strategies and collaborative approaches to address operational challenges. In countries like Burkina Faso, Haiti, Mali, Myanmar, the Niger and the Sudan, WFP established technical access cells, with the Security Division supporting strong partnerships and information-sharing mechanisms.
31. Enhancing community support mechanisms remained a cornerstone of WFP's strategy, with civil society organizations playing an integral role in sustaining field operations. Such partnerships were especially pivotal in countries like Myanmar, where civil society organizations provided indispensable surge capacity and technical support. Capacity-building initiatives were prioritized, with WFP hosting several key workshops (e.g. on humanitarian access in the Syrian Arab Republic).
32. WFP continued to reinforce its position as a global leader in humanitarian response and capacity building. Consistent investment in security training initiatives and commitment to operational safeguarding have empowered United Nations personnel across various regions, enabling more effective and safer humanitarian interventions. Throughout the year, WFP Security successfully trained 820 personnel in Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments (41 sessions) and 978 personnel received Women's Security Awareness Training (41 sessions). This achievement reflects concerted efforts by the Security Division to integrate gender considerations and enhance security awareness through targeted training.

Strengthening the Security Division's ability to respond to evolving security requirements using technology

33. In 2023, the Security Division advanced its transformative journey towards better management of security risks, sharpening its focus on field operations. The creation of a dedicated information management branch within the division contributed to enhancing the use of information and knowledge management for greater effectiveness, accountability and efficiency, facilitating coherent strategy development, continuous horizon scanning, seamless data integration and effective information dissemination.
34. This structure equips the division with better tools in support of informed decision making and operational efficiency. A major milestone in that regard was the introduction of the Security Tracking and Reporting System, which marked a major step towards combining all security-related data processes within one unified digital framework. This approach highlights the division's dedication to reinforcing data-driven decision making and proactive risk management. Through continuous learning and improved use of technology, the Security Division is better positioned to meet current and future challenges with resilience and agility.
35. Technological advancements have improved efficiency in support of security compliance requirements and emergency responses. In 2023, the division introduced a new system for gathering data from field locations and monitoring the compliance of WFP's global facilities with security measures. In addition, during the emergencies in the Sudan and Türkiye, WFP Security validated the multichannel digital strategy, an approach that provides security personnel with a unique and validated list of personnel and dependants and, in parallel, the ability to promptly monitor the security status of its personnel and dependants and communicate any necessary information, thereby facilitating more effective crisis management.

Budget and staffing optimization through enhanced planning and tracking

36. Throughout the reporting period, the Security Division continued to advocate more systematic integration of security considerations into corporate programme cycles. Cooperation with relevant divisions was expanded and efforts were made to expand internal capacity. Continued focus will be placed on ensuring that WFP's strategic orientations are informed early on by current and foreseeable security risks and their potential impact on global operations.
37. Security-related costs at headquarters and regional bureaux totalled USD 28.1 million (an increase of 9 percent from 2022). That figure accounted for 4.8 percent of the programme support and administrative (PSA) budget.
38. In field locations, the estimated costs related to security amounted to USD 89.5 million, representing 14.4 percent of the total direct support cost (DSC) budget at the country office level. A breakdown is shown in the table below.

WFP SECURITY EXPENDITURES - 2023			
Description	USD	Description	USD
Headquarters and regional bureau personnel	11 189 973	Field personnel	54 381 120
Department of Safety and Security	12 919 138	Residential security country office	3 025 106
Headquarters and regional bureaux - other costs (Security Emergency Fund, training, security assistance missions)	4 038 569	Security equipment	12 876 599
		Local cost - shared security budgets	8 900 000
		Security guards (only country offices)	10 359 664
Total for security under PSA	28 147 680	Total for security under DSC	89 542 489
Percentage of total PSA budget	4.8	Percentage of total DSC budget	14.4
PSA total	576 300 000	DSC total	621 817 269