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Summary report on the strategic evaluation of WFP's approaches to targeting and prioritization for food and nutrition assistance

Executive summary

This strategic evaluation assessed the relevance, appropriateness and effectiveness of WFP's approaches to targeting and prioritization for food and nutrition assistance in a time of rising needs and shrinking resources. Covering January 2019–May 2025, it used a theory-based, mixed-methods design, combining document and data review, interviews, focus group discussions and an online survey. Gender equality, inclusion and disability were taken into account throughout the evaluation.

WFP invested substantially in developing its normative framework for targeting and prioritization, which is largely fit for purpose. The framework is fragmented, however, with gaps in relation to resilience activities and limited strategic direction on how to prioritize assistance under pressure. Global and regional support capacity facilitated implementation of the framework but is declining as a result of major funding gaps and consequent workforce reductions.

Targeting and prioritization approaches vary widely across WFP country offices. Community-based methods remain the most common, while hybrid models combining data-driven and participatory processes are increasingly used to strengthen accuracy and community ownership. A shift to more vulnerability-based targeting is evident, albeit incomplete. Each approach has its advantages and drawbacks and staff understand these well. However, WFP lacks systematic evidence on the relative performance and cost-effectiveness of each approach. The rationale for opting for a given

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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targeting or prioritization method is rarely documented, and agility in adapting to changing conditions or cultural contexts remains limited.

WFP's choices regarding targeting and prioritization are generally appropriate within the constraints imposed by donor earmarking of contributions, host government positions and operational contexts. The approaches chosen largely allow WFP to reach food-insecure people. Yet WFP does not systematically collect data on inclusion and exclusion errors, which hampers any assessment of how well it reaches those most in need. Verification and de-duplication practices vary, partly due to challenges with digital data systems.

Food assistance has been spread too thinly, limiting outcomes. The differing objectives of emergency and resilience programmes have led to differences in targeting logic, hindering integration and limiting the potential for cumulative impact. WFP has begun to address this in recent strategies and through guidance that promotes greater depth and integration of activities.

Targeting and prioritization decisions shape community relations. Consulted people in affected communities appreciate WFP's intent to reach the most vulnerable but often lack clear information about how decisions are made, raising concerns about fairness. Transparency and communication emerged as key factors shaping perceptions of equity and influencing social cohesion.

Cooperating partners, valued for their contextual knowledge and community presence, play a central role in the implementation of targeting and prioritization approaches, although in some instances they operate with limited oversight and support. Coordination with other humanitarian actors has improved, particularly with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Children's Fund. Engagement through mechanisms such as the food security cluster and cash working groups, on the other hand, remains limited. WFP's support for government social protection systems remains an important long-term goal, but these systems rarely serve WFP's own targeting needs and often require community-based verification.

The evaluation found gaps between standards and practice. Verification, monitoring, data interoperability and appeals mechanisms are unevenly implemented. Recent and anticipated workforce reductions threaten institutional gains. The evaluation therefore recommends clarifying WFP's strategic focus on prioritization, safeguarding minimum standards and essential staffing, enhancing transparency and agility and strengthening WFP's data-sharing frameworks with partners and the interoperability of WFP's internal systems.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the strategic evaluation of WFP's approaches to targeting and prioritization for food and nutrition assistance (WFP/EB.1/2026/6-C/2) and management response (WFP/EB.1/2026/6-C/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

Evaluation features

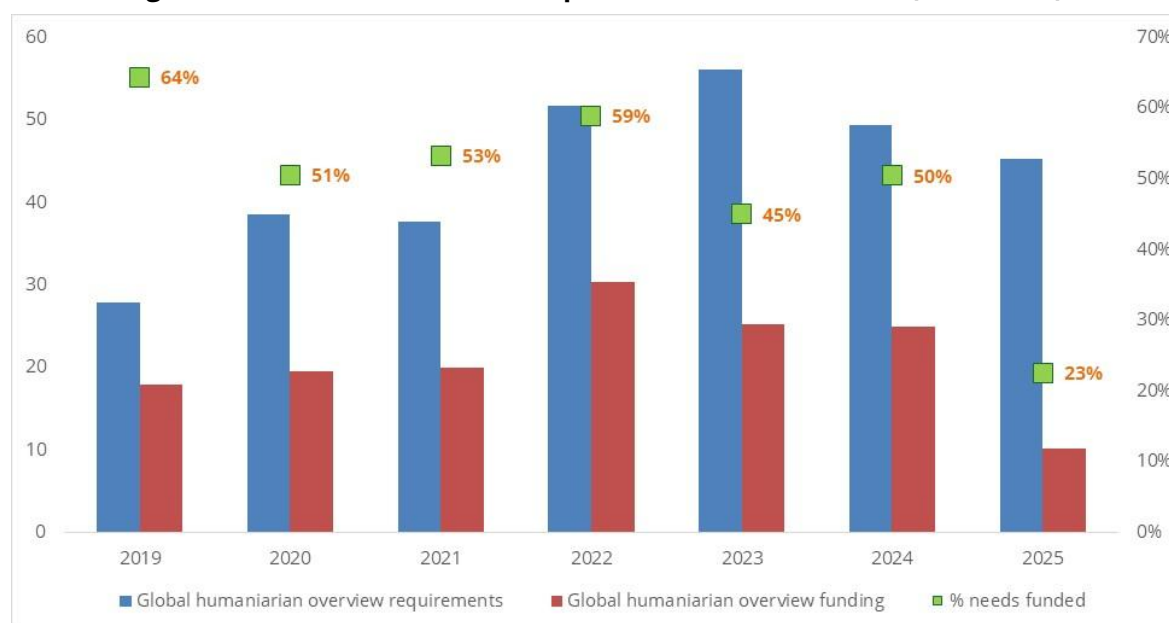
1. This strategic evaluation assessed the relevance, appropriateness and effectiveness of WFP's approaches to targeting and prioritization for food and nutrition assistance. It examined whether WFP has suitable frameworks, systems and practices for identifying and reaching those most in need in a context of rising humanitarian needs and tightening resources. The evaluation also aimed to generate learning to inform future policy, guidance and operational decision-making. It addressed four questions:
 - a) How relevant and appropriate are WFP's approaches to targeting and prioritization?
 - b) What are the effects of those approaches on the people WFP serves?
 - c) How effectively does WFP engage and collaborate with others on targeting and prioritization?
 - d) What factors affect WFP's performance on targeting and prioritization?
2. The evaluation covered the period from January 2019 to May 2025 and was global in scope, encompassing all regions and WFP organizational levels.
3. A theory-based, mixed-methods approach combined document and data review, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and an online staff survey. Evidence was drawn from global headquarters, including regional offices, and seven country offices. Case studies were conducted in the country offices for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jordan, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and South Sudan, and two further case studies were conducted remotely for the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Data was triangulated across levels and sources. In total, the team conducted 301 key informant interviews and focus group discussions with 423 participants and consulted 91 employees from 52 country offices via an online survey.

Context

4. Humanitarian needs have risen sharply due to conflict, climate shocks, economic instability and the effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic. The number of people facing acute food insecurity in countries supported by WFP more than doubled between 2019 and 2025, from 135 million to over 319 million.¹ Global humanitarian requirements as summarized in United Nations global humanitarian overviews grew from USD 28 billion in 2019 to almost USD 45 billion in 2025. Although donor funding grew until 2022, it has not kept pace with the rising needs.² Following recent reductions by key donors, the overall funding level for humanitarian operations halved in 2025 (figure 1).

¹ WFP Global Operational Response Plan reports from 2020 to June 2025. Figures are based on countries where WFP operates and where data are currently available. For 2025, the analysis covers 67 countries.

² Global humanitarian overview reports from 2019 to 2025, available on the [website of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#).

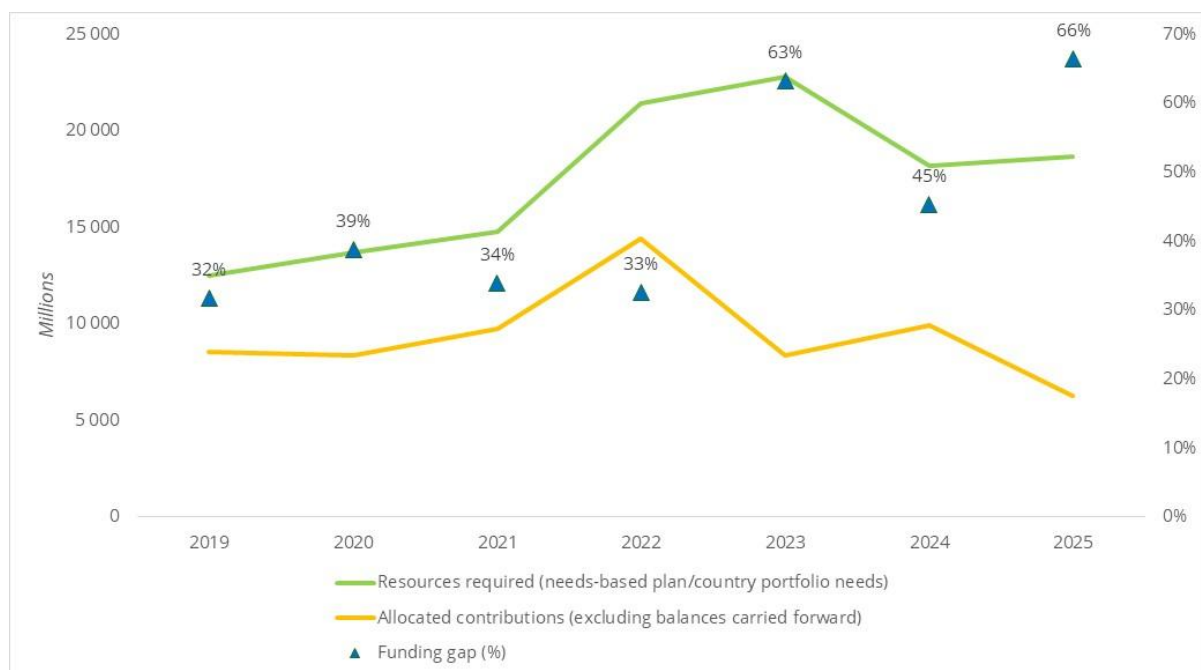
Figure 1: Global humanitarian requirements and resources (2019–2025)

Source: Office of Evaluation, based on October 2025 data from the financial tracking service of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

5. In 2024 WFP began an organizational realignment aimed at providing more efficient and effective services to country offices. Under subsequent efficiency measures required by the constrained funding environment, it has scaled back its workforce and undertaken budget cuts. In 2024, WFP reviewed its approach to the design of country strategic plans, requesting country offices to establish realistic country portfolio needs and budgets that are resource-informed.³ Although these plans no longer represent the full scale of needs, the funding gap still stood at 66 percent as of October 2025 (figure 2). This has led many country offices to drastically reduce their programmatic coverage and, in the case of direct food assistance, to reduce rations, including in some contexts for households classified as being in “emergency” or “humanitarian catastrophe” situations (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) phases 4 and 5). In some countries, WFP has also adopted “hyper-prioritization”, providing assistance only to those identified as the most vulnerable among all those experiencing food insecurity. Such measures illustrate how WFP’s ability to act in accordance with humanitarian principles, including humanity – the imperative to address human suffering wherever it is found, is increasingly challenged.
6. These dynamics, as well as some documented cases of aid diversion, such as in Ethiopia, have intensified scrutiny of WFP’s targeting and prioritization practices. In response, reforms such as WFP’s global assurance project⁴ initiated in 2023 have focused on several priority areas including targeting, with the objective of providing greater assurance that WFP safely and effectively reaches the right people with its assistance.

³ WFP. 2024. *Calibrating our ambition: guidelines to formulate focused Country Strategic Plans and develop realistic Country Portfolio Needs and Budgets* (internal document).

⁴ The project was subsequently mainstreamed as the global assurance framework. WFP. 2024. *Executive Director’s circular: WFP Global Assurance Framework (OED2024/004)*.

Figure 2: WFP resource requirements and allocated contributions, 2018–2025

Source: Factory platform (data retrieved in May 2025 based on forecast and confirmed contributions between January and October 2025).

Subject

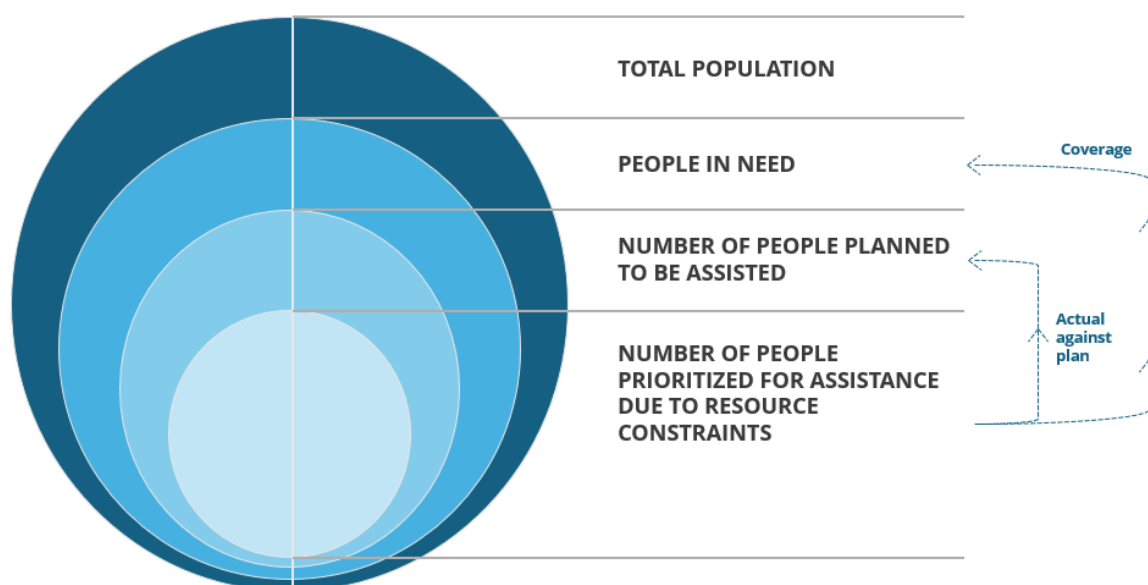
7. The evaluation distinguished between targeting and prioritization following definitions from WFP's normative framework (see box1).

Box 1: Definitions of targeting and prioritization⁵

Targeting refers to the process of selecting communities, households and/or individuals for assistance, based on programme objectives and needs assessments and with the participation of communities.

Prioritization refers to deciding which people within a targeted population receive assistance when overall identified needs cannot be met or when entitlements are reduced due to resource constraints.

⁵ Executive Director's circular: Management of Targeting Processes by WFP Offices (OED2022/026).

Figure 3: The targeting–prioritization pathway: from people in need to people assisted

Source: WFP, 2021. *Targeting and prioritization: Operational Guidance Note*. Adapted by the evaluation team.

8. The evaluation analysed how targeting and prioritization approaches were defined, guided and implemented across WFP during the period under review, drawing on the organization's normative framework, institutional arrangements and field practices. It assessed both the strategic underpinnings and the operational application of targeting and prioritization, focusing on their contribution to WFP's efforts to reach the most vulnerable people.
9. Targeting and prioritization were examined within WFP's broader programme cycle, focusing on activities that delivered direct food, cash and nutrition assistance, including unconditional resource transfers (URT), malnutrition prevention and treatment, asset creation and livelihoods, anticipatory action and school-based programmes. The evaluation did not assess the prioritization of resources allocated at the corporate level across countries.

Evaluation conclusions and supporting findings

Conclusion 1: WFP's normative framework and support structures for targeting and prioritization have evolved considerably over the past years and largely serve their purpose well, although country offices are asking for clearer strategic guidance in an era of unprecedented budget cuts.

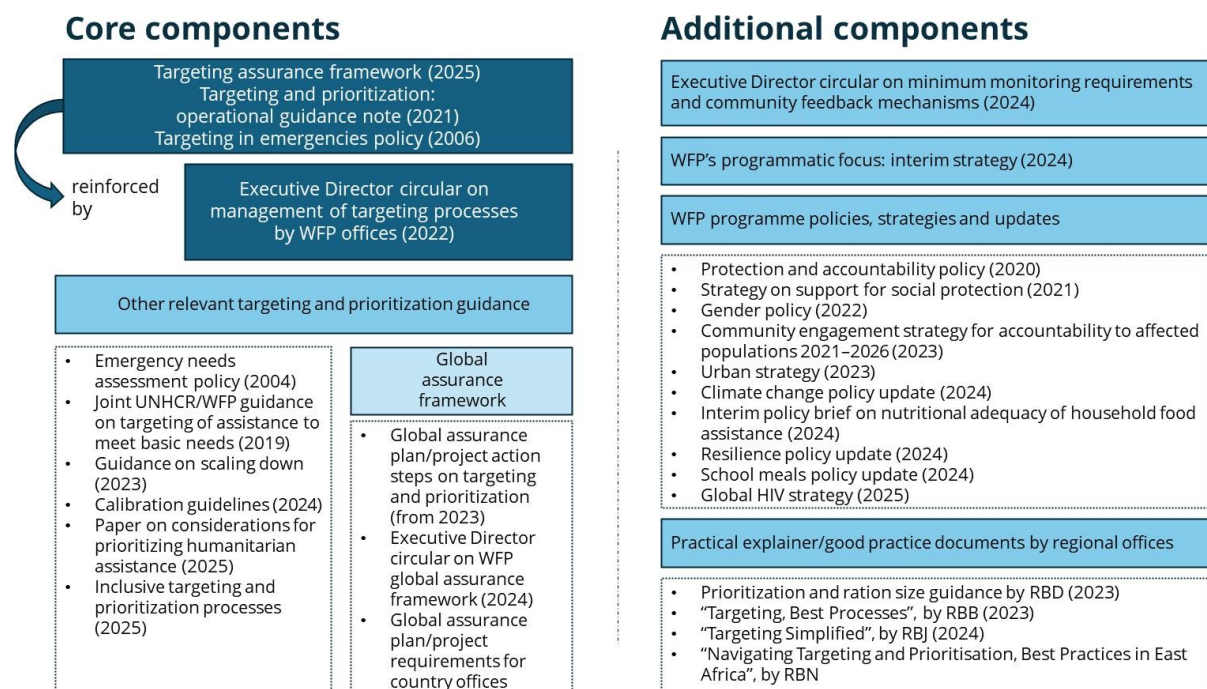
10. Since the internal audit of beneficiary targeting in WFP conducted in 2020,⁶ the organization has substantially improved its guidance and support structures related to targeting and prioritization. The audit found WFP's approaches to targeting and prioritization only partially satisfactory and called for major improvements. WFP has taken a range of pragmatic steps to address the shortcomings found. The global assurance framework, established in 2023 in response to donor demands for greater assurance and accountability, accelerated progress. The targeting assurance framework adopted in 2025 defines measures for strengthening targeting and prioritization practices; country office teams are expected to follow these practices in all operations and are held accountable for doing so. In addition, WFP's enterprise risk management policy guides practice by requiring that risk be **actively assessed and incorporated** into decisions about who receives assistance and when and how they receive it. As a result, WFP now has a suite of guidance materials and formal

⁶ WFP, 2020. *Internal Audit of Beneficiary Targeting in WFP*. Internal audit report AR/20/07.

requirements related to targeting and prioritization (as shown in figure 4) and continues to fill priority gaps.

11. Overall, WFP's normative framework strikes an appropriate balance between guiding and prescribing. It provides clear definitions, formal guidelines on gender and inclusion and a variety of examples based on lessons learned, while leaving country offices flexibility to adapt to local circumstances.

Figure 4: Overview of the normative framework for targeting and prioritization



Source: Evaluation team.

Abbreviations: RBB = Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific; RBD = Regional Bureau for Western Africa; RBJ = Regional Bureau for Southern Africa; RBN = Regional Bureau for Eastern Africa; UNHCR = Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

12. However, the normative framework is disjointed and has gaps. Above all, there has so far been only a limited focus on prioritization. WFP has recently started to address this with a paper on prioritizing humanitarian assistance.⁷ Country offices appreciate this paper but note that it deals primarily with URT for crisis response. Country offices seek clearer guidance on targeting for resilience and livelihoods interventions and in development-focused settings, as well as greater clarity regarding WFP's overall strategic direction in rapidly changing circumstances. Finally, the many separate guidance documents that constitute the normative framework for targeting and prioritization are not readily available from one source and are therefore difficult to use.
13. Support structures within global headquarters, including regional offices, have proven instrumental in strengthening targeting practices at the field level. These structures include regional targeting advisers as well as a headquarters-based cross-functional working group on targeting and prioritization established in 2024. They have supported knowledge transfer and learning and helped country offices to improve their targeting strategies and to verify compliance with the assurance steps required by the global assurance framework. Increasingly working in close cooperation with other relevant functional areas, the Needs Assessment and Targeting Service, the Emergency Preparedness and Response Service and

⁷ WFP. 2025. *Considerations for prioritising humanitarian assistance*.

regional targeting advisers have been effective in serving as an institutional “home” for this crucial topic. Yet, as a result of the substantial funding cuts, several targeting advisor positions at global headquarters will have to be abolished in 2026. In addition, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)/WFP Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub will be phased out. This will reduce critical targeting and prioritization technical capacity within WFP.

Conclusion 2: WFP has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of various targeting and prioritization approaches and increasingly takes into account vulnerabilities in the way it targets and prioritizes. Selected approaches were found to be largely appropriate for their specific contexts but evidence related to the costs of various approaches is inconclusive. In addition, WFP’s targeting and prioritization practices were found to be insufficiently agile and cooperative.

Appropriateness

14. WFP’s scope for making decisions on targeting and prioritization is constrained by donor earmarking of contributions, host government positions and other circumstances. The evaluation found that the choices made within those constraints were largely appropriate. More specifically, WFP uses a variety of targeting and prioritization approaches that often combine different methods, as shown below. When census data are available and household surveys are possible, WFP often opts for highly data-driven approaches to determine household vulnerability. When few data are available, the means to conduct large-scale household surveys are limited or humanitarian access is constrained, WFP frequently adopts a community-based targeting approach. For livelihood programmes, community consultations are central both for selecting participants and for choosing projects or assets for rehabilitation. WFP has demonstrated a high degree of flexibility in selecting targeting approaches that suit the demands of specific situations. That said, the rationale for opting for a given targeting or prioritization approach is rarely documented.

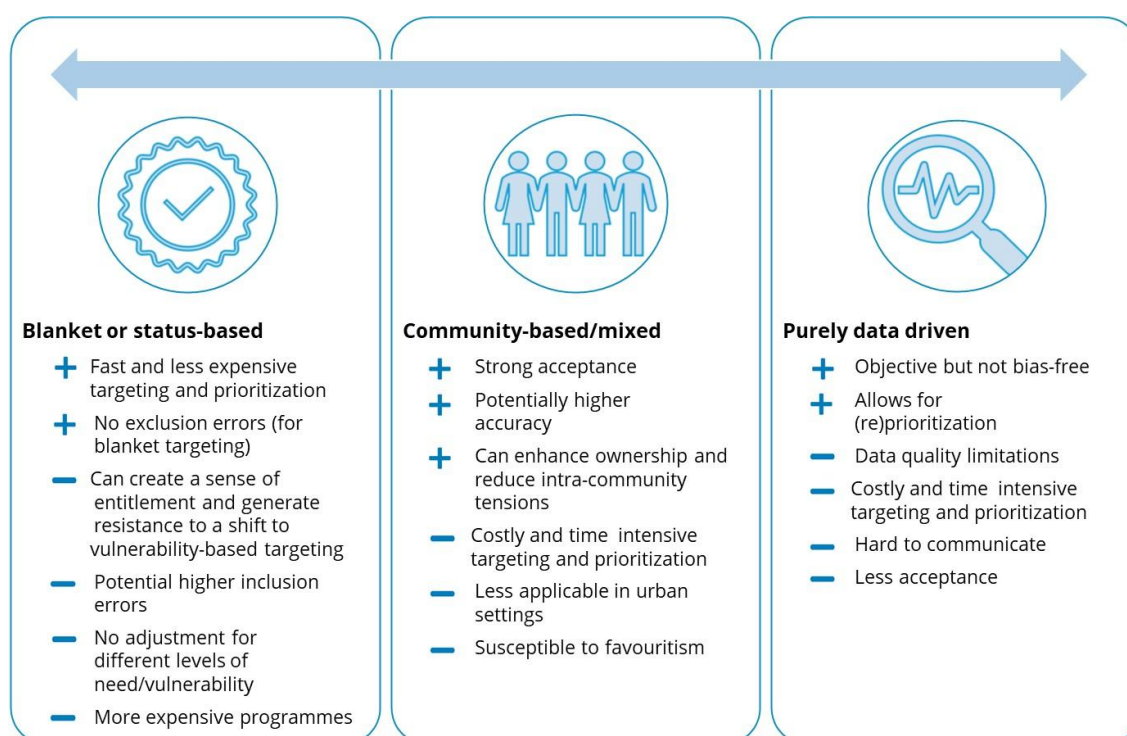
TABLE 1: OVERVIEW OF TARGETING AND PRIORITIZATION APPROACHES USED	
Programme type	Targeting and prioritization approaches (summary)
Unconditional resource transfers (URT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-based targeting most common; then categorical household-level targeting, status-based or a mix of methods • Blanket targeting at times • Prioritization mainly through geographic focus or reducing size of population assisted; also adjustments to duration, ration size or transfer value
Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention: geographic targeting and prioritization based on malnutrition prevalence; individual targeting linked to URT targeting and based on demographic criteria (e.g. young children, pregnant and breastfeeding women) • Treatment: referrals through health centres or community mobilizers using demographic and anthropometric indicators (e.g. mid-upper-arm circumference)
School meal programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographic targeting and prioritization often determined by or with the participation of governments in stable contexts, and informed by education and food security indicators. • Selection of schools based on a number of factors including community capacity to prepare meals

TABLE 1: OVERVIEW OF TARGETING AND PRIORITIZATION APPROACHES USED	
Programme type	Targeting and prioritization approaches (summary)
Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less standardized; driven by project-specific objectives • Geographic targeting focused on chronically food-insecure and/or shock-prone areas • Household targeting considering vulnerability and labour capacity, sometimes self-targeting

Source: Evaluation team.

15. Each targeting and prioritization approach has its own distinct strengths and weaknesses (figure 5). Blanket and status-based approaches, for example, can be relatively fast to implement and involve limited or no exclusion errors, while data-driven approaches allow for re-prioritization according to vulnerability when needed, and community-based approaches are typically better accepted.
16. WFP employees at all levels demonstrated a clear understanding of these strengths and weaknesses, even though systematic evidence about the performance and costs of the various approaches is lacking. Most personnel consulted for this evaluation deemed their country offices' approaches to targeting and prioritization as either completely or mostly fitting the context in which they were operating.

Figure 5: Overview of strengths and weaknesses of various targeting and prioritization approaches



Source: Evaluation team.

17. In recent years, WFP has shifted to more refined vulnerability-based targeting for a growing number of programmes. For example, instead of providing blanket assistance in certain areas or status-based assistance for certain population groups, country offices are applying more focused criteria to identify those in greatest need. This shift is not yet complete, however; some country offices select only small proportions of targeted households

through vulnerability analysis, and these more refined approaches have not yet been scaled up.

18. Most vulnerability-based targeting is community-based, although data-driven and hybrid approaches are becoming more common. The evaluation found that community-based approaches vary greatly and often lack clear documentation or rationale for their specific configurations. Hybrid models, combining community input with data analysis, are increasingly applied to mitigate the limitations of single-method approaches. Recent examples include vulnerability scorecards in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, integration of social registry data with community validation in Haiti and a data-driven proxy means test developed jointly with UNHCR and the World Bank in Jordan.
19. Across a range of operating environments, country offices reported combining different sources of information to define approaches to prioritization, including data-driven methods relying on WFP food security assessments, IPC or multi-sector assessments and community consultations. Less common sources reported included conflict sensitivity assessments, poverty and nutrition assessments, integrated context analyses, government data sources, including municipalities, disaster risk information, rapid needs assessments, SMART⁸ surveys and Geographic Information System data and satellite imagery.
20. WFP has also made progress in integrating gender, disability and inclusion into its targeting work. Most country offices use criteria such as households headed by women or older people and households with members with disabilities in order to estimate vulnerability. However, the evaluation found that these categories are at times applied too generically and without enough triangulation of contextualized food security, nutrition and/or poverty indicators. Community-based targeting mechanisms are also not always sufficiently gender-responsive, and women and other excluded demographic groups at times lack real influence in targeting decisions.

Agility

21. While WFP has the required flexibility to choose targeting and prioritization approaches that fit different situations, its planning is often insufficiently agile. In many cases WFP lacks the ability to adapt and adjust its responses to changing circumstances. Once the overall number of people to be assisted is defined, often during the initial geographic targeting, incentives are stacked against revising it. Budgets are set, in-kind assistance is procured or cash transfers arranged and agreements with cooperating partners are signed, and little or no contingency is made available to respond to valid appeals brought forward through community feedback mechanisms or monitoring findings. The WFP strategic plan for 2026–2029 also acknowledges this by stating that “WFP must strive for greater agility,”⁹ a conclusion that applies to targeting and prioritization as well as to other aspects of WFP operations.

Cooperation

22. WFP has formally institutionalized the early involvement of both management and programme personnel in targeting decisions through its targeting assurance framework and the establishment of targeting working groups. Practices vary, however. A cross-functional approach, where responsibilities are shared between vulnerability assessment and mapping and programme teams and informed by monitoring and evaluation, has proven effective in countries such as Jordan. The evaluation found evidence from the countries studied that engaging WFP cooperating partners from the outset had facilitated the

⁸ SMART stands for standardized monitoring and assessment of relief and transitions.

⁹ “WFP strategic plan (2026–2029)” (WFP/EB.2/2025/3-B/1/Rev.1).

alignment of technical approaches with political realities and fostered stronger ownership at the field level, for example in Nigeria.

23. Since WFP is the world's largest humanitarian organization, its targeting and prioritization practices have important implications for other humanitarian actors. Other agencies commonly refer individuals and households in need of food assistance to WFP – an example of good practice. In recent years, WFP has strengthened its cooperation with UNHCR in refugee settings and with the United Nations Children's Fund on nutrition-related targeting and prioritization. Meaningful engagement among stakeholders on targeting and prioritization through humanitarian coordination structures such as the food security cluster or cash working groups, however, remains an important gap. The potential benefits of partners jointly designing targeting criteria, validating beneficiary lists when data sharing agreements are in place and adapting targeting frameworks in response to changing needs are not being fully realized.
24. WFP has been supporting governments in strengthening national social protection systems, including with regard to social registries. This is a key objective in its own right, in particular in order to fully transfer to governments the responsibility to assist their own populations. The expected additional benefits of using national social registries for WFP's own targeting and prioritization, however, have so far rarely materialized. Depending on circumstances, WFP therefore needs to complement social registry data with systematic eligibility verification, community-based processes and effective appeal mechanisms.

Conclusion 3: WFP's targeting and prioritization approaches enable the organization to reach food-insecure people, but assistance has been spread too thinly and programme integration is insufficient.

Effectiveness

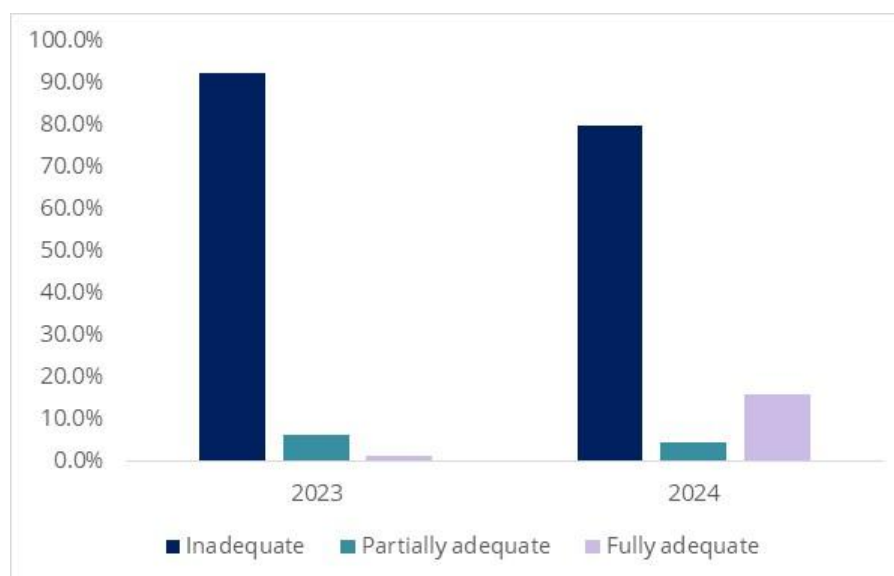
25. WFP does not systematically collect data on inclusion and exclusion errors. This is not a new issue and has been identified in previous audit reports and reviews. It continues to impede the assessment of WFP's targeting effectiveness.
26. WFP commonly selects geographic areas classified as IPC phase 3 or above (i.e. areas in crisis, emergency or catastrophe food insecurity) for assistance. When forced to prioritize further, WFP focuses on areas classified as IPC phase 4 or 5 only to avert famine or famine-like situations. WFP employees reported a high level of trust in IPC results. Yet the use of IPC classifications for geographic targeting and prioritization can result in significant exclusion errors, largely because IPC data classifies geographic units in a way that obscures differences between varying levels of vulnerability within geographic areas, as well as because of broader data limitations. In practice, WFP country offices usually complement IPC data with other context-specific information in order to refine geographic targeting and prioritization.
27. Of the seven countries reviewed for this evaluation, only in Jordan did WFP compare the effects of its assistance on targeted groups by using a food security outcome monitoring system assessing levels of food insecurity among sample beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. In Haiti, WFP used subjective questions in a post-distribution monitoring questionnaire to understand people's perceptions of inclusion and exclusion errors. In other countries, monitoring tools included general questions on targeting (e.g. knowledge of selection criteria or of the organization in charge of the selection in Nigeria) but the samples and questions were not designed to estimate inclusion or exclusion errors.
28. The evaluation found that targeting approaches employed in the countries examined were largely appropriate in terms of identifying and reaching the most vulnerable. Where stakeholders did voice criticism, it stemmed more from a lack of knowledge about WFP practices than from opposition to the specific approaches taken. This highlights the

importance of communicating both the targeting and the prioritization approaches adopted and the rationales for them.

Breadth versus depth

29. When forced to prioritize, WFP, taking other stakeholders' priorities and operational constraints into account, has generally opted to reduce rations and/or the duration of assistance instead of or in addition to reducing the number of people assisted. This, along with corresponding programme design decisions, has led to assistance often being spread too thinly.
30. WFP's corporate data show that over 90 percent of WFP's URT in-kind assistance in 2023 did not meet nutritional needs, raising questions about whether WFP assistance could realistically hope to improve food security outcomes. Although the situation improved slightly in 2024, 80 percent of URT rations were found to be nutritionally inadequate (figure 6). This trend was visible in the countries studied for this evaluation and has been highlighted in audits and evaluations for other country offices. Moreover, even when WFP maintains the level of assistance to fewer beneficiaries (i.e. prioritizes depth over breadth), the actual value of transfers received by beneficiaries may be diluted when beneficiaries share their assistance with family members and others.

Figure 6: Nutritional adequacy of WFP in-kind food rations (actual URT rations), 2023–2024



Source: WFP Nutrition and Food Quality Service.

31. Balancing breadth and depth of assistance presents an important ethical dilemma. The principle of humanity calls for serving all those in need. Yet when resources are limited, it is necessary to choose between reaching as many beneficiaries as possible with assistance too limited to make a real difference to their food security and reaching only a subset of the most vulnerable people with a greater level of assistance that can have a meaningful impact.
32. This evaluation found emerging efforts to resolve this tension, largely focused on ensuring a reasonable depth of assistance. WFP guidance documents emphasize the need to avoid transfers falling below 70 percent of daily nutritional requirements, taking into account the extent to which supported households can meet their own needs.¹⁰ WFP's strategic plan for 2026–2029 reinforces this approach, stating that WFP will “aim to reach fewer people with

¹⁰ WFP. 2025. *Considerations for prioritising humanitarian assistance*; WFP. 2025. *Prioritization Guidance for Emergency Response* (unpublished internal document).

higher-quality and better tailored assistance.¹¹ New practices for measuring and reporting on the nutritional adequacy or intensity of assistance through WFP annual performance reports also support this approach by helping to counter a longstanding focus on the number of people assisted as the key corporate success indicator.

Programme integration

33. WFP's goal of programme integration is clearly stated in corporate documents. In practice, evidence shows that WFP has fallen short of its ambition to better layer, sequence and integrate life-saving assistance and resilience assistance. This has direct consequences for WFP's targeting and prioritization practices. Until recently, WFP's "saving lives" and "changing lives" pillars followed discrete strategic directions, which often led to diverse programme and targeting logics. URT is designed for rapid, flexible responses intended to reach the most vulnerable in dynamic crisis situations and highly food-insecure locations, relying on updated vulnerability assessments to adapt interventions to changing needs. In contrast, resilience programmes are typically implemented in areas affected by recurrent shocks but with greater potential to recover and maintain food security, sometimes in line with donor or government preferences. Within such areas, households are selected through community-based planning or self-targeting and are expected to be supported for a longer period in order to facilitate graduation from assistance. Resilience activities are often physically demanding and may exclude households that are among the most vulnerable.
34. This practice may change in accordance with the recent update of WFP's resilience policy, which calls for the targeting of areas at high risk of experiencing shocks with integrated programming. WFP's strategic plan for 2026–2029 reinforces this by stating that "resilience work will focus on geographic areas and communities that experience protracted or recurrent acute food insecurity, prioritizing people whose food security and nutrition are most impacted by shocks".¹²

Conclusion 4: There is a disconnect between WFP's clear standards on targeting and prioritization and its practice, which leaves the organization exposed to several risks and requires stronger compliance with minimum standards as well as improvements in data systems.

35. The evaluation found that the way in which targeting approaches are implemented often matters more than which approach is selected. One of WFP's core challenges lies at the "last mile" in ensuring consistent, high-quality execution of targeting and prioritization processes closest to the people served. Where execution was not in line with standards, the evaluation found inclusion and exclusion errors and erosion of community trust. In some instances, this was compounded by an overreliance on cooperating partners who had uneven capacity for targeting and prioritization and/or by the use of outdated or incomplete vulnerability data. Especially in politically sensitive situations, such shortcomings can expose WFP to significant operational, reputational and accountability risks.
36. While WFP's global assurance and targeting assurance frameworks cover many of the critical issues identified, the targeting assurance framework in particular is still very recent. WFP practices observed by this evaluation often fall short of the standards outlined in these frameworks. Monitoring, above all, has not been a reliable source of information on targeting effectiveness, and the way operations are monitored frequently do not fully meet WFP's own minimum standards.

¹¹ "WFP strategic plan (2026–2029)" (WFP/EB.2/2025/3-B/1/Rev.1).

¹² *Ibid.*

37. Another issue noted by the evaluation is the risk of inadequate or inconsistent partner capacity, which is identified in WFP's enterprise risk management policy and country risk registers. WFP has made progress in guiding cooperating partners to adhere to its corporate standards. Yet the evaluation found instances in which partners operated with limited support and oversight, increasing risks for WFP and creating potential for inaccurate targeting. In particular, while practices vary widely, there is frequently insufficient engagement with cooperating partners on the implementation of community-based targeting. This created situations where community consultations lacked safeguards against elite capture, social bias and targeting errors.
38. Community members consulted for this evaluation highlighted both the potential positive effects of assistance on social cohesion and some frictions that could be caused by targeting and prioritization. They generally understood and appreciated WFP's intention to reach those most vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition. However, they often did not understand the details of the targeting and prioritization processes or rationales, which left them concerned about whether implementation was fair and equitable. The level of transparency and information sharing with affected people emerged as a key factor influencing the acceptability of WFP's targeting and prioritization practices. While WFP has generally made progress in communicating with affected people, it still restricts information on targeting and prioritization in several contexts, with adverse effects on social cohesion.
39. Finally, verification systems could be strengthened. Most standard operating procedures require checks to ensure that people assisted meet eligibility criteria, but there is little evidence of whether these are systematically implemented at the level required to address inclusion errors. The use of de-duplication processes remains limited because digital registration systems are not consistently used and the interoperability of WFP's relevant information technology systems is weak. In addition, community feedback mechanisms rarely translate into effective appeals mechanisms in the absence of a way to adjust caseloads more readily. As a result, WFP in many instances still lacks the feedback and control mechanisms needed to refine and improve its targeting and prioritization in real time and to effectively mitigate the related risks to its programmes and reputation.

Conclusion 5: Humanitarian funding cuts are forcing WFP to make tough choices about where and how it provides assistance and to whom and for how long. These pressures expose unresolved dilemmas in targeting and prioritization, making it urgent for WFP to clearly define its principles and strategic direction.

40. Most major donors are currently reducing their contributions to the humanitarian system, reversing more than a decade of growth. This creates significant dilemmas for WFP and the broader sector, especially in relation to targeting and prioritization. WFP is being forced to prioritize more sharply, facing ethical dilemmas about whom to assist and whom to leave out. At the same time, shifting from status-based targeting to vulnerability-based targeting to enable fair and just prioritization increases targeting costs. With shrinking budgets and rising targeting costs, the value and feasibility of rigorous targeting is likely to be questioned. Meanwhile, potential broader shifts in the humanitarian architecture are being discussed, ranging from the merger of United Nations bodies and a reduction in the number of humanitarian clusters to the localization of humanitarian assistance and the entry of new actors, often from the private sector. These developments require WFP to more clearly define its position on targeting and prioritization.
41. Which targeting and prioritization approaches are most appropriate depends on WFP's intended aims. WFP thus needs more clarity regarding its strategy. If WFP primarily wants to be a humanitarian provider of last resort that reaches the most vulnerable in the most difficult locations, then it must be able to bear the costs of identifying those most in need with accuracy, alongside the often higher costs of operating in such locations. If, on the other

hand, WFP primarily wants to save and improve the lives of the greatest number of people affected by food insecurity, it needs to focus more on cost effectiveness and on providing integrated live-saving and resilience or livelihood activities in highly food-insecure areas.

42. The evidence reviewed for this evaluation shows that WFP has begun to articulate its stance on some critical issues. Yet many fundamental questions remain unaddressed and trade-offs stand unacknowledged. The recent commitment signalled in the strategic plan for 2026–2029 provides some clarity on WFP’s positioning: to focus on those most in need and affected by crises; to ensure meaningful levels of assistance, in an integrated way; and to focus livelihood activities on areas most affected by shocks and food insecurity.¹³ Yet WFP has been less clear about which activities it will scale back or cease altogether. Should it focus more strictly on areas facing acute food insecurity only, reducing its footprint in middle-income countries such as Sri Lanka or Ukraine? Should it phase out predictable lean season assistance, as recommended in the February 2025 prioritization guidance issued by WFP’s Western and Central Africa Regional Office? While the strategic plan for 2026–2029 discusses WFP’s position and comparative advantages, it takes a relatively cautious stance on areas where it will cease to engage.¹⁴
43. Donor direction is a key determinant in WFP choices, but this evaluation concluded that the strategic questions related to targeting and prioritization described above need to be discussed and addressed more openly by WFP’s senior management. Doing so will help to optimize targeting and prioritization approaches and support WFP country offices in prioritization decisions – as this evaluation suggests in its first recommendation below.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsibility WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
<p>Recommendation 1: Support country offices in prioritization decisions by more clearly articulating WFP's strategic focus and positioning in order to strengthen their targeting and prioritization rationales.</p> <p>Faced with unprecedented budget cuts, country offices need more support in navigating the trade-offs inherent in targeting and prioritization. As WFP implements its new strategic plan, it should provide clear strategic guidance on the matters central to programme design and targeting and prioritization discussed below. It should also advocate with donors for space to follow these directions.</p>	Strategic	Programme Division	Cross-functional working group on targeting and prioritization Supply Chain and Delivery Division (Planning and GCMF Unit)	High	June 2026
1.1 Reinforce WFP's commitment to providing high-quality assistance by defining and upholding minimum levels of emergency assistance, strengthening reporting about and accountability for the nutritional adequacy of emergency assistance (for example through a more systematic use of the Optimus analytical tool), and supporting the integration of emergency and resilience programmes in areas affected by recurrent shocks (including by advocating with donors).		Programme Division	Supply Chain and Delivery Division (Planning and GCMF Unit)		June 2026
1.2 Building on the paper "Considerations for prioritizing humanitarian assistance", encourage country offices to give greater consideration to the cost-effectiveness of emergency interventions among the many issues to be considered when deciding whom to target and prioritize among groups of people facing the same severity of need.		Programme Division	Cross-functional working group on targeting and prioritization		June 2026

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsibility WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 2: Uphold targeting and prioritization standards by making guidance and tools more accessible, enforcing compliance with minimum standards, and safeguarding capacity. The evaluation team suggests that WFP employ the measures discussed below in its efforts to maintain its targeting and prioritization standards during this period of diminishing financial and human resources	Strategic	Programme Division		High	December 2026
2.1 Rather than develop a new policy, make existing guidance more accessible by better consolidating and streamlining key documents in one location that is easily accessible to all functions and complementing them with practical tools, training materials and examples of good practice (especially for targeting and prioritization for resilience). As part of these efforts, ensure that targeting and prioritization processes are clear and integrated (see recommendation 4).		Programme Division	Supply Chain and Delivery Division (Delivery Assurance Service)		December 2026
2.2 Maintain adequate staffing and expertise at global headquarters (including regional offices) and in country offices to enable a cross-functional approach to targeting and prioritization as well as sufficient capacity for data collection and analysis and the design of adaptable targeting and prioritization approaches.		Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer Department Assistant Executive Director, Programme Operations Department	Programme Cycle, Quality, and Budgeting Service Programme Operations, Staffing Coordination and Capacity Service, Programme Division (Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Service)		December 2026

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsibility WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
2.3 To uphold minimum standards, hold country offices accountable for consistently verifying lists of people to be assisted and ensuring inclusive targeting and community engagement practices. Strengthen oversight of cooperating partners in order to mitigate risks of bias, favouritism, sexual exploitation and abuse, and exclusion. Ensure that the resources required to meet minimum standards are adequately reflected and supported in country portfolio needs budgets.		Programme Monitoring and Reporting Service	Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Service Supply Chain and Delivery Division (Delivery Assurance Service)		December 2026
Recommendation 3: Support country offices in adopting more transparent, more agile and more cost-effective targeting and prioritization approaches. WFP can take the steps described below to help its country offices become more transparent, agile and cost-effective in their targeting and prioritization practices. This is important to address existing weaknesses in targeting and prioritization practices and to adapt to a more volatile and resource-scarce environment.	Operational	Programme Division	Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer Department	High	
3.1 Require country offices to monitor targeting effectiveness (inclusion and exclusion errors disaggregated by sex, age and other characteristics relevant to the context) across programmes, ideally through outcome monitoring among WFP beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries and at a minimum through standardized questions included in post-distribution monitoring as well as the analysis of community feedback data.		Programme Monitoring and Reporting Service			December 2026

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsibility WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
3.2 Require country offices to transparently share WFP's targeting and prioritization rationales and criteria with affected people and to communicate the planned duration of assistance from the outset. Where WFP provides blanket or status-based assistance during the initial phase of a response, require country offices to define explicit criteria and, if possible, timelines for the phase-out of assistance or transition to more targeted assistance and to communicate the criteria and timeline transparently to affected people and partners.		Assistant Executive Director Programme Operations Department (Gender, Inclusion and Protection Unit)	Emergency Preparedness and Response Service Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Service		December 2026
3.3 Improve the tracking of targeting costs and encourage country offices to increase the cost-effectiveness of targeting and prioritization processes by accepting higher error rates in the initial phases of a response (and in short-term responses) and increasing accuracy over time.		Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Service	Chief Financial Officer Division		December 2026
3.4 Require country offices to turn existing community feedback mechanisms into more functional appeals processes by ensuring some flexibility to adjust lists of people to be assisted based on appeals.		Programme Monitoring and Reporting Service	Gender, Inclusion and Protection Unit		December 2026
3.5 Encourage country offices to use their engagement with food security and nutrition clusters and cash working groups to create more transparency about targeting and prioritization strategies and, where possible, align approaches to avoid fragmentation.		Programme Division (global food security cluster)	Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Service		December 2026

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsibility WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
<p>Recommendation 4: Strengthen the interoperability of WFP's own data systems and common data systems or data sharing with other humanitarian agencies for targeting and prioritization.</p> <p>Effective targeting and prioritization hinges on the availability of accurate data. Collecting and updating such data requires a major investment of resources. In a very resource-constrained environment, WFP should therefore adopt more cooperative and more efficient approaches to data collection and management. Depending on context, this can entail one or several of the approaches described below.</p>	Strategic	Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Service		High	December 2027
<p>4.1 Prioritize the necessary financial and human resources needed to accelerate the modernization and interoperability or integration of WFP's own digital data systems (e.g. SCOPE, SugarCRM, MoDa and CODA), together with reliable and secure data management practices, in order to enable a more comprehensive collection and storage of vulnerability data for prioritization and support effective de-duplication. This requires clear and integrated processes for targeting and prioritization (see recommendation 2).</p>		Technology Division	Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Service Programme Monitoring and Reporting Service Supply Chain and Delivery Division (Delivery Assurance Service, Logistics Service)		December 2027

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsibility WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
4.2 Strengthen WFP's role in making data a humanitarian public good by expanding and operationalizing global data-sharing agreements with key humanitarian partners and establish clear governance frameworks for data access, protection and use.		Assistant Executive Director, Programme Operations Department (including Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Service and Delivery Assurance Service)	Global Privacy Office Legal Office		December 2027
4.3 Advance local data sharing practices by identifying pilot countries to assess and address common challenges to establishing local data sharing agreements, including legal, ethical and technical barriers. Based on these insights, define concrete steps for expediting local data sharing agreements.		Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Service	Country offices Global Privacy Office		December 2027

Acronyms

IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
URT	unconditional resource transfers