



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

Executive Board

Second regular session
Rome, 14–17 November 2022

Distribution: General

Agenda item 6

Date: 5 October 2022

WFP/EB.2/2022/6-C

Original: English

Evaluation reports

For consideration

Executive Board documents are available on WFP's website (<https://executiveboard.wfp.org>).

Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Ecuador (2017–2021)

Executive summary

An evaluation of the country strategic plan for Ecuador for 2017–2021 was conducted between April 2021 and June 2022. It assessed WFP's strategic positioning, its relevance, effectiveness and efficiency and the factors explaining its performance. The evaluation served the dual purpose of accountability and learning and informed the preparation of a new country strategic plan.

Ecuador is an upper-middle-income country with high levels of inequality and chronic malnutrition; about 52 percent of the population has inadequate access to nutritious food. The country is highly vulnerable to disasters and climate change, and in recent years has experienced the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic and the arrival of large numbers of Venezuelan migrants.

WFP's country strategic plan for Ecuador emphasizes crisis response, smallholder farmer support, climate change adaptation and country capacity strengthening under five strategic outcomes.

The evaluation found that the plan was aligned with people's needs and national priorities and enabled WFP to contribute effectively and efficiently to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. WFP acted on its dual mandate of saving lives and changing lives and worked in coordination with government partners and other United Nations entities.

WFP displayed commendable operational flexibility in scaling up and diversifying interventions to meet the need caused by multiple emergencies, including the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

Smallholder farmer support led to enhanced production and better access to nutritious foods, but the envisaged change in nutrition-related behaviour was not achieved. Farmers' access to public contracting schemes and the institutionalization of procurement schemes (for the handover of the school feeding programme) require further attention.

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

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WFP mobilized funding to pioneer climate change adaptation and resilience activities, but budget execution and programme implementation suffered delays. Innovative approaches were adopted, but the design of asset-based activities could have been more diversified.

WFP's capacity strengthening efforts were informed by an ample evidence base. Despite achievements, however, the country office needs to ensure that its staff have the skill needed to optimize WFP's role in policy engagement, technical assistance and capacity strengthening.

Important progress was achieved in beneficiary participation and feedback and in the mainstreaming of gender- and nutrition-sensitive approaches. However, WFP missed opportunities, for example to put in place a behaviour change communication strategy and to strengthen nutrition monitoring. More attention could have been paid to the risks threatening vulnerable beneficiary men and boys.

A siloed approach to implementation of the five strategic outcomes limited the coherence, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. Challenges in knowledge management and monitoring hindered evidence-based management and the visibility and sustainability of interventions.

The original country portfolio budget more than tripled during implementation of the country strategic plan, and WFP successfully mobilized resources for scaling up activities. However, extensive earmarking of donor contributions impeded the continuity of activity 2 (livelihoods strengthening as an element of crisis response). WFP identified cost-saving strategies and reduced the share of direct support costs in total expenses, but the introduction of new approaches slightly increased the cost per beneficiary and changes in cash-based transfer redemption points appear to have eroded the value of beneficiary entitlements as a result of higher prices.

In conclusion, the evaluation found that WFP successfully delivered on its dual mandate in alignment with national priorities and needs, contributing effectively to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Emergencies were attended to in a timely manner, with strong leadership and great operational flexibility, despite the extensive earmarking of contributions. However, there are opportunities to further strengthen climate change adaptation activities, protection, nutrition and work on the triple nexus. Weaknesses were also identified in monitoring and knowledge management. The country strategic plan constituted an adaptable framework, but its components need to be better integrated.

The evaluation made four strategic and two operational recommendations relating to the triple nexus and humanitarian protection; WFP's role in public policy engagement; the mainstreaming of nutrition; the integration of programme management and monitoring; internal synergies; and capacity development for staff.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Ecuador (2017–2021) (WFP/EB.2/2022/6-C) and management response (WFP/EB.2/2022/6-C/Add.1) and encourages further action on the recommendations set out in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

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

Introduction

Evaluation features

1. The evaluation of the country strategic plan (CSP) for Ecuador for 2017–2021 was conducted between April 2021 and June 2022. It covered WFP's strategy, interventions and systems for the period between April 2017 and August 2021. It served the dual purpose of accountability and learning by assessing the results achieved and creating opportunities for learning at the national, regional and corporate levels. The results of the evaluation informed the preparation and design of a new CSP for Ecuador.
2. The evaluation adopted a theory-based mixed-methods approach, drawing on monitoring data, a literature review, semi-structured interviews, discussions with beneficiary focus groups and an online survey. A gender-sensitive approach was applied throughout the process. Despite the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the evaluation was largely conducted on the ground: only the senior international evaluator had to engage with informants remotely, while the evaluation team leader and three national team members were able to put hygiene and safety measures in place that enabled them to visit communities and meet stakeholders in Ecuador in person. The evaluation findings and recommendations were discussed with internal and external stakeholders at two workshops conducted in hybrid format (in-person meetings with some participants joining remotely) in November 2021.
3. The evaluation team had only limited access to beneficiaries, field-based activities and cooperating partners as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and, in some cases, the termination of projects. In addition, incomplete and misaligned monitoring data limited opportunities to analyse operational effectiveness. Despite those shortcomings, the evaluation team considers that the available data, the key informant interviews conducted and the site visits undertaken were sufficient to allow evidence-based analysis.

Context¹












4. Ecuador is an upper-middle-income country, but it has high rates of poverty and is among the most unequal countries in the world. It is highly vulnerable to disasters and climate change, which affect rural communities in particular.²
5. Women in Ecuador are vulnerable: the country was ranked 42nd of 156 countries in terms of the gender gap in 2021 and has the third highest teenage fertility rate in the region.³ About 65 percent of women have experienced gender-based violence.

¹ The data reported in this section of the summary evaluation report were updated from secondary sources in June 2022 and so may differ from those in the full evaluation report.

² Salinas, V., Cevallos, W. and Levy, K. 2020. "*Afrodescendientes e indígenas vulnerables al cambio climático: desacuerdos frente a medidas preventivas estatales ecuatorianas*" ("Afro-descendants and indigenous people vulnerable to climate change: Disagreements about preventative measures of the Ecuadorian state") *Íconos. Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, 66: 107–129.

³ World Bank Databank. 2020. [Adolescent fertility rate \(births per 1,000 women ages 15–19\) – Ecuador](#).

6. Ecuador was one of the Latin American countries hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic, with 35,725 deaths by June 2022.⁴ In 2020, overall economic losses were equivalent to 16 percent of gross domestic product,⁵ with women and indigenous people disproportionately affected and the emergence of problems that included child pregnancies⁶ and deteriorating food security.⁷
7. In 2021, Ecuador hosted 503,882 refugees and migrants from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.⁸ During the pandemic, an estimated 500 to 1,000 irregular migrants per day crossed the border, including children.⁹

TABLE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Value	Year
	Total population (million) (1)	17.9	2021
	Life expectancy at birth (years) (1)	77	2020
	Maternal mortality ratio (national estimate, per 100,000 live births) (1)	57	2018
	Disability prevalence (percentage) (2)	2.67	2021
	Human Development Index (rank) (3)	86	2020
	Poverty headcount ratio (percentage of population) (4)	32	2021
	Gini coefficient (4)	0.5	2020
	Global Hunger Index (on a 100-point GHI Severity Scale, where 0 is the best score) (5)	14	2021
	Chronic malnutrition (stunting), prevalence for children under 5 (percentage) (9)	23	2021
	Households without economic access to a nutritious diet (percentage of population) (6)	48	2018
	Obesity and overweight, prevalence for children between 5–19 (percentage) (9)	28	2021

⁴ Government of Ecuador. 2022. [COVID-19 statistics](#). (Available in Spanish only.)




⁵ Ecovis Ecuador. 2021. [Impacto del Covid en la economía ecuatoriana](#) (Impact of COVID on Ecuador's economy)

⁶ United Nations Population Fund and United Nations Children's Fund. 2020. [Consecuencias socioeconómicas del embarazo en la adolescencia en Ecuador](#) (Socioeconomic consequences of adolescent pregnancy in Ecuador).

⁷ WFP. 2020. [Migration Pulse – February 2020. Remote Assessment: Venezuelan Migrants and Host Communities – Colombia, Ecuador and Peru](#).

⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. [Refugee Data Finder 2021 Ecuador](#).

⁹ United Nations Children's Fund. 2021. [Ecuador Humanitarian Situation Report](#).

TABLE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Value	Year
	Refugees (total) (7)	56 603	2021
	Asylum seekers (total) (7)	7 137	2021
	Gender Inequality Index (score) (8)	0.739 (42 out of 153 countries)	2021

Sources: (1) World Bank; (2) National Council for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities; (3) United Nations Development Programme; (4) National Institute of Statistics and Census; (5) Global Hunger Index; (6) WFP; (7) Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; (8) World Economic Forum; (9) United Nations Children's Fund.

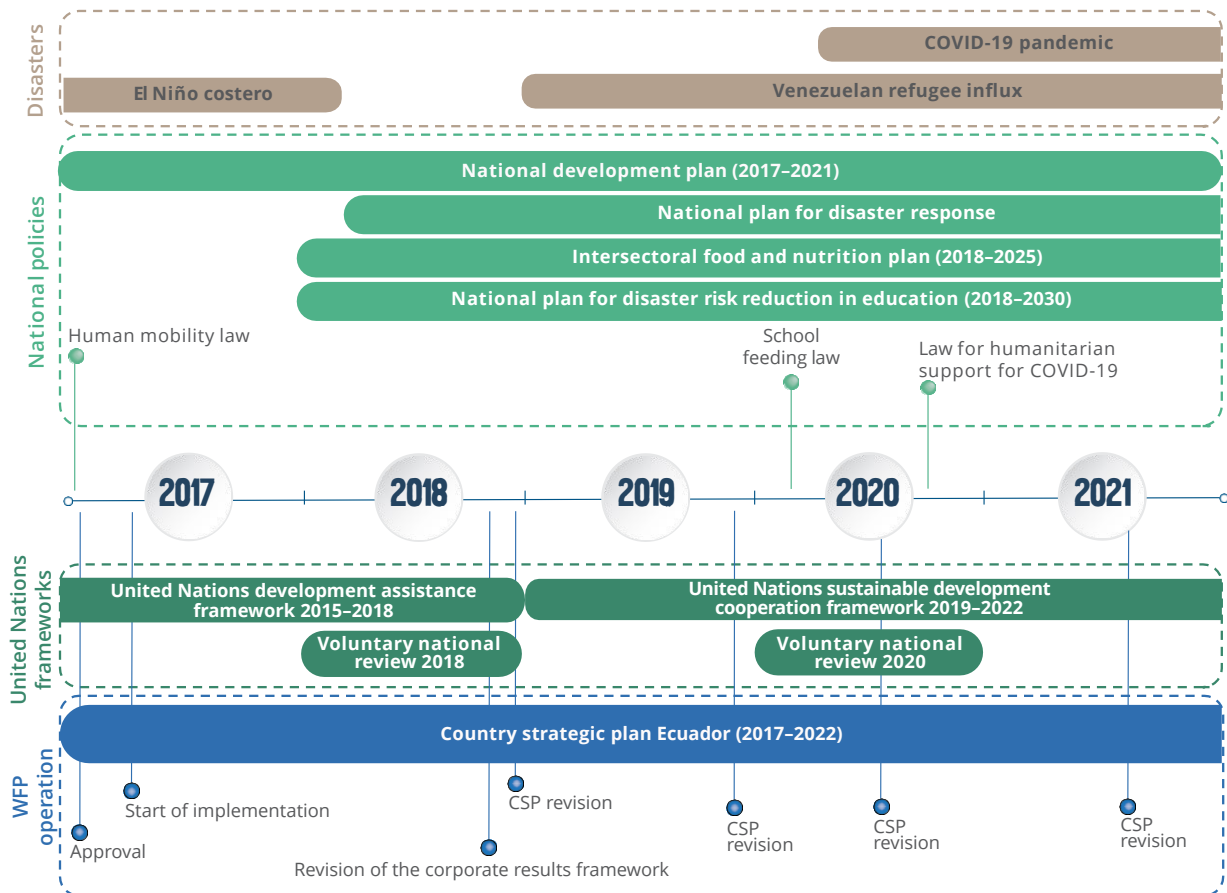
8. Ecuador's main national development plan for 2017–2021, the *Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir 2017–2021: planificamos para toda una vida* (National Plan for Good Living: We Plan for a Lifetime), and other development policies are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The intersectoral food and nutrition plan for 2018–2025 is the main instrument that addresses nutrition. Other relevant frameworks include the human mobility law of 2017, the national plan for disaster risk reduction in education for 2018–2030, the school feeding law of 2020, the national climate change strategy for 2012–2025 and the national agricultural policy and plan.
9. Food insecurity in Ecuador is correlated with socioeconomic vulnerabilities, such as those related to gender and rurality. Inadequate access to nutritious food has been identified as an important determinant of undernourishment for 52 percent of the population.¹⁰ Adequate access to food is the most urgent need for most migrants.¹¹ Nutrition is still a challenge: 12.4 percent of the population is undernourished¹² and 23 percent of children under 5 suffer chronic malnutrition, with higher figures for rural and indigenous populations.¹³

¹⁰ WFP. 2020. *Cerrando la brecha de nutrientes en Ecuador* (Filling the Nutrient Gap in Ecuador).

¹¹ WFP. 2020. *Migration Pulse – February 2020. Remote Assessment: Venezuelan Migrants and Host communities – Colombia, Ecuador and Peru*.

¹² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, Pan-American Health Organization, WFP and United Nations Children's Fund. 2021. *Latin America and the Caribbean – Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2021: Statistics and trends*.

¹³ United Nations Children's Fund. 2021. *The State of the World's Children 2021: On my mind – Promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health*.

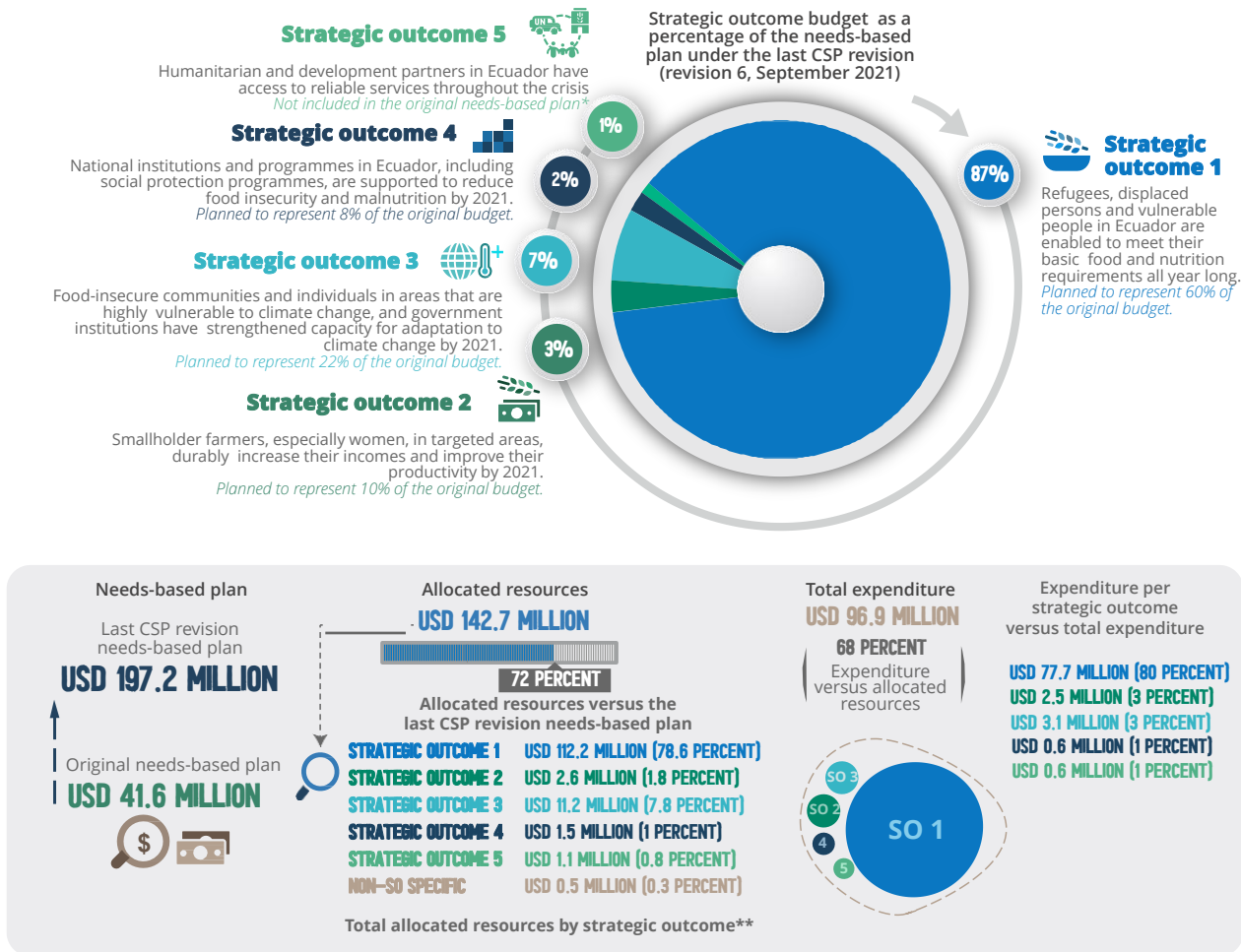
Figure 1: Country context and WFP operational overview, 2017–2021

Source: Office of Evaluation, based on the full report of the CSP evaluation.

The WFP country strategic plan

10. The CSP for Ecuador for 2017–2021 placed particular emphasis on complementing national social protection systems, supporting smallholder farmer households and fostering climate change adaptation and resilience. It also envisaged the broadening of WFP's humanitarian response through the inclusion of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in its direct assistance activities.
11. The CSP was structured around four strategic outcomes, with a fifth introduced in 2020. Thirteen outputs and ten activities addressed WFP's focus areas of resilience building, crisis response and root causes. The intervention modalities used included cash-based transfers, capacity strengthening, and service delivery. Cross-cutting priorities included accountability to affected populations, gender issues, protection and the environment.
12. The CSP was implemented during a challenging period marked by the arrival of large numbers of Venezuelan refugees and migrants and the COVID-19 pandemic, which required a significant expansion of WFP's support. Budget data reflect those substantial changes during the implementation period. After six revisions of the CSP and its budget, the budget more than tripled from USD 41,597,853 to USD 197,247,946, and the number of planned direct beneficiaries increased from 175,950 to 1,791,269.

Figure 2: Ecuador country strategic plan for 2017–2022, strategic outcomes, budgets, funding and expenditures up to 31 December 2021



* Strategic outcome 5 was introduced in July 2020 with the fifth revision of the Ecuador country strategic plan (2017-2021).
 ** Allocated resources by strategic outcome do not add up to USD 142.7 million because resources were also allocated to direct (USD 5.4 million) and indirect (USD 8.3 million) support costs. Expenditures by strategic outcome do not add up to USD 96.9 million because resources were also spent on direct (USD 4.4 million) and indirect (USD 8.3 million) support costs.

Source: WFP Integrated Road Map Analytics.

Evaluation findings

To what extent are WFP’s strategic position, role and specific contributions based on country priorities, people’s needs and WFP’s strengths?

- The CSP for Ecuador was aligned with the country’s main national policies and priorities related to food security and nutrition, early childhood development, health, equality and climate change. Through its objectives related to equity and inclusion, economic development, resilience building and environmental sustainability, the CSP was also aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- The design of the CSP built on WFP’s prior experience in the country and on the results of a participatory analysis. WFP contributed to both national objectives and the SDGs, in particular poverty eradication (SDG 1), zero hunger (SDG 2) and partnerships (SDG 17). More indirectly, CSP strategic outcomes 1, 2 and 3 sought to contribute to seven other SDGs: 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11 and 13.
- WFP activities in Ecuador have targeted highly vulnerable populations including people severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Consideration of ethnicity and gender were integrated into WFP’s targeting criteria, but there was limited inclusion of host communities in activities designed to support Colombian and Venezuelan migrants.

Figure 3: Main population groups covered by WFP assistance

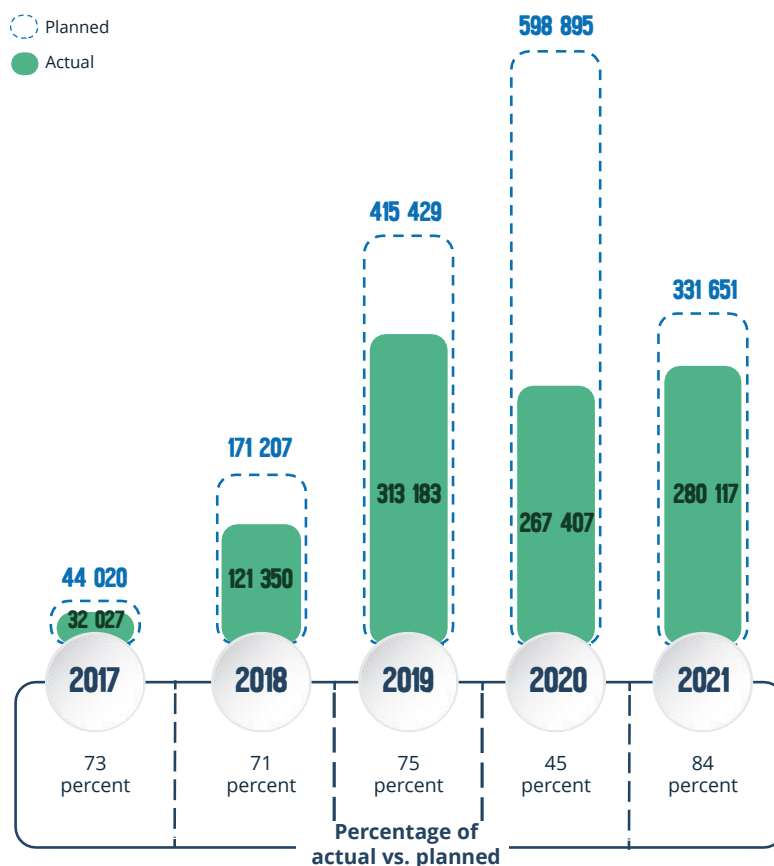
Source: Evaluation team.

16. The relevance of WFP's interventions was confirmed and consolidated during the implementation of the CSP, thanks to continuing engagement with partners to ensure that actions responded to national needs and complemented existing structures. WFP was able to position itself as an expert in food security, but focus on chronic malnutrition, overweight, obesity and breastfeeding practices was limited.
17. There was a major programmatic shift during the COVID-19 pandemic. WFP responded by expanding strategic outcome 1 and including an additional strategic outcome (5), reflecting a two-pronged approach of contributing food assistance to complement national social protection systems while also providing transport services, storage services and capacity strengthening (logistics) support to humanitarian partners.
18. During activity design and implementation, WFP made a clear effort to identify synergies and complementarities with a broad range of other United Nations entities. Areas of coordination included support for refugees and migrants through the working group on refugees and migrants with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Children's Fund, nutrition and school feeding with the United Nations Children's Fund and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and joint efforts to foster gender approaches with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

What are the extent and quality of WFP's contribution to country strategic plan outcomes in Ecuador?

19. **Strategic outcome 1: Crisis response** – WFP was flexible in adapting its crisis response, particularly in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. The country office increased assistance by expanding its geographic reach and duration and by extending it to vulnerable Ecuadorian households. WFP's crisis response improved access to food and fostered knowledge of nutrition in crisis situations. However, people's behaviour with regard to feeding practices was not notably enhanced. In 2019, weaknesses were identified in beneficiaries' haem iron intake and food consumption levels. Inadequate monitoring data did not allow the analysis of contributing factors, which may have been due to programme performance, changes in circumstances or both.
20. **Strategic outcome 2: Smallholder farmers and links to school feeding** – WFP contributed to the consolidation of the national school feeding programme through capacity strengthening activities. Following the handover of WFP's direct assistance to the national school feeding programme in 2019, the country office assumed an important role in providing technical assistance and supporting the design of public policies. Nevertheless, various aspects of the Government's implementation of school feeding activities remained challenging. At the local level, WFP established a model that could enhance future implementation by linking schools to smallholder farmers for the supply of fresh nutritious foods. CSP activities led to increases in the incomes of assisted subsistence farmers, and WFP interventions contributed to the strengthening of the productive, associative and commercial capacity of smallholder farmers, in particular women. However, obstacles that hindered farmers' sales of produce to public institutions, such as schools, persisted. As an unexpected outcome, food produced by smallholder farmer organizations strengthened food security during the COVID-19 pandemic.
21. Following the 2021 revision of the CSP and its budget, activities under strategic outcomes 1 and 2 were extended to serve totals of 1,738,019 and 53,250 beneficiaries respectively, about nine times the numbers initially planned. Actual beneficiaries served reached a peak of more than 300,000 in 2019, with 97 percent being migrants and refugees (figure 4). COVID-19 and continuing migrant movements maintained the number of beneficiaries at high levels in 2020 and 2021, although access restrictions and the closure of shelters and canteens in response to the pandemic impeded the ability to reach the planned numbers of beneficiaries.

Figure 4: Actual versus planned beneficiaries reached by WFP in Ecuador under strategic outcomes 1 and 2, 2017–2021



Sources: Ecuador annual country reports 2017–2021.

22. **Strategic outcome 3: Resilience and climate change adaptation** – Through capacity strengthening activities, WFP effectively positioned climate change adaptation as a key contributing factor in combatting food insecurity through local and national development plans. However, the implementation of those and other activities under strategic outcome 3 suffered from low budget execution (with only 27.5 percent of the allocations to the needs-based plan spent) and delays, mainly in consequence of the time required for participatory processes; problems with internet access in indigenous communities; increased insecurity; changes in the authorities participating; and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited data collection by the country office since 2017 limited the ability to analyse the effectiveness of the contributions made under this strategic outcome.
23. Climate change adaptation activities overemphasized enhancing the efficiency of resources such as irrigation systems to the detriment of more diverse activities aimed at protecting livelihoods and identifying produce suitable for existing soil conditions.
24. Among the strengths of strategic outcome 3 activities was the innovative approach of working with the Awá and Afro-Ecuadorian communities, which facilitated the incorporation of ethnobotanic studies and ancestral wisdom into the development of climate change adaptation approaches. Formal agreements with academic institutions in Ecuador constitute a commendable strategy for strengthening the capacity of those communities, although activities under those agreements were not yet being conducted at the time of data collection for the evaluation.

25. Government disaster preparedness, anticipatory action and early warning systems were extensively supported through capacity strengthening activities that leveraged enhanced coordination between WFP and its government counterparts. Strategic outcome 3 activities also supported the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including through the design and activation of a pandemic contingency plan and the adoption, with key institutions, of a number of strategies that facilitated business continuity when social distancing was required. WFP also contributed by using the national social protection system for the distribution of nutrition vouchers to vulnerable migrants and Ecuadorians.
26. **Strategic outcome 4: Country capacity strengthening** – WFP developed and disseminated significant evidence and provided various kinds of technical assistance to government partners to support the design of public policies, social dialogue and technical cooperation related to food security and nutrition and to promote equality and inclusion. The technical assistance provided included support through a United Nations pilot project involving South-South collaboration with China, Guatemala and Peru. The content and methodology of many training events, including on family agriculture, social protection, emergency and disaster risk management and the impact of the pandemic on nutrition and food access, were considered adequate in terms of the quality of the information provided, the use of scientific evidence, and the focus on social development and gender equality.
27. **Strategic outcome 5: Service provision for humanitarian partners** – Strategic outcome 5 was added to the CSP in 2020 in response to the need for transport and storage services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The logistics services and training that WFP provided to other United Nations entities, the Government and other humanitarian partners helped to enhance efficiency in addressing the health crisis.

Cross-cutting areas

28. *Gender equality, the empowerment of women and the prevention of gender-based violence:* The substantial progress achieved in the integration of gender equality into WFP's programming was leveraged in strategic alliances, particularly with UN-Women. A joint programme on gender-transformative approaches to food security and nutrition for 2019–2022 was implemented with UN-Women, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Fund for Agricultural Development and formed an umbrella for much of the country office's work on gender. In the area of policy formulation, WFP contributed to the national agricultural strategy for rural women and helped to foster gender-relevant coordination mechanisms, such as a technical round table for rural women and the first national meeting of rural women, and build evidence, including through the systematization of a pilot project on the prevention of teenage pregnancies and the provision of support for vulnerable pregnant teenagers. Targeting and activity design integrated gender considerations, although they focused mainly on the needs of women and did not cover factors related to risks specific to men.
29. *Humanitarian principles and protection:* In Ecuador WFP is known for its application of the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, independence and humanity. However, humanitarian protection was not emphasized until 2019. In 2020, WFP analysed protection risks posed by its programme implementation; this led to some adaptations of targeting criteria, but no mitigation activities seemed to have been implemented at the time of the evaluation.
30. *Accountability to affected populations:* During CSP implementation important efforts were made to strengthen feedback mechanisms and ensure their continued functioning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

31. *Nutrition-sensitive approaches:* In accordance with WFP's corporate policy, nutrition-sensitive approaches in Ecuador cut across CSP activity categories. However, their implementation and measurement were limited and the absence of a strategy for nutrition-related behaviour change was also noted.
32. *Environment:* Progress was achieved in environmental do-no-harm approaches, but mainly within South-South collaboration and climate change adaptation activities (Ecuador-Colombia binational project) and such approaches could be mainstreamed further. Examples of the approaches used include the building of community environmental awareness, the adoption of agroecological practices by smallholder farmers and the reduction of pollution.

Sustainability

33. Sustainable approaches were integrated into the CSP through the channelling of food assistance through national safety nets during the COVID-19 pandemic; the focus on capacity strengthening, technical assistance and evidence generation in support of an enabling environment in the political and institutional domains; partnerships with academic institutions; and support for the Government in the form of tools such as EVIN for rapid needs assessments, integrated context analysis and the nutrition calculator. However, additional efforts are required for the successful institutionalization of local procurement schemes for school feeding and the proper functioning and maintenance of community assets. Strengthening of the country office's knowledge management systems through the systematization, dissemination and use of project results would contribute to the sustainability of achievements over time.

Humanitarian-development-peace nexus

34. Attention to links between the humanitarian, development and conflict prevention spheres was insufficient, as reflected in the small number of Ecuadorian host communities selected as beneficiaries of strategic outcome 1 activities, which was seen as a way of addressing the xenophobia that had been increasing since 2019, despite the Government's call for the inclusion of migrants in local communities. Efforts were made by the working group on refugees and migrants, implemented until 2019, but synergies among the various CSP activities (notably between emergency response and smallholder farmer support activities) could have been better identified and pursued.

To what extent has WFP used its resources efficiently in contributing to country strategic plan outputs and strategic outcomes?

Timeliness

35. Generally speaking, and particularly regarding emergency response activities, WFP delivered outputs in a timely fashion, despite minor administrative challenges that arose under strategic outcome 2. However, the implementation and monitoring of strategic outcome 3 activities suffered delays, mainly as a consequence of the pandemic, insecurity, the time required to design innovative activities and apply participatory approaches, and prolonged shortages of staff.
36. With regard to the timeliness of the budget execution under the CSP, the time that passed between funding receipt and expenditure was shorter for emergency response activities than for others.

Coverage and targeting

37. Evidence indicates that the coverage and targeting of CSP activities were adequate, including during the significant scale-up in response to a large influx of Venezuelan refugees and migrants and the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the needs of extremely vulnerable host communities were not sufficiently addressed, and gender analysis should have informed

strategies for addressing the risks faced in particular by vulnerable boys and men. Other gaps identified included the absence of a vulnerability and risk analysis to inform the targeting of beneficiaries of climate change activities. There was also potential for extending the coverage of capacity strengthening and service provision activities at the field level under strategic outcome 5.

Cost efficiency

38. WFP's budget structure does not allow results-based analysis at the activity level, and therefore the evaluability of the CSP's cost efficiency is limited. Proxy indicators demonstrated greater expenditure for direct assistance to beneficiaries than for activities under strategic outcomes 4 and 5.
39. Direct support costs as a percentage of total expenditure under the CSP decreased over time. By contrast, the cost per beneficiary of emergency response support (activity 1) increased from USD 99.11 in 2017 to USD 105.4 in 2021, partly as a result of the distribution of additional benefits but also owing to the start-up costs of a new transfer mechanism.

Cost-saving alternatives

40. At the time of data collection for the evaluation, collaborative arrangements with other United Nations entities designed to reduce the transaction costs of work under strategic outcomes 1 and 5 had recently been initiated.
41. The move to a sole provider of food items (a supermarket chain) was conceived as a cost-saving measure but led to the erosion of the value of cash transfers because of higher prices at the chain's supermarkets.

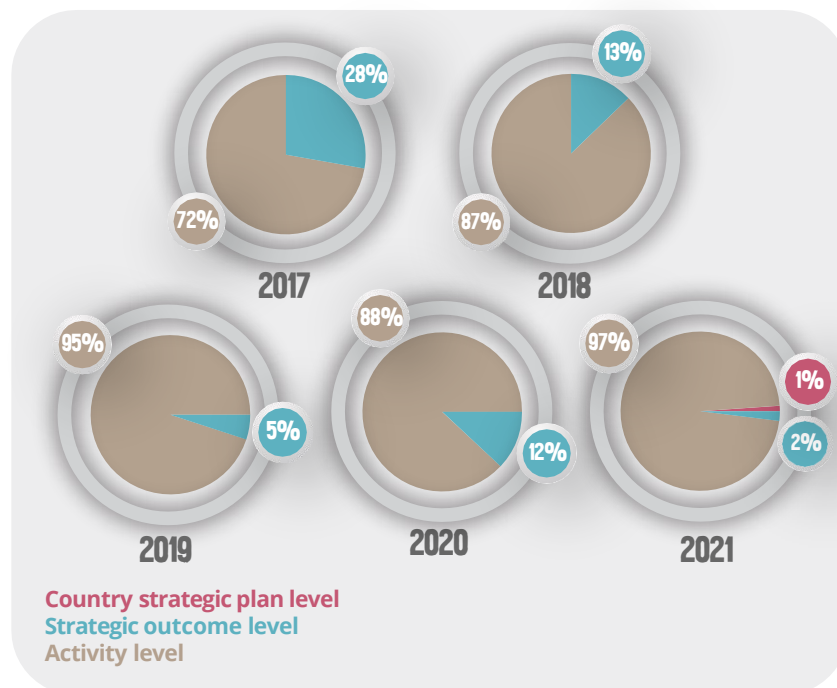
What factors explain WFP's performance and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected under the country strategic plan?

Use of evidence

42. The CSP was designed using participatory approaches and based on evidence emanating from operational lessons learned and evaluations. However, pragmatic considerations rather than the analysis of results-based evidence drove the changes made throughout CSP implementation.
43. The country office used evidence appropriately to inform its advocacy on food security matters, which leveraged the positioning of WFP as an organization that not only delivers humanitarian aid but also is effective at policy engagement and technical assistance.

Resource mobilization

44. WFP proved highly competent in mobilizing resources for its humanitarian response, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. The country office successfully attracted funding for work in new focus areas, such as activities connecting climate change adaptation to food security.
45. With regard to capacity strengthening objectives under strategic outcome 4, investments were insufficient to cover the generation of evidence, knowledge management and good practice exchange needed for sustained learning and the fine tuning of programme design.
46. The structure of the CSP did not facilitate resource mobilization, and extensive earmarking of contributions impeded WFP's application of its own criteria for the allocation of resources among strategic outcomes and activities (figure 5). This led to the discontinuation of activity 2, on livelihoods strengthening and the integration of vulnerable groups into host communities, for lack of funding.

Figure 5: Levels of donor earmarking, 2017–2021

Source: WFP FACTORY.

Partnership

47. WFP strengthened its strategic alliances with government institutions and other United Nations entities and fostered innovative partnerships. However, limited decision making power at the sub-office level weakened WFP's positioning and ability to play a more catalytic role in its relations with other local actors.
48. The country office applied processes for identifying and monitoring the suitability of cooperating partners based on need, partner competencies and geographic presence.

Operational flexibility

49. High levels of operational flexibility under the CSP allowed WFP to respond to changes in circumstance and need, as evidenced by the country office's ability to perform work in new areas (strategic outcome 5 and activity 10), expand the coverage of WFP interventions and adapt to new ways of working. Various programmatic adaptations during the COVID-19 pandemic supported beneficiary safety.

Other factors

50. The most important factors enabling the achievement of results and the strategic shift in the focus of the CSP were the credibility of WFP's technical competencies among stakeholders, the support of the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, WFP's ample field presence, which facilitated an understanding of contextual developments, and the country office's strategies for promoting local leadership.
51. The recruitment of staff and the allocation of responsibilities among staff were not sufficiently aligned with the needs of the CSP, leading to mismatches between staff profiles and responsibilities in some programmes, an excessive workload for certain units, and challenges in the retention of institutional knowledge.
52. Other factors that limited WFP's response included the siloed management of the five strategic outcomes, a failure to integrate monitoring into programme management, and the limited risk analysis carried out.

Conclusions

53. The CSP successfully delivered on WFP's dual mandate of saving lives and changing lives. In doing so, WFP confirmed its comparative advantage in food security and logistics and positioned itself as the lead agency in humanitarian assistance. WFP's role in, and contribution to, public policy engagement warrants continued investment and effort to ensure that country office and field staff have the right skills.
54. Interventions under the CSP gained relevance and effectiveness through WFP's engagement with strategic partners. They built adequately on national priorities and people's needs and adapted well to changing circumstances. Better coordination and more systematic inclusion of host communities as targeted beneficiaries could have strengthened links at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.
55. The CSP effectively supported the Government's humanitarian response and the strengthening of national capacity while enabling enhanced productivity of agrifood systems, increased food diversification and better access to nutritious foods for vulnerable people.
56. Important progress was achieved in the integration of gender as a cross-cutting area in WFP's field operations and in public policy formulation and social mobilization work. Despite the appointment of a gender focal point, however, the country office needs to continue capacity building for its staff and the monitoring of gender activities. With regard to humanitarian protection, the CSP needs to direct more attention to the various risks threatening male and female refugees and migrants.
57. The country office pioneered activities for the strengthening of systems for resilience building and climate change adaptation through local development plans, but implementation delays, slow budgetary execution and a lack of monitoring limited their effectiveness. Opportunities in this area include the undertaking of assessments, the expansion of programme coverage and the diversification of activities to benefit agricultural production.
58. Nutrition was mainstreamed across strategic outcomes as part of CSP design, but the lack of a nutrition-specific strategic outcome limited the visibility and coherence of activities. In addition, there is need for further strengthening of work on nutrition-related national priority areas in the CSP.
59. Donor trust allowed WFP to meet additional needs and to more than triple the country portfolio budget during CSP implementation, as the country office successfully mobilized resources. However, extensive earmarking of contributions impeded flexible resource management and caused the discontinuation of some activities. In other cases, adaptation to evolving circumstances was swift, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the timeliness of WFP's emergency response was optimal, allowing WFP to enhance its strategic positioning.
60. The structure of the CSP was conducive to the intended strategic shift of WFP in Ecuador. However, the CSP's envisaged shift from a project orientation towards a more integrated approach did not materialize. Synergies among strategic outcomes and the reduction of transaction costs were not observed during the evaluation.
61. Programmatic performance analysis has not been integrated with data on financial resource management and challenges to knowledge management and monitoring have led to limited evidence-based planning and decision making, learning and accountability, to the detriment of the visibility and sustainability of WFP's interventions in Ecuador.

Recommendations

#	Recommendation	Level/ nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
1	WFP should strengthen its approach to the triple nexus (humanitarian, development and peace) and protection in its response in Ecuador, leveraging existing protection systems and alliances.	Strategic	Country Director	Country office, regional bureau, headquarters Programme and Policy Development Department	High	January 2023
	1.1 Incorporate host communities into WFP's response as a conflict prevention strategy.		Country Director	Country office	High	January 2023
	1.2 Assess and update vulnerability criteria to include a gender perspective and the specific risks faced by adult men in the current setting (from a protection perspective), and climate and disaster vulnerability criteria.		Country Director	Country office, regional bureau	High	January 2023
	1.3 Organize a planning event with partners to identify and determine new opportunities for joint work and collaboration on the triple nexus.		Country Director	Country office, regional bureau	High	December 2022
	1.4 Undertake risk and vulnerability assessments that include environmental impact criteria.		Country office programme manager	Country office, regional bureau	High	December 2022
	1.5 Develop programme guidance for WFP staff and partners, listing a wide variety of possible activities for the improvement of resilience through agricultural production (harvests and reduced post-harvest losses) and income generation for women. The guidance will serve as the basis for a justified and documented selection of future resilience and climate change activities, linked to the country office's humanitarian response where possible.		Country office programme manager	Country office, regional bureau	High	December 2022

#	Recommendation	Level/ nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
2	Capitalize on WFP's strategic position and learning by continuing to strengthen the organization's role in supporting public policy design and implementation. This recommendation can be implemented by adjusting country office human resource profiles, systematizing knowledge and developing a knowledge management and advocacy plan with the Government.	Strategic	Country Director	Country office	Medium	June 2023
	2.1 Strengthen country office human resources with technical and political expertise required to provide technical support to the Government in project and policy design and implementation, incorporating a gender-transformative approach.		Country Director	Country office	Medium	June 2023
	2.2 Systematize learning and achievement related to school feeding activities and their connection to WFP smallholder production.		Country Director	Country office	Medium	June 2023
	2.3 Develop a knowledge management and advocacy plan aimed at ensuring knowledge exchange in support of the national school feeding strategy, other social protection and nutrition programmes, national strategies for public food procurement and for WFP's own cash-based transfer activities. In knowledge management, WFP should prioritize systems and tools for the compilation and dissemination of learning and achievements. Potential areas of learning include capacity strengthening for smallholder farmer associations along the production chain, the boosting of local and institutional food markets, and the reduction of barriers in the public procurement system.		Country office programme manager	Regional bureau, headquarters Innovation and Knowledge Management Division	Medium	December 2022
3	Revise the country strategic plan structure to include a clear definition of coordination mechanisms in order to increase internal synergies among strategic outcomes throughout the project cycle, particularly with regard to needs assessments, targeting and the design, implementation and monitoring of activities.	Strategic	Country office programme manager	Regional bureau, headquarters Programme and Policy Development Department	High	January 2023

#	Recommendation	Level/ nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
4	Ensure that nutrition is addressed as a cross-cutting topic in the new country strategic plan, emphasizing the prevention of chronic malnutrition and obesity and the promotion of breastfeeding.	Strategic	Country office nutrition specialist	Country office, regional bureau	High	January 2023
	4.1 Develop a global theory of change for the new country strategic plan that is nutrition-sensitive and includes plans and a budget for human and financial resources sufficient to guarantee the integration of nutrition-sensitive approaches into all strategic outcomes and the establishment of a unit specialized in nutrition, with relevant experience in chronic malnutrition, breastfeeding, behaviour change and nutrition-sensitive social protection.		Country office nutrition specialist	Country office, regional bureau	High	July 2022
	4.2 Ensure that the new country strategic plan broadens the response for pregnant women and lactating mothers, as a group with specific nutrition vulnerabilities, to cover improved feeding practices for infants and small children and strengthened mechanisms for referrals to specialized entities for case management when necessary.		Country office nutrition specialist	Country office	High	January 2023
5	Improve the integration of monitoring, programme management and financial tracking systems so that programme managers better understand the achievement of goals, objectives and cost-efficiency.	Operational	Country office monitoring and evaluation unit	Country office, regional bureau	High	July 2023
	5.1 Review indicators and promote their measurement and integrated analysis under the new country strategic plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensuring the integration of process and result indicators for cross-cutting areas under all planned outcomes of the new country strategic plan; and - allowing the integration of ad hoc monitoring frameworks into WFP's corporate monitoring framework. 		Country office monitoring and evaluation unit	Country office, regional bureau	Medium	December 2022
	5.2 Introduce a procedure for the periodic analysis of the country office's financial statements, disaggregated by strategic outcome and activity, for the purpose of cost efficiency analysis.		Country office monitoring and evaluation unit	Country office	Medium	July 2023

#	Recommendation	Level/ nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
	5.3 Ensure the inclusion of indicators for the measurement of dietary diversity and quality, with data disaggregated according to the various vulnerable groups that WFP supports.		Country office monitoring and evaluation unit	Country office, regional bureau	Medium	December 2022
	5.4 Ensure that the country office and sub-offices have resources sufficient for regular data collection and analysis (monitoring) and promote the use of monitoring findings for programmatic and strategic decision making during country strategic plan implementation.		Country office monitoring and evaluation unit	Country office	High	January 2023
6	Strengthen the capacity of all country office employees working in programme and cross-cutting areas, particularly in relation to gender, protection, nutrition, monitoring and climate change. In addition, strengthen the capacity of those employees who work directly with migrants to deal with matters related to mental health and psychosocial support.	Operational	Country office programme manager	Regional bureau	Medium	July 2023

Acronyms

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN-Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women