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Summary report on the evaluation of the transitional interim country strategic plan (2018–2019) and the country strategic plan (2020–2024) for Iraq

Executive summary

The evaluation of the WFP transitional interim country strategic plan for Iraq for 2018–2019 and the subsequent country strategic plan for 2020–2024 was conducted between June 2023 and May 2024 with the main purpose of providing evaluation evidence on WFP's strategic positioning, relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency and the factors explaining WFP's performance in Iraq from 2017 to October 2023. The evaluation used a theory-based and mixed-methods approach to serve both accountability and learning purposes.

The evaluation found that WFP's programme objectives were closely aligned with national and regional priorities and with the priorities of the United Nations country team. WFP's interventions were based on a flexible framework, which was crucial to the adaptation of WFP's approach and to ensuring relevance and strategic positioning. WFP leveraged its comparative advantages in emergency response, food security and digitalization and its operational presence at the community level to build strategic partnerships with a broad range of partners. WFP's unconditional food assistance provided an important buffer against shocks for vulnerable internally displaced persons and refugees. However, over time, improvements in food security have been partially offset by shocks and soaring food prices. WFP's livelihood and climate adaptation interventions were key to facilitating the return of displaced people and improving social cohesion through the re-establishment of agricultural activities and the provision of income generation and skills development opportunities; however, linkages with local value chains and market opportunities are still limited, and the short duration and limited tailoring of the livelihood

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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support activities put sustainability at risk. While WFP reached equal numbers of men and women beneficiaries throughout programme implementation, more progress is needed to address the root causes of inequality, as well as to ensure that persons with disabilities are included. WFP successfully engaged with the Government on a number of capacity-strengthening initiatives but faced challenges in handing those initiatives over to the Government owing to the limited availability of funding, administrative hurdles and limitations in corporate guidance. Timeliness and coverage were appropriate overall, and WFP successfully adapted its prioritization strategies in response to changing needs and declining funding. The evaluation found a positive evolution in the cost-efficiency of WFP's activities in Iraq, with large cost savings attributable to the switch from programme implementation through cooperating partners to direct implementation by WFP.

The evaluation concludes that despite funding and capacity challenges, the country office successfully navigated the evolving operating environment and managed the overall transition from humanitarian to development programming. It highlights donors' interest in funding development activities that have a realistic pathway towards the handover of capacity-strengthening activities to the Government and underlines the risks derived from heavy reliance on two main donors and from the steep decline in global funding levels.

The evaluation provides six recommendations aimed at supporting WFP in the design and implementation of the next-generation country strategic plan: focus efforts on key areas of comparative advantage, defining clear milestones for the future transition of activities; ensure that capacity-strengthening approaches are aligned with and integrated into government systems, and leverage social protection reform to develop a crisis response mechanism tailored to the country's transition to upper-middle-income status; resize and reconceptualize WFP's operations to reflect reduced funding prospects and a development-focused future; diversify funding and ensure multi-year funding to foster sustainable change; leverage partnerships to ensure the coherent rollout of development interventions and obtain access to specialist expertise; and ensure that women's empowerment and disability considerations are included where relevant, particularly for emergency preparedness and social protection interventions.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the transitional interim country strategic plan (2018–2019) and the country strategic plan (2020–2024) for Iraq (WFP/EB.1/2026/6-D/3/Rev.1) and management response (WFP/EB.1/2026/6-D/3/Add.1/Rev.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. Country strategic plan (CSP) evaluations are a key instrument for accountability and learning in accordance with the expectations of the WFP Executive Board and management. They provide evidence on WFP's strategic positioning, the relevance of its activities to needs, its effectiveness in contributing to strategic outcomes, its efficiency and the factors explaining its performance so as to inform the design of the next generation of CSPs and, potentially, the design of United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks.
2. The evaluation of WFP's transitional interim CSP (T-ICSP) and CSP for Iraq¹ covers WFP's interventions in the country from 2017 to October 2023. It analyses shifts in WFP programming since 2017, particularly WFP's transition from emergency response to a focus on resilience and country capacity strengthening interventions.
3. The evaluation was conducted between June 2023 and May 2024. Its main users are WFP – the Iraq country office, the Middle East, Northern Africa and Eastern Europe Regional Office and other parts of global headquarters – the WFP Board, the Government of Iraq, donors, members of the United Nations country team, cooperating partners and the beneficiaries of WFP programmes in Iraq.
4. The evaluation adopted a theory-based and mixed-methods approach, drawing on monitoring data, document reviews, field observations, interviews and focus group discussions. In-country data collection was conducted from 5 to 26 October 2023. In March 2024, the evaluation results were discussed in Baghdad with country office staff and WFP's partners. A virtual workshop was also organized with WFP partners in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.
5. Consideration of equality between men and women, disability concerns, protection, accountability to affected populations, nutrition, climate-related shocks and environmental issues was integrated into the evaluation. Ethical standards were applied to safeguard the dignity of the people involved and the confidentiality of the information shared.

Context

6. With a population of 44.5 million,² Iraq is culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse. Between 75 and 80 percent of the population are Arab, Kurds represent 15 to 20 percent and the majority of Iraqis identify as Muslim.³ The political landscape is complex and governance is divided between the Federal Government and the Kurdish Regional Authority, with the latter having a significant degree of autonomy, including through a regional government and a parliament based in Erbil.

¹ This is the summary report on the evaluation. The full report is available on the WFP website <https://www.wfp.org/publications/evaluation-iraq-wfp-country-strategic-plan-2020-2024>.

² World Bank. 2023. [Population, total - Iraq](#).

³ European Asylum Support Office. 2021. [Country Guidance: Iraq – Common analysis and guidance note](#) (2.15 Religious and ethnic minorities, and stateless persons).

7. Oil dominates Iraq's economy, contributing 42 percent of gross domestic product, followed by agriculture, which accounts for 5 percent. Poverty rates increased to nearly 30 percent owing to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, and unemployment stands at 16.5 percent – 28.2 percent among women.⁴ Poverty rates are highest in Iraq's southern governorates.
8. Following the end of the conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, the number of people in need in Iraq decreased from 11 million in 2017 to 2.5 million in 2022. Overall food insecurity is relatively low, with more than 95 percent of the population showing acceptable levels of food consumption.⁵ Progress on addressing malnutrition is mixed:⁶ 12.6 percent of children under 5 are stunted and 6.1 percent are overweight – below the regional averages.⁷ However, 40.1 percent of adult women and 26.5 percent of men are obese.⁸
9. Significant climate-related risks affect the livelihoods of vulnerable communities across the country.⁹ Water resources are rapidly dwindling and reliance on transboundary water flows compromises Iraq's water security. Droughts, compounded by excessive salt in rivers, pose challenges for agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing.¹⁰
10. Since 1990, the country has maintained a universal public distribution system, which is one of the world's largest food distribution programmes. However, the system and the national social safety net suffer from a lack of prioritization strategies and rising costs. Despite the progress made over the last few years, Iraq's population still faces numerous challenges, including limited access to basic services, unstable governance, conflict, youth unemployment, and protracted displacement. Women and girls face significant risks of violence, exacerbated by socioeconomic vulnerability and traditional social norms.

⁴ World Bank. 2022. *Iraq Economic Monitor: A New Opportunity to Reform*; Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. 2022. *Multidimensional Poverty Analysis: Iraq 2022*; and World Bank. 2022. *Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) – Iraq*.

⁵ WFP. 2024. *Iraq annual country report 2023*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Global Nutrition Report. 2022. *Country Nutrition Profiles – Iraq*.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ United Nations Environment Programme. 2019. *Global Environment Outlook – GEO-6: Healthy Planet, Healthy People*.

¹⁰ World Bank. 2022. *Iraq Country Climate and Development Report*.

SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Value	Year
	Total population (millions) (1)	44.5	2022
	Human development index (rank and score) (2)	128 of 193 countries 0.673	2022
	Share of the population below the poverty line (%) (3)	30	2021
	Prevalence of stunting in children under 5 (%) (4)	12.6	2018
	Agriculture, forestry and fishing value added as share of gross domestic product (%) (5)	5	2021
	Employment in agriculture (% of total employment) (modelled International Labour Organization estimate) (5)	20	2019
	Refugees (6)	279 240	2023
	Global Gender Gap Index (rank and score) (7)	154 of 156 countries 0.535	2021

Sources: (1) World Bank; (2) United Nations Development Programme; (3) Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency; (4) Global Nutrition Report; (5) Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; (6) Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; (7) World Economic Forum.

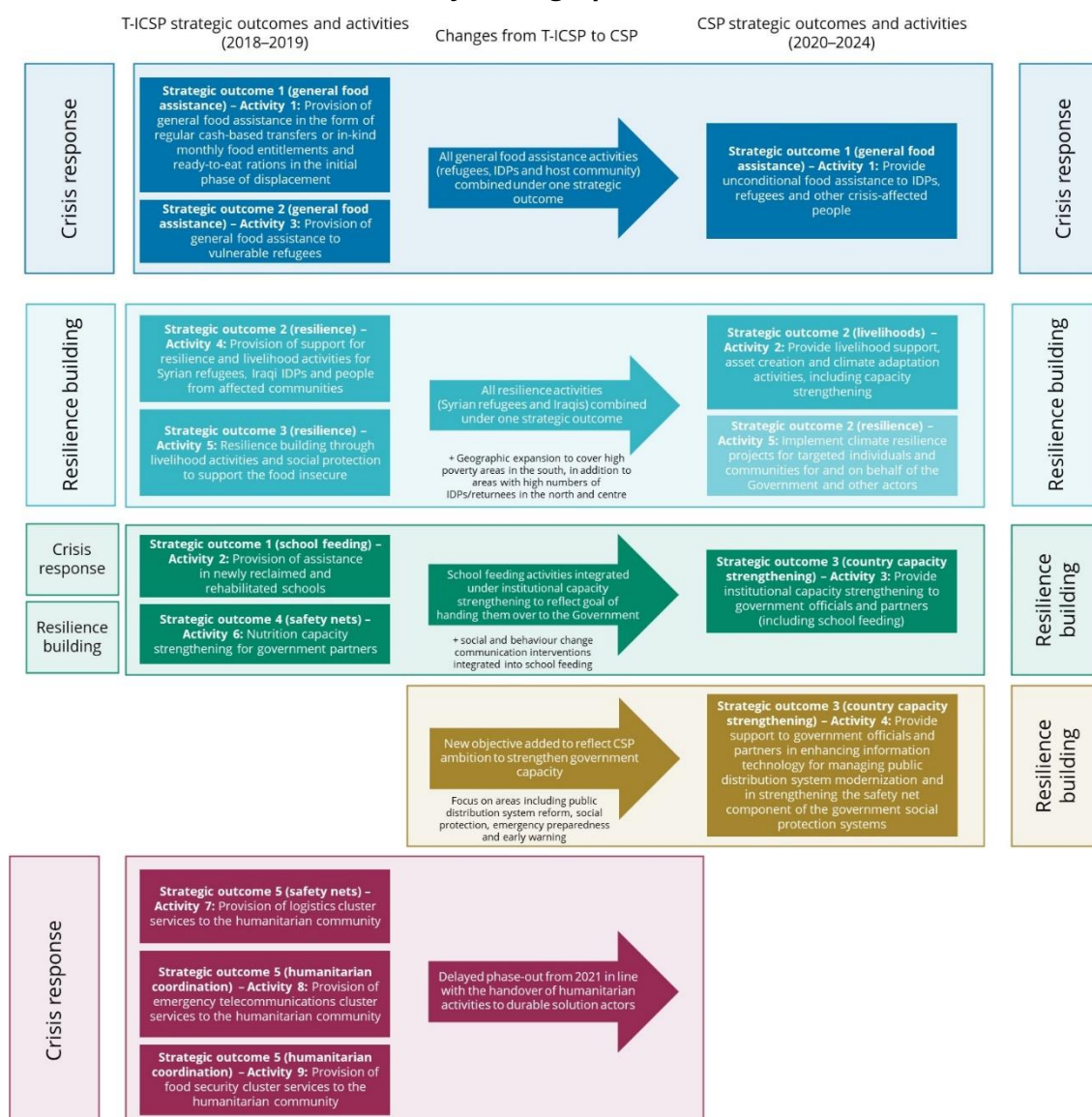
WFP country strategic plans

11. In 2018, the WFP country office in Iraq launched the T-ICSP for 2018–2019 aimed at providing continuous emergency assistance for internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and returnees while scaling up long-term recovery and livelihood-based activities, a trend that was continued and accelerated under the CSP for 2020–2024. With the approval of the CSP in 2020, WFP intended to shift its role to that of an enabler of national programmes and envisioned handing over several interventions to the Government of Iraq.¹¹
12. The CSP incorporated crisis response interventions for IDPs and Syrian refugees under strategic outcome 1. Support for resilience and livelihoods was consolidated under strategic outcome 2, and all country capacity strengthening activities – including in school feeding, emergency preparedness and early warning, and social and behaviour change communications – along with WFP's support for the reform of social protection and the public distribution system were gathered under strategic outcome 3.¹²

¹¹ WFP. 2023. Iraq country strategic plan (2020–2024): mid-term review (internal document).

¹² "Iraq country strategic plan (2020–2024)" (WFP/EB.2/2019/7-A/3) and [Annual country reports – Iraq – 2018, 2020 and 2022](#).

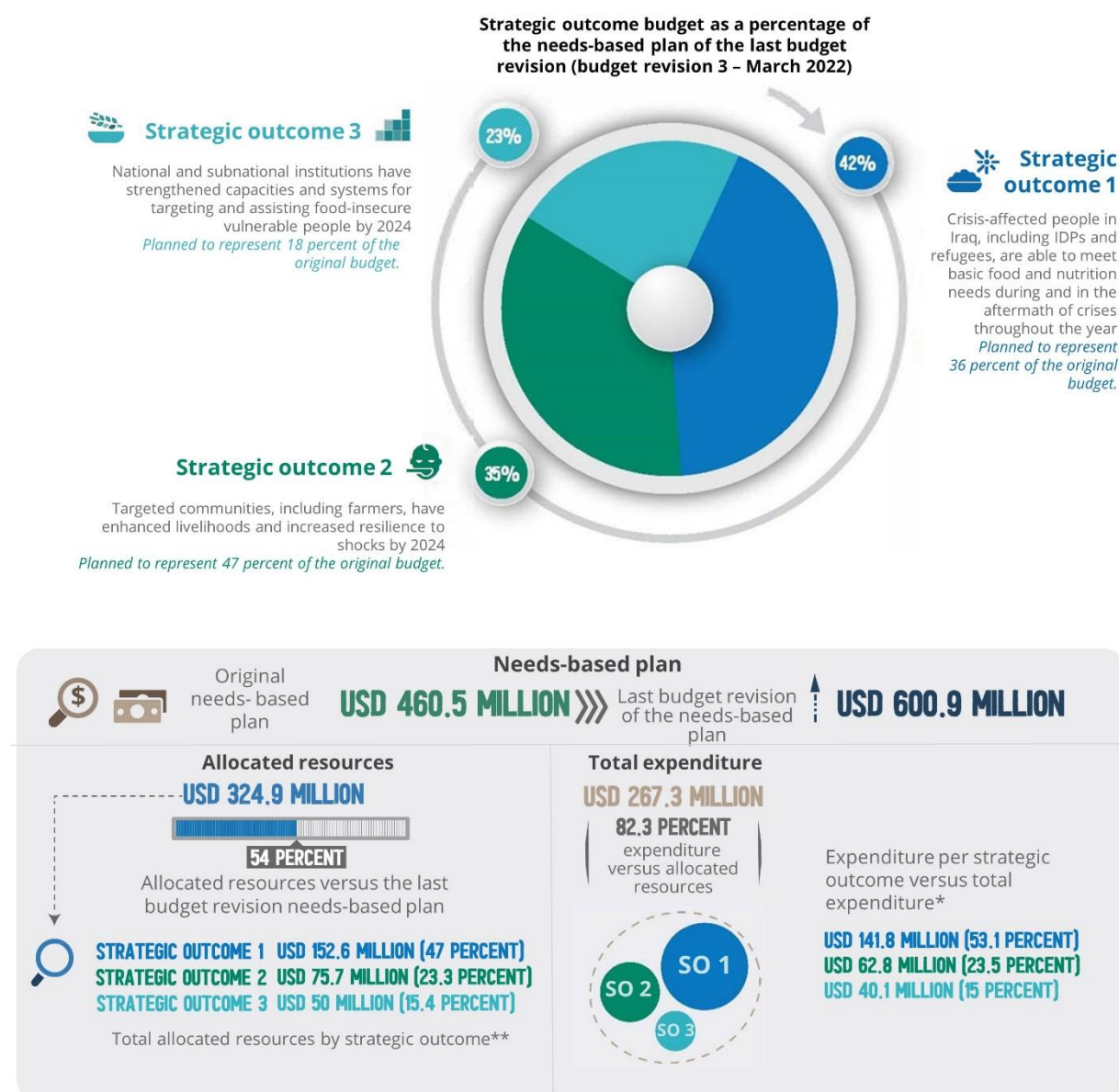
Figure 1: Activity mapping – Iraq transitional interim country strategic plan and country strategic plan, 2018–2023



Source: Evaluation team, based on T-ICSP and CSP documentation.

- The CSP underwent four budget revisions, with the needs-based plan increasing from USD 460,514,522 for 1 million beneficiaries in November 2019 to USD 701,035,047 for 2.3 million beneficiaries. As of October 2023, 54 percent of the needs-based plan was funded. Germany was the largest funding source, followed by the United States of America, flexible funding, the Government of Iraq, and Japan.

Figure 2: Iraq country strategic plan (2020–2024) strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures*

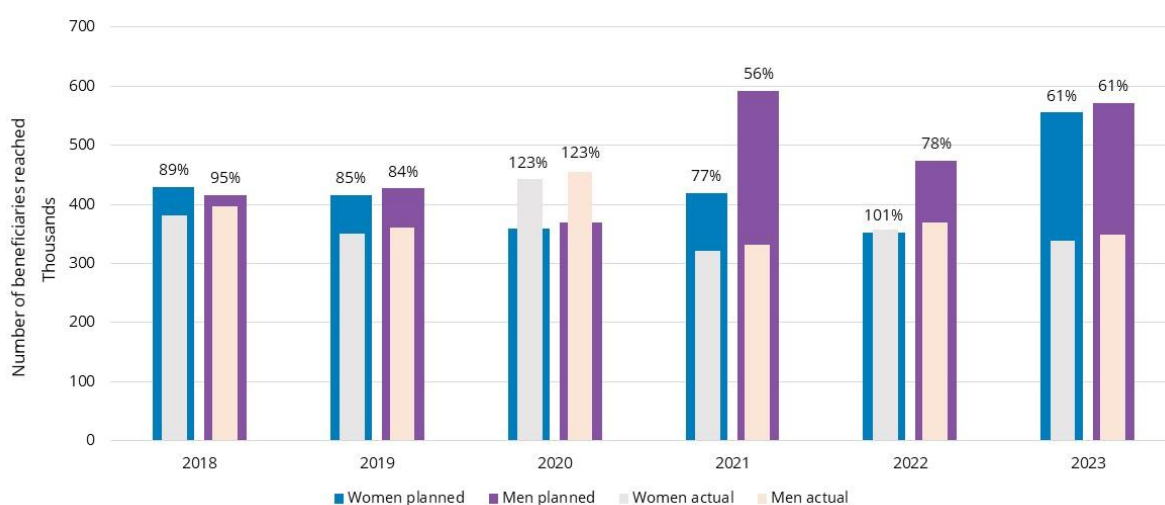


* The inception report states that the period covered by the evaluation was 2017 to October 2023. As a fourth budget revision was approved in September 2023, after the finalization of the inception report, the planned and actual figures for financial and beneficiary data presented in the evaluation report are in line with the figures in the third budget revision.

** Percentages of allocated resources and expenditures by strategic outcome do not add up to 100 percent because resources were also allocated to and spent on non-strategic outcome purposes.

Sources: Country portfolio budget, CSP budget revision 3, integrated road map analytics and annual country reports.

14. On average, WFP reached 80 percent of planned beneficiaries between 2018 and 2023, with variations over the years. While WFP exceeded its beneficiary targets for 2020 and reached more than 85 percent of planned beneficiaries in 2019 and 2022, it achieved only 64 percent of its targets in 2021, mainly owing to challenges with resource mobilization.

Figure 3: Men and women beneficiaries, planned and actual, 2018–2023

Source: WFP COMET. Data for 2018–2019 from the T-ICSP and for 2020–2023 from CSP reporting.

Evaluation findings

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

Relevance and alignment

15. The design of the T-ICSP and CSP was informed by appropriate assessments and evidence that highlighted the need for WFP to continue focusing on the emergency needs of the most vulnerable people while shifting its focus from the provision of humanitarian assistance towards long-term approaches, increasingly addressing the drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition.
16. As set out in the T-ICSP and CSP, WFP's objectives were closely aligned with national and regional priorities,¹³ and with the United Nations country team strategy, with a focus on Iraq's transition to a post-recovery stage and the building of effective state institutions to reduce unemployment, restore productive sectors and establish social safety nets.

Comparative advantage and strategic positioning

17. WFP leveraged its comparative advantages in emergency response, food security and digitalization and its operational presence at the community level to build strategic partnerships with a broad range of other United Nations entities in the areas of social protection, climate resilience and disaster management.
18. WFP's work in rural development and livelihoods – encompassing job skills development and vocational training – supported sustainable returns and contributed to the COVID-19 pandemic response, but other actors in Iraq have a stronger comparative advantage in these areas under an agenda focused on development.

Coherence and adaptiveness

19. Overall, WFP's shift in focus towards disaster risk management, resilience building and capacity strengthening activities was consistent with the strategy of the United Nations country team, in which humanitarian actions under the humanitarian response plan were

¹³ Including Iraq's national development plans for 2018 and 2022, Vision 2030, reconstruction framework for 2018–2027, private sector development plan for 2014–2030 and strategy for poverty reduction for 2018–2022, and the Kurdistan Region's "2020: A Vision for the Future".

complemented by a recovery and resilience programme as part of a commitment to multidimensional reconstruction.

20. WFP's interventions were based on a flexible framework, which was crucial in enabling the organization to navigate changing conditions and adapt the focus of its approach from the implementation to the enabling of interventions. WFP successfully adapted its programming in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest and the return of Iraqi refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, adjusting transfer values, adding new urban livelihood approaches and providing take-home rations and ready-to-eat meals. Country capacity strengthening plans were responsive to the Government's requests but overestimated the absorptive capacity of government institutions.
21. While the broad scope of some strategic outcomes provided important flexibility in a fluid environment, it also made it challenging to coherently articulate WFP's approach in key development areas such as capacity strengthening.

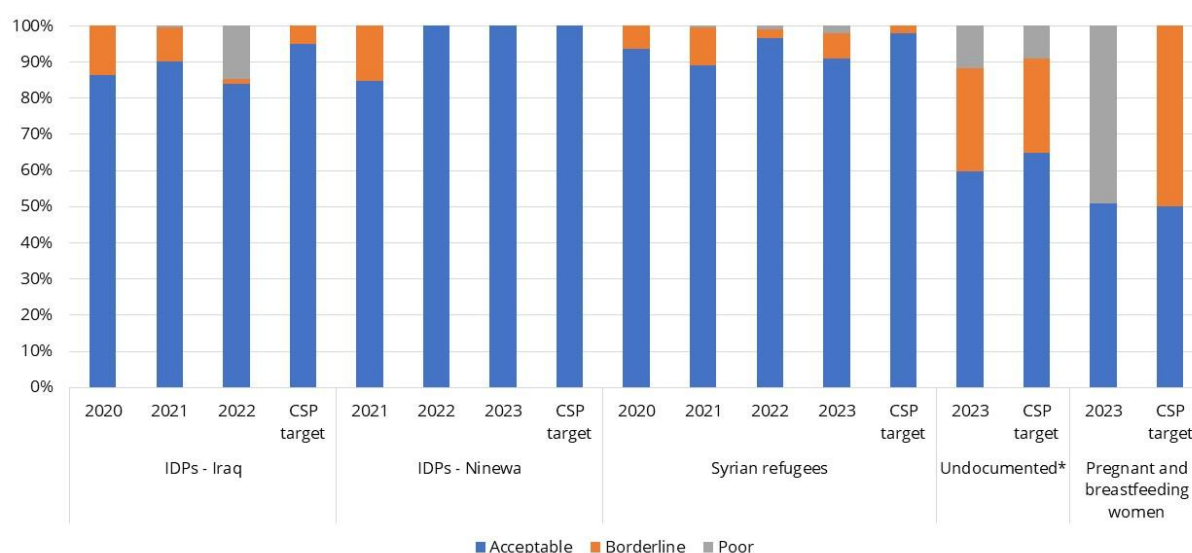
What are the extent and quality of WFP's specific contributions to country strategic plan strategic outcomes in Iraq?

22. This section discusses achievements and challenges related to the strategic outcomes included in the T-ICSP and the CSP. The logistics and emergency telecommunications clusters under T-ICSP strategic outcome 5 were deactivated in 2019 soon after the start of the T-ICSP, so no evidence is provided for that component.

Strategic outcome 1 – general food assistance

23. WFP's unconditional food assistance provided an important buffer against shocks for vulnerable IDPs and refugees. However, reduced funding for emergency response, limitations in government capacity and shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and soaring food prices meant that during the CSP period WFP's assistance fell short of some of its outcome targets for food consumption scores and coping strategies, in particular for IDPs outside the Ninewa region and for pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls.

Figure 4: Strategic outcome 1 – food consumption score, 2020–2023



* Since 2023, WFP has also supported crisis-affected households residing in formal and informal sites and lacking essential civil documentation, and pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls. Outcomes in the region of Ninewa for 2018–2020 are not reported.

Source: WFP country office tool for managing effectively.

24. The mobilization of funding for work under strategic outcome 1 has been a challenge since 2018. To cope with funding shortages while striving to ensure adequate coverage, WFP had to reduce the value of cash transfers in some areas for several months in 2018, 2021 and 2022.

Strategic outcome 2 – livelihoods and climate adaptation

25. WFP's livelihood and climate adaptation interventions supported the sustainable return of IDPs and improved social cohesion through the re-establishment of agricultural activities and the provision of income generation and skills development opportunities.
26. The main obstacles and challenges to the success of the livelihood interventions were related to the poor quality of the materials provided to participants and the timing of their delivery, the short duration of the training provided, weak linkages to employers or credit schemes, and restrictive social norms and travel constraints for women.
27. Over the second half of the CSP period WFP initiated several pilot projects supporting young people and smallholder farmers which will require continued support over several years in order to become sustainable.

Strategic outcome 3 – institutional capacity strengthening in school feeding, emergency preparedness, social and behaviour change communication and the digitalization of the public distribution system

28. WFP successfully established a school feeding programme in 2018, expanding it to 13 governorates over the years and handing it over to the Government at the start of the 2023/2024 school year. Teachers, school officials and students appreciated the programme, despite the small number of feeding days provided owing to reduced funding, instability, COVID-19 and onerous administrative and bureaucratic hurdles.
29. Given Iraq's precarious situation with regard to climate change, the building and maintenance of government capacities in emergency preparedness is crucial. However, the evaluation found that the training delivered from 2020 to 2022 focused more on water management than early warning and preparedness. Moreover, the activities did not progress as expected because of limited funding and the turnover of personnel in WFP and national ministries.
30. Social and behaviour change communication was not widely integrated into school feeding activities and overall lost focus as CSP implementation progressed.
31. WFP has been able to work with the Government of Iraq to address issues related to the public distribution system and social safety net reform, including the absence of prioritization strategies and the high costs. WFP's shift from the provision of digital assets to the implementation of capacity strengthening activities is overall positive. However, corporate guidance requesting that the social protection digitalization project be implemented through an international company meant that digital assets deployed by WFP were not always suitable for local conditions, and to some extent this affected the quality and sustainability of digital products.

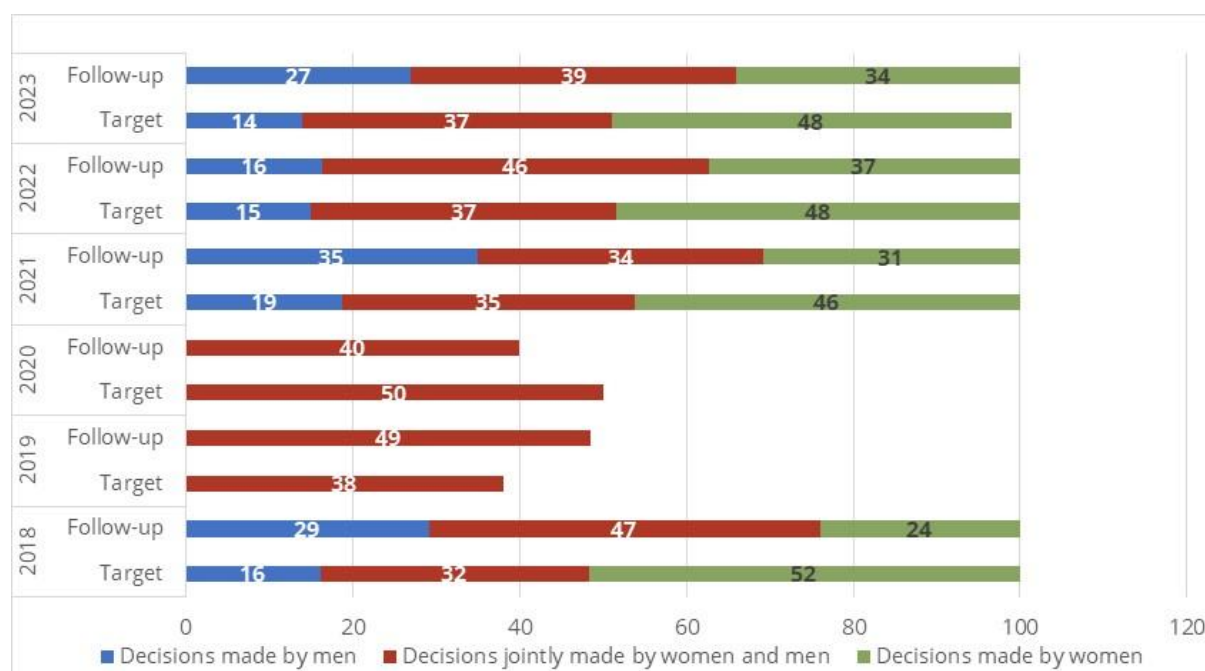
Strategic outcome 5 – humanitarian coordination

32. Under the T-ICSP, WFP contributed to the effective coordination of humanitarian support in Iraq, drawing on its extensive logistics and technical capacity. The handover of humanitarian coordination activities to the Government and development partners was not well managed, although the weaknesses related largely to gaps in government and United Nations leadership that were beyond WFP's control.

Cross-cutting areas

33. WFP made good progress in mainstreaming equality between men and women throughout its programmes and systems, achieving equality between men and women in its programming and introducing a number of interventions tailored to the needs of women and girls. However, progress in achieving the CSP's more ambitious agenda for women's empowerment is mixed owing to limited investment and challenges in engaging with government stakeholders.

Figure 5: Country strategic plan cross-cutting outcome indicator: proportions of households where women, men or women and men make decisions, 2018–2023



Note: In 2019 and 2020, only values for joint decisions were recorded.

Source: WFP country office tool for managing effectively.

34. WFP made a concerted effort to reach persons with disabilities in its programmes, reaching 97,900 persons with disabilities in 2021 and 108,000 in 2022. Although some adjustments were made to distribution sites and training venues, the evaluation did not find clear evidence of specific adjustments being made to programme activities in order to meet the different needs of persons with disabilities.
35. The country office has implemented various procedures for handling complaints related to fraud, corruption and sexual exploitation and abuse but must urgently publicize its new feedback mechanism so as to fill a gap in accountability, as many of the beneficiaries consulted did not know about the mechanism's existence.
36. WFP has integrated climate adaptive practices widely in its food assistance for assets activities by introducing, for example, reforestation and mangrove rehabilitation initiatives in the marshes in 2023. While these are positive and potentially scalable initiatives, their late start meant that it was too early in their implementation for the evaluation team to assess the effectiveness and sustainability of these approaches.
37. WFP maintained adherence to humanitarian principles in its crisis response programming and throughout its transition to development work, although its prioritization of beneficiaries living in camps at times weighed on its ability to reach people in need outside the camps.

Sustainability and handover

38. Over the CSP period, WFP pivoted towards more sustainable approaches, including by working directly with the Government and academic institutions to build community assets and invest in job skills development. The handover of the school feeding programme serves as a model for future capacity strengthening approaches, with national funding secured and government stakeholders expressing confidence in their ability to scale up the programme.
39. The evaluation team found little evidence on the sustainability of resilience and livelihood interventions. The weak focus on markets and value chains meant that some farmers were not confident that they could maintain the assets after the end of WFP assistance. Similarly, many beneficiaries who engaged in vocational training and job skills programmes needed longer and more tailored support to graduate sustainably from vulnerability to resilience.
40. WFP's intentions regarding the handover of projects to the Government were overly ambitious at all levels. Constant government turnover, limited budget allocations and challenges in sourcing appropriate technical capacity meant that counterparts were not always confident that they could maintain the projects without ongoing support from WFP.
41. The digitalization of the public distribution system was promising, but short-term funding, a reliance on international rather than local information technology solutions and insufficient capacity in the Government undermined the overall sustainability of social protection reform.

Humanitarian-development-peace nexus

42. WFP facilitated strategic linkages between humanitarian action and development cooperation by designing the framework for the transition from emergency to resilience work and drawing on its core strengths in food security to support broader peace and stability objectives.
43. WFP's resilience and capacity strengthening work, underpinned by conflict-sensitive approaches and the effective inclusion of different population groups, is contributing to sustainable returns of displaced people and community-level social cohesion between returnees and the communities to which they return.

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

Timeliness

44. Overall, WFP delivered assistance in a timely manner, implementing appropriate mitigation measures to address restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, delays from school feeding suppliers and access challenges.
45. Outputs related to capacity strengthening and climate change were delivered with some delays, with several interventions in these areas starting only in 2022.

Appropriateness of coverage and prioritization

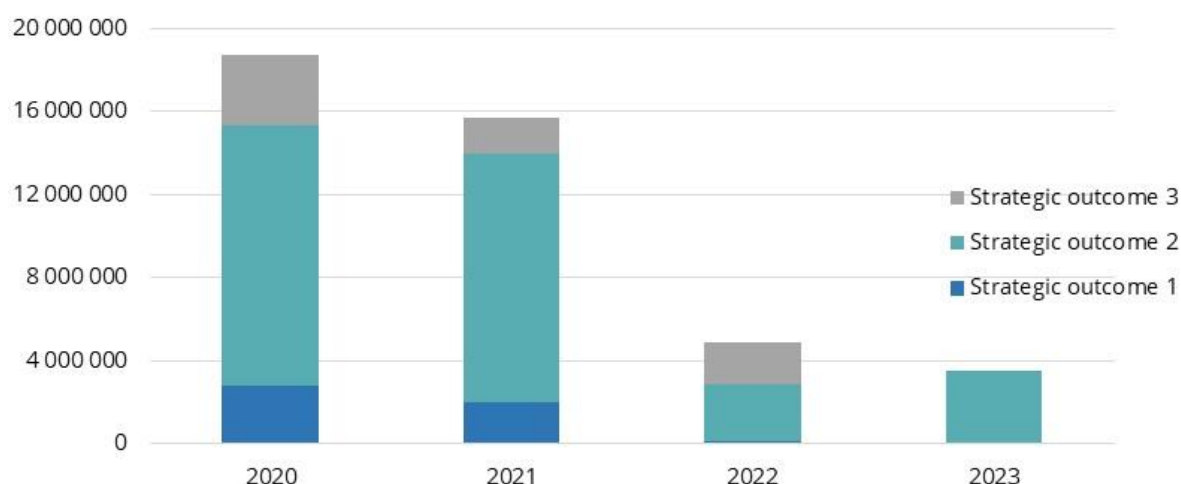
46. Coverage was appropriate in reaching the most vulnerable IDPs, returnees and host community members. WFP's unconditional food assistance was aligned with the presence of IDPs in Iraq, and resilience and livelihood interventions were concentrated in areas with high levels of food insecurity and displacement, reflecting the dual strategy of supporting sustainable returns while shifting to long-term approaches to tackle food insecurity and climate risks.
47. WFP adapted its prioritization strategies appropriately in response to changing needs, declining funding and the transition to development-focused activities. The criteria used to prioritize beneficiaries in livelihood activities ensured the engagement of vulnerable groups

and promoted social cohesion, but it unintentionally led to inclusion errors by allowing the participation of citizens with little interest in active employment.

Cost-efficiency in the delivery of activities and outputs

48. The evaluation found a positive evolution in the cost-efficiency of the country office's activities as CSP implementation progressed, with large cost savings in 2022 in cash-based transfer activities under strategic outcomes 1 and 2 due to the switch in implementation approach from the use of cooperating partners to direct implementation by WFP. Other actions such as asset sales and savings on logistics expenses contributed to cost-efficiency and enabled the country office to continue to reach beneficiaries despite reduced funding.

Figure 6: WFP funding channelled to cooperating partners per year, 2020–2023 (USD)



Source: Country office data on monthly payments to cooperating partners, 2020–2023.

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

Financial resources

49. The country office's ability to raise sufficient resources varied significantly over the years and among the areas of intervention. While the Iraq CSP has benefited from higher than average levels of multi-year funding compared with other CSPs,¹⁴ the predictability and flexibility of funding began to decline in 2022, making WFP's transition to development work more difficult. Resilience and livelihoods (CSP activity 2) and institutional capacity strengthening (CSP activity 3) programmes were particularly affected by funding shortfalls. WFP made significant efforts to diversify funding, including by exploring innovative climate finance, multi-year development funding and private sector partnerships. However, the evaluation observed a lack of corporate guidance and support on how to engage with the Green Climate Fund and other funding sources at the country level, which made it challenging for the country office to approach such funding mechanisms.
50. Donors view WFP as a credible development partner but are unwilling to fund activities beyond those designed to build government capacity. The Government of Iraq values its partnership with WFP but has not yet funded WFP's direct costs. Heavy reliance on two main donors (Germany and the United States of America), an overall decline in donor funding for Iraq and a steep decline in WFP's global funding represent significant risks for WFP's financial stability.

¹⁴ WFP. 2023. *Evaluation of WFP's Policy on Country Strategic Plans*.

Monitoring and reporting

51. The ability to generate and disseminate evidence, often in partnership with other key actors, was a key factor in ensuring the relevance and adaptiveness of WFP's strategy throughout a period of major transition and changing circumstances.
52. From 2021 onwards the country office engaged in several capacity building initiatives with the national and Kurdistan authorities to support food security monitoring and climate interventions. However, the decision to start several pilot projects in a broad range of new geographic and thematic areas in 2022 made it challenging for the country office to articulate, measure and demonstrate its achievements.
53. The country office's monitoring and reporting system is aligned with WFP's corporate results framework which, however, did not suit the specific needs of a country office undergoing the transition from humanitarian programming towards more development-oriented interventions.

Partnerships

54. WFP's move to direct implementation allowed it to build a diverse network of partnerships across government – at both the national and subnational levels – the United Nations, universities, the private sector and local communities.
55. There are opportunities for stronger engagement with private sector actors and for enhancing communication flows between central and district ministries on the relevance and sustainability of WFP's activities, which is critical to the scale-up of pilot programmes.
56. Beyond their country-level memorandum of understanding signed in 2019, WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations could have done more to leverage their other core strengths.

Human resources

57. WFP has managed the transition from humanitarian to development work, and from working through cooperating partners to direct implementation, without a major increase in staff numbers owing largely to the strong commitment of its highly motivated employees.
58. WFP made important steps in building new skills for development programming, with many employees gaining new skills through working and covering a diverse portfolio of projects in a large geographic area.

Conclusions

59. ***The structure and adaptability of the transitional interim country strategic plan and the country strategic plan.*** The T-ICSP provided a coherent but flexible framework for WFP's response to the changing environment and the evolving priorities of the Government while shifting to more development-focused interventions. However, at the CSP design stage WFP overestimated the availability of funding for the scale-up of resilience activities while underestimating the potential delays in the implementation and handover of capacity strengthening activities, and the consequences for WFP personnel of the transition to direct implementation.
60. ***Achievements and comparative advantages.*** Following the end of the conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, WFP's shift in emphasis from providing food assistance to supporting the Government in promoting youth employment and climate-resilient agriculture and improving national social safety nets laid the foundation for a long-term, sustainable approach to addressing food insecurity in the country. WFP leveraged its comparative advantages in emergency response, food security and digitalization, underpinned by its strong presence at the community level across the country.

61. ***Equality between men and women, and protection.*** WFP achieved gender equality and women's empowerment in its programmes in a country with very low levels of women's participation in formal job markets and prioritized support for persons with disabilities. However, it did not invest enough in women's empowerment-focused approaches. While WFP had appropriate systems and training in place to manage protection risks and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, many beneficiaries were not aware of how to make a complaint through WFP's feedback mechanism, thereby revealing an accountability gap.
62. ***The sustainability and scalability of achievements.*** In line with its transition from being an implementer to becoming an enabler of interventions, WFP piloted several new programmes and capacity-strengthening initiatives, including a national school feeding initiative, new digital platforms for registration in the public distribution system and innovative approaches to climate-resilient agriculture through mangrove rehabilitation and reforestation. The lack of a collective vision among government and United Nations partners of the type of social protection system Iraq is building somewhat undermined the sustainability of social protection reform.
63. ***Partnerships and funding.*** WFP's activities benefited from the strong partnerships it established with the Government, universities, communities and other United Nations entities. WFP was largely unsuccessful in securing funding to cover its own costs from the Government of Iraq, despite the Government's growing interest in partnering with WFP. Heavy reliance on two donors proved to be a weakness in a challenging transition period. Donors see WFP as a credible development partner but are increasingly willing to fund only activities that have a realistic pathway to the handover of capacity strengthening activities to the Government.
64. ***Demonstrating results.*** WFP's office structure and corporate monitoring systems were not conducive to the demonstration of long-term results, with gaps in monitoring and reporting capacities posing a risk to donor support. Overall, WFP's achievements were due mostly to the strong efforts of its staff, who delivered results along the humanitarian-development spectrum during the transition period.
65. ***Navigating the shift.*** Despite funding and capacity challenges, the country office successfully managed major transitions, including a shift in its work from a humanitarian to a development context, and an operational shift that made the most of limited funding through direct implementation of programmes. Further work is needed to clarify WFP's comparative advantages and its contributions to Iraq's emergency preparedness and social protection systems as the country continues to progress towards middle-income status and a development context, while WFP continues to assist highly vulnerable people who may fall outside the Government's established safety net systems.

Recommendations

Recommendations and sub-recommendations		Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
1. Focus WFP's efforts on supporting Iraq's capacity for climate resilience, emergency preparedness and response and social safety nets, with clear milestones in WFP's transition and exit strategy as Iraq progresses towards upper-middle-income and post-crisis status. Advocate the maintenance of specialist international support for particularly vulnerable people during the transition.		Strategic				
1.1.	In the CSP for 2025–2029 and related strategic documents, clearly articulate and focus efforts on key areas of WFP's comparative advantage, including social safety nets, emergency preparedness and climate resilience. Clearly define success and set measurable milestones for the responsible handover of capacity strengthening activities to the Government and WFP's exit from Iraq as the country continues its progress towards post-conflict, upper-middle-income status supported by significant national revenue sources.		Country office	Regional office	High	First quarter of 2025
1.2	Develop a theory of change that sets out plausible pathways for the building, testing and handover of capacities, with realistic timelines, clear vectors of change and the identification of relevant assumptions. Ensure that all capacity building plans are clearly aligned with government priorities and needs.		Country office		High	First quarter of 2025
1.3	Advocate targeted continuous international support for vulnerable people who are likely to fall outside social safety nets – such as undocumented people, refugees, Iraqis returning from the Syrian Arab Republic and marginalized groups (for example, Yazidis) – while national systems are strengthened or other durable solutions found.		Country office	Regional office and headquarters in Rome (Partnerships and Innovation Department)	High	Third quarter of 2027

Recommendations and sub-recommendations		Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
2. Focus country capacity strengthening on strategic approaches for integrating cash-based transfer, resilience, social protection and emergency preparedness initiatives into government systems. Develop a model that can be scaled up in response to a future crisis and that is tailored to Iraq's transition to upper-middle-income status.		Strategic				
2.1.	Develop a clearly articulated vision of the type of social protection system that the Government is building with WFP's support, which will inform collaboration with government and other partners – including United Nations partners – on generating a broadly shared vision for social protection in Iraq.		Country office	Headquarters in Rome and regional office (social protection unit)	High	Fourth quarter of 2029
2.2.	Examine WFP's comparative advantage in relation to the reform of the social protection system (including the public distribution system), strengthening and investing in the appropriate capabilities for the organization in Iraq in areas such as social protection, monitoring, communication for development and other communications, and capacity strengthening.		Country office	Headquarters in Rome (Programme Policy and Guidance Division) and regional office (programme unit)	Medium	Fourth quarter of 2029
2.3.	Ensure that digital transformation is integrated into the broader reform agenda. Prioritize local solutions so as to develop digital assets that partners have the capacity to maintain. Build sustainability and handover plans into all digital asset programmes from the start.		Country office	Headquarters in Rome (Partnerships and Innovation Department and Technology Division) and regional office (partnerships and technology units)	High	Fourth quarter of 2029
2.4.	Develop a model for maintaining contingency emergency response capacity tailored to Iraq's transition to upper-middle-income status. The model should include consideration of the ways in which WFP can link its emergency response capacity to its ongoing work on social protection and emergency preparedness so as to facilitate a rapid and appropriate response in the event of a future crisis in Iraq.		Country office	Headquarters in Rome (Partnerships and Innovation Department, Emergency Preparedness and Response Service, and Programme Policy and Guidance Division)	Medium	First quarter of 2029

Recommendations and sub-recommendations		Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
3. Resize and reconceptualize WFP's operations in Iraq to reflect a constrained funding environment and a development-focused future, and develop contingency plans for cases when funding falls below a minimum viable level.		Strategic				
3.1	Focus on fewer interventions in the areas of WFP's core added value – social protection, emergency preparedness and response to climate-related shocks – to allow staff to specialize and to demonstrate sustainable impact. Use pilot projects to test and innovate new approaches in line with, and within the framework of, identified strategies linked to a rigorous plan for taking successful approaches to scale.		Country office		High	First quarter of 2029
3.2	Where possible, maintain WFP's presence in the governorates, prioritizing the recruitment and retention of staff with solid development, climate and capacity strengthening expertise. Support WFP staff working in the governorates through a core support team based in Baghdad and Erbil. Implement a comprehensive engagement strategy to ensure that governorate-level pilot projects are understood at the central level and can be funded and scaled up through central ministries.		Country office		Medium	First quarter of 2029
3.3	Move away from humanitarian-focused, "one-size-fits-all" interventions and prioritization strategies. Tailor assistance to beneficiaries' needs and priorities based on an assessment of the size and length of investment needed to move people out of vulnerability, which is likely to take years. Increase investments per person and per intervention to promote sustainable change.		Country office		High	Second quarter of 2025

Recommendations and sub-recommendations		Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
3.4	Strengthen the capacity of monitoring and evaluation staff in order to increase learning and accountability to donors and partners. Revise corporate monitoring indicators and guidelines with a view to developing approaches to outcome monitoring that are suitable for demonstrating the achievement of long-term development outcomes and are tailored to country offices working in transitional settings.		Country office and headquarters in Rome (Analysis Planning and Performance Division)	Regional office (research, assessment and monitoring unit)	High	Second quarter of 2025
3.5	Identify the minimum viable funding level needed to maintain a country office in Iraq. Develop alternative delivery models in case funding falls below this level, such as the maintenance of programme teams supported remotely by the regional office and headquarters or the use of cost sharing for support services.		Regional office	Country office and headquarters in Rome (Programme Policy and Guidance Division)	High	Second quarter of 2025
4. Diversify funding and ensure multi-year funding for sustainable change.		Operational				
4.1.	Continue to diversify funding, exploring innovative climate finance, multi-year development funding and partnerships with regional donors and the private sector. Advocate funding from the Government of Iraq.		Country office	Regional office and headquarters in Rome (Partnerships and Innovation Department)	High	Third quarter of 2025
4.2.	Ensure that long-term climate resilience and capacity strengthening work is underpinned by long-term funding and avoid commencing any new work unless resources are reasonably secure.		Country office	Regional office and headquarters in Rome (Partnerships and Innovation Department)	High	Third quarter of 2025
5. Leverage partnerships to ensure the coherent rollout of development interventions over the long term, and to obtain access to specialist expertise.		Operational				
5.1.	Continue to build and strengthen partnerships with development actors such as other United Nations entities and international financial institutions so as to leverage development expertise that is not traditionally found in WFP, especially expertise related to the responsible handover of livelihood and rural development activities.		Country office	Regional office (partnerships unit)	Medium	Second quarter of 2025

Recommendations and sub-recommendations		Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
5.2.	Develop a partnership engagement strategy based on stakeholder and process mapping to ensure that all partners at the national, Kurdish Regional Authority and governorate levels are aware of, and engage in, WFP interventions in the country.		Country office	Regional office (partnerships unit)	Medium	Fourth quarter of 2025
5.3.	Explore and strengthen partnerships with universities, civil society and communities with a view to building sustainable approaches to emergency preparedness and response, climate resilience and social protection thereby ensuring ongoing reach into vulnerable communities.		Country office	Regional office (partnerships unit)	Medium	Third quarter of 2025
6. Ensure that women's empowerment and disability considerations are included where relevant, particularly for emergency preparedness and social protection interventions.		Strategic				
6.1.	Ensure that programme strategies are informed by appropriate gender, disability and protection analysis tailored to the cultural and religious environment.		Country office	Regional office (gender, protection and inclusion unit) and headquarters in Rome (Gender, Protection and Inclusion Service)	High	Second quarter of 2025
6.2	Train staff and key partners at the national, Kurdish Regional Authority and governorate levels on cross-cutting concerns to promote their integration into programme implementation.		Country office	Regional office (gender, protection and inclusion, and climate units)	Medium	Fourth quarter of 2025
6.3	Develop indicators that measure progress, tailored to the Iraqi context.		Country office	Headquarters in Rome (Analysis Planning and Performance Division)	Medium	Third quarter of 2025
6.4	Publicize the new accountability and feedback mechanisms to facilitate effective feedback loops that inform the management of risks related to complex change in existing social norms.		Country office	Regional office (gender, protection and inclusion, and climate units)	High	Fourth quarter of 2025

Acronyms

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
IDP	internally displaced person
T-ICSP	transitional interim country strategic plan