

Supplementary information note to the security report

Psychosocial risk management in high-demand operational contexts

I. Introduction and context

1. Humanitarian operations are increasingly conducted in environments marked by instability, high stress, and exposure to traumatic events. Mental wellbeing of humanitarian employees is equally critical to sustaining effective operations and fulfilling organizational mandates. A workforce that is mentally well is better equipped to respond to crises, make sound decisions, and support the communities it serves.
2. WFP is no exception. The organization operates in complex, high-demand environments in which the psychosocial work environment has direct implications for workforce sustainability, leadership effectiveness, team functioning, decision-making and continuity of delivery, including the ability to operate safely and effectively under pressure.
3. In this context, psychosocial risks arise primarily from the design and management of work, including workload, role clarity, leadership practices, team dynamics, organizational culture and work-life pressures. For WFP, these factors are not separate from operational effectiveness; they influence how individuals, teams and the organization function in demanding settings.
4. Evidence from United Nations system data and broader occupational health research shows that insufficient attention to psychosocial risks carries significant operational and organizational consequences. These include increased sick leave and stress-related absence, higher turnover and loss of institutional knowledge, reduced engagement and productivity, greater exposure to reputational and legal risk under duty of care obligations, and diminished capacity to deliver on organizational mandates. Beyond the occupational health perspective, psychosocial risks are also directly correlated to increased accidents and unintentional safety incidents in safety critical contexts. Research demonstrates that poorer psychosocial risk conditions are associated with a higher number of human error and safety incidents, underscoring the relevance of psychosocial risk management not only to staff well-being, but also to the prevention of operational and safety incidents¹.
5. The cost of inaction on managing psychosocial risks is high and increasing. The WFP sick leave dashboard shows the sick leave trend from 2020 to 2024 increasing by almost double, from 23, 805 to 46, 366 days lost per year. Mental health related sick leave has constituted over 11 percent of all cases, rising from 2, 968 days lost in 2020 to 5, 359 in 2024. Across the United Nations system, the economic productivity cost to the United Nations due to

¹ Bergh, L.I.V., Ringstad, A.J., Leka, S. and Zwetsloot, G.I.J.M., 2014. *Psychosocial risks and hydrocarbon leaks: An exploration of their relationship in the Norwegian oil and gas industry* *Journal of Cleaner Production*. 84, 824-830.

unmitigated psychosocial risk is estimated at USD 12 million annually.² The true cost of inaction impacting the health of WFP employees, the health of workplace culture and the effectiveness of WFP as an operational entity. During a time when United Nations entities are being asked to reform and achieve cost efficiencies while maximizing effectiveness, the role played by psychosocial risk management is paramount as WFP moves forward in this complex and volatile global landscape.

6. WFP's wellness strategy 2025–2030 reinforces the importance of employee wellbeing by placing people at the centre of performance and by promoting a balanced focus on individual, team and organizational health. Anchored in WFP's values, people policy and duty of care accountability framework, the strategy highlights the importance of safe, inclusive and healthy work environments in enabling employees to perform at their best. In a resource-constrained environment with competing operational priorities, psychosocial risk management is therefore not only a workforce issue, but also a matter of organizational effectiveness, operational readiness and strategic oversight.
7. This relevance is reflected both externally and internally. At the system level, psychosocial risk management forms part of a broader United Nations effort under the United Nations mental health and well-being strategy to strengthen these approaches more systematically, including through inter-agency collaboration on emerging common tools and methods, in which WFP is a leading technical contributor.
8. Within WFP, recent internal audit findings have reinforced the importance of strengthening integrated risk management, performance monitoring and reporting for duty of care in an increasingly challenging operating environment. Against this backdrop, psychosocial risk management is receiving increased attention as part of WFP's broader duty of care framework, with the aim of strengthening how these risks are understood, managed and progressively embedded within WFP's wider workforce-related risk architecture in a way that is grounded in operational reality.

II. Building on existing foundations

9. Building on this context, WFP continues to strengthen its duty of care architecture and expand support for the health, safety and well-being of its workforce. The 2026 Internal audit on duty of care in WFP confirmed the progress made over the past decade, including through the establishment of the duty of care accountability framework, while also identifying opportunities to further strengthen integration, risk management and reporting. The current focus on psychosocial risk management is being advanced through the Wellness and Culture Division and reflects a broader shift towards a more proactive and preventive approach to addressing organizational risk factors alongside the support mechanisms already in place.
10. A more integrated, data-informed and evidence-based approach is central to this next phase. It is intended to make better use of data WFP already holds, connect insights that currently sit across different parts of the organization, and strengthen collaborative efforts to understand where risks are emerging, what may be driving them and where action is most needed, particularly during periods of change, emergency response and sustained operational pressure. This approach enables more forward-looking analysis and a more strategic use of data, institutional learning and cross-functional collaboration to anticipate psychosocial risks earlier and support more effective action, including through predictive modelling of possible impacts and the consequences of inaction.

² United Nations. (2018). *A healthy workforce for a better world: United Nations system workplace mental health and well-being strategy*, p. 12.

11. Taken together, this is strengthening organizational intelligence by linking the psychosocial work environment to operational, people and performance outcomes, including effects on workplace culture and employee engagement, and by using that insight to inform management decisions, risk prioritization, reporting and accountability. In addition, it has practical operational value by supporting earlier action, more effective planning, better prioritization of limited resources and stronger support to teams working under pressure. Over time, this will support stronger prevention, workforce resilience and healthier, higher-performing teams.
12. WFP's current psychosocial support environment includes important foundations, including staff counselling and psychosocial support services, critical incident support, medical and human resources pathways, management support structures and the broader direction set through the wellness strategy and duty of care accountability framework. These mechanisms remain essential and, in many contexts, are helping individuals and teams access support, navigate acute challenges and strengthen local response capacity. At the same time, there is benefit in maximizing the impact of existing support mechanisms with a more systematic preventive approach, with increased focus on earlier identification of psychosocial risks, stronger cross-functional integration and more consistent follow-through across locations and contexts.
13. Before the current psychosocial risk management approach, WFP and other organizations have relied on a range of complementary tools to understand workforce experience and identify emerging concerns, including staff surveys, pulse checks, facilitated discussions, debriefs and broader people, health and oversight data. These remain relevant and useful, particularly for capturing perception, engagement and broad organizational trends. The value of the new approach is not to replace those tools, but to complement them by focusing more specifically on psychosocial hazards in the work environment, linking findings more directly to action planning and clarifying where management attention, support and accountability may be most needed. It also supports a more refined and forward-looking use of data by connecting relevant insights more systematically to better understand psychosocial risks, their operational impact and the outcomes of action over time.

III. Governance and accountability

14. This shift also has important governance implications. Psychosocial risk management is a central component of WFP's duty of care approach and should be understood as a shared organizational responsibility.
15. Accordingly, accountability for the psychosocial work environment sits across all levels of the organization: in corporate frameworks and oversight, in leadership and line management, in the functions responsible for duty of care and people support, and in teams themselves. Positioning psychosocial risk management in this way helps reinforce that psychosocial risks are relevant not only to staff wellbeing, but also to safety, security, staff retention, decision-making and operational continuity.
16. The duty of care accountability framework and the enterprise risk management framework provide the main institutional pathways for this integration. Strengthening that link is already under way and is intended to give psychosocial risks clearer visibility, ownership and follow-through through existing governance, reporting and risk processes, rather than addressing them separately from those systems.
17. Over time, a stronger and more embedded psychosocial risk management approach should help leaders and managers act earlier and with greater clarity, while enabling the functions responsible for duty of care and people support services to collaborate more effectively, provide more coordinated support to teams and use available resources more efficiently in responding to team needs.

IV. Status update

18. Since 2024, WFP has recognized the criticality of psychosocial risk management and, consistent with this broader shift, advanced this work through the piloting of the team support programme, its structured application of psychosocial risk management at team, office and division level, with the Wellness Division Counselling team providing the technical lead. Initially developed as a practical mechanism to support leaders and teams in identifying psychosocial hazards and emerging needs in the work environment, the programme has provided a useful foundation for a more structured organizational approach, with eight country offices and teams having participated to date.
19. Across these early pilots, the programme has been applied in a range of operational settings where teams were experiencing sustained pressure, organizational change or concerns relating to team functioning and the wider work culture and environment. Participation was voluntary and reflected leader interest in using the programme as a practical mechanism to support teams in challenging operational and organizational contexts. While each context has differed, the process has consistently shown the value of creating a structured space to identify psychosocial hazards more clearly, engage managers and teams in shared reflection, and translate findings into practical actions with clearer ownership and follow-up.
20. Pre-liminary results from the PRSM pilot in WFP has demonstrated positive movement across several psychosocial dimensions linked to organizational performance and delivery, such as leadership quality, predictability, role clarity and quality of work, while identifying issues requiring continued management attention. It also helped surface key strengths in the team environment, including existing factors supporting performance and cohesion, so that these could be reinforced, learned from and monitored over time. These findings informed targeted follow-up actions and continued engagement with the team as part of the broader change process. This illustrates how the process can support continuous improvement, strengthen change management and provide leaders with a more practical basis for prioritization, targeted support and sustained operational effectiveness over time.
21. Building on insights from these early pilots, WFP is developing a more sophisticated and connected psychosocial risk management tool to support the next phase of this work. The PRSM dashboard is an interactive tool that provides a comprehensive view of psychosocial risks and supports forward-looking analysis and predictive modelling of possible organizational, mental health and other health impacts, including the potential costs of inaction. It further strengthens action planning by linking identified risks to evidence-based mitigation options and relevant support already available within WFP. The data presented on the dashboard is aggregated to provide context specific but anonymized information based in integrated scientifically validated risk assessment insights. Keeping data ownership within WFP supports confidentiality, future analysis and ongoing adaptation over time, while helping to prioritize interventions where they are most needed.
22. Through this approach, support to teams is increasingly informed by data and tailored both to their specific needs and to WFP's operational context. To date, 15 country offices and teams have tentatively committed to this next phase, with further engaged anticipated as the programme continues to roll out. With sustained effort and investment, psychosocial risk management has the capacity to strengthen workforce readiness and resilience, helping WFP to sustain delivery of its mandate in increasingly complex operational environments.

V. Future direction and next steps

23. The next phase is to embed psychosocial risk management more fully within WFP's duty of care and wider risk management architecture so that psychosocial risks are increasingly identified, monitored and managed through existing organizational systems as part of routine management practice. In this sense, psychosocial risk management forms part of WFP's broader enterprise approach to workforce sustainability. As this work becomes more embedded, the programme is expected to continue expanding across the organization.
24. Achieving this will require sustained organizational effort to strengthen data capabilities, provide clear guidance and support to managers and teams, and reinforce cross-functional collaboration in implementation. Over time, these efforts are expected to consolidate and scale a more consistent institutional capability for managing psychosocial risks across the organization, supported by more deliberate prioritization and allocation of resources.
25. Sustaining progress will depend on continued organizational prioritization, strong institutional coordination and the maintenance of core capabilities required to support WFP's workforce effectively over time. Ensuring adequate and sustained investment in this area will be essential to strengthening WFP's overall approach to managing workforce-related risks and supporting organizational resilience.

VI. Conclusion

26. Mental health is a central pillar of WFP's duty of care framework, and it is foundational to WFP's commitment to staff wellbeing, safety, and resilience, in the context of increasing security, health and psychosocial risk in the humanitarian space.
27. WFP's duty of care framework operationalizes the need for internal governance and risk management systems as enshrined in the declaration for the protection of humanitarian personnel. Calls by the United Nations Security Council resolution (2024) for enhanced protection of humanitarian personnel highlights the urgency for humanitarian actors to take concrete steps to prevent harm, ensure accountability, and improve operational safety. Psychosocial risk management is a concrete step that WFP is taking to address risks, harm and safety, from a mental health perspective.
28. As psychosocial risk management is a core component of WFP's ability to operate effectively in demanding operational environments, PRSM integration is essential for WFP to be meet its current and future mandate, while remaining resilient, agile and impactful.
29. WFP is building on a strong foundation in this area of psychosocial risk management and is moving towards a more embedded, data-informed and evidence-based approach to understanding and managing these risks. This represents a broader shift towards a more integrated organizational approach to managing workforce-related risks in complex and high-pressure operating contexts, and a more strategic use of data, institutional learning and cross-functional collaboration to support earlier and more effective action. Strengthening and integrating psychosocial risk management within enterprise risk management and duty of care frameworks will support stronger leadership accountability, workforce resilience and organizational sustainability, while helping to safeguard WFP's people and support safe, effective and resilient operations over time.