

Scoping Study on Social Protection and Safety Nets for Enhanced Food Security and Nutrition in the Kyrgyz Republic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2018



After a difficult initial period of independence and transition, the Kyrgyz Republic has made remarkable progress in economic and social development. The economy is recovering from recent shocks, including financial crises in 2008 and 2014, political unrest and natural disasters. Economic growth is projected to slowly increase from 3.5 percent of GDP in 2017 to 5.4 percent in 2022¹. The Kyrgyz Republic has recently become a member of the Eurasian Economic Union. Poverty has decreased dramatically, with less than 1 percent of the population living below the international cut-off point of 1.90 dollar a day². The Global Hunger Index now categorizes the Kyrgyz Republic as a country with low level of hunger – a substantial improvement since the "serious" score estimated in 1995³.

Yet, food insecurity and poverty still affect much of the Kyrgyz population. Access to food, particularly economic access, is a major threat to household food security. According to the National Statistical Office, poor households spend on average 69 percent of their total monthly budgets on food items⁴. Micronutrient deficiencies, which result from inadequate quality and variability of the food consumed, affected many of the country's children. In 2011, more than a third of children under five were anaemic. In 2014, more than every tenth child was stunted, a condition associated with chronic undernutrition⁵. Instability hinders the food security of rural households and households in areas affected by natural disasters and political unrest⁶. Poverty and food insecurity are

intertwined, as the lack of purchasing power prevents households to consume enough nutritious food. Even though poverty rates at the international lines have decreased, a fourth of the population consumes less than the national poverty line⁷. Rural populations, particularly in the rural South, are disproportionately affected by poverty. Children and members of large households are among the poorest of the poor.

Social protection is relatively comprehensive in the country, but social assistance and active labour market programmes are relatively small.

Pensions are responsible for an estimated 56 percent decrease in extreme poverty, thanks to their wide coverage and relatively high benefit adequacy. Social assistance, however, suffers from fragmentation, low coverage and low transfer values – thus, these programmes do little to tackle poverty. Promotive social protection is strongly encouraged by international partners, particularly the World Food Programme (WFP), and is making its way towards the national social protection agenda. The growing scope of productive safety nets (most of all, WFP's Productive Measures of Social Development) has the potential to break the cycle of poverty and food insecurity. The "Optimizing School Meals" programme has undergone substantial reform with WFP support and is now a major contributor to the food security of children. In a context of salient external labour migration, remittances play an important role in the livelihoods of receiving households.



Since 2010, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and its partners have demonstrated dedication to improve the well-being of the population and have made important achievements in social protection policy. The last two decades have brought about several reforms, and there have been ongoing efforts to expand and consolidate social protection. Yet, social protection in its current form does not comprehensively address the needs and vulnerabilities of the Kyrgyz population. A number of caveats and bottlenecks are present, which must be addressed by a comprehensive reform of social protection.

Several challenges exist in social protection, the key ones being gaps in protection, programmes being too small in scope, targeting errors and implementation difficulties. Even though the Kyrgyz Republic has signed the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Social Protection Floor initiative, no comprehensive income guarantees are in place for either children or people in working age. Promotive social protection is progressively being recognized as a powerful tool in breaking the poverty cycle, but it is still relatively small in scope, and government ownership is low. The main social assistance programme, the Monthly Benefit for Poor Families and Children, serves only extremely poor households with children, which excludes many of the poor. Moreover, even those who do benefit from the programme receive transfers too little to make a lasting change. Nutrition objectives are not considered in most social protection initiatives, with the "Optimizing School Meals" programme being the only government-run scheme with an explicit food security objective. Social services address only a narrow sub-set of needs.



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Most of the challenges are linked to insufficient funding of social protection. The government receives substantial support from its international partners. However, the resources currently directed at social assistance and active labour market policies are insufficient to address all the needs, fill gaps in provision and strengthen existing programmes. Targeted social assistance, for instance, only received 0.6 percent of GDP in 2015⁸. Adding new programmes, expanding existing schemes and building capacity are only possible if additional resources are allocated to social protection.

A comprehensive reform aimed at strengthening social protection and its impact on food security should include the following elements:

- **Policy dialogue among all stakeholders involved in social protection.** Such a dialogue should be guided by a set of minimum standards, such as the inclusion of promotive and transformative measures and the ILO's Social Protection Floor. Such standards should include nutrition objectives, to ensure a food security focus of social protection programmes.
- **Strengthen social protection programmes by reviewing design, standards (that guide eligibility and benefit values) and targeting approaches.** Ensure that the protective, preventive, promotive and transformative potential of social protection are de facto realized. Allow the poor, not only the officially unemployed, to access active labour market policies.
- **The implementation of social protection needs strengthening.** Capacity-building, introducing a nationwide electronic registry and carrying out robust monitoring and evaluation practices, could contribute to a more efficient and effective system.
- **The financing of social protection must be increased.** The efficiency of resource allocation within social protection should be reviewed, but an increased financial commitment to social protection is also necessary to overcome the gaps and bottlenecks.

1 International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2016). World Economic Outlook Database. Available at: www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2014/01/

2 World Bank (2017). The World Bank in the Kyrgyz Republic: Country Snapshot. Washington DC: The World Bank.

3 IFPRI (2016). Global Hunger Index dataset. Available at: http://data.ifpri.org/lod/ghi/resource/Global_Hunger_Index

4 National Statistical Committee (NSC) (2017). Information bulletin on food security and poverty of the Kyrgyz Republic.2/2017. NSC. Bishkek 2017

5 UNICEF (2014). Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey – Kyrgyz Republic. Database available at: <http://mics.unicef.org/>

6 World Food Programme (WFP) (2015). Food Security Atlas Kyrgyz Republic 2014. Bishkek: Ministry of Agriculture and Melioration of the Kyrgyz Republic & WFP.

7 National Statistical Committee (NSC) (2017). Data retrieved from <http://www.stat.kg/en/>

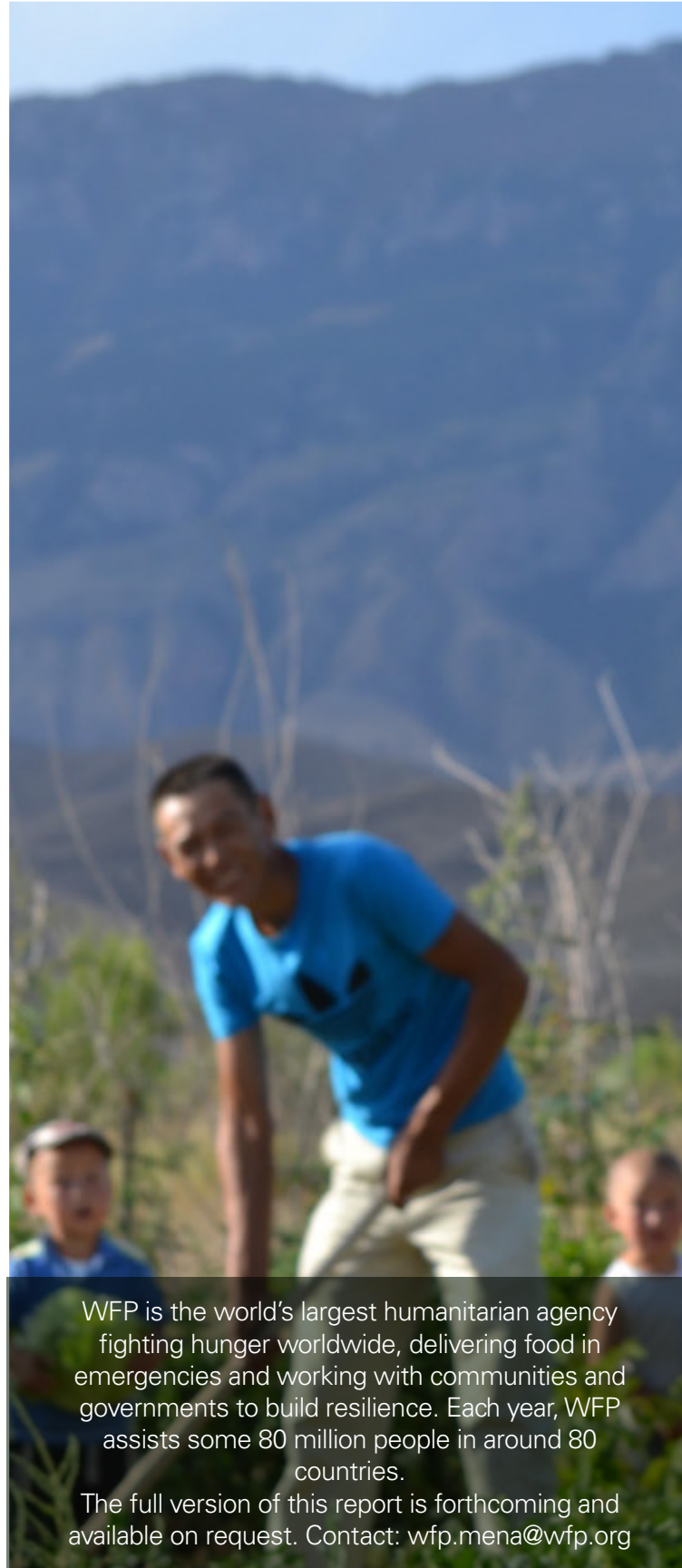
8 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (forthcoming). Social Protection Background Paper: Kyrgyz Republic.



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The full version of this report is forthcoming and available on request. Contact: wfp.mena@wfp.org