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## Summary report on the evaluation of the update of WFP's safety nets policy (2012)

### Executive summary

The policy evaluation provides an assessment of the quality and results of and influencing factors for the 2012 update of WFP's safety nets policy<sup>1</sup> and has the objectives of enhancing accountability and learning. It covers the period from 2012 to 2017 while also considering more recent developments. The findings, conclusions and recommendations in this summary report are derived from data gathered from 250 key informants, 12 country case studies and an extensive review of literature, documents and reporting data.

Since 2012, WFP's work in safety nets has grown to focus more broadly on social protection in parallel with the development of social protection systems by governments. The policy update established two key pathways for WFP work: direct provision of safety nets; and activities in support of government-owned safety nets. It was consistent with the prevailing concepts of its time, encouraged alignment with national governments and took into consideration the links between social protection and humanitarian assistance. The focus on safety nets was well grounded in WFP's established food assistance mandate. However, the policy update did not provide a clear vision, purpose or results framework for WFP's work in safety nets, nor did it include discussion of gender or disability issues. Guidance developed in 2014 and 2017 provided greater coverage of and updated information on the ways in which WFP can contribute to national social protection systems, although both the policy and the guidance were hampered by limited dissemination and uptake.

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<sup>1</sup> WFP/EB.A/2012/5-A.

*In line with the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021) (WFP/EB.2/2015/4-A/Rev.1), 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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While corporate-level investments in implementing the policy update were limited, progress has increased since the creation of the Safety Nets and Social Protection Unit in 2016. WFP country offices and regional bureaux were found to be implementing a wide range of safety nets reaching tens of millions of people each year and supporting social protection systems through technical assistance and capacity strengthening. The development of country strategic plans has increased the focus on safety nets and social protection.

WFP is widely viewed as a credible actor in safety nets. Its comparative advantages in operations and analysis coupled with its growing experience of using cash programming and technology facilitate its social protection work. WFP partnered with other social protection actors, but competition for resources reduced the potential for collective outcomes and created coordination and prioritization challenges for governments. Short-term, unpredictable funding and donors' perceptions about the role of WFP in longer-term programming have at times put WFP at a competitive disadvantage in social protection work.

A lack of internal prioritization has impeded the development of capacities for WFP's work in safety nets. Shortcomings were found in the human resources, knowledge management and monitoring and reporting systems that underpin WFP's ability to engage in upstream policy work, context analysis and systems thinking.

The evaluation concluded that the growing experience of WFP in safety nets and social protection has positioned it well to contribute in this area. WFP can play an important role through its efforts to achieve zero hunger when these are aligned with or support government systems. To ensure continued results, WFP should confirm and sustain a high-level commitment to social protection and should develop and disseminate a strategy for engagement, improve cross-functional coordination and coherence, invest in knowledge management, build internal capacities and strengthen its monitoring and reporting systems in this area.

### **Draft decision\***

The Board takes note of the document entitled "Summary report on the evaluation of the update of WFP's safety nets policy (2012)" (WFP/EB.A/2019/7-B) and the management response WFP/EB.A/2019/7-B/Add.1 and encourages further action on the recommendations, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

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\* 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 and evaluation features

1. The “Update of WFP’s Safety Nets Policy: The Role of Food Assistance in Social Protection” was approved by the Executive Board at its 2012 annual session and superseded the 2004 policy.<sup>2</sup> Now in its sixth year, the policy update is due for evaluation in accordance with WFP’s policies. The evaluation provides evidence, analysis and recommendations related to the policy update’s quality and results and to the factors that influenced those results; it has the dual objective of enhancing accountability and learning.
2. The evaluation was conducted between June and November 2018. It covers the period from 2012 to 2017 but also takes note of more recent developments in the countries studied and at headquarters with a view to providing timely evaluation findings that are related to ongoing and potential changes.
3. The following methods and approaches were used in the evaluation:
  - construction of a theory of change;
  - twelve country case studies, five through field visits (Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Colombia, Egypt and Uganda) and seven through remote desk studies (Ecuador, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritania, Mozambique, Turkey and Sri Lanka);
  - 250 key informant interviews with representatives of all regional bureaux, relevant headquarters units, partners and other actors;
  - review of 2016–2017 data from standard project reports analysed by the Safety Nets and Social Protection Unit;
  - review of global and regional WFP documents and records; and
  - review of external literature including from other organizations.
4. Major limitations included variable clarity among WFP country offices regarding the classification of activities as safety nets, which sometimes contradicted WFP guidance. The ability to assess results comprehensively was limited by corporate reporting systems and results frameworks, which do not identify the activities, outputs and outcomes of WFP’s programmes that are linked to safety nets and social protection. The overall timeline for data collection and reporting was highly compressed, limiting the potential for follow-up enquiries.
5. Despite these limitations, the evaluation findings are based on triangulated evidence from multiple data types and sources. Reliability was enhanced through debriefs with country offices at the end of field missions in order to confirm impressions, a global debriefing held at the end of the data collection phase, a workshop with WFP staff and management from the countries and regions visited, and discussions of findings, conclusions and recommendations with headquarters divisions, during which feedback was gathered.

### Context

6. The policy update defined safety nets as “formal or informal non-contributory transfers provided to people vulnerable to or living in poverty, malnutrition and other forms of deprivation”. This definition was consistent with those used by the World Bank and the United Nations Children’s Fund at the time. However, some ambiguity in these definitions was evident, including regarding whether safety nets must be government-owned, the

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<sup>2</sup> WFP/EB.3/2004/4-A.

duration of safety net interventions and whether humanitarian assistance can be a safety net.

7. The evaluation used the policy update's definition of safety nets and criteria from WFP guidance of 2014, which states that safety nets are long-term, predictable and linked to governments. WFP's definition from 2017 was adopted, which defines social protection as "the broad set of arrangements and instruments designed to protect members of society from shocks and stresses over the lifecycle".
8. The use of safety nets and social protection has grown considerably since 2012, with all governments around the world employing at least one safety net mechanism by 2015.<sup>3</sup> Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 focuses on ending poverty including through the use of national social protection systems and measures.<sup>4</sup> Globally there has been increased focus on expanding safety nets, using social protection systems in times of shock – and while preparing for shocks – and increasing the use of cash-based transfers.
9. WFP's direct implementation of safety nets has also expanded through a broader focus on providing capacity strengthening and technical support for national social protection systems, in line with WFP's shift from "implementer to enabler" initiated in the WFP strategic plan for 2008–2013. Various humanitarian and development conferences have also shaped the global landscape and influenced WFP's work.<sup>5</sup>

### **WFP's Safety Nets Policy Update (2012) and its implementation**

10. The policy update includes principles and lessons learned, concepts and definitions, roles and comparative advantages and five scenarios for different levels of country capacity and stability. It presents emerging issues, programming choices, key priorities and implications.
11. The policy update did not include a theory of change, a logical framework, specific results statements or indicators for measuring progress. A theory of change was developed for the evaluation by inferring the expected activities, outputs, outcomes and impact of the policy update. This theory of change identified two pathways for WFP's contributions to safety nets and social protection: a "provision pathway" for the direct implementation of activities for providing "safety net instruments and transfers"; and a "support pathway" for WFP's "functions in support of nationally led safety nets".<sup>6</sup> A third set of elements that contribute to both pathways were identified. Activities in the constructed theory of change were reflected in the sub-questions of the evaluation.
12. The organizational structure of WFP units relevant to the policy update has changed several times, including through increased staff resources for the Social Protection and Safety Net Unit over the past two years. A timeline of milestones in WFP's safety net and social protection work is provided in figure 1.

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<sup>3</sup>The World Bank. 2015. *The state of social safety nets 2015*, page 1. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/415491467994645020/The-state-of-social-safety-nets-2015>.

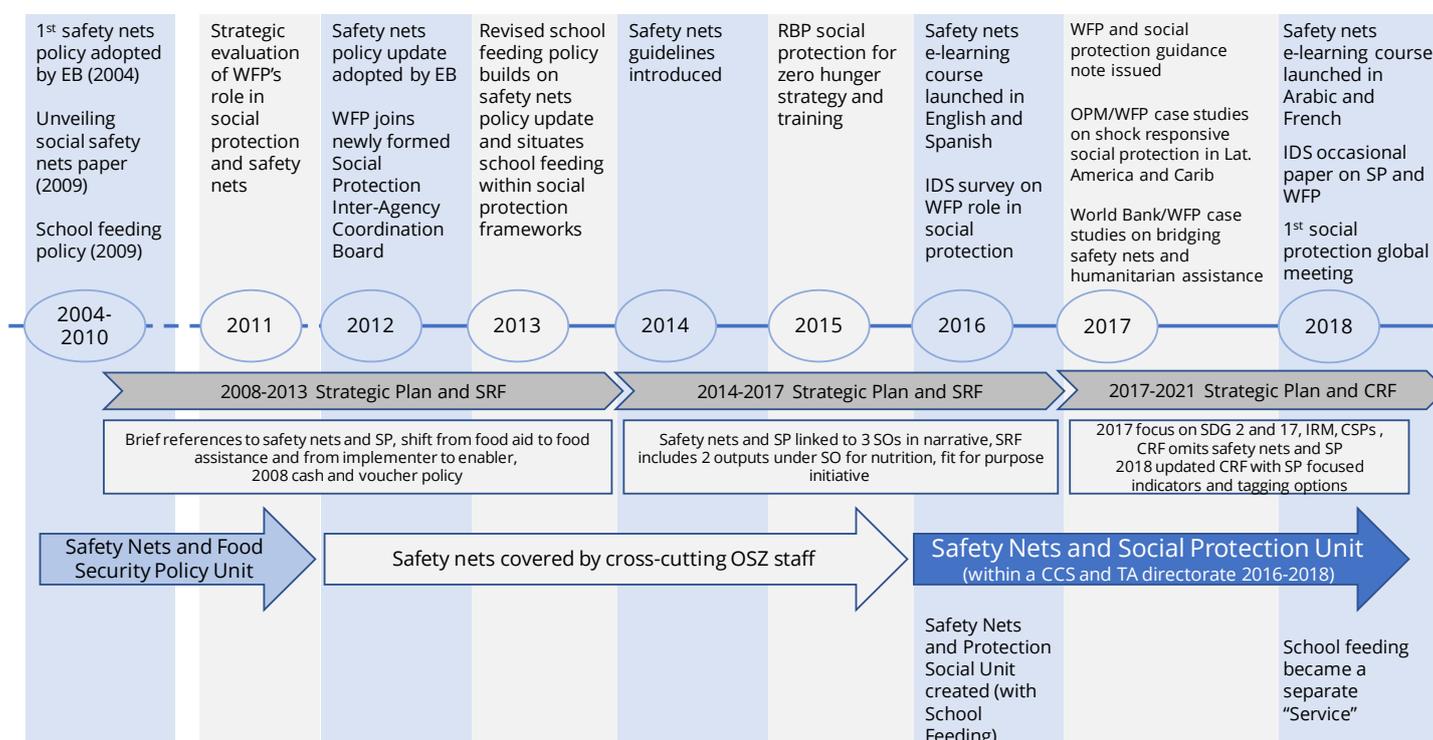
<sup>4</sup> SDG Target 1.3: Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable. SDG Knowledge Platform. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg1>.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the International Conference on Social Protection in Contexts of Fragility and forced Displacement led by the United Nations Children's Fund and the European Commission and co-organized by WFP in 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Activities in the provision pathway include the design of safety nets for food security and nutrition and the operationalization and implementation of safety nets, including procurement, logistics and the delivery of transfers. Activities in the support pathway include country capacity strengthening, technical and analytical advice and advocacy for influencing policy.

13. WFP's documented experiences with safety nets reaches back to at least 1998,<sup>7</sup> when a policy paper entitled *Food-based safety net needs and WFP* was developed. WFP's role in safety nets was first formalized in the 2004 policy "WFP and food-based safety nets: Concepts, experiences and future programming opportunities".<sup>8</sup>
14. Between 2004 and 2012, WFP developed several papers that articulate the understanding of what safety nets are in WFP. A 2011 strategic evaluation of WFP's role in social protection and safety nets<sup>9</sup> concluded that WFP was widely engaged in safety nets and social protection but lacked adequate guidance and needed to institutionalize changes in planning, programme design, external collaboration, monitoring and financial systems for safety nets and social protection. The 2012 policy update had the aim of building on these lessons by clarifying key concepts and linking them to WFP's activities and roles.

**Figure 1: Milestones in WFP's safety nets and social protection work**



Abbreviations: CCS: country capacity strengthening; CRF: corporate results framework; IDS: Institute for Development Studies; SO: strategic outcome; SP: social protection; SRF: strategic results framework; TA: technical assistance

Source: Evaluation team from document review and interviews.

<sup>7</sup> WFP activities that are now considered to be safety nets, such as school feeding, have been in operation since the 1960s.

<sup>8</sup> WFP/EB.3/2004/4-A.

<sup>9</sup> WFP/EB.A/2011/7-B.

## Findings

### *Quality of the policy*

15. The quality of the policy update and its related guidance and tools was assessed. The evaluation found that the policy update was generally aligned with the concepts of safety nets and social protection prevailing at the time. While it emphasized the rationale for supporting safety nets, it neglected some opportunities for supporting broader social protection, reducing its relevance and utility today. The core content of the policy update remained relevant throughout the evaluation period but thinking about and approaches to social protection have advanced considerably, especially regarding the strengthening of systems, links to humanitarian assistance and the expansion of access and coverage.
16. The relevance and utility of the policy update were diminished by a lack of essential elements. The policy update did not establish a clear conceptual framework, vision, purpose, outcomes or outputs and, as a result, was less practical and feasible than it could have been. In addition, it included little consideration of gender or disability issues. The policy update was well grounded in WFP's established food assistance mandate and outlined the scope of WFP's engagement, evidence, lessons and priorities but it did not discuss alignment with other WFP policies and only briefly mentioned the WFP strategic plan.
17. WFP guidance developed in 2014 and 2017 went beyond the focus on safety nets and provided more information on contributing to national social protection systems. The 2014 guidance provided a clearer explanation of concepts and tools for programme design, implementation and external engagement. The 2017 guidance note provided a clear and up-to-date articulation of how WFP activities for social protection can be framed and positioned in the development of country strategic plans (CSPs) and in alignment with national actors and priorities. The guidance also noted the need for an explicit focus on nutrition in the design of social protection in order to enable nutrition impacts, and provided examples of outcomes and outputs for integration into CSPs, but it is too early to assess the results of these changes as reflected in CSPs.
18. The 2011 strategic evaluation report<sup>10</sup> included six recommendations on strengthening WFP's policy, capacities and positioning for, and contributions to, safety nets and social protection. While its findings and conclusions are broadly addressed in the policy update, this evaluation found that progress in implementing the recommendations is incomplete. Recommendations on strengthening organizational capacities and staff capacities, positioning, policy engagement and adherence to good practice standards were not fully implemented and failed to achieve the intended effects. However, the rate of progress has increased considerably since the creation of the Safety Nets and Social Protection Unit at headquarters in 2016.
19. The policy update is credited with encouraging WFP's alignment with national governments. It marked the beginning of a shift in focus for WFP from direct implementation of safety net activities to provision of support for government-led safety nets. The emphasis on using WFP's comparative advantages to contribute to filling gaps in national systems is increased in subsequent guidance.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

20. Although the policy update does not explicitly mention alignment with other WFP policies, it was largely coherent with WFP policies at the time of its adoption. More recent policies on related subjects<sup>11</sup> reflect updated thinking on and the concept and coverage of social protection and on how WFP relates to them.
21. The quality of a policy can be partly assessed from the levels of awareness and use of the policy throughout an organization. The evaluation found that most WFP staff members were unfamiliar with the policy update and few were aware of the 2014 and 2017 guidelines. Only 21 percent of the staff members interviewed during country office visits reported having read the policy prior to the evaluation, and staff at 10 of the 12 country offices visited stated that the policy update was not useful as practical guidance. Key informants stressed challenges related to dissemination of the policy update, its emphasis on WFP's traditional activity areas rather than cross-cutting issues, and their own capacity to absorb the large number of WFP strategies, policies, guidance and process changes. Nevertheless, WFP country directors, deputy country directors and heads of programme in all 12 countries felt that the subject covered by the policy was relevant to the work of their offices.

### **Policy results**

22. The evaluation assessed the results stemming from the policy update. Although awareness of the policy update was low, the evaluation found that the results observed are indirectly attributable to it through the influence of guidance, training and other initiatives.

### **Global results**

23. Development of the 2014 guidelines and 2017 guidance note provided tools for programme design and implementation. Key informants at country offices felt that the content of guidance documents was useful but still too general for most programme design and implementation decisions. A considerable portion of the 2014 guidelines provides general information that staff need for country capacity strengthening work, engagement with external actors, securing of funding and overall programme design – topics that could have been covered once in overarching programme guidance rather than being duplicated in various documents providing guidance on specific activities or themes.
24. The three-module safety nets e-learning course has been used by staff throughout WFP, but delays in its development resulting from staff turnover at headquarters and gaps in project management may have limited its utility and relevance. Only 5 percent of WFP's internationally recruited workforce and 3 percent of local employees completed at least one module.<sup>12</sup>
25. Recent efforts to develop a global base of evidence have generated useful learning for WFP but have not been part of a broader knowledge management and learning strategy. Following establishment of the Safety Nets and Social Protection Unit, current information and knowledge management practices were assessed and a workplan was developed. Efforts to generate and share evidence included:
  - creation of a document repository, a community of practice on school feeding and social protection and information hubs on the intranet;
  - regular communications to social protection focal points at regional bureaux and country offices ;

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the revised school feeding policy: WFP/EB.2/2013/4-C.

<sup>12</sup> Three-hundred-sixty-one national staff members/consultants (out of 12,674) and 167 international staff members/consultants (out of 3,189) have completed at least one module of the e-learning package. Total WFP employee figures found in WFP Annual performance report for 2017 (WFP/EB.A/2018/4-A/Rev.1), annex V: WFP employees as at 31 December 2017.

- case studies with the World Bank on humanitarian assistance and social protection;
  - research with Oxford Policy Management (OPM) on shock-responsive social protection in Latin America and the Caribbean;
  - a study on WFP and social protection and technical support for CSP development from the Institute for Development Studies (IDS);
  - case and scoping studies on social protection [DM1] carried out by the Regional Bureau for the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia with IDS in the Middle East and North Africa and with Maastricht University in the Commonwealth of Independent States; and
  - research on social protection in rural and urban areas, adaptive social protection and migration and social protection carried out by the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean.
26. The evidence generated from these efforts provided material for increasing knowledge throughout WFP, but dissemination and use of the results were limited, largely because corporate knowledge management efforts were ad hoc. Country office staff were generally unaware of the results of research efforts, except when the research was conducted in their own countries or regions.

### **Country and regional results**

27. Evidence from evaluation case studies showed that WFP contributed to safety nets and social protection through both the direct provision and the support pathways identified in the theory of change (see paragraph 11). Key informants almost universally viewed WFP's work in safety nets and social protection as a critical means of fulfilling its strategic goals. In a January 2018 report, IDS noted that the opportunities for WFP to engage in safety nets and social protection will likely increase, with its commitments related to SDG 2 providing an "entry point for WFP to advocate for food security-oriented safety nets and nutrition-sensitive social protection".<sup>13</sup>
28. While WFP guidance suggested that long-term, predictable interventions and connections to national systems and programmes are important, key informants at many country offices incorrectly referred to activities that were not connected to national systems as "safety nets". Table 1 summarizes where WFP engaged in direct provision of or support for different types of activities.

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<sup>13</sup> Sabates-Wheeler, R. and Devereux, S. 2018. *Social Protection and the World Food Programme.*, WFP Occasional Paper No. 25. <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000073283/download/>

TABLE 1: ACTIVITIES IN WHICH WFP ENGAGED IN DIRECT PROVISION OR SUPPORT, 2012–2017												
	Country visits					Desk studies						
	Burkina Faso*	Cambodia**	Colombia	Egypt	Uganda	Ecuador***	Kenya	Lesotho	Mauritania	Mozambique	Sri Lanka	Turkey****
	LIC	LMIC	UMIC	LMIC	LIC	UMIC	LMIC	LMIC	LMIC	LIC	LMIC	UMIC
School feeding	P/S	P/S	P/S	P/S	P/S	P	P/S	P/S	P/S	P/S	P/S	
Nutrition	P/S	S		P/S	P/S		P/S	P/S	P/S	P/S	P/S	
Food security		S		S	P/S	P/S	S	P/S	P	P/S		P/S
Livelihoods, smallholders	P	P		P	P/S		P/S	P/S	P	P/S	P/S	
Emergency preparedness and response	P	P				P/S	P/S		P/S	P/S	P/S	P/S
Capacity strengthening and technical assistance		S	S	S		S	S					S
Shock-responsive social protection						S	S	S		S	S	S

\* In Burkina Faso, most WFP staff consulted viewed food assistance for assets programmes as a safety net. Government interviewees and a World Bank review of safety nets also included seasonal or emergency food assistance.

\*\* In Cambodia, food assistance for work or assets programmes during 2012–2017 ranged from large-scale projects that the Government considered as part of its social protection system to small-scale interventions that fell outside the national system.

\*\*\* In Ecuador, programmes link smallholder farmer associations to school feeding.

\*\*\*\* In Turkey, the emergency social safety net is oriented towards meeting basic needs through multi-purpose cash transfers. WFP monitors food security and nutrition outcomes. The programme serves an emergency response function and is coordinated with national disaster management authorities, implemented in partnership with social protection ministries and aligned with the ministries' systems.

LIC = low-income country; LMIC = lower-middle-income country; UMIC = upper-middle-income country.

P = provision; S = support.

Light grey shading signifies activities that were not directly linked to government systems.

Sources: Evaluation team analysis based on review of case study documents and interviews. World Bank <http://data.worldbank.org/country> for data on countries' income level.

### Contributions of the support pathway

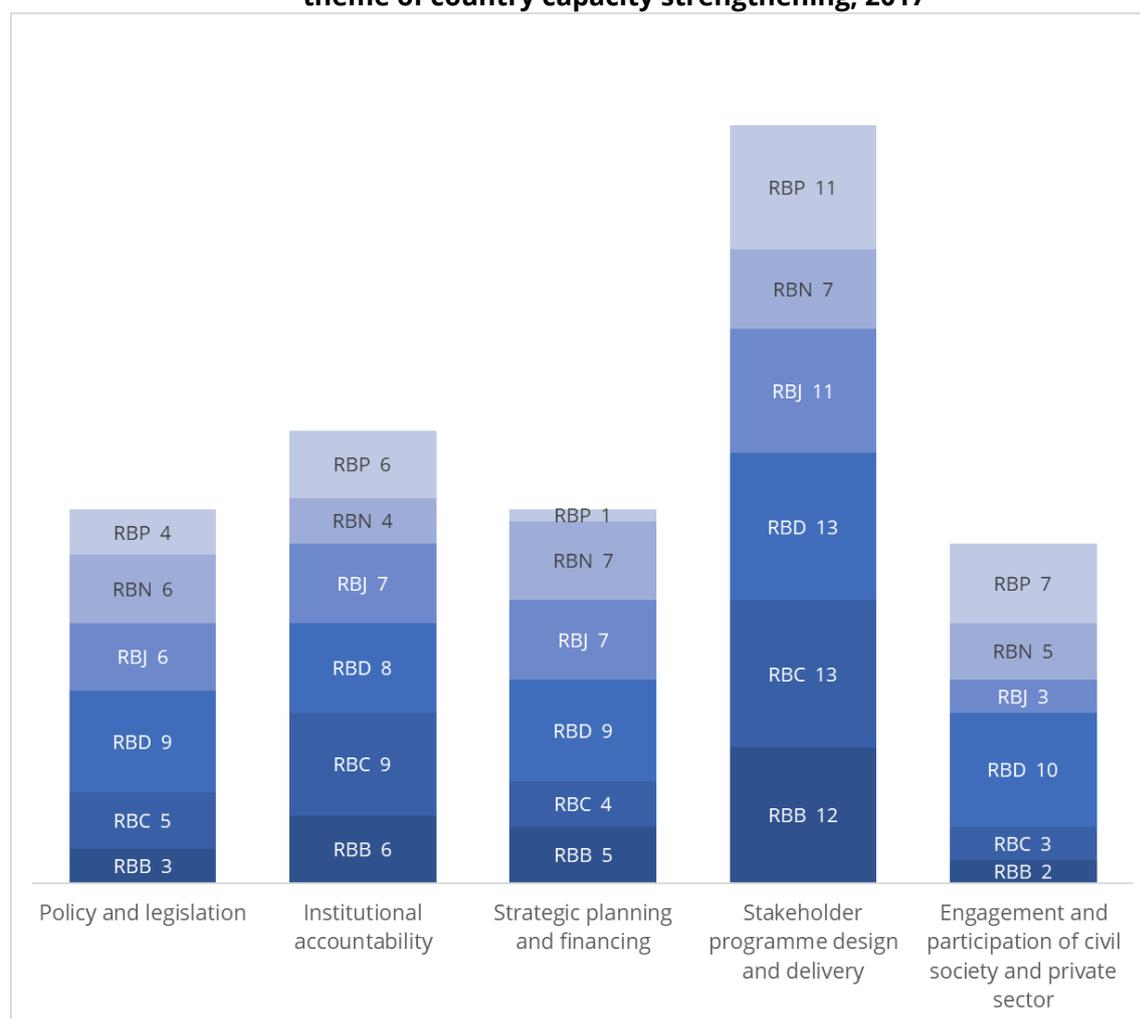
29. The evaluation found that country offices made relevant and useful contributions to national social protection systems through cross-cutting technical and analytical support and advice. While aligned with the activities in the policy update, WFP's capacities for support may not always meet the broader needs of government systems.
30. Many examples of WFP's contributions to technical assistance, analytical support, policy advice and capacity strengthening were noted.<sup>14</sup> Key informants reported that WFP's engagement in safety nets and social protection efforts has grown in recent years, in

<sup>14</sup> While the policy update listed these activities separately, the distinctions among them were often found to be blurred and WFP now frequently refers to all of them as country capacity strengthening or technical assistance.

line with WFP's strategic shifts and the development of CSPs. A review of CSPs for case study countries found that all 12 country offices explicitly included reference to work in social protection and safety nets. Four CSPs cited recommendations from national zero hunger strategic reviews regarding engagement in social protection. All 12 CSPs mentioned social protection or safety nets either directly in their strategic outcome statements or in the accompanying activities and outputs. Shock-responsive social protection is a key activity in 10 of the 12 CSPs.

31. Figure 2 shows the numbers of country offices that supported government safety nets or social protection initiatives, by the theme of the country capacity strengthening offered.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 2: WFP's support for government safety nets or social protection initiatives, by theme of country capacity strengthening, 2017**



Source: Evaluation team's elaboration of the Safety Nets and Social Protection Unit's analysis of 2017 data from standard project reports.

Abbreviations: RBB: Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific; RBC: Regional Bureau for the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia; RBD: Regional Bureau for West Africa; RBJ: Regional Bureau for Southern Africa; RBN: Regional Bureau for East Africa; RBP: Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean.

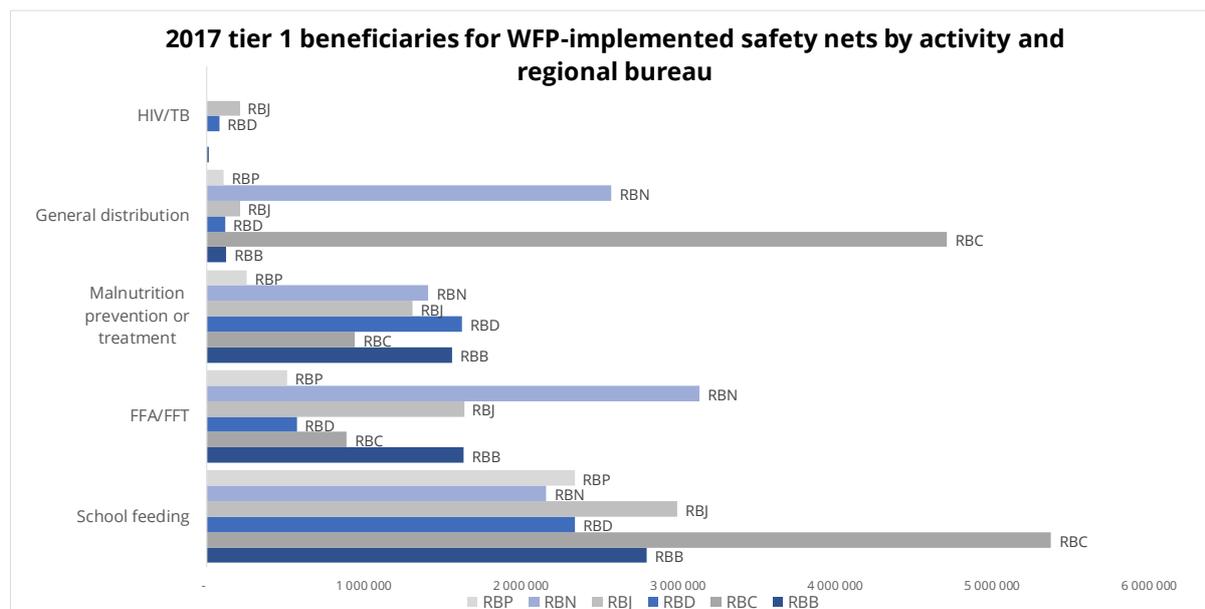
<sup>15</sup> These five themes were defined in the corporate framework for country capacity strengthening (July 2017). (<https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000011956/download/>),

where they are referred to as "pathways". WFP Safety Nets and Social Protection Unit, 2017 internal analysis of standard project reports.

### Contributions of the direct provision pathway

32. WFP country offices designed and implemented activities that they considered to be safety nets. Sometimes, these activities were planned so that they could become components of national social protection systems. However, some activities seemed to operate in parallel with national systems but with shorter duration and, therefore, of limited predictability, particularly for general food assistance and food assistance for assets.
33. In 2017, 67 country offices reported having implemented various activities as safety nets, serving more than 41 million direct beneficiaries as shown in figure 3.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 3: WFP implementation of safety nets\***



\* According to the WFP Management Plan (2018–2020) (WFP/EB.2/2017/5-A/1/Rev.1) tier 1 beneficiaries are those who benefit directly from WFP assistance, while tier 2 and tier 3 beneficiaries benefit indirectly.

Source: Evaluation team's elaboration of the Safety Nets and Social Protection Unit's analysis of 2017 data from standard project reports.

Abbreviations: RBB: Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific; RBC: Regional Bureau for the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia; RBD: Regional Bureau for West Africa; RBJ: Regional Bureau for Southern Africa; RBN: Regional Bureau for East Africa; RBP: Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean

34. Some country offices, with support from regional bureaux, engaged with national social protection systems for emergency response or worked with governments to make existing social protection systems more shock-responsive. WFP often used the term "shock-responsive social protection" to describe efforts that reflect good practices and accepted definitions, such as activities for increasing the number of people reached by social assistance in response to a shock, but in some cases the term was used incorrectly, such as when referring to rice banks or seasonal food assistance that were not linked to social protection systems.

<sup>16</sup> The regional bureaux for the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia and for East Africa represented outliers with substantially more direct (tier 1) beneficiaries of general food distributions than other regions, likely because of the heavy concentration of emergency and protracted crises in these regions. The Regional Bureau for the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia was an outlier in school feeding because of the large number of beneficiaries resulting from the Syrian crisis. The Regional Bureau for East Africa had a disproportionate number of direct beneficiaries in food assistance for assets or training interventions, likely because of the significant focus on working with smallholders in this region.

## Partnerships

35. WFP worked in partnership with other social protection actors, but high competition for resources and positioning limited collective impacts and posed challenges for national governments.
36. Evidence was found of strong partnerships for specific initiatives with a wide range of actors at the global, regional and country levels, including through WFP's work to support South-South and triangular cooperation particularly through the Centre of Excellence Against Hunger in Brazil. At the same time, however, because of competition for resources from shared donors, these relationships were characterized by tension in some places. The evaluation found instances of direct competition for support from specific donors and national governments, especially related to nutrition activities and work with smallholder farmers.
37. Some government stakeholders expressed concern about the inability of WFP and international actors to collaborate on common priorities for social assistance. This inability creates challenges for coordination and decisions regarding which programming models and priority outcomes to adopt, often in situations of scarce government resources and limited capacity. The evaluation team observed that the ideas and approaches adopted by governments were most often influenced by the ability of an agency to build and sustain relationships, understand government systems and position itself accordingly.

## Issues related to gender, disability and accountability to affected populations

38. There is little evidence that WFP's work in safety nets and social protection contributed to gender-transformative outcomes, specifically identified or addressed the needs of people with disabilities or enhanced accountability to affected populations in the cases studied.
39. While the policy update and related guidance provided little direction on gender considerations, the Gender Office issued guidance on the integration of gender issues into social protection programming in 2017. Sex- and age-disaggregated data are collected in corporate reporting systems, and some standard project reports include sections on gender, but data related to safety nets and social protection cannot be isolated because activities are not "tagged" as safety nets and social protection in WFP's systems. A few cases were identified of school feeding programmes prioritizing the needs of girls, and women and their children were specifically targeted for some nutrition programmes, but examples of programmes designed to lead to gender-transformative outcomes were not found.
40. WFP has no specific policy on persons with disabilities, and the policy update made no reference to them. The specific needs of this population group were sometimes considered during targeting and assessment, but the programmes reviewed did not differentiate assistance in accordance with these specific needs. The Emergency Social Safety Net in Turkey was a positive outlier in this regard in considering disability and inclusion in its targeting criteria, providing a "top-up" to their cash transfers and identifying and addressing barriers to access for persons with disabilities.
41. Accountability to affected populations was also not well covered in the policy update or guidance. Some evaluation case studies provided evidence of country offices supporting governments in the development of feedback and complaint mechanisms. Examples of programme participants being consulted and involved in the design of programmes were rare, except for some small-scale efforts related to livelihoods and resilience work.

### Factors explaining results

42. The evaluation collected and analysed evidence on the factors that influence results through stakeholder interviews, a review of WFP documents and triangulation of the results observed with various characteristics of countries and WFP's capacities and resources in the country.

### External factors

43. WFP was widely viewed as a credible safety net actor based on its comparative advantages related to its field presence, focus on delivering assistance, logistics, links to local organizations, analytical capacities and ability to deliver at scale. Since 2012, WFP's experience with implementing large-scale cash-based programmes and adopting technology for the registration and management of beneficiaries have added to these strengths. These advantages create opportunities for WFP to contribute to sustainable, government-led programmes that alleviate hunger, improve nutrition and mitigate the effects of poverty and vulnerability. However, there is a perceived risk that systems and tools developed by WFP for its own programming may not be compatible with or appropriate for governments' own systems. Transferring the skills and capacities to develop context-specific solutions may be a better approach.
44. The suggestion in the policy update that a country's stage of development, stability, capacity and risk exposure determine WFP's roles was not fully confirmed. Data from case studies revealed no link between a country's income, fragility or risk rating and WFP's roles. WFP's past programme portfolios, relationships with government actors and country office leadership, the roles of other partners and funding patterns had greater bearing on WFP's engagement and contributions.
45. Most funding for WFP activities in safety nets and social protection was short-term, limiting predictability and challenging WFP's ability to commit to long-term programming, including country capacity strengthening. It was reportedly difficult to convince donors that WFP has a key role to play in long-term programming, including social protection, although alignment with government initiatives led to increased donor interest in a few cases.<sup>17</sup> The 2018 IDS report<sup>18</sup> noted that short-term, unpredictable funding puts WFP at a competitive disadvantage and makes it difficult to engage with systems that require reliable and sustainable flows of funding over extended periods.

### Internal factors

46. The evaluation found that WFP's ability to analyse, understand and relate to government structures, political developments and overarching social protection systems determine how relevant and influential it can be. Country offices with dedicated staff for the monitoring and analysis of legislative and budgetary developments, administrative structures and political priorities were better positioned than those without such resources. The evaluation found that investing in the development and maintenance of relationships with core government staff and partners is critical, although continuity is a major challenge for WFP and government counterparts.

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<sup>17</sup> See the summary report on the strategic evaluation of WFP's support for enhanced resilience for similar conclusions. WFP/EB.1/2019/7-A.

<sup>18</sup> Sabates-Wheeler, R. and Devereux, S. 2018. *Social Protection and the World Food Programme.*, WFP Occasional Paper No. 25. <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000073283/download/>.

47. Where WFP has a well-developed understanding of government systems, policies and politics, it can contribute effectively by influencing national social protection systems through both incremental support to programmes and systems and advice during significant systems changes. Changes in government structures, policies and leadership pose risks to WFP's positioning when not expected, but also provide opportunities if WFP can adjust nimbly to new actors and structural changes.
48. Since 2012, WFP's corporate investments in safety nets and social protection have reportedly been minimal.<sup>19</sup> Centralized efforts to build internal capacities, enhance learning and provide technical support to regional bureaux and country offices have been made only for projects with earmarked funding from donors. This parallels the even more limited corporate support for country capacity strengthening efforts, as found in the evaluation of the capacity development policy update (2009).<sup>20</sup> WFP's potential for credibly and consistently positioning itself and contributing to social protection requires greater attention from WFP's global leadership and more resources if it is to be fully realized.
49. WFP's systems for and investments in human resources were found to be ill-suited to an increased role in social protection. Numerous evaluations and audits since the fit for purpose initiative of 2012<sup>21</sup> and the people strategy of 2014<sup>22</sup> have highlighted the need for WFP to adapt its workforce so that it includes the competencies needed to support achievement of WFP's Strategic Objectives, including competencies in upstream engagement in policy dialogue and work with governments. Standard job profiles do not cover such skills, however, and the staff rotation system makes it difficult for country office staff to develop the relationships needed for networking and establishing political influence before moving to other WFP offices.
50. The use of short-term consultants has enabled country offices to fill some critical gaps but does not represent a sustainable method for meeting human resources needs. The evaluation did not find substantial progress in the systematic recruitment of experts from outside WFP to regular staff positions. National staff played critical roles in enabling WFP's work in social protection, providing insights into local conditions and continuity of WFP staffing.
51. Strategic reviews and consultations for the development of CSPs frequently highlighted the importance of working through national social protection systems in order to achieve SDG 2. Key stakeholders felt that these processes provided a good opportunity to engage government actors in discussion of WFP's support for social protection.
52. Other WFP systems, processes and structures are unsupportive of a coherent shift towards a greater role in national social protection systems. The strategic results frameworks for 2012–2017 and the corporate results framework approved in 2016 did not enable country offices to monitor and record their contributions to safety nets or social protection. New social protection indicators were approved in November 2018 in the revised corporate results framework, along with the option of "tagging" activities that are related to social protection. However, there is a risk that because such tagging is voluntary, the data it generates will be of limited use.

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<sup>19</sup> Staff turnover and lack of systematic consolidated tracking of funding sources for and amounts of headquarters and regional bureau investments in capacity building for safety nets and social protection limited the ability of the evaluation team to fully analyse financial trends during the period covered.

<sup>20</sup> WFP/EB.1/2017/6-A/Rev.1.

<sup>21</sup> WFP/EB.1/2017/11-C.

<sup>22</sup> WFP/EB.2/2014/4-B.

## Conclusions

53. Engagement in safety nets and social protection is a cross-cutting element in much of WFP's work rather than a theme for specific programmes. The evaluation identifies the challenges that this poses, particularly given WFP's strong focus on implementation of specific programmes and the early stages of its shift towards more integrated, long-term programming through CSPs. The findings of the evaluation present evidence of clear strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges as WFP looks to its future roles in social protection and safety nets.
54. *Strengths.* The policy update was relevant when adopted and the topic remains important to stakeholders throughout WFP. The update outlined a clear rationale for WFP's engagement in safety nets, created authorization for such work and provided legitimacy to support country office programming and positioning. The policy also introduced dual approaches through which WFP supports national government efforts while also continuing to implement activities directly.
55. Creation of the Safety Nets and Social Protection Unit reinvigorated implementation of the policy. The guidance produced to support policy implementation was generally good quality. The e-learning modules supported learning and provided a link between the policy and practice. The recent dissemination of knowledge products, establishment of a community of practice and increased partnerships and efforts to engage in global social protection forums further enhanced policy implementation.
56. The expansion of WFP's experience of implementing safety nets at scale and the enhancement of country offices' abilities through capacity strengthening and partnerships position WFP well to continue contributing to social protection systems. The successes of country offices and regional bureaux in using social protection to improve food security and nutrition can be leveraged to expand work in this area.
57. *Weaknesses.* The policy update had a narrow focus on WFP's role in safety nets rather than on WFP's position in relation to broader social protection systems. It neglected gender-responsive social protection and disability considerations. Equivocal language in the update and lack of a clear results framework reduced its value as a tool for providing direction. Poor dissemination of the policy update and guidance resulted in weak uptake throughout WFP.
58. Investments in the building of internal capacity to support policy implementation were limited and there was little evidence of senior management focusing on safety nets and social protection. This was coupled with an overall lack of resources for country capacity strengthening throughout WFP. Human resource limitations and gaps in expertise for upstream policy analysis and engagement pose challenges for WFP's work in social protection. No overall knowledge management and learning strategy for social protection was in place and WFP's monitoring and reporting systems did not consistently or adequately capture results related to safety nets and social protection.
59. *Opportunities.* Social protection is an essential means of sustainably working towards zero hunger. Commitments in the WFP Strategic Plan (2017–2021), CSPs and the 2030 Agenda affirm the centrality of national governments in their countries' development, which will require WFP to support the development and enhancement of national social protection systems.
60. The growing experience of social protection among country offices and regional bureaux provides a platform for further development of WFP's approach. WFP's strengths can complement those of other international actors, potentially leading to partnerships based on a clear WFP "offer". The overall growth in instruments for national social protection and emphasis on increasing access to and coverage and quality of social protection programmes

present opportunities for greater WFP contributions. As noted in the 2019 strategic evaluation of WFP's support to enhanced resilience,<sup>23</sup> global interest in bridging humanitarian response and social protection and a focus on the humanitarian–development–peace nexus further increase the relevance of WFP's work in this area.

61. *Threats.* Senior management's prioritization of WFP's work in social protection is unclear. As a cross-cutting topic rather than a programme activity, it is difficult to define and operationalize WFP's social protection work and ensure that it is coordinated throughout the organization. Such definition and coordination are prerequisites for a coherent approach and for ensuring that appropriate resources are allocated to delivering concrete results in this area.
62. WFP culture remains largely operational rather than systems- or policy-oriented. Social protection work requires a systems-oriented approach and alignment with government priorities. Interest in shock-responsive social protection is growing but, without proper context analysis, may lead to overestimation of the capacities of national systems. Another perceived risk is that WFP will try to transfer tools developed for its own programmes rather than strengthening the capacities of governments to design and implement tools and systems that are appropriate to national situations.
63. Working in partnership with other actors will be critically important in avoiding unnecessary competition with them and fragmentation of support for governments. Unpredictable short-term funding and donors' perceptions of WFP's role present further threats to the expansion and enhancement of WFP's social protection work.
64. *Summary.* When aligned with national systems, WFP's work in social protection can play an important role in sustainably addressing food and nutrition needs at scale. To achieve the vision of a world free of hunger, WFP needs to expand its engagement with social protection actors and systems. Country offices and regional bureaux have demonstrated interest in, and a willingness to rethink, how WFP can contribute to social protection for more lasting and sustainable results. Recent investments and organizational changes to enhance staff capacity and systems will support continued results. Greater leadership attention and prioritization of social protection work is needed to amplify and support these efforts and thereby maximize WFP's contributions to social protection systems.

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<sup>23</sup> WFP/EB.1/2019/7-A.

## Recommendations

65. The following recommendations draw on the findings and conclusions of the evaluation. They were informed by inputs provided by a wide-array of stakeholders, including at a January 2019 workshop with WFP staff from headquarters, regional bureaux and country offices.

Recommendations	Action by	Implementation deadline and priority
<p><i>Recommendation 1: Prioritization and leadership.</i> WFP leadership should confirm and sustain its commitment to supporting nationally-led social protection programmes. A strategy for engagement in social protection should be developed and widely disseminated. The strategy should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a clear definition of social protection endorsed by WFP with an outline of the boundaries of WFP's work;</li> <li>• a theory of change that articulates the implications of social protection as defined by WFP, including what it means for WFP's activities and programmes; and</li> <li>• a costed implementation plan, budget and resource mobilization strategy, which could be embedded in a broader programming strategy for WFP's support to national systems and country capacity strengthening.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant Executive Director of Operations Services Department (OS), Director of Policy and Programme Division (OSZ)</li> </ul>	<p>December 2019 High priority</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 2: Cross-functional coordination and coherence.</i> Strengthen mechanisms for coordination in social protection in order to ensure coherent cross-functional approaches. Disseminate guidance on implementation of the strategy and incorporate the guidance into other activity-specific and overarching programme strategies, policies and guidance, especially those related to country capacity strengthening, in coordination with other units at headquarters – including those for operation services, human resources, performance management and reporting, supply chains, emergency preparedness and response and information technology – and in consultation with regional bureaux and country offices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant Executive Director of OS, Director of OSZ</li> </ul>	<p>Mid-2020 Medium priority</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 3: Knowledge management and positioning.</i> WFP should develop a knowledge management component of the social protection strategy that builds on existing activities, consolidates evidence, learning and good practices and facilitates adaptation to changes in the environment, including advances in food security-focused, nutrition-sensitive and gender-responsive approaches to social protection.</p>	<p>Safety Nets and Social Protection Unit (OSZIS) in consultation with the Innovation and Change Management Division and regional bureaux</p>	<p>Mid-2020 High priority</p>

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Implementation deadline and priority</b>
<p><i>Recommendation 4: Internal capacity.</i> Identify the dedicated human, technical and financial resource requirements for building sustainable internal capacities in social protection, including the resources needed for shared, cross-functional activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide additional resources and training opportunities to WFP staff in all relevant functions with a view to enhancing their understanding of and engagement in policy, public financing, public administration systems and debates on aspects of social protection such as targeting and conditionality.</li> <li>• Develop an approach to human resources that enables units to establish the best balance among the building, buying or borrowing of human resources and is based on a review of standard national and international job profiles, a mapping of social protection competencies and gap analysis against the strategy, development of additional specialist job profiles for social protection as needed, training plans, recruitment of experts from outside WFP to fill gaps and adjustments to human resource policies as needed.</li> <li>• Identify the core capacity requirements and submit a financial request for these to be included in the next management plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant Executive Director of OS and OSZ with support from the Human Resources Division</li> </ul>	<p>March 2020 High priority</p>

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Implementation deadline and priority</b>
<p><i>Recommendation 5: Monitoring and reporting.</i> Standardize monitoring of and reporting on WFP's contributions to social protection in order to establish a reliable base of quantitative and qualitative evidence on WFP's role and added value and enhance learning. Building on recent revisions to the corporate results framework, WFP should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• require the tagging of activities that contribute to social protection based on clear quality standards such as timeliness, predictability and links to national strategies and systems in order to enable analysis of outputs and outcomes disaggregated by category of vulnerability such as sex, age and disability;</li> <li>• engage with custodians of SDG Target 1.3 with a view to identifying ways of reporting on WFP's contributions and supporting country offices in reporting on country-specific contributions in national and global SDG reporting formats;</li> <li>• develop a monitoring framework for further improving performance measurement of social protection activities linked to the strategy and theory of change, and use this as a basis for future evaluations with mandatory reporting on standard indicators and tagging in the next corporate results framework; and</li> <li>• produce an annual or biannual summary report on WFP's social protection contributions (or standardize a format for integrating such a report into the annual performance report) that supports internal learning and external positioning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance Management and Monitoring Division with support from OSZIS</li> </ul>	<p>March 2020 High priority</p>

**Acronyms used in the document**

CSP	country strategic plan
IDS	Institute for Development Studies
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal