



# World Food Programme Strategy for Support to Social Protection: Summary version



SAVING LIVES  
CHANGING LIVES

July 2021

# Introduction

**The World Food Programme's (WFP's) Strategy for Support to Social Protection consolidates our approach to social protection for the years ahead.** Social protection has benefits for food security and nutrition, and social protection programmes do not need to be specifically focused on food security to see these outcomes. Support for social protection development, implementation, and coverage will in most cases contribute to food security, and any way WFP is able to assist in strengthening national social protection systems, in contexts of food insecurity, is appropriate to WFP's mandate. In social protection we have a key tool as we work together on saving lives and changing lives.

**The topic is by no means new to WFP: we have been contributing both directly and indirectly to the field now known as social protection since the 1960s.** It is a mainstream part of our work. In 2020, for example, we partnered with others to strengthen national social protection systems in 78 countries, making our support in this field integral to our activities in most countries where we operate. The 2012 'Update of WFP's Safety Nets Policy' laid the ground for much of the increased attention to social protection evident in WFP's practices today, though it was not the first corporate statement in this field: it superseded earlier policies in 2004 and 1998.

**WFP's new and timely strategy builds on that history and coincides with the development of a new series of strategic plans for WFP as a whole at corporate and country level.** It articulates our approach to social protection and offers a coordinating framework that outlines how we will contribute deliberately and systematically to collective efforts to achieve long-term national social protection goals, as a complement to our work in responding to food security-related emergencies. It is informed by a body of operational and analytical evidence from our country offices, regional bureaux, global headquarters and independent analysts that highlights the contribution of social protection in enabling WFP to deliver on its mandate, and enabling governments to meet their global commitments, leaving no-one behind.

**The present document is the summary version.**

It highlights the key messages of the strategy, presenting the main framework, concepts and diagrams. The full strategy, which has been published at the same time, provides more detailed analysis of the data on Zero Hunger and the other challenges that WFP aims to address through its support to social protection; it also goes into greater depth regarding WFP's interpretation of the scope of social protection and the entry points where we contribute most effectively, and provides many rich examples of our work in the sector. To read the full strategy, scan the QR code on the back of this document.

## 1. The context

**Social protection is essential if we are to reach Zero Hunger.** Hundreds of millions of people contend daily with food insecurity and malnutrition, poverty and inequality. These challenges are often linked in complex ways. What's more, as the COVID-19 pandemic reveals, all people—whether currently in a vulnerable situation or not—risk welfare declines owing to shocks and stressors. Social protection is a cornerstone of policies that address these issues by redistributing resources

and by interventions that help individuals or households to manage risks. It is an accelerator for many Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

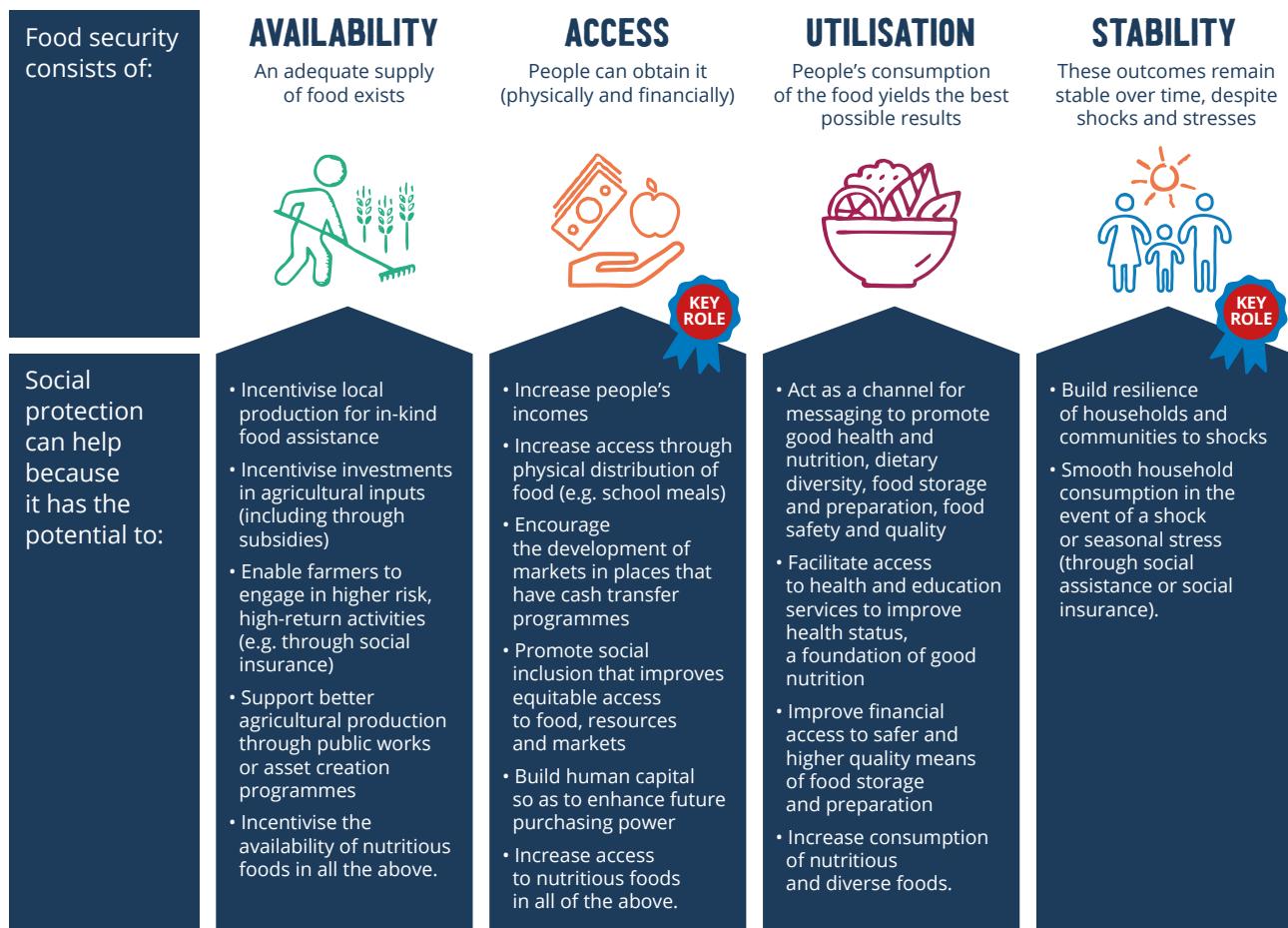
**Countries define social protection according to their context.** An interagency definition describes social protection as the, 'policies and programmes aimed at preventing, and protecting people against, poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their life [...] with] a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups' (SPIAC-B, 2019, p.1).

These typically cover a range of cash transfers, food and other material support; they may also include some fee waivers, active labour market schemes, targeted subsidies and/or social care services.

**Social protection can enhance food security and nutrition through several entry points.** (Figure 1) Food security has four elements: food availability, access, utilisation and stability over time. Improving food access (by enhancing economic capacities) and stability (smoothing consumption during disruption) is intrinsic to social protection. Food availability and utilisation are less intrinsic and so require special attention. With respect to nutrition, social protection tends to be more effective when nutrition goals are pursued deliberately.

**Commitment to social protection by governments and their partners has long been increasing.** Many challenges remain, some already the subject of global cooperation and others meriting attention. These include expanding social protection across the three dimensions of the Universal Social Protection 2030 agenda—coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy; improving quality; and embedding programmes in a cohesive system. Taking better account of food security and nutrition considerations, and of extra needs in crises, are other important concerns.

**Figure 1: How social protection can enhance food security and nutrition**



Source: WFP.

## 2. WFP's engagement in social protection

### CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

**For WFP, poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion—the three conditions cited in the interagency definition as the remit of social protection policy—are part of three broader domains of concern, relating to needs, risks and inequalities respectively.** All three resonate with our mandate:

#### Needs

Certain needs must be met for people to have a decent life—not just food but a range of essential needs, all of which can affect food security and nutrition—and social protection can help them attain it.

#### Risks

Social protection's risk management function is of primary importance to WFP. The benefits may be twofold. First, households and individuals may attain immediate relief and build resilience so as to better manage future risks with fewer negative impacts. Second, for governments and their partners, investments in system-building may increase efficiency in the long run and reduce the scale of need for protracted international humanitarian assistance.

#### Inequalities

The role of social protection in combating inequalities matters as these affect vulnerability. Opportunity and disadvantage are influenced in part by social, economic and/or geographical factors e.g. age, gender, disability, location or migration status. People may experience combinations of factors that compound inequality. Social protection can help by redistributing resources and by addressing marginalisation and social exclusion.

In WFP's social protection strategy we focus on formal, public social protection initiatives that tackle these concerns.

### RATIONALE FOR WFP'S ENGAGEMENT

**Our social protection work is aligned with WFP's twin roles in 'Changing Lives' and 'Saving Lives'.** Supporting social protection is fundamental to our contribution to Zero Hunger, and is a route by which we enact our commitment to working 'at the nexus' of humanitarian and development assistance and peace.

**National social protection systems, with their annual expenditure of trillions of dollars, operate at a scale that is orders of magnitude greater than any international humanitarian response.** By continuing to invest catalytic amounts in strengthening those national systems WFP aims to improve outcomes among the several hundred million hungry and malnourished—and those at risk—whom we do not reach directly and who may also need support if Zero Hunger is to be achieved. The COVID-19 crisis, together with the growing number and duration of protracted crises worldwide, have made the task more pressing than ever.

### WHAT'S NEW IN THE STRATEGY

**The strategy provides a strategic direction and a coordinating framework for ongoing activities.** Building on the 'Update of WFP's Safety Nets Policy' (2012), and following an evaluation in 2018–19, it contains new features including: consideration of major agreements since 2012, such as the SDGs, Social Protection Floor Initiative, USP2030 and Grand Bargain; a more detailed articulation as to how social protection can contribute to food security and nutrition; and a greater focus on strengthening the effectiveness of social protection in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, to build resilience and as a channel for shock-response.

## OUR VALUE PROPOSITION

**Feedback from our partners is clear and consistent about the value that WFP adds to our partnerships with governments and other actors in this field.** These are:

**1. Field presence.** WFP prides itself on its global footprint and frontline presence, with 280 field offices including in very remote locations and situations of conflict and protracted crisis as well as stable low- and middle-income contexts. This means we can offer practical support for establishing, using and strengthening social protection even in contexts of disruption where others are absent.

**2. Operational expertise.** WFP has developed the largest global capacity to deliver and scale up food assistance, often in exceptional circumstances. This experience and strong 'delivery culture' offers us a unique perspective from which to support countries to design, set up and run effective programmes of their own—especially, but not exclusively, for cash and food transfers.

**3. Analytical capabilities.** WFP's analytical expertise makes it a partner of choice for countries seeking to understand the nature of vulnerability and food insecurity. We also support market price monitoring; geospatial analysis; and analysis of climate risk and the likely disruption due to shocks, among others.

### **4. Food security and nutrition expertise.**

We have a long history of designing and implementing large-scale programmes that contribute to food security and nutrition as well as supporting livelihoods and promoting human capital development.

**5. Working across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.** WFP is committed to making a positive contribution to resilience and peace while achieving core development and humanitarian outcomes. The awarding of the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize to WFP is testament to these efforts.

## PRINCIPLES

**We will adhere to principles that ensure we offer effective, context-specific support.** We remain guided by our mandate and support national social protection when we judge that food security and/or nutrition will improve as a result, directly or indirectly. In this context we will provide evidence-based solutions underpinned by an appraisal of the benefits, trade-offs and possible risks, to minimise adverse impacts. Our work starts from a nation's own objectives and capacities and does not presuppose the adoption of any particular approach. Where a national system is absent, weak or disrupted, we will aim to work in ways that promote the (re-)establishment of long-term, nationally owned social protection. We will keep people at the centre, maintaining a firm focus on accountability to affected populations. Collaborative partnerships are fundamental: we will align with UN frameworks, strive to avoid duplication and aim to add value by seeking explicit agreement about our contribution relative to others'.



### 3. The strategic framework

We have developed a strategic framework that will guide WFP's work in social protection for the years ahead.

We set it out in five parts (Figure 2). These are: (1) Our vision (2) The priorities (3) Social protection for whom? (4) Modes of support (5) Areas of work.

Figure 2: The strategic framework

#### PART 1 VISION

**WFP's vision is that by 2030 people will have substantially increased access to national social protection systems that safeguard and foster their ability to meet their food security, nutrition and associated essential needs, and to manage the risks and shocks they face**



#### PART 2 PRIORITIES

This implies two interlinked priorities:

1



Social protection that helps people to meet their food security, nutrition and associated essential needs

Approaches that are:

- Food security-specific / nutrition-specific; or
- Food security-sensitive / nutrition-sensitive; or
- Aimed at meeting essential needs / poverty reduction / human capital development

2



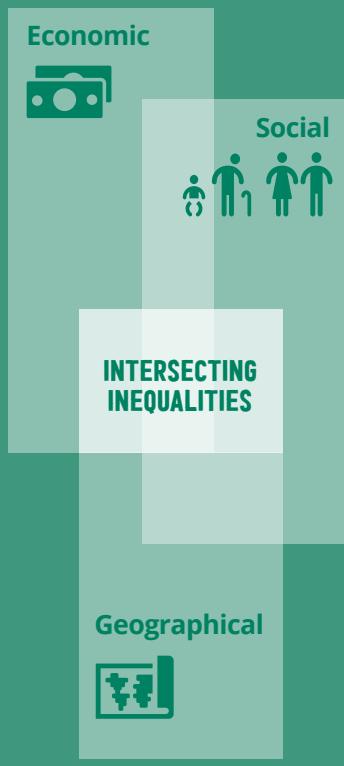
Social protection that helps people to manage risks and shocks

- Reducing and addressing idiosyncratic and covariate risks
- Building resilience
- Providing effective support in contexts of disruption

Source: WFP.

## PART 3 SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR WHOM?

We will support and promote the inclusion of people with diverse and often intersecting vulnerabilities and inequalities:



## PART 4 MODES OF SUPPORT

We will provide our support in a variety of ways, which may also be blended or combined:



Supporting nationally led social protection systems and programmes

- Advice and guidance to national actors
- Delivery on behalf of national actors



Complementary actions in WFP's own programming

## PART 5 AREAS OF WORK

We will pursue four key areas of work as we advance towards this vision:

1

Contribute to strengthening the **national social protection system** architecture

2

Support enhancements to the quantity and quality of **national social protection programming**

3

Improve the effectiveness of social protection in the shared space between humanitarian, development and peace actors

4

Build social protection partnerships and evidence globally

## PART 1 VISION

**The vision for this strategy is that, 'By 2030 people will have substantially increased access to national social protection systems that safeguard and foster their ability to meet their food security, nutrition and associated essential needs, and to manage the risks and shocks they face'.** With this ambition we reaffirm our readiness to support nations worldwide in their pursuit of the commitments they have set for that date.

**In the remaining parts of the strategic framework we set out our approach to achieving this vision. We articulate it by responding to four questions** (Parts 2-5 respectively): (i) What objectives will WFP prioritise in its support to social protection? (ii) Who are we intending to benefit? (iii) How will we provide our support? (iv) What actions will we undertake?



## PART 2 PRIORITIES

**Two distinct but interconnected priorities emerge from the vision.** In respect of both priorities we will aim to enhance coverage, comprehensiveness, adequacy and/or quality of social protection as required. This pertains not only to particular programmes that deliver assistance, but also to the enabling environment that facilitates programme delivery (such as policies, institutional arrangements and evidence generation).

### PRIORITY 1—SOCIAL PROTECTION THAT HELPS PEOPLE TO MEET THEIR FOOD SECURITY, NUTRITION AND ASSOCIATED ESSENTIAL NEEDS

**Recognising the variety of routes by which social protection can help achieve Zero Hunger, WFP is open to many approaches.**

**First, we will support ‘food security-specific’ or ‘nutrition-specific’ programmes.** By this we mean programmes with an exclusive or primary objective of improving food security and/or nutrition. Examples are our support to school feeding, or institutionalising lean season assistance.

**Second, we will support ‘food security-sensitive’ and ‘nutrition-sensitive’ approaches.** These measures consciously strive to increase relevant impacts in programmes where this is not the main objective but that contribute hugely (e.g. cash transfers). Examples, among many, include identifying nutritionally vulnerable groups, or calculating transfer values that promote people’s ability to obtain an adequate quantity of healthy food.

**Third, we will assist programmes that aim to reduce multidimensional poverty broadly even when a food security or nutrition lens is not directly applied, but in contexts where food insecurity and malnutrition are a major concern.** Examples could be programmes that promote income generation or human capital development.

### PRIORITY 2—SOCIAL PROTECTION THAT HELPS PEOPLE TO MANAGE RISKS AND SHOCKS

**The second priority is closely related.** Shocks jeopardise people’s ability to meet their essential needs; in turn, vulnerability to shocks is heightened if the ability to meet essential needs is already compromised. We aim to help address both idiosyncratic and covariate risks. Our approach will be tailored according to whether or not government services exist and are functioning.

**This priority comprises support both to improvements to social protection for resilience-building, and for responding in contexts of disruption.** In our development work we will build resilience by supporting social protection activities that mitigate risk; in crisis contexts, we will work alongside others to meet needs in a way that also strengthens longer term resilience. By doing so we may reduce the scale of humanitarian needs, making efficient use of our resources for emergencies by not having to, ‘save the same lives over and over again’.

**When a shock hits, social protection can be a central response.** We aim to strengthen national systems in a way that improves disaster preparedness; provide guidance to ensure ‘business continuity’ for social protection in contexts of disruption; facilitate coordination where required; and support the synthesis of lessons learned. We may also leverage elements of social protection systems in our own emergency responses where appropriate.

**We will always assess whether our actions are likely to create conflict or protection risks.** This is paramount in situations of active conflict where international humanitarian law applies, where actions directly supporting government programmes may not be immediately feasible. In such contexts the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence are primary and will not be compromised.

## PART 3 SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR WHOM?

**All people have different needs, preferences and capacities, and face opportunities and disadvantages deriving from their unique circumstances.** Taken individually, the implications of identity markers such as gender, age or disability can be broadly characterised. However, nobody fits into just one category: everyone is disadvantaged by some identity markers while being privileged by others. The ‘Leave no-one behind’ pledge of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is rooted in the recognition that people have multiple inequalities, and attempts to mitigate them.

**We will mainstream considerations of social, economic and geographical identity in our social protection work.** This means that we do not focus on pre-determined population groups. Rather, we will aid national actors and their partners to conduct vulnerability analyses to identify how different attributes affect people’s needs and preferences in a given context (including rapidly identifying emerging needs in covariate shocks). We will assist the design and implementation of social protection programmes adapted to people’s needs and capacities, and the reform of the enabling environment so as to accommodate and/or address certain factors of vulnerability.

**For WFP, helping to address geographical inequalities is, and will continue to be, a major focus.** Where people live greatly affects their exposure and vulnerability to shocks and hazards—including conflict and protracted crises—which in turn are key determinants of food security, nutrition and many other outcomes. Many people live in places that are remote, hard to reach or poorly linked with basic services. Geographical disparities often intersect with other forms of deprivation, compounding economic and social exclusion. If we are to leave no-one behind we must step up efforts to support social protection for people living in difficult contexts, including in ways that contribute to prospects for peace and security.

## PART 4 MODES OF SUPPORT

To implement the priorities, in our country-level assistance we will:

**1. Support nationally led systems and programmes.** Our direct support to national social protection may entail providing advice and guidance, or implementing elements of programmes on governments’ behalf as needed. The precise form will depend on the nature of need, the government’s priorities, the maturity of part or all of the social protection system, and the activities of other partners, as well as our own capacities in a country. We can—and do—contribute to all stages of design and implementation. This support may be delivered via different contractual arrangements: it can be funded by contributions from donor organisations, or delivered by WFP as a contracted service provider, according to context.

**2. Provide complementary actions in WFP’s own programming.** Assistance in our own programmes—whether as an emergency or longer term response—will be made with a clear intent to strengthen national social protection where possible. Figure 3 highlights several ways of doing this. Where elements of the national system are operating, we will draw on and complement them. Conversely, where national social protection systems have gaps or are only nascent, WFP will look for opportunities to fill gaps or to set up the basic building blocks of a future system. Not only WFP’s development interventions but also its emergency programmes and platforms may at times be of relevance to serve as the foundation. Not all of WFP’s own programming delivers this complementary role, nor should it: sometimes a clear delineation is required between WFP as a humanitarian agency and national actors, or between emergency and development functions.

The approaches are neither mutually exclusive nor static over time.

**Figure 3: What might WFP's complementary actions look like?**



Source: WFP. Note: By 'building block' we refer to those in Figure 4 below regarding the system architecture, programme features and knowledge and learning elements.

## PART 5 AREAS OF WORK

**Adopting these objectives and methods, we have identified actions that can be grouped into four broad areas of work.**

They are to:

1. Contribute to strengthening the national social protection system architecture
2. Support enhancements to the quantity and quality of national social protection programming
3. Improve the effectiveness of social protection in the shared space between humanitarian, development and peace actors
4. Build social protection partnerships and evidence globally.

### AREAS OF WORK 1 AND 2: NATIONAL SYSTEM-STRENGTHENING

**The first two comprise our assistance to strengthening national systems.** This covers, respectively, the overall system architecture (the enabling environment)—including also elements relating to knowledge and learning—and the programmes that deliver services.

**We conceive of national social protection as having 12 building blocks** (Figure 4). While we can and have supported each part of a social protection system in many contexts, in any given country we do not expect to pursue every activity but rather to identify what is needed. The full strategy outlines the broad direction of our contribution to each building block, with specific examples in an annex.

**In brief, supporting the national system architecture comprises contributions to national policy and legislation; governance, capacity and coordination; platforms and infrastructure; and planning and financing.** For WFP, contributing to improvements in these areas within the scope of our two priorities may mean, to cite just a few examples:

- advising on the inclusion of food security and nutrition objectives, and also on effective strategies for delivering social protection in fragile contexts, during the development of national, local and regional social protection policies and strategies

- promoting coordination among social protection actors as well as across sectors, offering a bridge to agencies working in e.g. disaster risk management, emergency response, food security and nutrition
- supporting the development of mobile apps, management information systems and databases for social protection—including integrated beneficiary registries, social registries or other types
- contributing to the integration of social protection into plans for emergency preparedness.

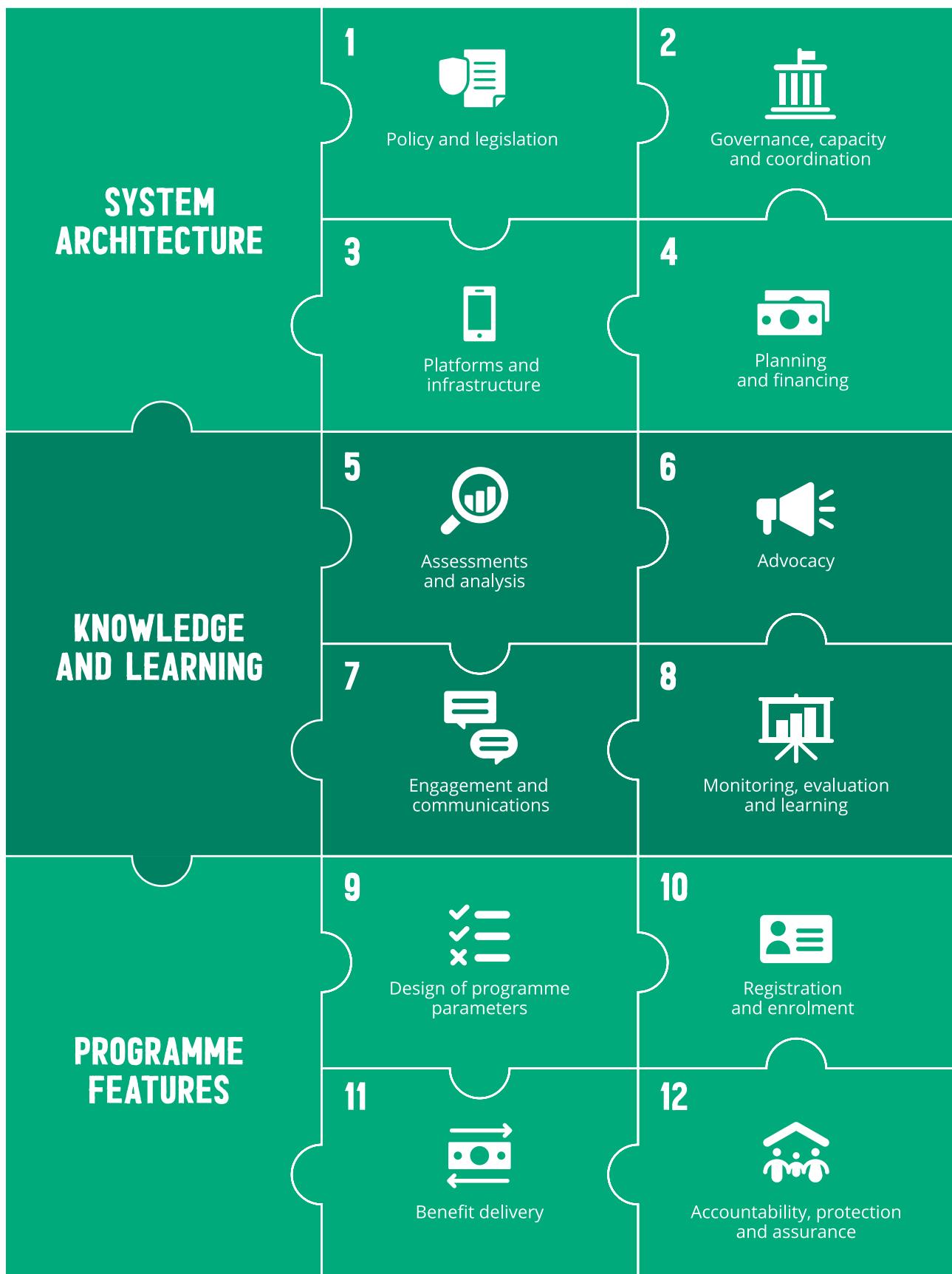
### Examples of actions to support national actors with knowledge and learning for social protection include:

- putting our expertise in assessments and analysis at the service of national actors, including through corporate tools such as the 'Fill the Nutrient Gap' tool or the 'Shock-Responsive Social Protection Capacity Assessment' tool
- supporting governments with advocacy for the inclusion of food security, nutrition and disaster risk management outcomes into social protection strategies and budgets
- supporting the development of modes of communication and materials adapted for remote, marginalised or crisis-affected contexts
- advising on the design of monitoring and evaluation frameworks to monitor food security and nutrition outcomes in social protection interventions.

### Some examples of our programmatic support to social protection include:

- supporting analysis of who needs assistance, and for which contingencies
- advice on the collection and treatment of sensitive data during enrolment
- advice on the design, selection and roll-out of mechanisms for delivering benefits
- integration and mainstreaming of accountability, protection and assurance considerations into social protection programmes.

**Figure 4: Building blocks of a national social protection system**



Source: WFP. Notes: (1) Area of work 1 presents our areas of focus for the system architecture and knowledge and learning elements. Area of work 2 presents those for the programme features. (2) The building blocks draw on, and expand upon, the five pathways identified by WFP in the corporate framework for support to country capacity-strengthening. The analytical approach is also coherent with many international frameworks, such as the 'three key aspects' of social protection in CODI.

## **AREA OF WORK 3: THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-PEACE NEXUS**

**The third area covers our social protection activities consistent with our commitment to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.**

These are particularly pertinent to situations of conflict, post-conflict, protracted crisis and fragility. The hallmark of these efforts is closer ‘collaboration, coherence and complementarity’ between humanitarian, development and peace actors.

**Improving social protection in these settings implies several specific actions.** It means thoroughly understanding the causes of fragility, vulnerability and conflict, and the potential risks of supporting programmes in that environment; a commitment to conflict-sensitive programming, regardless of whether a conflict is active; and considering not only how current humanitarian operations might lay the ground for future social protection interventions, but also how the two might interact during phases of transition. Since most of the world’s poor and hungry live in fragile and conflict-affected settings, a nuanced understanding of conflict-sensitive approaches is vital if social protection is to be extended effectively to all.



## **AREA OF WORK 4: GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AND EVIDENCE**

**Finally, the fourth area explains how we will fulfil our commitment to an evidence-based, partnership-oriented approach, not only in countries but also regionally and globally.**

WFP pursues partnerships actively across all its operations as a means of achieving better outcomes for people.

**In social protection we have partnerships for operations, resourcing, knowledge and advocacy.** The full strategy indicates key actions in each. Amongst these, to name but a few, are: joint advocacy and programming; the provision of common platforms and services; partnering to help governments mobilise complementary investments; the management of long-term agreements with academic partners and consulting firms, for technical services related to social protection; and the joint production of knowledge.

**We will contribute to the building and application of shared knowledge, through a series of distinct but mutually reinforcing steps.** These entail:

- **research and evidence-generation**, filling knowledge gaps
- **communication**—adapting and disseminating the knowledge acquired
- **capacity-strengthening**—capitalising on and applying this knowledge over time, in order to maximise the return.

**There is a positive feedback loop when knowledge generation and dissemination activities are combined with efforts to augment capacities in this way.** The process of learning from, and capitalising on, knowledge can itself lead to the generation of new insights, the identification of gaps requiring research or new evidence, and better tailored communications.

# 4. Ensuring success

**For any strategy to achieve its goals it must be coherent with, and integrated into, internal and external processes for planning, monitoring and reporting; and must be resourced appropriately.**

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

**This strategy is accompanied by global and regional implementation plans, which translate into annual workplans.** These are available separately.

## COHERENCE WITH CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLANNING

**WFP has an overarching corporate strategic framework that guides all its humanitarian and development activities.** Social protection already features in WFP's current corporate Strategic Plan 2017–21. It will feature still more prominently in WFP's Strategic Plan 2022–26, guided by the direction set out here and complementing WFP's emergency response work. This reflects the importance of the topic in WFP.

**At country level the social protection strategy will inform the next generation of WFP's Country Strategic Plans, beginning in 2021.** Country offices will identify the social protection actions relevant to their context and will incorporate them into the strategic orientation of their plans and budget. We have developed an illustrative theory of change which suggests how our priorities may be linked to WFP's national-level strategies, and identifies assumptions and risks.

**Social protection objectives are included in many other global WFP thematic policies and strategies or are distinctly pertinent to them.** These cover dozens of fields as varied as disaster risk reduction, gender, climate change, protection and accountability, and partnerships. Our social protection strategy draws on many existing policies and will be used to guide updates.

## COHERENCE WITH EXTERNAL PLANNING AND MONITORING

**Beyond WFP, we place a high value on coordinating and ensuring complementarity with partners, particularly—but not only—with the UN.** The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework forms the centrepiece of the relationship between the UN and host governments. Where social protection is jointly identified by UN agencies as a 'strategic priority', we envisage that WFP is likely to participate in the related Results Group, in which UN agencies develop a joint workplan and coordinate and review their respective activities.

**We also aim to maximise the relevance of our monitoring and reporting for governments and other national and regional partners.** This includes aligning with national systems and procedures for monitoring and evaluation where possible. We will aim for compatibility in the exchange of information (e.g. indicators, data sources).

## Workforce planning

**To deliver this strategy keeping pace with growing demand for our assistance, WFP must sustain and develop its capacities accordingly.** The skills themselves are not new to WFP. We are now being asked to contribute to social protection in most countries where we work and expect this to continue. Our approach to workforce planning aims to strike the best balance between building the capabilities of current employees, hiring to fill new positions and optimising the use of external experts. In addition, our continued strengthening of partnerships with other national and international organisations enables us to maximise our effectiveness through joint and complementary actions.

## LOOKING AHEAD

**With this strategy and our commitment to continued investment, we aim to maximise the effectiveness, efficiency and coherence of our work with governments and their partners to establish and strengthen high quality social protection systems and programmes globally, as we strive towards our vision.**

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For further information, do get in touch with us at  
[socialprotection@wfp.org](mailto:socialprotection@wfp.org).

To know more about WFP's work in social protection,  
follow this link:  
[www.wfp.org/social-protection-and-safety-nets](http://www.wfp.org/social-protection-and-safety-nets)

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