



World Food Programme

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

WFP Urban Strategy

Achieving zero hunger
in an urbanising world

Summary

May 2023

WHY URBAN AREAS MATTER TO ACHIEVE ZERO HUNGER

The world is increasingly urban. 4.5 billion people, or 55% of the global population, currently live in urban areas. By 2050, this is estimated to grow by 2.3 billion, or roughly **215,000 people per day**. This rapid urbanisation, coupled with several inter-related factors, are driving up the number of people facing food insecurity and malnutrition in urban settings. These factors include a **rise in urban poverty**, the prevalence of **urban inequality**, the concentration of **risks and compounded vulnerabilities** in dense cities, and **land and nutrition transitions** that are deeply transforming rural and urban relationships and the food system that depend on them. With this strategy, WFP recognises these trends and acknowledges that 'urban' is a key operational context where its strategic outcomes can be pursued to achieve zero hunger.

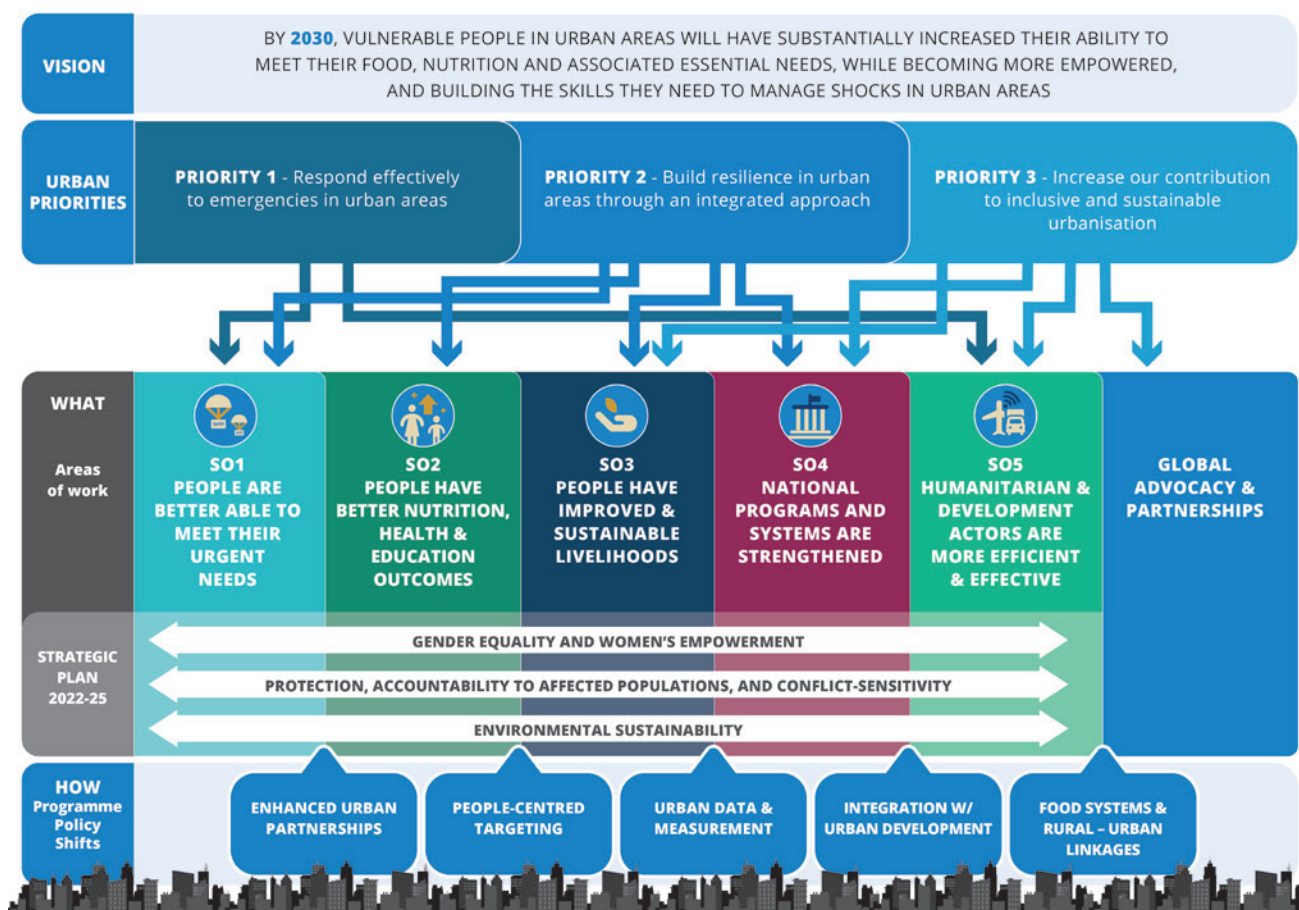
OUR VISION

By 2030, vulnerable people in urban areas will have substantially increased their ability to meet their food, nutrition and associated essential needs, while becoming more empowered, and able to manage shocks in urban areas.

The strategy provides a framework to achieve this vision by responding to four questions:

- What **priorities** for engagement will WFP pursue in the immediate and medium term in its support to food insecure and vulnerable urban populations?
- In what **role** will WFP provide support?
- What **actions** can we undertake?
- What **programmatic shifts** are needed to deliver on these priorities and actions?

Figure 1 - Urban framework to achieve WFP's urban vision



Strategic urban priorities

Three distinct but interconnected priorities and respective entry points have been identified as critical to guide WFP's support to food-insecure populations in urban areas.



PRIORITY I. RESPOND EFFECTIVELY TO EMERGENCIES IN URBAN AREAS.

First, WFP will work with the systems, sectors, and actors already in place in urban areas to support the effective delivery of services to vulnerable populations (including cash transfers, nutrition and school feeding services), and ensure these systems remain uninterrupted during crises. These systems include, but are not limited to, government-led social protection, health, emergency response, and municipal systems. **Direct implementation will be considered only when existing systems are overwhelmed.**

Second, WFP will proactively invest in urban preparedness as part of a longer-term agenda to build national and local capacities for response. Our support to urban crises, will be accompanied by efforts to strengthen emergency preparedness and response capacities at the national, subnational, and local level, particularly in highly vulnerable urban contexts that continuously face compounded risks.



PRIORITY II. BUILD RESILIENCE IN URBAN AREAS THROUGH AN INTEGRATED APPROACH FIT FOR URBAN CONTEXTS.

First, we will capitalise on our systems-strengthening expertise on social protection to enhance preparedness and risk anticipation, whilst helping to build resilience. This is crucial to address clear gaps in coverage in urban areas and to support governments in linking social protection with disaster risk management.

Second, we will adapt and expand our efforts in building human capital and enhancing and diversifying livelihoods, complemented with the

integration of **financial inclusion and social and economic empowerment** across our cash transfer, social protection, food systems, and livelihood interventions.

In the medium term, we will invest in improving our ability to support enabling environments that promote income generation and livelihoods diversification, including by leveraging **food systems and urban-rural linkages** for nutrition outcomes and employment generation.



PRIORITY III. INCREASE OUR CONTRIBUTION TO INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE URBANISATION.

First, WFP will build upon its increasing contribution to the implementation of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, such as our work on strengthening national systems, our ability to layer humanitarian and development programming, and our efforts to advance our contribution to peace and social cohesion.

In the medium-term, WFP will gradually increase its ability to leverage and contribute to urban and territorial development efforts. This will require an effort to understand the urban systems which our services may be complementing at the local and sub-national level, including urban policy, planning, and budgeting processes. With this understanding, WFP could contribute to urban policy and spatial planning processes and support wider capacity strengthening efforts that have a positive long-term impact on food security and nutrition in urban areas. All efforts should be done in complementarity with UN agencies and local actors, and according to WFP's Country Capacity Strengthening Principles.

Our role

The precise role WFP will take in each country will depend on what is needed, the government's priorities, the maturity of national and local systems, and the activities of other partners, as well as our own resources and capabilities on the ground.

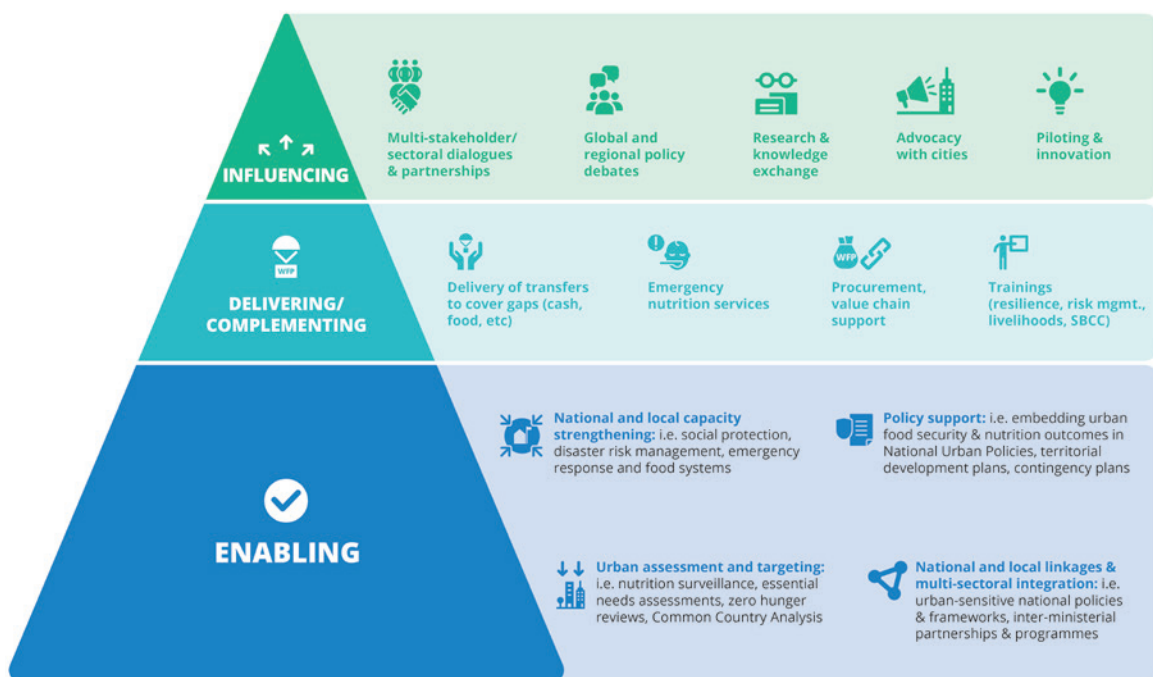
ENABLING. In most urban contexts, WFP will primarily take on an enabling role, working alongside of (or on behalf of) government and other stakeholders to provide upstream technical support and capacity strengthening across programmes and policies relevant to urban areas.

DELIVERING. In situations where major shocks disrupt national systems or where lack of coverage leaves vulnerable groups unassisted, WFP can play a key delivering role, implementing time-bound programmes such as cash transfers, emergency nutrition services, and school-based programmes.

INFLUENCING. Lastly, WFP will need to take a leading influencing role to advocate for more attention to and a better understanding of urban food security and nutrition including through evidence generation, knowledge exchange, engagement in high level debates and multi-stakeholder/sectoral dialogues.



Examples of roles that WFP may take in its response in urban areas



Strategic outcomes

The strategic direction and programmatic offer in urban areas directly aligns with each of the result areas outlined in the **WFP Strategic Plan 2022-25** - recognising urban environments as a key operational context to leave no one and no place behind.



STRATEGIC OUTCOME 1. PEOPLE MEET THEIR URGENT FOOD AND NUTRITION NEEDS

What the problem looks like in urban areas:

- Humanitarian crises are increasingly concentrated in urban areas, impacting both vulnerable populations and the urban environment.
- Urban crises disproportionately affect the most vulnerable, compromising their livelihoods and access to services, affecting their wellbeing and ability to meet food, nutrition, and essential needs, and often deepening their conditions of poverty.
- Nearly 60% of the world's cities with at least 500,000 residents (1.4 billion people) are vulnerable globally to cyclones, floods, earthquakes, and other natural hazards.
- 50 million people worldwide are estimated to be affected by armed conflict in urban areas, while 96% of urban growth is estimated to take place in fragile countries.
- Displaced populations are increasingly seeking refuge in urban areas, now harbouring more than half of the refugee population and 2 out of 3 IDPs globally.
- Early warning systems are often national in nature and may need to be more "localised" to fit the information needs of cities and urban populations.
- Likewise, while emergency and contingency plans exist in many cities, they often have weak food security and nutrition components that are focused mostly on short-term sudden-onset hazards.

What WFP can do:

- Support governments in enhancing coverage and **shock-responsiveness of social protection systems** during crises, including transitions to recovery and longer-term absorption of the newly vulnerable.
- **Provide cash-based assistance**, including support on data and analysis needs arising from urban crisis, determining appropriate transfer values in cities, adapting or setting up digital delivery mechanisms

(like mobile money or mobile banking), and supporting financial inclusion.

- Deliver **emergency nutrition** services for individuals whose nutritional status has been affected, do joint delivery of integrated packages of school health and nutrition, and provide data and analytics expertise on the **urban food environment** during and prior to crises.
- **Develop market-based interventions**, such as market incentives for food retailers to set up outlets in or near affected areas. WFP may also address crucial gaps in the supply and storage capacities of local markets.
- With its **supply chain capabilities**, WFP can facilitate the rapid delivery of assistance, and adjust coverage by pre-identifying potential bottlenecks across the supply chain, in synergy with local contingency plans and local actors.
- Invest in early warning systems linked to **anticipatory and early action** and build local emergency response capacities to better anticipate and respond to shocks by working with local authorities, civil society, and communities.



STRATEGIC OUTCOME 2. PEOPLE HAVE BETTER NUTRITION, HEALTH AND EDUCATION OUTCOMES

What the problem looks like in urban areas:

- With rapid urbanisation come several changes in how people access food and the dietary choices they make in cities.
- The food environment in cities is more complex and less understood than in rural areas. For example, cities offer more unhealthy food options, and healthy diets cost an average of 60% more than diets that contain only essential nutrients.
- In cities, the wider presence of mass media, the informal food sector, and supermarkets influences what people purchase and consume.
- Currently, the triple burden of malnutrition – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and obesity – is carried in prevalence by urban populations. Often, hunger and nutritional deficiencies coexist with obesity, sometimes within the same household.
- The built environment of cities plays a critical role in shaping the food environment. Overcrowding, inadequate housing and sanitation, and lack of energy access affect how urban populations prepare and consume their food, exposing them to food contamination and restricting the products that they can buy.

What WFP can do:

- Support government partners in designing and implementing **nutrition-sensitive** social protection policies, programmes, and services. Support government partners in designing and implementing nutrition-sensitive social protection policies, programmes, and services.¹
- Use its comparative advantage on data and analytics, including the deployment of Fill the Nutrient Gap (FNG), to provide support in **improving national health and nutrition surveillance in urban areas** through capacity strengthening and technical support.
- Provide support in strengthening **nationally-owned school meal systems** and in the delivery of school-based programming that address the nutritional needs of urban children.²
- Pilot **food system partnerships and interventions** to improve nutrition outcomes in urban areas.
- Support governments and communities in delivering **nutrition services** through existing **health and education systems**.
- Enhance the design and promote the use of **social and behavioural change** (SBC) strategies across its urban programmes and in the technical support provided to partners in urban areas.
- Support the **integration of nutrition-strengthening activities in complementary sectors** (e.g., WASH) and urban planning interventions.



STRATEGIC OUTCOME 3: PEOPLE HAVE IMPROVED AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

What the problem looks like in urban areas:

- Vulnerable urban populations are often exposed to multiple shocks and social barriers that impede them from meeting their needs and managing financial risks. This is especially true for women, youth, and displaced communities.
- Nearly 50% of the global urban workforce is engaged in the informal sector, often in unstable and precarious situations. Of this, 75% are women.
- In developing economies, men are more likely than women to own an account at a financial institution or through a mobile money provider (by 9%) and more likely to access formal savings at financial institutions (by 11 %).³
- Youth are predicted to make up 60% of the urban population by 2030, however unemployment amongst the youth is 5% higher in urban versus rural areas across most regions, rising to 10% in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁴
- The urbanisation process also shapes a different labour market, with an increased demand for specific soft and technical skills that fit the service and knowledge-oriented nature of cities.
- Despite the fundamental role of smallholder farmers in the value chain, they continue to fail in benefiting fairly from market engagement. With 70% of all food produced being consumed by urban dwellers, there is an untapped opportunity to leverage cities and food systems to boost the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.

1 Concrete areas for capacity and systems strengthening on social protection are detailed further in result area 4.

2 WFP is a member of the School Meals Coalition, an emerging initiative of governments and a wide range of partners to drive actions that can urgently re-establish, improve, and scale up food and education systems, support pandemic recovery and drive actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Coalition will support governments and their partners to improve the quality of school meals and strengthen school meal systems globally, in a manner which is tailored to local contexts and which promotes the sharing of international best practices.

3 World Bank, 2018

4 World Bank JOIN/I2D2 database, 2020

What WFP can do:

- Support the creation and diversification of **livelihood opportunities and networks** to reduce the financial burden of food insecure people in urban areas and allow them uninterrupted access to basic needs and healthy diets.
- Collaborate with government and private sector actors to identify opportunities for **remunerated jobs across the value chain** (in the production, storage, distribution, and retailing sectors), through new techniques, or through the opportunities created by digital technologies.
- **Link smallholder farmers**, especially women and youth, with the **increasing urban demand for food**, including through skills development in communication, marketing and financial literacy, and incentives for the adoption of technology and modern inputs.
- WFP can also **promote more direct linkages** between smallholders and urban markets in its own programming, through direct buying schemes, local procurement, and more inclusive value chains.
- **Collaborate with the private sector** to strengthen input supply, to improve cold chains, and to ensure that producers have reliable access to appropriate financial services, including credit and insurance.
- As the largest cash actor globally, WFP is in a good position to enable interventions that promote **economic empowerment and financial inclusion** of vulnerable and unbanked populations in urban areas, particularly women.
- Support communities in identifying, building, and managing basic infrastructure that **reduces exposure to shocks** in urban areas.
- Contribute to building **climate-resilient cities** by leveraging the food system and engaging urban actors as part of climate action.



STRATEGIC OUTCOME 4: NATIONAL AND LOCAL PROGRAMMES AND SYSTEMS ARE STRENGTHENED

What the problem looks like in urban areas:

- Rapid urbanisation is outpacing the capacity of governments to plan for, and adequately serve their growing urban populations.
- Governments will have to increasingly balance between managing urbanisation, the use of natural resources, and the productive land needed to sustain food provision for their growing populations.
- Despite the increase of urban poverty and inequality, social protection coverage is higher in rural vs. urban areas by 10% across all regions and all country income groups.
- As governments move into expanding their social protection systems into urban areas and into improving the efficiency of food systems, more accurate data and a better evidence base will be needed, including for targeting and prioritisation, and for understanding, improving, intervening, and monitoring food systems performance.
- During WFP's Covid-19 response, several lessons were captured on the challenges faced by governments when scaling up responses to include beneficiaries in urban areas, including challenges with selecting the most appropriate transfer modalities and adapting to triggers such as changes in exchange rates or collapse of local markets.

What WFP can do:

- Work with government partners on expanding and enhancing **inclusive social protection systems** that reach food insecure and at-risk populations in urban areas, such as informal workers, displaced populations, or people living in informal settlements.
- Support governments in refining urban assessments, targeting methodologies, and processes to enhance **accountability to affected populations** in urban areas.
- Promote and support **stronger linkages** between social protection and health, education, and disaster risk management systems through technical support on policy, advocacy, and evidence generation.

→ Support governments in enhancing the **efficiency of food systems and urban-rural linkages** by providing timely market information and identifying existing or potential market/supply chain delivery bottlenecks.

→ Support governments in embedding **food security and nutrition outcomes in local development plans**, programmes, and interventions, through integrated programming, capacity strengthening, advocacy, and partnerships.



STRATEGIC OUTCOME 5: HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT ACTORS ARE MORE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE

What the problem looks like in urban areas:

- Urban crises over the past decade, including those in Haiti, Syria, Ukraine, and the Philippines, have shown the challenges of operating in cities. Lessons learned include:
 - » The need for a more holistic response and a stronger inter-sectoral (e.g., inter-cluster) coordination to address multi-sectoral issues and needs.
 - » The need to prioritise engagement with local actors such as authorities, civil society, or the private sector to create links within coordination mechanisms and to build ownership.
 - » The need for humanitarian and recovery efforts to complement and/or strengthen existing long-term plans to address immediate needs while also supporting development goals.
- Many economic activities in cities depend on the physical and online connectivity brought by their transportation and telecommunication infrastructure. This infrastructure is both equally essential during crises and at risk from the hazards that cause them.
- Transport infrastructure (roads, bridges, ports, airports, etc.) serves as a lifeline after natural and man-made hazards, and as a launchpad for response to neighbouring rural areas.
- Information and communication technologies are critical in addressing chronic vulnerabilities and managing shocks as timely and effective information flow is important for decision-making, and for early warning and action.

What WFP can do:

→ Strengthen the focus on urban areas of the Emergency Telecommunications, Logistics, and Food Security Clusters.

→ Play a strong role in incorporating, highlighting, and shaping the **urban programming requirements** of the UN Sustainable Development Common Frameworks (**UNSDCF**) and the Humanitarian Response Plans (**HRP**).

→ Through its body of analytics, highlight the most pressing urban food security and nutrition issues and their root causes and integrate these into the **Common Country Analysis (CCA)** of countries where it operates.

→ Urbanisation is occurring within the context of **rapid technological change**. There is untapped potential to use urban data and technological innovation for crises preparedness and response.

→ WFP can support on **business processes, data governance, data management**, and technology to enable contributions to partners via open-source constructs.

→ Deploy **innovative/digital solutions** to address gaps in humanitarian response in urban areas, localising the application of Satellite imagery, drone technology (e.g., for mapping urban slums/informal dwellings or neighbourhoods), machine learning and AI applications, among others.

→ Ensure that WFP's engineering and infrastructure interventions not only meet urgent food and nutrition needs but also **contribute to longer-term development** of beneficiary cities in line with their respective local development plans.

CONTRIBUTING TO GLOBAL ADVOCACY AND PARTNERSHIPS

Through its international standing, its credibility, and its extensive field presence and global reach, WFP can strategically position itself to:

- Bring more attention to urban food security and nutrition through multi-stakeholder global and regional partnerships.
- Influence policy debates through global and regional policy-making dialogues and processes, with an emphasis on integrating food security and nutrition measures in national urban policies.
- Reach cities through advocacy strategies that can support mainstreaming urban food security and nutrition in urban development, inclusive cities, and related frameworks for urban areas.
- Develop research and facilitate knowledge exchange platforms and events that can help generate interest and bridge knowledge and awareness gaps on urban food security and nutrition issues.

Ensuring success: programmatic shifts to achieve the urban vision

The Strategy sets forth five programmatic shifts to enhance our internal capabilities and strengthen our programmatic approaches to better respond to an increasingly urban world.



SHIFT 1: ENHANCING OUR PARTNERSHIPS FOR URBAN PROGRAMMING

Local actors are part of the solution in urban areas. From local governments to the private sector, from business owners to urban poor federations, from academia to financial service providers—each stakeholder has its own distinct set of interests, values, and norms. Navigating this operational environment requires knowledge of the power brokers, the roles, and the responsibilities of local government and other formal and informal actors in providing services and support systems for the most vulnerable. Stronger multisectoral partnerships are also important to enhance programming, to reduce the funding gap, to lay the foundations to swiftly proceed to national programmes where possible, and to ensure the delivery of well-integrated packages.

WFP will accelerate this shift by:

- Embedding strong actor mapping and power analysis fit for urban areas in programme design
- Developing comprehensive guidance for partnership building and coordination in urban areas
- Seeking alignment and complementarity with existing local government programmes, plans and projects
- Contributing to a UN system-wide approach to sustainable urbanisation



SHIFT 2: MAKING DATA AND MEASUREMENT FIT FOR URBAN CONTEXTS

WFP's strong expertise in designing and conducting food security analysis; market price monitoring; essential needs analysis and costs of nutritious diets analysis; among others, make it a partner of choice to fill data and knowledge gaps on urban food security and nutrition, which in turn can create more demand for such services and support resource mobilisation. However, there are specific data and measurement challenges that require attention in programme design, including: 1) the measurement of food security continues to be largely rural-centric; 2) context analysis is often not fit for urban areas, and 3) that intra-urban and disaggregated data are crucial to understand urban food security and nutrition, but often scarce and difficult to attain.

To make data and measurement fit for urban contexts, WFP will:

- Further adapt its tools to urban contexts and integrate urban data into existing corporate systems;
- Use urban context analysis to enhance integrated programme design;
- Leverage the actors present in urban areas, as well as local administrative data and monitoring systems, to enhance evidence and availability of intra-urban data.
- Leverage digital solutions, the private sector and community-led approaches for data collection and analysis





SHIFT 3: REACHING THE FURTHEST BEHIND THROUGH PEOPLE-CENTRED TARGETING

Several characteristics of urban areas can stand in the way of a successful targeting system. Vulnerable urban populations such as those living in slums, the internally displaced, and migrant populations are often invisible in data, not likely to be included in government registries or covered by official statistics. Have and have-nots often live side-by-side, making it difficult to differentiate who is worse-off among a generally poor urban population. Socio-economic and political dynamics, such as the political alignment of community groups, as well as competing community leaderships are all more common in urban areas, elevating the risk of fraud and corruption, and raising tensions and protection issues.

WFP will accelerate this shift by:

- Mainstreaming the mapping of and appropriate engagement with local structures
- Leveraging local organisations and referral systems to reach the furthest behind
- Optimising resources and data by coordinating and partnering on urban
- Enhancing communication and sensitisation with communities through mixed approaches



SHIFT 4: LEVERAGING THE RURAL-URBAN LINKAGES FOR FOOD SYSTEMS EFFICIENCY AND TRANSFORMATION

Strong rural-urban linkages support food systems performance and are, therefore, pivotal for sustaining urban populations while also contributing to rural development. They can generate economic growth and employment opportunities across the value chain, improve availability and affordability of healthy food in urban areas, boost the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in both rural and peri-urban areas, and help reduce post-harvest losses.

WFP will accelerate this shift by:

- Enhancing the linkages between urban programming and value chain actors
- Strengthening collaboration with Rome-based agencies

- Investing more efforts on small and secondary cities
- Developing our ability to engage and influence in territorial development discussions
- Collating and/or generating operational research on food systems and rural-urban linkages



SHIFT 5: INTEGRATING EFFORTS WITH URBAN PLANNING AND TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

Achieving zero hunger in urban areas and increasing our contribution to inclusive and sustainable urban development requires a shift in how WFP relates and works with urban planning and territorial development processes. The UN System-Wide Strategy on Sustainable Urban Development, particularly, will be built upon and leveraged to coordinate and integrate efforts as part of the UN system.

WFP will accelerate this shift by:

- Boosting our internal capacity and further defining WFP's value proposition for urban development processes
- Enhancing partnerships with urban development actors and aligning better with urban development and planning efforts led by local governments or by development agencies
- Increasing the focus on informal settlements
- Increasing the focus on secondary cities and smaller towns

Way forward

Cities have always been places of opportunity and prosperity, offering a space for refuge and survival, as well as a space to grow and thrive. The same characteristics that attract people to cities will be leveraged by WFP to drive progress towards zero hunger in an urbanising world.

The Urban Strategy recognises that “urban” is not a separate programme area, but rather an operational context where WFP’s strategic outcomes and different areas of work can be pursued. As such, the urban strategic framework presented here—aligned with the WFP Strategic Plan 2022-2025—offers a means to mainstream urban programming across the organisation using its existing structures and systems, including through its programmatic areas, and regional workplans and country strategic plans.

Global implementation of the Urban Strategy will rely on several enabling factors to catalyse WFP’s efforts to eradicate food insecurity and malnutrition in urban areas: its people (engaged through an Urban Community of Practice), its experience with digital solutions that address urban food security and malnutrition, and available platforms for innovation, such as the WFP Innovation Accelerator.

As the world’s largest humanitarian organisation, WFP is committed to promoting greater coherence among humanitarian, development, and peace actions in its work in urban areas around the world.

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Photo page 11: WFP/Sayed Asif Mahmud



**PROGRAMMING IN URBAN AREAS,
EMERGENCIES AND TRANSITIONS UNIT (PRO-P)**

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