



**REGIONAL BUREAU BANGKOK**



# WFP's support to national social protection in Asia and the Pacific

## WFP'S APPROACH TO SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social protection<sup>1</sup> systems and programmes play a vital role in the pursuit of a world with Zero Hunger. They prevent and protect people from falling into poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion and support individuals and households to manage and build resilience to shocks and stressors.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, evidence shows social protection systems and programmes support the resilience and performance of national food systems, enhance food security and nutritional outcomes, and help build human capital through equitable and inclusive programming.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A common 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 (ISPA, 2016; SPIAC-B, 2019). Social protection strategies include: social assistance (non-contributory support to vulnerable individuals), social insurance (contributory protection against social and economic risks), and labour market policies (support for employment and worker protection).

<sup>2</sup> WFP (2021) [World Food Programme Strategy for Support to Social Protection](#). July 2021

<sup>3</sup> WFP (2023). Social Protection: Building Strong National Social Protection Systems to Address Unmet Essential Needs, Risks and Shocks to Scale. March 2023

WFP is uniquely positioned to support governments in building and strengthening their national social protection systems:

- Field presence: WFP's global frontline presence in remote locations, fragile contexts and conflict situations allows us to provide practical support in establishing, using, and strengthening social protection, even in the absence of others.
- Operational experience: WFP's extensive experience in delivering and scaling up cash and food assistance<sup>4</sup> positions us as an ideal partner for supporting countries in designing and implementing effective social protection systems and programs.
- Analytical capabilities: WFP's analytical expertise makes us a partner of choice to map, identify, and target those most in need of social protection.
- 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.

Building sustainable social protection systems is central to fulfilling both the vision of governments and WFP's mission to end global hunger. In this regard, our Strategy for Support to Social Protection focuses on two interlinked priorities:



To implement these two priorities, WFP supports the design and delivery of nationally led social protection, providing strategic and technical advice and/or implementing programmes on governments' behalf. In addition, WFP's own programmes are often implemented in ways that are complementary to national social protection systems, or can function in the absence of state-led services.

For WFP, national social protection systems comprise 12 building blocks (*Figure 1*).<sup>5</sup> Support to a social protection system means supporting the enabling environment that steers the sector as a whole (system architecture), the programmes that deliver services and support to the population (programme features), underpinned by cross-cutting processes of knowledge and learning.

<sup>4</sup> The term "food assistance" for WFP encompasses food, cash and voucher assistance.

<sup>5</sup> Concrete examples of WFP's offer in support of the 12 building blocks of a nationally-led social protection system can be found in Annex C of WFP's [Strategy for Support to Social Protection](#).

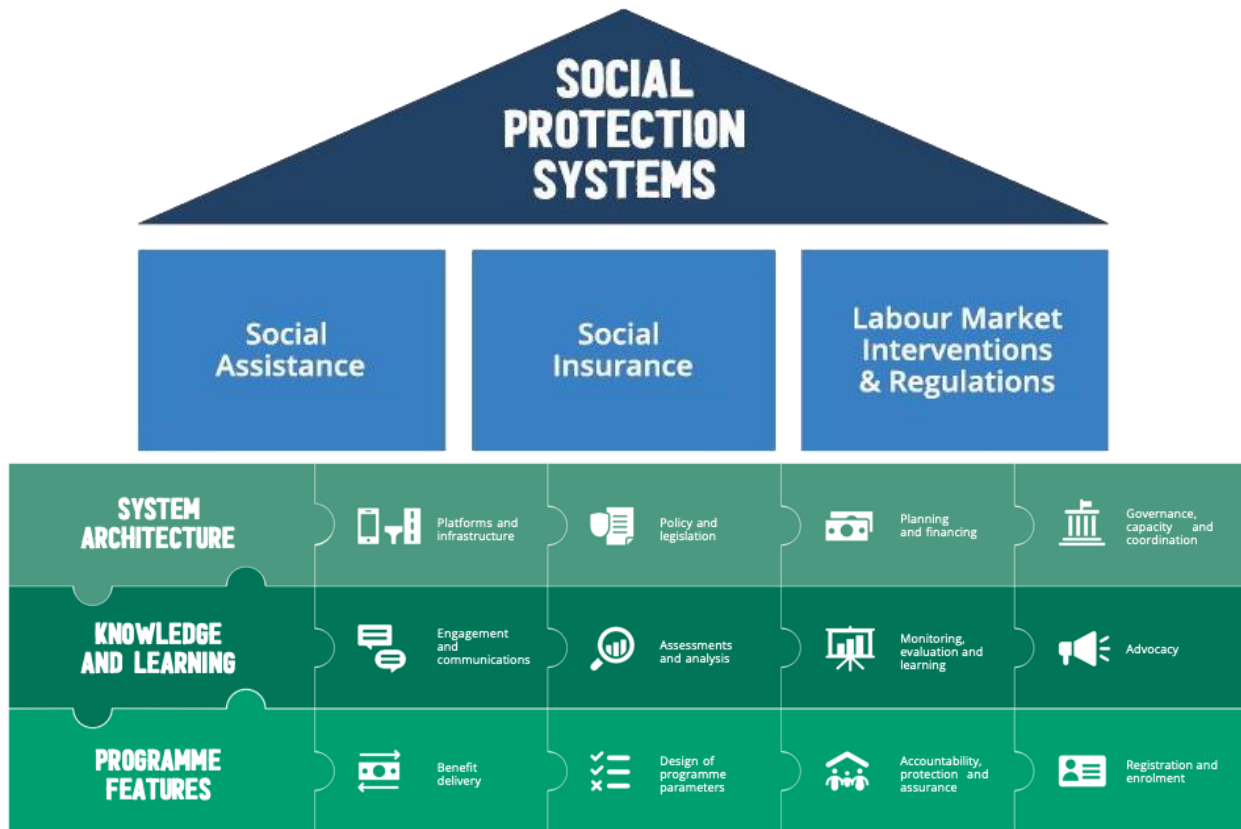


Figure 1 Building blocks of a national social protection system

## WFP'S REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL PROTECTION

### Strategic and technical support

In Asia and the Pacific Region, WFP provides a wide range of strategic and technical support and capacity strengthening services across 17 countries,<sup>6</sup> with a view to improving the coverage, comprehensiveness, adequacy, quality and responsiveness of national social protection systems. In this regard, WFP has worked directly with and alongside government programmes and systems through 100 engagements in 16 countries, and also designed and delivered its own programmes in ways that contribute to national social protection system development through 30 engagements in 10 countries.

Leveraging its presence and experience, and with a portfolio spanning food security and nutrition, resilience-building, climate and disaster risk financing, digital innovations and shock-responsive social protection, WFP offers expertise across all elements of policy and programme design to improve access to and delivery of social protection support, including for marginalized groups and those in insecure contexts.

<sup>6</sup> WFP is working in 4 sub-regions (16 country offices and 1 multi-country office) in Asia and the Pacific. Central Asia includes Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. Southeast Asia includes Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and the Philippines and Timor-Leste. South Asian countries includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. A Pacific multi-country office covers 14 Pacific states. WFP is also operating in DPRK (East Asia).

## Evidence generation

An effective contribution to social protection requires systematic efforts to produce new evidence to enhance impact. WFP has conducted social protection scoping studies in 12 countries across the region,<sup>7</sup> as well as a [regional synthesis report](#), to understand the social protection landscape and to define and improve its role, engagement and strategic partnerships in support of national social protection systems.

Moreover, WFP collaborated with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to develop the Asia and the Pacific Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in [2019](#) and [2020](#). WFP has complemented this by undertaking a series of studies on food security and nutrition since the start of COVID-19, which includes a [regional overview](#) on the impact of shocks on food security and nutrition in the region, and four case studies in Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines and Pakistan (forthcoming).

In addition, WFP recently published a [new study](#) on cash transfers and digital financial inclusion, in collaboration with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). The regional publication examines the barriers and opportunities to improve digital financial inclusion through humanitarian and social protection cash transfer.

## Partnerships

WFP pursues partnerships actively across all its work using a people centred approach. This includes the promotion of joint action in support of regional and national priorities and needs. In 2021, WFP partnered with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the International Labour Organization (ILO), FAO and UNICEF to support the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the development of the [Guidelines on Disaster Responsive Social Protection](#). The document provides strategic guidance for policymakers on when and how to advance disaster-responsive social protection to increase resilience, and has served as an entry point to support governments in the region to take forward their shock-responsive social protection agendas.

Moreover, we aim to shape regional and country-level social protection agendas, and influence decision-makers' understanding of what works. As a member of the Asia-Pacific Issue-Based Coalition (IBC) on Empowerment and Inclusion, WFP is contributing to streamline and coordinate UN response to challenges and crises in the region and work together to advocate for scaling up inclusive social policy options including social protection. WFP has also established a regional partnership with the ADB Social Development Thematic Group, which advocates for the promotion of policies and programmes aimed at reducing poverty, inequality, and vulnerability by transforming social institutions.

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<sup>7</sup> The following reports are publicly available: [Cambodia](#), [Pakistan](#), [Samoa](#), [Sri Lanka](#), and the [Philippines](#).

Furthermore, we seek global collaborations to generate and disseminate relevant evidence on social protection. In 2022, our main partners included UN agencies, ODI, Oxford Policy Management and the University of Wolverhampton. Through these collaborations, WFP has contributed to building a stronger evidence base for social protection, which is critical to achieving the goal of Zero Hunger.

## WFP'S SUPPORT TO SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

### Afghanistan

- Between January and March 2023, WFP reached more than 14 million people with emergency food and nutrition support, including the delivery of in-kind assistance, cash and value vouchers, commodity vouchers, and specialized nutritious foods. WFP is rethinking the programme design and working with partners to explore opportunities to link ongoing humanitarian cash assistance programmes, nutrition interventions and analytical capacities, that could potentially be linked with emergency safety nets and a future social protection system.

### Bangladesh

- WFP works with the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs to strengthen the Mother and Child Benefit Programme, with the aim to reach some 6 million pregnant women and children under five by 2026. The support includes the establishment of a management information system, government-to-person (G2P) payment innovations, self-registrations, improved targeting mechanisms and social and behaviour change communication activities.
- WFP is supporting the integration of the Vulnerable Women Benefit management information system with the National Election Commission database, enabling some 2.5 million vulnerable women to apply for the programme through multiple online and offline platforms. Additionally, WFP provides technical assistance for the digitalization of the cash transfers, promoting women's digital and financial inclusion and economic empowerment.



### Cambodia

- Commissioned by the General Secretariat for the National Social Protection Council, WFP supported the formulation of a national shock-responsive social protection framework to guide systematic responses to multi-shock scenarios. Building on this, WFP, jointly with GIZ and UNICEF, is providing technical assistance to operationalize the framework, and to develop vulnerability and risk monitoring system and an anticipatory action plan, leveraging the

information from the Platform for Real-time Impact and Situation Monitoring (PRISM).

- WFP collaborates with line ministries to establish synergies with the national cash transfer programme, with the goal of enhancing the responsiveness of social assistance to climate shocks. Through a shock-responsive cash transfer program, WFP supported 38,900 households in 70 flood-affected communes across five provinces.
- Together with other development partners, WFP supported the roll-out of the Ministry of Planning IDPoor database to identify newly poor households and register them in social assistance programmes, enhancing the shock-responsive social protection data system and planning. WFP continues to provide support on analytics, mapping, forecasting, contingency planning, and linking the IDPoor system to the PRISM and other social protection databases.

## India

- WFP is providing technical assistance to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of the Government's food-based social protection programmes. Over the past decade, WFP has supported the automatization and digitalization of the Public Distribution System (PDS), which nationally reaches more than 800 million people per month. Key areas of engagement include policy advice, supply chain optimization, fortification, social and behavioural change communications, targeting, advocacy, and evidence generation.
- WFP developed the Annapurti (automated grain dispensing system) and piloted it in seven locations in five states to increase access to PDS entitlements with speed and accuracy. The Government requested WFP to expand the implementation of the Annapurti system to 2,000 locations within the next three years, aiming to reach approximately 8 million people.
- Working with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and its State departments, WFP supports the roll out of rice fortification used in the PDS, school meals and integrated child development services scheme in seven states, reaching 328 million people. To facilitate this process, WFP provides technical assistance, training support to rice millers and the private sector, sensitisation of government officials, community awareness campaigns and monitoring in partnership with local universities.



## Indonesia

- Under the leadership of the Ministry of National Development Planning (Bappenas) through their roadmap for adaptive social protection, WFP and UNICEF are helping enhance the Government's early warning and risk information systems, including the Ministry of Social Affairs' e-SIMBA platform, and training staff at national and local levels to analyze and utilize this data to inform future adaptive social protection programmes and facilitate delivery of anticipatory actions.
- WFP is supporting the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs (Kemenko PMK), the National Disaster Management Agency, the Meteorological, Climatological, and Geophysical Agency, and Ministry of Social Affairs to introduce and institutionalize anticipatory action into existing disaster risk management and social protection programmes. This includes the development of a scoping study to review policies, frameworks and funding mechanisms, the establishment of new multi-stakeholder coordination platforms, south-south and triangular cooperation and development of protocols at the subnational level.
- Working with Kemenko PMK, Bappenas, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, and the Ministry of Health, WFP is mainstreaming nutrition-sensitive programming of national social protection programmes. To achieve this, WFP is promoting the integration of multiple micronutrient fortified rice, nutrition education materials and social and behavioural change communications into national and regional social assistance programmes, through enhanced policies, coordination, piloting, evidence generation and south-south and triangular cooperation.

## Kyrgyz Republic

- WFP, UNICEF, ILO, and the World Bank, jointly with the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration (MLSSM), conducted a comprehensive assessment of the national social protection system based on the [ISPA CODI tool](#). The results will support the design of the National Social Protection Policy and Plan.
- Upon the request of the MLSSM, WFP supported the digitalisation and integration of the paper-based social registry with other national information systems. This will increase access to comprehensive data on vulnerable populations, reduce data processing time and improve data security and targeting of low-income families.
- The MLSSM and WFP collaborated to pilot the Social Contract, a labour market social protection measure aimed at lifting low-income families out of poverty. After piloting the programme for 100 families, the Government allocated KGS 292 million (US\$3.5 million) for implementation, reaching 2,800 low-income families. In 2023, WFP will continue to support the scale-up of the intervention.

## Lao PDR

- WFP contributed to building a stronger evidence base for social protection at country-level by conducting a study to assess the operational feasibility of delivering cash-based transfers in an anticipatory action setting, focusing on existing cash delivery mechanisms and the capacity of financial service providers. The study also identified national social protection programs that could potentially be leveraged for anticipatory action.
- In support of the Ministry of Education and Sports, WFP provided food and technical assistance to strengthen the national school feeding programme towards full national ownership. Focus areas of support included legislation, financing, monitoring, income generation, nutrition promotion as well as food availability and diversity. WFP's continued support to the national school feeding programme supported over 195,900 students across 2,100 schools nationwide.



## Myanmar

- WFP provided cash transfers to 12,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women and children under 2 to in four townships in peri-urban Yangon to prevent stunting. This intervention is aligned with the Maternal and Child Cash Transfer Programme of the national social protection system in terms of targeting, transfer modality and delivery.
- WFP piloted a disability inclusion top-up reaching some 1,500 persons with disabilities in Kachin and northern Shan States to meet their specific food security and nutritional needs, in line with the national social protection disability cash transfer programme.
- WFP, jointly with UNICEF and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), is developing an interim Inter-Agency Social Protection Response Strategy Framework to coordinate and harmonize social protection interventions with the aim to integrate them within the national social protection system in the future. In March 2023, maternal and child cash transfers and disability cash transfers were prioritized as strategic interventions of the interim Inter-Agency Social Protection Response Plan.



## Nepal

- WFP strengthened the social protection system architecture at federal and local government levels by informing policies, strategies, standards, and guidelines through technical assistance. Furthermore, WFP strengthened the capacity of local governments to design, implement and monitor programmes and their emergency preparedness for anticipatory action.
- To advance knowledge and learning, WFP conducted periodic food security and monthly market monitoring to identify trends resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the global food crisis, and led the revision of the Minimum Expenditure Basket with the national Cash Coordination Group. The evidence generated by WFP was disseminated through workshops with government actors from all levels.
- WFP contributed to enhancing social protection programme by piloting innovative approaches to improve food security and help people to manage risks and shocks, such as anticipatory cash transfers. The interventions were followed by technical assistance to local governments, contributing to the redesign of programme parameters. In addition, on behalf of the Government, WFP delivered conditional cash transfers and specialized nutritious food to the population most affected by socio-economic and climate-induced shocks.



## Pacific Islands

- WFP through its multi-country office in Fiji works closely with 14 nations in the Pacific, including helping several to build or adapt their social protection programmes to better deliver social protection services to its citizens, rather than WFP delivering them directly. This includes working with governments in the region to collect and analyse regular food security monitoring data as well as assist with reporting on price fluctuations and market assessments which help policymakers make evidence-based decisions.
- Together with a cash expert from CashCap, WFP provides direct technical support to Fiji's Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to strengthen their social protection cash-based transfer modalities to make them more inclusive, food security and nutrition sensitive, and shock responsive. This includes regularly supporting top-up cash transfers to the Government of Fiji Social Welfare beneficiaries in the aftermath of cyclones.
- WFP, in partnership with OCHA/UN-CERF, will support Fiji's Department of Social Welfare (DSW) to implement an Anticipatory Action Pilot to provide anticipatory cash, early warning messages and preparedness assistance to selected DSW beneficiaries if tropical cyclone triggers are reached. In addition, WFP has piloted the roll out of a parametric micro-insurance product to Government Social Welfare beneficiaries in the event of cyclones, droughts and flooding.

## Pakistan

- Under the national stunting prevention programme Benazir Nashonuma, WFP provided 591,900 pregnant and breastfeeding women and children aged 6-23 months with specialized nutritious food along with awareness training on maternal, infant and young child nutrition practices and cash assistance. The programme aims to expand to support to 1.7 million people in all districts across the country by 2024. Nashonuma runs in complementarity to the Nationwide Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP).
- WFP is implementing two integrated nutrition-focused and shock-responsive safety net programmes to assist prioritized vulnerable households in flood-affected areas. The projects target 21,000 children under five and 6,100 women.
- WFP participated in the "National Conference on Social Protection" organized by the Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety, which aimed to facilitate knowledge sharing, enhance understanding of collaborative data use, explore the application of forecasting models, and promote the development of an adaptive social protection system in the country.



## Philippines

- Through the leadership of the President of the Philippines and the Department of Social Welfare and Development, WFP and ADB are supporting a pilot to demonstrate the feasibility of a value voucher program on dietary diversity of households experiencing hunger. Lessons from this pilot will inform the design of a national programme covering 1 million poor and food insecure households. The pilot and its scale-up support WFP advocacy for nutrition sensitive social protection, and the Government's priorities on food security, nutrition and digitalization.
- WFP has been working with the Government, through the Food Fortification Technical Working Group and the private sector, to support mainstreaming of the use of fortified rice in social protection programmes and commercial channels. Technical assistance on policy and regulatory frameworks, advocacy, evidence generation and programming is provided to key government partners and relevant stakeholders.
- With the Office of Civil Defence, WFP is helping to draft and advocate for the adoption of a national law on the Declaration of Imminent Disaster. The law will allow the use of national and local resources/funds for anticipatory action activities and will support a flexible funding window for shock-responsive social protection interventions.

## Sri Lanka

- WFP has been a long-term partner of the Government, providing technical assistance to the Department of Samurdhi Development to strengthen its largest social protection program. In response to the current socio-economic crisis, WFP supported the Government by delivering



cash assistance through the Samurdhi program, reaching 41,700 households in seven districts.

- WFP, in collaboration with FAO, is implementing the Joint Food Security Initiative with the goal of improving food security and nutrition for 625 smallholder farmers, and 4,500 vulnerable households in three districts. The intervention delivers cash-based assistance through the Samurdhi programme and Western Union, and distributes fortified rice through the National School Meals Program.

### Tajikistan

- Under the Interagency Cash Working Group umbrella, WFP is hosting a Cash Cap partner to provide technical support and advice to the group. The main priorities are developing a multisector Minimum Expenditure Basket to inform sectoral cash transfer values and, in the long-term, enhancing the shock-responsiveness of the national flagship social protection programme, Targeted Social Assistance.
- WFP worked closely with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population and the Ministry of Education and Sciences to strengthen the National School Feeding Programme and facilitate its gradual transition to full national ownership. To achieve this, WFP provided technical support to develop the legislative and regulatory frameworks, and to set up functional mechanisms to ensure its sustainability.

### Timor-Leste

- WFP partnered with the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI) to provide essential food and nutrition assistance to 38,400 pregnant and lactating women in six municipalities, addressing their macro and micronutrient needs amid recent extreme weather events and other global shocks. In addition, WFP also strengthened the capacity of MSSI staff to enhance their skills in technical areas, including nutrition and supply chain.
- In order to support the Government, WFP, World Vision and CRS launched the Cash Working Group (CWG) to coordinate the use of cash and voucher in collaboration with UN agencies and other development partners. Within the CWG, a Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) Technical Working Group has been established to define a MEB for the country's vulnerable populations.



For further information, please contact:

**Daniel Longhurst** ([daniel.longhurst@wfp.org](mailto:daniel.longhurst@wfp.org)), *Regional Social Protection and CBT Adviser*

**Aphitchaya Nguanbanchong** ([aphitchaya.nguanbanchong@wfp.org](mailto:aphitchaya.nguanbanchong@wfp.org)), *Regional Social Protection Officer*

**Francesca Ciardi** ([francesca.ciardi@wfp.org](mailto:francesca.ciardi@wfp.org)), *Regional Social Protection Officer*

**Arniela Rénique Vega** ([arniela.reniquevega@wfp.org](mailto:arniela.reniquevega@wfp.org)), *Regional Social Protection Knowledge Management Officer*

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