Internal Audit of Staffing in Emergencies

Office of the Inspector General
Internal Audit Report AR/23/11

September 2023

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I. Executive summary

Introduction and context

1. As part of its annual workplan, the Office of Internal Audit conducted an audit of WFP's staffing in emergencies. The audit focused on a review of WFP's emergency staffing preparation, staffing scale-up and risks to staff wellness in emergencies. The team surveyed 28 country offices under an emergency designation and performed detailed reviews of emergencies in the following countries: Afghanistan, Haiti, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Ukraine. The audit covered the period from 1 January to 31 December 2022.

2. WFP seeks to continuously strengthen its response to saving lives by effectively and efficiently supporting its emergency operations with the right skill sets and people.[1] WFP is committed to providing its employees with an enabling and supportive workplace and ensuring that an effective health and welfare risk management process is in place.

3. WFP faced unprecedented humanitarian needs worldwide in 2022, assisting 158 million people – a historic high for the organization. In the period from January 2016 to December 2022, WFP responded to 128 emergencies, including in Afghanistan, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Currently, more than half of WFP's 23,000 global employees serve in emergency duty stations assisting beneficiaries.

4. The audit did not include a review of WFP's programmatic or operational delivery in emergencies and made no related statements or assumptions about its effectiveness, efficiency or timeliness.

Audit conclusions and key results

5. Based on the audit results, the Office of Internal Audit reached an overall conclusion of **major improvement needed**. The assessed governance arrangements, risk management and controls were generally established and functioning, but need major improvement to provide reasonable assurance that the objectives of WFP's staffing in emergencies would be achieved. Issues identified by the audit negatively affect the achievement of the objectives of staffing in emergencies. Prompt management action is required to ensure that identified risks are adequately mitigated.

6. Recognized as a global leader in emergency response, the Emergency Operations Division has received widespread praise for its exceptional support in coordinating staffing for Corporate Scale-up emergencies. The division has strengthened WFP's workforce through comprehensive emergency response training, including simulations. Embracing a no-regrets approach, WFP has delegated authority to country offices, enabling them to fast-track and single-source recruit short-term employees during emergencies, resulting in more rapid scale-up capabilities.

7. Staff counsellors play a crucial role in employee wellness in emergencies by providing pre- and post-deployment counselling to personnel deployed in emergency situations. Several countries have gone the extra mile by maintaining dedicated staff counsellors and establishing Wellness Committees, emphasizing their commitment to employee well-being.

8. This audit report identifies several cross-cutting findings related to the ownership, governance, monitoring, and control of emergency staffing processes that have impacted management's ability to ensure optimal performance in WFP's emergency staffing. However, these challenges present opportunities for improvement and growth. By addressing critical gaps in governance, monitoring and controls, WFP can enhance its emergency response capabilities and effective and efficient deployment of staff to emergencies.

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[1] OED 2022/003 WFP Emergency Activation protocol – 18 January 2022.

9.   This report's observations encompass data monitoring and measurement, staffing needs assessments, pre-existing staffing gaps, regional bureau staffing models, emergency staffing preparedness gaps, and wellness risk monitoring and management.

Cross-cutting

10.   Many of the findings in this report have previously been identified through internal and external reviews[2] as far back as 2013, underscoring the organization's commitment to continuous improvement. To effectively address these findings, WFP must clarify process ownership and bridge existing gaps in governance oversight. This will ensure that past review findings are promptly resolved and implemented.

11.   The role of the WFP Strategic Task Force, as a senior leadership forum, is instrumental in addressing strategic issues during a corporate scale-up emergency and advising on risks beyond specific emergencies. While the task force oversees performance and response to individual emergencies, its mandate should extend to encompass WFP's overall performance during emergencies. This expansion of responsibilities will foster comprehensive oversight, enabling effective monitoring and control over emergency staffing.

12.   WFP's decentralized management approach and the aforementioned governance gaps have resulted in limited monitoring and control over emergency staffing. To overcome this challenge, the report recommends revising the terms of reference for the Strategic Task Force. This revision will facilitate performance monitoring and staffing preparations for emergencies, establish appropriate authorities, and ensure the timely resolution of persistent gaps.

Systems, data and staffing needs

13.   Process, data, and system limitations have hindered management's ability to assess emergency staffing performance accurately. The report highlights that emergency staffing data is incomplete, and there is a need for improved tools and more clearly outlined roles and responsibilities for monitoring. While progress is underway in creating an information system to support staff deployment and roster management for Corporate Scale-up emergencies, there is a remaining gap in having a system serving most of WFP's emergencies not reaching the Corporate Scale-Up level.

14.   The report identifies that emergency operational planning and staffing needs assessments must be more robustly aligned. It also reveals instances where critical staff were not in place during the initial staff scale-up. To rectify this, enhanced guidance, monitoring, and oversight of country office emergency staffing are essential to ensure accurate identification and definition of staffing needs.

Staffing gaps and preparedness

15.   Staffing gaps in certain country offices have necessitated increased reliance on temporary surge staff and regional bureaus, which have stretched their capacities. Management should carefully consider the structure and role of regional bureaus in supporting emergencies to maintain adequate support and monitoring in non-emergency countries.

16.   Upgrading emergency staffing preparedness tools, guidance, and standardization is crucial to ensure WFP's readiness to respond to emergencies. Additionally, establishing emergency rosters will significantly enhance WFP's staffing response speed.

Wellness risks

17.   To consistently monitor and manage staff wellness and ensure staff well-being, it is imperative for WFP to establish minimum standards or criteria for staff wellness in emergencies. Some high-risk emergency locations lack wellness committees or dedicated wellness staff, and these best practices should be implemented widely.

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[2] List of past oversight reports in Annex E.

18. Inadequate monitoring and support of the rest and recuperation (R&R) entitlement have resulted in underutilization of this benefit, with only 53 percent of eligible employees exercising their entitlement in any given month, often for less time than entitled. Headquarters must enhance monitoring of the R&R entitlement and hold country offices accountable for facilitating its use. Headquarters should also support country offices and regional bureaus in ensuring staffing levels enable eligible employees to take their R&R leave.

19. Overall, this report sheds light on areas for improvement while acknowledging WFP's significant achievements as a global leader in emergency response. By addressing the findings outlined in this report and embracing opportunities for improvement, WFP can further enhance its emergency staffing response capabilities, ensuring the organization remains ready to deploy staff effectively and efficiently.

Actions agreed

20. The audit report contains four high and two medium-priority observations. In consultation with units implementing other workstreams, the Emergency Operations Division and the Human Resources Division will be the primary lead for implementing the agreed actions. Management has agreed to address the reported observations and work to implement the agreed actions by their respective due dates.

THANK YOU!

21. The Office of Internal Audit would like to thank managers and staff for their assistance and cooperation during the audit.

II. Context and scope

WFP emergency protocol

22. Following its Strategic Plan 2022–2025, WFP's highest priority is saving lives in emergencies by meeting urgent food and nutrition needs. WFP seeks to continuously strengthen its timely response to emergencies, supporting its response with the right skill sets and people in the right manner. This includes strengthening early warning and anticipatory action and building a top-class, deployable workforce.

23. In 2022, WFP faced unprecedented humanitarian needs around the world. As of the end of October 2022, the number of people affected by hunger worldwide had risen to 828 million. Globally, an estimated 345 million people were facing acute food insecurity (Integrated Food Insecurity Phase Classification – IPC Phase 3 or above), and almost 1 million were one step away from catastrophic famine-like levels of hunger (IPC Phase 5). Since 2016, WFP has responded to 128 humanitarian emergencies (see Figure 1 below), as of February 2023, 23 of which (18 percent) had remained active as per WFP's emergency protocols. In response, WFP mobilized all available resources to step up its efforts to assist the most vulnerable and reached 153 million people in 2022.

Figure 1 **- WFP emergency responses since 2016[3]**
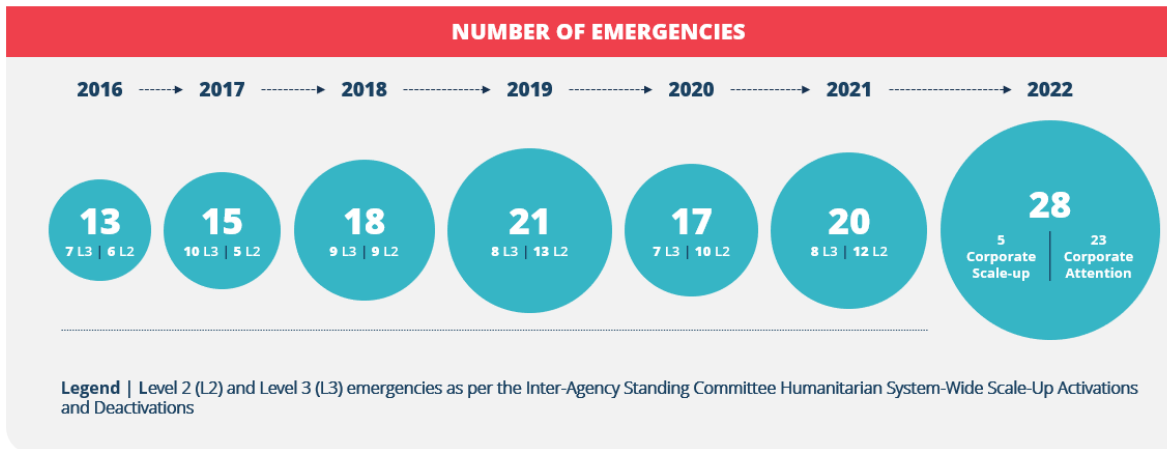
WFP emergency protocol

24. WFP revised its emergency protocol in January 2022, replacing WFP's previous system[4] for emergency response and outlining its adjustment to an increasingly complex global operational context. This protocol provides policy direction for WFP's staffing response to emergencies, such as the Emergency Operations Division's support and coordination role in corporate scale-up emergencies. The protocol covers WFP's engagement in situations at risk of a sudden or slow onset humanitarian emergency affecting food security and nutrition. This was further updated in February 2023, introducing lessons learned from 2022 emergency responses.

25. The protocol includes three phases: "Early Action and Emergency Response;" "Corporate Attention;" and "Corporate Scale-Up", each having a different impact on staffing processes.

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[3] Data source: WFP Emergency Division, Emergency Responses 2012-2022. The sharp increase in the number of emergencies between 2021 and 2022 can be explained by the development of new emergencies and the reclassification of existing ones under the new WFP protocol (see paragraph 20).

[4] Based on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activations and Deactivations ([Link](#))

- The **Early Action and Emergency Response** phase involves country offices responding or preparing to respond to an emergency, mainly within the country office's capacity with regional bureau support. The response in this phase is managed following existing structures, reporting lines and standard normative staffing guidelines unless otherwise authorized.

- The **Corporate Attention** phase signals the need for close attention to potential severe risks resulting from early warning indicators such as the Corporate Alert System. With no time limit reference, this phase involves, among other measures, the potential for workforce mobilization to assist in scenario planning and readiness measures. Specific delegations of authority can be granted to the country director or regional bureau to facilitate staff deployments.

- The **Corporate Scale-Up** phase signifies a situation in which the scale, complexity, urgency and reputational risks overwhelm, or threaten to overwhelm, available capacity. Its activation mandates a whole-of-organization approach and, within 72 hours, triggers, among other things, the establishment of empowered leadership and workforce mobilization.

Overview of WFP emergencies

26. Figure 2 provides a status overview of WFP's various emergencies as of February 2023.[5]

Figure 2 **- Status of WFP emergencies in February 2023**
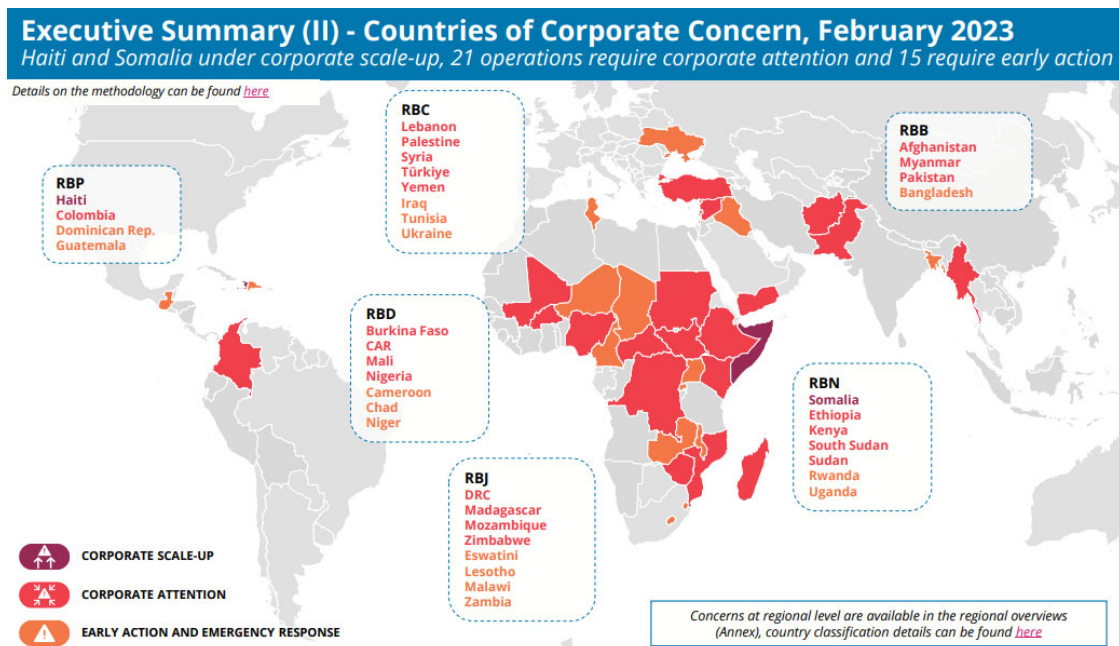
Emergency staffing processes

27. Country offices have several tools at their disposal when it comes to staffing positions: (i) reassignment; (ii) external, competitive recruitment; (iii) short-term hires on different contract modalities (including but not limited to international consultants, SSAs) and (iv) TDYs.

28. Emergency staffing refers to different processes. The WFP Human Resources Emergency Preparedness and Response toolkit refers to these as three phases: preparedness, response and deactivation. It might also include

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[5] Data source: Opweb February 2023 (https://opweb.wfp.org/news/)

general staffing processes for country offices in a protracted state of emergency. Each of these various staffing phases is highly interconnected, especially for some of WFP's most significant operations that repeatedly face such emergencies.

Figure 3 **– Emergency staffing phases**
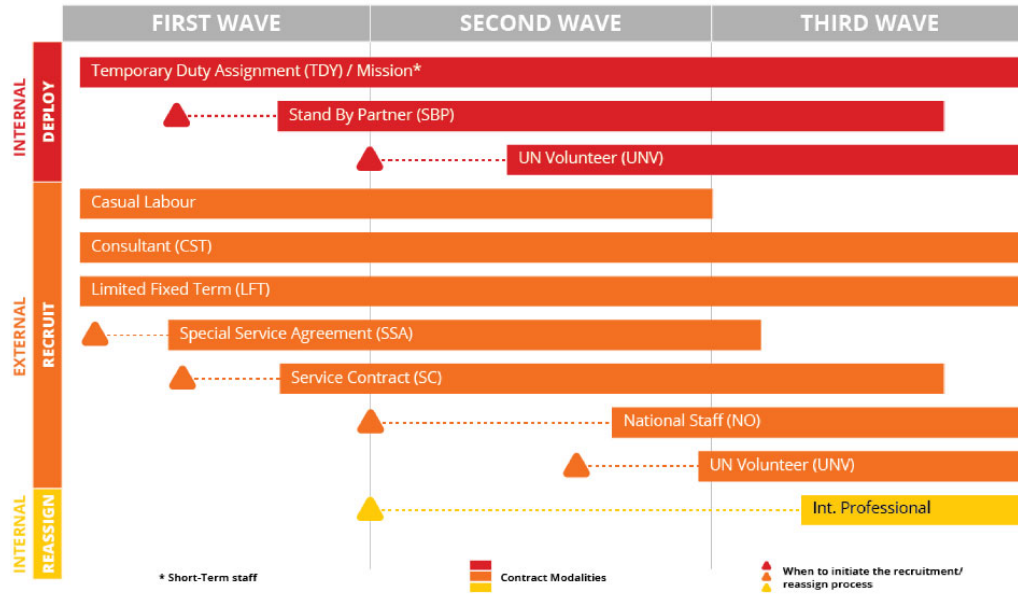
29. Human resources units in country offices can propose these different staffing methods and the appropriate contract modalities to their management. Various staffing methods are currently applied depending on the particular waves of the emergency and the funding available.

30. During the first wave of an emergency (generally the first three months), most of the surge workforce will be composed of personnel on temporary duty assignments, short-term contracts and casual labour. The Rapid Response Team may also be deployed during the first wave. In parallel, the country office usually advertises positions for national staff, as this competitive process takes longer.

31. With the activation of a corporate scale-up emergency response, both processes for deployment and recruitment of personnel can be expedited. This includes authority for the designated Corporate Response Director to approve the creation of positions and includes a number of flexible options regarding the recruitment of consultants and limited fixed-term staff members, whereby a single-source, fast-track approach can be utilized.

Roles and responsibilities

32. As the first responders to an emergency, WFP country offices are charged with assessing staffing needs, creating staffing requests, vetting candidates and processing local contracting. Their direct point of liaison and authority are the respective regional bureaus to which they report.

33. Regional bureaus have a coordination, support and oversight role. During a corporate scale-up, the Regional Director, as Corporate Response Director[6], ultimately maintains accountability for WFP's response to the given emergency. Depending on the levels of delegation of authority provided for a specific emergency,

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[6] if an emergency is multi-region or global, the Deputy Executive Director or other delegate may be appointed by the Executive Director as Corporate Response Director.

regional bureaus may also be tasked with key recruitment steps. Regional bureaus regularly support country offices in recruitment by establishing local/regional rosters and vetting candidates. Regional bureau staff can also be directly deployed to a given location in the region to support country offices.

34. Headquarters functions support the process via the core work they and their staffing coordinators carry out. As appropriate, they provide human resources-related emergency support with relevant other functions to support the needs of country offices.

35. In the context of a corporate scale-up activation, WFP needs the capability to rapidly deploy the right people on a "no regrets" basis. The Country Director remains the lead within the Corporate Attention, Early Action and Emergency Response phases. But for a Corporate Scale-Up, the Corporate Response Director is accountable for the response.

36. Within the Emergencies Operations Division (EME), the Global Surge Coordination Unit is developing a circular and a tool set to be released in 2023 to support and coordinate the surge staffing requests created by country offices under corporate scale-up emergencies. This includes support in identifying and helping the deployment of surge staff, and matching personnel with field requirements in coordination with staffing coordinators, regional bureaus and country offices.

Objective and scope of the audit

37. The objective of the audit was to provide assurance on the effectiveness of governance, risk management and internal control processes related to staffing of WFP emergencies and to assess whether the process effectively supports WFP operations. Such audits contribute to the Office of the Inspector General's annual assurance statement to the Executive Director on governance, risk management and internal control processes.

38. The audit was conducted in conformance with the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*.

39. The audit used a performance approach to explore and answer questions related to the staffing of emergencies. The audit scope covered the following lines of enquiry:

- **Line of enquiry 1:** Does WFP effectively staff its emergency operations by ensuring that the right number of people, with the right skill sets, are in place to respond to an emergency on a timely basis?

- **Line of enquiry 2:** Are country offices, regional bureaus and headquarters units adequately prepared to provide the right level of staffing support in the event of an emergency response?

- **Line of enquiry 3:** Are risks related to staff wellness in emergencies, in particular the proper use of rest and recuperation, adequately identified and monitored?

40. The audit scope covered the period from 1 January to 31 December 2022. Where necessary, transactions and events pertaining to other periods were reviewed. The audit fieldwork was conducted from 13 December 2022 to 2 March 2023.

41. The audit team conducted structured interviews with relevant stakeholders at global headquarters and field levels, and documentation reviews to evaluate the overall performance of WFP's staffing in emergencies. Procedures primarily focused on staffing preparation and scale-up. The team surveyed 28 country offices under an emergency phase and performed a detailed review of the following countries: Afghanistan, Haiti, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Ukraine.

III. Results of the audit

Overview of conclusions

42. Table 1 outlines the extent to which audit work resulted in observations and agreed actions. These are classified according to the lines of enquiry established for the audit (see paragraph 35) and are rated as medium or high priority; any observations that resulted in low-priority actions are not included in this report.

Table 1: Overview of lines of enquiry, observations and priority of agreed actions	**Priority of issues/ agreed actions**
Cross-cutting contributory causes	
1. Disparate ownership and limitations in governance, monitoring and control	*High*
Line of enquiry 1: Does WFP effectively staff its emergency operations by ensuring that the right number of people, with the right skill sets, are in place to respond to an emergency on a timely basis?	
2. Information systems and tools	*High*
3. Quality and accuracy of staffing needs assessments	*Medium*
Line of enquiry 2: Are country offices, regional bureaus and headquarters units adequately prepared to provide the right level of staffing support in the event of an emergency?	
4. Pre-existing staffing gaps and regional bureau staffing models	*Medium*
5. Emergency staffing preparedness gaps	*High*
Line of enquiry 3: Are risks related to staff wellness in emergencies, in particular the proper use of rest and recuperation, adequately identified and monitored?	
6. Wellness criteria, monitoring and control	*High*

Cross-cutting contributory causes

43. While the audit identified gaps and related causes for each line of enquiry, some fundamental contributory causes were cross-cutting to all findings in the audit. If addressed, they would help resolve other identified gaps and actions.

> **Observation 1: Disparate ownership and limitations in governance, monitoring and control**

44. While interconnected, the emergency staffing preparedness and surge staffing processes are owned and operated by a diverse set of stakeholders who must work together to achieve optimal performance. This diverse ownership of the process, coupled with inadequate levels of governance, monitoring and control further outlined below, impaired management's ability to consistently ensure the adequate performance of WFP's staffing in emergencies as detailed below:

- Findings in this audit report have been identified in previous reviews,[7] including internal advisories, evaluations, external and internal audits. The absence of more apparent process owners and governance oversight gaps hindered the organization's ability to resolve issues promptly.

- Regarding governance mechanisms for emergencies, while the Strategic Task Force and the Global Operational Task Force oversee WFP's performance and response to specific emergencies,[8] including global emergencies, they did not appear to oversee WFP's overall performance in emergencies, resulting in a governance gap.

- The low level of monitoring and control over emergency staffing was connected to WFP's overall approach of decentralization and delegation of authority and responsibility to country offices.

45. These cross-cutting findings acted as contributory causes to the observations identified from the three lines of enquiry in this report:

- **Observation 2 – Limitations in data, performance, monitoring and measurement**: Diverse and unclear process ownership hindered WFP's ability to measure and track staffing during emergencies and sometimes led to miscommunication, duplication of efforts and inefficiencies in filling surge staffing needs. Staffing data during emergencies was not complete or accurate, and staffing performance was not assessed.

- **Observation 3 – Quality and accuracy of staffing needs assessments**: Monitoring and controls were not present to ensure staffing needs assessments were scrutinized for accuracy and validity, and to identify adjustments to staffing at various stages of the emergency in a timely manner.

- **Observation 4 – Pre-existing staffing gaps and regional bureau staffing models**: Staffing gaps in some country offices before an emergency scale-up led to heavy reliance on regional bureaus, stretching their capacity and affecting their ability to perform relevant monitoring and oversight of country offices.

- **Observation 5 – Emergency staffing preparedness gaps**: The fragmentation of roles and responsibilities meant that emergency rosters and other essential emergency staffing preparedness tools and guidelines were not updated, widely communicated and recognized as criteria. Similarly, monitoring and oversight of country offices, regional bureaus and headquarters units were inadequate to ensure they were prepared for emergency staffing.

- **Observation 6 – Wellness criteria, monitoring and control**: Decentralization and delegation of authority and responsibility to country offices for staff wellness was not accompanied by minimum standards or monitoring controls to ensure any risks to staff wellness could be managed. This also applied to monitoring personnel's rest and recuperation (R&R) entitlement, for which there was no

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[7] List of past oversight reports in Annex E
[8] OED 2022/003 WFP Emergency Activation protocol – 18 January 2022

monitoring or oversight from regional bureaus or headquarters. This resulted in low rates of R&R usage and staffing structures that did not generally account for R&R leave.

46. Each of these observations, along with any other related causes and agreed actions, are elaborated further below in each line of enquiry section.

Agreed Actions [High priority]

1) The Leadership Group will revise the Strategic Task Force's terms of reference to include the role of monitoring WFP's overall performance in preparation for staffing emergencies

2) The Leadership Group will also ensure that the Operational Task Force:

i) Establishes clear authority and responsibility for the ownership, implementation and monitoring of processes related to emergency staffing preparedness, surge staffing and staff wellness in emergencies.

ii) Monitors gaps from lessons learned, after-action reports and other relevant reviews so that they are followed up on and resolved.

Timeline for implementation

1 February 2024

Line of enquiry 1: Does WFP effectively staff its emergency operations by ensuring that the right number of people, with the right skill sets, are in place to respond to an emergency on a timely basis?

47. Evidence from the audit procedures indicated that process data and system limitations impaired management's ability to determine whether and to what extent its emergency operations were staffed correctly, and whether they were staffed in an efficient and timely manner.

48. These findings do not provide an opinion on the impact on, or performance of, WFP's programmatic delivery in emergencies.

49. To ensure the adequate and timely staffing of its emergency operations, particularly an emergency scale-up, WFP must rapidly assess staffing needs, and identify and mobilize staff. Assessing the performance of these staffing processes is enabled by (a) key performance indicators; (b) access to accurate and complete data; (c) information management tools; (d) monitoring processes; and (e) defined and agreed roles across all actors engaged in deploying personnel in emergencies.

50. The audit assessed a sample of emergencies, reviewed relevant data and documentation, and conducted interviews and walk-throughs with stakeholders. In particular, the audit team reviewed how emergency staffing needs were assessed, reviewed and positions filled.

51. The country offices reviewed noted the strong support from EME in their efforts to fill emergency surge staffing needs. Individual offices and regional bureaus used innovative approaches to assist in supplying and coordinating their surge staffing needs, such as:

- establishing remote hubs to support local and temporary staff recruitment and contracting;
- direct hiring of retired employees who have knowledge of the operation;
- pre-onboarding package sent to the new joiners to prepare them before arrival;
- weekly onboarding sessions held every week for all new joiners and all contract types;
- creating a detailed local website to present the regional bureau and operations to new joiners.

52. The audit also received a positive response from country offices on the emergency human resource delegations of authority that permitted them to recruit some personnel through a fast-track, single-source process, which enabled them to scale up operations quickly.

53. Evidence from the audit procedures indicated that process data and system limitations (as described below in observation 2) impaired management's ability to determine whether and to what extent its emergency operations were staffed correctly, and whether they were staffed in an efficient and timely manner.

54. These findings do not provide an opinion on the impact on, or performance of, WFP's programmatic delivery in emergencies.

Observation 2: Limitations in data, performance, monitoring and measurement

Processes, systems and tools

55. Suitable tools and accompanying standard operating procedures were absent. Roles and responsibilities need to be clearly defined to support monitoring and measurement of staff scale-up for emergency response. This absence prevented management from effectively and efficiently overseeing and monitoring the staffing process during emergencies, as detailed below:

- **Tracking the fulfillment of emergency staffing needs** during the various stages of an emergency needed to be made more transparent. Actual emergency staffing needs at any given moment were

unclear, i.e. how many positions were filled, for how long, or whether they were still open or had been newly created.

- **Emergency staffing data** was incomplete, maintained at various levels and had to be consistently monitored and tracked through multiple offline Excel-based lists for staffing needs and position trackers. The allocation of responsibilities, accountability or identification of who needs to be informed or consulted when maintaining these trackers was not defined, increasing the risk of errors and inaccuracies in the position tracker lists and decreasing their usefulness.

- **Staffing data in WFP Information Network and Global Systems (WINGS)**, while generally available, did not identify surge versus non-surge positions. Additionally, personnel (international staff, consultants or national staff) that were either temporarily deployed to emergencies or fully supported remotely were not always recorded in WINGS, increasing the difficulty for management to ascertain the number of staff deployed to emergencies at any given time.

- **Emergency staffing processes** lacked criteria and key performance indicators to measure how efficiently and effectively emergency staffing needs were met, including timelines, skill sets and the number of staff. While EME started a process of establishing some corporate key performance indicators during the audit, they were not explicitly linked to country offices or EME's performance in terms of filling staffing needs for an emergency. The recently issued Executive Director's Circular on "WFP Emergency Activation Protocol"[9] established a target criteria timeline for sudden onset corporate scale-up emergencies. This emergency type does not apply to any recent emergencies, leading to significant performance information gaps.

56. At the time of the audit fieldwork, EME was developing an information system, "Surge Station", to act as a tool to support the coordination of emergency staffing scale-up. The audit team reviewed this system and noted that, along with standard operating procedures and roles and responsibilities, it could help resolve many of the identified gaps.

57. Surge Station aims to support the scale-up of staff when authorized and when EME is directly involved during corporate scale-up emergencies, or when requested for individual corporate attention or early action and emergency response emergencies. This selective approach will continue to lead to data gaps, lessening effective and efficient support and monitoring for most emergencies.

Procedures, roles and responsibilities

58. While some emergency staffing roles and responsibilities were outlined in the Executive Director's Circular,[10] they were unclear and only sometimes worked as intended. The definition and communication of these roles and responsibilities sometimes led to duplication and other inefficiencies in fulfilling staffing needs, as outlined below:

- **Support to non-corporate scale-up emergencies**: Different emergency phases called for different paths in filling emergency staffing scale-up needs, with multiple layers of initiatives and approvals. While EME's Global Surge Coordination Unit coordinates and supports surge staffing for corporate scale-up emergencies, other emergency phases received support only when requested. EME's capacity to coordinate and support non-corporate scale-up emergencies is unclear. For example, audit testing showed that the same individual could simultaneously be subject to multiple requests and for different emergencies due to a lack of coordination and the multiplication of offline initiatives and requests.

- **Key dependencies**: Staff sourcing roles and responsibilities often relied on ad-hoc, informal channels and personal networks. While this personal knowledge-driven approach was agile in quickly identifying

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[9] OED 2022/003 WFP Emergency Activation protocol – 18 January 2022
[10] OED 2022/003 WFP Emergency Activation protocol – 18 January 2022

talent, it also led to key people dependencies, limited the pool of staffing resources stakeholders could draw from and could contribute to a culture of non-transparency.

Underlying causes: Relevant cross-cutting contributory causes and agreed actions outlined in Observation 1; exigent circumstances of responding to an ever-increasing number of emergencies, including COVID-19; and limited resources to develop necessary tools, policies and guidance.

Agreed Actions [High priority]

1) The Emergencies Operations Division, in coordination with Human Resources Management, will finalize the development of relevant tools, systems, standard operating procedures and monitoring processes to support the global workforce surge in the event of corporate scale-up and other emergencies.

2) As per the authorities, roles and responsibilities established in Observation 1, the Emergencies Operations Division, with the support of Human Resources Management and functional units, will develop relevant tools, systems, standard operating procedures and monitoring processes for early action and corporate attention emergencies.

Timeline for implementation

31 July 2024

Observation 3: Quality and accuracy of staffing needs assessments

59. Country offices' authority and responsibility for staffing during emergencies were not accompanied by monitoring and control over the quality and accuracy of defined emergency staffing needs. This increased the risk that country offices are not able to identify and follow up on staffing needs at various stages of an emergency, as detailed below:

- **Concept of operations**: Only some country offices developed a concept of operations with clearly outlined staffing needs, which is a vital tool in emergency operational response planning. This is despite EME having established a concept of operations template with these characteristics.

- **Staffing needs assessments**: There was no clear link between country offices' operational planning to identify staffing needs and staffing needs assessments. Country offices inconsistently documented staffing assessments, mostly in stand-alone spreadsheet documents based on a decentralized process (sub-offices listing their various staffing needs).

- **Staffing models**: Human Resources provided tools and guidance for defining and filling emergency staffing needs, including proposed emergency response staffing models. There was low awareness and use of these tools, further to the tools/guidance not being updated since 2018. The regional bureaus and headquarters units tasked with monitoring, coordinating and supporting emergency staffing should assess if these tools and guidance are fit for purpose, then use them as criteria or reference points.

60. The after-action report for one emergency reviewed identified that technical staff for some critical functions with knowledge of emergency systems and processes was not covered in the initial stages of staffing scale-up, demonstrating the risks that can transpire from these gaps.

Underlying causes: Relevant cross-cutting contributory causes outlined in Observation 1; and disparate ownership of emergency staffing processes described in Observation 1 hindered the update, maintenance and application of existing guidance.

> **Agreed Actions** [Medium priority]
>
> The Emergency Operations Division will, in consultation with Human Resources Management, regional bureaus and functional units, update and establish relevant tools to support, and a process to periodically monitor the timeliness and effectiveness of emergency surge staffing needs assessments.
>
> **Timeline for implementation**
>
> 31 July 2024

Line of enquiry 2: Are country offices, regional bureaus and headquarters units adequately prepared to provide the right level of staffing support in the event of an emergency?

61. The audit concludes that pre-existing staffing gaps and the absence of up-to-date, commonly acknowledged and followed emergency staffing preparedness standards impaired management's ability to consistently ensure that WFP's various units were adequately prepared to provide staffing support in an emergency.

62. As per WFP's Emergency Preparedness Policy,[11] WFP aims to use emergency preparedness to effectively and efficiently respond to emergencies in a timely manner. WFP must ensure country offices, regional bureaus and supporting headquarters functional units are fully and appropriately staffed before emergencies occur or scale up. These safeguards ensure that country offices respond more effectively and efficiently to emergencies, lessening the need for additional surge staff.

63. The audit reviewed the preparedness guidance and emergency staffing criteria and assessed whether and to what extent these were effectively designed and eventually implemented by relevant stakeholders. The audit also considered whether and to what extent country offices were appropriately staffed before emergencies occurred, by reviewing relevant previous audit reports and a survey of country offices under an emergency at the time of the audit fieldwork.

64. As part of preparedness, EME provides emergency response training, including emergency simulations, to build personnel's skill sets and capacity to respond to emergencies. The division also maintained a tool to identify standby partners from various donors, non-profit organizations and private sector companies which support WFP in its emergency staffing response and relevant procedures for requesting, deploying and managing these partners.

Observation 4: Pre-existing staffing gaps and regional bureau staffing models

Pre-existing staffing gaps

65. Pre-existing and ongoing staffing gaps in some country offices under emergencies affected their surge capacity during initial scale-up in response to an emergency, risking excessive and longer-term reliance on surge staffing rather than a stable workforce as detailed below:

- **Prolonged use of temporary staff**: Some country offices were unsuccessful in filling posts through reassignment and resorted to using temporary workers to fill key positions on an ongoing basis. These temporary staff positions generally highlighted the need for more robust handover practices and caused, in several cases, a loss of institutional knowledge.

- **Staff deficits**: Staffing gaps in country offices under an emergency were outlined in the internal audit of reassignment in 2020.[12] In response, the Human Resources Division made changes in 2021 and 2022 to the reassignment[13] and promotion[14] policies. While these updated policies are encouraging, critical staffing gaps persisted in country offices under emergencies. Over 60 percent of countries surveyed by the audit identified pre-existing staffing gaps as a critical obstacle to their effective emergency staffing response. Emergencies in certain countries are particularly vulnerable to staffing shortages due to their

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[11] WFP/EB.2/2017/4-B/Rev.1* - Emergency preparedness policy
[12] AR/21/09 – Internal Audit of the Reassignment Process in WFP
[13] OED2022/025 – Reassignment of Staff Members in the Professional and Higher Categories
[14] OED2021/008 – New Promotion System for P1 to D1 International Professional Staff Members on Rotational Positions; OED2022/020 – National Staff Recruitment and Promotion Framework

perceived undesirability or lack of qualified staff speaking the language, as highlighted by the recent internal audit of WFP operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo[15] and Haiti.[16]

66. While this report does not raise additional agreed actions regarding staff deficits in addition to those made in the audit of reassignment and other country office audit reports, the Office of Internal Audit encourages management to regularly assess and follow up on the effectiveness of the newly revised reassignment and promotion policies.

Regional bureau capacity and staffing models

67. Regional bureaus provided regular staffing support to country offices as the first responder in all emergencies and were the primary coordinator and responder to country offices under corporate attention and early action emergencies. The audit observed the deployment of regional bureau staff to emergencies for periods well beyond the initial surge phase, straining regional bureau resources, and weakening the regional bureaus' ability to support and oversee non-emergency countries.

68. Despite significant efforts by regional bureaus, less than half of country offices surveyed by the audit (43 percent) responded that the regional bureau provided sufficient staffing support during emergencies. Demands from new or concurrently deteriorating emergencies could further exacerbate the existing capacity gaps on already stretched regional bureau resources.

69. Further, the audit noted that regional bureau capacity needs to be reassessed and strengthened if they are to fulfil their role in coordinating, monitoring and overseeing emergency staffing for early action and corporate scale-up emergencies. As noted in previous internal audit reports, there is a correlation between regional bureau oversight activities and the ability to effectively detect and mitigate risks and internal control issues in a timely manner.

Underlying causes: Previously identified structural staffing issues, including a staff deficit and difficulties attracting personnel to certain duty stations, and the absence of a documented methodology used to determine how and to what extent regional bureaus should be staffed, considering their role in emergencies.

Agreed Actions [Medium priority]

The Human Resources Division, in coordination with the Emergency Operations Division and the regional bureaus, and in consultation with the Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer, will assess the extent of regional bureau involvement in emergency staffing and establish relevant staffing models with appropriate capacity in line with regional bureau roles and responsibilities for staffing support in country office emergencies.

Timeline for implementation

31 July 2024

Observation 5: Emergency staffing preparedness gaps

70. Emergency staffing preparedness criteria and processes, including emergency rosters, were not robustly established. Existing guidance was out-of-date and should have been communicated to stakeholders to set standards and benchmarks against which emergency staffing preparedness actions could be measured.

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[15] AR/20/12- Internal Audit of WFP Operations in democratic Republic of Congo
[16] AR/22/12 – Internal Audit of WFP Operations in Haiti

71. Among the gaps that impacted WFP's ability to effectively and efficiently staff emergencies, the audit highlights the following:

- **Toolkits**: The "Human Resources Emergency Preparedness and Response Toolkit", developed in 2018, was not formally established as the emergency preparedness standard against which country offices and regional bureaus should align. Most of the minimum preparedness actions and checklists in the toolkit were not followed, including the preparation and update of local rosters, key for most WFP emergencies.

- **Rosters**: WFP did not maintain an emergency roster or have specific processes to manage local or global rosters. This resulted in deployment inefficiencies and bottlenecks as various stakeholders expended time identifying, discussing and agreeing on resources.

- **Floating staff**: Various functional units were developing a contingent of floating staff that could respond to ad-hoc or emergency surge staffing needs in their respective functional area. Each of these were being designed independently, without an agreed standard profile or necessary skill set for preparedness to deploy to an emergency.

72. As part of a benchmarking analysis with other United Nations organizations involved in humanitarian response, the audit identified two good practices in the use of rosters and rapid deployment of staff to emergencies which could be considered at WFP:

- **Roster best practices**: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) maintains an active, regularly updated emergency roster of over 200 existing personnel, including senior and national staff. It possesses clearly defined roles and responsibilities and standard operating procedures for maintaining the roster and deploying personnel.

- **Process best practices**: Technical skills and capabilities are identified, and a releasing manager agreement is obtained before the onset of emergencies. This helps UNHCR deploy staff quickly and without having to identify and obtain the release of each individual once an emergency has begun.

Underlying causes: Relevant cross-cutting contributory causes outlined in Observation 1; despite recurring emergency types and responses, each emergency is perceived as unique, minimizing the emphasis on preparedness; and a constant and heightened response state since COVID-19 impacted the attention given to and resources available for preparedness.

Agreed Actions [High priority]

The Emergencies Operations Division, in consultation with Human Resources Management, will:

a) Update the relevant emergency and preparedness framework and minimum required actions for emergency surge and ensure that these are communicated as criteria to all stakeholders.

b) Update the common response staffing models to be used as tools by country offices in carrying out their own emergency staffing needs assessment.

c) Develop tools, procedures and methodologies to guide WFP in creating and maintaining active and up-to-date emergency roster(s), including for local staff.

Timeline for implementation

31 July 2024

Line of enquiry 3: Are risks related to staff wellness in emergencies, in particular the proper use of rest and recuperation, adequately identified and monitored?

73. Evidence from audit procedures indicated that minimum criteria were needed to ensure that risks related to staff wellness in emergencies were consistently identified, monitored and managed. In particular, monitoring of R&R for applicable emergency duty stations must improve, and staff must be better enabled and encouraged to use their R&R entitlements.

74. Many of WFP's emergencies occur in high-risk, high-stress locations and contexts that can significantly impact the wellness of WFP's personnel. WFP recognizes its duty of care, addressed in its Wellness Strategy by committing to "providing its diverse employees with an enabling and supportive workplace in which health and welfare risks are managed, and in which there are wellbeing, resilience and prevention measures as well as prompt and effective responses to incidents, accidents, and illnesses." WFP provides eligible staff with R&R in line with United Nations standards. R&R entitlements enable staff wellness and help ensure staff can continue to operate at a high level of effectiveness.

75. The audit reviewed how and to what extent risks to staff wellness in emergencies were identified, monitored and managed. The audit also assessed how the tools and best practices suggested by WFP's Wellness Division were adopted and utilized to identify and manage risks to staff wellness in emergencies. Additionally, the audit analysed how and to what extent R&R entitlement was being used, monitored and managed based on WFP's policy.

76. WFP's Wellness Division created tools and resources that WFP employees and management can access. For example, personnel deployed to emergency duty stations are proactively contacted to undergo suggested pre- and post-deployment counselling sessions. In addition, the Wellness Division offers a Wellbeing Application that allows employees deployed to emergencies to self-assess and monitor, and to access remote counselling when required.

Observation 6: Wellness criteria, monitoring and control

Wellness criteria and standards

77. The absence of minimum standards or criteria for staff wellness in emergencies resulted in inconsistent wellness risk monitoring and management. While the Wellness Division suggested best practices and tools for management to use in the field, management can decide whether and how to apply them, for example:

- Wellness staff were not included in either initial or subsequent deployment waves for some emergencies, leaving responsibility for wellness risk management to individuals who were not technically equipped.

- Only some country offices maintained suggested best practice tools for identifying and managing risks to staff wellness. This included staff wellness committees and dedicated staff counsellors who actively advised management.

78. These gaps meant that WFP personnel had unequal access to wellness tools, solutions and support, increasing the likelihood that risks to staff wellness went undetected, thereby impairing WFP's duty of care responsibility.

Management and use of rest and recuperation

79. Overall, inadequate monitoring and enabling conditions meant that R&R was not used by staff in emergency duty stations as intended. While context and circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic certainly impacted

staff's ability to take R&R during 2020 and 2021[17], this situation continued into 2022 when the effects of the pandemic had subsided, as outlined below:

- **Enabling staffing structures**: Staffing structures do not always consider the resources needed to mitigate the impact of staffing gaps resulting from R&R leave. As illustrated by the audit testing performed on country offices under emergency situations and with R&R leave entitlement, some critical positions were only partially filled due to multiple absences or field missions. This also required heavy handover and delegations to ensure the officer-in-charge can be supported during the absences.

- **Monitoring of R&R**: While country offices attempted to monitor and manage R&R, the Workplace Culture Department – the R&R policy owner – did not create tools to enable effective monitoring. Headquarters and regional bureaus also did not monitor R&R usage at the country office level and, therefore, could not assess associated risks and implications to staff and WFP operations.

- **R&R usage rate**: Overall, R&R usage rates were far below the entitlement level. The audit's analysis, verified by Human Resources Management, indicated that a little more than half of the employees (53 percent) eligible for R&R each month exercised their entitlement.

- **Misuse of R&R**: a proportion of R&R was taken on a delayed basis and for fewer days than entitled, or taken earlier than permitted and for more days than were allowed in each period.

80. Staff underuse or misuse of their R&R entitlement could result in the following:

- Overall lower effectiveness, efficiency and performance as personnel are unable to recharge;

- Health and wellness consequences, including burnout, anxiety and depression;

- Lower employee retention rates as personnel decide to leave because they cannot exercise their R&R;

- Potential staff deterred from serving in emergency duty stations who might otherwise be interested in doing so.

Underlying causes: Some relevant contributory causes outlined in Observation 1; R&R monitoring roles and responsibilities not explicitly established; absence of relevant tools to monitor R&R; and R&R cycles and their impact on staffing levels not considered in staffing structures and emergency staffing needs assessments.

Agreed Actions [High priority]

The Workplace Culture Department will:

a) Under the leadership of the Staff Wellness Division, and in consultation with Human Resources Management, the Emergency Operations Division, country offices and regional bureaus, create risk indicators, minimum standards and guidelines for monitoring and managing risks to staff wellness in emergencies, including as it relates to surge staffing in initial emergency response.

b) Ensure that Human Resources Management creates guidance to prescribe how country offices (supported by regional bureaus and the Emergency Operations Division) ensure that rest and recuperation cycles are incorporated into emergency staffing needs assessments.

c) Assign roles and responsibilities for active monitoring of the rest and recuperation policy, including developing reporting mechanisms and tools and procedures for country office managers, regional bureaus and headquarters.

Timeline for implementation

31 December 2024

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[17] Special Leave with Full Pay (SLWFP) in lieu of R&R was available during the pandemic. This was specifically approved by the Executive Director through the COVID-19 guidelines to compensate staff who were not able to exercise R&R due to travel restrictions.

Annex A – Agreed action plan

The following table shows the categorization, ownership and due date agreed with the auditee for all the audit observations raised during the audit. This data is used for macro analysis of audit findings and monitoring the implementation of agreed actions.

#	Observation title	Line of Enquiry	Owner	Priority	Timeline for implementation
1	Disparate ownership and limitations in governance, monitoring and control	Cross-cutting contributory causes	Leadership Group	**High**	1 February 2024
2	Limitations in data, performance, monitoring and measurement	LOE1	Emergencies Operations Division	**High**	31 July 2024
3	Quality and accuracy of staffing needs assessments	LOE1	Emergencies Operations Division	**Medium**	31 July 2024
4	Pre-existing staffing gaps and regional bureau staffing models	LOE2	Human Resources Division	**Medium**	31 July 2024
5	Emergency staffing preparedness gaps	LOE2	Emergencies Operations Division	**High**	31 July 2024
6	Wellness criteria, monitoring and control	LOE3	Workplace Culture Department	**High**	31 December 2024

Annex B – Definitions of audit terms: ratings & priority

1   Rating system

The internal audit services of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS and WFP adopted harmonised audit rating definitions, as described below:

Table B.1: Rating system

Rating	Definition
Effective / satisfactory	The assessed governance arrangements, risk management and controls were adequately established and functioning well, to provide reasonable assurance that issues identified by the audit were unlikely to affect the achievement of the objectives of the audited entity/area.
Some improvement needed	The assessed governance arrangements, risk management and controls were generally established and functioning well but needed improvement to provide reasonable assurance that the objective of the audited entity/area should be achieved. Issue(s) identified by the audit were unlikely to significantly affect the achievement of the objectives of the audited entity/area. Management action is recommended to ensure that identified risks are adequately mitigated.
Major improvement needed	The assessed governance arrangements, risk management and controls were generally established and functioning, but need major improvement to provide reasonable assurance that the objectives of the audited entity/area should be achieved. Issues identified by the audit could negatively affect the achievement of the objectives of the audited entity/area. Prompt management action is required to ensure that identified risks are adequately mitigated.
Ineffective / unsatisfactory	The assessed governance arrangements, risk management and controls were not adequately established and not functioning well to provide reasonable assurance that the objectives of the audited entity/area should be achieved. Issues identified by the audit could seriously compromise the achievement of the objectives of the audited entity/area. Urgent management action is required to ensure that the identified risks are adequately mitigated.

2   Priority of agreed actions

Audit observations are categorized according to the priority of agreed actions, which serve as a guide to management in addressing the issues in a timely manner. The following categories of priorities are used:

Table B.2: Priority of agreed actions

High	Prompt action is required to ensure that WFP is not exposed to high/pervasive risks; failure to take action could result in critical or major consequences for the organization or for the audited entity.
Medium	Action is required to ensure that WFP is not exposed to significant risks; failure to take action could result in adverse consequences for the audited entity.
Low	Action is recommended and should result in more effective governance arrangements, risk management or controls, including better value for money.

Low priority recommendations, if any, are dealt with by the audit team directly with management. Therefore, low priority actions are not included in this report.

Typically audit observations can be viewed on two levels: (1) observations that are specific to an office, unit or division; and (2) observations that may relate to a broader policy, process or corporate decision and may have a broad impact.[18]

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[18] An audit observation of high risk to the audited entity may be of low risk to WFP as a whole; conversely, an observation of critical importance to WFP may have a low impact on a specific entity, but have a high impact globally.

3   Monitoring the implementation of agreed actions

The Office of Internal Audit tracks all medium and high-risk observations. Implementation of agreed actions is verified through corporate system for the monitoring of the implementation of oversight recommendations. The purpose of this monitoring system is to ensure management actions are effectively implemented within the agreed timeframe to manage and mitigate the associated risks identified, thereby contributing to the improvement of WFP's operations.

Office of Internal Audit monitors agreed on actions from the date of the issuance of the report with regular reporting to senior management, the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee, and the Executive Board. Should action not be initiated within a reasonable timeframe, and in line with the due date as indicated by Management, the Office of Internal Audit will issue a memorandum to management informing them of the unmitigated risk due to the absence of management action after review. The overdue management action will then be closed in the audit database and such closure confirmed to the entity in charge of the oversight.

When using this option, the Office of Internal Audit continues to ensure that the office in charge of the supervision of the unit who owns the actions is informed. Transparency on accepting the risk is essential, and the Risk Management Division is copied on such communication, with the right to comment and escalate should they consider the risk accepted is outside acceptable corporate levels. Office of Internal Audit informs senior management, the Audit Committee and the Executive Board of actions closed without mitigating the risk on a regular basis.

Annex C – Acronyms

EME	Emergencies Operations Division
R&R	Rest and recuperation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	World Food Programme
WINGS	WFP Information Network and Global Systems

Annex D – List of figures and table

Annex E – List of past relevant oversight reports

- Learning from 15 years of WFP emergency response (internal review – 2013)
- Major emerging themes from 5 years of lessons learning (internal review, 2016)
- Rapid Response Workforce Planning (internal review - Shaver & Romano-Bosch, May 2017)
- Report of the External Auditor on the scale-up and scale-down of resources in emergency operations (WFP/EB.A/2018/6-H/1 Executive Board, May 2018)
- 2018 Sahel Shock Response Lessons Learned (internal review, July 2019)
- Strategic Evaluation of WFP's Capacity to Respond to Emergencies (January 2020))
- Evaluation of Workforce Management during COVID-19 (February 2021)
- WFP Wellness Strategy (2020-2024)